

By Allah,  
We've begun the search for hidden  
chemical and biological weapons,  
The god Aššur,  
the great mountain,  
granted to me unrivalled sovereignty  
Soldier, you will not be safe, neither in  
your home nor on the streets.  
and already know of hundreds of sites  
that will be investigated.  
made my weapons greater  
than those of all  
who sit on royal daisies.  
We will lie in wait for you at every place  
of ambush.  
Any person involved  
in committing or planning  
terrorist attacks  
becomes an enemy of this country  
We have come to you  
with men who love death,  
just as you love life

All of the people  
from the UpperSea of the Setting Sun to  
the Lower Sea of the  
Rising Sun bow down at my feet.  
Our coalition will stay until our work is  
done and then we will leave and we will  
leave behind a free Ira

I approached the city Ekron  
and I killed the governors and nobles  
who had committed crimes.  
We demonstrate  
the mujāhidīn's resilience  
towards crusader coalition airstrikes.  
From distant bases or ships at sea,  
we sent planes and missiles  
that could destroy an enemy division  
or strike a single bunker.  
The crusaders heavily underestimated  
the strength of the mujāhidīn.  
I hung their corpses on towers  
around the city.  
I filled the plain with the corpses of their  
warriors,  
like grass.  
Allah granted success to our brothers,  
casting terror and fear  
into the hearts of the crusaders  
I cut off their lips  
and thus destroyed their pride.  
Marines and soldiers  
charged to Baghdad  
across 350 miles of hostile ground  
with a number of the Khilāfah's soldiers  
armed with explosive belts,  
explosive devices,  
and automatic weapons  
in one of the swiftest advances  
of heavy arms in history.  
I put to the sword the population  
I cut off their hands  
like the stems of cucumbers in season.  
You have shown the world  
the skill and the might  
of our armed forces.

I destroyed,  
devastated,  
and turned into ruins  
their smaller settlements.  
Detonated his explosive vehicle,  
completely destroying the  
command center.  
Military power  
was used to end a regime  
by breaking a nation.  
I burned with fire  
pavilions and tents,  
their abodes,  
and reduced them to ashes,  
We entered the ruins  
of the ancient Assyrians  
in Wilāyat Nīnawā  
and demolished their statues,  
sculptures,  
and engravings  
of idols and kings.  
In the images of fallen statues  
we have witnessed  
the arrival of a new era.  
I made the smoke  
from their conflagration  
cover the wide heavens  
like a heavy cloud.  
May Allah  
cleanse all Muslims' lands  
of the idols of both  
the past and the present.  
Destroyed,  
devastated,  
burned with fire,  
I turned into a mound of ruins.  
We have  
the greater power  
to free a nation.

In the East,  
I saw the dust cloud stirred up,  
the city of ar-Ramādī  
– the capital of al-Anbār –  
by the feet of my troops.  
was liberated by the soldiers  
of the Khilāfah.  
Without directing violence  
against civilians.  
They abandoned their tents.  
In what amounted to a repeat  
of the Safawī army's embarrassing  
retreat in Mosul.  
Operation Iraqi Freedom  
was carried out with a combination  
of precision and speed and boldness  
the enemy did not expect.  
Then he abandoned the city Ukku,  
his royal city,  
and fled afar.  
In order to save their lives,  
they trampled the corpses  
of their troops  
as they pushed on.  
The residents of the city watched,  
and even recorded video.  
They have failed.

