

## **Abstract**

It has long been known that areas such as Cheshire, Lincolnshire and Essex were intensely exploited for salt in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. Previous research has tended to focus on the eastern coast of Britain, with less attention being paid to other potential salt-producing areas.

In previous studies in southern Britain, much emphasis has been placed on the distribution of salt and the 'equipment' used to produce and potentially transport salt - briquetage. Much less attention has been paid to the production process.

This research project directly addresses this imbalance, by placing the emphasis on to the study of the production sites, and by creating and analysing a new dataset to contextualise sites using a holistic perspective. The analysis of salt-production sites has redefined the archaeological terminology for salt production, and has critically evaluated how these sites have been incorporated into the archaeological record.

The re-categorisation of the archaeological remains on a site by site basis has enabled the formation of a comprehensive dataset for the first time. This has enabled a regional and chronological comparison of salt-production in southern Britain to be undertaken.

The analysis has shown that despite problems of incorrect perceptions of salt production practices, inconsistent recording and categorisation, and severe site damage by human and natural forces, it is possible, to inject concepts of 'agency' and 'identity' into these sites by exploring evidence of technological choice and use of space.

It was possible to identify distinctive 'working areas' containing features (hearths and brine tanks) where the main stages of salt-production were carried out.

New 'Modes of Salt-Production' have been created in order to compare different methods of organisation and 'site management' across time and space. These

modes enable a new approach about salt-production to be made set in the wider context of supply networks and specific consumer markets.

This research has shown that there were significant regional and chronological variations in salt-production; with three main areas of activity identified in Somerset, Dorset and Kent. The most significant chronological change was the substantial increase in salt-production during the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. followed by its decline in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D in Kent and Dorset. However, this was not the case in Somerset, where the dominant period of salt-production occurred between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.

The identification of regional trends in the scale and organisation of production, as well as the rich diversity of sites, shows that producers adapted to changes in the supply and consumption of salt over time. Considerably more salt would have been required to supply the growing population in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D and this encouraged the creation of many new production sites. However, the diversity in site character suggests that there was little tight control of coastal salt-production sites at that time. It is argued that instead, focus was placed upon the exploitation of salt from inland brine springs in Cheshire and Worcestershire. This is evidenced in the organisation, technology and creation of military supply bases close to these sites.

Instead, it is argued that the Roman invasion formalised and expanded existing supply networks from coastal salt-production sites, in addition to creating new inland networks. This resulted in the creation of more formal 'production and/or distribution centres. It is also probable that the emergence of uniform salt-production sites in Somerset in the later Roman period, reflects that this area had become predominant for the supply of salt to major 'consumer sites such as legionary fortresses and the larger towns.

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