

Modern Approaches in Solid Earth Sciences

Andrew Y. Glikson

# The Archaean: Geological and Geochemical Windows into the Early Earth



 Springer

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# Modern Approaches in Solid Earth Sciences

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Andrew Y. Glikson

# The Archaean: Geological and Geochemical Windows into the Early Earth

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*The book is dedicated to the memory of Alec Trendall, pioneer of Precambrian research, as well as a tribute to the contributions to Archaean field and isotopic geology and asteroid impact research by Arthur Hickman, Don Lowe, Allen Nutman, Bruce Simonson, Martin Van Kranendonk, Gary Byerly, Bob Pidgeon, Bill Compston, John Valley, Simon Wilde, Peter Haines and the late Ian Williams.*





## Vestiges of a Beginning

In dealing with rocks formed when the world was less than half of its present age, a strict adherence to the doctrine of uniformitarianism is considered unjustified. (Macgregor 1951, p. 27)

Determinations of the age of the Earth at  $4.54 \pm 0.05$  billion years, based on radiometric U-Pb radiometric age of meteorites and consistent with the 4.567 Ga age of the solar system, as determined from Ca-Al inclusions in carbonaceous chondrites, lunar samples and the oldest measured terrestrial zircons <4.404 Ga-old from the Jack Hills, Western Australia, leave large part of the earliest history of the planet unknown. Where the zircons signify relic felsic rocks as far back as ~4.4 Ga, due to selective retention of zircons and quartzite and destruction of more labile lithologies, i.e. mafic and ultramafic rocks, the composition of the bulk of the Earth crust at that stage remains unknown. Isotopic and geochemical signatures in rocks as old as ~3.8 Ga indicate an evolutionary trend from mafic-ultramafic crust to tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG)-dominated micro continental nuclei. To date, signatures of the 3.95–3.85 Ga Late heavy Bombardment (LHB), manifested by the lunar Mare, have not been discovered on Earth. ~4.0–3.8 Ga high-grade metamorphic terrains, known from Slave province and Antarctica; ~3.8 Ga supracrustal volcanic-sedimentary belts represented by the Isua and Akilia terrains in southwest Greenland; and mafic rocks from the northern Superior Province may conceal evidence for the LHB. Recent discoveries of near to 14 Archaean impact ejecta units up to 3.48 Ga-old intercalated with volcanic and sedimentary rocks in the Barberton and Pilbara greenstone belts, including clusters about 3.25–3.22 Ga and 2.63–2.48 Ga in age, may represent terrestrial vestiges of an extended LHB. The interval of ~3.25–3.22 Ga ago emerges as a major break in Archaean crustal evolution when, as indicated by a major body of field and isotopic age evidence, major asteroid bombardment resulted in faulting, large scale uplift, intrusion of granites and an abrupt shift from crustal conditions dominated by mafic-ultramafic crust associated with emplacement of tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) plutons, to semi-continental nuclei represented by arenites, turbidites, conglomerate, banded iron formations and felsic volcanics. At this stage, pre-3.2 Ga dome-structured granite-greenstone systems were largely replaced by linear accretional granite-greenstone

systems such as the Superior Province in Canada, Yilgarn Craton and the western Pilbara Craton, compared by some authors to circum-Pacific arc-trench settings. A fundamental geotectonic transformation is consistent with the increasing role of garnet fractionation as indicated by Al-depleted and plagioclase-enriched magmatic compositions, suggesting cooler high P/T (pressure/temperature) mantle and crustal magma sources, consistent with development of subduction. A concentration of large impacts during 2.63–2.48 Ga potentially accounts for peak magmatic events culminating the Archaean era. Strict comparisons between the Archaean systems and modern Arc-trench geotectonic setting will be shown to be unwarranted. These observations are considered in this monograph in the context of a review of major aspects of the Archaean record, in particular in the southern continents but with reference to northern cratons. The book provides an excursion through granite-greenstone terrains, and to a lesser extent high-grade metamorphic terrains, focusing on relic primary features including volcanic, sedimentary, petrological, geochemical and paleontological elements, with the aim of elucidating the nature of original environments and processes which dominated environments in which early life forms have emerged. By contrast to uniformitarian models, which take little or no account of repeated impacts of large asteroid clusters and their effects during ~3.47–2.48 Ga, the Archaean geological record will be shown to be consistent with the theory of asteroid impact-triggered geodynamic and magmatic activity originally advanced by D. H. Green in 1972 and 1981.

# Acknowledgements

This book conveys my observations in Archaean terrains following my studies at the University of Western Australia during 1964–1968, my years in the Australian Geological Survey (BMR/AGSO/GA) during 1968–1996 and the Australian National University to the present. The list of people I like to thank is long; however I particularly like to thank those who have given me special collaboration, advice and support: John Vickers, for many years of collaboration in geological field work in Western Australia; The late Alec Trendall and Tom Vallance, for their generous petrological advice during 1965–1967; Bill O’Beirne, Jack Hallberg, Gary Robinson and Kingsley Mills, for help with my Ph.D. thesis; Arthur Hickman, Franco Pirajno, the late Ian Williams, Peter Haines and Martin Van Kranendonk in connection with collaboration with the Geological Survey of Western Australia; the late Shen Su Sun, John Sheraton, Ian Lambert, Doone Wyborn, John Ferguson, Alan Whittaker, John Casey, the late Walter Dallwitz and Chris Pigram during my years in the BMR/AGSO (now Geoscience Australia); David Green, Ian Jackson, Richard Arculus, Chris Klootwijk and Prame Chopra for support at the Research School of Earth Science, Australian National University. I thank my overseas colleagues for collaboration, in particular Lutz Bischoff, Alec Baer, Don Lowe, Gary Byerly, Bruce Simonson, Scott Hassler, and Shigenori Maruyama. I am grateful to John Ferguson, Miryam Glikson, Victor Gostin, Arthur Hickman, Gerta Keller, Victor Masaitis, Franco Pirajno and Bruce Radke for reviews and comments on this book manuscript and to Brenda McAvoy for meticulous proof reading. I thank G. Byerly, Arthur Hickman, Michele McLeod, Reg Morrison, J-F Moyen, Allen Nutman, Bill Schopf, Bruce Simonson and John Valley, Geoscience Australia and the Geological Survey of Western Australia for permission to reproduce figures and photographic material. I thank Franco Pirajno, Petra van Steenbergen and Corina Van der Giessen for their advise and editorial assistance.



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# Chapter 1

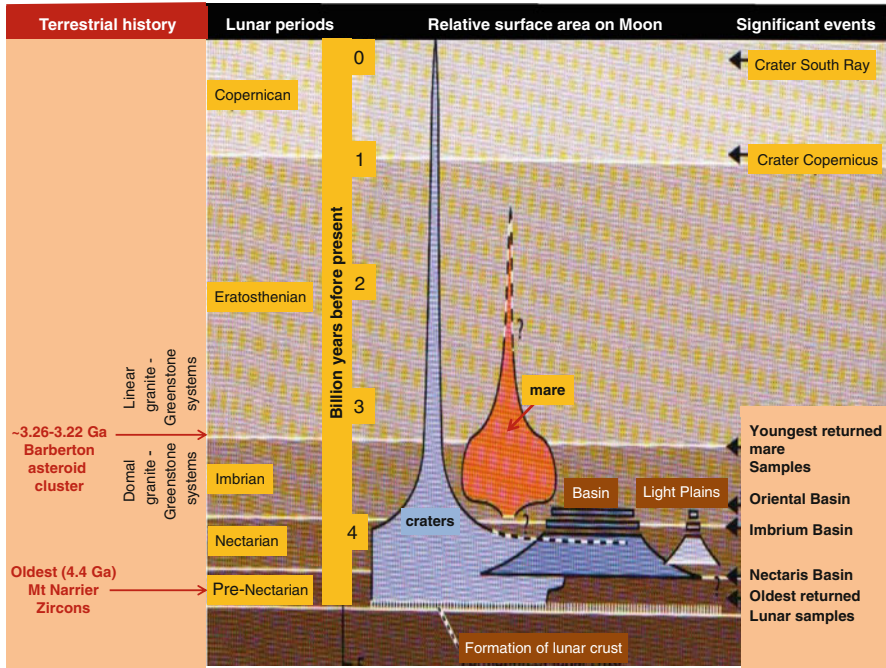
## The Moon and the Late Heavy Bombardment (LHB)

**Abstract** The Lunar surface offers the best evidence for events since accretion of the Earth-Moon system during the pre-Nectarian (pre-3.9 Ga) to about 3.85 Ga (Nectarian) whereas the terrestrial records for this era, referred to as the Hadean, are limited to high-grade metamorphic terrains (to ~4.0 Ga) and detrital or xenocrystic zircons (to ~4.4 Ga). Asteroid bombardment of the Moon during ~3.95–3.85 Ga (Late Heavy Bombardment – LHB), forming the lunar Mare, has not to date been identified in the terrestrial records. Interpretations of the terrestrial zircon record in terms of a Hadean felsic continental crust suffer from a major sampling bias in favor of preservation of resistant zircon grains vs an absence of labile mafic detrital material, rendering the overall composition of the pre-4.0 Ga Earth crust uncertain. Lunar impacts associated with Mare volcanism about ~3.2 Ga correlate with a large impact cluster which affected Archaean mafic-ultramafic crust and associated TTG (tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite) plutons, triggering abrupt uplift of the greenstone-TTG crust, forming small continental nuclei documented in the eastern Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa, and the Pilbara Craton, northwestern Australia. As suggested by Lowe and Byerly (Did the LHB end not with a bang but with a whimper? 41st Lunar Planet Science conference 2563pdf, 2010), the Archaean asteroid bombardment can be regarded as an extension of the LHB on Earth.

**Keywords** Moon • Late Heavy Bombardment • Lunar mare • Lunar spherules • Mare volcanism • Ti-rich basalt

Early terrestrial beginnings are interpreted in terms of a cosmic collision between an embryonic semi-molten Earth and a Mars-scale body—Theia ~4.5 billion years-ago determined from Pb isotopes (Stevenson 1987). The consequent formation of a metallic core, inducing a magnetic field which protects the Earth from cosmic radiation, and a strong gravity field which retards atmospheric gases from escaping into space, resulted in a haven for life at the Earth's surface (Gould 1990). It is assumed that, by analogy to the Lunar history (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3), Earth was subject to

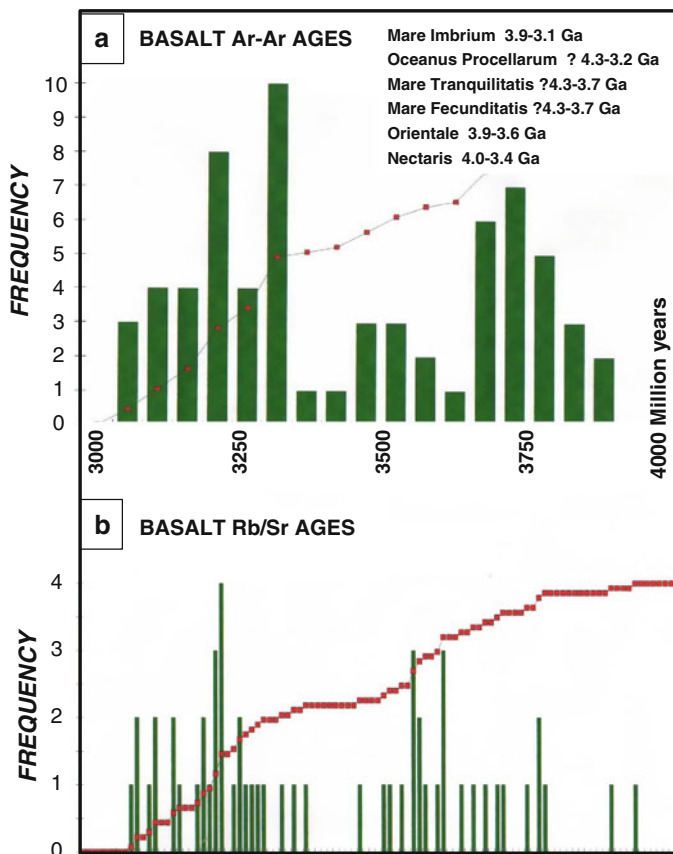




**Fig. 1.1** Broad stratigraphy of the Moon with the early Earth, marking the distribution of the lunar basins, light plains, craters and mare, correlated with Archaean stages and events on Earth (Data source: NASA)

heavy bombardment by asteroids during  $\sim 3.95\text{--}3.86$  Ga (Ryder 1990, 1991, 1997). Discoveries of detrital and xenocrystic zoned zircons from Mount Narryer and Jack Hills (Western Australia) (Fig. 2.1), containing  $\sim 4.4$  Ga cores and younger zones (Fig. 2.2) represent the only direct record of the terrestrial Hadean era (pre-4.0 Ga), a term coined by Cloud (1972). The zircons signify vestiges of felsic magmatic rocks, with high  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values ( $>5$  ‰ VSMOW) (Valley et al. 2002) implying relatively low temperatures and thereby a presence of a surface water component during alteration of the zircons (Wilde et al. 2001; Mojzsis et al. 2001; Valley et al. 2002, 2006; Valley 2005) (Figs. 11.2 and 11.3).

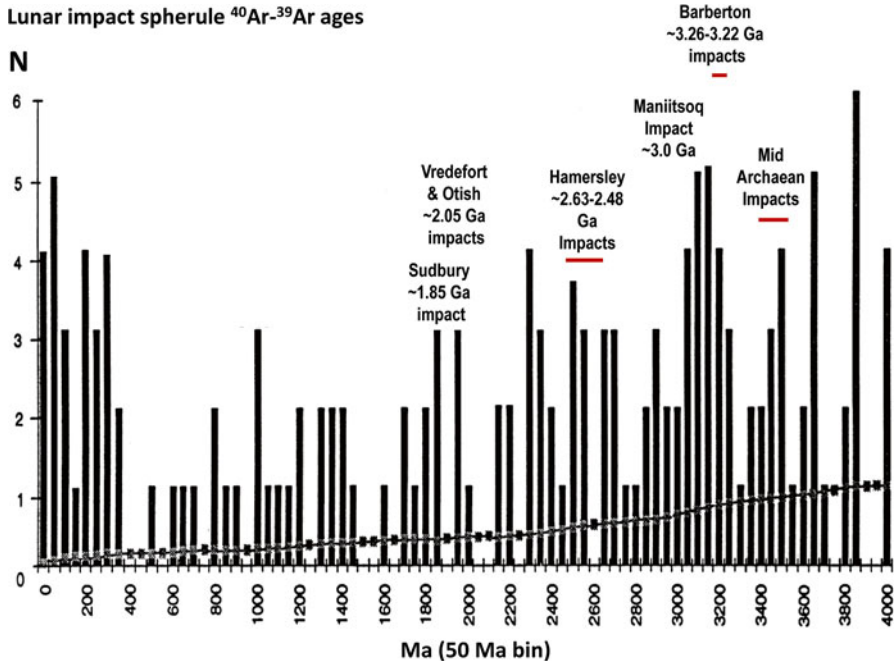
Early Precambrian terrains contain relict  $<4.1$  Ga-old supracrustal and plutonic components, exposed in Greenland, Labrador, Slave Province, Minnesota, Siberia, northeast China, southern Africa, India, Western Australia and Antarctica (Van Kranendonk et al. 2007a, b), although in some instances U-Pb zircon ages may be inherited. Amphibolite to granulite grade metamorphism of these formations, some of which formed parallel to the Late Heavy Bombardment (LHB) on the Moon ( $\sim 3.95\text{--}3.85$  Ga) (Ryder 1990), obscures recognition of primary features, precluding identification of signatures of the LHB. During the LHB exposure of the Earth surface to cosmic and UV radiation, incineration affected by large asteroid impacts and acid rain, likely restricted or precluded photosynthesis (Zahnle and Sleep 1997; Chyba 1993; Chyba and Sagan 1996). On the other hand extremophile chemotrophic



**Fig. 1.2** Frequency distribution of isotopic ages of Mare basalts: (a) Ar-Ar isotopic ages; (b) Rb-Sr isotopic ages, based on data from *Basaltic Volcanism of the Terrestrial Planets* (BVSP 1981)

bacteria (the ‘*deep hot biosphere*’ of Gold 1999) are likely to have resided in faults and fractures following formation of original crustal vestiges. The suggestion that low  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  graphite clouding in apatite in  $\sim 3.85$  Ga-old banded iron formation (BIF) in south-western Greenland may represent biogenic effects (Mojzsis and Harrison 2000) has not been confirmed, as the clouding was shown to arise from secondary contamination (Nutman and Friend 2006). By contrast, new evidence has emerged for a biogenic-mediated deposition of dolomite and possibly of BIF in the Isua greenstone belt (Bolhar et al. 2004; Nutman et al. 2010).

The LHB has been alternatively interpreted in terms of the tail-end of planetary accretion or as a temporally distinct bombardment episode (Ryder 1990, 1991). Mare volcanism is recorded for a period of about 1.3 billion years ( $\sim 3.8$ – $\sim 2.5$  Ga). Ar-Ar and Rb-Sr isotopic age frequencies indicate peak volcanic activities about  $\sim 3.8$ – $\sim 3.7$  Ga and  $\sim 3.4$ – $\sim 3.2$  Ga (Fig. 1.2). A  $\sim 3.8$ – $\sim 3.5$  Ga (Imbrian) Ti-rich mare



**Fig. 1.3** Frequency distribution frequency of  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  ages of Lunar impact glass spherules from the lunar soil, based on data by Culler et al. (2000)

volcanic phase (Apollo 11 and Apollo 17 type basalts) flooded large areas of the eastern portion of the lunar near-side (Head 1976). Eruption of  $\sim 3.5$ – $3.0$  Ga (Middle to late Imbrian) less Ti-rich basalts (Apollo 12 and Apollo 15) flooded widespread areas of the moon. About  $\sim 3.0$ – $2.5$  Ga (early Eratosthenian) Ti-rich basalts flooded portions of Mare Imbrium and the western Mare (Head 1976). Some of the largest lunar Mare basins contain low-Titanium basalts which likely represent impact-triggered volcanic activity (Ryder 1997), including Mare Imbrium ( $3.86 \pm 0.02$  Ga) and associated  $3.85 \pm 0.03$  Ga-old K, REE, and P-rich-basalts (KREEP) (BVSP 1981). Similar relationships between impact and volcanic activity may pertain in Oceanus Procellarum ( $3.29$ – $3.08$  Ga basalts) and in Hadley Apennines ( $3.37$ – $3.21$  Ga basalts) (BVSP 1981). The likelihood of impact-volcanic relationships of the lunar mare gains support from laser  $^{40}\text{Ar}/^{39}\text{Ar}$  analyses of lunar impact spherules from sample 11199 (Apollo 14, Fra Mauro Formation) (Culler et al. 2000; Levine et al. 2005; Hui et al. 2009) (Fig. 1.3).

Impact events tentatively indicated by the lunar spherule data include 3.87 Ga, 3.83 Ga, 3.66 Ga, 3.53 Ga and 3.47 Ga peaks. A significant age spike is indicated at 3.18 Ga, i.e. near the boundary between the Late Imbrian lunar era ( $3.9$ – $3.2$  Ga) and the post-Mare Eratosthenian lunar era ( $3.2$ – $1.2$  Ga), as defined by the cratering record (Wilhelms 1987). Some 34 lunar impact spherules yield a large-error mean

age of  $3,188 \pm 198$  Ma with a median age at 3,181 Ma, whereas 7 spherule ages with error  $<100$  m.y. yield a large-error mean age of  $3,178 \pm 80$  Ma and a median at 3,186 Ma (Fig. 1.3), which correlates approximately with the 3.256–3.225 Ga impact cluster indicated by impact condensate spherule units in the Barberton Greenstone Belt, Transvaal, South Africa (Figs. 7.9–7.17).

Despite the occurrence of  $>3.8$  Ga rocks (Chap. 2) to date no direct evidence of the effects of the LHB on early Archaean crust has been detected (Koeberl 2006). The penetratively deformed high-grade metamorphic state of  $>3.8$  Ga terrains overprints and obscures primary textural and mineralogical features diagnostic of shock metamorphism. Nor have shock metamorphic (planar deformation features) been detected in zircons and quartz grains entrained as xenocrysts in magmatic and metamorphic rocks or in detrital sediments, a likely explanation being the structurally weaker state and thus destruction of shock metamorphosed minerals. Schoenberg et al. (2002) reported tungsten isotope anomalies based on the  $^{182}\text{Hf}$ - $^{182}\text{W}$  system in metamorphosed sedimentary rocks from the 3.8–3.7-Ga Isua greenstone belt, West Greenland and northern Labrador. The short half-life of 9 Ma of the parent  $^{182}\text{Hf}$  isotope and the preservation of the  $^{182}\text{W}$  daughter isotope imply pre-existence of components of the primordial solar system in the metamorphosed sediments. Jorgensen et al. (1999) report an average Iridium level of 150 ppt from clastic and banded iron sediments in southwest Greenland, about seven times higher than present day ocean crust (20 ppt), an enrichment attributed by these authors to cometary impacts. Examination of the  $^{53}\text{Mn}$ - $^{53}\text{Cr}$  and  $^{53}\text{Cr}$ - $^{52}\text{Cr}$  isotopic compositions of metamorphosed turbidite, pelagic sediments and banded ironstones in the  $\sim 3.7$  Ga Isua Supracrustal Belt, southwest Greenland, did not detect meteoritic components (Frey and Rosing 2005). According to these authors unequivocal evidence of an LHB remains uncertain. Possible explanations include unrepresentative samples and sedimentation period which did not overlap with asteroid impacts. Potential chromium anomalies, if present, may be too small to be detected.

Tentative correlations between the lunar spherule data and terrestrial events include the following (Fig. 1.3):

- (A) Sharp  $\sim 3.53$  Ga and  $\sim 3.47$  Ga lunar maxima closely correlate with peak magmatic activity associated with volcanic activity in Archaean greenstone-granitoid systems in the Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, and Kaapvaal Craton, Transvaal;
- (B) A  $\sim 1.8$  Ga lunar peak, including spherule ages of  $1,813 \pm 36.3$  Ma, occurs within error from the 1.85 Ga age of the  $>250$  km-diameter Sudbury impact structure, Ontario (Grieve 2006);
- (C) Two of the shallower lunar age peaks overlap the age of impact spherules in the Hamersley Basin, Western Australia, including  $\sim 2.56$ – $2.57$  Ga spherule units in the Wittenoom Formation (Sect. 10.2.3) and a  $\sim 2.48$  Ga spherule unit in banded ironstones of the Dale Gorge Member (Simonson 1992; Simonson and Hassler 1997; Simonson and Glass 2004);
- (D) The  $\sim 1.08$  Ga peak parallels the emplacement of the large layered mafic-ultramafic Giles Complex, central Australia (Ballhaus and Glikson 1995; Glikson 1995).

Nine lunar spherule ages, with errors of less than 20 Ma, allow comparisons with terrestrial isotopic ages of similar or better precision (Fig. 1.3). These include (1)  $3,872.1 \pm 11.2$  Ma and  $3,807.4 \pm 14.5$  Ma lunar spherule ages corresponding in part to the LHB; (2)  $3,542 \pm 11.4$  and  $3475.8 \pm 15$  Ma ages correlated in part with Archaean volcanic events and impacts in the Pilbara and Kaapvaal cratons, and (3)  $3,186.2 \pm 12.1$ ,  $352.6 \pm 6.6$  (the latter corresponding to the end-Devonian),  $304.6 \pm 17$  and  $51.4 \pm 4.0$  Ma ages. Notable in their absence are spherule age peaks corresponding to the  $\sim 2.023$  Ga  $\sim 300$  km-diameter Vredefort impact structure and the  $\sim 500$  km Otish Basin impact (Genest et al. 2010). The lunar spherule age data reflect the late Devonian impact cluster (Woodleigh, Western Australia; Mory et al. 2000), D = 120 km, 364.8 Ma (Uysal et al. 2001), Charlevoix, Quebec, 367.15, D = 54 km; Siljan, Sweden, 368.11 Ma, D = 52 km; Alamo breccia, Nevada, Frasnian-Famnenian age, including impact spherules, shocked quartz and Ir anomalies; Ternovka, Ukraine, 350 Ma, D = 15 km; Kaluga, Russia, 380.10, D = 15 km; Ilynets, Ukraine, 395.5 Ma, D = 4.5 km; Elbow, Saskatchewan, 395.25 Ma, D = 8 km) and contemporaneous Frasnian-Famnenian and end-Devonian mass extinctions. The late Devonian events may be mirrored by a precise lunar spherule age of  $352.6 \pm 6.6$  Ma age and a cumulative peak of 11 spherule ages with errors  $>100$  m.y.. Other potential correlations may be indicated by lunar spherule ages include  $\sim 303$  Ma (Carboniferous–Permian boundary – Warburton twin impacts – Glikson 2013),  $\sim 251$  Ma (Permian–Triassic boundary), and  $\sim 103$  Ma,  $64$ – $71$  Ma (Cretaceous–Tertiary boundary),  $\sim 52$  and  $\sim 38$ – $32$  Ma (late Eocene impacts and extinction).

Most Archaean crustal models have neglected the consequences of impact by large asteroids in the inner solar system in the wake of the LHB, assuming a decline in flux from 4 to  $9.10^{-13}$   $\text{km}^{-2}$   $\text{year}^{-1}$  (for craters  $D_c \geq 18$  km) to a flux of  $3.8$ – $6.3.10^{-15}$   $\text{km}^{-2}.\text{year}^{-1}$  (for craters  $D_c \geq 20$  km) (Grieve and Dence 1979; Baldwin 1985; Ryder 1991). Post-LHB impact rates estimated from lunar and terrestrial crater counts are of the same order of magnitude as the cratering rate, i.e.  $5.9 \pm 3.5.10^{-15}$   $\text{km}^{-2}$   $\text{year}^{-1}$  (for craters  $D_c \geq 20$  km) estimated from astronomical observations of near-Earth asteroids (NEA) and comets (Shoemaker and Shoemaker 1996). Combining these rates with crater size vs cumulative size frequency relationships approximating  $N \propto D_c^{-1.8}$  to  $N \propto D_c^{-2.0}$  ( $D_c$  = crater diameter;  $N$  = cumulative number of craters with diameters larger than  $D_c$ ), implies the formation of more than 53 craters of  $D_c \geq 300$  km, and more than 19 craters of  $D_c \geq 500$  km since  $\sim 3.8$  Ga, nearly two orders of magnitude higher than the preserved record. The size distribution relationship  $N \propto D^{-1.8}$  is probably only valid for craters  $<100$  km. NEAs in the range of  $D_p = 0.1$ – $5.0$  km correspond better to the relation  $N \propto D_p^{-2.0}$  consistent with young cratered surfaces on the terrestrial planets (Glikson 2001). The frequency of impacts by asteroids the size of Eros (long axis  $D_p = 34$  km), the comet Swift Tuttle ( $D_p = 26$  km) and Ganymede ( $D_p = 32$ – $34$  km) is uncertain, but a preliminary estimate suggests at least 12 impacts by bodies of this scale since the LHB.

Comparing estimates of post-LHB impacts with the preserved terrestrial cratering record documented to date, the minimum extraterrestrial impact incidence for craters  $D_c \geq 100$  km is defined by the eight observed impact structures of  $D_c \geq 100$  km, including Maniitsoq –  $\sim 300$  km; Vredefort – 298 km; Sudbury – 250 km;

Chicxulub – 170 km; Woodleigh – 120 km; Manicouagan – 100 km; Popigai – 100 km; Warburton >400 km (Glikson et al. 2013) and Otish Basin of possibly ~500 km diameter (Genest et al. 2010), which struck continental crust. Based on the Lunar impact flux a minimum number of 30 continental craters of  $D_c > 100$  km and ten continental craters of  $D_c \geq 250$  km may be estimated.

The Lunar LHB evidence records a rapid decline of the magnitude and rate of impacts following ~3.85–3.80 Ga (Cohen et al. 2000; Hartmann et al. 2000). By contrast, since the discovery of ~3.48–3.22 Ga asteroid impact fallout units in the Barberton Greenstone Belt, South Africa (Lowe et al. 1989; Lowe et al. 2003) and in ~2.63–2.48 Ga sediments of the Hamersley Basin, Pilbara Craton, Western Australia (Simonson 1992), more than 14 impact fallout/ejecta units were identified in Archaean terrains, including:

- Barberton Greenstone Belt (Lowe et al. 2003; Lowe and Byerly 2010): 3,482 Ma, 3,472 Ma, 3,445 Ma, 3,416 Ma, 3,334 Ma, 3,256 Ma, 3,243 Ma, 3,225 Ma (2 units).
- Transvaal Basin: 2,647 ± 30 Ma (Monteville Spherule Layer), 2,581 ± 9 Ma (Reivilo Spherule Layer), 2,516 ± 4 Ma (Kuruman Spherule layer).
- Pilbara Craton and Hamersley Basin, Western Australia (Simonson and Glass 2004; Glikson 2013): ~3.47 Ga (2 fallout units), ~2.63 Ga, ~2.57 Ga, ~2.56 Ga (2 fallout units), ~ 2.48 Ga.

Another Archaean impact structure is documented in southwestern Greenland by the ~2.975 Ga Maniitsoq impact structure (Garde et al. 2012). Based on the above evidence, Lowe and Byerly (2010) suggest the LHB continued through the early Archaean, an idea supported by a view of the Archaean impact record as the ‘*tip of the iceberg*’ in terms of the limited preservation of impact fallout units and the difficulty in their identification in the field. Due to the incomplete nature of the Archaean sedimentary record, large parts of which have been removed as evidenced by unconformities and paraconformities, likely less than 10 % of asteroid impact ejecta units have been detected to date in Archaean and Proterozoic terrains. This potentially opens the door to a paradigm shift in terms of the understanding of early crustal evolution.

## Chapter 2

# Hadean and Early Archaean High Grade Metamorphic Terrains

*Who knows for certain  
Who shall here declare it  
Whence was it born, whence came creation  
The Gods are later than this world's formation  
Who then can know the origins of the world*

(The Rig Veda, X.129).

### **Ancient Water / Marble Bar**

*No one*

Was there to hear  
The muffled roar of an earthquake,  
Nor *anyone* who froze with fear  
Of rising cliffs, eclipsed deep lakes  
Sparkling comet-lit horizons  
Brighter than one thousand suns  
That blinded *no one's* vision.

*No one*

Stood there in awe  
Of an angry black coned volcano  
Nor *any* pair of eyes that saw  
Red streams eject from inferno  
Plumes spewing out of Earth  
And yellow sulphur clouds  
Choking *no one's* breath.

*No one*

Was numbed by thunder  
As jet black storms gathered  
Nor *anyone* was struck asunder  
By lightning, when rocks shuttered  
Engulfed by gushing torrents  
That drowned smouldering ashes  
Which *no one* was to lament.

*In time*

Once again an orange star rose  
 Above a sleeping archipelago  
 Sun rays breaking into blue depth ooze  
 Waves rippling sand's ebb and flow  
 Receding to submerged twilight worlds  
 Where budding algal mats

*Declare life*

*On the young Earth.*

A poem by Andrew Glikson

**Abstract** The oldest terrestrial minerals identified to date are  $4,363 \pm 20$  Ma-old detrital zircons from Jack Hills, Western Australia (Valley et al. *Geology* 36:911–912, 2002; Nemchin et al. *Earth Planet Sci Lett* 244:218–233, 2006; Pidgeon and Nemchin, *Precamb Res* 150:201–220, 2006), predating the oldest known rocks – the ~4.0–4.03 Ga-old Acasta Gneiss (Bowring and Williams *Contrib Mineral Petrol* 134:3–16, 1999). The zircon data suggest development of low temperature hydrosphere predated the ~3.8 Ga Isua supracrustal belt of southwest Greenland by some 600 Ma. These greenstone belts contain a wealth of primary textural, mineralogical, geochemical and isotopic features allowing detailed insights into the nature of near Earth surface as well as deep seated plutonic processes. Early Archaean (>3.6 Ga) gneisses underlie approximately 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> of Earth surface (Van Kranendonk et al., *Paleo-archaeon development of a continental nucleus: the east Pilbara terrain of the Pilbara craton*. In: Van Kranendonk MJ, Smithies RH, Bennett VC (eds) *Earth's oldest rocks. Developments in Precambrian geology* 15. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp 307–337, 2007a, *Terra Nova* 19:1–38, 2007b). Terrains containing >4.0 Ga (Hadean) detrital and xenocrystic zircons include the Mt Narryer-Jack Hills Terrain (<4404 Ma), Acasta Gneiss (4.03–3.94 Ga) (west Slave Province, northwest Canada) and East Antarctic Gneisses (4.06–3.85 Ga).

**Keywords** Archaean • Hadean • Zircon • Mount Narryer • Jack hills • Acasta gneiss • Isua belt • Itsaq gneiss

The spatial juxtaposition of the Earth and Moon early in the history of the solar system (Ringwood 1986) requires both have been affected by early meteorite bombardment periods, documented on the Moon at ~3.95–3.85 Ga (Ryder 1990) and earlier periods. However, to date no shock-produced planar deformation features were identified in zircons from the Mt Narryer and other early Archaean terrains. The presence of ~3.85 Ga banded iron formations in southwest Greenland (Appel et al. 1998; Nutman et al. 2010) may signify yet older mafic volcanism with consequent ferrous iron enrichment of the early hydrosphere under unoxidizing conditions of the Archaean atmosphere (Chap. 11). The absence to date in pre-3.75 Ga terrains of un-metamorphosed or low-grade supracrustal rocks retards a search for signature of asteroid impacts. A possibility that terrestrial zircons >4.0 Ga may have been derived from

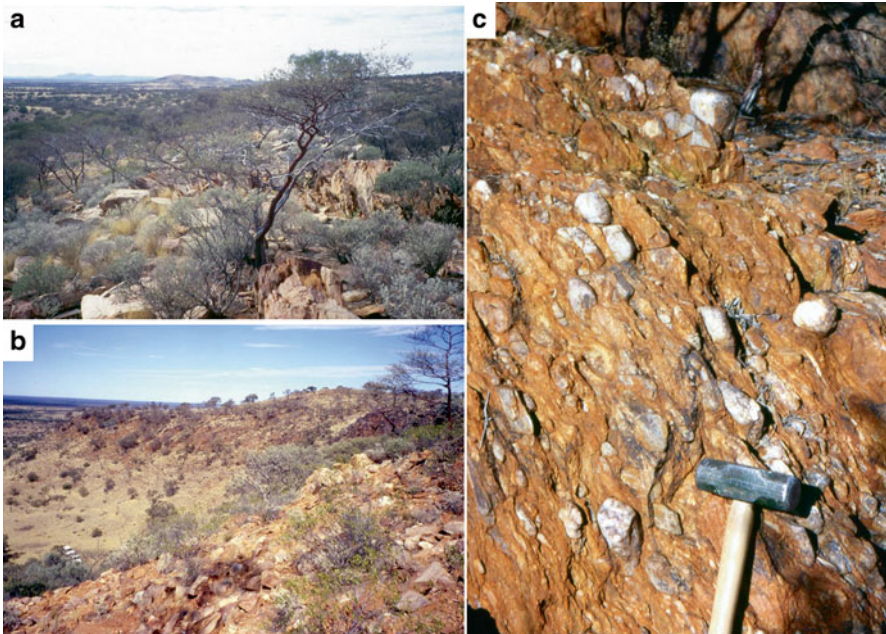


impact-produced felsic and anorthositic melt sheets, contemporaneous with pre-4.0 Ga lunar mega-impacts such as the South Pole Aitken, requires further examination.

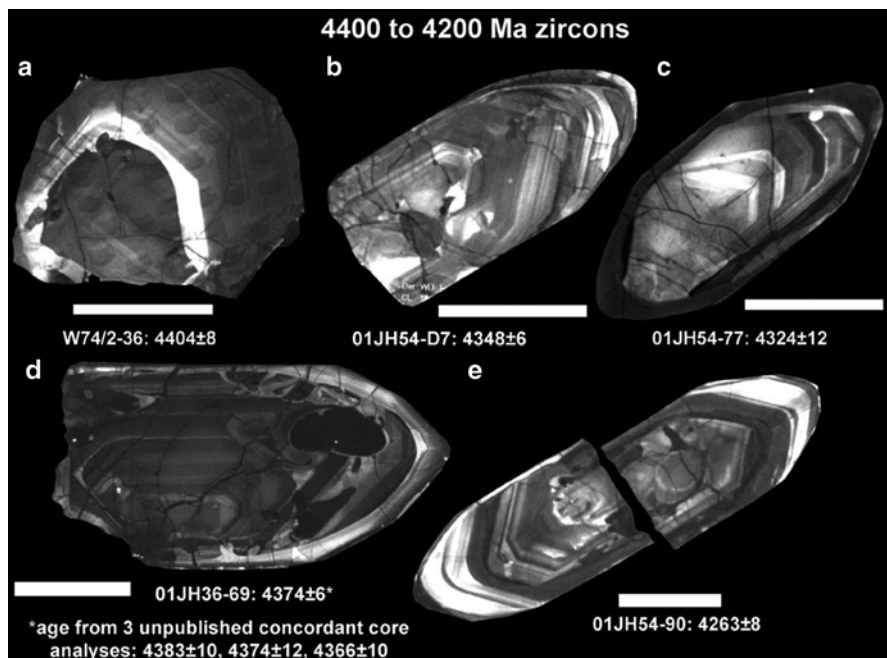
The following sections discuss the principal features of high-grade gneisses and relic zircons in geochronological sequence, with implications to the nature of the Hadean (pre-3.8 Ga) crust.

## 2.1 Mount Narryer >4.0 Ga Detrital Zircons

The 30,000 km<sup>2</sup>-large Narryer Terrain, northwestern Yilgarn Craton, Western Australia (Myers 1988; Wilde et al. 2001), consists of granitoids and granitic gneisses ranging in age from early to late Archaean interlayered with banded iron formation, mafic and ultramafic intrusive rocks and metasediments (Williams and Myers 1987; Myers 1988; Kinny et al. 1990). The terrain contains ~3,730 Ma gneiss-hosted zircons and <4,404 Ma detrital zircons hosted by ~3 Ga-old quartzites (Fig. 2.1) (Froude et al. 1983; Wilde et al. 2001; Watson and Harrison 2005; Harrison et al. 2005; Valley et al. 2006; Nemchin et al. 2006; Pidgeon and Nemchin 2006; Cavosie et al. 2004) (Figs. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4). The gneiss terrain is defined in the west by the Darling Fault, and in the north by the Errabiddy shear zone. Nutman et al. (1993) regards the Narryer Terrain as an allochthonous thrust block over the 3.0–2.92 Ga granites of the Youanmi.



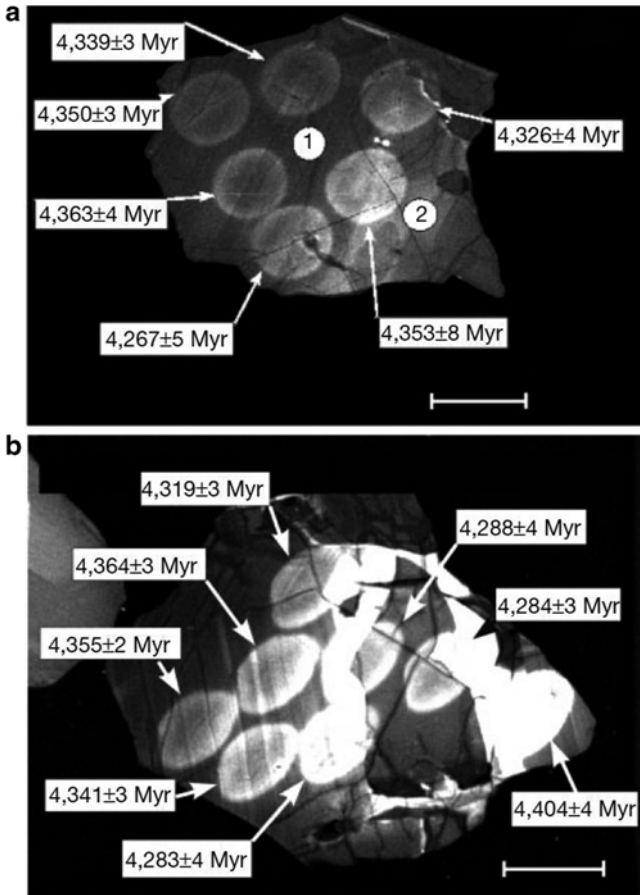
**Fig. 2.1** Photographs of quartzite and conglomerate, Jack Hill, northwestern Yilgarn Craton, Western Australia. (a and b) Jack Hills, Western Australia, site of Hadean zircons as old as 4.4 billion years, the oldest known samples of Earth; (c) Outcrop of quartzite pebble-bearing metaconglomerate at Jack Hills. Courtesy John Valley



**Fig. 2.2** Cathodoluminescence images of five 4,400–4,200 Ma detrital zircons from Jack Hills. Details of these grains are presented in Cavosie et al. (2004, 2005, 2006). Ages are in Million years. Uncertainties in Pb-Pb ages are 2 SD. Scale bars = 100  $\mu$ m (From Cavosie et al. 2007; Elsevier, by permission <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/bookseries/01662635/15>)

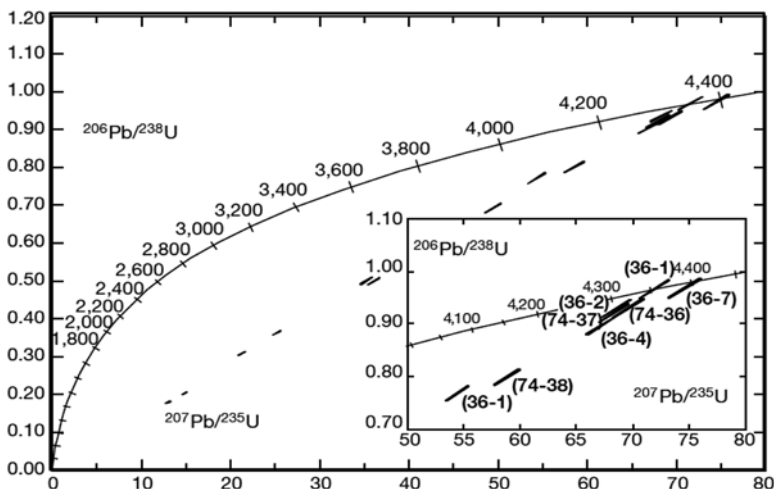
Hadean to early Archaean  $\sim$ 4.4–3.9 Ga-old ages reported from 251 zircon grains from  $\sim$ 3.0 Ga Jack Hills quartzite sediments indicate a peak magmatic activity during  $\sim$ 4.2–4.0 Ga. Seventeen grains yielded ages  $>$ 4.3 Ga, mostly from a single arenite layer (Cavosie et al. 2004). A 4,352 Ma-old zircon grain measured from Maynard Hills (Wyche et al. 2004) constitutes the oldest terrestrial age record measured to date. The old zircons may display zoned rims representing magmatic overgrowths, some of which dated as  $\sim$ 3,360 and  $\sim$ 3,690 Ma, consistent with granite ages from the Narryer Terrain, indicating the  $\sim$ 4.3 Ga zircons were re-incorporated in granitoid magmas (Cavosie et al. 2004).

Conglomerates of Jack Hills containing early zircons are dominated by quartzite clasts (Fig. 2.1c). To date no granitoid clasts were encountered, which restricts considerations regarding provenance terrains of the zircons. The U-Pb ages, morphology, zoning and geochemistry the zircon population of the Narryer Terrain suggest derivation from heterogeneous sources (Wilde et al. 2001). About 12 % of the zircons yield ages older than 3.9 Ga (Pidgeon and Nemchin 2006). The bulk of the zircons from Mt Narryer and eastern Jack Hills are consistent with granitic provenance similar to adjacent gneisses in terms of age, oscillatory zoning and U-content, whereas zircons from the western Jack Hills are of different composition and origin (Crowley et al. 2005).



**Fig. 2.3** 4.4 Ga Zircons Cathodluminescence and back-scattered electron images of a detrital zircon crystal grain W74/2–36 from Jack Hills. Scale bars are 50  $\mu\text{m}$ ; (a) lighter circular areas are the SHRIMP analytical sites and the values record the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  age of each site. The two white areas (1 and 2) represent the approximate location of the  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  oxygen analytical spots. (b) Cathodluminescence image showing the sites of analysis and the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages for each spot (From Wilde et al. 2001; Nature, by permission)

Palaeo-thermometry studies using Ti levels in zircon and oxygen isotopes support contact with water (Mojzsis et al. 2001; Peck et al. 2001; Wilde et al. 2001; Cavosie et al. 2005; Watson and Harrison 2005). Suggestions of a “cool” early Earth (Valley 2005; Valley et al. 2006) are supported by studies of Ti/zircon of >4.0 Ga-old zircons, inferring temperatures of  $\sim 700^\circ\text{C}$  consistent with modern-day geodynamic conditions (Watson and Harrison 2005). From post  $\sim 2.6$  Ga, however, a long term rise in the maximum  $^{18}\text{O}/^{16}\text{O}$  ratios indicates further overall cooling of the Earth crust (Figs. 11.2 and 11.3) (Valley 2008). Preferential retention of Lu relative to Hf in the mantle and the low initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  of most Jack Hills zircons imply derivation



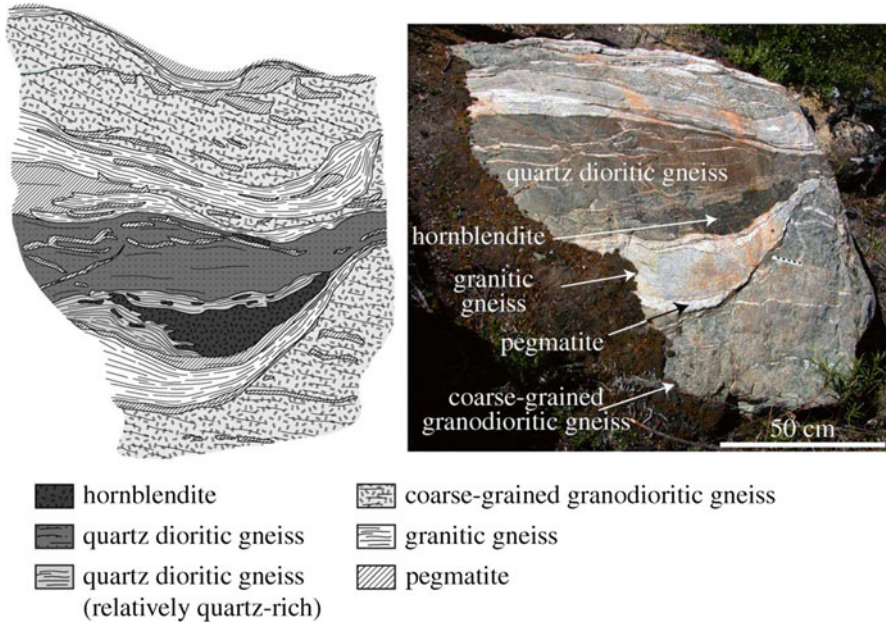
**Fig. 2.4** Combined concordia plot for grain W74/2-36 showing the U-Pb results obtained during two analytical sessions. The inset shows the most concordant data points together with their analysis number (From Wilde et al. 2001; *Nature*, by permission)

by reworking of low Lu/Hf crust. The low  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  and  $^{18}\text{O}/^{16}\text{O}$  isotope values of the zircons thus suggest that within  $\sim 100$  Ma of its formation Earth had settled into a pattern of crust formation, erosion, and sedimentary cycling similar to that produced during younger periods. Many zircons younger than 3.6 Ga have higher initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios, which suggests mantle contributions (Bell et al. 2011).

The assumption of a Hadean continental crust (Harrison et al. 2005) is difficult to reconcile with the likely arrest of the gabbro to eclogite transition under high Archaean and Hadean geotherms, which would have retarded subduction of mafic and production of granitic continental crust (Green 1981). Further, the  $T_{\text{Zr}}$  values correspond to near-eutectic zirconium saturation temperatures, which could have included equivalents of the Archaean tonalite-trondjemite-granodiorite (TTG) suite (Chap. 4). Interpretations of zircon populations in terms of the composition of provenance terrains are likely to suffer from a major sampling bias in favor of zircons, as contrasted to a paucity in signatures of labile mafic-ultramafic and other lithic detritus eroded during current reworking. To cite an example, the composition of late Archaean conglomerates, such as in the Moodies Group of the Barberton Greenstone Belt (Chap. 7) or the Lalla Rookh Formation of the Pilbara Craton (Chap. 8), hardly represents the composition of the underlying greenstone-granite terrains.

## 2.2 Acasta Gneiss and Hadean Zircons

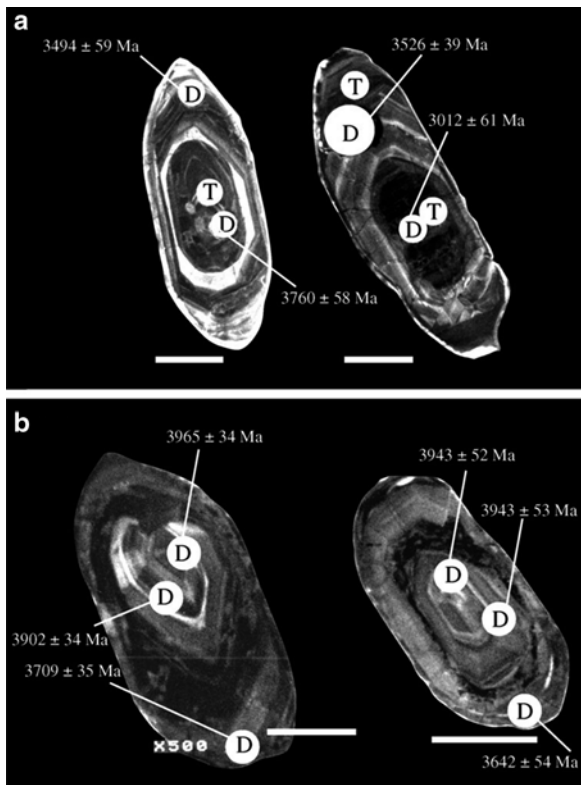
The Acasta Gneiss complex, west Slave Province, northwest Canada, includes relic 4.03–3.94 Ga granitoids and diorites with granitic protoliths indicated as  $\sim 4.2$  Ga-old (Bowring and Williams 1999; Bleeker and Stern 1997; Iizuka et al.



**Fig. 2.5** Sketch map and photo of outcrop of quartz dioritic, coarse-grained granodioritic and granitic gneisses, with minor pegmatite and hornblendite layers. The outcrop displays granitic gneiss intruding quartz dioritic and coarse-grained granodiorite gneisses. The quartz diorite gneiss differentiated into relatively quartz-rich quartz diorite gneiss leucosome and residual layers of hornblendite, indicating anatexis of the quartz diorite by intrusion of granitic magmas (From Iizuka et al. 2007; Elsevier, by permission)

2007) (Fig. 2.5). The un-radiogenic Hf isotopic composition and the geochemical and mineralogical properties of the ~4.2 Ga zircon xenocrysts suggest crystallization in granitic magmas derived by reworking of older Hadean felsic crustal rocks (Iizuka et al. 2007). Calculations based on  $^{176}\text{Lu}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios of the ~4.2 Ga zircons and juvenile magma of chondritic Hf isotopic composition allow estimates of mixing ratios and metamorphic reworking, suggesting that about half of the samples have a reworking index higher than 50 % and implying extensive reworking of Hadean granitoid crust (Iizuka et al. 2007). Zircon zonation patterns (Fig. 2.6) include evidence for metamorphic overgrowth of ~3.66 Ga zones around ~3.96 Ga cores, likely associated with intrusion of granites. Younger magmatic events include ~3.74–3.72 Ga granitoids, >3.6–3.59 Ga diorites and granitoids (Iizuka et al. 2007). ~4.2 Ga ages are obtained from model Hf zircon data and  $^{40}\text{Ar}$ - $^{39}\text{Ar}$  ages of ~4.3 Ga within banded iron formation, also obtained in the Isua supracrustal belt (Kamber et al. 2003) (Sect. 2.5). U-Pb zircon data indicates mafic magmatic activity at ~4.0 and ~3.6 Ga. Evidence for younger magmatic events in the West Acasta terrain includes ~3.36, ~2.9, ~2.6 and ~1.9–1.8 Ga felsic magmatism and related anatexis and metamorphism associated with the Wopmay orogeny

**Fig. 2.6** Cathod-luminescence images of zircons: (a) from granitic gneiss AC458 with a protolith age of 3.59 Ga, showing that some zircons contain xenocrystic cores; (b) from granitic gneiss AC584 with a protolith age of 3.94 Ga, showing the overgrowth of oscillatory-zoned zircon during recrystallization/anatexis at 3.66 Ga, which is coincident with the protolith age of an adjacent tonalitic gneiss. Scale bars are 50  $\mu\text{m}$ . Values record 207Pb/206Pb ages ( $2\sigma$ ). “D” and “T” represent analytical spots of LA-ICPMS dating and LA-ICPMS trace element analysis, respectively (Iizuka et al. 2007; Elsevier, by permission)



(Hodges et al. 1995; Sano et al. 1999), followed by  $\sim 1.26$  Ga MacKenzie mafic dyking event (LeCheminant and Heaman 1989; Bleeker and Stern 1997).

### 2.3 Northeastern Superior Province Gneisses

The Nuvvuagittuq (or Porpoise Cove) greenstone belt, located on the eastern coast of Hudson Bay, Northeastern Superior Province, Canada, dated at 3.8 Ga, is composed of Archaean plutonic suites containing 1–10 km-wide belts of amphibolite and granulite-facies greenstones traced up to 150 km along strike (Percival and Card 1994; Percival et al. 1992; Leclair et al. 2006). The terrain includes one of the world’s oldest known mantle-derived assemblages (O’Neill et al. 2007), comprising both Al-depleted and Al-undepleted komatiite volcanics and isotopic positive  $\epsilon\text{Nd}$  values indicating long-term preceding mantle-type high  $^{147}\text{Sm}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  ratios and depletion in the light rare earth elements (LREE). U-Pb age determinations define younger 3.8–1.9 Ga domains spatially defined by aeromagnetic anomalies (Leclair et al. 2006). Two principal age terrains are identified, including (A) The east Arnaud

River terrain consisting of <2.88 Ga rocks with Nd depleted-mantle model ages ( $T_{DM}$ ) <3.0 Ga, and (B) The west Hudson Bay terrain including the Nuvvuagittuq greenstone belt which contain ~3.8 Ga inherited zircons (Stevenson et al. 2006). Mafic components of the gneisses include cummingtonite amphibole with positive Eu and Y anomalies, similar to those of Algoma-type banded iron formations of marine exhalite origin and seawater signature (Fryer 1977; Graf 1978; Fryer et al. 1979). Banded iron formation associated with the greenstone belts display heavy Fe isotopic composition (0.1–0.5‰ amu) relative to those of associated gneisses and amphibolites, indicating origin as marine chemical precipitates, by analogy with heavy Fe isotopic composition of the Akilia banded iron formation, southwest Greenland. The origin of banded iron formations includes interpretations in terms of precipitation of marine exhalations (Jacobsen and Pimentel-Klose 1988; Olivarez and Owen 1991), oxidation of  $Fe^{+2}$  derived from deep ocean basins and deposition under anoxic conditions (Holland 2005) and anaerobic microbial activity (Konhauer et al. 2002). The REE and Y profiles and the Fe isotopic compositions of Nuvvuagittuq's BIF confirm their origin as marine exhalites (O'Neill et al. 2007).

## 2.4 Wyoming Gneisses

The northwestern Wyoming Craton and the Granite Mountain region of central Wyoming include outcrops of 3.4–3.2 Ga rocks (Mueller and Frost 2006) and evidence from Nd and Pb isotopic indices suggesting 3.6–4.0 Ga precursor source terrains (Wooden and Mueller 1988; Frost and Frost 1993; Mueller and Frost 2006; Chamberlain et al. 2003). The Archaean rocks are exposed in the cores of Laramide (Cretaceous) uplifts, bordering Proterozoic terrains and late Archaean ~2.67 Ga terrain of the Teton and Wind River Ranges (O'Neill and Lopez 1985; Mueller et al. 2002; Frost et al. 2006). Other late Archaean terrains occur in the North Snowy Block, southwestern Montana and in south-central Wyoming (Chamberlain et al. 2003).

Detrital zircons from 3.3 to 2.7 Ga quartzite of the eastern Beartooth Mountains, western Beartooth Mountains and Tobacco Root Mountains and Hellroaring plateau are dominated by 3.3–3.4 Ga grains and also include >3.6 Ga zircons, including grains 3.9–4.0 Ga-old (Mueller and Frost 2006). Lu-Hf model ages of 3.3–3.4 Ga from bulk zircon samples in quartzites suggest derivation from a relatively juvenile magmatic event (Stevenson and Patchett 1990). Early Archaean zircons also occur in the northwest part of the Wyoming Craton, which contains extensive pelitic, quartzitic and carbonate metasediments interleaved with gneisses (Mogk et al. 1992, 2004). Zircon xenocrysts from these meta-sediments yield ages of ~3.3 Ga from trondhjemite from the northern Madison Range and up to 3.93 Ga from the Tobacco Root Mountains. Tonalitic orthogneiss with magmatic ages of ~3.3 Ga east of the Granite Mountain contains early Archaean xenocrystic zircon cores mostly yielding ages of about ~3.3 Ga with some grains yielding ages of ~3.42, ~3.48, ~3.59 and ~3.80 Ga (Kruckenberg et al. 2001). Cores of xenocrystic zircons from the

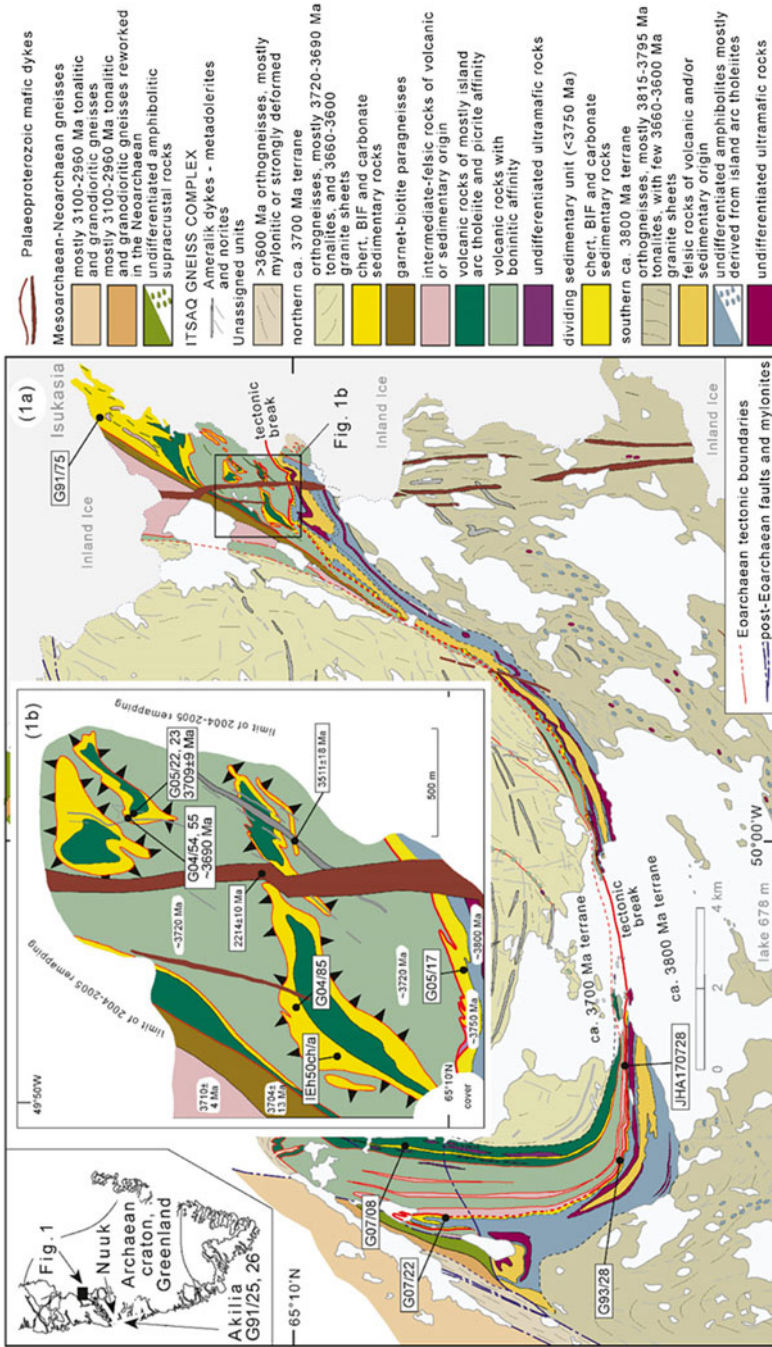
southwest Wind River Range include 3.8–3.65 Ga internal domains with low U (34 and 25 ppm) and high Th/U (0.70 and 0.74) values, suggesting crystallization in mafic or high grade metamorphic rocks.

Chamberlain and Mueller interpreted the evidence in terms of the pre-existence of a major ~3.3 Ga craton extending from the Oregon Trail belt in south-central Wyoming to the Great Falls Tectonic zone and Dakotan segment of the Trans-Hudson Orogen. Prevalence of 3.3–3.4 Ga detrital zircons in the eastern Beartooth Mountains suggests proximal sources of terrains of this age. Elevated isotopic  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratios in upper Archaean rocks suggest derivation from high- $\mu$  Hadean-aged basaltic proto-crust and mantle. Nd isotopic data vary widely, in part suggesting mantle-derivation and in part incorporation of 3.8–3.6 Ga components in the sources of younger magmatic events (Kamber et al. 2003). Chamberlain and Mueller interpreted the evidence in terms of combination of erosion of early Archaean cratons and subduction of basaltic crust including craton-derived sediments into the mantle. Cratonization of the Wyoming Craton about ~3.5, ~3.3 and 3.0–2.85 Ga was associated with multiple intrusions of tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite and K-granites in the Beartooth-Bighorn Magmatic Zone, forming broad plutonic blooms rather than arc trench-type linear belts (Frost et al. 2006; Mueller and Frost 2006). Evidence of modern-style lateral accretion and arc magmatism is suggested at 2.67–2.63 Ga in the southern part of the craton. Possible geophysical evidence for buried equivalents of the ~3.3 Ga craton is provided by a, at least 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> large, 15–25 km thick and seismically-fast lower crustal layer imaged beneath the Bighorn subprovince by the Deep Probe experiment (Nelson 1999; Gorman et al. 2002; Chamberlain et al. 2003), imaged north to the Great Falls tectonic zone and much of central and eastern Montana.

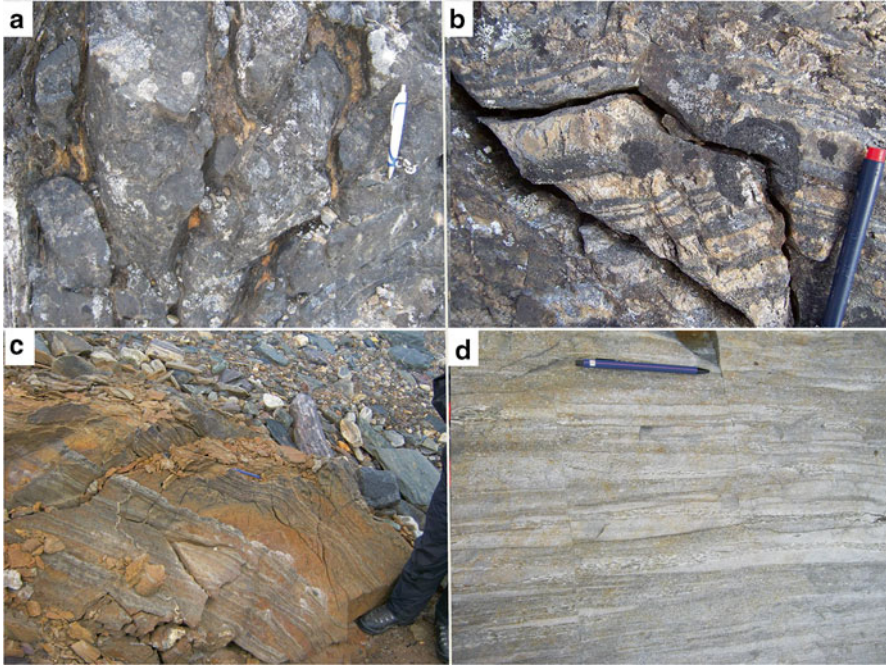
## 2.5 Itsaq Gneisses and Supracrustals, Southwest Greenland

The Itsaq Gneiss Complex contains tonalitic, granitic, minor quartz-dioritic and ferro-gabbro gneisses dated as ~3,870 and 3,620 Ma, associated with amphibolite, chemical sediments, minor felsic volcanics, gabbro-anorthosite suites and slivers of >3,600 Ma peridotite. Intrusive tonalites are compared to the Archaean tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite suite in terms of their geochemistry, including Sr and Nd isotopic mantle-derived signatures and are interpreted in terms of partial melting of hydrated basalt converted into eclogite (Nutman et al. 1993, 2007). The northern part of the Itsaq gneiss complex contains the 35 km-long Isua supracrustal belt (Fig. 2.7), originally dated as ~3,700 Ma (Moorbath 1977), 3,800 Ma (Baadsgaard et al. 1984) and 3,710 Ma (Nutman et al. 2007), including meta-volcanic amphibolite and banded iron formations. The primary volcanic and sedimentary textures are mostly overprinted by penetrative deformation, leaving only small low-strain least-deformed structural windows where original features such as pillow lava in amphibolite are observed (Komiya et al. 1999; Nutman et al. 2007). The chemical





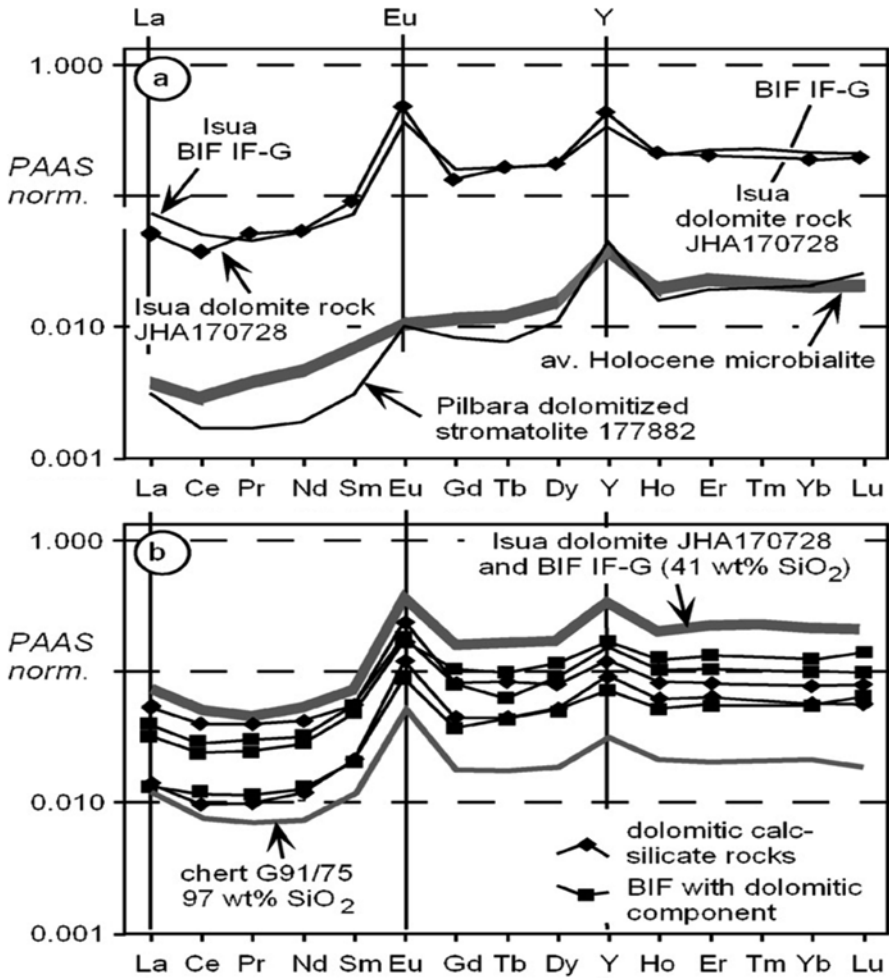
**Fig. 2.7** Isua supracrustal belt, southwestern Greenland: (a) Map of the Isua supracrustal belt showing location of samples; (b) map of a small part of the eastern part of the Isua supracrustal belt, showing the geological relationships between altered intermediate basaltic-andesite(?), pillowed volcanic rocks, chemical sedimentary rocks and an overlying thrust sheet of boninitic amphibolites. The rocks were deformed prior to intrusion of Ameralik dykes ~3,510 Ma (From Nutman et al. 2010; Elsevier, by permission)



**Fig. 2.8** Isua supracrustal belt: (a) Relict pillows in amphibolite facies  $\sim 3.8$  Ga meta-basalts of arc-tholeiite to picrite compositions from the southern flank of the Isua Belt; (b) Low strain zone in  $\sim 3.760$  Ma Isua banded iron formations. Note the grading of the layering and the layering on a cm-scale; (c) Agglomerate clasts in a  $\sim 3.7$  Ga Ma felsic intermediate unit from the eastern end of the Isua belt; (d) Original layering preserved in quartz + dolomite + biotite +/- hyalophane (Na-Ba feldspar) metasediments, likely derived from marl and evaporites (Courtesy Allen Nutman)

composition of the amphibolites compares with arc basalts (Polat et al. 2002; Jenner et al. 2006). Pillow basalt (Fig. 2.8a) and felsic meta-volcanic schist (Fig. 2.8c) preserving pre-deformation layering and graded volcanic breccia and conglomerate, containing 3,710 Ma zircons (Nutman et al. 1997). Relic banded iron formations (Moorbath et al. 1973; Dymek and Klein 1988) and likely sedimentary calc-silicate are mostly deformed, displaying transposed layering, where local primary sedimentary banding is reserved (Fig. 2.8b–d). The supracrustal relics are tectonically intercalated with the tonalites and are separated by  $\sim 3.6$  Ga mylonite shear zones.

The Isua metasediments display low  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  ( $<0.5\%$ ) and  $\text{TiO}_2$  ( $<0.05\%$ ) levels and the Ca-Mg-Fe ratios correspond to those of ferroan dolomite – siderite – Fe-oxide sediments, with the sedimentary origin corroborated by shale-normalized REE + Y profiles showing La, Ce, Eu and Y positive anomalies (Fig. 2.9) which correspond to the signature of sea water (Bolhar et al. 2004). Evidence for early life in Isua sediments and in quartz + tremolite + calcite interstices of pillow lava emerges from Chap. (11):



**Fig. 2.9** REE+Y patterns normalized to Post-Archaean-Australian-Shale (PAAS). (a) IF-G Isua Banded iron formation and metamorphosed dolomite (JHA170728), modern Mg-calcite microbialite from Heron Island, Great Barrier Reef and a Warrawoona ~3.45 Ga low-temperature dolomitized stromatolite; (b) Isua dolomitic calc-silicate rocks and BIF with a dolomitic component (From Nutman et al. 2010; Elsevier, by permission)

- (A) Experimental evidence for anoxic microbial origin low-temperature dolomites (Nutman et al. 2010; Vasconcelos et al. 1995; Roberts et al. 2004), and
- (B) The likely precipitation of banded iron formations either by microbial oxidation of iron or by photolysis by ultraviolet radiation under the ozone-poor or ozone-free Archaean atmosphere (Konhauser et al. 2002).

Granulite facies banded iron formations and calc-silicates observed in the ~3,850 Ma Akilia terrain, southwest Greenland, displaying similar compositions as

reported from the Isua supracrustal belt, suggest early traces of microbial life at the end of the late heavy Bombardment defined about 3.95–3.85 Ga (Ryder 1990, 1991, 1997) (Chap. 11).

## 2.6 Siberian Gneisses

The Aldan Shield of the Siberian Craton north of Lake Baikal is dominated by the Olekma granite–greenstone terrain and gneisses and granitoids of the tonalite–trondhjemite–granodiorite series (TTG). The gneisses yield  $T_{\text{NdDM}}$  ages of 3.69–3.49 Ga and are intruded by gabbro at 3.1–3.0 Ga (Rosen and Turkina 2007). The terrain includes mafic–ultramafic and felsic volcanics, dated as 3.2–3.0 Ga, as well as granulite–gneiss suites. The terrains have been interpreted as micro–continents amalgamated during 2.8–2.6 and 2.0–1.7 Ga. Mid–Archaean 3.57–3.51 Ga granitic crust in the Onot and Bulun granite–greenstone domains displays evidence of reworking, recycling, and magma intrusion at 3.41–3.28 Ga. 3.22–3.0 Ga crust in the Sutam granulite–gneiss terrain and 3.4–3.3 Ga of the Sharyzhgaysk granulite–gneiss domain display overlap (Rosen and Turkina 2007). The Anabar Shield in the northeast Siberian Craton includes granulite–gneiss terrain dominated by 3.35–3.32 Ga metamorphosed calc–alkaline volcanics, TTG and mafic gneisses, followed by 3.16 Ga enderbites derived by partial melting of mafic source and reworked at 3.1–3.0 Ga. Derived sediments have  $T_{\text{NdDM}}$  model ages of 3.19–3.00 Ga (Rosen and Turkina 2007). Granite–greenstone terrains include the Onot and Bulun belts which include TTG plutons with mafic enclaves dated by Sm–Nd ( $T_{\text{NdDM}}$ ) as 3.57 Ga and 3.51 Ga. U–Pb zircon ages of 3.41–3.28 Ga represent metamorphism and contamination. Paleo–pressure and temperature estimates suggest an origin of TTG gneiss under pressures of ~10 kb. The Irkut and Kitoy granulite–gneiss domains contain intermediate and felsic granulites with zircon cores ~3.4–3.3 Ga–old and Nd model ages of 3.4–3.1 Ga. These rocks have undergone high–pressure metamorphism at 2.5–2.4 Ga and granulite facies metamorphism at ~2.0–1.85 Ga. Meta–sedimentary enclaves associated with the gneisses yield model  $\text{Nd}_{\text{DM}}$  ages of 3.6–2.8 Ga. A derivation by erosion of 3.64–3.46 Ga tonalitic gneisses is likely. Diorite gneisses and granites have generally younger ages of 3.2–3.0 Ga. The eastern part of the Aldan shield contains Late Archaean and paleo–Proterozoic rocks.

