

From *Sal* to a “Semantic Spider’s Web” in Latin

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Abstract. This paper examines the lexeme *sal* and its lexical family in Latin, as attested in various written sources. The terms formed from *sal* have been classified in *partes orationis* (*nomen et verbum*), and their semantic spectrum (e.g., preservation, occupations, literal and figurative meanings).

Rezumat. Această lucrare analizează lexemul *sal* și familia sa lexicală în latină, așa cum este atestată în diferite surse scrise. Termenii formați de la *sal* au fost împărțiți în *partes orationis* (*nomen et verbum*) și a fost analizat spectrul semantic al acestora (e.g., conservare, ocupații, sens propriu și figurat).

Keywords

Salt, Latin language, lexical family, semantic spectrum, *partes orationis*.

Introduction

This article aims to investigate, as a preliminary approach, the lexical family formed from *sal*-, as part of a larger project on the terminology of salt in classical languages².

This research addresses the Latin lexic on salt developed only from the term *sal*. We will not deal with terms semantically related to salt, which are not constructed on the radical *sal*- (e.g. fish sauces like *garum*, *liquamen*, *muria* și *hallex*)³.

Therefore, we propose an analysis split into two categories: terms categorized according to literal and figurative meanings and terms categorized according to *partes orationis* (*nomen et verbum*).

In the extensive analysis of research on salt or brine in Latin authors, I would highlight, within the context of our study, two major synthesis works. The first synthesis covers topics such as symbolism and epistemological approach of salt in antiquity⁴, while the second one addresses issues related to salt lakes and springs, salt rivers, rock salt exploitation, human

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² For the issues related to the terminological aspects of salt in Greek, see CURCĂ 2016.

³ DUMITRACHE 2014.

⁴ MOINIER 2012.

consumption, price of salt, food preservation, halotherapy, metallurgy, pedology, architecture, spirituality, rites, sacrifices, etc.⁵

Selectively, I will list the most significant studies related to the topic. The anthropological perspective was proposed by M. Alexianu⁶. N. Morère Molinero cataloged and analyzed the occurrences of the term *salinae*, considering them not only as production sites but also as economic hubs. This analysis takes into account chronological factors in interpreting their economic significance⁷. M. Paraschiv has examined various aphoristic expressions from Greek and Latin authors in which the term *sal* is attested. Thus, she quotes phrases denoting the idea of spirituality, friendship, hospitality⁸. B. Moinier conducted a detailed analysis of the symbolic and culinary dimensions of salt in the works of Cicero and Horace⁹. The aspects related to fiscality and commerce, exploitation techniques were analyzed by C. Carusi¹⁰. The halotherapeutic dimension was also a topic of research in the literature¹¹. The etymological aspects were discussed by A. Poruciu¹² and A. Falileyev¹³.

As regards this last aspect, the etymological one, it is appropriate to make several comments. As far as the Proto-Indo-European etymology of the Latin *sal*, it has been a topic of debate in the exegesis ("The word for salt (*seh_a-(e)l-), for example, was a major issue of discussion among linguists of the nineteenth century because it was regarded as disritical in locating the homeland near a natural source of salt such as the Black Sea or Aegean. In reality, salt springs and later salt mines were exploited over many areas of Eurasia since the Neolithic shift in diet that required salt both for dietary reasons (increasing consumption of cereals resulted in a reduction of salt intake from a meat diet) and for the preservation of meat"¹⁴). The Latin *sal* possible originated from Proto-Indo-European **sal-* which carries a double meaning: salt or dirty (the last one derived from the colour of rock-salt blocks). The controversy over Indo-European origin originated from the lack of salt words in Indo-Iranian idioms¹⁵. Apart from Latin and Greek, the radical **sal-* also occurs in languages like Old Irish *salann*, New English *salt*, Latvian *sāls*, Armenian *al*, Tocharian B *salyiye*, Lithuanian *sólymas*,

⁵ MOINIER, WELLER 2015.

⁶ ALEXIANU 2015 ; 2023, 3-10.

⁷ MORÈRE MOLINERO 2010, 1465-1473 ; 2011, 155-161.

⁸ PARASCHIV 2011, 2019-223.

⁹ 2015, 37-49.

¹⁰ CARUSI 2007, 325-342; 2008, 353-364.

