blocks of Late Gothic and to spin some engaging descriptive passages, or ekphrasis, while at the same time demonstrating his enviable acquaintance (with beautiful photography) with a wide range of buildings extending from eastern Europe to Spain. The most effective section of this chapter deals with vaulting, a discussion in which the author introduces his idea of “pictorial vaults.” We encounter here some very eloquent figurative language: of Sankt Valentin and Krenstetten in upper Austria Kavaler writes, “The vault appears to pour down to form a type of capital, a box-like structure that surrounds the column like a clamp gripping a wooden dowel” (137).

Chapter 3 deals with microarchitecture, a theme first introduced to the scholarly world in the 1960s by François Bucher and profitably explored in multiple rich essays by Achim Timmermann. Microarchitecture celebrated the rites and functions of the church, dramatizing the performance of baptism and the Eucharistic sacrament and offering a dramatic platform (pulpit) for the reading of scriptures and sermons. The mode induces reflection on scalelessness: as represented in the Vienna drawings, small objects can look like monumental spires.

I found chapter 4, “Natural Forms,” the most inspired section of the book, leading as it does to the central trope in the story of Gothic as an architectural mode derived from trees not yet cut down (Raphael and Vasari). Natural forms, already incorporated in earlier Gothic buildings, reached a crescendo in the decades around 1500: “Architectural members suddenly morph into living forms, an effective artistic conceit and an instrument for conveying the mystical nature of religious experience. These botanical forms, these vines, branches, flowers, and the like, could communicate the miracle of animation, of vivification and flowers, and the like, could communicate botanical forms, these vines, branches, of mimetic forms and signifying masters’ consummate command over techniques of their art. We are offered images of tracery that seems to be breaking apart and has been tied together with “rope,” carved in the stone as well as ribs that seem to have missed their landing point in the springing of the vault and have been secured by “bolts”—again carved in stone. This is a self-conscious critique of the old relationship between articulation and structure. Gothic tradition had been associated with a prematerial world of geometrical forms and properties that registered the divine imprint in pure mathematical terms. The new games challenged this extraworldly status: metaphysical became physical with a radical assertion of mundane materiality. It is, above all, this deconstructive mentality that confirms Kavaler’s thesis that the Gothic of the decades around 1500 should not be seen as a simple continuation of what went before but rather as “a vibrant, vital mode that borrowed essential constructive elements from earlier Gothic designs but turned these to radically new purposes” (265).

Renaissance Gothic sets out to be provocative, and some readers may have reservations. Kavaler is self-conscious in choosing a scholarly mode resembling that of Paul Frankl, one that focuses on the “aesthetic” of the style. But should we recognize the essentially subjective nature of the noun aesthetic? While the author is a master of ekphrasis, others might find a different set of architectural qualities in a particular building. A different selection of buildings, moreover, might change the flavor of the phenomenon as a whole. The Frankl mode also tends to insulate the monuments from their context, liturgical function, and structural behavior. I would have liked to hear about the structural behavior of, for example, the great vault of the Vladislav Hall or the hanging pendants of Oxford Cathedral. The structural viability of the spectacular jubé of the Saint-Madeleine Church in Troyes is secured by a bridge-like mechanism in the radial coursing that runs across the entire screen transcending the three “bays.”

These are minor points, outweighed by the great virtues of a book that brings to the attention of the reader an extraordinary range of monuments, accompanied by eloquent commentaries, together with some exciting new insights on architectural form and the production of meaning.

STEPHEN MURRAY
Columbia University

Note

Ömür Harmanşah
Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East

The urban and architectural traditions of Syro-Anatolia, the region of southeastern Turkey and northern Syria, are the focus of Ömür Harmanşah’s Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East. As the “world’s desire” in preclassical antiquity, this is the area where the great conquests of the founders of the Hittite Kingdom were directed, through which the Hittite state became acquainted with ancient Mesopotamian lore, and where Assyria had also turned its face on its westward expansion.
Syro-Anatolia is a region of deep-seated traditions of city building that reach back to the third millennium BCE; it is the geographic area to which Hittite culture had shifted from its Anatolian heartland by the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1530–1200 BCE), and where it remained throughout the Early Iron Age (ca. 1200–850 BCE). It was also the region most coveted by the Assyrian kings, from their forays in the Middle Assyrian period (ca. 1350–1000 BCE) down to its annexation in the eighth century BCE; here they hunted elephants and ostriches, symbolically washed their weapons in the Mediterranean Sea, and exploited the much-prized ivory-carving workshops and viticulture that both flourished in the area. The Egyptian Empire had also aspired toward Syria, with the Thutmose- side conquests of the fifteenth century BCE reaching the river Orontes, where famously the Battle of Kadesh was fought in the thirteenth century BCE. As the alleged location of the Cedar Forest of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, it was a region of mythical grandeur, admired for its position as a commercial crossroads and for the high levels of culture and civilization attained by its often singular civic polities.