## 2.7 North China Craton

The Anshan region of the northern China craton, northeastern China, contains extensive >3.6 Ga gneisses, including some ~3.8 Ga components: (1) Baijiafen mylonitized trondhjemitic rocks; (2) Dongshan banded trondhjemitic rocks, and (3) Dongshan meta–quartz diorite (Song et al. 1996; Liu et al. 1992). Associated

younger Archaean rocks include 3.3 Ga Chentaigou supracrustal rocks, ~3.3 Ga Chentaigou granite, ~3.1 Ga Lishan trondhjemite, ~3.0 Ga Donganshan granite, ~3.0 Tiejiaoshan granite, ~2.5 Ga Anshan Group supracrustal rocks, and ~2.5 Ga Qidashan granite (Liu et al. 1992; Wan et al. 2005). The Archaean blocks are rimmed by paleo-Proterozoic collisional orogenic belt extending through Wutai and Hengshan in Shanxi province to Kaifeng and Lushan in Henan province, separating the North China Craton into an eastern and a western block, the latter including meta-sedimentary rocks (Zhao et al. 2005). Tectono-metamorphic events in the North China Craton are manifest by a concentration of zircon ages at 2.55–2.5 Ga (Shen et al. 2005), constituting about 85 % of the North China Craton. Minor age frequency peaks occur at ~2.7, ~1.85 and ~2.15 Ga. Linear granite-greenstone terrains about ~2.5 Ga in age are widespread, including the western Liaoning province. Volcanic geochemical features correlate with island arc basalts (Wan et al. 2005). ~2.5 Ga greenstones and TTG plutonic rocks were metamorphosed within short periods following their formation (Kröner et al. 1996).

## 2.8 Antarctic Gneisses

The East Antarctic Shield contains 4.06–3.85 Ga-old high-grade metamorphic blocks and 1,400–910 Ma-old Proterozoic and younger formations which were amalgamated in the Cambrian (Cawood 2005; Harley and Kelly 2007). 3,850–3,400 Ga-old suites are dominated by tonalites, granodiorites and granites in terrains located in Gondwana reconstructions south of India, including the Rayner Province and Prydz Belt, and are superposed and overprinted by younger metamorphic belts. Similar early Archaean events are recorded in the Napier Complex and Rayner Province in Kemp Land where an anatexis/metamorphic event at ca. 3,450–3,420 Ma is locally preserved. Harley and Kelly (2007) suggest that much of the geological terrain covered by the East Antarctic ice cap consists of Archaean crust. Major thermal events have been dated as <2,840 Ma to >2,480 Ma, 2,200–1,700 Ma, 1,400–910 Ma and 600–500 Ma (pan-African Orogeny) (Harley 2003). Originally the Archaean blocks were juxtaposed with Gondwanaland crustal segments including Africa, India and Australia (Tingey 1991; Dalziel 1991; Fitzsimons 2000; Harley 2003).

## Chapter 3

# Early Archaean Mafic-Ultramafic Crustal Relics

**Abstract** The long-standing controversy between two schools of thought regarding the precedence in the Archaean of either granitic continental crust or, alternatively, of mafic-ultramafic oceanic-like crust has proven to be an elusive *chicken or the egg* type debate, because: (a) relic supracrustal rocks contain xenocrystic zircons indicative of pre-existing felsic igneous rocks and (b) the oldest gneiss terrains are known to contain mafic enclaves representing yet older supracrustals. The abundance of mafic-ultramafic volcanic xenoliths and enclaves within, and spatially and temporally intertwined relations with Archaean TTG (tonalite-trondhjemite-granoidite) plutonic suites, as indicated by similar isotopic ages to felsic volcanics within greenstone belts, suggests near-coeval relations. Due to the differential resistance to weathering and erosion processes of zircons, quartz and mafic fragments the occurrence of xenocrystic and detrital zircons up to ~4.4 Ga-old cannot be taken as evidence for a Hadean continental granitic crust. Likewise, the Sm-Nd signatures and entrained zircons in Archaean mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequences, such as the Onverwacht Group in South Africa and Warrawoona Group in northwestern Western Australia, do not necessarily imply an underlying granitic basement since felsic materials could well have been shed from neighboring older granitoid-dominated blocks, such as the Swaziland gneiss complex in South Africa and Mount Narryer terrain in Western Australia. Some mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequences may have formed in rifted zones between early gneiss terrains and may in part overlap the older blocks through unconformities.

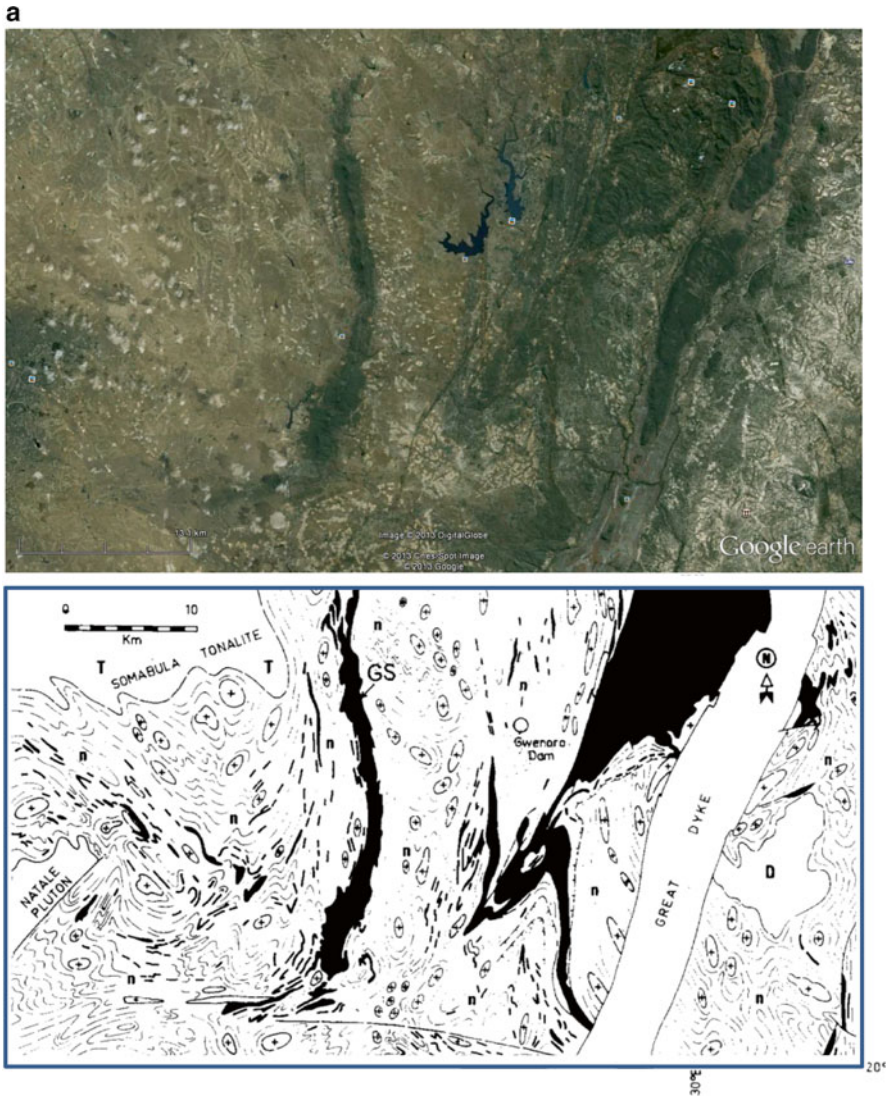
**Keywords** Mafic-ultramafic crust • Greenstone belt • Sial nuclei • Tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite

Some of the oldest rock units identified in Archaean low-metamorphic grade granite-greenstone terrains and high-grade gneiss-granulite terrains include supracrustal enclaves within orthogneiss-dominated plutons, occurring either as

linear supracrustal belts (greenstone belts) or as discontinuous xenolith swarms (Figs. 3.1 to 3.5). Tectonized boundary zones of batholiths contain foliated gneiss-greenstone intercalations derived by deformation of xenolith-bearing intrusive contacts, a process which involves inter-thrusting and refolding of plutonic and supracrustal units (Fig. 3.4) and tectonic reactivation involving penetrative interleaving of gneiss and foliated greenstone slivers, masking primary granite-greenstone relations. The origin of the xenoliths is betrayed by little-deformed intrusive high-angle contact zones between linear greenstone belts and diapiric tonalite-trondhjemite plutons, displaying progressive magmatic injection, disintegration and assimilation by granitic magma (Figs. 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3).

The distribution patterns of mafic-ultramafic xenoliths in Archaean orthogneiss terrains allow identification of the internal geometry of granitoid batholiths. Principal regional to mesoscopic-scale characteristics of xenolith swarms are outlined in several terrains, including Zimbabwe Craton (Fig. 3.1), southern India (Fig. 3.2) and the Pilbara Craton (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4), displaying transitions along-strike and across-strike between greenstone sequences and xenolith chains, which defines the age of the xenolith. The transitions involve a decrease in the abundance and scale of supracrustal enclaves from synclinal keels (Fig. 3.2a) to outcrop-scale xenoliths (Fig. 3.2b), defining early greenstone belts as mega-xenoliths which outline subsidiary gneiss domes within the batholiths (Figs. 3.1 and 3.5). The common contiguity of xenolith patterns places limits on horizontal movements between individual intra-batholithic domal structures, indicating these domes as least-deformed cratonic islands or nuclei within an otherwise penetratively foliated gneiss-greenstone crust, modelled in Fig. 3.5. The domal architecture suggests magmatic diapirism followed by late-stage solid-state uplift. Exposed high-grade metamorphic sectors along batholith-greenstone boundaries likely represent uplift of deep-seated crustal sectors along reactivated boundaries of batholiths (Fig. 3.4). It is possible some isolated mafic-ultramafic xenoliths represent relic residues of partial melting process which gave rise to felsic magmas.

Examples of early Archaean supracrustal enclaves include the ~3.8–3.7 Ga-old Isua outlier (Fig. 2.7), the ~3.85 Ga Akilia xenolith suite in southwest Greenland (Allaart 1976; McGregor and Mason 1977), the pre-3.6 Ga old Uliak swarm in the Nain Complex, Labrador (Collerson and Bridgwater 1979), Dwalile supracrustal remnants in the ~3.7–3.5 Ga old Ancient Gneiss Complex of Swaziland (Anhaeusser and Robb 1978), pre-3.5 Ga old Sebakwian swarms in the Selukwe and Mashaba areas of Zimbabwe (Stowe 1973) (Fig. 3.1), pre-3.4 Ga old Sargur Group enclaves in the amphibolite to granulite facies gneisses of southern Karnataka (Janardhan et al. 1978) (Fig. 3.2a, b) and greenstone xenoliths and intercalations within Pilbara batholiths in Western Australia (Hickman 1975, 1983; Bettenay et al. 1981) (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4). The commonly deep weathering of Na-rich granitoids of the TTG suite and thus relatively poor exposure as compared to quartz-rich K-rich granitoids (Glikson 1978; Robb and Anhaeusser 1983) results in a sampling bias.

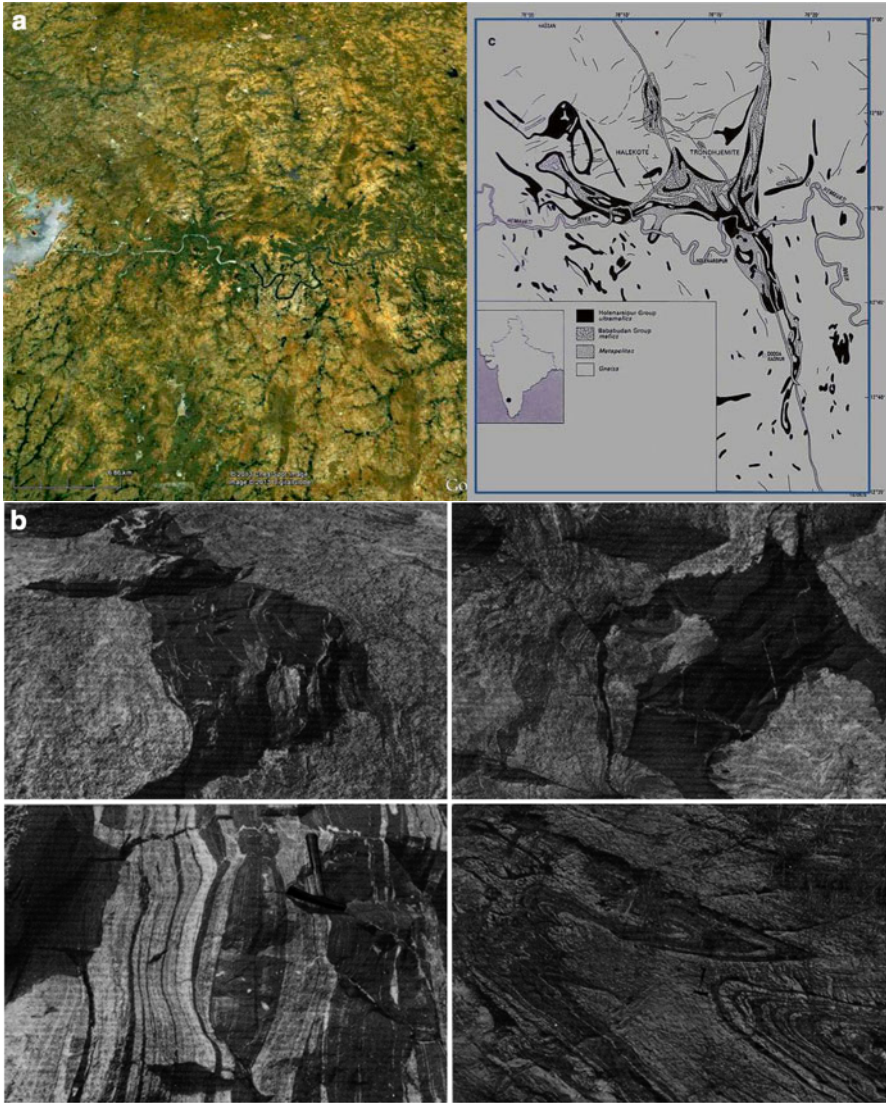


**Fig. 3.1** (a) LANDSAT image and geological sketch map of plutons and greenstone xenolith distribution patterns in the Selukwe area. Symbols as for a. SS Selukwe schist belt, GS Ghoko schist belt (Stowe 1973; Wilson 1973; Glikson 1979a; Elsevier by permission); (b) LANDSAT image and geological sketch map of plutons and greenstone xenolith distribution patterns in the Mashaba area, Zimbabwe Craton: *T* tonalite, *D* granodiorite, *A* adamellite, *n* gneiss and migmatite, *p* porphyritic, black areas; greenstone belts and enclaves; trends denote gneissic areas; crosses denote massive plutons (Phaup 1973; Glikson 1979a; Elsevier by permission)

Some of the best documented xenolith patterns have been reported from the Selukwe-Gwenero Dam area, southern Zimbabwe (Stowe 1973; Taylor et al. 1991), where both across-strike and along-strike transitions occur, for example between

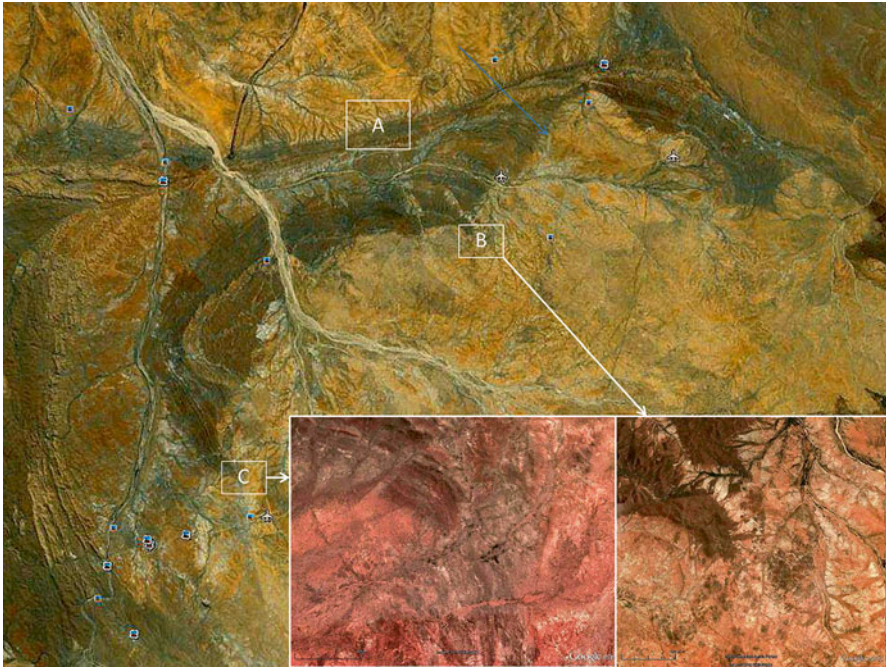






**Fig. 3.2** (a) LANDSAT image and geological sketch map of plutons and greenstone xenolith distribution patterns in the Holenarsipur area, Dharwar Craton, south India. (b) Mafic xenoliths within gneiss, Sargur area, southern Dharwar Craton

the Selukwe and Ghoko schist belt and mafic-ultramafic xenolith swarms (Fig. 3.1a). Here mafic-ultramafic screens outline a ghost stratigraphy contiguous with the greenstone belt with which they merge, as modelled in Fig. 3.5. Whereas magmatic cores within the batholiths are composed of little-foliated TTG, the xenoliths are associated with strongly deformed gneiss and migmatite. Progressive anatexis and

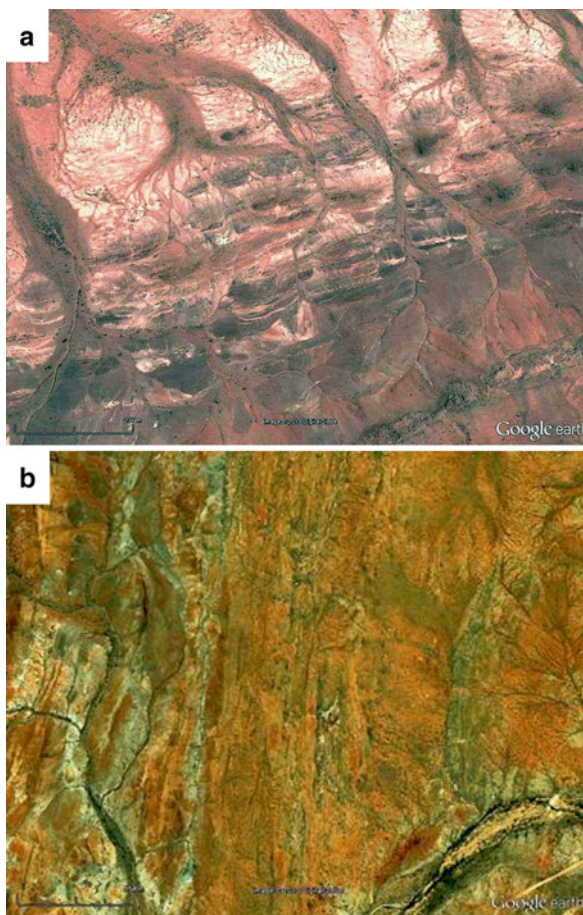


**Fig. 3.3** Greenstone xenoliths distribution patterns, Pilbara Craton, Western Australia: (A) LANDSAT image of the northern part of the Mount Edgar batholith. *Inset A* relates to image shown in Fig. 3.4a, showing a sheared granite-mafic contact. *Inset B* – a tongue of mafic xenoliths extending from the Talga greenstone belt south into the Mount Edgar batholith; *Inset C* – a tongue of mafic xenoliths extending from the McPhee Reward greenstone belt southeastward into the Mount Edgar batholith. NASA/LANDSAT

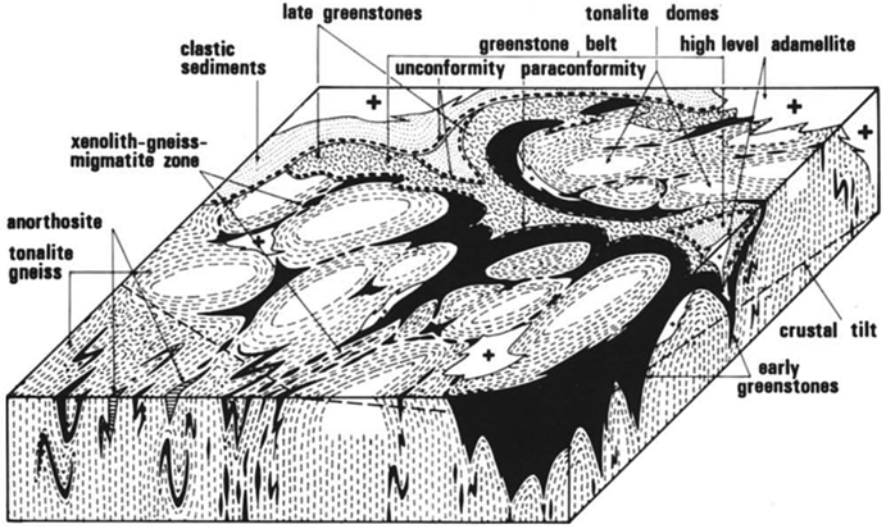
digestion of mafic-ultramafic volcanic material was achieved by lit-par-lit injection of near-liquidus tonalitic magma. Metamorphic effects in supracrustal rocks increase from greenschist facies within intact schist belts to amphibolite facies along contact with granite and gneiss. Supracrustal xenoliths may be retrogressed along their margins. Examples of these relations occur in the Gwenoro Dam complex, including the Somabula tonalite, Natale pluton, and Eastern Granodiorite plutons, regarded as the larger intrusive cores of the gneisses. The oldest gneiss phases are typically uniform, fine-grained Na-rich varieties, whereas younger felsic magma fractions are more fractionated, coarser-grained rocks (Stowe 1973).

Xenolith chains extending from mafic-ultramafic sequences of the Onverwacht Group, Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB), display contiguous transitions from the main greenstone synclinoria into surrounding gneisses, for example between the Stolzburg and Theespruit tonalitic plutons (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Robb and Anhaeusser 1983) (Fig. 7.2). Anhaeusser and Robb (1978) and Robb and Anhaeusser (1983) applied the xenolith distribution patterns to delineate intra-batholith plutons and cells southwest of the Barberton Mountain Land. Agmatites associated with the xenoliths exhibit intrusive relations, including lit-par-lit injection, discordant

**Fig. 3.4** Sheared greenstone belt – gneiss boundaries, central Pilbara Craton, showing intimate intercalations of sheared mafic slivers and xenoliths with granitic gneiss. (a) Northern boundary between the Talga greenstone belt and the Muccan batholith (see Fig. 3.3 for locality); (b) sheared western margin of the Shaw Batholith, including amphibolite facies gneisses, and the eastern part of the Tambourah greenstone belt. NASA LANDSAT



intrusive tongues, mechanical desegregation and progressive assimilation features (Fig. 7.7a). Xenolith fragmentation and digestion patterns depend on the original rock type. Thus felsic tuff units are more heavily veined than mafic rocks, becoming progressively more difficult to distinguish from the intrusive gneiss. Remobilized units composed of partly desegregated and assimilated mafic-ultramafic material are intercalated with gneiss and sheared to obliteration of the original relations between these components (Fig. 7.7a). Small deformed basic dykes display intrusive relations with the gneiss. The occurrence of angular xenolith fragments and assimilated mafic schlieren in close proximity to each other suggests differential viscous flow, where parts of the agmatite froze in situ, while other parts were subjected to continuous flow-deformation and progressive magmatic digestion. Similar features were pointed out by Viljoen and Viljoen (1969a, b) in connection with the Rhodesdale batholith, Zimbabwe, where basal units of the Sebakwian Group, including ultramafic rocks, tholeiitic basalts and fuchsite schist, are identified within gneiss along the periphery of the pluton.



**Fig. 3.5** Block diagram illustrating the concept of coeval relations between Archaean granite-greenstone terrains and high-grade terrains. The diagram represents a tilted crustal segment portraying the relations between a major greenstone synclinorium and a high-grade terrain gneiss terrain. Domal tonalites intrude relic ultramafic-mafic volcanic sequences (early greenstones) (*black*). The tonalites become increasingly gneissose (*dashed patterns*) toward their margins and with depth. Late greenstone depositories (*hatched patterns*) and sedimentary sequences (*dotted*) form unconformably and paraconformably above the tonalites and the early greenstones. Loci of maximum late supracrustal deposition coincide with interdomal synclinoria. Deep-seated gneiss root zones of batholiths are characterized by a linear structural grain, attenuated relics of supracrustal enclaves and xenoliths, mafic – ultramafic intrusions and anorthosites (From Glikson 1979a, b; Elsevier by permission)

Hickman (1975, 1983) demonstrated the Mount Edgar batholith, Pilbara Craton, can be divided into at least five oval gneiss domes defined by foliations and intervening amphibolite screens. The preservation of original relationships between supracrustal and plutonic units depends on the primary geometry of their contacts and on subsequent deformation history of the boundary zone. Where supracrustal units strike at high angles to intrusive contacts the original geometry of intrusive contacts may be retained, probably owing to the mechanical strength of interlocked boundaries. Examples of such relations occur along the northern and western flanks of the Mount Edgar batholith, where detached greenstone xenoliths extending from the Talga-Talga Subgroup are engulfed by trondhjemite, attesting to primary intrusive relations (Fig. 3.3). Where the boundary of batholiths and the strike of greenstones are parallel, primary contact relations are mostly overprinted by shear dislocation (Fig. 3.4), representing the susceptibility of these lithological discontinuities to late and post-magmatic reactivation and multiple solid state deformation.

The Shaw batholith of the central Pilbara Craton contains interleaved mafic-ultramafic material, much of it highly deformed. A structural study of the western part of this batholith (Bettenay et al. 1981; Bickle et al. 1983) delineated multiple

post-consolidation deformation features affecting tectonically interleaved gneiss-greenstone units. At least three phases of deformation have been identified, including syn-metamorphic horizontal thrusting and recumbent folding. Fold axes and foliations in the gneiss are oriented at low to intermediate angles in relation to the main gneiss-greenstone belt boundary. Upper amphibolite facies metamorphism of some intercalated supracrustal material suggests considerable uplift relative to the juxtaposed Tambourah greenstone belt (Fig. 3.4b). Intrusive gneiss-greenstone relations are recorded. However, the above authors argue against a view of the greenstone intercalations as sheared greenstone-derived xenoliths, pointing out the absence of magmatic assimilation features and suggesting the older gneiss phases are remnants of a granitoid basement predating the greenstones.

According to the early continental basement theory the interlayering of mafic-ultramafic xenoliths and gneiss originated through extensive re-melting of an older granitoid basement. However, anatexis of a pre-existing granitoid basement would have resulted in an abundance of K-rich granitoid neosome fractions, such as are common for example where Nelspruit migmatites and Lochiel Granite are developed by re-melting of Barberton tonalites (Chap. 4) (Fig. 7.2). An alternative view regards the interleaved gneiss-greenstone suite as sheared equivalents of intrusive xenolith-bearing granitoids, for example along the southern border of the Muccan Batholith and southern border of Mount Edgar batholith (Fig. 3.3). These zones range in width from several hundred meters to a couple of kilometers, consisting of gneiss, amphibolite and chlorite schist intercalated with foliated gneiss on a centimeter to meter-scale. Local re-melting resulted in sub-concordant vein systems protruding into the schists. In the Pilbara Craton thermal metamorphism of contact aureoles and xenoliths is mostly up to lower amphibolite facies and rarely attains pyroxene hornfels facies. Late-stage emplacement of Pilbara batholiths was associated with solid-state deformation of solidified upper and marginal sectors, where shearing and retrogression served to obscure original igneous features.

The South Indian Peninsular gneiss complex in the vicinity of Karnataka greenstone belts contains hosts of mafic-ultramafic enclaves (Radhakrishna 1975) (Fig. 3.2a, b). Some of the best examples occur around the Holenarsipur greenstone belt (Naqvi 1981) and the Sargur area (Janardhan et al. 1978). Deformed ultramafic xenoliths and minor pelitic and anorthositic xenoliths of amphibolite facies abound east and west of the Holenarsipur belt. Here supracrustal enclaves form a hierarchy of scales, from a few centimeters to several kilometers in length. Quarry exposures and continuous sections along irrigation canals allow detailed observations of both intrusive and tectonic relationships between gneiss, greenstone and xenoliths (Fig. 3.2b). The density and size distribution frequencies of enclaves in the Hamavati River area are as high as to question any spatial distinctions between greenstone belts and gneiss terrains. Thus, the main Holenarsipur, Nuggihalli and Sandur belts can be regarded as the largest entities within a range of supracrustal enclaves pervaded by tonalitic gneisses on a hierarchy of scales, a relation observed on LANDSAT imagery, on map scale, in individual outcrops and under a thin alluvial veneer in poorly exposed areas.

The south Indian gneiss-greenstone terrains grades into charnockites of the Eastern Ghats metamorphic belt (Fig. 9.5). In the Sargur area hosts of high-grade enclaves of pyroxene granulite, hornblende-rich rocks, ultramafic rocks, quartzite, marble and pelitic schist pervade granulite facies orthogneiss, the ultramafic rocks being volumetrically the most important constituent (Janardhan et al. 1978). The size and continuity of supracrustal enclaves diminish upon transition into the granulite facies terrain, arcuate belt patterns are almost absent, foliated planar structures dominate and original lithologies become difficult to discern. However, syncline keels and supracrustal xenoliths are retained, demonstrating that granulite facies metamorphism was superposed on older granite-greenstone suite. The decreasing abundance of metamorphosed supracrustal material in the high-grade terrain is consistent with the synclinal structure of the supracrustal belts and an increasingly deeper crustal level. Given the northward structural tilt of the Indian Shield (Pichamuthu 1968), variations in abundance, size, and texture of the xenoliths with metamorphic grade allow their use as markers in the study of vertical crustal zonation.

The structure of granite-greenstone terrains and the relations between their components are the subject of long-term controversy. Many regard supracrustal belts as discrete depositories formed in subsiding or down-faulted zones above an older granitoid basement (Baragar and McGlynn 1976; Binns et al. 1976; Archibald et al. 1978; Bettenay et al. 1981; Groves and Batt 1984; Hickman 2012). Evidence for deposition of late Archaean sequences unconformably above older gneisses comes from the Belingwe belt (Bickle et al. 1975), Jones Creek, Yilgarn (Durney 1972), or Finland greenstone belts (Blais et al. 1978). Proponents of an early continental basement theory refer to older cratonic blocks as potential basement for early greenstone sequences. Examples of unresolved relations include: (a) the relations between the <3.55 Ga-old Barberton Greenstone Belt and the ~3.7 Ga-old Ancient Gneiss Complex of Swaziland; (b) the relations between the ~3.0 Ga-old Murchison greenstone belts (Fletcher et al. 1984) and the ~3.7–3.6 Ga-old Narryer Terrain, Northwestern Yilgarn Craton.; (c) the relations between the ~3.8 Ga old Sand River gneisses, Limpopo belt (Barton 1981) and the Murchison greenstone belt, and (d) the relations between the 3.6–3.0 Ga old Western Gneiss Terrain, Yilgarn Block (Gee et al. 1981), and Southern Cross greenstone belts. In each of these instances it is not clear whether the gneiss blocks originally underlay the supracrustals or, alternatively, represent spatially and temporally distinct blocks intervened by rifted greenstone depositories.

A major constraint on an original location of pre-greenstone belts gneiss blocks arises from the chemistry of the tonalite-trondhjemite-Granodiorite (TTG) plutons intruded into the greenstones. Deposition of mid to early Archaean mafic-ultramafic sequences such as the Onverwacht Group and the Warrawoona Group above older gneiss terrains, accompanied or followed by anatexis of such basement, would produce differentiated K-rich granitic magmas, such as occur mainly at late stage of evolution of the greenstone belts. The author's concept of the relation between greenstones, batholiths and their deep level metamorphic analogues is portrayed in Fig. 3.5. Petrological and geochemical features of mafic-ultramafic volcanics are discussed in Sect. 6.1.

## Chapter 4

# The Tonalite-Trondhjemite-Granodiorite (TTG) Suite and Archaean Island Continents

**Abstract** Since the 1970s it was realized the bulk of Archaean granitoids intruded into Archaean supracrustal sequences have typically Na-rich composition, comprising tonalite, trondhjemite and granodiorite, the so-called TTG suite (Glikson and Shertaon, *Earth Planet Sci Lett* 17:227–242, 1972; Hanson, *Geochim Cosmochim Acta* 39:325–362, 1975; Arth and Hanson, *Geochim Cosmochim Acta* 39:325–362, 1975; Barker, *Trondhjemite: a definition, environment and hypotheses of origin*. In: Barker F (ed) *Trondhjemites, dacites and related rocks*. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp 1–12, 1979; Glikson, *Earth Sci Rev* 15:1–73, 1979a; Glikson, *J Geol Soc India* 20:248–255, 1979b; Moyen et al, *TTG plutons of the Barberton granitoid-greenstone terrain, South Africa*. In: Van Kranendonk MJ, Smithies RH, Bennett VC (eds) *Earth's Oldest Rocks. Developments in Precambrian geology* 15. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp 607–667, 2007). Petrological studies (Green and Ringwood, *Contrib Mineral Petrol* 18:105–162, 1977), coupled with geochemical and isotopic evidence, demonstrate a derivation of TTG from mafic crustal materials containing isotopic mantle signatures. The evolution of TTG igneous activity is closely correlated with volcanic events within associated greenstone belts. By contrast post-kinematic Archaean granitoids typically comprise quartz monzonites and granites enriched in the large ion lithophile elements (LILE) and display field and petrological evidence for derivation by partial melting of older TTG batholiths. Pre-3.2 Ga TTG tend to occur as oval plutons containing abundant mafic enclaves, with best examples in the Zimbabwe Craton and around the Barberton Greenstone Belt, Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa. By contrast late Archaean granitoids Post-kinematic granitoids are commonly emplaced along boundaries between TTG and supracrustal enclaves, or at high structural levels of batholiths, as is the case with the Lochiel Granite in Swaziland.

**Keywords** Tonalite • Trondhjemite • Granodiorite • Barberton • Ancient gneiss



## 4.1 Archaean Batholiths

Granitic terrains have long constituted the terra incognita of Precambrian shields, underlying vast expanses of flat desert, savanna or forest featuring sporadic boulders, monadnocks and low rock benches, which contrast with the commonly better exposed greenstone belts (Figs. 8.1 to 8.4). The largely unknown nature of the granitic terrains was manifested by their representation as undivided pink areas on regional geological maps and their designation in such terms as ‘*sea of granite*’ (Yilgarn, Western Australia) or ‘*peninsular gneiss*’ (southern India) (Pichamuthu 1968; Shackleton 1976). The methodological problems inherent in the study of batholiths have been highlighted by Krauskopf (1970). Glikson and Sheraton (1972) pointed out the dominance of Na-rich tonalite, trondhjemite and granodiorite (TTG) in granite-greenstone terrains and their deep seated equivalents (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b, c; Anhaeusser 1973; McGregor 1973; Arth and Hanson 1975; Tarney et al. 1976; Glikson 1976a, b, c; Hunter et al. 1978; Collerson and Fryer 1978). Mafic and ultramafic xenoliths abound in the TTG (Figs. 3.1 to 3.5, 7.7a). Where the generally poor exposure of these rocks due to weathering of plagioclase resulted in quantitative underestimates, adamellite and K-rich granite are commonly better exposed thanks to their higher quartz content. These rocks tend to occur in three principal modes: (1) as end-members of TTG suites in high crustal levels (Fig. 6.8); (2) as post-tectonic intrusions emplaced along Na-rich granite-greenstone contacts, and (3) as injected bands in trondhjemite—tonalite gneisses (Fig. 7.7b).

Macgregor (1932, 1951) identified two classes of intrusions in the Zimbabwe Craton:

- (A) Suess-type batholiths, marked by polydomal ‘gregarious’ outlines outlined by greenstone belts, enclaves and xenolith screens (Fig. 3.1). In Macgregor’s (1932, p. 25) words

*inclusions of rock of intermediate composition are usually broken up into small masses forming characteristically the darker components of the migmatites, and vary according to the amount of alteration they have undergone from massive amphibolite to pale grey wisps only a little darker than the granite matrix.*

Intrusive contacts of these plutons feature multiple alternations of sheared gneiss and mafic schist whose foliations tend to dip away from the plutonic cores, reflecting their domal structures. Concentric intra-batholithic screens of greenstones are common, representing roof pendants and synclinal keel root zones of greenstone synclinoria (Fig. 3.1). The supracrustals include mafic-ultramafic volcanics and siliceous to ferruginous banded sediments. Progressive assimilation of xenoliths is associated with ptlygmatically folded aplite veining controlled by older foliations.

- (B) Daly-type batholiths are structurally more uniform and are characterized by abundant coarse-grained and porphyritic rock types, by sharp cross-cutting intrusive contacts, paucity of roof pendants and supracrustal xenoliths, and little evidence of assimilation of xenoliths. This class of intrusions forms massive bodies emplaced into the older Suess-type gneisses and into greenstone belts. They are typically exposed as rugged terrains featuring jointed granitic tors.

The two-fold classification is reflected on Phaup's (1973) map of Zimbabwe granites, where intrusions are classified in terms of petrography (tonalite, granodiorite, adamellite) and structure (gneiss complex, massive granite, porphyritic granite). Oldest components of the gneiss complex include the Tokwe River gneiss (Pb-Pb age:  $3475 \pm 97$  Ma, Taylor et al. 1991) consisting of tonalitic gneiss and migmatite. Massive granites include adamellite, granodiorite and tonalite. Small tonalitic intrusions are emplaced along the margins of, or within, the greenstone belts, examples including the Sesombi, Whitewater, Heany, Bulawayo and Matopos tonalites. Adamellites occur in three principal modes: (1) high-level sheets which dominate the eastern sector of the Zimbabwe Craton, e.g. Zimbabwe, Chilimanzi, Umtali and Salisbury intrusions; (2) small to medium-size intrusions which pierce the older tonalitic gneisses; and (3) small bodies within the greenstone belts. On Phaup's (1973) map the massive granites are commonly separated from greenstone belts by zones of gneiss which represent dynamically deformed margins and/or remnants of older gneisses. A characteristic feature of the older tonalitic gneiss is their wealth in enclaves, screens, bands and schlieren of supracrustal material. In Phaup's (1973, p. 61) words:

*There is a close connection in space, time and structural deformation between the gneiss complex and the basement schists, which it almost everywhere bounds and intrudes', and 'inclusions of basement schists of all sizes and in all states of assimilation and dispersion occur nearly everywhere, but are most abundant along the margins and along the root zones of now eroded schist belts.*

Zones of migmatite are common and in many areas are closely associated with greenstone xenoliths, hinting at a relation between migmatization and dehydration of supracrustal material and released water lowering the solidus and viscosity of the granitic magmas. In the Seluke area interbanding and gradations occur between the greenstone belt and supracrustal screens and tonalitic gneiss on a range of scales (Stowe 1973) (Fig. 3.1a). Xenolith-rich gneiss and migmatite zones representing advanced injection of tonalitic magma into root zones and limbs of supracrustal folds are separated by xenolith-poor gneisses which include small oval cores of massive to banded tonalite, designated as 'micro-cratons' (Fig. 3.1a), possibly representing roof cupola of the larger bodies of tonalite (Stowe 1973).

Another example of the Zimbabwe gneiss complex was documented near Mashaba (Wilson 1973) where tonalitic gneisses intruded conformably by the Mashaba Tonalite and Mushandike Granite are in turn succeeded by the high level discordant Chilimanzi batholith (Fig. 3.1b). The gneisses are banded, foliated and migmatitic in structure, containing an abundance of supracrustal mafic remnants, whereas the Mashaba Tonalite consists of homogeneous to weakly marginally banded tonalite. Boundaries between tonalite and the gneiss are gradational. Similar relations pertain between the Mushandike Granite and associated gneisses. Marginal sectors of homogeneous intrusions contain gneiss inclusions derived from the surrounding tonalitic gneisses.

The structural conformity between greenstone belts, xenolith screen-rich gneiss--migmatite zones, xenolith-poor gneiss, micro-cratons and larger plutons within Archaean batholiths, and the systematic decrease in abundance of supracrustal

material in this order, constitute evidence for progressive migmatite injection and assimilation processes. Supracrustal remnants including amphibolite to granulite facies ultramafic–afic volcanics and banded ironstones may be retrogressed near intrusive margins. Partly digested xenoliths may be enveloped by nebulite and banded gneiss, representing end products of the assimilation process. Whereas early gneiss phases tend to be fine grained, younger bands and apophysae tend to be increasingly coarser grained, porphyritic and pegmatitic.

Similar features pertain to granite-gneiss terrains south and west of the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB), Eastern Transvaal (Figs. 6.8 and 7.2). Viljoen and Viljoen (1969a, b) demonstrated a general decrease in the dimension of oval tonalitic domes ('*Ancient Tonalites*') upwards beneath the Onverwacht anticline, i.e. from the Stolzburg Pluton (~3,460–3,431 Ma) to the Theespruit Pluton (~3,443 Ma) and the Doornhook Pluton. The domes are separated from each other by tongues of komatiitic volcanics of the lower Onverwacht Group (Fig. 7.7a; ~3,548–3,350 Ma, Appendix I). The deformation of the supracrustals is controlled by the configuration of the diapiric tonalites and parallel marginal gneissosity and lineation in the plutonic rocks (Fig. 7.7a). In some instances tonalitic domes developed as parasitic lobes above one another. Two principal varieties of tonalite were distinguished, including leucocratic biotite tonalite (Nelshoogte, Stolzburg and Theespruit plutons) and mesocratic hornblende tonalite (Kaa Valley Pluton) (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b). In both types screens of xenoliths are dominated by komatiite-derived amphibolite and define subsidiary intra-batholithic domal structures southwest of the BGB (Anhaeusser and Robb 1978). The Kaa Valley Pluton (3,229–3,223 Ma) is defined by conspicuous tongues of volcanic rocks branching from the main Barberton greenstone synclinorium, the Nelshoogte belt in the south and the Jamestown belt in the north. These greenstones are more intensely deformed and metamorphosed than central sectors of the BGB (Anhaeusser 1973). The tonalitic diapirs are internally composite, containing multiple injected gneiss, complex banding and veining (Anhaeusser and Robb 1978). The structural concordance and the general decrease in deformation and metamorphic grade from the intrusive margins into central sectors of greenstone synclinoria suggest the dynamic-thermal effects were related to the diapiric intrusive process (Anhaeusser et al. 1969).

Development of the tonalite – greenstone system has been succeeded by emplacement of younger differentiated plutonic bodies which, in contrast to the 'ancient tonalites' invaded stratigraphically higher formations within the greenstone belt, including turbidite-felsic volcanic-BIF association of the Fig Tree Group. The younger granites may occupy synclinal positions in the greenstone belts, e.g. Dalmein Pluton (~3,216 Ma) and Salisbury kop granite (~3,109 Ma). Northwest of the Barberton Greenstone Belt the high-level Nelspruit porphyritic granite (~3.0 Ga) grades in depth into migmatite and gneiss (McCarthy and Robb 1978). To the southeast the high-level Lochiel Granite grades downward into migmatite and tonalitic gneiss which merge and are continuous with the Ancient Tonalites. In Swaziland and southwest of the Barberton Mountain Land the Lochiel granite (~3.0 Ga) and equivalents grade into gneissic terrain, reflecting vertical geochemical and isotopic zonation of the Archaean granitic crust (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b). These relationships are

interpreted in terms of anatexis of the tonalites and upward migration of eutectic LIL (Large Ion Lithophile)-enriched partial melts (Glikson 1976a, b, c). A model of vertical stratification of Archaean batholiths is portrayed in Fig. 3.5.

The Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, features oval batholithic structures including the Mount Edgar, Corrunga Downs and Shaw batholiths (Figs. 3.3, 6.8, 8.1 to 8.5) (Hickman 1975; Van Kranendonk 2000; Champion and Smithies 1999, 2007). Hickman (1975), who showed Pilbara batholiths consist of subsidiary domes outlined by xenolith-rich screens of greenstones accompanied by sheared gneiss and migmatites, and that these zones form loci of younger post-tectonic granites. Thus the Mount Edgar batholith can be divided into at least five oval bodies (Figs. 3.3 and 8.4). Continuous transitions between the amphibolite screens and greenstone units of the Talga-Talga Subgroup (Fig. 3.3) demonstrate these zones represent deeply eroded keels of greenstone synclinoria. The xenolith screens allow reconstructions of internal batholithic structures, indicating their poly-domal cauliflower-like configuration. Dominant lithologies include trondhjemite, granodiorite and granite, in places truncated by significantly younger felsic plutons. Intrusive relations are observed in relation to greenstones of lower part of the Warrawoona Group (Talga Talga Subgroup: >3,470 Ma, Hamilton et al. 1981; Gruau et al. 1987). Intrusive boundaries are well pronounced where layering orientations of the supracrustals are at high angles to the plutonic bodies (Fig. 3.3), whereas where the strike and the contact are parallel original relations may be obscured by faulting and shearing, reflecting the susceptibility of weak mechanical discontinuities to tectonic dislocation (Fig. 3.4). Parallel to subparallel granite-greenstone boundaries feature multiple alternations of sheared granitic gneiss and amphibolite schist, owing to lit-par-lit injection of gneiss and stress-induced interleaving. Aplite and pegmatite may abound in contact zones. Xenolith abundances and the extent of foliation decrease from the margins of pluton inwards, and cores of the plutons consist of weakly banded to homogeneous granite and gneiss. In places, subsidiary lobes of batholiths protrude into the adjacent greenstones, for example along the northern margin of the Mount Edgar batholith (Figs. 3.3 and 8.4).

Plutonic TTG batholiths in the Yilgarn Craton, southwestern Australia, and the Superior Province, Canada, are mostly more linear than those in the Zimbabwe, Kaapvaal and Pilbara cratons, i.e. NNW tectonic trends in the Yilgarn Craton, EW tectonic trends in the Superior Craton and EW trends in the western Pilbara terrain. Poor outcrop and intense faulting combine to obscure original contact features. Where the development of linear features in upper to late Archaean terrains may signify an onset of plate tectonics (Van Kranendonk 2011), as observed by Hamilton (2003) ophiolites and melange wedges of the circum-Pacific type are missing in Archaean terrains (Chap. 12).

The multi-domal geometry of the batholiths (Fig. 3.5) suggests their evolution by long-term accretion of progressively ascending magmatic increments involving diachronous rise of superheated magma into early mafic-ultramafic crust, assimilating vast volumes of the latter. A likely superheated state of TTG magmas and suppression of the solidus by volatiles derived from the digested supracrustals xenoliths, lowering the viscosity, account for enhanced mobility of the magmas. Concomitant chilling

of marginal concentric zones and further upward movements of viscous crystal mush resulted in deformation of solidified margins and of xenolith screens, serving as long-term loci for anatexis events. Post-magmatic isostatic adjustments between low-density felsic plutonic complexes and high-density greenstone synclinoria resulted in intermittent subsidence of the latter, as represented in the Pilbara Craton by the preferential occurrence of lower Proterozoic volcanic outliers of the Fortescue Group above the greenstone synclinoria (Hallberg and Glikson 1980). Petrological and geochemical features of the TTG and post-kinematic granites are discussed in Sect. 6.2.

## 4.2 Vertical Crustal Zonation

The relations between supracrustal low-metamorphic grade greenstone belts, gneiss terrains (Chap. 2) and root zones of Archaean batholiths are critical for a resolution of the structure and evolution of the Archaean crust. A commonly held view of high-grade metamorphic terrains regards them as spatially and temporally distinct from as well as older than supracrustal greenstone belts (Windley and Bridgwater 1971; Baragar and McGlynn 1976; Windley and Smith 1976; Bridgwater and Collerson 1976, 1977; Moorbath 1977; Young 1978). However, continuous transitions between remnant greenstone belts and gneiss terrain occur in the Zimbabwe Craton (Chap. 3; Fig. 3.1), southwestern Greenland (Sect. 2.5) and southern India (Figs. 3.2a, 9.5). In southern India, thanks to the northward tilt of the Dharwar Craton, a near-continuous gradation along strike occurs between greenstone belts (Dharwar, Nilgiris) and gneiss-granulite complexes (Pichamuthu 1968; Shackleton 1976; Naqvi et al. 1978) (Figs. 3.2a and 9.5). In Manitoba the high-grade Pikwitonei belt represents deep-seated equivalents of the Cross Lake granite-greenstone terrain, western Superior Province (Bell 1971; Ermanovics and Davidson 1976; Weber and Scoates 1978). In the Yilgarn Craton, Western Australia, an eastward crustal is indicated by seismic data along the Perth-Kalgoorlie cross section (Mathur 1976), corroborated by an overall eastward decrease in metamorphic grade (Glikson and Lambert 1976). However, in several of these terrains associated high-grade metamorphic terrains and evidence from xenocrystic and detrital zircons indicate pre-existence of terrains older than the low metamorphic grade supracrustals (Chap. 9). The compositional relations between greenstone belts and sedimentary remnants in high-grade metamorphic terrains provide clues for the original relations between these terrains. High-grade meta-sediments in southwestern Greenland (Isua enclave, Malene Supracrustals) and eastern Labrador (Upernavik Supracrustals) contain K-rich potassic pelites or tuffs, quartzite, carbonate and banded iron formations, referred to by Windley and Smith (1976) as evidence for a distinct tectonic environment. Whereas sediments intercalated with ultramafic sequences of Archaean greenstone belts are dominated by chert, some greenstone belts contain cross-bedded quartzite such as occur at basal stratigraphic levels of the Dharwar greenstone belts (Srinivasan and Sreenivas 1972) and in the

Wheat Belt of southwestern Australia. Minor carbonate sediments occur in the Warrawoona Group of the Pilbara Craton. K-rich tufts and derived sediments occur in the Theespruit Formation, Onverwacht Group. However, many occurrences of 'quartzite' and pelitic sediments in Archaean terrains correspond to recrystallized chert and metamorphosed tuff, respectively. A question arises whether some of the older terrains constituted basement for supracrustal greenstone belts or, alternatively, formed spatially and temporally discrete blocks separating down faulted supracrustal rift zones. In the absence of Paleomagnetic constraints on the position of Archaean terrains, isotopic age determinations offer temporal, if not a spatial, clues in this regard.

## Chapter 5

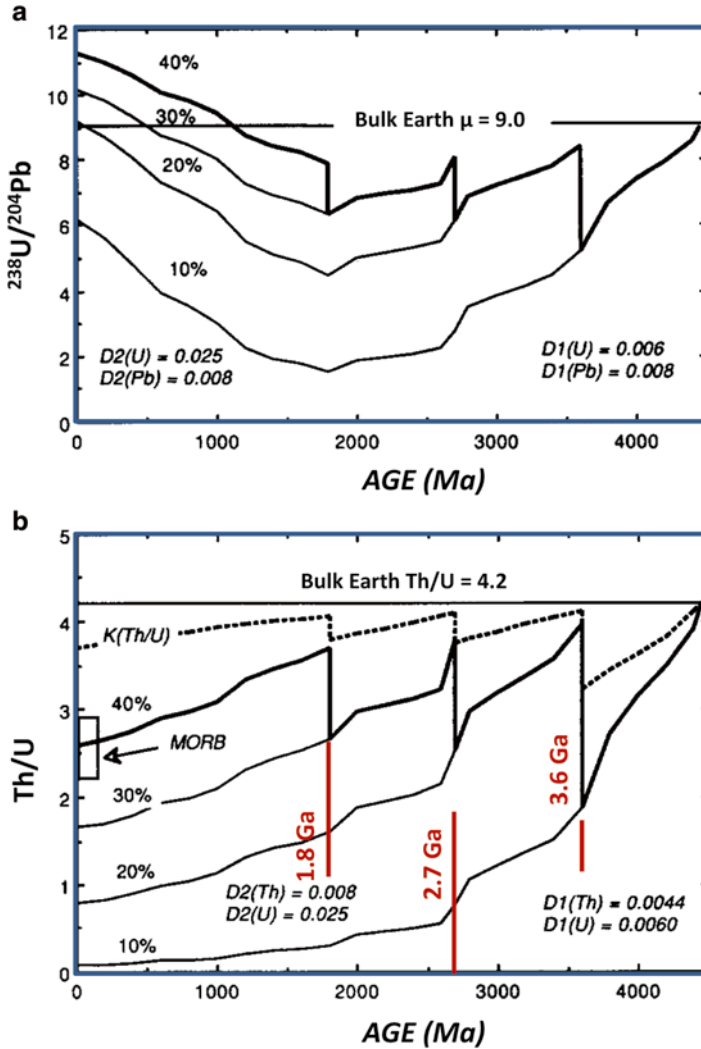
# Isotopic Temporal Trends of Early Crustal Evolution

**Abstract** The application of modern isotopic and geochemical analytical techniques to the study of Early Precambrian magmatic, sedimentary and metamorphic rocks and minerals allows the tracing of temporal isotopic and geochemical trends and the temporal and spatial evolution of Archaean systems. The fractionation of parent and daughter isotopic pairs, such as U-Th-Pb, Sm-Nd, Rb-Sr, Lu-Hf, Re-Os between source mantle, partial melts and crustal rocks allows (a) geochronological age determinations and (b) information regarding the degree of fractionation of precursor materials of analyzed rock suites represented by initial isotopic ratios, i.e. initial  $^{238}\text{U}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ ,  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$ ,  $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$ ,  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ,  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$ . Distinctions between mantle type precursor materials and crustal precursor materials allow an insight into the source of magmatic formations and their detrital derivatives. For example the low initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios of some early zircons hint at Lu-depleted precursor felsic igneous rocks whereas high initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios suggest mantle origin, constituting a tool in identification of the pre-history of crustal materials.

**Keywords** Isotopes • Precursor crust • U-Th-Pb • Rb-Sr • Sm-Nd • Lu-Hf • Re-Os

### 5.1 U-Th-Pb Isotopes

The differential melt/mineral/parent rock partitioning coefficients of U, Pb and Th, their fractionation between mantle and crust, combined with knowledge of isotopic parent-daughter decay constants, allow insights into the nature of precursors and age of geological materials. Models of evolution of U-Pb-Th isotopic systems (Tatsumoto 1978; Hofmann 1988; McCulloch and Bennett 1994) (Fig. 5.1) are complicated by changes in the composition of the mantle and in variations in the U, Th and Pb mantle/melt partition coefficients with time. The decay constants of



**Fig. 5.1** Major mantle-crust recycling events and the evolution of mantle  $^{238}\text{U}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratios ( $\mu$  values); (a) Calculated evolution of U/Pb in average MORB source. The *solid line* shows the evolution where the volume of depleted mantle increases in a stepwise manner from 10 to 40%. At 1.8 Ga there is a switch in the incompatibility of uranium relative to lead ( $D_{\text{U}} > D_{\text{Pb}}$ ) ( $D$  = partitioning coefficient) resulting in the post-Archaean depleted mantle undergoing a rapid increase in U/Pb. Modelling assumes a primitive mantle at 4,450 Ma with  $^{238}\text{U}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 9.0$ . From 4,450 Ma to 4,550 Ma,  $^{238}\text{U}/^{204}\text{Pb} = 1.0$ , with an initial lead composition at 4,550 Ma of Canyon Diablo; (b) Plot of the calculated Th/U ratios in the MORB source vs. time. The Th/U ratio of the mantle decreases continuously as  $D_{\text{Th}} < D_{\text{U}}$ . The sharp steps mark the increase in the volume of the depleted upper mantle from 10% to 40%. The present-day relatively low Th/U ratio of MORBs of  $\sim 2.5$  as inferred from  $^{234}\text{U}/^{230}\text{Th}$  disequilibrium studies is reproduced in this model. The time average Th/U or  $K_{\text{Pb}}$  value calculated from the  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ratios (*heavy dashed line*) is buffered by the growing volume of depleted mantle and has a present-day value of 3.7, also in good with observations. In our model there is no requirement for an extremely short residence time for thorium in the upper mantle. Calculations assume a bulk Earth or primitive mantle Th/U ratio of 4.2 (From McCulloch and Bennett 1994; Elsevier by permission)



uranium isotopes to lead isotopes allows calculation of the equilibration ages as below:

$$^{235}\text{U}(e^{\lambda_{235}t} - 1) = ^{207}\text{Pb}; \text{decay constant } ^{235}\text{U} = 9.849 \times 10^{-10} \text{ year}^{-1};$$

half-life  $7.07 \times 10^8$  years

$$^{238}\text{U}(e^{\lambda_{238}t} - 1) = ^{206}\text{Pb}; \text{decay constant } ^{238}\text{U} = 1.551 \times 10^{-10} \text{ year}^{-1};$$

half-life  $4.47 \times 10^9$  years

Which allows calculation of the age  $t$  from plots of  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$ .

The scatter of  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  vs  $^{206}\text{Pb}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  ratios of modern mid-ocean ridge basalts (MORB) delineates an array roughly corresponding to an age of  $\sim 1.8$  Ga. Mantle evolution models for the period  $\sim 4.45$  Ga  $\sim 1.8$  Ga, using element partitioning values ( $D = \text{mantle/melt}$ ) ( $D_{\text{Pb}} = 0.008$ ;  $D_{\text{U}} = 0.006$ ;  $D_{\text{Th}} = 0.0044$ ), indicate continuous relative depletion of the mantle in Uranium and thus a decline in the U/Pb ratio ( $\mu$  value) from 9.0 to 6.1. Likewise a decline is observed in the mantle Th/Pb and Th/U ratios during the Archaean and the early Proterozoic, reflecting a preferential extraction of Th relative to Pb and U from the upper mantle into the crust (McCulloch and Bennett 1994) (Fig. 5.1). A modelled mantle-crust mixing event about  $\sim 1.8$  Ga leads to re-introduction of U to the mantle and an increase in the  $\mu$  value of the mantle from 6.1 to 11.2. Other mantle-crust interaction episodes are defined at  $\sim 3.6$ – $3.5$  Ga and  $2.7$ – $2.6$  Ga, consistent with geological evidence (Chaps. 7 and 8). These changes can be modelled in terms of mixed radiogenic and un-radiogenic components, an increase in the volume of depleted mantle and its consequent mixing with compositionally more primitive lower mantle about  $\sim 1.8$  Ga (McCulloch and Bennett 1994). The Th/U ratio of the mantle decreases as  $D_{\text{Th}} < D_{\text{U}}$ , represented by low Th/U of MORB (Allegre et al. 1986). A Plot of the calculated evolution of the U/Pb and Th/U in the average mantle source of MORB is related to a step-wise increase in the volume of U-depleted mantle with time from 10 to 40 %, as shown in Fig. 5.1 (McCulloch and Bennett 1994), assuming a primitive mantle with  $^{238}\text{U}/^{204}\text{Pb}$  of 9.0 at  $\sim 4,450$  Ma.

## 5.2 Rb-Sr Isotopes

The fractionation of Rb/Sr during partial melting, the incompatibility of Rb relative to Sr vis-à-vis residual phases (pyroxene, plagioclase), and the growth of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  through the decay of  $^{87}\text{Rb}$ , provide parameters for differential isotopic evolution in the mantle and crust, formulated by:

$$^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_t = ^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}_{\text{initial}} + ^{87}\text{Rb}(e^{\lambda t} - 1); \lambda = 1.42 \times 10^{-11} \text{ year}^{-1};$$

$^{87}\text{Rb}$  half-life  $48.8 \times 10^9$  years.

Directly measured  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values of Archaean volcanic rocks (McCulloch and Bennett 1994) tend to be higher than model calculations of the  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  evolution of the mantle which assume an original basaltic achondrite best initial composition (BABI:  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}=0.69897$ ), determined by Papanastassiou and Wasserburg (1969) (Fig. 5.2a). The discrepancy is resolved by assuming higher initial Sr isotopic composition for the Earth at  $-4450$  Ma of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}=0.6995$ , defined as BEBI (Bulk Earth Best Initial), as well as lower Rb/Sr partitioning coefficient (D) of 0.006, instead of 0.010 (McCulloch and Bennett 1994), implying a slower rate of growth of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  in the mantle with time. Other factors include possible variations in the D parameter due to the water contents of melts and thus melt/crystal equilibria related to changes in plate tectonic processes with time (McCulloch and Gamble 1991). Secondary alteration of the mobile Rb and Sr during metamorphism, hydrothermal and weathering processes complicate interpretation of Sr isotopic compositions. This includes uncertainties in application of the Sr isotopic composition of relic Archaean pyroxenes and low Rb/Sr barite deposits to early mantle compositions.

A clear distinction is observed between the range of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values of Archaean and post-Archaean igneous and sedimentary rocks, where the Archaean rocks spans  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values of 0.700–0.705 and Proterozoic rocks up to approximately 0.720 and higher (Fig. 5.2c). This suggests lower  $^{87}\text{Rb}$  and  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values of Archaean precursors materials as compared to mixed crustal and mantle sources of Proterozoic and younger rocks. Flament et al. (2013) discuss the implications of the evolution of the  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  of marine carbonates to continental growth, suggesting the late Archaean rise in  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  of marine carbonates signifies the emergence of the continents rather than enhanced rate of production of continental crust.

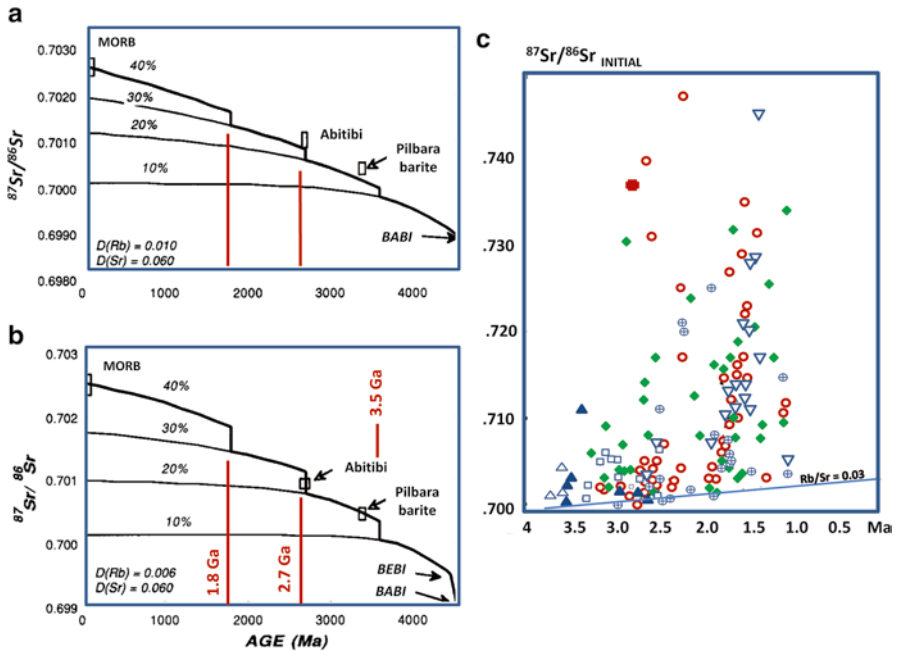
### 5.3 The Lu-Hf System

Fractionation of the elements Lu and Hf during mantle melting processes, where Hf is preferentially incorporated in partial melts, coupled with the decay of  $^{176}\text{Lu}$  isotope to  $^{176}\text{Hf}$  isotope (half-life of  $\sim 35.10^9$  years), allows isotopic dating and identification of precursors of crustal rocks (Kinny and Maas 2003; Griffin et al. 2003). The enrichment of the rare earth elements (REE) in zircon renders the Lu-Hf method suitable for determination of precursors of zircons. Isotopic dating using Hf isotopes is based on the relation:

$$\left( \frac{^{176}\text{Hf}}{^{177}\text{Hf}} \right)_t = \left( \frac{^{176}\text{Hf}}{^{177}\text{Hf}} \right)_{\text{initial}} + \left( \frac{^{176}\text{Lu}}{^{177}\text{Hf}} \right)_t \cdot (e^{\lambda t} - 1)$$

(t – Elapsed time;  $\lambda$  –  $^{176}\text{Lu}$   $\beta$  decay constant, commonly held at  $1.94 \cdot 10^{11} \text{ year}^{-1}$  and revised to  $1.86 \cdot 10^{11} \text{ year}^{-1}$  (Scherer et al. 2001);  $^{177}\text{Hf}$  is used for normalization of Hf and Lu abundances).

Studies of Lu-Hf in zircon use the more accurate U-Pb systematics for definition of the ages of  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios in internal components of the zircon. Departures of



**Fig. 5.2** Major mantle-crust recycling events (represented by red lines) and the evolution of mantle  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios. **(a)** Plot of the evolution of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios in progressively growing depleted mantle. The fraction of mantle involved in the formation of continental crust is assumed to increase with time from 10 % to 40 % (by mass) of the total mantle. In this figure the accretion of the Earth is assumed to be essentially complete by 4,550 Ma with the Earth having an initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratio of BABI (Basaltic Achondrite Best Initial) = 0.69897 and constant D (partitioning coefficient) values for Rb and Sr. The few measurements of the early Archaean mantle represented by data from the Abitibi, Onverwacht and Pilbara greenstone belts are all systematically higher than those predicted by the strontium isotopic evolution model. This may reflect incorporation of crustal-derived radiogenic strontium in the samples, or inappropriate model parameters; **(b)** Plot of the evolution of  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios in progressively growing depleted mantle using modified model parameters. In this figure the accretion of the Earth takes ~100 Ma to complete, and as a result has a higher initial strontium ratio of BEBI (Bulk Earth Best Initial) = 0.69950 at 4,450 Ma. With a higher initial strontium isotopic ratio for the Earth, it is possible to account for the observed  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios in both the Archaean and present-day MORBs (From McCulloch and Bennett 1994; Elsevier, by permission); **(c)** Plots of Rb – Sr isochron ages against corresponding initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ratios, including data from the North Atlantic Craton, Canada, Australia, Zimbabwe and Transvaal-Swaziland. *Open triangles* – North Atlantic Craton; *circled crosses* – Canadian Shield; *Open circles* – Australian granites; *diamonds* – Australian gneisses; *inverted triangles* – Australian felsic volcanics; *solid triangles* – Zimbabwe plutons; *solid diamonds* – eastern Kaapvaal Craton (From Glikson 1979a; Elsevier by permission)

Hf isotopic composition from chondritic isotopic composition at elapsed time (t) are given by:

$$\epsilon_{\text{Hf}} = \left[ \left( \frac{{}^{176}\text{Hf}}{{}^{177}\text{Hf}} \right)_t / \left( \frac{{}^{176}\text{Hf}}{{}^{177}\text{Hf}} \right)_{\text{chondrites}} - 1 \right] \times 10^4$$

Positive values reflect relatively high  $^{176}\text{Lu}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  sources and negative  $\epsilon\text{Hf}$  values reflect relatively low  $^{176}\text{Lu}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  source, allowing estimates of the relative abundance of mantle vs crustal source compositions. Progressive modification of Lu/Hf ratios upon mantle melting and crustal fractionation raises the mantle  $^{176}\text{Lu}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  to levels higher than those of chondrites and lowers the crustal  $^{176}\text{Lu}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  and  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios (Fig. 5.3).

The Lu/Hf isotopic systematics of Hadean and Archaean zircons indicate a strong early-stage fractionation of the mantle, producing Lu-rich mantle residue and Lu-depleted melts, represented by low  $\epsilon\text{Hf}$  ( $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ ) ratio inherited by the zircons (Kamber 2007) (Fig. 5.3a).  $\sim 4.4\text{--}4.0$  Ga zircons display low  $\epsilon\text{Hf}$  values ( $\sim 2.799\text{--}2.802$ ) whereas post  $\sim 3.8$  Ga zircons display higher  $\epsilon\text{Hf}$  values, representing re-enrichment of magma sources in Lu. Kamber (2007) notes a rehomogenisation of  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios between  $\sim 3.96$  and  $\sim 3.76$  Ga, reducing Hf isotopic variability by about two thirds. Comparisons of  $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{initial}}$  data for the Limpopo belt and worldwide versus isotopic ages indicates initial Lu/Hf ratios lower than those of chondrite and in some instances lower than those of depleted mantle (Zeh et al. 2009, 2014) (Fig. 5.3b). The prevalence of granites with  $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{init}}$  values below values of CHUR (chondritic upper mantle reservoir) and below DM (depleted mantle) indicates derivation of the bulk of the magmas from low Lu/Hf crustal rocks. It is possible the re-enrichment of crustal materials and zircon in Lu took place in connection with the heavy bombardment (LHB:  $\sim 3.95\text{--}3.85$  Ga – Ryder 1990, 1991) due to impact remelting of residual Lu-rich mantle.

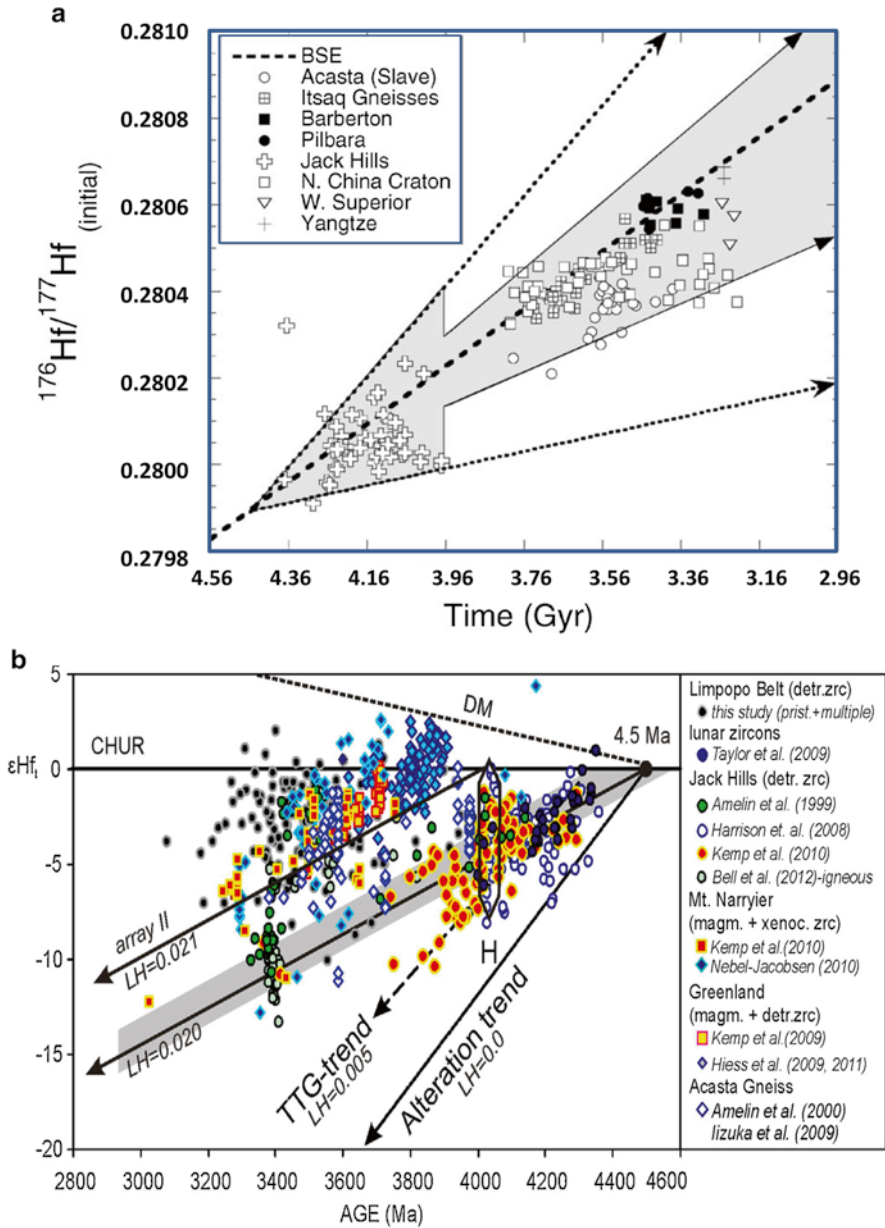
## 5.4 The Sm-Nd System

The long half-life of  $10^9$  years for  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  decay to  $^{143}\text{Nd}$  renders the method useful in isotopic studies of meteoritic and early terrestrial rocks (DePaolo 1983; Dickin 1995). Differential partitioning of Sm and Nd into minerals helps with multi-mineral isochron age studies using phases such as garnet and pyroxene.

