

Oriental Institute
University of Chicago
Chicago 37, Illinois
February 15, 1956

Uppsala Universitet
Attn: Professor Torgny Segerstedt
Uppsala, Sweden

Dear Sir:

By letter of December 3, 1955, you honored me by entrusting me with the function of "special adviser in assessing the work in Assyriology" of two of the applicants for the chair of Semitic languages, namely Docents Alfred Ossian Haldar and Gustav Frithiof Rundgren. Herewith I fulfill this highly responsible assignment. I must say in advance, however, that I cannot completely separate my judgment of this particular aspect of these candidates from that of their personality and scholarship as a whole. My judgment is based, as to Mr. Haldar, on four books, three articles (one of them unpublished and never meant to be published), and three reviews; as to Mr. Rundgren, on one book, two published articles, and three unpublished articles which are, however, obviously intended to be published.

I do not hesitate to tell you that Mr. Rundgren is by far more gifted than Mr. Haldar, although his domain seems to be limited by comparison with the broad field commanded by Mr. Haldar, and although his talents all go in one direction, the so-called Sprachwissenschaft. As to Mr. Rundgren's "work in Assyriology" I would limit myself to one sentence: he is no Assyriologist and does not claim to be an Assyriologist. The latter fact gives him a moral superiority over his competitor, who claims to be an Assyriologist and is not. Mr. Rundgren uses the Akkadian language many times in his books and articles, but he only hevers over the grammar as God did over the waters. He has no intimate knowledge of this language whatsoever, as he showed especially in his treatment of the Akkadian t-form. Perhaps his acquaintance with the Ethioptic dialects is a little better.

It is the claim of the Sprachwissenschaft to make discoveries, without really understanding any language, by the so-called comparative method, the only form of thinking of which Mr. Rundgren disposes. The conviction that it is unnecessary to understand a language in order to make comparisons of this kind is common to all Sprachwissenschaftler. Mr. Rundgren is very optimistic about the prospects of these comparisons, which he bases by preference on the different dialects of Ethioptic with the inclusion also of what are termed the Hamito-Cushitic (African) group. I am extremely doubtful of the prospects of discovering any truth in this way. As a matter of fact the conceptions Ur-semitisch and even Ur-semito-hamitisch are very vague, and remain ill-defined and uninvestigated to this day.

The atomizing of a language by isolating so-called deictic elements which jump from nouns to verbs, from prefixes to suffixes, is in my eyes a by-passed stage of linguistics. Although Mr. Rundgren quotes Trubetskoj twice in his book, he is still completely addicted to the old Sprachwissenschaft which has no conception of structure or Gestalt, and uses a simply additive method to reconstruct older stages of a language in a purely hypothetical way. The prototypes of Mr. Rundgren are Bauer, Bröckelmann, Christian, and his teacher Nyberg. But for the latter two, being philologists, the constructive Sprachwissenschaft was only more or less of a hobby, whereas Mr. Rundgren means to have founded a new field of truth-detection. It is easy to predict that, as Bröckelmann changed his basic views three times during his life, so Mr. Rundgren, having ripened, will also abandon all these oversophisticated analogies and hypotheses on which his grammatical and etymological comparisons are based.

At the moment he destroys in his book the very bases on which all Semiticists agree, namely, the equation of Ethiopic yanagger with Akkadian ikassad, the parallels found in the Cushitic languages for the Akkadian suffix -is and the Akkadian Native suffix, and the natural and generally accepted derivation of Akkadian assum from ana sum. For him both ikassad and the Akkadian dative and -iss suffixes are examples of "innerakkadische Entwicklung", while assum is a compound of two or three assumed deictic elements. He goes so far as to split even Sumerian SM (name) into two deictic elements, entirely ignoring the fact that Sumerian, which has ma - ... - se corresponding to Akkadian assum, strictly contradicts his audacious etymologies.

I can consider all this only as a game without foundation in reality, which does no harm but is not taken seriously by anyone. The derivation of Akkadian summa from a spurious Akkadian demonstrative element su + ma, though advanced first by a serious scholar like Speiser, I cannot rate higher than the examples just quoted. In this case, paradoxically enough, Mr. Haldar, derided by Mr. Rundgren, has hit on the truth, namely the equation of Akkadian summa with Ugaritic hm, Hebrew hm, etc. Without denying the great talents and the wonderful mental agility of Mr. Rundgren, I can only pity the students who will learn from him no more than the usual hypotheses about the so-called Lautschieberei and neck-breaking etymologies.

As to Mr. Haldar, I have already charged him with pretending more than he represents by calling himself an Assyriologist. There are three contributions, two published and one unpublished, in which Mr. Haldar has committed himself in our field. One is the edition of an Old Babylonian letter (Bibliotheca Orientalis X 14); by checking the accompanying photograph of this tablet, it is easy to discover more than a dozen elementary misreadings and mistranslations. The second is an unpublished treatment of some of the easiest Old Babylonian letters and contracts available; without doubt if any periodical would publish this - I would not accept it even as a Master's thesis because of uncounted elementary mistakes. The third is a translation of the Babylonian Epic of Creation into Swedish. Here Mr. Haldar claims that, in three cases, he advanced the readings by collations in the

* He even teaches Poebel Sumerian in order to get rid of Akkadian is.

