

Rescue on the obtaining of salt by traditional means in the south of the State of Mexico

*One of the objectives of the **Gastronomic Observatory of the State of Mexico**, is to provide information obtained through research that has been done with the rescue of uses and customs about foods consumed and produced in the entity. In this order of ideas, this paper aims to present the rescue of the traditional salt of two communities in the south of the State of Mexico.*

Héctor Favila Cisneros

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The information included is the result of an ethnographic research on one of the most significant activities among the inhabitants of the south of the State of Mexico: the generation of salt as a daily activity, following the traditional way practiced among the ranchers in the region, known with the names of: “El Salitrillo” and “Salitre grande”, located in the municipality of *Tlatlaya*.

The study area is located in the northeastern of the municipality of Tlatlaya, an area with a height of around 800 meters SNM (Above Sea Level), with a subhumid warm climate and rains during the summer; the indicated *rancherías* benefit from the water of the stream known as “Salitrillo”, site that generates salt.

The importance of this topic lies in the fact that for a time salt was obtained in a traditional way, an activity that was carried out during the lent months: taking into account the notion of time that locals have, between the months of October to May. It also used to be carried out in a second period of the year, from the months of June to September considered as rainy or temporary.

However, it should be noted that these dates were not due to a particular historical event, is due to a reality that responded to a particular space and time of his own life; for that reason the intention of rescuing these events through the memory of the people who carried out this traditional work and in this way make an ethnographic rescue that reflects part of the life of those who do not leave written history about themselves, hence this reality can offer a memory from the reconstruction of the social imaginary.

Imaginary that seeks to give meaning to the representations of this particular community and to give it a place in the social structure in its own reality, for which the way in which it is constructed is through the imagined, that is, the stories provided by people, because these become realities of their historical memory and collective symbols, indispensable tools for the ethnographic researcher.

That is why both the memory and the imaginary can not be treated separately, since they inevitably work hand by hand: the symbolic is the way of appreciating things in a different way, being where the imaginary really lies; In this sense, the historical memory and the story approach a version of reality that does not discriminate its imaginary and its historical memory, affirming itself as a reality of local history.

Around these ideas and from this reflective framework, the description of obtaining salt in a micro-region of the south of the State of Mexico is centered. But before giving rise to this description, it is important to comment a bit about the salt area of *Huiztallo*, located in the south of the town of *San Miguel Ixtapan, Tejupilco*, and it is where the *Aquiagiua* River is located, site where the saltpeter scallops are located. Considering these, it is important to note that this site is still active, as well as another located in San Francisco, also belonging to the municipality of *Tejupilco*.

