

**An assessment of particulate organic carbon to thorium-234 ratios in the ocean and  
their impact on the application of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a POC flux proxy**

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## Abstract

This review focuses on the application of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a proxy for the flux of particulate organic carbon (POC) from the surface ocean. The use of this  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach requires determination of both the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity distribution (used to calculate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  fluxes), and an estimate of the  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio on sinking particles to empirically derive C fluxes. Observations have shown that in general  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  decreases with depth and can vary between regions (highest in blooms of large diatoms and highly productive coastal settings). Ideally, a flux weighted  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio is needed, but most sampling methods separate particles based upon size (filters) or presumed sinking properties (traps). When a single sampling method is used the results show the most predictable behavior. For example, in most studies that employ in situ pumps to collect size fractionated particles,  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  either increases or is relatively invariant with increasing particle size (size classes  $>1\mu\text{m}$ ). Comparisons of C fluxes derived from  $^{234}\text{Th}$  show good agreement with independent estimates of C flux, including mass balances of C and nutrients over appropriate space and time scales (within factors of 2-3). We are encouraged by new technologies which are optimized to more reliably sample truly settling particles, and make recommendations for improved application of this approach.

## Introduction

Since the first reported measurements of thorium-234 ( $^{234}\text{Th}$ ) in the ocean (Bhat et al., 1969), decreases in  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activities between open ocean and coastal waters indicated that  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity distributions were strongly influenced by the marine particle cycle. This prompted the use of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a new *in-situ* tracer of oceanic “scavenging”, a term

used to describe the complex processes related to the association of particle reactive elements with particle surfaces and their removal in the oceans (Goldberg, 1954). Using simple activity balance equations (see review by Savoye et al this issue), the ratio of the particle reactive radionuclide  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (half life = 24.1 days) to its soluble and long lived parent,  $^{238}\text{U}$  can be used to quantify the rate of uptake of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  onto particles and their export flux out of the surface ocean.

The focus of this review is on the application of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a tracer of the export flux of particulate organic carbon (POC) from surface waters. A central question is: how can one use the rates of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  removal to determine the flux of carbon associated with sinking particles? Early studies showed a positive correlation between the  $^{234}\text{Th}:$  $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibria and biological activity in the upper ocean of the eastern north Pacific, which was attributed to attachment and removal of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking biological particulate matter (Coale and Bruland, 1985; Coale and Bruland, 1987). Based upon these correlations, it was suggested that one might be able to use the total residence time of particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  to estimate the flux of POC (Eppley, 1989). However, this approach was not pursued since the residence times of particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and POC are unlikely to be the same, due to their different rates of recycling in the surface ocean (Murray et al., 1989).

A more direct approach for using  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a particle flux proxy is to multiply the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux (derived from  $^{234}\text{Th}:$  $^{238}\text{U}$ ) by its ratio to other elements on sinking particles; i.e., for carbon,  $\text{Flux C} = ^{234}\text{Th flux} \times \text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking particles (Fig. 1a). The flux of C would be doubled, if the  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of particles sinking to depth were twice as high for the same Th flux or  $^{234}\text{Th}:$  $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibria (Fig. 1b). On the other hand, if the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux were reduced by half as well (Fig. 1c), there should be a corresponding decrease in

$^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking particles by a factor of two, but the C flux would remain the same relative to our initial example (Fig. 1a).

This empirical method, which we term here the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach, was first formalized in a study of particle cycling and organic carbon export associated with the spring bloom in the North Atlantic (Buesseler et al., 1992), though the concept was applied in at least one much earlier study in the North Pacific (Tsunogai and Minagawa, 1976). After its initial application to POC and particulate organic nitrogen (PON) fluxes, this approach was expanded to include other elemental fluxes, such as particulate inorganic carbon (Bacon et al., 1996), PAH's (Gustafsson et al., 1997a), PCBs (Gustafsson et al., 1997b), biogenic silica (Buesseler et al., 2001; Rutgers van der Loeff et al., 2002) and trace metals (Weinstein and Moran, 2005). We emphasize here the use of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a POC flux proxy, and its application to other elements is discussed in a companion paper on future applications of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (Waples et al., this issue). We also emphasize applications of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  to processes in the upper ocean where a  $^{234}\text{Th}$ : $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibrium is common since particle fluxes are rapid relative to thorium's *in-situ* production rate.

The principal limitations of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach are our ability to model  $^{234}\text{Th}$  export on sinking particles (Savoye et al., this issue) and to reliably characterize the ratio of POC to  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (hereafter  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ ) on sinking particles. Beginning with the earliest applications, differences in  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  were found between samples and between studies depending on the different particle collection devices used, such as sediment traps, filtration from ocean sample bottles, or *in-situ* filtration using pumps and size

fractionated particle sampling (Buesseler et al., 1995; Murray et al., 1996). Regional differences and changes with depth and season were also evident. Why does this occur?

The goal of this paper is to provide an assessment of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability in the upper ocean and to discuss potential causes thereof. We begin with a general discussion of possible geochemical and biological controls on the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of particles, to serve as a foundation for understanding and perhaps predicting  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios. We will consider how well sinking particles are represented by, or are variable within the particulate samples that are used to determine  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in a given study. One way to address this question is by investigating variability in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  vs. particle size, sampling depth, season, region, and sampling method. Another is to compare  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived fluxes with independent estimates of C cycling, such as new production, primary production and C or nutrient mass balances. None of these independent methods, including direct estimates of flux using sediment traps, are without their own biases and assumptions. We are encouraged by agreement between the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach and multiple methods where appropriate comparisons can be made. We present technologies that are just beginning to be used to better sample sinking particles and thus obtain a more accurate  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio on both bulk and specific classes of sinking particles. Finally, as a community review article, we provide recommendations to further our understanding of processes responsible for  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability, and discuss standardized methodologies to improve our use of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a particle flux proxy in ocean sciences.

## Overview of processes controlling the $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ ratio of marine particles

Despite over a decade using  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios to determine export fluxes of POC, there is no single process or model that can be invoked to explain how particulate  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios vary with time, depth, particle type, size, or sinking velocity. Various methods and studies have shown the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio to vary from 1 to  $>100 \mu\text{mol dpm}^{-1}$  (*all references to  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  will be presented in units of  $\mu\text{mol dpm}^{-1}$ , typically determined for total organic C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  decay corrected to the time of sampling*), and there is continued discussion regarding the significance of this variability for the accuracy of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach (e.g. Benitez-Nelson and Charette, 2004; Buesseler, 1998; Moran et al., 2004; Moran et al., 2003). For the application of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a POC flux proxy, we do not need to know the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio on all particles, just the ones sinking out of surface waters. Hence, site specific variability at depth is most important in the application of this method.

To a first order, thorium presumably reaches chemical equilibrium or quasi-equilibrium with respect to sorption to particle surface sites (see review by Santschi et al. this issue), whereas carbon content varies as a function of particle volume and/or composition. This relationship of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  with surface sites and C with particle volume leads to an initial prediction that  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  should increase on larger particles due to increasing volume:surface area (V:SA) (Figure 2). All  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  versus size relationships that rely on V:SA are sensitive to particle shape, size and morphology. Cell-specific changes in V:SA during growth (Snoeijs et al., 2002) or seasonal progression of a biological community, with bacteria up to large cells and aggregates, impact the average V:SA relationship and would thus influence the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio. Conceptually, a change in

$C/^{234}\text{Th}$  vs. size is important because sinking velocities are thought to be related to particle size and density (Aldredge, 1989; Asper, 1987; Smayda, 1970). This can be incorporated into models with ocean particle settling parameterized using modified Stokes settling velocities (Burd and Jackson, 1997; Jackson, 1995).

There are other processes however that can impact  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  (Figure 2). For example, rapid abiotic aggregation of small particles into larger ones would leave the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  relationship vs. size unchanged. The rate of aggregation varies as a function of particle size, concentration, and stickiness, and much attention has been paid to TEP (transparent exopolymers) or other natural “glues” that are produced under conditions of phytoplankton stress, and hence may trigger the onset of higher export of diatom aggregates (Passow, 1995; Passow, 2002; Passow et al., 1994).

Conversely, a decrease in the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio with size is expected if there are preferential C loss terms, such as degradation or assimilation of C. One way to think of this process is to consider C assimilation rates between trophic levels, which predict a decreasing C content per unit volume between phytoplankton (generally small) and zooplankton fecal matter (usually larger & rapidly sinking). There is evidence that there can be extremely high  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activities in fecal material relative to C (Coale, 1990; Dunne et al., 2000) most likely due to assimilation of cytoplasmic C. If the particle spectrum is characterized by abundant fecal material,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  would be lower on the larger size class pellets vs. small cells (Fig. 2).

In coastal settings, one would also have to consider the abundance of detrital materials derived from land or resuspended from bottom sediments. These materials



would presumably have a lower C content than fresh plankton and these might have higher or lower  $^{234}\text{Th}$  depending upon the balance between  $^{234}\text{Th}$  scavenging and decay.

We have thus far assumed a constant binding capacity for all particle surfaces. If the number of surface sites or affinity for  $^{234}\text{Th}$  changes with particle size or type this would impact C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios as well (Lee et al., 1993). This includes changes in solution chemistry associated with complexation of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  by natural acid polysaccharide (APS)-rich TEP ligands (e.g. (Guo et al., 2002b; Hung et al., 2004; Santschi et al., 2003), which would alter the exchange of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (relative to POC) with the surrounding particle regime. While differences in the distribution coefficient of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  for different inorganic particle types are on the order of  $10^3$ - $10^6$ , affinity for APS ligands is more than two orders of magnitude higher (Quigley et al., 2002). Thus, possible binding to inorganic particles, poor in organic carbon, may significantly decrease C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  when such particles are ubiquitous. This implies that changes in Th speciation can alter the C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of suspended and sinking particles independent of other mechanisms. The speciation of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  in seawater is reviewed in detail in a companion paper in this issue (Santschi et al.).

For the successful application of the Th flux approach, one also needs to consider the temporal and spatial scales of scavenging and flux processes in the ocean. The *in-situ*  $^{234}\text{Th}$ : $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibria is an integrated measurement of flux over several days to weeks prior to sampling, while the measurements used to characterize C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking particles are often single points in space and time. In short, today's particles may not have driven yesterday's flux. Ideally, one would measure total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activities over time and space to determine the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux out of a given water parcel, and use similar coverage for the particulate C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of sinking particles at the base of the same

water parcel, to accurately determine the flux of POC (see Savoye et al. this issue). Rarely is this level of sampling achieved, and there are practical limitations in the extent of sampling on all scales of time, space and depth variability. Single profiles of total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  are often used to predict the export flux, and one or a few particulate samples are analyzed for  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . For the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach to hold, we need a representative sampling of sinking particles, in essence a flux weighted average of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . The method is inaccurate if there is some fraction of the sinking flux that has both different  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ , and if these unsampled particles are responsible for a significant fraction of the total C flux.

