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# AMOC and summer sea ice as key drivers of the spread in mid-holocene winter temperature patterns over Europe in PMIP3 models

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1 **AMOC and summer sea ice as key drivers of the spread in Mid-Holocene winter**  
2 **temperature patterns over Europe in PMIP3 models**

3

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17 **Abstract**

18 The mid-Holocene (6,000 years before present) was a warmer period than today in summer in  
19 most of the Northern Hemisphere. In winter, over Europe, pollen-based reconstructions show  
20 a dipole of temperature anomalies as compared to present-day, with warmer conditions in the  
21 north and colder in the south. It has been proposed that this pattern of temperature anomaly  
22 could be explained by a persisting positive phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation during this  
23 period, which was, however, not reproduced in general by climate models. Indeed, PMIP3  
24 models show a large spread in their response to the mid-Holocene insolation changes, the  
25 physical origins of which are not understood. To improve the understanding of the

26 reconstructed temperature changes and of the PMIP3 model spread, we analyze the dynamical  
27 response of these model simulations in the North Atlantic for mid-Holocene conditions as  
28 compared to pre-industrial. We focus on the European pattern of temperature in winter and  
29 compare the simulations with a pollen-based reconstruction. We find that some of the model  
30 simulations yield a similar pattern to the reconstructed one, but with far lower amplitude,  
31 although it remains within the reconstruction uncertainty. We attribute the northern warm part  
32 of the latitudinal dipole of temperature anomaly in winter to a lower sea-ice cover in the  
33 Nordic Seas. The decrease of sea ice in winter indeed reduces the local sea-ice insulation  
34 effect, allowing the released ocean heat to reach continental northern Europe. This decrease in  
35 winter sea-ice cover is related to an increase in the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation  
36 (AMOC) and its associated ocean heat transport, as well as the effect of insolation changes on  
37 sea ice in summer, which persists until winter. We only find a slight cooling signal over  
38 southern Europe, compared to reconstructions, mainly related to the insolation-induced  
39 cooling in winter over Africa. We show that the models that failed to reproduce any AMOC  
40 increase under mid-Holocene conditions are also the ones that do not reproduce the  
41 temperature pattern over Europe. The change in sea level pressure is not sufficient to explain  
42 the spread among the models. The ocean-sea ice mechanisms that we proposed constitute an  
43 alternative explanation to the pattern of changes in winter temperatures over Europe in the  
44 mid-Holocene, which is in better agreement with available model simulations of this period.  
45 Finally, we evaluate if reconstructions of the AMOC for the mid-Holocene can provide  
46 interesting emerging constraints on key changes in European climate, and indirectly on  
47 AMOC response to on-going and future radiative changes. Although there is a significant link  
48 between the response of the mid-Holocene and projections, it remains limited. The proposed  
49 mechanism does not appear to be sufficient to explain the large discrepancies between models  
50 and reconstruction data for the summertime period.

51 *Keywords: PMIP3, Mid-Holocene, NAO, AMOC, inter-model spread*

## 52 **Introduction**

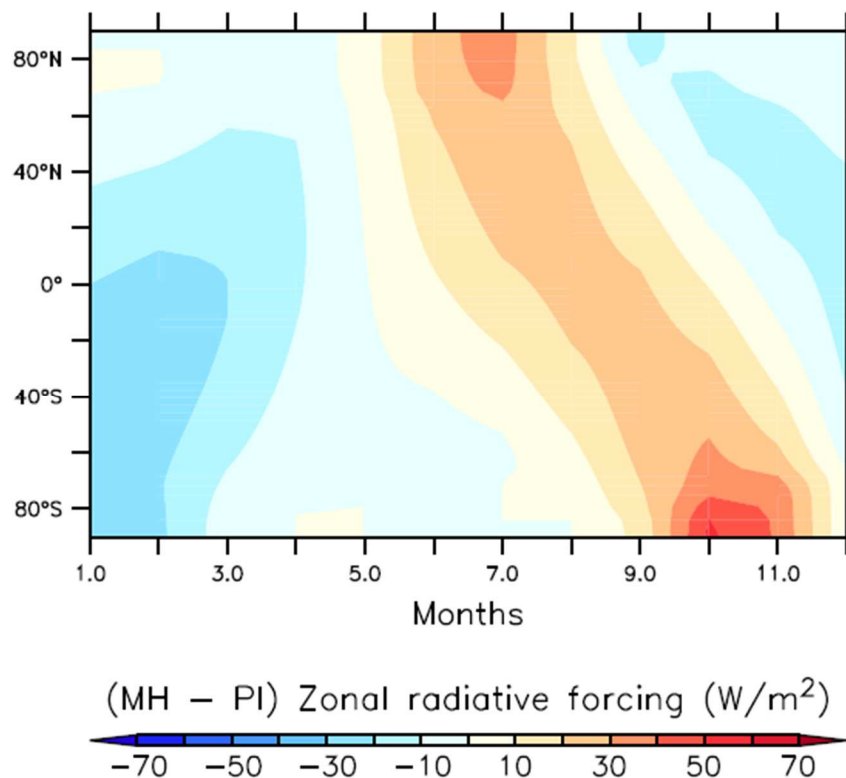
53 Projections of the climate of Europe show a large spread for the ongoing century (IPCC  
54 Working Group 1 et al. 2013). For a given emission scenario, uncertainties are related to the  
55 internal variability, that can be large at the regional scale (Deser et al. 2012), and to the  
56 model-dependent sensitivity of the climate system to external forcings (Hawkins and Sutton  
57 2009). In particular, changes of the atmospheric or oceanic circulation tend to vary a lot  
58 between models. Future projections of the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), that plays a  
59 crucial role in the climate variability of Europe in winter (Hurrell 1995), do not even agree on  
60 its sign (Cattiaux and Cassou 2013). At multi-decadal timescales, the Atlantic Meridional  
61 Overturning Circulation (AMOC) also plays a key role for the climate of Europe through its  
62 massive northward transport of heat all along the Atlantic Ocean (Swingedouw et al. 2009,  
63 Haarsma et al. 2015, Jackson et al. 2015). Its long-term projections are, similarly, very  
64 uncertain (Weaver et al. 2012), even though all the models agree that it should decrease in the  
65 coming century, especially when the Greenland ice sheet melting is accounted for (Bakker et  
66 al. 2016; Swingedouw et al. 2015a). To improve our estimate of the response of the NAO or  
67 the AMOC to external forcing, paleoclimate data could provide key observational constraints  
68 (Schmidt et al. 2014; Harrison et al. 2015).

69 Paleoclimate reconstructions are based on proxy records that have been collected for decades  
70 around the world. The main issue with proxies is that they are indirect records of climate  
71 variables, so that they could be subject to large uncertainties and biases. Nevertheless, except  
72 for the short instrumental era, they are the only observational estimates of the climate  
73 response to different external forcings. Even though there is no exact analogue of the future in  
74 the past, information on the climate response to changes in external forcings has a high  
75 relevance to better evaluate the sensitivity of climate models and possibly reduce the

76 uncertainty concerning the on-going climate change (Schmidt et al. 2014), especially at the  
77 regional scale.

78 The mid-Holocene (MH: 6000 years Before Present) is a period for which reconstructions  
79 suggest a mean climate of the northern high latitudes that was considerably warmer than  
80 today in summer (Fischer et al. 2018), due to a different insolation forcing (Figure 1). This is  
81 an interesting climate period, when the Sahara is suspected to have been greener than today  
82 (Claussen and Gayler 1997). This is why the Paleoclimate Model Intercomparison Project,  
83 phase 3 (PMIP3) initiative (Braconnot et al. 2012) proposed this period as a key snapshot to  
84 be simulated by the same climate models that produce climate projections (Schmidt et al.  
85 2014; Harrison et al. 2015).

86



87

88 **Figure 1:** Zonally-averaged climatological monthly differences in the incoming shortwave radiation at the top of  
89 the atmosphere between mid-Holocene and pre-industrial simulations.

90 A recent study proposed an improved reconstruction of climate over Europe for the MH based  
91 on a broad compilation of pollen data (Mauri et al. 2014). The results showed a dipole of  
92 winter near-surface temperature anomalies, with warm anomalies in the north of Europe and  
93 cold anomalies in the south. The authors suggested this pattern could be caused by an  
94 atmospheric circulation anomaly similar to a positive phase of the North Atlantic Oscillation  
95 (NAO<sup>+</sup>). Other studies also proposed such a change for mid-Holocene European climate in  
96 winter (Guyard et al. 2013; Chabaud et al. 2014). This hypothesis therefore provides an  
97 interesting testbed for climate models. Mauri et al. (2014) argued that PMIP3 simulations in  
98 general did not reproduce very well the reconstructed dipole in temperature in winter because  
99 they do not show any NAO<sup>+</sup>-like changes in atmospheric circulation for the MH. This was  
100 also the case for the older PMIP2 dataset (Gladstone et al. 2005). Nevertheless, it has been  
101 proposed that PMIP2 dataset still showed some skill in capturing the pattern of climate  
102 change over Europe for the MH (Brewer et al. 2007). While the new generation of PMIP3  
103 models show larger changes in sea ice for MH conditions than PMIP2 models over the Arctic  
104 (Berger et al. 2013), which may impact the response over Europe, a quantitative comparison  
105 of the PMIP3 models with winter reconstruction of temperature over Europe has not been  
106 made yet. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the mechanism explaining the wintertime  
107 response in PMIP3 simulations for MH is also missing for the North Atlantic.

108 The large increase in summer insolation for MH conditions may have strongly affected the  
109 sea ice in polar regions, even in winter through inertia. This could then influence the  
110 continental climate, notably in winter where the heat flux release by the ocean is largest, as  
111 well as the insulation effect of sea ice (Goosse et al. 2002). Such an impact was illustrated by  
112 Fischer and Jungclaus (2011) in a transient simulation over part of the Holocene using the  
113 MPI climate model. Otto et al. (2009), using different simulations for the MH where the  
114 coupling between the ocean and vegetation was either activated or not, also showed that the  
115 ocean plays a key role for the amplitude of the temperature response of the northern high

116 latitudes to the radiative forcing. The insolation during the MH was indeed very different  
117 from the pre-industrial period. The latitudinal gradient was strongly reduced during the  
118 summer season, which could have impacted the oceanic and atmospheric meridional heat  
119 transport (Davis and Brewer 2009).

120 In the present study, we propose to analyze the response of climate models participating in  
121 PMIP3 under MH wintertime conditions, with a specific focus on the North Atlantic region.  
122 We will assess the potential causes for the model spread in temperature response over Europe  
123 in winter and analyze the role played by changes in atmospheric circulation, oceanic  
124 circulation and radiative changes amplified by sea ice response. We will also compare these  
125 simulations, using classical skill scores, with the reconstruction of Mauri et al. (2014). This  
126 will allow us to determine the models that best reproduce the temperature dipole pattern over  
127 Europe. Our main result is that atmospheric circulation changes are not the main driver of the  
128 simulated patterns of temperature anomalies. These are instead linked to sea-ice anomalies,  
129 forced either by AMOC slowdown or summer sea-ice melt.

## 130 **Experimental design**

131 We analyze pairs of mid-Holocene and pre-industrial (PI) simulations performed with PMIP3  
132 climate models. Only 12 models (Table 1) are retained, as we require at least 100 years of  
133 both PI and MH simulations to perform robust statistical analyses. When more than 200  
134 model years are available, we use the last 200 years of the simulation. Throughout the  
135 analyses, we use data on the native grid for each model, except when multi-model statistics  
136 are calculated, in which case the model data is first interpolated on a regular  $1^\circ \times 1^\circ$  grid for the  
137 temperature to be compared with Mauri et al. (2014) and a regular  $2.5^\circ \times 2.5^\circ$  grid for the other  
138 variables. We also use RCP85 projections of the AMOC for the CMIP5 models available in

139 order to compare the simulated changes in the AMOC in these projections to those for the  
 140 mid-Holocene.

