

NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

Vol. XI No. 2

Feb, 2005

RYAS IN NORWAY

by Helen Engalstad

translated by Loraine Leftwich and edited by Betty Johannesen

The oldest preserved ryas here in Norway are dated from the end of the 1700's. If we are going to study rya weaving before that we must turn to written sources. Documentation before 1660 is very sparse and gives an appearance of coincidence. A single inventory list, a sales contract or an estate settlement casts a glance over the homes, furnishings and bedcovers that especially interest us here, but we don't get any detailed pictures. Not until the end of the 1600's do the source materials get richer. From this point on we can precisely determine the rya's place among the overall textile furnishings. We meet it as a common article for everyday use in a majority of Norwegian homes and we understand that rye weaving has been known and lost in all parts of the country. But the information on technique and patterns is sparse, so it is first through the study of the still existing ryas together with oral traditions of the 1800's, that we distinguish the local characteristics, which have characterized rye weaving.

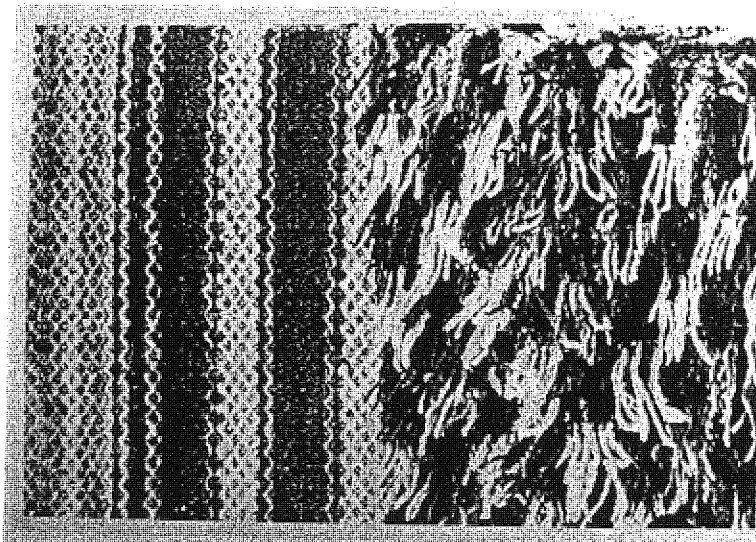


Fig. 7: Rya from Gloppen in Nordfjord

On the 12th of January 1460, Helge Bergsvensøn tendered as payment for a place to live in Afflodals, Sogn in Jemtland among other things "ten ells of cloth, one rya, one åkle."¹ This is the first time we encounter the term rya in the old Norwegian documents. Several more times we hear about ryas in Jemtland. Namely in 1480 "2 ryer" are enumerated among chattels in an inheritance,² in 1498 where "1 rye" is included in a payment for a farm,³ in 1500 with an inheritance distribution,⁴ and in 1537 with a farm exchange.⁵ A rya was determined to be worth one Jaemzsa mark, which according to the money system at the time had the value of one cow.

In the 1500's we often hear of ryas in different places around the country. Of special interest is an inventory list from Tuterøyens cloister⁶ from 1531 or 1532. Here it says "item for recording: 16 beds, 16 ryas and 5 pair bed sheets and 14 woven coverlets". The monks also used ryas as bedcovers, possibly the cloister rules contained a requirement about it, as such was the case at Vadstena cloister.⁷ They have probably been used in other Nordic cloisters.

The monks on Tautra were especially interested in raising sheep⁸ and conducted research with the rearing of imported English or Spanish merino sheep. The current Tautra sheep, with its especially fine wool, could have descended from these, but later surely were crossed with other foreign breeds presumably in the 1700's.

We must presume that the monks used their homegrown wool when they had woven ryas. In another register from Tuterøyens cloister are mentioned "item two old rya". The clergy has clearly utilized ryas also in other places as bed furnishings, as an inventory list on the furnishings of the deaconate in Trondheim⁹ states in 1539 "one unmade bed with Coln bolster, rya and English åkle" and on Holtålen's rectory¹⁰ in 1550 "one half worn rya" and in 1572 "one worn out and torn rya".

In all, ryas seem to be very common in Trøndelag in the 1500's as well as later. Among the property which Archbishop Olav Engelbrektssøns staff were to have taken from Ing Ottesdatter (to Østråt) and Herr Vincent Lunge in the period 1529-32 also appeared to be ryas.¹¹

Fru Inger says "I have lost some bolsters, rye, bed sheets and bed coverings on this hunt, which Brett Karllsen was upon" and Herr Vincent complains about having had taken "item a beautiful bed with all the accessories, a rya and 10 fur coverlets worth 30 marks."

At Trondheim farmstead (translator's note: bishopric) ryas were also very common. In 1596 there were found at "fateburet" (storage

building) no less than 22 ryas.¹² They also certainly must have been woven earlier because 12 are "worn and not useful" and 10 half worn.

On Swedish and Finnish royal properties and castles in the 15-1600's a remarkable number of ryas are noted. There is nothing corresponding to that in Norway, even though in no way were ryas unknown here.

In the accounts from Bergenhus in 1518 there are among many personal property items as "Ludwig the bailiff in Rødeøen answers here" and names "Item one rya"¹³ and in 1521 appears the entry "These inscribed hereafter are the goods which fell to my men from Olav who was hanged in AD 1521." Among other things here "Item 1 length of cover or rya" and later "item three ryas".¹⁴ Among 28 bedcoverings counted in 1523 are "one rya"¹⁵ and finally in 1603 we hear about "two old ryas soon useless."¹⁶

In Akershus ryas are mentioned only once,¹⁷ but they take a modest place beside the remaining abundant bed coverings, which go under the description "Good flemish bed coverings", "large half flemish covers or just large bed covers."¹⁸

We don't know much about the ryas used in the middle class homes and farms all over the country during this period but Christen Jennssøn in 1646¹⁹ explains in his Dictionarium that "Ryas or *Rugge* is what is called a napped bed cover, which is woven of twined wool yarn". We can assume that ryas were common at least in the area around Bergen where he was from.

Then in the 1600's one rya is mentioned as the cause of a marital dispute in Stavanger.²⁰ Ryas in the last half of the 1600's were so completely common that it is reasonable that they were in use in large parts of the country in the first part of the century.

