



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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www.ne-rugsociety.org

November Meeting:

Val Arbab Saturday Seminar on Structure of Handwoven Piled Rugs

Single-wefted? Semi-depressed warp? Offset knotting? Asymmetric knot pulled to the left? Say good-bye to those meetings when your head was spinning with all that arcane ruggie chatter. California-based oriental rug expert Val Arbab will make everything crystal clear in a special four-hour, hands-on session on Saturday, November 13.

The event will be a slight departure for the NERS, being the first time we have held a mid-day Saturday workshop. Val has presented these workshops throughout the U.S., and long experience has shown her that it takes a good four hours to both cover the basics and to demonstrate how structure is used to identify rugs.

The meeting will run from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM, and a box lunch will be served midway through the session. Soft drinks, coffee, and tea will be available throughout.

Please note that we need you to make a reservation, and that a nominal charge is necessary to cover the cost of the luncheon and the extended facility rental. Details are noted in the box at right.

The seminar will entail hands-on learning throughout. You'll be seated at a table delving into the nitty-gritty of how rugs are woven and how understanding the structure helps you identify them.

You should dress comfortably and bring the following items:

1. Magnifying glass
2. Tape measure or ruler.

To help enrich the discussion of rug identification, you're encouraged to bring one or more pieces of your own for others to study. "Mystery rugs," i.e. pieces whose identification is unsure, are particularly welcome.

Val has been a student and a teacher in the field of oriental rugs for the past thirty-two years. She owned and operated an Oriental rug shop for the first ten years, specializing in old collectible and decorative rugs, including cleaning and restoration. For the past twenty-two years her primary activities have been appraising

Next Meeting Details

Date: Saturday, November 13

Time: 10AM to 2PM

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: \$5 guest fee for non-members

Directions: See page 8

You must make a reservation by Nov. 9!

To reserve your place at the Saturday workshop, please contact Mark Hopkins at mopkins@comcast.net or 781-259-9444. **Reservations must be received no later than Tuesday, November 9. When you call, indicate the number of attendees in your party and their choices of sandwiches (roast beef, tuna salad, or grilled-veggies).**

There will be a \$10 charge for members at the door. Guests are welcome by reservation and a \$15 guest fee. If no one is home when you phone, please leave a message. Also, feel free to bring one or more rugs that you'd like to have identified.

and educating. She holds the highest designations with the American Society of Appraisers and International Society of Appraisers. Val developed and taught a course on Oriental rugs for Indiana University, and created and produced a video "A Consumer's Guide to Old Decorative Rugs." She continually attempts to demystify oriental rugs for appraisers and the general public through lectures, seminars, and the printed word. Val's knowledge of her specialty and appraisal concepts established her as an expert witness in both Federal and Municipal Courts, an arbitrator, a consultant to the U.S. Government, insurance, and moving industries, as well as to attorneys, other appraisers, and the general public.



September Meeting: James Douglas on the Weavings of the Baluch

By Jim Adelson

On September 24th, about 40 members assembled at First Parish in Lincoln to open the 2004-2005 NERS season. St. Louis Baluchophile James Douglas gave the society's first talk on Baluch weaving, using many examples from his collection to illustrate his points.

James opened by noting that with most rugs, people first learn where, when, and by whom they were made, but this information remains elusive for the Baluch. He gave several reasons: the Baluch were never conquered, therefore their ethnography was not studied and recorded; Baluch weavings weren't actively collected until fairly recently, and even then, "the Baluch rode at the back of the Turkmen bus." There were many different ethnic groups in the areas in question, of which the Baluch were but one. To complicate things further, the

Baluch had a great tendency to break up, regroup, and rename themselves, and they were also very open to "adopting" other tribes. As a result, there were lots of influences from Turkmen, Kurds, Turks, Silk Road traders, Mashad city weavers, Afshars, and more. James summarized saying "I like to think of Baluch more as a regional distinction than a tribal one."

James then began the display of pieces from his collection, at times proceeding by geographical area, and at other times by design family. He started with a set of items from the Baluchistan and Sistan areas—the southernmost Baluch region. The first was a flat-woven floor rug with weft substitution weave and a banded design. The most conspicuous color in the palette was green, which James noted was most common among southern area rugs. Next came a Sistan/Baluchistan cover, also with a banded design but slit-tapestry weave. Last in this group was a Dastan—a cover for the pile of daily bedding. The Dastan had alternating color bands, and tassels for decoration.

