

# A SEED MEGASPORE FROM THE DEVONIAN OF CANADA

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**ABSTRACT.** A megaspore tetrad, *Cystosporites devonicus* sp. nov., is described from the Upper Devonian of Scaumenac Bay, Quebec, Canada. *Cystosporites* megaspores have previously been reported only from the Carboniferous, where they have been found in the lycopod seed *Lepidocarpon*. The occurrence of this Canadian *Cystosporites* shows that a level of heterospory equivalent to that reached by *Lepidocarpon* had already been attained by the late Devonian.

THIS paper is an account of some Devonian fossil megaspore exines (briefly described in Chaloner and Pettitt 1963) which had, in at least one respect, reached the level of differentiation achieved in the seed plants. They consist of isolated tetrads, each consisting of one large (about 2 mm.), oval (presumably fertile) megaspore, and three very much smaller (presumably abortive) spores. They closely resemble the seed megaspores formed inside the Carboniferous lycopod seed *Lepidocarpon*. Hitherto the highest degree of heterospory reported in Devonian fossil plants is that in which many megaspore tetrads reached maturity in each megasporangium (e.g. in *Cyclostigma kiltorkense*, *Archaeopteris latifolia*) and were apparently shed, much as in the living *Selaginella* or *Isoetes*. The fossils described here show that a level closely approaching that of seed formation had already been attained in the Devonian.

*Materials and methods of investigation.* The material from which the megaspore tetrads were obtained was collected from the Upper Devonian Escuminac Formation of Scaumenac (Escuminac) Bay, Quebec, Canada, in 1934 and 1937 by W. Graham-Smith and deposited in the Department of Palaeontology, British Museum (Natural History). The Escuminac Formation is generally accepted as being of early Upper Devonian age (Cooper *et al.* 1942, McGregor 1959). One of the samples, a hard sandstone, bears compressions of *Archaeopteris* foliage and sporangia, whilst the second, a more indurated finer-grained sandstone from the Acanthodian Bed of the same locality, bears compressions of a thickly cutinized plant axis of unknown affinity.

The sandstone was mechanically crushed into small pieces and disaggregated further in commercial (40 per cent.) hydrofluoric acid for several hours. After washing and sieving, the megaspores were picked out and macerated individually in Schulze's solution (potassium chlorate in nitric acid) for 2 to 3 hours, until they were sufficiently transparent for examination by transmitted light. When this oxidative maceration was complete the spores were transferred to dilute ammonia solution for a few minutes and then washed and mounted in glycerine jelly, 'Clearcol' or Canada balsam. Spores of the same type were also seen on the bedding planes of the Acanthodian Bed and one of these spores was removed from the matrix with a needle and treated as outlined above.

To help in resolving the structure of the spore wall, serial sections of several of the macerated specimens were cut. These were dehydrated in 95 per cent. alcohol and cleared in methyl benzoate followed by a solution of 1 per cent. celloidin in methyl benzoate.



After a brief period in benzene, the spores were infiltrated with paraffin wax of melting point 45° C and then transferred to wax of melting point 54° C for about 45 minutes to complete embedding. Serial sections were cut on a microtome at 6  $\mu$ ; the sections were dewaxed and mounted in Canada balsam.

All the preparations are in the collections of the Department of Palaeontology, British Museum (Natural History), registered numbers V45428 to V45450.

*Acknowledgement.* We wish to express our thanks to Mr. J. V. Brown for his patient help in taking the photographs.

### SYSTEMATIC DESCRIPTION

GENUS CYSTOSPORITES Schopf 1938

*Cystosporites devonicus* sp. nov.

