



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. XIV, No. 1 August 2006

www.ne-rugsociety.org

September Meeting: Wendel Swan on “The Oriental Carpet – Islamic Art with Ancient Roots”

Wendel Swan plans to arrive in Boston with a mission of sorts: to stimulate us to look at oriental rugs not in isolation, but in relationship to other kinds of Islamic art and to consider that many of our woollen collectibles are part of a tradition that is much older than is generally realized.

In his presentation he will provide an overview of how Islamic culture and religion have influenced the evolution of the unique designs and patterns found in Islamic art. Using extensive slides and real rugs and objects that he hopes will be brought in by our members, he will show the relationship between rugs and other media in the Islamic world, such as architecture, ceramics and calligraphy.

Having collected rugs for close to four decades, he now laments the fact that for so long he read primarily rug books and listened to lectures just about rugs, both of which generally fail to explore those relationships.

Members are encouraged to bring rugs or textiles from any one of the following categories: strictly geometric rugs, prayer rugs, Persian city rugs with figures or medallions, and early Turkish rugs. In addition, any other Islamic works of art having a design relationship to rugs would be welcome. Wendel hopes that our members will engage in a discussion as the result of his comments.

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September & October Meeting Details

Date: Friday, September 22 (Swan)

Friday, October 13 (Blackmon)

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.**

October Meeting: Jim Blackmon on “The Gateway Tunic of Tiwanaku: The World’s Most Important Ancient Textile?”

Some textiles are so rare, so beautiful, and so loaded with cultural meaning that they transcend their traditional role as mere vestment, container, or decoration, and rise to the level of great historical document. The Bayeux tapestry and the Pazyryk carpet are two textiles which arguably reach this standard. The Gateway Tunic from the Pre-Columbian culture of Tiwanaku

is also a candidate for consideration as a textile of this high level. Come to this lecture and learn more about this fascinating and important art work.

The Gateway Tunic dates to the beginning of the first millenium. Its intricate tapestry weave depicts ceremonial and architectural detail that complements and

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Please don't forget to send in your membership renewal form!



September Meeting

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Wendel has collected oriental rugs since the late 1960s and has been an active speaker on oriental rug topics ranging from Chinese rugs to design evolution to his favorite topic of Shahsavan weavings. He has spoken at ICOC, ACOR, many rug societies, the Smithsonian, and The Textile Museum.

Wendel has served and continues to serve many educational non-profit rug organizations. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of The Textile Museum,

serves on the Executive Committee of the International Conference on Oriental Carpets, and was chairman of the 10th ICOC that was held in Washington in April of 2003.

Wendel is a contributing editor of *Hali* magazine and is past president of the International Hajji Baba Society.

He claims to have a day job in business brokerage in Northern Virginia and he describes himself as a recovering lawyer.

President's Year End Review

The New England Rug Society has finished out its 21st year in good cheer and fine health. Our membership stands at 178, an all-time high. Our finances are sound, and another year of worthy events and memorable meetings is on the planning table.

It was a year of well-attended and well-received meetings, with the added benefit of the 8th American Conference on Oriental Rugs replacing our April meeting. We've covered ACOR 8 in previous writings, so suffice it to say here that the general consensus considered it the best ACOR ever, and much of that success was indisputably the direct result of NERS members' energetic and generous volunteer efforts.

The NERS 05/06 season kicked off with Dr. Jon Thompson's carefully considered talk on carpet greatness, held on a September evening at **John Collins'** beautiful new Watertown gallery. In October Erik Risman transported the bulk of his phenomenal Ersari collection to the Armenian Library & Museum for an illuminating show-and tell and some additional discussion of the work he is doing with Peter Poullada to better define the tribal weavers of the middle Amu Darya region.

The Florentine dealer and scholar Alberto Boralevi visited us in November and presented a provocative talk on prayer rugs that challenged some of the conventional thinking. Then in January, **Jeff Spurr** hosted an NERS group for a special tour of the Sackler Museum's exhibition of shawls and silver, of which he was co-curator.