I joyfully entered his palace,  
We have not forgotten  
the victims of September the 11th.  
Allah has opened the lands  
for His awliyā'  
so they entered and dispersed  
within the lands  
then I opened his treasury,  
and brought out gold,  
silver,  
gold,  
silver utensils,  
precious stones,  
all kinds of possessions and  
killing the ghters of the kuār,  
capturing their women,  
and enslaving their children.  
Terrorists and their supporters  
declared war,  
and war is what they got.  
together with his palace women,  
courtiers,  
attendants,  
male singers,  
female singers,  
all of the craftsmen,  
as many as there were,  
his palace attendants,  
and I counted them as booty.  
We and our coalition  
will finish what we have begun.  
The female captives  
became lawful for the one who  
ends up possessing them even  
without pronouncement of divorce  
by their harbī husbands  
May God bless you all.  
And may God continue  
to bless America

The liberation of ar-Ramādī  
Dunni-Šamaš,  
Mosul,  
Baghdad  
Bīt-Risiya,  
Yarmūk  
Nasiriyah  
Bīt-Ahlamê,  
as-Sukhnaḥ  
Najaf  
Dūru,  
Ninawa  
Basra  
happened together with  
a major advance in the West  
by the armies of the Khilāfah.  
In this battle,  
we have fought  
for the cause of liberty  
and for the peace of the world.  
I surrounded,  
conquered,  
thirty-four fortified cities,  
Also took control of a large part  
of the city of Tadmur Palmyra.  
I confined him  
inside the city Jerusalem,  
like a bird in a cage.  
We destroyed the Taliban,  
many terrorists  
and the camps where they trained.  
The operation had multiple phases,  
including using both aerial drones  
and ground units  
I detached from his land the cities of  
Ashdod,  
and illi-Bēl,  
the king of the city Gaza,  
and thereby  
made his land smaller.  
We are committed to freedom  
in Afghanistan,  
Iraq  
and in a peaceful Palestine.

# History begins with the vanity of Kings

How to rewrite the Taylor Prism<sup>1</sup> today? How can my Site Writing project establish a dialogue with a piece created more than 2600 years ago in a completely different society? Despite all the differences that might exist in relation to this gap, I think the essential aim of writing history and sharing it with our communities is still an important need that connects us with that period of history.



Could King Ashur have predicted the exhibition of the Prism in the British Museum? Could King Ashur have predicted a scene in which I am taking a picture of the Prism with my iPhone 5s in the British Museum? Probably not. But the fact that the Prism was made of clay allowed its survival to one of the most tragic events of its lifetime: the fire started by the Babylonians after they took the city of Nineveh and destroyed the castle of Ashur. In this tragedy, most of the castle's library was destroyed, including papyrus and text written in pieces of fabric. However, a large amount of clay books survived. Today the Library of Ashurbanipal is the world's oldest library.

Following these lines, the main theme arising from my research



is the idea of the reappropriation of the Prism today, 2600 years after its creation. How to reappropriate it, what strategies can help reframe its symbolic content and how to use it as a condensing strategy of the present, specifically in the context of Iraq's huge heritage destruction after ISIS, are some questions that surround the approach of the Prism today. Understanding the Prism's exhibition today in the British Museum as a donation by Mr Taylor's widow, the object should not be considered independently from its colonial background, which is somehow connected with Mosul, its original city. Additionally, not only the Prism itself should be questioned, but also the museum as institution. As Hito Sterel remarks in his Essay "A tank on a pedestal", the museum should not be a place of passive display of objects

from the past but a space to generate new ways to think and create our future<sup>2</sup>.

Thinking about museums such as the British Museum, which exhibit their collections formed from the accumulation (extraction or even robbery) of colonial objects, makes us wonder about our past and the current events taking place today in the territories where these objects come from. Origin is an essential topic in Shelly Sacks' work "Exchange Values Images of invisible lives"<sup>3</sup>, which allows us to reflect on the origin of labour injustices by big companies in the extraction and production of bananas in Colombia. Her work tries to visibilise the structure behind consumption, while showing the production chain behind products such as bananas, in this case. In this work, I would like to connect the prism with Mosul, Iraq and the situation in these places today. It is a situation of rebuilding after one of the most dramatic cases of heritage destruction in the latest centuries, paradoxically related to the United States invasion of these territories under the idea of a contemporary colonialism: an economic one. In this way, my idea is to think said critical present around Mosul and Iraq. In this scenario, the question about the role of the museum is related to the idea of connecting not only with the past but also with the original geographic location of objects and their people. It is an exercise of consciousness close to the example of Marc Augé about tourism stating that "the western tourists will one day become aware that their privileged destinations are the same ones from which migrants escape"<sup>4</sup>. In the case of museums, it could also be said that maybe one day tourists will become aware that the objects they contemplate in



London also come from the colonised countries that nobody wants to visit.

