

MULTI-WAVELENGTH RADIO CONTINUUM EMISSION STUDIES OF DUST-FREE RED GIANTS

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Draft version May 6, 2013

ABSTRACT

Multi-wavelength centimeter continuum observations of non-dusty, non-pulsating K spectral-type red giants directly sample their chromospheres and wind acceleration zones where most of the energy that drives their mass loss is deposited. Such stars are feeble emitters at these wavelengths however, and previous observations have provided only a small number of modest signal-to-noise measurements slowly accumulated over three decades. We present multi-wavelength Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) thermal continuum observations of the wind acceleration zones of two dust-free red giants, Arcturus (α Boo: K2 III) and Aldebaran (α Tau: K5 III). Importantly, most of our observations of each star were carried out over just a few days, so that we obtained an essentially consistent snapshot of the different stellar layers sampled at different wavelengths, independent of any long-term variability. We report the first detections at several wavelengths for each star including a detection at 10 cm (3.0 GHz: S-band) for both stars and a 20 cm (1.5 GHz: L-band) detection for α Boo. This is the first time single (non-binary) luminosity class III red giants have been detected at these continuum wavelengths. Our long-wavelength data sample the outer layers of α Boo’s atmosphere where its wind velocity is approaching (or possibly has reached) its terminal value and the ionization balance is becoming *frozen-in*. For α Tau however, our long-wavelength data is still sampling its inner atmosphere where the wind is still accelerating, probably due to its lower mass loss rate and lower level of ionization in its outflow. We compare our data with previous measurements and published semi-empirical models based on ultraviolet data and the marked deviations highlight the need for new atmospheric models to be developed. Spectral indices are used to discuss the possible properties of the stellar atmospheres and we find evidence for a rapidly cooling wind in the case of α Boo. Finally, we develop a simple analytical wind model for α Boo based on our new long wavelength flux density values.

Keywords: Radio continuum: stars — Stars: chromospheres — Stars: individual (α Boo, α Tau) — Stars: late-type — Stars: winds, outflows

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the unknown mechanisms which drive the large mass loss rates from evolved spectral-type K through mid-M stars, an understanding of the dynamics and thermodynamics of their atmospheres is essential. An important discovery in late-type evolved stellar atmospheres resulted from the first ultraviolet Explorer (IUE). The survey revealed a ‘transition region dividing line’ in the giant branch near spectral type K1 III which separates these stars based on the properties of their atmospheres (Linsky & Haisch 1979). Stars blueward of the dividing line were found to possess chromospheres and transition regions like the Sun, while stars on the red side were found to possess chromospheres and cool winds. X-ray observations showed that this dividing line extended to coronal emission (Ayres et al. 1981). Around the same time, another class of late-type evolved star emerged which showed signs of possessing both a transition region and a cool wind (e.g., Reimers 1982). Nowadays, many of these so called ‘hybrid atmosphere’ stars show evidence for coronal emission, albeit much weaker

than on the blue side of the dividing line (Ayres et al. 1997; Dupree et al. 2005). Understanding the exact nature of the atmospheric properties of late-type evolved stars will ultimately lead to a broader understanding of the mass-loss process.

Mass loss from late-type evolved stars plays a crucial role in both stellar and galactic evolution and ultimately provides part of the material required for the next generation of stars and planets. Despite the importance of this phenomenon and decades of study, the mechanisms that drive winds from evolved spectral-type K through mid-M stars remain an enduring mystery [clearly laid out by Holzer & MacGregor (1985) but still unsolved, e.g., Crowley et al. (2009)]. There is insufficient atomic, molecular, or dust opacity to drive a radiation-driven outflow and acoustic/pulsation models cannot drive the observed mass loss rates (Sutmann & Cuntz 1995). Ultraviolet (UV) and optical observations reveal an absence of significant hot wind plasma and the winds are thus too cool to be Parker-type thermally-driven flows (e.g., Linsky & Haisch 1979; Ayres et al. 1981).

Magnetic fields are most likely involved in the mass loss process, although current magnetic models are also unable to explain spectral diagnostics. Exquisite high signal-to-noise (S/N) ratio *Hubble* UV spectra have revealed that the 1-D linear Alfvén wave-driven wind models of the 1980s (e.g., Hartmann & MacGregor 1980; Harper 1988) are untenable. These models predict chromospheres as integral parts of a turbulent, extended and

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heated wind acceleration zone, but the theoretical line profiles and electron densities do not agree with the *Hubble* spectra, (e.g., Judge & Carpenter 1998). One important property of cool evolved star winds gleaned from UV spectra is that, for the most part, the red giant winds accelerate in a quasi-steady manner and are not the result of ballistic ejecta as shown by the increase of wind scattering absorption with optical depth in Fe II lines (Carpenter et al. 1999). A new generation of theoretical models with outflows driven within diverging magnetic flux tubes have now emerged (Falceta-Gonçalves et al. 2006; Suzuki 2007) but these too are not yet in agreement with observations (Crowley et al. 2009). It has also been suggested that the winds may be driven by some form of magnetic pressure acting on very highly clumped wind material (Eaton 2008) but Harper (2010) does not find support for this hypothesis. Progress in this field continues to be driven by observations that provide new insights into the mass loss problem.

1.1. Radio Continuum Observations

Although studies of wind-scattered UV and optical line profiles have provided clues to the mass loss rates and radial distribution of the mean and turbulent velocity fields, the thermal structure remains poorly constrained. In the UV, the source function, S_ν , of electron collisionally excited emission lines is sensitive to electron temperature, T_e , (i.e., $S_\nu \propto e^{-h\nu/kT_e}$). Therefore, a localized hot plasma component in a dynamic atmosphere can completely dominate the temporally and spatially averaged emission and hence not reflect the global mean radial electron temperature value. At radio wavelengths however, the source function is thermal and is just the Rayleigh-Jeans tail of the Planck function, which is linear in electron temperature (i.e., $S_\nu = 2kT_e\nu^2/c^2$). This should give a more appropriate estimate of the mean radial electron temperature. It is this value that controls the atomic level populations and ionization of the mean plasma that feed into UV spectroscopic analyses. This value is also needed to quantify the implied thermal heating supplied to the wind by the unknown driving source/sources, allowing constraints on potential mass loss mechanisms to be derived.

