

The Autographed 1987 8c Arvid Pardo Stamp

By

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Collecting autographed stamps can be a lot of fun. Perhaps the most well known philatelist in this specialty was Malcolm MacGregor. He amassed items signed by different people in whose honor the stamps were issued, celebrities in all walks of life – kings and queens, statesmen, artists, athletes, aviators, clergy, composers etc. Curiously, he did not possess any stamp autographed by a royal family member of England. Here is what he had to say in pursuing this adventure: “Endeavoring to get together a collection of autographed stamps one must be prepared for a number of rebuffs for not all of the notables portrayed on stamps will readily respond to a request for autographs. Sometimes involved negotiations are necessary before they are ready to comply.”¹ MacGregor attests that he visited consulates and embassies where he was sometimes subjected to a thorough cross-examination of his life history before he obtained the autograph. But, he also made friends with distinguished people and received many invitations to visit them in their home countries. Certainly a very good way to meet interesting and prominent personalities! He eventually bequeathed his collection to the National Museum of American History.

According to Richard Novick, another avid autograph stamp hunter, requests can be denied altogether since some people such as Queen Juliana of the Netherlands or Winston Churchill made it a policy not to sign any stamps. And yet, he also found the hobby an exciting occupation. He recounts that he always waited for his mail to arrive to see if his request had been granted – and then there was the thrill of opening an envelope to find the signed stamp.

Judging the rarity of an autographed stamp is difficult since there are no controls over a celebrity’s signature. A case in point happened on October 26, 2010 when Margit Pardo, the wife of Arvid Pardo whose image is displayed on the December 18, 1987 8c postage stamp commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the UN resolution of the peaceful use of the seabed and ocean floor, died. She bequeathed five autographed sheets of the 8c stamp to her three children. (See figure 1 for a partial shot). One of the five sheets was given to the International Maritime Law Institute at the University of Malta under the directorship of Professor David Attard. These sheets were notarized by Carolyn Chiles for authenticity in Houston, Texas about a year before ambassador Pardo died on June 19, 1999 in Seattle. (See figure 2 and note the expiration date on the notary emblem). According to Malta Post, there is no other known stamp autographed by a Maltese personality who bears his or her image on the stamp. Stamp designer’s signatures on cards and covers are known, however. Arvid Pardo, as far as I can tell, never signed any other stamps, which would make these sheets rare.

