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TEXTILES IN "RUTEVEV" FROM VEST-AGDER

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"You can expect to be recognized!" This praise could be given to weavers in Vest-Agder if they had made a coverlet in the rutevev technique which had especially fine colors.¹ Precise color choices contribute to a large degree in distinguishing the coverlets from this district in the Norwegian Folk Museum's collection. Black and white together with deep vivid shades of red, moss green, blue and gold appear over and over. At certain times, we might also find such colors as brown, lilac, violet and red-orange.



Åkle, rutevev. Fra Eiken, Vest-Agder

The impression we get of a textile, however, is dependent on more than color. Equally important are patterns and their distribution over the surface, as are also materials and weaving techniques. Rutevev coverlets are woven in a weft-faced plain weave. The warp -- of linen, hemp, cotton, or wool -- is therefore covered by the weft, which is always of wool.

The color, pattern, and weft yarns are what we first note in these coverlets. Other features, which distinguish them, are not as obvious. A closer examination is needed to reveal these more subtle characteristics.

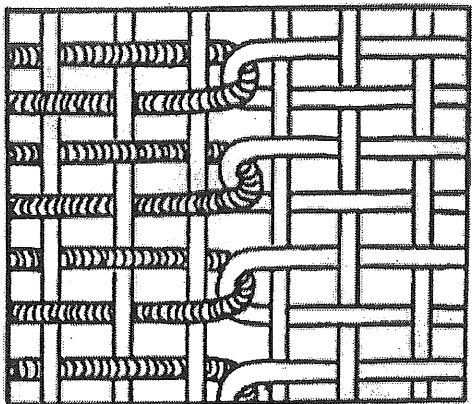
In this article I plan to look at Vest-Agder's rutevev coverlets from a purely visual standpoint. The textiles in the Norwegian Folk Museum will be the basis of the study, together with those which were part of an exhibition of old textiles from Vest-Agder held in Kristiansand in the fall of 1983.²

Technique

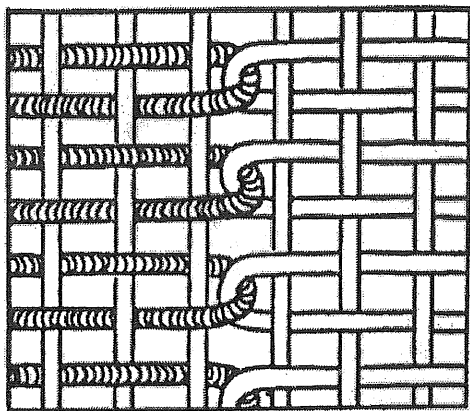
The Norwegian Folk Museum owns 46 rutevev, which definitely or probably come from Vest-Agder.³ This number was considered adequate to provide an overview of the various patterns used and the techniques employed. It also revealed that the material culture of the past was more varied than we might have previously believed. In addition to the familiar simple single designs and compositions, there were a series of exciting new discoveries.

My short visit to the exhibition did not allow for detailed study, but just before its conclusion I found that one of the coverlets had a type of weft join which I could not recall ever having previously seen.

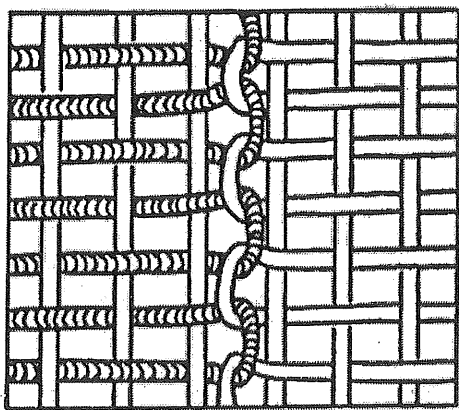
From my experience with rutevev coverlets at the Folk Museum and elsewhere, I had thought there were three ways to join meeting weft colors:



1. *Interlocking around a single shared warp*



2. *Single interlocking between warp threads*

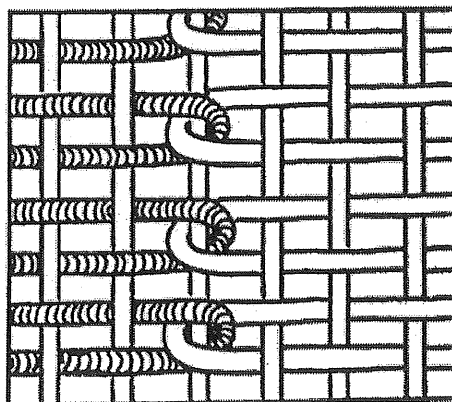


3. *Double interlocking in which meeting wefts interlock when traveling in either direction*

1) single shared warps, in which meeting wefts share one warp; 2) single interlocking, in which meeting wefts interlock between warp threads when the wefts are travelling in one direction only, either from the right or from the left; and 3) double interlocking, in which meeting wefts interlock when travelling in either direction. The last is non-reversible, having a ridge on the back where joins are made.

