

SPECTROSCOPIC OBSERVATIONS OF COMET KOHOUTEK (1973f) - II

Piero Benvenuti

Systematic spectroscopic observations of comet Kohoutek (1973f) were scheduled at the Asiago Astrophysical Observatory, starting from the end of October. The nebular spectrograph for the newtonian focus of the 122 cm reflector was selected as main instrument for this research. This spectrograph, described by Bertola (1970), is followed by a WL-30677 image tube and it is particularly designed for extended objects of low surface brightness. Two gratings were used giving a dispersion in the first order of 125 \AA mm^{-1} and 240 \AA mm^{-1} respectively. The scale normal to the dispersion is $127 \text{ arcsec mm}^{-1}$ and the full length of the slit is 8 arcmin.

Weather conditions, particularly bad after the 25th of January, shortened the observational program, and the 40 available spectra cover six nights before perihelion and five nights after perihelion. The material is listed in Table I.

As already published (Herbig, 1973, Benvenuti and Wurm, 1974) the first spectra of the coma of comet Kohoutek were characterised by some fairly strong, asymmetric, unidentified emissions in the red and the near infrared spectral regions. From these very preliminary indications Herzberg and Lew (1974) proposed a tentative identification of the H_2O^+ ion. As soon as the comet approached the perihelion and further spectra became available, other H_2O^+ emissions appeared (Benvenuti, 1974, Wehinger and Wyckoff, 1974), and the tentative identification was confirmed (Wehinger et al., 1974).

Table 1
Log of Observations

Date	r	Δ	Spectrum No	U.T.	Exposure	Dispersion	
Oct 30	1.55	2.15	2127	4 ^h 39 ^m	17 ^m	240 Å mm ⁻¹	
			2128	4 33	6	240	
Oct 31	1.53	2.12	2137	3 50	10	240	
			2138	4 14	10	240	
			2139	4 29	15	240	
			2150	4 00	20	125	
Nov 2	1.49	2.06	2166	4 12	10	125	
Nov 21	1.10	1.58	2167	4 25	3	125	
			2168	4 38	10	125	
			2169	4 49	15	125	
			2171	4 29	20	125	
			2172	4 56	20	125	
Nov 23	1.06	1.53	2195	4 55	5	240	
			2196	5 02	1	240	
			2197	5 15	5	240	
			2198	5 25	10	240	
			2199	5 07	5	240	
Dec 4	0.80	1.30	2200	5 22	5	240	
							+
Jan 17	0.70	0.82	2227	17 18	3	240	
			2228	17 25	10	240	
			2229	17 37	5	240	
			2230	17 46	1	240	
			2231	18 10	15	240	
			2232	18 28	15	240	
Jan 18	0.73	0.83	2235	17 32	10	125	
			2236	17 41	4	125	
			2237	17 52	10	125	
			2238	18 18	5	240	
			2239	18 35	20	240	
			2240	18 54	15	240	
			2266	17 27	4	125	
			2267	17 36	10	125	
Jan 23	0.85	0.87	2268	17 47	3	125	
			2269	18 02	10	125	
			2270	18 18	15	125	
			2271	18 50	30	125	
			2277	17 54	1	240	
			2278	17 57	10	240	
			2279	18 05	10	240	
			2280	18 15	1	240	
Jan 25	0.90	0.90	2281	18 31	15	240	
							+

(+) Tail Spectrum

ORIGINAL PAGE IS
OF POOR QUALITY

H_2O^+ emissions were measured in two high quality Asiago spectra. The resulting wavelengths, in good agreement with those published by Wehinger et al. (1974), are listed in table II, together with laboratory data. In these spectra some features remain still unidentified, even if, as for their spatial behaviour, i.e. the asymmetry respect to the continuum, they look like ion emissions. As the H_2O^+ bands identified so far belong to the v' progression $(0, v', 0) - (0, 0, 0)$, it is likely that the unidentified lines come from other progressions with higher vibrational levels in the lower state. These progressions are present in the laboratory spectra but not yet completely analysed.

H_2O^+ emissions are extremely asymmetric respect to the nucleus. This is shown in Fig.2, where two microphotometric tracings of the spectrum No 2235 are reported: in case a the slit was put on the tail side, in case b on the opposite (Sun) side, symmetrically respect to the continuum. The distance between the two slit positions was 2×10^5 Km. Moreover Fig. 3 shows the profiles, normal to the dispersion, of the two more prominent lines of H_2O^+ and of the adjacent continuum (the profile of the 6122 \AA NH_2 line is also reported for comparison). From these tracings an upper limit of 2.5×10^4 Km can be derived for the extension of the H_2O^+ ions towards the Sun. For several spectra the slit of the spectrograph was set normal to the radius vector in order to derive the radial distribution of H_2O^+ around the nucleus, but in that case no traces of ions emission was found over the continuum.

