



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. IX, No. 3 November 6, 2001

Next Meeting: Good Rug? Great Rug?

Cancellations due to recent events threatened to leave another void in our schedule. Mark Hopkins came to the rescue by offering to emcee another edition of the ever-popular *Good Rug? Great Rug?* show at our next meeting. *GR?GR?* is a slide presentation aimed at exploring the esthetic factors that create artistic greatness in the pile weaving art. It begins with a very brief presentation of what Mark believes are the principal parameters of artistic excellence in oriental rugs. Following that, pairs of rugs are projected on the screen, and a panel of experts assembled from the Society's membership scores the rugs for their artistic merits and discusses the reasons for its preferences. Audience participation is encouraged, with each member maintaining his or her own private 'scorecard.' At the end, everyone takes an informal 'test' by examining ten slides of rugs and then measuring their conclusions against the panel's scores.

Mark's emphasis is on the subjectivity of evaluating great textile art, while at the same time revealing the common factors that seem to be consistently present. The format is light, informal, and often humorous. Rug lovers ranging from beginners to serious collectors have thoroughly enjoyed the program at rug society meetings all over the United States and Canada, as well as at several ACORs.

January Meeting: Tour of MFA's 'Poetry of the Loom' Exhibition

NERS members are invited to a special tour of the ongoing exhibition of Persian textiles at the Museum of Fine Arts. The tour will be led by the exhibition's curator, our own Julia Bailey, and should take half an hour at most. Julia has written the following introduction that appeared in the September/October 2001 issue of the MFA's *Preview*:

"As this exhibition will show, textiles have long been vital to the economic and cultural life of Iran (formerly Persia). The coming of Islam in the seventh century led to artistic emphasis on the written word; on many medieval Persian textiles, Arabic bless-

Next Meeting Details

Date: Friday, November 30

Time: 7:30PM

Place: Bemis Hall, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: \$10 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.

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.

Parking:

On Bedford Road, plus Parish Hall parking lot across the street.

January Meeting Details

Date: Saturday, January 19 2002

Time: 11:00 AM

Place: Museum of Fine Arts, Huntington Ave., Boston, MA. Assemble inside Museum's West Wing entrance.

Note: there will be no separate Newsletter published before this meeting, so be sure to mark this date on your calendar now!

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Last Meeting: 6000 Years of Turkmen Ornaments

By Jim Adelson

On October 10th, approximately 50 NERSers turned out for the rare opportunity to hear one of the world's most esteemed authorities speak on Turkmen rugs. Elena Tsareva, who came from Russia to Massachusetts in the course of a whirlwind tour including talks to nine rug societies, kicked off this year's NERS season after the September meeting had been cancelled. Elena's topic was *6000 Years of Development of Turkmen Carpet Ornaments*.

Elena opened by observing that the first things that attract us to Turkmen carpets are color, and particularly the enormous variety of patterns. Yet, with this variation of design, the pieces have a lot in common; Elena illustrated her point with a Beshir prayer rug and a kapunuk (door opening surround), both of which used a curl meander design on a white background. She then asked whether we can trace the history of a pattern, and if so, how far can we go?

For her oldest illustrations, Elena showed ceramics with what have been labelled "carpet ornaments," and also rock engravings, both from south Turkmenistan from the sixth millenium BC. She commented that this area was settled very early, in the sixth millenium, by peoples who had come from Iran.

They initially lived close to the Caspian Sea, then moved east. They were a European-type people, and they practiced primitive agriculture. Their earliest artwork consisted of female figures that represented the spiritual identity and knowledge of the tribe. The people made ceramics with wave patterns inspired by sand or by water, which they worshipped.

