

Herati Glass

Glass production in Herat still operates on the same lines it has for hundreds of years. A one-room workshop with a single mud-brick furnace. In 1968, glass production had been reduced to just several small factories, with one run by a family who had made glass continually for two hundred years.

The technique of traditional Herati glass-making uses methods that are similar to those found on cuneiform tablets. Like Istalifi ceramics, production involves the making of a natural glaze made of white quartz (mined from riverbeds) and the ash from a desert bush known as *Ishkar*. This *Ishkar* is piled into a pit and burnt. The ashes collect in the ground and are left to cool over night. Historically, this *Ishkar* was produced by nomadic peoples in northern Afghanistan. Most of their *Ishkar* would be used to make soap, but it would also be sold to glass-blowers and potters for glaze-making. Glass-blowers choose the best *Ishkar* by tasting it – that which has a ‘sweet taste’ is supposed to be the best!

These two items are then mixed with copper to create the blue glaze. The glassblowing itself involves blowing sharp bursts of air through a long metal pipe to inflate molten glass into a bubble (known as a *parison*). The glass is then rolled on a steel slab, known as a *marver*, to cool it down and to allow for being moulded into different shapes.

Today, this Herati glass is still made by hand, although some glassblowers use chemical glazes instead of the *Ishkar* technique of old. The glassware is proving popular in European markets, and it is hoped that this living cultural heritage will survive for many centuries to come.