

# Spreading Dynamics of Water Droplets on a Completely Wetting Surface

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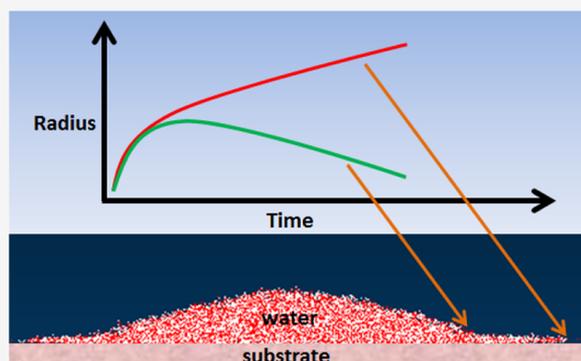
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**ABSTRACT:** The spreading of water droplets of varying sizes on a completely wetting surface where the kinetics of spreading are controlled by hydrogen bonding between substrate and water molecules is modeled for the first time using atomistic molecular dynamics simulations. The spreading observed is characterized by the bulk part of a droplet spreading over a high density monolayer of water that forms within tens of picoseconds after the droplet is placed on the surface. The monolayer exhibits two spreading regimes, each following a power law in time with different exponents, and the late stage is faster than that predicted by Tanner's law. The bulk part of the droplet initially spreads over the monolayer with increasing radius until a characteristic time  $t^*$ . Beyond  $t^*$ , it shrinks while maintaining a constant contact angle and, interestingly, the radius is described well with a first-principles model based on hydrodynamic theory. Overall, the simulation results qualitatively agree with recent experimental data.



## I. INTRODUCTION

When a droplet is brought in contact with a solid substrate with essentially zero speed, it may spread spontaneously under the influence of capillary and intermolecular forces.<sup>1,2</sup> A lot of research effort has been directed for over a century to understand the spreading dynamics of a wide variety of liquids on different types of substrates. Most of the studies focused on simple nonvolatile Newtonian droplets spreading on smooth surfaces. Theoretical investigations generally followed one of two approaches: Hydrodynamics and Molecular kinetic theory.<sup>3</sup>

The hydrodynamics theory<sup>4,5</sup> describes the characteristic features of droplet spreading in terms of an interplay between inertia, capillary, and viscous forces.<sup>4–6</sup> Just after a spherical drop is brought in contact with a substrate, the drop is initially set in motion because of a curvature gradient, i.e., a gradient of Laplace pressure, between the highly distorted edge of the drop close to the substrate and the spherical part sufficiently farther away.<sup>7</sup> In this early stage, the inertia of the drop resists the capillary driven motion, and the spreading radius has been observed to grow with time as  $r(t) \sim t^{1/2}$ , independent of surface wettability for liquids with low viscosity.<sup>8,9</sup> In the final stages, the effect of viscous forces acting in the neighborhood of the three phase contact line becomes relevant and the competition between surface tension and viscous forces results in extremely slow spreading dynamics which follows what is called Tanner's law,<sup>10</sup> according to which the radius of the wetted area varies with time as  $r(t) \sim t^{1/10}$ . The corresponding contact angle varies as  $\theta(t) \sim t^{-3/10}$ .<sup>10</sup>

In certain cases, the spreading is characterized by the emergence of a precursor film that moves ahead of the bulk part of the droplet.<sup>11–13</sup> In the case of a wettable surface, a precursor film consisting of one or more monomolecular layers has been observed to spread in front of the macroscopic part of the droplet with a radius varying with time as  $r(t) \sim t^{1/2}$ .<sup>19</sup>

In molecular kinetic theory,<sup>14–18</sup> spreading is explained in terms of the forward and backward displacement of individual molecules and/or atoms across the three phase contact line. In this case, the contact radius and contact angle vary with time as  $r(t) \sim t^{1/7}$  and  $\theta(t) \sim t^{-3/7}$ .

The total energy dissipation has contributions from hydrodynamics flow in the bulk of the droplet, viscous dissipation in the precursor film, and adsorption and desorption of molecules to the solid substrate in the vicinity of the contact line.<sup>19</sup> For small contact angles, hydrodynamic dissipation is claimed to be dominant while molecular kinetic dissipation is dominant for relatively large contact angles.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to classical continuum modeling efforts, the use of molecular dynamics simulations (MD) allows for studying the behavior of droplet spreading down to the molecular scale with the advantage that no assumptions on the moving contact

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line singularity are needed. In MD, the wetting characteristics are directly controlled by the solid–liquid interaction, which determines the equilibrium contact angle. The challenge, however, is to achieve sufficiently large drop sizes to recover a hydrodynamic regime.