Index	Model	Modeling Center	Reference
A	bcc-csm1-1	Beijing Climate Center (BCC)	Xin et al. (2013)
B	CNRM-CM5	Centre National de Recherches Météorologiques/ Centre Européen de Recherche et Formation Avancées en Calcul Scientifique (CNRM/CERFACS)	Voltaire et al. (2013)
C	CSIRO-Mk3-6-0	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization/ Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence (CSIRO-QCCCE)	Rotstayn et al. (2012)
D	IPSL-CM5A-LR	Institut Pierre-Simon Laplace (IPSL)	Dufresne et al. (Dufresne et al. 2013)
E	FGOALS-g2	State Key Laboratory of Numerical Modeling for Atmospheric Sciences and Geophysical Fluid Dynamics/Institute of Atmospheric Physics (LASG/IAP)	Li et al. (2013)
F	FGOALS-s2	LASG/IAP	Bao et al. (2013)
G	MIROC-ESM	Atmosphere and Ocean Research Institute (The University of Tokyo), National Institute for Environmental Studies, and Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology	Watanabe et al. (2011)
H	HadGEM2-ES	Met Office Hadley Center (MOHC)	Collins et al. (2011)
I	MPI-ESM	Max Planck Institute for Meteorology (MPI-M)	Jungclaus et al. (2013)
J	MRI-CGCM3	Meteorological Research Institute (MRI)	Yukimoto et al. (2012)
K	GISS-E2-R	NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies	Schmidt et al. (2006)
L	CCSM4	National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR)	Gent et al. (2011)

141  
 142 **Table 1:** List of PMIP3 models included in this study.

143 We focus our analysis on Mid-Holocene climatological anomalies with respect to the pre-  
 144 industrial period for wintertime (December-February averages – DJF), summertime (June-  
 145 August averages – JJA) or annual means (ANM). Wherever suitable, we use a two-sided  
 146 independent sample t-test to determine if and to what level these anomalies are statistically  
 147 significant, considering the interannual variability in the PI and MH simulations, at each grid

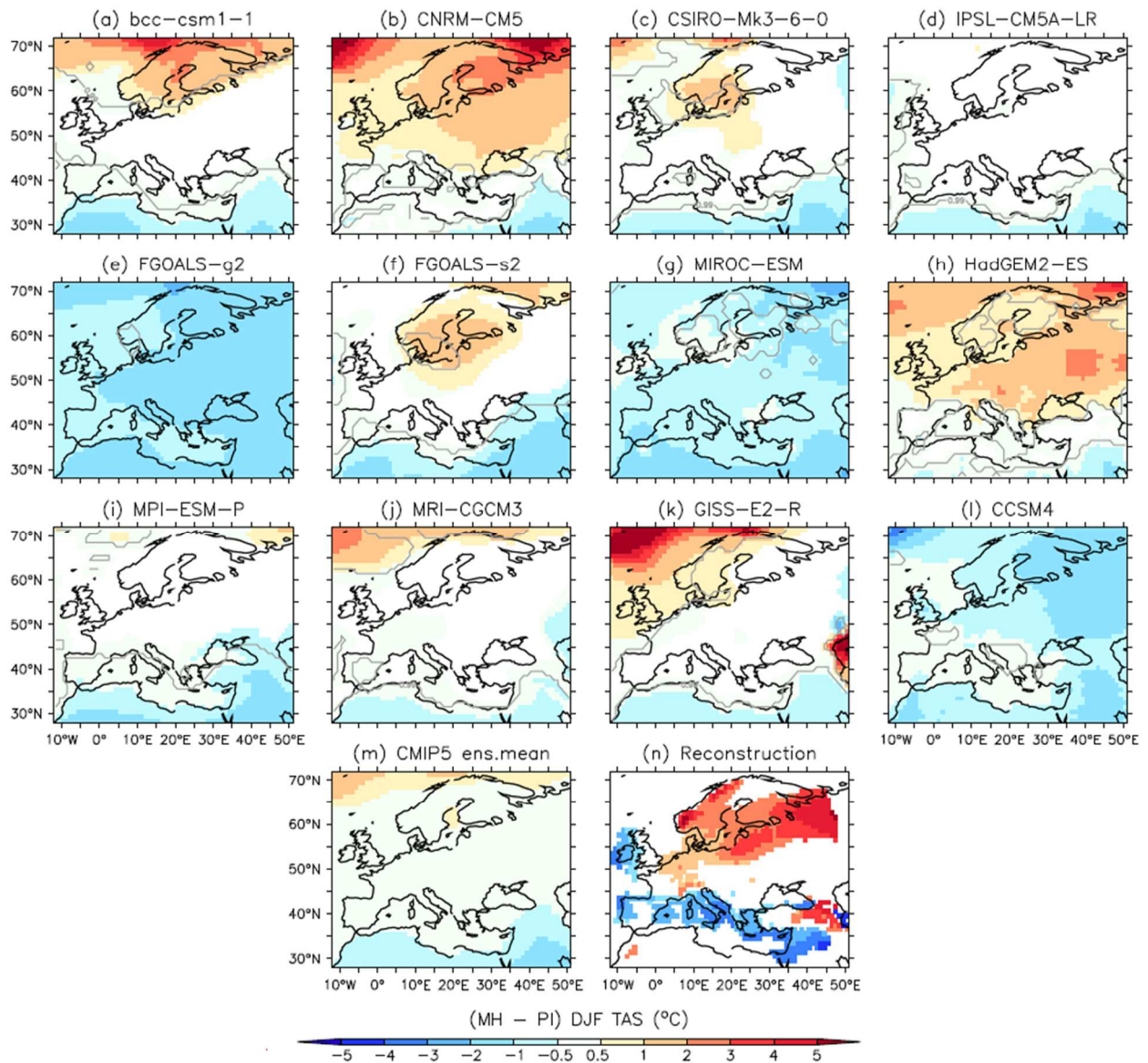


148 point. Where this is done, we shade in color the regions where the anomalies are significant at  
149 the 90% confidence level. For a more stringent test, we add contours corresponding to  
150 significant anomalies at the 99% confidence interval.

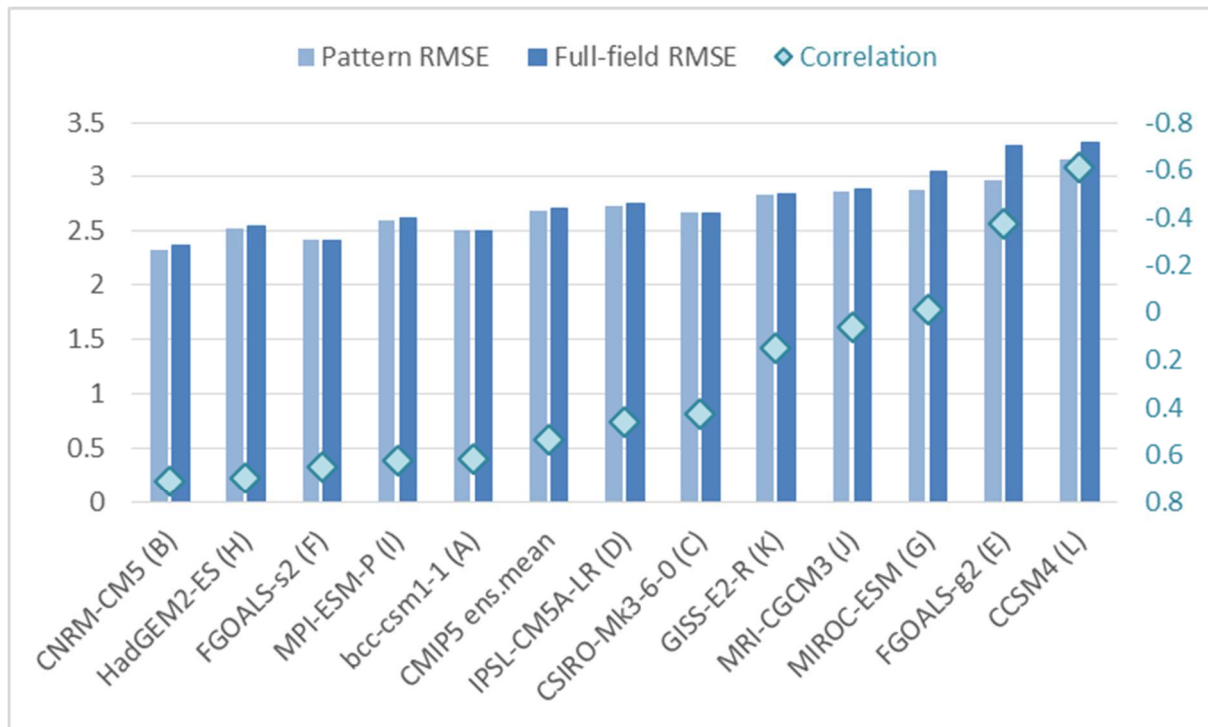
## 151 **Temperature and circulation response**

### 152 **MH winter temperature response in PMIP3 models**

153 While the external forcing (insolation changes) is the same in the different models, their  
154 responses to MH climatic condition in winter over Europe are very different, as illustrated in  
155 Figure 2. This figure shows the significant winter surface atmospheric temperature (SAT)  
156 anomalies over Europe simulated with the 12 different climate models, the multi-model  
157 ensemble mean anomaly and the reconstruction by Mauri et al. (2014). The uncertainties in  
158 the pollen-based reconstruction can be quite large, therefore Figure 2n only shows those  
159  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF,EU}}$  values that are larger in absolute value than the respective estimated uncertainties.  
160 We find a wide range of simulated SAT anomaly patterns between the 12 models, and some  
161 important differences from the mean reconstructed pattern. We quantify these model-  
162 reconstruction differences in Figure 3, showing the pattern correlation, pattern root-mean-  
163 square difference (RMSE; pattern RMSE obtained by removing the respective spatial average  
164 from each field before the RMSE calculation) and full-field RMSE for each model compared  
165 to the Mauri et al. (2014) reconstruction, as well as for the multi-model ensemble mean.



166  
 167 **Figure 2:** (a)-(l) Significant differences (color: at 90% confidence level; inside contours: at 99% confidence  
 168 level) between mean wintertime near-surface air temperature (SAT) in mid-Holocene and pre-industrial  
 169 simulations run with 12 different climate models; (m) Multi-model ensemble mean difference between MH and  
 170 PI climatological wintertime SAT; (n) Mauri et al. (2014) reconstruction of the MH climatological wintertime  
 171 SAT anomaly – only data where the signal is larger than the estimated uncertainty is considered.

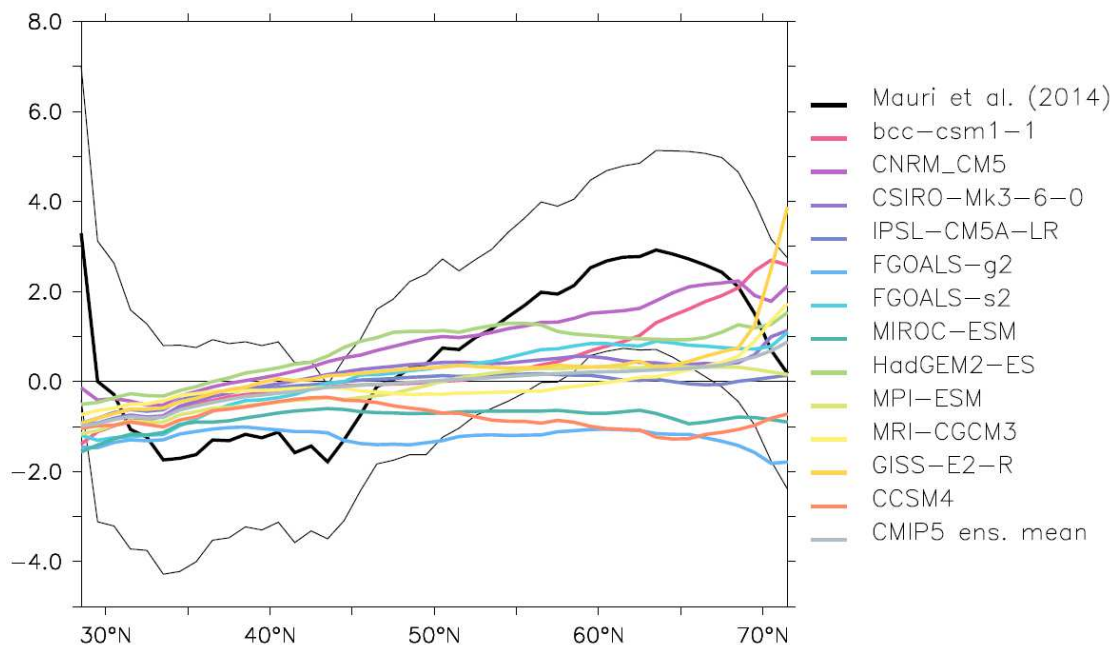


173

174 **Figure 3:** Statistics comparing the simulated and reconstructed (Mauri et al. 2014) mid-Holocene wintertime  
 175 SAT anomalies over Europe. Correlation (values shown on the right-side vertical axis): spatial correlation  
 176 coefficient between the two fields compared; Pattern RMSE: root-mean-square error when the respective spatial  
 177 average has been removed from each of the two fields compared; Full-field RMSE: total root-mean-square-  
 178 difference between the two fields. The model data, including the multi-model ensemble mean, are sorted from  
 179 the highest to the lowest spatial correlation with the reconstructed data. The statistics are only calculated using  
 180 those grid points where the reconstructed signal is stronger than the estimated uncertainty (see Figure 2n).

