

Woollen Handicrafts on the Baltic Islands





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Woollen Handicrafts on the Baltic Islands

Handbook and DVD film

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	Anu Sepp	5
2. Local breeds of sheep	Karen Allas	8
3. Customs and rituals associated with wool on Saaremaa	Merike Sepp	15
4. Working tools and techniques throughout time	Kaie Kesküla	19
5. Natural dyes	Kaie Kesküla	23
6. Examples of island handicrafts	Kaie Kesküla, Birgitta Nygren, Sonja Tobiasson	27
7. Older traditions and modern application	Katrin Kabun	52
8. Present day designs inspired by traditional motifs and nature	Karen Allas	58
9. Care and storage of woollens	Anu Sepp	63
10. Resources		65



Anu Sepp

The Baltic Sea islands under discussion in this book belong to the countries of Estonia, Finland and Sweden. There are literally thousands of islands, some smaller and others larger, the largest being Gotland, Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Öland.

What do the islanders have in common? A strong relationship to the Baltic Sea and raising sheep. Because of the northern climate people have depended on sheepskins and woollen clothing to keep warm, meat for sustenance and horn and bone for fashioning tools. Sheep have also been very suitable animals in maintaining the island coastlines and meadows.



The Åboland Archipelago. Photo: Sonja Tobiasson

The Baltic islands have served as stepping stones between the mainland and the open sea throughout time, for both traders and conquerors. It was thus during the early Iron Age when the Vikings' trade empire was built around the Baltic Sea and passed along the riverways in Russia to the Black Sea, through the mercantile period of the Hanseatic League to the present era. Throughout history, the islanders have been influenced by many cultures – Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Danish, Polish, German and Russian – and they have served as a conduit of culture themselves.

This is reflected in their handicraft patterns. In my travels, I have often been amazed when visiting handicraft museums and shops to see a symbol or pattern that I believed particular to an Estonian island held to be someone else's traditional pattern as well. The eight-pointed star that I knew as the *Muhu mänd* is a symbol known elsewhere as the Scandinavian star. Another ancient pattern which is common to all of these islands is the 'sun wheel'. Alice Starmore, from the Shetland Islands, in her quest for the origins of Scottish patterns has referred to the Baltic Circle as being a source of influence (Book of Fair Isle Knitting, pp 16–19).



**The Estonian "Muhu mänd". Knitted by Maret Suik.
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**



Naalbinding. Photo: Anu Sepp

I have even found similar patterns in faraway places – including at a marketplace in Tunisia.

Throughout time the same technology and methods of wool-handling evolved in parallel on these islands. Naalbinding, or needle knitting, for example, is an ancient form of looped knitting dating back to the Bronze Age, which was a common technique at the time everywhere. A mitten dating from 200–300 A.D. has been found in Åsle, Sweden. The Vikings from Gotland used these mittens for trade (Bush, N., Folk Knitting in Estonia). Spinning wheels to hand-spin yarn and floor looms for weaving, as well as other tools for processing wool, are quite similar throughout the region. These originated from England around the 16th

century. Interestingly, there is a developing popularity in reviving these old techniques today.

On the one hand, the islands are open to the sea and hence open to the influences of other cultures, yet at other times, being surrounded (enclosed) by the sea has had the opposite effect. This other aspect of

‘islandness’ has also influenced sheep-keeping and handicrafts on the islands. The now rare Estonian native sheep breed survived on the remote islands of Ruhnu, Kihnu, Saaremaa and Hiiumaa as well as in other periphery areas on mainland Estonia thanks to their remoteness. Also, the old traditional patterns and techniques of making hand-knitted mittens and sweaters, folk costumes etc. have been retained on the islands to this day, again thanks to their remoteness.



Traditional folk costumes of Pargas, Finland. Worn by folk ensemble Bergmans spelmanslag. Costumes made by Brages Ab. Photo: Vera Hongell



Saaremaa folk dancers. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Handicrafts are highly valued in northern European countries, where they are still part of the school curriculum. Folk costumes continue to be worn on special occasions with pride.

In the 1960s and 1970s there was worldwide interest in knitwear and weaving, and those from Scandinavia became very popular. Countries of the western Baltic Sea and Finland were represented in books and knitting magazines. By far the most popular sweaters were from Norway and Sweden (Pagoldh, S., Nordic Knitting).

Estonian culture, however, was cut off from the rest of the world at the time by the Soviet occupation. It took a while after Estonia regained its independence – until 1999 – before Nancy Bush, from the USA, published Folk Knitting in Estonia, an excellent overview of history and folk culture as well as knitting patterns. This resulted in a global surge of interest in Estonian knitwear and patterns.

Nowadays books pertaining to wool and handicrafts are being published yearly in Estonia, but many are still not available in English. However, this period of freedom allows all of us to visit our nearby Baltic islands and share our skills and talents again, as in the time of the Vikings.

We are very grateful that initiatives are being created to encourage such exchanges and for the financial support that we have received from the KnowSheep project.

This book presents an overview of the development of technology and treatment of wool with respect to the Baltic islands. A team of authors from the major islands were selected to share their expertise.

There is an accompanying DVD that illustrates various techniques which will be of interest to students as well as experienced craftspeople. For further in-depth information, please note the resources at the back of the book.

One final word of acknowledgement and thanks goes to Karen Allas, our own 'herd dog' who has kept all of our initiatives in line and heading in the right direction.



Group of Saaremaa handicrafters visiting Gotland by boat to partake in Krea Tov felting symposium.

2

Local Breeds of Sheep

Karen Allas

The native sheep of Estonia, Finland and Sweden all belong to the same family of sheep breeds known as the North European Short-Tailed Sheep. These breeds have lived in areas stretching across northern Europe since the Iron Age, and in certain areas even earlier.

From a study of bone artefacts found in Neolithic (4900–1800 B.C.) and Bronze Age (1800–500 B.C.) settlements on Saaremaa, it is possible to establish when people began to rely on domestic animals, including sheep, for sustenance. Whereas in the Neolithic period the bones of seals, fish and wild animals were used to make artefacts such as spearheads and awls, in the Bronze Age the bones of domestic animals were mainly used for making such artefacts. It is interesting to note that on Bronze Age sites on Saaremaa, awls, pointed tools used for leather-working and textile production, were typically made from the metapodial bones of goats and sheep and that the bones of these animals are also most numerous among faunal remains, followed by cattle, pig and horse.



Bronze Age - spearhead made from sheep-goat tibia.



**Bone awls from sheep – goat metapodials.
From the collection of the Tallinn University
Institute of History, Archeology Department.**

The tails of the sheep

The North European Short-Tailed Sheep breeds have certain characteristics in common. They have a short tail that is broad at the base and tapers to a hair-covered tip. The face and legs are not covered with wool. Both sexes can be horned or polled. They are smaller in size compared to other breeds. For the most part they are hardy, healthy and good mothers. Having retained many of their primitive survival instincts, they are easier to care for than many modern breeds. The fleece appears in a wide variety of colours and patterns – pure white, deep black, shades of grey, shades of brown and a reddish brown.



Long tailed sheep. Photo: Alar Allas



**Short tailed sheep.
Photo: Annika Michelson**

These sheep are also referred to as landraces or native, which means that they have developed largely by natural processes, by adaptation to the environment in which they live. This differs from a formal breed which has been selectively bred to conform to a particular standard of traits. Landraces are usually more genetically and physically diverse than formal breeds. Many formal breeds originated from attempts to make landraces more consistent.

Depending on the local climate and environment – whether the weather is colder or rainier and whether the sheep live by the sea or in a forest – the various strains of the North European Short-Tailed sheep have developed different features in different countries over time, including various types of wool, with differing curls, lustre and softness.

In Finland the breeds that belong to this ancient sheep family are the Åland sheep, the Kainuu grey and the Finnsheep. In Estonia, these sheep are called the Estonian native sheep. On Gotland, the most primitive is the Gute sheep. Also on mainland Sweden there is a wide range of rare native sheep (the Dala-Päls, Fjällnäs, Gestrike, Helsinge, Klövsjö, Roslag, Svärdsjö, Värmland and Åsen.



Finnsheep. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association



**Gute Sheep.
Photo: Gute Sheep Association, Nykil, Sweden**



**Estonian native sheep.
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**



Åland sheep. Photo: Sonja Tobiasson

Sheep from the North European Short-Tailed family are also located, for example, in Iceland (where you will find the Icelandic sheep) and include the Shetland sheep on the Shetland Islands. This sheep breed was spread by the Vikings, who took sheep with them on their travels to provide the crew with meat, wool and skins along the way.

Over time, many of the short-tailed sheep breeds were gradually displaced by the importing of larger, long-tailed sheep breeds. Today, many of the Northern European Short-Tailed sheep breeds are rare in their own geographical area. Some have been classified as endangered species and are under protection. Historical developments in the wool industry have led to this outcome.

Finer wool

During medieval times, the wool trade was a lucrative business in Europe. Fine-fibred wool in particular fetched good prices, as fine woollen broadcloth was in high demand with the elite. The wool of native breeds was suitable for hand-knitting, weaving and felting, but it was too coarse to produce broadcloth. Thus the northern countries began to import long-tailed sheep breeds with fine wool, such as the Merino.

During the reign of Gustav Vasa (1523–1560), the Swedish state began to import sheep from Germany and England, which were raised on royal estates in Sweden. Again in the 18th century, there were new initiatives to import sheep breeds with fine-fibred wool. The state gave cash premiums to both farmers and importers who contributed to increasing the stock of Merino sheep in Sweden, with the aim of establishing a strong industry in textiles following the example of England. The peasantry showed resistance to the new breeds and preferred the native breeds with their coarse wool suitable for making homespun cloth. This conflict of interest endured for several centuries. Throughout the 20th century, sheep stock decreased and the textile industry went into decline as Australia, New Zealand and South America were producing the softest wool at the lowest prices.

In Estonia, similarly fine-fibred breeds were imported on the initiative of the German landlords of the manors, particularly Merino sheep. The first half of the 19th century has been named the period of fine-fibred sheep in Estonia. Numbers grew quickly so that by 1840 there were 208,820 fine-fibred sheep or fine-fibred sheep crossbred with native sheep in Estonia and Livonia. This is quite a lot of sheep, given that today there are fewer than half that number in Estonia. As the prices for fine-fibred wool fell due to competition from Australian Merino wool, the landlords reverted to importing meat sheep. The second half of the 19th century has been named the period of meat sheep.

In Finland also, fine-fibred sheep were imported from Germany and Sweden. Around 1800 Merino sheep were imported directly from Spain. A proposal was made to the government that all native rams should be replaced by purebred Merino rams. The farmers were against this, and support for the fine-fibred breeds further waned as Australian wool entered the market and the local textile industry went into decline. As in Estonia, interest reverted to raising sheep for meat.

New breeding initiatives emerged in the early 20th century, though with different aims and outcomes. In Estonia, two new breeds of sheep were developed through controlled cross-breeding which began in 1926 – the Estonian Blackhead sheep, a cross between the local native sheep and Oxford Down and Shropshire sheep; and the Estonian Whitehead sheep, a cross between the local native sheep and Cheviot sheep. They were both acknowledged as new sheep breeds in 1958. These breeds were developed with the primary goal of improving meat quality and are prevalent on farms throughout Estonia today, including the islands. As primarily meat sheep, their wool is not in demand with handicrafters. In other countries, such wool is used to make other kinds of products, such as insulation.

Only small flocks of native sheep on a few farms are left in Estonia, located in remote areas – among others on the islands. These native sheep were purchased by several farmers who, on a voluntary basis, are trying to preserve the breed and increase the stock. Unlike the native sheep in Sweden and Finland, the Estonian native sheep breed is not officially recognized and their numbers are uncertain, as no such classification exists in the Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board. According to the organisation Maadjas, there are around 500 Estonian native sheep (2013). Though their wool is highly sought after by handicrafters, especially those whose focus is using natural colours, most use imported yarns that offer them a greater selection of colours and have a consistent availability.

Gotland and Gute sheep

On Gotland, the Gute sheep has virtually ceased to exist. In 1940 there were fewer than 20 horned sheep left. A small group of farmers got involved in preserving the breed and numbers have again risen. Since 1977, the Gute Sheep Association has taken on the task of preserving the breed and the number of Gute sheep has grown to around 7000.

