

Green Pass *versus* Health Faiths. To travel in confidence with public health

Omar Larentis

Centre of Research in Osteoarchaeology and Paleopathology, Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences, Insubria University, Varese, Italy

Abstract. The Green Pass (EU Digital Covid Certificate) was reconfirmed on June 13th 2022 by the European Parliament as an indispensable tool for coordinating travel safety in Europe. The subject is still debated today, although similar regulations have existed in the Old World since the 15th century. In this letter, I want to briefly recall the means used in the past to regulate the movement of people in different countries, means not different from those used today.

Key word: Digital Covid Certificate; History of Medicine; movement restrictions; Europe; Italy

The Green Pass (EU Digital Covid Certificate) has become a reality in Europe as a tool for containing the COVID-19 since the first months of 2021. Most member states have adopted the health passport, which is also useful to regulate travelling between countries. On June 13th 2022 the European Parliament (EP) has definitively approved the extension of the validity of the Green Pass for a further 12 months (1). The members of the EP approved the agreement to prevent possible restrictions on free movement in the EU in the event of new variants or other threats related to the pandemic, reconfirming the previous legislation. By the end of 2022, the European Commission will assess the impact of the Green Pass on free movement and fundamental rights and may propose its revocation if the public health situation allows it, based on the most recent scientific advice from the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the EU Health Security Committee.

However, it is not the first time that a similar measure is enacted. Indeed, during the 14th and the 15th century the plague struck the Old World. For the first time, Europe witnessed the foundation of Several Health Offices created to deal with the problems related to the infection. The first one was established in Italy with the name of Quarantine Office. It

was founded in Venice in 1423, when plague patients started being isolated and quarantined in an established place near the convent of Santa Maria di Nazaret, from which Nazaretum then lazaret according to one of the many interpretations (2).

Another office was responsible for the production of health certificates, attesting the health status of travellers arriving to and departing from the Republic of Venice. This certification was fundamental for merchants who often had to travel between different countries.

The documents were called the “Health Faiths” and were issued by the Magistracy of Health of Venice. Their name recalled an act of faith, necessary towards the health measures they represented to resume the normality of an economy that, already in the 15th century, could not survive without a complex system of commercial networks.

The production of these documents by the historic states of Italy continued until the second half of the 19th century (Figure 1). Their importance was such that their falsification resulted in penalties ranging from imprisonment to the death penalty (3).

The history of medicine has shown how public health measures aimed at guaranteeing safe movement of people, today as much discussed as the Green Pass,

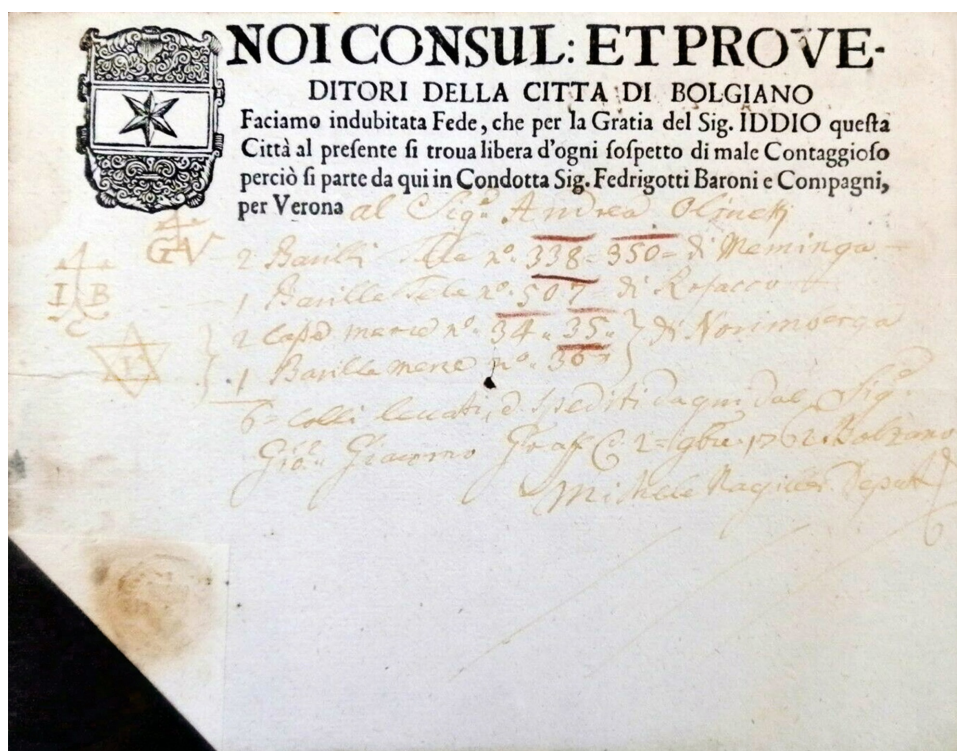


Figure 1. Health Faith dated to 1762 produced in Bolgiano, Milan, Italy.

have long been adopted in response to situations of need. With this respect, The COVID-19 epidemic offers us food for thought about our past and about the significance of medical choices, some of which are still used and that, today, face with the patient's autonomy and his freedom of care (4, 5).

A prominent example is certainly the use and distribution of the Green Pass and its similarity with a health measure already theorized and implemented by the Health Magistracy of Venice in the early 15th century. They both give voice to the desire of many people to return to live their freedom of movement thanks to the trust in these health certifications, now with the Green Pass as well as 600 years ago with the Health Faiths.

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Corresponding author:

Omar Larentis

Centre of Research in Osteoarchaeology and Paleopathology,
Department of Biotechnology and Life Sciences, Insubria
University, Varese, Italy

Mail: omar.larentis@uninsubria.it