



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. IX, No. 4 February 5, 2002

Next Meeting: Raoul "Mike" Tschebull on Kazak Rugs

Mike Tschebull is a well-known figure in the rug world. He was co-founder of the New York Rug Society, was an original member of the ACOR Board of Directors, and is a collector of weavings from what could be termed "Greater Azarbayjan." His book *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus* is a standard reference, and he has contributed many articles to *HALI* over the years, including most recently, a review (*HALI* 120) of an exhibition of Iranian nomad weaving at the Ethnographisches Museum in Dahlem, Germany. He is an NERS member and has spoken at several of our meetings, the last time on 4/4/98 about folkart weaving by villagers and nomads in East Azarbayjan.

Mike, who catalogued "Kazak" in NYC thirty years ago, revisits the subject at our next meeting. He will talk about who the weavers were and why he thinks they wove the formats they did, and he will discuss economic and cultural motivation for weaving of "Kazak" pile rugs, and will try to fit the "Kazak" look into a larger context. The presentation medium will primarily be slides, drawn from a photo inven-

Next Meeting Details

Date: Friday, March 1

Time: 7:30PM

Place: Armenian Library and Museum,
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. The second 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!

tory dating back to the late sixties, but Mike will bring some Kazaks along for illustration.

We all look forward to hearing yet another one of Mike's illuminating talks.

Last Meeting: Good Rug? Great Rug?

By Jim Adelson

On November 30, Mark Hopkins led the latest instance of his finely honed "Good Rug, Great Rug" format. This session gives panelists and audience alike a chance to develop their eye for the qualities that distinguish a rug, good or great (or bad!).

Mark kicked off the session with his own summary of the keys to aesthetically assessing rugs. He explained his easily remembered "4Cs"—color, composition, content, and character. The most important thing about a rug is color; it can be flamboyant, regal, or subtle, but it has to be great. A rug's composition has to be well thought out, balancing the

two- and three-dimensional senses, conveying spaciousness, and guiding the eye through the work. The content must command the viewer's attention, sometimes even presenting interpretive or detective challenges to the viewer. Finally, a rug's character is perhaps the hardest of these elements to judge, although sometimes character may stem from rarity, even uniqueness.

Mark also outlined another four Cs that may be of interest to the collector, but are not a critical part of the aesthetic valuation of the rug. He first men-

Continued on page 2

NERS website has been launched!

See page 6 for details

ACOR 6 Registrations still accepted!

See page 7 for details



Last Meeting

Continued from page 1

tioned construction, which may help identify and inform, but does not directly affect aesthetics. He then noted chronology; age by itself makes no difference: some 200+ year old pieces have no great merit, while others less than 100 years old have great artistic merit. Condition may affect economic value, but doesn't define artistic value. In the field of rugs, we often have to take what we can get. Finally, Mark listed cost, which again is a statement of economic value, but not necessarily artistic worth.

After Mark's short opening remarks, he introduced panelists Mike Kendall, Laney Balkin, and Kyle Hedrick. Our three commentators were all new to this role with NERS: Mike is a Boston attorney who has recently become an avid rug collector. Laney and her husband Mendy run Décor International on Newbury Street. She is also a noteworthy collector of rare textiles, especially molas. Kyle has been a New England antique dealer for many years, with a special fondness for tribal and workshop rugs.

The program started with pairs of ostensibly similar rugs displayed, and the judges getting 30 seconds to rate the rugs on an Olympics-like 0-10 scale. At the same time, the audience also rated each rug. Then the judges explained the thoughts behind their ratings, and on some occasions Mark asked audience members to identify the rugs and provide their own ratings.

First up were a pair of Central Anatolian rugs from the late 18th or early 19th century. Right off the bat we had an illustration of different people's preferences, with Mike and Kyle giving one rug the slightly higher rating, while Laney gave the opposite rug a somewhat higher rating. In giving their reasons, Mike and Kyle cited such factors as the less typical border design or even the whimsical handling.

The second pair of pieces were both South Persian saltbags, and here all three judges rated one piece higher than the other. With this comparison, another theme of the evening emerged—the panelists were often at their most insightful and entertaining when being critical. Kyle said of the lower rated piece,

praising the technical skill of its weaving while lamenting its monotony "like asking a diva to sing middle C."

A pair of Afshar rugs again found Laney on the opposite side from Mike and Kyle in the assessments, as did the Anatolian (Mudjur?) rugs that followed. Consensus followed with a pair of Caucasian Akstafa-design rugs, with Laney and Kyle slightly preferring one over the other, and Mike rating them equal.

