

NEW INACCURACIES TO CARBON DATING REPORTED

On August 13 *The Times* of London carried a report of claims by researchers at Columbia University, New York, that some carbon datings may be inaccurate by up to 3,500 years. Apparently the Columbia researchers have been comparing carbon dating with a new technique, uranium thorium dating, on a fossil reef off Barbados. They found a particularly marked decline in accuracy in respect of the carbon datings of objects more than 8,000 years old. While the discrepancies indicated by the Columbia University researchers are of course rather far outside the disputed time range of the Turin Shroud, and do not explain this latter, nonetheless they add further fuel to the argument that carbon dating is insufficiently reliable to be used as an arbiter on its own, as was too quickly assumed by the world's media in respect of the Shroud.

As yet another example for this same argument, the latest issue of *Radiocarbon* (vol. 32, no. 1, 1990, pp.59-79), carries a paper by S.G.E. Bowman, J.C. Ambers and M.N. Leese (all of the British Museum Research Laboratory), entitled 'Re-evaluation of British Museum Radiocarbon Dates Issued between 1980 and 1984'. According to this paper, it is now known that all dates issued by the British Museum radiocarbon laboratory between 1980 and 1984 were in error. On average, where revision has been possible, these are known to have been too young by between 200 and 340 radiocarbon years. The reason for this has been established as a failure to take into account weight/evaporation losses in modern samples routinely used as controls during those years. While the British Museum personnel are to be commended in bringing these miscalculations into the open, and the findings have no direct bearing on the Shroud dating, the layman is inevitably left wondering what other mistakes and false assumptions regarding carbon dating may lie as yet undetected and unrevealed.