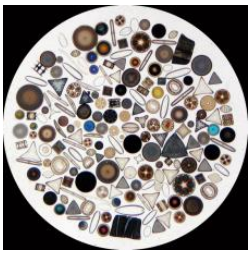
Sea Plankton In Earth Orbit?

August 23, 2014
Terry Hurlbut



The Russian flight director for the International Space Station said this week two cosmonauts had found sea plankton, or traces of them, on the outer hull and window of a Russian module of the International Space Station. If this proves out, they might have proved a key part of the Hydroplate Theory of the Global Flood without knowing it.

Did the Russians find sea plankton?

The first reports came out early Tuesday morning at *ITAR-TASS* (*Informatsionnoye Telegrafnoye Agyentstvo Rossiy;* the *TASS* is the acronym for the old name *Telegrafnoye Agyentstvo Sovietskiy Soyuz*). *ITAR-TASS* published the report in Russian and in their own English translation (not perfect, but accurate enough). Vladimir Solovyev, the "chief of Russian orbital mission," said two cosmonauts, on a routine spacewalk, were watching the buildup of pollution on the hull and portholes of the two Russian ISS modules, *Zarya* and *Zvezda*. *Zvezda* is the important module. It has the dock for the *Soyuz* capsules that bring in relief crew. (The new *Dragon* capsules dock at the *Unity* module that connects *Zarya-Zvezda* with the rest of the station.) *Zvezda* also has the attitude jets that keep the massive space station in orbit. Between the firing of those jets, and the docking operations for *Soyuz* and *Dragon* capsules, "space soot" can build up over time.

So two cosmonauts, watching this buildup, took swabs from the hull and one of the two-foot-diameter windows on *Zvezda*. When scientists on earth examined these, they found traces of sea plankton. (Note: the original Russian uses a word the English version renders as "illuminator." But that word translates as "window," both at Google Translate and according to another reader who reads Russian. Given the context, the original author probably had one of the two-foot-wide portholes of *Zvezda* in mind, not the lens of any "running light.")

This clearly excited Solovyev. He used an expression that his translators rendered as "absolutely unique." An English speaker probably would have said, "I've never seen anything like it."

So say the Russians. They haven't convinced NASA. Spokesman Dan Huot seemed to discount the idea in an interview with Space.com: The Russians did take samples from one of the windows on the Russian segment, and what they're actually looking for is residues that can build up on the visually sensitive elements, like windows, as well as just the hull of the ship itself that will build up whenever they do thruster firings for things like re-boosts. That's what they were taking samples for. I don't know where all the sea plankton talk is coming from.

How did the sea plankton get up there?

If Solovyev speculated to *ITAR-TASS* about where those sea plankton came from, *ITAR-TASS* did not publish it. But *The Daily Telegraph* (London) did. He noted the sea plankton his scientists found, typically grew on the surface of the ocean and were *not* native to Baikonur, where all Russian rockets launch from. Then he said,

There are some uplifting air currents which reach the station and settle on its surface.

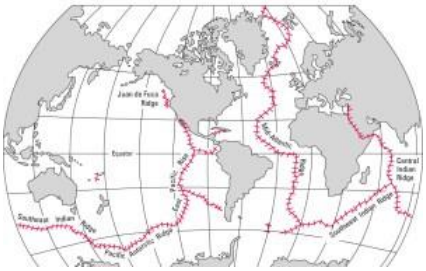
Walt Brown, of the Center for Scientific Creation, laughed out loud at that idea. The International Space Station generally stays 260 to 265 miles above sea level. This places it in the thermosphere, which lies between two barriers. Winds that could carry any objects from the surface of the sea that high in space are impossible to imagine.

In a discussion with this correspondent, Brown agreed the sea plankton could have gotten onto the hull and outside porthole of *Zvezda* in only one of three ways:

1. Someone somehow contaminated Module *Zvezda* before the loadmasters even loaded it aboard its Proton rocket.
2. Some sea plankton somehow rode one or more launch vehicles, either from Baikonur or Cape Canaveral, aloft.
3. The sea plankton were already part of the thermosphere long before NASA and Roscosmos started building the ISS.

