THE CLOSE T TAURO BINARY SYSTEM V4046 Sgr: ROTATIONALLY MODULATED X-RAY EMISSION FROM ACCRETION SHOCKS

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THE CLOSE T TAUINARY SYSTEM V4046 Sgr: ROTATIONALLY MODULATED X-RAY EMISSION FROM ACCRETION SHOCKS

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ABSTRACT

We report initial results from a quasi-simultaneous X-ray/optical observing campaign targeting V4046 Sgr, a close, synchronous-rotating classical T Tauri star (CTTS) binary in which both components are actively accreting. V4046 Sgr is a strong X-ray source, with the X-rays mainly arising from high-density \(n_e \sim 10^{11–10^{13}} \text{cm}^{-3}\) plasma at temperatures of 3–4 MK. Our multi-wavelength campaign aims to simultaneously constrain the properties of this X-ray-emitting plasma, the large-scale magnetic field, and the accretion geometry. In this paper, we present key results obtained via time-resolved X-ray-grating spectra, gathered in a 360 ks XMM-Newton observation that covered 2.2 system rotations. We find that the emission lines produced by this high-density plasma display periodic flux variations with a measured period, \(1.22 \pm 0.01 \text{d}\), that is precisely half that of the binary star system (2.42 d). The observed rotational modulation can be explained assuming that the high-density plasma occupies small portions of the stellar surfaces, corotating with the stars, and that the high-density plasma is not azimuthally symmetrically distributed with respect to the rotational axis of each star. These results strongly support models in which high-density, X-ray-emitting CTTS plasma is material heated in accretion shocks, located at the base of accretion flows tied to the system by magnetic field lines.

Key words: accretion, accretion disks – stars: individual (V4046 Sgr) – stars: magnetic field – stars: pre-main sequence – stars: variables: T Tauri, Herbig Ae/Be – X-rays: stars

Online-only material: color figures

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of star formation and evolution, understanding the physics of young low-mass stars is essential. Such stars possess strong magnetic fields that regulate the transfer of mass and angular momentum to and from the circumstellar disk, via accretion and outflow phenomena. Young low-mass stars are also intense sources of high-energy emission (UV and X-rays) that ionizes, heats, and photoevaporates material in the circumstellar disk, thus affecting its physical and chemical evolution and, eventually, the disk lifetime (Ercolano et al. 2008; Gorti & Hollenbach 2009).

Low-mass pre-main-sequence stars are classified as classical T Tauri stars (CTTSs) when they still accrete mass from the circumstellar disk. They become weak-line T Tauri stars (WTTSs) when the accretion process ends. Both CTTSs and WTTSs are bright in X-rays due to the presence of hot coronal plasmas, heated and confined by the intense stellar magnetic fields (Feigelson & Montmerle 1999; Favata & Micela 2003; Preibisch et al. 2005; Güdel & Naze 2009). It was suggested that in CTTSs also the accretion process, beside the coronal magnetic activity, can provide a further X-ray emission mechanism (Ulrich 1976; Gullbring 1994; Lamzin 1999). Magnetospheric accretion models predict that in CTTSs mass transfer from the inner disk onto the star occurs via accretion streams funneled by magnetic flux tubes (e.g., Königl 1991; Hartmann et al. 1994; Bouvier et al. 2007), where material moves in an almost free fall with typical velocities of \(\sim 300–500 \text{km s}^{-1}\). The impact with the stellar atmosphere, usually involving small fractions of the stellar surface, generates shock fronts that heat the infalling material up to temperatures of a few MK, and therefore should yield significant emission in the soft X-ray band (0.1–1 keV).

Numerical modeling predicts high \(L_X \sim (10^{30} \text{erg s}^{-1})\) even for low accretion rates (\(10^{-10} M_\odot \text{yr}^{-1}\)), indicating that X-ray emission related to the accretion process can rival or exceed coronal emission (Günther et al. 2007; Sacco et al. 2008) at least in principle.

