



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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www.ne-rugsociety.org

February Meeting: Mike Tschebull Show & Tell on North-West Persian Weavings

Raoul “Mike” Tschebull is a well-known figure in the rug world. He was co-founder of the New York Rug Society, was an original member of the ACOR Board of Directors, and is a collector of weavings from what could be termed “Greater Azarbayjan.” His book *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus* is a standard reference, and he has contributed many articles to *HALI* over the years. He is an NERS member and has spoken at several of our meetings, the last time on 3/1/02 about Kazak rugs. He was also curator of the NERS on-line exhibition *To Have and to Hold*.

Mike sent us the following description of his talk:

“I will show a wide variety of small rugs, bags, bands, fragments and samplers acquired since the 1960s, mostly reflecting nomadic or transhumant lifestyles and an Iranophile orientation. They all come out of a large Harz Gebirge painted oak and pine dower chest we acquired in Germany in the 1970s. Some pieces were bought directly in Iran, and these tend to be brighter than most collectibles, as they have not seen much light of day until recently.

“Other than having to fit into the dower chest, these pieces must be, yes, attractive, but also should have ethnographic and taxonomic interest. A central question pertaining to each piece is, ‘Why was it woven?’

“I think one learns about Islamic rugs and textiles by owning and handling them—the more, the better—and small pieces give the most economical opportunity to achieve this goal.”

March Meeting: Jennie Wood on “Dyes and Dyeing: The Sources and the Processes”

Jennie Wood is a long-standing NERS member. Her formal education is in sociology and urban cultural anthropology. As it turned out, this training has been beneficial to the work she’s done with men and women dyers in rug weaving villages. She began experimenting with natural dyeing in the 1970s, went on to train with

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February & March Meeting Details

Date: Friday, February 24 (Tschebull)

Friday, March 17 (Wood)

Time: 7:30PM

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: \$5 guest fee for non-members

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.**

**We need to hear from you
NOW if you want to be an
ACOR volunteer!**

(details on Page 6)



March Meeting

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two North American masters of the craft, and then applied this knowledge to the field of oriental rugs and textiles under the tutelage of George O'Bannon and the Philadelphia Rug Society. She has served as consultant on natural dyes and wool quality for projects in eastern and western Turkey (Woven Legends), Armenia (Tufenkian), and India (Yayla), as well as working with Afghan refugees in Pakistan and felt makers in Kyrgyzstan. Working with a partner, she was instrumental in establishing an embroidery program for Afghan women in Amla, a mountain village in southeastern Afghanistan. Naturally, only traditional dyes are used. Her work in Armenia was the subject of her previous

NERS address in 1995.

Jenny sent us the following summary of her forthcoming talk:

"In order to gain some understanding of the colors we see in old rugs, we will identify the naturally occurring materials that create good dyes. We'll also examine the processes that are involved in dyeing and talk about what impact these have on the color palette we see in rugs. A brief history of dyeing will lead us to the early synthetic dyes and to the question, "What are the differences between synthetic and natural dyes, and why does it matter? Or does it?" If there is interest and time, we'll see slides of natural dye houses that are part of rug productions in several areas where I've worked."

November Meeting: Alberto Boralevi on Prayer Rugs

By Jim Adelson

On November 11th, Alberto Boralevi spoke about prayer rugs to an enthusiastic group of NERSers. Alberto was formally trained as an architect, but he comes from a family in the rug business, and both sides of his background contributed to his remarks. He opened with the comment that "this talk will not give any answers about prayer rugs, but probably start new questions," and set the tone for a presentation that challenged a number of common views about pieces in this format. Alberto also acknowledged the NERS interest in and knowledge of this rug type when he said "I have great chutzpah to speak of prayer rugs with you," referring to the NERS on-line exhibition.

Alberto's first illustration was a picture from his 2004 Transylvanian Rug Tour, showing a coupled-column prayer rug. He noted that when he saw rugs hanging in their church locations in Transylvania, they were typically mounted on the wall, and that got him thinking that the rugs were woven for hanging, not for floor covering. This suggested a decorative purpose, rather than functional use for praying.

In looking back to the oldest extant woven pile examples with the prayer rug format, Alberto showed several illustrations of Ottoman Court carpets with coupled-column designs. In his opinion, these were potentially the design predecessors for the Transylvanian carpets. He also showed examples of Egyptian Cairene

carpets with architectural details such as cupolas.

