



Fig. 1  
Pipe-smoking in Merchants Street, Valletta, as depicted in *Street Sketch at Valetta*, 23.5 x 14.4cm, in A. Nicolas, *Antique Malta: 1842-1885, A topographical and historical catalogue of engravings and articles as depicted in the major English magazines of this eventful period* (1982 edition, p.9)

# *Pipital-Qasba* illustrated

John Wood presents a selection of pipes as depicted in various works of art

In many parts of the world natives used to consume a number of plants as hallucinogens, or at least as enervating agents, of which tobacco was the mildest. In the Americas pipes dating several centuries BC are commonly found in archaeological contexts. Consumption was not considered a pastime or entertainment, but a significant ceremonial or religious activity.<sup>1</sup>

Tobacco of the genus *Nicotiana*, discovered in the Americas and introduced into Europe in the sixteenth century, provoked two schools of thought as to whether it was a poison or panacea. Once across the Atlantic, the smoking pipe and its use spread eastwards with extraordinary rapidity, the one-piece through Europe and the bowl with separate stem across Africa and around the Eastern Mediterranean; the two waves met along the north-west borders of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The first mention of tobacco and pipes in the Mediterranean occurred in the Dardanelles in 1599 when an English ship exchanged courtesies with part of a Turkish fleet. The Turkish captain demanded a present, 'some tobacco and tobacco pipes ... which in the end he had'.<sup>3</sup> English traders were

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left: Fig. 2  
*Peasant Costume*, Catalogue of Drawings and Museum Objects, Eastern Antiquities, Society of Antiquaries of London.

opposite left: Fig. 3  
*Country man* as depicted in George Percy Badger's *Description of Malta and Gozo* (1838).

opposite right: Fig. 4  
 Charles Frederick de Brocktorff, *Maltese Country Family*.

quick to spot the market and were soon selling tobacco to Turks as a cure for disease. People soon discovered the pleasurable effects of smoking and in due course pleasure seekers became addicted.<sup>4</sup>

At this time Malta, home to the Knights of St John, was already a cosmopolitan culture. Not entirely self-sufficient in basic, let alone luxury items, the residents relied on imports.

A number of pleasurable diversions were available to all freemen in the community whether they were residents, sailors or traders, and the government granted licences for the sale of liquor and tobacco.

It would appear from the pictorial evidence that prior to the nineteenth century reed pipes were preferred in Malta. This evidence is borne out by recent archaeological evidence from Fort St Elmo.

A serendipitous note from a colleague researching in the archive of the Society of Antiquaries, London, produced an anonymous illustration of a Maltese family *circa* 1780.<sup>5</sup>

This pencil drawing (Fig. 2) depicts a couple with their baby, and is attributed to Jean-Pierre Houël (1735-1813). This attribution however cannot be substantiated, and begs further questions.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that the male is smoking a *pipa tal-qasba*, a common enough practice, promoted an in-depth look into the illustration of smoking pipes in Malta. 'Artists depict a wide range of Maltese and Gozitan dress, some of which directly refer to the rural world. Paintings, prints and watercolour representations offer an illuminating background.'<sup>7</sup>

Malta has excellent archival records. The possibilities for research are prolific given both the number of local artists and the fact that the island was a Mecca for European

travellers. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were a time when the privileged did the 'Grand Tour.' These and other travellers were often keen illustrators and collectors. Maltese museum and library collections have works signed or authenticated by artists quoted below. The same sources also include anonymous works.

Briar and olive wood pipes have been produced in Malta since 1933.<sup>8</sup> The one-piece white clay pipe, as illustrated by Edward Caruana Dingli on the 4c stamp was, according to entries in Lloyd Maltese shipping registers, imported from Northern Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup> The once-fashionable *pipa tal-qasba* (illustrated in Fig. 12), depicted in the London illustration and in *Country man* (Fig. 4) is no longer used. These pipes were never made commercially on the island; they were only made by a few domestic potters, and then not as a business venture but for friends. Earlier, the reed pipes, found the length and breadth of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, came to Malta mostly from Italy, Sicily, Greece or Turkey.<sup>10</sup>

