NASA Spin Mercurial

Written by Administrator Wednesday, 05 December 2012 08:19 -

NASA spin mercurial, as weeks of PR leading up to an "earth shattering announcement" finally hit the science press with the claim water ice has been found on the planet Mercury, according to reports Nature News 29 November 2012 and BBC News 30 November 2012. Scientists analysing data from NASA's Messenger spacecraft, which is orbiting Mercury, claim to have found water ice in the craters close to Mercury's north pole. In spite of its closeness to the sun, some of the craters near the north pole are in permanent shadow and never see the sun because the planet's axis is almost vertical to the plane of its orbit, and the planet's poles do not get tilted towards the sun like those on earth. This means the temperature at the bottom of shadowed craters remain more than cold enough for any water in them to remain frozen.

The scientists claim several different kinds of evidence show there is water ice in these craters. The spacecraft has fired infra-red laser pulses at the planet and revealed bright regions inside nine darkened craters near the north pole, and these bright regions line up perfectly with ultra-cold spots found on thermal model of the planet. Finally, the spacecraft's neutron spectrometer has detected a decrease in the flow of neutrons coming from these spots. Neutrons are generated when cosmic rays hit the planet, but hydrogen absorbs neutrons and water is a combination hydrogen and oxygen. David Lawrence, a planetary scientist at the Johns Hopkins University explained: "Not only is water the best explanation, we do not see any other explanation that can tie all the data together". The researchers also found areas of dark material around the ice, which they interpret as deposits of hydrocarbons forming an insulating layer about 10cm thick over the ice.

Having found evidence for ice, the next question is where did it come from? The researchers suggest it was deposited when comets collided with Mercury. Sean Solomon, Messenger's principal investigator explained: "The guess is that both the water and the dark material, which we think is organic-rich material, were delivered by the same objects impacting Mercury: some mixture of comets and the kinds of asteroids that are rich in organic and volatile material like water ice". David Paige, a planetary scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles, one of the researchers, also suggests water and hydrocarbons were delivered when comets collided with Mercury, and the comet chemicals migrated by repeatedly vaporizing and precipitating to the poles, where they get stuck in the extremely cold polar craters.

There is also the question of how long it has been there. According to Nature News, repeated "Small impacts should have buried the surface if the ice were a billion years old, and the Messenger researchers believe it might be much younger than that, perhaps 50 million years old". Paige commented: "The ice deposits we are looking at are not ancient". According to the BBC, "The findings may help explain how these ingredients first arrived on Earth".

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BBC, Nature News

Editorial Comment: We are not surprised that few of the secular press picked up much on the story as it is a PR let down big time – people wanted Aliens or at least life chemicals, not just more boring un-living water.

We agree partly with Nature News and Paige – ice on Mercury is not ancient, and hasn't been there for billions of years, but we would argue that even 50 million years is more than enough time for any ice or hydrocarbons to vaporise and disappear from the planet's cold crater bases. Ice does evaporate! Watch your untended ice trays in the freezer for this.

The most important part of this report is Sean Solomon's comment, reported by the BBC: "The surprise that we received on making the first chemical measurements of Mercury was that none of the theories for how Mercury was assembled are correct. So we're having to rewrite the books on how Mercury was assembled, and by implication how all the inner planets were assembled. The ice at the poles is only a recent chapter in that history but it's one that might be very informative". We would suggest to Solomon that if he wants to re-write the book about Mercury's origin he should start by consulting a book by the author of the planets — an already written eyewitness account on the origin of the planets — the book of Genesis. Here we are told the stars and planets (the word "planet" means moving star) were created by God to serve mankind for signs, times and seasons, only thousands, and not millions, of years ago. This is a direct contradiction to the theory that the solar system formed from a swirling mass of hot gas billions of years ago. However, if the planetary scientists started with Genesis we predict their findings of volatiles on cold planetary spots such as youthful Mercury would make far more sense. After all such volatiles shouldn't exist after billions or even millions of years. (Ref. astronomy, planets, chemistry)

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