

# Constraining the mechanisms of aeolian bedform formation on Mars through a global morphometric survey

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December 13, 2022

## Abstract

Aeolian processes on Mars form a distinct class of meter-scale ripples, whose mechanisms of formation are debated. We present a global morphometric survey of bedforms on Mars, adding relevant observational constraints to the ongoing debate. We show that the bedforms located in the Tharsis region form a distinct group, not akin to the large dark-toned ripples which cover dune fields elsewhere on the planet. The relation between wavelength and atmospheric density derived from the new data is consistent with the predictions of a wind-drag mechanism, favoring the model that uses a saltation saturation length. Regardless of the mechanism that limits the size of bedforms, these results confirm the existence of a robust relationship between the wavelength of large ripples and atmospheric density (ripples spacings increases with decreasing atmospheric density). This provides further support to the interpretation of paleoatmospheric conditions on Mars through the analysis of its aeolian sedimentary record.

1   Constraining the mechanisms of aeolian bedform formation on  
2   Mars through a global morphometric survey

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12

13   **Key Points:**

- 14   • We present a global morphometric survey of aeolian bedforms on Mars and assess the  
15   mechanisms that may control their size
- 16   • Bedforms within the high elevation Tharsis region form a distinct group, attributed here  
17   to different sediment and transport conditions
- 18   • We confirm the existence of a robust relation between wavelength and atmospheric  
19   density, which is consistent with a fluid-drag mechanism
- 20

**21 Abstract**

22 Aeolian processes on Mars form a distinct class of meter-scale ripples, whose mechanisms of  
23 formation are debated. We present a global morphometric survey of bedforms on Mars, adding  
24 relevant observational constraints to the ongoing debate. We show that the bedforms located in  
25 the Tharsis region form a distinct group, not akin to the large dark-toned ripples which cover  
26 dune fields elsewhere on the planet. The relation between wavelength and atmospheric density  
27 derived from the new data is consistent with the predictions of a wind-drag mechanism, favoring  
28 the model that uses a saltation saturation length. Regardless of the mechanism that limits the size  
29 of bedforms, these results confirm the existence of a robust relationship between the wavelength  
30 of large ripples and atmospheric density (ripples spacings increases with decreasing atmospheric  
31 density). This provides further support to the interpretation of paleoatmospheric conditions on  
32 Mars through the analysis of its aeolian sedimentary record.

33

**34 Plain Language Summary**

35 The winds that shape the surface of Mars form two distinct scales of aeolian ripples, which  
36 coexist and evolve over martian dunes. The larger ripples (with spacing between crests between  
37 1-5 m) are enigmatic, as the mechanisms that control their equilibrium size are not fully  
38 understood. In this study we provide new observational data, which we use to assess different  
39 models that predict a dependence of bedform wavelength with atmospheric density. This new  
40 dataset shows that there are more than one population of meter-scale bedforms, with the ones  
41 located around the Tharsis volcanos being significantly different from the ones that cover dark  
42 dunes. We found a good agreement with the predictions of the wind-drag model, suggesting that  
43 the size of the large ripples is controlled by an aerodynamic mechanism. Most importantly, we  
44 confirm the existence of a global relation between wavelength and atmospheric density (ripples  
45 spacings increases with decreasing atmospheric density). This provides further support to the  
46 interpretation of paleoatmospheric conditions on Mars, as this relation can be applied to infer  
47 past atmospheric densities from the sedimentary record.

48

## 49 1 Introduction

50 Martian dark dunes are covered by large ripple-like bedforms which are actively migrating  
51 under present-day atmospheric conditions (Bridges et al., 2012; Silvestro et al., 2010). These are  
52 metric-scale bedforms (~1-5 m spacing between crests, ~5-40 cm high) which can have  
53 symmetrical or asymmetrical profiles and sinuous or straight crests. On terrestrial aeolian  
54 environments with well-sorted sediments there are no obvious analogue bedforms in terms of  
55 scale, morphometry and dynamics (Lapotre et al., 2018; Silvestro et al., 2016; Vaz et al., 2017).  
56 Most notably, the meter-scale bedform are overlaid by centimeter-scale ripples, similar in scale  
57 and dynamics to impact ripples (Bridges et al., 2012; Lapotre et al., 2016; Weitz et al., 2018). The  
58 coexistence to these two different scales of bedforms raised several questions. Namely, why do we  
59 have two scales of ripples on Mars and what are the mechanisms that control their sizes?

60 To explain orbital and ground-based observations of widespread aeolian activity (Baker et  
61 al., 2022; Bridges et al., 2012; Silvestro et al., 2010, 2013) transient low-flux transport regimes,  
62 that occur between impact threshold and fluid threshold speeds, were invoked (Andreotti et al.,  
63 2021; Baker et al., 2018; Lapotre et al., 2018; Sullivan & Kok, 2017; Swann et al., 2020). Recent  
64 in situ observations by the Curiosity rover at Gale crater demonstrate that intermittent saltation is  
65 taking place, contributing to the migration of centimeter-scale ripples (Baker et al., 2022; Sullivan  
66 et al., 2022). In addition, wind tunnel experiments suggest that the size of impact ripples does not  
67 vary significantly with atmospheric density, maintaining their characteristic centimeter scale even  
68 in the low density conditions that exist on the surface of Mars (Andreotti et al., 2021). Therefore,  
69 all evidence shows that the size of centimeter scale ripples on Mars is controlled by the same  
70 impact-splash mechanism that produces terrestrial aeolian impact ripples.

71 In contrast, two hypotheses have been proposed to explain the origin of the meter-scale  
72 ripples. They have been interpreted: a) as arising from a hydrodynamic instability i.e., they are  
73 analogous to fluid drag ripples typically found on terrestrial subaqueous environments (Duran  
74 Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2016, 2021); or b) as forming from the same impact-splash  
75 mechanism as terrestrial aeolian ripples (Sullivan et al., 2020; Sullivan & Kok, 2017). In the first  
76 hypothesis, the equilibrium wavelength of the large ripples is limited by a hydrodynamic anomaly  
77 (Duran Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2016), while in the second case ripple height (and  
78 consequently their wavelength) is controlled by the wind dynamic pressure at the bedforms crests,  
79 which is lower on Mars and would allow the growth of the bedforms (Sullivan et al., 2020). Lapotre

80 et al. (2016, 2021) argued that there is a clear wavelength gap between the two types of bedforms,  
 81 inferring that two different mechanisms are limiting the size of the bedforms (impact-splash for  
 82 the centimeter-scale ripples and fluid-drag for the meter-scale bedforms). In contrast, Sullivan et  
 83 al. (2022) reported a continuum distribution of superimposed ripple wavelengths observed by the  
 84 Curiosity rover at the “Sands of Forvie” sand sheet. They also reported the existence of  
 85 granulometric segregation between the troughs and crests of large ripples (the same was reported  
 86 in other areas by Gough et al., 2021) with coarser grains preferentially located on the crests of the  
 87 larger bedforms. They interpreted these two characteristics as evidence that the meter-scale ripples  
 88 are impact ripples rather than fluid-drag bedforms.

89 An important aspect of the debate about the mechanism that sets the size of large ripples is  
 90 the near-inverse relation observed between wavelength and atmospheric density at a global scale.  
 91 This relation was initially hinted at by Lorenz et al. (2014) for the bedforms located across the  
 92 high elevation Tharsis region, while Lapotre et al. (2016) extended the number of surveyed areas,  
 93 focusing on sites where dark dunes are present. Based on this compilation, Lapotre et al. (2016)  
 94 argued that the observed decrease in ripple wavelength with increasing atmospheric density is  
 95 consistent with a fluid-drag origin. A view not shared by Lorenz (2020), which highlighted the  
 96 different gradient of the model predictions and observational data (see Fig. 2 in Lorenz, 2020).  
 97 Lapotre et al. (2021) revisited the same dataset proposing that when a saltation saturation length  
 98 formulation is adopted (Duran Vinent et al., 2019), the fluid-drag mechanism provides a better fit  
 99 to the data, particularly to the bedforms analyzed outside Tharsis.

100 Drag ripples wavelength scales according to  $\lambda \approx \frac{\left(\frac{\mu}{\rho_f}\right)^{2/3} D^{1/6}}{(Rg)^{1/6} u_*^{1/3}}$  (Lapotre et al., 2017), where  $\mu$  is  
 101 the dynamic viscosity,  $\rho_f$  is the fluid density,  $D$  is grain diameter,  $g$  is the gravity acceleration and  
 102  $R$  is the submerged reduced density of the sediment ( $\frac{\rho_s - \rho_f}{\rho_f}$ ). This relation predicts that bedform  
 103 wavelength is strongly dependent on  $\rho_f^{-2/3}$ . The mechanisms that set the wavelength of impact  
 104 ripples are less understood. Wind tunnel experiments show that the saturation wavelength on well  
 105 sorted sediments increases linearly with friction velocity (Andreotti et al., 2006; Cheng et al., 2018;  
 106 Rasmussen et al., 2015), and is thought to be limited by the height of the ripples (Bagnold, 1954;  
 107 Manukyan & Prigozhin, 2009). Yet, in less well sorted sediments coarser particles form an armor  
 108 layer on the crests, causing ripples to increase in height and consequently in wavelength (Sharp,

109 1963). Sullivan et al. (2020) argue that the wind dynamic pressure  $WDP = \frac{1}{2} \rho_f u^2$  ( $u$  is the wind  
110 velocity) controls ripples height, with higher dynamic pressures removing particles from the crests  
111 and precluding the growth of the bedforms. Therefore, higher WDP should generate smaller  
112 ripples. In this case, if we assume a constant wind velocity the wavelength of impact ripples scales  
113 with  $1/\rho_f$ . Note that this assumption (constant wind speed at a global scale) may be problematic,  
114 as according to the equation WDP may be relatively more influenced by wind velocity than by  
115 density variations, which is the only factor addressed in previous studies as well as in this work.  
116 Nevertheless, both theories suggest an increase in wavelength when atmospheric density  
117 decreases.

118 Other questions not entirely settled in previous studies regard the nature of the bedforms  
119 located in the Tharsis region. Lapotre et al. (2016) noticed the morphologic and albedo differences  
120 between the dark-toned ripples covering dunes and Tharsis bedforms. Nevertheless, they merged  
121 the two datasets to fit their wind-drag model, while in later works Tharsis and non-Tharsis  
122 bedforms were analyzed separately (Lapotre et al., 2021; Lorenz, 2020).

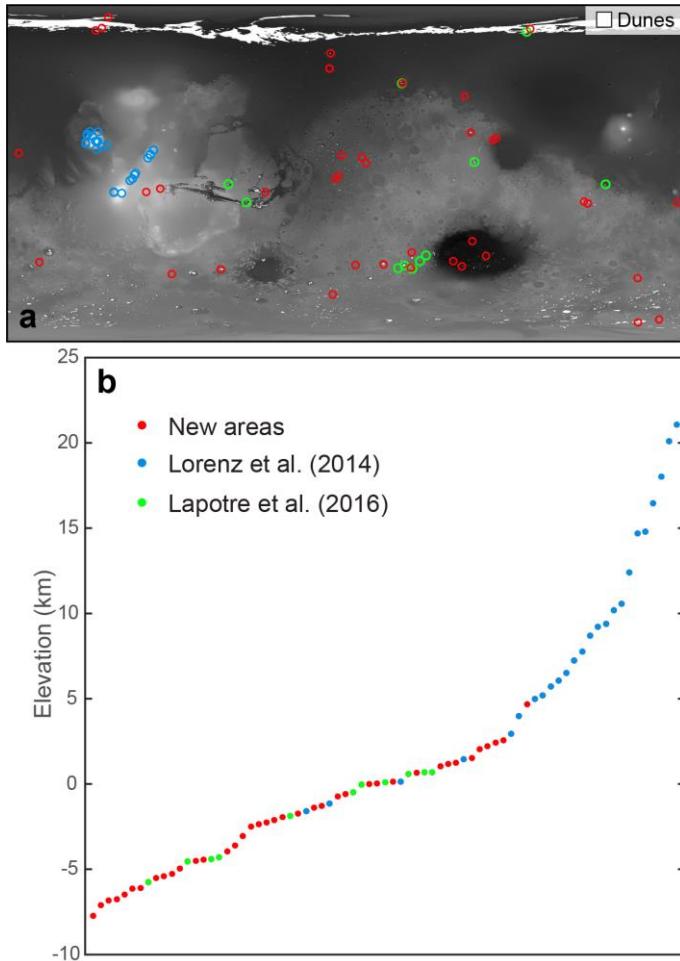
123 Here we focus on these unresolved issues, reviewing and expanding the observational  
124 dataset, analyzing the consistency of measurements, and testing the models that predict the size of  
125 large ripples on Mars as a function of atmospheric density.

126

## 127 **2 Data and methodology**

128 We use High-Resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HiRISE) images (0.25-0.5 m/pix,  
129 McEwen et al., 2007) to perform a global scale mapping and wavelength survey of aeolian  
130 bedforms. Our survey cover the same 25 areas located in the Tharsis regions and analyzed by  
131 Lorenz et al. (2014), as well as the 11 areas reported in Lapotre et al. (2016) (Fig. 1). Furthermore,  
132 we expand the elevation coverage including 39 new areas where meter-scale bedforms are present  
133 covering dark-toned dunes (Supporting information S1 - section 1, Fig. S1 and Table S1).

134

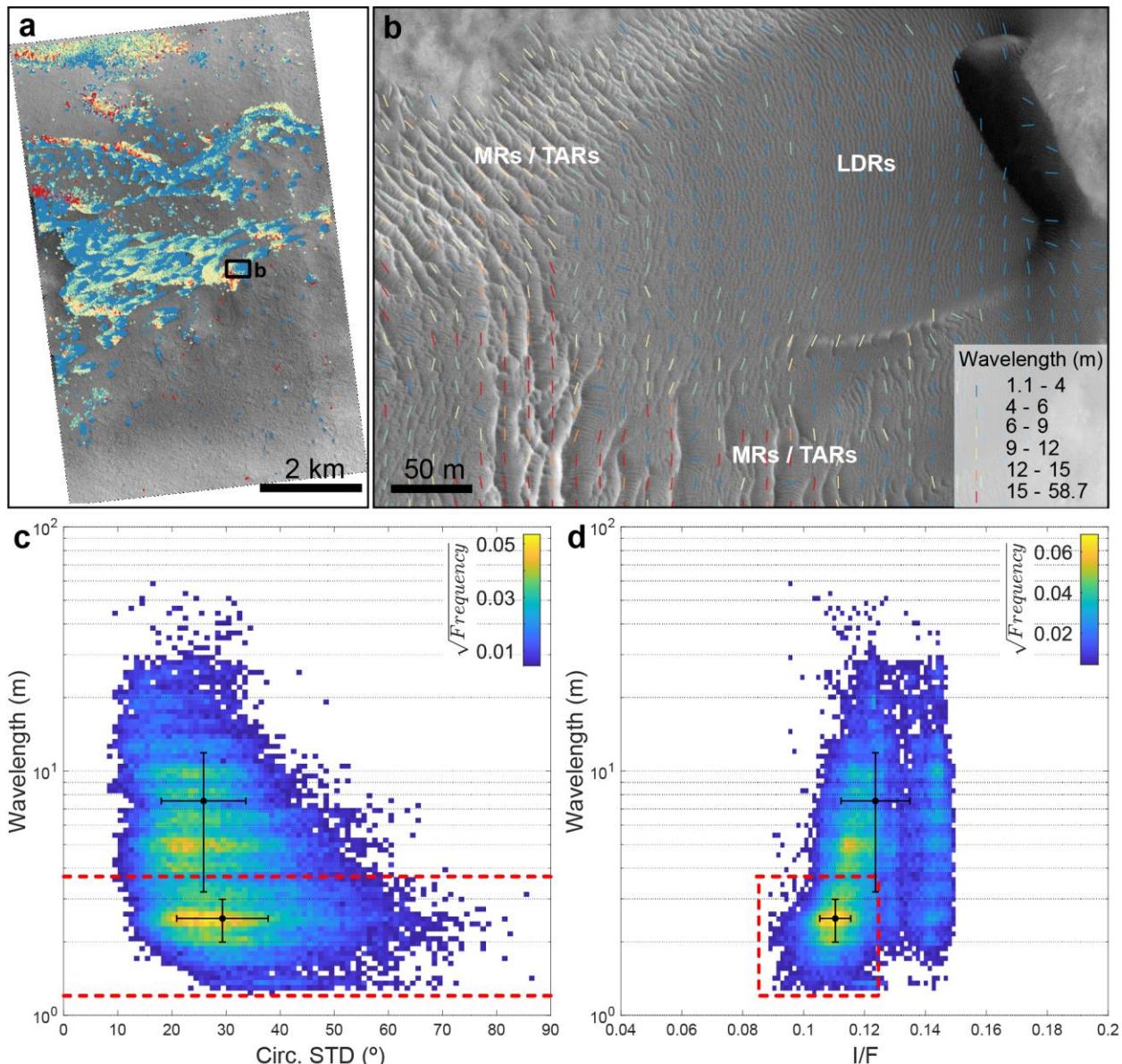


135  
136 **Figure 1.** Location (a) and elevation distribution (b) of the 75 sites surveyed in this study. We  
137 analyzed the same 25 areas of Lorenz et al. (2014) as well as the 11 dark-tone dune sites previously  
138 analyzed by Lapotre et al. (2016). Our survey improves the spatial coverage, extends the range of  
139 surveyed elevations and provides a more continuous elevation sampling. A global dune catalog  
140 (Fenton, 2020; Hayward et al., 2014) is shown overlaying MOLA elevation data.  
141

142 Previous surveys relied on the discrete manual measurements of crest-to-crest distances in  
143 randomly selected points (Lapotre et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2014). Here we applied a set of image  
144 processing and machine learning techniques which allow the mass automatic mapping of bedforms  
145 and the accurate measurement of their wavelengths (Fig. 2). We adapted the 2D Fast Fourier  
146 Transform approach introduced by Voulgaris and Morin (2008), implementing a multiscale  
147 scheme coupled with neural networks. This method allows the mapping and characterization of

148 large ripples and transverse aeolian ridges (TARs) in a wide range of spatial scales and surface  
 149 settings. See Supporting information S1 - section 2 for a in depth description of the method.

150



151

152 **Figure 2.** Wavelength survey of aeolian bedforms on Lyot crater (ESP\_055318\_2290, area 26 in  
 153 Table S1). a) The applied method allows the full mapping and wavelength characterization of  
 154 aeolian bedforms. b) Detailed view of the wavelength and trend of the mapped bedforms: large  
 155 dark-toned ripples (LDRs) cover a barchan dune and have a spacing between crests of less than 4  
 156 m; megaripples (MRs) and transverse aeolian ridges (TARs) present higher albedos, higher  
 157 wavelengths and are overlaid by the dune darker sediments. c and d) 2D histograms showing the

158 distribution of wavelength, circular standard deviation and albedo (I/F), a square root stretch is  
159 used to highlight secondary peaks. Red dashed lines correspond to the wavelength and albedo  
160 thresholds used to segment two bedform classes. The black dots and lines represent the computed  
161 averages and  $1\sigma$  intervals.

162

163 Previous studies analyzed the relation between the average wavelength and atmospheric  
164 density at the surface, focusing on large ripples and TARs. To comply with this framework, we  
165 segment the mapped bedforms in two classes: a) large dark-toned ripples and b) a second class that  
166 comprises megaripples and TARs. Wavelength and relative grain size were proposed to be key  
167 parameters to discriminate different types of aeolian bedforms on Mars (Day & Zimbelman, 2021).  
168 We use albedo as a proxy for grain size, as it is usually assumed to be related to dust coating and/or  
169 to the presence of coarser particles (Sullivan et al., 2020). We examine the wavelength and albedo  
170 distributions using 2D histograms and we define threshold values that allow the partition of the  
171 mapping results, so that summary statistics can be computed for each class (see Supporting  
172 information S1 - section 3 for examples and Supporting information S2 for global results).

173 To evaluate the mechanisms that set the size of large ripples on Mars we test which model  
174 best describes the wavelength vs. atmospheric density relation observed in our dataset. We tested  
175 three models (refer to Supporting information S1 - section 5 for details): a) the wind-drag model  
176 of Lapotre et al. (2016), where the saturation length scale is approximated as that of fluvial  
177 bedload, b) a modified version of the same scaling, which instead uses a saturation length scale for  
178 aeolian saltation (Duran Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2021), and c) a generic inverse linear  
179 dependence between wavelength and atmospheric density (as proposed by Lorenz et al., 2014).  
180 We fit power laws and linear models to facilitate the comparison between our measurements and  
181 the models' predictions.

182

#### 183 **4 Results and discussion**

184 Bedforms spaced between 1 to 100 m were mapped over a total area of  $\sim 2200 \text{ km}^2$   
185 (Supporting information S2). The applied method correctly identifies the location of bedforms  
186 (93.7% of overall accuracy) and robustly measures their wavelength (we estimate a confidence  
187 interval of  $\pm 12\%$ , Supporting information S1 - section 2). When comparing our data with previous

188 surveys, we found a good agreement with large ripple measurements reported by Lapotre et al.  
189 (2016), which on average differ by 4%. Yet, the averages for the larger bedforms (megaripples  
190 and TARs) reported in the same study are severely underestimated by 84%, which we attribute to  
191 a possible under sampling. To assess the wavelength of these larger bedforms Lapotre et al. (2016)  
192 collected on average of 46 wavelength measurements on each site. This number of randomly  
193 located measurements may not be enough to characterize these populations, as they cover a small  
194 percentage of the mapped areas and form scattered patches of bedforms with variable wavelengths.

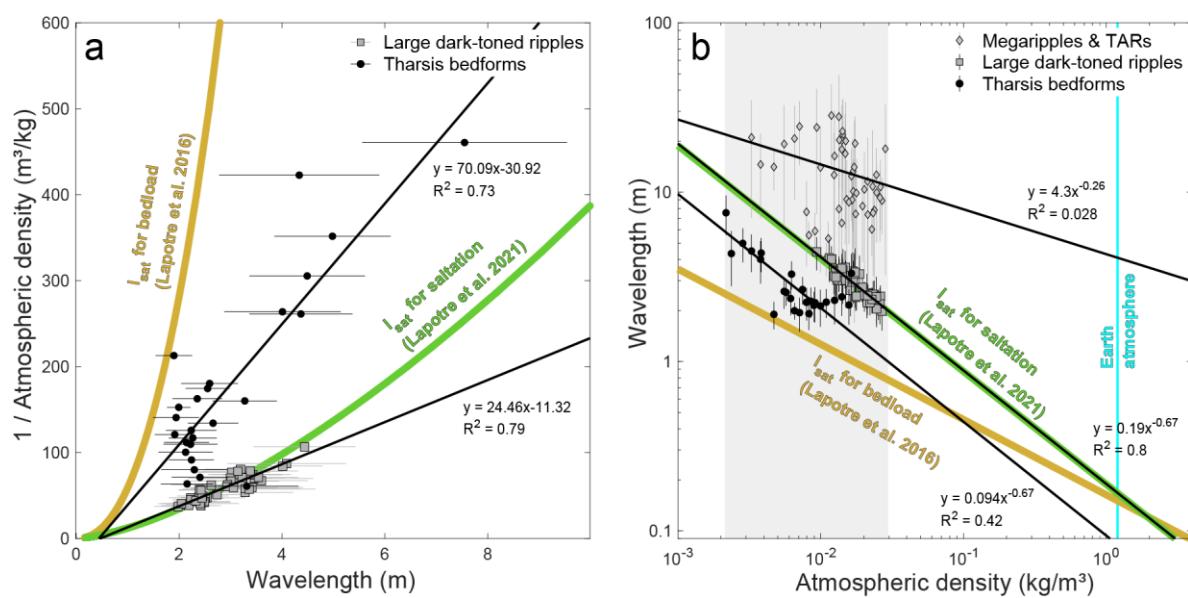
195 Our results for the Tharsis sites (which represent ~2/3 of the data analyzed in previous  
196 studies) show that Lorenz et al. (2014) values are systematically underestimated: on average they  
197 are 73% lower than the values obtained in this study (Fig. S10 and S11; Supporting information  
198 S1 - section 4). Indeed, some cited measurements there (e.g., 0.5-1.1 m) are dubious at best given  
199 HiRISE resolution (0.25 m/pix). The causes for this large disparity are less clear, nevertheless we  
200 note that in this case the measurement locations were not randomized, and that in some of the areas  
201 the spatial distribution of the bedforms is not uniform. These two factors may complicate the  
202 obtention of representative values from a few tens of scattered measurements.

203 Other potential sources of uncertainty are the elevation values reported for each site, which  
204 are used to derive the atmospheric pressure. We sampled the MOLA elevations at the centroid  
205 point of the largest bedform patch mapped in each area. However, previous works do not refer the  
206 sampling scheme or location where elevation values were collected. Therefore, in areas where the  
207 HiRISE footprints cover regions with higher elevation gradients (mainly in the Tharsis region) we  
208 can have elevation differences between our values and previous surveys of more than 2 km. This  
209 happens in four of the areas analyzed by Lorenz et al. (2014) (Fig. S11b).

210 We found several lines of evidence which support that Tharsis bedforms form a distinct  
211 population, apart from the large dark-toned ripples found elsewhere on Mars: a) as noted by  
212 Lapotre et al. (2021), we found that Tharsis bedforms have higher albedos (Fig. S12); b) we found  
213 that they have distinct thermal inertia (Putzig and Mellon, 2007) and dust cover index signatures  
214 (Ruff and Christensen, 2002), denoting lower thermal inertias (possibly associated with finer  
215 materials) and higher dust content/coverage (Fig. S13); c) as noted by others, Tharsis bedforms  
216 form unique patterns (Fig. S14) such as honeycomb or reticulate patterns (Bridges et al., 2010;  
217 Lorenz et al., 2014); and d) are in most cases associated with extensive mantling units, while large  
218 ripples outside Tharsis are typically found overlaying dark dunes (see Supporting information S1

219 - section 5 for details). These distinctive characteristics suggest that the two sets of bedforms  
 220 should be considered separately when evaluating bedform-formation mechanisms.

221 The compiled data confirms the existence of a decrease of wavelength with increasing  
 222 atmospheric density for the large dark-toned ripples (Fig. 3). Only five areas (~7%) deviate from  
 223 this general tendency (Supporting information S1 - section 5 and Fig. S15), corresponding to cases  
 224 where: a) sand sheets occupy a significant percentage of the mapped areas, suggesting the presence  
 225 of coarse and/or poorly sorted sediments; and b) where dust devil tracks are visible covering the  
 226 bedforms, suggesting limited migration/activity. These outliers are not included in the fits done to  
 227 evaluate the proposed models, but their existence highlights two points: the accuracy and  
 228 consistency of the measurements and the need to select comparable dune settings, as differences  
 229 in grain size and sorting influence the wavelength of the bedforms.  
 230



231 **Figure 3.** Relation between bedforms wavelength and Martian atmospheric density. The same data  
 232 is shown in two different plots: a) highlighting the linear inverse relation proposed by Lorenz et  
 233 al. (2014) and b) comparing with the models proposed by Lapotre et al. (2016; 2021), the gray area  
 234 represents the maximum range of atmospheric densities on Mars while the cyan line represents the  
 235 density of Earth's atmosphere. Black lines represent the best fitted models for each dataset,  
 236 computed using the average wavelengths for each site (linear models in a) and power laws in b);  
 237 the  $R^2$  values in b) were computed in the log space). The golden line represents Lapotre et al.  
 238 (2016) empirical relationship where transport saturation length is taken as that of fluvial bedload,  
 239

240 while the green line corresponds to a transport saturation length for aeolian saltation (Lapotre et  
 241 al., 2021). A similar plot that includes the datasets used in previous studies is shown in Fig. S19.

242

243 The model obtained by fitting previous datasets which takes into account the bedload  
 244 transport saturation length (Lapotre et al., 2016) predicts significantly lower wavelengths and a  
 245 different scaling to the one we derived from our dataset. Conversely, our data for the dark-toned  
 246 large ripples overlaps the predictions of the wind-drag model that uses the saltation transport  
 247 saturation length, with a best fitted power law with  $\sim 2/3$  scaling.

248 Tharsis data presents higher scattering, particularly for lower wavelengths where data  
 249 points seem to converge towards the dark-toned ripple dataset. Due to the discrepancies found  
 250 between our results and those of Lorenz et al. (2014), we note that the Tharsis data compiled in  
 251 this study does not overlap or follow a similar scaling to the wind-drag model that considers a  
 252 bedload transport saturation length (Fig. 3 and S19). Instead, the best fitted power law ( $R^2=0.42$ )  
 253 has the same scaling ( $\sim 2/3$ ) of the model that uses the saltation transport saturation length.

254 The compiled data suggests that the mechanism that limits the size of large ripples on Mars  
 255 is dependent on the atmospheric density. Overall, we observe that all our data are bounded by the  
 256 two saturation length scaling laws, supporting the hypothesis that the equilibrium size of large  
 257 martian ripples is controlled by an aerodynamic mechanism. The scaling laws for saturation length  
 258 arise from idealized representations of transport in unimodal sediments. As previously discussed,  
 259 the grain size distribution of the sediments on the Tharsis bedforms is probably more complex,  
 260 which may contribute to the observed differences between Tharsis and non-Tharsis bedforms.

261 Even so, in accordance with previous studies (Lorenz, 2020; Lorenz et al., 2014) we notice  
 262 that linear functions (which imply that  
 263  $\lambda \propto 1/\rho_f$ ) also provide robust fits to the data ( $R^2=0.79$  and 0.73 for the dark large ripples and  
 264 Tharsis bedforms, respectively). In the case of the large ripples, both inverse and power law  
 265 functions explain  $\sim 80\%$  of the variance. This means that, strictly from a numeric point of view,  
 266 we cannot discriminate what is the best model to fit the data. As previously mentioned, to fully  
 267 test the impact ripple hypothesis we would need to consider the wind velocities at each site,  
 268 something that could be done using climate model predictions.

269 Finally, the wavelengths of the larger bedforms (megaripples and TARs) present a large  
 270 dispersion (Fig. 3B), not showing an obvious relation with any of the scaling laws. Linear or power

271 law models do not produce a meaningful fit to the data ( $R^2=0.03$ ). This suggests that at a global  
272 scale these bedforms do not form a homogeneous set and are probably not representative of the  
273 same boundary conditions (i.e., they likely formed with different grain size distributions, or under  
274 differing atmospheric conditions). Nonetheless, we cannot exclude the possibility that including  
275 TARs and megaripples in a same class may be flawed, especially since different degrees of  
276 mobility under present day winds have been described for the two sets of bedforms (Chojnacki et  
277 al., 2021; Silvestro et al., 2020).

278 For the dark-toned large ripples the degree of agreement between the global measurements  
279 and the predictions of the scaling relationship of Lapotre et al. (2021) (where saturation length is  
280 taken as that of aeolian saltation) is remarkable. Particularly if we consider that we are using a  
281 “static” average atmospheric density, which is merely a function of elevation and does not consider  
282 regional and seasonal atmospheric density variations. On the other hand, we cannot exclude that  
283 the density may just be one of the factors influencing the bedforms dimensions. As suggested by  
284 Lorenz (2020), wind speed at a global scale may increase with elevation creating a more complex  
285 interplay between density, wind speed and resulting bedform size.

286

## 287 **5 Conclusions**

288 This survey provides improved measurements to evaluate the mechanisms that set the size  
289 of bedform on Mars. We show that previous works used biased measurements, particularly for the  
290 bedforms located in the Tharsis region. We investigated the uniqueness of the bedforms located in  
291 this region, concluding that these bedforms form a distinct population and should be analyzed  
292 separately from the more common dark-toned large ripples that cover dunes outside Tharsis.

293 Our survey covers a larger range of elevations than previous works, and for the first time  
294 provides full wavelength mapping of extensive regions. Overall, our results are consistent with the  
295 predictions of the “wind-drag” hypothesis, favoring the model that considers a saltation transport  
296 saturation length. Still, the compiled morphometric data is not enough to refute the impact ripple  
297 hypothesis, as that would probably require the integration of variable wind velocities for each site.

298 The compiled dataset corroborates the existence of a robust relation between the  
299 wavelength of large dark-toned ripples and atmospheric density. Therefore, this new survey  
300 complements and helps to validate the main concept introduced in Lapotre et al. (2016): that paleo-

301 atmospheric density can be inferred for Mars by looking at the aeolian sedimentary record,  
302 providing an important tool to probe the evolution of the planet's environment.

303

304 **Acknowledgments**

305 This research was supported by CITEUC (UID/Multi/00611/2021&POCI-01- 0145-FEDER-  
306 006922) and by FCT grant CEECIND/02981/2017. M. C. and S.S. were funded by NASA Mars  
307 Data Analysis Program Grant 80NSSC20K1066. We thank the Laboratory for Advanced  
308 Computing at University of Coimbra for providing computing resources.

309 We acknowledge the valuable comments and suggestions made by Mathieu Lapotre and two  
310 anonymous reviewers to an earlier version of this work. We thank Rob Sullivan for insights on the  
311 morphodynamics of impact ripples.

312

313

314 **Open Research**

315 HiRISE images used in this work are publicly available at the Planetary Data System  
316 (<https://hirise-pds.lpl.arizona.edu/PDS/>) where details can be obtained at McEwen et al. (2007).  
317 The morphometric database compiled in this study is available at  
318 <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21064657>.

319

320

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1    **Constraining the mechanisms of aeolian bedform formation on  
2    Mars through a global morphometric survey**

3

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12

13    **Key Points:**

- 14    • We present a global morphometric survey of aeolian bedforms on Mars and assess the  
15    mechanisms that may control their size
- 16    • Bedforms within the high elevation Tharsis region form a distinct group, attributed here  
17    to different sediment and transport conditions
- 18    • We confirm the existence of a robust relation between wavelength and atmospheric  
19    density, which is consistent with a fluid-drag mechanism
- 20

**21 Abstract**

22 Aeolian processes on Mars form a distinct class of meter-scale ripples, whose mechanisms of  
23 formation are debated. We present a global morphometric survey of bedforms on Mars, adding  
24 relevant observational constraints to the ongoing debate. We show that the bedforms located in  
25 the Tharsis region form a distinct group, not akin to the large dark-toned ripples which cover  
26 dune fields elsewhere on the planet. The relation between wavelength and atmospheric density  
27 derived from the new data is consistent with the predictions of a wind-drag mechanism, favoring  
28 the model that uses a saltation saturation length. Regardless of the mechanism that limits the size  
29 of bedforms, these results confirm the existence of a robust relationship between the wavelength  
30 of large ripples and atmospheric density (ripples spacings increases with decreasing atmospheric  
31 density). This provides further support to the interpretation of paleoatmospheric conditions on  
32 Mars through the analysis of its aeolian sedimentary record.

33

**34 Plain Language Summary**

35 The winds that shape the surface of Mars form two distinct scales of aeolian ripples, which  
36 coexist and evolve over martian dunes. The larger ripples (with spacing between crests between  
37 1-5 m) are enigmatic, as the mechanisms that control their equilibrium size are not fully  
38 understood. In this study we provide new observational data, which we use to assess different  
39 models that predict a dependence of bedform wavelength with atmospheric density. This new  
40 dataset shows that there are more than one population of meter-scale bedforms, with the ones  
41 located around the Tharsis volcanos being significantly different from the ones that cover dark  
42 dunes. We found a good agreement with the predictions of the wind-drag model, suggesting that  
43 the size of the large ripples is controlled by an aerodynamic mechanism. Most importantly, we  
44 confirm the existence of a global relation between wavelength and atmospheric density (ripples  
45 spacings increases with decreasing atmospheric density). This provides further support to the  
46 interpretation of paleoatmospheric conditions on Mars, as this relation can be applied to infer  
47 past atmospheric densities from the sedimentary record.

48

## 49 1 Introduction

50 Martian dark dunes are covered by large ripple-like bedforms which are actively migrating  
51 under present-day atmospheric conditions (Bridges et al., 2012; Silvestro et al., 2010). These are  
52 metric-scale bedforms (~1-5 m spacing between crests, ~5-40 cm high) which can have  
53 symmetrical or asymmetrical profiles and sinuous or straight crests. On terrestrial aeolian  
54 environments with well-sorted sediments there are no obvious analogue bedforms in terms of  
55 scale, morphometry and dynamics (Lapotre et al., 2018; Silvestro et al., 2016; Vaz et al., 2017).  
56 Most notably, the meter-scale bedform are overlaid by centimeter-scale ripples, similar in scale  
57 and dynamics to impact ripples (Bridges et al., 2012; Lapotre et al., 2016; Weitz et al., 2018). The  
58 coexistence to these two different scales of bedforms raised several questions. Namely, why do we  
59 have two scales of ripples on Mars and what are the mechanisms that control their sizes?

60 To explain orbital and ground-based observations of widespread aeolian activity (Baker et  
61 al., 2022; Bridges et al., 2012; Silvestro et al., 2010, 2013) transient low-flux transport regimes,  
62 that occur between impact threshold and fluid threshold speeds, were invoked (Andreotti et al.,  
63 2021; Baker et al., 2018; Lapotre et al., 2018; Sullivan & Kok, 2017; Swann et al., 2020). Recent  
64 in situ observations by the Curiosity rover at Gale crater demonstrate that intermittent saltation is  
65 taking place, contributing to the migration of centimeter-scale ripples (Baker et al., 2022; Sullivan  
66 et al., 2022). In addition, wind tunnel experiments suggest that the size of impact ripples does not  
67 vary significantly with atmospheric density, maintaining their characteristic centimeter scale even  
68 in the low density conditions that exist on the surface of Mars (Andreotti et al., 2021). Therefore,  
69 all evidence shows that the size of centimeter scale ripples on Mars is controlled by the same  
70 impact-splash mechanism that produces terrestrial aeolian impact ripples.

71 In contrast, two hypotheses have been proposed to explain the origin of the meter-scale  
72 ripples. They have been interpreted: a) as arising from a hydrodynamic instability i.e., they are  
73 analogous to fluid drag ripples typically found on terrestrial subaqueous environments (Duran  
74 Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2016, 2021); or b) as forming from the same impact-splash  
75 mechanism as terrestrial aeolian ripples (Sullivan et al., 2020; Sullivan & Kok, 2017). In the first  
76 hypothesis, the equilibrium wavelength of the large ripples is limited by a hydrodynamic anomaly  
77 (Duran Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2016), while in the second case ripple height (and  
78 consequently their wavelength) is controlled by the wind dynamic pressure at the bedforms crests,  
79 which is lower on Mars and would allow the growth of the bedforms (Sullivan et al., 2020). Lapotre

80 et al. (2016, 2021) argued that there is a clear wavelength gap between the two types of bedforms,  
 81 inferring that two different mechanisms are limiting the size of the bedforms (impact-splash for  
 82 the centimeter-scale ripples and fluid-drag for the meter-scale bedforms). In contrast, Sullivan et  
 83 al. (2022) reported a continuum distribution of superimposed ripple wavelengths observed by the  
 84 Curiosity rover at the “Sands of Forvie” sand sheet. They also reported the existence of  
 85 granulometric segregation between the troughs and crests of large ripples (the same was reported  
 86 in other areas by Gough et al., 2021) with coarser grains preferentially located on the crests of the  
 87 larger bedforms. They interpreted these two characteristics as evidence that the meter-scale ripples  
 88 are impact ripples rather than fluid-drag bedforms.

89 An important aspect of the debate about the mechanism that sets the size of large ripples is  
 90 the near-inverse relation observed between wavelength and atmospheric density at a global scale.  
 91 This relation was initially hinted at by Lorenz et al. (2014) for the bedforms located across the  
 92 high elevation Tharsis region, while Lapotre et al. (2016) extended the number of surveyed areas,  
 93 focusing on sites where dark dunes are present. Based on this compilation, Lapotre et al. (2016)  
 94 argued that the observed decrease in ripple wavelength with increasing atmospheric density is  
 95 consistent with a fluid-drag origin. A view not shared by Lorenz (2020), which highlighted the  
 96 different gradient of the model predictions and observational data (see Fig. 2 in Lorenz, 2020).  
 97 Lapotre et al. (2021) revisited the same dataset proposing that when a saltation saturation length  
 98 formulation is adopted (Duran Vinent et al., 2019), the fluid-drag mechanism provides a better fit  
 99 to the data, particularly to the bedforms analyzed outside Tharsis.

100 Drag ripples wavelength scales according to  $\lambda \approx \frac{\left(\frac{\mu}{\rho_f}\right)^{2/3} D^{1/6}}{(Rg)^{1/6} u_*^{1/3}}$  (Lapotre et al., 2017), where  $\mu$  is  
 101 the dynamic viscosity,  $\rho_f$  is the fluid density,  $D$  is grain diameter,  $g$  is the gravity acceleration and  
 102  $R$  is the submerged reduced density of the sediment ( $\frac{\rho_s - \rho_f}{\rho_f}$ ). This relation predicts that bedform  
 103 wavelength is strongly dependent on  $\rho_f^{-2/3}$ . The mechanisms that set the wavelength of impact  
 104 ripples are less understood. Wind tunnel experiments show that the saturation wavelength on well  
 105 sorted sediments increases linearly with friction velocity (Andreotti et al., 2006; Cheng et al., 2018;  
 106 Rasmussen et al., 2015), and is thought to be limited by the height of the ripples (Bagnold, 1954;  
 107 Manukyan & Prigozhin, 2009). Yet, in less well sorted sediments coarser particles form an armor  
 108 layer on the crests, causing ripples to increase in height and consequently in wavelength (Sharp,

109 1963). Sullivan et al. (2020) argue that the wind dynamic pressure  $WDP = \frac{1}{2} \rho_f u^2$  ( $u$  is the wind  
110 velocity) controls ripples height, with higher dynamic pressures removing particles from the crests  
111 and precluding the growth of the bedforms. Therefore, higher WDP should generate smaller  
112 ripples. In this case, if we assume a constant wind velocity the wavelength of impact ripples scales  
113 with  $1/\rho_f$ . Note that this assumption (constant wind speed at a global scale) may be problematic,  
114 as according to the equation WDP may be relatively more influenced by wind velocity than by  
115 density variations, which is the only factor addressed in previous studies as well as in this work.  
116 Nevertheless, both theories suggest an increase in wavelength when atmospheric density  
117 decreases.

118 Other questions not entirely settled in previous studies regard the nature of the bedforms  
119 located in the Tharsis region. Lapotre et al. (2016) noticed the morphologic and albedo differences  
120 between the dark-toned ripples covering dunes and Tharsis bedforms. Nevertheless, they merged  
121 the two datasets to fit their wind-drag model, while in later works Tharsis and non-Tharsis  
122 bedforms were analyzed separately (Lapotre et al., 2021; Lorenz, 2020).

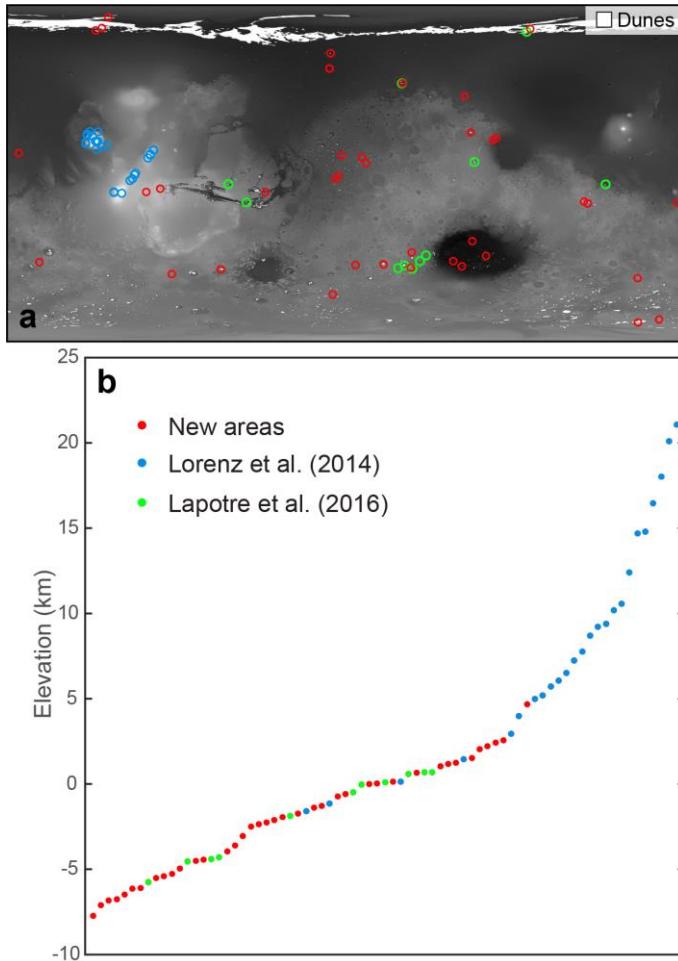
123 Here we focus on these unresolved issues, reviewing and expanding the observational  
124 dataset, analyzing the consistency of measurements, and testing the models that predict the size of  
125 large ripples on Mars as a function of atmospheric density.

126

## 127 **2 Data and methodology**

128 We use High-Resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HiRISE) images (0.25-0.5 m/pix,  
129 McEwen et al., 2007) to perform a global scale mapping and wavelength survey of aeolian  
130 bedforms. Our survey cover the same 25 areas located in the Tharsis regions and analyzed by  
131 Lorenz et al. (2014), as well as the 11 areas reported in Lapotre et al. (2016) (Fig. 1). Furthermore,  
132 we expand the elevation coverage including 39 new areas where meter-scale bedforms are present  
133 covering dark-toned dunes (Supporting information S1 - section 1, Fig. S1 and Table S1).

134

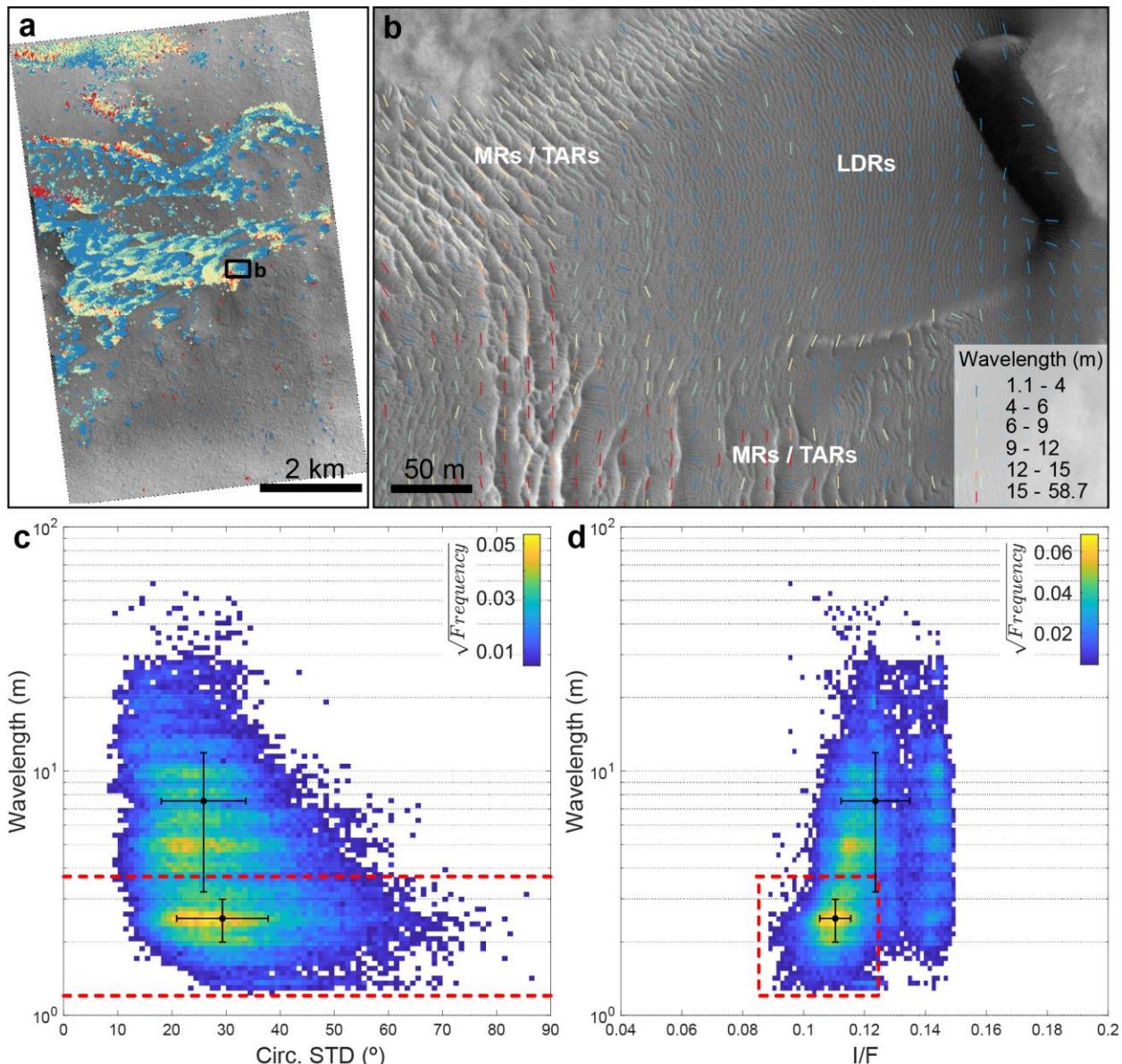


135  
136 **Figure 1.** Location (a) and elevation distribution (b) of the 75 sites surveyed in this study. We  
137 analyzed the same 25 areas of Lorenz et al. (2014) as well as the 11 dark-tone dune sites previously  
138 analyzed by Lapotre et al. (2016). Our survey improves the spatial coverage, extends the range of  
139 surveyed elevations and provides a more continuous elevation sampling. A global dune catalog  
140 (Fenton, 2020; Hayward et al., 2014) is shown overlaying MOLA elevation data.  
141

142 Previous surveys relied on the discrete manual measurements of crest-to-crest distances in  
143 randomly selected points (Lapotre et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2014). Here we applied a set of image  
144 processing and machine learning techniques which allow the mass automatic mapping of bedforms  
145 and the accurate measurement of their wavelengths (Fig. 2). We adapted the 2D Fast Fourier  
146 Transform approach introduced by Voulgaris and Morin (2008), implementing a multiscale  
147 scheme coupled with neural networks. This method allows the mapping and characterization of

148 large ripples and transverse aeolian ridges (TARs) in a wide range of spatial scales and surface  
 149 settings. See Supporting information S1 - section 2 for a in depth description of the method.

150



151

152 **Figure 2.** Wavelength survey of aeolian bedforms on Lyot crater (ESP\_055318\_2290, area 26 in  
 153 Table S1). a) The applied method allows the full mapping and wavelength characterization of  
 154 aeolian bedforms. b) Detailed view of the wavelength and trend of the mapped bedforms: large  
 155 dark-toned ripples (LDRs) cover a barchan dune and have a spacing between crests of less than 4  
 156 m; megaripples (MRs) and transverse aeolian ridges (TARs) present higher albedos, higher  
 157 wavelengths and are overlaid by the dune darker sediments. c and d) 2D histograms showing the

158 distribution of wavelength, circular standard deviation and albedo (I/F), a square root stretch is  
159 used to highlight secondary peaks. Red dashed lines correspond to the wavelength and albedo  
160 thresholds used to segment two bedform classes. The black dots and lines represent the computed  
161 averages and  $1\sigma$  intervals.

162

163 Previous studies analyzed the relation between the average wavelength and atmospheric  
164 density at the surface, focusing on large ripples and TARs. To comply with this framework, we  
165 segment the mapped bedforms in two classes: a) large dark-toned ripples and b) a second class that  
166 comprises megaripples and TARs. Wavelength and relative grain size were proposed to be key  
167 parameters to discriminate different types of aeolian bedforms on Mars (Day & Zimbelman, 2021).  
168 We use albedo as a proxy for grain size, as it is usually assumed to be related to dust coating and/or  
169 to the presence of coarser particles (Sullivan et al., 2020). We examine the wavelength and albedo  
170 distributions using 2D histograms and we define threshold values that allow the partition of the  
171 mapping results, so that summary statistics can be computed for each class (see Supporting  
172 information S1 - section 3 for examples and Supporting information S2 for global results).

173 To evaluate the mechanisms that set the size of large ripples on Mars we test which model  
174 best describes the wavelength vs. atmospheric density relation observed in our dataset. We tested  
175 three models (refer to Supporting information S1 - section 5 for details): a) the wind-drag model  
176 of Lapotre et al. (2016), where the saturation length scale is approximated as that of fluvial  
177 bedload, b) a modified version of the same scaling, which instead uses a saturation length scale for  
178 aeolian saltation (Duran Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2021), and c) a generic inverse linear  
179 dependence between wavelength and atmospheric density (as proposed by Lorenz et al., 2014).  
180 We fit power laws and linear models to facilitate the comparison between our measurements and  
181 the models' predictions.

182

#### 183 **4 Results and discussion**

184 Bedforms spaced between 1 to 100 m were mapped over a total area of  $\sim 2200 \text{ km}^2$   
185 (Supporting information S2). The applied method correctly identifies the location of bedforms  
186 (93.7% of overall accuracy) and robustly measures their wavelength (we estimate a confidence  
187 interval of  $\pm 12\%$ , Supporting information S1 - section 2). When comparing our data with previous

188 surveys, we found a good agreement with large ripple measurements reported by Lapotre et al.  
189 (2016), which on average differ by 4%. Yet, the averages for the larger bedforms (megaripples  
190 and TARs) reported in the same study are severely underestimated by 84%, which we attribute to  
191 a possible under sampling. To assess the wavelength of these larger bedforms Lapotre et al. (2016)  
192 collected on average of 46 wavelength measurements on each site. This number of randomly  
193 located measurements may not be enough to characterize these populations, as they cover a small  
194 percentage of the mapped areas and form scattered patches of bedforms with variable wavelengths.

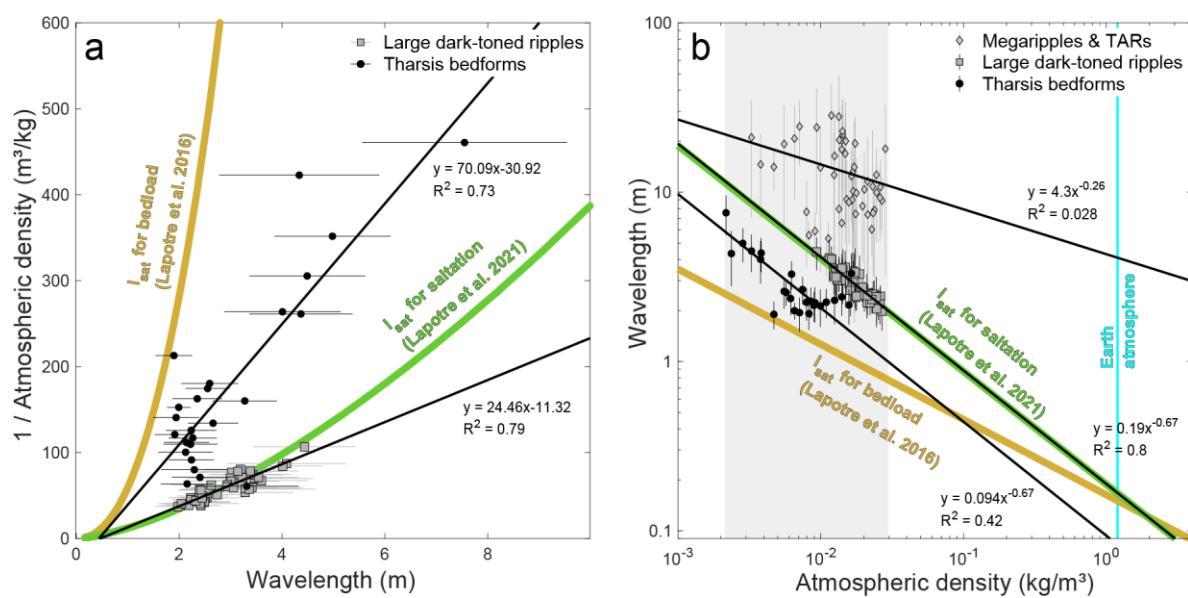
195 Our results for the Tharsis sites (which represent ~2/3 of the data analyzed in previous  
196 studies) show that Lorenz et al. (2014) values are systematically underestimated: on average they  
197 are 73% lower than the values obtained in this study (Fig. S10 and S11; Supporting information  
198 S1 - section 4). Indeed, some cited measurements there (e.g., 0.5-1.1 m) are dubious at best given  
199 HiRISE resolution (0.25 m/pix). The causes for this large disparity are less clear, nevertheless we  
200 note that in this case the measurement locations were not randomized, and that in some of the areas  
201 the spatial distribution of the bedforms is not uniform. These two factors may complicate the  
202 obtention of representative values from a few tens of scattered measurements.