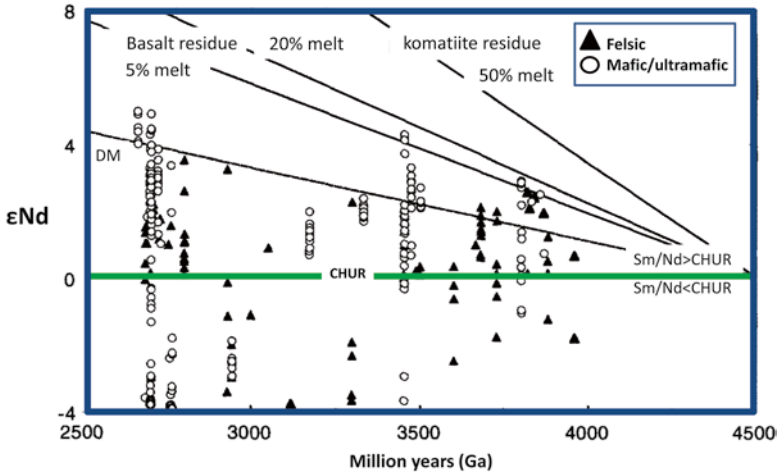
The decay of  $^{147}\text{Sm}$  to  $^{143}\text{Nd}$  by  $\alpha$ -decay

$$\left( ^{147}\text{Sm} \rightarrow ^{143}\text{Nd} \quad T_{1/2} = 10^6 \text{ Ga}; \lambda = 6.54 \times 10^{-12} \text{ year}^{-1} \right)$$

Fig. 5.3 (continued) and the continental crust (points plotting *below* BSE). Combined data imply an event of rehomogenisation sometime between 0.6 and 0.8 billion years after Earth accretion, here schematically outlined with a *grey polygon*, in which Hf isotope variability was reduced by 2/3 at 0.6 Ga. Irrespective of age and models, note that on average, zircon has unradiogenic Hf plotting well below BSE, indicating that the host melt originated by re-melting of pre-existing crust. Very few zircons reflect direct derivation from mantle (From Kamber 2007; Elsevier, by permission). (b) Comparison of combined U–Pb–Hf isotope datasets from the Limpopo Belt with datasets from worldwide sources. Arrows define the evolution of Hadean TTG and mafic rocks. The prevalence of granites with  $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{init}}$  values below values of CHUR (chondritic upper mantle reservoir) and below DM (depleted mantle) indicates derivation of the bulk of the magmas from low Lu/Hf crustal rocks (From Zeh et al. 2009, 2014; Elsevier, by permission)



**Fig. 5.3** (a) Hf isotope evolution diagram showing initial  $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$  ratios recorded by Hadean and Paleo-Archaean zircon as a function of time calculated from U/Pb zircon crystallisation age. Position of bulk silicate Earth (BSE) reflects the  $^{176}\text{Lu}$  decay constant (Scherer et al. 2001). Note that Hadean zircons (pre-4.0 Ga) define a wide spread in Hf isotope composition. Trajectories that encompass this spread (shown as *stippled arrows*) extrapolate to much greater Hf-isotope variability than what is actually observed in younger zircon; namely, Paleoproterozoic zircons require trajectories with much less divergence between the depleted reservoir (points plotting *above* BSE)



**Fig. 5.4** Plot of model  $T_{Nd}$  vs. time showing the effects of extraction and storage of basaltic and komatiitic crust on the neodymium isotopic evolution in the residual depleted mantle. Neodymium evolution curves are shown for 100 % storage of tholeiitic crust produced by 5 and 20 % partial melting and komatiite produced by 50 % partial melting also shown are the initial neodymium isotopic compositions for selected Archaean rock (From McCulloch and Bennett 1994; Elsevier by permission)

Is expressed by the relations:

$$^{143}\text{Nd} / ^{144}\text{Nd} = \left( ^{143}\text{Nd} / ^{144}\text{Nd} \right)_o + \left( ^{147}\text{Sm} / ^{144}\text{Nd} \left( e^{\lambda t} - 1 \right) \right)$$

The CHUR (chondritic unfractionated reservoir) model, representing material formed in the primitive solar nebula, defines the relations between the Nd isotopic composition of samples relative to the original (chondritic)  $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  ratio in the terms:

$$\epsilon_{Nd,CHUR}(t) = \left[ \left( ^{143}\text{Nd} / ^{144}\text{Nd} \right)_{\text{sample}} / \left( ^{143}\text{Nd} / ^{144}\text{Nd} \right)_{\text{CHUR-1}} \right] \times 10^4$$

$$^{143}\text{Nd} / ^{144}\text{Nd}_{\text{CHUR}} = 0512638$$

Model Sm/Nd ages can be estimated from a single pair of measurements by (1) calculating an assumed growth rate of  $(^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd})_{\text{sample}}$  from the  $(^{147}\text{Sm}/^{144}\text{Nd})_{\text{sample}}$ ; (2) assuming the Sm/Nd of the source mantle in terms of either an LREE-depleted mantle or an undepleted chondritic mantle; (Fig. 5.4); (3) plotting the intersection of the sample growth trend with the depleted or chondritic mantle growth trend.

Due to preferential retention of Sm and thus  $^{147}\text{Sm}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  ( $\epsilon_{Nd}$ ) in the mantle and the loss of the relatively incompatible Nd to magmas and the crust, the mantle

evolved a high  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$ , represented in its partial melting products with time ( $\epsilon_{\text{Nd, CHUR}} > 1$ ) vs intra-crustal material ( $\epsilon_{\text{Nd, CHUR}} < 1$ ) (Fig. 5.4). Complications occur: in the Barberton Greenstone Belt time-integrated  $\text{Sm}_{\text{N}}/\text{Nd}_{\text{N}} > 1.0$  indicated by isotopic studies are contrasted with directly analyzed REE concentrations indicating  $\text{Sm}_{\text{N}}/\text{Nd}_{\text{N}} < 1.0$  of the samples (Glikson and Jahn 1985). This suggests secondary LREE enrichment of the mantle prior to partial melting and/or secondary LREE enrichment of the basalts. In the ~3.8 Ga Itsaq gneiss and Isua Greenstone Belt sediments and amphibolite, southwest Greenland, display higher  $^{142}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  than younger Archaean and modern mafic rocks, suggesting high  $^{147}\text{Sm}/^{142}\text{Nd}$  ratios in their mantle source and thereby early loss of the relatively incompatible Nd from the mantle (Kamber 2007). This suggests extraction of LREE-enriched felsic magmas and of granitic crust from the mantle preceded 3.8 Ga. Thus both  $\epsilon_{\text{Hf}}$  and  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  parameters manifest loss of the relatively lithophile Hf and Nd from the mantle at early stages of crustal evolution.

McCulloch and Bennett (1994) developed a 3-component geochemical model including primitive mantle, depleted mantle and crust reservoirs, exploring the relations between mantle depletion and crustal growth with time. A step-wise episodic evolution is suggested by high  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  indices representing mantle fractionation and rapid crustal growth at ~3.6, ~2.7 and ~1.8 Ga. The mostly positive  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  composition of ~3.8–3.4 Ga Archaean rocks suggest mantle sources have been strongly depleted in Nd and other light rare earth elements (LREE) at ~3.8 Ga (Frey et al. 2004; O'Neill et al. 2007). A wider spread of positive and negative  $\epsilon_{\text{Nd}}$  values at 2.7–2.6 Ga indicates a combination of melting of high Sm/Nd mantle source and low Sm/Nd crustal rocks. In McCulloch and Bennett's (1994) model ~10 % of the mantle mass (upper 220 km) is extracted during ~4.5–3.4 Ga, ~20 % (upper 410 km) during ~3.6–2.7 Ga and 40–50% (upper 800–1,000 km) from ~1.8 Ga. The model is consistent with Re/Os, Rb/Cs, Nb/U and Th/U relations in mid-ocean ridge basalts (MORB) and ocean island basalts OIB.

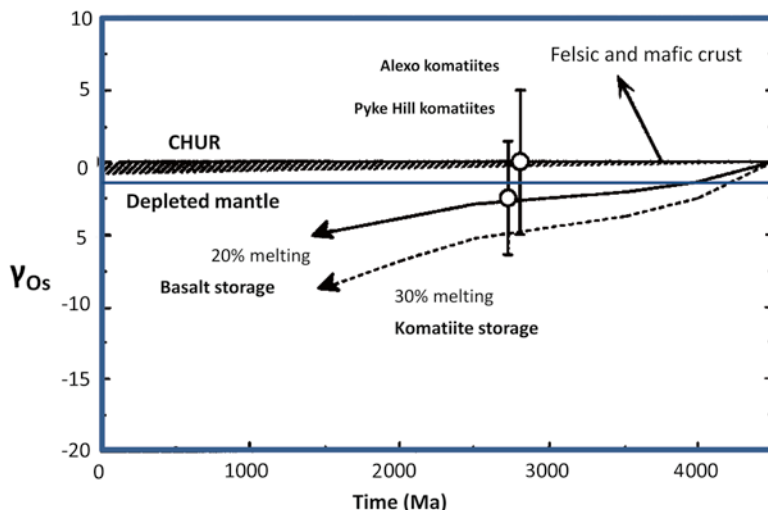
## 5.5 The Re-Os System

The  $\beta$ -decay of  $^{187}\text{Re}$  to  $^{187}\text{Os}$  allows isotopic age determinations and petrogenetic estimates of the composition of precursor materials based on the relation (Shirey and Walker 1998):

$$^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}_t = ^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}_i + ^{187}\text{Re}/^{188}\text{Os}_{\text{chon}} \left( e^{\lambda(4.558 \times 10^9)} - e^{\lambda t} \right)$$

$$\left( ^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}_i = 0.09531 \right) \text{ (i - IIIA irons) } \left( \lambda = 1.64 \times 10^{-11} \text{ year}^{-1} \right)$$

$$^{187}\text{Re}/^{187}\text{Os} \text{ half - life } (41.6 \times 10^9 \text{ year})$$



**Fig. 5.5** Decrease in the mantle initial  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$  ( $\gamma\text{Os}$ ) with time as represented by komatiites and basalts, reflecting the consequence of preferential partitioning of Re to magmas and the crust (From McCulloch and Bennett 1994; Elsevier by permission)

Re-Os relations in iron meteorites indicate core crystallization in asteroids within the first 10–40 Ma of evolution of the Solar System. Overall the Earth mantle largely maintained a chondritic Re/Os pattern (Shirey and Walker 1998) including evidence of addition of siderophile elements during late accretion. Due to the small total volume of continental crust relative to the mantle and high Os levels of the mantle the fractionation of the continental crust resulted in little change in the  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$  of the mantle, with local exceptions (McCulloch and Bennett 1994) (Fig. 5.5). Mafic and felsic magmatic rocks display similar Re/Os ratio, indicating little intra-crustal fractionation of the refractory platinum group elements (Allegre and Luck 1980; McCulloch and Bennett 1994).

The differential compatibility of Re and Os relative to mafic phases results in elevated Re/Os ratios in mantle-derived magmas, rapid evolution of  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$  in mafic crustal rocks and low  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$  ratios in mantle residues (McCulloch and Bennett 1994). Consequently mantle samples such as komatiites are depleted in Re and have low  $^{187}\text{Os}/^{188}\text{Os}$  (Fig. 5.5).



## Chapter 6

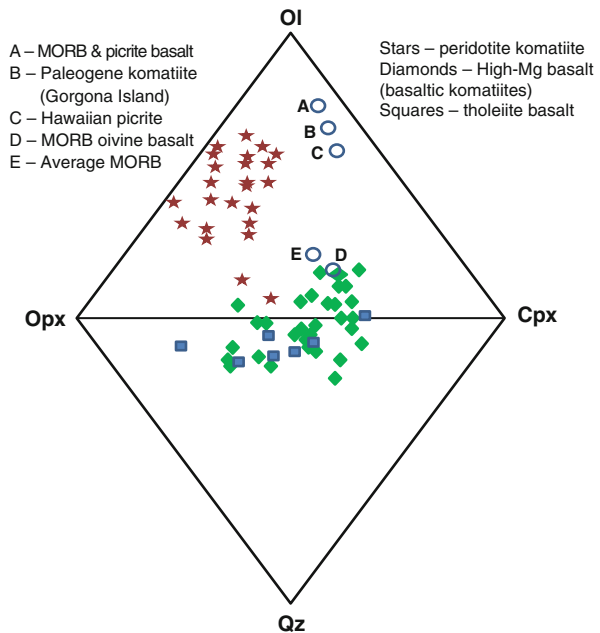
# Geochemical Trends of Archaean Magmatism

**Abstract** Comprehensive studies of well-exposed supracrustal sequences, including the Barberton Greenstone Belt, eastern Kaapvaal Craton, and Pilbara greenstone belts, northwestern Western Australia, allow detailed resolution of the relations between volcanic stratigraphy, isotopic ages and geochemistry, revealing systematic evolutionary trends of mantle and crust. This includes long term ~3.5 to ~3.2 Ga depletion of the source mantle in high field strength elements (HFS – Ti, Nb, rare earth elements) and a decrease in the ratio of Light REE to the heavy REE, as well as shorter term cycles displaying depletion and in some instances enrichment in the HFS elements, the latter likely implying juvenile mantle increments. Post 3.2 Ga basalts commonly display stronger LREE/HREE fractionation and Al-depleted compositions represented by high  $\text{CaO}/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and  $\text{TiO}_2/\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , implying increased importance of garnet in mantle residues and thereby cooler higher P/T (pressure/temperature) regimes. Felsic volcanic sequences ranging from andesites and dacites at low stratigraphic levels to rhyolites and K-rhyolites at higher levels represent increasingly fractionated compositions with time. Similar trends are shown by Archaean plutonic suites, an example being the increasing importance of garnet fractionation with time from ~3.55 to ~3.45 Ga implied by an increase in Sr and therefore the plagioclase component in TTG magmas (Moyen JF, Stevens G, Kisters AFM, Belcher RW, TTG plutons of the Barberton granitoid-greenstone terrain, South Africa. In: Van Kranendonk MJ, Smithies RH, Bennett VC (eds) *Earth's oldest rocks. Developments in Precambrian geology* 15. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp 607–667, 2007).

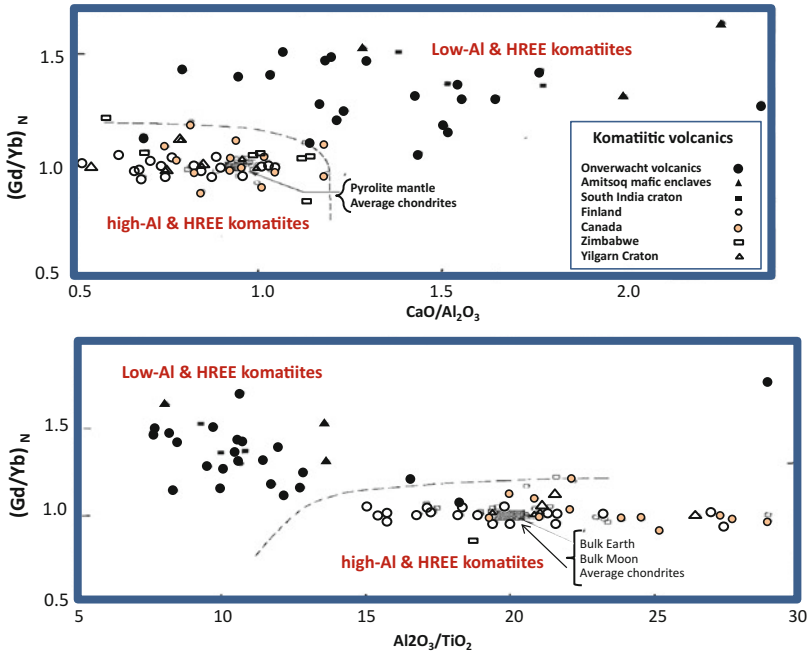
**Keywords** Geochemical trend • Trace element • Source mantle • Rare earth elements • High field strength elements

## 6.1 Mafic and Ultramafic Volcanics

The unique association of tholeiitic basalts (TB), high-Mg basalts (HMB) (basaltic komatiites) and peridotitic komatiites (PK) in Archaean greenstone belts, representing high-degree melting of mantle sources as compared to post-Archaean periods, allows insights into the composition, evolution and petrogenetic processes of the Archaean mantle (Sun and Nesbitt 1977, 1978; Glikson 1983). The field of PK may be continuous with, or distinct from, the continuous fields of HMB and TB (Fig. 6.1). Where a compositional gap occurs it is possible that, whereas the HMB-TB suite formed by partial melting of the Archaean asthenosphere, PK magmas represent large-scale melting in ascending mantle plumes. Assuming steep Archaean geotherms of  $>25$  °C/km and 20–40 % partial melting in a ~50 km-deep low velocity zone, followed by low pressure fractionation, a continuum of HMB – TB magmas may be produced. Episodic tectonic and/or impact events (Green 1972) could trigger ascent of mantle diapirs from levels of ~200 km and below, involving  $>50$  % partial melting producing PK magmas. Low pressure fractionation of HMB – TB melts is supported by their commonly quartz-normative compositions (Fig. 6.1), suggesting breakdown of orthopyroxene under low pressure of  $<15$  kb. Low-pressure melting and fractionation is supported by the scarcity to near-absence of alkaline rocks in most Archaean greenstone belts. Some similarities are noted between Si-enriched HMB and boninites found in ophiolites and fore-arc systems, interpreted in terms of hydrous mantle melting and/or involvement of continental lithosphere (Cameron et al. 1979; Smithies 2002).



**Fig. 6.1** OI-Opx-Cpx-Qz ternary diagram displaying the fields of peridotitic komatiites (*stars*), high-Mg basalts (*diamonds*) and tholeiitic basalts (*squares*), compared to the compositions of (a) MORB picritic basalt; (b) Paleogene komatiite; (c) Hawaiian picrite; (d) Average MORB; (e) MORB olivine basalt



**Fig. 6.2** Normalized rare earth element  $(Gd/Yb)_N$  ratios vs  $CaO/Al_2O_3$  and  $Al_2O_3/TiO_2$  ratios in komatiites and basalts from early (pre-3.2 Ga) Archaean terrains (Onverwacht Group, Amitsoq gneiss mafic enclaves, Indian Craton) and upper to late Archaean terrains (Finland, Zimbabwe, Superior Province, Yilgarn Craton), indicating heavy REE-depleted and Al-depleted compositions of early Archaean mafic rocks, attributed to fractionation of residual garnet (From Jahn et al. 1981, 1982; Springer, by permission)

Sun (1987) developed a multistage accretion model of the Earth based on element abundance ratios in komatiites and ultramafic xenoliths. Mostly element distribution patterns are close to chondritic, with the exception of  $CaO/Al_2O_3$  and  $V/Ti$  ratios, interpreted in terms of fractionation of aluminous garnet and of incorporation of vanadium in the core, respectively. A coexistence of Al-depleted and Al-undepleted komatiites attests to heterogeneous partial melting at different levels in a layered mantle, in agreement with a bimodal model of HMB-TB and PK derivation. A similarity between the ratios of siderophile and lithophile element ( $Ni/Mg$ ,  $Co/Mg$ ,  $Fe/Mg$  and  $P_2O_5/TiO_2$ ) and PGE abundances estimated for the Archaean and modern mantle argue against continuous growth of the Earth's core.

Jahn et al. (1981, 1982) classified komatiites in terms of their rare Earth element (REE) patterns (Fig. 6.2):

Group I: HREE flat,  $(Gd/Yb)_N \sim 1.0$

Group II: HREE depleted,  $(Gd/Yb)_N > 1.0$ ;  $CaO/Al_2O_3 > 1.0$ ;  $Al_2O_3/TiO_2 < 15$

Group III: HREE enriched,  $(Gd/Yb)_N < 1.0$ ;  $CaO/Al_2O_3 < 1.0$ ;  $Al_2O_3/TiO_2 > 15$

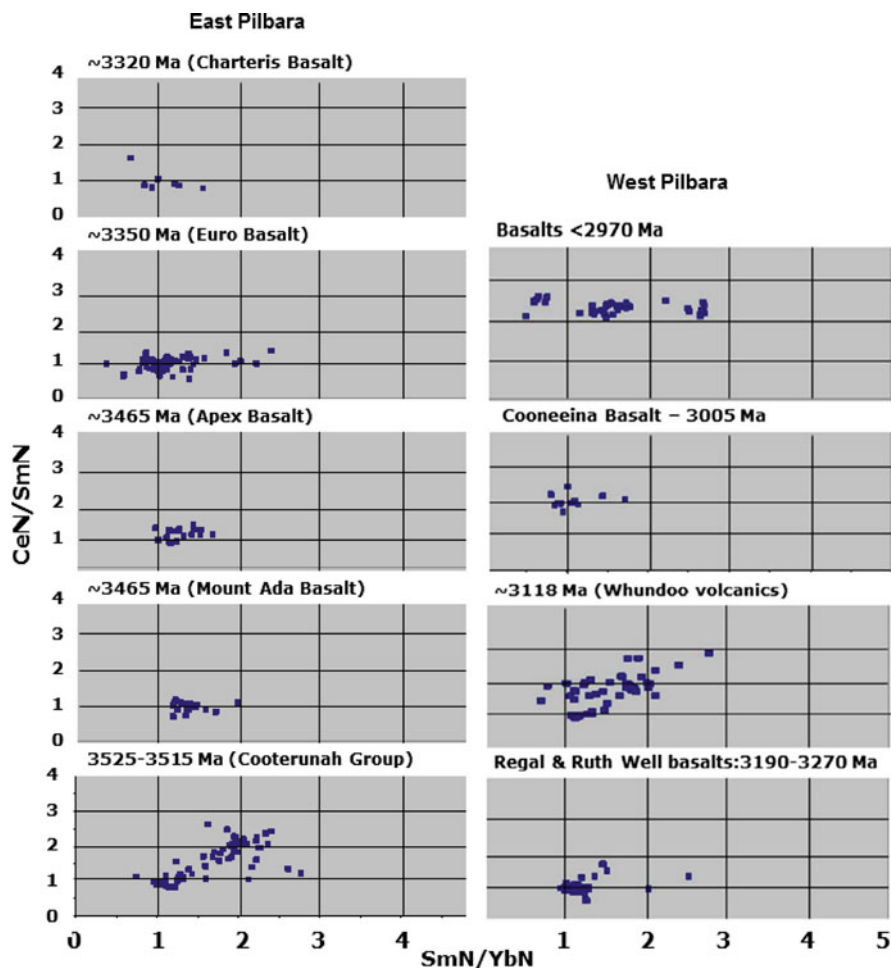
The composition of Group II komatiites, prevalent in Early to mid-Archaean (~3.5–3.2 Ga) greenstone belts (Kaalvaal, India, southwest Greenland enclaves),

signifies fractionation of garnet and thereby separation of  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$  and Yb from mafic and ultramafic partial melts. Fractionation of garnet would occur where the mantle solidus is intersected at depth  $\geq 200$  km, hinting at high-pressure mantle source environments. By contrast, komatiites from Late Archaean (~3.0–2.6 Ga) greenstone belts (Finland, Canada, Yilgarn, Zimbabwe) display little HREE depletion and are more similar to chondrite composition. Thus, komatiites in the ~3.52–3.23 Ga East Pilbara terrain include both Al-depleted and Al-undepleted types, whereas those in the post-3.2 Ga West Pilbara terrain are typically Al-undepleted (Smithies et al. 2007a, b).

A comprehensive geochemical study conducted by Hallberg (1971) has shown volcanics of the Kalgoorlie-Norseman greenstone belts in the Yilgarn Craton are dominated by tholeiitic pillow basalts, displaying similarities to Archaean tholeiites from Canada and South Africa with respect to their low content of K, Rb, and Sr and  $\text{Fe}_2\text{O}_3/\text{FeO}$  ratios. However, unlike calc-alkaline volcanic cycles of the Superior province, andesites are rare and only limited geochemical cyclicity is manifest in Yilgarn volcanic sequences.

The well-exposed low metamorphic grade greenstone belts of the Barberton Greenstone Belt eastern Kaapvaal Craton (Glikson and Jahn 1985) and the Pilbara Craton of northwestern Australia (Glikson and Hickman 1981; Glikson 2007, 2008; Smithies et al. 2005, 2007a, b) allow detailed resolution of temporal geochemical trends of mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequences. Pre-3.2 Ga greenstone sequences of the eastern Pilbara Craton display a decline in  $\text{TiO}_2$ , REE and light/heavy REE ratios during ~3.52–3.23 Ga (Figs. 6.3 to 6.5). By contrast post-3.2 Ga mid-late Archaean basalts display a wide compositional range including high La/Sm and Sm/Yb ratios, signifying sharp increase in LREE/HREE fractionation associated with development of semi-continental environments (Glikson and Hickman 1981; Smithies et al. 2005, 2007a, b) (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4), likely implying variations in the role of garnet fractionation and thereby of pressures in mantle source regions. Smithies et al. (2007a, b) identified intercalated low- $\text{TiO}_2$  and high- $\text{TiO}_2$  basalts ( $\text{TiO}_2 > 0.8\%$ ), the latter showing high levels of high field strength elements (Hf, Zr, Ti, Nb, Ta), high rare earth elements (REE) levels and Gd/Yb ratios (1.12–2.23), high Fe, low  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3/\text{TiO}_2$  ratios (18.7–8.9).

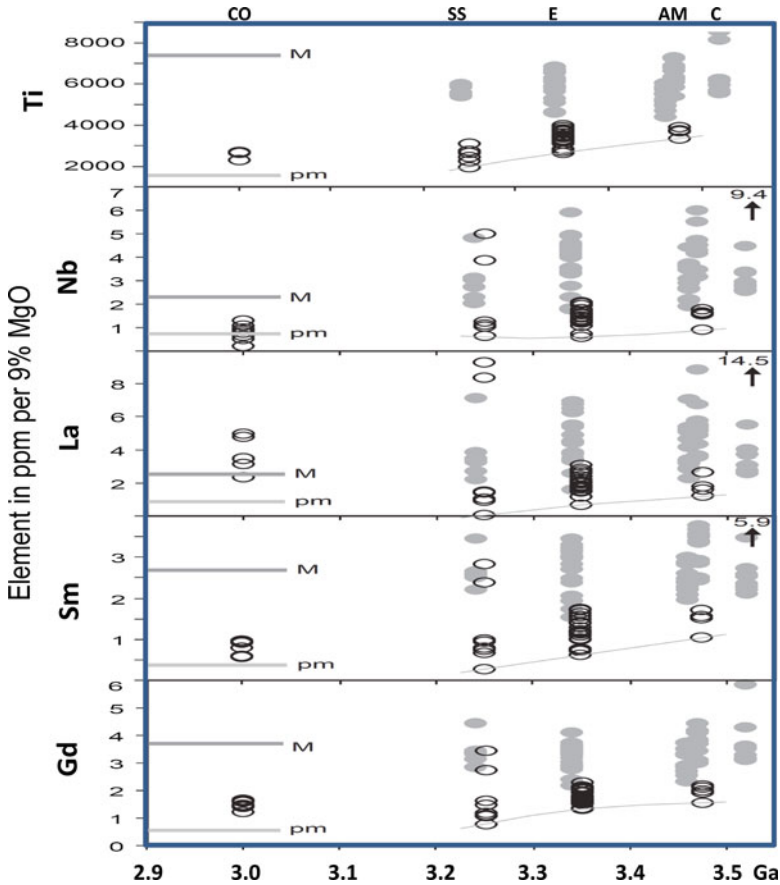
Superposed on the long-term depletion trends in HFSE are smaller scale cycles. Basalt sequences of the North Star Basalt (NSB) and Mount Ada Basalt (MAB) (Fig. 6.5) display systematic depletion in  $\text{TiO}_2$  with stratigraphic levels, suggesting depletion of the source mantle in HFSE elements (Glikson and Hickman 1981). A concentration of volatiles, alkali elements, S and Cu toward the top of MAB sequence is attributable to late syn-volcanic carbonization or/and secondary upward migration of volatiles associated with leaching of mafic volcanic rocks. The oldest volcanics of the North Star Basalt (NSB ~3,490 Ma) consist of Qz-normative HMB closely interspersed with tholeiitic basalts and dolerites with high Ti and low K, Al, Ni and Cr levels. High Ti and low Ni and Cr basalts of the NSB are distinct from high-Ni and Cr modern mid-ocean ridge basalts. The overlying MAB is locally dominated by heavily carbonated tholeiitic basalts and dolerites. In both the eastern and western Pilbara the mantle sources of the basalts were typically less depleted in



**Fig. 6.3**  $Ce_N/Sm_N$  vs  $Sm_N/Yb_N$  plots for basaltic volcanic units, Pilbara Craton (Data sources: Glikson and Hickman 1981; Glikson 2007, 2008; Smithies et al. 2005, 2007a, b)

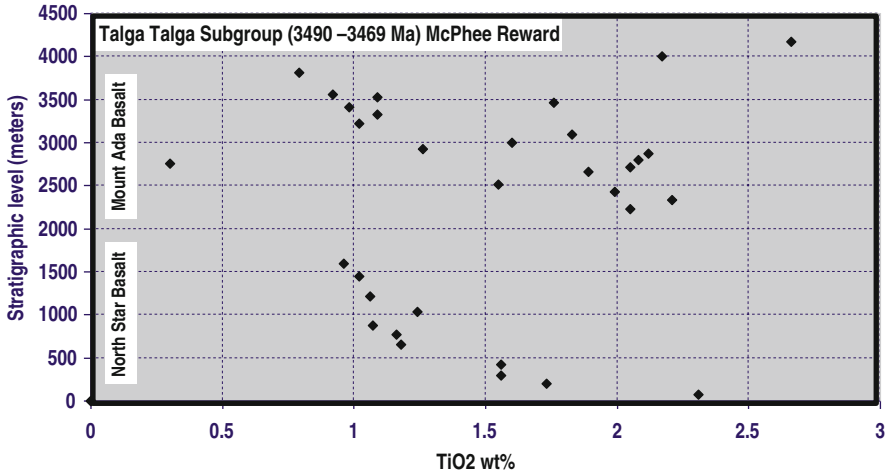
incompatible elements than normal MORB sources (Smithies et al. 2007a, b). By contrast to these ~3.49 Ga basalts, mafic and ultramafic volcanics of the ~3.35 Ga Euro Basalt display enrichment in  $TiO_2$  with stratigraphic level (Fig. 6.6), likely reflecting the tapping progressively enriched juvenile mantle sources, possibly mantle plumes.

Trace element characteristics of TB of different stratigraphic units commonly correlate with those of associated high-Mg basalts and peridotitic komatiites, suggesting primary magmatic inheritance of these features. Two geochemical series can be discerned based on Ni and Ni/Mg: (a) High-Ni low-Mg/Ni basalts associated with komatiites; (b) low-Ni high-Mg/Ni basalts of commonly low  $Mg'$  values ( $Mg/Mg + Fe$ ) accompanied by minor komatiite component. Trace metal indices (V/Cr,

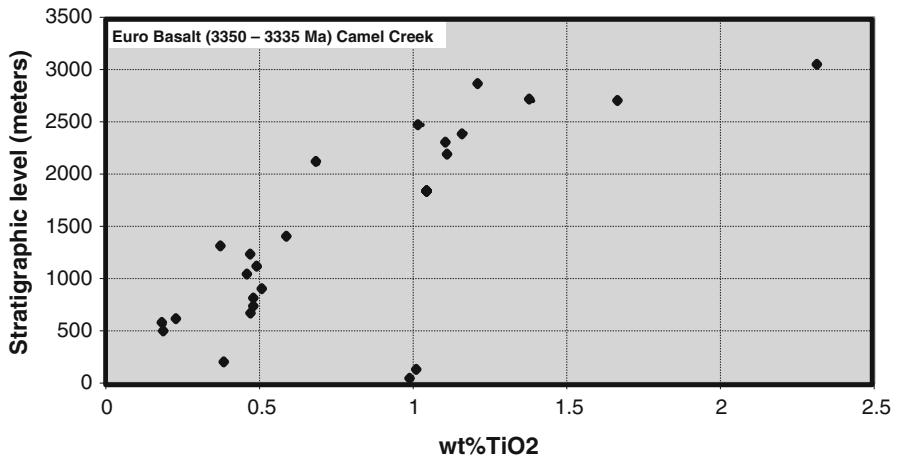


**Fig. 6.4** Variations in the compositions of high-Ti basalts (*grey circles*) and low-Ti basalts (*open circles*) of the Pilbara Supergroup with time. *C* Coonterunah Subgroup, *M* Mount Ada Basalt, *A* Apex Basalt, *E* Euro Basalt, *SS* Sulphur Springs Group, *CO* Cooniceena Basalt Member (Bookingarra Formation, Croydon Group, De Grey Supergroup). Values for N-MORB (*M*) and primitive mantle (*pm*) are from Sun and McDonough (1989). Trace element concentrations recalculated to values expected at 9 wt.% MgO (From Smithies et al. 2007a; GSWA, by permission)

Co/Ni, Ti/Ni) suggest high fractionation of ~3,490 Ma TB, lower fractionation of ~3,449 Ma TB; low-to-intermediate degree of fractionation of post-3,225 Ma TB; variable fractionation of 2.78–2.63 Ga Fortescue Group plateau basalts (Gliksion et al. 1989). Petrogenetic model calculations suggest somewhat siderophile elements-enriched mantle source compositions. As suggested by compositional gaps between PK and HMB, these magmas may not be generally inter-related by crystal fractionation. HMB likely formed by 30–50 % melting of mantle peridotite in shallow Archaean equivalent of the modern low velocity zone. The continuous chemical spectrum between high-Mg basalts and tholeiitic basalts suggests the latter could form from primary high-Mg magma by 25–65 % crystal fractionation,



**Fig. 6.5** Variations in TiO<sub>2</sub> in basalts with stratigraphic levels: North Star Basalt (~3.49 Ga) and Mount Ada Basalt (~3.47 Ga), Marble Bar region, Pilbara Craton



**Fig. 6.6** Variations in TiO<sub>2</sub> in basalts with stratigraphic levels: Euro Basalt (~3.35–3.325 Ga) Camel Creek, Marble Bar region, Pilbara Craton

leaving residues of olivine, clinopyroxene, orthopyroxene and plagioclase. The high-K values of post-3,225 Ma tholeiitic basalts may represent effects of contamination by felsic crust.

Some of the geochemical trends indicated earlier in this section suggest a secular depletion of the mantle in incompatible elements in some regions of the Archaean Earth, consistent with observations by Griffin et al. (2003) who indicated a systematic variation in the composition of the subcontinental lithospheric mantle with age. These authors indicate the Archaean subcontinental lithospheric mantle is distinctively

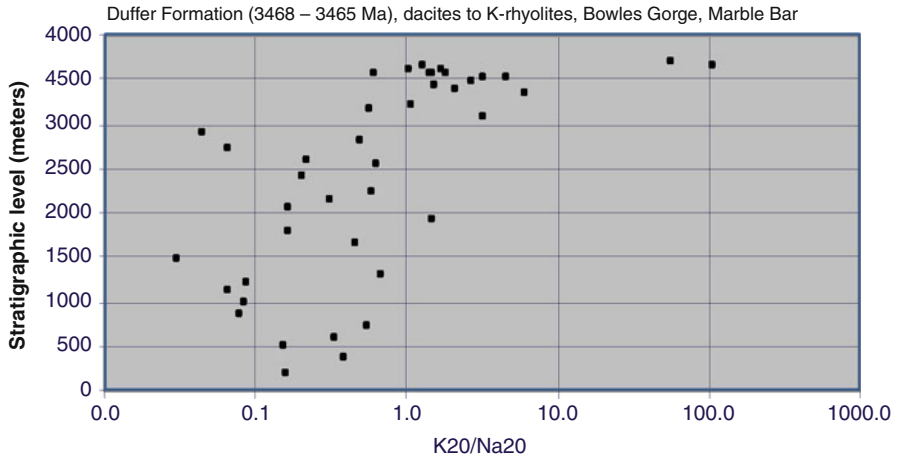
different from younger mantle and is highly depleted in incompatible elements, containing depleted sub-calcic harzburgites which are essentially absent in younger sub-continental mantle. On the basis of this trend and isotopic and trace element geochemistry of mantle xenoliths these authors suggest a quasi-contemporaneous formation or modification of the crust and its underlying mantle root zones, implying the crust and mantle have in many cases been coupled in time and space through their subsequent history. A further development of the theory conveyed by Griffin et al. (2014) based on worldwide compilation of U/Pb, Hf-isotope and trace-element data on zircon, and Re–Os model ages on sulfides and alloys in mantle-derived rocks and xenocrysts develops a 4.5–2.4 Ga mantle and crust model invoking long periods of stagnant mafic crustal conditions interrupted by pulses of juvenile magmatic activity at ca 4.2 Ga, 3.8 Ga and 3.3–3.4 Ga the authors interpret in terms of mantle plume episodes on a time scale of ~150 Ma. In this model generation of continental crust peaked in two main pulses at ~2.75 Ga and ~2.5 Ga. However, as indicated in Chaps. 2, 4, 7, 8 and 9 extensive magmatic activity took place in several cratons during intervening periods.

## 6.2 Felsic Igneous Rocks

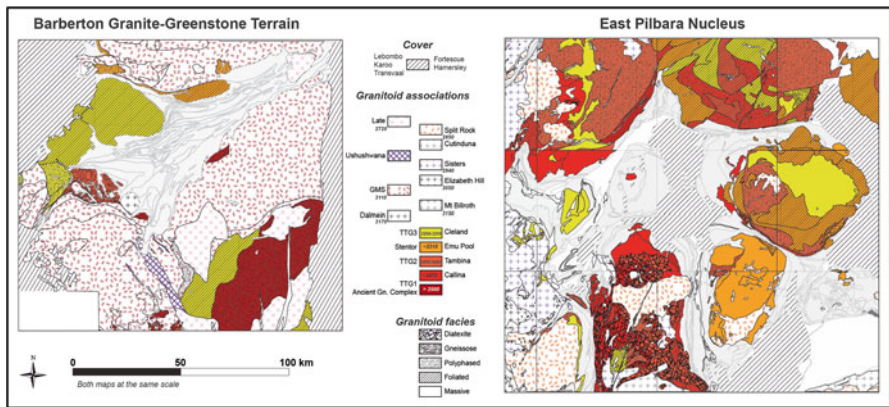
Geochemical studies of Archaean granitoids (Arth and Hanson 1975; Hanson 1975; Arth 1976; Arth et al. 1978) display clear trends from Na-rich syntectonic magmas to fractionated K-rich magmas (Glikson and Sheraton 1972; Glikson 1976a, b, c, 1979a; Glikson and Hickman 1981; Martin 1999; Smithies 2000; Smithies and Champion 2000; Smithies et al. 2003; Champion and Smithies 1999, 2007; Martin et al. 2005; Moyen et al. 2007, 2009) (Figs. 6.7 to 6.11), underpinning the significance of a temporally distinct Archaean Tonalite-Trondhjemite-Granodiorite (TTG) suite (Barker 1979). Analogous dacitic compositions pertain to Archaean felsic volcanic and hypabyssal porphyries (O'Beirne 1968). Archaean calc-alkaline volcanic sequences commonly display evolution from dacites to K-rhyolites, as recorded in the ~3.47 Ga volcanics of the Duffer Formation, Pilbara Craton (Glikson and Hickman 1981) (Fig. 6.7).

Archaean batholiths include multiple generations of intrusive bodies forming a complex geometry where in some instances younger plutons penetrate at the centers of older plutons and in other instances post-kinematic intrusions are emplaced at the margin along contacts with greenstone belts (Fig. 6.8). Geochemical data for granitoids from Archaean granite-greenstone terrains and gneiss-granulite terrains, classified on the An-Ab-Or ternary (O'Connor 1965) display continuous compositional spectrum between the fields of tonalite, trondhjemite, granodiorite and adamellite. Tonalites dominate among pre-3.2 Ga granitoids of the Kaapvaal Craton (Glikson 1976a, b, 1979; Moyen et al. 2007; Moyen and Martin 2012) (Figs. 6.8 and 6.9). By contrast ~3.3 Ga Pilbara granitoids display a wide range of  $K_2O/Na_2O$  ratios, including relatively differentiated compositions (Moyen et al. 2007). The tonalitic chemistry of Barberton plutons, as distinct from Western Australian trondhjemites and





**Fig. 6.7** Stratigraphic variations of the K/Na ratio in a dacite to K-rhyolite sequence of volcanic rocks and pyroclastics of the Duffer Formation (~3.468–3.465 Ga), Bowles Gorge, Marble Bar area, Pilbara Craton



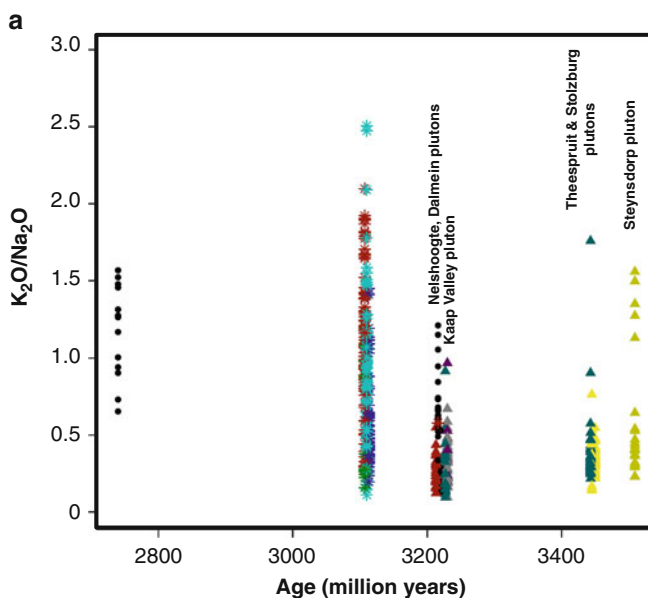
**Fig. 6.8** Granitoids in the East Pilbara craton and the Barberton Granite – Greenstone terrain record different modes of Archaean crustal accretion (From Moyen et al. 2011; courtesy J-F Moyen)

granodiorites, may be attributed to an ultramafic composition of the precursor materials, consistent with the komatiite-dominated composition of the Onverwacht Group.

Felsic igneous rocks associated with the Barberton Greenstone Belt, Kaapvaal Craton (Glikson 1976a, b), display low abundances of large ion lithophile (LIL) elements pertaining to the ‘ancient tonalites’ plutonic suite which intruded the volcanics at ~3.4–3.2 Ga and to albite porphyries intercalated with early ultramafic-mafic volcanics of the Onverwacht Group. 3,548–3,298 Ma felsic volcanic units display REE patterns similar to those of the intrusive tonalites, with total REE, Ce<sub>N</sub>/Yb<sub>N</sub> and

Rb/Sr values comparable to some tonalitic-trondhjemitic components of the Ancient Gneiss Complex in Swaziland (~3,644–3,433 Ma, Compston and Kröner 1988). Some of the felsic volcanics display highly fractionated REE patterns suggesting equilibration with garnet and thereby origin by high-pressure melting of eclogite at depths of 30–50 km. REE patterns of the ‘ancient tonalites’ are characterized by pronounced positive Eu anomalies, reflecting the abundance of plagioclase. Some of the albite porphyries may represent shallow-level hypabyssal equivalents of the ‘ancient tonalites’. Late-stage members of the ‘ancient tonalites’ are present, examples being the Dalmein and Bosmanskop plutons, representing decreasing partial melting of basic source rocks. In the Barberton terrain post tectonic K-rich adamellite and migmatite are represented by the 3.0 Ga Hood granite and Nelspruit migmatite, displaying field evidence for derivation by anatexis of the ‘ancient tonalites’ as well as incorporation of ultramafic to mafic xenoliths derived from the Onverwacht Group.

Orthogneisses from high-grade Archaean terrains tend to be more mafic than samples from granite-greenstone terrains, likely due to extensive digestion of mafic materials. Apart from high FeO/MgO gneisses such as the Amitsoq gneisses (Lambert and Holland 1976), the Fe-Mg-Alk relations of Archaean Na-rich granitoids define calc-alkaline trends, similar to post-Archaean Na-rich granitoids, with the notable exception of oceanic plagioclase-rich granites (Coleman and Peterman 1975). The differentiation Indices ( $Qz + Or + Ab + Ne + Le + Kp$ ) and Solidification Indices ( $100 \text{ MgO} / (\text{MgO} + \text{FeOt} + \text{Na}_2\text{O} + \text{K}_2\text{O})$ ) of Archaean gneisses confirm the



**Fig. 6.9** (a) Variations in  $\text{K}_2\text{O}/\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  with time in granitoids of the Barberton Mountain Land, eastern Kaapvaal Craton. Courtesy J-F Moyen. (b)  $\text{K}_2\text{O}/\text{Na}_2\text{O}$  vs. Sr diagrams for Barberton and Pilbara rocks. Barberton samples on the *left*, Pilbara on the *right*. Samples are grouped by chronological order, *bottom to top* (From Moyen et al. 2009; Royal Society of Edinburgh, by permission)

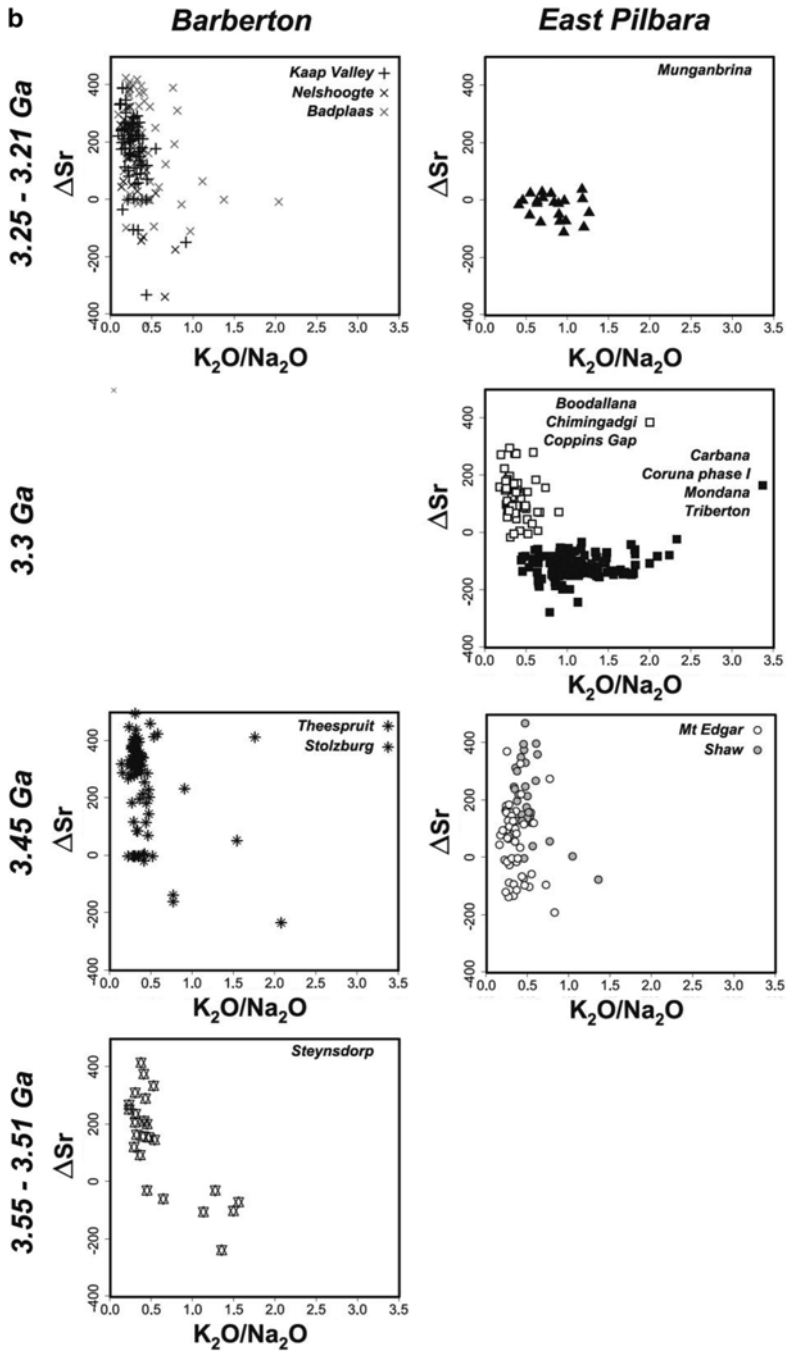
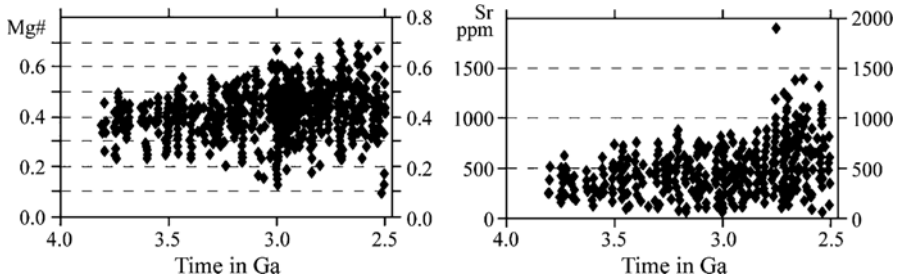
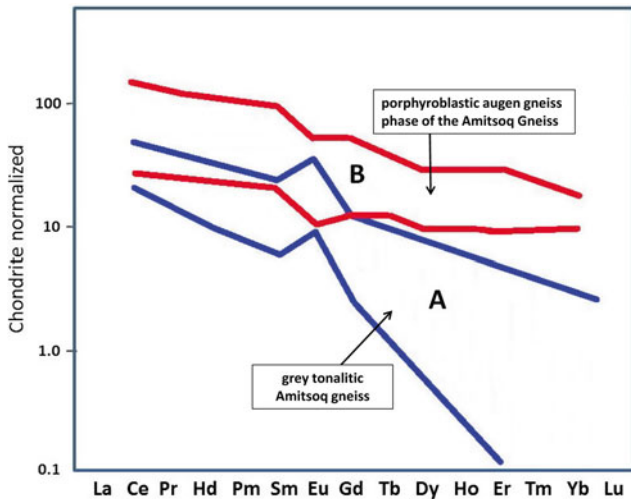


Fig. 6.9 (continued)



**Fig. 6.10** Diagrams showing time-evolution of Mg# and Sr in TTG magmas during the Archaean. The upper envelope of the group of points represents the composition of the more primitive TTG magmas (From Martin and Moyen 2002; Elsevier by permission)



**Fig. 6.11** Contrast between the REE patterns of tonalitic gneisses and K-granites, an example from southwest Greenland. (a) Grey (tonalitic) Amitsoq gneiss; (b) porphyroclastic augen gneiss phase of the Amitsoq Gneiss (From O’Nions and Pankhurst 1978; Elsevier, by permission)

relatively basic composition of Barberton and Minnesota – Ontario samples, whose FeO/MgO ratios are lower than for Western Australian rocks. Some Yilgarn trondhjemites are of siliceous, high-alkali and ferromagnesian-poor chemistry, exemplified by granitoid pebbles in Kurrawang conglomerate. Relatively ferroan compositions are associated with low Na<sub>2</sub>O/K<sub>2</sub>O and low CaO. The alumina levels of Archaean granitoids are low to moderate (13–16 % Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>) and with sediment-derived paragneisses are rare.

Trace element abundances in Archaean granitoids show marked fluctuations of the large ion lithophile (LIL) elements, including Sr, Ba and Rb. Some Yilgarn, Kaapvaal and Minnesota and Ontario TTG have remarkably high Sr (<800 ppm)

contrasted with Pilbara trondhjemites with Sr abundances lower by factors of 2–4. Positive Sr-CaO correlations ( $r=0.70, 0.61$ ) pertain to Pilbara and Minnesota-Ontario compositions. Many samples from high-grade Archaean terrains have high Ba abundances as compared to data from granite – greenstone terrains. Ba decreases from ~3.7 to 3.6 Ga granitoids to ~3.0–2.8 Ga granitoids. High Ba and Sr levels pertain to some Minnesota-Ontario syeno-diorites and Barberton plutons of alkaline affinities (Arth and Hanson 1975; Glikson 1976a, b). Rb levels display a wide dispersion, as shown for example by comparisons between Minnesota-Ontario tonalites (Rb ~ 34 ppm), Barberton tonalites (Rb ~ 42 ppm), Pilbara trondhjemites (Rb ~ 93 ppm) and Kurrawang trondhjemite pebbles (Rb ~ 12 ppm). Gneisses of the Swaziland terrain have higher Rb levels than Barberton tonalites, a difference to which Hunter (1974) referred as evidence against their coeval relations. Lewisian gneisses may be extremely depleted in Rb, with the average of 254 Drumbeg gneisses with 11 ppm Rb (Sheraton 1970). Higher levels pertain to Nuk gneisses and the older Amitsoq gneisses have an average of 71 ppm for 25 samples. With few exceptions, such as the Lewisian gneisses, Archaean felsic plutonic rocks have low to moderate K/Rb ratios of below 400. Trondhjemite and granite tend to have higher Rb/Sr ratios (0.5–1.0) than tonalites (<0.15).

Hurst (1978) studied the evolution of initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  ( $R_i$ ) ratios between 3.9 and 1.6 Ga, deducing an average mantle Rb/Sr ratio of 0.014, implying early depletion of the mantle in Rb, likely selectively transferred to mafic and felsic crust, a conclusion consistent with the decrease in Rb/Sr from ~3.7 to 3.6 Ga Amitsoq and Uivak gneisses to ~3.0–2.8 Ga Nuk and Lewisian gneisses. A temporal increase in the Rb abundance of Archaean granites was reported from the Barberton – Swaziland terrain (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Condie and Hunter 1976) and from the Yilgarn Craton (Glikson 1979). The low initial  $\text{Sr}^{87}/\text{Sr}^{86}$  ( $R_i$ ) values in Archaean magmatic bodies (Hurley et al. 1962; Moorbath et al. 1976; Moorbath 1977) (Fig. 5.2) constrain the crustal prehistory and suggest derivation from juvenile mantle-derived materials. Other views suggest continuous recycling of SIAL crust associated with secondary depression of  $R_i$  values through isotopic exchange with the mantle ('zone refining') (Armstrong 1968). The significance of  $R_i$  values for crustal residence times of precursor materials depends on assumptions regarding the nature of these precursors and their Rb/Sr ratios as well as assumptions regarding the mantle  $R_i$  growth curve. Secondary depression of the  $R_i$  values depression has also been suggested as a result of crustal recycling (Bridgwater and Collerson 1976, 1977) and volatile activity associated with mantle degassing (Collerson and Fryer 1978), a suggestion requiring special pleading. Thus, recycling of granitoid crust would result in isotopic age resetting, contrasted with the preservation of an age record as far back as ~3.8 Ga (Black et al. 1971; Moorbath et al. 1973). The low  $R_i$  values of tonalites and trondhjemites in high-level TTG bodies subject to little or no 'zone refining' places strict limits on crust-mantle recycling processes.

Compilations of Rb-Sr ages and  $R_i$  values indicate low fractionation of Archaean TTG (Fig. 5.2). In the Zimbabwe Craton plutonic rocks include (1) ~3.6–3.4 Ga tonalitic gneisses of low  $R_i$  values (0.700–0.702); (2) ~3.0 Ga tonalite – trondhjemite – granodiorite plutons of low  $R_i$  values; (3) ~2.8–2.7 Ga plutons of low  $R_i$

values; (4) ~2.7–2.6 Ga intrusions including (a) small bodies of tonalite to granite of low  $R_i$  values which intrude Bulawayan Group greenstones (Somabula and Sesombi tonalites) and (b) extensive high-level adamellite – granite yielding intermediate  $R_i$  values (0.704) (Chilimanzi and Zimbabwe batholiths); (5) high values such as 0.711 occur in the Mont d'Or gneiss (Pb-Pb age –  $3,345 \pm 55$  Ma) (Moorbath et al. 1976; Taylor et al. 1991). Intermediate values of ~0.705–0.706 are recorded in Swaziland gneisses where a linear correlation occurs between  $R_i$  values and age (Davies and Allsopp 1976). It appears that, where two-stage mantle melting processes (Green and Ringwood 1967) dominated formation of felsic magmas, further intra-crustal melting took place at younger stages of crust formation. In the Pilbara Craton Rb-Sr isochron ages reported for the Mount Edgar and Shaw batholiths comprise 3.1–2.9 Ga ( $R_i$  ~0.702) ages of older gneiss phases and ~2.7–2.6 Ga ( $R_i$  ~0.735) ages for post-tectonic granites (DeLaeter and Blockley 1972; DeLaeter et al. 1975). U-Pb zircon ages of gneisses from the Mount Edgar and Shaw batholiths yielded ages of about 3.4–3.3 Ga (Pidgeon 1978) whereas Pb-Pb K-feldspar ages of Pilbara gneisses appear to be reset at 3.0–2.9 Ga (Oversby 1976).

The high field strength lithophile (HFSL) elements (Th, Pb, Zr, Nb) are depleted in some Archaean gneisses, for example in Barberton tonalites and in southwest Greenland (Lambert and Holland (1976). Two distinct groupings apply to Yilgarn granites, one represented by trondhjemites (Kambalda pluton: U=1–3 ppm;  $K_2O=2.1$ – $2.4$  %) and the other by high-K granites with up to 10 ppm U. Some Pilbara samples have anomalously high U values of about 15 ppm, possibly reflecting secondary enrichment. Good correlations are observed between Pb and  $K_2O$ . (Yilgarn  $r=0.67$ ; Pilbara  $r=0.82$ ). Some Amitsoq gneisses have high Zr levels (200–400 ppm) in comparison to other gneisses of the North Atlantic Craton, with a main range of 100–250 ppm Zr. Guiana gneisses define two Zr-TiO<sub>2</sub> groupings, one with 130–230 ppm Zr and 0.25–0.40 % TiO<sub>2</sub> and the other with 20–150 ppm Zr and 0.20–0.70 % TiO<sub>2</sub>. Nb values of Archaean rocks appear to be low compared to the average high-Ca granite of Turekian and Wedepohl (1961) (Nb=20 ppm). A good correlation of Nb with Zr is apparent for the Amitsoq gneiss ( $r=0.76$ ).

Quartz diorites, tonalites and trondhjemites ~2.7 Ga-old from northeast Minnesota and northwestern Ontario have steep chondrite-normalized rare earth (REE) patterns and, in some instances, positive Eu anomalies (Arth and Hanson 1975). Some samples display extreme depletion in heavy REE, with  $Yb_N$  levels of <1.0 and in some instances <0.1, attributable to separation of mineral phases with high partition coefficients ( $K_{Yb}^{Gm}=39.9$  for dacitic melts) and/or hornblende ( $K_{Yb}^{Hbl}=4.89$  for dacitic melts) (Arth 1976). By contrast positive  $Eu_N$  anomalies in tonalitic magmas represent low partition coefficients of Eu in garnet and hornblende.

By contrast to the TTG suite REE patterns of post-tectonic quartz monzonite show negative Eu anomalies, attributed to plagioclase fractionation, and in many instances show low degrees of fractionation of HREE. The K-rich intrusions display eutectic low-melting compositions, high LIL element levels and highly variable  $R_i$  values (Arth and Hanson 1975; Condie and Hunter 1976; Glikson 1976a, b; Hunter et al. 1978). The plutons occur either as discrete late high-level intrusions in

granite – greenstone terrains or as zones and bands of porphyritic gneiss in high-grade terrains. The geochemical characteristics of the K-rich bodies have been interpreted in terms of partial melting of greywackes (Arth and Hanson 1975), siliceous granulite (Condie and Hunter 1976) or of older TTG basement (Glikson 1976a, b), consistent with field relations in South Africa and Western Australia. A third plutonic class identified by Arth and Hanson (1975) comprises syeno-diorites and syenites characterized by high total REE, strong LHEE enrichment ( $Ce_N = 200\text{--}500$ ), fractionated REE ( $Ce_N/Yb_N = 30\text{--}60$ ) and a lack of Eu anomalies. Similar characteristics are displayed by the Bosmanskop pluton, a late-stage member of the Barberton suite intruded into the Ancient Tonalites (Anhaeusser 1974; Glikson 1976a, b).

The trace element and isotopic parameters outlined above suggest derivation of TTG by partial melting of eclogite, basic granulite or amphibolite (O’Nions and Pankhurst 1974; Condie and Hunter 1976; Glikson 1976a, b; Hunter et al. 1978; Collerson and Fryer 1978; Drury 1978; Collerson and Bridgwater 1979). Arth and Barker (1976) emphasized the role of amphibole fractionation in preference to garnet. REE patterns allow estimates of degrees of partial melting, for example for the Saganage Tonalite ( $Ce/Yb \sim 12\text{--}54$ ;  $Eu/Eu^* = 0.87\text{--}1.90$ ), modelled as the product of 30–35 % melting of quartz eclogite (30 % gnt, 55 % cpx, 15 % qz) (Arth and Hanson 1975). An alternative interpretation regards the HREE depletion of TTG as a result of complexing and leaching of REE elements by  $CO_2$ ,  $SO_2$ , Cl and F bearing fluids (Collerson and Fryer 1978). However, this model does not account for the systematic field and petrological differences preserved between the TTG suite and late K-rich granitoids as indicated above. Lambert and Holland (1976) pointed out the generally low yttrium abundances ( $Y \sim 10\text{--}30$  ppm) and low Y/CaO ratios in Archaean volcanics as compared with modern ocean-floor tholeiites ( $Y \sim 20\text{--}60$  ppm). Low Y/CaO ratios are well pronounced in Lewisian gneisses (Sheraton 1970; Glikson and Sheraton 1972). The low HREE and Y may be attributed to depletion of the Archaean mantle in HREE and Y or, alternatively, arrest of HREE and Y in residual amphibole or garnet.

The field relations, geochemical and isotopic data reviewed above provides boundary conditions for models of origin of Archaean batholiths. Tonalitic and trondhjemitic magmas are unlikely to be the product of anatexis of granitoid basement rocks as the typical products of anatexis of felsic rocks yield adamellite to granite magmas (Carmichael et al. 1974). An exception would be where total melting or remobilization of TTG crust occurs, requiring superheating and extreme  $H_2O$  pressures, such as have yet to be demonstrated. Field records in high grade metamorphic terrains indicate re-melting of TTG granitoids results in segregation of K-rich leucosome fractions from paleosome restite. Thus models advocating formation of the TTG suite by anatexis of older granitic crust (Baragar and McGlynn 1976; Archibald et al. 1978) do not account for the geochemical differences between the TTG suite and the K-rich LIL element-high products of en-SIAL anatexis.

Viljoen and Viljoen (1969c) regarded the Barberton tonalites as products of mantle melting and Taylor (1967) interpreted the origin of Archaean batholiths in terms of large-scale up-streaming of lithophile elements from the mantle. Low-degree melting of hydrated peridotite under pressures of  $\sim 10$  kbar is capable of

yielding basaltic andesite (Kushiro 1972; Mysen and Boettcher 1975). However, whereas small volumes of dacite may ensue by fractional crystallization of mantle-derived andesitic melts, it is unlikely the large volumes of the TTG suite could arise in this manner. In this regard it is pertinent to note the relative paucity of andesites in older Archaean greenstone belts, as contrasted with their appearance in late greenstone belts in the Superior Province (Folinsbee et al. 1968; Baragar and Goodwin 1969; Green and Baadsgaard 1971) and the Yilgarn Craton (Hallberg 1971).

Assuming a high geothermal gradient of  $\sim 40$  °C/km in Archaean mafic-ultramafic crustal domains (Glikson and Lambert 1976), partial melting of H<sub>2</sub>O-saturated olivine tholeiite should commence about 20 km depth and segregation of dacitic melts would be widespread between 20 and 30 km depth. Under anhydrous conditions this process would commence at  $\sim 35$  km depth. Garnet becomes stable at subsolidus temperatures between 40 and 50 km, depending on partial H<sub>2</sub>O pressure. Under pressure of about  $\sim 30$  kbar the breakdown of amphibole results in a release of water and depression of the solidus, defining the low-velocity zone. However, under high geothermal gradients the breakdown of amphibole would take place under lower pressure, resulting in a shallower upper limit of the low-velocity zone. The bulk of partial melting would be concomitant with dehydration under high pressures associated with transformation of amphibolite to granulite and eclogite. Under very high geothermal gradients granulite facies conditions are attained before the H<sub>2</sub>O-saturated solidus is intersected. In this case melting would only commence at or above 1,200 °C at depths of  $\sim 10$ – $20$  km. Addition of water to the magma during its ascent would, lowering the solidus, result in lower viscosity and enhance the assimilation of invaded supracrustals.

Apart from the melting of mafic crust it is possible re-melting of trapped basic pods within the Archaean upper mantle and fractional crystallization of basic magmas have contributed to formation of the TTG suite. On the other hand, fractional crystallization would result in an abundance of rocks of intermediate composition, such as are comparatively rare in early Archaean greenstone belts and in Archaean batholiths. Questions regarding two-stage mantle melting model include: (a) whereas partly digested relics of assimilated mafic material are common in xenolith chains (Chap. 3), no examples are evident of ultramafic residues of the partial melting process at or below deep seated roots zones of TTG batholiths, for example in Lewisian granulites formed under 10–15 kbar (O'Hara 1977). Exceptions may be represented by spinel dunite and spinel pyroxenite enclaves in the Fiskenaeset region, southwest Greenland (Friend and Hughs 1977). Assuming that the volumes of residual refractory materials were at least equal to that of the TTG batholiths, it must be inferred the dense residues must have sunk into the Archaean mantle.

The nature of the structural environment and tectonic mechanism which facilitated partial melting of vast volumes of mafic-ultramafic crust remains little understood. Geochemical and isotopic parameters diagnostic of the composition of source materials and the nature of fractionation processes are not definitive with respect to identification of tectonic environments, except where uniformitarian assumptions are made (Chap. 12). Attempts at correlating trace element features of ancient



volcanics with tectonic environments (cf. Floyd and Winchester 1975; Pearce et al. 1977) are complicated by likely lateral vertical and lateral mantle heterogeneities and temporal evolution of mantle composition (Sun and Nesbitt 1977; Jahn et al. 1979; Glikson and Hickman 1981), which cast doubt on the validity of geochemical-tectonic correlations. Contrasting schools of thought have developed during the last decades with regard to the interpretation of Archaean tectonic environments, including

- (a) models advocating an early granitoid basement below greenstone belts (cf. Windley and Bridgwater 1971);
- (b) plate tectonic-based models interpreting high-grade Archaean terrains in terms of assembly of coexistence of micro-cratons associated with subduction of mafic-ultramafic crustal tracts (cf. Bridgwater et al. 1974; Nutman et al. 2007);
- (c) Non-uniformitarian crustal transformation models.

Models type A make a distinction between gneiss – granulite terrains and greenstone belts, the latter believed to form above the former. Models type B advocate horizontal tectonics, plate tectonics, subduction and lateral inter-thrusting of granitic and mafic crustal analogous of modern circum-Pacific regimes, notably the Chilean ophiolite – granodiorite complexes (Windley 1973; Bridgwater et al. 1974; Tarney et al. 1976; Windley and Smith 1976; Tarney and Windley 1977; Moorbath 1977). Models type C emphasize the antiquity of early ultramafic – mafic volcanic enclaves in the isotopically oldest-documented tonalite – trondhjemite batholiths, the absence of evidence for granitic basement directly underlying early pre-3.2 Ga mafic-ultramafic sequences (Onverwacht Group, Warrawoona Group), coeval transitions between granite – greenstone and deep-seated gneiss – granulite root zones, and vertical tectonics associated with diapiric plutonic emplacement of the gregarious batholiths (Glikson 1970, 1972, 1976a, b; Anhaeusser et al. 1969; Viljoen and Viljoen 1969c; Anhaeusser 1973; Glikson and Lambert 1976; Naqvi 1976; Weber and Scoates 1978).

Geochemical analogies between post-3.2 Ga greenstone belts of the Superior Province and low-K tholeiite-andesite-dacite-rhyolite assemblages of modern island-arcs (Folinsbee et al. 1968; Baragar and Goodwin 1969; Green and Baadsgaard 1971) support type-B models. Likewise, significant similarities are observed between Archaean and post-Archaean granite-greenstone terrains, such as the middle Proterozoic Snow Lake – Flin Flon terrain (Stauffer et al. 1975) and Phanerozoic ophiolite – granodiorite complexes (Tarney et al. 1976; Hietanen 1975a, b; Burke et al. 1976). However, these similarities, interpreted in terms of two-stage mantle melting processes (Green and Ringwood 1967, 1977), do not necessarily imply identical structural environments. Fundamental distinctions between Archaean terrains and younger orogenic belts include (Chap. 12):

1. Abundance of temporally unique peridotitic komatiites and high-Mg basalts in Archaean greenstone belts.
2. Dominance of the bimodal low-K tholeiite – Na dacite suite and paucity of andesite in pre-3.2 Ga Archaean greenstone belts.

3. The near-absence of alkaline volcanic and plutonic rocks within Archaean batholiths, except at final stages of their evolution.
4. Evidence for near-liquidus temperatures of the Archaean tonalite – trondhjemite granodiorite magmatic suite and the digestion of vast volumes of ultramafic – mafic crust by the felsic magmas.

The Na-rich felsic igneous rocks can be modelled in terms of equilibrium melting of mafic-ultramafic rocks of average high-Mg basalt composition and fractional crystallization of a mafic parent magma involving separation of garnet (Glikson and Jahn 1985). By contrast near-flat heavy REE profiles of post-tectonic K-rich granites (Lochiel Granite) display field evidence for derivation by anatexis of tonalite-greenstone crust about ~3.0–2.6 Ga, confirmed by distinct REE patterns including HREE depletion and Eu enrichment of tonalites as compared to K-rich granites (Fig. 6.11). Likewise siliceous gneisses of the Ancient Gneiss Complex of Swaziland with high total REE, high  $Ce_N/Sm_N$ , low  $Sm_N/Yb_N$ , negative Eu anomalies and high Rb/Sr can be modelled in terms of late or post-magmatic anatexis of the tonalites.

The distribution patterns of rare earth elements (REE), alkali, alkaline earth elements (Rb, Ba, Sr) and high field strength elements (Ti, Zr, Nb) in felsic volcanic and plutonic rocks of the Pilbara Block, Western Australia (Glikson et al. 1987) define a number of associations:

- (A) 3.5–3.4 Ga Na-rich calc-alkali and occasionally high-Al andesite-dacite-rhyolite volcanics within greenstone belts and plutonic equivalents. This association is dominated by low Rb/Sr ratios (<0.4) moderate to high light/heavy REE fractionation,  $(Ce/Yb)_N < 15$ , small or no Eu/Eu\* anomalies and near-flat heavy REE profiles,  $(Dy/Lu)_N = 0.9–1.2$ .
- (B) 3.32–2.9 Ga includes K-rich rhyolite lavas at high stratigraphic levels of the Warrawoona Group (Wyman Formation) and late to post-tectonic granites. This association includes rocks of very high Rb/Sr ratios (11–15), moderate  $(Ce/Yb)_N$  (5–6), marked Eu/Eu\* anomalies (<0.4) and flat heavy REE profiles  $((Dy/Lu)_N = 0.9–1.1)$ .
- (C) ~2.9 Ga rhyolitic pyroclastics (Mons Cupri Volcanics) and related plugs (Mount Brown Rhyolite) of the Whim Creek Group. This association includes rocks of moderate Rb/Sr ratios (0.6–1.0), moderate  $(Ce/Yb)_N$  (5.7–7.0), low Eu anomalies and weakly fractionated heavy REE  $(Tb/Yb)_N < 1.0$ .

A derivation of magmas of association (A) by partial melting or fractional crystallization of basic rocks can be modelled by separation of residual clinopyroxene, plagioclase and minor garnet. This is consistent with the very low Nb anomalies and lack of Eu and Sr depletion in the andesite-dacite magmas, which suggests a minor role of plagioclase separation and thus unlikely derivation by anatexis of felsic crust. By contrast the origin of associations (B) and (C) can be modelled in terms of anatexis of tonalite/trondhjemite crust, possibly including a mafic component, involving separation of a residue of plagioclase and clinopyroxene. These models are consistent with an evolutionary trend from largely mafic to largely felsic sources with time. The low-LIL dacites of the Duffer Formation probably formed by partial

melting of basic source materials, but late-magmatic hydrothermal addition of Si and K is required for the rhyolites. Elvan-type quartz porphyries of the Wyman Formation were related to late-stage hydrous differentiation. Smithies et al. (2007a, b) observe a trend toward silica and alumina enrichment and an increase in  $La_N/Yb_N$  in felsic volcanics with time in Pilbara greenstone belts. These authors point to compositional differences between felsic volcanics and the tonalite-trondhjemite suite and emphasise fractional crystallization of tholeiitic magma accompanied with crustal contamination, as well as an increase in the role of high-pressure melting with time.

Several petrological and geochemical studies of volcanic sequences of the Superior Province and Slave Province greenstone belts report (1) a low-stratigraphic and geochemically primitive mafic assemblage of komatiites and tholeiitic basalts and (2) overlying geochemically evolved calc-alkaline basalt-andesite-dacite volcanic assemblage, an example being the Abitibi greenstone belt. The two assemblages are distinguished by higher incompatible elements and light/heavy rare-earth element fractionation in the calc-alkaline assemblage. The contrast is accounted for in part by different degrees of melting of unmodified mantle lherzolite and in part by variations in the composition of the source mantle. Trace-element geochemistry studies of three Abitibi (~2.7 Ga) volcanic sequences, each approximately 16 km-thick, confirms the existence of Archaean volcanic cycles composed of lower tholeiitic and upper calc-alkalic parts (Capdevila et al. 1982). Depleted and undepleted magmas are intercalated, indicating contemporaneous coexistence of heterogeneous mantle sources. The tholeiitic basalts closely resemble modern mid-ocean ridge basalts whereas the calc-alkalic andesites and alkalic rocks are similar to modern oceanic island-arc andesites and to some modern volcanic-arc high-K rocks, respectively.

