

# NORWEGIAN TEXTILE LETTER

Vol. XI No. 3

May, 2005

## TABLET WOVEN BANDS IN NORWAY Living Tradition and Forgotten Techniques

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By og Bygd Norwegian Folk Museum Yearbook 1983-84  
Volume XXX p. 55-94 Part I

*Translation by Katherine Larson*

Tablet weaving in Norway is documented by bands preserved from as early as prehistoric times. The technique of weaving with tablets has survived in home handweaving in simple form in rural communities here until recent times. But only in a little area in East Telemark has tablet weaving been practiced uninterrupted up to the present.

In the area around Bø, Heddal and Sauherad, tablet weaving has lived on, and has been utilized to make hair bands and belts for the East Telemark costume. The well-known weaver Anne Kaasene of Bø has been one of the most important bearers of tradition—one of the oldest and last who has learned the technique from her foremothers and has woven items for sale on the home-handcraft market.<sup>1</sup>

The technique as it has been used in the most recent tradition is of a simple type, where the pattern is determined by the threading of the tablets, and results from a continuous turning of the tablets. Therefore there is not a lot of variation in the patterning of the different bands. In contrast, if we look at the prehistoric bands that are found in archaeological excavations here in Norway, they show great skill and imagination in utilizing the technical possibilities in tablet weaving for much more involved patterns. Similar complicated patterning is known from archaeological finds in Europe and later production in Africa and Asia.

It has long been thought that the only form of the tablet technique known here in Norway in recent times has been that which we find in the Telemark bands. In work on research into bandweaving in Norway<sup>2</sup> I have, however, come across a few preserved bands indicating that other, more involved and exciting possibilities for pattern development in tablet weaving were known.

Below I shall present the types of techniques I have come across so far while registering tablet woven bands in museums, collections, and in private ownership here in Norway. But first, a little about technique and implements in general.

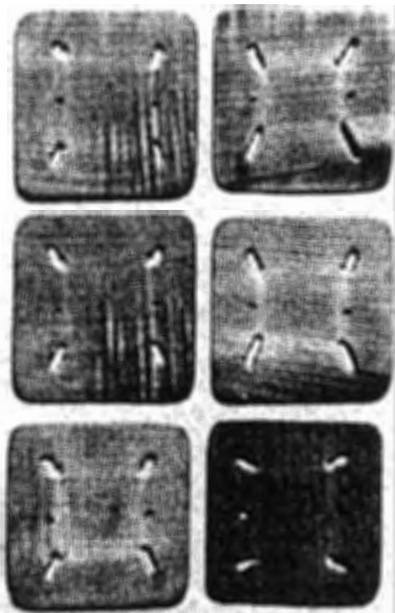


*Tablet weaver Anne Kaasene, Bø,  
Telemark. Photo 1962.  
Norwegian Folk Museum Photo  
Archive.*

## Implements and Technique

Tablets as the shed-making implements in bandweaving have more technical possibilities than any other bandweaving equipment. A tablet is a small, thin square slab, most often made of wood, with holes in the corners through which to thread the warp threads. Besides wood, tablets could also be made of bone, horn, leather, and cardboard, earlier often of playing cards.

Depending on how many holes there are in the tablet, or how many threads are threaded in the tablet, there can be from two to eight different sheds made in the course of a 360° turning of the tablets when they are placed on edge. One can weave with from two to more than one hundred tablets, depending on how wide one wants the band.



Tablets with six holes. Part of a set belonging to Anne Kaasene, Bø, Telemark. Author's photo.

Three-sided tablets with three holes are known, as well as four sided with two, four, or six holes, and five-sided, six-sided, and eight-sided with respectively five, six, and eight holes, on the corners. Square tablets with two holes have them placed in the middle of two opposing sides, and if there are six holes, the extra holes are placed in the same manner in addition to the four corner holes.

There have only been a few finds of tablets in archeological excavations here in Norway. The most important find was made in Oseberg, where several loose tablets and a fully prepared warp with 52 tablets was preserved.<sup>3</sup> The tablets from Oseberg are quite small in comparison to those

that are preserved from later times, about 4.3 x 4.3 cm to barely 5 x 5 cm, compared to later tablets that usually have a side of from 6 to 8 cm. Most of the tablets from the Oseberg find have four holes, some have six, and some have a more irregular number. There have been a few tablets found from city excavations recently, among them a tablet from Trondheim, probably from the 11th century. It is large, with sides of 6.2 cm, and has eight holes.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the registered tablets from recent times have four holes, but there are also tablets with six holes registered. All of these come from eastern Norway. There is only one set of tablets registered from western Norway, and they have two holes, one on each of two opposing sides.<sup>5</sup> All the preserved tablets are made of deciduous wood. Local terms for tablets [*brikker*] in Telemark are "*brekkur*" and "*brekker*," in Setesdal "*spjøll*." In Rogaland "*spjellvev*" is used, in Vest-Agder "*å brikka*." In Valdres, people are familiar with the expression "*å spjøla*."

