

MALTA

by John Wood

Summary

Geographically and politically Malta had a pivotal position in the Mediterranean (Figure 1). The Order of St. John of Jerusalem acquired the islands in 1530. In 1798 Napoleon occupied the island with the connivance of the local population. Following his defeat, Malta effectively became a UK protectorate until independence in 1974.

On Malta there was never a clay pipe factory as such, although residents were both users and traders in tobacco. Ottoman-style socketed pipes - chibouks or reed pipes (Maltese *pipi tal-qasba*) - from Greece or the Balkans dominate the assemblages from the seventeenth century onwards; western European products figure increasingly at later dates.

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries



Figure 1: General location map.

By 1673 the popularity of tobacco was such that Grand Master Niccolò Cottoner decreed it a taxable commodity and since the Knights looked to Sicily to supply their most basic needs, let alone luxuries, one might suppose that clay pipes were also coming from that direction. Both Birgu and Bormla were at the hub of maritime activity when tobacco was first introduced on the island (Figure 2). In addition to the standard recreational facilities on offer in any port the demand for tobacco related products created a market for professional vendors. Nine examples of Venetian-style thrown pipes with sockets, dating from 1670 to 1750, have been found in the Malta quarantine harbour (Figure 3). There is also a prisoner's graffito of a flared pipe bowl on the walls of Gozo citadel that must date to around 1700 (Figure 4).

Between 1654 and 1692 60% of all tobacco imports were from the Greek mainland and islands (Cutajar 1987). Although pipes are not specifically mentioned it is unlikely that all this tobacco was rolled into cigars or



Figure 2: Malta and Gozo.

ground as snuff. In 1732 200,000 clay pipes were ordered in preparation for a siege and a corresponding amount of tobacco (*pers. comm.* Giovanni Bonello). A series of Arrival Books in the National Archive Malta Libretti for the years 1743-47 show 89% of tobacco imports coming from the east (*pers. comm.* Joseph Muscat).

The two most numerous groups of clay pipes on record may have formed part of that colossal order of 1732. In Group 1 ten practically identical artefacts (Figure 5), were excavated from Dockyard creek, one from an old sewer system in the Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu, and a further two in the Gozo Museum reserve collection. The eight pipes in Group 2 (Figure 6) were recovered from two sites in Dockyard creek at different times.



Figure 3: Pale buff body covered in a metallic looking glaze; thrown rim in a distinctive Venetian style and an internal 3-holed grate at waist level; thumbnail indentation under the heel. Height: 53mm, terminal dia.: 18mm, socket opening: 9mm. [BA1/3/37].

Found by a team of diving archaeologists carrying out an impact assessment in advance of a proposed yacht marina in Dockyard Creek.

This pipe was made in the vicinity of Venice between 1670 and 1750 (Boscolo 1980). This style of pipe has been found as far afield as Zelovo, Croatia (Bekic 1999-2000, 249-279), the Marseille quarantine (Gosse 2007, 8-12), and from a shipwreck at Omonville-la-Rouge, Normandy (Anon 1985) associated with a Dutch pipe dating from 1700 to 1725.

A further eight similar artefacts have been excavated from the Malta quarantine harbour.



Figure 4: During restoration of the Citadel of Gozo prisoners' graffiti were uncovered by the removal of wall plaster. One shows a tobacco pipe with a rounded bowl and flared rim. This style had been a popular shape since the early seventeenth century. However, the 'keel' joint under the bowl suggests a late seventeenth or early eighteenth century model. Also the addition of a mouthpiece would indicate the prisoner was a gentleman - and the loss of his pipe was one of his deprivations.



Figure 5: Black sack like 'shaved' ware; slightly flared damaged rim; undecorated except for a double incised line around the socket. Height: 38mm, length: 44mm and socket opening: 8mm. [VTR/1994/108].



Figure 6: Sack like fluted bowl in greyish to black clay with evident keel; a quarter of the bowl and half the rim are missing. Rim diameter: 27mm, socket opening: 8mm. [BA3/4/219].

The Nineteenth Century

Free men were at liberty to go around with 'the bit between their teeth' as this illustration shows (Figure 7). This type of pipe remained popular (Figures 8 to 11). Recent restoration work on the fabric of Fort Manoel has revealed various artefacts including a number of clay tobacco pipes (Figures 12 to 16) which seem to date mainly from the period of British occupation, during which period Lloyds Maltese shipping registers confirm the existence of trade from France and the United Kingdom (Table 1). European and Ottoman pipe makers were highly organised at this time and trade routes relatively safe. Merchants and tradesmen exploited these conditions.



Figure 7: A peasant off to market with his goats' cheeses and with a pipi tal-qasba well alight.

The Twentieth Century

Both chibouks and western-style clay pipes remained popular well into the twentieth century.

