



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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December Meeting: Fred Mushkat on Warp-Faced Bands from Tribal Iran

Fred Mushkat's lecture will be devoted to his main avocation: warp-faced bands made by the nomads of Iran. These rare weavings were mainly used as pack animal bands or tent bands, or by necessity, for both purposes. The pack bands were used to attach mafrash and other loads to camels, horses, and donkeys during migrations. Some groups, like the Bakhtiari, made decorative bands for their animals. Tent bands served several functions; some were purely decorative, but others were integral to the tent structure, and were used to stabilize the frame and hold the felt to the struts. Groups that lived in black goat hair tents generally had no need for tent bands and made only pack bands, while other tribes who lived in felt tents, such as the Shahsavan in Azerbaijan, made only tent bands. Identifying the tribal origin of any band therefore begins with understanding whether it was a tent or pack band, then assigning it to a given group based on structure and design characteristics.

Prior to the changes in tribal life during the past five decades, the bands were an important part of displaying the tribal identity on the loaded pack animal, and were an important aspect of tribal culture. The iconography of these bands was untouched by commercial influences, since there was never a market for export or sale outside of the tribe. Bands were not known to be fashionable items except among the nomads themselves. As such, these weavings represent a long tradition of images that were inherent to each group. Many of these images do not appear on any other textiles made by these groups of people.

Fred started collecting rugs in 1978 and warp-faced bands in 1986; their lack of commercialization was, to him, one of their main attractions. He has exhibited bands from his extensive collection at the ICOC in Philadelphia (1996) and at the Indianapolis ACOR (2002), and



December Meeting Details

Date: Friday, December 1

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.**

has published many articles about them, including one in *HALI* 84 (Jan/Feb 1996). He is currently writing a book about this topic, due out next year. He lives in Paducah, KY, and works as an emergency-room physician in his spare time.

Being able to see and hear about Fred's favorite pieces should be quite a treat. As an additional attraction, **there will be a ceremony in which one of our members will be given an award for his services to rugdom.** Don't miss it!

Left: detail of Shahsavan band, 19th c. Mushkat collection



**September Meeting: Wendel Swan on
“The Oriental Carpet — Islamic Art with Ancient Roots”
Reviewed by Jim Adelson**

On September 22nd, Wendel Swan returned to NERS, opening the 2006-2007 season with a talk entitled “The Oriental Carpet—Islamic Art with Ancient Roots.” Throughout the evening, Wendel’s focus was on the linkage between the concepts and designs we see in weavings and many other thematic and artistic examples within Islam.

Wendel defined Islamic art as art created by or for people where Islam is practiced—admittedly an impossibly broad topic. While he would be connecting weaving to other art media, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of rugs and textiles themselves to Islamic culture and economics, both for settled and for nomadic peoples. Rugs and textiles define structure and space; aid in transport, storage, bedding, and seating; serve many ceremonial functions; provide economic activity and impact a number of other fields.

Islamic art is tied to the tenets of the religion, but not as specifically as in Christian art. For example, Islamic art is non-representational, generally following geometric, floral, or epigraphic designs. Many westerners have believed that Islam explicitly prohibits representational art, but that is not the case. The Koran prohibits idolatry, not representation, though this has sometimes been interpreted as a ban on depiction of living figures. Human and animal figures are not found in mosques, but are used not only in weavings, but also in metalwork and a number of other art forms.

Turning to further exploration of the design repertoire, Wendel observed, “Islamic designs are seldom exclusive to one medium,” showing illustrations of design similarities between weavings, ceramics, metalwork, architecture, and other art forms. He acknowledged that some designs clearly pre-date Islam. He illustrated this point with stripe designs, which he showed in a pre-Islamic funereal plainweave from a mummy, and then in a much later jajim. Establishing the initial instances and origins of designs is very difficult: “When we think we’ve found the original source of a design, we inevitably find it somewhere earlier.”

Wendel remarked that “art in the Islamic lands is



Palmettes in rugs and architecture

Above, left to right: **Caucasian (18th c.);**

Gohar (16th c. ?); Shasavan (19th c.)