The Gotland Pelt sheep has become quite famous for its curly and silky grey skins, used for making coats, vests and furniture coverings. It is a crossbreed of several short tailed breeds: the Gute, Karakul and Romanov sheep. Controlled breeding and intensive selection since the 1920s have produced a modern sheep. It is raised for both meat and wool, which is well-suited to felting and knitting. There are around 15,000 Gotland Pelt sheep, accounting for ca 23% of the sheep on the island.



Gotland Pelt sheep. Photo: Külli Bergbolm



**Gotland sheep's wool.
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**

Breeds of Finland and Åland

In Finland, the selective breeding of Finnsheep started after the foundation of the Finnish Sheep Breeding Association in 1918. The aim was to improve both meat and wool production of the Finnsheep breed. There are about 15,000 Finnsheep ewes in Finland today. Both their meat and their wool are of high quality.

The Åland sheep breed had almost become extinct by 1980 when the remaining animals were collected together. The population has since grown to around 1200 sheep (2012).

In recent years, many handicrafters and fashion designers have linked up with the movement to 'buy local' and are creating products aimed at this growing niche market. Many people associate this movement with food, because there have been a lot of campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of buying local food. Discerning consumers nowadays want to know exactly where the food they are eating came from, right down to the name of the farm and the farmer. Tourists are particularly interested in genuine, authentic local experiences, whether that is a taste of a region or purchasing handicrafts. Good reasons for buying local food also apply to products such as textiles. Buying local products helps support the local economy, the farmer, the environment and community life.

Highlighting the local sheep breed as the source of materials helps to add value to the handicraft products made in the Baltic islands today.



Local handicrafts at farmers' market in Pargas, Finland. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association



**The Finnsheep raised at Stentorp provide the wool which is used for their own exclusive designs.
Photos: Courtesy of Jill Christiansen, Stentorp**



Finnsheep at Stentorp. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association



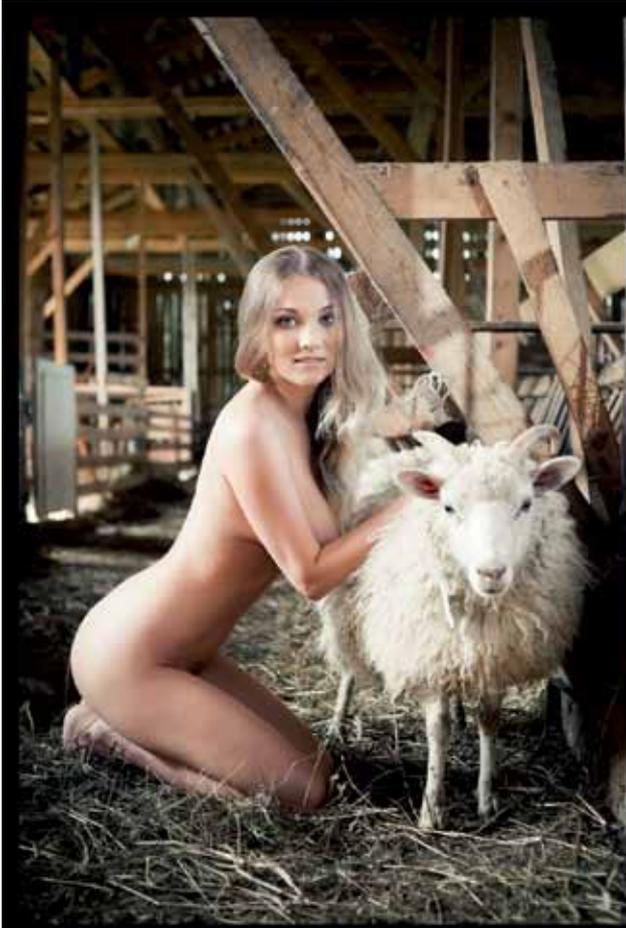
Pillow covers made from the skins of the Gotland Pelt sheep. Fashioned by Laila Gustavsson, Gotland



Slippers by Laila Gustavsson, Gotland



Seat cushions designed by Annika Grandelius of Ullversta'n, Gotland. Photos: Courtesy of Ullversta'n



Estonian Native sheep wool from Anneli Ärmpalu's farm utilized by Estonian fashion designer Eve Anders. The aim of this photo campaign is to illustrate the humane use of a sheep's fleece to cover the naked person which in-turn produces a "naked" sheep. Photo: Courtesy of Eve Anders Eco Fashion

3

Customs and rituals associated with wool on Saaremaa

Merike Sepp

Keeping sheep has been very important in and around Sõrve (Saaremaa island). These animals have been loved here for quite a long time. Even during the Soviet rule there were sheep in the sheds of Anseküla collective farm and village children cared for the grazing sheep during summer holidays. Coast dwellers herded sheep on seaside meadows with a shepherd accompanying the herd. Pastures did not have any fences, as sheep walked along the seashore. The vegetation there suited the sheep well. Diversity of vegetation ensures a good quality of wool.



Washing sheep at the sea side 1932. 3958:82 Saaremaa Museum

Some traditional beliefs and customs from old times

- Any work involving wool or spinning was prohibited on Martinmas.
- If a sheep defecates when being sheared, it will thrive; if it urinates, its wool will deteriorate. This was also believed elsewhere in Estonia, for example in Halliste parish in southern Estonia.
- Coast dwellers held water celebrations in hope of obtaining better and softer wool the next year. The party was held after the washing of the sheep in the sea and on the shore.
- Rams' scrotum hair was cut for girls so that they could weave them at the bottom of their jackets. This was supposed to ensure that they would get married.
- A starved sheep will grow no wool.
- Coastal people worked together, both by the sea and on each others' farms. Work was easier together, news was exchanged and the day ended with a party.
- Each village had a certain shepherd who collected the sheep from all farms and took them to the seaside. The shepherd had a specific way of summoning sheep to which the sheep habitually responded. Some used a willow whistle; others a long shepherd's horn made of birch bark. Village shepherds had fun names. For example, my grandma was called Lamba-Liini (Sheep-Liini). Her real name was Aki-Liina. When she was about to go and tend to the sheep, she used to say "I'll go sheeping now".

Washing and shearing sheep

In the old days, sheep were washed and sheared in April or May when flies and horseflies were not yet a threat. The water was still cold in the sea, but it was refreshing and invigorating acting against spring fatigue. Women wore woollen stockings and clothing to go into the sea.) Woollens keep one warm even when wet. The sheep, of course, had their fur coat for that purpose. The sheep's head was held up and its wool floated in the sea water – This was an easy way to get all the juniper needles and debris out of the fleece. The sheep was then rubbed and soaked in cool water in sunny weather. The heat from the spring sun had warmed up the shallow water.



Lamb washing bee at a beach in Sörve, Saaremaa, 2010. Photos: Egon Sepp

When the work was done, the women swam with their clothes on and splashed one another. There was one big water party on the beach – as was traditional after such work.

The sheep had to dry for one to three days before they could be sheared. Sheep shears were used for this. To do this work, a bench was needed on which the sheep was placed so that its legs reached the ground. A long strap was tied around the shearer's shoulder with the other half around the sheep's neck. In this case there was no need for the help of more people and the sheep stood calmly in place. The wool was sorted and placed in textile or mesh bags and hung from the ceiling of an outbuilding in a dry place. In most cases, shorn wool was not washed. It was easier to spin it this way. Only later, when the yarn was ready, was it washed in rainwater. If there was not enough rainwater, water from a river or lake could be used as well. It is recommended to use soft water for washing wool. Rain water is especially good.

Washing wool

Ordinary laundry soap and washing soda are the most common substances used for washing wool at home. These substances are taken in equal quantities, 25–30 g per 10 litres of water. Bleach must not be used. Soda is added to the water first, as it eliminates some of the calcaneous salts from the hard water. Soap is cut into flakes, which are dissolved in hot water in a separate container. The soap solution thus produced is poured into the washing water.

The temperature of the soap and soda wash solution should not be higher than 45–50°C. When wool is washed in soap water, lanolin separates, forming an emulsion. It is important to ensure that some of the lanolin is retained in the wool fibres, as wool that is too clean will become coarse. Wool should be washed rather quickly, so that dirt floating in the solution is not redeposited in the wool fibres. At the end of the washing, it is good to add warm (35–40°C) water to the soap solution so that some of the washing solution pours over the edge of the washtub.

Ordinary laundry soap or green soap may also be used for washing, rinsing it off with plenty of water.

Before washing, areas of wool affected by dung are separated. Heavily soiled wool is washed separately. Before washing, the wool is soaked in warm (35–40°C) water in a tub or trough. No soap or soda needs to be added to the soaking water, as wool contains plenty of alkaline substances. The wool is soaked for 6–8 hours, stirring it with a stick or paddle a couple of times. After soaking, the wool is placed in another tub and cold water is poured over it.

The pre-washing water temperature should be 40–45°C. Pre-washing means that the wool is moved back and forth in the water (intensive squishing and rubbing between the hands is not recommended). In this way, all the mineral dirt (sand, soil and clay) falls off the wool and sinks to the bottom of the washtub. The duration of

pre-washing depends on the quantity of wool and lasts 20–40 minutes. After pre-washing, the wool should be carefully lifted out of the water so that the dirt deposited on the bottom remains there. The wool is drained and the washtub is rinsed. After rinsing, the water is squeezed out of the wool and the wool is left to dry. It can be dried outdoors (not in direct sunlight) or in a well-ventilated room.



Removal of sheep manure from the wool.
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association.



Pre-washing the wool.

The temperature must not rise above 50°C when the wool is drying. Stirring speeds up the drying process. The moisture content of dried wool is usually 15–16%.

Mistakes in washing can include excessive wool fat, which makes wool sticky. Stickiness can also be caused by calcium soap forming in hard water. Excessive washing is also a mistake, which results in the removal of all wool fat from the wool fibres. This happens when using too much soap or other detergent in the washing solution. Wool which is poor in fat is rough, coarse and brittle. It is important to ensure that the fat content does not fall below 0.5–0.8%. Felting is also a washing mistake, which can easily occur if wool is intensively squished and rubbed in hot soapy water. Wool should be washed as soon as possible after shearing. If wool is not washed within three months of shearing, it turns yellow and will not revert to being white even with washing.



Drying the wool. Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association.

Spinning wool



Spinning wheel. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Wool-spinning was one of the most important and difficult jobs for women. The spindle was the oldest spinning tool.

Before the wool could be carded, it had to be picked outdoors in cool wind to ensure that it was clean and workable. Before carding and spinning, a sauna was heated and the work was done in the warm front room, which had just enough moisture to ensure that the yarn would run easily. In most cases, unwashed wool was spun because sheep, rather than the wool, were washed. The wool was prepared for spinning by carding. Another option was to card and spin in front of a hot oven or stove.



**A woman from Muhu spinning 1913.
Photo: J. Pääsuke, 3761:2555 Saaremaa Museum**

People in Sõrve used their own dialect. For example vokk (spinning wheel) was okk. In Sõrve they say: “Akame nüid okkima” (Let’s spin). When yarn slips into the orifice of the spinning wheel they say: “Juugas ää”. The orifice of the spinning wheel was the ‘throat’, while the carved upright sticks holding the bobbin were called ‘horns’.

- *It was believed that everyone should use their own spinning wheel for spinning.*
- *You can get everything from the forest bar a ready-made spinning wheel.*

In the old days, wool was combed to obtain worsted yarn. This was a smoother and finer yarn that was not itchy. When spinning, sheep’s wool was mixed with rabbit, fox and/or dog fur.

All of these customs and traditions are still known today as innovations or peculiarities. It is good that old peasant wisdom has been passed down from one generation to the next, as each belief has a grain of truth in it and this is what has helped Estonians, whether living on Saaremaa or elsewhere, to survive.

4

Working tools and techniques throughout time

Kaie Kesküla



A woman from Jämaja (Saaremaa) carding wool 1929. Photo: C. O. Bullov, 3235:2, Saaremaa Museum

In ancient times, wool was mostly processed for a family's own use. The productivity of spindles and warp-weighted looms was low, and the sheep breeds used are unlikely to have produced much wool.

The professions of artisans – blacksmiths, potters, weavers and other craftsmen – began to emerge as the Middle Ages evolved. Settlements developed into towns, and manors attracted artisans from abroad. They brought new, more effective tools with them which, over time, spread among the local people.

The 19th century and in particular its last quarter saw further innovations. Nevertheless, traditional textile handicraft skills were still passed on from parents to children. These came in handy after the events of the second half of the 20th century (World War II and the Soviet years).