In the following sections, we limit our discussion to how  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variations with size, depth, season, region, and sampling device may be explained by processes such as growth, assimilation and aggregation (e.g. Figure 2). Because we are concerned with the application of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a proxy for sinking particles, attention is devoted to filterable particles of size  $\approx 1\ \mu\text{m}$  and larger, which are thought to contribute significantly to the vertical export flux.

### **$C/^{234}\text{Th}$ versus particle size**

Marine particles come in many different shapes and sizes, with the more abundant smaller particles being considered less likely to sink due to their smaller size (though density will also play an important role). Based upon models and measurements, it is the rarer, large cells, fecal pellets, and marine snow aggregates that are thought to dominate particle export (e.g. (Fowler and Knauer, 1986). For this reason, earlier  $^{234}\text{Th}$  studies used sequential filtration methods to separate large and small particles, following the lead

of Bishop et al. (1978) and others. By convention, particles were most often separated using a 53  $\mu\text{m}$  diameter or other large pore sized screen followed in series by a 0.5 – 1  $\mu\text{m}$  filter, thus operationally defining large  $\geq 53 \mu\text{m}$  and small particles (1-53  $\mu\text{m}$ ) that were later analyzed for both C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$ . In most applications, the C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio on the larger size classes was assumed to approximate the ratio on sinking particles, and hence, was used to convert  $^{234}\text{Th}$  fluxes into POC export.

Some of the first large scale applications of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach were made during the 1992 U.S. JGOFS Study in the Equatorial Pacific. In this region, measurements of C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  showed a factor of 2 to 4 lower C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios on the  $\geq 53 \mu\text{m}$  versus the 1 – 53  $\mu\text{m}$  fractions in two studies (Bacon et al., 1996; Buesseler et al., 1995), and similar C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios vs. size in a third (Dunne et al., 1997). The Equatorial Pacific study area is a region characterized by efficient recycling of nutrients and carbon, and a community structure dominated by small picoplankton and flagellate grazers (Landry et al., 1997). These abundant, biologically-derived small particles that have some of the lowest particulate C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios measured (Buesseler et al., 1998)

Other data sets followed that measured C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  in colloid size classes using cross flow filtration (e.g. Moran and Buesseler, 1992) or small volume filtration for the smaller particle size classes. The ratios in this very small sub-micron size range seemed to fit a pattern of decreasing C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  with particle size (Burd et al., 2000; Guo et al., 2002a). A model that included uptake of Th by small and abundant colloids and production of larger aggregates using a particle aggregation model, predicted a decrease in C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  with size for the smallest size classes and relatively invariant or slowly decreasing C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  in the 1-100  $\mu\text{m}$  range (Burd et al., 2000)

A number of other studies, however, seem to contradict this earlier trend (Table 1). This is due in part to differences in collection method, i.e. cross flow filtration versus large volume samples filtered with *in-situ* pumps or small volume samples filtered out of bottles or differences when comparing POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  collected on different filter types. The challenges of collecting unbiased or truly representative marine particle samples have been known for some time. These challenges apply to studies of the smallest colloids isolated via cross flow filtration (e.g. Buesseler et al., 1996) as well as to those of larger particles where differences in POC concentrations between bottle filtration and *in-situ* pumps have been documented (Gardner et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2005; Moran et al., 1999). Differences in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  as a function of sampling method will be discussed below. We contend that with regard to  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  versus size relationships, those data collected using a single collection method are the most likely to demonstrate  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  patterns that can be reliably interpreted. There is also a danger using one method or filter for POC and another for particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$ , because the ratio may be influenced as much by operational sampling biases, as by true variability among different particle size classes.

If we restrict our  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  analysis to size fractionated particulate data  $>1\mu\text{m}$  obtained using a single collection method, i.e. *in-situ* pumps (since bottle filtration does not process sufficient volume for the analyses of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  on rarer large particles), we find that all data sets subsequent to the Equatorial Pacific show evidence for increasing or constant  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  versus increasing size. Examples can be found in the Arabian Sea (Buesseler et al., 1998), equatorial Atlantic (Charette and Moran, 1999), Ross Sea (Cochran et al., 2000), Southern Ocean (Buesseler et al., 2001), oligotrophic Pacific (Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001), Labrador Sea (Moran et al., 2003), and elsewhere (Table

1). An exception to this pattern are recent studies of the Gulf of Mexico, where a single large volume *in-situ* pumping system was used, but separate samples for POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  were collected using a separate filtration rig for POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (membrane filters for C and cartridges for  $^{234}\text{Th}$ ; Guo et al., 2002a; Hung et al., 2004). Using a single filter does not assure unbiased sampling, however the C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio measured on a single filter is at least representative of the material that is caught under one set of conditions vs. comparing separate samples collected with differing conditions.

Unpublished data from a CLIVAR cruise along 140°E in the Southern Ocean, have resulted in more detailed size fractionation measurements of C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  for as many as five particle size classes between 1 and >210  $\mu\text{m}$ , all collected with a single large volume pumping system (Fig. 3). While the absolute C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio varies somewhat between stations, there is a general trend of increasing or non-changing C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio with size at any given station.

When one looks at the many studies of C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  versus size that employ single sampling methods and filters, it now appears that C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  increases with or is roughly constant for particles >1  $\mu\text{m}$ , the exception being the two early studies in the Equatorial Pacific (Table 1). Thus V:SA and particle aggregation may explain most particulate C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  changes with size. Nonetheless, other processes certainly play a role. Since sinking velocity is not just a function of particle size, but also of density difference between the particle and surrounding media, it is difficult a priori to attribute all of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and C flux to the largest size class. However, most models predict sinking velocities to increase with size. As a result, many groups have used C/ $^{234}\text{Th}$  from the larger size classes, typically 53  $\mu\text{m}$  or larger, whenever possible to represent their best

estimate of the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio on sinking particles. With size fractionated data,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  of the smaller size classes can, with this model, be used as a lower limit on the overall flux prediction (assuming  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  is lower on small particles, see for example, Buesseler et al., 1998). Sinking velocities, particle concentrations, and  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in each size class would be needed to obtain a flux weighted  $C/\text{Th}$  for the ideal application of this approach. This type of sampling based upon settling velocity and flux is beginning to be tested (see **New particle sampling technologies**).

### **$C/^{234}\text{Th}$ vs. depth relationships**

The  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach for determining  $C$  export is based upon the premise that one knows the  $C/\text{Th}$  ratio of sinking particles at the depth where one is calculating POC flux. This is especially important, since in most data sets,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  decreases with depth (Figure 4a-d) and the use of a shallower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  would overestimate POC flux in this case. Size fractionated data show similar trends with depth for different size classes (Buesseler et al., 2005; Buesseler et al., 1998). There are few sediment trap data sets with  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  vs. depth information, but thus far these suggest a decrease with depth as well (Buesseler et al., 1992; Fig. 4d). Processes discussed above, such as preferential remineralization of  $C$ , changes in surface binding ligands with depth, or simply increasing  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activities at depth (and thus higher particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$ ) are commonly invoked to explain higher particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and thus lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  at depth (Rutgers van der Loeff et al., 2002).

In many studies,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability is much greater in surface waters than at depth, suggesting a large role for biological processes in setting  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ , since the

variability in these processes decrease below the euphotic zone. Thus using  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  below the mixed layer constrains more tightly the predicted C flux. For example, surface water  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in the Arabian Sea has a relative standard deviation about the mean that is 2.5 times larger than at 100 m (calculated from data in Buesseler et al., 1998). The same was seen in the Southern Ocean (Fig. 4a). Charette et al. (1999) found a larger range in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in surface waters along a transect from the coast to off shore waters, relative to  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios below 50-100 m (Figure 4b). The possibility of lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability at depth is an advantage in using  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  on particles collected from below the surface mixed layer. This of course depends on the fidelity of obtaining an estimate of the sinking  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio from concentration data using filters. It is possible that the advantages of low variability in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  at depth are offset by methodological biases if there are classes of rapidly sinking particles that are not sampled using filters.

Due to sampling limitations, some studies have either taken a shallow water ratio of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  and applied a correction factor based upon measurements of the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  decrease observed at a few representative stations (Buesseler et al., 1995), or assumed that the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variation between surface and depth is small. If only surface water  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  data are available, it is difficult to constrain export of C at depth better than a factor of 2-10, i.e. the difference in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  observed between surface and deeper waters. At a minimum, one should have  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  particle data from one depth below the mixed layer and a well characterized total  $^{234}\text{Th}$ : $^{238}\text{U}$  activity ratio in the water above, in order to calculate a C flux at that specific depth. Highly resolved vertical sampling of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  is not required to determine a flux at a single depth, but depth varying patterns of both

$^{234}\text{Th}$ ,  $^{238}\text{U}$  and  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  allow for study of C flux vs. depth dynamics that may lend insight into particulate C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux relationships (Bacon et al., 1996; Buesseler et al., 2005).

### **Regional variations in $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$**

Early data suggest lower  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  in the Equatorial Pacific, relative to diatom bloom conditions and high latitude sites (Buesseler, 1998). These regional differences are most apparent if we compare data collected by a single method, and we focus here on a regional comparison of  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  from samples collected below the mixed layer (Figure 5). For example, using measurements from sediment traps (typically drifting traps in the upper 100 - 300m),  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  is  $< 5$  in the oligotrophic settings of HOT, BATS, EQPAC and the Mediterranean, with higher values ( $>10$ ) in biologically productive coastal settings, such as Baffin Bay and Arabian Sea coastal waters (Fig. 5a). Particles sampled via *in-situ* pumps (typically  $>53$  or  $70\ \mu\text{m}$ ) also show a similar trend (based upon many more samples but fewer locations) with  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th} > 10$  for the Ross Sea and Baffin Bay, both high latitude sites and productive coastal systems (Fig. 5b).  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  derived from small volume bottle filtrations (generally  $0.5$  to  $1.0\ \mu\text{m}$  pore size filters) are consistently higher than both large volume pumps and sediment traps, with no  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th} < 5$ , and most  $>10$  (Fig. 5c). In these bottle samples, the ratio is especially high in coastal settings. From these trends, we conclude that productive coastal waters and high latitudes are characterized by particles that have elevated  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ . One hypothesis for this difference that fits the V:SA model is that sites dominated by sinking of large cells (high latitudes and coastal blooms) have elevated  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ . Those dominated by small particles and typically lower relative particle fluxes (oligotrophic settings) have lower  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ .



While  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  might increase with a shift from picoplankton to communities with larger phytoplankton, in particular diatoms, one should also consider zooplankton processing. In waters with relatively large zooplankton populations, the flux of fecal pellets would contribute more significantly to POC flux. C assimilation rates for ingestion and preferential loss of C from fecal pellets, result in lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in larger pellets (Fisher et al., 1987; Lee and Fisher, 1992; Reinfelder and Fisher, 1991). Thus a shift from a region where flux is dominated by phytodetritus to one with higher zooplankton grazing and C export as fecal pellet material, would result in a shift to lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios. In essence, both phytoplankton community structure and zooplankton grazing need to be considered in order to understand regional variability in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . It should be possible to use site specific plankton abundance data and models that incorporate assimilation and regeneration of C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  to better understanding and predict the impact of changing food web processes on regional  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  relationships (Fisher and Buesseler, 2005). Since regional variations have been shown to be large (Figure 5), site specific data are needed in any case.

### **Temporal changes in $C/^{234}\text{Th}$**

Temporal changes in upper ocean biology, particle sources, and particle geochemistry should be expected to impact  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . This is because the processes that set the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio can vary within a given particle size class as a result of seasonal variations in the biological community at any one site. This would be particularly significant in the euphotic zone, where primary biological particles are formed and packaged in to sinking ones. Waite and Hill (2005) modeled the progression of a diatom

bloom wherein small diatom cells formed small aggregates that dominate the export flux late in a bloom. If  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  follows V:SA, these small flocs would tend to have lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ , and thus they predict that the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of the truly sinking material would decrease over time. If this were the case, one would need to account for this shift to smaller flocs with lower  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ , rather than rely on the assumption that the largest particles always dominate export.

$C/^{234}\text{Th}$  is influenced by changes in particle sources, sinking velocities (and these may not always follow size), solution chemistry, and remineralization of C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  associated with sinking particles. As such, both regional and time-specific  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios are the key to the proper application of the empirical approach. One example from a time series in the Baltic that is characterized by varying particle sources throughout the year and changing water column biogeochemistry (Gustafsson et al., 2004). These changing sources are postulated to be responsible for the factor of 10 seasonal variability in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  on filterable particles collected from the mixed layer (Figure 6). Not all studies, however, show such a dynamic shift in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  during a seasonal cycle. For example, at the open ocean time series site off Hawaii (HOT), there is only a factor of 2-3 variability at 150m in this ratio, based upon measurements made over an annual cycle using size fractionated filtration (particles ranging in size from 1 to  $\geq 53 \mu\text{m}$  size classes) and sediment traps (Table 2 in Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001). Collectively, these studies suggest that seasonal variability in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  can be impacted by a wide range of processes and these are regional and depth-related. It would be inappropriate to apply a single  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  estimate made at one location to the same site under differing conditions, just as it is inappropriate to use shallow  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  to estimate deeper fluxes.

## **Methodological biases in $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ due to sampling techniques**

### ***Traditional particle sampling methods***

We have shown that regional and size variations in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  are most apparent when  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  data are compared using a single sampling device since differences between collection techniques have been documented (e.g. Buesseler et al., 1995; Murray et al., 1996). Which sampling system best represents truly sinking material is a more difficult question to answer. Nevertheless, it is useful to summarize data comparing different particle sampling devices with comments regarding possible sampling biases, so that variability between samples may be evaluated in terms of biology and geochemistry.

Fundamentally, one would presume that sinking particles would be best represented by that material caught in a sediment trap. However, there are inherent difficulties in using upper ocean sediment traps that might impact not just the quantity of flux (Buesseler, 1991), but also the quality (Gustafsson et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004). There are three common processes that may impact trap results (for complete review, see Gardner, 2000): collection efficiency related to how the trap samples sinking particles while moving in a fluid medium (hydrodynamic effects); the capture of non-sinking and motile zooplankton (i.e. swimmers); and the loss of particulate bound elements to solution after collection in the trap and during sample handling or storage (resolubilization). Each of these processes would likely result in not just a total flux bias, but also elemental fractionation. For instance, hydrodynamics might preferentially impact particles of different settling velocities (e.g. under/over collection related to sinking velocity; Gust et al., 1996). Chemical composition changes might lead to

differential resolubilization rates after collection, including loss of C to solution (Gardner et al., 1983; Noji et al., 1999). Variations in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  might be attributed to the number of swimmers that are collected in a trap, since this ratio can be highly elevated (e.g. an elevated  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  bias with intact zooplankton swimmers; (Coale, 1990, Passow et al., this volume). Significant progress is being made in new trap designs that avoid or at least reduce some of these potential issues (see **New particle sampling technologies**).

Particle filtration is the most commonly used method to sample particles for  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . In earlier experiments, bottle POC data were compared to  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived from individual cartridge filters or other particle collectors, such as in Buesseler et al. (1992). With increased awareness of the differences in each collection device and the importance of representative  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios for application of the Th method, there was a subsequent use of large volume *in-situ* pumps which allowed for measurement of C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  on the same filter. Also, larger volumes permitted size fractionation work, and, thus characterization of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  on the larger, rarer and presumably more rapidly sinking materials.

$C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios of particles collected from bottles (typically 2-5 L samples) are more often higher than ratios collected by either pumps or traps from the same regional setting and depths (Fig. 5). This is most likely due to an elevation in bottle POC as has been confirmed by a range of studies that directly compare bottles and pumps using small pore sized filters (0.7 - 1  $\mu\text{m}$  diameter) typically made of glass or quartz fiber (Gardner et al., 2003; Liu et al., 2005; Moran et al., 1999). At low POC concentrations (few  $\mu\text{M}$  POC) this bias has been attributed to dissolved organic carbon (DOC) sorption on to the filter. This bias would be higher in high DOC surface waters and more evident in small

volume bottle samples (Moran et al., 1999). One alternative explanation is simply that bottle POC is higher due to the smaller pore size of GFF filters (nominal pore size of 0.7  $\mu\text{m}$ ) used with bottle POC methods vs. the quartz filters (nominal pore size of 1  $\mu\text{m}$ ) typically used with pumps (Dunne et al., 1997; Gardner et al., 2003). For example, Dunne et al. (1997) compared collection of chlorophyll and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  from bottle and pump pairs and concluded that pump POC concentrations had to be increased by a factor of 1.1 to 2.3 for accurate comparison with bottle POC because of the pore size differences and abundance of small cells in their study. Conversely, it has been suggested that the higher cross-filter pressure differentials created with *in-situ* pumps causes particle break-up and thus reduced retention of fragile/flexible high C particles (e.g. TEP and bacteria), leading to a bias of low POC with pumps (Gardner et al., 2003).

Given that POC represents a spectrum of particle sizes, types and sources, these variations are likely site, season and depth specific. For example, in sub-zero temperature waters, this difference between bottle and pump POC is most pronounced (Gardner et al., 2003), but the reason for this is not yet explained. The most recent study on this issue by Liu et al. (2005) systematically varied pumping and bottle filtration conditions at different sites, and corrected for possible DOC adsorption blanks. They observed no difference in bottle vs. pump chlorophyll concentrations, but found enhancement of POC in nearly half of the bottle POC samples. Their conclusion is that marine sample bottles preferentially capture motile zooplankton relative to most current pumping systems. This leads to enhanced POC on some bottle filter samples derived from living zooplankton, rather than from truly sinking material. This bias is similar to

collecting zooplankton or “swimmers” in shallow traps, which also artificially biases trap  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios towards higher values.

Whatever its ultimate cause, observations suggest that methodological differences need to be addressed if we wish to use filtration to assess  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability, and hence apply the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach in the ocean more precisely. In the meantime, if it can be shown for a given setting that sediment traps and large volume filtration methods are comparable, then these different collection techniques may be used to constrain minimum and maximum estimates of particle export. From regional analyses and site specific studies where both traps and filtration have been used, sediment trap  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  are generally within a factor of two of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  of large particles collected using *in-situ* pumps (Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001; Fig. 4d; see NBST below). This convergence of trap and large particle data from pumps is encouraging, but not the final story on how best to sample the truly sinking pool for  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  (see next section).

It should be noted at this point, that if we had the ideal particle flux collector, we could rely on direct collection of sinking particles, but as discussed, standard shallow sediment traps have possible biases in flux and composition. However, even if these issues can be overcome, shallow sediment traps are typically deployed for days to weeks at fixed or single moving points, limiting spatial and temporal coverage. It is therefore still desirable to have a more efficient and cost-effective way to estimate particle export over large geographical areas. With the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  approach, one can collect hundreds of water samples on a single cruise. Thus, it may be better to use sediment traps (or pumps) to determine  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  at a few points in space and time, and use total  $^{234}\text{Th}$ : $^{238}\text{U}$  to obtain a more detailed coverage of particle flux variability. Thus far,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability at

depths below the mixed layer has been smaller than changes in  $^{234}\text{Th}$  fluxes above (for example at HOT- Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001) and during iron fertilization experiments (Buesseler et al., 2005), but this would need to be considered in designing any flux study.

## **New particle sampling technologies**

### ***Neutrally Buoyant Sediment Traps***

Since hydrodynamic effects caused by fluid flow, tilt, and vertical motion in sediment traps may lead to particle sampling biases, development of sediment traps that reduce trap motion relative to the surrounding fluids is greatly encouraged. Recently, neutrally buoyant sediment traps (NBSTs), have been developed which by design decrease the hydrodynamic effect (Buesseler et al., 2000; Lampitt et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2004; Valdes and Price, 2000). In the first set of deployments off Bermuda, NBST's and standard drifting particle interceptor traps (PITS) were compared for flux and composition. Under relatively benign and low flux conditions (mean current velocities relative to traps of  $4\text{--}5\text{ cm sec}^{-1}$  and excursions  $< 10\text{ cm sec}^{-1}$ ), there was good agreement in total mass and C flux but differences in minor flux components (Buesseler et al., 2000). For  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ , the NBST was 2-3 times higher than the PITS. Since the expected hydrodynamic bias was undercollection of slowly sinking particles in the PITS, the explanation for this bias may be that NBSTs collected a higher fraction of a slowly sinking, elevated  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  material.