Ryas We Still Own
Material, technique, measurement, weight, color and pattern

A rya is a woven tapestry with more or less scattered rows of knotted pile on one side.¹ The pile side can be a single color or patterned, and the smooth side often exhibits colored stripes, squares or the like. Characteristic for the large majority of our ryas, the backs of the knots lie hidden in the ground weave. Here they are subjected to less wear and they don't disturb the pattern on the smooth side. Which of the two sides one regards as the right and which as the wrong can be difficult to decide. It probably was decided by the rya's immediate use; as wall tapestry, bed covering, boat or sled rya.

Material

The materials in our preserved ryas are nearly exclusively wool. Some linen and hemp have been used as warp and in a very few cases cotton was used.

For the so-called rag rya or cloth rya, fabric pieces of all kinds have been put to use instead of or together with wool. With the exception of cotton and a few of the fabric pieces, we can assume that the materials present are in the districts where the ryas were woven, that is all over the country.

Sheep's wool has from prehistoric time been one of the foremost raw materials for textile art in Scandinavia. Still, the interest in sheep farming and the use of wool has changed down through the times. Climate and the natural grazing conditions along the coast has always made it easy to raise sheep here, but the sheep breed which thrived under a primitive method of working or with very limited supplies of winter feed was light weight, and the pelt had 2 kinds of wool: a coarse but lustrous guardhair over a softer layer of fine silky underhair.

When the textile industry in the last half of the 1800's, with its machine spinning and weaving, it little by little displaced home industry, insisting that first class wool should solely consist of long, soft, strong curly wool. The worsted yarn spinning factories considered it a defect if there was straight, guard hair in the

wool, and they didn't appreciate its silky sheen. Therefore people began to import new sheep breeds.

The difference between the old Norse sheep race "stuttrova sauene" (shorttail) or *spelsau* and the foreign English and Spanish sheep must always have been conspicuous. Our sheepbreeding history is a presentation of steadily repeated research into either introducing new breeds, or to try mixing with another race with the importation of breeding rams. The research took place with more or less momentary success but the results in the long run seem to have had relatively little success in the last half of the 1800's.

In and of itself we have here an outstanding illustration of the old tug of war between a foreign oriented and progressive upper class and a stubborn rural class for whom the once accepted method of working, built upon the local conditions, played a major role. It helps little that business men or nobility introduced new sheep breeds, when at the same time nothing was done to change tending of the animals, especially in winter. Many may also have preferred *spaela* wool on the basis of its special characteristics. For rya anyway, it must have been ideal. The guardhairs are a superior material for the tightly spun, strong and resilient warp threads, and the lustrous wool gives the pile side a surprising likeness to furs. Not least, *spaela* wool is an advantage for the patterned rya where the plant dyed pile appears to have an intense silky sheen. Finally it is worthwhile to note that *spaele* wool has always been regarded as best suited for sea clothing.²

In order to correctly utilize the wool of the old Norse sheep, it must be sorted. This happened in the old days with one laying the sheared wool on the table. With fingers or with a rough comb one pulled up the coarse wool, the so-called "cover" and divided it from the "fine." The soft underwool was strong, soft and very shiny and was preferred for decorative weaving.³ One must think a similar sorting took place with the

wool clumps, which were pulled off during shedding time.

With the use of a comb, one avoided carding the wool. This had a big advantage in that the guardhair was not exposed to breakage and splitting and therefore lost its shine. Such wool combs are found at the Norwegian Folk Museum, among others, and they surely have been in use since time immemorial.

The wool was spun as a rule with a spindle. In the course of the 1600's, despite the fact that the spinning wheel became common in Norway, the spindle remained in use tenaciously in most sections of the country. Old folk still remember that the spindle was taken along, just like the other handwork, when they tended herds or when they would pay a visit to a neighboring farm.

The wool of the guardhair also was used both for warp and pile. But one only seldom preferred the softer ground wool for "napp" or "nokk" which the knotted pile is also called. In such a case it is often fulled. Maybe the soft wool also became more felted in use than is the case with the outer hair. For the most part the spinning and twining holds up well in the soft felted yarn, but it very often has loosened itself completely in the pile composed of pure outer hairs. Wool that has lain spun for a longer period of time preserves the twine better than newly spun wool used in pile. The old Norwegian sheep race was completely dominant until around 1830, but also in later ryas, its silky wool has been put to use. Nevertheless little by little it was replaced by the new wool and yarn types, which had to do with the attempt to use machine spun wool, but then this obviously wasn't sufficiently strong and elastic for warp threads in a rya, so people went over to using cotton instead. The large rya from Frosta is an outstanding example of the combination of old rya technique and modern materials: warp of heddle yarn, and pile of factory spun and dyed wool.

For the weft, people often used wool of finer quality. In ryas with a 3 or 4 shaft groundweave the weft lay completely covered while in ryas with 2 shaft ground weave the weft was visible (Rep weft). These ryas have checkered patterns in the pile and the knot backs are visible on the smooth side. There is no doubt that it is the pile which forms the right side. The ground weave has a linen warp and the weft is mainly of cowhair. The ryas are made primarily as decorative weaves, possibly as wall hangings, and consideration is not given to eventual wearing of the knots or the value of the material's inherent warmth.

As it is evident from the name "nauthår" it comes from cows, either with the currying or the like during preparation of the cowhide. One then uses a lime treatment which loosens the hairs. In 1723 an estate document from Fåvang states "In the iron to saw the hair from the hide with" (I jern at sage Haar af Huder med), which hints that the lime method of treatment is of newer date. Overall it speaks of "horsehair clothes" and "cowhaired coverlets" often. In order to spin cowhair it must be mixed with a smaller amount of sheep's wool.

Hair of goat and dog could have been used in a similar manner but it isn't encountered in Norwegian ryas. In the 1700's we hear of mixed yarns having a prominent role in rya weaving here. We find it in use as weft in the ground of diagonal weave or as warp in the above-mentioned ryas with a ground of 2-shaft rep.

