



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. XIII, No. 4 May 2006

www.ne-rugsociety.org

May Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market New Location!

The picnic will be held at 715 High Street, Dedham, the home of NERS members Michael and Nancy Grogan. The house is a dark red Victorian hiding behind a high fence beneath a giant copper beech tree and overlooking a spacious back yard that slopes down to the banks of the Charles River. It's a beautiful setting and we will have a large tent for those wishing to get out of the sun and other unexpected weather. Bring warm clothes just in case.

Bring your own picnic. Pack up your own munchies, and we'll provide the beverages, including soft drinks, coffee, tea, beer, and wine. If you can, bring a blanket or a lawnchair or two to make things comfortable. We'll provide tables and chairs.

Participate in our moth market. We are inviting our members, dealers or not, to bring a few things for sale, and we'll hold our own small informal flea market (moth market in ruggie terms). In case of inclement weather, we'll move things indoors.

Share one or two of your treasures. Please limit yourself to one or two pieces for the Show & Tell session. That way we'll keep the event from becoming an overly-long marathon.



Uzbek hats off to ACOR!

Remembrances of ACOR 8

We present below some of our members' remembrances of ACOR. Because of space limitations we had to limit the number of pictures appearing in this article and on page 11; more may appear in our next issue. Our thanks to all the contributors!

Mark Hopkins

Having lived and breathed ACOR 8 for the past several months, my objectivity is non-existent, so I'll need to leave comments on how worthy and enjoyable it was to those who attended. Suffice it that early in the con-

May Meeting Details

Date: Saturday, May 20

Time: 12 noon to 4PM rain or shine!

Place: 715 High Street, Dedham

Note: \$5 donation for non-members

Directions:

From Boston and the north, take Route 95 (128) South to Route 135 (Exit 17) and go right toward Dedham at the end of the ramp. After about 1.6 miles you will come to a traffic light. Proceed straight ahead; you are now on High Street. The Grogan house is on your left after about 1/4 mile.

From the south shore, take Route 95 (128) North to Route 109 East (Exit 16A) and turn right at the end of the ramp. At about one mile, turn right at the traffic light. That's High Street. The Grogan house is on your left after about 1/4 mile.

Parking:

Park on either side of High Street. Please move your car onto the grass as far as possible so as not to block the street. **Michael asks that early arrivals park toward Dedham Center where the parking meters begin.**

ference I lost count of the people who made special efforts to seek me out and opine—invariably with glowing enthusiasm—that it was the most enjoyable and rewarding ACOR they had yet attended.

For all of us who made it happen, this was one massive undertaking. Consider the numbers. ACOR 8 brought together 423 registrants from around the world. They gathered here from throughout the US, Canada, and Europe, and from countries as distant as Turkey, Israel, Greece, and India. Dealers—59 in all—trans-

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Remembrances of ACOR

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ported their goods here from those lands and more, including China, Nepal, and Japan.

No previous ACOR has presented the sheer breadth of exhibitions that made this conference so special. There were eight shows in all, occupying more than 15,000 square feet of space and featuring in excess of 450 rugs, textiles and other related ethnographic objects. Every last textile on exhibition was lent by NERS members, 36 of them in all—or 37 if you count Tom Stocker, who rounded up four of his paintings for a special bonus exhibition.

Although ACOR has burgeoned in scope to where it relies on two professional firms—a meeting planning company to handle registration and contract management and an exposition service to build the exhibition booths—its success is still heavily dependent on the generous efforts of volunteers. More than 60 rose to the occasion, half of them NERS members, with their contributions shepherded by my patient and well organized wife Margie.

And of course the NERS was much in evidence among the attendees. At final count 73 members of the society were registered participants in the happenings.

There are so many people to thank that it's hard to know where to start. Two groups come first to mind: First, the curators of our exhibitions, who invested gargantuan efforts over many months to make their shows both esthetically memorable and educationally compelling. They were Julia Bailey, Jeff Spurr, Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick, Gerard Paquin, Ann Nicholas and Rich Blumenthal, Al and Suzanne Saulniers, Yon Bard and Jim Adelson, and Tom Hannaher.

And second, we must salute the sponsors: those NERS members whose generous donations helped make ACOR 8 a fiscally healthy undertaking. They include Jeremy and Hanne Grantham, Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick, John Collins, Michael Grogan, Peter Pap, and Beau Ryan. In addition, the New England Rug Society was itself a sponsor.

