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# Galaxy Formation and Symbiotic Evolution with the Inter-Galactic Medium in the Age of ELT-ANDES

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### Abstract

High-resolution absorption spectroscopy toward bright background sources has had a paramount role in understanding early galaxy formation, the evolution of the intergalactic medium and the reionisation of the Universe. However, these studies are now approaching the boundaries of what can be achieved at ground-based 8-10m class telescopes. The identification of primeval systems at the highest redshifts, within the reionisation epoch and even into the dark ages, and of the products of the first generation of stars and the chemical enrichment of the early Universe, requires observing very faint targets with a signal-to-noise ratio high enough to detect very faint spectral signatures. In this paper, we describe the giant leap forward that will be enabled by ANDES, the high-resolution spectrograph for the ELT, in these key science fields, together with a brief, non-exhaustive overview of other extragalactic research topics that will be pursued

by this instrument, and its synergistic use with other facilities that will become available in the early 2030s.

**Keywords:** Galaxy formation and evolution, Intergalactic medium, Circumgalactic medium, Interstellar medium, High-resolution spectroscopy, ANDES

## 1 Introduction

After an initial hot, dense phase, the Universe expanded and cooled enough to enable protons and electrons to form the first hydrogen atoms. The epoch that followed is known as the “Dark Ages”. The first generation of stars and galaxies formed from gas collapse approximately  $\sim 100 - 200$  Myrs after the Big Bang and started flooding its surroundings with highly energetic ultraviolet (UV) radiation. These UV photons (with energies  $E > 13.6$  eV) brought the hydrogen atoms in the intergalactic medium (IGM) back into a highly ionised state. This important physical transition, which impacted almost every baryon in the Universe, is known as the Epoch of Reionisation (EoR). The same first stars enabled also the production of the first chemical elements heavier than hydrogen and helium (dubbed “metals”) beyond those produced by Big Bang nucleosynthesis, thereby opening the stage for the chemical enrichment of the early Universe.

At present, the ionising photon budget for reionisation is thought to have been dominated by radiation emitted by the first generations of star-forming galaxies (e.g. [Jiang et al, 2022](#); [Matthee et al, 2022](#)), although it is still debated whether accreting black holes may also have provided a substantial contribution (e.g. [Grazian et al, 2022](#); [Fontanot et al, 2023](#)). The fraction of ionising photons that eventually escaped from these sources into the IGM is also uncertain. Despite the recent discovery by JWST of unexpected excesses of both bright galaxies (e.g., [McLeod et al, 2023](#)) and faint active galactic nuclei (AGN, e.g. [Harikane et al, 2023](#); [Maiolino et al, 2023b,a](#)) at  $z \gtrsim 7-10$ , a complete account of all ionising sources in the early Universe remains very challenging.

A less direct but powerful, complementary approach is to focus on the signature that the first galaxies will leave on their surrounding gaseous environments. Intergalactic gas in the early Universe represents the reservoir for the formation and sustenance of gravitationally bound luminous sources, but is also sensitive to the escape of ionising radiation and heavy elements from them, even from those that are too faint to be directly imaged. Reionisation-era sources will therefore have a measurable impact on the ionisation state, temperature and metallicity of the IGM (e.g., [Becker et al, 2015](#)).

The investigation of this interplay between galaxies and the IGM through cosmic history is central to the understanding of galaxy formation and evolution. Most of the interaction between galaxies and the IGM happens on scales of the order of 1 physical Mpc or less, corresponding to  $\lesssim 2$  arcmin at  $z \sim 2.5$  ( $\lesssim 3$  arcmin at  $z \sim 6$ ), and this region has been aptly termed the circum-galactic medium (CGM).

Spectroscopic observations focused on absorption lines are the method of choice to study the diffuse gas outside galaxies but also the interstellar medium (ISM). Multiple, complementary probes are available: neutral hydrogen Lyman-series lines (in

particular, H I Lyman- $\alpha$  and Lyman- $\beta$ ), transitions of heavier elements (e.g. C, O, Si, Mg, Al and Fe, to cite the most common ones), as well as molecular transitions (due to e.g. H<sub>2</sub>, HD, CO). Accurate chemical abundances and physical conditions can be derived from absorption spectroscopy up to the highest redshifts probed by bright background sources, at variance with other high- $z$  galaxy measurements derived from emission line diagnostics.

In this paper, we highlight the outstanding questions related with galaxy formation and evolution that can be answered with the ArmazoNes high Dispersion Echelle Spectrograph (ANDES<sup>1</sup>) for the Extremely Large Telescope (ELT), mainly through the properties of the ISM, CGM and IGM studied in absorption in the spectra of bright background sources.

High-resolution spectroscopy has been key to investigate the properties of the diffuse gas in terms of spatial distribution, physical conditions and chemical abundances at intermediate redshift,  $z \sim 2 - 4$ , e.g. determining the temperature of the IGM and the intensity of the UV background impinging on it (e.g. Gaikwad et al, 2021, and references therein), assessing the existence of large amount of metals in the gas surrounding galaxies (e.g. Turner et al, 2014) but also their presence in the shallow intergalactic gas (e.g. D’Odorico et al, 2016). ANDES, thanks to its wavelength extension to the near-IR (0.4 – 1.8  $\mu\text{m}$ , goal 0.35 – 2.4  $\mu\text{m}$ ), its spectral resolution ( $R \sim 100,000$ ), and the unprecedented collecting area of the ELT, will allow us for the first time to carry out very detailed studies of the H I distribution, the metal content and chemical (relative) abundances at the epoch of Reionisation (EoR). At the same time, we will be able to significantly increase the sample of objects that can be studied at high resolution in the intermediate redshift regime ( $z \sim 2 - 4$ ) with unprecedented sensitivity for the weak metal absorption lines, which is beyond the reach of current 8-10m class telescopes.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the science case which deals with the characterisation of the epoch of Reionisation through the study of the Lyman- $\alpha$  and Lyman- $\beta$  forests in the spectra of  $z \gtrsim 6$  quasars and  $\gamma$ -ray bursts (GRBs). Section 3 highlights how ANDES will unveil the chemical enrichment of the early universe and the nature of the first stars. Section 4 is dedicated to the extragalactic transient phenomena whose investigation will be allowed by ANDES. In Section 5, we briefly describe a few additional science cases hinting at the potentiality of ANDES in this field. In Sections 6 and 7 we report the benefits of an extension to the U band and of the addition of a mode with resolving power  $R \simeq 50,000$ , respectively. Finally, in Section 8 we highlight the synergies between ANDES at the ELT and other surveys or facilities.

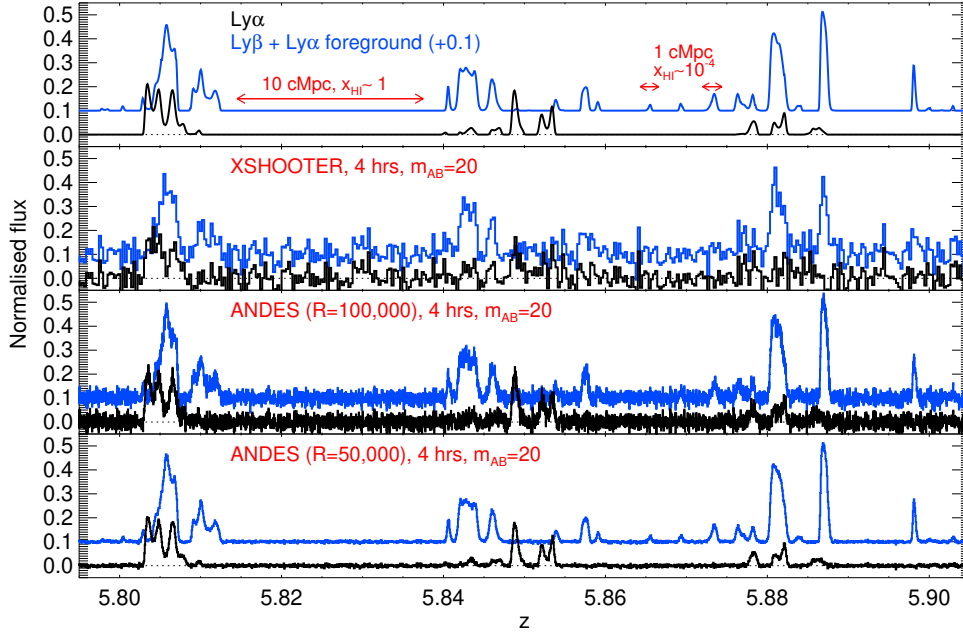
## 2 Investigating the reionisation epoch with absorption spectroscopy

In the forthcoming decade, the detection of the redshifted H I 21-cm emission and/or absorption from the neutral IGM at redshift  $z > 6$  is a key goal of radio interferometric arrays such as the Square Kilometre Array (SKA, e.g., Koopmans et al, 2015). This

