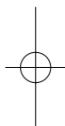




# Alas – All About Salt

Salt and salinas in the Mediterranean





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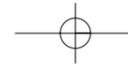
The editors wish to express their gratitude to Hjalmar Dahm not only for being the “official” ALAS photographer, but for all his support and enthusiasm during the whole life of the project and beyond.

*To Boris Križan*



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^ The beginning of the ALAS idea, Paris 1997. From right to left – Boris Križan, Zora Zagar, Hjalmar Dahm, Theodora Petanidou and Renato Neves

Photo: Theodora Petanidou and Hjalmar Dahm

## Foreword STORIES MAKE HISTORY

Theodora Petanidou

*Y ya estarán los esteros  
rezumando azul del mar.  
¡Dejadme ser, salineros,  
granito del salinar!  
¡Qué bien a la madrugada  
correr en las vagonetas,  
llenas de nieve salada,  
hacia las blancas casetas!  
Dejo de ser marinero,  
madre, por ser salinero.*

Rafael Alberti  
*Marinero en Tierra*

Despite having salted the last 15 years of my life with the coarse salt of salinas (saltworks), only recently did I have the great pleasure of coming across the salty poetry of Rafael Alberti. It was then I realized why salt had kept me prisoner for so long, inspired me enormously, kept me aware beyond its manufacture, further to its chemical characteristics and character as seasoning, much more than its hypersaline habitat, and all these together. There is something fascinating in this business, something magic in its making and use, so aesthetic in all that is happening around it. That is why a poet of the stature of Alberti responds, as above, to the never-ending dilemma of a Mediterranean man: between the sea and the salinas, he prefers to be a salter, at the same time to look at the blue of the sea, touch the wagon's salty snow, enjoy the comfort of a house, the warmth of a home, family affection; in brief to be a grain of salt made up of sea, but being on the earth.

I take the verses of Alberti as the first effort to praise a profession that has been so important for society and civilization, west and east, but at the same time so misjudged! Despised by everybody, people and state, the salter's profession has finally, through the verses of Alberti, found a niche of dignity: only a poet could recognize some pride in this profession and the extraordinary labour exercised in the salinas vis-à-vis the profound knowledge of materials, weather and winds, and brine, in order to master the manufacture of this magic substance. The recognition took so long that the occupation started to vanish. Then, we clearly understood the poet; and started to feel sorry for what we are now missing!

This is a book about salters, the salters of the Mediterranean. It explores the salt of the earth of the Mediterranean, its past and futures. Many explorers have shared the experience of this journey, have contributed to the research and results presented here. After being together on a small vessel, i.e. sharing a common project, we are now happy to announce our findings, each one from a different viewpoint and on a subject that is enormously complex, but certainly interesting!



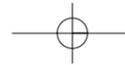
This salty story began in June 1997, during the Conference "Nature and Workmanship – Artificial Wetlands on the Mediterranean coast" held in Paris under the auspices of the European Commission, UNESCO and INSULA (International Scientific Council for Island Development, an international NGO). Salinas and salt constituted the major discussion issue in the conference, with many contributors from numerous Mediterranean countries. Many experts, organisations and agents responsible for Mediterranean coastal artificial wetlands have pointed out the great value of the salt-making business in the traditional economy and related historical, cultural and natural heritage. They concluded that sustainable development of the areas concerned should comprise rehabilitation of abandoned salinas together with promoting job training of young people and developing a quality policy based on labels, and initiation of common actions including creating public awareness. Among the participants and well-known salina lovers were Hjalmar Dahm (Guérande, France), Boris Križan and Zora Zagar (Piran, Slovenia), Renato Neves (Lisbon, Portugal), Theodora Petanidou and Nikos Korovessis (Greece). When the conference was over, all of us were sure that we would soon be able to make the *Salt Routes* possible.

It was not until November 15 1998 that a concrete start was made by the consortium. This was preceded by a series of important geographical and life rearrangements: Theodora Petanidou and Hjalmar Dahm in the meantime moved to Lesvos, an important site of salinas in Greece, with a university that could cope with the responsibilities and charges of such a demanding proposal. They had to find another partner that could diversify the aims of the project both geographically and thematically. They found it in Pomorie, Bulgaria, a place that has hosted extensive salinas since ancient times, the times of the ancient Greek Anchialos (a name meaning *near the sea*). Besides the salinas of Polichnitos (Lesvos, Greece) and Pomorie, the salinas of Figueira da Foz (Portugal) and those of Piran were also included. The submission process, starting with contacting the Commission in spring 1998, until sending out the proposal (15 November), lasted about eight months.

