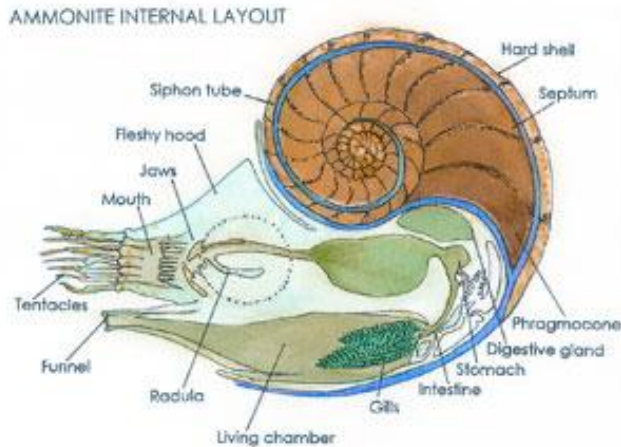


The Ammonite Story

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Ammonites lived in the seas about the same time as Dinosaurs ruled the planet; in fact ammonites were often preyed on by marine dinosaurs. Fossil specimens of ammonite shells with Plesiosaur teeth marks have been found at Lyme Regis, Dorset. Ammonites were also prodigious predators, snatching their prey with tentacles and then crushing it with their strong beaks, similar to the squids of today (a distant relative).



Ammonites moved horizontally by squirting water from their funnel (jet propulsion) and up and down by altering the gas pressure in their hollow chambers using a structure known as the siphuncle canal (siphon tube). This gave them great mobility, enabling them to be among the most successful creatures in terms of numbers and distribution. This makes them important as “Index Fossils”, used to date similar rock strata from different locations around the world. Each species has a unique shell suture line pattern (thought to strengthen shell joints) enabling identification from shell fragments.

Suture patterns are an example of a self repeating pattern found in nature known as fractals also seen in snowflakes, fern heads and trees for example.

Ammonites were most numerous and highly evolved during the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, 200 to 65 million years ago. They ranged from a few centimetres to nearly 2 metres in diameter with evidence to suggest that females were much larger than males. Ammonites disappeared at the end of the Mesozoic mass extinction (K/T) along with the dinosaurs, making way for mammals and birds to become dominant. Their close relative the Nautilus managed to survive till today.

The word ammonite comes from the name of the Egyptian God of sheep, Ammon, as their spiral shape is similar to the horns of certain sheep. They are classified as Cephalopods meaning “head-foot” creatures.

Some of my specimens are hand sectioned to show their internal spiral structure; selected fossils are then set in a resin used to preserve scientific specimens with handmade solid silver frames as pendants, ear rings or brooches.

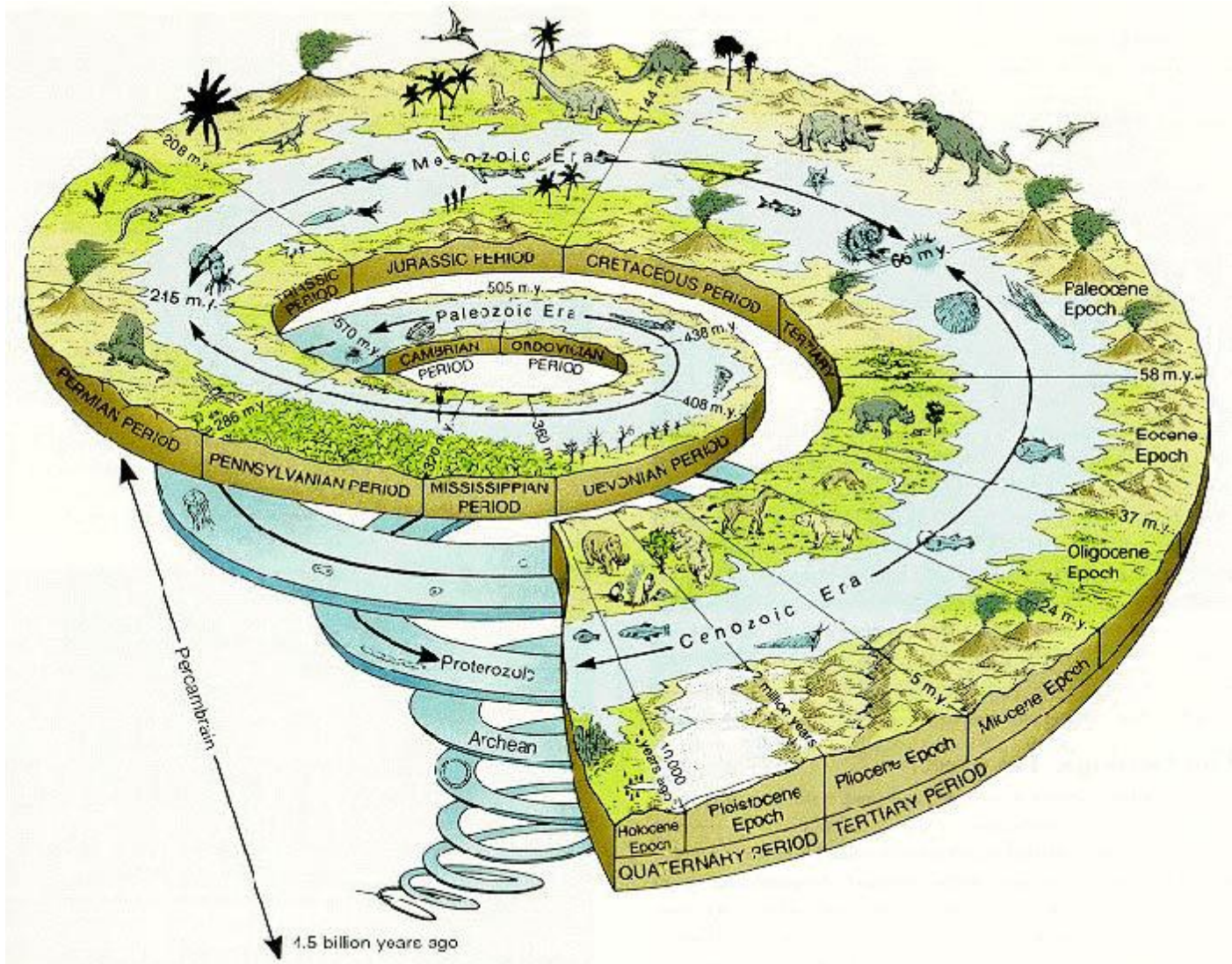
Image showing how ammonites may have looked



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Geological time scale



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Ammonites lived from about 200 to 65 million years ago (Mesozoic Era), humans looking like us have been around for 200,000 years, too short a time to show on the above scale.