

EAOG NEWSLETTER NO. 8

A. MESSAGE FROM COMMANDER VARG

You're all dead, except for my pal Vincent (see below).

B. MESSAGE FROM THE NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Dear friends, here we are again with another jolly edition of the EAOG Newsletter. As promised, it contains a summary of the Minutes from the Board Meeting. There is also an intriguing item from our colleague Vincent Grossi on geochemists' false friends, as he calls them, some of whom he met on his travels sponsored by the EAOG.

What the Minutes of the Board Meeting do not fully reveal, since Minutes are invariably soberly written, is the extent of the hospitality we were shown in Istanbul, where our hosts did a truly splendid job. We saw the venues for the conference dinner (where we ate until we could eat no more), and the ice breaker (where we were served afternoon tea and coffee by white-gloved waiters who hovered attentively throughout). We were shown the conference venue, which combines historical interest with modern facilities, the nearby restaurant where lunch will be served, and a range of hotels from 5 to 3 stars with prices to match. We ate an excellent lunch in a randomly chosen, down to earth roadside cafe (so finding good cheap food will not be a problem) and, last but not least, we ate dinner at the top of a 6th Century tower with an unforgettable (but perfectly proper) floor show - and we have pictures to remind us of our participation in it in case our memories fade! The presentation of the conference arrangements at the Board Meeting was both professional and reassuring, and everything seems to be more or less in place already. All the signs are that we are in for an excellent meeting.

Well, here in Stavanger the seasons have been turned upside down this year. We had Spring in February followed by Winter in March, which didn't do much for the daffodils and other spring bulbs. Now it's 5oC almost every day, which means it could be almost any month of the year.

C. EAOG BOARD MEETING, ISTANBUL, 14 -16 FEBRUARY 1998

Below is the secretary's minutes from the actual Board Meeting. Members attending the meeting were Douglas, Grimalt, Horsfield, Patience, Telnæs and Rullkötter. Hetenyi, Nederlof and Rowland were unable to come for different reasons. For the local committee organizing the 19th International Meeting in Istanbul 1999, M. Namik Yalçin (Istanbul University and Marmara Research Center), Sedat Inan (MRC), Gülbin Gürdal (MRC), Hakan Horgomez (Istanbul University), Cengiz Soylu (TPAO), Halit Edip Özcan (TPAO) and Cengiz Korkmaz (VIP Tourism) attended part-time.

Item 1: Welcome

The chairman, Brian Horsfield, opened the meeting at 9:25 a.m. on Sunday, 15th February 1998. He expressed his relief that his eventful journey had come to a good end and hoped this would also happen to his suitcase. He thanked the Turkish hosts for organising the venue of the meeting. The Board send best wishes to Magdolna Hetenyi for a quick and full recovery from her illness.

Item 2: Minutes of Maastricht Board Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were unanimously approved.

Item 3: International Meeting on Organic Geochemistry in Istanbul 1999

Yalçin presented the state of the preparations for the next meeting; a handout summarizing the most important items had been laid out for the Board members before their arrival in the hotel rooms.

Organisational:

The meeting will be held from 5th to 10th September 1999 in the Harbye Cultural Center in Istanbul (Turkey). The Marmara Research Center (MRC) of the Turkish Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) will be the official host institution. VIP Tourism, Congresses & Incentives Co. has been contracted by MRC as a service organisation. As a first step, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) will sponsor the conference dinner (at about \$ 18,000). An oral commitment has been obtained from the BORUSAN industrial company for sponsoring the classical music concert featuring their own chamber orchestra. Effort for gaining additional sponsors will be intensified. A governmental PR organization may provide funds for supporting participants from developing countries. Analytical instrument manufacturers have been addressed and expressed their interest in the conference. Horsfield, Telnaes and Patience will support the organizers by providing links to international oil companies as potential sponsors.

Korkmaz (VIP Tourism) reported on the logistical support that his company will provide. It includes transportation (between airport and hotels, to social events), hotel reservation, airline ticketing (reconfirmation), registration (forms, fees, badges, conference materials), preparation of printed materials, conferences services and logistics (technical equipment etc., hosts/hostesses), social activities and tours (welcome cocktail, coffee breaks, lunches, concert organization, conference dinner, spouse program, optional daily city tours, pre- and post-conference excursions). The Board members expressed the need for a sufficient amount of accommodation in the lower price categories. Despite the high tourist season in September, an attempt should be made to further negotiate with the hotels. The Board members appreciate that all pre-booked hotels are within walking distance from the conference center and that guest house/student home rooms will be available as well.

