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# On the generation and **segregation** of kinetic helicity in geodynamo simulations



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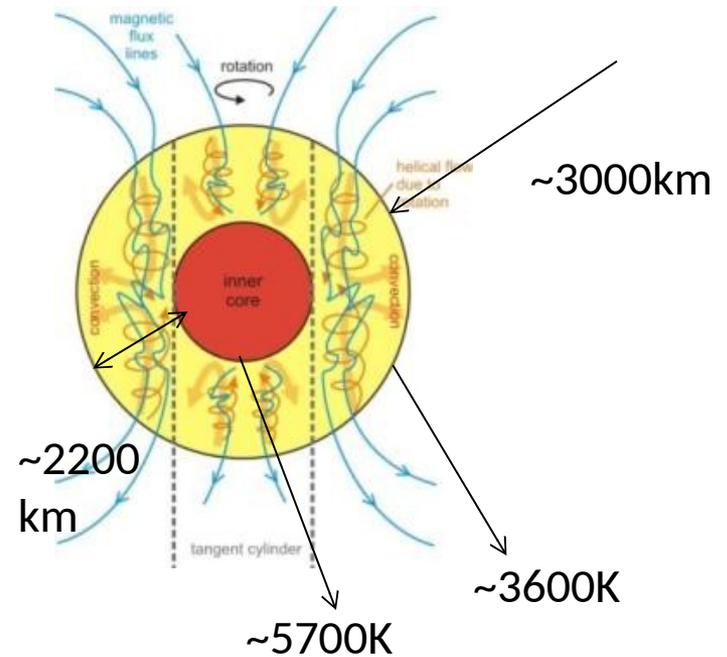
**Helicity2020**

**Online Advanced Study Program on helicities in Astrophysics and Beyond**

**11 December 2020**

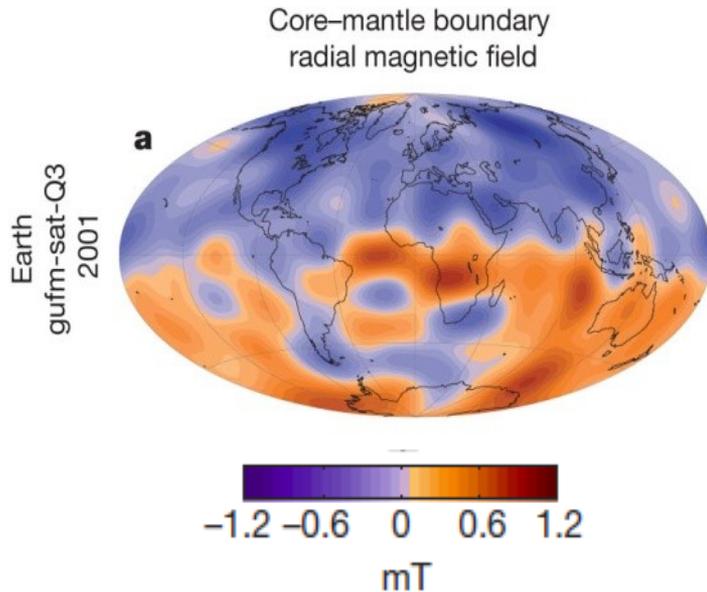
# Outline

- Motivation
- Why is helicity segregation important?
- Helicity evolution equation
- Dynamo simulations
- An interesting correlation!
- DNS in a box – buoyant blobs under rotation
- Some (speculative) explanations



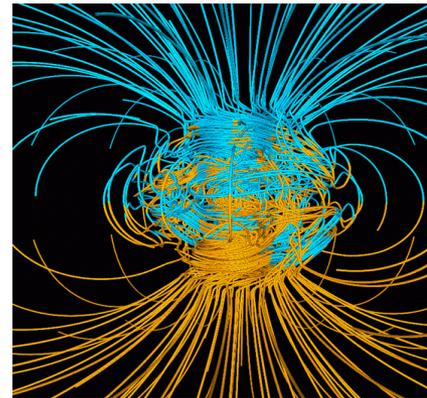
**Helical columnar flow could be important for the generation and maintenance of the magnetic field !**

# Where does the dipolar magnetic field of the Earth come from & why is it still there?



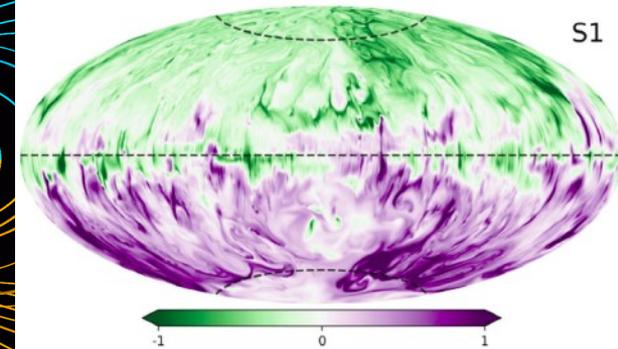
*Aubert et al 2013*

## Observation



*Glaztmaier & Roberts'*  
*Nature, 95; PEPI, 95*

49 X 32 X 64 modes  
 $Ra = 5.7 \times 10^7$   
 $E = 2 \times 10^{-6}$



*Schaeffer et al. GJI, 2017*

512 X 720 X 1440 modes  
 $Ra = 1.3 \times 10^{11}$   
 $E = 1 \times 10^{-6}$

## Numerical Simulations

In the core,  $E \sim 10^{-15}$ ;  $Ra \sim 10^{22}$   
*(Schubert, Treatise on Geophysics)*

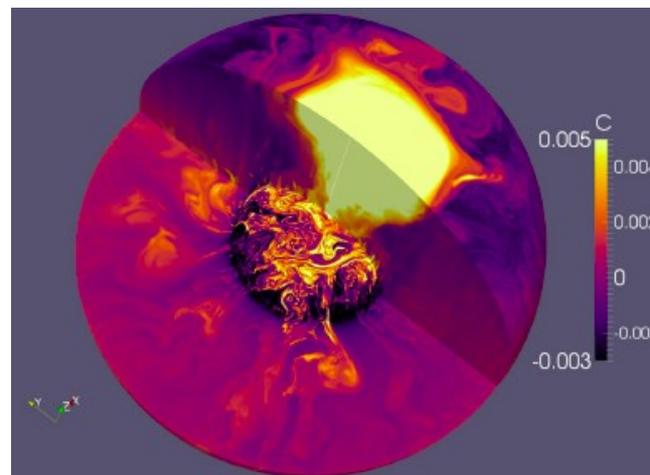
With core radius  $\sim 3.5 \times 10^6$  m; conductivity  $\sim 4 \times 10^5$  S/m; magnetic diffusivity  $\sim 2$  m<sup>2</sup>/s  
 Magnetic field should have died in  $\sim 200,000$  years  
 Age of the earth  $\sim 4,543,000,000$  years

# Turbulent geodynamo simulations: a leap towards Earth's core

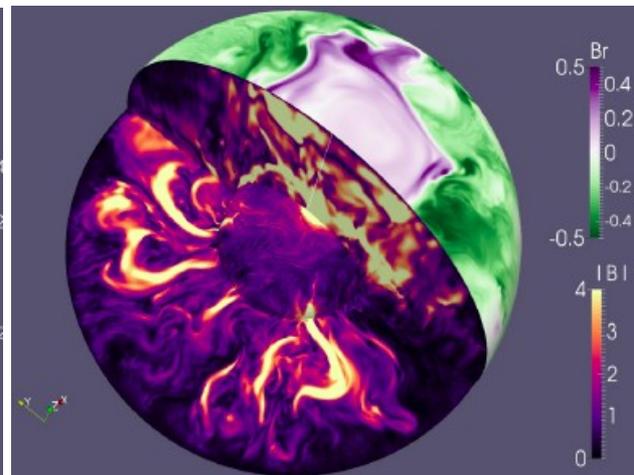
N. Schaeffer,<sup>1</sup> D. Jault,<sup>1</sup> H.-C. Nataf<sup>1</sup> and A. Fournier<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, ISTERre, F-38000 Grenoble, France. E-mail: [nathanael.schaeffer@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr](mailto:nathanael.schaeffer@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr)*

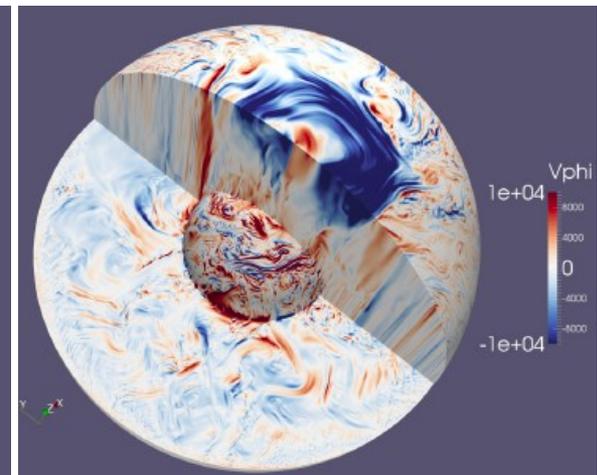
<sup>2</sup>*Institut de Physique du Globe de Paris, Sorbonne Paris Cité, Univ. Paris Diderot, CNRS, 1 rue Jussieu, F-75005 Paris, France*



Temperature  
(Co-density)

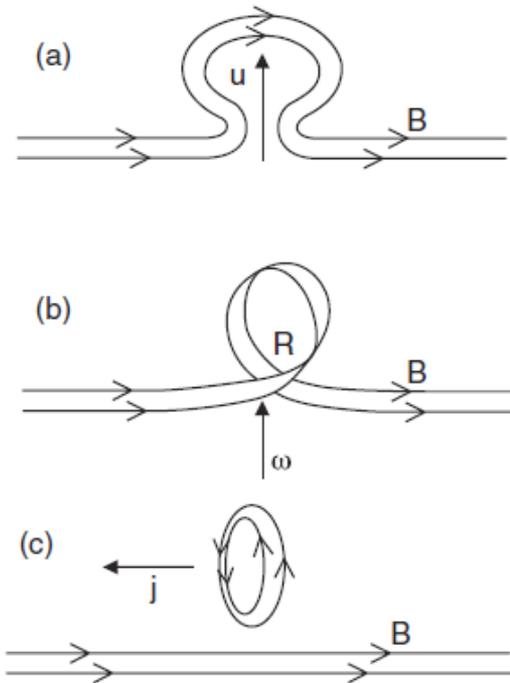


Radial comp. of  $\mathbf{B}$



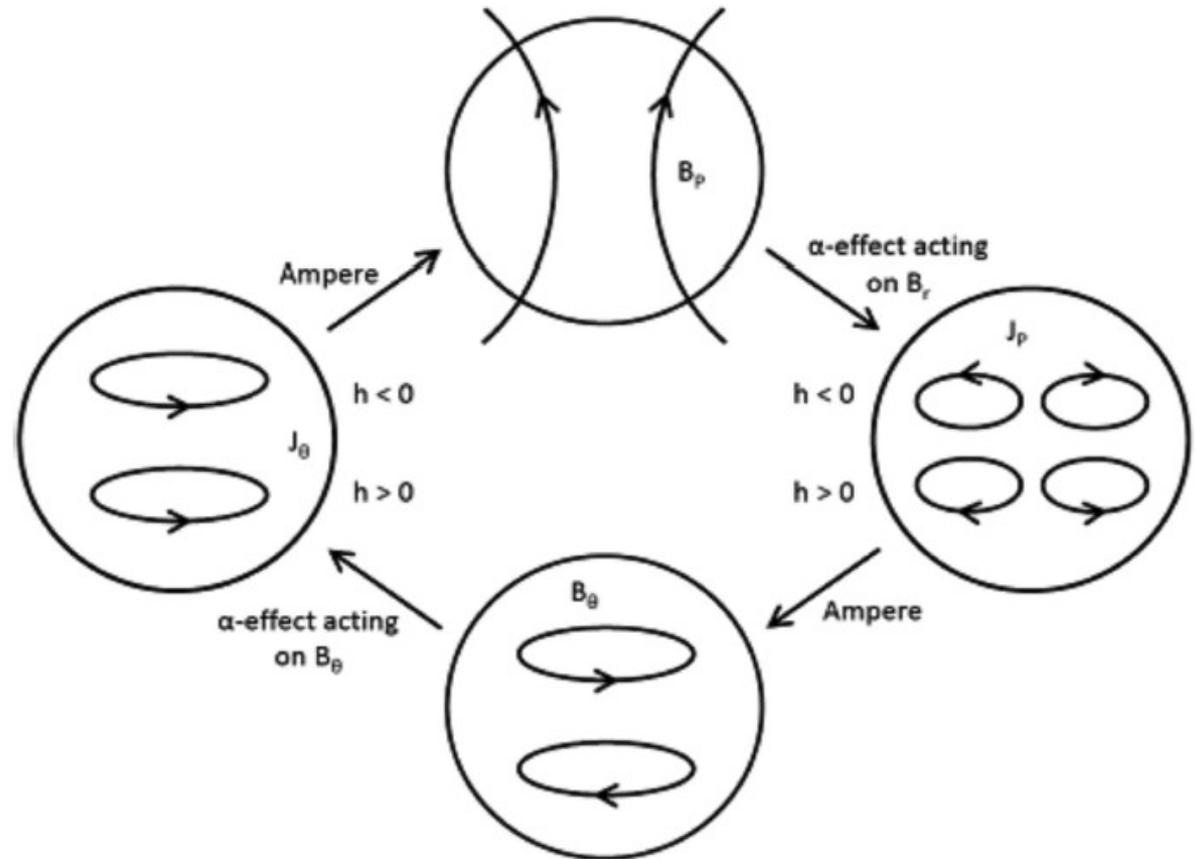
$\phi$  comp. of  $\mathbf{u}$

# Parker's $\alpha$ -effect & $\alpha^2$ -dynamo



Parker's 'lift & twist'  
 $\alpha$ -effect (Parker, 1955)

