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Searching for gamma-ray counterparts of FRBs with H.E.S.S.

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Fast Radio Bursts (FRBs) are highly energetic, extremely short-lived bursts of radio flashes. Despite extensive research, the exact cause of these outbursts remains a mystery. One of the most accredited models suggests that they originate from highly magnetized and rapidly spinning neutron stars known as magnetars. The high luminosity, short duration, and high dispersion measure of these events suggest they result from extreme, high-energy astrophysical processes of extragalactic origin. The number of detected FRBs, including repeating ones, has grown rapidly in recent years. Except for FRB20200428, that is associated to the galactic magnetar SGR1925+2154, no multi-wavelength counterparts to any FRB has been detected yet. The High Energy Stereoscopic System (H.E.S.S.) telescope has developed a program to uncover the nature of these mysterious events by searching for their gamma-ray counterparts. This contribution provides an overview of the searches for FRB sources conducted by H.E.S.S., including follow-up observations and simultaneous multi-wavelength campaigns with radio and X-ray observatories.

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1. Introduction

Fast radio bursts (FRBs) are millisecond-long radio pulses detected around ∼1 GHz. They were serendipitously discovered at the Parkes Radio Telescope [1, 2] and are now routinely detected by various facilities. Over a thousand FRB events from approximately 500 published sources have been reported (see e.g. FRB catalogs [3, 4]). Some FRBs exhibit repeating bursts, while others show periodic patterns in their activity cycle, although with limited significance. The distinction between repeating and non-repeating sources and their underlying physical differences remain unclear. Determining the distance to FRBs is challenging as they lack a direct distance indicator. Instead, the dispersion measure (DM), which tracks the amount of free electrons along the line of sight, is used to infer distance information. However, there is a degeneracy between contributions from the intergalactic medium, host galaxies, and the local environment of the FRB source. While it is widely accepted that FRBs have an extragalactic origin, estimates of their redshift (z) have large uncertainties, with most falling within the range of $0.1 \leq z \leq 1$.

Recent efforts have focused on understanding the progenitors of FRBs. Compact objects such as magnetars (strongly magnetized neutron stars) and massive black holes are favored models due to the short duration of FRBs [5]. Some magnetars may produce FRBs through interactions between strongly magnetized pulses and surrounding material, leading to synchrotron maser emission [6]. Other models suggest that repeating FRBs originate near the surface of magnetars through ultra-relativistic internal shocks and blast waves associated with flares [7].

Apart from one case associated with the galactic magnetar SGR1925+2154, no multiwavelength counterparts to FRBs have been detected. However, studying the electromagnetic emission of FRBs across different wavelengths is crucial for unraveling their nature. It allows us to understand source characteristics, explore the surrounding environment, refine emission mechanisms, search for associated phenomena, and explore cosmological and fundamental physics. The High Energy Stereoscopic System (H.E.S.S.) telescope has developed a program to search for their gamma-ray counterparts. This contribution provides an overview of the searches for FRB sources conducted by H.E.S.S. since 2015, including follow-up observations and simultaneous multi-wavelength campaigns with radio and X-ray observatories [8].

2. H.E.S.S. FRB follow-up program

H.E.S.S. is an array consisting of one 28 m and four 12 m imaging atmospheric Cherenkov telescopes (IACTs) [9]. It is situated in the Khomas Highland in Namibia at an altitude of 1835 m, and its primary function is to detect very-high-energy (VHE) gamma rays spanning energies from a few tens of GeV to 100 TeV. Since 2015, H.E.S.S. has been actively engaged in a comprehensive follow-up program for FRBs, with the aim of investigating potential correlations between these events and VHE gamma-ray emissions. The FRB searches conducted by H.E.S.S. employ two primary strategies: Target of Opportunity (ToO) alerts triggered by radio or X-ray observatories, and coordinated multi-wavelength campaigns. In the first approach, the objective is to identify the afterglow emission in VHE gamma-rays associated with FRBs. This involves promptly responding to ToO alerts from radio or X-ray observatories, enabling H.E.S.S. to capture and study any potential gamma-ray emissions that may follow the FRB events. In the second approach, the focus is on observing known FRB sources, whether repeating or not, to study their host galaxies and on capturing FRBs simultaneously with radio facilities. Coordinated multi-wavelength campaigns are designed to systematically observe and analyze the activity of these sources. By collecting data across different wavelengths simultaneously, H.E.S.S. aims to uncover any recurring patterns or behaviors associated with the FRB sources.