¹¹ CURCĂ 2007, 259-270 ; SANDU ET AL. 2010, 225-256.

¹² PORUCIUC 2008, 133-148; 2011, 215-218.

¹³ 2011, 209-214.

¹⁴ MALLORY, ADAMS 2006, 264 ; see also Ernout, Meillet 1959, s.v.

¹⁵ PORUCIUC 2011, 215-218.

Sanskrite *salilá*, etc.¹⁶. The Sanskrit lexeme is considered by A. Poruciuc as the equivalent of the Latin word *salum-i* (*sea in motion, open sea*)¹⁷.

We will analyse the meanings of the lexeme *sal* and its lexical family from a semantic perspective (literal and figurative meaning) (Table 1), followed by an examination of the *partes orationis* (*nomen and verbum*) associated with *sal* (Table 2): 1.*sal, salis* (masculin / rarely neuter) means : ‘common salt (sodium chloride), pl. lumps of salt, as symbol of hospitality; 2.a.flos salis : Crystalline salt obtained from brine ; oily deposit found near salt-mines ; sal Hammoniacus / Sal Hamoniacum : an impure state of sodium chloride found in Libya; sal fossicius (fossilis) : rock-salt ; sal marinus : sea salt ; sal nativus : natural salt ; sal nitrum : Nitrum ; sucus salis : brine ; 3.salt water, brine; 4.poetic (the sea); 5. a sort of flaw in precious stones; 6.a quality which gives 'life' or 'character' to a person or thing; (of speech) wit; pl. examples of wit jokes witticisms’¹⁸.

Table 1.		
LITERAL MEANING		
Latin lexeme	Ancient authors	Meaning
<i>insulsus, -a, -um</i>	Col., 2.9.10	‘unsalted’
<i>salacaccabia, -orum</i> (n. pl.)	Appic., 4.116	‘salaisons’
<i>Salacia, -ae</i> (f.)	Apul., <i>Apol.</i> , 31 ; Cic., <i>Tim.</i> , 39	‘the name of a sea-goddess’
<i>salacitas, -atis</i> (f.)	Col., 8.1115; Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 9.59	‘strong sexual appetite, salaciousness’
<i>salariarius, -a, -um</i>	Ulp., <i>Dig.</i> , 17.1.10.9	‘one who receives a <i>salarium</i> , mercenary’
<i>salarium, -ii</i> (n.)	Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 31.89; Sen., <i>Ep.</i> , 97, 2; Tac., <i>Agr.</i> , 42	‘a regular official payment to the holder of a civil or military post’
<i>salarius, -a, -um</i>	Liv., 29.37.3; Mart., 1.41.8	‘of or relating to salt ; <i>via Salaria</i> : the ancient salt route of the Sabines’
<i>salarius, -ii</i> (m.)	Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 31.89 ; Suet., <i>Nero</i> , 48.1	‘a dealer in salted fish’
<i>salax, -acis</i>	Ov., <i>Fast.</i> , 4.771; Col. 7.9.1;	‘(of men), male animals. Eager for sexual intercourse, highly

¹⁶ MALLORY, ADAMS 2006, 261.

¹⁷ PORUCIUC 2008, 136; 2011, 215-218.

¹⁸ For the references on lexical family of salt mentioned in this article, see Glare 1968, s.v. and Gaffiot 2000, s.v.