The next pair were very similar Ersari prayer rugs, and both Mike and Kyle rated the two equally, while Laney had a moderate preference. A pair of Kordi (northeast Persian Kurd) rugs brought the panel back to agreement, as did a pair of Kazaks (one Lori-Pambak, the other a triple medallion design). The same thing occurred with the next pair, from Eastern Anatolia, with the higher-rated rug drawing praise above its mate for color choice and for boldness of design.

A pair of Beluch weavings concluded this section of the program, and brought out the most unanimous and strong preferences from the group, with all panelists rating one piece (the SAME one) four or more points above its partner. The preferred rug drew praise for its openness of design, while the lesser rug was labelled mechanical and rigid.

In the next section of the program, ten pieces were displayed one at a time, with all panelists rating each piece on the same scale and then describing their reasons at the end. The very first rug was a Central Anatolian village rug (Konya?) which got everyone's praise and ratings that ranged from 8 to 10, with the fantastic color and openness of the best of such village weavings. Next came a mafrash labeled Tekke (this author thought Yomud; editor's comment: Yomud, unquestionably!) that drew middling marks from the panel. A Caucasian Shirvan or Kuba drew a full slate of 9s, with Laney in particular labeling the piece "a miracle of proportion and color." Next came a Hamadan that the panel again rated highly, with a 7, 9, and 10; Mike commented "this could be one of the first things I've ever stolen." A Salor chuval elic-

Continued on page 3



Last Meeting

Continued from page 2

ited only moderate marks from Mike and Laney, while Kyle gave it an 8.

The next piece, a Kurd weaving, got some of the lowest marks of the night, receiving two 4s and a 5. Next up, a Baluch tree-of-life prayer rug, fared only a little better, with two 5s and a 6. In particular, Kyle observed that “if you owned it, you’d be lucky if it were stolen; if it was stolen, you’d never recover it because they all look alike.”

The session finished with three more highly esteemed pieces, the first of which was a Qashqa’i, averaging 7 from the panel. The penultimate piece

was a Bakshaish that got 8 from Mike and 9 from Kyle, but left Laney lukewarm at 5. The session concluded strongly with an ancient piece from either Eastern Anatolia or the Caucasus that got 8, 9, and 10 from the panel. Kyle summed this one up, saying it had a “wonderfully archaic quality,” and praising its wildness.

Our thanks once again to Mark, for the education and enjoyment of the session, and for his willingness to fill a gap created by cancellation of the originally scheduled speaker. And we really appreciate Mike, Laney, and Kyle’s sharing their experience and judgment for all of our benefit!

PROFILE OF A COLLECTOR—GUENTHER HERPFER

By Ann Nicholas

Some things are fondly remembered—one’s first car, first kiss, and, for rug collectors, one’s first rug. Guenther acquired his first oriental rugs in 1960, when he was an intern at Worcester Memorial Hospital, by trading an old Studebaker to a Persian medical resident for three “Bukhara” rugs. His first three pieces of furniture, he liked their bright red colors and utilitarian nature. Although unimportant pieces, they are still in his collection.

In over forty years, Guenther Herpfer, a retired North Shore physician, and his wife Monica, have acquired a vast collection of fine oriental rugs. He explains that he is not a serious collector of esoteric or museum quality fragments or threadbare rugs. Rather, his collection is a highly selective group of good rugs that he lives with, enjoys, and appreciates. Though they include examples from many rug weaving areas, over half of them are Bijars. Several years ago John Collins gave a talk to the NERS and brought several of Guenther’s Bijars to share with the group.

In his early years of rug collecting he bought rugs mainly to use as furniture. He did his medical training in both Germany and Massachusetts. Whenever he moved to a new apartment, the carpets would be draped over the suitcases and packing crates, laid on the floor, and hung on the wall; an instant, portable décor for a nomadic student. During this time at the Gregorian rug store, Arthur Gregorian intro-

duced Guenther to some existing rug literature and Baluch scatter rugs. Their early purchases were guided by Guenther’s reading of the literature and Monica’s feeling for the graphics and colors. Size, shape, and origin were not important.

Guenther realized that he had morphed from acquiring rugs to collecting rugs the day that he brought home a wonderful Tabriz with a hunting scene and Monica reminded him that she still did not have a washer and dryer. He still fondly recalls the rug that he returned. When they bought an older home on the North Shore, rug collecting was on the back burner while they repaired, renovated, and furnished it, and raised their two sons. They began acquiring carpets again when they finally removed bilious yellow wall-to-wall carpeting to discover oak floors throughout the house.

