



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

## Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran phosphorites of northern Mongolia

**Citation for published version:**

Anderson, RP, Macdonald, FA, Jones, DS, McMahon, S & Briggs, DEG 2017, 'Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran phosphorites of northern Mongolia' *Geology*, vol. 45, pp. 1079-1082. DOI: DOI:10.1130/G39576.1

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[DOI:10.1130/G39576.1](https://doi.org/10.1130/G39576.1)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Geology

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Geology

## Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran phosphorites of northern Mongolia --Manuscript Draft--

<b>Manuscript Number:</b>	G39576R1
<b>Full Title:</b>	Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran phosphorites of northern Mongolia
<b>Short Title:</b>	Latest Ediacaran Doushantuo-type microfossils from Mongolia
<b>Article Type:</b>	Article
<b>Keywords:</b>	Ediacaran; Doushantuo; fossil embryos; acritarchs; phosphatization
<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Ross Peter Anderson Yale University New Haven, Connecticut UNITED STATES
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	Yale University
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>	
<b>First Author:</b>	Ross Peter Anderson
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Ross Peter Anderson Francis Alexander Macdonald David S Jones Sean McMahan Derek Ernest Gilmor Briggs
<b>Order of Authors Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Manuscript Region of Origin:</b>	MONGOLIA
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>Phosphorites of the latest Ediacaran upper Khesen Formation in the Khuvsgul Group of northern Mongolia preserve a newly discovered, three-dimensionally phosphatized Doushantuo-type microfossil assemblage. Eight genera include the second occurrence of the putative multicellular fossil animal embryo <i>Megasphaera</i> outside South China, the Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphic acritarchs <i>Appendisphaera</i>, <i>Cavaspina</i>, and <i>Variomargosphaeridium</i>, and the possible alga <i>Archaeophycus yunnanensis</i>. The assemblage occurs in the lowermost phosphorite horizon in foreland basin deposits on the Khuvsgul terrane; lithostratigraphic and <math>^{13}\text{C}</math> correlation with the Zavkhan terrane of southwestern Mongolia establish a latest Ediacaran age for the fossiliferous phosphorites. Thus, this is the youngest Doushantuo-type assemblage yet reported. It extends the range of <i>Megasphaera</i>, filling a gap in the record of phosphatized embryo-like forms between the ~600 Ma Doushantuo Weng'an Biota and Cambrian examples. The Khesen fossil assemblage emphasizes the potential of Mongolian phosphorites to provide new paleontological data on the Ediacaran-Cambrian transition, and to resolve the phylogenetic debate surrounding <i>Megasphaera</i> embryo-like taxa.</p>
<b>Response to Reviewers:</b>	<p>Response to reviewer's comments</p> <p>Line 116. I believe that the specimens in Fig. 3B and 3C represent <i>Cavaspina acuminata</i>. They have too short and small processes to be <i>Tanarium</i>.</p> <p>We have removed the reference to <i>Tanarium</i>. However, our fossils most closely resemble <i>Cavaspina basiconica</i> from the Doushantuo Formation (Xiao et al., 2014, J. Paleo.) which has larger numbers of more densely packed processes and can reach</p>

larger sizes more similar to those of our specimens than to the type material of *Cavaspina acuminata* from Siberia. Please see lines 102–108 in the revised manuscript.

Line 137. Correct the citation: it is fig. 103 parts 6, 7, and 18 in Liu et al., 2014 (not fig. 117).

We have corrected the citation as suggested. Please see lines 126–127 in the revised manuscript.

Lines 162-164. The morphologically complex acanthomorphic microfossils of the Pertatataka-Doushantuo type are actually known from the late Ediacaran strata in Siberia and were reported by Moczydlowska and Nagovitsin (2012 in *Precambrian Research* 198-199, 1-24) and Moczydlowska (2015, *Palynology online*, and 2016 *Palynology* 40, 1, 83-121). The cited publication Golubkova et al., 2015, deals with the East European Platform, Baltica, record of microfossils.

In the text we note that Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs are generally known from strata deposited prior to or synchronously with carbon isotope excursions interpreted to be equivalent to the Shuram carbon isotope excursion. The fossils reported in the publications of the reviewer come from the Ura and Chench Formation in Siberia. The younger of these, the Chench, was deposited synchronously with the Shuram isotope excursion (see Pokrovskii et al. 2006, *Lithology and Mineral Resources for carbon isotope stratigraphy*). In contrast the fossils of Golubkova et al. (2015) may be in the “high horizons of the Upper Vendian (Ediacaran)” presumably above the Shuram excursion. Xiao et al. (2016, *Episodes*), in their review of acanthomorph biostratigraphy for the Subcommittee on Ediacaran Stratigraphy, detail this stratigraphic arrangement: “Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs as a whole seem to be restricted to the lower Ediacaran System, below the Gaskiers-age Moelv diamictite in southern Norway and below negative 13C excursions in South China, South Australia, and Siberia that are interpreted as equivalent to the Shuram excursion. However, as mentioned above, recent reports of elements of Doushantuo- Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs in terminal Ediacaran rocks (Golubkova et al., 2015) need to be assessed critically.”

We have altered the text to make clear that the Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type assemblage is “generally” found prior to “or synchronously with carbon isotope excursions interpreted to be equivalent to the Shuram carbon isotope excursion”. Please see lines 157–160 in the revised manuscript.

We have also corrected the text by stating that the Golubkova et al. (2015) publication refers to the East European Platform rather than Siberia. Please see lines 154–156 in the revised manuscript.

Lines 165-166. I would rather say “predate the Shuram excursion” not the end of the excursion. The “end of the Shuram excursion” means that the successions of the EN3/Shuram excursion intervals contain the microfossils. In fact only the terminal Ediacaran member IV of the Doushantuo Formation is devoid insofar of the Doushantuo type microfossils in China. In Siberia and the EEP, and now in Mongolia, this type of microfossils occurs in the terminal Ediacaran strata. I agree that the record in Mongolia may be the youngest.

We have reworded this sentence to read: “Elsewhere in the world Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs occur generally in rocks that predate or are synchronous with carbon isotope excursions interpreted to be equivalent to the Shuram carbon isotope excursion (Zhou et al., 2007; Xiao et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2017)” for the reasons detailed in our response to the comment on lines 162-164 above. Please see lines 157–160 in the revised manuscript.

Line 166. I would add the recent reference to Zhou et al, 2017, *Precambrian Research*

288, 23-38.

