

# Mirrors of Salt

## Proceedings of the First International Congress on the Anthropology of Salt

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Cover: Cucuteni typical ladles, Romania (photo: C. Preoteasa).  
The production phases of salt crystallization in Cacica, the Cucuteni culture (Mugur Andronic).

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# Contents

<b>Foreword</b> .....	v
(Marius Alexianu)	

## Theoretical Approaches

<b>Salt: Anthropology of a Quasi Amethodic Topic. Some Thoughts</b> .....	3
Marius Alexianu	
<b>The ‘Sapientia’ of Salt</b> .....	11
Michele Zuppi, Paolo Zuppi, Elisabetta Rossi	

## Archaeology

<b>The Qraya Salt Experiment. Reenacting Salt Production Processes of Protohistoric Mesopotamia</b> .....	17
Beatrice Hopkinson, Giorgio Buccellati	
<b>Research on the use of Hallstatt’s stone axes: Study of mechanics</b> .....	33
Alfons Fíguls, Kerstin Kowarik, Hans Reschreiter	
<b>Considerations on Salt Exploitation in Bukovina, from Prehistory to Modern Times</b> .....	47
Mugur Andronic, Bogdan P. Niculică	
<b>Unique Cucuteni Artefacts Used in the Salt Recrystallization Process</b> .....	55
Constantin Preoteasa	
<b>The Exploitation and Control of Salt Sources from the Early Neolithic to Late Antiquity. Case Study: Oglinzi - Băi Area (Neamț County, Romania)</b> .....	65
Vasile Diaconu, Gheorghe Dumitroaia(†)	
<b>A Tiny Story About Salt, Herding and Landscape in Chalcolithic and Late Bronze Age Eastern Romania</b> .....	73
Neculai Bolohan, Luminița Bejenaru	
<b>A Technological Approach to the Production Sequence at the Beaker Brine-Boiling Site of Molino Sanchón II (Villafáfila, Zamora, Spain): Some Hypotheses about the Moulding of Salt using Organic Containers</b> .....	85
Elisa Guerra-Doce, Francisco Javier Abarquero-Moras, Germán Delibes-de Castro	
<b>Assessing the Role of Salt in the Spread of the Beaker Phenomenon across Western Europe during the Third Millennium BC</b> .....	97
Elisa Guerra-Doce	
<b>‘Reddish <i>olle</i>’ and Production and Use of Salt: an Open Question</b> .....	107
Tomaso Di Fraia	
<b>Salt in Southwest Germany at the End of the Iron Age</b> .....	117
Martin Hees	
<b>Salt Control and Distribution in the Southern Part of Eastern Carpathians. A Story of a Lost Dacian Hillfort</b>	127
Dan Ștefan, Bogdan Ciupercă	
<b>Geophysical Prospections in the Area of the Salt Mine at Sânpaul</b> .....	135
Alexandru Popa	

<b>Salt Production as a Reflection of Inter-Ethnic Contact and Culture Change during Late Prehistory (AD 800-1100) in South Alabama, United States</b> .....	143
Ashley A. Dumas	
<b>Recent Archaeology of Salt in Southeastern North America</b> .....	151
Ashley A. Dumas	
<b>Towards an Archaeology of Salt Production in Ireland</b> .....	161
Wes Forsythe, Rosemary McConkey, Colin Breen	
<b>The Vall Salina: More than 6500 years of Halite Exploitation. Cardona, the Salt of History</b> .....	169
Alfons Fíguls, Olivier Weller, Thomas Xaver Schuhmacher, Mireia Martínez, Raül Segarra, Rosa M. Lanaspá, Marc Cots, Aitor Henestrosa	
<b>Where the Salt ‘Kerns’: Historical Archaeological Investigations at the Saltpans of the Venezuelan Islands, 17th–19th Century</b> .....	181
Konrad A. Antczak	

