

Tobacco pipes from Birgu and Bormla: Malta 2007

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INTRODUCTION.

Both Birgu and Bormla were at the hub of maritime activity when tobacco was first introduced on the island. In addition to the standard recreational facilities on offer in any port the demand for tobacco created a market for professional vendors. For example in 1636 Carlo Bartolo described himself as a 'tobacco retailer from Senglea'.¹

During the period of the Knights the Inquisitor was the spiritual authority on the island. His residence is reputed to be one of the few that survive from an institution once widespread throughout Europe and the Roman Catholic world. To avoid the rigours of municipal law, rich businessmen in Malta including several tobacco merchants jostled to enlist as licensees of the Inquisitor.² The Inquisitor's Palace is well preserved and contains a range of cells with original inscriptions dating back over centuries, an austere tribunal room, a chapel and a relatively sophisticated sanitary system.³

Of these artefacts 22 were retrieved from the Palace sanitary system, in an excavation conducted by Heritage Malta.

The other 11 were revealed during managed development in both wet and dry environments, namely harbour works in the vicinity of St Angelo wharf and the basement of a house in St Lazarus Street, Bormla. (Figure 1)

CATALOGUE

The terminology used to describe these pipes generally follows that established by Robinson (1985).⁴ Abbreviations are: D diameter, H height, L length, RD rim diameter. Where appropriate drawing conventions include the use of hatching to designate broken areas and solid black for interiors.

St Lazarus Street, Bormla

B 1. A complete mould made pipe. Slight chip on the rim. Buff coloured clay with large orange patches. RD 27 mm, inner RD 20.5 mm. H 50.8 mm. Shank opening 9 mm. Rim has three raised panels either side with impressed divisions. The central panel has a slightly raised vertical line. Two horizontal bands circle the upper and lower rim. The bowl is decorated with one broad and two comparatively narrow gadroons on either side. The stubby keel-jointed shank terminates with a 5.8 mm collar. Similar artefacts are most common in the region of Sicily and southern Italy. Loppel (1985) proposes a date circa 1800⁵ and Lo Cascio and Maurici (1997) suggest the later date of 1870.⁶

B 2. European pipe bowl and small stem fragment. Mould made. White pipe clay. The bowl is an imperfect hexagon in plan with three parallel faces of L 20.9, 28.5 and 28.8 mm. The inside section is oval. There are three decorated panels on either side of the bowl. The front panels have a large frond growing from the stem, the rear panels have a small frond from the same source and each centre panel has three strap like leaves. These are all gathered into a band at the stem junction. Either side of the vestigial stem is a six-petal flower with a sunburst effect of raised lines and dots. The stem has a 2.2 mm bore at the break. The artefact is probably French judging from the style of the flower decoration on the stem. Hexagonal bowls were unusual in UK. Dated circa 1870 to 1920.

B 3. European pipe bowl and stem fragment. Mould made. White pipe clay. The bowl, H 36.6 mm, has an outer RD 22.3 mm and inner RD of 17.6 mm. On the front of the bowl a raised

¹ Wettinger, G. (2002) *Slavery, Malta*, p. 542.

² Ciappara, F. (2000) *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightenment Malta*, Malta, p. 120.

³ <http://www.agius.com/Birgu/index.html>

⁴ Robinson, R. (1985) 'Tobacco Pipes of Corinth and of the Athenian Agora' *Hesperia* 54, 149-203.

⁵ Loppel, S. (1985) 'Un Naufragio Anonimo e Senza Storia' *Blu* 1, 3.

⁶ Lo Cascio, P. and Maurici, F. (1997) *Rinvenimenti di pipe di terracotta in Sicilia, secoli XVIII e XIX*, unpublished manuscript.

decoration of two superimposed broad tongues starts 5 mm below the rim then narrows and merges with the stem. A plain raised bar decorates the dorsal junction of bowl and stem. Stem D 7.8 mm at break with a 2 mm bore hole. This artefact is likely to be English although the design was produced to a lesser extent in France. The style of decoration was popular from the mid 19th century and became especially common in the 1870s and 1880s although it continued well into the 20th century. Many of these pipes had long stems. Later short cutty styles were also made.

