The salinae of O Areal (Vigo) and Roman salt production in NW Iberia

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In antiquity, the production of sea salt was one of the most important sources of salt. According to Pliny the Elder (NH 31.81), the most common way of obtaining salt was through marine salinae: facticii varia genera, volgaris plurimusque in salinis mari adfuso. There are plenty of textual references to marine salt evaporation ponds: 1 Livy (1.33) reported that Ancus Marius opened saltworks on the Tiber next to Ostia; Pliny (NH 31.84-87) mentioned a series of examples of such installations distributed throughout the Mediterranean, while Columella (Rust. 10.135) indicated the existence of saltworks at Pompeii, and Cassiodorus (Var. 12.24) spoke of those located near Venice. Passages in Rutilius Namatianus (De red. 475-90) and Manilius (Astr. 5.682-92) are also well known for their explanations of how ancient saltworks operated.

The available archaeological evidence for saltworks is scattered and incomplete, but this is starting to change as evidence for marine salt production emerges across Mediterranean lands. Saltworks have been documented on the right bank of the Tiber dating to the first half of the 1st c. A.D. 2 At Kaunos, 48 circular ponds have been identified; with a diameter of 4.3 m, 14-18 cm deep and a floor in opus caementicium, 3 these ponds were arranged in 8 lines of 6, to create a total of 5 units separated by 4 rectangular canals through which sea water was distributed. 4 At Antibes, a large cobble-paved floor next to an ancient salt-water lagoon has been interpreted as a salina. 5 In connection with the large number of Roman fish-salting factories known in Gades, 6 some remains of Roman saltworks have been documented at Cádiz. 7 In Huelva at the site of El Terrón (Lepe) Roman saltworks have been

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4 The proximity of the saltworks to the city of Kaunos (c.5 km away), as well as Pliny’s reference (NH 31.99) to salt from Kaunos as a remedy for eye diseases (Carusi [supra n.1] 85), could lead one to think that the origin of these structures could be taken back to classical antiquity; yet no archaeological evidence has been published that allows the chronology to be fixed.