For the simpler rya one used either cloth pieces in place of or together with woolen wads. It is evident that this was the natural economic need to utilize all scraps, but often the rags are placed with a truly artistic sense for material and color effect. Such ryas are not less interesting because the small cloth strips give us a good picture of utility weaving from earlier times. Often the scraps can also create a basis for a relatively exact dating of the rya. Very interesting is a report from Hjørundfjord in Sunnmøre.⁴ It is said here that businessmen who traveled to Trondheim purchased and

brought back "Lisse," that is, small clippings from the tailor workshops of the army. This eventually became used for pile but it turned out to be a little stiff and such a rya was not good and warm. We now have, "klude" (cloth) and "fillerya" (rag rya), preserved mainly from the coast of Møre, nevertheless it is evident from written sources that they were in use over the entire country and often it is this form of rya people since stopped weaving. All scraps would certainly be used. The name rag rug in this century (1900's) has been transformed into a much simpler 2 shaft weaving technique which in and of itself doesn't have anything in common with the old rya than the use of cloth pieces: rags.

Warp threads in the preserved rya are as a rule of 2 thread left spun and right twined wool, but the weft is spun and twined the opposite way. Variations often still occur and for many of the rya, people have used those materials they had at hand. Large parts of our rya material carry an early sign of being the last generation of an old tradition-rich home craft which is in the process of disappearing, displaced by new times and its cultural forms. In estate records rya yarn is spoken of several times, but is not defined more closely as to whether it is warp yarn or pile yarn. At Modum in 1679 a *bismerpund* (about 12 lbs) of woolen rya yarn is valued at 2 dollars (Norwegian banknote before 1875 -translators note). A *lispund* (18 lbs.) was set at the same value in 1698 in Skien and in 1699 in Larvik 16 marks (translator's note - one mark was approximately ¼ kg.) of wool yarn and 6 marks of wool for a rya while a new rya as a rule was valued at 2-3 dollars. Especially beautiful or large rya were valued up to 5 or 6 Norwegian dollars (before 1875.) *Wa-* yarn rya or *War-* yarn rya are mentioned often in Drangedal and Fyresdal around 1700. Probably *Wa* or *War* means that the rya was woven of a lesser quality wool, probably winter wool. According to Hans Ross, people in Telemark, Setesdal and at Jæren used the syllable *va* to report or reinforce an idea of deficiency.

Rya are valued in part according to their color and pattern, but first and foremost according to their materials which are transformed during production and this has considerable meaning relating to boat rya. The weight of the preserved rya varies between 2 and 12 kilograms. Kristian Kielland mentions also that the weight of those rya in estate documents has been up to 2 *bismerpund*.

While bed rya from inner and southern Norway most often are small and light, the boat rya from the west coast and especially from Northern Norway are large, thick and very heavy. It is a solid cover, able to withstand wind and weather and the teeth of time.

Technique

Technically it is natural to speak of the rya's ground weave (*ryetel*) which consists of warp and weft and its pile (*ryenapp*), which is developed by knotting the clipped, yet long threads tightly to the warp at regular distances and in rows on the reverse of the weave. The pile is called "*nopp*", "*nupp*" or "*nokk*."

If there are few weft rows between the knotted rows the pile is very tight, and if it is short the knots stand right up and completely cover the groundweave. This is called *helfloss* (*flossa* or *pile weave*).

If in contrast there are many weft rows or threads between knot rows, the pile, if it is long, will lie down and create a more or less sparse layer over the ground weave. Most often the length of the *floss* determines the distance from one pile row to the next, or perhaps it is little longer. This method of weaving we call rya technique. It must certainly be noted that many of our preserved rya have a very tight and thick pile layer but the tufts at the same time are very long, (5-7 cm.) The pile lies down partially instead of standing up straight and stiff as in a normal *floss* or *pile weave*.

For completions sake it must be mentioned that half flossa (voided pile weave) is a patterned weaving with a smooth groundweave. The pattern is created by straight, vertical comparatively short pile knots against a flat bottom. Here in this country we have preserved a series of pillow covers and bench coverlets in half flossa and flossa, but in the creation of their patterns and their groundweave technique, åkle and billedvev are closer, that won't be the subject of the research here. We shall now go through what characterizes the method of weaving in the preserved Norwegian ryas.

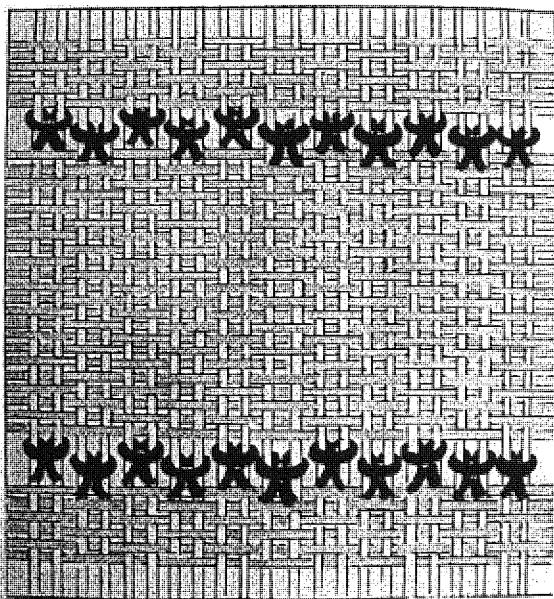


Fig. 10 - Knotting in ryas with a 2 shaft rep ground

The groundweave is very simple. It can be 2 shaft weft-faced rep, 3 or 4 shaft diagonal or point twill and finally 4 shaft return twill or goose eye pattern.

Only one single Norwegian rya exhibits a more complicated binding in the groundweave, namely, the one from Ekre in Heidalen, where doubleweave, so called *flensvev* was used.

There is then, as a rule, an interaction between the knotting of the pile and the groundweave's threading, and it is appropriate to study this relationship a little closer.

The warp threads are double and always of strong linen thread. The pile rows are created

by knotting a common smyrna knot over each of the doubled warp threads. Then the knot back (that is to say the back side of the knot) in this manner becomes visible on the smooth side. One must assume that it is the pile side that should be the right side, as much as these rya always have checkered patterns in color in the pile. The linen in the warp and the tight wool weft make the rya stiff and not pliable. They are best suited as wall tapestries or floor rugs.