Subsequent NBST studies at the same site have confirmed that while differences in bulk parameters may be small, minor flux components may differ significantly in the NBST. This is presumably due to fractionation or different collection efficiencies for

different particle types (Stanley et al., 2004). Figure 7a shows a comparison of the relative  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio in material caught by NBSTs and PITS as well as in size fractionated,  $>1 - 70\ \mu\text{m}$  and  $> 70\ \mu\text{m}$ , particles from *in-situ* pumps (all data from 150 m collected during 4 cruises). The trap data are from three day deployments and average concentrations are from at least two separate trap collection tubes. The pump data are from a single collection at 150m. As with the earlier study, NBST  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  are, on average, almost twice as high as the ratio in particles from PITS. What is perhaps surprising is that the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  of the NBST is higher than both the small and large particles collected using pumps. This implies that there is a C rich source of sinking material that is not being collected by the more common sampling methods, i.e. filtration and PITS. We should note that there were compromising analytical issues in this particular data set, as C was not analyzed from the same collection tube as  $^{234}\text{Th}$  for the trap particulates. Stanley et al. (2004) noted large tube to tube differences in flux for both NBST's and PITS at this site. Also, the pump filters were collected only once during trap collection and processed separately with different labs and methods for POC on the traps and filters. Nonetheless this enrichment in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in NBST is confirmed by another new ocean particle collection device, SPLITT (split flow thin cell fractionation), which may also better sample this slowly sinking pool (see *SPLITT* below).

### ***Settling Velocity Traps***

During the Medflux program, an Indented Rotating Sphere (IRS) sediment trap (Peterson et al., 1993) was deployed at the Mediterranean DYFAMED site (Marty, 2002). The trap was operated in a fashion such that it could collect particles setting at different



velocities. The sphere was allowed to collect particles for 24 hours, at which point it rotated and released the particles to the lower portion of the trap. The carousel containing the collection cups rotated completely once per day, timed to begin with the rotation of the sphere. Each cup was kept open for different, progressively longer lengths of time, allowing particles with different settling speeds to collect in different cups. Slowly settling material collected in the later cups. The cups corresponding to the settling velocities integrated settling particles over the length of the deployment. Mass fluxes were calculated as the total amount of material accumulated in each cup over the length of the deployment. Splits from each cup were analyzed for  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (by nondestructive low level beta counting) and POC (by CHN analyzer). Details of this experiment and other results can be found in Cochran et al. (2004).

Two IRS traps were deployed for 61 days in the settling velocity mode at 200 m. The greatest mass and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux was recorded in the fraction settling at velocities estimated by this method to be between 196 and 490  $\text{m d}^{-1}$ , with >60% of the total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux in those particles sinking at rates estimated to be >98  $\text{m d}^{-1}$  (data not shown). The  $\text{POC}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio in the trapped material is shown relative to the minimum settling velocity for each fraction in Figure 8. There is relatively little variation among the settling velocity classes. Indeed if a trend is present, it is a tendency for the ratio to increase as settling velocity decreases. This is not consistent with the expectation of small, slowly settling particles with high surface area and hence high  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity. Additional analyses of the organic compounds and biomarkers of the different fractions are underway to resolve the differences. During this experiment,  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  was also determined using *in-situ* pumps at 200m, and the  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of these filtered samples

were similar to the flux weighted averages of the settling velocity trap (2.4 and 3.2 on 1-70  $\mu\text{m}$  and  $>70 \mu\text{m}$  size classes, respectively; Cochran et al., 2004) These data are encouraging for the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach and imply at least in this setting, that most particles, both sinking and slowly settling that were sampled via traps or filters, all do a reasonable job in representing  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking particles.

### ***Split flow thin cell fractionation***

Split flow thin cell fractionation (SPLITT) is a method where particles are introduced in to a laminar flow within a thin channel (100's  $\mu\text{m}$ ). The flow is adjusted so that particles greater than a specific sinking velocity are collected at a lower outlet port, while slower sinking particles are channeled out via an upper port (Giddings, 1985). Thus far, SPLITT has been used mostly in biomedical applications and rarely in natural settings due to the low concentration of sinking particles in aquatic systems (Gustafsson et al., 2000). Much like the settling velocity trap, SPLITT is designed to separate particles based upon hydrodynamic properties, rather than size.

Gustafsson et al. (this volume) describe a high capacity SPLITT system they have optimized for a study of POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  within the surface mixed layer in coastal waters. In practice, they can adjust the SPLITT to separate particles with sinking velocities greater than 1 to 10  $\text{m d}^{-1}$ . Due to the low concentrations of rapidly sinking particles in general, they preconcentrate  $>100\text{L}$  of seawater using a cross flow filtration system (0.2  $\mu\text{m}$  Millipore Pellicon system) prior to SPLITT processing. Gustafsson et al. (this volume) collected SPLITT samples and standard filtered particles via a pumping system that brings water up from a depth near the base of the mixed later, and deployed PITS

traps immediately below the mixed layer. Their results from Gullmar fjord show  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  in SPLITT samples (adjusted to collect all particles  $>1 \text{ m d}^{-1}$ ) are significantly higher than the PITS in 4 field deployments (avg.  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  for SPLITT:PIT= 3:1), as well as in 3 of 5 comparisons to a  $1 \mu\text{m}$  filter (avg.  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  for SPLITT:filter = 1.5:1). Gustafsson et al. (this volume) hypothesize that the SPLITT does a better job at sampling slowly settling material, which they believe is enriched in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . Known hydrodynamic biases are invoked for PITS that would make them less efficient at collecting slowly sinking particles. Truly suspended particles sinking  $<1 \text{ m d}^{-1}$  are postulated to be TEP and/or APS rich, and thus lower in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio due to the higher affinity of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  for these surfaces.

These new studies using NBSTs, Settling Velocity traps and SPLITT to sample sinking particles, do involve more challenging methods than traditional filtration. However, they have great potential if they can be proven to more accurately collect what is truly settling as opposed to material collected based upon its size or impacted by some other sampling bias. Such information would be of great value for the study of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios and the sampling of sinking particles in general in the ocean. Future studies combining these new methods and measuring  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  on sinking and size fractionated particles under differing flow and particle conditions are greatly needed.

### **Comparisons of C export flux derived from $^{234}\text{Th}$ and $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ ratios versus other methods**

One way to evaluate the accuracy of particulate C fluxes determined using the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach is by comparison with other methods. Agreement between

independent methods, mostly C and nutrient budgets or incubation rate experiments for C and N uptake, lend some confidence to, or at least constrain, upper and lower limits to the overall C balance. However, it is important to realize that such comparisons are never ideal, since each method has its own assumptions and there are real differences in what is actually measured. In essence, two methods may agree or differ either because they are measuring different components of the local C pool or are integrating over different space and time scales.

For example, the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity balance from a single profile represents particle export that has taken place prior to sampling, and integrated over time scales related to the mean life of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  ( $1/\lambda = 35$  days). Furthermore, it is only measurable when the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux is large relative to production and decay rates (i.e. the  $^{234}\text{Th}/^{238}\text{U}$  method is more sensitive when the deficit is large). Sediment traps are intended to collect passively sinking particles over a fixed period of time that may or may not match the time scale or particle source region sampled by  $^{234}\text{Th}$  water column measurements. Measured changes in the concentration or standing stock of C and other nutrients have been used to derive C flux by difference, but the difficulty here is related to the large impact of horizontal and vertical exchange; the rates of which are difficult to quantify and the fluxes of which are typically large relative to C lost via sinking particles. Furthermore, changes in C stocks are particularly influenced by other processes such as air-sea gas exchange and dissolved organic matter transport. Finally, bottle incubations, i.e.  $^{13,14}\text{C}$  or  $^{15}\text{N}$  uptake, have their own inherent biases (so called “bottle effects”) and relatively short time scales (hours to 1 day). To make a proper comparison using all of the above techniques, one would need to make repeated measurements over a complete growth and export cycle, since the

instantaneous rates of new production and export need not balance, only the longer term average.

Despite these caveats, it is instructive to compare C fluxes based upon the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach to other independent flux indices. The most informative cases are those where multiple methods were used to constrain the C balance in the upper ocean for an extended observation period. The U.S. Joint Global Ocean Flux Study (JGOFS) Program provided some of the best opportunities for such comparisons, and three examples are shown in Figure 8. During a roughly 5 week set of observations during the North Atlantic Bloom Experiment, significant particle export was observed during the onset and development of the spring bloom (Lochte et al., 1993). This first application of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach (Buesseler et al., 1992) suggested a lower and upper limit of POC flux at 150 m between 20-70  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ , depending upon whether one used the  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio from suspended particles (high  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ ) or trap samples (low  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ ). Using a mass balance for the drawdown of  $\text{CO}_2$ , C losses of 70  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  were estimated for the upper 125 m over the same time period (C. Goyet, personal communication). Nitrate and oxygen budgets for the first two weeks of the bloom in the upper 50 m, suggested a C loss equivalent to 30-40  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  (Bender et al., 1992). While the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived flux increased over the course of the bloom, VERTEX style cylindrical trap fluxes at 150m were relatively invariant during three separate two week deployments, and were the lowest overall of any method ranging from 7-13  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  (Martin et al., 1993).

In the Equatorial Pacific Process study, three groups made POC flux estimates using the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach but on separate cruises. In all cases, POC fluxes were significantly lower than the earlier North Atlantic Bloom study. Looking at only the

boreal spring cruises and equatorial stations along 140°W, and using either  $> 53 \mu\text{m}$   $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  from *in-situ* pumps (Bacon et al., 1996; Buesseler et al., 1995) or sediment traps (Murray et al., 1996) POC fluxes were estimated to be 3 - 6  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  at 100m with the higher values calculated when  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  in trap samples was used. New production determined using  $^{15}\text{N}$  bottle incubations ranged from  $< 6$  to 12  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  (McCarthy et al., 1996). A C budget from  $\text{pCO}_2$  and DOC measurements determined a C flux out of the upper 100 m of  $< 5 \text{ mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  (Feely et al., 1995; Peltzer and Hayward, 1995) and a combined DIC and  $\text{DI}^{13}\text{C}$  approach estimated a C flux from 4-11  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  (Zhang and Quay, 1997). At this same site two sediment trap designs gave POC flux estimates of 1 - 4 (Wakeham et al., 1997) and 4 - 36  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  at 125 m (Murray et al., 1996). However, as noted by Murray et al. (1996), the highest fluxes were derived from traps that had significantly overcollected  $^{234}\text{Th}$  bearing particles based upon water column  $^{234}\text{Th}$  data. Using a more rigorous error and probability analyses, Quay (1997) concluded for the Equatorial Pacific process study that individual C flux measurements yielded only a 30 % chance that the DIC budget could be balanced within  $\pm 50\%$  for the surface waters.