English sailors had introduced tobacco pipes and smoking into Ottoman Turkey *circa* 1600. The habit spread quickly. In 1636 Carlo Bartolo described himself as a 'tobacco retailer from Senglea',<sup>11</sup> and by 1650 the smoking habit was so widespread that Grand Master Lascaris made the wise decision to forbid smoking on the Order's galleys because of the risk of fire.<sup>12</sup>

*Country man* is found in the chapter on 'Costume' (p. 92) in George Percy Badger's *Description of Malta and Gozo*, published by Weiss, Malta in 1838 (Fig. 3). Most of the illustrations in the book acknowledge Luigi Brocktorff, son of Charles Frederick. Badger was resident in Malta between 1821 and 1841, and became editor of Church Missionary Society publications.

Figure 5 depicts *A Maltese pothouse* by Charles Frederick de Brocktorff. Of Danish origin, Brocktorff was commissioned in 1828 by the First Duke of Buckingham to paint a series of Maltese views. Nicholas de Piro's *International Dictionary of Artists who Painted Malta* (p. 33, no. 3) describes this painting



as 'Playing Morro'. Another copy, at the Museum Café in Valletta, is labelled 'Calling Shop': two men are playing Nigra and one is eating macaroni (the location of the original illustration is unknown). An employee at the café says Morro is still played in the villages; he plays in Qormi. The proprietor of the pothouse smokes a clay pipe, the bowl of which has a vertical striped decoration known as gadrooning. Figure 8.2 shows a pipe with gadrooned decoration on a round bowl, as does the sketch of Francesco Zimelli's '*habillement ancien du Paysan Maltoise*' in Figure 13.3.

Michele Bellanti was born in Valletta in 1807. A lawyer by profession, he was one of Malta's most gifted artists of the nineteenth century. As a young man Bellanti studied and practised art in earnest in the bottega of Giuseppe Hyzler (1793-1885). He supplemented his artistic research with visits, in a 'Grand Tour' manner, to the Italian cities of Naples, Rome, Florence and Venice. Apart from his technical ability in painting in oils and in watercolours, Bellanti was also one of Malta's foremost lithographers. He perfected his studies of the lithographic process in Paris between 1840 and 1841.<sup>13</sup>

There is an elegant painting of *Turkish ladies* executed by Bellanti in Constantinople in the 1840s. Their pipes have stems with exaggerated length. The bowls are 'disk-based', similar in shape to other artefacts found in Malta; one, for example, in the foundations of a house in Birgu, another in the Quarantine Harbour, as well as in the sewer system of the Inquisitor's Palace<sup>14</sup> and St Angelo wharf (Fig. 8.3). The 'ladies' pipes and similar artefacts can be seen on page 10; a detail from *Marina of Valetta* by Lieut H.E. Allen, Royal Engineers, and Antoine Favray's 'Interior with Orientals'. The latter can be seen in the Cathedral Museum, Mdina.

