

# The initial stages of cluster mergers observed in radio and X-rays

Andrea Botteon (Leiden Observatory)

in collaboration with the LOFAR Galaxy Clusters Working Group and Surveys KSP  
botteon@strw.leidenuniv.nl

## 1. Introduction

Despite the observed connection between mergers and diffuse radio sources in the intra-cluster medium in the form of radio halos and relics [1, 2], little is known about the generation of synchrotron emission in the very *early phase* of a merger (Fig. 1). Systems in this merging phase are referred to as *pre-merging* clusters. From a theoretical point of view, it is still unclear if (and how) a significant fraction of the energy of gas dynamics can be channelled into non-thermal components during the pre-merger phase becoming detectable in the radio band. Radio and X-ray observations of cluster pairs can help to address this point.

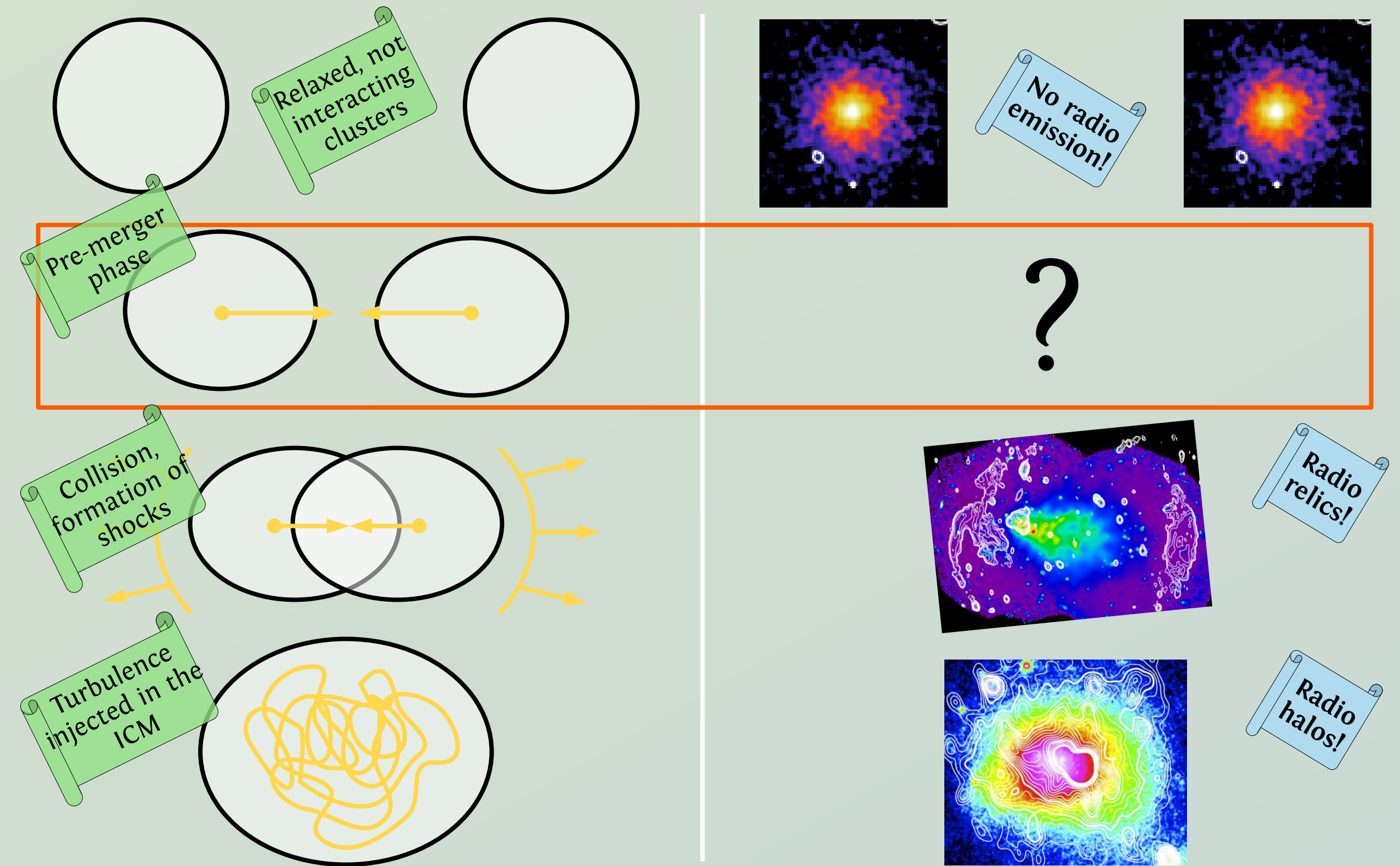


Fig. 1: Schematic view of a binary cluster merger.

