Shrinking of Cluster Ellipticals: a Tidal Stripping explanation and Implications for the Intra-Cluster Light.

Shrinking of Cluster Ellipticals

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ABSTRACT

We look for evidence of tidal stripping in elliptical galaxies through the analysis of homogeneous CCD data corresponding to a sample of 228 elliptical galaxies belonging to 24 clusters of galaxies at $0.015 < z < 0.080$. We investigate departures from the standard magnitude-isophotal size relation, as a function of environmental (cluster-centric distance, local galaxy density) and structural (cluster velocity dispersion, Bautz-Morgan type) properties. We find that, for any particular galaxy luminosity, the ellipticals in the inner and denser regions of the clusters are about 5% smaller than those in the outer regions, which is in good agreement with the finding of Strom & Strom (1978d) based on photographic photometry. The null hypothesis (i.e., galaxy sizes are independent of the cluster-centric distance or density) is rejected at a significance level of better than 99.7%. Numerical models of Aguilar & White (1986) predict that tidal stripping can lead to changes in the whole structure of ellipticals producing shrinkage and brightening of the galaxy, qualitatively consistent with our measurements and also with the findings of Trujillo et al. (2002), that more centrally concentrated ellipticals populate denser regions. Our observational results can be interpreted as evidence for stripping of stars from ellipticals in the central/denser regions of clusters, contributing to the intra-cluster light observed in these structures.

Subject headings: galaxies: clusters: general- galaxies: clusters: individual: (A3558)- galaxies: interaction- galaxies: photometry-
1. Introduction

The existence of diffuse optical light in the central region of galaxy clusters is well known (Zwicky 1951; de Vaucouleurs 1960), but its very low surface brightness precluded quantitative analysis.

More recently, due to advances in observational and data reduction techniques, accurate measurements of the total amount of this light and its color and spatial distribution became feasible for rich clusters (Uson, Bough & Kuhn 1991; Scheick & Kuhn 1994; Gonzalez et al. 2000, 2005; Feldmeier, Ciardullo & Jacoby 2002; Feldmeier et al. 2004a). Moreover, single objects, like planetary nebulae, red-giant stars or supernovae have been detected in the intra-cluster medium (ICM) (Theuns & Warren 1996; Arnaboldi et al. 1996, 2002, 2003; Feldmeier, Ciardullo & Jacoby 1998; Ferguson et al. 1998; Feldmeier et al. 2004b).

These studies indicate that between ~10% to 20% (or higher) of the total stellar light of the clusters comes from stars in the ICM. These stars have, probably, been stripped from cluster galaxies after galaxy-galaxy (Gallagher & Ostriker 1972; Richstone 1976) or galaxy-cluster interactions (Merritt 1984). As a galaxy moves through the cluster, it is subject to the gravitational forces of their neighbors, as well as of the cluster as a whole. As a result of the action of these tidal forces, some galaxy stars may be accelerated to velocities larger than the local escape velocity, being removed from the parent galaxy. This process is called tidal stripping. In some cases the tidal forces may be so strong that the galaxy as a whole is disrupted. Indeed, a significant fraction of galaxy stars may be dispersed in the ICM after disruption of dwarf spheroidals or low surface brightness disk galaxies (e.g. Lopez-Cruz et al. 1997), as suggested by the light plumes observed in clusters like Centaurus and Coma (Calcáneo-Roldán et al. 2000; Korchagin, Tsuchiya & Miyama 2001).

In the present work we investigate whether stars stripped of ellipticals can make a significant contribution to the intra-cluster light (ICL). There are some hints that point towards this direction. Firstly, ellipticals are basically found in the central, denser, cluster regions, where close encounters between galaxies are very common. Their almost radial orbits (Ramirez & de Souza 1998) lead them to several close approximations to the cluster center, where tidal forces are very strong. The diffuse light is often distributed like a halo around the brightest cluster galaxy (BCG), extending sometimes beyond ~ 500 kpc. Gonzalez et al. (2005) in their study of the surface brightness distribution of BCGs in 24 clusters identify a component, independent of the BCG, that is possibly due to intrachannel stars and dynamically linked to the cluster as a whole.