203 Other potential sources of uncertainty are the elevation values reported for each site, which  
204 are used to derive the atmospheric pressure. We sampled the MOLA elevations at the centroid  
205 point of the largest bedform patch mapped in each area. However, previous works do not refer the  
206 sampling scheme or location where elevation values were collected. Therefore, in areas where the  
207 HiRISE footprints cover regions with higher elevation gradients (mainly in the Tharsis region) we  
208 can have elevation differences between our values and previous surveys of more than 2 km. This  
209 happens in four of the areas analyzed by Lorenz et al. (2014) (Fig. S11b).

210 We found several lines of evidence which support that Tharsis bedforms form a distinct  
211 population, apart from the large dark-toned ripples found elsewhere on Mars: a) as noted by  
212 Lapotre et al. (2021), we found that Tharsis bedforms have higher albedos (Fig. S12); b) we found  
213 that they have distinct thermal inertia (Putzig and Mellon, 2007) and dust cover index signatures  
214 (Ruff and Christensen, 2002), denoting lower thermal inertias (possibly associated with finer  
215 materials) and higher dust content/coverage (Fig. S13); c) as noted by others, Tharsis bedforms  
216 form unique patterns (Fig. S14) such as honeycomb or reticulate patterns (Bridges et al., 2010;  
217 Lorenz et al., 2014); and d) are in most cases associated with extensive mantling units, while large  
218 ripples outside Tharsis are typically found overlaying dark dunes (see Supporting information S1

219 - section 5 for details). These distinctive characteristics suggest that the two sets of bedforms  
 220 should be considered separately when evaluating bedform-formation mechanisms.

221 The compiled data confirms the existence of a decrease of wavelength with increasing  
 222 atmospheric density for the large dark-toned ripples (Fig. 3). Only five areas (~7%) deviate from  
 223 this general tendency (Supporting information S1 - section 5 and Fig. S15), corresponding to cases  
 224 where: a) sand sheets occupy a significant percentage of the mapped areas, suggesting the presence  
 225 of coarse and/or poorly sorted sediments; and b) where dust devil tracks are visible covering the  
 226 bedforms, suggesting limited migration/activity. These outliers are not included in the fits done to  
 227 evaluate the proposed models, but their existence highlights two points: the accuracy and  
 228 consistency of the measurements and the need to select comparable dune settings, as differences  
 229 in grain size and sorting influence the wavelength of the bedforms.  
 230



231 **Figure 3.** Relation between bedforms wavelength and Martian atmospheric density. The same data  
 232 is shown in two different plots: a) highlighting the linear inverse relation proposed by Lorenz et  
 233 al. (2014) and b) comparing with the models proposed by Lapotre et al. (2016; 2021), the gray area  
 234 represents the maximum range of atmospheric densities on Mars while the cyan line represents the  
 235 density of Earth's atmosphere. Black lines represent the best fitted models for each dataset,  
 236 computed using the average wavelengths for each site (linear models in a) and power laws in b);  
 237 the  $R^2$  values in b) were computed in the log space). The golden line represents Lapotre et al.  
 238 (2016) empirical relationship where transport saturation length is taken as that of fluvial bedload,  
 239

240 while the green line corresponds to a transport saturation length for aeolian saltation (Lapotre et  
241 al., 2021). A similar plot that includes the datasets used in previous studies is shown in Fig. S19.

242

243 The model obtained by fitting previous datasets which takes into account the bedload  
244 transport saturation length (Lapotre et al., 2016) predicts significantly lower wavelengths and a  
245 different scaling to the one we derived from our dataset. Conversely, our data for the dark-toned  
246 large ripples overlaps the predictions of the wind-drag model that uses the saltation transport  
247 saturation length, with a best fitted power law with  $\sim 2/3$  scaling.

248 Tharsis data presents higher scattering, particularly for lower wavelengths where data  
249 points seem to converge towards the dark-toned ripple dataset. Due to the discrepancies found  
250 between our results and those of Lorenz et al. (2014), we note that the Tharsis data compiled in  
251 this study does not overlap or follow a similar scaling to the wind-drag model that considers a  
252 bedload transport saturation length (Fig. 3 and S19). Instead, the best fitted power law ( $R^2=0.42$ )  
253 has the same scaling ( $\sim 2/3$ ) of the model that uses the saltation transport saturation length.

254 The compiled data suggests that the mechanism that limits the size of large ripples on Mars  
255 is dependent on the atmospheric density. Overall, we observe that all our data are bounded by the  
256 two saturation length scaling laws, supporting the hypothesis that the equilibrium size of large  
257 martian ripples is controlled by an aerodynamic mechanism. The scaling laws for saturation length  
258 arise from idealized representations of transport in unimodal sediments. As previously discussed,  
259 the grain size distribution of the sediments on the Tharsis bedforms is probably more complex,  
260 which may contribute to the observed differences between Tharsis and non-Tharsis bedforms.

261 Even so, in accordance with previous studies (Lorenz, 2020; Lorenz et al., 2014) we notice  
262 that linear functions (which imply that  
263  $\lambda \propto 1/\rho_f$ ) also provide robust fits to the data ( $R^2=0.79$  and 0.73 for the dark large ripples and  
264 Tharsis bedforms, respectively). In the case of the large ripples, both inverse and power law  
265 functions explain  $\sim 80\%$  of the variance. This means that, strictly from a numeric point of view,  
266 we cannot discriminate what is the best model to fit the data. As previously mentioned, to fully  
267 test the impact ripple hypothesis we would need to consider the wind velocities at each site,  
268 something that could be done using climate model predictions.

269 Finally, the wavelengths of the larger bedforms (megaripples and TARs) present a large  
270 dispersion (Fig. 3B), not showing an obvious relation with any of the scaling laws. Linear or power

271 law models do not produce a meaningful fit to the data ( $R^2=0.03$ ). This suggests that at a global  
272 scale these bedforms do not form a homogeneous set and are probably not representative of the  
273 same boundary conditions (i.e., they likely formed with different grain size distributions, or under  
274 differing atmospheric conditions). Nonetheless, we cannot exclude the possibility that including  
275 TARs and megaripples in a same class may be flawed, especially since different degrees of  
276 mobility under present day winds have been described for the two sets of bedforms (Chojnacki et  
277 al., 2021; Silvestro et al., 2020).

278 For the dark-toned large ripples the degree of agreement between the global measurements  
279 and the predictions of the scaling relationship of Lapotre et al. (2021) (where saturation length is  
280 taken as that of aeolian saltation) is remarkable. Particularly if we consider that we are using a  
281 “static” average atmospheric density, which is merely a function of elevation and does not consider  
282 regional and seasonal atmospheric density variations. On the other hand, we cannot exclude that  
283 the density may just be one of the factors influencing the bedforms dimensions. As suggested by  
284 Lorenz (2020), wind speed at a global scale may increase with elevation creating a more complex  
285 interplay between density, wind speed and resulting bedform size.

286

## 287 **5 Conclusions**

288 This survey provides improved measurements to evaluate the mechanisms that set the size  
289 of bedform on Mars. We show that previous works used biased measurements, particularly for the  
290 bedforms located in the Tharsis region. We investigated the uniqueness of the bedforms located in  
291 this region, concluding that these bedforms form a distinct population and should be analyzed  
292 separately from the more common dark-toned large ripples that cover dunes outside Tharsis.

293 Our survey covers a larger range of elevations than previous works, and for the first time  
294 provides full wavelength mapping of extensive regions. Overall, our results are consistent with the  
295 predictions of the “wind-drag” hypothesis, favoring the model that considers a saltation transport  
296 saturation length. Still, the compiled morphometric data is not enough to refute the impact ripple  
297 hypothesis, as that would probably require the integration of variable wind velocities for each site.

298 The compiled dataset corroborates the existence of a robust relation between the  
299 wavelength of large dark-toned ripples and atmospheric density. Therefore, this new survey  
300 complements and helps to validate the main concept introduced in Lapotre et al. (2016): that paleo-

301 atmospheric density can be inferred for Mars by looking at the aeolian sedimentary record,  
302 providing an important tool to probe the evolution of the planet's environment.

303

304 **Acknowledgments**

305 This research was supported by CITEUC (UID/Multi/00611/2021&POCI-01- 0145-FEDER-  
306 006922) and by FCT grant CEECIND/02981/2017. M. C. and S.S. were funded by NASA Mars  
307 Data Analysis Program Grant 80NSSC20K1066. We thank the Laboratory for Advanced  
308 Computing at University of Coimbra for providing computing resources.

309 We acknowledge the valuable comments and suggestions made by Mathieu Lapotre and two  
310 anonymous reviewers to an earlier version of this work. We thank Rob Sullivan for insights on the  
311 morphodynamics of impact ripples.

312

313

314 **Open Research**

315 HiRISE images used in this work are publicly available at the Planetary Data System  
316 (<https://hirise-pds.lpl.arizona.edu/PDS/>) where details can be obtained at McEwen et al. (2007).  
317 The morphometric database compiled in this study is available at  
318 <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21064657>.

319

320

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- 461

1

2                   *Geophysical Research Letters*

3                   Supporting Information for

4                   **Constraining the mechanisms of aeolian bedform formation on Mars through a**  
5                   **global morphometric survey: Supporting information S1**6                   David A. Vaz<sup>1</sup>, Simone Silvestro<sup>2,3</sup>, Matthew Chojnacki<sup>4</sup> and David C. A. Silva<sup>1</sup>7                   <sup>1</sup>Centre for Earth and Space Research of the University of Coimbra, Observatório Geofísico e Astronómico da  
8                   Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.9                   <sup>2</sup>INAF Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte, Napoli, Italia.10                   <sup>3</sup>SETI Institute, Carl Sagan Center, Mountain View, CA, USA.11                   <sup>4</sup>Planetary Science Institute, Lakewood, CO, USA.

12

13                   **Contents of this file**

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15                   Text S1

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17                   Tables S1 to S7

18

19                   **Introduction**20                   This file includes a detailed explanation of the applied methods, auxiliary data,  
21                   supplementary figures and tables.

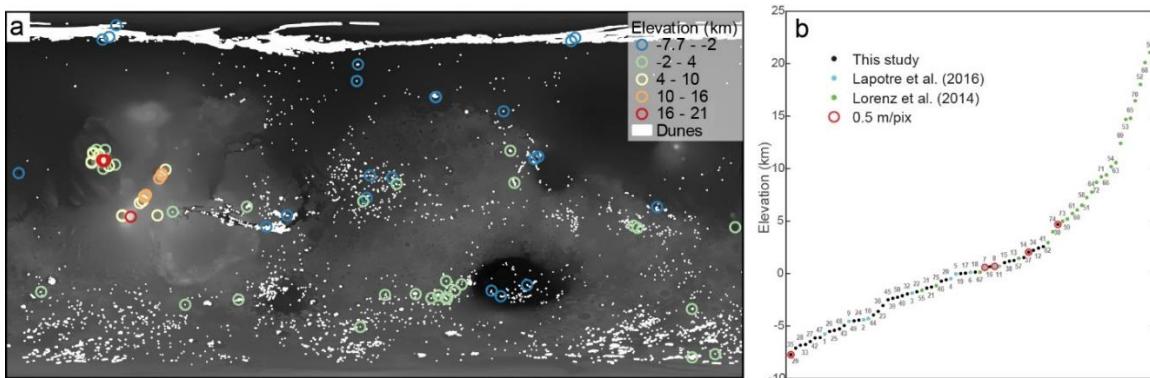
22

23                   **Text S1.**24                   **1. DATA AND GLOBAL BEFORM SURVEYS**25                   To investigate the relation between atmospheric pressure (as function of elevation)  
26                   and the wavelength of Martian large ripples we analyze a total of 75 HiRISE images (Table  
27                   S1), some of which were previously surveyed by other authors. Namely, the first 11 areas

28 are the same reported by Lapotre et al. (2016), while the last 25 areas are the same analyzed  
29 by Lorenz et al. (2014) in the Tharsis region. We provide a complete mapping of the  
30 HiRISE images, extending the elevation coverage (Fig. S1b) and filling the gaps of  
31 previous works.

32 The new areas were selected based on the presence of dark-toned dunes or sand sheets  
33 which are covered by large ripples. Besides the Tharsis cluster that corresponds to the  
34 Lorenz et al. (2014) dataset, the selected areas are scattered across Mars surface (Fig. S1a).  
35 We primarily use full resolution HiRISE data (0.25 m/pix), although 0.5 m/pix images were  
36 used in five areas (this coarser spatial resolution is still enough to identify and map large  
37 ripples).

38



40 Fig. S1 – Global map and elevation distribution of the study areas. a) Location of the study areas, the  
41 global distribution of dune fields is shown in white (Fenton, 2020; Hayward et al., 2013). b) Elevations  
42 of the mapped areas, the different colors highlight the areas which were analyzed in previous studies  
43 (Lapotre et al., 2016; Lorenz et al., 2014); the numbers next to each dot correspond to the IDs in Table  
44 1; areas where lower resolution 50 cm/pixel data were used are also noted. In this study we extend the  
45 sampled elevation range and provide more continuous coverage.

46  
47 Table S1 – List of surveyed areas, including their location and spatial resolution. A full record of the  
48 information compiled in this study can be found at  
49 <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.21064657>.

50

Area ID	Image	Spatial resolution (m/pix)	Location	Previous studies
1	ESP_027864_2295_RED	0.25	Acidalia Mensa	Lapotre et al. 2016
2	ESP_018854_1755_RED	0.25	Gale crater	Lapotre et al. 2016
3	ESP_034909_1755_RED	0.25	Juventae Chasma	Lapotre et al. 2016
4	ESP_025042_1375_RED	0.25	SE of Yaonis Regio	Lapotre et al. 2016
5	ESP_011421_1300_RED	0.25	Hellespontus	Lapotre et al. 2016
6	ESP_041987_1340_RED	0.25	Proctor crater	Lapotre et al. 2016
7	ESP_011909_1320_RED	0.50	SE of Proctor crater	Lapotre et al. 2016
8	ESP_024502_1305_RED	0.50	SW of Proctor crater	Lapotre et al. 2016
9	PSP_001970_1655_RED	0.25	Coprates Chasma	Lapotre et al. 2016
10	ESP_018011_2565_RED	0.25	North Polar erg	Lapotre et al. 2016
11	ESP_039955_1875_RED	0.25	S of Nili Patera	Lapotre et al. 2016
12	ESP_013790_1035_RED	0.25	Planum Australe	
13	ESP_049439_1165_RED	0.25	Sisyphi Planum	
14	ESP_023913_1275_RED	0.25	Thaumasia	
15	ESP_021509_1325_RED	0.25	Kaiser Crater	
16	ESP_048154_1255_RED	0.25	S Eridania	
17	ESP_022320_1335_RED	0.25	Terra Sirenum	
18	ESP_022422_1300_RED	0.25	Ogygis Undae	
19	ESP_032941_1310_RED	0.25	Noachis Terra	
20	ESP_019570_1390_RED	0.25	North of Rabe Crater	
21	PSP_009758_2030_RED	0.25	Baldet Crater	
22	ESP_037082_1870_RED	0.25	S Arabia Terra	
23	ESP_018500_2000_RED	0.25	Crater NE of Jezero	
24	ESP_045307_2580_RED	0.25	Mare Boreum	
25	PSP_010413_1920_RED	0.25	Pettit Crater	
26	ESP_055318_2290_RED	0.25	Lyot Crater	
27	ESP_037201_2450_RED	0.25	Lomonosov Crater	
28	ESP_024237_1315_RED	0.25	Hellas Planitia	
29	ESP_022668_1340_RED	0.25	Hellas Planitia	
30	ESP_028410_1710_RED	0.50	Noctis Labyrinthus	
31	ESP_034274_1780_RED	0.25	Meridiani Planum	
32	PSP_001513_1655_RED	0.25	Gusev Crater	
33	ESP_025054_1370_RED	0.25	Hellas Planitia	
34	ESP_017610_1730_RED	0.25	Noctis Labyrinthus	
35	PSP_008097_1450_RED	0.50	Hellas Basin	
36	ESP_028856_1710_RED	0.25	Ganges Chasma	
37	ESP_022151_1660_RED	0.50	Crater West of Herschel	
38	PSP_002860_1650_RED	0.25	Herschel Crater	
39	ESP_035948_1900_RED	0.25	Arabia Terra	
40	ESP_043742_1800_RED	0.25	Meridiani Planum	
41	ESP_040058_1020_RED	0.25	Ultima Lingula	
42	ESP_062177_2370_RED	0.25	Kunowsky Crater	
43	ESP_062168_2585_RED	0.25	Mare Boreum	

44	ESP_063282_2225_RED	0.25	Renaudot Crater	
45	ESP_057799_1910_RED	0.25	Arabia Terra	
46	ESP_058788_1320_RED	0.25	Asimov Crater	
47	PSP_009721_2370_RED	0.25	Kunowsky Crater	
48	ESP_017426_2570_RED	0.25	Scandia Cavi	
49	ESP_018427_2640_RED	0.25	Mare Boreum	
50	ESP_061119_1990_RED	0.25	North of Jezero Crater	
51	PSP_005387_1935_RED	0.25	Ascraeus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
52	PSP_005032_1985_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
53	PSP_006811_1910_RED	0.25	Ascraeus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
54	PSP_002249_1805_RED	0.25	Pavonis Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
55	ESP_011928_2025_RED	0.25	NW of Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
56	PSP_008460_1980_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
57	PSP_005546_1960_RED	0.25	E of Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
58	ESP_013655_1710_RED	0.25	Arsia Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
59	PSP_005441_1970_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
60	ESP_012310_1715_RED	0.25	Arsia Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
61	PSP_002118_2015_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
62	PSP_003476_1940_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
63	PSP_001642_1895_RED	0.25	Ascraeus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
64	PSP_005783_1775_RED	0.25	Pavonis Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
65	PSP_004754_1915_RED	0.25	Ascraeus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
66	PSP_004109_2010_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
67	ESP_013998_2035_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
68	PSP_005111_1985_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
69	PSP_005084_1810_RED	0.25	Pavonis Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
70	PSP_008341_1705_RED	0.25	Arsia Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
71	PSP_010780_1805_RED	0.25	Pavonis Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
72	PSP_010213_1785_RED	0.25	Pavonis Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
73	PSP_005322_1955_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
74	PSP_008803_1980_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014
75	ESP_014341_2035_RED	0.25	Olympus Mons	Lorenz et al. 2014

51

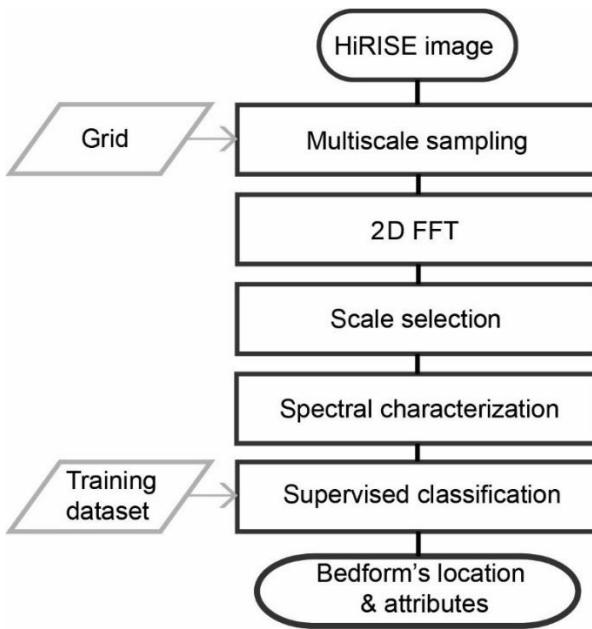
## 52 2. RIPPLE PATTERN MAPPING AND WAVELENGTH SURVEY

53 Different methods have been proposed to automatically map aeolian bedforms from  
 54 HiRISE images. Previous studies mapped bedform crests, producing a set of polylines that  
 55 can be used to assess bedform trends and lengths (Foroutan & Zimbelman, 2017; Vaz &  
 56 Silvestro, 2014). These outputs can be used to study bedforms' spatial variations and  
 57 patterns, however when applied at a dune field scale they generate a large set of crestlines,  
 58 requiring subsequent spatial integration/generalization (Vaz et al., 2017). Furthermore,  
 59 given the high number of ripples that can be present on one image, the size of the output

60 datasets may be of the same order of magnitude of the image itself (a few gigabits), which  
61 complicates the study of these bedforms at a global level.

62 Here we address these limitations by applying a new approach to Mars data for  
63 detection and quantification of bedform metrics, namely wavelength. We adapted the 2D  
64 Fast Fourier Transform (2D FFT) approach described by Voulgaris and Morin (2008) to  
65 study seabed bedforms, implementing a multiscale search scheme that allows the  
66 identification and characterization of large ripples and TARs (Transverse Aeolian Ridge)  
67 at different spatial scales. Figure S2 illustrates the adopted procedure.

68



69

70 **Fig. S2 - Flowchart with the main processing steps used to map and characterize large ripples and**  
71 **TARs using HiRISE images. See text for details.**

72

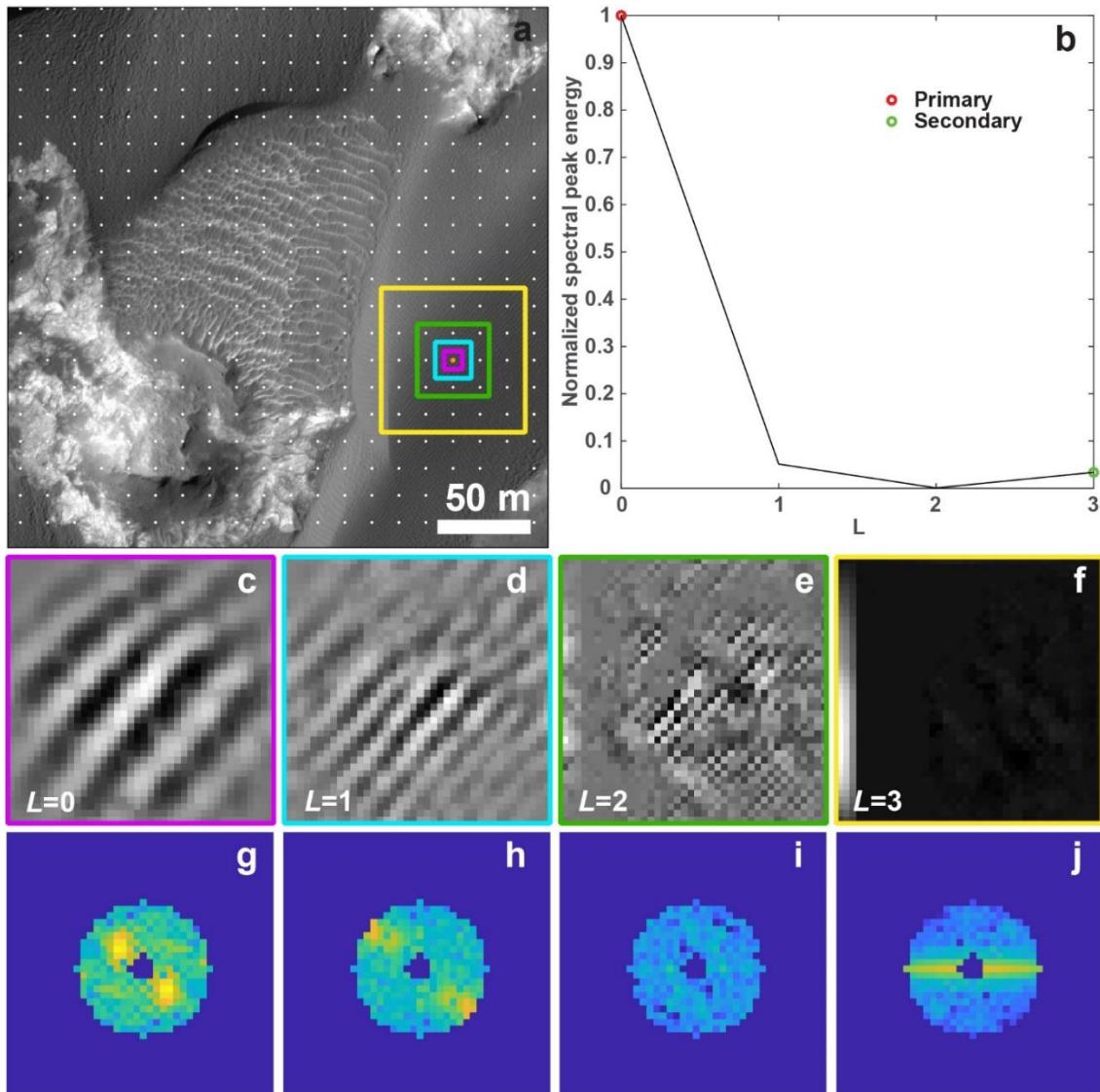
### 73 Multiscale sampling

74 The technique we use to map the location of the bedforms and extract precise  
75 wavelength measurements begins with the creation of a regular grid which overlaps the  
76 HiRISE scene. A grid spacing of 15 m is used, so that we guarantee that each grid note  
77 includes several large ripples crests (~3 m spacing between crests). We then sample the  
78 image content around the grid nodes, with different spatial resolutions and window sizes  
79 (Fig. S3a). HiRISE images are stored in JP2000 image file format, therefore we take

80 advantage of the wavelet-based compression algorithm that is used in this format  
81 (Taubman & Marcellin, 2002) to sample the image at different scales (Fig. S3c-f). A dyadic  
82 sampling scheme is implemented, where the spatial resolution ( $r_s$ ) at each scale/reduction  
83 level ( $L$ ) is given as a function of the images' spatial resolution ( $r_i$ ):

84  $r_s = r_i * 2^L$  (Eq. 1)

85 This implies that the extent of the sampled area and the examined wavelength at each  
86 scale also increases proportionally to  $2^L$ , while the dimensions of the sampled areas are  
87 constant. For instance, when  $L=0$  the band-pass filter that is later applied in the spectral  
88 domain preserves wavelengths in the range 1-5 m, while when  $L=1$  the range is 2-10 m  
89 (Fig. S3g-j). The only required input is the maximum wavelength of analysis, which is  
90 derived from a preliminary inspection of the image and that corresponds to the estimated  
91 maximum TAR spacing. This parameter is used to define the maximum  $L$ , controlling the  
92 maximum scale of analysis.



93

94 Fig. S3 – Example of the adopted sampling scheme and scale selection procedure (Area 2:  
95 ESP\_018854\_1755\_RED). a) A grid with 15 m spacing is created and for each node the image is  
96 sampled at different spatial resolutions and extents (the colored outlines correspond to the extent of  
97 the sampled areas for each  $L$ , c-f). b) normalized peak energy (derived from g-j), the identification of  
98 the primary and secondary local maxima allows the selection of the best scales of analysis, i.e. the ones  
99 with more relevant and sharpest content. c-f) sampled datasets which include the filtering pre-  
100 processing described in the following section, note the smoother appearance of the corner areas created  
101 by the imposed circular taper function. Large ripples with straight crests are discernible when  $0 \leq L \leq 2$ ,  
102 while for  $L=3$  the albedo variation due to dune topography is the only recognizable feature. g-j) shifted  
103 2D FFT spectra (values were stretched with a log transformation) for each  $L$ , a band pass filter is used  
104 to subset the target wavelengths at each scale. At  $L=0$  a strong peak is present, denoting the preferential  
105 trend and periodicity of the large ripples. The maximum energy at each scale is used to select the best  
106 scale/s of analysis (b).

107

108 **2D FFT analysis and scale selection**

109       The objective of the described sampling scheme is to implement the spectral  
110      characterization (which provides the characterization of the bedforms, for instance their  
111      trend and wavelength) in the most suitable scale of analysis, the same way as a mapper  
112      would use different zoom levels (i.e. different scales of analysis) to map ripples or larger  
113      TARs. To remove long wavelength components (e.g. created by dune topography) and  
114      increase the image contrast we subtract top-hat and bottom-hat (Soille, 2002) filtered  
115      versions of the input areas (a circular structuring element with radius 8 is used). To reduce  
116      the artifacts caused by the non-isotropic sampling (the sampled areas have square shapes)  
117      we multiply the matrix by a circular taper function (computed as the normalized Euclidean  
118      distance to the central pixel). Figures S3c-f show the results of these operations, which  
119      prepare the data for the subsequent spectral analysis.

120       A 2D spectrum is computed for each filtered area/scale using the FFT. A band-pass  
121      filter is applied in the spectral domain, which subsets the analyzed wavelength range on  
122      each scale. The same scaling function described in Eq. 1 is used to define the target  
123      wavelength ranges, starting at a range of 1-5 m for  $L=0$  (Fig. S3g-j). Power spectrums (the  
124      square of the transform magnitudes; Gonzalez et al., 2004) are computed and the spectral  
125      peak energies ( $S_L$ ) are collected for each scale (Voulgaris & Morin, 2008). This is the  
126      parameter used to choose the most relevant scale (i.e. the scale with the sharpest periodic  
127      features), which is found by identifying the local maxima of the peak spectral energy across  
128      scales (Fig. S3b). In certain situations, different sets of bedforms with different trends and  
129      wavelengths overlap in the same areas, which translates in the existence of a secondary  
130      maxima. If present, the two local maxima are recorded, while if only one is present the  
131      secondary scale is set as  $\text{argmax}(S_L)-1$ . No secondary maxima is derived when  $\text{argmax}(S_L)$   
132      is one.

133

### 134      **Spectral and textural characterization**

135       The objective of this processing step is twofold: 1) measure the trend and wavelength  
136      of the bedforms, and 2) assemble a sparse set of descriptors that summarize image  
137      proprieties and textures, to be used in the following classification step. Table S1 lists the  
138      computed parameters and detail how they were computed while Fig. S4 show some  
139      examples. The same descriptors are computed for the two selected scales and stored in a

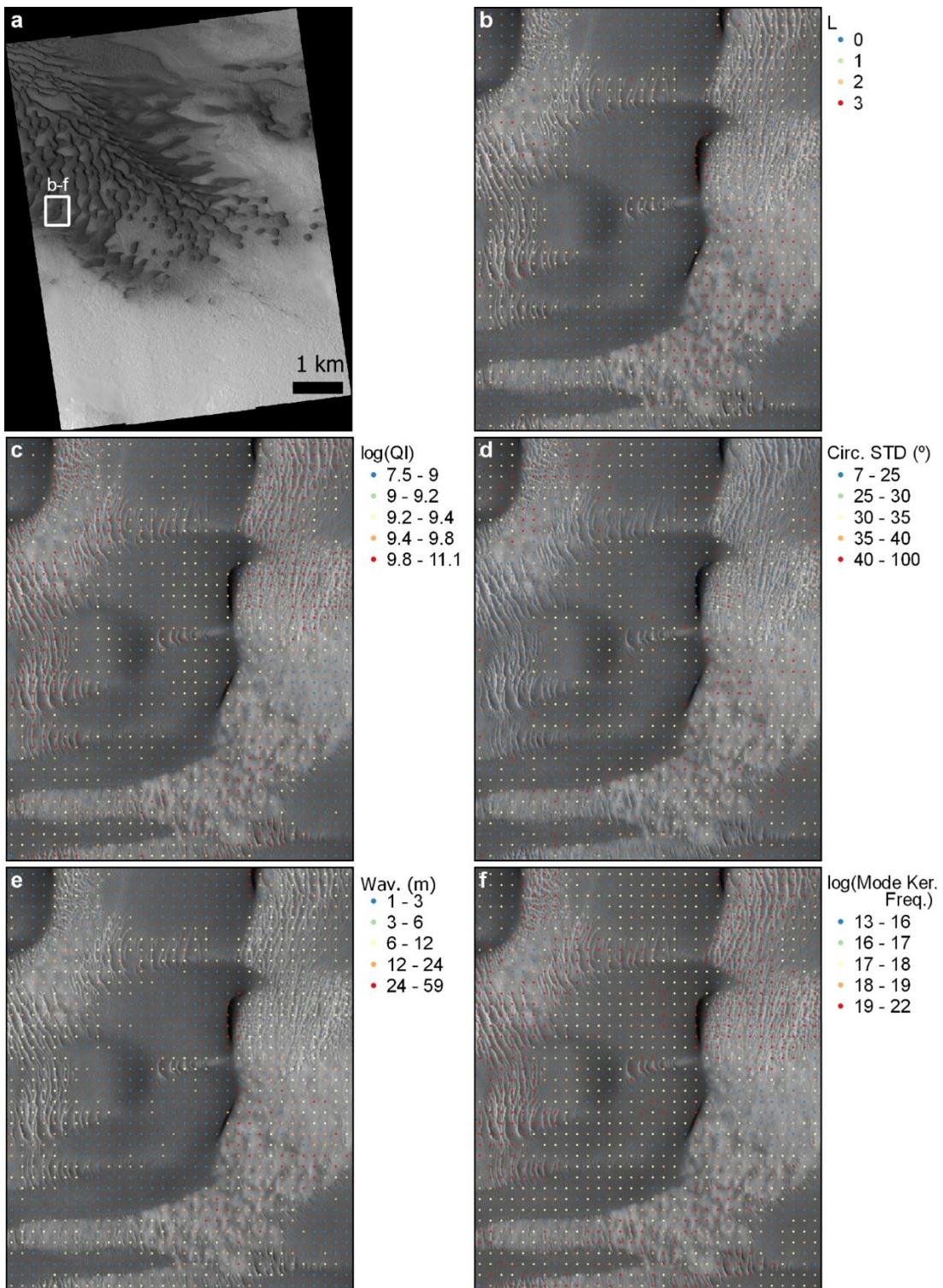
140 database. We adopted the same approach described by Voulgaris and Morin (2008) to  
 141 measure the wavelength and the trend of the bedforms. Additionally, we apply a kernel-  
 142 based technique to analyze the circular distribution derived from the spectral analysis in  
 143 order to parameterize bimodal circular distributions (Vaz et al., 2015), which is of  
 144 relevance since the trend of large ripples may not be unidirectional.

145

146 **Table S2 – List of parameters compiled for the identified primary and secondary scales.**

Description	Descriptors	Details	References
Selected scale/reduction level	$L$ (Fig. S4b)	See previous section for details	
Normalized peak energy	$S_L$	e.g., Fig. S3b	
Azimuth	Trend of the spectral peak	Sub-pixel interpolation using the neighborhood of the maximum peak	(Voulgaris & Morin, 2008)
Wavelength	Wavelength of the spectral peak (Fig. S4e)	Sub-pixel interpolation using the neighborhood of the maximum peak	(Voulgaris & Morin, 2008)
Average trend and wavelength	Mean vector trend, circular standard deviation (Fig. S4d), circular skewness and kurtosis.  Wavelength weighted average and standard deviation.	Spectral energies are used as weighting factor.	
Directional modes	Trend of the primary and secondary modes. Primary mode kernel frequency (Fig. S4f) and kernel frequency ratio.	Spectral energies are used as weighting factor and a kernel window of 20° is used to create the circular kernel function (see Vaz et al., 2015 for details).	(Vaz et al., 2015)
Spectral proprieties	Maximum peak energy. Peak and quality indices (Fig. S4c).	Provide textural context and can be regarded as proxies for bedform/image sharpness	(Voulgaris & Morin, 2008)
Lambert albedo	Lambert albedo (I/F) average and standard deviation	Computed using the scaling factors and offsets obtained from the HiRISE label files	

147



148

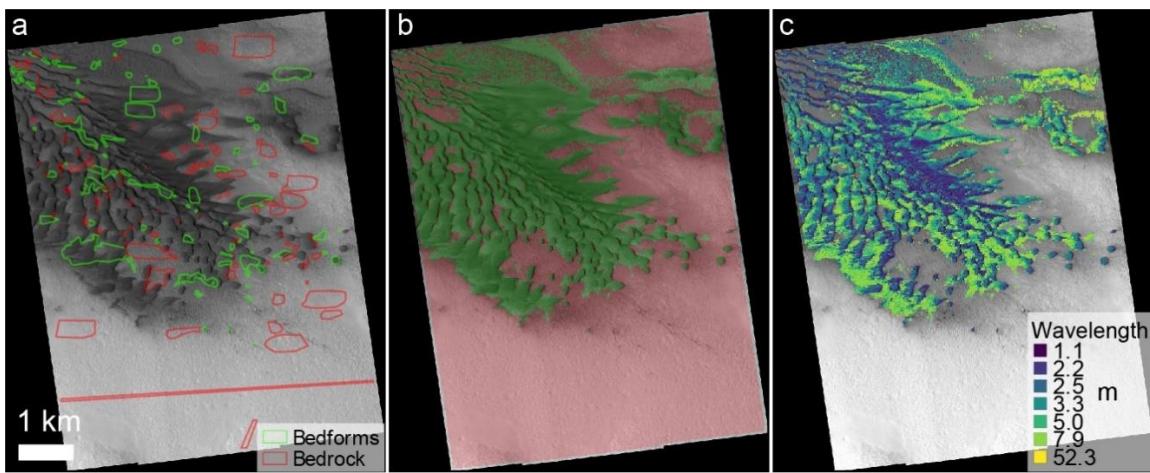
149 Fig. S4 – Examples of pattern descriptors used in the classification process (see Table S2 for details  
 150 and Fig. S5 for the classification outputs). a) HiRISE image (Area 1: ESP\_027864\_2295\_RED). b)  
 151 Selected primary scale. c) Quality index (stretched using a log scaling). d) Circular standard deviation.  
 152 e) Spectral peak wavelength. f) Kernel frequency of the main mode (stretched using a log scaling).  
 153

154 **Supervised classification**

155 Bedforms are typically scattered covering different types of surfaces (e.g. bedrock,  
156 regolith), and do not usually form a continuous patch. Therefore, we need to discriminate  
157 two classes: targeted bedforms (large ripples, megaripples and TARs) and bedrock  
158 (including slipfaces and other long-wavelength or shadowed terrains). To achieve this, we  
159 implemented a supervised classification using artificial neural networks (ANN). We use a  
160 feedforward ANN architecture with one input, one hidden (38 nodes) and one output layer  
161 (two nodes). We use hyperbolic tangent transfer functions and conjugate gradient  
162 backpropagation (Moller, 1993) to train the networks.

163 All the fields listed in Table S2 that correspond to azimuthal information are excluded  
164 from the classification procedure (using them would result in directional bias). The  
165 remaining parameters for the primary and secondary scales are normalized (min-max  
166 normalization) to serve as inputs to the ANN classifier. The training datasets were digitized  
167 for each area using QGIS and a random partition (train, test, and validation datasets) is  
168 performed. Fig. S5 show examples of training data and output final classification.

169



171 **Fig. S5 - Classification process overview.** a) Labeled training data (Area 1: ESP\_027864\_2295\_RED).  
172 b) Output classification (accuracy of 96.6%). c) Measured bedform wavelength.

173

174 **Accuracy Assessment**

175 To assess the performance of the described technique we need to evaluate two types  
176 of accuracies: 1) classification accuracy: how well can we identify and map bedforms?;  
177 and 2) wavelength accuracy: can we retrieve accurate wavelength measurements?

178       The first question is addressed by creating confusion matrices and computing the  
179       overall accuracy and kappa index to evaluate the classification results. Overall, the training  
180       data corresponds to 7.5% of total mapped area, with a prevalence (percentage of bedform  
181       class in the training dataset) of 59%. The overall classification accuracy is 93.7% (kappa  
182       index of 0.87) which demonstrates the excellent performance of the proposed technique  
183       (Table S3).

184

185       **Table S3 – Accuracy of the supervised classification with two classes: bedforms (large ripples and**  
186       **TARs) and bedrock (other non-bedforms features). Overall accuracy ranges from 0 to 100%, with**  
187       **100% denoting a perfect classification. Kappa index range from 0 to 1, where 0 corresponds to a**  
188       **random non-agreement case. Prevalence is the percentage of training data that correspond to the**  
189       **positive case (bedform class), ideally it should be ~50%. N is the number of mapped grid nodes. The**  
190       **training dataset corresponds to 7.5% of the total mapped area.**

191

Area ID	Accuracy (%)	Kappa index	Prevalence (%)	N	Train %
1	96.6	0.93	58.1	20923	10.0
2	98.0	0.87	90.7	56423	15.9
3	97.8	0.93	19.6	19659	7.3
4	92.5	0.83	66.2	28902	14.6
5	92.3	0.84	63.8	39844	10.7
6	88.0	0.73	68.6	29173	17.3
7	94.3	0.86	28.1	14635	3.7
8	96.1	0.91	66.3	60308	20.0
9	93.4	0.81	79.6	52435	16.7
10	96.0	0.91	68.5	9534	2.6
11	93.4	0.87	47.5	21168	6.8
12	94.1	0.86	71.4	16189	3.0
13	94.5	0.87	30.8	6779	5.8
14	90.2	0.80	50.7	13724	14.2
15	94.7	0.87	29.0	15132	5.1
16	92.9	0.85	60.1	11059	5.2
17	99.2	0.95	91.4	29229	13.2
18	91.3	0.81	37.1	31141	11.6
19	94.8	0.90	44.6	31954	15.5
20	90.2	0.80	43.3	46403	22.8
21	95.0	0.84	17.0	17445	3.3
22	88.7	0.76	33.0	14769	8.5
23	98.0	0.96	46.2	19334	6.1
24	96.1	0.92	63.7	23035	5.7
25	94.8	0.88	67.0	39433	9.7
26	98.1	0.96	66.5	22238	9.5
27	94.8	0.89	57.4	8663	1.7

28	94.4	0.89	44.3	11122	5.2
29	89.9	0.70	17.4	15666	7.6
30	94.1	0.52	91.8	45895	6.0
31	97.0	0.94	45.5	13917	3.9
32	92.3	0.72	81.5	28053	5.2
33	87.8	0.75	54.9	27698	8.5
34	95.3	0.89	71.0	13885	6.0
35	85.3	0.71	47.6	77548	12.9
36	92.6	0.76	83.1	15699	7.0
37	93.5	0.87	45.7	13657	12.0
38	90.4	0.80	35.9	11340	3.2
39	95.3	0.91	47.0	23407	8.4
40	97.3	0.95	53.2	38685	14.1
41	94.6	0.88	67.4	4484	3.0
42	92.1	0.84	55.3	18859	7.8
43	98.7	0.96	18.5	14804	7.1
44	93.1	0.83	27.2	17261	9.8
45	96.5	0.90	78.6	19742	16.3
46	93.3	0.75	86.4	31039	11.6
47	92.0	0.82	65.4	31130	7.8
48	93.9	0.87	37.1	43224	11.8
49	94.5	0.88	64.4	52921	7.3
50	95.2	0.90	64.4	20660	9.2
51	91.8	0.72	81.2	32572	6.8
52	96.4	0.8	12.9	4926	1.4
53	90.4	0.8	34.8	11924	4.3
54	96.2	0.9	17.2	4521	3.6
55	93.7	0.7	84.4	14067	6.6
56	99.5	0.8	1.4	13800	5.8
57	90.3	0.8	59.2	41672	10.4
58	98.9	1.0	16.4	28720	26.1
59	90.6	0.8	70.4	15438	3.3
60	97.7	0.9	81.0	25090	6.8
61	90.5	0.8	70.8	16495	6.1
62	89.4	0.8	67.3	11844	2.5
63	97.8	0.9	27.9	10764	3.1
64	98.0	0.9	17.0	5810	3.4
65	90.8	0.8	38.0	36124	10.8
66	98.2	1.0	36.6	5438	2.1
67	92.6	0.5	92.8	49404	15.9
68	89.1	0.8	56.1	5046	0.9
69	99.1	1.0	75.5	21921	4.4
70	98.0	0.9	15.1	11501	5.4
71	99.3	0.7	1.2	8536	2.9

72	96.7	0.8	10.0	3379	1.4
73	97.6	0.8	90.9	32621	8.1
74	91.1	0.7	19.4	18819	3.7
75	93.4	0.8	77.7	46119	10.9
Total	93.71	0.87	58.8	1766778	7.45

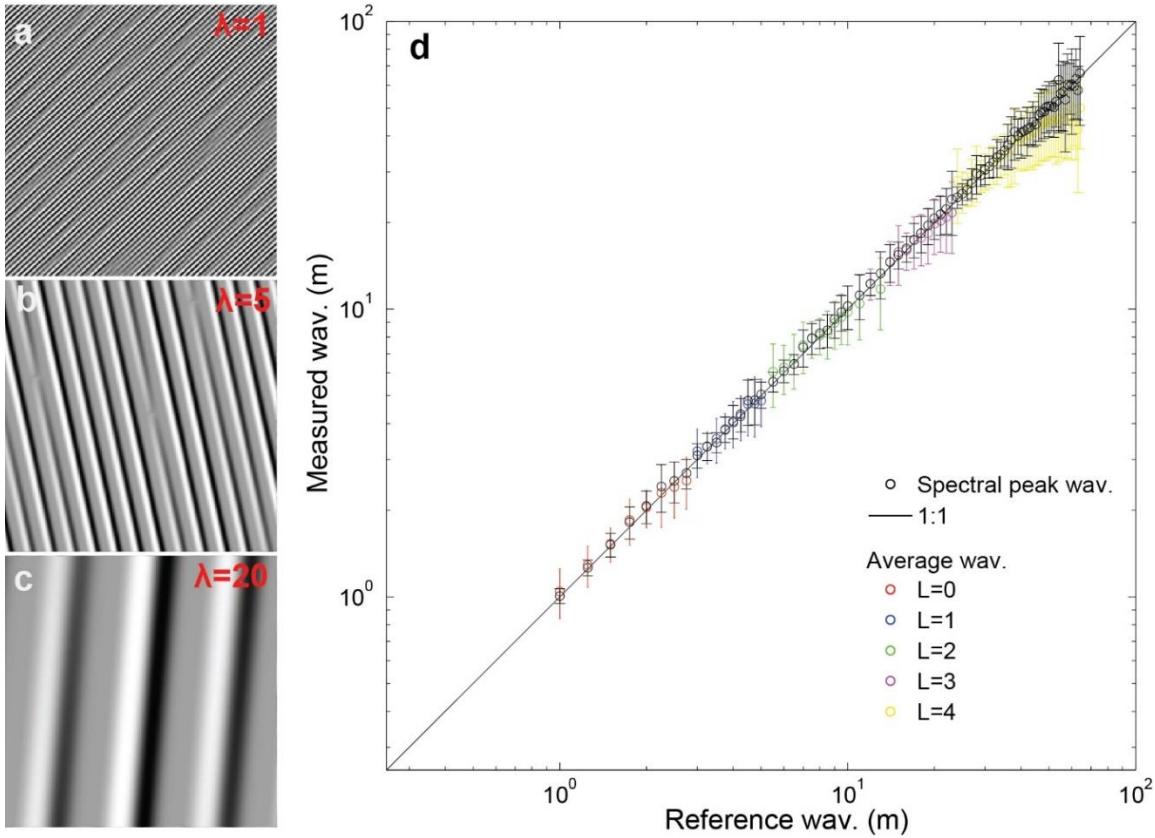
192

193 To evaluate the accuracy of the wavelength measurements we use hillshade images of  
 194 synthetic bedforms' topography, modelled with a superellipse function (Eq. 2). Transverse  
 195 bedform topography is modelled with  $n=0.4$  and  $h=\lambda/10$  ( $h$  represents the maximum height  
 196 of the bedforms and corresponds to 1/10 of the wavelength  $\lambda$ ). The length of the bedforms  
 197 is assumed to scale with wavelength ( $\lambda*50$ ) and is controlled with a longitudinal taper,  
 198 obtained with  $n=4$  and  $h=1$ .

199  $|x|^n + \left|\frac{y}{h}\right|^n = 1 \quad (\text{Eq. 2})$

200 Random azimuths allow to test the directional precision of the adopted technique. Fig.  
 201 S6a-c shows examples of the test datasets, displaying periodic bedform-like features with  
 202 different trend and spacing. In Fig. S6d we evaluate our measurements (peak and average)  
 203 for a wide range of wavelengths. Peak wavelengths provide the most accurate predictions  
 204 (average error of 3% and trend accuracy below 1°, Table S4) and present narrower  
 205 uncertainty bars. Additionally, we demonstrate the stability of the sampling and scale  
 206 selection schemes, with a regular progression of  $L$  with increasing wavelength (Fig. S6d).

207



208

209 Fig. S6 – Wavelength accuracy assessment using synthetic hillshade views of periodic bedform-like  
 210 patterns. a-c) Examples of the datasets created using random trends ( $\lambda$  corresponds to the crest spacing  
 211 in meters). d) Measured vs. modelled wavelength, the black line corresponds to a perfect agreement  
 212 case while two different wavelength estimates are shown: the spectral peak wavelength which produces  
 213 more accurate results across all scales of analysis and with smaller uncertainty bars, and the average  
 214 wavelength with larger uncertainty bars. The different scales of analysis ( $L$ ) are depicted in different  
 215 colors, note the congruent sequence of selected scales when wavelength increases.  
 216

217 **Table S4 – Wavelength percentual error and azimuth error computed using synthetic datasets (Fig.**  
 218 **S6).** We estimate wavelength errors of 3% and trend errors of less than 1°.

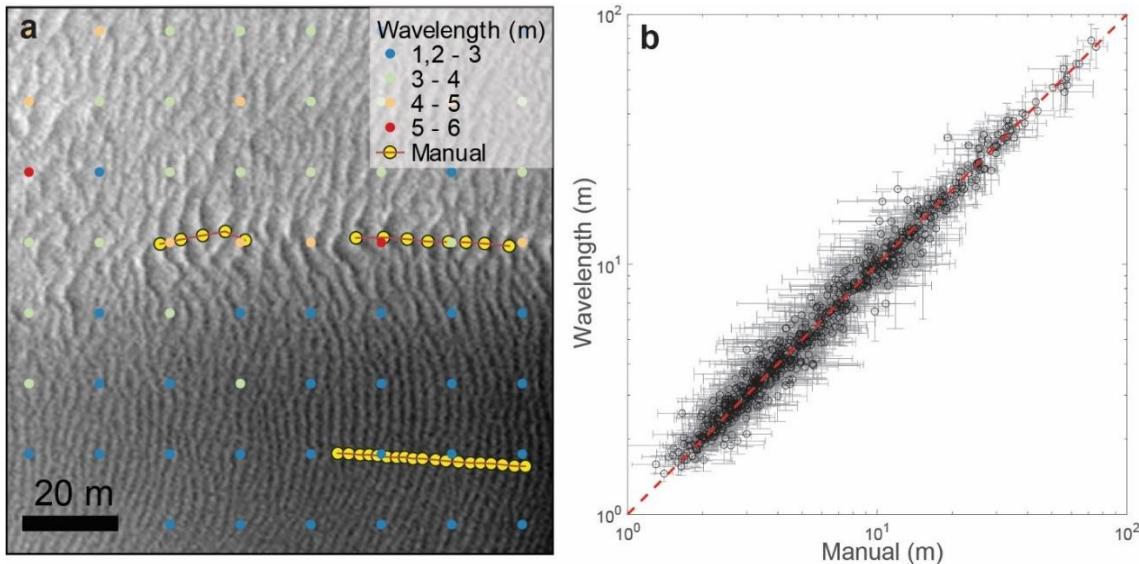
Measurement type	Wavelength percent error (average $\pm$ STD %)	Azimuth error (average $\pm$ STD °)
Spectral peak	2.7 $\pm$ 2.3	-0.1 $\pm$ 0.8
Spectral average	6.4 $\pm$ 6.9	-0.01 $\pm$ 0.6

219

220 Finally, a total of 978 reference wavelength measurements were compiled in QGIS  
 221 (e.g. Fig. S7a) and compared with our results. Fig. S7b highlights the linear response of the  
 222 mapping algorithm for a large range of values. We compute an average percentual  
 223 difference of  $-0.7 \pm 11.9\%$  (Table S5), which demonstrates that the obtained results are not

224 biased and that differences are within a standard deviation interval of  $\pm 12\%$ . Besides this  
225 detailed local assessment, section 4 presents a global comparison with previously published  
226 measurements.

227



229 Fig. S7 – Comparison of wavelength measurements. a) Example of reference wavelength  
230 measurements obtained by mapping successive bedform crests (yellow dots), the peak wavelength  
231 obtained automatically is also shown. b) automated wavelength estimates vs. manually derived  
232 measurements (manual estimates were averaged and integrated into the sampling grid using a 7.5 m  
233 spatial buffer), the red line corresponds to a 1:1 ratio.

234

235 Table S5 – Wavelength was compared for five different areas, including one with coarser spatial  
236 resolution. Overall, we estimate that the obtained wavelengths are comparable to manually derived  
237 measurements within a  $\pm 12\%$  confidence interval.

Area ID	Percent difference (average $\pm$ STD %)	N	Spatial resolution (m/pix)
1	-0.8 $\pm$ 11.6	331	0.25
2	-1.7 $\pm$ 14.4	181	0.25
3	-0.6 $\pm$ 12.5	192	0.25
4	0.7 $\pm$ 9	111	0.25
8	-0.1 $\pm$ 10.1	163	0.5
All	-0.7 $\pm$ 11.9	978	

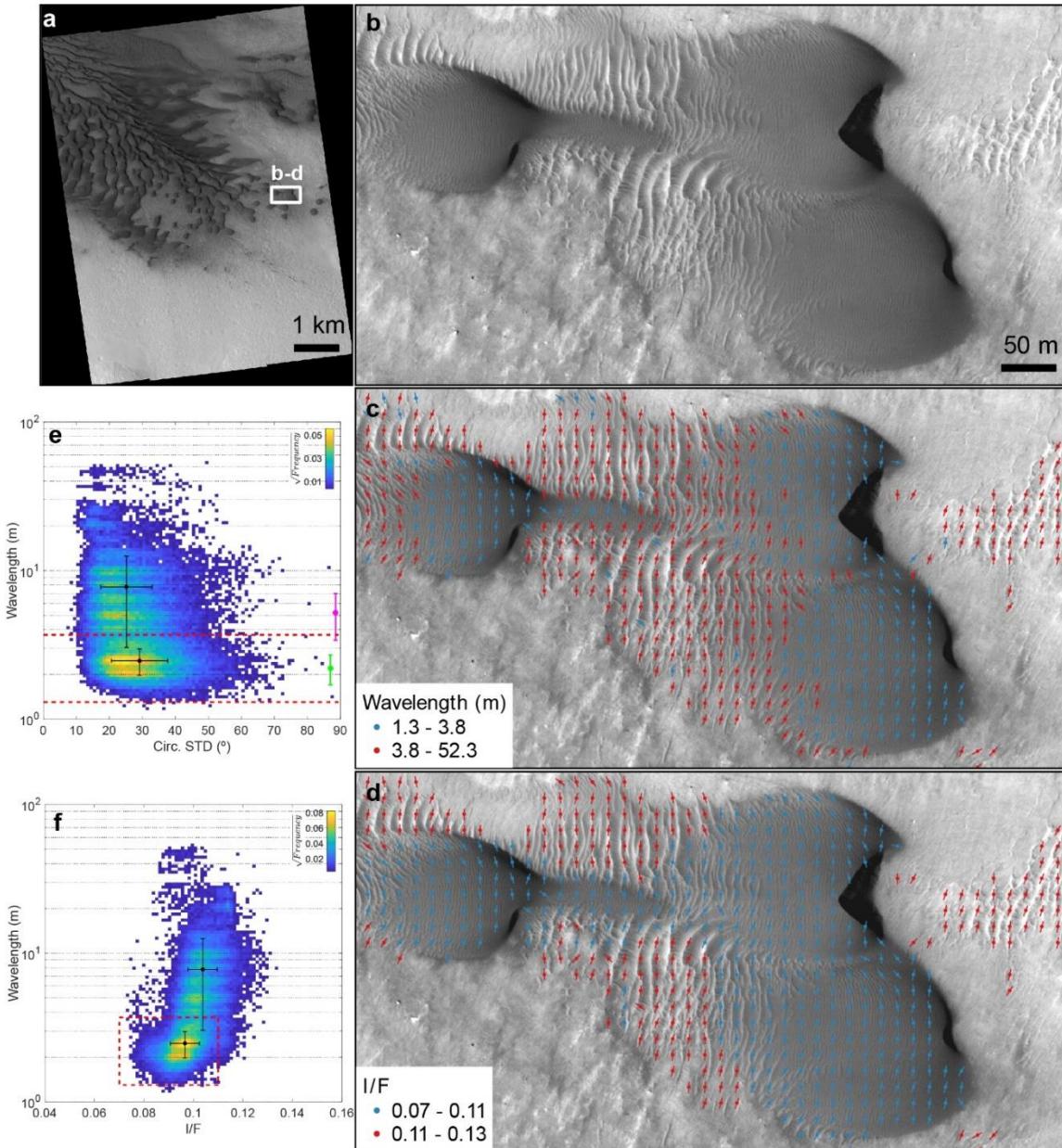
238

239 **3. BEDFORM POPULATION SEGMENTATION AND SUMMARY  
240 STATISTICS**

241 Two main characteristics are commonly used to discriminate and classify Martian  
242 aeolian bedforms from remote sensing imagery: wavelength and albedo (Day &  
243 Zimbelman, 2021). We use an exploratory and iterative approach to set threshold values  
244 for these two parameters. This allows a quantitative and more objective segmentation of  
245 the bedform types. To the purpose of this work, we discriminate two classes: large ripples  
246 and megaripples & TARs. We create 2D kernel density histograms using the mapped  
247 bedform's wavelength (e.g. Fig. S5c), HiRISE Lambertian albedo (I/F) and circular  
248 standard deviation (here used as a proxy to crest straightness). These plots are inspected  
249 for each area, and putative wavelength and albedo thresholds are selected (Fig. S8e, f).  
250 These values are then tested/visualized in QGIS and iteratively adjusted (Fig. S8b-d). In  
251 most cases this is a straightforward process, since large ripples cover extensive areas, thus  
252 forming clear maxima corresponding to meter-scale wavelengths and low albedos. Fig. S8  
253 shows how the threshold values identified in the histograms correspond to clear pattern  
254 changes in map view. Supporting information S2 includes the histograms and global map  
255 views for all the mapped areas.

