



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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www.ne-rugsociety.org

April Meeting: Gary Lind-Sinianian on “Caucasian Rugs from the Pilibosian Collection”

Our next meeting will be held at **7:30 on Friday, April 15, at the Armenian Library and Museum (ALMA) in Watertown.** ALMA curator and NERS member Gary Lind-Sinianian will give a talk on Armenian and Caucasian rugs and lead a tour of a recently opened exhibition at ALMA which showcases 25 carpets from the collection of a local merchant and collector, Kaspar Pilibosian.

The New England Rug Society is proud to have contributed to this exhibition through a grant which funded two textile interns for ALMA: Rebecca Schaffer of Tufts University and Caroline Ly from Paris, France, who assisted ALMA’s textile staff in preparing the rugs for this exhibition.



Karabagh rug from the collection of Kaspar Pilibosian

April Meeting Details

Date: Friday, April 15

Time: 7:30PM

Place: Armenian Library and 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!

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

See meeting details on page 8.

The picnic will be held on **Saturday, May 21**, 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 forgo wine and beer due to 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).

Editor wanted! See page 5



February Meeting: Lauren Whitley at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Reviewed by Jim Adelson

On February 4th, NERS members and guests got to savor the new American Wing at the Museum of Fine Arts, and the expanded textile display made possible by the new gallery space. Lauren Whitley, curator of the Textile and Fashion Arts Department, was our welcoming guide, helping us to enjoy both the new architecture and the textiles.

Lauren explained that the American Wing provides 53 new galleries, making it possible to exhibit a larger number (though still a tiny fraction) of the MFA's 45,000+ textiles in the collection. She told attendees to expect more pieces to be put on view on a rotating basis.

Lauren started the tour with a fantastic complete pre-Columbian Paracas mantle, with many figures executed in stem-stitch embroidery. She dated the textile to approximately 100 AD. Nearby were other pre-Columbian pieces from the Wari culture, including a four-cornered cap, a headband, and a hair-braid cap made with wrapped human hair. The display also included a Wari resist-dyed tunic. Lauren commented that the Wari chose deliberately difficult techniques for some of their weaving, as the weavers' skills were highly esteemed in the culture.

The lower-level galleries featured a number of North American Indian items. A Lakota shirt used bead, human hair, and other exotic materials for decoration. A Great Lakes Pelerine (small cape with wide shoulders) had a design executed with elaborate featherwork. A pentagonal Chilkat blanket from the Pacific Northwest was also on display. There were also several Navajo blankets.

Heading upstairs, a brief pause in another gallery revealed a different medium for textile exposure—paintings. A 1925 oil painting of a domestic interior included a Caucasian Talish long rug.

Of course, the MFA's textile collection is much more diverse than even the pieces we broadly associate with tribal and weaving cultures. That was illustrated by the next examples. From the fashion arts field, Lauren pointed out a pageant costume, worn by Amy Rotch Sargent. Then, Lauren highlighted a pictorial quilt Harriet Powers, a freed slave, created in the late 1890s. The

quilt comprised 15 square blocks with many different biblical compositions, including Jonah and the whale, the Crucifixion, and the creation of the animals. Many of the quilt's blocks also included themes from folk life and local legends, such as a famous hog. Powers fashioned the quilt from very simple materials—humble cottons.

Another gallery presented textiles in a different setting—furniture and home decoration. There was a Gothic revival chair with a needlework cover, and a block-printed cotton velvet designed by Ruth Reeves in 1930 for the upscale furniture company W. & J. Sloane.

While all of the galleries we visited had been fairly crowded, our final area was jammed with people, all attending the MFA's "First Friday" social event. In this area hung the highlights from a traditional oriental rug perspective—four 17th and 18th century Caucasian carpets. Julia Bailey offered comments about these four rugs, but the remarks were virtually impossible to hear amidst the throng in this area.

