



# View from the Fringe

## Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. XVII, No. 4 April 2010

[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

### April Meeting: Thomas Farnham on “Classical Persian Carpets: the New England Connections”

At our April 16 meeting Thomas Farnham, an internationally known and respected rug scholar, will speak on classical Persian carpets, particularly as related to New England. The meeting will be held at ALMA (the Armenian Library and Museum) in Watertown.

Compared to New York, Philadelphia, or Chicago, Boston and New England have been home to few classical Persian carpets. But among the several carpets that have resided or still do reside in New England, several are particularly important pieces, and a discussion of them and of the individuals who owned them will be the primary focus of the talk. In addition to those carpets that remain in New England, either in museums or in private hands, several masterpieces that were once in the region have moved on to new homes elsewhere. Among them are the Los Angeles Ardabil and Coronation Carpets. Of similar interest is a carpet once owned by Richard T. Crane of Ipswich, Massachusetts, which is now among the treasures of the Textile Museum in Washington.

Once coveted by European royalty, aristocracy, and church hierarchy, Persian carpets had lost much of their appeal by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Only in the late nineteenth century did they once again attract the attention of West Europeans and North Ameri-

#### April Meeting Details

**Date:** Friday, April 16

**Time:** 7:30PM

**Place:** Armenian Library & Museum of America,  
65 Main Street, Watertown

#### Directions:

Go to Watertown Square (out-of-towners, get off the Mass Pike at exit 17 and follow the signs.) Take Main Street (Rte. 20) westbound (left turn if coming from the Pike). The first light is Church Street, and the Museum is on the righthand corner.

#### Parking:

Go right on Church Street and into the municipal lot on the right. Most meters are free after 6PM, but check to make sure!

cans, a shift in taste encouraged by a handful of insightful dealers who had come to understand that these carpets were indeed works of art. How, when, and by whom the fascination with Persian carpets was rekindled will be another aspect of this talk.

Several New Englanders have, through their schol-

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

*See meeting details on page 8.*

The picnic will be held on Saturday, May 15, at Gore Place in Waltham, the grounds of the former governor's mansion. We'll have an enclosed 50 x 80 foot tent with water and electricity, plus a spacious barn with bathrooms, electricity, and all the tables and chairs we'll need, plus grounds galore to spread out on. It'll work perfectly, rain or shine, but we'll have to forego

wine and beer due to the place's legal restrictions.

**Bring your own picnic.** Cart along your own lunch and munchies, and we'll provide the beverages, including soft drinks, coffee, and tea.

**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).

**Let's work hard to make this year's Show & Tell a great one!!**

Bring two or three of your favorite pieces to the picnic, even if they've been shared before.

All wonderful rugs and textiles are welcome!



## April Meeting

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arly interest, confirmed the canonization of classical Persian carpets. They—including Arthur Upham Pope, the creator of the seven-volume *Survey of Persian Art*; Arthur Urbane Dilley, the author of one of the best-selling early studies on oriental rugs; and George Hewitt Myer, the founder of the Textile Museum—deserve mention as part of the New England connection.

Tom Farnham was born in Vermont, raised in Massachusetts, and educated at the University of North Carolina, where he received a Ph.D. in 1964. He spent his professional career teaching American history, initially at the University of North Carolina and later in the Connecticut State University system. He has published seven books, including a biography of Nathan Hale.

Tom first became intrigued by oriental carpets while researching the life of the nineteenth century “robber baron” Charles Yerkes, who was also a major carpet collector. While investigating the Yerkes collection, Tom was introduced to classical Persian carpets which sparked his interest in these carpets and in the dealers who bought and sold them.

A Joseph V. McMullan Award recipient, Tom is currently a Research Associate at The Textile Museum, a member of the ICOC’s Executive Committee, and chair of the ICOC’s Publications Committee.

Members are encouraged to bring any fragments of classical Persian carpets or personal stories about New England collectors, scholars, or dealers of classical Persian carpets.

### February Meeting: Alberto Levi on “Primitivism and Abstraction in Persian Tribal Flatweaves” Reviewed by Jim Adelson

On February 5, Italian dealer and rug enthusiast Alberto Levi spoke to about 35 NERS members and guests in a talk entitled “Primitivism and Abstraction in Persian and Tribal Flatweaves.”