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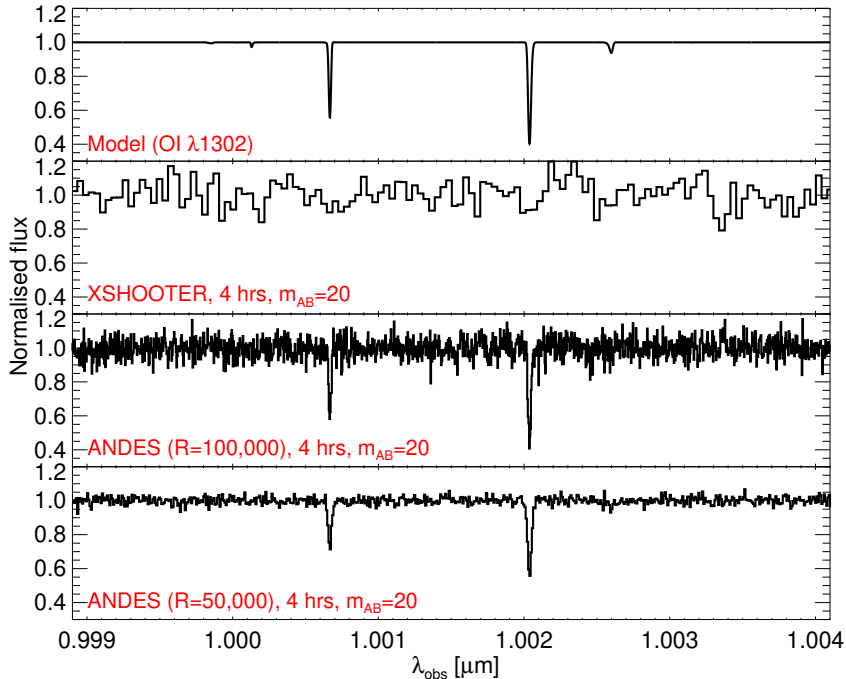
<sup>1</sup><https://andes.inaf.it/>

approach holds enormous promise for characterising the nature of the first stars and galaxies across a broad range of time that stretches from reionisation at  $z \sim 6$  to the end of the cosmic dark ages at  $z \sim 20\text{--}30$ . However, the 21-cm observations are subject to challenging foregrounds, and during reionisation the 21-cm power spectrum and/or tomographic maps will be primarily sensitive to the distribution of the neutral hydrogen gas on the  $> 10$  comoving Mpc scales typical of ionised regions (e.g., Lu et al, 2023). Furthermore, the results of 21-cm experiments will require independent verification by other methods.



**Fig. 1** The *upper panel* shows a segment of the Lyman- $\alpha$  (black curve) and coeval Lyman- $\beta$  (blue curve) forests in the spectrum of a  $z = 6.1$  quasar, drawn from a cosmological hydrodynamical simulation coupled with radiative transfer (Puchwein et al, 2023). Note that the Lyman- $\beta$  forest flux has been offset by +0.1 for presentation purposes, and it also includes foreground Lyman- $\alpha$  forest absorption at  $z' = \lambda_{\beta}(1+z)/\lambda_{\alpha}$ , where  $\lambda_{\alpha} = 1215.67 \text{ \AA}$  and  $\lambda_{\beta} = 1025.72 \text{ \AA}$ . The lower three panels show simulated observations with an exposure time of 4 hours assuming a magnitude  $m_{\text{AB}} = 20$  for the target quasar, obtained with (*from top to bottom*): VLT-XSHOOTER at  $R \sim 10,900$  (see e.g., D’Odorico et al, 2023) with  $S/N \sim 12$ , ELT-ANDES for the baseline resolution of  $R = 100,000$ , reaching  $S/N \sim 77$  and for the lower resolution mode with  $R = 50,000$  with  $S/N \sim 113$ . All signal-to-noise ratios are per  $10 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  spectral element.

An alternative, well-established and highly complementary approach, that is also sensitive to gas on much smaller scales ( $< 1$  comoving Mpc, see Figure 1), is absorption line spectroscopy. Indeed, the majority of our current observational understanding of the later stages of Reionisation has been derived from studying the IGM using optical and near-IR spectroscopy. For example, variations in the Lyman- $\alpha$  opacity observed in the spectra of bright quasars at  $z > 5.5$  are consistent with the final



**Fig. 2** O I absorbers at  $z \sim 6.7$  in the simulated spectrum of a quasar with magnitude  $m_{AB} = 20$ . As for Figure 1, the lower three panels show simulated observations with VLT-XSHOOTER at  $R \sim 10,900$  and ELT-ANDES for the baseline resolution of  $R = 100,000$  and a possible lower resolution mode with  $R = 50,000$ .

stages of reionisation ending as late as  $z \sim 5.3$  (Kulkarni et al, 2019; Bosman et al, 2022). The rather small ionising photon mean free path at  $z \sim 6$  inferred from the Lyman continuum opacity measured in high redshift quasar spectra points to a similar conclusion (Becker et al, 2021; Zhu et al, 2023). The widths of Lyman- $\alpha$  transmission spikes at  $z > 5$  have been used to measure the temperature of the IGM (Gaikwad et al, 2020), a quantity that is sensitive to the spectral shape of the ionising radiation from the first galaxies. Furthermore, the three-dimensional relationship between Lyman- $\alpha$  transmission spikes, metal lines, and high redshift galaxies has yielded new insights into the escape of enriched gas (Díaz et al, 2021) and the escape fraction of ionising radiation into the IGM (Meyer et al, 2020; Kashino et al, 2023). Dark gaps and pixels in the Lyman- $\alpha$  forest can be used to measure (or place limits on) the IGM neutral fraction at  $5 < z < 7$  (Zhu et al, 2022; Jin et al, 2023). Finally, Lyman- $\alpha$  damping wings in the spectra of quasars (Wang et al, 2020), gamma-ray bursts (Lidz et al, 2021) and (now, with JWST) star forming galaxies at  $z = 6-12$  (Umeda et al, 2023; Heintz et al, 2023) are sensitive to intergalactic and circumgalactic neutral hydrogen deep into the reionisation era.

The enormous advantage that ANDES brings to this endeavour is the dramatic improvement in spectral resolution and sensitivity that is attainable with a high resolution spectrograph on the ELT. At present, only modest samples of the brightest

( $m_{\text{AB}} \lesssim 20$  mag) among the quasars at  $z \gtrsim 6$  can be gathered with high enough sensitivity to carry out reliable studies at the EoR and only at intermediate resolution ( $R \lesssim 10,000$ ) (e.g. D’Odorico et al, 2023). ANDES will allow us to increase these samples from tens to hundreds of background sources (moving the magnitude threshold to  $m_{\text{AB}} \sim 21$  mag) and study both Lyman-series transmission features and metal absorption lines with a sensitivity and a resolution ( $R \sim 100,000$ ) never obtained before. Should a  $R = 50,000$  mode also be implemented in ANDES, then we could have access to the majority of the quasars at  $z \gtrsim 6$  known today (Fan et al, 2023, for an updated catalogue) with  $m_{\text{AB}} \sim 21 - 23$  mag, that cannot be used today for the proposed studies, therefore outstandingly improving the statistical significance of constraints on key properties (e.g., the average H I fraction). This will allow ANDES to constrain the patchiness of the reionisation process, the properties of the ultraviolet background (UVB) radiation, and the thermal state and chemical enrichment of the IGM to high precision.

Figure 1 illustrates a mock line of sight through the IGM at  $z \sim 6$  drawn from a cosmological hydrodynamical simulation that has been coupled with radiative transfer (Puchwein et al, 2023), and that assumes a late, inhomogeneous reionisation that completes at  $z \sim 5.7$ . The increasingly neutral IGM at  $z \geq 5.5$  produces largely saturated Lyman- $\alpha$  forest absorption (i.e. the Gunn-Peterson trough, Gunn and Peterson 1965) blueward of the Lyman- $\alpha$  of the background source. However, underdense, highly ionised regions of the IGM may nevertheless produce narrow transmission features in this part of the spectrum. The smaller absorption cross-section of the Lyman- $\beta$  transition furthermore allows transmission from ionised regions that otherwise remain saturated in Lyman- $\alpha$  absorption. For example, several regions with saturated Lyman- $\alpha$  absorption (black curves) are highlighted with horizontal red arrows in the upper panel of Figure 1. There is a small  $\sim 10$  comoving Mpc island of fully neutral hydrogen ( $x_{\text{HI}} = 1$ ) at  $z \sim 5.83$  that exhibits coeval saturated Lyman- $\beta$  absorption (blue curves). In contrast, the region of saturated Lyman- $\alpha$  absorption between  $z = 5.855 - 5.875$  is highly ionised ( $x_{\text{HI}} \sim 10^{-4}$ ), as indicated by the coeval Ly $\beta$  transmission peaks that extend over scales of  $\lesssim 1$  comoving Mpc. The simulated observations in the lower three panels highlight the unique capabilities of ANDES for probing Lyman series absorption at the tail-end of the reionisation era. The narrow features in the forest are easily detected by ELT-ANDES, but are not accessible with VLT-XSHOOTER. By detecting such features, ANDES will provide constraints on the patchiness of the reionisation at scales that are highly complementary to those probed by SKA. Furthermore, the intrinsic (thermal) widths of these features (where  $b_{\text{Ly}\alpha} \sim 12.9 \text{ km s}^{-1} (\text{T}/10^4 \text{ K})^{1/2}$ , cf. FWHM  $\sim 6 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ ) will be resolved by ANDES even at  $R \sim 50,000$  (if the medium resolution mode is implemented), therefore enabling the temperature of the IGM to be measured (Boera et al, 2019). The locations of these transmission spikes may also be correlated with galaxies detected in emission with IFU observations or slitless spectroscopy (e.g. with JWST, see Kashino et al, 2023), yielding insight into the relationship between the IGM and the sources of ionising photons.

