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the Cool Image of the Kuiper Belt Analogue q¹ Eri

R. Liseau¹, C. Eiroa², D. Fedele^{2,3,4}, J.-C. Augereau⁵, G. Olofsson⁶, B. González⁷, J. Maldonado², B. Montesinos⁸, A. Mora^{2,9}, O. Absil¹⁰, D. Ardila¹¹, D. Barrado^{8,12}, A. Bayo^{8,24}, C.A. Beichman¹³, G. Bryden¹⁴, W. C. Danchi¹⁵, C. del Burgo¹⁶, S. Ertel¹⁷, C.W.M. Fridlund¹⁸, A.M. Heras¹⁸, A.V. Krivov¹⁹, R. Launhardt³, J. Lebreton⁵, T. Löhne¹⁹, J.P. Marshall²⁰, G. Meus², S. Muller¹⁹, G.L. Pilbratt¹⁸, A. Roberge¹⁵, J. Rodmann²¹, E. Solano⁸, K.R. Stapelfeldt¹⁴, Ph.Thébault²², G.J. White^{20,23}, S. Wolf¹⁷

1. Onsala Space Observatory, Chalmers University of Technology, S-439 92 Onsala, Sweden 2. Departamento de Física Teórica, C-XI, Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Cantoblanco, 28049 Madrid, Spain 3. Max Planck Institut für Astronomie, Königstuhl 17, 69117 Heidelberg, Germany 4. Johns Hopkins University Dept. of Physics and Astronomy, 3701 San Martin drive Baltimore, MD 21210 USA 5. Université Joseph Fourier/CNRS, Laboratoire d'Astrophysique de Grenoble, UMR 5571, Grenoble, France 6. Stockholm Observatory, AlbaNova University Center, Roslagstullsbacken 21, SE-106 91 Stockholm, Sweden 7. INSA at ESAC, E-28691 Villanueva de la Canada, Madrid, Spain 8. LAEX-CAB, Depto. Astrofísica, Centro de Astrobiología (INTA-CSIC), P.O. Box 78, E-28691 Villanueva de la Canada, Madrid, Spain 9. ESA-ESAC Gala SOC, P.O. Box 78, E-28691 Villanueva de la Canada, Madrid, Spain 10. Institut d'Astrophysique et de Géophysique, Université de Liège, 17 Allée du Six Aout, B-4000 Sart Tilman, Belgium 11. Spitzer Science Center, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125, USA 12. Centro Astronómico Hispano Alemán de Calar Alto (CAHA), C/ Jesu Durban Ramon 2-2 E-04004 Almeria, Spain 13. NASA Exoplanet Science Institute, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, CA 91125, USA 14. Jet Propulsion Lab, California Institute of Technology, 4800 Oak Grove Dr, Pasadena, CA 91109, USA 15. NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, Exoplanets and Stellar Astrophysics, Code 867, Greenbelt, MD 20771 16. UNINOVA-CA3, Campus da Caparica, Quinta da Torre, Monte de Caparica, 2825-149 Caparica, Portugal 17. University of Kiel, Institute of Theoretical Physics and Astrophysics, Leibnizstrasse 15, 24098 Kiel, Germany 18. ESA Astrophysics & Fund Physics Missions Division, ESTEC/SRE-SA, Keplerlaan 1, NL-2201 AZ Noordwijk, The Netherlands 19. Astrophysikalisches Institut und Universitätssternwarte, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, Schillergässchen 2-3, 07745 Jena, Germany 20. Department of Physics and Astronomy, Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes MK7 6AA, UK 21. ESA/ESTEC Space Environment and Effects Section, PO Box 299, 2200 AG Noordwijk, The Netherlands 22. LESIA, Observatoire de Paris, 92195, Meudon, France 23. Science and Technology Facilities Council, Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, Chilton, Didcot OX11 0QX, UK 24. European Southern Observatory, Alonso de Cordova 3107, Vitacura, Santiago, Chile

Abstract. About two dozen ex-solar debris systems have been spatially resolved. These debris discs commonly display a variety of structural features such as clumps, rings, belts, eccentric distributions and spiral patterns. In most cases, these features are believed to be formed, shaped and maintained by the dynamical influence of planets orbiting the host stars. In very few cases has the presence of the dynamically important planet(s) been inferred from direct observation.