Modeling the solid substrate by a smooth integrated 9–3 Lennard-Jones (LJ) potential has been observed to lead to spreading rates that were linear in time, i.e.,  $R \sim t$ , where  $R$  is the radius of the wetted area at the solid surface.<sup>21–23</sup> When the solid substrates were allowed to have a molecular structure with a 12–6 LJ potential for the liquid–solid interactions, the spreading rates were found to follow the  $R^2 \sim \log(t)$  behavior.<sup>24</sup>

Sessile droplets with two-dimensional and cylindrical configurations have been considered in previous numerical studies<sup>24–29</sup> focusing mostly on the spreading of a precursor film. In their investigations on the spreading dynamics of liquid drop on a solid substrate, De Coninck et al.<sup>26</sup> observed that the spreading rate of the precursor film varies with time as  $r(t) \sim t^{0.46 \pm 0.03}$ . Using large hemispherical drops, Heine et al.<sup>30</sup> observed the  $r(t) \sim t^{1/2}$  behavior for the precursor foot in agreement with the molecular kinetic model. In a subsequent study,<sup>31</sup> they examined the spreading dynamics of nanodroplets in a cylindrical geometry within the context of molecular kinetic theory and noted that the scaling laws in this geometry are modified such that  $r(t) \sim t^{1/5}$ .

Simulations by He and Hadjiconstantinou<sup>29</sup> showed that Tanner's law for spreading droplets could be recovered even if van der Waals effects and the resulting precursor film were limited to distances of the order of three atomic diameters from the substrate. They suggested that the precursor theory of de Gennes<sup>19</sup> could be generalized to precursors of molecular thickness in which flow is not characterized by the continuum model. Investigations by Yang et al.<sup>24</sup> on spreading of liquid drops on solid surfaces found log behavior for the growth of the average radii of the first and second layers, but the discrepancy with power laws is attributed to vapor condensation and small sample size.

Studies by Kandlikar et al.<sup>28</sup> on the spreading of a liquid water droplet in contact with a platinum surface found that the spreading area is proportional to  $t^{1/3}$ . Other studies based on MD simulations<sup>21,32</sup> reported that the spreading was much slower than that observed experimentally, and close to  $r^2(t) \approx \log(t)$ , and the precursor film was spreading linearly in time.

Recent experimental results by Kim et al.<sup>33</sup> on the spreading of water and silicon oil on textured superhydrophilic surfaces show various power laws for bulk radius, precursor foot radius, and fringe film radius which is the difference between the radii of the precursor and the bulk. They found that (i) the bulk radius initially increases but then shrinks in the late stage, (ii) the precursor foot radius is proportional to  $t^{1/4}$ , and (iii) the fringe film radius is faster than diffusive for the entire time of spreading.

The review so far indicates that the spreading of liquid droplets on solid substrates is not yet a completely understood phenomenon. In addition to acquiring fundamental insights into spreading phenomena, a thorough understanding of the spreading behavior of droplets in contact with surfaces is important for many practical applications such as coating, corrosion protection, self-cleaning surfaces,<sup>34,35</sup> evaporation,<sup>36</sup> micro- and nanofluidics,<sup>37–43</sup> and biotechnology<sup>44</sup> that rely on the spreading behavior of water droplets on surfaces. However, none of previous simulation studies have investigated the

spreading dynamics of water droplets on real surfaces. In this work, we have attempted to gain a better understanding of spreading processes using large-scale molecular dynamics simulations to examine the spontaneous spreading behavior of water nanodroplets of various initial sizes on a completely wetting surface. Simulation results are used to obtain scaling relationships for describing the temporal variation of spreading radius and the effect of droplet size on the spreading characteristics. Our simulation results show similar trends as the experimental results for bulk and precursor foot radii.<sup>33</sup>