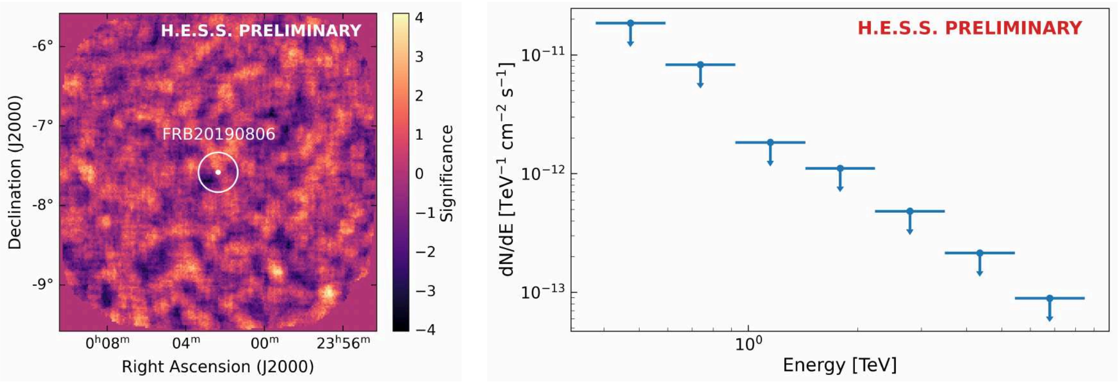
This contribution provides an overview of H.E.S.S.'s FRB searches, focusing specifically on the follow-ups of an FRB candidate triggered by UTMOST and of the magnetar SGR1830-0645m, and on the multi-wavelength campaigns conducted in collaboration with radio and X-ray observatories. For the analysis of the H.E.S.S. data presented in this contribution, the method described in [10] was employed, utilizing standard gamma-hadron separation techniques and event selection cuts. The background estimation followed the established "reflected background" technique [11], and the results were validated through cross-check analysis employing an independent event calibration and reconstruction method [12].

3. Follow-ups observations

A first follow-up campaign of FRBs in VHE gamma rays was conducted by H.E.S.S. in response to the detection of FRB150215 and FRB150418 [13] by the SUPERB (SUrvey for Pulsars and Extragalactic Radio Bursts) project, which utilizes the Parkes telescope. However, no gamma-ray emission was detected during the campaign. The resulting integral upper limits at 99% confidence level (C.L.) were $\Phi_\gamma(E > 1.18\ \text{TeV}) < 6.5 \times 10^9\ \text{m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ [14] and $\Phi_\gamma(E > 350\ \text{GeV}) < 1.33 \times 10^8\ \text{m}^{-2}\text{s}^{-1}$ [15], respectively, assuming an E^{-2} energy spectrum [15].

On August 6, 2019, a radio burst was detected by the Molonglo radio telescope during a blind FRB search as part of the UTMOST program [16]. The optimal DM for FRB20190806 was measured at 388.5 pc cm^{-3}, and the DM-inferred redshift was found to be $z \leq 0.32$. Subsequently, H.E.S.S. initiated observations on August 8, 2019, and collected data for $\sim$ 2.3 hours. However, no significant gamma-ray flux was detected from the direction of FRB20190806. The distribution map of the Li&Ma [17] significance, which measures the excess of gamma-ray events over the background, is shown in Figure 1a for the full region of interest (ROI). The significance values are consistent with the background expectation. The resulting 99% C.L. differential upper limits on the gamma-ray flux, assuming an E^{-2} energy spectrum, are shown in Figure 1b.

Due to due to their similar burst characteristics and the possibility of both originating from highly magnetized compact objects, Soft Gamma Repeaters (SGRs) are considered counterparts to FRB sources. The first evidence supporting this scenario came in April 2020 when an FRB was detected from the Galactic magnetar SGR1935+2154, preceded by two gamma-ray outburst alerts by the *Swift*-Burst Alert Telescope (BAT) satellite, prompting follow-up observations by H.E.S.S.. Due to darkness and visibility constraints, follow-up observations could only commence approximately ~7.5 hours later. These observations ($\sim$ 2 hours), overlapping with X-ray bursts from the magnetar detected by INTEGRAL and *Fermi* Gamma-ray Burst Monitor (GBM) and prior to the FRB detection by STARE2 and CHIME, provided the first observations of a flaring magnetar in the very-high energy domain. While VHE gamma-ray emission was not detected from SGR1935+2154, upper limits on the flux were established, resulting in $F_\gamma(E > 600\ \text{GeV}) < 2.4\times10^{-12}\ \text{erg cm}^{-2}\ \text{s}^{-1}$ assuming a spectral index of $E^{-2.5}$.