Above redshift  $z \sim 6.5$ , the Lyman forest becomes less and less informative for what concerns the amount and the distribution on neutral hydrogen, due to the almost

complete absorption of the quasar flux. However, high-resolution,  $z \gtrsim 6.5$  quasar spectra could still be useful for the study of the topology of the reionisation process thanks to the presence of metal absorption lines in the region of the spectrum not affected by H I absorption. Some of these metal absorption lines could trace the mostly neutral IGM, if this is polluted to metallicities  $\log(Z/Z_\odot) \sim 3.5 - 2.5$ . Such a minimal level of metal pollution is expected at the EoR if stars in galaxies (and not AGN) are the main ionizing sources. The O I line at 1302 Å is particularly promising: the O and H first ionization potentials are almost identical, and O I should be in very tight charge exchange equilibrium with H I. The Si II 1260 Å transition might also be observable. At high redshift, overdense regions are the first to be polluted to high metallicity but the last to remain permanently ionised, as a result of the short recombination times. Such regions should produce a fluctuating O I and Si II forest, which, if observed, would indicate large quantities of neutral hydrogen (Oh, 2002). Furthermore, cosmological hydrodynamical simulations with on-the-fly multi-frequency radiative transfer shows that, concurrent with the development of the hydrogen reionisation process, O I absorbers undergo a decrease in their footprint around haloes and a decrease in the number of observed systems (Doughty and Finlator, 2019). This decrease occurs preferentially for absorbers that are farther from haloes (in the IGM and CGM) and that have lower equivalent width ( $EW \lesssim 0.05$  Å). State-of-the-art observations at intermediate resolution ( $R \lesssim 10,000$ ) of a sample of  $\sim 200$  quasars covering the redshift range  $3.2 < z < 6.5$  show a drop of the number density of O I absorbers with  $EW \geq 0.05$  Å at  $z \lesssim 5.7$  (Becker et al, 2019, Sebastian et al. subm.), evocative of the evolution suggested by simulations due to the change in the ionisation state of the CGM gas. However, present facilities do not allow to gather statistically significant, complete samples of low equivalent width O I absorption lines.

Only thanks to the sensitivity and resolving power of ANDES, it will be possible to detect the weak metal lines due to, in particular, O I 1302, Si II 1260 and also C II 1334 Å up to the highest redshifts probed by quasars (and possibly GRBs, see Section 4). An example of the capability of ANDES to reveal these tracers of the early chemical enrichment is illustrated by the simulated spectrum of a  $z \sim 7$  quasar in Figure 2. The model is drawn from a cosmological hydrodynamical simulation of inhomogeneous reionisation with a volume averaged neutral fraction of  $\langle x_{\text{HI}} \rangle = 0.38$  at  $z = 6.7$  (Puchwein et al, 2023). Following Keating et al (2014), a density dependent metallicity of  $[\text{O}/\text{H}] = -2.65 + 1.3 \log_{10}(\Delta/80)$  is assumed, where  $\Delta = \rho/\langle\rho\rangle$  is the gas density relative to the mean and  $[\text{O}/\text{H}]_\odot = -3.31$  (Asplund et al, 2009). In this model, strong O I absorbers typically arise from circumgalactic gas that remains well-shielded from UV radiation (i.e. with a neutral hydrogen fraction  $x_{\text{HI}} \sim 1$ , see also Doughty and Finlator 2019). The figure also shows how this kind of science is challenging for current facilities (e.g. VLT-XSHOOTER).

### 3 The metal era: the onset of metal enrichment in the Early Universe

Metals in the ISM and CGM of galaxies have a crucial role in shaping the formation and evolution of galaxies, stars, planets, and molecules. All chemical elements heavier than

beryllium that we observe today were formed in diverse stellar processes throughout the history of the universe. The first generation of stars (Pop III) were likely very massive and short-lived (possibly between 10 and 1000  $M_{\odot}$ , [Hirano et al, 2014, 2015](#); [Koutsouridou et al, 2023](#)). PopIII stars were born from pristine gas and polluted their surroundings with the first metals, thus starting the chemical enrichment of the early universe and marking the onset of the “metal era”.

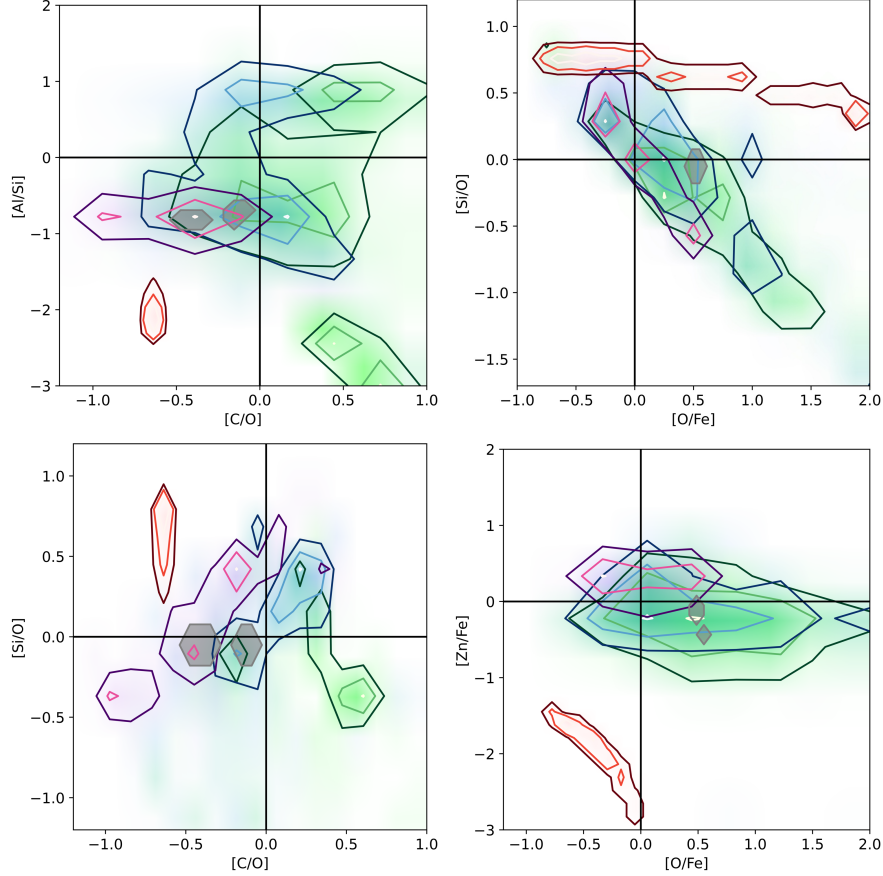
Simulations predict that the first stars appeared around  $z \sim 20\text{--}30$  in the so-called  $\text{H}_2$ -cooling low-mass minihalos (e.g. [Abel et al 2002](#); [Yoshida et al 2003](#) and for a review [Bromm 2013](#); [Klessen and Glover 2023](#)) and that they rapidly enriched the ISM (e.g. [Greif et al, 2008](#); [Wise et al, 2012](#)) along with the IGM (e.g. [Tornatore et al, 2007](#); [Pallottini et al, 2014](#); [Jaacks et al, 2018](#)) with their newly produced heavy elements. Observationally, direct detection of PopIII stars is beyond the reach of present and currently foreseen facilities<sup>2</sup>, with JWST having the potential to unveil emitting gas at low-metallicity at high- $z$  ([Vanzella et al, 2023](#); [Maiolino et al, 2023c](#)). A powerful way to investigate the early chemical enrichment is instead to study the chemical signature of Pop III stars in gas throughout the universe by comparing the gas (relative) abundances with the expected metal yields of Pop III stars and related stellar populations (Sect. 3.1). ANDES will be transformational in unveiling the early metal enrichment by studying very-metal-poor absorbing systems tracing pristine gas at intermediate redshifts (Sect. 3.2) as well as gas-rich galaxies or absorbing systems at very high redshift towards quasars and GRBs (Sect. 3.3).