Alberto started the talk with a picture of a Senneh kilim, commenting that this was what the oriental rug world knew of Persian flatweaves until the late 1970s. He characterized that time as the beginning of a “mini-revolution” in which a new generation of dealers started to present weavings, such as gabbahs, that were different. David Black, Clive Loveless, Eberhart Herrmann, and Galerie Neiriz were representatives of this deepening interest in Persian tribal flatweaves. In fact, some collectors had already encountered examples such as the backs of some Qashqa’i and other saddlebags with finely woven pile faces. The attention to tribal flatweaves attracted new collectors like Ignazio Vok, who amassed a collection of South Persian and other minimalist pieces. Alberto showed a couple of such pieces from the Vok collection, including a five-panel black-and-white kilim originally attributed to the Chahar Mahal region and Luri or Bakhtiari weavers, but later identified by Parviz Tanavoli as coming from the Mazandaran area, which lies between the Caspian Sea and the Elburz mountains, northeast of Tehran.

Alberto next mentioned an influential exhibition of these flatweaves at the St. Gallen, Switzerland, museum in 2005. At this exhibition, tribal Persian flatweaves were divided into three groups based on design: stripes, squares, or open fields. He illustrated with examples of each type: a South Persian warp-faced jajim with stripes varying in width as well as in color; a sofreh in square format with unusual color juxtapositions; and a simple kilim with an open-field background color and large areas of a contrasting color. Alberto commented that these pieces have sparked interest among those attracted to other contemporary arts. He also showed a Bauhaus textile (German) from 1929, noting that the artist arrived at a similar sensibility by different paths.

After this introduction to flatweave designs, Alberto explored in more detail several types of pieces that utilize them. He started with jajims, selecting a Qashqa’i example first. Jajims are warp-faced flatweaves; since the warps form the design, vertical stripes are very common, with the stripes dictated by the colors of the warps. Jajims are often woven with a color palette similar to the tribe’s pile weavings. Functionally, jajims served as blankets, floor spreads, bed covers, pile rug covers, bags, and animal covers. Alberto commented that jajims are

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## February Meeting

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not a recent invention: he showed Persian miniatures from circa 1426 and 1450, each depicting a textile that appears to be a jajim.

Alberto moved on to another type of textile, the perdeh. Perdeh were made by Kurds in eastern Anatolia, and were used as tent dividers. They are woven as a set of plain weave strips, each of which is dip-dyed individually, and then the strips are sewn together. Again, they predate many of the modern art movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but have a similar feeling in their pure use of color.

Alberto proceeded next to the somewhat better-known sofrehs. He noted that there are two main types—one used for dining, and the other for preparing bread from flour. Dining sofrehs are larger and, in his opinion, usually less interesting in design. He showed two flour sofrehs, circa 1920, from the Kamo region in West Persia, and compared them with Joseph Albers's 1949 painting *Hommage to the Square*, and Kasimir Malevich's *Suprematism* from 1916-1917, again noting the works had a similar feeling despite different origins.

Alberto showed several more flour sofrehs with different designs. One had a central face or mask, and hands reaching in from the sides. Another had a gabled central shape, perhaps influenced by prayer rug designs, and a particularly varied color set. Another half-dozen examples followed with red and undyed wool primary palettes, and varying designs with wavering lines. In some instances, there appeared to be errors in the wavering lines, and Alberto wondered whether they were mistakes, but mostly concluded that they were deliberate design variations, very skillfully executed. John Collins concurred from the audience, pointing out that you see some of these same design variations on the backs of very finely executed pile bagfaces, indicating the great skill and technical prowess of the weaver. Alberto concluded his survey of sofrehs with a very colorful and unusual example, with much broader color variation and extensive use of curved wefts to produce a repeated fan-like shape. He showed a picture of this sofreh placement in a collector's home, right beneath a contemporary art work with similar colors.

The next weaving format Alberto chose was the

tacheh, a term derived by Parviz Tanavoli from the Persian for “little bale,” for this bag was used to store and transport wheat and barley. These weavings are predominantly flatweaves, but with a small pile section of a particular shape probably to reinforce the area getting the most wear. Pieces in this format first appeared in the Tehran bazaar in 1991. When encountered, they are just as likely to be cut up as whole.