In the cm-radio regime the radio opacity, κ_λ , strongly increases with wavelength (i.e., $\kappa_\lambda \propto \lambda^{2.1}$) and so the longer wavelengths sample the extended layers of a star’s atmosphere, thus providing us with spatial information about the star’s mass outflow region. The NRAO⁵ Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) is sensitive to over three orders of magnitude in continuum optical depth, τ_λ , ($\tau_{20\text{ cm}}/\tau_{0.7\text{ cm}} \approx 10^3$) and provides an area-averaged sweep through the wind acceleration zone of evolved late-type stars. The thermodynamic properties in this spatial region control the ionization in the far wind because the ionization balance, which also controls the cooling rates, becomes *frozen-in* at large radii due to advection. Furthermore, it is these outer extended regions of the star’s atmosphere that contribute to the commonly seen P Cygni line profiles in the UV. In these profiles the line-of-sight absorption caused by the star’s wind is su-

Table 1
Properties of red giant sample.

| | α Boo | α Tau |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Spectral Type..... | K2 III | K5 III |
| HD Number..... | 124897 | 29139 |
| Mass (M_\odot)..... | 0.8 ± 0.2 | 1.3 ± 0.3 |
| Effective Temperature (K)... | 4294 ± 30 | 3970 ± 49 |
| Angular Diameter (mas) | 21.0 ± 0.2 | 20.2 ± 0.3 |
| Distance (pc)..... | 11.3 ± 0.1 | 20.4 ± 0.3 |
| Radius (R_\odot)..... | 25.4 ± 0.3 | 44.4 ± 1.0 |
| Photospheric Escape Velocity | 110 km s^{-1} | 106 km s^{-1} |
| Rotation Period (yr)..... | 2.0 ± 0.2 | 1.8 |
| Wind Terminal Velocity..... | $\sim 40\text{ km s}^{-1}$ | $\sim 30\text{ km s}^{-1}$ |
| Mass Loss Rate ($M_\odot\text{ yr}^{-1}$) . | 2×10^{-10} | 1.6×10^{-11} |
| Wind Temperature (K)..... | $\sim 10,000$ | $< 10,000$ |
| Semi-empirical Model | Drake (1985) | McMurry (1999) |

Note. — Masses are from Kallinger et al. (2010) and Lebzelter et al. (2012). Effective temperatures and photospheric angular diameters are from di Benedetto (1993). Distances are from van Leeuwen (2007). Rotation periods are from Gray & Brown (2006) and Hatzes & Cochran (1993). Mass loss rates are from Drake (1985) and Robinson et al. (1998).

perimposed on the blueshifted scattered emission. Thus, centimeter radio continuum observations can provide a test of models based on these UV profiles. In this paper we directly compare our new VLA observations with atmospheric models derived from UV analysis.

1.2. Sample Selection

Currently the most detailed spatial information about the atmospheres of K and early M evolved stars is obtained from eclipsing binaries such as the ζ Aurigae and symbiotic systems (e.g., Wright 1970; Baade et al. 1996; Eaton 2008; Crowley et al. 2008). Even though these systems offer us the best opportunity to obtain information on the dynamics and thermodynamics at various heights in the evolved star’s atmosphere, the very nature of the binary system may introduce further complexities. For example, the orbital separation is often within the wind acceleration region and one could expect flow perturbations to be present (e.g., Chapman 1981). In fact, using the ‘old’ VLA, Harper et al. (2005) confirm that the velocity structure of ζ Aurigae is not typical of single stars with similar spectral types, such as λ Velorum (Carpenter et al. 1999).

In order to avoid the assumed additional complexities of a companion, we have selected two single luminosity class III red giants: Arcturus (α Boo: K2 III) and Aldebaran (α Tau: K5 III). These nearby red giants have been extensively studied at other wavelengths and their stellar parameters, which are briefly summarized in Table 1, are accurately known. Both of these late-type giants have ‘hybrid atmospheres’ as they show evidence for both coronal/transition region activity and strong winds. Even though they are slow rotators, a magnetic field (albeit weak) has been detected on α Boo (Sennhauser & Berdyugina 2011) along with a magnetic cycle with a period of ≥ 14 yr (Brown et al. 2008). Also, the detection of O VI in α Tau (Dupree et al. 2005) suggests magnetic activity in its atmosphere. These stars are predicted to be point sources at all frequencies between 1 and 50 GHz in all VLA configurations so our radio observations measure their total flux density, F_ν . Moreover, both stars have existing semi-empirical 1-D chromospheric and wind models which we directly compare to our data in this paper.

⁵ The National Radio Astronomy Observatory is a facility of the National Science Foundation operated under cooperative agreement by Associated Universities, Inc.

Table 2
VLA Observations

| Star | Date | Band | Frequency ^a (GHz) | Wavelength (cm) | Time on Star (hr) | Restoring Beam ('' × '') | Bandwidth (GHz) | Number of Antennae ^b | Phase Calibrator |
|-------|-------------|------|---------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| α Boo | 2011 Feb 22 | Q | 43.3 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.19 × 0.15 | 0.256 | 22 | J1357+1919 |
| | 2011 Feb 22 | Ka | 33.6 | 0.9 | 0.2 | 0.25 × 0.20 | 0.256 | 23 | J1357+1919 |
| | 2011 Feb 22 | K | 22.5 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 0.35 × 0.28 | 0.256 | 24 | J1357+1919 |
| | 2011 Feb 11 | X | 8.5 | 3.5 | 0.3 | 1.14 × 0.70 | 0.256 | 18 | J1415+1320 |
| | 2011 Feb 11 | C | 5.0 | 6.0 | 0.5 | 2.02 × 1.30 | 0.256 | 21 | J1415+1320 |
| | 2011 Feb 13 | S | 3.1 | 9.5 | 1.8 | 2.57 × 2.08 | 0.256 | 12 | J1415+1320 |
| | 2012 Jul 19 | S | 3.0 | 10.0 | 0.7 | 2.82 × 2.30 | 2.0 | 23 | J1415+1320 |
| | 2012 Jul 20 | L | 1.5 | 20.0 | 1.6 | 4.46 × 3.94 | 1.0 | 23 | J1415+1320 |
| α Tau | 2011 Feb 11 | Q | 43.3 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.18 × 0.16 | 0.256 | 22 | J0431+1731 |
| | 2011 Feb 11 | Ka | 33.6 | 0.9 | 0.2 | 0.22 × 0.20 | 0.256 | 19 | J0449+1121 |
| | 2011 Feb 11 | K | 22.5 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 0.35 × 0.31 | 0.256 | 21 | J0449+1121 |
| | 2011 Feb 13 | X | 8.5 | 3.5 | 0.5 | 0.85 × 0.78 | 0.256 | 25 | J0449+1121 |
| | 2011 Feb 13 | C | 5.0 | 6.0 | 1.2 | 1.48 × 1.32 | 0.256 | 21 | J0449+1121 |
| | 2011 Feb 12 | S | 3.1 | 9.5 | 1.8 | 2.74 × 2.02 | 0.256 | 11 | J0431+2037 |

^a Central frequency of selected bandpass.

^b Number of available antennae remaining after flagging.

2. OBSERVATIONS AND DATA REDUCTION

Observations of α Boo and α Tau were carried out with the VLA during Open Shared Risk Observing (OSRO) in February 2011 at Q, Ka, K, X, C, and S-band in B-configuration (PI: G. M. Harper, Program ID: 10C-105). α Boo was also observed at S and L-band in July 2012 when the VLA was again in B-configuration (PI: E. O’Gorman, Program ID: 12A-472). Some details of these observations are given in Table 2. For the 2011 observations, the correlator was set up with two 128 MHz sub-bands centered on the frequencies listed in Table 2. Each sub-band had sixty-four channels of width 2 MHz and four polarization products (RR, LL, RL, LR). For the S and L-band observations in 2012, the 1-2 GHz and 2-4 GHz frequency ranges were both divided into 16 sub-bands, each with sixty-four channels. The channel width was 2 and 1 MHz for S and L-band, respectively.

