The quintessential pipe smoker: Captain Olof Gollcher O.B.E. (1889-1962)

The choice of pipes as the subject of Palazzo Falson’s temporary exhibition in 2010, continues in the same vein as the first temporary exhibition, held in 2009, which focused on whistles, an equally unusual subject. Though, possibly, unorthodox, such themes are intended to shine a light on little known areas of the decorative arts. By using objects from our permanent collection as the starting point, the items on display are in the main loaned from Maltese private and museum collections. Examination of the objects reveals some remarkable stories, as well as providing an opportunity to approach the study of history, traditions and crafts in an unusual and engaging manner.

The subject of pipes and pipe smoking is intimately linked to the last owner of Palazzo Falson, formerly ‘The Norman House’, Olof Gollcher (1889-1962), who was himself an avid pipe smoker and collector of a number of unusual pipes. Gollcher was one of a brotherhood of artists who took to calling themselves the Confraternity of the Pipe. The brotherhood, an uninhibited collection of artists, most of whom were Italian, would meet regularly in an underground cavern, accessed through a discreet doorway on the well known Via Margutta in Rome. In their subterranean meeting place they would indulge in mock rites and bohemian, fancy dress parties which included plays animated with puppets, and dancing. They also held exhibitions in this underground location and apparently were united by their love of pipe smoking, which explains the dedication of the ‘Confraternity’ to the pipe. Olof Gollcher held a prominent position in this group of artists and was named ‘Gran Compare’ in around 1924.

La confraternita della “Pippa” article by Mario Matteucci gives a detailed description of the Confraternity, and its meeting place: the ‘Antro’ at 47, Via Margutta, Rome.¹

¹ Source: Newspaper clipping, OFG Archives, Box Doc 41 (Newspaper source not indicated)
Mimicking mysterious sects, this ‘Confraternity’ wore red robes and a member would have to undergo initiation rites to be introduced to the ‘grandi misteri’. The confraternity was organized into a number of appointments within a ‘court’, such as the ‘Gran Compare’ and the Commendatore della gran <<Pippa>> all described within a book of laws that they themselves had created. Matteucci describes the seat of this confraternity, the subterranean ‘Antro’ (t. cavern) as a den of thieves peopled by disheveled and disorderly individualists. A large fireplace, around which the members gathered, dominated this underground space. A sculpted falcon was placed above the throne of the Gran Compare which was sited in a temple like space with surrounding altars all dedicated to ancient deities. The main altar was dedicated to the ‘Pippa’ with the following words: ‘In tubulo virtus est ad hauriendum tabaci fumum’.

A variety of items decorated the ‘Antro’, including a rack holding several pipes of various sizes, some of which were fully two metres in length.\(^2\)

The male-only confraternity held celebrations which they described as ‘Bambù’. This term encompassed their typically bohemian gatherings, involving ‘orgiastic’ dancing, to frenzied orchestral accompaniment; but which could also descend to a funeral dirge of Brazilian inspiration. In their red robes they may have appeared almost satanic; but the term also embraced childish playfulness and innocence, as well as satire and irony, the very soul of the artist. Ultimately, the term ‘Bambu’ meant a brief dreamlike escape from the mundane into an enclave for carefree souls.

Clearly, mysterious goings on at the ‘Antro di Torrone’ piqued the curiosity of the public and this was satisfied by occasional exhibitions, to which the public were invited.\(^3\) An impish sense of humour clearly dominated. One newspaper announcement regarding an exhibition of theirs finishes with; ‘Valga la presente di partecipazione e si prega di non inviare fiori, ma possibilmente bottiglie’.

It is probable that over time the artists could not sustain their utopic bolt hole and eventually the Confraternita fizzled out. The friendships, however, did not. Throughout the ensuing decades, right into old age, whenever Olof Gollcher happened to be in Rome his diaries confirm that he would meet up with his artist friends for convivial meals and fancy dress parties. Luckily, photographs survive of these events where, no doubt, old friendships were re-kindled and artistic debates and pipe smoking took centre stage once again.