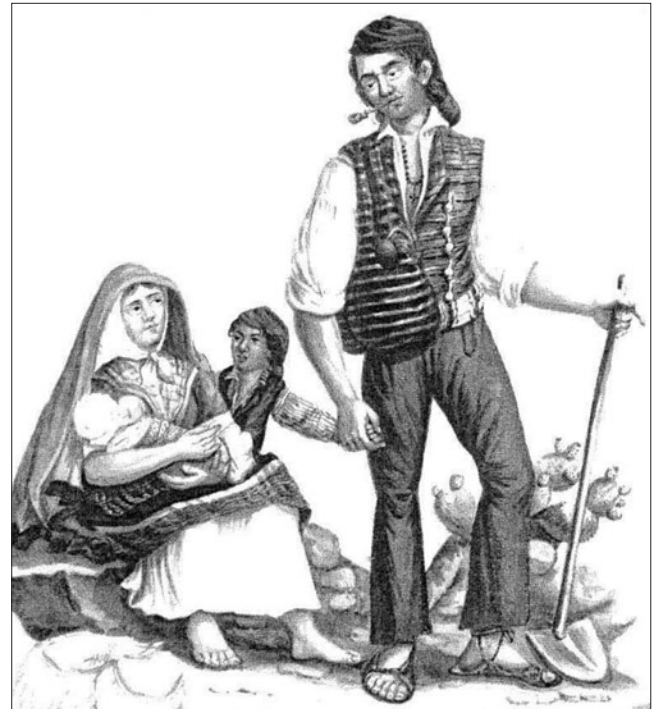


Figure 7 features a detail from the lithograph *Veduta del Gran Porto di Malta e della Valletta* by Giovanni Schranz circa 1828.<sup>15</sup> Schranz was born in Minorca (24/11/1794); he arrived in Malta in July 1818 and married a Maltese girl, Concetta. They died within a few months of each other in 1882. The pipe in Schranz's picture has an exaggerated lip to the rim like that of the London illustration (see sketches on page 42). This may well represent a hinged metal cap which, although uncommon, occurs on a few pipes found in Malta (Fig. 8.4, 8.8).

Within the Ottoman sphere a cool smoke was appreciated and water pipes proliferated. Another cooling method was to exaggerate the stem length, and to achieve this, cherry and jasmine were cultivated in special orchards.<sup>16</sup> The fashion reached Malta through trade. A detail from the Schranz brothers' lithograph *View taken near Nix Mangiare Stairs, Marina* shows this.<sup>17</sup> Nix Mangiare stairs, which still exist, were the haunt of beggars in the nineteenth century. For the better off there was business to be done, and a detail shows two turbaned 'Turks' in discussion with a gentleman in European clothes. The 'Turks' are accompanied by another oriental, who wears a fez and smokes a long-caned pipe.

Other features are regularly found on allover of the Mediterranean. For example the 'keel', that graceful shape under the bowl like an aquadynamic ship, see Figure. 8.5; this artefact was found in a cesspit off Inguanez Street, Mdina. The ringed 'stepped' end nearest to the smoker is also featured on Figure 8.3 from St Angelo wharf. Sometimes the elegant rim and bowl are simply shaped like a 'sack'; this is adequately illustrated by Figure 8.6, from an excavation in Dockyard creek.



Fig. 5  
Charles Frederick de Brocktorff, *A Maltese pothouse*.

Joseph Cassar Pullicino, author of *Studies in Maltese Folklore* (Malta University Press, 1992), describes on p. 150 'folklore activities' as illustrated by Charles de Brocktorff in June 1849. *Maltese Country Family* (Fig. 4) may be one of that series. It shows the way artists saw the rural family.

Like all pottery, pipes were prone to damage and the cleaning process was all part of a ritual. Smokers would scrape away at the 'dottle' causing the sort of breakage illustrated by Figure. 8.7.

Several of Brocktorff's pipes appear to have the rim neatly removed altogether, perhaps a frugal adaption to extend the life of an appreciated pipe; examples are the one depicted in Figure 5 and those sketched from *A Maltese pothouse* (Fig. 5) and *Maltese in Winter Dress* (Fig. 9.11).

An anonymous watercolour featuring a 'Rahli ta Zmien il Conti Ruggiero – 1090' (Country man from the time of Count Roger) was possibly intended as a souvenir for the tourist market.<sup>18</sup> It captures a look of satisfaction on the face of the smoker, if not the donkey.

The pipe is a classic example of a round bowl with a tall rim (see Fig. 9).

Another example of pipe-smoking can be seen in detail in *Casal Bircicara on the island of Malta*<sup>19</sup> drawn and executed by Filippo Benucci. Benucci was a painter and designer of lithographs who arrived in Malta in 1810. He later settled in Munich.<sup>20</sup>

The work of the Brocktorff family has, by chance, produced the most valuable material for this investigation, although opinion can be critical as to the quality of the actual work. Michele Bellanti's views of Malta, even though at

times mass-produced for the souvenir market, are perhaps the most artistically satisfying of the lot. His closest rivals in the topographical market were Giovanni Schranz and Charles Frederick de Brocktorff. Their great concern with the representation of realist exactitude makes their work appear unpleasantly stiff when compared with the fluidity of Bellanti's work. Brocktorff was the least talented artist of the three and his work, even though greatly appreciated, remains that of a weak draughtsman who used stereotypical formulas for the representation of scenes. His otherwise unexciting views were usually accompanied by little anecdotes of popular life which made his work, at least, charming. Schranz's oil paintings were much better and attracted the attention of the more sophisticated buyers. He had a particular penchant for the representation of harbour scenes.<sup>21</sup>

Charles Brocktorff settled in Malta circa 1810. He opened an art studio in Valletta where his business prospered, and his four artist sons eventually joined him to enrich the family enterprise. They captured not only the magnificent views, but portrayed popular culture and lifestyle of the various classes.<sup>22</sup> They obviously had a thriving family business fulfilling Buckingham's commission in the 1820s. Their work at Xagħra earned the temple complex the soubriquet 'Brocktorff Circle'. Luigi illustrated Badger's popular tourist publication in the 1830s and in the 1840s; the Brocktorffs created the series 'folklore activities'.