Table II
Cometary and Laboratory Lines of H_2O^+

Sp No 2171	Sp No 2235	Laboratory (\AA)	Assignment
-	5521.0	5521.2	10-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(2)$
-	5798.3	5799.7	9-0, Σ $P_{Q_{1,N}}(3)$
-	5915.7	5915.3	9-0, Δ $P_{P_{3,N-2}}(3)$
6148.3	6146.9	6147.1	8-0, π $r_{R_{O,N}}(0)$
6158.4	6158.1	6158.7	8-0, π $r_{Q_{O,N}}(2)$
6187.5	6187.3	6187.2	8-0, π $P_{Q_{2,N-1}}(3)$
6199.7	6199.6	6199.4	8-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(2)$
-	6210.6	6210.5	8-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(3)$
-	6222.9	6222.4	8-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(4)$
-	6542.6	6542.8	7-0, Σ $P_{Q_{1,N}}(1)$
-	6561.8	6562.7	7-0, Σ $P_{P_{1,N-1}}(1)$
6576.2	6576.9	6575.0	7-0, Δ $r_{R_{1,N}}(1)$
-	6594.2	6594.3	7-0, Δ $r_{Q_{1,N}}(4)$
6684.9	6686.7	6686.0	7-0, Δ $P_{P_{3,N-2}}(3)$
6969.9	-	6971.9	6-0, π $r_{R_{O,N}}(0)$
6984.4	-	6986.5	6-0, π $r_{Q_{O,N}}(2)$
7039.2	-	7039.3	6-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(2)$
7052.7	-	7054.1	6-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-1}}(3)$
7069.8	-	7069.9	6-0, π $P_{P_{2,N-2}}(4)$

Laboratory wavelengths are averages of the spin doublets.

**ORIGINAL PAGE IS
OF POOR QUALITY**

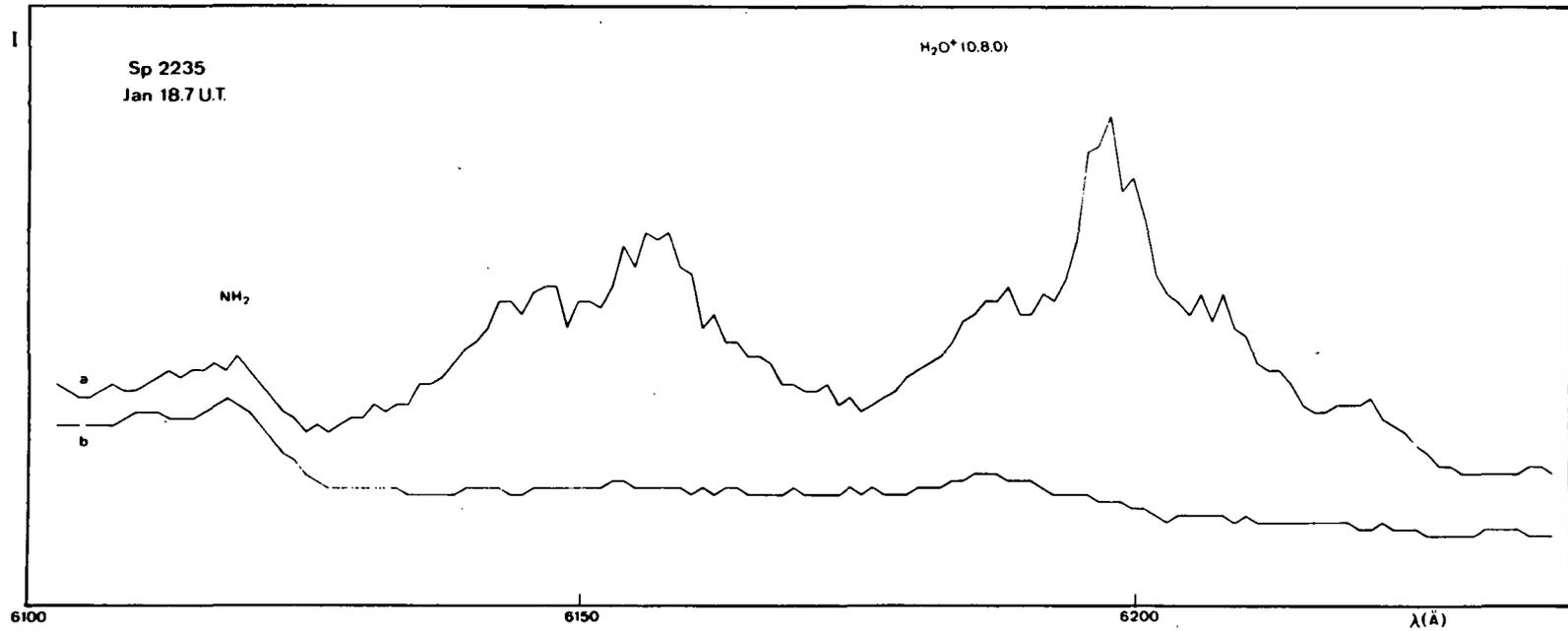


Fig. 2 - Microphotometric tracings of Spectrum No 2235 (see Fig. 1). The microphotometric slit in case a was towards the tail, in case b towards the Sun.