Under this context and my project's aim to critically question the Prism, I have decided to focus on three texts/sources: the original text inscribed in the Prism which talks about the campaigns of the Assyrian

people in Judea; the magazine Dabiq from the Islamic State; and George Bush' speech to his military forces about the victory of USA over Saddam in May 2 of 2003.

The original transcriptions of the Prism published in 1924 by the Chicago University provide a context for the content of this object, explaining how the Assyrian Empire was known for its sadism in war campaigns and also for their lack of development compared to their Babylonian neighbours. Babylonians, in turn, were well known for their good treatment to other people and for the creation of the Code of Hammurabi. The warlike spirit of the Assyrian empire and King Ashur can also be found in the Prism, for example in this excerpt "I put to the sword, and I cut off their heads and I piled them in heaps I built a pillar over against his city gate, and I flayed all of the chief men who had revolted, and I covered the pillar with their skins"<sup>5</sup>. The inscriptions' writing style is mainly descriptive but also has the intention to highlight the Empire's power and self pride. The text is written in first person, so we can read it as if the King himself were speaking to us about his success.



Secondly, I used the Islamic State rhetorics. ISIS has been known for its extreme violence and performativity in its attempts to create a unified Islamic land based on the ideas of conservative Wahhabism. Its movies and propaganda have been a focal point in the world, not only because of their sadism but also because of the use of new media and other resources to express ideas. In the abstract "Discovering hidden motifs in ISIS jihadi texts by using text mining"<sup>6</sup>, this conflict is said to be the most mediated conflict in history. ISIS' self awareness regarding their campaigns can be compared to that of King Ashur. This correlation is also strong because both ISIS and King Ashur share the same geographical location. The paradox, in this case, is that ISIS destroyed King Ashur's artifacts by replicating the violent rhetoric of the past. Dabiq states "We entered the ruins of the ancient Assyrians in Wilāyat Nīnawā and demolished their statues, sculptures, and engravings of idols and kings. May Allah cleanse all Muslims' lands of the idols of both the

past and the present". Both cultures get together in the act of heritage destruction.

Finally, in order to avoid a parallel comparison between Assyria and ISIS that could lead to a basic idea about the intrinsic violence of the Arab culture, I decided to add a third voice, the voice of the United States, specifically George Bush' speech declaring victory to his troops<sup>7</sup>. The American invasion of Iraq is fundamental to understand the instability in the region today. Mehyar Kattein<sup>8</sup>, Iraqi scholar and Nahrein Network Coordinator, states that the American invasion in 2003 is the main reason for the current crisis, as it disassembled the country's social and political structures. The inclusion of this third perspective provides a voice that speaks the reason behind the conflict: the liberating aim of USA. A first reading of Bush' speech style shows a less aggressive style than that of ISIS and Assyria, however, a deeper reading reveals its actual animosity. This speech is less naive than the other two. The seeming aim of the speech is to provide freedom and democracy in Iraq, nonetheless we know the terrible consequences of the American Invasion, which make the speech look more like a joke than a convincing rhetoric. As Rodrigo Karmy expresses in his book "Escritos Bárbaros"<sup>9</sup>, the American and western narratives are based on the bipolar idea of good and evil (this is very well



expressed in the documentary Bitter Lake by Adam Curtis, when he refers to the British campaigns in Afghanistan). This narrative is also associated with the religious figure of the saviour, the one who comes to save, liberate and relieve.

