

# archaeological horizon



CHAPTER I

# archaeological horizon

## chapter one: an army of expert diggers





# list of characters

Athanasius Kircher (Geisa, Germany, 1602 - Athanasius Kircher (Geisa, Allemagne, 1602 - Rome, Italy, 1680). Rome, Italie, 1680).

Jesuit, egyptologist, linguist, geologist, mathematician, historian of religions, physician, sinologist. It is said that he wasn't competent in any of his subjects. Founder of the *Museum Kircherianum*. Jésuite, égyptologue, linguiste, géologue, mathématicien, historien des religions, médecin, sinologue. On dit qu'il n'était compétent dans aucun de ses domaines. Fondateur du *Museum Kircherianum*.

Giuseppe Verdi (Roncole, Italy, 1813 - Milan, Italy, 1901). Giuseppe Verdi (Roncole, Italie, 1813 - Milan, Italie, 1901).

Self-taught composer. After he was rejected by the Milan conservatoire, he met the glory thanks to the opera *Nabucco*. His marches and his name will be associated to the Italian unification movement, even if he didn't really care about it. Compositeur autodidacte. Après avoir été refusé par le Conservatoire de Milan, il connaîtra la gloire grâce à l'opéra *Nabucco*. Ses marches et son nom seront associés à l'unification de l'Italie sans qu'il y soit vraiment intéressé.

Gertrude Bell (Washington New Hall, England, 1868 - Bagdad, Iraq, 1926). Gertrude Bell (Washington New Hall, Angleterre, 1868 - Bagdad, Irak, 1926).

Dilettante archaeologist, she had a major role in the division of the Ottoman Empire under the British mandate. Advisor of Faisal I king of Iraq, founder of the Iraq Museum, decorated with the Order of the British Empire, she is well known for her lyrical descriptions of the desert. Archéologue dilettante, elle a été une figure de premier rôle dans la division de l'Empire Ottoman sous le mandat Britannique. Conseillère du roi d'Irak Faiçal I, fondatrice du Musée d'Irak, décorée de l'Ordre de l'Empire Britannique, elle est connue pour ses descriptions lyriques du désert.

Henry James Whigham (Tarbolton, Scotland, 1869 – Southampton, USA, 1954). Henry James Whigham (Tarbolton, Écosse, 1869 – Southampton, États Unis, 1954).

Amateur golf player, as a war correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* he travelled extensively. In *The Persian problem*, his book relating his trip on the path of the Bagdadbahn, he describes his encounter with Robert Koldewey working on the excavations in Babylon. His best literary success is the self-help book *How to play golf*. Joueur de golf amateur, en tant que correspondant pour le *Chicago Tribune* il voyagea énormément. Dans *The Persian problem*, son ouvrage sur son voyage le long de la Bagdadbahn, il décrit sa rencontre avec Robert Koldewey au travail dans les fouilles de Babylone. Il doit son succès littéraire à son manuel *How to play golf*.



# distribution

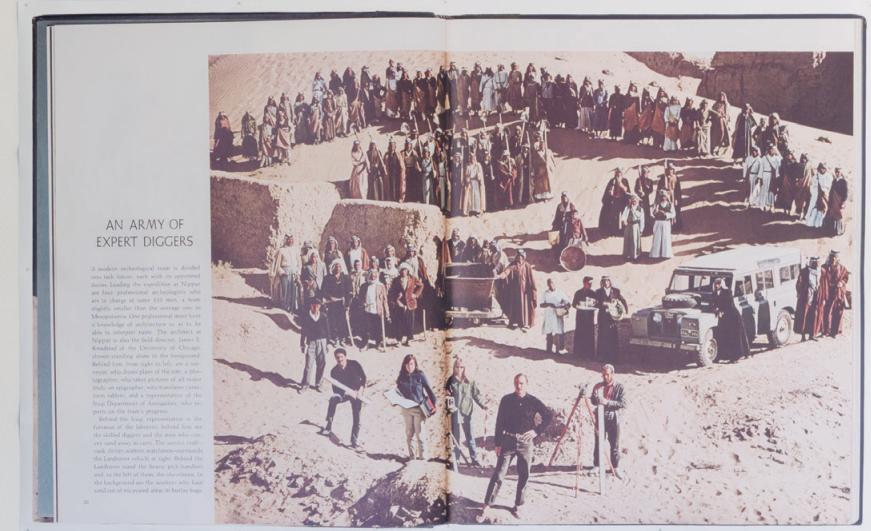


Saddam Husayn (Tikrit, Iraq, 1937 - Bagdad, Saddam Husayn (Tikrit, Irak, 1937 - Bagdad, Iraq, 2006). Iraq, 2006).

Self-taught strategist. After dropping law studies Stratège autodidacte. Après l'abandon des in Egypt, he started leading the Baa'th party even études en droit en Égypte, il prend la tête du parti if he never attended a military academy. Presi- Baathiste sans avoir jamais fréquenté une aca- dent of Iraq since 1979, he kept his position until démie militaire. Président d'Irak depuis 1979, il he was overthrown in 2003. est resté en poste jusqu'à son éviction en 2003.

Enrico Floriddia (Catania, Italy, 1984).

Artist, scholar, publisher, photographer, archaeologist, writer. To-day he hasn't found any institution. Artiste, chercheur, éditeur, photographe, archéologue, écrivain. à ce jour, il n'a fondé aucune institution.



المتحف العراقي  
Iraq Museum

POST CARD

(٦٢) تنين . آجر مزجج  
بابل / ٦٠٠ قم  
63 - Relief in glazed tiles: mythical  
animal. From Ishtar Gate,  
Babylon (600 B.C.)

Printed in Italy by Scala  
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## CHAPTER IV

## HÎT TO KERBELÂ

*March 18—March 30*

HISTORY in retrospect suffers an atmospheric distortion. We look upon a past civilization and see it, not as it was, but charged with the significance of that through which we gaze, as down the centuries shadow overlies shadow, some dim, some luminous, and some so strongly coloured that all the age behind is tinged with a borrowed hue. So it is that the great revolutions, "predestined unto us and we predestined," take on a double power; not only do they turn the current of human action, but to the later comer they seem to modify that which was irrevocably fixed and past. We lend to the dwellers of an earlier day something of our own knowledge; we watch them labouring towards the ineluctable hour, and credit them with a prescience of change not given to man. At no time does this sense of inevitable doom hang more darkly than over the years that preceded the rise of Islâm; yet no generation had less data for prophecy than the generation of Mohammad. The Greek and the Persian disputed the possession of western Asia in profitless and exhausting warfare, both harassed from time to time by the predatory expeditions of the nomads on their frontiers, both content to enter into alliance with this tribe or with that, and to set up an Arab satrap over the desert marshes. Thus it happened that the Benî Ghassân served the emperor of the Byzantines, and the Benî Hârîch fought in the ranks of the Sassanian armies.

Justin II nor to Chosroes the Great came the like of Mecca a child was born of the Kureish who was destined to found a military state as formidable as any that the world has seen, and nothing could have exceeded the fantastic impressiveness of such intelligence.