256 In this work we focus on a first order segmentation, collapsing the data into two  
257 classes. Yet, in some areas the plots also highlight the presence of second order sub-  
258 populations, which may be attributed to the effect of dune topography and/or granulometric  
259 differences (for instance between putative megaripples and TARs, Fig. S9). A finer  
260 analysis and clustering are thus possible, although it is out of the scope of this paper.

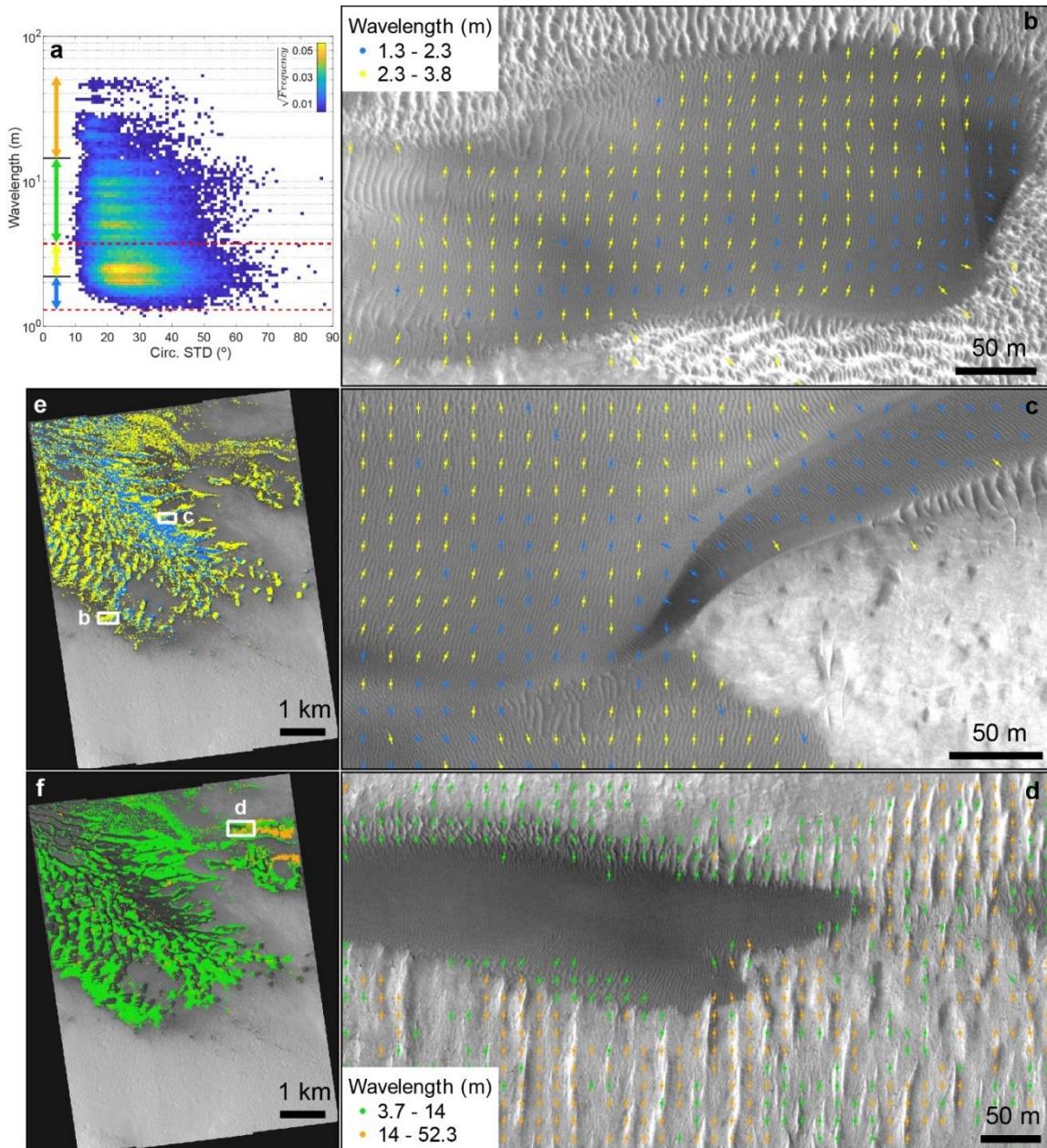
261 Summary statistics (wavelength mean and standard deviation) are computed for the  
262 two classes and constitute the basis of the following analysis. To help to identify outliers  
263 and evaluate possible relations between dune morphology and large ripples morphometry,  
264 we identified the type of dunes in the areas mapped outside Tharsis (Fig. S15), as that  
265 region lacks dark dunes. Most areas present more than one dune type, therefore we used a  
266 dual classification scheme, visually identifying a primary and secondary dune types.  
267 Primary class corresponds to the type of dune most abundant, in terms of relative area.  
268



269

270 Fig. S8 – Bedform segmentation using wavelength and albedo threshold values derived from 2D  
 271 histograms. a, b) HiRISE image (Area 1: ESP\_027864\_2295\_RED). c) map view of the two classes  
 272 defined using a wavelength threshold range of 1.3-3.8 m (large ripples) and >3.8 m (megaripples &  
 273 TARs); these values correspond to the red dashed lines in (e); the trend of the mapped bedforms is also  
 274 shown. d) map view of the two classes defined using an albedo threshold range of 0.07-0.11 (large  
 275 ripples) and >0.11 (megaripples & TARs); these values correspond to the vertical red dashed lines in  
 276 (f); the trend of the mapped bedforms is also shown. e) 2D histogram relating bedforms' wavelength  
 277 and circular standard deviation (to improve readability the frequencies were scaled with a square root  
 278 function), the defined threshold values are depicted as red dashed lines (figure (c) provides a map  
 279 view), note the main maxima corresponding to a wavelength of ~2.5 m; the black dots and variation  
 280 intervals correspond to the averages and standard deviations computed for the segmented classes; the  
 281 green (large ripples) and magenta (TARs) dots located near the right edge of the plot correspond to  
 282 the summary statistics of Lapotre et al. (2016). f) 2D histogram relating bedforms' wavelength and  
 283 albedo (frequencies were scaled with a square root function), the defined threshold values are depicted

284 as a red square (figures (c, d) provide map views of the two parameters); the black dots and intervals  
 285 correspond to the computed averages and standard deviations.  
 286



287 Fig. S9 - To establish direct comparisons with previous studies only a first order bedform segmentation  
 288 is discussed in this work (Fig. S8), nevertheless this example illustrates the possibility to pursue more  
 289 detailed studies in the future. a) 2D histogram showing the wavelength intervals that produce the  
 290 partition shown in the map views, the first order wavelength thresholds correspond to the red dashed  
 291 lines while the colored double arrows identify the wavelength intervals shown in the map views. b, c,  
 292 e) possible secondary partition of the large meter-scale ripples, bedforms with less than 2.3 m appear  
 293 clustered in the center of the dune field (e) and occur in the downwind sections of some dunes (b, c). d,  
 294 f) possible megaripples are widespread (f), have wavelengths between 3.7 and 14 m, are located in the  
 295

296 lower sections of the dunes and appear in continuity with large ripples (d), while TARs have larger  
297 wavelengths and are mainly located in the NE corner of the mapped area (f).  
298

#### 299 4. COMPARISON WITH PUBLISHED MEASUREMENTS

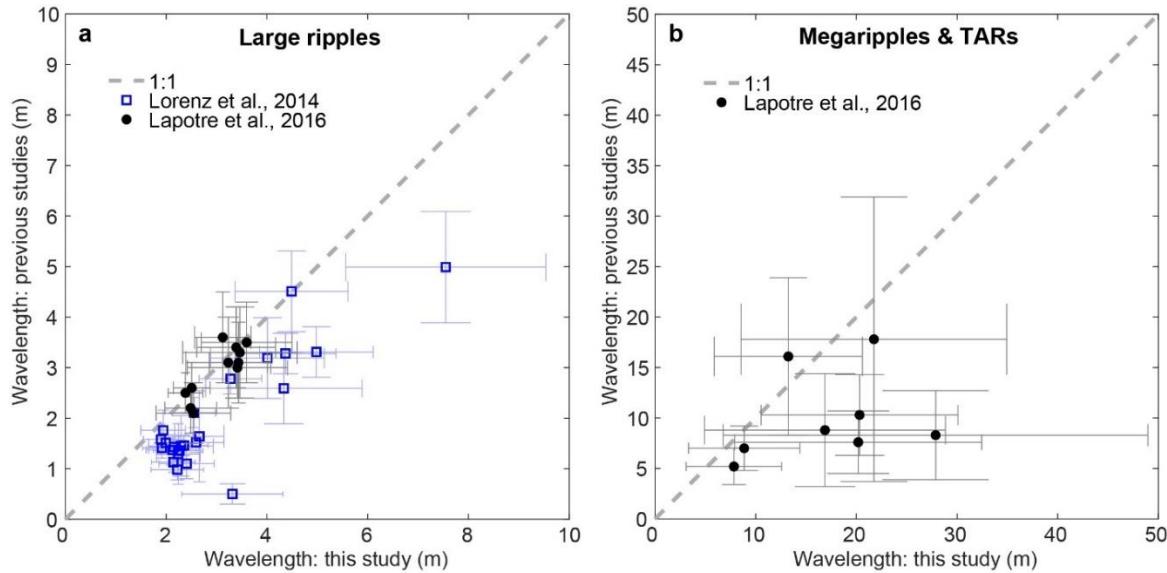
300 In this section we compare our results with the ones obtained by Lapotre et al. (2016)  
301 and Lorenz et al. (2014) for a total of 11 and 25 areas, respectively (Table S6). The average  
302 large ripples wavelengths computed in this study are inline with the values reported by  
303 Lapotre et al. (2016) (Fig. S10a). On average, we estimate a percentual difference of  
304  $4\pm10\%$  with a maximum difference of 21% for Area 2 (Table S6). If we also consider the  
305 standard deviation intervals, we conclude that the two sets of measurements are very  
306 similar, presenting overlapping distributions (Fig. S10a and Table S6). The case of the  
307 larger bedforms seems to be different, with an average percentual difference of  $84\pm83\%$   
308 and a maximum of 236%. Even if we have overlapping distributions in four areas (Fig.  
309 S10b, note how in some cases the standard deviation intervals intersect the 1:1 line), half  
310 of Lapotre et al. (2016) areas clearly show an underestimation of the larger bedforms'  
311 wavelengths (data points and standard deviations below the 1:1 curve, Fig. S10b).

312 In summary, our wavelength estimates for the large ripples are consistent with the  
313 measurements made by Lapotre et al. (2016). We found that for most of the areas the  
314 averages differ by less than 10%, approximately the same confidence interval derived from  
315 the comparison made with manually derived measurements in this work ( $\pm12\%$  confidence  
316 interval, Table S5). To understand the larger discrepancies associated with the larger  
317 bedforms, one must question if the sampling used by Lapotre et al. (2016) was enough to  
318 characterize these populations. Focusing in the two areas with larger differences (Areas 6  
319 and 8), Lapotre et al. (2016) collected 36 and 40 measurements for TARs and 136 and 98  
320 for large ripples. These were randomly sampled across the HiRISE scenes. Yet, our  
321 complete mapping reveals that TARs only cover a small fraction of the mapped areas (38  
322 and 20% respectively), in addition TARs tend to form disperse sets of bedforms with  
323 variable wavelengths. Therefore, we hypothesize that a more complete sampling would be  
324 needed to characterize these populations and that this is the main reason for the observed  
325 wavelength disparities.

326 Lorenz et al. (2014) values are consistently underestimated when compare with our  
327 measurements (Fig. S10a). On average, their values differ by  $73\pm106\%$  with a maximum

328 percentual difference of 563% (Area 55, Table S6). In this specific area, Lorenz et al.  
 329 (2014) reported an average wavelength of 0.5 m, which is a questionable estimate since it  
 330 only corresponds to two pixels. This was noted in Lapotre et al. (2021), which replace this  
 331 value by an estimated wavelength of ~1 m (see their Fig. 2). In each area Lorenz et al.  
 332 (2014) sampled approximately 40 sets of bedforms, divided by four selected sub-areas.  
 333 Among other possible causes (e.g. non-random sampling), also in this case we hypothesize  
 334 that under sampling may have contributed to the measured differences. Bedforms in the  
 335 Tharsis region do not form unambiguous dune fields or sand sheets, and most of the times  
 336 they are scattered or preferentially located in depressions. This non-uniform spatial  
 337 distribution may further complicate the obtention of representative wavelength samples  
 338 from a few tens of measurements. In section 5 we argue that Tharsis bedforms represent a  
 339 different type of bedforms and that merging the two datasets is not appropriate. In any case,  
 340 from the validation presented in section 2 and from the comparison with Lapotre et al.  
 341 (2016) results we determine that wavelengths derived with our method are robust, which  
 342 means Lorenz et al. (2014) results denote a systematic underestimation (Fig. S11a).

343



344

345 **Fig. S10 – Comparison of wavelength measurements.** a) Large ripples, there is a good agreement with  
 346 Lapotre et al. (2016) values and error bars always overlap the 1:1 (perfect agreement) line; when  
 347 compared with our data, Lorenz et al. (2014) measurements are clearly underestimated. b) In the case  
 348 of the larger bedforms, half of Lapotre et al. (2016) values are comparable to our data, while the other  
 349 half seems to be relatively underestimated.

350

351 Previous works used MOLA elevations to compute atmospheric density, so this is  
352 also a variable we try to verify and compare. The elevations presented in this work are  
353 automatically extracted from the MOLA MEGDR (Mission Experiment Gridded Data  
354 Records), which represent elevations above the areoid with a spatial resolution of 463  
355 m/pixel (Smith et al., 1999). The spatial centroids of the largest bedform patches mapped  
356 in each area are used as sampling points. Lorenz et al. (2014) mentions that their elevation  
357 data was derived from MOLA data, however they do not provide any other detail (e.g.  
358 specific sampling locations, reference datum or methods used to collect the elevation  
359 values). In their supplementary materials, Lapotre et al. (2016) mentions that Lorenz's data  
360 "were measured with respect to the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter reference ellipsoid" and  
361 that for this reasons they have corrected the data to be consistent with the areoid datum  
362 used in their survey. We applied the same correction, converting Lorenz's (2014)  
363 elevations to orthographic heights.

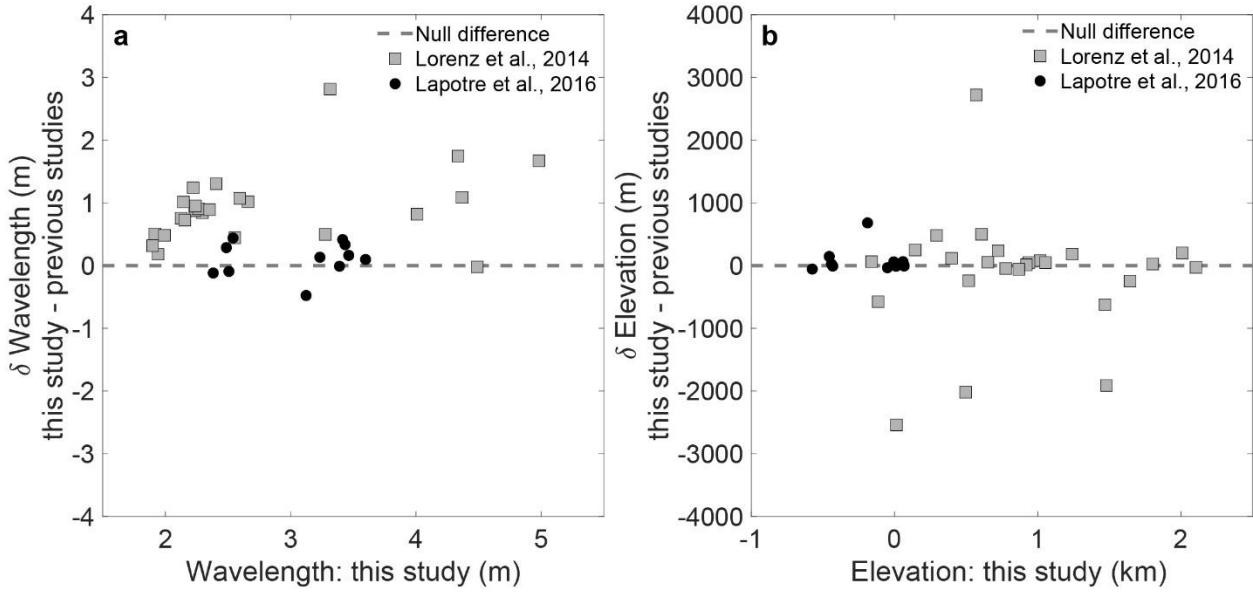
364 We found a good agreement with Lapotre et al. (2016) elevations (Fig. S11b), the  
365 only exception is Area 3, which has an elevation difference of ~700 m. In this specific case,  
366 elevations inside the mapped area can vary by ~ 1000 m, therefore the mentioned  
367 discrepancy can be attributed to the different sampling location.

368 We found significant differences between the elevations computed in this work and  
369 part of the elevations reported in Lorenz et al. (2014). In four areas differences can range  
370 between 2 and 3 km (Fig. S11b). Also in this case, differences are likely caused by a  
371 different sampling location. The Tharsis region extreme topography result in large  
372 elevation variations across the HiRISE image footprints. In some cases, maximum  
373 elevation differences of ~4 km are possible, depending where in the image footprint the  
374 MOLA data is sampled.

375 We conclude that relevant elevation differences may exist between studies. These are  
376 due to the uncertain location of the sampling points and produce higher disparities for the  
377 studied areas located in the Tharsis region. We implicitly use the location of the mapped  
378 bedforms to define the sampling points, thus we adopt a more consistent and robust  
379 methodology which reduces the uncertainty in the measurement of this variable.

380

381



382

Fig. S11 – Differences in large ripples’ average wavelength and elevation. a) Wavelength differences between our measurements and Lapotre et al. (2016) are small and cluster around 0 m, while Lorenz et al. (2014) dataset presents higher discrepancies and are consistently below the values obtained in this study. b) Lapotre et al. (2016) elevation values are consistent with our work, except for Area 3 which has an elevation difference of ~700 m, yet this is understandable since inside the mapped area elevations can vary by ~1000 m; the differences with Lorenz et al. (2014) measurements are more relevant, with elevation differences that can reach 3 km, which is justified by the fact that high slope areas in the Tharsis region (e.g. Olympus Mons basal scarp) can produce large topographic differences (we measured elevation ranges up to 4 km) even inside the relatively small footprint of an HiRISE image.

392

393

394

Table S6 – Comparison of wavelength summary statistics, the first 11 areas correspond to the areas analyzed by Lapotre et al. (2016) while area IDs above 51 correspond to the 25 areas studied in Lorenz et al. (2014). Summary statistics (average and standard deviation) are reported, and percentual errors were computed according to:  $100 * (\text{Wav}_\text{this study} - \text{Wav}_\text{other studies}) / \text{Wav}_\text{other studies}$ .

395

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Area ID	Large ripples		TARs & megaripples		Percentual differences	
	Wav. avg. ± STD (m)	Wav. avg. ± STD (Lapotre, 2016 / Lorenz, 2014)	Wav. avg. ± STD (m)	Wav. avg. ± STD (Lapotre, 2016 / Lorenz, 2014)	LRs % difference	TARs % difference
1	$2.5 \pm 0.5$	$2.2 \pm 0.5$	$7.8 \pm 4.8$	$5.2 \pm 1.8$	13.0	50.7
2	$2.5 \pm 0.7$	$2.1 \pm 0.6$	$8.9 \pm 5.5$	$7 \pm 2.2$	20.9	26.5
3	$3.4 \pm 1$	$3 \pm 0.6$	$13.2 \pm 7.4$	$16.1 \pm 7.8$	13.8	-17.8
4	$3.6 \pm 0.9$	$3.5 \pm 0.8$	$16.9 \pm 12$	$8.8 \pm 5.6$	2.8	91.8
5	$3.5 \pm 1.1$	$3.3 \pm 0.9$	$21.7 \pm 13.2$	$17.8 \pm 14.1$	5.0	22.2
6	$3.2 \pm 0.8$	$3.1 \pm 0.9$	$20.2 \pm 12.3$	$7.6 \pm 3.1$	4.3	165.6
7	$3.4 \pm 0.6$	$3.1 \pm 0.8$	$20.3 \pm 9.8$	$10.3 \pm 4$	10.8	97.3
8	$3.1 \pm 0.6$	$3.6 \pm 0.9$	$27.9 \pm 21.1$	$8.3 \pm 4.4$	-13.2	235.8
9	$2.5 \pm 0.4$	$2.6 \pm 0.5$	$7.4 \pm 4.1$		-3.6	
10	$2.4 \pm 0.3$	$2.5 \pm 0.4$	$9.6 \pm 7$		-4.7	

11	$3.4 \pm 0.8$	$3.4 \pm 0.8$	$13 \pm 7.7$	-0.3
51	$2.7 \pm 0.5$	$1.6 \pm 0.9$	$7.4 \pm 4.7$	62.1
52	$5 \pm 1.1$	$3.3 \pm 0.5$		50.5
53	$4.4 \pm 1$	$3.3 \pm 0.4$	$13.1 \pm 9.9$	33.1
54	$2.6 \pm 0.4$	$2.1 \pm 0.3$	$6 \pm 1.2$	21.0
55	$3.3 \pm 1$	$0.5 \pm 0.2$	$12.4 \pm 5.7$	563.0
56	$7.5 \pm 2$	$5 \pm 1.1$	$17.8 \pm 2.1$	51.3
57	$2.3 \pm 0.6$	$1.5 \pm 0.6$	$16.3 \pm 14$	58.3
58	$2.2 \pm 0.5$	$1.4 \pm 0.2$	$7.6 \pm 4$	64.3
59	$2.1 \pm 0.4$	$1.1 \pm 0.2$	$5.1 \pm 3.7$	89.7
60	$1.9 \pm 0.4$	$1.4 \pm 0.2$	$5.6 \pm 1.1$	35.8
61	$2.3 \pm 0.5$	$1.4 \pm 0.2$	$5 \pm 1.3$	66.5
62	$2.2 \pm 0.4$	$1.3 \pm 0.6$	$4.1 \pm 0.9$	73.7
63	$2.6 \pm 0.5$	$1.5 \pm 0.2$	$19.2 \pm 13.4$	70.6
64	$1.9 \pm 0.4$	$1.8 \pm 0.4$	$24.4 \pm 10$	10.3
65	$4 \pm 1.1$	$3.2 \pm 0.8$	$14.6 \pm 7.5$	25.7
66	$2.4 \pm 0.5$	$1.5 \pm 0.2$	$4.3 \pm 0.6$	61.1
67	$2.4 \pm 0.5$	$1.1 \pm 0.3$	$6.6 \pm 4.2$	118.7
68	$4.3 \pm 1.6$	$2.6 \pm 0.7$	$10.5 \pm 1.2$	67.4
69	$1.9 \pm 0.4$	$1.6 \pm 0.3$	$14.1 \pm 3.9$	20.1
70	$4.5 \pm 1.1$	$4.5 \pm 0.8$	$21 \pm 14$	-0.5
71	$3.3 \pm 0.6$	$2.8 \pm 0.3$	$8.7 \pm 1.8$	17.9
72	$2 \pm 0.2$	$1.5 \pm 0.1$	$20.7 \pm 11.7$	32.0
73	$2.2 \pm 0.5$	$1 \pm 0.2$	$5.9 \pm 1.7$	126.7
74	$2.1 \pm 0.5$	$1.4 \pm 0.3$	$14 \pm 10.6$	55.2
75	$2.2 \pm 0.5$	$1.4 \pm 0.2$	$8.7 \pm 3.8$	50.7

399

400

## 401 5. EXPLORATORY DATA ANALYSIS AND OUTLIER IDENTIFICATION

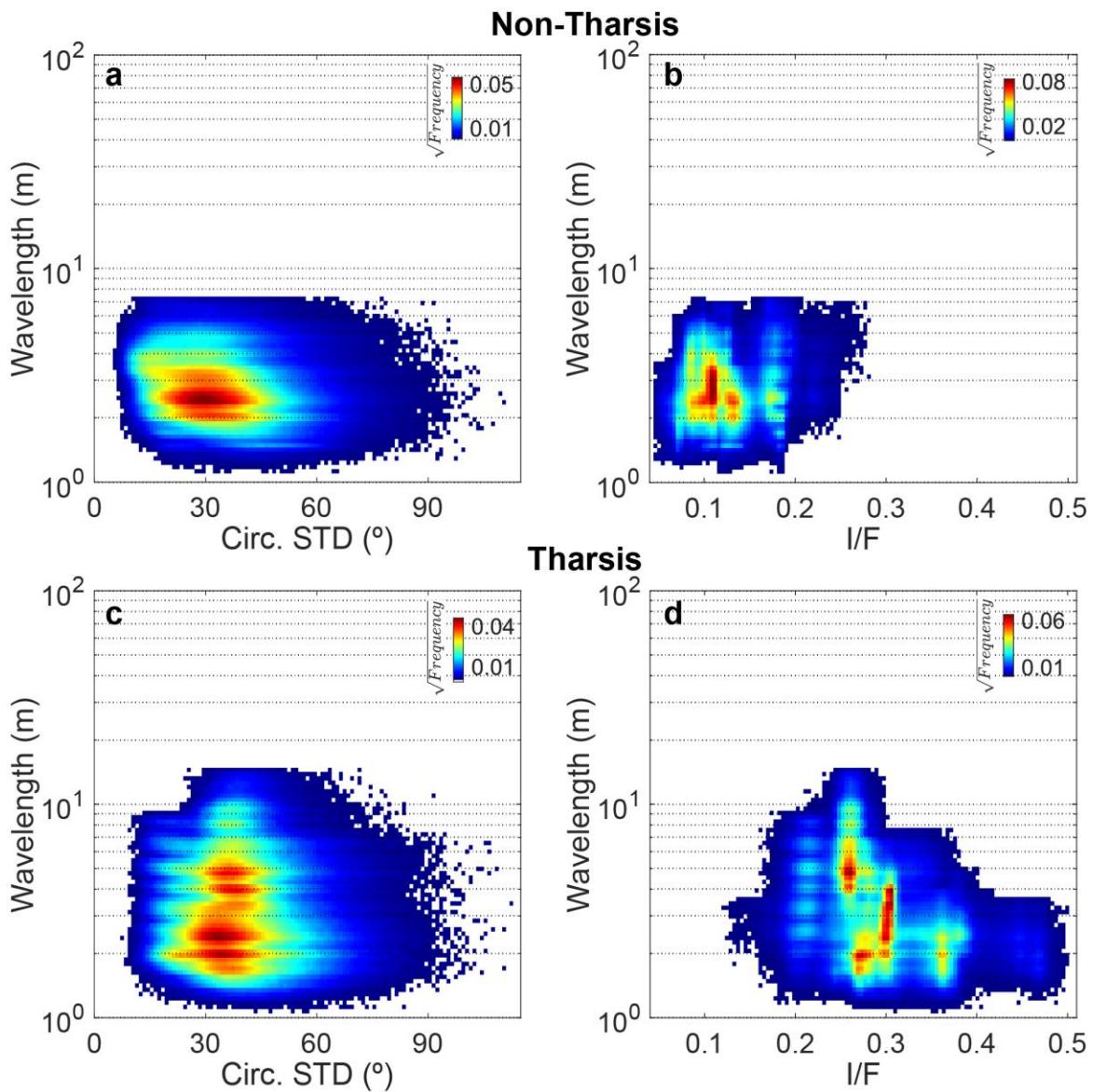
402 We note that Lapotre et al. (2016) merged their dataset with the one derived by  
 403 Lorenz et al. (2014), and evaluated the model predictions using both datasets. In contrast,  
 404 a segmentation of the two datasets and the fit of different models was later preferred  
 405 (Lapotre et al., 2021; Lorenz, 2020). Therefore, the first question we address here is: can  
 406 we integrate the measurements made in the Tharsis region with others made elsewhere on  
 407 Mars, or do they constitute different sets of bedforms? To answer this question, we evaluate  
 408 if there is a unique and continuous distribution of wavelength and albedo. Then we briefly  
 409 discuss the morphological differences and overall setting and significance of the two sets  
 410 of bedforms.

411 In Fig. S12 we compare the wavelength and albedo distributions of the large ripples  
412 mapped in the Tharsis region (the same 25 areas of Lorenz et al., 2014) and elsewhere on  
413 Mars. The wavelength of Tharsis' bedforms is more variable, on average form more  
414 sinuous patterns (i.e. with higher circular standard deviation, Fig. S12a and c) and most  
415 importantly, they present higher HiRISE albedos (Fig. S12b and d). This clearly different  
416 albedo signature is further corroborated by plotting the thermal inertias (Putzig and Mellon,  
417 2007) and dust cover index (Ruff & Christensen, 2002) for the mapped areas (Fig. S13).  
418 This data shows that the Tharsis bedforms form a distinct population, with lower thermal  
419 inertia (possibly denoting finer materials), higher dust coverage/content and morphologies  
420 that possess a higher degree of directional variability (the fine "reticulate" texture of the  
421 bedforms in this region was previously discussed by Bridges et al., 2010).

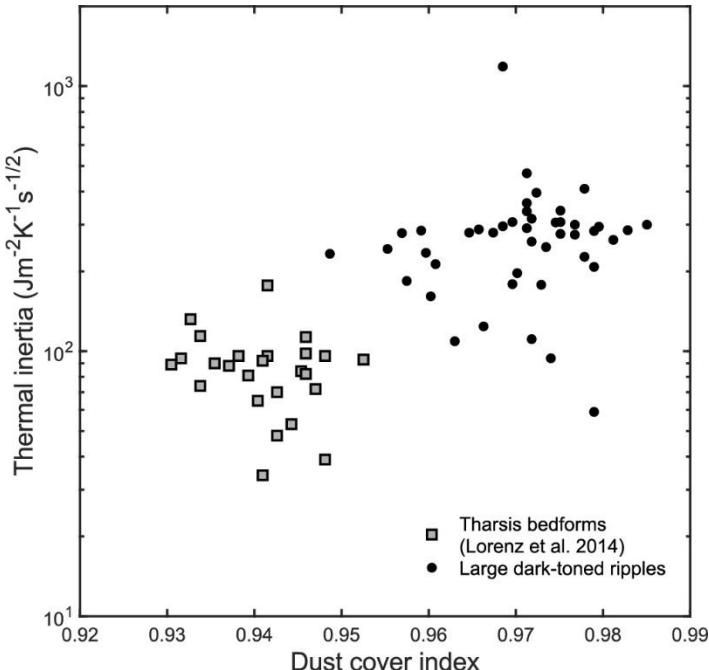
422 The morphology of some of the Tharsis bedforms is also distinctive and variable (e.g.  
423 Fig. S14), forming honeycomb patterns or appearing in association with longitudinal  
424 spurs/erosive features (Bridges et al., 2010; Lorenz et al., 2014). Tharsis bedforms usually  
425 overlay bedrock, forming in some cases extensive mantling units. In contrast, meter-scale  
426 bedforms surveyed outside Tharsis typically cover larger scale bedforms (i.e. dark dunes).

427 The new global survey we present confirms the uniqueness of the bedforms located  
428 in the Tharsis region. Tharsis' bedforms were studied in detail by Bridges et al. (2010),  
429 proposing that they were formed by saltation of dust aggregates, which in some cases may  
430 have produced indurated bedforms. This suggests that major differences in granulometry,  
431 density and transport susceptibility exist. Therefore, to test/fit wavelength predictive  
432 models Tharsis and non-Tharsis bedforms should be treated separately, as they represent  
433 two distinct populations.

434



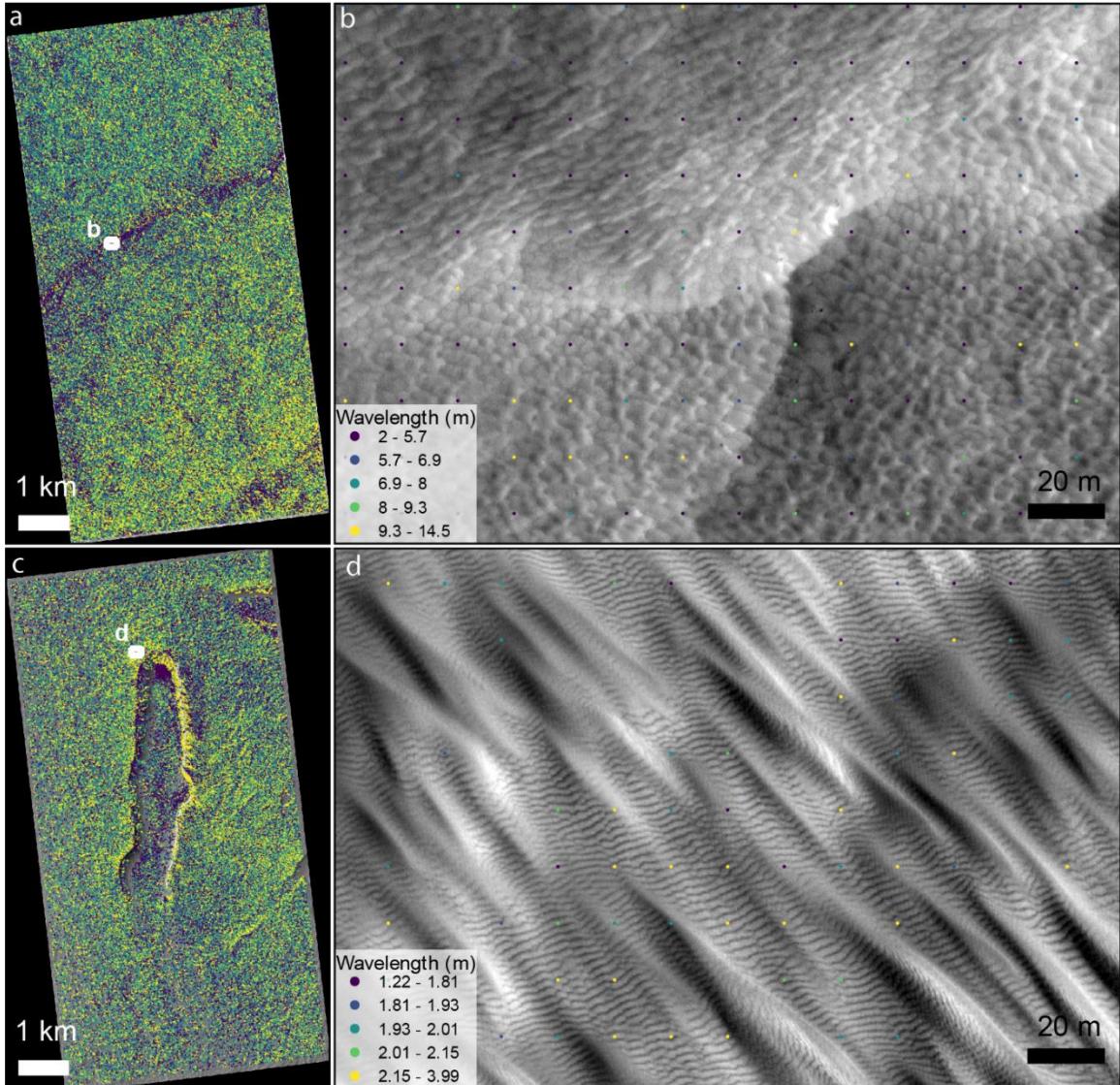
437  
438 Fig. S12 – 2D histograms of the dark-toned large bedforms mapped in the Tharsis region (c, b)  
439 and elsewhere on Mars (a, b). Bedforms in Tharsis show a larger dispersion of wavelengths (clustering at  
440 ~2.5 m outside Tharsis and ranging from 1.5-5 m in Tharsis), form patterns with larger trend  
441 variations (median circular distributions of ~30° vs. 30-45°) and consistently present higher albedos  
442 (<0.25 vs. >0.2).



443

444 Fig. S13 – Nightside TES thermal inertia (Putzig & Mellon, 2007) vs. dust cover index (Ruff &  
 445 Christensen, 2002) for all mapped areas. Tharsis areas form a distinct cluster, characterized by lower  
 446 thermal inertias and lower dust cover index (lower index values are indicative of dust covering, while  
 447 higher values correspond to dust free areas). This demonstrates that the Tharsis bedforms form a  
 448 different population, in terms of thermophysical proprieties and dust coverage/content.  
 449

450



451

Fig. S14 – Different bedform morphologies in the Tharsis region. a, b) Example of honeycomb shaped bedforms forming a continuous covering unit that encompass all the area (Area 56, PSP\_008460\_1980). c, d) Transverse linear bedforms that overlay what appear to be erosive longitudinal troughs; also, in this case the bedforms are pervasive, covering almost completely the region and forming a mantling unit that seems to be controlled by the bedrock's main topographic features (Area 72, PSP\_010213\_1785).

457

458 Another point we address here regards the uniformity of the dataset collected outside  
 459 Tharsis, does our survey include areas which may not be representative of the global trend,  
 460 i.e. do we have and can we identify possible outliers?

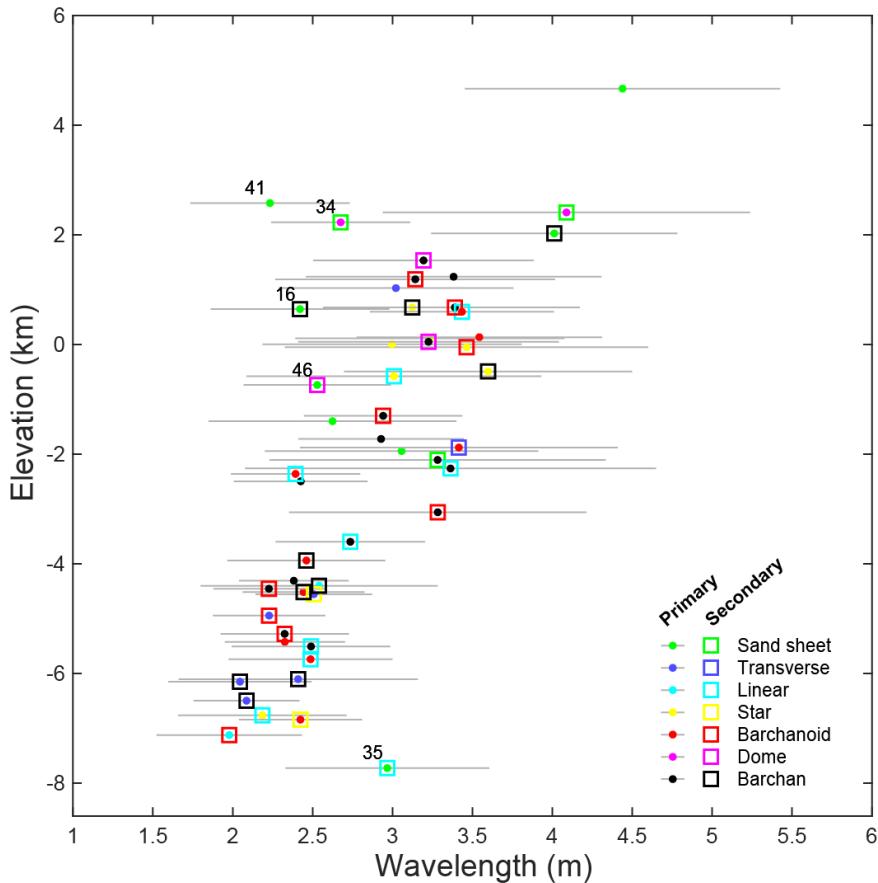
461 A linear direct relation is evident between average wavelength and elevation (Fig.  
 462 S15), although a few points do not seem to follow the same trend (the five labelled points

463 in the plot correspond to the outliers we discuss here). Coincidentally, we notice that these  
464 five areas have a common attribute: a significant part of the meter-scale bedforms in those  
465 areas are located on sand sheets and/or dome dunes.

466 A closer inspection further revealed other factors that may condition the average  
467 measurements for these areas. Namely, in Area 16 (Fig. S16) we have a mixture of two  
468 sets of bedforms, one covering barchans and other covering a sand sheet area. The later set  
469 presents lower wavelengths which contribute to lower the average wavelength plotted in  
470 Fig. S15, producing a noticeable underestimation. Large ripples in Area 34 (Fig. S17) cover  
471 low-lying dome dunes or small sand patches located in depressions. This may justify why  
472 this area does not follow the same generic trend, as these topographic settings may shelter  
473 bedforms and influence their wavelength. Moreover, the assumption of well sorted  
474 sediments may not apply in this case, since substantial lag materials may be present in this  
475 sediment starved environment. We also note that large ripples in some of the areas  
476 identified as outliers are overprinted by dust devil tracks (Fig. S18). This may denote low  
477 or even null migration of the bedforms, since the presence of dust devil tracks implies  
478 cycles of dust deposition and removal.

479 To summarize, five areas stand out as outliers, which we associate with cases where  
480 sediments may be coarser and poorly sorted, and where active aeolian processes may not  
481 be in equilibrium with current day atmospheric conditions. These areas were removed from  
482 the subsequent analysis and model fits.

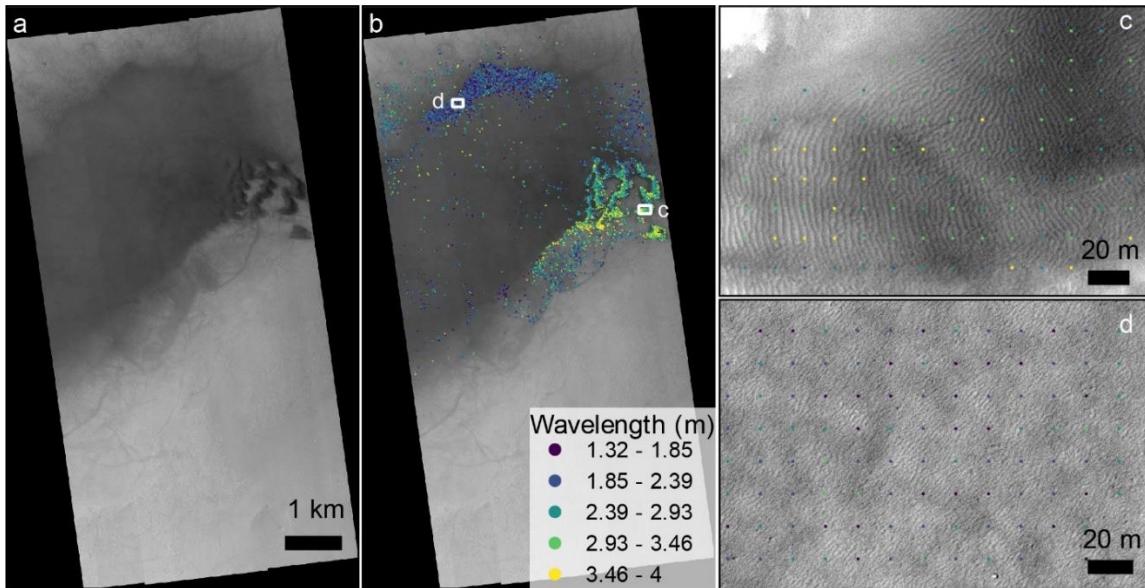
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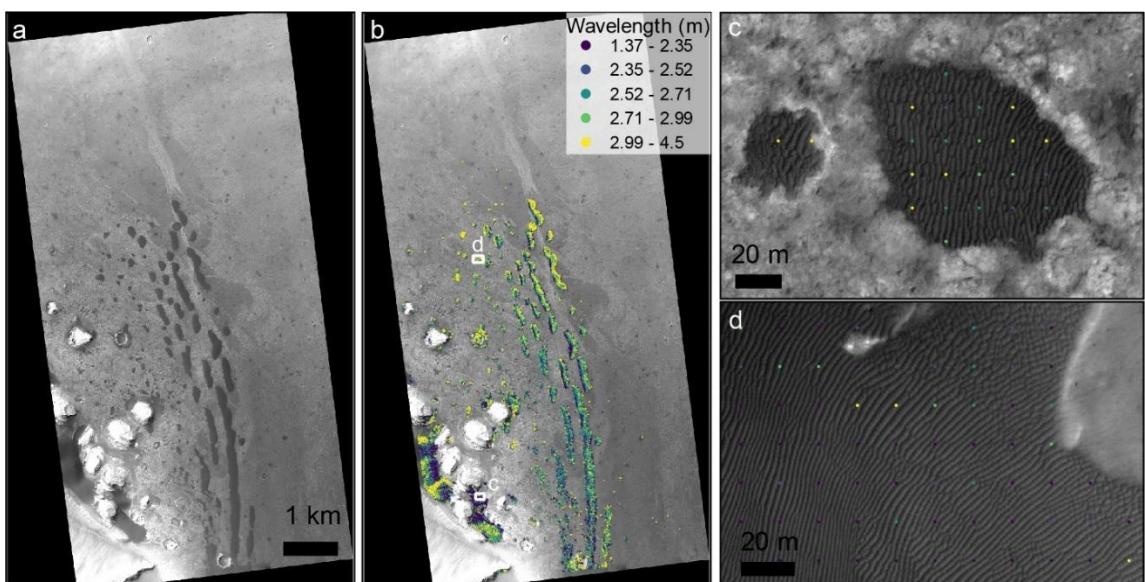
485 Fig. S15 – Average wavelength vs. elevation for the 50 areas located outside Tharsis, gray lines  
 486 correspond to  $1\sigma$  intervals. The color code represents the type of dune morphology present in the  
 487 mapped areas, when more than one type is present, we assign a primary (covering higher area) and  
 488 secondary class. The five labeled sites correspond to the outliers discussed in this section.  
 489

490



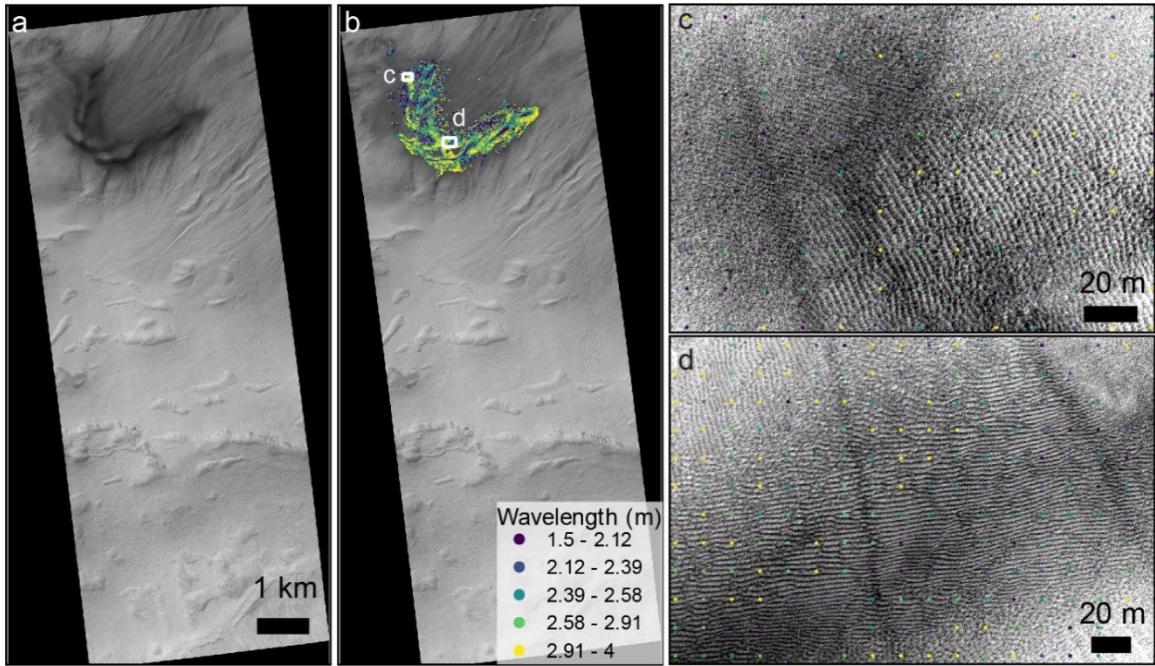
491 Fig. S16 – Example of a possible outlier where barchans transition to an extensive sand sheet (Area  
 492 16). a, b) Wavelength measurements overlaid in the HiRISE image, note the lower wavelengths in the  
 493 sand sheet (northern section) when compared to the barchans (eastern section). c) Bedforms that cover  
 494 the barchans, note the presence of dust devil tracks and the higher wavelengths of the ripples. d)  
 495 Bedforms on the sand sheet present lower wavelengths, therefore the average value for this area  
 496 merges two different sets of bedforms, with the sand sheet contributing to decreasing the overall  
 497 wavelength estimate (Fig. S15).  
 498

499



500 Fig. S17 – Area 34 large ripples cover low-lying dome dunes and sand sheets (ESP\_017610\_1730),  
 501 typically located in depressions. We hypothesize that the bedforms in this area may be enriched in  
 502 coarser/lag materials and that the specific topographic setting may also influence their wavelength.  
 503 a, b) Wavelength measurements overlaid in the HiRISE image. c, d) large ripples located in crater  
 504 depressions or other topographic lows.  
 505

506



507

508 Fig. S18 – Dust devil tracks overlay large ripples in Area 46 (ESP\_058788\_1320), which implies dust  
 509 deposition and removal cycles as well as reduced bedform migration. a, b) Wavelength measurements  
 510 overlaid in the HiRISE image. c, d) Examples of dust devil tracks overlapping the large ripples.

511

## 512 6. WAVELENGTH VS. ATMOSPHERIC DENSITY SCALING: MODELS 513 AND FITS

514 Here we implemented the same model described in Lapotre et al. (2016), where wind  
 515 shear velocity ( $u_*$ ) is set to be equal to the impact threshold shear velocity ( $u_t$ ) predicted  
 516 by Kok (2010) model (Table S7 summarizes the models input parameters). Atmospheric  
 517 density is computed as a function of elevation using the ideal gas law:

$$518 \rho_f(z) = \frac{M_{CO_2} p(z)}{r T(z)} \quad (\text{Eq. 3}),$$

519 where  $M_{CO_2}$  is the molar mass of carbon dioxide,  $r$  is the ideal gas constant and  $p(z)$  is the  
 520 atmospheric pressure computed from MOLA elevations (section 4) using the relation  
 521 derived from the atmospheric descent profiles of the Mars Exploration Rovers missions  
 522 (Withers & Smith, 2006). We assume an isothermal atmosphere with a temperature ( $T$ ) of  
 523 227 K, while kinematic viscosity ( $\nu$ ) at elevation  $z$  is computed through:

$$524 \nu(z) = \frac{\mu}{\rho_f(z)} \quad (\text{Eq. 4}),$$

525 where  $\mu$  is a constant dynamic viscosity (Table S7).

526 Based on a fit made to flume experiments and Martian morphometric data, drag  
 527 ripples' wavelength was predicted to vary according to:

528 
$$\lambda = 2777 \frac{v^{2/3} D^{1/6}}{(Rg)^{1/6} u_*^{1/3}} \quad (\text{Eq. 5})$$

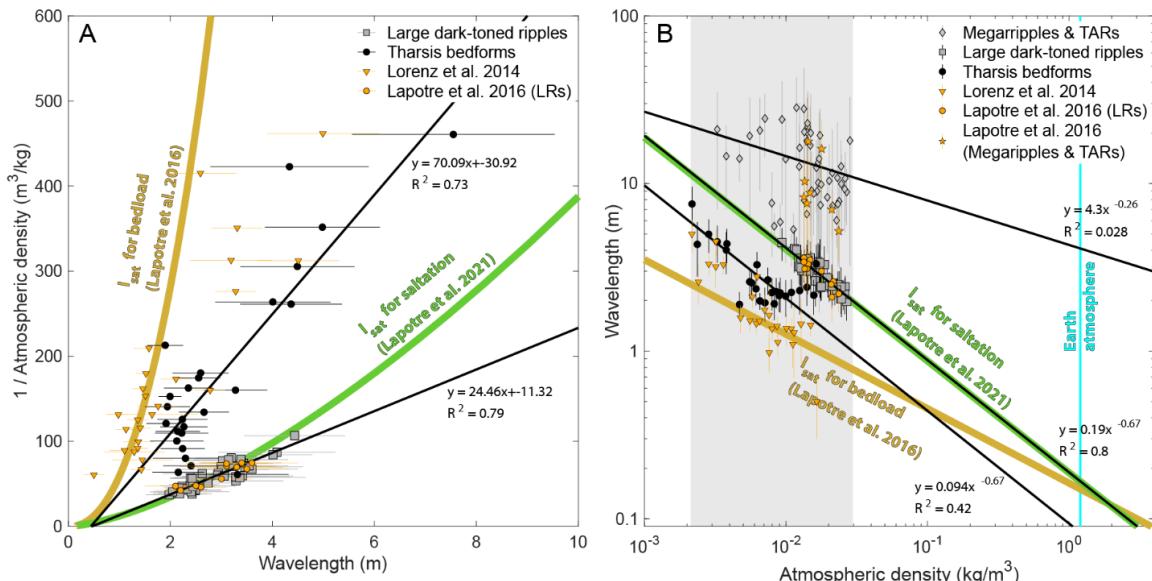
529 where  $D$  is grain diameter,  $g$  is the gravity acceleration on Mars and  $R$  is the submerged  
 530 reduced density of the sediment ( $R = \frac{\rho_s - \rho_f}{\rho_f}$ ) (Lapotre et al., 2016). This is essentially the  
 531 same relation later generalized in Lapotre et al. (2017), and is considered to be  
 532 representative of bedload saturation length (Duran Vinent et al., 2019; Lapotre et al., 2021).

533 Lapotre et al. (2021) adapted the same framework, considering a saltation saturation  
 534 length  $l_{sat} = \frac{\rho_s u_t^2}{g(\rho_s - \rho_f)}$ , which is used to predict bedform wavelength through  $\lambda =$

535 
$$\frac{\lambda^* v}{u_*}$$
, where  $\lambda^*$  is a dimensionless wavelength:  $\lambda^* \approx 600 \left( \frac{l_{sat} u_*}{v} \right)^{1/3}$  (Lapotre et al., 2021).

536 In Fig. 3 and S19 we compare our wavelength measurements with the predictions of  
 537 both models, and we fit power laws and linear models (as proposed by Lorenz et al., 2014)  
 538 to our datasets.

539



540  
 541 Fig. S20 – Previous surveys and relation between bedforms wavelength and Martian atmospheric  
 542 density. This is the same plot shown in Fig. 3, where we added the dataset compiled by Lapotre et al.  
 543 (2016), which includes Lorenz et al. (2014) data for the Tharsis region. We see that a large fraction of  
 544 this data (corresponding to the Tharsis region bedforms) overlaps the fluid-drag predictions with a  
 545 bedload saturation length formulation (golden line), while our dataset for these same areas presents  
 546 higher wavelengths, with the data points located between the two models' predictions. Like in our  
 547 dataset, the existence of two different clusters is noticeable in the previous compilation, as well as an

548 overlap of the large ripples datasets with the fluid-drag model predictions when saltation saturation  
549 length is considered (green line). The gray area represents the maximum range of atmospheric  
550 densities on Mars while the cyan line represents the density of Earth's atmosphere. Black lines  
551 represent the best fitted models for the datasets compiled in this study and were computed using the  
552 average values for each site (linear models in A and power laws in B; the R<sup>2</sup> values in B were computed  
553 in the log space).