In short, the principle of tablet weaving is that all the threads threaded on one tablet twine together in a cord when the tablet is held on edge and turned from one edge to the next, 90°, until it has been rotated one revolution. This constitutes, with continuous rotation, one repeat of the pattern. At each shed that opens after a 90° turn, a weft is inserted that binds the cords of the respective tablets together. (See diagram of four-hole tablets.)

The cords created from each tablet receive different twining depending on which side of the tablet (when placed on edge) the thread is threaded from, or if the tablet is rotated forwards or backwards. If the tablets are arranged in pairs towards each other, such that the threads run into the tablets from their own side, the cords in the two tablets receive different twining, and it gives a type of *knit-like structure* to the pattern. If the direction of rotation is changed, the direction of twist is changed as well, and this change creates a stripe across the band.

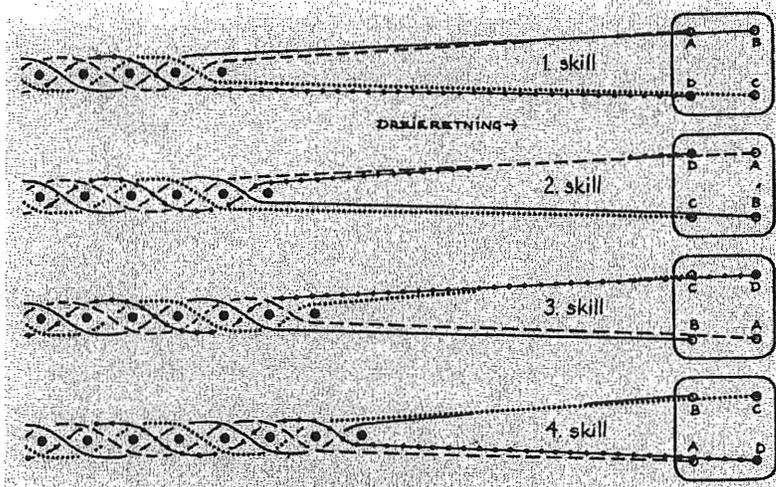


Diagram of the four sheds that are created with continuous 90 degree rotating in the same direction with four-holed tablets, here marked by one color in each hole in the tablet. Notice that each color passes over two weft picks (indicated by black dots), but that on the surface they only appears to go over approximately one pick because with the twining all the threads cover part of each other. After Andersen, 1967, with additions. (shed 1, shed 2, shed 3, shed 4, direction of rotation)

If the tablets are laid on one another, and not arranged pair-wise towards each other, such that the threading is from the same side in all tablets when they are placed on edge, all the cords have the same direction of twining, and a more even surface in *cord structure* is formed.

It is the *cord creation* and knit-like or cord structure that is the typical characteristic of tablet weaving. The pattern is created on the basis of the different colors that are threaded in the holes. A multitude of variations in pattern can result from not rotating all the tablets at one time, but rotating them in groups or individually, and from varying the number of forward and backward rotations. One can also neutralize the creation of cords and weave plain weave by rotating only once forward and once backward; then the use of tablets cannot be detected. There remain innumerable methods to vary the structure and pattern that we shall not touch upon here.

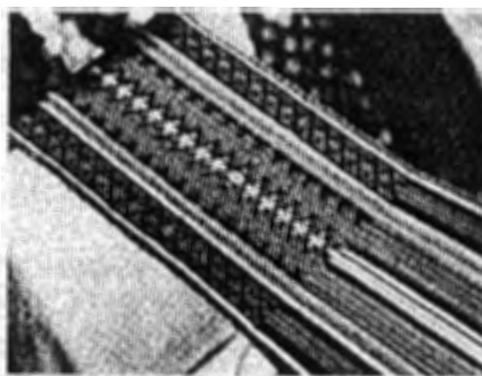
All the bands that are registered as tablet bands from recent times here in Norway have, however, cord formation as a characteristic.

The pattern types in tablet weaving that are registered<sup>6</sup> group themselves as follows:

1. With cord and knit-like structure, pattern determined by threading.
2. With cord structure and regularly changing direction of twining.
3. With knit-like structure, irregularly changing direction of twining.
4. Patterning with and without cord twining.
5. Patterning in the groundweave and with supplemental weft, brocaded.
6. Patterning on unpatterned groundweave with supplemental weft, brocaded.

### 1. Bands with Cord and Knit-Like Structure Executed with Four Sheds and Consecutive Patterning

The largest group of registered bands is made with this technique, where one uses four different sheds, and the pattern is determined by threading the tablets with different colors.



Belt from the East Telemark costume, Anne Kaasene, Bø, 1962. Norwegian Folk Museum Photo Archive.

