

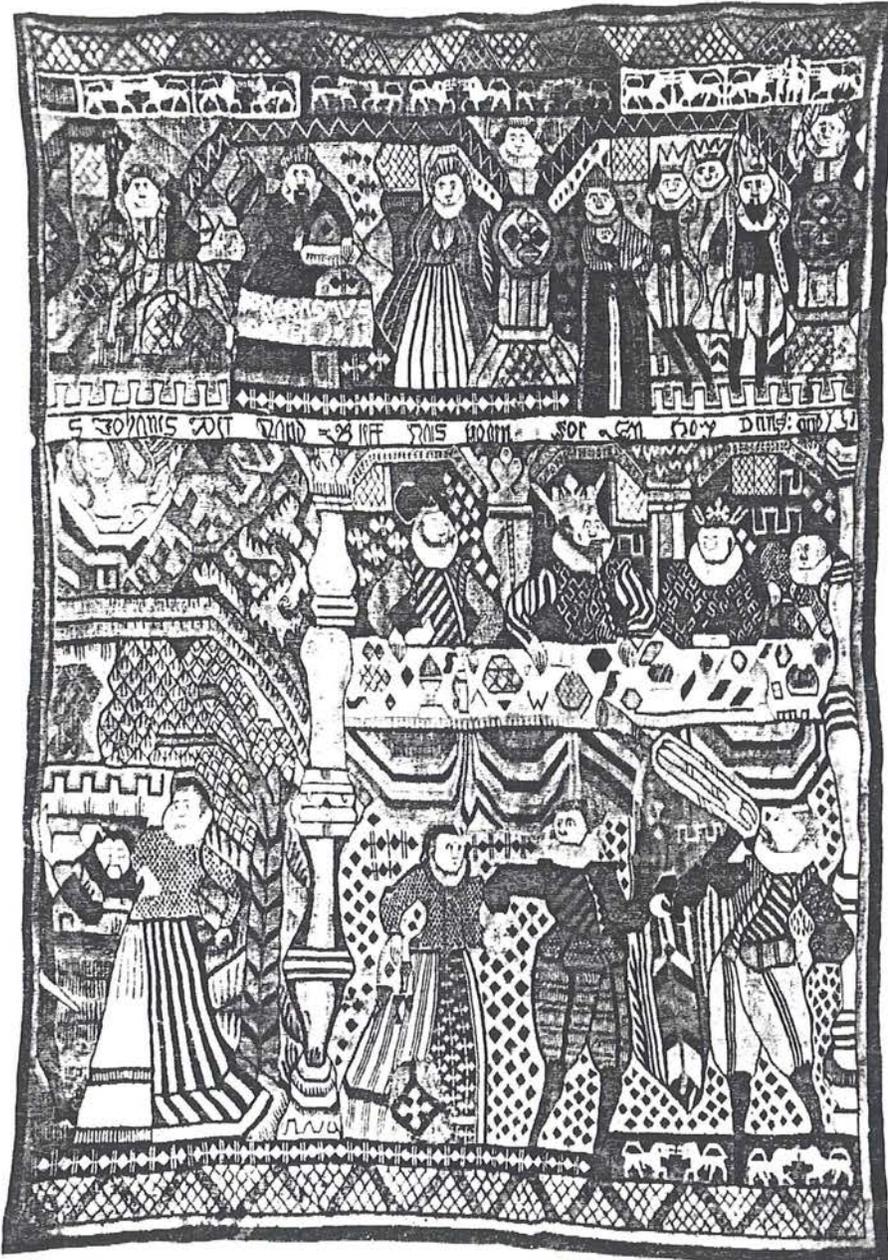
NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

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ABOUT THE HEROD TAPESTRY OF 1613 FROM SJÅK

by Roar Hauglid



from Aase Bay Sjøvold Norwegian Tapestries
Oslo: C. Huitfeldt, 1976

Norwegian tapestries preserved from the 1600s and 1700s, particularly the ones from Gudbrandsdalen, have frequently been discussed during the last few years. The discussion has focused on both the origin and the distribution of the tapestries, as well as their dates and function. In a dissertation about the use of the fireplace in Norway's countryside, I touched on these problems and expressed the opinion that it was highly unlikely that the oldest of these tapestries were made by or for the use of peasant farmers. It is erroneous to consider these an expression of peasant art, as previously assumed. Signs of homecrafted tradition from the Middle Ages as evidenced in some of them is probably due to a more underdeveloped and provincial environment. I pointed out design parallels between the tapestries and church paintings from the same period, without anyone ever calling the latter peasant art, however

primitive or medieval they look. I made the point that the above mentioned Herod tapestry from 1613 in Sjøk would most likely have been removed to its location and maybe ended up among peasants, possibly after such tapestries were no longer fashionable among the upper classes.

Contrary to the old theory, which assumed that the function of old Norwegian tapestries was connected to the custom of draping textiles on walls for formal occasions during the Viking times, I held that the origin for these tapestries must be found in towns and among rich people around the 1500s and early 1600s, and that the custom of using such tapestries among the rural lower classes hardly could have happened until much more recently.

I arrived at this almost self evident theory because the tapestries were characterized by an urban style, form and content, as I had noticed in most aspects of the younger folk art where you can observe a similar movement from town to country. There is always a certain danger associated with considering a separate art form by itself apart from its environment. If one is going to understand the tapestries and their place in folk art, one must understand the environment where they belonged and among other things how the tapestries might have been used.

Thor Kielland, in his opus about tapestries, the first volume of which was published after my dissertation, added to the old and in a way also credible theory that tapestries were used for decoration on walls. This assumption, in addition to the fact that they look like they belong in the Middle Ages, enabled Kielland to adhere to the old theory about the origin of the tapestries. Even if he granted that both form and content were

affected by new impulses from the outside, he was of the same opinion as Helen Engelstad in her books about tapestries, that the custom of hanging tapestries on walls had survived in Norway, and that the new weaving which arrived from an outside source reached a society which already had preserved such a custom, dating all the way back to the Middle Ages and the times of the Viking decorations of houses. This theory builds on an older, unclear and perhaps somewhat romantic attitude about the origin of the younger folk art and its historic connection, something which again comes from a lack of knowledge about the social and economic conditions of peasant farmers from the latter part of the 1600s, and particularly into the 1700s, and which brought about a total change in the conditions of the farmers.

In a new dissertation about fireplace, house and weaving I touched on this relationship again, and tried through a broad, critical treatment of the older tapestry theory to show that there is no scientific proof for the connection between Viking times and the Middle Ages. The oldest of the tapestries which we assume have been produced in a rural environment have probably no connection with the Middle Ages, although there is a solid connection with the provincial art of urban paintings.

In this connection I considered the above mentioned tapestry of Herod from 1613 from Sjøk (p.5), since this, according to Kielland's work, is listed as probably the oldest rural tapestry we know and I made the point that this tapestry had just as little in common with the Middle Ages as the paintings of its time, and that it was historically unacceptable to place its production in one of Gudbrandsdalen's poorest mountain valleys where people still lived in dwellings with

only a smoke hole in the ceiling over an open fireplace. "The thought that a weaving industry with cartoons and rich renaissance tapestries in the peasant huts in the north of the valley from 1660 and on has, together with the wrong dating of the 'Hjeltar cabin' (1563 should be 1763) contributed to the erroneous assumption that the acanthus flower itself budded way up in the north of valley; yes, it almost grew out of the mountain itself".