Another commonly held belief that Alberto questioned was the exclusive linkage of rugs in this format to Islamic worship. He showed the Gorzi rug, which carries an Armenian inscription, and is dated 1651. According to Alberto, the inscription describes the rug's use as a curtain in the Temple of Saint Hripsimo. Other Armenian pieces in a prayer rug format exist, although the Gorzi rug is the only such rug with an Armenian inscription. Looking at broader Christian connections outside of Armenia, Alberto pointed to a number of church curtains, some of which were pile weavings, all with niche designs. He also mentioned Mihaliccik rugs—niche rugs from a particular village in Turkey, used by Greek Orthodox residents in the village.

Alberto also pointed out that there



Gorzi rug
Armenian, dated 1651

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November Meeting

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are a number of “prayer” rugs with Hebrew inscriptions, and among his examples he included one from the 17th century, probably used as an ark curtain. He went on to show a very early piece from the Padua synagogue, also used as an ark cover, and probably based originally on book plates. Alberto felt that its style was more Italian than Jewish. As another possible design source, he showed a late Roman-era synagogue mosaic with a coupled-column design.

Returning to the Islamic groups, Alberto noted many kinds, starting with the Transylvanian carpets. These generally dated from the 17th and early 18th centuries. The rugs used a number of design models, and few of the rugs had inscriptions. In Transylvanian churches, prayer rugs were also intermixed with “non-prayer” rugs—such as those with Lotto designs, although he noted that there are less obvious niches in some pieces. In commenting on this last point, he showed a rug from his own collection, where the Lotto design had later been altered to convert to a very obvious niche, though this had not been the choice of the original weaver.

While describing Islamic examples, Alberto pointed out that Islam does not require a rug for prayer. Any textile can be used for the purpose, and (in modern-day observance) even a newspaper. What’s important is to have a clean place to kneel.

Alberto then moved to 19th-century prayer rugs. He started with a number of Turkish examples from major weaving areas like Ghiordes, Kula, Melas, and Mudjur. These types often share some specific variations of the prayer rug format, such as pointed mihrabs and remnants of columns, though sometimes other designs are encountered.

Other weaving groups used different design variants. Square niches show up in both Caucasian and Belouch weaving. Some Caucasian pieces utilize a four- or five-sided niche; Alberto picked examples from Shirvan and Kuba, and then moved farther east with a rare example of the same niche shape in a Turkmen piece.

Alberto showed a number of other Turkmen examples, from Yomud, Chodor, and middle Amu Darya weavers. The niches take several different forms, and the weavers use a number of other designs in conjunction with the chosen niche. He concluded his Central Asian review with Turkmen engsis and with Kirghiz Eshik Tysh. The Turkmen engsis are usually considered to be tent door hangings, but they sometimes have certain design elements found in prayer rugs,. This caused Alberto to speculate, both from these Turkmen examples and an Anatolian fragment, whether perhaps the niche itself is not a mihrab, but a rendition of a tent!

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Left to right: Padua ark curtain with Hebrew inscription; Brashov church hung with “Transylvanian” rugs; Alberto Boralevi



November Meeting

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After his presentation, Alberto took questions from the audience. One discussion thread covered whether some prayer rugs were ever used for prayer, or whether they began to be produced in that format solely for sale to the West. Then a number of NERS members showed prayer rugs they'd brought from their collections, with

the contributions including several Belouch sub-groups, different Caucasian regions, and Anatolian and Turkmen examples as well.

Our thanks to Alberto Boralevi for his willingness to share his thoughts and examples with us and for his questioning approach to this long-recognized and popular rug genre.



Niche rugs
left:
Kirghiz Eshik Tysh
Right:
Belouch prayer rug



Istanbul Museum's Call for Help

We have received the following message from Dennis Dodds, Secretary General of the ICOC. NERS is planning to make a contribution, but we also urge our members to make their own contributions.

The entire collection of rare early carpets now in the Turk ve Islam Eserleri Muzesi (TIEM) in Istanbul numbers around 1,600 items. Drawn from mosques and village sources, these pieces are mostly Turkish, but also include weavings from the Caucasus and Persia. They are in desperate need of our help. With the approval of the TIEM's director, Dr. Saracettin Sahin and curator Gonul Tekeli, I have offered to establish the Turkish and Islamic Museum Conservation Fund under the auspices of ICOC. Our immediate goal is \$25,000.

I have just returned from spending ten days inside the Museum, working with Mrs. Tekeli and meeting with Dr. Sahin. After selecting 108 outstanding pieces from

their collection that will be shown during the ICOC in April 2007, we jointly devised a plan for the new installation of carpets. But before we get to that point, this irreplaceable material is in dire need of conservation. Every piece must be properly washed and painstakingly re-mounted—beginning now. As the Curator notes, most pieces “have never been cleaned at all!” While I was there, the curatorial staff washed one of their two famous “pelt” carpets. The brilliant red ground and spotted white field stunned me for its newly revealed clarity and richness. I had examined this carpet prior to washing and the difference is profound. Look at the cover of HALI, number 112 and you will see it “before.” Come to the 11th ICOC in Istanbul and you will see it “after” in all its glory, following proper conservation.