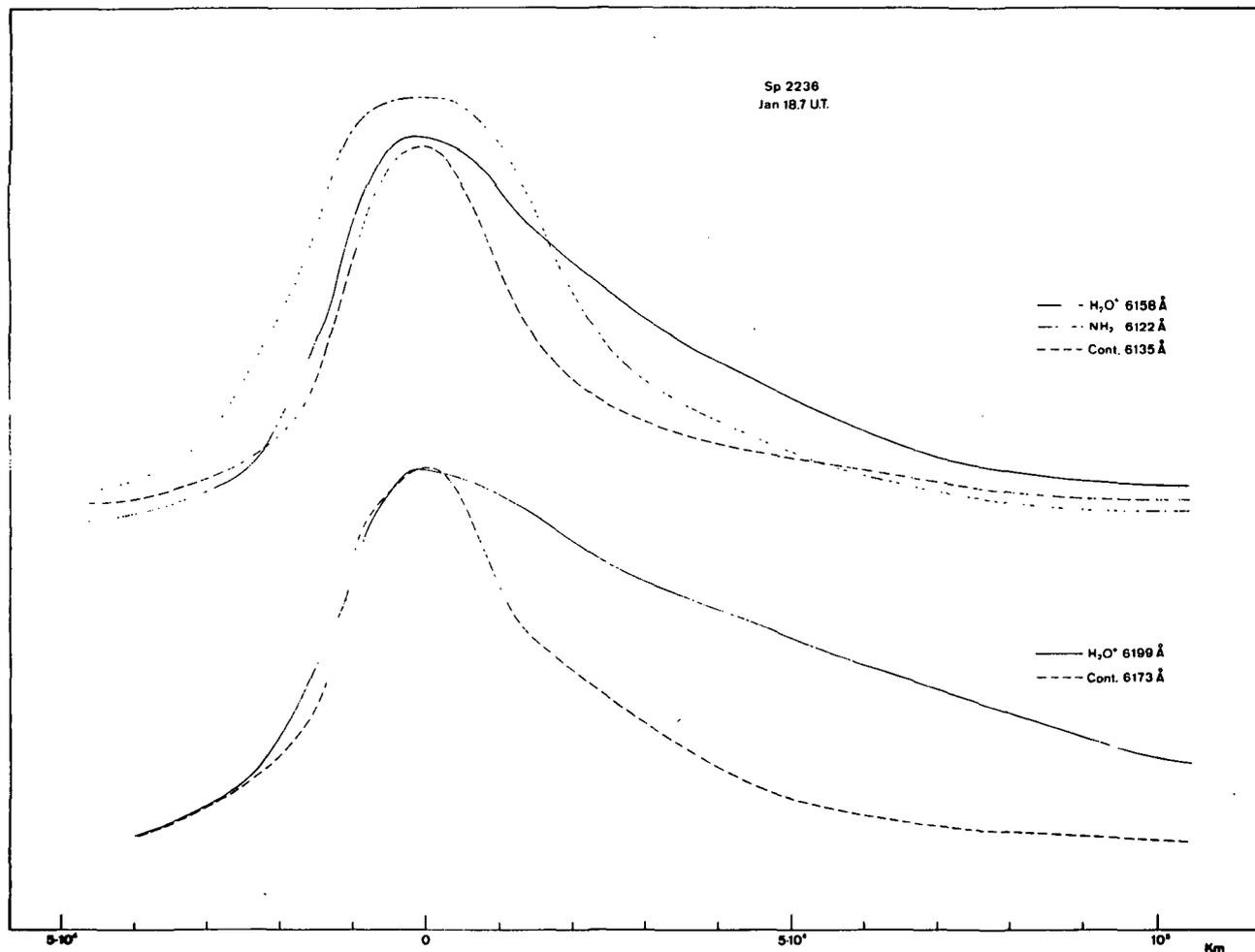


Fig. 3 - Microphotometric tracings, normal to the dispersion, of two H₂O⁺ lines and of the adjacent continuum. The profile of NH₂ at 6122 Å is also reported.

