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# Experimental evidence for foraminiferal calcification under anoxia

**M. P. Nardelli[1], C. Barras[1], E. Metzger[1], A. Mouret[1], H. L. Filipsson[2], F. Jorissen[1], and E. Geslin[1]**

[1]UMR CNRS 6112 LPG-BIAF Bio-Indicateurs Actuels et Fossiles, Université d'Angers, 2 Boulevard Lavoisier 49045 Cedex Angers, France
[2]Department of Geology, Lund University, Sölvegatan 12, 223 62, Lund, Sweden

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Correspondence to: M. P. Nardelli (mariapia.nardelli@univ-angers.fr)

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## Abstract

Benthic foraminiferal tests are widely used for paleoceanographic reconstructions. There is ample evidence that foraminifera can live in anoxic sediments. For some species, this is explained by a switch to facultative anaerobic metabolism (i.e. denitrification). Here we show for the first time that adult specimens of three benthic foraminiferal species are not only able to survive but are also able to calcify in anoxic conditions, at various depths in the sediment, with and without nitrates. This demonstrates ongoing metabolic processes, even in micro-environments where denitrification is not possible. Earlier observations suggest that the disappearance of foraminiferal communities after prolonged anoxia is not due to instantaneous or strongly increased adult mortality. Here we show that it cannot be explained by an inhibition of growth through chamber addition either. Our observations of ongoing calcification under anoxic conditions means that geochemical proxy data obtained from benthic foraminifera in settings experiencing intermittent anoxia have to be reconsidered. The analysis of whole single specimens or of their successive chambers may provide essential information about short-term environmental variability and/or the causes of anoxia.

## 1 Introduction

Oxygen depletion is one of the most severe environmental stressors in marine ecosystems. It is predicted to increase in near future (Sarmiento et al., 1998; Keeling and Garcia, 2002; Meier et al., 2011), due to climate change, changes in circulation and enhanced eutrophication. Therefore, there is an urgent need to study past variability of dissolved oxygen concentrations in benthic ecosystems in response to climate change. Foraminifera are among the most ubiquitous marine calcifying micro-organisms and among the most common used proxy carriers, as their fossilizing calcareous test registers the geochemistry of seawater. The identification of the environmental conditions

under which calcification takes place is of prime importance for the interpretation of proxies based on the geochemical composition of the foraminiferal tests. Although many foraminiferal species are known to be able to survive short to long periods of hypoxic or even anoxic conditions (Bernhard, 1993; Bernhard and Alve, 1996; Moodley et al., 1997; Langlet et al., 2013a; Geslin et al., 2014), it is still an open question whether benthic foraminifera are able to calcify under anoxia. The ability of some species to calcify under hypoxia (< 63 µmol $L^{-1}$; Middelburg and Levin, 2009) was only recently proved experimentally by Geslin et al. (2014). The recent discovery of facultative anaerobic metabolism (i.e. denitrification; Risgaard-Petersen et al., 2006) by certain foraminiferal species, allowing them to survive and potentially be active in the absence of oxygen, suggested that calcification could eventually also take place under complete anoxia.

We designed an experiment that allowed to study the calcification of three foraminiferal species in various geochemical microenvironments in the sediment (along a redox-cline), eliminating bioturbation effects and inhibiting foraminifera to migrate to more favorable microhabitats, as was previously observed by several authors (Alve and Bernhard, 1995; Moodley et al., 1998a; Duijnstee et al., 2003; Geslin et al., 2004). Two experiments were carried out using three benthic foraminiferal species: (1) *Ammonia tepida* (coastal species) and (2) *Bulimina marginata* and *Cassidulina laevigata* (shelf to deep-sea species).

## 2 Materials and methods

### 2.1 Experimental design

For each experiment five cores were filled with natural sediment, sampled in the same sites were each foraminiferal species were collected (see next paragraphs for details), sieved (< 38 µm) without the addition of water. They were then placed in an aquarium filled with approximately 20 L of bubbled artificial seawater (ASW) (Red Sea Salt in



MilliQ water) and kept under controlled conditions of salinity and temperature, and at dark, to avoid algal blooms and consequent geochemical instability. Two of these cores, with an internal diameter of 8 cm, were used for geochemical analysis at the start ($T_{start}$) and at the end ($T_{end}$) of each experiment. Foraminifera were introduced in the remaining three special cores (Fig. 1), constituted of superposed Plexiglas rings (4 cm Ø, 1 to 3 cm high), which were each separated by 100 µm mesh nylon nets, to avoid foraminiferal migration. The cores were left 30 days in the aquarium before starting the experiment, in order to a relative stability of geochemical parameters of the cores.

