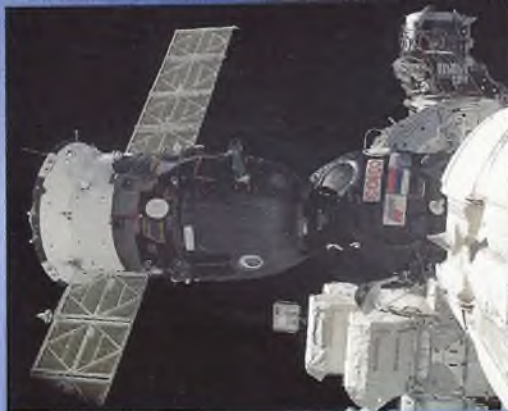


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Are Signatures on Astrophilatelic Covers Just Ornamentation?

Spanish member Antoni Rigo who is the Spanish Astrophilately Chairman and FIP Astrophilately Delegate for Spain discusses the issue in an article first published in the September 2013 issue of AdAstra our Italian sister journal

Signatures don't add points to our participations in competitive exhibits. However, I think that in the hypothetical case where two identical exhibits were displayed, the first one with all signed covers and the second without, the former would get some additional points and not for the signatures in themselves but because signed covers are more difficult to buy, so they are rarer, and under the concept of rarity they would get these extra features.

In any case, astrophilatelists prefer the acquisition of signed covers and in the development of our hobby we are constantly looking for signatures from astronauts, cosmonauts and personnel involved in space programmes for which we have astrophilatelic covers, cancelled with the exact date and location appropriate to where the space events happened.

So the issue is— do signed covers add points – or not ?

In the beginning the signatures (treated independently) can NOT or must NOT add points because they are not a philatelic element. The origin of the signature, its authenticity, the autopen issue, and the forgeries – all stand as additional difficulties for the Jury. For this reason, signatures are not taken in consideration in an isolated way but rather are integrated in the astrophilatelic cover, after Jury has validated it as such.

However, there is one kind of cover where the presence of the signatures determines what sort of cover it is. Specifically I would like to refer to Apollo Insurance Covers. In Fig 1 an Apollo Type Insurance Cover for the launch of Apollo 12 is shown. This kind of cover, signed by crew, was delivered to each family of astronauts for collecting funds for their children in case the astronauts did not return safe home. As this cover herein shown is NOT signed, it is not really an Apollo Insurance Cover but an Apollo Type Insurance Cover, i.e., the kind of cover used.

Another kind of cover where the signatures determine in any way its legitimacy are in space flown covers to different space stations. When astrophilatelists find space flown covers with exclusive space postmarks but not signed, we doubt about their authenticity and regard these covers as suspects. It is a tradition in Soviet (now Russian) crews to

sign such space flown covers. In consequence, its presence (as in Fig 2) legitimizes the cover itself.

Fig.1 - 14.11.69 KSC. Apollo Type Insurance Cover



Fig 2 - 13.09.91 Zvezdny Gorodok 04.10.91 Soyuz TM13 docking with MIR 01.01.92 New Year 25.03.92 Soyuz TM12 Return.



This seems evidence then that signatures in astrophilatelic covers serve for something else than a simple ornament. Furthermore, there are some aspects in the signatures that should be taken in account.

Sometimes, the presence of a signature allows us to know the professional identity of any person involved in the space programmes. In Fig 3 are shown two signed covers for same person, Daniel S. Hunter, who was Director of Tracking Station in Fresnedillas, Madrid (Spain) from 1968 to 1970 and then Director of Tracking Station in Bermuda.

This kind of cover signed by same person but developing responsibilities in different destinations is quite common with regard to a military career path. So, as another example, in Fig 4 are shown two covers signed by Captain of US Navy R.W.Broom from two different tracking ships for two tracking STS missions.

Fig 3 - 03.03.69 Madrid. Apollo 9 launch and 31.01.71 Bermuda. Apollo 14 launch. Covers signed by Daniel S. Hunter.



Fig 4 - 27.06.82 CC. USNS Vandenberg, tracking ship for STS-4 and 27.08.85 CC. USNS Redstone, tracking ship for STS-51. Covers signed by Capt. R.W. Broom



The signatures also provide an incentive for astrophilatelists, who frequently look for the info in the missions in order to identify a signature not previously known. In Fig 5 is shown a signed cover from which the name is not easily readable.