James commented "now we're going up North," and showed another Dastan, also featuring a banded design, with a design row in the middle, flanked on both sides by a plain colored band, and then another design band on both sides, and the alternation of plain and paired design bands continuing out to the ends of the piece. This piece used slit-tapestry weave for the plain colored sections, and soumak for the design bands. It had been woven in two pieces and joined. Next came a Khorassan pile piece with the same design, flatwoven ends, and a Turkmen vine border. James followed this with a couple of khorjin faces, and then two pile saltbags.

The last three pieces in this group showed Turkmen design influences. The first of these was a pile piece with Salor "turret" guls. James observed "the earlier ones were coarse, and they got finer as they went along ... the flat weaves were the opposite." This particular piece used all kinds of materials for warps—"whatever she had, she strung up." The second of these pieces used the Kurbaghe gul; James said that the Baluch "sometimes use minor Turkmen guls as major figures." By contrast, he remarked that the Baluch never used the



Kurbaghe-gul rug, 4th quarter 19th c. 3-7 x 2-7
(Douglas collection)

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more common Turkmen Chemche guls—“the Baluch were very selective about what they stole from the Turkmen.” The last was a Timuri-Taimani piece, with a Turkmen-like major/minor gul arrangement, and some Turkmen minor borders as well. There were some Caucasian design influences also. This final piece used silk, which is uncommon in Baluch weaving, but James noted “it seems too old to be young.”

James proceeded to a number of pieces with the Mushwani design. He began by commenting that today the Mushwani are a small group that trades but does not weave—perhaps the name originated from their trading. The first piece was a main carpet, possibly 18th century. According to James, “it better be old to justify this kind of condition.” Next came a Timuri main carpet with a Mushwani design in the main field and a variation of the Turkmen Tekbent design in the main border. The piece was woven with asymmetric open to the left knots,

which is the most common structure for Baluch pieces. Another Mushwani main carpet followed—somewhat smaller, with minor borders that overpowered the major border. The next example exhibited the Mushwani design, but differed in its use of a white box flower main border, seen in Ersari Turkmen weaving. The piece also used a common Turkmen minor border known as the “running dog.” James then showed a Mushwani pile khorjin from the Sistan area with its signature abundance of green, followed by a Mushwani flatwoven piece. James closed out this section with a Mushwani design in a narrow format that he speculated might be Uzbek, and with a very colorful piece (perhaps Aimaq) that was symmetrically knotted with floating medallions and a Caucasian “calyx and leaf” border.

His next theme was the Mina Khani design, borrowed from city weavings. Reflecting its urban origin, this design had more naturalistic drawing, was woven

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Clockwise from left:

Timuri small main carpet with Mushawani pattern (detail), 4th quarter 19th c.

Camel-ground prayer rug, 2nd half 19th c.
3-4 x 2-10

Timuri mafrash-like bag face, 2nd half 19th c.

(Douglas collection)





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from a cartoon, and tended to have resolved corners. He showed three examples with this design.

James followed the floral aspects of the Mina Khani design with about a dozen pieces with trees and shrubs as their central motif. The first was a classic camel-ground prayer rug with a large central stem and Turkmen-inspired motifs in the field. Other pieces in the group were in different formats, including small carpets, balischts (pillow cases), khorjins, and even a mafrash (shallow storage bag)—a format used much less frequently by the Baluch than some other groups. There was significant variation in the handling of the trees and shrubs, and also considerable variation in the richness of the color palette. One example used a fuchsine dye; Robert Pittinger quotes an English travel writer who observed fuchsine use among the Baluch as early as 1875.

James concluded his talk by showing two non-Baluch pieces—one a Kurdish rug with the Hauzi design from northeast Persia, and the other a Turkmen flatweave—to show how different Baluch weaving was

from their neighbors’.

Following the talk, NERS members displayed the extent and diversity of their own Baluch holdings with an extensive show-and-tell of Baluch treasures. Members had brought 25-30 pieces, many echoing comments that James had made earlier or illustrated in his own pieces. Some examples included an Arab shrub rug woven with asymmetric knots open to the right; a double-niche rug with all-cotton whites that James speculated might have had a funerary use; another Arab rug with botchs as the field motif and a random color arrangement; a classic bird bag; a double bag with a Salor gul as the main design element; a Timuri main carpet with cartouches; four or five camel-ground prayer rugs; and a curious set of small-format rugs that might have been intended for children. As always, the rugs that members brought added to both the educational value and the pleasure of the evening.