After one month ($T_{start}$), the foraminiferal replicate cores were opened under $N_2$-flushed atmosphere to introduce calcein-labelled foraminifera (following Bernhard et al., 2004). The cores were then replaced in the aquaria, after being introduced in plastic bags filled with sediment, to further avoid any possible lateral oxygen penetration. At this time the first geochemical core was removed from the aquarium, sliced under $N_2$-flushed atmosphere to obtain pore waters for geochemical analyses (see below for details).

At the end of the experiment, sixty days later ($T_{end}$), each sediment layer of the foraminiferal cores was sieved (100 µm) with ASW and the foraminifera were picked. A two step observation was performed on each specimen in order to avoid any possible bias related to the use of two fluorescent probes (calcein and fluorescine diacetate) that excite and emit at similar wavelengths. First, the presence of newly formed chambers, not calcein-labelled, was checked using epifluorescence microscopy (Nikon SMZ 1500, 460–490 nm excitations) for all the specimens of a core layer (approximately 1 h). Only thereafter the foraminifera were incubated for 24 h in a 10 µM solution of fluorescein diacetate (FDA) in ASW (Bernhard et al., 1995), and assessed for vitality under epifluorescence microscopy. The much more intense fluorescence of FDA labelled cells compared to dead calcein labelled specimens allowed us to easily distinguish dead from alive foraminifera even in presence of calcein labelled chambers (Fig. 2). Moreover, specimens with new chambers were incubated separately from the others

in FDA solution, in order to avoid any mix of samples.At the end of the experiment, the remaining geochemical core was sliced for pore waters analyses at $T_{end}$.

### 2.2 Experiment 1: *Ammonia tepida*

Superficial sediment (≈ 2 mm) was hand collected during the low tide period, at the intertidal area of the Aiguillon Bay, West Atlantic French coast (46°15.279′ N, −1°8.410′ E) in January 2013. The sediment was grossly sieved (63 µm) on field with natural seawater and stored in plastic jars filled with seawater until laboratory. There, the seawater in the jars was substituted with a solution of calcein 10 mg $L^{-1}$ in artificial seawater (ASW) for calcite labelling (Bernhard et al., 2004). At the same site, sediment samples to fill up the cores (both geochemical and foraminiferal ones) were also collected. Sub-superficial (0.5–10 cm) sediment, potentially poorer in organic matter content than superficial, was used to avoid a compression of redox fronts toward the top of the core (Michaud et al., 2010). The sediment was sieved (< 38 µm) without addition of water, in order to remove foraminifera and most of meiofauna and avoid bioturbation, and homogenized before its introduction in the cores.

The top layer of the foraminiferal cores was only partially filled, with a sediment layer of 0.3 cm. This choice was made in order to obtain a first layer as high as the oxygen penetration depth in the core and therefore to separate the oxygenated layer 1 from the hypoxic to anoxic layers below.

The cores were placed in an aquarium filled with ASW at salinity 35±0.1 and ambient temperature (between 16.5 and 18 °C) and in the dark. An air-bubbler was placed in the aquarium to oxygenate the water and to create a minimal circulation.

Thirty days after, the sediment incubated in calcein solution was sieved at 150–350 µm with ASW and the calcein-labelled specimens were picked. The vitality of each specimen was tested on a thin layer of fine sediment as described in Koho et al. (2011). The foraminiferal specimens were randomly separated in groups of 50 specimens. Foraminiferal cores were opened under $N_2$ atmosphere, to avoid re-oxygenation of deep sediments, and 50 specimens of *Ammonia tepida* were introduced at each layer



with a Pasteur pipette, filled with $N_2$ flushed ASW. Only for the superficial oxygenated layer foraminifera were introduced under oxygenated atmosphere.

### 2.3 Experiment 2: *Bulimina marginata* and *Cassidulina laevigata*

Sediment sampling was performed with a box-corer at site GF1 (58°19.284′ N, 11°32.902′ E), at 117 m of depth and GF3 (58°16.042′ N, 11°28.901′ E), at 51 m depth, in the Gullmarsfjord, Sweden, in October 2012. The first millimeters of sediment were collected with a spoon, sieved (63 µm) with bottom waters sampled by Niskin Bottles, to avoid thermal and salinity stress to foraminifera. Temperature at the sampling site varied between 6 and 7.5 °C. The samples were kept refrigerated until laboratory. Then, the sediment was incubated at 12 ± 0.5 °C in a solution of calcein in seawater from the sample site (10 mg $L^{-1}$).

