

PROBLEMATIC SOURCES

Nineteenth-century Investigations into Russian Healing Springs

Evgenii Platonov

The State Hermitage Museum, Research Library

Traditional Russian worldviews explained healing from water sources in terms both Protestants and Catholics would have used elsewhere in Europe: as the grace of God or as the intervention of saints through associated relics or wonder-working icons. Holy wells were freely venerated within parishes until the eighteenth century when Peter the Great and the Holy Synod (the Russian Orthodox Church's highest governing body) forbade pilgrimage to holy wells in a reformist drive to eradicate religious "superstitions." This essay employs primary sources to consider how nineteenth-century developments at Russian holy wells and mineral springs related to social class, economics and those eighteenth-century reforms that merged the church with government structures. While liturgical activities at holy wells and the designation of new holy wells was criminalized, mineral springs gained appeal for "scientific" cures and as resort enterprises for the upper classes.

Keywords: holy wells, curing wells, mineral water, balneology

While no one knows how many thousands of water sources Russians have once regarded as holy and healing wells, the earliest chronicles note those that had special meaning. As elsewhere in Europe, holy wells were significant to indigenous pagan cults. Some of these wells were Christianized and today remain a feature of everyday Orthodox church rites and folk religious practices. Traditional beliefs prescribe drinking and anointing the body with holy well water for relief from physical, mental, and spiritual problems. Many surviving contemporary customs have historically documented analogues from the late medieval and early modern periods.

While the Russian Church had a governmental structure for liturgical rites, what took place at holy wells was within a realm negotiated between parish and priest. Such wells were the property of the local parish, functioned in relation to water-blessing ritual of the Orthodox Church, local practices and healing needs, and were the sources of consecrated water. However, in the eighteenth century, parochial traditions underwent certain changes as the state, in attempting to modernize its institutions (and those of the Church as well), tried to assert control over every aspect of citizens' lives. In the drive to suppress religious "superstitions," i.e., different religious expressions, Peter the Great and the Holy Synod (the Russian Orthodox Church's highest governing body) forbade pilgrimage to holy wells. Holy wells with reputations for cures were declared to be fraudulent and donations for the maintenance of these sites, including as gifts of gratitude for cures, were said to be inspired by the people's ignorance and clerical greed. Here we can see the impact of the early Renais-

sance and Humanist ideas, such as those of Erasmus Roterodamus, who struggled with the Church's abuses without affecting the doctrine.

By the nineteenth century, the Russian Orthodox Church had been subsumed under the state, which continued to suppress those rites considered to be fraudulent, such as payments in return of prayer service at holy wells and "wonder-working" icons. Liturgical activities near holy wells were criminalized. Local administrations, both ecclesiastical and civil, were required to investigate the reverence of springs if any clergy took part in ritual activities at these sites. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century suppression of folk liturgical practice was carefully documented and the rich archival materials accessible to us today describe the origins of localized holy well cults (when known), the development of a site's veneration over time, and often the end of the use of these sites. Employing primary sources from the Russian State Historical Archive and the State Archives of the Ryazan and Vologda districts, this essay considers how Russian holy wells and healing springs were perceived, investigated, legislated, and curated in the nineteenth century. The essay will consider the evolution of Russian holy well veneration by first contextualizing Russian practices in comparison with those of Western Europe and identifying contested understandings of sacred water within Russia. The paper then considers class-based engagement in mineral resorts, as opposed to the traditional healing waters of holy springs that retained peasant devotion, and examines efforts of the church and state (operating in conjunction) to shut down use of "unapproved" holy wells. A particular case study of what happened when an ill peasant woman, Maria Somova, "discovered" a new holy well in the early 1800s will be considered as an example of how civil authorities worked to suppress folk practices in order to bring peasant religious traditions into conformity with Orthodoxy. By the nineteenth century, holy wells and mineral springs were both seen as having giving properties, but while both peasants and elites had faith in holy wells, folk liturgies at such sites, particularly unapproved holy wells, were not supported even by the priests on whom the common people depended, and mineral spas were accessible only to the wealthier classes. The case of St. Kornilly's water is then offered as the only attempt to transform the place of a holy well into a lucrative mineral spa. The essay demonstrates that eighteenth-century royal efforts to modernize Russia and eliminate peasant superstition carried over into the nineteenth-century merger of church and state and into governmental attempts to regulate even the spiritual lives of the population. In efforts to modernize Russia and embrace new scientific perspectives, holy wells, once fonts of both physical health and spiritual succor, became well-documented sites of contesting both the independence of the church and the freedom of peasants to retain unorthodox, traditional belief systems.

Readers will encounter three types of waters that were contested throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: official holy springs endorsed by the church, "unofficial" springs deemed holy by the folk, and mineral spas. Readers will meet two different "interpretive communities" that fostered the change in status of Russian sacred water sites across those two centuries and whose understandings of water were sometimes in conflict, sometimes compatible, and shifted over time. Those

communities were the peasantry and other Orthodox believers who held traditional views about springs' capacity to heal (a capacity often associated with holy figures, saints, and their deeds) and civil and church authorities who sought to exert greater control over sacred water sites to root out "superstition". The essence of this "superstitions" had two-fold determination during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: in the early period we can observe the disciplinary regulatory context while in the nineteenth century we find the traditional practices coming into contradiction with the scientific interpretation of nature.

Varying perspectives on healing springs in Western Europe and Russia

Scholars studying the healing springs of Western Europe have often noted the new ways of understanding their curative properties that appeared in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the growth of new philosophic and scientific knowledge and changing confessional and social structures, interpretations of healings became more complex (Walsham 2011: 430–431). Heated discussions in Europe in the modern period helped to crystallize three varying conceptions of healing water – two confessional (Catholic and Protestant) and one rational (therapeutic). The Catholic conception explained the healing properties of springs by grace emanating from a saint's blessing, relics, or wonder-working images and transmitted through water. The Protestant conception claimed such healing was the act of God and that healing waters were His gift while emphatically denying the intercession of saints or the power of religious artifacts. The therapeutic conception emphasized the medical properties of water and explained such healing by considering the biological processes of the human body. Supporters of each conception were actively skeptical about the other points of view (Lotz-Heumann 2013: 236–238).