Our sincere thanks to James Douglas for his knowledge and insight, his wit, and his schlepping all these pieces a thousand miles from St. Louis!

October Meeting: Peter Poullada’s Memories of the Hindu Kush

By Jim Adelson

On Friday, October 22, a crowd of over 75 NERSers gathered to hear Peter Poullada describe his “Memories of the Hindu Kush.” Peter had lived in Afghanistan as a child, teenager, and young adult. He drew extensively from slides taken by various family members in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, and added comments from his own recollections and from extensive research that he has conducted. Peter framed his session with his initial comment that “this is a talk about the people who weave the products we collect . . . an exercise in human geography.”

Peter opened with a summary of the geography of Afghanistan. He explained that the Hindu-Kush mountain massif rising up to 18,000 feet runs through the center of the country. Deserts surround the mountains, and rivers run out of the mountains. As the rivers fan out of the mountains they reach the desert flatlands; it is at this level that irrigation systems and cities have been built. These geographic characteristics provide the perfect environment for transhumant nomadism—the seasonal mi-

gration between appropriate territories for winter and summer living for people and animals. In these migrations, members of diverse ethnic groups such as the Aimaq and Pashtun converge upon the central massif (otherwise home mainly to the Hazara) from the surrounding regions. By contrast, the Turkmen in Afghanistan have been limited to their winter pasture areas for the past 300 years or so. Weaving and animal raising have continued to be the mainstays of the Turkmen economy—they were “still pastoralists, but not nomadic.” The Turkmen weavings were very much influenced by market demand: Peter showed a slide of a Saryk family with a 20th-century Tekke-design carpet, asymmetrically knotted. The Saryk historically have woven their own designs, predominantly using symmetrical knotting, but the Kabul merchants preferred the Tekke-style weavings—so that’s what they got.

Throughout his talk, Peter emphasized that the distinction between nomads and settled groups is often

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overblown. For one thing, there was tremendous interdependence between nomads and settled people, either agriculturalists or merchants. Nomads depended upon the settlements for many goods that they needed, such as pots and tea. They obtained critical services, too, such as blacksmithing. The settlements in turn served as markets for the nomads' products—raw materials like wool and animal skins, as well as their weavings.

Peter used a number of slides to depict the key locales in the nomads' life. Winter pastures were typically at the altitude of about 1,000 meters. The nomads relied upon man-made irrigation to produce grazing for the flocks in an otherwise arid landscape. The tents they erected showed some variations in style among the different tribal groups. For example, the Aimaqs' tents had an almost conical roof, while other groups had a more pronounced curved profile between the vertical sides of the tent and the upper roof portion. Peter informed us that the term 'yurt' did not mean 'tent' (as we commonly use it), but rather referred to the territory that constituted the nomads' range!

The roads between the winter quarters and the summer pastures typically followed the rivers, supplying both a route and a source of water on the way. The summer pastures were often around 9,000–10,000 feet. At this high altitude, summer pasturing had to end early, as significant snowfall could arrive in late August or early September.

The nomadic caravan had a very particular structure, which Peter illustrated with several slides. The nomads would send an advance group of scouts to make sure that the pastures were in good shape, and that no one else had grabbed them first. The caravan itself would be headed by the caravan leader, followed by the tribal elders who were responsible for any negotiations that had to be conducted along the migration. Following that was the main caravan, with the tents on camel-back and the children riding or walking. Finally, merchants came at the tail of the main caravan. They had perhaps joined caravans originally for safety, but had taken on the role of financing the migration, as well as the grain harvest for the settled agriculturalists. The flocks were

conspicuous in their absence from the caravan: Peter commented that they had to travel separately, starting earlier, because the caravan would typically travel 15–20 kilometers a day, while the flocks would go much more slowly—perhaps three kilometers a day.

Another commonly held belief that Peter refuted is that settled people were more religious than the nomads. In his experience, both were equally pious, but the nomads practiced a brand of Islam that was based on Sufism.