The sediment to fill the experimental cores was collected at site GF1. Three sediment layers 0–5 cm, 5–10 cm and 10–15 cm were separately collected from a box corer and sieved (< 38 µm) in laboratory without addition of water. The cores were introduced in an aquarium filled with approximately 20 L of ASW at salinity = 34 ± 0.1, air-bubbled and incubated in the dark at 12 ± 0.5 °C.

After incubation in calcein solution, labelled specimens of *Bulimina marginata* and *Cassidulina laevigata* (> 100 µm) were picked. As these species are much less motile than *Ammonia tepida*, their vitality was tested incubating (≈ 24 h) the specimens in Petri dishes filled with ASW and a thin layer of concentrated solution of lyophilized *Chlorella* sp. in ASW (ca. 0.5 g/50 mL) on the bottom. The specimens showing moving traces and/or dark green cytoplasm (due to algal ingestion) were considered as alive.

Thirty days after the preparation of sediment cores, *Bulimina marginata* specimens ($n$ = 31 or 32) were introduced at layers 1 to 5 (corresponding to 0–4.3 cm of absolute sediment depth), while *Cassidulina laevigata* ($n$ = 32 or 33) was introduced only at layers 1, 2 and 4 corresponding to absolutes depths respectively of 0–0.3 cm, 0.3–1.3 cm and 2.3–3.3 cm. The procedure to introduce foraminiferal specimens was the same described for experiment 1.

### 2.4 Geochemical analyses

#### 2.4.1 Oxygen profiles

Oxygen profiles (up to 8) were realized on the geochemical cores daily during the first week and then weekly during the rest of incubation time, using a Clark-type microelectrode with a 50 µm thick tip (OX50, Unisense, Denmark).

#### 2.4.2 pH profiles

pH profiles were measured at 1000 µm depth increments on each core at $T_{start}$ and $T_{end}$ using a glassy microelectrode (Unisense, Denmark) with a 500 µm thick tip and a Ag/AgCl reference. The probes were calibrated using NBS buffer solutions (pH 4, 7 and 10) and values are given as $\delta$pH, were calculated as the difference between pH values at each sediment depth and the pH of overlying waters. This enables the elimination of errors due to the use of NBS standard buffers which have not the same matrix of the analyzed marine water samples (Metzger et al., 2007).

#### 2.4.3 Analyses of pore waters

Geochemical cores at $T_{start}$ and $T_{end}$ of each experiment were cut under $N_2$-flushed atmosphere. Each sediment layer was centrifuged (10 min, 5000 t min$^{-1}$) to extract pore water. The water was then filtered (0.20 µm) and analyzed for several geochemical species.

Total nitrate and nitrite ($\Sigma NO_3^-$) were analyzed by flow injection analysis (FIA) following the method described by Anderson (1979).

The profiles obtained for all other geochemical species are showed in the appendix. They were measured for a more complete knowledge of the geochemistry of the experimental cores but they are not discussed in the present paper.



Total alkalinity was measured by spectroscopic method, modified after Sarazin et al. (1999). 250 µL of sample were added to 1 mL of reagent (300 µL of 0.1 M methanoic acid, 2 mL of 500 mg L$^{-1}$ bromophenol blue, 2 mL of 2 M NaCl and MilliQ water until 20 mL final volume). Absorption was measured at 590 nm (Podda and Michard, 1994; Sarazin et al., 1999).

Samples for sulfate analyses (250 µL) were fixed with 50 µL of zinc acetate 0.01 M and analysed by ionic chromatography after 1 : 800 dilution. Phosphate was analyzed with the colorimetric method described by Murphy and Riley (1962); calcium, magnesium, iron and manganese by ICP-AES (iCAP 6300 radial, ThermoFisher Scientific).

### 2.5 Statistical analyses

Statistical analyses were carried out using Past 2.17c (Hammer et al., 2001). ANOVA and Tukey's post-hoc tests were performed in order to test the hypothesis of significant differences among layers both in terms of survival and calcification rates ($p$ values $< 0.05$ or $< 0.01$ were considered as significant). Percentages were transformed (arcsin $X$) before performing ANOVA analyses.