Life for many Maltese families was at best basic, as described below by Bernadine Scicluna (2008). Tobacco was not a necessity, yet the evidence shows that most men were attached to their pipes.

The *Maltese Country Family* ... conveys changelessness in that an indigent lifestyle could have never afforded the purchase of anything beyond the staple necessities. Barely making ends meet was a pressing priority over buying new clothes, let alone adornments of different styles, colour and material. Moreover, when looking back at certain laws introduced and enforced by the Order in a strict

endeavour to curtail the excesses of extravagant fashions, this was just as conducive to hinder the development of any sort of modifications to both male and female dress for a considerable time, particularly in the unvarying rustic world.

Whereas white European pipes were usually well-catalogued by the maker, *pipi tal-qasba* imported into Malta were mostly from anonymous sources. However, the origin of some artefacts can be identified with reasonable certainty by shape. An example is an Italian pipe in Louis Ducros's *Group of young Gozitan folk people dancing* (Fig. 8.9). Lloyd Maltese shipping registers list ports of call mentioning part cargoes of pipes imported from Marsala and Naples. Artefacts similar to Figure 8.9 have been found in a field-walking project at Molise between Rome and Naples, also in the Garagliano river, at Pompeii, Marsala and Milazzo near Messina.

Many people in the Maltese islands have been associated with, even addicted to, their pipes. The 'Country Priest in Undress' from *Manners and Customs of Malta* (p. 5), is not setting a good example to a younger generation.

In 1801 priests, 'due to their state and dignity', were forbidden by the Bishop to smoke in public,<sup>23</sup> but times change.

In Gozo there is an old prison block off Cathedral Square in the Citadel. The present building, consisting of one storey containing six cells, dates from the early 1600s. The prison closed down in the middle of the nineteenth century. In 1988 the Ministry for Gozo started restoration work on the site, during which a unique image was uncovered by the removal of wall plaster (Fig. 6). The subject matter of prisoners' art work sometimes depicts their deprivations, and one such graffiti shows a tobacco pipe with a rounded bowl and flared rim. This style was popular from the early seventeenth century. However the extension of a mouthpiece would definitely suggest that this was carved by a 'gentleman' confined to prison.

Hundreds of thousands of smoking pipes were used over time. In 1732 for example, Grand Master Vilhena appointed the Balì de Chambray to make preparations for a siege.

Consequently Chambray did so, and also ordered 200,000 clay pipes and a corresponding amount of tobacco.

More recently the habit of smoking clay pipes went from commonplace to old-fashioned and obsolete in a generation. The hundreds of pipes that remain in national and private collections are more the result of coincidental discovery, although some may still be found in family effects. Artefacts are still being discovered as a result of projects such as field-walking and rescue archaeology,<sup>24</sup> particularly around the ports and harbours which are the hub of trade. The qualities of salt water and the soft sedimentary deposits in the creeks act as a preservative.<sup>25</sup>

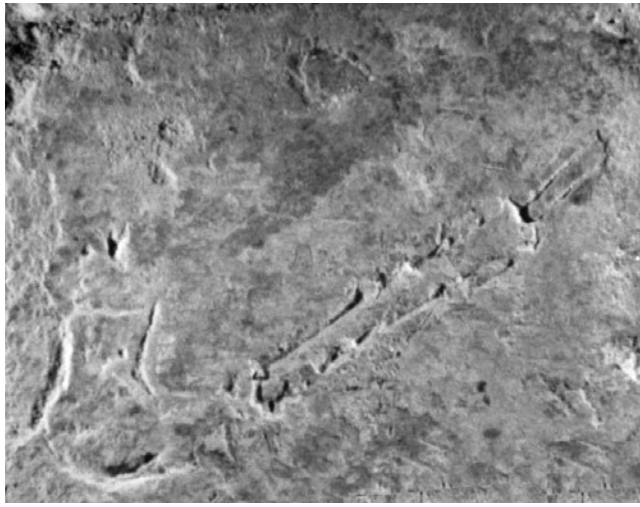
In Vincenzo Fenech's *The Agozzino* (a Warrant Officer whose main duty was to enforce discipline on board ship), the subject is dressed like a gentleman with an appropriately impressive smoking kit,<sup>26</sup> as is the well-dressed gentleman in Ducros's *Group of young Gozitan folk dancing*. Otherwise these illustrations depict working-class males.