181 Some models fail to represent the reconstructed  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$  pattern, like CCSM4, FGOALS-  
 182 g2 and MIROC-ESM, which show near-zero or negative spatial correlation coefficients with  
 183 the reconstructed field and RMSEs larger than  $3^\circ\text{C}$ . Other models like CNRM-CM5 and  
 184 HadGEM2-ES have some success in simulating a similar pattern, *i.e.*, a positive north-south  
 185 temperature anomaly gradient (spatial correlation coefficient  $\sim 0.7$ ) but still fail at simulating  
 186 the reconstructed amplitude (pattern RMSE  $\geq 2.3^\circ\text{C}$ ), and the temperature anomalies  
 187 themselves (full-field RMSE  $\geq 2.4^\circ\text{C}$ ).

188 In terms of latitudinal gradient, Figure 4 shows the zonal mean anomalies of wintertime  
 189 temperatures over continental Europe in the models compared to the reconstruction. This  
 190 figure clearly shows that all the models do not reproduce the amplitude of the dipole between  
 191 northern and southern Europe. It also shows that the uncertainty in the temperature  
 192 reconstruction is large and there are three models that are within the error bar of the  
 193 reconstruction for this diagnostic for more than 95% of the latitude range considered: CNRM-  
 194 CM5, FGOALS-s2 and bcc-csm1-1. The first two are also in the top three for the RMSE and  
 195 correlation (cf. Figure 3). This shows that some models succeed in reproducing the  
 196 reconstruction latitudinal gradient when considering the uncertainty in the reconstruction,  
 197 although with a lower amplitude as compared to the best guess. We also notice that the  
 198 precise pattern is usually not perfectly reproduced (*e.g.* cooling signal over Ireland in the  
 199 reconstruction).

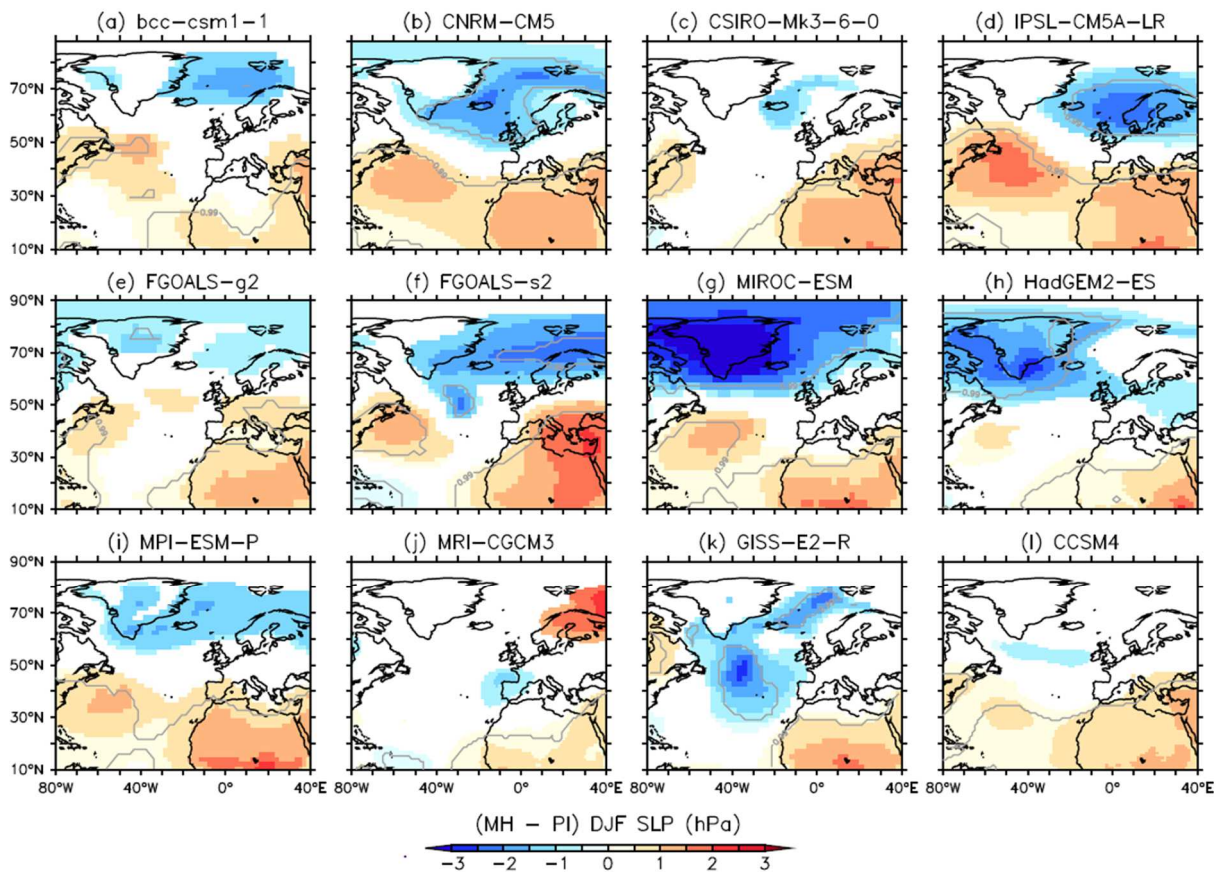


200 **Figure 4:** Zonal means of the climatological wintertime temperature anomalies over Europe – model results vs.  
 201 Mauri et al. (2014) reconstruction. The reconstruction is shown in black (thick line) with its associated  
 202 uncertainty (thin lines). The different models are shown in color and the model ensemble mean is shown in grey.  
 203 All model data have been regridded onto the reconstruction data grid and the same (reconstruction) land-sea  
 204 mask was applied before the calculation of the zonal means.

205

206 **MH winter atmospheric circulation anomalies in the PMIP3 models**

207 Mauri et al. (2014) proposed that the MH temperature anomaly pattern over Europe could be  
208 caused by a NAO-like atmospheric circulation anomaly. To explore this possibility in the  
209 PMIP3 database, Figure 5 shows the statistically significant sea-level pressure differences  
210 ( $\Delta$ SLP) between the climatological wintertime (DJF) MH and PI simulations over the North  
211 Atlantic (NA) sector for the 12 analyzed models. All models show significant MH winter SLP  
212 anomalies, of the order of 0.5-1.5 hPa, with corresponding 1000-hPa wind speed anomalies  
213 ( $\Delta U_{\text{horiz,DJF,1000}}$ , not shown) of the order of 0.2-0.7 m/s.



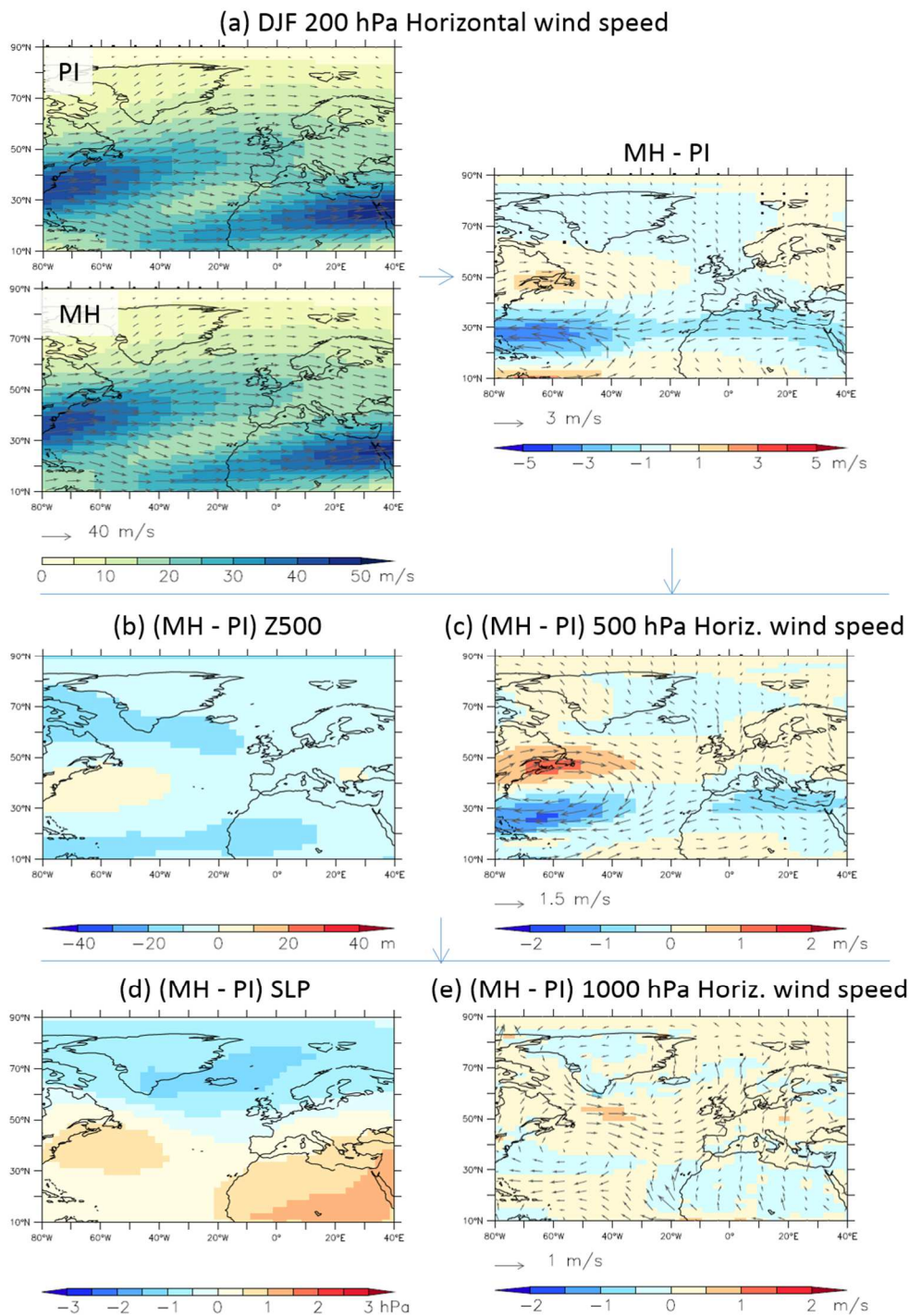
214

215 **Figure 5:** Significant differences (color: at 90% confidence level; inside contours: at 99% confidence  
216 level) between mean wintertime sea-level pressure in mid-Holocene and pre-industrial simulations run  
217 with 12 different climate models.