### 3.1 Expected metal yields of Pop III stars

The first Pop III SNe can explode with a variety of energies. Pop III stars with  $m_* = 140\text{--}260 M_{\odot}$  are predicted to end their life as Pair Instability Supernovae (PISN, e.g. [Heger and Woosley, 2002](#); [Takahashi et al, 2018](#)) whose explosion energy increases with the stellar mass ( $E = 10^{52\text{--}53}$  erg) and is able to completely destroy the progenitor star. Conversely, Pop III stars in the mass range  $m_* = 10\text{--}1000 M_{\odot}$  can, independently of their mass, evolve as SNe with different energies,  $E = (0.3\text{--}10) \times 10^{51}$  erg, thus releasing in the surrounding gas different chemical elements (e.g., [Heger and Woosley, 2010](#)). General theoretical models for Pop III stars’ enrichment can be used to pinpoint the chemical signature of these different Pop III SNe ([Salvadori et al, 2019](#); [Vanni et al, 2023](#)). In Fig. 3, we report the diagnostic diagrams introduced by Vanni et al. (submitted), which enable us to disentangle the chemical signature left by different Pop III SNe in high- $z$  absorbers, where the H I column density can not be always measured. It is clear from the figure that gaseous environments solely imprinted by PISNe dwell in very specific regions of the diagrams. Thus, we can potentially identify them by measuring the proposed abundance ratios. Conversely, environments imprinted by less massive,  $m_* = 10\text{--}1000 M_{\odot}$ , Pop III SNe overlap for several chemical abundances and reside in regions of the diagrams where we can also find the imprint of normal Pop II SNe (see [Vanni et al, 2023](#), for details). This makes their identification more challenging. We should also emphasize that while the yields of PISNe are extremely

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<sup>2</sup>With the possible exception of gravitationally lensed, individual PopIII stars (e.g. [Windhorst et al, 2018](#); [Surace et al, 2018](#)), which are potentially detectable in imaging, but for which it would be extremely hard, if not impossible, to establish whether they actually are Pop III (e.g., by measuring their metallicity).



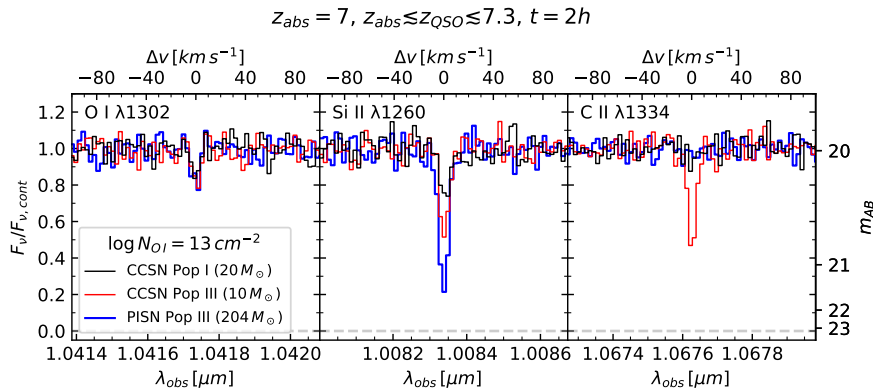
**Fig. 3** Chemical abundance ratios predicted for a gaseous environment imprinted by a single zero-metallicity Pop III SN (faint SNe: green; core-collapse SNe: blue; hypernovae: purple; PISN: red). The intensity of the colour increases with probability. For comparison we show in grey the predicted chemical abundances of an environment solely imprinted by normal Pop II stars.

solid, the predictions for less massive Pop III (and Pop II) SNe are more unsure (e.g. see Sec. 2.2 of [Welsh et al, 2019](#)). To minimize this issue in Fig. 3 we adopted the most complete set of yields for Pop III SNe with  $m_* = 10 - 1000 M_\odot$  by [Heger and Woosley \(2010\)](#), which accounts for different possible explosion energies and stellar mixing efficiencies (see Sec. 5 and Fig. 10 by [Koutsouridou et al \(2023\)](#) for a comparison with other yields). For Pop II SNe, furthermore, we show their IMF-integrated contribution for two different sets of yields ([Woosley and Weaver, 1995](#); [Limongi and Chieffi, 2018](#)).

### 3.2 Metal-poor gas at intermediate redshift

Finding and studying near-pristine gas can be an effective way to trace gas enriched by the first generation of stars. Very-metal poor ( $Z < 10^{-2} Z_\odot$  [Cooke et al, 2011](#); [Beers and Christlieb, 2005](#)) gas in absorbing systems such as Lyman Limit systems

(LLS) and Damped Lyman- $\alpha$  systems (DLAs)<sup>3</sup> has been observed at  $z \sim 2 - 4$  (e.g. Fumagalli et al, 2011; Welsh et al, 2019, 2020; Robert et al, 2022). The existence of such systems at intermediate redshifts implies that the mixing of metals in gas is still incomplete 10 Gyr after the Big Bang, so it is promising to search for signatures of the first generation of stars in gas even at cosmic noon. In some cases gas that had possibly been enriched by a single generation of stars was observed (Cooke et al, 2012; Crighton et al, 2016; Cooke et al, 2017). Recently, Saccardi et al (2023a) observed C-enhanced very metal-poor absorbing systems, which represent the high- $z$  analogue of Carbon enhanced metal poor (CEMP-no) stars observed in the Local Group. These peculiar absorbers are likely the first example of high- $z$  gas clouds that have preserved the chemical yields of Pop III stars exploding as low-energy SNe (see Salvadori et al, 2023). However, we are still missing distant absorbers imprinted by the chemical products of more energetic hypernovae and PISNe, whose direct descendants have been already identified among metal-poor stars (Placco et al, 2021; Skúladóttir et al, 2021, 2023; Xing et al, 2023). Thanks to our Pop III diagnostic and the ANDES spectrograph we will be able to finally discover these absorbers in the distant Universe.

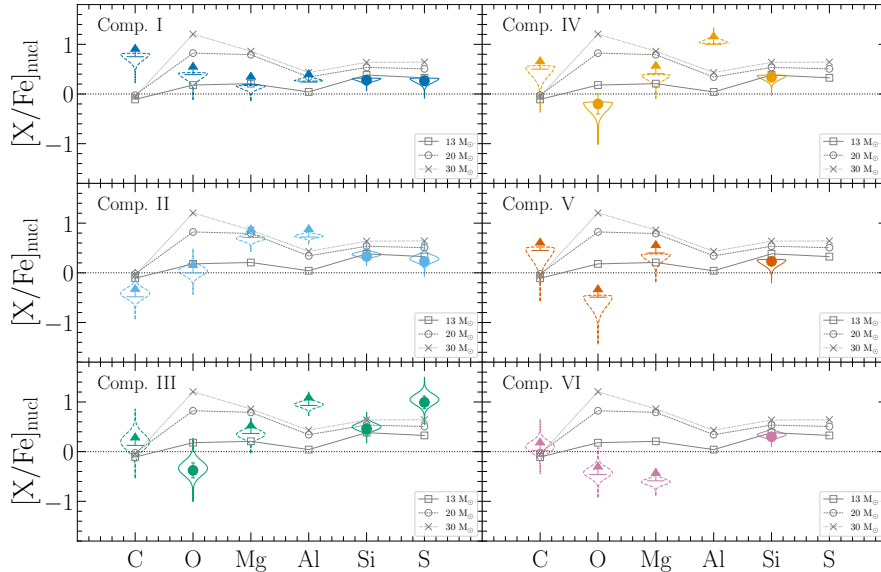


**Fig. 4** Simulated ANDES spectrum of a metal absorption system at  $z = 7.0$ , with  $N(\text{O I}) = 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$  along the line of sight to a background  $m_{\text{AB}} = 20$  quasar observed for 2 hours (noise level based on the ANDES v.1.1 exposure time calculator). The panels display zoomed-in regions around the O I  $\lambda 1302$ , Si II  $\lambda 1260$  and C II  $\lambda 1334$  absorption features in three different scenarios enriched by the ejecta from: the core collapse supernova (CCSN) of a  $Z = 1/3 Z_{\odot}$ ,  $m_* = 20 M_{\odot}$  star (black line; Sukhbold et al, 2016, yields), the Pop III CCSN of a  $m_* = 10 M_{\odot}$  star (red line; Heger and Woosley, 2010, yields) and the Pop III PISN from a  $m_* = 204 M_{\odot}$  star (blue line; Heger and Woosley, 2002, yields). The three scenarios can be clearly distinguished from the ANDES spectrum.

### 3.3 Relative chemical abundances in gas at $z \gtrsim 6$

At higher redshift, the metallicity of DLAs decreases (e.g., De Cia et al, 2018) and the probability of finding gas enriched by a single generation of stars increases. Recent

<sup>3</sup>These absorption systems are defined by their H I column density. LLS have  $17.3 \leq \log(N/\text{cm}^{-2}) < 20.3$ , while DLAs are characterised by  $\log(N/\text{cm}^{-2}) \geq 20.3$



**Fig. 5** Relative abundances corrected for dust depletion,  $[X/Fe]_{\text{nucl}}$ , observed in individual gas components/clouds (one per panel) associated with a  $z = 6.3$  GRB, observed with VLT-XSHOOTER (adapted from [Saccardi et al., 2023b](#)). In grey, nucleosynthetic yields for type II SNe ([Kobayashi et al., 2006](#)) are reported as a function of different progenitor masses  $m_* = 13, 20, 30 M_{\odot}$  (respectively solid, dashed, and dotted lines) for a chosen metallicity  $\log(Z/Z_{\odot}) = -1.3$ . Similar studies will be extended to numerous targets thanks to an instrument like ELT-ANDES.

surveys are finding an increasing number of quasars around the reionisation epoch, which can be used to study the gas in absorption ([Fan et al., 2023](#); [D’Odorico et al., 2023](#)).

