

Biographical/Historical note

Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772) was a Dutch-Austrian physician who served as the personal physician to Austrian Empress Maria Theresa in 1745 and transformed the Austrian health services as well as medical university education.

Born in Leiden, Gerard van Swieten obtained his education at the University of Leiden and was a student of one of the most respected physicians of the time, Hermann Boerhaave. After receiving his degree, van Swieten lectured and became a respected physician in Leiden. Following the death of the Imperial Court physician, van Swieten was asked to serve as the personal physician to Austrian Empress Maria Theresa and her family in Vienna.

In addition to his duties as court physician, van Swieten focused his attention on reforming the Austrian health service and medical university education in Vienna. Through his efforts, "the teaching of lower-grade medical personnel such as midwives and barber-surgeons was improved, better-trained physicians were appointed at hospitals throughout Austria ... [and there was the] introduction of stringent control of sanitation by the State," (Kidd, page 448). Because of his efforts, the Vienna Medical School's prominence was established. He continued in his work both as physician to the Empress and her family, and in making sweeping reforms in medical education until his death in 1772. According to Kidd, "although he was an insightful scholar, a respectable scientist, and a gentle and devoted physician, it was his work in elevating the medical school of Austria into eminence that made his name renowned," (Kidd, page 449).

Bibliography:

Kidd, Mark and Irvin M. Modlin. "Van Swieten and the Renaissance of the Vienna Medical School." *World Journal of Surgery*, 2001 (25): 444-450.

Scope and Contents note

This collection consists of eight volumes of medical writings in Latin concerning nutrition, pharmacy, and surgery. Several pages at the beginning of Volume I, and a few pages elsewhere, are translated into English on the facing pages.

Administrative Information