(a) (b)

Figure 1: FRB20190806 triggered by UTMOST. **(a)**: Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20190806. **(b)**: Differential 99% C.L. upper limits derived from the H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20190806 assuming a E^{-2} gamma-ray spectrum.

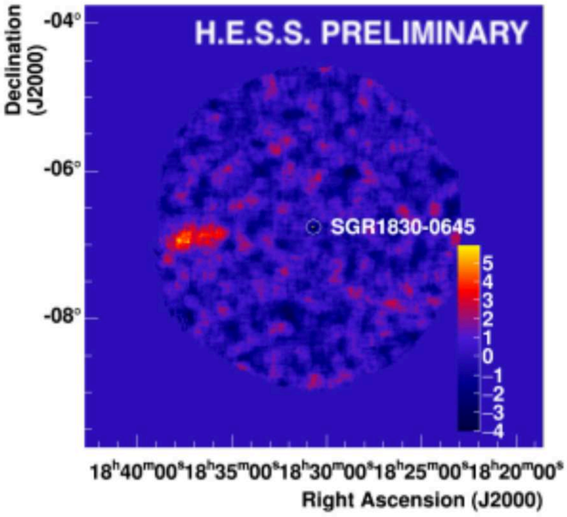
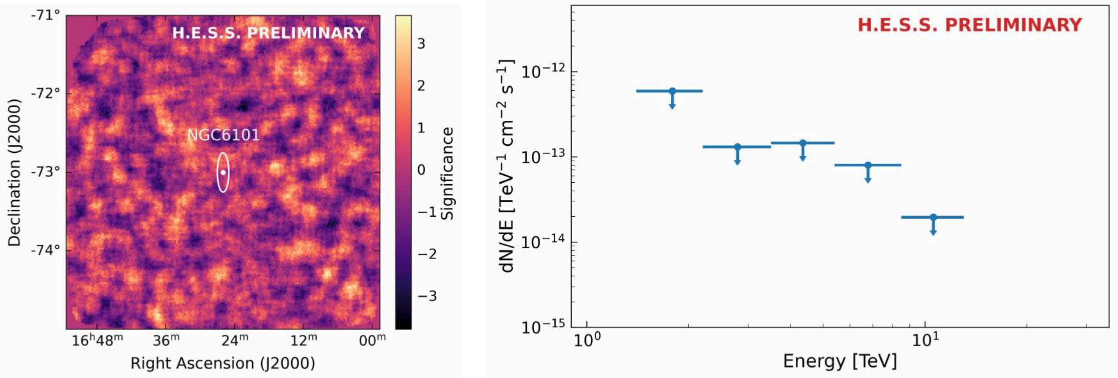


Figure 2: Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on SGR 1830-0645.

On October 10, 2020 H.E.S.S. conducted observations in the direction of SGR 1830-0645 following an alert from Swift-BAT [18]. The source was classified as an SGR based on its short X-ray duration (8 ms), soft spectrum (not visible above 50 keV), and its location in the Galactic bulge near the plane. No VHE gamma-ray emission was detected by H.E.S.S. during the ToO observations, as shown in the Figure 2. The Li&Ma significance map distribution obtained by excluding a circular region of 0.25° radius (red histogram) indicate compatibility with the background expectation, further supporting the absence of significant VHE gamma-ray emission.