Mike Tschebull was our February speaker, exploring the many aspects of Northwest Persian tribal bags, a talk that included many pieces from his own collection plus pieces brought by members. And in March,

Jennie Wood gave us a full-length sneak preview of her talk on natural dyes that she would present at ACOR 8 the next month, a presentation that reflected Jennie's years of experience in the field.

Finally, we closed out the season with our annual picnic and show-and-tell, this time in a new setting: **Michael and Nancy Grogan's** lovely home in Dedham with its spacious yard bordering the Charles River. It was an interesting and fulfilling season.

As usual, I have the pleasure of thanking that band of loyal members called the Steering Committee without which the New England Rug Society just plain wouldn't work. The group, as ever, turned like clockwork to make things happen: **Lloyd Kannenberg, Gillian Richardson, and Tom Hannaher** handling food and refreshments at the meetings; **Yon Bard** doing the newsletter with the able assistance of **Jim Adelson; Julia Bailey** helping to coordinate the speaker arrangements; **Bob Alimi** building and administering our website; **Jo Kris** helping with ACOR 8 planning; **Janet Smith** handling the logistics of mailings, nametags, and other indispensable clerical tasks; and **Jeff Spurr** for numerous other contributions.

Others who pitch in meeting after meeting are our audio-visual team: **Buzz and Louise Dohanian** who manage the projector screens, and **Turgay Erturk** who takes care of our sound system. Our thanks to them as well.

Jo Kris has submitted her resignation from the Steering Committee owing to other pressures, and we're delighted to report that **Ann Nicholas** has accepted our

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President's Year End Review

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invitation to join the committee. Ann and her husband **Rich Blumenthal** have been avid supporters of the NERS since the society's beginnings. Many thanks to Jo for her generous support, and to Ann for agreeing to join the group.

Bob Alimi is continuing to shepherd the growth of the highly successful NERS website. He has already added a virtual presentation of the Rare and Unusual Turkmen Pile Weavings that **Yon Bard** and **Jim Adelson** curated for ACOR 8, and plans to have one or two other ACOR 8 exhibitions represented there in the future.

Whenever it can, the NERS endeavors to support other organizations and undertakings that we believe are of vital importance to the world of antique oriental rugs and textiles. This past year we were able to make modest donations to The Textile Museum in Washington, DC, the Textile & Fashion Arts Department of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, the Armenian Library and Museum of America, and the ICOC Turkish Carpet Restoration Project, which is working to restore the great carpet collections in Istanbul in preparation for the upcoming ICOC conference there next April. In addition, the NERS was a major sponsor and funder of the ACOR 8 conference in Boston.

Our membership continues to be as diversified as

it is enthusiastic. Twenty three new members came aboard this year, many of them finding us through the internet and others discovering us when they visited ACOR 8. A breakout of our members' whereabouts follows:

Eastern Mass.	129
Western Mass.	25
Connecticut	3
Rhode Island	1
New Hampshire	5
Vermont	4
Maine	6
New York	1
Indiana	1
Illinois	1
California	2

Finally, many warm thanks to all the members of the NERS for such generous support over the past season, for pitching in when help is needed, and for contributing the enthusiasm and encouragement that is so vital to keeping our organization a healthy and rewarding one. We couldn't do it without you!

Mark Hopkins

ExtrACORDinaire (HALI's Review of ACOR 8)

Editor's note: The following article appeared in HALI 147, July-August 2006, pp.87-89. We reprint it here with HALI's generous permission.

Pure indulgence for the four hundred ruggies who flocked to Boston, the 8th American Conference on Oriental Rugs offered a gourmet banquet of rug fare. A remarkable series of exhibitions took centre stage, backed by an enjoyable dealers' fair and a practical minded educational programme. **Daniel Shaffer** reflects on the event.

