



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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November Meeting: Stefano Ionescu on Tuduc Fakes

“Half of the fun would go out of carpet collecting if there were no fakes or forgeries or at least no wrongly attributed pieces,” Kurt Erdmann.

Stefano Ionescu, a noted Romanian rug scholar, author, and tour guide, will talk on “Tuduc Fakes in American and European Collections.” The meeting will be held on Friday evening, November 5, at 7:30pm at First Parish, Lincoln.

Theodor Tuduc was an infamous early twentieth century Romanian rug restorer and forger. His “reproductions” fooled many prestigious museums and collectors. Today these Tuduc fakes have become highly collectable in their own right, with examples appearing at auction and commanding considerable prices. They are even featured in some important museum collections, including the Museum for Islamic Art in Berlin, the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto.

“I first became interested in Tuduc fakes when I bought a ‘Bird’ rug in Bucharest after having seen the magnificent collection of rugs the day before in the Black Church,” Stefano relates. “That was in the early 90s and I would have bet my home that the rug was the real thing. When I returned to Rome, several people expressed doubts about it, and eventually I discovered it was woven by Tuduc. I had no idea who Tuduc was at the time, but this purchase began my fascination with Theodor Tuduc and his fakes.”

In his talk Stefano will discuss thirty well-documented Tuducs, showing the original rugs and copies found in collections or on the market. In studying these examples commonalities can be identified which may help assign carpets to the workshop of Tuduc and unmask other Tuduc fakes. Stefano will also discuss the close relationship between Tuduc and Dall’Olio, a collector who built one of the best collections of ‘Transylvanian’ rugs.

This material is based on three years of research

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November Meeting Details

Date: November 5

Time: 7:30 PM

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: Non-members welcomed for \$10 fee

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 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.



Coupled column “Transylvanian” rug. Left: the genuine article; from Véggh and Layer, 1926. Right: from the workshop of Tuduc; National Museum of Art, Bucharest



November Meeting

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covering pieces found in the main carpet museums, many collections, and various auction houses. The results will be published in late October in *The Handbook of Tuduc*

Fakes. The talk promises to be a fascinating story of forgery, collusion between collectors and dealers, museum misattributions, and finally, of how the fakes themselves became highly collectable.

September Meeting: Austin Doyle on East Caucasian Rugs Reviewed by Jim Adelson

Numbers in brackets refer to photos on page 4.

On September 10th, Austin Doyle opened the 2010-11 season with a talk on “The Development of Design in Weavings of the Eastern Caucasus.” Austin joined us from the DC area, where he is a medical oncologist with the National Cancer Institute. He described his initial contact with oriental rugs saying “I fell under their sway more than 20 years ago.”

Austin said that he would be focusing on Eastern Azerbaijan and the Caspian coast. This region has a warm climate and is largely settled with villages and towns, so it is not an area for pastoral nomadism. The weaving was done by Chechens and Lesghis in the north-east Caucasus, and by Azeri Turks and Tats in the Shirvan area. These peoples were primarily Muslim.

Austin gave a brief overview of the political and ethnic history of the region: Mongol and Tartar tribes had invaded in the 13th century. Persia and Turkey were the major influences in the 16th and 17th centuries. The start of the 18th century was marked by increasing Russian influence that expanded with additional conquests in the 19th century.

There is little documentation of indigenous Caucasian weaving before the early 17th century. At that time, Shah Abbas established workshops in Karabagh (Shusha) and Shirvan (Shemakha). The characteristics of weavings of this period are quite different from the Caucasian weaving of the mid-19th century onward. These earlier carpets have depressed warps, cabling of wefts, and a stiff handle—more like NW Persian rugs—compared to the later, floppy commercial Caucasian production. The formats also differed, with the earlier rugs typically larger and of narrower proportions.