The Chibouks

Thanks to Guido Lanfranco and his folklore phone-in on RTK radio we know that a Mr. Spiteri from Zejtun remembered an old man who made and sold chibouks. Spiteri said his grandfather bought red *pipi tal-qasba* from itinerant North Africans who sold them in Malta before 1940 at two and a half pence each, along with the sweet sedge root *habb ghaziz*, the latter being a treat for the children. According to the late Salvu Axiaq, a lifelong pipe smoker, the Gozitan potter Carmel Sacco dug and processed clay from il-Harrax (Figure 2). Sacco occasionally made pipes for Axiaq. Another correspondent Tessie Vella, formerly of Rabat, said a professional potter worked at Bir Riebu (a suburb) in the 1930s. He made pipes as a sideline for his friends. She also remembered North African nationals selling attractive pipes in cream coloured clay.

The folklorist Joseph Cassar Pullicino and museum director Francis Mallia both remembered seeing Gozitan priests smoking reed pipes. In earlier times as Fr. Joseph



Figure 8: Complete mould-made pipe; buff coloured clay with large orange patches; slightly chipped rim; three raised panels either side with impressed divisions and the central panel a slightly raised vertical line; two horizontal bands circle the upper and lower rim. Bowl decorated with one broad and two narrow gadroons on either side. Rim diameter: 27 mm, inner rim diameter: 20.5 mm, height: 50.8 mm and the shank opening 9 mm; stubby keel-jointed socket terminal with a 5.8 mm collar [B 1].

Found in the basement of a house in St Lazarus Street.

Similar artefacts are most common in the region of Sicily and southern Italy. Loppel (1985, 3) proposes a date circa 1800 and Cascio and Maurici (1997) suggest the later date of 1870.



Figure 9: Mould-made pipe in gritty micaceous terracotta with a burnished amber finish. The rim is missing; length: 48mm, socket diameter: 19mm. The bowl is rounded with chevron rouletting underneath. The socket has 12mm opening and a single band of rouletted decoration. A stylised bird is impressed on the right hand side of the socket [Ca 1].

Found during the excavation of an old sewer system in the basement of the Auberge de Castille, Valletta, which was used to quarter both French and English regiments between 1798 and 1840. After the latter date a new sewer system came into operation and the old one was abandoned.

A very similar stamp occurs on a pipe from the Athenian Agora (Robinson 1985, 149-203, Pl. 61, A 10). The bird stamp is characteristic of a group of pipes from Varna, Bulgaria, and this pipe may well be a product of the Varna workshops.



Figure 10: The clay is yellowish-red and burnished. A rounded panellied bowl supports a straight faceted rim. Length: 65mm, terminal diameter: 28mm, socket opening 15mm. The rim facets have panels with a rayed dot decoration, the bowl has impressed ovals with raised middles surrounded by elongated dots separated by stamped triangles and the termination has a scalloped wreath. A mark is applied to the right hand side of the shank the details of which are indiscernible. Robinson says of these pipes that the idiosyncratic mark seems to be a meaningless imitation of an Arabic monogram. The rim is fashionably decorated with an ornate metal lid [CRP 3].

The pipe is relatively large as tobacco prices plummeted with massive production to meet demand. Other examples have been found in Dockyard creek, the Quarantine harbour, Fort Manoel and the Auberge de Castille.

Various authors (Hayes 1980 and Robinson 1972) have described artefacts like this. According to Hayes (1980, 6) this is a typical pipe produced in Istanbul workshops after 1850.

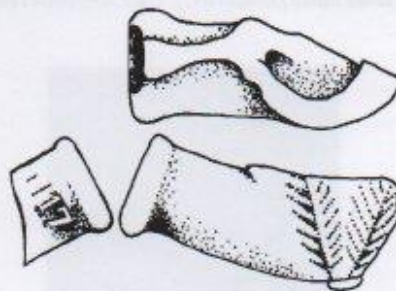


Figure 11: Mould-made terracotta pipe fragment; broken bowl; rim missing and termination damaged. The bowl has a button shaped foot above which are decorative palm leaves. On the left side of the socket, parallel with the termination, is a very abraded moulded pattern number [---N? 17]. Length: 46mm, terminal diameter: 20mm and socket opening: 9mm [I-S 1].

Found a decade ago on the roof of a farmhouse at Triq Sruc in Xaghra.



Figure 12: Plain white clay bowl; internal diameter: 18mm, rim one third missing. There is a black residue in the bowl. It has a chipped heel and no stem [Manoel 091]. Excavated in the crypt of the chapel dedicated to St Anthony of Padua. Probably French, nineteenth century.



Figure 15: Undecorated white pipe bowl and part of stem; blackened inside; 2-3 mm thick. Similar to Fig 14 but the 'snub nose' keel sweeps back upwards over the remaining stem [Manoel 094]. English 'Gladstone' design. Late nineteenth to early twentieth century.



Figure 13: White pipe bowl; walls 3mm thick; plain heel; stem missing. Bowl has moulded milling around the rim; 7-string harp moulded decoration on both sides; blackened inside [Manoel 092]. Later nineteenth century.

