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Shuicheng Li and Lothar von Falkenhausen (eds.), *Salt Archaeology in China, Volume 1. Ancient Salt Production and Landscape Archaeology in the Upper Yangzi Basin: Preliminary Studies*, six color plates with 25 photos, 2006; *Volume 2. Global Comparative Perspectives*, 12 color plates with 25 photos and 1 color map, 16 white/black plates, 2010, Science Press, Beijing.

The appearance of the industrial age, the refrigeration age and globalisation are some of the reasons that worked to gradually depreciate the value that salt had for humanity. Today, particularly in advanced societies, salt is a common product, profusely present in a large range of varieties. But, as we go back in time from the Middle Ages onwards, we come to an understanding of the importance of salt in daily life, coming to grips with a time during which the only mineral habitually consumed by

humans was labelled as “white gold”. Salt was vitally important not only for the day-to-day alimentation, but particularly for preserving food during the non-productive seasons in the temperate continental areas. But salt was used by people for many other purposes, and left a strong imprint on various aspects of human life. It is precisely because of this that the efforts of the specialists focused on investigating salt from during the archaeological time, naturally starting with prehistory, are noteworthy. It is more so the case with those human communities that played a major role in the evolution of mankind. In this context, it is obvious that the very title of the book discussed in these lines suffices to elicit the greatest interest on part of the advised readers.

The starting point of the researches was the discovery of an important manufacturing site at Zhongba in Zhong Xian (Chongqing). Because this multiperiod site presented a considerable epistemic potential, it brought about the idea of an international project (Landscape Archaeology and Ancient Salt Production in the Sichuan Basin and Adjacent Areas) conducted through an institutional collaboration between two notable universities, Peking University and UCLA, represented by Li Shuicheng (Chinese co-Pi) and Lothar von Falkenhausen (American co-PI), two representative personalities of the archaeology of salt. The project, which commenced in 1998, further attracted other foreign researchers. The first concrete activity consisted of a one-month field trip undertaken in March 1999 in order to gather a preliminary set of information of the research area, and to estimate the parameters of the feasibility of research. As it is widely known, the success of any project is dependent on the clear definition of its background and purpose. Professor Falkenhausen remarked in the first volume, in the first chapter entitled as such, what vast scientific benefits and international visibility could the Chinese discoveries have, though contingent on the extent to which the finds, made in a country that emerged from international isolation only after 1990, are capitalised through the most advanced research methods and paradigms available worldwide. Starting with its world areas of primary civilization, and by developing the recent global directions, Chinese archaeology can take the opportunity to integrate itself, as it certainly

deserves, into the area of the world's greatest scientific interests. This is all the more so since, before the start of this project, the archaeology of salt in China was much too under represented on the world stage. On account of the fact that it left its mark in various ways on the evolution of the entire mankind, this research field involves a complex approach that should be as holistic as possible, which surpasses the regular limits of archaeology. Aware of this fact, the project articulated by the American co-PI was designed from the perspective of anthropological archaeology (human impact on, and adaptation to, the natural environment, environmental history, production system). As it is rightly stressed in this first chapter, the production of salt is, in Durkheim's terms, "a total social fact — an aspect of human behaviour that encapsulates the totality of the social system" (p. 15). This approach should ideally cover all the chronological segments of any area investigated, up to the present time, which explains the propitious combination, in our opinion, between the archaeological approach centered on prehistory, and the historiographical one. From this point of view, the Sichuan area, "one of China's principal salt-producing area" (p. 17), harbours evidences from all the past ages, as exemplified by the Late Neolithic and the Bronze Age archaeological chronologies of the Sichuan Basin (p. 21).

Another particularly commendable idea of this project is to position the new discoveries from the Sichuan area in the context of the most significant archaeological, historical and ethnographical research from around the world. This necessary comparative vision was behind the decision to invite some of the most prestigious foreign experts from this field of research, who, by means of their vested input, would help interpret the discoveries from the Sichuan area.

The second chapter is comprised of four reports. The first, dealing with the 1999 preliminary field season and elaborated by Falkenhausen with the contribution of the researchers from the Department of Archaeology (Peking University), the Institute of Archaeology (UCLA), the Chengdu Municipal Institute of Archaeology, and the Department of Anthropology (University of Alabama), is structured on sections concerning the large areas investigated and the individual localities found

there (pp. 31–113). The list of areas and the number of settlements and sites serves to make sense of the amplitude of these investigations: A. Locations in Pujiang County, Chengdu Municipality (Sichuan) (6); B. Locations in Qionglai County, Chengdu Municipality (Sichuan) (1); C. Sites in Zigong City, the „Salt Capital” of Sichuan (3); D. Sites in Zhong Xian (Chongqing Municipality) (4); E. Sites in Yunyang and Fengjie Counties (Chongqing Municipality)(1); F. Sites in Wuxi and Wushan (Chongqing Municipality) (2); that is to say, an total of 18 micro-areas. The appendix at the end of the chapter is in fact a day-by-day account of the journey.

The ancient salt wells from the Yushan Township (Pengsu County, Chongqing) are treated in the second report. Authored by Li Xiaobo, the report is structured in three sections addressing the geological conditions, the presentation of the actual survey conducted in Yushan, and the significance of the research on the ancient salt industry from the area in question. The third study is a preliminary report on the archaeological investigations conducted by the Chengdu Municipal Institute of Archaeology in Pujian County, at an ancient salt production site and in four other locations. In the fourth and last report of the second chapter, Long Teng analyses the cliffside carvings located near the salt wells from Pujian County.