The solar-type star q¹ Eri is known to be surrounded by debris, extended on scales of up to some 30". The star is also known to host at least one planet, albeit on an orbit far too small to make it responsible for structures at distances of tens to hundreds of AU. The aim of the present investigation is twofold: to determine the optical and material properties of the debris and to infer the spatial distribution of the dust, which may hint at the presence of additional planets.

The photodetector array camera and spectrometer (PACS) aboard the Herschel Space Observatory allows imaging observations in the far infrared at unprecedented resolution, i.e. at better than 6" to 12" over the wavelength range of 60 μ m to 210 μ m. Together with the results from ground-based observations, these spatially resolved data can be modelled to determine the nature of the debris and its evolution more reliably than what would be possible from unresolved data alone.

For the first time has the q¹ Eri disc been resolved at far infrared wavelengths. The PACS observations at 70 μ m, 100 μ m and 160 μ m reveal an oval image showing a disc-like structure in all bands, the size of which increases with wavelength. Assuming a circular shape yields the inclination of its equatorial plane with respect to that of the sky, $i > 53^\circ$. The results of image de-convolution indicate that i likely is larger than 63° , where 90° corresponds to an edge-on disc.

The observed emission is thermal and optically thin. The resolved data are consistent with debris at temperatures below 30 K at radii larger than 120 AU (7"). From image deconvolution, we find that q¹ Eri is surrounded by an about 40 AU wide ring at the radial distance of about 85 AU. This is the first real Edgeworth-Kuiper Belt analogue ever observed.

Keywords. Stars: q¹Eri (HD 10647, HR 506, HIP 7978) -- planetary systems: planetary discs -- circumstellar matter -- formation