Wool-processing in the Middle Ages – cards, spinning wheels, skein-winder and ball-winder

Cards with metal teeth, with one side of a card fastened to a bench, were introduced in medieval Europe in the 12th century to facilitate wool processing. Smaller hand cards reached Estonia in the 19th century.

Spinning wheels as tools for spinning and twisting yarn were introduced in Europe some time in the 15th or 16th century (Viires, 2006, p. 180). At first, the wheel was turned by hand; spinning wheels with treadles became widespread later. Spinning wheels were imported into Estonia as early as the 16th century. They were used for spinning yarn in manors in the 17th century and in peasants' homes only a century later. The Saxony spinning



**Hand cards,
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**



**Saxony spinning wheel,
ERM A 764:166**



**Dutch spinning wheel, ERM A
584:10, Estonian National Museum**

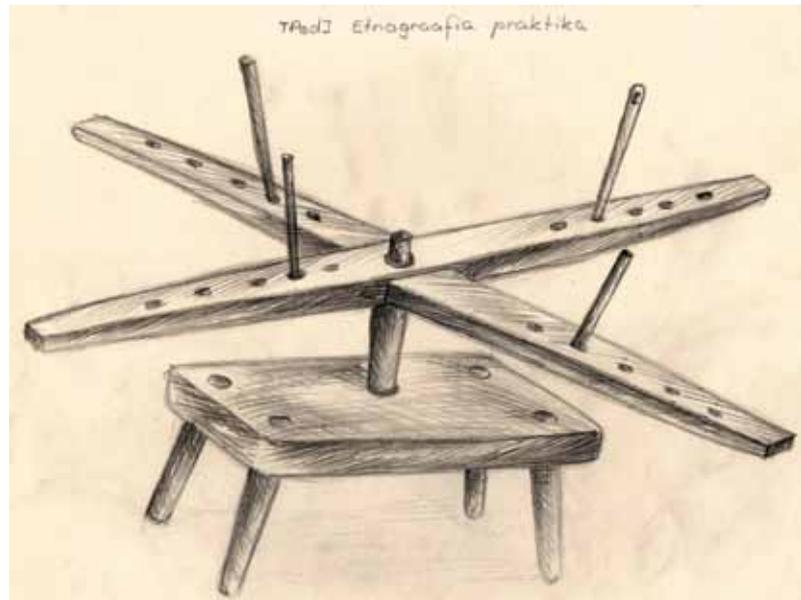
wheel was the most common type. In the 19th century, spinning wheels were ordered from village turners and cards from card masters, while all other tools were made at home.

Once spun, yarn had to be coiled into skeins for further processing. This was done with the help of a skein-winder, which replaced the ancient cross reel. Until the first half of the 19th century, a skein-winder would be fixed on a wall. Later, skein-winders with a base were adopted.

If necessary, yarn was rolled from skeins into balls using a ball-winder. Both skein-winders and ball-winder enabled the length of yarn to be measured, which was very important in weaving fabric. The unit of measurement was an ell (1 ell = ca 53 cm). The circumference of a skein-winder was 4–7 ells, and 60 rounds of yarn on a winder were considered one skein. Some skein-winders had a gear-fitted system which resembled a clock that measured the



Skein-winder. ERM EJ 220:11



Ball-winder. ERM EJ 481:39, Estonian National Museum

yarn (Gea Troska, Ants Viires, Ellen Karu, Lauri Vahtre, Igor Tõnurist, 2000, p. 32). Skeins were tied loosely with yarn of another colour; a hank consisted of several skeins (K. Konsin, 1979, pp. 22–27).

Wool and flax were processed in late autumn and winter, when other farm work had been completed. Flax-spinning started after Martinmas (November 10th). This work was followed by carding of wool, which was often done together with other farms. Wool had to be spun by Candlemas (February 2nd).

Finer and more tightly twisted warp threads were made of wool from the back of sheep. Weft threads were more loosely twisted (K. Konsin, 1979, pp. 13–14).

The first wool mills were founded in Estonia in the 1890s. They carded and spun yarn and sometimes wove fabric. Sheep were now sheared twice a year (previously 3–4 times a year), because wool mills would not accept short wool. Wool for stockings, mittens and gloves was still spun at home.

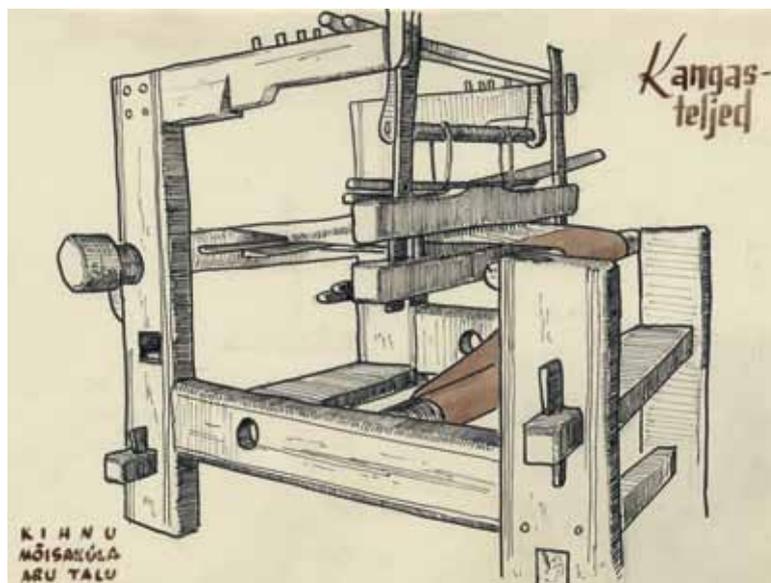
Knitting tools

In handicrafts made from woollen yarn, knitting seems to have had a lesser role than weaving.

This is probably due to the fact that the tools were much simpler and women used to knit alongside other work almost all year round. In the 19th century knitwear comprised mainly mittens, gloves and socks or stockings for both work days and festive occasions. Knitted jackets and lace shawls were less widespread. For circular knitting, copper or steel needles were used. Lace shawls were knitted with lightweight wooden needles made at home. Lilac was considered the best material.

Weaving tools

As the productivity of yarn-processing increased, the ancient warp-weighted vertical loom no longer met needs. Horizontal looms were probably known as early as the 13th century, but peasants did not start to use them, along with other tools, until the 17th century (Gea Troska, Ants Viires, Ellen Karu, Lauri Vahtre, Igor Tõnurist, 2000, p. 64).



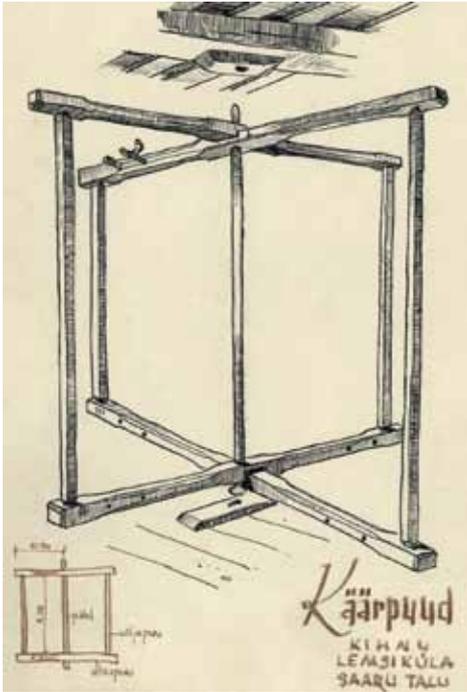
**Simple floor loom. ERM EJ 220:16,
Estonian National Museum**

A simple floor loom has four support poles or pillars connected with side bars. The front poles are usually lower and between them is the weaver's bench. The rear pillars carry the upper side bars. Two to four heddles and the reed (the so-called upper beater) hang from the crossbars that rest on the upper side bars. Heddles are moved by means of wooden blocks. The width of a simple floor loom is 2 ells or 110–120 cm. Fabrics with a simpler weave structure (plain and twill) and with plaited-in patterns (raised or flat motifs) can be woven on a simple floor loom. In the case of blankets and rugs, two pieces of fabric have to be woven and then sewn together.



Loom for figured weaving in Turku Museum. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Looms for figured weaving (or Finnish looms) began to spread on farms at the end of the 19th century. The rear pillars are low, the middle frame rests on the side bars between pillars and on top of it is the harness frame. The heddles are moved by a system of harnesses and lams. Up to 8 heddles enable more sophisticated and derived weaves to be created. The width of a loom for figured weaving is at least 3 ells (ca. 160 cm) and the beater is often connected to the lower part of the front pillars (the so-called lower beater). The bench is usually not fixed to the



**Warping reel. ERM EJ 220:14,
Estonian National Museum**

loom (K. Konsin, 1979, pp. 29–33).

The **warping reel** used for warping threads was introduced in the first half of the 19th century. Before that, threads were warped around pegs fixed to a wall.

The circumference of a warping reel was 8, 10 or 12 ells – thus the length of the fabric being warped could be measured. To accelerate work, multiple threads were warped at the same time. To prevent yarn from becoming entangled, each thread would run from a separate ball. The yarn balls were located in a special box with divisions (warping box). In the case of more than four threads, a board with holes in it was used as well (K. Konsin, 1979, pp. 22–27).

Similarly to spinning wheels, looms were also ordered from carpenters in the 19th century. Reeds were ordered as well. Other accessories were made at home.

Fabrics were woven in the second half of winter, when the days were longer and brighter. First linen fabrics were woven, and only then woollen fabrics. Poorer families did not weave woollen fabrics every year. A hard-working weaver could weave over 5 metres of plain fabric per day (K. Konsin, 1979, p. 47).

Modern tools

There are still some older people in Estonia who can card with hand cards and spin with a spinning wheel, using tools that have survived from the first half of the 20th century. The use of looms was declined in the second half of the century as industrially produced apparel and home textiles supplanted hand-woven materials. At the end of the 1950s it was recommended to teach the weaving of home textiles at schools. Textile artists also used looms.

After the restoration of independence in Estonia in 1991, old traditions began to be revived. Many of the old looms (both simple floor looms and looms for figured weaving) have found their place in workshops and handicraft societies. The age of a loom is not important as long as it has been well maintained. Looms are nowadays mostly used to weave simple textiles, and the yarn used for weaving is not usually self-made.

You can find serious wool enthusiasts amongst textile artists, sheep farmers and owners of tourist farms. High-quality tools are of help in producing small quantities of craft yarn or other products for sale in limited quantities, thus not abandoning the handicraft tradition. Drum-carders, modern spinning wheels and well-balanced spindles made of valuable wood are produced outside Estonia, with Ashford and Louët being the most well-known suppliers. The Finnish Toikka is a reputable loom manufacturer with a long tradition in the Baltics.

Even more advanced are electric spinning wheels and computer-assisted looms where the computer helps in designing and weaving the fabric.



Electric spinning wheel from Ashford



**Püstvokk firmalt Louët.
www.louet.nl**



Natural colours from the wool of Saaremaa sheep. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Natural wool itself comes in several colours: black, white, grey and brown. Colours can be mixed, brightened and darkened by carding different wools together. By using a minimum of two contrasting colours it is possible to create quite diverse handicraft, depending on the technology.

Yet, even prehistoric people wanted to see more colour in their festive clothes (in which they were often also buried). At the end of the 19th century, dyes were mostly obtained from plants growing around people's homes in Estonia. The tradition was to dye wool or yarn, which took on colour better than flax. Blue, red and green were the preferred colours (Jüri Peets, 1998, p. 279). In general, however, plant-dyed shades were soft and pastel.



Until the 18th century, **blue** was obtained in Europe from woad (*Isatis tinctoria*), which also grows naturally on the west coast of Estonia (Ilves, p. 1). In the 18th century, woad was replaced by True indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*), a plant brought in from southern countries. Its dye was basically the same as that of woad and it was pre-processed, making it water-soluble in a strong alkaline environment created by the fermentation of urine. Unlike other plant dyes used in Estonia, indigo is a vat dye, i.e. it is fixed as a result of exposure to atmospheric oxygen. A material kept in the solution turned blue only in the process of drying (Jüri Peets, 1998, p. 291).

Red was obtained from the roots of northern bedstraw (*Galium boreale*). Bedstraw red is a warm and dark red with a slight brownish tinge.

Green shades are obtained when dyeing with nettles or St. John's wort, but these colours are usually characterised by a yellowish or dull tint. A brighter shade is obtained when material that has previously been dyed yellow is re-dyed with indigo. Yellow can be obtained from many plants, such as birch leaves or yellow daisies.