Traditional Russian worldviews explained healing from water sources in terms used by both Catholics and Protestants elsewhere: as the grace of God or as the intervention of saints through associated relics or wonder-working icons. In church legends, as well as in folklore, there are many stories of saints finding healing springs or the discovery of icons near springs. In the latter case, the springs became sacred as mediators of grace, just as in the Catholic conception of healing. The concept of healing as forgiveness for sins, which was typical in medieval religious thinking, gave such springs one of their local names – *proshchi* ("places of pardon"). It also explains the common word formula that introduced descriptions of healing: "Holy Mother of God forgave..." or "Saint Nicholas forgave..." (or any other saint before whose wonder-working icon people prayed). Churches' water blessing rituals strengthened the connection between religious artifacts and water. A priest would wash relics, a cross, or an icon in a basin of water or wipe them with a wet sponge and then squeeze the water out into a special vessel. This water was then used to sprinkle on people, cattle,

and houses to heal the sick or exorcise evil spirits. *Trebniks* (Euchologions or liturgical books in the Orthodox tradition) of the eleventh through seventeenth centuries contain a number of established services and rites performed to bless water for everyday use or healing as well as those to bless water sources. Such blessings were performed on a regular basis several times a year in every town or village and in every church.

However, in the eighteenth century, these traditions underwent certain changes. Though Russia did not have a Reformation as in Western Europe, the early modern state sought control of religion and even citizens' everyday routines and thus religious practices were greatly altered. Official doctrine granted the possibility of miraculous healing near sanctified and revered springs; however, serious measures were taken to counteract assertions of new miracles and prevent personal gain for landowners or clergy from the influx of pilgrims. The approach of the state was similar to the humanistic criticism of the Catholic Church (Eire 1986: 28–45). Rather than altering religious doctrine, changes in the eighteenth-century Russian Church reformed church governance so that the institution and priestly appointments were placed under the emperor's authority. Reforms seamlessly merged the church within government structures.

Thus, arguments about the miraculous nature of holy wells that were typical for Catholics and Protestants elsewhere (Oestigaard 2010: 21) became, in Russia, governmental affairs and focused on disciplinary issues (including measures to limit the number of pilgrims and stifle rumors about water sources' supernatural power) (Zhivov 2009). Here lies one of the main differences between Russian practice and the examination of cult sites of the Counter-Reformation. Church reforms introduced during the reign of Peter the Great were not similar in their effect to those of the Counter-Reformation, as has been assumed by A.S. Lavrov (Lavrov 2000: 446). While the Counter-Reformation resulted in the increased number of local cults, canonical sacred places, and their regulation (Walsham 2005: 220; Tingle 2005: 251, 258), in Russia, at least prior to the mid-nineteenth century, disciplinary procedures were designed to destroy such places and, later on, restrict their proliferation. Russian reformers considered holy wells to be instruments of fraud and introduced changes to the law accordingly.

From 1721–1737 several decrees and instructions were issued to ban the veneration of wells. Firstly, the Ecclesiastic Regulation of 1721 laconically mentioned abbots and priests who tried to find (or claimed to have found) icons near wells to augment the income of small monasteries and local churches. The text prohibited the singing of services of supplication at such places (see Cracraft 1971: 290–302). Next, during Anna Ioannovna's reign, in 1737 the spreading of "superstitious rumors" about the discovery of miracle-working icons was prohibited and a procedure for investigating related sites and stories was devised. Inquiries were to be made by both clerics and civil officials with the sole aim of abandoning the well and relocating the icon to the home church of the local bishop.

These reforms were not embraced by the public. Even though such cult sites were threatened with destruction, they nevertheless remained very popular among the

people of different social classes as sources of holy or healing water well into the eighteenth century. Then, as elsewhere in Europe, the visitation of water sources for health cures bifurcated along class lines, with peasants seeking religious sites for healing (old holy wells and newly revealed sites) while the upper classes gradually preferred to visit mineral springs for “scientific” cures.

Development of mineral springs resorts

Healing mineral springs were known in Russia at the time of Grand Principality of Moscow (until the end of seventeenth century), but this knowledge was accessible only to the nobility and related to an awareness of foreign resorts. Russian doctors did not practice treatment with mineral water on a regular basis (Vesti-Kuranty 1972: 137 and 1996: 77). In a remarkable departure from traditional culture, eighteenth-century researchers in Russia began leveraging the latest achievements of continental medicine. “New” doctors trained in the Enlightenment mentalité began rationally borrowing individual methods of treatment, though they did not necessarily adopt western philosophies of “water cures” (Shirokova 2010: 26–76). Mineral waters became known to the public and widely used for medical treatment only through the efforts of specialists unknown in Russia before the time of Peter the Great: natural scientists, geographers, chemists, and medical practitioners with new, western standards of training.

The first mineral spa in Russia, *Olonetskie Marcialnyie Vody* (iron-rich waters at the town of Olonets), developed on the initiative and under the patronage of Peter the Great (see also Hammarberg 2017). The “Marcial Waters” source named for the god and planet Mars (which was associated with iron in the science and astrology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) was discovered in 1714 by factory worker Ivan Ryaboyev. Before the site became a resort, his initial use of the waters was in accordance with traditional folk practices. Upon identifying a spring that flowed within marshes as special because it did not freeze in winter, he drank the waters for three days while praying to God and subsequently credited the healing of a heart condition to this observance (Chudinov 1857). Impressed with this account, Peter I founded a resort and opened the spring for public use. However, he gave different directions for the healing practice, wrote special rules for visitors to the resort, and ordered records to be kept of such healing. Although the resort was visited by the emperor himself and his entourage (including, for example, the first governor of Saint-Petersburg, Prince Aleksander Menshikov) and a palace and church were built near the spring, like many of the emperor’s other innovations, the resort fell into decay after his death.¹

¹ An early twentieth-century government report on the Konchezerskiy ferruginous spring (the only such spring in the Olonets governorate) noted that people no longer visited the source (RGIA 3: 86–86 vers.). Only after the Revolution of 1917 was the resort restored and again became popular.

