## The climates of Earth's next supercontinent: effects of tectonics, rotation rate, and insolation

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#### **Key Points:** 11

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- The climate of a distant future Earth is modeled for two different supercontinent scenarios.
- The latitudinal location of the supercontinents are critical to mean surface tem-٠ 14 peratures. 15

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#### 16 Abstract

We explore two possible Earth climate scenarios, 200 and 250 million years into the fu-17 ture, using knowledge of the evolution of plate tectonics, solar luminosity, and rotation 18 rate. In one scenario, a supercontinent forms at low latitudes, whereas in the other it 19 forms at high northerly latitudes with an antarctic subcontinent remaining at the south 20 pole. The climates between these two end points are quite stark, with differences in mean 21 surface temperatures approaching 4 degrees. The fractional habitability (mean surface 22 temperatures remaining between  $0 < T < 100^{\circ}$  year round) on land is shown to differ as 23 much as 40% between the two simulations. These results demonstrate the need to con-24 sider alternative boundary conditions when simulating Earth-like exoplanetary climates. 25

### <sup>26</sup> Plain Language Summary

We investigate two tantalizing Earth climate scenarios 200 and 250 million years 27 into the future. We show the role played by plate tectonics, the sun's increase in bright-28 ness, and a slightly slower rotation rate in these future climate scenarios. In one case the 29 present day continents form into a single land-mass near the equator, and in the other 30 case Antarctica stays put, but the rest of the present day continents are mostly pushed 31 well north of the equator. The difference in the mean surface temperatures of these two 32 cases differ up to 4 degree Celsius, while also being distinct in the total surface area in 33 which they maintain temperatures allowing liquid water to exist year round. 34

#### **1 Introduction**

Earth's near-future climate has been extensively explored via the IPCC and associated CMIP studies (e.g. Collins et al., 2013). Earth's ancient climate has also been studied at various levels of detail, including the Cretaceous greenhouse (e.g., Huber et al., 2018), the Neoproterozoic Snowball (Pierrehumbert et al., 2011), and on the supercontinent Pangea (e.g., Parrish, 1993). Earth's deep time future is a novel research discipline, and changes in deep-time future climate, induced by changes in topography and land/sea masks (e.g., Davies et al., 2018), have yet to be explored until now.

The geological formations on the ever-changing surface of the Earth have a strong 43 influence on our climate. The separation of Australia from Antarctica (DeConto & Pol-44 lard, 2003) and the opening of the Drake Passage (Barker, 2001) 30-40 million years ago 45 induced the Antarctic glaciation. The development of the Caribbean arc and closing of 46 the Panama Isthmus allowed the Gulf Stream to form, with major consequences for global 47 climate (Montes et al., 2015). A closure of the Strait of Gibraltar led to the Messinian 48 Salinity Crisis (Krijgsman et al., 1999), whereas the Himalayas, a consequence of the India-49 Eurasia collision, allows for the monsoon (Tada et al., 2016). Recently, Farnsworth et 50 al. (2019) showed that the climate sensitivity for the period 150–35 million years ago is 51 dependent on the continental configuration, particularly ocean area. Schmittner et al. 52 (2011) investigated the effects of mountains on ocean circulation patterns of present day 53 Earth and concluded that the current configuration of mountains and ice sheets deter-54 mines the relative deep-water formation rates between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. 55

The tectonic plates on Earth aggregate into supercontinents and then disperse on a cycle of 400-600 million years – the supercontinent cycle (Davies et al., 2018; Pastor-Galán et al., 2019; Yoshida, 2016; Yoshida & Santosh, 2018). The latest supercontinent, Pangea, formed around 310 million years ago, and started breaking up around 180 million years ago. The next supercontinent will most likely form in 200–250 million years, meaning Earth is currently about halfway through the scattered phase of the current supercontinent cycle (Davies et al., 2018).

There are obvious and strong links between large scale tectonics and climate. It 63 would be interesting to know what Earth's climate could be like in the distant future, 64 when continental movements have taken Earth away from the current continental con-65 figuration (Davies et al., 2018). This will be explored here, where we investigate what 66 the climate may look like on Earth in a future supercontinent state. A secondary appli-67 cation of climate modelling of the deep-time future is to create a climate model of an Earth-68 like exoplanet using the parameters known to sustain habitability and a stable biosphere 69 (Earth). Using the Deep-time future Earth as a basis for exoplanetary climate studies 70 allows us to establish sensitivity ranges for the habitability and climate stability of the 71 future Earth and its distant cousins in our Milky Way Galaxy. 72