## 3 Results

During the first experiment, performed with *A. tepida*, the oxygen penetration depth did not exceed 0.3 cm, corresponding to the top layer of the experimental cores (Fig. 3c). The first layer was the only one where both oxygen and nitrates were present (Fig. 3d). Nitrates were abundant down to about 8 mm depth, with trace concentrations (up to 3.5 µM) detected until 2 cm depth. Deeper sediment layers were characterized by low pH ($\delta$pH up to −1.8) (Fig. 3c). Layer 3 (2.3–3.3 cm sediment depth) corresponded to the iron-reduction zone (Appendix A, Fig. A1), while still deeper layers showed increasing ammonium and phosphate concentrations and enhanced sulfate reduction (Appendix A, Fig. A1). After two months incubation, average survival rates of *Ammonia*

*tepida* ($n$ = 50 in each layer) varied from 49 ± 9 to 90 ± 6 % and did not display a significant difference between individual layers of the three replicate cores, down to 10.3 cm depth (Fig. 3a; ANOVA, $p$ value > 0.05). Therefore, *A. tepida* not only tolerated anoxia, but also survived in very different geochemical microenvironments. In all sediment layers except one, a small number (1 to 4 % on average) of the *A. tepida* specimens added a single new chamber (Figs. 3b and 4a), irrespective of oxic or anoxic conditions. This first observation of foraminiferal calcification in completely anoxic environments is particularly important since it not only confirms ongoing metabolism, but also continuing life processes.

In the second experiment, carried out with the open marine species *Bulimina marginata* ($n$ = 31 to 32 in each layer) and *Cassidulina laevigata* ($n$ = 32 to 33 in each layer), we obtained comparable results as in the first one. In this case the oxygen penetration depth ranged from 0.5 to 0.6 cm depth, exceeding the depth of the top layer of the sediment (0–0.3 cm). However, oxygen concentrations in the second sediment layer were always lower than 50 µmol $L^{-1}$ (Fig. 5c), thereby representing hypoxic conditions (Middelburg and Levin, 2009). The $\delta$pH in the experiment showed different profiles compared to the first experiment. The decrease ($\delta$pH until −0.7, Fig. 5c) observed in the first 0.5 cm depth is due to organic matter degradation under oxic conditions, while the subsequent increase, below 0.5 cm ($\delta$pH until 1.3), is typical for sediments not subjected to sulfate reduction (Appendix A, Fig. A1). Also nitrate profiles (Fig. 5d) were different from the first experiment. Although maximal concentrations (up to 100 µM) were observed in superficial layers (0–1.3 cm), nitrates were always present down to 4.3 cm depth in the sediment.

After two months incubation, the average survival rates of *Bulimina marginata* varied from 39 ± 4 to 34 ± 3 %, without significant differences (ANOVA, $p$ value > 0.05) between oxic, hypoxic and anoxic layers (Fig. 5a). *Bulimina marginata* was not only able to survive but also to calcify in the first 3.3 cm of sediment, irrespective of oxygenation level (Fig. 5b and 4b). The ANOVA analysis ($p$ value < 0.01) and the Tukey's post-hoc test ($p$ value < 0.05) revealed only a significant difference in calcification between



the first two layers (0–1.3 cm) and the deepest one (3.3–4.3 cm), where none of the individuals added chambers. The difference between the topmost layer, where 31 ± 9 % of the specimens added new chambers and the deeper layers (0.3–3.3 cm), where 24 ± 3 % to 8 ± 4 % of the specimens calcified at least one chamber, was not significant. In most cases, only one new chamber was added. Four specimens grew more than one chamber (3 individuals from the top layer of one replicate produced 2 new chambers; 1 individual of the second layer of another replicate added 3 chambers). The absence of calcification in this lowermost layer does not seem to be related to changes in the analysed geochemical species (Fig. 5d and Appendix A, Fig. A1).

As observed for *Bulimina marginata, Cassidulina laevigata* did not display significantly different survival rates (ANOVA, $p$ value > 0.05) between oxic (top layer) and hypoxic (0.3–1.3 cm depth) sediment layers, with average survival rates of 35 ± 9 % and 26 ± 4 % respectively. However, all specimens of *C. laevigata* introduced in the anoxic layer (2.3–3.3 cm depth) died during the experiment (Fig. 5a).