Both α Boo and α Tau were slightly offset from the phase-center by ~5 synthesized beam widths in order to avoid possible errors at phase-center. All scheduling blocks (SBs) were kept to ≤ 2.5 hours of duration. For the high frequency observations (i.e., Q, Ka, and K-bands) we used the *fast switching* technique which consists of rapidly alternating observations of the target source and a nearby unresolved phase calibrator. The total cycle times for the Q, Ka, and K-band observations were 160, 230, and 290 s, respectively. For both target sources these high frequency observations were combined into a single 2 hour observing track and commenced with X-band reference pointing with solutions being applied on-line. After X-band pointing the target source was observed at Q-band to ensure the best pointing solutions were used. The tracks at lower frequencies were composed of repeatedly interleaved observations of the target source and a nearby phase calibrator but had longer cycle times. The primary calibration sources 3C286 and 3C138 were observed at the end of all tracks and were used to measure the complex bandpass and set the absolute flux for α Boo and α Tau, respectively.

The data were flagged, calibrated, and imaged within the Common Astronomical Software Application (CASA; McMullin et al. 2007) package. Data deemed to be bad by the VLA online system were flagged, as

were zeros, non-operational antennae, dummy scans at the beginning of each track, and poorly performing antennae. Visual inspection of each scan was carried out to determine if data at the beginning or end of these scans needed to be flagged. For the 2011 low frequency data the two sub-bands were centered at relatively radio frequency interference (RFI) free regions of the band-pass and only a very small amount of RFI had to be flagged. The 2012 wide-band data were initially Hanning smoothed (combining adjacent frequency channels with weights 0.25, 0.5, and 0.25) to suppress Gibbs ringing. We manually flagged entire sub-bands that were badly contaminated with RFI. The *testautoflag* task was then used to conservatively flag RFI from all sources and any remaining RFI was manually flagged.

In order to calibrate the data, we solved for the complex gains of the calibration sources while applying the bandpass solution, which was derived from the relevant flux calibrator. The amplitude gains of the phase calibrators were scaled according to values derived from the flux calibrators using the “Perley-Butler 2010” flux density standard (Perley & Butler 2013). At the time, no Ka or S-band flux density standard models were available so instead for these we used the K and L-band models, respectively, which were scaled according to their spectral indices. The more frequently observed phase calibrators were then used to calibrate the amplitude and phases of the targets. Atmospheric opacity corrections were also applied to the high frequency data sets using the average of a seasonal model (based on many years of measurements) and information from the weather station obtained during the observations.

The visibilities were then both Fourier transformed and deconvolved using the CASA *clean* task in multi-frequency synthesis imaging mode, which separately grids the multiple spectral channels onto the *u-v* plane and therefore improves the overall *u-v* coverage. We used natural weighting for maximum sensitivity and the cell size was chosen so that the synthesized beam was about five pixels across. For the high frequencies it was usually sufficient to place just one CLEAN circle around the target source. For the low frequencies however, the image sizes were usually set to a few times the size of the primary beam so that nearby strong serendipitous sources

Table 3
VLA Flux Densities of α Boo and α Tau

| Star | Band | Frequency ^a (GHz) | Peak F_ν (mJy beam ⁻¹) | Integrated F_ν (mJy beam ⁻¹) | <i>Imfit</i> Integrated F_ν (mJy beam ⁻¹) | Image rms (mJy beam ⁻¹) | <i>Imfit</i> Fitting Error (mJy beam ⁻¹) |
|--------------|------|---------------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| α Boo | Q | 43.28 | 5.94 | 6.09 | 6.42 | 0.30 | 0.26 |
| | Ka | 33.56 | 4.16 | 4.32 | 4.49 | 0.08 | 0.09 |
| | K | 22.46 | 1.83 | 1.78 | 1.81 | 0.04 | 0.05 |
| | X | 8.46 | 0.51 | 0.51 | 0.53 | 0.03 | 0.02 |
| | C | 4.90 | 0.21 | 0.14 | 0.16 | 0.04 | 0.01 |
| | S | 3.15 | 0.15 | 0.14 | - | 0.03 | - |
| | S | 2.87 | 0.13 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| | L | 1.63 | 0.07 | 0.07 | - | 0.01 | - |
| α Tau | Q | 43.28 | 3.67 | 3.73 | 4.08 | 0.26 | 0.18 |
| | Ka | 33.56 | 2.19 | 1.96 | 2.13 | 0.09 | 0.07 |
| | K | 22.46 | 1.86 | 1.88 | 2.07 | 0.04 | 0.08 |
| | X | 8.46 | 0.30 | 0.29 | 0.28 | 0.01 | 0.02 |
| | C | 4.96 | 0.15 | 0.17 | 0.18 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| | S | 3.15 | 0.06 | 0.04 | - | 0.02 | - |

^a Frequency of the final image produced using the multi-frequency synthesis imaging mode within CASA’s *clean* task.

could be CLEANed thus reducing their sidelobe contamination of the final image. These images were CLEANed interactively, taking sky curvature into account, down to about the 3σ level with clean boxes placed around sources as they appeared in the residual image. All images were corrected for primary beam attenuation.

In each image the flux density from the unresolved target source was calculated by, 1) taking the peak pixel value from the source, 2) manually integrating the flux density around the source, and 3) fitting an elliptical Gaussian model to the source and deriving the integrated flux density using the CASA *imfit* task. Each of these values along with the image root mean square (rms) noise measured from adjacent background regions and fitting error produced by *imfit* are given in Table 3. For weak detections (i.e., $F_\nu \lesssim 5\sigma$) we avoid using the *imfit* task to obtain a flux density estimate, as this may produce biased parameter estimates (Taylor et al. 1999). The flux density values used in Section 4 are the peak values listed in Table 3. We assume absolute flux density scale systematic uncertainties of 3% at all frequencies (Perley & Butler 2013).

3. RESULTS

Apart from α Boo at C-band and α Tau at S-band, detections were made in both sub-bands for the 2011 data. For all other bands, the flux densities of the targets in both sub-bands were found to be the same within their uncertainties so we do not present separate values here. Instead we give the values from the radio maps produced by concatenating the two sub-bands. We present in Table 3 the target flux densities extracted from these concatenated radio maps. In the following two sections we briefly discuss the properties of these radio maps for both targets.

3.1. α Boo Radio Maps

High S/N detections ($> 19\sigma$) of α Boo were made at 22.5, 33.6, and 43.3 GHz. Some residuals of the dirty beam remained in the CLEANed maps due to the paucity of uv-coverage in these short high frequency observations. At the lower frequencies, it was necessary to image confusing sources, notably a strong radio source located $186''$ north-west of α Boo. This source was reported by Drake & Linsky (1986) and their flux density of 25 mJy at 4.9

GHz is in close agreement with our measurement of 23.2 mJy at the same frequency. We find the source to have a spectral index α ($F_\nu \propto \nu^\alpha$), equal to -1.4 and reaches 80.3 mJy at 1.6 GHz.

We detected α Boo at 6σ in the lower frequency sub-band of C-band, at 4.9 GHz. The noise was slightly higher and the images were poorer quality in the C-band higher frequency sub-band, with artifacts exceeding $\pm 200 \mu\text{Jy}$, and we cannot report a detection in this sub-band, so values given in Table 3 are taken from the lower frequency sub-band only. We obtain good detections ($> 5\sigma$) of the star for both epochs at ~ 3 GHz (S-band) and the peak flux densities agree within their uncertainties. We can therefore safely assume that the 1.5 GHz (L-band) flux density has not changed significantly over that period either, and so can safely be included in any analysis. The map at L-band was highly contaminated by the sidelobes of the strong source north-west of α Boo but the star is still detected at the 5σ level. There is a slight positional offset of $1''$ between the position of the peak flux density at 1.5 and at 3.0 GHz for the 2012 data, which were taken within 1 day of each other. However, the position uncertainties, due to noise and to the atmospheric differences between the directions of the phase reference source and the target, are at least $1''$, and so we feel that it is highly likely that both detections are of α Boo.

