

In summary, this volume is a product of the time at which the original ceramic study was undertaken. Notwithstanding, it presents an extensive and useful corpus, including material from periods currently not well represented in the scholarly literature on Egypt, and it provides further evidence of the long duration of Late Antique traditions into the early Islamic period. One hopes that the full range of data, including quantification—which was clearly undertaken—will be made available in the future, in a manner that makes it possible to raise, and answer, alternative questions.

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RONAN TOOLIS & CHRISTOPHER BOWLES. *The lost Dark Age kingdom of Rheged: the discovery of a royal stronghold at Trusty's Hill, Galloway*. 2016. vi+169 pages, several colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford & Philadelphia (PA): Oxbow; 978-1-78570-311-9 hardback £30.



This glossy monograph promises much. The front cover declares *The lost Dark Age Kingdom of Rheged*, with a subtitle: *the discovery of a royal stronghold*. The last page tells us that

Trusty's Hill was (probably) the royal seat of Rheged. Does the volume deliver?

Trusty's Hill will be familiar to Pictish enthusiasts and early medieval scholars as the isolated dot that appears on distribution maps of Pictish symbols in the extreme south-west of Scotland, some 160km from the nearest symbol stone from Edinburgh, itself a southern outlier of uncertain veracity. The

symbols carved on a rock face at the entrance to the hillfort have long puzzled scholars who have variously dismissed them as an antiquarian fallacy, or tried to historicise them as evidence of a Pictish attack, if no longer as support for the medieval myth of Pictish Galloway.

The late Charles Thomas undertook an excavation of the hillfort in 1960. A two-week investigation in wet weather produced no close dating, although he concluded that an Iron Age/first-century AD phase was rebuilt as a timber-laced nucleated fort and destroyed by Pictish raiders c. AD 600, leading to the visible vitrification of parts of the stone ramparts. His extended analysis of Pictish symbols led him to suggest tentatively that the Trusty's Hill carvings could be read as 'to the dead king of the S-Dragon group, by his champion', a narrative interpretation few scholars would attempt today.

The modern excavation by Ronan Toolis and Christopher Bowles, undertaken during two dry sunny weeks in 2012, was given only very limited Sites and Monuments Consent by Historic Scotland to empty Thomas's trenches and to investigate any surviving deposits left in them. Fortunately, Thomas's team had not bottomed the trenches and *in situ* features, and soil deposits and middens had survived and provided diagnostic artefacts and sufficient charcoal for nine radiocarbon dates to be obtained. A Bayesian assessment of these dates leads to the interpretation that an Iron Age phase, albeit indicated by a stray bead and redeposited material, was replaced by a timber-laced hillfort in the early sixth century AD, which itself was destroyed sometime between the mid sixth and mid seventh centuries. The excavators interpret the artefactual evidence to support a more precise date for the destruction and demise of the site in the early seventh century.

A substantial part of the volume (20 pages) is taken up by a careful description and discussion of the rock carvings by Katherine Forsyth and Cynthia Thickpenny. This uses a laser scan survey of the rock outcrop and provides detailed images of the relevant symbols. One of these, a simple disc-shaped human face with antennae is dismissed as largely modern. In contrast, the two or three key 'Pictish' elements—a Z-rod and double disc symbol ('spectacles'), a dragonsque beast (S-dragon) and an adjacent 'sword' (spike/pin?)—seem to be genuine and ancient. Although they were not illustrated until 1856, they had been noted some 60 years earlier,

well before any antiquarian copying of genuine Pictish imagery was likely. Forsyth and Thickpenny carefully discuss the details of all three images, citing the features that can be found on Pictish Class 1 and 2 stones. Their conclusion places the double disc and Z-rod as late in the typological series, while the dragonesque beast likewise finds parallels in Class 2 sculpture. Although the dating of the inception of Pictish symbols remains uncertain, and contested, the art-historical dating of Class 2 images can be tied fairly confidently to wider early medieval Insular pictorial schemes of a Christian nature. On this basis, Forsyth and Thickpenny suggest a date from the late seventh century at the earliest and more probably in the eighth or ninth century.

Another 46 pages of the volume consist of a discussion of the excavated evidence that also provides a useful extended discussion of interpretations of ecofactual and artefactual evidence from comparable sites in Scotland. This aims to demonstrate that Trusty's Hill is a nucleated fort similar to Dunadd in Argyll, the documented royal site of the kings of early Dal Riata. The presence of Pictish symbols at the entrance of Trusty's Hill, opposite a rock-cut basin, has previously led to suggestions that here, as with Dunadd, rock carvings might indicate royal inauguration or some other symbolic activity. The finds from the 2012 excavation—imported E-ware from Merovingian France, tools for metal- and textile-working, a gilt and silvered Anglo-Saxon-style two-horse harness mount, and an iron thistle-headed pin with copper alloy decoration, as well as evidence for metalworking in iron, bronze, gold and silver—all support the suggestion that this is a high-status site of *c.* AD 600. The number of artefacts is modest, but given the small scale of the investigations, the range of finds is impressive.

But is this the principal royal centre of Rheged and the site of its inauguration rituals before the Northumbrian takeover of Galloway in the mid seventh century? Rheged is one of the shadowy post-Roman British kingdoms of the North, but, apart from the evidence of heroic poetry of uncertain origins, virtually nothing is known about it. Arguments for its size and location fluctuate with generational fashions, and its cartographic representation grows and shrinks across large parts of southern Scotland and northern England.

Toolis and Bowles have confirmed that Trusty's Hill deserves a place on the settlement maps of

early medieval Britain. Two sunny weeks is not, however, enough to provide a convincing history of the construction and use of the site. Substantial excavation of the separate ramparts and undisturbed interior areas would be necessary to begin to give us a reliable development sequence. The art-historical dates for the genuine rock carvings (late seventh to ninth centuries) mark the site as important, but conflict with the narrow sixth- to early seventh-century date favoured by the excavators. The investigations at Trusty's Hill were driven by local interest in the site and supported by Heritage Lottery funding. The resulting finely illustrated report has drawn on the key specialists and a range of up-to-date techniques and finds analysis. The excavators' enthusiasm for the site, however, outstrips the evidence, and any scholar or student tempted to skip the main text and to head straight for the conclusions will be misled. This is an important site, but further investigation is required—it should not yet become the royal inauguration site of the lost Kingdom of Rheged.

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HANS-PETER KUHNEN (ed.). *Khirbat al-Minya: Der Umayyadenpalast am See Genezareth* (Orient-Archäologie 36). 2016. 175 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Rahden: Marie Leidorf; 978-3-89646-666-2 hardback €42.80.



This volume on Khirbat al-Minya is a welcome addition to studies on the phenomenon of the early Islamic *qusur* (singular *qasr*, often styled 'desert castles'). The palace is located close to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Tiberias), and is contemporaneous with the palace of Sinnabra (Khirbat el-Karak, or Beit Yerah) and the district capital of Tiberias (al-Tabariyya). The studies published in this volume originate from a colloquium held at Berlin in 2011, a remarkable assembly of scholars interested in all aspects of this

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