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# JOURNAL OF THE ACADEMIE INTERNATIONALE DE LA PIPE

VOLUME 2

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# ARGENTINA

by Daniel Schávelzon

## Introduction

The habit of smoking tobacco and other materials, as well as the chewing and inhaling of plant products were customs that originated in America but were taken to Europe following the Spanish arrival. Once in Europe, these practices rapidly spread worldwide. In Argentina some indigenous habits persisted, others were transformed, and still others developed in Eastern and Western Europe and even Africa. As a result, a mosaic of different traditions overlapping in time and space are found in the Americas that are difficult to understand.

## Pre-Hispanic Pipes – Eighth Century BC to Fifteenth Century AD

In that area which presently constitutes Argentina, as well as in the rest of the Andes, the natives used to consume a number of plants as hallucinogens, or at least as enervating agents, of which tobacco was the mildest. Pre-Hispanic peoples smoked in this region from at least the eighth century BC and pipes are commonly discovered in archaeological contexts (Figure 1). There are ceramic, wooden, bone and stone pipes (Figure 2), in a whole variety of forms and decorations but, interestingly, the dimensions of these objects are unrelated to European ways of consuming tobacco. Together with the pipes there is a series of related objects such as inhaling tubes and tablets for chopping tobacco and other plants, as well as hallucinogenic drugs. There is a rich iconography of shamanic visions that were produced as a result of smoking.



**Figure 1:** Pre-Columbian clay pipe with a large animal face made around the fifth century BC (Matteo Goretti Collection, Buenos Aires; photograph by J. L. Martinez).

The habit appears to have been restricted to a single social group, the shamans, and it was not considered as a pastime or entertainment but instead, a highly significant ceremonial and religious activity. Pipes sometimes show animal-related forms or related images, depicting both the power achieved through smoking and the visions produced during trances.

The most commonly used products included a cactaceous plant, the *Trichocereus*; coca or *Erythroxylum*; cebil or *Anadenathera*; ayahuasca or *Banisteriopsis*; *Brugmansia* flowers, the *Daturas* and tobacco, or *Nicotiana*. Tobacco was also smoked in the form of cigars and was chewed as well as being inhaled through the nose.



**Figure 2:** Pre-Columbian stone pipe with a human face made in the Formative period around the first century BC (Matteo Goretti Collection, Buenos Aires; photograph by J. L. Martinez).

## Colonial Pipes – Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries

### 1. European White Clay Pipes (Figure 3)

Archaeological excavations have produced pipes identified as originating in Western Europe, particularly Scotland, Germany and France. The existing examples date from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, with a large majority originating in Glasgow, followed by those from France. The abundance of this type of pipe in antiquarian shops suggests that they were common, and shop inventories clearly identify them as 'pipes for the whites' (*'pitos de blanco'*) to differentiate their use and form socially from 'pipes for blacks'. The most common mark is TD for Thomas Dormer of London.

### 2. African and Afro-American Pipes (Figures 4-6)

Since the sixteenth century, when tobacco spread around the world, slaves began to arrive from Africa bringing different pipes than those found here and in Europe. This tradition of pipes with bowls and no stems, and sometimes a hole for hanging round the neck, spread throughout Western Africa and later, with slavery, the entire American Continent. Decoration was superficial, and they were always made of plain clay, hand-modelled or showing the use of pointed instruments to make lines, stars, circles or triangles. Some feature a remarkable indigenous influence as is the case with examples from Santa Fe la Vieja, where the pipes may be considered indigenous but with African