Because of the increasing cosmic mean density and neutral gas fraction, above  $z \sim 6$  it is no longer possible to measure the neutral hydrogen column density of individual absorption features and therefore measure the absorbers’ metallicity. Nevertheless, the study of the relative abundances of elements heavier than helium can be used in a powerful way to characterise the metal pattern and thus the chemical enrichment of the absorbing gas. This is illustrated in Figure 4, where we show simulated ANDES spectra of a  $z = 7.0$  absorber characterized by a neutral oxygen column density  $N(\text{O I}) = 10^{13} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ . Here, we consider three different single-SN enrichment scenarios for the absorber – two featuring core-collapse SNe from either a metal-enriched or metal-free (Pop III), moderate-mass ( $10 - 20 M_{\odot}$ ) progenitor star, and one featuring a PISN from a very massive ( $\approx 200 M_{\odot}$ ) Pop III progenitor. By measuring the strengths of the O I  $\lambda 1302$ , Si II  $\lambda 1260$  and C II  $\lambda 1334 \text{ \AA}$  absorption features in the intervening gas cloud, ANDES can readily distinguish the three cases and probe the existence of very massive Pop III stars in the early Universe.

The relative abundances in gas are also sensitive tracers of the depletion of metals into dust, as well as to the nucleosynthetic signature imprinted in the gas by the previous stellar populations. These effects can be well disentangled by studying the relative abundances of different metals having different refractory and nucleosynthetic

properties (e.g. De Cia et al, 2016). This is important because significant amounts of dust have been observed out to the reionisation epoch (Watson et al, 2015; Saccardi et al, 2023b), so that dust depletion needs to be excluded or accounted for to be able to unveil the often subtle effects of nucleosynthesis of specific stellar populations. Figure 5 shows the relative abundances in individual gas components/clouds within and around the host galaxy of a  $z = 6.3$  GRB (Saccardi et al, 2023b). After correcting for dust depletion (e.g. Saccardi et al, 2023b; De Cia et al, 2021), the gas relative abundances can be directly compared to stellar yields. This comparison is displayed in Fig. 5, where some of the gas clouds/components show high levels of  $\alpha$ -element enhancements, and a high [Al/O], which is not well reproduced by the models.<sup>4</sup>

## 4 Extragalactic Transients

Extragalactic transients such as GRBs, various types of supernovae, Novae, counterparts of gravitational wave events, and tidal-disruption events unexpectedly light up superposed on the light of their host galaxy, and offer us for a limited amount of time new insights into the physical nature of these stellar- or galactic phenomena, and the galaxies that host them. This provides a complementary study of galaxies since the detection of transients does not depend on the host galaxy luminosity. The current limitation to these studies is the faintness of most targets, which ANDES will overcome with the unprecedented sensitivity of the ELT and with its near-IR optimised capabilities.

### 4.1 Gamma-ray bursts

GRBs are the most energetic events after the Big Bang. GRBs lasting longer than about 2 seconds are predominantly associated with the explosions of fast-rotating massive stars (Hjorth et al, 2003; Woosley and Bloom, 2006). Their afterglows can be used as bright cosmic beacons even at very high redshifts to unveil the chemical and kinematical properties of the galaxies that host them based on rest-frame UV absorption-line spectroscopy (e.g. Vreeswijk et al, 2004; Prochaska et al, 2007; De Cia et al, 2012; Bolmer et al, 2019). Absorption line spectra typically trace the warm and cold, predominantly neutral ISM in the host galaxy at distances greater than  $\sim 100$  pc from the explosion sites (Vreeswijk et al, 2007).

While GRB afterglows have been studied since 1997, numerous questions remain unanswered, and even to this date in 2023, the diversity of events remains a puzzle, including exceptionally long-duration or bright events, and compact object mergers (e.g. Kann et al, 2021; Levan et al, 2023; Williams et al, 2023). ANDES will provide a leap forward with a rapid acquisition of transient sources in the near-IR, combined with a wide spectral coverage at a high resolution.

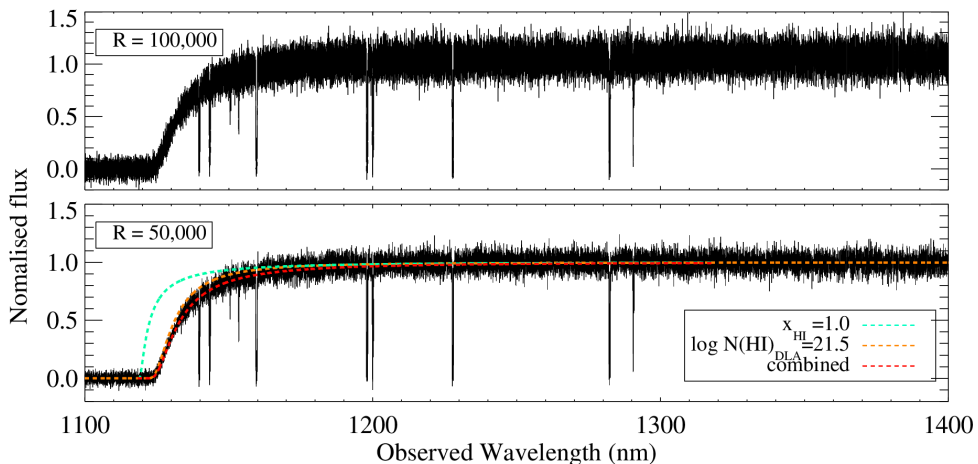
Searches for the afterglows conducted in the visible spectral range miss about half of them (e.g. Fynbo et al, 2009; Prochaska et al, 2009; Fynbo et al, 2014). We know that X-ray afterglows are often associated with bright, more metal-rich and dustier

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<sup>4</sup>Note that the H I column density of individual components and, as a consequence, their metallicity, cannot be determined observationally. Consequently, we have adopted the model yields by Kobayashi et al (2006) for a metallicity  $\log(Z/Z_{\odot}) = -1.3$  (corresponding to an absolute metallicity  $Z = 0.001$ ) close to the overall metallicity of the host galaxy ( $[M/H]_{\text{tot}} = -1.72 \pm 0.13$ ; Saccardi et al 2023b).

hosts than the optically detected afterglows (Perley et al, 2017). There hence is a large potential for spectroscopy of these dusty sight-lines with the near-IR coverage of ANDES.

Currently, only a few GRBs at  $z \gtrsim 6$  have very detailed chemical information (Hartoog et al, 2015; Saccardi et al, 2023b). The current record for a GRB with a secured afterglow spectrum is  $z = 8.2$  (Tanvir et al, 2009; Salvaterra et al, 2009), with another explosion at photometric redshift  $z = 9.4$  (Cucchiara et al, 2011). Long duration GRBs explode in star-forming galaxies and hence the highest redshift explosions will identify the exact location of the earliest generation of stars. Studying the absorption lines imprinted in the spectra of GRB afterglows with ANDES will allow a crucial test on the chemical yields in the early universe as described in Section. 3. Combining the ISM metallicity detected in absorption with emission-line based galactic metallicities would allow us to accurately calibrate the latter diagnostics, which remains a challenge to date even at intermediate redshifts (Schady et al, 2023). Furthermore, the estimate of the IGM neutral hydrogen fraction,  $x_{\text{HI}}$ , from the measured Lyman- $\alpha$  damping wing in high-redshift afterglows is less complex compared to quasar spectra (see Sec. 2) due to the simple power-law spectral distribution of afterglows, even in the presence of the contribution of the host galaxy DLA (Hartoog et al, 2015). Fig. 6 illustrates a simulated  $J$ -band spectrum of a  $z = 8.2$  GRB with a 1% solar metallicity and a strong damping wing from an intrinsic DLA in a fully neutral IGM. The simulated spectrum shows the signal that ANDES will obtain in a hour integration on a source with a magnitude  $J_{\text{AB}}=20$  in the nominal  $R=100,000$  resolution, and an  $R= 50,000$  mode.



**Fig. 6** Simulated ANDES  $J$ -band spectrum of a simulated GRB afterglow with a magnitude of  $J=20$  at  $z = 8.2$  with strong damping wing from a fully neutral IGM combined with a strong intrinsic hydrogen Ly $\alpha$  damping wing and with metal absorption lines corresponding to a 1% solar metallicity.