Chamber addition was observed for *C. laevigata* at all incubation depths (Figs. 5b and 4c), including the anoxic layer (2.3.–3.3 cm depth), without significant differences between layers (ANOVA, $p$ value > 0.05). The average percentage of specimens that calcified was 33 ± 8 %, 23 ± 1 % and 16 ± 1 % respectively in the first (0–0.3 cm), second (0.3–1.3 cm) and forth layer (2.3–3.3 cm), and none of the specimens calcified more than a single chamber.

## 4 Discussions

### 4.1 Survival and calcification under anoxia

*Ammonia tepida* generally lives in superficial microhabitats (e.g. Debenay et al., 1998). In some cases it is also described in deeper sediments (Bouchet et al., 2009) but the use of rose Bengal staining in these studies may have overestimated or falsely indicated the presence of living individuals in anoxic sediments (Hannah and Rogerson,

1997). The absence of significantly different survival rates in different depth intervals, independent of oxygen conditions, is consistent with the results of the experiments carried out on *A. tepida* by Geslin et al. (2014) under hypoxic to short-term anoxic (maximum 6 days) conditions. Their study shows that survival rates of this species are not affected by hypoxic conditions. Our experiment confirms their high tolerance to oxygen-depleted conditions (below 0.3 cm) and goes further, by reporting, for the first time, unaffected survival rates for this species until 60 days of anoxic conditions. Our results strongly suggest that the preference of *A. tepida* for superficial microhabitats (in natural environments) is a response to the quantity and quality of the organic supplies rather than a response to dissolved oxygen concentrations. In our experiment we used homogenized subsurface (0.5–10 cm) sediment to avoid large quantities of organic matter that could have slowed down the stabilization of geochemical fluxes. The lack of fresh organic matter could therefore explain why the survival rates observed in the well oxygenated top layer of our experiments are lower than the ones reported by Geslin et al. (2014) in oxygenated laboratory conditions.

The absence of significant differences in survival rates in anoxic layers below the nitrate front, including layers with extreme chemical conditions (i.e. occurrence of sulfate reduction) suggests, for *A. tepida*, a shift to lower metabolic rates or to metabolic pathways other than denitrification. Nitrate storage, which has not yet been demonstrated for this species (Piña-Ochoa et al., 2010), and/or a drastically lowered metabolism may not be the only response mechanisms to anoxia. The occurrence of calcification (Fig. 3b and 5b) under anoxia, down to at least 7.3 cm depth (well below the nitrate reduction front) could be indicative of other, as yet unknown, metabolic pathways, which would supply the necessary energy (ATP) for calcification (de Nooijer et al., 2009). Alternatively, the energy remaining in the foraminiferal cell when it was introduced into the experiment could have been enough to assure the calcification of one extra chamber. This aspect will be further discussed in the next paragraph.

*Bulimina marginata* has been described from a wide range of marine environments, and has been considered in several studies as an indicator species of low oxygen con-



ditions (Phleger and Soutar, 1973; Van der Zwaan and Jorissen, 1991; Sen Gupta and Machain-Castillo, 1993; Bernhard and Sen Gupta, 1999). In the present study, statistical analysis did not show significant differences in survival between layers, which confirms the tolerance of this species to anoxic conditions, and is consistent with the earlier results of Langlet et al. (2013b). This species is known to be able to store nitrates in the cell (Piña-Ochoa et al., 2010) but so far its ability to denitrify has not been demonstrated. Our results suggest that this metabolic pathway could eventually allow *B. marginata* to survive down to 4.3 cm in the sediment (where nitrates are still present), without apparent negative influence of oxygen depletion, not even in complete anoxia. Denitrification could also supply the energy needed for calcification under hypoxic to anoxic conditions.

Finally, the different survival rates of *Cassidulina laevigata*, with 100 % mortality in the 2.3–3.3 cm layer, suggest that this species is able to tolerate hypoxia but not anoxia. The observation partly agrees with observations reported from several natural systems, where *C. laevigata* is generally described as shallow infaunal in well-oxygenated systems and generally declining under low-oxygen conditions (Nordberg et al., 2000; Gustafsson and Nordberg, 2001; Filipsson and Nordberg, 2004). However, Sen Gupta and Machain-Castillo (1993) listed *C. laevigata* as species resistant to moderate oxygen depletion in bottom and pore-waters, which is consistent with our findings. *C. laevigata* is able to store nitrates (Piña-Ochoa et al., 2010), although it is unknown whether it has the ability to denitrify. The observed sensitivity of the species to anoxia, even in presence of nitrates (Fig. 5a and d), suggests, however, that it did not use denitrification as a facultative anaerobic metabolism. Interestingly, a rather surprising result was obtained for the calcification of *C. laevigata*: although none of the *C. laevigata* specimens introduced into the anoxic layer survived the experiment, some of them (6, 4 and 5 specimens of the 32 introduced in each of the three replicate cores) were able to calcify one chamber. Hence, in this anoxic layer, calcification occurred before the death of all specimens. This is a particularly interesting observation, indicating both that the specimens did not immediately die after being introduced into anoxic conditions and

also that some energy was still allocated to calcification under these severely adverse conditions.