In some ways the 8th return of ACOR was the most ambitious so far. Rightly so maybe, since April 2006 saw the event come home to Boston, where the biennial American conference series was launched 16 years ago.

As the years have flown by, the ACOR commer-

cial fair, like its ICOC counterpart, has assumed an ever more pivotal place in the mix. This time there could be few complaints about the quality and variety of goods on offer (see HALI 146). And yet,... comparison with the very high standard of the non-selling exhibitions gave at least some conference-goers pause for thought. Passing in review the great depth of the holdings of NERS members, ACOR visitors were forced to confront the apparent or real gulf between what was once available at entry-level prices and what can be bought by aspiring collectors today. These now well-established private collections, typically assembled over years with characteristic New England thrift, contain in profusion the great village and nomadic rugs and tribal textiles every collector yearns to find—and to afford.

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ExtrACORdinaire

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The final tally of twelve NERS exhibitions, all but one on-site, involved more than 450 rugs and textiles (not to mention the promised but eventually cancelled display of 'To Have and to Hold', seen in 'virtual' form on the NERS website). And while the highly sensitive politics of rug society members' loan exhibitions are only too well understood, it is hard to think of more than a handful of items on show that didn't earn inclusion on merit.

The first rugs that I saw were in the light and airy gallery of local rug merchants Landry & Arcari, just fifty yards around the corner from the Park Plaza. 'Celebrations in Wool—Antique Oriental Rugs From Eastern Anatolia' contained some two dozen typical examples in a variety of formats, from the collections of conference planning committee chair Mark Hopkins and Maine rug dealer/lobsterman Jeff Dworsky. All the appealing idiosyncracies of so-called Yürük and other Anatolian Kurdish rugs were there—quirkily woven, funkily drawn, more often than not mis-shapen, 18th-19th century Kurdish tribal and village rugs with lovely wool and rich colours. Hard to believe, but I was told that some conference-goers failed to find this exhibit throughout the entire ACOR weekend. Their loss!

Back on site, but set apart in the hotel basement, was 'Gems of the Caucasus—Antique Caucasian Carpets from the Rudnick Collection'. Based on prior reputation, this was the most-keenly anticipated of the planned NERS exhibits, a display first mooted for the Washington ICOC in 2004. In Boston we saw about forty pieces, including a lovely classical Dragon carpet fragment, and a fine selection of unusual pre-commercial period pile rugs with a southern bias, assembled with a fine disregard of the condition considerations that are important to many collectors of 19th century Caucasian rugs.

Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick's collection certainly lived up to expectations, but like the other ACOR 8 exhibitions it will not live on in a permanent record. The types of Caucasian rugs the Rudnicks favour—Kazaks, Moghans, Genjes, Surahanis, Talishes and the like—with their direct visual appeal, lively geometrics, good wool and blazing colours—are crowd-pleasers, so it is rather

sad that a show of this calibre remain unpublished, confined to the vagaries of memory and digital photography, and utterly lost to those who couldn't come to town.

The remaining ten NERS exhibits, ranging from local artist Tom Stocker's four life-size, knot-by-knot, paintings of prayer rugs, to Jeff Spurr's extended survey of lesser-known types of antique Central Asian textiles, were shown in a walk-through labyrinth of more or less interconnected spaces on the hotel's mezzanine level. Within the limitations of a three-day display in a hotel function room (flimsy partitions, paper walls, restricted lighting possibilities and, always, that carpet!), the set design, hanging and lighting were of a high standard, showing how much an experienced museum professional such as Julia Bailey can contribute to the team of willing volunteers who are the essential bedrock of such an event.

A room at one end of the mezzanine was given to Tom Hannaher's 'Demons & Decapitators—the Enigmatic Art of Ancient South American Coca Bags', bringing to the attention of ACORites a compact but mind-broadening non-oriental display of some twenty *ch'uspa*, of varied ages, cultures, materials and techniques. As befits archaeological textiles, condition and even graphic impact were not always paramount, but the bags share fully in the mysterious repertoire of mind-bending figurative iconography common to much early Andean weaving.