### 73 2 Methods

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#### 2.1 Tectonic maps

Maps of the future Earth were produced based on two plausible scenarios for fu-75 ture Earth: Aurica (forming around 250 million years from now; see Duarte et al., 2018) 76 and Amasia (forming around 200 million years from now; Mitchell et al., 2012) – see 77 Davies et al. (2018) for a summary. In both cases the ocean bathymetry was kept as in 78 Davies et al. (2019), with continental shelf seas 150 m deep, mid-ocean ridges 1600 m 79 deep at the crest point and deepening to the abyssal plains within  $5^{\circ}$ , and subduction 80 zones 6000 m deep. The abyssal plain was set to a depth maintaining the present day 81 ocean volume. Each topographic file was generated with a  $1/4^{\circ}$  horizontal resolution in 82 both latitude and longitude. 83

We generated three subsets of maps for each of the two supercontinent scenarios (see Table 1):

- 1. Low mean topography (land close to sea level), with no mountains (CTRL)
  - 2. Higher mean topography (land close to present day mean topography) with no mountains (PD)
- 3. Low topography with mountains (land close to sea level interspersed with mountains) (MTNS)

The first subset of maps serve as a control (CTRL), allowing us to test the effect of the position and geometry of the continents without the influence of high topographies and particular features such as mountain ranges. It could also simulate a supercontinent that has existed long enough to have been almost fully eroded. The land here has been assigned topography with a normal distribution (mean = 1 m and standard deviation = 50 m), giving topographic heights varying from 1 to 200 m.

The second set of maps assume mean topographic values close to those of present day (PD) but with no significant variation (e.g., no high mountains). This was made by applying a random topography following a normal distribution with mean and standard deviations closer to those of present day Earth's topography (i.e., mean of 612 m and standard deviation of 712 m). The resulting topography varies between 1 and 4000 m in height.

In the third set (MTNS), we included mountain ranges. The land of the supercon-103 tinent was first given a random topography similar to the control map (varying randomly 104 between 1 and 200 m), after which mountains were added manually. The mountains are 105 of three types: 1) Himalaya-type, which result from the collision of continents during the 106 formation of the supercontinent, with an average peak elevation of 7500 m; 2) Andes-107 type, located at the margins of the continents along major subduction zones, with an 108 average peak elevation of 4000 m; and 3) Appalachian-type, which correspond to eroded 109 orogens that were formed and then partially eroded during the supercontinent cycle, with 110

Sim	Name	Topography	$\mathbf{I}^{a}$	$\mathrm{LoD}^{b}$	Runtime (years)	$\mathbf{T}^{c}$ (C)	$_{\rm (Wm^{-2})}^{\rm Balance}$	$\mathbf{A}^d$ (%)	$\frac{\text{SnowFr}^e}{(\%)}$
			А	urica					
01	Aurica_Rand_CTRL	CTRL	1.0260	24.5	2000	20.5	0.23	30.5	0.5
$02 \\ 03$	Aurica_Rand_PD Aurica_250f	PD MTNS	"	$24.5 \\ 24.5$	$\frac{2500}{2000}$	$20.6 \\ 20.6$	$0.10 \\ 0.20$	$30.1 \\ 30.3$	$0.6 \\ 1.5$
			А	masia					
04	Amasia_Rand_CTRL	CTRL	1.0223	24.5	2567	19.7	0.42	30.1	4.2
$05 \\ 06$	Amasia_Rand_PD Amasia_200f	PD MTNS	"	$24.5 \\ 24.5$	$3000 \\ 3000$	$\begin{array}{c} 17.2 \\ 20.2 \end{array}$	$0.25 \\ 0.24$	$\begin{array}{c} 31.1 \\ 30.0 \end{array}$	$9.0 \\ 4.7$
			E	Earth					
07	Earth_noAer_noO3	_	1.0	24.0	1000	14.2	0.17	31.1	11.1

Table 1. A summary list of the simulations & results.

<sup>*a*</sup> Insolation, where  $1.0 = 1361 \text{ W m}^{-2}$  (Modern Earth). <sup>*b*</sup> LoD = Length of Day in hours.

<sup>c</sup> Global mean surface temperature in degrees Celsius from an average over the last 10 years of the model run. <sup>d</sup> Planetary Albedo.

