

The golden bust of Marcus Aurelius, a discovery of exceptional significance

Identified over the years as the bust of Marcus Aurelius, this golden bust was discovered in a sewer of the Cigognier Temple on 19 April 1939 when the foundations were being cleared by a group of unemployed volunteers from Lausanne who worked on various excavation sites during the Second World War. The treasure was probably hidden there during a period of major disturbances and was never retrieved by its owner. At 33.5 cm tall and 29.46 cm wide, the bust weighs a little over 1.5 kg. Made from a single sheet of 22 carat gold using the repoussé technique, it is undoubtedly the most precious object ever discovered in Switzerland. Carried on top of a column that was concealed with fabric, it represented the figure of the emperor particularly during processions or official ceremonies. Aside from its material worth, the bust is of great historical value: only three golden busts of Roman emperors have survived through the ages. In addition to the one unearthed at Avenches, the other two were discovered in France and Greece. A copy of the bust is on display at the museum which has been housed in an 11th century tower overlooking Avenches's famous amphitheatre since 1838.



Photo: SMRA, Jürg Zbinden

Characteristics

Effigy

2000 years of Aventicum

Design

In the style of a Roman gold bust found in Avenches

Technical data

Alloy: Gold 0.900

Weight: 11.29 g

Diameter: 25 mm

Legal face value

50 Swiss francs

Date of issue

7 May 2015

Mintage

Proof coin in presentation case:

5,000 coins



Coined and issued by

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Official commemorative coin 2015

2000 years of Aventicum



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Official commemorative coins

Each year, the Federal Mint Swissmint issues a small number of commemorative coins featuring carefully selected subjects. The coins in bimetal, silver and gold bear an official nominal value and are available in various minting qualities – as collectors' pieces in their own right or as an exquisite gift.

AVENTICVM, the flagship monument of Roman culture in Switzerland

Aventicum, the capital of the Helvetii tribe, whose territory occupied most of the Swiss plateau, had almost 20 000 inhabitants in the 3rd century A.D. Today, it is one of Switzerland's main archaeological sites and is of immense significance internationally for the Roman era.

Aventicum was built in the 1st century A.D., not long after the territory of the Helvetii was incorporated into the Roman Empire. The town grew quickly. Early on, the residential quarters became densely populated and the first public buildings appeared, including the forum as the political, administrative and religious centre of the new capital.

Shortly after coming to power in 69 A.D., the Emperor Vespasian, who enjoyed a special relationship with Avenches, where both his father and his son Titus lived, granted the town the status of *colonia*. In 71 A.D., construction began on the wall encircling the town, which was 5.5 km long. The number of public buildings increased in the 2nd century: thermal baths, temples, and the theatre and amphitheatre.

Just after the middle of the 3rd century, Avenches entered a period of political instability that was marked by the repeated attacks of the Alemanni tribe. Although significantly weakened, it still retained enough importance to become the seat of the bishopric at the start of the 6th century before this was transferred to Lausanne.

AVENTICVM – Roman Site and Museum in Avenches, www.aventicum.org