More generally, the development of healing springs in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed the two trends mentioned above: either employing a practical scientific approach to study mineral springs or a governmental/church concern with prosecuting real and alleged “crimes” that could have taken place near venerated springs, particularly those involving the use of religious objects (holy images). The strict legal regulations of the early eighteenth century were incorporated into the Charter of the Deanery and the Charter of Spiritual Consistories (1841) adopted in the following century. They prevented scientists from studying medical properties of healing springs that were venerated by local communities and thus stopped the process of converting holy wells into mineral water resorts. As a result, the two conceptions of healing springs, the scientific and the religious, developed separately and co-existed, though they were adopted by different social groups. This scenario partly resembled the situation in the countries of Northern Europe (Johansen 1979: 67–68) and in Scotland (Walsham 2011: 410; Jillings 2012).

The low credibility of medical reports hindered resort development as different doctors provided conflicting reports about the healing properties of the same spring. Such inconsistencies created doubts about the accuracy of research and people from different social groups continued to hold to conflicting opinions.² In the early nineteenth century, the inspecting officer of the medical *uprava* (executive board) of Tver, a man named Briker who studied waters in the Tver governorate (a principal administrative subdivision of the Russian Empire) wrote: “Accurate and comprehensive research of mineral springs is one of the most difficult tasks in chemistry; it demands continuous long-term research and chemists of the highest qualification. Yet good chemists still make mistakes rather often, which proves that even when they repeat the same tests with the same water and find the same chemical elements, their quantities and compounds may be different” (RGIA 1: 6). Therefore, special attention was paid to medical records; doctors compiled files on cured people with detailed medical histories (Verevkin 1780; Frideburg 1811; RGIA 2: 6–7 vers³., 18–28, 204–228). In terms of their form and purpose, such lists were not unlike lists of healing performed by “wonder-working” icons and springs. Since methods of chemical analysis were far from perfect and interpretation of their results was difficult, practical results were considered to be the main proof of the healing properties of water. Religious pilgrims could believe that healings were miraculous, while well-educated upper classes leaned towards the view that such healing resulted from the mineral properties of water.

Chemical analyses of holy well water did not begin until the nineteenth century. As the government started paying closer attention to such research, members of the nobility began to establish private mineral water resorts based on research findings.⁴

² Even into the twentieth century in Europe and in America, opinions varied widely on the healing properties of mineral water. Some advocated insurance coverage for mineral water treatment and elsewhere such coverage was completely denied (Weisz 2001: 451–454).

³ Here and further vers. means “versus”-turnover of the sheet of paper.

⁴ In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, those chemists and medical practitioners enthusiastically supporting the development of balneology included Vasily Severgin, D. Chernavsky, and K. Frideburg.

This process included chemical analysis of the water, procurement of permits from the Medical Council or the Ministry of Internal Affairs, construction of pumps, bath houses, hotels, and hospitals, catchment of springs, and other efforts to furnish the resort with everything necessary to make visitors comfortable. Rules for water resorts were included as a separate section within the government's Medical Charter and all mineral springs were checked for compliance with the Charter before a permit could be issued.

Among the most famous noble families to found their own resorts were the Olsufyevs, the Kushelevs, the Nashchokins (of the Tver governorate), and the Bestuzhev-Ryumins (of the Novgorod governorate). State-funded resorts developed slowly, with their full-scale operation beginning only after the 1840s, and they have remained open continuously to the present. In contrast, private resorts were usually built rapidly and soon became centers of social life that attracted the nobility, though they rarely survived their founders. Visits to resorts entailed an active social life. Comprehensive treatment involved walks in surrounding forests, active games and other invigorating pastimes, and ballroom dancing. As elsewhere in Europe and North America, many visitors came to be cured, but for others, balneology was no more than a fashionable addition to their social season or the commercial goals of resort owners. Addressed to the educated upper classes, spa publications and promotional materials might rhetorically mention God's grace in granting the healing power of the waters while nevertheless focusing on practical treatments and the scientific classifications of mineral springs.

Isolation of sacred springs as healing centers

When the clerical and civil authorities investigated the supposed discoveries of new sacred springs, they completely disregarded information about the water's mineral properties; rather their investigations focused on suppressing the circulation of stories about miraculous healing at unapproved sites (those not approved by the collegial ecclesiastical opinion). No approval process was created. Instead, instructions were straightforward – the place of worship was to be destroyed, or at least banned.⁵ Officials did not investigate whether touted healings were mere fantasies of pious pilgrims or were the result of curative mineral content. For the parishioners placing their faith in the waters of their local holy well, the chemical composition of the well's water was unimportant and could even compromise the "miraculous" explanations of healing. They esteemed faith and ritual over mineral analysis; in fact, historical evidence sometimes describes the holy well water that ill people used for washing and drinking as being dirty or stale (RGIA 4: 270–270 vers.).

⁵ Only after the mid-nineteenth century did some sites obtain indirect approval, for example, in the form of permission to build chapels near the site where services could be held although they were still banned by the wells. This allowance preserved the wells from destruction and allowed localized veneration to continue in a controlled fashion.