The next chapter, entitled *Monographs*, seeks to deliver synthesis works on the geology and archaeology of the Sichuan area. The first section, by Li Xiaobo, considers the geological background behind the development of salt production in ancient Sichuan. In the third section, Rowan Flad and Pochan Chen advance a monographic outline of the archaeology of the Sichuan Basin and the surrounding areas during the Neolithic. The monographic approach pins down a narrower category in Ian W. Brown’s section on the pointed-base cup, a ceramic species probable employed during salt production. The same approach is employed by Sun Hua and Zen Xianlong, the authors of the section on the same cups and the cauldrons with scalloped rims and the relations with the fishing and salt industry from the Yanzi Gorge Area during the pre-Qin period.

The rich bibliography section ending the first volume (p. 340–366) is relevant foremost for the concerns on the archaeology and the history of salt in China.

The main purpose of the second volume is to highlight the importance of the archaeological research on salt from China, in a referential context that is as encompassing as possible in terms of international references. The studies, which naturally were unable to exhaust not even the most important sites from around the globe, were structured into three distinct parts: *East and Southeast Asia*, *Near East and Europe* and *The New World*. They constitute the editorial capitalization, albeit a partial one since several of the authors were unable to finish their studies, of two international scholarly gatherings that took place in 2004 at UCLA and 2006 at Tübingen; these two scientific events fall along the trend line configured in 1974 at Gloucester, to conceive the archaeology of salt at a global scale. This is also made manifest from the increase in the number of researchers gathered at the two events. Thus, if at the conference from UCLA, organised by L. von Falkenhausen, was attended by participants from China, the United States and Canada, the conference in Germany, organised by H. U. Vogel gathered specialists from the host country, China, Japan, the United States, France, Spain, Austria. Certainly, research conducted on a global scale is the mandatory preliminary condition for comparative approaches. As revealed in the introductory pages signed by the editors of the book, only a single study – the paper authored by Jan Brown – is of an “explicitly comparative nature” (p. 11). But it is laudatory that the volume gathers synthesis studies, which are most useful for this global vision.

The part on the *East and Southeast Asia* contains studies addressing issues from the countries of this area: H.U. Vogel reconsiders the work on the production techniques for maritime salt during Imperial China; Chen Xingcan, Liu Li and Zhao Chunyan tackles the issue of salt from Southern Shanxi and the role in played during the development of the early Chinese polities; in the same vein, Kishimoto Masatoshi focuses on the circulation of salt in the ancient Japanese state; a multifaceted approach is applied by Andreas Reinecke to investigating the evidence for salt making

in ancient Vietnam; an ethnoarchaeological study on salt and pottery manufacturing in Bahal (Central Philippines) is signed by Andrea Yankowski constitutes the last paper of this part.

The part on archaeology of salt from the Near East features the study by B. Erdogu and M. Ozbacaran on the salt in prehistoric Central Anatolia. Much better represented is Europe, with a series of studies by German (Thomas Saile on the patterns of production and trade of salt in Neolithic Central Europe; Martin Hees on the prehistoric production of salt in Southwest Germany; Janine Fries-Knoblach, on the impact of salt production on the Central European Iron Age; Harald Witthoft on the economy and settling around the saline of Luneburg in Germany during the High Middle Ages) and French (Laurent Olivier on the Iron Age salt production centre from *Briquetage de la Seille* in Moselle, France) researchers. Included in this section is Ian W. Brown's study in which he compares the briquetage from Zongba (Sichuan, China) the finds from the red hills of Essex. This latter section should have rather be put into a separate chapter, precisely in order to draw attention to this promising comparative vision that must be furthered into the future.

With respect to the Americas, this part of the globe is represented by Heather McKillop's study on the spatial analysis of the briquetage and wooden buildings found at the Paynes Creek saltworks in Belize, and by Ian W. Brown, who provides with a synthesis work on the archaeological investigations on the salt springs from the Eastern Woodlands of the United States.

The careful reading of these two volumes has been particularly engaging, though I shall refrain from voicing my reflections, save for a number of them.

The bilingual edition (in Chinese and English), to which an essential contribution was made by Rowan Flad, faced numerous challenges with respect to the terminological equivalences between the English and Chinese (and viceversa) specialised lexicons. Judging by the impact of the first volume, deemed a "mini-boom of salt archaeology stuyd in various parts of China" (vol. II, pag. 3), these difficulties seem to have been succesfully overcome.

Special mention should also be made of the impressive bibliography gathered by L. von Falkenhausen (vol. II, pag. 411–470), which exposes to the international circuit a considerable portion of the results obtained by the various national archaeological schools or research directions.

On account of its general conception, the exploratory character of many of the endeavours, and the impressive quantity of information concerning the archaeology (and history) of salt, these two volumes definitely represent a major publishing event, set to become a reference work for this field of research. The publication of the already-announced future volumes is to be warmly welcomed.

Finally, a suggestion: the launch of a website dedicated to this project could, on the one hand, contribute to a substantial increase in its international visibility, and on the other, establish itself as a forum for future collaborations between the increasingly numerous researchers from around the world concerned with holistic approaches to the archaeology of salt.

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