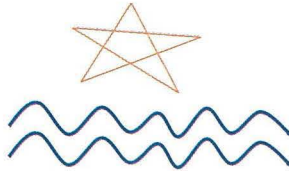# The Christmas Star and the Malta Emblem Stamp

by

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Follow Your Star

On the 3rd November, 1964 the era of the Christmas stamp in Malta began with the issuance of the 2d, 4d, and 8d nativity scene designed by the great artist E. V. Cremona.

Like the British, the Maltese have regularly issued stamps depicting the traditional Christmas scene. But is the scene correct? In particular, were there three magi, who were they and was the Star of Bethlehem really a star?

Over the centuries academic egos the size of hot air balloons, lured with the promise of promotion, fame and mountains of cold cash, have wrestled with the identity of the star. It is a comet, an occultation, a nova, a supernova, a this, a that—even aliens. Each time these egos have popped. Sophisticated astronomy has not explained exactly how the child was located and the historical discrepancy

1 A   2 A

1 B   2 B

1 A   2 A

1 B   2 B

1 A   2 A

1 B   2 B

behind the Roman tax of 6 AD and the dates of Herod's reign. In addition, confusion has befuddled some of them in contradictory attempts to show the star was an astrological event. The religious establishment, on the other hand, clothed in pious platitudes and ritual hocus pocus, has given up—it's a miracle!

We have to do better, assuming Matthew's account is not a fiction. Let's now go in search of the star as depicted in the unwatermarked 6c+2c Malta 2001 Christmas stamp. Let's use commonsense and some simple arithmetic. We will come to the conclusion that with at least 83 1/3rd percent certainty the child was born sometime between February 19 and March 20, 7 BC with a greater probability in March of that year. So we can get the exact date of birth within +/- 10 days and we can also provide a prediction which is a must for any kind of science. That prediction is depicted in the Malta emblem stamp.

Let's start with a little philosophy. Social science, as taught and practiced, is deterministic. That is why it is called "science". We can then suppose that the universe and all its creatures are governed as one – which means that the celestial movements and human interaction are related. The ancient Babylonian religion of astrology, we can surmise, contains some merits, albeit only statistical. The star of Bethlehem may then be an astrological event. Genesis 1:14 does not deny the validity of astrology.

All are agreed that our best guess is that the magi came from Babylonia and thus were familiar with astrology. Our first clue then can be found in the Babylonian almanac tablets of 7 BC where the triple Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Pisces, not a literal star, is discussed. We know the tablet was not written in the previous year since the conjunction, occurring about every 854 years, is non-periodic, in other words, unpredictable in a geocentric universe. This astrological event started on the evening of May 27, reached its second stationary point (i. e. in biblical language "it stood") in October and finished in December of 7 BC. Just as we eagerly watch movies in the evenings today, so the magi must have closely watched this event, the difference being that Hollywood is a man-made contrivance as opposed to the more interesting phenomena of Nature. We do not know how many magi there were who came to Jerusalem to ask where the child was born. There must have been at least two, but not necessarily the three in philatelic tradition. We can try to zero in on the identity of this cast of characters by specifying some markers:

(1) By Hellenistic standards the magi were competent astrologers, astronomers, and mathematicians who probably lived in close proximity to each other. They knew about precession and probably had access to data as accurate as or more accurate than that of Hipparchus.

(2) The prevalent religious belief in Babylonia at the time had integrated Babylonian astrology into Zoroastrian tenets. The magi were expecting a

messianic figure to inaugurate the Piscean age. The mother would then be a Virgo, not a literal virgin, while the son would be born in Pisces. Logic dictates that the magi were looking for a rare Piscean astrological event, not the Saturnalian holiday of December 25.

(3) The magi were familiar with Jewish prophecy and may have lived close to a Jewish community. It is possible that their home was located close to where the almanac tablets were originally discovered.

(4) Some or all of the magi were aristocrats for three reasons. First, they needed leisure and funds to complete the experiment to locate and honor the child. Second, that "Herod was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" implied that the magi were no ordinary characters. Third, it is generally believed that the Parthians who ruled Babylonia at the time had a poll tax for the working class. Nobility knew about demographics, the importance of which will become evident later in this paper.

We learn from the Gospels that the Christmas "star" appeared between 8 BC when Augustus decreed a universal tax and the spring of 4 BC when Herod died. There is no evidence whatsoever that an Augustan tax occurred in 6, 5, or 4 BC. Furthermore, there is no evidence, numismatic or otherwise, that Herod lived past his generally accepted date of death. St. Luke, undoubtedly, set the stage for the registration in 7 BC, if it ever occurred, by linking it to the Augustan decree to highlight the fact that something wonderful and of global significance was about to happen in a world such as ours.[2] Since the two events were chronologically close to each other, St. Luke merged the two events. Why 7 BC?