Efforts to develop mineral springs for resorts and in practical medicine differed greatly from attempts to integrate mineral water sites within church finances. There were several such attempts made in the nineteenth century in the recently annexed provinces of the Russian Empire where the administration of Russian law had yet to be established and where church hierarchs were familiar with European uses of sacred springs. One report described the discovery of a healing spring in the Eparchy of Chişinău, which was established on the lands annexed to Russia after the Russo-Turkish War of 1806–1812.⁶ In May 1815 a shepherd named Prokofi Muntyan had two dreams that prompted him to clear stones from an old well; he was healed by the resurging waters. Thereafter, more than twenty peasants and townspeople were also healed. Dimitriy, the Bishop of Bender and Ankerman, resolved that the shepherd could build a chapel with an icon near the well and control the donation box as well, with donations to be used for the theological seminary recently founded in the metropolis (in 1813). By a special certificate, the shepherd Prokofi and his brother Alexander were appointed curators of the chapel as well as the hospital and an almshouse that were to be built by the chapel. The issue of the well and its further development was deemed so important that Metropolitan Gavriil, Archbishop of Chişinău, wrote about it in his regular report on the eparchy (the province of the Orthodox Church). The report was handed to Emperor Alexander I when he visited Chişinău in May of 1818.

In this report, the well was described as a means to “support the seminary... sufficiently and continuously” (Khalippa 1900: 83), and Metropolitan Gavriil asked for an Imperial decree to secure the well, the land, and the chapel to the seminary. He also took the unusual step of having a local physician named Fisher confirm the mineral potential of the water to treat various diseases. Compiling a list of those who were cured between 1815 to 1818, the archbishop witnessed such healing himself in the summer of 1818 and appointed an elderly priest to serve *molebens* (a service of supplication) in the chapel near the well (ibid.: 84–86). Among the healed were those of various nationalities (Russians, Greeks, Turks, and Moldovans), social classes, and occupations (peasants, tradesmen, and even notable military men). While in the European districts of the Russian Empire, by conventional law, holy wells belonged to the parish, church, or monastery of the land on which they were found, in the newly annexed provinces one can see an attempt to incorporate the sacred spring into a different system. The holy well, lacking any connection with the parish church and curatorship, was bestowed on the brothers who discovered it, with the donations used to fund the seminary and a healing-focused infrastructure more typical of that built around European sacred springs in the Middle Ages (Rattue 2001: 84).

The project came to a halt when the Synod deemed plans for the spring development to be illegal according to the Ecclesiastical Regulation and the decree by Anna Ioannovna from 1737 on the suppression of superstitions. For clerics, this breach of

⁶ The full set of documents about this healing well was published in 1900 by I.N. Khalippa. All references in the present article are made to this edition and not to the less-detailed Synod account.

this law was a serious disciplinary offence and proof of acquisitiveness. The Synod ordered the Metropolitan to cancel all his previous decisions, transfer the priest serving near the well, destroy the chapel, and take necessary measures to prevent people from perpetuating their veneration of the holy well, “so as to prevent the superstition from spreading and consolidating” (Khalippa 1900: 87). According to the division of power principle, every administrative branch pursues its work in isolation without collaboration between ministries, and this characterized the treatment of the site. It was suggested that the civil authorities (with the economic means) might wish to turn the spring into a mineral water resort, whereas similar activity by the clergy would be based on ritual and would have been considered illegal. While the spring was not developed, different researchers working in the Bessarabia governorate through the nineteenth century regularly described the site, and people kept consulting its waters unofficially (Skalkovskiy 1848: 85).

As a result of such division of power, each department researching a healing spring engaged only with the facts belonging to its sphere of responsibility. For example, in 1808 the Spiritual Consistory received a report about the discovery of a healing spring in the Eparchy of Podolsk and commissioned documentation of when and how the spring was discovered, if beliefs (“superstitions”) had become connected with it, and how donations collected at the spring were used (RGIA 5: 172 vers.). The Consistory dealt only with the problems stipulated in the Ecclesiastical Regulation and never actually raised the question of whether the spring had any healing properties or not.

When researching healing springs, the Church and civil authorities employed different models based on different legislation. Peter the Great’s eighteenth-century Ecclesiastical Regulation remained intact until 1841, when the Charter of Spiritual Consistories was adopted, and in practice the provisions of Peter the Great were observed until the early twentieth century. At the same time, civil legislation had been developing and civil authorities would react to discoveries of new healing springs differently. One of the best-documented investigations, below, offers an example of three different reactions to the discovery of a healing spring: that of the common people, that of civil authorities, and that of the Church.

The case of Maria Somova and the healing spring

A healing spring was discovered three days after Christmas in 1828 by an ill peasant woman named Maria Somova. Authorities learned about the spring about six months later in June 1829 when the local *ispravnik* (police chief) noted the arrival of numerous pilgrims, coming from various villages and distant *uyezd* (administrative units) in hope of healing. Maria Somova was brought before the court where she told the story of the spring discovery. Her testimony was recorded as follows in a report to the governor:

For four years she had been suffering from a disease and had various fits from time to time. For six weeks before the last Christmas she had succumbed to some illness unknown to her, had probably contracted a cold, was coughing and gasping for breath. Being in such a pitiful condition and expecting her death to come at any moment, she prayed for enough time to repent before death, which she believed inevitable. Three days after Christmas at night she was sleeping with her daughter on a Russian stove⁷ and saw a dream, as if someone touched her right shoulder and told her to go to the hollow in the Red Forest, to find a spring, clean it of snow, and dig a well, to build a chapel over it and bring into the chapel the icon of Theotokos of Bogolyubovo. ... The next day after heating the stove she went to the hollow, cleaned the spring, drank from it, washed her face, and poured water on herself. After that her cough and suffocating feeling supposedly subsided. Then she returned home and when her husband berated her for the superstitions, she answered "I feel better now." Later, before Candlemas day, she slept on the stove again and dreamt that she must make a well, build a chapel over it, and bring the icon of Theotokos of Bogolyubovo there. After waking up she saw two women standing near her and repeating the same words. She told her neighbor [and the priest] about the vision. After that she dug a well at the location of the spring. Now, sick people from various villages come to this well, drink from it, and feel better. Beside the well, they leave money, candles, linen, and eggs. Maria Somova collected the money and gave 4 rubles to the church. She also spent 2 rubles on candles for the church, 1 ruble 60 kopeks on wheat flour for prosphora and 1 ruble on red wine. She also kept several pieces of linen which she gave to paupers and 150 eggs and brought to court 11 rubles 58 kopeks. (RGIA 6: 2–3)

The report to the governor concluded with a request for a verdict; should the well be left to pilgrims and what should be done with their donations?

