

SAVORY SALT: ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN ROMANIA



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The ethnoarchaeological research on the salt from Romania, conducted since 2007 as part of two extensive projects (cf. ethnosal.uaic.ro and ethnosalro.uaic.ro), avails itself of three major convergences: the existence of approximately 300 rock-salt massifs and 3000 salt springs, the presence of archaeological evidences for the exploitation of salt since ca. 6000 BC, and the endurance up to the present day, at an unexpected intensity, of traditional practices of salt exploitation and use. The ethnological investigations revealed a strikingly surprising phenomenon that is practically never taken into account by the specialists in the archaeology of salt, namely the use of brine collected from salt springs directly in the preparation of everyday food, as well as in the preservation of many products/foods of animal and plant origin necessary for satisfying the domestic food requirements during the harsh winters of temperate-continental regions. The human communities from the extensive resilient areas of Romania make use of a genuine ethnoscience with respect to the preservation of animal-origin foods, distinguishing, for instance, between brine with generic uses and brine with specific uses. For each spring, people know if its brine is suitable for preserving cheese and curing meat, or just for cheese or, conversely, just for curing. Similarly, savory flavors are built into the foods by combining different preservation techniques (e.g. drying, smoking and salting). In certain areas, the resilient communities employ an original technique of milk curdling for producing cheese, which involves the addition of brine from particular springs. Knowledge of these traditional practices is of considerable theoretic importance for understanding food production, consumption and preservation during the archaeological time, particularly for interior continental areas rich in salt deposits.