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Emmanuel Marcq, Franck Montmessin, Franck Lefèvre, Aurélie Reberac

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LOOKING FOR SO₂: A SPECTROSCOPIC STUDY OF MARTIAN UV ALBEDO USING SPICAM.

E. Marcq, *LATMOS, 11 Bd d'Alembert, Guyancourt, France (emmanuel.marcq@latmos.ipsl.fr)*, **F. Montmessin**, **F. Lefèvre**, **A. Reberac**, *LATMOS*.

Introduction

The detection of SO₂ in the Martian atmosphere would have far-reaching implications in our knowledge of the planet, much akin to the (actual) detection of CH₄. First of all, it would be a major point in discussing the level of geologic activity under the surface of Mars, since SO₂ photochemical is short enough – less than a year according to Wong et al. (2003) – so that it would need to be constantly replenished from a sub-surface source. Its presence would also help in discriminating the origin of CH₄ in the atmosphere; if SO₂ were present and correlated to CH₄, the source of both gases could be assigned to geological processes, thus ruling out the need for a biological source of CH₄.

Unfortunately, all recent measurements have failed to detect any significant amount of SO₂. Krasnopolski (2005) set an upper limit at 1 ppbv using TEXES at NASA IRTF, and more recently Nakagawa et al. (2009) found an upper limit at 2 ppbv in the submillimeter range using ASTE. Nevertheless, these upper limits were found by integration upon the whole Martian disk, and thus do not preclude higher mixing ratios locally, provided localized sources exist.

Our goal is to use SPICAM-UV in nadir geometry to yield upper limits (or mixing ratios in case of detection) of SO₂ in the atmosphere of Mars, but this time on a localized basis. Even though SPICAM is not a real mapping spectrometer, its proximity to Mars enables a good spatial resolution and the duration of the mission ensures that most of the surface has been observed several times since 2003.

Observations

The UV channel of SPICAM is fully described in Bertaux et al. (2006), and we give here only a brief summary of its relevant characteristics: observed range is between 115 and 310 nm. Resolving power is about 1 nm. Typical FOV at pericenter is 1.2×2.4 km. Several thousand orbits are available now

Pre-processing of data is very similar to Perrier et al. (2006). Correction of DC and straylight are performed first, and then relative radiance factors are derived using a reference observation of *Olympus Mons* recorded during orbit #1448. Proceeding to spectral ratios enables many calibration issues to be solved, but require a very

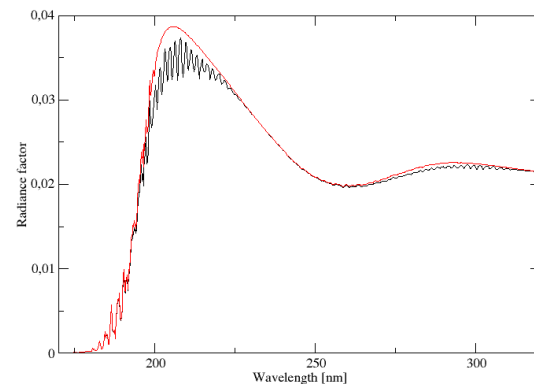


Figure 1: Synthetic radiance factors with 10 $\mu\text{m-atm}$ (black) and without SO₂ (red). Absorption near 250 nm is due to O₃.

good knowledge of the reference observation used as a denominator.

Modelling

Our spectrum forward model is based on Perrier et al. (2006) model, devised to measure O₃ column density. We used the same radiative core (SHDOM), and (P, T) profiles are extracted from the LMD-GCM as well as surface pressure and O₃ relative vertical profile. UV cross-sections are kept the same, except that we now add SO₂ using Wu et al. (2000) values. CO₂ clouds are not taken into consideration, and dust is assumed to follow a Conrath distribution. Sensitivity measurements yield a detection threshold at around 10 $\mu\text{m-atm}$ for SO₂ column density, mainly thanks to its 215 nm band (see Fig. 1). If vertically uniform, this column density translates into a mixing ratio threshold ranging from 10 to 100 ppbv. This is one or two orders of magnitude higher than globally averaged upper limits, so that we do not expect to find SO₂ in more than a few percents of SPICAM spectra.

Strategy

Our first strategy to derive SO₂ was an extension of Perrier et al. (2006). A Levenberg-Marquardt χ^2 optimization was realized in a 5-dimensional parameter

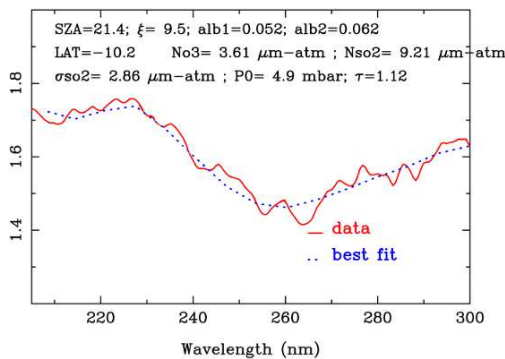


Figure 2: Observed relative radiance factor during orbit #61 and its best fit allowing SO₂

space: O₃ and SO₂ column densities, dust opacity, surface albedos at 200 and 320 nm. However, degeneracies cannot be avoided with such a high number of fitted parameters. A way to test this is to compare the fitted parameters when constraining SO₂ to be null and without this constraint: where high discrepancies occur, they cast doubt on the interpretation. The assumption of a surface albedo varying linearly between 200 and 320 nm is especially dubious.

That is why we are currently implementing another approach based on directly fitting radiance factors (instead of radiance factor ratios as we did previously). The spectral distortion induced by O₃, dust, CO₂ is then corrected using externally derived values, for example using Perrier et al. (2006) values. The corrected radiance factor would then contain information about mostly two parameters: ground albedo in the UV and, sometimes, SO₂ spectral signature. This method should be more robust than the first.

Preliminary Results

Provisional results are available only following the first strategy at the time of abstract submission, but neverthe-

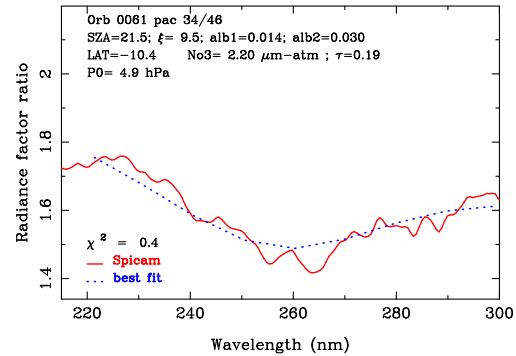


Figure 3: Observed relative radiance factor during orbit #61 and its best fit without SO₂

less encouraging as can be shown on Fig. 2 and 3. The spectral slope near 210 nm is especially encouraging in our search for SO₂. Nevertheless, the robustness of the fitting must be checked before any detection claim, especially since this feature seems present on a higher proportion of data than expected. We checked that this spectral feature is not primarily due to a faulty stray-light removal in the pre-processing stage, but did not check its sensitivity versus CO₂ pressure – a strong CO₂ band below 200 nm could interfere with our fit. And of course, some ground albedo feature at the observed location and/or at our *Olympus Mons* reference spectrum cannot be ruled out at the present stage.

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