## II. COMPUTATIONAL DETAILS

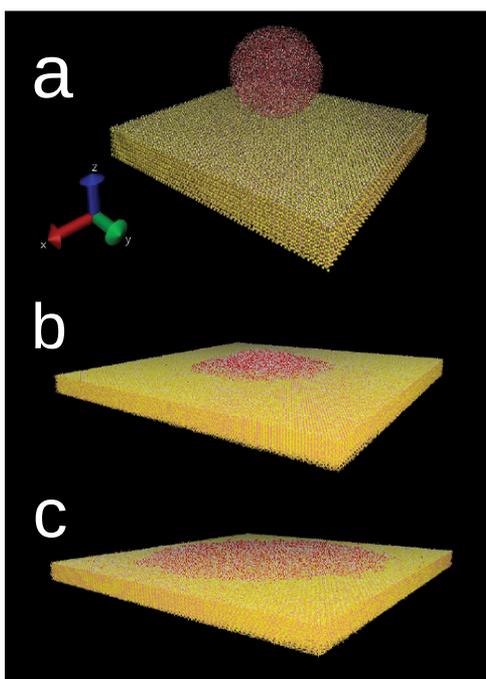
A widely used material in catalysis is aluminum oxide, often referred to as alumina. Alumina is used as a catalyst and catalyst support, as a substrate in microelectronic devices, and in many other applications. In this work, the (0001) crystallographic face of corundum  $\alpha\text{-Al}_2\text{O}_3$  (space group  $R\bar{3}c$ )<sup>45</sup> was used to model an OH-terminated alumina solid substrate.<sup>46</sup> The CLAYFF force field<sup>46,47</sup> was implemented to simulate the solid substrate. CLAYFF is based on an ionic (nonbonded) description of the metal–oxygen interactions associated with hydrated phases. All atoms are represented as point charges and are allowed complete translational freedom within this force field framework. Metal–oxygen interactions are based on a simple Lennard-Jones (12–6) potential combined with electrostatics.

The SPC/E model was used to simulate water.<sup>48</sup> The model is known to reproduce well structural and dynamic properties of bulk water. The bonds and angles of water molecules were kept fixed by employing the SHAKE algorithm. Nonbonded interactions were modeled by means of dispersive and electrostatic forces. The electrostatic interactions were modeled by a Coulombic potential. The dispersive interactions were modeled with a 12–6 LJ potential. The LJ parameters for unlike interactions were determined by Lorentz-Berthelot mixing rules.<sup>49</sup> The cutoff distance for all interactions was 12 Å. Long-range corrections to electrostatic interactions were treated using the particle–particle/particle mesh (PPPM) method.<sup>50</sup>

The LAMMPS<sup>51</sup> simulation package was employed for all simulations of droplets with radii ranging from 20 to 60 Å. The dimensions of the substrate in the lateral ( $x$ - $y$ ) directions were set to approximately 41.2 nm  $\times$  41.6 nm, for a total surface area of  $\sim 1700$  nm<sup>2</sup>. The total length of the simulation box along the  $z$  direction is  $\sim 130$  Å. The dimensions of the simulation box were chosen in such a way that there was enough vacuum above and below the combined system and the lateral dimensions were large enough to ensure that periodic images of a water droplet do not interact with each other. Periodic boundary conditions were applied in the three directions. The simulations were performed in the canonical NVT ensemble at 300 K. The Nosé–Hoover thermostat<sup>52,53</sup> with a relaxation time of 100 fs was used to keep the system temperature fixed at 300 K. The equations of motion were solved using the velocity-Verlet algorithm with a time step of 1.0 fs. Trajectory data were saved every 2 ps. The duration of a run was dependent on the droplet size. It took 1 ns for the 20 Å droplet to completely wet the sapphire surface, while the 50 Å droplet ran out of space within 10 ns.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

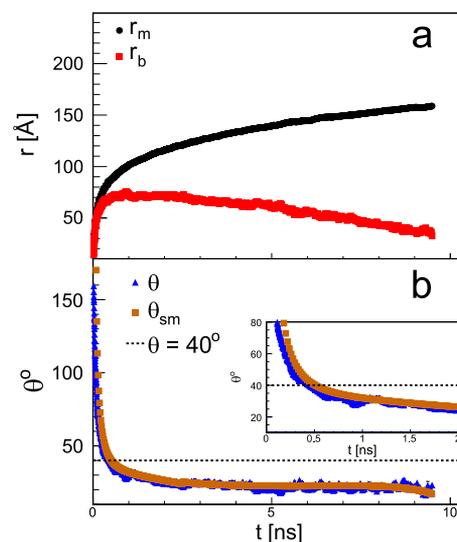
All the droplets considered had a spherical shape just before touching the substrate. Each droplet initially starts to spread due to a pressure gradient between the edge of the drop in contact with the substrate and the spherical part which is sufficiently farther away. We have observed that the water molecules frequently form and break hydrogen bonds with the substrate OH-groups. In a previous study,<sup>54</sup> we showed that water molecules involved in the formation and breaking of hydrogen bonds with a substrate diffused much slower than those in a bulk environment. This would have an effect on the spreading behavior of water on a hydrophilic surface with functional groups capable of forming hydrogen bonding. The shape of the droplet changes from spherical to a spherical cap over time. Figure 1 shows snapshots of a water droplet of initial spherical geometry at times  $t = 0$  ns (a),  $t = 1$  ns (b), and  $t = 12$  ns (c).