With VLT-UVES, astronomers made a breakthrough in discovering variable fine-structure lines powered by the photo-excitation and ionizing effect of the GRB afterglows on the surrounding gas, that allowed the determination of distances of the

absorbing clouds out to a kpc from the GRB (e.g. [Vreeswijk et al, 2007](#); [D’Elia et al, 2010](#); [De Cia et al, 2012](#); [Vreeswijk et al, 2013](#)). Such studies are challenging because the afterglow fades quickly, and it is impossible to detect the lines at phases later than one day after the burst. With a higher sensitivity, ANDES will overcome this main limitation and detect the line-variability as the GRB afterglows fade in time. This provides a unique opportunity to probe the sizes and internal ISM structure of high redshift galaxies, including that in very faint galaxies.

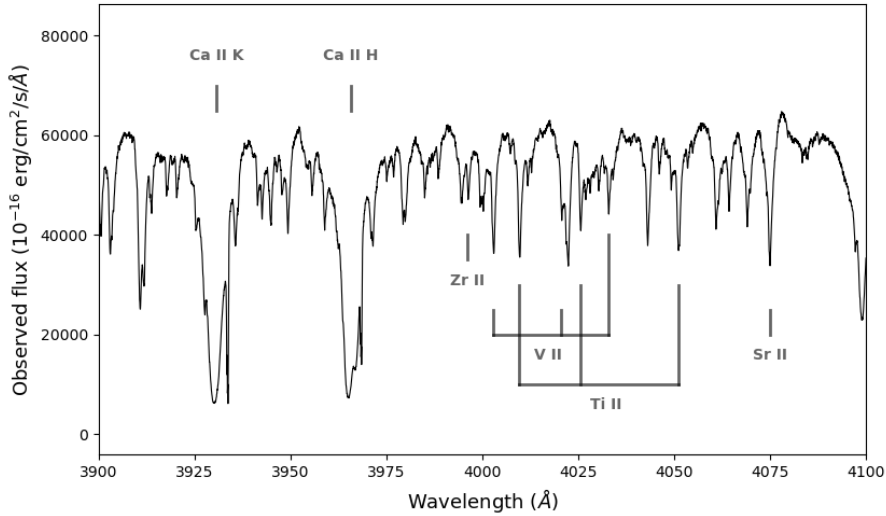
## 4.2 Superluminous Supernovae

Superluminous Supernovae (SLSNe) are a class of extremely energetic SNe ([Quimby et al, 2011](#); [Gal-Yam, 2012, 2019](#)), which are at least 10 and often 100 times more luminous than normal SNe (e.g. [Nicholl et al, 2013](#); [Inserra et al, 2017](#); [De Cia et al, 2018](#)). Because of their brightness, they can be observed out to high redshifts (currently  $z \sim 4$ , [Cooke et al, 2012](#)). They are particularly intriguing because their explosion processes and progenitor stars are highly debated, and may be associated with very massive stars, with potential links or analogies to pair-instability SNe and Pop III stars ([Gal-Yam et al, 2009](#); [Heger and Woosley, 2010](#)). The host galaxies of SLSNe have low metallicities and extreme properties ([Neill et al, 2011](#); [Vreeswijk et al, 2014](#); [Leloudas et al, 2015](#); [Lunnan et al, 2015](#); [Perley et al, 2016](#); [Schulze et al, 2018](#)). Spectral observations of SLSNe with 8-10m telescopes are already photon-starved and limited to mostly low-resolution studies, with a few exceptions that unveil host-galaxy ISM environments that are very different from any other galaxies we know of ([Vreeswijk et al, 2014](#); [Yan et al, 2018](#)). In addition, SLSNe have a potential use for cosmology out to much higher  $z$  than currently done with SNe Type Ia ([Inserra et al, 2013](#); [Scovaccicchi et al, 2016](#)). SLSNe spectra are diverse and fundamental to assess the properties of the explosions ([Quimby et al, 2018](#)), as well as their host galaxies in absorption ([Vreeswijk et al, 2014](#); [Yan et al, 2018](#)). Current time-domain survey facilities such as the Zwicky Transient Facility (ZTF, [Graham et al, 2019](#)) discover about 30 SLSNe per year ([Chen et al, 2023a,b](#)).

In the future, ANDES will be ideal to follow up selected SLSNe out to high  $z$ , and will bring new insights into chemical properties of the extreme host galaxies. In addition, the observations will also bring important information on the physics and diversity of these energetic explosions, the stellar evolution of most massive stars and an intriguing perspective for SLSN high- $z$  cosmology.

## 4.3 Novae

Classical novae (CNe) are non-disrupting thermonuclear explosions happening on the surface of a white dwarf that is accreting matter from a companion late-type main sequence star ([Bode and Evans, 2008](#); [Della Valle and Izzo, 2020](#)). These cataclysmic events lead to the ejection of the accreted shell into the interstellar medium, giving rise to multi-wavelength emission visible for months, if not years, after the outburst. Very high-energy emission in  $\gamma$ -rays has recently been discovered ([Ackermann et al, 2014](#)) from the presence of shocks originating from the multi-component nature of classical novae ejecta ([Mukai and Sokolowski, 2019](#)). Evidence for internal shock interaction,



**Fig. 7** A limited wavelength range, covering the region nearby Ca II H&K lines, of the spectrum of V906 Car obtained on March 24, 2018, with VLT-UVES, rescaled at the resolution of ANDES,  $R \sim 100,000$ . A bunch of THEA lines, including Zr II and Sr II, are clearly identified thanks to the resolution available with ANDES, and reported in the plot.

simultaneously to  $\gamma$ -ray and optical flares, within nova outflows has been observed in high-resolution spectra due to the appearance of new absorption systems and the evolution of P-Cygni absorption lines of the main line transitions detected in CN spectra (Aydi et al, 2020b), including transient heavy element absorption (Williams et al, 2008). Untangling multiple components expanding at different velocities within the nova ejecta (Aydi et al, 2020a) will help understand the still unknown origin of the shock interactions giving rise to the high-energy emission.

The resolution provided by ANDES will also allow us to identify and measure the abundance of narrow transient heavy element absorption components (namely *THEA*, Williams et al 2008), which are generally low-ionisation transition of neutral and ionised Fe-peak elements, including heavier elements such as Sr, Y, and Ba (see Fig. 7. These narrow lines have been detected during the bright optically thick phases of several CNe, and they exhibit only a single, low velocity, absorption component, suggesting that they are located in the slow toroidal ejecta component, but whose origin is not clearly identified yet. Among these lines, we have also identified in few cases the presence of the resonance line of the neutral lithium (Li I at 670.8 nm), which has been theoretically predicted to be synthesised in novae already in the '70s (Arnould and Norgaard, 1975; Starrfield et al, 1978), but was only discovered in CNe recently, thanks to the use of very high-resolution spectrographs (Izzo et al, 2015). ANDES will enable us to measure the abundance of THEA lines, compare their inferred abundance pattern with the spectra of late-type main sequence stars that are similar to the donor

secondary star, and shed light on their origin. At the same time, detection of lithium will be crucial to determine the lithium yield from a large sample of novae, possibly simultaneously to observations in the near-UV to measure the abundance of its parent element (7Be II at 313.0 nm), and finally to understand and characterise the role of novae as one of the main factories of lithium in the Galaxy (Molaro et al, 2023) and in nearby systems such as the Magellanic Clouds (Izzo et al, 2022).

#### 4.4 Specific requirements for the transient science cases

The majority of extra-galactic transient science investigations focus on spectroscopic analysis of individual objects, where stringent atmospheric conditions are not necessary, and can be conducted with seeing-limited observations. The ability of ANDES to simultaneously cover a wide wavelength range from 0.4 to 1.8 microns in a single exposure offers a significant advantage. Observations of extragalactic transients need the availability of a target of opportunity (ToO) mode, while the rapidly fading GRB afterglows require a rapid response mode (RRM) similar to that available on the VLT. Particularly, catching the fading afterglow minutes from the GRB trigger will benefit from an enhanced sensitivity enabled by a lower resolution ( $R \approx 50,000$ ) mode (see Section 7).

### 5 Additional science cases

The science cases described in the previous sections were chosen by the ANDES science team as the most compelling to be carried out with this instrument in the field of galaxy formation and evolution and the intergalactic medium. However, they are far from exhausting the extragalactic science that will be enabled by ANDES.

All the studies devoted to the investigation of the physical and chemical properties of the IGM, CGM and ISM at  $z \gtrsim 2.5 - 3.0$  will be improved in terms of statistics (number of targets), sensitivity as a function of exposure time and details of the velocity profile of absorption lines thanks to the characteristics of ELT-ANDES (but see also Sect. 6). Furthermore, ANDES could be used to observe pairs or small groups of quasars at small angular separations ( $\lesssim 1$  arcmin) on the sky to determine the small-scale variation of chemical properties in the CGM (see also Sect. 8 for the synergy with other ELT instruments).

In the following, we briefly describe three example science cases further describing the capabilities of ANDES.