Detailed geochemical studies of Archaean granitoids (Martin 1999; Smithies 2000; Smithies and Champion 2000; Smithies et al. 2003; Champion and Smithies 1999, 2007; Martin et al. 2005; Moyen et al. 2007, 2009) suggest an overall rise in #Mg values, Ni, Cr and Sr with time (Fig. 6.10), possibly representing increased interaction between the mantle. Moyen et al. (2007) interpreted the geochemistry of Barberton TTG in terms of the depth of melting of source amphibolites, including differentiation between two sub-series – a high-Sr high-pressure low temperature sub-series of mostly leucocratic trondhjemites and a low-Sr low-pressure and high temperature sub-series including tonalite, diorite, trondhjemites and granodiorites. An evolutionary trend is observed from ~3.55 to 3.50 Ga low-Sr tonalites signifying residual plagioclase to ~3.45 Ga high-Sr trondhjemite signifying deep-level melting and thus little plagioclase in the residue, to ~3.29–3.24 Ga high-Sr tonalite and trondhjemite. The dominant tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite TTG series in pre-3.2 Ga terrains consists of Na-rich, high-Sr, high La/Yb and high Sr/Y compositions attributed to partial melting of eclogites. Whereas TTG display similarities to Cainozoic adakites, the latter bear evidence for stronger interaction with the mantle in terms of their high #Mg values (Martin 1999; Martin et al. 2005). The dominant pre-3.2 Ga tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite suite in the Pilbara Craton is replaced in post-3.0 Ga terrains by a post-kinematic high-Mg (#Mg ~ 60) diorite suite (sanukitoid) suggestive of interaction with the mantle (Smithies and Champion 2000).

Variations occur between cratons, for example a rise in K/Na about 3.3 Ga in some granitoids in the Pilbara Craton is not reflected in 3.55–3.21 Ga tonalites in the Barberton terrain which is dominated by low K/Na ratios of  $<0.5$  (Moyen et al. 2009) (Fig. 6.9). In the Barberton terrain high  $\epsilon\text{Nd}$  (CHUR) ( $<4\%$ ) and low  $\epsilon\text{Sr}$  (T) tonalite and granodiorite ( $\sim 3.4\text{--}3.5$  Ga Theespruit and Steynsdorp plutons), signifying mantle signatures, are succeeded by low  $\epsilon\text{Nd}$  (CHUR) ( $-0.5$  to  $-3\%$ ) and high  $\epsilon\text{Sr}$  (T) ( $\sim 3.2$  Ga Kaap Valley and Nelshoogte plutons) (Moyen et al. 2007, 2009).

## Chapter 7

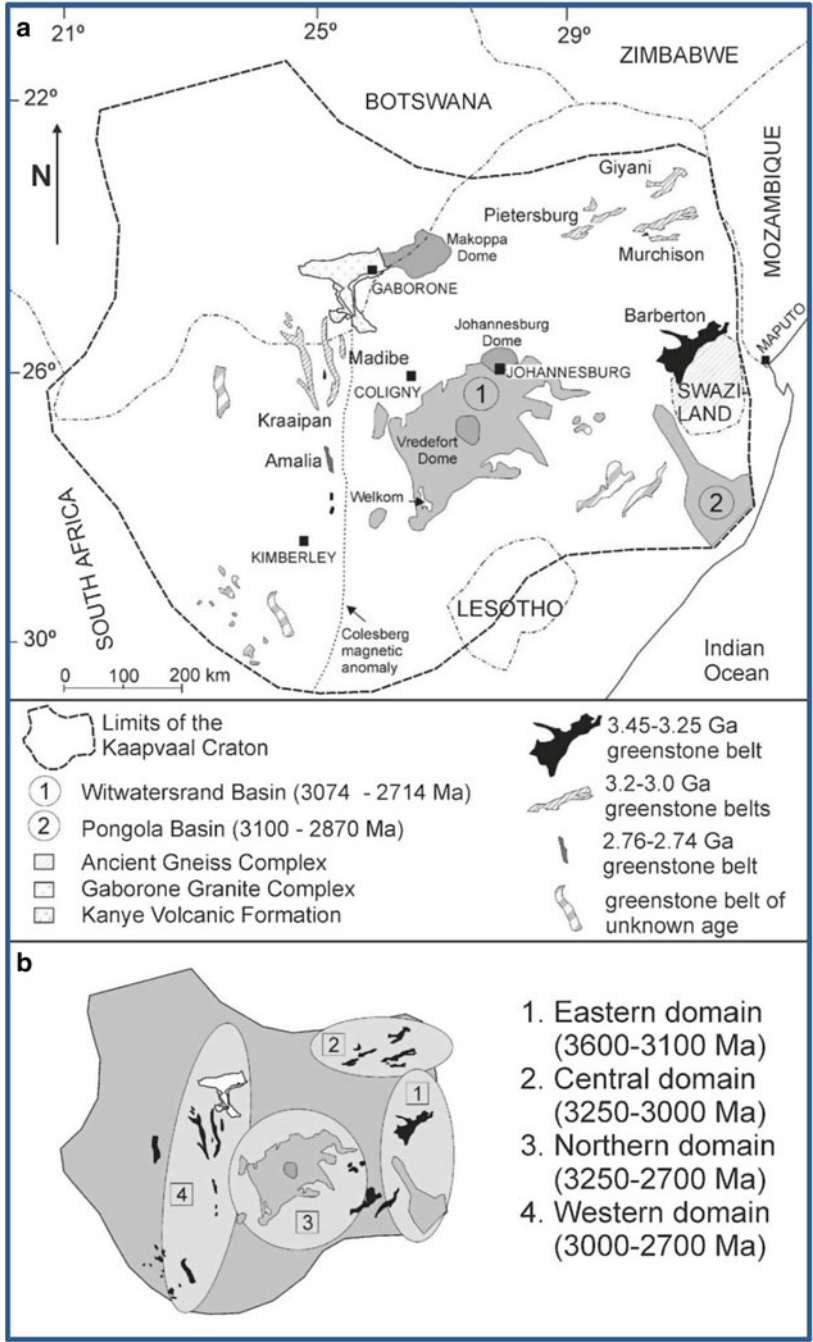
# Pre-3.2 Ga Evolution and Asteroid Impacts of the Barberton Greenstone Belt, Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa

**Abstract** The discovery of near to 14 Archaean impact ejecta units up to 3.48 Ga-old in the Barberton Greenstone Belt, Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa, and the Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, including asteroid impact clusters about 3.25–3.22 Ga and 2.63–2.48 Ga in age, may represent discrete impact episodes or terrestrial vestiges of an extended late heavy bombardment (LHB). The interval of ~3.25–3.22 Ga-ago emerges as a major break in Archaean crustal evolution when, as indicated by a large body of field and isotopic age evidence, impacts by a cluster of large asteroid bombardment resulted in faulting, large scale uplift, intrusion of granites and an abrupt shift from crustal conditions dominated by mafic-ultramafic crust and tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite plutons, to semi-continental conditions represented by arenites, turbidites, conglomerate, banded iron formations and felsic volcanics. These events resulted in geotectonic patterns from pre-3.2 Ga dome-structured granite-greenstone systems such as in the Kaapvaal, Zimbabwe and Pilbara cratons, to linear accretional granite-greenstone systems such as the Superior Province in Canada, Yilgarn Craton and Pilbara Craton in Western Australia.

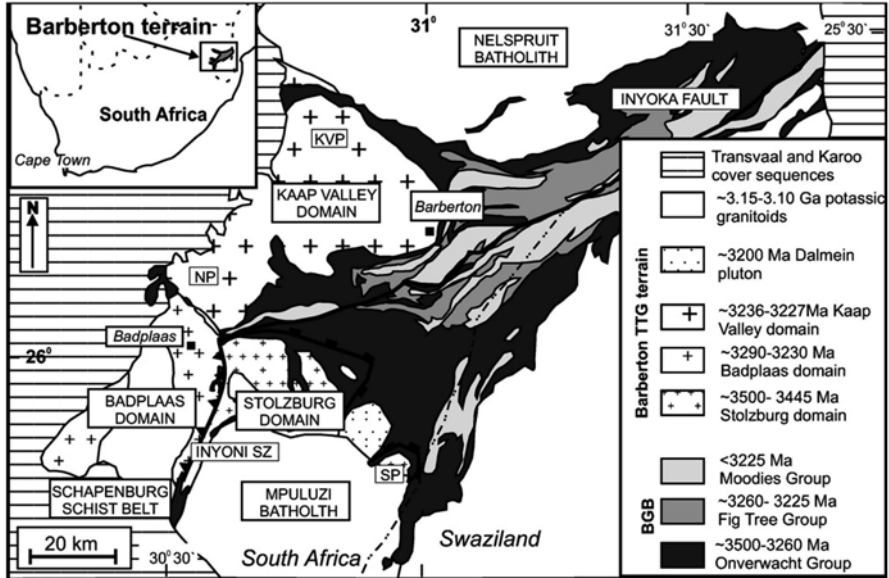
**Keywords** Asteroid impact • South Africa • Crustal evolution • Kaapvaal Craton • Zimbabwe Craton • Barberton Greenstone Belt • Onverwacht Group • Komatiites • Fig Tree Group

## 7.1 The Barberton Greenstone Belt, Eastern Kaapvaal Craton

The recorded evolution of the Kaapvaal Craton, spanning over  $10^9$  years as recorded by detailed stratigraphy and isotopic age determinations, involves a number of discrete spatial-temporal terrains (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b, c; Anhaeusser et al. 1969; Anhaeusser 1973; Kroner et al. 1989, 1991a, b; Poujol et al. 1996; Eglington and Armstrong 2004; Poujol et al. 2003; Schmitz et al. 2004; Poujol 2007) (Figs. 7.1 to 7.17).



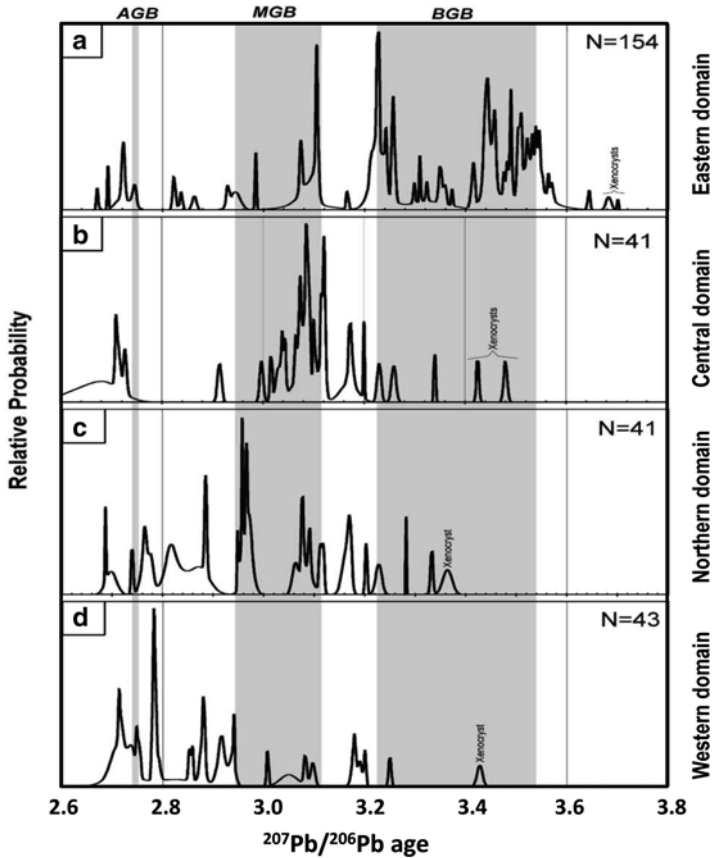
**Fig. 7.1** (a) Outline of the Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa; (b) Locations of the eastern, central, northern and western domains (From Poujol et al. 2003; Elsevier, by permission)



**Fig. 7.2** Geological sketch map of the Barberton granitoid-greenstone terrain, showing the main lithotectonic units: *NP* Nelshoogte Pluton, *KVP* Kaap Valley Pluton, *SP* Steynsdorp Pluton. The Inyoni shear zone is marked by black line and teeth (pointing to the upper plate); the trace of the southern extensional detachment at the base of the greenstone belt is marked by solid black line (From Kister et al. 2010; Elsevier, by permission)

Structural and geophysical data allow definition of several blocks, including the Witwatersrand, Kimberley, Pieterburg and Swaziland blocks, separated by major lineaments (Fig. 7.1). Pujol (2007) defines three periods of maximum magmatic activity about ~3.55, ~3.45 and ~3.25–3.22 Ga, recognized in the Ancient Gneiss Complex of Swaziland (AGC) and the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) (Fig. 7.2). The 3.55–3.22 Ga Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) (Fig. 7.2) and associated felsic plutons in the Eastern Transvaal and Swaziland, South Africa, along with the Pilbara craton (Chap. 8), constitutes the oldest well preserved mid-Archaean crustal fragments where primary volcanic and sedimentary features, including asteroid impact ejecta units are well retained. Allowing observations of ancient marine and terrestrial environments, with implications for the composition of the atmosphere-ocean system and early life (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Knauth and Lowe 1978, 2003; Lowe and Knauth 1977, 1978; Lowe and Byerly 1986a, b; Lowe and Byerly 1999; Lowe and Nocita 1999; Lowe and Fisher 1999; Lowe et al. 2003; Lowe and Byerly 2007).

The Barberton Greenstone Belt (Fig. 7.2) crop out in ridges (Fig. 7.4) while the granitoids underlie valleys or plateaus. Low metamorphic grade supracrustal sequences contain ultramafic lavas – termed ‘komatiites’ after their type locality on the Komati River, including basaltic komatiites (high-Mg basalts) and peridotitic komatiites (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Sun and Nesbitt 1977, 1978; Arndt et al.



**Fig. 7.3** Cumulative probability distribution of  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages for granite-greenstone domains of the Kaapvaal Craton. The grey background tones represent the times of emplacement of the Barberton (BGB), Murchison (MGB) and Amalia (AGB) greenstone belts. Poujol et al. 2003; Elsevier, by permission

1997) (Figs. 7.5 and 7.6). Plutonic bodies surrounding and intruding the BGB are dominated by the plagioclase-rich tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) assemblage (Gliksion and Shertaon 1972; Gliksion 1979a, b; Arth and Hanson 1975; Barker 1979) (Fig. 6.8, 7.7). The TTG are in turn intruded by a younger granite-monzonite-syenite suite (GMS) dominated by K-feldspar and quartz, which due to the resistance of quartz to erosion forms plateaus such as the Lochiel Plateau (Fig. 7.7b). Isotopic age determinations indicate a contemporaneity of TTG plutons and felsic volcanic units in the BGB (Appendix I) whereas the GMS association mostly postdates deformation and onset of late stage sedimentation (Lowe and Byerly 2007).



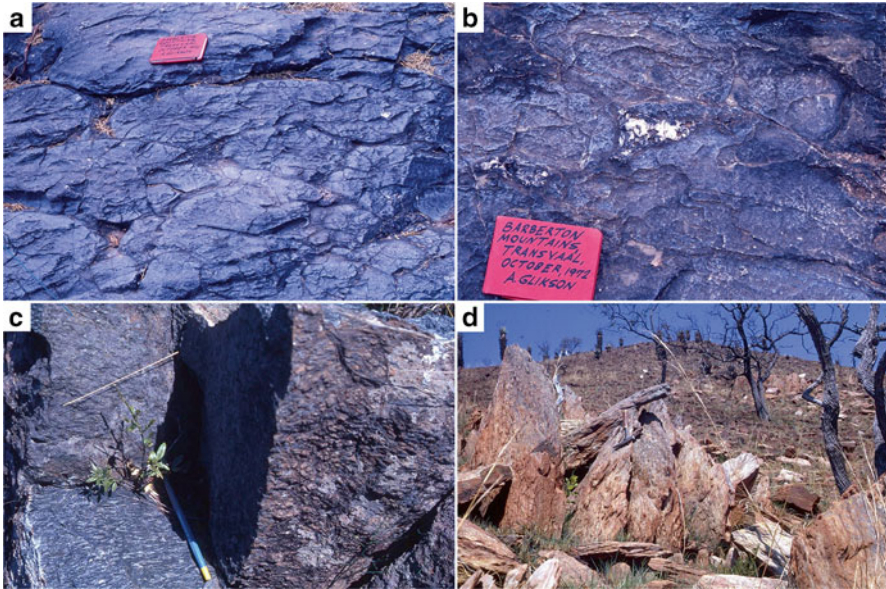


**Fig. 7.4** Two views looking northeast along the Kromberg syncline, showing the Pigge Peak ridge section with the Onverwacht Group mafic-ultramafic volcanics (ON), Fig Tree Group turbidites (FT) and Moodies Group Conglomerates (MO)

The evolution of the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) can be summarized in terms of the following stages (see Appendix 1, Table 1):

**Stage I (~3.7–3.5 Ga):** Development of the Ancient Gneiss Complex of Swaziland, in part predating the BGB.

**Stage II (~3.55–3.23 Ga):** Mafic and ultramafic volcanism accompanied with accretion of co-magmatic felsic plutonic and volcanic magmatic increments (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969c), forming an early greenstone-granitoid nucleus. This stage includes four magmatic cycles (Lowe and Byerly 2007): (1) >3,547–~3,500 Ma (Steynsdorp cycle); (2) ~3,500–~3,435 Ma (Songimvelo cycle); (3) ~3,435–3,330 Ma (Kromberg cycle); (4) ~3,330–3,225 Ma (Umuduha and Kaap Valley cycle).



**Fig. 7.5** Onverwacht Group volcanics: (a) pillowed ultramafic lava; (b) pillowed mafic lavas; (c) spinifex (quench) textured volcanic rock; (d) sericite schist, signifying altered felsic lava

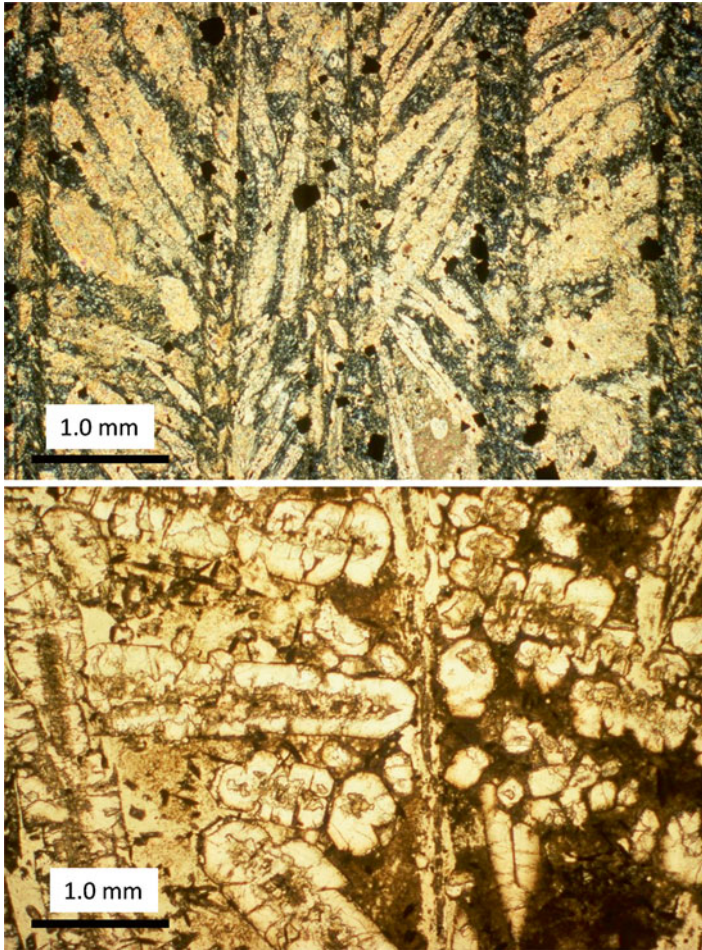
**Stage III (3,230–3,216 Ma):** A major impact cluster triggering major deformation of the greenstone-granitoid nucleus, emplacement of tonalite plutons and sharp unconformities (Lowe et al. 1989, 2003).

**Stage IV (~3,216–3,100 Ma):** Deformation and intrusion of large granitic batholiths, uplift, large scale erosion and deposition of turbidites, BIF and felsic volcanics (Fig Tree Group) and conglomerates (Moodies Group) (Fig. 7.8)

In the BGB an early plutonic-volcanic association is represented by the ~3,510 Ma Steynsdorp pluton and felsic volcanics dated at 3,548–3,530 Ma (Kröner et al. 1992, 1996). Felsic volcanics of the Theespruit and Hoogenoeg Formations (U-Pb zircon ages 3,453–3,438 Ma) overlap the ages of the Doornhoek, Theespruit and Stolzberg plutons (3,460–3,430 Ma).

Lowe and Byerly (2007) classified the southern and central BGB in terms of 5 tectono-stratigraphic suites including both supracrustal volcanics and sediments and plutonic units juxtaposed within fault-bounded blocks:

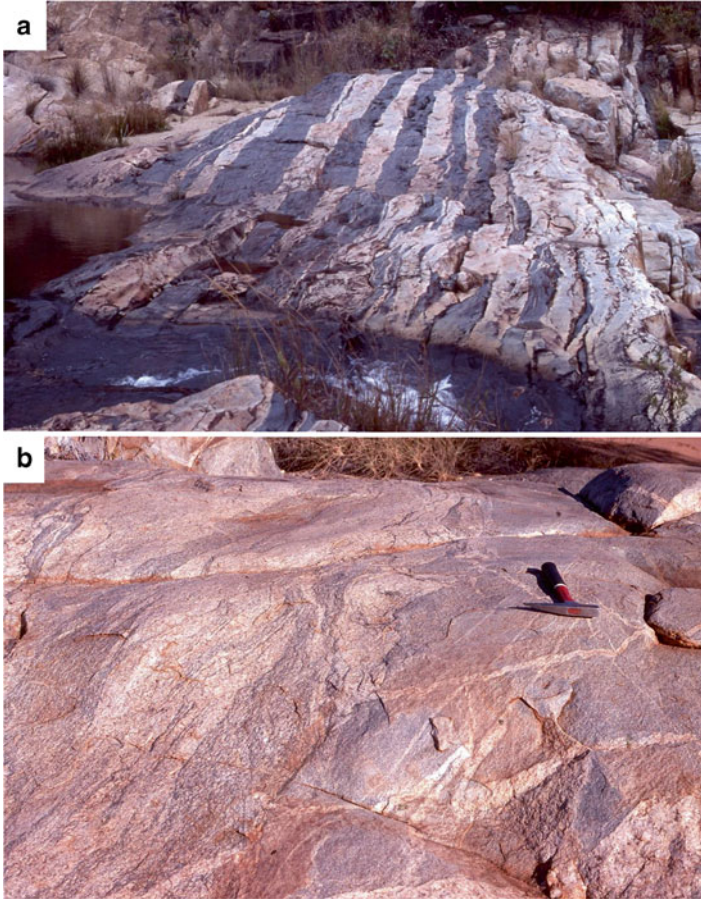
1. Steynsdorp suite, which includes pre-3.5 Ga supracrustals and the 3,509 Ma Steynsdorp Pluton;
2. Songimvelo suite, south-central part of the BGB, including supracrustals of the Theespruit and Sandspruit Formations and ~3,445 Ma Theespruit, Stolzberg, and Doornhoek TTG plutons (Robb and Anhaeusser 1983; Kisters and Anhaeusser 1995).
3. Kromberg suite, consisting of volcanic and sedimentary rocks of the Kromberg Formation;



**Fig. 7.6** Microscopic quench “spinifex” textures in peridotitic komatiite, consisting of tremolite and chlorite representing pseudomorphs after pyroxene and olivine. Komati Formation, Barberton Mountain land

4. Umuduha suite, mostly supracrustals occupying the central part of the BGB;
5. Kaap Valley suite, includes supracrustals and ~3,236 Ma to ~3,225 Ma TTG plutons – the Kaap Valley, Nelshoogte, and Badplaas plutons.

Plutonic gneisses associated with the Songimvelo suite are replete with mafic and ultramafic enclaves and xenoliths correlated with the Sandspruit Formation (Viljoen and Viljoen (1969a) (Fig. 7.2), which includes thin clastic sedimentary units containing 3,540–3,521 Ma-old detrital zircons similar in age to the Theespruit Formation (Dziggel et al. 2006). The >3,547 to <3,225 Ma stratigraphy of the BGB comprises the following major groups (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Lowe and Byerly 1999, 2007):



**Fig. 7.7** (a) layered felsic-mafic agmatite within Theespruit tonalite gneiss; (b) banded and veined migmatite of the Nelspruit Migmatite, Lochiel Plateau, Barberton granite-greenstone terrain

1. Onverwacht Group (>3,547–3,260 Ma, >10 km-thick). In the southern BGB the Onverwacht Group is dominated by mafic to ultramafic volcanics intercalated by thin cherts and silicified sediments (Fig. 7.5). Along northern and western fringes of the BGB the Onverwacht Group is represented by thinner (~1,000 m) post-3.3 Ga sequence.
2. Fig Tree Group (3,260–3,225 Ma, ~1,800 m-thick) consists of felsic volcanoclastic tuffs, clastic units eroded from the underlying volcanic sequences, and banded iron formations (BIF).
3. Moodies Group (post-3,225 Ma, ~3,000 m-thick) consists of coarse-grained quartz-rich and feldspathic sandstone and chert-clast conglomerate derived by erosion of underlying granitoids and greenstone units (Fig. 7.8).



**Fig. 7.8** Conglomerate of the Moodies Group displaying sheared pebbles of chert and granite

### 7.1.1 *Onverwacht Group*

#### **~3.53 Ga Sandspruit and Theespruit Formations.**

The lowermost stratigraphic units of the BGB, exposed at the Steynsdorp anticline (Fig. 7.10), consist of komatiite and basalt of the Sandspruit Formation. In both the Steynsdorp and Onverwacht anticlines lower stratigraphic units include felsic volcanics, felsic breccia, banded cherts, and mafic-ultramafic volcanics of the Theespruit Formation, the oldest U-Pb isotopic date being  $3,538 \pm 6$  Ma. The supracrustals are faulted against older TTG gneisses dated as  $3,538 \pm 6$  Ma.

#### **~3.48 Ga. Komati Formation**

The overlying Komati Formation consists of a ~3,500 m-thick sequence of partly pillowed quench-textured (“spinifex-textured”) peridotitic komatiites, basaltic komatiites and tholeiitic basalts (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969a, b; Viljoen et al. 1983; Cloete 1999; Dann et al. 1998) (Figs. 7.5 and 7.6). Peridotitic and basaltic komatiites consist of olivine-pyroxene-chromite assemblages set in aphanitic to recrystallized meta-glass matrix. The original olivine and pyroxene are mostly altered. Olivine is replaced by pseudomorphs consisting of serpentine and magnetite. Pyroxene is commonly replaced by tremolite and chlorite. Chromites are well preserved. Only a single 5–10 cm thick intercalation of sediments and felsic tuff, dated as  $3,481 \pm 2$  Ma (Dann et al. 1998) is known and individual pulses of lava are difficult to distinguish due to little alteration of flow tops – suggesting near-continuous eruption (Lowe and Byerly 2007).

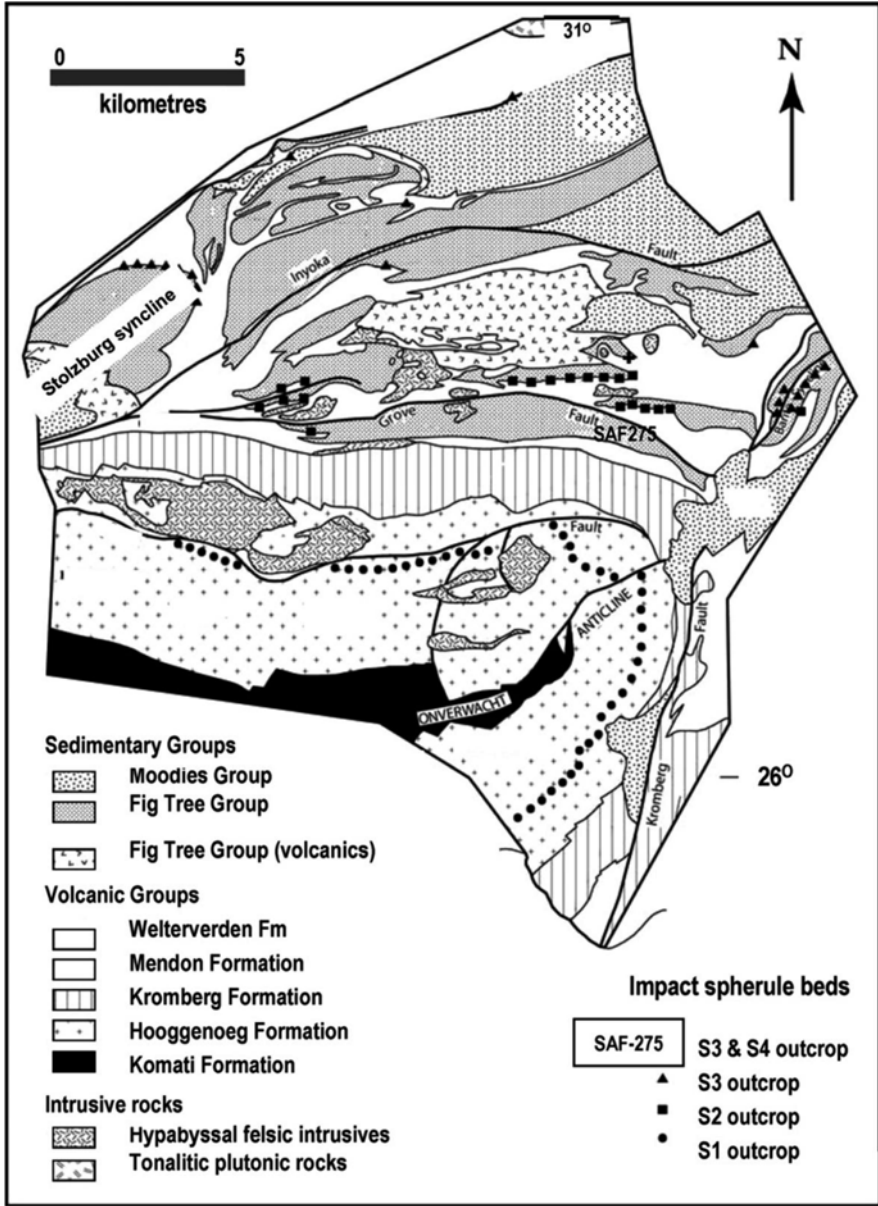
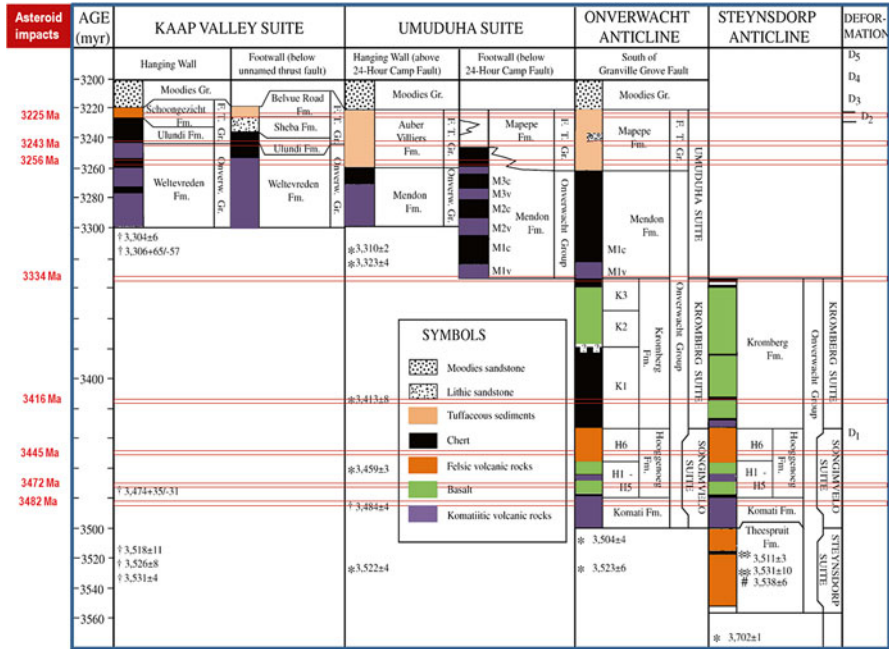


Fig. 7.9 Geological sketch map of the southwestern Barberton Greenstone Belt, east Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa, showing distribution of the S1, S2, S3 and S4 Impact spherule units (From Lowe et al. 2003; Elsevier by permission)



**Fig. 7.10** Generalized stratigraphies of the principal tectono-stratigraphic suites in the Barberton Greenstone Belt terrain. Ages with *asterisks* (\*) below stratigraphic columns are from xenocrysts within the magmatic rocks on that block. Ages with *daggers* (†) are from detrital zircons and rock fragments within sedimentary units. Age with *number symbol* (#) is from a gneiss block within a shear zone along the southern edge of the Songimvelo Block. Ages with *double asterisks* (\*\*) are from the Theespruit Formation of the Steynsdorp suite south of the Komati Fault on the west limb of the Onverwacht Anticline (Lowe and Byerly 2007; Elsevier, by permission)

**~3.47 Ga. Middle Marker**

**H-1.** The Middle Marker forms a 1–5 m-thick silicified unit, dated as  $3,472 \pm 5$  Ma (Armstrong et al. 1990), which caps a ~50 m-thick altered zone of the ultramafic Komati Formation. It consists of a shallow water (<100 m) wave and current-deposited assemblage of silicified ultramafic ash represented by green chert, ash particles, rip-up ash clasts, rounded carbonaceous clasts, carbonaceous sediments and accretionary lapilli (Lanier and Lowe 1982). The middle Marker correlates closely with chert and impact ejecta of the Antarctic Chert Member of the Mount Ada Basalt, central Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, dated as  $3,470.1 \pm 1.9$  Ma-old (Byerly et al. 2002; Glikson et al. 2004) and thereby likely formed contemporaneously to an asteroid impact event (Chap. 8; Figs. 8.14, 8.15).

**3,445–3,416 Ma. Hoogenoeg Formation**

The Hoogenoeg Formation (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b) consists of ~2,900–3,900 m-thick sequence of basalts, komatiite basalts, lesser amount of peridotitic basalt, dacite and

cherts intercalations (Lowe and Byerly 1999, 2007). These authors classified the stratigraphy in terms of six members occupying consistent stratigraphic positions around the Onverwacht Anticline and Kromberg Syncline (Figs. 7.4, 7.9 and 7.10).

**H-2.** Tholeiitic basalts ~1,200–1,400 m-thick sequence of pillowed and massive tholeiitic basalt consisting of ~10–50 m-thick flow units and capped by chert (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b; Williams and Furnell 1979);

**H-3.** Komatiite and tholeiitic basalts ~220–380 m thick, including pillowed and variolitic tholeiitic basalt, with komatiite basalt at the top, which consists of a massive ~150 m-thick ultramafic unit (Rosentuin Ultramafic Body, Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b) overlain by silicified volcanoclastic, accretional lapilli, carbonaceous sediments, altered ash. Trace element patterns in the ash, including high Cr, suggest derivation from ultramafic lava (Lowe 1999a, b).

**H-4.** ~250–350 m thick komatiite basalt including a 10–20 m thick unit consisting of very coarse-grained quench-textured pyroxene, overlain by intercalated non-quench textured pillowed basalt. A silicified intercalation includes a 0–6 m-thick silicified tuff, volcanoclastic, carbonaceous chert and an impact ejecta unit S-1 dated from detrital zircons as  $3,470 \pm 2$  Ma (Byerly et al. 2002).

**H-5.** ~390 m thick sequence of massive to pillowed high-Mg and tholeiitic basalt. The pillowed basalt display radial pipe vesicles, variolite textures <3 cm-large and chilled selvages. As in Pilbara pillow basalts (Fig. 8.6), variolites (osceli) decrease in size, and become increasingly well-defined from pillow cores toward chilled pillow margins, indicating outward boiling of volatile during cooling and likely liquid immiscibility (Ferguson and Currie 1972). Intercalations of chert include basal black chert, volcanoclastic sediments and accretional lapilli.

**H-6.** A 1,000–2,500 m-thick sequence of felsic and volcanoclastic volcanics including quartz-bearing dacite (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b) dated as  $3,445 \pm 4$  Ma (de Wit et al. 1987) capped by volcanic breccia, conglomerate and arenites. An intrusive origin of the dacite below the H-4 and H-5 volcanic units is indicated by basaltic enclaves derived from lower stratigraphic levels (Lowe and Byerly 2007). The massive dacite sill or dome is flanked laterally by felsic volcanoclastic breccia and conglomerate dated as  $3,445 \pm 6$  Ma and  $3,438 \pm 12$  Ma (de Wit et al. 1987) and silicified turbidites (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b; Lowe and Knauth 1977). Possible co-magmatic relations between the H-6 intrusive dacite and 3,445 Ma-old TTG plutons south of the BGB were considered by de Wit et al. 1987. Knauth and Lowe (2003) show that, whereas Hoogenoeg Formation sediments display part equilibration of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  compositions with those of associated volcanics, stratigraphically higher sediments retain non-igneous compositions, indicating lesser degrees of hydrothermal alteration.

### **3,416–3,334 Ma. Kromberg Formation**

The base of the Kromberg Formation ( $>3,416 \pm 7$  Ma, Kröner et al. 1991a, b) consists of 100–200 m serpentine-altered ultramafics (Viljoen and Viljoen 1969b) overlain by about 1,700 m of massive to pillowed basalt and komatiite, mafic lapilli tuff and banded chert whose top consists of a stratigraphically consistent black chert – the



Footbridge Chert overlain by the volcanic Mendon Formation. The Kromberg Formation includes the following units (Lowe and Byerly 2007).

**K-1.** Buck Reef Chert. A 150–350 m-thick unit of chert overlying dacite volcanoclastic arenites and shallow water carbonaceous sediment and evaporite of the Hoogenoeg Formation (Lowe and Fisher 1999). The basal section consists of silicified evaporite, a lower section consists of banded chert and ferruginous chert and shallow water sediments. The cherts include carbonaceous components representing microbial activity (Tice and Lowe 2006). The sediments are locally intercalated with basaltic volcanics and are locally underlain by peridotitic komatiite and accretional lapilli (Lowe and Byerly 2007). The Black Reef Chert is locally eroded at the top and is intersected by mafic dykes and sills, representing feeders for overlying volcanic units.

**K-2.** Up to 1,000 m-thick sequence of mafic lapilli tuff. Mafic coarse-grained tuff and lapilli, including a basal unit of 10–100 m-thick mafic to komatiitic tuff, thin komatiite flows and tuffaceous carbonaceous shale overlain by 300–1,000 m of mafic to ultramafic Cr-rich lapilli, including 0.5–4 cm large lapilli, chert fragments and volcanic fragments, intercalated with mafic flows (Ransom et al. 1999). Overlying 50–100 m-thick units feature finer grained (<1 cm) lapilli and ash deposited in wave rippled shallow water environment and extensively altered by chlorite, tremolite, iron-rich dolomite, and ankerite.

**K-3.** K2 is overlain by 500–600 m thick sequence of silicified pillow basalt with the upper 350 m consisting of tholeiitic basalt and intercalations of komatiite, tuff and pillow breccia, overlain by a unit of 15–25 m of black and white banded chert (Footbridge Chert). Felsic tuff from the Footbridge Chert yielded zircon ages of  $<3,334 \pm 3$  Ma (Byerly et al. 1996).

**3,330–3,258 Ma. Mendon Formation** (Lowe and Byerly 1999) (Fig. 7.10). Multiple volcanic cycles composed of ultramafic flows overlain by chert (Byerly 1999). Locally the formation consists of 300 m-thick peridotite komatiite flow capped by 20–30 m of graded silicified ultramafic ash, accretional lapilli and carbonaceous sediments (Msauli Chert). Lowe (1999b) interprets the Msauli Chert in terms of eruption of komatiitic ash into marine environment where quiet water conditions alternate with current activity. Locally the Mendon Formation is overlain by 20–50 m of black banded and ferruginous chert underlying the Fig Tree Group.

**3,258–3,227 Ma. Fig Tree Group** (Fig. 7.10) The Mapepe Formation of the Fig Tree Group consists of 700 m of predominantly fine-grained felsic tuff, shale, chert, arenite, grit and chert-clast conglomerate. A northern section includes the Ulundi Formation, Sheba Formation, Belvue Road and Schoongezicht Formations, which total ~1,500 m. The Ulundi Formation (20–50 m) consists of carbonaceous shale, ferruginous chert and iron-rich sediments, including impact unit (S3), the Sheba Formation (500–1,000 m) consists of fine- to medium-grained greywacke turbidite and the Belvue Road Formation (200–500 m) consists of mudstone and thin, fine-grained turbidite arenite and dacite volcanoclastics.

South of the Inyoka Fault the Group consists of the Mapepe and Auber Villiers Formations (Fig. 7.10). At its base and mid-level the Mapepe Formation includes

asteroid impact ejecta units (S2, S3, S4) (Lowe and Byerly 1986b; Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Shukolyukov et al. 2000; Kyte et al. 2003), overlain by clastic sediments, dacite to rhyodacite volcani-clastics and Jaspilite. The basal impact unit (S2) consists of impact condensation spherules (microkrystites, Glass and Burns 1988) and related ejecta (Lowe et al. 2003) overlain by hematite-rich sediments (Manzimnyama Jaspilite), fine-grained felsic tuffs dated as  $3,258 \pm 3$  Ma– $3,227 \pm 4$  Ma (Kröner et al. 1991a, b; Byerly et al. 1996), delta clastics, chert, jasper and barite – locally forming barite deposits (Heinrich and Reimer 1977). These units are overlain by 1,500–2,000 m of dacitic tuff; coarse volcanoclastic, arenite, conglomerate, breccia, gritstone and chert-clast conglomerate dated as  $3,253 \pm 2$  Ma (Byerly et al. 1996) and  $3,256 \pm 4$  Ma (Kröner et al. 1991a, b). Dacite located at high stratigraphic levels of the Fig Tree Group yields a zircon age of  $3,225 \pm 3$  Ma (Kröner et al. 1991a, b).

The Fig Tree Group truncates underlying Onverwacht Group and Mendon Group through major unconformities (Figs. 7.9 and 7.10). Little or no detrital K-feldspar is reported from sediments which precede deposition of the Fig Tree Group (Lowe and Byerly 2007), suggesting differentiated granitoids were not exposed during 3.55–3.258 Ga times.

### **3,224–3,109 Ma. Moodies Group**

The Barberton Greenstone Belt is capped by a 3,500 m-thick sequence of lithic, feldspathic, and quartz-rich arenite, conglomerate and siltstone defined as the Moodies Group, unconformably and locally conformably overlying uplifted older Archaean crust and representing deposition in fluvial to tidal marine environments in foreland and intermontane basins (Eriksson 1978, 1979, 1980; Heubeck and Lowe 1999) (Fig. 7.8). North of the Inyoka Fault the Moodies Group (>2,000 m) includes K-feldspar-bearing granitoid pebbles, indicating erosion of late-stage plutons associated with the BGB. The older age limit of the Moodies Group is inferred from the age of the youngest granitoid clasts ( $3,224 \pm 6$  Ma, Tegtmeier and Kröner 1987) whereas the upper age limit is defined by post-tectonic intrusions, such as the Salisbury Kop Pluton ( $3,109 \pm 10$ –8 Ma) which truncates tightly folded Moodies strata (Kamo and Davis 1994), and a felsic dike intrusive into Moodies Group was dated as  $3,207 \pm 2$  Ma (Heubeck and Lowe 1994).

## **7.2 Evolution of the Zimbabwe Craton**

The Zimbabwe craton comprises several distinct terrains, including (1) the central ~3.5–2.95 Ga Tokwe gneiss terrain containing inliers of greenstone belts, (2) unconformably overlying ~2.9–2.8 Ga mafic and felsic volcanic rocks and conglomerates, and a ~3.0–2.7 Ga sequence of sandstone, shale, and limestone; (3) Greenstone belts flanking the central Tokwe terrain, including ~2.7 Ga northwestern greenstone belts consisting of calc-alkaline volcanics and intercalated sediments intruded by syn-volcanic plutons, and ~2.7 Ga southeastern greenstone belts consisting of thick piles of tholeiitic basalts overlying ultramafic lavas (Kusky 1998) (Chap. 3). Oldest

detrital zircons yield ages up to ~3.8 Ga (Jelsma and Dirk 2000). Early Archaean zircon xenocrysts within Late Archaean volcanic rocks are interpreted by Wilson et al. (1995) in terms of their deposition on early Archaean granitoid crust. The oldest components of the Tokwe gneiss terrain include tonalite, granodiorite and migmatite yielding U/Pb and Pb/Pb ages of ~3.5–2.95 Ga (Kusky 1998), including the ~3.5 Ga gneisses and greenstones referred to as Tokwe segment (Wilson 1973, 1979; Wilson et al. 1990) (Fig. 3.1). U-Pb single zircon ages of early components of the Tokwe gneiss terrain yielded  $3,565 \pm 21$  Ma whereas other components are dated as  $3,455 \pm 2$  Ma and  $3,456 \pm 6$  Ma from the Tokwe gneiss terrain (Horstwood et al. 1999). Younger intrusions within the gneiss terrain yielded ages of ~3,350 Ma, indicating an upper age limit high grade metamorphism.

The ~3.5 Ga greenstones, denoted Sebakwian Group, are intimately intercalated with the gneisses (Fig. 3.1), interpreted by Stowe (1973) in terms of imbricate interthrusting of mafic volcanic layers with older gneisses, subsequently intruded by younger granites. Examples are ultramafic rocks, iron formation, quartzite, and mica schist in the Mashaba area in-folded with ancient gneissic rocks (Wilson 1979). By contrast Tsomondo et al. (1992) regarded the gneiss-greenstone complex as autochthonous. In other areas the Tokwe gneisses are unconformably overlain by a volcanic-sedimentary association referred to as Lower Bulawayan Group (Blenkinsop et al. 1997). Late Archaean volcanic activity lasted between ~2.9–2.65 Ga, including at least three ultramafic-mafic to felsic to late K-granite magmatic cycles (Wilson et al. 1995). In the Belingwe greenstone belt these supracrustals include mafic, ultramafic, intermediate, and felsic volcanic rocks, pyroclastic deposits and sedimentary rocks (Bickle et al. 1975), dated by U-Pb isotopic studies as  $2,904 \pm 9$  Ma and  $2,831 \pm 6$  Ma (Wilson et al. 1995). Upper age limits to this belt are defined by Pb-Pb ages of  $2,833 \pm 43$  Ma of the Chingezi tonalite (Taylor et al. 1991). Lower Bulawayan rocks are also present in the Midlands, Filabusi, Antelope–Lower Gwanda, Shangani, Bubi and Gweru-Mvuma greenstone belts, including post-3.09 Ga, pre-2.86 Ga shallow-water shelf arenites and banded ironstones and deep water shale, chert, BIF, carbonate and associated mafic-ultramafic volcanics (Fedo et al. 1996). The unconformably above post- $2,831 \pm 6$  Ma ~600 m-thick Manjeri Formation sediments (Wilson et al. 1995), which overlap the Tokwe basement gneisses and Sebakwian greenstones, is overlain by conglomerates, arenites and carbonate which grade upward into chert, argillite, greywacke and BIF (Bickle and Nisbet 1993). Kusky (1998) classified the Bulawayan Group into contemporaneous northern and southern volcanic belts possessing distinct lithologies, geochemistry and field relations:

**Northern volcanic belts:** The belt is located northwest of the Tokwe gneiss terrain, comprising the Bulawayan, Harare-Shamva, and other greenstone belts consisting of lower volcanic units succeeded by calc-alkaline basalt-andesite-dacite-rhyolite volcanic suite intruded by syn-volcanic plutons, dated as 2.68–2.70 Ga (Wilson et al. 1995; Wilson 1979). U-Pb, Pb-Pb, and Sm-Nd isotopic studies of the Harare-Shamva supracrustals and associated granites indicate crustal contamination of 2.72–2.67 Ga volcanics followed by deformation about 2.66 Ga and post-tectonic granitoids 2.65–2.60 Ga (Jelsma et al. 1996).

**Southern volcanic belts:** The belt includes the Belingwe greenstone belt, consisting of tholeiitic mafic-ultramafic volcanics which overlie gneisses and shallow-water sedimentary sequences southwest of the Tokwe gneiss terrain. In the Belingwe greenstone belt high-magnesium basalts, komatiites, and their intrusive rocks of the Reliance Formation and Zeederbergs Formation ( $2,692 \pm 9$  Ma, Chauvel et al. 1993) overlie sediments of the Manjeri Formation through allochthonous contacts (Bickle and Nisbet 1993). Komatiites of the Reliance Formation are regarded as formed on an oceanic plateau (Kusky and Kidd 1992) and are geochemically similar to intra-plate basalts (McDonough and Ireland 1993). Oceanic-like basalts of the Tati belt are overlain by andesite and felsic volcanics intruded by syn-tectonic granitoids (Key et al. 1976; Aldiss 1991).

**Shamvaian Group:** The group forms the uppermost Archaean supracrustals, consisting of terrestrial clastic sediments which unconformably overlie 2.7 Ga greenstone belts. The Shamvaian Group is 2 km-thick in the Bindura-Shamva greenstone belt where it consists of basal conglomerates which grade into thick arenite sequence (Jelsma et al. 1996). Felsic volcanics associated with the Shamvaian Group are intruded by circa  $\sim 2.6$ – $2.57$  Ga Chilimanzi Suite K-rich granitoids (Wilson et al. 1995; Blenkinsop et al. 1997). The Cheshire Formation which overlies the Belingwe belt consists of conglomerate, sandstone, siltstone, argillite, limestone, and minor banded iron formation (Bickle and Nisbet 1993). These events overlap and are likely related to the 2.68–2.58 Ga tectono-magmatic events in the Limpopo belt at the southern margin (Treloar and Blenkinsop 1995). Stabilization of the Zimbabwe Craton was near-complete with the emplacement of the Great Dyke (Fig. 3.1a) at  $2,575.4 \pm 0.7$  Ma (Oberthur et al. 2002).

Jelsma and Dirk (2000) sum up the Late Archaean 2.7–2.6 Ga history of the Zimbabwe craton in terms of modern-like plate tectonics, involving diachronous accretion of diverse crustal fragments including oceanic and back arc mafic crust, volcanic arc felsic crust, continental crust, and related sedimentary sequences, including concomitant diapirism, strike-slip faulting, magma intrusion, and sedimentation. The extent to which modern tectonic processes apply to Archaean terrains is considered in Chap. 12.

### 7.3 Pre-3.2 Ga Asteroid Impact Units of the Kaapvaal Craton

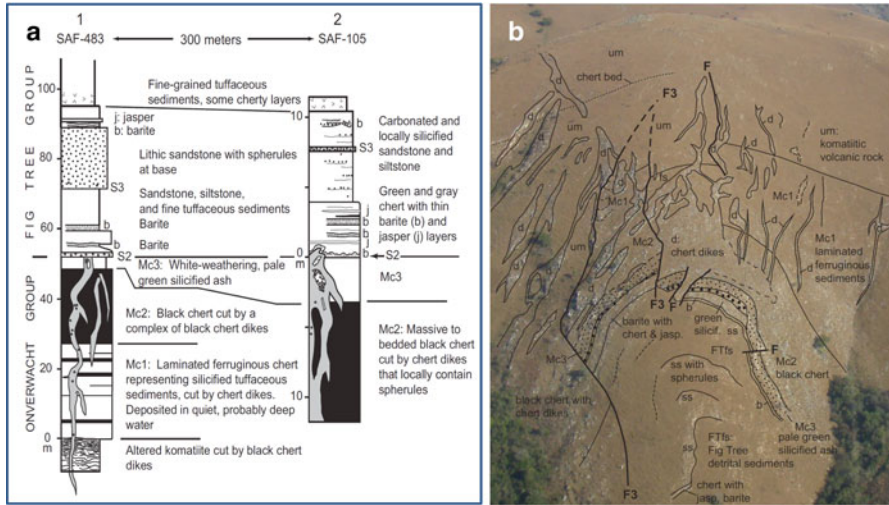
Discoveries of impact spherule and ejecta units in the Archaean Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) (Lowe and Byerly 1986a, b, 2010; Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Lowe 2013) include the following impact ejecta units (Figs. 7.11 to 7.17):

$\sim 3,482$  Ma – Komati Formation, Onverwacht Group (BGB)

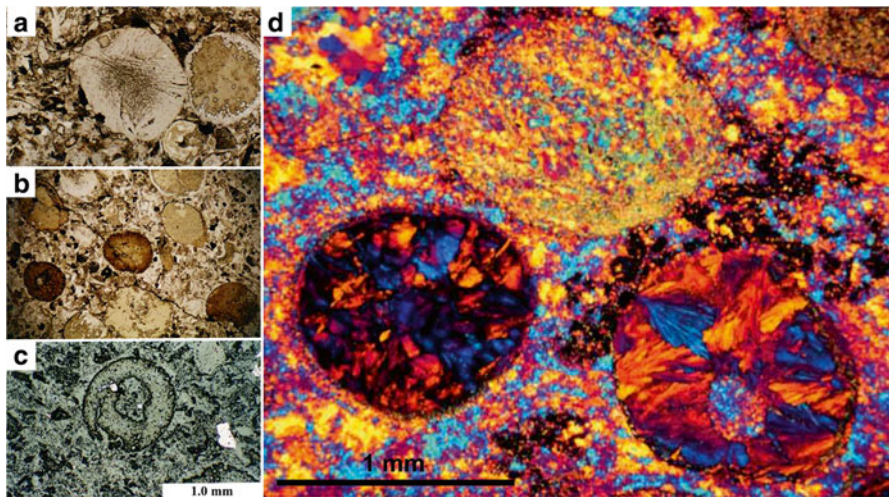
$\sim 3,472$  Ma – S1 spherule unit – Hoogenoeg Formation, Onverwacht Group (BGB)

$\sim 3,445$  Ma – Hoogenoeg Formation, Onverwacht Group (BGB)

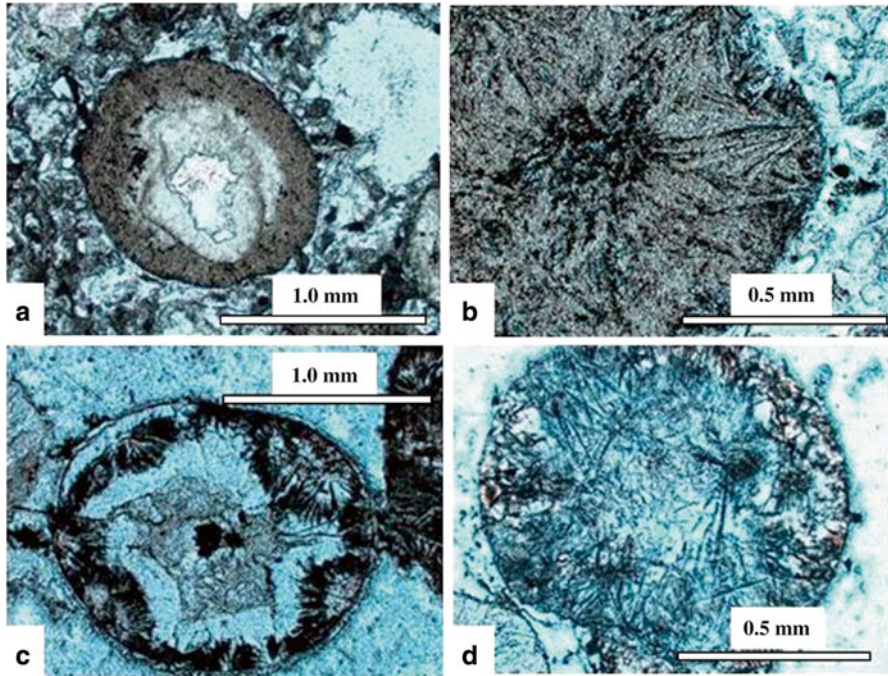
$\sim 3,416$  Ma – top Hoogenoeg Formation, Onverwacht Group (BGB)



**Fig. 7.11** Barberton impacts spherule-bearing chert dykes: **(a)** Stratigraphic sections of uppermost Onverwacht and lowermost Fig Tree Groups in the western part of the Barite Valley. Note differences in scales of columns. **(b)** Aerial photo, approximately perpendicular to stratification, of the type 1 chert dike complex A. **(a)** Photo without contacts. Scale is approximate because of perspective. **(b)** Photo with geologic contacts showing the restriction of chert dikes to units below the Fig Tree Group. One tongue of black chert extends upward through spherule bed S2 (black dots) and overlying green silicified ash units, either through faulting or early post diking foundering of dense barite-rich sediments into the still-soft dike complex. Several later faults, including F3, crosscut the dike complex and extend upward into the Fig Tree Group. Symbols: um—altered ultramafic volcanic rocks; Mc1, Mc2, Mc3 (stippled)—subdivisions of the Mendon sedimentary section; b—barite; ss—Fig Tree sandstone; d—type 1 chert dikes (From Lowe 2013; Geological Society of America, by permission)



**Fig. 7.12** **(a-c)** Barberton ~3,256 Ma S2 microkrystite spherules displaying quench textures and central to offset vesicles; **(d)** S3 spherules displaying inward radiating chlorite crystallite fans in polarized light (Courtesy G. Byerly)



**Fig. 7.13** Barberton  $3,243 \pm 4$  Ma S3 microkrystite spherules: Plane polarized microphotographs of microkrystite spherules: (a) cryptocrystalline chlorite-mantled spherule displaying an off-set central vesicle consisting of chlorite-quartz aggregates. Opaque oxide grains within the chlorite include Ni-rich chromite and sulphide. The spherule is set in groundmass consisting of chloritized to silicified mafic volcanic fragments; (b) chlorite dominated spherule displaying inward-radiating crystal fans interpreted as pseudomorphs after original quench structures; (c) An internally zoned spherule showing inward radiating chlorite aggregates, a median silica-dominated zone and an inner chlorite-quartz core; (d) chlorite spherule dominated by Interlocking inward-fanning needle-like pseudomorphs after pyroxene and olivine (From Glikson 2007; Elsevier by permission)

~3,334 Ma – top Kromberg Formation, Onverwacht Group (BGB)

~3,256 Ma – S2 spherule unit – Base Mapepe Formation, Fig Tree Group (BGB)

~3,243 Ma – S3 spherule unit – Base Sheba Formation, Fig Tree Group (BGB)

~3,225 Ma – Base Belvue Formation, Fig Tree Group (BGB)

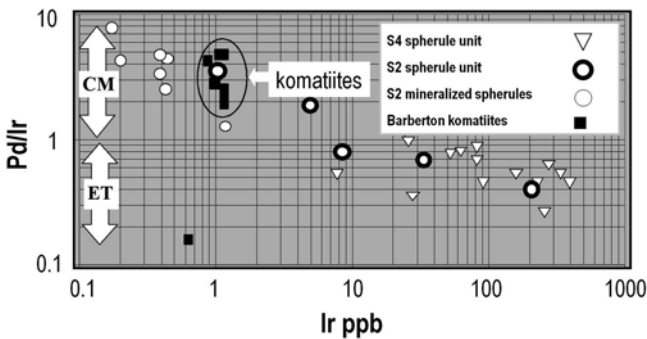
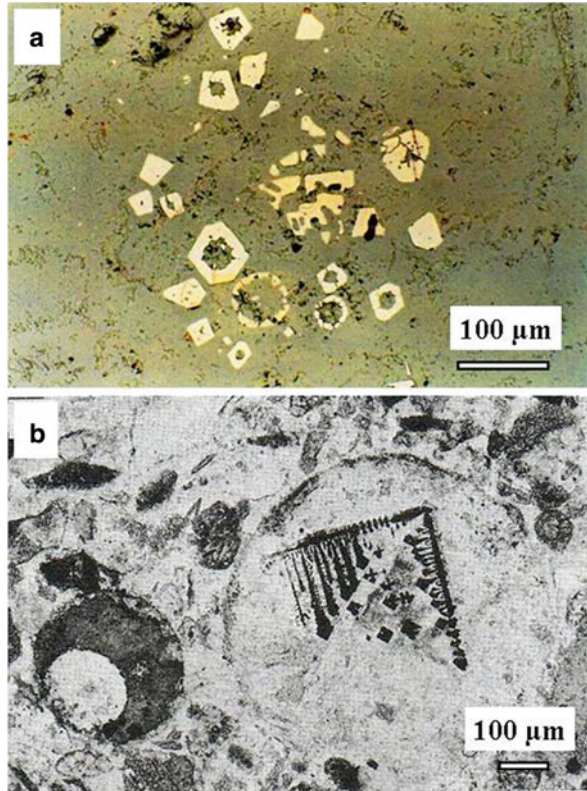
~3,225 Ma – Schoengezicht Formation, Fig Tree Group (BGB)

Detailed accounts presented to date pertain to the ~3,472 Ma, ~3,256 Ma, ~3,243 Ma and ~3,225 Ma impact ejecta units:

**~3,482 Ma:** The impact spherules unit (Lowe and Byerly 2010) is located in sediments intercalated within mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequence of the Komati Formation stratigraphically near a tuff horizon dated as  $3,482 \pm 2$  Ma (Dann 2000).

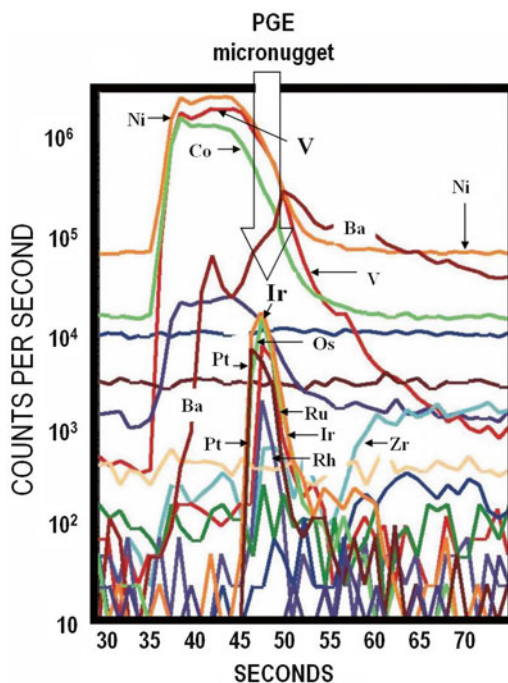
**~3,472 Ma:** The S1 spherule unit, located within a 30–300 cm-thick sericite-bearing and black chert intercalation exposed along ~25 km strike distance within the felsic

**Fig. 7.14** (a) Ni-rich chromites within Barberton S3 microkrystite; (b) Microkrystite spherule containing quench skeletal Ni-chromite. Spherule on lower left shows an off-center vesicle typical of microkrystite spherules (plane-polarized light) (From Byerly and Lowe 1994; Elsevier, by permission)



**Fig. 7.15** Pd/Ir vs Ir plots for Barberton spherule units S4 and S2 compared to komatiites. The data allow a clear distinction between the high Ir low Pd/Ir field of the spherules (*ET* extraterrestrial) and the low-Ir high Pd/Ir field of komatiites (*CM* crust–mantle) (From Glikson 2008; Elsevier by permission)

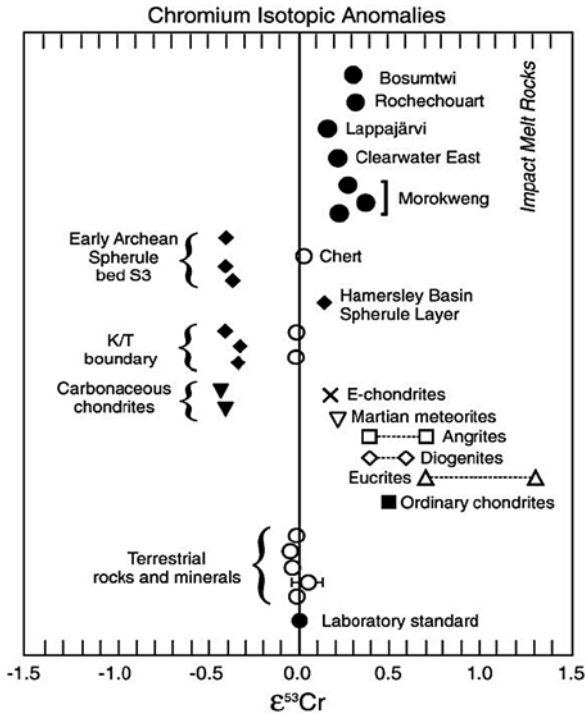
**Fig. 7.16** LA-ICPMS spot analysis (counts per second vs. time in seconds) of a Ni-chromite in sample SA306-1, showing a PGE micro-nugget (From Glikson 2007; Elsevier, by permission)



volcanic Hoogenoeg Formation, and denoted S1 (Lowe et al. 2003), was dated by U-Pb zircon as  $3,470 \pm 3$  Ma (Byerly et al. 2002). S1 constitutes a 10–35 cm-thick unit consisting of two distinct graded spherule units with 10–30 % spherules and including chert and locally volcanic fragments. The spherule units, consisting of 0.3–0.6 mm-size spherical to ovoid spherules, are intercalated with chert and tuff, locally overly chert and mafic volcanics unconformably and grade upwards into cross laminated siltstone (Lowe et al. 2003). Spherule compositions range from microcrystalline quartz to, less commonly, sericite-dominated, and are commonly rimmed by microcrystalline rutile and/or radial microlitic textures, likely representing quench effects. Internal cavities filled with quartz and sericite occur. Broken segments of spherules are common. Angular fragments consist of volcanic fragments and of quartz-sericite-rutile assemblages similar to those of the spherules. Iridium levels vary up to 3 ppb, only somewhat above those of underlying komatiites with 2.1 ppb Ir. Lowe et al. (2003) interpret the depositional setting of the host chert in terms of moderately deep below wave base environment. S1 is correlated with  $3,470.1 \pm 1.9$  Ma microkrystite spherule units the Antarctic Chert member, North pole dome, Pilbara Craton (Byerly et al. 2002) (Figs. 8.14 and 8.15).

**~3,256 Ma.** The S2 spherule unit (Lowe et al. 2003) (Figs. 7.9, 7.10 and 7.12), is located between black chert at the top of the Mendon Formation of the Onverwacht mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequence and basal volcani-clastic, chert and ferruginous sediments of the overlying Mapepe Formation of the Fig Tree Group. A zircon U-Pb





**Fig. 7.17**  $\epsilon\text{Cr}$  ( $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$ ) values of several meteorite classes, K–T boundary impactites, BGB-S4 impactites and sediments. *Open circles* – terrestrial rocks; *all other symbols* – meteoritic and impact spherules compositions. Note the correspondence between impactite  $\epsilon\text{Cr}$  range and carbonaceous chondrites [ $\epsilon\text{Cr} = 10^4 \{^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}(m) - (^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}(t))\} / \{^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}(t)\}$ ;  $m$  meteoritic,  $t$  terrestrial] (From Shukolyukov et al. 2000; permission requested from Springer)

age of  $3,258 \pm 3$  Ma was determined on tuff located 20 m above S2 (Byerly et al. 1996). The unit ranges between 20 and 310 cm thickness consists of 0.15–2.5 mm-size spherules of pure sericite to nearly pure silica composition accompanied with microcrystalline rutile showing microlitic quench textures. The units contain about 10–50 % spherules associated with silt-size to cobble-size volcanic and sedimentary fragments derived from subjacent strata (Lowe et al. 2003). S2 includes two graded sub-layers including lithic fragments, the lower consisting of 30–50 % spherules and the upper of ~10 % spherules and showing current bedding, and capped by chert and ferruginous representing silicification of fine grained sediments. Iridium levels within S2 spherules are in the range of 0–3.9 ppb and are in part accounted for by abundant komatiite debris. An extraterrestrial origin of anomalous PGE levels is corroborated by Cr isotopic studies indicating  $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$  ratios corresponding to carbonaceous chondrites (Shukolyukov et al. 2000; Kyte et al. 2003) (Fig. 7.17)

The S2 spherules (Fig. 7.12) were deposited in a turbulent waves and current-dominated environment, including locally derived detritus eroded from underlying

Onverwacht cherts and komatiitic volcanic units. This is contrasted with underlying and overlying sediments deposited under quiet, low-energy conditions, which suggests abrupt effects of seismicity and tsunami disturbances affecting otherwise pelagic below-wave base environments and associated with deposition of impact debris. In some areas the spherule unit is underlain by komatiite-clast breccia scoured into underlying chert and volcanics of the underlying Mendon Formation of the Onverwacht Group.

Lowe (2013) investigated the structure of chert dykes and veins which extend up to about 100 m into formations below the S2 spherule unit, likely representing the effects of seismic events and tsunami pressures associated with the impact/s (Fig. 7.11). Four types of veins were recognized:

**Type I.** Irregular dykes up to 8 m wide extending downward by up to 100 m, regarded as younger than Type II veins and representing liquefaction of sea bed sediments and spherule units and followed by tsunami effects;

**Type II.** Small vertical veins mostly <1 m wide restricted to the lower half of the Mendon chert section and representing the earliest seismic effects;

**Type III.** Small cross-cutting veins mostly <50 cm wide filled with silica;

**Type IV.** Small irregular to bedding-parallel and irregular veins mostly <10 cm wide filled with silica. Filling of the dykes involved foundering and injection of dense barite sediments into underlying fractures under high tsunami hydrodynamic pressures. The author remarks on the abrupt change from ~300 Ma of mafic-ultramafic volcanism represented by the Onverwacht Group to the orogenic clastic sedimentation and associated felsic volcanism of the Fig Tree Group, evolved over the next ~100 Ma into the Kaapvaal Craton.

**~3,243 ± 6 Ma.** The S3 spherules (Figs. 7.12, 7.13, 7.14) is intercalated with tuffaceous and terrigenous sediments about the middle of the Mapepe Formation of the Fig Tree Group, in some areas directly overlying komatiite and chert of the Onverwacht Group and underlying black cherts of the Ulundi Formation (Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Byerly and Lowe 1994). An underlying dacite ruff yielded a U-Pb zircon age of 3,243 ± 6 Ma (Kröner et al. 1991a, b). S3 is about 30–35 cm thick where it displays grading and is up to 2–3 m thick where it may have been accumulated by secondary currents. Well preserved spherules are mostly siliceous whereas chrome mica-rich spherules tend to be deformed. Centrally off-centered circular regions mostly filled-in by quartz represent original aerodynamic cavities of the microkrystites. Cr-mica may form microcrystalline quench textures radiating inward from spherule margins (Fig. 7.13). Chlorite and rutile are common components of spherules. The type section termed Jay Chert consists of 78 cm of spherules intercalated with silicified sandstone, mudstone, and intra-formational conglomerate located 100–150 m above the base of the Mapepe Formation (Lowe and Nocita 1999). Underground exposures of S3 occur in the Sheba Gold, Princeton Tunnel and Agnes Mines. Extreme iridium levels of 426–519 ppb occur in the Jay Chert spherule unit where spherules form ~10–50 % of the rock. Ir levels of 104–725 ppb are reported from in spherules from the Sheba Mine (Fig. 7.15). Cr isotopic analyses of S3 spherules indicate meteoritic origin of the Cr, suggesting a CV-type carbonaceous chondrite-type projectile (Kyte et al. 2003).

Spherule sizes may reach the unusual size of 4 mm in diameter (Byerly and Lowe 1994). Ni-rich spinels, including dendritic and octahedral chromites (Fig. 7.14), constitute a relic primary phase within S3 spherules (Byerly and Lowe 1994; Glikson 2007). These spherules display pseudomorphs after olivine, pyroxene and plagioclase, edge-centered fibro-radial crystals representing devitrification textures (Fig. 7.13). Byerly and Lowe (1994) distinguished two types of spinel:

1. chalcophile spinels with low MgO, Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>, and TiO<sub>2</sub>;
2. lithophile spinel with up to 5 % Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and MgO.

Energy dispersive spectrometry, laser ablation inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry (LA-ICPMS) track analyses of chlorite-dominated quench-textured microkrystite spherules and LA-ICPMS spot analyses of intra-spherule Ni-rich skeletal quench chromites from the  $3,243 \pm 4$  Ma Barberton S3 impact fallout unit reveal fractionated siderophile and PGE trace element patterns corresponding to chondrite-contaminated komatiite/basalt compositions (Glikson 2007). The chlorites, interpreted as altered glass, contain sharp siderophile elements and PGE spikes inherited from decomposed metal and Ni-rich chromite particles. LA-ICPMS spot analysis identifies PGE-rich micro-nuggets in Ni-chromites (Ir  $\sim 12$ –100 ppm, Os  $\sim 9$ –86 ppm, Ru  $\sim 5$ –43 ppm) and lower levels of the volatile PGEs (Rh  $\sim 1$ –11 ppm, Pd  $\sim 0.68$ –0.96 ppm) (Fig. 7.16). Previously reported PGE anomalies in the order of hundreds of ppb in some Barberton microkrystite spherules (Fig. 7.15) are accounted for in terms of disintegration of PGE-rich micro-nuggets. Replacement of the Ni-chromites by sulphide masks primary chondritic patterns and condensation element distribution effects. High refractory/volatile PGE ratios pertain to both the chlorites and the Ni-rich chromites, consistent with similar compositional relations in microkrystite spherules from other impact fallout units in the Barberton Greenstone Belt and the Pilbara Craton, Western Australia. The near-consistent low Pt/Re and high V/Cr and V/Sc ratios in chlorite of the spherules, relative to komatiites, are suggestive of selective atmospheric condensation of the spherules which favored the relatively more refractory Re and V. Selective condensation may also be supported by depletion in the volatile Yb relative to Sm. Ni–Cr relationships allow estimates of the proportion of precursor crustal and meteoritic components of the spherules. Mass balance calculations based on the iridium flux allow estimates of the order of magnitude of the diameter of the chondritic projectile.