The first of the four carpets was a so-called dragon carpet, circa 1700. The dragon design is believed to have originated in China, and reached the Caucasus via Iran. The degree of stylization of the dragon form var-

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"Sickle-leaf" carpet



February Meeting

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ies. The second carpet was a so-called sunburst carpet from the late 17th or early 18th century. The central motif that characterizes this design evolved into the main design element later seen in those rugs called “Eagle Kazaks.”

The third carpet, possibly from Northwest Persia rather than the Caucasus, had a sickle-leaf motif with many other leaves and blossoms filling the central field and a very elaborate reciprocal trefoil border. The final piece on display was the Gohar carpet, so-named because a very unusual inscription on the rug actually identifies the weaver, Gohar, and includes a date that trans-

lates to 1699-1700. These carpets will continue on display until June, so rug enthusiasts should certainly look for them.

After leading the tour, Lauren escorted the group to a reception and snacks in the offices of the Textile and Fashion Arts Department. Our thanks to her for the chance to enjoy the new spaces and to see some of these stellar examples from the MFA’s collection. We are all looking forward to the opportunity to see more such textile displays. And our thanks to Julia and many others who fought their way through snow and traffic-clogged Boston and surrounding towns to attend the event.



Top:

Block with crucifixion scene from Harriet Powers quilt, 1895-8

Peruvian tapestry, 1575-1625

Ensemble by Arnold Scaasi, worn by Barbra Streisand, 1969

Bottom:

“Dragon” carpet

“Sunburst” carpet

The “Gohar” carpet



March Meeting: Richard Laursen on “Color and Age: What Can Dye Analysis Tell Us About Uzbek Suzanis?”

Reviewed by Jim Adelson

On March 11th, retired BU chemistry professor Richard Laursen spoke to us about dye analysis, focusing specifically on Uzbek suzani. The meeting took place in a new venue at the UNA Senior Living Community in Somerville.

Richard started with the comment “I feel like I’m a bit of a fraud, because I’m not a rug collector, or a suzani collector.” He went on to explain that in 2004 he had gone to Xinjiang, China and seen the ca. 3000 year old mummies there, buried with striking textiles. The bright colors in the textiles have been well preserved in the extremely dry and salty conditions of the Takla Makan desert, and Richard wondered what the dye stuffs were, particularly the yellow.

Richard stepped back to give us a brief introduction to dye analysis. There are two primary techniques: The first operates by shining a light on the textile, and analyzing the resulting spectrum. The second requires taking a sample and performing tests upon it. The second technique has the drawback that it is “destructive,” in the sense that material must be removed, but this approach gives better separation of the dye components and of their spectra. It also has the advantage that the analysis can be performed remotely, rather than having

to bring the analytic equipment and the textile to the same place.

Richard turned to his results. He explained that the Russians had taken over much of Uzbekistan in the decade ending in 1875, and introduced synthetic dyes soon thereafter. Dye analysis of a suzani from the museum in Samarkand pinpointed pagoda tree buds as the source of the piece’s yellow dyes, cochineal (an insect dye) for the red, and a combination of pagoda tree buds and madder for the orange. Richard commented that yellow is interesting because it tends to come from local plants. All green plants contain flavonoids, which produce yellows. On the other hand, yellow dyes can potentially fade—this disadvantage is shared by both the natural and synthetic materials used for this color.

When Richard wanted to get a sample for analysis at the Tashkent Museum of Applied Art, he cringed as the Museum Director snipped out samples with a huge pair of scissors. Richard noted “a conservator in the West would just die.” The first Tashkent example contained primarily synthetic dyes. Another Tashkent example also had synthetic dyes, with purples that were similar to fuchsine. A Lakai embroidery from the same

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Pagoda tree buds
+ madder

Cochineal

Pagoda tree buds

Naturally-colored
suzani from
Samarkand Museum of
Fine Arts, showing
yellow, orange, and
red dyes



March Meeting

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museum also contained synthetic dyes, including metanil yellow.