The pattern is based on pairs of opposing tablets arranged so that the knit-like structure appears. Weaving progresses by continuous rotation, with a change of the direction of rotation at even intervals to loosen the twist created in the warp threads behind the tablets. It is this manner of weaving that has remained in East Telemark until today.

**Pattern**

As a rule, small bands have pattern in zigzag design along the middle of the band and the edges are distinguished by a color that differs from the background color. Larger bands usually have a three-part division of the width such that a motif runs along the edges, bordered on both sides by lengthwise stripes, and a somewhat wider pattern constitutes the middle portion.

The lengthwise stripes separating the patterns often have two to three tablets laid the same way such that they create small sections with a cord effect. The patterns are always symmetrical along a lengthwise axis. The only bands with asymmetrical patterning that are registered are some small skirt bands from Setesdal used as edging.

There are some regular patterns that recur in most of the bands of this type, and local terms for these are known from Bø. Lengthwise stripes are called "spindles" and also "square" "hook" and half hook" and a simple zigzag line is called "lock". The same terms, although somewhat more detailed, are reported from Heddal.<sup>7</sup>

These pattern elements, rhomboids, squares, triangles, and zigzags lines, have a distinctive character because of the stitch structure effect.



HEL KROK



LESE



HALV KROK TEIN

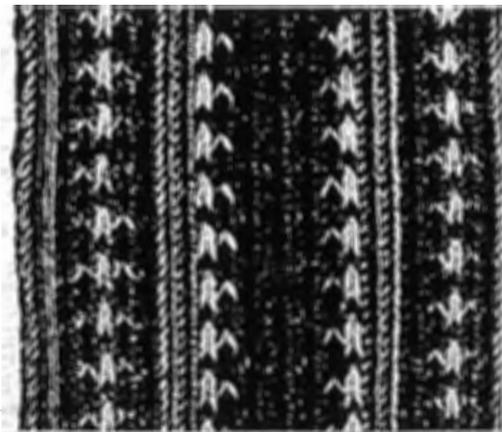
*Diagram of the most common pattern motifs along with names from Bø, Telemark. (square, half crook, lock, half crook - spindle)*

The pattern repeat extends over four picks, a result of four threads in each tablet, and because the tablets are rotated continuously in one direction, the pattern is regularly repeated over the band's length.

**Yarn and Color**

A group of bands have a warp of homespun, naturally dyed wool yarn of a shiny, often bristly quality. White linen appears to a small degree, and in some cases cotton. The weft is generally wool yarn. Common colors are varying tones of cool and warm reds, indigo, yellow, shades of golden brown, and white, less often green.

Another group has softer several-ply thin wool yarn in the warp. It is commercial yarn, imported, and is generally called "gobelin yarn." Individual threads of cotton or shiny, silk-like yarn appear. This yarn has a rather different range of colors. There are especially more and stronger red colors with deep shades of burgundy and strong cool pink tones being the extremes. Violet and orange also appear, as well as clear green and ultramarine blue.



*Detail of swaddling band, "reivebånd", from Seljord, Telemark. Privately owned, Seljord. Author's photo.*

**Use and Dating of Bands**

Most of the preserved bands in this group are hair bands and belts that are used in the East Telemark costume. Commercial yarn with the new colors became common in the last half of the 1800s. It was also in this period that the so-called "bracer skirt" became fashionable, for which wider and wider belts were used over

time. A number of weavers specialized in these wide belts that needed to be especially stiff to maintain the fashion. Local improvements in equipment were invented, among others the “band stool,” that made it possible to stretch the warp threads tighter allowing harder beating. The well-known weaver Helga Indleggen devised a form of loom or apparatus to attach the tablets to and wove exceptionally fine stiff belts. But the invention was not shared and remains in the ownership of the family.

The bands with homespun yarn are probably from the first part of the 1800s, and some could also come from the 1700s. Among these are some narrow bands that have probably been hair bands, and some belts of the older, narrower type. There have also been found some swaddling bands, and some that can be presumed to have been used as such.

There are many instances of the same band being used as a belt and earlier as a swaddling band for infants. Often a swaddling band [*lindebånd*] was called a “swaddling belt” [*reivebelte*]. The old Norwegian word for belt is “*linde*.” Finally then, “*linde*” became generally used as the band with which one wind around or swaddled [*reivet* or *lindet*] an infant.