One final example from the Ross Sea, shows  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived fluxes at 100 m from three stations ranging from 15 to 54  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$  between February and April (Cochran et al., 2000). C fluxes determined by POC balances (0 - 100m; Gardner et al., 2000) and net community production (0 - 200m; Sweeney et al., 2000) were similar,  $\sim 40 \text{ mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$ . In contrast, moored conical traps gave a much lower C flux estimate than any other method (1.5  $\text{mmol C m}^{-2} \text{d}^{-1}$ ), but these were from deeper depths than those where  $^{234}\text{Th}$  was measured (200m; Collier et al., 2000). This low trap flux implied

either strong remineralization between 100 m and 200 m, or undercollection by the traps. A factor of 3 - 6 undercollection was supported by  $^{230}\text{Th}$  and  $^{231}\text{Pa}$  comparisons between traps and the water column budgets conducted as part of this study (Fleisher and Anderson, 2003).

In summary, while there can be differences in the POC flux derived from  $^{234}\text{Th}$  at one depth due to the type of materials analyzed for  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  or the choice of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux models, POC fluxes derived from the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach overlap with most other estimates of C export within a factor of two. Larger differences between traps and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived fluxes have been noted previously, and, at least in these three JGOFS Process Studies, the agreement is best between the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived C flux estimates and other non-trap approaches. These  $^{234}\text{Th}$  results indicate higher POC export in response to spring bloom conditions in the North Atlantic and after retreat of sea ice in the Ross Sea. The equatorial system is characterized by lower POC flux, consistent with a higher C recycling associated with a food web dominated by smaller plankton and lower  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  as noted earlier.

## Summary & Recommendations

There has been considerable expansion in the use of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and its ratio to particulate organic carbon as a C flux tracer in ocean sciences since the first measurement of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  in the ocean 35 years ago. Single  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity profiles coupled with a few filters for POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  have been superseded by programs with hundreds of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  measurements per cruise and more sophisticated methods for  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ . Arguably, one of the largest uncertainties in the application of this approach is the correct determination of  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  on particles that are representative of the sinking flux. Differences in  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  are

methods-related, as well as varying regionally, temporally and with depth, making it difficult to compare studies. No single process or model can account for the wide range in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  observations and multiple processes are likely to play a role. Nonetheless, this does not mean the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  approach cannot be used as an empirical flux tool. The  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach would fail if we are missing a component of the export flux that has both different  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ , and on a flux weighted basis, accounts for a significant fraction of POC export. Many of the data thus far, suggest little difference in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  between particles collected via pumps or traps (Fig. 4c), or by sinking velocity (Fig. 8).

Since the local plankton community determines both surface and solution/ligand characteristics, regional and depth dependent fractionation of  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  is the norm. We see regional  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  trends using single methods, such as higher  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  with increasing particle size. We also generally see decreasing  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  with depth. Thus, choosing  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  at depths corresponding to the export prediction is critical. Moreover,  $C/\text{Th}$  variability is in many cases smaller at depth, thus reducing uncertainties when applying this method.

We can currently assess  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability and, by default, uncertainty by comparing  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios at a single depth and time using different particle sampling methods. This sets upper and lower limits on C export and typically results in a smaller range in total variability than found in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  between regions, depths and methods. Comparisons with independent methods for C flux can be used to argue that within the factor of 2-3 the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  derived fluxes agree with other indices of C export, at least in the few cases where such C balances have been calculated over appropriate temporal and spatial scales.



There are inherently large uncertainties in determining C flux by mass balance approaches related to the lack of proper constraints on physical transport and other exchange mechanisms. These processes tend to make much less difference in the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity balance in the open ocean under most settings, since the dominant factor in the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux models tends to be the  $^{234}\text{Th}:$  $^{238}\text{U}$  activity balance, and not physical transport (Savoye et al. this issue). At present, ocean science in general is limited by significant uncertainties in our ability to make direct or indirect C flux estimates, due to large uncertainties in quantifying air-sea gas exchange, horizontal transport rates and the relative magnitude of downward mixing of DOC and sinking POC. These limitations and related questions point to the need for the continued study of  $^{234}\text{Th}$  as a particle flux tracer.

We are left with an imperfect tool, though one with advantages over other tracers and flux methods. We recommend some basic standardization of methods, to allow for an improved use of this approach and better intercomparison between studies. At a minimum, along with total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity data and an appropriate flux model (Savoye et al., this issue), one should measure  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  (or other elemental ratios) below the layer where export is to be quantified. Many examples exist of decreasing  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  with depth, so applying a shallow  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio to determine flux at depth is not appropriate. Application of the method to a standard depth of 100m would be useful for more direct comparison between studies (though there may be good reason to be sampling other depths as well). Secondly, given the discrepancy between bottle and pumps estimates of POC and the advantage of having size fractionated data, studies that include at least the determination of  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  on a  $\sim 1.0\ \mu\text{m}$  filter and  $53\ \mu\text{m}$  screen are to be encouraged. The

larger particle  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios are generally more similar to the ratios measured in traps and some standardization would be helpful for comparisons between different studies. Detailed size fractionated data will also allow us to validate aggregation models. Large volume sampling required for this work more likely ensures that we have captured the rarer large particles, regardless. Note finally that while a GFF filter with a nominal pore size of  $0.7\ \mu\text{m}$  would have advantages for sampling smaller and sometimes abundant biotic, the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  beta background for a GFF filter is too high for practical use, hence the recommended use of  $1\ \mu\text{m}$  quartz fiber filters that can be easily analyzed for both POC and  $^{234}\text{Th}$ .

On a more basic level, given these potential sample collection biases, every effort should be made to make both C and  $^{234}\text{Th}$  analyses on the same particle sample, as opposed to two samples or filters collected independently. Multiple  $^{234}\text{Th}$  profiles and  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  sampled during the course of a longer observation period are recommended, to allow for better  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux modeling and to determine if there are temporal variations in  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  that are independent from changes in the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activity balance. This type of intensive sampling protocol, including Lagrangian time series studies, is now possible given improved and easier methods for measuring total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  (Rutgers van der Loeff et al., this issue). While analytical methods are not the focus of this review, it is clear that better calibration of particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  methods and intercomparisons of both particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  and POC methods are warranted.

New collection devices such as the NBST, SPLITT and Settling Velocity traps are promising, as they separate particles based upon their settling properties. Early results from these new devices suggest that  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  may be a factor of two or more higher in

truly settling materials (NBST and SPLITT) versus both standard traps and from pump filters, though in one study with the Settling Velocity trap,  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  differences between all particle collection methods were smaller. Standard cylindrical traps can be informative, particularly if it can be shown that traps are not sorting particles or that other artifacts (swimmers and resolubilization) are minimal. More comparisons of collection devices are needed.

The future of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach necessitates more extensive time series analyses of total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  activities in combination with the collection of representative samples of sinking particles for  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$ . Models and speciation studies to predict  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability will help considerably in increasing our understanding of how changes in local biogeochemistry can impact the  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio. This information will greatly assist in our choosing appropriate particle sampling methods. At present, the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach has already advanced our understanding of the magnitude and controls of particle export in the ocean, which result from changes in upper ocean biogeochemistry. With improved methods and sampling, proper application of flux models, and a better understanding of particulate  $C/^{234}\text{Th}$  variability and causes thereof, we can expect the utility of this tracer to increase, not just for its application for surface ocean C fluxes, but to other elements and to processes in deeper waters and in other settings.

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**Table 1. Summary of C/<sup>234</sup>Th vs. particle size (>1µm and collected using a single sampling device)**

Location	C/Th Trend with Increasing Particle Size	Collection Device	Reference	Comment
Eq. Pacific	Decrease	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Buesseler et al., 1995	1 & 53 µm; average of all data, mostly 0-100m
Eq. Pacific	Decrease	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Bacon et al., 1996	1 & 53 µm
Eq. Pacific	No Change	MULVFS	Dunne et al., 1997	1 & 53 µm; Multi Unit Large Volume Filtration System- J. Bishop.
Arabian Sea	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Buesseler et al., 1998	1 & 53 µm.
Mid Atlantic	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Charette and Moran, 1999	0.7 & 53 µm
Ross Sea	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Cochran et al., 2000	1 & 70 µm; large differences (>10x) esp. in surface; >70µm w/in factor of 2 of traps
So Ocean AESOPS	No Change	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Buesseler et al, 2001	1 & 70 µm (70 µm/QMA =1.1 +/- 0.5)
Hawaii, HOT	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001	1, 10 & 53 µm at 150m on 5 cruises Oct. 1999 – March 2000
Gulf of Mexico	Decrease	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Guo et al., 2002a; Hung et al., 2004	1, 10 & 53 µm. These data differ from others in this Table as while samples are collected with one pump, different filters were used and analyzed for C (flat membranes/screens) and <sup>234</sup> Th (filter cartridges).
Labrador Sea	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Moran et al., 2003	10 & 53 µm
SOIREE So Ocean	Increase/No Change	<i>In-situ</i> pump/hose	Charette, Trull, Buesseler, unpub	5 size classes, 1, 5, 20, 70, 210 µm; pump described in (Trull and Armand, 2001)
CLIVAR So. Ocean	Increase	<i>In-situ</i> pump/hose	Savoye, Trull, Buesseler, unpub.	5 size classes, 1, 5, 20, 53, 210 µm
Bermuda, BATS	No Change	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Buesseler et al. unpub in this form	1 & 53 µm @ 150m
South Aegean Sea	No Change	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Moran et al., unpubl.	5 size classes: 10, 20, 53, 70 and 100 µm collected at 50, 75, 100, 150 and 300 m depth.
Tyrehnian Sea	No Change	<i>In-situ</i> pump	Speicher et al., unpubl.	3 size classes: 10, 53 and 100 µm collected within upper 200 m.



## Figure captions

Figure 1. Schematic of the  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux approach. Three scenarios are shown for differing conditions of  $^{234}\text{Th}$ : $^{238}\text{U}$  disequilibria,  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux, sinking particle  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  and the impact on calculated C flux. In panel a, a  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux of 1000 and a sinking particle  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio of 1/4 results in a calculated POC flux of 250. Panel b shows the impact of a doubling of the  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio for the same  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux (C flux doubles). Panel c shows how a 50% reduction in Th flux for the same  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratio as in b results in a decrease in C flux by 50%. Units are not needed in these examples, but are commonly  $\text{dpm m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$  for  $^{234}\text{Th}$  flux,  $\mu\text{mol dpm}^{-1}$  for  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ , and C flux in  $\text{mmol m}^{-2} \text{ d}^{-1}$ .

