

A series of mittens knitted by Maria Larsson Mäarak has been documented by the ethnologist and mitten collector Erika Nordvall Falck, formerly Pawal. Here Erika tells about her work and the talented knitting girl from Skájdde

## **SKÁJDDE-MARIA'S GLOVES: technology and tradition in a northern climate**

By *Pärlälvens* (pearl river) flowing waters in the municipality of Jokkmokk, west of the lake Peuraure, lies the arctic farm Skájdde in a roadless land. Here lived at the beginning of the 20th century Maria Larsson Mäarak, called Skájdde-Maria, with her husband Lars Johannes Larsson Mäarak, known in the area as Skájdde-Janne, and here they raised eight children.

Skájdde-Maria was an Enarsson from *Västerfjäll*, born Andersson in 1875. She was a skilled knitter. In the fjällgården they had their own sheep, both white and black. From the wool they spun white, black and gray yarn. Skájdde-Janne often worked at the scrubbing chair, where he roughly carded the wool. The family helped each other with fine carding and Maria and the daughters then spun yarn. They dyed the yarn red, blue, and green with "bag color", which they bought from the trader in Jokkmokk.

Some of the things Maria did are still there. Even though the garments are worn and torn, they are fantastically exciting to study. You can see that they are produced with care and creative joy by a very skilled knitter. Maria always placed the densest patterns, which provide the greatest wear resistance, where the mitt was exposed to the most wear. They are incredibly tightly knit with thin needles and yarn that is full and tightly spun. The mitts are a little wrinkled from many years of use.

### CHARACTERISTIC KNITTING

The patterns are made up of simple geometric shapes, small squares, stripes, triangles and zig zag lines. These patterned elements are everywhere where people knit.

Still Skájdde-Maria's knitting is characteristic. Maria combined the patterned elements in a special way. The result was always well-balanced in whole, and in the neighborhood of *Pärlälven* valley you recognised her gloves.

One autumn day in 1979, I sat at my kitchen table in Jokkmokk and worked on my first reconstruction of a mitten from Skájdde. Then we were visited by an elderly man who worked in the timber forest as a young man, Kalle Olsson from Karats.

*-Oh, are you knitting Skájdde-Maria's mittens?* he exclaimed, very surprised, when he

saw the knitting growing under my hands. I was equally surprised. How could he know that? I didn't even have the original glove next to me. Kalle had worked many winters in the timber forest together with Skájdde-Janne and his boys.

*-You could immediately see which mittens were theirs, when the work team's mittens hung to dry on the dock in the evening,* he said.

## ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The surviving gloves are almost all work gloves. They were used inside leather gloves. The cuffs are wide and open - would be easy to take off and on while working outdoors. When the evening came, they knotted the cords of the mittens together and hung them on the drying rack over the iron stove or fire place.

Although the mittens were worn under gloves and were almost invisible, they were beautifully patterned. The small patterns increase wear resistance, but they also bear witness to Skájdde-Maria's artistic talent and joy in creation.

The daughter Amanda, *Manda*, mother to Jokkmokk's vicar emeritus Johan Mäarak, got married and moved to Lillselet a little further down the valley. Manda continued to knit in the same tradition throughout her life and has also generously shared her memories of her mother's knitting art. Thanks to Manda's stories in combination

with preserved garments and remnants of garments, I have been able to make reconstructions of Skájdde-Maria's knitting. Maria's gloves are truly an example of a tradition where materials and technology are well adapted to the climate and people's conditions in daily life.

*You can read more about Skájdde-Maria's knitting and about life on the farm Skájdde in the early 20th century in Ajtte's report "Duoddaris 3", which can also be ordered through libraries (ISBN 978-91-87636-52-3 and ISBN 91- 87636-52-2).*