We have added the reference as suggested. Please see lines 160 and 335–339 in the revised manuscript.

Lines 171-173. Absolutely, in Siberia and EEP, and now in Mongolia at the latest Ediacaran.

Please see our responses above to the reviewer's comments on lines 162–164 and 165–166.

Line 272. Incorrect reference. The paper by Liu et al., 2014 is published in Palaeontology Memoir 72, 1-133.

We have corrected the reference as suggested. Please see lines 261–264 in the revised manuscript.



Publisher: GSA  
Journal: GEOL: Geology  
DOI:10.1130/G39576.1

1 Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran  
2 phosphorites of northern Mongolia

3 **Ross P. Anderson<sup>1\*</sup>, Francis A. Macdonald<sup>2</sup>, David S. Jones<sup>3</sup>, Sean McMahon<sup>1</sup>, and**  
4 **Derek E.G. Briggs<sup>1</sup>**

5 <sup>1</sup>*Department of Geology and Geophysics, Yale University, 210 Whitney Avenue, New*  
6 *Haven, Connecticut 06511, USA*

7 <sup>2</sup>*Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Harvard University, 20 Oxford Street,*  
8 *Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138, USA*

9 <sup>3</sup>*Geology Department, Amherst College, 11 Barrett Hill Road, Amherst, Massachusetts*  
10 *01002, USA*

11 \*E-mail: ross.anderson@yale.edu

12 **ABSTRACT**

13 Phosphorites of the latest Ediacaran upper Khesen Formation in the Khuvsgul  
14 Group of northern Mongolia preserve a newly discovered, three-dimensionally  
15 phosphatized Doushantuo-type microfossil assemblage. Eight genera include the second  
16 occurrence of the putative multicellular fossil animal embryo *Megasphaera* outside South  
17 China, the Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphic acritarchs *Appendisphaera*,  
18 *Cavaspina*, and *Variomargosphaeridium*, and the possible alga *Archaeophycus*  
19 *yunnanensis*. The assemblage occurs in the lowermost phosphorite horizon in foreland  
20 basin deposits on the Khuvsgul terrane; lithostratigraphic and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  correlation with the  
21 Zavkhan terrane of southwestern Mongolia establish a latest Ediacaran age for the  
22 fossiliferous phosphorites. Thus, this is the youngest Doushantuo-type assemblage yet

23 reported. It extends the range of *Megasphaera*, filling a gap in the record of phosphatized  
24 embryo-like forms between the ~600 Ma Doushantuo Weng'an Biota and Cambrian  
25 examples. The Khesen fossil assemblage emphasizes the potential of Mongolian  
26 phosphorites to provide new paleontological data on the Ediacaran–Cambrian transition,  
27 and to resolve the phylogenetic debate surrounding *Megasphaera* embryo-like taxa.

## 28 **INTRODUCTION**

29         The Ediacaran Period represents a critical juncture in Earth's history with the  
30 emergence of macroscopic eukaryotic communities with animal components (e.g., Xiao  
31 et al., 2016). Ornamented spheroidal microfossils, known as Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type  
32 acanthomorphic acritarchs, are found in Ediacaran successions globally (see Cohen and  
33 Macdonald, 2015, and references therein). The discovery of similar fossils preserved in  
34 phosphorites of the Doushantuo Formation at Weng'an in South China has yielded  
35 critical insights into Ediacaran paleobiology (e.g., Xiao et al., 2014a). Some of the  
36 Doushantuo fossils may be the oldest fossil animals, resembling embryonic forms,  
37 although their phylogenetic affinities, even after ~20 years of study, remain  
38 controversial—none of the characters used to marshal the evidence for an animal affinity  
39 are unequivocally diagnostic (Cunningham et al., 2017). Similar phosphatized fossils  
40 have been recovered recently elsewhere in South China (Zhang and Zhang, 2017).  
41 However, despite the importance of Doushantuo-type preservation to studies of  
42 Ediacaran diversity and animal evolution, few phosphatized fossils have been reported  
43 from other global Ediacaran successions with the exception of the Biskopås Formation,  
44 Norway and the Chambaghat Formation, India. Although the Biskopås Formation has  
45 yielded a variety of acanthomorphs, embryo-like forms have not been discovered (see

46 Vidal, 1990, and references therein), and possible embryo-like forms reported from the  
47 Chambaghat Formation (Shome et al., 2014) are not preserved with the same fidelity as  
48 those of the Doushantuo Formation. Here we report new Ediacaran phosphatized  
49 microfossils, which include Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs and most  
50 notably multicellular embryo-like forms, from the upper Khesen Formation, Mongolia.

## 51 **GEOLOGICAL SETTING**

52 The Khesen Formation of the Khuvsgul Group (Fig. 1) is exposed discontinuously  
53 along a 250 km north-south belt on the western margin of Lake Khuvsgul in northern  
54 Mongolia (Macdonald and Jones, 2011). During Neoproterozoic and Cambrian time, the  
55 Khuvsgul and Zavkhan terranes formed one contiguous margin (Fig. 1A). Both terranes  
56 are characterized by ~800 Ma arc-volcanic rocks overlain by late Tonian rift-related  
57 strata, Cryogenian–early Ediacaran carbonate platforms interrupted by two Snowball  
58 Earth intervals, and latest Ediacaran to early Cambrian foreland basin successions  
59 (Macdonald et al., 2009; Kuzmichev and Larionov, 2011; Macdonald and Jones, 2011;  
60 Bold et al., 2016a; Bold et al., 2016b; Smith et al., 2016).

61 The Khesen Formation is divided into informal lower and upper members by a  
62 major unconformity (Fig. 1D, 1E, and 1F) that separates Marinoan glacial deposits and a  
63 basal Ediacaran cap carbonate succession from latest Ediacaran to early Cambrian  
64 carbonate, shale, and phosphorite deposits (Donov et al., 1967; Ilyin, 1973; Ilyin et al.,  
65 1986; Osokin and Tyzhinov, 1998; Macdonald and Jones, 2011). An equivalent  
66 unconformity is present on the Zavkhan terrane (Fig. 1C), separating early Ediacaran  
67 carbonates of the Ol and Shuurgat formations from latest Ediacaran phosphorite and  
68 carbonate of the terminal Ediacaran Zuun-Arts Formation (Bold et al., 2016b; Smith et

69 al., 2016). Latest Ediacaran–Terreneuvian phosphorite-bearing foreland basins formed on  
70 the Khuvsgul and Zavkhan terranes as the result of the collision of the Khantaishir-  
71 Agradag arc (Bold et al., 2016a; Smith et al., 2016). On both terranes, two phosphorite-  
72 rich successions bracket the Proterozoic–Phanerozoic boundary and additional  
73 phosphorite is present in overlying early Cambrian strata (Ilyin, 2004; Smith et al., 2016).  
74 The sediment-starved carbonate succession of the upper Khesen Formation preserves  
75 reworked granular phosphorite grainstone beds and massive replacive phosphate beds  
76 (Fig. 1). A minimum age constraint for the upper Khesen Formation is provided by  
77 Cambrian archaeocyathids and trilobites in the overlying Erkhelnur Formation (Ilyin and  
78 Zhuraveleva, 1968; Korobov, 1980).