218 Figure 6 shows the multi-model mean circulation anomalies at different levels in the  
219 troposphere. Significant anomalies (two-sided independent sample t-test of significance of the  
220 MH-PI difference using the last 200 years of each simulation or, where simulations were  
221 shorter, all years of the simulations) at the 99% level are found at all atmospheric levels. The  
222 most notable feature is a negative zonal wind speed anomaly in the subtropics (around 30°N),  
223 maximum at upper levels ( $\Delta u_{200}$ ) and over the western half of the North Atlantic. This feature  
224 is present and prominent in all models (with the exception of GISS-E2-R where the  
225 significant anomaly is present, but much weaker than in the other models, not shown), but  
226 with structures varying in strength, extent and zonal orientation. We can trace it to a local  
227 weakening of the jet streams (in some models, accompanied by a slight northward shift of the  
228 eddy-driven jet) and, for most models, a more marked separation between the eddy-driven  
229 and subtropical jet streams over the North Atlantic (illustrated in Figure 6a for the multi-  
230 model ensemble mean). This results in an anticyclonic horizontal wind speed anomaly and  
231 local high pressure in the West Atlantic northward of the negative  $\Delta u_{200}$  region. For most  
232 models, this anticyclonic anomaly dominates the pattern of mean atmospheric circulation  
233 change over the North Atlantic. In those cases, this anomaly structure is found throughout the  
234 atmospheric column (as illustrated in Figures 6b and 6c for the 500 hPa level), down to the  
235 surface (Figure 6e), explaining the positive SLP anomalies found in most models over the  
236 southwestern North Atlantic (Figure 5, Figure 6d). Even the MRI model, which has no  
237 significant anomalies in the lower atmosphere, shows a similar significant anomaly in the jet  
238 stream (not shown).

239 While this positive pressure anomaly in the Western Atlantic has an equivalent barotropic  
240 structure that extends throughout the troposphere, the positive SLP anomaly seen over North  
241 Africa in the multi-model mean (Figure 6d) is on the contrary very shallow, disappearing or  
242 even changing sign at 500 hPa. This baroclinic structure is linked to a cold temperature  
243 anomaly in the atmospheric column, which can be explained by the negative DJF radiative

244 forcing. The reduction of the radiative forcing is strongest at low latitudes (Figure 1), and has  
 245 a larger impact over continental regions like North Africa.



246  
 247 Figure 6: Multi-model ensemble mean wintertime: (a) 200 hPa horizontal wind speed in pre-industrial (PI), mid-  
 248 Holocene (MH) simulations and the corresponding MH-PI difference; (b) 500 hPa geopotential height MH  
 249 anomaly; (c) 500 hPa horizontal wind speed anomaly; (d) sea-level pressure anomaly; (e) 1000 hPa horizontal  
 250 wind speed anomaly. We used a two-sided independent sample t-test of significance of the MH-PI differences

251 (based on the last 200 years or, where shorter, on the full time series of the MH and the PI simulations,  
252 respectively), for each model. For each model, we have found significant MH-PI differences at the 99%  
253 confidence level. The anomaly patterns were very similar from one model to the other, which allowed us to  
254 present the anomaly maps for the multi-model ensemble as representative of the ensemble of models.

## 255 **Atmospheric circulation vs. European temperature anomaly patterns**

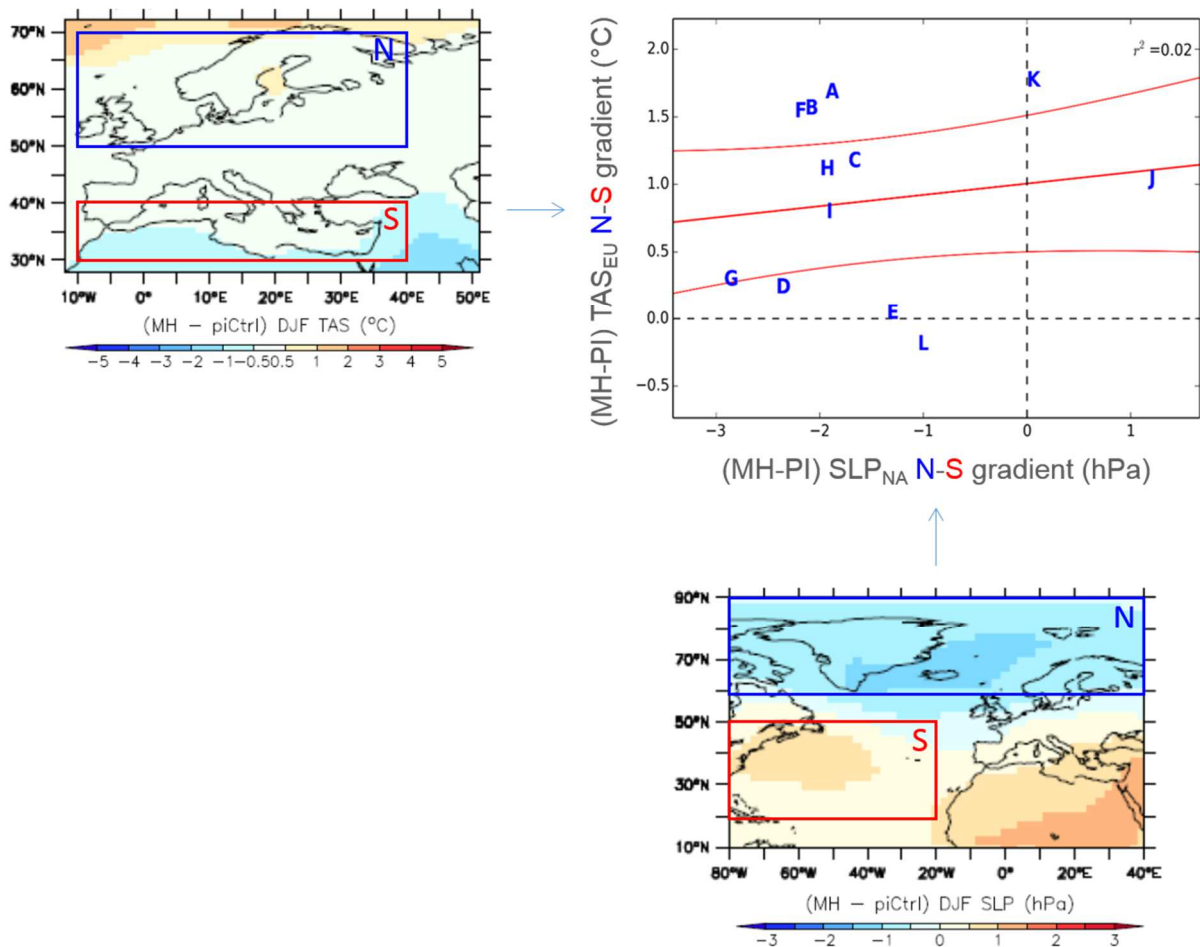
256 Figure 5 shows that several PMIP3 models simulate a positive SLP anomaly over the southern  
257 part of the North Atlantic and a negative SLP anomaly over the northern part of the basin  
258 during MH winters. This pattern could be roughly construed to be NAO<sup>+</sup>-like, as Mauri et al.  
259 (2014) argued could cause their reconstructed DJF  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{EU}}$  pattern. This section examines  
260 whether such a relationship between a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like circulation anomaly and a  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{EU}}$  pattern  
261 can be found within our multi-model ensemble.

262 A key question is whether the differences between the simulated temperature anomaly  
263 patterns between models can be attributed to the differences in their simulated atmospheric  
264 circulation anomalies over the North Atlantic. More specifically, we want to assess whether  
265 the models that simulate a positive north-south temperature gradient over Europe are only the  
266 models that also simulate a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like circulation anomaly over the North Atlantic.

267 A qualitative comparison of Figure 2 and Figure 5 indicates that this is not the case. While the  
268 hypothesis of a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like cause of marked north-south gradients in  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$  could hold  
269 for a few models (*e.g.*, CNRM-CM5), the ensemble of models does not support it. Some  
270 models exhibit a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like circulation without a strong north-south  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$  gradient  
271 (*e.g.*, IPSL-CM5A-LR, MIROC-ESM), while other models show a marked  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$   
272 gradient without simulating a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like circulation anomaly (*e.g.*, GISS-E2-R). For some  
273 model simulations showing a negative SLP anomaly around Iceland, which can look like part  
274 of a NAO<sup>+</sup> pattern, just like over Africa the pressure anomaly disappears with height (not  
275 shown), and is most likely a thermal structure caused by the local warming at the surface.



276 For a quantitative assessment, Figure 7 evaluates the relationship between first-order indices  
 277 of the large-scale temperature and circulation changes, namely the north-south  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$   
 278 gradient and the NAO<sup>+</sup>-like  $\Delta\text{SLP}_{\text{NA}}$ . The north-south  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF, EU}}$  gradient is defined as the  
 279 mean temperature difference between a northern and a southern region over Europe chosen to  
 280 approximately reflect the Arctic Oscillation signature on  $\text{SAT}_{\text{EU}}$ , as shown in Mauri et al.  
 281 (2014) (top left panel in Figure 7 below). The NAO<sup>+</sup>-like  $\Delta\text{SLP}_{\text{NA}}$  is defined as the mean sea-  
 282 level pressure difference between regions chosen to approximately reflect the centers of  
 283 action of the North Atlantic Oscillation index (*cf.* Hurrell & Deser 2010 – bottom right panel  
 284 in Figure 7). The scatterplot between the two indices in the top right panel of Figure 7 shows  
 285 a lack of significant correlation that confirms that the PMIP3 models do not support a  
 286 straightforward link between MH temperature anomaly patterns over Europe and a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like  
 287 circulation anomaly over the North Atlantic.



289 **Figure 7:** Top left: PMIP3 ensemble mean anomalies of SAT (in °C) in DJF for MH minus PI. The blue box  
290 defines the northern region and the red box, the southern region used for calculating the north-south SAT  
291 gradient. Bottom right: PMIP3 ensemble mean anomalies of SLP (in hPa) in DJF for MH minus PI. The blue  
292 box defines the northern region and the red box, the southern region used to define the SLP north-south gradient.  
293 Top right: Multi-model relationship of the land temperature anomaly gradient (defined in top left panel) - on the  
294 y-axis - and the SLP anomaly gradient (defined in bottom right panel) - on the x-axis. The squared correlation  
295 coefficient is shown in the top-left corner of the figure. The red lines indicate the linear regression and the 95%  
296 confidence interval for this regression.

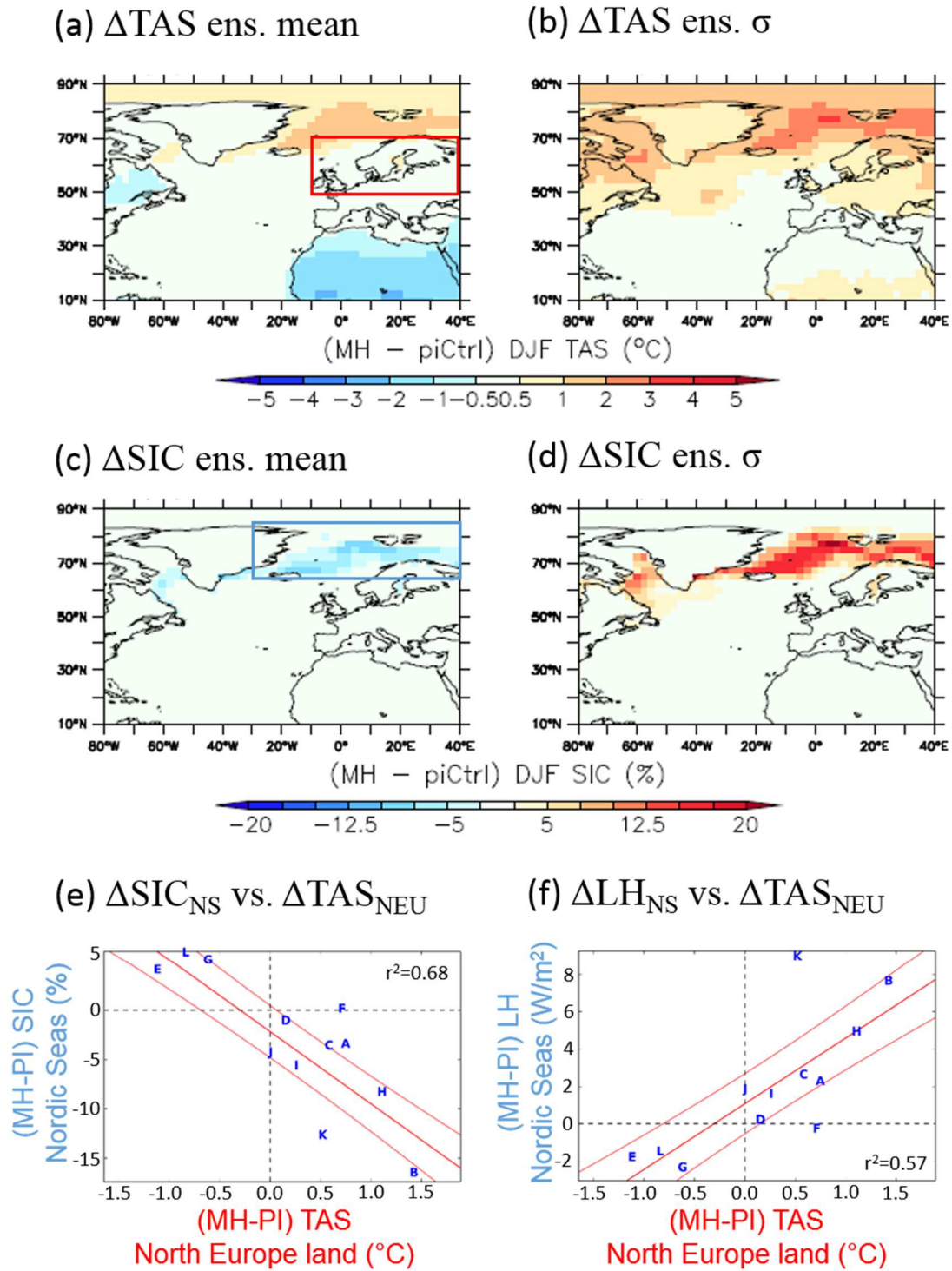
### 297 **Factors determining the simulated $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF,EU}}$ meridional gradients**

