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1 A new Burmese amber hawker dragonfly helps to redefine the position of the aeshnopteran
2 family Burmaeshnidae (Odonata: Anisoptera: Aeshnoidea)

3

4 Diying Huang ^{a*}, Chenyang Cai ^a, André Nel ^{b*}

5

6 ^a *State Key Laboratory of Palaeobiology and Stratigraphy, Nanjing Institute of Geology and*
7 *Palaeontology, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Nanjing 210008, People's Republic of China*
8 *(dyhuang@nigpas.ac.cn)*

9 ^b *Institut de Systématique, Évolution, Biodiversité, ISYEB - UMR 7205 – CNRS, MNHN,*
10 *UPMC, EPHE, Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Sorbonne Universités, 57 rue Cuvier,*
11 *CP 50, Entomologie F-75005, Paris, France (anel@mnhn.fr)*

12

13 * Corresponding author.

14 * Corresponding author.

15 *Email addresses:* dyhuang@nigpas.ac.cn (D. Huang), anel@mnhn.fr (A. Nel).

16

17 **ABSTRACT**

18 The new genus and species *Angustaeshna magnifica* of Burmaeshnidae is described on the basis
19 of a new fossil from Burmese amber. The genus *Cretaeshna* from the same amber is transferred
20 from the Telephlebiidae into the Burmaeshnidae. We redefine this last family, no longer
21 considered as the sister group of the Late Cretaceous Enigmaeshnidae, but as putative sister
22 group of the Telephlebiidae in the Aeshnoidea. No known fossil belongs to the Telephlebiidae.

23

24 *Keywords:* Insecta; Aeshnoptera; gen. et sp. nov.; Myanmar; phylogeny

25

26 **1. Introduction**

27 Mesozoic Aeshnoptera are very diverse but they mainly belong to the stem group of the extant
28 clade Aeshnodea Bechly, 1996. Only two Allopetaiidae Cockerell, 1913, one Telephlebiidae
29 Cockerell, 1913, and no Aeshnidae Leach, 1815 are recorded in the Cretaceous (Bechly et al.,
30 2001; Zheng et al., 2017). Huang et al. (2017) recently described the new family Burmaeshnidae
31 from the Burmese amber, on the basis of the basal parts of a fore- and a hindwing, and
32 tentatively considered it as the sister group of the Late Cretaceous family Enigmaeshnidae Nel
33 et al., 2008. It was not possible to compare *Burmaeshna azari* Huang et al., 2017 to the alleged
34 telephlebiid *Cretaeshna* Zheng et al., 2017 because the latter is based on distal parts of wings.
35 Here we describe a third hawker dragonfly from the Burmese amber, showing nearly complete
36 fore- and hindwings. This fossil allows to compare *Burmaeshna azari* with *Cretaeshna* and to
37 put all these in the same family Burmaeshnidae, as sister group of the extant Telephlebiidae.

38

39 **2. Materials and methods**

40 The fossil was examined and measured using an incident light stereomicroscope (Olympus
41 SZX9) and a stereomicroscope (Nikon SMZ 1500), as well as a Leitz Wetzlar binocular
42 microscope. Photographs were taken using a Zeiss Discovery V20 microscope system. Optical
43 instruments were equipped by camera lucida and digital cameras. The raw digital images were
44 processed with focus stacking software, and figure plates prepared with Adobe Photoshop™.

45 The nomenclature of the odonatan wing venation used in this paper is based on the
46 interpretations of Riek & Kukalová-Peck (1984), as modified by Nel et al. (1993) and Bechly
47 (1996). The higher classification of fossil and extant Aeshnoptera follows Bechly et al. (2001).
48 Wing abbreviations are as follows: CuA, cubitus anterior; IR1, intercalary radial veins; MA,
49 median anterior; MP, median posterior; N, nodus; Pt, pterostigma; RA, radius anterior; RP,
50 radius posterior; Sn, subnodal crossvein. All measurements are given in mm.

51 The specimen is preserved in a piece of relatively clear, yellow Burmese amber. The
52 amber piece was polished before being examined and photographed. All amber material was
53 legally acquired in Myanmar from local traders with government registration, and legally
54 exported according to the official regulations in Myanmar.

