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Tjukkåkle (Thick-åklæ)

Three Generations of Tjukkåkle-weavers in Lom weave "Det Gamle Mønsteret" [The Old Pattern], which comes from Lom and Skjåk, Gudbrandsdalen

Text and photos by Torbjørg Gauslaa

in *Norsk Husflid*, Number 2, 1985, pp. 14-19.

[Translated by Robbie LaFleur]

In the fall of 1982 and 1983 I interviewed Rønnaug Vangen, born March 10, 1898. She has lived at the Lom Retirement Home since 1979. She had many interesting things to tell about *tjukkåklæ* (thick-åklæ), or *krokbragd*, things that added to discoveries I learned from others - and which I am now sharing with the readers of *Husflid*.

Rønnaug, born in 1898, noted, "I took over weaving from my mother, and she took over from my grandmother." All three wove åklæ coverlets, and all wove for sale. It was Rønnaug's grandmother who began the weaving business. She worked until her hands gave out, at which point Rønnaug's mother finished the weaving begun by her grandmother. It was the first åklæ her mother wove. This was in the 1920s. (Pictures 1 and 2, figure 1: "The Old Pattern") The first åklæ her mother wove was steadily used at her home in Klepp—it lay on the bed day and night. The "thick åklæ" was used as is, not sewn to animal skins.

Rønnaug's grandmother and mother used the same loom; her mother took it to Klepp when she took over the weaving studio. It was similar to looms in other places in Lom and Skjåk. Rønnaug described it as a loom with two beams or a loom with one frame and two beams. A description from Skjåk was "weaving equipment with two seats and two beams."

The broader beam was used when weaving åklæ. The width of the first åklæ Rønnaug's mother wove was 110 centimeters (43.3"). The width of other old åklæ coverlets can be up to 130 centimeters (in two pieces in Skjåk).

In Lom and Skjåk it was said there should be as many threads in an åklæ as there are days in the year. Pictures 1 and 2 have 350 and pictures 4, 5, and 6 have 352 warp threads. An åklæ for a bed should be 3 *alne* long; for a divan, 4 *alne*. (1 *alne* = 62.75 centimeters, or 24.7 inches).

Rønnaug warped her loom for ten *alne* at one time. The warping reel hung on the wall which was common in Lom. She wound the warp in her kitchen. One hektogram



Rønnaug Vangen in 1983—85 years old.



Warping Reel

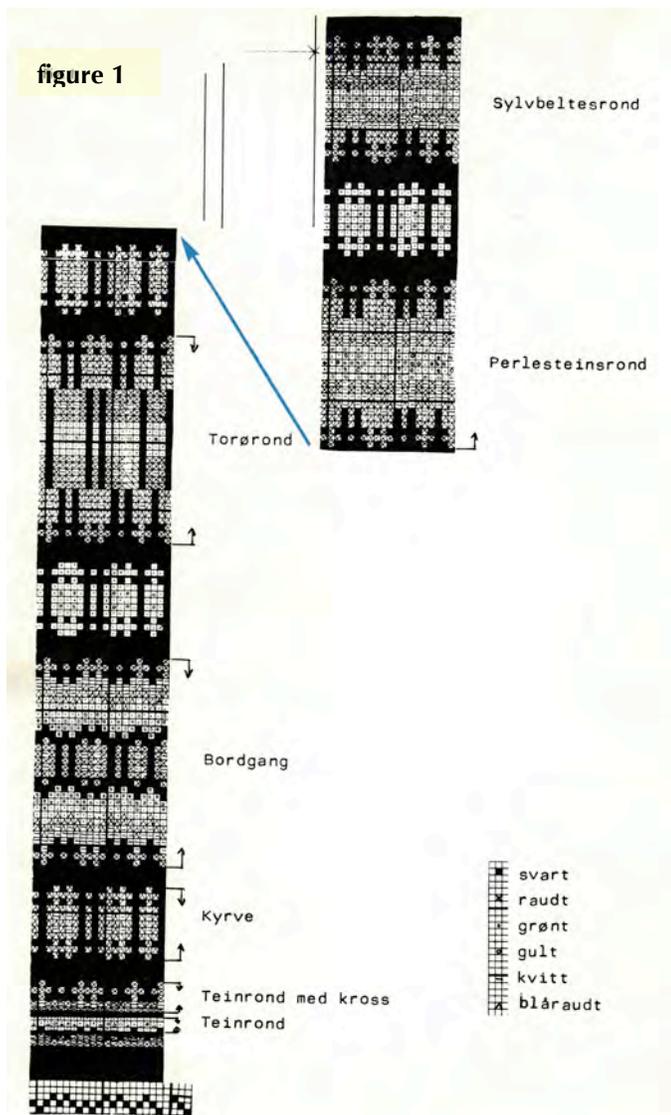
was used per *alne*. All three weavers used 12/6 cotton yarn in their warps. They would supply the warp and the customers would provide undyed wool yarn for the weft. They dyed the weft yarn.