298 Figure 2 shows that the strongest  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF,EU}}$  signals are found, for most models, close to the  
299 latitude boundaries of the region considered. Enlarging the domain of our analysis places the  
300 European temperature anomalies patterns in the larger-scale context (Figure 8a). We find that  
301 the modeled north-south  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF,EU}}$  contrasts are dominated, to the north, by warm  
302 temperature anomalies over the Nordic Seas and, to the south, by cold temperature anomalies  
303 over northern Africa. This pattern resembles the reconstruction of the North-South contrast,  
304 but there are a number of regional differences. Most notably, the cooling pattern over Ireland  
305 is not captured by the climate models, while the warming from the ocean does not penetrate  
306 enough inland over Europe.

307 To a large extent, the negative SAT anomalies over northern Africa (and the positive SLP  
308 anomalies) are related to the negative radiative forcing in winter at these latitudes (Figure 1).  
309 This anomaly is strongest at low latitudes and has an amplified effect on SAT over continents  
310 vs. oceanic regions, possibly due to the lower heat capacity of land than water and to the  
311 differences in lapse rates between land and ocean (*e.g.* Joshi et al 2008).

312 Inter-model differences of  $\Delta\text{SAT}$  over the southern region in Figure 7a are indeed small  
313 (0.3°C inter-model standard deviation) relative to the ones over the northern region (0.8°C),  
314 consistent with a lower  $\Delta\text{SAT}$  inter-model standard deviations over northern Africa than over

315 the Nordic Seas (Figure 8b). Thus, for the rest of the paper we will focus mainly on what  
 316 determines the inter-model spread in  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF}}$  over the Nordic Seas, that dominates the north-  
 317 south contrast.



318  
 319 **Figure 8:** MH winter anomalies of (a, b) near-surface air temperature and (c- d) sea ice cover over the North  
 320 Atlantic sector. (a) and (c) show the multi-model ensemble mean anomalies and (b) and (d) show the ensemble

321 standard deviation. (e) Relationship between simulated near-surface air temperature over land in northern Europe  
322 and sea ice cover anomalies averaged over the region highlighted in (a) and (c) for the 12 models analyzed. (f)  
323 Same as (e) but with sea ice cover anomalies replaced by latent heat flux anomalies from the ocean to the  
324 atmosphere. The squared correlation coefficient is show in the top- and, respectively, bottom-left corner of the  
325 plots. In both plots, the red lines indicate the linear regression and the 95% confidence interval for the regression.

326 The spatial patterns of both the  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF}}$  signal in the Nordic Seas and its inter-model spread  
327 (Figure 8a, b) are strongly reminiscent of those of the DJF sea-ice cover anomalies (Figure 8c,  
328 d). Sea-ice cover changes have a strong impact on near-surface temperatures *via* air-sea fluxes  
329 and albedo feedbacks (Swingedouw et al. 2006, Årthun et al. 2017). This influence extends to  
330 neighbouring land regions: the inter-model differences in  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF}}$  in land areas of northern  
331 Europe (Figure 8e) are well correlated ( $r^2=0.68$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) with the differences in  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$  over  
332 the Nordic Seas. Furthermore, these differences in  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF}}$  are also well correlated with the  
333 changes in latent heat flux from the ocean to the atmosphere over the Nordic Seas. Thus, we  
334 argue that it is the difference in latent heat flux released in winter by the ocean to the  
335 atmosphere and associated with the insulation effect of the presence (or not) of sea ice that  
336 explains the response of  $\Delta\text{SAT}_{\text{DJF}}$  over northern Europe land. A similar mechanism was  
337 indeed highlighted by Årthun et al. (2017) to explain the impact of Nordic Seas SST  
338 variability on the temperature of Scandinavia.

339 Thus, to understand the differences between the wintertime MH European temperature  
340 anomalies between the models, we mainly need to understand the origins of the differences  
341 between the simulated sea ice cover anomalies in the Nordic Seas region.

## 342 **Origins of winter sea-ice decline**

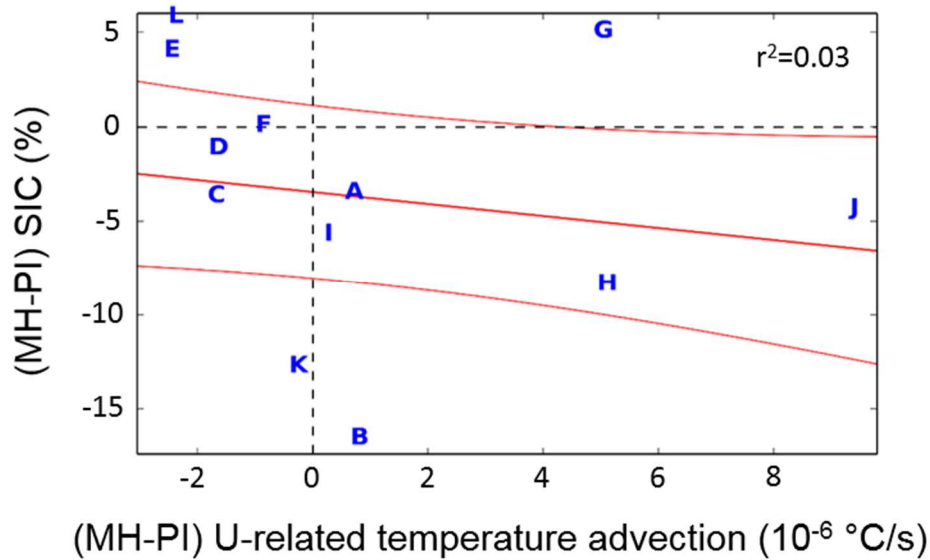
### 343 **Atmospheric circulation anomalies**

344 While NAO-like anomalies do not directly determine the inter-model differences in winter  
345 temperature anomalies over Europe in PMIP3 ensemble, atmospheric circulation changes

346 between MH and PI winters could potentially control the sea ice anomalies in the Nordic  
347 Seas, through anomalous atmospheric heat transport.

348 To test this hypothesis, we tried to calculate the total atmospheric heat transport into the  
349 Nordic Seas region. This computation should be based on changes of both the mean and  
350 transient circulation. Unfortunately, the PMIP3 database does not routinely include data at  
351 sufficiently high frequencies to allow for the calculation of the latter term, nor does it provide  
352 estimates of atmospheric heat transport computed at the model time step. We can thus only  
353 offer a partial answer, related to the mean wind anomalies only.

354 Whether we consider the near-surface horizontal temperature advection due solely to the  
355 change in the mean winter near-surface horizontal wind velocities between PI and MH  
356 (estimated as  $-\Delta\vec{U} \cdot \nabla T_{PI}$ , where  $\Delta$  stands for MH-PI differences,  $\vec{U}$  for the horizontal wind  
357 velocity and  $T_{PI}$  for the temperature for pre-industrial simulation; Figure 9) or the change  
358 between the mean circulation-induced horizontal temperature advection in PI vs. MH winters  
359 (estimated as  $-\Delta(\vec{U} \cdot \nabla T)$ ; not shown), we find no correlation of these respective anomalies  
360 with the winter sea ice cover anomaly over the Nordic Seas region (Figure 9). More generally,  
361 two other elements of the energy budget argue against an increased poleward atmospheric  
362 transport in MH winter: at the top of the atmosphere, the latitudinal gradient of insolation  
363 decreases (with more cooling at lower latitudes), and the ocean heat transport tends to  
364 increase (due to AMOC strengthening as shown below). Both would typically lead to a  
365 compensating equatorward energy transport by the atmosphere, away from the sea ice region.  
366 Such a response has actually been demonstrated in MH simulations run with the IPSL-  
367 CM5A-LR model (Saint-Lu et al. 2016). We thus find no evidence that the changes in the  
368 atmospheric heat transport may be responsible for  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$  in the models.



369

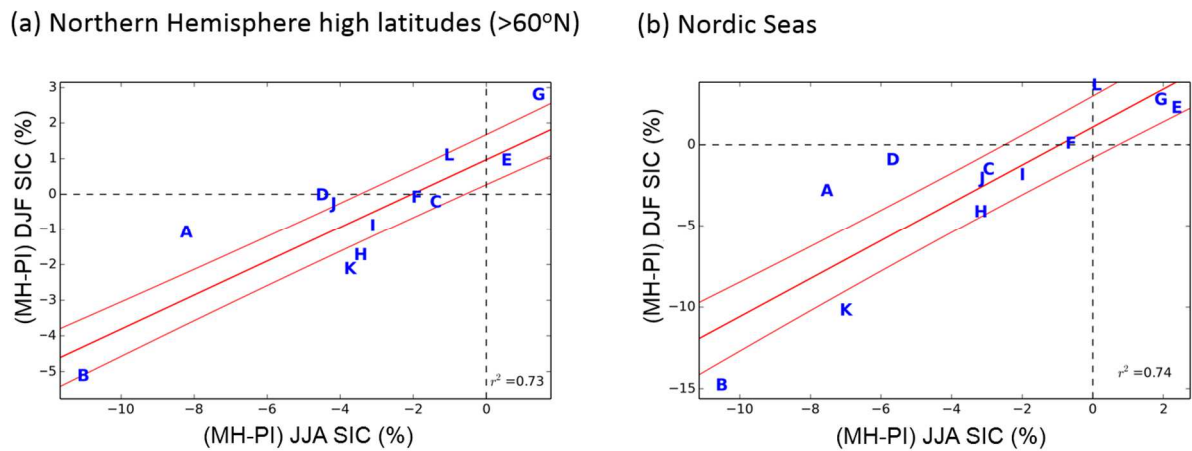
370 **Figure 9:** Multi-model relationship between wintertime sea ice cover anomalies and mean 1000hPa horizontal  
 371 circulation anomaly-related temperature advection in the NS region. The red lines indicate the linear regression  
 372 and the 95% confidence interval for this regression.