Tanavoli separated tachehs into two types: those produced by nomadic Bakhtiari and Lurs were typically woven with gabbeh patterns; those produced by sedentary Chahar Mahal villagers were woven using gol farangh designs derived from ceiling patterns. Alberto showed a number of examples, including one with cotton used to highlight the red and blue “flames” of the wavy design.

Alberto concluded his talk with an extensive review of Mazandaran kilims. They were first identified in 1998 by Tanavoli, who traced them to this region, and determined that they were made as rufarshi, the coverings for pile carpets in Qajar palaces. Within the Mazandaran area, many of the weavings come from Hezar-Jerib, which means a thousand acres or villages. The kilims were woven with a very soft, silky wool from urial sheep, and many were made as dowry pieces.

There are four types of Hezar-Jerib kilims, again categorized by design: horizontal stripes; plain, solid color fields; minimalist designs; and ikat-like patterns. All are weft-faced plain weaves. Occasionally, there were double-faced pieces. Most pieces were woven as two or three strips and then sewn together, although Alberto had examples assembled from four and even five strips. Some were used as Jo (barley) kilims—to dry barley—and these tend towards a rougher handle and coarser weave.

Kilims with ikat designs differed from the other types because of the horizontal color variations, with the intensity of color fading across an area, or one color transitioning into another. Again, the effect was one seen in Western abstract painting, but presumably of a different origin.

Alberto commented “these were the kilims we were all dreaming about, and they appeared in great

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## February Meeting

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numbers.” While the sudden appearance caused some alarm, including concern that they were fakes, Alberto noted that some other previously unknown types of weavings, like those from Zakatala, have also shown up in significant numbers.

In a short question-and-answer session, an attendee asked Alberto about any connection between Mazandaran kilim and Uzbek julkhyrs (coarsely woven sleeping rugs, constructed in strips). Alberto replied that there was perhaps an aesthetic connection, but not a tribal one—Mazandaran people are Kurds. In response to another question, Alberto indicated that Persian and Anatolian flatweaves are derived from different design pools. Finally, Alberto referred those interested to

Tanavoli’s book, *The Sofreh of Kamo*.

Members brought a few show-and-tell pieces, although they were flatweaves or mixed-technique items of different types than those mentioned by Alberto. The pieces included a Shahsavan kilim fragment, a Bidjar kilim, a Shahsavan soumak saltbag, an Afshar bag, and a Shahsavan mafrash panel. Two other pieces were closest in character to those presented by Alberto: one was a small pile and flatweave piece that may have served as a sofreh, and the other was a Qashqa’i striped, large-format piece with reciprocal saw-teeth in each stripe.

NERS is very grateful for Alberto’s remarks about, and illustrations of, this less well-known weaving category. Thanks again to John Collins for generously providing his gallery for this NERS talk.



A jajim and detail of a Persian miniature of 1426 depicting an “amorous prince” sitting on a similar weaving



Sofreh



Two Mazandaran kilims



## March Meeting: Jeff Spurr on "Style and Identity, People or Place: The Case for Lakai Suzanis" Reviewed by Jim Adelson

*Editor's note: Jeff was kind enough to provide his speaking notes—a rare luxury—for preparing this summary of the talk.*

On March 19, Jeff Spurr presented his most recent research and thinking on the evidence for attributing a particular group of suzanis to the Lakai.

After a delay due to technical problems, Jeff began the talk with some background on the politics of the region, and some observations on weaving traditions. Geographically, the area in question is bounded by the Amu Darya River on the south and west, and by the Syr Darya River on the northeast, and makes up most of what is currently Uzbekistan, plus an extension into neighboring Tajikistan. Within this region, a significant event occurred in 1794 when the silk workers from Merv were forcibly moved to Bukhara, engendering increased silk usage in that area. Improved political stability, along with the expanded availability of materials and weavers, set the stage for a blossoming of the textile arts beginning at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Textile weaving had certainly been practiced in the area beforehand, but examples and knowledge of these earlier weavings have not survived.

Jeff also reviewed the types of textiles produced in this region. Textiles were woven primarily by people of Uzbek or Tajik origin. Many suzanis, which take their name from the Persian word for needles, were constructed on cotton foundations. The cotton was woven in narrow loom width—10-16 inches—four to six of which were used for a suzani. These cotton strips were joined temporarily for drawing the design, and then separated for embroidery before being rejoined more firmly.

