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The spectral variations of AC Herculis

L. Mantegazza

Osservatorio Astronomico di Brera, Via Bianchi 46, I-22055 Merate, Italy

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Summary. — Low dispersion spectra were taken in order to study the spectral variations of the RV Tau star AC Her. They cover a complete cycle of light variations.

The results are discussed also in connection with the visual light variations.

As the spectra of AC Her are very entangled, the multivariate data analysis method of correspondences has been applied to them. This method has proved to be very effective in extracting information from data that are affected by several factors and that generally have a low signal to noise ratio.

Key words : RV Tau stars — spectral variations — multivariate data analysis.

1. Introduction.

AC Her is the brightest RV Tau star after R Sct and U Mon. Thus it is one of the most studied objects within a class of variable stars rather neglected by astronomers.

It has a 75^d.4 period between successive primary minima.

Even though its light variations are among the most regular in its class, it shows during most of its period rather strong bands of CH and CN, so that Rosino (1951) was induced to classify it, during these phases, as Rp.

Other works on the spectral variations of AC Her, at low or intermediate dispersions, came from Sanford (1931, 1955) and Preston *et al.* (1963).

A coarse abundance-analysis was made by Yoshioka (1979) and a fine one by Baird (1981). The latter tells us that AC Her is very poor in metals with respect to the Sun ($Z_* = 0.06 Z_\odot$), but not so poor in carbon ($C_* = 0.2 C_\odot$).

In a very recent paper, Baird (1982) has studied the kinematic behaviour of the atmosphere of AC Her. According to this paper, the main velocity curve can be explained in terms of radial pulsation. However, there is a secondary activity which Baird thinks could be due to a partial reflection of the outward pulsation and/or to the presence of a companion (first detected by Sanford, 1955).

Photoelectric observations of this star were carried out by Preston *et al.* (1963), Du Puy (1973) and Nakagiri and Yamashita (1979). Some photometric measurements in the DDO system were made by Dawson (1979).

AC Her also has a circumstellar dust shell (Gehrz, 1972).

2. Observations and data processing.

Observations of AC Her were made at the Merate Observatory from July 4, to September 29, 1980, with the Boller and Chivens mod. 31523 grating spectrograph attached to the 137 cm reflector. A total of 26 spectrograms at

115 Å/mm were obtained on II-a-F or 103-a-F photographic plates. Each spectrum covers the region between 3500 and 7000 Å, and each has been individually calibrated with a 12 step sensitometer.

The journal of observations is reported in table I, with the number of the spectrum, its Julian Date, phase, exposure time and photographic emulsion. The phases were computed with respect to the epoch of the deep minimum as it was obtained from the visual light curve (see below) : $J.D._{\min I} = 2444478$. Taking into account the uncertainties about this epoch and the length of the period, the phases are accurate within 0.015.

All the spectra are of good quality since an exposure-meter was used during the observations.

Moreover, 34 spectra of 10 standard stars, with spectral types between F2 and K5 and of luminosity classes Ib and II, were obtained for spectral classification purposes.

All the material was digitized on the PDS 1010A microdensitometer of Napoli Observatory with a sampling step of 10 μ . The spectra were then processed on the PDP 11/34 computer of the Merate Observatory. The data tape was read with a program written by Santin (1980), and then abscissae and densities of the spectra were transformed into wavelengths and intensities with some programs written by the author.

Several attempts were made to find an automatic criterion to define the continuum, but the results were not satisfactory owing to the complexity of the spectra of AC Her, whose spectra have emissions and absorption features with very large changes in width and depth from one spectrum to another. Finally the continuum was hand-drawn on plots of the spectra.

3. Results.

The central depths of the lines which appear in most of the spectra were measured taking the continuum as a unit. The depths of the hydrogen lines (multiplied by

1000) and the equivalent widths (in Å) of the CaII K line are listed in table IIa. A minus sign means that the line is in emission; a small « e » means that an emission peak is visible inside the line.

The values of all other metallic lines and molecular bands are in table IIb, where the first column gives the wavelength, the following 26 columns the central depths (multiplied by 1000), and the last one the element (or elements) which is the main contributor to the line. These element identifications were taken from Moore (1945), Dunham (1920), Wright *et al.* (1964) and Rosen (1970). The $\lambda 4325$ line was first attributed to CH by Rosino (1951). It must be taken into account that because of the dispersion of the spectra, all the measured features are blends of several lines.