Of the major design groups, Austin focused first on dragon and animal carpets. According to Austin, the design originated as a provincial version of the Safavid vase and animal carpets from Kashan and Kerman. The

design evolved in several phases. The first phase represented the most complete rendition of the design. In an example from the Textile Museum in Washington, blue and yellow jagged-edged leaves formed a lattice on the red background, with angular, s-shaped dragons and naturalistic palmettes within the lattice. The main field was bounded by a narrow, ivory main border. Austin’s second example was a carpet attributed by Schurmann to Daghestan or Kuba. This piece had a red background, a lattice formed by yellow and green leaves, and an abundance of ornaments and more naturalistic flowers. There were dragon forms in the lower half of the carpet and animals in the upper half. Structurally, this piece was more tightly woven than the preceding one. Austin’s third choice from this group was the Toms Dragon rug, with a yellow background in the main field, and a wider red main border with different forms. This rug was even more finely woven, on a cotton foundation. The final selection from this design family was a smaller-scale animal carpet, with a central medallion, simplified leaves and forms, and a main border consisting of flowers and vines [1].

Austin illustrated a pair of Persian vase carpets, indicating some of their potential design influences upon the dragon rugs, and also leading into the development of a Caucasian vase carpet-based design. In the Caucasian rendition, the palmettes, lanceate leaves, and in some examples pinwheel rosettes, were the main design elements.

Austin’s next design selection was the shield rug group. Shield rug production was attributed to Shirvan, starting in the late 17th and early 18th century. They were much more finely woven than dragon rugs, and usually had a silk foundation. The design is believed to have originated from Persian and Turkish textile patterns going back to the 14th century. Interestingly, one of the

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popular border designs in a particular subgroup of shield rugs is also seen on Tekke carpets and asmalyks. As Tekke people were known to reside in Shirvan starting in the early 18th century, some design crossover seems likely.

Austin turned next to a design he labeled “ascending palmettes.” Earliest versions from the 17th and 18th centuries had large, tulip-like palmettes within a leaf lattice [2]. Over time, the size of the individual flowers diminished, evolving into many recognizable 19th century Caucasian rug designs, with repeated flowers or shrubs, some with diagonal lattices and others without.

The Harshang and Karagashli rug designs derived from more floral Persian Herat and Shah Abbas carpets. Over time, the floral elements were simplified in the Caucasian renditions, the number of elements decreased, and early borders were replaced with ones found on other Caucasian carpets, such as the leaf and calyx border. The Afshan design followed a similar evolution, from more curvilinear flower forms in weavings from Mughal India and Khorassan, to a simplified and more angular treatment in 19th century Caucasian versions.

Austin linked the Alpan design to 17th and 18th century Caucasian silk embroideries, and showed an example from the Burns collection. He commented that, in turn, the design may have come from Islamic unglazed tile patterns from as far away as Spain.

Caucasian garden design rugs stemmed from 18th century NW Persian garden carpets, which had themselves been adapted from Central Persian models. Austin stated that designs such as the latticed Shirvan and Daghestan prayer rugs may have derived from these garden carpets. He also noted that some of the designs with large numbers of repeats may have come from other finer textiles such as brocades.

Austin noted Turkish influences, saying that they were strongest in the southwest Caucasus, but did extend even to some eastern Caucasian weavings. He showed an example of a Turkish “Bellini” carpet and another large-pattern Holbein carpet, followed in each case by later Caucasian examples that drew from these designs. He also noted that medallion designs were more

common in Turkey and in Persia than in the Caucasus, but that there were a few Caucasian rugs whose medallion designs drew from such predecessors to the west and south.

Austin felt that Safavid embroideries and ceramic tiles influenced the designs of Caucasian embroideries, and that the latter were the source of certain designs later rendered in pile. For examples, he selected a couple of Caucasian embroideries from the 17th and 18th centuries, and then followed them up with Shirvan and Kuba pile carpets using similar lobed medallions and sickle leaves [3, 4]. He later spoke about the Kasim Ushag design, and how that, too, may have sprung from Caucasian embroideries, with its use of lobed medallions, central pinwheel figures, and narrow borders. Choosing another well-known Caucasian design labeled “Bidjov,” Austin described how the vertically stacked palmettes with leaf forms trace their heritage to dragon and animal rugs, and to shield group carpets as well.

Austin finished his presentation with a few conclusions. First, East Caucasian rug designs seem to come from Turkey, Persia, and other parts of the Islamic world. Second, the designs were initially used in court patronized and established weaving centers. Third, while the designs were already provincial versions of more sophisticated Persian carpet designs, a significant amount of further design degeneracy occurred even early on. Finally, East Caucasian rugs incorporate motifs that were used earlier in Caucasian embroideries.