Among his other examples, Richard mentioned a suzani from the Feraghana Valley, currently in a German collection. This piece contained natural dyes, including cochineal for the red. An Ottoman embroidery used madder for its reddish tones.

Richard concluded his talk with a summary of what we can say about the age of a rug based upon its dye materials. If a piece has only natural dyes, it could be antique, or a modern replica or fake. If a piece has a mixture of natural and synthetic dyes, it could be from

the period 1860 – 1920 as synthetic dyes were gradually being adopted, or it could be an older piece repaired with more recent materials. A piece with only synthetic dyes is modern—probably 20th century.

Our thanks to Richard for sharing his expertise and the results of his research.

Reaction to the new location in Somerville was positive; our long-time Lincoln venue is nice but a little expensive, while we have free use of the Somerville spot! We ask those who attended the meeting to send any comments on the place to Ann Nicholas (annierich@att.net).

What in the World Is This?

Any Turkomaniacs worth their salt will immediately recognize the piece depicted here as a Tekke “animal tree” asmalyk (decoration for a bridal camel’s flank). It is an old, rare, highly prized, and highly priced weaving. What was it doing in a San Diego dumpster? But that is exactly where a mother-and-daughter team found it. They thought it was probably a machine-made piece of junk, and considered discarding it. But some research on the internet (where else?) revealed a similar piece that had sold for big bucks, so the daughter brought it to the Antiques Road Show, where NERS member Peter Pap recognized it for what it was, and appraised it for \$100,000-150,000. The lady’s reaction? “Now we can send our children to college.” It is rumored that the piece has since been sold for a considerable sum.

The full appraisal and a follow-up interview can be watched at www.pbs.org by searching for “tekke asmalyk.”



Note from the Editor

After fifteen mostly pleasurable years of editing *View from the Fringe*, I now find myself procrastinating more and more whenever I have to start working on the next issue. My conclusion is that it is time to resign from the job, so this is my last issue. **If anyone who is reading these words wishes to take over my duties, please contact me ASAP!** Some experience in editing text and pictures on the computer would be helpful, and I will be more than willing to assist my successor in learning the ropes. I am also willing to continue taking and editing pictures of our annual show-and-tell, as well as on other suitable occasions.

A bit of history: after co-founding our Society, then

known as the New Boston Rug Society, Rosalie Rudnick started issuing one- or two-page newsletters detailing the speaker and topic of each meeting. In 1993 it was decided that a more elaborate newsletter would be desirable, and Jim Adelson undertook to edit it. He coined its name and established a format that has served, with minor modifications, to the present day. However, after three years, he decided that the press of a full-time job and growing family left him little time to devote to the editorial work, at which time I took over. Being retired and having had editing experience in my previous computer-related job were my main qualifications.

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Note from the Editor: New Editor Wanted!

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I will conclude with expressions of thanks to the many NERSers who have helped me over the years. First and foremost Jim Adelson, who continued serving the newsletter as chief reporter at our meetings; his detailed reviews have been much admired by our readers, and are often cited as our newsletter's main attraction. He has managed to take elaborate notes under less than ideal lighting and acoustic conditions, and then provided his reports in timely fashion even under very tight deadlines. On some rare occasions when Jim was unavailable, Jeff Spurr acted as an erudite and able substitute.

Other notable helpers have been:

- Faithful reviewers of the finished newsletters, who always managed to find errors that needed to be corrected: my wife Dora, Jim Adelson (again!), Mark Hopkins, Janet Smith, Julia Bailey, and Ann Nicholas (it is amazing how many reviewers can read the same copy yet find errors missed by the others!)

- Frequent contributors, notably Sheryl Read who initiated the member profile column; Ann Nicholas who continued to do member profiles, started the *What in the World Is This?* feature, and provided the text for the meeting announcements in the last few years; Tom Stocker, who has contributed some original cartoons; Bob Alimi who has posted the newsletters on our website.

