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■ ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS

Scheele's Fire Air



One of Sweden's greatest chemists was a humble pharmacist named Carl Wilhelm Scheele (1742-1786). Scheele was the first scientist to observe or discover the chemical elements oxygen (1771), nitrogen (1772), barium (1772), chlorine (1774), and molybdenum (1778). Although he published his discovery of oxygen later than had Priestley and Lavoisier, Scheele's characterization of "fire air" had clearly preceded theirs. Two years after his 1775 election into Sweden's Royal Academy of Sciences, Scheele published his masterwork *Chemical Treatise on Air and Fire* (pictured above from the Huston Rare Book Room of the Wood Library-Museum). Tragically, Scheele would draw his last breath of "fire air" at the age of 43 years. Ironically, Scheele likely died from his self-described "trouble of all apothecaries": heavy metal poisoning. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. This image appears in the *Anesthesiology Reflections* online collection available at www.anesthesiology.org.)

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