I had determined to journey back behind this great line, to search through regions now desolate for evidence past that has left little historic record, calling upon me to take form again upon the very ground whereon, in days long gone by, they had played their part. So on a brilliant morning in March I started from Bagdad, and I saw the caravan start out in the direction of Hît, not without inner heart-searchings as to where and when I should meet it again, and having loaded three donkeys with all that was left to us of worldly goods, we turned our backs towards the wilderness. I looked back upon the green mound of Hît, the palm-groves, and the dense smoke of pitch fires rising into the clear air, and as I looked back the caravan came out to join us—a welcome sight, for the Muhammadians had well have repented at the eleventh hour. Now no longer did I shrink into the desert, however uncertain the adventure, but with a keen sense of exhilaration. The bright morning air, the wide clean levels, the knowledge that the problems of life and existence are reduced on a sudden to their simplest elements, your own wit and endurance being the sole determining factors—all these things brace and quicken the spirit. The way led us as we passed beyond the sulphur springs of Hûrûz. Fattûh held his head higher, and we other men anew, as if we had stepped out into another world, and for a fresh greeting.

"Allah be praised!" said he, and his words went far to restore the lightness of his heart, "I have left three wives behind me."

"Mâshallah!" said Fattûh, "you must be dead happy, gir-gir-gir of them."

"Eh billah!" assented Hussein, "I shut my eyes to my wives, two sons and six daughters, of whom but two are left. Twenty children I have had, and seven wives; three died and one became and returned to her own people, and she shall take another husband this year, please God."

"We will find you a wife," said Fattûh, "find one even if we have to search the world over."

"Yes, we will," answered Hussein politely, "but I would prefer to remain here in Kebeisah every year if I had the means."

"We will not let you do that," said Fattûh, "you will ride in Kebeisah," said I.

# reverse my perspective

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*Further, my view of the purpose of the various buildings has altered during the course of the excavations, especially in relation to the literary sources. This is the natural process in research; never working with conclusive material.*

Robert Koldewey

*L'origine, bien qu'étant une catégorie tout à fait historique, n'a pourtant rien à voir avec la genèse des choses. [...] Elle demande à être reconnue d'une part comme une restauration, une restitution, d'autre part comme quelque chose qui est par là même inachevé, toujours ouvert. [...] L'origine n'émerge pas des faits constatés, mais elle touche à leur pré- et post- histoire.*

Walter Benjamin

Horizon

Horizon

Apparently, we all need landmarks. A point of reference is needed in order to assess our own position in space. To establish a goal elsewhere, a direction. In the absence of artificial constructions, the horizon has become something of an efficient point of reference.

This is then a story of movement. Time plays its role, but it is mainly a matter of weight and space. To measure a distance. To establish a path. To assess its own weight. To calculate its needs. To ensure a means of transportation. To gather resources. To prepare victuals. To estimate a journey, to commence it.

It is only when the journey starts that it is possible to ask "where did we come from?" The question of the origins Their fabrication. I have to admit that this is the kind of question that bothers me. It is a common feeling to be annoyed by this sort of question when amongst those with a multilayered background. The answer to that question is never the same depending of who is asking, where the question is asked and in what situa-

Dans cette exposition, présentée à la Galerie Luise Michel, intitulée : *Horizon archéologique* Enrico Floriddia a rassemblé des pièces diverses, ou plutôt se rapportant aux diverses créations qu'il commente. En fait, la diversité est seulement apparente. Car un fil ténu, mais réel, relie entre elles, aussi bien diachroniquement que synchroniquement ces approches. C'est de la mémoire et surtout de l'oubli qu'il s'agit, de ce que l'artiste appelle l'*horizon archéologique*.

À la suivre dans une proposition visuelle, nous, spectateurs, y repérons ce que l'artiste d'aujourd'hui, en l'occurrence artiste visuel, revendique de la société et de l'*histoire* de son temps. Lui né en Italie, venu en France pour continuer ses études de littérature puis de photographie, il parle plusieurs langues. Et cela dans le sens derridienn, « je n'ai qu'une langue et ce n'est pas la mienne! ». Faire l'*œuvre* de création avec cette même langue c'est évidemment l'ouvrir à un autre et nouvel usage possible, la détourner et l'explorer. Mais l'artiste suggère de concentrer



tion it comes about. In my own case I shouldn't have too many reasons to be bothered. Technically, what some people call *identity* is easy to work out for me. I nevertheless consider myself a displaced person; since I don't know where I belong, I struggle to affirm where I come from. For sure, I journey.

Little is planned. The horizon is an illusion, an abstract line that doesn't exist. Landmarks can be reached. Sometimes it takes a long journey but at the end you stand in front of them. The horizon will always be at the same distance, unbridgeable. Still, it helps us go on.

son attention sur la perspective, sur l'horizon de regard commun. La phrase d'Enrico simple et limpide, m'est venue à l'esprit en suivant le raisonnement subtil présent dans ses œuvres. « Je trouve des éléments. Je les rassemble dans ce que les archéologues appellent un *horizon archéologique*: un ensemble d'artefacts provenant de différents sites disséminés sur la planète qui désignent une culture, ils appartiennent tous à une même strate. Et en donnent à voir d'autres. »

#### Origine

#### Play it by ear

I collect items from the places I go through. Most of the time documents, pages, often images but seldom objects. Objects are heavy, they slow you down. Objects are demanding, they need to be cared of. Objects are witnesses, they bring stories. We often imagine that these stories are hard to understand when they are centuries old, but it happens with very recent ones as well. It is just that the reasons are different.

An archaeological horizon is far away both in space and time. It is the history of a country that I've never visited. This particular archaeological horizon concerns a thirty year old story from a Near Eastern country.

Someone told me that every generation has its own war: the one that forged its own idea of war. It is often a conflict that happened when you were young. I ask myself if this is nothing more than another self-centred European myth – like