Budget

The conference fees calculated on the basis of the present status of program planning and information available are slightly higher than in Maastricht but in the range of the San Sebastian and Stavanger meetings. Uncertainties relate to the extent of support by sponsors. The present estimates are conservative, higher support may reduce registration fees slightly. On the other hand, there is also some uncertainty regarding the ratio of EAOG members to non-members due to the Maastricht action converting all non-member participants to members for 1998. While EAOG hopes the former non-members will extend their membership, this will at the same time reduce the number of participants in the International Meetings paying the higher non-member fee.

Among the most expensive single items are the lunches. Following the discussion during the Board meeting, the organizers will check the possibility of having alternate full and lighter lunches.

Overall the budget appeared thoroughly prepared, realistic and within the financial framework which has been accepted by the Board in the past.

Conference Structure

The meeting will start with an icebreaker on the terrace of the famous Çiragan Palace overlooking the Bosphorous. The structure of the scientific sessions will differ slightly from that in the Maastricht meeting in order to accommodate a few more oral presentations. There will be 15+5 min oral presentations in two parallel sessions in the morning and 20+5 min plenary orals in the late afternoon. The early afternoon is reserved for poster presentations. Coffee breaks will be 30 min as usual. There will be a concert on Tuesday night, the conference dinner on Wednesday night and the EAOG General Assembly on Thursday late afternoon following the end of the plenary session.

Deadlines

The Board approved the deadlines suggested by the organizing committee but recommended to have the abstract deadline at the beginning of December, 1998. The first circular will be mailed in April/May, 1998.

Topics

The scientific topics suggested by the organizers covered the usual broad range of themes, but with two local specifics, i.e. petroleum geochemistry of basins of CIS countries and petroleum geochemistry of petroleum provinces in the Middle East. Several Board members suggested to include soil geochemistry

in the list of topics. At the end it was left to the discretion of the local organizers to rephrase the list of topics.

Announcements

The drafts of the public announcements of the meeting were approved by the Board. Installation of a web site (www.nemrut.mam.gov.tr) was appreciated, a link will be made to the EAOG web site.

Scientific Committee

The Board decided that nobody from the Board and no one who served last time should be on the scientific committee. Also, younger scientist should be well represented, and there should be a balance between petroleum geochemists and biogeochemists. After a long debate, a list of potential candidates was drawn up to be contacted by the local organising committee.

Conference Site, Hotels, Attractions

The Board was given the chance to visit the conference site, the sites for icebreaker, conference dinner and lunches, the hotels (different categories, with detailed inspection of rooms and facilities) and selected city attractions. Everything was found to be very splendid promising another unforgettable International Meeting.

Item 4: Maastricht summary

Horsfield informed the Board that the financial report of the Maastricht meeting is still approaching completion. For the proceedings, a total of 135 manuscripts were submitted, of which 15 were rejected in the meantime. At least 98 (maybe as many as 110) of the remaining 120 are back to the authors for revision. Seven have been returned and accepted for publication. The first batch of final manuscripts will probably be ready by May/June, the second by July/August (which would be the latest date for printing in 1998).

Item 5: Future International Meetings and international cooperation

The Board members repeated their appreciation to Bob Alexander for offering to organize a meeting in Perth. Due to the approximately 50/50 split of opinions for and against a meeting outside of Europe among the EAOG members, the Board felt it could not choose the Perth option at this moment.

For 2001, P. Garrigues and P. Landais have expressed their interest to host the meeting in Bordeaux or Nancy, respectively. The Chairman will approach both of them and discuss the issue with the idea of a possible joint effort at one of the locations.

In 2003, the Copenhagen GEUS group is willing to organize the meeting (they could not do this in 2001 because their new geocenter building may not be ready by that time).

