
The Purpose Of Salt

Mark Kurlansky, author of *Salt: A World History*, once claimed “salt is so common, so easy to obtain, and so inexpensive that we have forgotten that...salt was one of the most sought-after commodities in human history.” Rather than going through what salt is today, Kurlansky decides to recall the history of salt. The book cites the different events that occurred because of salt, and it cites the different things that people used salt for. Salt was also the basis of many civilizations. Kurlansky believes that people do not truly know the history of salt or how the white crystals on their table came to be. The book goes through the history of salt as a whole. Throughout history, salt has been so much more than just a seasoning: it has served as a learning outlet, a problem, and an economic device.

Since many different areas were trying to get their hands-on salt, everyone had to come up with new ideas and techniques in order to get it. As the book states, many civilizations relied on others to bring salt because they did not have any salt or were very low. At the same time, numerous civilizations, such as Rome and Sichuan, tried to create their own salt because they did not want to depend on other civilizations for their need of salt. In the Roman society, the people would boil sea salt inside of pottery. After a solid block of salt formed, they would break the piece of pottery in order to collect the salt. Romans also collected rock salt by mining it, and they would scrape dry lake beds in order to collect bits of salt. During the ancient Roman times, people would collect salt by powering a huge wheel. The huge wheel would have two prisoners on the inside of it that were chained at their neck, and the prisoners would start walking. The wheel would turn a shaft that had a rope which would bring buckets of brine up. After the brine was picked up, it would be boiled. Since the brine was being boiled, it would eventually produce salt that the Roman people could use. In the Sichuan civilization, salt makers were able to drill a narrow shaft that would allow them to go deeper into the ground in hopes to collect salt. Using this technique, the salt makers were able to get brine using a bamboo tube that fit into the narrow shaft. After the brine was collected, it would go into a tank that would make its way to a boiling house. The boiling house would boil the brine and, eventually, everything would evaporate until the only thing left was salt crystals. Salt provided a learning experience because every civilization had to come up with a better way in order to get salt, rather than collecting it from other civilizations. If a collection technique was not working, civilizations would have to figure out different ways to collect salt efficiently. However, the new learning experiences and new techniques became a problem between many people.

Because many people wanted the substance, salt would create many problems between many different civilizations. According to the book, salt was a very profound item, and everyone would fight over the control of it. The archbishops of Salzburg and the Bavarians were among these people. During the medieval time period, they rivaled each other over the control of the salt mines because they claimed that the Dürnberg mountain had a Salzburger mine within it and there was a Bavarian mine as well. The book claims that the Salzburg territory was very abundant in gold, silver, and copper, but they continuously fought over the control of salt. They fought for it because salt gave them the independence they wanted. Since salt was very sought after by the Salzburgers, the archbishop lowered the selling price for salt from the mines. The Bavarians did not appreciate this so they fully banned trade with Salzburg. As a result of banning trade, a salt war had begun. Furthermore, according to the book, people in the middle

ages enjoyed high quality salt. Lüneburg salt was considered a very high-quality salt, but many people were producing lesser saltworks. As a result of having lesser valued salt, people would mark their salt with the wrong name in order to be able to enter into foreign markets. People were getting the wrong quality salt due to wrong labels being placed on salt. Also, during the time of the British government, families would produce salt together because each person had their own respective job, which made the process of getting salt easier. The British government did not like the local production of salt, so they wished to discourage production. They announced plans to stop the local production of salt, and they wanted the salt agencies to end salt manufacture. The halt in salt production led to a serious famine for the people under the British government's rule. In the end, people started to starve and die because they were not able to have any activity revolving around salt manufacture. So, salt became a huge problem for many people and areas because everyone wanted to produce it. The problems revolving around salt was mostly because of greed. People wanted salt to themselves and would figure out by any means how to do so.

In many situations, salt represented an economical advantage for many regions. During the history of China, salt was fixed at a higher rate and the purchase rate was lowered because they could import salt now and sell it to gain a profit. Salt was very important to China because it was able to maintain their basic economy. Since they were able to gain such a huge profit from salt, the revenue would go to building up a strong army, and it would build parts of the Great Wall. The Great Wall was built to keep invaders out of their land. Without the revenue from the salt, the Chinese would not be able to build the many defense structures that they ended up having. In Southern Poland, salt miners would work until death in salve conditions. At first, and they would boil brine in clay pots in order to make salt, but the brine dried up. As a result of the brine drying up, the workers started mining for salt. The Polish Crown would earn one-third of their annual revenue because of all of the salt being mined and collected. Also, Cape Cod's price of salt rose from fifty cents to eight dollars which would increase revenue. Since Cape Cod was able to increase the salt supply for all of its people, they were able to help the fishing industry grow because many people ate salted fish. Since people were getting more salt, this meant that they were making more money, and therefore, increasing the economy. People were able to increase their economy because they were able to figure out ways to increase their revenue using the production of salt. They were able to build defense structures due to the increase in the economy caused by salt. Salt helped different civilizations get what they needed: money.

Ultimately, the book was able to portray how important salt is and what all it has provided, rather than just being a white-crystal seasoning. Salt was the basis for new learning opportunities, several problems revolving around control, and building an economy. Salt created a new name for itself because it was so much more than a seasoning. It provided a long history of thriving civilizations.