Option 1 suggests carelessness of a phenomenal order. For many reasons, scientific and ethical, no one ever sends up a payload without sterilizing it first. Option 2 has two problems. First, those who launched *Zarya* and *Zvezda* shrouded them before launch. (If they hadn't, the tremendous headwinds at Max Q, the highest aerodynamic pressures with which a launching rocket ever has to cope, would have ripped away all their sensitive attachments.) Second, as Solovyev pointed out, Baikonur is too far inland for sea plankton to land on the shroud. Third, even NASA's Space Shuttle missions couldn't have carried enough sea plankton to start the kind of colony that could have contaminated *Zvezda* later.

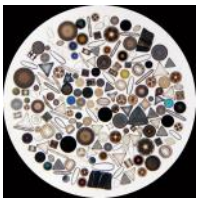
That leaves Option 3. And Walt Brown can explain that easily.



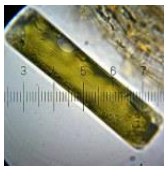
←World Distribution of Mid-Oceanic Ridges. Photo: J. M. Watson, US Geological Survey

The *hydroplate theory* says the Global Flood began when a subcrustal ocean broke containment. This produced a water jet moving at 33 miles per second, fast enough to blow through the atmosphere like a bullet punching a hole in a wall. The seam of this breakout persists as the Mid-Ocean Ridge system. Three of the ridges are in the Pacific basin: the Pacific Antarctic Ridge, the Eastern Pacific Rise, and the Juan de Fuca Ridge. Water breaking out at those parts of the Ridge system could have carried sea plankton aloft.

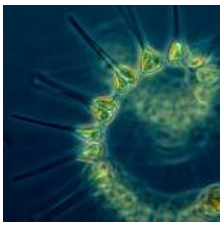
Assorted diatoms as seen through a microscope. These specimens were living between crystals of annual sea ice in McMurdo Sound, Antarctica. Photo: Prof. Gordon T. Taylor, Stony Brook University, NOAA Corps Collection



←Circle of diatoms on a slide. Photomicrograph: User Wipeter/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0 Unported LIcense

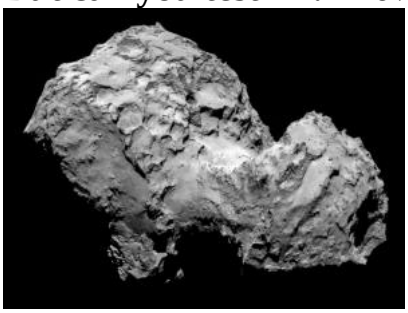


A diatom→.
100× objective, 15× eyepiece. Numbered ticks are 10 µM; apart. Photo: Bob Blaylock, CC BY-SA 3.0 Unportede License



←Phytoplankton – the foundation of the oceanic food chain.. Photo: NOAA MESO Project

But can you test Dr. Brown's Theory?



←Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko by Rosetta's OSIRIS narrow-angle camera on 3 August from a distance of 285 km. The image resolution is 5.3 metres/pixel. Photo: ESA/Rosetta/MPS for OSIRIS Team MPS/UPD/LAM/IAA/SSO/INTA/UPM/DASP/IDA

NASA could test this theory easily, with minimal cooperation from the Russian crew. They could prepare two plates, each made from one of the materials the cosmonauts sampled on their EVA. They would cut each to the largest size that could fit through the airlock. They would then attach a homing beacon to each, sterilize them, and launch them aboard a *Dragon* capsule. An astronaut would then extract them and remove their shrouds. (*He must not touch them,* to avoid contaminating the plates with his gloves.) After a few months of station-keeping, another astronaut could take samples, just as the cosmonauts did. Then another *Dragon* capsule, maybe carrying a robotic or "Waldo"-type capture device, could capture both and bring them down. If analysis of samples taken in space, and of the plates once they reach earth, shows sea plankton, that would confirm what the cosmonauts say they found. (Brown does say the Russians ought to say more about exactly what they found. They gave so little detail, one cannot tell whether they found one-celled diatoms or more sophisticated phytoplankton.)

Brown then suggested …

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