#### 79 **A NEW FOSSIL ASSEMBLAGE**

80 Eight genera of phosphatized microfossils (Figs. 2 and 3) were recovered from the  
81 lowermost phosphorite horizon of the upper Khesen Formation (see supplementary  
82 information for occurrences) with 5 genera confined to just two samples (Yale Peabody  
83 Museum YPM 536747 and 536748) from granular phosphorites along the ridgeline east  
84 of Urandush Uul (at 21 and 22 m, Fig. 1F). Probable cyanobacteria are found in most  
85 fossiliferous samples. Filaments of *Siphonophycus* occur as clusters of a few individuals,  
86 patchworks of hundreds of criss-crossing individuals, and clasts of microbial mat several  
87 hundred micrometers in maximum dimension. A few individuals of the possible  
88 oscillatoriacean cyanobacterium *Obruchevella* are also present (Fig. 3F).

89 Most of the fossil diversity in the assemblage is made up of probable eukaryotes.  
90 Simple leiosphaerid acritarchs are present in almost all fossiliferous samples.  
91 *Archaeophycus yunnanensis* occurs as solitary cells, or dyad, triad, tetrad, and octad

92 clusters (Figs. 2A and 3A). The tetrad form of this fossil was previously compared (as  
93 *Paratetraphycus giganteus*) to carposporangia of the modern bangialean alga *Porphyra*  
94 but convergent evolution among cyanobacteria and other algae cannot be ruled out (Xiao  
95 et al., 1998; Dong et al., 2009; Xiao et al., 2014a). In addition to these simple forms, the  
96 lower phosphorites yield a variety of Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphic  
97 acritarchs, most notably *Appendisphaera* (Fig. 2B), *Cavaspina* (Figs. 3B and 3C), and  
98 *Variomargosphaeridium* (Figs. 2C, 2D, 2E, and 2F). *Appendisphaera* is characterized by  
99 a spheroidal vesicle with densely spaced, long, hollow, unbranched processes  
100 (Moczydlowska et al., 1993; Moczydlowska, 2005). Three species are identified in the  
101 Khesen phosphorites: *A. grandis*, *A. fragilis*, and *A. tenuis*. An area of dense, dark  
102 organic matter can be present between the processes (Fig. 2B). Several Khesen fossils are  
103 tentatively identified as *Cavaspina*, which has conical processes that are commonly  
104 <10% of vesicle diameter (Moczydlowska et al., 1993). The Khesen specimens have  
105 larger vesicle sizes (>250  $\mu\text{m}$ ) than most reported examples of this genus, however, and  
106 the length of their processes, while commonly <10% of vesicle diameter, can reach  
107 ~13%. They most closely resemble *C. basiconica* from the Doushantuo Formation (cf.  
108 Fig. 8 parts 1–4 in Xiao et al., 2014b) in the number of processes and larger vesicle size.  
109 The most abundant acanthomorph (tens of specimens) is assigned to  
110 *Variomargosphaeridium gracile*. *Variomargosphaeridium* is characterized by  
111 heteromorphic, hollow, multi-branched processes (e.g., Fig. 2E); *V. gracile* is small  
112 (vesicle 30–150  $\mu\text{m}$  in maximum diameter) with thin processes (9–21  $\mu\text{m}$  in length).  
113 Some of the Khesen specimens contain numerous cell-like structures (Fig. 2C) allowing  
114 *V. gracile* to be added to a growing list of Ediacaran acanthomorphs which display

115 possible multicellular features (Xiao et al., 2014b). A number of specimens (<10  
116 individuals) with branching processes that are <10% of the vesicle diameter may  
117 represent a new species of *Variomargosphaeridium* (Fig. 2F).

118 Most notably, the assemblage includes the second reported occurrences (~50  
119 specimens of which <10 are well-preserved) of the multicellular fossil *Megasphaera*  
120 outside South China, where it occurs in the Doushantuo and Denying phosphorites (Xiao  
121 et al., 2014b; Zhang and Zhang, 2017). The Khesen fossils (Figs. 2G, 2H, 2I, 3D, and 3E)  
122 are readily accommodated by the emended diagnosis of *Megasphaera* (Xiao et al.,  
123 2014b), which calls for a large vesicle without long processes and enclosing one or more  
124 internal cells. However, the Khesen specimens also bear morphological similarities to  
125 leiosphaerid acritarchs from the upper Khesen Formation, to “leiospheres with cellular  
126 inclusions” from cherts of the Doushantuo Formation (cf. Fig. 103 parts 6, 7, and 18 in  
127 Liu et al., 2014), and to *Clonophycus* from other cherts of Ediacaran and Cambrian age in  
128 South China (Nantuo and Taozichong formations) (Oehler, 1977, 1978; Luo et al., 1982).  
129 They differ from *Leiosphaeridia* in the upper Khesen Formation in the presence of  
130 internal structures, are intermediate in size between species of *Megasphaera* found  
131 elsewhere and Doushantuo leiospheres with cellular inclusions, and are significantly  
132 larger than *C. guizhouensis*, the largest species of *Clonophycus*. The thick vesicle wall  
133 (Fig. 3D and 3E) supports our identification of these fossils as *Megasphaera*.