Helen Engelstad, in a commentary about my last dissertation in her more recent book about double weave in Norway tried to support the older theory about the connection between new weaving and Viking times, as well as the Middle Ages, particularly with reference to North Gudbrandsdal. She points to a series of writings from Gudbrandsdal where Flemish weavings are found even in the outermost mountain valleys and dating all the way back to the 1660s, as far back as we have written registration of property.

However, the occurrence of Flemish weaving is more rare in the oldest documents, particularly from the northern part of the valley. Most of the weavings from this period are mentioned in estate registries from the richer Fronds valleys, plus a good deal from the ministerial farm in Vågå. In the oldest estate document from North Gudbrandsdal (1658-73) Flemish weaving is only mentioned in 29 of 330 estate lists, which should indicate something about how uncommon such weavings were at that time.

In this connection we probably need to discuss whether "Flemish" weaving in the inventory lists in connection with "beddings" always means tapestry weaving in the sense we use it today. Marta Hoffmann has

discussed this issue in detail, and come to the conclusion it must mostly be so even if the vocabulary at times is vague, particularly during the 1700s or later when "Flemish" also referred to other textiles. She might be correct in her assumption, but we still need to pose the question why a compound descriptive term is used, as in "Flemish bedding with pictures", "Flemish bedspread woven in pictures" or "tapestry Flemish bedspread", etc. If "Flemish" always meant tapestry with pictures, the compound description might not have been necessary. Perhaps "Flemish" also could refer to a special yarn, maybe more expensive and finer, as we gather in a document from 1696 from the minister in Fron, Brede Hammer, where he mentions "Dogs with stories sewn with Flemish yarn" and 8 pounds "all kinds of colored Flemish yarn", estimated to be worth 8 riksdaler." There is no oral familiarity with the use of the word "Flemish weaving" in Gudbrandsdalen. However, the word "Flensweaving" is used, which could be a derivative. However, this word is not used about tapestries but about another kind of woven textiles, characterized by more ornamental decoration.

I won't dare go any deeper into this speculation. Mrs. Hoffmann's research about the question seems solid, but it does not hurt to maintain a skeptical attitude towards the written source materials from that period of time. We know from other instances that the same thing can be called by two different terms and vice versa, that the same terminology can have been used about different things.

The assumption that weaving from the 16th and 17th centuries were used as wall decorations is at the base of the old theory that the traditions have survived from Viking

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Winners in Vesterheim's Weaving Exhibition

Vesterheim Museum's 16th National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition was held on July 25-27. There was a particularly nice variety of weavings this year. Fourteen weavers entered 28 weavings. An additional six pieces were submitted by three Gold Medalists for Best of Show consideration. There were examples of *skillbragd*, *Telemarksteppe*, *billedvev*, *krokbragd*, *dansk brogd*, double weave, rosepath, *dreiel*, and rep weave. The weavings were displayed together with entries from the exhibitions of woodcarving and knifemaking.

The judges for the exhibition were Anne Holden, weaver from Valdres, Norway; Linda Elkins, weaving instructor at Luther College in Decorah; and David Kamm, assistant professor of art at Luther College. The Best of Show/HGA Award went to Jan Blesi of Wayzata, Minn., for a rep-weave wall hanging titled "Journey to Hana." The same weaving also won a Blue Ribbon. Blesi won a Red Ribbon for "Garden Trellis," a rep-weave wall hanging. A Red Ribbon went to Vivian Morrison of Antioch, Ill., for a 10-shaft *dreiel* runner/scarf in celery. Morrison also won a White Ribbon for a blue runner/scarf in 10-shaft *dreiel*. Gudrun Linden, Great Falls, Mont., won White Ribbons for her *skillbragd* wall hanging and double *krokbragd* wall hanging. Honorable Mentions went to Sally Ann Scott (NBC member) of Roseville, Minn., for a *dansk brogd* wall hanging titled "Bye, Bye Blackbird" and to Jan Mostrom (NBC member) of Chanhassen, Minn., for a *billedvev* hanging of a squirrel. Visitors to the exhibition voted for their favorite weaving. Jan Blesi's "Journey to Hana" tied with Jan Mostrom's "Dansk Brogd Flower Garden" wall hanging. Jan Blesi accumulated enough ribbon points to earn a Vesterheim Gold Medal in Weaving. Congratulations weavers!

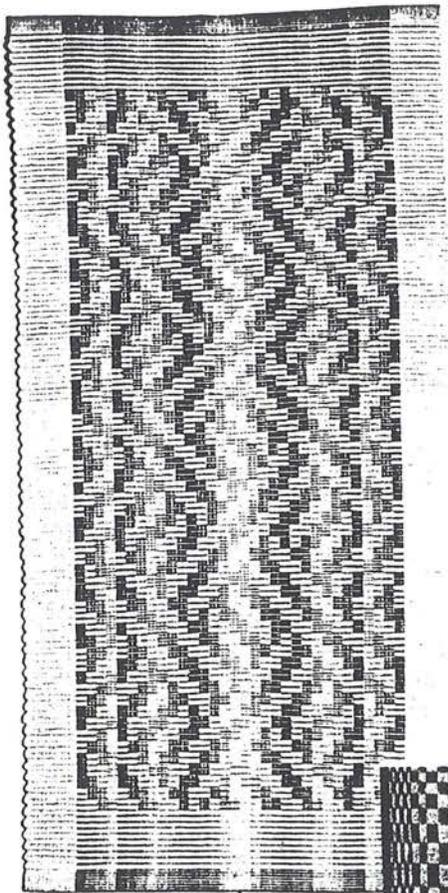
It's Conference Time!

The Norwegian Breakfast Club's first Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles is just around the corner. Have you sent in your registration form yet? There is no limit to the number of participants, but there is a limit to the amount of time left to sign up. Be sure your registration form is postmarked by October 3. If you are interested in a workshop, call the museum (319-382-9681) soon. Inge Dam's Tablet Weaving and Brocading class is full and the classes in Vestfold Technique, Dansk Brogd, and Double Weave are near capacity.

We are very grateful to the American-Scandinavian Foundation's Wigeland Fund for making it possible to bring two Norwegian scholars to the conference. The fund is providing air fare for Amy Lightfoot and Aagot Noss. Both will speak at the conference as well as at a public program at Luther College on Thursday, October 23. Aagot Noss will show her film on "Homespun Folk Dress in Setesdal, Norway" and Amy Lightfoot will show a video titled "On Dragons' Wings: Woolen Ship Sails from 1460." A special thank you goes to Luther College and Vesterheim Museum for providing additional support for Noss and Lightfoot.