At the same time, Austin posed a few questions that were prompted by the study of East Caucasian carpet design. He wondered whether some of the rugs depicted in older paintings and attributed to Turkey might, in fact, have come from Caucasian weavers. And, more recently, where was the market for Caucasian weavings from the 17th to the early 19th century? If embroideries and soumaks are the real indigenous weavings for the Caucasus in this period, does their design follow from some older local art, or were they based on designs found in the international Islamic world? And if carpet weaving came later to the Caucasus than to Persia and Turkey, how did Caucasian weavers become so skilled in weaving and in dyeing, in a relatively

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September Meeting

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short period of time?

After his formal talk, Austin displayed a number of Caucasian carpets from his collection that he had brought with him. The pieces illustrated some of his points, although the rugs were generally from the second half of the 19th century, and therefore further removed from the 18th and early 19th century that had provided the majority of examples he had spoken about in his presentation. Austin's examples included Kuba, Shirvan, and Daghestan carpets. NERS members had also brought in a few Caucasian rugs, including a Chelaberd design, a Kuba, a Perepedil prayer rug, and probably the oldest, a long rug with an Afshan or palmette design dated 1239 (Christian era 1823).

Our thanks go to Austin Doyle for taking these

Caucasian rug designs that many of us have become familiar with over the years and exploring their roots.



[1] Animal carpet, 17th c.
possibly Kuba

[2] Ascending palmette carpet,
17th c.

Top: [3] Azerbaijan embroidery, 17th c.
Bottom: [4] Kuba rug, first half 19th c.

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Ex-President Mark Hopkins's Report, part 2

Remembrances, Reflections and Ruminations of a Retired Ruggie

Continued from the last issue.

During those early years, my own collecting was slowly taking shape. I bought and read all the books I could, got to know more and more dealers and collectors, and even did some traveling—most memorably three separate trips to Turkey with my ever-supportive wife Margie. Rewarding friendships evolved, and my confidence grew that I quite possibly was beginning to know what I was doing.

In the late eighties I came to the conclusion that Baluch pile weavings would be my primary collecting target. A New Age guru once informed me that I was an “autumn colors person,” which aside from its otherwise incomprehensible ramifications meant that I liked reds, browns, and yellows, which was true. Besides, I could, if just barely, afford the price of a really good Baluch, something quite beyond my means when it came to the Caucasian and Anatolian rugs to which I was also drawn. There were also Turkmens, but they were too blood red and bloody boring for my autumn tastes.

There were many nice moments. One time I rushed into a Skinner auction preview at the last minute and, not being able to stay for the sale, left a cautious bid on an incredibly filthy Baluch bagface that I suspected might have potential under the grime. NERS member Alan Varteresian, it turned out, bought the piece, and when he learned that I had been an underbidder, he phoned me and said, “Mark, you’re the Baluch guy. This should be yours and you can have it for what I paid for it.” Taking up Alan’s unbelievably generous offer, I threw the piece in the tub, and what emerged from the mud two days later was one of the prettiest Baluch pieces I have ever owned. The provocative New Jersey dealer Ronnie Newman, not one to apply superlatives to the collections of others, later proclaimed it the best Baluch he’d seen in years. Thank you, Alan!

Try as I might, though, I couldn’t resist playing my hand outside the Baluch circle. Especially when it came to spectacular East Anatolian Kurdish carpets, my resolve sometimes caved in, usually quickly followed by my bank balance.

Perhaps the most memorable of the Turkish rugs I

owned was one I encountered in 1988 when, accompanied by the ever-patient Margie, I sat in a little shop near Istanbul’s grand bazaar watching them turn over rug after rug and continually asking, “Nice, but don’t you have anything older?” Near the end of the second day, after endless cups of apple tea and much thumb-twiddling while killing time waiting for the rug crew to return from their hourly Ramadan prayers, I witnessed the most amazing rug being unrolled before me. The deal was quickly consummated, and as we returned to the hotel with the prize, Margie said, “You know, I was watching your face when they rolled out that rug.” “So...?” I said. “So,” she said, “don’t ever play poker.”