Strong evidence of accretion-driven X-rays from CTTSs has been provided by the observed high densities of the X-ray-emitting plasma at \(T \sim 2–4 \text{MK}\) \(n_e \sim 10^{12–10^{13}} \text{cm}^{-3}\) (Kastner et al. 2002; Schmitt et al. 2005; Günther et al. 2006; Argiroffi et al. 2007, 2011; Huenemoerder et al. 2007; Robrade & Schmitt 2007). These densities, considering the typical accretion rates and surface filling factors, are compatible with predictions of shock-heated material, and are significantly higher than those of typical quiescent coronal plasmas at...
temperatures of a few MK \((n_e \lesssim 10^{10}\ \text{cm}^{-3};\) Ness et al. 2004; Testa et al. 2004). Moreover, Güdel & Telleschi (2007) observed a soft X-ray excess in CTTSs with respect to WTTSs, compatible with the scenario of a further plasma component at a few MK produced by accretion. However, other results are discrepant with predictions: the observed \(L_X\) of the high-density cool plasma component in CTTSs is lower than that predicted from the accretion rate by more than a factor of 10 (Argiroffi et al. 2009; Curran et al. 2011), leaving the coronal component the major contributor to the X-ray emission in CTTSs; furthermore in the cool plasma of CTTSs the density increases for increasing temperature, at odds with predictions based on a single accretion stream (Brickhouse et al. 2010). Because of these apparent discrepancies different scenarios were proposed, suggesting that the high-density cool plasma in CTTSs could be coronal plasma, confined into magnetic loops, that is somehow modified by the accretion process (Güdel et al. 2007; Brickhouse et al. 2010; Dupree et al. 2012).

In addition to containing plasma at a few MK, the shock region is known to be associated with material at \(T \sim 10^4\ \text{K}\) or more, significantly hotter than the surrounding unperturbed photosphere, as a consequence of the energy locally deposited by the accretion process. This photospheric hot spot produces excess emission in the UV and optical bands, which is often rotationally modulated because of the very small filling factor of the accretion-shock region and because accretion streams are usually not symmetric with respect to the rotation axis (Bouvier et al. 1993; Herbst et al. 1994; Petrov et al. 2001). Therefore, if the observed high-density X-ray-emitting plasma also originates in the accretion shock, then its X-ray emission might display rotational modulation. Specifically, plasma heated in the accretion shock, observed in the X-rays, could display periodic variations in density, emission measure, average temperature, absorption, and source optical depth, as a consequence of stellar rotation. First hints of accretion-driven X-rays that vary because of the stellar rotation were provided by Argiroffi et al. (2011) for the star V2129 Oph.

Understanding the origin of this high-density plasma is important, both for constraining the total amount of X-rays emitted in CTTSs, and setting the energy balance of the accretion-shock region (Sacco et al. 2010). Eventually, a definitive confirmation that this plasma component is material heated in the accretion shock would make its X-ray radiation an insightful tool to probe the physical properties (i.e., density and velocity) of the accretion stream, and to measure the chemical composition of the inner disk material (Drake et al. 2005).

To search for such X-ray modulation effects, we planned and carried out X-ray monitoring of V4046 Sgr, a close binary CTTS system in which both components are actively accreting from a circumbinary disk (see Section 3).

In this work, we describe the first results from an XMM-Newton Large Program focused on V4046 Sgr, based on time-resolved high-resolution X-ray spectroscopy on timescales down to 1/10 of the system orbital period. To constrain the large-scale magnetic field and the accretion geometry, we also carried out a coordinated multi-wavelength campaign involving photometry, spectroscopy, and spectropolarimetry of V4046 Sgr.