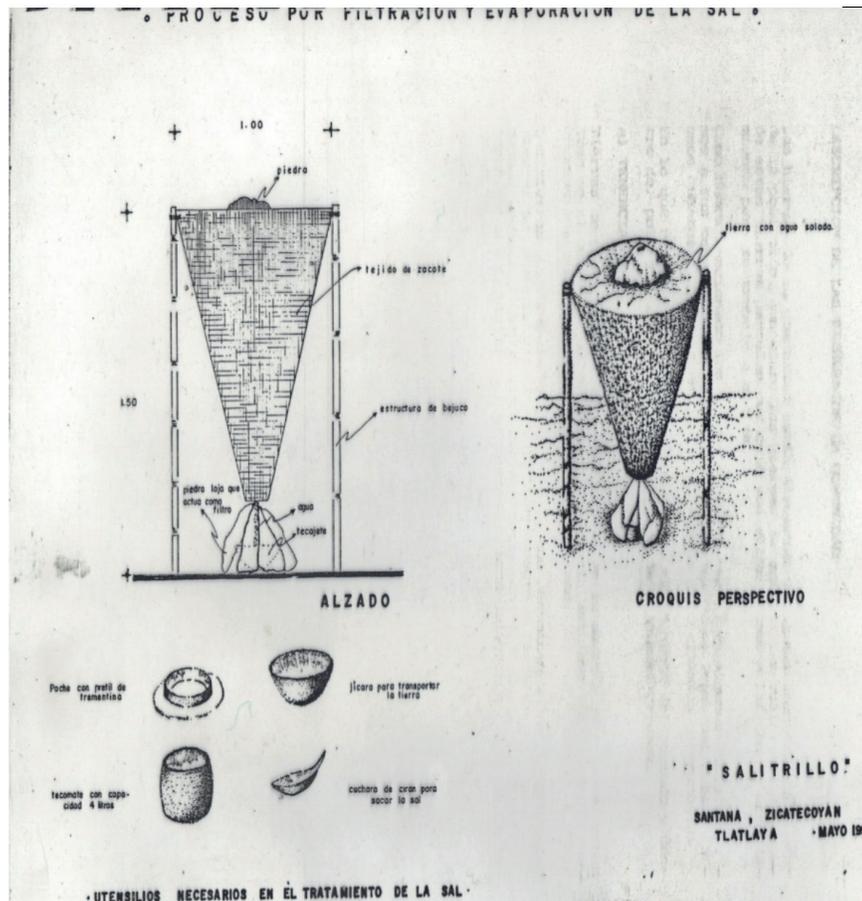
The process of obtaining salt from the area under study (*Tlatlaya*) is different; nevertheless, it was wanted to mention the one of *Tejupilco* because this municipality also is located in the south zone of the State of Mexico. During the mentioned months of lent, when the level of the river falls, the salty water of the scallops springs up; This is placed in a large cajete-shaped place that performs the function of draining impurities from the salty water and allowing the salt to settle. Then it is deposited in containers called “poches”, leaving it exposed to the sun for its evaporation, finally obtaining the salt in this way.

The following information already corresponds to the zone of *Tlatlaya*, and was provided by inhabitants of the *ranches* of “Salitrillo” and “El Salitre Grande”, where the activity is already in disuse, leaving only a few people who remember how the process was carried out. This filtering process was carried out in the months of March, April and May, obtaining a salt yield of eight quarts per week or every eight days. This activity was usually performed by women, and the salt they obtained was used to exchange it for other agricultural products or sold it in the towns near Salitrillo, and sometimes in the market that was placed in the town of San Pedro Limón, located a few kilometers away and that was the most populated.

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Image 1. Process of obtaining the salt by filtering and evaporation.



Source: Elaboration obtained from field work.

For the filtration, first the land is loosened; When this is done, it is put together and placed in a kind of boiler made of vines and grass, measuring approximately one meter high and another in diameter. Underneath three stones that allowed the filtration of the water are placed which fell in a container called *cajete*; This filtration takes about eight hours, the soil dries and is placed back where it had been removed to give time and repeat the activity.

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The transfer of the land from its place of origin to the boiler and vice versa is done by the women carrying on their heads some *jícaras*, already lying on the ground and wet it is left until the next day allowing time for the filtration; then the water acquires a yellowish color and it is now time to place it in the *poches* (containers with a stone base and a turpentine oil that helped the water not run off).

The residue is removed in the shade, that is, the dark is removed, putting more salt water to whiten it, waiting for it to evaporate. Once evaporated, the salt is taken out with a kind of spoons, and once extracted it is placed in some *chiquigüites* and then in the cans of sardines or wooden *cuarterones* to sell it. The measures sold them in five cents, according to the settlers, and it was the price of about 50 years ago.

In the other ranch “El Salitre”, salt is obtained by means of fire. Located a few kilometers from “El Salitrillo”, the community is very small: it currently has about six or seven houses, in which approximately forty people live. This is because the employment opportunities are very few and this has resulted in a high rate of migration, mainly to the United States of America to work of whatever and send resources to their families.