When we returned to Boston, I made it a point to visit local dealer Salman Khan, the then-NERS member who had put us in touch with the Istanbul seller. I expected one of two reactions from Salman: either “Wow, what a fantastic find!!” or “Oh my god, look who finally bought the Istanbul dog!!”....and I was curious as to which I’d get. Unexpectedly, it was a third and totally unanticipated response. Salman looked once at the rug and began a violent tirade in Urdu, the translation of which I suspected I did not want to know. It turned out that a month earlier he had seen the rug in Istanbul and had been offered it at a price more than three times what I paid for it. In this case, Woody Allen was wrong: just showing up wasn’t 80% of success, it was 100%.

That rug, if you’re familiar with the NERS-sponsored 1992 exhibition catalog “*Through the Collector’s Eye*,” is the one that graces the book’s cover.

Much of the joy of collecting, as I look back, came as much from the people as from the rugs. Getting to know the many collectors, scholars, and dealers that we imported as NERS speakers was intensely rewarding. And then there was the challenge of collecting rug books and finding the time to read them. There were so many aspects to the learning process: the esthetics of rugs; their history; their chemistry; their care and feeding. It was a constant learning process.

Other various cherished memories come to mind from years past. Among them:

— Getting to know the delightful European dealer
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Ex-President's Report

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Ulrich Schurmann, author of the seminal 1964 book *Caucasian Rugs*, at a Textile Museum conference in Washington and relishing in the unbridled enthusiasm that sustained him, at age 85, as one of the rug world's unabashed advocates.

— Perusing the Chris Alexander exhibition of Anatolian carpets at the 1990 ICOC conference (DeYoung Museum, San Francisco) with iconic rug scholar Charles Grant Ellis. The pieces were bizarrely lit with spotlights focused on single design features, but Charlie, who wisely came equipped with a flashlight, persisted in dismissing my every praise of 19th century features by instructing me that very little of interest ever happened in oriental rugs after the 18th century.

— Sharing with German-born Harald Böhmer, founder of the wonderful DOBAG project in Turkey, that, as 12-year-olds, while he was huddled in Hamburg in 1944 in dread of American bombs, I was huddled in Boston's far safer suburbs dreading an attack from the Luftwaffe. We both survived.

— Maintaining a long letterwriting correspondence with author/dealer James Opie on whatever was to be talked about in oriental rugs. Jim is a most accomplished writer, and our back-and-forths covered everything from whether or not a Kurd will ever ascend to the U.S. White House to whether so-called latchhook design elements are really ivy tendrils or animal heads. Jim says the latter. I don't think so.

Then the ACOR conferences started, and that opened up a whole new avenue of involvement. At the first ACOR, a quiet affair for 140 attendees at Boston's Colonnade Hotel in January of 1992, I served as speaker and carpenter. For ACOR 2 in Chicago two years later, I was the PR guy. After that I was honored with an invitation to join the board of directors, where I served for the next six conferences. The culmination for me personally was ACOR 8 in Boston, deemed by so many as the best ACOR ever. Unfortunately, it was probably also the last.

Even if that should be, what a grand finale it was for the great ACOR tradition of unfettered appreciation of antique rugs and textiles. Over 450 pieces were on

display in 12 exhibitions, every last one of them from collections belonging to New England Rug Society members. The work hours that NERS volunteers generously contributed to bring that conference to fruition were never totaled, but the memory of its great success is reward enough.

One of my favorite memories from past ACOR conferences happened when I was giving one of my *Good Rug?/Great Rug?* presentations and Heinrich Kirchheim was one of my four panelists. Heinrich, unfortunately now departed, was a most imposing figure, a larger-than-life German industrialist who over a short period of time had amassed a remarkable, world-class collection of very early Anatolian carpets. Right in the middle of the presentation Heinrich swung around to me and demanded in his thick German accent, "Vy don't you include more old Turkish rugs?" To which I replied, unrehearsed: "Because you own them all." The audience broke up, and Heinrich glowed.