#### 5.1 He II reionisation

In the cosmic reionisation theory, young stars play a key role in the reionisation of H I at  $z \gtrsim 6$  (e.g. Fan et al, 2006), but they are typically unable to further doubly ionise helium. Instead, quasars are thought to be the most likely ionizing sources responsible for the He II reionisation, which started at  $z \gtrsim 5$  and completed at  $z \gtrsim 3$  (e.g. McQuinn, 2016). The C IV absorption doublet at rest frame  $\lambda\lambda 1548.2, 1550.8 \text{ \AA}$  in the spectra of bright background quasars at  $z \gtrsim 4$  is the best tracer of the He II reionisation (e.g. Yu et al, 2021). This is because the C IV doublet is strong and easy to identify,

located at significantly longer wavelengths than the hydrogen Lyman- $\alpha$  emission line in the quasar spectrum, and the  $C^{3+}$  ion has a comparable ionization potential as  $He^+$ . Using high resolution optical spectra, after firmly identifying the C IV absorbers, it is then easier to identify other associated metal absorbers such as Si IV (e.g. [D’Odorico et al, 2022](#)), as well as the Lyman- $\alpha$  lines embedded in the forest (e.g. [Simcoe et al, 2004](#)). The identification of these multi-ion systems will help us to study the physical and chemical properties of the IGM in the He II reionisation epoch (e.g., [Simcoe et al 2004](#); [Songaila 2005](#)), when the AGN become more and more important in the cosmic reionisation (e.g., [Faucher-Giguère et al 2009](#)), and some large-scale gravitationally bound systems gradually become virialized (e.g., [Wang et al 2016](#); [Tozzi et al 2022](#)). High-resolution optical spectroscopy observations of  $z \gtrsim 4$  quasars with  $\sim 8$  m telescopes typically allow the detection of C IV absorbers in  $i < 19$  mag quasar spectra to an equivalent width of  $EW_r \gtrsim 0.01 \text{ \AA}$  (corresponding to  $\log(N(C\text{ IV})/\text{cm}^2) \gtrsim 12.5$ ; e.g., [Cooksey et al 2013](#); [D’Odorico et al 2022](#)). This leads to a small sample size due to either a small number of bright enough quasars (seriously affecting the statistics at the high  $N(C\text{ IV})$  end) or a small number of C IV absorbers above the currently reached detection limits. With the high-resolution mode of ELT-ANDES ( $R \sim 100,000$ ), it will be much more efficient to reach a lower C IV column density detection limit of  $\log N(C\text{ IV})/\text{cm}^2 \lesssim 12$  (assuming  $i \approx 20$  mag, exposure  $\approx 2$  hours, S/N  $\sim 27$ ). This is critical to constrain the C IV column density distribution function and its redshift evolution (e.g., [Ellison et al 2000](#); [D’Odorico et al 2010](#)). Furthermore, if a lower resolution, higher throughput mode of ANDES at  $R \sim 50,000$  will be implemented, an increase in sensitivity of about a factor of two is expected, which implies that the same threshold in C IV column density could be reached in the same exposure time for targets  $\sim 1.0 - 1.5$  magnitudes fainter.

## 5.2 Probing the circumgalactic medium of local galaxies

The Ca II H&K lines near  $3950 \text{ \AA}$  are the only lines in the optical that can be used to study the cold/warm CGM in absorption at  $z \approx 0$ . Previous surveys of Ca II absorption in the CGM of the Milky Way and other low-redshift galaxies using VLT-UVES and Keck-HIRES ([Ben Bekhti et al, 2008](#); [Richter et al, 2011](#); [Ben Bekhti et al, 2012](#)) demonstrate that these lines are particularly useful to study the small-scale structure at pc and sub-pc levels in the neutral CGM down to neutral gas column densities of  $\log N(\text{H I}) = 18$ .

ANDES and its planned spectral capabilities in the U-band will initiate a new era in using the Ca II H&K lines to characterize the internal density structure in  $z \approx 0$  CGM clouds. In principle, every extragalactic spectrum recorded with ANDES in the U-band can be used to investigate the foreground CGM of the Milky Way, tidal gas structures in the Local Group (e.g., the Magellanic Stream), and other circumgalactic gas features of foreground galaxies. The systematic comparison of Ca II H&K absorption patterns as a function of the lines of sight angular separations along thousands of them will provide crucial information on the small-scale distribution and coherence length of neutral gas structures in the (multi-phase) CGM.

Spectra of extragalactic sightlines can also be systematically combined with ANDES U-band spectra of (in projection) adjacent, distant halos stars ([Battaglia et al,](#)

2017) or stars in other Local Group member galaxies to constrain the distances of the Milky Way’s high-velocity clouds and the Magellanic Stream using the distance-bracketing method (e.g. [Wakker et al, 2007, 2008](#); [Thom et al, 2008](#)). This will be an essential step to reconstruct the 3D distribution and total mass of the Milky Way’s CGM, to determine the Milky Way’s gas-accretions rate, and to pinpoint the exact location and extent of the Magellanic Stream in the context of the on-going assembly of the Local Group.

With its capabilities to obtain high-resolution optical spectra of extragalactic background sources at extremely high S/N ( $> 2000$ ), ANDES also will potentially open a completely new window to study warm-hot gas in the intergalactic medium in the halos of foreground galaxies at low redshift by using the forbidden intersystem lines of [Fe X] and [Fe XIV] near 6375 and 5303 Å. As originally proposed in [York and Cowie \(1983\)](#), and later re-evaluated by other groups (e.g. [Hobbs, 1984](#); [Pettini et al, 1989](#); [Richter et al, 2014](#)), these extremely weak lines have a great potential to be used as tracers of million-degree halo gas at the virial temperatures of (massive) galaxies and hot gas in the shock-heated component of intergalactic medium (the WHIM). This requires, however, optical spectra of background AGN with a S/N of several thousand because of the extremely small transition probabilities of [Fe X] and [Fe XIV]. The combined use of individual ANDES high-sensitivity spectra and clever stacking strategies will enable us to search for warm-hot gas using [Fe X] and [Fe XIV] in different cosmological environments and to provide a census of the “missing baryons” in the WHIM in the local Universe ([Fresco et al, 2020](#)).

### 5.3 Low-mass Black Holes

Supermassive black holes (BH;  $M_{\text{BH}} \sim 10^5 - 10^{10} M_{\odot}$ ) are key actors in the formation and evolution of galaxies. The feedback due to radiation and winds from the accretion disk surrounding the BH, can shape the host galaxies and explain the present-day empirical scaling relations between their properties and the BH mass (e.g. [Fabian, 2012](#); [Kormendy and Ho, 2013](#); [King and Pounds, 2015](#)), and possibly also the dearth of massive galaxies (e.g. [Behroozi and Silk, 2018](#)). However, this paradigm is ultimately mostly based on several tens direct BH mass measurements in massive early type galaxies with  $M_{\text{BH}} > 10^7 M_{\odot}$  and little is known for the less massive galaxies which are predicted to host BH with  $M_{\text{BH}} < 10^7 M_{\odot}$  (see e.g. [Kormendy and Ho, 2013](#); [Greene et al, 2020](#)).

It is currently believed that low mass galaxies undergo a different growth than massive ones and, as a result, the distribution of their BH masses should retain an imprint of the original seed mass distribution (e.g. [Volonteri et al, 2008](#); [Reines, 2022](#)): BH growth models predict significantly different  $M_{\text{BH}} - \sigma$  relations at  $M_{\text{BH}} \sim 10^5 - 10^6 M_{\odot}$ , for different initial mass functions of the seed BH, i.e. for different seed formation mechanisms. JWST has started to probe this BH mass regime at high redshift ([Kocevski et al, 2023](#); [Harikane et al, 2023](#); [Maiolino et al, 2023b,a](#)), but in type 1 AGNs and using the so-called virial relations and single epoch observations, whose validity at high redshift (and specifically for the class of highly accreting BH identified by JWST) is uncertain.

To properly test the BH seeding scenarios, direct measurements of BH masses in the range  $\sim 10^5 - 10^6 M_\odot$  are needed. This is feasible in the local universe, provided that one has high enough spectral resolution and high enough angular resolution. A standard approach based on the measurement of gas and/or stellar kinematics would require to spatially resolve the BH sphere of influence which, for a  $\sim 10^5 M_\odot$  BH, in a galaxy with central stellar velocity dispersion of about  $50 \text{ km s}^{-1}$  located at distance  $D \sim 20 \text{ Mpc}$  (e.g., in the Virgo cluster), has a projected diameter of 4 mas. The diffraction limited spatial resolution of the ELT at  $1.2 \mu\text{m}$ ,  $2.2 \mu\text{m}$  (e.g. at the location of Paschen- $\beta$ , Br $\gamma$ , H2) is 6 and 12 mas respectively, meaning that even the ELT cannot reach the required spatial resolution.

Spectroastrometry of gas emission lines is a method complementing the classical techniques and which, by exploiting high spectral resolution, allows to measure gas rotational velocities on scales as small as 1/10 of the spatial resolution. This method consists in tracing the spatial centroid of the emission line in many independent spectral channels: if the gas is circularly rotating in a disk, then the centroid will present a unique variation with wavelength which can be modelled to provide the mass of the central BH. The method has been tested and successfully used to measure BH masses (Gnerucci et al, 2010, 2011, 2013). The same method has been successfully adopted in interferometric observations of the quasars 3C273 with VLTI-Gravity to spatially resolve, for the first time, the Broad Line Region and reveal its rotation (Gravity Collaboration et al, 2018).