H_2O^+ emissions dominate also the tail spectrum: this was roughly evident when red Schmidt plates of the Comet showed sharp filaments of the type I tail over the smooth dust tail. This was confirmed by some spectra taken in the tail at distances from the nucleus ranging from 5.5×10^5 Km to 1.4×10^6 Km (spatial resolution was achieved by offset guiding on the nucleus). Fig. 4 shows two of these spectra, and Fig. 5 reports the slit positions on a blue photograph taken at the same time with the 90/60 cm Schmidt telescope. At this heliocentric distance ($r = 0.70$ A.U.) also CO^+ emission was fairly strong and traces of C_2 and CN were present at about 8.2×10^5 Km from the nucleus. Spectrum No 2232, normal to the radius vector, shows that the more prominent tail stream of Jan 17th had very sharp edges, suggesting a bounded structure. The evolution of this feature can be followed in the plates of Jan 16th and 19th (Figs. 6,7): on the latter date it became unstable and a screwlike structure appeared. It would be very interesting to match these photographs with other plates (if available somewhere) taken at intervals of a few hours.

Besides the H_2O^+ emission, another peculiarity of Comet Kohoutek was the appearance of the [OI] forbidden lines at $\lambda\lambda$ 6300 - 6364 Å, already at heliocentric distance $r = 1.55$ A.U. (Comet emissions were clearly visible in short exposure spectra, although our dispersion were too low to show any Doppler shift from the night sky lines). The [OI] emissions are present in all our sample and became