	Petr., 43.8; Catul., 37.1	sexed, lascivious; stimulating sexual desire, aphrodisiac’; ? ‘an unidentified sea-fish’
<i>salgama, -orum</i> (n. pl.)	Col. 10.117	‘pickling vegetables, herbs’
<i>salgamarius, -ii</i> (m.)	Col. 12.56.1	‘a maker / merchand of pickles’
<i>salgamum, -i</i> (n.)	<i>Cod. Just.</i> 12.42	‘ce qui constitue l’alimentation, nourriture’
<i>salifodina, -ae</i> (f.)	Vitr., 8.3.7	‘salt pit’
<i>salillum, -i</i> (n.)	Catul., 23.19 ; Pl. <i>Trim.</i> , 492	‘a little salt-cellar’
<i>salinae, -arum</i> (f., pl.)	Caes., <i>Civ.</i> , 2.37.5; Vitr. 8.3.10; Liv., 24.47.15 ; Cic., <i>Fam.</i> , 7.32.1	‘salt-pans, salterns. A district of Rome by the Porta Gemina’
<i>salinarius, -a, -um</i>	Vitr., 8.3	‘de sel, de saline’
<i>salinator, -oris</i> (m.)	Cic., <i>de Orat.</i> , 2.273; Cic., <i>Brut.</i> , 73; Suet., <i>Tib.</i> , 3.2	‘the operator of a salt-works. Salinator (<i>cognomen</i>)’
<i>saliniensis, -is</i> (m.)	<i>CIL</i> IV, 128	‘merchand of salt’
<i>salinum, -i</i> (n.)	Liv, 26.36.6 ; Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 33.153	‘a salt-cellar’
<i>salipotens, -ntis</i>	Pl., <i>Trin.</i> , 820	‘roi de la mer’
<i>saliva, -ae</i> (f.)	Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 7.13; Sen., <i>Ep.</i> , 79.7; Sen., <i>Dial.</i> , 5.38.2	‘saliva, spittle (as a sign of pleasurable anticipation, also of greed ; applied to other more or less similar substances ; a distinctive flavour, esp. of wine)’
<i>salivarius, -a, -um</i>	Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 9.160	‘resembling saliva, slimy, viscous’
<i>salivatio, -onis</i> (f.)	C.-Aur., <i>Acut.</i> , 3.27	‘salivation’
<i>salivatium, -i</i> (n.)	Col., 6.10.1; Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 27.101	‘a medicine for inducing salivation, sialagogue’
<i>salivo, -are, -avi, -atum</i>	Plin. 9,125; Col. 6,5,2	‘to cause an animal to salivate ; to exude (a slimy substance)’
<i>salivosus, -a, -um</i>	Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 16.181; Apul., <i>Apol.</i> , 59	‘covered with saliva ; slobbering ; like saliva, slimy, clammy’

<i>sallo, -ere, -sum</i>	Sall., <i>Hist.</i> , 3.87	'to salt, make salty'
<i>salmacidus, -a, -um</i>	Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 31.36; Flor., <i>Epit.</i> , 2.20	'(of water) salt and bitter, brackish'
<i>salor, -oris (m.)</i>	Capel., 1.8	'couleur de la mer'
<i>salsamen, -inis (n.)</i>	Ann., 7.24	'viande salée'
<i>salsamentarius, -a, -um</i>	Col. 2.10.16; Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 28.140	'dealing in salt and fish; a seller of salted fish; (of containers) used for holding salted fish'
<i>salmentum, -i (n.)</i>	Char., 265.16	'salaison'
<i>salsamentum, -i (n.)</i> , usually pl.	Cato, <i>Agr.</i> , 88.2 ; Col. 8.7.12	'salted food, esp. fish'
<i>salsare, -is (n.)</i>	Hor. <i>S.</i> , 2.8.86	'vase à mettre de la salaison'
<i>salsarium-ii (n.)</i>	Appic., 9.442	'a salt-cellar'
<i>salsarius, -a, -um</i>	CIL VI, 9677	'marchand de salaisons'
<i>salsarius, -ii (m.)</i>	Inscr. <i>Grut.</i> , 647.1	'merchand of salted food'
<i>salsatus, -a-um</i>	Aug. <i>Ep.</i> , 108.14	'salé'
<i>salsedo, -inis (f.)</i>	Pall., 11.14.2	'salure'
<i>salsicius, -a, -um</i>	Hor., <i>S.</i> , 2.4.60	'salé'
<i>salsilago, -inis (f.)</i>	Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 31.92	'brine, saltiness'
<i>salsipotens, -ntis</i>	Pl., <i>Trin.</i> 820	'that rules over the salt sea ; epithete of Neptune'
<i>salsitudo, -inis (f.)</i>	Vitr. 1.4.11	'(of water) saltiness, salinity'
<i>salsiusculus, -a, -um</i>	Aug., <i>Conf.</i> , 8.3	'un peu salé'
<i>salso, -are, -avi, -atum</i>	Aug., <i>Ep.</i> , 108.14	'saler'
<i>salsugo, -inis (f.)</i>	Vitr., 2.7.2; Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 19.85	'water strongly impregnated with salt, brine; salt quality, salinity'
<i>salsura, -ae (f.)</i>	Cato, <i>Agr.</i> , 162.1; Col., 12.50.5	'the process of salting or pickling; the condition of being preserved in brine; salted food'
<i>salsurus, -a, -um</i>	Salt., <i>Hist.</i> , 3.87	'salé'
<i>salsus, -a, -um</i>	Ov., <i>Fast.</i> , 3.284; Cato, <i>Agr.</i> , 144; Sen., <i>Oed.</i> , 335; Plin. <i>Nat.</i> , 7.42	'artificially salt, preserved or flavoured with salt, salted; naturally salt, impregnated with/or tasting of salt, salty; (of water) salt, briny; (poet.), of the sea, or in periphrases denoting