**Helicity (or helicity density)**  
 $h = \mathbf{u} \cdot \boldsymbol{\omega}$

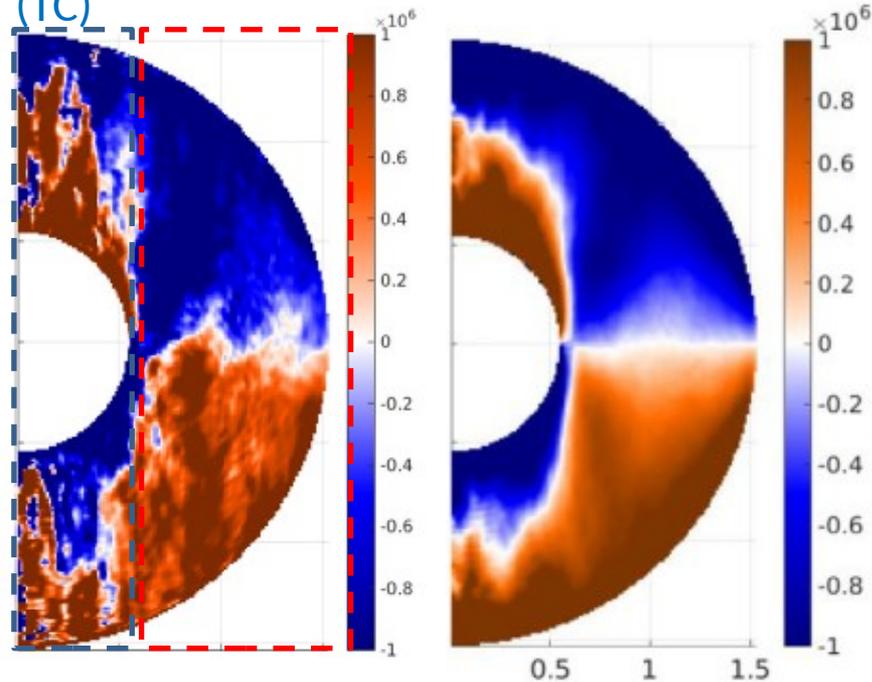


A  $\alpha^2$ -dynamo cartoon  
(Davidson, 2014)

If the flow is helical & helicity is -ve in north  
+ve in the south, then we can get one component of  $\mathbf{B}$  from the other & a self sustaining dynamo!

# What is the helicity in dynamo simulations?

Tangent  
Cylinder  
(TC)

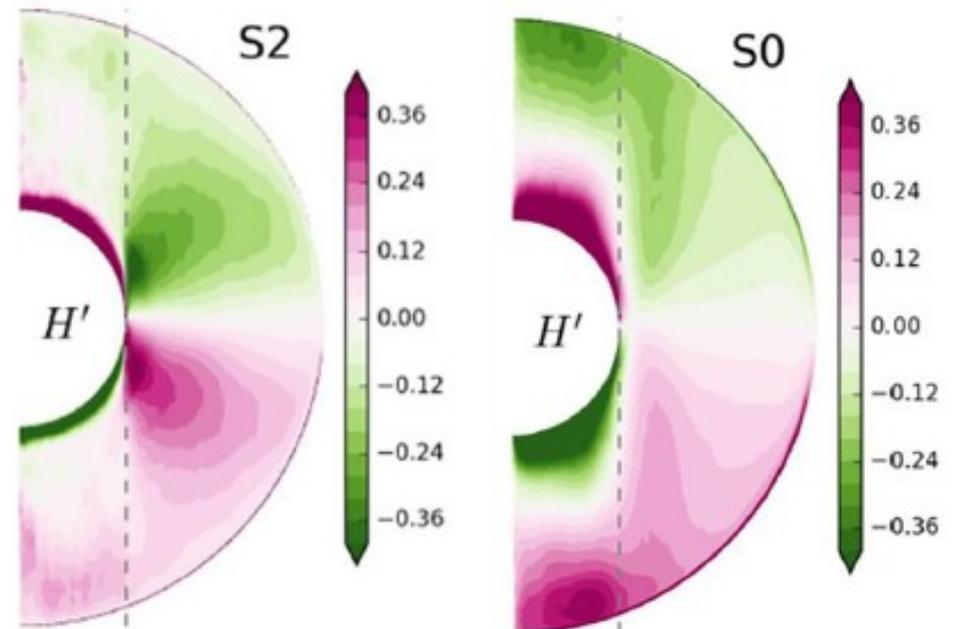


Instantaneous  
helicity avg. in  $\phi$

$$\langle h \rangle_{\phi}$$

Time-averaged  
helicity avg. in  $\phi$

$$\langle \bar{h} \rangle_{\phi}$$



**Figure 1.** Relative fluctuating helicity averaged in time and in  $\phi$  for two different simulations S2 and S0 (Schaeffer *et al.* 2017). Simulation parameters for S2:  $Ra/Ra_c = 6310$ ,  $E = 10^{-7}$  and S0:  $Ra/Ra_c = 4879$ ,  $E = 10^{-5}$ .  $Ra$  is the Rayleigh number (defined in Section 3), which equals  $Ra_c$  at the onset of convection. Fixed heat flux boundary condition was used in these simulations.

$$u' \cdot \omega' / |u'| |\omega'|_{\phi}$$

$$u'(x, t) = u(x, t) - \bar{u}(x)$$

# Sources of helicity according to literature

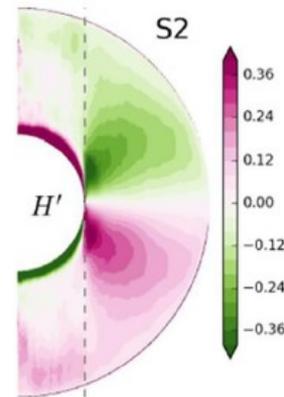
According to Busse (1975, 1976), three possible sources of helicity outside the tangent cylinder could be

- (a) Ekman pumping - this could be important only at large Ekman number & only near the boundaries.
- (b) the spherical boundary ( $\beta$ -effect) - this only leads to intensification of helicity
- (c) spatial variations of the Lorentz force.

- this is a certainly a source but, again, only leads to a local intensification of helicity (Sreenivasan & Jones, 2011)

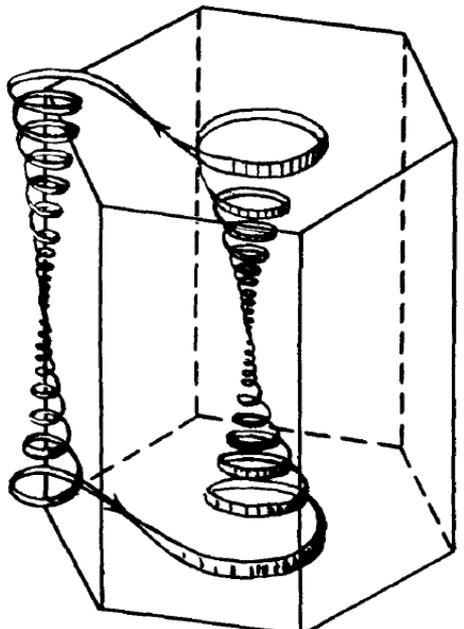
But, what leads to the segregation of helicity (-ve above, + below) in the simulations?

This is observed in simulations with free-slip B.C.s (ruling out Ekman pumping) and in non-magnetic simulations (ruling out Lorentz force)!

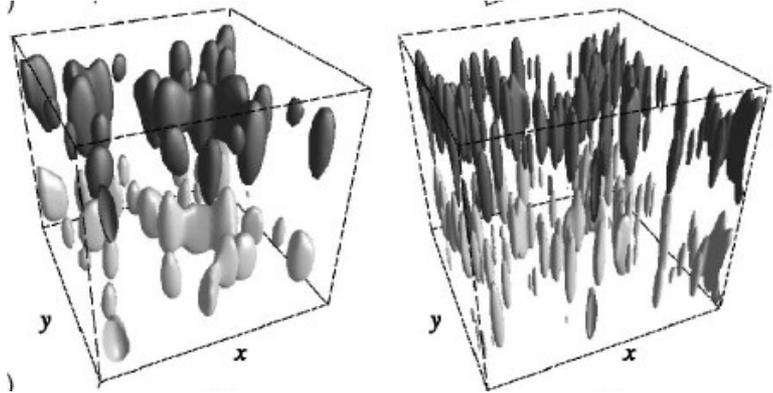


There is less debate for helicity in rotating RBC/ inside TC where  $\Omega // g$

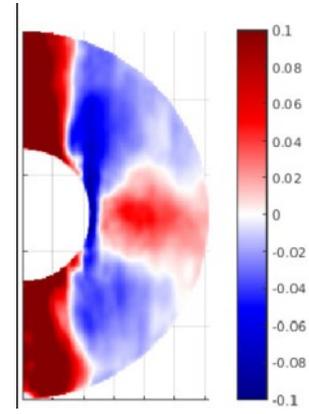
Veronis (JFM, 1959)



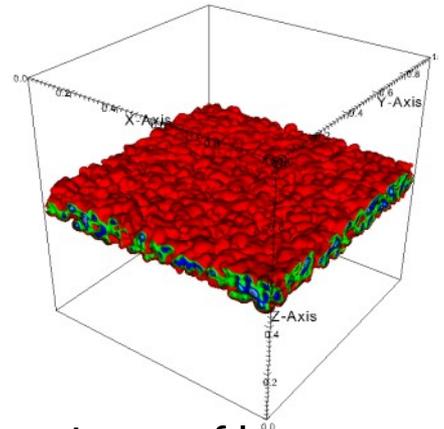
Stellmach & Hansen (PRE, 2004)



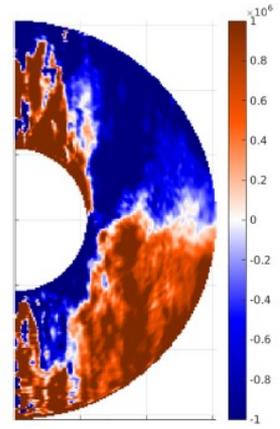
A “radical” idea proposed by Davidson (GJI, 2014)



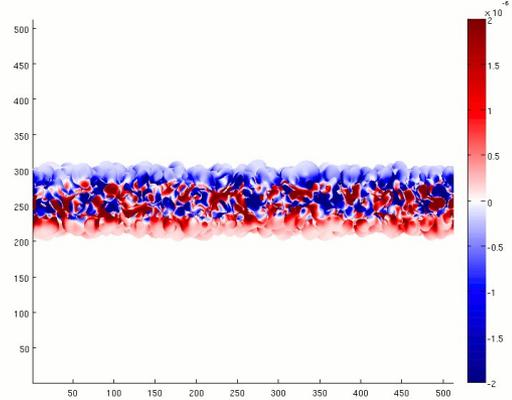
Temperature perturbations avg. in  $\phi$



Layer of buoyancy with  $\Omega$  perp. to  $g$



$\langle h \rangle_\phi$



Kinetic energy coloured with  $h$

Davidson & Ranjan (GJI, 2015)

# Inertial waves & helicity

$$\frac{\partial^2}{\partial t^2} \nabla^2 \mathbf{u} + 4(\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla)^2 \mathbf{u} = 0$$

$$\mathbf{u} = \hat{\mathbf{u}} \exp i(\mathbf{k} \cdot \mathbf{x} - \varpi t)$$

$$\varpi = \pm 2 \frac{(\mathbf{k} \cdot \boldsymbol{\Omega})}{k} = \pm 2\Omega \cos \theta$$

$$\theta \approx 90^\circ \quad \varpi \approx 0$$

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{u}}{\partial t} = -\frac{1}{\rho} \nabla \tilde{p} - 2\boldsymbol{\Omega} \times \mathbf{u}$$

