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## Optical constants of Pluto tholins

Lora Jovanovic<sup>1</sup>, Thomas Gautier<sup>1</sup>, Laurent Broch<sup>2</sup>, Marie Fayolle<sup>3,4</sup>, Eric Quirico<sup>3</sup>, Tanguy Bertrand<sup>5</sup>, Luc Johann<sup>2</sup>, Aotmane En Naciri<sup>2</sup>, and Nathalie Carrasco<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Université Paris-Saclay, UVSQ, CNRS, Sorbonne Université, LATMOS/IPSL, Guyancourt, France (lora.jovanovic@latmos.ipsl.fr)

<sup>2</sup>Université de Lorraine, LCP-A2MC, Metz, France

<sup>3</sup>Université Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, IPAG, Grenoble, France

<sup>4</sup>Delft University of Technology, The Netherlands

<sup>5</sup>NASA Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, CA 94035, USA

### I. Introduction

On July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the *New Horizons* spacecraft flew by Pluto and revealed the presence of aerosols in the atmosphere [1,2,3] and a curiously dark reddish equatorial region named Cthulhu [1,4]. These photochemical aerosols, extending at more than 350 km of altitude [2,3,5], may affect Pluto atmospheric chemistry and climate [6,7]. Furthermore, it was suggested that these aerosols sediment to constitute the non-icy dark material on the surface of Pluto [4,8]. To interpret the data provided by *New Horizons*, the atmospheric (e.g. [7]) and surface models (e.g. [4,9]) have so far used the optical constants determined for Titan tholins. Nevertheless, since optical constants strongly depend on the chemical composition of the materials [10], and as Pluto tholins differ chemically from those of Titan [11], Pluto aerosol analogues were synthesized in laboratory and their optical constants were determined by spectroscopic ellipsometry.

### II. Experimental setup and analyses protocol

#### ▪ Synthesis of Pluto tholins

We used the PAMPRE experimental setup [12] (LATMOS, France) to synthesize Pluto tholins as thin films onto silicon wafers. For this study, the gas mixture injected into the reactor was composed of variable proportions of N<sub>2</sub> and CH<sub>4</sub>, with 500 ppm of CO [5,13], to simulate photochemical aerosols formed at different altitudes on Pluto (Table 1). The experiments were conducted at a pressure of 0.9 ± 0.1 mbar and at ambient temperature.

Table 1: Types of Pluto tholins analyzed in this study

Composition of the gas mixture	Corresponding altitude on Pluto	Name of the sample
99.5% N <sub>2</sub> : 0.5% CH <sub>4</sub> : 500 ppm CO	< 350 km	P <sub>H</sub>
99% N <sub>2</sub> : 1% CH <sub>4</sub> : 500 ppm CO	400 km	P <sub>400</sub>
95% N <sub>2</sub> : 5% CH <sub>4</sub> : 500 ppm CO	600 km	P <sub>600</sub>

### ▪ Spectroscopic ellipsometry

We used the UVISEL (*Horiba Jobin Yvon*) spectroscopic ellipsometer to analyze Pluto tholins thin films. Spectroscopic ellipsometry is a technique measuring the changes in the polarization state between incident and reflected light on the sample, as a function of wavelength. DeltaPsi2<sup>®</sup> software was used to fit the ellipsometric data. More precisely, a modified Tauc-Lorentz dispersion model determined the thicknesses of the thin films, and a wavelength-by-wavelength inversion method was used to retrieve the refractive indices  $n$  (Fig. 1) and the absorption coefficients  $k$  (Fig. 2), from 270 to 2100 nm.