55 Fossil-bearing has mostly been collected from the Hukawng Valley in northern
56 Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). For an overview of the amber deposit and its geological
57 setting see, e.g., Zherikhin and Ross (2000), Grimaldi et al. (2002), Cruickshank and Ko (2003),
58 and Ross et al. (2010). Radiometric U–Pb zircon dating (Shi et al., 2012) recently constrained
59 this amber to a minimum age of 98.79 ± 0.62 Ma, which is equivalent to the mid-Cretaceous
60 (earliest Cenomanian). The original habitat of the amber forest is still controversial, in fact it
61 has originally been assumed to be a tropical araucarian forest (Grimaldi et al., 2002; Poinar et
62 al., 2007), possibly with Dipterocarpaceae as another source for the fossil resin. However, the
63 first detailed report on the macromolecular nature and palaeobotanical affinity of Burmite
64 (Dutta et al., 2011), based on gas chromatography - mass spectrometry, rejected Araucariaceae
65 and Dipterocarpaceae in favour of Pinaceae as the Burmese amber tree. Grimaldi (2016), after
66 Grimaldi and Ross (in press), considered ‘based on the abundant inclusions of leafy shoots’ that
67 it was formed by a conifer, and ‘amber produced possibly by *Metasequoia* (Taxodiaceae) or a
68 close relative’.

69 The family, genus, and species are registered in Zoobank under the urn: xxxx

70

71 **3. Systematic palaeontology**

72 Odonata Fabricius, 1793

73 Anisoptera Selys in Selys and Hagen, 1854

74 Aeshnoptera Bechly, 1996

75 Burmaeshnidae Huang et al., 2017

76 Type species. *Burmaeshna azari* Huang et al., 2017

77 Other taxa. *Cretaeshna lini* Zheng et al., 2017 nov. sit., transferred from Telephlebiidae into

78 Burmaeshnidae; *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov.

79 *Emended diagnosis*. Two characters have to be added to the diagnosis of the Burmaeshnidae:

80 IR2 with a distal fork; accessory anal loop between the two main branches of CuA in hindwing

81 present.

82

83 *Angustaeshna* gen. nov.

84 Type species: *Angustaeshna magnifica* sp. nov.

85 *Etymology*. Named after *angustus*, narrow in Latin for the very narrow wings, and *Aeshna*.

86 *Diagnosis*. Wing venation characters only. One oblique veins 'O'; accessory anal loop between

87 the two main branches of CuA in hindwing very well-defined; only one antesubnodal crossvein

88 distal of base of IR2; discoidal triangles divided into two smaller cells; base of IR1 1-2 cells

89 basal of pterostigma.

90

91 *Angustaeshna magnifica* sp. nov.

92 Figs. 1-5

93 *Holotype*. NIGP166238 (two incomplete forewings and a complete hindwing), stored at the

94 Nanjing institute of Geology and Palaeontology.

95 *Locality and Horizon*. Hukawng Valley, Kachin Province, Myanmar; late Upper Albian to

96 lowermost Cenomanian, Upper Cretaceous.

97 *Etymology*. Named after the wonderful state of preservation of the wings.

98 *Diagnosis*. As for genus. Hindwing discoidal triangle divided into two cells.

99 *Description*. Mid part of a forewing and distal half of the other one, hyaline, wing ca 31.7 mm

100 long, 6.1 mm wide; distance from base to arculus ca. 3.5 mm; from arculus to base of RP3/4