**Figure 1.** Snapshots of a 40 Å water droplet on sapphire at (a)  $t = 0$  ns, (b) at  $t = 1$  ns, and (c)  $t = 12$  ns. Substrate surface OH groups are not shown for clarity.

Figure 2 shows the temporal evolution of the geometrical parameters associated with a droplet of initial radius  $R_0 = 40$  Å (see Figure S1 of the Supporting Information). The spreading observed is characterized by the bulk part of a droplet spreading over a high density layer of water that forms within tens of picoseconds after the droplet is placed on the surface. The high density layer of water, referred to as a monolayer in this work since it has molecular dimensions, spreads in such a way that it eventually overtakes the bulk part. Figure S2 in the supporting material shows the final water density profiles of all the droplets considered on the sapphire substrate. It is clear from the plots that complete wetting has occurred for droplets with radii  $R \leq 40$  Å. For  $R \geq 45$  Å, the substrate was not large enough to observe complete wetting. It appears that all droplets give rise to similar monolayer thicknesses.

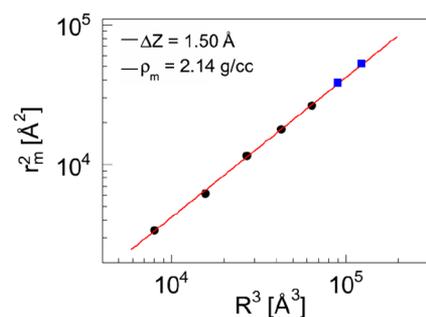
The monolayer radius  $r_m$  increases monotonically with time while the height (see Figure S3 of the Supporting Information)



**Figure 2.** Time variation of the geometric parameters of a 40 Å droplet as it spreads over the sapphire substrate. (a) Monolayer radius  $r_m$  and bulk radius  $r_b$ , (b) contact angle  $\theta$  and the contact angle  $\theta_{sm}$  that would be obtained with the small angle approximation<sup>55</sup> for given values of the monolayer and bulk radii. As shown in the lower part, the small angle approximation holds for  $\theta < 40^\circ$  (dashed line). The inset highlights the early time region.

and contact angle of the bulk part decrease with time. Similar to the experimental results,<sup>33</sup> the bulk part spreads with increasing radius up to a point and then its radius decreases and interestingly, in the later case, maintains a constant contact angle of  $\theta \approx 20^\circ - 25^\circ$ . It should be noted that the bulk part retains its spherical shape throughout the spreading process but eventually disappears into the monolayer.

Mass conservation for complete wetting gives the relation  $r_m^2 \propto R^3$ . Figure 3 shows the square of the monolayer radius from



**Figure 3.**  $r_m^2$  versus  $R^3$  where  $R$  is the initial radius of a droplet. Mass conservation results in the relation  $r_m^2 \propto R^3$ . The line is a linear fit restricted to the region where the initial droplet radii  $R \leq 40$  Å