554

555 **Table S7 – Model input parameters.**

556

Variables	Description	Values
M <sub>CO<sub>2</sub></sub>	CO <sub>2</sub> molar mass	44.01 g/mol
r	Ideal gas constant	8.314 JK <sup>-1</sup> mol <sup>-1</sup>
T	Temperature	227 K
g	Mars gravity acceleration	3.78 m/s <sup>2</sup>
$\sigma_s$	Grain density (basalt)	2900 kg/m <sup>3</sup>
D	Grain diameter	200 $\mu$ m
$\mu$	Dynamic viscosity	10.8x10 <sup>-6</sup> Pa.s

557



*Geophysical Research Letters*

Supporting Information for

**Constraining the mechanisms of aeolian bedform formation on Mars through a global morphometric survey: Supporting information S2**

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<sup>1</sup>Centre for Earth and Space Research of the University of Coimbra, Observatório Geofísico e Astronómico da Universidade de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal.

<sup>2</sup>INAF Osservatorio Astronomico di Capodimonte, Napoli, Italia.

<sup>3</sup>SETI Institute, Carl Sagan Center, Mountain View, CA, USA.

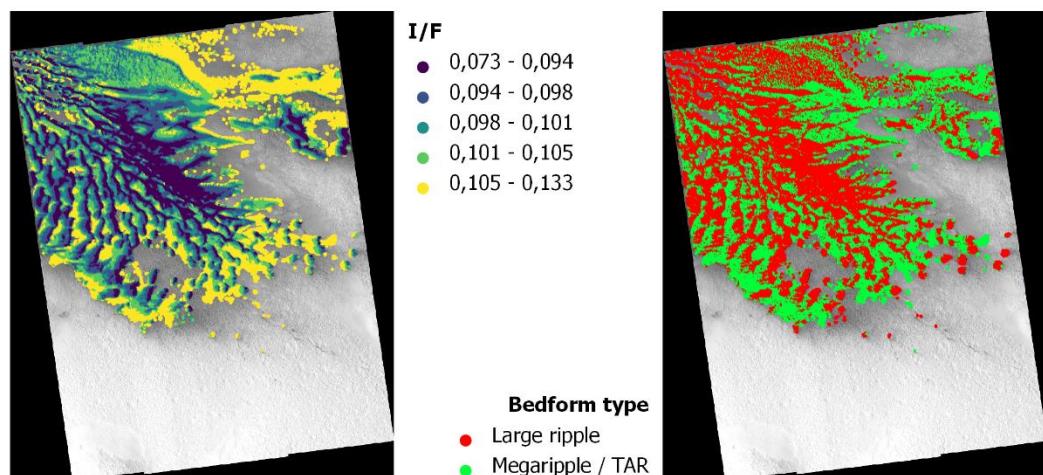
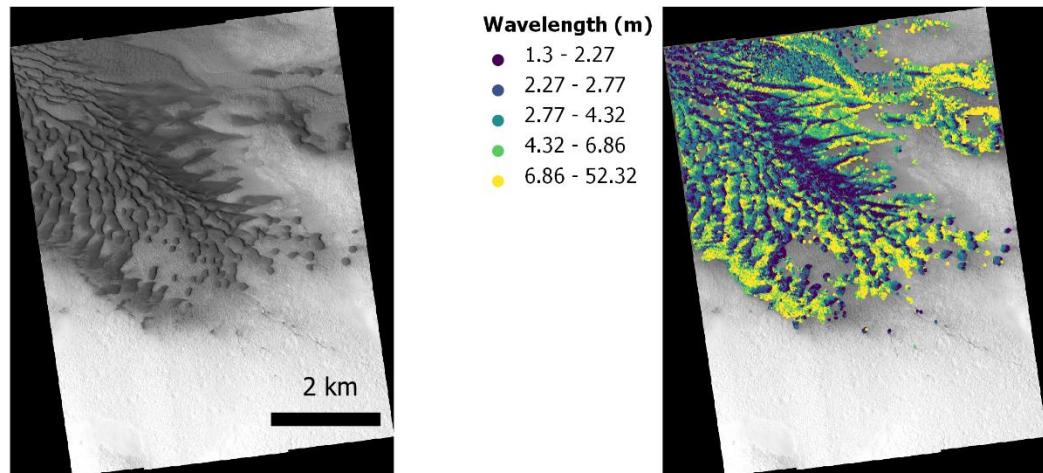
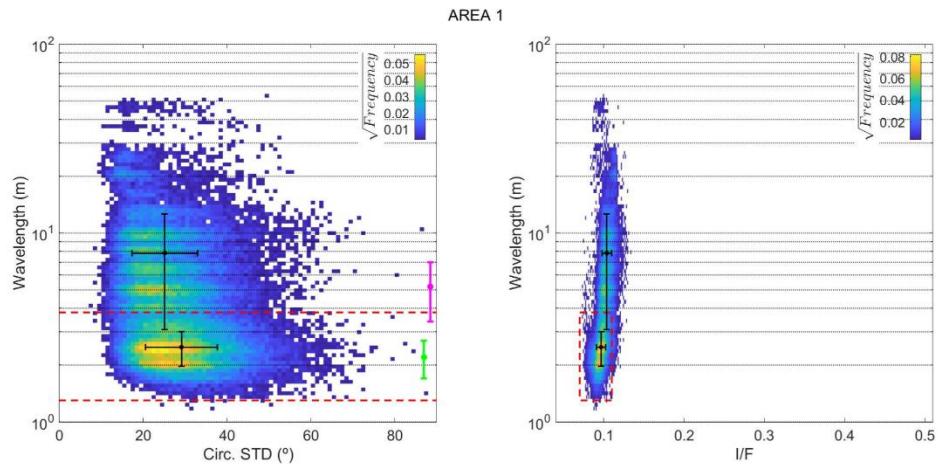
<sup>4</sup>Planetary Science Institute, Lakewood, CO, USA.

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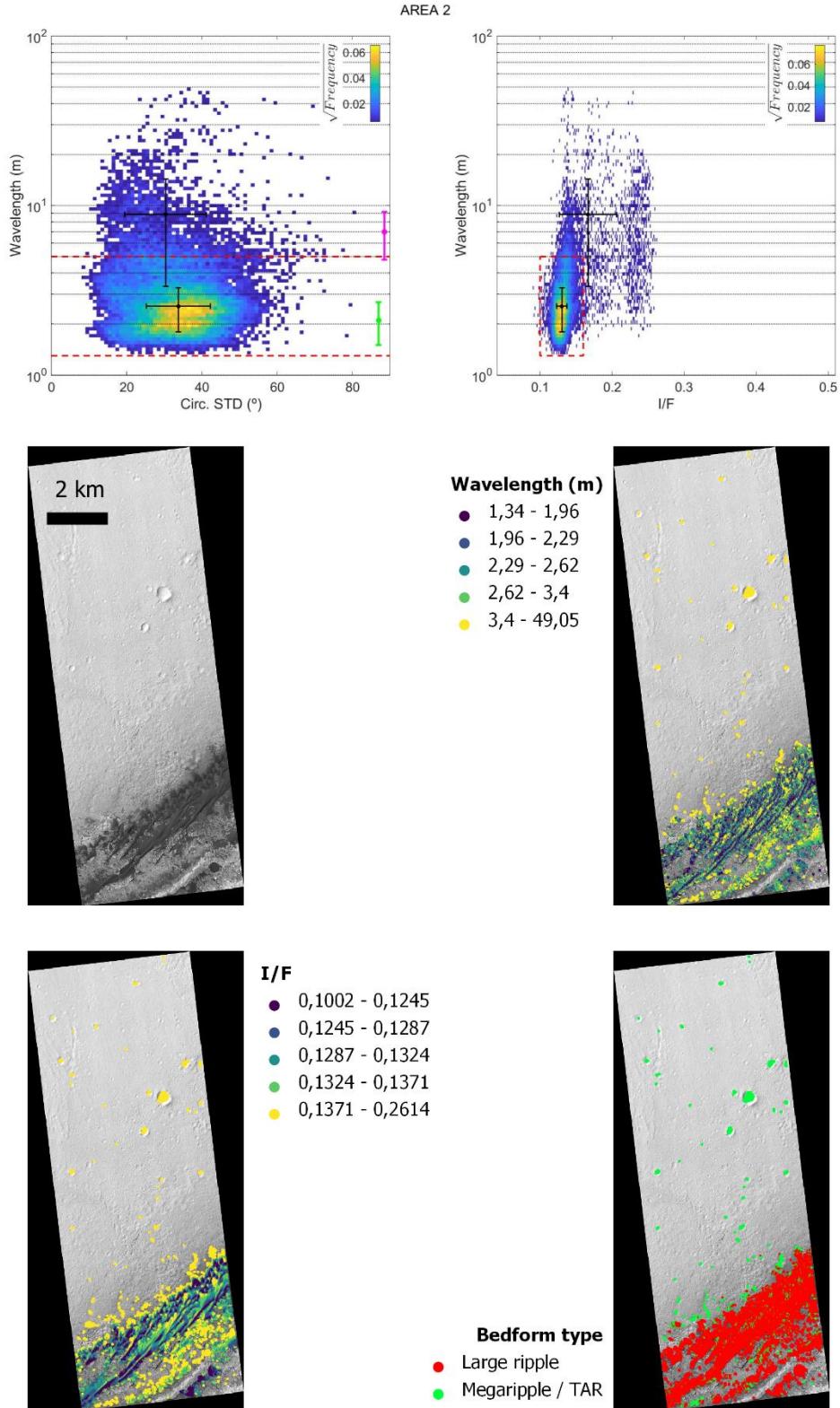
In this file we present the maps and histograms used to discriminate bedform populations. A common layout was adopted for the 75 areas, the first 11 areas are the same surveyed by Lapotre et al. (2016), while areas 51-75 correspond to the Tharsis regions analyzed by Lorenz et al. (2014).

The 2D kernel density histograms located in the first row display the distributions of wavelength, circular standard deviation and albedo (I/F), a square root stretch is used to highlight secondary maxima. Red dashed lines correspond to the wavelength and albedo thresholds used to segment the two bedform classes: large dark-toned ripples and megaripples & TARs. Computed averages and standard deviation intervals are shown in black, while wavelength averages from previous studies are shown in the right side of the first plot (green: large dark-toned ripples; magenta: TARs; cyan: Tharsis bedforms). In the middle row we show the HiRISE image (left) and the wavelength map (right). The lower-left map displays the albedo variations, and the lower-right map displays the classified bedform type.

