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THE ISO/SWS SPECTRUM OF IRC +10216: THE VIBRATIONAL BANDS OF C₂H₂ AND HCN¹

JOSÉ CERNICHARO,² ISSEI YAMAMURA,³ EDUARDO GONZÁLEZ-ALFONSO,² TEIJE DE JONG,^{3,4}

ANA HERAS,⁵ RAFAEL ESCRIBANO,² AND JUAN ORTIGOSO²

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ABSTRACT

We present the *Infrared Space Observatory*/Short-Wavelength Spectrometer full grating resolution spectrum of IRC +10216, which is dominated by strong absorption/emission bands of C₂H₂ and HCN. All C₂H₂ bands and the strong near-infrared stretching bands of HCN are observed in absorption, whereas the fundamental, hot, and combination bands of HCN involving the ν_2 bending mode around 14 μm are observed in emission. Particularly strong is the HCN $\nu_2 = 2^0 \rightarrow \nu_2 = 1^1$ vibrational transition at 14.3 μm . The most plausible mechanism for such emission is the radiative pumping of molecules from the ground to the $\nu_2 = 2^0$ state (7.1 μm) followed by radiative decay: $\nu_2 = 2^0 \rightarrow \nu_2 = 1^1$. We present detailed models for HCN that verify the efficiency of the mentioned effect. The HCN abundance inferred from these models is $(1.5\text{--}3) \times 10^{-5}$.

Subject headings: circumstellar matter — infrared: stars — radiative transfer — stars: AGB and post-AGB — stars: atmospheres — stars: individual (IRC +10216)

1. INTRODUCTION

IRC +10216 is the brightest C-rich, evolved object in the sky. It has an extended circumstellar envelope (CSE) in which around 50 molecular species have been detected, and it is probably one of the best-studied stellar objects at infrared and radio wavelengths (Cernicharo, Guélin, & Kahane 1999). IRC +10216 has a particularly rich carbon chemistry, and most molecular species are carbon-chain radicals (Cernicharo & Guélin 1996) that are formed in the external layers of the CSE (Guélin, Lucas, & Cernicharo 1993). Other species of interest detected in IRC +10216 include silicon carbide (SiC; Cernicharo et al. 1989) and the metal halides NaCl, AlCl, AlF, and KCl (Cernicharo & Guélin 1987). Some metal-bearing species are also detected in the external shell of IRC +10216, e.g., MgNC (Guélin et al. 1993). While polar molecules can be detected at radio wavelengths, nonpolar molecules can only be detected in the infrared through their active ro-vibrational transitions.

We present in this Letter a full grating resolution spectrum of IRC +10216 taken with the *Infrared Space Observatory* (ISO)/Short-Wavelength Spectrometer (SWS; de Graauw et al. 1996). It covers the 2.38–45 μm range with a spectral resolution of ≈ 2000 . In this work, attention will be confined to the molecular species that most strongly contribute to the emission/absorption spectrum of IRC +10216 in the near- and mid-infrared: C₂H₂ and HCN (see Cernicharo 1998). A detailed scheme for the radiative pumping of the vibrational levels of HCN is proposed.

2. OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

The full range AOT06 spectrum of IRC +10216 was taken on 1996 June 2 ($\phi = 0.3$). Another grating spectrum with lower spectral resolution (AOT01, speed 4) was taken 2 days before. The data have been reduced with the SWS Interactive Analysis system. The very strong signal of IRC +10216 causes significant fringes in band 3 (12–28 μm) and memory effects in bands 2 (4–12 μm) and 4 (29–45.2 μm). Nevertheless, the AOT06 and AOT01 spectra can be compared to ascertain the reality of the observed features. Fringes in band 3 (12–29 μm) are removed by shifting the relative spectral responsivity function slightly in wavelength. Fringes still remaining after this procedure were removed by a fast Fourier transform method. There are small discrepancies in flux between the different bands in the spectrum. Such inconsistencies have been corrected by scaling each band with respect to bands 1b (2.6–3.0 μm) and 3d (19.5–27.5 μm), which are adopted as references.