The reproduction of the Taylor Prism was made in a 1:1 scale with inscriptions of the three texts mentioned above. As a methodology, I first structured a dialogue between ISIS and Assyria, considering the magazine Dabiq and the Assyrians campaign inscribed in the Prism. I created a narrative arranged along the 6 columns, each of them showing a



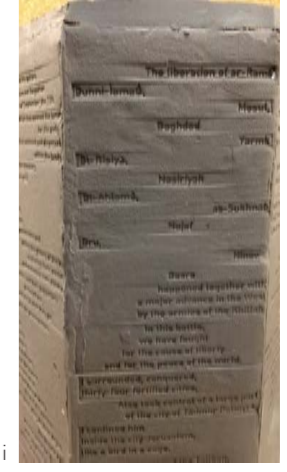
different tone. This group of 6 texts was divided into: general vision of the world, graphic violence, destruction, the escape of the defeated, capture and possession of material and, finally, victories. To these lines, I added excerpts from Bush' Speech. In some cases, the speech provides a sense of coherence, while in others, simple disruption. As an example of this dialogue, in the specific case of destruction, the Assyrian text deals with the destruction of cities (I burned with fire, pavilions and tents, their abodes, and reduced them to ashes), the text of Dabiq magazine addresses the destruction of heritage (We entered the ruins of the ancient Assyrians in Wilāyat Nīnawā and demolished their statues, sculptures, and engravings of idols and kings) and in the case of USA, the speech talks about the destruction of the statue of Saddam (In the images of fallen statues we have witnessed the arrival of a new era).



For the montage, I gave myself the freedom to arrange the texts in a very personal and subjective way. In this sense, I used archive material for it to be read and mixed to generate new content and enunciation spaces, just as what Di Carlo expresses when quoting Archaeology of Knowledge of Foucault<sup>10</sup>. The insertion of new text into the Prism's original shape works as a way of temporal montage that creates a sense of disruption. As Jane Rendell says in Art and Architecture<sup>11</sup>, the type of operation that puts together "what has been and the now" allows to create a space in between where the repressed aspects of objects and sites can emerge.

The idea of getting together different sources is more explicit and drastic because of the nature of the materials, which in this case results in the physical encounter of 3d prints and clay, but also the encounter between a digital media like the Internet, from where texts are extracted, and their physical inscription on the ceramic. This radical insertion tries to reflect on the notions of accumulation, archive and legacy in a liquid time where texts flow around the net and information seems to have a light weight. When I

was making the prism, which was more challenging than I expected, I was able to physically understand the feeling of recording text into a real material, affecting its shape. I could feel the transcendence of an act that



which in my opinion is not possible to achieve totally with digital technologies. This feeling gave me a sense of reality and responsibility in my actions and their legacy. Maybe it is all about thinking our own legacy through history.

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**References**  
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<sup>2</sup> Steyerl, Hito. Duty Free Art. Verso Ed. 2017.  
<sup>3</sup> http://exchange-values.org/  
<sup>4</sup> Augé, Marc. El antropólogo en el mundo global. Veintiuno Ed. 2014. P 106  
<sup>5</sup> Full access to the transcript: https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/files/uploads/shared/docs/oip2.pdf  
<sup>6</sup> https://www.umflint.edu/sites/default/files/groups/Research\_and\_Sponsored\_Programs/URO/P/is\_contentanalysis\_abstract.pdf  
<sup>7</sup> http://edition.cnn.com/2003/US/05/01/bush.transcript/  
<sup>8</sup> mehiyar.wordpress.com/2018/03/09/us-occupation-politics-and-cultural-heritage-in-iraq/  
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<sup>11</sup> Rendell, Jane. Art and Architecture, a place between. I.B Tauri. 2006.

**Images**  
a) Taylor Prism at British Museum  
b) Illustration of Ashur palace  
c) Sheet of cured banana skin number T330085  
d) Image under the internet search "Tourist in the British Museum"  
e) Assyrians placing Israelite captives on spikes.  
f) Dabiq magazine  
g) Moment when Saddam was found by the USA army.  
h) General composition of the prism. Blue as Bush speech; Red as ISIS; and Black as Ashur.  
i) Detail the raw Prism.