

Preface, Or: Why This Book?

This book will give you an overview of roughly 500 years of passport history. These pages contain insights on selected, rare examples of travel documents from the past including extinct countries along with fantastic stories and astonishing passport photos.

Identification papers until the 14th-century were a privilege, only from the 15th-century passports became somehow obligatory. For the first time, issued to soldiers, especially mercenaries who had returned from war and for whom such a document served as a letter of dismissal.

We discuss historical people, ordinary people, celebrities, heroes and criminals with their experience during their journey at different periods. You will be surprised by the beautiful passport photo of a young Japanese woman in her Kimono during the time of the Japanese Empire and some remarkable passports from territories which are no longer exist, like German-Austria, Ionian Islands or Manchukuo.

Furthermore, you will obtain insight into the value of old passports, including the most highly valued passport ever sold. The book includes 182 pictures and is a vital source for interested readers and collectors alike.

Old passports are “Pieces of Art.” Why? Because of the handwriting, the colorful border and revenue stamps and of course the passport photo. I often collect a passport only because of its unique or unusual passport photo. In the past, each passport was a unique document compared to our standardized passport booklets today.

Old passports tell the story of a person and will take you back to a time when traveling was not at all a common leisure activity like it is today. When we discuss old passports, then it's also always about traveling, which, back then, took several days or weeks and sometimes months.

This book is for everyone who enjoys the topic and wants to learn more about passports and their history. However, I do not claim the book teaches you everything, but you will learn about the core facts you need to know to get a comprehensive overview of passports and their history. With my long-time experience and knowledge, you will get a fantastic book about this rather unusual topic, entertaining you simultaneously.

Physical travel documents how we know them today might disappear in the following 20 years as travel and especially air travel is significantly growing, and our society is looking to speed up the process of travel while increasing security measures concurrently. Nowadays some countries already issue only electronic visas (which you don't see in your passport). Biometrics, like, facial recognition or fingerprints are also significantly on the rise. So, you will also learn about current modern passports and their future.

In 2003 I found my first old passport at a flea market in Kyoto / Japan. An excellent Japanese document from 1934 showing a beautiful young woman in her Kimono. A piece of art compared to the current standardized travel documents we all use today. Since then, passport history, research, and collecting of old passports became my passion.

Passport history is also quite educational as you will learn substantially about geography, history, and politics. But most

important you need some knowledge in these fields to evaluate your documents correctly, and I am sure this book will support you.

Tom Topol
May 2019

When do YOU start your historical passport collection?

Passports and Their Design

Passport function and feature changes through the centuries. When were the first passports issued and what was their purpose? What were these passports made of and how were they produced? Was there even something like a passport design back then? And what about the security of early travel documents? The answers to these questions may surprise you.

A Letter of Recommendation

Who was traveling in the 16th century? Before tourism (traveling for pleasure, without a real purpose) was common, only the powerful and determined would take to the roads and seas – at least until 1841, when Thomas Cook invented package tourism. A typical 16th-century passport was a handwritten document on paper, issued by a local lord, administration or even by a senior military officer. The primary purpose of the passport was not to identify the bearer but to act as ‘letter of recommendation,’ a safe-conduct to support the traveler on their journey when entering or crossing foreign soil. Issuing passports was not an exclusive right of the state either in the 16th-century.

Once an assistant had written up a ‘passport’ his master would sign and seal the document. The signature and wax seal served not only as a sign of the issuer’s authority but also as a security measure to avoid falsification. As passports had a purely functional character back then, more and more detailed descriptions of the bearers got added to the early modern passport, which initially was no more than a sealed certificate for a person named by name. Physical characteristics such as size, hair and skin tone, conspicuous scars or moles migrated from early passports to more modern versions. But this was

only true for the poor; wealthy and high-ranking travelers in Europe were exempt from describing their bodies and registering their 'special characteristics.' Their passports contained only names, and the fewer personal details they contained, the more effective they were. A passport, as Casanova wrote in his memoirs in the 18th century, gained one respect abroad.