The values of the Ca H line are not given since this line is heavily contaminated by the emissions of H7. Neither are the values of the Na I D lines given, since in some spectra they are polluted by city light emissions.

Where a value is missing in table IIb, it means that the feature has not been identified with certainty.

The data concerning some of the most outstanding features are plotted in figure 1.

The light variations of AC Her, observed during the two cycles in which the spectra fall, are represented at the top of this figure. The dots represent the visual observations of the AAVSO members, while the crosses are observations by an Italian amateur, Mr. Pampaloni.

In figure 1 the ordinates show :

- a) for the hydrogen lines, the central intensities with respect to the continuum (i.e. values larger than one correspond to emissions),
- b) for the CaII K line, the equivalent width,
- c) for the other features, the central depths expressed as a fraction of the continuum intensity.

It may be remarked that all these measurements refer to the same cycle of light variations of the star, and that they are not phased with respect to the period, as in other works on spectral variations in AC Her (e.g. Sanford, 1931, 1955). The phasing procedure, because of the non-perfect constancy of the period and of the shape of the light curve, can give only a rough picture of the phenomena.

Examining the data we can perceive the following :

- i) the hydrogen lines have two emission maxima during the phases of rising light from the minima. The H α line is always in emission;
- ii) the maximum intensities of the CN and CH bands are reached during the decline from maxima. For a few days preceding the light minima, the $\lambda 4737$ bands of C₂ are faintly visible (this fact had also been observed by Joy (1952));
- iii) the metallic lines show different types of behaviour : some have variations similar to those of the bands, but reach their maximum intensity a little later (e.g. CaII K, $\lambda 4384$ (FeI), $\lambda 6497$ (BaII)), while others change very little (e.g. $\lambda 4444$ (TiII), $\lambda 6516$ (FeII) and to a limited extent $\lambda 4227$ (CaI)).

The classification of the spectra of AC Her is a very

difficult task. Yet at first sight these spectra seem very different from those of standard ones. There are three major problems involved in the classification :

- a) the hydrogen lines are useless because they are heavily contaminated by emissions;
- b) the usual ratios of intensities between different metallic lines are useless too, because most of these lines are polluted at certain phases by CN or CH bands, and according to Baird (1981) the band spectrum must be ascribed to the circumstellar shell;
- c) the metallic lines are weaker than those of standard stars of the same temperature (because of the abnormally low metallic abundances, Baird, 1981), and so a classification founded on the intensities of these lines tends to give earlier types than would be consistent with the temperature.

An example of the spectral types, that can be obtained from the intensities is given in table III. In general we see, as we would expect, that the metallic lines indicate earlier types than those of molecular bands. As general behaviour, the earliest types are reached during the rising from the minima, while the latest are observed when the light falls toward the deep minimum.

In conclusion, because of the peculiarities of these spectra, it would be inaccurate or even incorrect to assign a precise spectral type to them. All we can say is that it seems as if the star underlying the shell is in some respects similar to the F-type stars.

4. Correspondence analysis.

In order to achieve a better understanding of the spectral variations the data have been subjected to a « correspondence analysis » (Benzécri, 1980).

To do this each spectrum has been defined through the intensities of the lines marked with an asterisk in table IIb (i.e. through the lines with the more reliable measurements). Thus we considered 26 spectra, each one defined by 45 lines. Then we obtained the « profiles » of spectra and of spectral lines by dividing each term of a spectrum, or of a line, by the respective mass. The « mass » of a line is the sum of the intensities it has in all the spectra, and the « mass » of a spectrum is the sum of the intensities of all its lines. Such a procedure is equivalent to giving greatest weight to the most intense lines. This is correct, because the relative error is inversely proportional to the intensities of the measurements.

The 26 spectral profiles constitute a cloud in the space of the line profiles, while the 45 line profiles form a cloud in the space of the spectral profiles. The maximum dimension of the two clouds is 25, but, as all the measured elements are not completely independent and taking into account the errors in the measurements, a much smaller number of orthogonal axes is sufficient to give a satisfactory description of the clouds.

Each point in its space has an « inertia », which is the product of the mass of the point by the square of its distance from the cloud barycentre. The « inertia of the cloud » is the sum of the inertiae of all its points.