Cities and the Shaping of Memory in the Ancient Near East is a much-needed and welcome project, investigating through the lens of archaeology the built environment of this cosmopolitan and still relatively poorly understood area together with that of northern Iraq. The book takes its thematic cue from the symmetrical movement of the two great empires of western Asia in Near Eastern antiquity, the Hittite and the Assyrian, across the Late Bronze and Iron Ages. Even though the shift in Assyria’s administrative core from the Upper Middle to the Upper Tigris left it within the traditional Assyrian heartland, and thereby in contrast to the more radical Hittite move, the connection is interesting and meaningful. In tandem with this dual geographic shift, Harmanşah explores the region’s cultural transition from the Late Bronze to the Early Iron Age, a complex topic that the author handles with thoughtfulness.

Harmanşah’s approach is at times embedded in landscape archaeology and anthropological theories of space. He has immense familiarity with surveys, excavations, and the physical geography of the area. At times, he brings to readers’ attention monuments still obscure even to the scholar of the ancient Near East, such as the Late Hittite commemorative stelae from the Malatya area (ancient Melid) in Turkey, those of Elbistan Karahöyük, İzgın, İspecçür, and Darende, works of art of great mystery and handsomeness (chapter 2). He lays out in meticulous detail the dynamics of the shifting Hittite (chapter 2) and Assyrian (chapter 3) landscapes and the accompanying urban and settlement developments. This approach involves a clearly declared critical distance from architectural history as it is often conceived, and proposes a new horizon in the study of the built environment.

The author takes up a rather elusive topic, the architectural koiné of orthostat slabs as wall revetments, and carries it onto a mainstream platform of discussion (chapter 5). He reveals the extent to which this phenomenon is a structural and architectural idiom in its original conception before it becomes a hallmark of figural representation in Hittite and Assyrian cultures. Harmanşah draws attention to its roots in Middle Bronze Age Syria, and traces its earliest manifestations in sites such as Ehla, Halab (Aleppo), Alalah, and Tilmen Höyük. Seeing in these finely dressed, thick, upright slabs the robust aesthetic of royal patronage, he aptly invokes notions of ontology and poetics in the craft of contemporary stone masons, which he regards as a supraregional network of artisanal knowledge. The links drawn here among the Middle Assyrian state, its orthostats and interest in Syria, and the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Hittite reinterpretations of the orthostatic technology to incorporate relief sculpture, are highly illuminating. As the final chapter of the book before an epilogue (chapter 6), one wonders if chapter 5 could have preceded the chapter on Nimrud and Carchemish and their sculptured orthostats (chapter 4) in order to provide a clearer presentation, especially for students.

From the perspective of ancient urbanism, according to Harmanşah, urban form is the result of an interaction and negotiation between an ideal blueprint, as preconceived especially by royal patronage, and the serendipity of the social milieu generated by the city, once built, and its surroundings. The archaeological record is the most authoritative mirror for these dynamics, which Harmanşah construes as a complex and multidimensional interaction among interventions in landscape and terrain, founding of new cities, formation of regional centers, state spectacles, architectural aesthetics, the accumulation of commemorative monuments over time, royal inscriptions, and visual representation. He asserts that it is the whole package of these activities, and not an isolated single domain, that enables the “shaping of memory” and that, accordingly, one should conjure up all these elements when reading ancient urbanism and architecture in the archaeological record.

Central to the author’s perspective is also a critical position that has driven archaeological inquiry over a number of decades now, one that favors the “specific” over the “general,” the “local” and “idiosyncratic” over “select highlights,” so much so that it has qualified itself as the only acceptable contextual approach in the study of material culture. But Harmanşah hardly steps outside the monumental record in his close readings of the evidence, despite the discussion and extensive literature cited in settlement, regional, and landscape archaeology. His declared theme of the complex interaction between the planned and the serendipitous seems to be outweighed by his readings of the inner cities of Nimrud and Carchemish, representative case studies if not highlights, as ideologically conceived and carefully articulated within the span of only a few interrelated reigns (chapter 4). Harmanşah stresses that he does not approach space as a “work of art” to be studied as a rarefied or abstracted object; rather, he sees it embedded in a much larger and dynamic picture of changing social and landscape parameters. In the end, however, the author does not fully avoid treating both the Ninurta Temple of Ashurnasirpal II and its sculptural program at Nimrud as works of art (chapter 4), and indeed he lays bare the palatial structure at Tilmen Höyük as a remarkable instance of architecture as fine art (chapter 5).1

Harmanşah’s comparative perspective in the treatment of Nimrud and Carchemish...
in chapter 4 is judicious. The focus of analysis is the city and its festivals. Highly original here is the author’s discussion of the Neo-Hittite columned portico, the alleged bri-te-tlani, as a specifically festive gateway, with roots in the imperial Hittite KILLAM (bilammar) festival, which was a gateway celebration. The conclusion to this chapter is one of the best passages in the book.