### 4.2 Metabolic activity under extreme oxygen conditions

The occurrence of calcification in deep anoxic sediments not only highlights that specimens were able to survive anoxic conditions but also that the foraminifera were metabolically active. The existing biomineralisation models in foraminifera postulate that calcification is an energetically expensive process (Erez, 2003; de Nooijer et al., 2009; Nehrke et al., 2013). No eukaryotic organisms have so far been observed to calcify in absence of oxygen. Our study demonstrates, for the first time, that three benthic foraminiferal species are able to calcify under anoxic conditions and at different redox conditions (e.g. in presence or in absence of nitrates), opening the way to a series of important new questions, insights and implications.

A major question is how these organisms can simultaneously support the absence of oxygen and produce the energy needed for calcification? Denitrification is so far the only known alternative metabolic pathway utilized by some benthic foraminiferal species under anoxic conditions (Risgaard-Petersen et al., 2006). Denitrification provides a lower ATP production (oxygen is a much better electron acceptor both for bioenergetic and kinetic reasons) than oxic respiration (Strohm et al., 2007). However, even supposing that denitrification may be energetically sufficient to support calcification, for several reasons, this process cannot explain all our observations. First, the ability to store nitrates and/or to denitrify has not been demonstrated for the three tested species (Piña-Ochoa et al., 2010). Next, *A. tepida* survived and calcified also in deeper sediment levels, where nitrates were absent. Therefore, while for *B. marginata* denitrification could explain our results (but remains to be demonstrated), other processes have to be envisaged for the other two investigated species: *A. tepida* and *C. laevigata*. For *A. tepida,* a possible explanation for its large scale survival and calcification under anoxic condition could be a shift towards anaerobic metabolic pathways other than denitrification, eventually mediated by ecto- or endobiotic bacteria (as hypothesized by



Bernhard et al. (2012) for some foraminiferal species). Anaerobic metabolic pathways that do not involve electron chain transport are generally much less efficient in ATP production (Vazquez et al., 2010). Therefore, even if such metabolic pathways could eventually explain foraminiferal survival, it is puzzling that the foraminifera would have enough energy to calcify.

An alternative explanation could be that essential life processes (calcification, nutrition, etc.) were continued in the beginning of the experiment, using energy reserves present in the cell, and were progressively abandoned later in the experiment. Such a mechanism would explain why the large majority of specimens calcified only a single new chamber, even *C. laevigata*, which died later in the experiment, probably due to a lower tolerance to anoxia.

Another question is why would foraminifera spend energy to calcify in highly adverse anoxic conditions? Based on the results, we hypothesize that for the species which did not demonstrate significant changes in survival rates under anoxic conditions (*Ammonia tepida* and *Bulimina marginata*) it is possible that calcification, meaning energy consumption, occurred because the life cycle was not affected by the scarcity or absence of oxygen. However, the case of *Cassidulina laevigata*, that was able to calcify in all tested conditions, from oxic to anoxic, but did not survive 60 days of anoxia, suggests that although calcification occurred, not all life processes could be assured. This seems to indicate that at least for this species, calcification occurred only early in the experiment, and was sustained by energy reserves present in the cell when the foraminifera were introduced in the experiment.

Finally, it has to be realized that in our experiments, the initial homogenization of the sediment column produced an organic matter gradient probably very different from natural environments, with the presence of a larger quantity of labile organic carbon in deeper layers than in natural settings. This could have enhanced foraminiferal activity (including calcification) in deeper layers. It is therefore not obvious that in nature calcification takes place in deeper anoxic sediment layers. However, our experimental results clearly show that the lack of oxygen is not inhibiting calcification, and that during

short anoxic periods, foraminifera will continue to calcify, at least at the sediment–water interface.