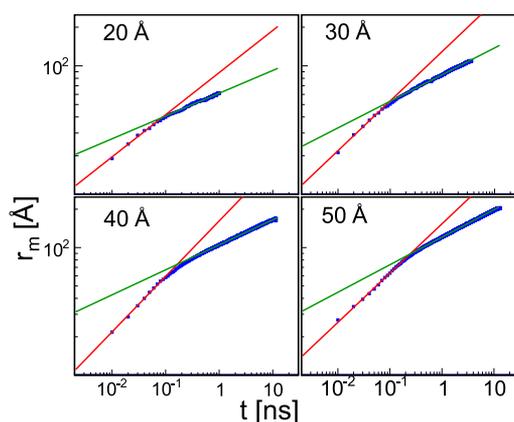
the simulation data plotted against the cube of the initial droplet radii. With setting the thickness of the monolayer to 1.5 Å based on the  $z$  distribution in Figure S4 of the Supporting Information, a linear fit to the data results in the monolayer density  $\rho_m = 2.14$  g/cm<sup>3</sup>. The fit is restricted to the region where the initial droplet radii  $R \leq 40$  Å since the larger droplets have reached the boundaries of the simulation cell, i.e., they do not have enough room for complete spreading. On the basis of the fit in Figure 3, one may estimate the maximum monolayer radius that would have been achieved for the droplets with initial radii  $R > 40$  Å if a larger

surface was available. For the droplets with  $R > 40 \text{ \AA}$ , we will use extrapolated values (square data points in Figure 3) for a discussion of the scaling behaviors of the monolayers.

The key result from this part of the investigation is that the monolayer spreading shows two power law regimes which may be fit to the expression

$$r_m(t) = At^n \quad (1)$$

Figure 4 shows the monolayer radius  $R$  vs time on sapphire surface for different initial radii of the droplets on logarithmic



**Figure 4.** Monolayer radius vs time on a log–log plot. The lines indicate the regimes with different spreading behaviors. The red and green lines are power law fits to the data points corresponding, respectively, to times smaller and greater than 200 ps.

axes. For times later than 200 ps, we observe a scaling consistent with  $r \sim t^{1/5}$  as the best fit to eq 1. It turns out that initial radius does have an influence on the spreading but only through the prefactor as shown in Table 1. The exponent  $n$  is

**Table 1.** Power Law Fit Parameters of the  $r_m$  vs Time Data for  $t > 0.2 \text{ ns}$

$R_0$	A	$n$
20 Å	61.2	0.18
30 Å	85.6	0.21
40 Å	105.2	0.20
50 Å	120.7	0.22

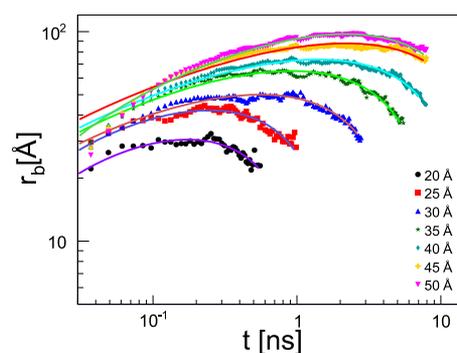
always very close to 1/5. The prefactor increases as the radius increases, such that large drops spread faster. The fit results for times earlier than 200 ps are given in Table 2. In this regime, the capillary driven motion overcomes the inertia of the droplet and forces it to adopt a spherical cap shape.<sup>8,9</sup> In this case, the spreading still follows a power law but the radius of the droplet affects both the prefactor and the exponent. It appears that the larger the droplet, the faster it spreads until the transition point is reached.

**Table 2.** Power Law Fit Parameters of the  $r_m$  vs Time Data for  $0.02 < t < 0.2 \text{ ns}$

$R_0$	A	$n$
20 Å	88.64	0.33
30 Å	129.92	0.39
40 Å	161.83	0.44
50 Å	153.54	0.39

We observe a significantly slower growth,  $r_m(t) \sim t^{1/5}$ , in the late stages of spreading irrespective of droplet size (see Table 1), but one that is faster than the prediction by Tanner's law ( $r_m(t) \sim t^{1/10}$ ). These departures in behavior may be due to molecular structure of the substrate as well as the types of the interparticle interactions involved. In contrast to previous experimental and theoretical results, the monolayer radius does not suggest diffusive behavior for which  $R(t) \sim t^{1/2}$ , which is also the obvious theoretical expectation, on the grounds that phenomena at scales below the hydrodynamic continuum are dominated by molecular diffusion. On the basis of the fact that the droplets completely wet the surface resulting eventually in a monolayer, the results for the late stage of spreading rule out a diffusive regime at larger time scales, at least for the droplet sizes considered in this work.