The problem to be solved involves finding, one after the other, the orthogonal axes that explain the largest

amount of inertia of the clouds. In our case we found, for example, that the first three axes explain 39.5 %, 10 %, and 9 % of the cloud inertiae respectively. The other axes give information of decreasing importance, e.g. the 4th axis of 6.5 %, the 5th of 5 % and so on. Taking into account the errors in the measurements, it is wise to consider only the first three axes as meaningful. It can be shown that the two clouds, the one with spectral profiles and the one with line profiles, can be described by the same set of axes, on the basis of which the passage from the coordinates of one cloud to those of the other is only a matter of a scale transform.

The sections of the two clouds defined by the axes 1,2 and 1,3 are represented in figures 2 and 3 respectively. These figures may be interpreted as follows : when a spectral line falls near a spectrum, the line is strong in that spectrum ; when it falls at a distance, the line is weak in that spectrum.

In addition to the 45 lines used to determine the axes, three more lines have been considered as « supplementary elements », i.e. their coordinates have been computed with respect to the axes. They were : $H\alpha$, CaII K, $\lambda 3883(\text{CN})$. The intensities of $H\alpha$ and CaII K have been arbitrarily normalized, as they were measured in units not homogeneous with those of the other lines. The measurements of $\lambda 3883(\text{CN})$ were not very accurate, and this was due to the difficulty in defining its continuum in some spectra.

Analyzing the figures we note the following facts :

i) The first axis is connected to the intensities of the molecular bands. They are strongest in the spectra on the left and weakest in those on the right. We can see that the variations of most of the metallic lines are independent of band variations or they have opposite behaviour (i.e. some of the metallic lines are weak when the bands are strong and *vice versa*). The only metallic lines which we can see on the negative side of the 1st axis are those polluted by CN bands (e.g. $\lambda 4206(\text{CN}, \text{FeI}, \text{EuII})$, $\lambda 4178(\text{CN}, \text{YII})$, $\lambda 4172(\text{CN}, \text{TiII}, \text{FeII})$, $\lambda 4154(\text{CN}, \text{FeI})$, etc.). From the relative positions of lines and spectra we see, moreover, that the bands are weakest near secondary minimum and during the rising from the deeper one.

ii) The second axis is connected to the intensities of the lines which have TiII as main contributor (i.e. $\lambda 4395$, 4468, 4444, 4501). These lines have their maximum intensities in the spectra at the top of figure 2 ; these values are reached a few days after the main light maximum, while their minimum intensities are reached during the light minima. Some lines which have FeI as main contributor show behaviour opposite to this (i.e. $\lambda 5108$, 6231, 4064, 4260, 4071). The line $\lambda 4172$, which is contaminated both by CN and TiII, is a good example of the efficiency of the analysis method in separating the two contributions (see Fig. 2).

iii) The third axis reflects the appearance of the spectra in the phases which follow the deep minimum immediately.

We see, on the negative side of this axis, the spectra BCL 647, 648, 650, 658 (which have respective phases : 0.05, 0.06, 0.07 and 0.10). In these spectra the lines $\lambda 4405(\text{FeI})$, $\lambda 6497(\text{BaII})$, $\lambda 4260(\text{FeI})$, $\lambda 4071(\text{FeI})$, $\lambda 4250(\text{FeI})$, are enhanced while the lines $\lambda 5052(\text{FeI})$, $\lambda 4078(\text{SrII})$, $\lambda 5018(\text{FeI})$, $\lambda 5184(\text{MgI})$, $\lambda 6371(\text{SiII})$, are dimmed. Moreover the hydrogen lines have their strongest emissions (we can see how the $H\alpha$ falls clearly below the lower edge of Fig. 3). As is known from Baird (1982), during these phases the star behaves in a very complex way, showing three major absorption systems and one major emission system of metallic lines, in addition to hydrogen emissions. The low resolution of the present spectra does not allow us to see these features, but obviously they affect the present spectra too, in some macroscopic way. Two spectra have a behaviour which is nearly symmetric with respect to the axes of figure 3, i.e. BCL 583 and 594 (phases : 0.39, 0.51, corresponding to the descent to secondary minimum and to the secondary minimum). We see from Baird's paper (1982) that in these phases the spectra are largely dominated by one absorption system, so that they are among the simplest. It is also remarkable that the spectra BCL 690 and 692, which have almost the same phases (0.38, 0.42), but belong to the following light cycle, behave differently, although the light curve is very similar in the two cycles.

Finally, we can observe how the correspondence analysis has been able to furnish much more information on the behaviour of the metallic lines than the approximate analysis of the data, which are blurred by noise. Similarly one can say this analysis method can extract information by considering the data in their totality.