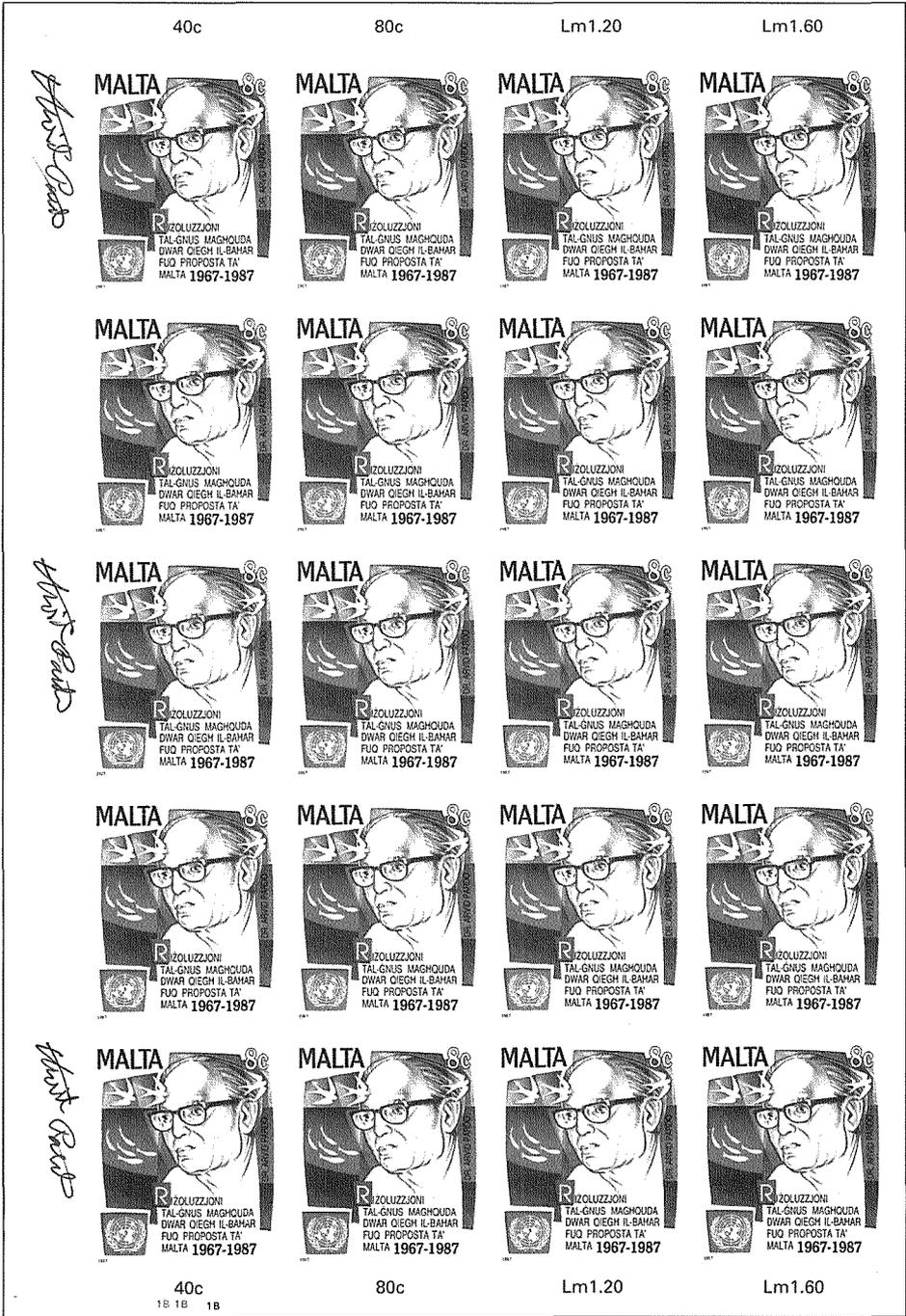


Figure 1: The Autographed 8c 1987 Arvid Pardo Stamp

Why was the stamp issued in the first place? After considerable research, it still remains a great mystery to me who exactly recommended the issuance to the postal authorities, although I suspect Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott, then Rector of the University of Malta, and perhaps Salvino Busuttill, then Director of the Foundation for International Studies, were instrumental.

Certainly there was cause. On November 1, 1967, in the same year as the six day war, Dr. Pardo addressed the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, which culminated in a resolution that was unanimously adopted by the Plenary Session. What made the speech famous was the introduction of a new international legal principle, the “common heritage of mankind” (CHM), that was finally incorporated in the Law of the Sea treaty of 1982. Most conceptions of the CHM have consisted of five main points. First, there can be no private or public appropriation of the commons. Second, the resources of the common heritage area must be used and managed by all countries. Third, all nations must actively share in the resources afforded by the commons. Fourth, the commons cannot be militarized. And, finally, the areas of concern should be preserved for future generations. Although the Moon treaty has expressly incorporated the CHM and the Antarctic treaty has been considered a good example of CHM in practice, these conditions have been and are being violated through expropriation by squabbling nation-states. Furthermore, the U. S., Russia and China are attempting to militarize outer space.

Dr. Pardo’s prediction over forty years ago of serious armed conflict on the high seas seems likely to come true in the not too distant future. The reason? Money and power, of course. Scientists estimate that one quarter of all untapped oil and gas reserves lies in the Arctic. Since global warming is making the northern region more accessible, and more navigable, intense competition for these resources is developing here between the U. S., Russia, Canada, Denmark and Norway among others. Much attention and rationalization have been devoted to maritime boundary disputes between these states. China has acknowledged that the Arctic is mainly a regional issue, but has claimed that it is also an inter-regional one due to international shipping. Therefore, the interests of non-Arctic states have to be recognized.