I have not seen one picture of a woman smoking a pipe in Malta at this time. Agius de Soldanis describes women's fashion accessories around the year 1750, saying that they must have a snuff box (*kaxxetta* or *scatola del tabacco*). Taking snuff therefore was a refined social habit.

According to the several artists quoted here, smoking was an acceptable leisure activity and the ban on priests smoking outside the privacy of their own home was overturned in Brocktorff's day.

Thanks to Guido Lanfranco<sup>27</sup> we know that, as already mentioned, a few Maltese potters made pipes for their friends but it was never an industry on the island, but that 'red ones used to be imported... the "Turks" (North African nationals) used to bring them' (Karm. Spiteri).

Some other origins are more certain. Figure 8.10 is the product of the Marseille factory Bonnaud, which used the mark depicted between 1880 and 1913. A chance find by a Gozitan farmer, this artefact is now in the Gozo Museum collection. There are two more Bonnaud pipes in a private



left: Fig. 6  
Carving of a pipe in an old prison block off Cathedral Square in the Citadel, Gozo.

below: Fig. 7  
Detail from *Veduta del Gran Porto di Malta e della Valletta* by Giovanni Schranz, c.1828.

opposite Fig. 8  
Illustrations of various pipes in Maltese and Gozitan collections.

museum collection in Gozo and one from an excavation in Mdina. Some were also found in Tunis.

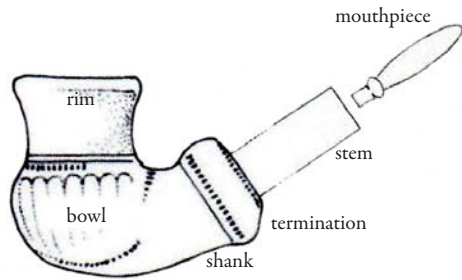
During the nineteenth century many Maltese were involved in the cotton and salt trade to Marseille and, as masters of speronara, controlled most of the coastal trade of Tunisia. A main thoroughfare in Sannat, Gozo, is still called Triq Marsilja.

Figure 8.11 was excavated from an old sewer system in the Auberge de Castille under the direction of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage. The stylized bird stamp is characteristic of a group of pipes from Varna, Bulgaria. The mark is also found in Istanbul and Athens. In the 1850s many Maltese went to Black Sea ports to supply

British troops with liquor and tobacco. Figure 8.12 has a simple oval stamp with seven raised hemispheres. This mark is also found on pipes from Varna.<sup>28</sup> A British hospital was established there during the 1854-1856 Crimean campaign.

From this study it can be seen that, from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, style remained remarkably constant, although bowl-size increased with the greater availability of tobacco and subsequent decrease in price. Some of the pipes described have French or Balkan makers' marks, others are Italian in style and some came from North Africa. North, south, east and west is an exotic mixture for such an everyday accessory.

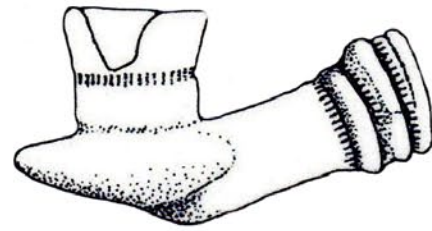




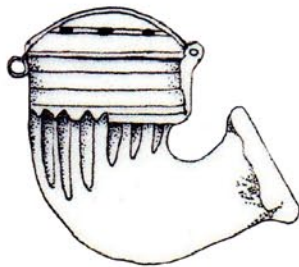
(.1) Constituent parts of the *pipa tal-qasba*



