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**Fachbereich Geschichts- und
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Berlin, 26.05.2014

Re: The Alarming State of Cuneiform Studies at Charles University

Dear Rector Magnificus,

I have been observing the gradual decline of cuneiform studies at Charles University with great distress since 1996, when I took part 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. The highest standards of scholarship, set by Hrozný, were followed even in the communist era by his former student and successor as Professor of Cuneiform Studies, 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.

The department of Cuneiform Studies at Charles University was formerly the *only* institution 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 an Assyriologist (and Professor für Wissensgeschichte at the FU Berlin) I am concerned about the standing of cuneiform studies at your University, particularly since I have a former student and current colleague who is Czech. He completed his PhD in

Assyriology (at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London), was then Postdoc at the Max Planck Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Berlin, and now has another Postdoc (in a Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft Project) at the Freie Universität Berlin. He is an excellent scholar by all international standards and is not someone who should be overlooked by the most prestigious university in his own country.

with best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Geller', with a stylized, cursive script.

Markham J. Geller