Most liberal countries in Western and Central Europe abolished a passport for foreign travel in the last third of the 19th century. Due to the nostalgic idea of traveling across Europe without visas and identity papers, many call this period 'the golden age of travel.' In 1888, English and French railway companies promoted the luxurious journey on the Orient Express from London to Constantinople, on which there was no need to change trains or present a passport, and wealthy people specifically – first-class passengers, so to speak – were exempt from passport requirements and compulsory checks. Something that came up at the end of the 19th century was the strong link between passport and nationality. From the 17th until well into the 19th century, many people traveled with passports issued by their destination country and not by their country of origin: Any official document was as proof of identity. By 1914 however, passport and citizenship were closely linked. The passport was thus not only a certificate of identity but also a certificate of affiliation.

Passport Design in History

Until the end of the 19th century, no one was seriously thinking about the design of passports. A passport had a purely functional character. However, as the function of passports changed, new requirements emerged regarding durability, security, and standardization, which all affected passport design.

Timeline

15th century	Invention, handwritten documents, wax seals
16th century	Paper featuring watermarks
17th century	First printed forms
18th century	Systematic use of passports, embossed elements
19th century	1st passport booklets
20th century	League conferences (first steps towards standardization), ICAO standardization, MRTD, security paper, and features
21st century	4th generation MRTD, BAC, EAC, LDS2, Polycarbonate data page, 38+ security features in MRTD

Let Pass or Die - The Paiza of Genghis Khan



Genghis Khan (ca. 1162–1227) and the Mongols are invariably associated with terrible tales of conquest, destruction, and bloodshed. This famed clan leader and his immediate successors created the largest empire ever to exist, spanning the entire Asian continent from the Pacific

Ocean to modern-day Hungary in Europe. Such an empire could not have been shaped without visionary leadership, superior organizational skills, the swiftest and most resilient cavalry ever known, an army of superb archers (the “devil’s horsemen” in Western sources), the existence of politically weakened states across Asia, and, of course, havoc and devastation. The legacy of Genghis Khan, his sons, and grandsons is also one of cultural development, artistic achievement, a courtly way of life, and an entire continent united under the so-called Pax Mongolica (“Mongolian Peace”). Few people realize that the Yuan dynasty in China (1271–1368) is part of Genghis Khan’s legacy through its founder, his grandson Kublai Khan (r. 1260–95).

We saw most-likely the first passports in the form of a Paiza during his time. These gave merchants and required travel with permission of the Khan the ability to travel along the silk road or other designated areas of the empire. Think of it like traveling the Pony Express with relay stations. The passport would enable

you access to resources needed. Without it, being caught would be certain death. A Paiza or paizi or gerege was a tablet carried by Mongol officials and envoys, as proof of their position and title, to signify certain privileges and authority.

A most impressive artifact is this imperial passport “Paiza” from an ambassador of Kublai Khan. Being one of two remaining in the world (late 13th century) with an inscription which can be interpreted as

***“I am the emissary of the Khan.
If you defy me, you die.”***



Figure 14 Paiza, 13th century

Paiza, with an inscription in Chinese and Mongolian square script. Gt. Mongol state, 13th c., Silver. 29.5 x 8.8 cm. Chinese inscr.: “Badge of Honor no. 34.” Mong. inscr.: *“By the power of Eternal Heaven, may the name of the Khan be revered. He who does not obey shall be killed and die.”* Found 1853 with other silver objects near village of Niuki, lower R. Selenga (W. Transbaikal region).

Reference: Inv. no. BM-1121. Pub.: Smirnov figs. 29, 30; GE/GIM Altyn urda, no. 4., pp. 110, 209; Genghis Khan, no. 6, pp. 27, 29



Figure 15 Paiza Genghis Khan Envoy

“By the power of eternal heaven, [this is] an order of the Emperor. Whoever does not show respect [to the bearer] will be guilty of an offense.”



Figure 16 Paiza - "Let Pass or Die"

Magnetic Bronze with 24-Carat Gold Foil, Later Jin Dynasty, C. 1368-1392. Reference: New York. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. "Red and Black: Chinese Lacquer, 13th-16th Century," September 7, 2011-June 10, 2012.