

Tobacco pipes: the question of antiquity

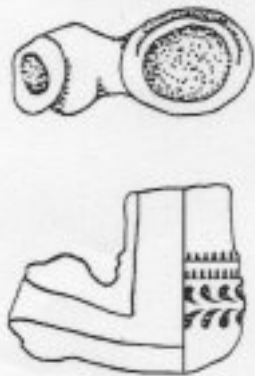


Figure 1 Mx1



Figure 2 Mx2

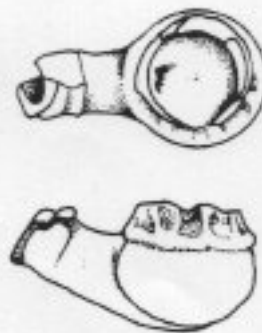


Figure 3 Wardija, Malta



Figures 1 and 2, Mx1, Mx2 have relatively small openings for the bowl and shank end. On this point as much as any other I queried the age with a colleague (St John Simpson, Assistant Keeper at the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities, British Museum).

The pipes were found in shallow water at Marsaxlokk, Malta.

Figure 1, Mx1 was published in the Society for Clay Pipe Research Newsletter No.18 (1988), p34, as a general request for information. There was no specific response. The pipe has practically no keel, the v shape being accentuated by a scribed line. St.J.S. agrees that a 17th century date is possible. The simple decoration is not helpful in ascribing a closer date.

Figure 2, Mx2 appeared in the International Journal of Nautical Archaeology (1986) 15,4: 347, as an unidentified artefact. Response was too general to be useful for dating but St.J.S. thinks an 18th century date is also feasible for this example. As he says it is slightly frustrating not to be more precise!

Figure 3, This pipe from Wardija, Malta, has similar dimensions to the above and like Mx1 only has a scratched line to indicate where the bowl joins the shank. Shank opening 9mm. Rim missing, bowl and shank damaged. At the base of the rim is a crudely done decoration of vertical finger marks. The clay is gritty orange with a darker biscuit like crust.

The earliest pipes?

If tobacco pipes existed in Malta before the 17th century I am sure they were rare. Imported tobacco would have been expensive and experimentation with other substances unlikely until people became addicted to tobacco. Whilst on the one hand a craze can spread like wild fire it is usually tempered by the natural conservatism of society. The written and illustrated records may be the best way to answer the question.