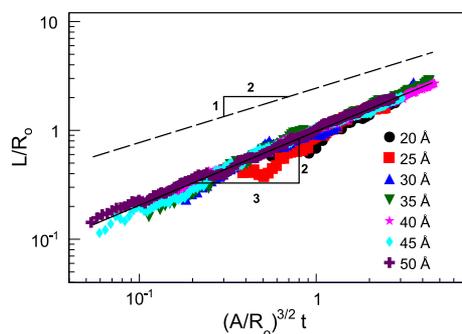
We would like to compare our simulation results with recent experimental results by Kim et al.<sup>33</sup> on the spreading of water and silicon oil droplets of various radii on textured superhydrophilic surfaces. They found the precursor foot radius or the monolayer radius to follow  $r_m \sim t^{1/4}$  which is slightly faster than the  $r_m \sim t^{1/5}$  we found from our simulations. We would like to note that the monolayer radii from the simulations initially increase at a much faster rate than  $t^{1/4}$  (Table 2) and then change to a slower rate of  $t^{1/5}$  (Table 1) at the late stage. Our bulk radius data, shown in Figure 2 and also in Figure S3 for all the droplets, show similar behavior as the experimental bulk radii shown in Figure 8 of ref 33, i.e., the bulk radius increases initially and then shrinks in the late stage. Furthermore, they predicted the initial increase to be proportional to  $t^{1/4}$  and the late decrease to be proportional to  $t^{1/2}$  and a fit to their experimental data shows a good agreement with their prediction. In Figure 5, we show that



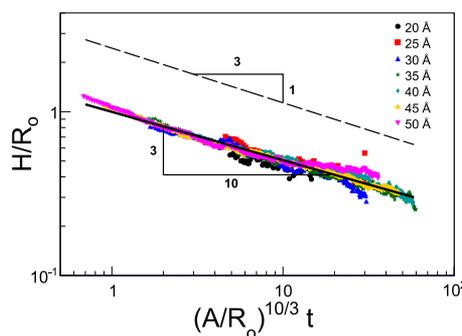
**Figure 5.** Time evolution of the bulk radius. The solid lines are fitting curves with the model  $r_b \sim At^{1/4} - Bt^{1/2}$  provided in ref 32.

their prediction also agrees well with our simulation data especially in the late stage. We also computed the fringe film radius ( $r_m - r_b$ ) from our simulations in order to compare with the experimental results. Interestingly, our simulation (see Figure 6) and the experiment show a similar dependence of  $t^{2/3}$ , which is faster than a diffusive behavior of  $t^{1/2}$ , for the fringe film radius. Put together, our simulation results help to illuminate some of the key experimental findings.

What is missing from the experiments is the behavior of droplet height as a function of time. Figure 7 shows droplet heights scaled by their initial droplet radius for all droplets. The data collapse onto a single curve when the time is scaled by  $(A/R_0)^{10/3}$ , where  $A$  is the power law coefficient and increase as  $t^{3/10}$ .



**Figure 6.** Time evolution of the scaled fringe film radius where  $L = r_m - r_b$ ,  $A$  is the power law coefficient, and  $R_0$  is the initial droplet radius.



**Figure 7.** Time evolution of the scaled droplet height, where  $A$  is the power law coefficient and  $R_0$  is the initial droplet radius.

#### IV. HYDRODYNAMICS THEORY

Much of the computational work in the literature deals with mostly viscous liquids with liquid–liquid and liquid–solid interactions modeled with simple Lennard-Jones potentials. The spreading behaviors observed with such systems exhibit spreading characteristics only without the reduction in the bulk radius in the presence of an expanding precursor film. The spreading behavior of water droplets on sapphire involves both spreading and shrinkage of the bulk part as a result of mass conservation that couples the monolayer radius to the bulk radius. Starov et al.<sup>55</sup> have experimentally observed behavior similar to what we see in our simulation data with silicon oil droplets on dry and fully saturated porous substrates. They have developed a hydrodynamic theory making use of the small angle approximation to describe their data. Thinking along the same lines, we argue that the motion of the bulk part of the droplet above the monolayer is a superposition of two motions: the spreading of the drop over the monolayer which leads to an expansion of the drop base, and imbibition into the monolayer causing the drop base to shrink. The spreading behavior of the bulk part of the droplet is thus a result of the interplay between the two competing processes. The time dependence of the bulk radius is thus characterized by a fast rise to a maximum and a slow decrease toward zero in the final complete wetting state.

