

Interactive comment on “Phanerozoic black shales and the Wilson Cycle” by J. Trabucho-Alexandre et al.

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Dear Dr Wagner,

Thank you for your review. Our answer to your comments is in line with that to Dr Wignall and Dr Jiménez Berrocoso. Indeed the stage of a basin in the Wilson Cycle is one element in defining whether black shales may preferentially develop in certain parts of a basin or not. Obviously, climate, dominant wind directions, oceanography, (local) nutrient supply, etc. are important as well. However, the Wilson Cycle is a fundamental element in the development of environments in which black shales may accumulate. We shall rewrite the manuscript where needed to address this problem in the perceived message of the manuscript.

C493

The model presented in this study does not attempt to fully explain all evidence of organic matter-rich sediments. Rather, it attempts to incorporate all environments past and present in which black shale accumulation is possible, and show that in different stages of the Wilson Cycle specific environments are more prone to black shale deposition than others. Also the type of organic matter (terrestrial vs marine) often shows a relation with the Wilson Cycle. Whether black shales are deposited or not, and at which time in the basin development, also depends on basin morphology and on local processes (including climate, oceanography, etc.). The black shales studied by Gavrilov et al. (2003) indeed illustrate that the Wilson cycle, though being an important element for the character and distribution of black shales, by controlling the development of depositional environments, does not necessarily overpower the other factors that favour black shale deposition. In case of the black shales formed on the Russian platform at the Palaeocene-Eocene Boundary clearly the PETM transgression, the dissociation of methane hydrates (Dickens et al., 1995), the availability of nutrients and a favourable circulation system were of importance. Nevertheless, in the context of the Wilson Cycle the PETM indeed coincides with a period of tectonic activity. The rift-to-drift transition in the NE North Atlantic has been shown to be coeval to the release of greenhouse gases, and a link between these two processes has been offered (Storey et al., 2007). A similar situation was seen during the Toarcian (e.g. Trabucho Alexandre et al., in press).

Different basins may be in different stages of the Wilson Cycle; therefore, environments around the globe in which black shales may accumulate will indeed be present during much of the Phanerozoic. Although black shales were deposited throughout the Phanerozoic, ‘widespread’ black shale deposition is characteristic for specific intervals in the Phanerozoic. These intervals are associated with supercontinent breakup, increased volcanism (large igneous provinces, increase of ocean-ridge volume). Whether the term uniformitarianism is relevant in this particular context seems a philosophical rather than a practical question.

C494

Whilst higher frequency controls on oceanography and climate are important indeed (cf. van Buchem et al., 1995), we focus here on the development over longer timescales of the environments in which black shales preferentially accumulate. We argue that when correlating black shales horizons worldwide it should be taken into consideration in which environments and by which processes they were formed. With regard to the notion that local black shale formation such as on Demerara Rise during the Cretaceous, needs to be considered in a wider regional (climate) context we refer to Trabucho Alexandre et al. (2010) who showed that in the western tropical Atlantic off South America black shale formation in the young North Atlantic was favoured by the combination of a high sea level, a warm climate and nutrient availability due to LIP activity, all related to supercontinent breakup, in combination with the circulation within the basin that depended on its orientation and latitudinal position.

Yours sincerely,

João

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C495

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C496