

Tobacco Pipes

The origins of the tobacco pipe are still somewhat a mystery, despite their presence across all continents for thousands of years. It seems as though nobody can accurately date the first appearances of the pipe. The first tobacco pipes found in Europe, c. 500 BC, were made of wooden stems or reed. The Scythians used them to inhale the smoke from campfires. Greeks and Romans adopted the tobacco pipe, as well as Germanic peoples and Celtic tribes, who used them to smoke all sorts of herbs.

Tobacco, as we know it today, and the culture that surrounds it, come from America. American-Indians cultivated this plant as a medicinal treatment, but also to smoke it. They rolled up tobacco leaves in the shape of a large cigar that they called 'tabaco'. They burned these tobacco leaves, along with the other herbs, in their famous tobacco pipe, which we now know as the 'calumet'. The tobacco plant still didn't exist in Europe. In 1492 Columbus discovered the plant on his expedition in America and reported it to Europe, and afterwards, the first manufacturing of tobacco pipes was registered.

The first manufactured pipes were made of clay, and mostly came from Northern Europe, at around the end of the 1500s. In the early 1600s, William Baernelts moved from England to Holland to launch the first mass production of clay pipes. Production then expanded to England and the south of France. After the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the first clay pipes were made in Dunkirk and Dieppe, replicating the Dutch design. Due to its free port status, Dunkirk played a key role in receiving tobacco from North America, and distributing it across the territory. Saint Malo adopted the English technique. These two production techniques expanded across the rest of France, and other manufacturers quickly appeared.

Throughout the later 1700s, tobacco, which until then was in powdered form and was snuffed, became smoking tobacco. Tobacco consumption and the production of pipes then increased considerably. Napoleon arranged for the creation of a tobacco pipe designed for combat soldiers. Heather was discovered for the fabrication of tobacco pipes in 1856, and great manufacturers like Butz-Choquin and Chacom made Saint Claude, France, the world capital of tobacco pipes.

During the 1900s, the pipe officially entered the army and became something of a trademark of WWI French soldiers and British officers. The pipe then became an accessory for philosophers, writers, and thinkers in general. Jean-Paul Sartre, Bourbil, Georges Brassens, Jacques Audiard, Lino Ventura, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, and plenty of others...were all pipe smokers.