## History

<b>Salt Outlets: Which Statistical Profiles in the Roman Empire?</b> .....	197
Bernard M. Moinier	
<b>Underground Waters as a Source of Salt: Reflections on the Technological Variations of their Use in the South of Mexico</b> .....	207
Blas R. Castellón Huerta	
<b>Salt ‘Roads’ in Moldavia by the 18th Century: Production, Transportation and Consumption</b> .....	221
Mihai-Cristian Amărieuței, Ludmila Bacumenco-Pîrnău, Luminița Bejenaru	
<b>A Less Known Practice: Making Salt Cakes in Wooden Vessels. The Testimony of a Foreign Traveller to Moldavia</b> .....	247
Vasile Diaconu, Roxana Diaconu	
<b>Organization and Functioning of the Salt Extracting Industry in Bessarabia (1812-1850)</b> .....	253
Andrei Emilciuc	
<b>From Blessing to Punishment: The Salt Issue within the Romanian Landscape in the 19th Century as Seen by Foreign Travellers</b> .....	267
Mircea-Cristian Ghenghea	
<b>Use of Salt in the Christian Church of Late Antiquity: Literary and Archaeological Evidence</b> .....	271
Ioan Iațcu	
<b>The First Systematic Research on the Salt Springs of Bukovina: an Austrian Report from 1783</b> .....	281
Vasile Diacon	

## Ethnography, Ethnoarchaeology, Ethnohistory

<b>Anthropological Studies of Salt in Mexico in the Last 20 Years: An Overview</b> .....	297
Blas R. Castellón Huerta	
<b>Huixtocihuatl. Goddess of Salt</b> .....	313
Martha Monzón Flores	

<b>Making Salt in Maras (Cusco, Peru): Traditional Salt Production Systems in the Context of Heritage Economy</b> .....	325
Oriol Beltran	
<b>Salt: a Crucial Feature of Mongolian Nomadism Success</b> .....	337
Francesca Lugli	
<b>The Role of the Oasis of Selima (Sudan) in the Long Distance Trade of Salty Rocks in the Sudanese Western Desert in the 19th and 20th Centuries</b> .....	343
Franck Derrien, Coralie Gradel	
<b>Usage of Salt in Therapy and as a Magical Cure among Mongolian Ethnic Groups</b> .....	351
Dulam Sendenjav	
<b>Salt in Georgia</b> .....	357
Manana Odisheli	
<b>Salt, History and Culture in the Western Grasslands of Cameroon</b> .....	363
Henry Kam Kah	
<b>Unity of Sacred and Profane in the Traditional Salt Industry of the Okposi Igbo of South-Eastern Nigeria</b>	371
Peter-Jazzy Ezeh	
<b>Salt in the Traditions of the Romanians. Notes for the Intangible Heritage in Dâmbovița County</b> .....	375
Ana Ilie	
<b>Traditional Use of Natural Brine. Ethnoarchaeological Research in the Subcarpathian Area of Romania</b> ...	389
Felix-Adrian Tencariu, Andrei Asăndulesei, Marius Alexianu	
<b>Salt Symbolism in the Work of Elena Niculiță-Voronca</b> .....	401
Mihaela Asăndulesei	
<b>Ukrainian Traditional Salt Traders ('Chumaks') in the North of the Sea of Azov (Case Study of Berdyansk Area)</b> .....	407
Igor Lyman, Victoria Konstantinova	

## Linguistics

<b>Germanic Lexical Evidence that Clarifies the Multiple Meanings of the Old European Root *sal-</b> .....	419
Adrian Poruciuc, Norbert Poruciuc	
<b>Imagery of Salt in Romanian Phraseology. Cultural Aspects (Romania)</b> .....	423
Petronela Savin	
<b>The Morphosyntax of Salt-Related Words, Idioms, Similes and Proverbs in English and Romanian</b> .....	429
Ileana Oana Macari	
<b>Morphonyms Related to 'Slatină' and 'Slătioară' in Eastern Romania</b> .....	435
Mihaela Asăndulesei	
<b>The Biography of the Romanian Expression <i>a făgădui marea cu sarea</i> (Romania)</b> .....	443
Petronela Savin	

## Literature

<b>Black Sea Salinity as a Reflection of Environmental and Climate Conditions in Ovid's Poems During the Exile Period in Tomis (SE Romania)</b> .....	449
Roxana-Gabriela Curcă, Alin Mihu-Pintilie	
<b>Salt in Ancient <i>Opsartytikón</i> Literature</b> .....	457
Mihaela Paraschiv	
<b>Latin Testimonies on the Exploitation of Salt in 17th–18th Century Moldavia</b> .....	461
Claudia Tărnăuceanu	

## Foreword

Three main factors contributed to the development of the concept of the anthropology of salt which I proposed in 2012. Firstly, the numerous ethnological surveys carried out as part of two Romanian exploratory research projects on the ethnoarchaeology of salt, Ethnosal and EthnosalRo, led me to notice with surprise that from a young age the inhabitants of Romanian villages located in the vicinity of salty springs acquired an integrated knowledge of the interconnecting facets of the topic of salt. Secondly, I was influenced by an amazing holistic book on salt dating back to the Spanish Renaissance (Gomez Miedes 1579, 2003), and thirdly, I was aware that not many contemporary books examined all the diverse aspects of salt. I gradually realized that in order to understand the true complexity of the role played by salt in the evolution of human societies everywhere it would be necessary to revisit the Renaissance model while adapting it to current studies and methodologies. This goal could only be achieved, in my opinion, by studying the anthropology of salt.