As meaningful as the Greek word, ALAS (*alas*, salt) was brought to life mainly through the unfading love of some unique aspects of the Mediterranean, some *alónitoi*<sup>1</sup>, a word that could be freely translated as *salt lovers*, and the need to do something about safeguarding salinas throughout the Mediterranean. However, it was not only the compilers' love of antiquity that turned up this name. Apart from its literal meaning, ALAS is also the acronym of *All About Salt*, which describes more or less what we intended to do within this project: to deal with all matters related to salt and salinas, and, where possible, to implement our findings by applying related remedies and management plans.

After a rigorous evaluation, the project was approved and officially started to run, under the management of the Development Company of Lesvos Prefecture, backed by the same Prefecture. However,

<sup>1</sup> *Alonitoi*, meaning "bought with salt", were Thracian slaves paid for with salt. The Thracians, an ancient tribe occupying the inland part of Thrace, were without salt resources of their own, their needs being supplied partly by the salinas of ancient Anchialos (see above), but mainly those of the town of Ainos. Meanwhile, the salt trade around the river Strymon was controlled by the Athenians, who left us the legacy of *alónitoi*, a word which eventually became synonymous with 'worthless'.



it was not until March 2001 that the Launching Conference of the project took place in Mytilene, seat of the Prefecture of Lesvos and the University of the Aegean. Hence, the effective period available for the project's implementation shrank from 36 to around 22 months (the official start and end dates were 15 December 1999 and 15 December 2002).

At the end of this introductory story of ALAS I want to express my appreciation and gratitude to the people who have greatly contributed to the project from setting up to realization, not only to congratulate our partners who, under extremely difficult conditions, social and financial, made results like the Salt Museum in Pomorie possible, not only to express gratitude for the excellent empirical lessons of collaboration, management, and democracy I gained personally through running the project, or to offer my great thanks to the officials of the European Commission who made all the processes flexible, even in cases when management did not come up to expectations. Bearing in mind that small stories make up history, I would like herewith to express my sincere thanks to the partners and collaborators of the ALAS consortium, who genuinely believed in the project and kept on trying until the end, despite the innumerable problems and the apparently insurmountable obstacles. I thank those who were aware, but nevertheless elected to invest invaluable efforts towards a very limited result, sometimes even at their own expense; those who, although very enthusiastic at the beginning, at the end found themselves with a profound and bitter sense of dissatisfaction with the running, the scientific results, and the implementation; those who, more knowledgeable than in the beginning, would dare to do it again, because the salinas are calling... In conclusion, those with whom we have shared "the salt and the beans"; those who became our bosom friends, purified by the eternal salt, our ALAS.

The bottleneck of ECOS-OUVERTURE projects, as the European Commission is certainly aware, is passing from theory to implementation by putting together heterogeneous people, and all this in so short a time span, that some areas cannot bear the strain, either administratively or socially. On the other hand, we also had the pleasure of collaborating with people who were brilliant exceptions, always well informed, smoothly skilled in ironing out troubles. Reinhard Klein, an eternal *alónitos*, *in sale salus*, was one of them!

My concluding point is not a confession, but a debt, a debt of honour of all of us, to a person who was one of the most enthusiastic initiators of ALAS, but never had the chance to share its results with us, never saw the salinas of the Aegean. Boris, the project manager of Piran, already a pioneer in ALAS since the Paris meeting, was the person standing by during the submission period, encouraging me during the exhausting periods of contacting authorities and compiling material of the sites; generous, gentle, and open to everybody, like on the night his wallet was stolen in Paris. Boris passed away in April 2000, after a year or so of incurable illness. Since then we have been deprived of his love and enthusiasm in actively managing both the natural and cultural heritage of salinas, his friendship, his generous smile and humour, his boundless energy. He never shared with us the launching of the project, and we had no encouragement from him in the running, no advice on how to pleasantly and effectively handle people and administration in a close collaboration. That was our loss. This book and all the results of ALAS are dedicated to Boris Križan, one of the last *alónitoi* that existed in the Mediterranean.