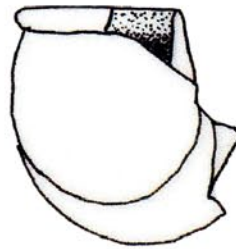
(.2) Reserve Collection, Gozo Museum



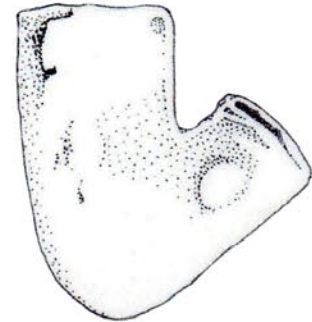
(.3) Reserve Collection, Superintendence of Cultural Heritage



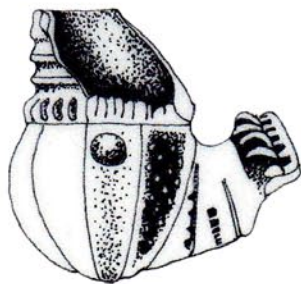
(.4) Private Collection, Gharb Folklore Museum



(.5) Reserve Collection, Superintendence of Cultural Heritage



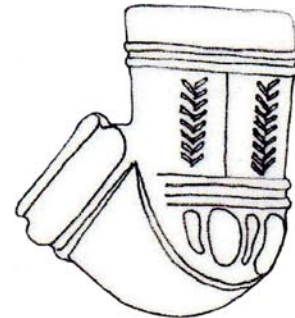
(.6) Reserve Collection, Superintendence of Cultural Heritage