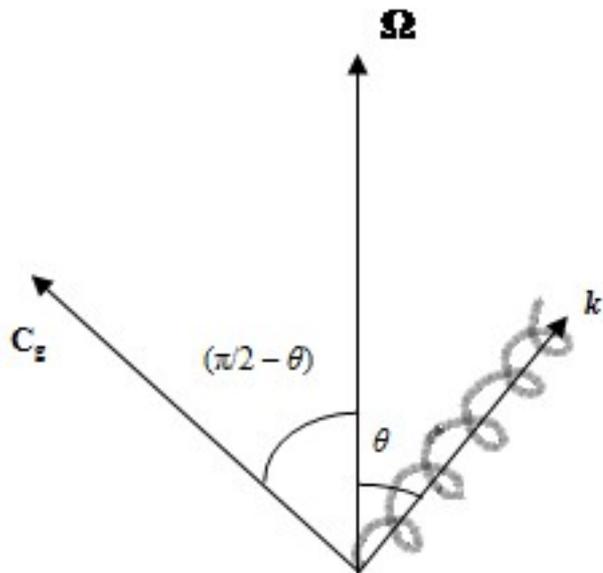
$$\varpi / \Omega = (-2, 2)$$

$$\frac{\partial \omega}{\partial t} = 2(\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla) u$$

$$\mathbf{C}_g = \frac{\partial \varpi}{\partial k} = \pm \frac{2\Omega}{k} [\hat{\mathbf{e}}_\Omega - \cos \theta \hat{\mathbf{e}}_k]$$

$$\mathbf{C}_g = \pm \frac{2\Omega}{k} \hat{\mathbf{e}}_\Omega$$

(Rate at which energy propagates)



$$\hat{\boldsymbol{\omega}} = i\mathbf{k} \times \hat{\mathbf{u}} = \mp k \hat{\mathbf{u}}$$

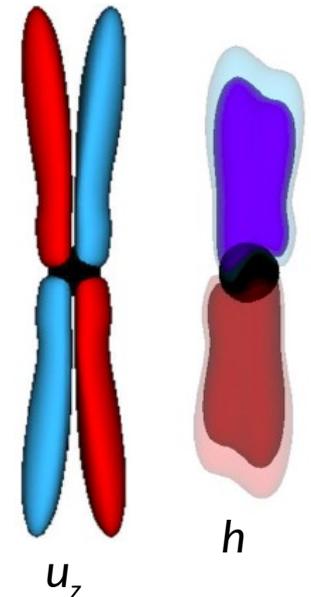
$$h = \mathbf{u} \cdot \boldsymbol{\omega} = \mp k |\hat{\mathbf{u}}|^2$$

Note Parallel velocity & vorticity amplitudes

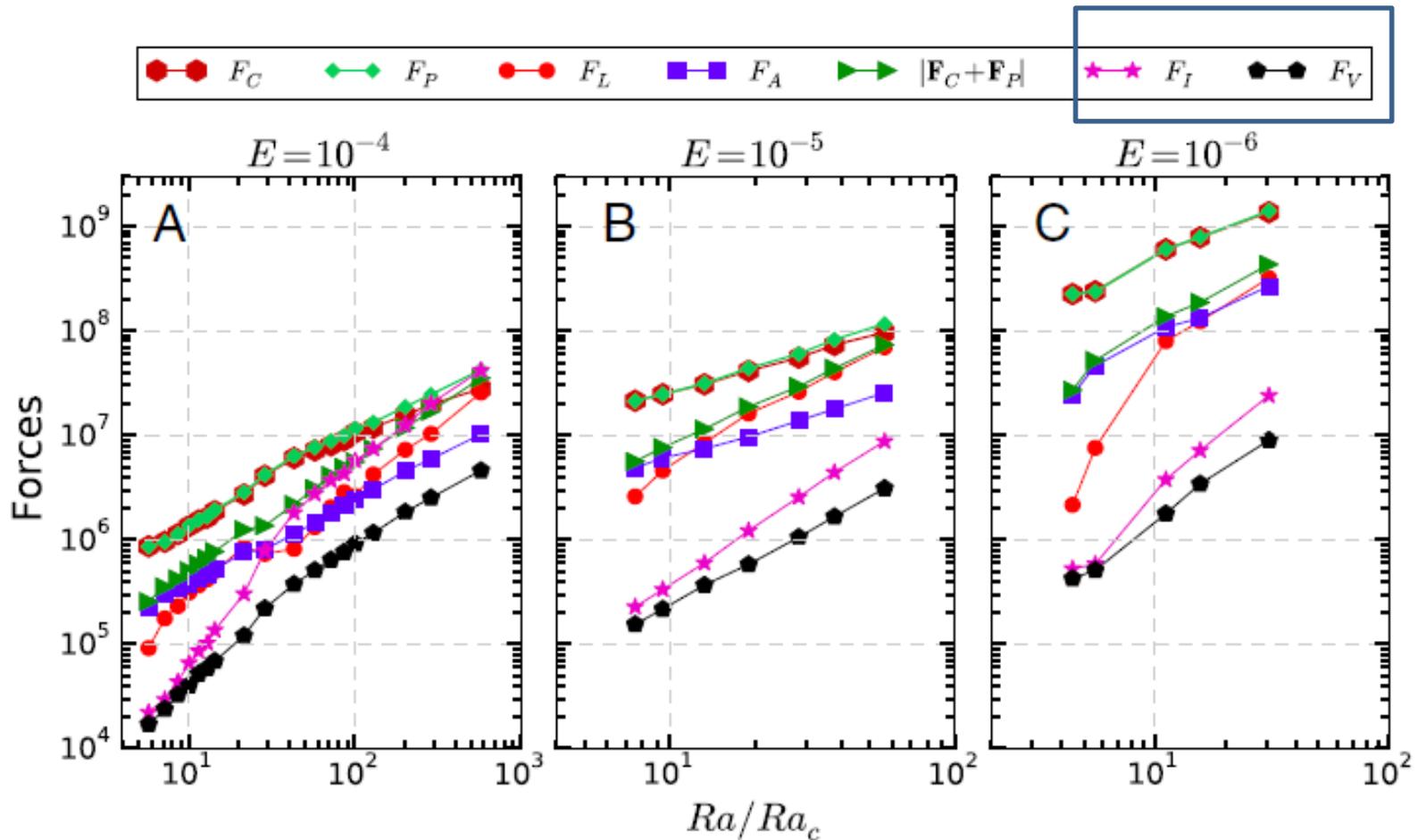
-ve above

+ve below

(Moffatt, 1970)



# MAC Balance in geodynamo simulations



# Helicity budget equation

$2\mathbf{u} \times \boldsymbol{\Omega}$

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{u}}{\partial t} = -\frac{\nabla p^*}{\rho} + 2(\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{a} - \alpha T \mathbf{g} + \frac{\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}}{\rho} + \nu \nabla^2 \mathbf{u},$$

$$(\mathbf{u} = \nabla \times \mathbf{a}, \nabla \cdot \mathbf{a} = 0),$$

$$p^* = p - (\rho/2)(\boldsymbol{\Omega} \times \mathbf{x})^2 + 2\rho(\mathbf{a} \cdot \boldsymbol{\Omega}).$$

$$\frac{\partial \boldsymbol{\omega}}{\partial t} = 2(\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u} - \alpha \nabla T \times \mathbf{g} + \frac{\nabla \times (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B})}{\rho} + \nu \nabla^2 \boldsymbol{\omega}.$$

$$\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{F} = H_T + H_B + H_v,$$

where

$$\mathbf{F} = -2(u^2) \boldsymbol{\Omega} - 2\mathbf{u} \times (\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{a}) + \frac{p^* \boldsymbol{\omega}}{\rho},$$

and,

$$H_T = -\alpha [\mathbf{u} \cdot (\nabla T \times \mathbf{g}) + \boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (T \mathbf{g})],$$

$$H_B = \frac{1}{\rho} [\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}) + \mathbf{u} \cdot (\nabla \times (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}))],$$

$$H_v = \nu (\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot \nabla^2 \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla^2 \boldsymbol{\omega}).$$

$\mathbf{F}$  - Flux of helicity

$H_T, H_B, H_v$  "sources" of helicity

$$\nabla^2 p^* = -\rho \nabla \cdot (\alpha T \mathbf{g}), \mathbf{F} \approx - (2u^2) \boldsymbol{\Omega}.$$

$$\langle \bar{\Sigma} \rangle_\varphi = \langle -\overline{\nabla \cdot \mathbf{F}}_\Omega + \bar{H}_T + \bar{H}_B + \bar{H}_v \rangle_\varphi.$$

# Geodynamo Simulation using spherical DNS code

## (Dimensionless) governing equations & parameters

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{u}}{\partial t'} + (\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla) \mathbf{u} = -\nabla p - \frac{2}{E} \hat{\mathbf{e}}_z \times \mathbf{u} + \frac{Ra}{Pr} T \frac{\mathbf{r}}{r_o} + \frac{1}{EP_m} (\nabla \times \mathbf{B}) \times \mathbf{B} + \nabla^2 \mathbf{u}$$

Magnetic Induction Equation

$$\frac{\partial \mathbf{B}}{\partial t'} = \nabla \times (\mathbf{u} \times \mathbf{B}) + \frac{1}{P_m} \nabla^2 \mathbf{B}$$

T is the temperature fluctuation above the adiabatic reference!

$$\frac{\partial T}{\partial t'} + (\mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla) T = \frac{1}{Pr} \nabla^2 T$$

$$\nabla \cdot \mathbf{u} = \nabla \cdot \mathbf{B} = 0$$

$t' = t\nu / D^2$   
 $x = x / D$   
 $u = u D / \nu$   
 $T = T / \Delta T$   
 $B = B / (\mu_o \lambda \rho \Omega)^{1/2}$

$$Ra = \frac{\alpha g_o \Delta T D^3}{\kappa \nu} \quad E = \frac{\nu}{\Omega D^2}$$

| Case | Resolution ( $N_r, N_\theta, N_\varphi$ ) | $Ra$ ( $\times 10^8$ ) | $Ra/Ra_c$ | $E$ ( $\times 10^{-5}$ ) |
|------|-------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| S1   | (81,192,384)                              | 1.2                    | 42.4      | 3                        |
| S1H  | (81,192,384)                              | 1.2                    | 42.4      | 3                        |
| S2   | (73,256,512)                              | 3                      | 28.4      | 1                        |

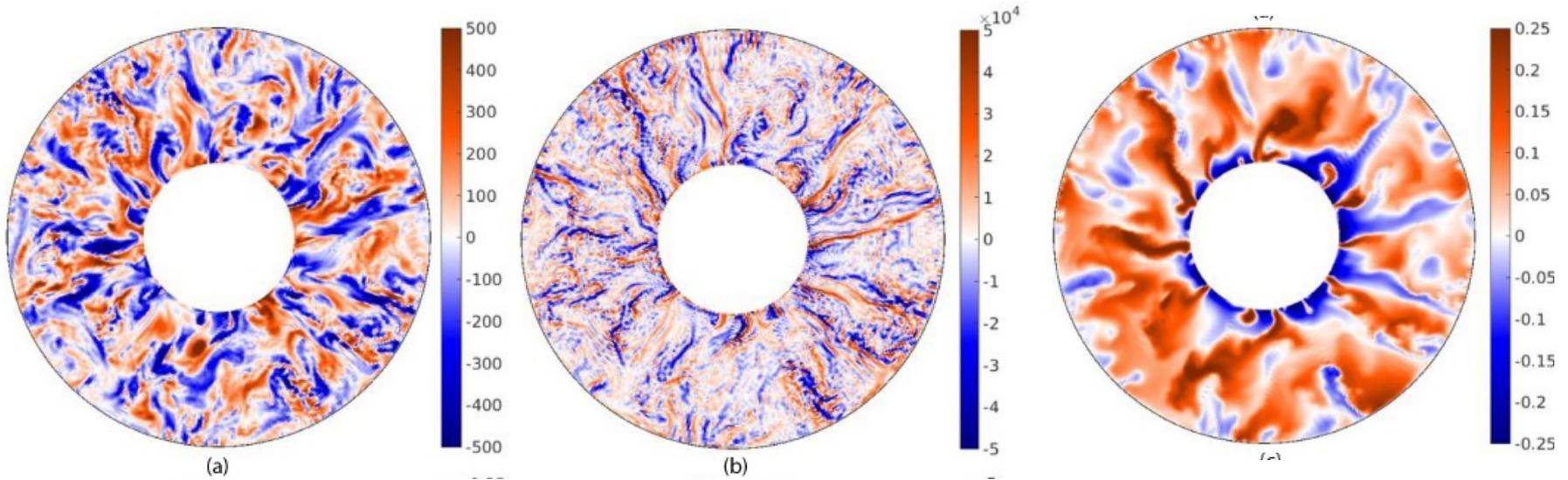
The DNS code **MagIC** solves the pseudo-spectral versions of these equations, **using spherical harmonics in  $(\theta, \varphi)$  and Chebyshev polynomials in  $r$ .**