3.2. α Tau Radio Maps

The final deconvolved radio maps of α Tau were of excellent quality with the rms noise reaching the predicted noise levels in many cases. The target field at all frequencies was free from strong serendipitous radio sources and thus the final images were free of the sidelobe contamination that were present in the low frequency α Boo images. α Tau was the only source in the high frequency maps while the brightest source in the low frequency maps was located $106''$ north-east of α Tau and had flux densities of 0.85, 1.35, and 1.7 mJy at 8.5, 5.0, and 3.5 GHz, respectively. Strong detections ($> 14\sigma$) of α Tau were made at all frequencies between 5.0 and 43.3 GHz. Due to the limited number of S-band receivers available at the time, a full 2.5 hr track was dedicated to α Tau at 3.1 GHz in order to achieve the required sensitivity to give a possible detection. We report a tentative 3σ detection

Table 4
Compilation of Previous Radio Observations of α Boo and α Tau ($\nu \leq 250$ GHz)

| | ν (GHz) | Date | F_ν (mJy) | S/N | Source |
|-----------------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------|-------------------------|
| α Boo (K2 III) | 4.9 | 1983 Jan 21 | 0.39 | 3.0 | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 4.9 | 1983 May 20 | 0.26 | 3.3 | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 4.9 | 1983 Dec 26 | ≤ 0.18 (3σ) | - | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 4.9 | 1984 Mar 17 | 0.24 | 4.8 | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 15.0 | 1984 Nov 6 | 0.68 | 7.6 | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 22.5 | 1999 Jan 06 | 1.7 | 8.5 | Dehaes et al. (2011) |
| | 43.3 | 1999 Jan 06 | 3.3 | 8.3 | Dehaes et al. (2011) |
| | 43.3 | 2004 Jan 25 | 3.34 | 41.8 | Dehaes et al. (2011) |
| | 86.0 | 1985 Nov | 21.4 | 3.0 | Altenhoff et al. (1986) |
| | 108.4 | 1997 Nov - 2000 Jun | 20.1 | 29.1 | Cohen et al. (2005) |
| | 217.8 | 1997 Nov - 2000 Jun | 83.5 | 48.8 | Cohen et al. (2005) |
| | 250.0 | 1986 Dec - 1989 Mar | 78.0 | 9.8 | Altenhoff et al. (1994) |
| α Tau (K5 III) | 4.9 | 1983 Jan 21 | ≤ 0.27 (3σ) | - | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 4.9 | 1984 Nov 6 | ≤ 0.22 (3σ) | - | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 5.0 | 1997 Sep 27 | ≤ 0.07 (3σ) | - | Wood et al. (2007) |
| | 8.5 | 1997 Sep 27 | 0.28 | 9.3 | Wood et al. (2007) |
| | 14.9 | 1997 Sep 27 | 0.95 | 11.9 | Wood et al. (2007) |
| | 15.0 | 1984 Nov 6 | 0.60 | 6.0 | Drake & Linsky (1986) |
| | 108.4 | 1997 Nov - 2000 Dec | 14.0 | 9.6 | Cohen et al. (2005) |
| | 217.8 | 1999 Sep - 2000 Dec | 25.8 | 4.6 | Cohen et al. (2005) |
| | 250.0 | 1986 Dec - 1987 Jan | 51.0 | 8.5 | Altenhoff et al. (1994) |

of α Tau at 3.1 GHz when we take its peak pixel value as its total flux density.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Results Versus Previous Observations

Prior to and during the early operation of the ‘old’ VLA, a small number of single dish radio observations reported the detection of flares from single red giants (e.g., Boice et al. 1981). These transient radio events have never been re-observed however, even with more sensitive interferometers, suggesting that such detections were false (e.g., Beasley et al. 1992). The first definitive detection of thermal free-free emission from a luminosity class III single red giant at centimeter wavelengths was of α Boo at 6 cm (Drake & Linsky 1983, 1986). Since then there has been a modest number of centimeter and millimeter observations of this star. In Table 4 we list the majority of these observations and plot their flux densities as a function of frequency in Figure 1. In comparison to other single red giants, α Boo had been relatively well observed at radio continuum wavelengths before this study, including detections in four VLA bands (i.e., Q, K, Ku, and C). No Ku band receivers were available during the commissioning phase of the VLA in early 2011 so we can compare three of our detections with previous ones.

Previous detections of α Boo at 6 cm ranged from a 3σ upper limit of 0.18 mJy to a 3σ detection at 0.39 mJy. Our 6 cm value agrees to within $\sim 10\%$ of the highest S/N (5σ) value of Drake & Linsky (1986). There is no significant difference between our 1.3 cm value and that of Dehaes et al. (2011). There is however a notable difference in flux density values at 0.7 cm where Dehaes et al. (2011) report values that are lower than ours by over 40%. Such a level of chromospheric variability seems rather high and would be unexpected from such supposedly inactive stars (Harper et al. 2013). Another possibility for the difference in values is that the longer cycle time used by Dehaes et al. (2011), which was over double our value, may cause larger phase errors and thus lower

final flux density values. Future high frequency VLA observations of α Boo will clarify this discrepancy at 0.7 cm but past detections at longer wavelengths appear to be in good agreement with our data.

Prior to this study, α Tau had only been detected at two VLA bands (i.e., X and Ku) and had never been detected at wavelengths longer than 3 cm due to its weakly ionized wind and low mass-loss rate. Our lack of a Ku-band measurement means that we can only compare the previous 3 cm detection reported in Wood et al. (2007) to ours. We find that there is no significant difference between the two. Interestingly, Wood et al. (2007) report a non-detection of α Tau at 6 cm and placed a 3σ upper limit of 0.07 mJy on its emission. In stark contrast to this, we were able to detect the star at 6 cm with a flux density over two times greater than this value. This hint of variability at long wavelengths can only again be confirmed with future high S/N observations.

