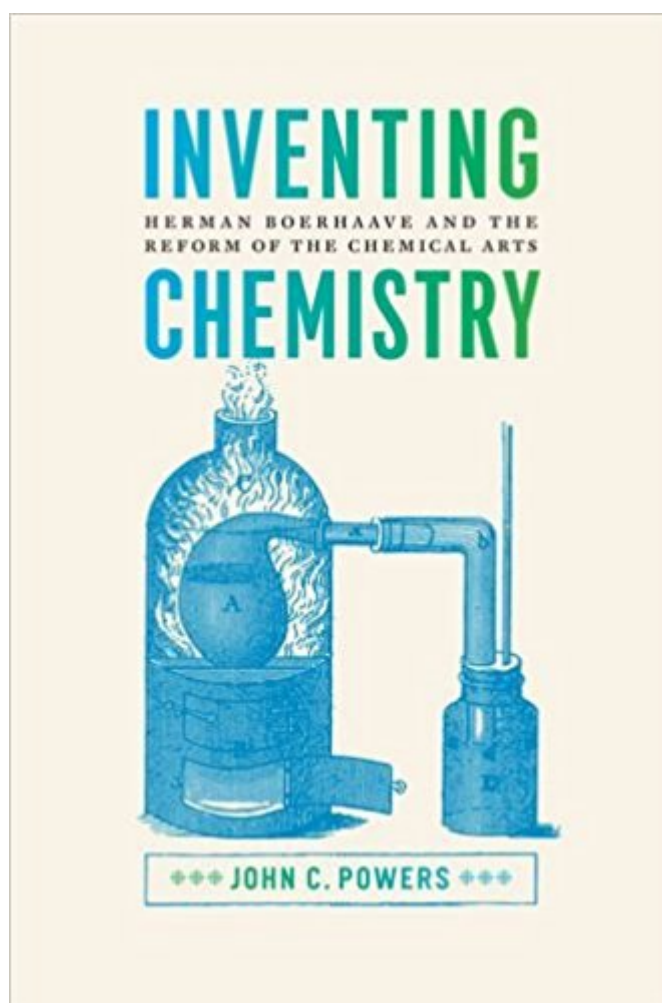


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# Inventing Chemistry: Herman Boerhaave And The Reform Of The Chemical Arts (Synthesis)



## Synopsis

In *Inventing Chemistry*, historian John C. Powers turns his attention to Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738), a Dutch medical and chemical professor whose work reached a wide, educated audience and became the template for chemical knowledge in the eighteenth century. The primary focus of this study is Boerhaave's educational philosophy, and Powers traces its development from Boerhaave's early days as a student in Leiden through his publication of the *Elementa chemiae* in 1732. Powers reveals how Boerhaave restructured and reinterpreted various practices from diverse chemical traditions (including craft chemistry, Paracelsian medical chemistry, and alchemy), shaping them into a chemical course that conformed to the pedagogical and philosophical norms of Leiden University's medical faculty. In doing so, Boerhaave gave his chemistry a coherent organizational structure and philosophical foundation and thus transformed an artisanal practice into an academic discipline. *Inventing Chemistry* is essential reading for historians of chemistry, medicine, and academic life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Powers has written a biography and detailed account of the contributions of Herman Boerhaave, a relatively unknown 17th- and 18th-century Dutch physician and educator. . . .

Boerhaave helped guide chemistry from recipes to principles, and he championed the evaluation of claims through experimentation. He saw the reform of chemistry as something he began, but also a process that was not yet complete. *Inventing Chemistry* will interest students and practitioners of

history, chemistry, and philosophy of science as well as chemistry educators.

Recommended. (R. E. Buntrock, University of Maine Choice 2012-09-01) "There are other books on Boerhaave but this one has the great advantage of drawing on hitherto unstudied manuscripts from the Military-Medical Academy, St Petersburg, Russia. . . . [A] considerable work of scholarship. (Bill Griffith Chemistry World) "Well written and meticulously researched, *Inventing Chemistry* will be of particular interest to historians of science and the philosophy of science for the new perspective Powers brings to the development of chemistry as an academic discipline and Boerhaave's role in that development. Specifically, Powers has made use of new documents available from the Khirovo Academy in St. Petersburg, Russia, expanding the source material beyond Boerhaave's original textbook. . . . [A]nyone with a strong interest in the development of chemistry as a science will find the book an informative addition to the expanding literature of the transition from alchemy to chemistry. (Journal of Chemical Education) "[A]n excellent book. . . . [D]ue to Powers's very fine study, Boerhaave now has his rightful place in the history of chemistry. (Anna Marie Roos, University of Oxford *British Journal for the History of Science*) "Power's book is a concise work, dense with information, yet highly accessible for historians and nonhistorians alike. (Arthur Greenberg, *University of New Hampshire Bulletin for the History of Chemistry*) "It used to be said that 'those who can, do; those who can't, teach.' In this exceptionally lucid study of Herman Boerhaave, John C. Powers shows how completely wrong this adage is, for, through his pedagogy, Boerhaave invented a new philosophical chemistry, reshaping the conceptual foundations of chemistry and giving it both a theoretical framework and a central role in the medical curriculum. Powers critiques and expands the most recent scholarship in the history of chemistry and employs entirely unstudied archival sources to produce a groundbreaking reconsideration of the history of chemistry and to point the way to a very fruitful direction for the history of science more generally. With exemplary clarity and elegance, Powers demonstrates that, for Boerhaave, pedagogy was an active, constructive endeavor, oriented to research and generative of new knowledge that reconfigured the fields of medicine and chemistry. Boerhaave was the architect of a new chemistry, and Powers restores him to his rightful place in the history of the discipline. (Pamela H. Smith, Columbia University) "In this extensive and meticulously researched study, John C. Powers brings Herman Boerhaave a central player in the deployment of the new science in European higher education to life, revealing him as a self-aware scholar who engaged both his predecessors and contemporaries as he constructed what would

become his most important book, *Elements of Chemistry*. Indeed, readers see the Boerhaave of the Enlightenment, who deployed experimental natural philosophy in a way that would characterize the chemical revolution of Antoine Lavoisier years before the traditional frame of that revolution. *Inventing Chemistry* will help historians evaluate the seeming rupture that came with the changing lexicon of chemistry during the second half of the century and return attention to the intellectual processes and experimental realities that underlay the celebrated changes in chemical narrative, which, while justifiably taken to be markers of these changes, were not their historical substance. (Jole Shackelford, University of Minnesota) “Herman Boerhaave was famous in the eighteenth century as the man who taught Europe chemistry, though he has been little studied since. John C. Powers has finally given him his due. In a work of meticulous and imaginative scholarship, he has shown how Boerhaave built his reputation by organizing chemistry for the purpose of pedagogy. In Boerhaave’s classroom, as Powers shows, chemistry shrugged off its alchemical heritage and emerged as a science of the Enlightenment. (Jan Golinski, University of New Hampshire)

John C. Powers is collateral assistant professor in the Department of History and assistant director of the Science, Technology, and Society Program at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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