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Use of Proxies in Paleoceanography

By Fischer, Gerhard / Wefer, Gerold

Book Condition: New. Publisher/Verlag: Springer, Berlin | Examples from the South Atlantic | Paleoceanographic proxies provide information for reconstructions of the past, including climate changes, global and regional oceanography, and the cycles of biochemical components in the ocean. These proxies are measurable descriptors for desired but unobservable environmental variables such as temperature, salinity, primary productivity, nutrient content, or surface-water carbon dioxide concentrations. The proxies are employed in a manner analogous to oceanographic methods. The water masses are first characterized according to their specific physical and chemical properties, and then related to particular assemblages of certain organisms or to particular element or isotope distributions. We have a long-standing series of proven proxies available. Marine microfossil assemblages, for instance, are employed to reconstruct surface-water temperatures. The calcareous shells of planktonic and benthic microorganisms contain a wealth of paleoceanographic information in their isotopic and elemental compositions. Stable oxygen isotope measurements are used to determine ice volume, and Mg/Ca ratios are related to water temperatures, to cite a few examples. Organic material may also provide valuable information, e. g., about past productivity conditions. Studying the stable carbon isotope composition of bulk organic matter or individual marine organic components may provide...


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