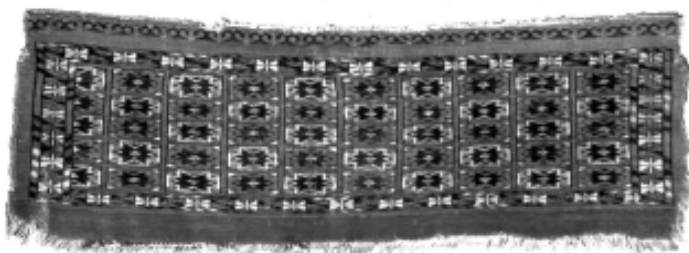
Slightly later, the patterns evolved into dots, which became popular, and Elena displayed a Beshir weaving with a similar design. Another early motif—reciprocal triangles—was seen on pottery, and also appeared (much later) in rugs. Elena observed that "a design, once produced, never disappears" since it is a product of commonly shared and understood ideas. As another example, Elena referred to the zig-zag design, showing an early form, and then an Ersari/Beshir rug with the evolved form.

According to Elena, the spindle was one of the most important items in Turkmen history. The spindle made thread possible, which in turn led to textiles, and to dramatic progress in clothing.

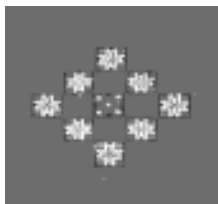
The Bronze Age brought many advances for the Turkmen population. You begin to see multiple-room

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Some motifs mentioned by Tsareva



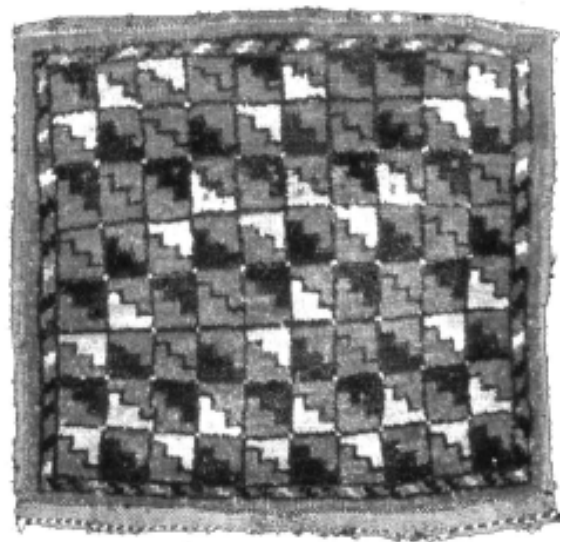
Eight-pointed stars



Charkh palak



Running wave or running dog



Stepped triangles in squares



Last Meeting

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houses, rather than just the single-room dwellings of earlier periods. The first specific evidence of carpets emerges, with wool-trimming knives from the fourth millennium BC. Artistically, there are new forms of goddess figures. Patterns in other artistic media become more complex—Elena showed a reflected pattern with diamonds, which she cited as the first closed form in Turkmen work. She also highlighted another design with squares that are diagonally divided into two stepped triangles. This is a design which she analyzed as “cloud and ground,” and which appears much later in Ersari rugs. Similarly, she described a design from the fourth to fifth millennium BC bowls, which she identified as a precursor to the Salor Charkh-Palak design of later carpets. According to Elena, eight-pointed stars have a similar extended design heritage.

During the Bronze Age, Egyptian and Sumerian mythology became widespread and important. Illustrating this, Elena commented on a design showing a bird within an octagon, with dogs on either side. The bird lived in the veil of Isis, god of fertility.

The Turkmen began to move further east, now encountering more desert terrain. They were helped by horses, which they had already domesticated. They start to use more floating motifs, including one which Elena labelled as ‘running wave’ (frequently called ‘running dog’ in carpet literature). Animal totems began to appear, with the cheetah being an early example. Elena rhetorically asked why this hadn’t occurred earlier, and speculated that perhaps it was due to fear. Snakes, bugs, and scarabs all became popular totems. Rams’ horns signified protection, and were seen in rugs in many forms. A hawk totem emerged, but seemed to belong only to high-ranking chiefs. Turtles were also very popular, and Elena traced this design element to a 19th-century zig-zag Beshir chival, and also to another ikat-design Beshir torba. She concluded her formal presentation with the observation that the troops of Alexander the Great brought a whole new set of design influences, which

were more decorative and carried their own symbolic meaning.