## 2. Abell 1758

[Botteon et al. 2018, MNRAS, 478, 885-898, Botteon et al. 2020, MNRAS, 499, L11]

Abell 1758 is a massive pre-merging cluster at  $z=0.279$  composed of two main components separated by a projected distance of  $\sim 2$  Mpc (Fig. 2). We observed A1758 with LOFAR LBA (53 MHz) and HBA (144 MHz), uGMRT band 3 (383 MHz), and JVLA L-band (1.4 GHz) to investigate the presence of the radio bridge connecting the galaxy clusters suggested in our earlier work [3]. The new images are shown in Fig. 3. We confirmed the presence of a *radio bridge* at 144 MHz [4]. This is the second large-scale radio bridge observed to date in a cluster pair (the other is A399/A401 [5]). Only hints of radio emission are observed at 53 and 383 MHz, requiring deeper observations to provide a robust estimate of its spectral index. By comparing the X-ray and radio surface brightness of the bridge, we found that *the two components are correlated*, suggesting that they occupy a similar volume (Fig. 4). This is in line with the expectation of recent models in which bridges may be powered by novel particle acceleration mechanisms that are activated by the *turbulence* that is generated in dynamically active pairs of massive systems [6].

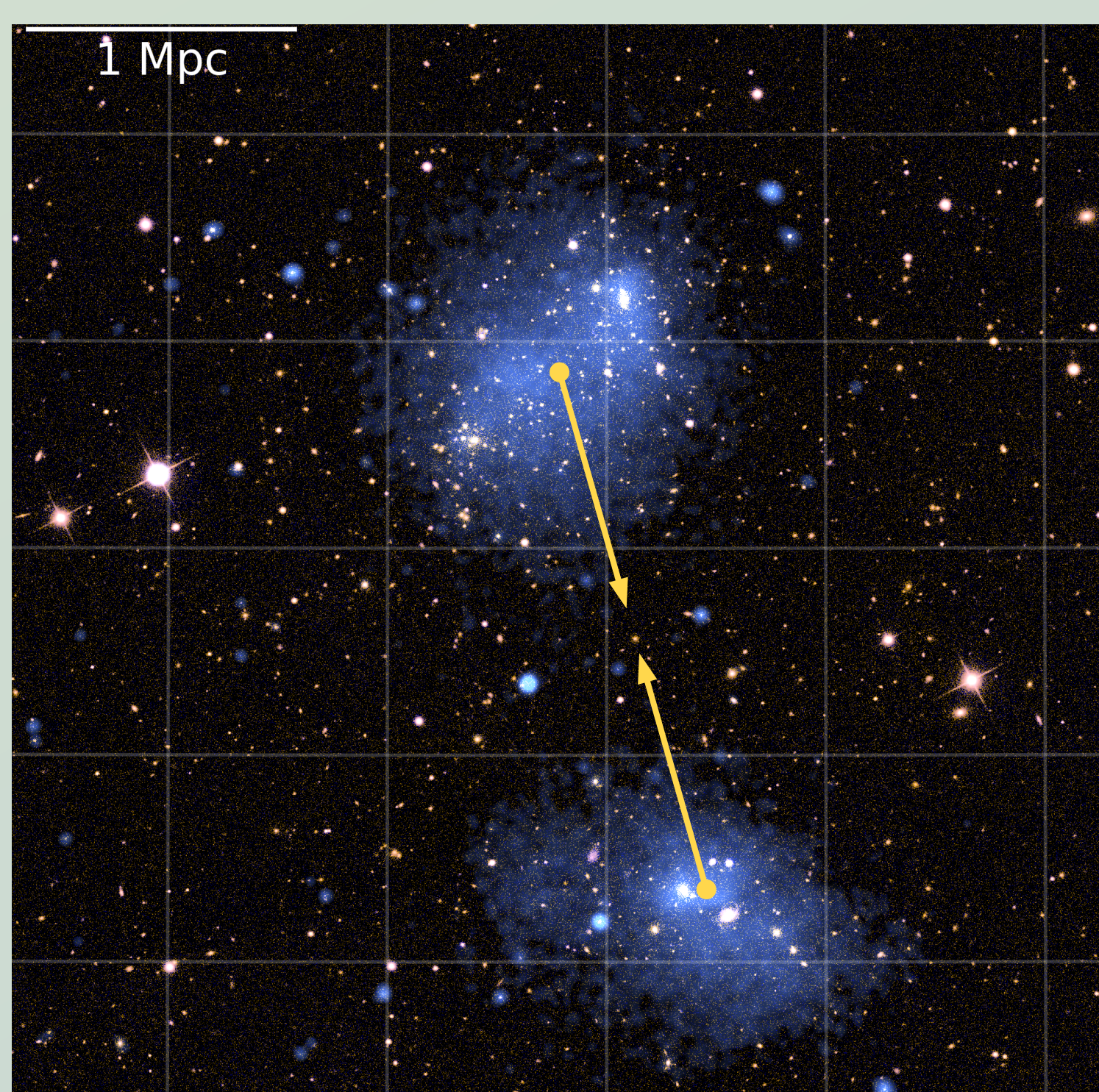


Fig. 2: Composite optical/X-ray image of Abell 1758,

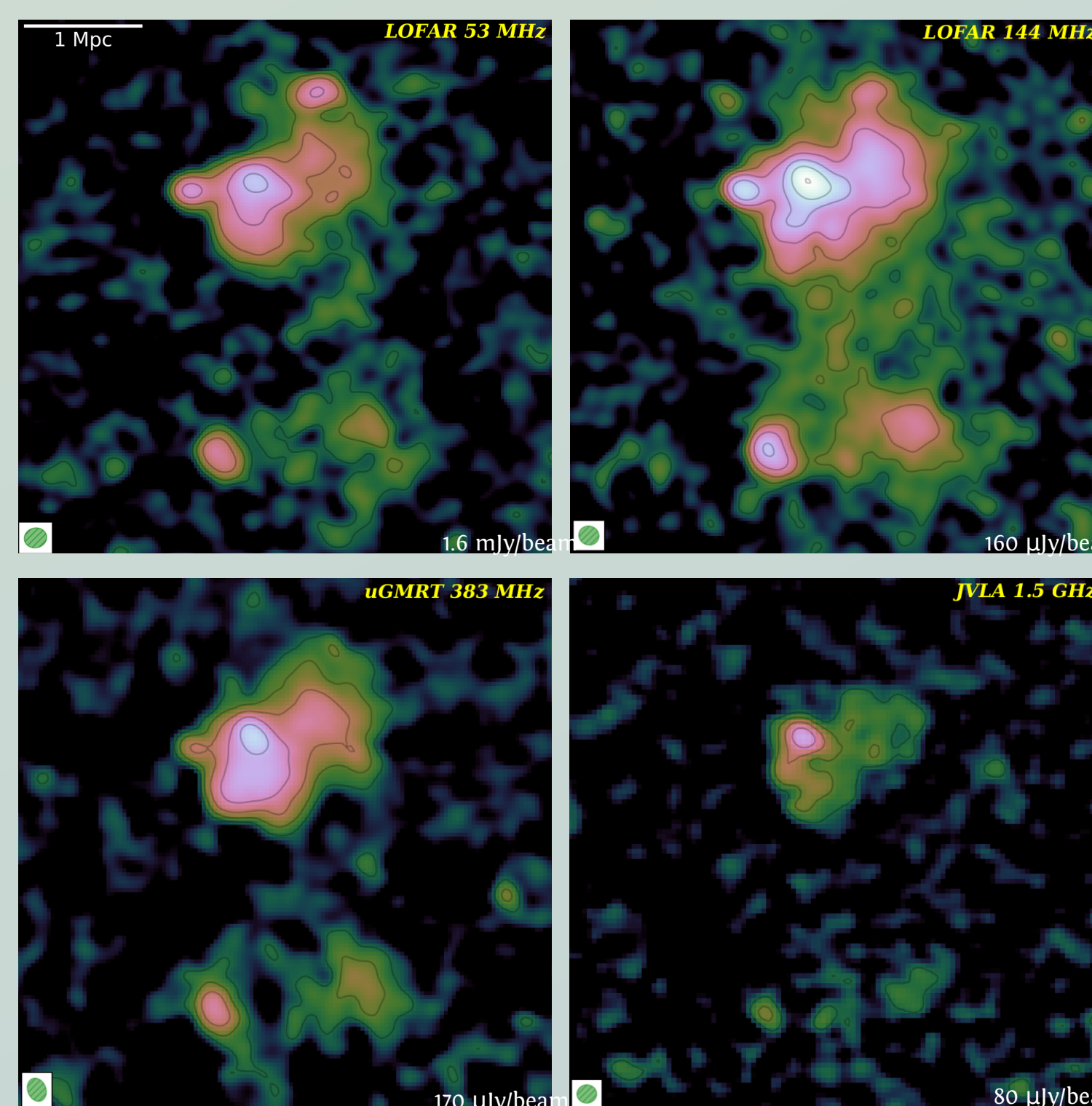


Fig. 3: Radio images of Abell 1758 from 53 MHz to 1.4 GHz.

