

Chapter 8

Conclusions

There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesome returns of conjecture out of such a trifling investment of fact.

Mark Twain

8.1 Summary of the Thesis

For thirty years observers and modelers have studied the gaseous clouds escaping from Io. The most heavily observed constituent of the clouds, sodium, has continued to demand attention due to the many ways its escape from Io manifests itself, including jets of fast sodium seen escaping from Io's atmosphere and a banana shaped cloud extending close to one million kilometers ahead of Io in its orbit.

The escape of oxygen from Io also exhibits itself in exciting and complex ways. The excitation of its emission by the plasma which acts to ionize it makes the analysis of its brightness morphology both difficult and tantalizing; understanding the distribution of neutral oxygen is intimately coupled with an understanding of the plasma torus. The fact that oxygen is the most abundant species in the neutral clouds and the plasma torus makes the study of oxygen all the more important.

In this thesis I used models and observations of Io's neutral features to study the escape of Io's atmosphere and the source regions of the plasma torus. These studies were complicated by the inherent difficulties involved in studying extremely time-variable phenomena. In spite of these difficulties, I have discovered a new feature of

Io's corona, advanced the understanding of previously observed phenomena with unique observations, helped compile an extensive and unique data set, developed a framework for analyzing future observations, and made predictions of the shape and interactions of the neutral clouds with the plasma torus. Below I summarize the main goals of each chapter. In the following section I describe my success in obtaining these goals and list the major accomplishments of this thesis.

The physical processes which are important for understanding the neutral clouds were reviewed in Chapter 2. The sodium neutral cloud is observed both in emission and absorption through the process of resonant scattering; oxygen line emission is excited by electron impacts which is strongly dependent on the state of the plasma torus. The dominant loss mechanism that forms the corona and neutral clouds is sputtering off the atmosphere and surface by plasma torus electrons. Neutral atoms are lost from the system by ionization. Ionization of sodium atoms occurs primarily through electron impacts. Oxygen is lost mainly by charge exchange with plasma torus ions. Sulfur exhibits a mix of the two mechanisms. Between their ejection from the atmosphere and their loss into the plasma torus, the paths of the atoms are determined by the force of gravity. Sodium atoms also experience a slight perturbation from radiation pressure.

Chapter 3 presented a new series of mutual event observations of Io's sodium corona. Mutual events have been the only method for determining the shape of the sodium corona. Data from three telescopes were analyzed to search for time variability and spatial asymmetries in the sodium corona.

A jet of fast sodium has been observed to extend many Jovian radii from Io (Goldberg et al. 1984; Pilcher et al. 1984). This feature, however, had never been observed close to its source in Io's ionosphere. Galileo observations of this fast sodium jet were presented in Chapter 4. Implications of the observation for Io's ionosphere were discussed.

Chapter 5 contained a description of the neutral cloud model that is used in

Chapters 6 and 7 to study Io's corona and neutral clouds. In addition to describing the model itself, I developed a new method for parameterizing the plasma torus such that the state of the plasma can be described as a function of the position relative to Jupiter and the magnetic longitude. The description relies heavily on observations of the torus (Bagenal 1994; Schneider and Trauger 1995; Brown 1994) and includes the effects of Jupiter's offset tilted dipole field, the dawn-dusk electric field, and observed variability of the torus with magnetic longitude. I also discuss several tests of the model including the first modeling analysis of the observed dependence of the north/south brightness ratio in the sodium cloud with magnetic longitude.

A detailed study of Io's neutral corona is presented in Chapter 6. After first determining the velocity distribution of neutral atoms from the exobase which best models the sodium corona observed in Chapter 3, I describe the effects of variations in the source distribution and in the loss by the plasma torus. I also present a model analysis of the sodium corona asymmetry which I discovered. The chapter ends with a comparison of the oxygen and sodium coronae based on HST/STIS observations of oxygen (Wolven et al. 2001).

