

TECHNICAL FILE

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INDEX

- Mutasam Al-Ghammari - ORDOVICIAN-SILURIAN PALYNOLOGY OF OMAN - **4**
- Jiří Bek , Tania Dimitrova - TAXONOMY AND STRATIGRAPHIC IMPORTANCE OF THE CARBONIFEROUS MIOspore GENUS *VESTISPORA* - **6**
- Jenny Brittain - PALYNOLOGICAL BIOSTRATIGRAPHY AND CORRELATION OF TOURNAISIAN (MISSISSIPPIAN) SYNSEDIMENTARY DEFORMATION AND REWORKING EVENTS IN SOUTHERN IRELAND AND SOUTH WALES - **8**
- Ewa Durska, Monika Jachowicz-Zdanowska, Wojciech Kozłowski - LATE LUDLOWIAN PALYNOMORPHS FROM THE ŁYSOGÓRY REGION, HOLY CROSS MOUNTAINS, CENTRAL POLAND – PRELIMINARY RESULTS - **10**
- Paulo Fernandes, Joaquim Luís, Sandra Rodrigues, Manuela Marques, Bruno Valentim, Deolinda Flores - THE MEASUREMENT OF VITRINITE REFLECTANCE USING MATLAB - **11**
- Anna Fijałkowska-Mader - PALYNOLOSTRATIGRAPHY OF THE UPPER PRAGIAN (SIEGENIAN) AND EMSIAN IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF THE HOLY CROSS MOUNTAINS (POLAND) - **14**
- Patricia G. Gensel, Charles H. Wellman, Wilson A. Taylor - ULTRASTRUCTURE OF IN SITU SPORES OF EARLY DEVONIAN LYCOPHYTINA - **16**
- Mohammad Ghavidel-syooki - BIOSTRATIGRAPHY AND PALEO GEOGRAPHY OF ORDOVICIAN STRATA, IN KABIRKUH WELL#1, IN LURESTAN AREA, SOUTHWESTERN IRAN - **18**
- Anna Górecka-Nowak, Jolanta Muszer - PALYNOSTRATIGRAPHY OF THE UPPER VISÉAN PAPROTANIA SERIES (BARDO UNIT, POLISH SUDETES) - **21**
- K. T. Higgs, B.P.J. Williams - PALYNOLOGY AND PALAEOENVIRONMENTS OF THE SILURIAN ROCKS OF THE DUNQUIN INLIER, DINGLE PENINSULA, CO. KERRY - **23**
- Monika Jachowicz-Zdanowska - PALYNOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE PROTEROZOIC-CAMBRIAN SUCCESSION IN THE MAŁOPOLSKA BLOK (SOUTHERN POLAND) - **24**
- Irfan U. Jan, Michael H. Stephenson - PALYNOLOGY OF THE ?GLACIGENIC CARBONIFEROUS TOBRA FORMATION OF PAKISTAN - **26**
- Hartmut Jäger, Guy H. Spence, Thilo Bechstädt - PALYNOLOGY OF GLACIAL INTERVALS IN THE NEOPROTEROZOIC OF NAMIBIA – NEW FACTS ON ‘SNOWBALL EARTH’ - **29**
- Gilda Lopes, Nuno Vaz, António J.D. Sequeira, José M. Piçarra, Paulo Fernandes, Zélia Pereira - PALYNOMORPHS FROM THE GORSTIAN (SILURIAN) OF SAZES FORMATION (BUÇACO SYNCLINE), CENTRAL IBERIAN ZONE, PORTUGAL – PRELIMINARY RESULTS - **31**
- Gil Machado - STRATIGRAPHY AND PALYNOLOGY OF THE FRASNIAN TO SERPUKOVIAN METASEDIMENTARY ALBERGARIA-A-VELHA UNIT, OSSA-MORENA ZONE, W PORTUGAL - **34**
- J.E.A. Marshall, Huaicheng Zhu, C.H. Wellman, Yi Wang, C.M. Berry – *ARCHAEOOPERISACCUS* - **37**
- Sören Meisel - VASCULAR PLANT RESIDUALS (?) INSTEAD ACRITARCHS - OBSERVATIONS FROM A LATE SILURIAN MARINE CARBONATE (OCKERKALK) IN SE-GERMANY (THURINGIA) - **40**
- Małgorzata Moczyłowska-Vidal - PROTEROZOIC ACRITARCHS AND DIVERGENCES OF GREEN MICROALGAE - **42**
- Jan Mortier, Jacques Verniers - THE RAVINE 700 M EAST SECTION OF NEUVILLE-SOUS-HUY (UPPER LLANDOVERY TO MIDDLE WENLOCK): LITHOSTRATIGRAPHY AND BIOSTRATIGRAPHY WITH CHITINOZOANS - **45**
- Marzena Oliwkiewicz-Mikłasińska, Kinga Filipowska-Jeziorek - PALYNOSTRATIGRAPHY OF CARBONIFEROUS DEPOSITS IN BOREHOLE M-1 NEAR PUŁAWY (LUBLIN BASIN) - **48**
- Teodoro Palacios - MIDDLE-UPPER CAMBRIAN ACRITARCHS FROM THE OVILLE AND BARRIOS FORMATIONS, CANTABRIAN MOUNTAINS, NORTHERN SPAIN - **50**
- Brian E. Pedder - LARGE SPINOSE ACRITARCHS (LSAS) FROM CAMBRIAN LAURENTIAN SEDIMENTS IN THE U.S.A. - **54**
- Janine Pendleton - PALAEOBOTANICAL INVESTIGATION OF A NEGLECTED COALFIELD: THE COALPIT HEATH BASIN OF THE BRISTOL COALFIELD - **56**