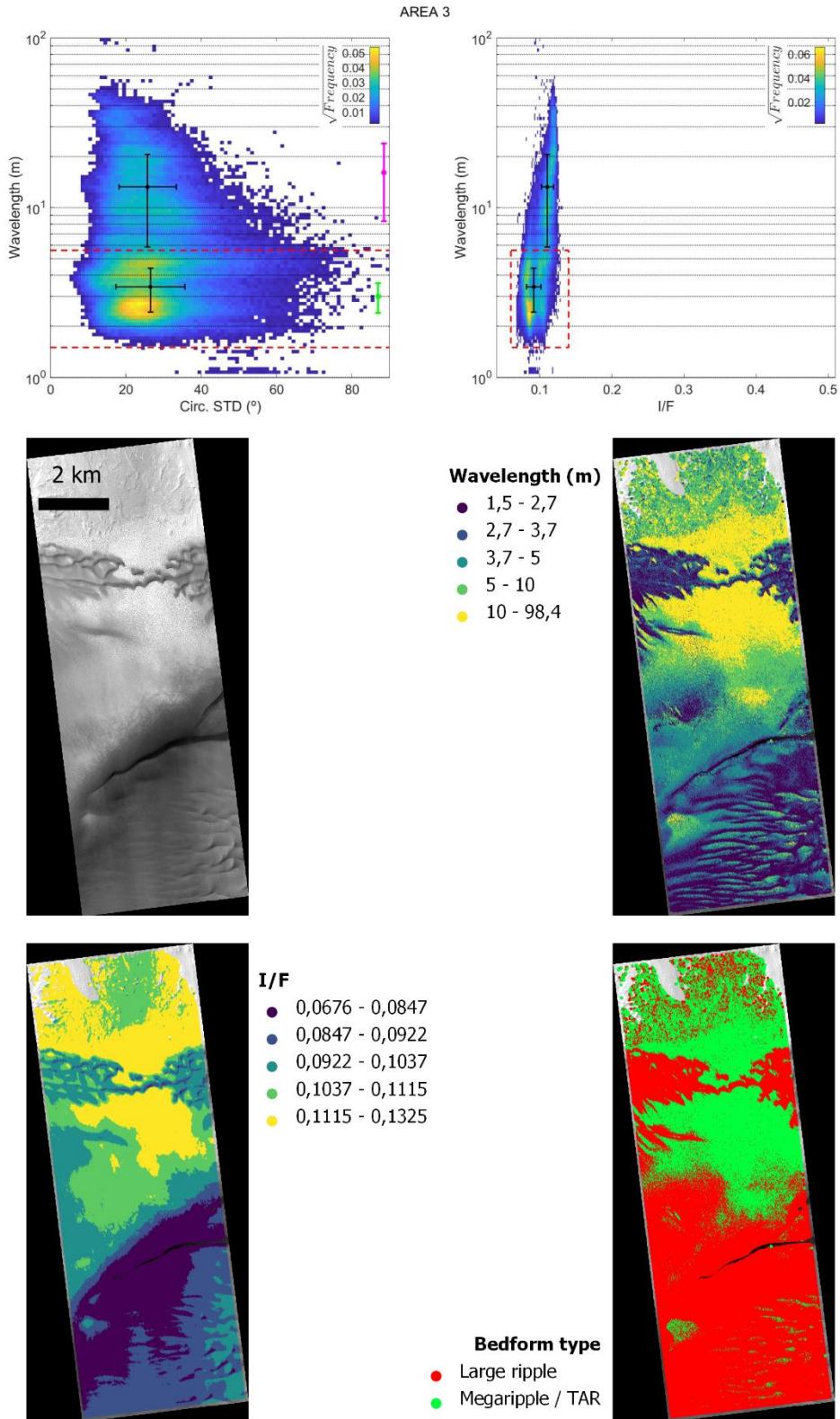
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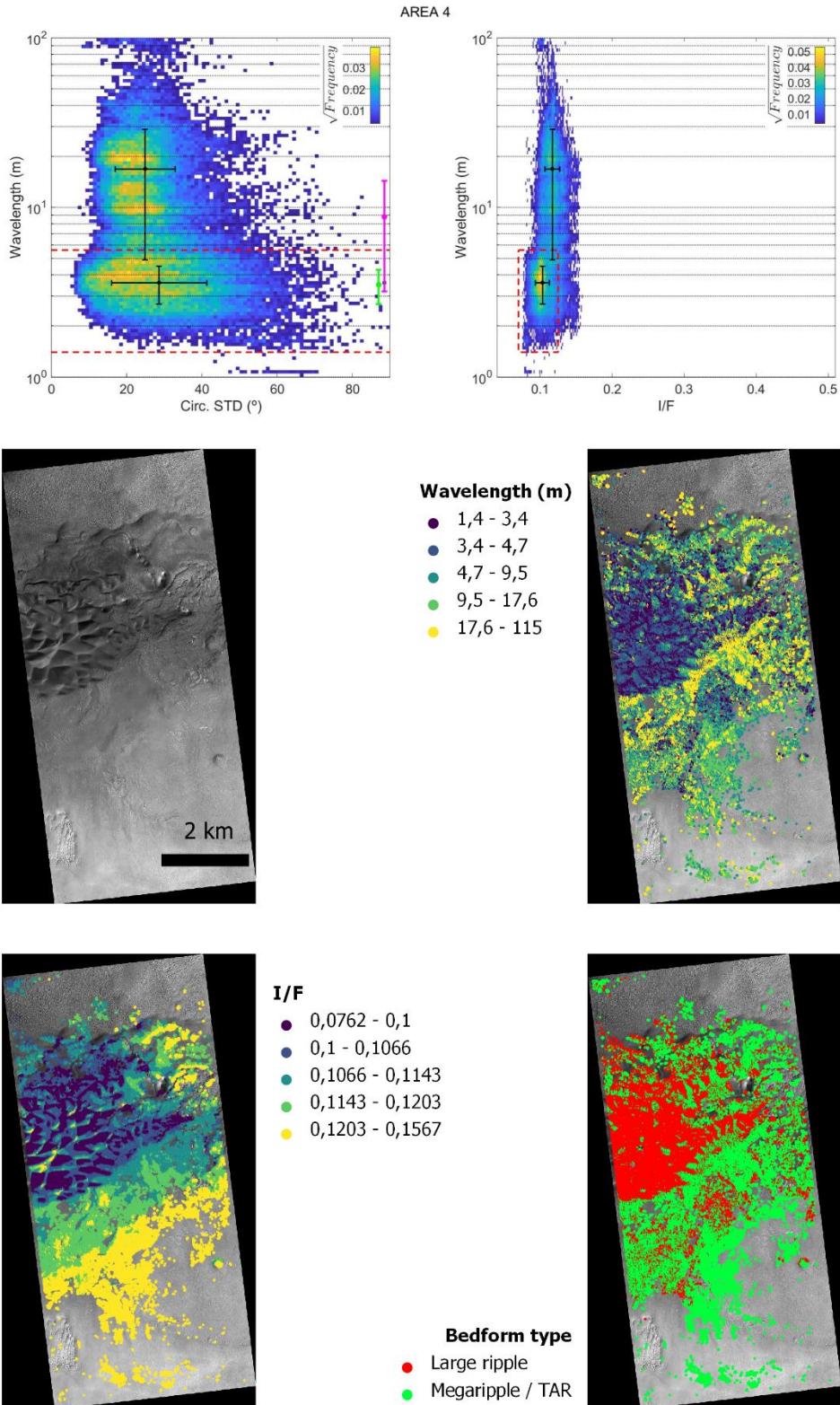
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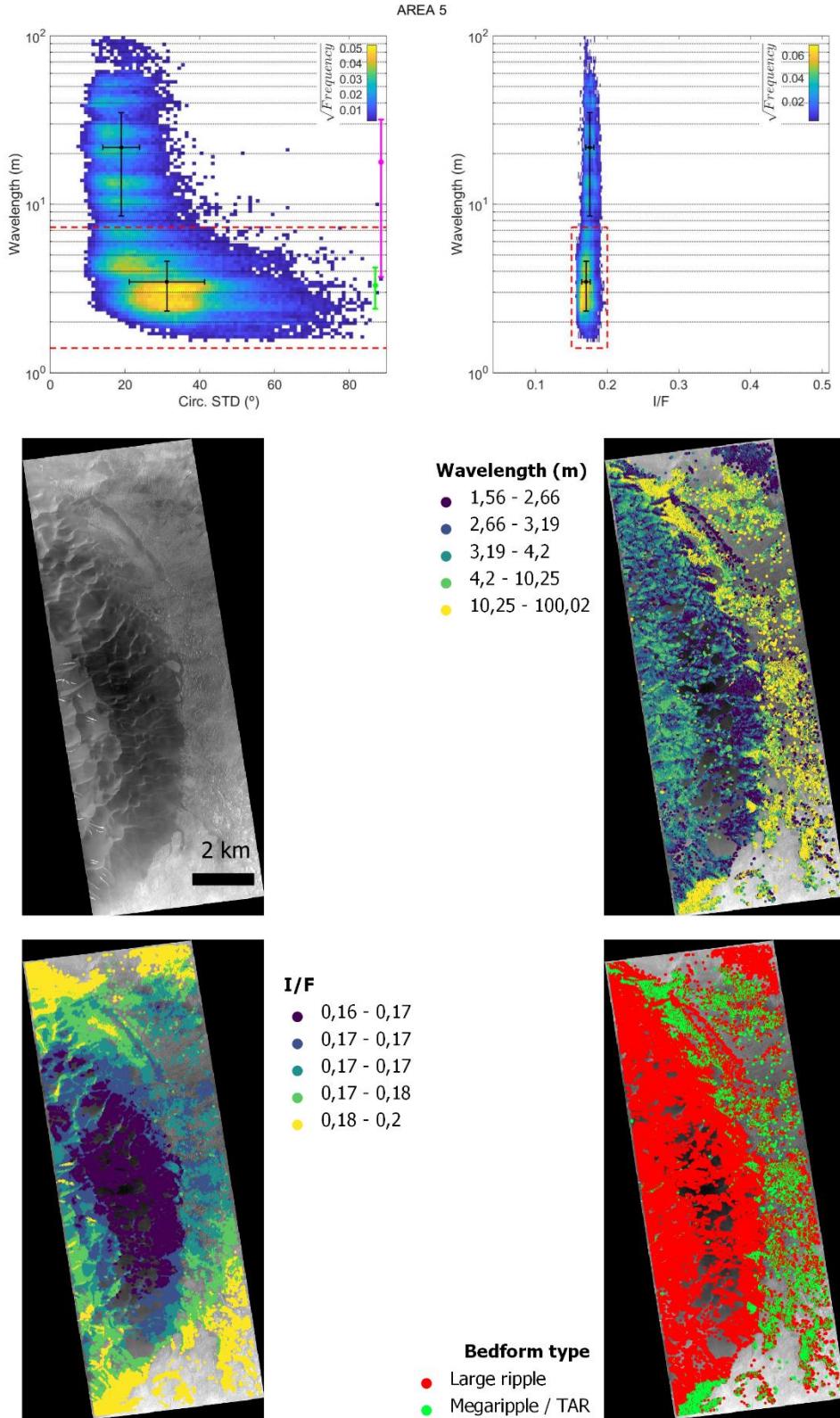
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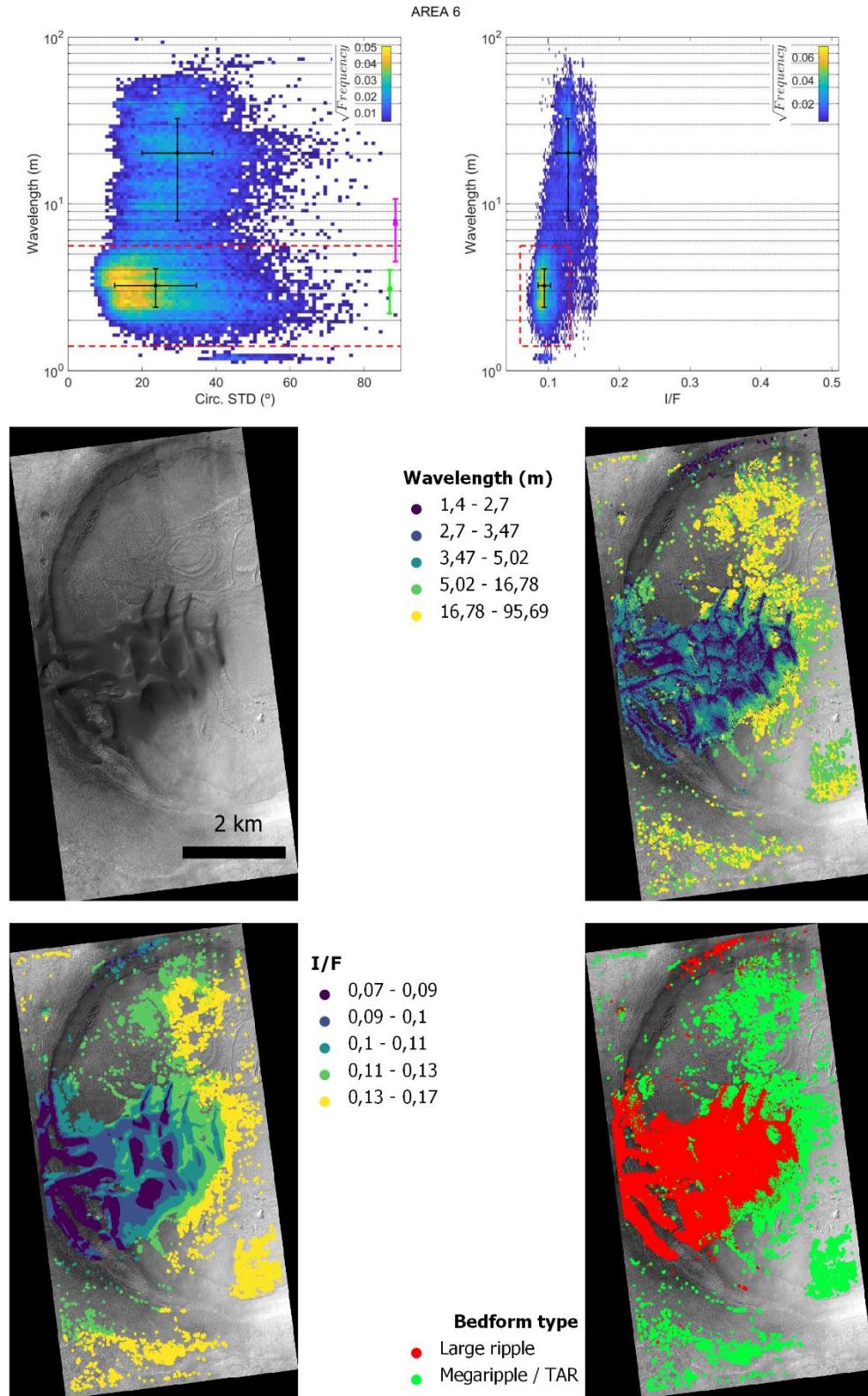
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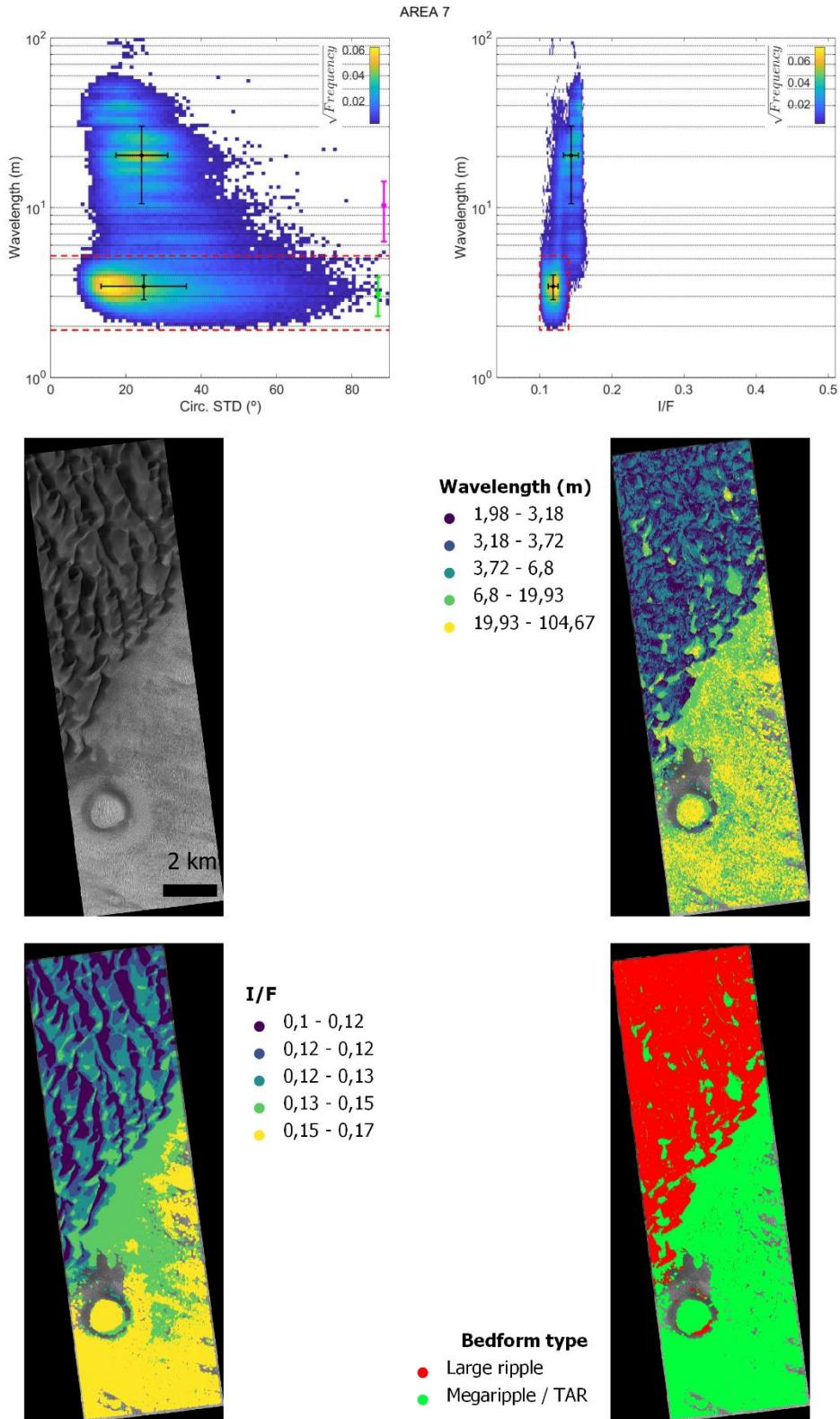
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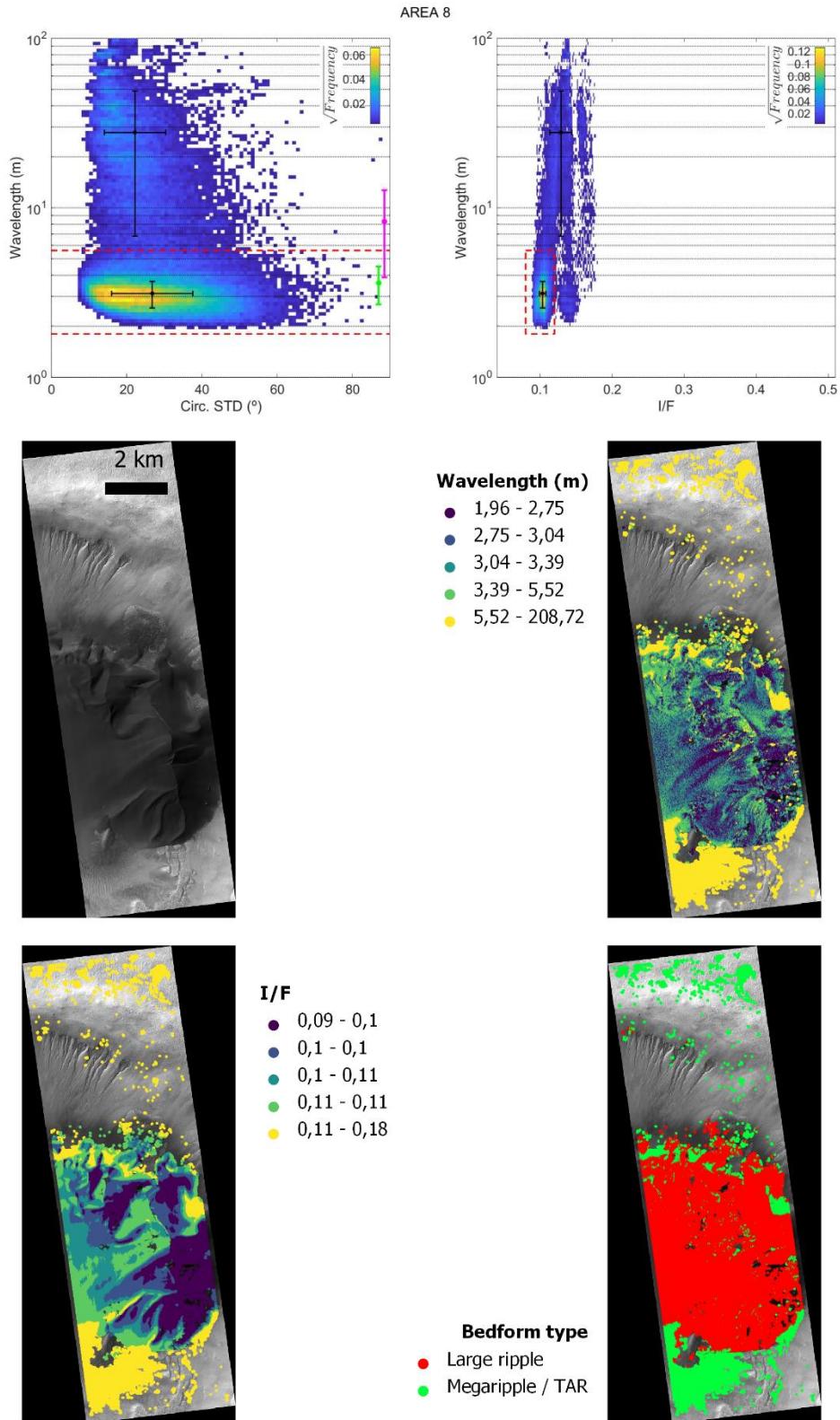
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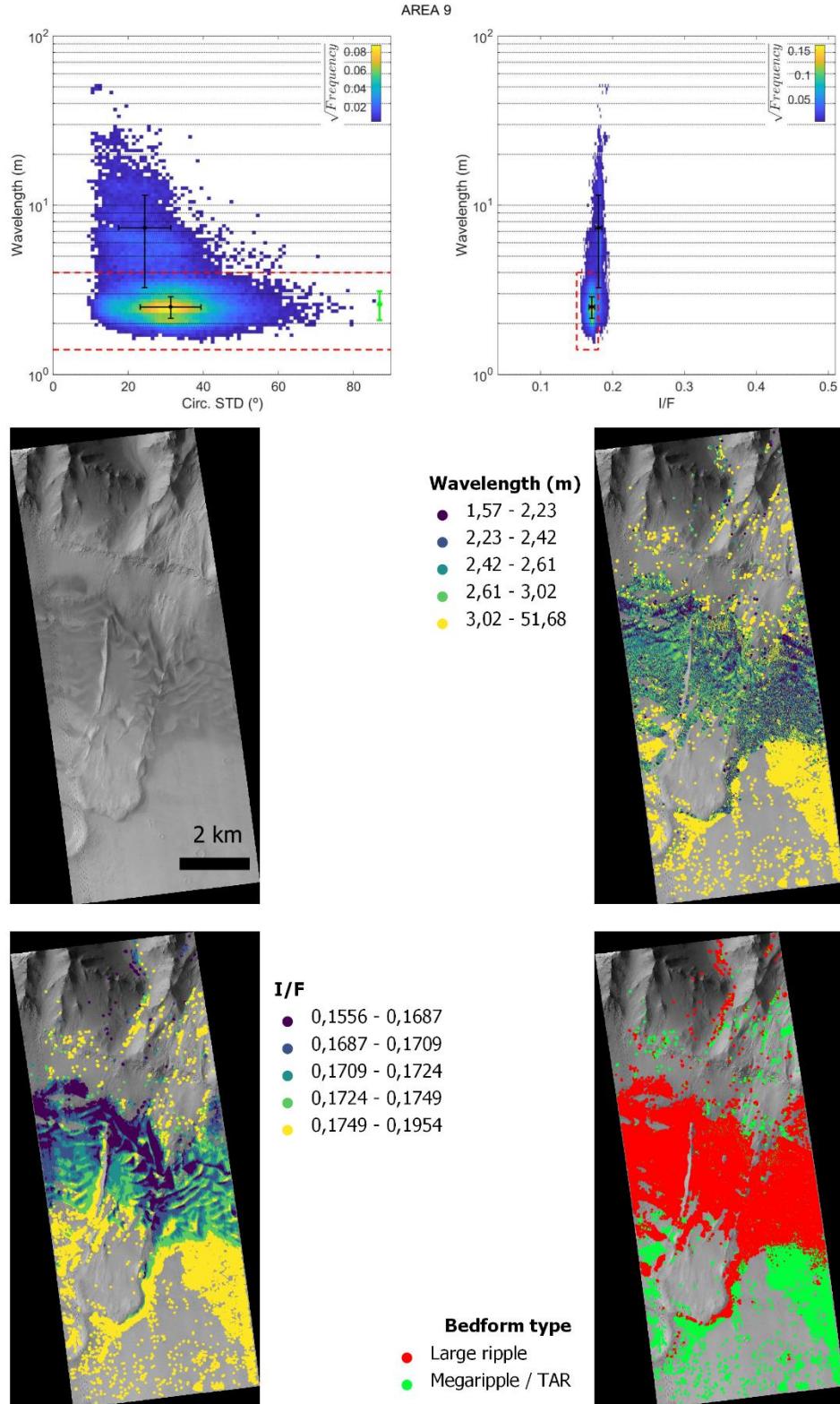
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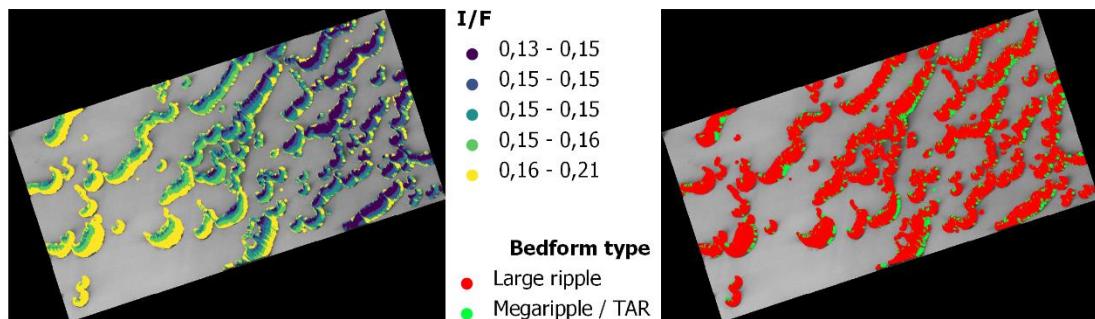
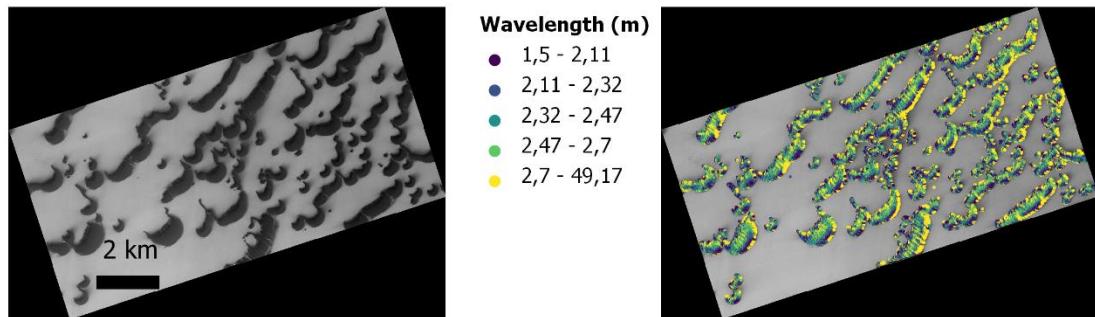
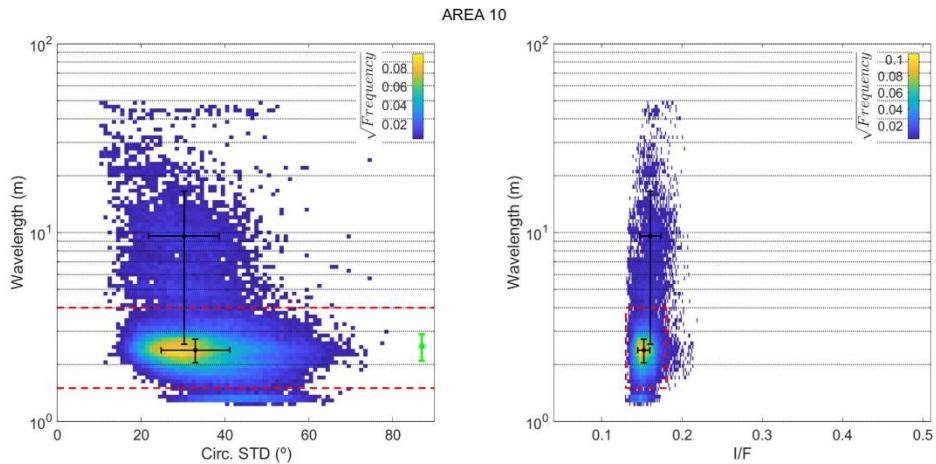
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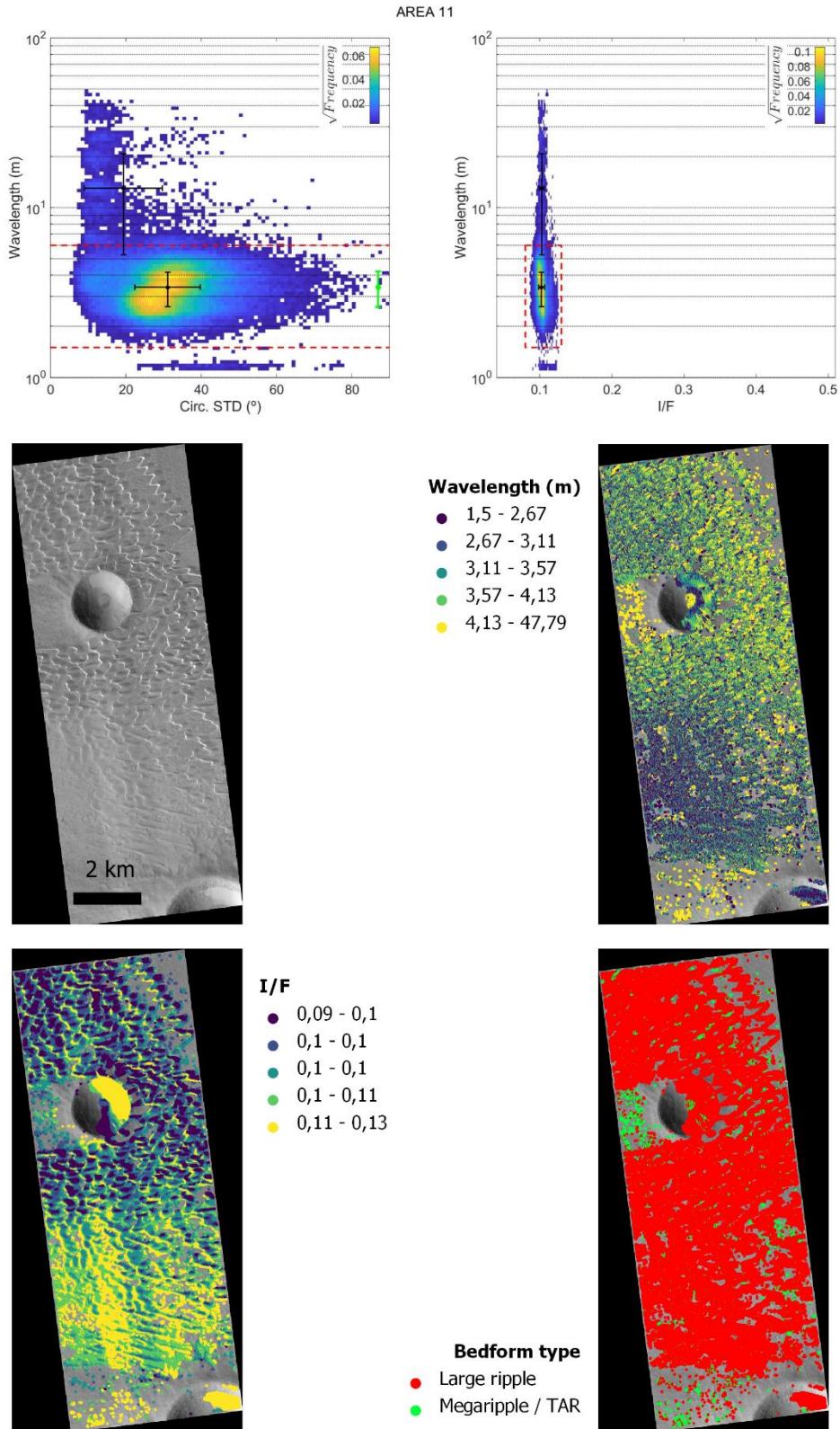
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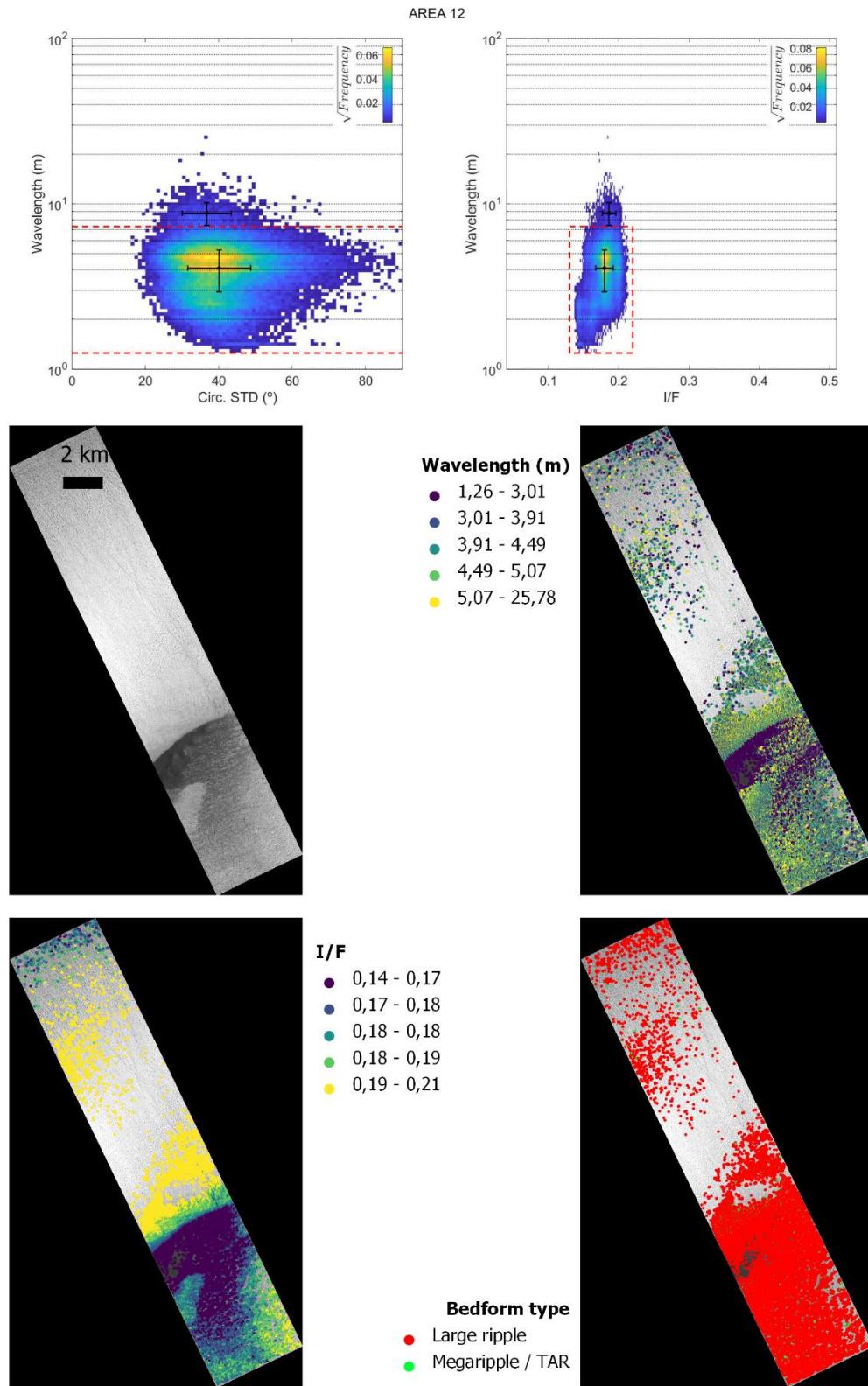
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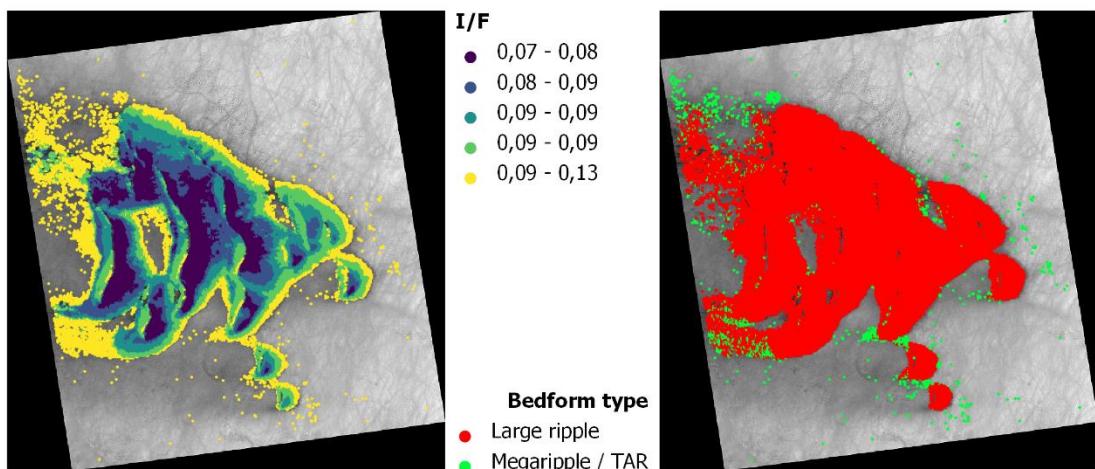
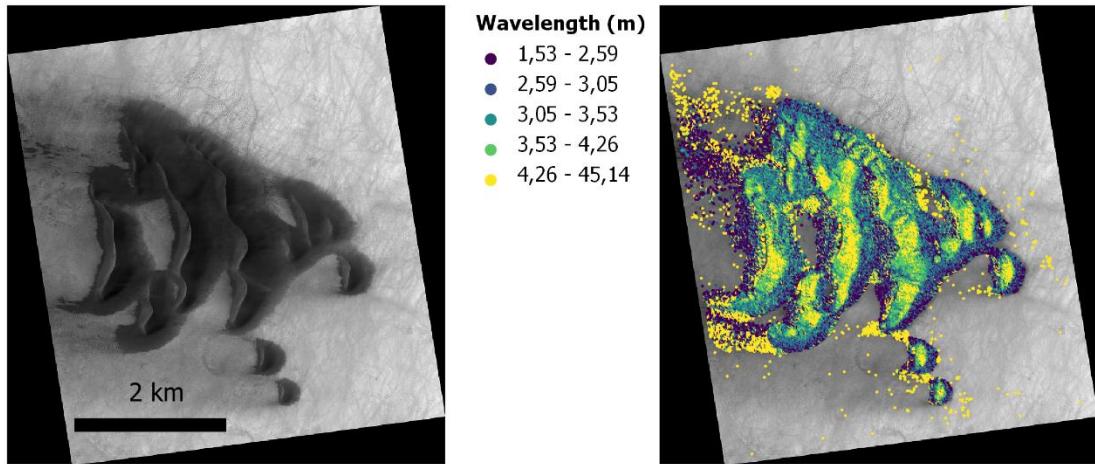
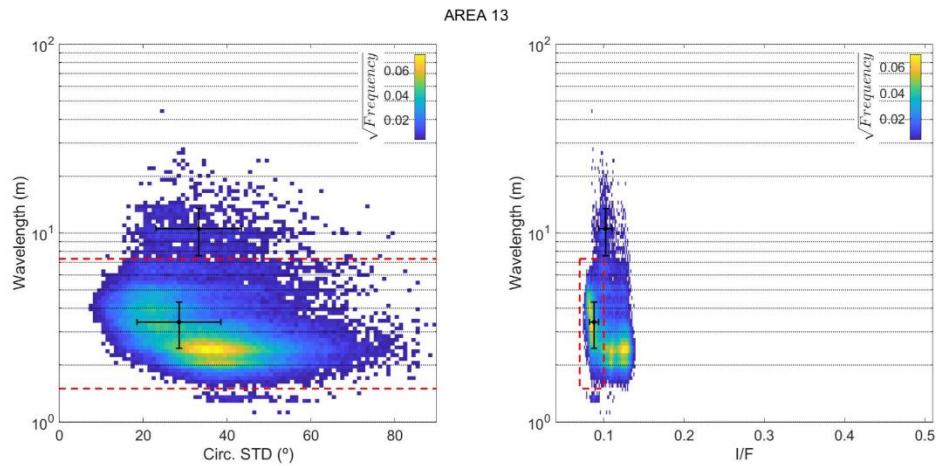
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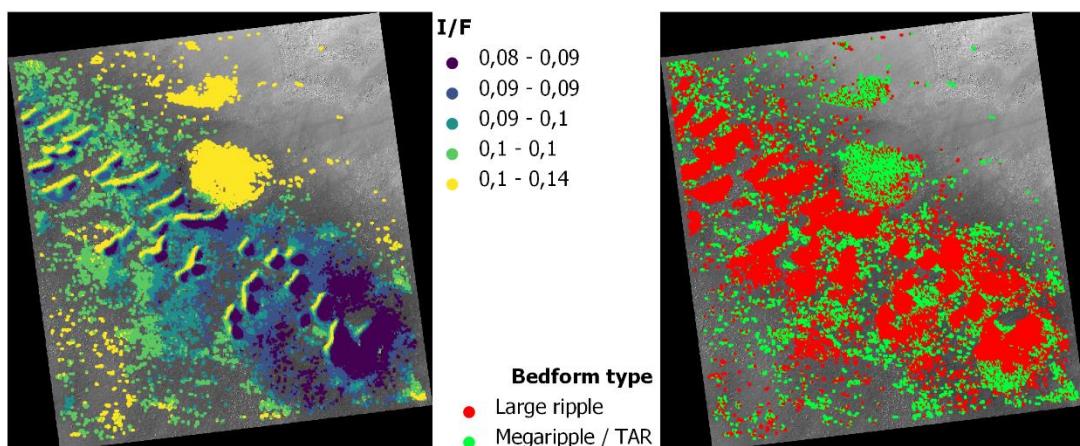
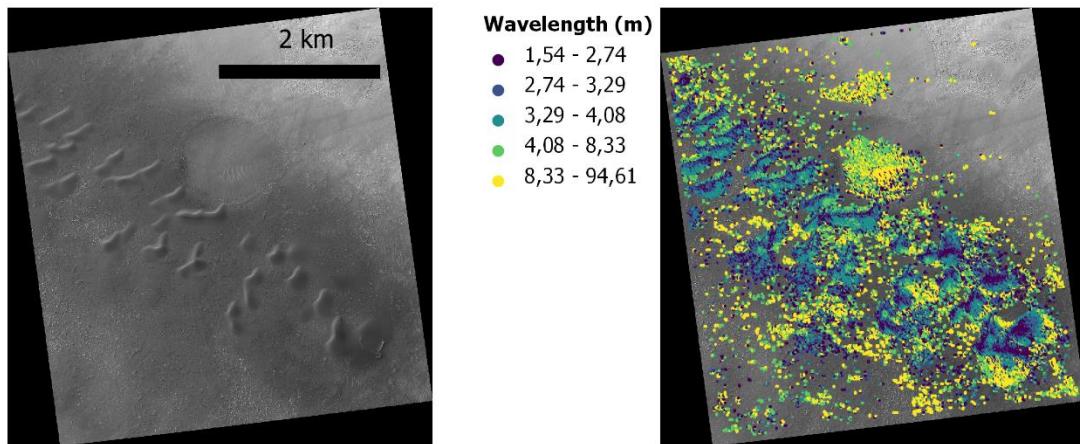
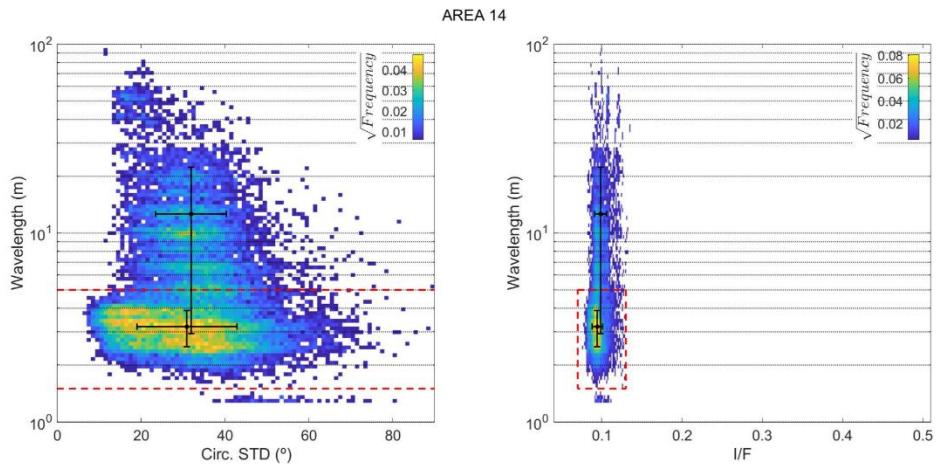
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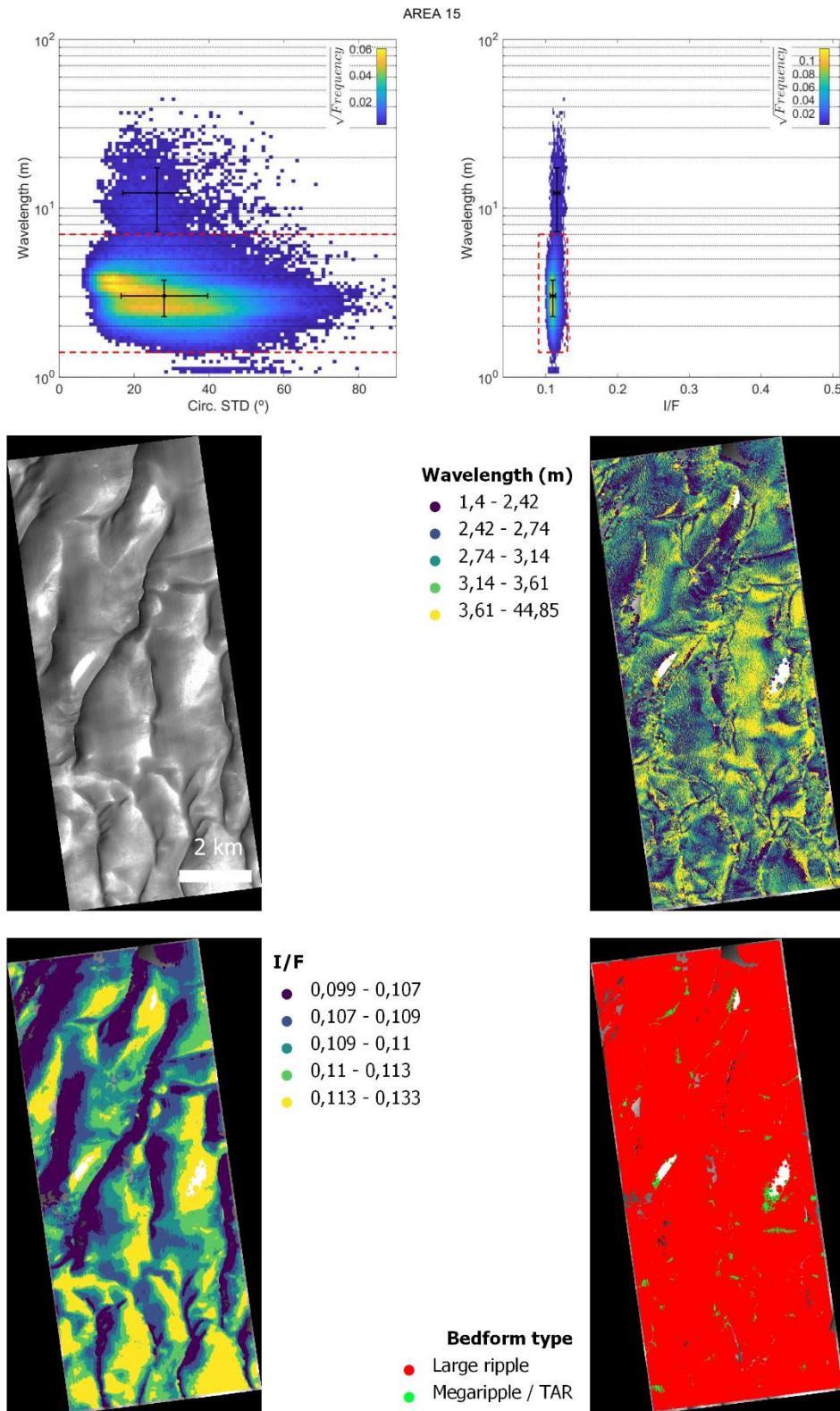
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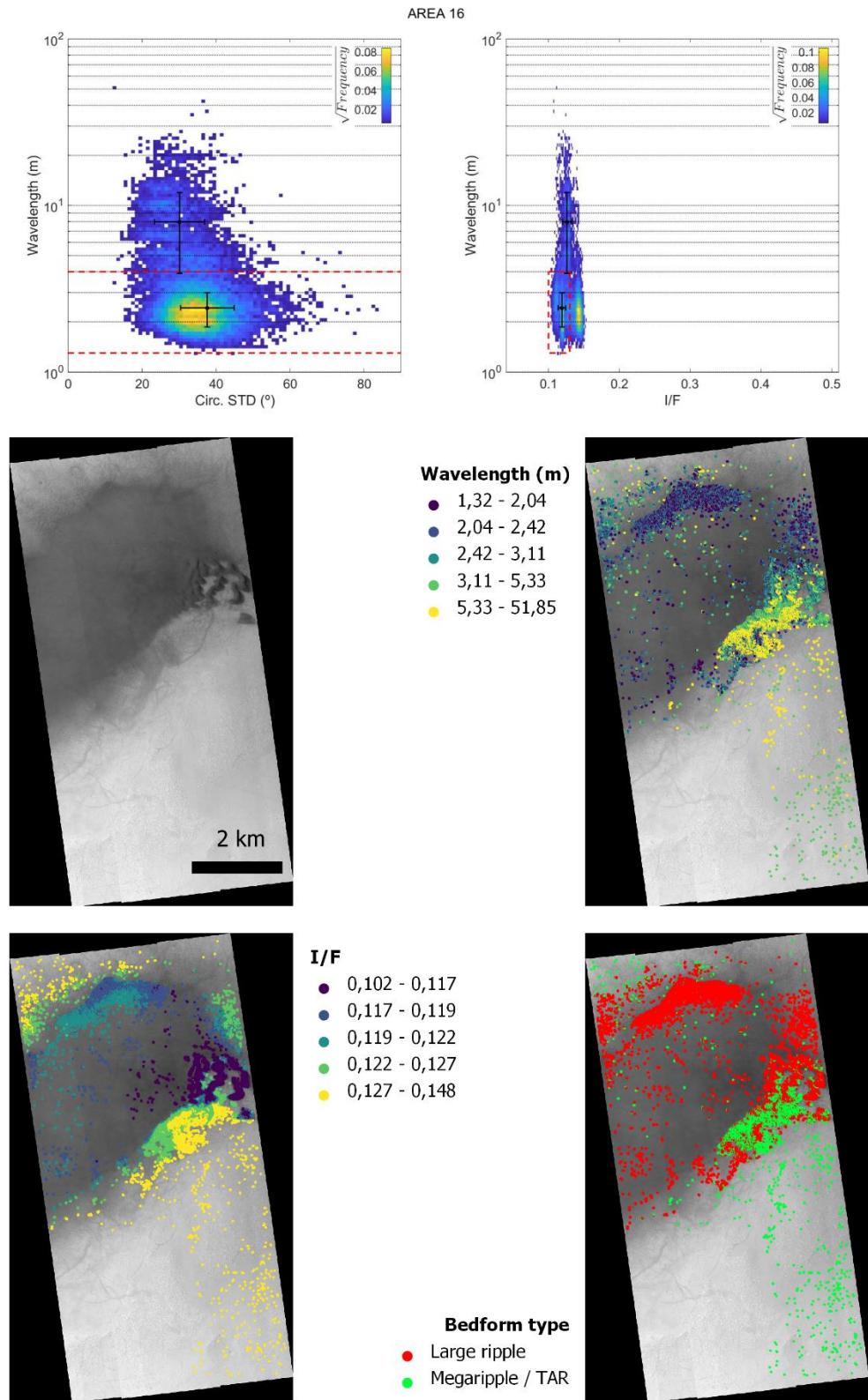
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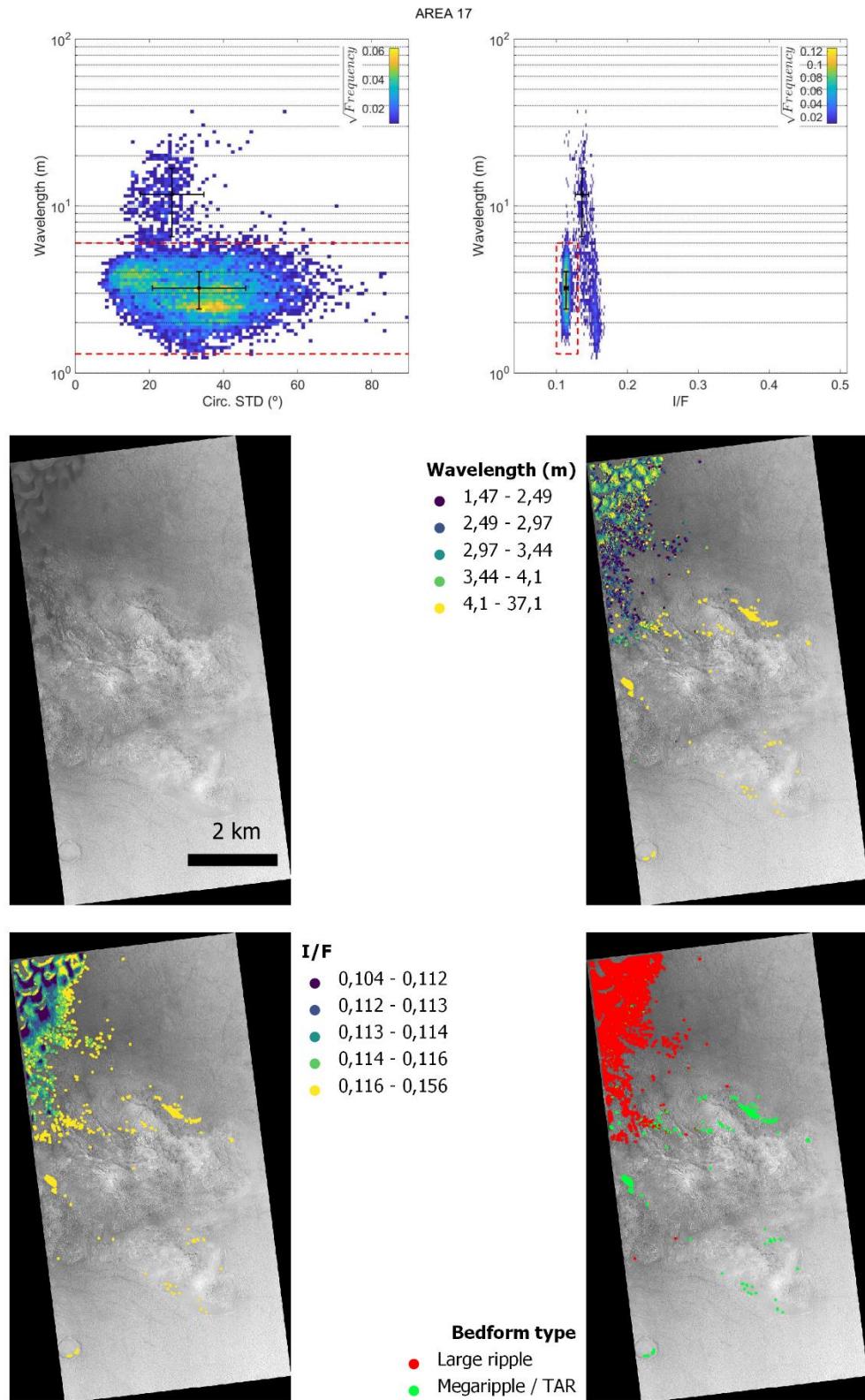
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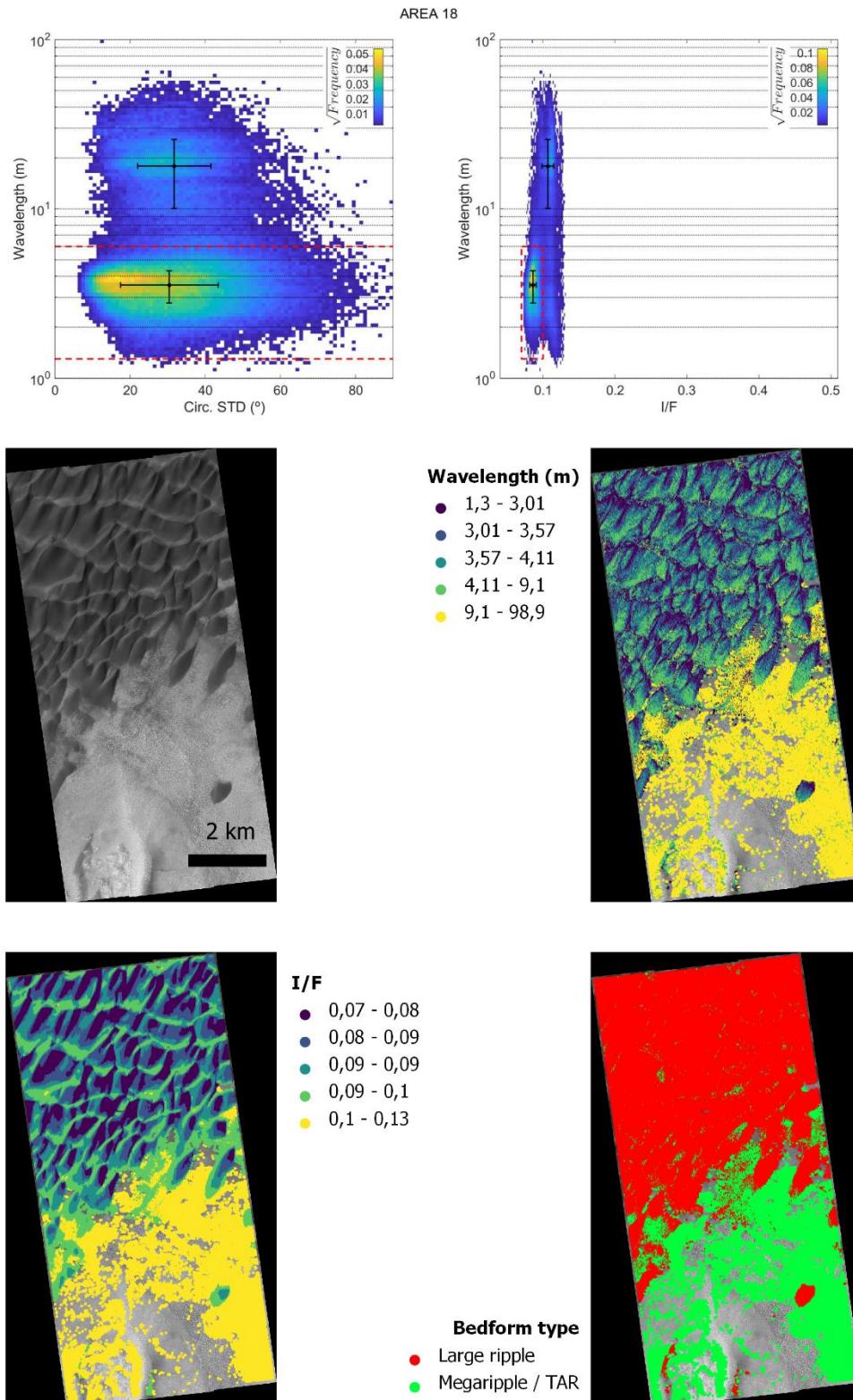
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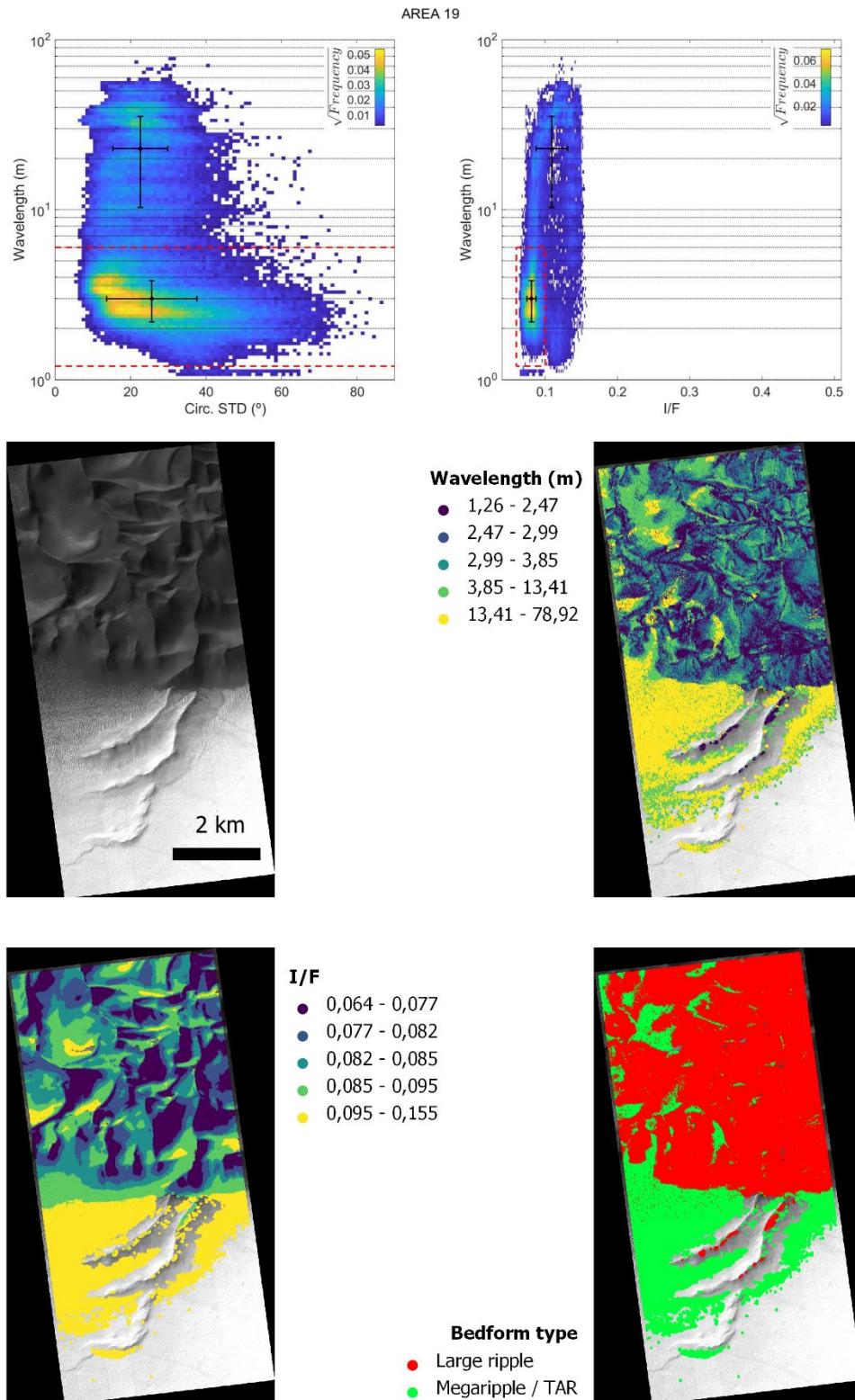
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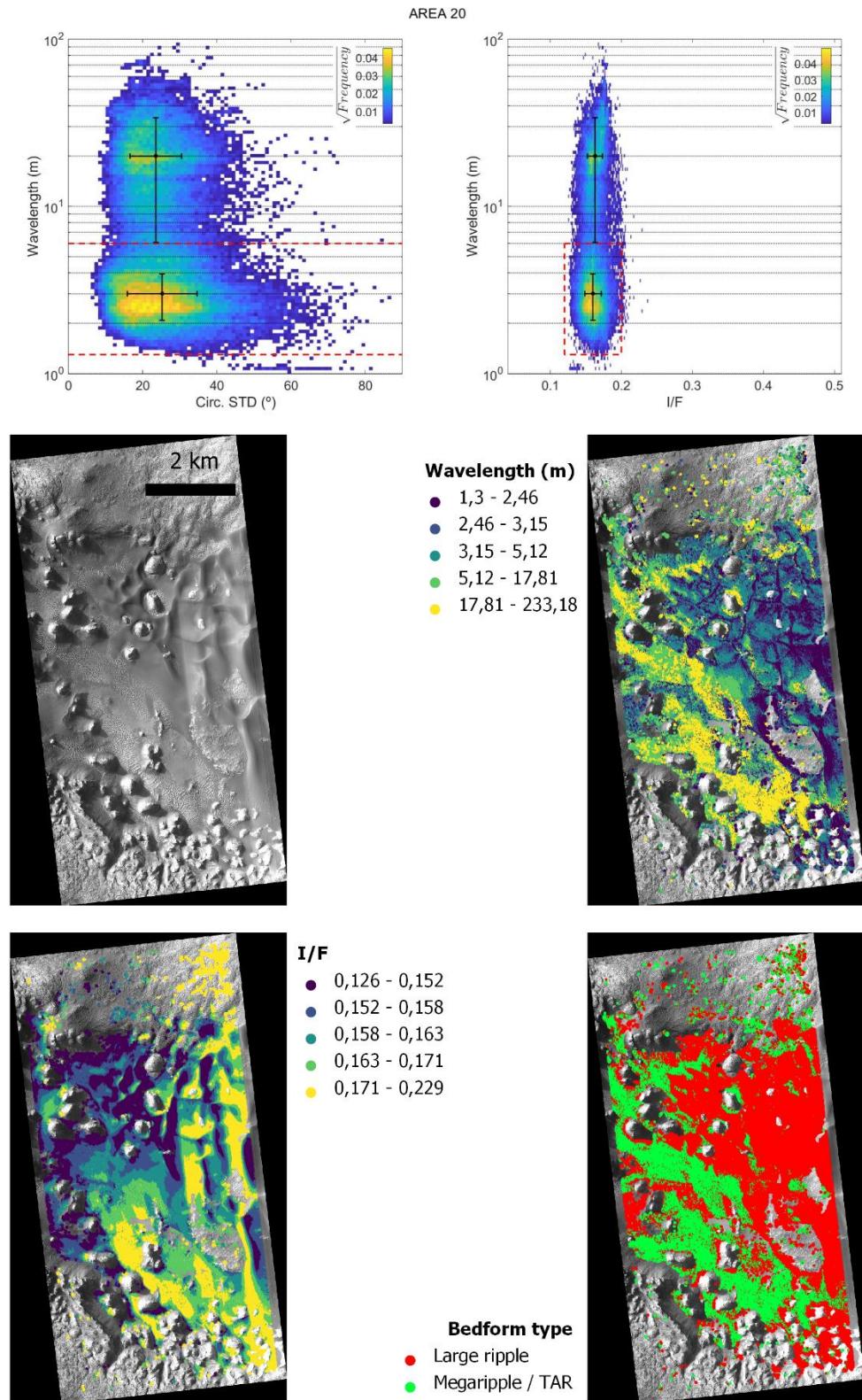
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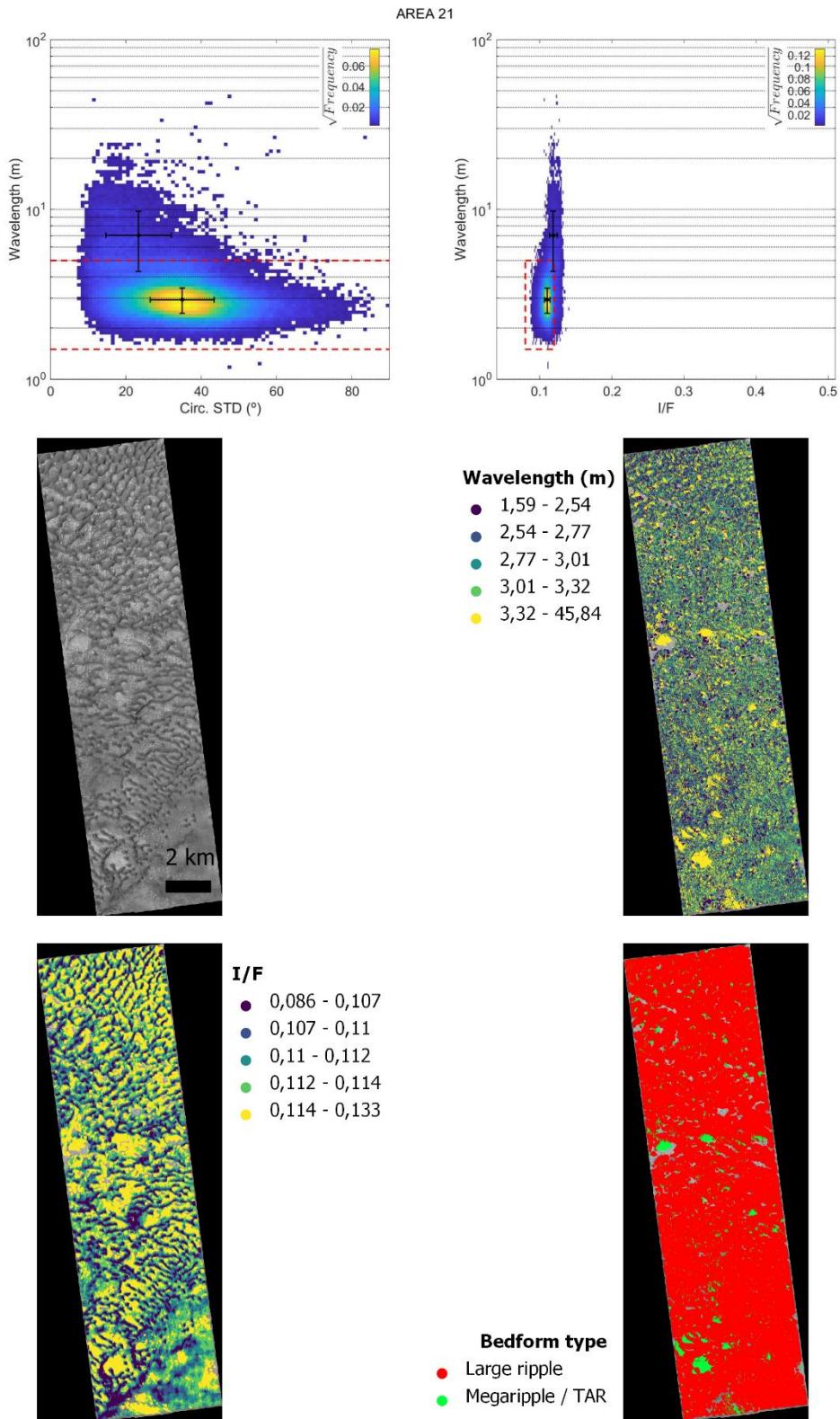
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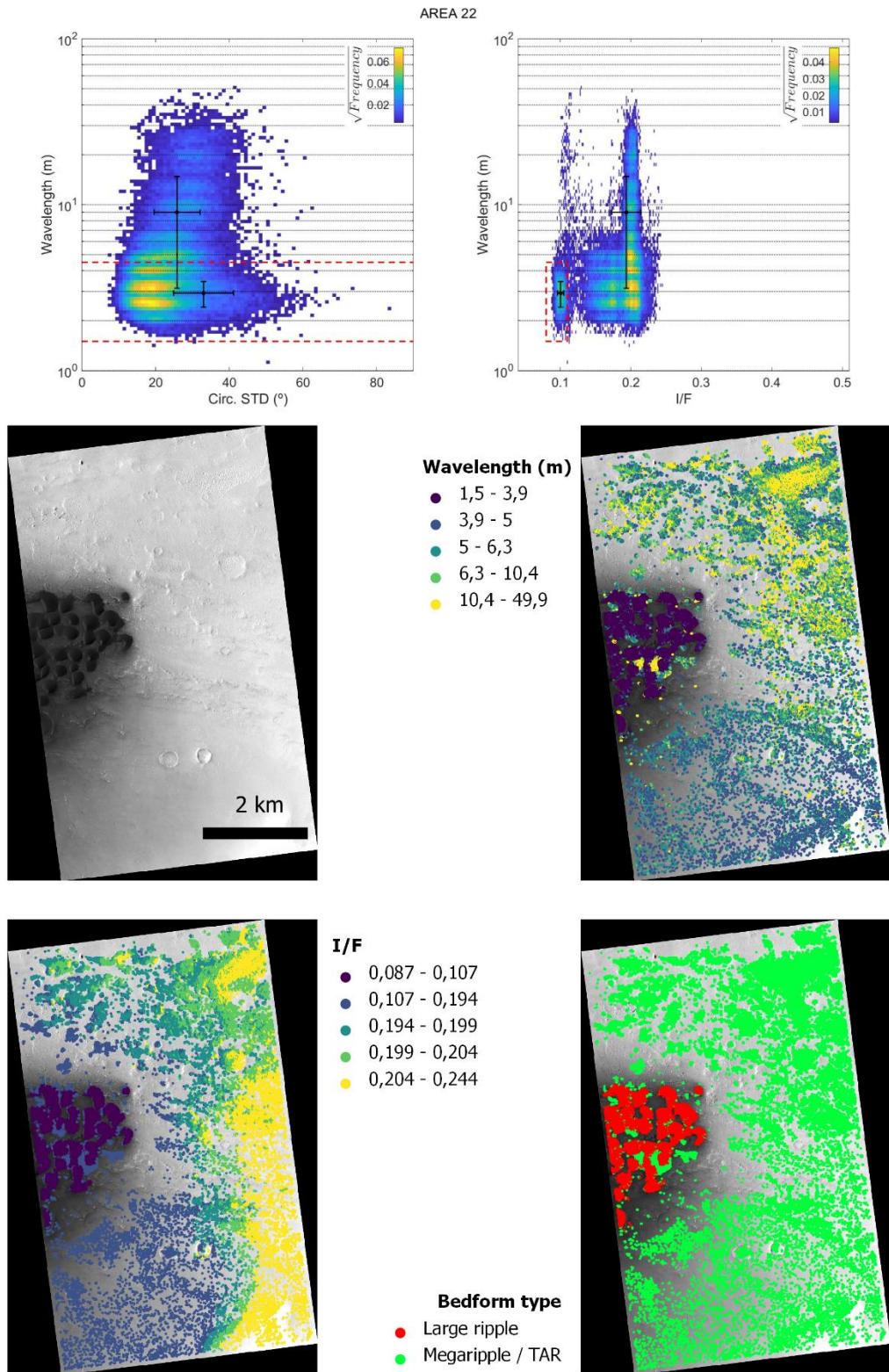
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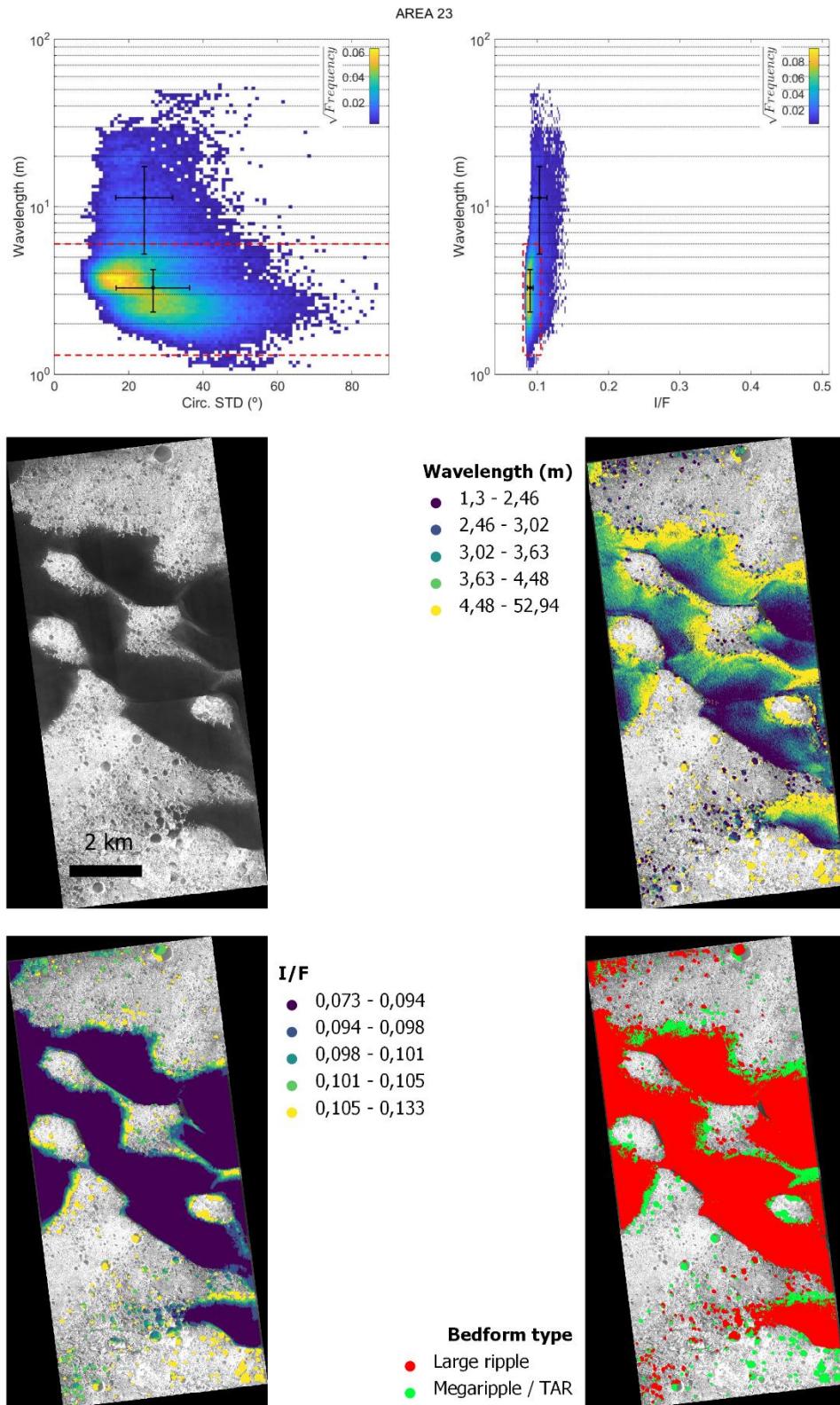
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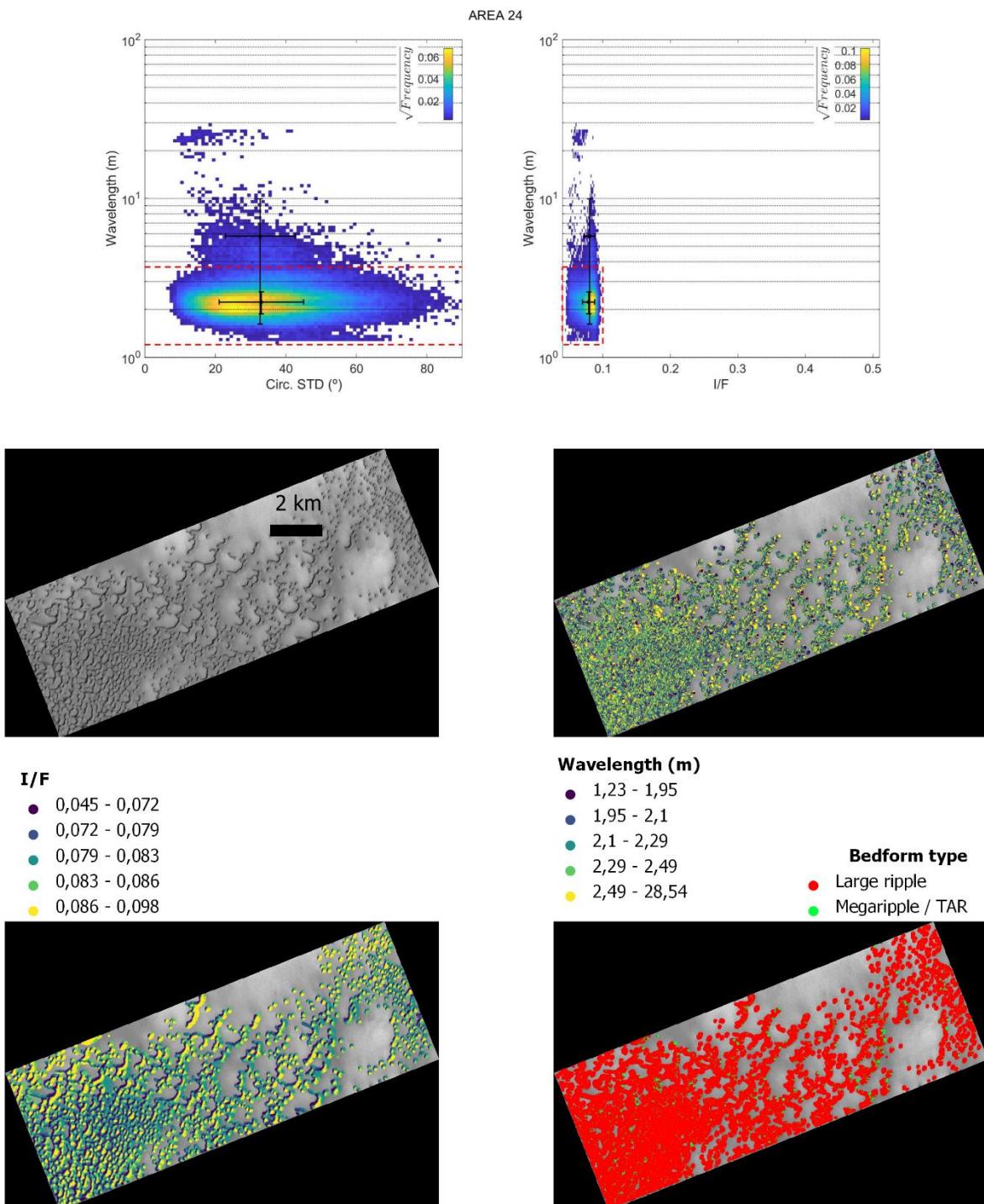
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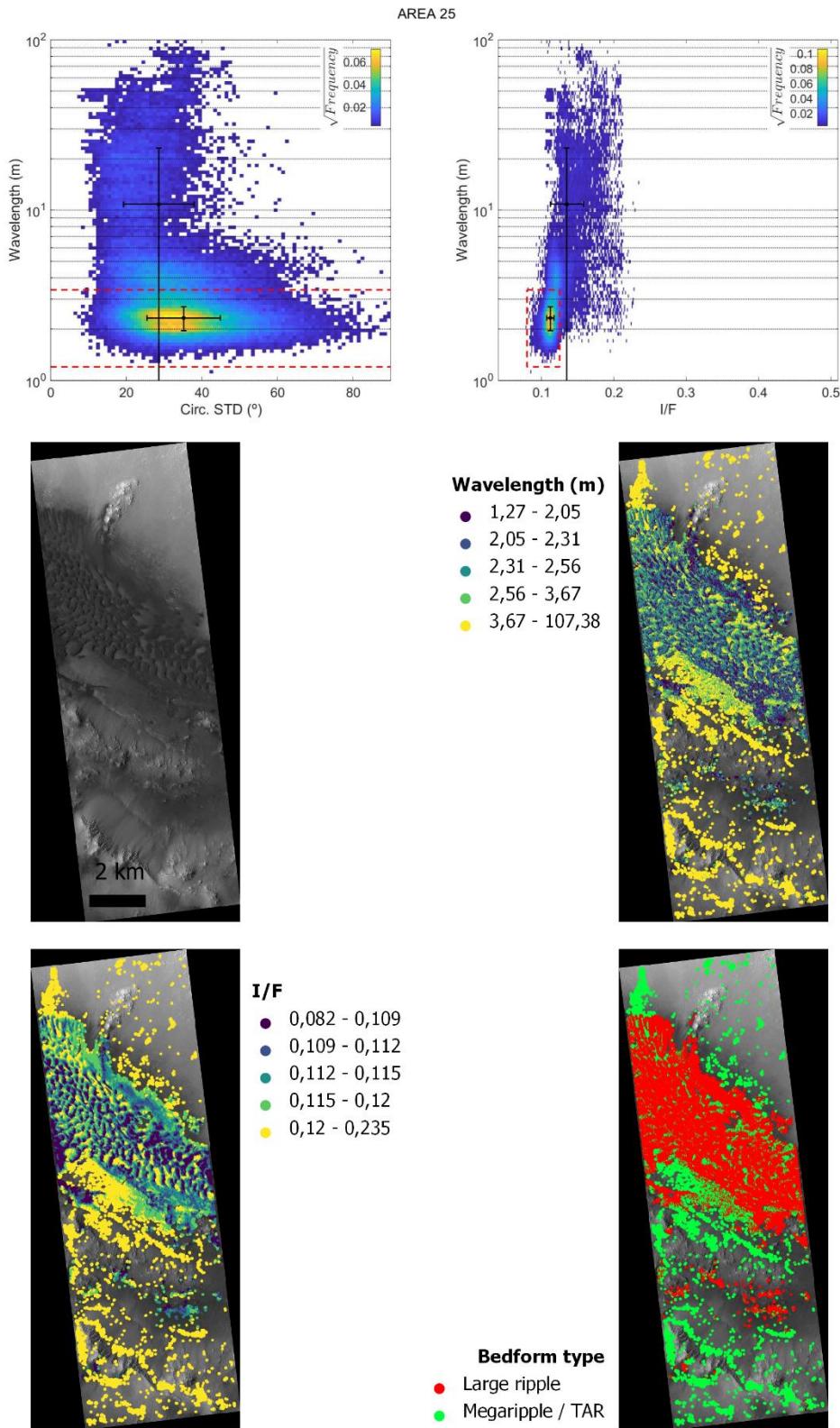
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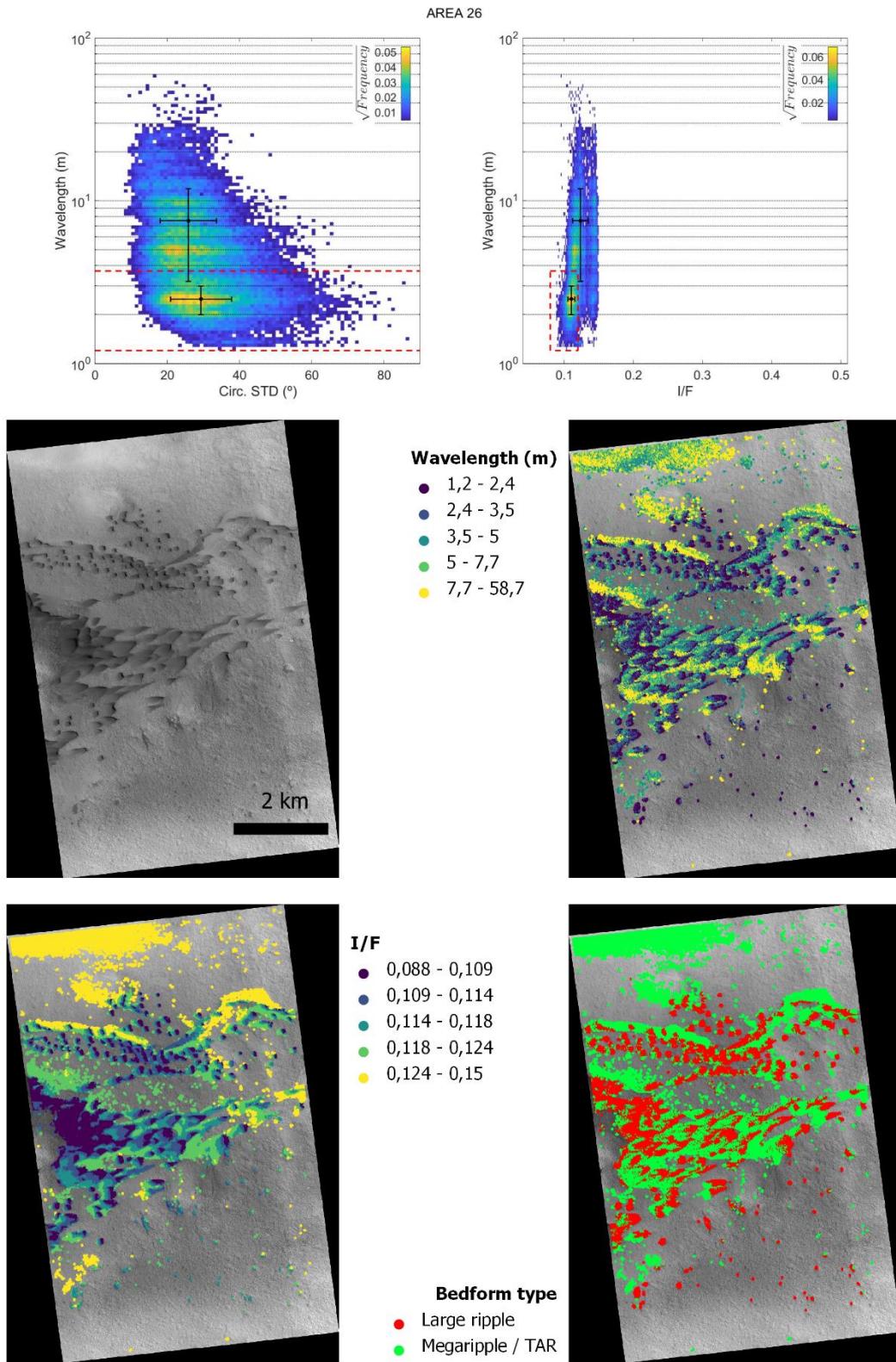
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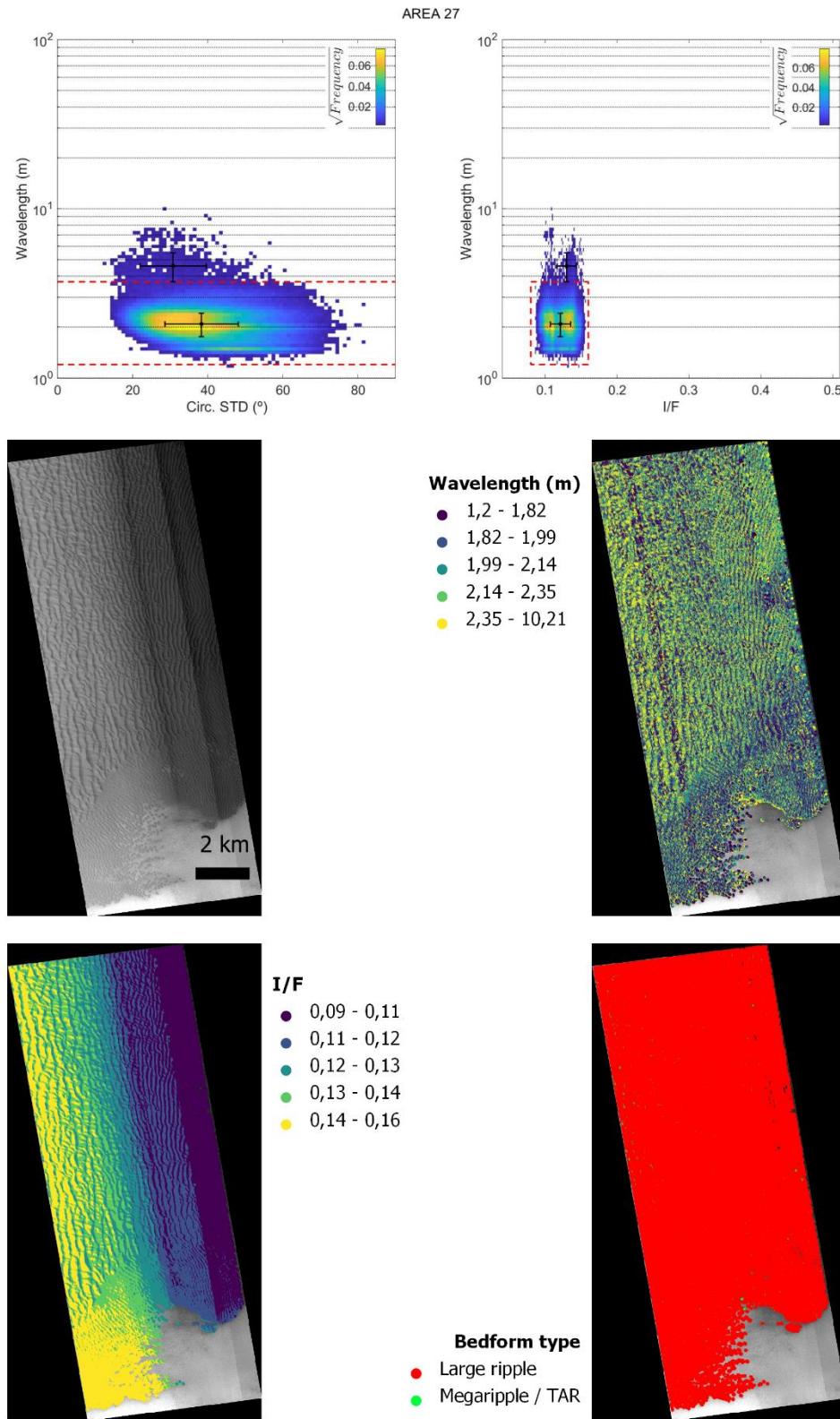
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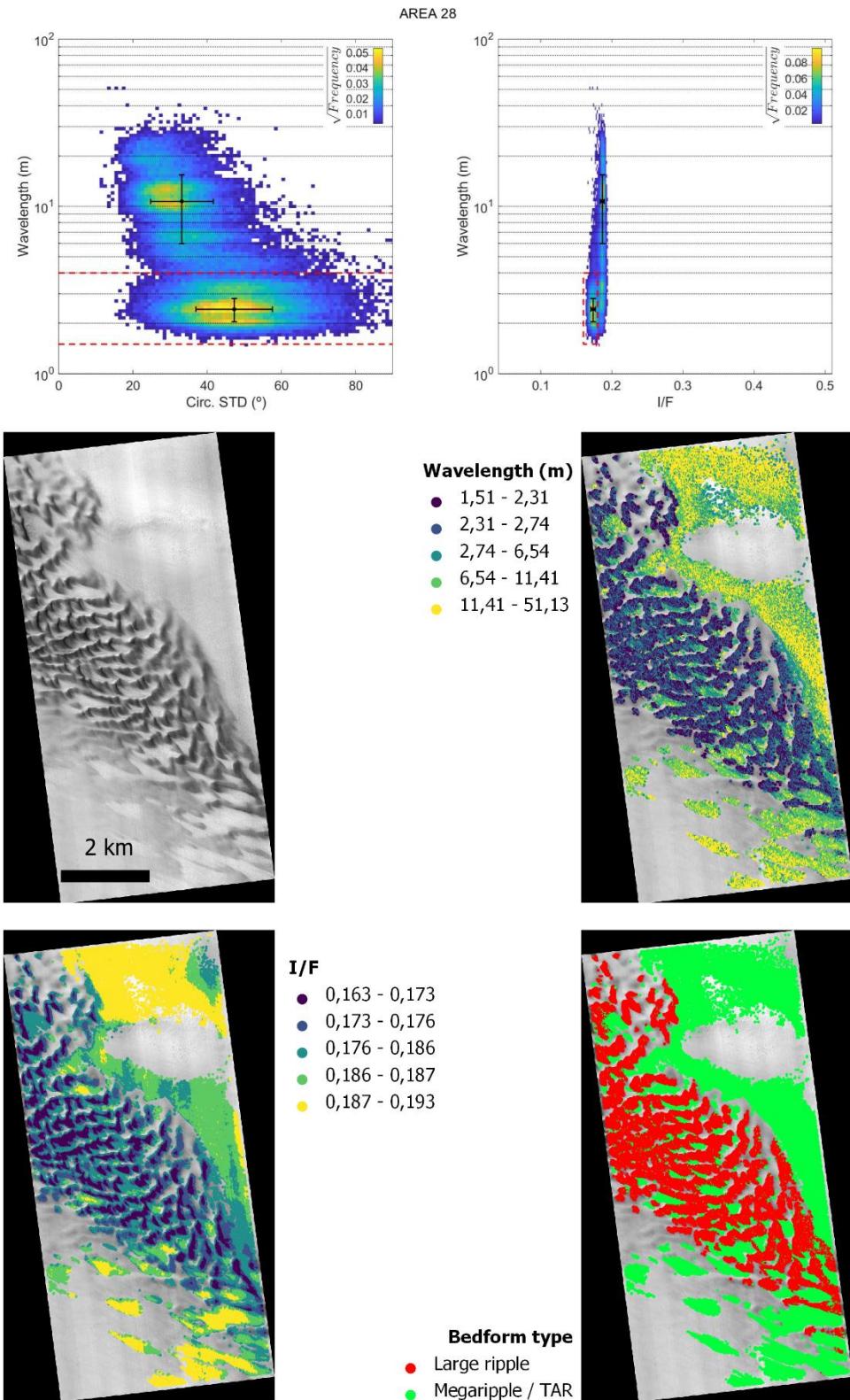
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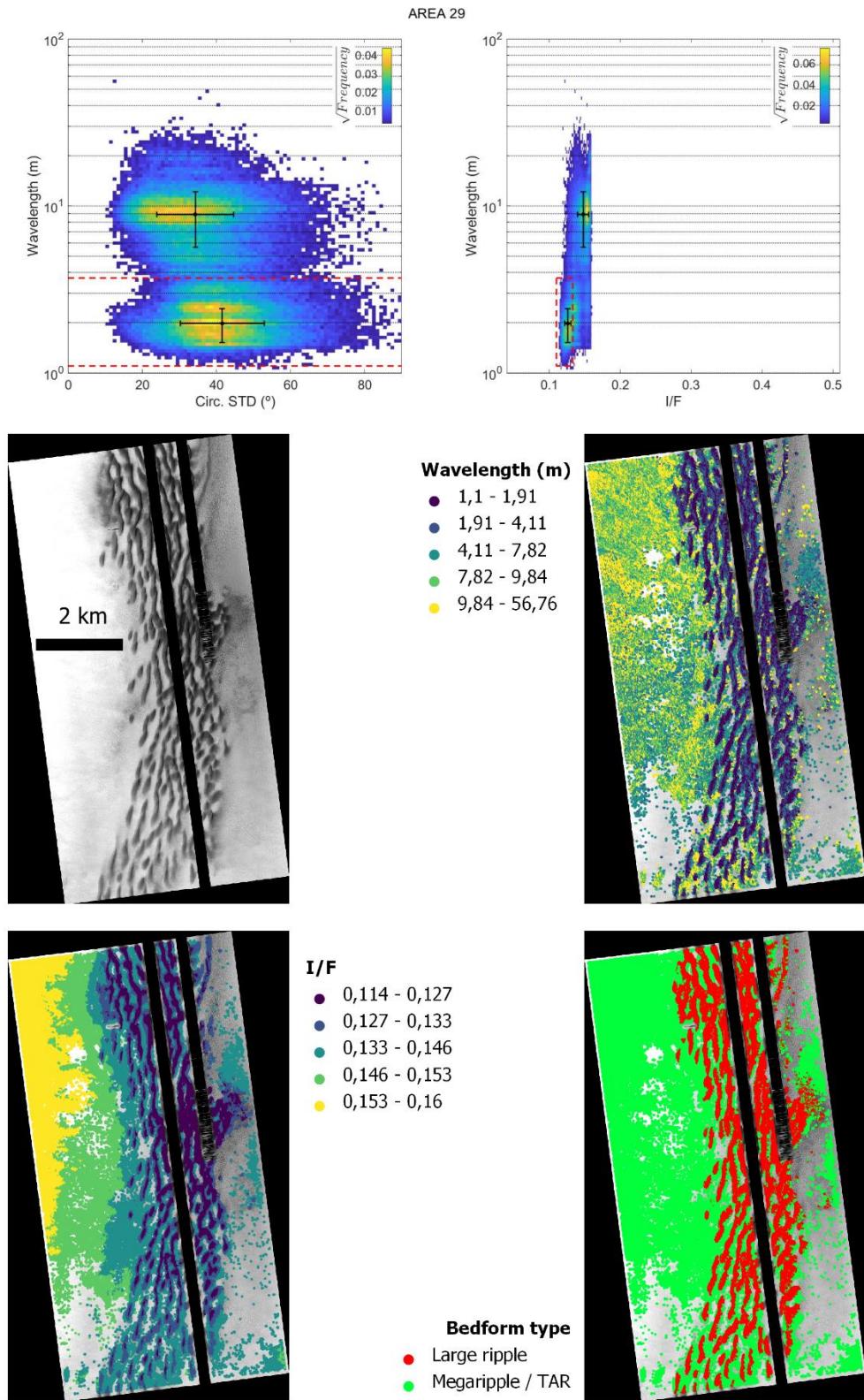
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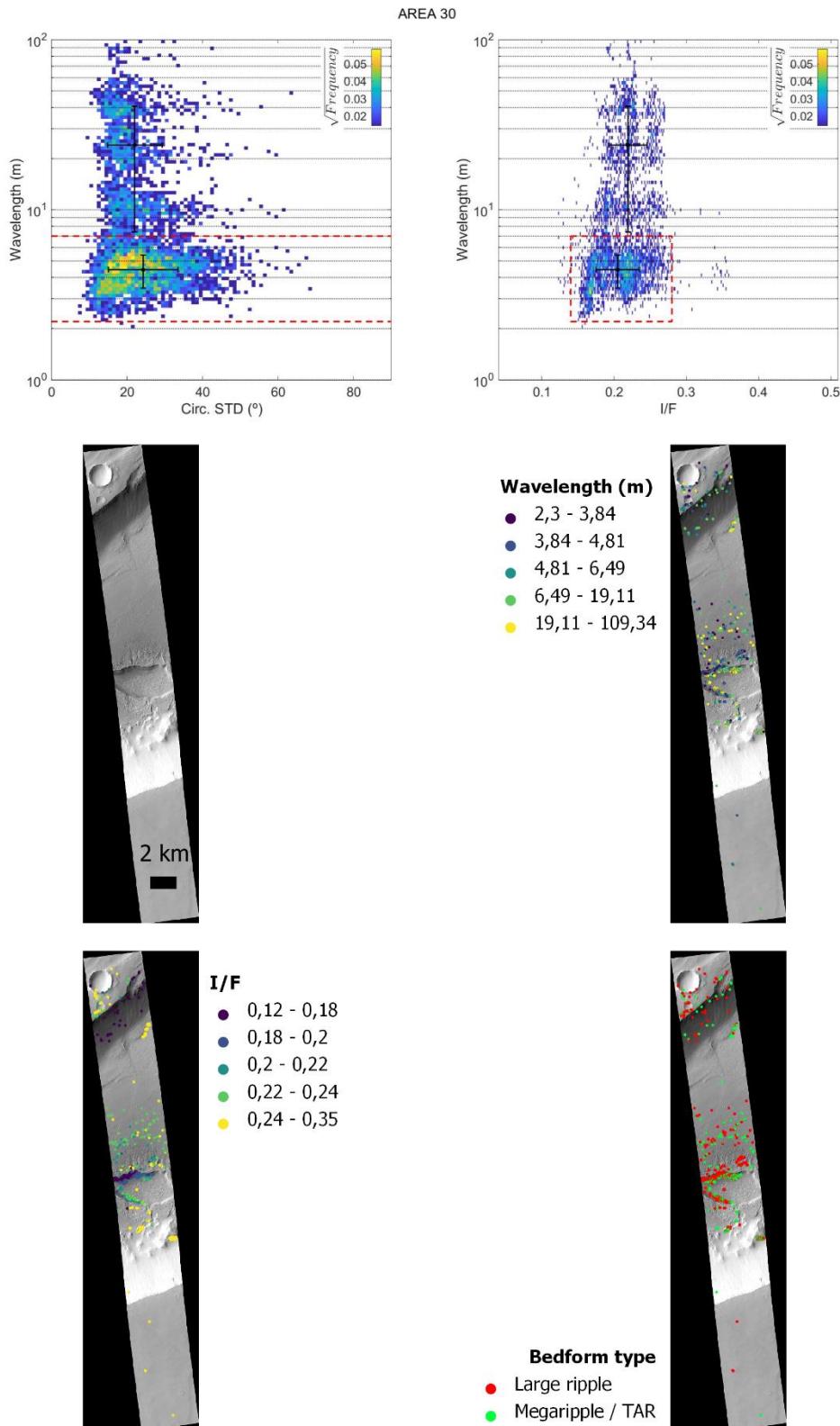
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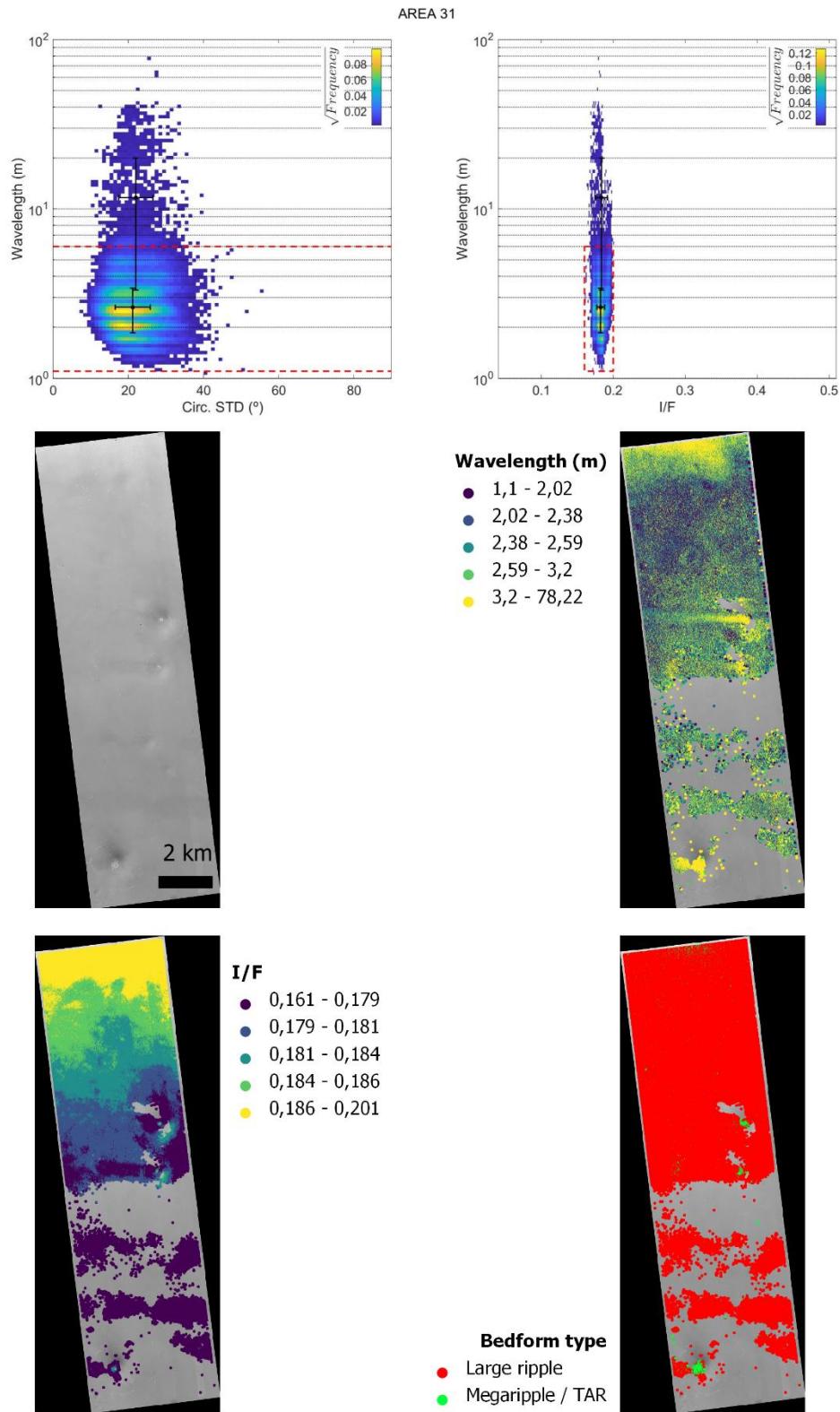
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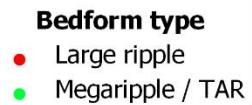
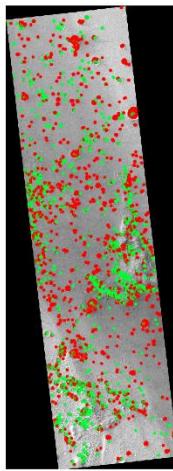
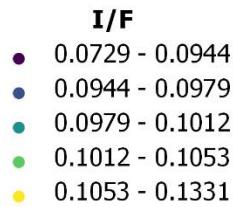
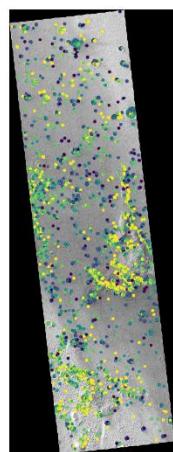
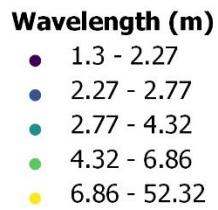
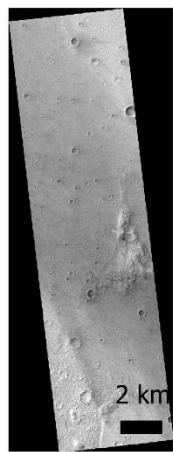
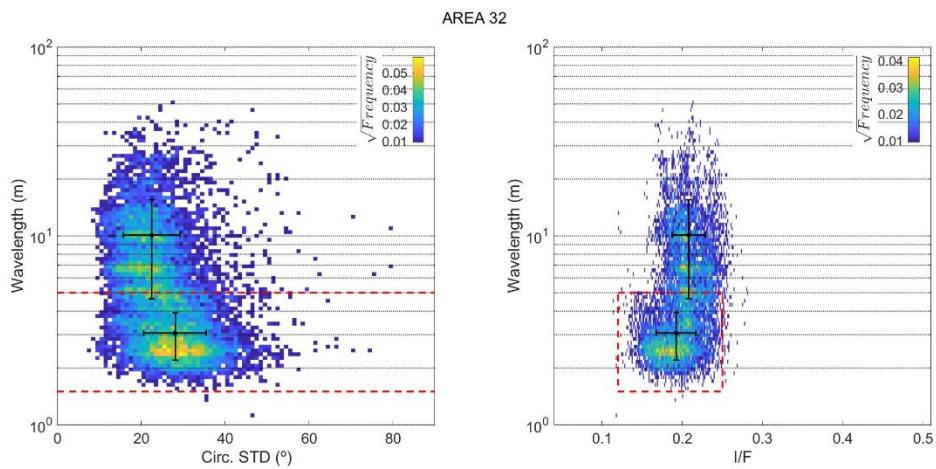
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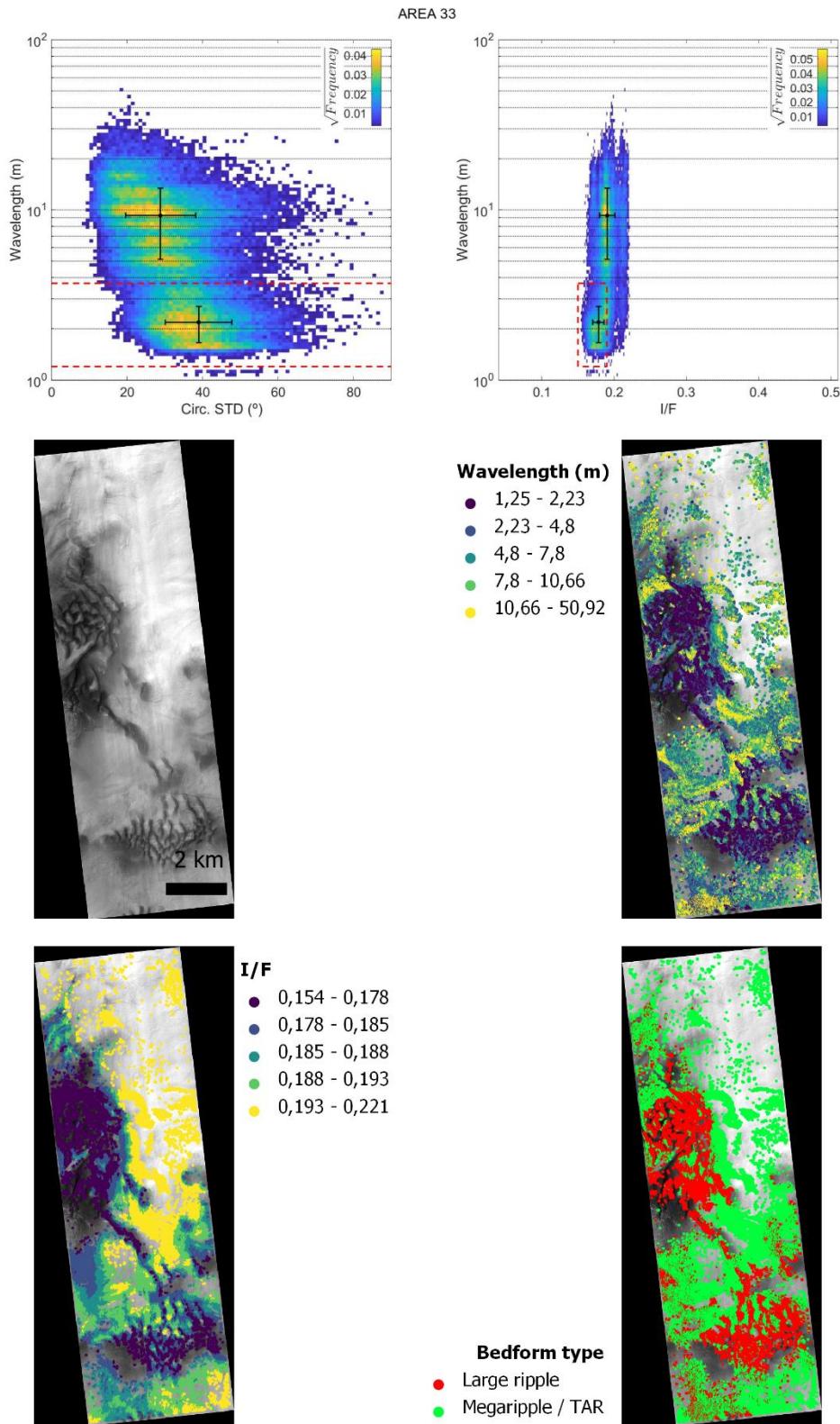
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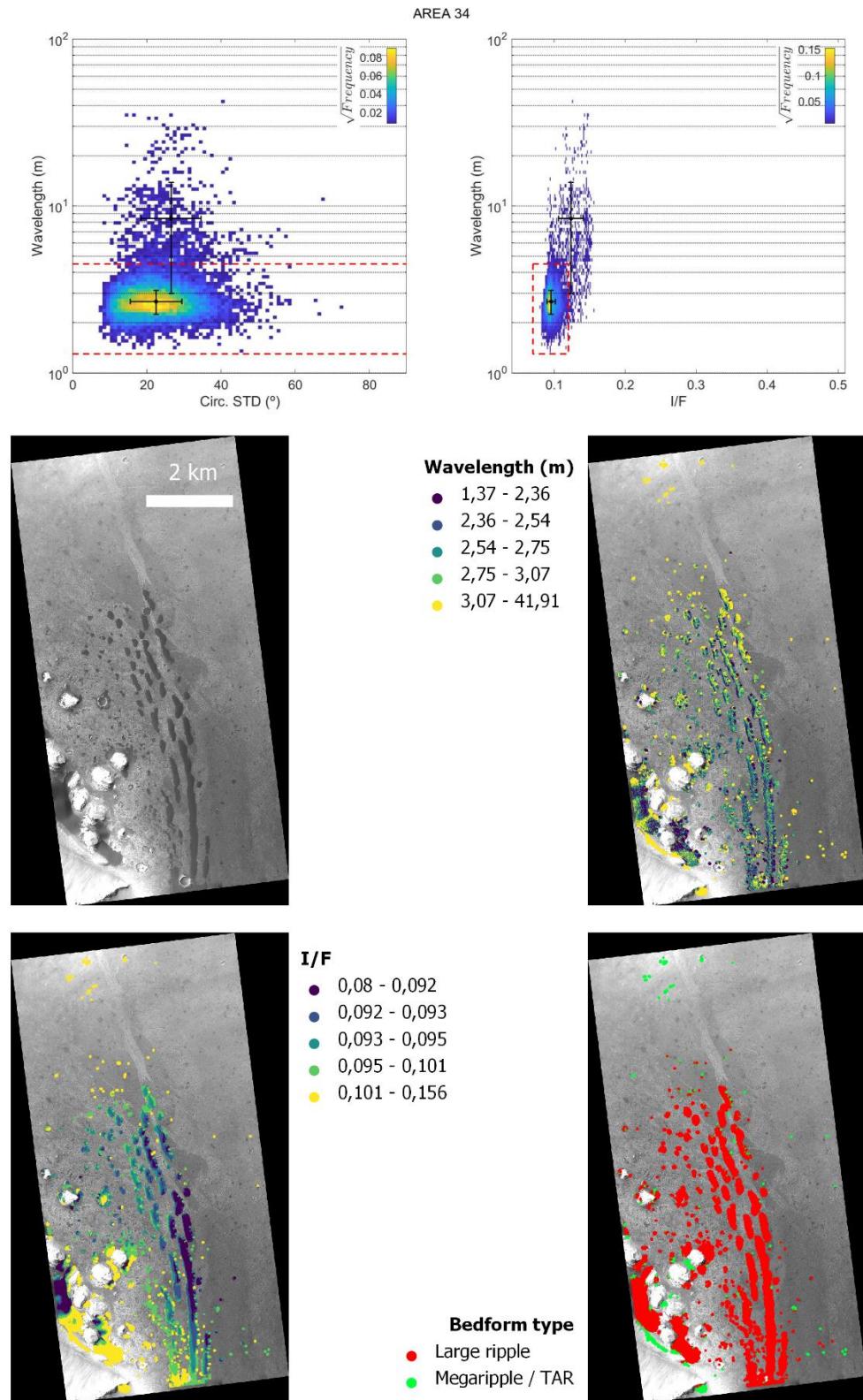
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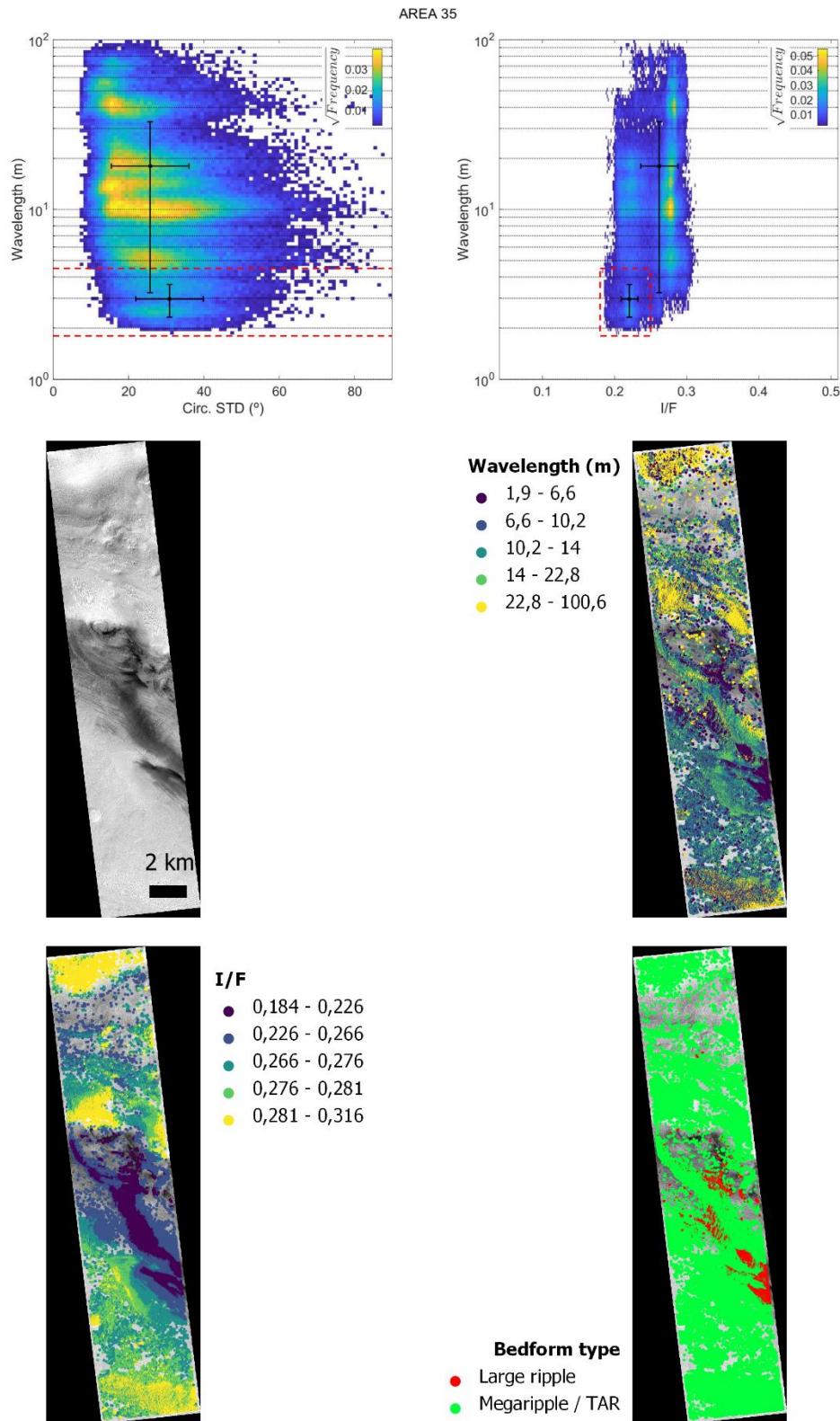
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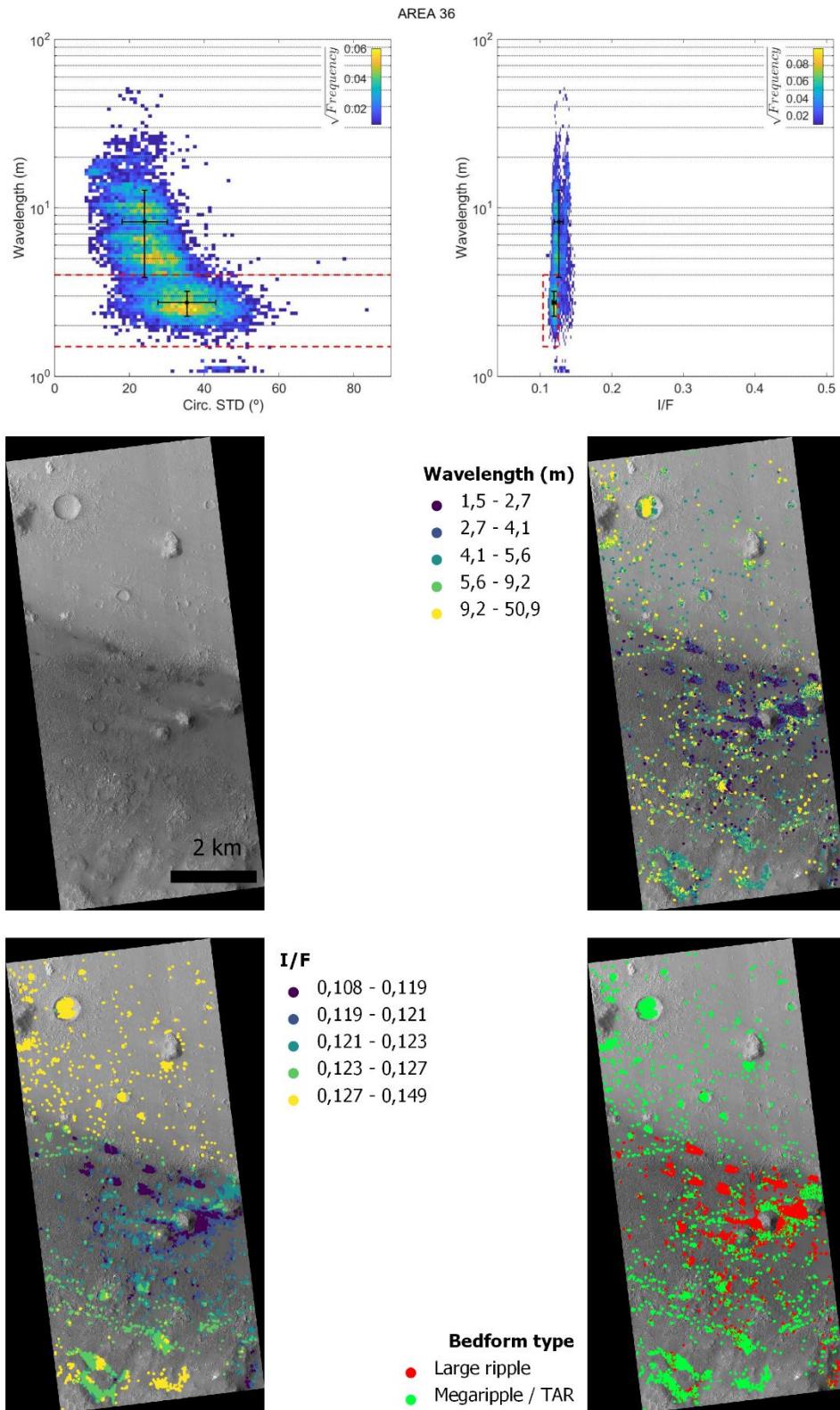
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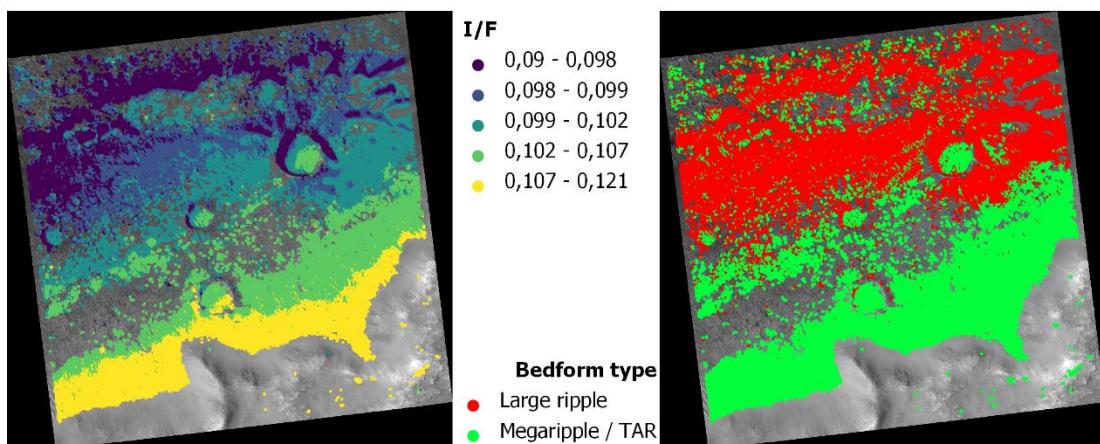
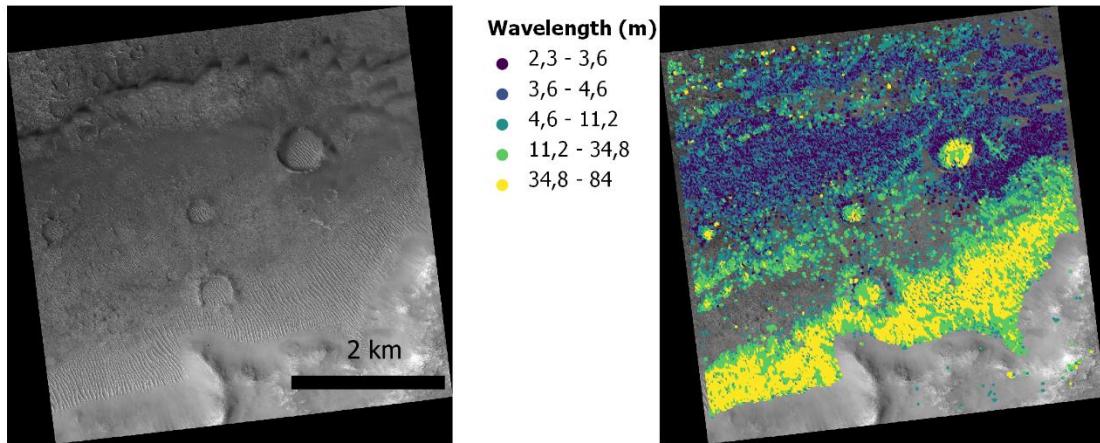
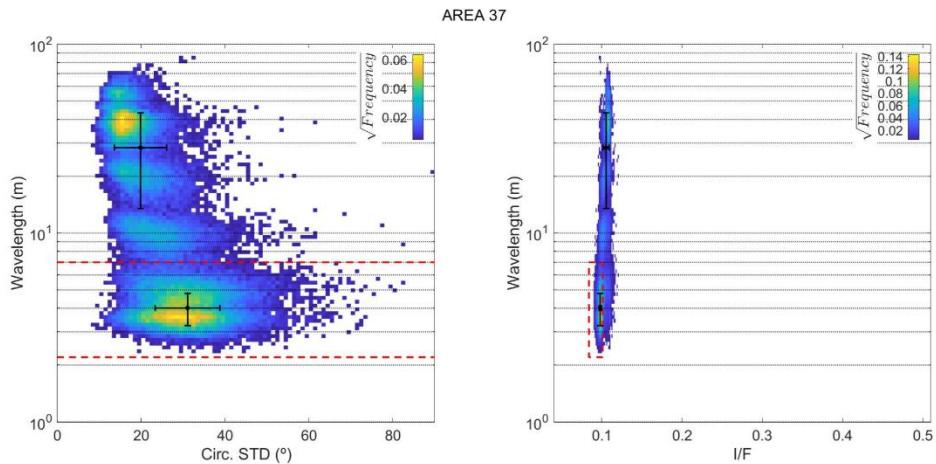
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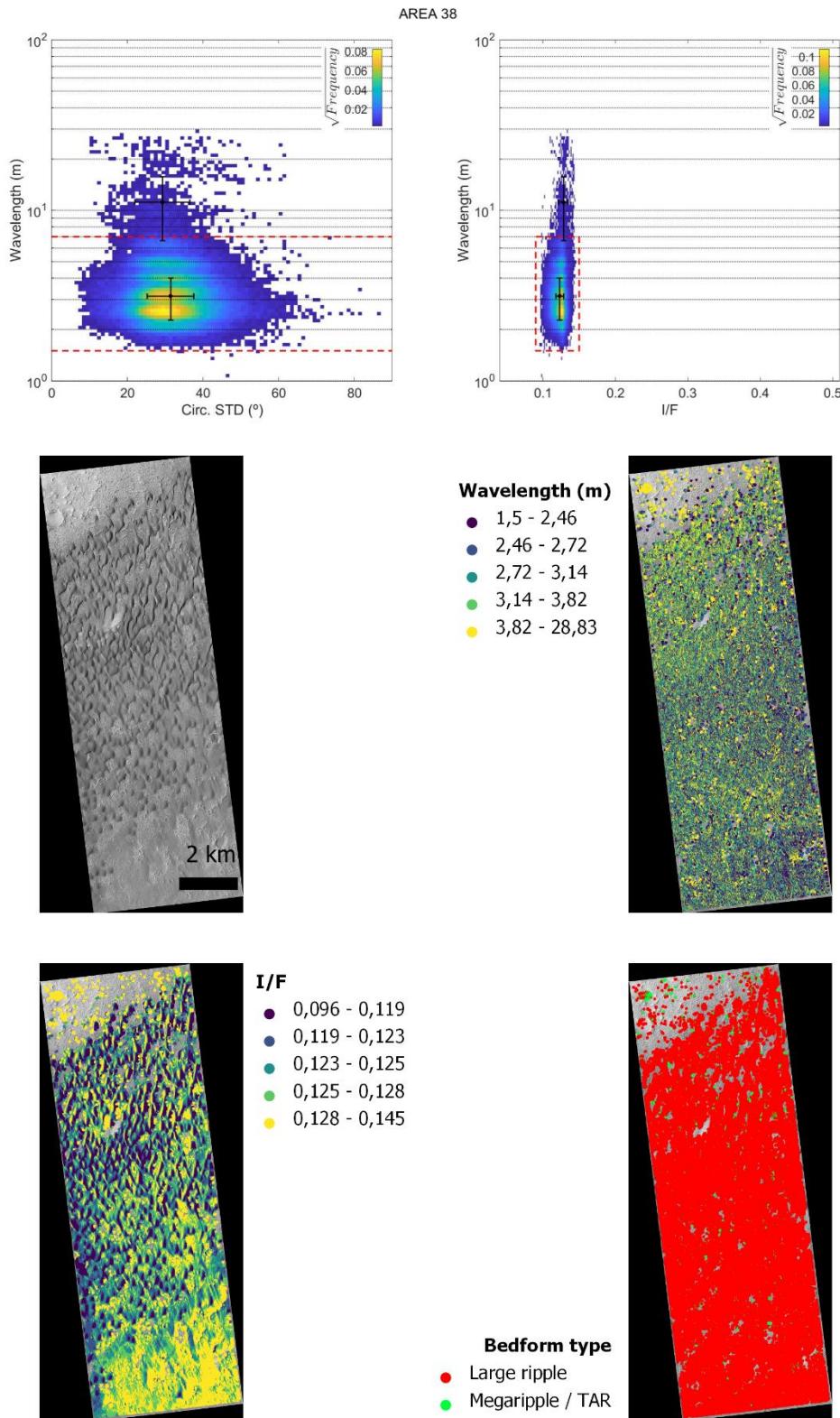
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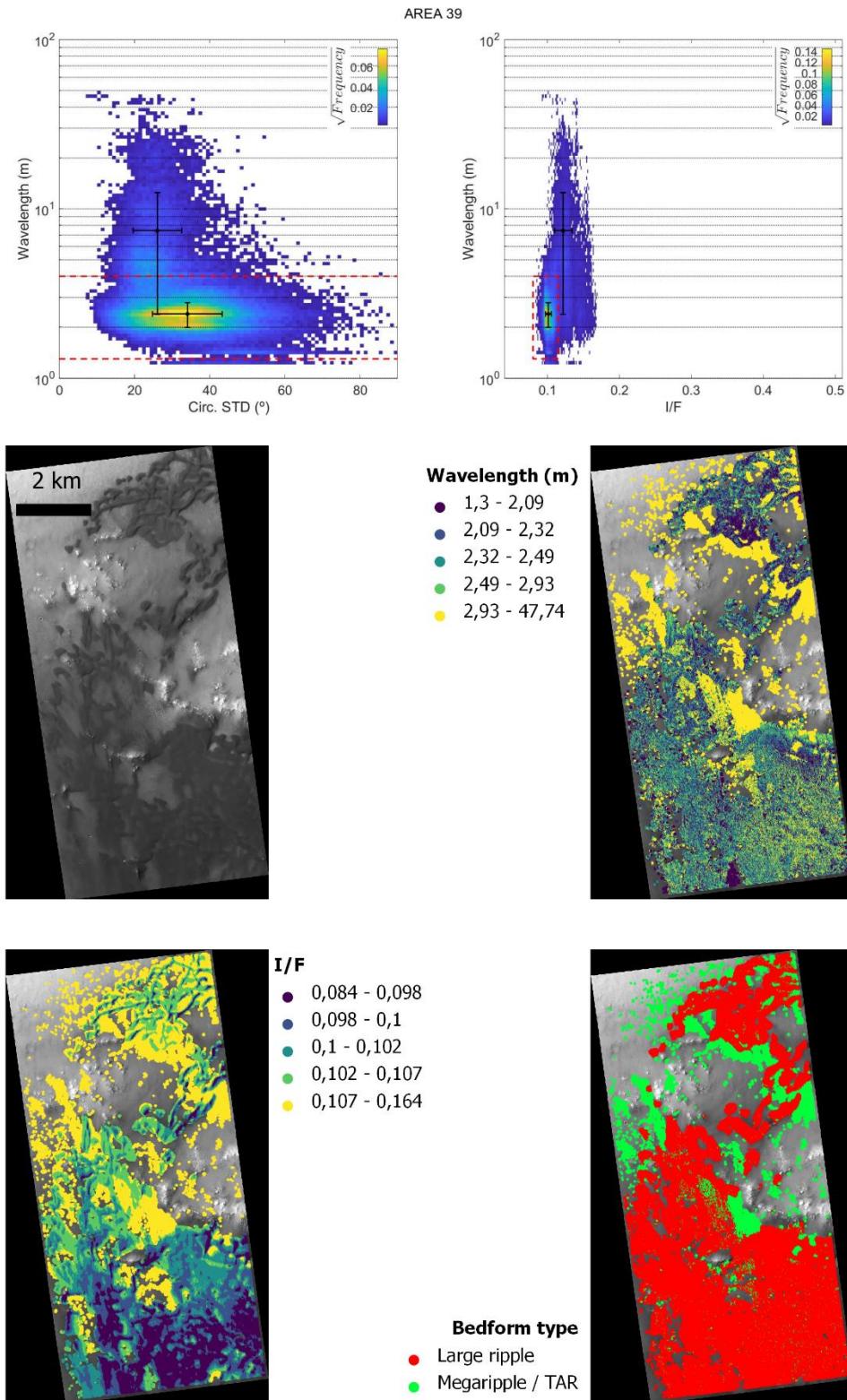
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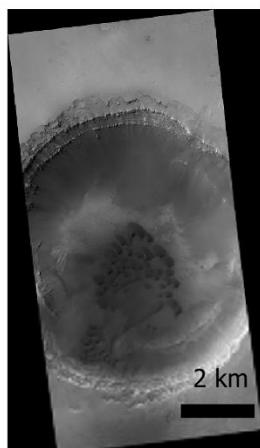
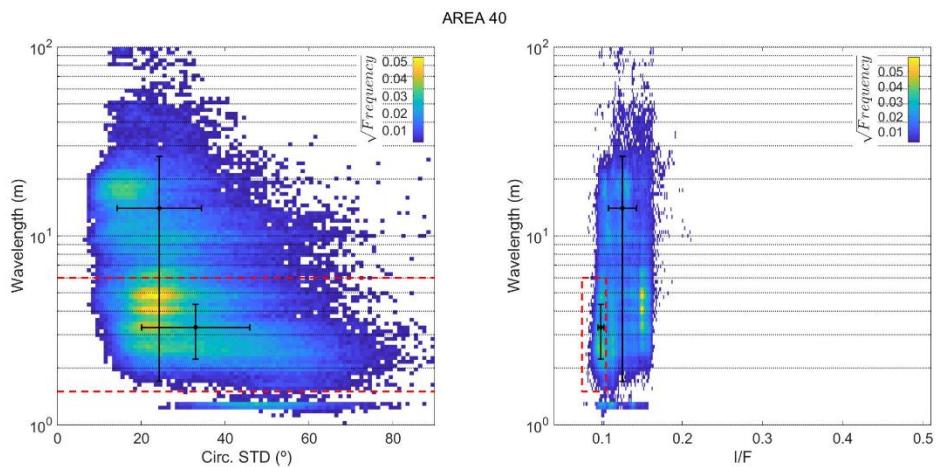
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## Area 39