In Section 2, we summarize the project focused on V4046 Sgr, whose properties are described in Section 3. Details of the data processing and analysis are reported in Section 4. The observing results are presented in Section 5, and then discussed in Section 6.
Data were filtered discarding time segments affected by high background count rates. The final net exposures of the three observing segments were of 115, 122, and 120 ks, respectively. We then applied the RGScombine task to add the RGS1 and RGS2 spectra of the same order. In total, 34,800 and 8200 net counts were registered in the first- and second-order RGS spectra, respectively.

We analyzed the RGS spectra using the IDL package PINTofALE v2.0 (Kashyap & Drake 2000) and the XSPEC v12.5 (Arnaud 1996) software. We measured individual line fluxes by fitting first- and second-order RGS spectra simultaneously.

The fit procedure was performed in small wavelength intervals ($\Delta \lambda \lesssim 1.0$ Å). The adopted best-fit function takes into account the RGS line spread function (determined by the matrix response function) and the continuum contribution (determined by adding a constant to the line emission, and leaving this constant as a free parameter in the fit).

5. RESULTS

The RGS spectra collected during the entire observation (see details in A. Maggio et al., in preparation) indicate that the main properties of the X-ray-emitting plasma of V4046 Sgr are similar to those observed during the previous Chandra observation ( Günther et al. 2006): the plasma at $T \sim 1–4$ MK has high density, $n_e \sim 10^{11}–10^{12}$ cm$^{-3}$, as determined by the $f/i$ line ratio of He-like triplets of Ne viii, O vii, and Ne ix.

5.1. Time-resolved RGS Spectra

To investigate variability on short timescales, we analyzed RGS spectra gathered in time intervals of $\sim 25$ ks (i.e., bins of 0.12 in rotational phase). In total nine lines have fluxes detected at the 1σ level in all the time intervals. These lines, and their fluxes at different time intervals, are reported in Table 1. Significant variability on the timescales explored is observed for all the lines listed.

To check for variations in the coolest plasma components, we considered lines with peak formation temperature $T_{\text{max}} < 5$ MK among the lines reported in Table 1. This sample of lines, named cool lines, is composed of the Ne ix triplet (13.45, 13.55, and 13.70 Å), O vii Lyβ 17 and Lyα (16.00 and 18.98 Å), O viii resonance line (21.60 Å), and N vii Lyα (24.78 Å). Among the lines reported in Table 1, the Ne x and Fe xvii lines stay out of

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Rot.</th>
<th>Ne x</th>
<th>Ne ix</th>
<th>Ne ix</th>
<th>Ne ix</th>
<th>Fe xvii</th>
<th>O vii</th>
<th>O viii</th>
<th>O viii</th>
<th>O vii</th>
<th>N vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>1/4</td>
<td>1/8</td>
<td>1/16</td>
<td>1/32</td>
<td>1/64</td>
<td>1/128</td>
<td>1/256</td>
<td>1/512</td>
<td>1/1024</td>
<td>1/2048</td>
<td>1/4096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/16</td>
<td>1/32</td>
<td>1/64</td>
<td>1/128</td>
<td>1/256</td>
<td>1/512</td>
<td>1/1024</td>
<td>1/2048</td>
<td>1/4096</td>
<td>1/8192</td>
<td>1/16384</td>
<td>1/32768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/32</td>
<td>1/64</td>
<td>1/128</td>
<td>1/256</td>
<td>1/512</td>
<td>1/1024</td>
<td>1/2048</td>
<td>1/4096</td>
<td>1/8192</td>
<td>1/16384</td>
<td>1/32768</td>
<td>1/65536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. For each line, the table head reports: ion, wavelength, and maximum formation temperature. $F_{\text{line}}$ refers to the line fluxes measured in the $i$th interval of the $j$th observing segment. For each time interval, the listed phase corresponds to the central time of the bin. Line fluxes are in $10^{-6}$ photons s$^{-1}$ cm$^{-2}$. Errors correspond to 1σ.