(a) **(b)**

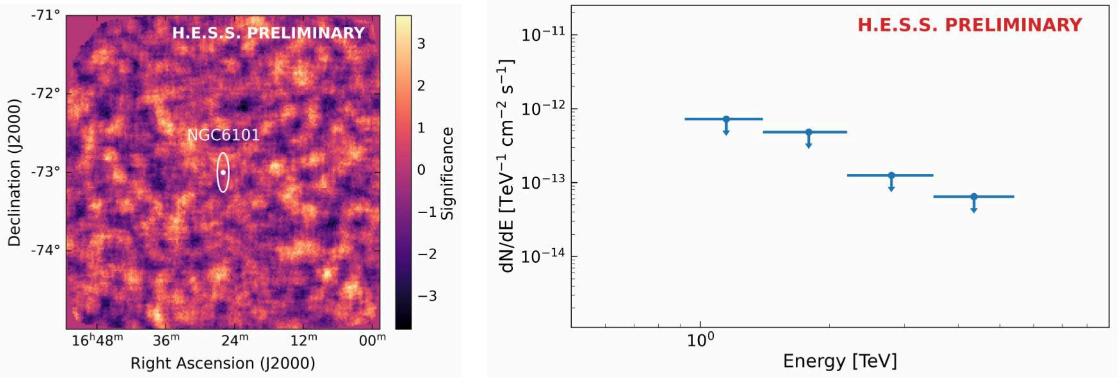
Figure 3: Observations of NGC6101 as part of the MWL DWF campaign. (**a**): Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on NGC6101. (**b**): Differential 99% C.L. upper limits derived from the H.E.S.S. observational data taken on NGC6101 assuming a E^{-2} gamma-ray spectrum.

4. Multiwavelength campaigns

The Deeper Wider Faster (DWF) program [19] coordinates multi-wavelength and rapid-response follow-up for fast transient studies. Previous DWF campaigns have contributed to follow-ups of FRB and gravitational wave events in the radio and optical bands, as well as advancements in data processing and real-time pipelines. H.E.S.S. participated in the June 2019 DWF campaign, led by the MeerKAT radio telescope, for six nights from June 24 to June 29. Three fields were targeted, including galaxies NGC6101 and NGC6744, along with the single-pulse FRB20180924 [20]. Optical coverage was obtained simultaneously with DECam on the CTIO Blanco telescope in Chile, as well as from other telescopes covering X-rays (HXMT), optical, and millimeter wavelengths (AST3-2 and South Pole Telescope, Antarctica). Unfortunately, cloudy weather in Chile resulted in poor quality optical data, compromising the detailed identification of over 700 observed optical transients. Additionally, real-time analysis of MeerKAT was not functioning, leading to the unavailability of rapid FRB detection information during the observations. H.E.S.S. conducted observations during moonlight but did not detect any signals from the three targets. Consequently, 99% C.L. differential upper limits were calculated, assuming an E^{-2} spectral distribution, using ad-hoc simulations to account for moonlight conditions [21]. The resulting significance maps and upper limits are presented in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5.

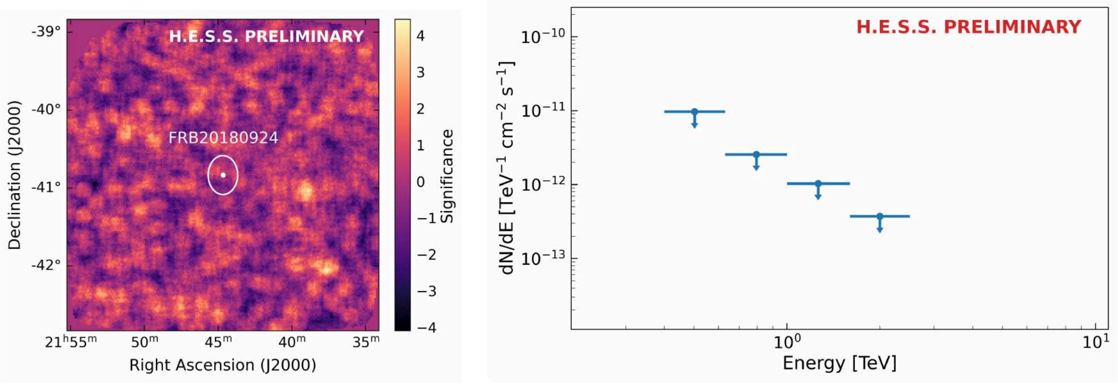
In September 2017, the repeating FRB20121102 entered an active state [22], and H.E.S.S. conducted follow-up observations for a few hours. However, no gamma-ray events or concurrent radio bursts were detected during the H.E.S.S. observations. In 2019, an INTEGRAL and XMM campaign was carried out on the same source, and H.E.S.S. observed for two nights. However, due to the challenging visibility of the burst location for H.E.S.S., insufficient data were collected. Furthermore, no FRB was identified by INTEGRAL.