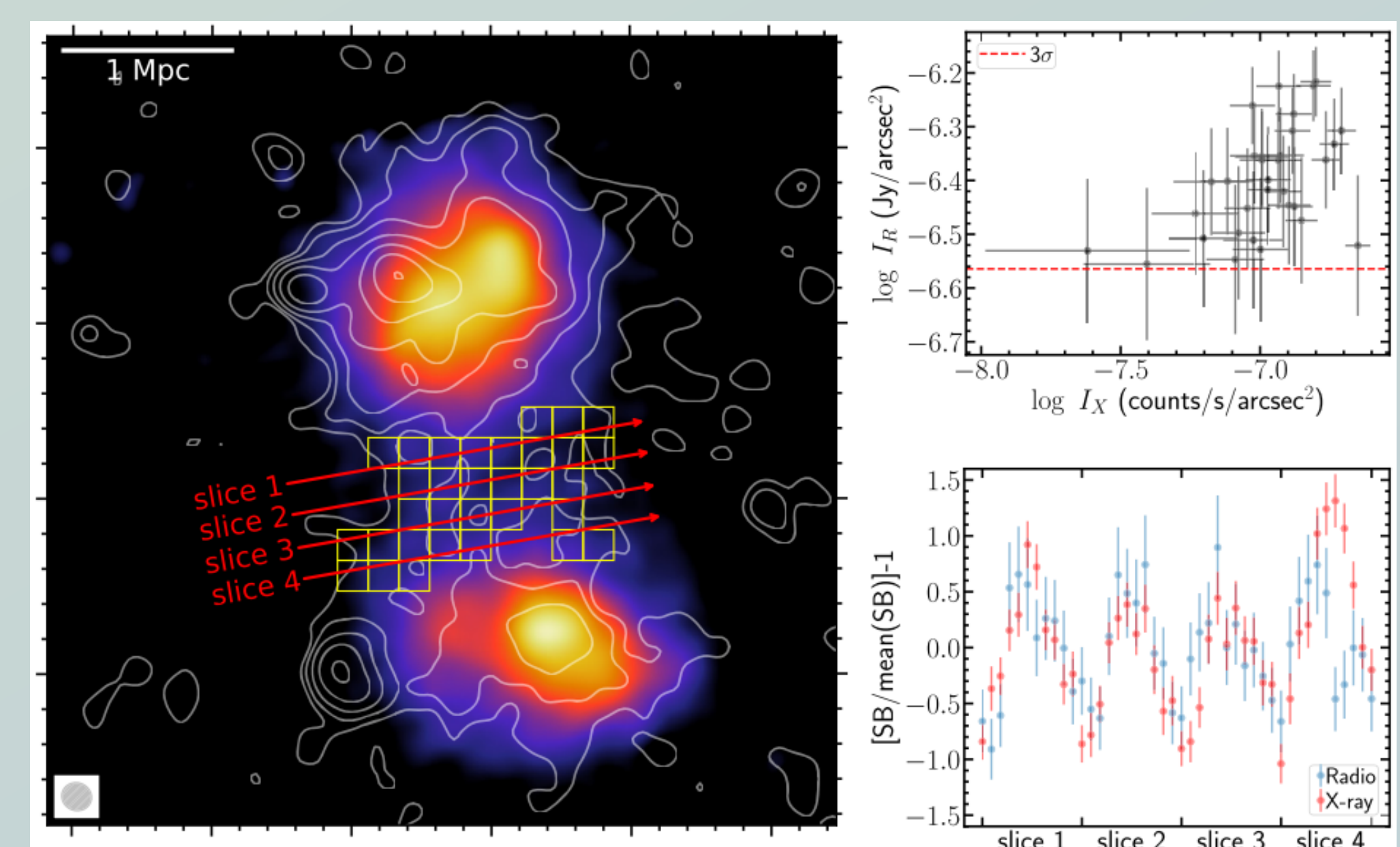


Fig. 4: Radio/X-ray correlation for the bridge in Abell 1758.

## 3. RXCJ1825/CIZA1824

[Botteon et al. 2019, A&A, 630, A77]

Located in the Lyra complex ( $z=0.07$ ), RXCJ1825 and CIZA1824 form another pre-merging system [7, 8]. In this case, LOFAR observations at 144 MHz *did not* reveal a radio bridge between the two clusters, but they allowed us to discover a *new radio halo* (Fig. 5) [9]. This halo has a *low-surface brightness extension* towards the SW, leading to a maximum linear extent of the diffuse radio emission up to  $\sim 1.8$  Mpc (Fig. 6). The remarkable spatial coincidence between the thermal and non-thermal emissions (Fig. 7) indicates that this feature is a consequence of the energy dissipated on small scales due to the interaction between RXCJ1825 and a galaxy group. Compared to the radio bridge pairs Abell 1758 and A399/A401, RXCJ1825/CIZA1824 is a less massive system, possibly suggesting a *role of the mass* in the generation of observable levels of synchrotron emission between pre-merging clusters.