**Boundary Cond. - No Slip, Fixed temperatures on ICB,CMB; electrically insulated IC**

**S1/S2 are run for  $\sim 0.1/0.064$  magnetic diffusion time until they reach equilibrium & then re-started and run for  $\sim 12/17$  eddy turnover time with output at small intervals**

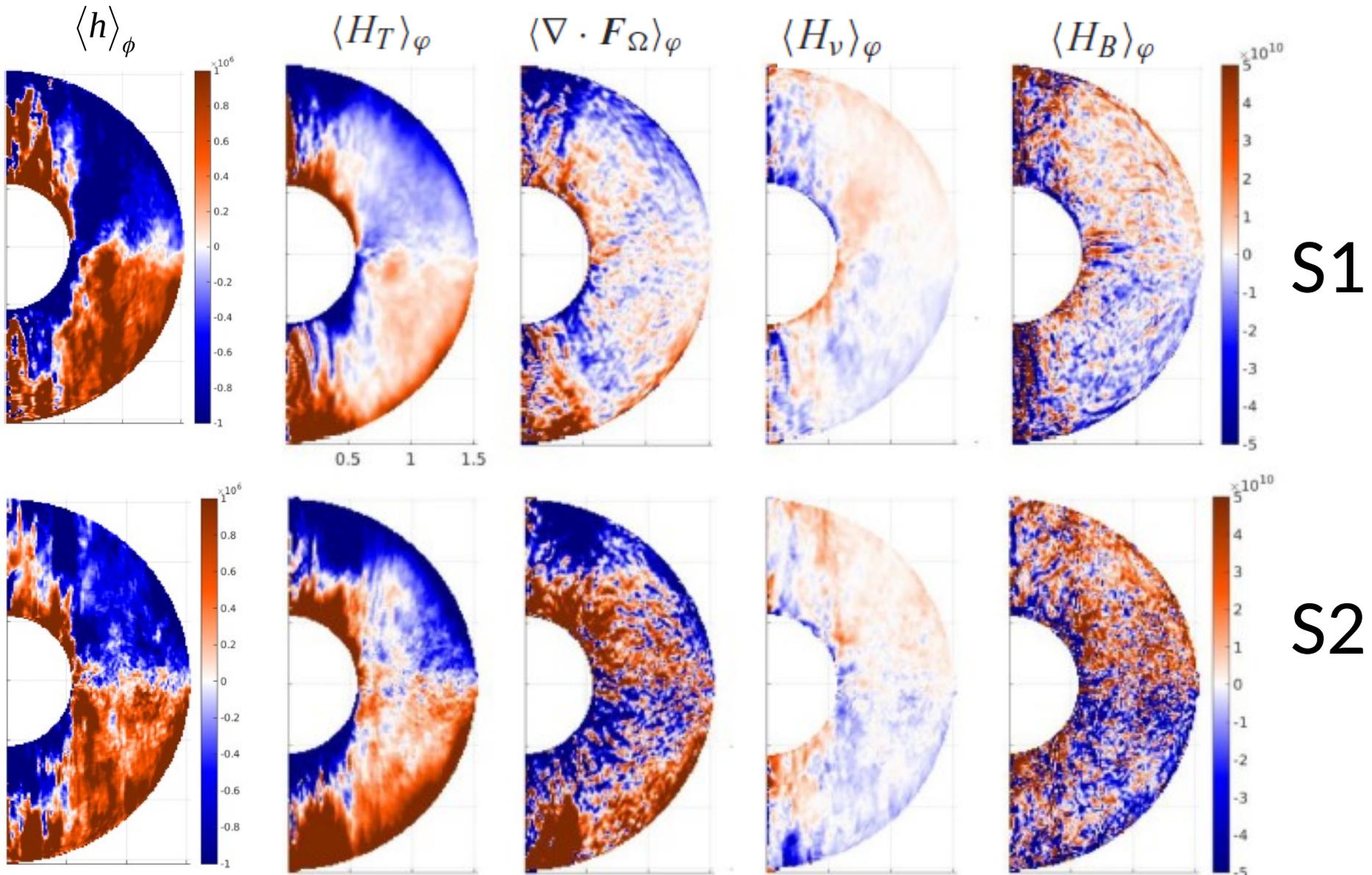
# Results

For S2 Equatorial cuts of vertical velocity  $u_z$ , vertical vorticity, and temperature perturbations  $T$

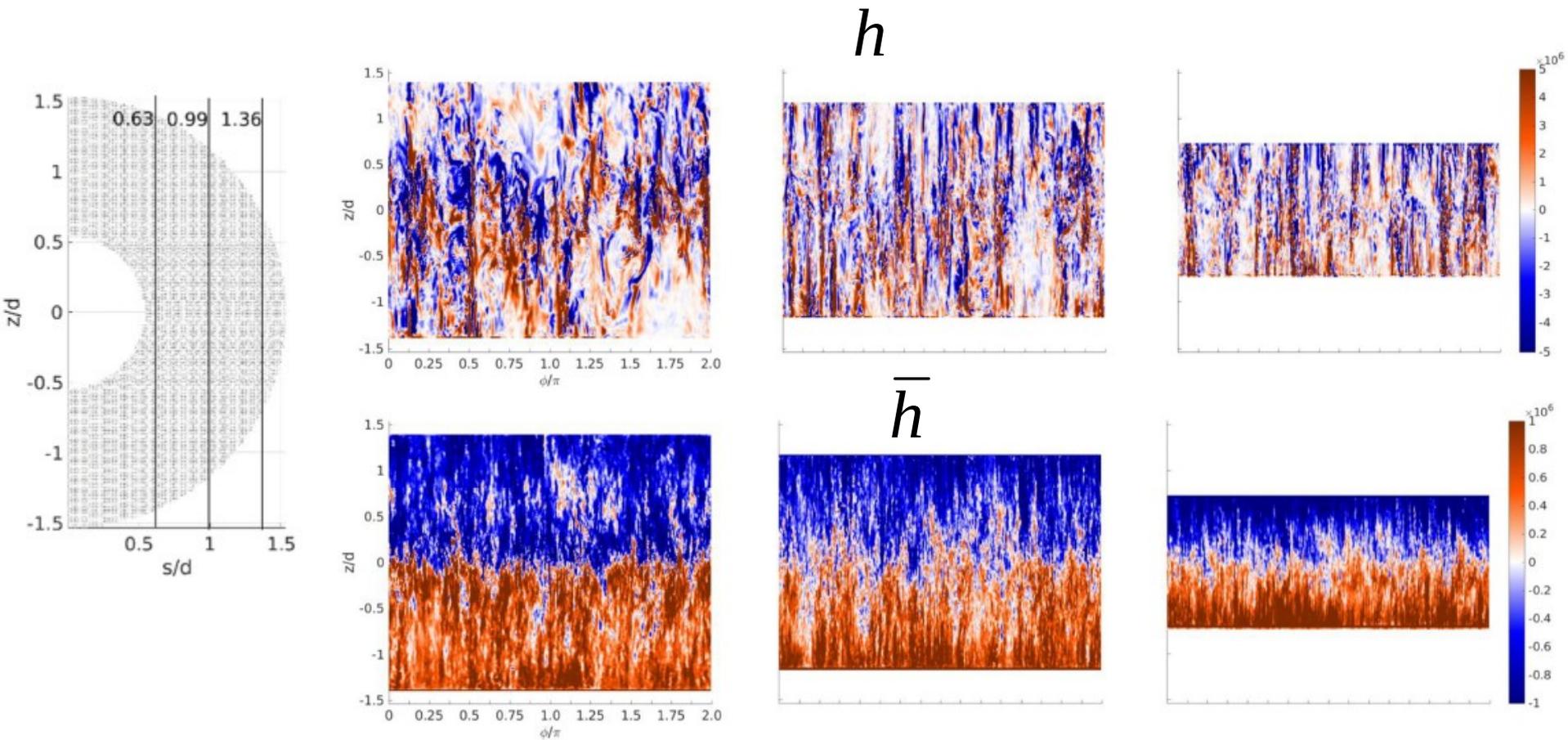


# Instantaneous helicity flux & sources

$$\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot F = H_T + H_B + H_v,$$



# Helicity on $\varphi$ - $z$ planes for S2

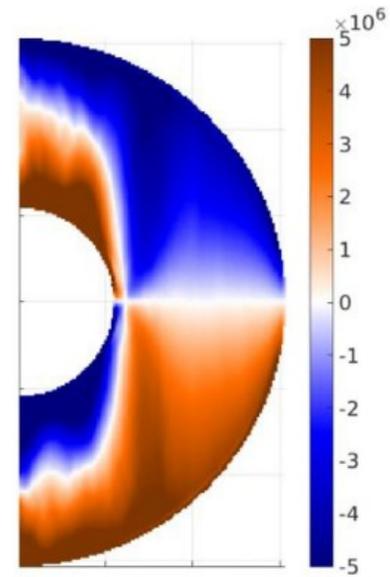
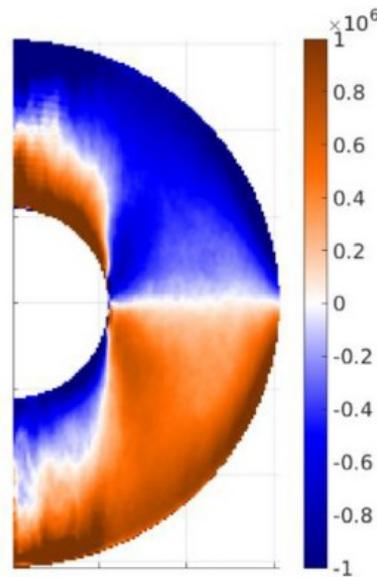
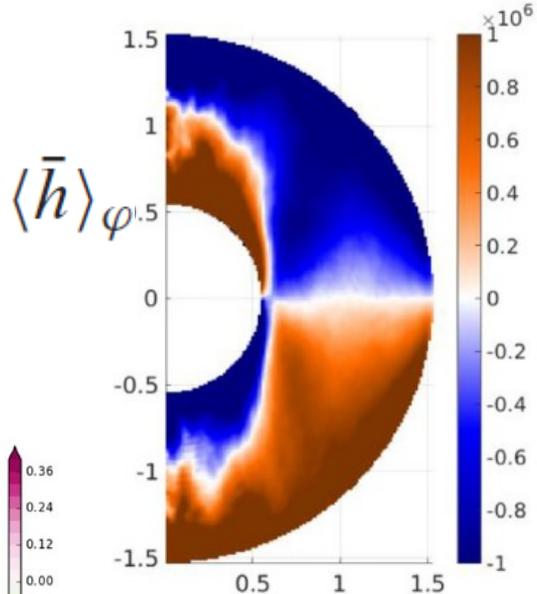


Time-averaged plots of helicity and fluctuating relative helicity

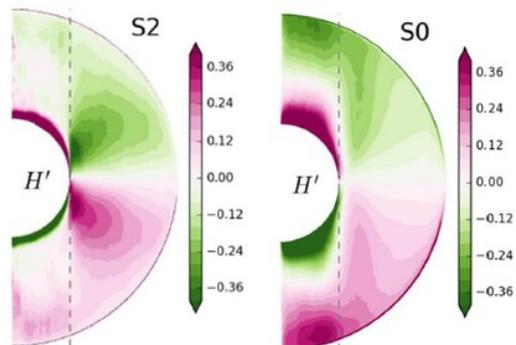
S1

S2

S1H

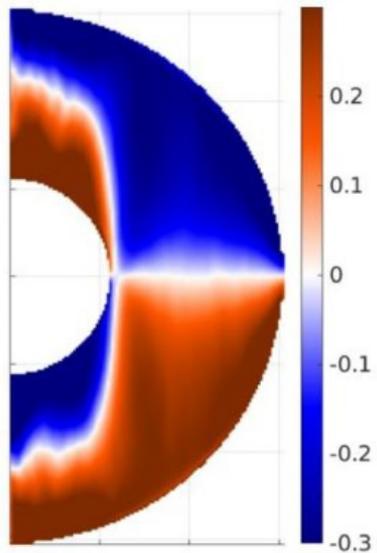
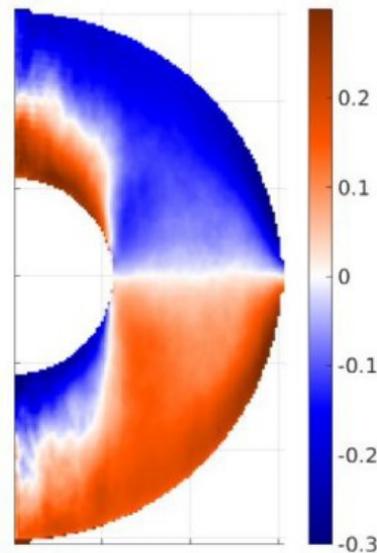
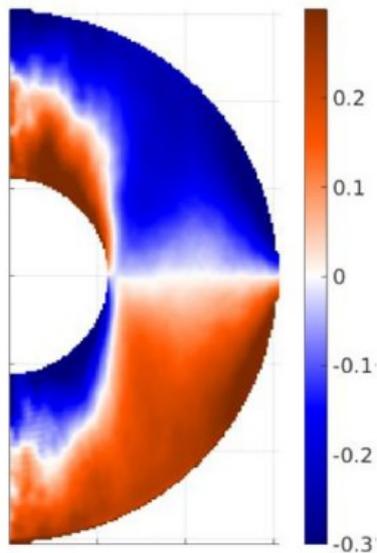


