

## **A few facts about the history of salt**

It is the only rock consumed by humans. It not only adds taste, but also preserves. It symbolises wisdom, seals friendships, sanctions contracts and protects from misfortune. Salt, because that is what we're talking about, is a powerful symbol, but it also has many practical applications and you can say without hesitation that it is a substance necessary for life.

The Romans used to say *amantes amentes*, meaning “in love, in delirium”, while a person in love was described as *salax*, meaning “salted”. Ancient conquerors salted the ruins of cities to make sure they would never be rebuilt. Salt was also poured on the stage in traditional Japanese theatre to protect actors from evil spirits.

Salt symbolises durability, and so it emphasises the eternal nature of the covenant between God and humanity. The Book of Numbers says, “It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring”, while the Book of Chronicles says, “The LORD, the God of Israel, has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt”. Hindu soldiers swore allegiance to the English on salt.

In Europe, it was customary to put a bit of salt on a newborn's tongue. When this practice was banned, cautious parents placed some salt in the baby's cradle, convinced that it would protect the child from evil.

A nef – an extravagant container filled with salt – was placed on the tables of French kings. The salt placed before the ruler meant his health, and thus the health, prosperity and permanence of the state.

Salt had great value and was also known as white gold. It is no wonder then that spilled salt was bad news. The power of the salt is evidenced by a warning from a 16th-century Jewish law book. Salt could only be touched with the middle finger and the ring finger.

Salt absorbs moisture, in which microorganisms grow, and destroys bacteria. Thanks to its preservative properties, people could keep their food longer – ancient Egyptians used salt to preserve fish and fowl. Ham is supposed to have been invented by the Celts. Humans in the Middle Ages savoured salted cod and herring, trade in salted goods flourished, allowing people to save themselves from hunger and survive many a siege during the war. Barrels of salted fish could certainly be found in the holds of ships embarking on Renaissance journeys in search of new lands.

Sodium chloride turned out to be essential in the process of obtaining a priceless dye called Tyrian purple. European farmers noted that ergot did not attack grain soaked in brine. Salt was used for tanning leather, cleaning chimneys, welding pipes and glazing ceramics. Doctors used salt as a remedy against toothaches and indigestion, as well as against “intellectual disability”.