

L-Imnara No. 16

PIPA TAL - QASBA

John Wood

I believe that most national collections around the Mediterranean littoral contain some examples of tobacco pipes, and no doubt, a comparative study will eventually emerge; meanwhile if one draws attention to the subject other examples may come to light, as may useful information, especially as some older folk still remember these clay pipes in everyday use.

Background

Malta and Gozo, lying midway between Gibraltar and Lebanon are almost at the geographical centre of the Mediterranean, and have formed a port of call between Europe and North Africa, between the Moslem and Christian worlds. The Maltese have been in contact with both for centuries, and the cultures of both have contributed many customs and ideas which the islanders have adapted for their own use. Emigration has been one the solution to problems of overcrowding in the archipelago and contact has been maintained between home and overseas communities.

Tobacco and tobacco pipes had penetrated the Eastern Mediterranean by the very early 17th century (Robinson 1985). Cultivation of the plant was introduced into Malta at the beginning of the 18th century. At first, entry was opposed by the Order of Knights for fear that the plant would foul the air, but later cultivation was allowed although no substantial area of arable land was occupied by the crop (Blouet 1967). In 1809 and 1810 tobacco was imported from Trieste in the Adriatic, and again in 1848. Subsequent plantation was considered by the administration (Bowen-Jones 1960). 19th century Maltese were apparently disadvantaged in that tobacco products lost their aroma when stored in buildings of moist local stone, (including perhaps snuff in the *kaxxetta* which De Soldanis lists as part of women's around 1750). According to Badger's description of Malta and Gozo, 1836-1841, the *pipa tal-qasba* was common enough to be part of the countryman's ensemble (Fig. 1).

Present Situation

Brief enquiries into the local manufacture of clay artifacts in Gozo indicate that finewares have frequently been imported from Sicily whilst everyday pottery has been made locally until comparatively recently. For example, the *Fuhhari* Carmel Sacco who died 28 years ago aged 87, worked a hand operated wheel in Victoria. He used the local grey bodied clay (*tafal*) which fires a biscuit colour with rusty areas depending on the position in the kiln and therefore the temperature. According to his relatives he never made tobacco pipes, although Salvu Axiq (age 86 in March 1993) from Wied Sara says Carmel Sacco worked clay from il-Harrax from which he made *pipa tal-qasba*. Salvu, a lifelong pipesmoker, was a customer. A modern potter at the Dbiegi makes only souvenirs and imports her clay from UK.

L-Imnara No. 16

In 1981 I contacted the sales manager of Malta Pipeworks, Ltd.; neither he, nor his father ever remember reed pipes being made locally, and said they were probably imported. In the same year, the folklorist Dr. Cassar Pullicino, in a personal communication to me, remembered as a youth, seeing Gozitan priests smoking the *pipa tal-gasba*. This was substantiated by the late Dr. Francis Mallia, then Director of the National Museum in Valletta.

Father Joseph Bezzina (1985) quotes from the Archiepiscopal Archives: "Some ecclesiastics were indulging in the not commendable but increasingly popular habit of smoking a pipe. Due to their state and dignity, they were prohibited to smoke in public, but were free to do so in private"; these circumstances pertaining between 1801 and 1840.

"A Maltese Pothouse" by Brockdorff (who was painting local scenes circa 1825) shows the proprietor smoking a reed pipe, and a detail from a watercolour (Ms1611 NLM) illustrates a pipe-smoking priest opposite the main entrance of south temple, Ġgantija, Gozo. The earliest illustration I can find is in a late 18th century copperplate engraving by Zimelli (in the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta), showing a peasant in wedding costume with a similar reed pipe.

The Reed Pipes

Zeppi Grech who worked at Xagħra windmill was a jack of all trades making everything from mousetraps to ploughs and most likely carved the stone (*Globigerina*) pipes which were found with his things (Figs. 2, 3).

Amongst a collection of reed pipes in the Gozo Museum are two whose origin can be identified. The stamp found on Fig.4 is also found on pipes from Varna, Bulgaria, (Stanceva 1975/76). Maltese merchants were importing cereals from the Black Sea in 1812 (Price 1954). Between 1854 and 1857 Malta was used as a staging for the Crimea War. The importation of this pipe is at least possible during those times. Fig.5 is stamped BONNAUD MARSEILLES underneath the stem. The firm was founded by Hippolyte Leon Bonnaud in 1824; it closed in 1955. Small numbers of Maltese had emigrated to Marseilles in 1832 (almost a decade after Bonnaud founded his factory). The migration continued until 1844. A larger number of emigrants arrived in 1855 and again in 1891. Perhaps sailors or returning migrants were responsible for its introduction.