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\(^2\) Newspaper clipping (Il Messagero, 23\(^{rd}\) Dec [year does not appear but is probably around 1924]), OFG Archives, Box Doc 41

\(^3\) Newspaper clipping (Il Messaggero, Dec 1924, p.8), OFG Archives, Box Doc 41
Olof Gollcher’s personal pipe collection numbers over 20 pipes, varying from the common briar wood pipes which were his ordinary, daily smoking pipes, to the more esoteric nargile and Chinese opium pipes, which he probably considered a part of his art collection rather than objects for daily use. A number of these, now form part of the Palazzo Falson collection and are featured in this exhibition.

Pipe smoking in Malta

Tobacco smoking was introduced into Malta around the first quarter of the 17th century.4 By the last quarter of the century tobacco was already being taxed as it fell within the ambit of the sumptuary laws. This inevitably gave rise to smuggling both from and to the islands.5

Taxes notwithstanding the Maltese, like their European counterparts, quickly fell victim to the smoking habit. When a Turkish invasion seemed imminent in 1732, amongst the various preparations made, was an order of 200,000 clay pipes and another for large quantities of tobacco. These massive orders are explained by the fact that soldiers’ addiction to smoking was so strong that they actually fell ill when prevented from

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5 Ibid. pp. 116-7, 122
smoking, which would have spelt disaster in a siege situation.\textsuperscript{6} Pandering to the habit seemed preferable to incapacitated fighting men.

The situation on board galleys of the Order appears to have been different with laws enacted to prevent smoking due to the fire hazard that the practice caused.\textsuperscript{7}

**Cultivation of Tobacco**

By 1705, tobacco was cultivated in Malta but not to the extent that it was a significant crop.\textsuperscript{8} The history of tobacco cultivation, importation, regulation, trade and consumption in Malta, has been extensively studied and published by Anthony Zarb-Dimech and Giovanni Bonello.\textsuperscript{9}

**Opium, Cannabis, Hashish & Narcotics in Malta**

Grate holes, which appear like a punctured lid integrated just below the rim of certain pipe bowls found in Malta may indicate that hashish, rather than tobacco, was smoked in these types of ‘tal-qasba’ terracotta pipes, typically found in excavations.\textsuperscript{10} One such pipe bowl on display at the Maritime Museum, Birgu, is described as ‘a probable Cannabis pipe: A pot shaped bowl with broken rim, such pipes were found on Lesbos, and are described as Hashish pipes and were used as a sedative for sailors and galley rowers’. A project spearheaded by reed pipe specialist John Wood together with the Superintendency of Cultural Heritage will examine the traces found in such type of pipes to establish whether they were truly used for narcotics or not.

It is to be noted that the smoking of cannabis before battle would give soldiers additional courage which could spell the difference between victory and defeat.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{tobacco_pipe}
\caption{Note the grate holes in this typical ‘tal-qasba’ pipe which may indicate that it was used for the smoking of hashish}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushleft}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid. p. 118
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid. p. 119
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid. p. 118
\end{flushleft}
‘Tal-qasba’ pipes & archaeology

Pipes which can be associated most clearly with Malta can be organized roughly into three categories: the ‘tal-qasba’ (reed or chibouk) pipe, the briar wood pipe and the large, wooden painted souvenir pipes.

The ‘tal-qasba’ pipes are of particular interest since they are amongst the earliest recorded pipes used in Malta and have been found in numerous quantities in both land and marine archaeological contexts in and around the island.\(^\text{11}\)

Reed pipe expert John Wood, has for many years been studying ‘tal-qasba’ pipe bowls and pipe fragments being found in Malta and has published his studies in numerous publications.\(^\text{12}\) As a result of his study, Wood confirms that ‘the largest number of pipes found in Malta are Ottoman style from the Greek or Balkan area’.\(^\text{13}\)

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\(^{11}\) Pipe fragments were found in Galley Creek, Birgu, in the waters near Manoel Island and Quarantine Harbour, Gzira, in digs at the Inquisitor’s Palace, Birgu and other nearby locations, Fort Rinella, Mdina, and several other locations all over the Maltese islands. Clay pipe bowls, more often than not in a fragmentary state, regularly turn up in fields, in the ‘deffun’ layer laid on roofs, under floors, and wherever the user might have discarded them.

\(^{12}\) A select bibliography of John Wood’s publications on pipes:

- Forthcoming article: ‘Tobacco pipes from an underwater excavation at the quarantine harbour, Malta.’ *Malta Archaeological Review* 7.

