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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS

Sertürner Crystallizes Morphine



Initially practicing pharmacy near his birthplace, outside Paderborn, Germany, Friedrich Wilhelm Adam Sertürner (1783–1841) first isolated morphine from a poppy's raw opium in 1803. After he and three of his friends had each ingested an astonishing total of 90 mg of morphine (in three divided doses) over 45 minutes, Sertürner had to induce vomiting for the ensuing abdominal pains and sleepiness. Sadly, fellow scientists ignored this “sleeping agent” reported by Sertürner in a letter published by a pharmacy journal in 1805. Sertürner then moved to Einbeck to practice at a second pharmacy and persevere with his groundbreaking alkaloidal research. In 1817 in Gilbert's *Annalen der Physik* (pictured above, courtesy of the Wood Library-Museum), Sertürner presented the world with the “crystallizable” isolate of opium that he had aptly named “morphine,” after Morpheus, the ancient Greek god of dreams. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc. This image appears in color in the *Anesthesiology Reflections* online collection available at www.anesthesiology.org.)

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