Below: **Dome of the Rock, interior mosaic (7th c.)**



highly traditional,” meaning that it tends to reflect the existing values that persist for long periods of time. For example, the Dome of the Rock was built in the late 680s. Wendel showed a detail of an internal octagonal arcade, richly decorated with floral palmettes, as well as very similar palmettes in rugs from a much later period. He noted that “gardens are an essential part of Islam’s vision of paradise,” which explains their beauty and ubiquity in Islamic art and weaving. Many other features of Islamic religious architecture find their way into weavings: lamps are a key element in mosques and get prominent treatment in certain rugs; lattices are frequently found in mosques and become an organizing and decorative element in rugs, as in examples from Afshar and Mughal weaving. Most importantly, perhaps, the prayer niches of Islamic architecture are the foundation element for the genre of weavings that we refer to as prayer rugs.

Calligraphic designs also link weavings with other Islamic art forms, including illustrated manuscripts and Koran covers. Wendel commented that weaving might have been the most economically important art in the Islamic world, but calligraphy was perhaps the noblest

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art form. In weavings, calligraphic designs are most often used in rug borders, either in a fairly direct form, or in the more abstract Kufesque designs. [Julia Bailey noted later during the Q&A period that the limitations in use of calligraphic designs flow naturally from the technical difficulties of rendering script in weaving.] Koran covers often use medallion designs, like those found in rugs.

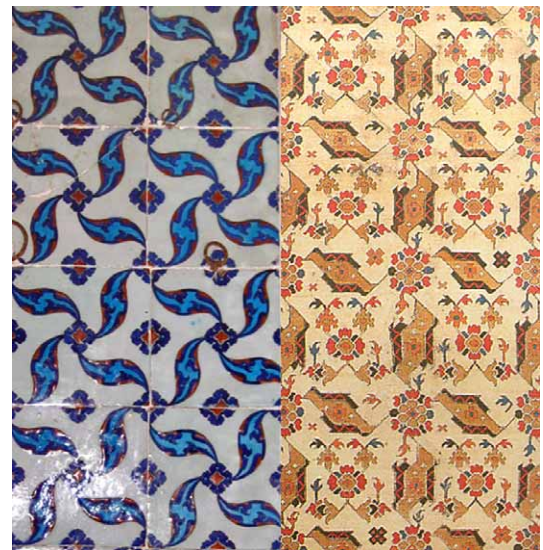
Geometric designs have many connections within Islam. They reflect the position given to mathematics and sciences, which were very important in the Islamic world. From a design standpoint, Islamic depiction doesn't distinguish between positive and negative space, or between foreground and background; these principles in geometric design influence weavings and many other media. For example, some of the complex geometric designs seen in weaving are commonly found in metalwork and ceramics. Wendel showed an octagonal design in a plate from the 9th or 10th century, similar to rug motifs. Another example was the eight-pointed star, found frequently in several types of rugs such as Turkmen ensis and compared by Wendel to a similar design in 14th century tilework from Samarkand. Even the design that's commonly identified as a rosette, with a presumed floral origin, really has more of a connection with tradi-

tional geometric designs.

This part of the session triggered questions from the audience on one of the most common and challenging problems for rug aficionados—how to know whether one design really came from another design, or whether they evolved independently. Perhaps the technical limitations of the art form drove different weavers to produce the same designs. One audience member indicated that, from her experience with knitting, she tends to start from different design concepts, but arrives at the same design over and over again due to the technical aspects of that art form; perhaps this also happens with rugs and other textile weavings.

The evening concluded with a few items that members brought in. Lawrence Kearney brought a yastik with “rosette” forms floating in the field. With regard to this piece, Wendel observed that if the rosette design had come originally from flowers, the stylization probably occurred a long time ago. Doug and Julia Bailey brought two tile fragments—one a 16th-century Iznik example, and the other attributed to 17th-century Damascus—with designs that are also found in weavings.

Many thanks to Wendel for the thought-provoking examples of links between rugs and other art forms in the Islamic world.



Two comparisons:

Left: Tilework, entrance to Samarkand tomb (14th c.); Chodor ensi, Hecksher collection (19th c.)
Right: Tilework, Rustem Pasha mosque, Istanbul (16th c.), compared to Bird-Ushak rug (17th c.)



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

Reviewed by Jim Adelson

On October 13th, Jim Blackmon spoke to NERS, focusing on a single textile—the Tiwanaku “Gateway Tunic.” Jim has been involved with rugs for 35 years, with pre-Andean textiles for 28 years, and with this particular textile for 15 years.

Jim started by commenting that he considers himself a fan of both Andean and Near Eastern/Central Asian weavings, the two main areas of wool-based art. He observed that these are the two main areas of the world with ready availability of wool-producing animals. For the Andean area, there is a continuous history of weaving with surviving examples, while there are periods of Near Eastern weaving, such as around 600 AD, from which no examples remain.