RECALL



$\langle \overline{h'_{r'}} \rangle_\varphi$

$= \overline{\mathbf{u}' \cdot \boldsymbol{\omega}'} / |\overline{\mathbf{u}'}| |\overline{\boldsymbol{\omega}'}|_\varphi$





# Main observations & some explanations

- $H_T$  is strongly correlated with  $h$
- $H_B$  and  $H_v$  are oppositely correlated with  $H_T, h$
- $H_v$  is small, others have comparable magnitudes
- The flux is relatively more complicated in the dynamos
- *At locations where  $h$  is negative, a positive value of  $\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B})$  means negative  $\mathbf{u} \cdot (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B})$  which is expected since magnetic energy grows at the expense of kin. energy*
- *For a helical wave  $H_v = \nu(\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot \nabla^2 \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla^2 \boldsymbol{\omega}) \sim -2\nu k^2 h$ .*

$$\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} + \nabla \cdot \mathbf{F} = H_T + H_B + H_v,$$

where

$$\mathbf{F} = -2(u^2)\boldsymbol{\Omega} - 2\mathbf{u} \times (\boldsymbol{\Omega} \cdot \nabla \mathbf{a}) + \frac{p^* \boldsymbol{\omega}}{\rho},$$

and,

$$H_T = -\alpha [\mathbf{u} \cdot (\nabla T \times \mathbf{g}) + \boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (T\mathbf{g})],$$

$$H_B = \frac{1}{\rho} [\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}) + \mathbf{u} \cdot (\nabla \times (\mathbf{J} \times \mathbf{B}))],$$

$$H_v = \nu (\boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot \nabla^2 \mathbf{u} + \mathbf{u} \cdot \nabla^2 \boldsymbol{\omega}).$$

# Why is $H_T$ correlated with $h$ ?

Let us look at  $H_T$  in more detail!

$$H_T = -\alpha[u \cdot (\nabla T \times \mathbf{g}) + \boldsymbol{\omega} \cdot (T\mathbf{g})].$$

$$H_T = H_{T1} + H_{T2},$$

$$H_{T1} = \nabla \cdot (u \times (-\alpha T\mathbf{g}))$$

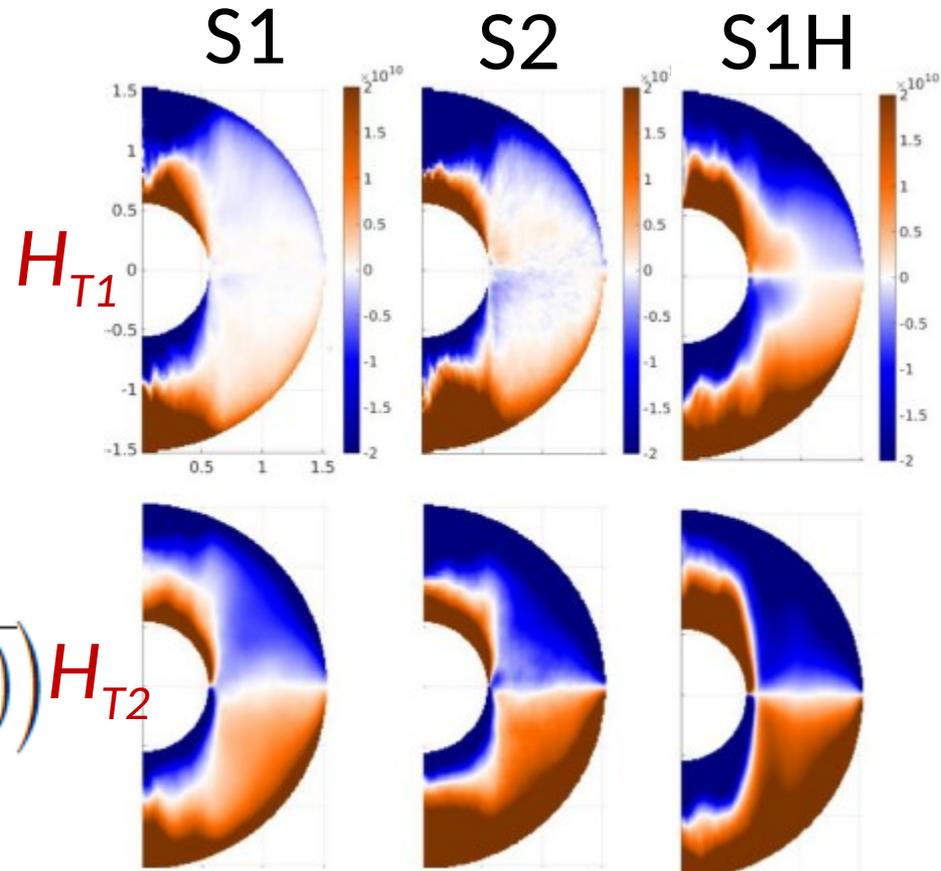
$$H_{T2} = -2\alpha u \cdot (\nabla T \times \mathbf{g}).$$

In cylindrical co-ordinates

$$\bar{H}_{T2} = \frac{2\alpha g_0}{r_0} \left( (zu_s - su_z) \frac{\partial T}{s \partial \varphi} + u_\varphi \left( s \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} - z \frac{\partial T}{\partial s} \right) \right) H_{T2}$$

Major contribution to  $H_T$  comes from

$$-u_z \partial T / \partial \varphi$$

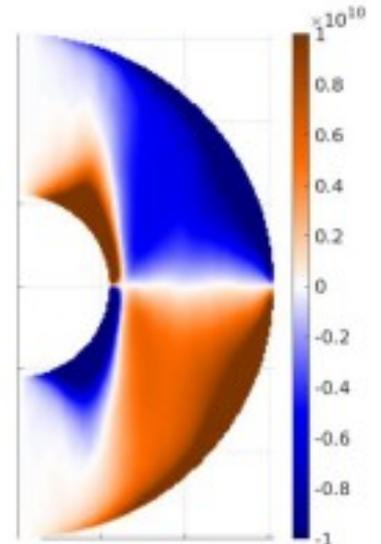
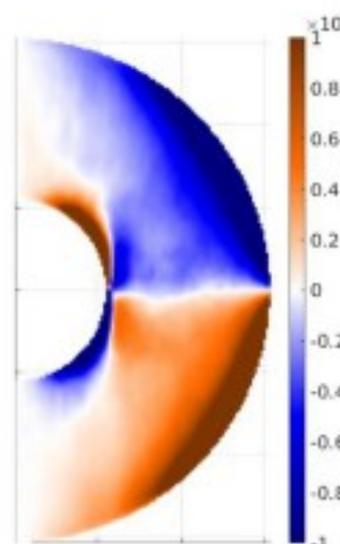
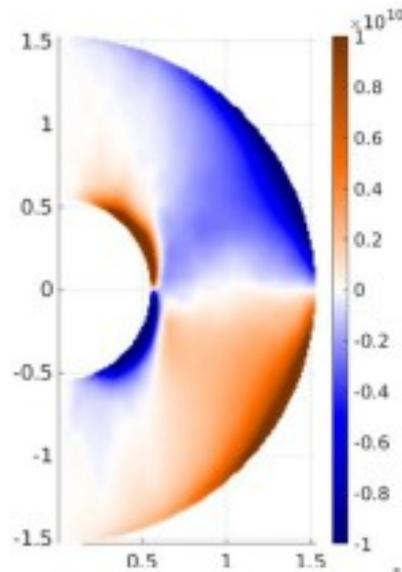


S1

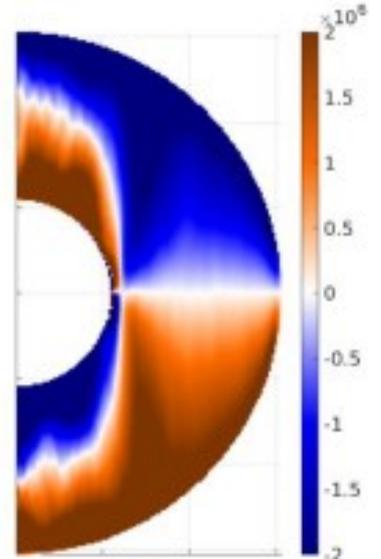
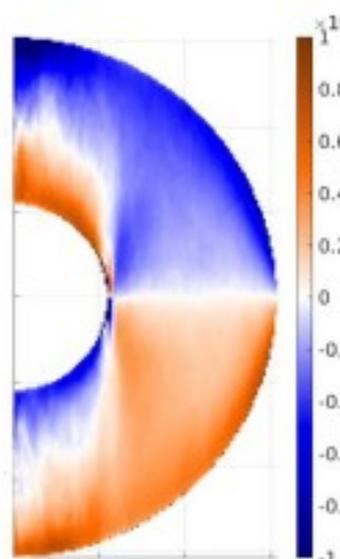
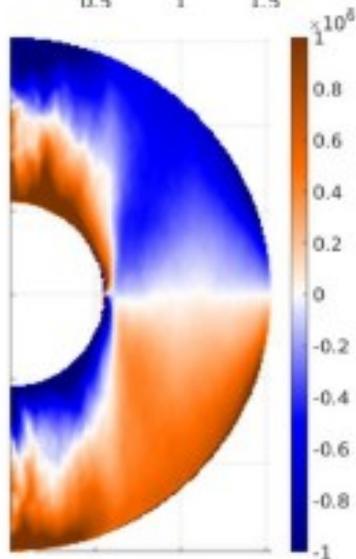
S2

S1H

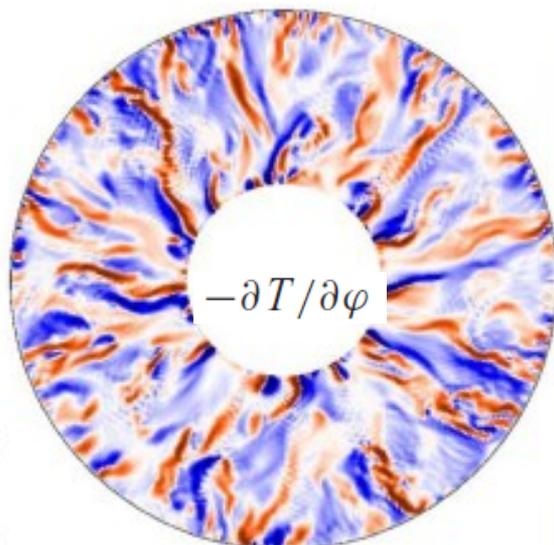
$$\langle (\alpha g_0 / r_0) \overline{(-u_z \partial T / \partial \varphi)} \rangle_\varphi$$