Lastly, a big thank you to those NERS members who gave generously of their time and energy as volunteers. We list them here with the caution that if we missed



Taking it easy: Mark Hopkins and Nina Rose

recording any in the din of battle, they have our apologies: Doug Bailey, John Clift, Sharon Deveney, Louise Dohanian, Jeff Dworsky, Felix Elwert, Mark Gilbert, Hanne Grantham, Ann Hannaher, Jaimye Ingraham, Lloyd Kannenberg, Wendy Klodt, Linda Konnersman, Jo Kris, Don McCool, Fred Mushkat, Gillian Richardson, Nina Rose, Tim Rose, Joe Rosen, Peggy Simons, Janet Smith, Judy Smith, Sharon Soltzberg, Tom Stocker, Carl Strock, Inge Tschebull, Mike Tschebull, Peter Walker, Jennie Wood, and Mohammad Yamin.

Finally, our thanks to Turgay Erturk for giving us an evening of wonderful Turkish music during the Friday evening reception.

For those of you who missed it, our condolences; there will likely never be such an event in Boston again in our lifetime. But there's always next time: ACOR 9 will happen in St. Louis in the spring of 2009. By Board decision it will be a scaled down version of recent conferences, probably with a reversion to holding the dealers' fair in the hotel rooms rather than in a bazaar setting. But surely it will strive to maintain the informal, friendly, hands-on environment that has made past ACORs such a success. We hope we'll see you there. Meanwhile, to all those who worked so hard to make ACOR 8 an event to remember, our warmest thanks.

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Remembrances of ACOR

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Yon Bard

As a result of ACOR I can now add the title *co-curator* to my résumé. Perhaps if ACOR returns 14 years from now I'll graduate to full curatorship. But, seriously, putting on the Turkmen exhibition with Jim Adelson was a lot of work and also a lot of fun. Jim and I would like to thank all the volunteers who helped us, especially Kathy Green (from Toronto), Lloyd Kannenberg, and Nina Rose; without them we'd still be at the Park Plaza hanging rugs on the walls.

Altogether, the ACOR experience was awesome. All the talks, focus sessions, and hands-on sessions were excellent, but I particularly enjoyed the image of Elizabeth Barber chasing flocks of prehistoric sheep to get wool samples!

Much as everybody enjoyed ACOR, I am sure nobody can match the elation felt by the protagonist of the next story. Read on!

Anonymous

While meandering through the Dealers' Fair, a long-time NERS member saw, hanging in one of the booths, a Kurdish rug that had been stolen from her 23 years ago. It had been her favorite among a group of rugs that had vanished from the back of a closet while her house was undergoing renovations

Clearly, it was necessary to establish beyond doubt the rug's identity. Among her files she found an old slide but needed to make prints of it. It was 8 a.m. on Sunday morning but, fortunately, at Harvard's Science Center, she found a professional photographer who produced splendid enlargements. With this evidence she, accompanied by a friend, showed the photograph to the dealer, and all immediately agreed that it was the same rug. The rug had come from a recent northeastern country auction.

Now she needed to prove that the theft had been reported, but all she had was a carbon copy, barely legible, of the Stolen Property report and a letter from a police detective, on plain paper, telling her that polygraph tests had been booked for the two suspects. The police records office informed her that stolen goods reports were only kept for twelve years, and also that there



Kurdish rug, before its 23-year exile

had been a fire. However, more calls finally reached the very detective, now superintendent, who had signed the letter. He could not have been more helpful, and within an hour sent a letter, hand delivered, this time on headed police department notepaper, stating that the theft had been reported in November 1983, with several details and the case number. And his signature matched the one on the letter.

The dealer had agreed to meet with her in order to see the evidence before returning abroad early on Wednesday. He also agreed to leave the rug in John Collins' lockup while ownership was determined. However, this proved to be unnecessary: with all the required documents available, the meeting took place, with two other NERS members present to lend moral support. The dealer, who could not have been more honorable throughout, accepted a check for a fraction of the \$17,000 price tag that he had put on the rug, and agreed to undertake contacting previous owners, etc. The rug

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was handed over and everyone shook hands. So after 23 years in exile, the carpet is now back home. It was like being reunited with a lost child!

Bashir Ahamed

Yes it was a WOW and for me on Monday I was depressed because the four days of my life were full of great warmth. Just did not gaze enough on the pieces in exhibitions as well as the bazaar!