Tablet woven belts for the East Telemark’s costume, “*raudtrøyekleda*,” is known from the end of the 1700s. Tablet woven swaddling bands are also known from the 1700s. In an estate settlement from Heddal in 1758, a type of belt is first mentioned, then “2 tablet swaddling bands at 1 mrk. 16 sk....”<sup>8</sup> This shows that the swaddling bands in tablet weaving were used at the beginning of the century inasmuch as articles in an estate settlement must be supposed to have a certain age. The valuation is relatively high compared to other values for bands in estate settlements, implying that they have been regarded as fine bands. For comparison, an apron “*Speild Baand*” from an estate settlement in 1741 in Gjøvdeal, Aust-Agder, was valued at 12 shillings.<sup>9</sup>

A preserved swaddling band from Seljord,<sup>10</sup>



*Pillow cover of sewn-together bands in different techniques. NF 248-98. Flesberg, Buskerud.*

called “*reive bånd*,” is woven with 52 tablets. The yarn is homespun and naturally dyed with indigo, cool red, lighter red, yellow and white linen. The swaddling band is 252.5 cm long and 4.5 – 5 cm wide. It has a change in the direction of rotation every 25 – 30 cm. This swaddling band had also been used around the porridge pail for childbed porridge. The same is also known from other places in the country. A similar swaddling band is preserve in Vinje, and a group of bands with the same measurements, materials and colors can be presumed to have been used as swaddling bands. On some, a discoloration from red to red-violet can be seen on sections of the band. This is evident on several swaddling bands and probably indicates the effect of urine, something that supports the probability of use as a swaddling band.

The high valuation of tablet woven swaddling bands from the estate settlements mentioned suggests that tablet woven bands were considered to be of such value that they were not used for everyday, but perhaps as baptismal swaddling bands.

Besides this type of tablet woven band, which still exists as a living tradition, there are a few tablet woven bands with patterns created by weaving methods about which traditions no

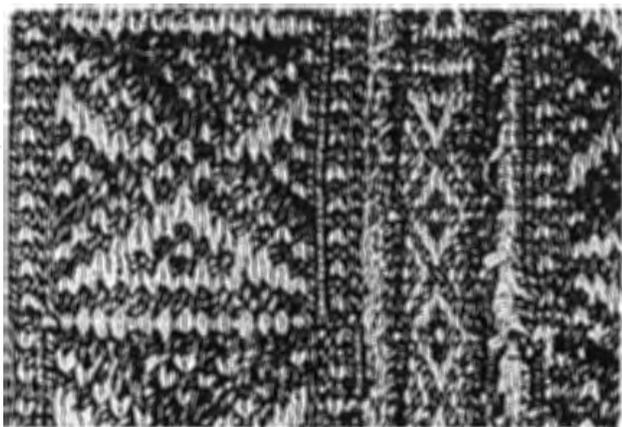
longer exist. The patterns on these bands are created with different principles.

## 2. With Cable Structure and Regularly Changing Direction of Twining.

A pillow cover from Flesberg<sup>11</sup> in Buskerud that is composed of sewn-together bands includes some tablet woven bands of various widths made from different types of patterning techniques.

A. The narrowest band in the pillow cover is 1.6 cm wide and woven with 14 tablets. Four lengths of the band are sewn in, for a total length of ca. 216 cm.

Each half of the tablets in the pattern area are threaded from their own sides and laid together to create a cord effect. In the center where the two middle tablets are set against each other with each threaded from its own side, a knit-like structure is formed. Each outside edge is made up of a yellow, blue, and outermost, white cord.



Detail of wide (3a) and narrow (2a) tablet woven bands from the pillow cover, Flesberg, Buskerud. Author's photo.

The material is white linen and light brown, indigo, and yellow wool yarn. Four-holed tablets are used, threaded such that weaving "straight forward" creates cross stripes, with every other stripe in white linen, and the alternate stripes in wool, light brown with two blue middle threads. (In each tablet, every other thread is linen, the other wool.)

The pattern results from a fairly regular change of the direction of rotation in the pattern area,

after every fourth pick, and by floats of the white linen yarn that are created by some tablets being rotated individually, and "standing above" two to three picks. This results in triangles being created that become hourglass forms when turned on their point, and rhomboids when turned to the baseline. Often cross stripes are formed when this turning happens at the baseline, since all of the tablets are rotated normally before and after the turning.

B. Another narrow band in the pillow cover is also in four lengths totaling ca. 216 cm and ca. 1.6 cm wide. This is made from 15 tablets. On each side there are three edge tablets of yellow, indigo, and outermost, white. All the tablets in the pattern section are threaded the same way, with cord effect.

This band is also threaded for cross stripes in respectively white linen and wool, with indigo in three tablets on each side of three middle tablets of light brown wool. The pattern is created by floats in both the white linen and the wool yarn. It consists of triangles in white and blue, and thin diagonal lines in white, all resulting from individual rotation of the tablets. There are regular sections with turning after each ten picks. The pattern gives a rather unclear and disordered effect that appears to be due partly to mistakes in weaving and partly to wear.

## 3. With Knit-Like Structure and Irregularly Changing Direction of Twining.

Two wider bands sewn into the pillow cover both have knit-like structure that results from paired opposing tablets. They have narrow borders on the edges and a wide pattern area where the tablets, that is to say each *pair* of tablets, is rotated "individually" to create different pattern figures. Both are threaded as for cross-striped pattern, with linen and wool yarn in every other hole in each tablet.

