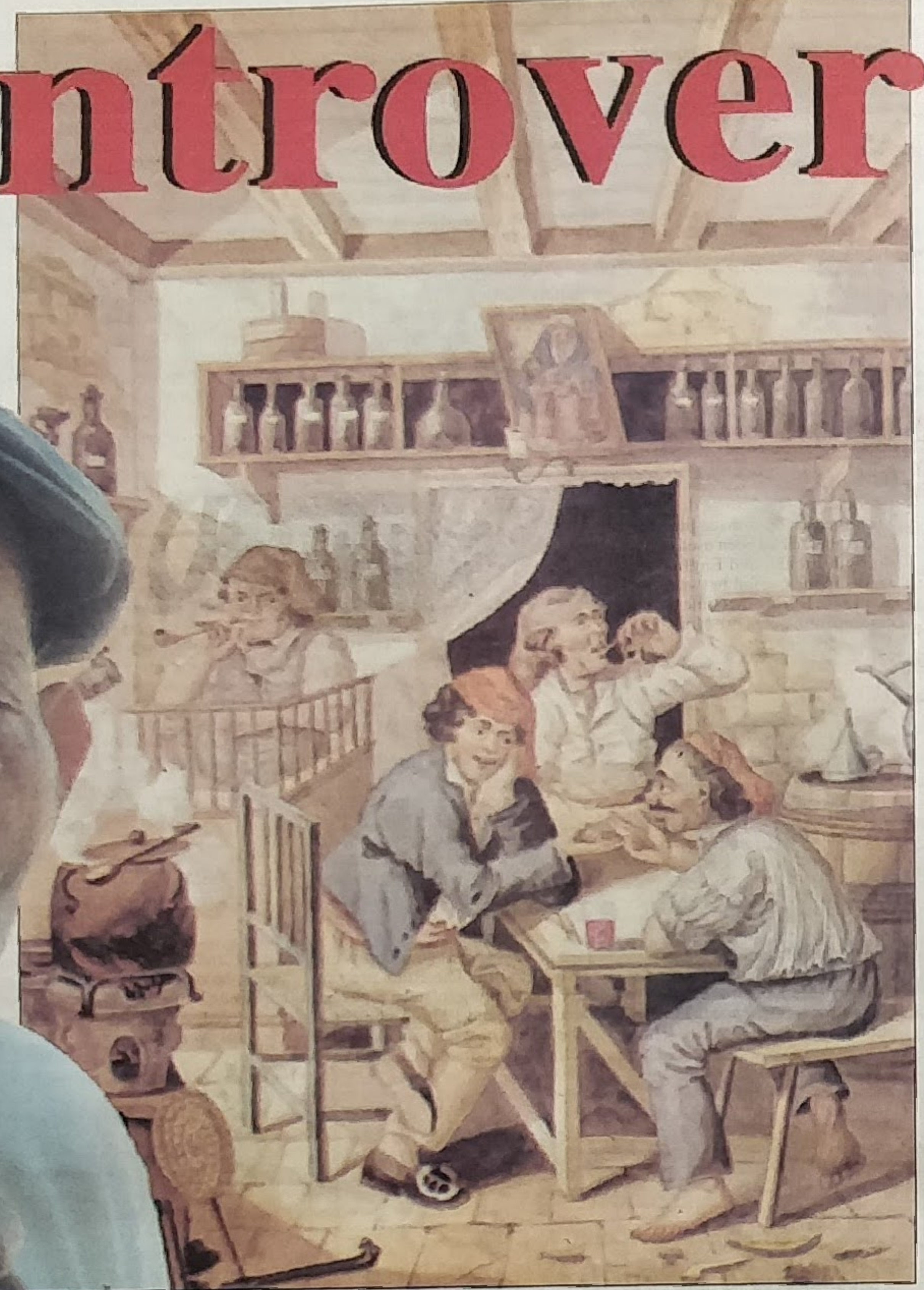


A controversial vice



IL-MERIN smoking his pipe at Ggantija temples, Gozo



CHARLES F. BROCKDORFF: A Maltese Pothouse



ANTOINE FAVRAY: Interior with Orientals (The Cathedral Museum, Mdina)

JOHN WOOD looks at the history and current use of tobacco pipes in Malta and Gozo

air and there was the ever-present fire risk on board ship. However 25 years later the tax that had been imposed on consumables in the form of a customs levy also included tobacco.