Forthcoming note: ‘Maltese pipes’ in St.John Simpson (Ed.).

\(^{13}\) (From J. Wood’s presentation: *Pipi tal-Qasba: From Objects of Little interest to an International Study*)
The ‘tal-qasba’ pipe consists of a pipe bowl made of fired clay, generally mould made, and which comes in a variety of plain or decorated shapes, to which is attached a reed or bamboo stem. Sometimes, and particularly if the smoker belonged to the higher echelons of society, a separate mouthpiece would be added. Representations of smokers throughout the centuries show varying lengths of cane, from the longest, which were well over a meter in length; generally smoked by orientals, and required the pipe bowl to be rested on the floor, with the smoker sitting cross-legged in front of it, to the short cane stem which we have now come to associate with more recent forms of pipes and which was more practical.

The ‘tal-qasba’ pipe bowl, which can be seen in this exhibition, though found in numerous variations can be roughly classified into four types based on shape: Disc-based, lily, round-bottom, and sack shaped types.

This lily shaped type of pipe, made of burnished terracotta with gold highlights is Turkish and likely to date to the 19th c.

The four shapes are well represented abroad and all the indications point to the fact that they were imported in large quantities from Sicily, North Africa, Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean. Other more refined types, were made by famous French firms such as Bonnaud. Their value was low, and they were considered almost disposable, as they would easily break and could just as easily be replaced. Their price and ready availability meant that usage was widespread and they were to be found in taverns and in use by the peasant classes.

A typical Bonnaud pipe, displayed in this exhibition

14 J. Wood has identified at least three Bonnaud pipes found in Malta. He explains their presence as follows: ‘In the 19th century many Maltese were involved with the cotton and salt trades to Marseille… The French factory was a family business founded by Alphonse Bonnaud in 1824. It closed in 1958.’ (From J. Wood’s presentation: Pipi tal-Qasba: From Objects of Little interest to an International Study)
Though mostly made abroad, a few Maltese potters are known to have made pipe bowls out of Maltese clay. \(^{15}\) These seem to have been one-offs and there is no evidence of mass production of truly Maltese clay pipes. \(^{16}\) Home made pipes would even be made entirely of reed or wood with the bowl being formed separately and the stem inserted into it, mimicking the ‘tal-qasba’ type. \(^{17}\)

Retailers of pipes imported into Malta, now long since gone, included Genovese who operated from Cart Street, Valletta, Borg in East Street and Reno Baldacchino who was sited near Victoria Gate. \(^{18}\) Another retailer in St John Street, Valletta in the Ta’ Giezu church area and North African traders are known to have brought pipes to Malta for sale. \(^{19}\)

After the first World War use of clay pipes declined in favour of wooden pipes and cigarettes. \(^{20}\)

The Manufacture of Wooden Pipes in Malta

Unlike the ‘tal-qasba’ type of pipes, wooden pipes were actually made in Malta on an industrial scale. Mostly using briar wood \(^{21}\) these pipes were produced by the British Empire Pipe Co. Ltd which eventually changed its name to Briar Pipeworks Ltd. Some of

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\(^{15}\) I thank Mr John Wood for this information  
\(^{17}\) G. Lanfranco, ‘Old Smoking Pipes’ in L-Imnara, No. 18, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1994, p.21  
\(^{18}\) This information is quoted almost verbatim from D.Darmanin, ‘Clay Pipes; A Victorian soldier’s vice’ in The Times of Malta, 10/09/00. I thank Denis Darmanin for providing me with this study.  
\(^{19}\) G. Lanfranco, ‘Old Smoking Pipes’ in ‘L-Imnara’, No. 18, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1994, p.21  
\(^{20}\) E. Ayto says that ‘By 1914 clay-pipe manufacture as an industry had virtually come to end, leaving only a few well-established makers to meet the small but continuing demand.’ (E. Ayto, Clay Tobacco Pipes, Shire Publications, UK, 2002 (reprint), p. 10)  
\(^{21}\) The advantage of briar wood over other woods is that it is not heavy, it lasts long, does not scorch and it provides a cool smoke (B. Gottfried ‘Pipes Handicraft for Smokers’ Pleasure’ in ‘The Encyclopaedia of Collectibles’, Time-Life Books, USA 1979, p.36. I thank Mr Guido Lanfranco for providing me with this study.)
the pipes in the Palazzo Falson collection, smoked regularly by Olof Gollcher, were made in this factory.