**~3,225 Ma.** The S4 spherule unit is known from a single outcrop within the Jay Creek Chert at 6.5 m stratigraphically above S3, cropping out as a 15 cm-thick current-bedded arenite mixed with terrigenous debris over a 1 m-long distance along strike beneath sandstone and conglomerate. The S4 spherules are 0.2–1.6 mm in diameter and in part display amalgamated textures indicating mergence in the liquid state. They contain up to 25–30 % Cr-rich rutile, Cr-rich chlorite, apatite, pyrite and chalcopyrite. Iridium levels reach 250–350 ppb and Os/Ir and Pt/Ir ratios are akin to those of CI chondrites (Kyte et al. 1992). Cr isotopic compositions of S4 are akin to those of carbonaceous chondrite, with  $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$  ratios of  $20.32 \pm 0.06$  and  $20.26 \pm 0.11$  (Shukolyukov et al. 2000).

Diagnostic criteria allowing the identification of the asteroid impact origin of the spherule-bearing ejecta layers include:

1. PGE chondrite-normalized patterns displaying marked depletion in the volatile species (Pd, Au) relative to refractory species (Ir, Pt), distinct from terrestrial PGE profiles, excepting depleted mantle harzburgites (Fig. 7.15).
2. Quench-textured and octahedral Ni-chromites ( $\text{NiO} < 23\%$ ) with high Co, Zn and V, unknown in terrestrial chromites (Byerly and Lowe 1994), and which contain PGE nano-nuggets of compositions distinct from terrestrial PGE nuggets (Fig. 7.16).
3.  $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$  isotopic indices ( $\epsilon^{53}\text{Cr} = -0.32$ ) which correspond to values of carbonaceous chondrites and values of K-T boundary impact fallout deposits, but distinct from terrestrial values (Shukolyukov et al. 2000) (Fig. 7.17);
4. Diagnostic textural features, including inward-radiating quench textures and offset central leucocratic vesicles, as defined by B.M. Simonson (1992) (Figs. 7.12 and 7.13).

Mass balance calculations based on Ir and Cr levels and thermodynamic-based correlations of spherule sizes of 1–4 mm-diameter (O'Keefe and Aherns 1982; Melosh and Vickery 1991), suggest impact by asteroids on the order of 30–50 km-diameter (Lowe et al. 1989; Byerly and Lowe 1994), scaled to terrestrial impact basins some 300–800 km in diameter. The Fe-Mg-rich composition of the spherules and the absence, in most instances, of shocked quartz in the units suggest the impact basins formed in simatic/oceanic regions of the Archaean Earth, which from geochemical and isotopic evidence (McCulloch and Bennett 1994) occupied over 90 % of the Earth surface before about 3.0 Ga. The stratigraphic location of the Barberton S2–S4 spherule units immediately above the >12 km thick mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequence of the Onverwacht Group and at the base of a turbidite/felsic volcanic sequence of the Fig Tree Group, which contains granitic detritus, hints at the onset of fundamentally different crustal regime about 3.24–3.227 Ga (Lowe et al. 1989; Glikson 2001, 2013; Glikson and Vickers 2007, 2010). Estimates of asteroid impact incidence rates and modeling of the tectonic and magmatic consequences of mega-impacts on thin thermally active oceanic crust (Glikson and Vickers 2007, 2010) suggest such impact clusters constituted critical factors in Archaean crustal evolution.

U-Pb and Lu-Hf isotope studies by Zeh et al. (2009) using laser ablation-sector field-inductively coupled plasma-mass spectrometry on zircon grains from 37 granitoid samples from the Kalahari Craton (including the Barberton, Murchison, Limpopo, Francistown cratons), indicate major crust forming events at 3.23 Ga, 2.9 Ga and 2.65–2.7 Ga. Whole-rock Sm–Nd isotope systematics of 79 Archaean granitoids by Schoene et al. (2009) indicate offsets in  $\epsilon\text{Nd}$  values for 3.2–3.3 Ga granitoids consistent with significant crustal growth at this stage. A concentration of felsic plutonic activity about ~3.3–3.2 Ga is also indicated by U-Pb zircon ages of the Nelshoogte pluton ( $3.212 \pm 2$  Ma and  $3.236 \pm 1$  Ma) and Kaap Valley pluton (3,229–3,223 Ma) (Appendix I) ages. The significance of the overlaps between the ~3.24–3.227 Ga Barberton impact cluster and these magmatic events requires further investigation.

## Chapter 8

# Evolution and Pre-3.2 Ga Asteroid Impact Clusters: Pilbara Craton, Western Australia

**Abstract** Volcanic and sedimentary sequences of the Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, display remarkable stratigraphic and isotopic age correlations with the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB), Kaapvaal Craton. However, peridotitic komatiites are less common in the Pilbara and intrusive batholiths include a lesser tonalite component than in eastern Kaapvaal plutons. Asteroid impact units in the Pilbara Craton include a ~3.47 Ga multiple spherule ejecta units precisely correlated with an impact ejecta unit in the Onverwacht Group of the BGB. The ~3.235 Ga unconformity between the volcanic Sulphur Springs Group, megabreccia and the clastic-felsic volcanic Soanesville Group in the central Pilbara Craton correlates within analytical error with the ~3.225 Ga unconformity between the Onverwacht Group and Fig Tree Group in the BGB. As in the BGB, the ~3.2 Ga break represents a fundamental change from the greenstone-TTG system to semi-continental environments dominated by arenites, turbidites, conglomerate, banded iron formations and felsic volcanics. These events resulted in a change of geotectonic patterns from pre-3.2 Ga largely dome-structured batholiths to linear structural patterns of supracrustal belts and intervening granitoids observed in the post-3.2 Ga western Pilbara Craton.

**Keywords** Asteroid impact • Western Australia • Crustal evolution • Pilbara Craton • Warrawoona Group • Sulphur Springs Group • Mega-breccia

### 8.1 Crustal Evolution

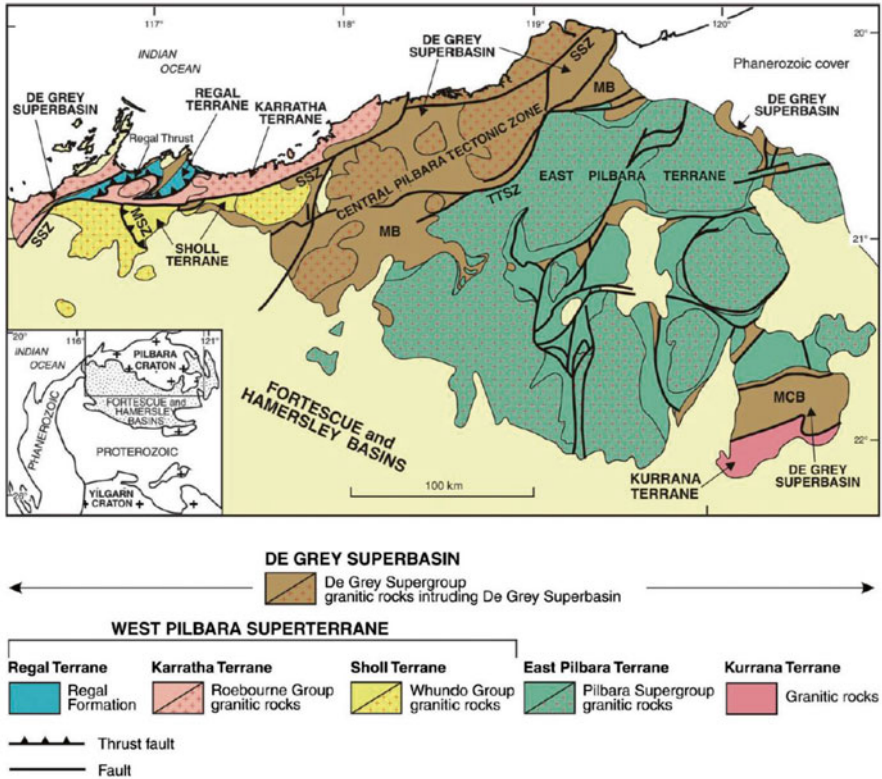
Reconnaissance geological mapping of parts of the ~60,000 km<sup>2</sup>-large northeast Pilbara Craton (Noldart and Wyatt 1962) and systematic 1:250,000 geological mapping (Lipple 1975; Hickman 1977, 1981, 1983, 1990; Griffin 1990; Trendall 1995) and geophysical survey the Geological Survey of Western Australia (GSWA) of the ~400,000 km<sup>2</sup>-large craton have established litho-stratigraphic subdivision



**Fig. 8.1** Space shuttle image looking at the Pilbara region, northwestern Australia, from the north, showing the granite-greenstone patterns. NASA. *Inset* – Granite boulders, Yule Batholith

and correlations of the Archaean volcanic-sedimentary greenstone belts and major features of intervening diapiric granitic domes (Figs. 8.1 to 8.5). The preservation of a wealth of primary igneous and sedimentary structures and textures in least-deformed structural windows in the Pilbara Craton has allowed investigations of the original magmatic and sedimentary environments in which they have been deposited. Examples include pillow lavas, oscicular lavas (Fig. 8.6a), relic microscopic quench and porphyritic textures (Figs. 8.7[1], [2]), pyroclastic agglomerates (Fig. 8.8), variolitic spherulitic textures in felsic volcanics (Fig. 8.9), columnar lavas (Fig. 8.10a) and resorbed phenocrysts (Fig. 8.10b).

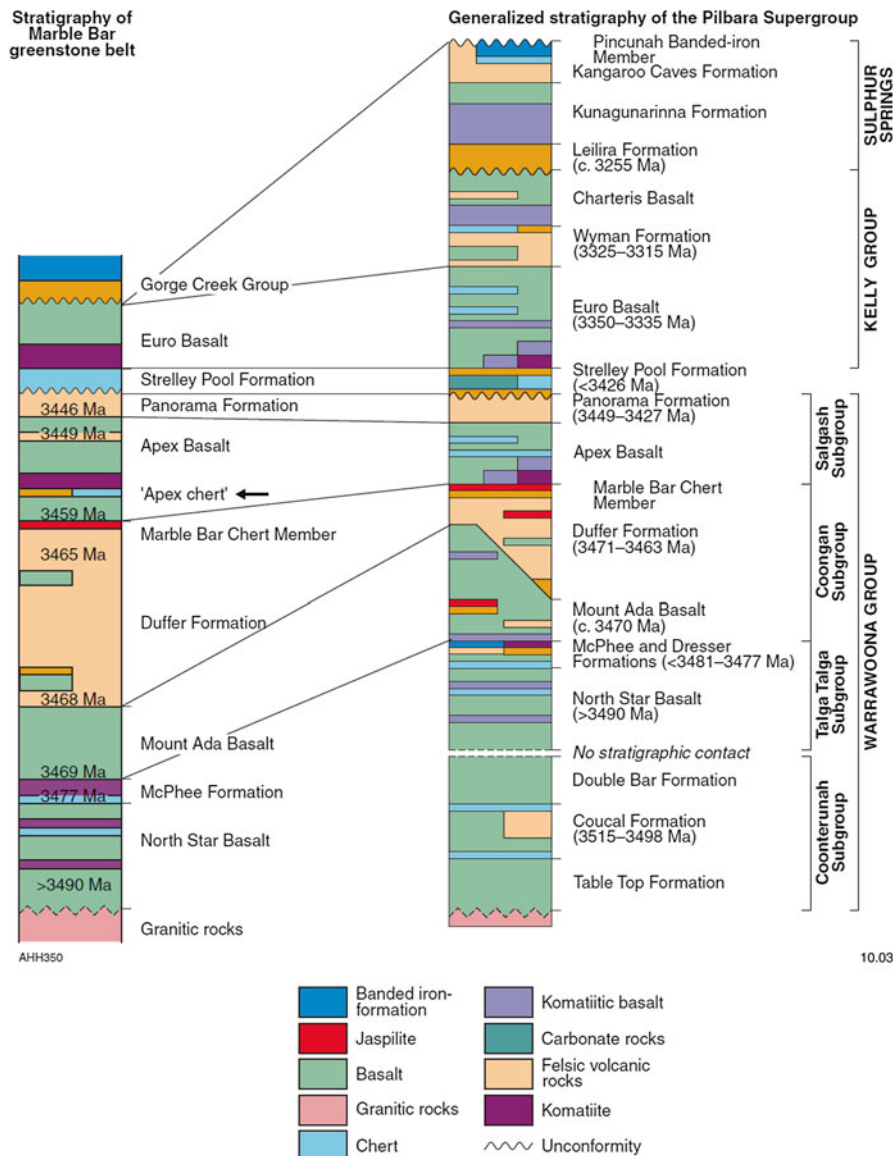
The geological mapping was accompanied by detailed structural, metamorphic, sediment logical, petrological, geochemical, isotopic and paleontological aspects by the University of Western Australia, Curtin University, Australian National University, Australian Geological Survey Organization (AGSO, now Geoscience Australia), interstate and overseas universities, in particular the University of Utrecht, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Stanford University and Oberlin College. Detailed 1:100,000 geological mapping since 1995 accompanied with airborne magnetic and radiometric surveys by GSWA greatly expanded field and laboratory research (Van Kranendonk et al. 2002, 2006, Van Kranendonk et al. 2007a, b; Hickman 2004; Hickman and Van Kranendonk 2004, 2008). Hickman (2012)



**Fig. 8.2** Geological map of the northern Pilbara Craton showing terrains and the De Grey Superbasin. *MB* Mallina Basin, *MCB* Mosquito Creek Basin, *SSZ* Sholl Shear Zone, *MSZ* Maitland Shear Zone, *TTSZ* Tappa Tappa Shear Zone (Hickman 2012. Geological Survey of Western Australia, by permission)

reviewed the results of these studies (Hickman 1981; 2004, 2012; Hickman and Van Kranendonk 2004, 2008; Van Kranendonk 2010; Williams 1999, 2001; Williams and Bagas 2007; Smithies et al. 2005, 2007a, b; Trendall 1995; Glikson 1979a, b; Glikson and Hickman 1981 and other papers) in terms of the following evolutionary sequence (Appendix 2):

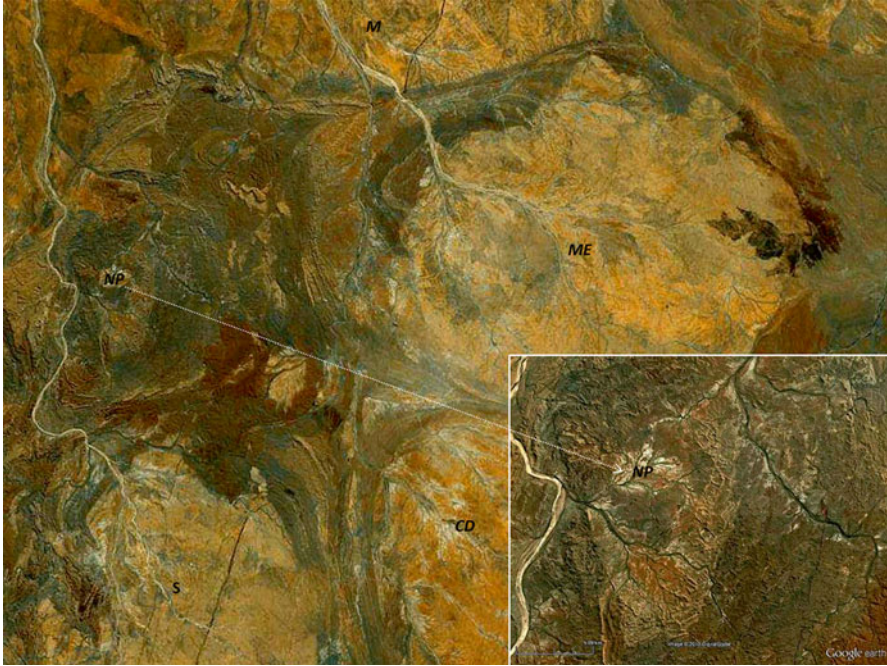
**<3.7 Ga:** Records include (1) 3.66–3.58 Ga biotite–tonalite enclaves within post-3.5 Ga granodiorite and monzogranite of Warrawagine gneisses, northeastern part of the Pilbara Craton (Williams 2001); (2) xenoliths of 3.58 Ga gabbroic anorthosite within ~3.43 Ga granitic rocks on the western margin of the Shaw Granitic Complex (McNaughton et al. 1988); (3) relic 3.72 Ga zircon within felsic units of the Pilbara Supergroup (Thorpe et al. 1992); (4) clastic 3.60 Ga zircons within Archaean sediments, including a 3.80 Ga zircon in the Mallina Basin and a 3.71 Ga zircon in the Mosquito Creek Basin; (5) Nd isotopic data from Archaean volcanics supporting relic pre-3.55 Ga ages (Jahn et al. 1981;



**Fig. 8.3** Stratigraphy and isotopic ages of the Marble Bar greenstone belt. *Red dots* represent units correlated with stratigraphic units of the Barberton Greenstone Belt containing impact ejecta deposits. The *red dots* represent stratigraphic units correlated with ages of asteroid impact fallout units in the Barberton Greenstone Belt, South Africa (Geological Survey of Western Australia, by permission)

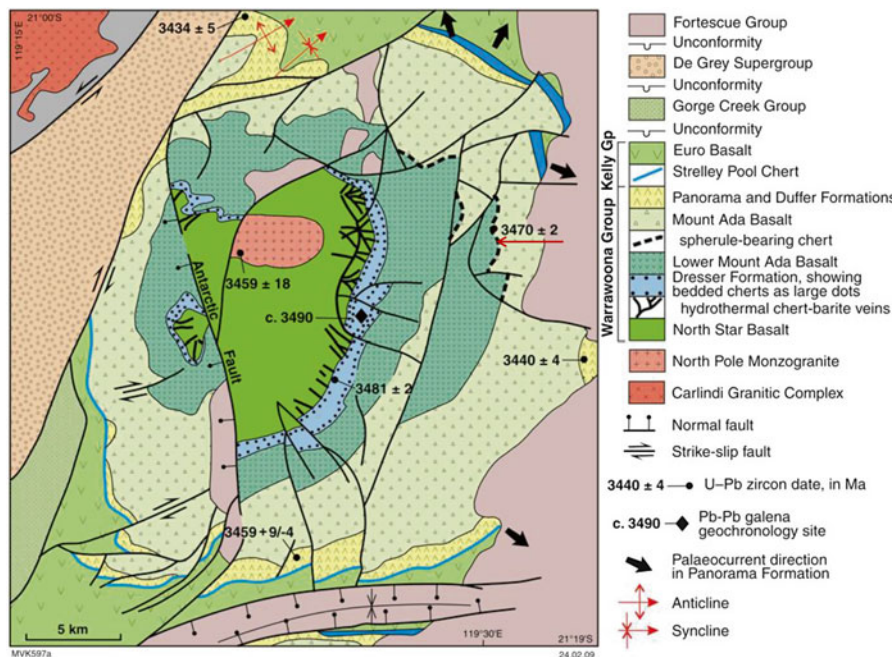
Van Kranendonk et al. 2007a, b; Tessalina et al. 2010); (6) evidence for formation of 3.50–3.42 Ga tonalite–trondhjemite–granodiorite (TTG) series from pre-3.5 Ga sources (Smithies et al. 2009).





**Fig. 8.4** LANDSAT image of the eastern Pilbara Craton, showing the Mount Edgar (*ME*), Corruna Down (*CD*), Shaw (*S*) and Muccan (*MU*) batholiths and the North Pole dome (*NP*). The *inset* shows the North Pole Dome

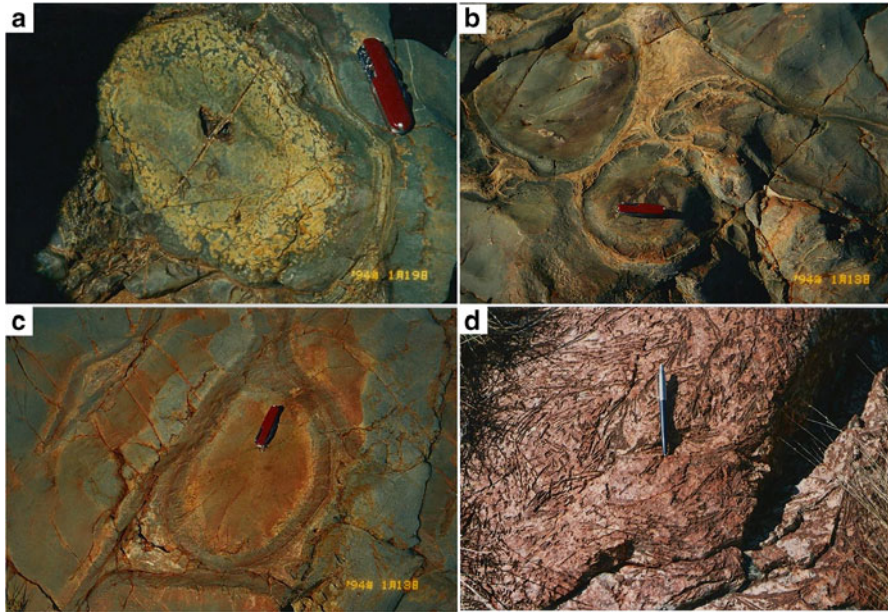
**3.53–3.235 Ga.** Multiple successive volcanic cycles (Pilbara Supergroup) concomitant with plutonic granitic magmatism, culminating with formation of thick SIAL, are exposed in 18 greenstone belts in the eastern Pilbara Craton. The base of the Pilbara Supergroup is truncated by younger granites. The oldest exposed supracrustals represented by the >3.52 Ga Table Top Formation (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3) are intruded by 3.48–3.47 Ga granites of the Carlindi Granitic Complex (Buick et al. 1995). The pre-3.22 Ga terrain, estimated as 100,000 km<sup>2</sup>-large, consists of a 15–20 km thick volcanic succession (Pilbara Supergroup) composed of at least eight ultramafic–mafic–felsic volcanic cycles, representing repeated mantle melting episodes. Repeated to semi-continuous partial melting events resulted in felsic magma accreted into growing batholiths. In some instances plutonic units are connected to felsic volcanic units by granitic veins, dykes, stocks, or cupolas, as in the Marble Bar greenstone belt where ~3,466 Ma granite intrudes an 8 km thick sequence of felsic volcanics of the 3,471–3,463 Ma Duffer Formation (Reynolds et al. 1975; Hickman and Lipple 1978; Hickman and Van Kranendonk 2008). The youngest pre-3.2 Ga-old volcanic cycle is represented by Sulphur Springs Group, which includes a major ultramafic–mafic volcanic unit—the Kunagunarinna Formation (~3,255–3,252 Ma) capped by felsic volcanics of the Kangaroo Cave Formation (3,253 ± 3) (Fig. 8.3).



**Fig. 8.5** Geological sketch map of the North Pole dome, central Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, showing the distribution of the ~3.47 Ga impactite unit, indicated by a *red arrow*, in the middle of the Mount Ada Basalt sequence in the northeastern part of the dome. Geological Survey of Western Australia, by permission

**3.235 ± 3 Ga:** An abrupt end of the volcanic mafic-ultramafic cycles is represented in the central Pilbara by the felsic volcanics of the Kangaroo Cave Formation of the volcanic Sulphur Springs Group (Van Kranendonk 2000), capped by a marker chert truncated by a major unconformity (Figs. 8.11, 8.16 and 8.17). Stratigraphic and geochronological correlations with the Barberton Greenstone Belt where an abrupt unconformable break occurs between the top of the volcanic Mendon Formation (3,258 ± 3 Ma) and the base of the clastic Mapepe Formation, accompanied with the S2 and S3 impact ejecta, suggest a connection with the effects of large asteroid impacts (Glikson and Vickers 2006) (Fig. 7.9). The unconformity is overlain by lenses of megabreccia (olistostrome) containing blocks up to 250 m-large (Fig. 8.16).

**3.235 ± 3 Ga–3.16 Ga:** The Sulphur Springs Group is overlain by the clastic Soanesville Group (Corboy Formation, Paddy Market Formation, Pyramid Hills Formation) which includes volcanics of the Honeyeater Basalt, representing intracratonic sedimentation and volcanic activity (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3). At this stage rifting resulted in separation of the Karratha block (~3.50–3.25 Ga, Western Pilbara Craton) and Kurrana block (~3.50–3.17 Ga, southeast Pilbara Craton) from the Eastern Pilbara Craton. Evidence for development of SIMA crust between the East Pilbara terrain and the Karratha block is furnished by the ~3.2 Ga Regal Formation.

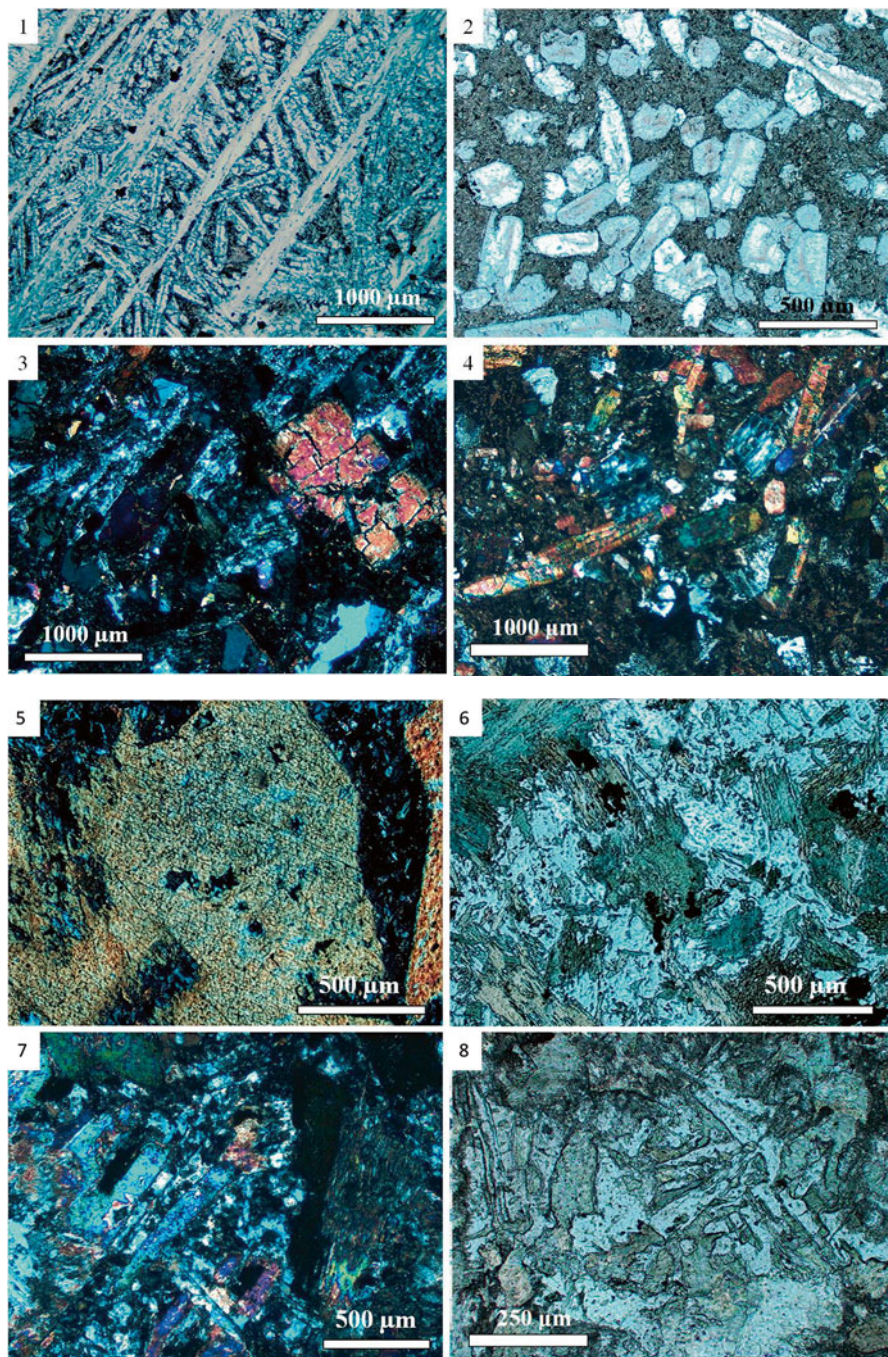


**Fig. 8.6** Archean volcanics, Pilbara Craton: (a–c) Pillow basalts, basal Apex Basalt, Coongan River, photo **a** showing outward boiling of vesicles and photos **b** and **c** showing inter-pillow fragmental mesostasis; (b) Quench “spinifex” textures in Archean volcanics, Louden Basalt, west Pilbara Craton

**3.13–3.11 Ga:** Eruption of calc-alkaline volcanics (Whundo Group) and emplacement of granites in the western Pilbara Craton.

**3.05–2.93 Ga:** Arenite and granite pebble-bearing conglomerate deposited in the Gorge Creek, Whim Creek, Mallina, and Mosquito Creek Basins (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3) represent major uplift, exposure and denudation of Archean batholiths throughout the eastern and western Pilbara Craton.

**2.78–2.63 Ga:** The Fortescue Basin, spanning 2.78–2.63 Ga, is represented by a ~6 km thick sequence of volcanic flows dominated by basaltic andesite, with intercalated carbonate (Tumbiana Formation), and terminated by extensive deposition of shale, chert and BIF of the 2.69–2.63 Ga Jeerinah Formation (Thorne and Trendall 2001). The Fortescue Group unconformably overlies the Pilbara Craton over an area of at least 250,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Blake 1993). Three mafic-felsic volcanic cycles are observed (Mount Roe Basalt, Hardey Formation, and Kylena to Maddina Formations) (Kojan and Hickman 1998), interpreted in terms of mantle plume events by Arndt et al. (2001). The Mount Roe Basalt, reaching thicknesses of up to 2,500 m (Blake 1993), is preserved mainly in palaeo-valleys which overlie subsiding Archean greenstone belts subsiding between batholiths due to differential isostatic movements. The feeders are represented by north-northeast trending dolerite dykes (Black Range Dolerite Suite). In the northern Pilbara basaltic volcanism was succeeded with formation of shallow rift valleys



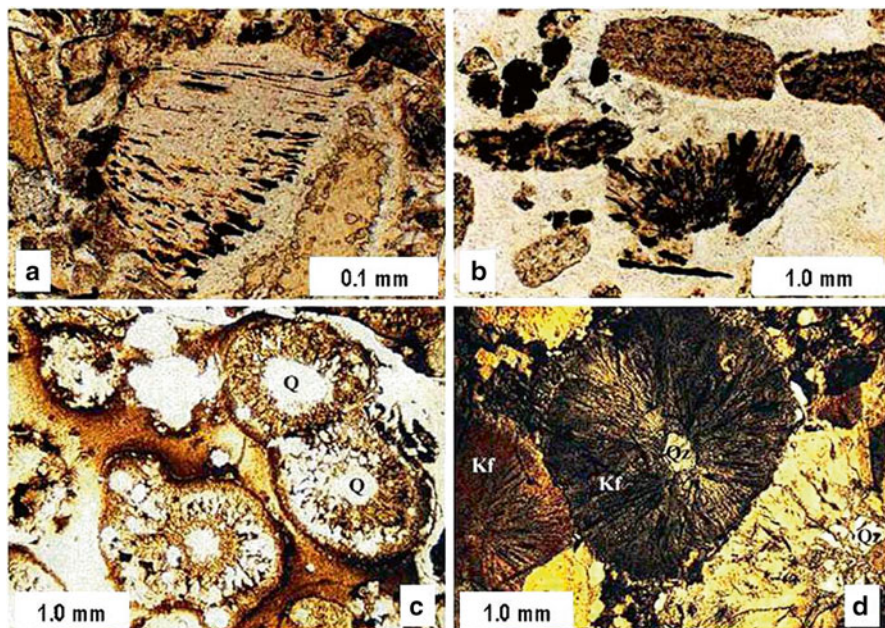


**Fig. 8.8** Jaspillite fragment-bearing volcanic agglomerate, Duffer Formation, Coongan River, Marble Bar

filled with clastic sediments of the 2.76–2.75 Ga Hardey Formation (Thorne and Trendall 2001). The second volcanic cycle is represented by high-K basalts of the 2.74 Ga Kylena Formation, overlain by felsic tuff and stromatolitic carbonate of the lacustrine 2.73–2.72 Ga Tumbiana Formation, and a third volcanic cycle by the 2.71 Ga Maddina Formation (Sakurai et al. 2005; Hickman 2012). The Fortescue Group terminates at 2.69 Ga with extensive deposition of off-shore mudstone, pyritic shale, siltstone, chert, carbonates of the Jeerinah Formation, representing a northerly marine transgression in a deepening basin (Thorne and Trendall 2001).

Hickman (2012) classified the northern Pilbara Craton in terms of five 3.53–3.11 Ga-old granite–greenstone terrains and a number of volcanic and sedimentary

←  
**Fig. 8.7** Microscopic images of Archaean volcanics, Apex Basalt, Camel Creek, East Pilbara Craton: (1) spinifex-textured komatiite consisting of skeletal pseudomorphs of tremolite after pyroxene and interstitial altered feldspathic matrix; (2) porphyry, displaying crystals of altered plagioclase set in cryptocrystalline chlorite-rich matrix; (3) orthopyroxene microphenocrysts set in clouded ophitic-textured altered basalt; (4) Clinopyroxene prisms set in clouded basaltic matrix; (5) gabbro – a phenocryst of clinopyroxene enclosing a plagioclase in ophitic relations; (6) metamorphosed gabbro displaying acicular actinolite set in albite-oligoclase; (7) dolerite – lath-like crystals of plagioclase separated by clouded microcrystalline clinopyroxene-bearing matrix; (8) ophitic to graphic-textured actinolite-plagioclase dolerite. (Figures 3, 4, 5 and 7 are in cross nicols)

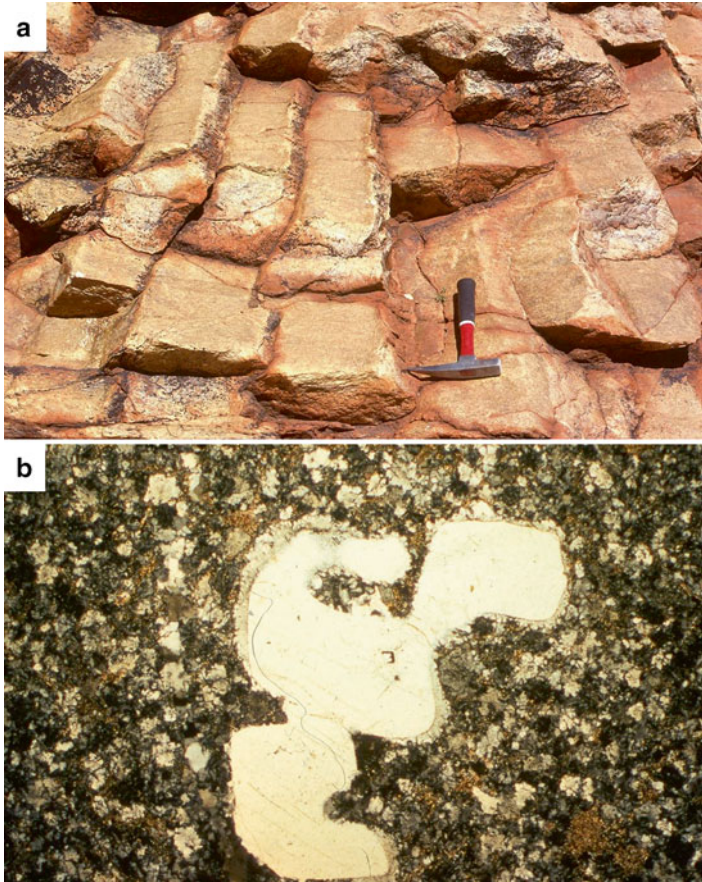


**Fig. 8.9** Variolitic spherulitic textures in Archaean felsic volcanics, lower part of Soanesville Group, East Pilbara Craton. Note the distinction between the outward-radiating crystallites of the volcanic spherules, in some instances cored by feldspar crystal, and microkrystite spherules displaying inward-radiating crystallites (Figs. 7.12, 7.13, 10.3e, 10.4 and 10.7d) (From Glikson and Vickers 2006; Elsevier, by permission)

basins. From ~3.22 Ga onwards, these terrains and basins evolved separately in different parts of the Pilbara Craton (Figs. 8.2 and 8.3). These terrains and basins include (Hickman 2012):

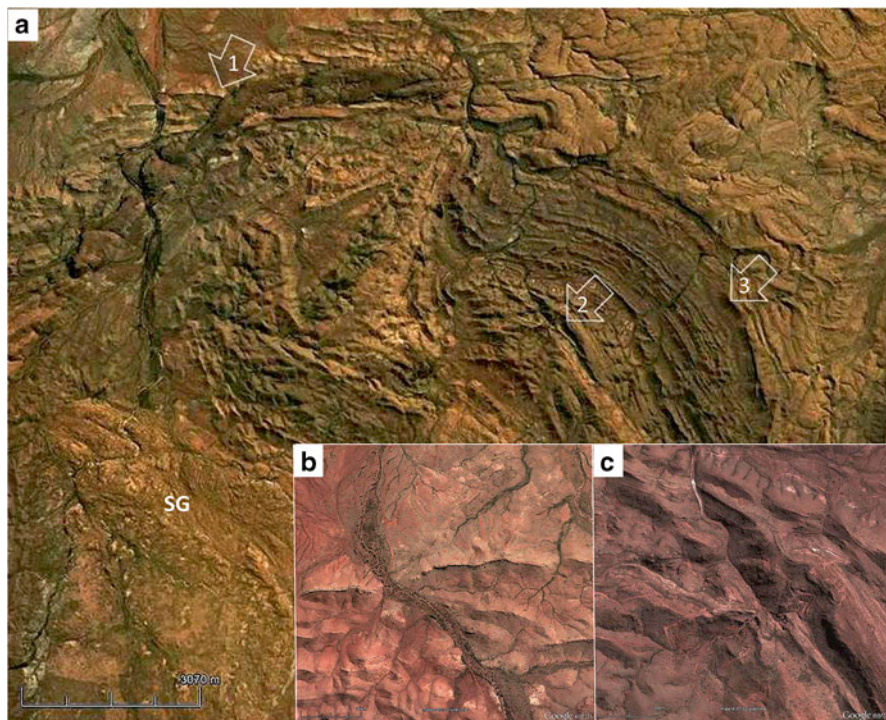
1. 3.22–3.17 Ga Soanesville Basin and similar rift-related basins occupied by epicontinental clastic successions overlain by deeper water volcanics along the rifted margins of the East Pilbara, Karratha, and Kurrana Terrains.
2. ~3.2 Ga Regal Terrain, West Pilbara, represents mafic crust formed between the East Pilbara and Karratha plates later than ~3.22 Ga.
3. 3.13–3.11 Ga Sholl Terrain, consisting of ~10 km-thick volcanics of intermediate composition (Whundo Group) and related granitic rocks.
4. 3.05–2.93 Ga De Grey Superbasin, extensional basins intruded by granitic plutons between 3.02 and 2.94 Ga.
5. 2.89–2.83 Ga Split Rock Supersuite, post-tectonic granitic intrusions

Prior to 3.22 Ga the three major greenstone successions (Warrawoona, Kelly, and Sulphur Springs), dominated by mafic-ultramafic volcanic sequences capped by felsic volcanic sequences (Duffer, Panorama, Wyman, and Kangaroo Caves formations), are separated by major unconformities (Figs. 8.2 to 8.5). The volcanic sequences and contemporaneous granitic supersuites (Callina, Tambina, Emu Pool, and Cleland)



**Fig. 8.10** (a) columnar rhyolite of the Wyman Formation (3,325–3,215 Ma); (b) resorbed quartz crystal in the Wyman Formation rhyolite, signifying derivation from depths where quartz phenocrysts are stable in melts, as discussed in Green and Ringwood (1977)

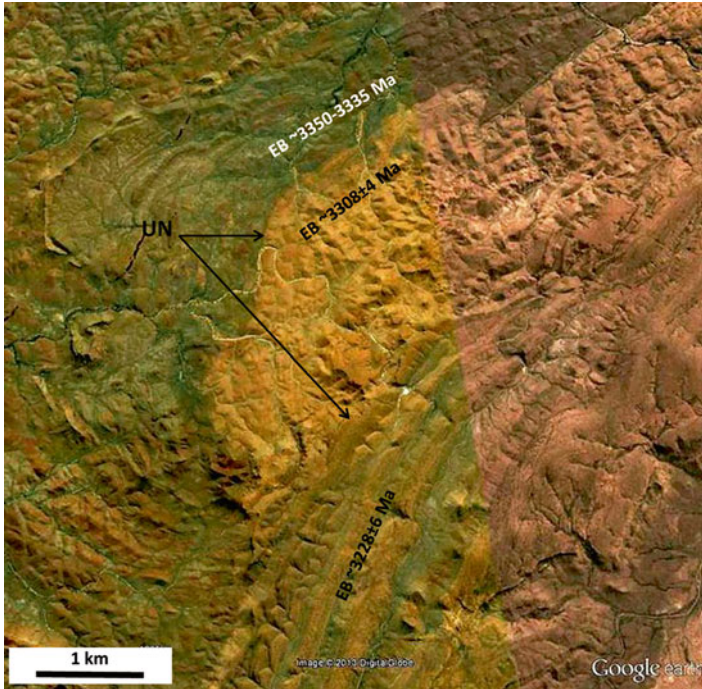
represent coeval, in some instances connected, extrusive and plutonic anatectic events associated with or succeeding mantle melting events. The significant time intervals separating the Warrawoona and Kelly Groups (3,427–3,350 Ma; ~75 Ma) and the Kelly and Sulphur Springs Groups (3,315–3,255 Ma; 60 my) may represent deformation and metamorphism of underlying sequences, long-term hiatuses and missing sequences. The Warrawoona and Kelly groups are separated by an unconformity overlain by ~1,000 m-thick shallow water sediments of the Strelley Pool Formation (Hickman and Van Kranendonk 2008) (Fig. 8.3). The Kelly and Sulphur Springs groups are separated by unconformity overlain by up to 3,900 m-thick clastic sediments of the Leilira Formation (Van Kranendonk and Morant 1998; Buick et al. 1995, 2002; Hickman 2012).



**Fig. 8.11** Pilbara Craton, >3.43 Ga and ~3.2 Ga unconformities. (a) northern limb of the Strelley anticline enveloping the Strelley Granite (SG). Arrows: 1 – referring to inset B; 2 – referring to inset C; 3 – unconformity at the base of ~3.0 Ga Gorge Creek quartzite and conglomerate; (b) unconformity between the Coonterunah Group (3,515–3,498 Ma) and the overlying Strelley Formation (~3,426 Ma); (c) basal Soanesville Group olistostrome unconformably overlying Sulphur Springs Group and overlain by turbidite-felsic volcanic sequence. For stratigraphic relations and ages see Fig. 8.3

The youngest greenstone cycle of the 3.53–3.23 Ga Pilbara Supergroup, the Sulphur Springs Group, is terminated abruptly at ~3.23 Ga, where the uppermost felsic volcanic unit, Kangaroo Cave Formation (~3,252–3,235 Ma) is truncated unconformably by the Soanesville Group (Fig. 8.16) which is dominated by clastic sediments, banded iron formation, felsic volcanics and conglomerate accompanied by felsic tuff and basalt (Hickman 2012), signifying the onset of semi-continental conditions. The base of the Soanesville Group includes lenses of mega-breccia (olistostrome) consisting of blocks up to 250 m-large (Hill 1997) (Fig. 8.16). Equivalents of the Soanesville Group and Nickol River Formation are represented in the southeast Pilbara by sediments of the ~3.22 Ga Budjan Creek Formation (Fig. 8.12) and associated volcanics of the Kelly Belt, representing intra-cratonic rifting (Erikson 1981). Equivalents of the Soanesville Group also occur in the Kurrana terrain (Fig. 8.2) where the >3.18 Ga Coondamar Formation meta-sediments and volcanics are interleaved with granites. In the western Pilbara correlated





**Fig. 8.12** Pilbara Craton ~3.3–3.2 Ga unconformities, Budjan Creek. Aerial photograph displaying high-angle unconformity between the Wyman Rhyolite ( $WR - 3,308 \pm 4$  Ma) and the Budjan Creek Formation (BCF –  $3,228 \pm 6$  Ma), Kelly greenstone belt. *UNC* unconformity (NASA)

formations include the ~3.3–3.27 Ga Ruth Well basalts and unconformably overlying clastics, quartzite, chert shale, BIF, and carbonates of the ~3.22 Ga Nickol River Formation (NRF). The NRF is overlain by the ~3.2 Ga (Van Kranendonk 2007a, b; Kiyokawa et al. 2002), 2–3 km-thick volcanic Regal Formation, consisting of pillow basalt, basal komatiitic peridotite and rare chert, with possible geochemical signatures of oceanic crust (Ohta et al. 1996; Sun and Hickman 1998; Smithies et al. 2005, 2007a, b). During about 3.16–3.07 Ga the Central Pilbara Craton separated from the Karratha terrain of the west Pilbara and the Kurrana Terrain of the southeast Pilbara, underlain by SIMA crust represented by Regal Formation. The development of these northeast-trending Terrains (Van Kranendonk et al. 2006; Eriksson 1981; Wilhelmj and Dunlop 1984) was accompanied with intrusion of ~3.07 Ga granites, signifying ~3.18 Ga rifting subsidence of thick clastic sequences accompanied by intrusion of mafic dykes and sills of dolerite and gabbro, as well as intrusion of 3.19–3.17 Ga granites of the Kurrana Terrain. Interpretations by workers of the Geological Survey of Western Australia regard the ~3.5–3.2 Ga greenstones as a volcanic plateau formed above continental basement, followed at 3.2 Ga by development of passive margin and non-continental basins prior to 3.07 Ga.

The younger volcanic terrains in the western Pilbara Craton are represented by >6 km-thick volcanic sequences of the 3.13–3.11 Ga Whundo Group and the 3.13–3.11 Ga

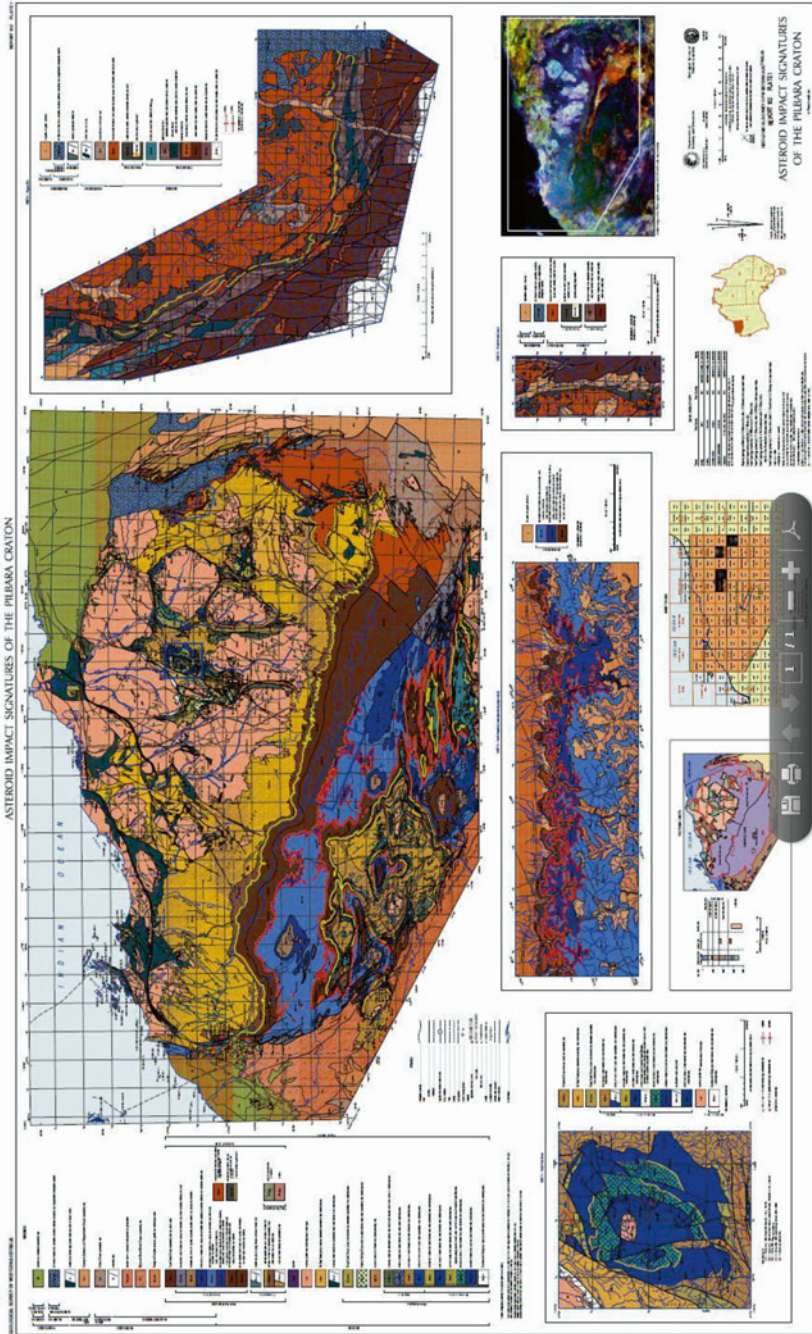
Railway Supersuite of the Sholl Terrain, consisting of meta-basalt, ultramafic rocks, intermediate pyroclastic rocks, andesite, dacite, rhyolite, dolerite sills and thin meta-sedimentary units, (Hickman 2012). The Whundo Group includes calc-alkaline and boninite-like rocks, a middle package of tholeiitic rocks with minor boninite-like rocks and rhyolites, and an upper package of calc-alkaline rocks, including adakites, Mg-rich basalts, Nb-enriched basalts, and rhyolites, with Nd isotopic compositions close to depleted mantle values ( $\epsilon\text{Nd}$  of +1.5–2.0 at ~3,120 Ma) (Sun and Hickman 1998; Smithies et al. 2005). On this basis several authors compared the Whundoo Group to modern convergent margins, arc-trench, back-arc systems or intra-oceanic systems (Krapez and Eisenlohr 1998). The low Th/La, La/Nb, and Ce/Yb ratios of boninites are consistent with intra-oceanic arc setting (Smithies et al. 2005). Associated plutonic units, including meta-tonalite, Meta-granodiorite and meta-monzogranite gneiss, contain zircons up to 3,149 Ma-old and Nd TDM model ages of 3.23–3.21 Ga (Smithies et al. 2007a, b).

Uplift of pre-3.1 Ga SIAL blocks was followed by an opening of oceanic gaps at ~3.13–3.11 Ga, represented by the volcanic Whundo Group, tectonic movements (~3.07 Ga “Princep Orogeny”) and development of major up to 2,000 m thick shallow-water molasse-type conglomerates, fanglomerates and quartzite (De Grey Superbasin) in the northern Pilbara Craton, unconformably overlying the ~3.6–3.2 Ga granite greenstone system (Dawes et al. 1995). Post 3.07 Ga continental basins include the 3.05–3.02 Ga Gorge Creek Basin with massive conglomerates of the Lalla Rookh Sandstone (Eriksson et al. 1994), the 3.01–2.99 Ga Whim Creek Basin, the 3.01–2.94 Ga Mallina Basin and the 2.97–2.93 Ga Mosquito Creek Basin (Hickman et al. 2010; Hickman 2012). The correlated 3.01–2.99 Ga Whim Creek Basin in the west, containing felsic and basaltic volcanics, was regarded as an ensialic back-arc basin (Pike and Cas 2002). Plutonic equivalents of the Whim Creek Group are likely represented by the 3.00–2.98 Ga Maitland River Supersuite of granites. The Mallina Basin contains a 2–4 km-thick sequence of conglomerate, arenite, shale and intercalated basalts and high-Mg basalt (Eriksson 1982; Smithies 2004). Plutonic and volcanic activity during 2.95–2.94 Ga (Negri and Loudon volcanics) is interpreted in terms of subduction (Smithies and Champion 2000). The Mosquito Creek Basin in the southeast Pilbara Craton (2.95–2.94 Ga), formed in subsiding rift structures, contains graded-bedded arenite and siltstones displaying Bouma cycle sequences (Van Kranendonk et al. 2006). Post-orogenic plutonic activity is represented by 2.89–2.83 Ga fractionated monzogranite and syenogranite (Split Rock Supersuite).

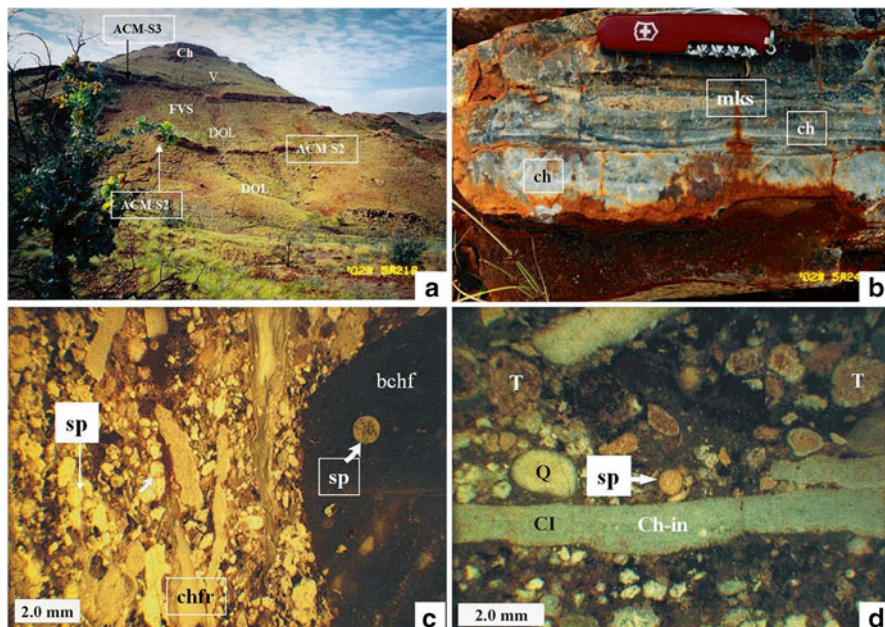
## 8.2 ~Pre-3.2 Ga Impact Fallout Units in the Pilbara Craton

A geological map of the Pilbara Craton indicating the distribution of impact ejecta units is presented as a pdf enclosed with the book, a condensed version of which is shown in Fig. 8.13 (<http://extras.springer.com/2014/978-3-319-07908-0>).

Low and Byerly (1986b) reported millimeter to sub-millimeter scale silicified spherules containing quench-crystallization and glass-devitrification textures from a

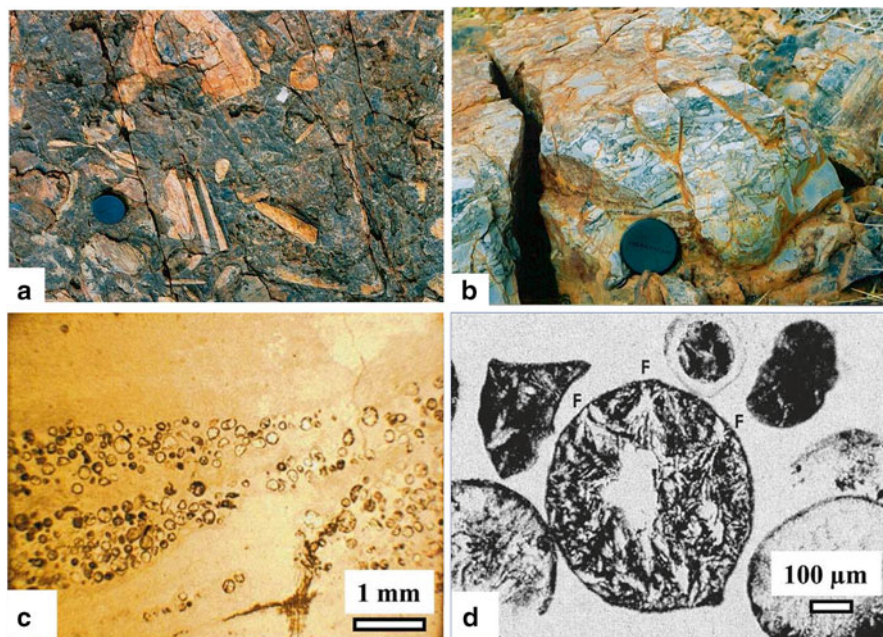


**Fig. 8.13** Pilbara asteroid impact map (Glikson 2004a, b. Geological Survey of Western Australia, by permission. pdf file on line <http://extras.springer.com/2014/978-3-319-07908-0>)



**Fig. 8.14** Pilbara Craton ~3.47 Ga impact spherules. Antarctic Chert Member impact unit. (a) View of type locality north of Miralga Creek. Abbreviations: *DOL* dolerite, *ACM-S2* spherule-bearing diamictite, *FVS* felsic volcanics/hypabyssals, *ACM-S3* spherule-bearing chert and arenite, *FV* felsic volcanics, *Ch* chert. (b) *ACM-S3* – spherule lens (*mks*) in laminated chert (*ch*). Swiss knife – 8 cm; (c) *ACM-S3* – chert intraclast diamictite, including bedding-parallel chert fragments (*chfr*) and a black chert fragment (*bchf*) which includes a microkrystine spherule (*sp*) – possibly derived from an older spherule unit *ACMS1*; (d) *ACM-S3* chert-intraclast diamictite including bedding relic chert intraclast (*Ch-in*) and spherules in the matrix (*sp*)

chert/arenite unit located about 3.0 km above the Dresser Formation, tracing this unit about 1 km along strike (Figs. 8.14 and 8.15). The underlying Mount Ada Basalt, as defined by Hickman (1983, 2012) and Van Kranendonk (2000) Van Kranendonk and Morant (1998), consists of extensively carbonated pillowed tholeiitic to high-Mg basalt, dolerite sills, minor volcanoclastic rocks and ~1–10 m-scale intercalations of chert, chert/arenite and minor intraclast chert pebble-dominated conglomerate. In the North Shaw 1:100,000 Sheet area, the Mount Ada Basalt forms a ~6.5 km-thick sequence on the eastern part of the North Pole dome (Figs. 8.4 and 8.5), overlying the Dresser Formation (chert, arenite, barite) and underlying the Panorama Formation (carbonate-altered felsic volcanic and volcanoclastic rocks and derived clastic sedimentary rocks). The isotopic age of the Mount Ada Basalt is constrained in the adjacent Marble Bar greenstone belt to the east by the age of the underlying Duffer Formation (~3,471–3,463 Ma) and the age of the overlying Panorama Formation (~3,458–3,454 Ma) (Van Kranendonk et al. 2002; Hickman 2012). The thickest (5–20 m) sedimentary intercalation within the Mount Ada Basalt, titled Antarctic Creek Member, consists of felsic volcanoclastics, mafic tuff silicified argillite, aren-



**Fig. 8.15** Pilbara Craton ~3.47 Ga impact spherules. ~3.47 Ga Antarctic Chert Member impact unit (a) ACM-S2 – chert fragment diamictite, viewed parallel to bedding plain, showing some pebbles at high angle to the layering. Camera lens cap (*LC white arrow*) – 6 cm; (b) chert fragment diamictite viewed across the layering; (c) a pocket of silicified microkrystite spherules; (d) silicified microkrystite spherule preserving relic inward-radiating pseudo morphed crystallites

ite, Jaspilite intruded by dolerite (Fig. 8.14). Above this unit, the volcanic sequence includes several intercalations of chert/arenite and intraclast flat chert-pebble conglomerate. A similar spherules-bearing fragmental unit near 40 meters-thick has recently been identified under the Marble Bar Chert about 25 km to the east of the Miralga Creek occurrence.

Spherules are mostly 0.10–0.75 mm in diameter. Irregular particles, compound spherules, dumbbell shaped particles and broken spherules are present. Spherules within chert retain high to very high sphericity and internal radiating quench textures, allowing their positive identification as microkrystite spherules (Glikson et al. 2004) as defined by Glass and Burns (1988). Byerly et al. (2002) reported a 207/206 Pb age of  $3,470.1 \pm 1.9$  Ma for euhedral zircons derived from the spherule-bearing unit, i.e. within error from the age of the Duffer Formation ( $3,467 \pm 4$ , Van Kranendonk et al. 2002). Of the 30 zircons of 50–100 µm extracted from 2 kg of rock, two grains yielded ages of c. 3,510 Ma, suggesting derivation of some of the clastic material from the older Coonterunah Group (Buick et al. 1995; Van Kranendonk and Morant 1998; Van Kranendonk et al. 2002). Byerly et al. (2002) correlate the spherule-bearing unit with a similar S1 unit in the Hoogenoeg Formation, Barberton Greenstone belt, Kaapvaal Craton, South Africa, which yielded a 207/206 Pb zircon age of  $3,470.4 \pm 2.3$  Ma (Sect. 7.3).

The microkrystite-bearing units of the Antarctic Chert Member, defined here as ACM-S, consist of at least three horizons, ACM-S1-3, including (Glikson et al. 2004):

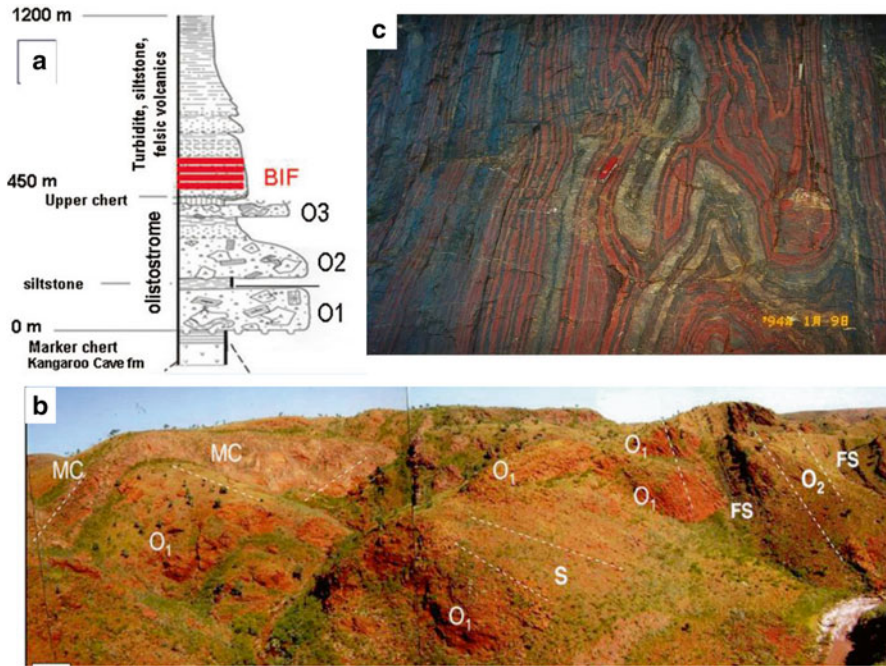
1. ACM-S1 – Spherule-bearing chert fragments in ACM-S3.
2. ACM-S2 – A basal lens of spherule-bearing diamictite, located below ACM-S3 from which it is separated by a ~200 m-thick dolerite and ~30 m-thick felsic hypabyssals.
3. ACM-S3 – A chert unit bearing spherules and chert fragments;

The microkrystite spherules are discriminated from angular to subangular detrital volcanic fragments by their high sphericities, inward-radiating fans of sericite pseudomorphs after K-feldspar, relic quench textures and Ni-Cr-Co relations. Scanning Electron Microscopy coupled with E-probe (EDS) and laser ICPMS analysis indicate high Ni and Cr in sericite-dominated spherules, suggesting mafic composition of source crust. Ni/Cr and Ni/Co ratios of the spherules are higher than in associated Archaean tholeiitic basalts and high-Mg basalts, rendering possible contamination by high Ni/Cr and Ni/Co chondritic components. The presence of multiple bands and lenses of spherules within chert and scattered spherules in arenite bands within S3 may signify redeposition of a single impact fallout unit or, alternatively, multiple impacts. Controlling parameters include: (1) spherule atmospheric residence time; (2) precipitation rates of colloidal silica; (3) solidification rates of colloidal silica; (4) arenite and spherule redeposition rates, and (5) arrival of the tsunami. The presence of spherule-bearing chert fragments in S3 may hint at an older spherule-bearing chert (ACM-S1). Only a minor proportion of spherules are broken and the near-perfect sphericities of chert-hosted spherules and arenite-hosted spherules constrain the extent of shallow water winnowing of the originally delicate glass spherules. It follows the spherules were either protected by rapid burial or, alternatively, disturbance was limited to a short term high energy perturbation such as may have been affected by a deep-amplitude impact-triggered tsunami wave.

### 8.3 ~3.24–3.227 Ga Impact-Correlated Units

Three impact spherule-bearing units (S1–3) were identified on the basis of quench textures, iridium anomalies and Cr isotopic data in the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) at the base to lower part of the Fig Tree Group (Lowe and Byerly 1986a, b; Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Byerly and Lowe 1994; Byerly et al. 2002; Kyte 2002; Kyte et al. 1992, 2003; Shukolyukov et al. 2000; Glikson 2007). Significant stratigraphic, lithological and isotopic age analogies, as well as differences, pertain between sequences in the BGB and Eastern Pilbara greenstone belts, including likely correlations between the following stratigraphic/unconformity breaks about ~3.25–3.22 Ga (Glikson and Vickers 2006, 2010) (Figs. 8.3 and 8.17)

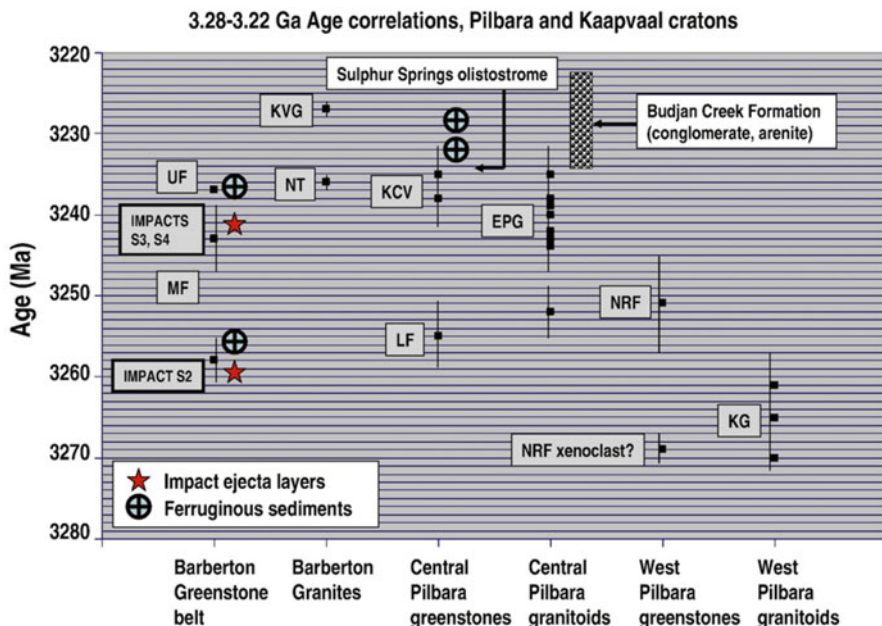
- (A) In the BGB the hiatus between the upper part of the ultramafic to mafic/felsic volcanic Onverwacht Group (Mendon Formation  $3,298 \pm 3$  Ma) and turbidite/felsic volcanics of the lower Fig Tree Group (Mapepe Formation –  $3,258 \pm 3$ – $3,225 \pm 3$  Ma) in the Barberton Greenstone Belt (U-Pb zircon ages after Kroner et al. 1991a, b and Byerly et al. 1996).



**Fig. 8.16** Pilbara Craton ~3.2 olistostrome and banded iron formations: (a) Schematic cross section showing the basal unconformity of the olistostrome over volcanics of the Sulphur Springs Group, multiple olistostrome units and overlying banded iron formations, turbidites and felsic volcanics of the Soanesville Group; (b) A view of olistostrome units (O<sub>1</sub>, O<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>3</sub>), intercalated siltstone (S) and ferruginous siltstone (FS) and the underlying Marker Chert (MC) signifying the top of the Sulphur Springs Group; (c) Banded iron formation of the Gorge Creek Group (From Glikson and Vickers 2006; Elsevier by permission)

(B) In the central Pilbara Craton a break occurs between the upper part of the ultramafic to felsic volcanic Sulphur Springs Group (U-Pb zircon ages of 3,255–3,235 Ma, Van Kranendonk and Morant 1998; Van Kranendonk 2000; Buick et al. 2002) and overlying mega-breccia (olistostrome), ferruginous argillite/turbidite/felsic volcanic BIF (banded iron formation)-bearing Gorge Creek Group, Pilbara Craton (Figs. 8.16 and 8.17).

The proposed correlation between these breaks has led to a search for impact fallout units in corresponding units in the Pilbara Craton (Glikson and Vickers 2006) (Fig. 8.17). The close stratigraphic and geochronological correlations between (1) the ~3.258 Ga break between the Onverwacht Group–Mendon Formation and Fig Tree Group, and (2) breaks at ~3.255 and 3.235 Ga in the central Pilbara Craton on the other hand, support an investigation of the latter in terms of the effect of large asteroid impacts. The ~3.255–3.235 Ga Sulphur Springs Group (SSG) overlies the ~3.35–3.31 Ga Kelly Group unconformably and is dominated by a volcanic succession that varies in composition upward from a basal unit of conglomerate, wackes and



**Fig. 8.17** Isotopic age correlations between 3.28 and 3.22 Ga units in the Kaapvaal Craton and Pilbara Craton. *Solid squares and error bar lines* – U–Pb ages of volcanic and plutonic units; *stars* – impact ejecta layers; *circled crosses* – ferruginous sediments; *MF* Mapepe Formation, *UF* Ulundi Formation, *NT* Nelshoogte tonalite, *KVG* Kaap Valley Granite, *LF* Leilira Formation, *KCV* Kangaroo Cave volcanics, *EPG* Eastern Pilbara granites, *NRF* Nickol River Formation (including an older xenoclast), *KG* Karratha Granite (From Glikson 2008; Elsevier, by permission)

felsic volcanic rocks (~3,255 Ma Leilira Formation), through komatiite (Kunagunarinna Formation), to a unit of basalt-andesite and rhyolite, with interbedded chert horizons (3.235 Ga Kangaroo Caves Formation). The volcanic rocks are overlain by a chert horizon, up to 50 m thick, composed of silicified fine-grained epiclastic and siliciclastic rocks. The chert formed during hydrothermal circulation associated with the final emplacement of the syn-volcanic Strelley Granite laccolith and precipitation of volcanogenic massive sulphide deposits (Vearncombe et al. 1998; Brauhart et al. 1998). The chert is overlain in turn by an olistostrome breccia (Fig. 8.16) and by fine-grained clastic and locally chemical sedimentary rocks of the Pincunah Hill Formation (Gorge Creek Group), including felsic tuff lenses. Marked sedimentary facies variations are observed in these sediments, which include (Van Kranendonk and Morant 1998; Van Kranendonk 2000). These units include:

1. A polymictic megabreccia, or olistostrome, reaching up to 600 m thick across a 4 km long strike length and consisting of blocks of chert, ferruginous shale, argillite, banded iron formation and felsic volcanic rocks set in an arenitic to ruditic matrix dominated by pyroclastic felsic volcanic material, mapped in detail by Hill (1997) and described by Vearncombe et al. (1998) and Van



Kranendonk (2000), unconformably overlies a marker chert at the top of the Sulphur Springs Group. The unusual dimensions of the blocks, up to <250 m, and their angular geometry militate for major faulting.

2. Ferruginous argillite, shale, and banded iron formation, including thin lenses of felsic pyroclastic rocks (Pincunah Hill Member). The Pincunah Hill Member varies laterally in thickness and pinches out altogether at the apex of the syn-volcanic Strelley Granite. At this locality, the overlying Corboy Formation fills in a submarine canyon as a series of turbidites that lap onto the marker chert which had previously been lithified, as evidenced by Neptunian sandstone dykes filled by Corboy sandstones in the marker chert (Van Kranendonk 2000).
3. Turbiditic feldspathic arenite beds grading up to argillite (Corboy Formation). Thickness variations in the Corboy Formation to the west of the Sulphur Springs area occur across faults, suggesting horst and graben fault activity during sedimentation (Wilhelmij and Dunlop 1984).

A search for impact fallout unit/s in sedimentary intercalations of 3.255–3.235 Ga exposed units and drill cores has not to date identified microkrystite-bearing impact fallout units. Volcanic varioles and amygdalae are widespread in felsic to intermediate metavolcanic rocks and in pyroclastic rocks and are distinguished from impact spherules by (1) occurrence of resorbed quartz microphenocrysts in the volcanic fragments (Fig. 8.9); (2) outward-radiating textures in varioles, as contrasted with inward radiating and quench textures in impact-condensation spherules (microkrystites) (Figs. 7.12, 7.13, 10.3e and 10.7); (3) poor sorting and occurrence of >5 mm-scale spherules in volcanic deposits, contrasted with the highly uniform size distribution and mostly mm to sub-mm-scale of impact spherules.

It is likely that the arenite-dominated composition of the Leilira Formation and part of the basal Soanesville Group resulted in corrosion and destruction of the originally glassy microkrystite spherules. The lenticular geometry of impact fallout units, probably brefflecting syn-depositional current-induced erosion/redistribution of the spherules, requires further search for impact fallout lenses in sedimentary intercalations of the Sulphur Springs Group, including (1) the chert at the top of the Sulphur Springs Group; (2) the olistostrome breccia unit above the marker chert unit at Sulphur Springs; (3) Pincunah Hills Formation, and (4) base and lower parts of the arenitic Corboy Formation. The olistostrome may have been associated with the end of felsic volcanic activity and caldera collapse (Van Kranendonk et al. 2002); however, the location of the megabreccia/olistostrome at a stratigraphic level correlated with the Barberton impact spherules, and the several hundred meters-size of the blocks (olistoliths), conceivably hint at contemporaneous seismic/earthquakes effects that may relate to impact energy. Further study of the matrices of the olistostrome and intercalated argillite units is planned.