### III. Optical constants of Pluto tholins from UV to near-IR

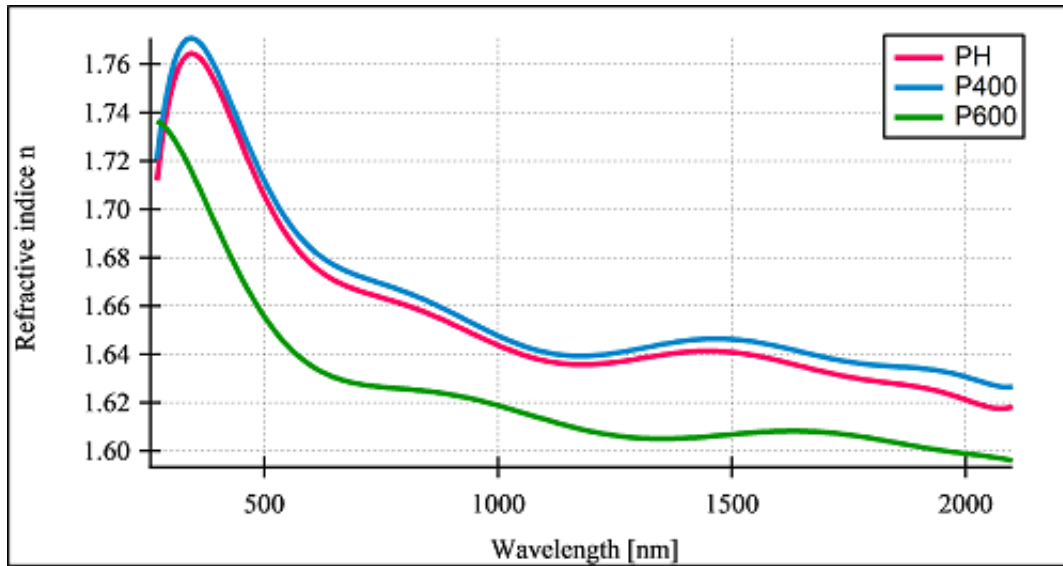
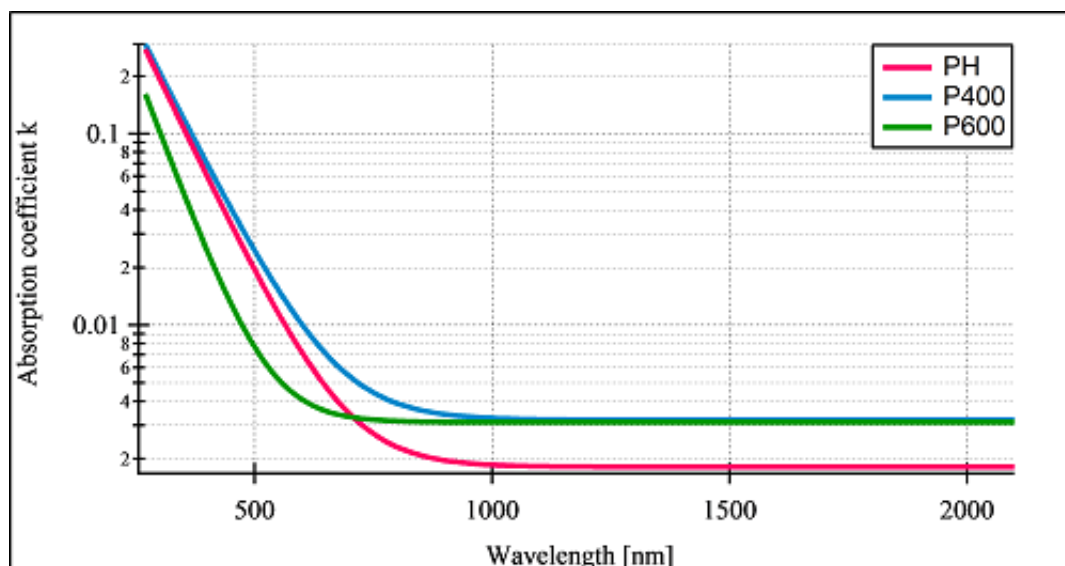


Fig. 1: Refractive indices  $n$  of Pluto tholins determined by spectroscopic ellipsometry



**Fig. 2: Absorption coefficients  $k$  of Pluto tholins determined by spectroscopic ellipsometry**

Our study shows: (1) the refractive indices  $n$  of Pluto tholins vary from 1.60 to 1.77, and such  $n$ -values can correspond to organic polymers [14]; (2) a strong absorption of UV and Visible radiation by Pluto tholins, due to their N- and O-bearing molecules [15,16,17]; (3) a lower absorption in the near-IR with  $k$ -values of a few  $10^{-3}$ ; (4) a dependency of  $n$  and  $k$  indices to the altitude of aerosols formation, with especially higher  $n$ - and  $k$ -values in the UV-Vis spectral range for Pluto low-altitude aerosols ( $P_H$  and  $P_{400}$ ).

#### **IV. Discussion and Conclusion**

Due to higher  $n$ -values for the samples  $P_H$  and  $P_{400}$ , compared to the  $P_{600}$  sample, we can suppose that aerosols formed in Pluto's lower atmosphere ( $\leq 400$  km of altitude) will differently scatter the light compared to aerosols formed at higher altitudes ( $> 400$  km of altitude) [18], and thus differently affect the photon flux reaching the lower atmosphere and the surface. The strong absorption below 600 nm is likely due to the presence of N- and O-bearing molecules with lone pair, N- and O-containing polycyclic aromatic compounds and unsaturated molecules with extensive conjugated multiple bonds [14-17]. Since the nitrogen and oxygen content is higher in low-altitude tholins [11], their  $k$  indices are higher in the UV-Vis wavelength range. We can thus suppose that in Pluto's atmosphere the aerosols formed at different altitudes will differently absorb the photon flux and differently affect Pluto atmospheric and surface radiative transfer [18].

As Pluto tholins are chemically different from Titan's [11], we propose a new set of optical constants to update Pluto atmospheric and surface models that were hitherto based on the optical constants of Titan tholins.

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