Following the work of Starov et al.<sup>55</sup> with spreading of nonvolatile liquids over porous substrates, we assume that the decrease with time of the drop volume above the monolayer is determined only by the imbibition into the monolayer. This implies a dependence of the drop volume,  $V$ , only on the slow time scale. The whole spreading process can be subdivided into two stages: (1) A first stage in which the drop spreads with constant volume approximately and the imbibition into

the monolayer may be neglected. (2) A second slow stage, when the spreading process is almost already over, and the evolution is determined by the imbibition into the monolayer. For times where the small angle approximation holds, the governing equations for both the droplet base radius  $r_b$  and the monolayer radius  $r_m$  are given by<sup>55</sup>

$$\frac{dr_b}{dt} = 0.1 \left( \frac{4(V_0 - \pi m \Delta r_m^2)}{\pi} \right)^{0.3} \left( \frac{10\gamma\omega}{\eta} \right)^{0.1} \frac{1}{(t + t_0)^{0.9}}$$

$$- \frac{1}{3} \frac{\pi m \Delta K_p p_c r_b / \eta}{(V_0 - \pi m \Delta r_m^2) \ln \left( \frac{r_m}{r_b} \right)}$$

$$\frac{dr_m}{dt} = \frac{K_p p_c / \eta}{r_m \ln \left( \frac{r_m}{r_b} \right)} \quad (2)$$

where  $V_0$  is the initial volume of the droplet, and  $\gamma$  and  $\eta$  are the surface tension and the dynamic viscosity of the liquid, respectively.  $\Delta$  is the monolayer thickness,  $m$  is the porosity,  $\omega$  is the lubrication coefficient,  $K_p$  is the permeability of the monolayer, and  $p_c$  is the effective capillary pressure in the monolayer;  $t_0$  is the duration of the inertial stage of spreading when the capillary regime of spreading is not applicable. Using a 4<sup>th</sup> order Runge–Kutta algorithm, the data for each droplet are fit to the coupled differential expression given in eq 2. The value of  $t_0$  is set to 0.01 ns, the surface tension  $\gamma$  is fixed to the SPC/E value of 62.5 mN/m, and the dynamic viscosity  $\eta$  is left as a fit parameter except for the 50 Å droplet for which a reasonable fit could not be obtained and is set to the SPC/E value of 0.729 mPa-s. The resulting fit parameters are given in Table 3. As shown in Figure 8, the model very well describes

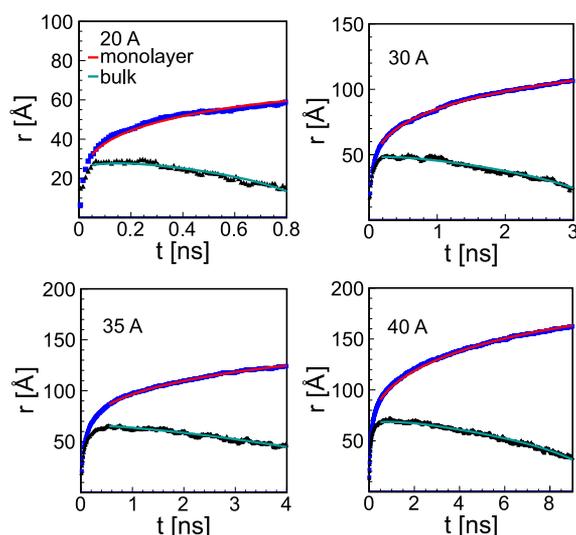
**Table 3.** Fit Parameters Obtained Using the Runge-Kutta Algorithm on the Coupled eqs 2<sup>a</sup>

$R_0$	$\eta$	$\omega$	$m\Delta$	$K_p p_c$
20 Å	0.200	$9.52 \times 10^{-2}$	2.93	0.002
30 Å	0.203	$1.15 \times 10^{-3}$	3.03	0.001
35 Å	0.260	$7.51 \times 10^{-4}$	3.22	0.002
40 Å	0.198	$5.36 \times 10^{-4}$	3.09	0.002