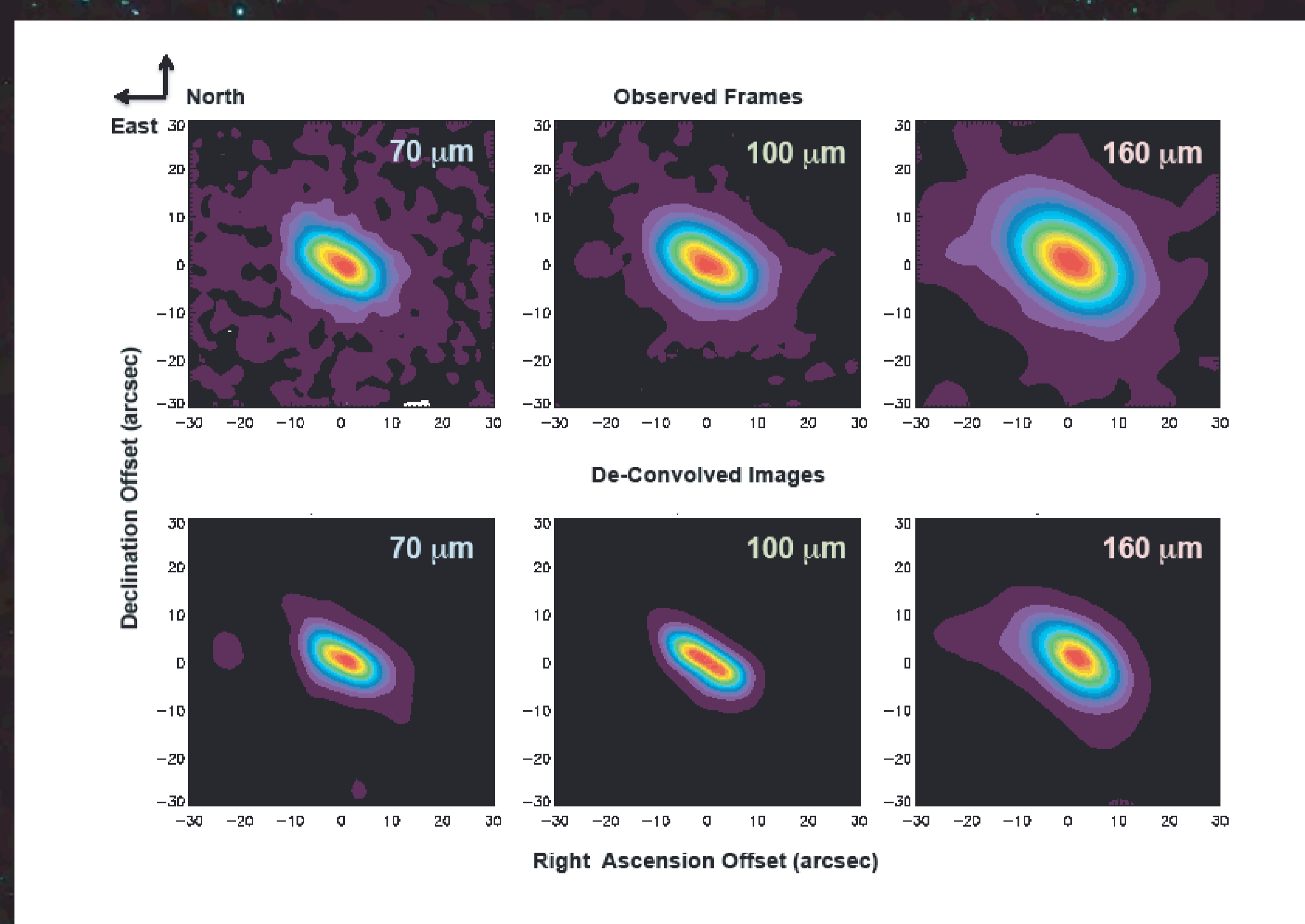


Figure Caption: PACS photometric imaging of q¹ Eri at, from left to right, 70 μ m (blue), 100 μ m (green) and 160 μ m (red). The 70 μ m image was taken in chop-nod mode, whereas the other two in scan-map mode. The upper panels display the reduced observations. Below, deconvolved images are shown, using observations of α Boo for the definition of the PSF. Displayed are the results for ten iterations of a MEM algorithm (Hollis et al. 1992, ApJ 386, 293). The star defines the origin of the frames, i.e. offset coordinates (0, 0). Within the positional accuracy (2" rms), the stellar position and the centre of the elliptical brightness distributions coincide and offsets are in seconds of arc. The lowest contours are at 5% of the maximum values and consecutive steps are also by this amount. At the distance of the star, 20" corresponds to 350 AU.