Figure 1 shows the spectrum of IRC +10216 between 2.4 and 197 μm ; it shows the 11 μm band due to SiC dust and the prominent “30 μm feature” usually attributed to MgS (Yamamura et al. 1998). A crude fit to the dust emission provides an estimate for the mass-loss rate of a few times $10^{-5} M_{\odot} \text{ yr}^{-1}$. Figure 2 shows the spectrum, normalized to the continuum flux, of IRC +10216 around 3 μm . The broad absorption feature is due to the stretching modes of C₂H₂ and HCN. In addition, the Q -branches of the $\nu_3 + \nu_5$, $\nu_3 + \nu_4$, and $\nu_2 + 2\nu_4 + \nu_5$ modes of C₂H₂ are detected around 2.5 μm . Many combination bands of the same molecule, like $\nu_2 + \nu_5$ among others, are detected around 3.8 μm . The Q -branch of the $\nu_2 + \nu_3$ mode of HCN and those of the $\nu_1 + \nu_2$ and $\nu_1 + 2\nu_2 - \nu_2$ vibrational transitions of HCN are detected in absorption around 2.5 and 3.6 μm , respectively. The $\nu_3 - \nu_2$ mode of HCN and other combination bands are also seen in Figure 2. However, they seem to be in emission rather than in absorption (see below).

Figure 3 shows the 14 μm spectrum of IRC +10216. The absorption features are due to the ν_5 bending mode of acetylene and its associated hot and combination bands. This figure shows that the HCN bands appear in emission with the Q -branch of the $2\nu_2^0 - \nu_2^1$ transition being particularly strong. Many other weak bands are also present in the 2.4–9 and 15–25 μm ranges. However, instrumental problems preclude at the present the definite assignation of these features to real spectral bands.

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² Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto de Estructura de la Materia, Departamento Física Molecular, Serrano 121, E-28006 Madrid, Spain; cerni@astro.iem.csic.es.

³ Astronomical Institute “Anton Pannekoek,” University of Amsterdam, Kruislaan 403, 1098 SJ, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

⁴ SRON-Utrecht, Sorbonnelaan 2, 3584 CA Utrecht, Netherlands.

⁵ Astrophysics Division, Space Science Department of ESA, ESTEC, P.O. Box 299, 2200 AG Noordwijk, Netherlands.

FIG. 1.—Spectrum of IRC +10216 between 2.4 and 197 μm as observed with the ISO/SWS and ISO/LWS spectrometers. At long wavelengths, the pure rotational lines of CO and HCN are clearly superposed over the weak continuum (see Cernicharo et al. 1996).

Future data products from improved calibration are needed to unambiguously derive the nature of observed features and to assign them to new species or to abundant molecules already detected in IRC +10216 such as SiS, NH_3 , CH_4 , and SiH_4 , which have been observed in the infrared (see, e.g., Boyle et al. 1994; Keady & Ridgway 1993).

3. DISCUSSION

Observations of many C_2H_2 ro-vibrational lines at 3 and 14 μm with high spectral resolution have been reported by Ridgway, Carbon, & Hall (1978), Keady & Hinkle (1988), and Keady & Ridgway (1993). Although our data suffer from lower spectral resolution, we avail of the observations from all the C_2H_2 bands (Figs. 1 and 2), thus allowing a better estimate of the temperature of the emitting/absorbing gas and the pumping mechanisms prevailing in the innermost region of the CSE. A first attempt to fit the absorption with the ν_3 and $\nu_2+\nu_4+\nu_5$ bands of C_2H_2 ($\mu = 0.061$ and 0.067 D; Rinsland, Baldacci, & Rao 1982) and with the ν_3 band of HCN indicated that the contribution from several hot and combination bands of C_2H_2 , together with bands from H^{13}CCH [$x(\text{C}_2\text{H}_2)/x(\text{H}^{13}\text{CCH}) \approx 22$; Cernicharo et al. 1991], should be included. By assuming an LTE distribution of the C_2H_2 and HCN levels' population, we have modeled the absorption produced by the ν_3 and $\nu_2+\nu_4+\nu_5$ bands and all the hot bands arising from $\nu_4 = 1, 2$, $\nu_5 = 1, 2$, and $\nu_4+\nu_5$. In total we have included in our models 21 bands of C_2H_2 and two bands of H^{13}CCH , together with three bands of HCN and the ν_3 band of H^{13}CN .