The chairman stressed again the need for more international cooperation with other geochemical societies or related branches of larger societies. He suggested that a practical way of doing this may be to set up a Worldwide Affiliation of Organic Geochemistry Organisations. The affiliation would principally be used to coordinate matters like registration fees (giving each other's members reduced registration fees at each others' conferences), making joint best paper awards etc. Importantly, individual organisations such as EAOG would remain essentially autonomous and set their own agendas. The most obvious organisations are ALAGO, the OGD of the Geochemical Society, the Geochemical Division of ACS and the Australian Organic Geochemical Society. Horsfield agreed to contact the chairpersons of these organisations.

Item 6: Board membership

In 1999, the terms of Grimalt, Hetenyi, Nederlof, Patience and Rullkötter will end, only Patience will be allowed to stand for reelection.

The call for candidates shall be announced in the December 1998 or January 1999 issue of Organic Geochemistry. It will appear earlier on the EAOG web site.

Ballot forms will be sent out in May 1999. Douglas will ask Peter Henn that we like Elsevier to do the mailing again, as for the last ballot.

Item 7: Fund raising

The Chairman proposed that a move should be made to raise regular funds for the EAOG awards from the oil industry (in the order of up to \$ 3000; 12 companies would be a good success rate). A list of people to be contacted will be provided by Patience and Telnaes. Grimalt will draft a letter, which will be reviewed by Patience and Telnaes and signed by Horsfield and Grimalt.

Grimalt announced that Dfl 3000 have been collected by selling the San Sebastian abstracts volumes. This amount will be sent to the treasurer and slightly confuse his north/south theory of profitable versus breakeven (or loss-making) EAOG venues.

Item 8: Membership

Rullkötter reported for Rowland based on information from Debbie Pethricks (Plymouth) and Horsfield. EAOG had 361 members before the Maastricht meeting which increased by 247 during the meeting. Of the 361 'old' members, there is an about equal split of European and non-European members. Strongest countries in Europe are UK (43), Germany (40), France (28) and Norway (26), outside Europe USA (100), Australia (18), Japan (17) and Canada (13).

Item 9: Journal report

Douglas distributed a written report on the journal situation. For 1997, OG volumes 26: 1-12 and 27: 1-8 were dispatched before the end of the year. For 1998, issue 28: 1/2 will be dispatched in mid-February, all other issues before the end of the year. The volume will include two special issues (selected papers of Biogeochemistry meeting 1997 in Bari and of ACS symposium on Advances in Petroleum Exploration and Production (Dallas, March/April 1998); The Maastricht proceedings will probably be 29: 1-8. For volumes beyond 1998, special issues will include those guest-edited by Largeau/Eglinton (OM preservation; Goldschmidt Toulouse), Prinzhofer (gases; AAPG Rio) and Lewan (OGD Toronto). The Board members are asked to contact symposia chair people etc. and direct their attention to the OG publication option. Currently there is a need for a higher manuscript flow.

The organizers of the Istanbul meeting have declared they will follow the Maastricht procedure for publication of proceedings.

Suggestions for new associate editors are needed.

Item 10: Awards

Grimalt reported that the new joint committee was formed. All members were kept because they did a good job in the past. Michaelis resigned, however, due to workload and was replaced by Alexander (other members are Hayes, de Leeuw, Lijmbach and Grimalt).

The application by Joseph Werne (Northwestern University) for a travel award to go to Texel was approved by the committee.

The written acceptance speech by K. Freeman is still pending, one travel award report is said to be in preparation.

Item 11: Internet news

Information on travel awards and on the members of the awards committee are missing on the web site; will be amended.

The call for candidates for Board membership will be put on the web site soon (Rullkötter will write to Telnaes).

The updated membership information shall be put on the web site (Rullkötter will write to Pethricks).

Information on the Istanbul meeting (plus a link to the Istanbul site) will be put on the web, Maastricht info will be deleted.

It is suggested that lab profiles may be added to the web site. The Board approved, but will not allow selling.

Information on standards shall be collected and published on the web site.

As there was no other business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

Jürgen Rullkötter, Secretary

D. DO ORGANIC GEOCHEMISTS HAVE "FALSE FRIENDS"?

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Since I started working in organic geochemistry (which was not so long ago), I have been pleasantly surprised by the apparent kindness of most geochemists, and by their constant enthusiasm for their discipline. Through direct contact during international, national or lab meetings, or through discussions via fax and e-mail messages, most people I have met or discussed matters with (from the "young inexperienced" student to the well-known and respected "big-shot") have been as friendly as they were professional, and have tried to settle any (naive) query I could provide. Of course, organic geochemistry is probably not as idealistic as I may imagine because "competition and glory" have always been common human traits, even amongst geochemists. However, I'm still convinced that the world-wide organic geochemistry corporation is supported by "serious-minded" people who try to promote, on the basis of friendly relationships, our lovely profession.