- Z. Pereira, J. X. Matos, P. Fernandes, J. T. Oliveira - PALYNOSTRATIGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE CAVEIRA MINE (NW SECTOR OF THE IBERIAN PYRITE BELT, PORTUGAL) - **57**
- H. N. Sinha, Jacques Verniers, Thijs R. A. Vandenbroucke - FIRST REPORT OF ORDOVICIAN CHITINOZOANS FROM THE SHIALA FORMATION OF TETHYS HIMALAYA, INDIA - **60**
- Philippe Steemans, Kevin Lepot, Craig P. Marshall, Alain Le Hérisse, Emmanuelle J. Javaux - FTIR CHARACTERISATION OF THE CHEMICAL COMPOSITION OF SILURIAN MIOSPORES (CRYPTOSPORES AND TRILETE SPORES) FROM GOTLAND, SWEDEN - **61**
- Marzena Stempień-Salek - PALYNOMORPHS FROM PRINCE CHARLES MOUNTAINS, EAST ANTARCTICA: CARBONIFEROUS, CARBONIFEROUS-PERMIAN OR PERMIAN? - **63**
- Ellen Stolle - BIOSTRATIGRAPHIC CORRELATION OF PERMIAN STRATA FROM SE TURKEY AND AUSTRALIA - **65**
- Ellen Stolle, Tania Dimitrova - *TORISPORA* (BALME) DOUBINGER AND HORST FROM PENNSYLVANIAN AND PERMIAN OF TURKEY AND BULGARIA - **68**
- Zbigniew Szczepanik - SUCCESSION OF THE ACRITARCHS ASSEMBLAGES IN CAMBRIAN OF THE HOLY CROSS MTS. (CENTRAL POLAND) - **70**
- Zbigniew Szczepanik, Wiesław Trela - EXOTIC ACRITARCHS IN THE HIRNANTIAN MICROPHYTOPLANKTON ASSEMBLAGE OF THE HOLY CROSS MOUNTAINS (POLAND) - **76**
- Wilson A. Taylor, Charles H. Wellman, Patricia G. Gensel - WHAT CAN SPORE WALL ULTRASTRUCTURE TELL US ABOUT AFFINITY AND EVOLUTION OF THE DEVONIAN FORM GENERA *EMPHANISPORITES* AND *CAMAROZONOTRILETES*? - **78**
- Claudia Trampisch - TEM STUDY OF THE MELANOSCLERITE *MIRACHITINA QUADRUPEDIS* EISENACK, 1932 - **81**
- Thijs R. A. Vandenbroucke, Howard A. Armstrong, Mark Williams, Florentin Paris, Jan A. Zalasiewicz, Koen Sabbe, Jaak Nölvak, Thomas J. Challands – ZOOPLANKTON BIOTOPES, CLIMATE BELT CONTRACTION AND POLAR FRONT SHIFT TOWARDS THE GLACIAL MAXIMUM OF THE EARLY PALAEOZOIC ICEHOUSE - **84**
- Thijs R.A. Vandenbroucke, Darren Gröcke, Howard A. Armstrong - CHITINOZOANS IN $\Delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{ORG}}$ STUDIES: A REVISION OF METHODOLOGY - **86**
- Nuno Vaz, Florentin Paris, J. Tomás Oliveira - CHITINOZOANS OF UPPER SILURIAN OF AMÊNDOA - MAÇÃO SYNCLINE - **88**
- Jacques Verniers, Monika Masiak - SILURIAN CHITINOZOANS FROM THE PRAGOWIEC RAVINE, HOLY CROSS MOUNTAINS, POLAND AND CALIBRATION WITH THE GRAPTOLITE BIOZONATION - **91**
- Wenhui Wang, Jacques Verniers - CHITINOZOANS IN *ADELOGRAPTUS TENELLUS* GRAPTOLITE ZONE OF THE LATE TREMADOCIAN (EARLY ORDOVICIAN) FROM YIYANG, SOUTH CHINA - **94**
- Charles H. Wellman, Patricia G. Gensel, Wilson A. Taylor - LATE SILURIAN-EARLY DEVONIAN PALAEOPHYTOGEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENTIATION: THE FRENCH/SPANISH CONNECTION - **97**
- Kui Yan, Jun Li, Thomas Servais - THE ORDOVICIAN ACRITARCHS ASSEMBLAGES IN SOUTH CHINA AND ITS BIOSTRATIGRAPHICAL IMPLICATIONS - **100**

