

Superintendence of Cultural Heritage,
173 St. Christopher Street,
Valletta VLT2000.

7 October 2019

Two reed smoking pipes (*pipi tal-qasba*). Reference: MRK 2019 CC 15.4.19 unstratified.

Pipe 1: figure 1 (side elevation), figure 2 (plan).

A plain, undecorated artefact made of moulded beige clay. It has a bowl, stem and termination, although most of the rim is missing. The socket aperture is 8mm, a sign of an older pipe. Corrosion inside the bowl and stem indicates extensive use.

There are similar pipes from Marsaxlokk harbour and farmland at Swieqi, both in private collections, the latter dated late 18th century. Another, excavated by the Superintendency at Fort Saint Elmo (ELM 2012 zone 7), is dated late 17th century. A test excavation in Dockyard Creek in March 2002 also revealed a very similar artefact (BA1/4/104).

This style was widespread and in use over a long period.

Pipe 2: figure 3 (side elevation), figure 4 (end elevation).

This pipe, made in terracotta clay, has a complete bowl with gadrooned decoration. Above the bowl is a protruding horizontal band supporting a damaged rim. Below is the beginning of a keel. The shank and termination are missing. The broken keel has two holes, only one of which, the upper, penetrates the base of the bowl. Well used.

This style was popular throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East and similar artefacts were found in Dockyard creek (VTR 1994/32), Triq il-Fosos, Citadel, Gozo. (PUO 97, 18th – early 19th century) and others, now in a private collection, were found in the Quarantine harbour.

European pipe. Reference: KRS 2018 JB. Collected from a skip at 96 Saint Christopher Street, Valletta. Jeremy Besancon 03/10/2019.

Pipe 3: figure 5.

White clay bowl with a chipped foot. Practically all the stem is missing. The bowl has 5mm thick walls and a 17mm diameter opening. It is decorated on both sides with a seven stringed harp. The artefact is well used and heavily stained on the outside.

Recent restoration on the fabric of Fort Manoel revealed a similarly decorated 19th century pipe. Another was found at Fort Saint Elmo (ELM 2012 EST KC). In Mdina, a 'weekend retreat for the well-off', a rescue dig conducted under a collapsing bastion beneath the Verdala Palace Hotel revealed MDN 1 2008, an unstratified pipe with a large harp and two more bowls decorated with smaller harps closer to the rim. Among finds from a disused cesspit in the area between Inguanetz Street and the bastion wall near Greek's Gate is an artefact with a similar small harp, a pattern introduced around 1800 in Glasgow.



Pipi tal-qasba were never made commercially in Malta, although according to Salvu Axiq, Carmel Sacco from Wied Sara in Gozo made to order. Wooden pipes were made in Marsa. Reed pipes marked 'Bonnaud Marseille' have been found in Mdina and Xlendi, Gozo. There are also two in the Gharb Folklore Museum. Two other pipes, one from Auberge de Castille, another from Gozo, have symbols such as a stylised bird identifying place of manufacture to Varna, Bulgaria. Apart from these marks size is useful to age an artefact. Style can indicate the place of manufacture.

It looks as though these three artefacts span the 17th – 20th centuries.

JRW 28/12/2019