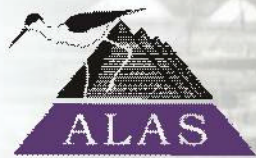


ALAS

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All About Salt



In the same ALAS leaflet series:

- Traditional saltworks in southern Europe: historical development and operation
- The salter's profession: weather and sweat
- Traditionally produced salt: a high quality product
- *Traditional production of salt: an age-old cultural heritage*
- Discovering traditional saltworks: a short guide for tourists and amateurs
- Traditional production of salt and its culture: your region benefits from it

The ALAS Project is an initiative that aims the safeguard of traditional salinas. It is carried out within the framework of an ECOS-Overture Programme. More information on this project can be obtained at www.alas.gr and www.aegean.gr/ alas/general.htm

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Traditional production of salt: an age-old cultural heritage



Cover photo by Pidar Kalachiev; Working salt in the salinas of Pomorie, old Anchaalos, Bulgaria

Traditional production of salt: an age-old cultural heritage

Traditional is the salt produced and used by tradition, as opposing to *modern*. Therefore, traditional salt is produced in non-modernised salinas, which can be even large-scale ones like those operated in Greece, Italy or Spain in the beginning of the 20th century. Following a general rule, the borderline between traditional and modern in the Mediterranean is just after the Second World War, in some countries, like Greece, extended as late as to the 60s. Today there are only remnants of this traditional operation, found in some few salinas working with big difficulties in the Basin. Such salinas are those of Nin and Ston in the Dalmatian coast of Croatia.



Salt harvest in the salina of Nin, Croatia

Further to its temporal meaning, *traditional* is a term encompassing also the *artisanal* salinas. In fact, the term traditional is often confused with artisanal, which is related to *art*, *manual work* and *craftsmanship*, concerning the way of working, as opposing to *industrial* and *mechanised*. Such salinas can be only small-scale ones, operating manually by one salter in all stages of production. Typical examples of artisanal salinas still operating in the broader Mediterranean, are the salinas of Guérande in Brittany, those of Slovenia and Portugal, the municipal salina of Pomorie (Bulgaria), the partly working salinas of Koukouri in Mani (Greece), in Cervia (Italy), in Malta.



Salina of Koukouri, Mani with people collecting salt

The operation mode of traditional salinas in the Mediterranean has gained a lot since the Roman salt-gardens and the adoption of

techniques imported from the northern borders of the Empire, such as Brittany. In fact, many of those places developed and prevailed because of the salt making activities performed there. During centuries, *salt routes* were established starting from some important Mediterranean ports where local and regional production was gathered diffused in the hinterland, or to be exported to remote regions in the Baltic and North Sea, to Central Europe, to Russia, to Constantinople and later to Istanbul. For many centuries the fortune of Venice was absolutely based on the salt traded first in the North Adriatic, then towards the southwest and southeast of the same sea, later its power extended to the west Mediterranean with Ibiza, the big producer, and finally to the east, with Cyprus, the second big producer of the Basin.

Although characterised by the same functional features, the Mediterranean salinas are very diverse, depending on the local conditions imposed by climate, site morphology, substrate, available materials and social conditions. The diversity concerns all sorts of cultural elements, such as architecture and geography of the salina sites, types and systems of soft energy used for pumping sea water and concentrated brine, slight but continuous innovations in the salt-making techniques, tools employed, houses and buildings used to live and store the product together with their equipment, the conditions of living, the product itself with its organoleptic and aesthetic qualities.



Salina of Malta with people collecting salt

As to the shape, salinas can vary from rather regular to more geometric. On estuaries and deltas basin walls and canals are made of mud and clay, whereas on small islands of the locally abundant stone. This is why, although remarkably different from the surroundings, *salt-gardens* are placed harmoniously in the environment from the Adriatic Sea to Canary Islands. In addition to an aesthetic use of the local material, man in salinas has proven to be able of making a sustainable use of natural resources and backgrounds, such as dunes, estuaries, deltas, lagoons, gulfs and bays.

Support buildings, brine pumping systems and transportation means, such as boats, were born and developed in conformity with the local conditions and availability of materials. The conception and design of these features are cultural values associated to salinas.



Salina Los Agujeros, Lanzarote, Canaries

Buildings for storing salt or housing the family are remarkably diverse. Most dominant in the Mediterranean is the one-floor house built in clay or stone. However, where the conditions allowed, such buildings could be also in wood, such as the Figueira da Foz warehouses made from the neighbouring coastal pinewoods, with a storing potential of up to 200 tons of salt. Still in Portugal, salt transportation employed special boats adapted to narrow and shallow canals of the river estuaries: elegant and very protective, such as the *galleões* and the *mercantéis*.



Warehouse for storing salt in Samos, Greece

Pumping systems, like lavouts, wind-, animal-, or even man-conducted pumps are amazing examples of simplicity and efficiency. Such examples are still found in Piran and the Canaries, in Pomorie, including those monumental ones of Trapani.

Traditional and artisanal salinas still in operation are living elements of a millenary knowledge and technology in the Mediterranean. Since a great deal of this business has been irrevocably lost in the Basin, this sort of salinas constitute nowadays cultural heritage with many-sided landscapes: the transformation into a manmade and artificially sustained landscape, the long salt-making practice crystallized in the salter's profession, the multitude of human inventions used in order to make it better and quicker, the presence of man in the landscape with all social consequences, the salinas natural aspect to protect. All these are elements of a culture in regression, needing special care from today's societies.