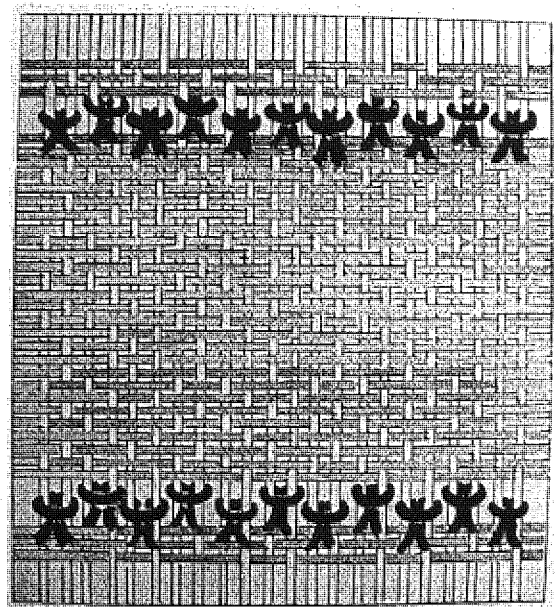


Fig. 11 - Rye with a groundweave of 3 shaft point twill

When the weft is very loose, the weave behaves like a rep. These rya, whatever the effect of pattern and material, relate to the previous group.

Rye with a groundweave of 3 and 4 shaft twill.

The warp and weft are always of wool. Only in a couple of late examples is cotton yarn substituted for the wool yarn. The warp thread is otherwise 2 ply and warpspun such that it becomes a tight and supple thread. The threading of the weave is very tight, approximately 80-110 threads per 10 centimeters. The weft is 1 or 2 ply, loose and spun opposite of the warp.

When the pile is knotted in, the common smyrna knot must be pulled up a bit. Partially for this

reason and partially because the warp is so tight can one nearly *never* see the knot backs on the back side. A practiced rya weaver has amazed me in this respect.⁵ It was necessary to protect the knots against wear so that the rya remained strong and the pile durable. Moreover, the knot backs if they were partially visible on the smooth side would disturb the beautiful striped and checkered patterns. Since it is obvious that it is the smooth side that should have been used as the right side, is easier to understand on this basis the reason behind hiding the knots.

If the pile side was to have a pattern, then it was necessary to get the knots in different rows placed right over one another. The distance between the rows of knots was therefore decided by the weft repeat, the latter repeated one or more times.

This technique is especially used in the light plaid-like ryas. In the older ryas the return twill is always executed very precisely and it is closely observed that the pile knots are placed every time the pattern "turns". The knotting method is arranged such that there is always a knot in the middle of the goose eye. In order for this to come out right, the distance among the rest of the knots in the row is varied. So the same method of knotting is observed on all rows.

Figure 20 shows the knotting of rya number 45, plate 27 from Hole in Skjåk. It is a good example of a painstakingly executed rya weaving. In the newer ryas there are often weaving errors in the ground weaving and the knotting is very irregular.

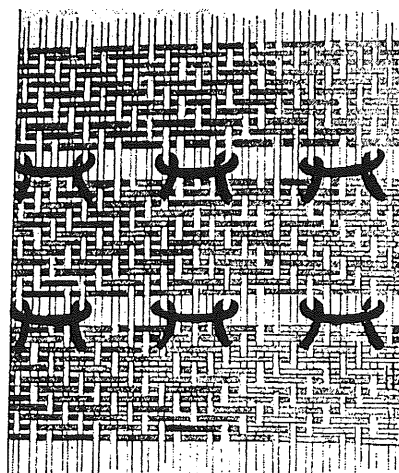


Fig 20 - Knotting of rya from Hole in Skjåk

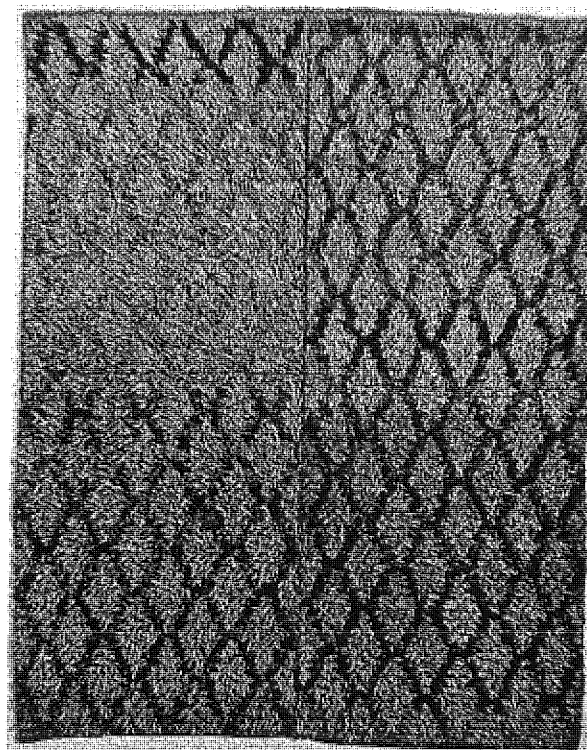


Plate # 27 - from Hole Skjåk

Ryas with a groundweave in korndreiel.

A variation of goose-eye, namely *korndreiel*, is also used as a ground. Here the warp repeat goes just over 6 or 8 threads such that the pattern is divided up in small diagonal squares.

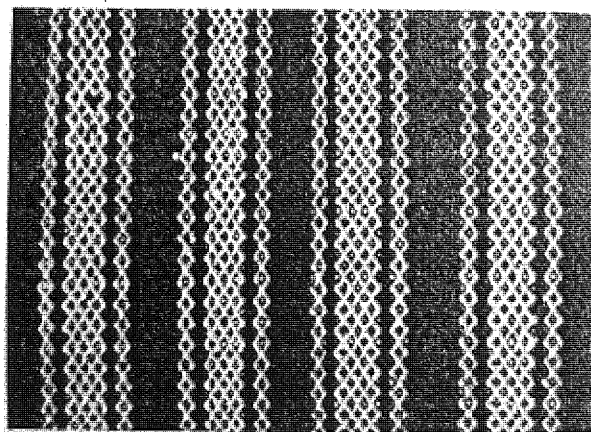


Fig. 9 Rya with groundweave in korndreiel

Ryas with a groundweave in doubleweave, so called flensvev (pick-up double weave).