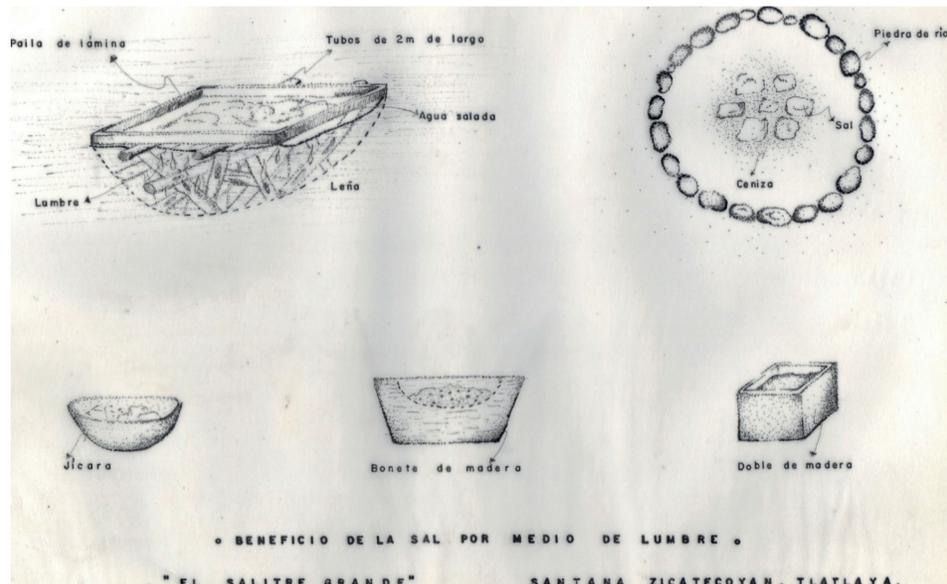
In this community, the process of obtaining the salt is the following:

The base is the salty water placed and prepared; a sheet of sheet is bent the four corners and their sides, about 6 or 7 cms. with a depth of 2 meters long by 80 cm. Wide. There the firewood is deposited to burn; this sheet is placed on top of 2 tubes that crossed the well in width so that the *paila*, that is, the sheet is not on the ground and the pit, then the water is put on and the wood is set on fire, which It had been deposited in the pit.

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Image 2. Process of obtaining salt by fire.



Source: Own elaboration obtained from field work.

The wood is left on all night until the water is completely consumed, and when this process is finished, the salt is obtained. The inhabitants interviewed make the explanation that, in order for the salt to come out clean and white, an egg white was added according to what it was desired to clean; boiling water removed the foam from the whites and thus cleaned and bleached the salt.

When this is done, it is allowed to cool and the salt is placed in the soil that had previously been prepared with the ash from the wood consumed; subsequently it was placed in the boats for sale. The fine salt is sold about 40 or 50 doubles or quarts -equivalences explained later-, and it is marketed for six or eight days depending on how it is worked.

The system of weights and measures of the southern region of the State of Mexico is the following, although the clarification is made that in some communities it is still applied, especially to weigh and measure the grain of corn. On the other hand, it is reiterated that this information was obtained through field ethnographic work:

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Table 1. Table of equivalence commonly used to market salt in the southern region of the State of Mexico.

Medidas de comercialización	
1 cuartillo	1.5 kg.
1 carga	100 cuartillos
2 dobles = a cuartillos	3 mts. de maíz
1 medida = 1 litro	1 cuartillo
½ cuartillo y un doble	2 medios cuartillos
2 cuarterón	½ cuartillo
4 cuarterones	1 cuartillo

Source: Own elaboration obtained from field work.

In this way the salt is measured and weighed both for personal consumption and for sale, since it is sold in nearby ranches; and of this, as additional data of interest, it is emphasized that women were in charge.

This is how the story is recreated and remains through the collective memory from the experiences of the people, reproducing the imaginary and sharing its memory thanks to the experience lived in the story. This memory reflects a series of identity projections for the place where it is reproduced, as well as in the generational knowledge of these people who benefited from salt and their social environment, always in the daily struggle for subsistence.