Removing dyed wool from natural dye.

The process of dyeing with plants begins with the collection of the dye plants. The weight of fresh plants and yarn should be equal. In the case of dried plants, their quantity should be larger. Fresh plants produce a better colour.

Plants are simmered or – less frequently – soaked to obtain the dye stew. It is best to use soft water. To fix the colours, mordants (salt, vinegar, soda, alum, copper and iron vitriol) are used. Yarn may be soaked in the mordant solution either before or after dyeing. Mordants may also be added to the dye stew.

The outcome of dyeing may be influenced by many unpredictable factors, such as the place of growth or phase of plants, and the characteristics of the wool fibres.



Naturally dyed yarn drying outdoors.



Naturally dyed socks on display at LUMO Centre in Turku, Finland. Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association

Today, serious wool enthusiasts dye craft yarns with plants for the purpose of sales in small quantities. Members of history clubs and supporters of environmentally-friendly lifestyles are interested in dyeing with plants, as well. It is possible to buy plants that do not grow in Estonia – for example, madder (*Rubia tinctorum*) or weld (*Reseda luteola*). When collecting wild plants, the place of growth should not be emptied altogether.



Handwoven shawls naturally dyed with the *Reseda luteola* plant.



Handwoven shawls naturally dyed with Brazilwood.



Naturally dyed woollen throws drying in the brief sunlight of a wintery Finnish day..

Guidelines

When to pick

- Leaves – from budding until mature
- Flowers – when blooming
- Bark – when bark can be peeled easily
- Mushrooms, roots and fruits – in autumn

Raw plants provide the strongest colour. The weight of fresh plants and yarn should be at least equal. In the case of dried plants, their quantity should be larger. The result depends on many factors, including the time and place of picking. Woollen materials take on colour more easily. Please note: be sparing with nature! Colours are soft – bright colours are rare.



Preparations

Dyebath: take 1 litre of boiling water per 100 grams of chopped plants and let the solution simmer for an hour (or longer in the case of bark, roots and cones). Allow to brew for an hour in a warm place and then drain. You can add a little mordant when preparing the dye stew – this will intensify the colour.

Other options:

- a) soak in cold water for 24 hours before boiling
- b) let the solution cool down and dye the wool the next day
- c) boil for 20 minutes, drain; boil the plants in new water and then mix the solutions



Mordanting

Mordants are additives that bring the dye out of plants, help fix the dye to the yarn, and change tones. You can mordant yarn before, during or after dyeing. The most common mordants are alum (pharmacies and building materials stores) and copper vitriol and iron vitriol (gardening stores). Alum and iron vitriol are not poisonous, but wearing gloves would not hurt.

Mordanting at the workshop
Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association

6

Examples of island handicrafts

Kaie Kesküla



Women from Jämaja, Saaremaa, 1929. Photo: Carl Oswald, Saaremaa Museum 3761:2554

The technology and uses of homespun woollen textiles have historically been relatively similar in the Nordic countries. The same can be said for rugs and knitwear. Equipment with greater capacity, such as the spinning wheel, and other innovations: natural commercial dyes aniline dyes, printed pattern sheets etc. spread to all regions, though to the remoter regions perhaps later.

Nevertheless, each island has its distinctive style manifested in certain typical patterns and their combinations (skirt stripes and patterns of mittens and gloves), decoration techniques (edgings and braids) and rituals relating to the making of fabrics and clothes.

Muhu Island

A lot of museum exhibits and oral heritage have been collected from Muhu and Kihnu Islands in Estonia. The voluminous collection Meite Muhu mustrid ('Designs and Patterns from Muhu Island', Anu Kabur, Anu Pink, Mai Meriste; Saara Publishers 2010) describes the heritage of the textile handicraft of Muhu Island. The following summary has been prepared on the basis of this book.

The history of the textile handicraft of each group of people is reflected in its traditional clothes. Until the mid-19th century, the folk costumes of Muhu and Estonian Swedes living in coastal regions were quite similar. Towards the end of the century, the famous **skirts on an orange background** appeared. Orange was later replaced with bright lemon yellow. Simple vertical stripes were replaced by multi-coloured patterned stripes, which were woven on a loom with eight heddles and treadles. Those with a simple floor loom used the 'picking' technique to create patterns or embroidered the stripes on woven fabrics. **The colours were bold and bright** – purple, dark blue, bright green, bright red, teal, dark red, and the famous 'Muhu pink' i.e. bright pink. The latter two colours, together with orange and black, yield the unique and intense colour spectrum characteristic of Muhu.

Muhu gloves are renowned for their intricate patterns. Black and red (orange) patterns consisted of a variety of motifs. The main colour of the cuff was orange or pink, made more vivid by narrow multi-coloured stripes and mostly white motifs. At the beginning of the 20th century there were also gloves with a solid-colour background and fingers, with the palm and back of the glove usually decorated with one narrow and one wide patterned stripe. These patterns originated from printed pattern sheets (birds, animals, initials, roses etc.).



**Gloves with cherry red background (private collection).
Photo: Kaie Kesküla**



**Gloves with embroidered rose pattern (collection of Anu Sepp).
Photo: Anu Sepp**



**Multi-coloured Muhu gloves (private collection).
Photo: Kaie Kesküla**

Until the beginning of the 20th century, typical socks were knitted on Muhu which were worn together with leggings. The **socks** were always white with a black-orange-white pattern with two large motifs (the Muhu whorl or eight-heeled star) in the leg part. After the turn of the century, socks were replaced by colourful (knee-length) stockings. The toe part of the **stockings** was knitted so that the right and left leg stockings could be clearly distinguished. The width and sequence of pattern stripes followed a certain system. Stockings with an embroidered leg part were also made during this period.



**Embroidered stocking,
ERM A 625:48//ab**



**Sock with Muhu whorl pattern, ERM A 563:2266//ab,
Estonian National Museum**



**Knitted stocking.
Collection of Anu Sepp.
Photo: Anu Sepp**

Short jackets began to spread in the mid-19th century. Solid-colour jackets for both men and women were knitted in bobble patterns (using slipped stitches and ribbing techniques). Men's jackets could have either a dark or white background and were knitted with two needles as separate pieces. Necklines, bottom edges and sleeve ends were decorated with brightly coloured fabric edgings adorned with embroidery.

Orange-and-black whorl-patterned men's jackets were knitted from the second half of the 19th century. Towards the end of the century, women considered it fashionable to wear short, mostly dark-coloured close-fitting jackets with a slightly longer back (tailed jackets). The neckline and broad front part were made of a brightly coloured fabric, embellished with braids and embroidery. The sleeve ends were also bright, crocheted or knitted with multiple colours.



Women's jacket (tailed), ERM A 789:5



**Men's festive jacket, ERM A 681:91,
Estonian National Museum**

Similarly to skirts, mittens and gloves, there were various types of Muhu **coverlets** mostly used as blankets on the marriage bed. They all were made of woollen yarn. Fancy coverlets were mostly made for weddings. The oldest coverlets were made from wool with a chequered pattern of natural brown and white colours. This was followed by striped woollen coverlets with a bright-coloured background in the second half of the 19th century. The broad spaces between the stripes were decorated with cross-stitched motifs. At the beginning of the 20th century, the backgrounds of coverlets were either single- or multi-coloured, and the coverlets were completely covered with cross-stitched motifs.

The famous coverings with **colourful floral embroidery** appeared in the 1910s. Arguably, these were inspired by the flower-patterned coverings made in Lääne County, as well as by kerchiefs brought by seafarers from their travels or home furnishing textiles seen in mainland mansions. At first the background of a coverlet with floral embroidery used to be bright-coloured and decorated with stylised plant motifs. Later, predominantly dark backgrounds

were used (mostly black, but also brown cherry, dark blue or dark green), embellished with lush multi-colour floral embroidery, where each flower was recognisable. Poppies, cornflowers, daisies and grain spikes were the most popular motifs. The fabric of a coverlet was woven on a loom at home. In later times fabrics bought from shops were used as well.



Traditional embroidered coverlet from Muhu made at the end of the 20th century. Private collection. Photo: Kaie Kesküla



Woollen yarn was also used to make small items. A **tablet-woven belt** was an essential part of Muhu folk costumes for a long time. These old belts could be up to 10 metres long. Compared to Saaremaa, tablet-woven borders (decorating the lower edges of skirts) were quite broad (made with 16–18 weaving tablets) and had a rather complex pattern. At the beginning of the 20th century, skirt borders were single-colour and embellished with floral embroidery.

Embroidered tablet-woven border (top) and patterned tablet-woven border (bottom) on orange-background skirts in Saaremaa Museum.

Photo: Kaie Kesküla



Folk dancers from Muhu. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Kihnu Island

Kihnu is an island with a unique culture. Despite the fact that Pärnu as the nearest major settlement is one of Estonia's four biggest cities, the islanders have tenaciously clung to their old customs and traditions, including the tradition of wearing folk costumes. The beginning of the 21st century has strongly supported this trend. The traditional culture of Kihnu and Manija Islands has been included in the world heritage list of UNESCO.

Woollen woven skirts, figured belts, socks and stockings and knitted jackets belong to the folk costume of Kihnu. Traditional rules and customs of processing wool and dyeing and using yarn are still observed. Rosalie Karjam, a craftswoman from Kihnu, described them in the comprehensive book *Elumõnu* (compiled by Svea Aavik, published by Kihnu Cultural Institute, 2009), which has also been used to prepare the summary below.

The **vertically-striped skirts** of Kihnu originate from the second half of the 19th century. The main colour is generally red. However, red may be less predominant in the skirts of older women, being represented by a few threads only. The pattern is created by rhythmic alternation of two wide pattern stripes. These stripes are symmetrical and separated by wider dark blue stripes. A mourning skirt is completely black or one where the stripe threads are blue, black, yellow, green, lilac and white – but never red. All Kihnu skirts have a red braid along the bottom edge.



Kihnu skirt, ERM EJ 501:8



Kihnu mourning skirt, ERM EJ 501:7, Estonian National Museum



Wall hanging woven by Leida Türk, Aava farm, Kihnu. Photo: Selma Kase

Coverlets have stripes that are similar to those of the woven skirts of Kihnu, with purple being considered the proper colour of intermediate stripes. In blankets, the weft yarn is a thick one-ply yarn or even yarn pulled from old woollens.

Kihnu women's **stockings** are all unique in their details, but still clearly recognisable. They end a little above the knee. Every stocking pattern can have a separate name, and all knitters observe the sequence and colours of pattern stripes. The part just above the knee is white, followed by three wider and sometimes also one narrower black-and-yellow figured stripe, then a figured stripe of red, white and dark blue, and below it a lacy teeth-patterned dark blue stripe. A twist-stitched pattern strip runs along the leg and towards the heel and toes.



**Kihnu women's sock,
knitted by Rosalie Karjam.
Photo: Anu Sepp**



**Kihnu men's sock.
Photo: Anu Sepp**



**Kihnu women's stocking.
Estonian Open Air Museum**

Both men's and women's socks and stockings are knitted so that the transition from one row to another in a pattern is made on the inner side of leg.

The yarn used for knitting stockings must be very white. Winter wool from the back of adult sheep is used for stockings. Kihnu women know that summer wool is yellow because of the sun, and lamb's wool would make 'hairy' yarn. Lamb's wool, which is soft, is suitable for knitting gloves and mittens, especially for children.

For patterned **mittens**, white and black yarn is used; **gloves** are knitted with white and dark blue yarn. Cuffs are brightly coloured, with jagged or patched patterns. Old-style cuffs also follow a certain composition, where a white lacy stripe is surrounded by red-white-black pattern stripes, which in turn are separated by fishtail-

patterned braids. The fingers of a patterned glove are knitted in a smaller pattern that differs from the pattern of the palm. The same patterns are used for knitting men's jackets or Kihnu *trois*.

A Kihnu **troi** is a knitted men's jacket that has won popularity in Estonia, but even more among tourists. Today, most trois are machine-knitted, with the decorating details being added manually. To knit a genuine



Kihnu glove with old-style cuff.
ERM 1344, Estonian National
Museum



Kihnu mitten.
Collection of Anu Sepp.
Photo: Anu Sepp



Kihnu white gloves, knitted by Rosalie Karjam. Collection of Anu Sepp.
Photo: Anu Sepp

Kihnu troi, you need dark blue and white yarn and about fifteen knitting needles. A troi is knitted in a circle. The bottom edge, shoulders, neck hole and sleeve ends are knitted in a different pattern, using bedstraw-red yarn.