Rønnaug's grandmother used commercial dyes, and she used "The Old Pattern" only.

Rønnaug's mother was interested in taking up natural plant dyeing, which she did at first, switching later to commercial dyes. She hung the dyed yarns in the window frame to see which dyes held up best against sunlight. She saw that the sun faded plant-dyed yarn more quickly than the commercially dyed yarn.

Rønnaug didn't weave the Old Pattern exclusively. She had 8-10 pattern samples from which people could choose. They were patterns from old åklæe, like Hofta, Krøkje, Aurjords, Aukrust, Røysheim, Vågå, and Oppdals-pattern. There could be a lot of blue in the stripes of pattern, but not in the background.

Traditionally the warp was two-ply "ragg," (pictures 2 and 3) with a right (Z) turn and left (S) twist. The ragg was spun of goat-ragg and wool/spelsau wool. It was a hard, fast yarn. In one old åklæe registered in Skjåk, the warp was a three-ply wool yarn with a left (S) turn and right (Z) twist. There are other åklæe coverlets in Lom and Skjåk using the Old Pattern and with ragg or wool in the warp.



The handspun wool weft, usually two-ply, could have both a right (Z) twist and a left (S) twist, something which

gives the åklæe a fine finished effect and liveliness in the pattern. This is the same yarn seen in many backstrap and tablet-woven bands in Nord Osterdal.

Rønnaug's grandmother wove åklæe for 2 kroner (crowns) each, and later for more. Prices changed even then. Rønnaug's mother received 80 kroner for the last åklæe she wove. Rønnaug earned 700 for the last one she wove, which she thought was getting to be a steep price, but Rønnaug supplied both the warp and weft.

Rønnaug's mother wove into the 1950s and continued to wind spools for Rønnaug as long as she could manage it. Rønnaug wove until the mid-70s, until she was 75.

The narrower beam was used for "ordinary weaving," for cotton weaving about 70 centimeters wide. Rønnaug's grandmother also wove *storrutasnorliv-ty* (large-checked fabric for bunad bodices) and her mother wove *rondastakk-ty* (bunad skirt fabric). When the *heile stakkeside* (the whole bunad skirt) was woven, the broader beam was used. Rønnaug wove only åklæe coverlets, so she always used the broad beam. Before Rønnaug took over the weaving studio she had a sewing business for about 20 years. Weaving was a much better job--more fit for her body.



The Old Pattern in Lom and Skjåk

In addition to the first åklæe that Rønnaug's mother wove (picture 1; figure 1), with a warp of double-sleyed cotton 12/6 yarn, there are two old, worn-out åklæe coverlets registered in Skjåk, one with ragg warp (pictures 2 and 3) and the other with wool warp--both with weft of handspun, plant-dyed yarn. In Skjåk there is a 50 centimeter long end fragment registered. It is half width (54 centimeters) with cotton 12/6 warp (not double-sleyed) and handspun commercially-dyed weft yarn (picture 4).

At the åklæ exhibit at Maihaugen in the fall of 1981 (see *Husflid* Number 1, 1982) there was one thick-åklæ from Lom--originally from Skjåk, in handspun yarn, with wool or ragg warp--3 alnes long and 125 centimeters wide, in the Old Pattern.

Unfortunately, the exhibit did not include any documentation of how many thick-åklæ-coverlets had ragg warp or wool warp, and how many included the Old Pattern. But Martha Motroen told about an old weaving pattern she had with borders; it was called "Border Names." Later it was discovered these were apparently the names and border patterns to the Old Pattern from Lom and Skjåk. (Martha didn't remember where she obtained the pattern, but her mother was from Lom, so it probably came from there.)