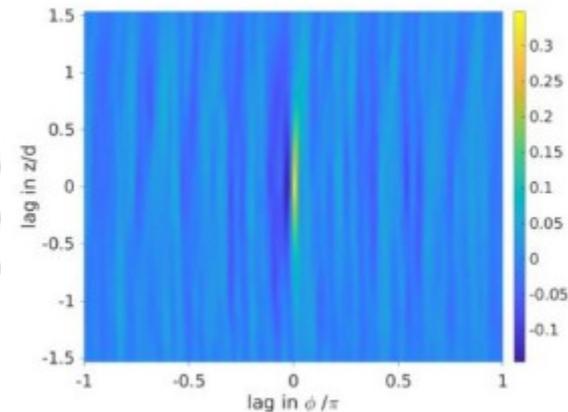
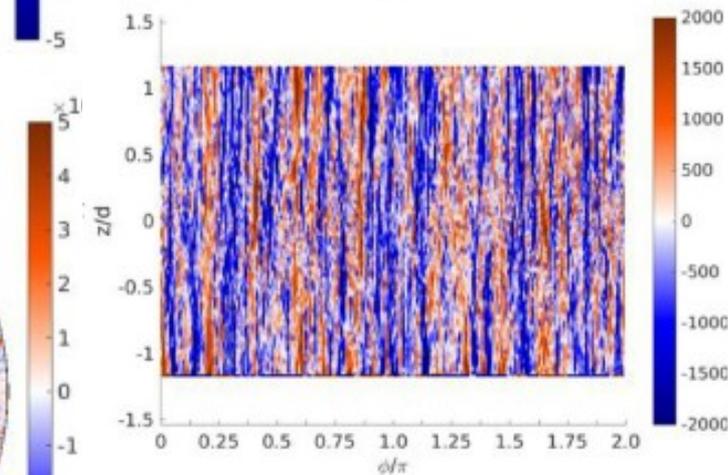
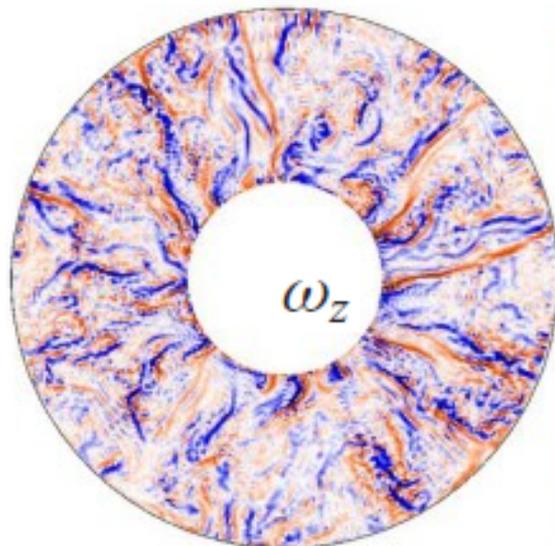
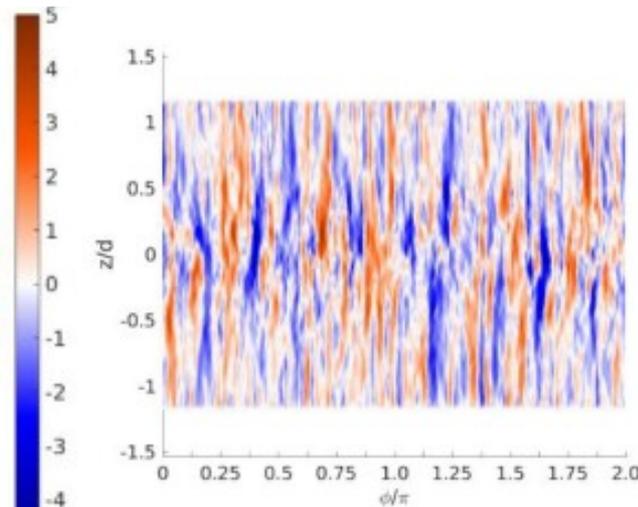
$$\langle \overline{u_z \omega_z} \rangle_\varphi$$



If  $\omega_z$  and  $-\partial T / \partial \varphi$  are positively correlated then we have an explanation why  $h$  correlates with  $H_T$



(d)



$$R_{\bar{\omega}_z, \bar{T}_\varphi}(r_z, r_\varphi) = \frac{\int_{-z_0}^{z_0} \int_0^{2\pi} \bar{\omega}_z(z, \varphi) \bar{T}_\varphi(z + r_z, \varphi + r_\varphi) d\varphi dz}{\left[ \int_{-z_0}^{z_0} \int_0^{2\pi} \bar{\omega}_z(z, \varphi)^2 d\varphi dz \int_{-z_0}^{z_0} \int_0^{2\pi} \bar{T}_\varphi(z, \varphi)^2 d\varphi dz \right]^{1/2}}$$

$\omega_z$  and  $-\partial T/\partial\varphi$  are indeed positively correlated.

But, we do not know why!

# DNS of a buoyant blob at small $Ro$

$$\frac{Du}{Dt} = -\frac{1}{\rho}\nabla\tilde{p} + \nu\frac{\partial^2\mathbf{u}}{\partial x^2} - 2\boldsymbol{\Omega}\times\mathbf{u} + \vartheta\mathbf{g}$$

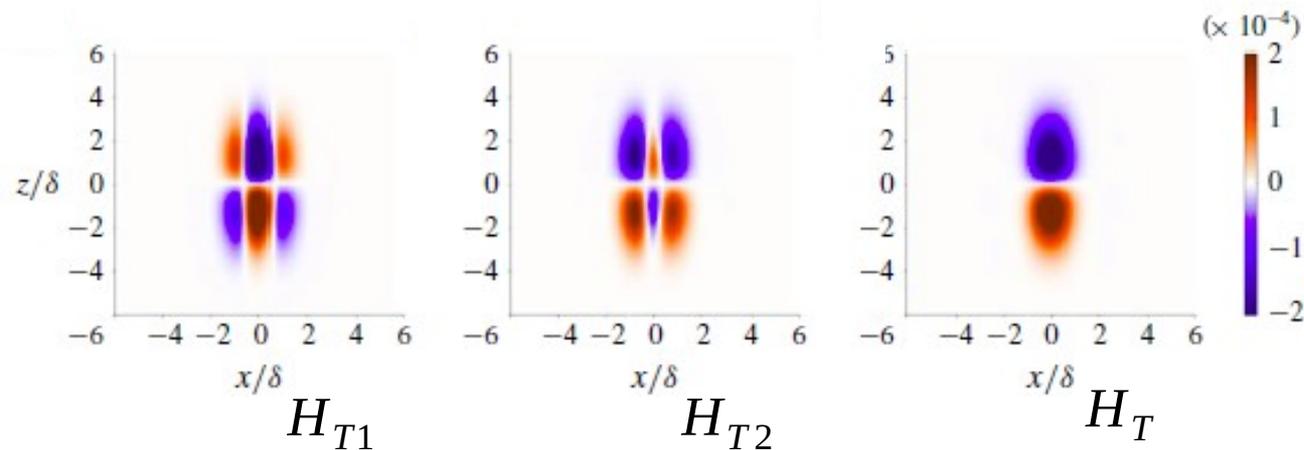
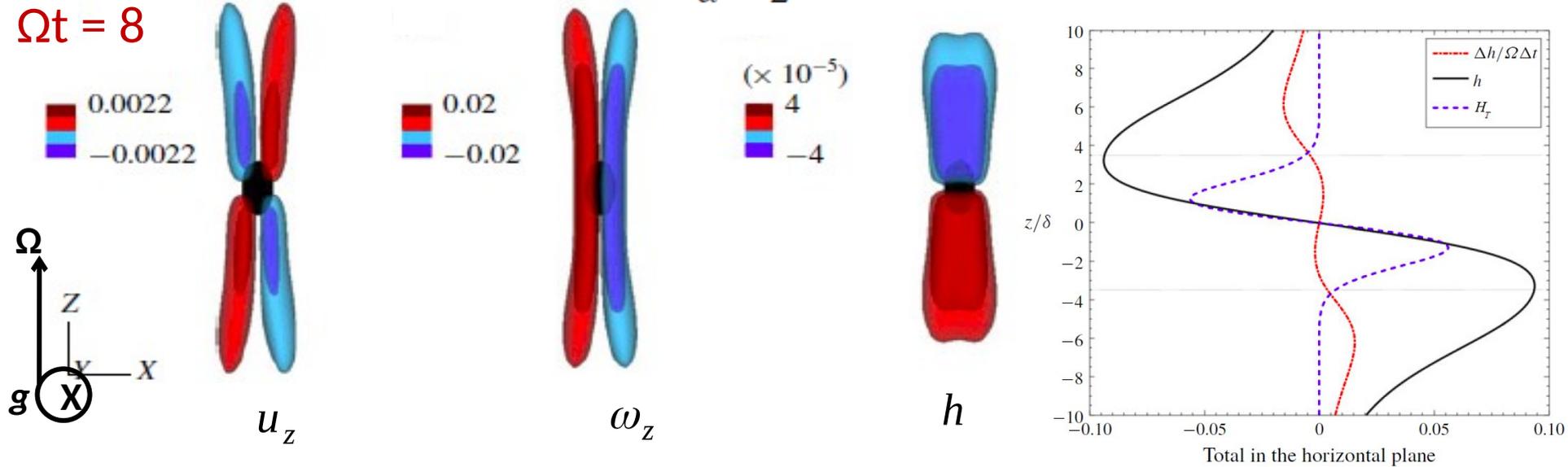
$$\vartheta = -\vartheta_0 \exp(-(x^2 + y^2)/\delta^2) \exp(-z^2/(\alpha\delta)^2)$$

$\alpha = 2$

$$\mathbf{g} = -g\hat{\mathbf{e}}_y \quad \boldsymbol{\Omega} = \Omega\hat{\mathbf{e}}_z$$