The audience had a number of questions for Elena:

Q: Did the designs from earlier times still exist in the area when the most recent group of Turkmen peoples arrived (in the 18th century)?

A: Some designs are indigenous, and can be traced continuously back to the 2nd millennium. Some of the migrations can be specifically traced earlier, too, including the arrival of Turks in the first century BC, and also later in the eighth to ninth century AD.

Q: Are the Turkmen Indo-European, but their language is not?

A: They are a mixture of the early Indo-European indigenous population with later Turkic and Mongolian arrivals. Language is easy to change.

Q: Why do you interpret triangle designs as clouds?

A: Mythology covers large areas, so you sometimes find clues in other areas with common mythology. There is a clearer example from northern Black Sea culture.

Q: How are the Scythians related to the Turkmen?

A: Scythians inhabited and left their marks on enormous territory, from Mongolia to Eastern Europe.

Q: Do you find the same designs in rock carving as in pottery?

A: Rock carvings are so much harder to execute, so the designs are more limited—rock carving designs used totems primarily, particularly animals that you don’t want to encounter in life, such as the cheetah and lion.

Q: The door hanging that you illustrated, with the bird in octagon design—how old is it, and where is it?

A: I don’t know how old, and it’s in Ashkabad.

Q: Can you trace things back as far in Uzbekistan and elsewhere, or only in Turkmenistan?

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Yon,

Your proposal (*Preservation of cultural treasures*, 8/20/01 page 6) is almost exactly what I have been advocating for over a decade, with the slight difference that I had thought the governmental entities should simply wholesale the rugs to dealers, probably local ones, with licenses that would permit export. This would be so that those who had been en-

gaged locally in the illegitimate traffic would have reason to conform to the new rather than continuing their old practices. Furthermore, the governmental ability to undertake greater numbers of controlled excavations would ensure that more local people would be employed by them rather than by the art thieves. Glad this proposal got into print!

Best, Jeff Spurr

Tour of MFA's 'Poetry of the Loom' Exhibition

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ings or Persian verses surround heraldic images. By the sixteenth century, Persian court textiles, like contemporary manuscript paintings, illustrated the words of poets with splendid images of lovelorn couples and royal hunters. The plaintive nightingales and dewy roses so common in poetry also inspired the designs of seventeenth-century silks. Angular versions of these immensely popular bird-and-flower motifs even appear on tribal articles woven two centuries later.

"*Poetry of the Loom* will include more than sixty Persian textiles—complex and sumptuous silks and

velvets, embroideries, printed cottons, carpets and tribal furnishings, and costumes. Drawn from the permanent collection and supplemented by museum and private loans, these textiles range in date from the sixth to the twentieth centuries."

Attendees who are not Museum members will have to pay the normal Museum admission fee (\$14; \$12 for seniors and students).

If many of us show up, we may have to be split up into two groups that Julia will lead through the exhibition in succession. Since the tour will be short, those having to wait will not be overly inconvenienced.

Last Meeting

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A: You can trace all of these areas back, and there's a lot of the same design vocabulary.

Q: Do you see objects from 500-1500 AD; why does this seem to be a hole?

A: You do find objects from this period.

Q: How do you know that the designs represent the world around the weaver, rather than just designs?

A: You just know it.

Next came the Show and Tell phase of the evening, with audience members displaying Turkmen pieces that they had brought for Elena's comment.

The pieces ranged widely, from good examples of more frequent types, such as a Tekke 12-gul torba and Yomud chuval, to more unusual pieces, such as a Yomud-group pile main carpet with flatweave-type patterns. Some of the pieces provided 19th-century illustrations of designs that Elena had included in her talk, such as a stepped-triangle bagface and a torba using the eight-pointed star design. In each case, Elena offered extensive thoughts about the piece—on design, on materials, on provenance, and on other aspects.

Many thanks to Elena Tsareva for sharing her many years of thought and observation with us!

