Star Clusters

- Colour-magnitude diagrams
- Open Clusters
- Globular Clusters
- Chemical evolution
- Stellar populations

Star Clusters

- Star clusters are a collection of stars that are concentrated in space
- They all formed together out of the same cloud and at the same time
- There are two common types of star cluster
  - Open clusters
  - Globular clusters

Colour-Magnitude Diagrams

- for star clusters m_V (or V) is equivalent (apart from an offset) to M_V since all stars are at the same distance
- can also use colour, e.g. B-V as a measure of temperature
- hence colour-magnitude diagrams (CMDs) for star clusters are similar to H-R diagrams

Open Clusters

- Typically have of order 1000 members
- Not gravitationally bound – will disperse over time
- Located in spiral arms
- Consist of young, hot, blue main sequence stars

Open cluster NGC 457. Credit: ROBERT GENDLER/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY


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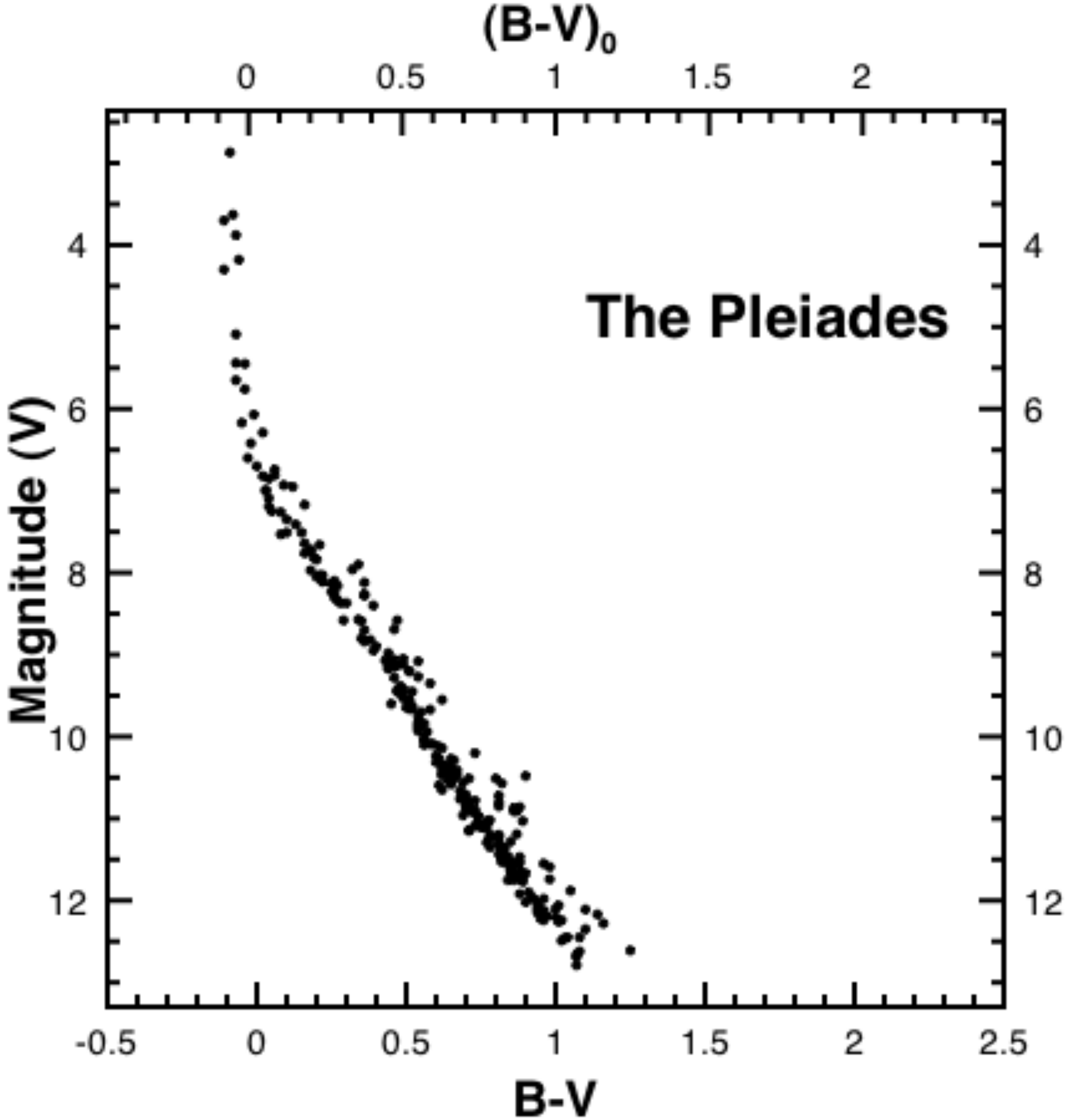
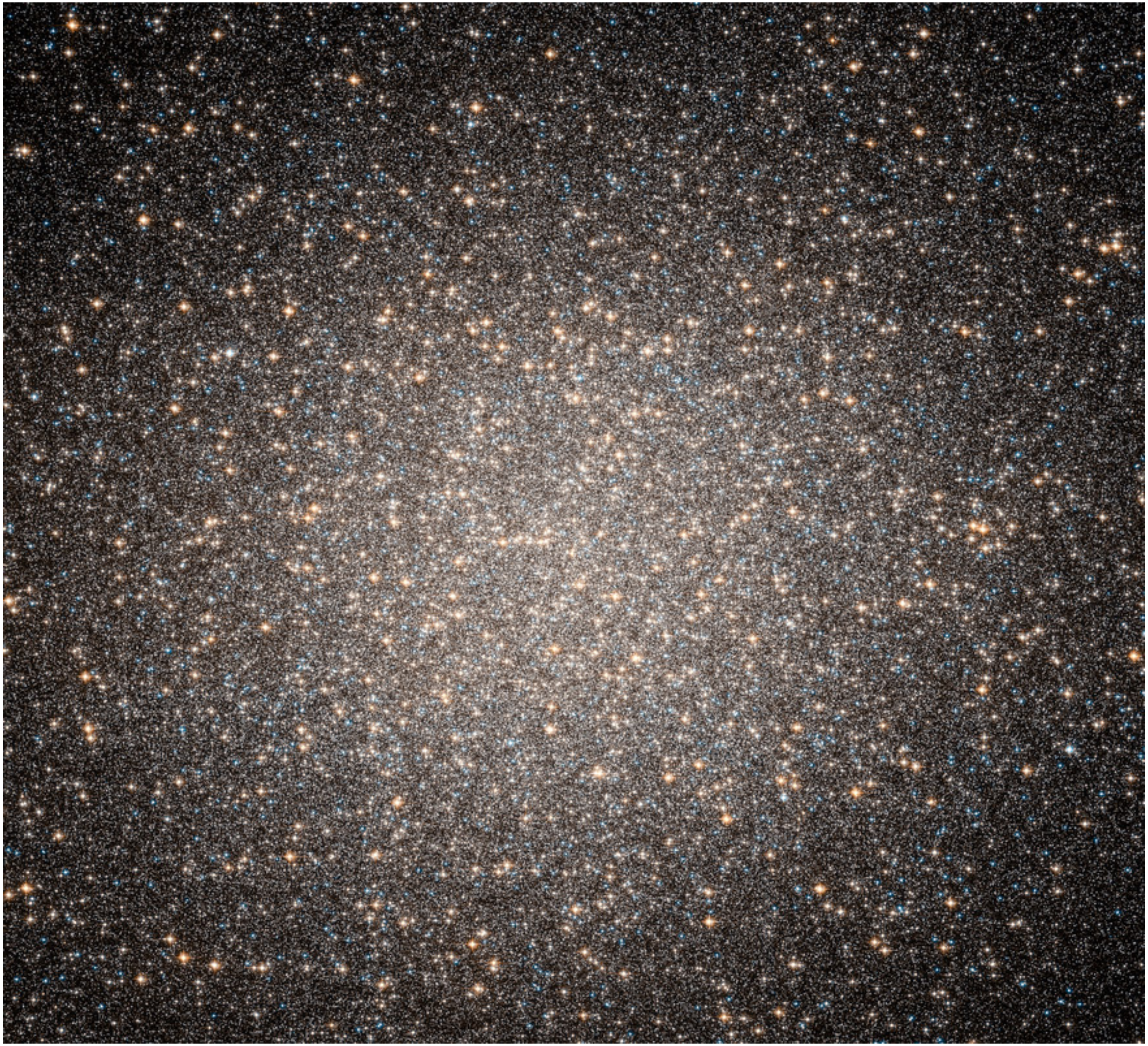