Plate 3, figs. 1–6; Plate 4, figs. 1–3, 6

*Diagnosis.* Isolated megaspore tetrads composed of one large, elongated megaspore (presumed fertile), and three small ones (presumed abortive). Fertile spore up to 2,550  $\mu$  in length; abortive spores typically 130–70  $\mu$  in diameter. Open triradiate suture (laesure) visible at apex of fertile spore when abortive spores are missing; sutures typically 100–150  $\mu$  long. Weakly differentiated contact faces on fertile spore correspond to position of abortive spores. Exine of fertile spore minutely granular in texture, without discernible sculpture as seen in profile, 10–15  $\mu$  thick. Wall of abortive spores typically 10–12  $\mu$  thick, ornamented with conical processes 1–2  $\mu$  high and 1–2  $\mu$  apart. Distal extremity of fertile megaspore exine sometimes extended as a solid, tapering, truncated stalk-like process.

*Holotype.* V45428, Department of Palaeontology, British Museum (Natural History); Pl. 3, figs. 1, 2.

*Type Locality.* Escuminac Formation, Upper Devonian; Scaumenac Bay, Quebec, Canada.

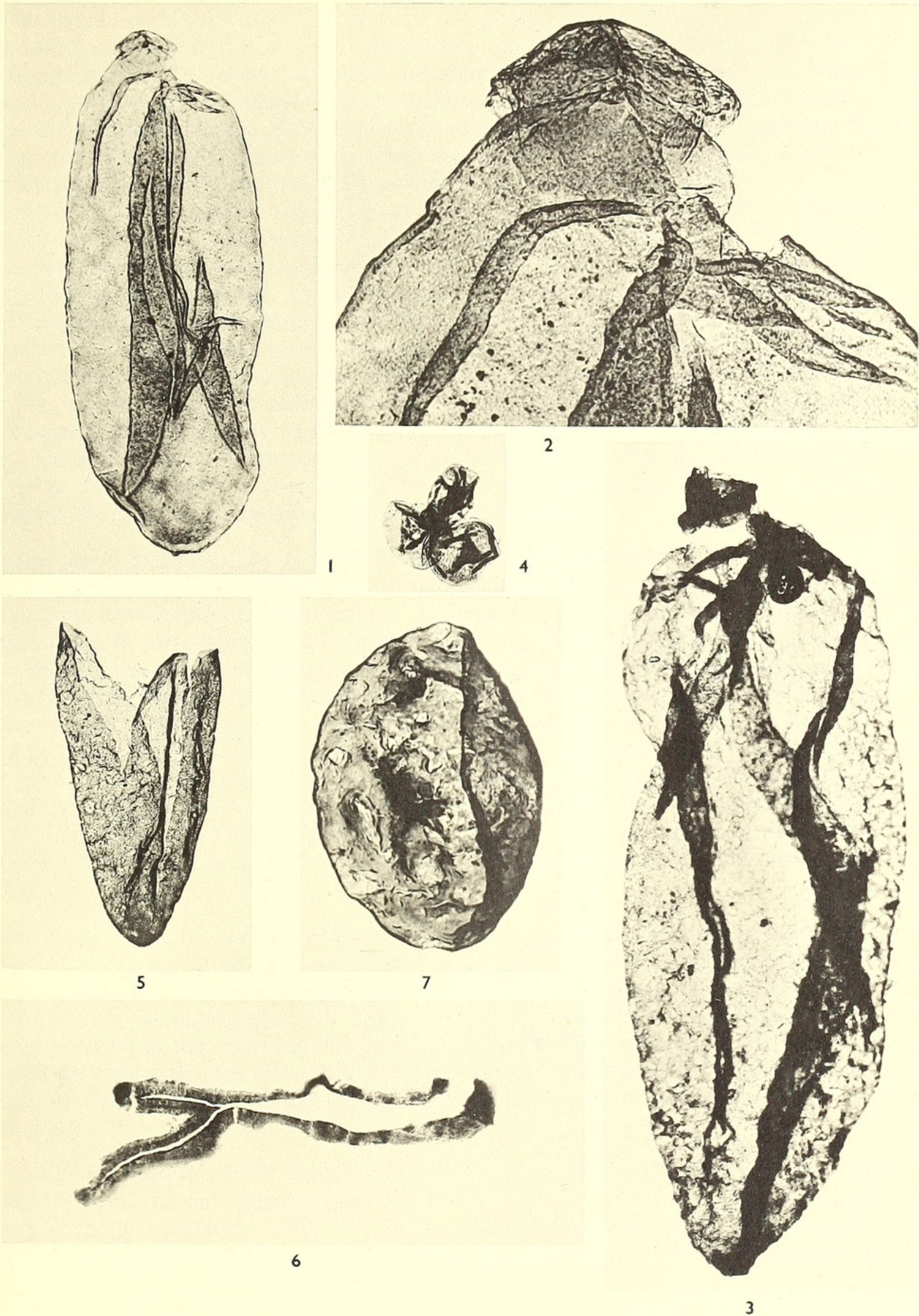
### Description

*Variation in size and shape.* The large fertile megaspore of each tetrad is typically ellipsoidal, being elongated along its polar axis (Pl. 3, figs. 1, 3). The largest is 2,550  $\mu$  long, and a typical specimen about 2,000  $\mu$ . This is very much larger than average Upper Devonian megaspores of presumably free-sporing type with normal tetrad development. A single, very much smaller, tetrad was isolated (Pl. 3, figs. 4, 7) in which the largest spore was 250  $\mu$  in length, and only slightly elongated (Pl. 3, fig. 7); the abortive spores (diameter 50–62  $\mu$ ) became detached from it during mounting (Pl. 3, fig. 4). It is questionable

### EXPLANATION OF PLATE 3

Figs. 1–7. *Cystosporites devonicus* sp. nov., from the Escuminac Formation, Scaumenac Bay, Quebec, Canada. All the photographs were taken by transmitted light; all the slides are in the British Museum (Natural History). 1, Holotype, V45428;  $\times 50$ . 2, Part of the same specimen showing the three abortive spores at the apex;  $\times 200$ . 