4.2. Existing Atmospheric Models

One of the most important diagnostic features indicating mass outflows in late-type evolved stars are the blue shifted absorption components present in the Mg II h and k resonance lines. Figure 3 shows one of the two chromosphere and wind models of α Boo (Drake 1985) which is based on the Mg II k 2796 Å emission line taken with the International Ultraviolet Explorer. Both of Drake’s atmospheric models contain the photospheric model of Ayres & Linsky (1975) and predict the wind to reach a terminal velocity of 35 - 40 km s⁻¹ by 2 R_\star . They contain a broad temperature plateau with $T \approx 8,000$ K between 1.2 and $\sim 20 R_\star$ with a cooler region further out, and are 50% ionized. We compute the expected radio spectrum from these models, assuming spherical 1-D geometry and the Gaunt factors from Hummer (1988) with free-free and H- free-free opacities are included. The radiative transfer equation is solved using the Feautrier technique (see, e.g., Harper 1994) and the boundary condition is determined by ensuring the atmosphere is optically thick at the deepest layers. Our computed radio

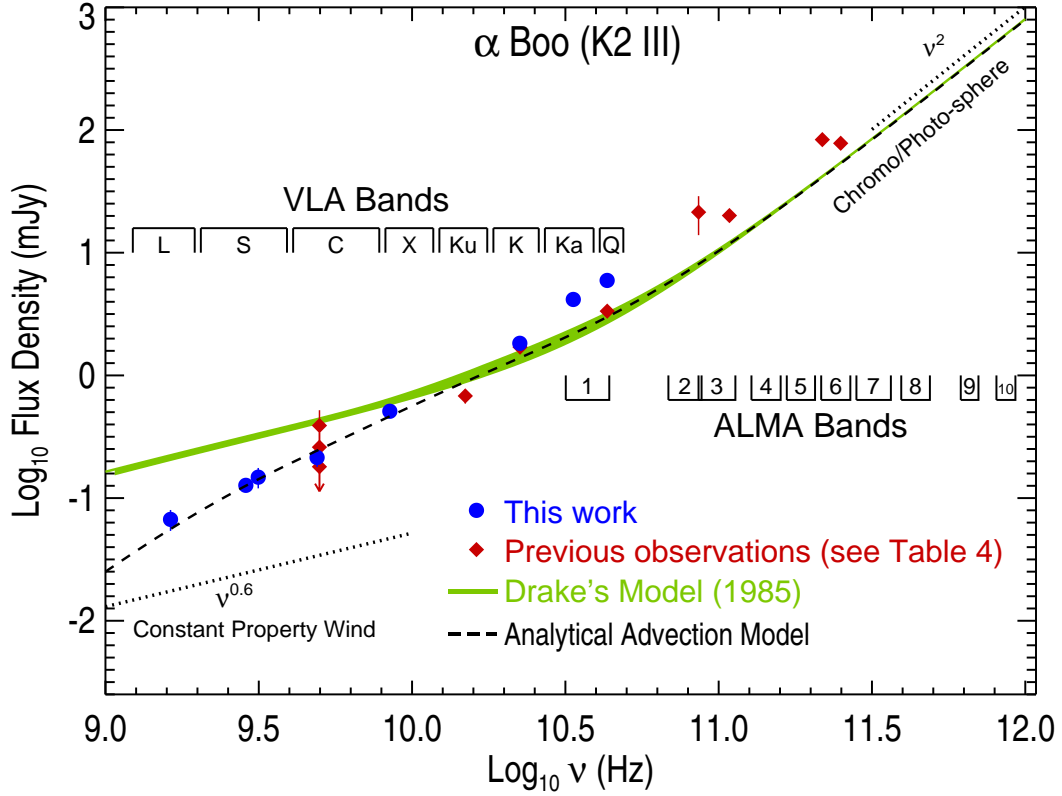


Figure 1. Spectral energy distribution of α Boo for $1 \text{ GHz} \leq \nu \leq 1 \text{ THz}$. Our new multi-frequency VLA observations which were mainly acquired over a few days in February 2011 are the blue circles and disagree with the existing chromospheric and wind models of Drake (1985). The overlap between the two models is represented by the green shaded area. The red diamonds are previous observations which were acquired sporadically over the last three decades with the ‘old’ VLA, IRAM and BIMA. The black dashed line is the expected radio emission from the Drake model which undergoes rapid wind cooling beyond $\sim 2.3 R_*$ (see Section 4.3 and 4.4).

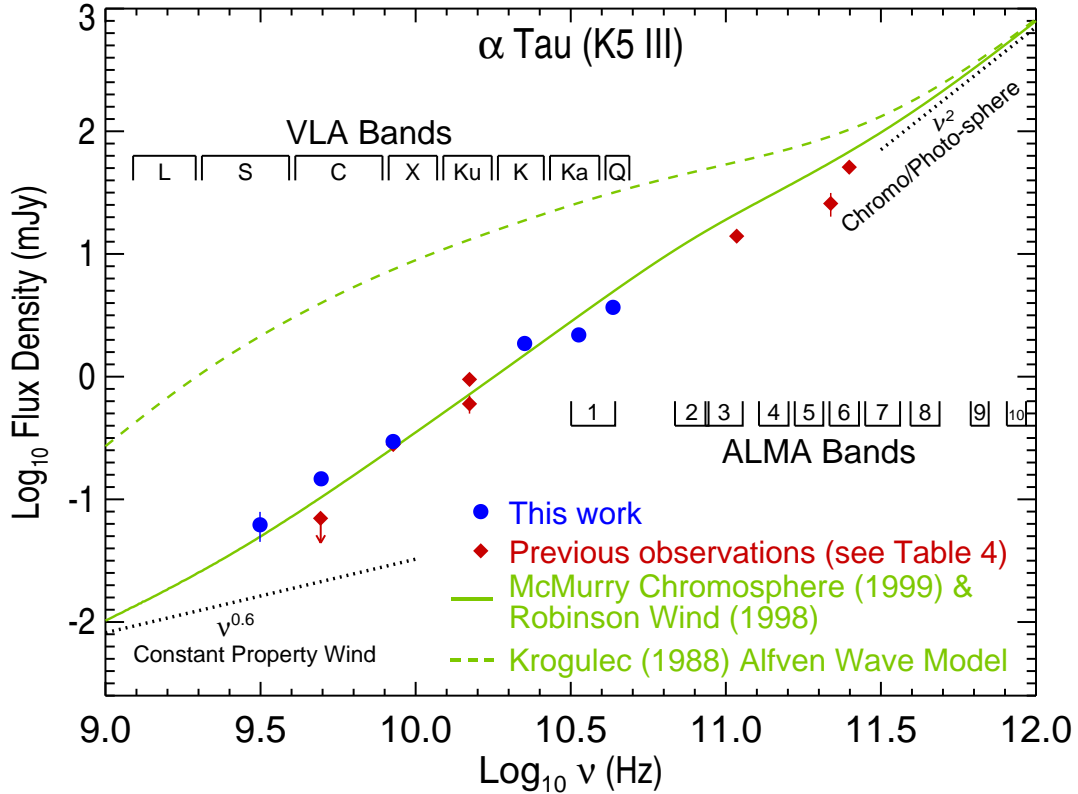


Figure 2. Spectral energy distribution of α Tau for $1 \text{ GHz} \leq \nu \leq 1 \text{ THz}$. Our new multi-frequency VLA observations of α Tau (blue circles) were acquired in just two days in February 2011. The red diamonds are the previous radio observations of the star which were acquired over many years. The green line is the expected radio emission from the existing hybrid chromosphere and wind model, while the dashed green line is the expected radio emission from a theoretical Alfvén wave driven model atmosphere.

