Water ice cloud property retrievals at Mars with OMEGA: Spatial distribution and column mass

Kevin S. Olsen (1), Jean-Baptiste Madeleine (1), Andre Szantai (1), Joachim Audouard (2), Anna Geminale (3), Francesca Altieri (3), Giancarlo Bellucci (3), Luca Montabone (1,4), Michael J. Wolff (4), and Francois Forget (1)

(1) LMD, Paris, France (kevin.olsen@lmd.jussieu.fr), (2) LATMOS, Paris, France (kevin.olsen@latmos.ipsl.fr), (3) IAPS/INAF, Rome, Italy, (4) Space Science Institute, Boulder, USA

Spectral images of Mars recorded by OMEGA (Observatoire pour la Minéralogie, l’Eau, les Glaces et l’Activité) on Mars Express can be used to deduce the mean effective radius ($r_{\text{eff}}$) and optical depth ($\tau_i$) of water ice particles in clouds. Using new data sets for a priori surface temperature, vertical profiles of atmospheric temperature, dust opacity, and multi-spectral surface albedo, we have analyzed over 40 OMEGA image cubes over the Tharsis, Arabia, and Syrtis Major quadrangles, and mapped the spatial distribution of $r_{\text{eff}}$, $\tau_i$, and water ice column mass. We also explored the parameter space of $r_{\text{eff}}$ and $\tau_i$, which are inversely proportional, and the ice cloud index (ICI), which is the ratio of the reflectance at 3.4 and 3.52 µm, and indicates the thickness of water ice clouds. We found that the ICI, trivial to calculate for OMEGA image cubes, can be a proxy for column mass, which is very expensive to compute, requiring accurate retrievals of surface albedo, $r_{\text{eff}}$, and $\tau_i$. Observing the spatial distribution, we find that within each cloud system, $r_{\text{eff}}$ varies about a mean of 2.1 µm, that $\tau_i$ is closely related to $r_{\text{eff}}$, and that the values allowed for $\tau_i$, given $r_{\text{eff}}$, are related to the ICI. We also observe areas where our retrieval detects very thin clouds made of very large particles (mean of 12.5 µm), which are still under investigation.