which these volumes emerge was to find ways of synthesising and communicating the value of the vast quantities of materials being collected from commercial archaeological excavations in England and Wales that have addressed Roman and Later Iron Age sites. This volume considers the settlement evidence, primarily focusing on the morphology of rural sites and the architecture of their buildings. The second and third volumes, both forthcoming, will centre respectively on the rural economy of Roman Britain and on the population of the countryside and, in particular, the evidence for their ritual behaviour.

The scale and ambition of the project are indicated by the 2500 published and unpublished excavations that have been analysed. These range from modest evaluations and watching briefs to large-scale excavations across England and Wales. The material is organised into eight geographic regions that offer "a characterisation of the mosaic of communities that inhabited the province and the ways they changed over time" (p. xxiii). The authors support earlier studies that have aimed to place the farmstead rather than the villa at the centre of analysis (e.g. Hingley 1989; Taylor 2007). Villas are increasingly seen to have been relatively uncommon and abnormal, although they continue to feature prominently in television coverage and popular perceptions of Roman Britain. The project documented 1866 farmsteads (small rural settlements without villa buildings) and only 326 settlements that could be classified as villas. The volume provides excellent documentation and analysis of the wide regional and chronological variations in the character of the farmsteads that typify each area of the province.

The text is accompanied by numerous colour site plans, distribution maps and diagrams that clearly demonstrate the value of the results that have emerged from commercial archaeological investigation over the past 30 years. This includes extensive data on buildings and the character of the settlements of which they form part. Also addressed is the history of research into the countryside in Roman Britain, a detailed consideration of the morphological approach adopted during the project and a summary that situates the results in relation to the wider history of the province. The 'Rural Settlement' project was developed, in part, to deal with the division that has emerged within British archaeology between researchers based in universities and the archaeologists based in commercial units who generate and publish most of the data from development-led fieldwork. The complexity of the material explored in this volume will provide an excellent foundation for student dissertations that could tease out and explore in greater detail some of the interesting issues identified in the monograph.

The project initially addressed the evidence from England, but was subsequently extended to cover Wales. Scotland is therefore excluded and there is no comparable work available on the equivalent period north of the (modern) border. It would be wrong to criticise this highly ambitious project for its failure to provide full national coverage, although it would be fascinating to consider how the materials derived from commercial archaeology in Scotland might supplement and transform the analysis presented here. The division of research into the Iron Age and Roman periods either side of the English-Scottish border provides one example of the fundamental ways in which national research traditions serve to condition what we can achieve through academic analysis. Another duality running through the project is the urban-rural opposition that has dominated discussions of the Roman Empire more generally; the relationship between town and country is briefly addressed at the end of the volume. In sum, this is a substantial, innovative and thorough account, and the remaining two volumes are eagerly awaited.

References

Hingley, R. 1989. *Rural settlement in Roman Britain*. London: Seaby.

Taylor, J. 2007. *An atlas of Roman rural settlement in England* (CBA Research Report 151). York: Council for British Archaeology.

Richard Hingley
Department of Archaeology,
Durham University, UK
(Email: richard.hingley@durham.ac.uk)

Josef Engemann. *Abū Mīnā VI. Die Keramikfunde von 1965 bis 1998* (Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 111). 2016. 145 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz; 978-3-447-10477-7 hardback €154.

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2017.113 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This substantial volume presents a range of ceramic material from the site of Abu Mina, close to Alexandria in the Egyptian Delta. Excavations were carried out during the latter part of the last century, and the study of the ceramics from the site took place more or less concurrently. Inevitably, therefore, the book reflects the strategies of the time at which the work was undertaken. The author himself observes that the importance of the ceramics for the site's excavators was considered to lie in their contribution to the wider historical understanding of Abu Mina rather than as a ceramic corpus in its own right. Readers expecting to find clear statements of methodology or a presentation of detailed statistical data that allows independent evaluation of the ceramics (e.g. as assemblages rather than typologies) will be disappointed. Nonetheless, the sheer quantity of ceramics included, and especially the little-known material of the eighth to ninth centuries AD, makes this an immensely useful volume.

Abu Mina was occupied, although not continuously, from the late Hellenistic period into the early ninth century AD. Its heyday was in the fifth to sixth centuries when it was a prosperous pilgrimage centre for visitors to the shrine of St Menas; it was destroyed by the Persians in the early seventh century, and a far smaller settlement was re-established later in that century over the ruins. The various phases are dated on the basis of pottery types (particularly imports and finewares) and, importantly, the coin evidence.

The book opens with an overview of the site in the light of the dating evidence provided by the ceramics. As no contextual information is given in the extensive catalogues that make up the bulk of the volume, however, it is not possible to reconstruct groups of associated types (except for one cistern fill dated to AD 480, suggesting that vessels assigned this date in the catalogue can be assumed to be from this particular deposit), or to make any conclusions about the distribution of types.

The catalogues are arranged chronologically and organised into two main sections: the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman period and the Late Antique and Early Arab period. The former section, which is relatively short, presents catalogues of imported wares, handle stamps, Nile-clay vessels and faience; the latter section is divided into nine catalogues, including the imported fine wares and Egyptian products (both based on Hayes's (1972, 1980) classification), as well as local products, glazed wares, imported amphorae and lamps. Within each catalogue, the vessels are ordered by form. The catalogue entries give only the briefest of information: the context date, a summary of the form characteristics, colour and size, and form parallels. Artefact drawings are presented at a variety of scales within the same plate; the glazed wares are illustrated with colour photographs. The rationale for the selection of the pieces for inclusion in the catalogues is unclear.

The largest and most interesting of the individual catalogues (H) deals with local production at Abu Mina, starting in the fifth century AD and continuing into the eighth/ninth centuries. The results of scientific analysis of the clay are quoted (indeed, references to analyses are also provided for a few other wares elsewhere in the book), but the actual report from which this information derives is not supplied. The local products demonstrate a wide range of shapes including transport wares, closed and open forms, *ampullae* with relief decoration for the pilgrim market and figurines. This local output is assessed in the context of broader pottery supply to the site over time, from both the rest of Egypt and farther afield. Thus, Engemann notes that a decline in imported vessels (which include Nile Valley productions) during the latest occupation phase correlates with an increase in the local production of transport vessels. He concludes that these and other changes, both aesthetic and technical, indicate falling standards, which he links to a general decline in prosperity at Abu Mina in the eighth to ninth centuries. In this context, however, there is a striking absence in this volume: although kilns and workshops are mentioned in the text, no further details are given, making it difficult to evaluate changes in ceramic production.

The catalogue of glazed wares is also of importance, given the scarcity of published comparative assemblages containing such material from elsewhere in Egypt. Engemann dates the introduction of these wares to the eighth century AD, slightly earlier than the date suggested in a recent publication of similar material from Istabl 'Antar (Gayraud & Vallauri 2017: 368).

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2017.113 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.

References

Gayraud, R.-P. & L. Vallauri. 2017. *Fustat II. Fouilles d'Istabl 'Antar: céramiques d'ensembles des IX^e et X^e siècles* (FIFAO 75). Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale.

Hayes, J.W. 1972. *Late Roman pottery*. London: The British School at Rome.

– 1980. *A supplement to Late Roman pottery*. London: The British School at Rome.

Pamela Rose
Austrian Archaeological Institute, Egypt
(Email: pamela.rose@oeai.at)

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 dragonesque 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,

https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2017.113 Published online by Cambridge University Press