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Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum's
1997 National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition



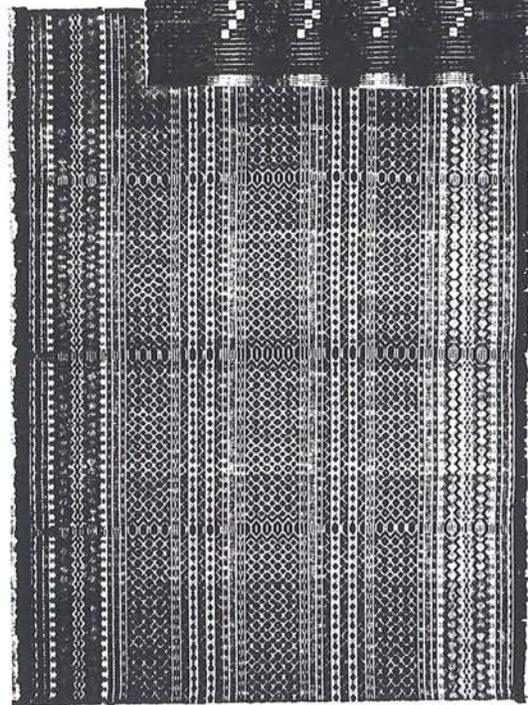
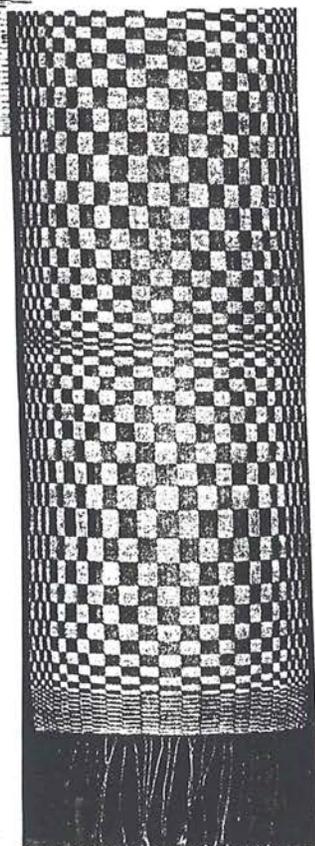
Left - *Garden Trellis*, a wall hanging in rep weave, by Jan Blesi, Wayzata, MN received a Red Ribbon.

Right - *Journey to Hana*, a wall hanging also by Jan Blesi, winner of a Blue Ribbon and Best of Show Award.



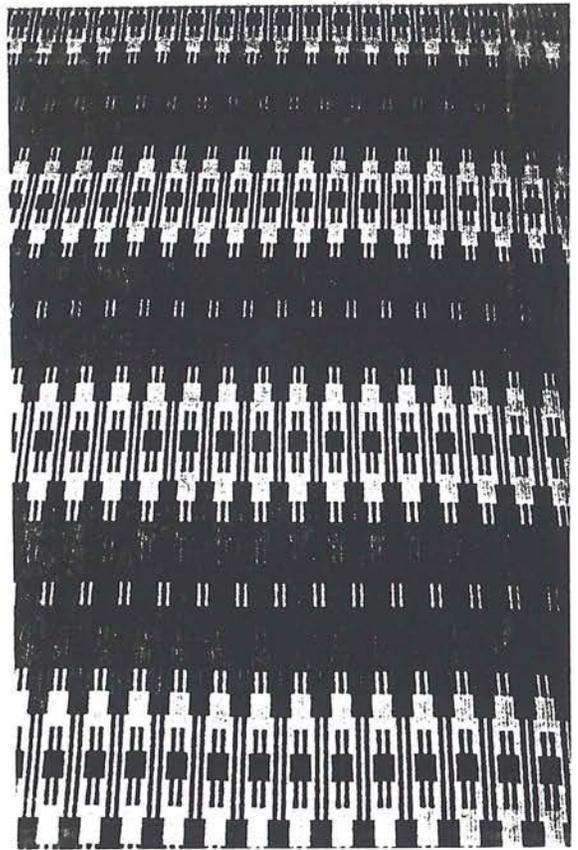
Left - A celery colored runner/scarf in 10-shaft *dreiel* technique, by Vivian Morrison, Antioch, IL winner of a Red Ribbon.

Right - A wall hanging in *skillbragd* technique, by Gudrun Linden, Great Falls, MT, winner of a White Ribbon.



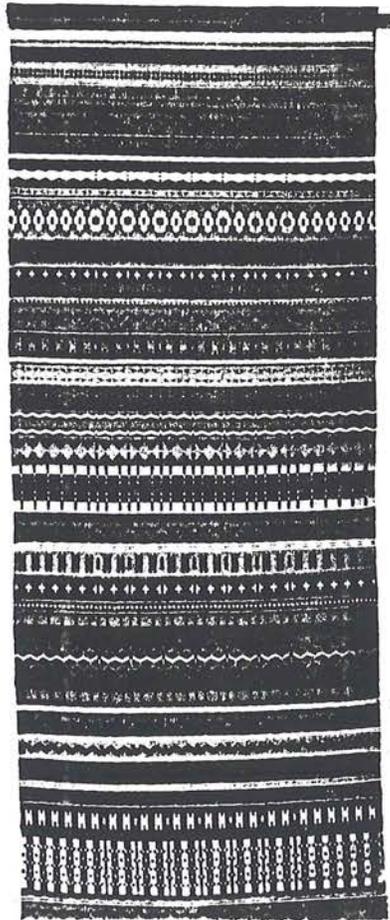


Left - A blue runner/scarf in 10-shaft *dreiel* technique, by Vivian Morrison, Antioch, IL, winner of a White Ribbon



Right - A rug/wall hanging in double *krokbragd* (bound weave) technique, by Gudrun Linden, Great Falls, MT, also won a White Ribbon.

Left - Danskbrogd wall hanging *Bye, Bye Blackbird* by Sally Ann Scott Roseville, MN, an NBC member, Honorable Mention



Right - Billedvev hanging, *Squirrel* by Jan Mostrom Chanhassen, MN, another NBC member, Honorable Mention.



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time. Theories promoted by Marta Hoffmann however, clearly show that this could not have been the case, at least not in the early period. The "Flemish" weavings mentioned in the farming documents are first and foremost "beddings" and "patterned spreads," hereafter "sleeping blankets" and "down covers." A 1722 document from Fåberg lists a "Flemish textile to hang on the wall in the room where guests are to be entertained."

It thus becomes difficult to sustain the earlier theory about the connection with the decorative wall hangings from Viking times. The "traditional theory" has built on the assumption that weavings were used as wall decorations. But there are no signs of wall hangings in our old peasant dwellings, nor such signs in richer town houses or in farm houses in the more prosperous flat valleys where formal rooms were mostly decorated with painted walls, the custom of which would exclude the use of tapestries.

Marta Hoffmann also agrees with this author about the origin, distribution and dating of tapestries from a technical weaving point of view. However, the above mentioned Herod tapestry from 1613 in Sjøk (p.5) is an exception. She bases her conclusion on the name Torø Rasmus-daater, which together with the year 1613 is clearly woven into a rectangular space in the top corner of the tapestry, indicating that this must have been woven for a farmer's wife in Lom or Sjøk. The given name Torø is only known from Lom, and she has found several examples of the combination Torø Rasmusdaater, albeit of a later date. She concludes from this that one can "assume with a degree of certainty that the Herod tapestry was not made for a town wife, later to make its way to the country," as this author believes. The

tapestry must, she says, have been woven for a woman from Lom, considering that "the name this early in history occurred only locally." In any case, Mrs. Hoffmann does conclude that the weaver or the owner must have been a woman from the country.