In 1700 the plant was grown in Malta as an experiment. Given the agricultural conditions and tobacco had never been extensively imported from America. Such was the demand for it that Agius de Soldanis described a *kaxxera* or *scatola del tabacco* (snuff box) almost as a fashion accessory for women in 1750. A refined social habit!

The French artist Antoine Favray, who was made a knight in 1751, was noted for his fascination with the exotic sights of Malta and the Constantinople in 1765. His painting in the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, *Interior with Orientals*, depicts pipe smoking and coffee drinking at an all-male musical soiree.

The structure of these pipes is typical of the 'insurance' model. The pipe is made in three pieces, bowl, stem and mouthpiece. The mouthpiece which actually touched the lips is in fact dispensable, but in cities like Constantinople workshops were furiously trying to keep up with the demand for mouthpieces made from minerals such as amber, semi-precious stones and coral. Special orchards were cultivated to grow jasmine and cherry wood for the long stem.

Without going to excessive lengths, the rule was "the longer the stem the cooler the smoke". In this sort of society the clay bowls were sometimes inlaid with gold or silver wire or set with precious gems and the wealthy would have slaves to fill, bear and service their pipes.

A pipe of a length is hardly a practical proposition, even admirals had shorter campaign models and of course the lower down the social scale the rustic apparatus, right down to the hand-made clay bowl as a potter's sideline or even a piece of bamboo cut just beneath a notch into it.

In 1778 Louis Abraham Ducros, a Swiss landscape painter, visited Gozo. Among his watercolours are two scenes of workmen enjoying a rare moment of relaxation. His *Group of young Gozitan folk people dancing* shows a European gentleman with an appropriately long-stemmed pipe talking to a bystander, but to cap that, in another scene one of the young Gozitan folk has an even cooler smoke!

secure quarantine port and its geographically central position made it an excellent trading centre. To feed a rising population grain was imported from the Black Sea. Varna, Bulgaria, one of the ports of call, had a busy pipe-making business, so it is not surprising that clay bowls with stamps of the Varna workshops have turned up in both Malta and Gozo.

The recent archaeological excavation of an old sewer under the Baroque-style Auberge de Castille unearthed a Varna-made pipe bowl. The Auberge had been used to quarter both French and English regiments in the capital between 1798 and 1840. During that time the sewers were obviously used for all sorts of rubbish. After 1840 a new system was created.

The Barbary ports offered openings to Maltese traders who would fill their sailing boats with European textiles, tobacco and wine to exchange for oil, dates and cereals. Their boats, the *speronaras*, were the forerunners of the now obsolete Gozo Boat, *tal-Latini*. As this trade increased other opportunities, such as wine shop proprietors, tobaccoists and boatmen, opened up in the North African ports and for the two-shilling trip to Tripoli or Tunis many destitute migrants became relatively well off.

George Percy Badger illustrates a *Country Man* off to market his goats' cheese, *gbejniet*. This was published in 1838. His short-stemmed pipe is well alright. There is also an anonymous 19th century watercolour on the same subject.

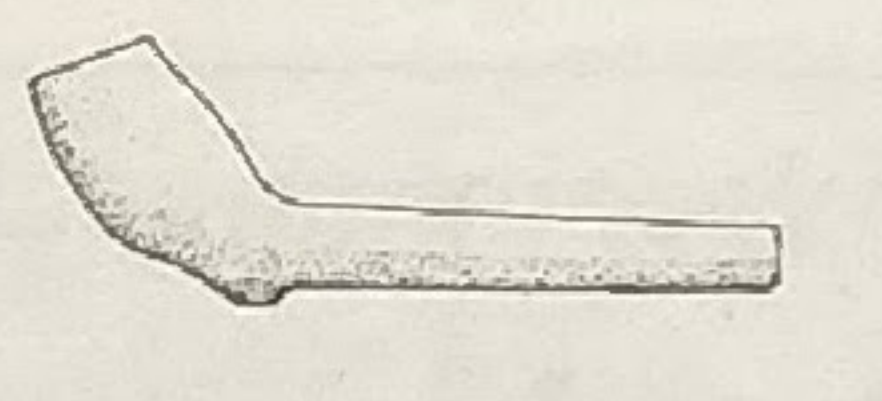
The Maltese artist Michele Bellanti, a noted traveller, made a watercolour now in the National Collection titled *Interior with 7 Oriental Figures*. This shows an all-male clientele in a relaxed coffee house atmosphere. The house offers both the Turkish *chibouk* and a choice of *narghile* or water pipe, a system much favoured in the East for the coolest possible smoke, the tobacco frequently mixed with honey.