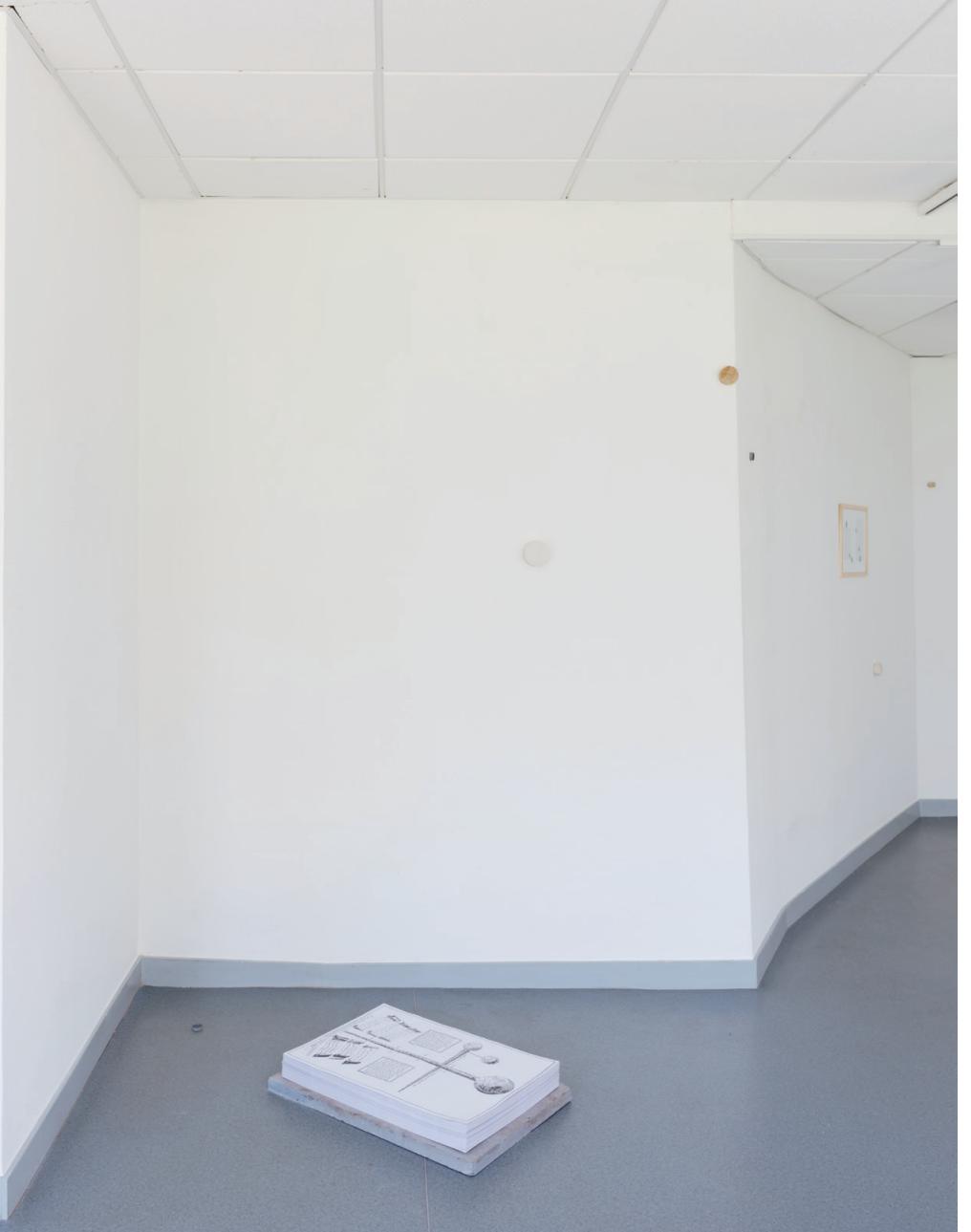
the one that claims that every country in Europe has been at peace since 1945 – yet if I had to point at the first war of which I heard outside of textbooks, it would be the *Gulf War*.

Ce qui nous frappe d'un point de vue artistique, c'est l'importance accordée à Saddam Husayn, à l'événement conflictuel entre Iran et Irak, à la

destruction des palais de Bagdad, recouvert entièrement par le marbre, matériau très cher et complètement absent de la tradition architecturale mésopotamienne. Le dictateur les a fait construire à sa gloire, se voyait comme l'héritier de Nabuchodonosor II. Le plus connu s'appelle *al-Faw Palace* et il est nommé ainsi après la reconquête de la péninsule homonyme,

reconquête considérée comme un tournant de la guerre en 1986. Le travail d'investigation d'Enrico a commencé en 2014, quand il a trouvé les documents et les archives de propagande dans les ruines de l'ancienne Ambassade d'Irak à Berlin. « Comme d'autres pays occidentaux, l'Allemagne a en même temps renforcé le régime en lui fournissant des armes et les moyens de les produire et en a appauvri l'héritage culturel par le biais de prélevements archéologiques » précise l'artiste.

Ce qui nous paraît retenir l'attention d'Enrico Floriddia, c'est que la mémoire de la fin du XXe siècle a changé, si l'on peut dire, de perspective. Mémoire qui sauf-garde, qui éternise, et qui



The Gulf War. Peculiar. When you hear *the Gulf* pour l'effet doit effacer et occulter, elle est une War, what do you think of? Do we think of the mémoire de l'oubli. Il s'agirait de se rappeler, same event? Everything is ambiguous about the malgré tout, ce que les meurtres et les censures expression. First of all: which *gulf*? ont voulu plonger dans l'oubli. Aller chercher des

If you navigate in *Google Earth* between Iran and origines mais pas dans le sens commun mais the Arabian Peninsula you bump into the *Persian* tel réfléchi par Benjamin pour qui l'origine, bien Gulf. Unless you are happen to be online in one qu'êtant une catégorie tout à fait historique, n'ai of the countries of Gulf Coast. In that case, the rien à voir avec la genèse des choses. very same body of water will be labelled as the L'origine ne désigne pas le devenir de ce qui est Arabian Gulf. How the Internet can be comfort- né, mais elle entraîne dans son rythme la matière ing. How intellectual segregation can be com- de ce qui est en devenir. Enfin, Babylone devient fortifying. Thank you, Great G. Let's not enter in le lieu de mémoire et d'origine. Mais y a-t-il conti- deeper explanations and just call it *the Gulf*. You nuité entre ce que dit Benjamin et ce que voit En- know what I am talking about, if not, just ask rico ? Est-ce la même mémoire ? Cette question Great W. Let's be neutral, let those that are priv- est au cœur du travail d'Enrico Floriddia et de ileged keep their advantage for now<sup>1</sup>.

So that place. A war took place there. When?

Some say between 1980 and 1988. Youngsters could associate it with 2003. Most people will think of 1991.

#### 1991: Operation Desert Storm

The first war I ever watched on TV. The first war ever broadcasted with live coverage. I bought it hook, line and sinker. The Evil forces, their victims, the heroes going to rescue them. It was a nice story for a seven year old kid. The characters were a bit clumsy but special effects were impressive. My parents let me watch it because it didn't look very violent: no blood was shown, just fireworks tracing green lines in the skies and plumes of smoke rising in the desert framed by videogamish gun-sights.

No sound. No blasts, no cries, no whistling wind. Images of that war were sanitised. People even doubted that anything was actually going on down there<sup>2</sup>.

Fascinating images of the war. It probably made

pour l'effet doit effacer et occulter, elle est une mémoire de l'oubli. Il s'agirait de se rappeler, malgré tout, ce que les meurtres et les censures ont voulu plonger dans l'oubli. Aller chercher des origines mais pas dans le sens commun mais tel réfléchi par Benjamin pour qui l'origine, bien qu'êtant une catégorie tout à fait historique, n'ai rien à voir avec la genèse des choses. L'origine ne désigne pas le devenir de ce qui est né, mais elle entraîne dans son rythme la matière de ce qui est en devenir. Enfin, Babylone devient le lieu de mémoire et d'origine. Mais y a-t-il continuité entre ce que dit Benjamin et ce que voit Enrico ? Est-ce la même mémoire ? Cette question est au cœur du travail d'Enrico Floriddia et de son œuvre centrale intitulée *Berlin, Iraq*.

Enrico Floriddia questionne la fonction de certaines expositions, qui ne se voudrait qu'historique. Les œuvres, collectionnées, exposées, mémorisées c'est la langue dans sa fonction sociale de communication et d'information. Le

choix des œuvres prend alors toute sa signification. L'artiste interroge la place du musée et de l'exposition. Car, si la fonction du musée était bien de présenter les civilisations soit disparues, soit en train de disparaître, l'artiste prend en considération ce qui n'était pas « montrable » ce qui ne s'apprête pas à une articulation muséale. Il semble bien que dans sa démarche artistique ressorte le besoin d'immémorial, non historique mais historial, de ce qui est oublié et qui doit

être remis en histoire, sorti à la lumière du jour<sup>2</sup>. Comme dans l'œuvre de Hans Haacke, invité à la biennale de Venise en 1993 qui brisa les dalles en marbre du sol du pavillon allemand. Ce bâtiment d'architecture nazie, inauguré en 1934



the US Army dramatically increase its human harvest during the following years. Personally, I was fascinated by the desert.