To establish the TIEM Conservation Fund within

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January Meeting: Jeff Spurr Leads Tour of Sackler Museum Exhibition of Silver and Shawls

By Yon Bard

On a rainy Saturday morning, an enthusiastic group of NERSers gathered at the Sackler Museum in Cambridge for a guided tour of the *Silver & Shawls: India, Europe, and the Colonial Art Market* exhibition. Our leader was NERS member and textile expert Jeff Spurr, curator of the shawls part of the exhibition; unfortunately, Kimberley Masteller—curator of the silver portion—was unable to attend, and the discussion perforce concentrated on the shawls, with only a brief glance at the silver.

As can be inferred from the exhibition's title, its focus was on the interaction between Indian producers and European consumers. When Kashmir shawls started to be imported into Europe in the late 18th century, their impact was widespread; as Jeff put it, among luxury goods from the Orient, only blue-and-white Chinese porcelain has had a comparable impact on Western popular taste. As a result, imitations began to spring up; the first copy was woven in Norwich, England, in 1782. The invention of the Jacquard loom in the early 19th century made it possible to produce such imitations in greater quantity and at lower cost. Nevertheless, high-end consumers kept up the demand for the genuine Kashmir product until about 1870, when the combination of political upheavals in Europe and a severe famine in Kashmir killed off the production in that region.

The original technique used to produce the shawls was the very labor-intensive twilled tapestry, but later simpler techniques, such as embroidery and even printing, were used to satisfy the demand for a more affordable product. The finest shawls were woven from *tus*, the winter underhair of wild Tibetan antelopes; close behind was *pashmina*, taken from goats reared at elevations above 14,000 feet.

Early shawls were long. Most of them consisted of a monochrome field edged at top and bottom with narrow bands of decoration that, with time, morphed from flowers in vases into the motifs that we know as *botehs*. In India, the shawls were worn exclusively by men—as shoulder wraps, and sometimes as turbans. In Europe, women wrapped them to serve as coats over

the voluminous crinoline dresses. In both cases, they served as status symbols.

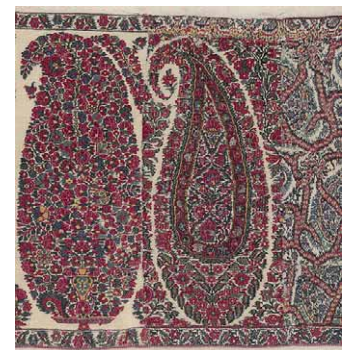
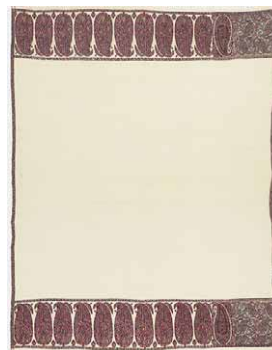
In the course of the 19th century, in response to shifting tastes and technological advances, various trends manifested themselves in the shawl designs: the decorated edges grew in size while the field receded; eventually, the decorations surrounded the field on all sides and achieved an all-over integrated design; the shrunken field's color became mostly black; and the shawl's length diminished until the overall shape became almost square. Kashmiri weavers adopted the new styles to satisfy European tastes, actually using European cartoons.

While the *boteh* design (also known as “Paisley”) was the most common, other designs were also used, but did not impact the European market. One of these involved the use of raw cloth with woven-in, often striped pattern. Another one was the moon-shawl design, which became most popular in Persia.

The silver exhibition that accompanied the shawls demonstrated how European silverware forms were adapted to local use in India, first by expatriate English silversmiths and then by local artisans. Their style was characterized by very elaborate decorations, and many wares were soon exported back to England.

We thank Jeff and the Sackler Museum for hosting this very fascinating look into these two fields where reciprocal influences between disparate cultures helped enhance the artistic output of both.

More pictures on page 6



Kashmir long shawl, ca. 1805, reduced, with additions; detail shows original *boteh* with base (left) and later addition (right)



Please Contact Me Now if You Want to Be an ACOR Volunteer!

Many NERS members have already told me they want to volunteer their time and energy to help out at ACOR 8 (Park Plaza Hotel, April 20-23), which is heartwarming for all of us on the planning committee.