I was aware that occasional rutevev coverlets could appear with bands in kelim (slit tapestry weave),⁴ in "hakketeknikk" (dove-tailed tapestry joins),⁵ and in an interlocking over two threads.⁶ The last variation must have been chosen for purely decoration considerations; rather than sharply delineated, joins are unruly and feathered. Weavers have also used several techniques within the same textile.⁷

What I was confronted with at the Kristiansand exhibit was a coverlet, which seemed to have a blending of single interlock and interlocking around one thread. In other words, wefts both interlocked around each other and around a common warp thread.



4. *Single interlocking with a shared warp thread*

A quick re-check of coverlets I had seen previously proved that many were executed in the same technique. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time to re-check all of the exhibition coverlets. But I wanted to look again at the Norwegian Folk Museum's Vest-Agder material to see if it revealed the same variation.

The Folk Museum's Vest-Agder rutevev coverlet collection included 34 complete bed covers and 7 fragments as well as a horse blanket and one cradle coverlet.⁸ Three rutevev of unknown origin have so many Vest-Agder features that I have included them in this group.⁹ The collection therefore numbers 46 items.

The catalogue cards for two coverlets indicated they were woven in a single shared warp method; the others were divided among single interlock, double interlock, and interlocking over one thread.

The question was the accuracy of the information. In Kristiansand I had experienced the difficulty of determining whether a coverlet was woven in single interlock over one thread, even with a relatively detailed examination. Could this variation have been overlooked in a portion of the Folk Museum's rutevev coverlets?

The answer was "yes". Another examination revealed that 19 coverlets were woven in single interlock over one thread, 6 in double interlock, 5 with double interlock over one thread, and 2 with single interlock.

Had these two unusual joins been known to previous textile researchers? Could I find them referred to in the textile literature?

In Marit Wang's RUTEÅKLÆR, her exhaustive study of the rutevev coverlets in the Bergen Historical Museum, there is no mention of single and double interlock also going around a shared warp.¹⁰

(The above has been translated by Darla Thorland, March 1996, and edited by Lila Nelson.)

In NORDISK TEXSTILTEKNISK TERMINOLOGI there is no mention of single or double interlocking being executed around one or two warp threads, nor is it discussed in any other Nordic writing I have checked.¹¹ Illustrations, moreover, always show interlocking between two warps.¹²

Non-Nordic textile literature, however, includes reference to different ways of executing single and double interlock. Dorothy Burnham writes in WARP AND WEFT that tapestry in the gobelin technique is woven with interlock; where the color surfaces meet, usually the weft threads are joined between two warp threads, or around one warp thread, with single or double interlock.¹³

In VOKABULAR DER TEXTILTECHNIKEN (German) published by Centre International d'Etudes des Textiles Anciens (CIETA) in Lyon, the definition is as follows: "The weft threads are interlocked or connected to each other either between two warp threads or around one joint warp thread."¹⁴

Irene Emery points out in a discussion about single interlock in THE PRIMARY STRUCTURE OF FABRICS that there are two ways to accomplish this technique. The weft threads connect usually between warp threads, but a less common way of joining is with weft threads interlocking with each other and also turning around a common warp thread, usually described as single interlock around one warp thread. The technique may be difficult to differentiate from simple interlock if the weft is tightly beaten.¹⁵

It is not specifically mentioned that double interlock can also be carried out between two warp threads or around a shared warp.

Though I perceived the Vest-Agder technique as a mixture of single/double interlock and interlock around one thread, it appears from the literature above that these joins are looked on as a variation of single and double interlock. I would suggest that in future references we ought to differentiate between single and double interlock between warp threads, and single and double interlock around one warp thread.

Among Norwegian folk museums, the above variations in rutevev appear to have occurred only in Vest-Agder. If future investigations should confirm this, then several questions arise.

How did these variations develop in Vest-Agder, and why? One possibility may be a direct loan from abroad but if so, we might ask which country would be the likely source. That is a question I cannot answer.

The above mentioned references say nothing about the spreading of the two different methods. In the other textile literature at my disposal, the single/double interlock around one warp thread has not even been mentioned.