The optical monitoring campaign confirmed the orbital/rotational period (2.42 d), and determined the conjunction and quadrature epochs at the time of the XMM-Newton observation. In this work, we adopt the phase reference defined in Stempels & Gahm (2004, HJD = 2446998.353 + 2.4213459 $E$, with phase 0.0 indicating the quadrature with primary receding). However, our optical monitoring revealed a phase shift of 0.069 with respect to that ephemeres, with quadratures occurring at phases 0.93 and 0.43, and conjunctions at phases 0.18 and 0.68 (Donati et al. 2011).

### 4. OBSERVATIONS

The XMM-Newton observation of V4046 Sgr, composed of three observing segments of $\sim 120$ ks each separated by gaps of $\sim 50$ ks, covered 2.2 system rotations. X-ray-emitting material heated in the accretion shock is expected to have temperatures of a few MK at most. Therefore, to search for X-ray variability possibly produced in the accretion shock we analyzed the XMM-Newton/RGS spectra that contain emission lines that possibly produced in the accretion shock we analyzed the XMM-Newton/RGS spectra that contain emission lines that

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15 Second-order spectrum was used only for lines contained in its wavelength range.

16 The measurements of the Ne ix triplet were performed by including in the fit the Fe xii line at 13.52 Å, that is anyhow weaker than the Ne ix lines.

17 This is blended with an Fe xvi line, that is however negligible because of the emission measure distribution and abundances of the X-ray-emitting plasma.
the cool line sample, because their $T_{\text{max}}$ is higher than 5 MK. Therefore, their flux likely includes significant contributions from hot plasma. These two lines compose the hot line sample.

To maximize the signal-to-noise ratio of the coolest plasma emission, we added the measured fluxes of the cool lines for each time interval. This total line flux, plotted in Figure 1, is variable and the observed modulation is clearly linked to the high-density, cool plasma component. We fitted these observed flux variations with a sinusoid plus a constant. We left all the best-fit function parameters (period, phase, amplitude) free to vary. We obtained a best-fit period of 1.22 ± 0.01 d and an amplitude of 23% ± 2% with respect to the mean value (Table 2). The inferred period is exactly half the rotational period of the system. As guessed, maximum and minimum phases occur approximately at quadrature and conjunction, respectively. To check whether this observed modulation is effectively linked to the cool plasma emission, and not to a given line emission, we performed the same fit by separately considering the total flux obtained from different and independent cool line subsets. In all the cases inspected (see Table 2), we found the same periodic variability (period, phase, amplitude).

We checked whether this modulation is present also in the emission of hotter plasma by applying the same fit procedure to the total flux of the hot lines, Ne x and Fe xvii. Fit results are reported in Table 2; in this case the periodic modulation is not detected. The observed variability is instead likely dominated by hot (coronal) plasma. Figure 2 shows a comparison between Ne x+Fe xvii line variability with modulation observed for the cool lines. The detected X-ray rotational modulation is also not visible in the EPIC light curves (A. Maggio et al., in preparation), even considering only a soft band. The substantial continuum contribution mostly due to the highly variable hot plasma likely masks the rotationally modulated signal. Hence, we conclude that the observed X-ray line flux modulation is due to the high-density, cool plasma component.

To understand the nature of the observed variability, we searched for variations in the average temperature by considering ratios of lines originating from the same element. All the ratios inspected display significant variability, but are not correlated among themselves, and are not related to the rotational phase. We also searched for variations in the plasma density,
The total flux of the hot line set vs. time. The set of hot lines is composed of the Ne x Lyβ line at 12.13 Å and Fe xvii line at 15.02 Å. The dotted line marks a sinusoidal modulation with the same period, phase, and relative amplitude obtained from the best fit of the total flux of the cool line set. The hot lines do not show rotational modulation, unlike the cool lines, see Figure 1, suggesting that their variability is associated with coronal plasma variability.

