

## COMMEMORATIVE SILVER COIN FOR THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF WOLFGANG KEMPELEN



The National Bank of Slovakia has prepared for March 2004 the issue of a commemorative silver coin to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the death of the polyhistor, inventor, constructor and technician Wolfgang Kempelen.

Wolfgang Kempelen (23rd January 1734 – 24th March 1804) was one of the leading intellectuals of his time. He held various important official posts in Austria-Hungary, including secretary and later also adviser to the Royal Hungarian Chamber in Bratislava. He used his extraordinary scientific and technical abilities to make complex machines and equipment. He constructed a fountain in the park of the imperial palace of Schönbrunn in Vienna. He created a system for drawing water for Bratislava Castle, built irrigation facilities on Žitný ostrov, modernized the technical equipment in salt mines and made a typewriter for the blind. He is especially famous for a chess playing machine from 1770 and later also for a speaking machine, which became world famous attractions. In connection with his work on the speaking machine, Kempelen wrote a scientific work on the mechanism of human speech (*Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache*), in which he analysed in detail views on the origin of speech and the anatomy and physiology of the speech organs. For his progressi-

ve views, he is regarded as a founder of the study of human speech.

The National Bank of Slovakia announced an anonymous competition in January 2003 to find a design for the coin to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Wolfgang Kempelen. Fifteen artists participated with seventeen works. After judging the entries, the expert commission stated that all the designs have a good professional level, but it did not recommend one of them for the first prize. The design of the Kremnica artist Miroslav Ronai, successful designer of various other Slovak commemorative coins, gained second prize and was identified as the most appropriate for production. The balanced character of the composition and content of the design of both sides and the appropriately chosen motifs interested the commission in his design. The artist depicted Kempelen's most famous invention, the chess playing machine on the obverse, and supplemented it with an illustration from his work on the mechanism of human speech. On the reverse the commission appreciated the combination of a portrait with a panorama of Bratislava, the city where Wolfgang Kempelen was born, lived and worked.

Mgr. art. Peter Ilčík was also awarded a second prize. His design addressed the commission especially with



its inventive and interesting character and excellent creation of a portrait on the reverse and compositional arrangement of motifs into the elements of a chessboard on both sides. The state shield, Bratislava Castle and motifs from Kempelen's work are fitted into a chessboard design on the obverse.

The third prize was given to Mária Poldaufová. The artist selected a simple motif depicting a chessboard for the obverse. Fragments of the chess playing machine are the dominant feature of the reverse. They are sup-

plemented by a portrait of Wolfgang Kempelen, situated on the right margin of the coin field.

The commemorative 200 Sk coin has a diameter of 34 mm and weight of 20 g. It has been struck from silver with a fineness of 750/1000 at the Kremnica Mint in the number of 11,200 pieces, from which 3,200 are proof. On the edge is the inscription: "VYNÁLEZCA – TECHNIK – KONŠTRUKTÉR" (Inventor – technician – constructor).

**Ing. Dagmar Flaché, Photo: Ing. Štefan Fröhlich**