Marit Wang hypothesizes that the technique, as well as two panels joined in the center, could be due to southern and eastern European influences.¹⁶ Because of the difficulty of getting accurate information in books from eastern Europe, Wang has built on conversations with colleagues plus her own studies of Polish, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian geometric tapestries. These as a rule appear to be woven with weft interlocks around one warp. I have been informed that Hungary also has tapestries which, if not done in kelim,¹⁷ were executed with an interlock around one warp. It appears that other areas must be explored and further research continued.

Another possibility is that the technique may have evolved locally and independently of foreign impulses. Or it may have come about from a meeting between differing ethnic traditions in which methods were combined.

I find it hard to believe, however, that weavers accustomed to the interlock around one thread would be influenced by the double interlock tradition to change technique. The opposite would seem more reasonable in that weavers would see an advantage in a reversible tapestry. That someone felt it necessary to change from double to single interlock around a shared warp we learn from a report in DEN NORSKE HUSFLIDSFÖRENING¹⁸ in which Gunvald Gulliksen, DNH manager in Laudal, states that early åkle weaving was done in double interlock but that around 1850 Knutsdatter Skuland changed to single interlock. It was also done in

other places in Norway and was especially widespread in Hardanger.

Anna Grostøl, a home economics teacher who traveled around Norway from 1930-1940 collecting information about various crafts, mentions a double interlock around one warp in connection with a rutevev from Bjelland. Her statement makes one wonder if the technique developed or was chosen out of practical motives. She says, "The woolen threads have both been taken around one warp thread. If the woolen thread wears on one side, the linen thread in the warp will keep the block design on the other side intact. It is therefore easy to mend a worn out blanket."¹⁹

This may be true, but the effect is the same for a single or double interlock between two warps. If coverlets have been observed to show more wear with these techniques, the change might be understandable. I believe that this would have been a late phenomenon, however, for adhering to tradition would earlier have taken precedence over utilitarian concerns.

At present, therefore, one cannot explain how the single/double interlock around one warp began, nor determine its age or if it originated in Vest-Agder. Unfortunately, the rutevev themselves can offer no answers because they seldom had woven-in dates; when the year is given, it only indicates that the technique was in use at that particular time. None of the pieces in this technique in the Norsk Folk Museum is dated.²⁰ An earlier mentioned tapestry registered by Anna Grostøl is most likely from the first part of the 1800s. She writes, "Astrid's great grandfather was from Ryllend, but he was born at Høie in Øslubø. By 1808 his children were grown, and at that time he bought Ryllend. His wife or daughters had woven the article Astrid bought at the auction, because it was from old Jon in Ryllend. Now they had come across a 'stoppeteppe' [mended blanket?]." This information cannot be confirmed.

A tapestry in single interlock around one warp from the Kristiansand exhibit was, according to

the owner, woven in 1852.²¹ Such information, however, is too limited and uncertain to accurately determine the beginning of the technique. It is most likely, however, that it has been in use into modern times.

Composition and Motif

The rutevev coverlets in the Kristiansand exhibit had more variety in designs and luxuriance in color than those from Vest-Agder in the Norsk Folk Museum collection. To get a more complete picture, I will consider the two groups as one. I have excluded smaller textiles such as the horse and cradle blankets as well as the fragments where the design cannot be clearly distinguished.²² I have followed Marit Wang's classification system of compositions.²³

Tapestries with frame composition. The 77 in this group are characterized by various borders along all four sides, forming a frame around the center. Because designs in the centers may differ, I have divided the textiles into subgroups.

Thirty-five coverlets have center designs squared diagonally, forming diamonds and outlines in several colors going toward the center,²⁴ in contrast to the usual cross- formed or squared center points. The number of diamonds in the length varies from 2 1/2 to 6 and differs in the width accordingly.

Anna Grostøl refers to the center designs as "cross and crown" and the diagonal designs as "erte-band" or "krokar."²⁵

Even in simply patterned groups, the coverlets reveal variety through differences in the size of the diamonds and in the colors used. Alternating colors within the divisions of the diamonds can change the nature of the design.

None of the following subgroups has as many pieces as the group just described. It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that here we have the most common rutevev design in Vest-Agder, at least in the 19th century and the beginning of our own. It is the time period

during which we consider most of these textiles were woven. Anna Grostøl refers to these designs as for "the old fashioned style textiles." She indicates that the eight-petal flower motifs were the most favored designs until classes in weaving and patterns from husflid entered the scene.²⁶

Two coverlets in this subgroup are dated 1843 and 1849. Oral information indicates that two others are from 1856 and 1880.²⁷ It is reasonable to assume that these designs may have been in use considerably earlier, but at present the beginnings of åkle weaving in Norway are unknown. Much is left to be investigated, a major source being the probate records. In the parish records for Sør Audnedal, for example, products for the Fardal farm from 1666 include a "dokkevevd" (butterfly woven) bedcover valued at 2 daler.²⁸ We do not know, however, if the earlier term "dokkevevnað" meant in 1600 what we interpret as rutevev today. And the probate record does not reveal where the coverlet was made.