In one set of mezzanine rooms we were given an in-depth journey through parts of four individual local collections. Ann Nicholas and Richard Blumenthal presented a wonderful array of south and southwest Persian tribal transport bags, both knotted-pile and flatwoven. These were juxtaposed with their collection of photographs showing such bags in use during the past eighty years.

North African weavings were represented at ACOR by the diverse and dramatic 19th and 20th century Berber and other Maghrebi rugs, flatweaves and textiles collected during their time working in Morocco by Alfred and Suzanne Saulniers. The selection surprised me both for its dynamic visual qualities, and for the fact that the collectors almost totally omitted examples of the highly eccentric Aït Bou Ichaouen material with

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ExtrACORdinaire

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which their names have become most closely associated.

Conference supremo Mark Hopkins offered visitors a thought-provoking sampling chosen from his extensive collection of ‘Baluch’ and related tribal and nomadic rugs from northeast Iran and northwest Afghanistan. His exhibit concentrated on mainly smaller pieces—bags, balishts, prayer and other smaller format rugs, many of them woven with a camel-coloured ground—from the more colourful end of the ‘Baluch’ spectrum.

The fourth individual display consisted of a selection from Gerard Paquin’s highly-regarded collection of mainly Turkish and Turkmen rugs, trappings, and fragments (not to mention his controversial ‘Ottomanesque’ silk embroideries, which were hung separately in another section of the display).

For me, however, the most impressive presentation of all was ‘Unusual and Overlooked—Antique Textiles from Central Asia’, curated by that most eclectic of world textile hunter-gatherers, Jeff Spurr. Here he augmented a mountain of pieces from his own myriad collection of Inner Asian felts, embroideries, resist-dyed silks, velvets, appliqués, trappings, bands, bags, garments, hats, and accessories, with choice items belonging to other NERS members. Multiple examples of various textile and costume types enabled visitors to compare, contrast and classify to their heart’s content. They also enabled Spurr, a very hard-working academic cataloguer inclined to perfectionism by profession, and a self-confessed ‘splitter’ by nature, to paint a picture both deep and broad of the many “unconsidered trifles” that could, and often still can be, snapped-up around the periphery of the antique oriental rug and textile market. And to his eternal credit, on top of preparing good gallery labels, repeated gallery talks, and a Focus Session, he also compiled a small text-only handbook to accompany the exhibit, with a serious introductory essay and long captions.

In a late addition to the exhibition programme originally anticipated in our ACOR preview, it was decided that the quality of NERS holdings of mainstream Turkmen

tribal rugs, and their deliberate exclusion from Jeff Spurr’s Central Asian textile presentation, warranted a separate display. So, to run alongside the region’s less conventional textiles and costume, local Turkomaniacs Yonathan Bard and Jim Adelson set to work to bring together a fine selection of ‘Rare and Unusual Turkmen Pile Weavings,’ focusing wherever possible on pieces of good age and high quality that defy or confound the ‘normal’ attributions and classifications so beloved of aficionados of Turkmen tribal weaving. To their credit, and not unconnected with Bard’s role as editor of the excellent NERS email newsletter, the show is now viewable on the society’s website.

As if all the above was not enough for us to enjoy and try to digest, let alone commit to memory in just three days, the whole colourful cornucopia was topped with ‘New England Collects’. This was a compendium exhibition, without particular regional or personal theme, of rugs and textiles from the collections of 26 separate NERS members. Here the offerings showed a welcome degree of eclecticism. From a superb Rasht appliqué and conventional small format Persian town rugs, they ranged through Baluch prayer rugs, Turkmen bags and trappings, Persian nomadic pack bands and some superb 19th century Caucasian village rugs, kilims and fragments. Then there was more exotic fare, both oriental (an Indian *phulkari*, a Kazakh *tus kiis* and an Algerian embroidery), and non-oriental (West African beaded cache-sexe, an Amish quilt, Panamanian molas, a Sihuas tapestry panel). What characterised it all was the sheer quality of what was displayed.