Seal-hunting was one of the winter activities of Kihnu men. Women used to knit simple garter-stitched **white hats** for seal hunters which were pulled over the leather winter hat so that the seals would not notice the hunters on the ice.

Bedstraw-red and dark blue woollen yarn were also used in Kihnu women's **figured belts**. Unlike other Estonian belts, Kihnu figured belts have two patterns. One of them is patched (with diamond- or star-shaped motifs) and the other is jagged (triangular motifs, with the diagonal lines supplemented with small jags or teeth). When wearing a belt, the side with the jagged pattern was always worn on top, and the triangular pattern was placed exactly in the middle of the back.

Due to the belt-weaving technology, the right and reverse sides of the belt were different. The right and reverse side of a belt with a jagged pattern are on the left in this photo. The patched pattern is on the right.

The width of a belt was measured by the number of threads. A wide belt had over 30 threads; such a belt was a precious gift, for example, from a bride to her future mother-in-law.



Traditional Kihnu sweater
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association



Belt, ERM 2550, Estonian National Museum

Hiiumaa Island

As elsewhere on Estonian islands, women on Hiiumaa wore half-woollen vertically-striped **skirts** from the 1840s until the beginning of the 20th century, before the transition to garments inspired by urban fashion. These were plain-woven, with flax used for warp threads and wool for weft threads. Thus, the skirt fabric looked the same on both sides.

This fashion was preceded by black twill-woven woollen skirts. Helgi Põllo, the curator of Hiiumaa Museum, speculates that black skirts were worn on Hiiumaa as early as the Swedish period (late 16th century to early 18th century).

The skirts of the four parishes of Hiiumaa are clearly distinguishable by their colours and stripes. However, all Hiiumaa skirts differ from those of other islands in that their main colour is generally red and they have wider stripes. The bottom edge of the skirts is often bordered with a strip of black or dark blue broadcloth measuring approximately 10 cm. On festive skirts the connection between the broadcloth strip and the skirt is decorated



Different Hiiumaa skirts. Hiiumaa museum collection. Photo: Hanno Luukas.

with a galloon. In southern Hiiumaa a white linen lining strip was sewn to the bottom edge of the skirts.

Mourning skirts usually had narrow light and dark blue stripes of equal width. Darker skirts, with no red, were also worn by older women or rich widows.

Leather and wool were also used to make **cloth slippers** – slipper-like shoes worn on Hiiumaa. A cloth slipper was made from a woollen sock, which was put on a last or, in the absence of it, on a shoe for further processing. A cover, usually of pieces of used garments, was sewn onto the sock; the sole was made of leather or felt. Cloth slippers were warm and lightweight and they were used both indoors and outdoors. For cloth slippers worn in winter the cover was sewn from sheepskin and the sole was made using home-tanned leather. For poorer people, such slippers may have been their only footwear.

Outdoor clothes were sewn on Hiiumaa, like on other islands, using homespun twill-woven fabric. Woollen woven fabric was processed by fulling to make it denser. The **long coat**, which was still worn on Hiiumaa and Vormsi

and in some parishes of Saaremaa in the 19th century and which was presumably influenced by Swedish garments, is considered a characteristic garment of Estonian islands. On Hiiumaa, natural brown fabric was woven to make a long coat. It was a loose-fitting winter overall which could be worn on top of a fur coat. Spaciousness was provided by pleats grouped on the centre line of the back, under the neck hole. The coat had wide gathered sleeves with cuffs. The neck hole and cuffs were decorated with bright-coloured broadcloth strips. The coat was fastened in front with a couple of hooks. There was room for a wide skirt and even a fur coat under it. Later long coats made of homespun fabric were influenced by European



Women's coat, ERM A 509:2162, Estonian National Museum

garments. A knitted **women's jacket** was brown, black or blue and knitted in a fisherman's rib pattern. The jacket was short and close-fitting, with sleeve ends, neck hole and flaps bordered with broadcloth.

Neckpieces were worn on outdoor clothes for both warmth and beauty. Hiiumaa is known for **knitted neckpieces**. They were dark and single-coloured, knitted with woollen yarn in a dense zigzag fisherman's rib pattern. The neckpieces may have been knitted with the help of a machine; for example, on Muhu, knitting machines were known to be in use as early as the late 19th century.



Knitted neckpieces from Hiiumaa Museum, HKM 2223:1 and HKM 567A.

Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association

Woollen **stockings** were simple and single-coloured on Hiiumaa – either red or white, and blue or black if worn with mourning clothing. Stockings knitted with tied-and-dyed motley yarn could be mentioned as a peculiarity of the island. However, such yarn was also used in neighbouring Lääne County and on Muhu. To obtain motley yarn, a hank of white yarn was tied in several places with thin yarn, and then dyed.



Gloves from the collection of Hiiumaa Museum

Stockings knitted with tied-and-dyed motley yarn, HKM 594517.

Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association

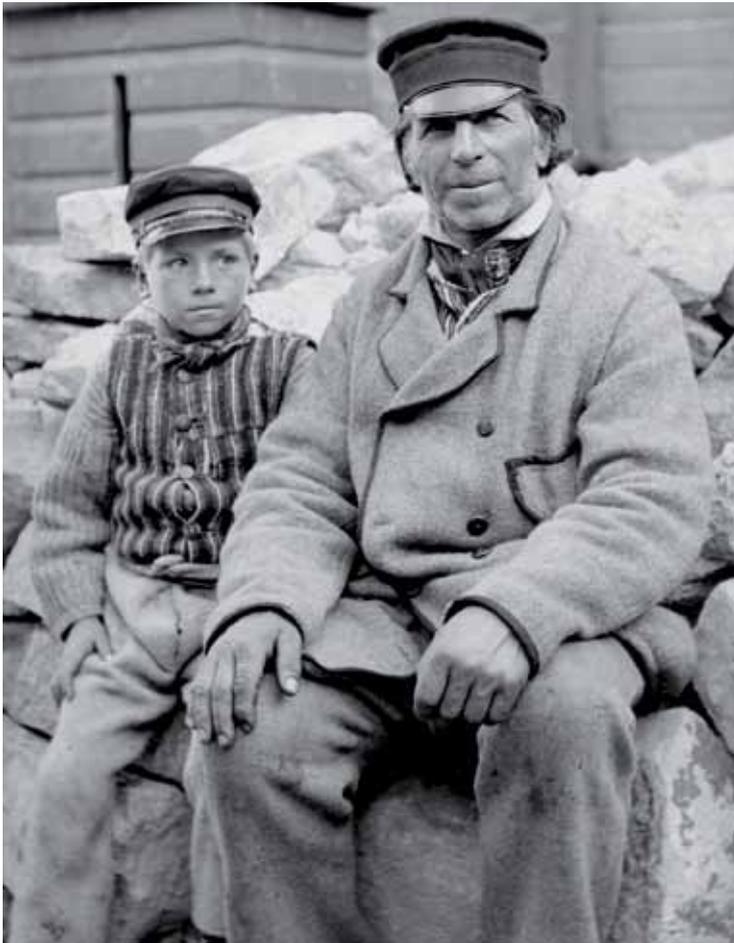
Ruhnu and Vormsi Islands

Ruhnu and Vormsi are two small islands where Swedish influences manifest themselves in clothing and culture more than on any other Estonian islands.

Knitting has long been a popular activity on Ruhnu. Due to the maritime climate, woollen clothes had to be

worn for a greater part of the year. Sheep-grey woollen jackets knitted in a fisherman's rib pattern, like the one worn by the boy in the photo below, were worn by all inhabitants of Ruhnu as everyday garments.

Riina Tomberg, who has studied the knitted jackets of Estonian islands, lists at least three types of such garments for women in her book *Vatid, troid, vamsad – silmkoelisi kampsuneid Lääne-Eesti saartelt* (Vatt, Troi and Vamsa – Knitted Jackets from West-Estonian Islands). All of them are characterised by patterns created with knit and purl stitches on the shoulders, along the bottom edge and at the side seams. The most festive white jacket – the holiday attire of a housewife – had a patterned front as well. Half-festive jackets of girls were dark blue, with white patterns on the sleeve ends and shoulders. A mourning jacket was black. No bright colours were used in the traditional jackets of Ruhnu.



Ruhnu fisherman Thomas Ullis with his son in 1908. ERM Fk 494:33, Estonian National Museum



Knitted jacket, "rosa vamsa", Ruhnu Museum



Ruhnu laceglove knit by Milvi Kitt.
Photos:Saaremaa Wool Association



Girl's dress, Vormsi, ERM A 509:2018,
Estonian National Museum

On **Vormsi**, as elsewhere, homespun woollen and half-woollen fabrics were used to make clothes. There are more colours in the garments of Vormsi. A peculiar feature is women's **leg coverings** – red leggings, which were always worn together with white socks. Woollen **skirts** were sheep-brown or black and woven using the plain weave technique. At weddings, bridesmaids wore blue skirts as well.

Yellow **dresses** with narrow black stripes and with the upper part decorated with red broadcloth were designed for young girls (up to seven years of age) and certainly caught the eye. The dress was fastened with buttons on the back. Small boys wore similar jackets made of yellow or blue fabric, but these were narrower, having only inverted pleats on the back and sides. Such garments are not known to have been worn in other parts of Estonia.



Young women on the Estonian island of Vormsi in 1937. Photo from Svenska Odlingens Vänneri (SOV) archive

Saaremaa Island

Similar to neighbouring islands, a lot of sheep were bred on Saaremaa. There had to be enough yarn for fabrics, as well as knitted mittens, gloves, socks and stockings. Woollen and half-woollen fabrics were woven at home; woollen fabrics were processed by fulling and primarily used to make outdoor clothes and men's coats.

Older Saaremaa **skirts** had a black background and were tightly pleated. Unlike on Ruhnu or Vormsi, a pattern of colourful transversal stripes was often woven along the bottom edge. The pattern could be different from parish to parish; the stripes were particularly wide on Sõrve peninsula. A narrow tablet-woven border or plaited border of woollen yarns was sewn along the bottom edge of a skirt.

For pleating, drawstrings were threaded in the skirt with 1–2 cm long stitches. The drawstrings were tightened (except in the front, which remained smooth) so that the skirt was as hard as a board. A skirt prepared in this way was wrapped in a clean, moist cloth and placed on a solid surface. Bread freshly taken out of the oven was laid on the skirt and left there until the next morning. This made the pleats stay in place.

Before the transition to urban fashion, vertically striped skirts were also worn on Saaremaa. The colour stripes are relatively close together (Kaarma and Mustjala) or two colours alternate as stripes of approximately 0.5 cm (Kärla and Kihelkonna).

Knitwear does not include a lot of eye-catching items in Saaremaa. Mittens and gloves are usually simple and small-patterned; stockings are single-colour. The white **women's jacket** worn in Jämaja (Sõrve parish) should be mentioned as an exception. The jacket is short, has beautiful wide sleeves and is decorated with knit-and-purl pattern rows. The neck hole is bordered with textile.



Skirt with transversal stripes from Jämaja (ERM 6071)



Women's jacket from Jämaja. ERM 12505, Estonian National Museum

In Mustjala, where skirts were shorter than elsewhere, women used to knit white stockings with a figured leg part. Festive gloves with a widening cuff and fringes come from the same parish. Men's gloves had a dark blue background, while women's gloves were knitted with a white background. The gloves are unique for their colourful fingertips. **Festive gloves** with a similar composition but slightly different patterns were knitted in Valjala and Püha parishes.



Men's gloves from Mustjala.
ERM 12363/ab



Women's gloves from Mustjala.
ERM 1103/ab



Women's gloves from Valjala.
Collection of Anu Sepp. Photo: Anu Sepp



Women's outdoor clothes from Mustjala and Anseküla,
19th century, ERM Fk 2887:169, Estonian National Museum

Accessories for clothes were made from woollen yarn and leather. The women in the photo are wearing a winter cap with 'horns'. These caps were common across Saaremaa in the 19th century. The crown of the winter cap is made of red broadcloth and edges of black lamb skin. Differences, as also seen in the photo, could be found in the shape of the 'horns' and the way the cap was worn.

The fine-looking neckerchief worn by a Mustjala bride on a sheep-brown long coat was knitted with red woollen yarn. Wall hangings were traditionally used to keep the walls of the house warm and also because they were beautiful. Loom-woven wall hangings were especially popular. It was fashionable to decorate fancy wall hangings with cross-stitch patterns.



