

A photometric and spectroscopic study of the multi-tailed asteroid (6478) Gault

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Abstract

Main belt asteroid (6478) Gault, a member of the 25 Phocaea asteroid family was reported to have a comet-like tail on December 8, 2018, from ATLAS images, and early Finsen-Probstein analysis of those images revealed ejection of material in early November 2018 [6]. Follow-up imaging of the object by us [4] and various other teams revealed outbursts and the presence of other shorter and growing tail-like structures, associated to other ejection events [2,3,5]. The orbital elements of Gault are $a=2.305$ au, $e=0.194$, and $i=22.8$, so it is an inner main belt object with a Tisserand parameter with respect to Jupiter of $T=3.46$. This classifies Gault as a new member of the active asteroid population [1].

In this presentation, we describe several months of monitoring of Gault since January 2019 using various telescopes and instrumentation. The goal is to characterize and to model the asteroids and the tails to impose constraints on the physical properties of the ejected dust, and to shed light on the activity timeline and the causes for the ejection events.

References

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