### 373 **Summer sea ice anomalies**

374 Another potential source of the inter-model differences in winter sea ice anomalies is the  
 375 summer (JJA) sea ice response, with a memory effect between the two seasons. Indeed, the  
 376 insolation is far larger in the Mid-Holocene compared to the pre-industrial period during  
 377 summer (Figure 1), potentially leading to large melting of sea ice and heat storage in the  
 378 ocean in summer, which may then persist into winter due to the large inertia of the ocean.  
 379 There is a fine interplay between winter and summer sea ice: winter sea ice thickness heavily  
 380 influences the ice pack vulnerability to summer melt, and thus has an important effect on  
 381 summer sea ice cover (Berger et al. 2013). Conversely, summer melt allows for ocean surface  
 382 heat uptake and renders new sea ice formation more difficult during autumn and winter. Thus,  
 383 we can also expect a  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA}}$  effect on  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$  (Berger et al. 2013). This latter effect may  
 384 play an important role in determining the inter-model  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$  differences. Indeed, the  
 385 different models may exhibit different sea ice responses to the summer radiative forcing  
 386 (Figure 1) for example through different strength of feedbacks, like the local cloud response

387 (cf. Knudsen et al. 2015; Abe et al. 2015). These differences in summer may then project on  
 388 the winter responses.

389 We thus check if the relationship between  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA}}$  and  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$  is consistent between the  
 390 models. Figure 10 indeed shows a strong multi-model relationship between  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA}}$  and  
 391  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$ , both globally over the Northern Hemisphere high latitudes ( $r^2=0.74$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and  
 392 regionally over the Nordic Seas ( $r^2=0.73$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).



393  
 394 **Figure 10:** Relationship between MH winter and summer sea ice cover anomalies (a) averaged over the  
 395 Northern Hemisphere high latitudes (above 60°N); (b) averaged over the Nordic Seas (rectangular region  
 396 contoured in Figure 8a, c). The text boxes in the bottom-left corner of the figures show the associated squared  
 397 correlation coefficients. The red lines indicate the linear regressions and the 95% confidence interval for the  
 398 regressions.

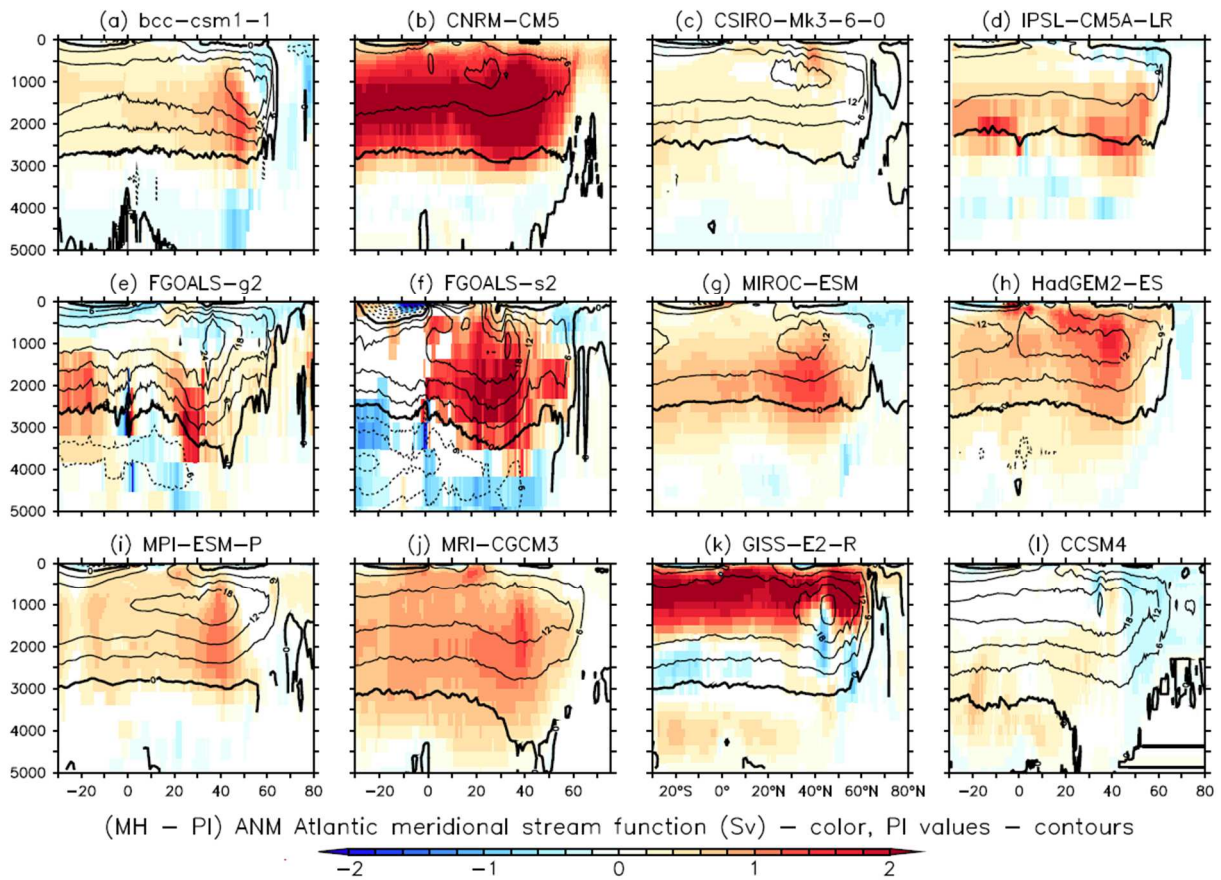
399 While it is likely that a memory of the seasonally forced  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA}}$  can influence  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF}}$ , it is  
 400 also possible that both summer and winter sea ice anomalies are influenced by a large-scale,  
 401 common factor such as a change in the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation (AMOC),  
 402 which we investigate in the following section.

### 403 **Change in the AMOC**

404 Figure 11 shows the changes in the AMOC between the simulated MH and PI climates. All  
 405 12 models analyzed show significant anomalies in the mean AMOC, with considerable inter-

406 model variability in terms of both anomalies (Figure 11, colors) and background state (PI  
 407 AMOC – Figure 11, contours). In general, the AMOC is strengthened in MH compared to PI.  
 408 This is consistent with Born et al. (2010), who proposed that for a climate with warmer  
 409 summer (the Eemian in their case), the decrease in sea ice transport through Fram Strait may  
 410 change the salinity in the Labrador Sea and enhance local convective activity, feeding a  
 411 stronger AMOC.

412 AMOC MH anomalies vary between models not just in terms of intensity, but also in terms of  
 413 structure, complicating their quantitative comparison. Nevertheless, maxima of the meridional  
 414 stream function have been shown to be strongly related to the meridional ocean heat transport  
 415 (e.g. Boning et al. 1995). Thus, they represent a reasonable parameter to consider in the  
 416 investigation of sea ice changes.



417



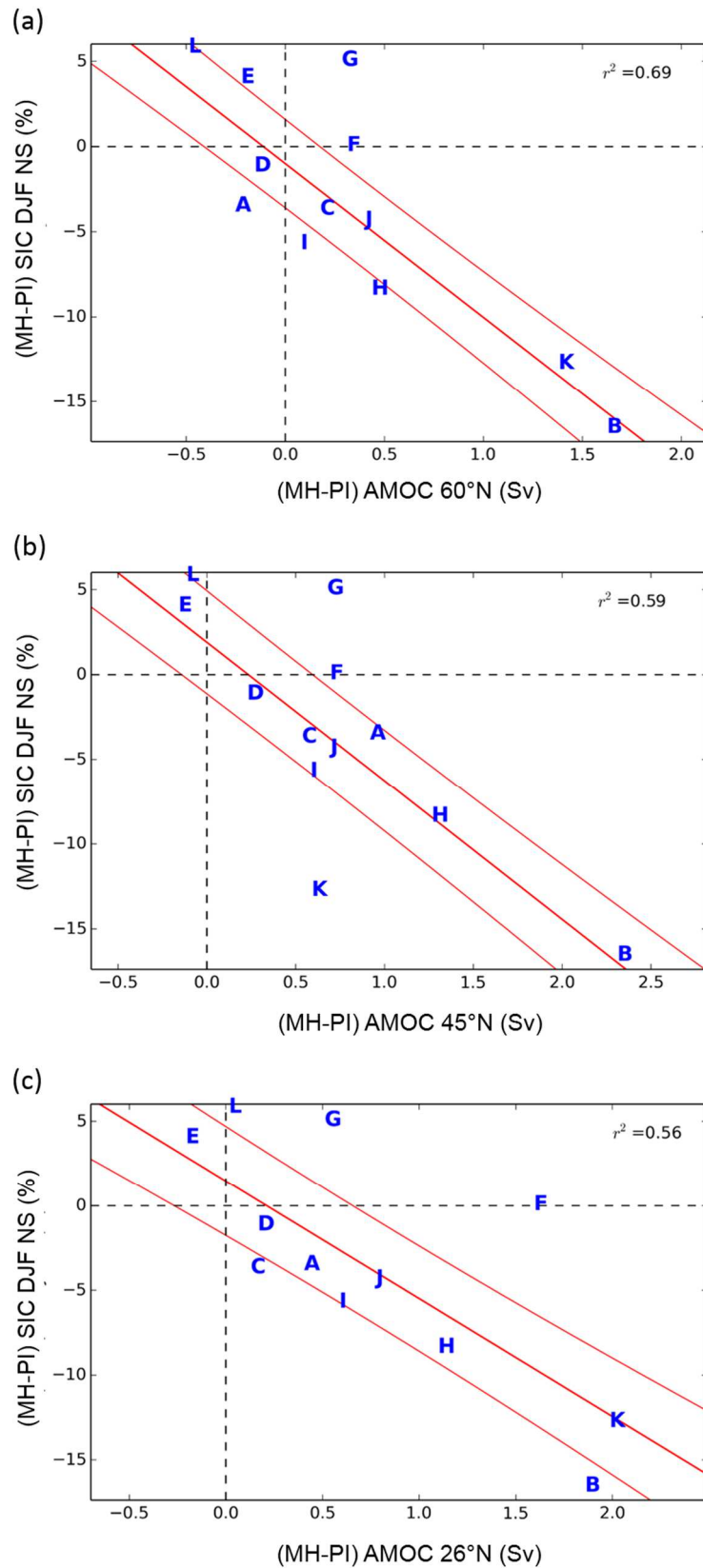
418 **Figure 11:** Color: significant (at 90% level) MH anomalies of the climatological annual mean (ANM) Atlantic  
419 meridional stream function; contours: PI climatologies (contour spacing: 6 Sv; solid/dashed contours represent  
420 positive/negative values) for the 12 models analyzed.

421 Figure 12 shows the relationship between winter sea-ice cover anomalies and anomalies in the  
422 maximum of the climatological Atlantic meridional stream function at three different  
423 latitudes: 26°N and 45°N, typically used when describing the AMOC strength (*e.g.*, Huck et  
424 al. 2008, McCarthy et al. 2015), and 60°N, closer to the Nordic Seas region. The DJF SIC  
425 anomalies are in all cases negatively correlated with the AMOC strength anomalies. The  
426 correlation coefficient and the slope of the corresponding linear regressions increase with  
427 latitude, so that the strongest link of  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF,NS}}$  with the meridional ocean circulation is found  
428 for  $\Delta\text{AMOC}$  at 60°N. The correlation coefficient is 0.89 (p-value < 0.01) and the linear  
429 regression line has a near-zero intercept, indicating that, as would be expected, an  
430 intensification of the AMOC at high latitudes is linearly associated to negative SIC anomalies  
431 in the Nordic Seas and *vice-versa*. The correlation remains high even at 26°N ( $r=0.75$ ,  
432  $p<0.01$ ), indicating that this relationship is not a purely local effect. Nevertheless, the  
433 relationships we find are very sensitive to the low number of models, and removing a few of  
434 them can strongly lower the correlation.

435 Changes in the subpolar gyre may also strongly affect the heat transport to the high latitudes  
436 (Born et al. 2015). However, the barotropic stream function was not available for all the  
437 models, limiting the analysis of this effect. Since the strength of the subpolar gyre is closely  
438 related to the strength of the convection in the subpolar gyre (Born et al. 2015), we suggest  
439 that the changes in AMOC would also be reflected in subpolar gyre strength, both leading to  
440 an increase of meridional heat transport.

