

THE MÜHSAM COLLECTION

by John P. Smith



Figure 1. Map of Europe showing glassmaking centers in the 17th and 18th centuries. Mallet & Son (Antiques) Ltd.

UNDOUBTEDLY THE GREATEST glass collector of all time, who had the good luck to collect before it was realised that glass was a worthy medium to be judged alongside silver or porcelain, was Felix Slade, whose collection is now in the British Museum. The earliest recorded great collector of glass in post medieval times was King Ferdinand of Spain who sent 148 pieces of glass from Barcelona to Queen Isabella at Alcala de Henares in 1503. Above two hundred years later King Christian of Denmark, in 1707, visited Murano and purchased an outstanding collection of Venetian glass to add to his German engraved glass which he arranged in a room in Rosenborg Castle outside Copenhagen, where it remains to this day. These were both collectors of 'contemporary' glass, equivalent to someone walking into Steuben today and purchase examples of every one of their finest objects.

The three major public collections of European glass in the world are in The Corning Museum of Glass in New York State, the most extensive, followed by those in the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum, both in London. Other really comprehensive collections are in the Prague, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, New York (The Metropolitan), Ecouen (Near Paris) and Berlin Museums. All these collections are well known and published. But few people in the United States will realise that North America has the greatest collection of European engraved glass assembled by one collector.

There are several great private collections which have been dispersed, Biemann, Krug and Walter Smith spring to mind, a very few remain in private hands such as the collection of Rudolf von Strasser but after Slade only three other one man collections, of exceptional importance, remain available to public view. The Strauss Collection in The Corning Museum of Glass, the Wolff Collection which was acquired a few years ago by the German city of Stuttgart for the Wurttembergisches Landes Museum for a reputed 30 million dollars, and the collection which is the subject of this article,

Jacques Mühsam's. He was a German who built his collection between the late 19th century and 1926 ending with 734 glasses.

Jacques Mühsam, who also collected furniture, was a shadowy figure about whom little is known. A catalogue of his collection was written by Dr. Robert Schmidt (the great German authority and sometime Director of the Kunstgewerbe Museum, Berlin) in 1914 with a small run of 250 copies which describes 408 glasses. The

Great War intervened and by the time Dr. Schmidt wrote volume II in 1926 he was able to describe another 326 glasses. In 1927 the collection was bought jointly by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the Art Institute of Chicago and came to America each organisation taking roughly half the glasses, where they remain to this day, except for 39 glasses which were sold by the Metropolitan to the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia in 1972/3.

This collection remains largely unknown both to specialists and the general public and apart from Schmidt's early publication and an article by C. Louise Avery in the Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, January 1928, the collection has remained virtually un-noticed. In her article Miss Avery quoted Dr. Schmidt 'Having devoted years of experience to all phases of glassware, it has been my privilege to become acquainted with and to study all the important collections of glass, both on the Continent and in England. I have no hesitation in asserting that the collection of Mr. J. Mühsam is superior to them all not only as regards the number of specimens collected, but especially as to their quality. Even the rich and well known collections of the museums at Berlin, Vienna and London are surpassed by it in almost every respect. The Bohemian-Silesian cut-glass drinking vessels starting from their earliest period are especially well represented. The same can be said about the extremely valuable specimens from Potsdam and Hesse and the other German

districts where the glass industry has been carried on. The category of the Bohemian gold glasses, including all its various specialties, is quite unique. There are also very fine examples of the Kunckel ruby glasses; the Mohn, Mildner and Kothgasser glasses form a splendid and complete group of their own. As to number and quality the exquisite group of the Dutch glasses (Greenwood, Wolff, & c.) can in every way compete with the large collection of the Ryks Museum at Amsterdam. There is hardly a collection in any of the museums which can boast of such perfect examples of the green Gothic so-called 'Waldglass'; and a series of enamelled tumblers and jugs of the German renaissance and baroque style at its very best.'

The Metropolitan Museum also owns a small collection of glass assembled by Robert Lehman containing 136 objects, some of very minor importance. This has recently been superbly catalogued by Dwight Lanmon, formerly director of Corning and now Wintertur, however in both monetary and historical terms the Lehman collection of glass is probably worth between one fifth and one tenth of the Mühsam collection.

THE MAJORITY OF GLASS OBJECTS IN THE PAST AND NOW ARE sold undecorated to be used every day and are collected as 'form' glasses. However the transparency of glass makes it an ideal medium for different forms of decoration and highly decorated glasses have always been in demand by the important and the wealthy. It was these latter European glasses which Jacques Mühsam collected, mainly dating from 1550 to 1850. *Figure 1* shows the major glass producing areas of Europe which were active for at least part of this period.

Dr. Schmidt in his catalogues divides his analysis into types of decoration rather than date or area of manufacture and this article will do the same. During manufacture (hot working) the vessel can be transformed by shaping with tools, trailing or blobbing, moulding and pincering. These techniques give the basic form upon which the cold worker, the decorator, can work. Probably the easiest, and one of the earliest forms of decoration is 'diamond point', where a sharp point, formally a diamond but nowadays a steel or tungsten carbide, is used to scratch the surface of the glass. This technique has been used wherever the glass has been made and continues to this day.

Diamond point engraving was practised by both amateurs and professional artists, using calligraphy, formal designs, heraldry, portraits and scenes, both of land and sea. Gentlemen would write toasts to their ladies after dinner using diamond rings on the glass. Talented amateur calligraphers such as the Dutchman Willem van Heemskerck would cover bottles with texts in flowing script. As toasting was *de rigueur*, after dinner glasses would be engraved with love allegories, benedictions on trade and commerce, commemorations and even the occasional bawdy scene. Life might be short in those days and convivial evenings – glass in hand – with family or guild, were universally popular.

Figure 2 shows a wonderful unsigned glass 14½ in (37cm) high made in Nuremberg in 1660 and attributed to Georg

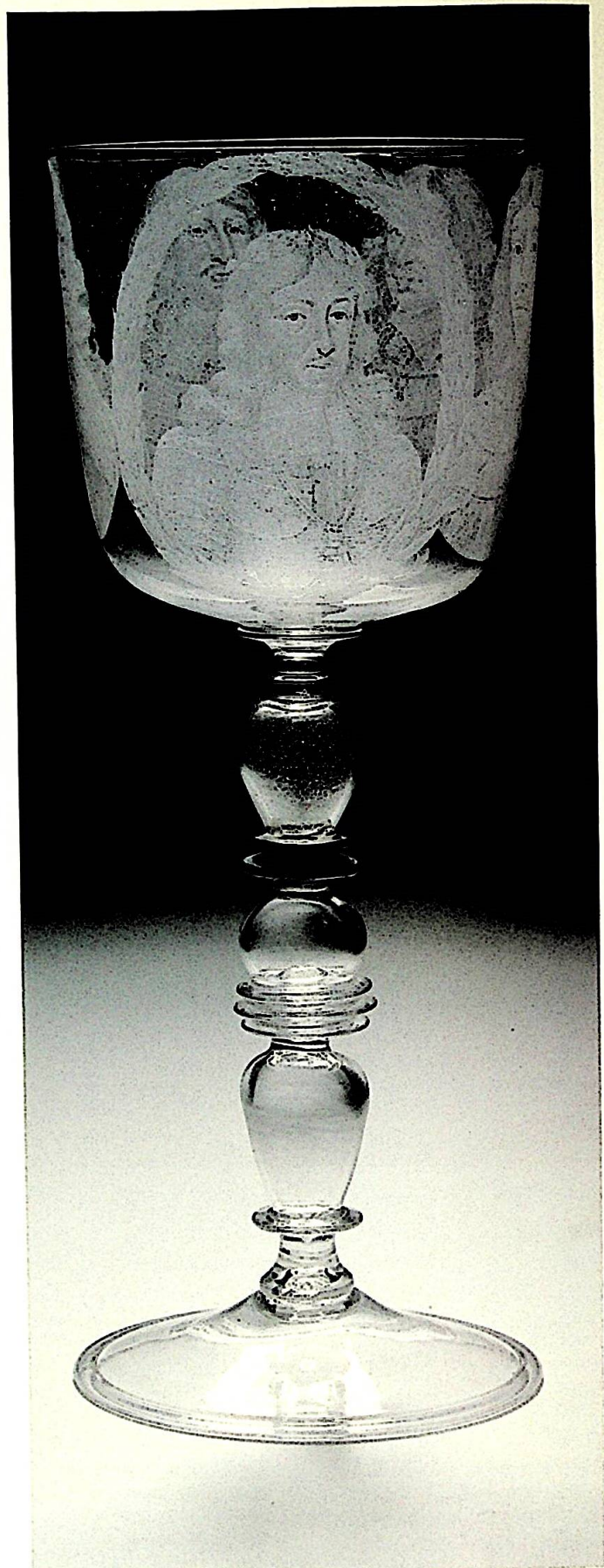


Figure 2. Diamond-point, Nuremberg circa 1660. *The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J. and A.N. Roscnwald.*

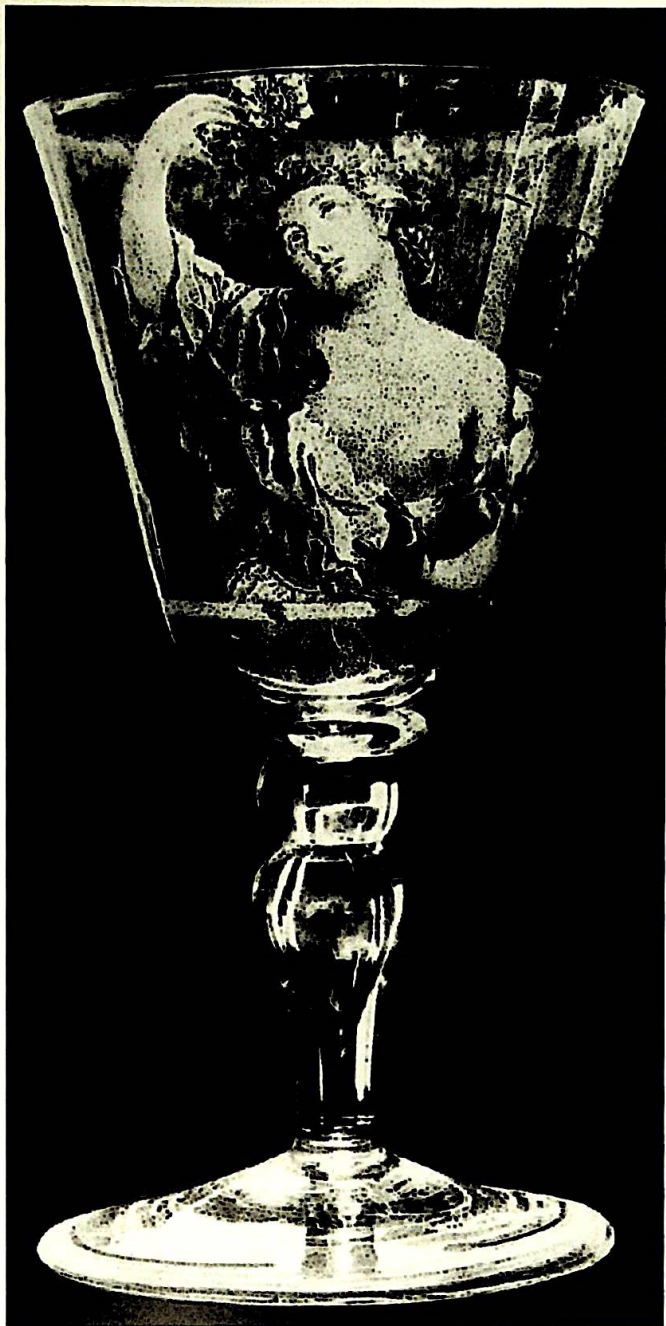


Figure 3. Stipple engraved, Netherlands; signed F. Greenwood.⁴ 1728.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Munsey bequest.
Photo: Sheppard & Cooper Ltd.

Schwanhardt the elder, engraved with five busts, of Emperor Leopold I and the four electors of the Holy Roman Empire, Johann Georg II of Saxony, Carl Ludwig of The Palatine, Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg and Ferdinand Maria of Bavaria. The glass with its highly convoluted stem, typical of production in Nuremberg at this time, has had the lower part of its stem replaced following a breakage.

Fashions in glass in Europe at this time were extremely localised, it would be nearly 200 years before the principalities of Germany would unify into one state under Bismark and even then the country was torn into two for over 40

years recently. These tall glasses, with a string of hollow spheres in the stem were produced in Nuremberg for nearly 100 years commencing around 1625 and were often lidded.

THE NEXT TYPE OF ENGRAVING DISCUSSED BY SCHMIDT IS stipple engraving. In this technique the engraver stipples or bounces his diamond point across the glass giving an extraordinarily delicate representation which barely disturbs the surface of the glass. This technique is unbelievably time consuming, a square inch of glass requiring days to cover and was virtually an exclusive Dutch form of decoration until the 20th century. Figure 3 shows a glass by the great Dutch master Frans Greenwood (1680-1763) 8½in (21cm) high engraved in 1728 with a likeness of the goddess of the Dutch river Maas portrayed as Flora, the Roman goddess of blossom. The reverse shows a view of a park, a fountain, urns and trees. The foot of the goblet is engraved:-

Verwekte 't schoon der Bloemgodin
Oit aan den Tyber grooter min,
Dan nu't op 't glas door Greenwoods hant
De Maasstroombgodin zet in Brant?
Maar, Schoonheit, wat is toch uw roem?
De teerheit van een glas, of Bloem?
K. Boon van Engel
F. Greenwood
1728

*Did the beauty of the Flower Goddess
on the Tiber ever excite greater love
Than now ignited in the Goddess of River Maas
By Greenwood's hand on this glass?
But, Beauty, what really is your fame?
The fragility of a glass or the delicacy of a flower?*

Another great Dutch stipple-engraver two generations later was David Wolff. Figure 4 illustrates a small wine glass decorated by him in 1795 towards the end of his life with a Batavian shaking hands with a French soldier between a lance topped by the hat of liberty. The reverse has the following inscription:-

VRVHEID, GELYKHEID, EN BROEDERSCHAP.
ONS' HULP O BATAVIER!
RED' U! UYT SLAVERNY.
WY WIERDEN T'ZAAM=GEDRUKT,
TANS ZYN WY BYDE VRY.
D : Wolff 17 1/26 95

*Freedom, Equality and Fraternity
Our help, oh Batavian!
Saves you from slavery.
We were both oppressed,
Now we are both free.*

Soon after 1800 the art was lost until revived by Lawrence Whistler in England in the 1930's.

The most universally common form of glass decoration was carried out with a small copper wheel rotated by a foot treadle, or, in larger workshops, using water power. The wheel was fed with water and a fine abrasive sand and it is this sand which grinds away the glass. A skilled engraver using a variety of different shape copper wheels can achieve the most life-like effects.

Figure 5 shows a covered goblet decorated in this tech-

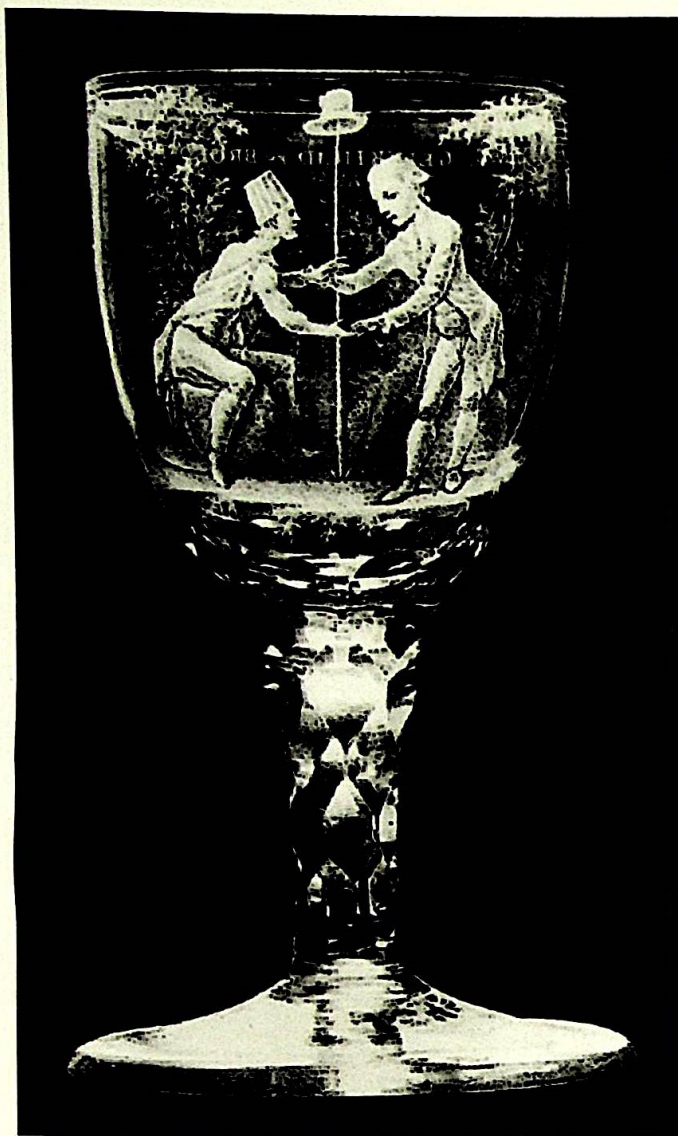


Figure 4. Stipple engraved, Netherlands, signed D. Wolff. *The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J. and A.N. Rosenwald. Photo: Sheppard & Cooper Ltd.*

nique with formal patterns and flowers and a prancing dog. The glass was made in Reichenberg around 1725. This type of engraving is also known as 'intaglio' engraving. However, it is also possible to cut away the ground leaving the image in relief as was done in quartz rock crystal. This technique is known in German as 'Hochschnitt' and this term is often used by English speaking writers. This type of engraving is very time consuming and hence much rarer than intaglio engraving.

The majority of these glasses are wheel engraved with small formal, classically derived patterns, as the copper wheels were small and the technique is not really suited to straight geometrical designs of the type known to us today as 'cut glass'. This needed large stone wheels, continental Europe using the over-hand technique, that is with the large wheels above the glass as in copper wheel engraving, while the English cutters used an under-hand technique, where the cutter presses the glass onto the wheel while looking through, rather than at, the glass.

Figure 6 shows a particularly attractive sweetmeat glass from a garniture for desert made in Silesia around 1760. *En suite* with this are two small decanters and a covered jar. This glass, with its parrot handle, would have been placed on a nobleman's table after dinner to serve crystallized fruits. This is one of the few vessels in the collection which is not a drinking glass and a fine example of *Hochschnitt* cutting. This form is known in silver and rock-crystal in the 17th and 18th centuries, and was reproduced by the Austrian firm of Lobmeyr in the 19th century. The high cost of this type of decoration meant that by 1800 production had ceased until it was briefly revived at the end of the 19th century in Stourbridge, England, as 'rock-crystal' engraving, leading to such masterpieces as the Fritsche Ewer, now in the Corning Glass Museum.

Figure 7 shows a covered goblet 12½in (32.2cm) high by Holland's most accomplished copper wheel engraver of the 18th century, Jacob Sang, Schmidt writes that the scene depicts Diana and Callisto, typical of mythological scenes which were favourite subjects for the engravers of the period. This scene would almost certainly be taken from a contemporary engraving and the glass is signed 'JACOB SANG, inv: et Fec: Amsterdam, 1752'. Jacob Sang worked in Amsterdam, although little is known about his life. Rather more is known about his relative, possibly a brother, Simon Jacob Sang who was born in Erfurt in 1720 and granted citizenship in Amsterdam in 1749. Simon Jacob Sang signed only four known glasses but Jacob Sang signed over 76 known examples, dating from 1750 to 1783, although it appears he was still working in 1794. His is a distinctive hand of the highest quality, his treatment of water and lettering being particularly distinctive.

ALL THE TECHNIQUES SO FAR DESCRIBED INVOLVE DISTURBING or partially removing the surface of the glass, however the surface can be used as a base for further decoration. The easiest way is to paint the surface either with oil paint or oil gilding. This was quite often done, particularly in Hall, Austria as well as Venice however this is a very fragile form of decoration as the result is rather impermanent and may disappear with washing. A much more stable method is to fire on enamel or gilding similar to decorated porcelain. This gives a permanent finish but is technically rather difficult. If the firing temperature is too low the enamel will not fuse properly leaving a granular appearance and if the firing temperature is too high the whole vessel will sag and distort.

Figure 8 shows a large early Rhineland romer made in green 'waldglas'. Following the decline of the Roman empire vestiges of the large Roman glass industry remained in the forests of Europe. By the 14th century many of the forest areas were supporting small glasshouses, using local clay for the pots, wood for the furnaces, wood ash and burnt braken for the alkalis, and river sand for the silica. The iron impurities in the sand gives *waldglas* its characteristic green color. The German and low countries glass forms followed in steady progression and figure 8 is typical of the mid 17th century. In Dutch paintings of the period they are always shown containing white wine, white clear glass flutes containing red

Figure 5 (Opposite). Wheel engraved, Reichenberg circa 1725. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Munsey bequest.*



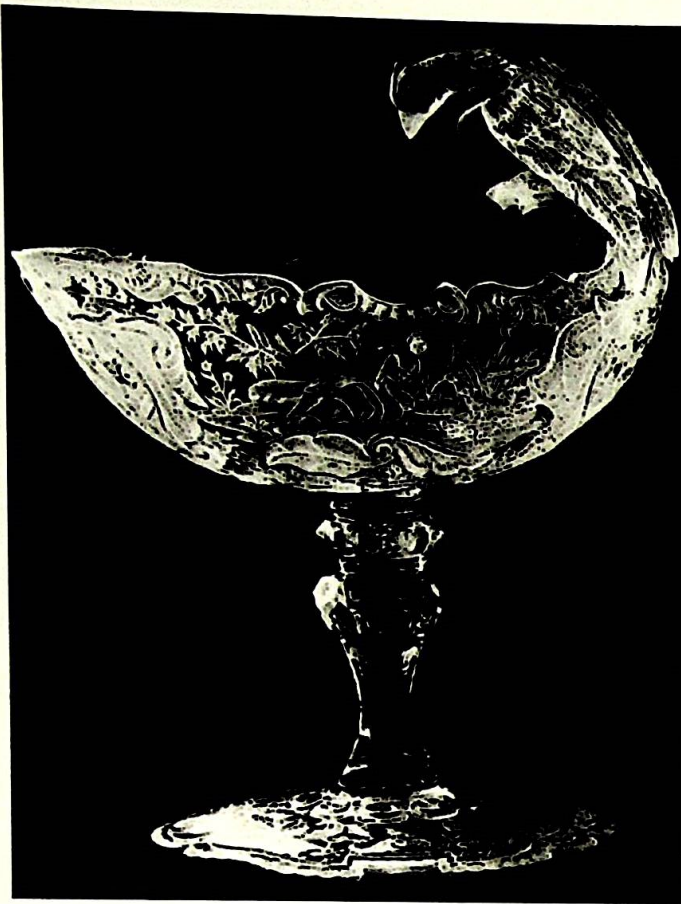


Figure 6. Hochschnitt wheel engraved, Silesia circa 1760, The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J. and A.N. Rosenwald. Photo: Sheppard & Cooper Ltd.

wine. (The clear glass was made in a less primitive and under more sophisticated factory-like circumstances than Waldglas which was made in clearings in the woods). The bowl is beautifully decorated with fired gilding or figures of a fisherman, a soldier, a King and a cripple with the associated inscriptions:

Ich hab' der List so vill erdacht, bis ich den Fisch in die Reusen bracht.

I have thought of many tricks, until the fish caught in the trap.

Gutter Gesell, ist Dir der Fisch nit feil, verkauff mir doch das Untertheil.

Old Chap, if you can't sell me fish, why don't you offer me the trap.

Alles Fleisch wolt ich gern vergesen, geb man solchen Fisch in Kloster zue Esen.

I gladly abstained all meat, if cloisters served such fish.

Diese Fisch haben gemacht, das ich auff Kruchken kruch hernach.

Such fish have made me creep along on crutches in the end.

Gilding was used throughout Europe, using a similar technique to gilding porcelain. The gold leaf was ground and applied using a carrying medium, often honey. The glass was then fired to soften the surface and fix the gold and on cooling the gilding was often burnished.

Enamelling glass was carried out throughout Europe but it

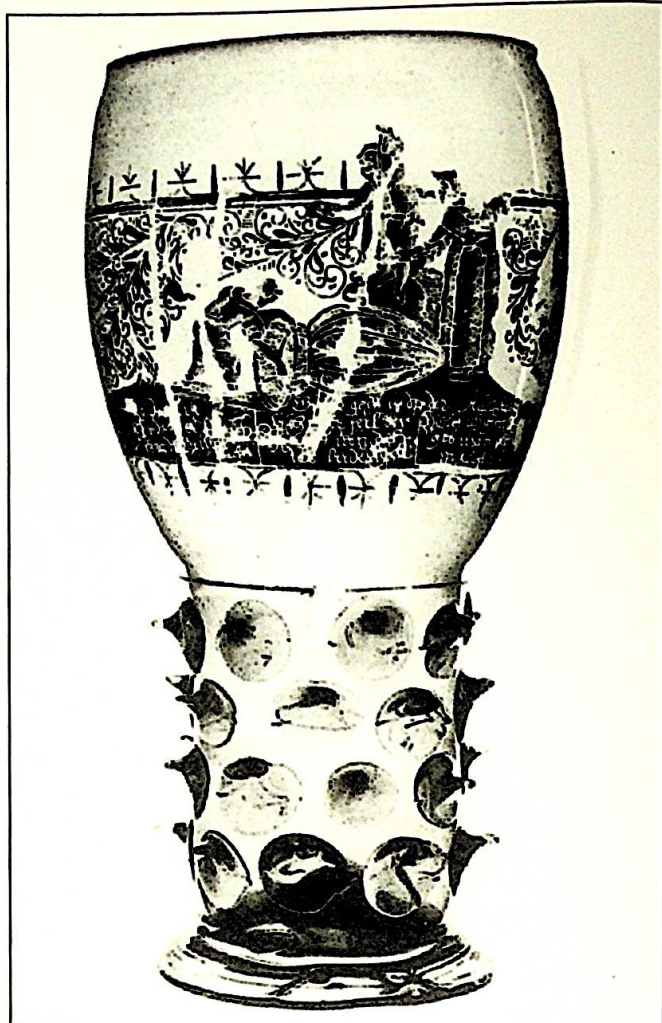


Figure 7 (opposite). Wheel engraved, Netherlands; signed Jacob Sang 1752. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J and A.N. Rosenwald.

Figure 8 (above) Gilding, Rhineland early 17th century. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J and A.N. Rosenwald. Photo: Christie, Manson & Wood Ltd.

was particularly popular in Bohemia from the 16th century onwards where large beer glasses or 'humpen' were made which were used at convivial evenings much loved by the German guilds of the period.

Figure 9 shows three such humpen, the glass illustrated on the left, dated 1695, contains four scenes labelled:-

Wo die Soldaten sieden und braten
Und die Pfaffen ins Weltliche rathen
Und die Weiber fuhren das Regiment
Da nimpt es alzeit ein schlecht End.

Which translates into colloquial American as:-

*When G.I's simmer and stew
And priests do worldly bend
When broads the bossing do
All comes to no good end.*

The center glass was made in Bohemia around 1600 and describes the ten ages of man (three more than Shakespeare allotted) with the inscriptions:-





Figure 9. Enamelled, Bohemia, left to right: 1695; circa 1600; 1597. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Munsey bequest. Photo: Christie, Manson & Wood Ltd.

10 JAR EIN KINDT	10 years a child
20 JAR EIN JUNGLING	20 years a youth
30 JAR EIN MAN	30 years a man
40 JAR WOLGETHAN	40 years accomplished
50 JAR STILLESTAHN	50 years stand-still
60 JAR GEHETS ALTER AN	60 years old age arrives
70 JAR EIN GREIS	70 years an old man



Figure 10. Enamelled, Austria Sigismund Mohn 1814. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of J. and A.N. Rosenwald. Photo: Sheppard & Cooper Ltd.

Figure 11 (Opposite) *Zwischengoldglas*, Saxony circa 1725. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Munsey bequest.

80 JAR NIMMER WEIS	80 years no longer wise
90 KINDER SPOT	90 years children's scorn
100 HAR GENAD DIR GOTT	100 years god have mercy

The right hand glass shows the German double headed eagle and coats of arms and is inscribed:-

DAS HEILIGE ROEMISCHE REICH MIT SAMPT
SEINEN GLIDERN 1587.
The Holy Roman Empire with all its constituents 1587.

This latter is the most common subject of surviving glasses.

Although all these humpen are of colorless glass enamelling was often carried out on colored glass, particularly cobalt blue glass, and jugs, *steins*, bottles, wine glasses, drinking horns and vases are all known using this technique.

So far all the glasses discussed have been pre 1800. However, Jacques Mühsam's interest continued into the 19th century and he had several fine examples by the Austrian enamellists Anton Kothgasser, Sigismund Mohn and Gottlob Samuel Mohn. These are often topographical and figure 10 shows a glass signed by Sigismund Mohn in 1814 showing the battle plan for the battle of Leipzig which took place between the 16th and 19th October 1813. Following his retreat from Russia this was Napoleon's first defeat by the allied armies lead by Blucher, Schwartzenberg and Bernadotte.

FINALLY WE COME TO THE MOST COMPLICATED TECHNIQUE of all, '*Zwischengoldglas*', a German term which is also used by English writers as any translation is extremely awkward. In this technique a glass vessel is made with a liner which fits its shape exactly so that when the liner is cemented to the glass a permanent seal is effected. The inner surface of the glass is then cold decorated usually using gold foil, but paint and silver foil are often used as well resulting in a permanently bright ornamentation. Figure 11 shows a fine beaker decorated with the coat of arms of Ernst Ludwig I. of Sachsen-Meiningen or his son Ernst Ludwig II dating the glass to circa 1725.

Chicago have currently on display 79 glasses from The Mühsam collection in their exciting new European Decorative Arts gallery and The Metropolitan, New York are displaying 20 glasses, with the remainder being held in store since 1974. In this short article I have only been able to illustrate and discuss eleven of the seven hundred and thirty four glasses formerly in the Mühsam collection. I hope that this article will increase awareness of what is one of the finest collection of European decorated glass in the world.

The Author wishes to acknowledge in the preparation of this article help from the following:-

1. Jutta-Annette Bruhn, Associate Curator, European Collections. The Corning Museum of Glass, New York State.
2. Jessie McNab, Associate Curator, European Sculpture and Decorative Arts. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
3. Rachel Russell, Associate Director. Christies, London.
4. Christopher Sheppard, Director. Sheppard & Cooper Ltd, London
5. F.G.A.M. Smit.
6. Ghenete Zelleke Associate Curator European Decorative Arts. The Art Institute of Chicago.