Conclusion

There has been ample opportunity for seamen, migrants, emigrants, and re-migrants to import smoking materials into the archipelago during the 17th-19th centuries, and on the evidence of clays, manufacturers' marks and stamps, it would appear that the majority of *pipa tal-gasba* were imported.

Much remains to be done to trace the development of pipe smoking in the Maltese Islands.

Fig.2 Globigerina
limestone blank for
pipes similar to Fig.3.
Provenance: Xaghra mill.

Fig.3 Globigerina
limestone pipe.
Provenance: Xaghra
mill.

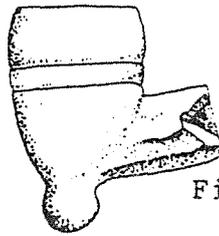
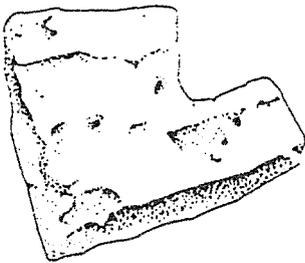
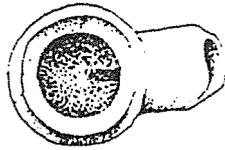
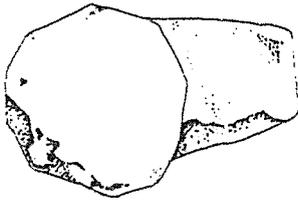


Fig.2

Fig.3



Fig.1 *Country man*

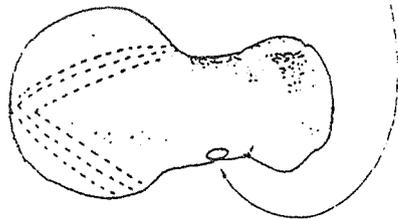
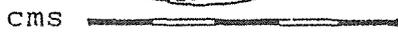
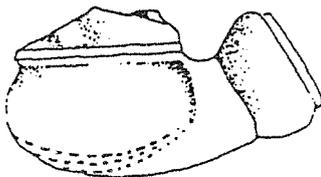


Fig.4

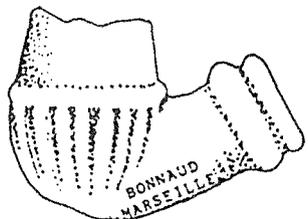
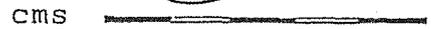
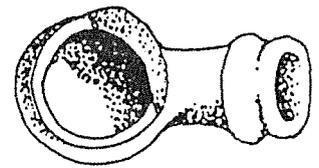


Fig.5

L-Imnara No. 16

References

- Agius de Soldanis. 1750 Della Lingua Punica presentamente usata da'Maltesi (pp115-117).
- Badger G.P. 1989. Description of Malta and Gozo. Melitensia Malta
- Bezzina J. 1985. Religion and Politics in a Crown Colony. Bugelli publications. Valletta.
- Blouet B. 1967. The Story of Malta. Progress Press. Malta.
- Bowen - Jones et al. 1960. Malta: Background for Development. Durham University.
- Price C.A. 1954. Malta and the Maltese. Georgian House. Melbourne.
- Robinson R.W. 1985. Tobacco Pipes of Corinth and of the Athenian Agora. Hesperia 54,149-203.
- Stanceva M. 1975/76. La confection de pipes en Bulgarie. Bull. du Musee des arts decoratifs (Beograd)19/20.129-37
-

Din il-Harga ta' L-Imnara

Minhabba diversi diffikultajiet, dan in-numru 16ta' L-Imnara li kien għas-sena 1992, kellna noħorguh tard, issa, fl-1994. F'qasir żmien, din is sena ukoll se noħorgu in-numri 17 u 18, wieħed biex jaqbel mal-1993, u l-ieħor għad din is-sena. L-Imnara tintbghat lil min ikun hallas is-sħubija tas-snin speċifikati.

Il-ħruġ ta' L-Imnara jirrikjedi bosta spejjeż (minbarra xogħol), u nħeggu lill-membri iħallsu regolari is-sħubija tagħhom ta' Lira fis-sena.