(end of translation by Ellen Berg)

Characteristic features.

Marit Wang has grouped the twelve checked tapestries from West-Agder housed in the Historical Museum in Bergen as a primarily southern type, together with the two tapestries from Setesdal. She says in her discussion about them: "Conclusion: This southern type of weaving is characterized by weft threads turning around the same warp where colors change. They are often joined by a seam in the middle; they are wider than average, and they have a weight and total surface area smaller than average. These tapestries have single ply warp strands that are not woolen, and they do not have a finished edge. Surprisingly many have lightning patterns, but the number is not higher than normal. Many are framed by borders, and the techniques do not vary." (53)

How do the square design tapestries from Norwegian Folk Museum in West -Agder compare to this description? Of the forty six textiles here, fourteen use interlocking around a

common warp end, nineteen use single interlocking around a common warp end, two use single interlocking between two warp threads, five use double interlocking around one warp end and six use double interlocking between two warp ends. Thirty-nine of the textiles are, or have been, joined by a seam in the middle (54) and the average width of the textiles is 126 cm. (55). Seven of the textiles have wool warps. In one case we see double warp ends in each headle; otherwise the warp ends are used singly. Lightning design is found on thirty-five textiles; ten of these have open lightning. Forty-three textiles belong, in terms of composition, to the group called "framed compositions", one belongs to the group "diagonal design", and two to the group "uniform octagons". I have not calculated weight per surface unit. Some of the textiles are completely lined, or have been re-enforced on the back in a variety of ways. My numbers are therefore not completely correct.

Let us look at this research in relationship to the twelve tapestries from Lista and Mandal housed in the Historic Museum in Bergen. (56). It appears that even though there is more variety in the textiles from Norwegian Folk Museum than in those in the Bergen collection, we still get the strong impression that there is a southern group of textiles with checkered designs that have elements in common. The characteristics seen in Bergen became more common, and were also subject to new impulses, which seem to be unique to the tapestries from West-Agder.

We find more cases of wool warp and of the use of double warp ends in our textiles. With other words, the textiles from West-Agder do not always have warp of fibers other than wool. In addition, the textiles from the Norwegian Folk Museum show more variety in the joining of yarns between two color fields. We find both single and double interlocking around one warp end, as well as single and double interlocking between two warp ends. The schematic comparison does not distinguish between the two variations. The percentage of textiles with double interlocking is about equal in the two museums, while it is considerably higher for

textiles with interlock around a common warp end in Bergen, and considerably more common with single interlock in Oslo.

If we compare the textiles from West-Agder with the textiles from the Norwegian Folk Museum we see that 37.93% of the total textiles interlock around a common warp end; the same percentage has single interlock (divided between 32.76% in single interlock around one warp end and 5.17% in single interlock between two warp ends), while the number of double interlock is 21.14% (of these 8.62% have double interlock around one warp end, 15.52% double interlock between two warp ends). There is no evidence to substantiate the claim that interlock around one warp end dominates. Single interlock is just as common, and in addition, there is a considerable amount of textiles woven with double interlock.

The other categories in the chart emphasize that the textiles from West-Agder, when compared to checkered textiles in the Historical Museum in Bergen, often are joined by a seam in the middle, and are wider than commonly seen. Borders frame a large number of the textiles. Two of the textiles in the Norwegian Folk Museum have open work in the borders (hemstitching?); otherwise there are only checks, stripes or striped weft rep (kjerringtenner). With other words, there is not much variety in techniques employed.

If we use this evidence to present a conclusion, it might look like this: we find a distinctive southern group of textiles where the technique in the transition between vertical color areas often is weft interlock around one warp or single interlock. A considerable amount is also woven with double interlock. One should note that the majority of the textiles woven with single interlock, and some of those with double interlock, are used on the types interlocking around a common warp end. The textiles are frequently joined by a seam in the middle, are wider than average, and have a weight per square surface area lower than average. They have almost always a single warp per headle, and only a few have wool warps. They do not have a

finished edge woven on the loom. Noticeably many have borders of lightning, and the occurrence of open lightning is higher than normal. Borders frame a majority of the textiles; the technique shows little variety.

It appears that the more tapestries with square designs that are collected, the more varied they appear to the viewer. We might have to change our conclusion if more textiles are included in future research.