"The desert is an invention, a creation of emptiness in the plenitude of existence, an introduction of barrenness into the fecundity of being. However dry this biome, it is never entirely vacant. Besides containing rocks and sand, the actual desert from Atacama to the Sahara and from Gobi to Mojave is propitious to certain animals (coyotes and scorpions, chipmunks and rattlesnakes) and plants (barrel cacti and Joshua trees, tumbleweeds and ironwood) that find themselves at home there. It would be the height of arrogance to deem these and countless others of its inhabitants so insignificant that they are sidelined or forgotten, leaving only the last vacuum, the expanding nothingness, that the ecosystem in question has come to denote. An automatic association of the desert with lifelessness betrays precisely such forgetting and neglect, which are, in my view, the side effects of a devastating project — refashioning the earth in the image of abstract thought. "The" desert is abstraction realised, cast over the world at the expense of biological, ecological, and ontological diversity."<sup>3</sup>

#### Mesopotamia

I found myself falling completely into line with that abstraction. The desert as the utter void. With no room for life. Only remote traces of lost civilisations. As human encounters in the desert are theoretically impossible, when they do happen it is necessary to ignore them. It doesn't fit the theorem — maybe if you avoid looking at it after a while it will disappear, perhaps in a plume of smoke.

par Hitler accueillera régulièrement les artistes allemands, dont la prise de position politique résonnera au-delà du monde de l'art. Comme encore l'an passé, lors de la biennale d'architecture, certains murs du pavillon allemand étaient abattus en vue d'ouverture. Oui, les artistes allemands tant séparés par le mur de Berlin, ne sont pas tentés d'en construire d'autres. Ils veulent les abattre quand d'autres pays projettent d'en construire.

Une signature de l'inachèvement présente sur ses œuvres souligne la différence entre production et création. Le goût d'Enrico pour le fragment ou l'esquisse, où le geste répétitif des mains, qui déplacent ses documents après qu'ils aient été posés et filmés, marque le projet interrompu du livre d'histoire en train de s'écrire (*Berlin, Iraq, 2016*). « Ma pratique se focalise sur la fabrication de la culture, sa manipulation et sur l'idée d'héritage culturel » dit l'artiste. C'est une exposition qui peut faire réfléchir le sociologue et l'historien, une exposition où la « ruine » ou les « ruines » ne sont pas considérées comme des objets rares ou comme des restes qui migrent d'un lieu à l'autre, mais comme sur ce quoi nous pouvons aussi construire. À la vision de l'homme comptable, dont on mesure plus en plus les dégâts, l'artiste oppose la puissance de l'art. Les monnaies de marbre, comme pièce d'échange, entre les continents, les architectures, les styles, ils résistent discrètement à l'idée capitaliste du marché. Ils suspendent de l'intérieur le pouvoir commercial d'agir sur les autres. Chez Enrico, la forme, le genre, la matière historique et artistique sont adoptés non seulement pour amender ses œuvres mais surtout pour en éclairer le



Human encounters are present in both Gertrude Bell and Henry James Whigham's accounts of the desert. Of course, Bell gave some importance to these encounters: she learned the language and local customs. She wasn't a tourist, she was a fugitive from her own country, and sometimes it seems like she even wanted to loose herself in the vast lands of the Syrian desert. She lived for journeying, for establishing a path — sometimes where there were no landmarks. She wrote incessantly. The beauty of her long descriptions is unnerving. She indulged herself in literature the same way she did in the apparently barren desert. She was zealous. Few of her contemporaries understood her work, and she kept herself unreachable, but she was useful to His Majesty's Empire, and she aided the British Imperial Army.

Whigham plays a different tune. He wasn't subject to the forms of exoticism that drove Gertrude Bell. He was just irritated by all that sand in his boots and essentially interested in how industry functioned in that godforsaken place. He was happy to meet another westerner digging out small pieces of enamelled bricks from a hole in the ground. In actuality, the westerners just watched the locals digging and gave instructions on how put the findings onto sound crates. Following Whigham lines everything looks like bad literature. Inanimate. You can feel the same disenchantment in ninety per cent of foreign correspondents' personal accounts of exotic places. The only thing lacking are the accurate descriptions of hotel rooms and their mini-bars. Whigham doesn't see people. The only real things are the mute traces of a civilisation he was once told about when he was a child. Summer, Babylon, Assyria. After Alexander the Great, history stopped in Mesopotamia. The creative valley between two rivers became an intellectual desert. A desert where the bases of mathemat-

sens à nouveau et, d'une certaine manière, en poursuivre l'écriture. Dans leurs flottements de statuts, la création continue à l'infini, étant ouvert à l'éternelle évolution et à l'histoire des hommes. Et l'œuvre d'art ne se forme pas au terme prescrit d'une exposition ou par l'intention initiale de l'artiste, mais là, où celui-ci l'arrête arbitrairement, alors que tout en lui semble résister à l'achèvement.

C'est cette « résistance » qui définit le mieux l'humanité, qui augure également de la liberté de l'homme, notamment celle de décider de sa politique. C'est aussi la condition de l'histoire, laquelle s'écrit en référence à un oubli et un manque : celui des origines.

Résistance

L'artiste se réfère à Benjamin pour exprimer cette dialectique de l'origine et de la genèse, ces éléments de puissance en acte qui sont au cœur de la création, marqués par la « résistance ». En un double sens : résistance aux paroles de l'histoire, au paradigme (du grec montrer, comparer) de la mémoire, à travers lequel le pouvoir s'exerce, afin de nous imposer sa seule et vérifiable vision. Mais dans l'autre sens aussi, plus intime peut-être, qui désigne pour Enrico, à la lumière de Benjamin, le hiatus, le moment de « résistance » qui perdure chez l'artiste entre son pouvoir, son talent d'agir sur l'histoire et l'acte créateur comme tel. C'est un suspens, qui dévient une réticence à l'égard du monde, une rétention qui donne à l'œuvre sa propre nécessité et singularité.

Peut-on identifier les interférences esthétiques à l'origine de ces paradigmes dans la tradition occidentale ? Pour parler d'elle il faudrait trouver alors une perspective extérieure ; trouver un point de vue qui est hors de nous-même ? Mais existe-



ics are translated and developed, navigation systems are acquired and Aristotelian philosophy is discussed. One thousand and one years of arid darkness.

Therefore the name that the ancient Greeks gave to that land lasted as the undying, unchanging name of the place. It is untenable. Like giving the name of another region to a new continent, just because you got wrong the first time. Like using an Italian word to name a continent with centuries of civilisations preceding the Renaissance from eight thousand kilometres away. Like taking the name of the whole continent and using it to designate just a part of it. You name it.

#### Language

Naming things is an act of power. The myth of Babel is a telling one in this regard. In a city where everybody was able to understand each other, things ran smoothly. Humans were building something marvellous, defying their own limits. In order to stop that, it was necessary to sow discord. It was necessary to fragment the language. It was necessary to divide people. One could say this is the moment when history started. At least the history of translation.

