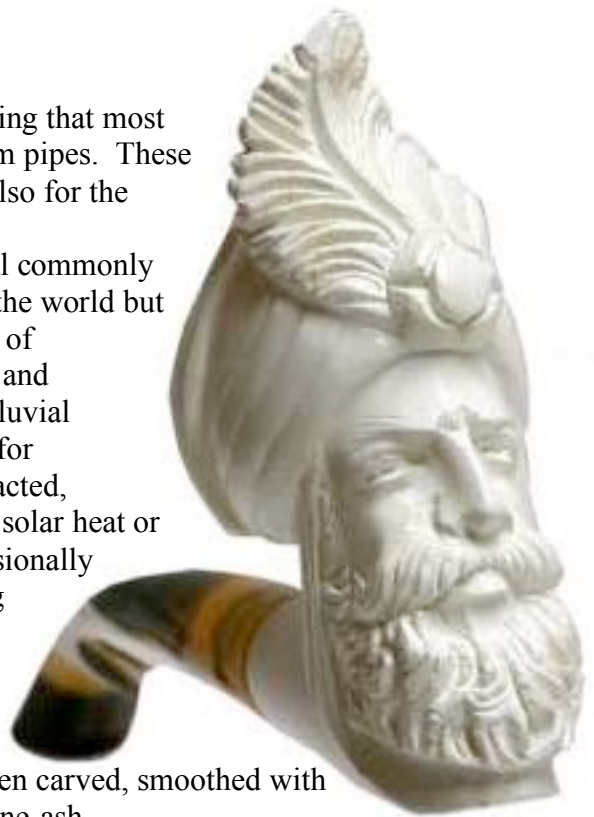


Meerschaum Pipes

While you may not be a smoker yourself, one thing that most people can't miss at a bazaar is the sight of Meerschaum pipes. These pipes are distinctive not only for their white color, but also for the fantastic designs that the material is carved into.

The material Meerschaum is a soft white mineral commonly known as Sepiolite. It can be found in various parts of the world but is primarily found in Asia Minor, chiefly from the plain of Eskisehir in Turkey, which is located between Istanbul and Ankara. It occurs there in irregular nodular masses in alluvial deposits. It is estimated that there are over 4000 shafts for Meerschaum mining in the region. When it is first extracted, Meerschaum is soft, but it will harden when exposed to solar heat or when it is dried in a warm room. Meerschaum has occasionally been used as a substitute for soapstone and as a building material; but it is mainly used for smoking pipes and cigarette holders. When prepared for use as a pipe, the natural nodules which are encrusted with earth are scraped away and then dried. After drying it is scraped again and polished with wax. The chunky masses are then carved, smoothed with glass-paper, heated in wax, and finally polished with bone-ash.



Why do they use Meerschaum for pipes?

Meerschaum has several unique qualities that make it a good pipe material. One is that it is very lightweight. As it is also a porous material it filters out a lot of the “undesirable” byproducts of burning tobacco leaves (but don't think that it makes the effects of smoking less hazardous to your health). Meerschaum also doesn't burn. For many pipe smokers they have to create a cake of carbon on the inside of the pipe bowl to protect the pipe and to protect the contamination of the tobacco flavor in the pipe. An interesting phenomenon with Meerschaum pipes is that the more they are used the more colorful the pipe becomes. As the stone absorbs the tars and other byproducts, they are drawn to the surface by the beeswax coating on the outside of the pipe. This will turn the pipe incremental shades of yellow, orange, and red from the base on up. A video of the making of a Meerschaum pipe can be found here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqBD4ICHUJo>



A Utah Connection?

Meerschaum is found in Utah but it is not commercially mined. You can find deposits in the valleys along the Green River and in the following canyon regions: Indian Canyon in Duchesne County, Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons in Salt Lake County, White Canyon in San Juan County, and Deep Creek Mountains and in the Oquirrh Mountains in Toole County.