B 4. Bowl and shank fragment. Most of rim missing. Mould made from buff coloured clay. L 48.2 mm. Bowl D 30 mm. Shank is keel jointed to the bowl and terminates in a 5 mm thick flange. The shank opening D 8.5 mm has an elegant but off centre lip (possibly an accident during manufacture?). 18th century.

B 5. Abraded fragment of rounded bowl with intact shank. Rim missing. Mould made in grey clay. L 54 mm. Bowl gadrooned. Keel jointed shank ends in a stepped termination. Keel and terminal junctions have worn roulette marks. Shank opening D 8.2 mm. 18th century.

Inquisitor's Palace, Main Gate Street, Birgu

IP 1. Cup like rim on small disk base. Short keel jointed shank with swollen termination. Damaged rim. OD rim 35.9 mm. Coated with burnished red slip, as was fashionable with the cognoscente.⁷ The rim (of which approximately one third remains) has a stamped decoration of bunched and bracketed lozenges, one complete and two partially so. Similar motifs reminiscent of the Assyrian palmette occur in Diyarbakir, Anatolia, near lake Van, the source of the red slip.⁸ Rim to bowl junction has two incised horizontal lines, repeated over a band of rouletting on the base. This decoration is again repeated at the neck of the termination and a band of impressed triangles surrounds the crown. Shank opening D 14 mm. 19th century (Humphrey 1990 says 18th) cf. Robinson (1985) Corinth 11-13, Athens 8.

IP 2. Rounded bowl and shank fragment. Damaged rim. Mould made in pale to bright terracotta clay. Gadrooned bowl. Keel jointed shank terminates in a D 16 mm collar with a 'rope work' decoration. Shank opening 13 mm.

IP 3. Part of a sack shaped bowl with non functional lip and vestigial shank. Orange clay. Bowl D 21.2 mm, H 38.2 mm. The lip feature occurs on two other artefacts BA3/4/193 and 259 from an excavation 20 m off the quay in the vicinity of the Palace of the Captain of the Galleys (unpublished).

IP 4. Fragment of bowl with vestigial rim. Shank missing. Glazed olive green on a dark cream body. Some glazing inside. The gadrooned bowl has an impressed ventral disc. A thick raised collar, rouletted either side, separates bowl and rim. External D of bowl 23 mm. Glazed pipes are rare in the Near East and Greece.⁹ Robinson (1983)(1985) published one from Athens and four from Corinth and suggests they are either local potters' sidelines or are imports from Poland where glazed pipes are reported from the late 19th century. One other glazed pipe from Xlendi bay, Gozo has been published.¹⁰