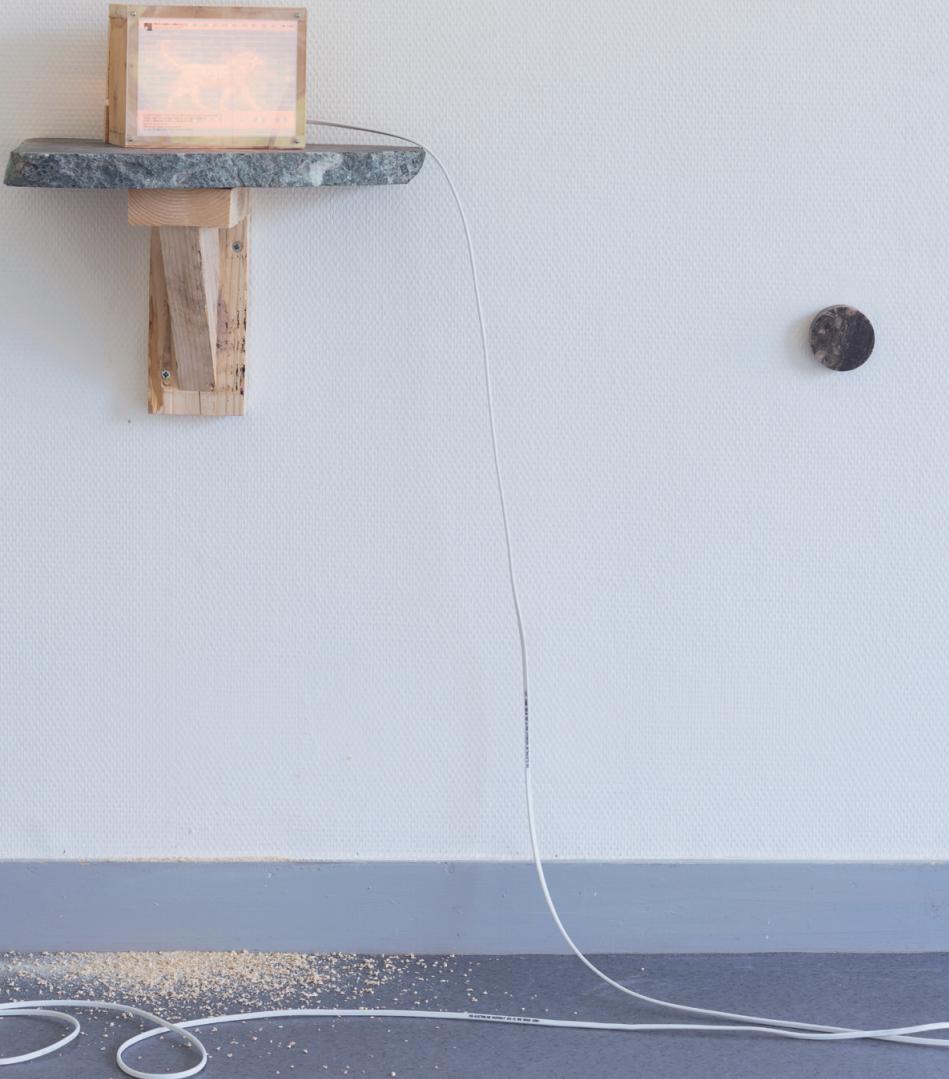
Athanasius Kircher's career was propelled by his skills as a translator from Coptic, Arabic and – preposterously – the translation of Egyptian Hieroglyphs into Latin. The mystery about his sources of knowledge allowed him to advance and move to Rome, the centre of his world, and yet, the more he published the more his contemporaries doubted his actual competence. His credibility was fading amongst the scholars, but his success was rising fast. It didn't matter if his machines worked or not or if his sloppy hieroglyphs translations were nothing else than

il ? Ou c'est une relation mobile, un horizon mobile, une perspective mobile, qui nous déplacent constamment dans le rythme des bombes qui tombent et des champs des victimes qui crient au secours ? Une absence d'horizon, paradoxalement, conditionne l'avenir même. Le surgissement de l'événement doit trouver son horizon d'attente. La rupture de la perspective historique, peut être la révolution ?

#### V.E.R.D.I.

Faut-il reconnaître que le chant de Nabucco, qui résonne dans toutes les œuvres, permet au passage à Floriddia de pointer l'existence de ces exclus, dont la mémoire n'est pas prise en compte. Dont le nom ne compte pas, qui n'entrent pas dans ce que, de la société, peut être mémorisé. On peut y ajouter, dans notre présent, les immigrés, les réfugiés, ceux qui fuient...

Enrico annonce que, « mon projet serait terminé si je réussissais à représenter l'opéra Nabucco dans les ruines de Babylone ». C'est dans le théâtre, construit par Husayn qu'en 1988 a été peut-être déjà joué l'opéra politique de Giuseppe Verdi. Et le chant des esclaves hébreux résonnerait aujourd'hui dans une dissonance aiguë à l'endroit, où le récit a pris le feu – selon les mots d'Agamben. Est-ce que plongés dans les sonorités nationalistes<sup>3</sup>, les peuples hébreux, tel que les Italiens de l'époque de l'unification, qui criaient : VIVA V.E.R.D.I. (Vive Victor Emmanuel Roi D'Italie), ou de l'année 2012, lors de la représentation devant Berlusconi seront-ils exhortés par la musique ? Quel public sera pris à la gorge, dans une réaction viscérale à la lamentation des esclaves qui chantaient : « Oh ma patrie, si belle et perdue ! » ? A l'époque ce sont les Hébreux qui suppliaient de leur venir en aide face aux Ba-



creative inventions. Facts didn't matter if he was able to deliver a vision. Moreover, he retained the key to access the ridiculous amount of knowledge hidden by eastern languages. He was a bridge. An unstable and slippery bridge that allowed the journey to carry on. He was part of that long chain of people that passed information throughout time and space. He probably didn't understand much of it, but it didn't matter. He was foolish and arrogant. He was precious. He had the arrogance to illustrate the tower of Babel as a human folly and demonstrate its absurdity by the means of his incorrect physics. He had the arrogance to illustrate the tower of Babel by using the image of a monument of an Islamic civilisation which he had largely ignored. He had the arrogance to claim he knew everything and show it off.

#### To wander

Even Kircher the Wise had it wrong. How to talk about this tale, then? Which words to use to describe recent Iraqi history? Should I indulge my desire to go to Babylon? My thirst for the exotic? Or should I stay ten thousand kilometres away and just trigger in Iraq a sound that I will never hear? I too could then make a movie about "the luckiest guy in Iraq"<sup>4</sup>. Should I name a people after the ethnic division that Saddam Husayn exploited and fed? Or maybe the religious division that the US occupation exploited? Should I participate in the construction of the account about the cradle of civilisation? The very same account repeated over and over by each and every museum that holds a piece of this fiction? Should I just try to lose myself in the vast expand of sand? The only certain thing is that I look forward to setting up an opera in the ruins of Babylon. This

byloniens, Seraient-t-ils maintenant les Arabes qui espèrent en l'aide divine ? Qui constituerait maintenant un garant de paix entre les Hébreux et les Babyloniens, les Juifs et les Arabes ?