#### 134 **THE AGE OF THE KHESEN ASSEMBLAGE**

135 Macdonald and Jones (2011) interpreted the age of the fossil-bearing lowermost  
136 phosphorite unit of the upper Khesen Formation as latest Ediacaran based on  
137 lithostratigraphic correlation with the Zuun-Arts Formation of southwestern Mongolia,

138 which preserves the Proterozoic–Phanerozoic boundary (Smith et al., 2016), and with the  
139 Zabit Formation of Siberia, which yields the latest Ediacaran fossil *Cloudina*  
140 (Kherzaskova and Samygin, 1992). The stratigraphy of the upper Khesen Formation is  
141 remarkably similar to that of the Zuun-Arts Formation and the basal Bayangol Formation  
142 (also southwestern Mongolia), comprising fossiliferous lower granular phosphorite beds,  
143 limestone, and upper bedded phosphorites (Macdonald and Jones, 2011; Smith et al.,  
144 2016). This correlation implies that the carbon isotope excursion between the  
145 phosphorite-rich successions in the upper Khesen Formation (Ilyin, 2004; Vishnevskaya  
146 and Letnikova, 2013, and Figure 1 herein) represents the Proterozoic–Phanerozoic  
147 boundary as it does in the Zuun-Arts Formation (Smith et al., 2016; Fig. 1). Such a  
148 correlation is consistent with the geodynamics of foreland basin development (Sinclair  
149 and Naylor, 2012) in which the migration of loads can create diachronous deposition over  
150 a few million years but not over tens of millions of years, as would be required for an  
151 early Ediacaran (i.e., older than the Shuram carbon isotope excursion) age for the Khesen  
152 fossils. Thus, geological evidence, as well as chemostratigraphic data, suggest that the  
153 Khesen fossil assemblage lies immediately below the Proterozoic–Phanerozoic boundary.  
154 This inference is consistent with recent reports of Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type  
155 acanthomorphs from possible late Ediacaran strata on the East European Platform  
156 (Golubkova et al., 2015).

157       Elsewhere in the world Doushantuo-Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs occur  
158 generally in rocks that predate or are synchronous with carbon isotope excursions  
159 interpreted to be equivalent to the Shuram excursion (Zhou et al., 2007; Xiao et al., 2016;  
160 Zhou et al., 2017). The similarity between the Khesen assemblage reported here and that

161 of the older Doushantuo Formation includes the presence of *Appendisphaera grandis* and  
162 *A. tenuis*, *Cavaspina ?basiconica*, *Megasphaera*, and *Variomargosphaeridium gracile*  
163 (Xiao et al., 2014b). Such similarities can be accounted for by conditions favoring similar  
164 preservation in phosphate rather than coeval deposition, and imply longer ranges than  
165 previously recorded for some taxa. Thus, the Khesen fossils suggest that Doushantuo-  
166 Pertatataka-type acanthomorphs are not confined to pre-Shuram strata, but extend into  
167 latest Ediacaran time.

## 168 **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

169 The fossils of the upper Khesen Formation represent a new discovery of embryo-  
170 like forms (e.g., *Megasphaera*) in Ediacaran phosphorites, adding to those of the  
171 Doushantuo and Denying Formations, South China (Xiao et al., 2014b; Zhang and  
172 Zhang, 2017) and the Chambaghat Formation, India (Shome et al., 2014). *Megasphaera*  
173 is >200  $\mu\text{m}$  in diameter in China and India (Shome et al., 2014; Xiao et al., 2014b; Zhang  
174 and Zhang, 2017). The Khesen fossils (Figs. 2G, 2H, 2I, 3D, and 3E) include specimens  
175 with a maximum diameter as low as 80  $\mu\text{m}$  and probably represent a new species. The  
176 spheroidal cellular inclusions are rarely in contact, presumably due to some degradation  
177 and shrinkage. The number in each vesicle ranges from 20 to 106 but thin sections do not  
178 reveal them all. Although this new material does not settle the question of whether or not  
179 *Megasphaera* represents the earliest animal fossils, the exceptional preservation, diversity  
180 of form, and age range provide new constraints on the paleobiology of this iconic taxon.

181 The discovery of possible fossil embryos in latest Ediacaran strata fills the gap in  
182 exceptional phosphatic preservation between the older South China occurrences (and  
183 possible equivalents in India) and unequivocal embryos in Cambrian successions (e.g.,



184 Donoghue et al., 2006; Brasier and Callow, 2007; Muscente et al., 2015). Doushantuo-  
185 type preservation involves the concentration of phosphate and organic matter through  
186 siliciclastic sediment starvation and the Doushantuo Formation at Weng'an comprises  
187 phosphatic grainstones resulting from reworking and winnowing (Xiao et al., 1998; Xiao  
188 and Knoll, 1999; Muscente et al., 2015). The Khesen assemblage is preserved in similar  
189 facies, with both massive replacive and granular phosphorites preserved within a  
190 condensed sediment-starved carbonate succession. The preservation of the Khesen fossils  
191 rivals that in the Doushantuo Formation: cell-division is evident in extracted specimens  
192 of *Archaeophycus yunnanensis* (Fig. 3A), and processes on other acanthomorphs are  
193 preserved with exceptional fidelity (Figs. 2C, 2D, 3B, and 3C). This similarity  
194 emphasizes the potential of Mongolian phosphorites to provide new paleontological data  
195 on the Ediacaran–Cambrian transition, and to resolve the phylogenetic debate  
196 surrounding *Megasphaera* embryo-like taxa.

#### 197 **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

198 S. Butts and J. Utrup managed collections. U. Bold helped with logistics in  
199 Mongolia. This work was supported by a GSA ExxonMobil Student Grant, the NASA  
200 Astrobiology Institute [NNA13AA90A], a NASA Earth and Space Science Fellowship  
201 [NNX14AP10H], and the Yale Institute for Biospheric Studies and Peabody Museum.  
202 We thank Malgorzata Moczydlowska, Shuhai Xiao, and an anonymous reviewer for  
203 helpful comments.

