

## Stained Glass

There is a story that was told by Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD) of a ship carrying a cargo of natural soda that made shore for the night. Having nothing to hold their pots and pans on for cooking, the crew took several blocks of the soda and placed them over the fire. The blocks, mixed with sand began to heat up and the crew saw a strange liquid begin to flow. This was the discovery of glass. Who knows if it is true or not, but it is an interesting tale. What we do know is that glass has been around for a very long time.

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 sand 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.

The Romans had also been working with flat glass in the first century AD. They had inserted small pieces of colored glass into mounts for decoration. The Muslims used the flat glass to make mosaics in windows.

The earliest known pictorial glass is from records dating back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest remnants were of a depiction of Christ's head from the Lorsch Abbey in the Rhineland (France) dated between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century. Medieval stained glass was not used to pass light but more to capture and reflect it and really did not take off until the Middle Ages in Paris. The Abbot Suger commissioned the windows for the Abbey Church of St. Denis between 1144 and 1151, starting the stained glass trend. Soon after that windows were commissioned for the Charters, Bouges, and Le Mans cathedrals. Stained glass reached its peak in the Middle Ages between 1130 and 1330. Popular scenes were iconic and religious. Another popular style is called a "rose" such as the one commissioned at St Denis. Most rose windows use one of two themes: either the glorification of Christ and the Virgin or Christ as the apocalyptic judge. Sources of inspiration of stained glass come largely from the Bible.

In the SCA you have the opportunity to explore this wonderful topic either on your own or with others that share the same interest. You will be amazed and gain a keen

understanding of the complexities of what goes into the making of a period stained glass panel. Perhaps you might even try making a piece or two of your own from what you have learned.



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