Cross-stitched wall hanging made by Hilda Sõrmus 1920 to 1923. The wall hanging hangs on the wall of her daughter's house in USA. Collection of Helju Sõrmus Droppa. 150 cm high and 275 cm long.



**Detail of carpet cross-stitching.
Photos: Anu Sepp**



Wall hanging from the collection of Anu Sepp. Photo: Alar Allas

There may be many reasons for each island retaining its unique handicraft traditions, such as insularity and isolation (Ruhnu) or a desire to stand out among neighbours (Muhu). However, changes still occur. The unfamiliar is accepted and given its own style, and this is how a new tradition begins. Folk art changed slowly, but constantly, and these changes were driven by our creative ancestors.



A Sörve women knitting 1913. Photo: J. Pääsuke, 3429:67, Saaremaa Museum

Pattern traditions of Gotland

Birgitta Nygren

On Gotland, wool and skins are used most in handcraft. Sheep farming is well-suited to the landscape of Gotland and provides a good return to farmers. Gotland sheep were bred to obtain both beautiful skins and good wool. The wool is grey, shiny, soft and with a beautiful lustre – perfect material for handcraft.

This excellent wool has been used in knitwear since the late 1600s. Exports of knitwear to mainland Sweden started in 1700. Many individuals and small businesses earn their income from the production and sales of knitwear, although they now rely on machines.

Gotland has a rich variety of knitting patterns and traditions. Hermanna Stengård was the first to start collecting the patterns in the early 1900s.

In 1925 she published a book titled *Gotländsk sticksöm*. Her private collection, which consists of mittens, gloves and many small remains of knitwear specimens, is kept in the treasury of the Gotland Crafts Association. The motifs used most often are variations of roses and leaves.

In the early 1800s, the sheep motif appeared in knitwear – a motif that is still appreciated and used on mittens, gloves and socks. Now these Gotland motifs



Gotland maiden's folk costume, private collection of Gertrud Bergbohm.

and patterns are knitted with the aid of machines. The first such entrepreneur was Agneta Werkelin and her 'Yllet' store. Soon after that Boel Olaisson began to use Gotland motifs in her knitwear, using the assistance of the textile artist Pernilla Svenre, who helped to design new and interesting women's knitwear products.

Sheepskins were sold initially as floor coverings, but over time fur production started. In the 1980s Yllet began to sell new, fashionably designed fur coats with fur inside and leather outside. Left-over material was used to manufacture smaller items, such as slippers, mittens, hats, toys and stuffed animals. In these products the fur was outside and the beautiful lustre and colour of the wool of Gotland sheep was there for all to see.

Wool has traditionally been used mostly to weave fabrics, especially ticking. On Gotland, cotton is usually used for warp threads and wool for weft threads in ticking. In woven fabric the warp thread effects show on the right side, while the warp threads remain on the reverse side. Dominating woollen stripes were woven on a white or grey background. A white background was considered more beautiful and such fabric was often woven for weddings. Ticking on



Knitted samples with Cranberry Stem motif, from the collection of Hermanna Stengard, Handicraft Guild Landska Huset.



Sweater that was designed by Pernilla Svenre for Boel Olaisson. Mitten using the Cranberry Stem motif from the collection of the Gotland Handicraft Guild, knit in 1980-81.

Photos: Birgitta Nygren



Mittens with traditional Gotland pattern.



Mittens with traditional Gotland pattern.



Mittens with traditional Gotland pattern.



**White mitten from the collection of Hermanna Stengard 1927 – is referred to as an ordinary Visby mitten.
Photos: Birgitta Nygren**



**Mitten knit by Lisa Passvik in 1980 for the Gotland Handicraft Guild.
Photo: Külli Bergholm.**



Gloves with the 'Gammelgam' pattern from the collection of the Gotland Handicraft Guild. Typical of the 1980's which was sold in the local shops. Photo: Birgitta Nygren.



**Mittens with 'Lingonberry stems' pattern knit by Elin Lindgren in 1980.
Photo: Birgitta Nygren**



**Mittens with traditional Gotland pattern.
Photo: Külli Bergholm**



**Mittens with traditional Gotland pattern.
Photo: Külli Bergholm**

grey background was meant for servants. Each weaver had her own patterns and methods. Usually four heddles and treadles were used. Damask coverings were quite rare.

Carpets came into vogue in the second half of the 1800s and were loom-woven on almost every farm. Weaving bloomed and a variety of materials and techniques were introduced. Old clothes were often cut into strips and re-used and this made weaving quite labour-intensive.

Felting is another technique in which much of Gotland's wool is utilised. The Gotland Crafts Association organised many different felting classes in the 1990s. As felting techniques developed, it was possible to start using the wool from Gotland sheep to make large carpets as well. Barbro Lomakka is a renowned carpet designer who often uses Gotland wool in her carpets. Gunilla Östbom initiated felting and design courses at the Folk University of Gotland. Today there are several felting artisans on the island whose felt products contribute to their livelihood.



Typical ticking from the Gotland Handicraft guild's collection. The texture with the white background is "more valuable" and the one on the darker background is "cheaper", which was used by single girls and servants.



The carpet is designed and felted by Barbro Lomakka for the Gotland Handicraft guild for a project led by Birgitta Nygren which explored new innovative uses for Gotland wool. Inspiration and motif came from the many Runic stones of Gotland's landscape. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

The KreaTov symposium takes place every 3 years in the town of Hemse, Gotland. It is organized by the Gotland Handicraft Association. Participants are able to learn about a wide range of felting techniques and applications through various workshops and lectures. These photos are of KreaTov 2012. Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association



Birgitta Nygren welcomes the participants to KreaTov 2012.



Crafts advice in Åboland

Sonja Tobiasson

Åboland Crafts Society belongs to a nationwide network of crafts societies, which form part of the Finnish Handicraft Organisation TAITO. 2012 marked the 75th anniversary of the Åboland Crafts Society and the 50th anniversary of the Gullkrona Crafts Society. A jubilee exhibition was held in June 2012.

Besides advising and running a loom-weaving house, the society also has a crafts school for children and young people. The crafts school, where Erna Elo took the lead in 2005, has existed for almost 30 years. Crafts camps with different themes are organised each summer. Erna admits that children have a variety of interests nowadays and the number of participants is not as high as it used to be.

Advising involves tutoring the weavers and artisans who use the services of the crafts society. In addition, the society procures the necessary materials and has a small warehouse for the artisans. At present the most common hand-crafted products include rag carpets, linen table runners, Poppana products, fast-woven napped woollen plaids and long and short linen curtains. Erna's favourites are rag carpets, woollen rugs and rya rugs. She dreams of creating or encouraging someone else to create a special Pargas or Åboland rya and selling rya kits to make ryas at home.

Erna says that rya rugs regained popularity in the 1980s, when many old Åboland rya patterns were restored and woven into new rugs. The patterns were drawn up, documented and used as a basis for weaving rya rugs with local patterns. Half-ryas were woven as well. In a half-rya only part of the rug is covered with the pattern of knots. For example, this rya depicting a tulip is a half-rya.

In general, the popularity of rya rugs as decoration items has waned. They do not always fit into today's minimalist and ascetic interiors. In 2011 just one rya rug was woven in the loom-weaving house, using a Gallen-Kallela motif.

Erna Elo's road to the position of chief adviser of Åboland Crafts Society took her from a primary school to the sewing class of the Åboland vocational school and a one-year weaving course at Pjukala Folk University. The world of crafts has surrounded her for 40 years.



Half-rya rug with tulip design. Photos: Sonja Tobiasson

After folk university, she became an ‘errand girl’ for the crafts society, which operated on the premises of a child welfare organisation. At about the same time, Gullkrona opened on Köpmansgatan. Erna’s main job was to pack threads or other handicraft materials for weavers who had looms at home. Finnish handicraft societies often swapped products. The society in Pargas sent “poor people’s minks” – loom-woven and napped scarves – to other societies in Finland, and purchased birch bark items from handicraft societies in eastern Finland. In the early years of the society, small quantities of products were also exported to Germany. A group of ladies gather in the weaving house (the so-called Blue House in Gamla Malm in Pargas) to



The Åboland Craft Society’s “Blue house” in Pargas.

Photo: Sonja Tobiasson



weave various items for themselves and their friends. They come to the weaving house daily throughout the year, except during the summer break.

Cooperation between the KnowSheep project and the Åboland Crafts Society resulted in a small rya rug known as the ‘Porvoo Weathervane’ (*Borgå Väderhanel/Porvoon sääkukko*), which was commissioned for the exhibition. It was delivered to the society as a handicraft kit, which Erna turned into a beautiful rug in summer 2012.



**Erna Elo making the rya rug titled “Porvoo weathervane.”
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**

**The completed rug. Photo: Rauno Träskelin,
Suomen Käsitöiden Ystävät**



The Dragsfjård mittens, from which the modern Åboland mittens have been developed. This pair was donated to the project by Mrs. Berit Laine. Photo: Sonja Tobiasson



Mittens from the Aboland region made in 1888 TMM13271, Museum Centre of Turku. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Associati



Stockings from the Åboland region knit in the late 1800's. Left: TMM2784, right: TMM2783; The Museum Centre of Turku.



Mittens from the Åboland region KA2800_20473, The Finnish National Museum. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association

Rya rug as a utility and ornament

Sonja Tobiasson

Rya rugs are traditional handicraft carpets that can still be found in homes in Åboland and elsewhere in Finland. They can be made by knotting woollen yarns on linen warps, forming the pile, or loom-woven, using linen warps. Rya rugs can have knots on just one side or on both sides. In the old days, rya rugs were utilities rather than ornaments. There were also special-purpose ryas, such as boat-ryas, which were used to keep people warm during long boat trips. These ryas were valuable assets that were found in each boat. In the book *Kustbygd* ('Seaside Village'), a court record from the island of Föglö originating from 1677 is mentioned. It states: "In the same year, four fishing boats were lost in an autumn storm and eight men were killed. Four rya rugs are mentioned among the equipment lost." Source: *Kustbygd*. The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland. *Folkklivsstudier* XIII. More recently, rya rugs also served as blankets and later as wall ornaments.

Rya rugs are expensive and larger ryas are therefore often presented as collages. Some of them are on display in public buildings.



Photo: Tatu Lertola

A picture of a *wedding rya* at the altar in Parga Church can be seen in the book *Martha med i det mesta*. It was a gift from Marthas of Pargas. One half of the rya was made by Marthas of Parainen and the other half by Marthas of Pargas, and then the two halves were sewn together. The wedding rya depicts crosses and rings and it is used, as the name suggests, at weddings – the bride and groom stand on it during the wedding ceremony. The rug is light blue and decorated with equal-armed crosses and pairs of rings.



Photo : Tatu Lertola

There are several rya rugs in the **Pargas Museum of Local History**. This picture depicts a two-sided rya rug with shorter pile on the reverse side.

There are two identical light-coloured rya rugs in the **Pargas Parish House** which were made at the Åboland Crafts Society. The text on the reverse side of one of the rya rugs says: "These rugs were donated by Marga Ljungqvist to the Swedish congregation of Pargas." The title of the rya rugs is "Veil" and their pattern was designed by Eva Mannerheim Sparre in 1906.



Photo : Tatu Lertola

The **'Harvesting'** rya rug is private property. This rug depicts harvesting workers – women with rakes and men with scythes. The year (1939) is embroidered in one of the bottom corners. The soft colours of the rug suggest that it was made from yarn dyed with plants.



Photo : Tatu Lertola



Marthas from Ålö commissioned a rya rug and donated it to the Friends of Ålö Youth Society. The rug hangs on the wall of the youth centre in Dalaskog. The rya rug depicts the family emblems of some farms of Ålö. The year (1980) is woven in the rug as the year in which it was made.

Photo: Sonja Tobiasson

Katrin Kabun



Ball winding competition in Saaremaa 1930. Photo: Saaremaa Museum 3550:5

Throughout history, wool has been the most widely used textile material, and the development of wool-working skills has been directly and closely linked to overall cultural development. Wool as a material is characterised by warmth, softness, flexibility, breathability, high moisture absorption, temperature insulation and the ability to dampen sound. It is also relatively fireproof.

Modern laboratories have so far failed to generate an equivalent material that possesses all of these properties. Thus, it is worth looking back and paying more attention to this natural material in order to find modern uses for its unique properties. We have the rich handicraft heritage of our ancestors and it is a matter of taste whether we now focus on old patterns, use archaic techniques and copy items stored in museums or create something completely new, building on what has been created in former times.