On the other hand, this author and Mrs. Hoffmann agree that it is difficult to combine this theory with the year 1613. The tapestry is, as she has shown, woven horizontally, and would have needed a loom almost 2.5 meters wide, at the same time as it needed a very large cartoon. She agrees that it is highly unlikely that such a complicated work of weaving could have taken place in the peasant dwelling in this mountain valley in 1613, during a time period in Sjøk when there probably was no dwelling with more than just a smoke hole in the roof above an open fire place.

In order to get around this difficulty, she assumes that the year 1613 maybe has been added to a copy of the original from that year and that our tapestry was woven much later. She assumes this on the basis of some problematic details in the space where the year is woven into the long rectangle above the Herod picture. The year is woven with a number 1, followed by three numbers which Thor Kielland interpreted to mean 1631, while Mrs. Hoffmann interprets them as 1731, and then promotes the theory that this was the year of its creation. She also thinks that this date fits the style of the tapestry, which "speaks for a considerably later date" than 1613.

In an otherwise very positive review of Marta Hoffmann's important book, Robert Kloster cannot accept her attempt to arrive at a new date for the Herod tapestry, but he agrees with her geographic placement.

Kloster has several reasons to remain committed to the year 1613. He does not believe the style belongs to 1731, particularly the style of the central section of the tapestry. But since he cannot agree with this author that the tapestry must have been woven in an entirely different environment and then later ended up in this mountain valley, he takes the position that the tapestry belongs both in terms of time and geography in Lom or Sjøk.

He discusses the tapestry and its history from this assumption, and arrives predictably at a solution which is very similar to the traditional theory. Like most critics before him, he seems to think there is a clear stylistic conflict between the lower part of the tapestry, undeniably influenced by European style, and the upper frieze where clear signs of Norwegian tradition from the Middle Ages can be seen. The explanation for this apparent contradiction in style then becomes that the tapestry is a cross between the new Flemish influence on weaving and an older, more familiar weaving tradition.

Kloster refers to Marta Hoffmann's theory that there was possibly a strong surviving tradition from the Middle Ages regarding the long frieze shaped double weave textiles (p.3) of which there are a few preserved in Norway, meaning a weaving tradition dating back to the early 1500s which grew up around wealthy farms. This viable weaving tradition should, according to Kloster's opinion, "have encouraged a strongly stylized use of figures, related to a style we see later in Norwegian tapestries." He assumes that, based on the traditions of this textile environment, and based on the rich inventory he is familiar with from a single church on the west coast, Ylmheim in Sogn, from 1521, with lots of textiles and weavings from a period otherwise known as "the dark

ages", there must have been a receptive climate in Norway for new Flemish impulses. He does admit that the lack of evidence from this period gives reasonable doubt, but it does not shake his faith. "It is not frivolous", he assumes, "to conclude that there is a connection between the modest farming church Ylmheim and its contemporary sacred and secular environments." He also points to the existence of quite well furnished churches and farms. "The picture of what was, becomes richer than we believed. The new impulses which followed the Renaissance did not enter a totally impoverished environment."

We must note however, that the year 1521 must have been erroneously remembered by Kloster. The inventory from Ylmheim is from 1321; but even if it had been from 1521, this author could have joined him in his conclusion if it was not for some contradictory evidence. We agree that the Catholic church was rich in both land and gold during the latter part of the Middle Ages, and this also applied to many Norwegian churches before the Reformation, at least in some parts of the country. And if Kloster with the secular environment means towns and a few rich farms spread over the country, it becomes obvious that the Renaissance did not find a totally impoverished environment. This environment saw a truly strong economic growth during the 1500s and could easily be open to new impressions from the outside world, which in turn would be somewhat modified by the provincial environment it entered.

But if Kloster means that such a rich environment also existed among common farmers and includes in the term "farm" ordinary peasant dwellings in the late Middle Ages and into the 1500s, I must say that his

conclusion is "frivolous." However, I believe Kloster sees this point himself when he says "on the other hand, we are led to believe that there were such strong differences socially and economically between the upper and the lower classes that the folk environment probably has not been very receptive, and thus outside impulses would have had very limited effects."

If there had been a flourishing artistic environment during the late Middle Ages in Norway, evidence would definitely have been preserved down to our time period. It is not strange that there is so little left of the rich inventories in our churches from the late Middle Ages. It has disappeared because of changing styles and fashion and a poor attitude towards preservation in a society which has seen a marked improvement in its standard of living. The attitude among farmers has been different, where things by and large have been taken care of and preserved, at least in the more isolated areas and in the mountain valleys. We see this in the large collection from the later Middle Ages of houses, chests, tables, etc. While peasant farmers in some areas of Sweden had a certain improvement in standard of living during the late Middle Ages, even experiencing a "folk art" connected to the church, Norway did not see any such development, at least not in the farming country of the east. Most of what is preserved from the Middle Ages originated prior to the Black Death. During the 1500s the development in our eastern valleys must have come to a stand-still, as documented by authorities. While the later prosperous Heidal in Gudbrandsdal had about 25 functioning farms in the Middle Ages, there were as late as 1528 only 10 farms and 10 tenants, and by 1577 the number had decreased to 7 farms and 7 tenants. The population decreased in other valleys as well.

Bishop Jens Nilson's descriptions of his visits emphasize the bleak conditions. Several of the once rich churches from the Middle Ages lay deserted. We can trace no development of artistic activity. Farmers lived in their dwellings with smoke holes in the roof over open fireplaces and they used their primitive chests and their tables folded up against the walls, or one with leaves to be raised while eating. There was no need or opportunity for anything new. The leap to the higher standards of the upper classes was, as Kloster says, too high.

I have earlier tried to show how the advent of the fireplace in our eastern farming valleys and the changes resulting from this invention had to have happened much later than earlier assumed. According to information presented by Eilert Sundt, there were still many dwellings with smoke holes in the roofs left in Vardal on Toten as late as the last half of the 1700's. This has brought him "to change the way I look at local history". When he wrote the first chapters about the history of buildings in 1861, he believed the evolution to a real fireplace would have happened "eons ago." But later he saw several "signs that the elder ages seem to have been closer to us in this respect, and finally I could, to my own surprise, talk about the mention of a particular house with smoke hole in the roof above an open fireplace about the year 1653, situated only three miles from Christiania, as described in a French travelogue." After he also got information about the dwellings in Toten, he was "strengthened in the opinion that the transition from dwellings with smoke holes to dwellings with chimneys probably did not take place in the eastern valleys until the 17th century."

It is doubtful, as I have earlier indicated, that textiles played a role in this farming

environment beyond practical usage. Somehow the table cloth does not seem to fit on top of a table folded up against the walls, or for that matter, on top of carved surfaces (p.7) or on chairs with carved dragon heads. The pillow was probably reserved for the chair of the king or the seats of the rich. The same applies to wall hangings and furthermore, there is no sign of their presence in any of the farm houses preserved from the Middle Ages.