I am so glad for all the organizers and the volunteers and the members of the New England Rug Society. All of the organizers must be so proud for this event which ended peacefully.

Marjorie Cook

We had a wonderful time at ACOR 8. We have been away from collecting rugs for several years, so it was good to reconnect with some old friends.

A high point was a chance second visit to the Rudnicks' exhibit where we found Rosalie giving an impromptu tour. Listening to her describe what excited her about each rug was a real treat! Thank you, Rosalie.

Another high point was seeing our two rugs beautifully hung and lit. All the exhibits were outstanding!

Ann Nicholas and Richard Blumenthal

Richard and I have attended all eight ACORs, but this was the first time we had actively participated—as exhibitors, speakers, and as volunteers. It broadened our ACOR experience.

- As exhibitors we spent many weeks planning for the exhibit; a few frantic hours putting it up with the help of several wonderful volunteers; and then for a few days we talked with fellow ruggies from all over the world about our collections of small tribal weavings and pictures of bags being used in nomadic life.

- As speakers we were excited to talk about our collection and share many rarely seen pictures of nomadic life, some never before published. After the talk, six different people remembered that they had pictures of the South Persian nomads up in their attic. Now we have invitations to look for more pictures of bags in use.

- As volunteers, we realized how much time and

effort goes into planning this once every two year event., and how much fun and hard work it is to put it all together. Mark Hopkins, Erik Risman, and all the planning committee did a great job.

- Since this ACOR was in Boston, we also had the opportunity to introduce some friends, two of our children, and our grandson, to the world of rugs and textiles. Austin, our six year old grandson, had special favorites from each collection he visited!

We are looking forward to ACOR 9 in St Louis in 2009 and this time we promise to be volunteers.

Nina Rose

Helping hang some of the exhibits gave me a feeling of personal involvement and special interest in the collections. I am just a beginner and seeing the pieces for the first time, getting to know them through working with them, and finally hearing the collectors' presentations was a very rich experience. I went to see the exhibits several times to admire and to study as much as I could.

Al Saulniers

Our exhibit of Moroccan textiles found an unexpected and welcome audience. The porter who ferried the textiles upstairs for Thursday's installation came from Morocco. He recognized the tent hangings on the luggage cart as coming from the Middle Atlas Mountains, and asked why Moroccan items were in the Park Plaza. During the course of the exhibit's installation, he returned several times, each time checking out the new weavings, captions, and photos that had been added to the walls since his last visit. Proudly, he spread word of the exhibit to other Moroccan staff at the hotel, to valets who parked cars, and to nearby service workers. Some of them came to view the exhibit—usually entering through the back door to look at items that reminded them of home. They eagerly scanned the maps to find weavings that came from their region of origin, read all the captions, and had heated discussions with each other about the textiles. One young man, whose parents came from the town of Figuig—east of where we had carried out research on rugs and textiles—unexpectedly found

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his Berber roots when he remembered that his parents spoke in Berber to each other when they did not want the children to understand. The Boston area is home to one of the largest concentrations of Moroccans in the US; ACOR helped some of them feel closer to home.

Holly Smith

My favorite part of ACOR was the Dealers' Row. I thought the textiles presented for sale were extraordinary. A level of the rare and exceptional was reached, the highest level I've ever seen at an ACOR, while affordable pieces were also available. As I listened to collectors' comments and, more importantly, the comments from the general public—how impressed they were by the dealers' expertise and presentation.

The venue played a large role in this professional appearance, but the streamlined visuals of each dealer's booth, coupled with the knowledge proffered by the dealers as they gladly discussed and shared their opinions, brought many into the ACOR fold. Those in attendance were also encouraged to find out more about the NERS and perhaps we shall see some new attendees, based on the impression Dealers' Row made.

Personally, I found a warmer welcome from the many national and international dealers than I have experienced before and basked in the camaraderie. I know ACOR has come a long way from the first meeting held in Boston, as we learn from the past and grow in our professional approach.

Mike Tschebull

As part of the install crew for *Unusual and Overlooked: Antique Textiles from Central Asia* I got a firsthand appreciation of how difficult, time-consuming, labor intensive, and exacting this process is. The mounting boards were often too hard and flexed too much to drive small nails into, so we evolved a process whereby we used small diameter bits on electric drills to make nail holes, then had to get the nail through the piece, usually heavy felts, so it fit neatly into the pre-drilled hole. Mounting smaller pieces required a three step process: We cut weather stripping to the width of small flat objects to be hung, stapled them horizontally to appropri-



Appliqued Yomud asmalyk

ate places on the walls, then used long narrow pins pushed almost vertically into the weather stripping to hold the piece in place.