The effects of galaxy-galaxy tidal collisions were studied by Aguilar & White (1985, 1986) through the use of the impulsive approximation and N-body numerical simulations of close collisions between galaxies with roughly the same mass and with mass distributions consistent with de Vaucouleurs and King profiles. They quantified the mass and energy changes during such collisions and studied the changes of the mass profiles. They found that the $r^{1/4}$ profile is robust, since it is recovered after a collision, but with different parameters. After strong encounters the central surface brightness becomes brighter and the effective and isophotal radius decrease as mass is stripped out. More recently, the high-resolution N-body+SPH numerical simulations of rich clusters by Willman et al. (2004) and Murante et al. (2004) indicate that the accumulation of ICL is an ongoing process, linked to infall and stripping events, and that the stars composing the ICL are on average older than the stars in cluster galaxies.

Other works have considered the effects of a smooth cluster potential on a galaxy. Using the impulsive approximation (Merritt 1984; Mamon 2000), or high resolution numerical simulations (Ghigna et al. 1998), it can be shown that cluster galaxies are truncated at the tidal radius:

$$r_{tid} = C \left( \frac{\sigma_g}{\sigma_{cl}} \right) r_p,$$

where $\sigma_g$ and $\sigma_{cl}$ are the velocity dispersions of the galaxy and the cluster, respectively, and $r_p$ is the radius of maximum approximation between a

1 Visiting Astronomer at the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory, National Optical Astronomy Observatories, which is operated by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc., under a cooperative agreement with the National Science Foundation.

2 The National Radio Astronomy Observatory is a facility of the National Science Foundation operated under cooperative agreement by Associated Universities, Inc.
galaxy and the cluster center, and $C$ is a non-dimensional constant that depends on several factors, like galaxy orbits, and is close to unity. This process is often called tidal truncation.

It is not clear yet what process is more effective in removing stars from cluster galaxies. Tidal truncation is indeed more efficient in removing halo stars, since $r_{\text{tid}}$ is larger than the optical radius for the majority of the galaxies. Anyway, as pointed out by Gnedin (1999), mass is not only lost by instantaneous stripping after cluster-galaxy shocks, but also by secular tidal heating.

The first observational detection of tidal stripping of stars from elliptical galaxies came from Strom & Strom (1978a,b,c,d), with a sample of 400 ellipticals and S0’s located in 6 different clusters, deeply imaged with photographic plates. These authors found that ellipticals in the center of rich clusters have isophotal radii 10-30% smaller at a given magnitude than ellipticals in poor clusters or in the outskirts of rich ones, estimating that up to $\sim 37\%$ of the luminous mass of the stripped ellipticals have been lost to the ICM.

Despite of the great impact of this work, it has been severely criticized, mainly because it was based on photographic photometry (e.g. Dressler 1984). Giuricin et al. (1989) questioned the statistical analysis done by the Strom & Strom, and using photo-electric and CCD data of $\sim 160$ elliptical galaxies from the sample of Burstein et al. (1987), did not find any dependence of the magnitude-size relation properties of elliptical galaxies with the environment. In this paper we will revisit this topic, using CCD data homogeneously collected and reduced.

The layout of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 we describe the observational material and the cluster sample, we present our method for the extraction of galaxy photometric parameters, as well as the selection criteria of the final galaxy sample. In Section 3 we present our results on galaxy sizes, that are discussed in Section 4. In Section 5 we summarize the main conclusions of this work. Throughout this paper, we adopt, when necessary, a $\Lambda$CDM cosmology with $H_0 = 70 \, h_{70} \, \text{km s}^{-1} \, \text{Mpc}^{-1}$, $\Omega_M = 0.3$ and $\Omega_\Lambda = 0.7$.

2. The data

2.1. The cluster sample and the observations

The galaxy sample discussed in this work was extracted from the set originally obtained as part of the Ph.D. thesis of Daniel A. Dale on peculiar motions of clusters with $z < 0.1$ (Dale et al. 1997, 1998, 1999a,b; Dale et al. 1999c). The original cluster sample was selected from nearby ($cz < 18000 \, \text{km s}^{-1}$) objects of the Abell, Corwin & Olowin (1989) cluster catalogue, in order to cover as much and uniformly the whole sky area as possible. Although the cluster selection criteria and imaging characteristics were chosen to optimize the peculiar motion study, the resulting database is useful for many other studies, since it was homogeneously observed and reduced, has high photometric accuracy, and the cluster sample is representative of the low redshift cluster population (Cypriano et al. 2001). For the present study, only the Southern part of this sample has been used. The clusters, and some of their properties that are relevant for this work, are presented in Table 1.