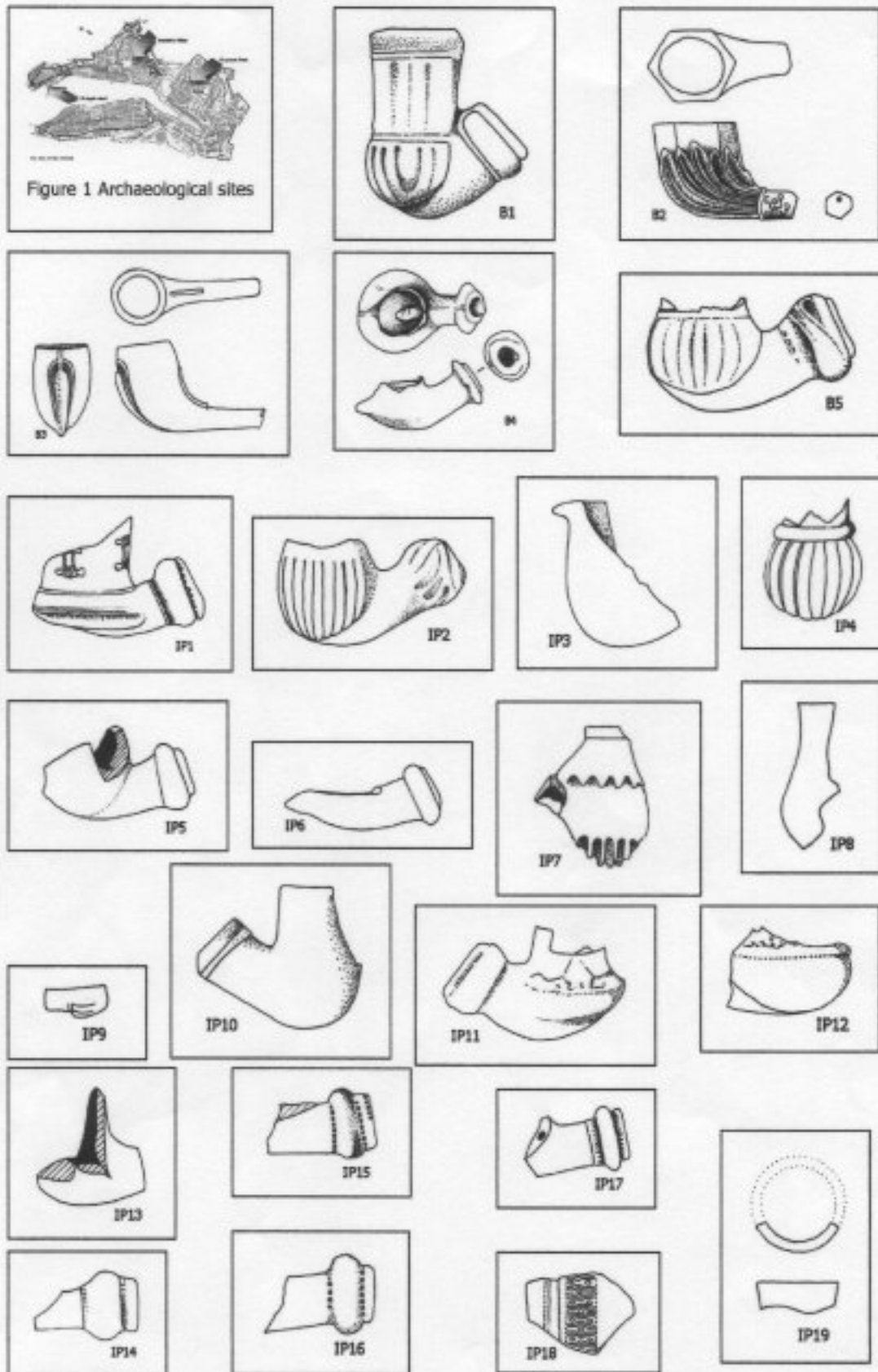
⁷ Robinson (1985) says 'Before the end of the 17th century grey and white ware had been replaced by red ... A truly red appearance was esteemed and a special clay called 'Spring Rose' (Gülbahar) was imported by Istanbul pipemakers from the region of Lake Van to make the slip that gave some of the pipes a rich ruby tint.'

⁸ Pers. Comm. Philip Gosse (2002).

⁹ I am grateful to Dr St John Simpson of the British Museum for drawing my attention to the following references: Robinson (1983) 'Clay tobacco pipes from the Kerameikos' *Mitt. Des Deutschen Archäologischen Institutes* 98, p. 273. Robinson (1985) pl. 47.

¹⁰ Wood, J. (1992) 'Pipes from Gozo (Malta)'. *Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter* 36, p. 30.