Sadly space does not allow anything but the most cursory mention of the educational programme, which as is ACOR’s way, was heavily biased to hand-on, show-and-tell-type presentations. Exceptions to this included Elizabeth Barber’s plenary lecture, which may have laid to rest once and for all the notion that there could have been woollen kilims at Çatal Hüyük, and Jürg Rageth’s comprehensive account of the application of C-14 testing to carpet and textile study. But like the exhibitions, these too are ephemeral, as there are no plans to publish.



May Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market

After staging a convincing reenactment of Noah's flood, the gods relented on May 20th just in time for us to hold our annual picnic and show & tell session under bright blue skies. The setting could not have been nicer: verdant slopes undulating towards the banks of the Charles River in back of Michael and Nancy Grogan's beautiful Dedham mansion. The moth-market dealers spread their wares on whatever flat areas they could

find on the slope, and business seemed to be brisk. After that we gathered under canopies that had been set up in the back yard, where we lunched to the sound of Turgay Erturk's playing of Eastern folk music, and then watched as members displayed the various treasures they had brought. A sampling of these is illustrated below.

We thank the Grogans for making their grounds available to us.

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From top
 Left: Ali Eli (aka Ersari, Middle Amu Daria...) chival; Lesghi bag
 Right: Indian embroidered bag; Paracas trophy embroidery fragment

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



Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2006/7 Meetings:

12/1: Fred Mushkat on nomadic bands (at First Parish)

2/16/07: John Collins on Persian rugs (at Collins Gallery)

3/23: Fred Ingham leading a Good Rug/Great Rug session (at First Parish)

4/13: Tom Hannaher on budget collecting (at ALMA)

5/19: Picnic & Show and Tell (location to be determined)

Auctions:

Sotheby's, London, 9/20

Christie's, London, 10/9

Bonham's, London, 10/10

Grogan, Dedham, 10/15 (including rugs)

Nagel, Stuttgart, 10/30

Rippon Bosell, Wiesbaden, 11/18

Skinner, Boston, 12/2

Christie's, New York, 12/12

Sotheby's, New York, 12/14.

Conferences:

New Directions in Persian Carpet Studies, Textile Museum Fall Symposium, Washington, DC, 10/21-22

11th ICOC: Istanbul, 4/19-22/07.

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Classical Persian carpet fragments, Textile Museum, Washington, DC, until 1/31/07

Ikat textiles of Indonesia, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, until 9/24

Wandering weavers: nomadic traditions of Asia, Textile Museum, Toronto, ON, until 10/29.

October Meeting

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extends information already known from the archeological record. Yet the textile likely pre-dates many of the stone monuments on the Tiwanaku site, including the Gateway of the Sun, and depicts other monuments not currently known—pointing to potential archeological treasures not yet excavated.

For more than 30 years Jim Blackmon has been a collector and importer of textiles; a textile restorer, conservator, cleaner, weaver, and appraiser; a writer and lecturer on, and student and curator of, various private and museum exhibitions; and lastly, a textile gallery owner. He has also served on the board of the Textile Arts Council of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and is

currently a member of the Textile Museum's Advisory Council. His most recent project was as curator of the exhibit *The fabric of life: Columbus collects textile art* at the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio.

Jim says emphatically that he is not a scholar but a serious student of the textile arts. However, he admits that after more than 30 years of involvement in the field he is qualified to be called a textile expert, having done a little of everything. His primary area of research has been what he regards as the world's two great wool weaving traditions: the carpet and textile traditions of the Near East and Central Asia, and the Andean textile tradition. He has also been involved to a lesser extent in the textiles of north and sub Saharan Africa.

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

Ann Nicholas

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



May Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market

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Left: Yüncü (Anatolian) rug

Right: Ourika Valley (Moroccan) lahmah (floor cover; detail); Baluchistan embroidered sash



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



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