The observational material consists of several Kron-Cousins I band images obtained with the 0.9m CTIO telescope. The details of the observations are discussed elsewhere (Dale et al. 1997, 1998) and here we only summarize them. The detector used was the $2k \times 2k$ Tek2k No.3 CCD, with a scale of 0.4 arcsec per pixel, resulting in a field of $13.5' \times 13.5'$ per image. The exposure time was 600 seconds in all cases. The images reach 23.0 to 23.8 $\text{mag arcsec}^{-2}$ at the 1 $\sigma$ level over the background, with a median of 23.6 $\text{mag arcsec}^{-2}$. The median seeing of the images is 1.52$''$ and ranges from 1.16$''$ to 2.80$''$.

These images, consisting of several pointings per cluster, in general do not uniformly cover a cluster, since they were taken in regions near spiral galaxies, although the central region of the clusters is always covered. For each cluster, the fraction of the projected area inside the $R_{200}$ radius (see section 2.4) covered by the imaging is also shown in Table 1. The actual distribution of pointings is presented in Dale et al. (1997, 1998, 1999b).
Table 1
Cluster sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>$\sigma_{cl}$</th>
<th>B-M Type</th>
<th>Total area (square degree)</th>
<th>Fraction of area (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>I-II</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>826</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aWe got redshifts and velocity dispersions from Abell cluster redshift compilation of Andernach & Tago (2005, in prep.), see Andernach, Tago (1998) for a description.

**Note.**—(1) name of the cluster in the Abell catalog (Abell, Corwin & Olowin 1989); (2) redshift; (3) radial velocity dispersion; (4) Bautz-Morgan Type (Bautz & Morgan 1970); (5) total imaged area; (6) The ratio of the area covered by the imaging over the whole area inside the $R_{200}$ radius; (7) number of ellipticals in the sample.
2.2. Determination of photometric parameters

Most of the images used here were obtained under good photometric conditions. The absolute calibration of the magnitudes was done by using standard photometric stars of Landolt (1992). The photometric zero-point calibration could be determined with a median accuracy of 0.018 mag, never larger than 0.031 mag.

In this work we have used an isophotal radius as an estimator of the galaxy size because its logarithm is very well correlated with the magnitudes (Spearman rank correlation coefficient $r_s = -0.99$). On the other hand, the log of the radius that encloses half of a galaxy light (the effective radius $r_e$) shows a significantly poorer correlation with magnitudes ($r_s = -0.86$). The Petrosian radius (Petrosian 1976) is also less well-correlated as a radius the geometrical average of the semi-major and semi-minor axis, the so-called equivalent radius, the isophotal radius ($r_{iso}$) is estimated from the galaxy isophotal brightness profile as the radius corresponding to $\mu_t$, and then the isophotal magnitude ($m_{iso}$) inside $r_{iso}$ is determined. Using the equivalent radius instead of the semi-major axis we remove possible bias due to different ellipticities between galaxies.

A de Vaucouleurs (1948) and an exponential profile were also fitted to the isophotal brightness profiles. Following the procedure described in Scodellio, Giovanelli & Haynes (1998), we removed from the fitting an inner region, with radius equal to two times the FWHM of stellar sources. These fittings were used as part of the selection of elliptical galaxies (see Section 3.3).

The median of the formal errors are 0.02 in magnitudes and 3.3% in $r_{iso}$, where errors in $r_{iso}$ have been calculated as:

$$\sigma(r_{iso}) = \sigma_{r_t} \frac{dr}{d\mu}$$

with $\sigma_{r_t}$ being the error of the corresponding surface brightness.

A check of the internal consistency of these errors can be obtained from a sample of 16 galaxies that are present in two different images. The rms differences between isophotal magnitudes and isophotal radii measured in different images are 0.02 and 2.7%, respectively, both in agreement with the formal errors.

2.3. Sky subtraction

Since the sky subtraction is critical in the kind of study presented here, the procedure of sky determination is now explained in detail.

Firstly, the software SExtractor (Bertin & Arnouts 1996) is used to determine the average sky value for the entire field. Then the galaxy image is modeled using the IRAF task ellipse and removed from a sky subtracted image. After, we estimate the residuals in the local sky, by examining the residuals in a square region centered in the

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1IRAF is distributed by the National Optical Astronomy Observatories, which is operated by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc. (AURA) under cooperative agreement with the National Science Foundation.
subtracted galaxy, with a side size equal to at least two times the galaxy major-axis at $\mu_i$. The size of this region was determined after several tests and proved to be convenient for the estimation of the local background. The new local sky level is obtained by removing the mean value of the residuals from the previously adopted background level.