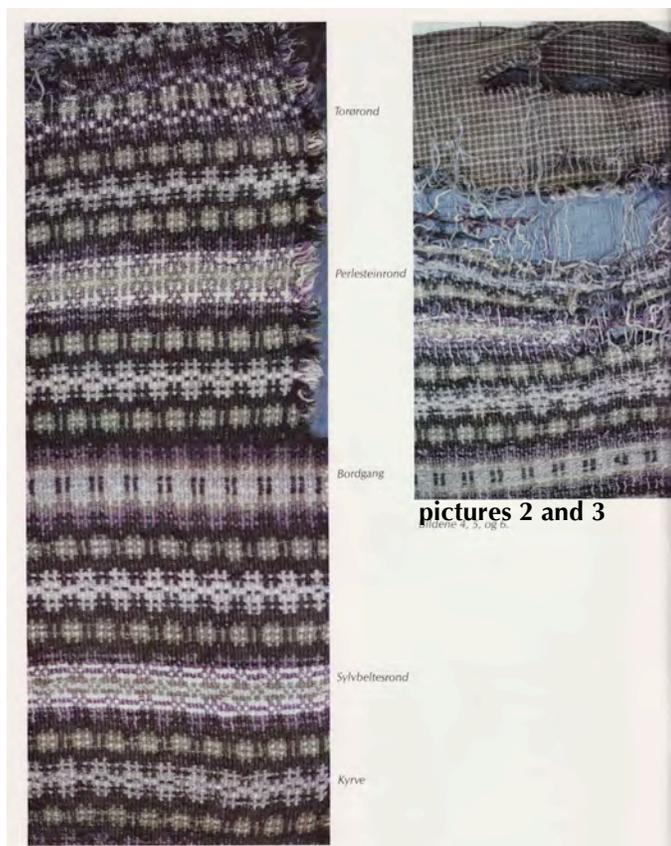


Figure 1 and picture 1 clearly show the four main borders in the old pattern: *Bordgang*, *Torørond*, *Perlesteinsrond*, and *Sylvbeltesrond*.

Between each border there were either one or three *kyrve* borders ("kyrve" is a specific pattern border), alternating blue and green. It was only the old åklæ coverlets in the Old Pattern that had *kyrver* between the borders. In the old days it was typical to have three *kyrve* borders (and this was verified by Agnes Teigum in Skjåk), alternating 1 green/1 red/1 green and 1 red/1 green/1 red. See picture 4.

The åklæ coverlet in pictures 2 and 3 has 3 *kyrve* borders, green on the outside and red (faded to beige). This is one variant. The åklæ was woven somewhat larger and sewn together. Between the *kyrve* borders near the ends of the åklæ are two half *kyrve* borders, shifted somewhat to create zig-zag patterns.

In one åklæ from Lom (originally from Skjåk) there is no background between the borders. The *Bordgang* and *Sylvbeltesrond* borders are together, and the *Perlesteinrond* and *Torørond* borders are together. For someone unfamiliar with the borders, it looks like two unsymmetrical borders--with one symmetrical border between. The symmetrical border is three *kyrve* borders (green on the outside, red in the middle, and with dark contours). They are placed together without background between--in contrast to the *kyrve* borders in picture 4.

The pattern elements in the Old Pattern were these four main borders. Between the borders one or three *kyrve* borders were placed on a dark background. At the ends, before the hem, were *Teinrond* borders, or *Teinrond* with crosses borders.



picture 4

In Lom and Skjåk there are many who remember these old patterns and can name them. Some have also begun to

weave the Old Pattern too, and that is a good sign that the names and borders will live on.

Colors

The base color is sheep-black and with one or several reds, green, white, and gold. The red color has been both red and purple. But the purple in many of the well-used and worn-out pieces, such as the one in pictures 2 and 3, may have been a true red, a true red dyed with cochineal in a tin solution. (See recipes 33, 34, and 35 - cardinal red, purple-red, and high red in Hilda Christensen's *Laerebok i farging med planter*. Kristiania 1908, 1917.)

With the effects of tin, the purple becomes red. If it is neutralized with alkaline (soda, lye, phosphate) detergent the color becomes more purple. The red color in this åklæ today is purple in the borders and in the kyrve borders it is beige with purple in the yarn.

Technique: Single and double krokbragd on three shafts.

Another thing common to a number of thick-åklæ-coverlets in Lom and Skjåk is the selvedge. It is tied up, treadled, and woven in single krokbragd on each end, from 2-3 to 10-15 repeats on each end, and double krokbragd in the rest of the åklæ.

Rønnaug told that single krokbragd was always used on each selvedge--it was stronger; it bound the åklæ better at the edges. This was for all thick-åklæ-coverlets, not only those in the Old Pattern. For single krokbragd and double krokbragd, Rønnaug also used the terms "single cross" and "double cross." (Compare the Teinrond pattern with crosses to the set of single krokbragd patterns in *Gamlekrossåklæ-coverlets frå Suldal*.)