A. The widest band is woven with 42 four-holed tablets, 21 pairs, and are ca. 4.5 cm wide. Four lengths are sewn in totaling ca. 216 cm. The edges are created of four pairs of tablets on each side, continuously rotated, with white linen

outermost, then ocher-yellow wool, the next pair of indigo and white in every other hole, and innermost ocher yellow. The pattern area is arranged with indigo and linen in two pairs on each side and three pairs in the middle that are flanked by three pairs of tablets with light brown and linen, such that it creates lengthwise stripes of indigo and light brown.

The patterns are squares, rhomboids and crosses set at an angle, often with cross stripes between these motifs. The tablet pairs are rotated separately, symmetrically about the lengthwise axis. Both wool and linen float over two to three picks in that the respective tablets have stood still while the remaining are rotated continuously. Changing the direction of rotation occurs at the cross stripes, but not often. The pattern is reversible in that both the wool and the linen yarn float, appearing alternately on each side.

**B.** The other band is woven with 22 four-hole tablets, 11 pairs. The width is 3 cm, and there are two lengths sewn in, ca. 108 cm. Two pairs of tablets on each side form edge stripes, in white linen and indigo wool. The middle part has red wool and white linen in seven pairs of tablets, two threads of each color in each tablet. The pattern in this band is simpler, for the most part crosses and triangles set at an angle and made of red or white floating threads, with many cross stripes in both colors between each motif. The pattern here is also reversible.

**C.** In the Historical Museum in Bergen<sup>12</sup>, there is a band with the same type of threading as the two preceding: for cross stripes with paired, opposing tablets, and four threads in each tablet. The band is 278 cm long with a width of 2.7 cm. Both ends have narrow borders with worn, twill-woven red wool cloth, woven of glossy yarn. Because of the band's length and the manner in which it is edged, I believe it highly likely to be a swaddling band and probably a baptismal swaddling band because of the rich patterning. The band originates from Lavik in Sogn. It is very worn in places, such that some of the warp yarn is missing and only the weft remains.

The band is woven with 34 tablets, eight edge tablets on each side and 18 tablets in the pattern area that are individually rotated by pairs for constantly changing pattern elements. Pattern figures are created from sections of floating threads where the tablets have remained stationary for from two to four or five picks.

Edge stripes are created by a pair of tablets with white linen outermost, then a pair with every other thread of red and light blue-green, then blue-green, and innermost red. The middle section is divided into three stripes with three tablets each, the middle warm red, flanked by indigo. There are two threads of linen and two of wool in each tablet. The wool yarn is glossy and coarse, the linen somewhat dry and worn. The weft is linen, about five picks per cm.

The band has reversible patterning in that both the wool and linen yarn float, appearing alternately on each side. Between the pattern figures or pattern elements are groups of cross stripes in both colors. The pattern tablets are rotated in the same direction for long sections, but stand still or are rotated individually depending on the pattern desired. In several figures or elements, every other tablet pair is rotated 1/4 turn forward such that the cross stripes are "nullified" and a speckled effect is created when all the tablets thereafter are rotated "straight forward."

The patterns are rhomboids, diagonal crosses, and figures composed of triangles, small squares and stripes. The light-dark effect of linen and colors makes many figures have a negative-positive effect that can be interpreted in two ways. The speckled knit-like effect also has much to do with the character of the patterns.

One band with narrower edges but the same pattern area and colors that is used as a border band on a waistcoat is also in the Historical Museum collection. Presently I am familiar with this one only through color photographs.

*Cont'd on pg 9*

## The Norwegian Textile Guild's 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles

Have you marked your calendar for October 21-23? Are you making plans to join us at the conference? Have you thought about taking a workshop at conference time? We hope to see you all here in Decorah for what should be a fantastic combination of interesting presentations, fun people, gorgeous textiles, and enjoyable workshops.

### Workshops

In this issue of Norwegian Textile Letter you will find the complete listing of fiber arts workshops offered by Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in conjunction with the conference. Workshops are offered before and after the conference and for one to four days in length. Topics range from spinning and dyeing to knitting, embroidery, and, of course, weaving. Expert instructors are coming from throughout the United States, Canada, and Norway.

There are four Norwegian instructors teaching in October. Marta Kløve Juuhl from Indre Arna (near Bergen) is repeating the warp-weighted loom workshop that she taught for the NTG in Norway in 2003. Grete Bodogaard, who is an immigrant from Bodø, will teach a workshop in *billedvev*, traditional Norwegian tapestry. Ossian Kidholm (Notodden) will teach spinning and Annemor Sundbø (Ose in Setesdal) will teach traditional Setesdal embroidery.

Register early! The Norwegian Textile Guild is receiving advanced notice of the October workshops. Workshop information will be released to the general public (by way of [www.vesterheim.org](http://www.vesterheim.org)) on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Take advantage of the opportunity to get into workshops before they are full. Register for workshops by contacting Vesterheim Museum at 563-382-9681.

