Creating Earth’s Most Ancient Crust

RICHARD W. CARLSON¹, MARION GARCON², JONATHAN O’NEIL³, JESSE REIMINK¹, HANIKA RIZO⁴

¹Carnegie Institution for Science, Department of Terrestrial Magnetism, Washington, DC, USA, rcarlson@carnegiescience.edu, jreimink@carnegiescience.edu
²Department of Earth Sciences, Institute of Geochemistry and Petrology, ETH Zurich, Switzerland, marion.garcon@erdw.ethz.ch
³Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Ottawa, Canada, jonathan.oneil@uottawa.ca
⁴Department of Earth Sciences, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, hanika.rizo@carleton.ca

Earth’s most ancient surviving crust consists of small remnants of generally highly metamorphosed rocks that postdate Earth formation by hundreds of millions of years. We have been using the short-lived radiometric system ¹⁴⁶Sm-¹⁴²Nd in concert with traditional radiogenic isotope tracers to investigate the petrogenesis of these ancient crustal rocks, in particular, the nature of their source materials. Supracrustal rocks from the northern Superior Province appear to be Hadean in age, but even Neoarchean granitoid rocks in this area show low ¹⁴²Nd/¹⁴⁴Nd suggestive of the reworking of Hadean LREE enriched crustal material. Hadean rocks in Acasta appear to be derived from mantle with BSE compositions, but from 3.9-3.6 Ga show evidence for the involvement of Hadean LREE enriched components in their genesis. The signature of these older crustal components is missing from younger Acasta rocks and from the much larger expanse of the Eo- to Neoarchean Central Slave Basement Complex just east of Acasta. Evidence for the involvement of crustal sources significantly older than the rocks themselves is present, but diminished, in the Paleoarchean rocks of the Kaapvaal Craton that reproducibly have ¹⁴²Nd/¹⁴⁴Nd slightly below the modern mantle value. In contrast, the Neoarchean igneous rocks and sediments of the southern Superior Province show ¹⁴²Nd/¹⁴⁴Nd ratios just slightly above the terrestrial Nd standard. Early Archean rocks from both Greenland and Labrador show even larger excesses in ¹⁴²Nd/¹⁴⁴Nd indicative of Hadean sources with high Sm/Nd ratios, though the rocks do not have trace element signatures consistent with derivation from strongly incompatible element depleted sources. The data thus show that different ancient crustal terranes were generated from wide ranging sources – reworked Hadean crust in some cases, directly out of “normal” mantle in others, and some from mantle sources of compositions that do not appear to exist anymore.