After, the procedure of surface photometry and image subtraction is done again, using this new value for the value of the local sky. The whole process is repeated until no significant local sky variations are found. Generally, two iterations were enough.

This process starts with the brightest galaxy in the field and continues in order of increasing magnitude, to avoid luminosity contamination of the galaxy by the envelope of the BCG and other bright galaxies in the cluster field.

2.4. Selection of the galaxy sample

The selection of elliptical galaxies for the analysis was done following several steps.

A first selection was done based on the galaxy morphology and the form of its light profile. Initially, all galaxies that are obvious spirals were removed from the sample. Then, by comparing galaxy light profiles with exponential and de Vaucouleurs (1948) profiles, it was possible to remove from the sample of elliptical galaxies some apparently featureless disk-like galaxies.

After, the morphological classification was checked with previous classifications using NED.

Nearly half of the galaxies in the sample had previous classifications. About 30% of them are classified as S0 and were removed from the sample. Only a few cases of early-type spirals classified as ellipticals were found. Galaxies with redshift inconsistent with those of the clusters were also removed.

Due to the presence of a disk component, S0 galaxies tend to have larger sizes, at a given magnitude, than ellipticals. However, since the radial distribution of S0s and ellipticals in clusters does not strictly match each other, there is the possibility that misclassification of lenticulars in ellipticals might produce a radial trend that could bias our results, because the radial distribution of the former is slightly more extended than the latter (Whitmore, Gilmore & Jones 1993). This is difficult to evaluate because we do not know, a priori, neither the number of misclassifications nor their radial distribution. However, we expect that they would be more common in the inner than in the outer parts of the clusters, due to the difficulty introduced by the cluster diffuse light in the detection of faint disks. If this is indeed the case, the bias introduced would only dilute the radial trends discussed here.

To ensure a high photometric quality of the data, only galaxies with isophotal radius larger than two times the FWHM of point sources plus 0.8'' (2 pixels) were included in the sample. Additionally, images where the chosen isophotal limit is within 1σ of the sky brightness were excluded from the analysis. The faintest galaxies of the sample have 17.5 I mag.

Objects with signs of contamination by a nearby object, which could be easily recognized on the light profiles and in the residuals that remain after the subtraction of the galaxy, were also removed. Objects with strong gradients in the local background, precluding an accurate sky subtraction, were also removed.

As a final criterion, only galaxies with cluster-centric distances lower than $R_{200}$ were included in the analysis. This is the radius where the mass density is $\sim$200 times larger than the critical density and is a good approximation to the virial radius. This radius $R_{200}$ is estimated using the expression

$$R_{200} = \frac{\sqrt{3}\sigma_{cl}}{10H(z)}$$

(Carlberg et al. 1996) where $\sigma_{cl}$ is the one-dimensional velocity dispersion of the cluster and $H(z)$, that is a function of the cosmological parameters, is the Hubble factor at the cluster redshift.

The size of the sample depends of the isophotal limit chosen. Using a fiducial isophotal limit in the galaxy rest frame of $\mu_{lim} = 22.75$ I mag arcsec$^{-2}$ which avoids significant incompleteness, the full sample contains 228 elliptical galaxies, 172 (75%)
of them with spectroscopic confirmation of cluster membership. The number of ellipticals per cluster in the final sample is presented in Table 1.

At this point it is important to warn the reader that the galaxy sample selected for this work is not complete in any sense, due to the way the fields of the clusters were imaged and also because we have rejected a number of objects for which we were not able to perform the surface photometry properly, mainly because of light contamination by a neighbor. This problem is more severe in the central parts of the clusters, since there the surface density of objects is large. Both factors of incompleteness can change the number of objects as a function of the radius, but it is not expected that they can lead to any bias that can explain the trends identified in this work (see next section), because they are completely independent of the photometric parameters of the galaxies.

3. Results

3.1. The magnitude-size relation for cluster ellipticals

In Figure 1 we plot the observed relationship between the absolute isophotal magnitude and the isophotal radius (at the fiducial isophotal limit in the galaxy rest frame of $\mu_{\text{lim}} = 22.75 \text{ I mag arcsec}^{-2}$), as well as standard least-square fits of linear and quadratic models. It can be appreciated in this plot that the linear model (dashed line) fits well the data, but with some systematic residuals in both the faint and bright extremes. However, these residual are minimized by the use of a quadratic model (continuous line). Actually, a likelihood ratio test indicates that a quadratic model is significantly more reliable than a linear model. Higher order models do not improve statistically the likelihood of the fit.