This exhibition was, for me, the best of the lot—and they were all pretty good. I was charmed by the familiar Turkmen pile-woven shapes in other media, the huge variety of color, material, format, and texture, and the very idea of “unusual and overlooked.” Indeed, the curator, Jeff Spurr, noted that while many of the pieces exhibited, 140 in total, were “manifestly beautiful,” the “curious and interesting” were given almost as much weight. They were produced at the end of an era, about 100 years ago, not as tourist goods, but as part of the local material cultures. The very volume of objects displayed gives a good view of a bygone way of life.

It is very refreshing to hear an authority like Jeff Spurr tout ethnographic art objects as 1) not very very old, and 2) not necessarily finalists in a beauty contest.

Judy Smith

ACOR was awesome.

Most impressive was the depth, quality and passion evident in the assembled collections from so many New Englanders. The exhibits had “soul,” as Lawrence Kearney remarked. Members felt proud to be part of the NERS—an organization that promotes excellence at every step. From each other, and with each other, we have grown, expanded our knowledge and become a world class organization.

Hats off to our “fearless leader”—here's to you Mark for leading us so ably.



February Meeting: Mike Tschebull on North-West Persian Weavings Reviewed by Jim Adelson

On February 24th, Mike Tschebull shared the product of his many decades of collecting and research experience with about 40 NERSers. Mike brought 30 small pieces from his collection, acquired as long ago as the 1960s up to as recently as the preceding week.

Mike has always striven to understand how and why each piece has been woven, as well as the use and the market it was intended for. He observed “I collect for a number of pathological reasons... I’ve always been interested in the economics of weaving.” Throughout his presentation, he disputed the stereotypical collector’s notion of greater artistry in non-commercial weaving, saying that weavers could, and in fact had to, weave very appealing, high-quality pieces for sale.

Mike has focused his collecting and research particularly on Northwest Persia, the region described as “Greater Azarbaijan.” The items that he showed were centered there, but also extended in all four directions—into Turkey to the west, further into the Caucasus to the north, to other Persian weaving regions in the south, and to the east with Kurdish, Turkmen, and Belouch examples.

Mike started off with an ivory field prayer kilim from Mut or Karapinar in Turkey. This was his most recent acquisition, with a very well drawn niche and beautiful, strong colors. In contrast, he followed this up with a worn fragmented Caucasian piece with atypical “prayer” niches at both ends. The piece was dated 1223 (1808). He observed that the prayer rug tradition does not appear to be that old in the Caucasus, with the earliest examples coming from the 18th century.

Mike’s next piece was a Turkish yastik, coming from the area north of Konya. He commented later that, curiously, the yastik format was very widely used in Turkey but absent in the Caucasus. He showed a small Kuba rug with diagonal stripes and great color variation, commenting that this was fairly close in size to a yastik, but apparently woven as a floor mat rather than a pillow cushion cover.

Mike moved on to a diagonally striped Bakhtiari pile mafrash side panel. Because of the materials used

and their tendency to wear, Mike theorized that this probably was not made for regular nomadic use, but perhaps for urban Iranians traveling in rural Iran. He showed several other mafrash side or end panels. He explained that “mafrash” was an Arabic word that means “furniture.” A soumak mafrash side panel was adorned with latchhook medallions and quadrupeds with humans suspended over them (see picture on next page). Mike also had a mafrash with latchhook medallions as the major design, and what he referred to as “marching peacocks” above and below the latchhooks.

The first of many bags among Mike’s selections was a torba of Kurdish origin, complete with flatwoven back and a border design of Turkmen origin. The next bag was a Luri khorjin, very large and heavy—again, Mike thought that it was probably not made for nomadic use, because of its unwieldy size. He went on to make the same comment about several other bags that he’d brought—their sizes exceeded typical dimensions, leading him to believe they were woven for urban, rather than nomadic use, probably for a wealthy person.

Along with his fascination with the economics of weaving, Mike also marveled at the way that such glorious weavings could emerge from such a rugged life. He noted that it was “interesting to think how grubby nomads made beautiful things; one step ahead of the tax collector, or the Shah’s army... and avoiding a whole host of diseases.”