Le palais dévasté de Nabuchodonosor II, que Saddam Husayn à fait entièrement reconstruire, grandiose et aussi artificiel qu'un décor de cinéma exprimait le rêve du nouveau bâtisseur et symbolisait la chute de son empire. Saddam Husayn rêvait d'être un roi du monde arabe, un fondateur de la « grande nation arabe », réuni autour d'une légendaire tour de Babel. Mais il s'est laissé prendre dans un tourbillon d'histoire qui attire sans cesse le présent vers un horizon dévastateur de devenir. L'histoire au sens de récit et non de chronologie a commencé à s'écrire là. Et on continue à raconter l'histoire, comme Jean-Yves Jouannais, qui lit son *Encyclopédie des guerres en train de s'écrire*, séance après séance. Selon Agamben, « tout récit - toute la littérature - est, en un certain sens, mémoire de la perte du feu<sup>4</sup>. » Le désir constant de compléter la mémoire du monde nous incite à préserver et sauvegarder encore et toujours plus, puisque notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament. Mais le temps efface les traces, érode les mémoires, il reste la destruction comme élément de l'histoire naturelle<sup>5</sup>, parce que l'élimination comme procédé est le réflexe<sup>6</sup> de l'avenir.

Małgorzata Gryglewicz

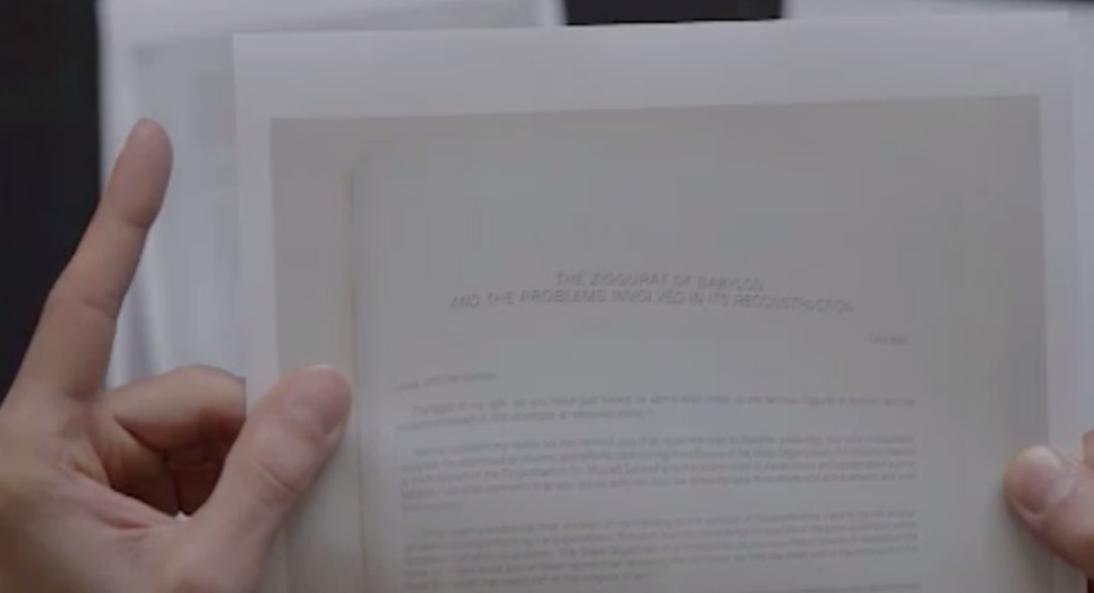
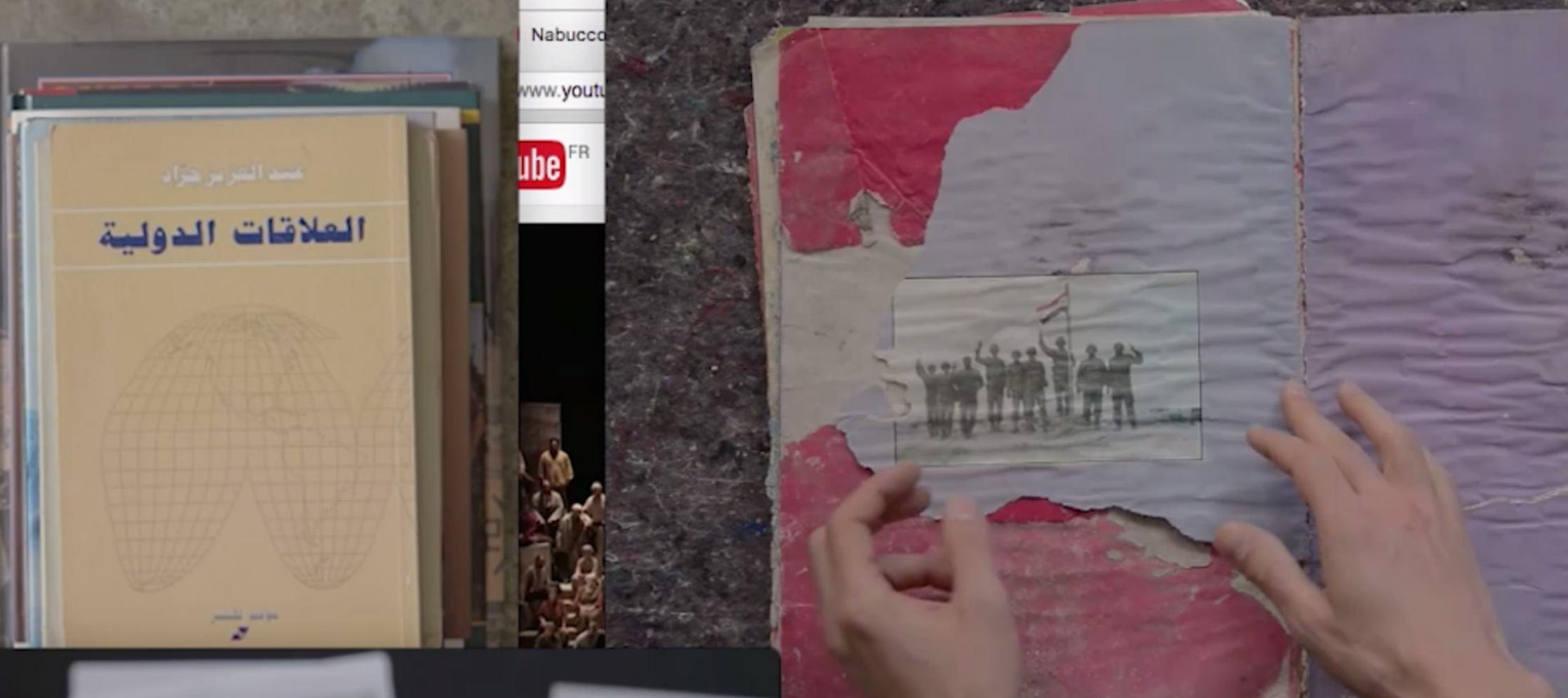


is the kind of unbridgeable horizon that nurtures my wandering.

Every character in this chapter is in motion, some of them moved objects, other moved people. They all stared at the horizon. In the chapters that follow, I will dig new words out of the desert in order to displace the terms of their stories.

