

THE 1928 COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL - AGAIN

By Tony Bijkerk

On July 31st, 2001, three ISOH members visited “Het Nederlands Muntmuseum” (the Netherlands Numismatic Museum) in Utrecht to have a meeting with Mr. L.M.J. Boegheim, who in 1997 authored an article on the Olympic prize medals, which were presented at the Games of the IXth Olympiad, in Amsterdam in 1928.

The intention of this meeting was to get as much information as possible on the production of the commemorative medal for these 1928 Olympic Games, in order to establish whether or not the existence of gilded silver and silver commemorative medals could still be possible after all.

The meeting was attended by the author of the article in the Journal of Olympic History, Volume 9, number 2, May 2001 [your editor, Anthony Th. Bijkerk]; Mrs. Ingrid O’Neil, auctioneer in the United States, who sold a gilded version of the medal in one of her auctions, and Mr. Jaco Treurniet, an Olympic memorabilia collector, who specializes in the Games of the IXth Olympiad, Amsterdam 1928.

Another reason for this meeting was supplied by Oleg Vorontsov, who in a letter to Tony Bijkerk explicitly stated that he knew of the existence of at least one silver commemorative medal from the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics. The silver(ed) copy of that medal exist in the collection of the Spanish Olympic Museum in Madrid.

The purpose for the meeting was explained by the three ISOH members to Mr. Boegheim, who represented the director of the Museum, and who himself [at the age of 74 years] is acting as honorary researcher for that Museum.

The actual purpose of the visit was to find out if gilded silver and silver versions of the 1928 commemorative medal really exist, and if so, if these then can be considered to be original copies of that medal.

The main points of discussion were:

- According to the Official Report (English version), page 130, “the design done by Mr. J.C. Wienecke, a well-known Dutch medallist, was found suitable after a few slight alterations and a bronze medal made by the firm of Gerritsen & Van Kempen at Zeist. 5139 of these souvenirs were given to those who were entitled according to the terms of the Protocol, and 762 to persons who had rendered some special service to the Committee.”
- There exist at least one gilded version of this medal [which was shown by Mrs O’Neil at the meeting]; and possibly three silver copies (information from Mr. Vorontsov). The origins of these medals are not [yet] known, but one silver medal belongs to the Olympic Museum in Madrid, Spain.
- There exist some serious doubts if the gilded silver and silver medals are original ones, which were supplied during or immediately after the 1928 Olympic Games.
- It is known and confirmed in writing that the Dutch Master-of-the Mint originally made an official offer for the production of the Commemorative Medal to the Organizing Committee for the 1928 Olympic Games. His offer was despatched to the Committee in December 1926 and in the offer he confirmed that the Mint could produce the requested amount of 5000 bronze medals, diameter 55 mm and packed in a simple cardboard box at a price of 1,65 guilders each. A short while later, to great regret of the Master-of-the Mint, it was found that the offer contained a serious miscalculation. The price should have been 0.85 guilders each. But that knowledge came too late. (copies of these letters are available in my archive, Tony Bijkerk)

- Based upon the original offer of the State Mint, the Organizing Committee informed the State Mint in January 1927, that the order would be given to someone else. The Master-of-the-Mint then by returnmail requested if he could be informed at what price the delivery of the medals now would take place, and at the same time he asked to be informed if gilt and silver medals had to be made as well? The answer from the Organizing Committee came soon after and they informed the Master-of-the-Mint that it would not be possible to mention any prices for which the medals now would be delivered, but only that the price that had been agreed was much lower as the one quoted by the Mint and that the offer concerned only 5000 copies in bronze. (copies of these letters are available in my archive, Tony Bijkerk)
- Later it came to be known that the order had been given to the firm Gerritsen & Van Kempen in Zeist, and that only bronze medals would be struck.
[extract from the article by Mr. Boegheim in 1997].
- Mr. Boegheim concluded that as far as he knew, as an expert in Dutch coins and medals, there should be a difference in weight between a gilded silver and a silver medal on the one side, and the bronze medal on the other side. He gave the example from his own article on the prize medals: the gilded silver and silver prize medals weighed about 66 grams each, the weights being the same, since the core of each medal would have been made of the same metal: silver. The added thin gold-layer gave so little extra weight that this extra weight could be neglected. The bronze medal was heavier: about 74 grams.
- When he was shown the letter dated 5 October 2000 from the Archives of the Dutch Royal Family, in which was stated that the Archive only contained one bronze commemorative medal from the Games of the IXth Olympiad, Amsterdam 1928, Mr Boegheim's conclusion was that in his view only bronze commemorative medals could have been produced and handed out to competitors and officials.