441 The changes in oceanic heat transport act on longer than seasonal time scales and may thus  
442 affect sea ice cover in both winter and summer, likely contributing to the correlation between

443 winter and summer anomalies highlighted in former sub-section. Nevertheless, direct changes  
444 in summer sea ice in response to changes in insolation are also due to regional sensitivity and  
445 feedbacks that may differ among the models (*e.g.*, Massonnet et al. 2012), and so could  
446 remain a relatively independent factor from AMOC strengthening to explain the inter-model  
447 spread.



448

449 **Figure 12:** Relationship between mean winter MH sea ice cover anomalies over the Nordic Seas region and the

450 MH anomaly in the maximum climatological Atlantic meridional stream function at (a) 60°N, (b) 45°N and (c)

451 26°N. The squared correlation coefficients of the associated linear regressions are shown in the respective panels.

452 The correlations are significant above the 99% level. The red lines indicate the linear regression and the 95%  
453 confidence interval for this regression.

#### 454 **Combination of multiple factors**

455 In the previous subsections we analyzed one-to-one relationships between  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF,NS}}$  and a  
456 suite of atmospheric and oceanic variables. However, the inter-model differences in the winter  
457 sea ice anomalies are most likely explained by a combination of different factors which affect  
458 the sea ice cover in different measures depending on the model.

459 We have investigated a wide array of variable combinations to best explain the inter-model  
460 variations in  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF,NS}}$  through multiple linear regressions. We have considered parameters  
461 physically linked with the winter sea ice anomalies, like the temperature advection due to the  
462 mean circulation change in the Nordic Seas region, the surface downward radiative flux  
463 anomalies, the background state (PI) sea ice cover, the summer sea ice cover anomalies and  
464 the change in the AMOC strength.

465 The low number of climate simulations (12), the reductive framework (lack of sensitivity  
466 experiments) and the intrinsic high level of connectivity between climate variables through  
467 non-linear relationships (*i.e.*, variables not independent) limit the potential of such a  
468 multivariate analysis. Nevertheless, some information can be distilled on the basis of this  
469 exercise.

470 While in most combinations and for most predictor variables, the high p-values associated to  
471 their respective coefficients did not allow for significant regressions, the p-values associated  
472 to the coefficient for the AMOC strength anomaly at 60°N were always very small (on the  
473 order of  $10^{-4}$ - $10^{-5}$ ) and the coefficients themselves were always found to be negative,  
474 indicating a robust effect of  $\Delta\text{AMOC}$  on  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF,NS}}$  in the direction already described in the  
475 former section.

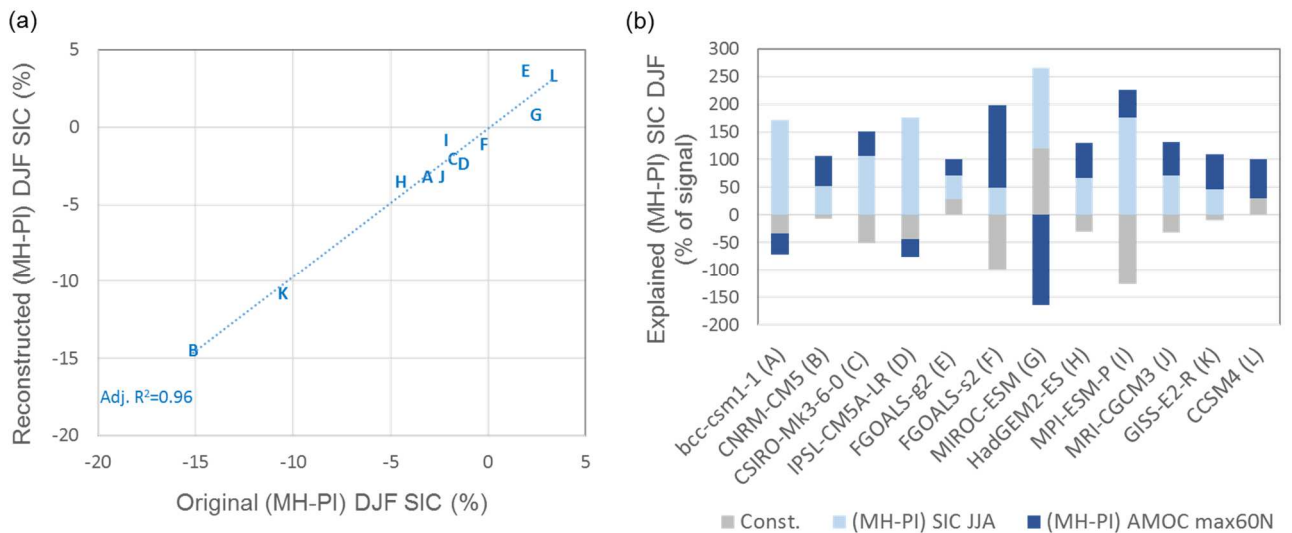
476 One multiple linear regression did yield significant results:

477

$$\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \Delta AMOC_{max.60^{\circ}N} + \alpha_2 \Delta SIC_{JJA,NS} \quad (1)$$

478 with  $p_{\alpha_0} = 0.04$ ,  $p_{\alpha_1} = 10^{-4}$ ,  $p_{\alpha_2} = 4 \cdot 10^{-5}$  and an adjusted  $r^2$  of 0.96.

479 Figure 13 shows the results of the multiple linear regression model in Eq. 1. Figure 13a shows  
 480 the good correspondence between the reconstructed and original  $\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS}$  and Figure 13b  
 481 shows, for each model, the percentage of the sea ice cover change associated with each term  
 482 in the regression model. According to the model of Eq. (1), the summer sea ice anomalies and  
 483 AMOC strength anomalies have comparable effects on  $\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS}$ , with the AMOC playing a  
 484 particularly important role in FGOALS-s2 and CCSM4, as well as in GISS-E2-R, HadGEM2-  
 485 ES, MRI-CGCM3, CNRM-CM5 and MPI-ESM-P where the AMOC term represents more  
 486 than 50% of the total change.



487

488 **Figure 13.** Results of the multiple linear regression of  $\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS}$  onto the MH anomaly of the AMOC maximum  
 489 at  $60^{\circ}N$  and  $\Delta SIC_{JJA,NS}$ : (a) correspondence of the reconstructed and original  $\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS}$ ; (b) fraction of the  
 490 simulated winter sea ice cover anomaly associated to each model predictor, for the 12 models analyzed.

491 The adjusted  $r^2$  can be mildly improved (to a value of 0.97) by adding the pre-industrial sea  
492 ice cover over the Nordic Seas region,  $SIC_{DJF,PI,NS}$ , as an extra predictor. However, the  
493 associated p-value is 0.015, indicating a 1.5% chance that this predictor has in fact no effect  
494 on  $\Delta SIC_{DJF,NS}$ . Furthermore, the coefficient for this extra term is positive in this regression  
495 model (indicating that climate models where more winter sea ice is present in the Nordic Seas  
496 region in pre-industrial simulations tend to have positive or less negative Mid-Holocene  
497 winter sea ice anomalies) but is negative in all other variable combinations analyzed. The  
498 role, if any, of the background sea ice cover on the  $SIC_{DJF,NS}$  anomalies thus remains  
499 uncertain.

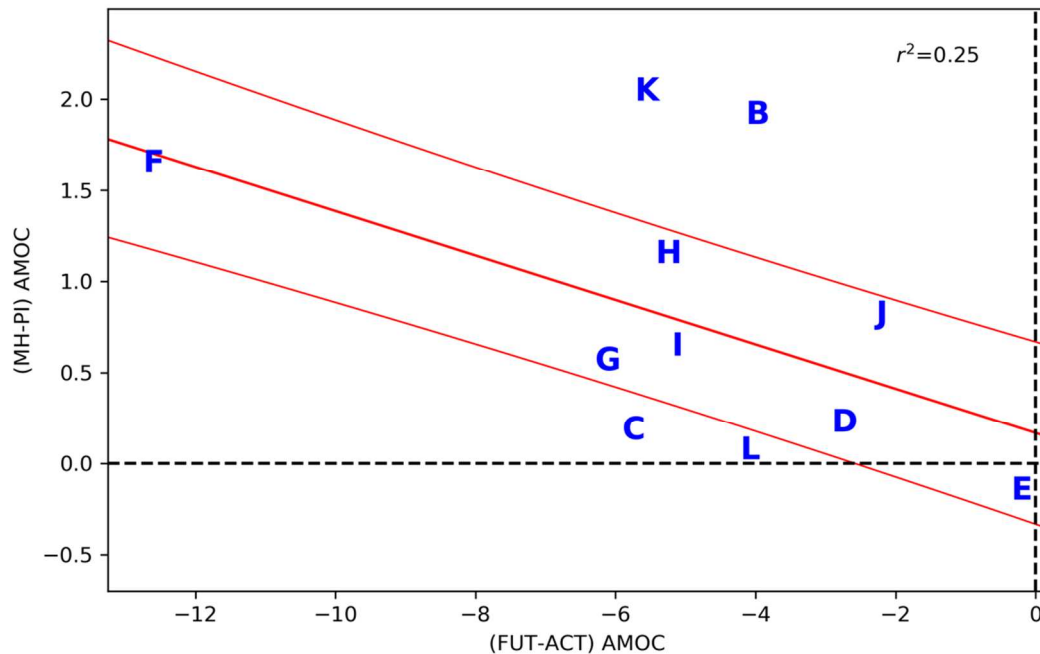
500 The main caveat of the model in Eq (1) is that the two predictor variables are not independent.  
501  $\Delta AMOC_{max,60^{\circ}N}$  and  $\Delta SIC_{JJA,NS}$  are correlated with an  $r^2$  of 0.34, significant at the 95% level.  
502 It is indeed very likely that the AMOC anomaly affects winter sea ice both directly, through  
503 oceanic heat transport in winter, and indirectly, by influencing sea ice anomalies during  
504 summer which, in turn, through ocean-sea ice-atmosphere feedbacks, can have a lasting effect  
505 on the winter anomalies. Nevertheless, the AMOC may be affecting the annual sea ice  
506 anomalies and, since sea ice seasonality is model-dependent, adding the summer sea ice as a  
507 second predictor improves the results of the regression analysis. Such a regression could thus  
508 allow to explain some of the spread that can be explained by local sea ice feedback and not  
509 only the AMOC changes.

510 Summer sea ice cover anomalies are actually not entirely determined by the AMOC  
511 differences. As shown in Figure 1, the Mid-Holocene experiences an important positive  
512 summer radiative forcing in the high latitudes and the sensitivity of each model to this forcing  
513 is very likely to have a strong effect on the summer sea ice anomalies. Since Mid-Holocene  
514 forcing is seasonal and unevenly distributed over the globe, classical definitions of climate  
515 sensitivity do not apply and could not be used to directly evaluate the model sensitivity effect

516 on  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA,NS}}$  and thus on  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{DJF,NS}}$ . We have attempted to use different first-order proxies  
517 of this effect that would be less correlated with the AMOC change (such as summer SAT or  
518 surface downward shortwave radiation anomalies over large domains in the Northern  
519 Hemisphere) as a replacement for  $\Delta\text{SIC}_{\text{JJA,NS}}$  in the regression model above, but with  
520 unsatisfactory results in terms of p-values and correlation coefficients.

### 521 **Link with future projections**

522 In order to estimate if simulated changes in the AMOC for the mid-Holocene are connected  
523 with its behavior in climate projections, we have processed data from RCP85 projections. We  
524 found 10 models from our PMIP3 pool that provide data for these projections. The scatterplot  
525 of the anomalies in projections *vs.* anomalies for mid-Holocene is shown in Figure 14. A  
526 significant correlation at the 95% level is found between the two, showing that models  
527 simulating a stronger AMOC in the mid-Holocene also tend to simulate a stronger weakening  
528 of the AMOC in RCP85 projections. This may indicate that models with a high AMOC  
529 sensitivity to changes in mid-Holocene conditions also show a higher sensitivity of the  
530 AMOC in future projections. Thus, constraining the changes in the AMOC for the mid-  
531 Holocene may constitute a potential emergent constraint to reduce the very large uncertainty  
532 of the AMOC response in future climates. Nevertheless, the relatively low correlation found  
533 limits this interpretation. Also, quantitative estimates of AMOC variations over the Holocene  
534 are lacking, even though a few qualitative reconstructions exist (Kissel et al. 2013, Ayache et  
535 al. 2018) and indicate that the AMOC may have been relatively intense during the mid-  
536 Holocene.