Hereafter, $\langle r_{\text{iso}} \rangle (M)$ will be used to denote the isophotal radius of a galaxy that, given its $I$ magnitude, obeys the magnitude-size relation represented by the continuous line in Figure 1. We define

$$\eta = \frac{r_{\text{iso}}}{\langle r_{\text{iso}} \rangle (M)},$$

where $r_{\text{iso}}$ is the actual isophotal radius, as a convenient way of measuring the deviation of the isophotal radius of a galaxy from the value that is expected given its luminosity. Note that $\eta < 1$ represents an effective “shrinkage” of a galaxy. The mean uncertainty in $\eta$ is 0.037, taking into account the error in the measured isophotal radius and in the fitted radius-magnitude relation.

We present in Figure 2 the distribution of $\eta$ for all galaxies in our sample. Its average value is 1.005 with a standard deviation of 0.10 (or 10%). The observational errors in $r_{\text{iso}}$ can account for one third of this scatter and the errors on the magnitudes are negligible (formal errors in $M_I$ are typically 0.02 mag). Indeed, most of the variance in $\eta$ is due to cosmic scatter in the magnitude-size relation.

We verified that the image quality is not affecting $\eta$ measurements. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient between $\eta$ and the seeing (FWHM) of the images is 0.1, indicating an inexistent or very low dependence between these two quantities.
3.2. Galaxy sizes as a function of cluster-centric distances

In the seventies, Strom & Strom claimed that they had found evidence for tidal stripping in galaxy clusters based on an analysis of the isophotal radius of cluster galaxies and a function of its cluster-centric radial position (Strom & Strom 1978d). We carry out a similar analysis in this section using the cluster galaxies of our sample.

Since the number of data points per cluster is generally low, we have decided to use an ensemble technique, where the data of all clusters are analyzed together. For that, the cluster-centric distances of the galaxies, $R$, were normalized by the value of the $R_{200}$ of the cluster. Figure 3 presents the ratio $\eta$ as a function of the normalized cluster-centric distance $R/R_{200}$ for our sample.

To investigate radial trends in the optical extent of elliptical galaxies, we examine whether $\eta$ varies with $R/R_{200}$. Indeed, by dividing the sample with respect to the median of $R/R_{200}$ (0.202), we find that galaxies in the group near the center ($\langle R/R_{200} \rangle = 0.11$) have $\eta = 0.980 \pm 0.009$, whereas those in the outer group ($\langle R/R_{200} \rangle = 0.43$) have $\eta = 1.030 \pm 0.009$. The mean difference in $\eta$ between the two groups is $(5.0 \pm 1.3)\%$, ruling out at a $3.8\sigma$ (99.99%) confidence level (C.L.) the null hypothesis that sizes are independent of the cluster-centric distance.

Comparing the medians, which are more robust estimators of location than the means, galaxies of a given luminosity in the outer group are 5.1% larger than those in the inner regions of the clusters.

It is interesting to verify how this result changes as a function of $\mu_{lim}$. In Table 2 we show the difference in $\eta$ (for medians and means as estimators) of galaxies in these two groups of projected radial distances, for different isophotal limits. For both estimators, this difference tends to increase toward fainter values of $\mu_{lim}$, although this gradient is well inside the errors.

The results of a Student’s $t$-test for the statisti-
cal significance of the difference of the mean value of $\eta$ for the two radial groups are also shown in Table 2 and indicates that this difference is significant for all values of $\mu_{lim}$. Note that the difference between the medians is almost always larger than that between the means.

The trend suggested by the data in Table 2 is that the differences between $\eta$ of the radial groups increases for fainter isophotal limits. This is particularly clear for the difference between medians. A word of caution here is that the significance of this gradient is low due to the errors in these differences. We show in Figure 3 mean values of $\eta$ for four radial bins with approximately the same number of data points in each one. The figure suggests that $\eta$ increases monotonically with radius, possibly reaching a plateau at $R/R_{200} \sim 0.4$.

Unfortunately, most of the clusters do not have a sufficiently large number of galaxies in our sample to allow separate analyses. However, Abell 3558 is an exception. This cluster, in the center of the Shapley super-cluster, is very rich and has 36 galaxies in our sample, allowing a statistical analysis. The $\eta$-radius relation for Abell 3558 is very significant, as shown in Figure 4. The difference between mean values of $\eta$ below and above $R/R_{200} = 0.202$ (0.68 $h_{50}^{-1}$ Mpc) is $(9.8 \pm 3.6)$%.