Colour-magnitude diagram of the Pleiades open cluster

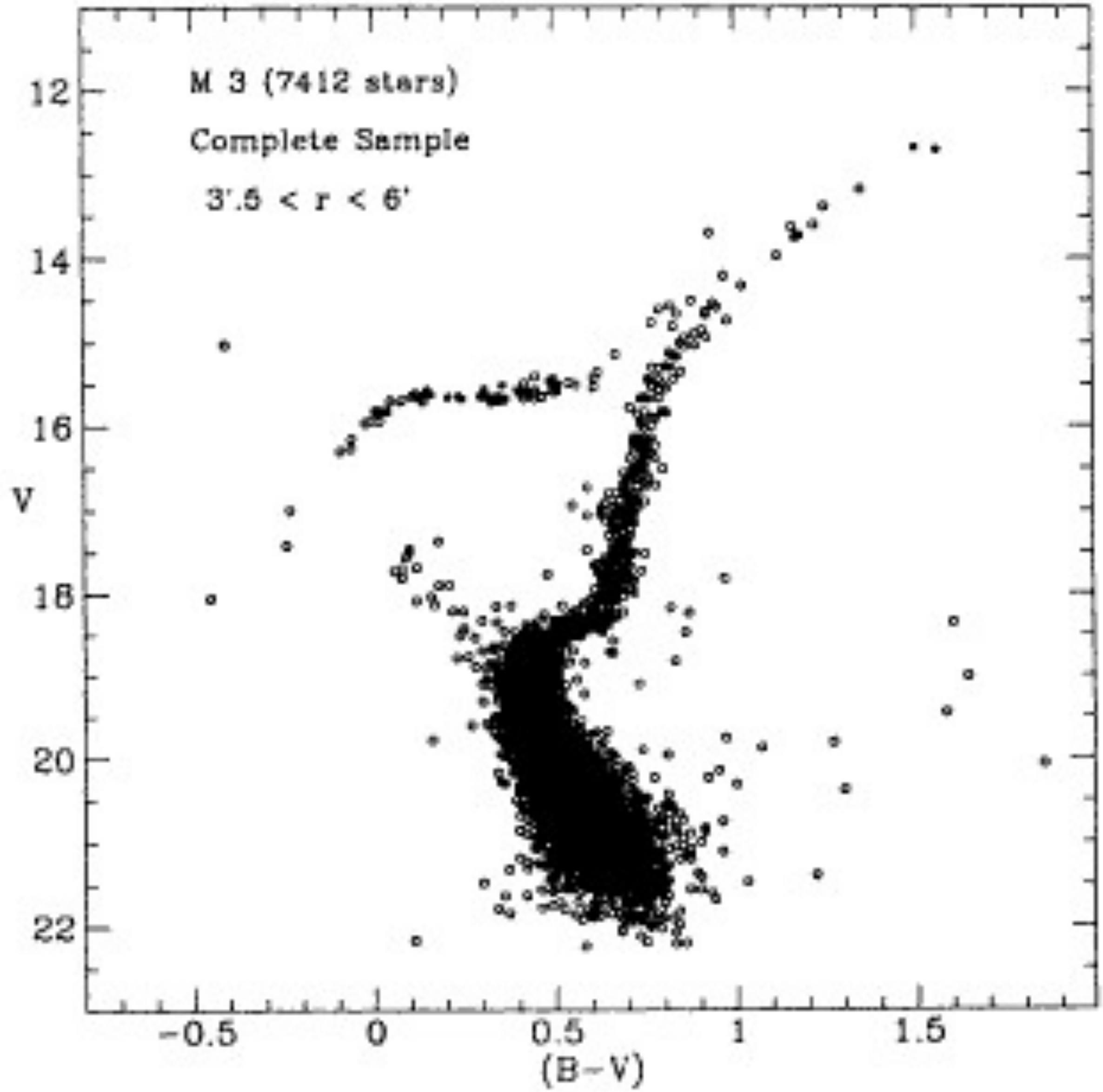
Globular Clusters

- Typically have of order 10^5 members
- Gravitationally bound
- Found in the Galactic halo
- Consist of old, cool, red, stars

Globular cluster M80. HST



Globular cluster Omega Centauri. HST



Colour-magnitude diagram for the globular cluster M 3.