5. Conclusions.

The spectral variations in AC Her have been observed and discussed, and their connections with the light variations have been emphasized.

The data analysis method of correspondences has proved to be a powerful tool in accomplishing this task, since it gives a concise, general and objective view of the matter, permitting deductions from the whole set of data, and hence the exploitation of the total information contained in them.

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TABLE I.

Spectrum	J.D.	Phase	Exposure min.	Emulsion
BCC 577	424.5	.29	53	II-a-F
" 581	429.5	.35	63	"
" 583	432.4	.39	53	"
" 594	441.4	.51	50	"
" 614	444.4	.55	84	"
" 619	445.4	.57	180	"
" 622	455.4	.70	176	"
" 628	456.4	.71	158	"
" 630	460.4	.77	80	"
" 634	461.4	.78	144	"
" 636	464.4	.82	92	103-a-F
" 639	465.4	.83	135	"
" 641	468.4	.87	123	"
" 643	472.4	.93	210	"
" 644	473.4	.94	225	"
" 647	481.4	.05	194	II-a-F
" 648	482.4	.06	135	"
" 650	483.4	.07	120	"
" 658	485.4	.10	114	"
" 664	488.3	.14	152	"
" 665	489.3	.15	115	"
" 667	492.3	.19	103	"
" 670	495.3	.23	132	"
" 671	496.3	.24	72	"
" 690	506.3	.38	180	"
" 692	509.3	.42	180	"

TABLE III.

Feature	Spectral types
K CaII	F0 - F6
Ca I 4227	F0 - F6
G Band	F5 - K0
CN Bands	G0 - G8
MnI 4033	F0 - G5
FeI 4384	F0 - G1
4173-79	F0 - G2

TABLE IIa.

Table with 14 columns (SPECT., PHASE, H ALPHA, H BETA, H GAMMA, H DELTA, K CAII) and 20 rows of data points.

TABLE IIb.

Large data table with columns for SPECT., PHASE, and MAIN CONTR., containing multiple rows of numerical and categorical data.