#### 204 **REFERENCES CITED**

205 Bold, U., Crowley, J.L., Smith, E.F., Sambuu, O., and Macdonald, F.A., 2016a,  
206 Neoproterozoic to early Paleozoic tectonic evolution of the Zavkhan terrane of

- 207 Mongolia: Implications for continental growth in the Central Asian orogenic belt:  
208 Lithosphere, v. 8, p. 729–750, <https://doi.org/10.1130/L549.1>.
- 209 Bold, U., Smith, E.F., Rooney, A.D., Bowring, S.A., Buchwaldt, R., Dudás, F.Ö.,  
210 Ramezani, J., Crowley, J.L., Schrag, D.P., and Macdonald, F.A., 2016b,  
211 Neoproterozoic stratigraphy of the Zavkhan Terrane of Mongolia: The backbone for  
212 Cryogenian and early Ediacaran chemostratigraphic records: American Journal of  
213 Science, v. 316, p. 1–63, <https://doi.org/10.2475/01.2016.01>.
- 214 Brasier, M.D., and Callow, R.H.T., 2007, Changes in the patterns of phosphatic  
215 preservation across the Proterozoic–Cambrian transition: Memoirs of the Association  
216 of Australasian Palaeontologists, v. 34, p. 377–389.
- 217 Cohen, P.A., and Macdonald, F.A., 2015, The Proterozoic record of eukaryotes:  
218 Paleobiology, v. 41, p. 610–632, <https://doi.org/10.1017/pab.2015.25>.
- 219 Cunningham, J. A., Vargas, K., Yin, Z., Bengtson, S., and Donoghue, P. C. J., 2017, The  
220 Weng’an Biota (Doushantuo Formation): An Ediacaran window on soft-bodied and  
221 multicellular microorganisms: Journal of the Geological Society (London),  
222 [doi:10.1144/jgs2016-142](https://doi.org/10.1144/jgs2016-142).
- 223 Dong, L., Xiao, S., Shen, B., Zhou, C., Li, G., and Yao, J., 2009, Basal Cambrian  
224 microfossils from the Yangtze Gorges Area (South China) and the Aksy Area (Tarim  
225 Block, Northwestern China): Journal of Paleontology, v. 83, p. 30–44,  
226 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022336000058108>.
- 227 Donoghue, P.C.J., Kouchinsky, A., Waloszek, D., Bengtson, S., Dong, X., Val’kov, A.K.,  
228 Cunningham, J.A., and Repetski, J.E., 2006, Fossilized embryos are widespread but

- 229 the record is temporally and taxonomically biased: *Evolution & Development*, v. 8,  
230 p. 232–238, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1525-142X.2006.00093.x>.
- 231 Donovan, N.A., Edemsky, H.B., and Ilyin, A.V., 1967, Cambrian phosphorites of Mongolia  
232 Popular Republic: *Sovetskaya Geologia*, v. 3, p. 55–60.
- 233 Golubkova, E.Y., Zaitseva, T.S., Kuznetsov, A.B., Dovzhikova, E.G., and Maslov, A.V.,  
234 2015, Microfossils and Rb-Sr age of glauconite in the key section of the Upper  
235 Proterozoic of the northeastern part of the Russian Plate (Keltmen-1 Borehole):  
236 *Doklady Earth Sciences*, v. 462, p. 547–551,  
237 <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1028334X15060045>.
- 238 Ilyin, A.V., 1973, Khubsugul phosphorite-bearing basin: Moscow, Geolicheskiy Institut,  
239 *Doklady Akademii Nauk SSSR*, p. 167.
- 240 Ilyin, A.V., 2004, The Khubsugul phosphate-bearing basin: New data and concepts:  
241 *Lithology and Mineral Resources*, v. 39, p. 454–467,  
242 <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:LIMI.0000040735.76025.80>.
- 243 Ilyin, A.V., Zaitsev, N.S., and Bjamba, Z., 1986, Proterozoic and Cambrian phosphorites  
244 — deposits: Khubsugul, Mongolian People's Republic, *in* Cook, P. J., and Shergold,  
245 J. H., eds., *Phosphate deposits of the world*: Cambridge, Cambridge University  
246 Press, p. 162–174.
- 247 Ilyin, A.V., and Zhuraveleva, I.T., 1968, On the boundary between the Cambrian and the  
248 Precambrian at Prikhubsugulie (Mongolian PR): *Doklady Akademii Nauk SSSR*,  
249 v. 182, p. 1164–1166.

- 250 Kherzaskova, T.N., and Samygin, S.G., 1992, Tectonic conditions in the East Sayan  
251 Vendian–Middle Cambrian terrigenous carbonate association: *Geotectonics*, v. 26,  
252 p. 445–458.
- 253 Korobov, M.N., 1980, Lower Cambrian biostratigraphy and miomeroid trilobites of the  
254 Lower Cambrian of Mongolia, *in* Menner, V. V., and Meyen, S. V., eds., *Lower*  
255 *Cambrian and Carboniferous biostratigraphy of Mongolia*, Volume 26: Moscow,  
256 *Trudy Sovmestnou Sovetsoko-Mongol-skoy Paleontologicheskoy Exspeditsii*, p. 5–  
257 108.
- 258 Kuzmichev, A.B., and Larionov, A.N., 2011, The Sarkhoi Group in East Sayan:  
259 Neoproterozoic (~770–800 Ma) volcanic belt of the Andean type: *Russian Geology*  
260 *and Geophysics*, v. 52, p. 685–700, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rgg.2011.06.001>.
- 261 Liu, P., Xiao, S., Yin, C., Chen, S., Zhou, C., and Li, M., 2014, Ediacaran  
262 acanthomorphic acritarchs and other microfossils from chert nodules of the Upper  
263 Doushantuo Formation in the Yangtze Gorges Area, South China: *Paleontology*  
264 *Memoir*, v. 72, p. 1–139, <https://doi.org/10.1666/13-009>.
- 265 Luo, Q., Wang, F., and Wang, Y., 1982, Uppermost Sinian–lowest Cambrian age  
266 microfossils from Qingzhen-Zhijin County, Guizhou Province: *Bulletin Tianjin*  
267 *Institute of Geology and Mineral Resources: Chinese Academy of Sciences*, v. 6,  
268 p. 23–41.
- 269 Macdonald, F.A., and Jones, D.S., 2011, The Khubsugul Group, northern Mongolia, *in*  
270 Arnaud, E., et al., eds., *The Geological Record of Neoproterozoic Glaciations:*  
271 *Geological Society, London, Memoirs*, v. 36, p. 339–345.