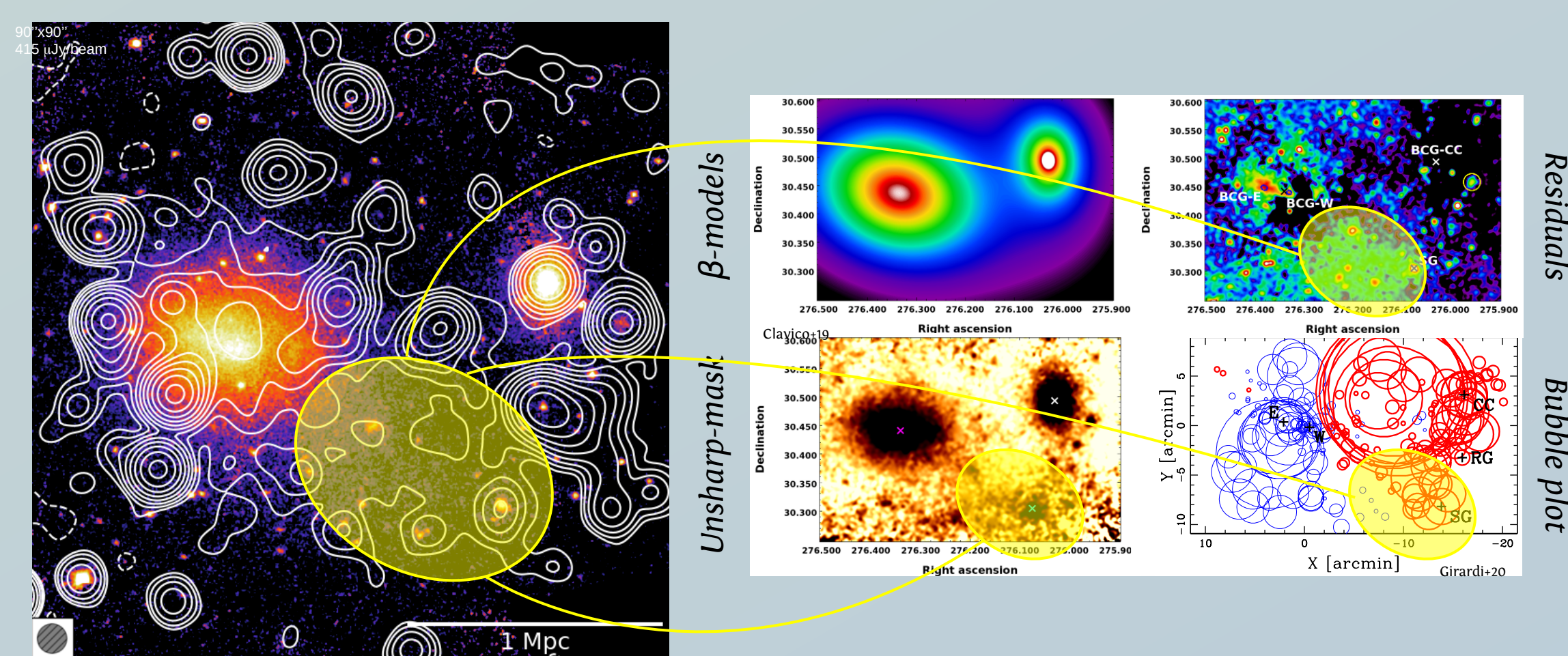


Fig. 6: The SW low-surface brightness extension of the halo in RXCJ1825.