101 6.0 mm; from arculus to nodus 6.4 mm; nodal crossvein and subnodus strongly oblique, ScP
102 making a right angle in nodus; six preserved antenodal crossveins distal of Ax2, the first one
103 being completed while the others are not aligned with those of second row between ScP and
104 RA, Ax2 between arculus and discoidal triangle, a secondary antenodal crossvein between Ax2
105 and Ax1, Ax1 not preserved; anterior part of arculus slightly curved, RP and MA separated in
106 angle of arculus where posterior part of arculus touches anterior part; hypertriangle 3.5 mm
107 long, free; discoidal triangle 1.0 mm distal of arculus, divided into two smaller cells, not very
108 elongate and narrow, with anterior side 2.5 mm long, and MAb 2.2 mm long, with a strong
109 angle from which emerges distinct convex trigonal planate, short and zigzagged; postdiscoidal
110 area with two rows of cells just after discoidal triangle and three more distally; Mspl well-
111 defined with one row of cells between it and MAa; base of Mspl four cells distal of discoidal
112 triangle; basal part of area between RA and RP with four crossveins basal of RP3/4, and two
113 distal of base of RP3/4 and basal of subnodus; area between RP and MA with three crossveins
114 basal of RP3/4; Bq space long, but two Bq crossveins; median area free; submedian area crossed
115 by curved CuP; subdiscoidal space free; one row of cells between MP and CuA; two rows of
116 cells in a narrow anal area; two rows of cells in area below CuA; CuA without well-defined
117 posterior branches; base of RP2 aligned with subnodus; RP2 straight; one row of cell between
118 RP2 and RP1; IR2 with a clear distal fork, and two rows of cells between its branches; Rspl
119 well-defined straight, with one row of cell between it and IR2; one oblique vein 'O' one cell
120 distal of subnodus; six preserved postnodal crossveins, not aligned with the eight postsubnodal
121 crossveins; pterostigma and wing apex not preserved in one forewing, present on the second
122 one, covering one cell and a half; a short pseudo-IR1 with its base below middle of pterostigma
123 but aligned with a zigzagged vein that begins two cells basal of pterostigma.

124 Hind wing complete, hyaline, 30.0 mm long, 7.3 mm wide; with a rather long petiole,
125 with stem of anal vein 2.2 mm long; distance from base to arculus 5.5 mm; from arculus to

126 nodus 7.7 mm; from arculus to base of RP3/4 5.3 mm; four antenodal crossveins of primary
127 type, viz. with a triangular membrane between C, ScP and radius, Ax0 at extreme base of wing,
128 Ax1 3.2 mm distally, 'Ax2' 3.5 mm distally and a supplementary one 'Ax3' 1.7 mm distally,
129 weaker than others and with a weaker membrane between C, ScP and RA; a secondary
130 antenodal crossvein between Ax1 and Ax2 and three secondary antenodal crossveins of first
131 row not well aligned with the three crossveins of second row, distal of most distal primary
132 antenodal; 11 postnodal crossveins not well aligned with postsubnodal crossveins; one row of
133 cells between RP1 and RP2; nodal veins with the same pattern as in forewing; arculus 1.1 mm
134 basal of Ax2; Ax2 aligned with basal side of discoidal triangle; RP and MA separated in angle
135 of arculus where posterior part of arculus touches curved anterior part; hypertriangle 3.9 mm
136 long, free; discoidal triangle 1.1 mm distal of arculus, divided into two smaller cells, more
137 elongate and narrower than in forewing, with basal side 1.2 mm long, anterior side 2.8 mm
138 long, and MAb 2.2 mm long, sigmoidal; postdiscoidal area with two rows of cells just after
139 discoidal triangle, distally broadened with 10 rows of cells along posterior wing margin; a
140 distinct convex trigonal planate, short and zigzagged; Mspl well-defined, straight, with one row
141 of cells between it and MAa; base of Mspl three cells distal of discoidal triangle; basal part of
142 area between RA and RP with two crossveins basal of RP3/4, and two distal of base of RP3/4
143 and basal of subnodus; area between RP and MA with two crossveins basal of RP3/4; one
144 oblique vein "O", one cell distal of base of RP2; one row of cells between IR2 and RP3/4 at
145 least till two cells distal of subnodus; base of RP2 aligned with subnodus; Rspl straight with
146 one row of cells between it and IR2; IR2 forked well basal of pterostigma, two rows of cells
147 between its branches; pterostigma short, 1.5 mm long, 0.8 mm wide, covering one cell and a
148 half; pterostigmal brace aligned with basal side of pterostigma and oblique; a short pseudo-IR1
149 with its base below middle of pterostigma but aligned with a zigzagged vein that begins one
150 cell basal of pterostigma; one row of cells between MP and CuAa; median area free; submedian

151 area crossed by curved CuP, situated between Ax1 and Ax2; subdiscoidal space free; no anal
152 triangle; no clear anal angle (female specimen?); postero-basal wing margin (AP) nearly
153 straight; anal area very long but not very broad, 5.5 mm long, 2.8 mm wide, with three rows of
154 large cells between AA and AP basal of anal loop and no clear posterior branches of AA; anal
155 loop two cells broad, much more elongate than broad, 3.9 mm long, 1.5 mm wide, hexagonal,
156 posteriorly closed, divided into five cells; CuAb well-defined; cubito-anal area narrow, with
157 three rows of cells between CuAa and posterior wing margin; CuAa with only one strong
158 posterior branch that delimitates a clear subanal loop.