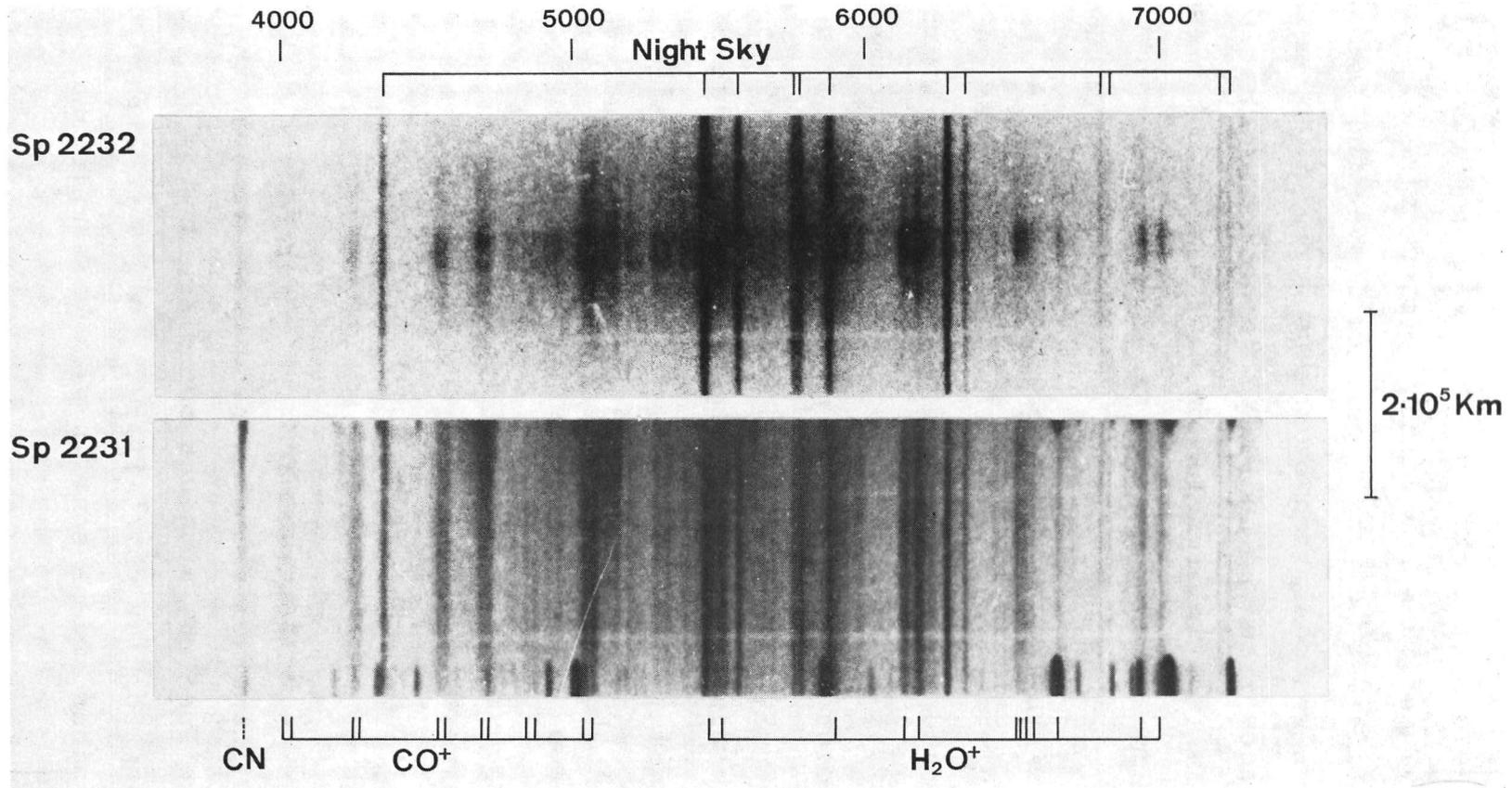


Fig. 4 - Tail spectra of Comet Kohoutek. The slit was centered at 8.2×10^5 Km from the nucleus, along the radius vector for Spectrum No 2231, perpendicular to it for Spectrum No 2232.

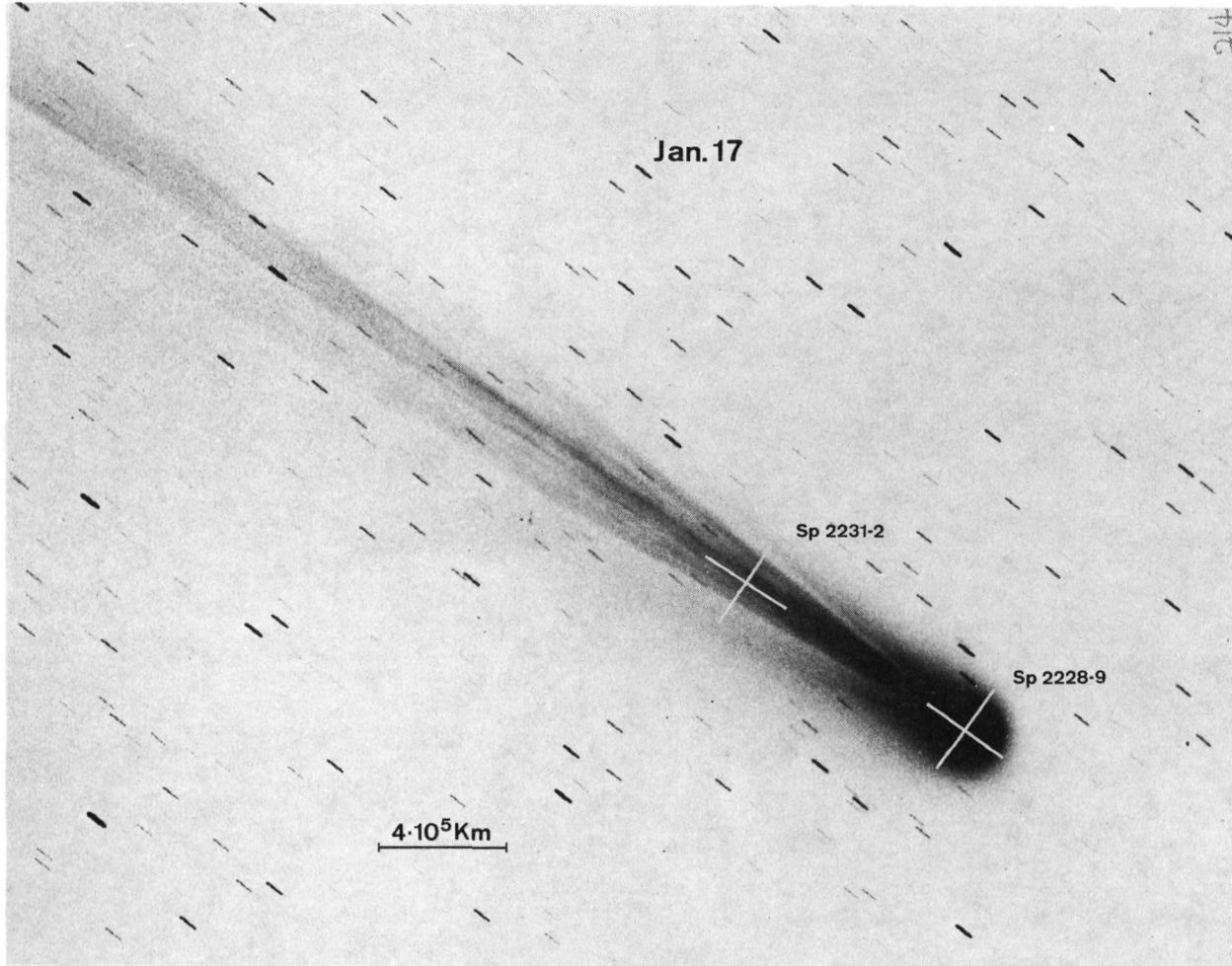


Fig. 5 - Comet Kohoutek. Asiago 90/60 cm Schmidt Telescope,
Jan 17.76 U.T., 103a-0, 15^m exposure. Slit positions
of Spectra Nos 2228-9 and 2231-2232 are reported.