Enrico Floriddia

- 1 Derrida, Jacques Derrida, *Le Monologisme de l'autre ou la prothèse d'origine*, Paris, Galilée, 1996.
  - 2 J.-L. Deotte, *Le musée, l'origine de l'esthétique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1993.
  - 3 L'air du « Chœur des esclaves » du Nabucco de Verdi accompagne les meetings de Jean-Marie Le Pen dès 1984.
  - 4 Giorgio Agamben, *Le feu et le récit*, Rivages, 2015.
  - 5 W. G. Sebald, *De la destruction comme élément de l'histoire naturelle*, Actes sud, 2004,
  - 6 Le terme reflex est couramment utilisé pour désigner un type d'appareil photographique mono-objectif, dans lequel un même objectif sert à la fois à la visée et à la prise de vue. Lors de la visée, un miroir réfléchit vers le verre de visée l'image produite par l'objectif (d'où le nom de reflex). Ce miroir se relève brièvement lors de la prise de vue, afin de laisser la lumière atteindre la surface sensible.
1. T. Minh-ha, *Reassemblage*, 1983.  
2. J. Baudrillard, *La Guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu*, Galilée, Paris, 1991.  
3. M. Marder, *The desert is a state of mind cast over the earth*, Cabinet, n. 63, spring 2017.  
4. R. Sahakian, *What We Are Fighting For*, e-flux Journal n. 84, September 2017.





previous page

berlin, iraq

page précédente



BY THE WATERS O

within half an hour's ride of Bagdad, and the strange pile of brick-work like Birs Nimrud, the meaning attached to it, is not now known. Otherwise it is safe to say that no foreigner would ever go near that part, fate took me to Babylon

on the easiest route to Bagdad. I have much more than time to pass at the latter, containing as they do a yearly increasing stream of pilgrims, and which especially attract attention at certain points on the route of the mud-brick railway. I am free to confess that I found the ruins of Babylon an interesting feature of an eight days' journey, which is accounted for by the fact that one of the German exploring expeditions under Koldwey and the extraordinary efforts of he and his colleagues, Dr. Weissbach, in their endeavour to make archæology attractive to the Philistine visitors.

Babylon itself is about sixty miles from Bagdad, and the journey to it can be made in a few hours or less if one takes a steamer up the Tigris daily to Hillah can be secured. It is necessary to the purpose to spend at least two days at Babylon, Hillah, Birs Nimrud, Kerbela, and other places. In this way a longer stay is usually taken by travellers, but which I was obliged to give because owing to

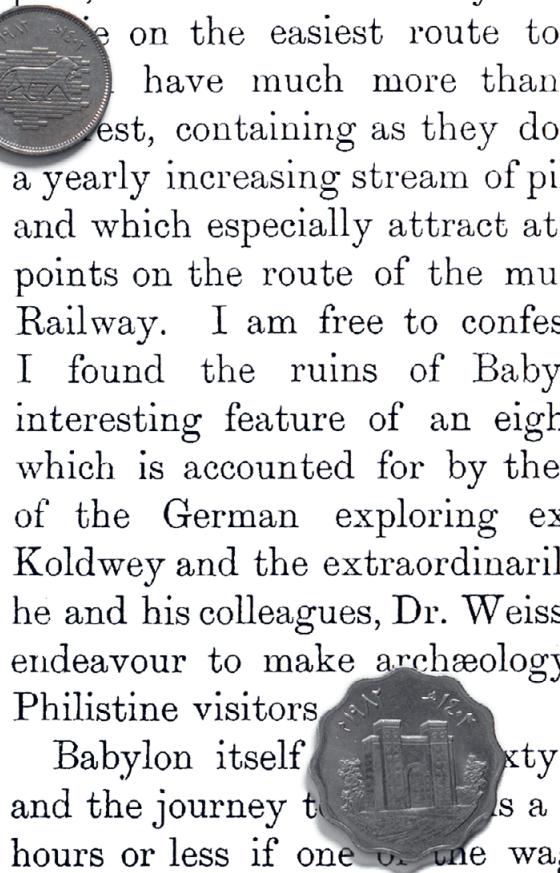


## CHAPTER XII

### BABYLON AND THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

THE visitor to Bagdad, if he is not confronted with many modern objects of interest beyond the kaleidoscopic details of a flourishing Eastern bazaar, has an embarrassment of riches to choose from in the way of archaic ruins. The valley of the twin rivers is literally strewn with the rubble of past ages. In his way over the desert the traveller tramples at almost every step on broken bricks that date back to the Babylonian period. His eye is constantly arrested by the sheen of potsherd that was burnt blue when the Mohammedan religion was in its infancy. The few landmarks of the dreary waste are mounds of sand-covered masonry such as Akarkouf or Birs Nimrud or Babel or the Arch of Ctesiphon, whose origin or intention is still sometimes a matter for conjecture in spite of all the science of the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, most of the remains of Mesopotamia's greatness are without interest or beauty, except in the eyes of the archæologist. A visitor to Bagdad visits the Arch of Ctesiphon and the ruins of Birs Nimrud because one has ample time to inspect them while the river steamer ploughs its way up stream round the tortuous bends of the Tigris. Zobeide's tomb is



f the Residency in Akarkouf, a mass of with less apparent much more difficult of to assert that few them. For my own because it happened Nejef and Kerbela, a mere antiquarian rich shrines whither lgrimage is directed, tention at present as ch-canvassed Bagdad less that in the event lon much the most nt days' tour, a fact presence at Babylon xpedition under Dr. ly kind way in which sbach and Mr. André, y easy for the most

miles from Bagdad, matter of forty-eight ggonettes which run

But it is much more st a week in going to Kifl, Kufah, Nejef, and circuit is made which e reverse order, ish in the order d of pilgrims. a



previous page

coins, national mint of iraq, 1982

page précédente



Vorderasiatisches Museum  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

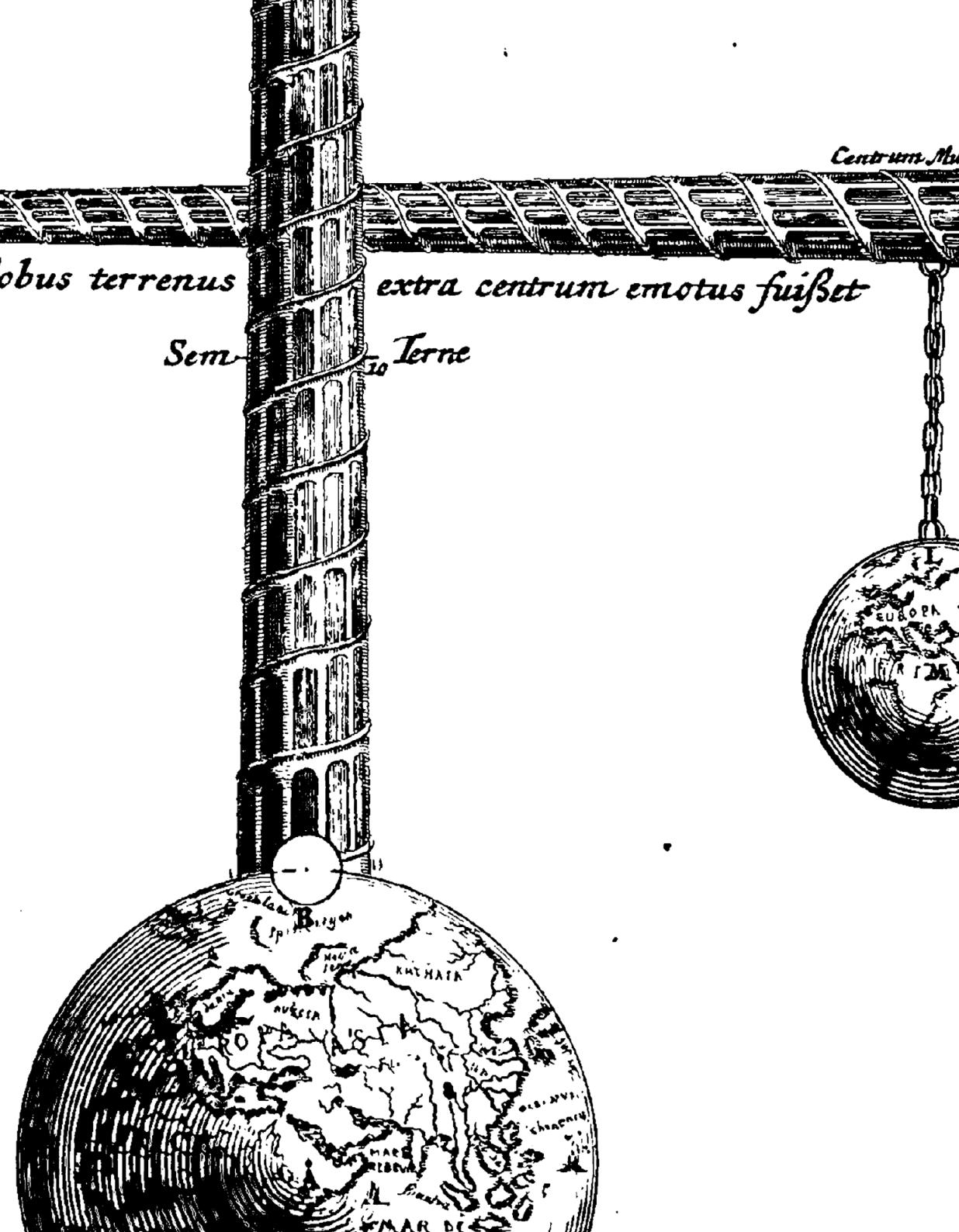
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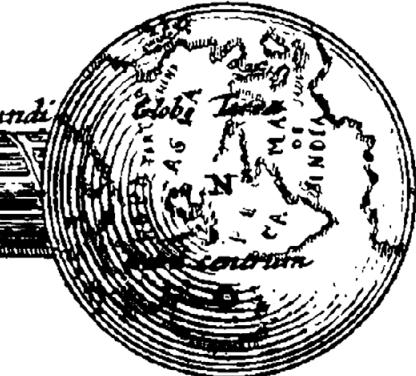