Figure 2. A conceptual view of the impact of various biogeochemical processes on  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios and particle sizes. As thorium associates principally with surface sorption sites and organic carbon is dominated by pools internal to cells, one might expect  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios to increase as particle size increases, with the volume to surface area (V:SA) ratios of spheres representing the upper limit for the relationship (all other cell/particle shapes have lower V:SA trends with size). Particle sizes in real marine systems tend to increase as a result of complex biological processes, however, including aggregation of small, neutrally buoyant cells into larger sinking particles and the generation of fecal material. Rapid aggregation of small particles alone without loss of mass would probably yield no change in V:SA ratios and hence no change in  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ , while consumption of particles by zooplankton would result in preferential loss of carbon and hence a decrease in  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios in larger fecal pellets. Processes that affect the Th side of the ratio (Th speciation), are not likely to be linked to particle size in a general way. These include increases in dissolved and particulate Th-binding ligands or sorption sites, which would increase or decrease  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios, respectively.

Figure 3.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  vs. filter pore size. Samples collected from 100m on a transect from Sub-Antarctic to Seasonal Ice Zone (Australian sector) during austral spring of 2001. Samples are pumped sequentially through 210, 53, 20, 10 and 1  $\mu\text{m}$  screens and filters, and the same material from each filter is analyzed for  $^{234}\text{Th}$  followed by POC. Different symbols represent different stations. Pumping system described in Trull and Armand (2001). Experimental setting and total  $^{234}\text{Th}$  profiles and fluxes reported in Savoye et al. (2004). Unpublished POC and particulate  $^{234}\text{Th}$  data from Savoye, Buesseler, and Trull.

Figure 4a-c. Selected examples of  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  vs. depth. 4a.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  in particles  $>1\text{-}53$  and  $>53 \mu\text{m}$  collected using in situ pumps as part of US Southern Ocean Iron Experiment for stations within (IN) and outside (OUT) of the Fe fertilized patch (Buesseler et al., 2005). 4b.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  collected using in situ pumps and a 1  $\mu\text{m}$  filter on a transect of 5 stations between coastal NE Pacific and off shore time series station “PAPA” (Charette et al., 1999). 4c.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios collecting in the south Aegean Sea, March 2004, using free-floating, surface-tethered sediment traps and large-volume *in-situ* pump with 100  $\mu\text{m}$  and 53  $\mu\text{m}$  Nitex screens (Moran et al., 2005).

Figure 5a-c. Regional variations in  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$ , grouped by the three common sampling methods and reported as the mean and standard deviation for samples collected below the mixed layer, generally 100-150m. For sediment trap Figure 5a, references include: EQPAC- Buesseler et al., 1995; PAPA- Charette et al., 2000; BATS- Buesseler et al., unpub. 1993-1995 data; HOT-



Benitez-Nelson et al., 2001; Barents Sea- Coppola et al., 2002; Mediterranean- Schmidt et al., 2002; NABE- North Atlantic Bloom Experiment- Buesseler, 1992; Baffin Bay- Amiel et al., 2002; Arabian Coastal- Buesseler et al., 1995, subset of original data from coastal sites. *In-situ* pump samples in Figure 5b are typically  $>53$  or  $70\ \mu\text{m}$  particles; references include: same as 5a, plus Gulf of Mexico- Hung et al., 2004; APFZ- Antarctic Polar Frontal Zone- Buesseler et al., 2001; Ross Sea- Cochran et al. 2000. For bottle samples in Figure 5c typically  $>0.1$  or  $1.0\ \mu\text{m}$ ; references include same as 5a and 5b, plus, Southern Ocean - Buesseler et al, 2001, North Sea- Gustafsson et al., 2000; Gulf of Maine- Benitez-Nelson et al., 2000.

Figure 6.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  ratios in Baltic Sea mixed layer collected using a surface pumping system on  $1\ \mu\text{m}$  filters (Gustafsson et al., unpublished data).

Figure 7.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  for NBST, PIT and  $>1-53$  and  $>53\ \mu\text{m}$  particles collected via in situ pumps at 150 m at the Bermuda Atlantic Time-Series (BATS) station (Buesseler et al., unpublished data). Four sets of comparisons are shown from different BATS cruises.

Figure 8.  $\text{C}/^{234}\text{Th}$  for particles separated based upon settling velocity in the Mediterranean on two deployments (SV1 and SV2) of the Settling Velocity trap (Cochran et al, 2004).

Figure 9a-c. A comparison of carbon flux estimates for three US JGOFS Process Studies: a. North Atlantic Bloom Experiment, b. Equatorial Pacific (data from  $2^\circ\text{N}$ - $2^\circ\text{S}$  along  $140^\circ\text{W}$ ), c. Ross Sea. When two bars are shown for a given method, these represent high and low estimates from the original study (see text for details). All fluxes are plotted on a Y axis scaled to a maximum of  $80\ \text{mmol C m}^{-2}\ \text{d}^{-1}$  equivalent. See text for references and a discussion for each estimate.

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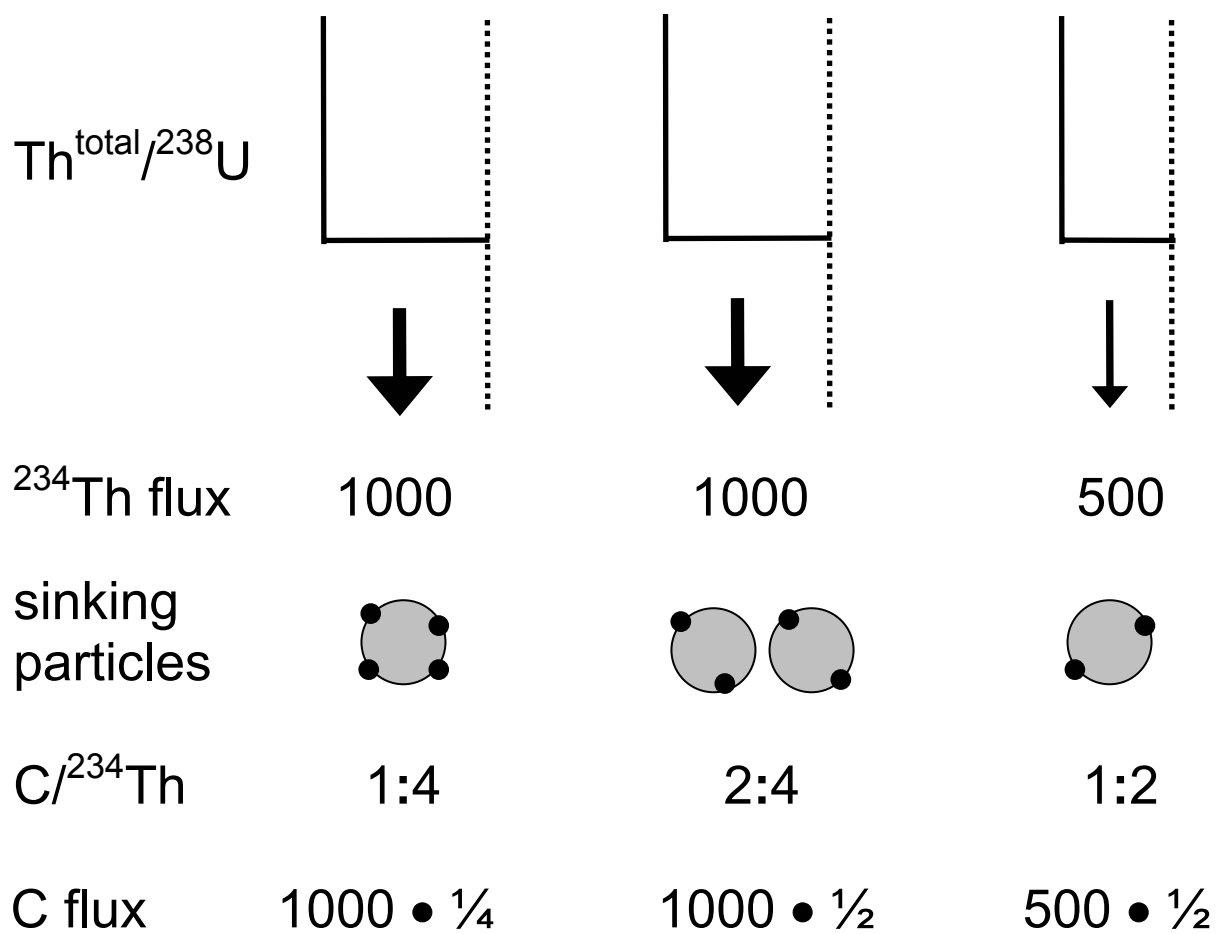


Figure 1. Buesseler et al.



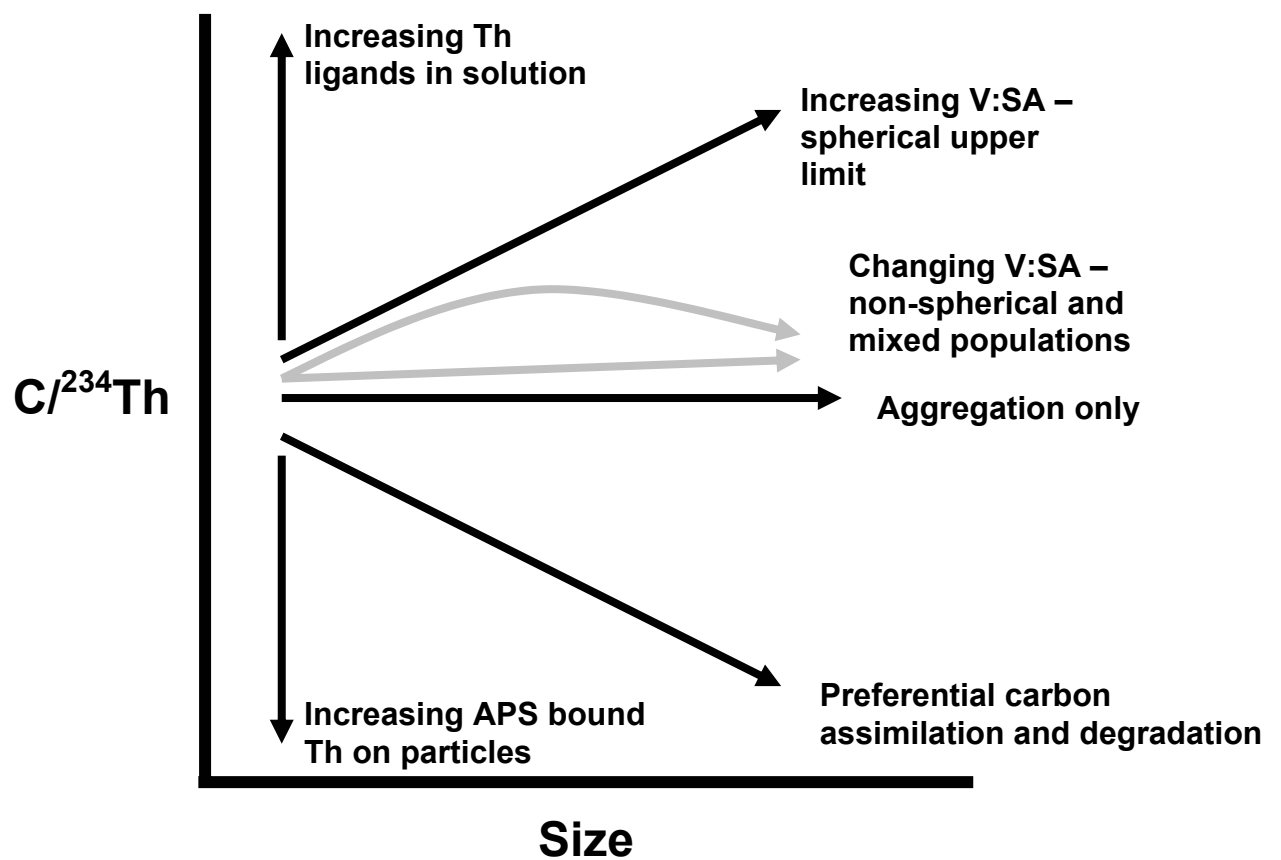


Figure 2. Buesseler et al.