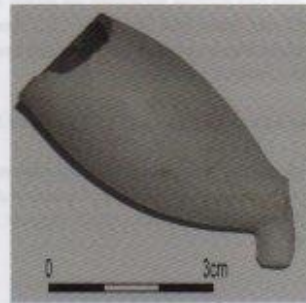


Figure 16: Undecorated white pipe bowl and heel; blackened inside; walls 1mm thick; one third of rim chipped and stem missing [Manoel 095]. Probably French, late nineteenth century.



Figure 14: Undecorated white pipe bowl with 'snub nose' keel; no evidence of use. Walls 2mm thick; three quarters of rim damaged [Manoel 093]. English 'Gladstone' design; late nineteenth to early twentieth century.

Bezzina says, some priests 'were indulging in the not commendable but increasingly popular habit of smoking a pipe. Due to their state and dignity, they were prohibited to smoke in public, but were free to do so in private'.

It would seem that reed pipes were not made in Malta on a commercial basis. Anthony Wetz, manager of Malta pipeworks at Marsa, who works with briar, says neither he nor his father remember reed pipes being made locally. In their opinion they were imported.

The Western-style Clays

Fifty years ago in Malta the older generation was familiar with clay pipes, although clay pipe smoking was practically obsolete. An anonymous resident of Valletta, born in 1932, remembers circa 1940:

Plaster pipes used to come in wooden boxes packed in straw and used to be sold by a man we called Mr Karm. His shop was in St John Street steps leading to ta'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.

In the Lloyd Maltese shipping registers for the early twentieth century there are many references to pipes as part cargo from ports of origin such as London, Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow (Figure 17). The McDougall bowl fragment from Glasgow and the Bonnaud pipe from Marseilles formed part of this trade (Figures 18 and 19).

Year	Date	Carrier	Source	Part cargo of clay pipes
1838	20-Apr	Celere	Marseille	11 cases
1838	02-Jun	Fifteen	London	9 bundles
1838	15-Jun	Lady Briggs	Marseille	4 cases
1838	12-Nov	Moise	Marseille	1 cases
1890	15-Jan	Marcotis	Liverpool	50 cases
1900	04-Jan	Neva	London	7 cases
1900	28-Feb	London Prince	Manchester	1 cases
1919	19-Nov	Serbino	Glasgow	61 cases
1920	24-Feb	Scottish Prince	London	8 cases
1920	24-Mar	Sitra	Glasgow	140 cases

Figure 17: Extracts from Lloyd's Maltese Shipping Registers.

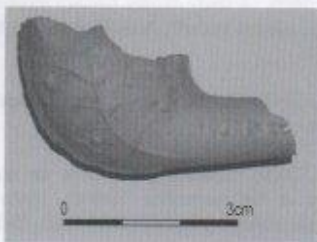


Figure 18: This pipe has a white clay bowl and a fragment of stem. The upper part of the bowl and end of the stem is missing. The bowl wall is 4mm thick at the break and a raised vertical spine is moulded on the front. One side of the bowl is decorated with raised trefoil leaves, the opposite side appears to have a harp. One side of the stem has an incise 100 followed by an M and a longer strip of illegible characters. The bowl is clean inside [Manoel 096].

Irish style: probably a product of McDougall of Glasgow around 1900. His model No. 100 is called 'Hibernia' (Gallagher 1987, 144).



Figure 19: Terracotta bowl with traces of a black coating; rim diameter: 25mm, height: 41mm and socket opening: 10mm. The bowl is fluted and the socket is stamped BONNAUD/MARSEILLE on the left hand side [Gb 2].

The French factory was a family business founded by Alphonse Bonnaud in 1824. It closed in 1958. This particular mark was registered on 7th April 1924 and renewed by Antoine Bonnaud on 5th February 1942 (Raphaël 2003, 166-167).

This pipe is one of two from the same factory displayed at Gharb Folklore museum. Another Bonnaud pipe was found by a farmer at Ras il-Bajda in Gozo and a fourth, a socket fragment, by museum excavators at Greeks' Gate, Mdina.

New Research Objectives

- Fortunately much of Malta has World Heritage status and there is a continual maintenance programme in progress. Projects such as shoring up the medieval bastion at Mdina and preserving the sophisticated quarantine system off Marsamxett harbour mean that archaeologists are working alongside developers. They frequently reveal pipes.
- Marine archaeology is well developed on the island and excavations undertaken for twenty-first century conversions, for example adapting the Knights Galley creek as a modern marina, are revealing many more artefacts.
- Expertise is shared with European colleagues on a regular basis.
- One future project, planned with the support of the Superintendent of Antiquities in Malta and with technical assistance from Glasgow University, is to test selected pipes excavated on the island or off its coast, for traces of cannabis and opium, as attested in archival records and by verbal tradition.

Principal Collections

- Heritage Malta and Superintendent of Antiquities: 349 pipes in all, mostly in reserve.

- Birgu Maritime Museum: display of small excavated group from Dockyard Creek.
- Gharb Folklore Museum, Gozo: private collection on display.

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