It was the slow decline of the antique oriental rug business, clearly apparent to collectors, dealers, and conference planners as the 21st century began, that prompted me to contemplate wherein lay the future of my collecting. The markets were slowing, new stuff wasn't appearing as it once did, dealer ranks were dwindling, and the looming prospect of my reaching age 75 made me wonder what Margie would do with my 300+ pounds of illiquid wool should anything unforeseen happen to me. In fact, I knew quite well what she'd face. And it wasn't something I wanted to burden her with.

So deaccessioning was an easy decision, really. Over 100 pieces were hanging on our walls, draped on our chairs, crammed onto our floors, and stuffed into closets, and they had to go. The Anatolian rugs went to a dealer friend in Istanbul, with the timing being just right because the upcoming ICOC conference there was looming. My Lakai embroideries were snapped up by an American collector/dealer. That left my Baluches, about 40 pieces that I considered the heart of my collection. What to do about them?, I wondered.

Fate wasn't long in providing an answer. Out of the blue one day came a call from a chap who intro-

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Ex-President's Report

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duced himself as a Baluch collector who would love to see my collection. Always delighted to share, but cautious as well, I checked him out, confirmed his reputation as a good one, and invited him to visit.

After perusing the whole collection at my house, during which he demonstrated a very astute eye for quality, we sat down for a beer. "Now," he said, "you know the ones I really liked. If you ever decide to sell one or more I hope you'll give me first crack."

Just on a lark, without a modicum of planning, I replied, "How about the whole collection?"

"Hmmm," he said. "What would you want for it?"

I replied, "Well, the insured value is \$ _____."

He pondered for a minute, nodded, and said, "Yes, I could do that."

And that, without any prior intention on either of our parts, was how it happened. Five days later, he packed the whole collection in his SUV trunk, I held a certified check in my hand, and Margie had every closet in the house all to herself again. All I had left were a few favorite old rugs on the floor and the satisfaction of closing a wonderful chapter in my life that has left me fairly rewarded and richly fulfilled.

I want to depart the bridge of the rug society leaving two messages in my wake. First, don't get discouraged by the apparent paucity of opportunities in the oriental rug market today. The absolute top stuff is going at astronomical prices to people with, far as I can see,

much more money than sense. But real gems are occasionally still bubbling to the surface, more often than not making their reappearance from prior days. And don't discount the opportunities posed by other kinds of textiles. The esthetic principles that separate good from bad in oriental rugs apply just as well to other fields, and there are still wonderful opportunities for collectors willing to venture off into the side roads and try something new. There's good stuff out there. Go get it.

And secondly, please do what you can to keep the rug society sound and vibrant. Membership is down, reflecting several forces. New collectors (read: younger members) aren't forthcoming in significant numbers. Interest in the field is waning in parallel with the drying up of both sources and goods. Which is all the more reason to keep this wonder field alive and prospering. Do what you can to bring in new members, especially those totally unaware of the joys of collecting and of immersing oneself in the broad field of ethnographic textiles. And keep supporting the society itself. It's a great little organization, and we're lucky to have all of you as members.

No goodbyes here; I'll still be around. See you all at the next meeting.

Mark

NERS Notes

We welcome the following new members: *Cheryl Clark, Caroline Kunin, Richard Larkin & Martha Brooks, David Lawson, Lauren Whitley*. We also welcome back former members who have returned to the fold: *Wayne Barron, Lawrence Kearney*.

Please note **changes to our meetings schedule**: John Gillow, the announced February speaker, had to cancel. In his place, new member and MFA curator Lauren Whitley will host us for a visit to the MFA's textile and carpet treasures. See page 11; full details to follow in next issue. Also, the picnic date has changed to May 21.

What in the World Is This?

At our Town "dump," my wife Susan spotted the tapa (mulberry bark cloth) hip wrap-around pictured on the right. It is about 9 feet long, 2 feet wide (one size fits all!). It probably comes from the Oro Province in New Guinea.

Lloyd Kannenberg





Janet Smith, Our Unofficial Historian and Librarian

By Ann Nicholas

After eighteen years of faithfully distributing NERS newsletters and name badges, Janet Smith is transferring these duties to other Steering Committee members. Today most of the newsletters are emailed, but in the past all of them—more than a hundred each time the newsletter came out—had to be printed, labeled, and mailed. It was a very big job! In addition, at every meeting Janet arrived with the name tags current and in order. “Alphabetizing, cataloging, and organizing, it’s all easy for a retired librarian,” she explained.

