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**Development of an observational error model, and astrometric masses of 28  
asteroids**

Thesis submitted by  
James J. Baer  
in July 2010

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Centre for Astronomy  
James Cook University

## Statement on the Contribution of Others

This dissertation produced three published papers:

- Chesley, S.R., Baer, J.J., Monet, D.G. Treatment of Star Catalog Biases in Asteroid Astrometric Observations, 2010, *Icarus* 210, 158. Sections 1-5 of this paper correspond to section 4 of the dissertation. Steve Chesley coordinated the community-wide effort to resolve the star catalog biases, and was therefore the lead author of this paper. I wrote sections 1, 2, 4.1, 5, 7.1, and 8 of this paper, while Steve wrote sections 3, 4.2, 6, and 7.2. For the purposes of this dissertation, I have rewritten all of the text that Steve contributed in my own words. Dave Monet contributed the catalog-specific bias look-up table described in that paper's section 4.2. With the exception of sections 6 and 7 (which are not included in this dissertation), I performed all of the calculations for this paper.
- Baer, J.J., Chesley, S.R., Milani, A. Development of an observational error model, 2011, *Icarus* 212, 438. The content from this paper corresponds to sections 3 and 5 of the dissertation. I wrote all of this paper, and performed all of the research associated with it.
- Baer, J.J., Chesley, S.R., Matson, R.D. Astrometric Masses of 26 Asteroids and Observations on Asteroid Porosity, 2011, *Astronomical Journal*, 141, 143. The content from this paper corresponds to sections 2, 6.0, 6.3, and 7.0 of the dissertation. I wrote all of this paper. Rob Matson contributed precovery observations of several asteroids; but I performed all of the calculations and analysis.

Intellectual support was provided by the following collaborators:

- Steve Chesley (Solar System Dynamics Group, Jet Propulsion Laboratory) acted as my Principal Supervisor. We discussed all aspects of this effort, including the design, construction, implementation, and validation of the observational error model, and the interpretation of the asteroid mass determinations. Steve coordinated the community-wide effort to resolve the star catalog biases, and was therefore the lead author of the first paper; however, for the purposes of this dissertation, I have rewritten all of the text that Steve contributed to that paper in my own words. Steve was also co-author on the second and third papers.
- Andrea Milani (Department of Mathematics, University of Pisa) helped conceive the idea of an observational error model, and provided guidance throughout its development. He was a co-author on the second paper.
- Rob Matson (Science Applications International Corporation) was a co-author on the third paper, contributing precovery images and reduced positions of several test asteroids.
- Dave Monet (U.S. Naval Observatory) was a co-author on the first paper, contributing the catalog-specific bias look-up table.

- Dan Britt (Department of Physics, University of Central Florida) shared his expertise on asteroid mineralogy, and discussed the appropriate grain densities for different asteroid classes.
- Alan Harris (Space Science Institute) helped locate a reliable occultation-based diameter for asteroid 8 Flora.

The full text of this dissertation was written by me; and all calculations (unless otherwise noted) were performed by me.

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## Abstract

As a large asteroid encounters a smaller body, its gravitational attraction perturbs the trajectory of the smaller asteroid. The method of astrometric mass determination uses a least-square algorithm to simultaneously solve for both the orbit of the small asteroid, and the mass of the larger asteroid required to produce the observed perturbation. Since the perturbations are quite small, the observations of the smaller asteroid must be highly precise; and the perturbations of other asteroids must be accounted for.

Current practice, however, is to assume that all observations of a given era have the same uncertainty, and that the errors in these observations are uncorrelated. These assumptions are unrealistic; and they lead to sub-optimal masses and orbits. We therefore pursue development of an observational error model that provides realistic estimates of the uncertainties and correlations in asteroid observations.

In the course of our first attempt to construct the error model, we detected a significant bias in the observations of numbered asteroids, due to position-dependent errors in the star catalogs from which the observations were reduced. Before proceeding further, we developed a method to remove these biases, and undertook extensive calculations to validate its performance. Implementing this technique, we completed development of the error model, and demonstrated that it produces orbits that are both more accurate, and more precise.

We then used the new error model to iteratively refine an integrated ephemeris of 300 large asteroids, which allowed us to deduce the masses of 28 main-belt asteroids. These include the first published masses of 5 Astraea ( $1.255 \pm 0.003 \times 10^{-12} M_{\odot}$ ) and 39 Laetitia ( $2.83 \pm 0.73 \times 10^{-12} M_{\odot}$ ).