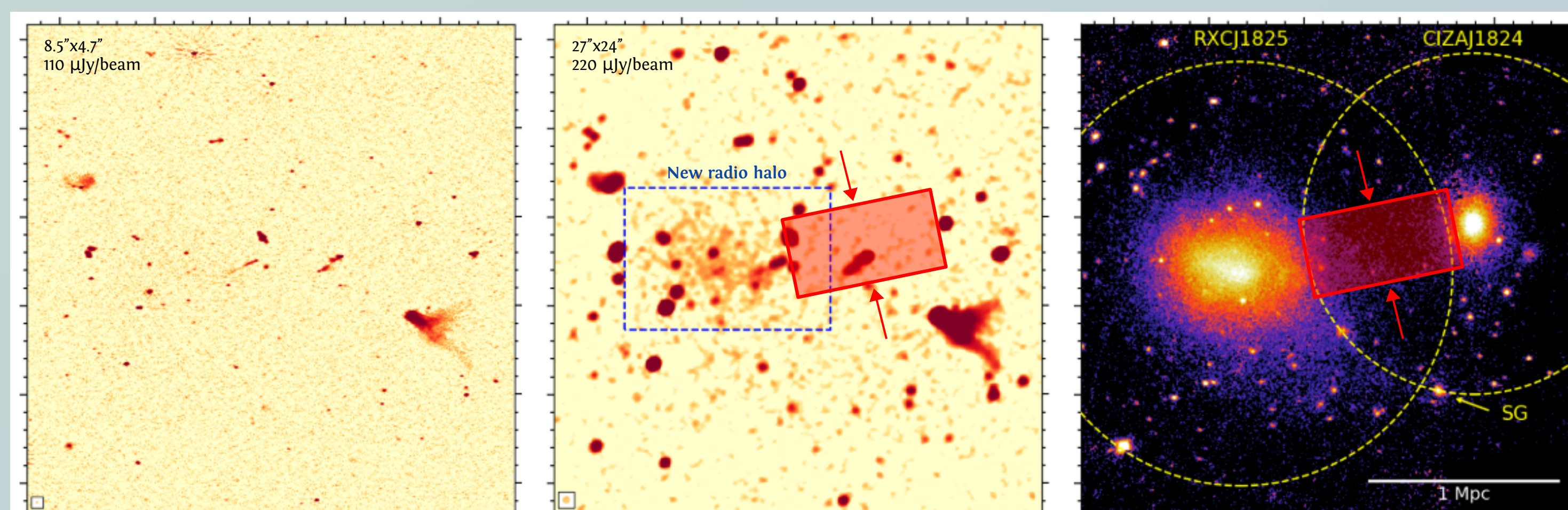


Fig. 5: LOFAR and XMM-Newton images of RXCJ1825/CIZA1824.