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Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, e-mail doryon@rcn.com



Upcoming Rug Events

NERS 2001/2 Meetings (note revisions):

1/19/02: Tour of MFA's Persian textiles exhibition, hosted by Julia Bailey

3/1/02: Raoul Tschebull on Kazak rugs

3/22/02: Al Saulniers on new opportunities in Moroccan tribal weavings

4/19/02: Saul Barodofsky on 'Small is Beautiful'

5/18/02: Picnic and Show & Tell.

Auctions:

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 11/17

Christie's, New York, 12/12, 12/18

Sotheby's, New York, 12/14

Skinner, Boston, 4/20/02.

Conferences:

ACOR 6 is scheduled for 4/25-28/02 in Indianapolis. If you haven't received your registration materials, refer to www.acor-rugs.org for information. Time is of the essence—space is filling up fast!

The next **ICOC** is scheduled for 4/17-21/03 in Washington, DC. A call for papers is out; see their website at www.icoc-international.org. Papers are due by 4/1/02.

Exhibitions:

From the Amu Darya to the Potomac: Central Asian bags from area collections, Textile Museum,

Washington, DC, until 2/24/02.

Poetry of the loom: Persian textiles in the MFA, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, until 1/21/02. Organized and curated by our own Julia Bailey. **Note:** a tour of this exhibition led by Julia is scheduled for January 19. See page 1 for details.

In the high Himalayas: textiles from the kingdom of Bhutan, RISD Museum of Art, Providence, RI, until 2/1/01.

Exhibition of Armenian rugs, dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of the adoption of Christianity as a state religion in Armenia, Armenian Embassy, 2225 R St., NW, Washington, DC 20008 11/19-12/19. This exhibition presents outstanding examples of inscribed Armenian rugs from the 19th and early 20th centuries made for use in Armenian homes and churches. For more information, call Nouné Zastoukhova at the Embassy of Armenia at 202-319-1976.

Tours:

Central Asia, including Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, with possible extension in Istanbul; 3/26-4/11/02. Katharine Green, a mainstay of the Toronto Rug Society, will be the tour leader. Call 800-451-5228 or email kgreenL3P@yahoo.com for information.

Reminder: send your wish list to the Lead-Forwarding Program, NERSLeds@aol.com

We welcome the following new member: Beth Lord

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. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained 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 hopmoto@earthlink.net.

NERS 2001/2 Steering Committee:

Mark Hopkins (President)

Jim Adelson

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

John Clift

Tom Hannaher

Sheryl Read

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



Suggested Reading List

General

Eiland, Murray L., and Eiland, Murray III. *Oriental Carpets, A Complete Guide*. Bulfinch/Little, Brown, 1998.

Ware, Joyce. *Official Price Guide To Oriental Rugs*. 2nd Ed. House Of Collectibles, 1996.

Thompson, Jon. *Oriental Rugs from the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of Asia*. 2nd Ed. Dutton Studio Books, 1993.

Opie, James. *Tribal Rugs*. Tolstoy Press, 1992.

Structure

Mallett, Marla. *Woven Structures—A Guide To Oriental Rug & Textile Analysis*. Christopher Publications, 1998.

Terminology

Stone, Peter. *The Oriental Rug Lexicon*. Univ. of Washington Press, 1997.

Turkish

Zipper, Kurt & Fritzsche, Claudia. *Oriental Rugs: Volume 4, Turkish*. Antique Collector's Club, 1989.

Caucasian

Bennett, Ian. *Oriental Rugs: Volume 1, Caucasian*. Antique Collector's Club, 1981 (1993 Ed.).

Persian

Edwards, Cecil. *The Persian Carpet*. Duckworth, 1967 (1983 Ed.).

Baluch

Boucher, Jeff. *Baluchi Woven Treasures*. Published by the author, 1989.

Turkmen

Tzareva, Elena. *Rugs & Carpets from Central Asia*. Lane/Aurora, 1984.

Kilims

Hull, Alistair & Luczyk-Wyhowska, Jose. *Kilims*. 1993.

