Thank you for your enthusiastic review. We will incorporate your suggestions about the International Year and Decade of Soils and clarify what we mean by MDF (medium density fibre board) and find a better picture (Fig. 2f). Regarding palaeo vs paleo, we follow the more common spelling ‘palaeo’. If the editor prefers ‘paleo’ we are naturally happy to change this. Finally we thank you for the information about the museum in Santiago de Compostela. We will contact them to ask if they have a monolith or lacquer peel collection (this is not immediately clear from the website) and include them in our list if they do.