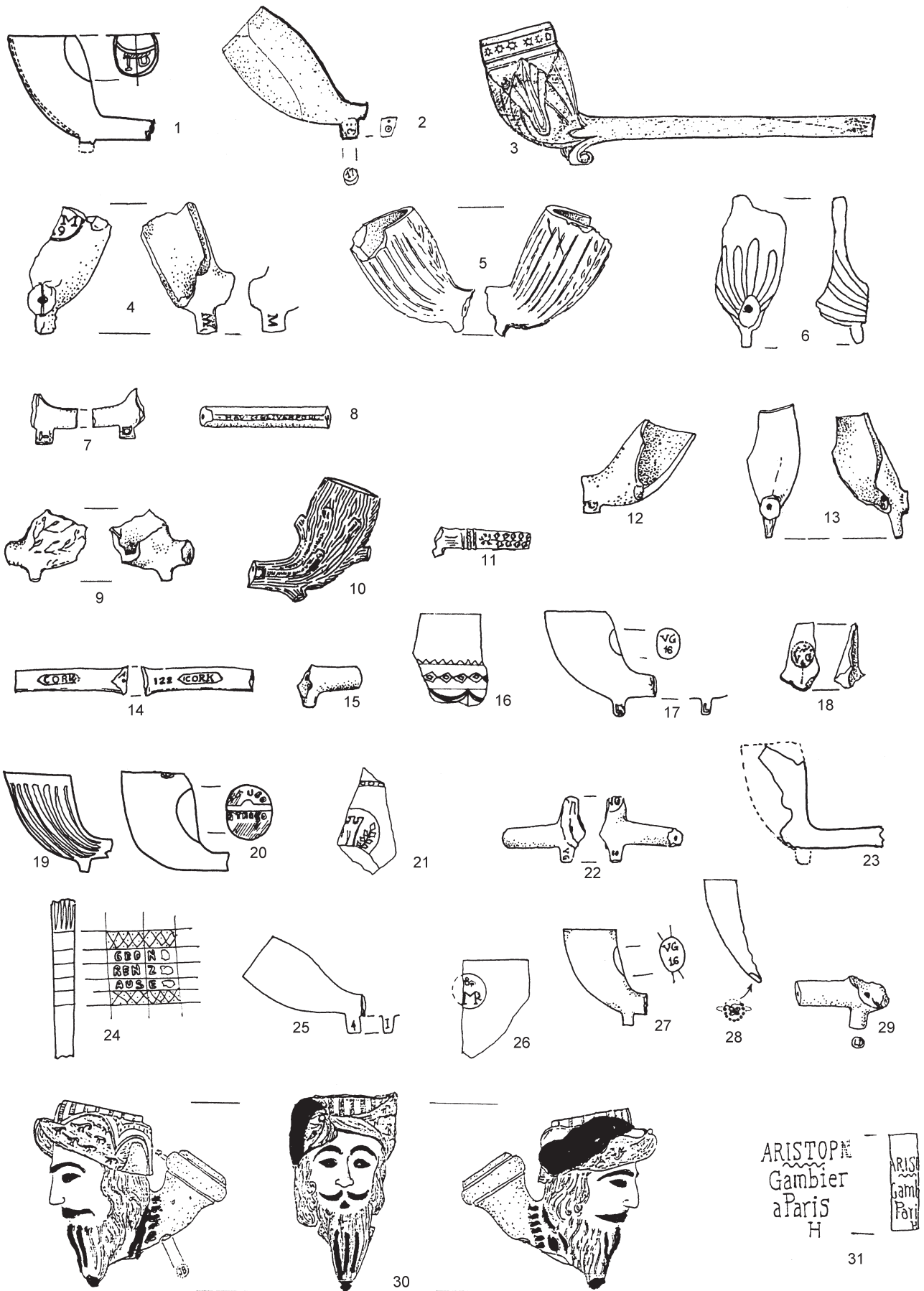
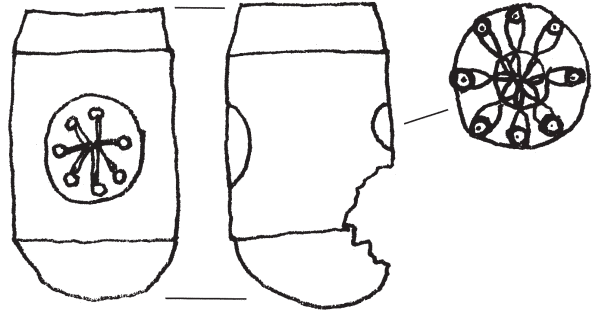