Mrs. Hoffmann refers to an old dictionary from Setesdal, dating back to the end of the 1600's, where the word "huusboon" is explained as "the large woven textiles which historically were used to decorate walls for weddings and parties." We need to look more closely at the definition of the word "historically" and whether this description applies to ordinary farmers in Setesdal. The text does not seem to indicate that and even if there had been some textiles preserved, there does not appear to be any signs inside the houses that they were hung on the walls. It appears from the text that the "large woven textiles" are not identical with the traditional wall hangings from Setesdal, because it points out that the walls were "covered all around" with these textiles. "Historically" also indicates that in this valley with long oral traditions the concept could refer to a very distant time, indeed.

Concerning the long double woven hangings we have spoken of earlier, from the end of the 1500s or the beginning of the 1600s, of which several pieces have survived throughout Norway, it is highly improbable that any of these were used in farm houses. We find mentioned in an inventory from Sørnum in Vågå dated 1672, a weaving 15 ell long (1 ell = 0.686 yds) worth 4 riksdaler, but there is no indication when this became the property of the farm or how it was used

or whether it even ever was used. It does not appear that it would have been used around 1672. If the dwelling at Sørnum then had a fireplace with chimney and windows, as would be likely, there would be no space on the walls for such a long weaving. There are three other long weavings listed in inventories in Gudbrandsdal: two from Bjørnstad and Sandbu in Vågå, the third from Rønne in Lesja. The inventories date back to 1673, 1675 and 1674, respectively.

Maybe the weavings were acquired around this time, maybe from the upper classes where they were popular during the 1500s, but now no longer fashionable. It is probable that they have never been made by or even for farmers and they have maybe never been used to drape walls either. In a particularly wealthy inventory from Sogn in 1673 is mentioned a "patterned weaving with sheep skin underneath," and this is a much more likely use for a textile. The pieces we have preserved of double woven cloth have in most cases been cut up and used for something else (p.9). Farmers also probably looked at these weavings like other possessions as "savings or investments in property normally held by the upper class," maybe used as sparingly as the ebony inlaid equestrian hammer well preserved in a chest at Graffer, or like the heavy, large and expensive copper coffee pots from the late Middle Ages which eventually ended up at Heringstad in Heidal. This seems to be reinforced by the mention of one weaving belonging to several in joint ownership, as listed in an inventory from 1667 after the death of Karen Ellingsdatter Fimrede in Sogn "a part of a house weaving, worth 3 riksdaler," and in 1680 where a sister and brother, respectively, inherit "one part of a house weaving each, valued at 1 riksdaler per part." Mrs. Hoffmann appears skeptical about her own theory that the weaving

originated with the farmers, so the logical conclusion, as mentioned before, is that they came from a higher socio-economic level as an "import," a well known phenomenon in a farming society experiencing a better standard of living, but with very few local artists.

Neither does the above mentioned tapestry from Hafslo Church with initials of giver (?) and date, 1656, sewn on, give any proof of home weaving activity during the Middle Ages. I mention it again here because Robert Kloster touched upon it in his review of Marta Hoffmann's book. He does not agree with me about the later date I have given it, and which consequently Agnes Geijer in Sweden has agreed with. He sees the work as a more professional product than Agnes Geijer does, agreeing with this author, and dates its origin to the latter part of the 1500s. He concludes this from the type of window with rectangular squares which is mirrored in the tapestry, and also says in connection with the Herod tapestry that "the transition from the diagonal to the rectangular can be dated to the second half of the 16th century." I am not familiar with the latter theory. We do not have proof, either in preserved materials or in pictures, that windows with rectangular squares were in use before 1600. In pictorial representations, the diagonal divisions last for a long time. The tapestry from Hafslo is probably one of the first pictorial presentations with this new form, which again proves that the inspiration itself probably is not very old either. The "modern" squares are hardly invented by the weaver who copied the design. Einar Lexow has not debated the problem in his book about Norwegian glass paintings from the Guild period (Oslo 1938) but the oldest example given of regular division of a window into four parts is from 1626 (p.30).

However, this date is not proven either since the decorated squares carrying the dates quite often are replaced with new windows during reparations, etc. If we assume that the original design for the embroidery was perhaps not quite new when it was copied, we can guess that the Hafslo tapestry hardly is much older than the date of 1654 which was sewn on, probably when it was donated to the church.

Kloster says the tapestry is the same age as the oldest tapestries, and I agree with this theory. They have many traits in common. Pictorial scenes are framed by arches as in the Herod tapestry and the scenes are also separated from each other by trees with leaves and fruits as well as parrots in the design, as in several other tapestries. In some of the arches we also see the winged angel heads typical for this period, and in the lowest border we find both tulips (?) and carnations (?) in shapes we recognize from woven tapestries. It is not necessary to find a specific date in order to assume that this tapestry belongs to the 1600s, as concluded by Erik Salven as well. Thoughts also go back to the earlier mentioned "dogs with stories, sewn with Flemish yarn," mentioned in the inventory of 1690 after the death of the minister Brede Hammer in Fron.

Neither do we find evidence of painted wall coverings in our old farm houses from the Middle Ages. Painted decorations were rare even in churches during the first half of the Middle Ages even if painted wall coverings, according to the preserved material, must have been much more common than real textiles. The last few years have seen the restoration of walls in old churches from the Middle Ages, bringing back to light the original white washed walls, but so far there has been no evidence detected on the walls about the hanging of textiles.

Based on this evidence, I find it hard to believe the theory about the existence of decorative carving of walls in houses with smoke holes in Hardanger (p.13) or any other part of the country, a theory which supposedly is based on the Viking custom of draping textiles around walls. How could such a purely decorative custom have remained unchanged for centuries in these districts which probably have received other and later impulses? Why do we not see proof of this custom from other archeological evidence from the Middle Ages? Why and when did people give up the custom of using real textiles? Or, if this "draping of walls" from old times only has existed as a painted and cheaper reproduction, when did this happen and where did people find the original textiles?

These questions remain unanswered, and will probably remain so. Therefore I support my earlier hypothesis that carving did not originate with the Middle Ages, or earlier, but is a parallel development to later textiles or painted wall decorations in churches or in secular housing.

Carved scroll work is known from several areas on the west coast, from Romsdal and Sunnmøre, from Nordhordaland, Hardanger and Strileland, and from West Agder. The custom was preserved in all of these places until the latter part of the last century. In preserved samples from Sykkylven at Sunnmøre the baroque vine creates the motif, and we can clearly see which original inspired the copy (p.15). According to what an old woman in Sunnfjord told Eilert Sundt, the women who were carving tried to copy the scrolls from the local church when they decorated the living rooms. But in most places simple figures, lines and dots, crosses and eight petal roses dominate (p.17), motifs well known in the younger folk art of that

period on the west coast, inspired by embroidery and weaving and from wood carvings. The custom of painting a white border around the living room under the ceiling is maybe the oldest, often with a sprang-like border underneath. Braiding or sprang appear sometimes to have been the original pattern. The first time we hear carving discussed is in Hans Strøm description about Sunnmøre from 1706. It is not clear whether the custom was particularly old at that time. If it were, he probably would have made such a comment. I do not believe the custom could be much older than from the 1600s or the beginning of the 1700s. The carving motifs fit the farmers' folk art during this period of time on the west coast, the richest period for weaving and carving.