The Tiwanaku culture flourished at the southern end of Lake Titicaca in modern-day Bolivia. As an empire, it existed for about 1,000 years, from 100 AD to 1100 AD, being brought down eventually by an extended drought. The physical environment was quite harsh due to the 12,500 foot elevation, with freezing temperatures almost every night of the year. However, the Altiplano area was a little more temperate because of the proximity of the lake. The inhabitants developed a system of raised beds for agriculture, retaining more warmth and yielding more abundant crops.

The area was populated by large herds of alpacas, llamas, and vicunas. All of these animals were originally wild, but were rounded up and sheared annually. Over time, the Tiwanaku people domesticated alpacas and llamas, and were able to produce very fine fibers from the alpacas.

Tiwanaku city was the Andean Mecca, built by a Shaman-priest ruling class with a large labor pool. It had a very carefully planned center, with orientation to east and west for observing the equinox sunrise and sunset. The sacred central pyramid, Akapanna, measured 600’ x 600’ x 60’. There were probably 40,000-60,000 people in the city, and perhaps as many as 200,000 in the area. Jim labeled Tiwanaku “the Oz of the Andes.”

From what remains today, we know of two major Altiplano artistic traditions—stone carving and weav-



The Tiwanaku Tunic



Tiwanaku Gate of the Sun

ing. Jim began with some details on the stonework. A fair amount of stone has been taken from Tiwanaku—the area has been “mined” for almost 1000 years. The Tiwanaku people had been masters of stoneworking, making very precise cuts and moving very heavy stones, weighing up to 200 tons. Later people considered the city a great source of cut stone. The stones that remain show lots of incised carving.

The Gateway of the Sun at the Tiwanaku site is one of the most famous Andean stone monuments. It features a rayed head on a stepped platform, with three rows of figures on the sides. It is believed to have been carved between 500 and 800 AD—the Classic period

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of Tiwanaku civilization. The main deity is the Sun figure, holding a staff in each hand. There exist different depictions of this Sun figure, with feathered and/or disk appendages.

Tiwanaku weaving uses a number of techniques, including warp-faced and tapestry weave. None of the known examples of Tiwanaku weaving have been found at the Tiwanaku site itself—they've been discovered elsewhere.

The Gateway Tunic is a unique textile—no others of that form survive. The piece would have been worn over the upper body, with a slit for the wearer's head and designs on both the wearer's front and back. The piece is completely covered by designs; by contrast, Jim showed a picture of a complete shirt of which about six are known. These shirts are made in plainweave with smaller panels of interlocked tapestry. It is hard to be 100% sure about the construction of the Gateway Tunic—Jim felt that it was constructed of eight panels joined together. He observed that the Gateway Tunic was not an everyday garment: "When you put your head through the neck slit of this tunic, you're entering sacred ground."

The largest single figure on the tunic is the Sun God, also called the Staff God or the Weather God. This figure follows the Tiwanaku traditions for its depiction, with rayed head, platform base, and staff in hand. There are 36 smaller figures around the Sun God, perhaps representing ritually garbed priests or ancestors. Each one of the 36 figures is unique, with specific design variations, not just a variation of color. The figures vary in

several ways, including what they are holding, such as pan pipes. Several figures contain what can be interpreted as references to hallucinogens (of which the people used several) as well as maize beer. In addition to these 36 figures, there are a number of other ceremonial images, including parrots. Jim remarked that the Gateway tunic differs from other Tiwanaku and Andean artwork in the absence of weaponry or severed heads. A lot of the figures resemble very closely those found in Tiwanaku stone carvings. For example, there is a winged puma in the tunic that is very similar to carvings found at the Akapanna.

The platform of the Sun God in the tunic has the very same shape as the Akapanna itself. The Gateway Tunic has been carbon dated a number of times, with results that range from approximately 100 A.D. to 400 A.D. This means that the Gateway Tunic is several hundred years older than the Akapanna itself—at least those ruins excavated to date. So the Gateway Tunic actually preceded the architecture and stonework we know today.

The modern-day history of the Gateway Tunic starts in the 1920s, when the piece first surfaced in Paris. It passed from France to a Swiss collection and then to New York in the 1950s, and in turn to a Colorado collection in the 1990s.

Jim concluded by saying that "the Tiwanaku tunic has a full picture of the ideological beliefs of an entire major culture." Our thanks to Jim for showcasing the Gateway Tunic as a magnificent object in itself, and as a gateway to learning more about this civilization.

ACOR 8 Central-Asian Exhibition Photos Needed!

