

Medium-resolution echelle spectroscopy of pulsating variables and exoplanet host stars with sub-meter telescopes

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1. Introduction

Medium-resolution echelle spectroscopy that is capable of ± 50 m/s radial velocity precision was first introduced to Hungarian observatories in late 2011 and early 2012. The instrument, the commercially available eShel echelle spectrograph of the French Shelyak Instruments [7] offers an exceptional light throughput that allows better than 100 m/s radial velocities for 9–11th magnitude stars with typical integrations of 20–60 minutes. With this precision a range of ground-based spectroscopic support work has become possible.

Here we present two of our interesting results obtained over the last 18 months on binary pulsating stars and exoplanet host stars. Our investigations are very promising by demonstrating that modern fiber-fed spectrographs open a whole new chapter in the life of small national and university observatories, which are currently active almost exclusively in CCD imaging and hence doing only multicolor photometry.

2. Spectrograph

The spectrograph consists of three main components. The fiber injection and guiding unit (FIGU) is attached to the RC focus of the telescopes. The field of view is monitored by a video camera through a diagonal mirror. FIGU is placed behind it and injects the light into the $50\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ core diameter multi-mode acquisition fiber. The spectrograph is located in a thermally isolated room. The light from the object fiber is collimated and projected to an R2 echelle grating, which is typically used between orders #29 and #56 separated by a prism, while the 2D raw spectrum is imaged by a Canon telephoto lens, and recorded by a QSI camera (Kodak KAF1600 chip). The light of the calibration lamps (ThAr, flat-field) is led to the FIGU through an other, $200\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ core diameter multi-mode fiber. During calibration exposures an electromagnetically controlled flip-mirror closes the light path from the telescope and projects the calibration light into the object fiber.

The entire process of data acquisition is fully computer controlled. The system is surprisingly compact and lightweight and it is easy to carry and install on different telescopes.



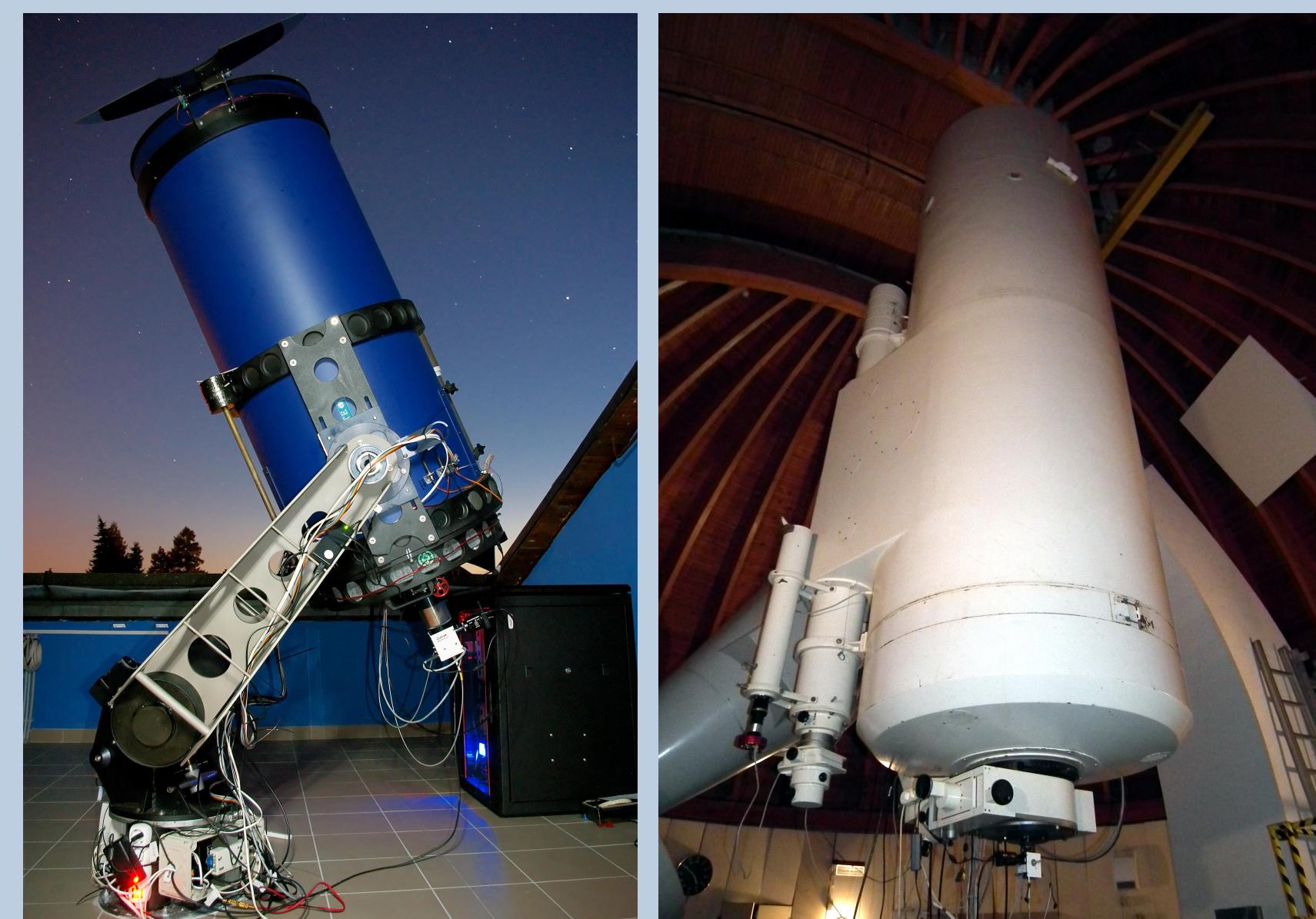
The eShel echelle spectrograph and its accessories: QSI 532ws CCD camera and the ThAr unit with its power supply box in a thermally isolated concrete room below the 0.5m RC telescope of the Gothard Astrophysical Observatory.