The Åklæ exhibit at Maihaugen had 51 thick-åklæ-coverlets in single and/or double krokbragd. Of these 20 had single krokbragd in 2-3 to 10-15 repeats on the ends and double krokbragd in the middle section - all from Lom or Skjåk (five of them originally from Lom and Skjåk). The åklæ coverlets were woven in one width and had various pattern borders (unfortunately no one investigated how many used the Old Pattern). Rønnaug said that the very oldest åklæ coverlets had a seam in the middle but later the looms were so much wider that it was possible to weave the entire width in one piece - and this was "before Grandmother's time."

Of the other 31 coverlets in the Maihaugen exhibit, 24 were in single krokbragd and 7 were in double krokbragd from other places in Gudbrandsdal.

Both the use of the Old Pattern and the use of a single

-
krokbragd edge in a double krobragd coverlet helped to identify them as thick-åklæ-coverlets, whether they were woven by Eldri Juland, Barbro Klepp, Rønnaug Vangen, or by other weavers in Lom and Skjåk.

In Klepp, home to both Barbro and Rønnaug, another handwork was pursued. In the woodhouse stood a tailors' press, and Rønnaug said, "Mother and everyone who had been at Klepp before us took in ironing."

Rønnaug ironed for three years, and it was hard work. She couldn't understand how her mother could have done it as long as she did.

They ironed dress bodices and bunad skirts. People brought the fabric they needed pressed. The fabric lay in the press for a week.

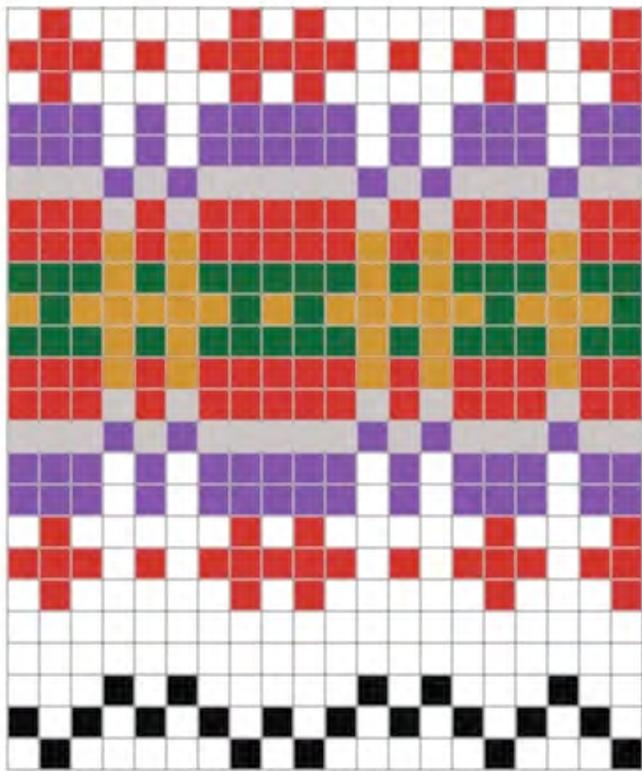
Her mother received 50 ore (half a crown/krone) for the first dress she pressed. Rønnaug took over the ironing (for three years) and for her last job she received one and a half crowns. The press was busy in the spring. "They wanted to prepare themselves for Syttende Mai--then it was busy at the press."

Many people over the whole country will recognize the name Rønnaug Vangen if they have been listeners of the half-hour folk music show on NRK (the national radio network), where Rønnaug has appeared many times with her children's songs. Rønnaug related that Myklebust said that there was no one who had as many children's songs in the NRK archives as she did. It wasn't long ago I heard Rønnaug Vangen mentioned on the folk music show on NRK.