		the sea
<i>salum, -i</i> (n.)	Cic., <i>Ver.</i> , 5.91; Caes., <i>Civ.</i> , 3.28.4 ; Verg., <i>A.</i> , 1.537; Catul., 6.3.16 Luc., 2.685; Liv., 44.12.6	‘the sea in motion, swell, billow ; the sea, deep’
FIGURATIVE MEANING¹⁹		
<i>insulse</i>	Mart., 7.85 ²⁰	‘unattractively, stupidly’
<i>insulitas, -atis</i> (f.)	Cic., <i>de Orat.</i> , 2. 217 ²¹	‘unattractiveness, stupidity’
<i>insulsus, -a, -um</i>	Quint., <i>Inst., orat.</i> VI, 3, 19 ²²	‘unattractive, boring, stupid’
<i>sal, -is</i> (m., n.)	Pl. <i>Cur.</i> IV, 4, 561-562 ²³ ; Hor., <i>Serm.</i> , 1, 10, 3-4 ²⁴ ; Plin., <i>Nat.</i> , 23, 149 ²⁵	‘to dine; spice; jokes’ (used at pl.)
<i>salse</i>	Quint., <i>Inst.</i> , 6, 3, 13 ²⁶	‘with spirit, witty’
<i>salinum, -i</i>	Hor., <i>Carm.</i> , II, 16, 13-14 ²⁷	‘modest way of life’
<i>salsitas, -atis</i> (f.)	Hier., <i>Lucif.</i> , 14	‘esprit fin, mordant’
<i>salsura, -ae</i> (f.)	Pl., <i>Cur.</i> , 240-243 ²⁸	‘humour’
<i>salsus, -a, -um</i>	Quint., <i>Inst., orat.</i> VI, 3, 17-18 ²⁹	‘salted with humour, witty, funny, cruel, jocking’

¹⁹ We will only present a few examples; for the list of occurrences of salt in Greek and Latin aphoristic expressions, see PARASCHIV 2011, 219-223.

²⁰ Quod non insulse scribis tetrasticha quaedam, disticha quod belle pauca, Sabelle, facis, laudo nec admiror.

²¹ nam et Siculi in eo genere et Rhodii et Byzantii et praeter ceteros Attici excellunt; sed qui eius rei rationem quandam conati sunt artemque tradere, sic insulsi exstiterunt, ut nihil aliud eorum nisi ipsa insulitas rideatur.

²² Salsum igitur erit quod non erit insulsum, velut quoddam simplex orationis condimentum, quod sentitur latente iudicio velut palato, excitatque et a taedio defendit orationem.

²³ Therapontigone Platagidore, salve; salvos quom advenis in Epidaurum, hic hodie apud me numquam delinges salem.

²⁴ Quis tam Lucili fautor inepte est, ut non hoc fateatur? at idem, quod sale multo urbem defricuit, charta laudatur eadem.

²⁵ In sanctuariis Mithridatis, maximi regis, devicti Cn. Pompeius invenit in peculiari commentario ipsius manu compositionem antidoti e Il nucibus siccis, item ficis totidem et rutae foliis XX simul tritis, addito salis grano.

²⁶ Occasio vero et in rebus est, (cuius est) tanta vis ut saepe adiuti ea non indocti modo sed etiam rustici salse dicant, et in eo, quid aliquis dixerit prior.

²⁷ Vivitur parvo bene, cui paternum/splendet in mensa tenui salinum.

²⁸ Quin tu aliquot dies perdura, dum intestina exputescunt tibi, nunc dum salsura sat bonast.