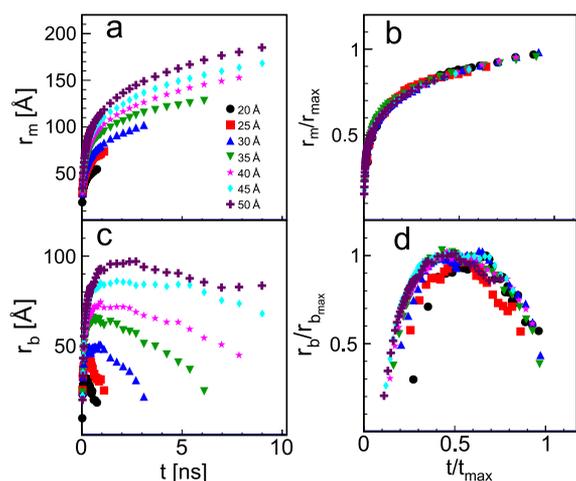
<sup>a</sup> $\gamma$  and  $\eta$  are the surface tension and the dynamic viscosity of the liquid, respectively.  $\omega$  is the lubrication coefficient,  $\Delta$  is the monolayer thickness,  $m$  is the porosity,  $K_p$  is the permeability of the monolayer, and  $p_c$  is the effective capillary pressure in the monolayer.

both the monolayer and bulk data qualitatively within the range of its validity which is the regime of low contact angles. This result suggests that the theory developed for microdroplets appears to work even at the nanoscale.

The theory also predicts a scaling of the monolayer radius  $r_m$  at complete wetting with respect to the maximum monolayer radius  $r_{m_{max}}$  and the time  $t_{m_{max}}$  taken by the monolayer to attain its maximum radius. The bulk radius  $r_b$  with respect to the maximum value  $r_{b_{max}}$  it attains when the monolayer transitions from the earliest power law regime to the late power law regime also shows a scaling behavior. Figure 9 shows the raw and scaled data for the monolayer and the bulk radii for all droplets. Each monolayer radius is scaled by the corresponding maximum radius achieved at complete wetting for initial radius  $R_0 < 40$  Å. Spreading time is scaled by the maximum time required for complete wetting. As mentioned before, the



**Figure 8.** R vs time fits using a fourth order Runge–Kutta algorithm with the coupled differential expression given in eq 2.



**Figure 9.** (a) Monolayer radius  $r_m$  versus time, (b) scaled monolayer radius  $r_m/r_{max}$  vs  $t/t_{max}$  where  $r_{max}$  is the maximum radius of a monolayer at complete wetting and  $t_{max}$  is the time to attain  $r_{max}$ , (c) bulk radius  $r_b$  versus time, and (d) scaled bulk radius  $r_b/r_{b,max}$  vs  $t/t_{max}$  where  $r_{b,max}$  is the maximum bulk radius attained.

maximum monolayer radii for the droplets with initial radii 45 and 50 Å are obtained by extrapolation using the fit shown in Figure 3, and the corresponding maximum times for these two cases are estimated using eq 1 for the late stage of spreading. As shown in Figure 9b,d, the data appear to collapse onto single master curves when  $r_m/r_{max}$  and  $r_b/r_{b,max}$  are plotted as a function of  $t/t_{max}$ .

## V. SUMMARY

Water in contact with surfaces is ubiquitous, and the challenge of understanding and quantifying this interaction has immense implications for the design of materials in many different applications including medicine, sustainability, and engineering applications. To this end, the spreading behavior of water droplets of varying sizes on a completely wetting surface has been investigated using fully atomistic molecular dynamic simulations. The dynamics observed are characterized by a monolayer of high density water of molecular dimensions that

moves ahead of the main bulk part of the droplet. The bulk part of the droplet initially spreads over the monolayer with increasing radius until a characteristic time  $t^* \sim 0.1$ – $0.5$  ns where the monolayer changes from one power law behavior to another. For times after  $t^*$ , it shrinks while maintaining a constant contact angle until it disappears altogether and only a monolayer of water remains on the substrate. The monolayer motion exhibits two spreading regimes, each following a power law in time with different exponents. The values of the exponents indicate a nondiffusive motion of the monolayer edge in both time regimes. The late stage monolayer dynamics are faster than that predicted by Tanner's law. Whether this is typical of completely wetting surfaces or is somehow related to the liquid being water remains to be resolved. A first-principles model based on hydrodynamic theory has been shown to describe the spreading data rather well in the regime where the low contact angle approximation holds. The scaling of both the monolayer and the bulk radii by the maximum monolayer radius  $r_{max}$  and time by the maximum time  $t_{max}$  for the monolayer to reach  $r_{max}$  collapses the data onto single master curves.

## ■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

### Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge at <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.jpcc.0c05167>.

Cartoon representation of the water droplet, water droplet profiles, small angle approximation, number distributions of water molecules in monolayer, mass conservation, time dependence of monolayer and base radii (PDF)

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### Notes

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