Suzanis were made in a number of formats, as well as with a variety of designs, depending upon their place of origin. Large, rectangular suzanis were used as covers or hangings. Jeff illustrated Bukharan and Tashkent examples, which are probably the two most common and well-known types. While the designs of these two types differ pronouncedly, both share a format with a main field, large main border, and two narrow minor borders flanking the main border. Designs from other

cities have been identified with fairly high confidence, including those from Nurata and Pskent; the latter's proximity to Tashkent explains some of the similarities between the two. There are also a number of designs that have not yet been identified, although the so-called large medallion suzanis have been ascribed to Bukhara.

In addition to the larger sized examples, weavers created smaller suzanis, called nim suzani (nim means "half"), typically measuring approximately 3 by 5 feet. These were used as covers or hangings. Even smaller pieces, called bokcha, just under three feet and square in shape, served as covers for food or smaller items. Ruidzho were large format weavings with a plain center and embroidery at the top and sides. These may have been used as bridal bed covers, although the evidence is incomplete. Zardevor, with multiple arches so that they resembled a saf, were used as wall hangings. Finally, joinamaz were another smaller type of suzani, with a niche figure likely connoting its use for prayer.

Having covered the general political backdrop and suzani weaving of the region, Jeff turned to the specific case for attributing a group of suzanis to the Lakai. He commented that most attributions have been to a specific place, without identification of the ethnic group involved in the weaving. He indicated that the particular suzanis in question display urban outgrowths of the same traditions carried forward contemporaneously in Lakai rural textiles. Jeff emphasized that both the smaller-format rural weavings and these suzanis date from the 1875-1925 period. Immediately before this time, the Mangit Emir of Bukhara had initiated a campaign, starting in 1869, to curb the Lakai's plundering activity. In this effort, he had forcibly relocated many of them; such resettling was a fairly common practice in Central Asia. While there is not conclusive proof, Jeff feels that a number of the Lakai were now to be found in Shahrisabz, Kitab, and Karshi—urban areas over which the Mangit Emir had much more control due to his own efforts and those of the Russians. Jeff hypothesizes that this new setting, along with new materials and new markets, gave

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# View from the Fringe



## March Meeting

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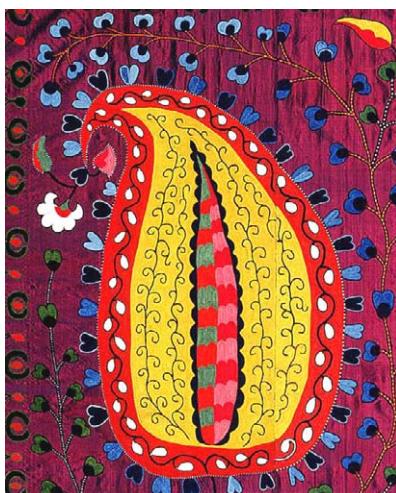
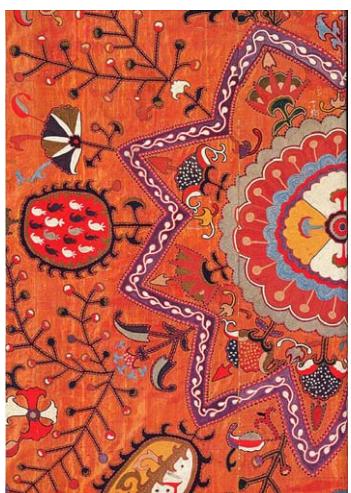
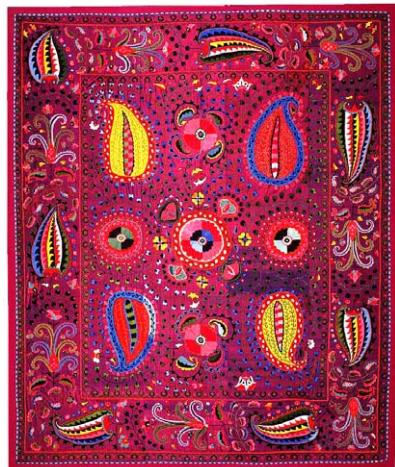
the Lakai opportunities to expand their weaving activities, although no pre-1869 examples survive.