159 *Discussion.* *Angustaeshna* gen. nov. can be attributed to the Neoaeshnida Bechly, 1996 (=
160 Gomphaeschnidae Tillyard & Fraser, 1940 + Aeshnodea Bechly, 1996) because of the very
161 elongate discoidal triangles; presence of only one row of cells between RP1 and RP2; well-
162 defined Mspl and Rspl, parallel to MA and IR2; both pairs of wings with a strong convex
163 secondary longitudinal vein (trigonal planate) in postdiscoidal area; in both pairs of wings MP
164 and CuA closely parallel with only one row of cells between them up to wing margin; only one
165 oblique vein 'O' (Bechly, 1996; 2016).

166 *Angustaeshna* has several characters currently considered as synapomorphies of the
167 Gomphaeschnidae, viz. the most distal part of antesubnodal area between RA and RP free of
168 antesubnodal crossveins (such a 'cordulegastrid gap' is not present in the fossil gomphaeschnid
169 *Alloaeshna quadrata* Wighton and Wilson, 1986); no accessory cubito-anal crossveins in
170 submedian space between CuP and PsA; discoidal triangles only divided into two cells by a
171 single crossvein; hypertriangles secondarily unicellular. Nevertheless, *Angustaeshna* has also a
172 crucial apomorphy of the Eueshnodea Bechly et al., 2001, viz. IR2 with a distal dichotomic
173 furcation, absent in all Gomphaeschnidae, recent and fossil. It cannot be attributed to the
174 Brachytronidae Cockerell, 1913 because its pterostigmal brace is not reduced and MP and CuAa
175 are distally not divergent. *Angustaeshna* has also a crucial synapomorphy of the Aeshnoidea

176 Leach, 1815, viz. a very well-defined accessory anal loop between the two main branches of
177 CuA in hindwing, also absent in all Gomphaeschnidae. *Angustaeshna* also has a synapomorphy
178 (proposed by Bechly, 1996, 2016) of the extant Telephlebiidae, viz. Ax2 recessed to basal angle
179 of discoidal triangle (close to, at, or even basal).

180 Nevertheless, *Angustaeshna* strongly differs from all the recent representatives of the
181 Telephlebiidae in the shape of the anal loop, clearly longer than wide, while it is wider than
182 long in the extant Telephlebiidae, as in the Aeshnidae. Also, its anal stem is distinctly longer
183 than in the modern Aeshnoidea. These structures are synapomorphies of the Burmese amber
184 family Burmaeshnidae Huang et al., 2017, together with the presence of three primary antenodal
185 crossveins Ax1, 'Ax2' and 'Ax3' in hindwing. Peters & Theischinger (2007) proposed a series
186 of synapomorphies for the Telephlebiidae, all based on body structures, unknown in these
187 fossils.

188 The genus *Burmaeshna* Huang et al., 2017 differs from *Angustaeshna* in several
189 characters, the most important being the presence of two oblique veins 'O' instead of one (a
190 character of the Neoaeshnida). This character is subject to homoplasies in the whole clade
191 Aeshnoptera, so it is possibly also the case here. The accessory anal loop between the two main
192 branches of CuA in hindwing is less well-defined in *Burmaeshna* than in *Angustaeshna*.
193 *Burmaeshna* has also more antesubnodal crossveins distal of the base of IR2 than in
194 *Angustaeshna*; and discoidal triangles divided into three smaller cells instead of two in
195 *Angustaeshna*.

