

Individual Paper Application  
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The Moral Economy of Mineral Waters  
*Chemical and moral standards in the eighteenth-century bottled water trade*

[Abstract]

The trade of mineral waters gained unprecedented pace in late eighteenth-century France, thanks in parts to the expertise of chemistry. Although the discipline was still fragile in its institutional roots, the present paper sets out to show that through standards imposed onto the market of mineral waters, chemistry gained considerable clout and credibility.

Different mineral waters were sold in bottles by the thousands in cities, brought along by an eclectic assortment of transporters with a broad disparity in price and quality. Much to the complaint of those that could only afford to visit their local transporter but not travel to the spring, this trade was plagued by fraud and extortion. In 1772, a commission supported by the state and the Royal Academy was established to take on the duty of regulating the market of remedies. This scientific institution became the *Société de Médecine*, staffed with physicians and chemists, tasked with the explicit purpose of upholding scientific, economic and moral standards in the trade of mineral waters.

The aim of this paper is to use this little known institution and its unique scrutiny of French waters to uncover the importance of water chemistry in the rise of the chemical discipline as a whole. By recovering the standards upheld by the *Société*, the entanglement of scientific discourse in society at large becomes apparent. Chemical practice and vocabulary entered the market and discourse surrounding mineral waters, and in turn served the ideal of establishing a moral and charitable mineral water trade.

**Keywords:** History of chemistry; Moral Economy; Eighteenth Century; Mineral Waters; Chemical Analysis.

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Equipment required:

Basic slideshow presentation material (projector and compatibility with a Mac computer)