

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HITTITES

Every afternoon he comes to the ruins,
to think. Romans, Hittites, Assyrians,
powers mighty and powers long gone,

and him still asking himself questions:
why no great art of his own yet, despite
the decades of sweat and ambition?

“I’m a painter,” he tells me before I ask.
“And I’m touring ruins,” I say, “to remember
the ancient.” Suddenly his wish to unmask

himself seems very old, at least as old
as these amphitheaters of the Romans,
great sandy circles where gladiators

could prove themselves. The painter and I stare
at tall temples to some forgotten god, maybe
the same one who ignored the Hittites’ prayers

and let them be eaten alive by the sea peoples,
those floating creatures and history’s great mystery,
who took a civilization and reduced it to rubble.

The painter tells me the Hittites left vases
galore but only sketchy writings, that they
were good people, who were killed hastily.

I think of how long it takes to make something,
and how quickly the Hittites faded into dust.
“Look, see how much is still standing,”

he smiles, motioning to the wide boulevards
for the fat Persian king, the star-filled
mosaics from the shops of Assyria,

and the intricate art that lined the Greeks'
public baths, all of it made by ancients
still whispering *we are here, we were here,*

*don't stop asking what happened to us,
we tried to tell you what to expect
but then everything just went bust.*