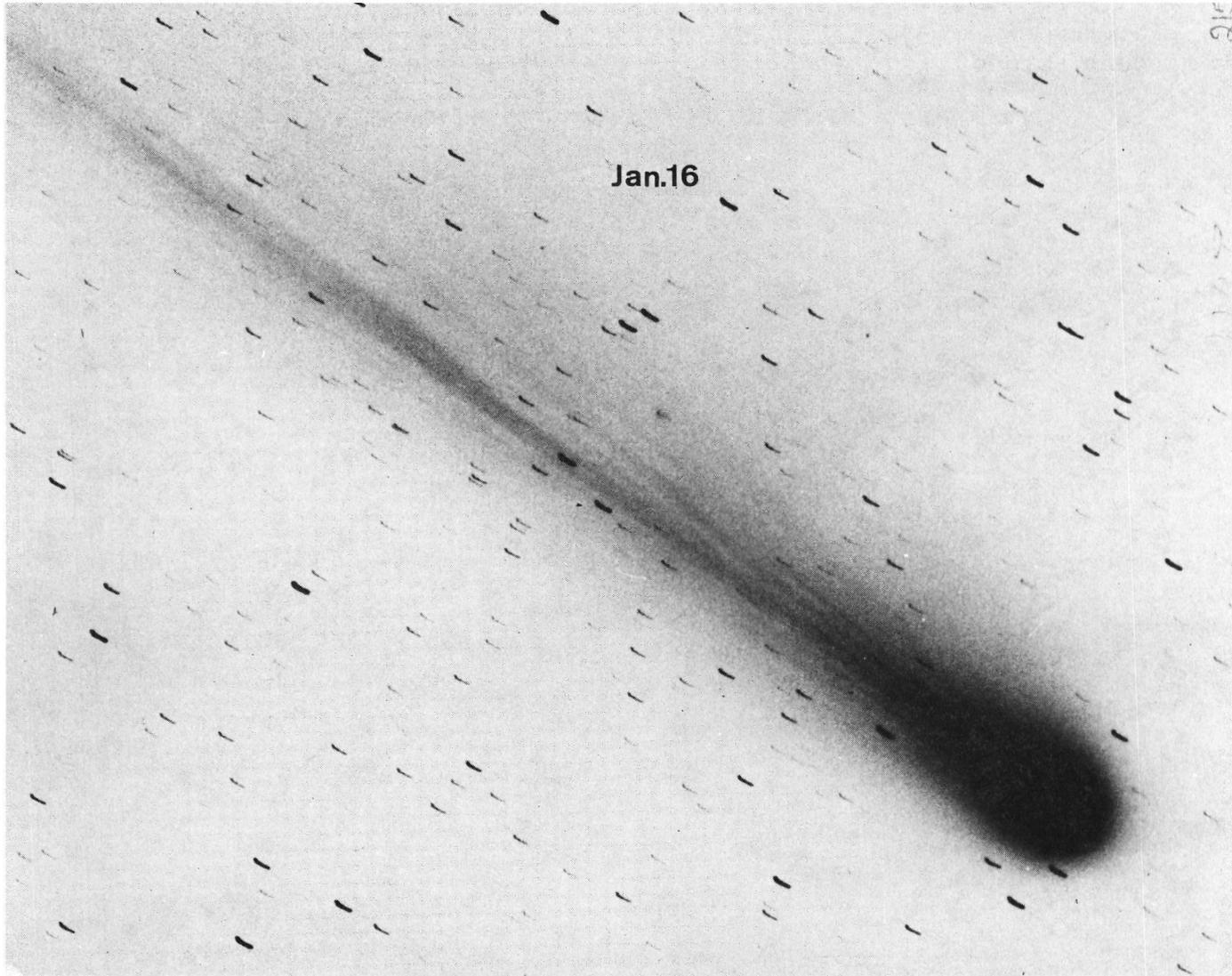


Fig. 6 - Comet Kohoutek. Jan 16.75 U.T. (data as Fig. 5)