Mike had an assortment of smaller bags as well. One was a chanteh in pristine condition, with virtually all cotton whites. He speculated that it might have been kept as capital, rather than used or sold. Another piece was an Afshar flatwoven salt bag. In addition, he had a couple of tubres—shoulder bags with loops for straps—one of which he identified as Kurdish from Khorassan (see picture on next page).

Mike concluded this portion of his exhibition with Belouch and Turkmen weavings. His first example was a large Belouch khorjin from the Khorassan area. He also had a balischt with a tree-of-life design. He jested

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that “You’ve seen two thirds of my Belouch collection ... I don’t want to show you everything.” Among his Turkmen examples, he had a Beshir torba with a varied blue field, and two Tekke torbas.

Mike finished up with two more unusual pieces. The first was an Arak sampler. He said that some of the forms were woven at two to three times the density of their normal depiction in carpets, so that they would be much larger when weavers used them in the larger pieces. His final example was a diadyzlik (cattle or bull cover) fragment, which he attributed to Karabagh, albeit with some uncertainty.

Following Mike’s remarks, a number of NERS members showed pieces they’d brought from their own collections. In keeping with the evening’s theme, most were bags and bag faces from various places in Azarbayjan and western Iran, although the session concluded with a Kurdish prayer rug with Kazak elements.

Our many thanks to Mike for bringing and sharing such a wide range of pieces, and also for his artistic, historical, commercial, and ethnographic perspectives!



Above: Azarbayjani nomad mafrash side; countered sumak wool patterned wefts, wool ground wefts, cotton warps; 1’11”x3’1”



Right: Kordi “tubre”/chanteh; face: wool split-tapestry; back: wool warps, red weft-faces wool plainweave; original strap, beads; 1’3”X1’3”

March Meeting: Jennie Wood on Dyes and Dyeing Reviewed by Lloyd Kannenberg

On a chilly St. Patrick’s Day evening, long-time NERS member Jennie Wood treated us to a fascinating and instructive presentation on dyes and dyeing. Jennie has really serious credentials: she has been a consultant on natural dyes and wool quality in Turkey for Woven Legends, Armenia for Tufenkian, and India for Yayla. She has worked with Afghan refugees in Pakistan, felt makers in Kyrgyzstan, and on an embroidery project with women in the village of Amla, in southeastern Afghanistan.

She opened her presentation with some background, a few definitions, and some cautions about the misuse of language in connection with dyes and dyeing:

“Natural” dyes are derived directly from biological sources. These are usually plants, but in a few cases—lac for example—the source is (very small) animals. It is true that some types of minerals are used; not directly as dyes however, but rather in their processing or appli-

cation. Because the sources of natural dyes are biological, the concentration of a dyestuff can be quite variable from one sample to the next. It is only to be expected that the weather, soil, and amount of water available to a plant can seriously affect the way it grows, and consequently the amount and quality of the dyestuff it produces. The age of a dye plant when it is harvested may also be a factor, if for example it concentrates the dyestuff early in its life cycle and then begins diluting or shedding it once it reaches a certain level of maturity. Some of these factors can be carefully controlled, but by no means all of them. As a consequence we typically find variations in the saturation and hue of the dye from a given field of madder from one year to the next, or from two fields at different elevations harvested the same year, and so forth. This type of variability is usually absent from synthetic dyes although, interestingly, it appears to

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occur in synthetically produced indigo, which is chemically identical to the dye found in the indigo plant. For ruggies, of course, the color variability inherent in natural dyeing is one source of the charm of older textiles.

Unlike synthetic dyes, very few natural dyes will, by themselves, bond to textile fibers such as wool or cotton; instead they require the addition of a fixative agent. As a consequence we can conveniently classify natural dyes according to the way they are bonded to the fiber.

Adjective dyes require the addition of a fixative or *mordant* for bonding. The majority of natural dyes fall into this category. The mordant chemically bonds the dye to the fiber, thus making the color more permanent; but it can also alter the resulting color—yellow to green, for example. Mordanting can also maximize the yield of the dyestuff, an important consideration for expensive dyes like cochineal. The most commonly used mordant is alum, which has the appearance of white, chalky rock. The color produced with an alum-mordanted dye is considered to be the standard or “normal” color of the dye. Other mordants include tin (stannous fluoride), iron (ferrous sulfate) and copper (copper sulfate). Tin-mordanted madder produces a unique pink, quite distinct from the standard brickish red of madder mordanted with alum. The tannin obtained from walnuts hulls is yet another mordant.

