Elzbieta Rodziewicz’ volume is a splendid production which allows the nature of occupation of an early Islamic city, Fustat, to be viewed alongside its material culture. The excavations of Istabl ʿAntar, a fringe of the mounds of Fustat, expertly directed by Roland-Pierre Gayraud on behalf of the IFAO between 1985 and 2003, have unearthed an array of objects preserved within a stratified sequence of early Islamic houses. By bringing to publication the majority of the material derived from Istabl ʿAntar, the Institut français d’archéologie orientale is accomplishing a great achievement. Islamic archaeology in Fustat, the importance of the first administrative and economic capital of early Islamic Egypt, the French excavations in Istabl ʿAntar (which are complemented by S. Pradines’ work in Fatimid Cairo on behalf of the Ifao), continuity and innovation in Fustat are remarkably highlighted in Sylvie Denoix’ preface of the volume.

After Bone and Ivory Carvings from Alexandria French Excavations 1992-2004: Etudes Alexandrines 12, IFAO, Cairo, 2007, Elzbieta Rodziewicz offers in Bone Carvings from Fustat-Istabl ʿAntar, another masterly study on bone carving in early Islamic Egypt. This first publication on Istabl ʿAntar’s new archaeological finds provides a detailed study of bone and the few ivory objects, horn, maritime and freshwater shell, ostrich eggshell and other items discovered on the site. Most of these artefacts are attributed to the Umayyad period from the second half of the seventh century until the middle of the eighth century; others are datable to the subsequent ʿAbbasid and Fatimid periods.

Bone Carvings from Fustat- Istabl ʿAntar is surveyed comprehensively, starting, in the first section, with a general and preliminary discussion of the decorative motifs emphasising the shift from floral/vegetal patterns to geometric arrangements in the early Islamic period. This is followed by further consideration of the characteristics of the collection (appliqués, inlays, furniture mounts, game boards, khol containers, palettes, combs, styli, jewellery, utensils, buttons, horn, astragali, shells and coral). Another group of objects which receives particular attention are bone dolls, offcuts and workshop refuse, unfinished products and waste. Rodziewicz approached her subject using a typological, stylistic, iconographical analysis of the objects examining their function and the techniques involved in their manufacture. This is often deduced through comparisons with bone and ivory carvings in Alexandria as evidenced in “Bone/Ivory carvings in Fustat and Alexandria” (p. 46–54). Indeed, Keywords: Fustat, Istabl Antar, Egypt, bone, ivory
the range, if not quantity of bone and ivory carving compares well with that from Alexandria. Furthermore, Rodziewicz’ thorough analysis of individual objects based on broad comparative studies help to solve problems such as the so-called “Coptic-dolls.” By studying this category labelled “Coptic” from a broad inter-disciplinary and comparative perspectives, the author identified, for the first time, the unknown provenance of the “Coptic-dolls.” Their existence elsewhere in south-west Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine and their occurrence in the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid structures in Fustat and above the Byzantine ruins, within an Umayyad context, in Alexandria, led Rodziewicz demonstrate their Sasanian origin; thus they were imported and shifts their chronology back to the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid times. Furthermore, the author provides stylistic description and suggests they circulated from Fustat to Alexandria. Working tools, yet reconstructed from the techniques of carving of the work produced, remain unexplored and the nature and availability of the material (such as mammalian bones and the import and division of hippopotamus tusk which are carved in situ) are mentioned very succinctly in “Material and Technology” (p. 35–38). An insight into this could be gained from A. Cutler, *The Craft of Ivory. Sources, Techniques, and Uses in the Mediterranean World: A.D. 200–1400* (Dumbarton Oaks, 1985); *The Hand of the Master: Craftsmanship, Ivory, and Society in Byzantium (9th–11th centuries)* (Princeton University Press, 1994); A. Shalem, *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context* (Brill 2004); and more significantly from scholarship on Ancient and Hellenistic Egypt (see P. T. Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds.) *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge University Press) and L. Caritoux, *Petit lexique du menuisier égyptien*, in M. Wissa (ed.) *GRAFMA Bulletin 3/4, 1999–2000*). Similarly, the question of bone and ivory craftsmen is unanswered. The author is explicit about the existence of local school of carvers in Fustat, raises the question of itinerant craftsmen in an early stage but does not cast light on whether the carvers were associated with carpenters as reported by R. D. Barnett in *Ancient Ivories of the Middle East and Adjacent Countries* (Qedem 14, 1982) and M. Ereschefsky in her unpublished Master dissertation *Bone and ivory carving in early Islamic Egypt* (American University in Cairo, 1979) and suggested by M. Wissa in her forthcoming publication on communities of artisans in Egypt from Justinian to the ‘Abbasids.

The second and longest section (p. 55–268) consists of the catalogue. It comprises a thorough description, analysis and interpretation of the unearthed recorded objects. A selection of some four hundred seventy seven objects carved in the round and in relief is illustrated in excellent drawings (71 plates), colour photographs (53 plates), and nine figures with fifty objects which enhance carving techniques and styles. The text is supplemented with synthetical conclusions, good index, concordances, bibliography and a glossary. In particular, and quite commendably the overall objects published in the catalogue includes a metric scale, inventory numbers along with the location (namely the northern, southern and aqueduct sectors) and stratum where the item was unearthed. Maps and plans would have helped to pinpoint the finding spots. Statistics are lacking with the exception of when it comes to highlight the importance of bone dolls.

The breadth and depth of research is impressive as befits the material with which
it deals. Elzbieta Rodziewicz’ own experience of working with her chosen material is evident throughout the book. The quality of presentation and printing, including the eye-catching cover design, makes this volume of the highest standard. It is an invaluable catalogue which integrates a discussion of the frequently separate areas of urban, social, economic history and the study of objects of everyday life produced for a wide market.