

Reflections of the Renaissance

The Tapestry Technique and Picture Weaving

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Norwegian Folk Art: The Migration of a Tradition

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31.

31. Coverlet with cloud motif (*skybragd*) in tapestry technique. NORW. Vågå, Gudbrandsdalen. 18th century. Linen, wool. H. 63" W. 74 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Norsk Folkemuseum (NF 772-06).

The diagonal orientation of repeated motifs here echoes the design of the double weave coverlet of Medieval type (28) that was also woven in Vågå. Here the pattern is built up with patches of color that go through the fabric, a technique which first gained prominence in Norway with the Renaissance-based picture weaving (32-34, 36). The borders reveal a direct connection. The simplicity and yet vitality of the color and the balance in geometric, organic, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal elements give *skybragd* a unique position in Norwegian weaving. In spite of the name, the design grows out of a pomegranate motif found in Spanish and Near Eastern brocades.



32. Coverlet in pictorial tapestry technique (*billedvev*): *Wise and Foolish Virgins*. NORW. IN AM. Gudbrandsdalen? Brought by an immigrant to Menomonie, WI. After 1660. Wool, linen? H. 82¼" W. 61¼" Somewhat garbled inscription referring to the wise and foolish virgins. Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

Norwegian pictorial folk coverlets descend in direct line from professional tapestry weaving in the lowlands. Even the technique is fundamentally the same, but the provincial weavers developed schematic ways of dealing with the joins where colors meet that both eliminated slits and replaced the illusion of space in the Renaissance models with two-dimensional pattern. The parallel figures in the *Wise and Foolish Virgins* made it ideal for this decorative stylization. The Biblical source and the relation to a festive event are typical. While the subject conveys a moral, the occasion is a wedding; and it was primarily at weddings, funerals, and holidays that these coverlets were used.

33. Coverlet in pictorial tapestry technique (*billedvev*) with scenes from the Adoration of the Magi. NORW. IN AM. Probably Gudbrandsdalen. After 1625. Wool, linen. H. 75½" W. 55½" Inscription: "SAO 1625" plus garbled phrase relating to the subject. Vesterheim, gift of Sylvea Bull Curtis. Once owned by violinist Ole Bull (84.123.1).

The arrival of the Magi was the second most popular subject on coverlets. A version of supposedly Renaissance origin appears here (only the lower left hand corner is shown). The piece migrated through the descendants of Ole Bull, whose American wife is said to have purchased it.

33.





34.

34. Coverlet in pictorial tapestry technique (*billedvev*) depicting the Adoration of the Magi. NORW. Gudbrandsdalen, after 1661. Wool. H. 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ " W. 56 $\frac{3}{8}$ " Kunstindustrimuseet i Oslo.

A version of the arrival of the Magi that is considered of Baroque origin combines the figures of the supposedly earlier version (33) in one space surrounded by a ring of animals.

35. Quilt: *Renaissance*. NORW.-AM. Helen Kelley, Minneapolis, MN. Signed and dated 1983. Cotton, poly-batt. H. 70" W. 50" Helen Kelley.

The impact of the preceding work (34) led to the migration of its image. The quilter, among the most recognized in America, is of English and German descent but made the quilt in honor of her husband's Norwegian grandmother. Cultural migrations can take many forms.



35.



36. Coverlet in pictorial tapestry technique (*billed-vev*) depicting the Wise and Foolish Virgins and the Adoration of the Magi. NORW. Kvamme farm, Lom, Gudbrandsdalen. 1760. Linen, wool, metallic threads. H. 71½" W. 47¼" Norsk Folkemuseum (NF 1906-841).

This is one of three preserved coverlets belonging to three sisters from Glomsdal, Boverdalen, and could possibly have been woven by them. It represents the tradition after it had become clearly rooted in the folk culture. The combining of subjects and increased schematization together with the well-preserved color make it exceptional.



37. Tapestry: *Battle of the Horse and Bull*. NORW.-AM. Nancy Jackson, Vallejo, CA. Signed. 1991. Wool, cotton. H. 40¾" W. 58" Nancy Jackson.

Building on the techniques and stylization in the Norwegian pictorial coverlets, this contemporary Norwegian-American weaver created a fanciful version of the struggle between good and evil.

37.

Figurative Relief Carving



38.

38. Back of a plank construction bench (*brugdebenk*) with carved figures. NORW. Setesdal. 18th century. Pine. H. 28" W. 63" Norsk Folkemuseum (NF 1928-521). (See detail on back endpaper.)

Between 1650 and 1800 a tradition in figure carving based on illustrations in two Bibles and in folk books on Holger the Dane and Charlemagne existed in Setesdal and surrounding areas. Stylized but expressive interpretations of the images were put together with little concern for narrative on bench backs, powder horns, and bowls. The central figure here is the horned Moses. The stylization and Biblical subject matter bring Gudbrandsdal picture weaving to mind, but the sources and specific characteristics are different. In carving, presumably a male art, emphasis is on combat. In weaving, it is on festivity.