For this weave two sheds are used which just hold together along the pattern edges. Richly developed square patterns are best suited. Of

such ryas we know of only one, plate 14 from Ekre in Heidal but they surely have been very common,⁶ and they have been finely suited to rya as the pile is set in after every row of

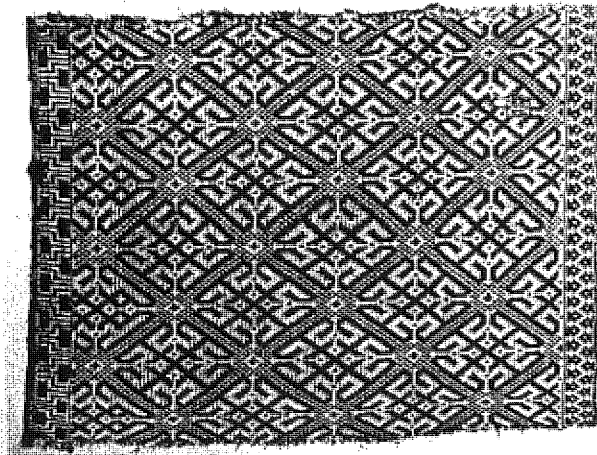
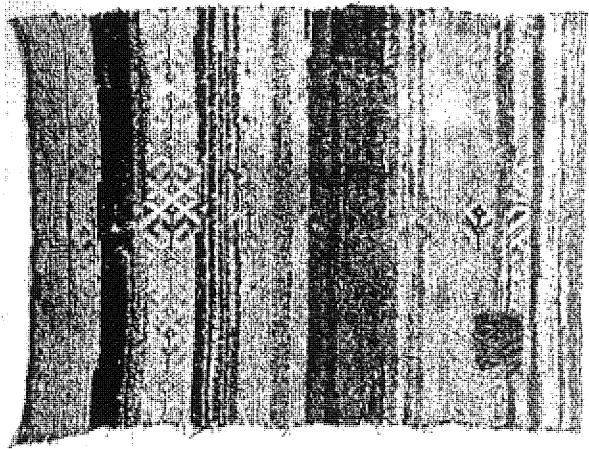


Plate 14 – Rya with flensvev groundweave

squares in the pattern's two sheds and is also invisible from the smooth side. This appears as a regular 2 shaft weave divided up into dark and light squares.⁷

A well woven rya represents a considerable amount of work first with the preparation of the wool, later with calculating the pattern and finally with the weaving itself. The pile was not as in modern pile weaving knotted over a stick or ruler in connected knots and later clipped off. No, one wound the yarn around a thick stick or wooden peg with a groove in it. When it was full one clipped along the groove and in this manner got threads of similar length to knot.

This work was so easy that small children were assigned to do it.⁸

The ryas were as a rule woven in a width of 70-80 cm and then 2 or 3 widths were sewn together. Two were suitable for a regular bed rya but for larger boat rya one had to use 3. Children's ryas were spoken of often; their size was naturally adapted to the bed or cradle. Just one of the preserved ryas were woven in a width of 135 cm but its ground weave was also 2 shaft and therefore could have been woven on a vertical loom. For the different variations of twill one presumably used a horizontal loom. Very wide looms have naturally been in use on the larger farms for *dreiel* and such but they haven't been especially common among the relatively poor fisher folk along the coast.

Colors

The colors in the preserved rye are amazingly monotonous. We are so used to the strong, vibrant colors and bold combinations which characterize Norwegian folk embroidery and weaving that we can only wonder about the white, gray, brown and black tones which at first appear to dominate in ryas.

They show us a new side of our folk art, more conservative and working with simpler means but likewise with a sure sense for decorative effect. Individuals understood how to utilize wool's changing luster and natural color nuances in a masterly manner. In such a manner could one learn to work with wool, steeped in tradition from earliest times.

In an estate document at Kaupanger manor in Sogn from 1678 are named different ryas, more closely specified are four gray ryas. This should indicate that people at one time distinguished between ryas which were patterned in several colors and others which were woven of undyed yarn in the sheep's original gray and brown shades of wool.

Possibly the gray rya was regarded as a simpler kind, since the price of dyed ryas are nearly

double that of the gray, but certainly other factors were an issue.

It is worthwhile to notice that the colored ryas which are preserved come for the most part from the inland districts. On the other hand, gray ryas belong along the coast in the west and north. These are boat ryas, intended for use in the open fishing boats. The plant dyes couldn't withstand the corrosive sea air and salty seawater. They have therefore found scant use and where it occurs, it appears they are now strongly faded. It is in the sea districts where rya weaving has lasted the longest so it isn't so rare that the gray rya now occupies the largest place in our Norwegian rya material. As we later shall see, the rya in strong colors were very common.

Before the middle of the 1800's people used the old dye stuff, found in nature, to dye wool for the colored ryas. Woad, indigo, cochineal and similar overseas materials had to naturally be imported but people also knew how to use dye stuffs found in the countryside's own plants and soil. Dyeing occurred in the homes and even after aniline dyes in 1856 were first produced and from the 1870's were common commodities here in the country, many continued to use their familiar dye recipes.

But it couldn't be avoided that Perkins' famous violet also left its mark on our ryas. Its occurrence is attributed to the chemical industry's newest discovery and the "den lilla mote" (the lilac fashion) which was created in the French capital during "le second empire" (the Second Empire).

Now the brilliance has disappeared and the violet appears faded and gray but in its time the intense blue and red violet colors together with the wool's natural gray tones must have given the rya a remarkable decorative look.

From the end of the 1800's, we can follow in the rya the wider appearance of the chemical colors in the wool industry. This did not work out to the advantage of rya weaving. The wool

yarn had lost its brilliance and colors appeared dead and cold. Gone is the silk like *spaele* wool in the pile, the linen like hard spun wool thread in the warp and the fine nuances in colors, all of these which gave the old rya their great charm.