$$Ro = \vartheta_0 g / 2\Omega^2 \delta = 0.01$$

$$Ek = \nu / \Omega \delta^2 = 0.029$$

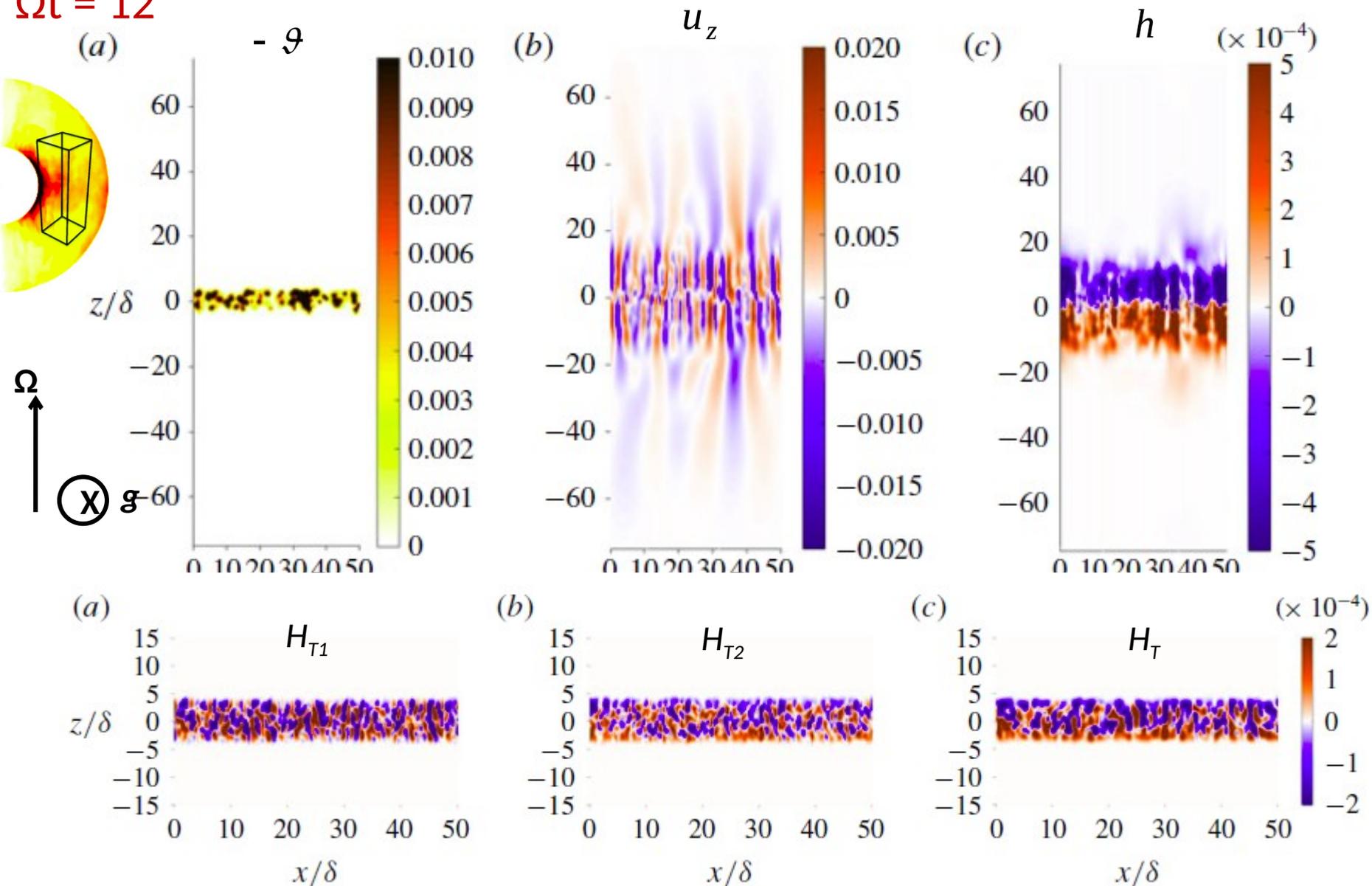


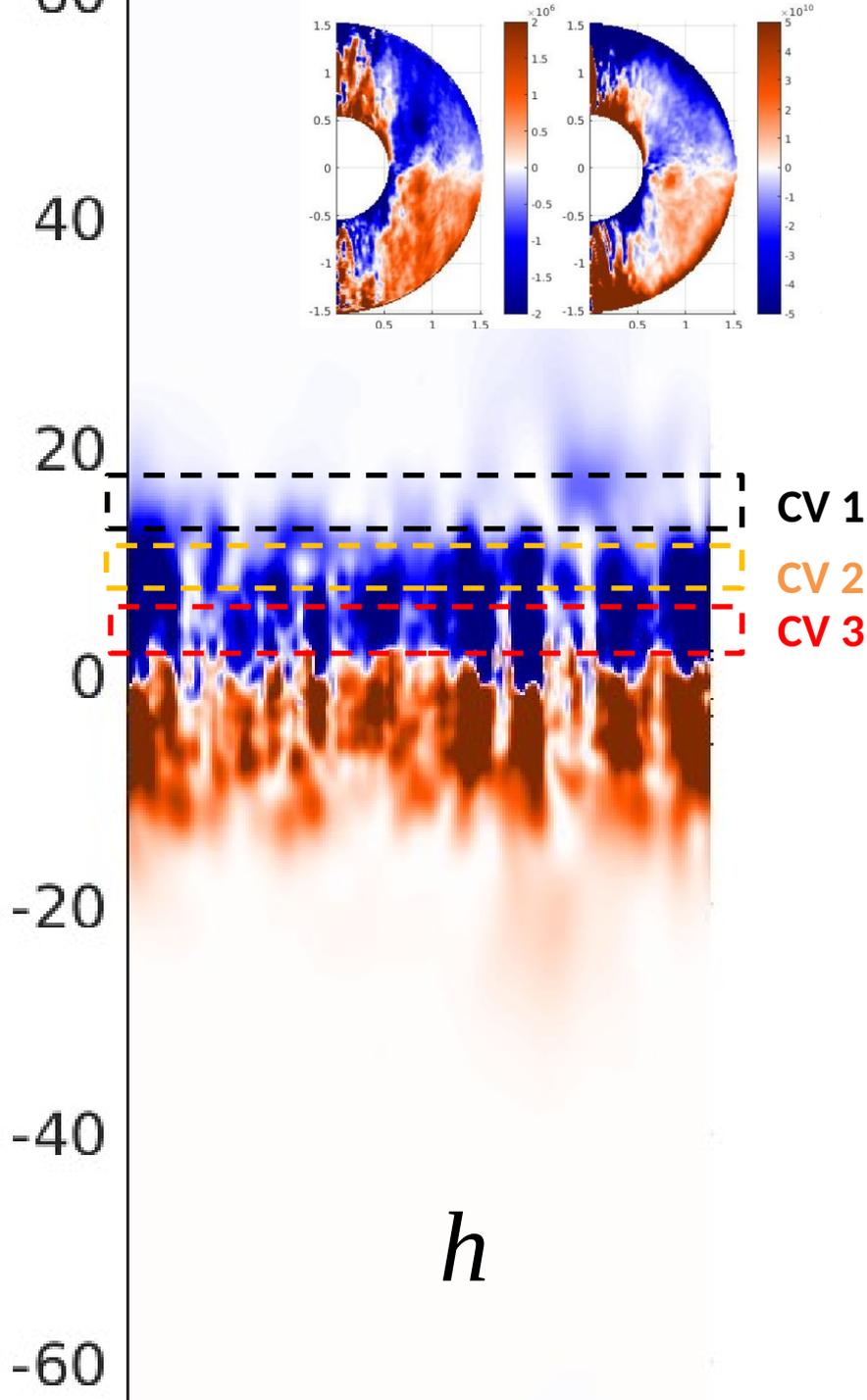
$$\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} = -\nabla \cdot \mathbf{F} + H_T$$

Once again  $h$  is correlated with  $H_T$

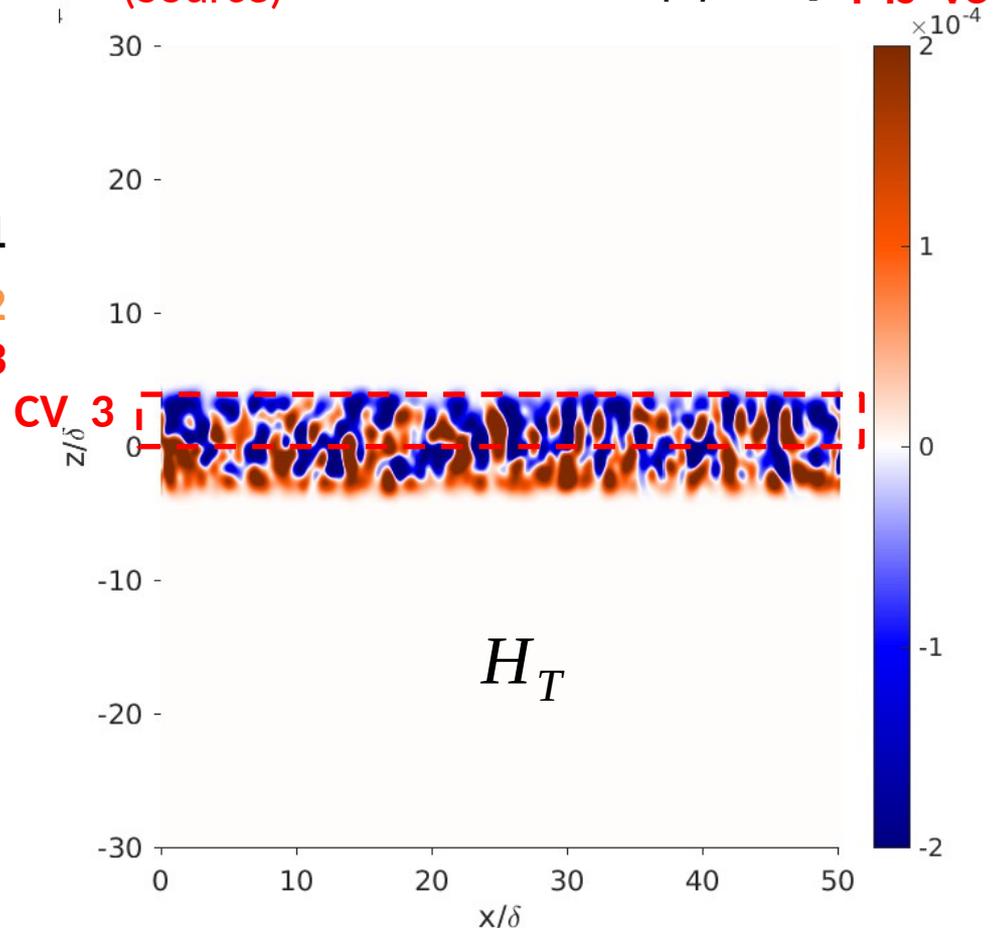
What if we have multiple blobs randomly distributed in the centre of a box?

$\Omega t = 12$

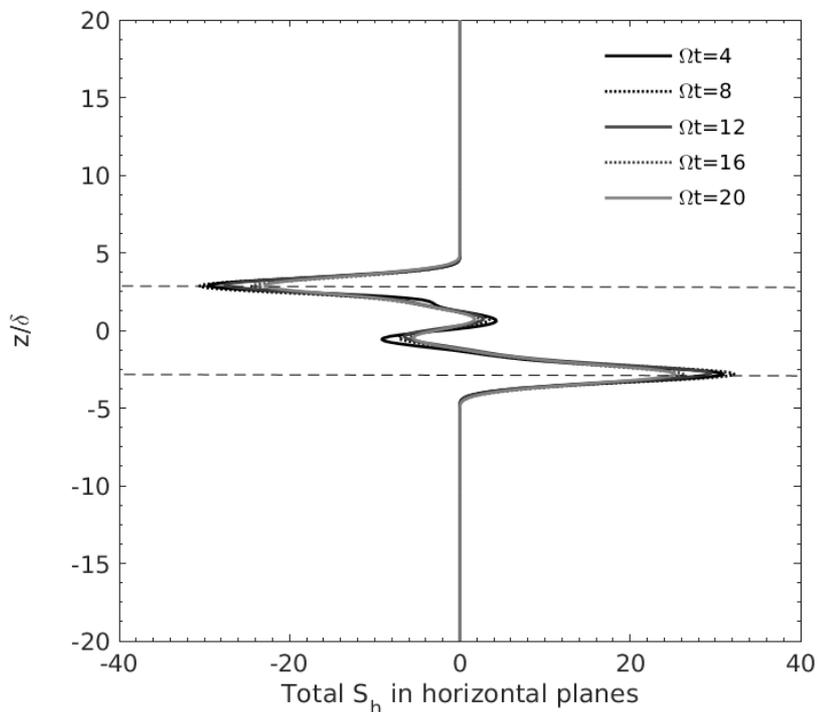
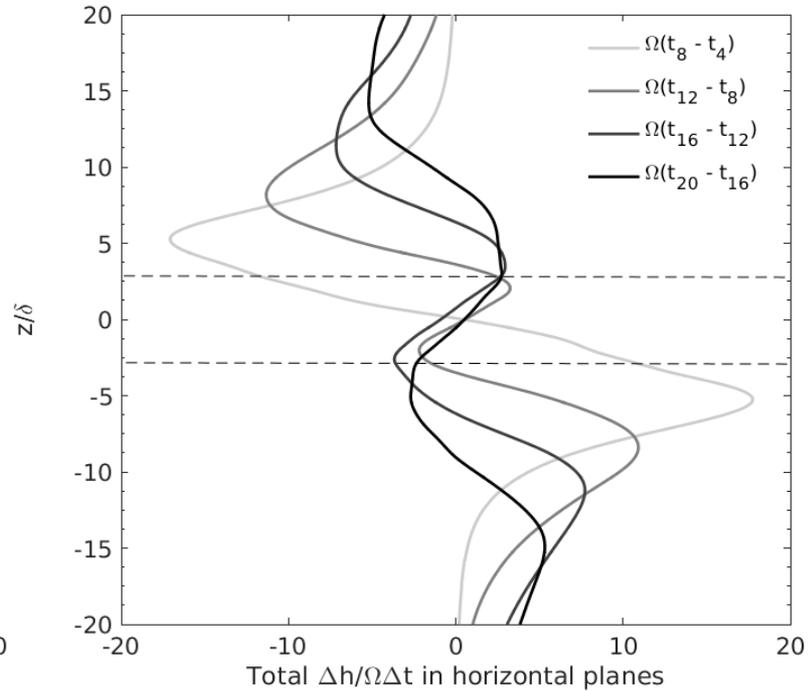
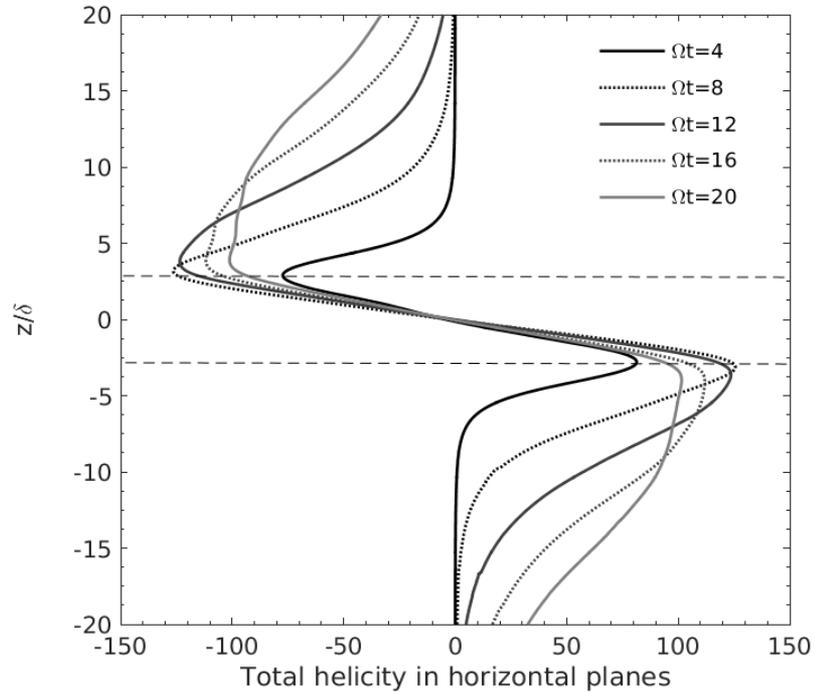




- (Front)  $Control\ Vol\ 1: \frac{\partial h}{\partial t} \approx -\nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}]$  **Div. -ve**  
**F is -ve**
- (Flux)  $Control\ Vol\ 2: \nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}] \approx 0$
- (Source)  $Control\ Vol\ 3: \nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}] \approx H_T$  **Div. +ve**  
**F is -ve**



$$\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} = -\nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}] + H_T$$



(Front) Control Vol 1:  $\frac{\partial h}{\partial t} \approx -\nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}]$

(Flux) Control Vol 2:  $\nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}] \approx 0$

(Source) Control Vol 3:  $\nabla \cdot [\mathbf{F}] \approx H_T$

## Summary & Speculations

The thermal 'source' of helicity **spontaneously** acquires the **same** sign as that of the helicity due to an **interplay** between the wave/velocity field and the buoyancy field.