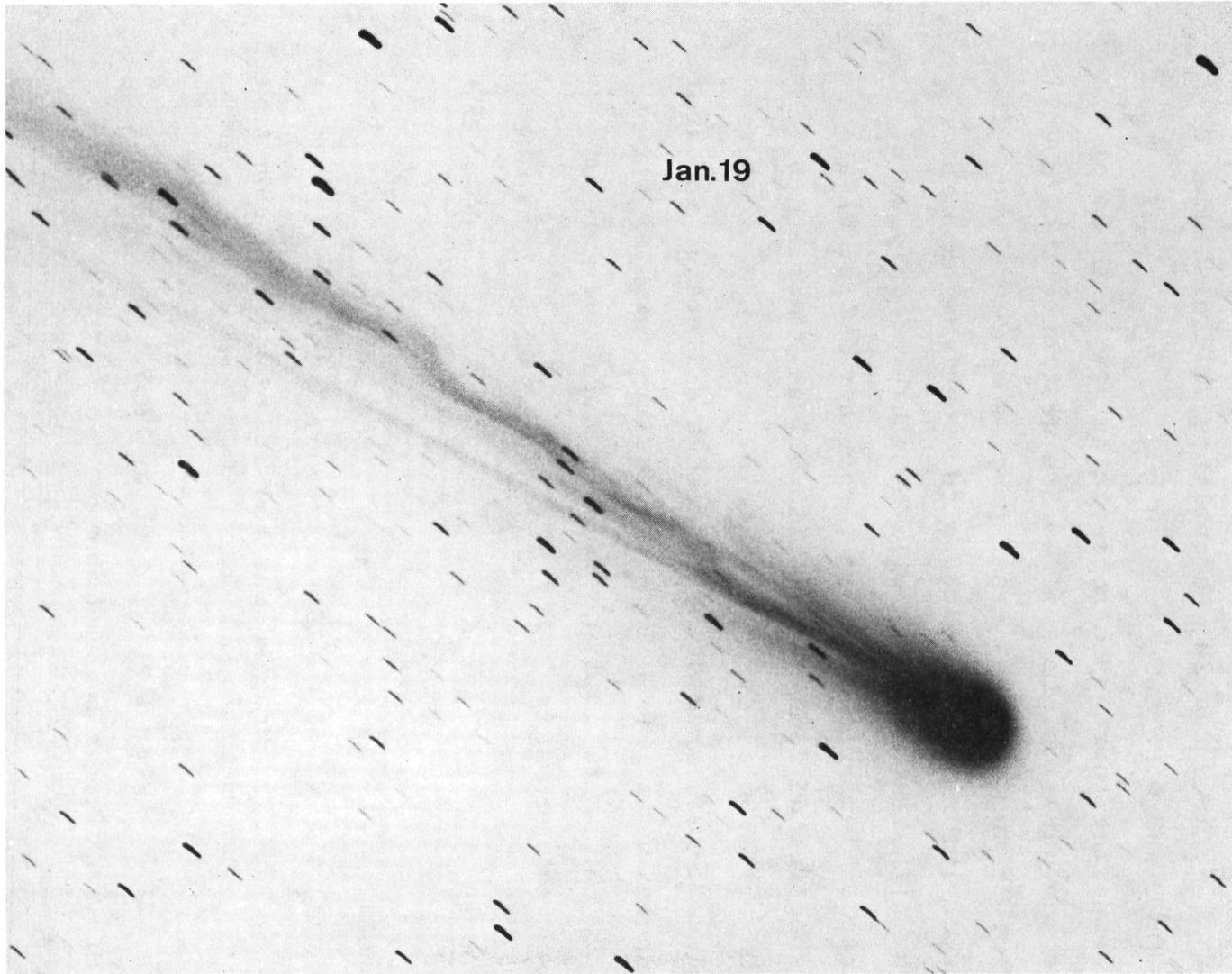


Fig. 7 - Comet Kohoutek. Jan 19.75 U.T. (data as Fig. 5)

fairly strong at $r = 0.80$ A.U.. CO^+ was rather poor in Comet Kohoutek: its emissions are present only in the spectra of Jan 17th, 18th and 23rd at heliocentric distances of 0.70, 0.73 and 0.85 A.U., respectively.

Comparing these spectroscopic data with those of other comets the question arises if we are dealing with a peculiar comet or if the observed discrepancies are merely due to a lack of information about the red spectrum of previous comets. Although an answer will be achieved only with new data on future comets, we report here (Fig. 8) a tail spectrum of Comet Bennet (1969i) at $r = 1.1$ A.U.. The CO^+ emission is clearly visible but no H_2O^+ features can be detected, suggesting that some difference in chemical abundances or in physical conditions must exist.

The author is much indebted to Drs. Herzberg and Lew for useful communications.