Patterns

"For dy wæffue the scriffter till sammen liigerwiis som ryer oc sengklede wdaff attskillig farffue forwden sind Oc skiell" (In order to weave they beat together some ryas and bedclothes on the outside several colors without thought and reason) wrote the Danish Carmelite monk Povl Helgesen in his war writings of 1530. We have here the best description we could wish for about the rya's appearance at this time. The colors have been placed << uten sind og skill >> (without thought and reason) and any planned pattern division of the surface. The same can be said about the majority of the preserved ryas. It is possible in this country that people wove "prydrye" (art rya) with detailed pile patterns. We shall return later to this question. To set in one or several strong colors against a gray mixed ground seemed to be somewhat common.

In many places people have had a certain affinity for bright red pile knots of wool or cloth. They were located along the edges such that they stuck out when rye lay with the smooth side up. We hear about some like this in an estate document from Vestby in 1748 where there is named "I sort og graae rannede rye med røde lapper og hvit samt guul flossing" (One black and gray striped rya with red rags and white and yellow tufts.) On the smooth side there is a striped pattern which is most striking. Lengthwise stripes were before, like now, very common in all kinds of bed covers. We know it so well from bolsters to mattresses to comforter covers or in the white woolen coverlets with blue or red stripes. Plate 5 shows the smooth side of a rya of characteristic width and narrow stripes.

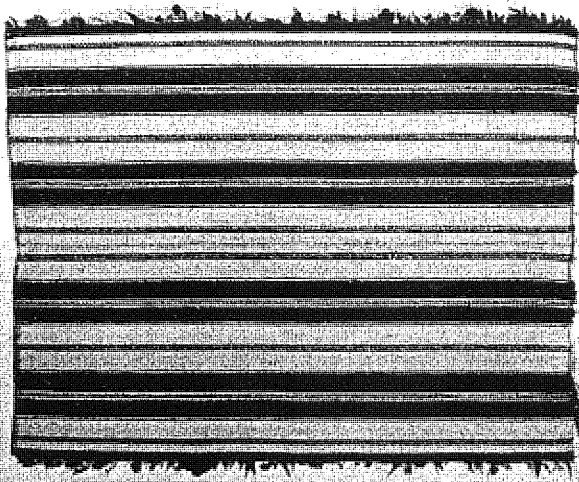
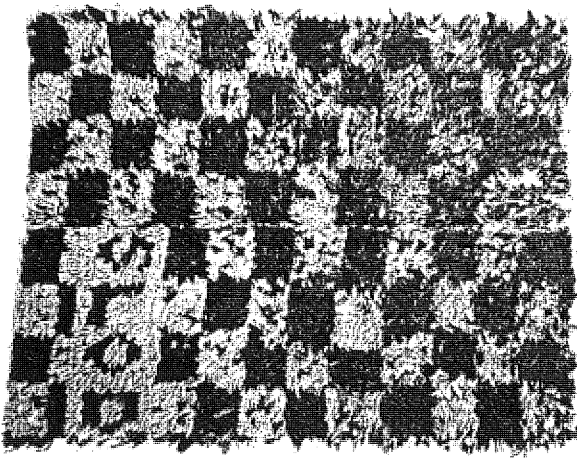


Plate 5 – Rya in which one can see pile knots along the edge

Ryas with a single colored pile were very common. For the most part the patterns of the Norwegian ryas, as in the Swedish and Finnish "slit rya" (very day ryas) are of a very simple geometric character. They are limited to crosswise stripes, lengthwise stripes, larger or smaller areas with checks, diamonds, and zig zag lines. Figure 22 shows attempts at these kinds of checkered patterns. A number of ryas from Vestfold illustrates border patterns and a decoratively developed middle portion with

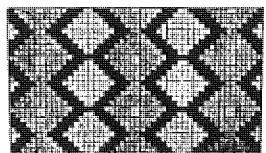
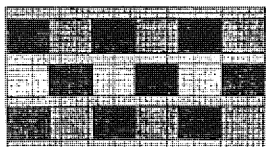
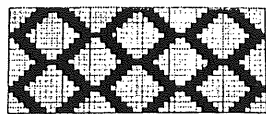
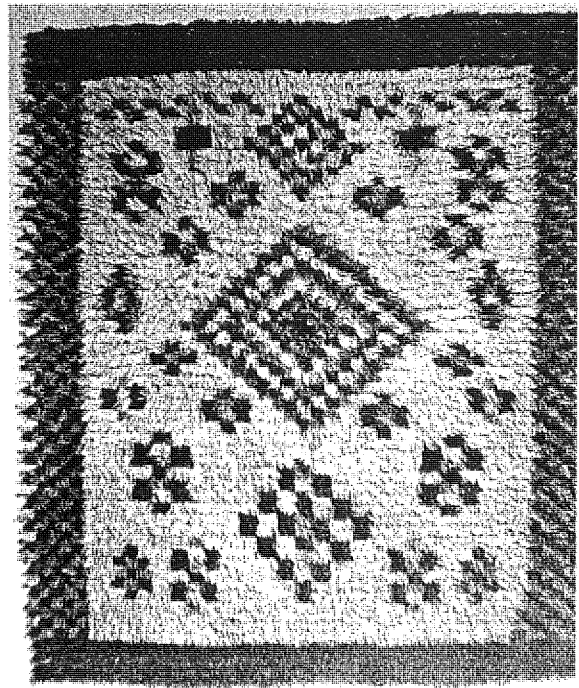


Fig 22 – Examples of checkered patterns used in rya



Rya from Vestfold

checkered motifs. In a similar manner the edge is highlighted in a couple of northern mountain ryas, plates 9, and a few times the year, a monogram, place of residence or a little figure is knotted in. That is everything. The artistic need has allowed itself to display itself so richly within the other branches of our textile art that there just has been a very limited place for something like this in the daily article of use: the rya.

