

## Ruutuvaippa



”Checked as a woodpecker, wide as a cow pelt”, a saying from Sakkola

”Ruutuvaippa” is a twill, black-and-white, thickly fulled throw cover characteristic to the Savonia-Karelian region. All the way to the 1800s, it was typical in the Savonia-Karelia region for people to live in smoke cabins and to sleep on its benches and floors. There was thus a need for a warm, self-made cover. The solution was an eastern Finnish throw blanket that was fully and evenly checkered and had a twill weave. It was dyed with natural colors in black, white and gray. Sometimes red was used as well.

During the time of subsistence economy, plenty of different patterned covers were made in western Finland, which was a relatively wealthy region. The making of the traditional blankets was eventually forgotten in the 1900s when newer designs were implemented. The tradition lasted longest in the Karelian Isthmus and southeastern Savonia.

”A typical Savonia-Karelian throw blanket used as a dowry was woolly and checkered, and apparently already made by ancient Karelians as well. In all its simplicity, the checkered blanket was stylish and beautiful in a rough, proper way, just like a log cabin”, Toini-Inkeri Kaukonen writes.

The checkered fabric was typically implemented in the clothes (that were used as dowry or inheritance) of the daughters of the household. It was also used for example when the bride walked into her a new home with her new husband. It also was used to keep the priest’s seat warm. Or it was used in the cold while sledding to church or to cover up a corpse. It was also a great cover while sleeping in a granary.

The value of the blanket almost amounted to the value of a cow. This was made apparent in an estate inventory organized in Kangasniemi in 1789. The blanket was estimated to last for 100 years.

The size of the blanket was dependent on wealth; a large blanket required a lot of wool, which was not affordable. There was a saying in Inkeri that encouraged living according to one's own fortune; "stretch your legs as far as the blanket gives in".

The old blanket was made by combining three cloths. The old loom was narrow, so the cloth that was woven was narrow as well. These cloths were then connected together by sewing. The blankets of the daughters of wealthy households sometimes had four or even five cloths sewn together with a strong cotton thread. This information originates from Svobodnoye (Fin. Kirvu).

In Pervomayskoye (Fin. Kivennapa) the blanket can be sized at 2,5 meters altogether. The size of the blanket was different in every region. In Ruokolahti, Toini-Inkeri Kaukonen measured the blanket at 245 x 180 cm.

The thread that was used was created by hand spinning a thick thread. The fulling of the blanket increased its warmth and durability.

The size of the checks in the blanket are around the width of two to three fingers, or 3-5 cm. According to Kaukonen's book, In Ruokolahti, every household had a different sized check.

The blankets were used as a dowry in Ruokolahti and Rautjärvi still in the 1910s and 1920s, all the way to the Winter War. Eventually, as the farming of sheep decreased, so did the making of the blankets. At the same time the emergence of cotton wool covers, that could be purchased and used immediately, lessened the need for the traditional blankets. Women started to weave quilts of linsey-woolsey that were, at the time, mainly used as horse blankets.

### **Many names**

The traditional throw blanket, that has countless different names, is prominent to the ancient culture of Eastern Finland, and it has been said to have been of great value.

The blanket has been estimated to be ca 2000 years old, with Germanic origins. The twill weave, that is believed to have originated from ancient Rome, has been found in Scandinavia since the Iron Age. Other well-preserved Nordic textile manufacturing techniques characteristic to the prehistoric era include for example tablet weaving, the sprang technique and nailbinding.

### **The Blanket of Ruokolahti**

Eija Auvinen has studied the checkered throw blanket of Ruokolahti. In 1975, Finnish Centre Women (of the Women's organization of the Finnish Centre Party) arranged an exhibition of old home textiles at the Ruokolahti market. The exhibition was met with praise, says Auvinen. The following year, Toini-Inkeri Kaukonen arrived to give a presentation on old Karelian textiles during the main celebration of the market. The artefacts of the rearranged exhibition were photographed and categorized into the archives of the Finnish Heritage Agency.

- You should utilize this, Kaukonen had said of one of the displayed blankets.

After a couple of weeks, the traveling board of the municipality arranged a competition that searched for the perfect souvenir for Ruokolahti. Kaija Karhunen remembered the encouragement of Kaukonen and wove a similar blanket to the displayed model that ended up winning the entire competition. Karhunen gave up the rights of the blanket to the Ruokolahti-Seura (the club of Ruokolahti) which got Annikki Sihvonen to weave them in the club's name. At first the blankets were sold at Aini Haikala's home.

Since 1992, the blankets have been made by Airi Ruokonen. They are sold at the museum during the summer, and for the rest of the year in Eukonpuoti that is located in Rasilantie 57. Over the years the blankets have been woven, for example in community colleges, for gifts as well as for own use.

### **Lastly**

Martin Lönnebo has said, blissful are the weavers who follow their inner longing – they weave their wings. For decades and even for centuries, plenty of blankets have been made by skillful women. The whole spectrum of life, sadness, and joy are woven on the blankets, as well as blessings for its user.

Airi Ruokonen

Lähde: Toini-Inkeri Kaukonen, Itse tuon sanoiksi virkki III