

SAPORTAEA SALISBURIoidES FONTAINE ET WHITE – AN ENIGMATIC, LONG-RANGING, WIDELY DISTRIBUTED BUT RARE TYPE OF LATE PALEOZOIC FOLIAGE

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New material of the enigmatic plant *Saportaea salisburyoides* is reported from the late Permian Umm Irna Formation, Dead Sea region, Jordan. The preservation and the sedimentology indicate that remains were transported over a very short distance. The specimens from one locality apparently belonged to a single monospecific stand, or maybe even a single plant. Another locality yielded a large leaf portion showing the leaf architecture. In a third locality *Saportaea* foliage was found in close association with *Nystroemia* sp., may suggest that this fructification belongs to *Saportaea*. *Saportaea* is a long-ranging but very rare genus with four species with a wide geographical distribution. It first appeared in the Westphalian D (Moscovian, Pennsylvanian) and its last appearance is in the Carnian (Late Triassic). In the late Paleozoic it evidently grew in drier, stress-prone, well-drained habitats where the preservation potential was low, which may explain the rareness of this taxon. The oldest Pennsylvanian and Permian representatives are known from low palaeolatitudes, whereas the youngest grew at higher latitudes in the Southern Hemisphere. An origin at low palaeolatitudes followed by a colonization of more temperate regions seems to confirm the trend also seen in several other late Paleozoic gymnosperm groups. *Saportaea salisburyoides*, an easily recognizable species that cannot be overlooked, is so far only known from the uppermost Carboniferous of North America. It apparently had a very long range, spanning some 50–60 Ma. *Saportaea salisburyoides* must have been out somewhere for many millions of years. It has never having been recognized or reported again in the over 140 years after its first discovery. On one hand, this demonstrates the imperfectness of the fossil record, and on the other hand it shows that the overall late Paleozoic flora must have been much more diverse than commonly believed.