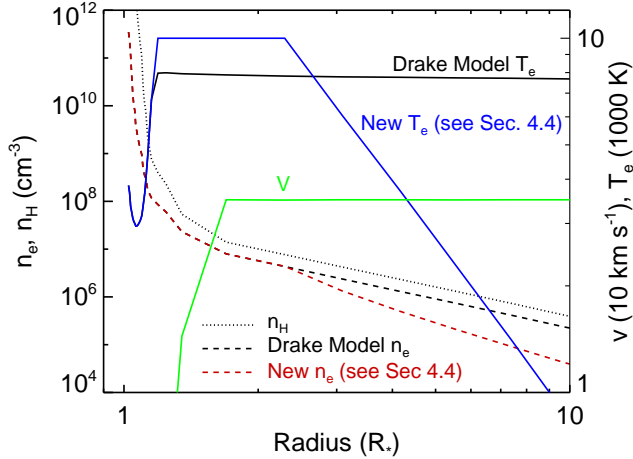


Figure 3. Existing atmospheric model for α Boo (Drake 1985, ‘model A’) along with the same model which undergoes rapid wind cooling beyond $\sim 2.3 R_*$ (see Section 4.4). The original Drake Model has a temperature plateau of $\sim 8,000$ K between 1.2 and $\sim 20 R_*$ (solid black line), reaches a terminal velocity of $35\text{--}40$ km s^{-1} within $2 R_*$ (solid green line), and has a wind which is 50% ionized (dashed and dotted black lines).

spectrum reproduces Drake’s (1985) predicted flux density value of ~ 0.4 mJy at 6 cm and this is a good check on the robustness of our method of producing radio spectra from these model atmospheres. In reality, substantial departures from spherical symmetry are to be expected in most stellar atmospheres. For example, a global magnetic dipole would cause density variations between the equator and the polar regions. Despite this fact, the study of a spherically symmetric atmosphere forms the basis of understanding the more complex environments in real stellar atmospheres.

Figure 1 shows the resulting predicted radio spectrum between 1 GHz and 1 THz for α Boo from these chromosphere and wind models. At high frequencies the radio spectra produced by these models have a blackbody-like slope (i.e., $\sim \nu^2$) as a result of the small ion density scale heights close to the star where the temperature is changing slowly. At low frequencies however, where the models predict the wind to have constant velocity, ionization fraction and temperature, the slopes approaches the well known $\sim \nu^{0.6}$ limit (Wright & Barlow 1975; Olsson 1975; Panagia & Felli 1975). The paucity and, in some cases low S/N, of previous observations made it difficult to discern the validity of this model prior to our multi-frequency study of α Boo. Our new data reveal significant deviations from the semi-empirical model at both low and high frequencies (in this case below ~ 8 GHz and above ~ 25 GHz). At high frequencies our VLA data indicates a flux excess which is in agreement with previous mm-observations. The discrepancy at low frequencies may indicate that we are still sampling a region of the wind where it is still accelerating (i.e., it has not yet reached its terminal velocity) or may also be a manifestation of rapid wind cooling further out than that predicted in UV spectral analysis. We will discuss these possibilities in the following sections.

In Figure 2 we plot the expected radio spectrum of α Tau based on the semi-empirical 1-D chromospheric model of McMurphy (1999) embedded in the 1-D wind model of Robinson et al. (1998). The McMurphy

model, which contains the photospheric model of Johnson (1973), is based on high S/N Hubble UV spectra and reaches a maximum temperature of 10^5 K at $1.2 R_*$. Beyond $1.2 R_*$ we use Robinson’s wind characteristics to describe the outflow velocity where the wind reaches $\sim 80\%$ of its terminal value by $3 R_*$. We assume the wind to have a constant temperature of $8,000$ K and have a constant ionization fraction, x_e , of 0.01 throughout. The combination of both atmospheric models result in a predicted excess of radio flux density at high frequencies (i.e., $\nu > 30$ GHz) but does well in reproducing the VLA flux densities below 30 GHz. The VLA, Institut de Radioastronomie Millimétrique (IRAM) 30 m-telescope and Berkeley Illinois Maryland Association (BIMA) continuum flux densities confirm that this model predicts a flux excess at even higher frequencies. One possible explanation for this is that the inner atmosphere contains extensive amounts of cooler gas than that predicted by the 1-D static chromospheric model of McMurphy. This scenario agrees with the findings of Wiedemann et al. (1994) who conclude that cool regions exist close to the stellar surface with large filling factors i.e., a thermally bifurcated CO-mosphere (Ayres 1996).

We also include the predicted radio spectrum from the theoretical Alfvén wave-driven outflow model for α Tau (Krogulec 1989) in Figure 2 to demonstrate how radio observations can test the robustness of theoretical models. This model is based on a fully-ionized outflow at a mass loss rate of $6.3 \times 10^{-9} M_\odot \text{ yr}^{-1}$, more than two orders of magnitude higher than the more recent estimate given in Table 1. As the radio opacity is proportional to $n_e n_{\text{ion}}$, where n_e and n_{ion} are the electron and ion number densities respectively, this model greatly overestimates the actual radio flux density at all VLA wavelengths. The Alfvén wave models for α Boo (Krogulec 1988) also assume full ionization, and have higher mass loss rates and outflow velocities than the established values given in Table 1, predicting higher flux densities than observed.

Recently, Ohnaka (2013) has found that a layer of CO exists in the outer atmosphere of α Tau (i.e. a so-called MOLsphere) which extends out to $2.5 \pm 0.3 R_*$, has a temperature of 1500 ± 200 K, a CO column density of $\sim 1 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ and a geometrical extent of $0.1 R_*$. It can be shown that a MOLsphere with these properties would be optically thick between 3 and 10 cm (i.e. X, C and S-band) if we conservatively assume that the electrons in this region of the atmosphere come from singly ionized metals and have an abundance of $\sim 1 \times 10^{-5} n_H$, where n_H is the total hydrogen number density. Using the assumption then of an optically thick disk with a spatial extent of $2.5 R_*$, the expected radio emission at these wavelengths is found to be $\sim 50\%$ lower than what we actually observe. In the next section we argue that the radio emission from α Tau at these long VLA wavelengths comes from a region much closer in to the star suggesting that the MOLsphere has either a lower column depth or has a much larger geometrical width in order to make it optically thin at these wavelengths.

4.3. Radio Spectral Indices

Long wavelength radio emission from non-dusty K spectral-type red giants is due to thermal free-free emission in their partially ionized outflows while shorter wavelength radio emission may emanate from nearly

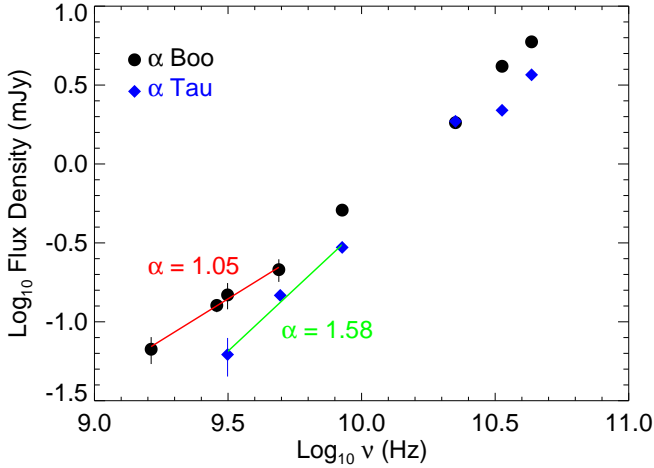


Figure 4. Radio spectra for α Boo and α Tau, together with the best fit power law to their long wavelength flux densities and the resulting spectral indices. The spectral index for α Boo and α Tau are found to be 1.05 and 1.58, respectively, which are both larger than the 0.6 value expected for a constant property wind model.

static lower atmospheric layers. The radio flux density-frequency relationship for these stars is usually found to be intermediate between that expected from the isothermal stellar disk emission, where α follows the Rayleigh-Jeans tail of the Planck function (i.e., $\alpha = +2$), and that from an optically thin plasma ($\alpha = -0.1$). It can be shown that the expected radio spectrum from a spherically symmetric isothermal outflow with a constant velocity and ionization fraction varies as $\nu^{0.6}$ (Wright & Barlow 1975; Olmon 1975; Panagia & Felli 1975). If we relax some of the assumptions about the outflow in this constant property wind model and instead assume that the electron density and temperature vary as a function of distance from the star r , and have the power-law form $n_e \propto r^{-p}$ and $T_e \propto r^{-n}$ respectively, then

$$\alpha = \frac{4p - 6.2 - 0.6n}{2p - 1 - 1.35n} \quad (1)$$

(e.g., Seaquist & Taylor 1987).

