



GERARD van SWIETEN

The Founder of the Vienna School of Medicine

On 31st January, 2007, the Austrian Mint launched its new four part gold series “Celebrated Physicians of Austria” with a 50 Euro gold coin for the founder of the Vienna School of Medicine in the 18th century, Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772).

As his name suggests, van Swieten originated in the Netherlands. The Empress Maria Theresa chose him as her personal physician, but it took two years of cajolery to persuade the reluctant van Swieten to move to Vienna. “*I’d rather remain a small republican, than to render slavish service at a princely Court,*” he insisted. But Maria Theresa also insisted, and in June, 1745, Gerard van Swieten arrived at the Viennese Court. He soon discovered that his position there was anything but that of a slave! The Empress entrusted her Court physician with the reform of medical training and he became the founder of the First Vienna School of Medicine, which was to provide the world with many great doctors and equally great break-throughs in medical science.

He established a new Chair of Medicine at the University. He encouraged notable scholars and professors to come to Vienna. He saw to the establishment of a botanic garden in the Palace of Schönbrunn, to laboratories for chemistry and physics. The new university building was erected on his initiative – today’s Academy of Sciences in the (now) “Old University”. Van Swieten encouraged the study of the natural sciences, and his friend and protégé Jacquin named a species of plant after him: the “*Swietenia Mahagoni*”. As curator of the imperial library he influenced all branches of higher learning, but above all it was medicine that most profited from van Swieten’s drive. In 1753 he was rewarded with the title of Baron.

Gerard van Swieten died at Schönbrunn on 18th June, 1772, much lamented by his imperial mistress. His legacy to the world of medicine made him the inescapable choice for the first coin in this new gold series “Celebrated Physicians of Austria”.

The new 50 Euro coin shows a profile portrait of the great man clasping a book. It is based on a number of contemporary portraits. In the background is the staff of Aesculapius (a staff entwined about by a serpent) as the symbol of this medical series. The reverse is a composite design of the Academy of Sciences, the handwritten text of the reform “*Plan pour la faculté de médecine*”, and a branch of the *Swietenia Mahagoni*.

The new coin by Helmut Andexlinger is struck in 986 fine gold to a maximum mintage of 50,000 pieces (according to orders). It is struck in proof quality only (reversed frosting) and comes in an attractive box with a numbered certificate of authenticity. The 50 Euro gold coin “Gerard van Swieten” is legal tender in the Republic of Austria. A wooden collection case for the series of all four coins may be purchased separately.

The series will continue next year with a coin for Ignaz Philipp Semmelweis, the “Saviour of the Mothers”.

K.R.J. Tattersall
Marketing Director
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GERARD van SWIETEN

Date of issue:	31st January, 2007
Design:	Helmut Andexlinger
Fineness:	986 Au
Fine weight:	10 g
Diameter:	22 mm
Face value:	€50.-
Mintage:	50,000 pieces in proof quality only