### Conference Registration

We are busy finalizing the program for the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles. The conference will begin at about 1:00 p.m. on Friday, October 21 and conclude by about 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, October 23. Most of the conference activities will take place at the Hotel Winneshiek in downtown Decorah, Iowa. We will spend an afternoon at Luther College in their beautiful new Center for the Arts and we will enjoy an open house with demonstrations and refreshments at Vesterheim.

The conference schedule and registration form will be available later in June. Norwegian Textile Guild members will receive information in the mail. The same information will also be posted on Vesterheim's website ([www.vesterheim.org](http://www.vesterheim.org)). Thank you for your patience. And thank you to planning committee members Carol Colburn, Betty Johannesen, Kay Larson, Kate Martinson, Betty Nelson, Lila Nelson, Mary Skoy, and Marianne Vigander.

### Frisk og Flink!

Don't forget about *Frisk og Flink! Fresh Artwork by Clever Weavers*, the special juried exhibition of contemporary handweaving. Get busy weaving and submit photos as entries by June 30<sup>th</sup>. Guidelines were inserted into the February NTL. Contact me with questions or to get additional copies of the guidelines. This is your opportunity to really stretch the boundaries of Norwegian weaving techniques. We're looking for traditional techniques combined with contemporary design. Thinking about something quite modern or edgy or sculptural? Go for it!

Laurann Gilbertson, Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, PO Box 379, Decorah IA 52101  
563-382-9681, [textiles@vesterheim.org](mailto:textiles@vesterheim.org), [www.vesterheim.org](http://www.vesterheim.org)

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#### 4. Patterning with and without Cord Twining

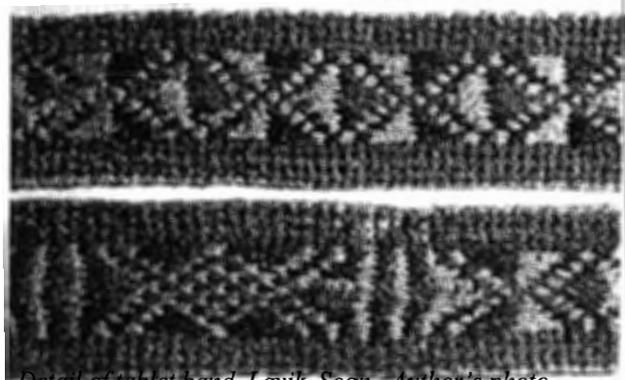
One band in the Bu Bygde Museum in Eidfjord diverges from the foregoing in threading and pattern technique.

The band is woven with 26 tablets. The edges are composed of six tablets on each side, opposed pair-wise. Outermost are a pair with white linen, then a pair with blue green and a pair with warm red wool yarn. The edge tablets are rotated continuously and form lengthwise stripes with knit-like effect.

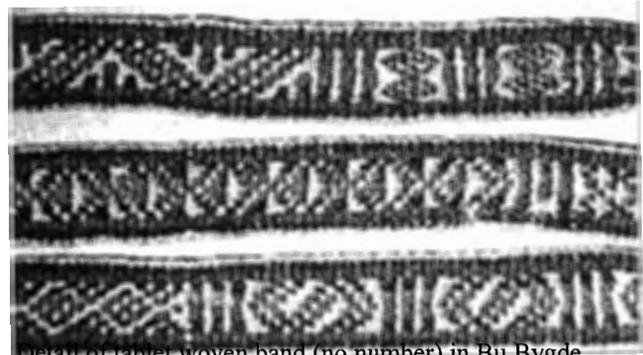
The 14 tablets in the pattern area are all threaded from the same side and as for cross stripes in respectively white linen and colored wool. The colors in the wool yarn are divided such that a middle stripe is formed from six tablets threaded with cool red, almost pink, wool yarn and white linen, flanked by four tablets of blue green (indigo) wool yarn and white linen.

The pattern elements are quite varied over the entire length, and the tablets are rotated most often two by two such that the pattern figures give a checkered effect of two red or two blue-green pattern threads against white. The largest part of the pattern area is woven with regular forward and backward rotation such that it does not form cord twining, but the usual plain weave structure. In the individual pattern figures both wool and linen yarn can float as individual tablet pairs stand above; but most often it is only the white linen that floats, less often only the wool yarn. The floats run over two and three picks. This is of consideration when the band is seen from the one side. On this band, as with the foregoing, the wool yarn floats on the one side when the linen floats on the other such that the pattern is reversible.

The pattern figures are diagonal lines, diagonal lines in zigzag from edge to edge, rhomboids, diagonal crosses, rosette-like figures (as on the previous band) and broken 'S's. Between the figures, or sections of figures, are cross stripes formed by forward and backward rotations that do not give cord twining. Here the threading can be seen.



Detail of tablet band, Lavik, Sogn. Author's photo.



Detail of tablet woven band (no number) in Bu Bygde Museum, Eidfjord, Hordaland. Author's photo.