Unfortunately I cannot use the material from the arts and crafts exhibit in Kristiansand for this study. I did not find the time to examine the technique employed for joining separate color areas for all fifty-eight tapestries using squares as a design element; neither do I have enough information to fill in the rubrics in Marit Wang's chart. (59). I also see other problems connected to comparing tapestries with square designs in the Historic Museum and in the Norwegian Folk Museum with the textiles from Kristiansand. Among the latter, several more appear to have been completed during the late 1800's and the beginning of the 1900's than is the case with the textiles in the two museums. In addition, it is safe to assume that a larger part of the textiles in the exhibit probably have been used for purposes other than bed covers. Eleven of them are also "rose" design, and we do find these in the collections of the two museums.

Having said this, I still venture to present a few numbers. If we exclude from our analysis two textiles meant for the table, one rug for the floor, two horse blankets and four relatively small and probably newer textiles maybe intended for the wall, we find that of the remaining forty-two textiles have a seam in the middle (85.7%). The forty-nine textiles have an average width of 131 cm. (60)

Of the total of fifty-eight textiles with geometrically square designs, only one tapestry had wool warp (1.72%). Among the remaining weavings, twenty-nine had linen or hemp warp, the others used cotton. No finished edges were observed. Nineteen of these had borders with

lightning design (32.76%); forty-three of them had framed borders (74.14%).

We might thus say that the textiles from the exhibit in Kristiansand conform to our previous observation that checkered tapestries from West-Agder often are joined by a seam in the middle; that they (considering the collection at the Historical Museum) are relatively wide and more often than is normal have lightning designs in the borders; that few have a wool warp; they do not have finished edges; most use borders which frame the design, and the technique shows little variety.

Weavers and their environment.

Marit Wang has pointed out, based on her research that two groups of textiles might have originated with professional weavers. (61). She maintains, quite wisely, that professional weavers might stay with one of the technique variations previously discussed, and that the textiles would show a high degree of technical skill, combined with standardization. The high technical quality would, among other things, require a finer yarn, and result in covers which weigh less.

One of the groups of possibly professionally crafted tapestries with square designs that Marit focused on, are from West-Agder and she characterized them thus: "woven with interlock around one warp end; joined by a seam in the middle; have single warp threads; normally do not use wool for warp; have no finished edges- or not much technical variation. Open lightning design occurs; no eight-sided "roses"; framed by borders. Probably originated in and spread from Mandal. Probably produced on relatively small looms." (62)

Since I haven't weighed the rugs I have examined, I cannot comment on her observation on this point. I also feel that the picture became a little more complex upon the discovery of the "new" variations in technique. We should also discuss questions so far not addressed that have to do with the environment which produced the preserved tapestries, including the dating of these

textiles. I am not going to address these issues here, however.

On the other hand, it is not always necessary to study the textiles themselves to acquire knowledge about the women who wove them and the conditions under which they worked. Written and oral sources also yield a good deal of information. Let me start with the most recent period.

Evidence indicates that the weaving of textiles with geometric, square designs was done by specialists during the latter part of the last century and the beginning of our century. In any case, it is safe to say that not all women who were accomplished weavers created such textiles. Several of Anna Grostøls informants have commented about this. Tori Malena Fossdal in Gyland, born 1853, said, "I have never made me a "butterfly" bed cover. Nils says they probably weren't common bed covers. I thought the weaving went too slowly." (63) Signe G. Mjaland, Harstveit in Gjørdal, born 1848, said "Tapestry bed covers; they go very slowly. I wouldn't let my servant girls waste their time on those." (64) The testimony under A.8 above, however, indicates that some servant girls might have woven with square designs, as did the servant girl of "aunt Siri at Akset".

Women who could weave textiles with geometric tapestry designs might have earned a necessary extra income by selling their products. At Anstein Eiken's, born about 1877, Anna Grostøl observed that "An old gal, Rannei Tveiten, on the farm neighboring to Eiken, made and sold bed covers. The Eiken's owned a couple of pieces, woven with multiple interlocking colors, which Rannei had sold them for five daler. New. But she did use yarns people had. Rannei Tveiten, who had woven these two "butterfly" textiles for Anstein Eiken, had a farm herself, but was rather poor, and did much weaving for people. An old gal. She died about 1900." (65)

Anna Maria Håbbesland, born Olsdotter, Verdal, 1865, told "My mother's sister, she spun some

yarn and a woman from Åserall wove it for seventeen kroner. Her name was Elisabeth Larsdotter Kjyddan. She was very good. She worked on it for a week, but managed to finish in that short time. The middle section was very well done, and it had a good selvedge. It is made with "butterflies". (66)

