

VIRUS

Beiträge zur Sozialgeschichte der Medizin

Band 13

Schwerpunkt:

Alternative und komplementäre Heilmethoden in der Neuzeit

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für den Verein für Sozialgeschichte der Medizin

Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2015



**“The Modern Therapeutic Bath under
Social, Medical and Economic Aspects”,**
Session at the
“European Social Science History Conference”,
Vienna, 23rd April 2014.
A Short Introduction

The practice of travelling to hot or cold springs in hopes of effecting a cure for some ailment has a long tradition in Europe – it even dates back to pre-historic times. The four following papers deal with the “modern therapeutic” bath, focusing on the medical and economic and social aspects during the 18th and 19th centuries. The health spas are examined in detail from two perspectives:

First, the question is asked as to what extent the patients (women, heads of state) used the spas and which special purposes they connected to them. How, for example, did a woman’s visit to a spa differ from that of a man? How could a ruler stay at a famous health spa whilst simultaneously continuing to meet his political obligations? Did visits by famous personalities benefit the further development of these spas? These socio-historically relevant questions can only be answered using diverse approaches, and they additionally enable an insight into the history and the evolution of health spas that were once famous but are now in decline.

In the second part, the aspect of medicalization is investigated. The Arcanum of the respective thermal springs was only “demystified” in the 18th and 19th centuries. At this time, the well-known modern-era spas in particular triggered a health spa boom, which has increased many times over since the 1990s. The expansion of these spas was also accompanied by an increase in their importance as economic enterprises for the respective owners. At present, these “spa resorts” are indispensable not only for the tourism industries of individual towns, but also for whole regions.