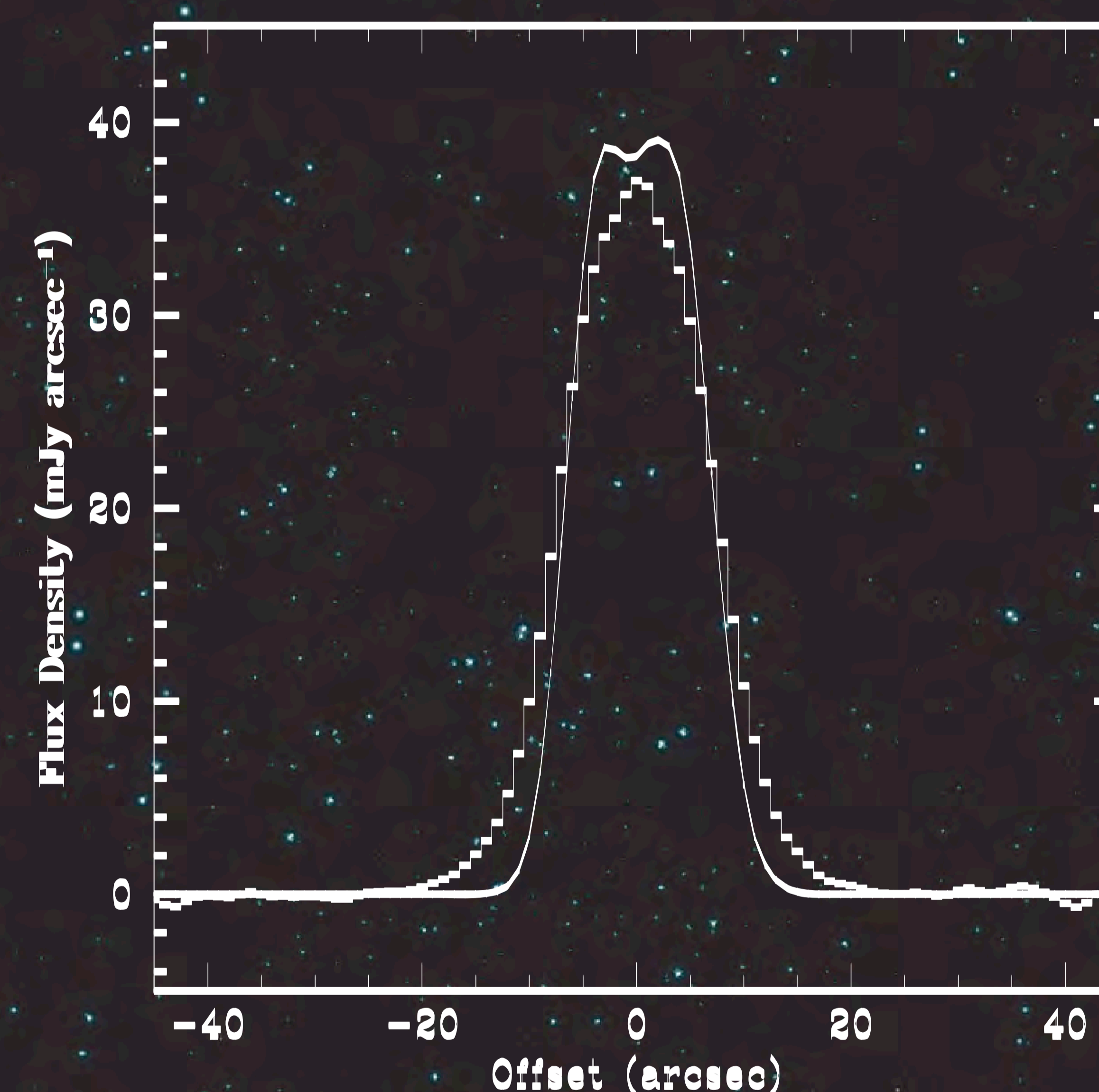


Figure Caption: One-dimensional cuts (averages of 5 pxl wide strips), along the major axis, through the 100 μ m scan map image, from which the stellar source (8 mJy) has been subtracted prior to the deconvolution. The histogram depicts the observed data, whereas the smooth line shows the result of the deconvolution, revealing the ring structure around the star q¹ Eri. This ring or belt is situated 85 AU from the star and has a width of 45 AU. Read the whole story in the Special Issue of A&A on Herschel.

Conclusions: Based on imaging observations with PACS in three photometric bands at 70 μ m, 100 μ m and 160 μ m we find that

- the debris around the solar-type star q¹ Eri has an oval-shaped brightness distribution, the size of which increases with the wavelength.
- the high S/N of the 100 μ m scan map is adequate to MEM the image, revealing a ring-like structure with max surface density at about 85 AU
- with a width of about 35 to 45 AU, this ring/belt around the some billion year old F9 V star q¹ Eri is similar to the Edgeworth-Kuiper belt around the Sun. This may hint at the presence of another planet, q¹ Eri c.

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