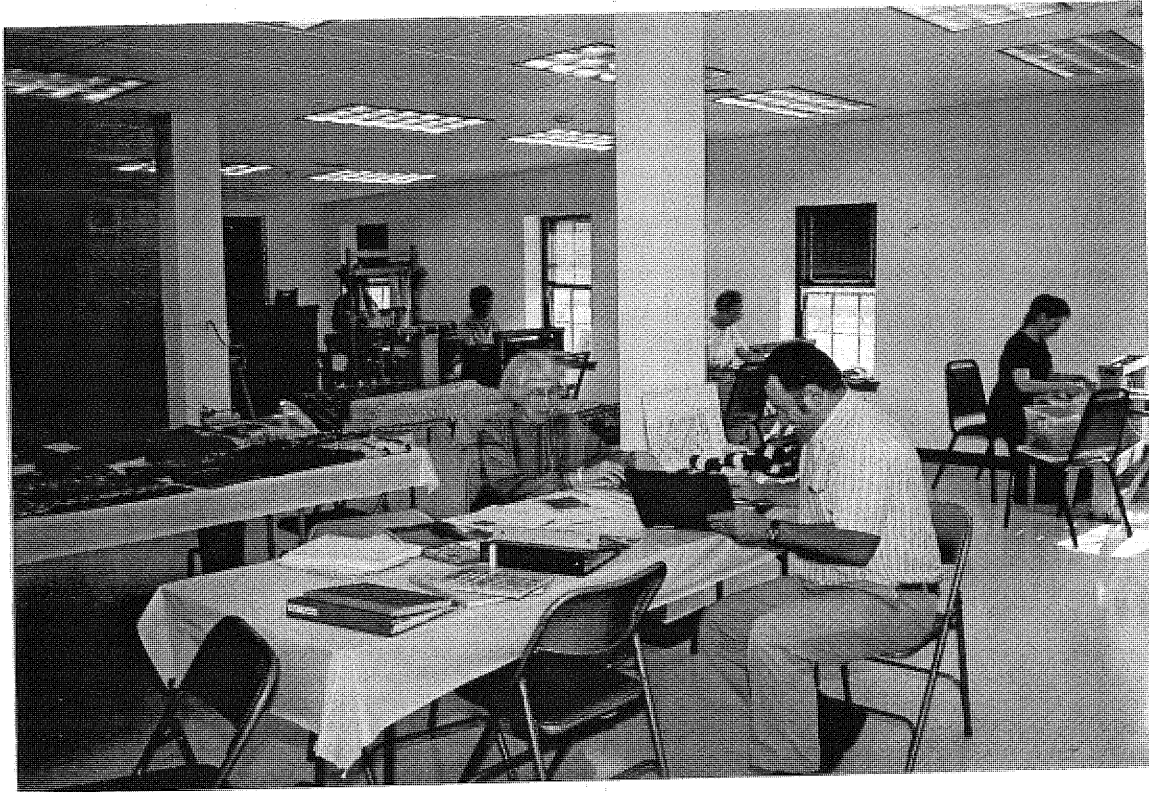
One of the informants in Fjotland, Anna Stakkeland, born Nordås, 1855, indicates that an air of secrecy might have surrounded the weaving of geometric tapestry textiles. "Butterfly weaving? When she was quite young, she observed a woman who was on the farm to weave such a textile. Many people used this woman to weave for them. But when Anna stood by her side to watch her weave, she looked so angry that Anna didn't dare watch long enough to learn as she had planned. It seemed like she didn't want anyone to learn the technique from her. But now many people know how to weave in this manner." (67)

The weavers mentioned above appear to have had production businesses with small individual differences, and can be seen as representatives for what Robert Kloster called "country crafts people". Kloster's other concept, the "crafts valley", can also be recognized in West-Agder, albeit in a more modern version. (68)

From the end of the 1800's, the Norwegian Crafts Association helped create welcome work for women in the county. Director Gunvald Gulliksen remembers from Laudal: "Ranði (Skuland) began to produce hand woven tapestries/coverlets for the organization in 1895. The work stirred additional interest in the valley, and two other women weavers immediately joined the activity. The first year these three weavers were paid a total of three hundred and eighty-seven kroner for their work. In 1900 the number of women weavers had risen to twenty-four, who received two thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine kroner. The number of women weavers increased dramatically, and at the same time more and more women in the valley became engaged in spinning and with sprang, so that the total number of women in the valley belonging to

Weaving Classroom Fundraiser Exceeds Goal

Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum is excited to announce that the fundraising project for the **Lila Nelson Weaving Classroom** has reached 107% of its goal of \$50,000. In the previous Norwegian Textile Letter you saw a photo of the room while it was under construction. Here you can see the completed space, busy with activity during Lila Nelson's July 21-25 "Smorgasbord of Norwegian Weaving" class. Four more fiber arts classes are scheduled in the room during 2001.