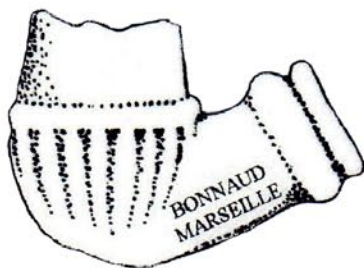
(.7) Reserve Collection, Gozo Museum



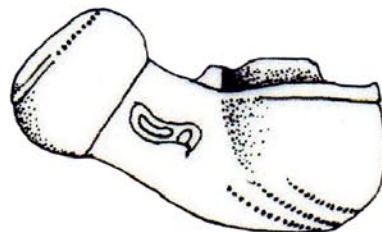
(.8) Casa Rocca Piccola, Valletta



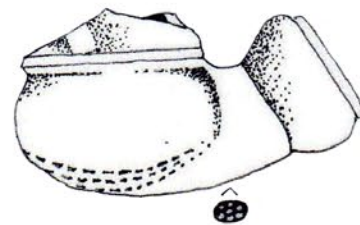
(.9) Private Collection, Gharb



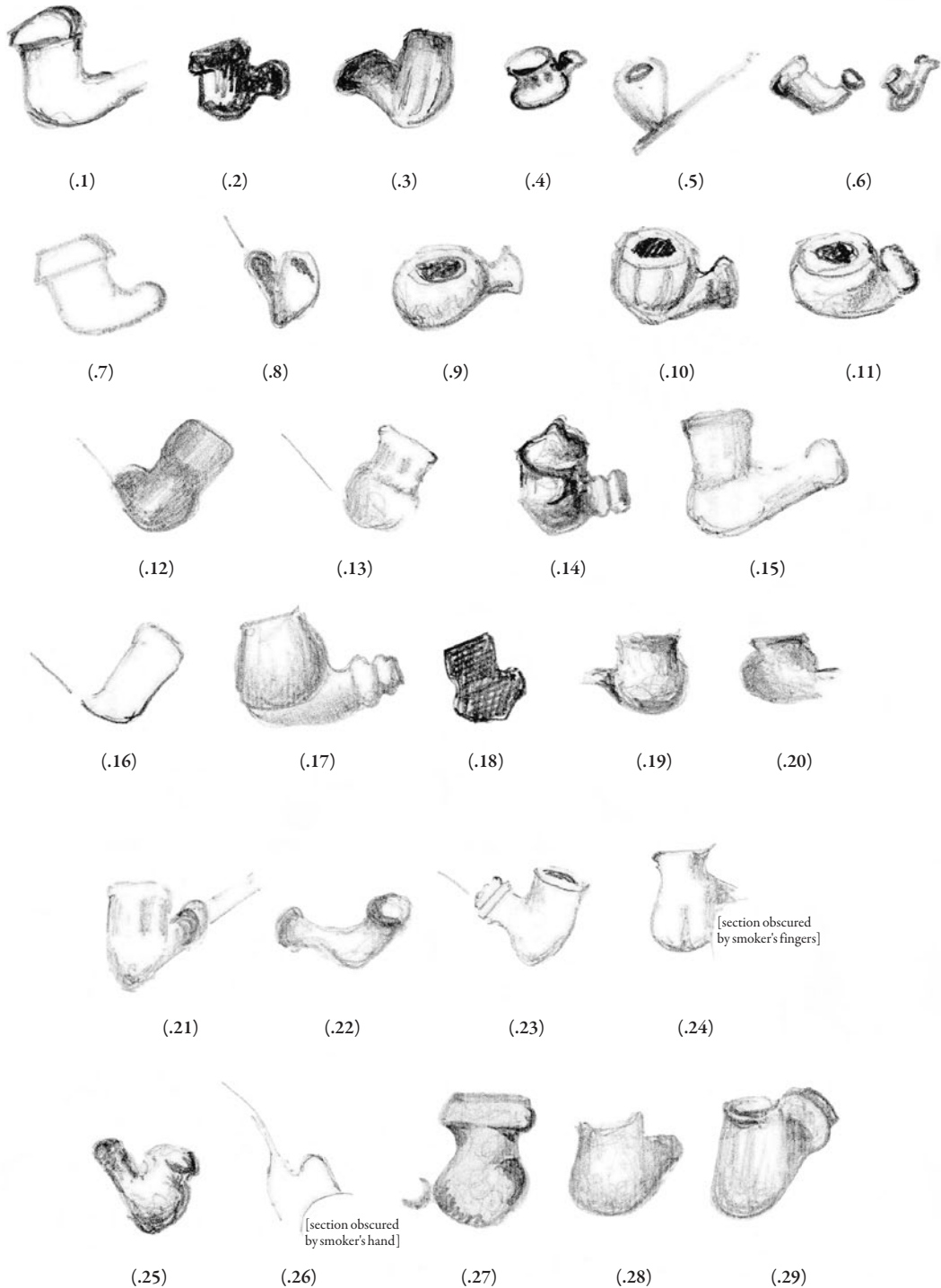
(.10) Gozo Museum Collection



(.11) Superintendence of Cultural Heritage Collection



(.12) Gozo Museum Collection



- (.1) Society of Antiquaries, London  
 (.2) L. Brocktorff (*Country man in Badger*)  
 (.3) Zimelli (*babillement ancien du Paysan Maltoise*)  
 (.4) Bellanti (*Turkish Ladies*)  
 (.5) Allen (*Marina of Valletta*)  
 (.6) Favray (*Interior with Orientals*)  
 (.7) Schranz (*Veduta del Gran Porto di Malta e della Valletta*)  
 (.8) Schranz (*View taken near Nix Mangiare Stairs, Marina*)  
 (.9) Brocktorff (*Maltese Country Family*)  
 (.10) Brocktorff (*Playing Morro*)  
 (.11) Brocktorff (*Maltese in Winter Dress*)  
 (.12) Anon (*Rabli ta Zmien il-Conti Ruggieru*)  
 (.13) Brocktorff (*Country Priest in Undress*)  
 (.14) Benucci (*Casal Bircicara on the island of Malta*)  
 (.15) Fenech (*The Agozzino*)  
 (.16) Ducros (*Group of young Gozitan folk people dancing*)  
 (.17) Anon. (*Peasant with Pipe*)  
 (.18) Bellanti (*Entrance to Valletta from Marina*)  
 (.19) Brocktorff (*Entrance to the Great Temple*)  
 (.20) Brocktorff (*Ferrying in Grand Harbour*)  
 (.21) Brocktorff (*Country man in black and white*)  
 (.22) Brocktorff (*Country man in colour*)  
 (.23) Brocktorff (*Country Man and Woman*)  
 (.24) Brocktorff (?) (*Maltese Porter in Sunday Dress*)  
 (.25) Ducros (*Festa*)  
 (.26) Gianni (*Upper Barracca*)  
 (.27) McFall (*Village Folk*)  
 (.28) Zimelli (*Paysan Maltoise*)  
 (.29) Zimelli (?) (*Peasant with Pipe*)

**Fig. 9**  
**Illustrations of various pipes as depicted in a number of works of art featuring the Maltese Islands.**

#### Acknowledgements

I appreciate the generous contribution of Bernadine Scicluna and her colleagues at the National Museum of Fine Arts, Nathaniel Cutajar and his colleagues at the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and Giovanni Bonello for his insight and encouragement.