537  
 538 **Figure 14.** Relationship between mean AMOC anomalies in mid-Holocene relative to preindustrial simulations  
 539 and projections following an RCP85 scenario for the period 2081-2100 as compared to present-day period 2006-  
 540 2015.

## 541 Discussion and conclusions

542 We have analyzed Mid-Holocene winter anomalies over the North Atlantic sector in 12  
 543 PMIP3 models with the purpose of comparing the simulated European winter temperature  
 544 anomalies with reconstructed data, and shedding light on their drivers.

545 Comparing the simulated winter near-surface air temperature anomalies with the recent  
 546 pollen-based reconstruction of Mauri et al. (2014) for the Mid-Holocene, we found some  
 547 qualitative agreement with the paleo-reconstruction for a few models, with pattern correlation  
 548 coefficients above 0.6 for 5 out of the 12 models, mostly reflecting a north-south temperature  
 549 anomaly gradient over Europe. All models underestimate the amplitude of the winter  
 550 anomalies, however, as well as the amplitude of this meridional gradient and the exact  
 551 anomaly pattern, compared to the Mauri et al. (2014) reconstruction. Nevertheless, the



552 uncertainties of this reconstruction do allow for a weaker gradient as found in some of the  
553 models.

554 To understand the simulated response to mid-Holocene (MH) forcing, we have first analyzed  
555 the simulated large-scale atmospheric circulation anomalies over the North Atlantic sector.  
556 Our analysis has revealed a consistent climatological winter atmospheric response in mid-  
557 Holocene consisting of two elements common to all models, though varying in spatial extent  
558 and intensity. The first is a dynamically forced anti-cyclonic anomaly over the south-western  
559 part of the North Atlantic, with a strong barotropic component. This structure is associated  
560 with a local weakening of the jet stream and a more pronounced separation between the eddy-  
561 driven and subtropical jet streams over the North Atlantic sector. The second element is a  
562 positive sea-level pressure anomaly over northern Africa with a shallow baroclinic structure.  
563 This SLP anomaly is a result of the colder atmospheric temperature in response to the strong  
564 negative radiative forcing at low latitudes, the effects of which are amplified over continental  
565 regions. In the same way, a shallow low-pressure anomaly is found in the north of the basin,  
566 in thermal balance with positive temperature anomalies. For some models these SLP  
567 anomalies could be interpreted as a NAO<sup>+</sup> signal, although the vertical structure of the NAO  
568 is much more barotropic.

569 While some models exhibit a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like atmospheric circulation anomaly near the surface in  
570 winter, the ensemble of 12 PMIP3 models does not support a link between this type of large-  
571 scale atmospheric response and the MH temperature anomaly patterns over Europe. Instead,  
572 the simulated MH European winter temperature anomaly patterns are, in most models,  
573 determined by the radiatively forced cold anomalies at low latitudes and the more model-  
574 dependent sea ice anomalies over the Nordic Seas, with the latter responsible for  
575 approximately three times more inter-model variability than the former.

576 The analyses carried out to understand the differences in these sea ice anomalies between the  
577 models have revealed multiple footprints of the  $\Delta$ SIC feedbacks onto other fields often  
578 dominating the climatological anomalies in the Nordic Seas region. We have shown here the  
579 signature of these feedbacks on the near-surface air temperature, but similar signatures have  
580 also been found (not shown) on other variables. A very tight collocation between strong  
581 negative (positive) sea ice anomalies and negative (positive) near-surface horizontal wind  
582 divergence anomalies was found in all models for which the latter could be calculated, likely  
583 explained by a response of the near-surface atmospheric circulation to the sea ice anomalies  
584 and to the associated air-sea flux anomalies. A local increase in cloud cover over negative  
585  $\Delta$ SIC regions (and *vice-versa*) has been found in most models, engendering marked local  
586 anomalies of the downward longwave and shortwave radiative fluxes at the surface (positive  
587 and negative respectively over regions of sea ice loss and *vice-versa*). A strong  $\Delta$ SIC  
588 feedback has also been found on the surface sensible heat flux (SH). In 3 out of 12 models this  
589 corresponds to a simple positive response of SH to a positive  $\Delta$ SIC or *vice-versa*. In most  
590 models, however, the response is more complex, taking the form of a strong positive-negative  
591 SH dipole over the  $\Delta$ SIC region depending on the background sea ice cover, which shows a  
592 subtle interplay of sea surface temperature and air temperature anomalies in these regions.

593 These ubiquitous sea ice feedback signatures confirm the importance of a correct sea ice  
594 representation in the models for representing the regional climate over Europe. All but three  
595 models show a reduced winter sea ice cover in the Nordic Seas region in mid-Holocene  
596 compared to the pre-industrial climate. While not allowing for a quantitative model evaluation  
597 of the sea-ice cover anomaly, a recent compilation of multi-proxy reconstructions of mid-  
598 Holocene  $\Delta$ SIC which expands on the data set used in Klein et al. (2014) (Seidenkrantz, 2015,  
599 personal communication) qualitatively confirms this result. Nevertheless, the publication of  
600 this compilation will be necessary to establish any strong observational constraints on this  
601 aspect. Based on this on-going work of compilation, we can suggest that an increase in Nordic

602 Seas winter sea ice cover in the mid-Holocene, namely in FGOALS-g2, MIROC-ESM and  
603 CCSM4, are not in line with the few available data for the MH climate in the North Atlantic  
604 sector. It remains unclear if these mismatches are due to a poor response of the sea ice system  
605 to insolation or are related to an ocean circulation response and its influence on the sea ice.

606 Sea ice feedback signatures dominating the climatological winter anomalies hinder the quest  
607 for the causes of SIC anomalies in the model results. Nevertheless, we were able to highlight  
608 a robust multi-model relationship between the MH winter SIC anomalies in the Nordic Seas  
609 region and the anomalies in the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation, which points to  
610 the AMOC as an important driver of the MH response of European winter temperatures.

611 The MH-PI differences in the atmospheric heat transport due to transient eddies form an  
612 important potential source of information on the drivers of the SIC anomalies. However, these  
613 differences could not be evaluated due to the lack of availability of the corresponding fields in  
614 the PMIP3 data base. This type of drawback will be solved thanks to the inclusion of such  
615 fields in the outputs from future model intercomparison exercises such as the upcoming  
616 CMIP6 and PMIP4.

617 Another potential key player neglected here is the feedback from vegetation changes in the  
618 high latitudes, which could also amplify the pattern found in the MH simulations (Wohlfahrt  
619 et al. 2008), potentially bringing the model simulations closer to MH observations.

620 We also know that PMIP3 models systematically underestimate the monsoon anomalies in the  
621 mid-Holocene (the “Green Sahara” event, Claussen & Gayler 1997). It is plausible that this  
622 event was linked to a northward shift of the Hadley Cell (Claussen and Gayler 1997), which  
623 would therefore not be captured, or, at best, be severely underestimated by the models. We  
624 conjecture that all models underestimate large-scale anomalies in the atmospheric circulation  
625 that may have taken place (Gaetani et al. 2017) and may have affected temperature patterns

626 over Europe during MH winters. Our study, however, highlights the potential relevance of  
627 other effects, which deserve further study.

628 While previous, paleo-reconstruction-based studies, often attribute mid-Holocene winter  
629 European temperature anomalies to a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like atmospheric circulation anomaly, our  
630 analysis of PMIP3 models suggests the possibility of an additional or even alternative  
631 explanation coming from a larger geographical context. In this new view, based on the most  
632 skillful PMIP3 models, European winter temperature anomaly patterns are determined, to the  
633 south, by strong low-latitude temperature responses to the seasonal negative radiative forcing  
634 and to the north by feedbacks of the negative sea ice anomalies over the Nordic Seas on the  
635 atmosphere. Model simulations also suggest that a major driving force for these sea ice  
636 anomalies is an intensification of the Atlantic meridional overturning circulation in the mid-  
637 Holocene compared to the modern period, as indirectly suspected in Masson et al. (1999).  
638 This is in agreement with reconstructions based on sortable silt in the North Atlantic, a proxy  
639 of deep water circulation, which indicate a stronger deep current during the MH (Kissel et al.  
640 2013). The amplitude of the north-south gradient over Europe is weaker in the models than in  
641 the reconstruction. We can suggest that this is related to a general bias of climate models in  
642 representing the strong air-sea interaction as recently highlighted by the so-called signal to  
643 noise paradox by Scaife et al. (2018).

644 The summertime temperature reconstruction from Mauri et al. (2014) does not show any  
645 agreement with model simulations and leads to very different patterns than the model  
646 simulations (not shown, *cf.* Mauri et al. 2014). This weakens the hypothesis expressed here.  
647 The analysis of the differences between models and reconstruction data is out of the scope of  
648 the present paper and deserves a dedicated study. Nevertheless, we can highlight here that  
649 changes in the AMOC mainly affect European temperature in winter (*e.g.* Figure 4 from

650 Jackson et al. 2015), and may have a far weaker signature on summer temperatures, where  
651 other processes might be dominant.

652 The cause for the differences in the AMOC has not been analyzed in the present paper, as it  
653 will also necessitate a dedicated study. As noticed before, this could be related to a decrease  
654 in sea ice transport through the Fram Strait due to a lower sea ice production when insolation  
655 is larger in summer (Born et al. 2010). This shows that the AMOC is not only influencing the  
656 sea ice, but could also be modified by it, implying a two-way feedback also potentially at play  
657 in the Nordic Seas. Another interesting factor could be related to the influence of the  
658 atmospheric circulation on the AMOC. For instance, variability of the AMOC over the last 60  
659 years has often been related to NAO variations (Delworth et al. 2016; Swingedouw et al.  
660 2015b). The mechanism is related to a cooling of the surface Labrador Sea during NAO<sup>+</sup>  
661 phases, which increases the Labrador deep water formation and, a few years later, the AMOC  
662 (Eden and Willebrand 2001). Thus, if the atmospheric circulation during the MH changed  
663 towards a NAO<sup>+</sup>-like configuration, then it likely amplified the AMOC, as highlighted in Shi  
664 and Lohman (2016) for the ECHAM-FESOM-MPIOM climate model. In the MH PMIP3  
665 ensemble, however, the NAO changes are not the main driver, since our indices of NAO and  
666 AMOC changes are not significantly correlated (not shown).

667 If this interpretation is correct, then the MH European winter temperatures may be a test-bed  
668 to estimate possible changes in sea ice and in the AMOC in the near future, with the role of  
669 the NAO to be further investigated in larger multi-model ensembles. Since, as we find here,  
670 the inter-model differences in MH temperature anomalies are mainly explained by AMOC  
671 changes, we conclude that the MH is indeed an interesting case study to evaluate the  
672 sensitivity of the simulated AMOC to changes in radiative forcing. Indeed, changes in the  
673 simulated AMOC for RCP85 projections generally exhibit strong weakening in models that  
674 show large strengthening for mid-Holocene. The linear relationship is nonetheless not very

675 strong and the interpretation is limited by the low number of models analyzed here. The proof  
676 of concept presented here will thus benefit from a higher number of models, which will be  
677 hopefully reached within CMIP6.

678 Furthermore, to produce a correct assessment of models, we need to have a finer, quantitative  
679 AMOC reconstruction for this period. The use of a methodology combining climate models  
680 and available observational datasets, as employed for the deglaciation by Ritz et al. (2013) for  
681 instance, is an interesting approach to be developed. This may help to better decipher the  
682 sensitivity of the AMOC to different forcings, which could then provide new leads to reduce  
683 the very large uncertainty (Weaver et al. 2012) concerning the future of the AMOC. For this  
684 purpose, the use of more models available with paleo-configuration will be a key prerequisite,  
685 since the analysis led here clearly suffers from the low number of models available within  
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