BIRGU, BORMLA ILLUSTRATED 1 of 2



- IP 5. Fragment of sack like bowl with complete shank, most of rim missing. Cream coloured clay. Abraded. Termination has a broad collar D 19 mm, shank opening 7 mm.
- IP 6. Fragment of 'cup and saucer' pipe. Cup is missing, saucer and shank complete. Yellowish clay. L 47.2 mm. TD 1.92 mm, Shank opening 8.3 mm.
- IP 7. Fragment of terracotta bowl. H 36.9 mm. The top has a slight lip. Below the lip is a collar of 'saw teeth' and below that a band of gadrooning.
- IP 8. Fragment of a bowl and rim, H 38 mm. Cream body, blackened inside.
- IP 9. Piece of termination. L 16 mm. Pale terracotta clay. Abraded. Evidence of gadrooning around terminal band with an inscribed line around vestigial shank.
- IP 10. Fragment of bowl and shank. Half of bowl missing, shank intact. Mould made in black clay. 2 incised bands around termination. TD 18 mm, shank opening 9 mm. Similar to seven other artefacts from Dockyard creek (Wood 1998), one from Gozo (Wood 1992) and others from Corinth (Robinson 1985), Jerusalem (Wightman 1989), Marseille (Gosse pers. comm.) and Wadi Qash (Bell 1984). 18-19th century.
- IP 11. Intact bowl and shank, much of the rim missing. Mould made of grey clay. Band of decoration around upper bowl too worn to describe accurately. Evidence of rouletting on both sides of swollen shank end. TD 22 mm Shank opening 14 mm.
- IP 12. Bowl fragment in black clay. D 30 mm. Vestige of rim and shank. Upper bowl has a horizontal band of rouletting. Keel joint outlined with an incised line, the vestige of shank has a central rouletted tramline.
- IP 13. Fragment of junction between bowl and keel. H 35 mm. Black clay with terracotta coating, possibly slip decoration.
- IP 14. Shank end and termination fragment in grey clay. TD 22.2 mm, shank opening 9.8 mm. Rouletted with two bands around terminal collar and another right angular ventral line.
- IP 15. Fragment of shank and termination. TD 19 mm, shank opening 7 mm. Black clay. Double band of rouletting outside the terminal collar, a single on the inside and another indicating a keel.
- IP 16. Shank and termination fragment. Black clay. TD 19 mm, shank opening 5.5 mm. Single band of rouletting either side of the collar.
- IP 17. Shank and termination fragment. TD 17.6 mm, shank opening 8 mm. Yellowish clay. Single rouletted bands either side of terminal ring and another right angular ventral line.
- IP 18. Fragment of shank end and termination. Black burnished clay. L 30.5 mm. Decorated with three bands of rouletting and a frieze of dots and alternate sine waves.
- IP 19. Rim fragment in yellow clay. Projected RD 24 mm, inside D 18 mm.
- IP 20. Fragment of flared shank end. Black clay. TD 18 mm, shank opening 7 mm. Rouletted decoration inside the lip of the shank.
- IP 21. Fragment of shank end and terminal. Pale cream body. TD 25 mm. Shank fluted leading to a narrow raised band and rope work around the collar.
- IP 22. Fragment of bowl and keel joint. Terracotta body with black burnished slip effect. L 26 mm. Line of rouletting under bowl to delineate keel joint.

BIRGU, BORMLA ILLUSTRATED 2 of 2

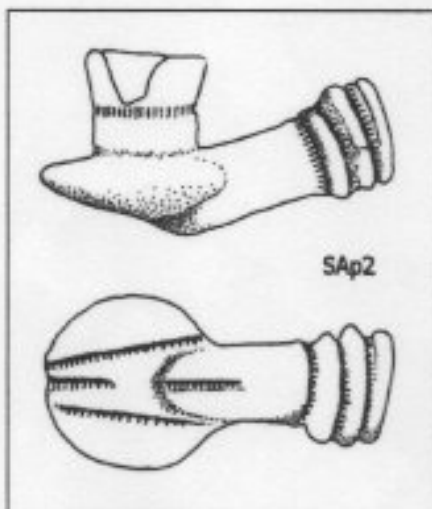
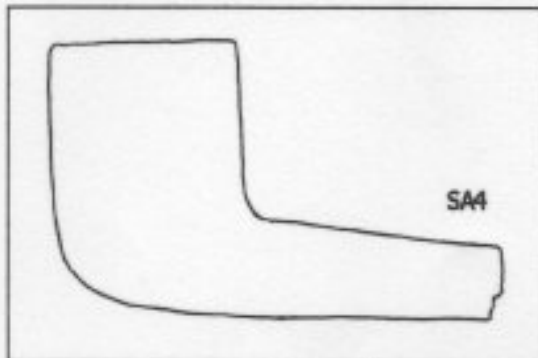
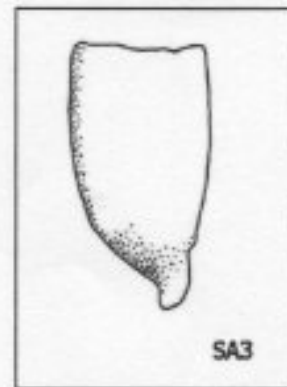
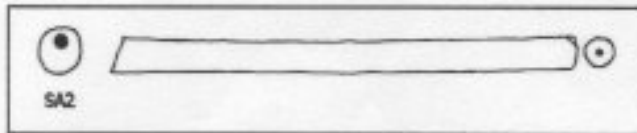
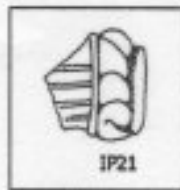
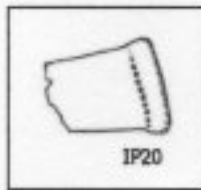