The chosen group of suzanis share a number of characteristics with the concurrent rural Lakai products. Both rural and urban weavings utilized finely embroidered motifs on a strongly colored solid background, often broadcloth in the rural examples and silk in the urban ones. Both types featured diagonality of color or design or both. Both had unique edge treatments, for decorative and functional reasons. Both rural and urban weavings used narrow bands within the design, with the bands demonstrating a small design repeat, such as barberpole or herringbone. All of these characteristics were frequently found in both this group of suzanis and the more well-known rural Lakai pieces, but were much less common in the other textiles of the area.

In addition to similarities with rural Lakai weavings that suggest the common ethnic origin, the suzanis of this group differ from the others of the region in several significant ways. These suzanis display much greater internal articulation of the design elements. They use some different motifs, particularly botehs. They display much more variation in the depiction of design elements within a given weaving. These are just some of the examples of the extensive creativity of the Lakai weavers and their openness to an evolution of their weaving products, compared to the slower-moving and more tradition-bound renditions in other weavings of the region.

Jeff proceeded to illustrate a number of examples of different designs, including central medallions with floral motifs, ascending vine designs, and ruidzho with ikat grounds. He also talked about ways in which both the

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**Clockwise, from top left:**  
Lakai urban suzani and rural ilgich (the latter from the Robinson collection), demonstrating diagonality of design

Rare example of rural Lakai embroidery in nim suzani format

Boteh from Lakai suzani, illustrating bold design and use of color

Lakai suzani detail, illustrating elaborate outlining designs



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## Upcoming Rug Events

**Auctions** (*major carpet sales in bold; dates may change— inquire before you go*):  
Sotheby's, London, 4/14  
**Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 5/29**  
**Sotheby's, New York, 6/2**  
Grogan, Dedham, 6/6.

### Exhibitions and Fairs:

**Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World**, American Museum of Natural History, NY, NY, until 8/15.

### Tours:

**Discover Transylvania 2010**, 5/20-29 and 6/11-19, organized by Susan Scollay and Stefano Ionesco. For information access [www.transylvanianrugs.com/wp-content/uploads/discover\\_transylvania-2010](http://www.transylvanianrugs.com/wp-content/uploads/discover_transylvania-2010).

### Conferences:

The ACOR Board of Directors has announced that there will be no ACOR meeting in 2011.  
Next ICOC in Stockholm, 6/16-19/2011.

## February Meeting

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suzanis and the rural weavings likely carried forward from their pre-settlement predecessors but took on new attributes to reflect the new setting. Among the smaller pieces, ilgich (bags), bokchas (covers), and mapramach (bedding bags) retained their traditional shapes, but were constructed in a much more decorative and less functional and rugged style than those meant to withstand the rigors of nomadic life. The small pieces likely took advantage of new ground materials, silk threads, different dyestuffs, and different backing fabrics, compared with what would have been easily available to Lakai nomads. The suzanis probably represent a similar combination of the design preferences, embroidery skills and

creativity of the Lakai with the traditions, formats, materials, and high weaving standards of the more urban areas of Uzbekistan.

Following his talk, Jeff fielded some questions and then turned to a show-and-tell of items that he and other NERS members had brought. By format, ilgiches were the most numerous of the pieces, but other examples included several joinamaz; a contemporary large-scale, white-ground suzani; and a rural nim suzani.

Our hearty thanks to Jeff for sharing his knowledge and insights regarding Lakai and other Central Asian textiles, even prior to targeted publication. And those interested in the subject area should definitely be on the lookout for the resulting article.

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Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, [doryon@rcn.com](mailto: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](http://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@verizon.net](mailto:mopkins@verizon.net).

### **NERS 2009/10 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 and Show & Tell) Details

**Date:** Saturday, May 15

**Time:** Noon to 4PM

**Place:** Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham

**Directions:**

**From Watertown Square** (see page 1): Take Main Street (Rte. 20) westbound. After 1.5 miles turn left onto Gore Street at the second of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on right). Proceed 0.2 miles on Gore Street. Turn left (through center island) to Gore Place entrance.

**From Rte. 128:** Take exit 26 onto Rte. 20 Eastbound (it starts out as Weston Road and becomes Main Street). After 3.3 miles turn right on Gore Street at the first of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell Station on left). Proceed on Gore Street as above.

**From Newton:** Go north on Crafts Street. Turn right (traffic light) on North Street. Cross the Charles River and go straight. The street eventually becomes Gore Street. Gore Place entrance will be on your right.

**Parking:** Parking area on the estate grounds



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