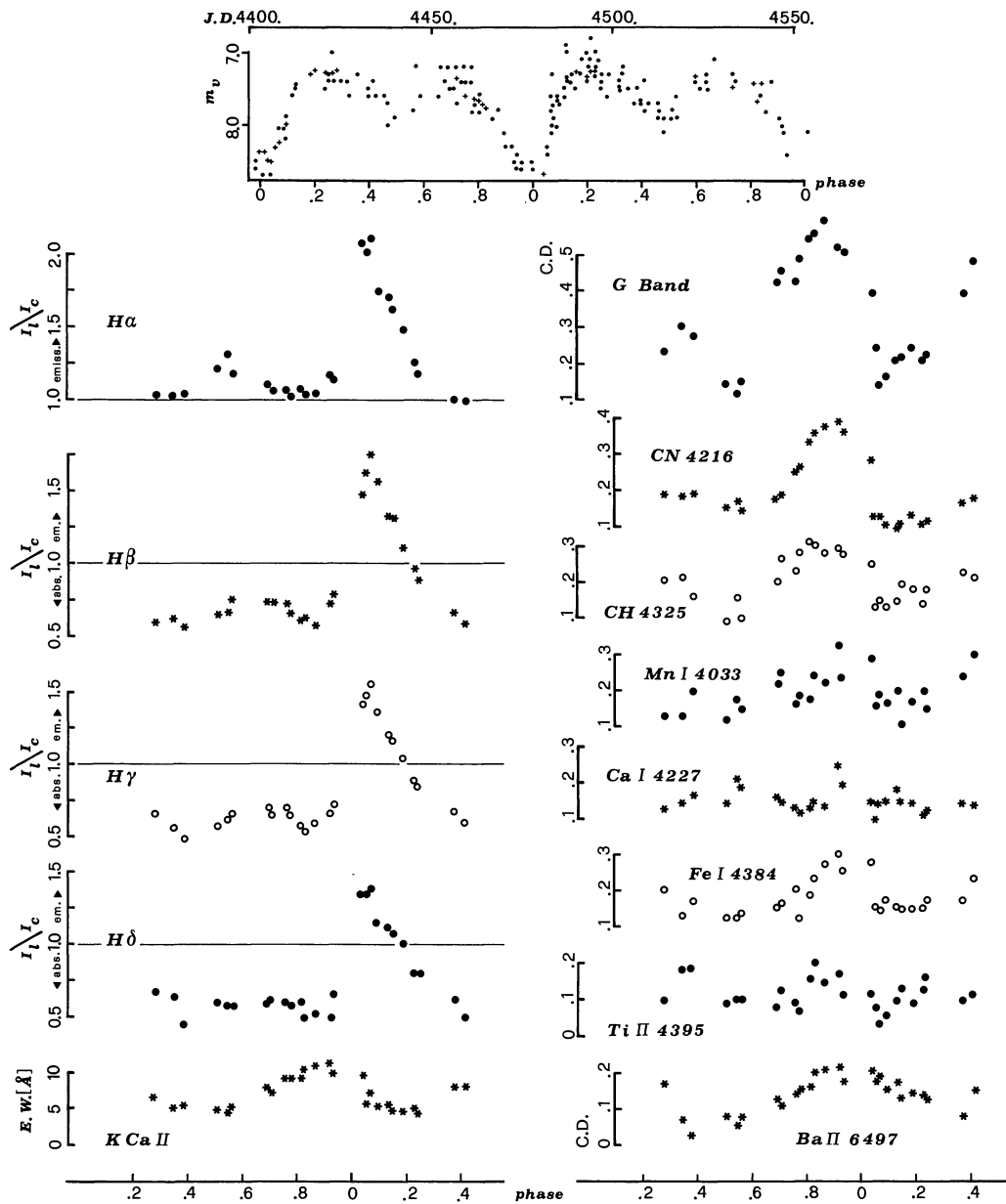


FIGURE 1. — Variations of some of the most relevant spectral features. At the top are represented the visual light variations. For details see text.