But we also find pattern with cord effect. Every other tablet is first rotated 90° forward, such that the cross stripes are "neutralized" and the tablets are then rotated continuously in the same direction. Diagonal stripes are thereby formed over the entire midsection, in respectively indigo/red and white. After this section (it can also be *before*, depending on which end the band is woven from, but I presume it is *after*) the tablets are in the same position. It is then woven with forward and backward rotations such that new twine is not created, but instead the usual weave structure of the "warp rep" type. Every other thread in the shed shows as alternately white linen or colored wool, and thus the next shed is one thread advanced from this.

This woven section merges into a section where the warp ends (the remainder of the warp) are braided. The band is finished on both ends with a sewn-on rectangular end piece of warm red, processed wool cloth in plain weave. It is sewn on with indigo wool yarn and, with the same yarn, a stripe is sewn along the edges with

running stitch, and a diagonal cross sewn from corner to corner of the end piece.

The woven part of the band is 308.5 cm long. Including braiding and end pieces, the length is 330 cm and the width is ca. 2.4 cm. Both because of length and the end pieces, I presume that we have here a swaddling band. Moreover we find the aforementioned discoloration from red to red-violet that also indicates use as a swaddling band. The rich patterning, end pieces, and for that matter quality, makes it likely to have been a baptismal band.

### **Similarities and Dating for Bands in 2, 3, & 4**

So far I have not found parallels for the bands in the pillow covers in the Norwegian Folk Museum, the Historical Museum in Bergen, and Bu Community Museum, either in Norway or the Nordic countries for that matter.

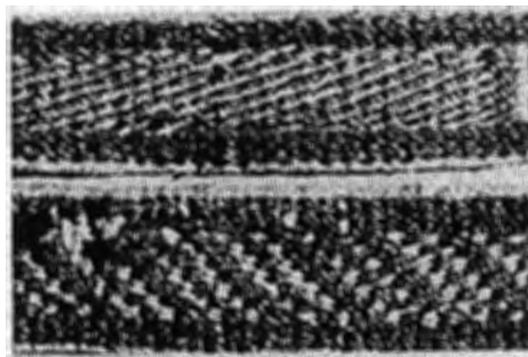
It is difficult to judge when they have been made. Based on the materials, handspun and home dyed yarn in the domestic materials of linen and wool, they can hardly be made later than the first decades of the 1800s. Based on the technique, which is rather advanced and demonstrates a completely different utilization and control of the tablet weaving technique's possibilities than the more recent tradition here in Norway, they most likely must be older.

It is striking how few preserved tablet woven bands are found from historic times in Norway, except for the relative plethora of hair bands and belts from the Telemark area in the technique and pattern type that is preserved in living tradition. There is also scant verbal tradition surrounding tablet weaving from other areas of Norway. Everything seems to indicate that in the 1800s and up into our century, there was only tablet weaving as known from the latest Telemark tradition, and probably only in a few places.

Furthermore, there are very few instances of preserved examples of the implements themselves, the tablets. They are small, insignificant looking artifacts that are easily

worn and disappear. This could be the reason that so few are preserved. But it could also mean that it has been a long time since the tablets went out of common usage. It seems that the tablets could have especially lost ground in the 1700s, being replaced by the rigid heddle band loom. A few preserved rigid heddle band looms are found from the 1600s, while there are a number that date from the 1700s and the first half of the 1800s. Accordingly it seems that band loom usage became stronger in the 1700s.

A rather small rigid heddle band loom was found



*Detail of tablet woven band, Bu Bygde Museum.  
Parts with and without cord twining. Author's*

during an excavation on the Bryggen in Bergen that has tentatively been dated to about 1300.<sup>14</sup> The implement was known in Norway in the Middle Ages, contrary to what was earlier believed. But it is difficult to judge when the rigid heddle band loom came into common usage. That there are so few preserved from the 1600s and earlier could simply be due to the fact that few utilitarian implements are preserved from so early a time. The many rigid heddle band looms from the 1700s could possibly be due to the fact that many more of all types of tools are preserved from that century and onward.

We find the earliest preserved tablet woven band used for secular clothing in historical times in the Skjoldehamn costume<sup>15</sup> from ca. 1500 [see note 15 for revised date], our only known secular garment from the late Middle Ages. A tablet woven band is used on the sleeve band, at the bottom of the pants, and as an ankle band. It is a simple, lengthwise-striped band with cord effect and some plain weave. At that time it could also

still have been common to weave simple utilitarian bands with tablets.