THE MEASUREMENT OF VITRINITE REFLECTANCE USING MATLAB

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The measurement of vitrinite reflectance is widely used as an indicator of coal rank and organic maturation in source-rock studies. This is due to the regular change in reflectance properties of the vitrinite group during coalification. Traditional coal petrographic studies', including rank determination, uses transmitted light microscopy. Vitrinite is differentiated from other macerals microscopically under an oil immersion lens using incident light on polished surfaces and taking into account properties, such as, colour, shape, relief, hardness and principally, reflectivity. The accurate measurements of vitrinite reflectance are achieved with the calibration of the microscope with, at least, two standards of known reflectance. The values of vitrinite reflectance are then registered analogically in a photo-multiplier apparatus or more recently in software packages that deal with image analysis treatment.

In this work we propose a method for vitrinite reflectance measurement that uses the techniques of image processing ready available in Matlab[®]. We developed a dedicated graphical tool that runs within the Mirone suite (also written in Matlab, Luis, 2007), that calibrates a scale of 256 grey levels with standards of known reflectivity. The black and white images of the vitrinite particles are imported to this routine and its reflectance values are measured. In order to test the reliability of this method, several coal samples with a known rank, ranging from lignite to meta-anthracite (Flores, 2002; Marques 1993; Suarez et al., 2006; Marques et al., 2009), were re-studied and its vitrinite reflectance were measured using the new tool[®]. The results of

this test (table 1 and figure 1) show that there is a very good correlation between the vitrinite reflectance measurements made with traditional methods (%Rm Literature) and the new Vitrinite tool[□]. Although more tests are needed to ascertain the consistency of this new method, these results show that this method can be a more affordable alternative to the commercial vitrinite reflectance software packages.

Coal Sample Ref.	%Rm Literature	%Rm MatLab	SD	No. Points
1707/1719	0.19	0.21	0.03	50
950/954	0.30	0.29	0.05	50
1375	0.55	0.56	0.02	50
1501/1502	0.74	0.68	0.05	50
136/140	0.90	0.82	0.03	50
3156	1.14	1.18	0.05	50
3152	1.41	1.46	0.07	50
3182	1.63	1.66	0.09	50
2844	1.73	1.78	0.25	50
3160	1.96	1.9	0.15	50
1429/1431	2.30	2.38	0.16	50
742/745	2.47	2.53	0.17	50
1/47	3.20	3.16	0.19	50
219	3.39	3.19	0.16	50
3153	4.28	4.15	0.25	50
20	4.68	4.67	0.21	50
16/18	4.90	4.85	0.24	50
286/289	5.28	5.33	0.26	50
97/99	5.52	5.55	0.46	50
266/273	6.16	6.06	0.33	50
168/181	6.25	6.21	0.36	50

Table 1. Values attained for the coal samples. %Rm Literature indicates the vitrinite reflectance values for the coals measured with traditional methods; %Rm MatLab the vitrinite reflectance values measured with the new Vitrinite tool routine; SD – standard deviation and the number of points measured.

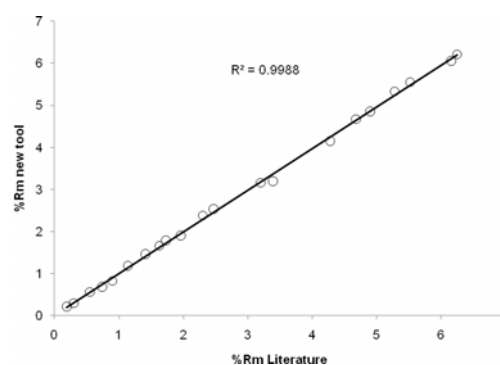


Figure 1. Correlation chart between the vitrinite reflectance values measured with the traditional methods and with the new Vitrinite tool. Note the very good correlation between the two sets of values with a regression line of $R^2 = 0.9988$.

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