

Session Proposal

European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) 12th Annual Meeting
Krakow, Poland
19th to 24th September 2006

Organizer: Sarah-Jane Hathaway and Mark Maltby

Theme:

Archaeology and Material Culture: Interpreting the Archaeological Record

Session Title:

‘Salt of the Earth’, Salt Production and Beyond

Abstract:

How is salt produced in the archaeological and historical record? How can we recognise and interpret the evidence for the innovation, production and consumption of this valuable commodity? How far can the evidence for the production and consumption of salt in the archaeological record be traced? How have the remains been affected by environmental and taphonomic factors? This is especially true for coastal production sites where there are so many environmental and preservational factors affecting the archaeological remains.

The location of this conference in Cracow, provides an ideal setting for a session on salt production. This session intends to review our current understanding of the salt production process, through assessing the archaeological and historical evidence as well as current interpretation and trends of thought in this subject area. There are many different strands of evidence that can be assessed, from directly looking at the remains of the process in the form of archaeological features and associated material remains such as briquetage, to faunal remains indicating the use and consumption of salt, to related patterns of trade and exchange.

Recent work had shown that in order to understand production sites it is essential to gain a firm grasp on the technological choices employed, this can be greatly assisted by experimental archaeology and ethnographic studies. This work has also focused upon the way in which salt has been consumed, with more work being carried out on the use of salt as a taste additive and a preserver of food on-site. Recent work has also clearly shown that these sites have potential to play a key element in understanding the structure of communities, especially those in coastal areas. The location of sites on the coast means they can act as valuable indicators in relation to local environmental change and sea level rise. There is also growing evidence that salt production was not the only process carried out on some sites and that it potentially integrated well with other production processes.

By embracing all of these different strands of evidence and current theory, focus can be placed upon the wider social and economic issues of salt in society as a whole. We can only begin to answer some of the many questions arising from the evidence of

this process by opening up and integrating the research with other disciplines and current theory.

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