In Table 3 we show the difference of $\eta$ between the inner and the outer radial groups of galaxies for the 5 clusters which have at least 15 galaxies in our sample. These clusters are among the richest in Table 1. In four out of the five clusters the galaxies in the outer group tend to be larger than those in the inner group, although for one of them (A3266), the difference is not really significant. For A3528 the difference is in the opposite direction but, again, the significance is low.

### 3.3. Galaxy sizes as a function of the local galaxy density

We are also interested on verifying whether $\eta$ varies with the local galaxy density. Since our imaging covers the clusters only partially, to avoid incompleteness in the spatial sampling we have used Super COSMOS data (Hambly, Irwin & MacGillivray et al. 2001) to obtain a catalog of the galaxies projected on to the cluster fields. We have selected only galaxies brighter than $R = 16.5$.

![Fig. 4.— Distribution $\eta$ as a function of the normalized projected radial distance $R/R_{200}$ for galaxies in Abell 3558.](image)

The local surface density associated to each galaxy in our sample has been computed from the projected distance to its sixth closest Super COSMOS neighbor ($R_6$), using the estimator of Casertano & Hut (1985)

$$\Sigma = \frac{5}{\pi R_6^2}$$

This quantity should be corrected by contamination of foreground and background galaxies.

This field contamination was estimated as the median surface density of galaxies in a ring at $R = 4.5 \pm 0.2 R_{200}$ of the cluster center. However, this correction is quite sensitive to the variance of the field galaxy counts, often produced by large scale structures near the cluster or in its line of sight. The cluster A3558, in the center of the Shapley super-cluster, illustrates well this problem. Despite its richness (Abell richness class 4), the densities estimated here are among the lowest of the whole sample because the background counts are strongly enhanced due to the presence of several clusters in the region. For this reason, we also analyzed the data without any background subtraction.
### Table 2

**Variation of differences of \( \eta \) for galaxies in the outer and inner radial groups, as a function of the limiting isophote**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( \mu_{\text{lim}} ) (mag arcsec(^{-2}))</th>
<th>Number of galaxies</th>
<th>Difference between medians (%)</th>
<th>Difference between means (%)</th>
<th>Student’s t-test</th>
<th>Prob.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.50</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.7 ± 1.1</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.75</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.0 ± 1.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.00</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>4.8 ± 1.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.25</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.6 ± 1.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>99.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0 ± 1.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>99.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.75</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.0 ± 1.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>99.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.00</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>7.0 ± 1.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**—(1) Isophotal limit in the I-band in the galaxy rest frame; (2) Number of galaxies; (3) Differences between the medians; (4) Differences between the means and their errors; (5) Value of \( t \) from the Student’s \( t \)-test; (6) Probability that the observed difference between the two radial groups will not be caused by statistical fluctuations.

### Table 3

**Variation of differences of \( \eta \) for galaxies in the outer and inner radial groups for individual clusters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster</th>
<th>Number of galaxies</th>
<th>Difference between medians (%)</th>
<th>Difference between means (%)</th>
<th>Student’s t-test</th>
<th>Prob.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3558</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>9.8 ± 3.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>98.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3667</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.2 ± 3.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A496</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>15.7 ± 4.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3266</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.6 ± 2.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3528</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-9.7</td>
<td>-6.9 ± 6.3</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
<td>-75.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.**—Only clusters with more than 15 galaxies on the sample
Figure 5 shows the relation between $\eta$ and the logarithm of the corrected projected number density. The figure suggests that there is a tendency for $\eta$ to decrease with increasing surface density.

The difference of $\eta$ between galaxies in environments with densities larger and smaller than the median for the background subtracted sample is 3.1% (median) and $3.3 \pm 1.3\%$ (mean; 98.6\% C.L.). The values for the non-background subtracted densities are similar: 3.3\% (median) and $4.0 \pm 1.3\%$ (mean; 99.7\% C.L.). The median value of $\Sigma$ for the background subtracted sample is 51.3 Mpc$^{-2}$ and 84.3 Mpc$^{-2}$ for the non-background subtracted one.

Fig. 5.— Distribution of $\eta$ as a function of the logarithm of the projected number density of galaxies, $\Sigma$. The solid circles shows averages of bins with similar number of data points for the background subtracted values of the density. The open circles correspond to the non background subtracted densities. The horizontal error bars are the 1-sigma dispersion of the densities in each bin and the vertical ones the error of the means. In this plot negative densities are represented as the logarithm of the absolute density value times -1.