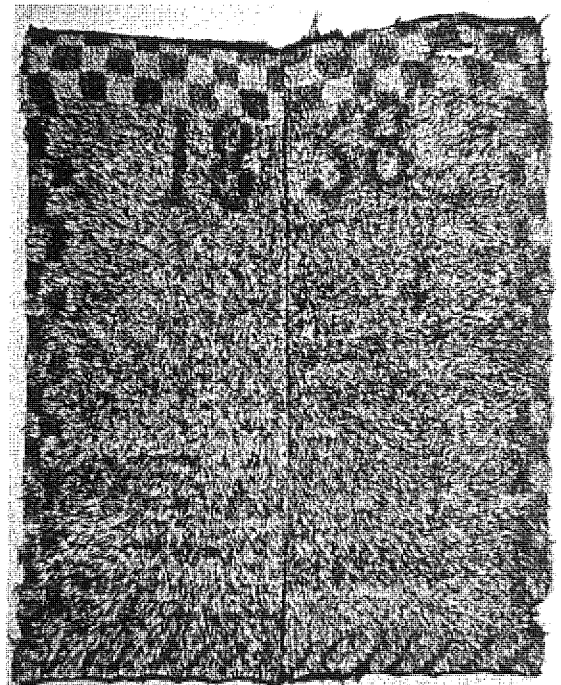


Plate 9 – Rya with date

FOOTNOTES

RYA, THE NORDIC PILE WEAVING.

1. same
2. Jacobsen, Jacob: Etymological dictionary of the Old Norse Language of Shetland. Copenhagen 1921.
3. Jacobsen, M.H. and Matras, Chr.: Faero-danish dictionary. Troshavn 1927-1928. It is probable that *ru* and *royta* have the same root even if it isn't directly proven.
4. Marstrander, C.J. S.: Contribution to the Norwegian Language's History in Ireland. Scientific Academy papers. Historical Philological Class number 5. Kristiana, page 29.
5. Sylwan, Vivi: Swedish Ryas, Stockholm 1934.
6. Broholm, H.C. and Hald, Margrethe. The Danish Bronze Age Clothing. Nordic Antiquity, Volume III, part 5&6. Copenhagen 1935.
7. Sylwan, I.c.s.15.
8. Geijer, Agnes: Birke III. The Textile Finds, page 131, Uppsala 1938.
9. Mentioned by Agnes Geijer in connection with the Swedish pile weave from Birka.
10. Fuhman, Irmgard: The Gravefinds of Pilgrimsdorf.
11. Walterstorff, Emilie von: Textile pictorial works. Stockholm 1925, page 26.
12. See Vogt, Emil:
14. Kielland, Kristian: Ryas in Northern Norway. Röhsska Arts & Crafts Museum. Annual Report 1934, page 47.
15. Sirelius, U.T. Finlands Ryas. Helsinki 1924.
16. Historical-topographic documents about Norway and Norwegian parts of the country written in Norway in the 16th century. Published by Gustave Storm. Christiana 1895, page 232. "About Finnmark."
17. In the year 1639 is mentioned "hollandsk ry" (Dutch ryas) in a Danish "toldliste." (duty list). See the dictionary of the older Danish language 1300-1700. Dutch ryas are mentioned in a Norwegian

estate settlement in Kristiana 1716. Government archives in Oslo.

18. Bragernes 1710. Government archives in Oslo.
19. Authored before 1786, published and edited in Copenhagen 1814.
20. Sylwan, I.c.s. page 14 & 53. Sirelius I.c.s. 9 and Anderson, Ellen: Folk Weaving in Denmark. Copenhagen 1941. See also Hald, magrethe" The Blue Bolsters. Copenhagen 1940, page 26.

RYE WE STILL OWN

1. Ryas with a pile on both sides are known in Sweden. Here in Norway they are mentioned only once.
2. See for example: Norway's descriptions. Copenhagen 1835.
3. See: Sæland, Jon. The New Sheepbook. Oslo 1930.
4. Told to me by Mr. Christian Rekkedal. Sogn's agricultural and horticultural school.
5. Mrs. Mette Paasche Jenssen. Alstahaug.
6. See about rya weaving in the Norwegian Handcrafts Association Handbook in Weaving with Carline Halvorsen. Oslo 1934.
7. About double weave see for example: Waltersdorff, Emilie von. Textile pictorial works. Stockholm, 1925, page 8.
8. Told to me by Mr. Hans Krøvel, engineer, who comes from Ørsta, Sunnmøre.

Excerpts from **Ryas in Norway** have been printed with permission of the late Helen Engalstad's family.

FROM SYVILLA TWEED BOLSON
512 LOCUST ROAD
DECORAH, IA 52101
Specializing in Norwegian wools:
Raumagarn and Røros-Tweed
Eleven weights for weaving, knitting
Sample color cards for sale
Call (563)382-3711
Email: smtweed@willinet.net
Answering machine available.
Flesberg Study Group: Time is near
for the conference and our show!
Samples are due soon. Inquire about
yarns needed.

Have Weavings, Will Enter

Some questions and answers about Vesterheim's two 2005 exhibitions of contemporary handweaving in the Norwegian Tradition.

? What is the *National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition*? ! The *National Exhibition* is an annual event. Weavers may enter two weavings in one of two categories (traditional and contemporary). There is an entry fee and there are ribbons awarded (with prize money). Ribbon winners accumulate points toward a "Gold Medal."

? What is "*Frisk og Flink! Fresh Artwork by Clever Weavers*"? ! *Frisk og Flink* is a special exhibition for 2005. Weavers may enter photographs of four weavings in one of two categories (fresh – contemporary and clever – combination of two weaves). There is no entry fee (though weavers must be or become members of the Norwegian Textile Guild if their weavings are selected for the exhibition). There are no ribbons awarded; weavers do not get points toward a Gold Medal.

? Can I enter the same weavings in the *National Exhibition* and *Frisk og Flink*? ! Traditional weavings can **only** be entered in the *National Exhibition*. Contemporary weavings can be entered in one or both exhibitions. Please read the guidelines for both exhibitions carefully.

? How are the two exhibitions judged? ! The *National Exhibition* is "judged." A team of three judges examines each weaving and decides who gets ribbons. All entered weavings are exhibited. *Frisk og Flink* is "juried." A team of jurors will examine photographs (as entries) and decide which weavings should be exhibited.

? Why do the guidelines ask for the backs of my weavings to be visible? ! Some judges want to see the backs to learn more about the weaving and the weaver. Judges appreciate weavings that show attention to detail and careful finishing.

? Where can I get guidelines or entry forms for the exhibitions? ! You'll find the guidelines and entry forms for the *National Exhibition* on Vesterheim's website (www.vesterheim.org) under Exhibitions & Collections. Guidelines and entry forms for *Frisk og Flink* are inserted into this issue of the Norwegian Textile Letter. You may also get copies of either or both exhibitions' guidelines and entry form by contacting Laurann Gilbertson at Vesterheim (563-382-9681, textiles@vesterheim.org).