Since 2019, H.E.S.S. has been participating in FRB campaigns led by the MeerKAT radio telescope, aiming to characterize the overall properties of a sample of host galaxies, such as radio active galactic nuclei activity and star formation, and to investigate the presence of more FRBs within radio nebulae. In 2019, H.E.S.S. joined the MeerKAT campaign for the Southern



(a) **(b)**

Figure 4: Observations of NGC6744 as part of the MWL DWF campaign. **(a)**: Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on NGC6744. **(b)**: Differential 99% C.L. upper limits derived from the H.E.S.S. observational data taken on NGC6744 assuming a E^{-2} gamma-ray spectrum.

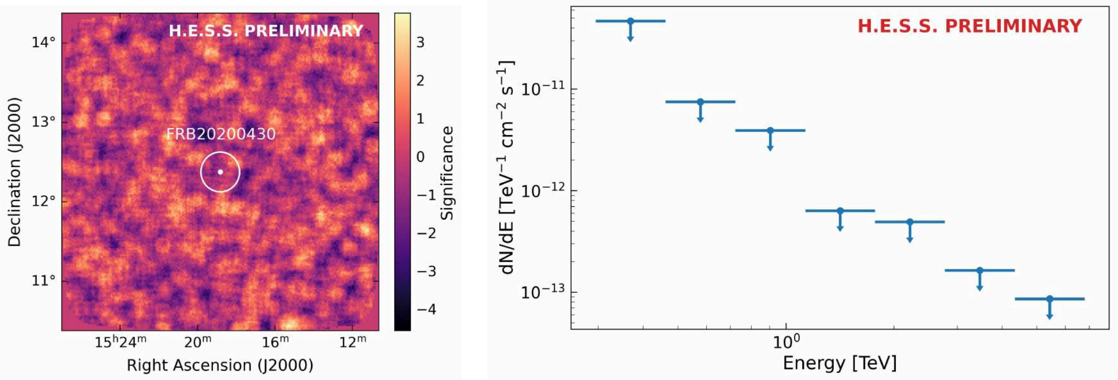


(a) **(b)**

Figure 5: Observations of FRB20180924 as part of the MWL DWF campaign. **(a)**: Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20180924. **(b)**: Differential 99% C.L. upper limits derived from the H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20180924 assuming a E^{-2} gamma-ray spectrum.

repeating FRB20171019A over two nights, on September 27 and October 18. The goal was to search for variability while conducting simultaneous observations in radio, ultraviolet, optical, and X-ray wavelengths. However, H.E.S.S. was only able to observe during the first night. No significant gamma-ray excess above the expected background was detected from the direction of FRB20171019A, resulting in integral upper limits of $\Phi_{\gamma}(E > 120\ \mathrm{GeV}) < 2.10 \times 10^{-12}\ \mathrm{cm}^{-2}\mathrm{s}^{-1}$ assuming an energy dependence following E^{-2} [23].

In 2021, H.E.S.S. conducted a new campaign to observe six FRBs with the objectives of obtaining detections, setting deep limits, and probing the variability of the persistent emission. The campaign, led by MeerKAT, also involved X-ray observations by Swift and optical observations by ATOM and MeerLicht. The campaign was divided into three epochs: the first epoch included observations by MeerKAT only, while the last two epochs (epoch 2A and 2B) included simultaneous observations by MeerKAT, H.E.S.S., and Swift. Epoch 2A observations were carried out on July



(a) **(b)**

Figure 6: Observations of FRB20200430 as part of the MeerKAT campaign. **(a)**: Significance map computed for H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20200430. **(b)**: Differential 99% C.L. upper limits derived from the H.E.S.S. observational data taken on FRB20200430 assuming a E^{-2} gamma-ray spectrum.

28, 2021, targeting the source FRB20200430. Epoch 2B observations took place from September 1 to September 6, 2021, with a duration of 2.5 hours each night, targeting a different source each night (FRB20190608, FRB20181112, FRB20190102, FRB20190611, and FRB20191228). The selection of these sources prioritized nearer sources and included a mix of repeating and non-repeating FRBs with well-localized positions. No gamma-ray detections were made, and only upper limits on the flux were determined. The results of the H.E.S.S. observations of FRB20200430 are shown in Figure 6.

5. Conclusions

We presented an overview of the H.E.S.S. program to search for FRB sources and summarized the results collected so far using real-time follow-up observations and simultaneous multi-wavelength campaigns with radio and X-ray observatories. While no significant gamma-ray excess was detected in the specific events studied, the program contributed valuable insights into the search for FRB sources and demonstrated the importance of multi-messenger observations in understanding high-energy astrophysical phenomena.

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