Table 2.				
sal-				
	Noun	Adjective	Verb	Adverb
<i>insulse</i>				•
<i>insulsitas, -atis (f.)</i>	•			•
<i>insulsus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salacaccabia, -orum (n., pl.)</i>	•			
<i>Salacia, -ae (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salacitas, -atis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salariarius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salarium, -ii (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salarius-, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salarius, -ii (m.)</i>	•			
<i>salax, -acis</i>		•		
<i>salgama, -orum (n., pl.)</i>	•			
<i>salgamarius, -ii (m.)</i>	•			
<i>salgamum, -i (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salifodina, -ae (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salipotens, -ntis</i>		•		
<i>salillum, -i (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salinae, -arum (f., pl.)</i>	•			
<i>salinarius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salinator, -oris (m.)</i>	•			
<i>saliniensis, -is (m.)</i>	•			
<i>salinum, -i (n.)</i>	•			
<i>saliva, -ae (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salivarius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salivatio, -onis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salivatium, -i (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salivo, -are, -avi, -atum</i>			•	
<i>salivosus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>sallo, -ere, -sum</i>			•	
<i>salmacidus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salsamen, -inis (n.)</i>	•			

²⁹ *Salsum in consuetudine pro ridiculo tantum accipimus: natura non utique hoc est, quamquam et ridicula esse oporteat salsa. Nam et Cicero omne quod salsum sit ait esse Atticorum non quia sunt maxime ad risum compositi, et Catullus, cum dicit: "nulla est in corpore mica salis", non hoc dicit, nihil in corpore eius esse ridiculum.*

<i>salsamentarius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salmentum, -i (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salor, -oris (m.)</i>	•			
<i>salsamentum, -i (n.), usually pl.</i>	•			
<i>salsare, -is (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salsarium-ii (n.)</i>	•			
<i>salsarius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salsarius, -ii (m.)</i>	•			
<i>salsatus, -a- um</i>		•		
<i>salse</i>				•
<i>salsedo, -inis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsicius, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salsilago, -inis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsipotens, -ntis</i>		•		
<i>salsitas, -atis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsitudo, -inis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsiusculus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salso, -are, -avi, -atum</i>			•	
<i>salsugo, -inis (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsura, -ae (f.)</i>	•			
<i>salsurus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salsus, -a, -um</i>		•		
<i>salum, -i (n.)</i>	•			

Apart from the examples illustrated above, we would also mention the lexeme *insula*, whose etymology, linked to the root for 'salt', has been a topic of debate in the literature³⁰.

We have identified 32 nouns, 17 adjectives, 3 verbs and 2 adverbs that semantically encompass the following contexts:

-food consumption and preservation (e.g. *salacaccabia, salgama, salgamum, salsamen, salsamentum, salsura*);

-saltiness (e.g. *salsatus, salsedo, salsicius, salsilago, salsitudo, salsiusculus, salsugo, salsurus*);

-occupations (e.g. *salsamentarius*);

-aphrodisiac dimension (e.g. *salacitas, salax*);

³⁰ For an analysis of this lexeme and its associated controversial etymological issues, see FALILEYEV 2011, 209-214 : “Martianus Capella, 6, 43: *inter fluenta emergentes terras, quae, quod in salo sint, insulae vocitantur*, Isidorus, Et. XIV, VI): *insulae dictae quod in salo sint, id est in mari.*”

-figurative uses (e.g. *insulsus, salsedo, salse, salsura, salsus*).

These contexts are attested, mainly, in various literary genres, as well as in juridical texts, etc. The lexical entries for *salt* are prevalent mostly as nouns, but also as adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and reflects both literal and figurative meanings, and includes terms formed through compounding (e.g., *salacaccabia, salifodina*), prefix derivation (e.g., *insulsus*), suffix derivation (e.g., *salsamentarius*), and diminutives (e.g., *salsiusculus*). We should highlight that the figurative meaning of *salt* is attested also in Greek (e.g. ἰλίφρων ‘with a lost, misled spirit’; ἰλία ‘salt-cellar’, mark of extreme poverty’). Compared to Greek, the number of words derived from the radical *sal-* in Latin is significantly lower; however, it is important to emphasize that these lexemes correspond to key aspects and necessities of Roman society.

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