3.4. Galaxy sizes as a function of cluster properties

In order to understand the origin of the stripping mechanism it is important to verify whether and how the isophotal diameters of the galaxies depend on cluster properties. Here we will analyze two of them: velocity dispersion and Bautz-Morgan type that, in principle, are approximately related to mass and evolutionary phase, respectively. In Figures 6 and 7 we show the dependence of $\eta$ as a function of these parameters.

Fig. 6.— Distribution of $\eta$ as a function of the dispersion of velocity of the cluster. The circles represents the mean value of $\eta$ with its error of the mean; the horizontal bars represent the interval of $\sigma_{\text{cl}}$ associated with each bin. Filled circles represent mean values for all galaxies in the bin, whereas the open ones contain only galaxies with cluster-centric distances less than 0.202 $R_{200}$. For clarity, we shifted horizontally the open circles by 20 km s$^{-1}$.

At a first glance neither of these figures displays a clear correlation, as those found for the cluster-centric distance and the local density. In Figure 6 it can be seen that galaxies in clusters in the smallest velocity dispersion bin, present values of $\eta$ significantly smaller than those in the other clusters.
Figure 7 shows how $\eta$ varies with the morphological type of the clusters. Again, we cannot see any trend here. What is noteworthy in this figure, however, is that elliptical galaxies (excluding the BCG) in the inner region of cD clusters (Bautz-Morgan type I) tend to be smaller than those in other cluster types, especially those closest to the cluster center. Actually, the inner galaxies of B-M type I clusters are the smallest in the present sample. A similar result was obtained by Sandage & Hardy (1973), who found that elliptical and lenticular galaxies in type I clusters are dimmer, at given radius, than in type II clusters.

3.5. Is there a dependence of $\eta$ with magnitude?

An important check is to verify whether the effects found here are an artifact of the fitted magnitude–size relation or the result of luminosity segregation. We address this issue in Figure 8.

The left panel of Figure 8, presenting the luminosity distribution as a function of the cluster-centric distance, shows that the brighter galaxies tend to be found in the outer regions. The difference considering only two radial bins, however, is rather insignificant, $0.27 \pm 0.18$ mag. Moreover, the right panel reveals that there is not a monotonic dependence between magnitude and $\eta$. For instance, there is no significant relative size difference between the bright and faint half of the sample, $0.8\pm1.4\%$. In fact, this plot shows a difference between $\eta$ values at the extremes and the center of the magnitude distribution. An inspection of Figure 1 shows that this is produced by the residuals of the fit of the magnitude-size relation with our quadratic model. Rather than indicating segregation (or anti-), the trends in Figure 8 are probably reflecting features of the galaxy sample, which is not complete in any sense (c.f. Sect. 2).

For a double check, we repeated our analysis considering only galaxies with magnitudes between -23.5 and -20.5. Within this interval, the linear and quadratic fits to the magnitude-size relation are nearly identical. We obtained, by doing that, essentially the same results, although they are noisier due to the smaller number of data points. We thus conclude that all the results found in this work, regarding the relative size of elliptical galaxies in clusters, are not artifacts of the magnitude-size relation fit or a function of the galaxy luminosity.
4. Discussion

4.1. Comparison with previous work.

Our main result, the shrinkage of galaxies inhabiting the inner parts of the clusters, is in qualitative agreement with the results of Strom & Strom (1978d). These authors found shrinkage factors of 10-30% in images reaching isophotal levels as faint as 26 R mag arcsec\(^{-2}\) or \(\sim 25.3\) I mag arcsec\(^{-2}\), assuming (R-I) = 0.7, which is typical of ellipticals at z\(\sim 0\) (Fukugita, Shimasaku & Ichikawa 1995). This is nearly 2.5 mag arcsec\(^{-2}\) fainter than our fiducial isophotal limit, 22.75 I mag arcsec\(^{-2}\), assuming (R-I) = 0.7, which is typical of ellipticals at z\(\sim 0\) (Fukugita, Shimasaku & Ichikawa 1995). However, they warned in their conclusions that a shrinkage of the isophotal radii of a few percent is consistent with their results, given their observational uncertainties. Actually, Giuricin et al. (1989) have not found any environmental dependency on the sizes of elliptical galaxies in their sample. Their photometry reaches 25.0 B mag arcsec\(^{-2}\), which is roughly as deep as our fiducial value for \(\mu_{\text{lim}}\) (assuming (B-I) \(\approx 2.27\) for ellipticals; Fukugita, Shimasaku & Ichikawa 1995). However, they warned in their conclusions that a shrinkage of the isophotal radii of a few percent is consistent with their results, given their observational uncertainties. Actually, Giuricin et al. (1989) report that their typical rms errors in log \(r_{\text{iso}}\) are around 0.04 (or 9.6%), and, in the best cases (CCD data) they are between 0.02 to 0.03 (4.7% to 7.2%), well above the rms error of the log of the isophotal radius in this work, which is 0.015 (3.5%), as explained in Section 2. Additionally, the present work uses the ensemble technique, that allows putting together data from different clusters, while Giuricin et al. (1989) divided their sample in sub-samples with small number of data points, leading to results with smaller statistical significance.