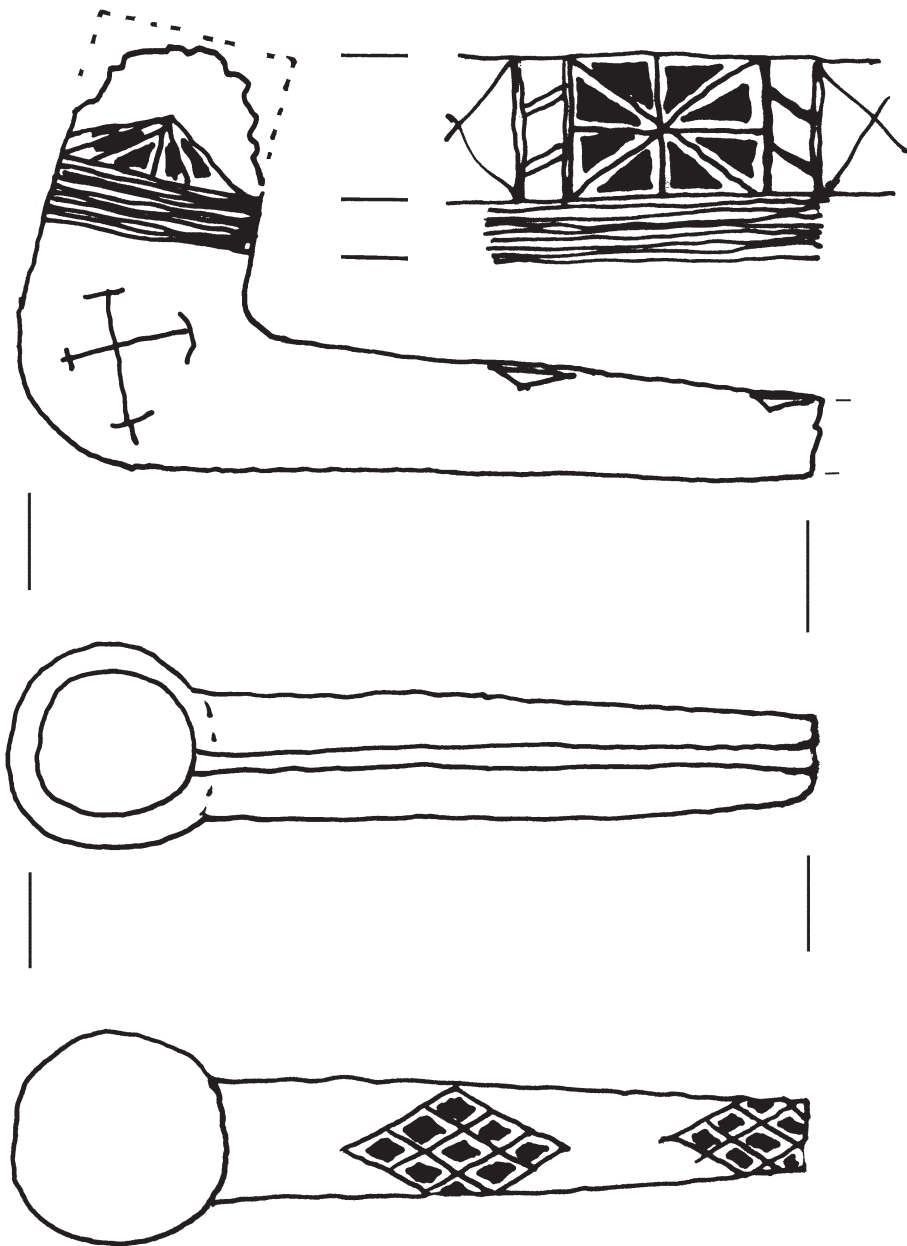
Figure 3: European pipes: fragments recovered from various archaeological excavations in Buenos Aires, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Centro de Arqueologia Urbana and Galerias Pacifico collections).



**Figure 4:** Afro-Argentine pipe; bowl decorated with stripes and triangles in bas-relief, nineteenth century (private collection, Buenos Aires).



**Figure 5:** Afro-Argentine pipe: mould-decorated bowl with African motifs, nineteenth century (El Zañon de Granados Collection, Buenos Aires).



**Figure 6:** Afro-Indian pipe found in Buenos Aires, featuring the form and motifs typical of Santa Fe la Vieja, 1550-1650 (private collection, Buenos Aires).



decoration (Figure 5). The decoration includes a wealth of religious symbols of African origin (Figure 6).

The use of pipes among the Afro-Argentine population was not restricted to men, but was also widespread among women. Diaries refer to this phenomenon, which was peculiar for white men, who considered smoking to be a male activity.

### 3. *Ethnographic Pipes* (Figure 7)

Those indigenous groups that survived the conquest continued smoking and using tobacco, but for how long the use of other plants persisted, still remains to be established. Due to centuries of exclusion and poverty, the more easily found plants began to be smoked, not for



**Figure 7:** *Ethnographic pipe made by the Mataco Indians c1930 (Ethnographic Museum, Corrientes).*

their hallucinogenic and energetic effects but for the mere pleasure of the action, or simply to reaffirm an ancient tradition. For example, poorer groups even smoked corn ears, and the enslaved Africans also used them.

The manufacture of pipes continued, some made in the old way though more modestly, others evidently new in forms and decoration, while still others imitated European ones. Research in this area is poor but, for instance, the Caingua and the Wichi groups made pipes that were different to all those previously known until the twentieth century. These synthesized regional influences with the evolution of very unusual forms.

### 4. *Eastern European, Asia Minor and Eastern Mediterranean Pipes – Nineteenth Century*

During excavations, pipes have been found in Eastern European and even Eastern Mediterranean forms. Most of them are nineteenth century, and would seem to be the result of a major immigration from Europe and Asia Minor to Argentina in the years around 1830. Several million immigrants settled in the country prior to the twentieth century, and probably brought pipes with them, which are rare and difficult to identify. As many as 3.5 million people from the Mediterranean entered Argentina prior to

1900, implying that such an influence ought not have been a minor one.

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- Museo Etnográfico, Universidad de Buenos Aires.
- Museo de Ciencias Naturales, La Plata.
- Museo Etnográfico de Santa Fe.