The early history of this pipe factory is of interest. On the 16\textsuperscript{th} August, 1933 a monopoly was granted to Messrs. Maurice and Victor Coenca of 3, 4, Faulkner’s Alley, Cowcross Street, London to manufacture pipes, pipe parts and related accessories in Malta for a period of 10 years, which monopoly was transferred in 1935 to Archibald William Stone, Esq. of 10/12, Pentonville Road, London.\footnote{Government Notice no. 76 (d. 1/3/1935) appearing in the Malta Gouv Gazette. I thank Mr Anthony Wetz for showing me this notice in the archives of Briar Pipeworks Ltd.} By a remarkable coincidence the factory’s first stores at 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Marsa Coal Wharf were rented from Olof and his mother Elisa Gollcher.\footnote{Lease agreement d. 27/3/1934, a copy of which is now in the archives of Briar Pipeworks Ltd.} By the early decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century wooden pipes had overtaken clay pipes in popularity.

Briar wood, though growing in Malta, is best sourced from cold, mountainous regions such as in the Eastern Mediterranean, Spain and Italy.\footnote{A. Zarb-Dimech, \textit{The Maltese Tobacco Scene – A Historical Survey}, Malta, 2005, p. 137} The process of turning a piece of briar wood root into a pipe is explained in detail by A. Zarb-Dimech. Suffice to say that the root needs to be boiled, seasoned for months, following which the process of cutting commences. The pipe is later fitted with a mouthpiece, and the pipe undergoes finishing to its body followed by staining and varnishing and polishing.\footnote{Ibid., p. 139 et. Seq.} This factory produced a great variety of pipes, generally identified by the Maltese cross, and occasionally with ‘Made in Malta’, stamped on them. Over the years several other stamps were used as is recorded by the surviving stamps and notebooks with impressions of these stamps in the factory’s archives.

Briar wood is very hard, which limits the possibilities for decorative carving. The shape of wooden pipes, however, does vary and certain shapes have been associated with particular names.

Briar Pipeworks have also invented their own designs such as the foldable Breast Pocket pipe and the Torpedo pipe. Moreover, this factory has created another unique pipe type, made of Maltese olive wood.\footnote{I thank Mr Anthony Wetz for the information regarding Briar Pipeworks Ltd.} Examples of all of these are included in the exhibition.
Some Maltese pipes, though functional, were actually produced as decorative or novelty pieces. The over-sized cherry wood pipe made by Briar Pipeworks (actually smoked by its owner when he purchased it in the 1960s) and the decorative oversize pipes, included in this exhibition, are examples of Maltese pipes that appealed mainly to the tourist market.

Photo of ‘Malta pipes’ in a shop window at The Strand, Sliema in the 1950s. Photo credit: Albert Joseph Caruana

Pipes from around the world

The story of pipes and smoking in Europe commences in the 16th century when the tobacco plant was first imported from the New World. But the origin of pipes is buried far deeper than the European story leads us to believe. One of the oldest pipes known comes from Ecuador and dates from the 5th to 3rd c. B.C. Tobacco is indigenous to Central America and it is from here that the earliest forms of pipe smoking emerged.27 Once the tobacco plant was brought to North-West Europe a pipe industry sprang up in the Netherlands, particularly in Gouda, and from here the habit spread to the rest of Europe. In the same period tobacco was brought to England from America and the production of pipes, albeit on a smaller scale, commenced.

Early pipes were made of white pipe clay which was pressed in a two-piece mould. Dutch pipes of the 17th century were characterized by their long stem measuring around 55cm and their ovoid bowl shape. English pipes on the other hand did not attain the quality of Dutch pipes. They had a characteristic curved bowl with a stem shorter than the Dutch.  

An English pipe, probably dating to the late 17th century. Dating is based on its shape in the absence of any other information.

A lot of innovation occurred in the 19th century, which is probably when the pipe reached the pinnacle of artistic production, before its gradual decline in the face of competition from the cigar, later the cigarette, and later still the widespread recognition of the harmful effects of smoking.