- 272 Macdonald, F.A., Jones, D.S., and Schrag, D.P., 2009, Stratigraphic and tectonic  
273 implications of a newly discovered glacial diamictite-cap carbonate couplet in  
274 southwestern Mongolia: *Geology*, v. 37, p. 123–126,  
275 <https://doi.org/10.1130/G24797A.1>.
- 276 Moczydlowska, M., 2005, Taxonomic review of some Ediacaran acritarchs from the  
277 Siberian Platform: *Precambrian Research*, v. 136, p. 283–307,  
278 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.precamres.2004.12.001>.
- 279 Moczydlowska, M., Vidal, G., and Rudavskaya, V.A., 1993, Neoproterozoic (Vendian)  
280 phytoplankton from the Siberia platform, Yakutia: *Palaeontology*, v. 36, p. 495–521.
- 281 Muscente, A.D., Hawkins, A.D., and Xiao, S., 2015, Fossil preservation through  
282 phosphatization and silicification in the Ediacaran Doushantuo Formation (South  
283 China): A comparative synthesis: *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology,*  
284 *Palaeoecology*, v. 434, p. 46–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.palaeo.2014.10.013>.
- 285 Oehler, D.Z., 1977, Microflora of the H. Y. C. Pyrite Shale Member of the Barney Creek  
286 Formation (McArthur Group), middle Proterozoic of northern Australia: *Alcheringa*,  
287 v. 1, p. 315–349, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03115517708527768>.
- 288 Oehler, D.Z., 1978, Microflora of the middle Proterozoic Balbrini Dolomite (McArthur  
289 Group) of Australia: *Alcheringa*, v. 2, p. 269–309,  
290 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03115517808527785>.
- 291 Osokin, P.V., and Tyzhinov, A.V., 1998, Precambrian tilloids of the Oka-Khubsugul  
292 phosphorite-bearing basin (Eastern Sayan, Northwestern Mongolia): *Lithology and*  
293 *Mineral Resources*, v. 33, p. 142–154.

- 294 Sinclair, H., and Naylor, M., 2012, Foreland basin subsidence driven by topographic  
295 growth versus plate subduction: *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, v. 124,  
296 p. 368–379, <https://doi.org/10.1130/B30383.1>.
- 297 Shome, S., Mathur, V.K., Nath, S., Xiao, S., and Broce, J., 2014, Occurrence of  
298 Neoproterozoic animal embryos in the Chambaghat Formation of Himachal Lesser  
299 Himalaya, India: *Current Science*, v. 106, p. 813–815.
- 300 Smith, E.F., Macdonald, F.A., Petach, T.A., Bold, U., and Schrag, D.P., 2016, Integrated  
301 stratigraphic, geochemical, and paleontological late Ediacaran to early Cambrian  
302 records from southwestern Mongolia: *Geological Society of America Bulletin*,  
303 v. 128, p. 442–468, <https://doi.org/10.1130/B31248.1>.
- 304 Vidal, G., 1990, Giant acanthomorphic acritarchs from the upper Proterozoic in southern  
305 Norway: *Palaeontology*, v. 33, p. 287–298.
- 306 Vishnevskaya, I.A., and Letnikova, E.F., 2013, Chemostratigraphy of the Vendian–  
307 Cambrian carbonate sedimentary cover of the Tuva-Mongolian microcontinent:  
308 *Russian Geology and Geophysics*, v. 54, p. 567–586,  
309 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rgg.2013.04.008>.
- 310 Xiao, S., and Knoll, A.H., 1999, Fossil preservation in the Neoproterozoic Doushantuo  
311 phosphorite Lagerstätte, South China: *Lethaia*, v. 32, p. 219–238,  
312 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1502-3931.1999.tb00541.x>.
- 313 Xiao, S., Muscente, A.D., Chen, L., Zhou, C.-M., Schiffbauer, J.D., Wood, A.D., Polys,  
314 N.F., and Yuan, X.-L., 2014a, The Weng’an biota and the Ediacaran radiation of  
315 multicellular eukaryotes: *National Science Review*, v. 1, p. 498–520,  
316 <https://doi.org/10.1093/nsr/nwu061>.

- 317 Xiao, S., Narbonne, G.M., Zhou, C.-M., Laflamme, M., Grazhdankin, D.V.,  
318 Moczydłowska-Vidal, M., and Cui, H., 2016, Towards an Ediacaran Time Scale:  
319 Problems, Protocols, and Prospects: Episodes, v. 39, p. 540–555,  
320 <https://doi.org/10.18814/epiiugs/2016/v39i4/103886>.
- 321 Xiao, S., Zhang, Y., and Knoll, A.H., 1998, Three-dimensional preservation of algae and  
322 animal embryos in a Neoproterozoic phosphorite: Nature, v. 391, p. 553–558,  
323 <https://doi.org/10.1038/35318>.
- 324 Xiao, S., Zhou, C., Liu, P., Wang, D., and Yuan, X., 2014b, Phosphatized  
325 acanthomorphic acritarchs and related microfossils from the Ediacaran Doushantuo  
326 Formation at Weng'an (South China) and their implications for biostratigraphic  
327 correlation: Journal of Paleontology, v. 88, p. 1–67, <https://doi.org/10.1666/12-157R>.
- 328 Zhang, Y., and Zhang, X., 2017, New *Megasphaera*-like microfossils reveal their  
329 reproductive strategies: Precambrian Research, v. 300, p. 141–150,  
330 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.precamres.2017.08.006>.
- 331 Zhou, C., Xie, G., McFadden, K.A., Xiao, S., and Yuan, X., 2007, The diversification  
332 and extinction of Doushantuo-Pertatataka acritarchs in South China: Causes and  
333 biostratigraphic significance: Geological Journal, v. 42, p. 229–262,  
334 <https://doi.org/10.1002/gj.1062>.
- 335 Zhou, C., Xiao, S., Wang, W., Guan, C., Ouyang, Q., and Chen, Z., 2017, The  
336 stratigraphic complexity of the middle Ediacaran carbon isotope record in the  
337 Yangtze Gorges area, South China, and its implications for the age and  
338 chemostratigraphic significance of the Shuram excursion: Precambrian Research, v.  
339 288, p. 23–38, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.precamres,2016,11,007>.

340

341 **FIGURE CAPTIONS**

342

343 Figure 1. Geological setting of the Khesen fossil assemblage. A: Map showing the extent  
344 of the Khuvsgul (Khuv.) and Zavkhan (Zav.) terranes. B: Geological map of the western  
345 margin of Lake Khuvsgul. C: Simplified stratigraphy of the Tsagaan Olom Group of the  
346 Zavkhan Basin (MU = Maikhan-Uul, BG = Bayangol). D: Simplified stratigraphy of the  
347 Khuvsgul Group (phos. = phosphorite). E: Khesen Formation at Ongoluk Gol with  
348 carbon isotope record. F: Khesen Formation stratigraphy from the ridgeline east of  
349 Urandush Uul.