Substantive dyes require no added fixative. Some substantive dyes have their bonding agent “built in,” as for example walnut shells, which as noted above are rich in the natural fixative tannin (also true of other nut shells). There are other substantive dyes, such as turmeric and safflower, but because they are not very light fast (see below) they have been little used in rugs.

Finally, *vat dyes*, of which indigo is the prime example, fall into a special category because they are not water soluble. The blue dye extracted from the leaves of the indigo plant must be converted to indigo white, a water-soluble form that will adhere to the fiber. The conversion requires that the indigo and the fiber to be dyed be immersed in a very alkaline bath, to which is added a *reducing agent*; that is, something that removes the oxygen from the bath. Today, sodium hydroxide

(plumber’s lye) is used to produce the alkaline bath, with sodium hydrosulfite the reducing agent. The traditional source for the alkali bath was wood ash, preferably from the oak, while urine—or anything with a lot of microbes—served as the reducing agent. Urine works slowly, but is quite effective. Dyers speculating on how the rather complex process for indigo dyeing evolved have come up with some entertaining scenarios! The water soluble indigo white can permeate the material to be dyed, and rapidly oxidizes back to indigo blue when the dyed material is extracted from the bath. Because of the complexity of this process, indigo dyers have been specialists for millennia.

Fastness, that is the permanence of the color, is an issue for all dyes. We can distinguish three types:

Light fastness is a measure of the degree to which a dyed color fades in light; we usually think of fading in sunlight, but any light will produce fading. Indeed, given enough time or light intensity, every color will fade; but some are much more susceptible to fading than others.

Wash fastness refers, of course, to the problem of color bleeding, and is most often encountered in rugs as a red intrusion into a neighboring white area. For a natural dye that requires a mordant, like madder, such bleeding is just a stain, which should wash away upon rinsing; it should not be fixed into the material where the mordant is lacking. Synthetic dyes, on the other hand, are self-mordanting, and therefore persistent bleeds tend to imply the presence of a synthetic dye. Alkalis (old-fashioned lye soaps are alkalis) will encourage the bleeding process, even in natural dyes, but again, such bleeding should come out in the rinse water.

Abrasion fastness is especially an issue with indigo, which unlike mordanted dyes adheres mechanically rather than chemically to the fiber. Indigo exhibits excellent light fastness, but the color of textiles such as blue denim may appear “faded” because chafing of the fabric surface has abraded away the indigo residing on the top fibers.

The quantitative measure of the acidity of a substance is its *pH*. A pH of 7 is neutral; lower numbers are progressively more acidic, higher numbers (up to 14) more alkaline (basic). Wool can be destroyed before

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your eyes in an extremely alkaline bath. In fact, one way to identify an unknown fiber is to boil a small sample of known weight in a strong solution of water and lye. If the sample disappears completely, it is wool—or at least it is all protein; silk is another protein fiber (cotton is cellulose).

Finally, Jennie pointed out that it is incorrect to use the term “aniline” in referring to synthetic dyes. While it is true that the earliest synthetic dyes were the notoriously non-light-fast aniline dyes, these were by no means the only synthetic dyes found, even in older rugs. Azo and chrome dyes are also used, the former manufactured from nitrogenated petroleum residues, the latter from the mineral chromite. Such manufactured products ought therefore to be referred to collectively as just “synthetic dyes”.

Jennie’s slide show provided a sweeping panorama of contemporary dyeing practice from the Near East to Central Asia, from Macedonia and Turkey through Armenia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan, to Pakistan and India. The description that follows hardly does justice to her images.

For obvious reasons, dyeing requires white wool; undyed dark wools find their use in some Central Asian felts and weavings. After shearing, the wool is thoroughly washed. The washed wool can be dyed directly, a useful practice for felting (the alternative being to dye the felted material). In felting, the soaking wet wool is pressed out into very large sheets by teams of four to five women; these sheets are then rolled up and pressed several times again to squeeze out the water and bind the wool fibers together. Once thoroughly pressed and dried, the sheets (each a single color) are cut up and sewn together to make up the finished appliquéd pattern on a felted ground. Jennie showed us pictures of felt cushions designed and made by Kyrgyz women.