British Museum, readings established by such excellent copyists as Delitzsch and L.W. King. If we check these passages it is evident that, in the case of I 36, Delitzsch's reading (el-li-ti[m-na]; cf. [el-li-ti]mma in KAR 317:4) is to be preferred to Halдар's (ellitamma, based on BM 45528), while, in the case of Iv 11 and 30, Halдар's readings, though ingenious, are proved impossible by the new Sultān Tepe duplicates.

Mr. Halдар never was trained in Assyriology, otherwise he would have learned this language despite all its difficulties. But the bad thing is not that he does not know the language but that he pretends to know it, for thereby he threatens the moral basis of a university. How can he know Akkadian? In his first volume (Associations of Cult Prophets, p. v) he thanks Professor Widengren for teaching him this language, but I wonder whence the latter's competence? Then he spent some time with Mr. Goetze in Yale (see his "Some Old Babylonian Letters"), but the fruit of his work there we have already assessed above. Yet his self-confidence goes so far that he dares to criticize the Akkadian Grammar of W. von Soden, a man who spent decades of the most penetrating study before he published this book. It is true that Mr. Halдар, from his very limited knowledge of Old Babylonian letters, contributed two additions to von Soden, who is too concise to go into all details. But in criticizing him he committed the most incredible blunders, especially when he tries to teach von Soden that tabtaqma is a second person singular preterite from bataqu (Studia Linguistica, p. 128), whereas it is in fact a second person plural, as is shown beyond any doubt by the other verbs in this letter, and therefore clearly a perfect from baqamu. How can anyone feel so self-confident, being so weak?

But these three contributions made by Mr. Halдар to our field are minor in comparison with the many occasions on which he has used Akkadian for comparisons. Here he relies totally, as did Mr. Rundgren for grammar, on second-hand information, and in this respect the two scholars are the same: good is what fits my theory. Whether it be an utterance of Bezeld's dating from the nineties, a translation of Witzel or Langdon, or the newest products of the methodical scholarship of a von Soden or a Falkenstein, all is on the same level. Quotation is the main instrument, and it is used in the most arbitrary way. We can only state that Mr. Halдар adds to his quotation his own analysis of a problem, and is in this respect superior to Mr. Rundgren, whose approach in these cases is purely "historical". That is, the latter quotes the most diverse authorities, all the way from Hitzig to von Soden, and lifts his quotations out of their contexts.

In his own way, however, Mr. Halдар is quite as old-fashioned as Mr. Rundgren and his Sprachwissenschaft. As the latter's vague reconstructions take no account of modern linguistics, so the former's conceptions of history, especially history of culture, are hopelessly outdated. The old pan-Babylonianism of Zimmern, regarded as dead and superseded by structural analyses and the doctrine of *Eigenbegrifflichkeit*, is still quite alive in the school to which Mr. Halдар adheres. Comparison to him means showing not the differences but only the similarities between - the Semites! Thus for example, the concept of *mae* (in Sumerian) and *parqu* (in Akkadian) is one of the most perplexing and "eigenbegrifflich" in Assyriology. In his "On the wall painting from ... Mari", Mr. Halдар makes no effort to study the respective

semantic ranges of these terms, their mutual differences, or their phenomenology, and he contributes nothing new to their philological elucidation. And, strange to say, he makes Semites out of the Sumerians! The craft of hepatoscopy or extispicy fall according to Mr. Haldar into the sphere of the seers; the Akkadian barū is a priest belonging to a temple community (Associations of cult prophets among the ancient Semites, ch.1). The oldest merchandise is brought forth once more to make of the Semites a cultural unity, and to reduce to a common denominator the thousands of years old Sumerian culture with the desert spirit of the Arabs and the original religion of Israel. It is true, Mr. Haldar belongs to a school and is not the only one who indulges in comparisons of this kind. But he at least should have avoided the temptation to use widely diachronic material for establishing a point. Instead he has fallen squarely into this trap throughout his works, even using pre-Sargonic lexical lists (ibid., p. 45), a class of texts which is prior to and utterly different from the main tradition of Sumer-Akkadian scholarship, and has up to now defied all attempts at penetration, together with the more than two thousand years younger material from Nineveh.

I am extremely sorry not to be able to give my whole-hearted recommendation to either of the two candidates. To sum up, Mr. Rundgren has a brilliant but undisciplined mind, isolated from the latest developments in linguistics; Mr. Haldar has a profound knowledge of second-hand sources and a very good methodical approach, but he distorts facts by his devotion to the thoroughly antiquated pan-Babylonistic and Frazerian schools. Mr. Haldar is not unworthy to receive this chair in a university with an old tradition of scientific solidity, but only on the condition that he absolutely renounce his claim to be an Assyriologist. Otherwise you would be appointing a quack pretending to be a doctor.

With that I have carried out your commission to the best of my knowledge and conscience. If any further questions should arise, I am ready to answer them in order to help both your University and my discipline.

Very faithfully yours,

B. Landsberger