? I have a few more questions. Whom should I ask? ! Contact Laurann Gilbertson at Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum (563-382-9681, textiles@vesterheim.org) with questions about the *National Exhibition of Weaving in the Norwegian Tradition* or *Frisk og Flink! Fresh Artwork by Clever Weavers*.

The Norwegian Textile Guild's 3rd Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles

Among the many interesting things planned during the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles (October 21 to 23, 2005) are four special exhibitions. Two exhibitions feature historical textiles and two feature contemporary textiles. Here is a preview:

A Common Thread: Textile Traditions of Norway and Sweden

Celebrating the host of similarities in the textile heritage of Norway and Sweden, *A Common Thread: Weaving Traditions of Norway and Sweden* will also recognize the distinctive elements that distinguish these neighboring traditions. In addressing the interrelated themes (broad strokes of similarity and the fine lines of distinction), the following elements will be explored: customary use, techniques and variations, aesthetic (pattern and color selection), and the social, economic, and physical conditions that provided a backdrop to the development of these elements. Textiles from the family bedstead, often the most decorative in the household, will be the focus of the exhibition, which opens October 10, 2005 in Vesterheim's Anna Hong Gallery. *A Common Thread* is sponsored in part by Helen Garnaas of Minneapolis, MN, and is on view through February 20, 2006.

Textile artifacts brought to America by Norwegian immigrants will be drawn from the collection of Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum. Swedish handweaving will be borrowed from Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, and private collectors.

The guest curator of *A Common Thread* is Katherine Larson. Larson is a Seattle-area researcher, author, and teacher of weaving. In 2001 Larson curated a major exhibition of Norwegian coverlets for Nordic Heritage Museum. The exhibition traveled to Fargo, ND, West Vancouver, BC, and Anchorage, AK. Larson wrote *The Woven Coverlets of Norway* (Univ. of Washington Press, 2001) as a companion to the exhibition, though it stands alone as an excellent resource on Norwegian *åklær*.

Weaving Bewitchment: Gerhard Munthe's Folk-Tale Tapestries

Around the turn of the twentieth century, Norway was experiencing a period of nationalism. While looking ahead to political independence from Sweden, Norwegians were also looking back into a past of Vikings, Norse mythology, and peasant culture. The old traditions informed and inspired a new nationalistic style. In textiles, this period saw the revival of traditional designs, techniques, and materials. Gerhard Munthe, a landscape painter from eastern Norway, played a pivotal role in the cultural revival.

Inspired by the textiles and culture in the rural areas he was painting, Munthe created a series of watercolors with folklore themes that were viewed with great excitement at an exhibition in Oslo in 1893. Norwegians saw the watercolors as being in a new national style. Soon these works were in great demand internationally for exhibition and in Norway for use as weaving cartoons. Legends, myths, and ballads were favorite themes and from the 1890s to the 1920s, Munthe designed many weavings with images of underworld creatures and scenes of humans being bewitched.

Many of Munthe's designs were woven in multiples at workshops in Oslo and Trondheim. However, Ragna Breivik (1891-1965) of Rød in Fana was the only person to weave the designs depicting the medieval ballad of Åsmund Fregdegjeva, a dramatic tale of hero, princess, and trolls. Breivik's tapestries are also unique for her technique of custom-blending the color of her yarn, more accurately recreating the atmosphere of Munthe's original artwork.

Ragna Breivik's series of ten tapestries, loaned by Hordamuseet, are the focal point of *Weaving Bewitchment: Gerhard Munthe's Folk-Tale Tapestries*. This will be the first time that the Åsmund Fregdegjeva series will be on view in the United States and it is only the second time the tapestries have been exhibited outside of Norway.

Weaving Bewitchment runs from October 21, 2005, to January 22, 2006, in Vesterheim's Hauge Gallery and is sponsored by Lila Nelson of Minneapolis, MN.

Frisk og Flink! Fresh Artwork by Clever Weavers

Frisk og Flink! is a special juried exhibition of contemporary weaving in the Norwegian tradition as interpreted by members of the Norwegian Textile Guild (NTG). The themes of the exhibition are inspired by the teaching and artwork of Lila Nelson, retired Vesterheim curator of textiles. Lila has encouraged and inspired weavers to explore traditional Norwegian weaves and to celebrate them with contemporary interpretations and applications. The exhibit will be on view from September 19 to October 23, 2005, in Vesterheim's Westby-Torgerson Education Center.

Artists are invited to submit up to four entries that fit into one of two categories: 1) *FRISK!* Artwork woven with traditional Norwegian techniques and showing excitingly FRESH contemporary designs (colors and patterns), and 2) *FLINK!* Artwork woven with a CLEVER and creative combination of two or more traditional Norwegian weaves. The deadline for entries is June 30, 2005. For complete entry details, see this issue of NTL or contact Laurann Gilbertson at Vesterheim Museum.

Flesberg Study Group Exhibition

Participants on the 2003 Textile Study Tour to Norway (sponsored by the Norwegian Textile Guild and Vesterheim) visited Lågdalsmuseet in Kongsberg, where they were shown a collection of historic coverlets. The coverlets, retrieved from attics and barns in the surrounding community, were registered in the 1990s by the *Flesberg Bondekvinne*lag (Farm Women's Organization), who felt it their responsibility to document the local weaving tradition that they called *Flesbergplegg*. The tour's American weavers quickly noted something special about these coverlets, namely the blending of two traditional Scandinavian weaves, krokbragd and rosepath, but with an intriguing twist. Flesberg Bondekvinne

lag shared a copy of a booklet of samples and patterns drafts with fellow weavers and the idea of the Flesberg Study Group was born. The group will exhibit both traditional and contemporary pieces, the results of their two-year study, from October 10 to 22, 2005, at Luther College's Center for the Arts.

Watch the *Norwegian Textile Letter* and Vesterheim's website (www.vesterheim.org) for future conference updates.

- Laurann Gilbertson (563-382-9681, textiles@vesterheim.org)

EDITORS:

Betty Johannesen
Donald Johannesen
51577 Bridgewater Ct.
South Bend, IN 46637
(574) 272-9806
e-mail: bettydon51@aol.com