Centrum Mu-

*Data hypothesi quantum globus terrenus extra centrum emotus fuisset*

Sem-Terre





# exhibits

*Berlin, Iraq*, video made with documents from the former Iraqi Embassy at the GDR, soundtrack from the opera *Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi, 2016

*Berlin, Iraq*, video réalisé avec des documents de l'ancienne ambassade d'Irak en RDA, bande sonore extraite de l'opéra *Nabucco* de Giuseppe Verdi, 2016

*Crates, Iraq Museum*

*Crates, DDR Vorderasiatisches Museum*

*Crates, British Museum*

*Crates, Musée du Louvre*

*Crates, Pergamon Museum*

lightboxes with postcards from the museum hosting pieces from Mesopotamia, 2017

*Crates, Iraq Museum*

*Crates, DDR Vorderasiatisches Museum*

*Crates, British Museum*

*Crates, Musée du Louvre*

*Crates, Pergamon Museum*

caissons lumineux avec cartes postales des musées qui abritent des pièces de Mésopotamie, 2017

*Cronology*, texts, chronology of Iraq-Germany relations, 2016

*Cronology*, textes, chronologie des relations Irak-Allemagne, 2016

*Babylon revival*, marble coins, 2016

*Babylon revival*, pièces de monnaie en marbre, 2016

*Semi-monologue*, 8 sound recordings of Enrico Floridia talking about his research to eight different audiences, 2016-17

*Semi-monologue*, 8 enregistrements d'Enrico Floriddia qui relate ses recherches à huit audiences différentes, 2016-17

*Coins, National Mint of Iraq, 1979*

*Coins, National Mint of Iraq, 1982*

fine art prints, with an excerpt from Gertrude Bell, *Amurath to Amurath* (1911) and palm theme coins and an excerpt from Henry James Whigham, *The Persian problem* (1903) and coin commemorating the rebuilding of Babylon, 2017

*Coins, National Mint of Iraq, 1979*

*Coins, National Mint of Iraq, 1982*

tirage, avec un extrait de Gertrude Bell, *Amurath to Amurath* (1911) et des pièces sur le thème du palmier et un extrait de Henry James Whigham, *The Persian problem* (1903) et des pièces commémoratives de la reconstruction de Babylone, 2017

*Turris babel*, poster, image from Athanasius Kircher, *Turris Babel sive Archontologia...* (1679) illustrating a preposterous scientific demonstration of how it was impossible to build the Tower of Babel, 2017

*Turris babel*, affiche extraite de Athanasius Kircher, *Turris Babel sive Archontologia...* (1679) en illustrant une démonstration prétendument scientifique de l'impossibilité de construire la Tour de Babel, 2017

*Library*, documentation about Iraqi international relation, recent history and archaeology, 2014-17

*Library*, documentation sur les relations internationales, histoire récente et l'archéologie de l'Irak, 2014-17

*Cradle of civilisation*, pp. 20-21, UV print from *Cradle of civilisation* (1967), 2017

*Cradle of civilisation*, pp. 20-21, tirage UV, issu de *Cradle of civilisation* (Le berceau de la civilisation, 1967), 2017



# imprint

Held at the Galerie Louise Michel, 25 rue Edith Piaf, Poitiers, France, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September to the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, the exhibition *Archaeological horizon. Chapter I: an army of expert diggers* by Enrico Floriddia has been produced by the City of Poitiers, Culture and Heritage department. It is part of the Artists' Studio initiative.

The City of Poitiers thanks the artist Enrico Floriddia, Małgorzata Gryglewicz, the EESI European School for Visual Arts and the services related to this production.

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Curator: Dominique Truco, visual arts development project manager  
Cultural coordinator: François Bouet

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Proofreading for English: Matthew Rosen

Set-up assistants: Savannah Garcia, Mathis Sabrié

Photographs and graphic design: Enrico Floriddia

Commissaire d'exposition : Dominique Truco, chargée de mission pour le développement des arts plastiques  
Coordination culturelle : François Bouet

Textes : Małgorzata Gryglewicz, Enrico Floriddia

Relecture pour l'Anglais : Matthew Rosen

Assistants à l'accrochage : Savannah Garcia, Mathis Sabrié

Crédit photographique et graphisme : Enrico Floriddia



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# enrico floriddia

## AN ARMY OF EXPERT DIGGERS

A modern archeological team is divided into task forces, each with its appointed duties. Leading the expedition at Nippur are four professional archeologists who are in charge of some 110 men, a team slightly smaller than the average one in Mesopotamia. One professional must have a knowledge of architecture so as to be able to interpret ruins. The architect at Nippur is also the field director, James E. Knudstad of the University of Chicago, shown standing alone in the foreground. Behind him, from right to left, are a surveyor, who draws plans of the site; a photographer, who takes pictures of all major finds; an epigrapher, who translates cuneiform tablets; and a representative of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities, who reports on the team's progress.

Behind the Iraqi representative is the foreman of the laborers; behind him are the skilled diggers and the men who convey sand away in carts. The service staff—cook, driver, waiters, watchmen—surrounds the Landrover vehicle at right. Behind the Landrover stand the heavy pick-handlers and, to the left of them, the shovelmen. In the background are the workers who haul sand out of excavated areas in burlap bags.