If a focus on the use of old technology is chosen, one could start by spinning yarn using a spindle. This is an archaic, easy and meditative way of preparing the yarn. I believe that this skill is hidden in every woman – just give it a try! It is possible to spin a wide variety of yarns with a spindle which suit the taste and need of each spinner, such as special-effect yarns with sections of varying thickness, or multi-coloured yarns which are spun by adding wool in different colours while spinning. One should aim for a creative approach, rather than compete with the quality of industrial yarns.



Yarn spun with a drop spindle, then plied.



Bag made from loom-woven fabric, with an archaic tablet-woven belt as a handle.

Once the yarn has been spun with a spindle, it can be used to knit a completely unique modern hat or vest. On the other hand, yarn spun with a spindle can also be used with other archaic techniques, for example, woven into a scarf, plaid or bag fabric.

Archaic needle-netted mittens are nice and durable even today, but in our climate the period during which one can enjoy such needlework is short. Therefore, needle-netted or knitted mittens could be decorated with national embroidery and used as oven gloves instead. Wool is known to be a very good heat insulator and does not catch fire easily. In old days the valuable material was not wasted on such items, but times have changed and nice handicraft can remain in view all year round.



**Naalbinding at the Turku Handicraft Museum in Finland.
Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association**



Knitted textile after fulling, which results in an interesting surface texture and knitted oven mittens decorated with national embroidery motifs. Photos: Katrin Kabun



Knitting is a relatively recent wool-working technique, which over time completely supplanted needle-netting as the prevailing technique. Today we cannot even imagine our handicraft heritage without figured mittens, gloves and sweaters, as they were so widespread. Fortunately, knitting is also popular today – gloves, socks, scarves, hats, sweaters and other knitwear have a firm place in our everyday attire.



Double-thread machine-knitted sweater. Two different types of woollen yarn were simultaneously used in knitting: the inner side was knitted with a fluffy fine wool yarn (dark grey), which makes the inner side of the sweater soft, warm and skin-friendly; while the outer side was knitted with a woollen yarn with a denser twist that contains overcoat wool (white), which makes the outer side of the sweater durable and both water- and stain-repellent. Photos: Katrin Kabun

Weaving has been a widespread technique around the world, and it is popular today as well. Initially, warp-weighted vertical looms were used, which were replaced by horizontal looms in the Middle Ages. Today's plaid (formerly wrap or coverlet) is the oldest textile item. There should be a cosy woollen plaid in every home which you can wrap around your shoulders to keep warm. Wool has the capacity to absorb moisture from the air, which reacts with the protein in the wool fibres. This process results in the emission of heat. This is why a woollen article immediately feels warm when it touches the skin. Woollen fabric also contains a lot of air – in the wool fibres, in the yarn and between the threads of woven fabric. Thus woollen fabric is like an insulation layer that keeps the wearer warm.



Loom-woven scarf and plaid fabric just taken off the loom.

Loom-woven skirt fabric with yarns made from the wool of Finnish, Estonian and Gotland native sheep. Photos: Katrin Kabun

Wool rugs convey their softness and warmth to the whole atmosphere of the room, while insulating the floor, maintaining the moisture balance of the room and improving acoustics. In addition, a wool rug is easy to clean, as due to the structure of the fibres it does not absorb dirt – and if something should fall on the rug, there will be no stains if you deal with it immediately.



POHL rug displaying different techniques – tufted surface and felted balls. Designer: Monika Järg. Photo: Juta Kübarsepp



Rugs, with felt and leather strips and wool yarn used as the material. Photos: Katrin Kabun

Modern interiors – in both public buildings and at home – are often decorated in minimalist style, with no curtains or carpets. This has led to a new problem – room acoustics suffers due to echo. Excessive echo is usually muffled by textile rugs, curtains and soft furnishings. In the absence of such items, one option is to use wool panels. Wool is an excellent muffler of sounds and also helps to adjust the moisture level of the room.



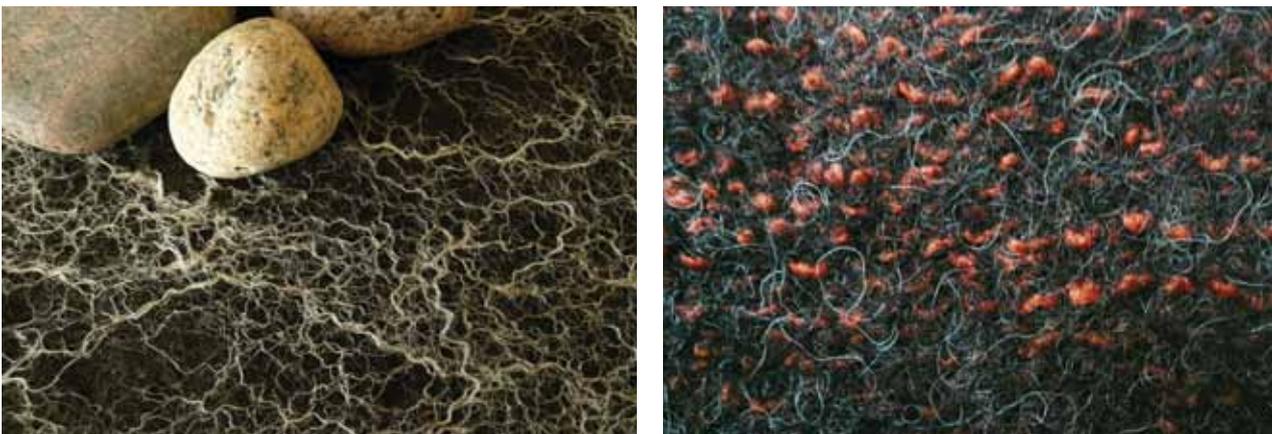
Barbro Lomakka's felted wall panels. Photo: Grasp Studio, Visby, Gotland

Fulling – mechanical processing of finished woven textiles in heat and moisture – is yet another technique that is occasionally highlighted nowadays. Needle-netted mittens were in many places referred to as felted mittens, as they were subjected to fulling to make them denser and thus warmer, more water repellent and durable.



Knitted mittens and a hat after fulling. The pattern was taken from the oldest piece of knitwear found in Estonia (the Jõuga burial site) which was probably a mitten cuff originating from the late 13th or early 14th century.

Both fulling and felting are based on wool fibres catching on one another. This offers a lot of opportunities for meshing wool with other fibres (silk, linen, cotton etc.) to create new and interesting textures and find more uses for wool.



Felt with silk fibres and wool rove on the surface, and textile samples woven with linen and then subjected to fulling Photos: Katrin Kabun

Wool has always been considered a valuable material. It is known that there was a tradition on farms to give wool as a gift to a woman who helped deliver a baby. In Märjamaa they said that if a piece of yarn could be wrapped around a finger three times, it should not be thrown away, as you might still need it three years later. We should attach more value to wool as a material, too, and find new ways of using wool residues. Some examples are shown below:



Unsorted and sorted scrap yarn and key rings knitted from it.



Shawl and the yarn and wool scraps from which it was made. Photos: Katrin Kabun

The life of wool does not end there. As wool becomes felted, old knitwear can be cut into strips, processed by fulling and then woven into durable rag rugs. When the completed rug becomes worn through use then it is good to know that it is fully biodegradable and as such, the wool will not harm nature.

8

Present day designs inspired by traditional motifs and nature

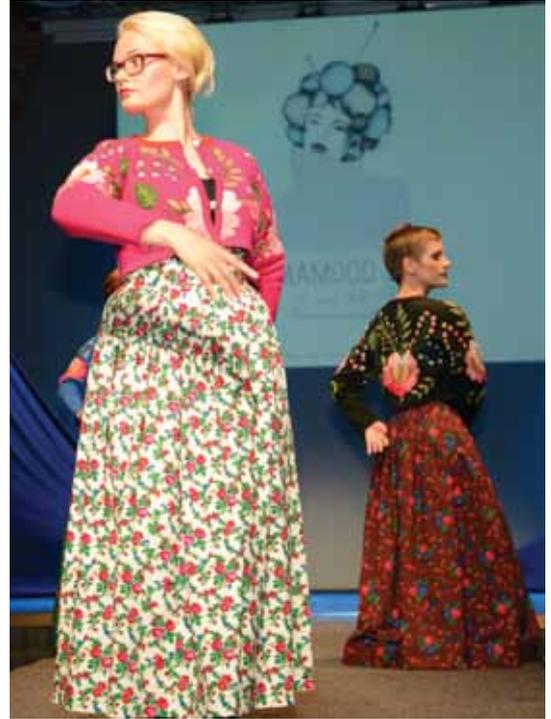
Karen Allas

The use of ancient symbols add cultural expression to knitwear. Elsebeth Lavold has been inspired by her Viking heritage to create new ways of cable knitting to illustrate patterns from runic stones and other viking artefacts. These pictures were taken in the summer of 2012 at an exhibition of her works in Sweden. Photos: Anu Sepp





Modern knitted fashions incorporate traditional styles and elements from local nature. These photos are from Riina Tombergs 2013 collection titled Flowers and Berries, as shown at the OmaMood fashion show in Viljandi, Estonia Photos: Courtesy of Riina Tomberg





There is a trend towards using local and natural fibers. Hiiu Vill knitwear is made from local Hiiumaa sheep's wool, spun into yarn at the local spinners on the island. The sweaters are made using undyed natural tones and incorporate traditional patterns. Photos: Hiiu Vill OÜ



This shawl is woven on a narrow loom with a double width fabric and was inspired by the double width chequered blankets which were used as bridal shawls in ancient times. Woven by Ülle Sepp. Photos: Saaremaa Wool Association



Felting has been continually growing in popularity throughout the Baltic region. There are a wide spectrum of products that are being created. These colourful, light weight felted shawls were designed and made by Annika Grandelius of Ullverstan, Gotland. Photos: Courtesy of Ullversta'n



Traditional Saaremaa patterns find new expression through new colour combinations and creative applications. Anu Sepp's ethnological interests have inspired the designs of her knitwear. Photos: Courtesy of Anu Sepp





These felted products are made by Eva Kyrklund of Villa Ylle, inspired by the islands. Pellinki Finland. Photos: Courtesy of Villa Ylle



Mareli Rannap's felt creations reflect the nature on Saaremaa. Photos: Courtesy of Mareli Rannap

9

Caring for Woollens

Anu Sepp

The lifespan of woollen articles can stretch over hundreds of years! With proper care a garment or blanket can still be functional while retaining its beauty and shape.

There is a common misconception that woollens need to be cleaned often. Not true! Woollens do need to be aired, brushed and exposed to sunlight frequently. Ideally in the winter you can throw your woollen items on the snow for a few hours. The cold will destroy any moth larvae embedded in the fibres and the sunlight will freshen the item up. This has been a common practice throughout the Baltic Sea countries for many generations. There is elasticity to the fibre which must be considered. If a garment is worn constantly you will notice a change in shaping. Often a sweater will 'take the shape' of the wearer! Pants will bag at the knees and elbows will become misshapen. Do not hang sweaters as they will stretch and lose shoulder shaping. Ideally woollen garments should be folded neatly and placed on a shelf or in a drawer.



Woollens spread onto snow. Photo: Saaremaa Wool Association.

Washing Woollens

If a knitted garment is very dirty or stained it can be hand-washed with care. Dry-cleaning is not necessary. For fitted garments, take measurements before washing. This will help when blocking the garment after washing. To avoid shrinkage make sure that hot water is not used! Do not stretch or wring wet wool. Because of its elasticity the original shape will be ruined.

Soaking

Fill a tub or a large bowl with warm water and mild soap. There are specific soaps on the market which are made for washing woollens (Eucalan). To neutralise the smell of perspiration, add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of diluted white vinegar to the water. Place the item in the water and gently swirl to make sure it is immersed. Soak for 10–15 minutes.

Rinsing

Gently gather the item and squeeze out the water without wringing or stretching it. Place it in a tub of clean warm water and gently press down and release. Turn it over and gently swish. Squeeze and remove gently. Repeat the rinse in a tub of clean, warm water until the soap or detergent is gone.

Rolling

Squeeze out the water and place the garment on a white towel on a flat surface. Roll the towel and garment together, pressing and squeezing, to remove excess moisture.