Recently I visited her. We had a lovely lunch as she reminisced about her life, family, and carpets. In nearly every room of her home are oriental rugs, most of them passed down from family members. “In the 1970s Bud, my late husband, and I received a number of rugs from his parents. I enjoyed the colors and designs and wanted to know more about them. I attended several lectures and courses that Arthur Gregorian held at his shop in Newton. It was fun, but I wasn’t very serious about rugs.”

Janet grew up near Rutland, Vermont, where her father was in the marble business. “We had a big house with a very large Bijar in the living room and a few smaller carpets. In 1948 I married Bud Smith, the son of my mother’s college roommate. We first met when we were five and six, but when we were in college, our parents tried to play matchmaker. It took six years, but finally our parents prevailed. Bud and I loved to hike. We climbed six mountains in seven days in New Hampshire on our honeymoon.”

Janet’s sister came to Boston in 1992 to attend the first ACOR, and Janet went with her to Providence to see the NERS exhibition *Through the Collector’s Eye*. There Janet met several NERS members and soon joined the group. “A few years later Bud and I took a tour with George O’ Bannon to Central Asia. It was a great experience! George’s death was a great loss to the rug world.”

As we walked through her home, Janet pointed out rugs, marble tabletops, photographs, and other family pieces. “Most of what you see in this house was given to us by our families. Bud and I really bought very little, but since joining NERS I have bought a few rugs which

I especially enjoy.” Many objects had stories: rugs from Bud’s parents and her family, Afghan war rugs from her nephew in the Foreign Service, a rug she and Bud bought in Bukhara on the George O’ Bannon trip, a sinuous hooked rug her mother made while grieving for Janet’s brother who died in the Second World War, and many photographs of her four sons and ten grandchildren. Janet is her family’s librarian, collecting and cataloging its stories.

Janet has also carefully kept a copy of every NERS newsletter. “I recently compiled a list of all our speakers. In looking over the old newsletters, I realized what a wonderful job Jim Adelson does in writing up our programs. I enjoyed rereading his reviews and remembering the talks.” Over the last eighteen years, then, Janet has done much more than just mail out the newsletters and manage the name tags; she has also been the unofficial NERS librarian and historian. We truly appreciate all her work and look forward to seeing her at many more meetings.



Janet Smith with an East Caucasian “Lesghi star” rug that she bought



October Meeting: Mae Festa's First Forty Years of Collecting Narrated by Jeff Spurr, and reviewed by Jim Adelson

Numbers in brackets refer to illustrations on pages 11 and 12.

On October 8th, longtime NERS member and collector Mae Festa was kind enough to share many of her textile treasures with the group. Mae had done a similar presentation earlier at The Textile Museum with Wendel Swan speaking about the pieces, but due to Wendel's health issues, Jeff Spurr narrated at our meeting. Jeff added greatly to the presentation, and we were very fortunate to have Jeff's extensive knowledge to enhance the joy of the pieces themselves. For those unable to attend the meeting, a catalog has just been published, providing a great way to see and appreciate the collection.

Mae is of Greek ancestry, and grew up in Manhattan. Her interest in textile arts really began to flourish when she and her husband, Gene, lived in Athens in the 1960s, and there she began her textile collecting. Returning to New York, Mae worked professionally as an interior designer for the noted architectural firm of Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates, and this provided her with the opportunity to add textiles to contemporary interiors. Her constant focus on textile types and traditions, and her access to many leading textile dealers, gave Mae the chance to develop and satisfy her broad collecting appetite.

Before focusing on any one piece, what is really striking is the unbelievable breadth and variety of the items in Mae's collection. The spectrum of cultures, the items' functions, underlying design ideas, and techniques are mind-boggling. Even the age range of the selected pieces—from circa 200 BC up to mid-20th century—gives some idea of the variety within the collection. Jeff presented approximately 50 pieces from Mae's collection; for this summary of the talk, we will focus on a smaller subset of about a dozen.