196 Huang et al. (2017) indicated that *Burmaeshna* shares with the Late Cretaceous family
197 Enigmaeshnidae the very elongate anal area with an anal loop distinctly longer than wide, as
198 putative synapomorphies. But *Enigmaeshna* Nel et al., 2008 strongly differs from *Burmaeshna*
199 and *Angustaeshna* in the complete absence of the accessory anal loop between the two main
200 branches of CuA; absence of a stem of anal vein; presence of numerous crossveins in the

201 hindwing subdiscoidal space; presence of numerous secondary antenodal crossveins between
202 Ax1 and Ax2; Ax2 well distal of base of discoidal triangle; and absence supplementary primary
203 antenodal crossvein in hindwing. Thus the similar shapes of the anal loops of *Enigmaeshna*
204 with those of *Angustaeshna* and *Burmaeshna* is a parallelism.

205 In conclusion, we consider that *Angustaeshna* belongs to the family Burmaeshnidae, but
206 to a genus different from *Burmaeshna*. Also the family Burmaeshnidae belongs to the clade
207 Aeshnoidea (Telephlebiidae + Aeshnidae), and is probably the sister group of the modern
208 family Telephlebiidae for the Ax2 recessed close to the basal angle of discoidal triangle.

209 Zheng et al. (2017) described the Burmese amber genus *Cretaeshna* on the basis of weak
210 arguments, viz. a distal half of a wing. They attributed it to the family Telephlebiidae on the
211 basis of the shape of the nearly straight vein Rspl; absence of the bulge in the distal part of MAa
212 (plesiomorphies); and presence of a forked IR2 (a synapomorphy of the Eueshnoidea).
213 Nevertheless the preserved structures of *Cretaeshna* are very similar to those of *Angustaeshna*,
214 the unique clear difference being the shorter vein IR1 that begins below the pterostigma in
215 *Cretaeshna* while it begins 1-2 cells basal of pterostigma in *Angustaeshna*. *Cretaeshna* differs
216 from *Burmaeshna* in the presence of only one oblique vein 'O'. The lack of information on all
217 the structures of the basal halves of the wings in *Cretaeshna* forbids us to better compare it to
218 *Burmaeshna* and *Angustaeshna*. Nevertheless the quasi identity in venation strongly indicates
219 that *Cretaeshna* also belongs to the Burmaeshnidae. Therefore the family Telephlebiidae sensu
220 stricto is still unknown in the fossil record.

221

222 **4. Conclusions**

223 The Burmese amber family Burmaeshnidae is not related to the Enigmaeshnidae, but belongs
224 to the Aeshnoidea, as putative sister group of the extant family Telephlebiidae, suggesting that

225 the modern aeshnoids began to diversify during the mid-Cretaceous, if the most diverse extant
226 Aeshnidae are still only known from the Paleogene.

227

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230 Academy of Sciences (XDB18030501) and XDPB05, and the National Natural Science
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232

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309

310 Figures

311 **Fig. 1.** *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov., holotype NIGP166238, photograph of two
312 fore- and one hindwing. Scale bar = 2 mm.

313 **Fig. 2.** *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov., holotype NIGP166238, photograph of
314 hindwing base. Scale bar = 0.5 mm.

315 **Fig. 3.** *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov., holotype NIGP166238, photograph of mid part
316 of hindwing. Scale bar = 1 mm.

317 **Fig. 4.** *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov., holotype NIGP166238, photograph of
318 hindwing pterostigma. Scale bar = 0.2 mm.

