During the mid- to late tenth century, there appeared a seigneurial class whose members built grand residential halls in these villages. Blair describes a Weberian evolution of upwardly mobile corls (aggrandizers) who accumulated land, built complex houses with kitchens and churches, and, upon assuming official duties, won the superior rank and responsibilities of tbehgus (aristocratic retainers). This assertion is at odds with the standard historiography of both Continental and English feudalism, and with the popular notion of the Norman manor as a bureaucratic invention.

Tenth-century developments provided the platform for early eleventh-century growth and the subsequent transformation (after the 1060s) of the archaeological record. The Normans went about introducing a new built environment in a way that Blair likens to British inner-city clearance and construction efforts of the 1960s. The most conspicuous consequences of the Norman Conquest were the rebuilding of cathedrals and abbeys and the construction of ubiquitous new fortifications. Yet projects of these kinds, Blair suggests, were already under way in the earlier eleventh century. Had Harold celebrated victory over Duke William on 14 October 1066 (instead of the other way around), the impact on the English landscape would probably have been similar.

The archaeological and topographical imprint left by the Anglo-Saxons may have been light compared to that of Romano-British or later medieval groups such as the Normans, but it was no less complex. Blair tells his story in extraordinarily fine detail, attributing to many eras and thus problematic to later manifestations. He offers the most detailed account to date of how the late Gothic evolved from the English Decorated and French Rayonnant styles.

As Bork notes, most discussions of the Northern Renaissance have said little about architecture. What we call Renaissance architecture was during this period in northern Europe called antiqve, modo Roman, welsch, and, eventually, Italian or Italianate. Bork calls it “classicizing” to convey the authority held by Roman antiquity and its offshoots in the early modern world, and he contrasts it to both the Gothic and the concept of realism. In this context, he discusses the work of artists such as Jan van Eyck and Claus Slater, who looked both to medieval modes and to emerging trends from Italy, and whose realism, contemporaneous with late Gothic architecture, promised a renewal of the arts. Realism is a difficult notion to define, attributed to many eras and thus problematic as a period term. It might, however, be applied to the radical representational ornament of the late Gothic, as in the arboREAL vault in the Tower of Jean the Fearless in Paris or the pretzel-shaped tracery in the bakers’ chapel in Saint George’s Minster at Dinkelsbühl. Such a move would bring together the figural and nonfigural arts.

How might we best explain Gothic architecture’s mid-sixteenth-century decline?
The Gothic and the antique were based on opposing systems of reference and proportion. Gothic forms were produced geometrically, their proportions often given in terms of square roots; thus, the relationships between parts could be difficult to parse. Classicizing proportions were mostly arithmetic and consequently much easier to read. They were typically based on the human body, whereas most Gothic elements had no real-world referents and were abstractly mathematical, products of the compass and straight edge. What eventually doomed the Gothic, then, was not the compass and straight edge. What even-\textit{tually} were abstractly mathematical, products of the human body, whereas most Gothic mostly arithmetic and consequently much easier to read.

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Thus, Bork offers no single, primary reason for the victory of the antique. Instead, he shows the various avenues through which classicism established itself in northern Europe, from oft-considered architectural treatises and pattern books to the intricate family ties and political allegiances that constituted chains of patronage. His perspective is remarkably wide-ranging. He endorses Marvin Trachtenberg’s theory of subtraction, whereby Gothic buildings gradually lost their rich ornamental—vault ribs and window tracery, for instance—only to emerge as classicized creations. He follows Stephan Hoppe, Christopher Wood, and others in seeing northern classicizing buildings as born in many cases from earlier Romanesque ones, the Romanesque having been considered as continuous with ancient Roman building campaigns.

Bork’s geographical range is also impressive. His treatment of Prague is understandable, given that it was a principal building site for two great architects, Peter Parler and Benedikt Ried. More surprising are Bork’s inclusions of the Netherlands, Portugal, and Hungary, all of which he effectively uses to cast light on the development of late Gothic architecture. The Church (now Cathedral) of Our Lady in Antwerp represented a synthesis of English Decorated style and French Rayonnant conventions. The Antwerp town hall, one of the paradigmatic buildings of the Northern Renaissance, combined elements from local Gothic town halls, Italianate elevations from Sebastiano Serlio’s treatises, and frontispieces drawn from French châteaux. English and Netherlandish models seem to have informed the design of the monastery church at Batalha, Portugal. Hungary, meanwhile, under the humanist king Matthias Corvinus, became one of the first places to adopt classicism as a sign of political and military triumph. Bork discusses the Bakócz Chapel in Esztergom (ca. 1506), a striking adaptation of contemporary Florentine models. Significantly, Bork also treats the materiality of the chapel, noting its construction in red Hungarian marble that immediately distinguishes it from Tuscan buildings. The accompanying color photographs reveals this contrast. Iberia, meanwhile, with its innovative late Gothic structures, is shown to have been a magnet for international talent from France, the Netherlands, and the Rhineland. Hanequin of Brussels, Juan of Cologne, and Joosken of Utrecht commanded positions of authority in Toledo, Burgos, and León. The Netherlanders Anton and Enrique Egas and Gil de Siloe and the Frenchmen Felipe Bigarny, Nicolau Chanterenne, Jean de Rouen, Jean de Langres, and, most important, Juan Guas did much to shape the Isabelline style, named for Queen Isabella of Castile.

Bork does not pretend to offer a comprehensive picture of Italian Renaissance architecture, but he shows enough to help the reader understand the challenge it represented to the Gothic. For this reason, Bork does not limit himself to discussing Roman, Florentine, and Venetian achievements but also considers the church of the Certosa of Pavia and other Lombard buildings that had a greater impact on French and Netherlandish patrons and artists. Similarly, he demonstrates that Giulio Romano’s Mantuan architecture was ultimately more important for buildings such as the Bavarian Residenz at Landshut than Donato Bramante’s Tempietto in Rome.

In his synthetic account of the rise and fall of late Gothic architecture, Bork provides a compelling and nuanced explanation of the end of an artistic manner. He confronts conflicting notions of a Northern Renaissance devolving partly from the division between architecture and the figural arts. This is a hefty book but one that integrates many architectural and cultural currents of the late medieval and early modern eras.

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