Figure 2 Brockdorff's 'Maltese pothouse' circa 1825 (detail)



Figure 3 Badger's 'Country man' 1838 (detail)



Figure 4 Graffito on a cell wall in Gozo's old Gaol. The separate mouthpiece, frequently of amber, suggests a 'gentleman' inmate

St Angelo

SA 1. Bowl fragment. Charcoal grey clay. D 24.75 mm. Decorated with abraded gadrooning, part of which has flaked away.

SA 2 Stem fragment of European pipe in white clay. L 103.5 mm. Bowl end has D 9.0 mm and a 2.9 mm bore, which is possibly part of the bowl cavity. Other end is D 7.2 mm with a 2.0 mm bore.

SA 3 European bowl fragment, much abraded and stained brown. Bowl oval in cross section D 25.5 mm front to back. H 45.2 mm from base of a worn foot to chipped rim. Probably mid to late 19th century.

SA 4 Modern briar pipe bowl and stem. Bowl outer D 30.1 mm, inner D 28.8 mm. Stem end D 12.5 mm, 7.5 mm bore; worn with the appearance of an internal thread.¹¹

St Angelo, pile 20

SAP 1. Bowl and shank, rim missing. Mould made in a dull reddish brown to ochre clay. L 48.8 mm. Bowl D 29.4 mm. Shank opening 8.8 mm. Bowl is decorated with gadrooning. Soot black inside. Plain shank with keel. Stepped termination with 'pie crust' decoration on centre band.

SAP 2. Disk based style pipe in matt black clay. Rim severed. The termination has a significant chip. L 61 mm. Bowl D 29.9 mm. Shank opening 8.5 mm. Sooty deposit in bowl and shank. The rim has a horizontal band of rouletting around the middle and another at the junction with its bowl. The keel is heavily rouletted either side and in a broken line along the base. The same heavy rouletting occurs before each of three rings around the terminus. 18th century.

DISCUSSION

Since the beginning of the 17th century tobacco was a desirable commodity. For example in 1642 a Venetian was so affronted by being robbed of a cargo of tobacco by Maltese corsairs that he claimed compensation for his loss.¹²

Bearing in mind the initial rarity and expense of tobacco, the clay pipe was a neat and efficient means of extracting maximum pleasure from this drug with minimal outlay and wastage.

According to Robinson (1985) pipes with a rounded bowl developed from late 17th century forms like Saraçhane IV, Hayes (1980). The style was common in the Maltese archipelago, ubiquitous throughout Southern Europe and the Ottoman domain. Seven of these pipes fall into this category, B 5, IP 2, IP 4, IP 7, IP 12, SA 1 and SAP 1.

