

Salz. lassen. (Sarah Burger)	5
Documentation	11
OF SALT: From Ancient Seas to Human Bodies to Household Magic (Leila Peacock)	29
Assembling Instructions	45



A Harvesting Salt.

Salt is a magnificent substance by virtue of its all-encompassing ubiquity. It is recorded as having multiple thousands of possible uses. Its history begins at the beginning of everything we know about the earth, certainly there would be no life without salt and the primordial soup out of which life sprang was salty to the taste. It embraces countless paradoxes; it both sustains us in life and preserves us in death, it desiccates the skin and makes the mouth water, it was at one time worth its weight in gold and now costs practically nothing. It has the capacity to both poison and heal. It will never run out, perpetually seeking to crystallise back into itself it is reincarnated over and over ad infinitum. Which means the salt on your tongue could, by now, be millions of years old. (A)

To understand how salt is formed and how it got into our oceans one must think in terms of the grand and imperceptible horizon of geological time. Rivers erode mountains, the sodium from the rock is carried into the seas where it combines with the chlorine gas being spewed into the water from underwater volcanoes (B), to form sodium chloride (C). By now the earth's oceans contain 50 quadrillion tons of salt (D). If this were to be extracted and spread over the land it would make a layer 150m thick. And the seas will, over the next hundred million years, get progressively saltier as they slowly evaporate, for there is nowhere for the salt to go. Eventually all seas will be like the Dead Sea (E) and then the Great Salt Lake. They will be salted solid.

How should we conceive of this substance? Which incarnation of salt should you be holding in your mind's eye as you ingest this text? Perhaps the most personal one, the one that allows our minds to see at all. Salt water is a conductor and the salt dissolved in our blood is what enables the nerves to fire electrical messages to

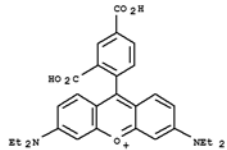


B Underwater Volcano.

OF SALT: From Ancient Seas to Human Bodies to Household Magic



F Neurons Firing.
 A study of salt ingestion in mice found that salt activates the same brain connections as addictive drugs and blocking addiction-related pathways in the brain can inhibit the hunger for salt, which is instinctive in almost all animals.



C Sodium Chloride NaCl.



D The Sea.
At sea a fellow comes out. Salt water is like wine in that respect.
 Moby Dick



E The Dead Sea.

the brain (F). A healthy human contains seven spoonfuls of salt (G), and it is this salt that makes thoughts thinkable.

We crave salt but we also sweat salt, we weep salt, we are bodies of salt. Perhaps this is what makes the image of Lot's wife (H) so visceral. In the Book of Genesis she is turned into a pillar of salt for disobeying God and looking back at her burning city. Salting a wound is a corrosive pain, hence the aphorism. The thought of this mummifying death, of being overwhelmed by a stinging, searing crystalline paralysis moving up one's throat and over one's eyes is horrifying.

For most of us our image of salt is probably impressively banal. We might think of the small salt shaker that sits on our table (I), waiting to be sprinkled over a bland dish, or any dish, for there is no recipe that does not call for at least a pinch of salt (J). Salt is not a flavour, salt is flavour. If we are blessed with a good sense of humour then we are, in figurative terms, *salty*. Salty has become an adjective for witty and colourful language because of its ability to add flavour. William Hazlitt quipped that *wit is the salt of conversation*.

It is not us, who have domesticated salt, but salt that has domesticated us. The rise of human civilisation has gone hand in hand with its ability to harvest and transport salt. Solnitsata, one of the earliest known towns in Europe located in present-day Bulgaria, was built around a salt source and it is believed the town grew rich supplying salt to the rest of the Balkans. For thousands of years *salt roads* wound their savoured way from ancient Rome to the Adriatic, Germany to the Baltic States, across Ethiopia and the Sahara in large slabs on the backs of camels, over Himalayan passes, up the Rhone and across the Alps, from areas rich in salt to those hungering for it. (K)



G.1 Seven Spoons of Salt.



G.3 One of Doré's engravings for Coleridge's poem.

Water, water, every where,
 And all the boards did shrink;
 Water, water, every where,
 Nor any drop to drink.
The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner



G.2 Sea water is a strange synonym for blood, all 92 of the minerals found in human blood are also present in sea water.

Drinking seawater to maintain hydration is counterproductive; more water must be excreted to eliminate the salt (via urine) than the amount of water from the seawater itself. In some countries the forced – ingestion of concentrated salt water is used as a form of torture.



H.1 Lot's wife.
Genesis 19:1-29.



H.2 A pillar of sulphur overlooking Mount Sodom in Israel and commonly referred to as Lot's Wife.



I.1 Common Salt Shaker.



I.2 Italian Salt Cellar, 18th Century. To be 'above the salt' is a phrase that derives from the 18th century when the salt cellar's position on the table divided the guests. An overt sign of social elevation was to be sat above the salt cellar next to your host.