In keeping with traditional practices for establishing sacred springs, Maria Somova tried to persuade the local priest to serve a *moleben* by the spring and bless the water. When the law-abiding priest refused, she tried to perform the rituals herself. The *moleben* of blessing the water was performed in her house (which was not prohibited by the church) and after that she poured the blessed water into the well. This ritual correlated with the Church practice of blessing ordinary wells on the days of Christian feasts. However, the ritual was not deemed sufficient for the holy well's presumed status; pilgrims would have preferred a *moleben* served at the spring.

The governor informed Grigory, Archbishop of Ryazan, about the well and took decisive actions to investigate the problem. First of all, he submitted a report addressed to Emperor Nicholas I, which he could do under a decree of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of April 4, 1828 which required the emperor to be informed about any peculiar diseases or evidence of infections or plague among people or cattle

⁷ A Russian stove is a large brick or stone masonry construction in which a fire can be lit and the top of which offers a warm sleeping platform.

(GARO: 8–8 vers.).⁸ Secondly, he gave directions to the medical *uprava* (administration) of Ryazan to research the spring and investigate reported healing. The research was conducted by Ginter, a doctor of the Dankov *uyezd*. This was one of the first cases in which a governor's decision was based on comprehensive medical research. Thirdly, the governor gave orders to the police to prevent any gatherings near the newly found sacred space. Reports focused on claims that cures derived from singular visits, whereas cures from mineral waters were thought to require regular consumption. Reported healing was dismissed as coincidental, Somova was described as seeking personal glory and economic gain, and the local medical *uprava* concluded that the well should be destroyed and “people who had grown up on superstitions and were eager to believe in the healing properties and sanctity of the water because of women's dreams should be banned from the well” (ibid.: 16). By the governor's instruction, the well was destroyed in 1829 (RGIA 7: 3 vers.).

The governor did not cite ecclesiastical authorities in his letters to lower management, but his conclusions were identical with theirs according to the Ecclesiastical Regulation and decrees on “superstitions.” However, the governor was more interested in disciplinary issues and along with the resolution on “superstition” he emphasized that “insufficient understanding and knowledge of laws by local officials was the main reason for their tolerance of Somova's actions” (ibid.: 6).

Before the autumn of 1829 Archbishop Grigory and the Synod only watched the work of civil authorities and did nothing to investigate the case under ecclesiastical jurisdiction. But on October 1, Ober-Procurator Prince Meshcherskiy conveyed to the Synod the prescription of Nicholas I, who had been informed about the well, calling “for ecclesiastical authorities to investigate and report,” which marked the beginning of the Synod's investigation (RGIA 6: 5, 12–12 vers.).

The results of the investigation, provided by a *blagochinny* (dean), were submitted to the Synod a year later, in November, 1830. By that time the situation had changed drastically—the well had long been destroyed by the order of the governor, so church officials could only investigate traces left at the site of the well and a pole-chapel with an icon of Saint Nicholas, which had been put near the former well by an unknown person or persons. No evidence of misdemeanors on the part of the priest or peasants was found. Since pilgrims stopped coming to the well, the archbishop suggested to keep the well filled and sealed because its waters were not deemed to have healing properties and to transfer the icon into the parish church. The priest was to make a signed promise not to perform services at the site of the well and not to collect any donations (ibid.: 20).

So, the heightened attention of civil authorities towards rumors of healing in the beginnings of the nineteenth century was driven by the development of medicine, which began to actively use mineral waters and balneology as a means of treating diseases, as well as by the new obligation to monitor the health of the population. It is also remarkable that numerous pilgrims, peasants, and citizens of the town Dankov, the center of the *uyezd*, kept visiting the well during the investigation. They expected

⁸ Later the circular was issued as an edict signed by the emperor (PSZRI 1830: 297–298).

that local authorities would assign a certain status to the well. However, there were only two alternatives—either the recognition of the spring as a holy well or the destruction of the well on the grounds that it had falsely been deemed sacred. At that time the recognition of the healing properties of mineral water was not even considered a viable option by the provincial community.

Behavior of all three groups of participants in this case illustrate trends typical of the nineteenth century. Maria Somova followed the principles of creating a sacred space that were established in folk and church traditions, civil authorities researched properties of the spring to estimate the prospects of its practical usage, and the ecclesiastical authorities focused on facts of the local priest's misdemeanors. Preventive actions of the police aimed at limiting access to the well by pilgrims also had precedents in the eighteenth century.

Authorities at different levels and branches of power continued to oppose initiatives of local communities to develop sacred springs. However, there is evidence that, for ordinary people, the dividing lines between the concepts of mineral springs and holy wells with healing properties were beginning to fade. First, this trend resulted in certain similarities that appeared in practical methods of treatment with waters from springs of different types. Ideas about the healing properties of water and methods for its use varied depending on the status, social class, and mindset of the afflicted person. Methods that were not approved in his or her social group—attempts to take the mineral water as if it were wonder-working or to use water from a holy well based on a scientific approach—were criticized by both sides in this opposition.