## Chapter 9

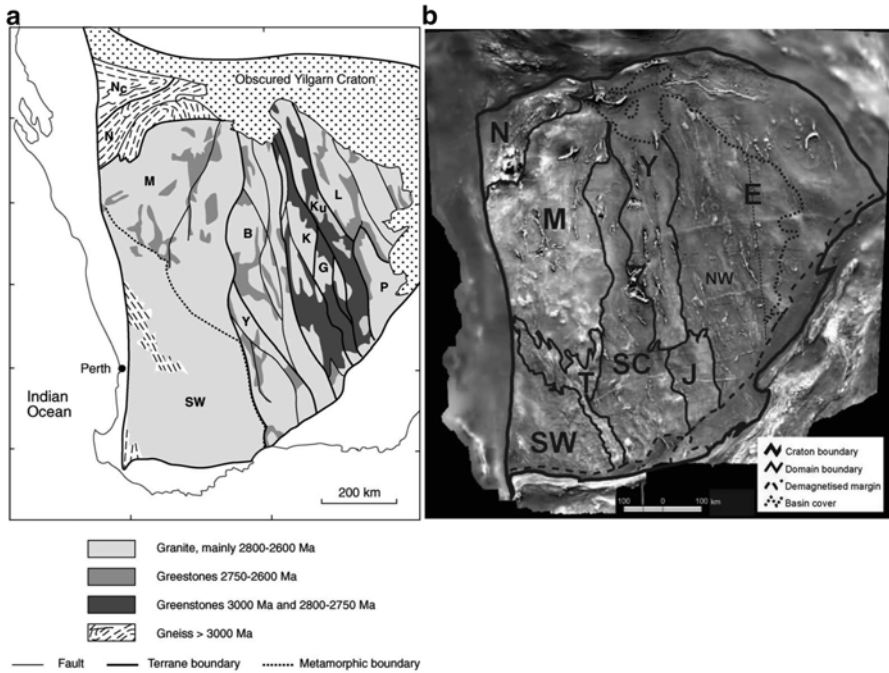
# Post-3.2 Ga Granite-Greenstone Systems

**Abstract** By analogy to pre-3.2 Ga system the younger granite-greenstone terrains display overall trends of evolution from largely mafic and ultramafic volcanic sequences to clastic sedimentary sequences, including turbidites and conglomerates. By contrast to pre-3.2 Ga granite-greenstone systems, commonly of oval or domal structure, post-3.2 Ga Archaean systems are mostly linear to sub linear, likely reflecting lateral accretion processes, for example supported by progressive southward isotopic age zonation of greenstone belts in the Superior Province. The linear structural grain of post-3.2 Ga systems is shown by seismic reflection studies in the Yilgarn Craton to be related to thrust and low angle detachment faults. However, a strict comparison between upper to late Archaean greenstone belts and circum Pacific-like accretionary wedges is negated by the lack of ophiolite-melange wedges of the type described along the northeastern Pacific rim (Hamilton, *GSA Today* 13:412, 2003). As is the case for pre-3.2 Ga systems, post-3.2 Ga mafic-ultramafic volcanics may represent rifted oceanic-like crustal zones developed along or between older gneiss terrains. In the Yilgarn Craton, southwestern Western Australia, such older gneiss terrains are represented by the Narryer terrain, southwestern gneiss terrain and by detrital zircons indicating pre-existing gneisses, the latter including peak magmatism about 3.2–3.3 Ga, a period correlating with the Barberton asteroid impact cluster.

**Keywords** Yilgarn Craton • Dharwar Craton • Superior Province • Linear greenstone belts • Lateral accretion

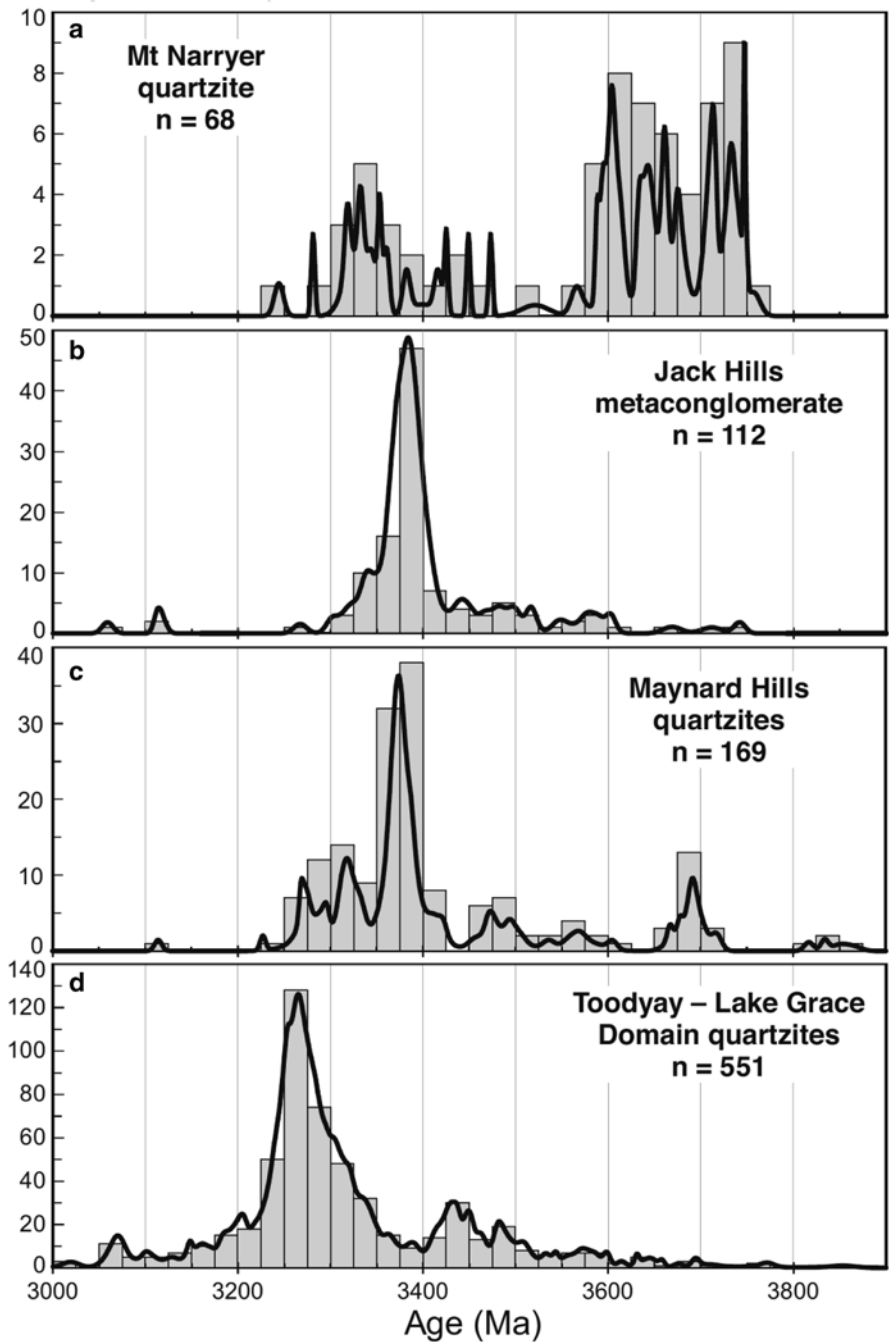
### 9.1 Evolution of the Yilgarn Craton

The Archaean Yilgarn Craton, southwestern Australia (Figs. 9.1 to 9.4), consists of metavolcanic and meta-sedimentary belts, granites and gneiss (Kinny et al. 1990; Pidgeon and Wilde 1990; Nelson 1997; Pidgeon and Hallberg 2000; Wyche 2007;

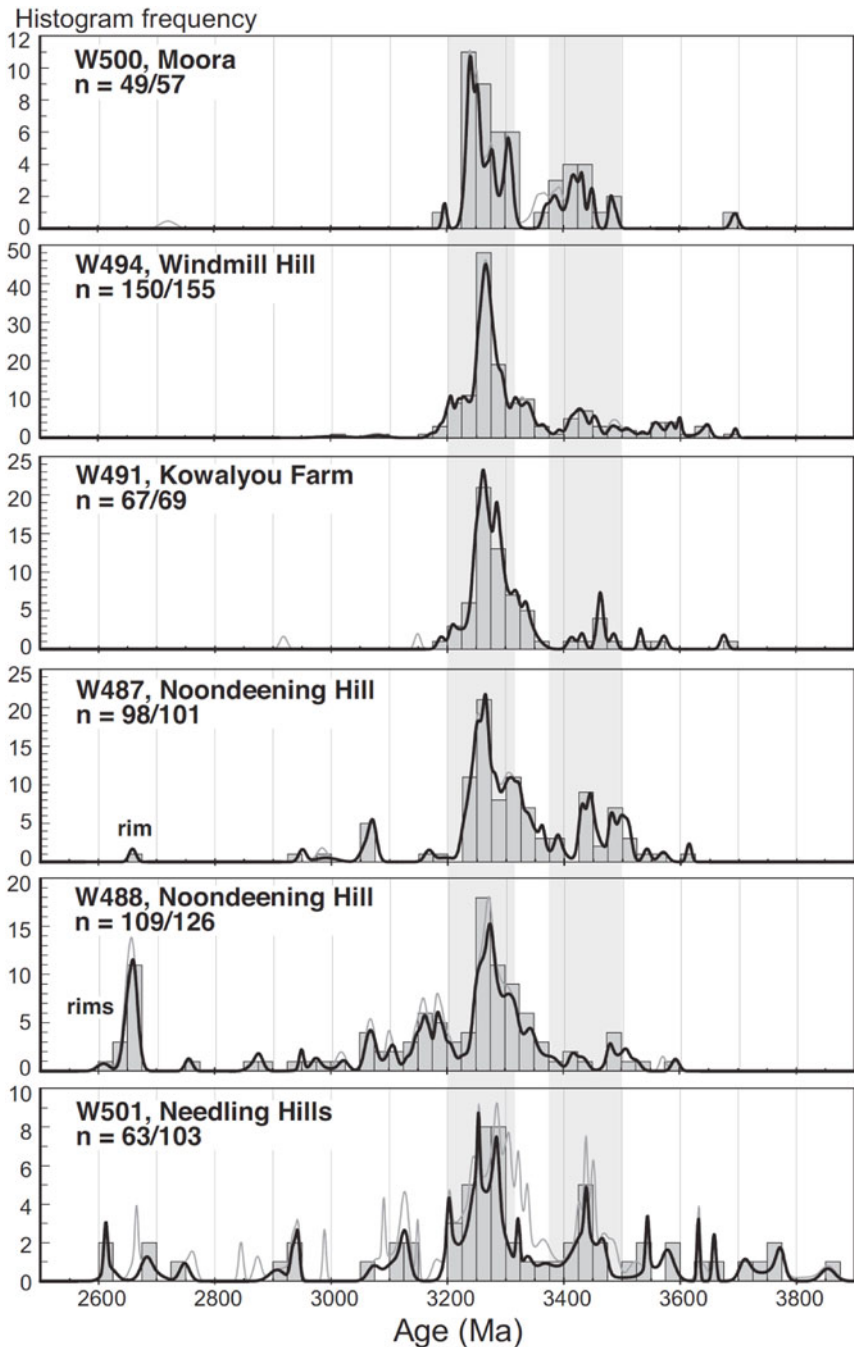


**Fig. 9.1** (a) Terrain structure of the Yilgarn Craton. *B* Barlee, *K* Kalgoorlie, *M* Murchison, *N* Narryer, *Nc* Narryer terrain affected by the Capricorn Orogeny, *SW* southwest Yilgarn composite terrain, *Y* Yellowdine, *Ku* Kurnalpi, *G* Gindalbie, *L* Laverton, *P* Pinjin (From Griffin et al. 2004; Elsevier by permission); (b) Total magnetic intensity image of the Yilgarn Craton – black to white represents low to high magnetization. Geophysical domains are labelled *N* Narryer, *M*– Murchison, *T* Toodyay-Lake Grace, *SW* Southwest, *SC* Southern Cross, *Y* Yeelirrie, *J* Lake Johnston, *E* Eastern Goldfields. *NW* in the west of the Eastern Goldfields domain correlates approximately with the Norseman-Wiluna Belt of Gee et al. (1981) (Whittaker 2001)

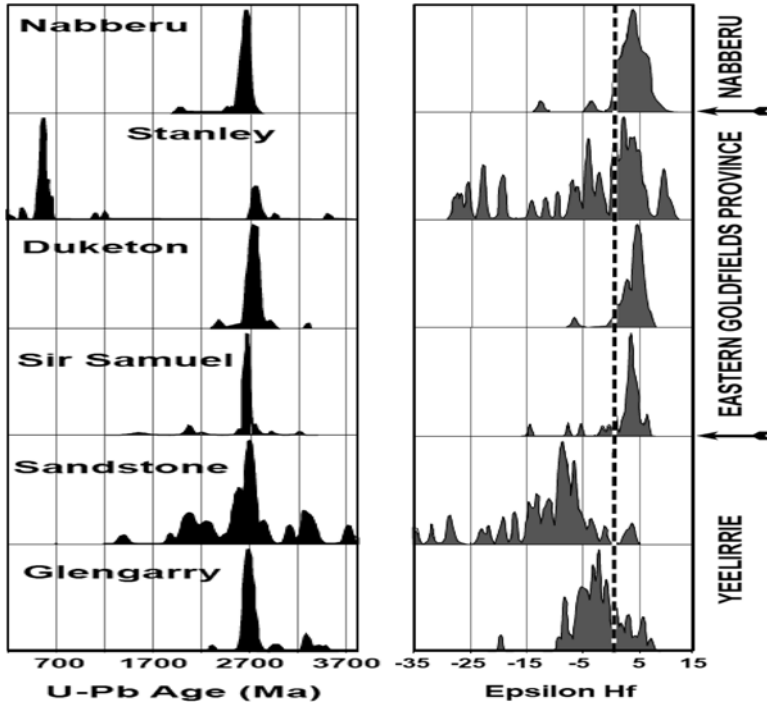
Van Kranendonk et al. 2013) which represent an assembly of separate blocks amalgamated into the craton during 2.76–2.62 Ga, a period of extensive granitic plutonic activity and east-west compression (Nutman et al. 1997; Myers 1997; Myers and Swager 1997). The craton constitutes the most extensive remnant of Archaean continental crust in Australia, displaying a long history of crustal fragmentation and aggregation by continental collision and accretion (Myers 1990), including the collision of the Pilbara and Yilgarn cratons to form the intervening Capricorn orogen between 2.000 and 1.600 Ga and thrusting along the southeastern margin of the Yilgarn Craton to form the Albany-Fraser orogen between 1.300 and 1.100 Ga. Rifting removed the northeastern part of the Yilgarn and Pilbara cratons between 1.1 and 0.7 Ga and further rifting resulted in the Paterson orogen about 0.7–0.6 Ga. The oldest recorded components include 3.73 Ga layered megacrystic anorthosites and associated amphibolite, intruded by sheets of ~3.6 Ga granite in the northwestern Narryer Terrain (Myers 1997). The mafic bodies were associated with 3.5–3.3 episodes of high grade metamorphism, deformation and melting. Central provinces of



**Fig. 9.2** Distribution of detrital zircon ages in the Yilgarn Craton between 3.0 and 3.9 Ga. (a) Quartzite from Mt Narryer in the Narryer Terrain (*NT*), (b) metaconglomerate from the Jack Hills greenstone belt in the *NT*, (c) quartzites from the Maynard Hills greenstone belt, Southern Cross Domain (*SCD*), and (d) quartzites from the Toodyay-Lake Grace Domain (*TLGD*) of the South West Terrain. All data are <10 % discordant; ages (from duplicate analyses of the same zircons are averaged. Pidgeon et al. 2010; American Journal of Science, by permission)



**Fig. 9.3** Distribution of detrital zircon ages in the Yilgarn Craton. Probability density diagrams and histograms of  $^{207}\text{Pb}/^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages obtained for zircons from six quartzite samples in the southwestern Yilgarn Craton. Thick curves and frequency histograms (bin width 25 Ma) include only data < 5% discordant, thin curves include all data. N = ages < 5% discordant/total number of ages (From Pidgeon et al. 2010; American Journal of Science, by permission)



**Fig. 9.4** Frequency distribution of isotopic U-Pb zircon ages and of initial  $\epsilon_{\text{Hf}}$  indices ( $^{176}\text{Hf}/^{177}\text{Hf}$ )<sub>initial</sub> in several terrains of the Yilgarn Craton. *Left*: relative probability plots of U-Pb data from each area. *Right*: cumulative probability plots of  $\epsilon_{\text{Hf}}$  data from each area, with vertical bar representing CHUR composition (From Griffin et al. 2004; Elsevier by permission)

the Yilgarn Craton including the Murchison and Southern Cross provinces and the high-grade southwest Wheat Belt province contain ~3.0 Ga metavolcanic rocks intruded by granite sheets at 2.9 Ga. By contrast the granite-greenstone terrain of the Eastern Goldfields consists mostly of 2.7–2.6 Ga volcanic sequences and granitic plutons, a period associated with extensive deformation, including deep crustal thrusting and development of imbricated structures (Fig. 9.1).

Geological studies of the Yilgarn Craton are constrained by extensive regolith, weathering and surficial cover (Whittaker 2001). Airborne magnetic data flown at 60 m above ground and 1,500 and 400 m line spacing allow discrimination between gneiss-migmatite-granite, banded gneiss, granite plutons and greenstone domains, defining magnetic/structural zones separated by sharp boundaries, including the Narryer, Murchison, Toodyay-Lake Grace, Southwest, Southern Cross, Yeelirrie, Lake Johnston, Eastern Goldfields and Norseman-Wiluna Belts (Gee et al. 1981; Whittaker 2001) (Fig. 9.1).

Early studies of Yilgarn greenstone belts in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia outlined sequences ranging from ultramafic and mafic basalts at low stratigraphic levels to felsic volcanics and turbidites at mid-stratigraphic levels

to molasse-like conglomerates at the top, compared at the time to Alpine ophiolite-melange sequences (Glikson 1972a, b). Similar sequences were observed in Canada, South Africa, and India. The low K<sub>2</sub>O levels of meta-basalts are comparable to oceanic tholeiites (Hallberg 1971). The composition of felsic lavas and hypabyssal dykes and sills is predominantly Na-rich, by analogy to Alpine Na keratophyres. These observations were interpreted in terms of an evolutionary trend from a thin primordial oceanic crust to a geosynclinal pile. However, uniformitarian interpretations have to be modified or abandoned in view of further geochemical and isotopic studies (Chaps. 6 and 12).

Gee et al. (1981) subdivided the Yilgarn Craton into four provinces, the Western Gneiss Terrain, and three granite-greenstone systems to the east, including the Murchison, Southern Cross and the Eastern Goldfields Provinces. U-Pb Zircon studies define ages of 3.7–3.3 Ga for gneiss in the Northwestern Gneiss Terrain, 3.0–2.7 Ga for greenstones in the Murchison and Southern Cross systems, and 2.74–2.63 Ga for greenstones and granite intrusions in the Eastern Goldfields Province. Most terrains contain rare ~3.0 Ga zircon xenocrysts (Swager et al. 1997; Cassidy et al. 2006). Northwestern granites include zircons with Hf-isotope compositions suggesting derivation from source terrains ~3.7 Ga (Wyche 2007). By contrast, no zircons older than ~3.055 Ga have been identified in the Southwestern terrain, the north-central Youanmi terrain and the Eastern Goldfields Super-terrain. In the Youanmi terrain, north-central Yilgarn Craton, eruption of mafic-ultramafic volcanics post-3.1 Ga signifies plume related rift volcanism. The voluminous granites intruded during 2.75–2.62 Ga dismembered and deformed the greenstone depositories, producing the present-day granite-greenstone patterns (Wyche 2007).

Isotopic age frequency distribution plots define distinct peaks representing crustal forming and reworking events, as follows: (1) U-Pb ages of detrital zircons define age peaks at ~3.75–3.6 Ga, 3.4–3.36 Ga, 3.26–3.24 Ga (Fig. 9.2) (Pidgeon and Nemchin 2006; Wyche 2007); (2) zircons derived from quartzites from the southwestern Yilgarn Craton display distinct age peaks between ~3.3 and 3.2 Ga (Fig. 9.3) (Pidgeon et al. 2010); (3) U-Pb data and  $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{initial}}$  indices indicating concentration of ages about 2.7 Ga display high- $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{initial}}$  mantle-type sources in northern (Nabberu) and central (Eastern Goldfields) terrains of the Yilgarn Craton and low- $\epsilon\text{Hf}_{\text{initial}}$  crust type sources in the north-central Yeelirrie terrain (Griffin et al. 2004) (Fig. 9.4).

Ion probe (SHRIMP) U-Pb studies of detrital zircons derived from ~3.1 Ga quartz-rich metasediments (Pidgeon et al. 2010) from the Toodyay-Lake Grace Domain, South West Terrain, demonstrate a basic uniformity in the composition of the source rocks derived from a provenance dominated by ca. 3,350–3,200 Ma granitic rocks with an age peak at ~3,265 Ma. Granites of this age have not been identified to date in the southwest Yilgarn Craton but ~3,280 Ma granites occur in the Narryer terrain, northwestern Yilgarn Craton. A second consistent zircon age component suggests an earlier episode of granite emplacement at ~3,500–3,400 Ma and a minor component is identified as 3,850 Ma. The source of zircons in the

southwestern Yilgarn Craton is different from that of zircons contained in ~3.1 Ga quartzites and conglomerates from Mt Narryer and the Jack Hills, northwestern Yilgarn Craton, which display a zircon population in the main range of ~3,750–3,550 Ma (Fig. 9.2), and from the Maynard Hills greenstone belt in the Southern Cross Domain which display a zircon population in the range of 3,450–3,250 Ma (Fig. 9.2). The overlap between the peak zircon ages of ~3,220–3,300 Ma (Fig. 9.3) and the large ~3.265–3.225 impact cluster recorded in the Barberton Greenstone Belt and its correlatives in the Pilbara Craton is considered significant (Sects. 7.3 and 8.3).

Van Kranendonk et al. (2013) indicate broad analogies between contemporaneous domains of the Yilgarn Craton, including the Murchison and Eastern Goldfields terrains. The similarities include ~2,810 hypabyssal and volcanic mafic-ultramafic magmatic activity, 2,720 Ma komatiitic-basaltic volcanism followed by widespread 2,690–2,660 Ma felsic magmatism, early deformation at 2,675 Ma, shear-hosted gold mineralization at 2,660–2,630 Ma, and post-tectonic granites at c. 2,630 Ma. These authors suggest that the shared evolutionary sequence, prehnite-pumpellyite to upper greenschist facies, lack of evidence for significant thrusting, and lack of passive margin/foreland basin/accretionary prisms require re-examination of subduction-accretion tectonic models.

Griffin et al. (2004) applied U–Pb age determinations, Hf-isotope and trace element analyses of detrital zircons to assess the geochronology and crustal history of segments of the Yilgarn Craton, including 550 analyses of detrital zircons from the northern Yilgarn Craton (Fig. 9.4). These studies identified ~3.7 Ga zircon ages and similar Hf model ages in younger granites of the Yeelirrie domain. In the Narryer province, northwestern Yilgarn Craton, traces of >3.4 Ga rocks are represented in younger igneous compositions. By contrast Hf-isotope data suggest much of the central and eastern Yilgarn Craton formed later than ~3.2 Ga. The 2.3–1.8 Ga magmatic activities associated with the development of the inter-cratonic Capricorn mobile belt involved recycling of Archaean crust.

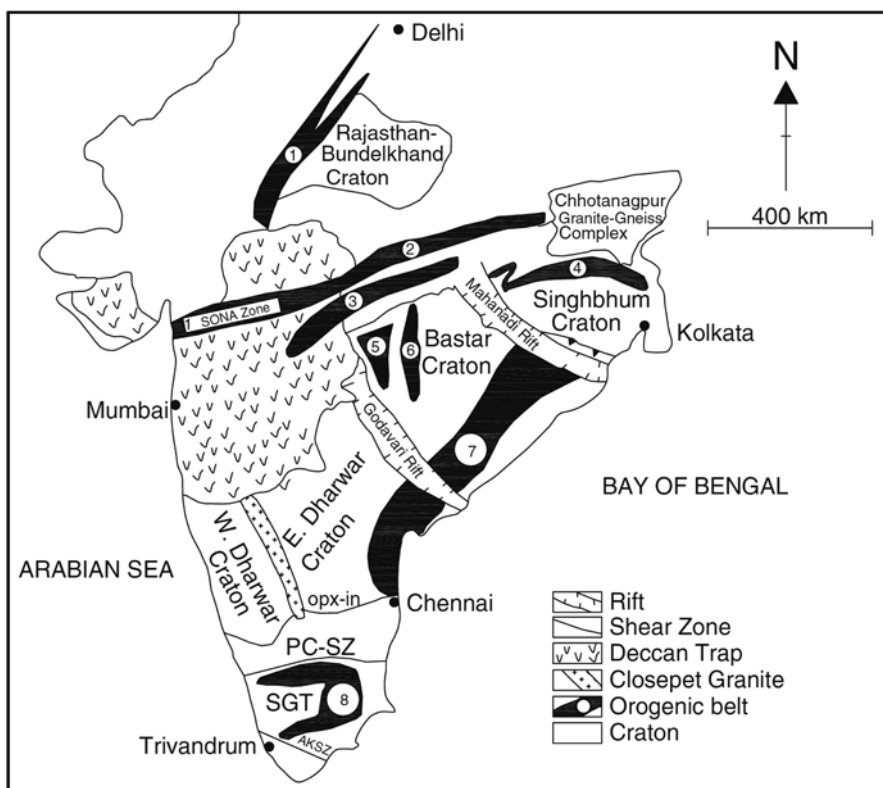
Early interpretations of the origin of Archaean cratons included a view of primitive mafic-ultramafic SIMA crust intruded by domal plutons dominated by the tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) association (Glikson 1972a, b; Glikson and Sheraton 1972; Glikson 1979a, b). Other models invoked development of greenstone belts above SIAL crust, or as intra-cratonic rift zones (Gee et al. 1981; Groves and Batt 1984). Some authors regarded the Norseman-Wiluna greenstone belt as a westward-dipping subduction (Barley et al. 1989; Morris 1993). Campbell and Hill (1988) invoked plume tectonic processes. The stratigraphy of greenstone belts was compared with plate tectonics sequence stratigraphy models, suggesting thin-skinned fold and thrust tectonics and transcurrent movements, consistent with allochthonous sheets truncated at 4–7 km depth by sub-horizontal detachments in contact with underlying SIAL crust. The evidence for large Late Archaean asteroid impact events (~2.63 Ga, ~2.57 Ga, ~2.56 Ga, ~2.48 Ga) observed in the Fortescue Basin and West Transvaal Basin (Sect. 10.1) is relevant to theories of the evolution of greenstone-granite systems (Chapter 12).



## 9.2 Evolution of South Indian Granite-Greenstone Terrains

The South Indian Shield displays continuous transitions from northern low metamorphic grade greenstone belts to southern gneiss-granulite terrains, allowing reconstruction of the Archaean crust in three dimensions. The shield includes six main cratons (Fig. 9.5; see also Fig. 3.2):

- (A) Dharwar craton (also called Karnataka craton);
- (B) Bastar craton (also called Bastar-Bhandara craton);
- (C) Singhbhum craton (also called Singhbhum-Orissa craton);
- (D) Chotanagpur Gneiss Complex;
- (E) Rajasthan (Bundelkhand) craton;
- (F) Meghalaya craton;



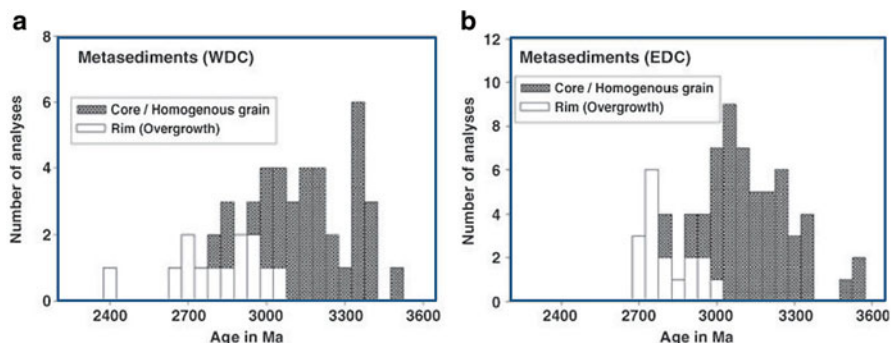
**Fig. 9.5** Outline map of the Indian shield showing the distribution of cratons, including Chotanagpur Granite Gneiss Complex, Rifts and Proterozoic fold belts. The fold belts are: 1 = Aravalli Mt. belt, 2 = Mahakoshal fold belt, 3 = Satpura fold belt, 4 = Singhbhum fold belt, 5 = Sakoli fold belt, 6 = Dongargarh fold belt, 7 = Eastern Ghats mobile belt, 8 = Pandyan mobile belt. Abbreviations: *Opx-in* orthopyroxene-in isograd, *AKS* Achankovil shear zone, *PC-SZ* Palghat Cauvery Shear Zone, *SGT* Southern Granulite Terrain, *SONA Zone* Son-Narmada lineament (From Sharma 2009; Springer, by permission)

The Dharwar Craton (Fig. 9.5), extending over almost 500,000 km<sup>2</sup> in southern India, consists of gneiss and granite-greenstone belts (Ramakrishna and Vaidyanadhan 2008; Sharma et al. 1994), grading into a granulite terrain in the south. The craton is delimited by the upper Cretaceous Deccan plateau basalts in the north, 2.6 Ga-old Karimnagar granulite in the northeast, and the Cuddapah Basin and Proterozoic Eastern Ghats mobile belt in the east (Fig. 9.5). The craton consists of north-north-west trending terrains, separated by the elongated Closepet Granite and by the Chitradurga shear zone (Naqvi and Rogers 1987) (Fig. 9.5). The western belts of the Dharwar Craton (WDC) consist of sediment-dominated supracrustals with lesser volcanic components and were metamorphosed under intermediate-pressure kyanite-sillimanite facies conditions, likely related to associated ~2.6–2.5 Ga granite intrusions. By contrast the eastern supracrustal belts (EDC) are metamorphosed under low-pressure andalusite-sillimanite facies rocks, including fuchsite quartzites, metapelites, andalusite-bearing, corundum-bearing or cordierite-hypersthene-sillimanite-bearing schists and gneisses, calc-silicate rocks and banded manganese-rich BIF. These observations are corroborated by geophysical surveys indicating a thick (40–45 km) nature of the crust underlying the intermediate-pressure WDC and a thinner (35–37 km) crust underlying the EDC (Singh et al. 2003).

The southern part of the WDC includes the 3.3–3.1 Ga greenstone belts of the Sargur Group, as well as younger 2.8–2.6 Ga greenstone belts of the Dharwar Supergroup, separated by angular unconformities. The greenschist to amphibolite facies supracrustal belts include basalts with clastic and chemical sedimentary intercalations. Locally basal conglomerate, cross-rippled quartzite and carbonate sediments occur, consistent with deposition of the Dharwar Supergroup on a gneiss basement (Sharma et al. 1994). The metamorphic grade of the supracrustal belts rises from north to south, reaching orthopyroxene granulite facies of rocks termed *charnockite* associated with orthopyroxene-bearing magmatic rocks termed *enderbite* (Pichamuthu 1960; Ravindra Kumar and Raghavan 1992; Ramiengar et al. 1978), with the metamorphic grade varying locally in relation to associated plutonic bodies. The variations in metamorphic grade along and across the supracrustal belts suggest an overall tilt of the shield eastward as well as northward (Mahadevan 2004). In many areas metamorphic foliation and metamorphic segregation are superposed on and oriented subparallel to original sedimentary layering.

The WDC has been subdivided into Bababudan Group and Chitradurga Group (Maibam et al. 2011). The former consists of a sequence of quartz pebble conglomerate, quartz arenite, basalt, rhyodacite and banded iron formation (BIF). Sm–Nd ages of mafic volcanic rocks indicate volcanic activity at 2.91–2.85 Ga (Anil Kumar et al. 1996) whereas SHRIMP U–Pb zircon ages of volcanic tuff interbedded with BIFs yield 2.72 Ga (Trendall et al. 1997). Chitradurga Group assemblages include quartz arenite, carbonate and banded manganese-rich BIF, overlain a basalt-dacite-rhyodacite-greywacke-iron formation sequence. The felsic volcanics were dated by SHRIMP U–Pb zircon as 2.61 Ga (Nutman et al. 1996; Trendall et al. 1997) while mafic volcanics were dated by Sm–Nd isochron age as 2.75 Ga-old (Anil Kumar et al. 1996).

Gneisses enveloping the supracrustal belts, broadly denoted as *Peninsular Gneiss*, include a widespread tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) suite dominated by



**Fig. 9.6** Histograms of age distributions of cores and rims of detrital zircons from the metamorphosed sedimentary rocks of Western Dharwar Craton (WDC) and Eastern Dharwar Craton (EDC) (Maibam et al. 2011; Springer, by permission): (a) Western Dharwar Craton (WDC); (b) Eastern Dharwar Craton (EDC)

3.56–3.4 Ga and ~3.0 Ga tonalitic gneisses which engulf ~3.2–3.0 Ga metamorphosed volcanic and sedimentary rocks denoted as *Sargur Group* (Meen et al. 1992). However, field relations do not always allow distinction between older xenoliths and younger tectonically interleaved supracrustals (Glikson 1979a, b, 1982). A compilation of principal characteristics of the EDC and WDC terrains is presented by Maibam et al. (2011).

Histograms of U-Pb age distribution of detrital zircons in the EDC and WDC supracrustal sediments are shown in Fig. 9.6 (Maibam et al. 2011). Zircons in metasediments, orthogneiss and paragneiss from both the WDC and the EDC yielded  $^{207}\text{Pb}$ – $^{206}\text{Pb}$  ages of 3.5–3.2 Ga whereas younger age imprints are represented by zircon overgrowth zones, representing evolution of both the EDC and WDC terrains between ~3.5 and 2.5 Ga, consistent with deformation patterns reported by Chadwick et al (2000). These authors drew parallels between the evolution of the Dharwar Craton and modern magmatic arcs, based on the presence of intermediate volcanic assemblages including boninites, andesites, adakites and dacites (Manikyamba et al. 2008). This involved reworking or remobilization of >3 Ga-old crust in the EDC consequent on large-scale arc magmatism. Large-scale K-rich granitic activity in the EDC resulted in higher heat flow in the EDC relative to the WDC. In this model the Chitradurga fault, which separates the EDC and WDC, is regarded as an oblique slip fault between foreland basin region and the magmatic arc region. Evidence for a short-lived nature of the Late Archaean magmatism in the Dharwar Craton is derived from U-Pb ages and Lu-Hf isotope signatures (Mohan et al. 2014). This includes voluminous ~2.56 Ga granitic magmatism in the Western Dharwar Craton as well as previously studied ~2.61 Ga and 2.54–2.52 Ga felsic igneous activity, consistent with several short-lived, episodic crustal growth events over a period of ~100 m.y.

### 9.3 Accretion of Superior Province Terrains

Goodwin (1968, 1981) proposed an analogy between the progressive accretion of greenstone-granite belts across the Superior Province and circum-Pacific arc-trench accretionary systems, a concept supported by subsequent studies (Langford and Morin 1976; Card 1990; Williams et al. 1992; Stott 1997), leading to models of complex aggregation and accretion of SIAL cratons. Percival et al. (2004, 2006) observe early micro-continent and arc-continent collisions, including the micro-continental terrains of the Northern Superior Province, Hudson Bay and Minnesota River Valley assembled about  $\sim 2.72\text{--}2.68$  Ga. Early  $\sim 3.8$  Ga rocks occur in the north-western Superior Province (Skulski et al. 2000) and the Hudson Bay terrain in the northeast. By contrast latitudinal-elongated terrains to the south are mostly of mid to late Archaean age, an example being the extensive  $\sim 3.0$  Ga North Caribou terrain in the south Superior Province (Stott and Corfu 1991; Stott 1997). Early to mid-Archaean  $\sim 3.6\text{--}3.0$  Ga cratonic fragments include the Minnesota River Valley terrain (Goldich and Hedge 1974), Winnipeg River and Marmion terrains. The older cratonic terrains are separated by elongated volcanic belts containing isotopic and trace element evidence for derivation from juvenile mantle sources and a paucity of cratonic clastic sediments, by analogy to Phanerozoic oceanic, arc-trench magmatic subduction domains (Thurston 1994; Kerrich et al. 1999; Percival 2007). Examples include the Oxford–Stull, La Grande, western Wabigoon and Wawa–Abitibi terrains of the southern Superior Province. Extensive latitudinal Late Archaean Large sedimentary belts including greywacke turbidites, migmatite and derived granite, including the English River, Quetico and Pontiac belts, are viewed syn-orogenic flysch to post-tectonic molasses-like wedges representing collisional progenies (Williams et al. 1992; Davies 2002). Seismic studies indicate a northward subduction polarity (White et al. 2003).

The accretion and amalgamation of Archaean micro-continental cratons and juvenile greenstone belts culminated with the locking of the mid to Late Archaean supracrustal and cratonic belts between the  $\sim 3.8$  and 2.9 Ga Hudson and Northern Superior terrains in the north and the  $\sim 3.5\text{--}2.8$  Ga Minnesota River valley craton in the south. Airborne and magnetic data define a boundary between the  $\sim 2.76$  and 2.7 Ga Wawa granite-greenstone terrain and the  $\sim 3.5\text{--}2.8$  Ga Minnesota River gneisses, referred to as the Great Lakes Tectonic Zone (Morey and Sims 1976). The mid-Archaean gneisses represent tectonically interleaved metamorphosed plutonic and supracrustal rocks of a range of ages (Bickford et al. 2006) including significant tectono-thermal events at  $\sim 3.5$  Ga and 3.38 Ga and synkinematic and post-kinematic thermal events at  $\sim 2.6$  Ga. The Superior Province greenstone-granite terrain thus likely represents an Archaean analogue of Phanerozoic plate tectonic-related transformation and accretion of SIMA to SIAL crust.

## 9.4 Archaean Fennoscandian/Baltic Terrains

Supracrustal suites of the Archaean of the Fennoscandian (Baltic) Shield are comprised of a number of age components, including <3.2 Ga, 3.1–2.9 Ga, 2.90–2.82 Ga, 2.82–2.75 Ga and 2.75–2.65 Ga, including granitoid complexes, ophiolites and eclogite-bearing associations (Slabunov et al. 2006). The main part of the shield with ages in excess of 3.0 Ga consist of the Karelia granite-greenstone province. Whereas detrital zircon grains of early Archaean age are present, the bulk of the Fennoscandian Shield consist of 3.2–3.1 Ga rocks, signifying the emergence of the first micro-continents such as Vodlozero and Iisalmi, which reached a peak about 2.90–2.65 Ga ago. Most authors advocate analogies with Phanerozoic ensialic and ensimatic subduction-related systems, including collisional, spreading-related, continental rifting, and the setting related to mantle plumes (Slabunov et al. 2006). East of the Fennoscandian Shield a continuous transition occurs to Proterozoic system of paleo-rift structures of the East European platform. Rifting and break-up of the shield during 2.5–2.0 Ga dispersed the Archaean domain (Gorbatshev and Bogdanova 1993). In the northern part of the shield basins underwent collisional orogeny during the Svecofennian orogeny 1.95–1.82 Ga-ago, expanding the continental crust. In the west the Svecofennian Orogen is truncated by the ~1.8–1.65 Ga ensialic Trans-Scandinavian igneous belt. Final stages of SIAL formation occurred in western Scandinavia between ~1.75 and 1.55 Ga, including formation of anatectic en-sialic granitoids. This was followed by major en-sialic reworking during the Sveco-Norwegian-Grenvillian and Caledonian orogenies ~1.2–0.9 and 0.5–0.4 Ga ago, respectively.

## Chapter 10

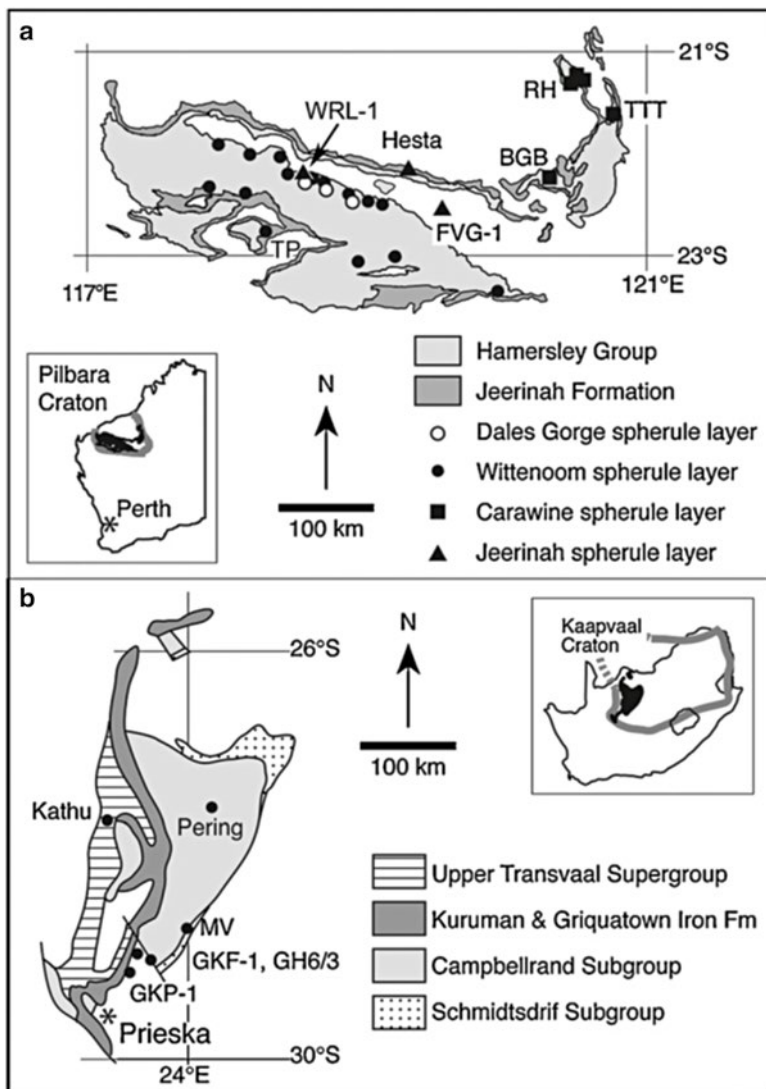
# Post-3.2 Ga Basins and Asteroid Impact Units

**Abstract** The sedimentary records of pristine little-deformed upper to late Archaean basins, including the Fortescue Basin, Hamersley Basin and West Transvaal basin, contain a number of major asteroid impact ejecta/fallout units spanning ~2.63–2.48 Ga. Detailed field and laboratory studies by Bruce Simonson, Scott Hassler and others uncovered a wealth of detailed evidence for the nature of the impacts and related mega-tsunamis. Follow-up platinum group element (PGE) analyses help to resolve the composition and size of the projectiles. The location of the original impact sites from which the ejecta was derived remains unknown. Stratigraphic and isotopic age studies define a number of inter-continental correlations between impact ejecta horizons in the Hamersley and Transvaal basins. These impact events bear implications for the origin of contemporaneous late Archaean greenstone-granite systems. Possible relations between large impacts and enrichment of the sea water in iron are subject to current studies, with potential implications for the origin of banded iron formations.

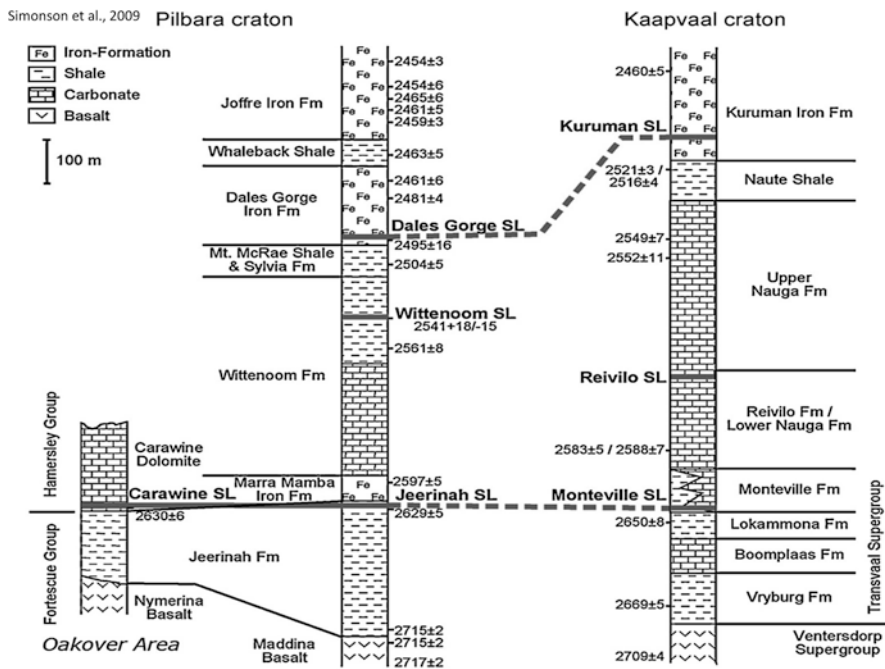
**Keywords** Upper Archaean • Fortescue Group • Hamersley Group • Transvaal Basin • Asteroid impacts • Microkrystite spherules • Tsunami breccia

### 10.1 Late Archaean Griqualand West Basin

The Griqualand West Basin of South Africa (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2) displays a wealth of primary sedimentological, palaeo-biological and asteroid impact fallout features (Button 1976; Cheney 1996; Beukes and Gutzmer 2008; Simonson et al. 2009a, b). The Monteville Formation ( $2,650 \pm 8$  Ma), consisting largely of carbonates and shale, includes an impact spherule layer (Simonson et al. 1999). Overlying carbonates of the Reivilo Formation host a younger spherule layer and a third spherule layer occurs in a core of the Kuruman Banded Iron Formation (Simonson et al. 2009a, b).



**Fig. 10.1** (a) Hamersley Basin map showing areas of occurrence of Hamersley Group and Jeerinah Formation (*uppermost Fortescue Group*) and most locations where spherule layers have been studied; labeled locations are Billy Goat Bore core drill site (*BGB*), two CRA core drill sites (*FVG-1* and *WRL-1*), Hesta exposure, Ripon Hills exposures (*RH*), Tarra Tarra turnoff exposure (*TTT*), and Tom Price (*TP*). See Hassler et al. (2005) and references therein for more details; (b) Griqualand West Basin map showing areas of occurrence of units in the Transvaal succession labeled are Agouron core drill sites (*GKF-1* and *GKP-1*), an exploration core drill site nearby (*GH6/3*), Kathu core drill site, Monteville exposures (*MV*), and Pering mine (From Simonson et al. 2009a, b; Elsevier, by permission)



**Fig. 10.2** Schematic columns of the parts of the Hamersley and Griqualand West successions on the Pilbara and Kaapvaal cratons, respectively, showing known impact spherule layers and proposed correlations. The middle column represents the stratigraphy throughout the main Hamersley Basin, whereas the short column on the left represents the erosional truncated succession typical of the Oakover River area in the northeast, e.g., the Ripon Hills area. Numbers on the side of each column list age constraints in millions of years. Dashed lines indicate layers thought to have been produced by the same impact (Simonson et al. 2009; Elsevier, by permission)

**2,650 ± 8 Ma.** Monteville Spherule Layer (MSL). Simonson et al. (2000a, b) reported a later Archaean microkrystite layer approximately ~8 cm-thick from the sedimentary tuff, carbonate and shale-dominated Monteville Formation, present in ten cores distributed throughout an area of ~17,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The MSL spherules are dominated by partly carbonate-altered K-feldspar typical of microkrystite spherules (Smit and Klaver 1982) and compositions, textures, and sedimentary structures typical of impact fallout units, including high Ni, Co and PGE, chondrite-like distribution patterns of the PGE and Ni/Ir, with Ir levels up to 6.4 ppb, as compared to mean crustal levels of ~0.02 ppb and chondritic levels of ~500 ppb. The Monteville spherule layer is likely correlated with the ~2.63 Ga Jeerinah Impact Layer of the Fortescue Basin, Pilbara Craton, Western Australia (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2).

**2,581.9 Ma.** The Reivilo spherule layer (RSL), first identified in the Kathu core and three other cores of the Griqualand West Basin (Simonson et al. 1999), consists of



shallow sub-tidal carbonate (Sumner and Beukes 2006; Simonson et al. 2009a, b) containing spherule units up to about 2–9 cm-thick and lenses hosted by deep water sediments. Spherules consist of mm-scale microkrytite spheres composed largely of K-feldspar, sericite, pyrite and carbonate (Simonson and Carney 1999). Spherule textures are in the main comparable to those of the K–T boundary layer (Izett 1990; Bohor and Glass 1995). Some spherules are tear-drop shaped suggestive of aerodynamic effects. Internal textural features of the spherules include pseudomorphs of 5–50  $\mu\text{m}$  laths, K-feldspar crystallites  $\sim$ 5–700  $\mu\text{m}$ -long, deformed crystallites, radiating fans, inward radiating fans branching from outer spherule rims, and 0.06–1 mm large central spots filled with carbonate, K-feldspar or sericite and representing original melt cavities. Simonson et al. (1999) regard the K-feldspar as authigenic. Spherules are commonly compacted although internal textures are mostly preserved intact, suggesting hard-shell protection upon deposition, perhaps somewhat analogous to the much larger-scale pillow lavas. Broken spherules are present. Spherule layers may be overlain by rip-up clasts zones up to 20 cm thick, suggestive of tsunami effects. Host carbonate sediments of the RSL may include small stromatolites, indicating shallow water environment. The Reivilo spherule layer may correlate with the  $\sim$ 2.56 Ga Spherule Marker Bed in the Bee Gorge member of the Wittenoom Formation (Simonson 1992; Glikson 2004a, b; Glikson and Vickers 2007) or with the  $\sim$ 2.57 Ga Paraburdoo spherule Layer, Hamersley Basin, Pilbara Craton, Western Australia (Hassler et al. 2011). Laser-ICPMS study of Reivilo spherules has detected Ni-Fe particles and Ni values of 3,931 ppm (Goderis et al., 2013).

**<2,521  $\pm$  3 Ma.** The Kuruman spherule layer (KSL), identified in the Agouron drill core (Simonson et al. 2009a, b) where it is located approximately  $\sim$ 37 m above the base of the Kuruman Iron Formation, constitutes a  $<$ 98 cm-thick layer of graded coarse-grained spherules consisting mainly of stilpnomelane and carbonate. The spherules occur mostly at the base of the layer and are overlain by compacted rip-up clasts of carbonate, chert, and/or stilpnomelane. Spherules are commonly rimmed by K-feldspar, which also occur as inward radiating fans and internal crystallites. Internal zones of stilpnomelane contain skeletal pseudomorphs after unidentified original phases. Rip-up clasts are about 3–5 mm long and 1 mm thick and some significantly larger. A possible upper 6 mm-thick layer of spherules dominated by stilpnomelane but devoid of K-feldspar, and thus compositionally distinct from the RSL, occurs at the top of the Kuruman Iron Formation in the GKF-1 drill core (Simonson et al. 2009a, b). The layer, containing rip-up clasts of stilpnomelane and carbonate up to 7 mm or more large, is overlain by an anomalous 17 mm layer of carbonate and sericite.

Siderophile trace element patterns of spherules from the Griqualand West Basin are consistent with the presence of a meteoritic component, including high total PGE levels and low Pd/Ir ratios (Table 10.1). The low Pd/Ir levels relative to terrestrial basalts can only be produced by primary chondritic Pd/Ir ratios of  $\sim$ 1.2 to which Pd – a mobile element in the terrestrial environment has been added during diagenetic processes. The only alternative, strong fractionation of the PGE represented by low Pd/Ir of harzburgites residues (Chou 1978), is unlikely to apply to the spherule beds.

**Table 10.1** Siderophile and PGE trace element comparisons between the mean composition of spherule units from the Griqualand West Basin

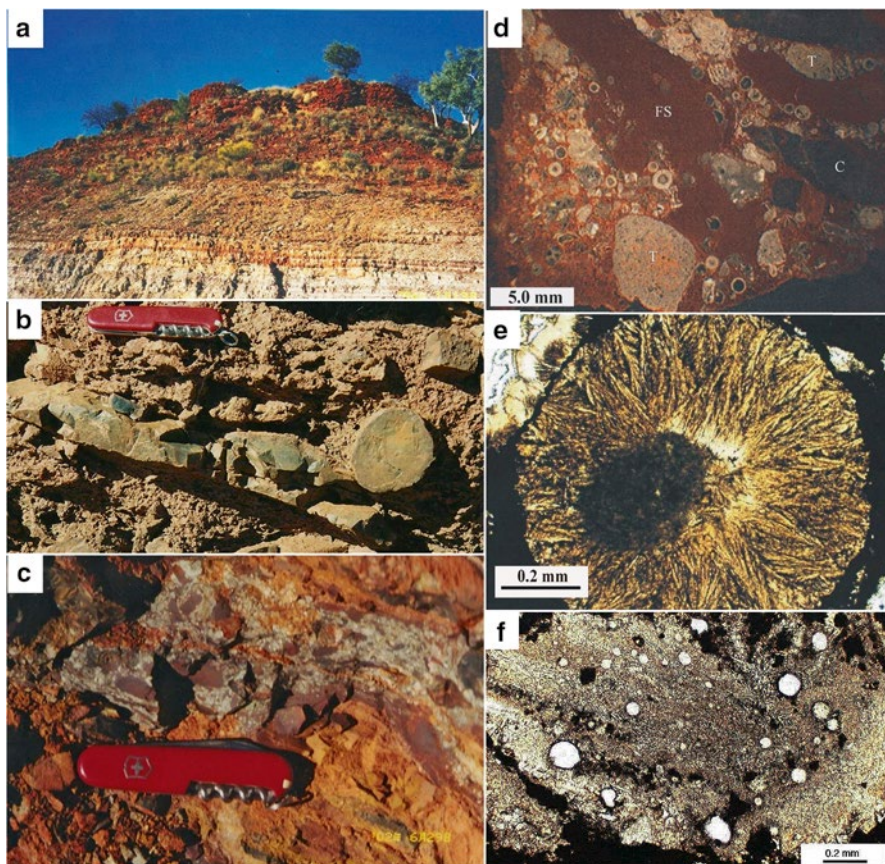
Monteville	Ni ppm	Cr ppm	Ni/Cr	Ir ppb	Pd ppb	Pd/Ir	Ref
Spherule bed							
P9-1A	65	418	0.15	4.8			1
P11-1A	15	385	0.038	2.5			1
P11-1B	68	264	0.25	6.4			1
P11-1B1	167	180	0.93	5.6			1
P11-2B	16	11.9	1.3	0.15			1
TK-1A	39.8	340	0.12	2.57	7.46	2.9	1
U98-1B	54.3	67	0.81	0.62	1.38	2.2	1
U126-1	27.2	39	0.69	0.28	0.67	2.4	1
V-1	35.7	293	0.12	4.92	6.85	1.4	1
Reivilo spherule bed							
Ku32sl	3,931	830	4.73	176	59.4	0.34	
A – C1	10,500	2650	4	455	550	1.2	
B – pyrolite	1,960	2625	0.75	3.2	3.9	1.2	
C – mean ultramafic	2,000			2.4	8.2	3.4	
D – komatiite	1,530			1.0	8.4	8.4	
E – MORB	200			0.05	0.6	12	
F – Archaean tholeiite	<150	<100	~1.5				
G – Archaean -high-Mg	198	749	0.26	0.49	18.2	37	

Simonson et al. (2009a, b) [Ref 1], C1-chondrites (A – Chou 1978); mantle pyrolite (B – McDonough and Sun 1995); mean ultramafic (C – Chou 1978); komatiite (D – Chou 1978); mid-ocean ridge basalt (E – Chou 1978); average Archaean tholeiite (F – BVSP 1981); high-Mg basalt (G – Glikson and Hickman 1981 – mean of 20 high-Mg basalts of the Apex Basalt)

## 10.2 Late Archaean Fortescue and Hamersley Basins Impact Units

### 10.2.1 ~2.63 Ga Jeerinah Impact Layer and the Roy Hill and Carawine Dolomite Impact/Tsunami Megabreccia

Simonson et al. (2000a, b) reported a thin ~6 mm layer of microkrystite spherules from the top of a black shale sequence of the Jeerinah Formation in the core of drill hole FVG-1 at Ilbiana Well, Fortescue River valley. The layer, denoted as Jeerinah Impact Layer (JIL), occurs 2.7 m below the top of the Jeerinah Formation ( $2,684 \pm 6$  Ma– $2,629 \pm 5$  Ma) (Arndt et al. 1991; Nelson 1999) underlying the Marra Mamba Iron Formation ( $2,597 \pm 5$  Ma). An exposure of the top-Jeerinah Formation impact spherule unit was located by B.M. Simonson at Hesta siding about 50 km northwest of Ilbiana Well (Simonson et al. 2001) (Figs. 10.1 to 10.8). This locality exposes the full transition from laminated argillite to argillite-chert sequence (~5 m) to a ~1 m thick unit consisting of (1) a lower zone of microkrystite spherules-bearing breccia with siltstone and chert intraclasts (~40 cm); (2) a massive zone of spherules with fewer argillite and chert intraclasts (~60 cm), and (3) overlying



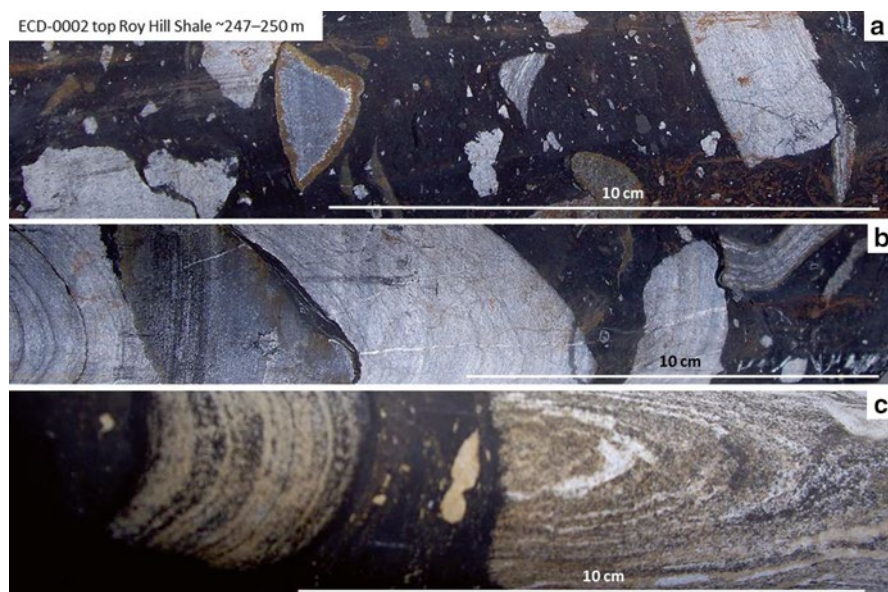
**Fig. 10.3** ~2.63 Ga Jeerinah Impact Layer (*JIL*) outcrop at Hesta: (a) Exposure of section from the Jeerinah Formation siltstones (*JS*) to siltstone-chert (*SC*) to laterite top (*L*). The *JIL* is located below the laterite cap; (b) Boulder bed representing a tsunami overlying the *JIL*; (c) Basal spherule-bearing siltstone breccia of the *JIL*; (d) Spherule-bearing siltstone breccia containing tektites (*T*); (e) Microkrystite spherule consisting of inward-radiating K-feldspar microlites and an offset vesicle; (f) Vesicle-bearing microtektite fragment

microkrystite spherules-poor breccia dominated by angular to rounded chert cobbles and boulders reaching 50 cm in size. The impact fallout unit is capped by a ~60 cm-thick argillite, in turn overlain by a boulder deposit likely representing tsunami effects (Figs. 10.5 and 10.6).

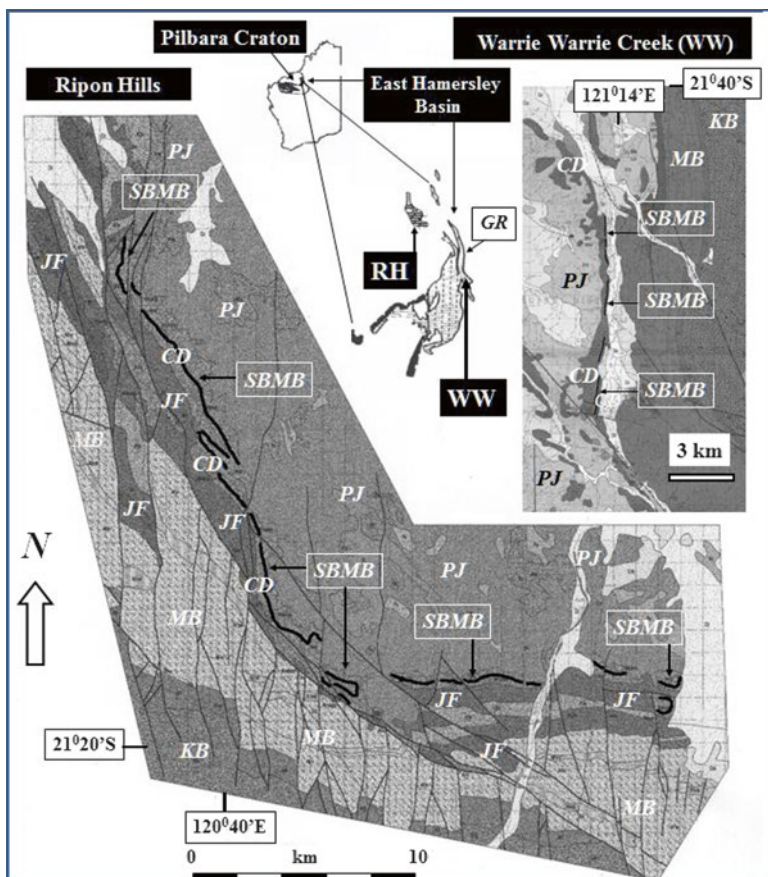
The basal conglomerate of the *JIL* unit consists of a poorly sorted assemblage of rip-up fragments of chert and siltstone set in a matrix of siltstone rich in microkrystite spherules and microtektites. The fragments are of similar composition to the underlying chert-argillite sequence of the Jeerinah Formation. The overlying spherule beds display high concentration of microkrystite spherules and lesser proportion of microtektites set in an argillite matrix. Microkrystite spherules display inward radiating fibrous K-feldspars and centrally offset vesicles and have a size range



**Fig. 10.4** ~2.63 Ga Jeerinah Impact Layer (*JIL*). A specimen of microkrystite spherules containing fragments of ferruginous siltstone. Hesta locality, central Pilbara Craton (Courtesy Bruce Simonson)

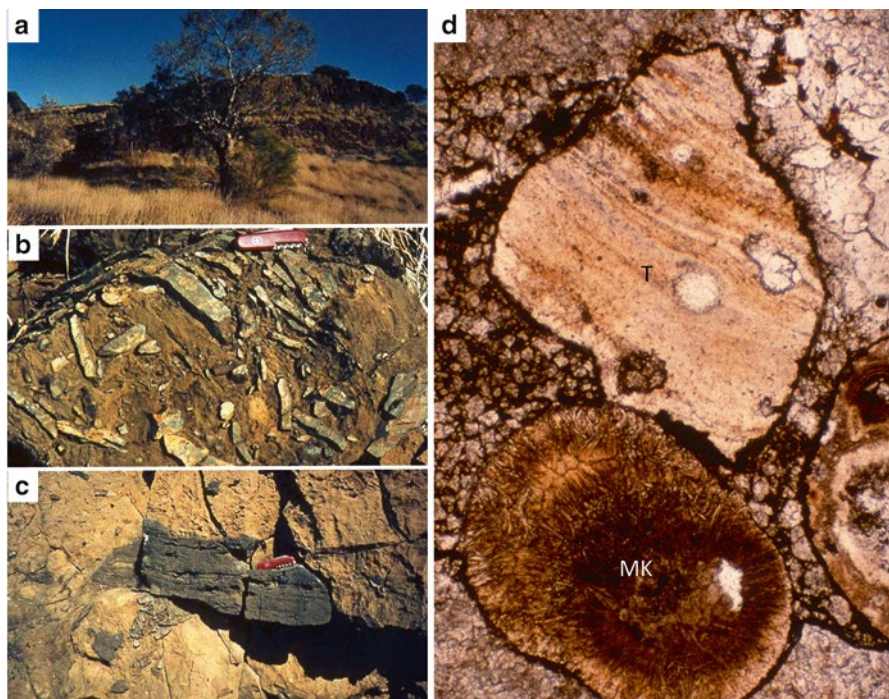


**Fig. 10.5** ~2.63 Ga Roy Hill breccia: Chert, carbonate and sulphide fragments and boulders within carbonate-spotted black carbonaceous shale within the tsunami deposit incorporating the Jeerinah Impact layer (*JIL*) in the ECD-0002 drill core, underlying the Roy Hill Member of the Marra Mamba Iron Formation. Note the sulphide rims and blebs in frames A and C



**Fig. 10.6** A geological sketch map of the Eastern Hamersley Basin, indicating the distribution of the Carawine Dolomite Megabreccia (CDMB). *KB* Kylena Basalt, *MB* Maddina Basalt, *JF* Jeerinah Formation 2.629 Ga, *PJ* Pinjian Chert (silicified breccia), *GR* Gregory Range, *WW* Warrie Warrie Creek belt, *RH* Ripon Hills. The CDMB unit is shown as a thick black line (Modified after Williams (2003). From Glikson 2004a, b; Astrobiology, by permission)

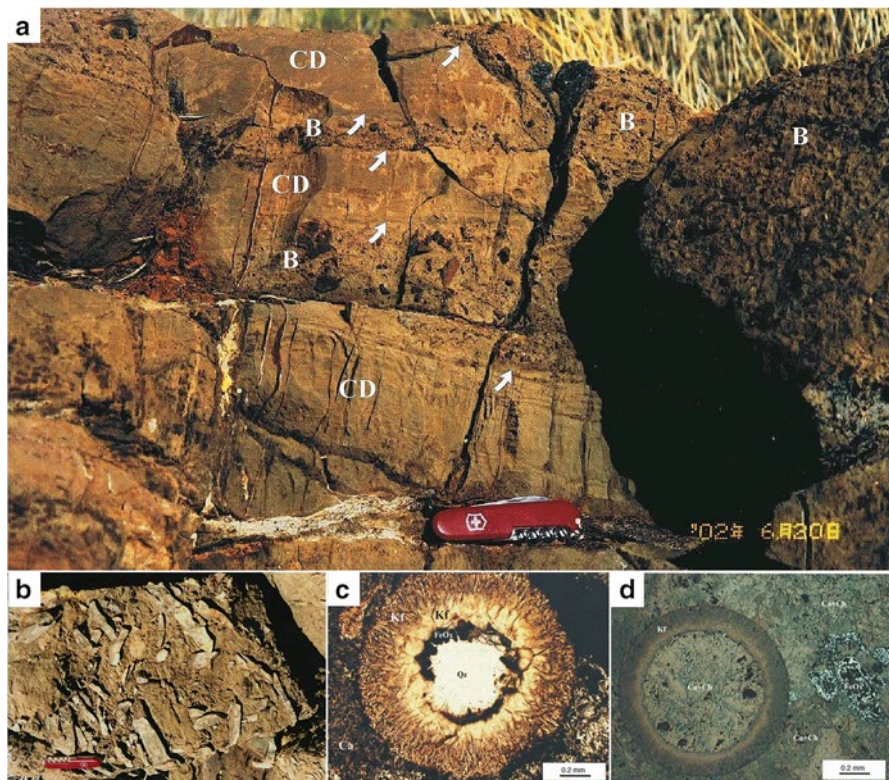
of 0.3–1.2 mm (Figs. 10.3 and 10.4). Composite grains with small microkrystite spherules enveloped by larger spherules and agglutinated spherules are present. Irregular-shaped fragments consist of feldspar microlites in microcrystalline matrix, showing some flow banding and quartz-filled vesicles, but little or no radial crystal textures. Both types of particles consist mainly of K-feldspar, hydrated iron oxide, sericite, quartz and carbonate. The irregular particles can be compared with Muong Nong type microtektites such as described from tsunami-disrupted carbonate-chert unit located at the contemporaneous Carawine Dolomite (Simonson et al. 2000a, b, 2001; Glikson 2004a, b). Most microtektites, which can reach 2–4 mm in size, are of irregular shape and contain abundant quartz-filled micro-vesicles/bubbles on a scale of <100 μm set in clouded microcrystalline matrix interpreted as meta-glass from its palimpsest flow banding.



**Fig. 10.7** Carawine megabreccia (CDMB) (a) outcrops of CDMB at Rippon Hills, Oakover Valley, eastern Pilbara; (b) Tsunami breccia – fragments of chert in carbonate matrix; (c) fragment of black chert in carbonate matrix; (d) Microtektite (*T*) fragment and composite microkrystite spherule (*MK*) within matrix of breccia (d – Courtesy Bruce Simonson)

Laser ICPMS analyses of JIL microkrystites indicate Ni levels are similar to those of basaltic compositions, Ni/Co ratios are somewhat higher than those of basaltic compositions. Pd/Ir ratios in JIL and CDMB spherules are distinctly low (~0.8–2.1) as compared with those of basalts and komatiites (~3.4–12) and similar relations hold for Pt/Ir (Table 10.2), consistent with earlier observations regarding depletion of volatile PGE relative to refractory PGE in microkrystite spherules during condensation (Glikson and Allen 2004; Glikson 2007).

The occurrence of <5.0 mm-large microtektites and fragments of meta-glass in the JIL may militate for a relative proximity of the originating impact crater, namely in the order of no more than a couple of thousand kilometer from the impact fallout location. Alternatively, the incorporation of large melt fragments suggests the impact was of a magnitude resulting in global fallout of ejecta. The large sizes of some of the spherules, reaching above 1 mm at the basal spherule-intraclast unit, may correlate with impacts by asteroids on the scale of 10–20 km following the criteria of O’Keefe and Ahrens (1982) and Melosh and Vickery (1991). Impacts by asteroids on this scale would result in impact craters with diameters in the order of 150–300 km. The prevalence of chlorite in spherule interiors and the lack of shocked



**Fig. 10.8** Carawine Megabreccia (CDMB): (a) conformable breccia (labelled B) intercalated between horizontal slabs of Carawine Dolomite (CD) and vein breccia (arrows) injected across layering; (b) fragments of chert within dolomite; (c) microkrystite spherule overlying the CDMB, displaying inward-radiating K-feldspar surrounding a core of quartz and Fe-oxide; (d) spherule consisting of chlorite shell enveloping carbonate-chlorite core

quartz grains with planar deformation features are suggestive of a basaltic/oceanic composition of the target crust, by analogy to earlier observations pertaining to microkrystites of the Wittenoom Formation and the Carawine Dolomite.

The development of JIL at Hesta is interpreted in terms of the following stages:

- (A) Impact-triggered seismic perturbations represented by rip-up clasts forming intraclast breccia concomitant with settling of microkrystite spherules, microtektites and microtektite fragments.
- (B) Continuing deposition of microkrystite spherules, microtektites and meta-glass fragments associated with minor rip-up clasts.
- (C) Deposition of tsunami wave-transported cobbles and boulders of chert.
- (D) Return to below-wave base deposition of argillite.

Rasmussen and Koeberl (2004) report an Ir concentration of 15.5 ppb in JIL spherules and an angular quartz grain containing planar deformation features (PDF),

**Table 10.2** Siderophile element abundances of spherule-bearing sediments from the JIL and CDMB units

	Ni ppm	Co ppm	Cr ppm	Ni/Co	Ni/Cr	Ir ppb	Pt ppb	Pd ppb	Pd/Ir	Pt/Ir	Pd/Pt	Ref
CDMB	62	43	22	1.44	2.82	0.596	5.82	1.24	2.1	9.8	0.21	1
Av of 5 samples												
W94-1A	176	19.2	251	9.2	0.7	5.18	10.1	7.94	1.5	1.9	0.78	2
W94-1 N	194	17.7	327	11	0.59	11.8	22.1	9.12	0.8	1.9	0.41	2
W94-1O	139	16.7	318	8.3	0.44	8.77	18.8	9.98	1.1	2.1	0.55	2
W102-1A	203	34.1	293	6	0.69	9.11	18.4	11.6	1.3	2.0	0.63	2
A – C1	10,500	500	2650	21	4	455	1010	550	1.2	2.2	0.54	
B – pyrolite	1,960	105	2625	18.5	0.75	3.2	7.1	3.9	1.2	2.2	0.55	
C – mean ultramafic	2,000	110		18.2		2.4	10	8.2	3.4	4.2	0.82	
D – komatiite	1,530	104		14.7		1.0	9.3	8.4	8.4	9.3	0.9	
E – MORB	200	41		4.9		0.05	2.3	0.6	12	46	0.26	
F – Archaean tholeiite	<150	60-80	<100	1.8-2.5	~1.5							
G – Archaean -high-Mg	198	49	749	4	0.26	0.49		18.2	37			

Data from Simonson et al. (1998) [Ref 1] and Simonson et al. (2009a, b) [Ref 2]) compared to CI-chondrites (A – Chou 1978); mantle pyrolite (B – McDonough and Sun 1995); mean ultramafic (C – Chou 1978); komatiite (D – Chou 1978); mid-ocean ridge basalt (E – Chou 1978); average Archaean tholeiite (F – BVSP, 1981); high-Mg basalt (G – Glikson and Hickman 1981 – mean of 20 high-Mg basalts of the Apex Basalt)

indicating the impact affected quartz-bearing rocks. Geochemical estimates by these authors suggest the spherule layer comprises about 2–3 wt % chondritic meteorite component.

