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Marine biomass changes after the Neoproterozoic Marinoan Glaciation in Australia

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The late Neoproterozoic Marinoan glaciation (ca. 635 Ma) was one of the most severe ice ages in the Earth history. It is thought that the glaciation affected the biosphere and caused some succeeding evolutionary events, such as the occurrence of the Lantian biota, the first known macroscopic multicellular eukaryotes (Yuan et al., 2011, 2013). We analyzed sedimentary organic molecules from post-Marinoan deposits in three Australian cores and a section: the Wallara-1 drillhole in the Amadeus Basin, the GILES-1 drillhole in the Officer Basin, the SCYW79-1A drillhole in the Adelaide Geosyncline, and the Moonlight Valley type section in the Kimberley region.

The analysis identified more than 10 types of sedimentary organic molecule, and some of these were used as indicators of biomass for this time. The trends and correlations among the indicators through the researched formations revealed that sum of pristane and phytane (biomass of photosynthetic organisms), 2-alpha-methylhopane (biomarker of cyanobacteria), aryl isoprenoids (photosynthetic organisms and/or green sulfur bacteria), and Cholestane (biomarker of eukaryotes) relative to total organic carbon (TOC) had a positive peak(s) in the lowermost Ediacaran System, which represents an increase in biomass of photosynthetic organisms and eukaryotes immediately after the retreat of the Marinoan glacier, probably caused by an increased nutrient flux to the sea. Except for aryl isoprenoids, those indicators relative to TOC increased through the upper part of the lowermost Ediacaran formations, which may correspond to a recovery and/or evolution of eukaryotes after the Marinoan glaciation.

Yuan, X., Chen Z., Xiao, S., Wan, B., Guan, C., Wang, W., Zhou, C. & Hua, H. (2013) The Lantian biota: A new window onto the origin and early evolution of multicellular organisms. Chinese Science Bulletin 58, 701-707.

Yuan, X., Chen, Z., Xiao, S., Zhou, C. & Hua, H. (2011) An early Ediacaran assemblage of macroscopic and morphologically differentiated eukaryotes. Nature Letter 470, 390-393.

Keywords: Organic Geochemistry, Neoproterozoic, Ediacara, Marinoan Glaciation