Carving also matches the newer textile decorative customs known from other parts of the country, especially in Sweden in terms of idea, time period and form. These customs appear to have been contemporary with and just as long-lived as carving. Weavings were hung for certain occasions on the walls in both Hallingdal and Valdres. The upper logs in the living room were hung with long lengths of white braids, knotting or sprang. Parts of such decoration, a "high seat textile" of linen with embroidery of wool and fringe on the bottom has come to the Norwegian Folk Museum from Hol in Hallingdal (p.12). The form and design both show a striking similarity to carvings from inner Hardanger, which should not surprise us. Several authors have pointed out similarities among carving and embroidery and sprang. We do not know how old this custom of textile decoration is. Mrs. Hoffmann refers to examples of the above mentioned "high seat textiles" from Hallingdal inventories from the 1750s and the custom probably is connected with the

big changes wrought in the farm house interiors by the advent of the fireplace with chimney, which also probably coincides with the closed stoves with chimneys which came into use on the west coast about this time.

We could compare these Norwegian customs to a similar pattern in Sweden, especially in southern houses with roof gables, even though the Swedish textile environment was much richer than that in Norway. The long narrow format and the ornamentation of the Swedish wall pieces particularly the even narrower borders with their embroidered or woven ornamentation can at times remind us strongly of the carved friezes in Norwegian "smoke huts" (p.18). These borders hang partly around edges of shelves, or are partly sewn on to the upper edge of the wall textiles. The oldest Swedish "drätte" cloths appear to have been completely white, but with borders in sprang, with a design reminiscent of carving. We hear about such white clothes from Smaland in farm houses from 1720s. They are in use for a long time, but eventually they are replaced with richer decorated textiles with designs in color. The oldest date for these is 1734. Painted decorations on textiles were also hung on walls during the latter part of the 1700s, long and narrow like the weavings. Ceilings were also decorated with painted textiles. The similarities between the narrow borders which decorate the "Christmas house" at the open air museum in Halmstad (p.19) with some of our west coast carved friezes are striking.

The ancient form and motifs in both textile and painted wall coverings in Sweden have contributed to the theory that the custom of covering peasant walls is directly descended from Viking times and the Middle Ages. Olaus Magnus contributed to this idea when he said that "it was commonly expected to

decorate the everyday rooms of the house all the way up to the ceiling with bleached white textiles in a lace type work called sprang," but there can be no doubt that this statement must apply to a higher socio-economic class than plain farmers, at least in southern Sweden. There is no doubt that textiles, which by the 1500s decorated the southern Swedish log cabins, still were the highest fashion at the royal castle and among the upper class. It is highly unlikely that farmers in the south of Sweden could have boasted such amounts of the then expensive textiles. The custom could have spread later, maybe through the ministerial farms, following an increase in the standard of living among farmers in these parts of Sweden. We certainly cannot assume that such textile decorations as known from the south Swedish log cabins were used before the time of the stoves with chimneys. It is simply not possible in the old houses with smoke holes in the roof above open fireplaces.

The painted wall coverings in the south Swedish peasant houses do not seem to be old either, in spite of their design reminding us of the Middle Ages and its pictorial content (p.28). The oldest of these do not have the narrow shape which is characteristic of the younger versions from the last part of the 1700s (p.20). The form was not influenced by any connection with the Middle Ages; it was a reflection of the low ceiling in the houses where the walls were to be decorated.

It is easier to explain the wood carvings in West Norway by looking at the younger, parallel decorative customs in Norway and Sweden. It also helps to look at their place in the larger context of Norwegian folk art and culture. Wood carvings become a link in the outside impulses which affect the peasant

society at exactly this time, proving that old customs are not necessarily as old as they look.

I have tried to simplify this discussion, and will return to my original starting point: the Herod tapestry from Sjak (p.5). Mrs. Hoffmann, as we remember, and similarly Kloster, decided that, on the basis of the name Torø Rasmusdaater, the tapestry had to be geographically placed in Lom or Sjak. This brought Mrs. Hoffmann into conflict with the 1613 date of the tapestry, since she could not imagine that the tapestry was locally produced at such an early period. Kloster, who also clung to the date of 1613, was led to an acceptance of the older traditional theory, based on the theory of the survival of older traditions which might explain such an early and rich artistic expression among farmers in a Norwegian mountain valley.

The assumption that the tapestry had to come from Sjak or Lom has led both of these researchers into a difficult and incorrect position. There is no proof that the tapestry must have come from this specific geographic area. However, before I talk in more detail about this I need to address the date of this tapestry and I declare myself in agreement with Robert Kloster that the year 1613 must be correct. Marta Hoffmann's assertion that the year 1731 might be correct is built on erroneous assumptions. By building her thesis on vague assumptions, she has to admit that "the style of the tapestry points to a period of time later than 1613," but she desists from guessing a specific date.

Like Kloster, I cannot agree with her conclusion. The style is compatible with this period and seems to agree with the year 1613, which is recorded next to the name of the owner or the giver on top of the tapestry.

The naming field is dominantly and well woven. There is no reason to believe this is a copy. There are such names and dates on several of the old tapestries which Thor Kielland does not consider peasant art. The second number 1 could possibly be a number 7, since it is a little different from the first number 1. The year would then be 1673, but I see no reason for this date. 1613 seems in all respects to fit this tapestry, as we shall see. The style is not stiff or poor. Compared to many of the tapestries Thor Kielland considers not to be peasant work, this is among the ones of better quality (p.22,23). The motifs are clear without any misrepresentations, and the figures are to a certain extent life-like. Considering that this is pictorial representations produced on a loom, they definitely hold their own in comparison with the decorative paintings in churches both in Sweden and in Norway, especially when considering that these themes probably have been copied many times. We find the Herod scene as early as in the 1470s painting from Germany (p.24), and it has been used in many tapestries since. The original picture has been expanded in width to include John's decapitation. Here, we only see the point of the executioner's sword, while Salome has received the head of the Baptist and the dance can begin. The checkered background for the scene of the dance is interesting. Such a background is also typical of Swedish wall paintings; and Sigurd Erixon has shown that it also can be found in German weaving from the later Middle Ages. The framing of scenes with columns in the style of the Renaissance is typical for the older originals. The same applies to the 3 part composition, which dates back to the foreign wall papers from the 1500s (p.25), particularly ones from Luneburg and Wismar. The placement of the border scene and the upper scenes under rainbows with an imitation of lead windows

in the background is also typical for this time. The motif has earlier been seen in the above mentioned tapestry from Hafslo from 1654 and we also recognize the motif from contemporary paintings, most typically in paintings from 1604 and 1649 in the Eidsborg stavchurch (p.27), and also prominently in the Swedish painted wall coverings. In both places we also find a presentation of the Holly Three Kings, which in some of the Swedish paintings is so similar to the Herod tapestry that the originals hardly could have been very different.