### 4.3 Implications and new perspectives

Several laboratory (Moodley et al., 1997, 1998b; Geslin et al., 2014) and field studies (Leiter and Altenbach, 2010; Langlet et al., 2013a), have demonstrated that foraminifera can survive anoxia up to 10 months (Langlet et al., 2013a), and the present study demonstrates that calcification may continue under these conditions, at least in early stages of anoxia. However, foraminifera disappear after prolonged anoxia, such is for instance shown by Mediterranean sapropel records (Jorissen, 1999). Experimental results suggest that the ultimate disappearance of the foraminiferal communities cannot be explained by adult mortality (high survival rates in several studies; e.g., Langlet et al., 2013a; Duijnstee et al., 2003), inhibition of calcification (this study), and possibly neither by lack of reproduction (reproduction was observed under experimental anoxia by Alve and Benrhard, 1995). We think that the final disappearance is explained by higher sensitivity to anoxia of the juveniles, which may no longer be capable to assure essential life functions, such as calcification. Although we showed a capability to add new chambers in adult specimens, it is well possible that calcification is not possible for the first life stages.

Our observations of calcification under anoxia and in different redox conditions may also have important consequences for paleo-proxy interpretations, especially in settings with intermittent anoxia. Until today, it was generally assumed that no foraminiferal tests are produced during anoxic periods, and consequently, foraminiferal samples representing an alternation of short term oxic and anoxic periods, would only contain foraminiferal tests formed during the oxic phases. This is especially relevant in coastal areas with seasonal anoxia, or the upper limits of intense oxygen minimum layers, which may also show important seasonal variability. In view of our results, it is possible that in such settings, contrary to earlier ideas, continuous records may be obtained.



Previous studies on the geochemical composition of individual foraminiferal tests have shown very large intraspecific differences between specimens from single samples (e.g., Duplessy et al., 1970; Rathburn et al., 2003). It appears that these differences are in many cases not due to different environmental parameters, but rather due to, still poorly understood, vital effects. Our results suggest that in settings with short term anoxia, part of this intraspecific variability could be due to the fact that different individuals represent periods with strongly contrasting oxygen concentrations. The study of individual specimens may in such cases add important information about seasonal variability, not only of bottom water oxygenation, but also of other environmental parameters, such as temperature or salinity. This information may also help to better understand the onset of anoxia.

Similarly, by analysis of elemental ratios in successive chambers of single specimens (for instance by laser ablation ICP-MS), it may be possible to obtain highly detailed reconstructions of ecosystems characterized by short-term (foraminiferal lifetime scale, seasonal) changes in bottom water oxygenation.

Finally, although our data show calcification in anoxia for all three investigated species, they demonstrate clear interspecific differences in tolerance of anoxia, with *Cassidulina laevigata* showing much lower survival rates than *Ammonia tepida* and *Bulimina marginata*. This suggests that some species will produce better (more continuous) records in areas affected by short term anoxia than other ones. A thorough knowledge of foraminiferal ecology, which will allow the selection of the best proxy carriers, remains therefore a prerequisite for successful geochemical paleoceanography studies.

**Supplementary material related to this article is available online at http://www.biogeosciences-discuss.net/11/4669/2014/bgd-11-4669-2014-supplement.pdf.**

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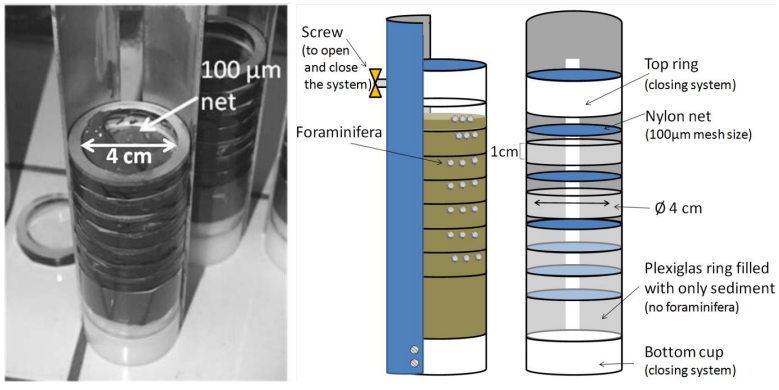


**Fig. 1.** Experimental cores. Picture showing the filling up of the cores with sieved sediment (left) and scheme of the experimental cores (right).