<sup>e</sup> Snow and Ice, global fractional area.

an average peak elevation of 2000 m. In all cases, the width of the mountains is 5° from 111 peak to base. 112

#### 2.2 Rotation changes 113

Day-length for the future was computed based on the simulated tidal dissipation 114 rates presented in Green et al. (2018). The tidal dissipation rates at the supercontinent 115 state is only about 20% of that at present, leading to a change in day length that can-116 not be ignored. The time rate of change in Earth's angular rotation rate,  $d\Omega/dt$ , can be 117 approximated by (MacDonald, 1964) 118

$$\frac{d\Omega}{dt} = \frac{45}{8} k \frac{Gm^2 A^3}{Mr^6} \sin(2\alpha) \tag{1}$$

Here k = 0.2 is a Love number,  $G = 6.67 \times 10^{-11} \text{ m}^3 \text{ kg}^{-1} \text{ s}^{-2}$  is the gravitational 119 constant,  $m = 7.3 \times 10^{22}$  kg is the moon's mass,  $M = 6 \times 10^{24}$  kg is the Earth's mass, 120  $A = 6.4 \times 10^6$  m is Earth's mean radius,  $r = 3.8 \times 10^8$  m is the Earth-moon distance, 121 and is the angle ( $\alpha$ ) between the tidal bulge and the Earth-moon center line. The lat-122 ter is defined from  $\sin(2\alpha) = D/W$ , i.e., the ratio between the tidal dissipation rate D 123 and the work done by the tide generating force, W; both are computed by the numer-124 ical tidal model used in Green et al. (2018). 125

The resulting spin down is  $d\Omega/dt = 2.23 \times 10^{-22} \text{ s}^{-2}$ , or the equivalent of a length-126 ening of a day by 0.5 hours over 200 million years (My). This length of day (24.5 hours) 127 was consequently used in the General Circulation Model simulations discussed below. 128

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### 2.3 General Circulation Model set up

The ROCKE-3D General Circulation Model (GCM) version Planet\_1.0 (R3D1) as 130 described in Way et al. (2017) is utilized for this study. A fully coupled dynamic ocean 131 is utilized. Data from Claire et al. (2012) (see their Table 2) is used to estimate the so-132 lar flux  $\sim 250$  My into the future impinging upon Earth. We do not change the solar spec-133 trum as the changes for such a small leap into the future will be minimal in terms of its 134 effect on Earth's atmosphere. We use an insolation value of 1.019 estimated as the mean 135 of today's value of 1 and the value 500 My into the future of 1.037 from Claire et al. (2012). 136 Hence the insolation in W m<sup>-2</sup> is  $1361 \ge 1.019 = 1397 \text{ W/m}^{-2}$ . 137

We use a 50/50 clay/sand mix for the soil given that we have no constraints on what the surface will be like in the deep future and is a value commonly used in the exoplanet community (e.g. Yang et al., 2014; Way et al., 2018). 40 cm of water is initially distributed into each soil grid cell. We use a ground albedo of 0.2 at model start, but the albedo will change via snow deposition (brighter), or from rainfall (darker) as the GCM moves forward in time.

The original topography resolution of  $1/4^{\circ} \times 1/4^{\circ}$  from the tectonic maps discussed 144 in Section 2.1 is down-sampled to a resolution of  $4^{\circ} \times 5^{\circ}$  in latitude by longitude, which 145 is the default R3D1 resolution. The standard deviation from the down-sampling is used 146 to set the roughness length of the surface in each grid cell. River flow direction is based 147 on the resulting topography and exits to the ocean when possible. Large inland seas (typ-148 ically less than 15 contiguous grid cells) are defined as lakes rather than ocean grid cells. 149 The GCM allows lakes to expand and contract as dictated by the competition between 150 evaporation and precipitation. The same holds for the possible creation and disappear-151 ance of lakes. This allows the model to handle inland surface water in a more sophisti-152 cated manner than making all surface water defined as ocean grid cells. This is highly 153 desirable because ocean grid cells cannot be created or destroyed during a model run. 154

Any ocean grid cell with a depth less than 150 meters (from the down-sampled  $4^{\circ} \times$ 5° data) was set to have a value of 204 meters (the mean depth of ocean model level 6). This is especially important at high latitudes where the ocean may freeze to the bottom, which will cause the model to crash due to its inability to dynamically change surface types from ocean to land ice.

The down-sampling has a side effect in that the land-sea mask will differ slightly between the three topographic types (CTRL, PD, MTNS). For example, in a case with a collection of ocean or lake grid cells adjacent to a number of high elevation land topography grid cells the down-sampling may change the combined ocean + land grid cells into a land grid cell, or vice-versa if the mean of the ocean grid cells is larger than that of the land grid cells. This is why the land/sea masks differ between CTRL, PD and MTNS in Figure 1, even though their  $1/4^{\circ} \times 1/4^{\circ}$  parents had exactly the same land-sea mask.