350

351 Figure 2. Paleontology of the Khesen Formation in thin-sections. A: *Archeophycus*  
352 *yunnanensis*, YPM 536754. B: *Appendisphaera grandis*, YPM 536755. C:  
353 *Variomargosphaeridium gracile* with possible internal structures, YPM 536772. D: *V.*  
354 *gracile*, YPM 536800. E: *V. gracile* showing distal end of processes to the upper left,  
355 YPM 536802. F: *V. sp.*, YPM 536787. G–I: *Megasphaera sp.*. G: YPM 536794. H: YPM  
356 536784. I: YPM 536766. Scale bars 50 µm.

357

358 Figure 3. Paleontology of the Khesen Formation revealed by 20% acetic acid maceration.  
359 A: *Archaeophycus yunnanensis* showing T cell-division, YPM 538070. B–C: *Cavaspina*  
360 *?basiconica*. B: YPM 538071 C: YPM 538072. D–E: *Megasphaera sp.*. D: YPM 538073.  
361 E: YPM 538074. F: *Obruchevella magna*, YPM 538075. Scale bars 100 µm.

362



Publisher: GSA  
Journal: GEOL: Geology  
DOI:10.1130/G39576.1

363 1GSA Data Repository item 2017xxx, xxxxxxxx, is available online at

364 <http://www.geosociety.org/datarepository/2017/> or on request from

365 [editing@geosociety.org](mailto:editing@geosociety.org).

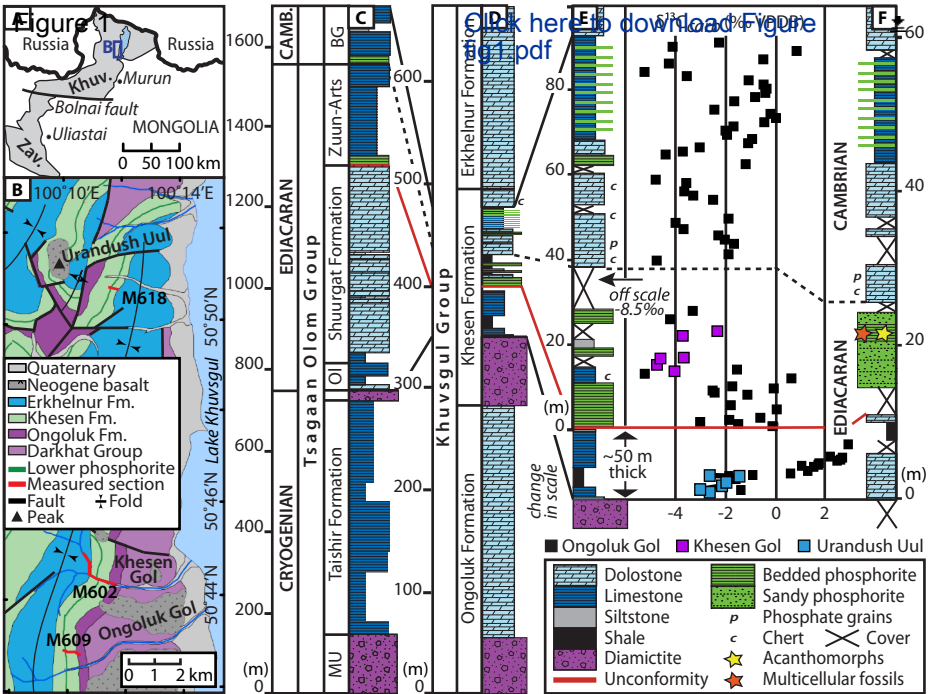


Figure 2

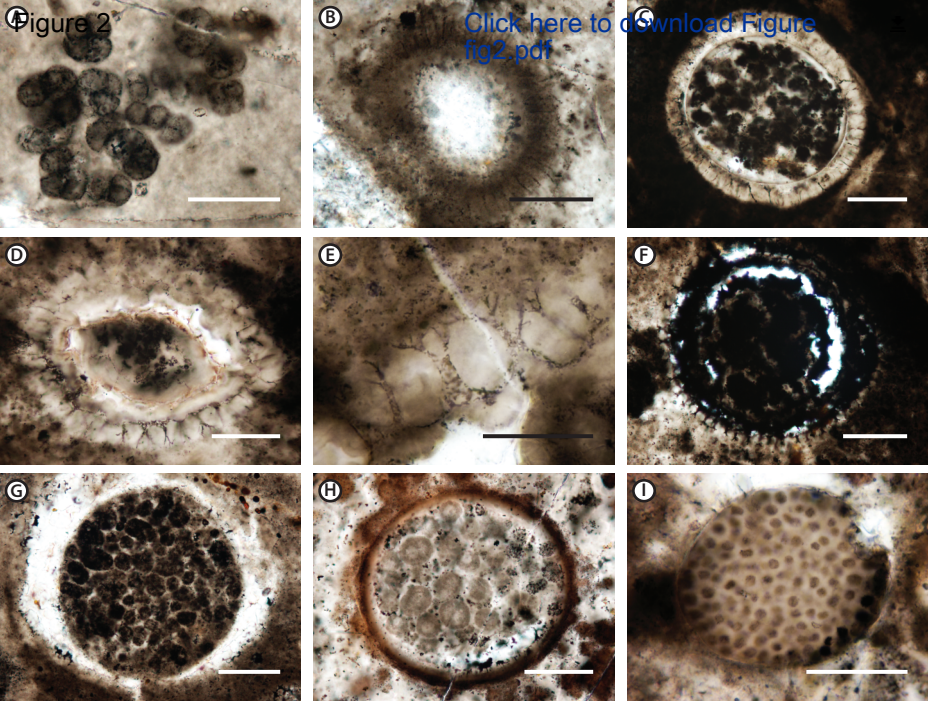
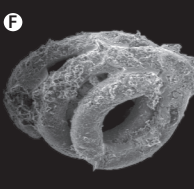
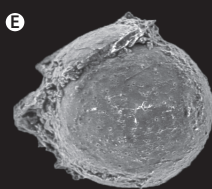
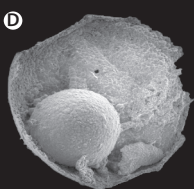
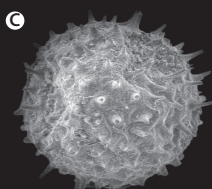
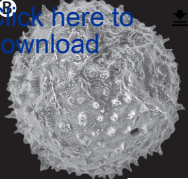


Figure 3

[Click here to download](#)



## **Supplementary Information**

### **Doushantuo-type microfossils from latest Ediacaran phosphorites of northern Mongolia**

Ross P. Anderson, Francis A. Macdonald, David S. Jones, Sean McMahon, Derek E.G. Briggs

Email: [ross.anderson@yale.edu](mailto:ross.anderson@yale.edu)

## Methods

The Khesen fossils were examined in thin-section and by scanning electron microscopy following 20% acetic acid maceration. All materials are deposited in the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History (YPM). Carbon isotope ratios of micro-drilled carbonate powders were measured following methods described in Macdonald et al. (2009).