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#### Notes

- 1 D. Schávelzon, 'Argentina', *Journal of the Académie Internationale de la Pipe*, Vol. 2 (2009).
- 2 R. Robinson, 'Tobacco pipes of Corinth and of the Athenian Agora', *Hesperia*, 54 (1985), 151.
- 3 J. Bent, *Early Voyages and Travels in the Levant* (London, 1893).
- 4 E. Birnbaum, 'Vice Triumphant: The Spread of Coffee and Tobacco in Turkey', *Durham University Journal* (1956), 21-29.
- 5 Society of Antiquaries of London Catalogue of Drawings and Museum Objects, Eastern Antiquities 68.2, Peasant Costume. [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/SoA\\_images/detail.cfm?object=1237](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/SoA_images/detail.cfm?object=1237).
- 6 'The image... is not found in the Houël publication'. Personal communication with Maroma Camilleri, Senior Assistant Librarian, National Library of Malta. Dominic and Nathaniel Cutajar have suggested that a less competent nineteenth-century artist, like one of the Brocktorffs, would be a more likely candidate.
- 7 [heritagemalta.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/peasant-costumes-insights-into-rural-life-and-society](http://heritagemalta.wordpress.com/2012/05/18/peasant-costumes-insights-into-rural-life-and-society).
- 8 Briar Pipeworks Ltd. (formerly British Empire Pipe Company). Correspondence with Anthony Wetz, 10 September 1997.
- 9 Talking on Guido Lanfranco's folklore phone-in on RTK Radio, a male caller, formerly of Valletta, gave the following testimony 'Plaster pipes used to come in wooden boxes packed in straw, and were sold by a man we called Mr Karm. His shop was on the St John Street steps, Valletta, leading down to Tà Giezu church. Sailors used to go in and buy these pipes. The

boxes were big wooden ones; the pipes came in quantities. We used to open the boxes for him. When a pipe accidentally broke, he gave it to us, and we used to put a matchstick to bridge the break and played at smoking pipes. They were all white, smooth, and sold at one penny each. They were also bought by some old men from the villages.'

- 10 J. Wood, 'Malta', *Journal of the Académie Internationale de la Pipe*, Vol. 2 (2009), 87.
- 11 G. Wettinger, *Slavery* (Malta, 2002), 542.
- 12 G. Wettinger, *Some Aspects of Slavery in Malta*, PhD dissertation (University College London, 1971), 406.  
 As times moved on (1833), *The Agozzino*, a Warrant Officer whose main duty was to enforce discipline on board ship, is depicted by Vincenzo Fenech dressed like a gentleman with an appropriate pipe and cane.  
*Agozzini* were to employ particular care to search for pipes and to prevent smoking, and were fined 50 scudi each time they failed to suppress such a dangerous practice (AOM 263, f.85).
- 13 Dominic Cutajar, 'An Overview of the Art of Malta'. [hopeandoptimism.com/essay.htm](http://hopeandoptimism.com/essay.htm).
- 14 National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Catalogue inventory no. 33563-4.
- 15 National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Catalogue inventory no. 30737-0 FAS/E/296, drawer D3.
- 16 R. Robinson, 'Tobacco Pipes of Corinth and of the Athenian Agora', *Hesperia*, 54 (1985), 156.
- 17 National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Catalogue inventory no. 0657 30957-8 FAS/PL/GG3, drawer 3.
- 18 Reel: Architectural drawings and various costumes, National Library of Malta.
- 19 In B. Scicluna, *Charles Frederick de Brocktorff: Watercolours of Malta at the National Library, Valletta*, Vol. 1 (Malta, 2007), 56; National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Reserve Collection, Catalogue inventory no. 80542 16021-2.
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