Following this host of praises, I must admit that I still consider organic geochemistry invaded by "false friends", namely analytical artefacts! Indeed, in spite of my young experience, I can already assume that analytical artefacts are one of the most detestable enemies an organic geochemist can have within his professional life. I was first confronted with analytical artefacts during my PhD work, when I had to find out whether phytadienes (some well-known unconquerable molecules) are effectively formed in the marine environment or not. At this time, fortunately, there were already some publications on the possible artificial formation of such hydrocarbons (e.g. Lytle et al., 1977; Van de Meent et al., 1977); though this helped us a lot to set up our analytical approaches, we were still confronted with new analytical problems (e.g. extraction, isolation, derivatization; Grossi et al., 1996) which needed to be solved.

Later on, I started to work on the effect of aerobic degradation processes (photo-oxidation, auto-oxidation, biodegradation) on biolipids. Here, I take the opportunity to thank very much the EAOG who partly supported this project. And here again, I discovered numerous analytical artefacts. First, following the identification, in vitro, of specific oxidised lipids, hard was the task to try to detect these compounds in biological samples: any extraction procedure or isolation procedure can induce the oxidation of labile lipids! Even on column GC injection can induce the rearrangement of oxidised compounds, especially of unsaturated ones (see for instance Rontani et al., 1997). This is without mentioning the long-term storage of biological samples (e.g. Redden et al., 1993) or organic extracts: even organic sulfur compounds can be oxidised (see, Kohnen et al., 1990; Schouten et al., 1995)!

Another part of my doctoral and post-doctoral work has been to try to find out whether photo- and auto-oxidation of lipids can induce the formation of oxygen cross-linked macromolecular structures. What a big assumption you may think! Anyhow, recent observations led me to believe that the audacious proposal made by Harvey et al. in 1983, may be (to a certain extent) plausible... On the hand, the recent renewed interest of geochemists in organic matter preservation in soils and sediments has led to the development of new analytical techniques related to the analysis of macromolecular structures. One common approach for such studies is the transformation of macromolecules into sub-units by the use of degradative chemical treatments. Now, guess who appeared once again while we were using these treatments to try to clarify the above hypothesis? ...analytical artefacts! This time, our "false friends" are due to the cleavage of C-O bonds by specific procedures (such as HI treatment). Ether bonds are effectively cleaved by these treatments, but several side reactions can appear, especially when functionalised lipids are present in the organic extract. Since some organic geochemists are currently using these techniques without any apparent problem, I take the liberty of warning them about possible deleterious effects. It is noteworthy that the same types of analytical problems have been met by geochemists while using desulfurizing agent (e.g. Ni₂B or Raney nickel, used to cleave C-S bonds) for similar studies. Fortunately,

in this case, people reacted quickly and informed the scientific population (thanks to Hartgers et al., 1996; Putschew et al., 1996; Prah1 et al., 1996). To be done with the denunciation against artefacts linked to the study of macromolecules, I should not forget the recent contribution of Allard et al. (1997) who reported the possible artificial formation of biomacromolecules associated with common analytical procedures.

To conclude, though I am quite sure that organic geochemists have always been aware of the existence of analytical artefacts, I am somewhat surprised to see that publications or communications on this topic are still very few compared to the scale of the calamity. The list given herewith is not exhaustive, but even so!! The use of inadequate (or even plain wrong) experimental approaches can lead to incorrect data and thus to wrong concepts on geochemical issues. This is why I encourage geochemists to keep us posted about new sources of artefacts. Moreover, these contributions are undoubtedly very educational for "inexperienced" scientists, and their publication bring more recognition to the (hours of) lab work done by students and technicians in organic geochemistry (yes I dare say it!).

Last but not least, I would very much like to again thank the EAOG Award Committee for the Travel Scholarship I was awarded in 1997, and D.U.M.B.O. (NIOZ) who kindly welcomed me many times. This allowed me to become definitively suspicious of (may I say allergic to?) analytical artefacts... Fellow geochemists, please receive my best regards from Southern France.

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