Artifice and Artistry: Figural pipes

During the 19th century, different designs and shapes emerged in other centres of production and a variety of materials ranging from wood to meerschaum were introduced for the making of pipes. In the early 19th century, the French started making shorter white clay pipes, decorating them with more heavily sculptured designs and incorporating colourful enamel.

Two French 19th century pipes decorated with delicate painted floral motifs

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28 Ibid., p. 25
29 Ibid., p. 44
30 Ibid., pp.32,3
These figural designs frequently took the form of portraits of notables, drawing on contemporary or historic characters; on classical or invented types, or other recognizable human or animal features.

Benedict Goes has described the French figural pipes as ‘the most imaginative and surprising smoking device the smoking world has ever produced’. Several factories, such as the Gambier, Fiolet, Duméril and Bonnau factories were established, producing a myriad of designs. Rarer and of greater value were the pipes which were modeled by hand rather than being mould made and are real works of sculpture in their own right. In the second half of the 19th century the focus shifted to Belgium and Germany. Belgian pipemakers became renowned for the excellence of the pipes they produced, while the Germans churned out great quantities of pipes. English figural pipes were not particularly innovative, however ‘giant’ models, having a very large bowl which ensured continuous smoking for up to four hours, was one of the lines to emerge.

With the advent of World War I the clay pipe making industry was all but killed off, never to revive again.

Other pipes from around the world can be roughly divided into different types including:

31 Ibid., p. 36
32 Ibid., p. 46
33 Ibid., pp. 40-42
Stummel pipes

The stummel pipe\textsuperscript{34} is a German invention of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. It consists of an elongated porcelain bowl (based on the ovoid shape of the typical Dutch pipe bowl) which is decorated with paintings and attached to a very long stem, generally made of turned wood. This is crucial in order to give the smoke time to cool during its long journey to the smoker’s mouth and because of moisture that emerges from the condensation of the smoke, and then gathers at the bottom of the V-shaped stem, far away from the smoker’s mouth. This type of pipe was a luxury product, as the use of porcelain implies, and pipes such as these were traditionally given to soldiers as parting gifts on their leaving the army.\textsuperscript{35} The decoration on the porcelain bowl could also be commissioned by a client in order to have a unique piece. However at the bottom end of the scale, particularly in the second half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, transfer printed decoration decorated the bulk produced stummels. Several types of stummel bowls are shown in this exhibition with a rather unusual one depicting American symbols and others, which were made purely as souvenirs.

\textit{A stummel pipe with scenes of courting}

\textsuperscript{34} Also known in Germany as the ‘holländisches Modell’ (B. Goes, The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes, Pipenkabinet, Leiden 1993, p. 57)
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., pp. 56 et. Seq.
Another unusual pipe on display is the large German wooden pipe that belonged to Olof Gollcher and is now in the Palazzo Falson collection. It is noteworthy because of its excessive size and probably pertains to the period 1840 to 1880.  

**Meerschaums**

Meerschaum pipes are very highly valued amongst collectors, particularly if they have a deep golden colour which is acquired through repeated use of the pipe. Meerschaum is a mineral which is quarried mainly from Asia Minor. It is very light and porous and is an ideal material for pipes as it effectively absorbs the condensation in the smoke given off from the burning tobacco, resulting in a cool, dry smoke. The tars and oils given off stains the white Meerschaum a golden colour, from the bottom of the bowl and gradually spreading upwards, and this deepens with age and repeated usage. Meerschaum is a light substance which is very easily carved as it is relatively soft on extraction, although it hardens on drying and with age. The most beautiful figures, which may in actual fact be considered veritable sculptured artefacts, are those made of Meerschaum. During the 19th century Vienna acquired a monopoly on the carving of Meerschaum.

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36 I thank Dr Don Duco and Mr Benedict Goes for further information and dating of this pipe (email d. 21/10/09)
Nargiles

Clearly inspired from the Near East and Africa, where they were most popular, the Nargile or water pipe is represented by two examples in the exhibition. They were probably made in Europe, or for a European consumer, as the painted decoration on their glass bodies, which is in the European taste, demonstrates. The two pipes in this exhibition are missing their flexible stems. However, the way they are made to function can be explained. Water pipes, also known as hookahs, make use of water held in the glass receptacle to cool and filter the smoke that emanates from the burning tobacco which is held in the container above the neck of the bottle. The smoke from the tobacco is led down into the water by means of a tube. A flexible stem attached to the glass container lifts out the smoke and conducts it to the smoker. This type of pipe became popular for a while in Europe at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, the period to which both of the displayed pipes probably belong.

