

Lampworking

Colored glass has its roots as far back as ancient Egypt around 3000 years ago. The Egyptians pressed glass for perfume bottles, beads, and a wide variety of other uses. Glass was preferred over pottery. They discovered that by heating silica (sand, quartz) with potash, the silica could be fused. It wasn't until between 1554 BC and 1075 BC that the Egyptians discovered how to make clear glass. At this point in time they learned that they could cast this new glass into rods and while hot, mold them around cores to create vessels. The colors they created were more accidental than design due to the impurities in the materials they used. Color could be somewhat controlled by heating or cooling.

The blowing iron came into use somewhere in the second century BC. This allowed the artisans to attach a blob of glass to the end of a tube and blow air into it. The glass could be easily shaped by heating, blowing, rotating, and then repeating the process again until the desired shape was achieved.

By the first century AD, it was discovered how to make glass transparent and colorless. Color could be controlled by adding certain oxides.

Lampworking is taking glass bits and rods, and manipulating it a flame. The term Lampworking is a generic term. In early days beads and vessels were made in earthen kilns. Late period items were made over the flames of oil or wax lamps with air added directly to the flame either by blowing into a tube or use of a bellows. It was the use of lamps where the term lampworking was introduced. Today we use any number of torches.

Lampworking can be found in every culture from early man to present day. Beads have found use as currency, used for adornment, and found homes in magic and religion. Core formed vessels were used to hold perfumes, carry medicines, or used as talismans to ward off evil spirits.

Formulas for glass and the techniques to manipulate glass were highly guarded. In Venice in 1291 the government dictated that the glass center was going to be on the island of Murano. These techniques and formulas were so guarded that if a glassworker were to leave, their families could be sent to jail, or they themselves could be hunted down and assassinated.

The format for making a bead has not really changed since ancient times. You need a metal rod with the end coated in clay. You need a heat source, glass and few simple tools.

In the SCA we don't have to worry about getting carted off to jail for sharing knowledge. In fact we love to share it. Here you can learn to make beads and manipulate glass in a period kiln (after you have researched and learned how to make one), or learn over a modern torch.



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