A unit of impact spherules correlated with the ~2.63 Ga Jeerinah Impact layer (JIL) is observed within a more than 100 m-thick fragmental-intraclast breccia pile in drill cores near Roy Hill, Eastern Hamersley Basin (Hurst et al. 2013) (Fig. 10.5). The sequence represents significant thickening of the impact/tsunami unit relative to the JIL type section at Hesta, central Pilbara, as well as relative to the 20–30 m-thick ~2.63 Ga Carawine Dolomite spherule bearing mega-breccia (CDMB), Oakover River to the East. The location of the JIL and associated breccia under supergene iron ore within the Marra mamba Iron Formation at Roy Hill renders the impact products of economic interest.

A stratigraphically consistent microtektite and microkrystite spherule-rich chert-carbonate megabreccia unit (CDMB), identified in the Oakover Valley, Eastern Pilbara, at Ripon Hills (Simonson 1992) and Woodie Woodie (Hassler et al. 2000), extends over a strike distance of 98 km (Figs. 10.6 to 10.8). The megabreccia unit is located within the lower basinal facies of the Carawine Dolomite, about 30–100 m above the basal contact with the underlying siltstones of the Jeerinah Formation. The megabreccia consists of chaotic unsorted and randomly



oriented chert and dolomite clasts and mega-clasts on scales ranging up to several meters and derived from an autochthonous to sub-autochthonous lithologically distinct chert-dolomite unit. Chert bedding segments may occur at high angles to the overall boundary of the CDMB or may show a crude subparallel imbrication (Fig. 10.8). Ductile deformation of bed segments is observed on a range of scales, for example in layered chert-carbonate blocks, within individual boulders and as small folded concretions.

Type outcrops of the CDMB display multiple veins of breccia and microbreccia injected across and along bedding planes of carbonates underlying the megabreccia (Figs. 10.7 and 10.8). Significantly the veins contain microkrystites and microtektites whose preservation despite expected corrosion through friction is interpreted in terms of tsunami-induced hydraulic pressures, minimizing mechanical grinding effects. Microtektite and microkrystite concentrations vary across the breccia and are generally concentrated toward the top, where the breccia is conformably overlain in sharp contact by well layered carbonate.

Salient features relevant to the origin of the CDMB include the following:

1. The CDMB megabreccia represents mega-tsunami effects associated with an extraterrestrial impact event, evidenced by the occurrence of microkrystite spherules and microtektites.
2. The CDMB megabreccia forms a stratigraphically unique time/event marker horizon, allowing the identification of lateral and vertical facies and thickness controls in the Carawine Dolomite.
3. The dominantly irregular structure, unsorted fragments and near-random orientation of blocks and fragments within the CDMB militates for autochthonous to near-autochthonous derivation of the fragments.
4. The absence of stromatolite-facies fragments within the megabreccia is consistent with an autochthonous nature of the brecciation.
5. The size of blocks, observed up to <7 m, and the common excavation of the base of the CDMB provide evidence for high-energy disruption of the sea bed.
6. The location of the CDMB in below-wave-base carbonate-siltstone units suggests the disruption originated by waves of larger amplitude than those resulting from wind-driven or gravity driven currents.
7. Any model regarding the origin of the CDMB must take into account the constraints imposed by the near-perfect preservation of microkrystite spherules within the megabreccia, including injected microbreccia veins and tongues.

Two models for the origin of the CDMB are discussed, including (a) impact-triggered seismic faulting and (b) mega-tsunami effects:

#### **Model A – Impact-triggered seismic faulting**

Submarine faulting associated with major seismic disturbances is, in principle, capable of producing block structures and escarpments shedding large blocks and fragments, which can then be transported by gravity currents and/or tsunami downslope. Such features have been described in the vicinity of the Chicxulub

impact structure at Belize, Mexico (Pope et al. 1997). Sharp variations in the thickness of the CDMB where megabreccia sections about 12 m thick are juxtaposed with megabreccia sections about 4 m-thick, support a faulting model. However, the results of such faulting can be expected to be heterogeneous, as contrasted with the extension of the CDMB with broadly similar thickness (4–25 m) over large areas (Fig. 10.6). Had faulting been a significant factor, boulders and fragments derived from fault scarps and transported downslope as debris flow would be partly rounded, which is not the case. In most observed outcrops angular blocks and large detached bedding segments of the megabreccia rest either conformably on, or are torn from, the underlying excavated carbonates, with little or no extension of faults into the substratum. Mechanical grinding of breccia fragment can be expected to have resulted in partial to total destruction of the microtektite spherules. Thus whereas locally faulting constituted a factor, on the whole the main features of the CDMB are not consistent with those of a fault-derived breccia.

**Model B** – Impact-triggered mega-tsunami autochthonous to sub-autochthonous breccia

Simonson (1992), Simonson and Hassler (1997), Hassler et al. (2000) and Hassler and Simonson (2001) proposed a tsunami origin for the Carawine Dolomite mega-breccia and for the Spherule Marker Bed (SMB). In terms of this model, propagation of a major tsunami wave/s occurred from NE to SW, consequent on an impact by a ~5 km-diameter projectile producing a ~60 km-diameter crater located east and north of area occupied at present by the Pilbara Block. The chaotic sub-autochthonous to autochthonous nature of the CDMB is amenable for interpretation in terms of disruption of the sea bed by a high-amplitude tsunami wave. An autochthonous origin, which accounts for the scarcity of round boulders, cobbles or pebbles, is consistent with the observed excavation of the sea floor, and accounts for the preservation of microkrystite spherules due to extreme hydraulic pressure imparted by the tsunami wave, exceeding lithostatic pressure and keeping breccia fragments and spherules separate within a fluid medium, thus preventing corrosion of spherules. The following sequence of events is envisaged in terms of a tsunami model:

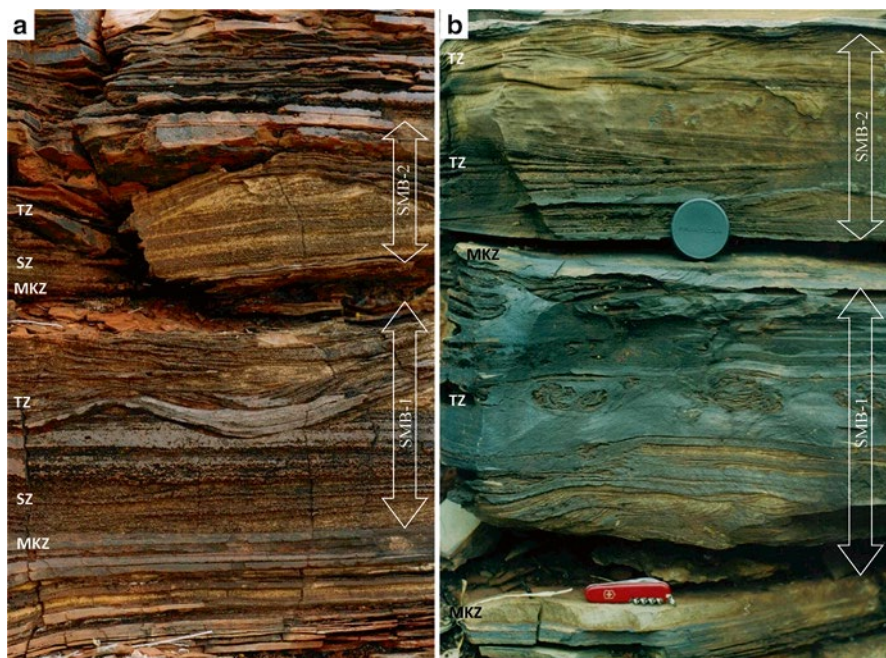
1. Arrival of the tsunami with consequent dispersal of the soft sediment column as a mud cloud in the submarine environment. Deformation of ductile sediments is evidenced by occurrence of ductile deformed/folded layers and fragments.
2. Excavation, fracturing and chaotic disruption of the solid substratum below the soft sedimentary column;
3. Settling of condensed microkrystite spherules and microtektite glass fragments from the impact-released cloud, forming a spherule layer
4. Continuing seismic-triggered tsunami waves and injection of parts of the subaqueous mud cloud as viscous fluid under the pressure of the tsunami, resulting in preservation of the microkrystite spherules in veins
5. Settling of the bulk of the mud cloud above the megabreccia.

### ***10.2.2 ~2.57 Ga Paraburdoo Impact Spherule Unit (PSL)***

The Paraburdoo Member of the Wittenoom Formation, which consists of thin-bedded dolomite deposited in a deep shelf off-platform environment (Simonson et al. 1993), contains a <2 cm-thick spherule layer (Paraburdoo Spherule Layer – PSL) located ~55 m below the top of the member and ~86 m below a marker tuff horizon dated as 2,561 ± 8 Ma (Hassler et al. 2011). A second tuff horizon located hundreds of meters below the PSL has been dated at 2,597 ± 5 Ma (Trendall et al. 1998). Based on an estimate of sedimentation rates an approximate age of 2.57 Ga is suggested for the PSL (Hassler et al. 2011). The contacts with underlying and overlying dolomite are sharp and carbonates above and below the PSL are of similar composition and layering styles. The PSL consist entirely of tight packed spherules accompanied with ~4 % intergranular carbonate cement and no extra-basinal detritus was observed. The spherules are internally recrystallized. K-feldspar crystallites form ~60–90 % and are either randomly oriented or form branching clusters and skeletal textures (Fig. 10.11). About two thirds of the spherules contain phlogopite-type skeletal crystals and pseudomorphs (Hassler et al. 2011). These authors interpret the K-feldspar crystallites as alteration products of quench crystallized plagioclase crystallites, by comparison to K-feldspar replacement of plagioclase in mafic Hamersley tuffs (Hassler 1993). Phlogopite pseudomorphs are possibly derived by alteration of quench crystallized olivine and pyroxene crystallites. Absence of current reworking in the PSL suggests below-wave deposition. Hassler et al. (2011) correlate the PSL with the Reivilo Spherule Layer (RSL), Transvaal Basin (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2), with which it shares textural and mineralogical characteristics, including phlogopite crystallites, not seen in other spherule layers. However, the RSL includes rip-up clasts and has likely formed in shallower water environment. Laser-ICPMS analyses of Paraburdoo spherules determined Ni levels of up to 404 ppm, Ir levels of up to 357 ppb and low Pd/Ir ratios in the range of 0.1–0.67 (Goderis et al. 2013).

### ***10.2.3 ~2.56 Ga Spherule Marker Bed (SMB)***

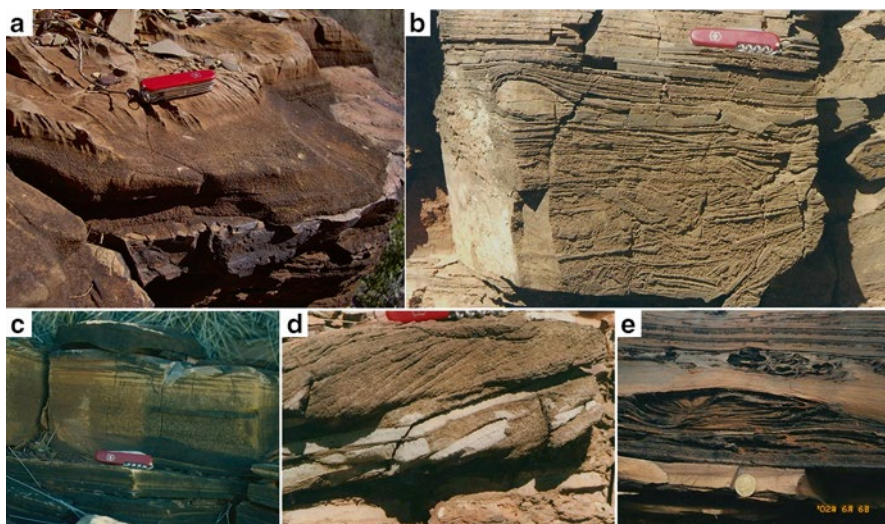
The Spherule Marker Bed (SMB), discovered by Simonson (1992) at Wittenoom Gorge, constitutes a unique microkrystite and microtektite-bearing turbidite unit about 0.5–1.0 m-thick within the ~230 m-thick siltstone-carbonate Bee Gorge Member, upper Wittenoom Formation (Figs. 10.9 and 10.10). The SMB is found to extend for at least 324 km E-W throughout the Hamersley Basin, over an area ~16,000 km<sup>2</sup>, displaying thickness and facies variations from centimeter-scale layers and discontinuous lenses of densely packed spherules in carbonate-argillite matrix to several decimeter-thick turbidite units with or without dispersed spherules. Observed thicknesses of the SMB turbidite unit are in the 12–130 cm range, and spherule-rich bands and lenses are in the 0.3–6.5 cm range (Simonson 1992).



**Fig. 10.9** ~2.56 Ga microkrystite spherule marker bed (*SMB*), showing two impact cycles, *SMB-1* and *SMB-2*, overlain and underlain by carbonate, siltstone, and chert. Each cycle includes a basal layer or series of lenses of microkrystite spherules (*MKZ*) overlain by rhythmic turbidites (seismic zone, *SZ*), overlain by a cross-rippled tsunami zone (*TZ*). The two cycles are separated by a stratigraphically consistent layer of silicified black siltstone denoted as a ‘Quiet Zone’ (**a** – Munjina Gorge; **b** – Wittenoom Gorge)

The thickness of spherules generally decreases from north to south, but no geographic trend is observed in the thickness of the turbidite (Simonson 1992). Sedimentological studies of 15 sections of the *SMB* (Simonson 1992; Hassler et al. 2000; Hassler and Simonson 2001) suggest a slope or deep shelf environment, persisting below and above the impact fallout layer. Cross-ripples form consecutive trains of connected bedforms up to 150 m-long, or discontinuous cross-layered lenses. Measurements of 26 sets of symmetrical cross-ripple and climbing-ripples (wavelength 23–40 cm; amplitude 1.0–3.5 cm; average dimension – 32 × 1.5 cm) indicate prominence of southward-directed palaeocurrents (Hassler et al. 2000).

A tsunami origin of the *SMB* is defined by the close association of these bedforms with microkrystite and microtektite-bearing units and by the below-wave-base position of the *SMB*, indicating a wave system of amplitude/energy in excess of ordinary atmospheric (wind)-driven wave systems (Hassler et al. 2000). U-Pb zircon ages for a crystal tuff unit located about 75 m below the *SMB* were reported by Hassler (1991) as  $2,603 \pm 7$  Ma and by Trendall et al. (1998) as  $2,561 \pm 8$  Ma or  $2,565 \pm 9$  Ma (Trendall et al. 2004), the ~2.6 Ga age probably representing older xenocrysts. Woodhead et al. (1998) measured a Pb-Pb carbonate whole rock age of  $2,541 + 18/-15$  Ma on the



**Fig. 10.10** ~2.56 Spherule Marker Bed, Wittenoom Gorge, tsunami-generated structures overlying microkrystite spherule beds: (a) <15 cm-thick spherule bed (deep brown dotted bed below swiss knife); (b) Development of diamictite structures in differentially siliceous carbonate overlying microkrystite spherules; (c) calcarenite-black siltstone intercalations overlying microkrystite spherules and capped by cross-layered tsunami unit' (d) cross-layered spherule-rich (more than 80 % spherules) unit; (e) cross-cutting sedimentary flame structures overlying spherule unit

SMB, nearly consistent with the U-Pb zircon age. Pb-Pb isotopic analyses of carbonate from the Paraburdoo Member and the Bee Gorge Member yielded ages of  $2,505 \pm 37$  Ma and  $2,346 \pm 38$  Ma, respectively, representing diagenetic overprinting.

Two distinct spherule units are documented within the SMB, each overlain by turbidite and current-disrupted arenite (Glikson 2004a, b) (Fig. 10.9):

**SMB-1.** The stratigraphically lower cycle contains at its base a cm-scale spherule-rich horizon or discontinuous <5 cm-thick spherule-rich lenses. In many areas spherules are missing. The spherule unit is overlain by graded bedded Bouma-type cycle arenite-turbidites in turn overlain by cross layered arenite, or by siltstone followed by convolute current turbulence climbing cross-bedding and “ball-and-pillow” structures. Major recumbent over-folds probably representing switching current directions, occur at the top of SMB-1, in turn overlain by tens of cm-thick little-disturbed stratigraphically consistent argillite.

**SMB-2.** The stratigraphically upper cycle locally includes a thick (<10 cm) densely packed spherule unit at the base, or isolated microkrystite-bearing carbonate bands, locally including flattened mm-scale siliceous peloids. The spherule unit is overlain by current-rippled argillite which reflects significantly lower current intensity as compared to current structures within the lower cycle SMB-1. Simonson (1992) documented splitting of the SMB at its westernmost occurrences into two parts: (1) lower argillite containing many decimeter-long and up to 25 mm-thick spherule-bearing lenses; (2) middle <7 cm thick laminated calc-argillite; (3) upper <60 cm-thick cross-layered dolomitic turbidite unit.

This author regards the SMB as having been emplaced either in pulses or by several closely spaced events (p. 835, *op cit.*). Both SMB-1 and SMB-2 can be identified in Munjina Gorge and Wittenoom Gorge – located about 40 km apart (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2). In both areas, undisturbed argillites 1–50 cm-thick separate the spherule units/lenses and current-rippled arenite/turbidite of the SMB-1 and SMB-2 units (Figs. 10.9 and 10.10). The close coupling of spherule deposition and high-energy current activity as two distinct cycles, each comprising a basal spherule unit overlain by current-disturbed turbidite, over a distance of at least 300 km, is difficult to reconcile with current-redistribution of a single original impact fallout layer. Redistribution by erosion and redeposition may be expected to be more sporadic, ensuing in places in elimination and in other places in the many-fold redeposition of spherules as well as their corrosion and breakage, a model difficult to reconcile with the consistent occurrence of two spherule-bearing units, each closely followed by strong current activity, throughout much of the Hamersley Basin.

Other essential components of SMB-1 are fragmental to irregular shaped microtektites consisting of random to crudely oriented microlites of K-feldspar and in some instances agglutinated with microkrystite spherules (Figs. 10.11 and 10.12). SMB-2 contains (1) spherule-rich units (2) mm-scale to cm-scale bands which contain isolated spherules and distinct flattened silicate-carbonate up to 3 mm long peloids of black appearance in outcrop. A complete continuum is observed between the various types of spherule-bearing units.

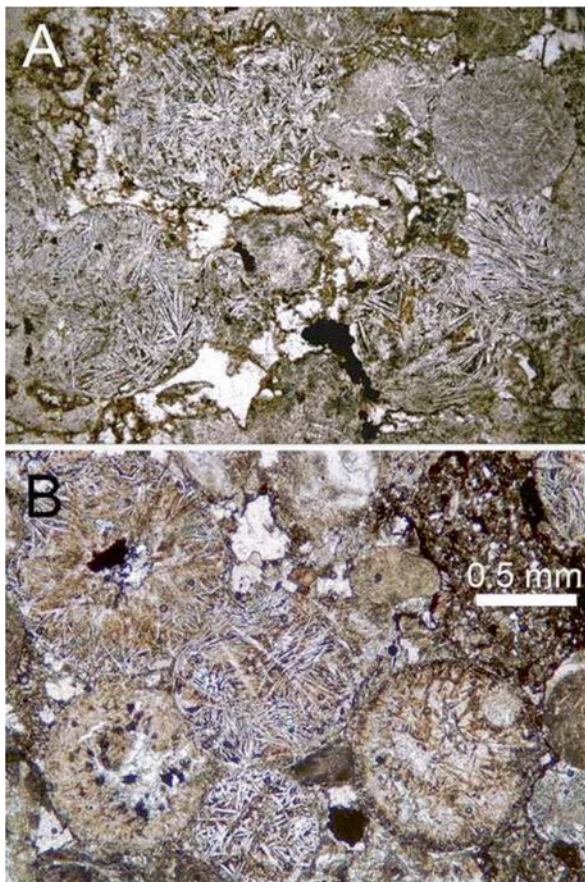
The microkrystite spherules display a wide range of textures, all of which contain all or some of the following features:

1. Inward-radiating fibrous/acicular K-feldspar which either form shells, shells and mantles, or completely fill the spherules (Fig. 10.12);
2. Internal voids filled with quartz, carbonate, chlorite, sericite and Fe-oxides; internal central to offset vesicles or bubbles filled mainly with quartz and carbonate. The bubbles have distinct boundaries and are different in texture from the central voids above.
3. Composite particles consisting of agglutinated microkrystite spherules and microtektites (Figs. 10.7 and 10.11)
4. Some microkrystites have both inward-radiating K-feldspar fans and randomly oriented K-feldspar needles, showing transitional characteristics with microtektites.

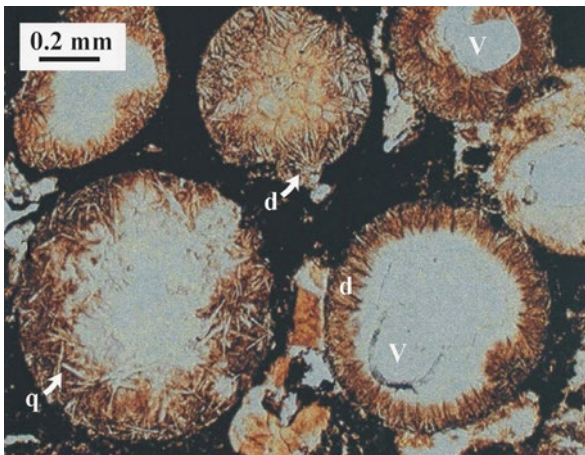
SEM/EDS analyses identify the distribution of K-feldspar in radiating fans in microkrystite spherules as microlites in microtektites and as micron-scale grains in the matrix. Cores may be occupied by K-feldspar, quartz, carbonate, iron oxides and accessory minerals. Inter-spherule matrices consist of microcrystalline assemblages of K-feldspar, quartz, chlorite, sericite, iron oxides and trace apatite and monazite similar to those of the host argillite and arenite. Iron oxide aggregates occur in inter-spherule position in association with microcrystalline feldspar and quartz. Flattened peloids consisting of almost pure silica, or feldspar, or silicate carbonate mix are set in matrices dominated by carbonate and chlorite. XRD analyses indicate abundance of dolomite, lesser concentration of K-feldspar and trace mica. Microkrystites display

**Fig. 10.11** Photomicrographs of Paraburdoo and Reivilo spherule layers in plane polarized light.

(a) Paraburdoo spherule layer showing tightly packed spherules with abundant K-feldspar crystallites, mix of intact and deformed spherule shapes, and pores shaped patches of sparry carbonate cement. (b) Reivilo spherule layer showing similar textures; scale bar applies to both images (From Hassler et al. 2011; Geological Society of America, by permission)



**Fig. 10.12** Spherules of the ~2.56 Ga Spherule Marker Bed, showing quench (*q*) and inward-divergent (*d*) K-feldspar crystallites surrounding silicified cores and vesicles (*v*)



**Table 10.3** Siderophile element abundances of spherule-bearing sediments from the ~2.57 Ga Paraburdoo spherule layer (Goderis et al. 2013) and ~2.56 Ga SMB spherule unit (Simonson et al. 1998, 2009a, b)

	Ni ppm	Co ppm	Cr ppm	Ni/Co	Ni/Cr	Ir ppb	Pt ppb	Pd ppb	Pd/Ir	Pt/Ir	Pd/Pt
Av of 12 Paraburdoo samples	404	72	1,107	5.6	0.36	247	341	81.8	0.33	1.38	0.24
Av of 9 SMB samples	36	18	100	2	0.36	0.496	5.42	1.42	2.8	10.9	0.26
BB	42.4	11.3	97	3.75	0.43	0.38	0.97	2.06	5.4	2.5	2.1
S64-1 SL	30.4	8.9	114	3.41	2.7	0.68	1.73	4.47	6.6	2.5	2.6
S77-1 SL	20.2	6.5	47	3.1	0.43	0.4	1.7	4.12	10.3	4.2	2.4
A – C1	10,500	500	2,650	21	4	455	1,010	550	1.2	2.2	0.54
B – pyrolite	1,960	105	2,625	18.5	0.75	3.2	7.1	3.9	1.2	2.2	0.55
C – mean ultramafic	2,000	110		18.2		2.4	10	8.2	3.4	4.2	0.82
D – komatiite	1,530	104		14.7		1.0	9.3	8.4	8.4	9.3	0.9
E – MORB	200	41		4.9		0.05	2.3	0.6	12	46	0.26
F – Archaean tholeiite	<150	60–80	<100	1.8–2.5		~1.5					
G – Archaean -high-Mg	198	49	749	4	0.26	0.49		18.2	37		

Data compared to C1-chondrites (A – Chou 1978); mantle pyrolite (B – McDonough and Sun 1995); mean ultramafic (C – Chou 1978); komatiite (D – Chou 1978); mid-ocean ridge basalt (E – Chou 1978); average Archaean tholeiite (F – BVSP 1981); high-Mg basalt (G – Glikson and Hickman 1981 – mean of 20 high-Mg basalts of the Apex Basalt)

a high degree of sphericity,  $D_{\min}/D_{\max}$  being generally higher than 0.9. Frequency size analysis of spherules indicates maxima in the range of 500–800  $\mu\text{m}$  (Fig. 10.12).

Whole rock analyses for siderophile elements (Ni, Co), Cr, Zn, and the Platinum Group Elements (PGE) reported by Simonson et al. (1998) indicate weak but significant anomalies consistent with a meteoritic derivation of the microkrystite spherules and microtektite-rich sediments. Comparative chondrite-normalized abundance profiles for the elements Ir, Ru, Pt, Pd, Au, Ni, Co, V and Cr – corresponding to progressive enrichment sequence in Pyrolite model mantle (Ringwood 1975) relative to C1-chondrite (McDonough and Sun 1995), allow the following observations (Tables 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4):

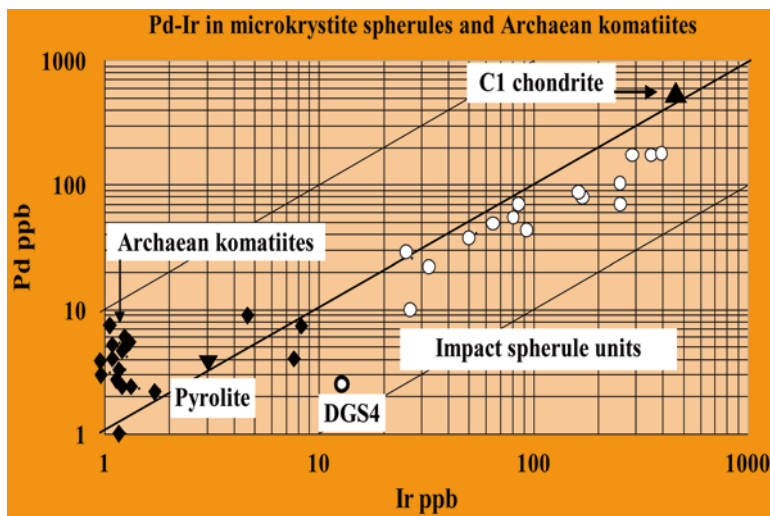
1. Ir levels of microkrystite spherule-rich sediments (range 0.02–1.54 ppb; mean of 9 samples – 0.496 ppb) are about an order of magnitude higher than in background shale/carbonate sediments (mean of 11 samples – 0.0033 ppb) associated with the SMB.
2. Ru levels likewise tend to be higher in the microkrystite-rich sediments (range 0.07–2.61 ppb; mean 1.21 ppb) relative to background sediments (0.5 ppb).
3. Pd/Ir, Pt/Ir are distinctly lower than those of spherule-poor sediments and background sediments, namely they are closer to chondritic values (Fig. 10.13).



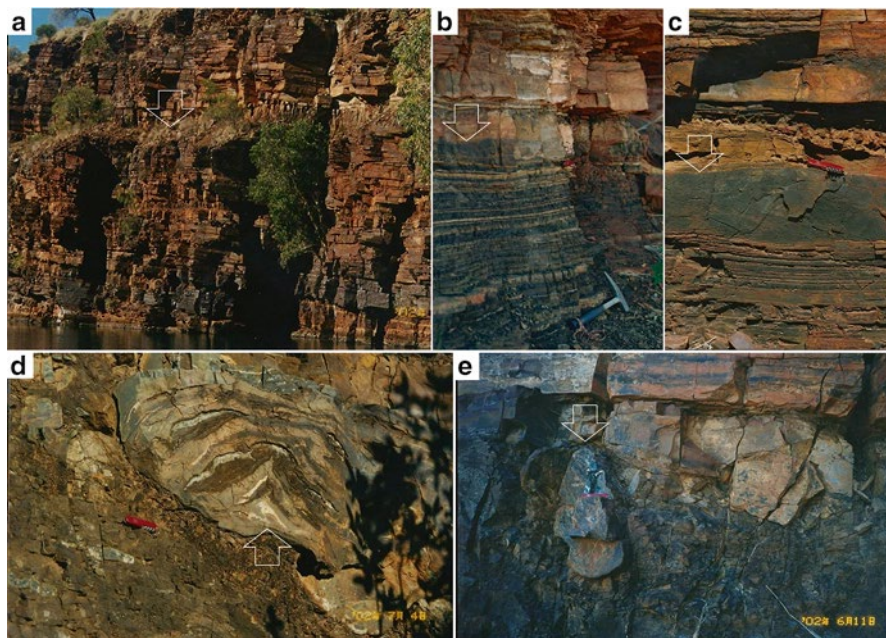
**Table 10.4** Siderophile and PGE trace element comparisons between the mean composition of spherules from DGS4

DGS4	Co		Cr		Ni/Cr	Ir ppb	Pt ppb	Pd		Pt/		Ref
	Ni ppm	ppm	ppm	Ni/Co				ppb	Pd/Ir	Ir	Pd/Pt	
DGS4 Dale Gorge Member	365	11	239	44	1.53		42	2.5		0.06	<b>1</b>	
96,357	150	7.3	54	20.5	2.8	1.13	2.37	0.64	0.57	2.1	0.27	<b>2</b>
96460A	422	42.5	265	9.9	1.6	13.7	28.2	7.72	0.56	2.0	0.27	<b>2</b>
96,466	311	36.5	272	8.5	1.1	17.9	40.8	25.1	1.4	2.0	0.61	<b>2</b>
DG crop	329	54.7	268	6.0	1.22	15.5	30.7	15.7	1.01	2.0	0.51	<b>2</b>
DG core	271	37.6	231	7.2	1.17	9.34	18.6	7.69	0.82	2.0	0.41	<b>2</b>
A – C1	10,500	500	2,650	21	4	455	1,010	550	1.2	2.2	0.54	
B – pyrolite	1,960	105	2,625	18.5	0.75	3.2	7.1	3.9	1.2	2.2	0.55	
C – mean ultramafic	2,000	110		18.2		2.4	10	8.2	3.4	4.2	0.82	
D – komatiite	1,530	104		14.7		1.0	9.3	8.4	8.4	9.3	0.9	
E – MORB	2,00	41		4.9		0.05	2.3	0.6	12	46	0.26	
F – Archaean tholeiite	<150	60-80	<100	1.8-2.5	~1.5							
G – Archaean -high-Mg	198	49	749	4	0.26	0.49		18.2	37			

Simonson et al. (1998) [Ref 1] and Simonson et al. (2009a, b) [Ref 2], C1-chondrites (A – Chou 1978); mantle pyrolite (B – McDonough and Sun 1995); mean ultramafic (C - Chou 1978); komatiite (D – Chou 1978); mid-ocean ridge basalt (E – Chou 1978); average Archaean tholeiite (F – BVSP 1981); high-Mg basalt (G – Glikson and Hickman 1981 – mean of 20 high-Mg basalts of the Apex Basalt)



**Fig. 10.13** Pd-Ir relations in Dales Gorge Shale Macroband 4 (DGS4) microkrystites compared to Barberton microkrystite spherules and Archaean komatiites. Key: open circles – microkrystite spherules; solid diamonds – Archaean komatiites

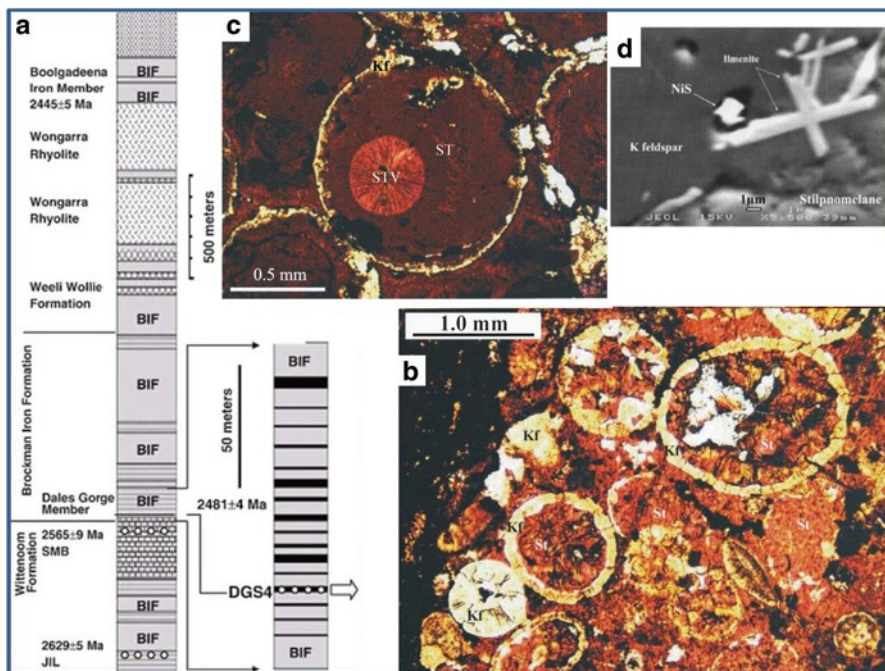


**Fig. 10.14** Outcrops of the Dales Gorge Shale Macroband (DGS4) impact ejecta unit. (a) Cliff outcrop at Wittenoom Gorge, near Mine Pool; (b) DGS4 impact ejecta unit at Yampire Gorge; (c) DGS4 impact ejecta unit at Dales Gorge; (d) boulder of banded chert within DGS4 ejecta, near Mine Pool, Wittenoom Gorge; (e) boulder of layered chert within DGS4 ejecta, near Mine Pool, Wittenoom Gorge

However, contrary to an expectation of high siderophile element levels, the abundances of Ni (mean – 36 ppm) and Co (mean – 18 ppm) in spherule-bearing sediments are similar to those in background sediments (mean Ni – 31 ppm, mean Co – 20 ppm), whereas the mean Cr values of the spherule-rich sediments (100 ppm) is about double that of background sediments (mean – 47 ppm) (Simonson et al. 1998). Likewise, an overall overlap is observed regarding Ni/Co ratios, whereas Ni/Cr values of spherule-rich sediments are lower by about a factor of two compared to background sediments, reflecting the higher Cr values of spherule-bearing units. Whereas the absolute level of PGEs is generally low, the ratios Pd/Ir and Pt/Ir are significantly lower than those of basalts and komatiites (Tables 10.1, 10.2, 10.3), consistent with preferential condensation of the refractory PGE relative to volatile PGEs (Glikson and Allen 2004; Glikson 2007).

#### 10.2.4 ~2.48 Ga Impact, Dales Gorge (DGS4)

LaBerge (1966) documented mm-scale spherulitic textures within the Shale-unit-4 (DGS4) Macroband of the lower Dales Gorge Member, Brockman Iron Formation (Fig. 10.14), dated as 2,479 Ga-old (Trendall et al. 1998; Thorne and Trendall 2001).



**Fig. 10.15** ~2.48 Ga Dales Gorge Shale Macrobanded 4 (DGS4) impact ejecta, Brockman Iron Formation. (a) schematic columnar stratigraphy showing main units of the Hamersley Group and U–Pb zircon isotopic ages (after Trendall et al. 2004); (b) DGS4 Microkrystite spherules occupied by stilpnomelane (red), and rimmed by K-feldspar; (c) DGS4 Microkrystite spherules occupied by stilpnomelane (red), containing a central vesicle and rimmed by K-feldspar (yellow); (d) Ilmenite crystals and NiS crystal within K-feldspar

Trendall and Blockley (1970) referred to this unit as a spherule-bearing breccia. Simonson (1992) identified the spherules as microkrystites on the widespread occurrence of spherule shells consisting of inward radiating K-feldspar fans surrounding stilpnomelane-dominated interiors (Fig. 10.15) and from their morphological parameters ( $D_{\text{mean}} \sim 0.7$  mm;  $D_{\text{max}} < 1.8$  mm). Whereas the majority of spherules show high sphericities, elongate and dumbbell-shaped spherules as long as 2.5 mm are present. Further petrological and geochemical studies established the extraterrestrial connection of the microkrystites (Glikson and Allen 2004)

The DGS4-Macrobanded which hosts the spherule-bearing unit can be traced at least 30 km in the Dales Gorge–Wittenoom Gorge area (Fig. 10.1). The Macrobanded forms a 1–2 m-thick soft zone consisting of finely laminated siltstone and shale which form a distinct recess within cliff-forming banded iron (Fig. 10.14a). Accessible type outcrops of the DGS4 occur at Dales Gorge, Yampire Gorge and Wittenoom Gorge. The spherule-bearing unit forms a conformable stratiform zone within the siltstone/shale, and varies in thickness from about 20–30 cm at Dales Gorge to 110 cm at Wittenoom Gorge. The spherule-bearing unit forms a soft to

crumbling, black-weathered, irregularly non-laminated zone, which can be easily mistaken for tachylite-rich pyroclastics. Where observed, the unit conformably overlies siltstone and shale. The top of the unit may contain cm-scale black fragments.

A distinct feature of the DGS4 is the presence of isolated angular to sub-rounded fragments and meter-scale rafts of chert and banded ferruginous chert (Fig. 10.14d) (Hassler and Simonson 2001; Glikson and Allen 2004; Glikson 2004a, b). The clasts rest at a variety of angles to the overall layering, including near-vertical orientations, resulting in flexuring of the overlying siltstone/shale. The mega-clasts appear to have been incorporated contemporaneously with the spherule-rich material and are interpreted as exotic tsunami-transported blocks ripped off submarine scarps, possibly derived from impact-triggered fault scarps. In hand specimen the black-aphanitic spherule-bearing material consists of largely obliterated fragments of stilpnomelane and isolated to tightly packed spherules marked by white K-feldspar shells. Where no K-feldspar shells are present the dark stilpnomelane-rich spherules are difficult or impossible to distinguish from the dark stilpnomelane-rich matrix. Microscopic observations reveal a wide range of spherule morphologies (Fig. 10.15) including oblate, disc-shaped and near dumbbell-like forms.

Spherules of the DGS4 Macroband display a frequency size peak in the range of 600–800  $\mu\text{m}$ , although more than about 10 % of spherules are larger than 1.0 mm, including large oblate, disc-shaped and dumbbell-like spherules reaching maximum long-axis size of about 2.5 mm. The elongate spherule shapes are regarded as primary as little or no penetrative deformation has affected the sediments. K-feldspar-mantled microkrystites consist of inward-radiating K-feldspar, which may also occupy spherule interiors, otherwise occupied by stilpnomelane. Spherule interiors may contain central to offset vesicles filled with randomly oriented fans of stilpnomelane (Fig. 10.15). Secondary micro-spherules of stilpnomelane may occur within K-feldspar shells and mantles (Fig. 10.15). K-feldspar appears to display little effects of alteration or weathering. Micron-scale Nickel particles within K-feldspar include Ni-metal, Ni-oxide, Ni-sulphide and Ni-arsenide (Fig. 10.15). Where K-feldspar shells do not exist, the material may show palimpsest outlines of shell-free spherules and/or partly obliterated mm-scale to cm-scale fragmental entities, possibly representing altered glass shards.

The meteoritic impact connection of spherules included in the DGS4 Macroband of the Dales Gorge Member is demonstrated by unique mineralogical and geochemical features, including:

1. Ni-rich submicron metal, oxide, sulphide and arsenide submicron particles within K-feldspar spherule shells.
2. High Ni levels in Fe-oxide grains.
3. High Ni abundances, very high Ni/Co ratios and high Ni/Cr ratios in stilpnomelane spherule interiors.
4. Low Pd/Ir, Pt/Ir and Pd/Pt ratios in stilpnomelane spherule interiors and to a lesser extent in K-feldspar shells.
5. Inward-radiating K-feldspar fans and offset vesicles within the spherules.

SEM/EDS analyses indicate an abundance of euhedral ~5–10  $\mu\text{m}$ -long ilmenite needles within K-feldspar spherule shells (Fig. 10.15). Associated with the ilmenite are rare high electron-density submicron Ni-rich particles, including near-pure Ni-metal (Ni < 84.7 %), Ni-S-As particles, Ni-Co-As-S particles and NiS particles (Fig. 10.15). Fe-oxide grains within the stilpnomelane contain an admixed silicate component and some are characterized by Ni contents up to 1.25 % NiO. Mean analyses of stilpnomelane and K-feldspar from four laser-ICPMS sections across microkrystites indicate meteoritic geochemical signatures, including high siderophile elements (Ni, Co, Cr) and high PGE abundances. Stilpnomelane spherule cores display Ni levels (~327–436 ppm, mean ~365 ppm), higher than basaltic high Cr basalts (47–387 ppm; mean ~240 ppm), and very low Co levels (mean ~11 ppm), with ensuing very high Ni/Co (mean ~44) and high Ni/Cr (~1–10; mean ~4) ratios as compared to basalts.

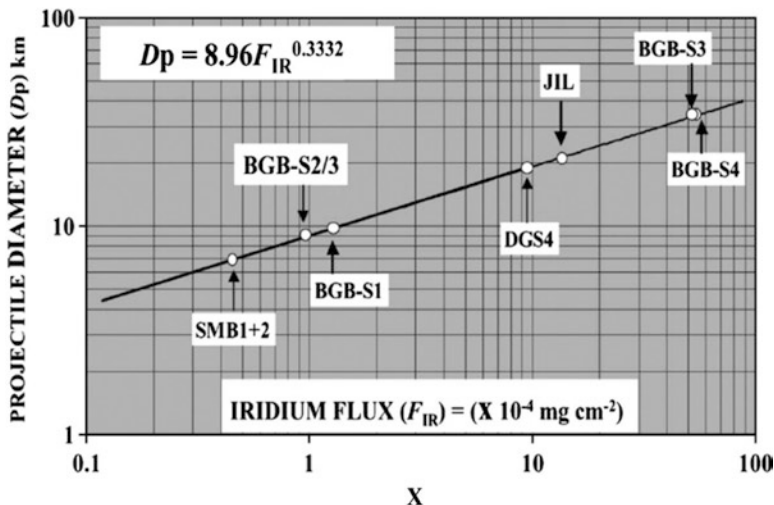
Whole rock PGE measurements by solution ICPMS yield high abundances of Ir (range ~1–18 ppb), Pt (range ~2–42 ppb) and distinctly low Pd (range ~0.64–25.1 ppb), reflected by low Pd/Ir ratios (0.56–1.4) as compared to terrestrial mafic rocks (range 3.4–37) (Table 10.4). The relative depletion in volatile PGEs is consistent with PGE patterns in microkrystite spherules from other impact ejecta units (Gliksion and Allen 2004; Simonson et al. 2009a, b) and is contrasted with the almost invariable enrichment of volatile PGEs (Pd, Au) in terrestrial materials, with the notable exception of refractory harzburgites (Chou 1978). In agreement with the above the C1-chondrite-normalized plot for the siderophile elements, following a pyrolite/chondrite depletion sequence (Ir < Pt < Pd < Au < Ni < Co < V < Cr < Sc), indicates significant departures from pyrolite ratios, including the high Ni/Co and low Pd/Ir and Pt/Ir noted above. Au abundances are not included in this discussion due to the high secondary mobility of this element under hydrous conditions.

The DS4 impact fallout unit includes larger microkrystite spherules than observed in any other Pilbara unit, including spherule diameters in the range of <1.4 mm and long axes of oblate and dumbbell-shaped spherules up to <2.2 mm. In accord with thermodynamic estimates by O'Keefe and Ahrens (1982) and Melosh and Vickery (1991) spherule condensates on this scale represent projectile diameters in the order of 15–25 km.

The likely equivalent of DGS4 were encountered in a drill hole ~30 km south of Griquaastad, western Transvaal Basin, where a ~1 cm-thick spherule layer is located below an ~80 cm-thick breccia unit within a 2 m-thick shale unit near the base of the Kuruman Iron Formation, about 37 m above Gamahuann carbonates.

### ***10.2.5 Estimates of Asteroid Size and Compositions***

Mass balance calculations based on the high PGE contents of microkrystite spherules (Tables 10.1 to 10.4; Fig. 10.16) support asteroid sizes on the order of tens of km (Byerly and Lowe 1994; Shukolyukov et al. 2000; Kyte et al. 2003, 2004). Size estimates presented below include the following assumptions: (1) derivation of the



**Fig. 10.16** Correlation between Ir flux (in units of  $10^{-4} \text{ mg cm}^{-2}$ ) and diameter of chondritic projectile ( $D_p$ ), based on mass-balance calculations assuming mean unit thickness, mean Ir concentration, and global distribution of ejecta. Unit symbols:  $\sqrt{[V_p / (4/3)\pi]}$ ;  $V_p = M_p / d_p$ ;  $M_p = FG / C_p$ ;  $FG_{\text{Earth}} = AE / dS \times TS \times S_{\text{Earth}}$  (Earth’s surface area), where AE is measured element (E) abundance in ejecta unit (in ppb); dS is mean density of ejected materials ( $\text{mg/cm}^3$ ) (assumed as  $2.65 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ); CE = mass of element E (in  $\text{mg/cm}^3$ ); ( $CE = AE \times DS$ ); TS = mean stratigraphic thickness of spherule unit (in mm); FE = local mean flux of element E (in  $\text{mg per cm}^2$  surface;  $FE = CE \times TS$ ); FG = inferred global flux (in  $\text{mg/cm}^2$ ) of element E;  $C_p$  = assumed concentration of element E in projectile (ppb) (C1 chondrites have 450 ppb Ir);  $M_p$  = mass of projectile;  $d_p$  = assumed density of projectile (C1 chondrites’ density =  $3.0 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ) (Elsevier, by permission)

bulk of the PGE from the projectile; (2) chondritic projectile with 500 ppb Ir and 1,010 ppb Pt; (3) global fallout unit thickness 50 % of the minimum thickness observed in outcrop or drill holes. Particularly the last assumption, although conservative, is fraught with uncertainty – rendering such estimates highly tentative.

The mass balance equation is formulated as:

$$R_p = \sqrt{[V_p / (4/3)\pi]}$$

$$V_p = M_p / d_p; M_p = FG / C_p; FG_{\text{Earth}} = AE / dS \times TS \times S_{\text{Earth}} \text{ (Earth’s surface area)}$$

where AE is measured element (E) abundance in ejecta unit (in ppb); dS is mean density of ejected materials ( $\text{mg/cm}^3$ ) (assumed as  $2.55 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ); CE = mass of element E (in  $\text{mg/cm}^3$ ); ( $CE = AE \times DS$ ); TS = mean stratigraphic thickness of spherule unit (in mm); FE = local mean flux of element E (in  $\text{mg per cm}^2$  surface;  $FE = CE \times TS$ ); FG = inferred global flux (in  $\text{mg/cm}^2$ ) of element E;  $C_p$  = assumed concentration of element E in projectile (ppb) (for C1 chondrites with 450 ppb Ir);  $M_p$  = mass of projectile;  $d_p$  = assumed density of projectile (C1 chondrites’ density =  $3.0 \text{ g/cm}^3$ ).

Based on these calculations estimates of projectile diameters are given in Fig. 10.16, which should however be regarded as tentative order of magnitude figures. Mass balance calculations derived from PGE and  $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$  isotopes a carbonaceous chondrite composition was suggested for the Barberton 3.225 Ga S3 and S4 spherules (Kyte et al. 2003), a carbonaceous chondrite suggested for the 65 Ma K-T boundary impact (Shukolyukov and Lugmair 1998) and ordinary chondrite type suggested for the Late Eocene impacts (Kyte et al. 2004).

### 10.3 Impact Fallout Units and Banded Iron Formations

A temporal association observed between Archaean to earliest Proterozoic asteroid impact ejecta/fallout units and overlying banded iron formations (Glikson 2006; Glikson and Vickers 2007) may hint that, in some instances, these impacts were closely followed by significant transformation in the nature of source terrains of the sediments. Recorded relations between impact spherule layers and banded iron formation (BIF), Jaspilite and ferruginous shale include the  $3,470.1 \pm 1.9$  Ma spherule units of the Antarctic Chert Member, Mount Ada Basalt (Glikson et al. 2004) (Fig. 8.14). The  $3,243 \pm 4$  Ma impact unit (S3) in the Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB) is overlain by iron-rich sediments (Ulundi Formation). The  $3,258 \pm 3$  Ma impact spherule unit (S2) of the BGB is overlain by BIF, Jaspilite and ferruginous shale. Two BIF and ferruginous shale units occur at the base of the Gorge Creek Group (Nimingarra Iron Formation and Paddy Market Formation), central Pilbara Craton, which overlie  $3,235 \pm 3$  Ma felsic volcanics associated with an unconformity and olistostrome correlated with the BGB-S3 impact unit (Sect. 7.3).

The Jeerinah Impact Layer (JIL) (Simonson et al. 2000a, b; Simonson and Glass 2004; Glikson 2004a, b; Hassler et al. 2005; Rasmussen and Koeberl 2004; Rasmussen et al. 2005) overlies an argillite-dominated unit (Jeerinah Formation,  $2,684 \pm 6$  Ma (Trendall et al. 2004) and lies directly below a thin volcanic tuff ( $2,629 \pm 5$  Ma), overlain by the Marra Mamba Iron Formation (MMIF) ( $2,597 \pm 5$  Ma) comprising banded iron formation (BIF). The Spherule Marker Bed (SMB) (Simonson 1992; Simonson and Hassler 1997; Simonson and Glass 2004), which includes two impact cycles (Glikson 2004a, b) is located at the top of a carbonate/calcareous siltstone-dominated sequence (Bee Gorge Member, Wittenoom Formation,  $2,565 \pm 9$  Ma (Trendall et al. 2004) and below a carbonate-poor siltstone–chert–BIF sequence (Mount Sylvia Formation, Bruno's Band (BIF), Mount McRae Shale,  $2,504 \pm 5$  Ma (Rasmussen et al. 2005). A unit of impact spherules (microkrystite) correlated with JIL is observed within a more than 100 m-thick fragmental-intraclast breccia pile in drill cores near Roy Hill, Eastern Hamersley Basin. The sequence represents significant thickening of the impact/tsunami unit relative to the JIL type section at Hesta, central Pilbara, as well as relative to the 20–30 m-thick  $\sim 2.63$  Ga Carawine Dolomite spherule bearing mega-breccia (SBMB) Oakover River to the East. The location of the JIL and associated breccia under supergene iron ore within the Marra mamba Iron Formation at Roy Hill renders the impact products of economic interest. The scarcity, with few exceptions

(Rasmussen and Koeberl 2004), of shocked quartz grains in the ejecta, suggests impacts occurred in SIMA regions of the late Archaean Earth (Simonson et al. 1998; Glikson 2005).

No significant thicknesses of iron-rich sediments are known to overlie carbonate-hosted impact ejecta units, including the  $2,561 \pm 8$  Ma Spherule Marker Bed (Bee Gorge Member) of the Wittenoom Formation, Monteville Formation and Reivilo Formation (Griqualand West Basin, Transvaal Group). However, the carbonate-shale sequence overlying the SMB is noticeably more ferruginous than underlying carbonates (Glikson and Vickers 2007). Impact spherules associated with the 4th Shale Macrobanded of the Dales Gorge Iron Member (DGS4) of the Brockman iron Formation. The  $\sim 2.48$  Ga-old Dales Gorge Member (DGS4) of the Brockman Iron Formation is underlain by a  $\sim 0.5$  m-thick rip-up clast breccia located at the top of the  $\sim 2.50$  Ga Mt McRae Shale, and is interpreted as a tsunami deposit.

Barring a possible presence of undocumented hiatuses between the impact layers and directly overlying units, such as in the case of the JIL-MMIF relations, and within the accuracy limits of U–Pb zircon age data, it may follow that the JIL and SMB mega-impacts were succeeded by enhanced supply of ferruginous and clastic materials, possibly reflecting enrichment of sea water in soluble ferrous iron derived from impact-triggered mafic volcanic and hydrothermal activity. A possible explanation of such links is provided by mafic volcanism triggered by large asteroid impacts, enriching the oceans in soluble FeO under Archaean atmospheric conditions, followed by seasonal microbial and/or photolytic oxidation to ferric oxide and precipitation of Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub> and silica.

## 10.4 Inter-continental Correlation of Impact Units

As well as furnishing regional stratigraphic markers, impact fallout units allow intercontinental time-event correlations, including (Fig. 10.2):

1. A correlation between the chert/arenite impact fallout unit of the  $3,470.1 \pm 1.9$  Ma Antarctic Chert Member of the Mount Ada Basalt and the S1 unit of similar age in the Onverwacht Group, Barberton Mountain Land, Transvaal (Byerly et al. 2002) (Figs. 7.10 and 8.3).
2. A correlation between the  $\sim 3,243 \pm 3$  Ma Sulphur Springs Group – Gorge Creek Group break and the  $3,237 \pm 6$ – $3,225 \pm 3$  Ma Onverwacht Group – Fig Tree Group break, Barberton Mountain Land, Transvaal (Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Glikson and Vickers 2006).
3. A possible correlation between the  $(2,629 \pm 5)$  Ma Ga Jeerinah Impact Layer (JIL) at the top Jeerinah Formation and the impact fallout unit in the Monteville Formation ( $< 2,650 \pm 8$  Ma), Western Transvaal (Simonson et al. 1999, 2009b) (Fig. 10.2).
4. A possible correlation between the  $2,481 \pm 4$  Ma Dales Gorge Shale-4 Macrobanded (DGS4) and a 10 cm-thick + spherule + breccia unit at the lower part of the Kuruman Iron Formation ( $< 2,460 \pm 5$  Ma, near Griqualand, western Transvaal Basin (Simonson et al. 2009b).



# Chapter 11

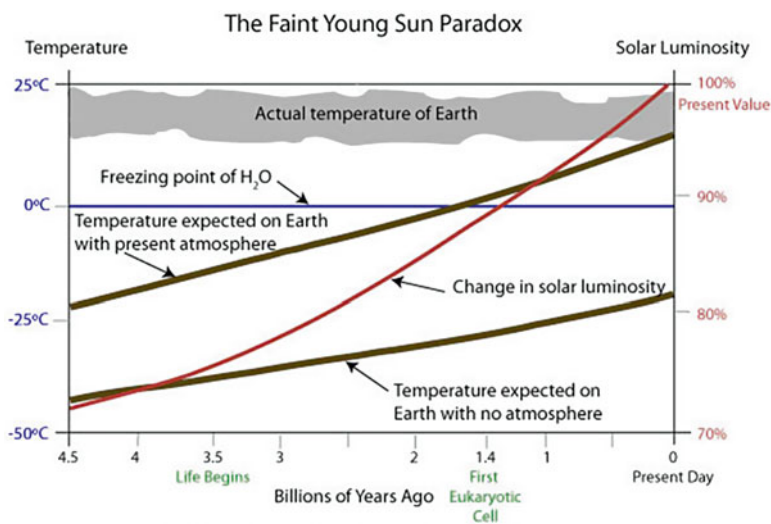
## The Early Atmosphere and Archaean Life

**Abstract** The application of isotopic tracers to paleo-climate investigations, including oxygen ( $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ ), sulphur ( $\delta^{33}\text{S}$ ) and carbon ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ ), integrated with Sedimentological and proxies studies, allows vital insights into the composition of early atmosphere–ocean–biosphere system, suggesting low atmospheric oxygen, high levels of greenhouse gases ( $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{CO}$ ,  $\text{CH}_4$  and likely  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ ), oceanic anoxia and high acidity, limiting habitats to single-cell methanogenic and photosynthesizing autotrophs. Increases in atmospheric oxygen have been related to proliferation of phytoplankton in the oceans, likely about  $\sim 2.4$  Ga (billion years-ago) and  $0.7$ – $0.6$  Ga. The oldest recorded indirect traces of biogenic activity are provided by dolomite and banded iron sediments (BIF) from  $\sim 3.85$  Ga-old Akilia and  $3.71$ – $3.70$  Ga Isua greenstone belt, southwest Greenland, where metamorphosed banded ironstones and dolomite seawater-like REE and Y signatures (Bolhar et al, *Earth Planet Sci Lett* 222:43–60, 2004; Friend et al. 2007) were shown to be consistent with those of sea water (Nutman et al, *Precamb Res* 183:725–737, 2010). Oldest possible micro-fossils occur in  $\sim 3.49$  Ga black chert in the central Pilbara Craton (Glikson 2010; Duck et al. *Geochim Cosmochim Acta* 70:1457–1470, 2008; Golding et al, Earliest seafloor hydrothermal systems on earth: comparison with modern analogues. In: Golding S, Glikson MV (Eds.) Earliest life on earth: habitats, environments and methods of detection. Springer, Dordrecht, pp 1–15, 2011) and in  $3.465$  Ga brecciated chert (Schopf et al, *Precamb Res* 158:141–155, 2007). Possible stromatolites occur in  $\sim 3.49$  and  $\sim 3.42$  carbonates. The evidence suggests life may have developed around fumaroles in the ancient oceans as soon as they formed.

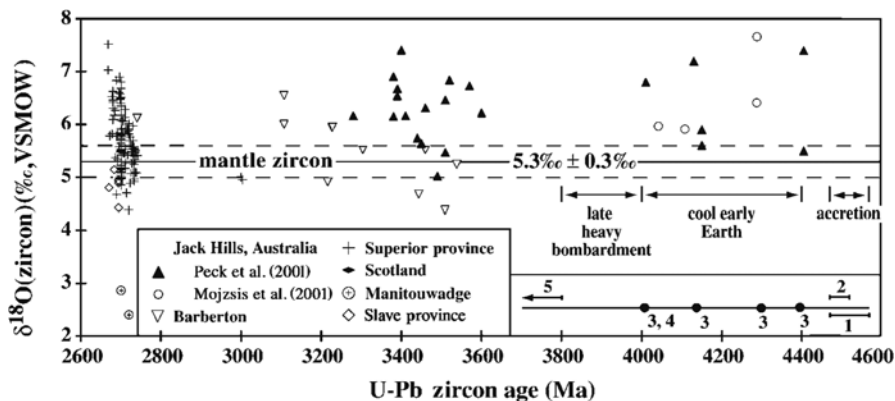
**Keywords** Early atmosphere • Carbon dioxide • Methane • Oxygen • Early life • Stromatolite • Microfossils

## 11.1 Archaean Carbon-Oxygen-Sulphur Cycles and the Early Atmosphere

During early stages of terrestrial evolution low solar luminosity (The Faint Young Sun, 27 % lower luminosity than at present) (Sagan and Mullen 1972), representing a progressive increase in fusion of hydrogen to helium, was compensated by high greenhouse gas (GHG) levels (Fig. 11.1), allowing surface temperature to remain above freezing. Alternative hypotheses were proposed by Longdoz and Francois (1997) in terms of albedo and seasonal variations on the early Earth and by Rosing et al. (2010) in terms of a high ocean/continent surface area ratio in the Archaean, leading to lower albedo and absorption of infrared by open water. Temporal fluctuations in atmospheric GHG levels constituted a major driver of alternating glacial and greenhouse states (Kasting and Ono 2006). Knauth and Lowe (2003) and Knauth (2005) measured low  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values in  $\sim 3.5\text{--}3.2$  Ga cherts of the Onverwacht Group, Barberton Greenstone Belt (BGB), Kaapvaal Craton, suggesting extremely high ocean temperatures in the range of  $55\text{--}85$  °C. The maximum  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  value in Barberton chert ( $+22\text{‰}$ ) is lower than the minimum values ( $+23\text{‰}$ ) in Phanerozoic sedimentary cherts, precluding late diagenesis as the explanation of the overall low  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values. Regional metamorphic, hydrothermal, or long-term resetting of original  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values is also precluded by preservation of  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  across different



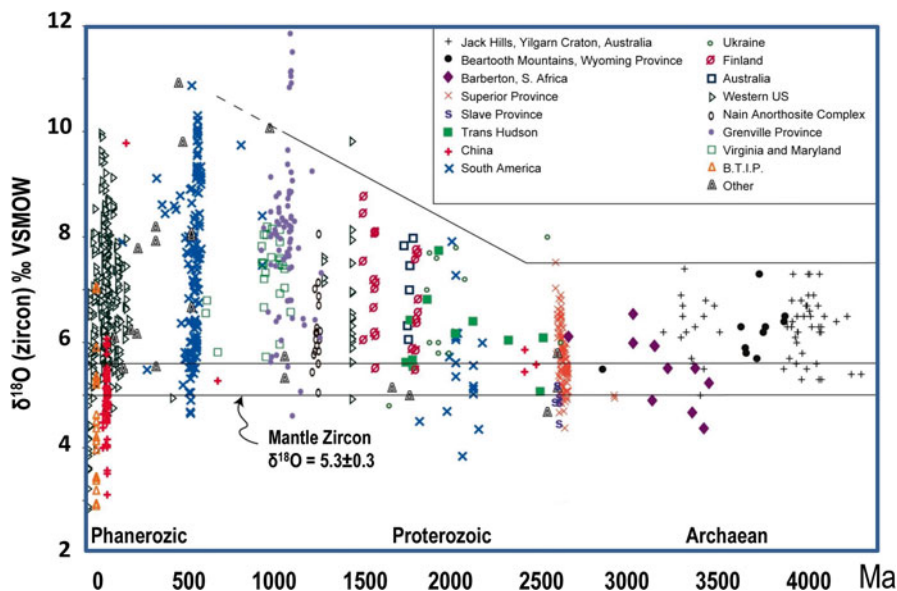
**Fig. 11.1** The faint young sun paradox according to Sagan and Mullen (1972), suggesting compensation of the lower solar luminosity by high atmospheric greenhouse gas levels at early stages of terrestrial evolution (Reproduced from The Habitable Planet course produced by Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics with permission from the Annenberg Foundation, [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org). Courtesy Michele McLeod)



**Fig. 11.2** Crystallization age (*U-Pb*) and  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  for Archaean magmatic zircons, the latter showing values mainly similar to present mantle zircon values and little variation throughout the Archaean. Some zircon  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values are as high as 7.5‰, regarded the result of melting of protoliths altered by interaction with low temperature water near the surface (From Valley et al. 2002; Geological Society of America, with permission)

metamorphic grades. According to Knauth (2005) high-temperature conditions extended beyond submarine fumaroles and the Archaean oceans were characterized by high salinities 1.5–2.0 times the modern level. In this interpretation ensuing evaporite deposits were removed by subduction, allowing lower salinities. However, well preserved Archaean sedimentary sequences contain little evidence of evaporite deposits. The low-oxygen levels of the Archaean atmosphere and hydrosphere limited marine life to extremophile cyanobacteria. Microbial methanogenesis involves reactions of  $\text{CO}_2$  with  $\text{H}_2$  and in organic molecules produced from fermentation of photo synthetically produced organic matter. Photolysis of methane may have created a thin atmospheric organic haze.

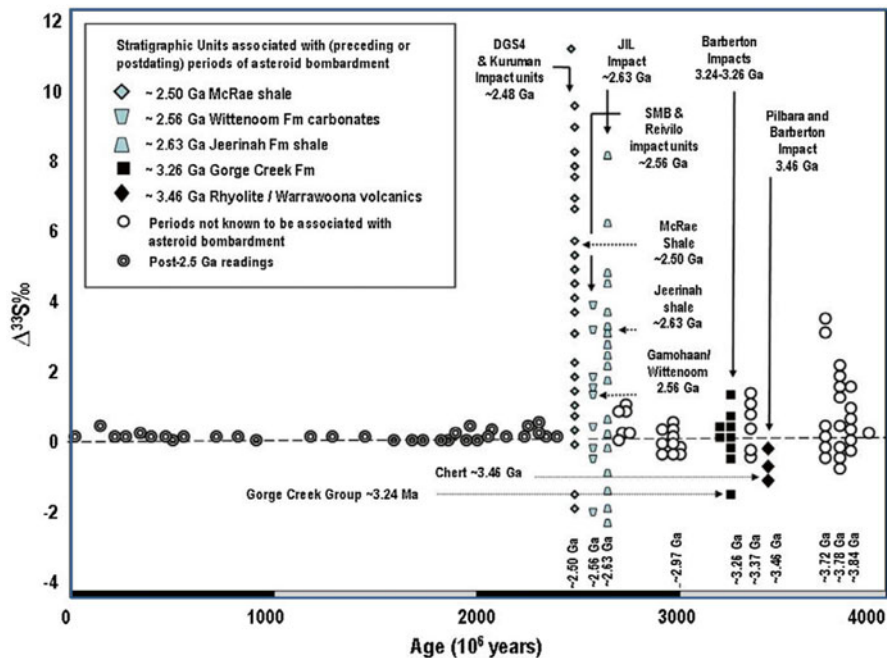
Studies of oxygen isotopes of Hadean zircons indicate little difference between their maximum  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  values of ~4.4–4.2 Ga zircons and those of younger ~3.6–3.4 Ga zircons (Fig. 11.2), which suggests presence of relatively low temperature water near or at the surface (Valley et al. 2002, 2005). An overall increase with time in  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  shown by terrestrial sediments (Valley 2008) (Fig. 11.3) reflects long term cooling of the hydrosphere, consistent with an overall but intermittent temporal decline in atmospheric  $\text{CO}_2$  shown by plant leaf pore (stomata) proxy studies (Berner 2004, 2006; Beerling and Berner 2005; Royer et al. 2001, 2004, 2007). The long-term decline may have been associated with increased rates of weathering-sequestration of  $\text{CO}_2$  related to erosion of rising orogenic belts, including the Caledonian, Hercynian, Alpine, Himalayan and Andean mountain chains (Ruddiman 1997, 2003). Such a trend is consistent with suggested increase in the role plate tectonics through time (Glikson 1980), which led to an increase in sequestration of  $\text{CO}_2$  by weathering of uplifted orogenic belts and subduction of  $\text{CO}_2$ -rich carbonate and carbonaceous shale. Central to studies of early atmospheres is the level of oxygen and its relation to photosynthesis. Sulphur isotopic analyses record mass-independent fractionation of sulphur



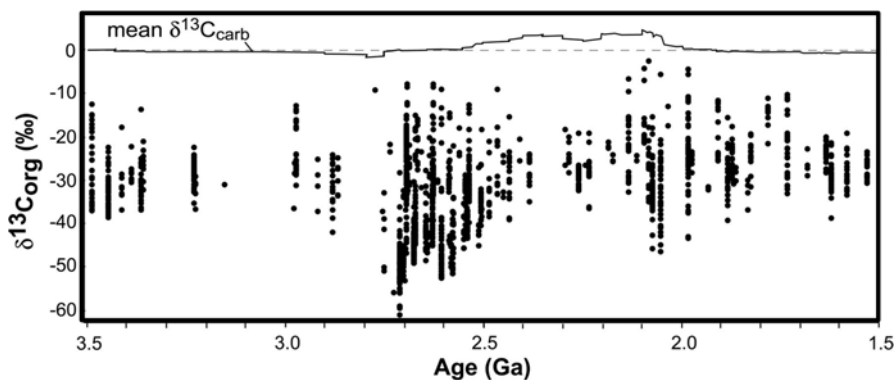
**Fig. 11.3**  $\delta^{18}\text{O}$  ratio of igneous zircons from 4.4 Ga to recent, displaying an increase in abundance of low-temperature effects with time from approximately  $\sim 2.3$  Ga (Courtesy John Valley)

isotopes ( $d^{33}\text{S}$ ) (MIF-S) in sediments older than  $\sim 2.45$  Ga, widely interpreted in terms of UV-triggered reactions under oxygen-poor ozone-depleted atmosphere and stratosphere (Farquhar et al. 2000, 2007) (Fig. 11.4). From about  $\sim 2.45$ – $2.32$  Ga – a period dominated by deposition of banded iron formations (BIF),  $d^{33}\text{S}$  values signify development of an ozone layer shielding the surface from UV radiation (Farquhar et al. 2000; Kump 2009).

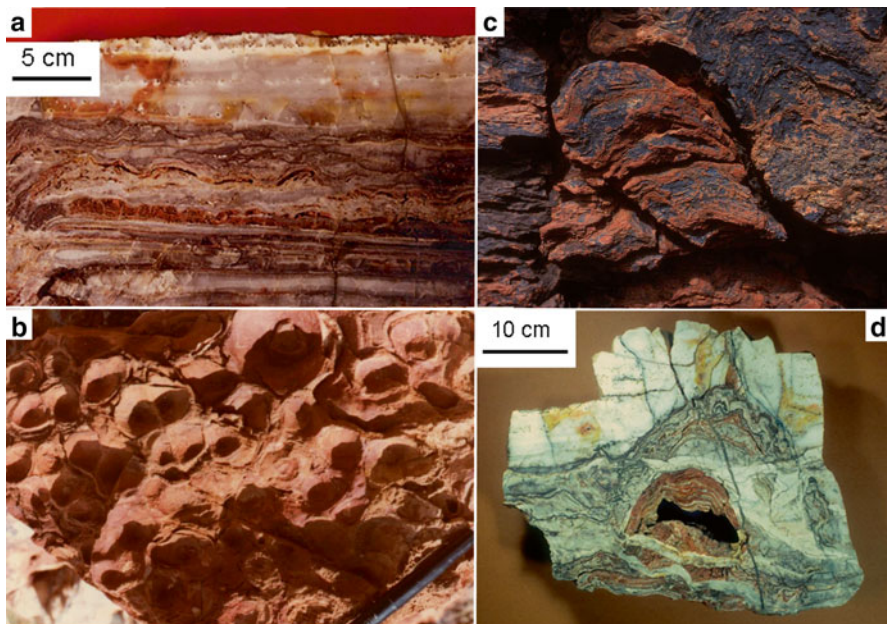
Evidence for the Archaean carbon cycle is contained in carbonaceous shale whose low  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  indices are suggestive of biological activity. The carbon isotopic compositions of Archaean black shale, chert and BIF provide vital clues to the proliferation of autotrophs in the shallow and deep marine environment. Peak biogenic productive periods about 2.7–2.6 Ga are represented by low  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  of chert and black shale intercalated with banded iron formations in the Superior Province, Canada (Goodwin et al. 1976), and in the Hamersley Basin, Western Australia (Eigenbrode and Freeman 2006) (Fig. 11.5). This peak, which coincides with intense volcanic activity in greenstone belts world-wide, suggests enhanced biological activity related to volcanic emanations and enriched nutrient supply. Biological processes include oxygen capture by iron-oxidizing microbes, microbial methanogenesis producing atmospheric  $\text{CH}_4$ , microbial sulphur metabolism producing  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ , ammonia-releasing microbes, oxygen-releasing photosynthesizing colonial prokaryotes (stromatolites) (Figs. 11.6 to 11.10) and algae, culminating in production of  $\text{O}_2$ -rich atmosphere and the  $\text{O}_3$  ozone layer. Earliest manifestations of biological activity



**Fig. 11.4** Plots of mass independent fractionation values for Sulphur isotopes ( $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  - MIF-S) vs Age. The high  $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  values for pre-2.45 Ga sulphur up to about  $\delta^{33}\text{S}=11$  is interpreted in terms UV-induced isotopic fractionation, allowed by a lack of an ozone layer. Periods of major asteroid impacts during which ozone may have been destroyed are indicated (From Glikson 2010. Elsevier, by permission)



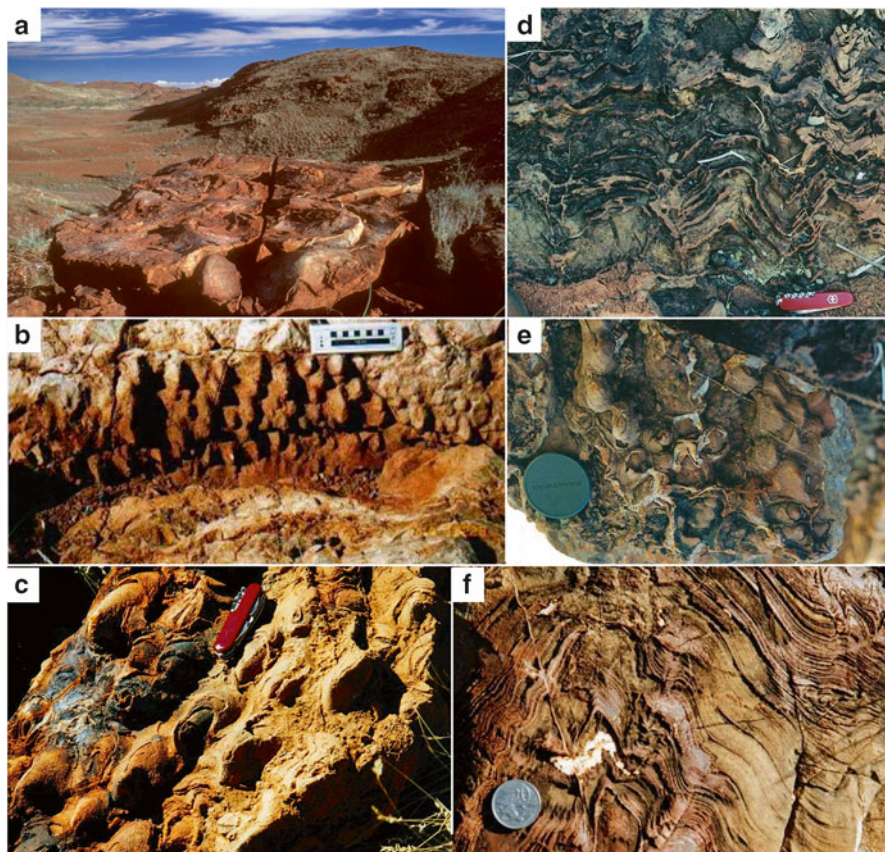
**Fig. 11.5** A compilation of published kerogen and total organic carbon  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values ( $\delta_{\text{org}}$ ) for all sedimentary rock types. Note high accumulations of organic carbon in the late Archaean at ~2.7–2.6 Ga (From Eigenbrode and Freeman 2006; PNAS, by permission)



**Fig. 11.6** Stromatolite-like forms in intercalated barite and chert, ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation, central Pilbara. (a) Cross layering view; (b) parallel-layering view; (c) an individual stromatolite-like structure; (d) a polished stromatolite-like form. Courtesy Bill Schopf



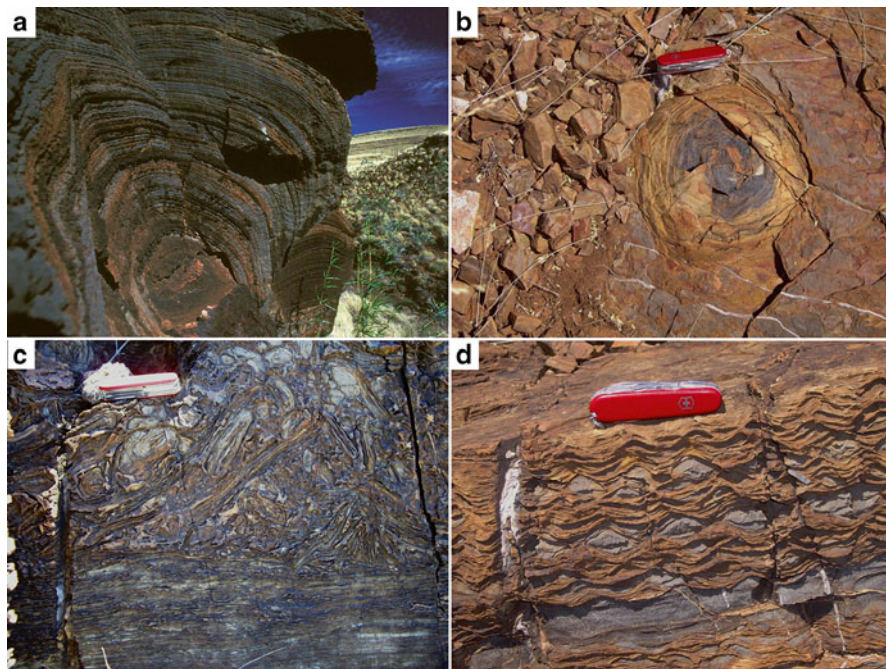
**Fig. 11.7** Outcrop of ~3.43 Ga stromatolite-like structures at the Trendall locality, Shaw River, central Pilbara Craton



**Fig. 11.8** Outcrops of ~3.43 Ga stromatolite-like structures, Strelley Pool Formation, central and eastern Pilbara Craton; (a) Eastern Pilbara (courtesy Reg Morrison); (b) Trendall locality, Shaw River; (c) Eastern Pilbara; (d and e) Central Pilbara, south of Carlindi batholith; (f) Trendall locality, Shaw River

may be represented by banded iron formations, widely held to represent ferrous to ferric iron oxidation by microbial reactions (Cloud 1968, 1973; Morris 1993; Konhauser et al. 2002; Glikson 2006).