Trujillo et al. (2002) have found a related result through the analysis of light concentration for the Virgo and Coma clusters, indicating that more centrally concentrated elliptical galaxies tend to inhabit the denser regions of galaxy clusters, which is in agreement with the results presented here. When interpreting their results, these authors suggest that the origin of such effect would be galaxy mergers, rather than tidal encounters because, quoting Strom & Strom (1978d), the latter would affect only the stars in the outer halo, leaving the cores untouched. However, the numerical simulations of Aguilar & White (1986) convincingly demonstrate (c.f. Figure 2 of this paper) that tidal shocks do lead to changes in the whole galaxy structure, not just in the outer parts: “...strong collisions produce a shrinkage in \(r_e\) and a brightening of \(\mu_e\), whereas weak collisions have the opposite effect”. Here \(r_e\) and \(\mu_e\) are the parameters of the de Vaucouleurs profile: the effective radius and the surface brightness inside \(r_e\).

Although tidal stripping may not be the only mechanism originating the observed shrinkage of ellipticals, this same mechanism has been validated through numerical simulations (Willman et al. 2004; Richstone 1976) to explain the observed intrachannel light in clusters of galaxies. One of the findings of our work, that, for cD clusters (B–M type I), the shrinkage of the central ellipticals is more pronounced than in the other cluster types, is consistent with the early Richstone (1976) claim that cD halos can be formed by stars stripped out from cluster galaxies by tidal shocks, also in agreement with the very recent work of (Gonzalez et al. 2005).

4.2. Tidal stripping mechanism

Finally, we discuss how can it be decided observationally whether tidal truncation (cluster–galaxy collisions) or collisional stripping (galaxy–galaxy encounters) is the dominant mechanism for the shrinkage of the ellipticals. A way to distinguish between these alternatives is by examining how the stripping efficiency (and thus the shrinking of a galactic radius) depends on the cluster velocity dispersion. In the first case, as shown in equation 1, the efficiency should be proportional to \(\sigma_{cl}\), because the tidal radius depends on \(\sigma_{cl}^{-1}\); while, in the second case, the dependency should be the opposite, since lower velocity dispersions leaves room for longer lived, and hence stronger, galaxy–galaxy shocks. Such test applied to our present data (Section 3.4), unfortunately does not show a clear correlation between galactic sizes and \(\sigma_{cl}\). An analysis of a much larger sample, and preferably deeper, is necessary to determine which is the dominant mechanism producing the tidal stripping of ellipticals in clusters of galaxies.
5. Conclusions

We have analyzed a sample of 228 elliptical galaxies belonging to 24 clusters to look for evidence of tidal stripping and to put constraints on the mechanisms behind star removal in cluster galaxies. The stripping was quantified by examining departures of the magnitude-isophotal radius relation for cluster ellipticals, measured by the parameter $\eta$ - the ratio between the measured isophotal radius of a galaxy (at 22.75 I mag arcsec$^{-2}$ in the galaxy rest frame) and the isophotal radius expected for a galaxy with the same magnitude.

Our main conclusion is that cluster ellipticals of a given magnitude in inner/denser cluster regions are smaller than those in the outer regions by a factor of the order of 5%. The shrinkage factor tend to decrease with increasing distance from the center of the cluster and with decreasing galaxy number density. Although the amount of galaxy stellar mass lost to the ICM remains unknown, it is probably of the order of a few percent of the parent galaxy mass within the optical radius. Thus, it is highly probable that the stars lost by the central cluster ellipticals are a significant contributor to the diffuse light observed in clusters of galaxies.

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