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Title:	IRAS 17208: An Advanced Merger with a Gas-Rich Starburst Evolving towards an Eliptical Galaxy?
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Abstract

The study of ultraluminous infrared galaxies (ULIRGs) in different evolutionary phases is central to probing the ULIRG-QSO connection and the formation of elliptical systems from the mergers of gas-rich spirals. Of particular interest is IRAS 17208-0014, a ULIRG which has a very high infrared luminosity (> 10^{12} L_{sun}) and appears to be in an interesting merger phase. Extended optical tails suggest it is a merger of two high angular momentum disk systems. The merger is likely to be at an advanced phase given the presence of an $r^{1/4}$ profile indicative of violent relaxation, and the detection of only one nucleus in NICMOS images. OVRO high resolution (1.0''x 0.7'') CO (2--1) observations, along with radio continuum, infrared, and optical data show a massive (several 10^{10} M_{sun}) concentration of cold molecular gas in the inner kpc, fuelling a starburst having a SFR of several 100 solar masses per year. The molecular ISM has scaled-up densities and linewidths in comparison with local starbursts. NICMOS images reveal bright central stellar clusters in the inner kpc region, reminiscent of super star clusters which are found in nearby starbursts and postulated to be proto-globular systems.

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