

A SHORT HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SALT PRODUCTION IN LORRAINE, FRANCE

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France is today one of the major salt producers in Europe (about 7500 kt incl. salt in brine). Halite deposits are mined there by dry mining and solution mining. Both technologies are used in Lorraine as follows:

- 1 rock salt mine at Saint Nicolas,
- 3 evaporated salt works at Dombasle, Einville, and Varangéville,
- 2 soda ash plants at Dombasle, and La Madeleine using salt in brine as a raw material.

The Lower Keuper deposit which is extensively mined in this area has a known extension of about 30 km by 50 km. The salt beds are at a depth of 90 to 170 m to the N.E. of the city of Nancy. Salt layers are no longer exploited at the towns of Dieuze and Sarralbe (Middle Muschelkalk). Original operations were first based on natural salt springs located in the river Seille valley, and some of the sites remained operated with ups and downs until the middle of the XXth century. Many questions remain unanswered regarding salt production techniques - called 'briquetage' - during the pre-historical times. As a matter of fact the salt works in the river Seille valley developed from the Xth century under the leadership of the bishop of Metz, various monasteries, and later on, under the domination of the Duke of Lorraine. A few words about Lorraine from a political point of view:

- Lotharingia was the part of the Carolingian empire attributed to Lotharius in year 843 (treaty of Verdun),
- The duchy of Lorraine was established in 895 within the limits of Lotharingia; and it was split into Low Lorraine and High Lorraine in the Xth century,
- High Lorraine was constituted as duchy of Lorraine, a feudal entity of the Holy Roman Empire.

One should keep in mind that after the changes affecting the former Lotharingia, the duchies of Lorraine and Bar in the east of France remained independent state until 1766 although the so-called 'three bishoprics' (Metz, Toul, Verdun) had been earlier integrated into the kingdom of France (1552). The 'departementalisation' initiated by the 1st French Republic, divided this area into administrative units : Meurthe, Meuse, Moselle, and Vosges. From that time two of them were concerned with salt production. Lorraine is currently a 'region' within the framework of the European Community.

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