By reaching even only 1/5 of the spatial resolution of the ELT, with spectroastrometry it will be possible to spatially resolve scales down to 1 and 2.5 mas at  $\lambda \sim 1.2 \mu\text{m}$  and  $2.2 \mu\text{m}$ , respectively. Spectroastrometry with the ELT will therefore allow us to spatially resolve the sphere of influence of  $10^5 M_\odot$  BHs at a distance of 20 Mpc. To adequately sample the rotation curve of a  $10^5 M_\odot$  BH at  $D \sim 20 \text{ Mpc}$ , at least 10 spectral channels should be sampling the nuclear rotation curve ( $30 - 60 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ ), therefore the spectral resolution must be  $(60 - 30)/10/2 = 3 \text{ km s}^{-1}$ , corresponding to  $R \sim 100,000$ . To adequately map the centroid position of the central unresolved source an IFU sampling the diffraction limited ELT PSF is needed. Complete near-IR spectral coverage will allow the use of several gas emission lines, Pa- $\beta$  in J, [FeII] in H, and H2 and Br- $\gamma$  in K. In summary, an IFU mode for ANDES working at the diffraction limit of the ELT and a spectral resolution of  $\sim 100,000$  would be able to detect BHs with masses down to  $10^5 M_\odot$  up to a distance of  $\sim 20 \text{ Mpc}$  (i.e. Virgo).

## 6 The benefits of the ANDES extension to the U-band

In Section 5.2, we highlight how the extension of ANDES to the U-band ( $0.35 - 0.4 \mu\text{m}$ ) would be of fundamental importance for the study of the CGM of the Milky Way and of the gas distribution in the Local Group. More generally, we would like to stress that almost the entire field of diffuse gas studies (IGM, CGM and ISM) over the Universe's history is based on absorption lines from electronic transitions, the vast majority of which occurring in the far UV. An extension to the U-band then corresponds directly to an extension in available redshifts. For instance, the study of gas metallicity requires

access to H I lines, and studying the transition to cold gas and interplay with stars (as well as AGN activity) requires covering H<sub>2</sub> lines. For systems at the rise and peak of star-formation history, these lines will be redshifted in the U-band.

## 7 The benefits of a higher sensitivity, lower resolving power mode

The majority of the science cases proposed in this work rely on the detection and measurement of spectral features which are generally resolved at a resolving power of  $R \sim 50,000$ . The comparison of quasar metal absorption lines observed at  $R \gtrsim 100,000$  and  $R \sim 50,000$  shows how the velocity profile of complex absorption systems does not change substantially with the increase in resolution, although the different velocity components (and in particular the narrow ones) become more visible (see e.g. [Berg et al, 2022](#)).

One of the aims of ELT-ANDES is to push the limits of the study of chemical enrichment to the early universe: this requires fine sensitivity. At  $z \sim 6$  most quasars have magnitudes fainter than  $J_{\text{AB}} \sim 19$  ([D’Odorico et al, 2023](#)) and the brightest GRB afterglows at  $z \sim 6$  have magnitudes around  $m_i \sim 20$  mag that fade within hours ([Hartoog et al, 2015](#); [Tanvir et al, 2021](#)). Targets at higher redshift will be fainter. An intermediate resolution mode ( $R \sim 50,000$ ) on ANDES will enable a  $\sim 60\%$  higher sensitivity than with the full-resolution mode, in the J band. This will be crucial to be able to reach the sensitivity levels needed to study the faint high- $z$  sources.

Simulations of GRB afterglow spectra show that the expected fraction of the total population of GRBs at  $z > 6$  is  $\sim 6\%$  ([Ghirlanda et al, 2021](#)). Their magnitude 0.5 days after the GRB trigger in the observer frame is in the range 17 – 27 mag (AB) in the  $J$ -band, with a fraction of 20%(35%) of afterglows being brighter than 20(21) mag. In case of an RRM trigger just 1 hour after the explosion, 60%(85%) are brighter than 20(21) mag. Requiring a  $S/N > 10$  per spectral pixel to analyse absorption lines at the nominal resolution of  $R=100,000$ , a single 50 minutes integration on a mag=20 source is adequate, while a 21 mag source requires 4 hours on target<sup>5</sup>.

In summary, a lower spectral resolution mode ( $R \sim 50,000$ ), which additionally benefits from an improved instrument throughput, is highly desirable because it would increase the sensitivity of ANDES by a factor of  $\sim 2$  compared to the baseline instrument configuration.

## 8 Synergy with present and future surveys and facilities

### 8.1 Selection of ANDES targets

Several upcoming telescopes and surveys will be important for optimising the selection of targets for ANDES. This includes Euclid, for which the Euclid Wide Survey ([Euclid Collaboration et al, 2022](#)) is expected to extend the available sample of bright ( $m_{\text{AB}} < 22$ )  $z > 7$  quasars ([Euclid Collaboration et al, 2019](#); [Schindler et al, 2023](#)), and the

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<sup>5</sup>Based on Version 1.1 of the ANDES Exposure Time Calculator

Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) at the Vera C. Rubin Observatory (Ivezić et al, 2019), which will allow the detection of SLSNe up to  $z \approx 5$  (Villar et al, 2018). The Dark Energy Spectroscopic Instrument (DESI) has recently added several hundred objects to the known set of  $z \approx 5-7$  quasars at  $m_{AB} \lesssim 21$  in the southern hemisphere, and is projected to double their sample in coming years (Yang et al, 2023). In the same redshift range, the future 4MOST survey is moreover expected to find  $\sim 4 \times 10^4$  quasars at  $z > 5$  and  $m_{AB} \lesssim 22.5$  (Merloni et al, 2019). On a longer horizon, the planned ESA THESEUS (Amati et al, 2021) or NASA Gamow Explorer (White et al, 2021) missions may allow the detection of  $z \gtrsim 6$  GRBs with afterglows that for a few hours will remain sufficiently bright for follow-up observations with ANDES (Ghirlanda et al, 2021).

## 8.2 ANDES complemented by other instruments and future facilities

The aspiration of ANDES to detect very metal-poor gas clouds and the chemical signatures of Pop III stars in absorption offers strong synergies with other optical and infrared spectrographs that will operate on ELT and that are currently operating on JWST. Follow-up observations of quasar fields hosting relevant absorbers will be possible at, e.g., ELT with the MOSAIC spectrograph. This instrument will be vital in identifying both galaxies associated with the absorbers, including the host galaxies, and characterizing the larger-scale galaxy environment near this gas by reaching low stellar-mass systems. The prospects of ANDES for studying low-metallicity gas at high spectral resolution along the line of sight to quasars fainter than what can currently be reached will thus be well-matched to upcoming ELT capabilities to probe the faint end of the galaxy population that clusters with these gas absorption systems.

While ANDES will be able to characterise the distribution and occurrence of absorbing gas clouds that bear the chemical imprints of the earliest generations of stars, JWST is already searching for Pop III-powered galaxies that lack strong metal emission lines but exhibit very strong hydrogen and helium emission lines (see early results by Vanzella et al, 2023). In the future, it may be possible to combine the two approaches and use JWST to search the fields around absorbers that exhibit signatures of Pop III enrichment, thereby potentially identifying the galaxies from which the supernova enrichment originated and constraining the outflow of metals from sites of recent PopIII star formation.

In the study of the high-redshift CGM with ELT, the combined use of the HARMONI/MOSAIC instruments for the fainter, more numerous targets and of ANDES for the brighter quasars in the same field will moreover allow us to reconstruct the 3D distribution and physical properties of the gas. At lower redshifts, the tomographic mapping of CGM in Ca II from ANDES with H I 21cm data from SKA will furthermore boost our understanding of the large-scale and small-scale neutral gas distribution around galaxies and its role for galaxy evolution.

In the study of cosmic reionisation, observations of the redshifted 21 cm signal from neutral hydrogen with SKA will allow new ways to connect small-scale (ANDES) and large-scale (SKA) constraints on the redshift evolution of the reionisation process. For rare high-redshift quasars or GRB afterglows that appear sufficiently bright at both near-IR and radio wavelengths, combined detections of metal (ANDES) and 21 cm

neutral-hydrogen (SKA) absorption lines along the same sightlines may furthermore be possible (Bhagwat et al, 2022).

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## Declarations

- Authors’ contributions

VD: Coordination, general writing and finalization of the paper; JSB: Coordination and writing of Sect. 2; ADC: Coordination and writing of Sect. 3; LC: Coordination and writing of Sect. 4; EZ: Writing of Sect. 8; SS: Writing of Subsect. 3.1; LI: Writing of Subsect. 4.3; JL: Writing of Subsect. 5.1; PR: Writing of Subsect. 5.2; RM, AML: Writing of Subsect. 5.3; AK, AS, IV: Help with simulations/forecasts, figures; PDM, RM, AM, LO, AZ: ANDES project office support; All authors provided comments to the draft.

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