Augustus wanted to prepare Herod's client kingdom for incorporation as a procuratorial province of Syria in 6 AD. With such a complicated personal situation in Herod's family, with many Jews asking for provincial status, with all the inevitable competing claims for Herod's throne, the emperor must have asked himself the question: what was going to happen in Judea after Herod, a "Third World" strongman and a puppet of the Romans, died? Augustus was leaving the "Syrian option" open, anticipating events with his usual tact and brilliance. If the Romans were preparing a census for Syria starting September 1, 6 AD, the most appropriate time for them to determine the ages of those over twelve in Herod's kingdom would be 7 BC. We know that all men from fourteen to sixty five and all women from twelve to sixty were obliged to pay a tributum capitis in the Syrian province. The age counted from the date of declaration. Hence, a baby girl declared at the 7 BC registration would pay the poll tax in 6 AD. The client kingdom, like the rest of Syria, would be on a twelve year cycle.

By instituting this 7 BC registration, the Romans prevented the Jews from

lying or not registering for the 6 AD tax. Augustus had secretly played on the fact that Jewish property rights and prestige were determined by genealogies. Why not require the Jews in Palestine to register at their ancestral city, not at the usual place of residence? After all, Herod wanted to redeem himself in the eyes of the Jews for earlier burning the Temple genealogies. Frankly, all the Jews had been duped. Is it any wonder then that the Romans considered Augustus the son of Apollo?

St. Matthew also gives us a clue as to when the registration took place. He states that Herod inquired when the Christmas "star" first appeared and then ordered the slaughter of the "innocents" based on the date of that appearance. Since there is no evidence whatsoever of a poll tax in Herod's kingdom on the May 27th evening, the window of registration must have closed at that time or shortly thereafter. Late February or early March would then be well within the realm of possibility for the beginning of the registration. And it is logical that Mary, now in her late pregnancy, must have been forced to journey to Bethlehem at the beginning of the registration period, not at its end.

Now that we have engineered a working hypothesis for the approximate dating of the nativity, what about the Christmas "star" that appeared only to the magi, not to the clueless Jerusalem religio-academic establishment? Once the magi learnt of Micah's prophecy that the child would be born in Bethlehem the search was simple. Bethlehem's size was like a Malta in the international community. Current estimates of the farming town's population run around a thousand people with an annual birthrate of about 4 percent. Many children did not last past their first birthday so we use 3 percent or so in our calculations. The magi were looking for a mother who was a Virgo and a first born and only son who was a Pisces. The chance for this combination is $1/12$ times $1/12$ times $1/2$, under the common assumption that there is statistical independence in signs, no twins (twins would be a rarity), and twelve signs. In other words, the probability of finding this combination in a typical population is $1/288$. For purposes of conservatism and arithmetic ease, let's say the population was 1,440 so that 43.2 children were born in Bethlehem that year.[3] This makes sense since the slaughter of the "innocents" is only recorded by St. Matthew. The number of baby boys murdered in cold blood must have been small otherwise the crime would have caught the attention of the Roman historian Josephus among others. The bottom line then indicates that the probability of finding no child in Bethlehem who met the requirements in the given year was $1 - 43.2/288$ or $17/20$. No wonder the magi were overjoyed at the sight of the mother and child. The chance of finding two children that met the requirements was roughly $9/400$. There was no mistake. The magi found what they were looking for. The search probably ended in October at the second stationary point of the triple Jupiter-Saturn conjunction when the "star stood over the house". From the first stationary point in May the magi could have predicted the rest of the triple occurrence.

How much credence can we place in this explanation? The magi must have thought that the dawning of an astrological age is accompanied by a major turning point in religious development. Effectively, there is a music of the spheres in that the inauguration of a new age is marked by a religious figure whose birth sign coincides with the sign or opposite sign of that age. Furthermore, one of the religious figure's parents or children has the astrologically opposite sign. The age of Taurus, the A, the ox, the "sacred cow" opposing the scorpion, started around 4,400 BC possibly contemporaneous with the invention of the ox-drawn cart. (Bishop Ussher tells us that the world, Mesopotamian civilization perhaps, began in 4004 BC.) We know that an important development, the formation of the Jews, occurred *c.* 2,100 BC. From biblical chronology the patriarch Abraham could have been born in *c.* 2,168 BC, assuming that the construction of the first Temple began in 967 BC and that recorded years in the Bible are not just half-years. The exodus would have taken place in 1,446 BC with Joshua's crossing of the Jordan around 1,405 BC. Ideally, what must be shown through the bible, Jewish folklore, or tradition is that *Abraham was a Libra and his son Isaac was an Aries or vice versa.* It is well known in rabbinical circles that Isaac was born on Nisan 15 at Passover, an extremely probable Aries. *There is then a 1/6 probability that this event date could have occurred accidentally.* Abraham's birthdate is problematic, although circumstantial evidence would support a Libra birthday.[4] The 83 1/3rd percent explanatory power of the theory is then at a minimum.

So, by extrapolation, the theory gives us the following astrological ages with the corresponding birth signs of the religious protagonists. These are displayed in table 1. The probability of any one of these events is 1/12 times 1/6 or 1/72 (i.e. 0.0139).