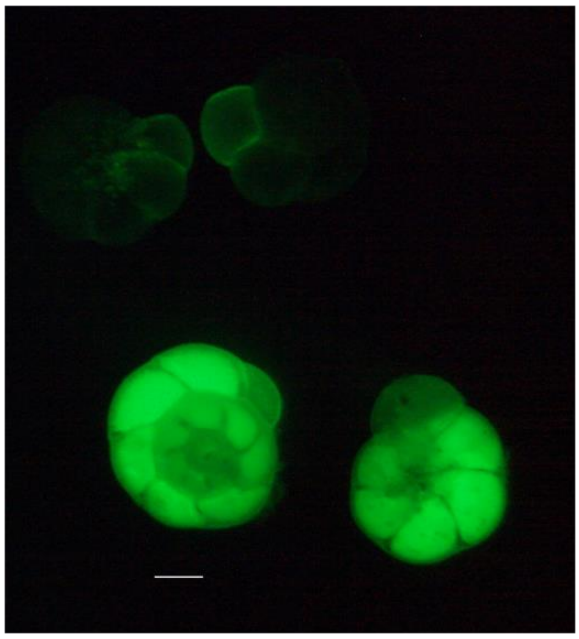

**Fig. 2.** Example of calcein labelled specimens of *Ammonia tepida*, as they were observed before incubation in FDA (high) and two living specimens after FDA incubation (down). Photo's exposure time: 1/4″. Scale bar = 100 µm.





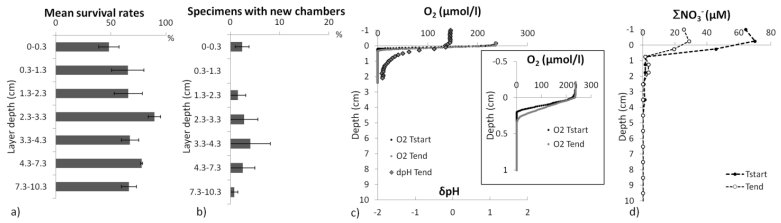


**Fig. 3.** Main results of experiment 1 with *A. tepida*. **(a)** Mean survival rates; **(b)** specimens that calcified new chambers; **(c)** oxygen and $\delta$pH profiles; **(d)** nitrates profiles. $\delta$pH is calculated as the difference between measured values at various sediment depths and pH value measured in overlying water. Error bars = mean standard error.

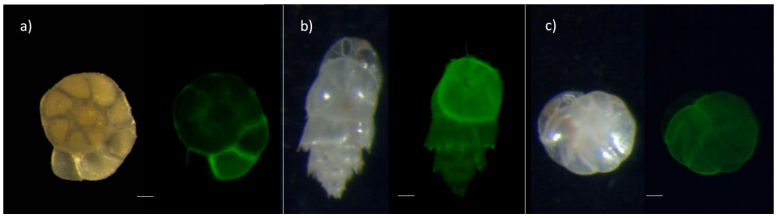


**Fig. 4.** Example of new chambers, not calcein labelled produced during the experiment in anoxic conditions. **(a)** *A. tepida* from layer 4 (2.3–3.3 cm) under natural light (left) and epifluorescence (right); **(b)** *B. marginata* from layer 3 (1.3–2.3 cm) under natural light (left) and epifluorescence (right); **(c)** *C. laevigata* from layer 4 (2.3–3.3 cm) under natural light (left) and epifluorescence (right). Photo's exposure time: 1/2.5″. Scale bar = 50 µm.





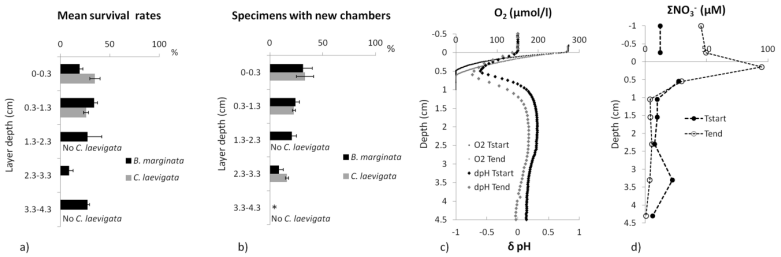


**Fig. 5.** Main results of experiment 2 with *B. marginata* and *C. laevigata*. **(a)** Mean survival rates; **(b)** specimens that calcified new chambers; **(c)** oxygen and $\delta$pH profiles; **(d)** nitrates profiles. $\delta$pH is calculated as the difference between measured values at various sediment depths and pH value measured in overlying water. Error bars = mean standard error. In 1.3–2.3 and 3.3–4.3 cm layers *C. laevigata* was not introduced (No *C. laevigata*). Star (*) indicates significant *p* value for Tukey's post-hoc test (< 0.01).