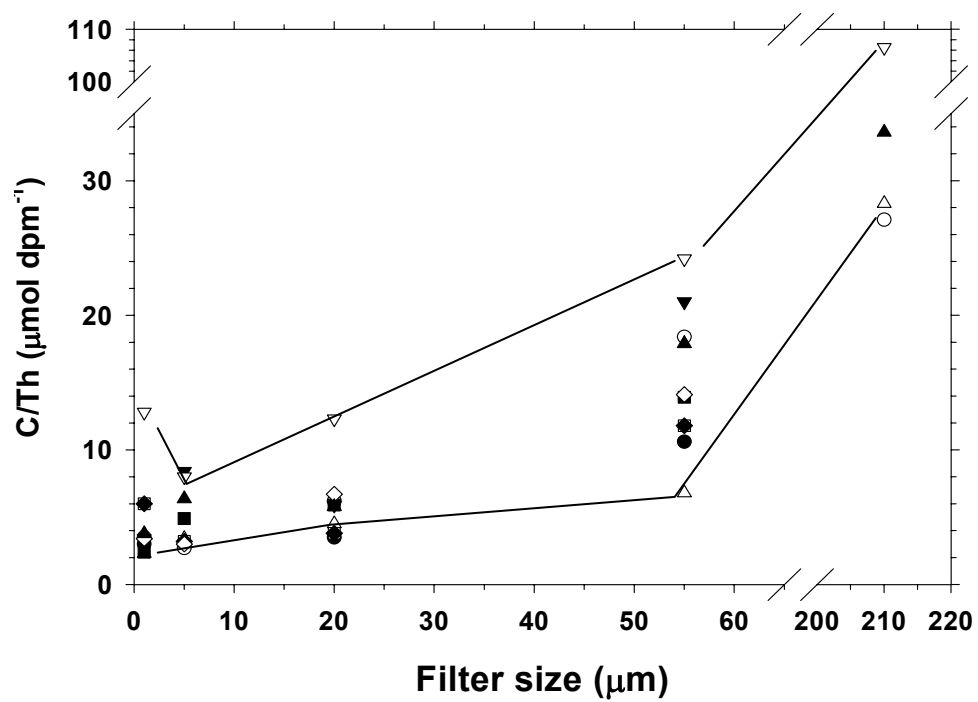


Figure 3. Buesseler et al.

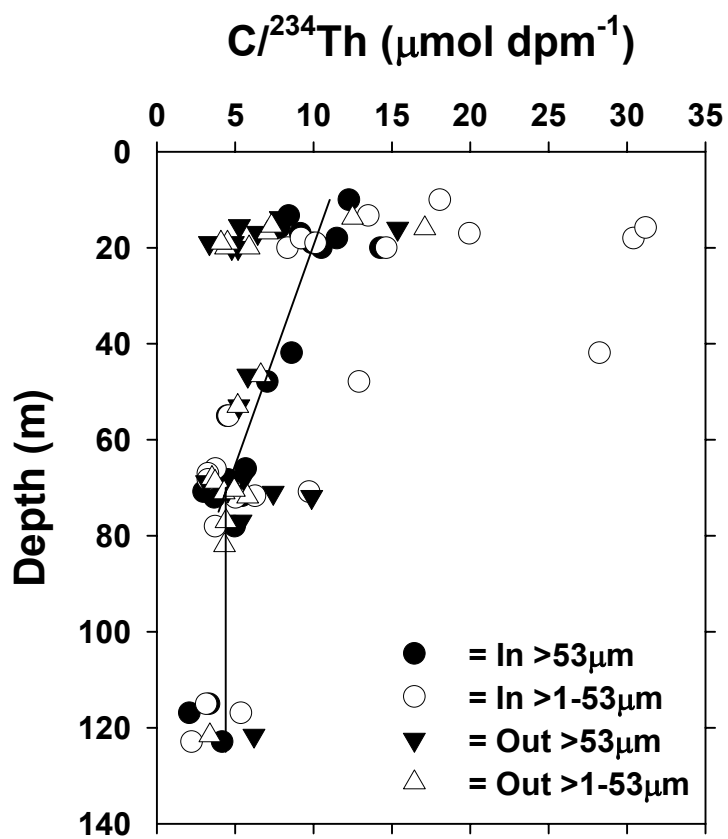


Figure 4a Buesseler

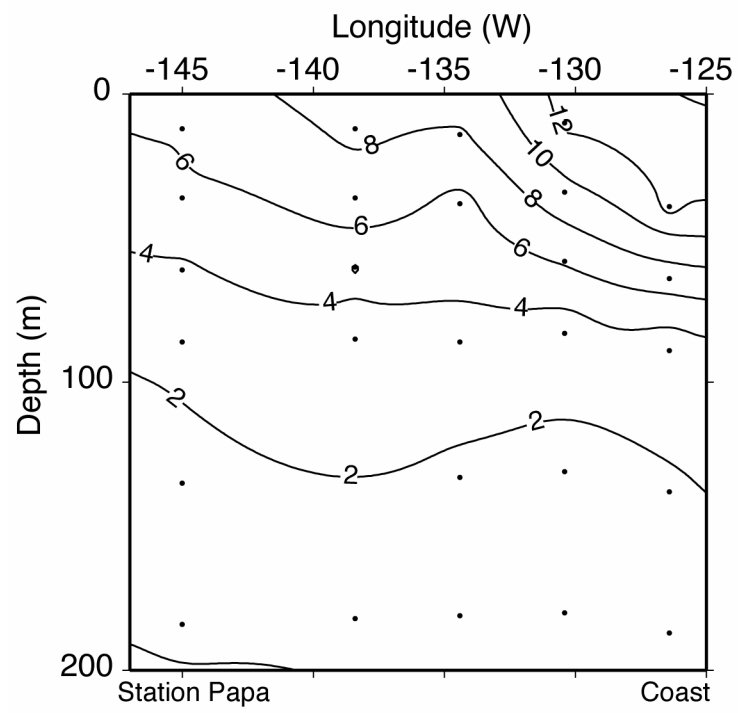


Figure 4b. Buesseler et al.

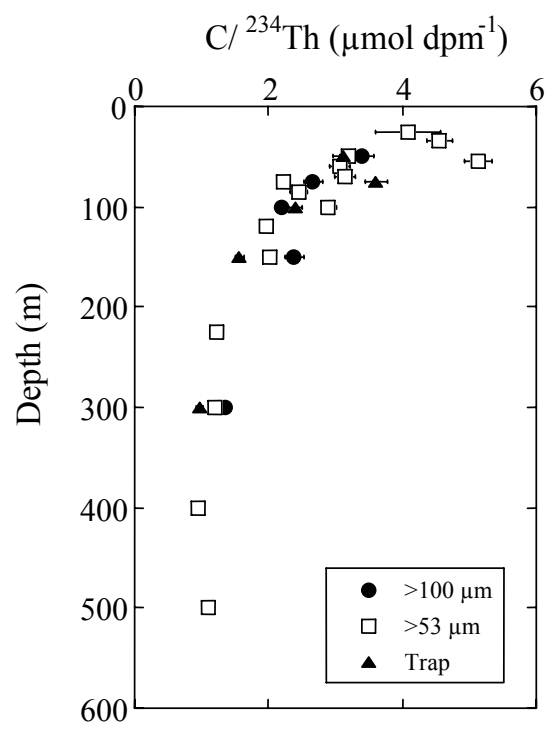


Figure 4c. Buesseler et al.