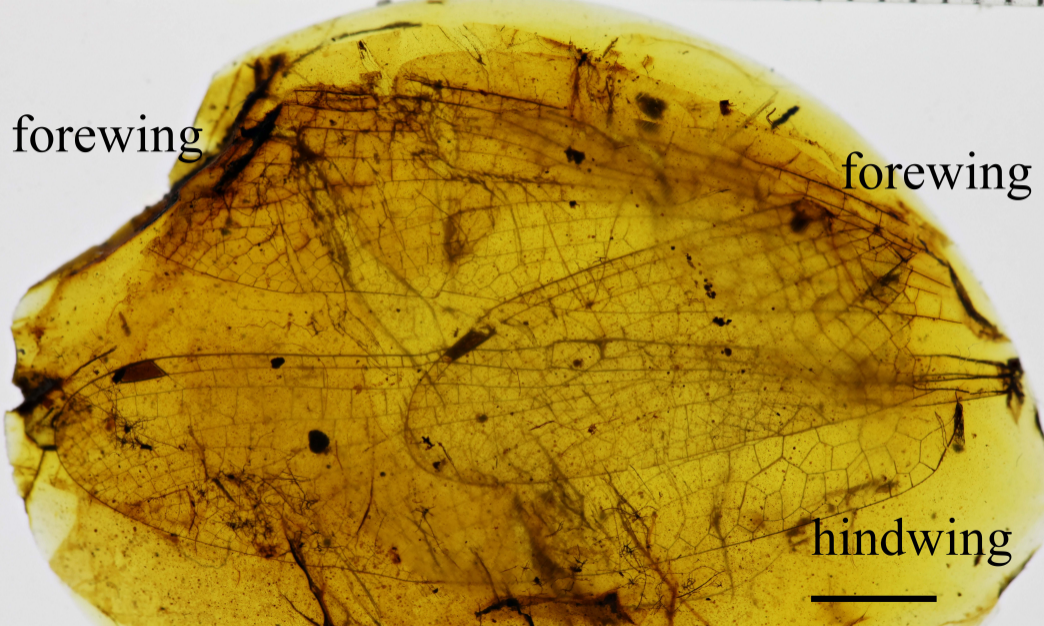
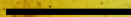
319 **Fig. 5.** *Angustaeshna magnifica* gen. et sp. nov., holotype NIGP166238, photograph of
320 hindwing apex. Scale bar = 2 mm.