That idea led us to organize a symposium in 2012 to test the validity of my new conceptual approach to the anthropology of salt by studying a salt-rich country, focusing on the example of Romania. Although the specialists in different areas who participated were unable to cover all the aspects they would have liked, they did find, with mutual surprise, how different approaches could be applied to the same subject of research: common salt. It is important to note that the intention was to test the anthropology at a national level, in this case examining salt in Romania. The surprise was that some Romanian researchers had also studied salt world-wide as well as at the national level. This outlook was also demonstrated by several studies submitted for publication by researchers outside of Romania who showed interest in the innovative theme of the Iași symposium. We realized that our initial intention to study the anthropology of salt at a national level could productively be extended to cover its study on the international plane. That is why the published works were divided into two primary sections: the anthropology of salt in the world and the anthropology of salt in Romania (Alexianu *et al.* 2015).

These developments led to the organization of another scientific gathering, this time at an international level. The main organizers of this event hesitated for a while when it came to selecting a name, deliberating over whether to define it as a symposium, a colloquium, a conference or a congress. Considering the enormous potential of the anthropology of salt we chose the last option, which was obviously very ambitious but suitable for covering the many topics generated by salt and the numerous disciplines which are involved in the research of this mineral.

This First International Congress on the Anthropology of Salt was organized within the EthnosalRo project. For financial reasons the date for this congress could not finally be set until six months before it actually took place on 20-25 August 2015. Obviously, this time frame was insufficient to ensure widespread promotion; however, contributions from 29 countries across four continents (Europe, America, Asia, Australia) were submitted. The many presentations were organized according to five major themes: anthropology and archaeology (47 presentations), history (14), halotherapy (8), heritage (22), and literary and linguistic approaches (7). Contributions on the archaeology and anthropology of salt attracted the most submissions, with 12 key presentations from the USA, China, France, Japan, Mexico, UK, Mongolia, India and Romania (Caliniuc *et al.* 2015). Contributing to the success of this congress were the energetic and pertinent activities of the event coordinator, Dr Roxana-Gabriela Curcă, who was assisted by then PhD candidate Mihaela Asăndulesei, and by Masters student Ștefan Caliniuc. Also worthy of mention are the other members of the organizing team, including Prof. Dr Gheorghe Romanescu [†], Dr Andrei Asăndulesei, Dr Vasile Cotiugă and Dr Felix-Adrian Tencariu. Amongst foreign participants, we appreciate the very welcome financial support given by Dr Olivier Weller (CNRS – Paris). A special mention is due to the co-editor of this volume, Dr Ashley Dumas (University of West Alabama), who has undertaken the complex and difficult task of ensuring the necessary standard of language for submissions from authors who are not native speakers of English. Our special thanks for the contribution made to the editing of this volume go to Dr Felix-Adrian Tencariu and PhD candidate Radu-Alexandru Brunchi.

As usual, not all attendees submitted their articles or studies. In place of these the editors were happy to publish other authors who found out too late about the organization of this congress, but showed great interest in the new challenge of the anthropology of salt. The number of papers submitted by Romanians was almost equal to that of foreign authors. This fact should not be considered a deficiency. The guiding principle of this type of congress consists precisely in spreading the knowledge of research on salt from different areas of the globe.

International participation at the First International Congress on the Anthropology of Salt, organized under the above-mentioned conditions, was encouraging but obviously did not exhaust the huge potential of this emerging discipline. This is why we believed that the next congress which took place between 12 and 16 October 2017 in the famous resort of Los Cabos, Mexico, in the homeland of the salt goddess Huixtocihuatl and of one of the world's largest salt-producing centres, Guerrero Negro, would mark an important step forward in the evolution of research into the role of common salt in the development of human societies everywhere and in all times.

Marius Alexianu

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