Jeff started talking about the piece created closest to Mae's current home in Connecticut. This was an early 19th century Iroquois belt, with a red velvet strip mounted on leather, and beaded deer, birds, trees, and other plants upon the velvet. Jeff indicated how this particular belt was quite different from most Iroquois works of its time, and likely drew on the Iroquois' con-

tact with English settlers in the choices of materials, technique, and subject matter.

Among several pre-Columbian pieces, Mae had a striking Huari ceremonial chest cloth [1], with an inner rectangle in yellow, edged in red-orange, and surrounded by brilliant green. The piece was constructed of parrot and macaw feathers, attached to a backing of cotton and camellid fibers. Jeff explained that, in addition to their vivid colors, such feathers were status indicators in ceremonial cloths, because they were known to be costly and also had to be transported long distances.

While the Huari piece was one of Mae's older ones—more than a thousand years old—she demonstrated that age was not a requirement with a panel from a mid-20th century underskirt, created by the Bushong ethnic group within the Kuba Kingdom in South-Central Congo. Such pieces were constructed by starting with a plain-color backing of raffia palm fiber made by men. The woman who was to wear the underskirt, perhaps assisted by other female relatives, would embroider and appliqué a dense mesh of linear designs.

Mae collected a number of European textiles; a particularly interesting one was an early 18th century English crewel mending bag [2]. The bag featured wool embroidery with silk accents on a cotton and twill cloth. The design drew from Indian textiles that were popular at the time—Indian chintz pampalores (bed covers) and Gujarat embroideries. On the crewel bag, the weaver depicted some exotic animals in the main field, including a camel, an elephant, and even a pair of dodo birds (already extinct by that time), along with a more familiar fox. By contrast, the border of the piece features more local imagery, with what appears to be a rooster and a couple of other birds along with flowers including a Tudor rose.

Mae's collection included several Greek examples, perhaps reflecting an interest from her own heritage or from her earliest collecting venue in Athens. One notable example was an 18th century bed curtain fragment from the island of Naxos. The piece was created with silk embroidery on natural linen. To the eye, the design appears to feature two distinct red hues, but Jeff pointed

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October Meeting

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out that the embroiderer achieved this effect using a single color of silk by stitching in different directions, so that the light is reflected differently giving the impression of two colors from one.

Turning to the Middle Eastern areas with whose weaving NERS members are likely most familiar, Mae's selections were still somewhat unusual, including Kaitag embroideries, a central (Yazd) Persian velvet ikat, a very distinctive Kurd pile bagface, and a Kirghiz appliqué pouch. A couple of the items chosen for further description here include an unusual late 19th century Ersari bagface [3] with a single large flower as the main field design element. This weaving was one of the few pile pieces in Mae's collection, and the drawing was not as detailed and precise as on many of Mae's other items, but had the rich color palette of this type of Ersari weaving, with abundant deep blue and blue-green. Mae also had a special fondness for Central Asian velvet ikats from the Bukhara region dating from the second half of the 19th century, with several outstanding fragments in her collection. Jeff recounted some of the key aspects of velvet ikat production, describing the repeated tying and dye baths necessary to yield the brilliant colors, and then the complex weaving and cutting process to create velvet ikats.

Continuing to move farther east, another outstanding example from Mae's collection was a 19th century rumal [4] from the Chamba Valley in northern India. Rumal are square covers for gifts, offerings, or images of deities. This particular example featured silk embroidery in many colors on a white cotton background. Beautifully colored and realistically drawn peacocks and other birds adorned the rumal, along with many flowers.

Compared with the multi-colored rumal, the next selected item, a tie-dyed late 19th or early 20th century shawl possibly from Northeast India, was on the other end of the color spectrum. Large, circular off-white medallions stand off from the solid blue background. Mae had acquired this piece in Nepal.

The next selected item was perhaps the most curious in appearance, looking at first glance to this writer like a small, hairy five-legged stool [5]. Jeff explained that this was a rain hat from Bhutan made of felted yak

hair. The five "legs" served to drain the water off the wearer's head.