The radio spectra for both stars are shown in Figure 4, together with the straight lines that were fitted to the long wavelength flux densities by minimizing the chi-square error statistic. For α Boo a power law with $F_\nu \propto \nu^{1.05 \pm 0.05}$ fits the four longest wavelength data points well. This spectral index is larger than the 0.8 value obtained by Drake & Linsky (1986) whose value was based on a shorter wavelength (2 cm) value and a mean value of four low S/N measurements at 6 cm. α Tau was found to have a larger spectral index and a power law with $S_\nu \propto \nu^{1.58 \pm 0.25}$ best fitted the three longest wavelength data points. This value is in agreement with Drake & Linsky (1986) who report a value ≥ 0.84 and is lower than the value of 2.18 that can be derived from the shorter wavelength data given in Wood et al. (2007). It should be emphasized that the spectral index for both stars is steeper than that expected from the constant property wind model.

Equation 1 can be used in conjunction with our new spectral index for each star to calculate possible density and temperature coefficients that describe their out-

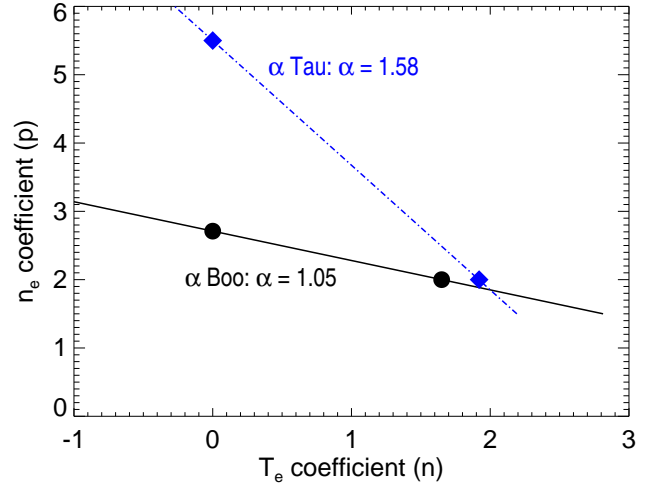


Figure 5. The variation of density and temperature coefficients for the empirically derived spectral indices. The density coefficients for an isothermal flow ($n=0$) along with the temperature coefficients for a constant outflow velocity ($p=2$) are also shown for both stars.

flow. The combinations of the electron temperature and density coefficients are shown for each star in Figure 5 along with the coefficients obtained by assuming either an isothermal flow or a constant velocity flow. One explanation for spectral indices of stellar outflows being larger than 0.6 is that the wind is still accelerating in the region where the radio emission is emanating from if the thermal gradients are assumed to be small. Ignoring thermal gradients may be reasonable over the wind acceleration region since it is probable that some sort of Alfvén waves are required to lift the material out of the gravitational potential and large damping lengths would be needed to do so. These large damping lengths could result in low thermal gradients close in. If we too make this assumption then the density coefficients are $p=2.71$ and 5.5 for α Boo and α Tau, respectively. This assumption is reasonable at short wavelengths where the majority of the radio emission is expected to emanate from the chromosphere or wind acceleration zone, but at long VLA wavelengths (i.e., between 6 and 20 cm) we may indeed be sampling the wind very close to or at its terminal velocity and the wind may have substantial thermal gradients.

To investigate this matter further, we estimate the effective radius of the radio emitting region per wavelength based on the Drake model for α Boo and the hybrid McMurry and Robinson model for α Tau. We follow the approach used by Cassinelli & Hartmann (1977) and assume that the radio emission at each wavelength emanates from a surface at radial optical depth $\tau_{\text{rad}}=1/3$. This is a modification of the Eddington-Barbier relation for an extended atmosphere where emission from smaller optical depths has added weight. Since the radio free-free opacity increases at longer wavelengths the optical depth along a line of sight into the stellar outflow also increases at longer wavelengths. This implies that the effective radius (i.e., the radius where $\tau_\lambda = \tau_{\text{rad}}$) will increase with longer wavelengths and will be greater for outflows with higher densities of ionized material as $\tau_\lambda \propto \int \lambda^{2.1} n_{\text{ion}} n_e dr$.

The higher degree of ionization in the mass outflow of

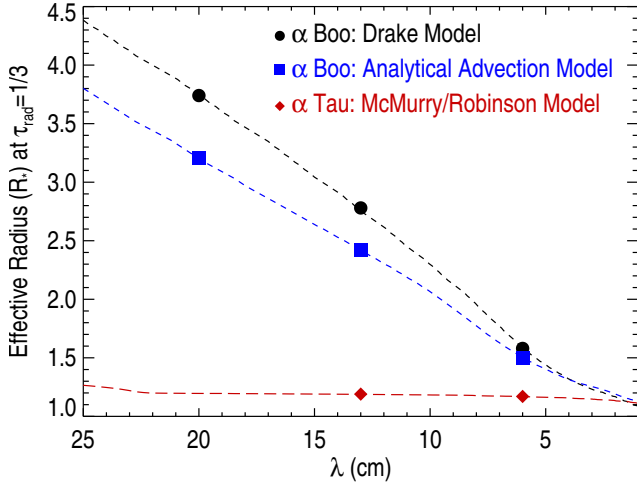


Figure 6. Predicted effective radius (dashed lines) as a function of wavelength derived from the existing atmospheric models of α Boo and α Tau. Also plotted is the predicted effective radius derived from our analytical advection model for α Boo (discussed in 4.4). Points corresponding to our long wavelength VLA measurements are also shown. At the same radio wavelengths the less ionized and less opaque mass outflow of α Tau results in a smaller effective radius than α Boo.

α Boo in comparison to α Tau means that the latter has a substantially smaller effective radius at longer wavelengths, as seen in Figure 6. At 6, 13, and 20 cm the effective radius of α Boo at $\tau_{\text{rad}}=1/3$ is predicted to be 1.6, 2.8, and 3.7 R_* but is only $\sim 1.2 R_*$ at 6 and 13 cm for α Tau. Robinson et al. (1998) predict that α Tau’s wind reaches $\sim 80\%$ of its terminal velocity by 3 R_* , but even our longest-wavelength observations are highly unlikely to sample the wind outside the lower velocity layers closer to the star. For α Boo however, Drake (1985) predicts that the wind has reached its terminal velocity by $\sim 2 R_*$ so based on this model our longest-wavelength measurements are of the region where the wind has reached a steady terminal velocity. From Figure 5, this implies that the n_e coefficient $p = 2$ and thus the T_e coefficient $n = 1.65$. Pure adiabatic cooling with no heat source has $n = 1.33$ so additional cooling operations must be operating, possibly due to recombination of H^+ and/or line cooling. Finally, if the wind ionization balance has not yet become *frozen-in* in the region of α Boo’s wind where the radio emission emanates from then the excess slope of the spectral index could be due to a combination of both cooling and changing ionization fraction. In this scenario the temperature coefficient n , may be smaller than our derived value because Equation 1 assumes a constant ionization fraction.