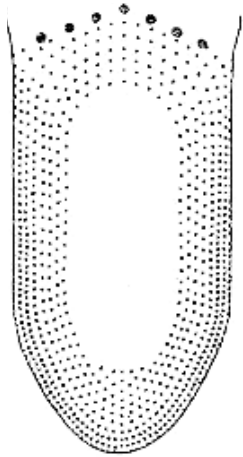
I.3 French Salt Cellar, 18th Century. The Romans considered salt to be a sacred article of food and it was a matter of religious principle for them to see that no other dish was placed upon the table before the salt was in position.



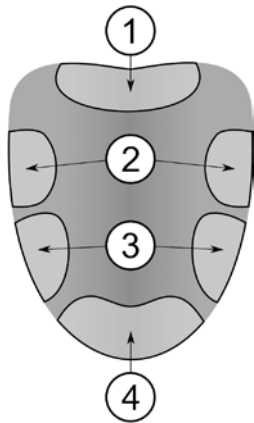
I.4 The Cellini Salt Cellar is one of the world's greatest Renaissance artefacts. It was completed in 1543 for Francis I of France. It later passed into the possession of Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol.



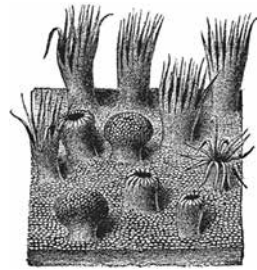
I.5 On May 11th, 2003, the Saliera was stolen from the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. The raid was one of the most embarrassing in art history, but it was only several days later, through the media, that the thief realised he had made off with a Renaissance masterpiece. He had been using it as a salt cellar in his holiday home. It was the first time that the sculpture had actually held salt for 200 years.



J.1 The Human Tongue.
The tongue map or taste map represents a common misconception that different sections of the tongue are exclusively responsible for different basic tastes. All taste sensations come from all regions of the tongue, although different parts are more sensitive to certain flavours.



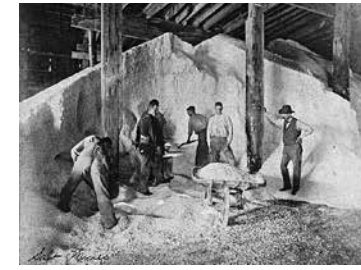
J.2 The Human Tongue.



J.3 Taste Buds.

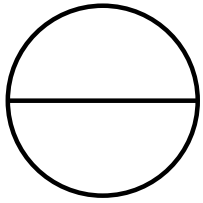


K Faux-Saunier.
At the time of the gabelle tax on salt in France salt smuggling was frequent. The smugglers were known as faux-sauniers and it was a crime punishable by death.



L 19th Century Salt Mine.
By the 14th century, salt-starved Poland was digging for salt to a depth of 300m and hauling 40'000 tons a year out of their salt mines. The idea to dig down and tap the veins of salt left-over from ancient bodies of water 250 million years old, lead ultimately to the industrialisation of salt mining in the 19th century and its reinvention as a commonplace household substance.

Civilisations in both Europe and Africa have records of using coin-shaped pieces of salt that functioned exactly like money. At one point it was so precious that it could be traded ounce for ounce with gold. (L) We get the word *salary* from the name for the money paid to Roman soldiers in order that they could buy salt. A soldier's salary was cut if he was *not worth his salt*, a phrase that is still used today to refer to something that is not worth the price paid. Even Venice's ostentatious fortune was built from trading in simple salt. From the monetary to the magical; its metamorphic properties, make it potently metaphorical and it leant itself readily to the alchemical imagination, obsessed with the power of transformation. In alchemy (M) it was one of the trinity of substances that defined the basis of matter and The Great Work, along with sulphur and mercury. It is hard to get a straight answer out of alchemy as to what salt symbolises, such is its immersion in an occult understanding that is always open to interpretation. But these mysterious scientists found salt compelling, because it can be so many opposing things at once. In alchemical texts it represented the *body* in all its myriad complexities and as such it serves to ground the volatile spirit of the *soul*, represented in alchemical diagrams by the bird in the flask. (M) It has always been considered a substance with magical properties. There is a long history of superstition around spilling salt (N), which is in many cultures a bad omen. One ancient remedy for this, still widely practiced, is to throw a pinch over your left shoulder – your sinister side – and straight into the eye of the devil standing there. As a substance that has founded civilizations, the rituals and symbols that have formed around it are often associated with the idea that it is literally civilising. It is a bringer of health and purity (O), a symbol of friendship and trust, and is used to make



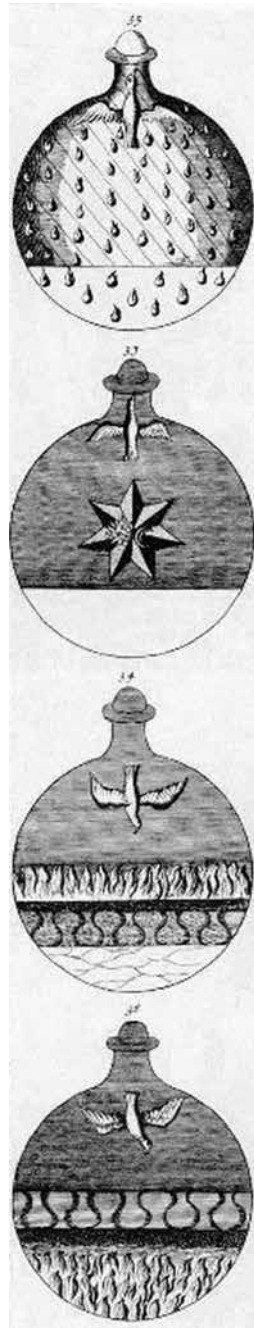
M.1 The alchemical symbol for salt. In it is represented the cosmic egg; it embodies the alchemical maxim *as above, so below*.