One sometimes feels that statements of method and approach consume the better part of Harmanşah’s study. A plethora of concepts and keywords is found throughout: spatial practices, commemorative practices, cultural practices, social practices, local practices, spatial narrative, visual culture, performativity, materiality, identity, place making, cultural biography, to name a few. A smaller selection of such terms used more sparingly would bear greater effectiveness. And some questions can be raised. Is every aspect of material culture to be explained only by the world around and outside it? As the author would have it, all correlates of culture are “part and parcel” of one indivisible, helical sweep encompassing settlements, the digging of irrigation canals, the opening of quarries, the planting of orchards, the founding of cities, the carving of rock reliefs, the raising of orthostats, and—when it is time—the carving of orthostats with royal inscriptions and pictorial imagery, in the midst of all of which revolve state festivals— the carving of orthostats with royal inscriptions and pictorial imagery, in the midst of all of which revolve state festivals.

Harmanşah’s book would have benefited from a lighter load of theoretical agenda yoked to its chapters, some of whose gist is perhaps much more immediately available in the articles published by the author on the various aspects of this study. Such an observation, however, cannot over- ride the importance of collecting within one volume all this rich material in bringing to attention the many elusive cultural aspects of a crucial but still relatively little understood geographic area during a key span of time in Near Eastern antiquity.

Mehmet-Alı Ataç
Bryn Mawr College

Notes
1. One is reminded here of Barry Kemp, Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1989]), 111–60, a chapter titled “Dynamics of Culture,” which makes a case for the crucial role of the “preformal,” meaning local, rudimentary, or provincial, in the forging of ancient Egyptian dynastic culture, especially architecture, in contrast to an “art historical” method that picks and chooses highlights and achievements in explaining historical development (esp. 112). Kemp’s very apt emphasis on the “preformal,” however, is readable only in reference to the ancient Egyptian monumental record, which eventually ends up taking the upper hand in the intellectual agenda of his book as well. Here, it is not so much Kemp’s approach that is problematic as it is the way in which he (mis)represents or (mis)constructs a scholarly discipline, art history (and what it really does), against which he would like to juxtapose and justify his own. Comparable, in principle, is Harmanşah’s choice of words in stating that he is taking into consideration the thickness of the orthostat slabs and not just their “fancy representational surfaces,” which, according to him, have been analyzed in the “standard art historical” fashion.
2. We are often conditioned to value three-dimensionality in our perceptions of architecture and space. An unusual but revealing discussion that argues for an essentially two-, even one-, dimensional, planar and linear, mind-set in ancient Mesopotamian conceptions of architecture and space may be found in Irene J. Winter, “Reading Concepts of Space from Ancient Mesopotamian Monuments,” in Concepts of Space, Ancient and Modern, ed. K. Vatsayan (New Delhi: Abhinav, 1991), 57–73, which Harmanşah also lists in his extensive bibliography.

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Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention
New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press and the Art Institute of Chicago, 2011, 192 pp., 140 color and 75 b/w illus. $60, ISBN 9780300167047

In 1967 a group of five buildings bearing the name Marina City opened for business on the north bank of the Chicago River. The city greeted the addition enthusiastically, and on two levels—cultural and social. The arts community recognized the pair of sixty-story towers that dominated the new complex as architecturally unprecedented in Chicago. Unlike most of the city’s tall buildings, they were cylindrical, not rectilinear. They were constructed of concrete, not steel. Forty-two stories of residences with balconies above were served by fourteen stories of parking ramps immediately below, and the edges of both were curved. The designers did not intend the resemblance, but the public could not help likening the elevations to a pair of giant corncobs and enjoying the comparison. So much for Chicago’s early, fascinated response to the vision newly materialized on the river. No less important, especially to the city’s movers and shakers, was the probable demographic impact of Marina City on the inner city. Chicago had recently witnessed a major population shift, with downtown steadily losing numbers, and economic and political clout, to the suburbs. For a variety of reasons Marina City promised a reversal of these fortunes.

In 1959 William McFetridge, head of the Chicago Janitors’ Union, approached local architect Bertrand Goldberg with a request that Goldberg design a new headquarters for the union in downtown Chicago; the union would provide the financing. Conversations led to the proposal for a building that would combine commercial and residential facilities, with the understanding that housing would