Table 3: Observed Line Fluxes at Different Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ion</th>
<th>λ (Å)</th>
<th>T_\text{max} (MK)</th>
<th>F_{\text{Low}} (10^{-6} \text{ photons s}^{-1} \text{ cm}^{-2})</th>
<th>F_{\text{High}} (10^{-6} \text{ photons s}^{-1} \text{ cm}^{-2})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ne x</td>
<td>10.24</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.9 ± 1.3</td>
<td>4.1 ± 1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne IX</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.1 ± 1.6</td>
<td>11.9 ± 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne x</td>
<td>12.13</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>46.2 ± 3.0</td>
<td>50.6 ± 3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvi</td>
<td>12.28</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>4.3 ± 1.6</td>
<td>3.7 ± 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvi</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>72.2 ± 4.0</td>
<td>75.3 ± 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvi</td>
<td>13.52</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>16.3 ± 3.3</td>
<td>9.4 ± 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne x</td>
<td>13.55</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>27.3 ± 3.1</td>
<td>49.4 ± 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne x</td>
<td>13.70</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>29.9 ± 2.9</td>
<td>41.7 ± 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvii</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.1 ± 1.6</td>
<td>3.8 ± 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvii</td>
<td>15.02</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>13.6 ± 1.8</td>
<td>14.3 ± 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii</td>
<td>15.18</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.3 ± 1.7</td>
<td>7.9 ± 1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii</td>
<td>16.01</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>19.5 ± 2.1</td>
<td>16.2 ± 2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvii</td>
<td>16.78</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.4 ± 2.1</td>
<td>10.3 ± 1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvii</td>
<td>17.05</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>12.7 ± 2.4</td>
<td>14.1 ± 2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fe xvii</td>
<td>17.10</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.8 ± 2.6</td>
<td>8.9 ± 2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O viii</td>
<td>18.97</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>90.5 ± 4.7</td>
<td>113.9 ± 4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N vii</td>
<td>20.91</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>11.0 ± 3.1</td>
<td>7.0 ± 2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii</td>
<td>21.60</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>24.8 ± 4.0</td>
<td>46.0 ± 6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii</td>
<td>21.81</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>17.3 ± 5.9</td>
<td>24.4 ± 6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii</td>
<td>22.10</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>12.2 ± 3.9</td>
<td>10.3 ± 3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N vii</td>
<td>24.78</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>72.0 ± 5.4</td>
<td>106.6 ± 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N vi</td>
<td>28.79</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>25.0 ± 4.5</td>
<td>17.9 ± 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N vi</td>
<td>29.08</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>12.7 ± 4.1</td>
<td>7.5 ± 3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C vi</td>
<td>33.73</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>25.3 ± 5.2</td>
<td>35.6 ± 5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes. Line fluxes measured during the high and low phases are listed. Flux errors correspond to 1σ.

Table 4: Line Flux Ratios at Different Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line Flux Ratio</th>
<th>R_{\text{Low}}</th>
<th>R_{\text{High}}</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ne ix (13.45 Å)/Ne ix (11.55 Å)</td>
<td>18^{+11}_{-7}</td>
<td>6.4^{+11}_{-6}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O vii Lyα (18.97 Å)/O vii Lyβ (16.01 Å)</td>
<td>4.6^{+0.7}_{-0.5}</td>
<td>7.0^{+1.1}_{-0.8}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N vii Lyα (24.78 Å)/N vii Lyβ (20.91 Å)</td>
<td>6.5^{+0.7}_{-0.5}</td>
<td>15^{+11}_{-5}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Ratio errors correspond to the 68% confidence level.

5.2. RGS Spectra at Different Phases

The total flux of the cool lines from V4046 Sgr displayed variations in time linked to the stellar rotation. To investigate the differences in the X-ray-emitting plasma corresponding to epochs of low and high fluxes of the cool lines, we added RGS data collected at the same phases with respect to the X-ray rotational modulation. We extracted two RGS spectra obtained by adding all the events registered during time intervals centered on maximum and minimum times, with duration of one-fourth of the observed X-ray period (integration time intervals are shown in Figure 1). The two resulting low and high spectra, whose exposure times are 84 and 94 ks, respectively, are shown in Figure 3, while the measured line fluxes, detected at the 1σ level in the two spectra, are listed in Table 3.