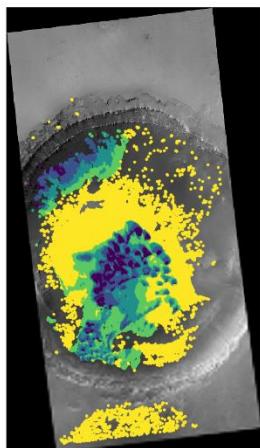
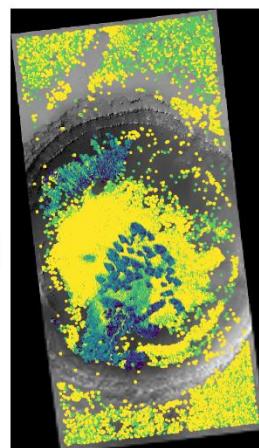


## Area 40



**Wavelength (m)**

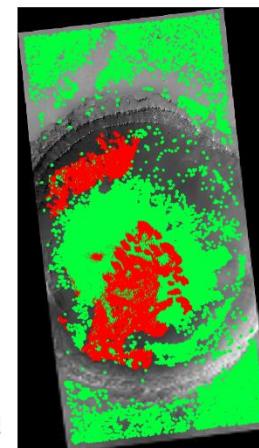
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- 2.27 - 2.77
- 2.77 - 4.32
- 4.32 - 6.86
- 6.86 - 52.32



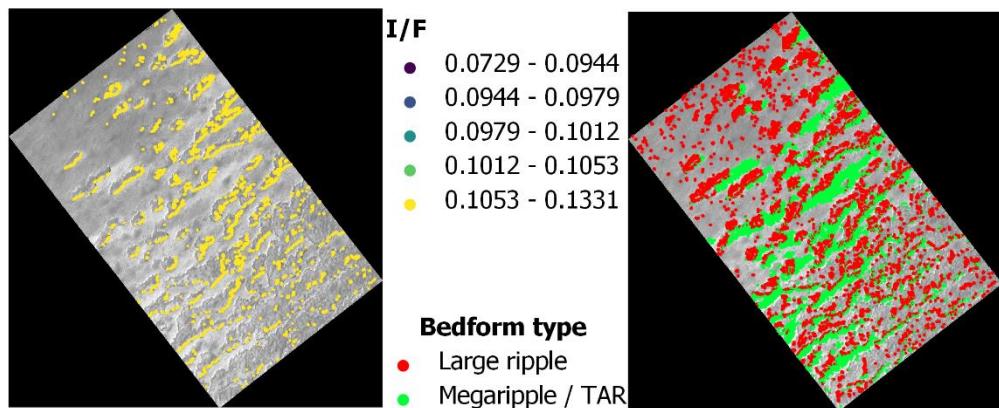
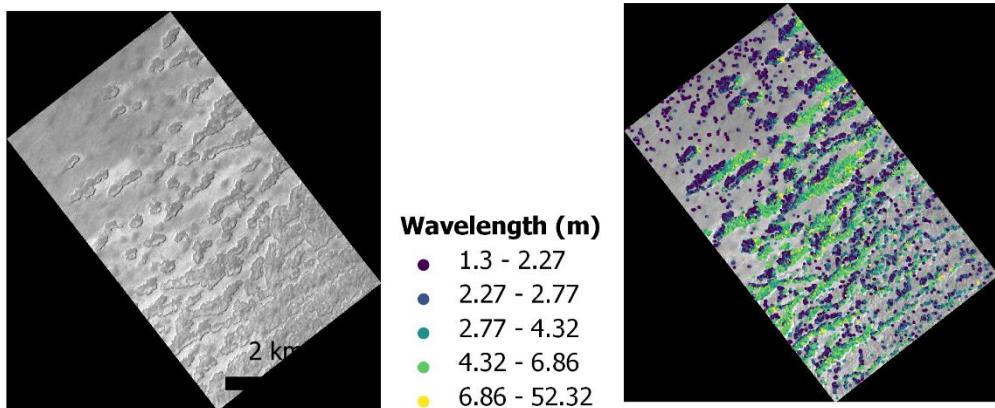
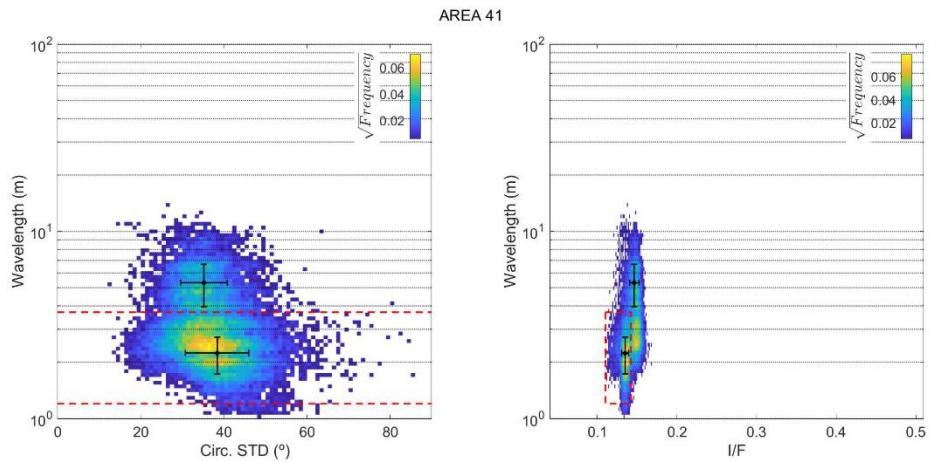
- 0.0729 - 0.0944
- 0.0944 - 0.0979
- 0.0979 - 0.1012
- 0.1012 - 0.1053
- 0.1053 - 0.1331

**Bedform type**

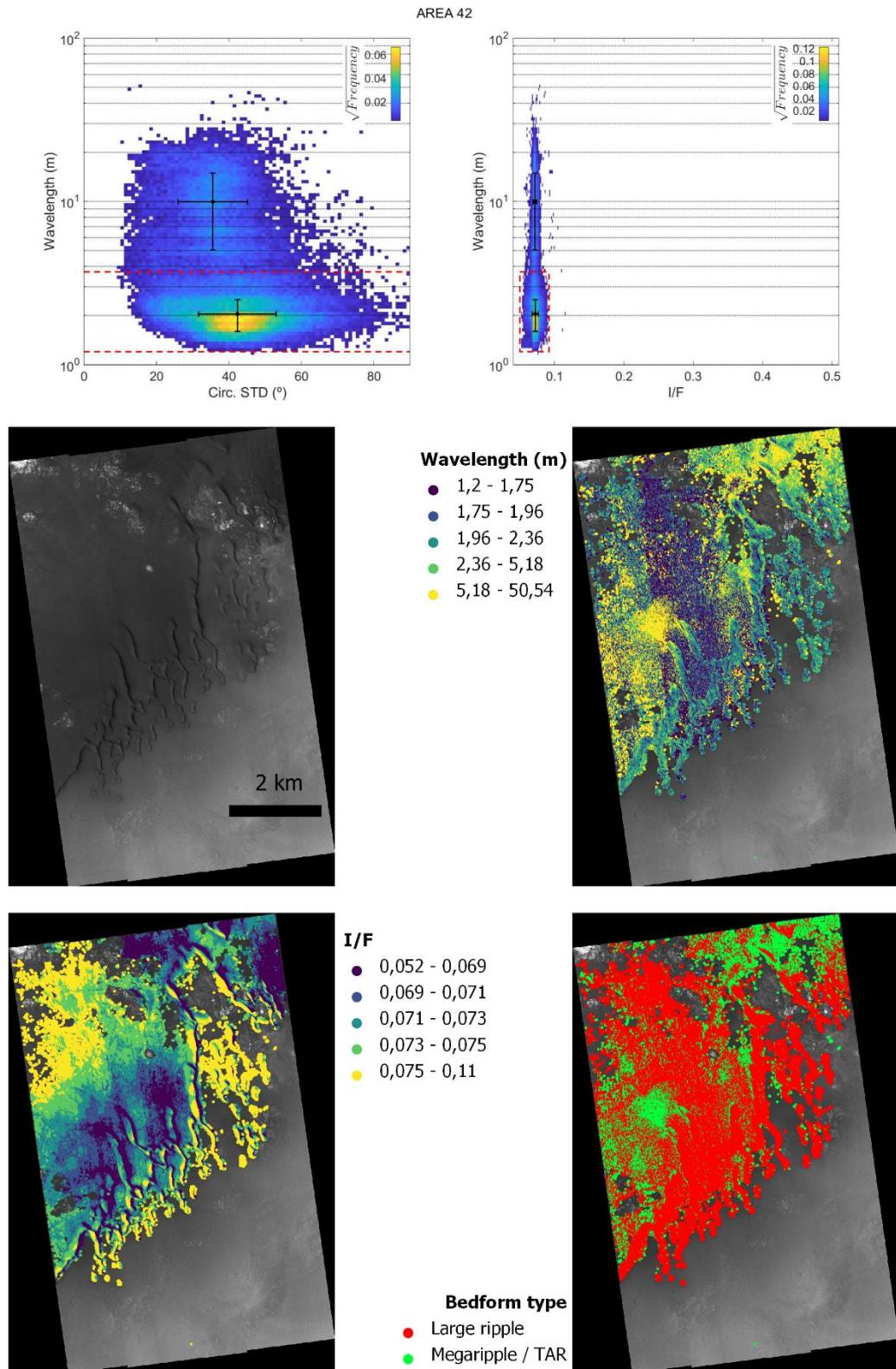
- Large ripple
- Megaripple / TAR



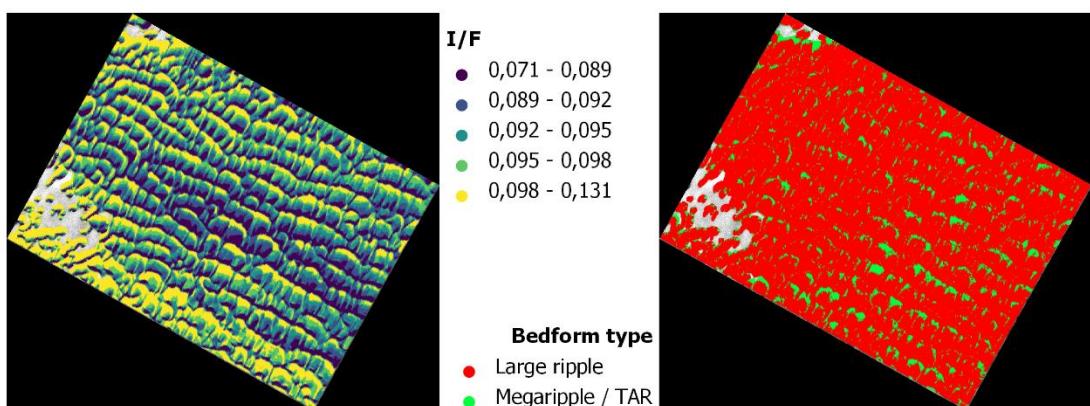
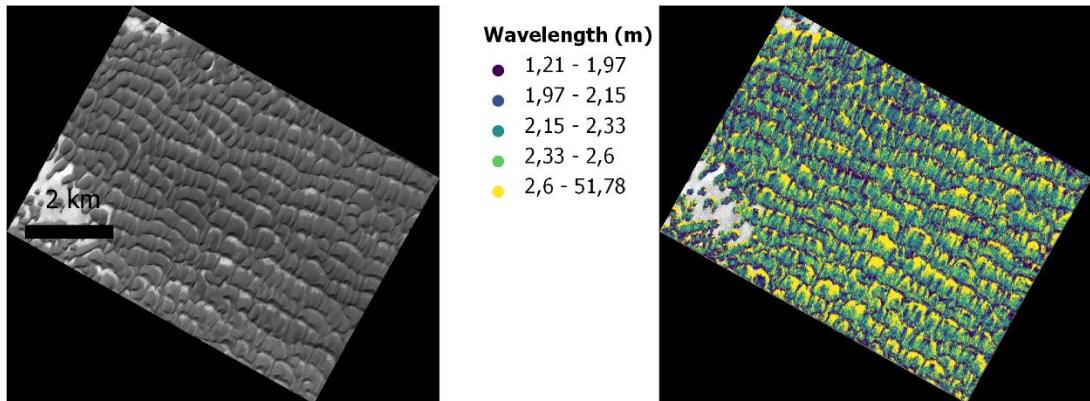
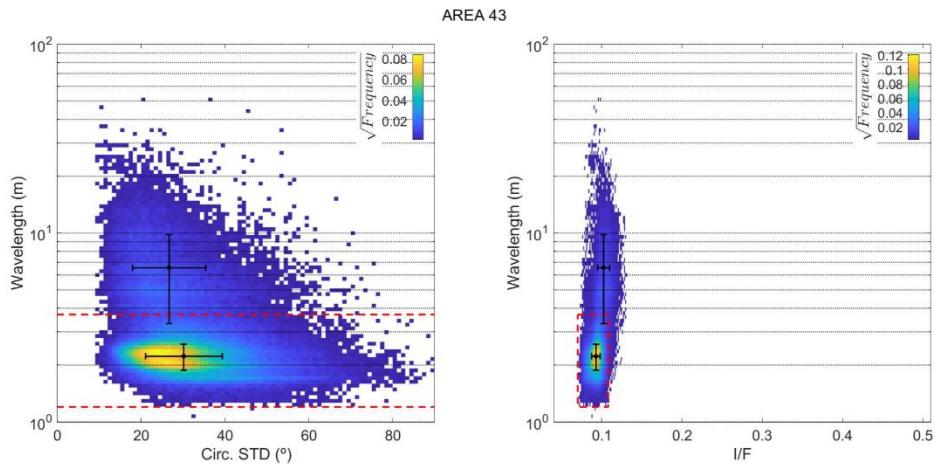
# Area 41



## Area 42

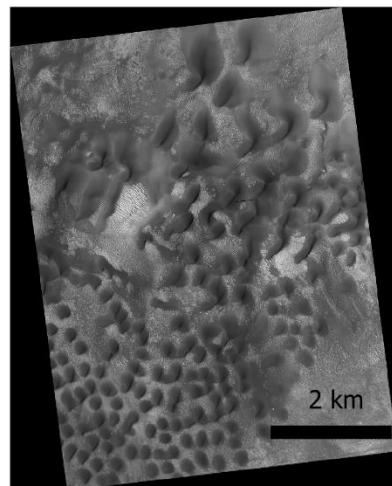
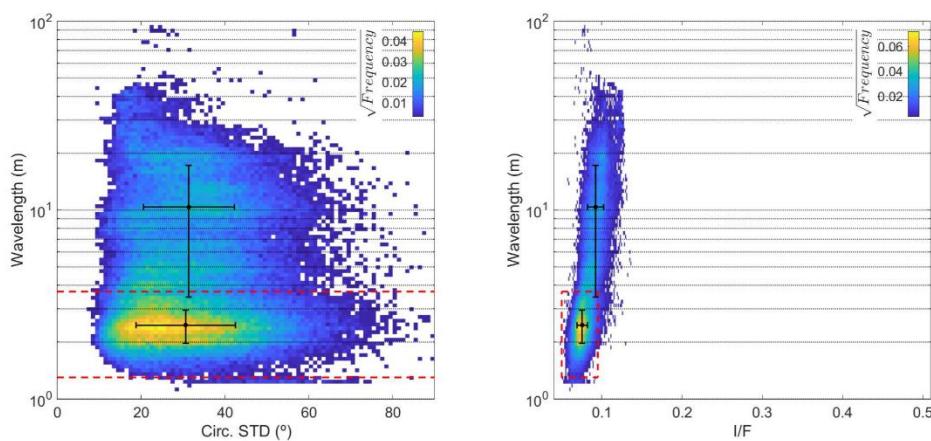


## Area 43



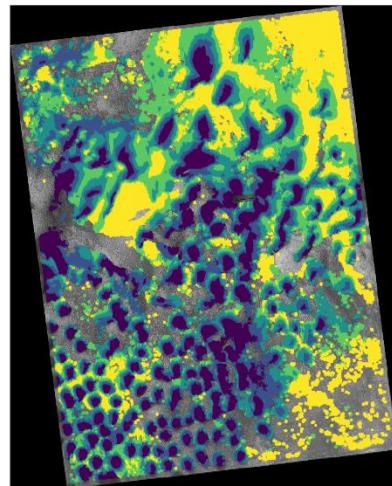
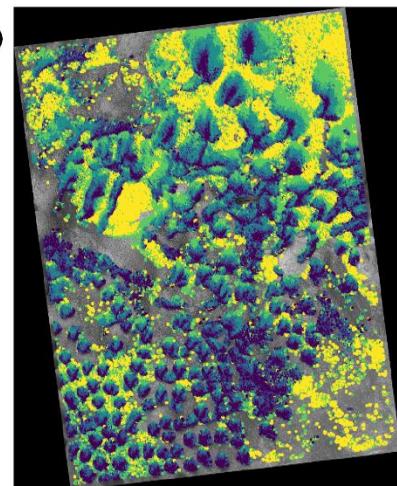
## Area 44