3, Larger specimen, V45429; the irregular mosaic of pale areas on the exine is attributed to impressions of coarse particles of matrix;  $\times 50$ . 4, 7, The smallest tetrad found, V45430; the three abortive spores (4) became detached from the fertile spore (7) in mounting;  $\times 200$ . 5, Fertile spore which ruptured along three splits extending from the triradiate sutures, to form three partial valves, V45431;  $\times 25$ . 6, Transverse section of a seed megaspore showing the homogeneous character of the exine and a longitudinal secondary fold, V45447;  $\times 200$ .





CHALONER and PETTITT, Devonian seed megaspore





how far the observed size variation represents ontogenetic stages; evidently all the spores were sufficiently cutinized to survive fossilization and eventual maceration in Schulze's solution. Chaloner (1952) has observed considerable size variation in the seed megaspores (*Cystosporites*) contained within otherwise typical sporophylls of *Lepidocarpon waltoni*. It may be that some of the smaller tetrads represent those formed in sporophylls near a cone apex, rather than merely immature forms. But the thin (3–4  $\mu$ ) wall and extremely small size of the tetrad of Plate 3, fig. 4 rather suggests immaturity.

Most of the fertile spores are darker at the ends (poles) and lighter (and probably thinner) in the central (equatorial) region. A number of secondary folds are usually developed, mainly parallel to the long axis presumably corresponding to collapse of an originally ellipsoidal body (Pl. 3, figs. 1, 3; also seen in section in Pl. 3, fig. 6). The polar axial elongation of the fertile spore, which is usually about three times the equatorial width, is a significant feature of agreement between these Devonian spores and the Carboniferous *Cystosporites*. In free-sporing heterosporous plants in which all four members of the megaspore tetrad develop equally, the spore body (aside from any special apical feature such as a gula) is typically more or less equidimensional, or even foreshortened axially. In Carboniferous *Cystosporites* (and possibly in the present case) the polar axial elongation corresponds to the spore expanding to fill the radially elongated sporangium characteristic of the *Lepidodendrales*.