We searched for differences in the low and high spectra to investigate how the emitting plasma properties vary between these two phases. The two spectra display significantly different photon flux ratios of N vii, O vii, and Ne ix lines, as reported in Table 4. In principle, these line ratios may vary due to changes of absorption, plasma temperature, or source optical depth. In Figure 4, we plot the measured line ratios together with the values predicted in the optically thin regime for different temperatures and different hydrogen column densities, N_H.

Absorption can change line ratios because, on average, lines at longer wavelengths suffer larger attenuation for increasing N_H. The two N vii lines considered here are an exception, because the absorption cross-section of the interstellar medium has the oxygen K-shell edge (23.3 Å, e.g., Wilms et al. 2000) located in Figure 3, while the measured line fluxes, detected at the 1σ level in the two spectra, are listed in Table 3.

In Figure 4, we plot the measured line ratios together with the values predicted in the optically thin regime for different temperatures and different hydrogen column densities, N_H.

Notes. Line fluxes measured during the high and low phases are listed. Flux errors correspond to 1σ.
Instead, an $N_H$ decrease from the low to the high state might explain the variation of the O viii line ratios, but an opposite $N_H$ variation should be invoked to justify the Ne ix variability (middle and lower panels of Figure 4). All these findings indicate that the hydrogen column density toward the source appears to be unchanged, and that the line ratio variability is produced by a different mechanism. This conclusion is supported by the similar fluxes between low and high spectra measured for the two lines at long wavelengths (N vi at 28.8 Å and C vi at 33.7 Å), the most affected by absorption, and it is also confirmed by the fully-fledged analysis of the EPIC data presented in A. Maggio et al. (in preparation), where $N_H$ is found to vary by only a factor two over the whole observation around a mean value of $3 \times 10^{20}$ cm$^{-2}$ (i.e., log $N_H = 20.5$).

The three ratios explored depend also on temperature, because of the different energy of the upper levels of the two electronic transitions considered in each ratio. In this respect, the three ratios do not vary consistently. In fact, a temperature decrease from the low state to the high state could explain the increasing N vii and O viii line ratios, but not the variation in Ne ix lines. The derivation of the plasma model (see A. Maggio et al., in preparation) is beyond the scope of this work, but we anticipate here that the emission measure distribution does not appear to vary enough between the two phases to justify the observed variations of the line ratios. Moreover, the average plasma temperature ($\log T \sim 6.6$–6.7), together with the measured $N_H$, indicates that, in some phases, line ratios are not compatible with the optically thin limit, irrespective of the nature of their variability.

Optical depth effects can change line ratios because each line optical depth is directly proportional to the oscillator strength of the transition (Acton 1978). Therefore, if optically thin emission does not apply, transitions with very different oscillator strength may suffer different attenuation/enhancement, with stronger effects occurring in lines with higher oscillator strengths. In the ratios inspected, the lines with higher oscillator strength are the Ly$\alpha$ line of N vii and O viii, and the 13.45 Å line of Ne ix (e.g., Testa et al. 2007). Non-negligible optical depth is expected in strong X-ray resonance lines produced from shock-heated plasma in CTTSSs (Argiroffi et al. 2009). The observed variable ratios might indicate that some lines are affected by a changing optical depth. Since the expected attenuation/enhancement with respect to optically thin emission depends on the source.
geometry and viewing angle, stellar rotation can produce periodic changes in the line opacity, and hence in the observed ratios. However, once again the three ratios do not vary in the same direction, with $N\text{vii}$ and $O\text{viii}$ ratios being higher in the high state, whereas the ratio of the slightly hotter Ne\text{x}\text{i} lines is higher in the low phase. This is evident from Table 4 and Figure 4.

