

IS THIS THE NEWS WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR?

As this Newsletter goes to press, U.K. and American radio-carbon dating specialists are gathering in Turin for a crucial three day series of meetings at the end of this month, to discuss ways and means for the first-ever radio-carbon dating tests to be conducted on the Turin Shroud.

The meetings have been called by Brazilian scientist Professor Carlos Chagas, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Sciences, indicative of the Shroud now being the property of the Pope and his successors following ex-king Umberto of Savoy's death in 1983. Although the exact details of the radio-carbon meetings are as yet confidential, among the delegates will be Dr. Michael Tite of the British Museum Research Laboratory, Professor Edward Hall of the Oxford Research Laboratory for Archaeology & the History of Art, Dr. Garman Harbottle of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, New York, Professor Harry Gove of the Nuclear Structure Research Laboratory, University of Rochester, New York, Dr. Robert Dinegar of the Los Alamos National Laboratory (carbon-dating co-ordinator for STURP), Dr. Alan Adler of the Dept. of Chemistry, West Connecticut State University (also of STURP), archaeologist William Meacham of the Museum of History, Hong Kong, and Professor Luigi Gonella of Turin Polytechnic, the chief scientific advisor to Cardinal Ballestrero of Turin.

The meetings follow one originally arranged for earlier this year, which was somewhat peremptorily postponed, and will inevitably be concerned with how best the carbon-dating test should be carried out to ensure maximum reliability and public confidence in the results achieved.

This will be somewhat crucial in the light of the recent carbon-datings of "Pete Marsh" or Lindow Man, the well-preserved body of an Iron Age man, apparently the victim of a human sacrifice, found in 1984 amongst the peat of Lindow Moss in Cheshire, and now on display in the British Museum.

As reported in the most recent issue (August 1986) of *Current Archaeology*:

...there are continuing problems over his [Lindow Man's] date. Three sets of radiocarbon dates have been obtained. Firstly there are those obtained by conventional methods from the peat that surrounded him, which has been dated both by Harwell and by the British Museum at dates around 300 BC., and this is the date they are adopting for publication.

The other dates are done by the two new super-duper small measurement laboratories at Harwell and at Oxford, which can date minute samples of the body itself, of the hair, bones and skin. However, whereas all the Oxford samples come out consistently in the 1st. century AD., all the Harwell samples come out consistently in the 5th. century AD. At one time they thought that the difference might be due to the differing pretreatment at the laboratories, so they swapped samples following pre-treatment, but the resulting measurements came out within the respective series for each laboratory. The archaeological world waits with bated breath to see how this problem is resolved...

Inevitably, it is not only the archaeological world that waits with bated breath... Such considerations add particular cogency to American-born archaeologist Bill Meacham's paper on carbon dating, given during the Shroud week in Hong Kong earlier this year, which in view of its topicality is reproduced almost in entirety below: