



12. A HISTORY OF SWEDISH GLASS

by Gunnel Holmér, Smålands Museum



Figure 12.1 The painting entitled "The Rich Man's Table" in the Church of St. Mary in Helsingborg depicts a table set with glass in the 16th century.

GLASS BEFORE 1900

By about 2 500 BCE, the ancient Egyptians had discovered the secret of glass. To start with, they mostly made glass beads, jewellery and other small items. Gradually, however, they learnt to make hollow vessels by winding molten glass around a clay core which was removed after cooling. With the advent of the blowing iron, which is thought to have been invented in Syria at around the time of the birth of Jesus, large vessels could be produced and production became more efficient.

With the Romans, the art of glassblowing spread all the way up to Northern Europe, so that by about 100 CE flourishing glass manufacturing centres had been established in Germany, Belgium, France and England. Archaeological finds even show that Roman glass was exported to Sweden. However, with the decline and eventual fall of the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, the ancient hot shops vanished and, for the rest of the Middle Ages, glass manufacture was the province of the monks in the monasteries. Their products consisted mainly of windows for churches and the great cathedrals founded during the 12th and 13th centuries.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, glassworks once more began to spring up, many of them in the forested areas of Germany. The