The atmosphere is set to roughly Earth constituents in the year 1850: Nitrogen dominated with 21% Oxygen, 285 ppmv CO<sub>2</sub>, 0.3 ppmv N<sub>2</sub>O, and 0.79 ppmv CH<sub>4</sub>. No aerosols or Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) are included. For comparison purposes we include a modern Earth-like land/sea mask (Simulation 07: Earth\_noAer\_noO3) with these same atmospheric constituents, but with modern insolation (1361 W m<sup>-2</sup>) and a bathtub ocean. The Earthlike land/sea mask is described in Way et al. (2018) and shown in Figure 8 of that paper.

### 174 **3 Results**

Previous work has shown that ancient Earth supercontinent phases, which are com-175 parable to our Aurica Simulations 01-03, have had more arid interiors where weather-176 ing effects and  $CO_2$  draw down may have been less efficient (e.g. Jellinek et al., 2019). 177 This would increase surface temperatures as the balance of  $CO_2$  would tend to be larger 178 than present day because volcanic outgassing (sources) would likely remain constant while 179  $CO_2$  drawdown (sinks) would decrease. However, there are other climatic effects to con-180 sider. For example, the Amasia reconstruction is essentially an arctic supercontinent with 181 an independent and isolated antarctic continent, meaning both poles are covered by land, 182 and much of that is covered by ice. Amasia is thus in essence a shift to consolidate the 183 present day domination of northern latitude land masses even further north. 184

This increase in land masses at northerly latitudes means that there is less ocean heat transport to melt the ice in the northern hemisphere summers. Consequently, more ice resides on land and in lakes all year round near the north pole, as we see in present



**Figure 1.** Land (grey) and Sea (white) masks used in experiments of Table 2.1. Present day Earth continental outlines are shown for reference.



**Figure 2.** Individual grid cell snow+ice fractional amounts. For Simulation 02 (left), Simulation 05 (middle) and Simulation 07 (right) for a sum of the months of December, January and February (top) and June, July and August (bottom) in the last year of each simulation.

day Antarctica. This is the well known ice-albedo climate feedback and explains why these simulations tend to be cooler than the others. The coolest simulation is Simulation 05 (Amasia\_Rand\_PD), because it has very very few inland seas in the north (compared to Simulations 04 & 06) that could thaw out in the summers, as well as less ocean area at high latitudes to transport heat. Hence, it tends to remain cooler than Simulations 04 & 06 with similar land/sea masks (see Figure 1).

It is informative to contrast Simulation 02 (Aurica\_Rand\_PD) with Simulation 05 194 (Amasia\_Rand\_PD). Simulation 02 is more contiguous (less inland lakes & seas), has land 195 at lower latitudes and uses the same "present day" (PD) topographic values for inputs 196 as Simulation 05. Simulation 05 also has contiguous land, but at much higher latitudes. 197 In Table 2.1 we give their mean surface temperatures, planetary albedo and fractional 198 snow & ice coverage. The snow & ice coverage in particular is clearly the biggest climatic 199 factor as shown in Figure 2. There, we show the seasonal snow & ice coverage for Sim-200 ulations 02 & 05 where Dec/Jan/Feb is an average over northern hemisphere winter months 201 December, January & February. Jun/Jul/Aug is an average over the northern hemisphere 202 summer months of June, July & August. We could have used albedo, but it is an im-203 perfect measure here since in the northern winter months much of the area above the 204

Arctic circle gives null values (no reflected light, hence no albedo) and the same during 205 the southern winter months for land areas below the Antarctic circle. Regardless, in Ta-206 ble 2.1 it is clear that the snow & ice fractions are much higher for the Amasia runs (04,207 05, 06) compared to the other three Aurica runs (01, 02, 03), and highest for Simulation 208 05 in particular. The higher snow fraction amount of Simulation 05 corresponds directly 209 to the lower surface temperature in this set of runs. This coldest of the future climates 210 (Simulation 05) has a similar global 10 year mean albedo to that of Simulation 07 (Earth). 211 However, the Earth simulation is cooler because it has more snow & ice at high northerly 212 latitudes and has a lower insolation. 213

The general effect of the different land/sea masks between Simulations 01–03 and 04–06 and how they compare with modern Earth in Simulation 07 are seen in Supplementary Material Figures S1 and S2. In Figure S1 we plot the stream function which indicates the strength of the Hadley circulation. While the Amasia stream function is roughly the same as modern day Earth's, the Aurica stream function is about an order of magnitude weaker. Surely this is due to the large super continent at low latitudes in the Aurica simulation that prevent moisture uptake at these lower latitudes.