A Bohemian glass water pipe, with silver trimmings. The glass reservoir should date to 1845-1860. 26.5 x 15.5.
African pipes are also represented in this exhibition. Though tobacco was brought to Africa by the Europeans in the 17th century, smoking soon spread throughout Africa with different regions bringing their indigenous artistic styles to bear on the creation of unique pipes which are truly African in terms of decoration.37

This pipe in the shape of a seated figure dates to about 1910 and comes from Belgian Congo

Far Eastern Opium pipes

Opium mixed with tobacco smoking was introduced to China by the Dutch in the early 17th century. By the 18th century the Chinese were smoking pure opium in purpose made pipes.38 Typical opium pipes look like metal flasks with a number of implements fitted into them and a metal mouthpiece emerging from them. The examples included in this exhibition belonged to Olof Gollcher, who we know traveled to the East stopping for example, in Japan and perhaps acquiring them during his travels.

Other types of opium pipes include the elephant pipe and curved tube pipe, which were acquired by their owner from the Phsar Chas (the old market) in Siem Reap, Cambodia, reputedly as typical local antiques.

Cloisonne decorated Chinese Opium pipe

37 B. Goes, The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes, Pijpenkabinet, Leiden 1993, p. 68
38 B. Goes, The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes, Pijpenkabinet, Leiden 1993, p. 76
Of less certain origin are the long pipes, probably for use with opium, that are represented in two examples, together with another example of more diminutive size. One of the long pipes is believed to have been acquired in India by the present owner’s seafaring great grandfather around the late 19th century. Its resemblance to Native American calumets, used for ceremonial purposes is, on the other hand, uncanny. The other example was acquired from an antique dealer in Malta and no further information is known about it, while the diminutive one was acquired by its present owner from a gypsy market in Hungary, in the mid-90s. The owner recalls this type of pipe being used as a cigarette holder.

From the Eastern Mediterranean come the Ottoman type pipe bowls, examples of which are also included in this exhibition. These were embellished with gold, as in one example, on display. An unusually large pipe of this type, which is also displayed, may have been produced at a period when tobacco became more affordable and therefore could be used in greater quantity. B. Goes explains the typical production process of such pipes, which were made in Istanbul (Constantinople):

“The production technique was unusual, as the fine red-baking clay was turned into a pipe on a potter’s wheel. This procedure, which is typical for Turkish pipes, is very time-consuming. The bowl and collar were made separately and stuck together by hand. Turkish pipes were usually immersed in a russet engobe which was burnished before firing, to give the object a particular shine….Finally it was decorated; the Turkish pipemaker carving or stamping geometric patterns in the leather-hard clay. As the Islamic religion forbids figurative images, ornamental, geometric decorative art has been highly developed.”³⁹

These pipes were then sometimes embellished further with brass or gold leaf and with the addition of metal or gold lids. Other Turkish pipes included ones with a saucer like base to the bowl, to which was added a very long stem, preferably of jasmine, which enabled the pipe to rest free-standing on the ground.⁴⁰

³⁹ B. Goes, The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes, Pijpenkabinet, Leiden 1993, pp.64,5
⁴⁰ B. Goes, The Intriguing Design of Tobacco Pipes, Pijpenkabinet, Leiden 1993, p. 64
RAOB: Memberships and ritualistic pipes

In some secret societies smoking of the pipe represented an initiation or participatory rite. In Malta several RAOB pipes have turned up in a variety of shapes and sizes made in white pipe clay or wood. They are all distinguished by the letters ‘RAOB’ and the head or horns of a buffalo. The letters stand for Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, which is similar to a Masonic organization, and which was also present in Malta.41

RAOB wooden pipe

Tobacco Jars, smoking paraphernalia, recipes and tricks

The activity of pipe smoking has generated a lot of associated accessories, ranging from air-tight containers intended to keep tobacco fresh, all the way to pipe racks where everything necessary for pipe smoking could be kept.