Weaving, of course, requires yarn, not just clean wool. To prepare yarn the undyed wool is first *carded*, as a rule in a carding mill, by being rolled over a series of drums. The carded wool emerges as a very thin batt which is drawn through a tube, resulting in a long floppy roll of carded wool that can be wound onto a stick. The carding mill is much faster, and in fact does a better job,

than hand carding.

Women and girls then *spin* the carded wool, which is done in nearly the same way over this entire area of Eurasia. The spinning process has remained essentially unchanged since prehistoric times, spindle whorls virtually identical to contemporary examples having been recovered from neolithic sites. Moreover, unlike some natural dyeing processes, the art of spinning has never been forgotten by the native people.

The spinning process is ingeniously simple. From the roll of carded wool, the spinner attaches a twist of fibers to the spindle, which she then sets spinning, as the name implies. She draws the fibers out of the roll in a uniform strand which the rotating spindle converts into a twisted thread of spun yarn. Skilled spinners can produce yarn of remarkable evenness, strength, and delicacy, scarcely matched by the best machine-made products. When the yarn is twisted to the satisfaction of the spinner, it is wound up on the spindle. The women can and do spin all day long. Spinning wheels are to be seen, but are less in evidence than might be expected. Once spun, the yarn may be *plied*; that is, two or more spun yarns are themselves twisted together into a single heavier and stronger strand. The spun and plied skein of yarn is then ready to be dyed.

Of the red dyes (madder, cochineal, lac), only madder comes from a botanical source, the root of the madder plant *rubia tinctorum*. The stems of the plant are rather weak, and they tend to spread out over the ground, although Jennie showed a slide of madder plants with the stems trained on sticks to grow vertically—possibly to grow more plants on a given plot of land. The roots are usually harvested as soon as the plants are mature, about three years after planting. They are then dried out and ground up in preparation for use in dyeing. Madder root is sold both whole and in packages already ground; but the women often prefer buying the roots and grinding them up themselves, even though this is very hard work. It is a matter of trust—brick dust looks a lot like ground-up madder root! The ground madder root is put into the hot (but not boiling) water of the dye pot along with its mordant and the skeins of yarn to be dyed. The temperature of the dye bath can affect

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the resulting color, higher temperatures producing darker hues. After dyeing, the skeins of yarn must be beaten vigorously to get out any bits of madder root that have become stuck in the fibers. Jennie showed us a novel arrangement to minimize the amount of ground root finding its way into the wool: the wool to be dyed is placed in a large sieve supported by chains that can be lowered into the dye bath. The ground root remains at the bottom of the dye pot and consequently does not come into contact with the wool. A dye bath can be re-used, with each repetition the color becomes lighter and more orange as the red component of the natural madder is depleted and the yellow component becomes more dominant. Jennie showed us both slides and examples of the spectacular range of colors that can be produced from madder by the judicious use of mordants and variations in details of the dyeing process.

Indigo is the universal blue dye. Almost all natural indigo dye is obtained from the leaves of the indigo plant (*indigofera tinctoria*), although woad (*isatis tinctoria*) is an alternative source. The indigo plant is a legume and looks something like a pea plant. The dye extracted from the leaves is concentrated into cakes of indigo blue, which are broken up for immersion in the alkaline dye bath with the reducing agent to produce the water-soluble white indigo (more yellow than white, in fact) that attaches to the yarn fibers.

There are many natural sources of yellow. The best for light fastness is weld (*reseta luteola*), but pomegranate and chamomile are also used. The light fastness of the latter two can be improved with appropriate mordanting. As with indigo, the dyestuff is obtained from the leaves, not the roots, of these plants. Most yellows are mordant dyes, and as with madder, the range of hues can be enormously expanded by varying the mordant used.

The source of natural browns and blacks is often walnut hulls, the dye itself being a brown slimy stuff. Although the dye is self-mordanting because of its tannin content, other mordants can be added, not to im-

prove bonding but, as with madder and the yellow dyes, to stretch the spectrum of colors the dye can yield.

Despite the ubiquity of green in living plants, there is no natural green dye. The color is usually made up by overdyeing blue on yellow or *vice versa*. Again, by adjusting the relative amounts of yellow and indigo, a range of hues can be obtained. However, since the yellow dye may not be as light fast as indigo, greens may eventually fade to a somewhat blotchy blue.