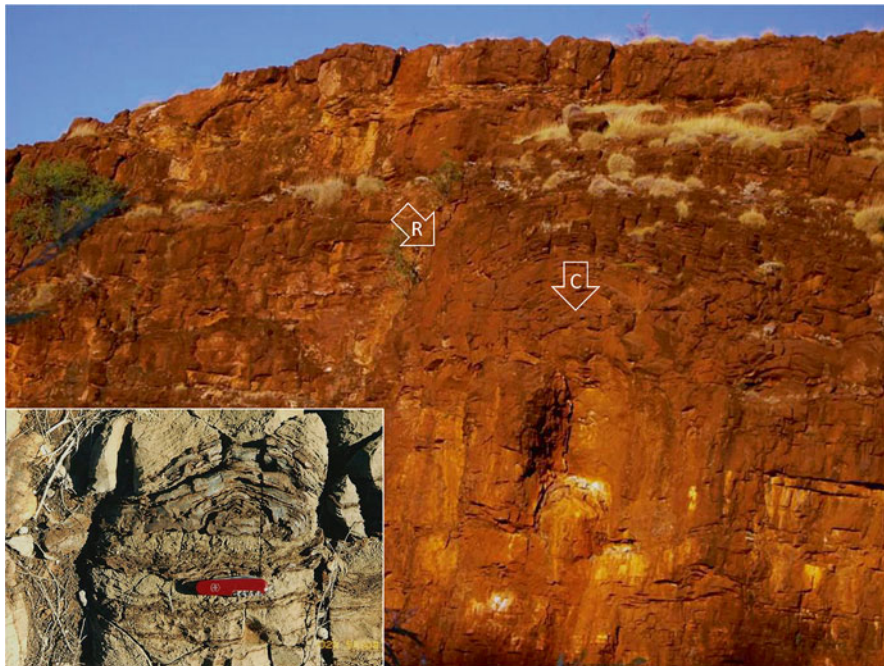
According to Kopp et al. (2005) photosynthetic oxygen release from cyanobacteria and aerobic eukaryotes affected oxidation of atmospheric methane, triggering planetary-scale glaciation at least as early as 2.78 Ga and perhaps as long ago as 3.7 Ga. According to Ohmoto et al. (2006) MIF-S values and oxygen levels fluctuated through time and place, possibly representing local volcanic activity. The role of asteroid impacts in affecting the ozone layer, UV radiation and thus regional MIF-S values has been discussed by Glikson (2010). Some of the earliest manifestations of biological activity may be represented by banded iron formations (BIF) from the ~3.8 Ga Isua supracrustal belt (southwest Greenland) (Fig. 2.7). Banded iron formations are



**Fig. 11.9** ~2.73 Ga Stromatolites, Tumbiana Formation, Meentheena, Fortescue Basin, eastern Pilbara: (a) Large stromatolite near Meentheena Station, Nullagine River; (b) bedding plane parallel view of Meentheena stromatolites; (c) storm-broken rip-up stromatolite bed; (d) rippling of current-worked carbonate layers interspersed with Meentheena stromatolites

commonly intercalated with volcanic tuff and carbonaceous shale whose low  $d^{13}\text{C}$  indices are suggestive of biological activity. The carbon isotopic compositions of Archaean black shale, chert and BIF provide vital clues to the proliferation of autotrophs in the shallow and deep marine environment. Peak biogenic productive periods about 2.7–2.6 Ga are represented by low  $d^{13}\text{C}$  of chert and black shale intercalated with banded iron formations in the Superior Province, Canada (Goodwin et al. 1976) and in the Hamersley Basin, Western Australia (Eigenbrode and Freeman 2006). This peak, which coincides with intense volcanic activity in greenstone belts world-wide, suggests enhanced biological activity related to volcanic emanations and enriched nutrient supply. Biological processes include oxygen capture by iron-oxidizing microbes, microbial methanogenesis producing atmospheric  $\text{CH}_4$ , microbial sulphur metabolism producing  $\text{H}_2\text{S}$ , ammonia-releasing microbes, oxygen-releasing photosynthesizing colonial prokaryotes (stromatolites) and algae, culminating in production of  $\text{O}_2$ -rich atmosphere and the  $\text{O}_3$  ozone layer. Earliest manifestations of biological forcing may be represented by banded iron formations, widely held to represent ferrous to ferric iron oxidation by microbial reactions (Cloud 1968, 1973; Morris 1993; Konhauser et al. 2002; Glikson 2006).





**Fig. 11.10** A giant ~40 m-large ~2.63 Ga stromatolite within the Carawine Dolomite at Carawine Pool, East Pilbara Craton; arrows point to the rim (*R*) and core (*C*) of the stromatolite; *Inset* – stromatolite within Carawine Dolomite, Woodie-Woodie area, Oakover River, eastern Pilbara

The origin of BIFs has been interpreted in terms of transportation of ferrous iron in ocean water under oxygen-poor atmospheric and hydrospheric conditions of the Archaean (Cloud 1968; Morris 1993). Oxidation of ferrous to ferric iron could occur through chemotrophic or phototrophic bacterial processes (Konhauser et al. 2002) and/or by UV-triggered photo-chemical reactions. The near-disappearance of banded iron formations (BIF) about ~2.4 Ga, with transient reappearance about 1.85 Ga and in the Vendian (650–543 Ma), likely reflect increase in oxidation, where ferrous iron became unstable in water and the deposition of BIF was replaced by that of detrital hematite and goethite. Archaean impact ejecta units in the Pilbara and Kaapvaal Cratons are commonly overlain by ferruginous shale and BIF (Glikson 2006; Glikson and Vickers 2007), hinting at potential relations between Archaean impact clusters, impact-injected sulphate, consequent ozone depletion, enhanced UV radiation and formation of BIFs (Glikson 2010), possibly by photolysis. Some of the oldest possible micro-fossils occur in black chert of the Dresser Formation (Duck et al. 2008; Golding et al. 2011) and in brecciated chert of the 3465 Ma Apex Basalt, Warrawoona Group, Pilbara Craton (Schopf et al. 2007). The paleo-environment, carbonaceous composition, mode of preservation, and morphology of these microbe-like filaments, backed by new evidence of their cellular structure provided by two- and three-dimensional

Raman imagery, support a biogenic interpretation. Evidence for hydrothermal and methanogenic microbial activity (Schopf and Packer 1987; Schopf et al. 2007; Hofmann et al. 1999; Duck et al. 2008; Golding et al. 2011) and intermittent appearance of shallow water stromatolites in ~3.49 Ga (Dunlop and Buick 1981) and ~3.42 Ga sediments (Alwood et al. 2007) testify to a diverse microbial habitat. This included heliotropic and by implication photosynthesizing stromatolites affecting release of oxygen. Problems in identifying early Archaean stromatolites were expressed by Lowe (1994) and by Brazier et al. (2002). Whereas the early stromatolites may represent Prokaryotes, Eukaryotes possibly appeared about ~2.1–1.6 Ga (Knoll et al. 2006), or earlier (Sugitania et al. 2009) and exist at present at Shark Bay, Western Australia. The occurrence of glacial stages during the Precambrian (pre-0.54 Ga) despite high atmospheric greenhouse gas levels is accounted for by Faint Early Sun conditions, examples include:

- (A) Upper Archaean glaciation represented by the 5,000 m-thick Mozaan Group of the  $2,837 \pm 5$  Ma Pongola Supergroup (Strik et al. 2007), which includes a sequence of diamictite containing striated and faceted clasts and ice-rafted debris (Young et al. 1998), representing the oldest glaciation recorded to date.
- (B) An early Proterozoic Huronian glaciation (~2.4–2.2 Ga) recorded by outcrops in the North American Great Lakes district, Pilbara Western Australia and the Transvaal (Kopp et al. 2005).

The glaciation, cooling of the oceans and enrichment of oxygen in cold water led to enhanced photosynthesis by phytoplankton and thereby further enrichment of oxygen. Likewise Kasting and Ono (2006) invoke biological activity as driver of the ~2.4 Ga glaciation, including a photosynthetic rise in  $O_2$  and concomitant decrease in  $CH_4$ .

Glacial deposits of the Cryogenian “Snowball Earth” (750–635 Ma) observed in Namibia, South Australia, Oman and Svalbard, correspond to the period of fragmentation of the long-lived Rodinia supercontinent (~1.1–0.75 Ga) (Hofmann et al. 1998). Palaeomagnetic evidence suggests that the ice sheets reached sea level close to the equator during at least two glacial episodes. Some glacial units include sedimentary iron formations, underpinning potential relations between BIF and glaciations. According to Kirschvink (1992) the runaway albedo feedback exerted by the ice sheets resulted in a near-global ocean ice cover whereas continental ice covers remained thin due to retardation of the hydrological cycle. In this model the appearance of banded iron formations may represent sub-glacial anoxia and thereby enrichment of sea water in ferrous iron. The termination of glaciation is marked by carbonates of the so-called cap carbonate (Halverson et al. 2005).

Hofmann et al. (1998) report Negative carbon isotope anomalies in carbonate rocks which cap the Neoproterozoic glacial deposits in Namibia, indicating accumulation of organic matter following glacial collapse in connection with volcanic outgassing, raising atmospheric  $CO_2$  to some 350 times the modern level. The late Proterozoic thus represents a transition from oxygen-poor composition of early atmospheres dominated by reduced carbon species such as methane, and oceans dominated by reducing microbial processes by chemo-bacteria. Following the

Cryogenian ice age ~750–635 Ma (Hofmann et al. 1998; Hofmann and Schrag 2000) the rise in oxygen during ~635–542 Ma and particularly following 580 Ma allowed oxygen-binding proteins and emergence of the multicellular Ediacara fauna in an oxygenated “Canfield Ocean”. According to Canfield et al. (2007) oxygen levels constituted the critical factor allowing multicellular animals to emerge in the late-Neoproterozoic, as evidenced from the oxidation state of iron before and after the Cryogenian glaciation. A prolonged stable oxygenated environment may have permitted the emergence of bilateral motile animals some 25 million years following glacial termination, later followed by the onset of the Cambrian explosion of life (Gould 1990) from ~542 Ma and development of a rich variety of organisms.

Studies of nature of the early terrestrial atmosphere–biosphere system make essential use of sulphur, carbon and oxygen stable isotopes (Holland 1984, 1994; 2005; Pavlov and Kasting 2002; Kasting and Ono 2006). The geochemical behaviour of multiple sulphur isotopes is a key proxy for long-term changes in atmospheric chemistry (Mojzsis 2007; Thiemens 1999). The identification of mass-independent fractionation of sulphur isotopes (MIF-S) in pre-2.45 Ga sediments has been correlated with ultraviolet radiation effects on the  $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  values, with implications for an ozone and oxygen-poor Archaean atmosphere (Farquhar et al. 2000, 2007), whereas other authors have suggested heterogeneous Archaean oxygen levels (Ohmoto et al. 2006). Development of photosynthesis, and thereby limited release of oxygen as early as about 3.4 Ga, is suggested by identification of heliotropic stromatolite reefs in the Pilbara Craton (Allwood et al. 2006a, b). The abrupt disappearance of positive MIF-S anomalies at ~2.45 Ga poses a problem, as atmospheric enrichment in oxygen due to progressive photosynthesis could, perhaps, be expected to result in a gradual rather than an abrupt decline in MIF-S signatures. MIF-S ( $\delta^{33}\text{S}$ ) anomalies (Fig. 11.4) overlap mid-Archaean impact periods (~3.26–3.24 Ga) and Late Archaean impact periods (~2.63, ~2.56, ~2.48 Ga) (Lowe et al. 1989, 2003; Simonson and Hassler 1997; Simonson et al. 2000a, b; Simonson and Glass 2004; Glikson 2001, 2004a, Glikson 2005; Glikson 2006; Glikson and Allen 2004; Glikson et al. 2004; Glikson and Vickers 2006, 2007), though no specific age correlations are observed. Estimates of projectile diameters derived from mass balance calculations of iridium levels,  $^{53}\text{Cr}/^{52}\text{Cr}$  anomalies and size-frequency distribution of fallout impact spherules (microkrystites) (Melosh and Vickery 1991), suggest projectiles of the ~3.26–3.24, ~2.63, ~2.56 and ~2.48 Ga impact events reached several tens of kilometre in diameter (Byerly and Lowe 1994; Shukolyukov et al. 2000; Kyte et al. 2003; Glikson and Allen 2004; Glikson 2005, 2013). Impacts on this scale would have led to major atmospheric effects, including large scale ejection of carbon and sulphur-bearing materials, effects on the ozone layer and isotopic fractionation of sulphur. Archaean impact ejecta units in the Pilbara and Kaapvaal Cratons are almost invariably overlain by ferruginous shale and banded iron formations (BIF) (Glikson 2006; Glikson and Vickers 2007). The origin of BIFs is interpreted, alternatively, in terms of oxidation of ferrous to ferric iron under oxygen-poor atmospheric and hydrospheric conditions (Cloud 1968; Morris 1993), direct chemolithotropic or photo-ferrotropic oxidation of ferrous iron (Konhauser et al. 2002), and UV-triggered photo-chemical reactions (Cairns-Smith 1978). The relations

between sulphur, oxygen and carbon isotopes, atmospheric oxygen levels, photosynthesis, banded iron formations and glaciations with implications for evolution of the early atmosphere remains the subject of current investigations.

## 11.2 Archaean Life

If the theory of evolution be true, it is indisputable that before the lowest Cambrian stratum was deposited, long periods elapsed ... and that during these vast periods, the world swarmed with living creatures. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*.

Inherent in the search for biological signatures in the Archaean geological record are fundamental questions associated with the origin of life (Darwin 1859; Cloud 1968; Davies 1999; Schopf 2001), conceived according to the Miller–Urey and other experiments to have arisen by racemic abiogenic synthesis of inorganic precursors to organic amino acids, the building blocks of life, triggered by lightning and radiation affecting a “primordial soup” rich in organic matter. Alexander Oparin (1924) regarded atmospheric oxygen as a constraint on synthesis of biomolecules, restricting original synthesis of biomolecules to the pre-oxygenation era. Metabolism may have occurred prior to replication, or the other way around, leading to a view of life as an extreme expression of kinetic control and the emergence of metabolic pathways manifesting replicative chemistry (Pross 2004).

According to Davies (1999) the probability of the primordial DNA/RNA biomolecules forming by accident is about  $1-10^{22}$ , rendering it equally or more likely the natural intelligence underlying the characteristics of these molecules and their more complicated successors resides in undecoded laws of complexity. According to Russell et al. (2010) viruses – forming parasitic entities on life forms – acted as mobile RNA worlds injecting genetic elements into proto-cells capable of replicating themselves around submarine alkaline hydrothermal vents. There chemical reactions created biosynthetic pathways leading to emergence of sparse metabolic network and the assembly of pre-genetic information by primordial cells. In this concept, life and evolution of prokaryotes constituted a deterministic process governed by bio-energetic principles likely to apply on planets throughout the universe, which means life is everywhere. However, exobiogenic theories which invoke introduction of biomolecules from other planets merely relegate the question of the origin of life further in time and space. Thus, theories suggesting seeding of life on Earth by comets are to date lacking in evidence, since while comets and meteorites may contain amino acids, the difference between amino acids and RNA or DNA is as vast as the difference between atoms of iron and supercomputers.

Much emphasis has been placed on likely analogies between extremophile microbial communities, such as around submarine hydrothermal vents (“black chimneys”) and original life forms (Martin et al. 2008). These authors compare the chemistry of the H<sub>2</sub>–CO<sub>2</sub> redox couple in hydrothermal systems and core energy metabolic biochemical reactions of modern prokaryotic autotrophs. The high greenhouse gas

levels ( $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{CO}$ ,  $\text{CH}_4$ ) of the early atmosphere allowing the presence of water at the Earth surface despite low solar luminosity (Fig. 11.1) implies high partial  $\text{CO}_2$  pressure and low pH of the Archaean oceans. Dissociation of  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  associated with microbial  $\text{Fe}^{+2}$  to  $\text{Fe}^{+3}$  transition under these conditions would have released hydrogen (Russell and Hall 2006). According to these authors life emerged around hydrothermal vents in connection with reactions involving  $\text{H}_2$ ,  $\text{HCOO}^-$ ,  $\text{CH}_3\text{S}^-$  and  $\text{CO}_2$  catalyzed by sulphide, analogous to the synthesis of acetate ( $\text{H}_3\text{C.COO}^-$ ). In this model Glycine ( $+\text{H}_3\text{N}.\text{CH}_2.\text{COO}^-$ ) and other amino acids, as well as tiny quantities of RNA, were trapped within tiny iron sulfide cavities. The released energy from these reactions resulted in polymerizing glycine and other amino acids into short peptides upon the phosphorylated mineral surface. RNA acted as a polymerizing agent for amino acids as a process regulating metabolism and transferring genetic information. Such biosynthetic pathways probably evolved before 3.7 Ga when reduction prevented a buildup of free atmospheric oxygen (Russell and Hall 2006).

The oldest chemical manifestations of life discovered to date are in the form of dolomite and banded iron sediments (BIF) from 3.85 Ga-old Akilia banded ironstones and dolomite, southwest Greenland, where these high-grade metasediments have seawater-like Rare Earth element and Y ( $\text{REE} + \text{Y}_{\text{SN}}$ ) signatures (Bolhar et al. 2004; Friend et al. 2007) (Fig. 2.9) consistent with those of sea water (Nutman et al. 2010), similar to metasediments in the 3.71–3.70 Ga-old Isua greenstone belt, southwest Greenland. Theories regarding the origin of BIF hinge on oxidation by microbial photoautotrophs or, alternatively, abiotic photo-oxidation of ferrous to ferric iron under the unoxidizing conditions of the early atmosphere/hydrosphere (Cloud 1973; Garrels et al. 1973; Konhauser et al. 2002). A biogenic origin of BIF is supported by evidence for fractionation of the Fe isotopes relative to Fe in igneous rocks (Dauphas et al. 2004). The significance of dolomite hinges on experimental studies indicating precipitation of low-temperature dolomite in sedimentary systems and interstices of pillow lava under unoxidizing conditions requires microbial mediation (Vasconcelos et al. 1995; Roberts et al. 2004). Alternative views regard the dolomite as the product of metasomatism (Rose et al. 1996). Previously low  $^{13}\text{C}$  in graphite clouding in Akilia apatite were interpreted in terms of early biogenic activity (Schidlowski et al. 1979; Mojzsis et al. 1996; Rosing 1999). Questions raised in this regard concern the sedimentary origin of host rocks and inorganic de-carbonation processes (Perry and Ahmed 1977; van Zuilen et al. 2002). Further, the significance of low  $^{12}\text{C}/^{13}\text{C}$  indices as discriminants between biogenic and non-biogenic processes has been questioned (McCollom and Seewald 2006).

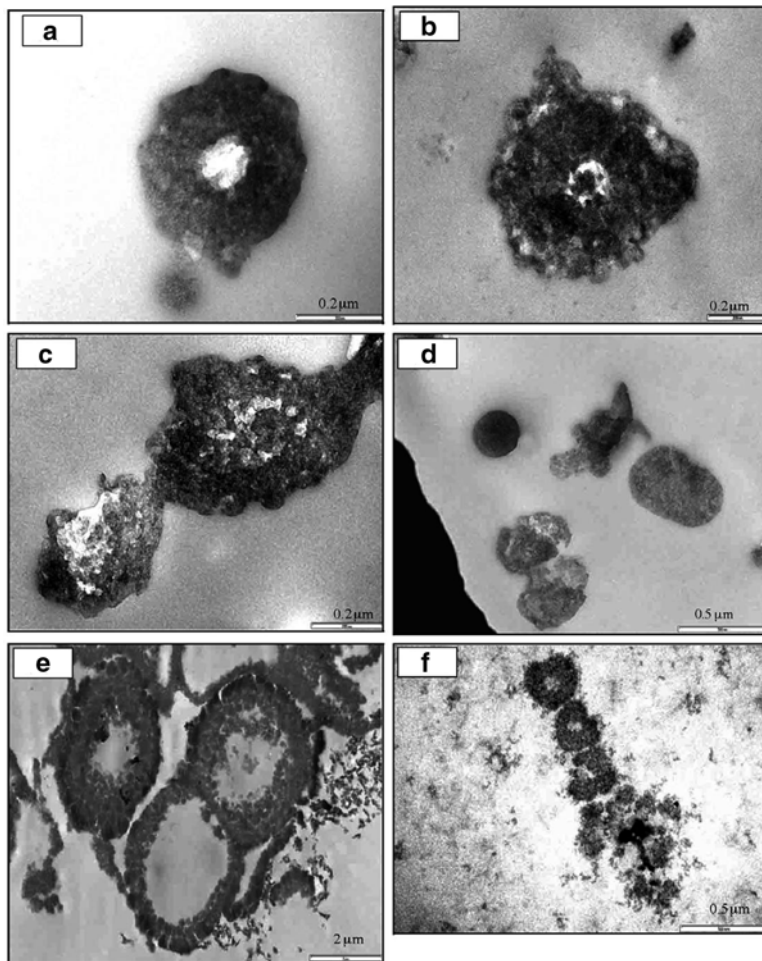
A study of 3.47–3.30 Ga carbonaceous chert layers and veins in the Onverwacht Group of the Barberton Greenstone Belt suggests an origin of the bulk of the carbonaceous matter in the chert by biogenic processes, accompanied by modification through hydrothermal alteration (Walsh and Lowe 1985; Walsh 1992). These studies identified textural evidence in cherts for microbial activity represented by carbonaceous laminations in intercalations within the Hoogenoeg and Kromberg Formations, with affinity to modern mat-dwelling cyanobacteria or bacteria. These include a range of spheroidal and ellipsoidal structures analogous to modern coccoidal bacteria and bacterial

structures, including spores. The Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, contains evidence of >3.0 Ga microfossils, trace fossils, stromatolites, biofilms, microbial and microscopic sulfide minerals with distinctive biogenic sulfur isotope signatures (Wacey 2012). Schopf and Packer (1987) identified eleven taxa, including eight new species of cellularly preserved filamentous Prokaryote microbes in a shallow chert sheet of the ~3.459 Ga Apex Basalt. This assemblage indicates morphologically diverse extant trichomic cyanobacterium-like microorganisms, suggesting presence of oxygen-producing photoautotrophs. However, a possibility remains these microbes represent contamination by ground water.

Studies of microbial remains from the ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation, North Pole Dome, central Pilbara Craton (Gliksun et al. 2008) (Fig. 11.11) and of filamentous microbial remains and carbonaceous matter (CM) from Archaean black cherts (Duck et al. 2007, 2008) (Fig. 11.12) have used the following methods: (1) organic petrology; (2) Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM); (3) Electron Dispersive Spectral Analysis (EDS); (4) high resolution TEM (HRTEM); (5) elemental and carbon isotope geochemistry studies (6) reflectance measurements determining thermal stress. The analyses resolve images of microbial relics and cell walls analogous to the modern hyperthermophilic *Methano-caldococcus jannaschii* residing in hydrothermal sea floor environments. Analogies include the wall structure and thermal degradation mode about 100 °C considered as the upper limit of life, whereas complete disintegration takes place at 132 °C. The  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of CM from the ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation (–36.5 to –32.1‰) show negative correlation with total organic carbon (TOC=0.13–0.75 %) and positive correlation with Carbon/Nitrogen ratios (C/N=134–569). These values are interpreted in terms of oxidation and recycling of the CM and loss of light  $^{12}\text{C}$  and N during thermal maturation. The TEM and carbon isotopic compositions are consistent with activity of chemosynthetic microbes in a seafloor hydrothermal system accompanied with rapid silicification at relatively low temperature.

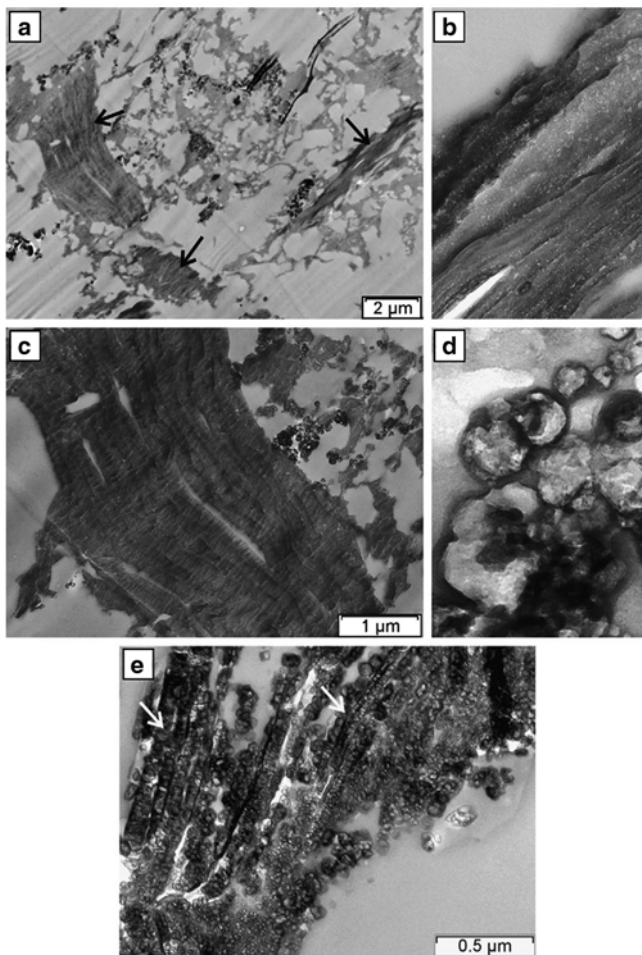
Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM) studies of filamentous and tubular structured isotopically light ( $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  –26.8 to –34.0‰ V-PDB) carbonaceous material associated with ~3.24 Ga epiclastic and silicified sediments overlying sulphide (Fig. 11.12), indicate close analogies with sea floor hydrothermal environments (Duck et al. 2007). The total organic carbon (<1.0–2.3 %) and thermal maturity obtained by reflectance (%Ro) indicates maximum temperatures around 90–100 °C. The association of sulphide with the organic matter suggests a sediment-hosted microbial community and seafloor hydrothermal activity.

Isotopic sulphur  $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  values from the ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation and ~3.24 Ga Panorama Zn–Cu deposit indicate presence of seawater sulfate and elemental sulfur of UV-photolysis origin (Golding et al. 2011), representing mixing between mass independently fractionated sulfur reservoirs with positive and negative  $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  in the Dresser Formation. Pyrite associated with barite is depleted in  $\delta^{34}\text{S}$  relative to the host barite, interpreted as evidence for microbial sulfate reduction. Alternatively the pyrite may have formed by thermochemical reaction inferred for the chert-barite assemblage units in excess of 100 °C. For the ~3.24 Ga deposit the data absence of significant negative  $\delta^{33}\text{S}$  anomalies in sulphide suggests volcanic sulfur rather than seawater sulfate.



**Fig. 11.11** Microbial remains from the ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation. TEM micrographs of thermally degraded Carbonaceous Matter (CM) concentrate after demineralization of rock. (A and B) Single granular-textured bodies showing porosity and central cavity following dissolution of mineral matter (samples DF-17 (a); DF-10 (b)). (c) Micro-porous bodies connected by extensions of same CM (sample DF-10). (d) Cell-like bodies 'caught' at possible early stages of dividing or splitting (sample DF-17). (e) Part of an aggregate of cell-like bodies showing central cavities as characteristic of CM concentrate after demineralization (sample H-1). (f) *M. jannaschii* harvested after being autoclaved at 132C, showing nano-porosity following breakdown and ejection of cellular material. Shrinkage, deformity of cells and amorphous material formation following thermal stress is evident as is contraction of cell cavity into a tiny central hollow (From Glikson et al. 2008; Elsevier, by permission)

The observation of stromatolite-like forms in chert-carbonate-barite sequence of the ~3.49 Ga Dresser Formation, North Pole dome (Fig. 8.5), central Pilbara Craton (Dunlop et al. 1978; Dunlop and Buick 1981) (Fig. 11.6) gave rise to a major controversy regarding the biogenic origin of these structures. Noffke et al. (2013)



**Fig. 11.12** Microbial remains from the 3.24 Ga Sulphur Springs black smoker deposit (a) TEM image illustrating the filamentous structure of the striated OM (*arrowed*). This material is comprised of compressed filaments and bundles of tubular structures, ranging from 1–5  $\mu\text{m}$  in width and up to 100  $\mu\text{m}$  in length; (b) Higher magnification TEM image of compressed filaments illustrated in (a). (c) TEM surface view of bundles of tubular microbial remains; (d) TEM cross section of a tubular bundle; (e) TEM image of silicified microbial tubes (From Duck et al. 2007; Elsevier, by permission)

documented microbially induced sedimentary structures from the Dresser Formation and interpreted the relations between microbial mats and the physical sedimentary environment. Detailed mapping on the scale of meter to millimeter indicates five sub-environments typical of coastal sabkha which contain distinct macroscopic and microscopic associations of microbially induced sedimentary structures. Outcrop-scale microbial mats include polygonal oscillation cracks and gas domes, erosional remnants and pockets, and mat chips. Microscopic microbial lamina comprise tufts,



sinoidal structures, and lamina fabrics and consist of primary carbonaceous matter, pyrite, and hematite, plus trapped grains.

Greater confidence exists regarding the nature of the 3.43 Ga Strelley Pool Chert (Lowe 1980) (Figs. 11.7 and 11.8). Despite reservations (Brasier et al. 2002; Lindsay et al. 2003) the heliotropic reef-forming structure of the microbialites supports a biological oorigin (Hoffman et al. 1999; Van Kranendonk et al. 2003). Alwood et al. (2006a, b, 2007) documented evidence for palaeoenvironmental extensive stromatolite-like reefs, including seven stromatolite morphotypes in different parts of a peritidal carbonate platform. The diversity, complexity and environmental associations of the stromatolites display marked analogies to similar stromatolite reef settings in younger geological systems.

Late Archaean ~2.73 Ga stromatolites, containing inter-bioherm interstitial debris are widespread in the Fortescue Basin, Pilbara Craton, reaching dimensions of tens of meters (Fig. 11.9), and yet younger ~2.63 Ga stromatolites have flourished following the JIL impact event in the central and East Fortescue Basin (Fig. 11.10).

## Chapter 12

# Uniformitarian Theories and Catastrophic Events Through Time

**Abstract** Uniformitarian models for the early Earth take little or no account of repeated impacts of asteroid clusters and their effects on crust and mantle. However a large body of evidence exists for multiple impacts by bodies on the scale of tens of kilometers during ~3.47–2.48 Ga (Lowe et al. *Astrobiology* 3:7–48, 2003; Lowe and Byerly, Did the LHB end not with a bang but with a whimper? 41st Lunar Planet Science conference 2563pdf, 2010; Glikson and Vickers. *Aust J Earth Sci* 57:79–95, 2010; Glikson *The asteroid impact connection of planetary evolution*. Springer-Briefs, Dordrecht, 150 pp, 2013), likely accounting at least in part for mafic-ultramafic volcanism produced by mantle rebound and melting events, consistent with original suggestion by Green (*Earth Planet Sci Lett* 15:263–270, 1972; Green *DH Petrogenesis of Archaean ultramafic magmas and implications for Archaean tectonics*. In: Kroner A (ed) *Precambrian plate tectonics*. Elsevier, Amsterdam, pp 469–489, 1981). Further, the juxtaposition of at least four impact ejecta units with the fundamental unconformity between granite-greenstone terrains and semi-continental deposits in both the Barberton Greenstone Belt and the Pilbara Craton about ~3.26–3.227 Ga constitutes a primary example for the tectonic and magmatic effects of asteroid impact clusters in the Archaean, supporting Lowe and Byerly's (Did the LHB end not with a bang but with a whimper? 41st Lunar Planet Science conference 2563pdf, 2010) suggested extension of the late heavy bombardment (LHB).

**Keywords** Evolution • Uniformitarianism • Catastrophism • Crustal evolution • Late heavy bombardment

James Hutton (1726–1797), observing the great thickness of sedimentary successions, deduced the long-term development of erosion and deposition over a vast expanse of geological time, a concept philosophically related to Darwin's evolutionary theory which has progressively replaced the theory of catastrophism, which advocated violent short-lived events outside our present experience drastically affected the

earth. The new trend culminated with Lyell's (1797–1875) uniformitarian doctrine, suggesting the natural laws and geological processes observed in the present time have operated in the past, as summed up by the dictum: "*the present is the key to the past*". According to Hutton's (1788) principle "*no powers are to be employed that are not natural to the globe, no action to be admitted except those of which we know*". Hutton insisted that the way and means of nature could be discovered only by observation, an empirical approach emphasized by Bullard (1964) who stated "*it is usually best to decide on the existence of a phenomenon in the light of the known facts, or of a reasonable explanation of them, and then to look for a mechanism or a physical theory*". Holmes (1965) recognized this problem and regarded uniformitarianism as an unhappy word liable to be taken too literally, stating: "*Lyell's term inevitably suggests a uniformity of rate, whereas what is meant is a uniformity of natural laws*".

Mitroff (1974), investigating the methodological questions associated with NASA's lunar rocks study, made the observation that, in multi-disciplinary studies, a proliferation of models is an inherently necessary development since usually no single mind does objectively master, assess and verify all the evidence for several contradictory hypotheses. For this reason workers supporting what are eventually shown to be mistaken concepts render as important a service to science as those who prove correct, as in this way the truth should come out in the wash. Where the conditions for debate do not exist and basic scientific ethics are not observed, dominant dogmas take over scientific progress. Any investigation of complex natural phenomena requires that both the limitations of individual methods and their implications to one another are recognized. It is common practice for workers to extrapolate observations from a single terrain or a single method into other areas or subjects.

The empirical methodology inherent in the development of plate tectonic theory suggests its extension into earlier chapters of earth history constitutes a preconceived uniformitarian assumption. By contrast, multidisciplinary analysis and synthesis of direct observations, adhering to a parsimony principle, is capable of constraining concepts on the spatial-temporal distribution of crustal segments. Where more than one explanation exists for a set of observations, the one with the least number of unknowns ought to be tentatively preferred. However, the rapidly growing Archaean databases over the last 50 years or so, rather than constraining geotectonic theories, has led to a diversification of models, including models unconstrained by direct observations and geochemical and isotopic data – constituting a fundamental methodological impasse.

Following the demonstration of plate-tectonics it has become commonplace to interpret a range of features in Precambrian terrains, including structural lineaments, faults, shears, magnetic and gravity lineaments, elongated intrusions, volcanic belts, metamorphic isograds, geochemical anomalies, in terms of plate tectonic elements compared to arc-trench, back-arc, Cordillera systems, or intra-plate settings or mantle plumes (cf. Pearce and Cann 1971, 1973; Pearce et al. 1977; Katz 1972; Dewey and Spall 1976; Tarney et al. 1976; Windley and Smith 1976; Walker 1976; Tarney and

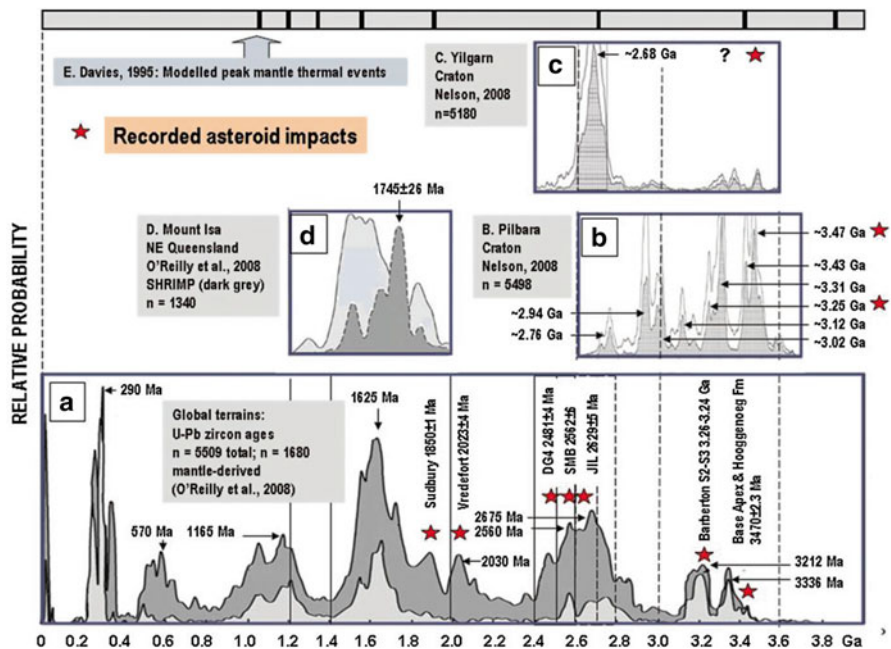
Windley 1977; Burke et al. 1976; Kroner 1981, 1991; de Wit 1998; Krapez and Eisenloh, 1998; Kerrich and Polat 2006; Pirajno 2000, 2007a, b; Krapez and Barley 2008; Percival et al. 2006; Burke, 2011; Jenner et al. 2006, 2013; Polat 2013; Beresford et al. 2013). Inherent in uniformitarian models of Archaean terrains is the assumption that similar petrogenetic processes and trace element patterns necessarily imply analogous geotectonic environments. Based on extensive observations in Mesozoic-Cenozoic circum-Pacific belts, Hamilton (2003) concluded Archaean crustal regimes are fundamentally distinct from subduction-related orogenic belts and accretion wedges. Thus, no ophiolite and melange-type thrust-associated assemblages such as are diagnostic of circum-Pacific wedges have to date been identified in Archaean greenstone belts. The evidence for large asteroid clusters and their consequences (Chaps. 7, 8 and 10) is inconsistent with tectonic models based on purely internal/endogenic processes. Whereas the bulk of geochemical and isotopic data from early to mid-Archaean terrain displays similarities with modern systems underpinned by two-stage mantle melting processes (Green and Ringwood 1967, 1977; Green 1981), no reason has been given why similar petrogenetic processes cannot occur in distinct tectonic environments.

Moorbath (1977) proposed a view of crustal evolution in terms of “episodic uniformitarianism”, i.e. intermittent operation of two-stage mantle melting processes leading to a series of major accretion-differentiation events in environments akin to modern circum-Pacific domains, where juvenile mantle-derived additions to continental crust dominate over intra-crustal reworking. However, whereas similarities exist between Archaean granite-greenstone terrains, Sierra Nevada Palaeozoic batholiths (Hietanen 1975) and Chilean Mesozoic granodiorite-greenstone back-arc terrains (Tarney et al. 1976), there is no evidence for the existence in the Archaean of large continents such as those fringing the circum-Pacific arc-trench belts. Inherent in plate-tectonic processes is subduction and partial melting of large volumes of oceanic crust and production of mafic to felsic magma in overlying mantle wedges, giving rise to belts of andesite, Na-rich dacite, Na-rich rhyolite and minor shoshonite and their dioritic, tonalitic and trondhjemitic plutonic counterparts. Early Archaean greenstone belts are dominated by bimodal mafic-felsic volcanic assemblages and plutonic counterparts are characterized by low initial  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values, heavy REE-depletion, light REE-enriched patterns, high Na/K and low LIL (Large ion lithophile) elements (Glikson 1979a). Andesite is a relatively rare component in pre-3.2 Ga volcanic sequences but common in younger greenstone belts (Superior Province, Midlands belt in Zimbabwe, Marda belt in Western Australia). These compositions are commonly distinct from those of several early and mid-Proterozoic terrains dominated by eutectic K-rich granites, adamellite, granodiorite and their extrusive equivalents, characterized by intermediate to high  $^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$  values, high LIL-element levels and negative Eu anomalies (Glikson 1976a, b).

Temporally unique features of the Archaean Earth include (Glikson 1980; Hamilton 2003):

1. The evidence for major asteroid impact clusters at several stages of Archaean and Early Proterozoic history, including ~3,482, 3,472, 3,445, 3,416, 3,334, 3,256, 3,243, 3,225 (impact ejecta units), 2,975 (Maniitsoq, Greenland), 2,630, 2,570, 2,560, 2,481, 2,020 (Vredefort), 1,850 (Sudbury) Shoemaker and Shoemaker 1996; French 1998; Glikson and Vickers 2010; Glikson 2013).
2. In particular impact, tectonic and magmatic records for the interval ~3,256–3,225 Ma in the Barberton Greenstone Belt and in the Pilbara Craton indicate major asteroid impact cluster resulting in faulting, uplifts, formation of unconformities and granite intrusions affecting abrupt shifts from mafic-ultramafic-TTG (tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite)-dominated crust to continental crust (Lowe et al. 2003; Glikson and Vickers 2006, 2010; Glikson 2013).
3. Evidence for high-temperature melting producing high-Mg and peridotitic komatiites (Green 1981; Arndt et al. 1997).
4. Trace element features suggesting presence of garnet in residues of partial melting, based on rare Earth element fractionation (Hanson 1975; Arth and Hanson 1975; Arth 1976); Modern arc-trench volcanics generally display lesser degrees of REE fractionation. High abundances of transition metals (Ni, Cr, Co) in Archaean andesites and some dacites, as compared to modern equivalents, suggest a high ultramafic component in the source of these magmas.
5. Presence of superheated tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) magmas (Glikson and Sheraton 1972; Glikson 1979a, b). The degree to which mafic-ultramafic enclaves and xenoliths are digested by Archaean TTGs (Chap. 4) appears to exceed those observed in Phanerozoic batholiths.
6. Dominance of bimodal tholeiitic basalt-dacite volcanic suites and relative paucity of andesite in pre-3.2 Ga early to mid-Archaean suites (cf. Glikson and Hickman 1981);
7. An absence of Phanerozoic-type ophiolites-turbidite-flysch association (Glikson 1980; Hamilton 2003).
8. A paucity of alkaline igneous rocks, except as minor occurrences in late Archaean (cf. Smithies and Champion 1999).
9. Relatively little evidence of intra-continental anatectic processes during 3.6–3.2 Ga; Thus, in granite-greenstone systems K-rich granites mostly appear at a late stage of evolution of Archaean batholiths (cf. Robb and Anhaeusser 1983).
10. Dominance of vertical crustal movements in pre-3.2 Ga early to mid-Archaean terrains; commonly transcurrent and thrust deformation of these terrains occurred at upper or late Archaean stage.
11. Frequency distribution diagrams of isotopic ages plotted against time point to a strongly episodic nature of Archaean tectonic-thermal history (Fig. 12.1), interpreted in part as due to the tectonic and magmatic effects of large asteroid impacts (Glikson and Vickers 2010; Glikson 2013).

Analogies between early Archaean mafic-ultramafic belts and oceanic crust (Glikson 1971, 1972a, b) or Mare-like crust produced by magmatism triggered by asteroid impacts (Glikson 2005) point to an apparent absence of directly observed basal unconformities below basal mafic-ultramafic sequences and a granitoid basement.



**Fig. 12.1** Isotopic U-Pb zircon age frequency distribution (relative probability) diagrams. (a) Global (After O’Reilly et al. 2008). (b) Pilbara Craton, Western Australia (After Nelson 2008). (c) Yilgarn Craton, Western Australia (After Nelson 2008). (d) Northwest Queensland (After Nelson 2008). (e) Model mantle thermal events (Davies 1995). Stars represent recorded large asteroid impacts. Impact ages are located above stars; histogram peaks are indicated by horizontal arrows (Glikson and Vickers 2010; Australian Journal of Earth Sciences, by permission)

These sequences include the Onverwacht Group (~3.548–3.258 Ga; Kaapvaal Craton), Sebakwian Group (>3.5 Ga; Zimbabwe Craton) and the Warrawoona and Coonterunah Groups of the Pilbara Craton. In this view occurrences of entrained zircons and early  $^{143}\text{Nd}/^{144}\text{Nd}$  model ages, indicating precursor granitic materials (Jahn et al. 1981; Smithies et al. 2007a; Van Kranendonk et al. 2007a, b; Hickman 2012), may reflect detrital components derived from adjacent older gneiss terrains. In the Pilbara Craton such older gneisses include the 3.66–3.58 Ga Warrawagine gneisses (Nelson 1999) and in the Kaapvaal Craton the Ancient Gneiss Complex (~3.7–3.5 Ga; Kröner et al. 1996; Kröner and Tegtmeier 1994).

The intrusion into greenstone belts of tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite (TTG) magmas whose geochemical and isotopic features imply derivation by partial melting of basic materials, militating against a sub-greenstone continental basement, as anatexis of such basement during extensive TTG magmatism would produce differentiated K-rich magmas.

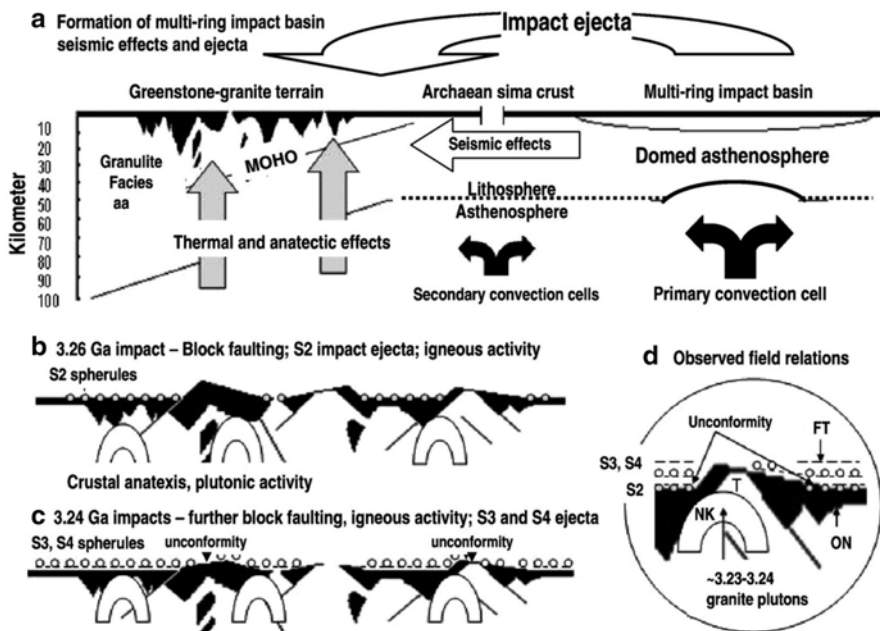
In the Pilbara Craton constraints on evolutionary theories include the >15–20 km cumulative thickness 3.53–3.23 Ga volcanic sequence of the greenstone belts, including at least 8 volcanic cycles each approximately 10–15 million years-long,

as based on zircon ages of felsic volcanic units (Hickman 2012). These cycles, representing mantle and crust melting events, were compared to those of Large Igneous Provinces (LIPs) formed by mantle plumes (Arndt et al. 2001; Condie 2001; Ernst et al. 2004). However, Phanerozoic LIPs are not known to be intruded by TTG magmas. Plate tectonic analogies of Archaean evolution in terms of Phanerozoic plate tectonics processes (Bickle et al. 1983; Barley 1993; Zegers et al. 2001; Kitajima et al. 2001; Terabayashi et al. 2003; Smithies et al. 2003) focus on similarities of tectonic and magmatic elements but overlook the differences. Thus, comparisons between the Archaean mafic-ultramafic sequences and modern oceanic crust overlook the occurrence of felsic volcanic intercalations within ultramafic-mafic sequences (cf.  $3,548 \pm 3$ – $3,544 \pm 3$  Ma felsic tuff within the Theespruit Formation, Barberton Greenstone Belt; felsic volcanics in the  $\sim 3,515$ – $3,498$  Ma Coucal Formation, Coonterunah Subgroup, Pilbara Craton, Fig. 8.3) and the presence of unconformities, such as the pre-3.43 Ga unconformity truncating the Coonterunah Subgroup (Buick et al. 1995).

An example of a possible intra-cratonic rift zone is furnished by the  $\sim 3.26$ – $3.22$  Ga-old Strelley greenstone belt, central Pilbara Craton, which is down-faulted between older 3.49–3.42 Ga terrains (Fig. 8.5). Where locally the Strelley Group unconformably overlaps the older terrain, these relationships do not necessarily imply the older terrain originally formed a continuous basement below the Strelley supracrustals, which could have been deposited in a tectonic rift zone. No sub-greenstones continental basement is required by seismic mid-crustal data (Swager et al. 1997) from Archaean terrains in the Yilgarn Craton. Here, major sub-horizontal shears and thrusts, which detach high level supracrustals from deep-level granitic sheets, preclude identification of the original field relations between these sheets. Thus the older gneiss terrains do not necessarily suggest sub-greenstones continental crust more than suggested, for example, by zircon-bearing Red Sea rift sediments. As another example, the continental rise of Lord Howe Island does not imply existence of felsic crust beneath the Tasman Sea.

Martin (1999) and Smithies (2000) suggest that the Archaean tonalite-trondhjemite-granodiorite suite (TTG – Glikson and Sheraton 1972; Glikson 1979a, b) can be distinguished from modern analogues (adakites) in terms of the low Mg# (Fig. 6.10), Ni and other trace metals and high SiO<sub>2</sub> values of the Archaean rocks, suggesting little interaction between the Archaean magmas and the mantle. Smithies et al. (2003) suggests that, in contrast to modern low-angle subduction zones where magmas form by melting of both oceanic crust and mantle wedge, little or no subduction occurred prior to about 3.1 Ga and that instead thick mafic crust was directly melted, a process they refer to as “flat subduction”. Exceptions occur, for example tonalites of the eastern Kaapvaal Craton with high Ni levels, possibly reflecting partial melting of komatiites which are abundant in this terrain (Glikson 1976a, b, c).

The identification of asteroid impact ejecta/fallout units in Archaean sedimentary sequences offers an explanation for a number of major Archaean episodes, as follows (Glikson and Vickers 2006, 2010; Glikson 2013):



**Fig. 12.2** A schematic model (not to scale) portraying the principal stages in asteroid impact-triggered cratering in mafic-ultramafic (*SIMA*) crustal regions of the Archaean Earth, ensuing rearrangement of mantle convection patterns, seismic activity, faulting, uplift, development of unconformities and igneous activity in both *SIMA* regions and affected greenstone-granite terrain. (a) 3.26 Ga (Barberton Greenstone Belt spherule unit S2 impact): formation of a multi-ring impact basin by a 20 km asteroid impact, impact ejecta, seismically triggered faulting, mantle convection underlying impact basin, secondary mantle cells, thermal and anatectic effects across the asthenosphere/lithosphere boundary and the MOHO below greenstone-granite nuclei. (b) 3.26 Ga: Block faulting in greenstone-granite nuclei, rise of anatectic granites, S2 spherules preserved in below-wave base environments. (c) 3.24 Ga – S3 and S4 impacts, ejecta fallout over below-wave base S2 ejecta and overlying sediments and over unconformities. Further faulting, block movements and rise of plutonic magmas. (d) Schematic representation of observed field relations between the ~3.55–3.26 Ga mafic–ultramafic volcanic Onverwacht Group (*ON*), intrusive early tonalites and trondhjemites (*T*), 3.26–3.24 Ga granites (*NK*), S2 ejecta, unconformity, S3, S4 ejecta, and the Fig Tree Group sediments (*FT*) (From Glikson, 2008; Elsevier, by permission)

~3.47 Ga. The association of a microkrystite spherules unit with at the top of the 3,470±2 Ma felsic volcanics of the Antarctic Chert Member (uppermost Mount Ada Basalt) (Figs. 8.14 and 8.15) correlated with felsic volcanics of the Duffer Formation (3,471–3,473 Ma), hints at an association of crustal anatectic event with multiple asteroid impacts (Glikson et al. 2004). Recently a possible equivalent of this impact deposit was found below the Marble Bar Chert some 50 km to the east.

~3.26–3.227 Ga. The asteroid impact cluster identified in the Barberton Greenstone Belt (Lowe et al. 1989, 2003), with correlated units in the central Pilbara Craton,



defines an abrupt transition from mafic-ultramafic crust to continental crust (Glikson and Vickers 2006, 2010; Glikson 2013) (Fig. 12.2) and a boundary between an early to mid-Archaean era and upper to late Archaean era. The significance of this period is underpinned by peak zircon ages of  $\sim 3265$  Ma ( $\sim 3.2$ – $3.3$  Ga) measured in the southwest Yilgarn Craton (Pidgeon et al. 2010) (Fig. 9.3). Whereas the former era is characterized by diapiric granitoids and vertical tectonics, the latter era is characterized by lateral accretion of elongate greenstone belts and thus by horizontal tectonics.

**$\sim 2.63$ – $2.48$  Ga.** Repeated asteroid clusters occur during the late Archaean, including major events at  $\sim 2.63$ ,  $\sim 2.57$ ,  $\sim 2.56$  (double impact) and  $\sim 2.48$  Ga. The relation between these impacts and late igneous activity in granite-greenstone terrains in the Yilgarn Craton (Figs. 9.1 to 9.4) and the late Archaean in the western Dharwar Craton, India (Mohan et al. 2014) are unclear.

To sum up, uniformitarian models take little or no account of repeated impacts of asteroid clusters and their effects on the Archaean Earth, despite of the large body of evidence for multiple impacts by bodies on the scale of tens of kilometer during  $\sim 3.47$ – $2.48$  Ga (Lowe et al. 2003; Lowe and Byerly 2010; Glikson and Vickers 2010; Glikson 2013), likely accounting in part for mafic-ultramafic volcanism produced by mantle rebound and melting events, consistent with original suggestion by Green (1972, 1981), and major breaks in crustal evolution such as about  $\sim 3.26$ – $3.227$  Ga.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: U-Pb Zircon Ages (Except Where Specified Otherwise) from the Ancient Gneiss Complex, Swaziland (AGC) and Barberton Greenstone Belt, Eastern Transvaal (BGB) (Compiled After Pujol 2007)

East Kaapvaal Craton			
AGC NW Swaziland	U-Pb zircon in banded tonalite gneiss	3,644 ± 4 Ma 3,504 ± 6 Ma 3,433 ± 8 Ma	Compston and Kröner (1988)
AGC	U-Pb zircons in foliated to massive granodiorite	3,702 ± 1 Ma	Kröner et al. (1996) and Kröner and Tegtmeier (1994)
AGC	U-Pb Ngwane gneiss	3,683 ± 10 Ma 3,521 ± 23 Ma 3,490 ± 3 Ma	Kröner et al. (1996) and Kröner and Tegtmeier (1994)
BGB	Granite pebble in Moodies Fm	3,570 ± 6 Ma 3,518 ± 11 Ma	Kröner et al. (1989)
BGB	Zircon xenocryst in felsic volcanic Hoogenoeg Fm	3,474 + 35/-31 Ma 3,559 ± 27 Ma	Tegtmeier and Kröner (1987) Kröner et al. (1989)
AGC	Foliated tonalitic gneiss	3,563 ± 3 Ma	Kröner et al. (1989)
BGB	Felsic volcanics, Theespruit Fm	3,548 ± 3-3,544 ± 3 Ma	Kröner et al. (1996)
BGB	Porphyritic granodiorite	3,540 ± 3 Ma	Kröner et al. (1996)
BGB	A tonalitic gneiss wedge in Theespruit Fm	3,538 + 4/-2 Ma 3,538 ± 6 Ma	Armstrong et al. 1990 and Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Theespruit Fm felsic volcanics	3,531 ± 10 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990)
	Theespruit Fm felsic volcanics	3,511 ± 3 Ma	Kroner et al. (1992)

(continued)

BGB	Steynsdorp pluton, banded trondhjemitic gneiss	3,510±4 Ma to 3,505±5 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Steynsdorp pluton, granodioritic phase	3,511±4 Ma 3,502±2 Ma	Kröner et al. (1996) Kamo and Davis (1994)
AGC	Trondhjemitic gneiss	3,504±24 Ma	Kröner et al. (1989)
BGB	Steynsdorp pluton, trondhjemitic gneiss	~3,490	Kröner et al. (1991a, b) and (1992)
BGB	Zircon xenocrysts in Steynsdorp pluton	3,553±4 Ma, 3,538±9 Ma 3,531±3 Ma	Kröner et al. (1991a, b) and (1996)
BGB	Stolzberg pluton, trondhjemitic gneiss intrusive into Theespruit Fm	3,460+5/-4 Ma 3,445±3 Ma 3,431±11 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994) Kröner et al. (1991a, b) Dziggel et al. (2006)
BGB	Quartz porphyry dyke, Komati Fm	3,470+39/-9 Ma 3,458±1.6 Ma (titanite age)	
BGB	Intercalation of tuff in Komati Fm	3,482±2 Ma	Dann (2000)
BGB	Meta-gabbro, Komati Fm	3,482±5 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990)
BGB	Impact spherules	3,472 Ma Pilbara spherules: 3,470±2 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
AGC	Tonalitic gneiss	3,458±3 Ma	Kroner et al. (1989)
AGC	Tsawela Gneiss, a foliated tonalite	3,455–3,436 Ma	Kröner and Tegtmeier (1994)
BGB	Trondhjemitic Theespruit pluton, intrudes the Sandspruit and Theespruit Fms	3,443–3,437 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990), Kamo and Davis (1994), Kamo et al. (1990) and Kröner et al. (1991a, b, 1992)
BGB	Felsic tuff, Hoogenoeg Fm	3,445±6 Ma 3,438±12 Ma	deWit et al. (1987)
BGB	Impact spherules	3,445 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
BGB	Doornhoek pluton, trondhjemitic gneiss, intrudes the Theespruit Fm.	3,448+4/-3 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Reset titanite age	3,215 Ma (titanite)	
BGB	Theeboom pluton trondhjemitic	3,460+5/-4 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Titanite age (reset)	3,237–3,201 Ma	
BGB	Impact spherules	3,416 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
BGB	Lowest Kromberg Fm	3,416±7 Ma	Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Komati Fm, pegmatitic gabbro	3,350 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990) and Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Stentor pluton	3,347+67/-60 Ma	Tegtmeier and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Impact spherules	3,334 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
South-central Swaziland	Granodiorite, Usuthu suite	3,306±4 Ma	Maphalala and Kröner (1993)

(continued)

BGB	Top Kromberg Fm (Footbridge Chert)	3,334 ± 3 Ma	Byerly et al. (1996)
BGB	Mendon Fm	~3,245–3,330 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2007)
BGB	Mendon Fm volcanics (Felsic tuff)	3,298 ± 3 Ma	Byerly et al. (1996)
BGB	Zircon xenocrysts, volcanic rocks, Fig Tree Group	3,334–3,310 Ma	Byerly et al. (1996) and Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Granite pebble, Moodies Group	3,306 + 65/–57 Ma	Tegtmeyer and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Felsic tuff, base Fig Tree Group	3,258 ± 3 Ma	Byerly et al. (1996)
BGB	Fig Tree Group felsic volcanics, clastics and BIF	3,259–3,225 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990), Byerly et al. (1996), Kamo and Davis (1994), Kohler et al. (1993) and Kröner et al. (1991a, b, 1992)
BGB	Felsic tuff	3,256 ± 4 Ma	Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Impact spherules	3,256 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
BGB	Felsic tuff	3,253 ± 2 Ma	Byerly et al. (1996)
BGB	Impact spherules	3,243 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
BGB	Felsic tuff, base Fig Tree Group	3,243 ± 4 Ma	Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Felsic tuff	3,227 ± 4 Ma	Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Porphyry intrusive into the Fig Tree Group	3,227 ± 3 Ma	de Ronde (1991)
BGB	Kaap Valley pluton (tonalite)	3,229–3,223 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1990), Kamo and Davis (1994), Layer et al. (1992) and Tegtmeyer and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Kaap Valley pluton (tonalite)	3,214 and 3,142 Ma	Layer et al. (1992)
	40 Ar/39 Ar hornblende and biotite ages		
BGB	Nelshoogte pluton; U-Pb	3,236 ± 1 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Nelshoogte pluton; Pb-Pb zircon	3,212 ± 2 Ma	York et al. (1989)
BGB	Nelshoogte pluton; 40 Ar/39 Ar ages	3,080–2,860 Ma	York et al. (1989)
BGB	Stentor pluton (central part) – trondhjemitic to granodiorite gneiss	3,250 ± 30 Ma	Tegtmeyer and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Stentor pluton (eastern part)	3,107 ± 5 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Dalmein pluton, granodiorite	3,216 + 2/–1 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
BGB	Badplaas domain gneisses	3,290–3,240 Ma	Kisters et al. (2006)
NW Swaziland	Wyldsdales pluton	3,234 + 17/–4 Ma	Fletcher (2003)

(continued)

NC Swaziland	Usuthu suite, granodiorite	3,231 ± 4 Ma– 3,224 ± 4 Ma	Maphalala and Kröner (1993)
AGC	K-feldspar-rich granitic gneiss	3,227 ± 21 Ma	Kröner et al. (1989)
AGC	Tonalitic dyke	3,229 Ma	de Ronde and Kamo (2000)
BGB	Titanite age	3,229 ± 25 Ma	Diener et al. (2005)
Tjakastad schist belt	Titanite from a sedimentary unit	3,229 ± 9 Ma	
	Youngest group of Tjakastad belt	3,227 ± 7 Ma	
	Late trondhjemitic	3,229 ± 5 Ma	
BGB	Dacite, top Fig Tree Group	3,225 ± 3	Kröner et al. (1991a, b)
BGB	Impact spherules (at least 2 layers)	3,225 Ma	Lowe and Byerly (2010)
BGB	Pebble, Moodies Group	3,224 ± 6 Ma	Tegtmeyer and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Porphyry intrusion, Stolzburg Syncline	3,222 + 10/–4 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
AGC	Tonalitic gneiss	3,214 ± 20 Ma	Kröner et al. (1989)
BGB	Granodiorite intrusive, Dwazile greenstone belt	3,213 ± 10 Ma	Kröner and Tegtmeyer (1994)
BGB	Moodies Group – older age limit	3,224 ± 6 Ma	Tegtmeyer and Kröner (1987)
BGB	Felsic dyke intruding Moodies Group	3,207 ± 2 Ma	Heubeck and Lowe (1994)
BGB	Moodies Group – younger age limit (Salisbury Kop pluton)	3,109 + 10/–8 Ma	Kamo and Davis (1994)
<b>South-eastern Kaapvaal Craton</b>			
	Layered light and dark TTG gneisses and amphibolite	3,640–3,460	Hunter et al. (1992)
	Luneburg gneisses, tonalitic to trondhjemitic gneiss	3,458–3,362 Ma	Hunter et al. (1992)
	Witkop formation of the Nondweni Group, zircons from a rhyolite flow	3,406 ± 6 Ma	Versfeld and Wilson (1992)
	Commondale greenstone belt, peridotite, Sm-Nd age	3,334 ± 18 Ma	Wilson and Carlson (1989)
	Mvunyana Granodiorite – Rb-Sr, Pb-Pb and limited U-Pb zircon	0.3290 Ma	Matthews et al. (1989)
	De Kraalen gneiss, layered tonalitic rocks	Intruded by 3,250 Ma Anhalt Granitoid Suite	Hunter et al. (1992)

(continued)

Anhalt Granitoid Suite – trondhjemites, granodiorites and quartz monzonite.	Rb-Sr age 3,250 ± 39 Ma	Hunter et al. (1992) Farrow et al. (1990)
Komatiite basalt flows, Re-Os isochron regression age	3,321 ± 62 Ma	Shirey et al. (1998)
Natal Spa granite	3,210 ± 25 Ma	Reimold et al. (1993)
<b>Northern Kaapvaal Craton</b>		
Zircon xenocrysts, Mac Kop conglomerate, Murchison greenstone belt	3,364 ± 18 Ma	Poujol et al. (1996)
Goudplaats gneisses – migmatitic tonalitic gneiss	3333.3 ± 5 Ma	Brandl and Kröner (1993)
Tonalitic gneisses	3282.6 ± 0.4, 3,274 + 56/ –45 Ma	Kröner et al. (2000)
Felsic metavolcanic, Giyani greenstone belt	3203.3 ± 0.2 Ma	Brandl and Kröner (1993)
Makhutswi Gneiss, tonalite to granodiorite	3,228 ± 12 Ma	Poujol et al. (1996)
<b>Central Kaapvaal Craton</b>		
Trondhjemite gneiss, Johannesburg Dome	3,340 ± 3 Ma	Poujol and Anhaeusser (2001)
Zircon xenocrysts, Vredefort dome	3,425 Ma 3,310 Ma	Hart et al. (1999) Kamo et al. (1996)
Zircon xenocryt	3,480 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1991)
Zircon xenocryt	3,259 ± 9	Armstrong et al. (1991)
Zircon xenocryt	3,230 ± 8 Ma	Armstrong et al. (1991)
Tonalitic gneiss, Johannesburg dome	3199.9 ± 2 Ma	Poujol and Anhaeusser (2001)
<b>Western Kaapvaal Craton</b>		
Zircon xenocryt, felsic schist, Madibe greenstone belt	3,428 ± 11, 3,201 ± 4 Ma	Hirner (2001)
Tonalitic and trondhjemitic gneisses, 207Pb/206Pb age	~3,250 Ma	Drennan et al. (1990)
Tonalitic gneiss, 207Pb/206Pb	3,246–3,069 Ma	Schmitz et al. (2004)

## Appendix 2: Key Supracrustal and Plutonic Units and Isotopic Ages, Pilbara Craton, Western Australia

Age (million years) (Ma)	Supracrustal unit	Lithology	Plutonic unit	Age (Ma)
West Pilbara Craton <sup>a</sup>				Karratha terrain
~2,940	Mallina formation	Siltstones, arenite, greywacke	~3.27–3.26 Ga $T_{Nd}$ ~3.48–3.43 Ga	Karratha granodiorite
	Bookingarra formation	Siliceous high-Mg basalt	~2.93–3.27	Yule Batholith
	Constantine sandstone	Arenite, conglomerate	~2,945	Mungaroona granodiorite (high-Mg diorite) <sup>c</sup>
~2,950	Rushall Shale	Shale		
~2,960	Cistern formation	Fanglomerate, breccia and arenite		
~2,980	Cattle well formation	Felsic volcanoclastics		
	Coonieena Basalt	Basalt		
~3,000	Red hill volcanics	Volcanics		
	Warambie Basalt	Basalt		
	Cundaline formation	Conglomerate, arenite, shale		
~3,020	Cleaverville formation	Chert, BIF, carbonaceous shale, arenite		
	Farrel Quartzite	Arenite, conglomerate		
~3,118	Woodbrook formation	Tuff, agglomerate, basalt		
~3,120	Bradley Basalt	Pillowed basalt and komatiite		
~3,120	Tozer formation	Basalt, andesite, dacite, rhyolite and sediments		
~3,126	Nallana formation	Basalt, ultramafics, pyroclastic volcanics		
Sholl shear zone				
~3,190	Port Robinson Basalt	Banded iron formations		
	Dixon Island formation	Volcanics, felsic tuff		

(continued)

Regal thrust				
~3,180	Pilbara well volcanics	Mafic volcanics		
~3,180	Honeyeaster Basalt	Mafic volcanics		
	Paddy market formation	Submarine fan		
~3,190	Cardinal and Corboy formations	Clastic sediments		
~3,220	Budjan creek formation	Clastic sediments		
~3,250	Roebourne Group	Mafic volcanics		
~3,270	Ruth well formation	Mafic volcanics		
East Pilbara Craton				
~2,930	Mosquito creek formation	Siltstone, shale	~3.20–3.17	Kurrana terrain Gneiss granodiorite
~3,335	Kangaroo cave formation	Felsic volcanics and sedimentary intercalations	3,241 ± 3	Mount Edgar Batholith <sup>b</sup>
	Kunagunarinna formation	Mafic and ultramafic volcanics	3,243 ± 4	“
~3,270	Leilira formation	Arenite and conglomerate	3,294 ± 5	“
Unconformity			3,298 ± 2	“
	Charteris Basalt	Basalt	3,303 ± 6	“
~3,320	Wyman formation	Rhyolite	3,308 ± 3	“
~3,350	Euro Basalt	Mafic and ultramafic volcanics	3,314 ± 6	“
Disconformity			3,321 ± 6	“
~3,420	Strelley Pool formation	Carbonate, arenite, stromatolites	3,429 ± 13	“
Regional unconformity			3,437 ± 5	“
~3,430	Panorama formation	Felsic volcanics	3,448 ± 8	“
	Apex Basalt	Mafic to ultramafic volcanics		
~3,465	Duffer formation	Felsic volcanics (dacite to rhyolite)		
3,470.1 ± 1.9 Ma				
~3,470	Mount Ada Basalt	Pillowed and carbonated basalts		
~3,480	Dresser and McPhee formations	Felsic volcanics, arenites, barite, chert		
~3,490	North Star Basalt	Mafic volcanics		
	Double bar formation	Mafic volcanics		
~3,515	Coucal formation	Felsic and mafic volcanics		
~3,525	Table top formation	Mafic volcanics		

<sup>a</sup>Supracrustal unit ages after Hickman (2012)

<sup>b</sup>Mount Edgar granite data after Van Kranendonk et al. (2007a): secular tectonic evolution of the Archaean continental crust interplay between horizontal and vertical processes in the formation of the Pilbara Craton, Australia *Terra Nova* 19, 1–38

<sup>c</sup>Geological Survey of Western Australia Annual Review 1999–2000



## About the Author



**Andrew Y. Glikson**, an Earth and paleo-climate scientist, studied geology at the University of Jerusalem and graduated at the University of Western Australia in 1968. He conducted geological studies of the oldest geological formations in Australia, South Africa, India and Canada, studied large asteroid impacts, including effects on the atmosphere, oceans and mass extinction of species. Between 1998 and 2014, this work included detailed studies of impact ejecta units in the Pilbara Craton, Western Australia, geochemical studies of impact ejecta units from South Africa, and the identification and study of several Australian buried impact structures, including Woodleigh, Gnargoo, Mount Ashmore, Talundilly, Warburton and Winton. Currently he is a Visiting Scientist in Geoscience Australia developing a catalogue and website of Australian confirmed and

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