AREA 44



**Wavelength (m)**

- 1,3 - 2,23
- 2,23 - 2,68
- 2,68 - 4,07
- 4,07 - 9,21
- 9,21 - 114,5

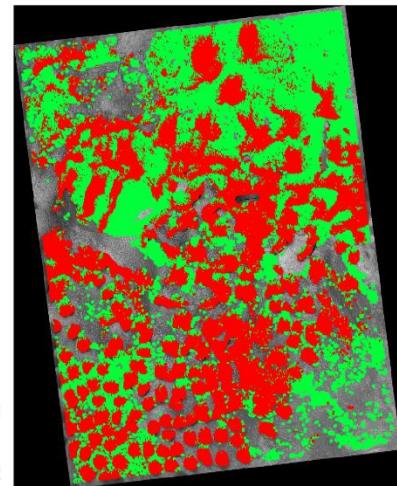


**I/F**

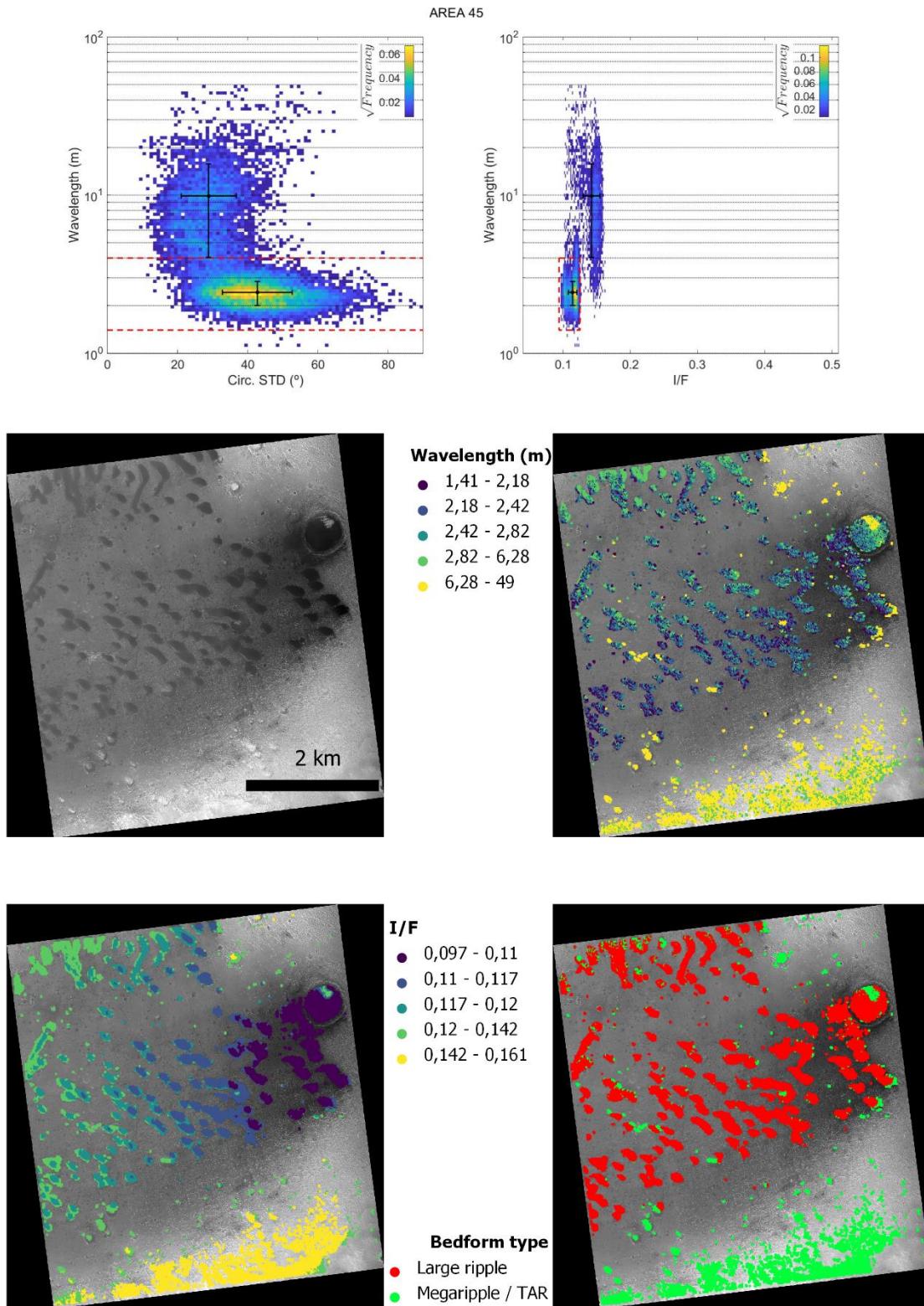
- 0,051 - 0,073
- 0,073 - 0,078
- 0,078 - 0,084
- 0,084 - 0,093
- 0,093 - 0,137

**Bedform type**

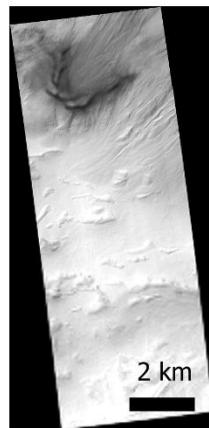
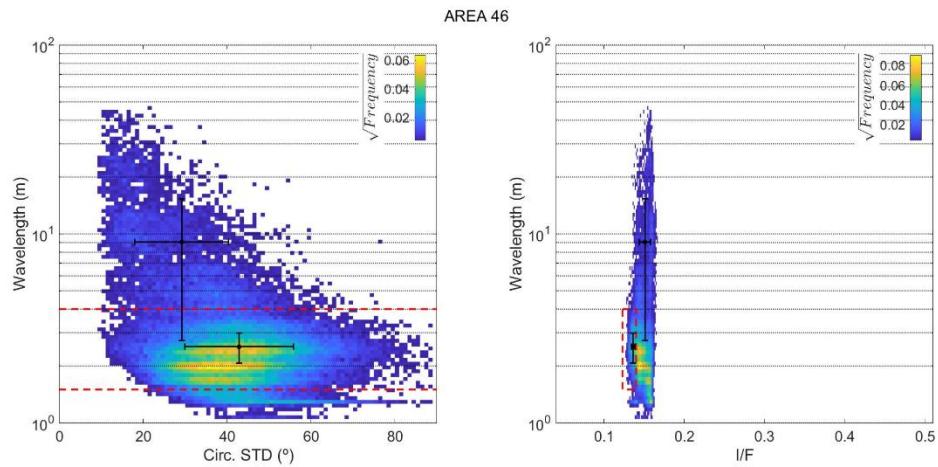
- Large ripple
- Megaripple / TAR



## Area 45

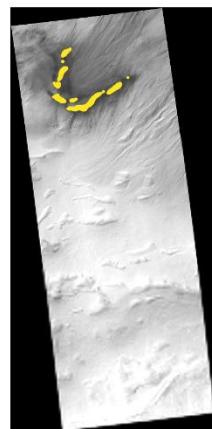
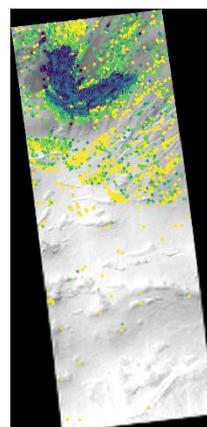


## Area 46



**Wavelength (m)**

- 1.3 - 2.27
- 2.27 - 2.77
- 2.77 - 4.32
- 4.32 - 6.86
- 6.86 - 52.32

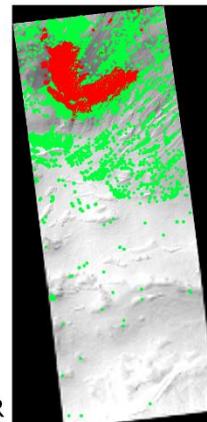


**I/F**

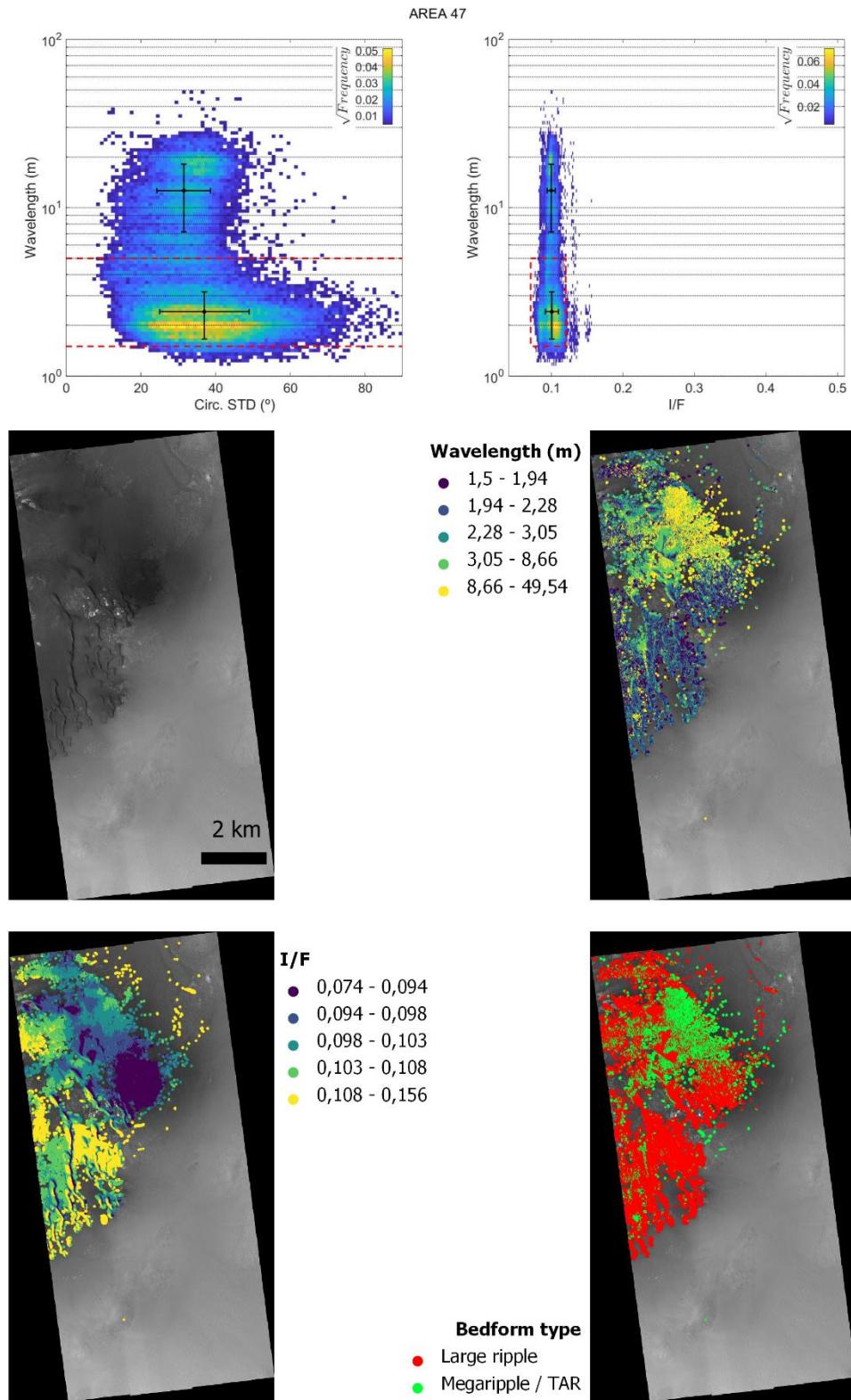
- 0.0729 - 0.0944
- 0.0944 - 0.0979
- 0.0979 - 0.1012
- 0.1012 - 0.1053
- 0.1053 - 0.1331

**Bedform type**

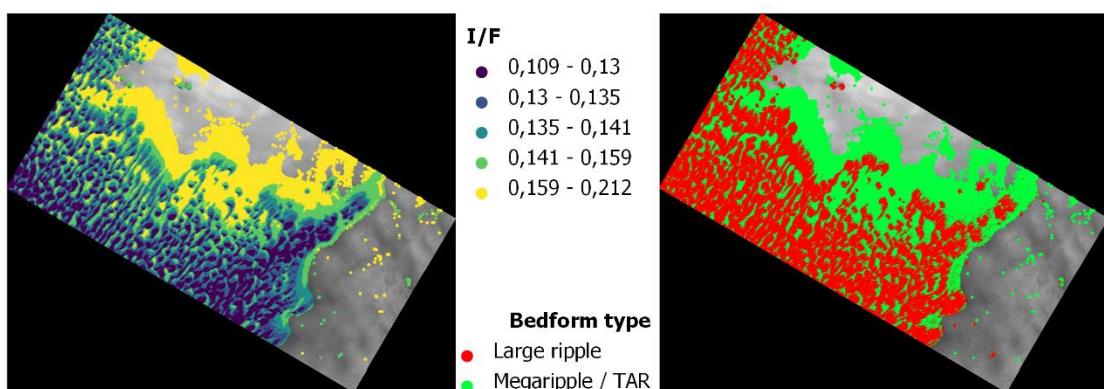
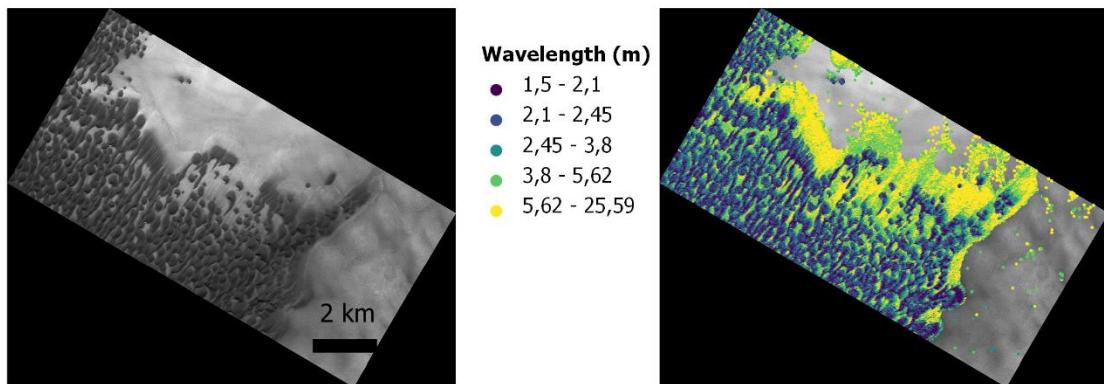
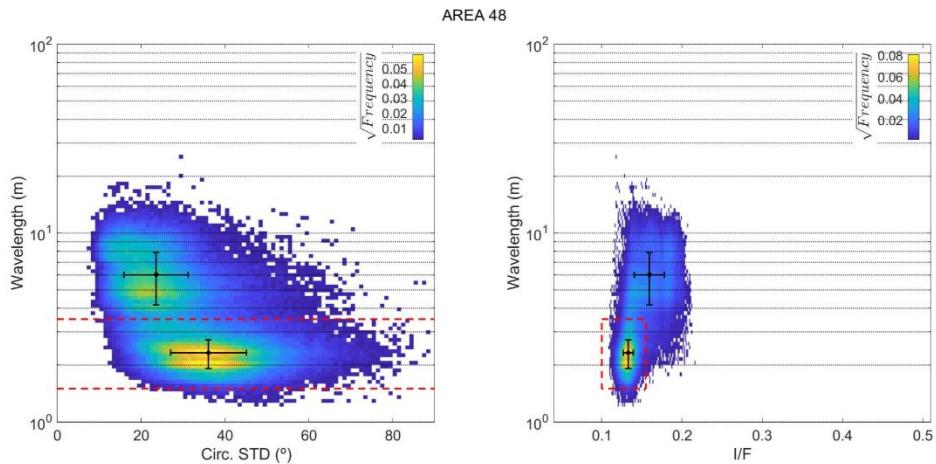
- Large ripple
- Megaripple / TAR



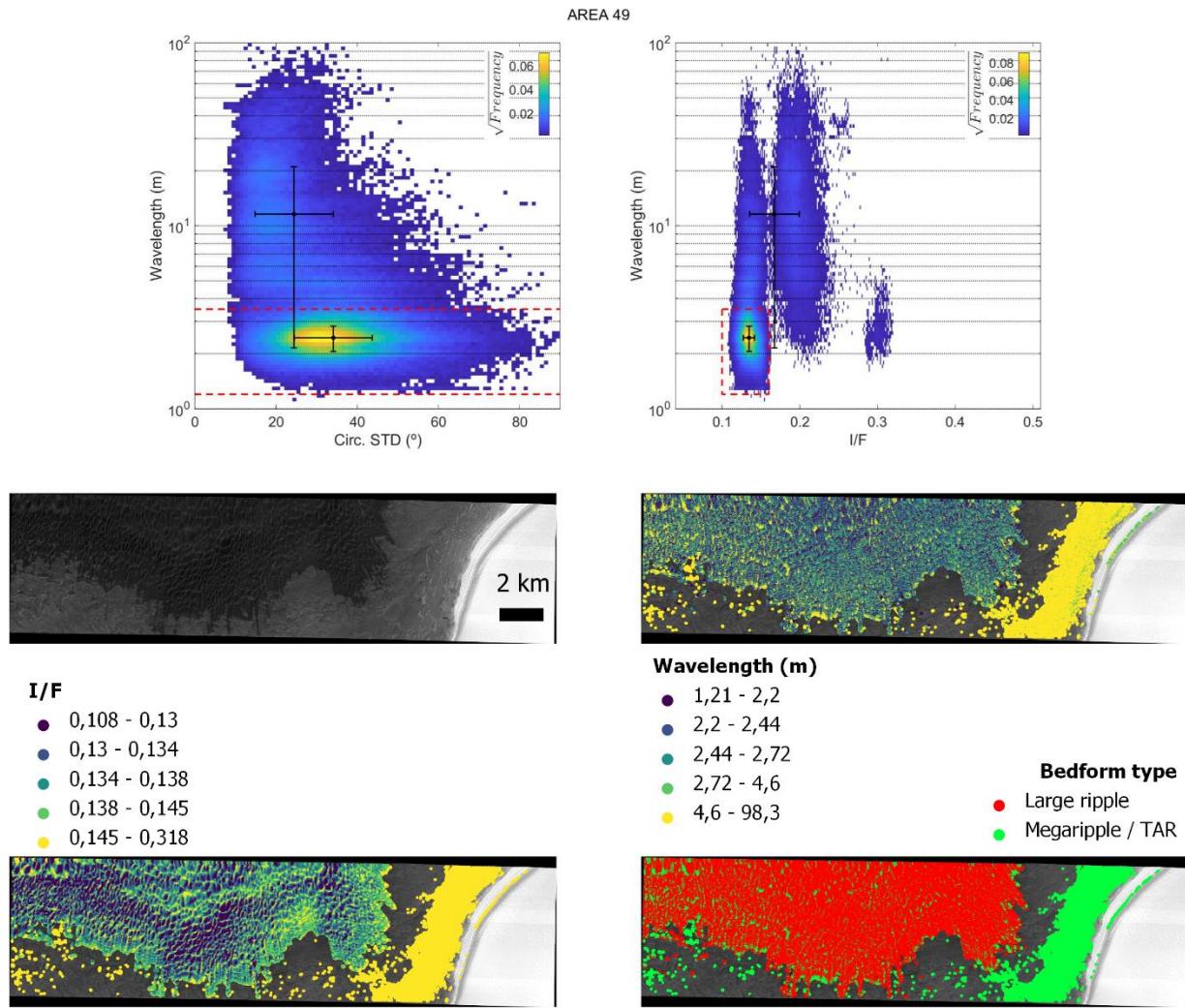
## Area 47



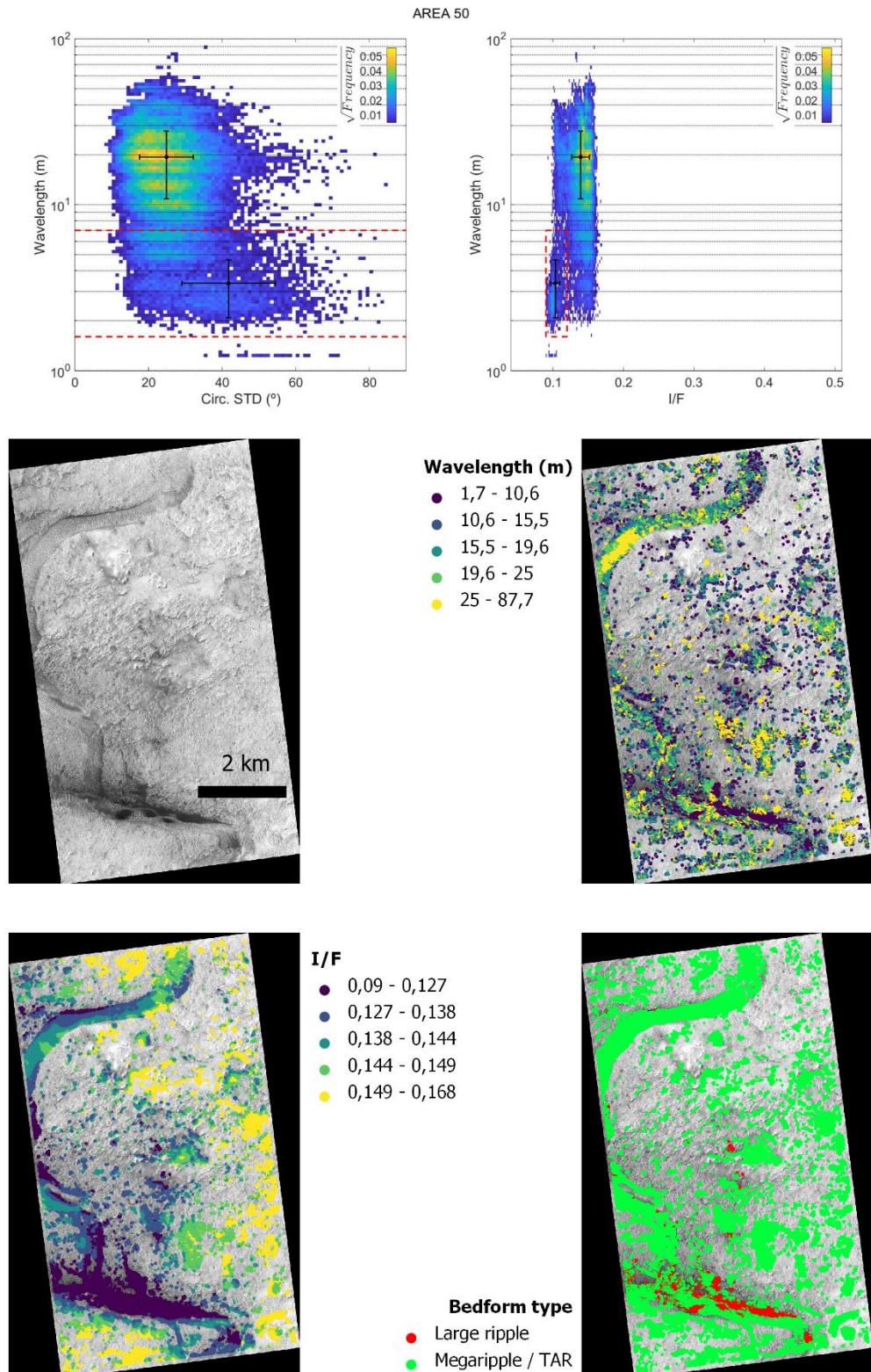
## Area 48



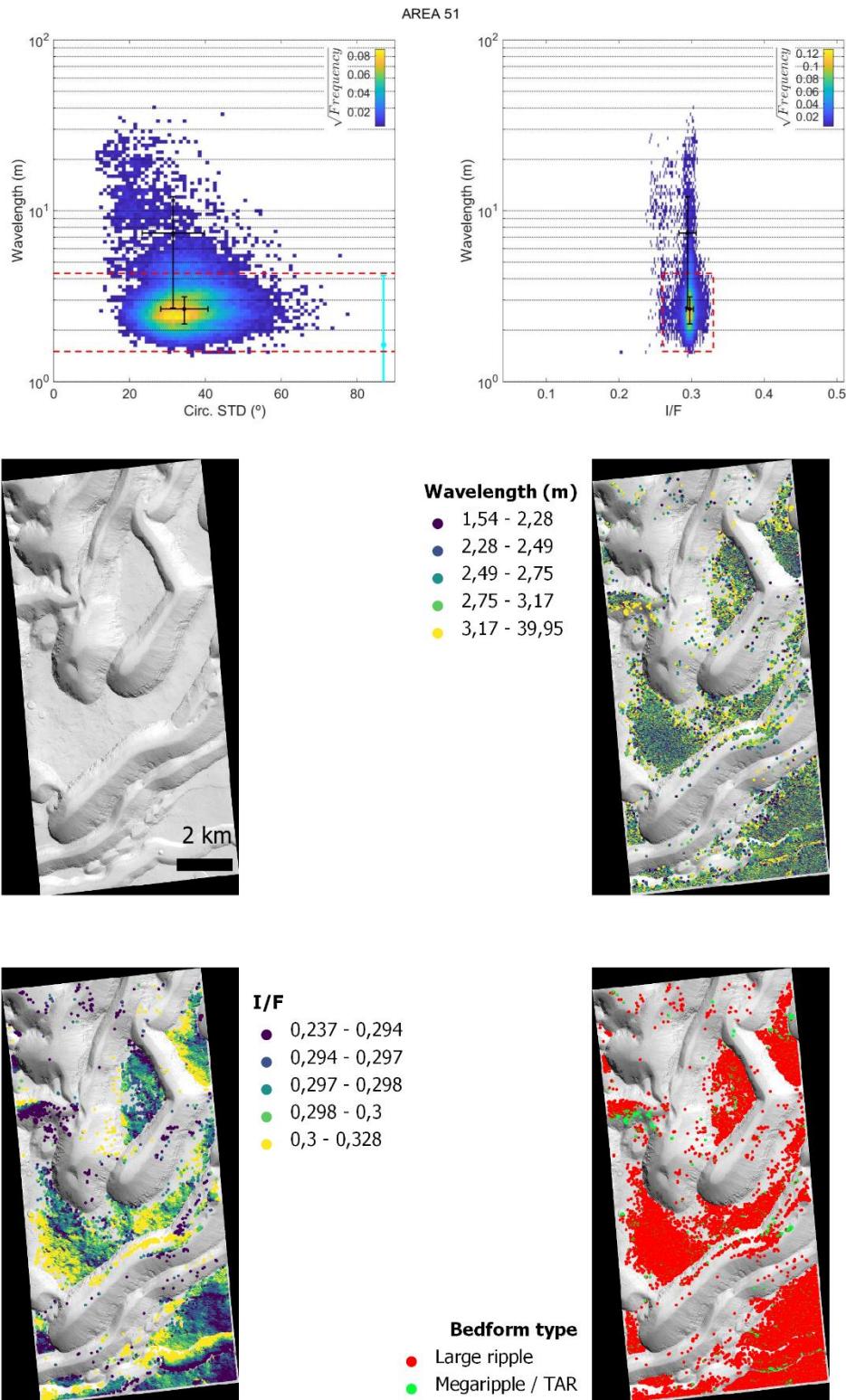
## Area 49



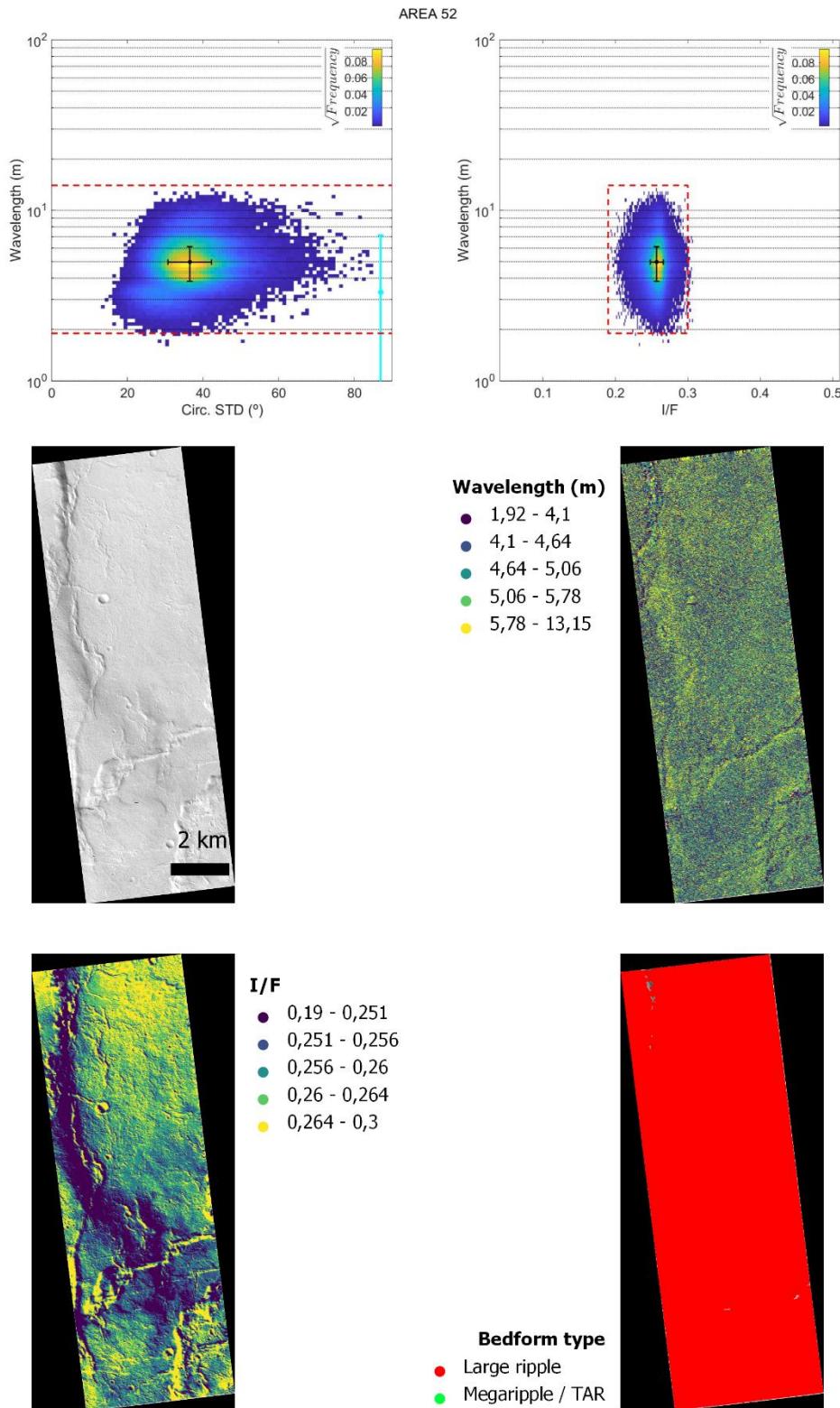
## Area 50



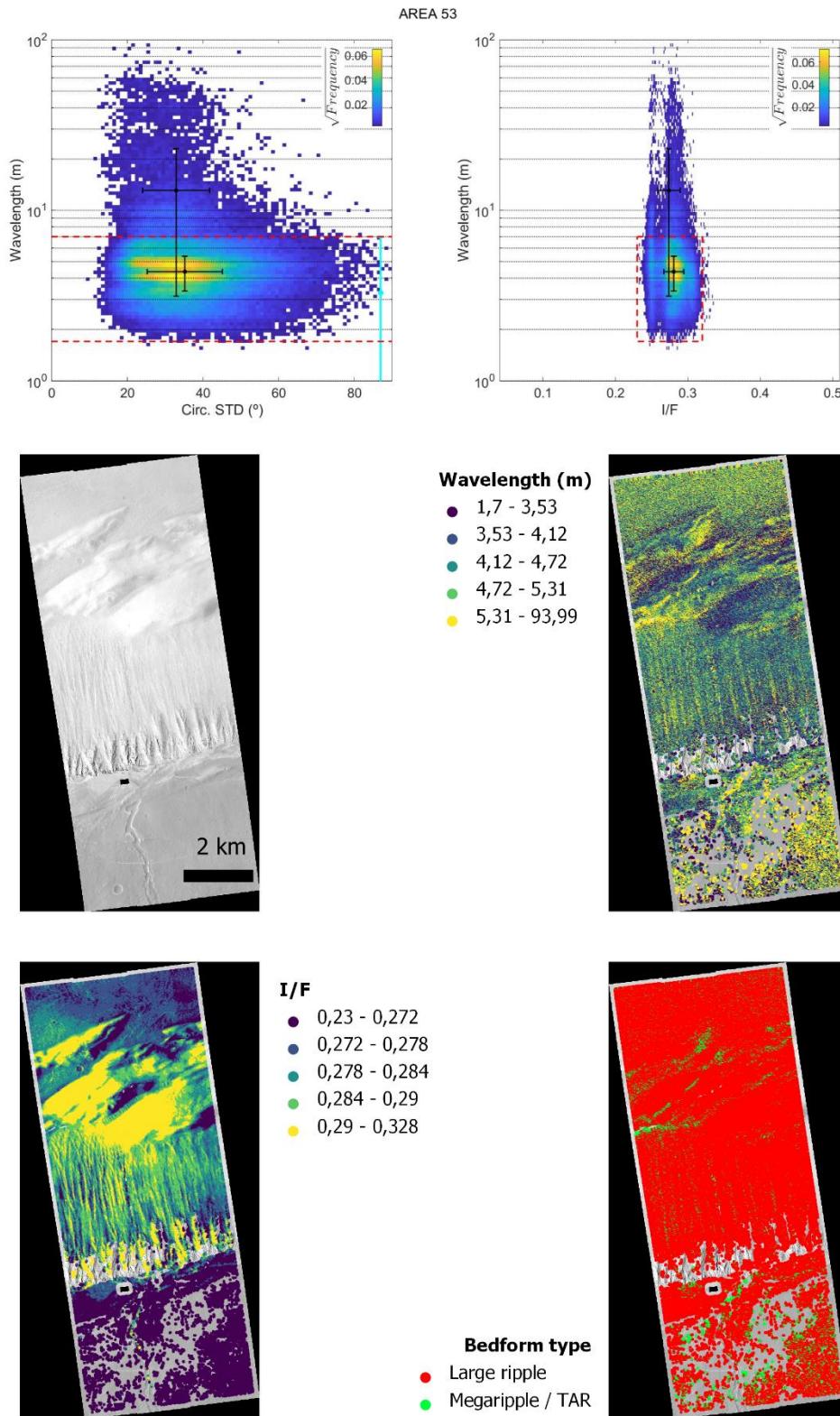
# Area 51



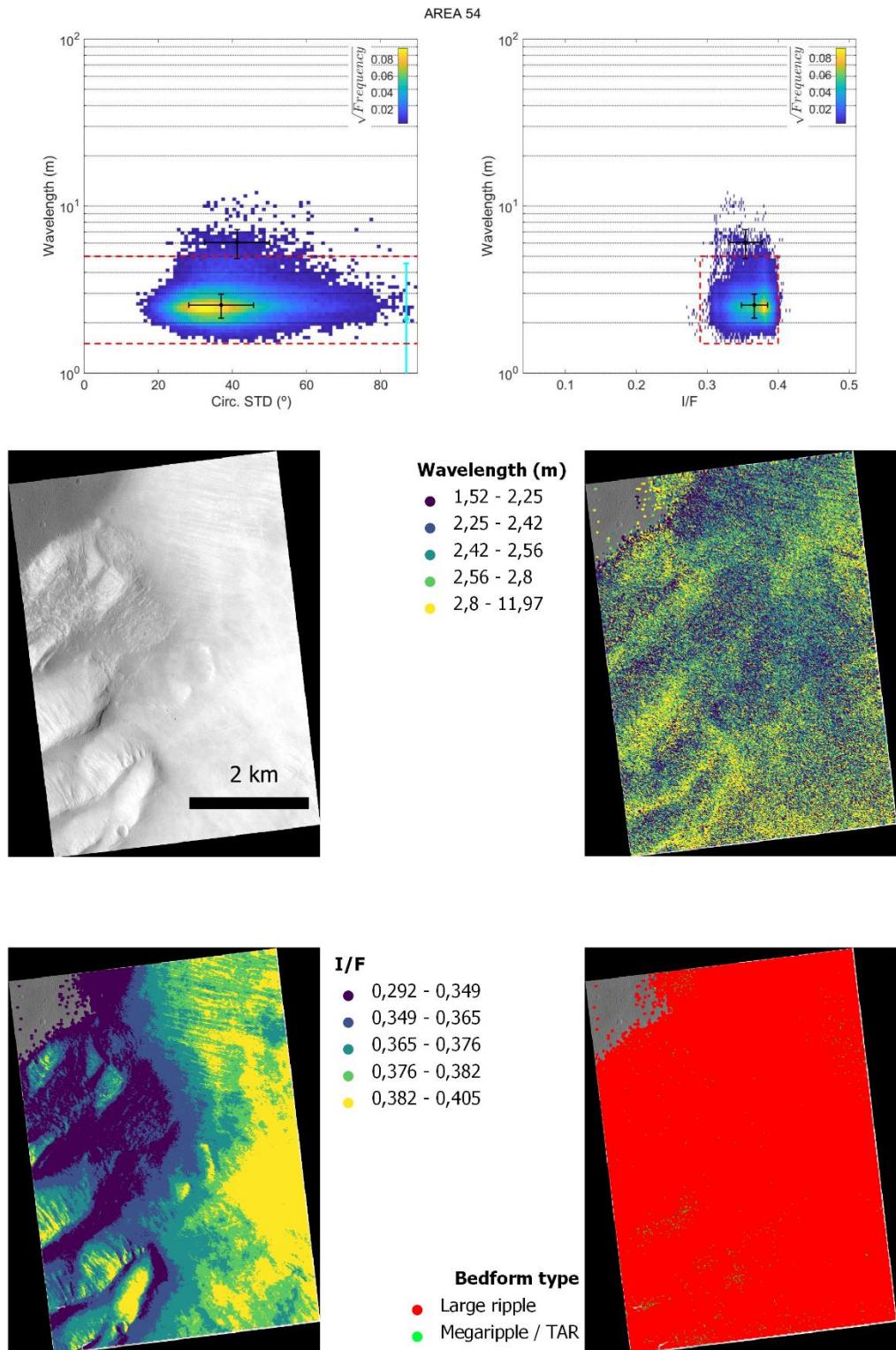
## Area 52



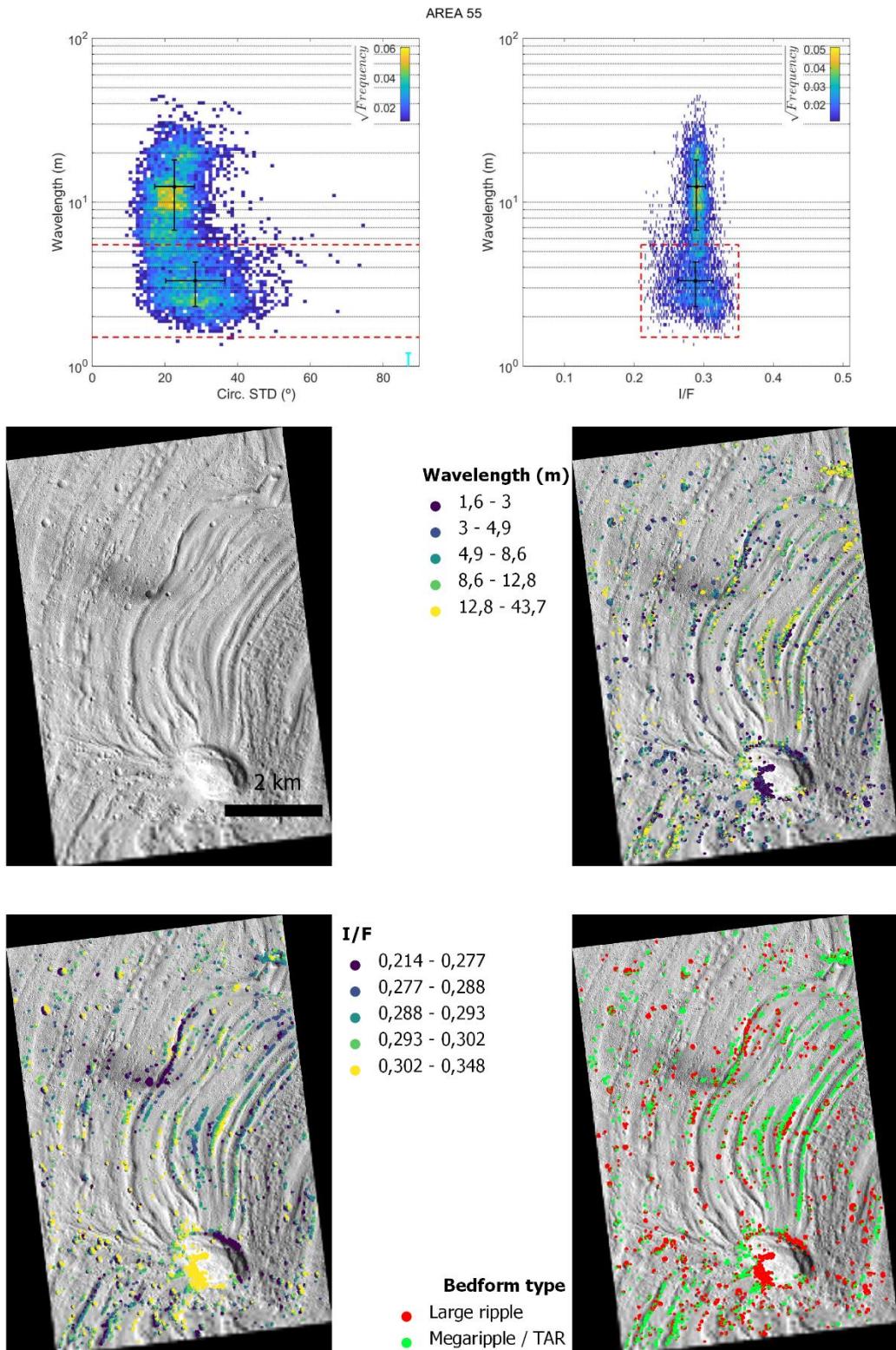
## Area 53



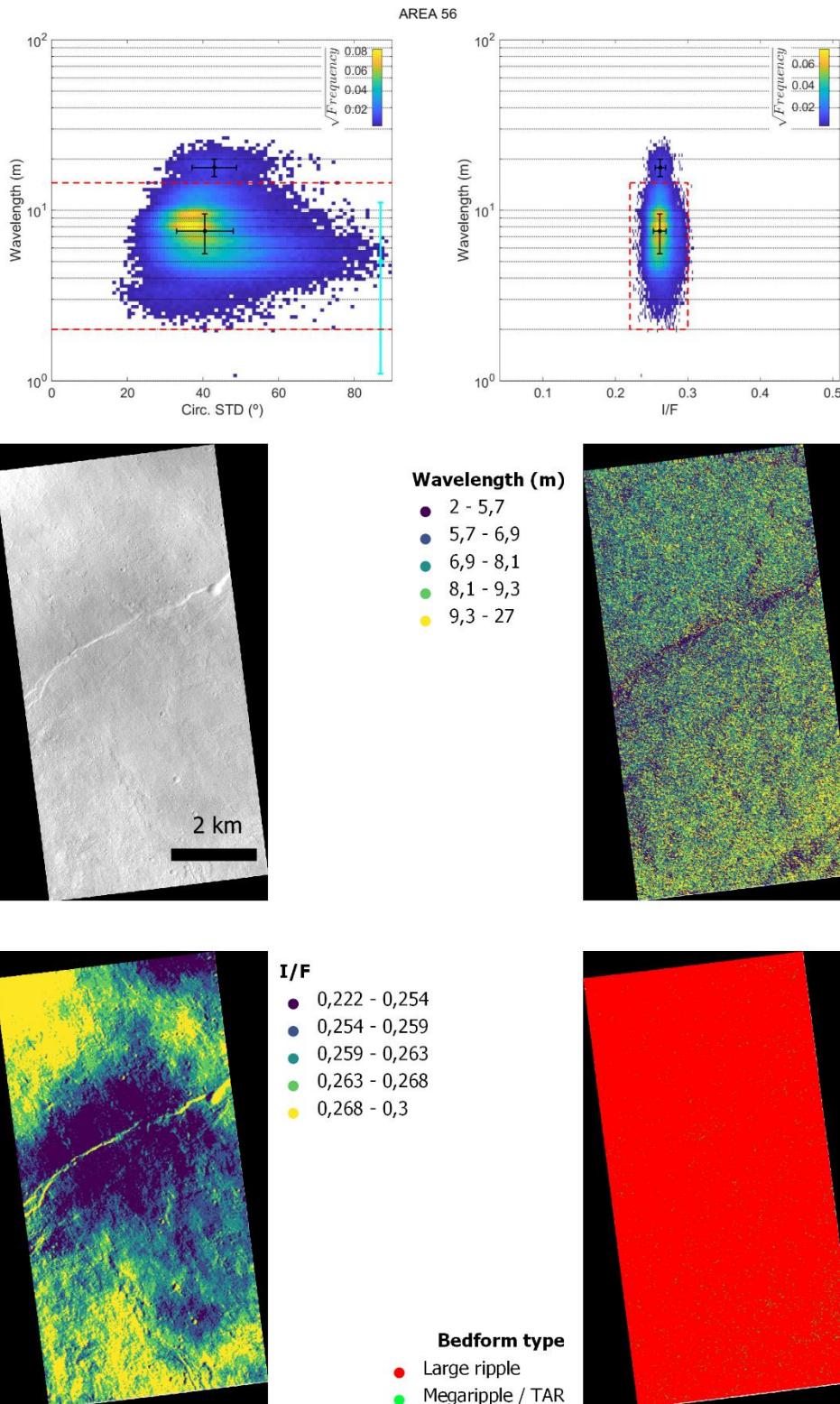
## Area 54



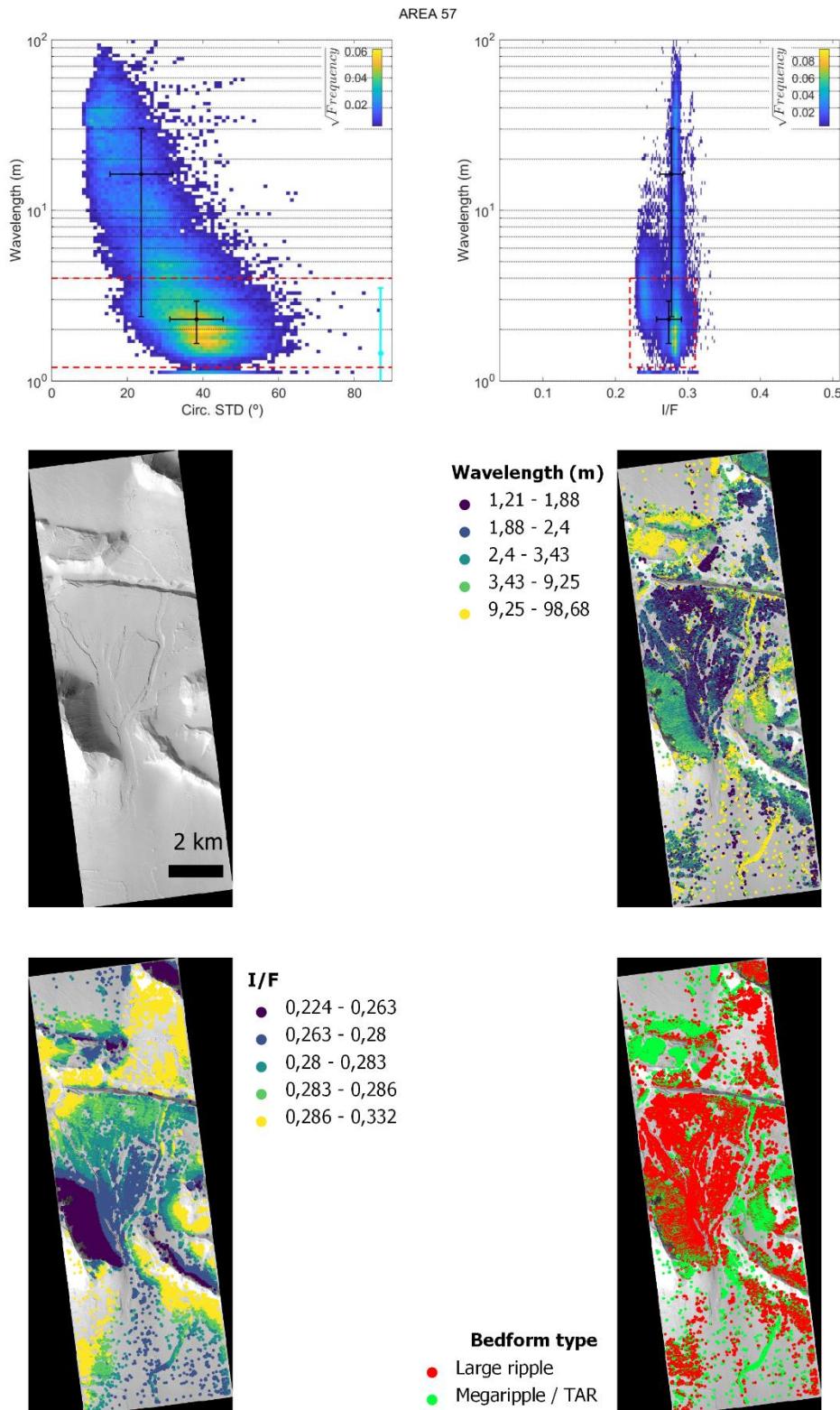
## Area 55



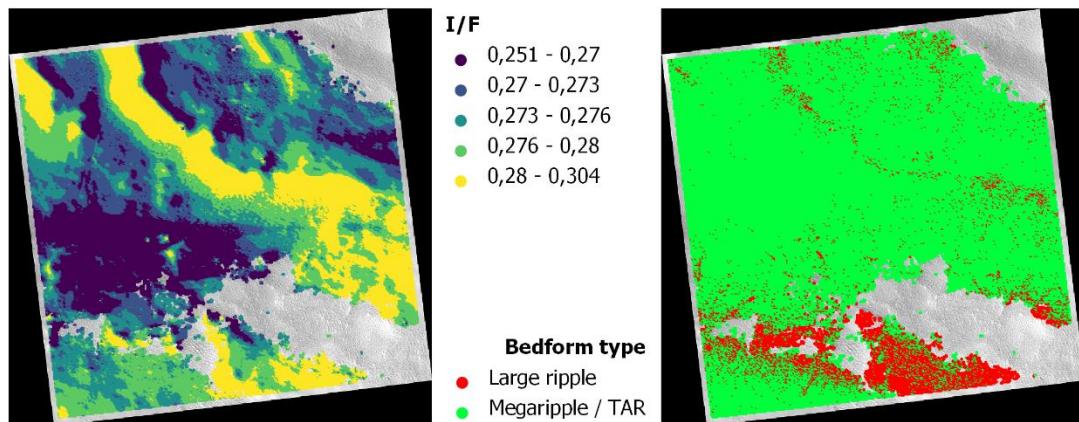
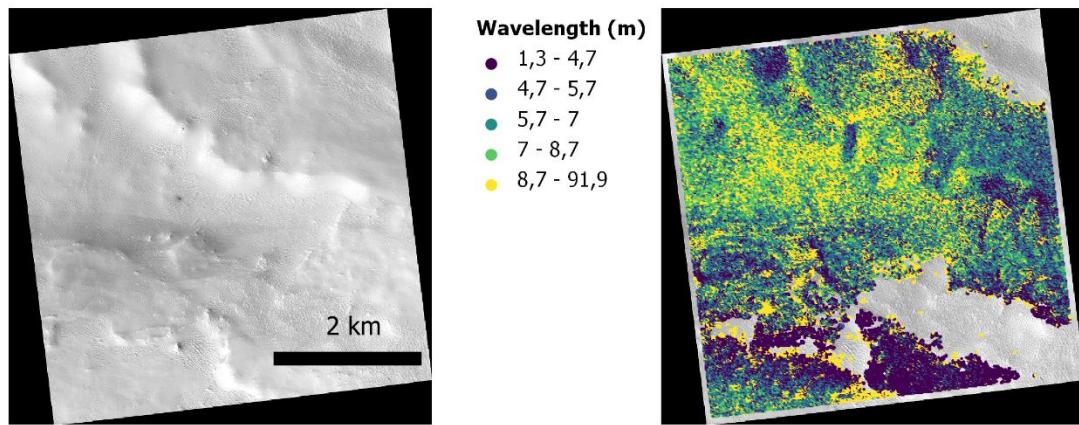
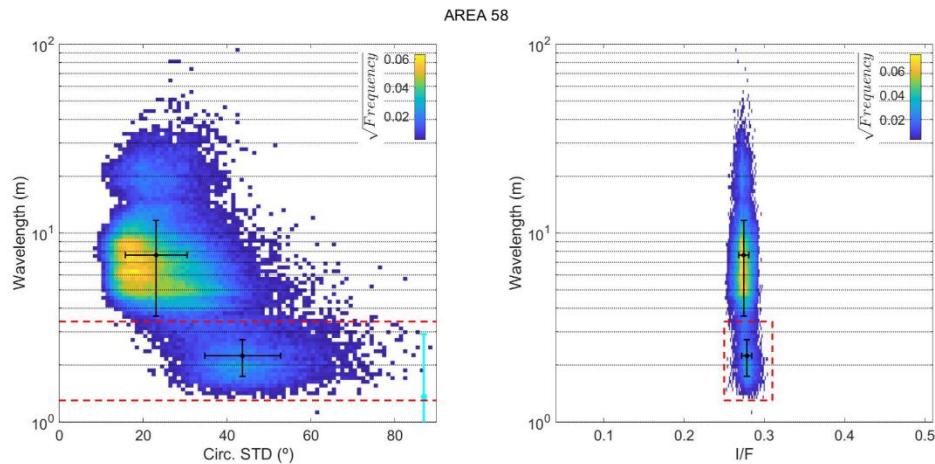
## Area 56