I am appealing to anyone who took it upon themselves to take photos of the exhibit *Unusual and Overlooked, Antique Textiles from Central Asia* that I curated at ACOR 8 this past April. This is necessary due to a snafu which led to the expected photos not being taken. I am therefore collecting as many digital images of good quality of all parts of the exhibit from all sources in order to cobble together a complete representation of the 140 textiles in the show, before bringing the whole exhibition online.

Any help that anyone can provide will be gratefully received. I would also appreciate this notice being forwarded to others who may have attended ACOR, but do not necessarily receive an NERS mailing.

To help identify pictures from this exhibition, please note that the displays were mounted against a dark blue background.

Thanks and best wishes,

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Textile Gems of the Caucasus

Rugs from the Collection of Rosalie and Mitchell Rudnick

Reviewed by Yon Bard

Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick are founding members of the NERS (originally the New Boston Rug Society), and Rosalie was its first president. Early on, they hosted most of the Society's meetings at their Lincoln house, where we had a chance to see their splendid collection of Caucasian rugs. These opportunities became rare when the meetings moved to other venues and the Rudnicks moved to Boston. Their collection continued to evolve, though, as their tastes matured and their knowledge deepened; some of their pieces were deaccessioned while new ones were acquired. We caught a glimpse of some of the new pieces at ACOR 8, but now we have another opportunity to see how the collection has evolved: about 25 of their prize possessions can be seen at the Concord Art Association (see details on page 7) in an exhibition curated by our own Jo Kris Powell, and open until November 26.

We attended the opening reception and gallery talk on November 9, and it was a treat! The pieces are spaciouly displayed in a well-lit gallery, accompanied by informative labels. Jo delivered a brief introduction, following which Rosalie, with help from Mitch and Jo, conducted us around the room. She emphasized two

aspects of each piece:

First, what is special or unusual about it (a piece that has nothing special about it has no room in this collection). The star (in more ways than one!) of the collection is a case in point: Star Kazaks are rare to start with, but, as Rosalie pointed out, the Rudnicks' example (see below) does not strictly belong to any of the three recognized classes. Its main border is unique, and the white background stands out since it is unusually free of clutter. I also find it refreshingly different because of its free, whimsical, execution—normally these pieces are very precise and formal. The Talish long rug (see back page) provides another example of an extraordinary border with unusual figures in the field.

Second, what she sees in it—in particular, what she thinks is the meaning of various design elements. These were her own personal interpretations—she never claimed to know what the weaver had in mind. A prime example of this is the Kazak prayer rug whose central medallion looked to Rosalie like a splayed, winged animal of some sort (see back page).

We cannot enumerate here all the wonders of the collection, but we urge you to go and see it while it's up!



Left: Mitch and Rosalie Rudnick flanking Jo Kris Powell; South Caucasian long rug fragment and Caucasian prayer rug in background

Right: Star Kazak

More pictures on back page





Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2006/7 Meetings:

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:

Rippon Bosell, Wiesbaden, 11/18

Skinner, Boston, 12/2

Grogan, Dedham, 12/10 (including rugs)

Christie's, New York, 12/12

Schuler, Zurich, 12/13

Sotheby's, New York, 12/14.

Conferences:

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

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Textile Gems from the Caucasus; Rugs from the Collection of Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick; Concord Art association, 37 Lexington Road, Concord, MA (978-369-2578), until 11/26. See review on page 6.

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

Soviet textiles from the Lloyd Casten Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, until 1/21/07

Tsutsugaki textiles from the David Paly Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, until 7/6/07. These are Japanese folk textiles from the 19th century. The indigo ground cotton and silk fabrics are patterned with strong graphics and subtle colors of salmon, blues, greens, off white etc. They include resist-dyed futon covers, gift wrapping cloth, and padded kimono-like sleeping robes.

Cosmophilia; Islamic Art from the David Collection, McMullen Museum, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, until 12/31.

Tours:

Istanbul and Greater Anatolia Textile and Rug Adventure, 10/16-28/07 and 11/1-13/2007. These tours will be led by Vedat Karadag and will include visits to Istanbul, Iznik, Cappadocia, Konya, and Antalya. Contact info@walkturkey.com or telephone 011-90-212-458-5750, or visit www.walkturkey.com for more information.

We welcome new NERS member *Chris Hunt*

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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.

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



More *Textile Gems*
from the *Caucasus*
(see p. 6)

Left: Kazak prayer rug,
dated 1827

Right: Talish long rug
(detail)



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