Peter enlivened his talk with slides and comments on exotic and foreign characters. His stars included various local governors, a photojournalist for Time magazine, and a few other western tourists. But the greatest level of intrigue surrounded a possible KGB operative and his counterpart, the U.S. CIA station chief for the region, who were made to travel together—and neutralize each other—by the Afghan authorities.

Peter's remarks had been focused on the tribes and their way of life, with only occasional observations on the weaving. When he completed his talk, the emphasis switched, as the attendees relished a large assortment of pieces that members had brought. As always, the breadth and quality of NERS collections was well represented, including both well-known types and mysterious items. There were a number of embroideries, including several Lakai ilgitsches and Uzbek bags and covers. Collectors refer to some of the bags as bokches, and Peter pointed out that many people in the West think these were used as Koran covers, but in fact the weavers put anything that they wanted in them.

There were also some carpets and pile bags from different groups including Afghans and Baluch. Some of the more unusual items included a resist-dyed silk hanging (perhaps from Herat); a very decorative woman's headcover, possibly attributable to the Taimani or Aimaq; and a narrow embroidered sheath that was identified as a woman's braid cover.

Many thanks to Peter for sharing his personal history and knowledge with us, and to the many NERSers who enriched the session with the weavings that they brought!



Gwenneth Knight (1946-2004)

Gwen Knight was a native Cantabrigian born in 1946, although much of her schooling occurred in Europe, starting at age six. Her father was a professor of physics at Harvard while her mother was, among other things, a student of Sanskrit. Gwen pursued higher education at Sarah Lawrence and the Sorbonne. She was a long-time member of the NERS although her characteristically frenetic schedule made her attendance intermittent. On Friday, September 3, Gwen was with friends at a private beach on Martha's Vineyard. She and another member of the group were standing waist deep in the water when a riptide caught them and dragged them out. Although Gwen was removed from the water with a lingering pulse, she was later pronounced dead from drowning, a terrible shock to her many friends.

I met Gwen shortly after my arrival in Cambridge, but not here—in New York. I had recently discovered the existence of John Edelman's auction house at 77th and Lexington, specializing in rugs and textiles. Since this was a new interest of mine, I headed down in early December 1979 to attend an auction. While inspecting a particularly fine Palestinian embroidery lying across a small table, I noticed—and how could I not?—a striking, blond-haired woman, dressed to beat the band, admiring it from the other side. It was Gwen, of course, and she exhibited many of the traits then and there that I grew to love in her: openness, engagement, verve, knowledge and, indeed, conversational skill.

We discovered that we both lived in Cambridge, although I was dwelling in a basement apartment on Cambridge Street, rather unlike the large Brattle Street house that Gwen owned, following in a line of maternal antecedents back to about 1800. Still, our common love of textiles provided a means to a friendship, which proved to be the first true and lasting one I made in this place. I have been anything but a gadabout—and thus Gwen's antithesis—but our mutual pleasure in textiles proved to be a sustaining link around which a richer friendship grew. Gwen's strong yet flexible aesthetic sense and extraordinary capacity to see beyond the constraints of the conventional,

to appreciate and measure the recondite and unexpected, made it a pleasure to be in her company and show her a new acquisition. Her province seemed at times to be the whole of visual culture from high art to antiques, furnishings and fashion—much of which I did not care much about—but she seemed to bring the same knowledge, standards and penetration to it all.

Gwen did seem to rush through life hell bent for leather, but her hunger for experience gave her a remarkable scope: she had seen a lot (for example, spending two years traveling around Africa in her youth), and knew a lot (her daughter Clementine referred to Gwen as her “walking encyclopedia”), and had friends everywhere.

I saw Gwen last shortly before her death, when our friends and fellow NERS members, Jeremy and Hanne Grantham, invited us to dinner at the Red House in Cambridge, which was new to us all. True to form, Gwen raced in from a Bourgeault auction preview a little late, but proved to be, as usual, the engine behind a lively conversation that kept us going for hours. As we staggered out into the night, Hanne said, “We really should start earlier next time.” Sadly, unimaginably, there will be no next time.