321

forewing

forewing

hindwing



0.5 mm

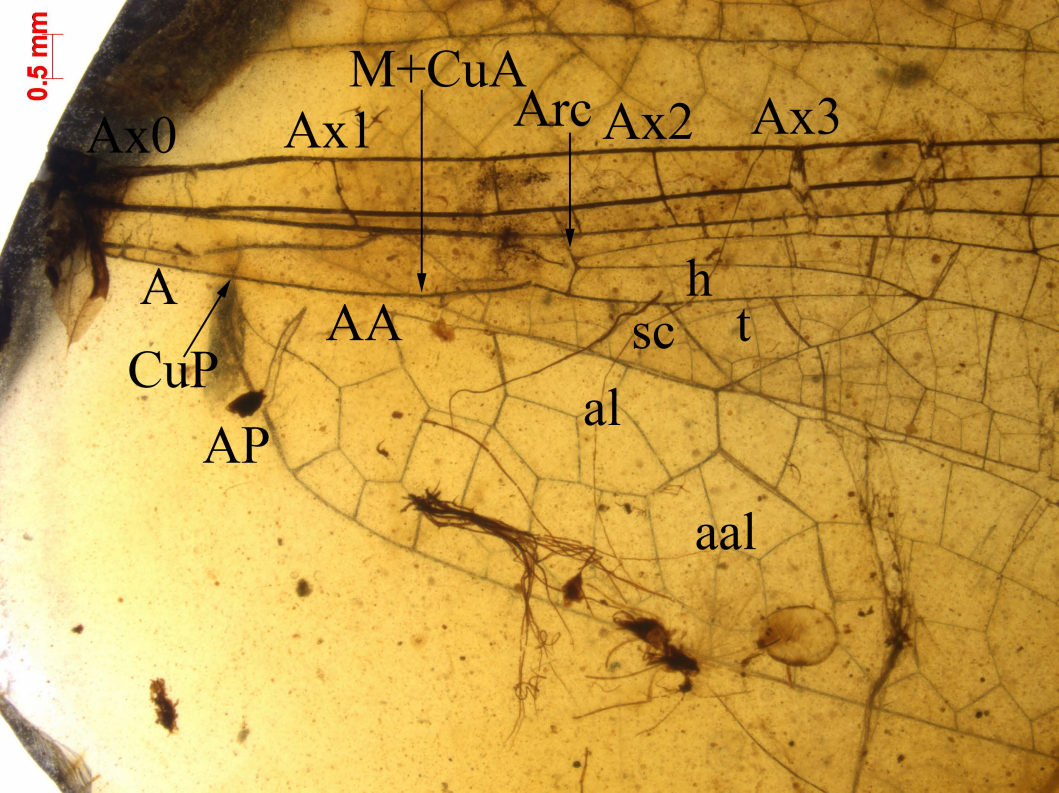
Ax0 M+CuA Ax1 Arc Ax2 Ax3

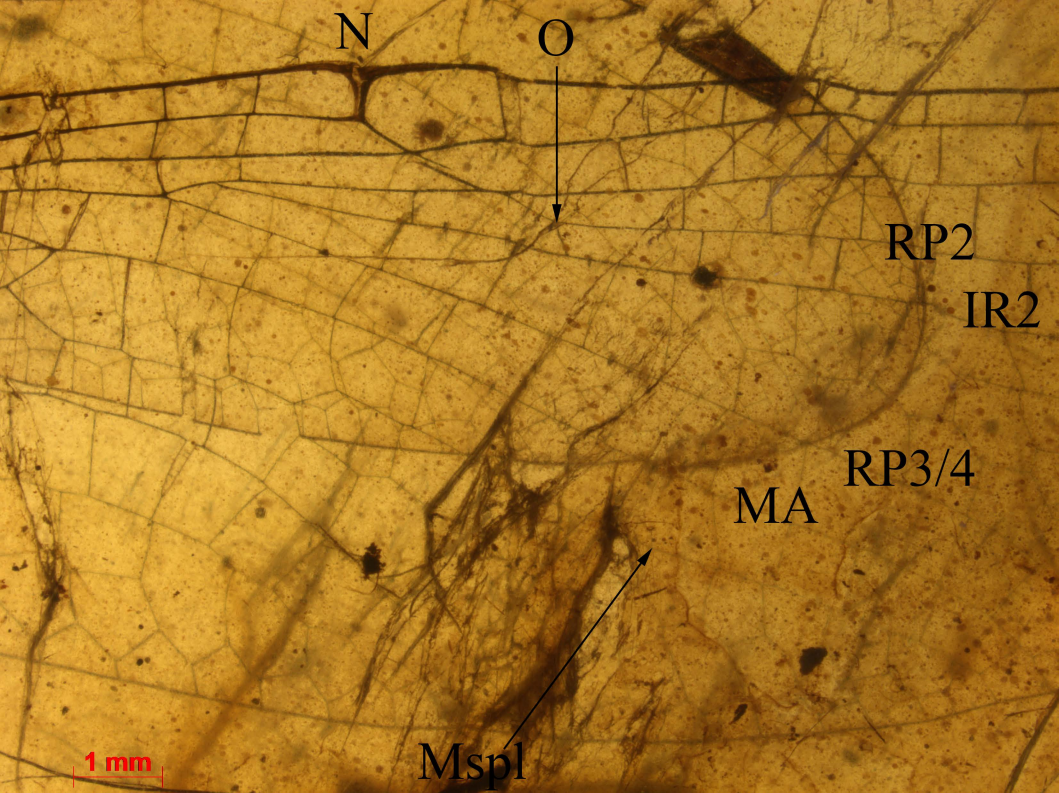
A
CuP
AP

AA