- Performers of the physical labors required to produce and distribute the newsletters: Janet Smith, who for many years took the master copy to the printers, collected the finished newsletters, folded and sealed them, stuck on address labels and stamps, and then put them in the mailbox; Linda Hamilton, who took over these duties this season; Mark Hopkins and Jim Sampson who printed out the labels and sent them to Janet or Linda.

To all these, and any others whom I have overlooked (my apologies!), my heartfelt thanks! Without you I would have quit after one year, not fifteen.

Yon Bard

More from the Editor: A Rug's Story

When I was growing up, we had some oriental rugs in our Tel Aviv apartment. These rugs boasted of no great age; they were acquired by my parents in Vienna, probably in the late 1920s. Among them was a Turkish prayer rug that hung on the wall above our living room sofa. When my mother liquidated the household in 1975 in order to join us in America, this is the only one she brought with her.

When, in 1992, I became seriously interested in rugs, I sought to learn more about this one. An expert identified it as a copy of a Ghiordes design, made of mercerized cotton (a process that gives cotton a somewhat silk-like luster) in the Kayseri area of Anatolia.

In the spring of 1992 I found myself in New York, cruising the wholesale rug district in the East Thirties. In the window of one of the showrooms I saw a rug of identical design to mine. It was the genuine Ghiordes model from which my rug was copied! Intrigued by the idea of buying it and displaying the two rugs side by side in my home, I took a few moments to try and reach a decision, when a man burst into the store urging the owner to close shop immediately since a race riot was imminent! It was the day after the Rodney King riots in Los

Angeles, and everybody was afraid that the riots would spread to New York and other cities. Indeed, the owner immediately made everyone leave and, like all others on the block, he shuttered his shop. Fortunately, no riot ensued, but in the confusion I forgot to note the address, and have been unable to find the rug again!

There is a postscript to the story. Some time later, at an exhibition for a rug auction, I saw a rug cataloged as a 19th century Ghiordes prayer rug. However, it had the look and feel of my mercerized cotton rug. While I was examining it, a Middle-Eastern gentleman passed by and whispered in my ear, "You and I know what this really is!" I am still pondering the mystery of how he knew that I knew!



The Rug
with
my
mother,
Lucia,
and my
wife, Dora

Tel Aviv
1961



Upcoming Rug Events, etc.

Auctions (dates of major carpet sales in bold):

Christie's, London, **4/5**

Skinner, Boston, **5/7**

Grogan, Dedham, **5/22**

Nagel, Stuttgart, **9/13**.

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. Until June 2011.

Caucasian rugs from the Pilibosian collection: Armenian Library and Museum, Watertown, MA. See page 1 for details of NERS visit to the exhibition.

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:

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.

An interesting website:

John Howe, an enthusiastic ruggie in Washington, DC, is maintaining an excellent and informative website, www.rjohnhowe.wordpress.com, devoted exclusively to reporting on the "Rug and Textile Appreciation Mornings" held monthly at the Textile Museum. The site is a fascinating source of information for anyone interested in carpets or textiles.

Among many extensively illustrated reports on the site, a few recent ones are:

- *Amish Quilts from Southern Maryland* by Amy Rispin and Pat Reilly
- *The Memling Gul Motif* by John Howe
- *Vertically Twined Plateau Bags* by David Fraser
- *Tree of Life Design* by Christine Brown
- *Vintage Fashions from around the World* by Steve Price

Check out this site!! You won't be disappointed.

Newsletter contributors and helpers: Yon Bard (editor), Jim Adelson, Julia Bailey, Dora Bard, Linda Hamilton, Ann Nicholas.

Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, 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, 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:

Jim Adelson
Robert Alimi
Julia Bailey (co-chair)
Yonathan Bard
Linda Hamilton
Tom Hannaher
Mark Hopkins
Lloyd Kannenberg
Ann Nicholas (co-chair)
Gillian Richardson
Jim Sampson
Jeff Spurr



May Meeting (Picnic and Show & Tell) Details

Date: Saturday, May 21

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



New England Rug Society

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