There is no reason to search for stylistic differences between the upper and the lower sections of the tapestry. I definitely cannot detect any more stiffness or poor weaving in the upper section. Take some time to observe Mary in the proclamation scene. It has probably been difficult to squeeze in all the figures in the scene with the adoration of the magi, but the pictorial skill with which it is done is no poorer than in the lower section of the tapestry. We cannot be sure either, that the same woman has woven the whole tapestry. Similar varieties in style are also seen in the contemporary decorative church paintings. "Stylistic variation" is also dependent on what was used as originals. I believe that the stylistic differences seen by earlier authors have been due to their feeling that the upper part of the tapestry was specifically reminiscent of Norwegian tradition from the Middle Ages, as in the Baldishol tapestry.

The earlier mentioned painted presentation should be proof enough that this is not the case, but that designs for such presentations must have been very commonly circulated among the painters of the time and also used for decorative panels for the upper classes. The same applies to the typical image of the three Holy Kings from Gudbrandsdalen

(p.29). If we compare this to the Swedish painted panel from Boras (p.28), we can recognize the same kind of riders and horses with Bethlehem and a starry sky in the background.

The costumes are also typical for its time period. We can compare them to the period church pieces, portrait paintings or the painted sections in lead windows. The style and the fashion are the same. The women of the period around 1600 all wore skirts with a protective front or aprons, caps characteristic of married women, and kerchiefs with tattings. The men's costumes were also similar with their ruffled collars and wide pants. The lettering in the given space for authentication is also compatible with the paintings of its time. The often mentioned animal shapes which have been used to promote the theory from the Middle Ages are also well known from the double weavings of the time. Weavers have added them here and there, as for example in the tapestry "Guamar's story" and similar figures are also found on a contemporary embroidery from Tingelstad church, now housed in the Norwegian Folk Museum. This embroidery also shows additional similarities to the Herod tapestry. The same biblical scenes are partly present in both, and clothing, as well as figures, show great similarities.

In other words, there is not a single thing about the Herod tapestry which contradicts its obvious date of 1613, the year which stands next to the name of the owner or the giver.

The presence of this name has contributed to the fact that first Marta Hoffmann and later Robert Kloster chose the wrong path. Both assume that the name Torø Rasmusdaater places the tapestry geographically in Sják or

Lom. There is no reason to believe this. First of all it is not possible to trust the spelling of a name during this period when many actually spelled their names in a variety of ways, even from one year to the next. Secondly, it is of course impossible to say that the name Torø only is known from Lom. Mrs. Hoffmann has unfortunately carelessly used the source materials provided by Eivind Vågslid in Norwegian Name Book (Oslo 1930). Vågslid does not, of course, say that this form of the name was not used outside of Lom. This would be a dangerous statement. He only says that the form is known from Lom. If we look in this name book under Lars or Jens, we will see that Vågslid shows that both of these names were known from Haram and Roald. But he cannot therefore say that they are not used in other places, for example in Romerike, where this author's forefathers were called Lars and Jens for several generations.

The name Torø, Tora or Tore have of course been used both in town and in country and the combination with Rasmus has probably occurred as frequently, even though Rasmus is not mentioned at all in the name book.

Neither am I willing to concede that this tapestry is made for a farm wife and not made for a town woman, as Mrs. Hoffmann assumes. There are a series of such signature marks on tapestries and other art pieces from this time. On the tapestry with the lost son from Varteig in Østfold (p.37) is an equally rural sounding name: "Ane Bursdøter" in a similar field and with the date -87, probably 1687. The name "Karen Pedersdøter 1649" is recorded in a similar name field in the Salome tapestry from Hurum, Buskerud (p.36). We find the name "I Ahanne L(a)vritzdøter" in a square name field in a tapestry from 1630 in the Sondeled church. The latter was donated to the

church by a widow in memory of her husband, Gert Fronnich from Tønsberg. The way these names are inserted indicate more that they are the names of the givers, as we also find them on the painted glass panels in lead windows, often only the names of women. In the woven pulpit cloth from 1625 from Sansvaer church is also included the name of the giver: Mats Mokholt and Anne Persdøter both of whom have their names clearly emphasized in name fields on either side of Christ on the cross (p.36). The same applies to the names Johan Falc Omejer Arnheim and Maren Bonsdøter on a pulpit cloth from 1663.

In other situations the name could represent owners, a theory also held by Thor Kielland. But he also grants the possibility of givers' names, for example in the tapestries with women's names I have just mentioned. He considers the possibility that these women's names could represent the weavers, but does not really believe so and I agree with him.

Where was the Herod tapestry woven? Well, history is silent on this point. Stylistically it is related to the rich renaissance paintings from around the 1600s in Dale church in Luster (p.41) and it logically could have been woven in Bergen, based on a cartoon made by contemporary painters. We do know that there were Flemish weavers in Bergen during those days, as we found out by studying a couple of unsavory witch trials from the period just before 1600. One of these involved Johanne Flemishweaver who was burned as a witch in 1594. She came to Bergen from Skien where she also had been accused of witch craft. However, in Bergen she managed to build her own house, and she had several girls employed as apprentices. One of these was possibly Suzanne Absalomsdøter who is mentioned as a weaver in connection with

the other witchcraft trial of Suzanne's mother, Anna Pedersdotter Absalons, widow after Absalon Pedersen Beyer. She also had to face death by burning a few years before Johanne Flemishweaver.

It might be tempting, based on this evidence, to place the construction of the tapestry to Bergen. But of course it also could have come from the east part of the country, for example with the minister Søren Rasmussen Falk who arrived in Lom in 1629. His family was probably Danish and he had originally been minister to the royal castle in Akershus. Later he became district minister in Hof in Solør. He was rich and bought several farms in Lom. His descendants lived there until the latter part of the 1700s. But it makes no sense to keep guessing. The tapestry could also have arrived in the valley later in the 1600s, like many of the other "Flemish" weavings mentioned in inventories from the latter part of the century. However, it seems reasonably sure that it has not arrived in the valley later than 1700, based on the many copies made later. We are familiar with eleven copies, most of them probably made by peasants from Gudbrandsdalen. (p.39) But by that time such bed spreads had long since lost their fashionable appeal among the rich.

The place of the Herod tapestry in Norwegian art history should be clear. We no longer need to worry about its date, and we do not need to go searching for an older, assumed artistic environment among Norwegian peasants in the later Middle Ages. It falls squarely into the Renaissance in Norway, as we see it among the upper classes, woven,- not for a bed solidly attached to the wall in a peasant dwelling in Sjøk - but for the bridal bed of a renaissance woman.