## Biostratigraphy

Khesen Gol

YPM 536746 and 536748 are at 0 and 3 m respectively in Fig. 1E.

Urandush Uul

YPM 536747 and 536748 are at 21 and 22 m respectively in Fig. 1F.

	Khesen Gol		Urandush Uul	
	YPM 536746	YPM 536749	YPM 536747	YPM 536748
<b>Cyanobacteria</b>				
<i>Obruchevella delicata</i>	R			
<i>Obruchevella magna</i>			R	R
<i>Obruchevella parvissima</i>				R
<i>Obruchevella</i> sp.				R
<i>Siphonophycus</i> spp.	C	C	C	C
<b>?Algae</b>				
<i>Archaeophycus yunnanensis</i>			R	
<b>Acritarchs</b>				
<i>Appendisphaera grandis</i>			R	
<i>Appendisphaera fragilis</i>		R		R
<i>Appendisphaera tenuis</i>			R	
<i>Cavaspina ?basiconica</i>			R	
<i>Leiosphaeridia</i> spp.	R	R	C	C
<i>Megasphaera</i> sp.			C	C
<i>Variomargosphaeridium gracile</i>			C	C
<i>Variomargosphaeridium</i> sp.				R

Table S1: Biostratigraphy of the upper Khesen Formation showing reported taxa from the four most diverse samples and their relative abundance within the assemblage. R = rare (isolated individuals, only a few specimens). C = common (10s of individuals). In the case of *Megasphaera* 10s of individuals are reported but only a few are preserved with enough fidelity to confidently interpret internal structures. YPM sample numbers are given for reference.

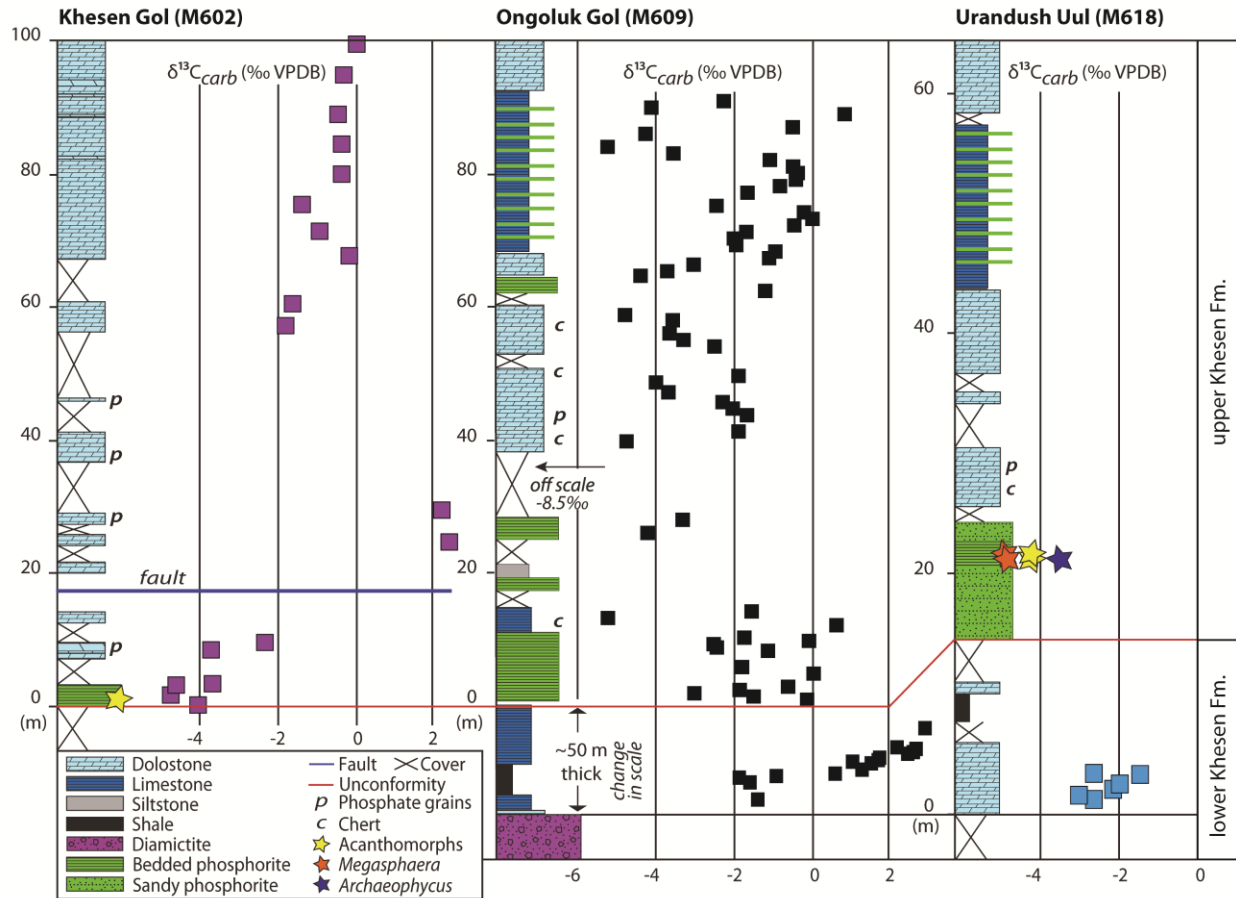


Figure S1: Expanded stratigraphy showing relationships between Khesen, Ongoluk, and Urandush Uul localities. See Figure 1 for locality information.

## References

Macdonald, F.A., Jones, D.S., and Schrag, D.P., 2009. Stratigraphic and tectonic implications of a newly discovered glacial diamictite-cap carbonate couplet in southwestern Mongolia: *Geology*, v. 37, p. 123–126, <https://doi.org/10.1130/G24797A.1>.