

NOTES AND COMMENTS

A LETTER TO THE RADIOCARBON COMMUNITY

Dear Colleague,

You will probably recall the discussion we had during the business meeting in Dubrovnik about our radiocarbon community forming some kind of, more or less, formal association. It was my personal impression that this subject could not adequately be discussed with such a large group at such short notice. The idea (which is not mine) was not sufficiently dissipated before the business meeting, for which I apologize.

Nevertheless, some colleagues feel that it is a good idea. I will try to give you more and better reasons than I presented in Dubrovnik. However, let me be absolutely clear about one thing. We do not intend to change the community's status, in that it should become an international society with all kinds of boards, committees, subcommittees, sections and what have you. We should not seek recognition or become part of a large existing society, although you may have had that impression during our meeting. It should merely be a means of obtaining a more close and less *ad-hoc* cooperation than we have at present. And I believe that we are in need of a better organization than was required in the past.

For this closer cooperation and more frequent contacts between laboratories, I can think of several reasons:

1. The installation and maintenance of international and national or local data bases require more effort and consultation than some of you realize. A small group of colleagues had a frequent exchange of letters and proposals during the past few years and we have not come to a final arrangement, although the main principles have become clear. This discussion, however, took place on a very personal basis and we do not know whether all laboratories are informed or agree. Still, this is the moment for decisions, because it will soon be too late to get everybody on the same track sufficiently.

2. The calibration of the ^{14}C time scale has made tremendous progress. However, we are not finished yet. The problems become larger going back in time. We had discussions and made further arrangements about this in Dubrovnik, but I believe that once in three years is not enough.

Producing more and better calibration may have lost the original glamour, but its curves have not become less important.

And then we have the question of how to use the calibration curves. Another small group of colleagues becomes active, but without sufficient deliberation. Yet, we have to make fast progress, because the "users" do not sit and wait and may be (and already are) applying procedures which possibly may be regretted after publication.

3. As everybody knows by now, laboratory intercomparison is a hot item (and should have been a long time ago). Recently the different matter of Quality Control, required by several laboratories, was added. This will require our permanent attention. Opinions on how and whom differ

greatly and will again be discussed in Glasgow in September 1989. It is of the utmost importance that procedures will be found to which everyone can agree so that in the future all laboratories will contribute to or make use of the intercomparison and standardization efforts.

4. For the organization of our regular ^{14}C conferences, the local organizers may wish to, and possibly should, appeal to an international "Advisory Board." In the past, these committees have been ineffectively large and merely ornamental.

5. Besides the issues that draw radiocarbon daters together, an organization can seek funding from national and international foundations for the purposes of holding conferences, travel support for scholars and cooperative projects.

6. A newsletter can be circulated at least four times a year for better communications, current events and cooperation among members. Membership fees would cover these costs.

You may ask: why can we not continue to operate in the manner we are used to during the past few years with several different small or too large groups of individuals. I believe that a few colleagues should be made and thus feel responsible for the coordination of all common efforts and interests, for distributing information and asking opinions, for being aware of who can and should contribute to what.

An "Association of Radiocarbon Laboratories" should not do any harm to the atmosphere of cordiality within our community; it should become a light-footed organization (contrary to the European Common Market), which should facilitate the necessary cooperation and prevent lack of action and unfortunate growing-apart where opinions differ.

I would very much appreciate receiving your consent, comments or criticism. If your support is substantial, Austin Long and I will discuss how to proceed.

Prof Dr W G Mook

Post scriptum added in proof: After my letter was distributed within our community, two items (5 and 6) were added. Meanwhile, I received substantial support with valuable suggestions.