On a possibly cheerier note about human nature, there has been considerable speculation that the CHM principle might be applied in religion. Back in the 1980s, Jordan requested to register the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls on the World Heritage List, established under the UNESCO convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage. By that time, of course, Jordan was no longer in control of the Old City, but its request was granted. A further development might be the recognition of a *corpus separatum* under the CHM, a variation of the 1947 UN proposal. For what purpose? Simply put, to develop a new religious text, a new bible so to speak. In this time and space, the very idea of a new bible underlying a new religion to supplement discovery of the universe itself conjures up numerous,

indeed, almost limitless, possibilities. The content would be a challenge in itself, trying to lay the foundation for some kind of global consensus with due attention to the diverse spectrum of opinion. If Israel were to take up the lead, it would certainly provide a “moral” justification for the nation’s existence. And, more importantly, reaching a consensus now which could guide or even shape the globe would teach us something about ourselves and the meaning of goodwill and interpersonal skills. The completion of such an endeavor, in effect, would be the diplomatic coup of the Aquarian age. Should a new bible be taken seriously, it would be interesting to see how the current dispute between the Israelis and Palestinians would play out in the coming months and years.

Malcolm MacGregor, “Collecting Autographed Stamps and How to Go About it”, Stamps, September 25, 1954; 446-447.

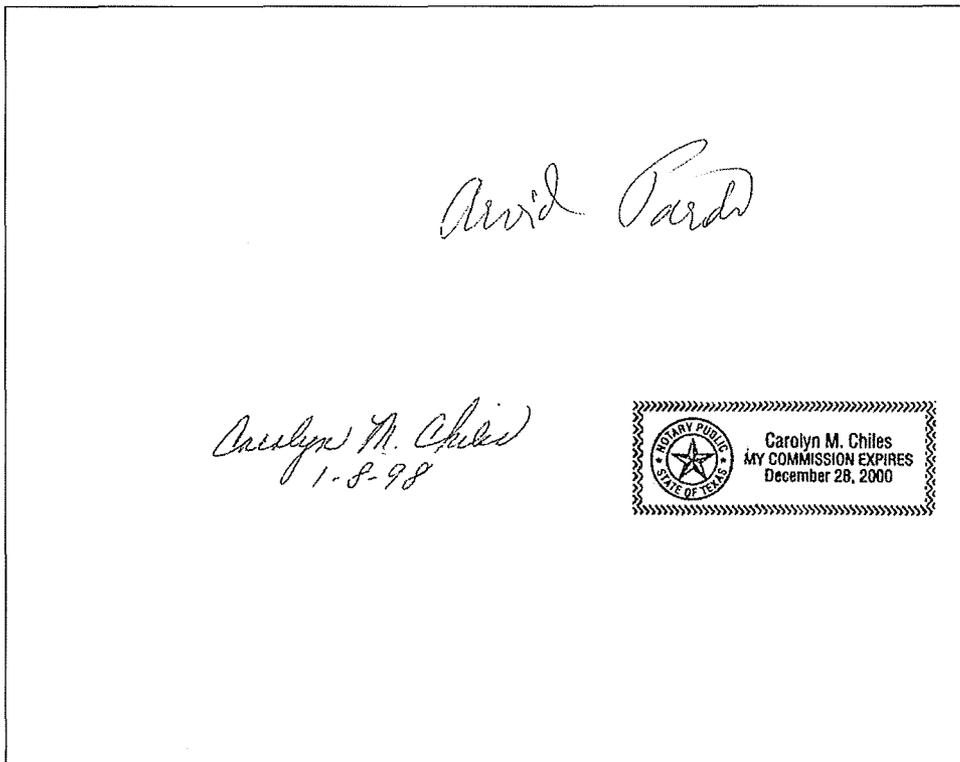


Figure 2: The notarized signature of Dr. Arvid Pardo