Mae's collection contains several examples from the ethnic Miao group from China. One notable piece was a late 19th century sleeve fragment, with fine silk embroidered designs on a plain-weave background [6]. The design vocabulary included several motifs, starting with large butterfly figures; Jeff commented that Miao mythology features a butterfly goddess. Other prominent design elements included birds and swastikas. The designs were rendered in just three fundamental colors—red, blue, and white—but with sufficient variation to give the piece a rich, polychromatic appearance.

Of course, it doesn't take a multiplicity of colors to yield a spectacular textile. Mae's collection included a late 19th century Tibetan Buddhist monk's cape, rendered almost completely in brilliant yellow silk damask, with only a single, small panel presenting any other visible colors. The piece was constructed of 24 strips, joined with flaps that contributed even more to the way that the cape projected its color in the light. The multi-colored panel had a curious compound design, with elements of a lotus flower and three balls similar to the cintamani design. Jeff indicated that this certainly would have been the garment of a high-ranking lama.

The last piece selected here was a tampan (wedding gift cover) from the Lampung District of Sumatra [7]. The piece was constructed with designs formed by cotton supplementary wefts on a red ground. The motifs included a big ship, a large dragon form, two horses with riders, and a number of additional elements that had been stylized to the point where they were difficult to recognize.

We owe a lot to Mae for her vision and perseverance in collecting such an extensive and diverse group of weavings, and for her generosity in presenting them to NERS and elsewhere. Many of these pieces represent genres that have not been seen at previous NERS sessions. Those interested may want to get the just-published catalog of Mae's collection. And we also want to thank Jeff for the tremendous amount of information he brought to the presentation, so that we could all get the most out of it.

See illustrations on page 11 and 12.



Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2010/11 Meetings:

Feb. 4: Please note change of program! Museum of Fine Arts textile curator Lauren Whitley will lead a tour of the textiles in twenty galleries of the newly opened American Wing of the museum. She will show us pre-conquest Andean textiles, Navajo blankets, colonial Boston needlework, nineteenth-century quilts, and modernist furnishing fabrics. In addition, she will discuss the four important Caucasian rugs already on view in the upper colonnade area of the museum. Check the next newsletter for details of time, meeting place within the museum, and parking.

Mar 11: Richard Laursen on *Analysis of dyes in historical textiles: a consideration of some 19th century Uzbek suzani*s

Apr 15: Gary Lind-Sinanian on *Caspar Pilobosian's collection of Caucasian rugs* (ALMA, Watertown)

May 21: Picnic and Show & Tell (Gore Place, Waltham).

Auctions (major carpet sales in bold):

Skinner, Boston, 10/23

Grogan, Dedham, 10/24

Sotheby's, New York, 12/10.

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Carpets on view at the MFA: The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, is now exhibiting four important classical

carpets from the Caucasus. Displayed in the upper colonnade area of the museum, all four carpets will be on view through April 2011. **See Feb. 4 meeting details for NERS visit to the museum!**

Small weavings of South Persian nomads: On-line exhibition on the NERS website, consisting of the pieces from the Ann Nicholas & Rich Blumenthal collection shown at ACOR 8, Boston, 2006. Go to www.ne-rugsociety.org and click on *Gallery*.

Conferences:

Volkmanntreffen 2010, Berlin, 10/22-24. Commemorates the centenary of the *Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art* exhibition in Munich, "the greatest ever exhibition of historical Islamic carpets." For information visit www.volkmanntreffen.de.

ICOC 12, Stockholm, 6/16-19/2011. For information visit www.icoc2011stockholm.se. There will be pre and post-conference tours to Copenhagen and St. Petersburg, respectively.



October meeting illustration:

[2] English crewel mending bag (detail)

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 290393, Charlestown, MA 02129**, calling Jim Sampson at 508-429-5512, or emailing him at jahome22@gmail.com.

NERS 2010/11 Steering Committee:

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Jim Sampson

Jeff Spurr



October Meeting Illustrations



Left, top to bottom:
[1] Huari chest cloth
[4] Chamba Valley (India) rumal (cover cloth, detail)
[7] Lampung (Sumatra) tampan (gift cover)

Above: [3] Ersari bagface

Right, top to bottom:
[5] Bhutan rain hat
[6] Miao sleeve fragment



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