*Abortive spores and haptotypic features.* Most of the fertile spores still have the abortive members of the tetrad adhering to the proximal pole (Pl. 3, figs. 1–3). The abortive spores show a sculpture of minute coni, 1–2  $\mu$  high and 1–2  $\mu$  apart. This ornament is variable, and in some specimens is barely discernible. The substance of the abortive spore exine is more or less granular, as in the fertile spores. The fertile spores show a clear triradiate suture when the three abortive spores have been removed (Pl. 4, fig. 1). In one case (Pl. 3, fig. 5) splitting had extended from the original sutures almost to the distal pole to divide the spore into three valves; this may have occurred before fossilization, or as a result of compaction in the matrix. In those spores where the proximal polar area of the fertile spore is visible, the areas of contact with the abortive spores are rather thinner than the adjacent exine and so are paler in colour (Pl. 4, fig. 1). The contact faces are bounded by weakly developed arcuate ridges, which appear darker than the surrounding exine.

*The nature of the exine.* The wall of the fertile megaspore is typically 10–15  $\mu$  thick, and under  $\times 500$  magnification it shows a small-scale heterogeneity of a finely porous or granular nature (Pl. 4, fig. 6). Superimposed on this is an irregular, much larger scale pattern, of slightly thinner areas (Pl. 3, fig. 3; Pl. 4, fig. 1) which we attribute to coarse grained particles in the enclosing matrix which have left their impression on the exine. There is no clearly defined exine stratification; in section the fertile megaspore shows a more or less uniform exine (Pl. 4, fig. 6) with the fine granular texture extending throughout.

*The basal stalk.* Several of the fertile megaspores have at their base (the distal end with respect to the tetrad) an irregular prolongation of the exine in the form of a tapering, usually abruptly truncated, 'stalk' (Pl. 4, fig. 3). A closely similar feature has been described by Bochenski (1936) in *Cystosporites giganteus* found inside *Lepidocarpon*



major (Brongt.) Piérart (1961), and also on isolated *Cystosporites giganteus* (Dijkstra 1946).

*Associated miospores.* Several of the fertile megaspores have miospores adhering to them. While some of these are rather obscure, others have a prominent triradiate mark and an equatorial feature (Pl. 4, fig. 2), and may be assigned to the dispersed spore genus *Lycospora*. *Lycospora*, in addition to representing the microspores of many *Lepidostrobus* species, probably includes the microspores of *Lepidocarpon* (see, for example, Felix 1954). The occurrence of *Lycospora* in this context is of particular interest in view of the paucity of lycopod macrofossils at this horizon (see below). However, this occurrence of the *Lycospora* appressed to several of the specimens of *Cystosporites devonicus* cannot be regarded as being anything more than a suggestive association.

#### ASSIGNATION TO CYSTOSPORITES

In making the genus *Cystosporites* Schopf (1938) begins the diagnosis, 'Seed megaspores . . .'. It is amply demonstrated that many species of *Cystosporites* were borne on *Lepidocarp* megasporophylls (e.g. *C. giganteus*, *C. varius*) and were in this sense seed megaspores, but this is a piece of information which is not derived from an innate character of the dispersed megaspores themselves, and is only deduced from the circumstances of occurrence of certain specimens. The genus *Cystosporites*, which is based on dispersed megaspores, must be defined in terms of the megaspores alone, although it may be surmised that most (probably all) species included in the genus do indeed represent *Lepidocarp* seed megaspores. The main feature of *Cystosporites* is the development of the tetrad in such a way that the fertile spore becomes very large and sack-like in shape while the three abortive members of the tetrad remain relatively small and rounded. A further feature on which Schopf lays considerable emphasis is the fibrous character of the fertile spore exine. He reasonably correlates this with the supposition that this made it possible for food reserves to pass into the seed megaspore from the parent plant at a late stage in its development (while still enclosed in the sporangium). The thick continuous exine of the megaspores of *Lepidostrobus* and *Sigillariostrobus* (free-sporing plants) would presumably have prevented the inward passage of food reserves after the development of the spore wall was complete.