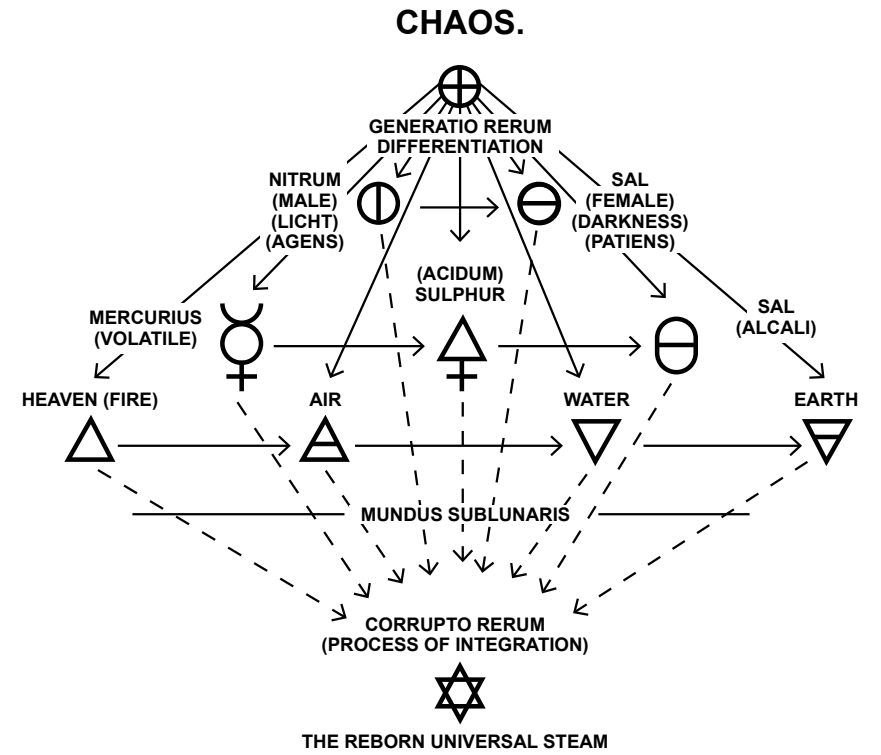
M.2



M.3



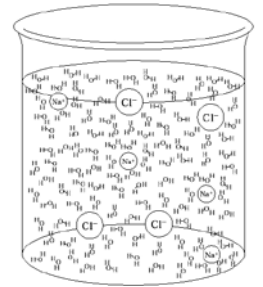
M.4



M.5 Golden Chain of Homer



N One widespread explanation of the belief that it is unlucky to spill salt is that Judas Iscariot spilled the salt at the Last Supper. Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* depicts Judas Iscariot having knocked over a salt-cellar.



holy water in the Roman Catholic Church rite. But it is also a means of warding off the uncanny and anarchic influences of witches and devils. (P) It is a widespread folk belief that the magic inherent in salt is protective. (Q) It is considered to literally soak up evil spirits, in the way that it does bad smells and the foul air in damp rooms. Somehow it is its own colourless indifference that has made us imagine it is impervious to evil. How can one write the biography of a substance so ancient and multiplicitous; one so indifferent to us and yet so inherent to our survival? Salt crystallises a narrative around itself. Watching salt crystals growing, manifesting, they have a narrative logic of their own. This process has a mysterious beauty to it as the salt transforms inexorably into its most stable state with a godless, teleological certainty, savouring only itself.

SAL SAPIT OMNIA.(R) Salt Savours All.



O The Roman goddess Salus was the goddess of good health. Her name shares its root with the word for salt which was prized for its antiseptic properties.

P In Scotland, when a person is ailing of some affliction whose nature is not apparent, as much salt as can be placed on a sixpence is dissolved in water, and the solution is then applied three times to the soles of the patient's feet, to the palms of his hands, and to his forehead. He is then expected to taste the mixture, a portion of which is thrown over the fire while saying, *Lord, preserve us frae a' skaith.*



Q.1 Salt circle used in satanic ritual.



Q.2 Witches circle.



Q.3 Many practitioners of magic, ancient and modern, suggest that salt is the best substance with which to draw a magic circle around oneself when under siege from evil spirits.



R SAL SAPIT OMNIA salt savours all.

The emblem for the Worshipful Company of Salters. A guild of salt traders in London created in 1394 and still active today.