Similar pipes have previously been found in the Maltese harbours, towns and countryside. There are also a number of contemporary illustrations, such as Brockdorff's 'Maltese pothouse' circa 1825 (Figure 2) and Badger's 'Country man' 1838 (Figure 3), also an interesting graffito on a cell wall in Gozo's old Gaol, where the separate mouthpiece, frequently made of amber, suggests a 'gentleman' inmate (Figure 4). Gosse (2007) refers to these pipes as 'Greek style'. In the 19th century shipping records *Il Mediterraneo* and *Lloyd*

¹¹ Comment by Briar Pipeworks Ltd. 2/4, Carrick Street, Marsa MRS 1130, t: 21 234522 e: pipework @ maltanet .net 22nd November 2007 "The pipe bowl looks like a modern briar pipe bowl which could have easily been manufactured by us. All our pipes are stamped and maybe the stamp is still visible. We did not make many pipes with 'an internal thread' so I would have to see it to see if it looks like one manufactured by us. Hope this is of some help and maybe you can read the stamp on the pipe. AW" ... *The pipe in question was kept in water after excavation and is still being desalinated in the museum lab. Perhaps when it is released and I need a second opinion we could come to some arrangement ...* "Please do not hesitate to contact me again if you would like me to see the pipe bowl" AW

¹² Mallia-Milanes, V. (1992) *Venice and Hospitaller Malta* PEG, p. 152.

Maltese there are a number of references to quantities of tobacco and reed pipes being imported from the Aegean port of Smyrna (Izmir).

Robinson's theory (1985) speculates that disk-based pipes coexisted with the rounded bowls, developing from late 17th century forms like Saraçhane XXVI Hayes (1980).

Again the style was common in the Maltese archipelago, ubiquitous throughout Southern Europe and the Ottoman domain. Five of these pipes fall into this category, B 4, IP 1, IP 6, IP 11 and SAp 2. Kindred examples occur in Marseille (Gosse 2007), Tunis (Wood 2000) and Corinth (Robinson 1985) and there is an excellent illustration in Antoine Favray's 'Interior with Orientals' in the Cathedral Museum, Mdina.

The common form of 'sack shaped' bowl is represented here by IP 3, 5, 8, 10 and 13. A functional form widely popular with smokers, not only in Malta and Gozo, but in Egypt (Bell 1984), France (Gosse 2007), Greece (Robinson 1985) and Israel (Wightman 1989), as testified by excavators. Given the prevalence of pipes similar to IP 10 it is possible that particular batch was part of Chambray's massive order, sanctioned by Vilhena in 1732, in preparation for an anticipated siege.¹³

Most styles of shank end sit comfortably with a variety of different bowls. There are a number of fragmentary shank ends in this collection, the most numerous is the 'swollen' sort. Of the fragmentary shank ends five fit the description, that is IP 14 – IP 18. Fragments IP 9 and IP 21 have more elaborate gadrooning and IP 20 widens to make a flute shape.

Artefacts IP 19 and 22 are too fragmentary to categorise.

B 1 is clearly Italian sourced and dated 1800 – 1870 which, together with the European pipes B 2, B 3, SA 2 and SA 3 post date the Order's tenure.

CONCLUSION

Probably without exception these artefacts are imported. Without makers' marks or secure stratification precise dates are difficult. Little is known about pipe production outside a metropolis such as Istanbul, Venice or Varna. Often, pipes were of lesser importance in a workshop geared up for finer ware. Style is the most reliable clue and there are here a number of Ottoman types which would predate the Inquisitor's departure.

Altogether this varied and fascinating collection, from a select area, reflects the tastes and travels of a maritime community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to: Dr David Higgins for his work in identifying the European pipes and Dr St John Simpson of the British Museum for drawing my attention to the Robinson (1983) (1985) references, also Anthony Wetz, Director at Briar Pipeworks Ltd., Marsa, for his observations about SA 4.

¹³ Plaisse, A. (1991) *Le Rouge de Malte* Rennes, p. 105.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1: Archaeological sites
- Figure 2: Brockdorff's 'Maltese pothouse' circa 1825 (detail)
- Figure 3: Badger's 'Country man' 1838 (detail)
- Figure 4: Graffito on a cell wall in Gozo's old Gaol. The separate mouthpiece suggests a 'gentleman' inmate