Since Scott's original (1901) description of petrified *Lepidocarpon* a number of species based on compression fossils have been put in the genus. The main problem involved in doing this is one commonly encountered in palaeobotany—that of extending a genus

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#### EXPLANATION OF PLATE 4

Figs. 1, 3, 6. *Cystosporites devonicus* sp. nov. 1, Fertile spore apex showing triradiate sutures (laesurae) and pale areas of the contact faces, V45428;  $\times 200$ . 3, Distal end of a fertile spore showing the 'stalk', V45433;  $\times 200$ . 6, Exine, showing its porous-granular character, V45434;  $\times 500$ .

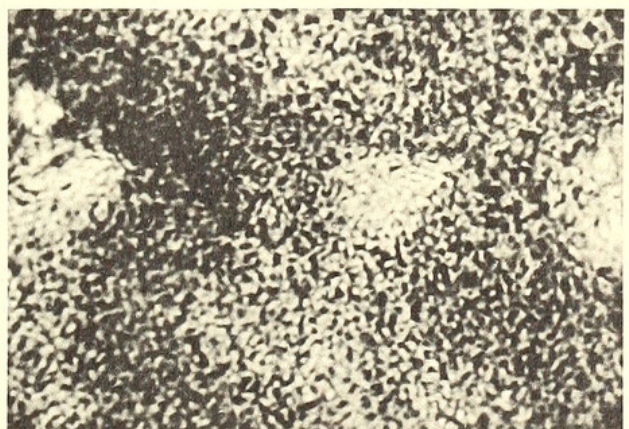
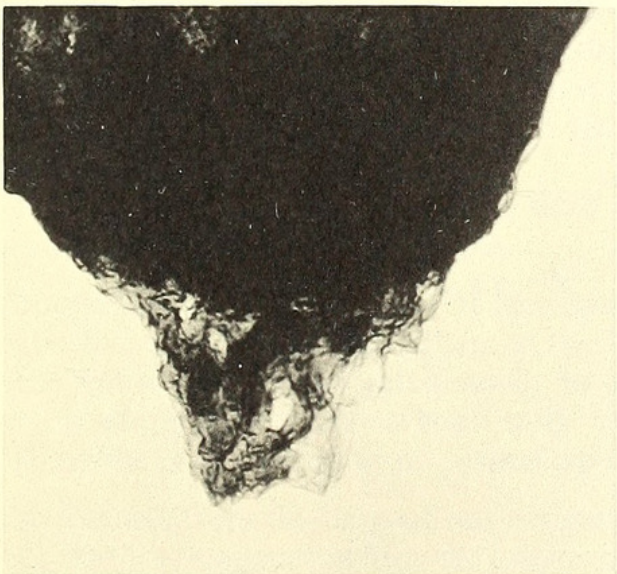
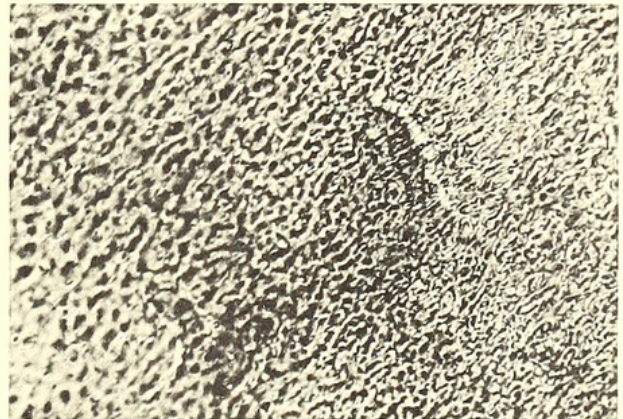
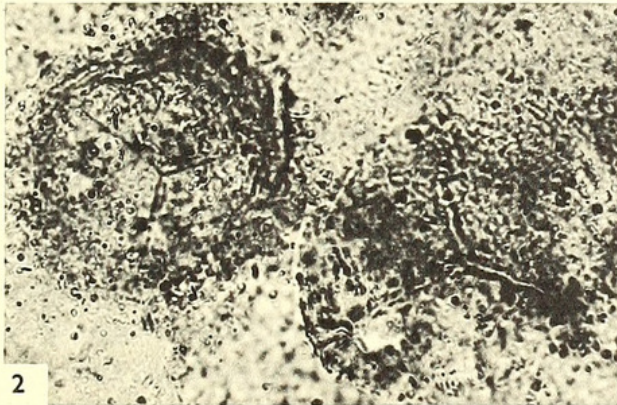
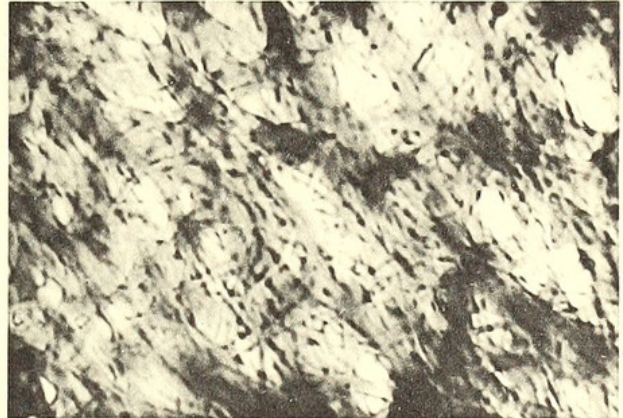