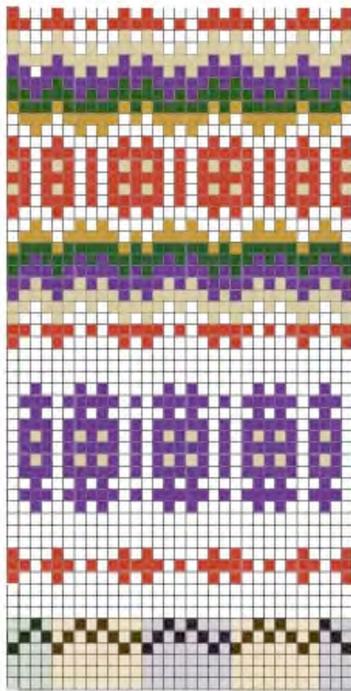
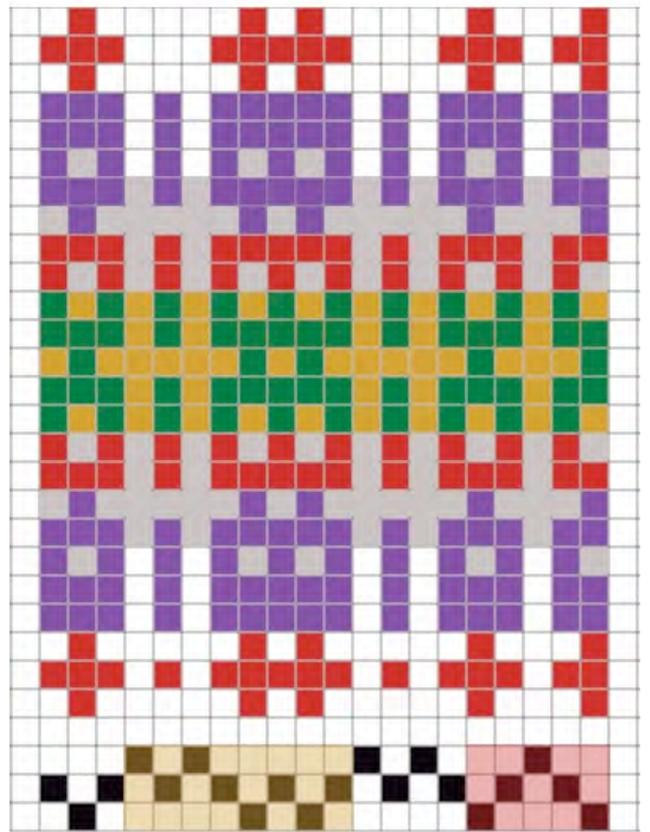
DRAWDOWNS OF THE OLD PATTERN

To create the graphic interpretations of the Old Pattern on the following page (5), Robbie LaFleur imported graph paper into Photoshop[®] and then filled in the appropriate squares with color.

Sylvbeltesrond



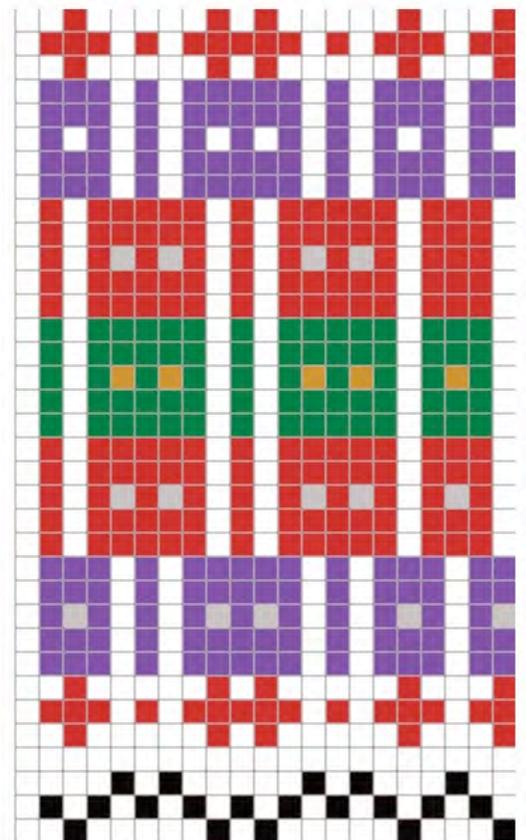
Perlesteinsrond



Bordgang

Kyrve

Tororond



The Old Pattern –The New Pieces

After translating the article, I wove three pieces using cotton seine twine warp at 8 epi and Rauma aklaegarn as weft. In the first piece I used the colors indicated and reproduced the patterns as faithfully as I could. That is the piece with the sheepskin back. I moved on in a more experimental way, using colors I love and the borders I liked best, modifying them for balance and interest. Details from the first two new pieces are below.

Additional photos of these pieces and another two pieces woven at a larger scale can be found at:

<http://boundweave.wordpress.com/>.

I was not able to contact the author or the weaver. I'd love to let the friends or family members of either one know that "The Old Pattern" will now serve as inspiration for a whole new set of weavers. If any readers have ideas, please let me know!

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