Religion or science: holy wells versus mineral springs

While beliefs in the healing power of holy wells and mineral springs were widespread, both curative sources were culturally regulated. While popular understandings of holy wells suggested that drinking the water once was enough to cure any disease, balneology asserted the need to “take the waters” from mineral springs regularly, under the supervision of a doctor, and only in case of certain diseases. Doctors often emphasized the dangers of self-treatment. Doctor Gordeenkov, who supervised patients at the mineral springs of Slavyansk near Kharkov, complained: “There was another factor that undermined the positive effect of the water and interfered with my medical observations—the opinion of patients, who expected the springs of Slavyansk to have some supernatural powers and cure any disease regardless its severity and other circumstances. Having no doubts about their conclusions, they treated themselves as they saw fit, without asking for medical advice” and thus put their health in jeopardy (Gordeyenko 2-nd 1838: 40).

On the other hand, attempts to regularly take the waters from a holy well without performing religious rituals were condemned by parish communities. In one of the many letters in which peasants appealed to the Synod for well use, the need for faith

is stressed in a deliberate description of a military surgeon who drank holy water without praying or believing and, therefore, received no cure (RGIA 8). He lived for several months in a *selo* with a holy well as one would live at a mineral water resort. He drank from the holy well but rarely went to church and did not pray to the icon of Our Savior that had been discovered near the well. Advocates of the holy well wrote to the Russian Synod, “What did he achieve? He left our *selo* just as he had come, without faith or repentance, not cured by the mineral properties of the water though he took it regularly” (RGIA 8: 157- 58). Both mineral springs and holy wells were perceived as requiring the correct understanding, accompanied by the expected behaviors, for either type of water to cure.

Official newspapers and magazines (approved by the government and printed at government expense) popularized scientific knowledge about healing springs. In the 1830s–1840s, information about mineral springs was mostly published in specialized editions, such as *Gornyi Zhurnal* (a magazine on geology, mining, and metallurgy) (Bertie 1827; O sernykh istochnikakh 1829; Voskoboynikov 1830; Kratkoye svedeniye 1834). In the 1840s, the first articles appeared in the *Vedomosti* newspapers (produced by local governments). The period from the 1850s to the 1890s saw regular articles about newly discovered mineral springs and discussions of methods of treatment.⁹ Many springs were granted status as mineral waters, so it is possible to speak about a gradual change in the therapeutic model. Even when not scientifically verified, mineral water cures became a popular alternative to traditional religious faith in holy wells.

The Ecclesiastical Regulation and the legislation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries explicitly stated which actions of communities and priests at holy wells were to be considered fraudulent. They included announcements about the appearance of an icon near a spring, stories about wonders made by the icon, the collection of donations, the presence of large numbers of pilgrims, *moleben* services, and organized processions to the spring. However, when not connected to official religious symbols and rites, spring-side traditions were considered folk customs and thus did not demand immediate counteraction.

Attempts to convert holy wells to mineral spring spas could play to both perceptions of healing water. For example, in the Smolensk governorate there was an attempt in 1804 to establish a mineral resort using water from springs revered by the local community. Stepan Apraksin, the Governor of Smolensk, reported to Viktor Kochubey, the Minister of Internal Affairs, that Nikolayev, a landlord from the Yelinskiy *uyezd*, “came up” with “two wells that had already been called healing wells by the locals and whose water was similar to the springs of Lipetsk” (RGIA 9: 24). Doctor Metike, an inspector from the medical administration of Smolensk sent to research the wells, confirmed that their waters were rich in iron and sulfur. Stepan Apraksin visited the wells himself and experienced their mineral properties. He

⁹ Such news appeared in *Vedomosti* of Vologda (O tselebnykh vodakh 1857), Vyatka (Dva slova 1857; O Lyalinskikh 1862; Mikhaylov 1872), Voronezh (Veinberg 1885), Pskov (Pskovskiy gubernskiy vedomosti 1867) and Tver Governates (except already cited: Kashinskiye mineralnye vody 1905).

wrote: “I was also informed, that many people of the Yelinskiy *uyezd* had suffered from fever in the spring and summer and many of them died, but the landlord told me that in his village people from eight households near the well had been drinking from it, as they usually do, and had not fallen ill. They had been healthy all the summer and still were” (ibid.: 24–24 vers.). People in the neighborhood “felt that they were protected from many diseases by these wells and, to express their gratitude and their true feelings, they planted an alder tree by one of the wells, richly decorated it with various gifts—mostly rags and pieces of cloth according to the peasant tradition—and called the spring holy and healing” (ibid.: 24 vers.). While the resort was not developed, the spring was not destroyed because of the focus on the mineral content of these “holy wells” rather than on any church rituals or announcements about discovered icons or miracles.

The case of St. Korniliy’s waters

The use of mineral springs and holy wells in Russia in the nineteenth century was influenced by many factors: first, by the social class of people using the spring and by legislature, and later by economic factors. In the late nineteenth century, after the Great Reforms of Emperor Alexander II, which made Russian society more mobile, economic restructuring and the blurring of social boundaries encouraged people to actively explore mineral springs as business operations. Requests to recognize the healing properties of a mineral spring were often submitted by entrepreneurs (RGIA 10), and in the early twentieth century, even by peasants who were planning to sell water or lease a spring (RGIA 11).

This period provides a remarkable, and probably singular, example of the conversion of the site of a holy well to a mineral spring resort. The monastery of Korniliy Komelskiy owned a holy well at which rituals of the church were celebrated while the waters were further employed in medical treatment. The nearby springs associated with the monk St. Korniliy (1455–1537) had been revered as a source of healing since the late Middle Ages. There is no proper information as to whether this well was actually dug by St. Korniliy or it simply ascribed to him in a later tradition. In either case, many Russian and European cloisters had springs that legend dates back to the founder of the monastery. Another spring near a cloister was identified as a mineral spring in the middle of the eighteenth century and, by the 1820s, efforts were made to create a mineral water resort at the monastery.