Chapter 7 focused on the similarities and differences in the extended neutral clouds of sodium and oxygen. A model analysis was presented to explain morphological features in both the column densities and emission intensities of modeled images. In particular, I discuss the strong dependence on the observing geometry of the clouds, the variations in sodium brightness with orbital phase, and the effects of the plasma torus on oxygen observations. I also present an archive of sodium images which will be used in conjunction with the neutral cloud model to study variability in Io's neutrals.

8.2 Major Results

The modeling and observational studies presented here have yielded answers to several outstanding questions regarding Io's neutral clouds. These results are summa-

rized here for the different regions which I studied:

(1) Io's Corona:

- Comparison of mutual events from 1985, 1991, and 1997 have demonstrated remarkable stability in the sodium corona despite large short term event-to-event variations. This implies that although Io's atmosphere and the plasma torus are both highly variable, on average each remain roughly constant.
- I discovered a previously undetected asymmetry in Io's corona between the sub-Jupiter and anti-Jupiter hemispheres: the corona above the inner hemisphere is denser than above the outer hemisphere. This asymmetry implies asymmetric loss from Io's exobase. Approximately 70% of the source sodium in the corona was ejected from the sub-Jupiter hemisphere.
- The oxygen corona has been observed to be more extended than the sodium corona. If this difference is due to column density differences between oxygen and sodium it implies that oxygen is ejected from Io at a faster average velocity. The longer oxygen lifetime cannot explain the magnitude of the observed difference. The increased velocity may be due to differences in the sputtering of the two species or may indicate that oxygen escapes from Io due to a second mechanism in addition to any loss by sputtering. The difference may also result from the fact that the electron temperature in the plasma torus decreases close to Io as observed by Voyager.
- The mechanism for creating the inner/outer asymmetry in the sodium corona is not responsible for creating an asymmetry in the oxygen column density. It is not possible to distinguish whether the upstream/downstream oxygen asymmetry is a result of differences in the emission rates of oxygen between the two regions or indicative of column density differences without

detailed modeling of the effects of Io's interaction with the torus on the plasma parameters.

- The variable and complex apparent motions and brightness variations of the plasma torus relative to Io cause large variations in the neutral lifetime at Io. These variations affect both the brightness in the the corona and the rate at which the density decreases as a function of distance from Io. The different ways in which the torus changes introduce local time, magnetic longitude, and non-periodic variability in the corona.
- A confirmation of the source mechanism described by Smyth and Combi (1988b) for the east/west brightness ratio in the corona was presented. The explanation for this asymmetry was expanded by showing that the column density at Io's surface does not change as a function of Io's orbital phase and that the asymmetry results from a change in the spatial extent of the corona.

(2) Io's fast sodium jet:

- I presented the first image of Io's fast sodium jet within several Io radii of Io providing support for the resonant charge exchange model of the jet formation described by Wilson and Schneider (1999).
- The jet originates from a region smaller than Io's diameter implying that Io's ionosphere is concentrated near the equator, consistent with observations that the atmosphere is also denser near the equator (Feldman et al. 2000)

(3) Io's extended neutral clouds:

- The plasma torus introduces a magnetic longitude variation in the north/south brightness ratio of sodium in the neutral cloud as predicted by Trafton

(1980).

- The oxygen neutral cloud is significantly larger in extent than the sodium cloud. Observations of oxygen are difficult to make due to the fact that the oxygen emissions are faint compared to scattered light from Jupiter and telluric air glow emissions. In addition, the nature of the emission mechanism makes it difficult to extract column densities from the oxygen intensities without knowledge of the state of the local plasma.
- The large available data set of neutral sodium images combined with the neutral cloud model and near-simultaneous images of the plasma torus will help determine the large term variability in both Iogenic neutrals and plasma.

It is also important to note that although there has been a long history of observing the minor species sodium, new discoveries are still being made. I have presented in this thesis two new observational results based solely on the observations of sodium: the inner/outer asymmetry in the corona and the size of the source region of the sodium jet. Therefore it is essential to study the sodium data set, and other data sets which have not been adequately mined, for the wealth of new results which they should be expected to contain.

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