Blocking and Drying

Place the garment on a flat surface which allows air to penetrate around it, such as a metal lattice or thin wooden slat tabletop. Gently block it into shape without stretching it. Let it dry naturally and keep it out of sunlight. The drying process may take several days, because wool absorbs moisture.



Wet woolen items drying on a wooden slat surface. Photo: Anu Sepp

Moth protection

Protection from moths has always been a concern for handicrafters. There are a few principles to follow. Moths are attracted to sweaty, dirty woollens. Make sure your woollens are clean when put away for long storage. Otherwise air them out regularly. It is not the adult moth that is the enemy, but the larvae, which bed down in the fibres of the wool. Extreme temperatures will kill off the larvae. Put infested items in a freezer for 48 hours or place them in direct sunlight. In northern climates in winter, place woollens on the snow.

Moths do not like the aromatic scent of several plants. Cedar and juniper are often used to deter them – hence cedar chests in which woollens are stored. Sachets of dried lavender are also used. The renowned Estonian wool artist Anu Raud spoke recently on this theme on the ETV programme *Prillitoos*. She uses orange peels and chestnuts in her woollens to deter moths. I have questioned every knitwear artist I have met about this problem, but there does not seem to be a definitive answer. The general understanding is to air out woollens often and keep them in a clean, dust-free space. This way we can protect our precious work and provide a legacy for the future.

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Organizations

Estonian Folk Culture Center

J. Vilmsi 55, Tallinn 10147, Estonia
+372 600 9291
e-mail: keskus@rahvakultuur.ee
www.rahvakultuur.ee

The Folk Culture Centre is a national organization under the Ministry of Culture that supports the survival and evolution of Estonian folk culture. Their website includes a large database of the organizations, businesses and individuals involved in folk culture throughout Estonia.

Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union

Pikk 22, Tallinn 10133, Estonia
+372 660 4772, +372 518 7812
e-mail: info@folkart.ee
www.folkart.ee

This non-profit organisation brings together regional folk art and craft organisations as well as individual craftsmen with the aim of preserving folk craft as a cultural phenomenon as well as a source of subsistence. The Union organizes workshops and large handicraft fairs including the Tallinn Medieval Days and St. Martins Day Fair. Visit their website for a calendar of events.

Estonian National Museum

Veski 32, Tartu 51014, Estonia
+ 372 735 0400
e-mail: erm@erm.ee
www.erm.ee

ENM is a cultural history museum with a direction towards ethnology. The work concentrates on Estonian culture, which is complemented by other Finno-Ugric, especially the closer small Baltic-Finnic nations. The museum has extensive databases, collections and books.

Etno Tuba MTÜ

(Folk costumes of Hiiumaa)
info@etnotuba.ee
www.etnotuba.ee
Tel. 6555398, Margit GSM 5524216

A society in Tallinnas trying to preserve old handicraft traditions, helping the real masters meet inquisitive learners.

Kuressaare Regional Training Centre

Kohtu 22, Kuressaare, Saaremaa 93812, Estonia
+ 372 452 4600
e-mail: info@ametikool.ee
www.ametikool.ee

This school offers a 3 year full time program in textile work covering handicraft history, materials, practical skills in knitting, weaving, embroidery and sewing. The handicraft teachers are happy to share their knowledge.

Hiiumaa Handicraft Society

Hiiu 1, Kärkla, Hiiumaa 92413, Estonia
+372 5244785
e-mail: hiiukasitoo @ gmail.com
www.hiiukasitoo.ee

Muhu Handicraft Society “Oad ja Eed“

Liiva, Muhu, Saaremaa 94701, Estonia
+372 58509096
e-mail: oadeed@hotmail.ee
www.oadeed.ee

Vormsi Handicraft Society

Hullo, Vormsi, Läänemaa 91301, Estonia
kristinarajando@gmail.com
+372 56616395

Kihnu Cultural Space - Kihnu Department Store

Linaküla, Kihnu, Pärnumaa, Estonia
+372 5071453
email: kihnukaubamaja@kihnu.ee
kultuuriruum@kihnu.ee+372 5344 3202
www.kultuuriruum.ee

Kihnu Kultuuri Instituut

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e-mail: info@kihnuinstituut.ee
www.kihnuinstituut.ee

Ruhnu Cultural Storehouse

Ringsu, Ruhnu, Saaremaa 93001, Estonia
+372 56929551
e-mail: kulli.vahi@gmail.com
www.rosavamsa.blogspot.com

The Estonian Sheep Breeders Association

Aretuse 2, Märja vald, Tartumaa 61406, Estonia
+372 742 2579, +372 53 309 406
e-mail: kontor@lammas.ee
www.lammas.ee

Kihnu Native Sheep Breeders Association

Õnnekivi farm, Männikuste village, Tõstamaa, Pärnumaa, Estonia
+372 53427359 e-mail: toomaarst@gmail.com
www.kihnumaalammass.eu

Estonian Native Sheep Society for Conservation and Breeding

Sae farm, Uuri village, Kolga, Harjumaa 74602, Estonia
+372 5280054 e-mail: imbi@lahemaalammas.ee
www.lahemaalammas.ee
www.sites.google.com/site/eestimaalammas

Hiiumaa Cattle and Sheep Society

Orjaku village, Käina parish, Hiiumaa 92114, Estonia
+372 5165600 info@dagen.ee

The Finnish Crafts Organization ”Taito”

Kalevankatu 61, FIN-00180 Helsinki, Finland
+358 (0)40 7525 160
e-mail: ktl@taito.fi
www.taito.fi

Together with the 20 regional Crafts Associations, the Finnish Crafts Organization forms the national Taito Group. The organization offers courses, workshops, crafts schools, exhibitions, products, materials and business services. Almost all the regional Crafts Associations have a shop. In fact, these Associations were originally established as a marketing tool for businesses. They are the main organizers of Crafts trade fairs and other sales events in Finland.

South-West Finland Arts and Crafts Association

Uudenmaakatu 1, 20500 Turku, Finland
+358 40 849 9641
e-mail: toimisto@taitovarsinaissuomi.fi
www.taitovarsinaissuomi.fi

Gullkrona - Turku (regional craft association shop)

Nunnankatu 4, 20700 Turku, Finland
+358 (02) 469 5411 e-mail: gullkrona.fi@gmail.com
www.gullkrona.fi

Gullkrona – Pargas (regional craft association shop)

Köpmangatan 12, 21600 Pargas, Finland
Shop +358 (02) 454 4065
Office +358 (02) 454 4066
e-mail: gullkrona@parnet.fi
www.gullkrona.fi

Åbolands Handicraft Center

Klockarståget 5 and 8, 21600 Pargas, Finland
+358 (02) 458 3877
e-mail: taito.aboland@gmail.com

Abo Akademi University, Ethnological Archive

Tuomiokirkontori 3, FI-20500 Turku, Finland
+358 (0)2 215 4396
+358 (0)2 215 4982
e-mail: etnologiska.arkivet@abo.fi
www.abo.fi/institution/en/etnarkiv

The Ethnological Archive collects different kinds of tradition-related material in Finland emphasizing the Finland-Swedish areas. The archive consists of written material, photos, recorded interviews, maps, drawings, films and videotapes. It also includes a special archive for Finland-Swedish textile tradition. The material is available for closer studying at the archive.

Lumo- center

Elävän kulttuurin Koroinen association
Koroistentie 2, 20380 Turku, Finland
GSM +358 44 9074597
e-mail: koroinen@gmail.com

www.koroinen.org

Koroinen is a historical farm site situated near the centre of Turku. Owned by the city, the farm is a centre for local students of sustainable development and ecological living. The venue is being used for courses and workshops in crafts and arts, ecological building, organic gardening and permaculture.

Luostarinmäki Handicrafts Museum

Vartiovuorenkatu 2, P.O. Box 286, 20101 Turku, Finland
+358 2 262 0350
e-mail: museokeskus@turku.fi, vapaa-aikatoimiala@turku.fi
www.museumcentreturku.fi

An outdoor museum that offers information about Turku's handicrafts history in an original pre-industrial environment. There are exhibits, events and workshops. The highlight of the year are the Handicrafts Days in August.

Skargardens Sheep Club in Pargas

+358 400 528684
e-mail: info@skargardensfarklubb.fi
www.skargardensfarklubb.fi

The club aims to protect and work for sheep breeding in the archipelago region. The website has information about sheep products for sale, upcoming events, resources, links and more.

Finnish Sheep Association

PO Box 251, Vantaa 01301, Finland
+358 020-7472451
www.lammasyhdistys.fi

Finnsheep r.y.r.f.

+358 (0)40 482 5026
e-mail: pia.parikka@proagria.fi www.finnsheep.fi

This organization aims to keep the Finnsheep breed pure, support measures for the conservation of the breed and act as a connecting link between Finnsheep breeders.

Pargas kyrkliga samfällighet

http://www.ltsrk.fi/paraisten-seurakuntayhtyma
Kyrkoessplanaden 3, 21600 PARGAS
E-mail: pargas-parainen@evl.fi
+358 (0)40 3124 400

Pargas hembygdsmuseum

Storgårdsgatan 8, 21600 Pargas
+358 (0)2 458 1452
http://www.pargashembygdsmuseum.fi/fin/
E-mail: pargas.hembygdsmuseum@parnet.fi

Pargas Marthaförening

Margaretha Aller
Åskgränd 5, 21600 Pargas

The National Association of Swedish Handicraft Societies ”Hemslöjden”

Åsögatan 122, 11624 Stockholm
08-54 54 94 50

e-mail: info@hemslojden.org

www.hemslojden.org

Hemslöjden is the umbrella national organization that co-ordinates Sweden's regional handicraft societies. It offers courses, consulting, publishes books and publishes the handicraft magazine ”Hemslöjd”.

Gotland County Handicraft Society

Kopparsviksgatan 7, 62158 Visby
+46 0737-131131

e-mail: helenawottle@hotmail.com

+46 0498-21 71 60

e-mail: birgitta.nygren@hemslojd.org

Textil Gotland

www.textilgotland.net

This is an association of the active professionals within textile design, weaving, felting etc. living on the island of Gotland. The website includes a lengthy list of members with each of their contact information.

Skinnriket Gotland

Hejnum Graute 310, 624 38 Tingstäde, Gotland, Sweden
c/o Kjell Nilsson, mobil 070-471 29 99,

e-mail: graute@live.se

www.skinnriket.se

An economic association of the sheep farmers on Gotland who are raising mostly Gotland pelt sheep for sheepskins. The website includes a map of the members with each of their contact information.

Swedish Sheep Farmers Association

c/o Maria Edman

Nybygget, Jorstorp, 514 55 Ljungsarp, Sweden

e-mail: info@faravelsforbundet.com

www.faravelsforbundet.com

The website of this national organization has links to the 24 regional sheep farmers associations and to the sheep clubs for specific breeds.

Gotland Sheep Farmers Association

See the website for contact information. www.faravelsforbundet.com/distrikt/7-distrikt/38-gotland

Gute Sheep Association

Knoppetorp, 590 52 Nykil, Sweden

info@gutefar.se

www.gutefar.se

Swedish Native Sheep Society

Bondegatan 1A, Stockholm 11623, Sweden

e-mail: info@allmogefar.se

www.allmogefar.se

Maadjas

Õismäe tee 77-2, Tallinn 13515, Estonia

+372 53-416962

e-mail: maadjasmtu@gmail.com

www.maadjas.ee

The aim of this organization is the preservation of indigenous plants and native animals in Estonia.

Estonian Seminatural Community Conservation Association

Struve 2, Tartu 51003, Estonia

+372 7428363

e-mail: pky@zbi.ee

www.pky.ee

The association aims to preserve traditional agricultural landscapes, seminatural meadows and pastures.

Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland

Takalantle 4, FI-25250 Märynummi

c/o Iiro Ikonen

+358 500 609526

www.vsperinnemaisemat.net

The KnowSheep project
www.knowsheep.eu



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Seamtress and handicrafter

The Baltic Sea islands
under discussion in this book belong to
the countries of Estonia, Finland and Sweden.

There are literally thousands of islands,
some smaller and others larger,
the largest being Gotland,
Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Öland.

What do the islanders have in common?
A strong relationship to the Baltic Sea
and raising sheep.

Throughout history, the islanders
have been influenced by many cultures
– Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Danish,
Polish, German, and Russian – and they have
served as a conduit of culture themselves.
This is reflected in their handicraft patterns.

This book presents an overview of the
development of technology and
treatment of wool with respect
to the Baltic islands.

KNOW
SHEEP



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