Weaving, from left to right: Elaine Behm (DeSmet, SD), Lillian Monson (Colorado Springs, CO), and Shannon Crary (St. Louis, MO). Seated are Lila Nelson and Bob Paulson (Oklee, MN).

Mark your calendars and join us for the **Third Annual Weavers Banquet** at Vesterheim on Saturday, November 3rd (please note the change in date). We'll eat supper together, view slides of the Nordic Fest weaving entries, meet the new Gold Medalists, and enjoy a program by Lila Nelson about some of the textiles at the museum that she considers particularly significant. Laurann Gilbertson will finish off the program by identifying several key additions to the collection since Lila's retirement in 1991. Supper will begin at 5:00 p.m. at the museum's Bethania Church. The menu and cost will soon be finalized. Reservations are required. To sign up for the banquet, please contact Laurann at 563-382-9681 or textiles@vesterheim.org before October 29, 2001.

the organization totaled about one hundred during the later years. The weavers are either young girls who weave in their spare time, in addition to the work in the home, or they are the wives of small, independent farmers or widows, for whom a little extra income meant the world". (69)

The above quote refers to a later time period. If we traced the history of tapestries woven with geometric, square design in West-Agder to an earlier time, would we still find the "country crafts person" and the "valley crafts environment"? My sources do not yield an answer to this question, but there is still much research left to do.

In 1974 and in 1975 county administrator P. Holm publishes "Attempt to Describe Lister's and Mandal's Parishes in Norway". He only mentions the female cottage industry in a few sentences, and none of it relates to the weaving of tapestry coverlets. But he says about the mountain people who live the high country that "they sometimes spin and weave, but for their private use only, coarse materials such as vadmél, burlap, yardage and linen twill." (70) The description of coastal communities does not include references to either spinning or weaving. In the paragraphs about individual parishes we only hear twice about the production of textiles. From Gyland we hear that the women spin, weave and sew their own clothes for daily use. From Spind we hear that "spinning and weaving is mostly done for private use, cloth, burlap and yardage with stripes; however, there are some weavers who come from the outside, in addition to Wansöe's own women and girls". (71)

Later topographical literature does not indicate that tapestry coverlet weaving was common either. P. P. Flor in his "Economic Travels to Lister and Jedderen, taken the year 1810", includes a chapter about "the industry of the women of Jedderen". However, for Lister he only mentions textiles under the chapter about Undal, where he says that necessity has forced people to weave clothing for personal use. (72)

In Jens Kraft's "Topographic-Statistical Description of the Kingdom Norway", published from 1820 to 1835, we do not find any information about female cottage industry under "Lister's and Mandal's Parishes", but a lot is said about the topic under "Jederen's and Dalerne's Bailiffdom".

We might assume that the authors of the above mentioned publications were not always well informed about women's cottage industry in various parts of Norway. Even so we must assume that textile production for the market place has been more prominent in the neighboring county Rogaland than in West-Agder. Eilert Sund does not emphasize weaving as particularly characteristic of West-Agder in his study "About Cottage Industry in Norway" from the 1860's. Production of vadmél and linen twill are the only two varieties he mentions. (74)

In spite of a lack of written descriptive texts about women's textile work, we still have the evidence of industrious hands as seen in artifacts which have been preserved. They show that even while working very hard to survive, many women must have found strength and joy in creating beautiful textiles. Information from more recent times indicate that many of the tapestry woven coverlets from West-Agder have been executed by specialists, by women who might have earned a partial living by weaving.

A majority of the aforementioned tapestry coverlets from West-Agder have distinctive characteristics, which contribute to the fact that they, seen as a whole, form a unique sub-group when looking at all Norwegian tapestry coverlets. We then need to pay particular attention to the unique way the weft is joined between two fields of color.

It is reasonable to assume that the county has seen an unbroken tradition in the weaving of tapestry coverlets from older times and into our own century. This tradition must have been so strong that a significant number of women found it natural to translate geometric tapestry designs into realistic, modern embroidery design from

the middle of the 1800's. This led to a somewhat different use of the tapestries. The "rose" tapestries were not only used on beds, but also found their use on floors and on tables.

From the end of the last century the Norwegian Crafts Association also introduced new ways of using tapestries, for example, as wall hangings. This weaving must have helped maintain the tapestry coverlet tradition in West-Agder. However, certain preferences for design, colors, materials and techniques could also have led to stagnation.