“The meeting concluded that the origins of the gilded and silver versions of the medals can only reveal how they came into existence”

- He stressed that it could have been possible that someone, owning a bronze commemorative medal, for one reason or other had gilded that bronze medal, while other persons could have done the same but in silver with regard to the existence of the one in the Spanish Museum.
- Mrs O'Neil informed that she had consulted another expert on the matter, Mr. Winter from Germany, who, having been shown the gilded version of the medal, stated that the gilt layer looked to be from the twenties and that his opinion was that the medal could be an original one. This opinion was later confirmed by a specialist in medal plating, whose professional opinion was that the plating process was an old one conforming to the 1920's and 1930's processes.
- The meeting concluded that the origins of the gilded and silver versions of the medals can only reveal how they came into existence, but that all

currently available evidence points at the fact that the Organizing Committee for the 1928 Olympic Games only ordered bronze commemorative medals, and that the Official Report clearly confirms the number of medals handed out.

So, although the matter is far from solved, one possible solution might be found in determining the exact weight of the gilded, the silver[ed] and the bronze medals. If these weights would be almost equal: that is if they all weight within a difference of 1 or 2 grams from each other, the conclusion must be that the core of the gilded and silvered medals must be bronze!

This conclusion would then point in the direction that some people, maybe way back in the twenties, had their bronze medal covered with a gilt and/or a silver layer. The reasons for such acts can no longer be decided and/or traced.

However, it still seems fact that as far as the history can be traced back, no medals have officially been gilded and or silvered.

However, it should be said that Mrs O'Neil still thinks it possible that both the goldplated and

silverplated medals are genuine medals, which could be made to show to the Organizing Committee how they would look.

However, there is one important argument in contradiction to this statement. The original request to the Organizing Committee if gilded and silver commemorative medals should be also produced came from the contemporary Dutch Master-of-the-Mint, who did not get the order after all. Because his price was too high, the order for 5000 commemorative medals was awarded to another firm. This firm later merged with several other firms. Alas, no archive has been found in which this order could be found. It does no longer exist.

However, when talking to the director of the current [merger]firm about this problem, he told me that according to the rules in those days, the original firm would certainly have produced no other medals than the ones ordered by the Organizing Committee.

It must be stated that no blame whatsoever can be laid at the feet of the auctioneer who sold that gilded medal, as some of the greatest authorities on Olympic medals still think that this medal, and the silver ones too, are original ones.

Personally, and based on the research mentioned above, I am quite certain that these medals have not officially been gilded and or silvered in 1928.

OLYMPIC ORDER FOR FOUR-TIME OLYMPIAN

Peter Montgomery, who represented Australia four times as an Olympic water polo player and later became foundation president of the World Olympians Association, has been awarded the International Olympic Committee's Olympic Order in Silver.

Born on 6 July 1950, Peter Montgomery is a Sydney lawyer and a member of the International Society of Olympic Historians. He played 512 international water polo matches, and competed for Australia at the 1972, 1976, 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games. In 1976 and 1980 he was team vice-captain, and in 1984 he was captain.

He played in four world championships (in 1973, 1975, 1978 and 1982) and one World Cup (in 1981, when he captained Australia).

Montgomery has a distinguished record as an administrator. He was president of the World Olympians Association 1995-1999, and honorary secretary of the water polo committee of FINA 1984-1992. He has been an executive board member of the Australian Olympic Committee since 1989, and a vice-

president since 2001. He has been assistant chef de mission of Australian Olympic teams in Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, and will fill a similar role in Athens 2004.

He was a member of the board of the International Court of Arbitration for Sport as athlete representative from 1995 to 1999. Among his many IOC posts have been membership of the Athletes' Commission (1988-1999), the 2000 Sydney Co-ordination Commission (1995-1999), the Cultural Commission (1989), the Academy and Education Commission (1990-1996), the Bidding City Evaluation Commission (1991) for the 1998 Olympic Games, and the Commission for Sport and Law (1996-1999).

Montgomery served as foundation chairman of the AOC Athletes' Commission from 1984 to 1992, and as a board member of the Australian Institute of Sport and the Australian Sports Commission. He has been honoured with the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM).

By Harry Gordon