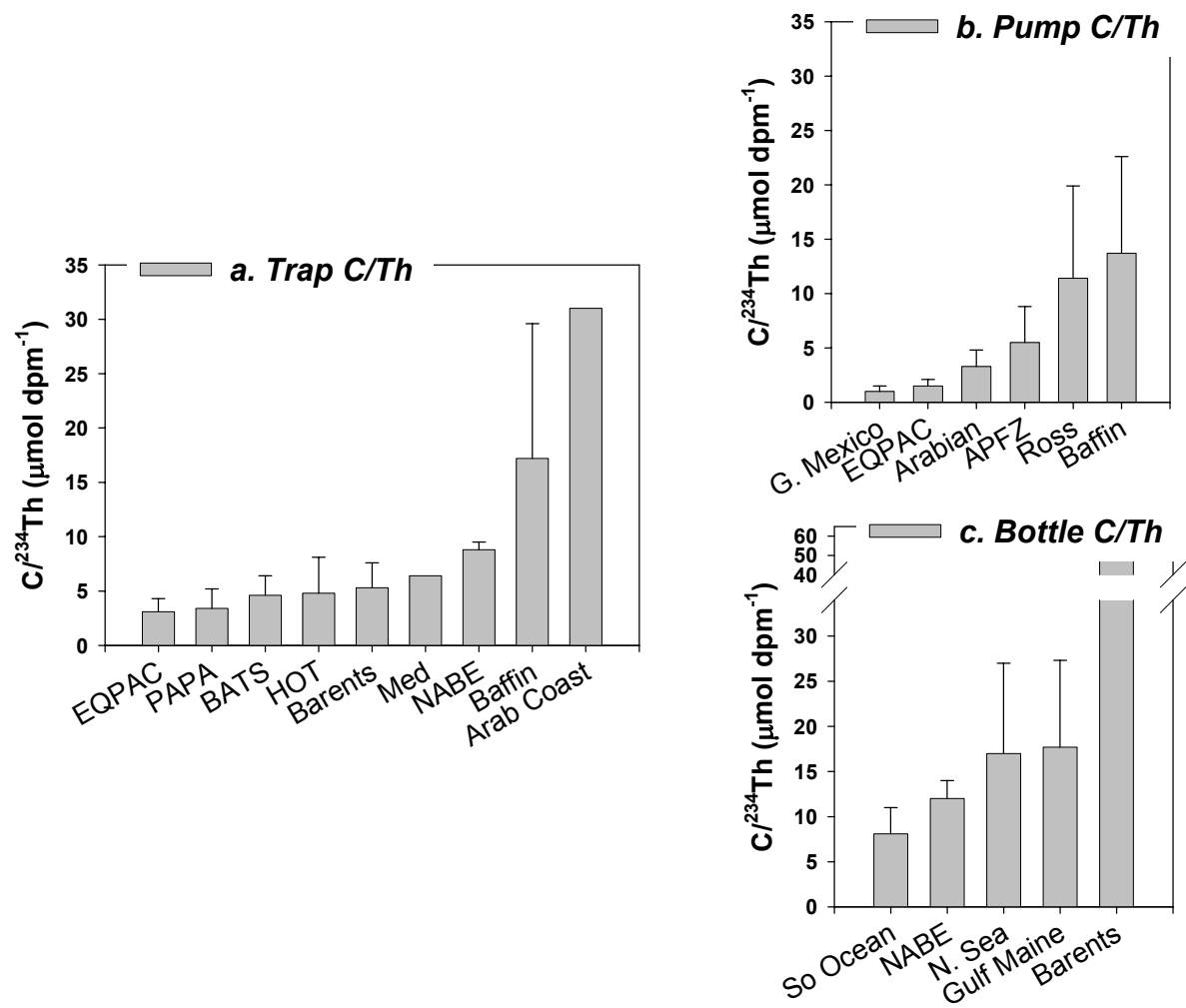


Figure 5a-c. Buesseler et al.

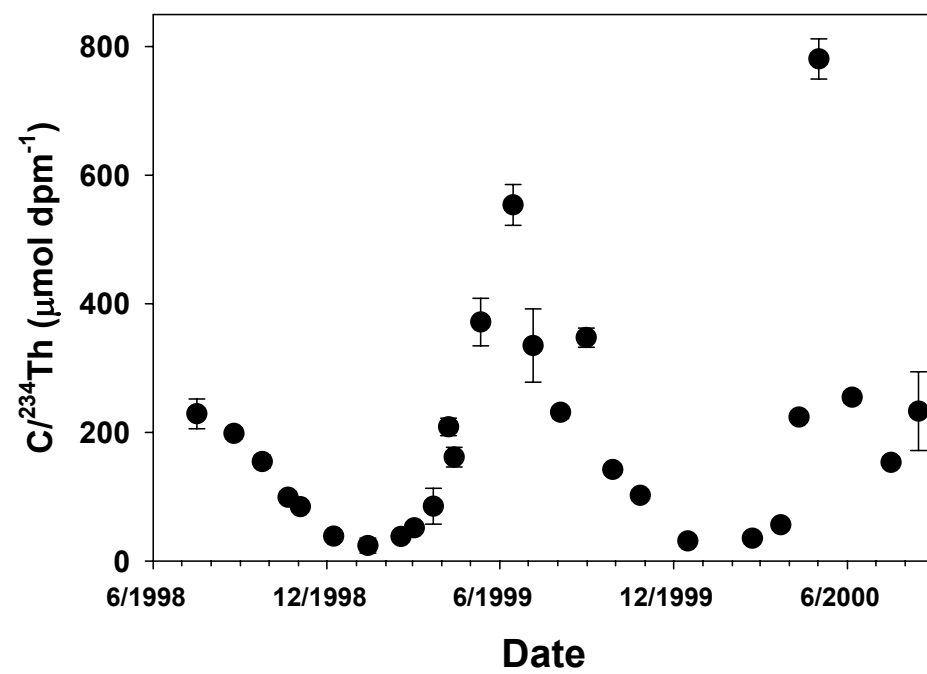


Figure 6. Buesseler et al.

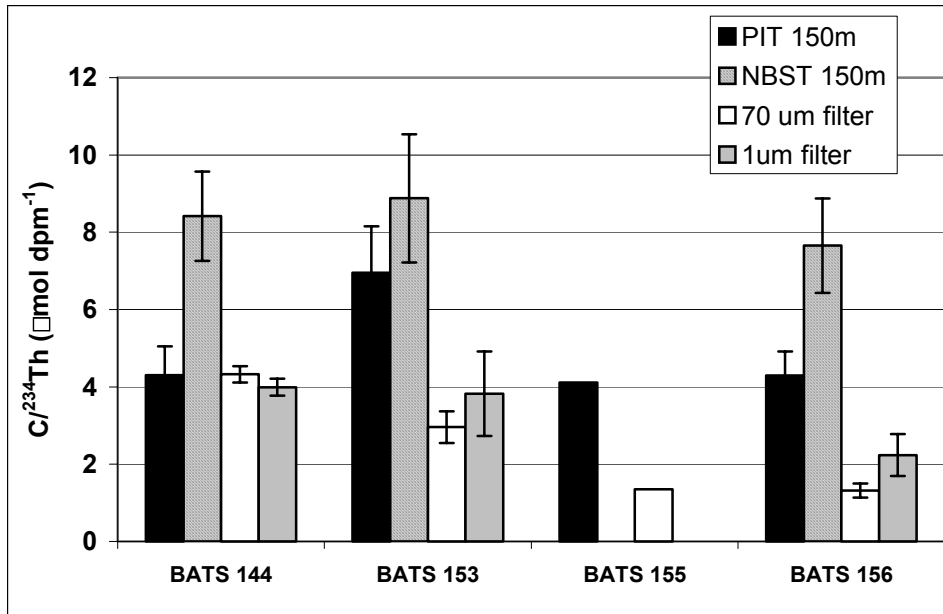


Figure 7. Buesseler et al.



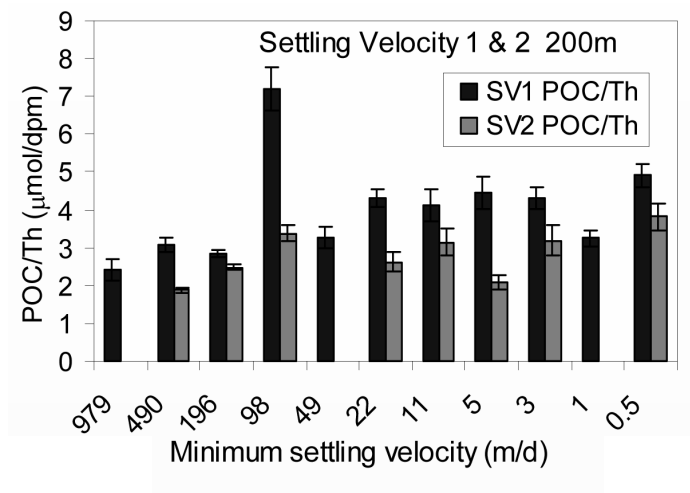


Figure 8. Buesseler et al.

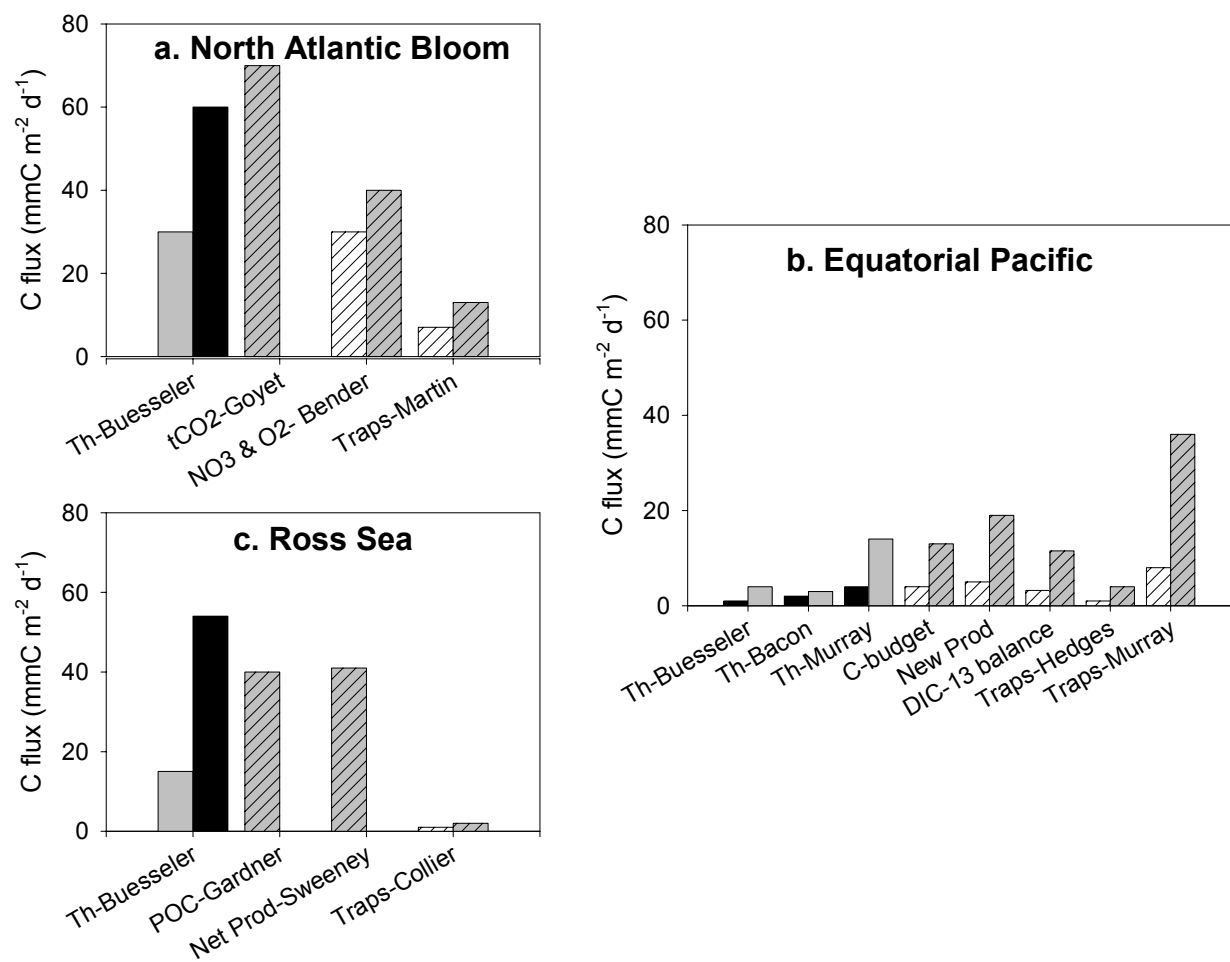


Figure 9a-c. Buesseler et al.