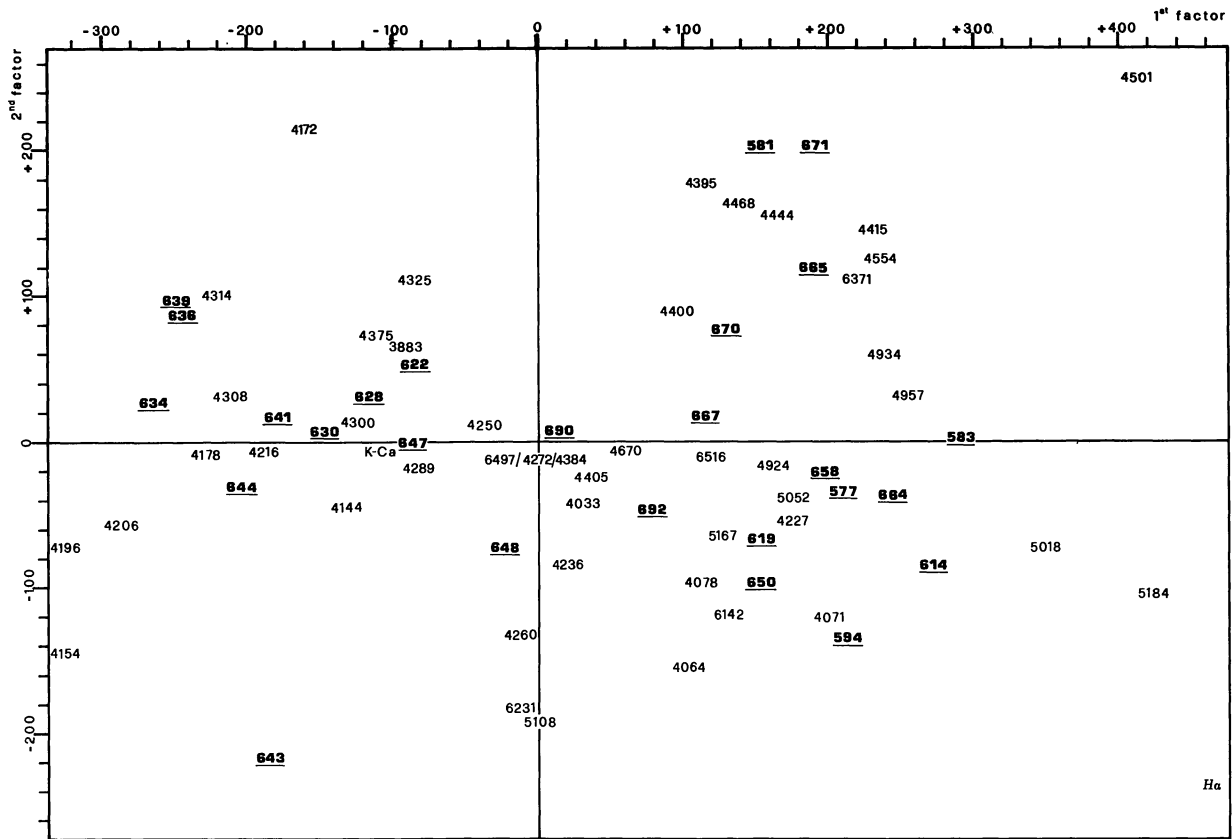


FIGURE 2. — Spectra (underlined numbers) and spectral lines are represented in the section defined by the 1st (horizontal) and 2nd (vertical) factorial axes.

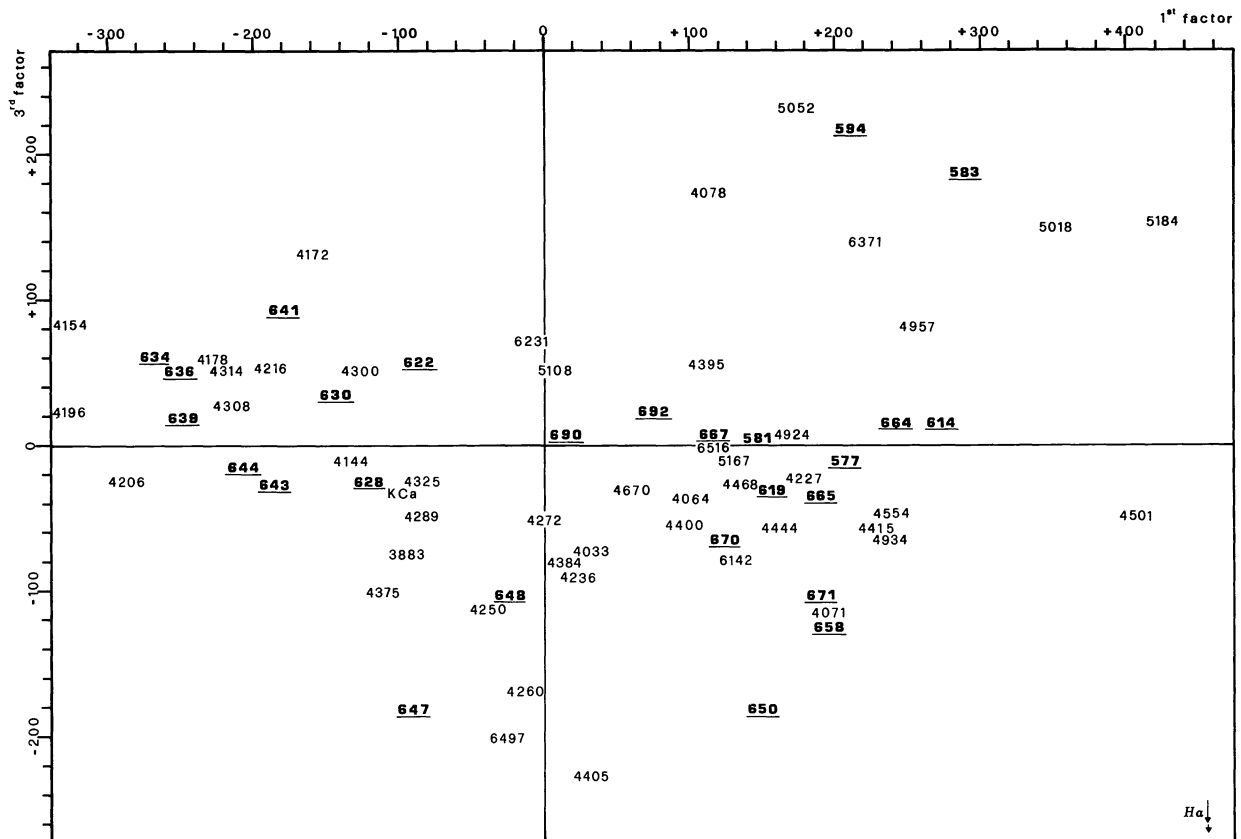


FIGURE 3. — Spectra (underlined numbers) and spectral lines are represented in the section defined by the 1st (horizontal) and 3rd (vertical) factorial axes. The double arrow near H α means that this line falls below the lower side of the figure.