References

- Benvenuti, P. 1974, I.A.U. Circular No 2628
- Benvenuti, P., Wurm, K. 1974, *Astron. & Astrophys.*, 31, 121
- Bertola, F. 1972, *Proceedings ESO/CERN Conference on Auxiliary Instrumentation for Large Telescopes*, Ed. by Lausten and Reiz
- Herbig, G. H. 1973, I.A.U. Circular No 2596
- Lew, H. 1974, Private communication
- Wehinger, P., Wyckoff, S. 1974, I. A. U. Circular No 2626
- Wehinger, P., Wyckoff, S., Herbig, G. H., Herberg, G., Lew, H. 1974, *Astrophys. J. (Letters)*, 190, L43

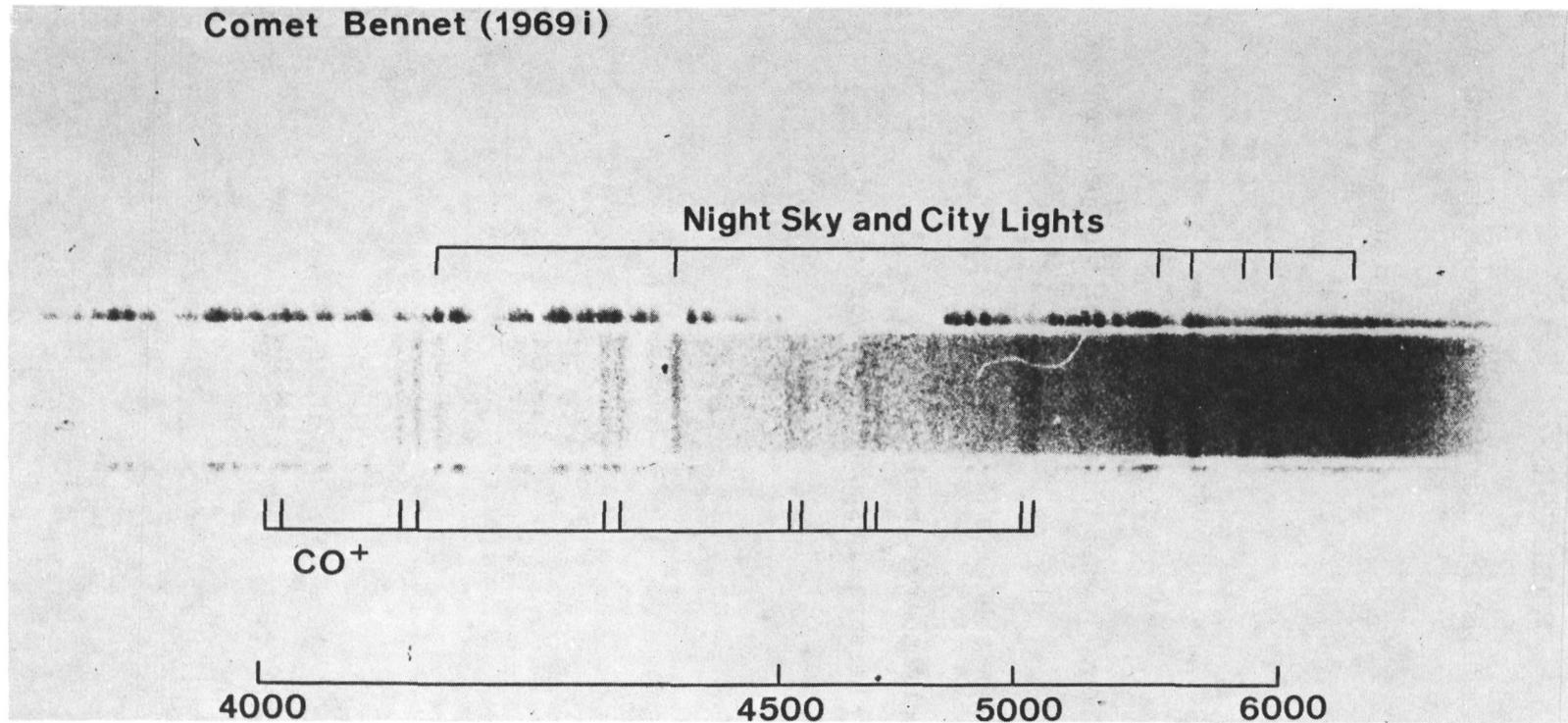


Fig. 8 - Comet Bennet (1969i). Tail spectrum, May 3.30 U.T., 1970. The slit was put normal to the tail at about 6.2×10^5 Km from the nucleus. Heliocentric distance $r = 1.1$ A.U.

DISCUSSION

G. Herzberg: I was going to ask Dr. Herbig, and perhaps Benvenuti can comment on that, too.

Dr. Herbig told us that in his spectra H_2O^+ is strongest at the head, if I understood correctly.

D. H. Herbig: Correct.

G. Herzberg: Now my question is, what about CO^+ , is it also strongest at the head?

D. H. Herbig: I don't know. It wasn't in the region of the spectrum we photographed.

G. Herzberg: Would you be able to tell?

P. Benvenuti: In the region near the nucleus?

It is very difficult to say because my spectra are overexposed near the nucleus.