Fig 5 - 04.04.83 Greenbelt. STS-6 launch. Cover signed by GAS Project Manager of GFSC James S. Barrowman.

Thanks to the info available through different sources it is possible to identify most of signatures of astrophilatic covers. In this specific case, in the Press Kit page 43 of the mission STS-6 appears the name of the signer.

But signatures can be much more. Though rare, sometimes signatures confirm data not known before as even today some people who participated directly in space programmes have remained hidden to our knowledge.

The cover in Fig 6 is a good example of how a signature can supply us data unknown until the date.

Fig 6 - 19.01.65 USS Lake Champlain. Splashdown GT-2. Cover signed by Captain James Longino Jr.



There were known covers signed by James Longino Jr as Captain of USS Lake Champlain on 29th Aug 1965 for the recovery of Gemini 5 astronauts but for the Gemini 2 mission it was uncertain who was the captain, until this cover was discovered (this was the only specimen known until recently, when a second signed cover appeared in the philatelic market).

It's possible then that the cover shown as Fig 6 above could have been signed by error (as on some occasions all kind of covers are presented for signature and the signer does not pay much attention to what he is signing). Illustrated is the front of return cover (Fig 7) received by the collector and this is dated before the dates of mission Gemini 5.

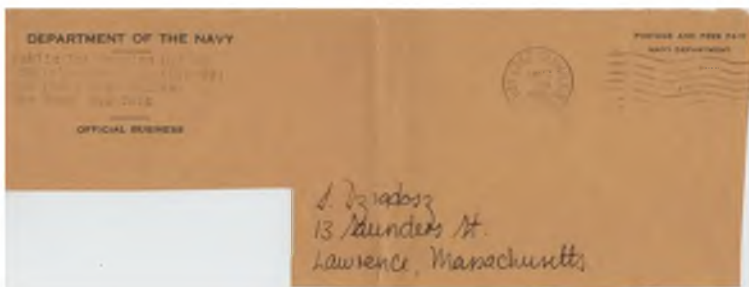


Fig 7 - 17.06.65 USS Lake Champlain. Front of cover addressed to collector.

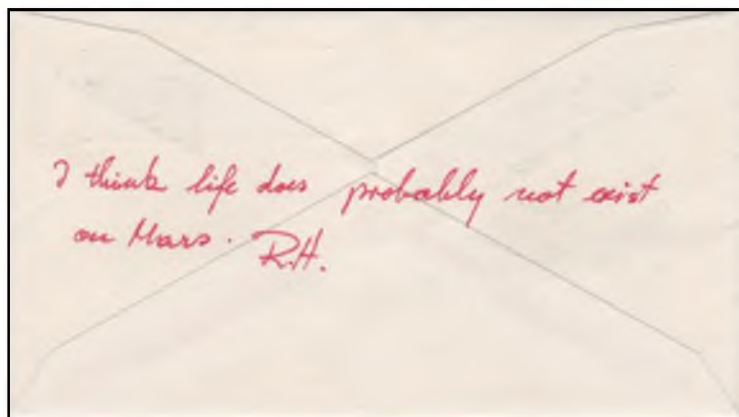
Just to finish, an oddity concerning to the signatures.

Usually, signers put their names, sometimes their positions and even a brief dedication to the person who signed. However, these often do not reflect personal opinions or specific aspects of space mission. In Fig 8 and Fig 9 are shown a cover with an exception to this unwritten rule.



Fig 8 - 20.08.75 Greenbelt. Launch of Viking 1. Cover signed by Dr. Rudolf A.Hanel, scientist of GSFC.

Fig 9 Reverse of the cover. Personal opinion of Rudolf Hanel. However, his opinion still stands correct.



Nowadays, in order to avoid sensitive situations resulting from personal opinions of participants in space programmes, NASA has regularised the signatures reflected at the end of all NASA members' emails and has added the following disclaimer, " The opinions expressed herein do not represent those of NASA"...

A Smattering of recent New Issues of Possible Interest. A full retrospect will appear in January 2015 issue



GB 2014
Kubrick's 1968 seminal film
2001: A Space Odyssey



Guatemala 2012
Expiration of the
13th Ba'kt'un of the
Mayan Calendar

Bulgaria 2012
Grand Parade of the Planets (Ed note : allegedly !)
Bulgaria 2013
50th anniv of Tereshkova (with Ride and Li Ying)