Factors other than the few preserved tablets and tablet woven bands and a weak tradition in the technique make it likely that the tablet weaving technique must have gone out of common usage perhaps at the latest in the beginning of the 1700s. Among the many bands registered in my research of Norwegian band weaving that are not woven with tablets, there are a number that must be presumed to have been made in the 1700s. These are technically accomplished and fine-patterned bands that indicate the rigid heddle band loom must have been well established already at that time. This should support my interpretation based on the preserved, dated rigid heddle band looms.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless one could think that the tablets for a time continued to be used alongside other implements and that then, over time, they came to be used only in certain places. Individual people could presumably have stuck to tablets while others adopted the rigid heddle band loom. Perhaps to begin with people used the rigid heddle band loom for simple bands and tablets for more complicated patterns in, for example, baptismal bands and bride belts.

Based on this, how can one then date the bands from the pillow cover and the bands from the western districts?

The four bands in the pillow cover are woven with individual rotation and for that matter in an intricate technique when compared to bands created in the later Telemark tradition. Still, it is my opinion that the pillow cover bands represent a relatively late expression of the technique that no longer appears to be controlled with complete confidence. The patterns are somewhat unclear and not always sustained. One must consider that the bands have been used secondarily for pillow covers after first having another function. The pillow cover came to the Museum in 1898, and assuming a certain age as a pillow cover, one can presume that the bands were sewn together in the course of the first half of the 1800s. It is

likely, then, that the bands could have been woven in the 1700s and have been in use for a time before they were cast aside. The widest band could have been a swaddling band and initially used for perhaps a couple of generations.

The bands from the western districts are executed with confidence and in my opinion demonstrate a much greater familiarity with the technique's possibilities. The patterns are both precise and varied. They also appear to be a link in a solid tradition, in that several pattern types appear again in similar forms both in these two bands and in the waistcoat edging band in the Historical Museum (see 3 C) – even the slightly complicated motif I call “rosette-like” composed of triangles and diagonal crosses.

This indicates that the bands were made in a time when tablets were still a well known implement and the tradition was still a living one. If it is correct that the rigid heddle band loom replaced tablets and, as the preserved bands in various techniques seems to show, had been well incorporated in the 1700s, these bands from the western districts ought to be from around the 1700s. Nor is it unthinkable that they could have been made in the 1600s. There are preserved bands in excellent condition in other techniques that *can* go back as far; one is marked 1612, and in my opinion this dating can be accepted.<sup>17</sup> Traditionally, garments and bands for baptism have been especially well taken care of through many generations, and have not been the sort of garment to be worn out. It can be mentioned that the Bu band's ends are sewn of exactly the same type of cloth and decorated with the same type of stitches as the border on the aforementioned band that is marked 1612.

All in all, in my opinion it is justifiable to propose the hypothesis that the bands from the pillow cover could have been made at some point in the 1700s, and that the two presumed baptismal bands must be older, perhaps made around the beginning of the century, possibly in the century before. Regardless, one must figure that these last are typologically/technologically older than the bands from the pillow cover.

## Notes

1. Noss, 1966; Christie, 1978.
  2. Christie, 1978.
  3. Grieg, 1928; Hougen, 1948.
  4. Master of Arts Birthe Weber has graciously given this information. The tablet has the number N 37362, FF 2019.
  5. Christie, 1978.
  6. Christie, 1978. In the system of classification I have made for the band techniques that I have registered her in Norway, the tablet woven bands fall within group IV, those that have a major characteristic of cord twist in the warp, and a subgroup based on how the pattern is created.
  7. Information from Anne Kaasene, Bø, in a letter of 10/31/1974 to the author, together with information about the belt stool in the Norwegian Folk Museum, probably given by Anne Bamle, Heddal.
  8. Holla, 1926, p. 232.
  9. Estate settlements in State's Archive in Kristiansand S., in a copy from Olav Aamlid, Arendal, whom I thank for the making available for use.
  10. Registered in private ownership in Seljord.
  11. Norwegian Folk Museum inventory number 248-89.
  12. Inventory number Bd. 2598 in the Historical Museum, University of Bergen. I thank curator Marit Wang for loan of the band to the Norwegian Folk Museum for analysis and photographing.
  13. Bu Bygde Museum, without inventory number.
  14. Herteig, 1969, p. 161. Dating from information from Curator Arne J. Larsen at Bryggens Museum in a letter of 6/6/1973 to the author.
  15. Gjessing, 1938. New radiocarbon dating by Nockert and Possnert, 2002, indicates a date of between 995 and 1029.
  16. Here I lay most weight on the rigid heddle band loom, that appears to have been the most widespread bandweaving implement from the 1700's and up to our time. There have also been other implements used for bands, but these have a more local distribution.
  17. Christie, 1978. The band is executed in the technique "square weave with slits," and comes from Gransherad in Telemark. The technique group is also addressed in Christie, 1984.
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## Errata:

The title article appearing in the Feb. 2005 issue of the Norwegian Textile Letter should have read *Ryas in Norway* by Helen Engelstad translated by Lorraine Leftwich. We apologize for the errors we have made.

Readers have asked for the following information:  
Originally published as:  
Helen Engelstad, *Norske Ryer Teknikk, Form og Bruk* (Oslo: Cammermeyers Boghandel, 1942)

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