

## Salt Trading in the Amazon Basin

### Conclusions Suggested by the Distribution of Guarani Terms for Salt

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The use of salt among the Indians of South America is regulated primarily by its supply. In western South America it is found in abundance, on both the table-land and the seaboard, whereas in the area to the east of the Andes salt supplies, even in the form of salinas or brine wells are practically non-existent, except for the southernmost part of the continent, where there are salinas in the plains to the east of the Andes, from the interior of the northern Gran Chaco down to about the latitude of Puerto Santa Cruz in Patagonia. Natural salinas exist also in the central part of the Pacific coast, and the Caribbean coast to the north. Contrary to the central part of the Pacific coast, there are, owing to the more humid climate, no natural salinas on the corresponding parts of the Atlantic coast, the seabord of Brazil. The Indians on the coast of Brazil, like those in Tierra del Fuego and the southernmost part of the Pacific coast, were able to satisfy their natural need for salt because of their direct contact with the sea. Evidence for this are the characteristic large accumulations of mussel shells and cockles at their settlement sites. References to the use of salinas for extracting salt from the sea are therefore few (cf. LÉRY 1880 Vol. II p. 26). The suggestion that the Fuegans, like the Eskimos, do not use salt (BIRKET-SMITH 1943 Vol. I pp. 153-154 et al.) is true only in a qualified sense. Their natural need for salt is met in an indirect and rather casual way ; they depend for their diet to a large extent on food from the sea, and when at sea they lick the seawater sprayed over their faces (GUSINDE 1931 p. 293 ; 1937 pp. 269-270).

GUSINDE (1916-1917 pp. 208-209) writes about man's need of salt:

"La sal como condimento ha sido siempre necesaria al hombre, aunque para las necesidades estrictas de la vida basta con la cantidad que contienen los alimentos que se ingieren diariamente. Bunge (en : POULSON [Lehrbuch der Pharmakologie. Leipzig 1912], pág. 356), ha demostrado, con una serie de ejemplos muy interesantes, que, tanto el hombre como los animales, en cuanto se alimentan principal o exclusivamente de vegetales ricos en potasa, tienen gran necesidad de la sal, mientras que en los quienes se alimentan de sustancias animales, por ser éstas relativamente ricas en soda, tal necesidad es menor. En las descripciones de los viajeros se lee que en pueblos salvajes que siguen una vida