**Perhaps** the same phenomena happens in the geodynamo/ non-magnetic simulations but in a statistical sense!

More work needed to understand the flux of helicity in spherical simulations.

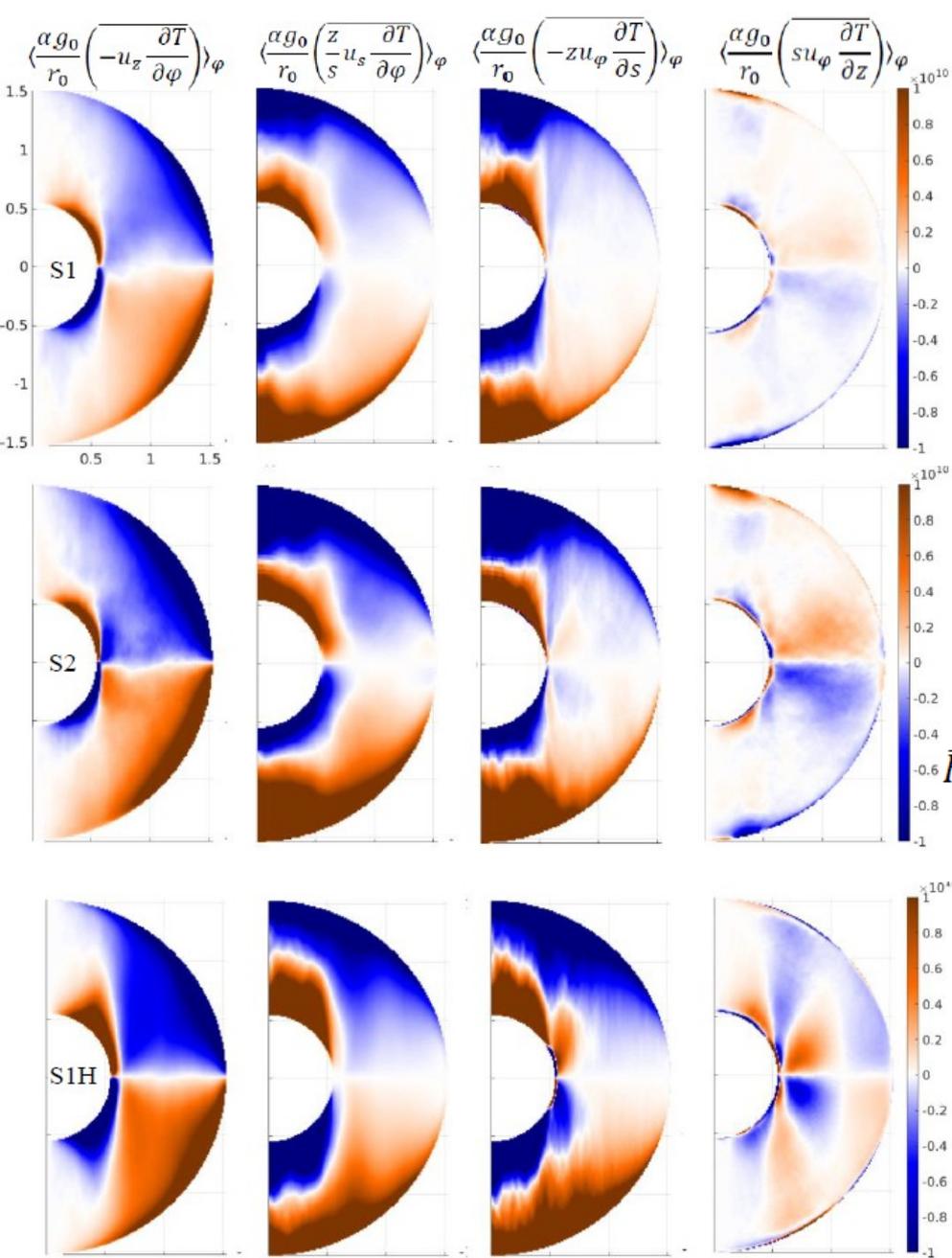
Similar model problems can be designed (e.g. with magnetic field) to probe further

# Thank You

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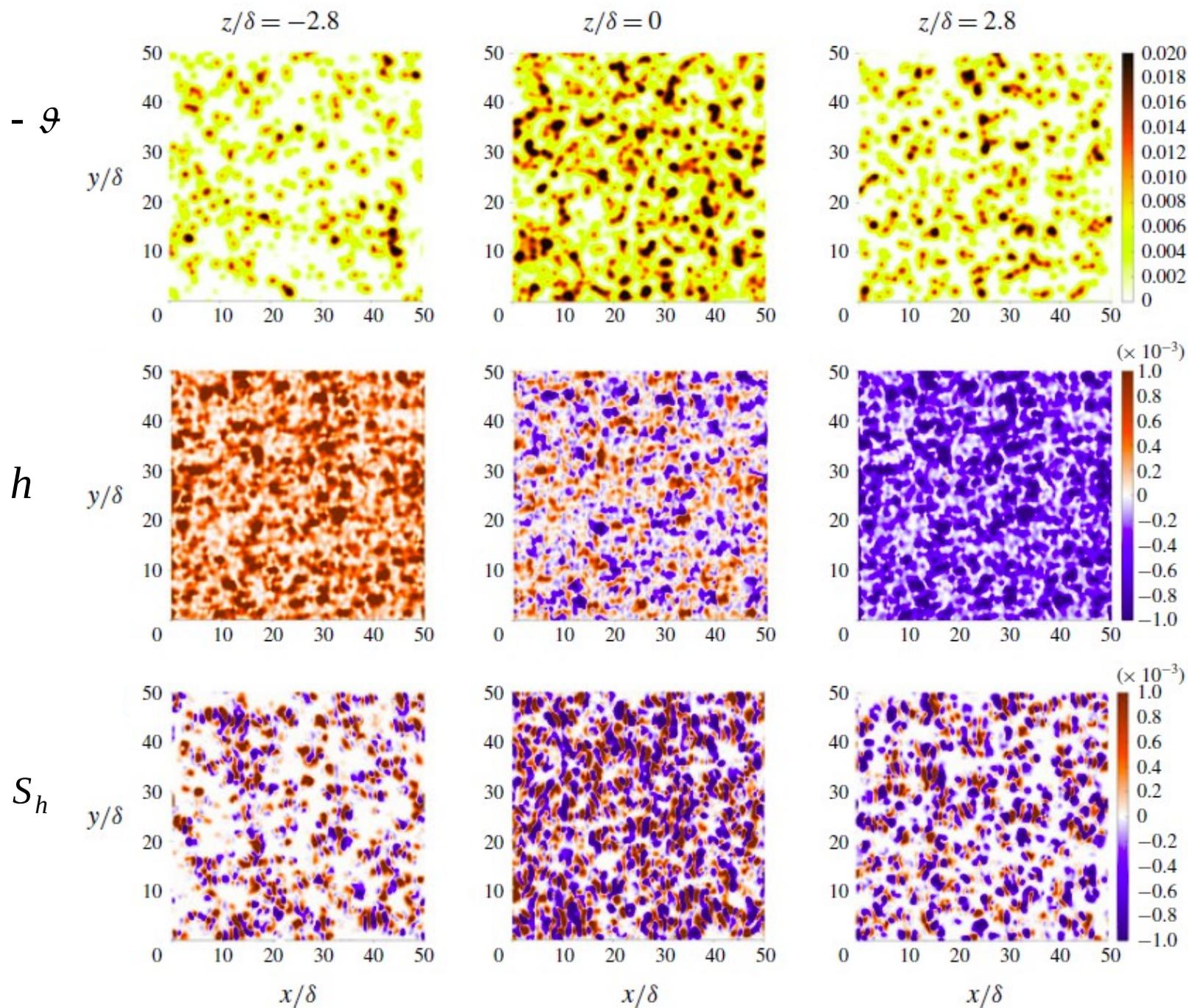


$$H_T = H_{T1} + H_{T2}$$

$$H_{T1} = \nabla \cdot (\mathbf{u} \times (-\alpha T \mathbf{g}))$$

$$H_{T2} = -2\alpha \mathbf{u} \cdot (\nabla T \times \mathbf{g})$$

$$\bar{H}_{T2} = \frac{2\alpha g_0}{r_0} \left( (z u_s - s u_z) \frac{\partial T}{s \partial \varphi} + u_\varphi \left( s \frac{\partial T}{\partial z} - z \frac{\partial T}{\partial s} \right) \right)$$



# MagIC: numerical details

Decomposing the velocity and magnetic field vectors into poloidal ( $W$ ) and toroidal ( $Z$ ) potentials,

$$\mathbf{u}(r, \theta, \phi) = \nabla \times \nabla \times [\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r W(r, \theta, \phi)] + \nabla \times [\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r Z(r, \theta, \phi)]$$

$$\mathbf{B}(r, \theta, \phi) = \nabla \times \nabla \times [\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r g(r, \theta, \phi)] + \nabla \times [\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r h(r, \theta, \phi)]$$

$$\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r \cdot \mathbf{u} = -\Delta_H W$$

$$\hat{\mathbf{e}}_r \cdot (\nabla \times \mathbf{u}) = -\Delta_H Z,$$

where,  $\Delta_H$  is the horizontal part of the Laplacian,

$$\Delta_H = \frac{1}{r^2 \sin \theta} \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \left( \sin \theta \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} \right) + \frac{1}{r^2 \sin^2 \theta} \frac{\partial^2}{\partial \phi^2}.$$

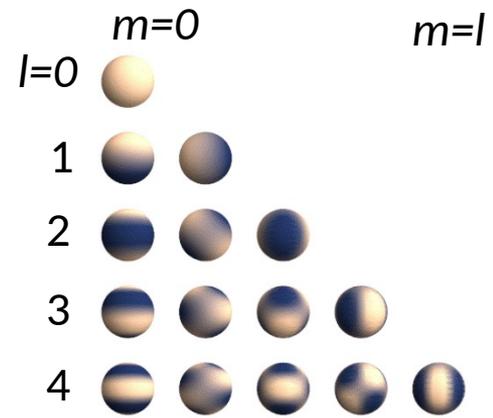
In terms of  $W$  and  $Z$ , the velocity can be written as

$$\mathbf{u}(r, \theta, \phi) = -(\Delta_H W) \hat{\mathbf{e}}_r + \left( \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial W}{\partial \theta} + \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial Z}{\partial \phi} \right) \hat{\mathbf{e}}_\theta + \left( \frac{1}{r \sin \theta} \frac{\partial W}{\partial \phi} - \frac{1}{r} \frac{\partial Z}{\partial \theta} \right) \hat{\mathbf{e}}_\phi.$$

The scalars can be expanded in spherical harmonics,

$$W(r, \theta, \phi) = \sum_{l,m} W_l^m(r) Y_l^m(\theta, \phi)$$

$$Z(r, \theta, \phi) = \sum_{l,m} Z_l^m(r) Y_l^m(\theta, \phi)$$



, where  $l$  and  $m$  denote the spherical harmonic degree and order, respectively, and  $Y_l^m(\theta, \phi) = P_l^m(\cos \theta) e^{im\phi}$ ,  $P_l^m(\cos \theta)$  is Legendre Polynomial and  $\sum_{l,m} = \sum_{l=0}^{l_{max}} \sum_{m=-l}^l$ .

Conversely,

$$W_l^m(r) = \frac{1}{\pi} \int_0^\pi W_m(r, \theta) P_l^m(\cos \theta) \sin \theta d\theta$$

$$W_m(r, \theta) = \frac{1}{2\pi} \int_0^{2\pi} W(r, \theta, \phi) e^{-im\phi} d\phi$$

The potentials can be expanded in radial direction terms of Chebyshev polynomials ( $C_n(r) = \cos[n \arccos(r)]$ ), where  $n$  is the radial index, as

$$W_l^m(r) = \sum_{n=0}^N W_{lmn} C_n(r).$$