Table 1

Sign Configurations with Associated Probabilities

Sign Pair	Beginning Date of Age	Probability	Joint Probability
LIBRA/ARIES	2200-2000 BC	.0139	.0139
VIRGO/PISCES	100 BC-100 AD	.0139	.0002
LEO/AQUARIUS	2000 -2200 AD	.0139	.0000
CANCER/CAPRICORN	4000-4300 AD	.0139	.0000

No evidence, archaeological or otherwise, has yet been found confirming a Taurus/Scorpio combination. Also, we can only speculate on the Cancer/Capricorn figures. My own preference is that one of them is an artist, perhaps a Pan, someone like the hero of A. J. Cronin's A Thing of Beauty. I harbor two reasons. First, I surmise that he counterbalances the pedestrianism of prevailing scientific procedure.

Second, in classical mythology, Pan is married to Eupheme and has a son named Crotus the Sagittarian. Gemini/Sagittarius follows Cancer/Capricorn.

One prediction of the theory is that in the foreseeable future there will be another major religious innovation inaugurated by a person whose astrological sign is Leo the Lion, a symbol of the Sun, with an immediate family member, preferably father or son, as an Aquarius. This would suggest that the Christmas event is not a theological singularity, in line with originally intended passages in the Old Testament. It becomes more apparent if Leo the Lion is born on the 9th/10th of Av in the Jewish calendar as foretold in Second Temple Judaism. A lifelong celibate, he could suffer the psychiatric consequences of a traumatic catharsis induced by a subconscious conflict (a Maltese cross?), consequences intimated in the messianic texts. As a result, he may carry a new set of religious rules.[5] Just as the Virgo's youth is intertwined with the secret of the resurrection via Joseph of Arimathea, so these rules may be intertwined with the accomplishments of the Aquarian.[6] With 1967 marking an all-important year in Jewish history, could the Malta-inspired "common heritage of mankind" concept embedded in the modern Law of the Sea convention be involved? After all, Maltese stamps commemorating the 20th anniversary of the U. N. resolution of the sea bed were issued in December, 1987. The rules under this legal concept could propagate peacefully during the remainder of the *Pax Americana* and then could lay the Aquarian foundation for the future civilization(s) encompassing the solar system.

Figure 1 symbolically depicts the prediction of the Leo/Aquarius combination. The stamp shows the emblem of the republic of Malta issued in January of 1976

Figure 1: The January 28th, 1976 Definitive Emblem Stamp

with watermark 7 and designed again by E. V. Cremona. Here we see the golden sun shining over a tranquil sea. What's with the empty Maltese daisa departing from the shore? The boat with the painted eyes could represent the Maltese version of the *Castor and Pollux* (the "star" and the "scepter", if you will) christened in the allegory and real life story of Acts 28.[7] A new world religion is born. The boat is empty because any and all can sail in it. Recall that, after the shipwreck of the *Big Fish* Christianity on the island, St. Paul takes this boat bound for Italy and sails deathlessly into the port of Puteoli finally to reside at the Three Taverns, symbol of the Cancer/Capricorn age.

A few years ago, when in Malta, I casually asked Professor Salvino Busuttil, then Director of the Foundation for International Studies, where the emblem originated. He told me that Mr. Dom Mintoff as Prime Minister liked the picture after he won the general election in 1971. The emblem lasted in popularity until 1987 when there was a change in government. Ironically, little did Mr. Mintoff know that the design might have larger implications…

So, in conclusion, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year—next March!

Footnotes:

1. This paper is based on the following journal article: David A. Pardo, "A Statistical Solution to the Star of Bethlehem Problem", http://cura.free.fr/xx/20pardo.htlm
2. The word απογραφομαι (apographomai) means to register or record, not tax. Hence, the general sense is that there was an enrollment prior to taxation or the beginning of a census made before its completion by Quirinius in 6 AD.
3. The wise men went directly to Bethlehem since the child could have left with his mother after the "tax". That there was considerable demographic movement during the "tax" was not a concern, however. A woman during late, albeit perhaps here unwanted, pregnancy does not travel. Hence, the wise men could use the demographics of Bethlehem prior to or after the "tax" in any of their calculations.
4. The time of year of Abraham's birth month is narrowed down to either Nisan or Tishri if one considers the controversy in the Talmud Bavli (Rosh Hashana 10b-11a) between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua (1st-2nd C. Yavneh).
5. For a suggested set of new religious rules and their order of importance see David A. Pardo, "A Statistical identity for the Teacher of Righteousness in the Dead Sea Scrolls", http://biblicalstudies. org.uk/pdf/dss_pardo.pdf
6. For the story of Easter, see David A. Pardo, "Was the Virgo really a Virgo?", http://cura.free.fr/ xxx/27pardo3.html
7. For the outline of the allegory in Acts 28 see David A. Pardo, "The 1919 10/- Shipwreck and the Sign of Jonah", Journal of the Malta Philatelic Society, vol. 44/3, 2015, p. 31-32