Buonanno, R.; Corsi, C. E.; Buzzoni, A.; Cacciari, C.; Ferraro, F. R.; Fusi Pecci, F. Astron. Astrophys. 290, 69-103 (1994)

Chemical Evolution

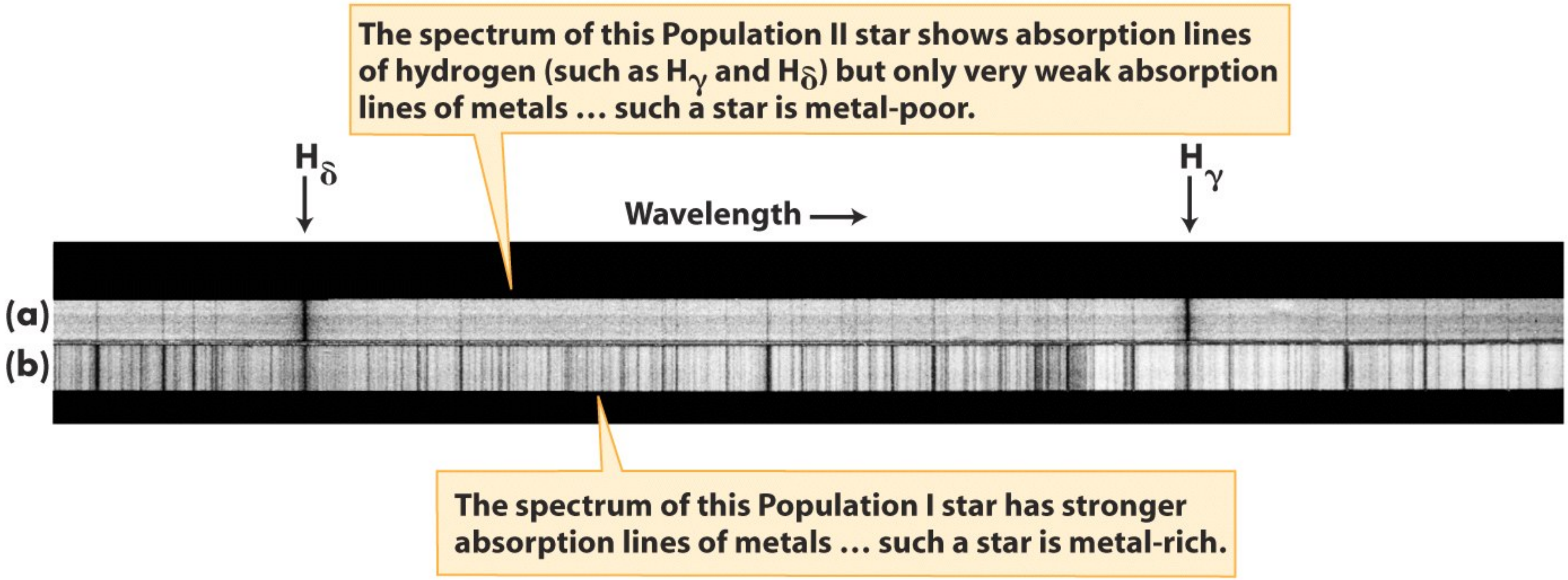
- The first stars to form were made from material left over from the Big Bang
- This was almost pure hydrogen and helium
- Nucleosynthesis within stars due to fusion of light nuclei produces heavy elements
- These are returned to the interstellar medium via supernovae explosions and planetary nebulae

Supernova remnant

Planetary nebula

NASA HST

- This enriched material is then the raw material for the next generation of stars
- Hence, successive generations become progressively more enriched in heavy elements or ‘metals’
- Can be tracked by measuring the composition via the spectra of stars


The spectrum of this Population II star shows absorption lines of hydrogen (such as H_γ and H_δ) but only very weak absorption lines of metals … such a star is metal-poor.
H_δ
Wavelength →
H_γ
(a)
(b)
The spectrum of this Population I star has stronger absorption lines of metals … such a star is metal-rich.

Stellar populations

- Stellar populations are divided into two groups
- Population I stars
  - young
  - 10^7 to 10^9 years
  - metal-rich
  - >1% metals by mass
  - ongoing or recent star formation
  - e.g. open clusters

- Population II stars
  - old
  - 10^{10} years
  - metal-poor
  - ~ 0.1% metals by mass
  - no star formation for a long time
  - e.g. globular clusters

Summary

- Colour-magnitude diagrams for star clusters enable us to determine their age
- They are a key tool in the study of stellar and galaxy evolution
- Stellar populations are divided into old, metal-poor stars and young, metal-rich stars