References

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- [4] Szabados, L. 2003, Inf. Bull. Var. Stars, 5394
- [5] Szabados, L. et al. 2013, MNRAS, 434, 870
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3. Telescopes & observations

The main light gathering instrument for the spectrograph is the 0.5m RC telescope of the Gothard Astrophysical Observatory (GAO), but thanks to its transportability it has regularly been used on the 1m RCC telescope at Piszkéstető Mountain Station of the Konkoly Observatory (PO). FIGU's focal ratio is $f/9$ which equals to that of 0.5m RC. This value for the 1m RCC is $f/13.5$, hence a 0.63x focal reducer made by Meade is used when the spectrograph is mounted on this telescope. Also a ten days long observing run had been carried out at the Hvar Observatory (University of Zagreb) for testing the spectrograph on the 1m ACT telescope.



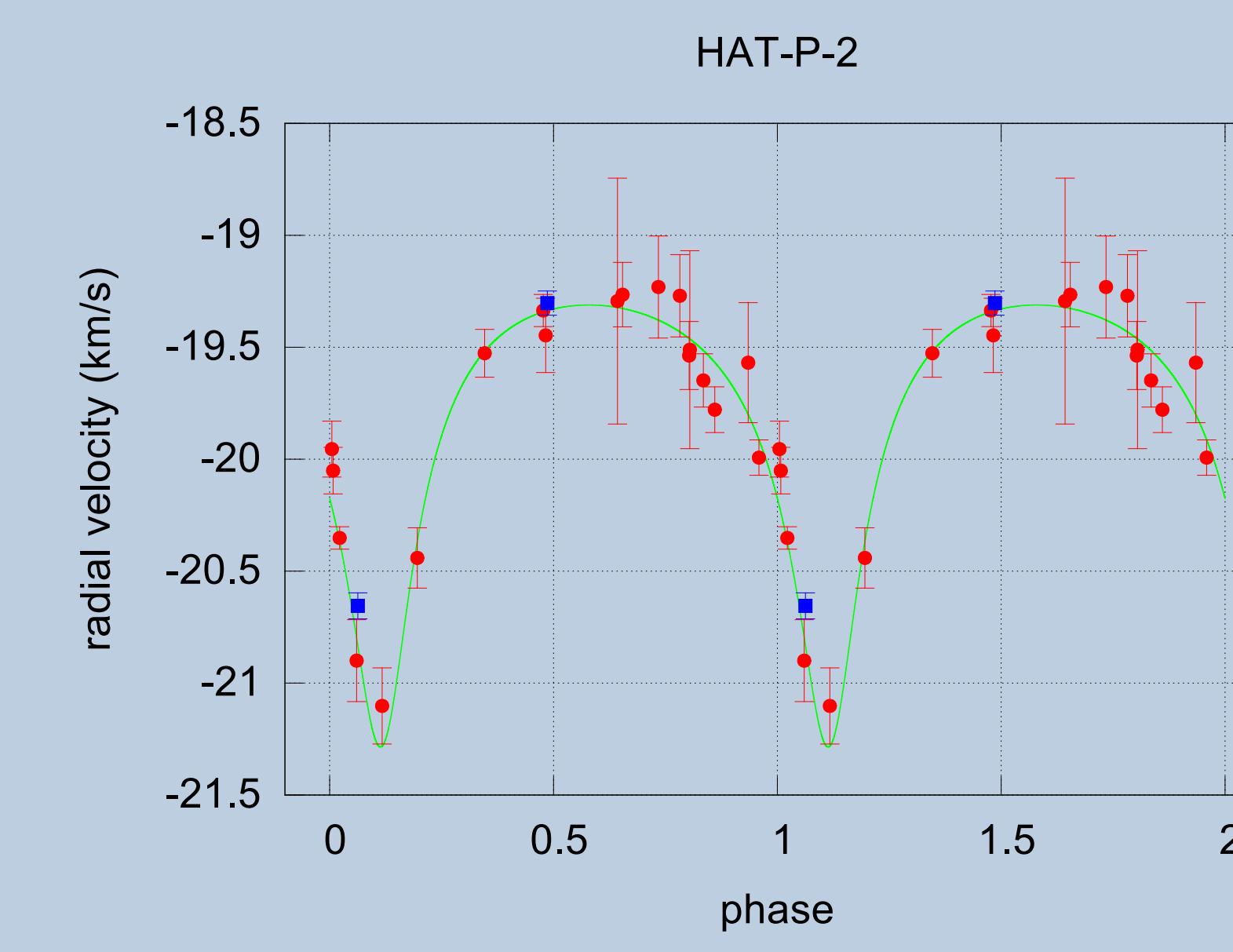
0.5m RC telescope of GAO and 1m RCC telescope of PO.

Over the last 18 months more than 16 000 scientific frames including about 4 700 stellar spectra of about 180 stars were recorded, mainly at GAO and PO during several long observing runs. A typical night session starts and ends with observation of radial velocity standard stars, whose spectra are taken for checking the stability of derived radial velocities. ThAr spectra are recorded in every hour during the night, while long series of dark frames of different exposures times are taken as frequently as possible, usually in the daytime.

4. Exoplanet host stars

Doppler observations of exoplanet systems has been a very expensive technique, mainly due to the high costs of high-resolution stable spectrographs. However, recent advances in instrumentation enable affordable Doppler planet detections with surprisingly small optical telescopes that have traditionally been neglected for this kind of studies.

Our target list includes well known bright exoplanet host stars, as well as somewhat fainter objects from WASP and HATNet projects, e.g. HAT-P-2 [2].



