
DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

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RECTOR MAGNIFICUS
UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE
prof. MUDr. Tomáš Zima, DrSc., MBA
Ovocný trh 3-5
Praha 1
116 36
CZECH REPUBLIC

Re: The Alarming State of Cuneiform Studies at Charles University

Dear Rector Magnificus,

I am writing to you in my capacity as President of the International Association of Assyriologists, the organization that represents the majority of scholars and students working on the cultures of ancient Mesopotamia and surrounding regions of the ancient Near East, whose writings were preserved in various languages the cuneiform script. For some time, I have been observing the gradual decline of Cuneiform Studies at Charles University with great distress since 1996, when I took part, as an invited honoured guest, in the 43rd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale organized jointly by the university Institute of Near Eastern Studies and the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Prague.

The university institute has in the meantime become an Institute of Comparative Linguistics, while the field of cuneiform studies has been almost completely eliminated from its curriculum; there have been no students of cuneiform in the past ten years.

As an Assyriologist interested in the origins and traditions of the field, I take the liberty to remind you that Cuneiform Studies in Prague were founded in 1919 by Bedřich Hrozný, the decipherer of Hittite language and founder of the currently thriving sub-field of Hittitology, but who was also well known for his work on ancient Babylonia and Assyria. The highest standards of scholarship, set by Prof. Hrozný, were followed even in the Communist era by his former student and successor as professor of Cuneiform Studies, Dr. Lubor Matouš. During his tenure, the department of Cuneiform Studies at Charles university was the most respected centre of the field in Eastern Europe, attracting PhD students from all over the Eastern bloc, as I know well, having begun my studies at Warsaw University in the sixties of the last century.

The Institute of Cuneiform Studies at Charles University was always the *only* department in your country specifically designed for and focused on the study and teaching of the languages, history, culture and religion of ancient Mesopotamia and Anatolia.

As President of the International Association of Assyriology, I feel responsible for the future of Cuneiform Studies worldwide, and I am particularly concerned with the situation at your University. I would be interested in engaging in a dialogue with you regarding this situation. With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Michalowski', written on a light-colored background.

Piotr Michalowski
George G. Cameron Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations,
President, International Association of Assyriologists,
Past president, American Oriental Society
(piotrm@umich.edu)