Dyeing with madder in the presence of iron is usually employed to produce violet (aubergine), though it is a tricky process that can just as easily produce purple browns. Harald Boehmer has credited Josephine Powell with rediscovering the “cold dyeing” method by which violet was traditionally made in Anatolia using madder alone.

Jennie showed us pictures of an incredible array of dye houses, ranging from one-room concerns that could only meet local needs, to large commercial operations with many enormous vats that looked capable of servicing a considerable client base. In no case did the atmosphere of the dye house seem salubrious, suffused as it was with smoke from the fires heating the dye pots and the dubious fumes from the dye pots themselves; but at least the fires in the village houses were fueled by wood, whereas in at least one large concern they were burning used engine oil! One can only speculate about the toxic load inflicted upon the unfortunate dye workers—a hidden cost of the textiles we love. Most of the dyeing was done by men, while weaving, like spinning, is exclusively the domain of women.

Jennie ended her slide show with a couple of pictures of the “carpet factory” in Ashkabad, “with not a natural dye in sight, but the women weaving their hearts out.” For your reporter this was a fitting and nostalgic conclusion, as he could almost recognize some of the faces he saw there a quarter century ago! Afterwards we were able to look in detail at some of the products of the women Jennie worked with, including an interesting felt rug. A thoroughly informative and entertaining program!

We welcome new members: John Batki, Eugene and Joan Hill, Jaimye Ingraham, Doug Pouliot, Don McCool, Joe Rife, Beardsley Ruml, and Stephen & Harmony Spongberg.



Upcoming Rug Events

FAuctions:

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 5/20, 9/23, 11/18
Nagel, Stuttgart, 5/15
Sotheby's, New York, 6/1
Grogan, Dedham, 6/25 (incl. rugs)
Skinner's, Boston, 12/2.

Conferences:

Textile Arts Symposium/2006: Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, 6/22-25
11th ICOC: Istanbul, 4/19-22/07. Their website is www.icoc-istanbul.org.

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Armenian Library & Museum, Watertown:

- Undercover: Armenian Textiles of Bed and Bath: Highlights domestic textiles and accessories that were made for domestic use, including embroidered beddings and towels, lingerie, bathhouse tools, and other objects of the boudoir and bathhouse; all from the Museum's collections. Until 6/29.

- Armenian Rugs and Weavings: Features a wide range of weavings from Armenia and the Transcaucasus, including rare inscribed rugs from ALMA's collection,

as well as smaller woven textiles and rugs from the newly acquired Offen-Alimian Collection. Also, a dozen exceptional rugs loaned to ALMA by members of the Armenian Rugs Society. Until 8/15.

Ninth annual Textile & Tribal Art HALI Fair, Olympia, London, 6/8-18



Seen at ACOR:

Left: World's crookedest rug; Jeff Dworsky's Kurdish carpet exhibited at Landry & Arcari's

Right: Julia Bailey and Carl Strock: "What the heck is that?"

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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.

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 Julia Bailey
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 Gillian Richardson
 Janet Smith
 Jeff Spurr



The Red Books By Janet Smith

As a follow up to our recent illuminating talk by Jennie Wood on dyes, here are two books you may have missed. Both were published last year, and both are concerned with the color red.

Brian Murphy has written *The Root of Wild Madder*. He is an American journalist who had frequently traveled to Iran and Afghanistan and thus became aware of his lack of knowledge about the many carpets he found surrounding him. Consequently, we learn about the shops, the rug sellers, and the musty bazaars, as well as a little bit of the political and cultural history of these countries. This book is really about his search not only for wild madder, but also for the perfect rug for himself.

Our own Mark Hopkins and many other names we know well are cited in the text. You will also learn much (too much?) about Sufism, and about the 14th century Persian poet Hafez, whose ideas seem to imbue the mystical aspects of Persian rugs and life in general.

Amy Butler Greenfield has written a captivating history of cochineal called *A Perfect Red*. She begins with a brief survey of various red dyes used for centuries before 1500, but none of them a perfect red. With their encounter with cochineal in Mexico in 1519, Cortes and the Spanish conquistadors found this amazing color for which the whole world had been searching. This book is a well researched telling of the many interrelated tales that make up the history of cochineal: the Spanish used many subterfuges to keep their lucrative secret from other countries, especially from England, Italy, and Holland, which were the foremost clothmaking centers desperately in need of this much-prized and elusive dye—was it worm, seed, or fruit? It took almost 300 years for this mystery to be solved.

This is an absolutely absorbing story and so well written. I loved it!



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