After combining our mass estimates with those of other authors, we studied the bulk porosities of over 50 main-belt asteroids; and after reviewing the collisional evolution of main-belt asteroids, we concluded that asteroids as large as 300 km in diameter may be loose gravitational aggregates. This finding will place a specific constraint on models of main-belt collisional evolution. Additionally, we found that C-type asteroids tend to have significantly higher macroporosity than S-type asteroids; and after reviewing thermal models of asteroid accretion, we concluded that distant C-type asteroids likely have a cometary-type structure and composition that results from a lack of global heating following their initial accretion.

# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1	Asteroid Mass Determinations . . . . .	12
1.2	Asteroid Volume Determinations . . . . .	13
1.3	Asteroid Density and Porosity . . . . .	15
<b>2</b>	<b>Previous Work</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1	Selection of candidate encounters . . . . .	16
2.2	The force model . . . . .	17
2.3	The iterative process . . . . .	17
2.4	The mass determination algorithm . . . . .	18
2.5	Results . . . . .	20
<b>3</b>	<b>The Observational Error Model</b>	<b>20</b>
3.1	The Work of Carpino et al. (2003) . . . . .	21
3.2	Definition of the Observational Error Model . . . . .	22
3.3	Numerical Considerations . . . . .	24
<b>4</b>	<b>The Initial Error Model, and the Star Catalog Biases</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1	Detection of the Star Catalog Biases . . . . .	27
4.2	The Star Catalog Flag . . . . .	39
4.3	Debiasing: An Iterative Indirect Approach . . . . .	43
4.4	Debiasing: A Direct Star Catalog Approach . . . . .	45
4.5	Debiasing Validation: A Test on All Numbered Asteroids . . . . .	51
4.6	Correlation of Postfit Residuals with Sky Position . . . . .	52
4.7	Untagged Astrometry . . . . .	57
4.8	Correlation of Residuals with Time . . . . .	58
4.9	Correlation of Residuals with Focal Plane Position . . . . .	59
4.10	Validation Through Prediction . . . . .	61
4.11	Application: Asteroid Mass Estimation . . . . .	62
<b>5</b>	<b>Error Model: Second Iteration</b>	<b>65</b>
5.1	Refinements in the Second Iteration . . . . .	65
5.2	Error Model Validation . . . . .	79
5.3	Error Model Interpretation . . . . .	83
<b>6</b>	<b>Application of the Error Model: Asteroid Mass Determination</b>	<b>84</b>
6.1	Advantages of the Error Model for Mass Determination . . . . .	88
6.2	PanSTARRS Mass Determination Simulations . . . . .	90
6.3	Interpretation of Masses . . . . .	94
<b>7</b>	<b>Porosity Implications</b>	<b>104</b>
7.1	Rubble Pile Evidence . . . . .	105
7.2	Interpreting C-type porosity . . . . .	110
7.2.1	Collisional Hypothesis . . . . .	110
7.2.2	Thermal Evolution . . . . .	112

7.2.3 The Nice Model . . . . .	114
<b>8 Research Plan</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>A Extract from the BC-405 Asteroid Ephemeris</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>B The Error Model Correlation Coefficients</b>	<b>139</b>
<b>C Extract from the Observational Error Model</b>	<b>141</b>



## List of Tables

1	Star Catalog Flags for Optical Observations in MPC Data File. . . . .	41
2	Observer-supplied Star Catalog Information . . . . .	41
3	Total Observations Using Each Star Catalog. . . . .	42
4	Inter-catalog Systematic Errors, with respect to 2MASS. . . . .	47
5	Residual Statistics for Numbered Asteroids by Catalog and Observa- tory. . . . .	53
6	Attribution of unknown 699 and 644 observations. . . . .	57
7	Mass/Porosity Determinations Using Raw and Debiased Observations.	63
8	Characteristics of the MIX bins. . . . .	69
9	Masses measured using the observational error model . . . . .	84
10	Mass and significance comparison: Observational error model vs. con- ventional uncertainties . . . . .	88
11	Improvements in mass determination for simulated PanSTARRS ob- servations (first set of encounters). All masses are in units of $10^{-12}M_{\odot}$	91
12	Improvements in mass determination for simulated PanSTARRS ob- servations (second set of encounters). All masses are in units of $10^{-12}M_{\odot}$	92
13	Improvements in mass determination for simulated PanSTARRS ob- servations (third set of encounters). All masses are in units of $10^{-12}M_{\odot}$	93
14	Recent Asteroid Mass Determinations . . . . .	95
15	Asteroid Ephemeris Extract: Epoch = JD 2453775.0 . . . . .	131
16	Error Model Extract: Correlation Coefficients . . . . .	140
17	Error Model Extract: Bin RMS Error, Bias, and Kurtosis . . . . .	142

