GRBs Optical follow-up observation at Lulin observatory, Taiwan

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Summary. — The Lulin GRB program, using the Lulin One-meter Telescope (LOT) in Taiwan started in July 2003. Its scientific aims are to discover optical counterparts of XRFs and short and long GRBs, then to quickly observe them in multiple bands. Thirteen follow-up observations were provided by LOT between July 2003 and Feb. 2005. One host galaxy was found at GRB 031203. Two optical afterglows were detected for GRB 040924 and GRB 041006. In addition, the optical observations of GRB 031203 and a discussion of the non-detection of the optical afterglow of GRB 031203 are also reported in this article.

PACS 95.55.Cs – Ground-based ultraviolet, optical and infrared telescopes.
PACS 98.70.Rz – gamma-ray source; gamma-ray bursts.

1. – Introduction

A parallel effort based on the Kiso GRB optical observation system (1, 2), was started in July 2003 using the Lulin One-meter Telescope (LOT) at Taiwan. The scientific aims of our Lulin GRB program are: (1) to discover optical counterparts of XRFs and short- and long-duration GRBs; (2) to perform multi-band observations that will unlock the temporal and spectral evolution of the corresponding optical afterglows. The Lulin observatory is located in Nantou County, Taiwan, at 120°52'25"E, 23°28'07"N, on a 2862-m high peak. The sky background levels in the UBVRI bands are: U = 21.8; B = 22.0; V = 21.3; R = 20.9; I = 19.5 mag arcsec^-2, respectively. From statistical measurements at Lulin site, it was found that the typical accumulative observation time is 1700 hours per year and the typical seeing is 1.5 arcsec. The LOT is a Cassegrain telescope (f/8) with an ACE filter system and a main CCD camera – PI1300B (1340 ×
Table I. – Basic characteristics of LOT with PI1300B and AP8 CCD

| Filter | PI1300B CCD | AP8 CCD |
|--------|-------------|---------|
|        | Zero point * | Color term | Extinction | Zero point | Color term | Extinction |
| B      | 22.34±0.02  | 0.199±0.018 | 0.19±0.02 | 21.99±0.03 | 0.035±0.005 | 0.28±0.02 |
| V      | 22.68±0.02  | −0.058±0.017 | 0.11±0.01 | 21.97±0.02 | 0.069±0.004 | 0.20±0.02 |
| R      | 22.66±0.01  | −0.049±0.021 | 0.09±0.01 | 21.87±0.02 | 0.113±0.007 | 0.15±0.02 |
| I      | 21.99±0.04  | 0.040±0.029  | 0.06±0.01 | 21.27±0.03 | 0.043±0.005 | 0.12±0.02 |

*Units : Zero point (mag), Color term (mag), Extinction (mag/airmass)

Due to the fact that there are only a very few telescopes for GRB follow-up observations in East Asia, and that the observational range can reach up to Dec. −40 degree, Lulin enjoys a unique position for GRB study. The fast PI1300B read out time that allows small cadence multi-band time series photometry is another distinct advantage.

Due to the nature of GRBs detection, the Lulin GRB project is included as a part of the Target of Opportunity (TOO) program. We have developed two approaches to search for GRB optical afterglows, according to the dimensions of the burst error box provided by such satellites as HETE−2, INTEGRAL, and SWIFT. First, if the error range is larger than the FOV of the LOT, we can dither the field and search for the optical counterpart in the B or R band. Second, if the error range is smaller than the FOV, we can quickly locate the counterpart and monitor the temporal variation of the brightness of the optical afterglow in several wavelengths.

During the analysis procedure, the positions and coordinates of the detected objects in our images are compared with the USNO stellar coordinates. These physical coordinates are then transformed to equatorial coordinates using the WCS (World Coordinate System). After this, our images compared with DSS2 images, to look for likely candidates.

2. – Summary of observed events

Between July 2003 and Feb. 2005 (Table II), thirteen follow-up observations were provided by LOT. We could provide upper limits to the magnitude for ten events. Two optical afterglows were detected for GRB 040924 and GRB 041006 and the host galaxy of GRB 031203 was identified. We will focus on the GRB 031203 case in the following.

GRB 031203 was detected by the IBIS instrument on INTEGRAL on December 3, 2003 at 22:01:28 UT as a single peaked burst with a duration of 30s [4]. XMM−Newton detected two sources named S1 and S2 within the INTEGRAL error circle. The brightest source S1, which faded throughout the observation period, was interpreted to be the afterglow [5]. Its position coincided with that of a fading radio source [6].