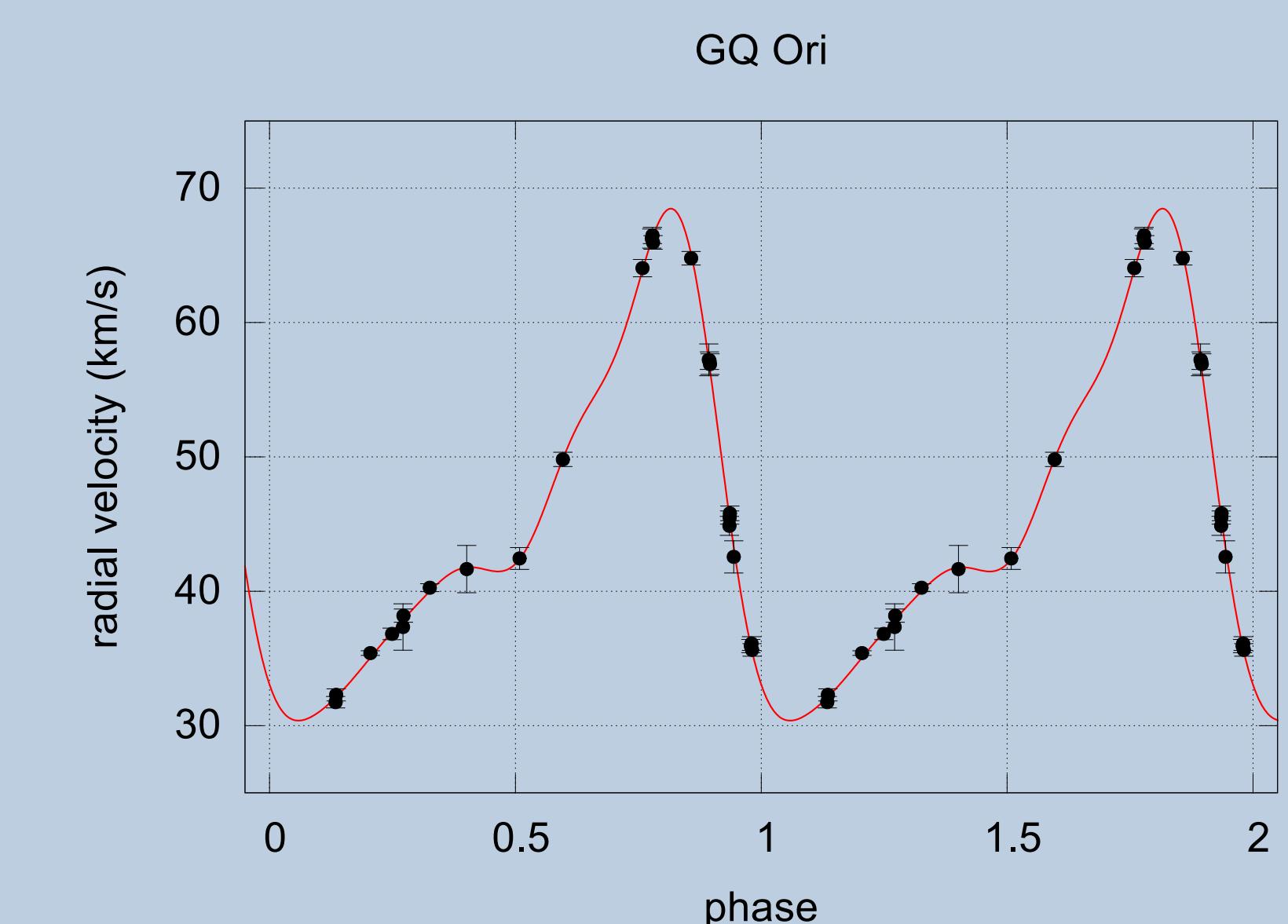
Model RV curve of exoplanet host star HAT-P-2 based on photometric observations (green) overplotted with our (red) and Mercator/HERMES (blue) radial velocity measurements. Note that the accuracy of our data is sometimes better than 100 m/s, which clearly shows the applicability of our technique for detection exoplanets with relatively small RV amplitude.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Konkoly Observatory for using 1m RCC telescope and its infrastructure. The project has been supported by City of Szombathely under Agreement No. S-11-1027. L. Szabados thanks also ESTEC for supporting his work under Contract No. 4000106398/12/NL/KML.

5. Pulsating variables

Photometry of pulsating variables is a traditionally successful research field of the Hungarian astronomy, but over the last century no spectroscopic observations were carried out in our observatories. With the acquisition and installation of a medium-resolution mobile echelle spectrograph our aim was to change this situation, especially in the case of Cepheids.

