

# ***Salt landscapes from protohistory to Rome in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula: novelties and perspectives***

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Over the last two decades, the archaeological research carried out in the Northwest of the Iberian Peninsula has documented an important complex of sea salt exploitations dated from Protohistory to the Roman times, located between the Rías Baixas and the Douro River. Based on the analysis of the archaeological record, in this communication we propose a diachronic vision for the characterization of salt landscapes, from protohistoric production to the great Roman industrial centres.

On the Atlantic coast, located approximately between the Miño and Cávado rivers, small salt pans excavated directly into the rock have been documented. For more than a decade, our research group has carried out a systematic field survey after which we have been able to locate precisely these structures, and establish its territorial distribution. Through new excavations and with the revision of previous archaeological data we have been able to place its origin in Protohistory and the moment of abandonment around the change of era. One of the most relevant questions is whether these structures dedicated to the production of salt correspond to a production for self-consumption or if it would be destined to exchange relations. One verified fact is that this type of saltpans only appear in this coastal strip and not in other coastal areas of northwest Iberia. In this communication, we will pay attention to the evidences of rock-carved out saltpans located on the Portuguese coast, and to the well-studied cases of Viana do Castelo. We will show the different archaeological arguments that allow dating its moment of operation and abandonment.

After the arrival of Rome a new form of salt production arises. The small-scale production of salt typical of the protohistoric saltpans gives way to large industrial complexes: the *salinae*. Now, large cobbled pavements appear, delimited with slabs, and that can be found scattered along the Atlantic coast. The different excavations carried out on those salt works place its origin around the 1<sup>st</sup> c. A.D. These salt production centres appear in a clear relationship with the *garum* and *salsamenta* industry, which had undergone great development since the change of era. In this presentation, we will review the different evidences of Roman saltworks on the coast of ancient Gallaecia. We will pay special attention to the cases of the Roman *salinae* on the coast of A Guarda and Oia, where we have carried out excavations in recent years, in order to trace an interpretive reconstruction of their operation system based on the archaeological record contrasted with literary sources.

On the other hand, we will analyse the legal and fiscal framework that determines the forms of ownership and organization of labour in the Roman *salinae*, and how it conditions the appearance of new forms of social structure. There are numerous unknowns regarding the structure of salt exploitation in Roman times that prevent us from knowing exactly fundamental aspects such as the type of property, the management model or the forms of taxation in the Iberian Northwest. These limitations are due to a double bias in the available sources. On the one hand, there is no source that informs us directly and explicitly about the way in which salt was exploited in the region, despite its great economic importance. This makes necessary reflection and comparison with the record available in other areas of the Empire. On the other hand, the available documentation is diverse and discontinuous in space and time, which does not always make it easy to draw a fully coherent operating model. In order to circumvent some of these limitations, here we propose a diachronic vision that includes different sources of information: funerary, votive and legal epigraphy, literary sources and legal texts, analysed in relation to documented archaeological evidence.

The administration of salt in the provinces of the Empire has often been reduced to a simplistic extension or extrapolation of the model of the city of Rome and the saltworks of Ostia, precisely because of its greater archaeological and epigraphic information. However, the comparison of this record, in which the public nature and direct management of the salt flats prevails, is not reproduced clearly in the documentation of other regions, which seem to show, on the contrary, a great diversity of possible solutions to the forms of exploitation of salt. Our objective is, on the one hand, to attend to the legal nature of the *salinae* according to the origin of the salt, given that the treatment and possible forms of exploitation are different depending on whether it is understood as a subsoil asset (native salt) or, as in the case of the Iberian Northwest, as a good provided by the sea, which enables forms of appropriation and private and community exploitation in the *litora maris*. This perspective is consistent with epigraphic testimonies that present interesting indications about the role of local communities in the management of this resource and allow new ways of interpretation to be opened about the control of salt as well as the labour used in its exploitation.