A pipe rack included in this exhibition is of particular historic interest as it belonged to the Hon. Walter Luke Salomone (1888-1970) who served as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries between 1927 and 1929 and as Minister of Industry and Commerce till 1930.42

Volumes have been written about the tobacco plant and pipe smoking, including books in the Library collection of Palazzo Falson. Accessories such as pipe cleaners, very much part of the ritual that is pipe smoking and general care of a pipe, could be external or could be integrated into the pipe.

Tobacco jar used to preserve the moisture of the tobacco

41 According to Eric Ayto these pipes are ‘...still used...by the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes during the initiation ceremony of new members’ (E. Ayto, Clay Tobacco Pipes, Shire Publications, UK, 2002 (reprint), p. 10)
The use of tobacco jars may have been reserved for the richer pipe smoker who would have reserves of tobacco to fall back on, although this was not always the case. Cheap clay pipes would be sold already filled with tobacco and they were practically disposable. Others who may have not had the means to preserve their stash of tobacco in porcelain containers, devised a number of tricks to keep their tobacco fresh and to extend its use (and volume).

John Wood tells us the following about Maltese smokers: ‘Locals who smoked pipes tried to ensure that their tobacco lasted them a long time and mixed it with used tea leaves, which were dried before being mixed with tobacco. Dried vine and fig leaves were also crushed and used to cut tobacco’\(^{43}\) The use of orange peel was another popular trick. It was kept with the tobacco in a pouch to keep the tobacco fresh.

Ingenious solutions presented themselves to address problems associated with tobacco smoking. By way of example, the soggy mess at the bottom of the pipe bowl that resulted from burning tobacco could be avoided, and some tobacco saved, if a fine wire mesh was placed at the bottom of the bowl. Buttons worked equally well.\(^^{44}\)

Moreover, another common habit in Malta, was to place a perforated metal bottle top over the bowl, not as a wind or rain guard as tended to be the case in Northern Europe, but to reduce the air being sucked in and therefore making the tobacco last longer.\(^{45}\) Wealthy Maltese stevedores, who had made a fortune after the first world war, would use a golden sovereign as a lid for their pipes in a display of ostentation, rather than for purposes of frugality.\(^ {46}\)

Extending the tobacco by various means, fragrant or foul, was another common trait. J. Wood says that ‘In Gozo I have heard contemporary references to smokers cutting tobacco with fig and vine leaves and carob husks’.\(^ {47}\) A Sicilian author who wrote about tobacco in the early 18\(^{th}\) century reveals that substances, which included nuts, roses, oranges and vines, but also animal excreta and urine were surreptitiously added by traders in tobacco.\(^ {48}\) Colouring was also added.\(^ {49}\) Some recipes which are found in a 1746 recipe book compiled by Don Michele Seychel give detailed instructions about what and how to add to tobacco.\(^ {50}\) And the same source provides an amusing trick to play on one’s friends. It features tobacco and can be roughly translated as follows:

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\(^{43}\) Interview with J. Wood, The Times of Malta, 20/09/1999
\(^{44}\) I thank Mr Denis Darmanin for this information (personal comm. 7/8/09). E. Ayto also cites this practice in a British context: ‘Two dodges favoured by navvies and other labourers were the use of a metal trouser button at the base of the (pipe) bowl to act as a filter and the fitting of a metal bottle cap, pierced with holes, on top of the bowl to keep the rain out.’ (E. Ayto, *Clay Tobacco Pipes*, Shire Publications, UK, 2002 (reprint), p. 10)
\(^{45}\) I thank Mr Denis Darmanin for this information (personal comm. 7/8/09)
\(^{46}\) I thank Mr Peter Bartolo Parnis for this information (personal comm. 28/09/10)
\(^{47}\) Condensed from J. Wood ‘Tobacco substitutes’ Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter 33, p.38
\(^{48}\) G. Bonello, Histories of Malta, Vol. 9, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2008, p. 129
\(^{49}\) Ibid., p. 136
To sneeze a lot:
Pick ‘lebaro bianco’ and crush gently. Put it in tobacco, or spread it on the floor where people dance and you will see its effect; instead of ‘lebaro’ you may use ‘bettonica’ or pepper in the tobacco.\textsuperscript{51}