In summary, we stress the significant variations observed in line ratios between low and high phases. The origin of these variations remains unclear. If these variations were due to changes in plasma temperature or absorption, a coherent behavior would be expected for the three ratios, and this is not the case. Opacity effects instead can operate in a more complex way, provoking both line enhancements or reductions, depending on the source geometry and viewing angle. This hypothesis is therefore the most intriguing, especially considering that in some phases line ratios are discrepant from the value expected in the optically thin limit.

6. DISCUSSION

The main result of the time-resolved spectral analysis of the X-ray-emitting plasma from V4046 Sgr (Section 5) is that the high-density plasma component at 3–4 MK is rotationally modulated with a period of half the system orbital period, with maximum and minimum phases occurring at quadrature and conjunction epochs, respectively. The observed X-ray rotational modulation indicates that this high-density plasma component is not symmetrically distributed with respect to the stellar rotational axes. We also found that strong emission lines from this plasma component provide some indications of non-negligible optical depth effects, and that the periodic modulation appears to be associated with variations in the source optical depth, as evidenced by the significant variations in line ratios sensitive to optical depth observed between low and high phases.

The strongest X-ray emission lines, produced by shock-heated material in CTTSs, are expected to have non-negligible optical depth due to the high density and typical size of the post-shock region (Argiroffi et al. 2009). Moreover, the optical depth should vary if the viewing geometry of the post-shock region changes.

Hints of non-negligible optical depth observed in the strongest X-ray lines of V4046 Sgr indicate that the high-density plasma is mostly concentrated in a compact portion of the stellar surface, as predicted for the post-shock material. Moreover, the variability of the optical depth can be naturally explained with the changing viewing geometry of the volume occupied by the high-density plasma during stellar rotation. This scenario requires plasma confinement by the stellar magnetic fields.

We observed an X-ray period of half the system orbital period, as already observed for accretion indicators (e.g., Vrba et al. 1993; Kurosawa et al. 2005) and X-ray emission (Flaccomio et al. 2005) from some CTTSs. That could be explained, in the case of V4046 Sgr, by different scenarios. If the X-ray-emitting plasma is located in only one of the two system components, then a period of half the rotational period is observed when there are two accretion-shock regions on the stellar surface at opposite longitudes, or there is only one accretion-shock region and the maximum X-ray flux is observed when the base of the accretion stream is viewed sideways (Argiroffi et al. 2011, a configuration that occurs twice in one stellar rotation).

Considering the system symmetry and the accretion geometry previously suggested by Stempels & Gahm (2004), it is conceivable that both components possess similar amounts of high-density cool plasma. In this scenario, the half-period can be naturally explained assuming that the location on each stellar surface of this plasma, compact and not azimuthally symmetric with respect to each stellar rotation axis, is symmetric for 180° rotations with respect to the binary rotation axis.

The simultaneous optical monitoring campaign indicated that the two components have similar accretion rates, validating the assumption that the two components possess similar amounts of high-density plasma. However, the optical accretion spots, probed by Ca\text{ii} IRT, did not show rotational modulation (Donati et al. 2011). Therefore, accretion regions emitting Ca\text{ii} should be symmetrically distributed with respect to the stellar poles. This scenario, different from that obtained from the X-ray data, could be reconciled considering that X-rays are likely produced only by a fraction of the entire accretion-shock region (Sacco et al. 2010).

In conclusion, our XMM-Newton/RGS data of the V4046 Sgr close binary system have shown for the first time the rotational modulation of X-ray lines characteristic of a cool, high-density plasma corotating with the stars. This strongly support the accretion-driven X-ray emission scenario, in which the high-density cool plasma of CTTSs is material heated in the accretion shock. It moreover suggests that the accretion flow is channeled by magnetic field lines anchored on the stars, along small magnetic tubes. This is consistent with the general framework of magnetic accretion, but brings new insights into the accretion mechanism in close binary systems of CTTSs.

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