Gwen's agile nature caused her to appreciate the world of rugs and textiles in its widest range and her judgment was always engaged whether the subject was Chinese costume, Kuba cloths, European tapestries, antique area rugs or tribal bags—fine, offbeat and compelling examples of the latter being a special love of hers, particularly if they were very small. Furthermore, she wore the most arresting garb of anyone I have ever known, ethnic and designer and what not, always worthy of attention; actually, hard to overlook, and usually wonderful in a flamboyant sort of way. For those who had the good fortune to get to know her well and appreciate her wry sense of humor, her friendly nature, her capacity to engage virtually any topic, and her amazing vitality, her loss will be a lasting and irreplaceable one.

Jeff Spurr

October 23, 2004



Upcoming Rug Events

NERS 2004/5 Meetings:

February 25, 2005: Sumru Krody on Anatolian carpets

March 18: Diana Myers on Bhutanese textiles

April 17: Ann Nicholas & Richard Blumenthal on South Persian weavings—a hands-on survey

May 21: Picnic and show & tell.

Auctions:

Nagel, Stuttgart, 11/9

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 11/20

Skinner, Boston, 12/4

Christie's, New York, 12/15

Sotheby's, New York, 12/16.

Conferences:

ACOR 8: Boston, MA, 4/20-23/06.

World Batik Conference: Boston, Mass. College of

Arts, 6/7-15/05. Visit www.massart.edu/batik for more information (see related item on page 8).

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Inspired by Craft: Paintings of Textiles, Real and Imagined, by NERS member **Tom Stocker**: UMass-Boston Healy Library Gallery, until 11/25. For information call 617-287-5944 or email www.tomstocker.com

Islamic Art, the Calderwood Collection: Sackler Museum, Cambridge, until 3/13/05

Floral Perspectives in Carpet Design: Textile Museum, Washington, until 2/6/05

Plainweave: Textile Museum, Washington, until 1/2/05

Carpets from the Vodstrcil Collection: Textile Museum of Canada, Toronto, 11/10/04-5/1/05.

Hard Copy Version of Bag Exhibit

You can now have a printed version of the fabulous NERS on-line bag exhibit *To Have and to Hold*. Each of the 47 bags is depicted in color—front, back, and close up views, accompanied by a scholarly essay

and a full technical analysis.

To order a copy, send an e-mail to Judy Smith at jasmith@heidrick.com or call her at 617-330-2171. The price is \$43.00 plus postage.

We welcome new members: Wendy Klodt, Stephen and Nancy Loftus

Newsletter contributors and helpers: Yon Bard (editor), Jim Adelson, Dora Bard, Mark Hopkins, Janet Smith, Jeff Spurr

Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, doryon@rcn.com

The New England Rug Society is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Its meetings are held six to eight times a year. Annual membership dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained on our website www.newenglandrugsociety.org, or by writing to **New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773**, calling Mark Hopkins at 781-259-9444, or emailing him at mopkins@comcast.net.

NERS 2003/4 Steering Committee:

Mark Hopkins (President)

Jim Adelson

Robert Alimi

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

John Clift

Tom Hannaher

Jo Kris

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



Rozome Masters Auction

The **World Batik Conference Boston 2005** is proud to announce the Rozome Masters Auction in support of the Japanese Rozome Masters Exhibition at Massachusetts College of Art, 6/10-9/21/05, and at the Textile Museum, Washington, 10/14/05-2/12/06. This is a sale of exquisite shikishi art (traditional Japanese “painting boards” also called poem or calligraphy panels). This is a rare opportunity to buy exceptional shikishi art without a visit to Japan, and all for a great cause. The auction starts on November 1st., 2004.

Access <http://www.cmarket.com/catalog/landingPage.do?vhost=rozomemasters> to browse the catalog. Fourteen Japanese masters in rozome have generously donated seventeen of their works to be included in the sale. These contemporary rozome artists are highly respected in Japan and have contributed to many exhibitions at home and abroad. Many of the artists are current or emeritus professors at the top national and private art universities in Japan, and some are recognized informally as ‘living treasures’ in their field.

November Meeting Directions

Directions:

From Rte. 95 (128) take the Trapelo Road West exit (#28B) in Waltham. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there is a white planter in the middle of the intersection.) Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 miles to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your right. **The parish house is on your left.**

From Rte. 2 take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270 degrees to cross Rte. 2 at the light.) Proceed 0.9 miles and you will see Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. **The parish house is on your right.**

Parking:

In back of the parish house plus along the street. It's OK to park in front of Bemis Hall **provided the building is dark and not in use.**



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