## List of Figures

1	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 291 and 333.	28
2	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 566 and 608.	29
3	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 644 and 675.	30
4	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 683 and 689.	31
5	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 691 and 699.	32
6	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 703 and 704.	33
7	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 809 and E12.	34
8	Initial RA and Dec correlation models for observatories G96 and MIX.	35
9	Kurtosis of RA and Dec residuals for initial error model. . . . .	36
10	Nominal residuals of the numbered asteroids, illustrating Dec bias. . .	37
11	Mean residuals of the numbered asteroids, illustrating Dec bias. . . .	37
12	Mean of normalized post-fit residuals for the 1649 numbered asteroids (including all numbered NEAs and some space mission targets) under automated orbit maintenance as of mid-2008. Nearly all observations are weighted at 1 arcsec, so the abscissa is approximately in arc seconds.	38
13	Applied USNO A2.0 Dec debias (in arc sec) - Fifth Iteration. . . . .	44
14	Probability densities of inter-catalog systematic errors, as compared to the 2MASS catalog. For each plot, the abscissa is the difference in arcsec between the given catalog and 2MASS, and the ordinate is the associated probability density in $\text{arcsec}^{-1}$ . Note that the plots are not all on the same scale. . . . .	46
15	HEALPix maps of the RA and Dec biases with respect to 2MASS for USNO A1.0, A2.0, B1.0, UCAC, and Tycho. . . . .	48
16	HEALPix maps of the RA standard deviations with respect to 2MASS. The Dec dispersions are not significantly different. . . . .	49
17	Distribution of orbital element variation between raw and debiased fits to all numbered asteroids. . . . .	51
18	Mean residuals for fits of raw astrometry to numbered asteroids. The plots depict 49152 equal area cells using the HEALPIX algorithm (Górski et al., 2005). Cells with ten or fewer observations are not plotted. . . .	54
19	Mean residuals for fits of debiased astrometry to numbered asteroids. The debiasing has substantially removed the catalog bias signal seen in Fig. 18. . . . .	55
20	Distribution of postfit residuals for raw and debiased orbital fits for all numbered asteroids. . . . .	56
21	Correlations between closely-spaced observations of the same asteroid for several large observatories, illustrating the reduction in correlation due to debiasing. . . . .	58
22	Mean residuals for the image planes of observatories 703, E12, and G96, illustrating the effects of high order distortions in the image reduction process. . . . .	59
23	Cumulative distribution function of raw and debiased "observed - predicted" RMS errors for opposition n-3, demonstrating that the debiased orbits better predict observations. . . . .	61

24	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 106 and 291. . . . .	67
25	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 568 and 608. . . . .	68
26	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 644 and 673. . . . .	69
27	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 683 and 689. . . . .	70
28	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 691 and 699. . . . .	71
29	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories 703 and 704. . . . .	72
30	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories E12 and G96. . . . .	73
31	Second Iteration RA and Dec correlation models for observatories J75 and MIX. . . . .	74
32	RA RMS errors for observations of magnitude 18-19 made by observatory 704 as a function of time. . . . .	75
33	Dec RMS errors for observations of magnitude 18-19 made by observatory 704 as a function of time. . . . .	75
34	RA RMS errors for observatory 704 as a function of bin threshold magnitude. . . . .	76
35	Dec RMS errors for observatory 704 as a function of bin threshold magnitude. . . . .	77
36	Relative differences in error model and debiased epoch state vectors for asteroids 1-200,000. . . . .	78
37	Cumulative Distribution Function: RMS errors for the error model and the conventional model with debiased observations. . . . .	79
38	Cumulative Distribution Function: Normalized RMS errors for the error model and the conventional model with debiased observations. . . . .	81
39	Cumulative Distribution Function: RMS errors for the error model and the conventional model with debiased observations for opposition n-3. . . . .	81
40	Cumulative Distribution Function: RMS errors for the error model and the conventional model with debiased observations for opposition n-4. . . . .	82
41	Bulk porosity as a function of effective diameter for the asteroids in Table 14. . . . .	104
42	Bulk porosity as a function of effective diameter for the C-type asteroids in Table 14. . . . .	105
43	Bulk porosity as a function of effective diameter for the S-type asteroids in Table 14. . . . .	106
44	Density of asteroids per unit volume as a function of semi-major axis. The semi-major axes for the numbered asteroids are drawn from the Minor Planet Center MPCORB file for January 5, 2009. . . . .	111