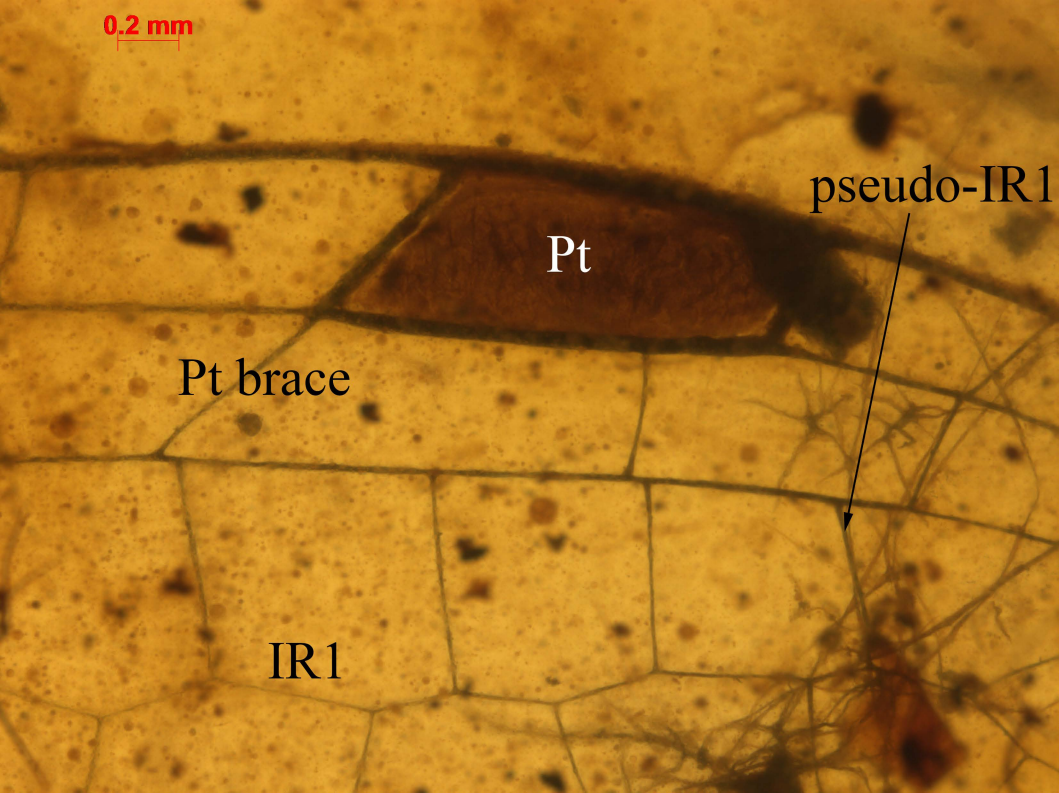
h
sc t
al

aal





0.2 mm

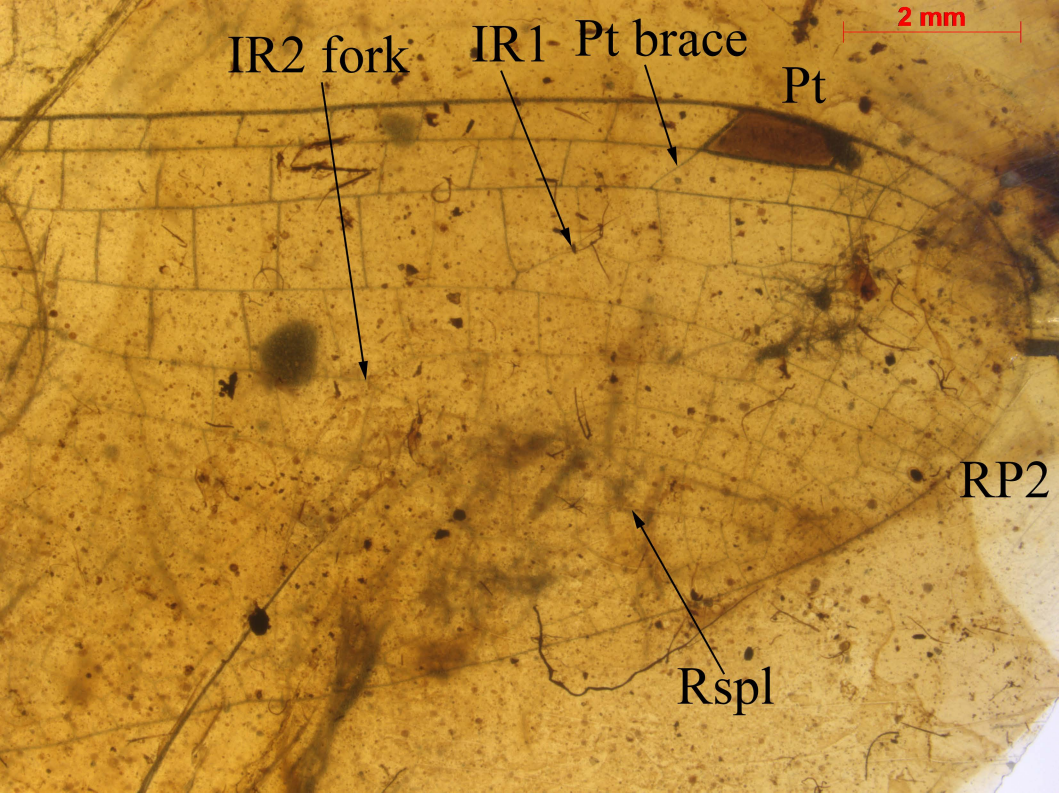


Pt

pseudo-IR1

Pt brace

IR1



IR2 fork

IR1 Pt brace

Pt

2 mm

RP2

Rspl