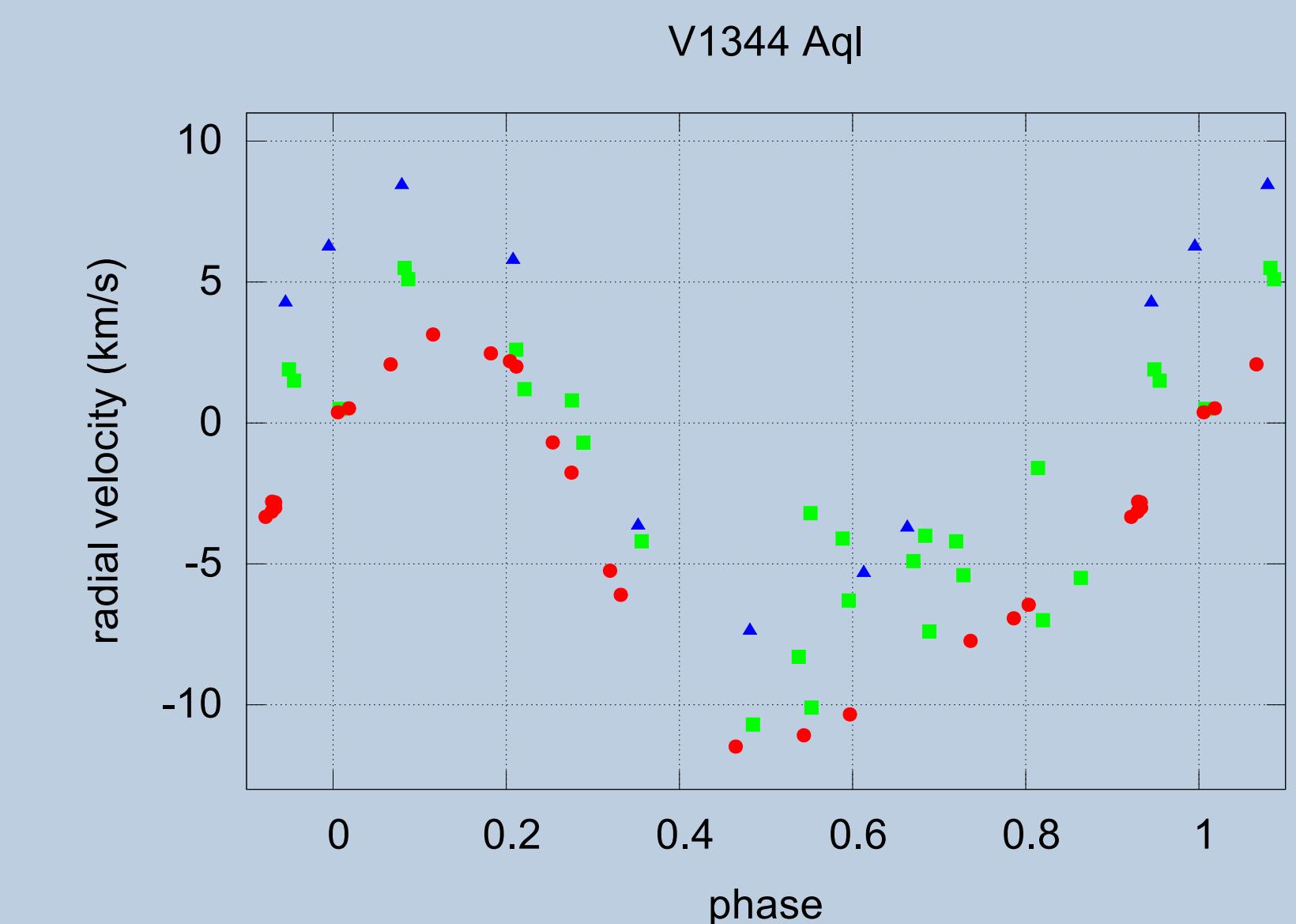


RV phase curve of GQ Ori based on very first medium-resolution echelle spectra taken in a Hungarian observatory ever. Data points are fitted with a Fourier polinomial of $n = 5$.

Classical Cepheid variables are well known primary distance indicators owing to the P - L relationship. Companions to Cepheids, however, complicate its applicability for distance determination [5].

Binaries among Cepheids are not rare at all: their frequency exceeds 50% for the brightest Cepheids, while among the fainter Cepheids an observational selection effect encumbers revealing binarity [4]. In the case of pulsating variables, spectroscopic binarity (SB) manifests itself in a periodic variation of the γ -velocity. In practice, the orbital radial velocity variation of the Cepheid component is superimposed on the RV variations of pulsational origin.

The very first result of this work is pointing out the SB nature of the bright Galactic Cepheid V1344 Aql by analysing old and our new radial velocity measurements [6]. Two earlier data sets ([3], [1]) already imply a slight shift between the annual mean velocities. Supplemented with our new data, the merged phase diagram of all RV observations clearly shows a vertical shift between the mean values valid for early 1980s and 2012. Though the difference is small, quality of the data and the identical treatment is a guarantee that the shift is real.



RV phase curve of V1344 Aql. Red circles represent our new measurements, green squares denote Balona's data [3], while Arellano Ferro's data [1] are marked as blue triangles.

Regular monitoring of the RVs of a large number of Cepheids will be instrumental in finding more long-period SBs among them. Data to be obtained with the Gaia astrometric space probe will certainly result in revealing many new SBs among Cepheids brighter than 13–14th magnitude. As to V1344 Aql, we keep this Cepheid among our targets.