But to assure that our records are accurate and up to date, *I need to hear from you at this time if you want to be a volunteer.* Even if you've already contacted me in past months, please let me hear from you now to confirm that your name should be on our list.

Within the next week, if you possibly can, please contact me by either phone or email. All we need at this point is your name, and an indication of the preferred way of reaching you with volunteer details: (i.e., email or snail-mail).

Within the next six weeks my wife Margie, who is

coordinating the ACOR volunteers, will contact you with specific information regarding the volunteer help we need, and will ask you for information concerning your availability and preferences. With that information in hand, we'll work out the assignments in time for the conference.

Many thanks to all NERS members who have offered to help, and to all of you who are yet to step forward. ACOR's success depends on you as a member of the host rug society, and it'll be a rewarding and memorable experience for you as well. I look forward to hearing from you.

Mark Hopkins

781-259-9444 or mopkins@comcast.net



From Sackler Museum *Silver & Shawls* exhibition, clockwise from upper left:

Moon shawl, Kashmir, ca. 1780

Black-ground shawl, Kashmir, ca. 1870

French Jacquard shawl, Lyon, ca. 1850

Claret jug, Bhuj, ca. 1880



Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2006 Meetings:

April: no meeting (ACOR, 4/20-23)

May 20: Picnic and show & tell.

Auctions:

Grogan, Dedham, 3/12 (including rugs), 4/22 (rugs)

Bonhams & Butterfields, Los Angeles & San Francisco, 3/14

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 3/25, 5/20, 9/23, 11/18

Sotheby's, London, 4/5

Christie's, London, 4/6

Skinner, Boston, 4/22

Nagel, Stuttgart, 5/15

Sotheby's, New York, 6/1.

Lectures:

Heads and threads: spiritual textiles of Borneo.

John Kreifeldt, Professor Emeritus of Tufts University and local collector; Thursday, 2/9 at 6:30 pm in the Trustees Room of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

Gather at the information desk prior to the talk. The talk will address the symbiotic relationship between head hunting and weaving among the Iban peoples of Borneo; weaving techniques and the "meaning" of designs using examples from the speaker's collection

for illustration. Several textiles will be hung and spread on tables for inspection following the talk.

Conferences:

ACOR 8: Boston, MA, 4/20-23/06. Reservations are now being accepted at www.acor-rugs.org. **See call for volunteers on page 6.**

11th ICOC: Istanbul, 4/19-22/07. Their website is www.icoc-istanbul.org.

The subsequent ICOC will be held in St. Petersburg in 2009.

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Textile Museum, Washington:

Silk & Leather, Splendid Attire of 19th Century Central Asia, until 2/26

Rozome Masters of Japan, until 2/12

Armenian Library & Museum, Watertown, until 6/20. **Undercover: Armenian Textiles of Bed and Bath:** The exhibit highlights domestic textiles and accessories from the Museum's collections that were made for domestic use, not public display, including embroidered beddings, lingerie, bathhouse tools, embroidered towels, and other objects of the boudoir and bathhouse.

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

Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, e-mail 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, Student \$25. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained on our website www.ne-rugsociety.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 2004/5 Steering Committee:

Mark Hopkins (President)

Jim Adelson

Robert Alimi

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

Tom Hannaher

Lloyd Kannenberg

Jo Kris

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



Istanbul Museum's Call for Help

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ICOC, I am asking for donations from rug societies and individuals who have a passion for these magnificent weavings and want to see them preserved. Ninety-percent of this money will be directed to the TIEM to pay for materials and additional professional conservators for this important and time consuming work. Ten percent will be used as seed money to create a fund for other conservation projects in deserving museums around the world.

The International Conference on Oriental Carpets is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) corporation, registered in the state of Pennsylvania. All of our officers serve voluntarily and without pay. In the last few days, we have raised \$3,000 from three generous individuals who share these objectives. We are on our way.

May we have your commitment as well? Thank you in advance. You will see the fruits of your generosity and your gift will be duly acknowledged at the spectacular exhibitions during the 11th ICOC in Istanbul, April 19-23, 2007. It is not that far off!

Please send as much as you wish and can afford to: PHILADELPHIA EIGHTH ICOC, INC.; Attn: Wendel Swan, Vice-treasurer; 2106 Woodmont Road, Alexandria, VA 22307 USA.

For a preview of the Conference, please go to www.icoc-orientalrugs.org and www.icoc-istanbul.org.

Sincerely,
Dennis R. Dodds
Secretary-general, ICOC



New England Rug Society
Post Office Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773



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NOW if you want to be an
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(details on Page 6)

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