Bellanti studied lithography in Paris and used his newly acquired skill to illustrate the *Ghar Ilma* to Rabat aqueduct on Gozo. "The New Aqueduct" was inaugurated in 1843. The lithographer shows an amusing scene, one man ploughing while two others watch, one of whom appears to be enjoying a leisurely smoke.

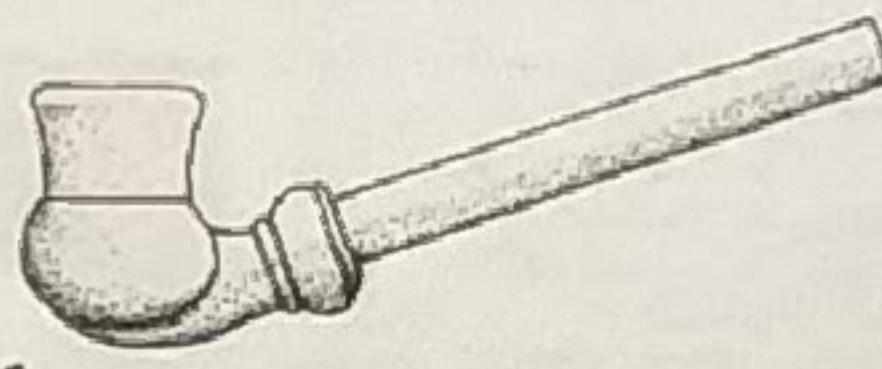
A modern Gozitan farmer, also ploughing, turned up a clay pipe bowl marked with the manufacturers' stamp 'Bonnaud Marseille'. A number of Gozitans made the



STONE CUT pipe bowl and leather tobacco pouch made by 'Zeppi' Grech, a miller from Xaghra



ENGLISH-STYLE PIPE and (below) pipa tal-qasba, or chibouk



GEORGE PERCY BADGER: Country man in Description of Malta and Gozo

migration to Marseille in the 19th century, indeed a busy thoroughfare in Sannat still bears the name Triq Marsilja. The Bonnaud factory was making tobacco pipes between 1832 and 1955. A number of other pipe bowls from the same factory have turned up in Malta and Gozo.

At work or at home a quiet smoke was socially acceptable, especially for men. A.W.C. McFall's *Village Folk* shows just such a homely scene.

In the 19th century there was certainly a taste for the English-style pipe as can be seen in old photographs. In 1930 white clay pipes were being imported in straw-lined wooden crates. They were popular with sailors and villagers alike who could buy them at a penny each from a shop on St John Street Steps, leading to Ta' Giezu church in Valletta. Children of that era remember being given the breakages. They would bridge the gap with a matchstick and play at smoking.

Before the second world war a few potters - Carmel Sacco, for example, working in Rabat, Gozo - prepared his own clay from Il-Harrax. He was making a few Ottoman-style pipes as a sideline for local custom. However the 'Turks', that is North Africans, were importing *chibouks* in quantity. They were made from red clay. A smoker

would have several in his collection, finding his own reeds for the stem. Turks also brought in attractive cream-coloured *chibouks* in sacks at tuppence ha' penny along with the sweet sedge root *habb' ghażiz* or *Cyperus esculentus*.

The recently restored windmill at Xaghra, Gozo, was last operated by miller 'Zeppi' Grech. Obviously an ingenious and practical man, he had a collection of unusual tobacco pipes for his personal use. These included an imported French briar pipe in the shape of a torpedo, *La Torpille déposée*, a home-made turned wooden bowl with brass cap, and several hand carved limestone *globigerina* imitations of the clay *chibouk*. He also made his own leather tobacco pouch with a handy metal spike to pick the pipe clean. In hard times other substances such as carob husk, bean and fig leaves were mixed in to make the tobacco go further.

The increasing popularity of cigarettes after World War One eventually ended the production of the clay tobacco pipe and to a great extent pipe smoking in general. It is a sobering thought that into the millennium there will be no more first-hand evidence for this fascinating piece of popular culture.



MOULD-MADE pipe bowls in the Ottoman style



LOUIS DUCROS: Group of young Gozitan folk people dancing (from Thomas Freller's Gozo, the Island of Joy, published by Colour Image, Mgarr, Malta)



ANOTHER Ducros watercolour showing a Gozitan young man enjoying a long-stemmed pipe (reproduced on the cover of Freller's book)