As was typical for the time, the process was initiated by the civil and military governors who discussed the prospects of mineral water treatment in their letters to each other and the Minister of Internal Affairs. The Governorate-General regarded the matter from a political point of view and remarked that the “development of a resort may help in controlling diseases and benefit the whole region. Ill people travel long distances hoping that mineral water will ease their sufferings. A resort opened in the center of Russia would do a lot of good for the poorest people who have no

means to travel to distant countries” (RGIA 12: 1–1 vers.). The medical *uprava* of Vologda (local medical council) conducted the necessary tests and concluded that drinking the spring water and bathing in it could be good “for nerves, [...] troubles with stomach and digestion, and hemorrhoid pain.” Suggested development included the opening of shelters near the spring, a bathhouse, and an inn (*ibid.*: 4 vers.–5 vers.). Although the Medical Council (headquartered in Saint-Petersburg) declined the project, the initial research heightened the interest of pilgrims. For a time, the springs received more visitors, especially the devout who believed in the wonder-working power of the well dug by the saint (Volotskoy 1877: 3).

The monastery’s persistence in popularizing the springs bore fruit, as members of the upper classes of the governorate started taking the waters at the monastery of Korniliy Komelskiy. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the springs were nationally renowned. In 1846, *hegumen* (abbot) Arseniy arranged a small building by the well with a boiler to heat water (Istoricheskoye opisaniye 1855: 106). St. Korniliy’s chalybeate springs appeared in lists of therapeutic springs published in official newspapers alongside the springs of Staraya Russa and other famed mineral resorts (O tselebnykh vodakh 1857: 139–140). At the same time, a well with a wooden chapel near the monastery was used for religious ritual. This was the very well believed to have been dug by Saint Kornily. To honor his memory a solemn procession to the spring took place every year on June 10 (according to the Julian calendar) (Istoricheskoye opisaniye 1855: 105).

By the 1870s, capitalist trends in economics had grown stronger and social life had become more active, leading to new efforts of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities to popularize the resort by the monastery of Saint Korniliy. An influential public figure in Vologda, V. Volotskoy, expressed the merits of further development:

Apart from the properties of the spring itself, one should also note advantages—an altitude of 450 feet above sea level, the proximity to the railway and towns, the quite picturesque surroundings of rural nature, the absence of serious diseases, the quietness of the monastery, and its methodical lifestyle. All in all, the choice of this place for treatment could be considered very fortunate... The combination of comfort and proper medical services along with spiritual desires may attract not only people suffering from diseases but also healthy people who would like to enjoy country life, bathing, and tranquility. (Volotskoy 1877: 3)

In the early 1870s, external investors, including a local doctor, even offered to rent the mineral springs and build a bathhouse, however the local government and parish authorities secured the well as the property of the monastery. Regular remarks about the growing number of visitors could be found in the monastery’s chronicles (GAVO 1: 15 vers., 24, 30, 37 vers., 43 vers. and many others).

In 1878, the monastery was visited by Theodosius, the Bishop of Vologda, who conducted services by the well of Korniliy Komelskiy and repeatedly bathed in the waters (*ibid.*: 32 vers.). The same year also saw the construction of the rooms for

visitors who continued to come to take the waters as well as the construction of a bathhouse (*ibid.*: 33). In 1879, 1881, and 1883 the mineral springs attracted attention of Vologda Governors M.P. Daragan, L.I. Cherkasov and M.N. Kormilitsin, who inspected the bathhouse and also took the waters themselves (*ibid.*: 36 vers., 44, 51). After 1878, there were repeated records in the chronicles about repairs and reconstructions of the inn and bathhouses. In 1884, Israel, the Bishop of Vologda, who was inspecting the documents and property of the monastery, gave orders to buy out another mineral spring belonging to nearby villagers in order to expand the resort (*ibid.*: 55). The monastery was allocating more and more resources to the development and maintenance of the resort, which had become the main source of income. Revenues increased every year. In 1892, the monastery earned 960 rubles from the baths, inn, and grocery store. In 1900, the amount increased to 1321 rubles and by 1912 this amount had risen to 2575 rubles (GAVO 2). These revenues were generated despite the fact that the season for treatment was very short, lasting just three months from June to August (RGIA 4: 294). In another unsuccessful attempt at acquiring official permission from the medical council in Saint-Petersburg to use the mineral springs for treatment, *hegumen* Anatoliy traveled to the capital in 1880 with samples of mineral water (GAVO 1: 39).

Both the holy well of Korniliy Komelskiy and the mineral springs coexisted and could be used at the same time. *Molebens* for blessing the water were conducted over the former on August 1, the celebration of Origin of the Cross, when water sources had to be blessed. This is a day on which priests wash crosses in the waters and one of the days when services were conducted near springs and wells all over Russia according to the menological rules for liturgies (the list of approved festivals and saints" days for each month of the year) (Mineya 1646: 15 vers.). Nevertheless, every natural water source in the monastery and on the lands around it was believed to cure diseases in its own way. Tatyana, a pilgrim from Yarensk who was cured from severe headaches, wrote a testimonial letter about a spring in a field that she thought was somehow related to Saint Korniliy (GAVO 1: 43 vers. 44, 55), despite the only "official" well of Korniliy Komelskiy being that located in the aforementioned chapel by the road to Moscow. Many pilgrims did not take the waters regularly, but rather bathed in them just once, as was typical for the use of sanctified springs (Ornatskiy 1884: 90), in contrast to the balneological concept of methodical and prolonged water treatment. By exploring springs of different kinds, the monastery expanded its opportunities and attracted visitors, who could find a spring meeting their needs, despite the skeptical remarks from professional doctors on the methods and organization of such treatment (*ibid.*: 84–91).¹⁰

¹⁰ In the early twentieth century the heads of the monastery continued to maintain the condition of the springs and to develop the resort. For example, in 1912 *hegumen* Niphon employed the services of a water-supply engineer sent to the monastery on official business to improve the water flow. Reasoning that the monastery was short of funds, the *hegumen* also submitted a request to pay for a pump and a boiler from the public treasury, and to finance the construction of a bath house (the draft of which looked like a chapel). The application was declined because the local government had no share in the resort and could not control it (RGIA 13). Later, *hegumen* Nicander submitted a request to classify the water as table water so that the monastery could bottle it and sell. The medical council

Conclusion

The holy well at the monastery of Korniliy Komelskiy is the only example of clergymen using a spring on their land to develop a mineral water resort receiving support from both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. A religious institution implemented the civil model of resort development despite numerous unfavorable conclusions of the medical council, instead relying on the report of a local doctor and the support of the local upper classes.¹¹ The monastery seized the opportunity to diversify their activities just as a civil institution or a commercial company would have done, despite holy wells usually being exclusively ritual domains.