On the other hand in Figure S2 we plot the Atmospheric, Oceanic and Total (At-221 mospheric + Ocean) meridional heat transport in units of petawatts. Simulations 01-222 03 (Aurica) and 07 (Earth) are decidedly similar, while that of Amasia appears to be 223 generally stronger. The largest differences are the ocean transport in the middle figures 224 where the low latitude landmass of Aurica prevents large meridional flows, whereas the 225 lack of low-latitude landmasses in Simulations 04–06 (Amasia) allow for greater trans-226 port. Similar contrasts were seen in ancient Venus simulations at the inner edge of the 227 habitable zone (Way et al., 2016) where a land-sea mask with more land at lower lat-228 itudes, versus modern Earth, generated distinct global mean surface temperatures. 229

We were not able to discern any marked differences in climate due to the day length being 30 minutes longer. This was examined by looking at the difference between Simulation 07, which uses a modern Earth day length, and the same simulation (unpublished) using the same day length as Simulations 01–06. So, any differences between Simulations 01–06 and Simulation 07 mentioned above are likely to due to differences in land-sea mask, insolation, and associated climate dynamics.

Work by Spiegel et al. (2008) uses a metric of "climatic habitability" that defines 236 the amount of surface area of a planet that can host liquid water (e.g., surface temper-237 atures in the range  $0 < T < 100^{\circ}$  C) at modern Earth atmospheric pressures. Again focus-238 ing on Simulation 02 and 05 we find that Simulation 02 has much less fractional hab-239 itability if we look at land and lakes -58% – compared with Simulation 05 (99.8%). Sea 240 surface temperatures are more balanced: Simulation 02 was at 73% and Simulation 05241 242 was at 71% habitability for the ocean. These numbers are all taken from averages of the last 10 years of each run. 243

## <sup>244</sup> 4 Conclusions

The supercontinents of the future can provide us some guidance on how surface temperatures will increase or decrease depending on how the continents are distributed. But there are other factors to consider related to weathering rates and volcanic outgassing (e.g. Jellinek et al., 2019), not to mention the related role of atmospheric pressure (Gaillard & Scaillet, 2014).

As mentioned above, the small 30 minute decrease in rotation rate for Simulations 01–06 as compared with modern Earth (Simuation 07) appears to play little or no role in the climate dynamics as there is no discernible difference in the strength or distribution of the Hadley/Ferrell/Polar cells when comparing Simulation 05 and Simulation 07 (see Figure S2). There is a decrease in the strength of Simulation 02 compared to 07 (Figure S2), but this is likely due to the large low latitude supercontinent in Simulation 02.

While we discuss the future climate of Earth we do not touch on the future of life. There are too many uncertainties for us to speculate, but recent work provides some guidelines (Mello & Friaça, 2019). The reduced tides during the supercontinent stage (Davies et al., 2019) will lead to reduced vertical mixing rates, i.e. a reduced vertical diffusivity in the abyssal ocean (Munk, 1966; Wunsch & Ferrari, 2004). This may have implications for ocean ecosystems, and biodiversity. At the same time it appears that the formation of Pangea had little effect on the global biodiversity of marine animals (Zaffos & Peters, 2017) and Pangea was in a very weak tidal state (Green et al., 2017).

It would be interesting to compare the GCM derived climates for the superconti-264 nent at low latitude in the Aurica runs with previous work on Pangea (e.g. Chandler et 265 al., 1992; Chandler, 1994; Fluteau et al., 2001; Gibbs et al., 2002; Roscher et al., 2011). 266 Unfortunately it is difficult to make a proper comparison for a number of reasons. First, 267 all of these previous works use either atmosphere only GCMs (i.e., no ocean) or shallow 268 mixed layer oceans with either prescribed horizontal heat transport or none at all. Sec-269 ondly, unlike Aurica, Pangea spanned not only lower latitudes (like Aurica), but also high 270 southern latitudes where ice/snow forms easily (e.g. Chandler et al., 1992, see Figure 5). 271 Finally, there are different reconstructions for different time periods and not all are di-272 rectly comparable to those we simulate herein. This makes a direct comparison with Pangea 273 complicated and we leave such an analysis for the future. 274

These new reconstructions may prove useful for exoplanetary studies where researchers will have a larger library of topographies and land/sea masks to chose from when estimating the probability of surface habitability on neighboring worlds.

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fig2d.png.

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fig2e.png.

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fig2f.png.

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fig1d.png.



fig2b.png.

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fig2c.png.

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figS2c.png.



fig1e.png.



figS2a.png.



fig1c.png.



fig1f.png.



Figure 1a.



figS1.png.



figS2b.png.



fig2a.png.

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