There are many more preserved tapestry coverlets in West-Agder than those used in this study. Local communities are now in the process of creating a survey of these. If these textiles were to be included in a similar study, they might necessitate changes in the conclusions we have drawn in this article. Such a change, or lack of change, will bring us closer to an understanding of the history of coverlets in the county.

(end of translation by Eve Douthit)

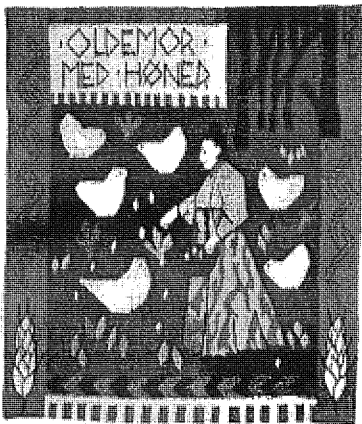
First appeared in **BY OG BYGD** Vol 31, 1985-86 and reprinted with permission.

EDITORS NOTE: This is a partial translation. The complete translation together with illustrations and notes has been added to the Vesterheim archives.

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"Great Grandmother with Chickens" meets the curious public

by Robbie LaFleur



After winning a ribbon at the Scandinavian Weaving Competition in Decorah last summer, an article about my accomplishment appeared in my local paper, the

White Bear Press. The ink may have still been wet when I received a call from the president of the Local Sons of Norway - would I demonstrate weaving at a Leif Erickson Day at Landmark Center in October?

I usually don't have something portable but I had been chipping away at a 'billedvev' on a Hagen tapestry loom and said I'd be glad to bring it to the festivities. Tapestry weaving takes quite a bit of time and my family was a bit bored by its slow progression. As my husband once noted, "You keep working and I don't see anything different." I was ready for a bit of positive reinforcement. The cartoon is based on a turn-of-the-century photograph of my great-grandmother, done in a Norwegian medieval style. She is surrounded by chickens and decorative borders. I brought along the inspirational photo and the smaller piece I had done as a sample when I went to demonstrate.



*Robbie LaFleur with
OLDEMOR MED HONER*

I barely had time to set out the loom and samples on the table before being deluged with curious and incredulous visitors. How many hours have you worked on that? (Believe me, I don't want to count.) How do you put in the new color? What did you do with the ends of the threads? How did you get that pattern? How do you know when to start a new color? Where did you learn to do that? Would I come back in January for a Scandinavian Afternoon program? I barely took a breath and the two hours were over.

I almost completed the tapestry but left a small area undone in order to demonstrate in January. That time I brought my teenage daughter to help and a few rag rugs to sell. It was a repeat performance: nonstop visitors asked a million questions (and bought all the rugs!).

“Great Grandmother with Chickens” is now complete and it will remind me of those rewarding hours I was able to spend sharing my enthusiasm for weaving. In this era of cell phones and computers and busy schedules and fast food there is still a genuine interest in traditional textile techniques. So if you are asked to demonstrate weaving, I highly recommend it!

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Norwegian Textile Guild Exhibition in Seattle

Twenty five entries have been selected for the Norwegian Textile Guild member's exhibition, Cultural Odyssey: Contemporary Norwegian Weaving in America (Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, WA, September 14 – November 11, 2001). A variety of techniques are represented, including tapestry, square weave, krokbragd, dreiel, monk's belt and skillbragd. This promises to be a marvelous show, highlighting textile traditions that are still a vibrant part of our cultural heritage. Attendees at the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles will select a “best of show” to be included in November's edition of the Norwegian Textile Letter.

Conference Update

There is still time to register for the Second Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles in Seattle, October 4-6. This is your chance to hear experts in various fields of Norwegian textiles without actually going to Norway. If going to Norway is your preference, however, come to our Norwegian Textile Guild Breakfast meeting at the Conference, where Laurann Gilbertson will outline plans for the next NTG Textile Tour to Norway. For further Conference information, go to the Nordic Heritage Museum website: www.nordicmuseum.com and click on the

conference page, or contact Kay Larson, (206) 842-7734.

Pre-Conference Textile Workshops

A few places are still available in the Meråker Doubleweave, Hands-Off Lichen Dyes, Nordic Spinner, Tabletweaving, and Fisherman's Rya workshops.

To check on availability, contact Kay Larson, 206 842-7734, kaylarson@hotmail.com.

Coverlet Book Goes to Press

The long-awaited Woven Coverlets of Norway will be available in September! Copies will be for sale at the Conference on Norwegian Woven Textiles book signing, or you may order an autographed copy from the Nordic Heritage Museum. The 200+ page book, which includes over 300 illustrations, 150 in color, is priced at \$40 soft cover, \$70 hard cover. A Museum order form will be included in the November issue of the Norwegian Textile Letter.

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