POSTSCRIPT

Following the publication of the above article, I have had occasion to read Alf Bøes' very intelligent and interesting dissertation about three tapestries from Bøverdalen woven in 1760, one of which was woven by a certain Torø Rasmusdaater from Glomsdal (Nordenfjord Art & Industry Museum, Yearbook 1959-60). Bøe mentions in this connection the signature of Torø Rasmussdatter on the Herod tapestry from 1613 in a footnote and discusses the local tradition which would like to see both the older and the younger Torø Rasmussdatter as famous weavers. Bøe does not argue either point, but feels that local research and oral tradition should be granted more respect. This of course, is correct. Many questions need to be answered in connection with local research and oral tradition must be consulted while doing research. However, if one is responsible for an academic dissertation, it seems self evident that oral tradition must be treated with great care and a critical point of view, especially if it originates in Gudbrandsdal, a point familiar to Eilert Sundt even in his time. During my research of old building customs and wood carving in this valley I have on several occasions observed how the folk tradition has been wrong, and in some cases I have even been able to refer to written sources, for example an edition of Snorre, Gerhard Schoning, Hiorthoy or to Eilert Sundt, even including Ivar Kleiven and Johan Meyer. "Most farmers can write and like to read the law and old histories," says N. C. Lassen in 1777 about the farmers in Gudbrandsdal and it is clear how materials from both this and from later written sources often have been included in stories.

When Bøe tells the story about the industrious seter girls who are stringing up

their tapestry loom between two birches in the summer mountains, he builds on the assumption that the tapestry was woven on a primitive loom like the one used by the Sami today. Marta Hoffmann has shown that this cannot be the case, and that Flemish weaving must have been of a different and more complex kind. Common sense also tells us that it makes no sense to cart two meter long loom bars with more or less completed tapestries already attached, as well as other necessary tools, around the isolated mountains. I am sure they might have been weaving during the seter days, but the weaving must have been far simpler. The seter housing did not lend itself to tapestry weaving either; they only had a smoke hole in the roof until far into the 1700's.

The tradition about the old Torø Rasmusdaater as a weaver and maybe even the younger Torø Rasmusdaater from Glomsdal probably goes back to the prominent signature on the Herod tapestry we have discussed. Johan Meyer concluded on the basis of a misleading date on a cupboard that there must have been two Sjak-Olav's, one older and one younger, and the older had carved acanthus vines long before this motif was familiar to people in Gudbrandsdal. Both on this basis and because Ivar Kleiven mistakenly placed Sjak-Ola in the 1600's (corrected by Kleiven in a later publication), do these men have a prominent place according to oral tradition today as expert wood carvers.

Bøe quotes Anders Skrede, suggesting that Torø Rasmusdaater from Glomsdal might have woven three Holly King tapestries, one at Marstein 1759, one at Kvamme 1760, and one at Andvord 1765 (she then resided at Anvord). I do believe, however, that there might have been a misunderstanding of traditions. There is indeed a tapestry

preserved from Kvamme dated 1760, which has a connection with Glomsdal because it is woven for Torø's sister Ronnaug (now at the Norwegian Folk Museum). However, the tapestry from Andvord preserved in the picture by Eilert Sundt could not have been connected to the above mentioned Ronnaug tapestry. It is characterized by a completely different style, and one must question Sundt's date of 1765. In that case, the number 6 must have been woven backwards, but the question is whether it really should be a number 3. Sundt is vague on this point, as I suspect the tapestry is. 1735 fits this tapestry better since we have several parallels, including one from 1717, one from 1735 and one from 1739. These tapestries are so similar to the one pictured by Sundt that there can be no doubt they were created by the same master. These later tapestries belong to a larger group of weaving with the same motif.

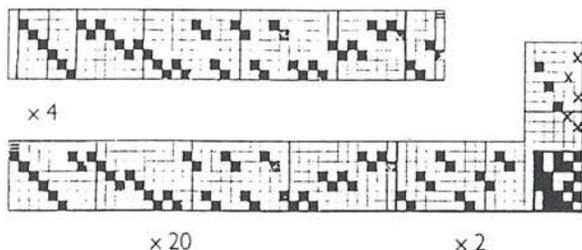
The theory about the weaver being Torø Rasmusdaater from Glomsdal seems shaky. As Bøe himself points out, there is no proof that she has woven these tapestries and my feeling is that it is better to discount this mode of thinking altogether. We must also consider that these tapestries carry the yet uninterpreted initials G.S.D, which we assume must be the signature of the weaver, as also suggested by Thor Kielland and probably also Alf Bøe.

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Eva Hovde Douthit, Coos Bay, Oregon

FOR THE LOOM

Telemarksteppe



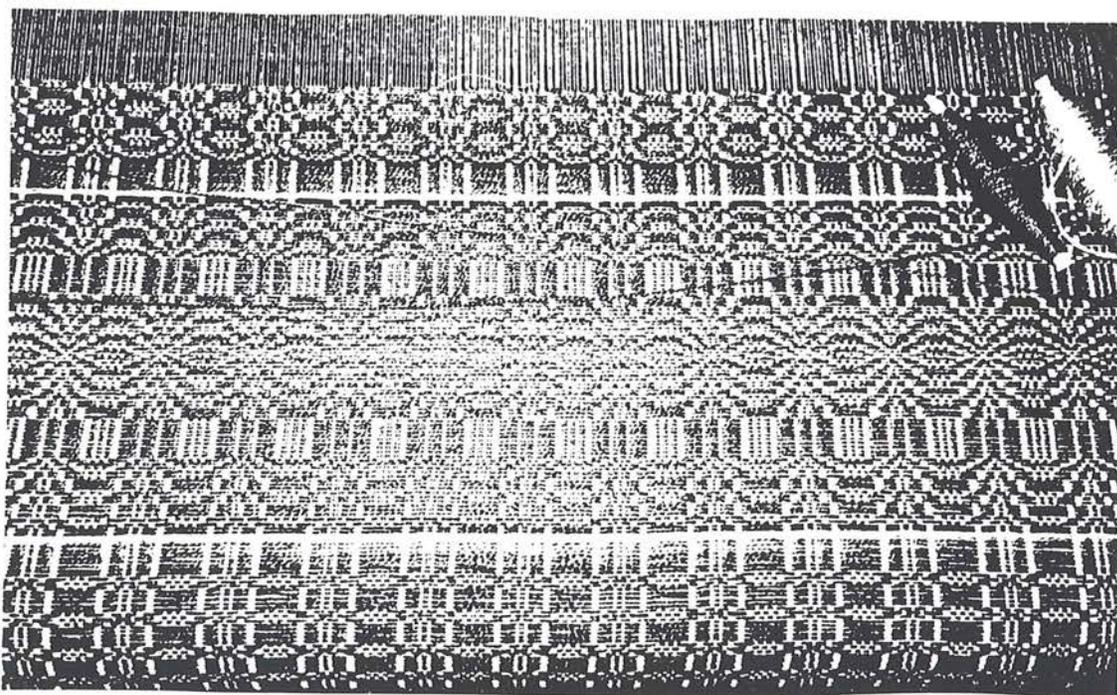
Warp: 20/2 linen

Weft:

Ground Weft - 16/1 linen

Pattern Weft - Rama or Norsk Kunstvevgarn

Sett: 28 to 30 e.p.i.



weaving by Ingrid Bjaadal, Fyresdal, Norway

Draft used in the Vesterheim weaving workshop taught by Ingebjørg Vaagen in Dalen, Norway
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