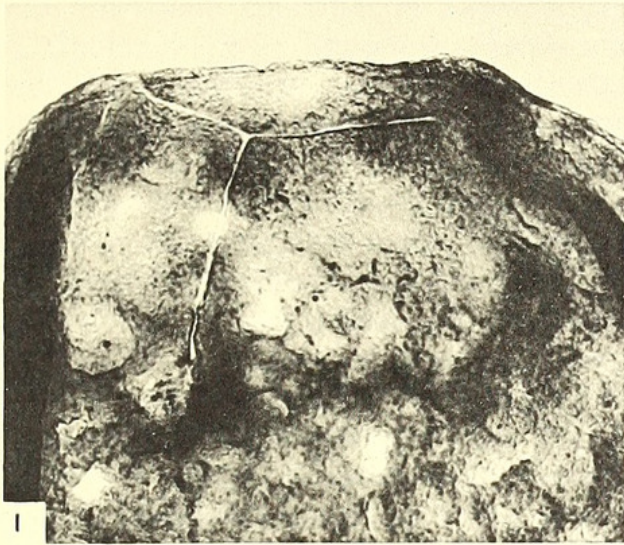
Fig. 2. Two miospores, cf. *Lycospora* sp., adhering to the exine of a fertile spore of *Cystosporites devonicus*, near to the distal end, V45432;  $\times 500$ .

Fig. 4. Exine of *Cystosporites giganteus* (from the holotype of *Lepidocarpon waltoni*, from the Lower Carboniferous of Scotland) showing the fibrous character of the fertile spore wall, V45451;  $\times 500$ .

Fig. 5. Exine of *Cystosporites verrucosus* (from *Lepidocarpon braidwoodensis*, Upper Carboniferous of England), showing the more or less granular character of the fertile spore wall, and two spines, V45452;  $\times 500$ .

All the slides are in the British Museum (Natural History).













Chaloner, W. G. and Pettitt, J M . 1964. "A seed megaspore from the Devonian of Canada." *Palaeontology* 7, 29–36.

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