4.4. Analytical Advection Model for α Boo’s Wind

A failure of the Drake model for α Boo is that it overestimates the radio fluxes at long VLA wavelengths which sample the outer atmosphere, as clearly shown in Figure 1. If these wavelengths are indeed sampling the wind at its terminal velocity then a reason for this overestimation may be that the wind is cooling closer in than predicted by the existing model, which assumes a constant temperature of 8,000 K out to $\sim 20 R_*$. The main mechanism for such cooling would be adiabatic expansion (O’Gorman & Harper 2011) and would cause lower electron densities than those predicted by the existing

model due to larger recombination rates.

To investigate the possibility of the wind undergoing more rapid cooling closer in to the star, we adjusted one of the existing models [referred to ‘Model A’ in Drake (1985)] to include a temperature power-law falloff of the form

$$T_e(r) = T_e(r_1) \left(\frac{r_1}{r} \right)^p, \quad (2)$$

at some distance r_1 from the star, and used the temperature coefficient $p = 1.65$ obtained from our new VLA data assuming a constant velocity flow (see Figure 5). We introduce the distance r_1 as the outer limit to ionization processes; at $r > r_1$, the ionization fraction is only determined by recombination. To calculate the new n_e and n_{ion} densities in the wind regime where this temperature falloff occurs, we used the analytical expression of Glassgold & Huggins (1986) to calculate the hydrogen ionization fraction, $x_{\text{HII}} = n_{\text{HII}}/n_{\text{H}}$, where n_{HII} and n_{H} are the ionized and total hydrogen number densities, respectively. To do so, we need to make a number of assumptions about the wind properties beyond radius r_1 , namely:

1. A constant velocity mass outflow, i.e., $n_{\text{H}}(r) = C/r^2$ where n_{H} is the total hydrogen number density and C is a constant proportional to the ratio of the mass loss rate divided by the terminal velocity. For α Boo, $C = 1.5 \times 10^{32} \text{ cm}^{-1}$.

2. All ionization processes cease beyond r_1 . The ionization of hydrogen in the chromosphere and wind is a two stage process: the $n = 2$ level is excited by electron collisions and Lyman-alpha scattering, followed by photoionization by the optically thin Balmer continuum. When the temperatures begins to decrease in the wind the collisional excitation rate and thus ionization rate decrease rapidly.

3. Only radiative recombination of H is considered and the temperature variation of the recombination coefficient α_b which excludes captures to the $n=1$ level (Spitzer 1978) is included. The recombination coefficient varies with temperature as

$$\alpha_B = \alpha_B(r_1) \left[\frac{T(r_1)}{T(r)} \right]^{0.77}, \quad (3)$$

where the power law coefficient is obtained by finding the slope of the best fit line through the recombination coefficients between 1,000 K and 16,000 K defined in Spitzer (1978).

4. A fixed ion contribution from metals with a low first ionization potential, $x_{\text{ion}} = n_{\text{ion}}/n_{\text{H}} = 10^{-4}$, as these are easily ionized in the outflow.

Using these assumptions it can be shown that the ionization fraction beyond r_1 is given by (Glassgold & Huggins 1986)

$$x_{\text{HII}}(r) = \frac{x_{\text{HII}}(r_1)x_{\text{ion}}e^{-I(r)}}{x_{\text{ion}} + x_{\text{HII}}(r_1)[1 - e^{-I(r)}]} \quad (4)$$

where

$$I(r) = 2.38 \times 10^{-3} \left[\left(\frac{r_1}{r} \right)^{-0.19} - 1 \right], \text{ and } r \geq r_1. \quad (5)$$

We adjusted the value of r_1 to obtain the best fit to our long wavelength observations and found this happened when $r_1 = 2.3 R_*$. To get this best fit, the existing atmospheric model (plotted in Figure 3) needed to be adjusted so that it now has a narrower and slightly larger temperature plateau of $T_e = 10,000$ K between 1.2 and $2.3 R_*$, and a temperature profile and a density profile governed by Equation 2 and Equation 4 beyond $r_1 = 2.3 R_*$, respectively. This gives good agreement with our new long wavelength VLA data as shown in Figure 1. This new *hybrid* model which is plotted along with the original Drake model in Figure 3, still has the original ionization fraction of $x_{\text{HII}} \approx 0.5$ inside $2.3 R_*$ but now contains an initial rapid decrease in x_{HII} post $2.3 R_*$ which then *freezes-in* to a constant value of ~ 0.04 beyond $\sim 10 R_*$.

Encouraging as it is that such a simple analytical model can reproduce values close to the observed radio fluxes at long wavelengths, it must be stressed that this *hybrid* model is just a first order approximation. It assumes that the excess slope from the radio spectrum is a result of rapid cooling only. It still does not reproduce the radio fluxes at wavelengths shorter than ~ 3 cm and therefore a new atmospheric model is still required that can reproduce all of the observed flux densities. To do so, the non-trivial task of simultaneously solving the radiative transfer equation and non-LTE atomic level populations which include advection will be required.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have presented the most comprehensive set of multi-wavelength radio continuum observations of two standard luminosity class III red giants to date. This is the first time such stars have been detected at wavelengths longer than 6 cm. Such long wavelength detections are crucial if one wants to study the outer environments of these partially ionized stellar outflows. Our observations were carried out with the VLA during its commissioning phase when only a fraction of the now available bandwidth was at our disposal. The continuous bandwidth coverage between 1 and 50 GHz of the new VLA will allow fast detections of historically weak or undetectable radio continuum luminosity class III red giants at both long and short wavelengths. Previous upper limits will be replaced by firm detections allowing a greater understanding of their outer atmospheric properties.

The spectral index of both α Tau and α Boo at long wavelengths is found to be greater than that expected from a constant property wind. For α Tau our longest wavelength detections are still sampling emission from an accelerating region within the outflow while for α Boo the emission probably emanates from a region where the flow is close to, or indeed has reached its terminal velocity. Using our new VLA data we have developed a simple analytical model for the outer atmosphere of α Boo which contains a rapid wind cooling profile. Future detailed non-LTE radiative transfer models which include advection are required to match all radio flux densities at all wavelengths.

The data presented in this paper were obtained with the Karl G. Jansky Very Large Array (VLA) which is

an instrument of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO). The NRAO is a facility of the National Science Foundation operated under cooperative agreement by Associated Universities, Inc. We wish to thank the NRAO helpdesk for their detailed responses to our CASA related queries. This publication has emanated from research conducted with the financial support of Science Foundation Ireland under Grant Number SFI11/RFP.1/AST/3064, and a grant from Trinity College Dublin.

Facilities: VLA.

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