In the mid-nineteenth century, social class differences in understanding the properties of healing springs were vividly expressed by publicist and prolific church writer Ioann Belyustin, a priest of Saint Nicholas Cathedral near Kalyazin. In describing a sacred spring near the *selo* Nikolo-Penye, he noted:

Common people always feel veneration towards such places. Even if you try to explain to them that the healing properties of mineral water result from the fact that it passed through layers of limestone, took some particles from it, dissolved them, and thus can treat certain diseases, people will not believe you, because they will not understand you. They have their own theory to explain the healing properties of the spring: “A wonder-working icon must have appeared here some time ago and brought God’s blessing to this place and then, to help the suffering who may come here with faith in their hearts, a healing spring came to the earth’s surface.” So, they choose their methods of treatment according to this theory. If there is indeed an icon by the spring, they serve a *moleben* there, and if not, they go to the nearest church. After that they begin to drink this water and wash themselves with it. Is it surprising that the water they use with such faith and veneration soon miraculously cures them even from protracted illnesses? (Belyustin 1850: 149)

By the nineteenth century, one of the main distinguishers between holy wells and mineral springs was in their discovery and curation: the methods of recognizing holy wells belonged to the sphere of social interaction, while the exploration of mineral waters involved scientific and economic research. While new holy wells could be incorporated into tradition through the deployment of the appropriate rituals and the spreading of narratives about their powers (something impoverished peasants could do if they were not banned or if they could elude authorities), the creation of a mineral water resort required a completely different level of social development. Chemical tests and analyses of mineral properties were worth the effort only if the owner of the spring had plans for further development or commercial use.

considered results of chemical tests and refused, and even disagreed that the springs might be considered mineral (RGIA 14), just like a century before.

¹¹ There was another monastery with mineral springs in Russia—the monastery of Nil Stolobenskiy in the Sayan Mountains. In this case the mineral springs were developed by V.Y. Rupert, the Governor-General of Eastern Siberia, and handed over to the monastery later (A.N. 1860: 236–240).

In sum, numerous cultural, social, and economic factors defined the development and use of mineral springs and holy wells in Russia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The use of sacred springs to treat diseases was prohibited by legislation and hindered by considerable cultural differences between social classes. As a result, sacred springs were frequented mostly by people from lower classes. The development of mineral water resorts long remained the domain of the nobility or the state government. Visits to such resorts were regarded as a pastime for upper classes and were associated with other aspects of social life. Only in the second half of the nineteenth century, after the beginning of large-scale economic and social reforms across the Russian Empire, did mineral spring development become a business and balneological resorts become more affordable. Resorts could generate considerable profits even when scientific proof of their benefits was lacking, as was the case with the resort at the monastery of Korniliy Komelskiy.

With the spread of this novel attitude, the previous sharp divide between pilgrims visiting sacred springs and patients visiting balneological resorts faded. It is well known that peasants and clerics took the waters from mineral springs, though not so frequently, while representatives of the upper classes never stopped venerating “wonder-working” icons and holy wells regardless of religious revolutions. However, the initial reactions and further developments of sacred places or resorts were conditioned by the characteristics of the social strata considering a spring for either purpose. Scientific tests of water properties for medical and hydrochemical research also played a role in the process, influencing public opinion and creating a framework in which healing springs as natural phenomena could exist. Yet the interpretation of springs as healing was often rooted in the ideas and beliefs of local people and correlated with strategies of development that were familiar to the community (Rattue 2001: 10; Sennikov 1860: 313–315).

Eighteenth and nineteenth century documentation of the discovery and development of mineral springs illustrates how social factors played a key role in the process. Different methods of using healing water were less defined by objective information about the properties of the water than by the strategy chosen by the community that used the spring. The choice of strategy, in turn, was defined by cultural and economic conditions of different social classes in different regions of the Russian Empire (Platonov 2018). In such circumstances both scientific and religious conceptions became equally popular in the late nineteenth century and a newly discovered spring could become an object of competitive struggle.

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Problematični izvori. Devetnaestostoljetna istraživanja ruskih ljekovitih izvora

Tradicionalni ruski svjetonazori objašnjavali su iscjeljenje vodom u terminima koje su drugdje u Europi koristili i protestanti i katolici: kao božju milost ili intervenciju svetaca putem relikvija ili čudotvornih ikona. Sveti bunari slobodno su se štovali u župama sve do 18. stoljeća kada su Petar Veliki i Sveta sinoda (najviše upravno tijelo Ruske pravoslavne crkve) zabranili hodočašća na svete izvore u reformističkoj težnji da iskorijene vjerska "praznovjerja". Koristeći se primarnim izvorima, u članku se razmatra kako su devetnaestostoljetni događaji vezani uz ruske svete bunare i mineralne izvore bili povezani s društvenom klasom, ekonomijom i već spomenutim osamnaestostoljetnim reformama koje su dovele do fuzije Crkve sa strukturama vlasti. I dok su liturgijske aktivnosti povezane sa svetim bunarima kao i imenovanje novih svetih bunara bili kriminalizirani, mineralni su izvori postali privlačni zbog svoje "znanstvene" ljekovitosti te kao odmarališta i poslovni pothvati viših klasa.

Ključne riječi: sveti bunari, ljekoviti izvori, mineralne vode, balneologija