

The Invention of *Theoretische Chemie*: Forms and Uses of German Chemistry Textbooks, 1775–1820

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The most significant outcome of an analysis of the German chemistry textbooks published between 1775 and 1820 was the emergence of the concept of *theoretische Chemie*. Rather than providing fundamental explanations for substances, affinities or reactions, *theoretische Chemie* ordered the available chemical facts. For the large group of university-based chemists who lacked technical facilities for experimental research, building these kinds of ordered systems proved an adequate way of contributing to chemistry. Furthermore, *theoretische Chemie* was important for the self-image of chemistry as a science by offering a framework for integrating new knowledge from various nonscientific fields of practice. In spite of this function, textbook authors discussed their very different ordered systems merely in terms of didactic appropriateness rather than in terms of scientific justification or correspondence with nature.

Introduction

This paper has two aims. The first consists in giving an overview of German chemistry textbooks. Textbooks, long deemed to be "boring, dogmatic, conservative,"¹ and no suitable object of study for historians of science, have gained increasing attention in recent years. The most comprehensive contribution to chemistry around 1800 is *Communicating Chemistry: Textbooks and Their Audiences, 1789–1939*,² edited by Anders Lundgren and Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent, in which, however, German chemistry is dealt with only indirectly, in Barbara Orland's contribution on popular chemical writing and in Gunter Lind's contribution on chemistry in physics textbooks.³ Although physics was indeed closely related to chemistry in the German-speaking states around 1800, we consider academic chemistry textbooks as worthy of being treated in their own right.

The second aim is to retrace a significant development in German chemistry around 1800, which resulted in the establishment of *theoretische Chemie*. Chemists used this term

¹ Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent and Anders Lundgren, "Preface," in *Communicating Chemistry: Textbooks and Their Audiences, 1789–1939*, ed. Anders Lundgren and Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent (Canton, Mass.: Science History Publications, 2000), VII.

² Lundgren and Bensaude-Vincent, *Communicating Chemistry*.

³ Barbara Orland, "The Chemistry of Everyday Life: Popular Chemical Writing in Germany 1780–1939," in Lundgren and Bensaude-Vincent, *Communicating Chemistry*, 327–66; Gunter Lind, "Chemistry in Physics Textbooks, 1780–1820," in Lundgren and Bensaude-Vincent, *Communicating Chemistry*, 119–39.

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