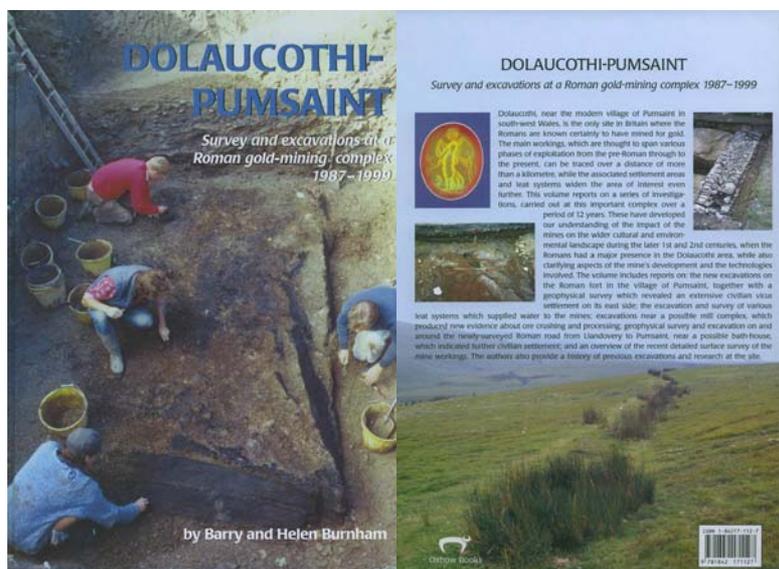


**Burnham, B & H. Burnham. 2004. Dolaucothi-Pumsaint. Survey and excavations at a Roman gold-mining complex, 1987-1999. – Oxford, Oxbow Books.**

Book review by E.N.A. Heirbaut



Dolaucothi, near the modern village of Pumsaint in southwest Wales, is the only site in Britain where the Romans are known certainly to have mined for gold. The main works, which are thought to span various phases of exploitation from the pre-Roman period through to the present, can be traced over a distance of more than a kilometer. The presence of associated settlement areas and leat systems (these are man made water channels) widen the area of interest even further.

In this volume, the authors give us an insight in the results of the excavations of the Roman fort of Pumsaint, the civilian *vicus*, the various leat systems which supplied water to the mines, a possible mill complex, the newly-surveyed Roman road from Llandovery to Pumsaint and a nearby bath-house. It becomes clear that the pioneering work undertaken by Lewis and Jones lay only on the base of what has become very important research. In several cases, the preliminary assumptions of Lewis and Jones are proven wrong. Their developmental model for the successive stages of Roman exploitation, for instance, was based on several assumptions which were not yet proven. They presumed that the basic layout of the mines originated in the Roman Period. A survey undertaken in 2000 by a French team led by Béatrice Cauuet, however, demonstrated that a large part of the works at Dolaucothi could have been exploited in the pre-Roman period. These two models are very much opposed to each other, and a definitive answer cannot be given on present evidence. In fact, many of the questions raised during the 1987-1999 work are still open for discussion. Nevertheless, the information about the presence of the Roman fort and the exploitation of the mines and the wider cultural and environmental landscape during the later 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries adds a lot of new elements to the study of the Roman presence in this part of the Roman Empire. Apparently, after the construction of Hadrian's Wall, the Roman fort was abandoned. The associated *vicus* will not have survived for long, but much still remains uncertain about the date and character of a second settlement south of the river Cothi.

This 339 pages counting book contains a lot of information about the surveys and excavations done in this area. Unfortunately, the authors tried to give as much information as possible, resulting in a very descriptive text which was at times quite hard to read. Every feature is described in detail. One can ask oneself whether it would not have been better if these descriptions were compiled in a catalogue at the back of the book. In this way, the text itself would have been a lot easier to read. Now the reader is tempted to skip parts of the text. A second remark, which links up with the previous one, concerns the references to the drawings and more particularly to the different fills of the features that are drawn. They are put in the text, together with the extensive observations; as a result of this, the reader has to go through very long descriptions. On the other hand, a quick scan of the drawing is difficult because no legends are placed with the drawings. Also the layout of the text makes it difficult to keep attention to what one is reading. Each chapter has a lot of subdivisions which are again divided in smaller sections. This might not have been a problem if they were clearly marked in the text, but because this is not the case, it becomes quite hard to keep track of which chapter one is reading at a particular moment.

If one is capable of persisting at reading the text, one is rewarded with a lot of interesting information about the working of the leats, about the layout of the settlements and the layout and different phases of the fort.

This study of the only goldmine in Wales, and the surrounding prehistoric, Roman and post-Roman features is very interesting. The extensive documentation in the form of pictures, drawings and excavation plans is of a high quality and it is obvious that a lot of time and effort has been put in this work. We can only hope that future research will resolve many of the unanswered questions.

Burnham, B & H. Burnham. 2004. Dolaucothi-Pumsaint. Survey and excavations at a Roman gold-mining complex, 1987-1999. – Oxford, Oxbow Books. 339 pp. ISBN 1-84217-112-7. Price £ 60.00 (hardback).