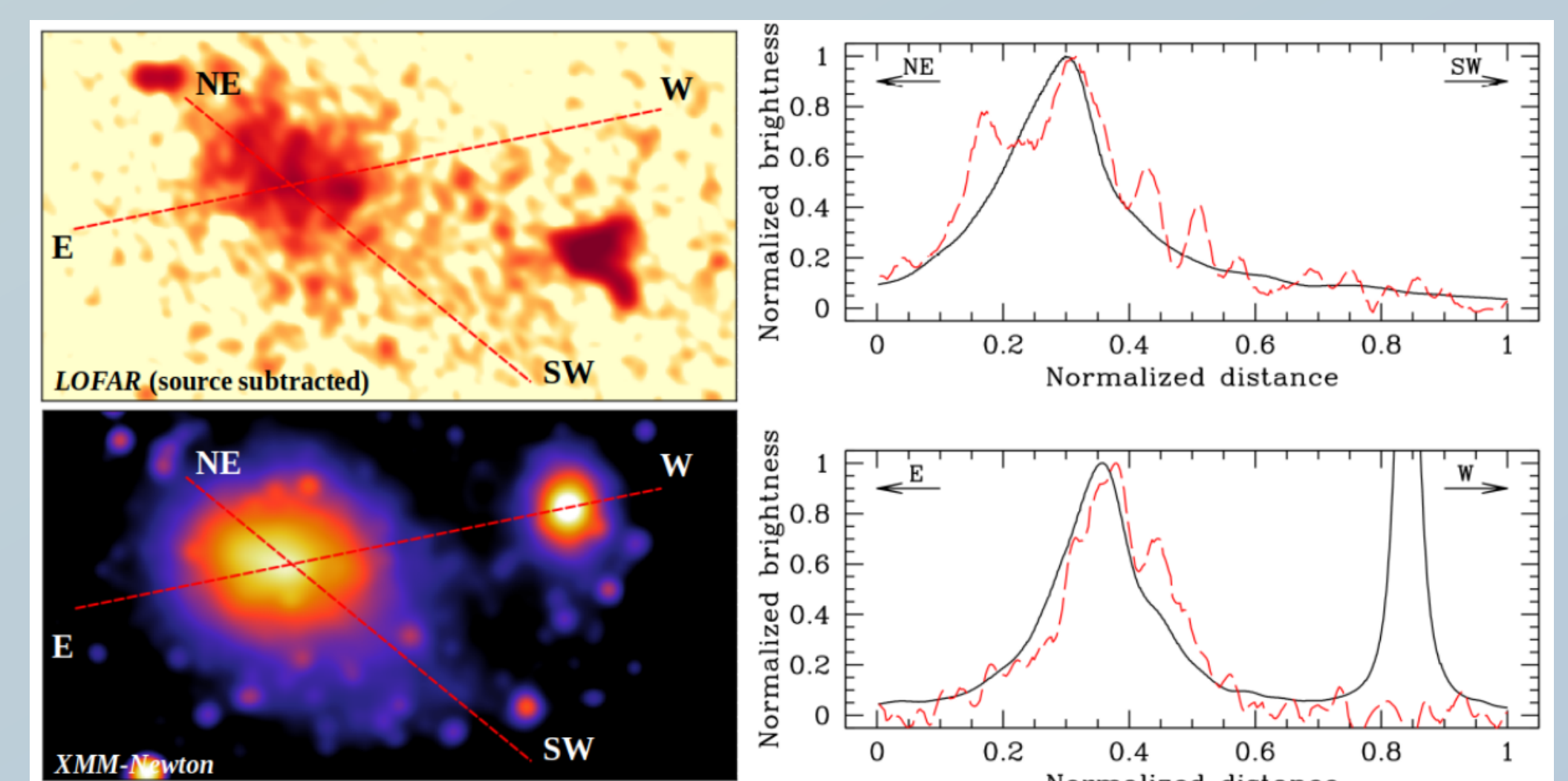


Fig. 7: 1D brightness profiles of the X-ray (black lines) and radio emission (red dashed lines) extracted across two directions.

## 4. Conclusion & future prospects

The detection of radio bridges and extensions of radio halos demonstrate the existence of magnetic fields and particle acceleration mechanisms at *large distance from the cluster center*. Particularly, radio bridges probe that non-thermal phenomena can be generated *even in the initial phase of the merger*. Future observations with LoTSS [10] and LoLSS [11] will be crucial to search for new bridges and constrain their spectral properties.