A model with a single layer cannot explain the observed band profile (see Keady & Hinkle 1988). The adopted model, which is a simplification of the detailed CSE structure derived by Keady & Hinkle, includes several layers between 1 and 500 stellar radii. Figure 2 shows the best fit to the band shape at 3 μm . We have adopted $X(\text{C}_2\text{H}_2) = 5 \times 10^{-5}$ and $X(\text{HCN}) = 3 \times 10^{-5}$ (Cernicharo et al. 1996; Wiedemann et al. 1991). In

FIG. 2.—Observed spectrum between 2.4 and 4.0 μm in IRC +10216. The spectral resolution is $\approx 150 \text{ km s}^{-1}$. The thin line shows the modeling of the C_2H_2 and HCN stretching mode at 3 μm and their hot and combination bands. The positions of the bands are indicated by arrows.

FIG. 4.—Modeled HCN spectrum in IRC +10216. The model is described in the text. Note the large intensity predicted for the Q -branch of the $2\nu_2$ $l = 0 \rightarrow \nu_2$ $l = 1$ transition, in good agreement with the observations. In addition, the ν_3 - ν_2^1 band is also predicted in emission as observed in Fig. 1.

bands of HCN will be in absorption while the ν_2 and its overtone bands will be in emission. The model also predicts that the ν_3 - ν_2 band will be in emission. In fact, a detailed analysis of Figure 2 shows that this band appears indeed in emission. With the adopted HCN abundance (3×10^{-5} from Cernicharo et al. 1996), which matches the HCN rotational emission from a more simple large velocity gradient analysis, the Q -branch emission of the $2\nu_2^0 \rightarrow \nu_2^1$ transition is overestimated by a factor of ≈ 2 , so that a better estimate of the HCN abundance would be $\sim (1-1.5) \times 10^{-5}$. The pumping mechanisms are different for the different regions of the envelope. In the innermost regions, before the dust formation zone, absorption of photons at $3 \mu\text{m}$ in the ν_3 mode will be very efficient. Radiative decay to the $2\nu_2$ $l = 0$ and ν_2 $l = 1$ states will be an important mechanism

to populate both levels. Also in this region the ν_3 - ν_2 band will appear in emission. Outside the dust formation region the flux at $3 \mu\text{m}$ decreases, but it increases considerably at $7.1 \mu\text{m}$. The pumping from the ground state to the $2\nu_2$ $l = 0$ vibrational level, followed by radiative decay to the ν_2 $l = 1$ level, will be the main mechanism in producing the observed emission at $14.3 \mu\text{m}$. Consequently, the intensity of the HCN bands, as observed by *ISO*, will be very different in stars with low, moderate, or high mass-loss rates (see, e.g., Aoki, Tsuji, & Ohnaka 1999). Our calculations show that resonant scattering through the envelope is very efficient for HCN and also probably for C_2H_2 (see Cernicharo 1998; González-Alfonso et al. 1998 have modeled similar effects for water vapor). Resonant scattering in CSEs could also have an effect on the heating and cooling of the molecular gas (Cernicharo 1998). The behavior of the observed HCN emission bands is similar to that found in O-rich stars by Justtanont et al. (1998) for CO_2 ; in fact, González-Alfonso & Cernicharo (1999a, 1999b) have shown that the CO_2 emission around $15 \mu\text{m}$ could also be explained by resonant scattering through the CSEs. The radiative pumping mechanism for HCN was already mentioned by Lucas & Cernicharo (1989) to explain the strong $\nu_2 = 1$ $J = 2-1$ maser in IRC +10216 and other C-rich CSEs. Our calculations indicate that the low- J lines of the $\nu_2 = 1$ vibrational state are inverted and that the proposed radiative pumping could explain the maser emission. However, the ro-vibrational lines of the Q -branch are overlapped in frequency, and these effects have to be considered in order to explain the millimeter and submillimeter masers of HCN (see, e.g., González-Alfonso & Cernicharo 1997).

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