

## Chapter III

# Historical Background: From Manual Identification to Auto-ID

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes the reader through a historical tour of identification techniques from ancient times to the present. The histories shed light on how the purpose of citizen identification (ID) has changed as it has been impacted by complementary and supplementary innovations. The chapter provides a thorough exploration of government-to-citizen (G2C) ID systems, so as to better understand the possible uses or potential misuses of current and future mandatory ID schemes. It also presents some of the evolutionary changes that have taken place in the nature and scope of citizen ID, and their subsequent potential implications on society. Historically governments have requested the registering of their population for census collection and more recently the need to know what social benefits accrue to each household. Nowadays, however, citizen ID numbers are even used to open bank accounts and to subscribe to mobile services, among many other things. In addition, auto-ID techniques are not only pervasive but are increasingly becoming invasive. The chapter draws examples from history and emphasizes the types of issues that should be carefully deliberated in the introduction of any new national ID-based scheme. These schemes need forward planning and safeguards beyond those currently provided.

### Defining Identification

*Identification* is defined in several ways, dependent on what aspect is being considered; it is “the act of identifying, the state of being identified [or] something that identifies one” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1998, p. 1062). The verb *identify* is linked to the noun *identity*, such as in the case of the term identity card which can be used to identify someone belonging to a particular group. Founded in Europe (from the Late Latin *identitas*) the word identity became noticeable in the English-speaking world around 1915, primarily through Freud (Pollock, 1993, pp. 1-20). The preferred definition for identity within the context of this book is the “condition, character, or distinguishing features of person or things effective as a means of identification” (Macquarie Dictionary, 1998, p. 1062).

## MANUAL IDENTIFICATION

### Early Identification Techniques

Before the introduction of computer technology the various means of external identification were greatly limited. The most commonly used method was relying on one's memory to identify the distinguishing features and characteristics of other humans, such as their outward appearance or the sound of their voice. However, relying solely on one's memory had many pitfalls and thus other methods of identification were introduced. These included marks, stamps, brands, cuts or imprints engraved directly onto the skin, which were to be later collectively referred to as tattooing. A tattoo is defined as "...permanent marks or designs made on the body by the introduction of pigment through ruptures in the skin..." (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1983c, p. 841). Tattooing is considered to be the human's first form of expression in written form (Cohen, 1994; Delio, 1993; Gell, 1993; Jaguer, 1990; Sanders, 1989; Rubin, 1988; Jones, 1987).

*"All the nomadic peoples try to distinguish themselves from the rest, to make themselves unique and also to establish a means of recognizing their kinsmen in the various clans. In order to achieve this, they resort to the resource which is the most accessible and the most lasting: their skin. This decorated skin defines the boundary against the hostility of the outside world, for it is visible to everyone and it accompanies the individual everywhere"* (Grogard, 1994, p. 19).

Historical records date the first tattoo about 2000 BC to Ancient Egypt, though there is evidence to suggest that tattooing was introduced by the Egyptians as early as 4000 BC (Cohen, 1994, p. 25). Tattoos and/or marks on humans were considered both disapprovingly and in some instances (which were not lacking) quite acceptable. An example of the former is in the *Old Testament* in the Book of Leviticus 19:28, where God commands Moses: "You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you". Similarly in the *New Testament* in the Book of Revelation 13:16-17, there is the ill-omened passage about the beast who forces everyone "...both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark..." Though, strictly speaking, the mark [*charagma*] is not necessarily a tattoo per se. It can be a mark or stamp, engraved, etched, branded, cut, imprinted (Gingrich & Danker, 1958, p. 876). In classical literature, however, tattooing could serve to identify the bearer's rank, status or membership in a group or profession. The historian, Herodotus (c. 484 - c. 425 BC) writes concerning the Thracians, "[t]hey consider branding a mark of high birth, the lack of it a mark of low birth..." (Herodotus, 1972, p. 282). The mark was usually visible for others to recognize. M.G. Michael (1998, pp. 278-301) has written extensively on the topic of tattooing and marking with reference to the Bible. In addition, for a complete guide to tattooing as a form of body art, particularly by people in Africa, Asia and Oceania, see Rubin (1988).

### The Misuse of Manual ID

Branding as a method of identification (especially of minority groups) continued throughout history. In antiquity tattooing was generally held in disrepute, "[t]he ancient Greeks branded their slaves (*doulos*) with a delta, and the Romans stamped the foreheads of gladiators, convicted criminals sentenced to the arena, for easy identification" (Cohen, 1994, p. 32). According to Paoli (1990, p. 140), "...the Romans fastened to the necks of slaves who were liable to run away an iron collar with a disc (*bullae*) firmly attached to it bearing the owner's name and address." Even until 1852, the French penal system would

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