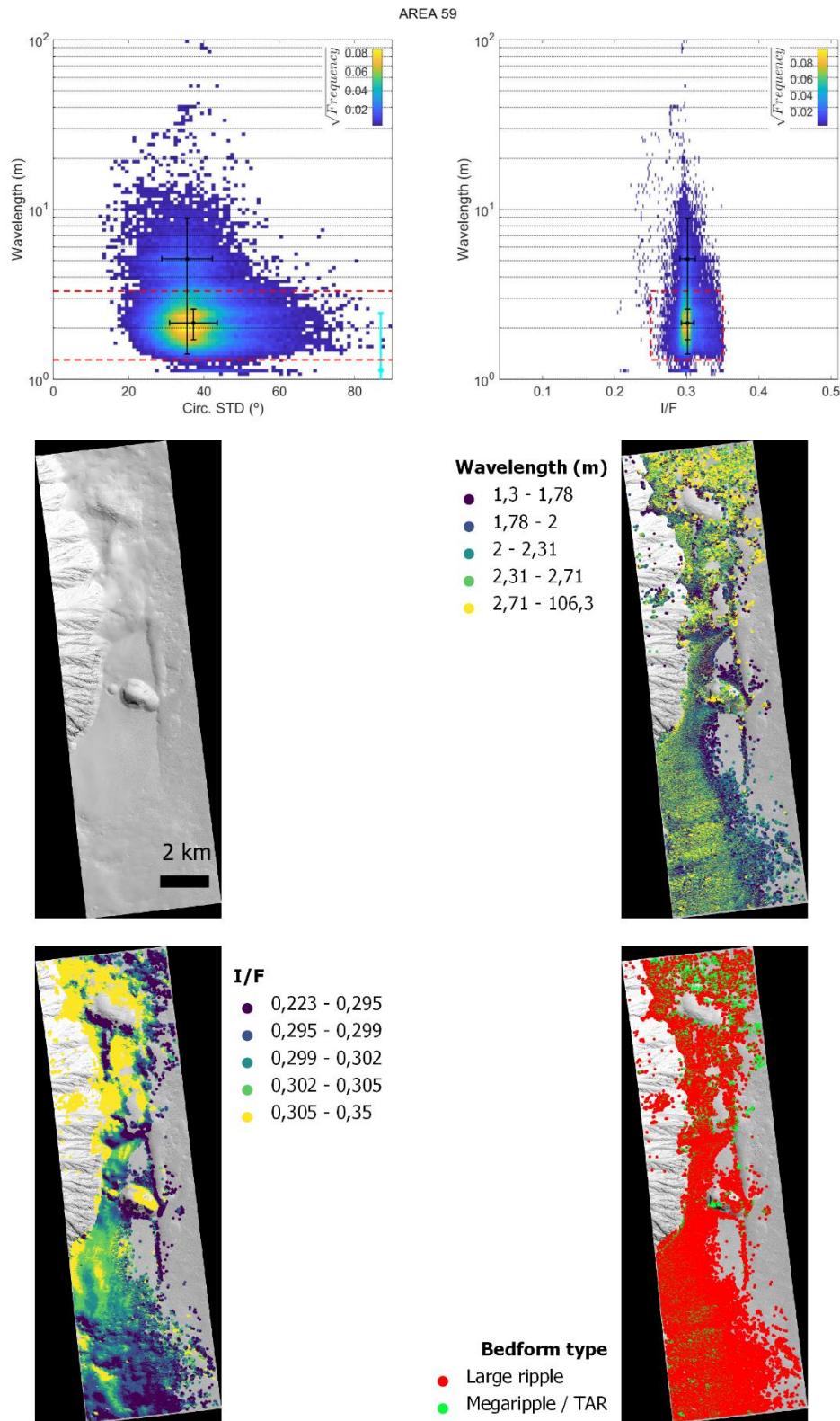
## Area 57



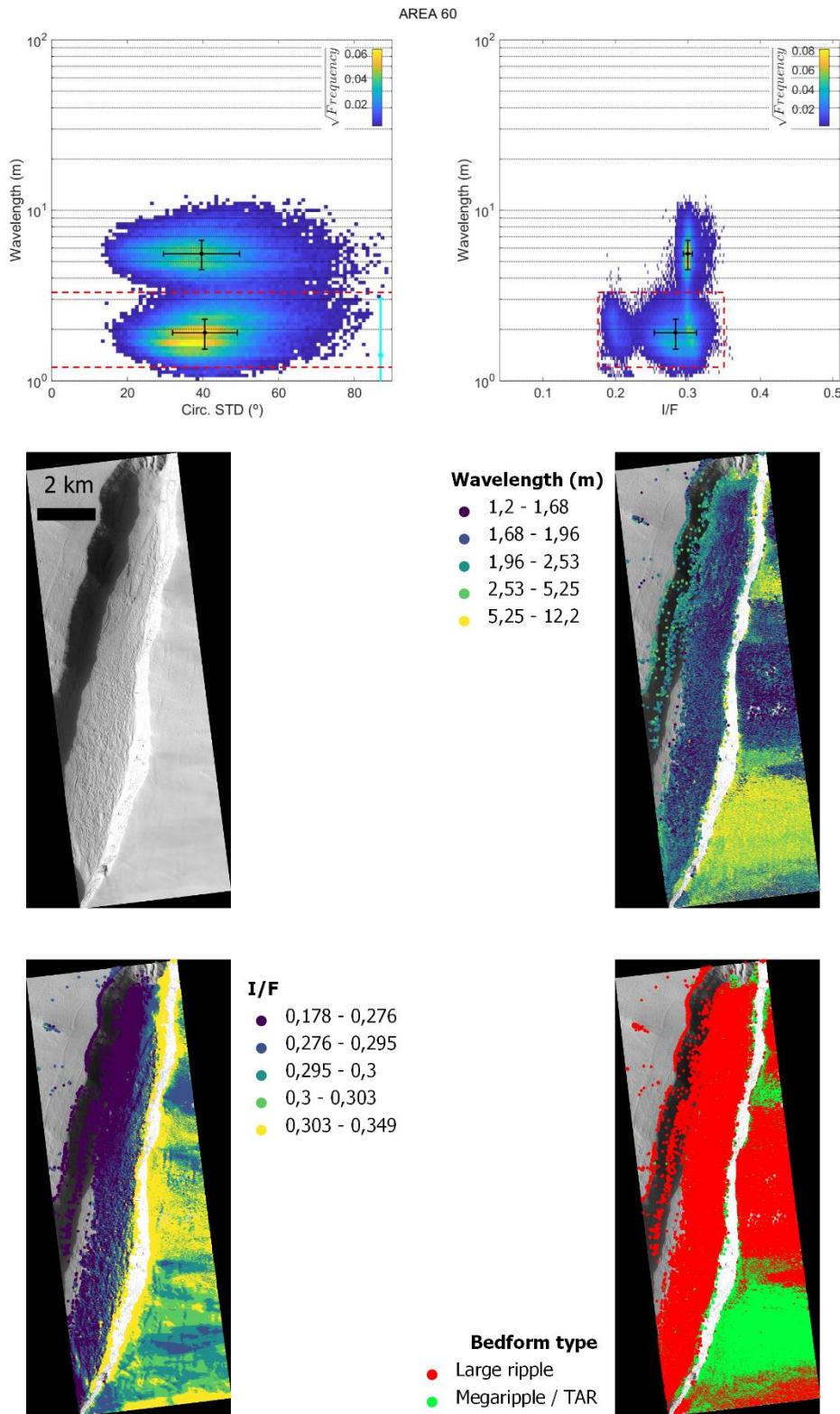
## Area 58



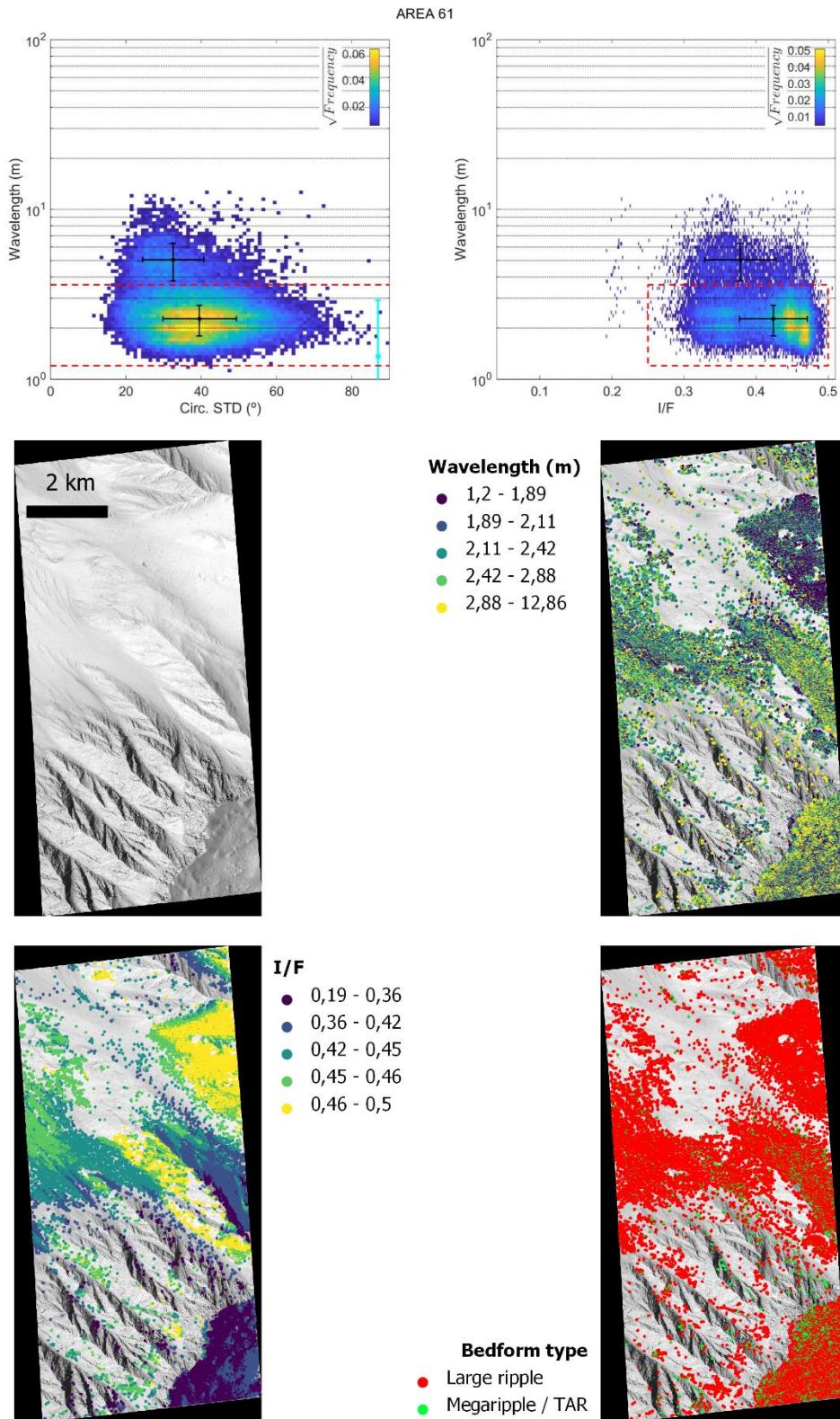
## Area 59



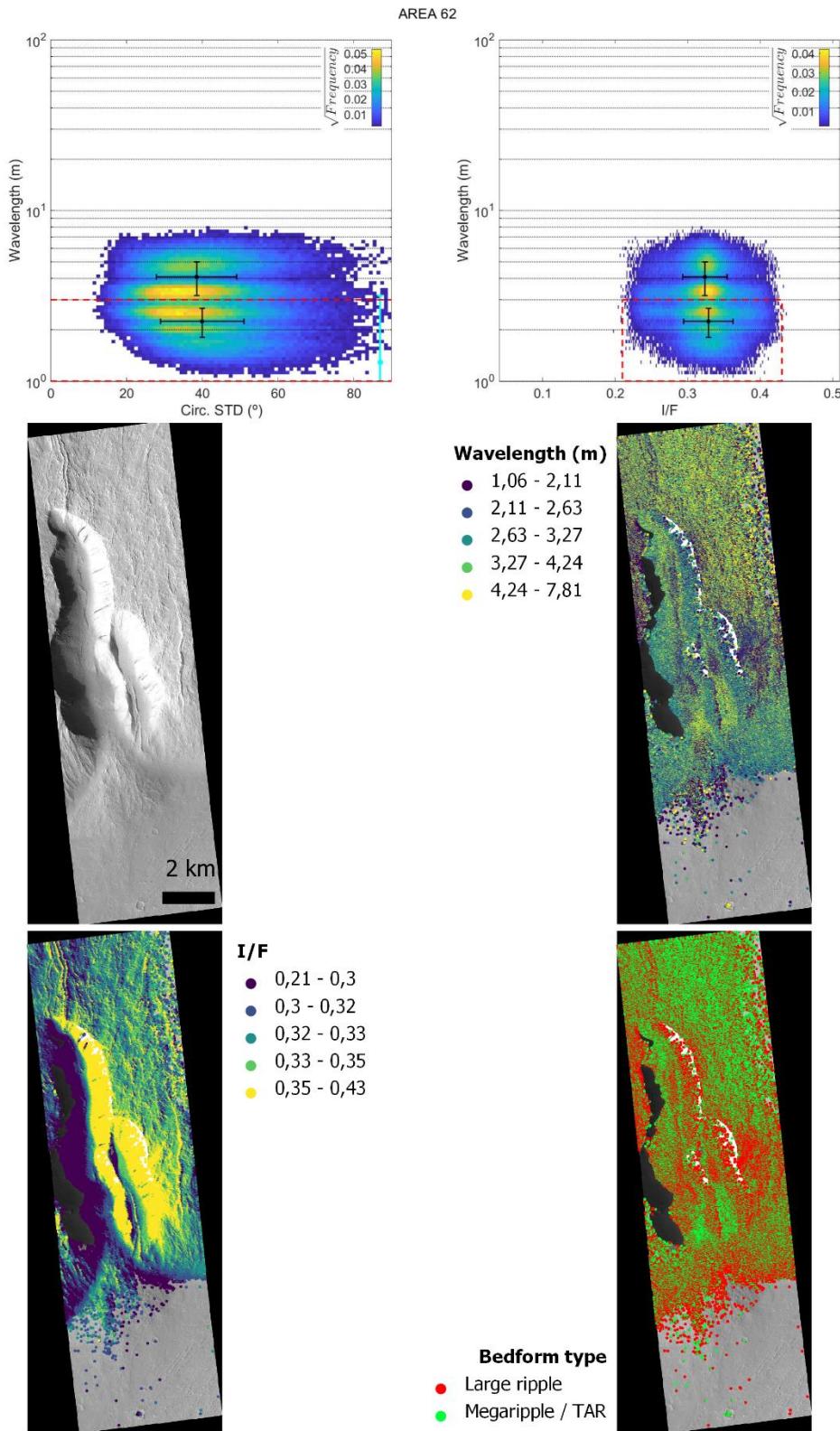
## Area 60



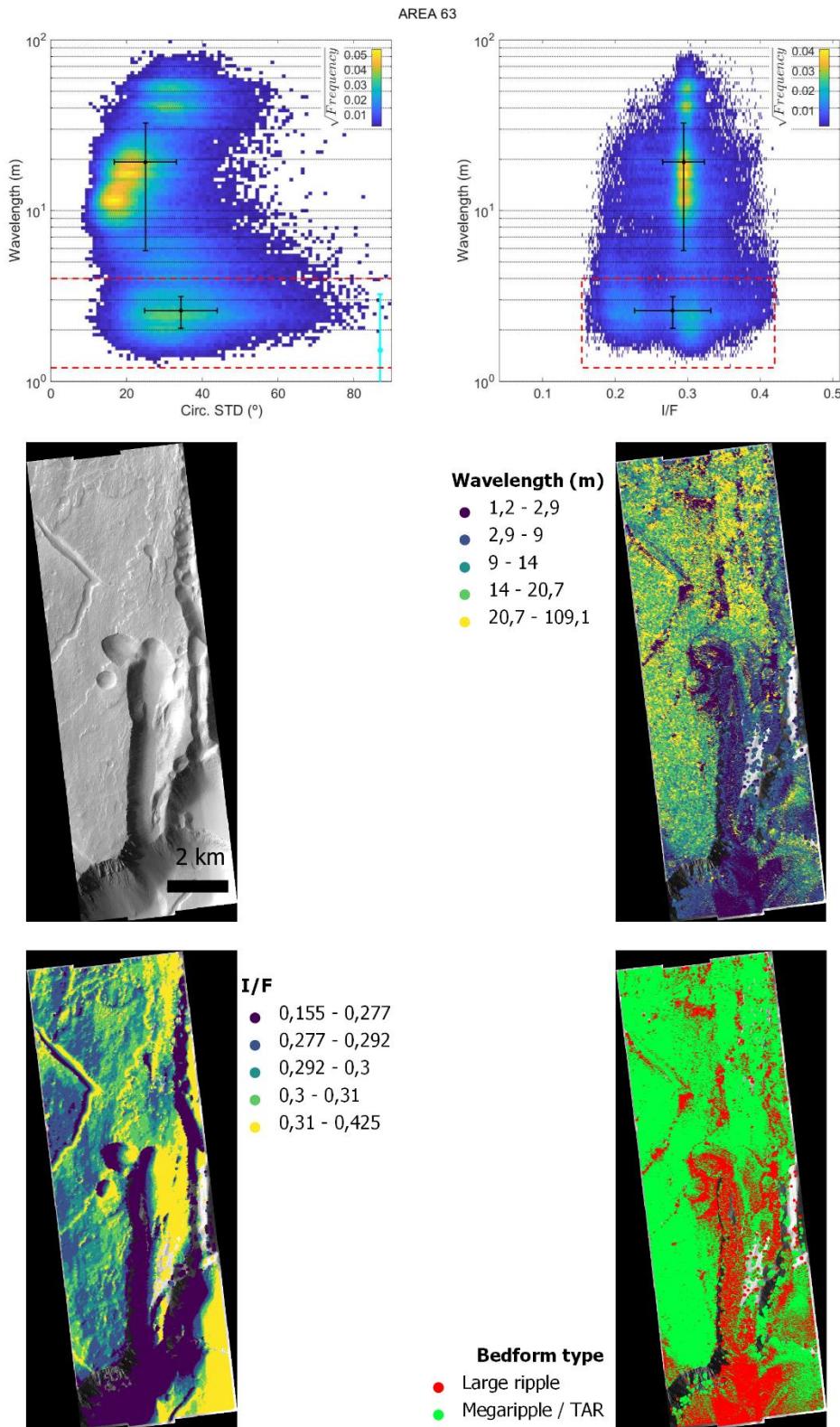
# Area 61



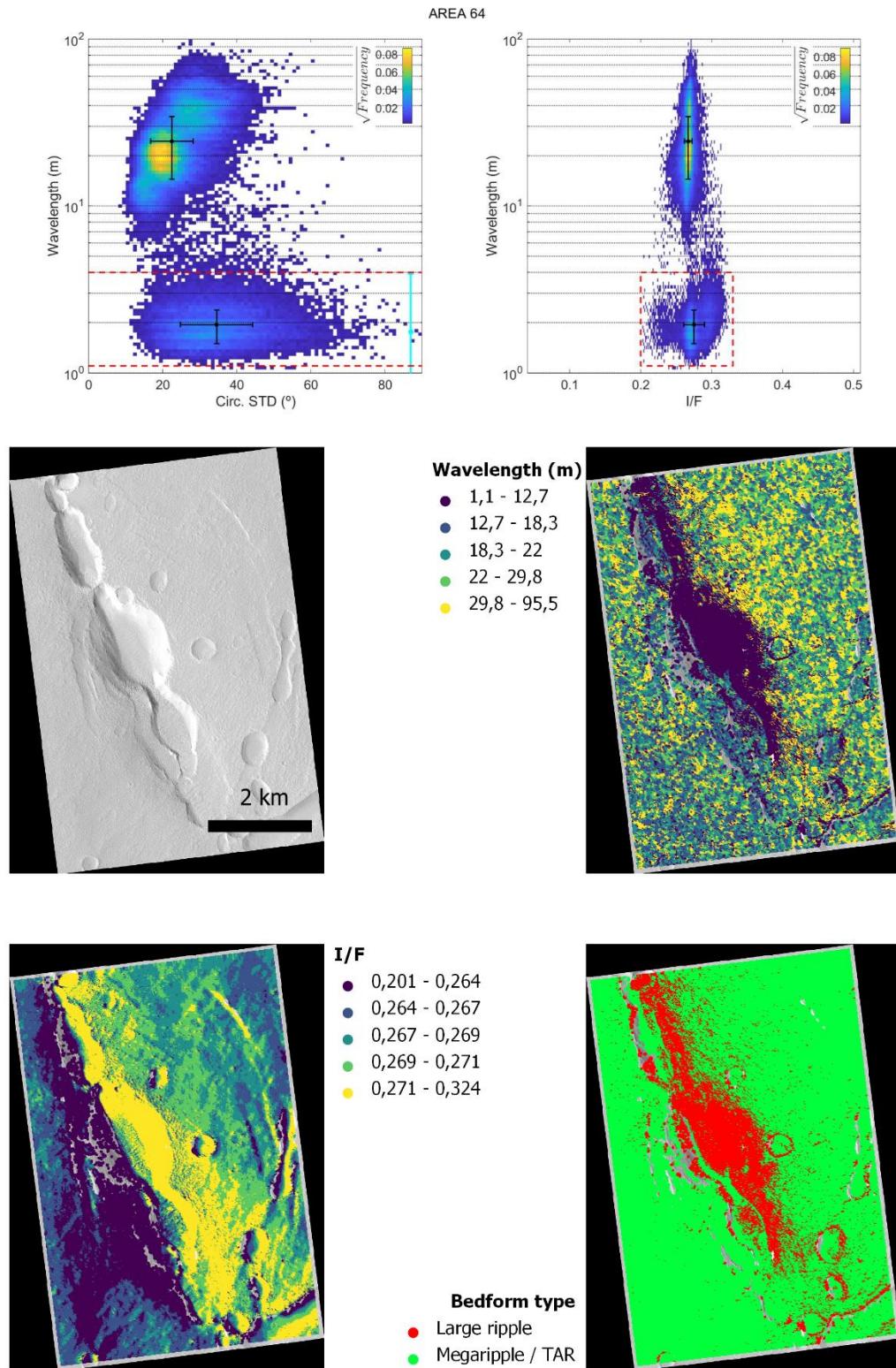
## Area 62



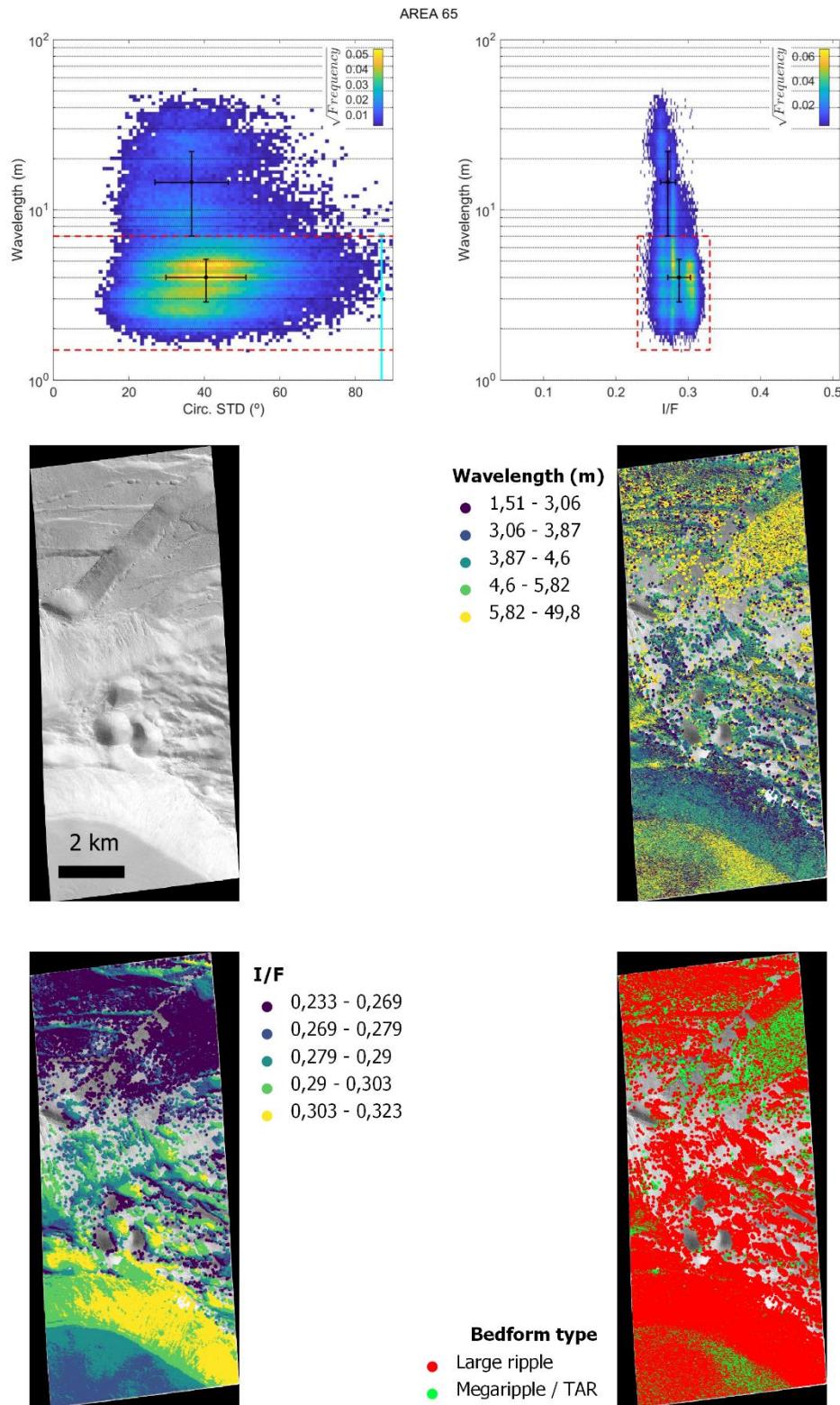
## Area 63



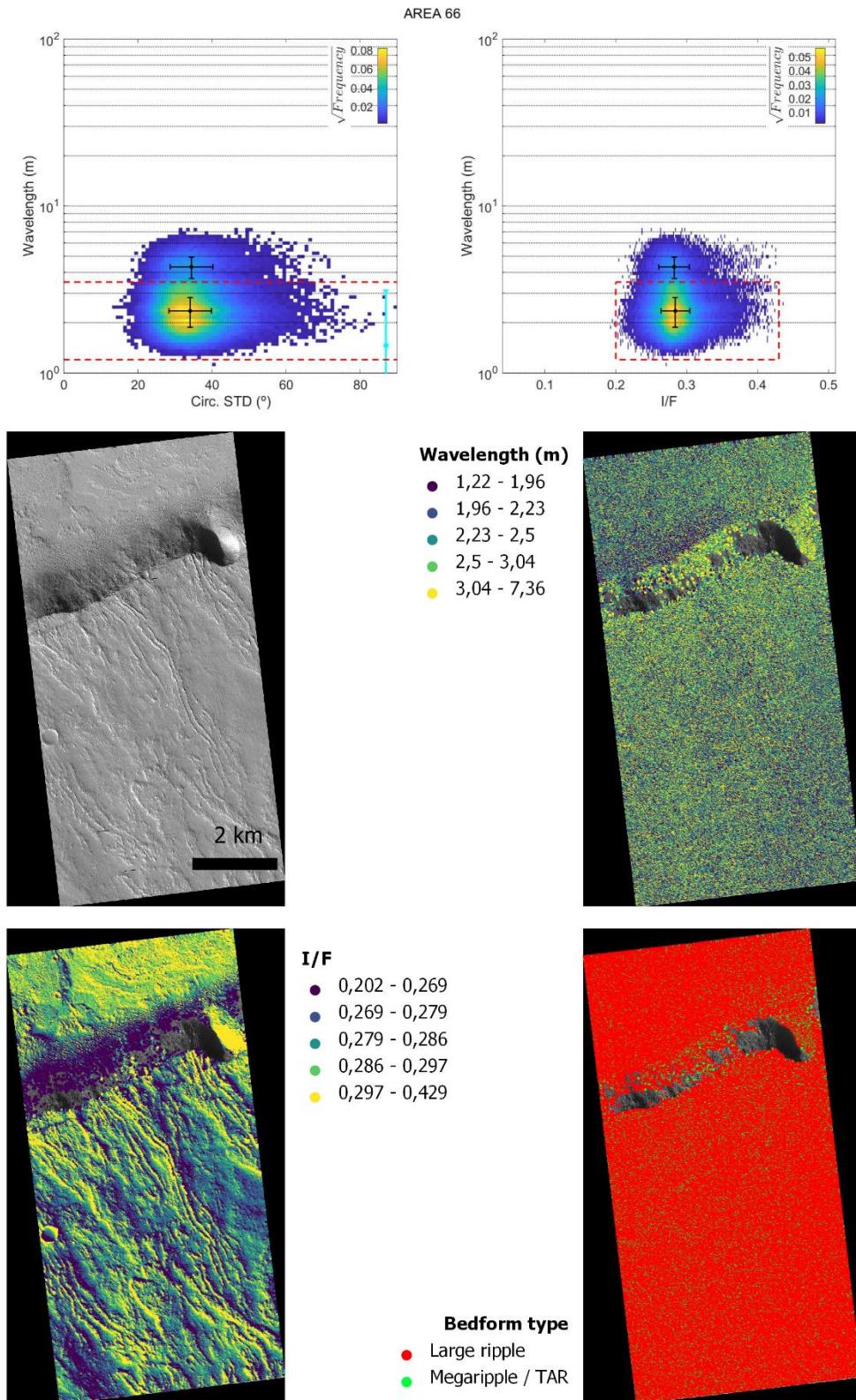
## Area 64



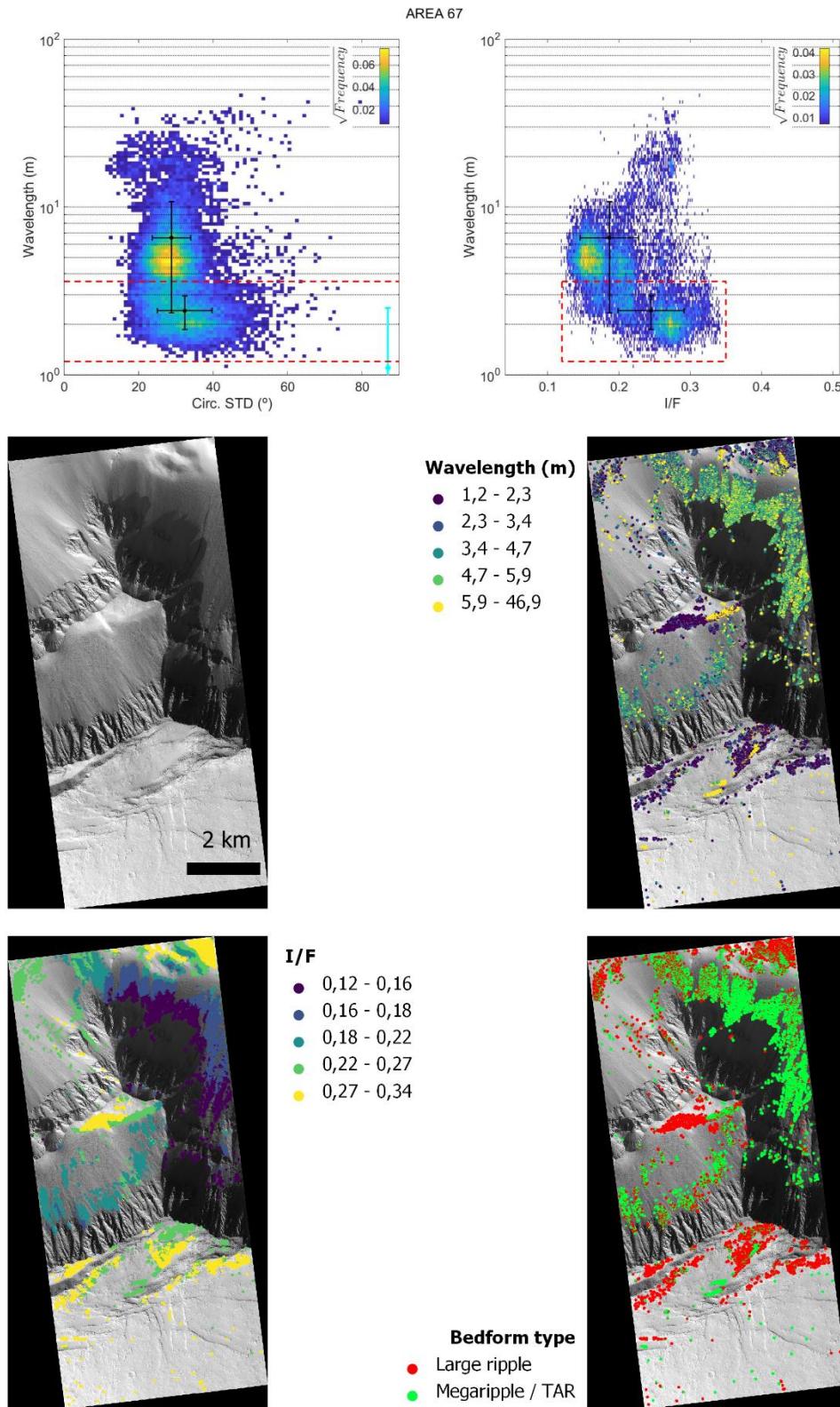
## Area 65



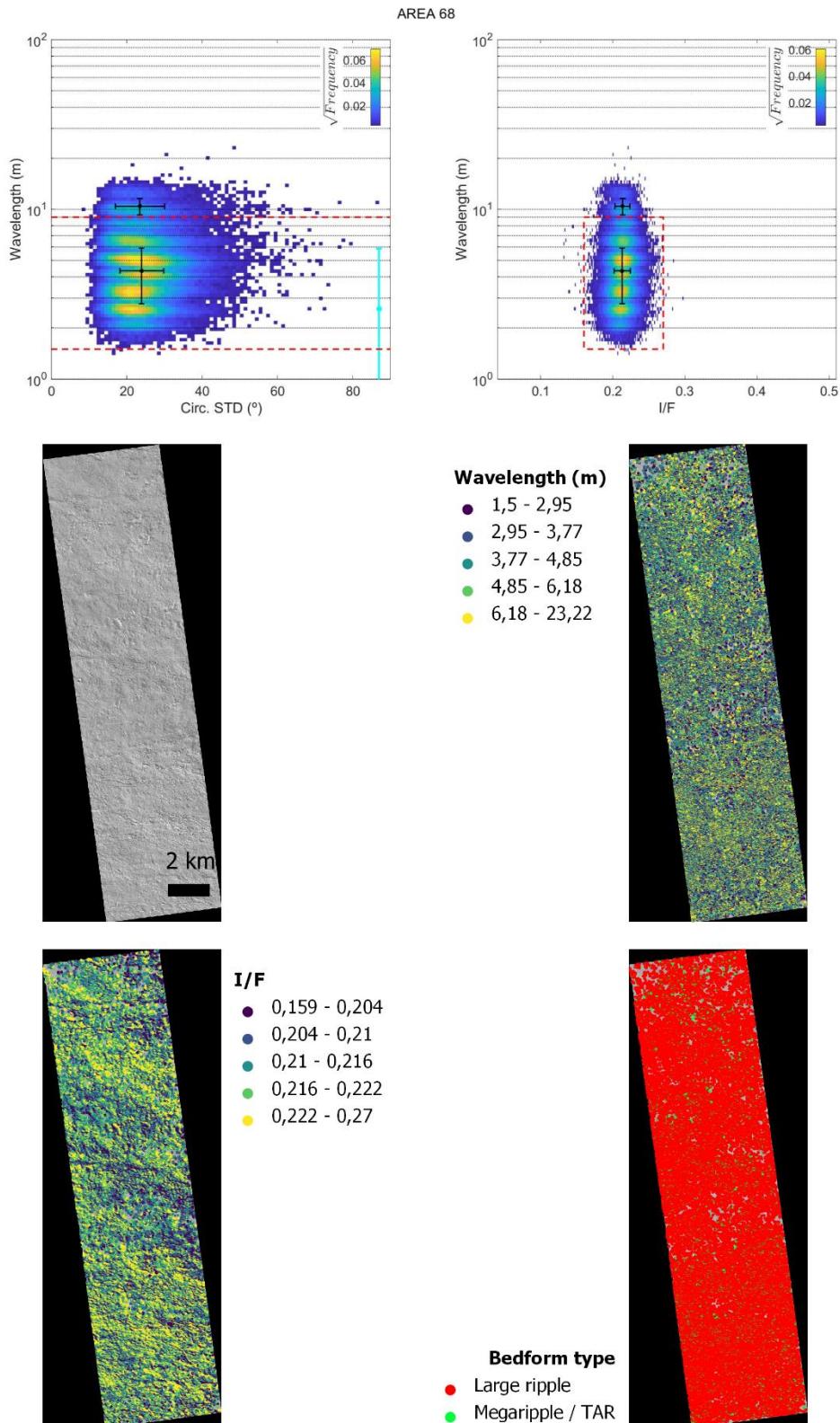
## Area 66



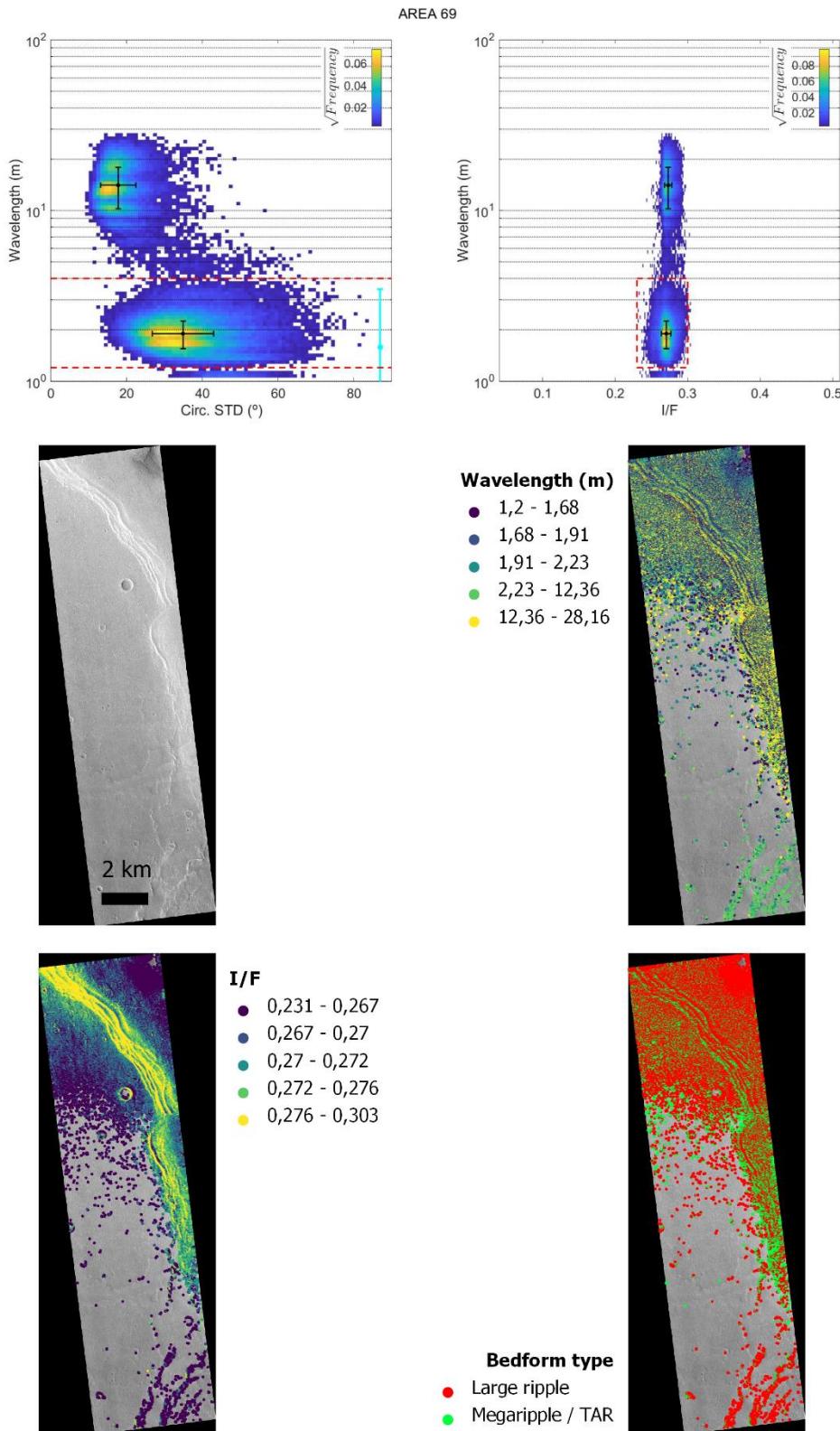
## Area 67



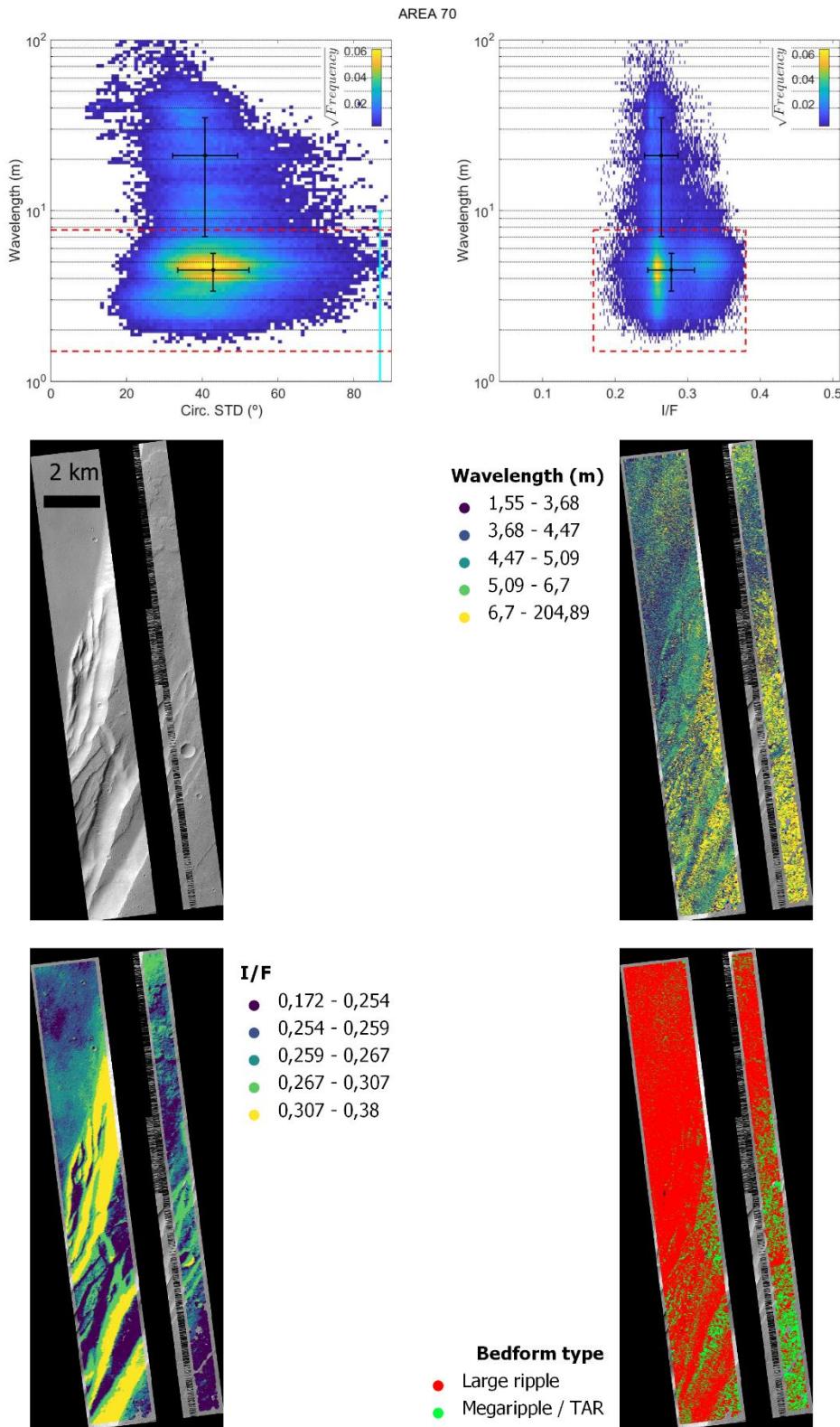
## Area 68



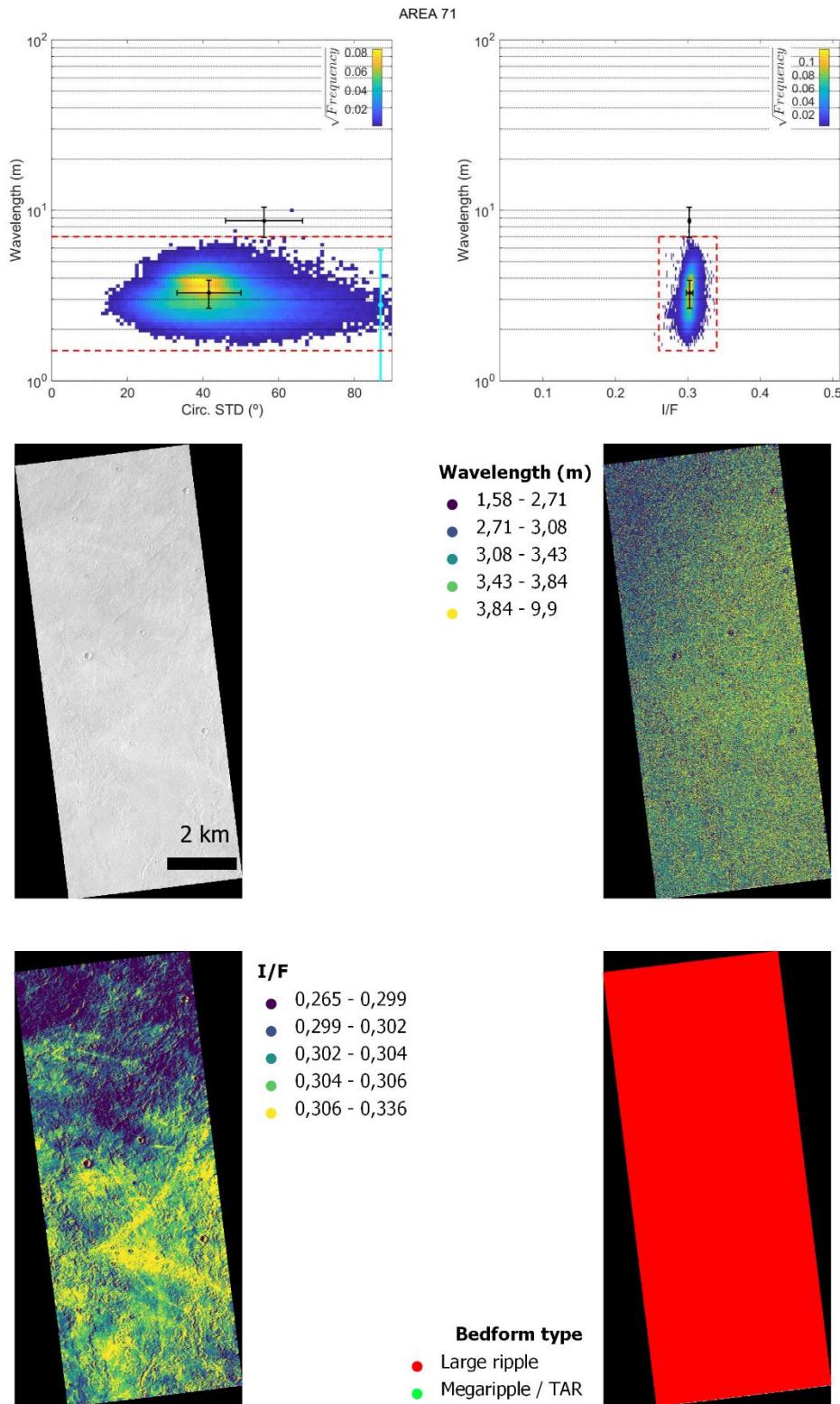
## Area 69



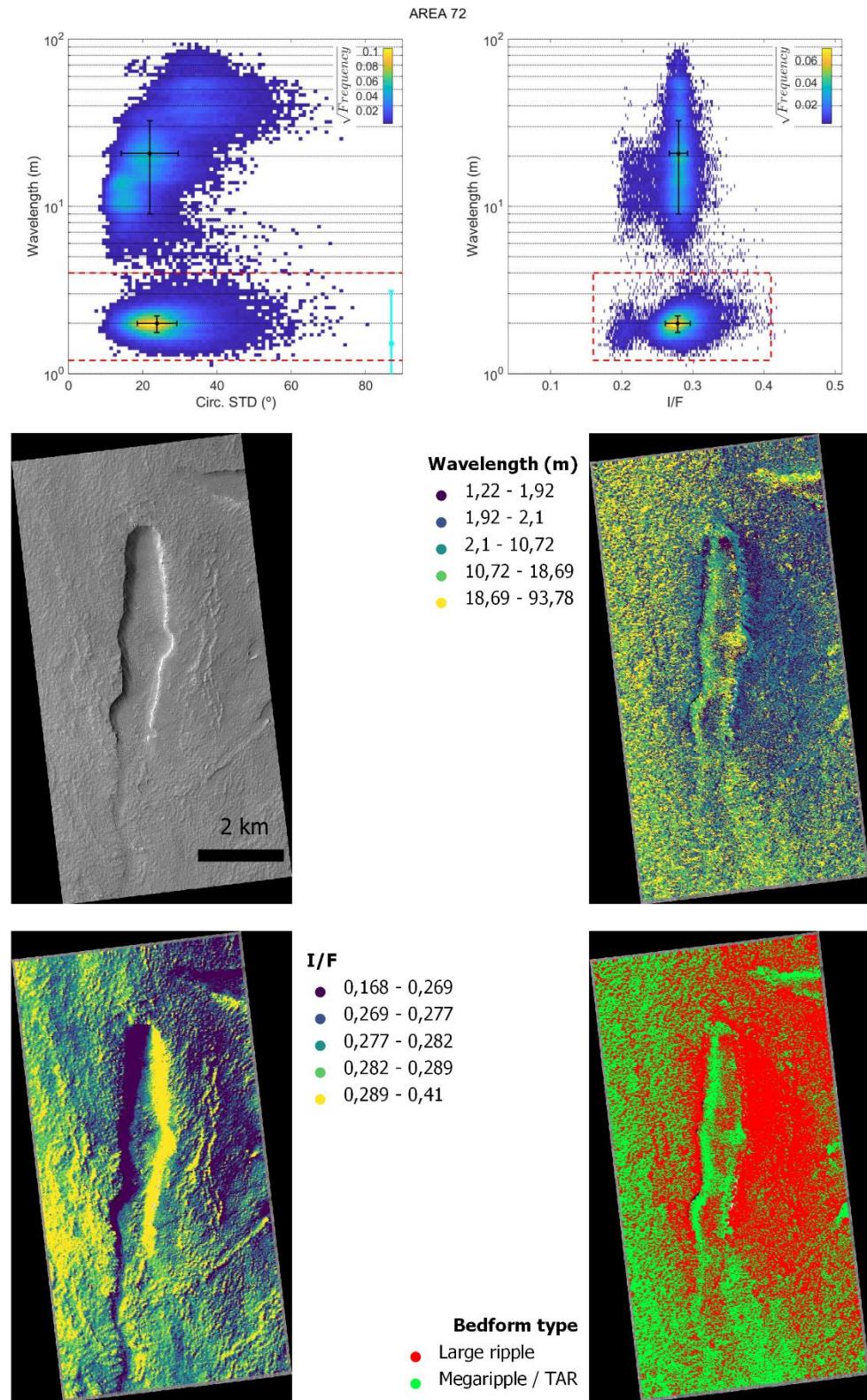
## Area 70



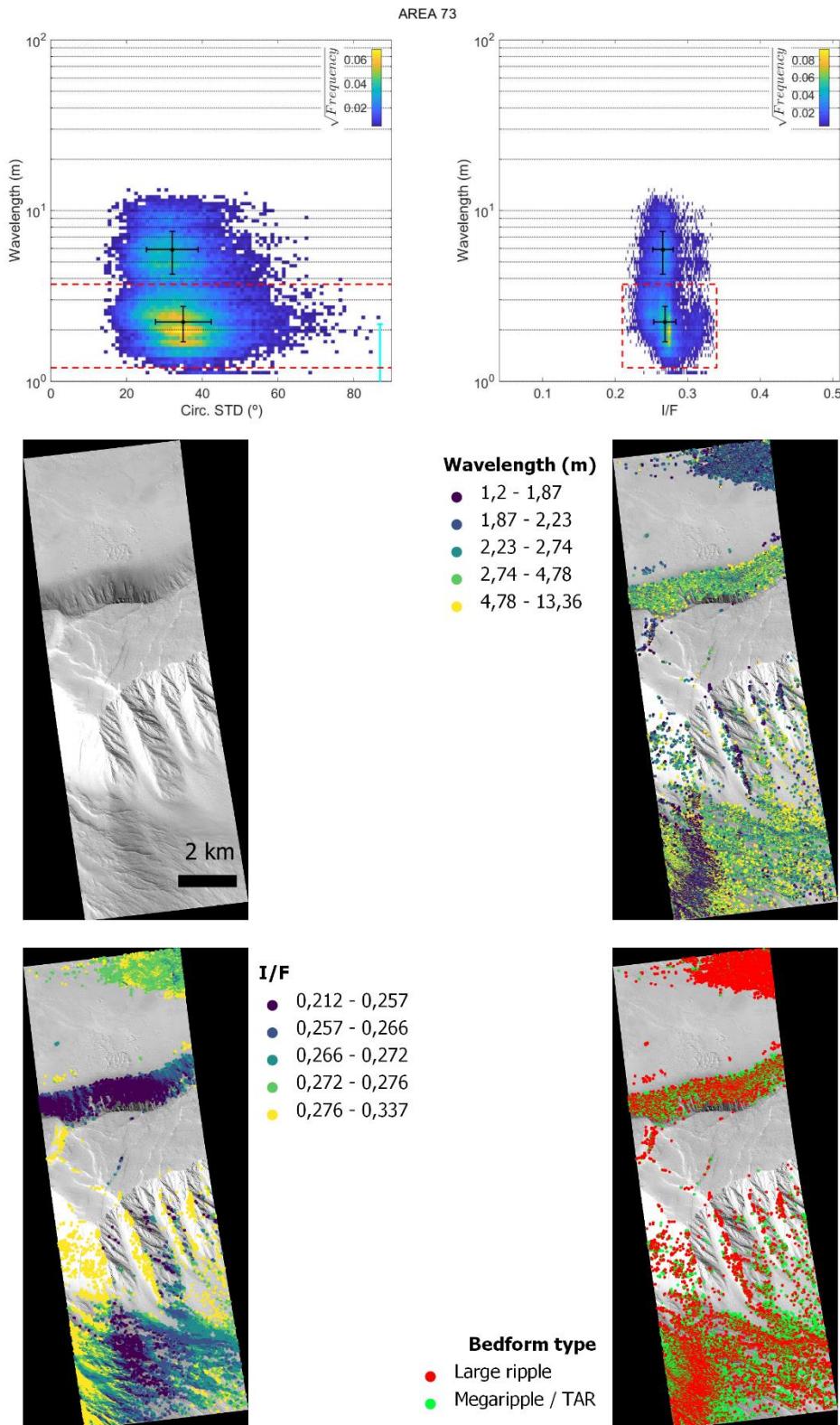
# Area 71



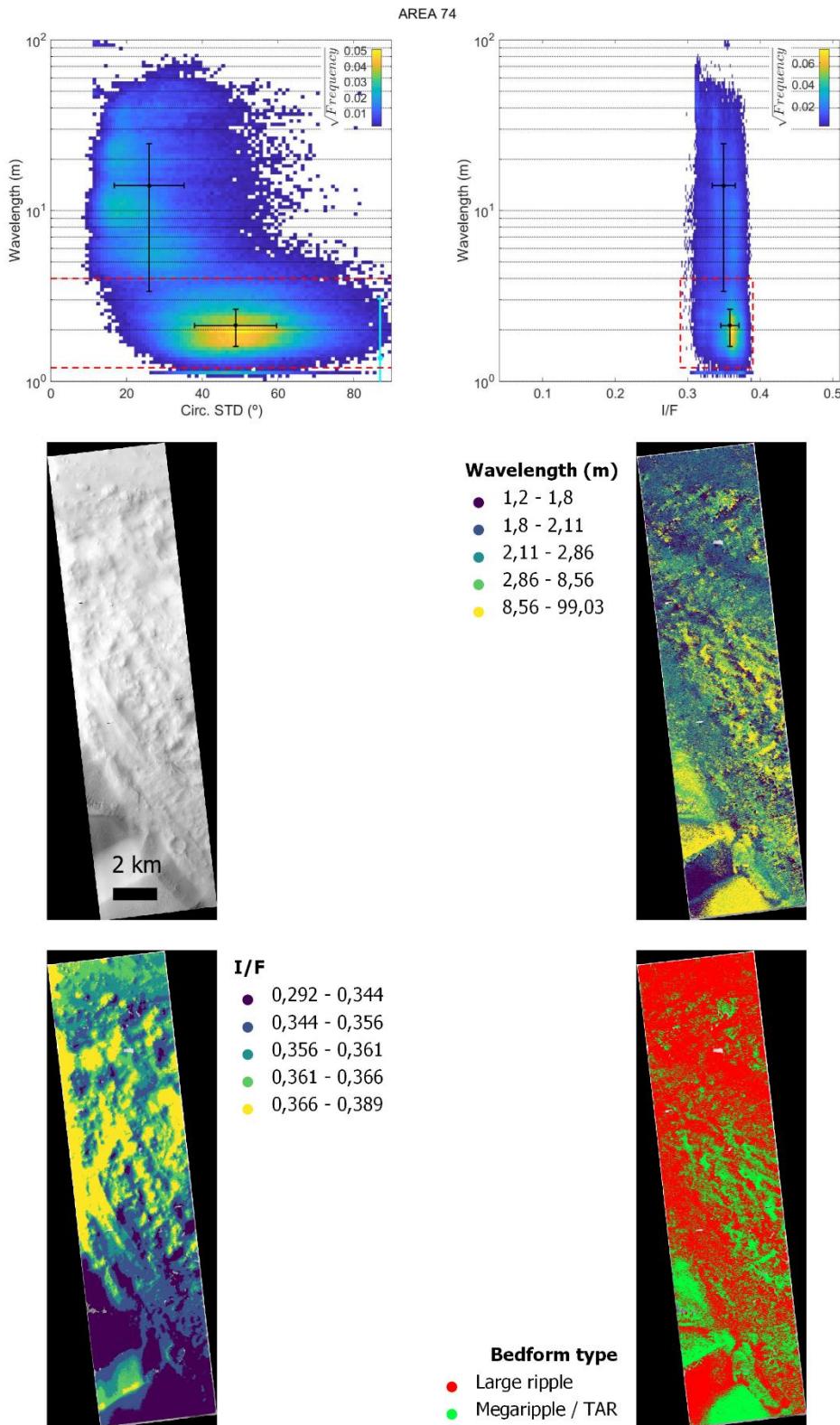
## Area 72



## Area 73



## Area 74



## Area 75