A new source was detected by Lulin I−band observations [7]; see Figure 1. Bloom et al. [8] have pointed out that this new source could either be a galaxy in the foreground or the host of GRB 031203. A radio afterglow was detected at the same position. From spectroscopic observations, Prochaska et al. [9] found this to be an active star-forming
Table II. – Log of Lulin GRB follow-up observations.

| GRB       | Delay time (hr) | Triggered Spacecraft | Limit mag. (3σ) | Results          | Publications |
|-----------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| GRB 030823 | 3.3             | HETE − 2             | R ∼ 19          | Upper limit      | GCN 2360     |
| GRB 031026 | 6.0             | HETE − 2             | R ∼ 21          | Upper limit      | GCN 2436     |
| GRB 031203 | 19.6            | INTEGRAL             | I ∼ 20          | Host Galaxy      | GCN 2470     |
| GRB 031220 | 8.0             | HETE − 2             | R ∼ 20          | Upper limit      | GCN 2494     |
| GRB 040422 | 9.6             | INTEGRAL             | R ∼ 20          | Upper limit      | GCN 2577     |
| GRB 040916 | 16.3            | HETE − 2             | I ∼ 20          | Upper limit      | GCN 2721     |
| GRB 040924 | 2.3             | HETE − 2             | –               | OT               | GCN 2744     |
| GRB 041006 | 9.0             | HETE − 2             | –               | OT               | GCN 2785     |
| GRB 041211 | 3.4             | HETE − 2             | R ∼ 20          | Upper limit      | GCN 2840     |
| GRB 041219 | 9.6             | SWIFT                | R ∼ 21          | Upper limit      | GCN 2891     |
| GRB 050123 | 5.5             | HETE − 2             | I ∼ 19          | Upper limit      | GCN 2971     |
| GRB 050124 | 4.4             | SWIFT                | R ∼ 20          | Upper limit      | GCN 2976     |
| GRB 050215B| 13.1            | SWIFT                | V ∼ 19          | Upper limit      | GCN 3030     |

galaxy, with $z = 0.105$ and that should be the host galaxy of GRB 031203, designated HG 031203.

The LOT follow-up observations in combination with other I-band data \[10,11,12\], indicated that the source did not show variability in terms of its brightness (Figure 2). Thus, the optical source detected was the host galaxy, HG 031203, no variable source brighter than $I = 20.0$ was found during our observations. The astrometry of the GRB 031203 field was corrected by matching with stars in the USNO A2 catalog. This resulted in the following astrometric position of HG 031203: R.A. = 08h02m30s.177 ± 0.175 arcsec, Dec. = −39°51′03″.960 ± 0.164 arcsec (J2000.0). It is important to note that optical and spectroscopic observations made by several groups have revealed that SN 2003lw was associated with GRB 031203. It had a brightness peak between 26 and 34 days after the gamma-ray burst \[10,11,12,13\].

In order to explore the reason behind the absence of optical afterglow, we have analyzed the X-ray XMM – Newton afterglow data. Using the power law plus absorption
model, we found that the best fit of the photon index is $1.8 \pm 0.1$ ($\chi^2 = 14.07$ with 22 dof) with $N_H = 7.73 \pm 0.04 \times 10^{21} \text{cm}^{-2}$ for the energy between 0.6 keV to 10 keV. Our results are consistent with those found by Watson et al. [14]. Assuming no break in the lightcurve, the spectral flux distribution follows $F_\nu \propto \nu^{-\beta}$ ($\beta = 0.8 \pm 0.1$) and the extrapolation of the X-ray flux to the optical range yields $I = 20.65$ and $R = 21.13$, at 0.26 days after the burst.

In comparison with the value of $N_H = 7.73 \pm 0.04 \times 10^{21} \text{cm}^{-2}$, the neutral hydrogen column density along the line-of-sight to GRB 031203, is on the order of $N_H = 6.21 \times 10^{21} \text{cm}^{-2}$ within the Galaxy [15]. This means that most of the extinction of the optical emission of this gamma-ray burst should have come from the Galactic interstellar medium. This effect alone is enough to reduce the optical brightness by 2 magnitudes from 20.65 to about 22.65 at the $I$-band [15]. This might explain why GRB 031203 shows no optical afterglow.

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