What does Guenther look for in assessing a rug? Color and graphic design are foremost. Since most of his rugs are actively lived with, good workmanship, good wool, and being more or less intact are also important considerations. In his opinion, sitting and admiring a fine rug is one of life’s great pleasures.

Bijars appeal to him because of the wonderful colors, great wool, and patterns that reflect an ethnic quality from way back. The Bijar weavers were

Continued on page 4



PROFILE OF A COLLECTOR—GUENTHER HERPFER

Continued from page 3

at the crossroads of several cultures and their patterns reflect those influences. Describing his favorite Bijar, he spoke of the blue background so deep you couldn't tear your eyes away from it; wool so soft you wanted to get down on you knees and touch it; and a geometric pattern influenced by motives and characteristics of so many ethnicities that you could see and smell them. In his study in front of the desk is another favorite: a Bijar with yellow lions that look like the heraldic lions of Bavaria, the area in Germany where he grew up. He feels the beauty and sense of both rugs deeply.

Guenther also collects Renaissance maps. Many of these copper etched and hand colored maps were collected by his family and survived the War. What is it that drives him to collect the rugs and maps? Part is the joy of the pursuit. But it does not end with the acquisition of the object. Living with it, appreciating the color and graphics, and integrating it into his life is the continuing joy of collecting. Monica refers to these collections as his "other sons."

After forty years of collecting, he advises beginning collectors to read all the literature they can. The Internet is a great source of information that was

not available when he started. Get to know a dealer that you can trust. Look at hundreds of rugs to understand what's good, what's great, and what you can live with and enjoy. Before you start purchasing rugs at auctions and flea markets, know what you want and how to value a rug. A good eye takes knowledge and experience.

Another aspect of collecting is stewardship. Sell or trade rugs which no longer fit in your collection. Before buying a rug consider how you will preserve it, display it, and insure it. Guenther has no problem running out of display space, since his two grown sons now have a third of his collection on permanent loan.

Guenther feels that in collecting rugs he has had the great good fortune to know some great people and to be able to acquire some pieces he really loves. A great rug complements any house and furniture style. And when he dies, he envisions an urn with his ashes being wrapped in a carpet like a Teutonic gentleman and thrown into the sea in front of his home. Only the carpet should have a rope attached to it, so at the last minute the carpet will be snatched back for the next generation to appreciate.

On the Origin of Turkmen Motifs Addendum by Yon Bard

Shortly after hearing Elena Tsareva's talk (10/10/01) in which she traced Turkmen rug motifs back thousands of years in history, I came across an article by Samuel Hughes in my alumni magazine, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (available on the web at <http://www.upenn.edu/gazette/1101/hughes.html>). The article was entitled *Stamp Seal Mystery*, and it dealt with a stamp seal that was found at Anau, a Bronze Age archaeological site in Turkmenistan. The seal was found on the ground near a dig into a 4300 years old stratum, and its face is shown on the left in the illustration. Its size is about one square inch. What struck me most about it is that all the motifs shown on it appear on present day Turkmen rugs. I photographed the relevant details on some of my rugs and juxtaposed the images to mirror the arrangement of mo-

tifs on the seal, as seen on the right side of the illustration. While admittedly the shape of the 'S' motif has changed considerably, the other two are strikingly similar in both illustrations. This seal certainly provides strong evidence for Elena's assertions!



Anau seal
(ca. 2300 BC?)



Pastiche of motifs
from 19C Turkmen rugs



Tour of The MFA's *Poetry of the Loom* Exhibition By Jim Adelson; edited by Julia Bailey

On January 19, Julia Bailey led about 30 NERSers on a narrated tour of *Poetry of the Loom*, an exhibition of Persian textiles she had curated for Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. It was a wonderful opportunity to see some of the MFA's rarely displayed treasures, combined with loaned items from other museums and private collections.

As Julia started in the gallery, she warned that many pieces were fragmented. She commented, "it's a miracle that they've survived at all," but observed that they did so because textiles were precious—a fact we've forgotten in this age of industrial production. She explained that the low light levels were intended to protect the textiles from further fading.

The oldest pieces on exhibit came from the Sasanian empire, which flourished from the third to seventh centuries. Sasanian textiles were highly regarded within the empire and exported widely as well. Sasanian weavers mastered sericulture (silk cultivation), learning to grow and spin their own silk, which they had previously imported from China. They also perfected the drawloom, allowing weavers to do very complex, multicolor repeat patterns. One fragment in the exhibit was a piece of trim from a man's coat, with a vegetal latticework containing pairs of birds—this design would continue into later Persian weaving. The Sasanian weavings allowed Julia to introduce another theme: "what is admired by the luxury crowd makes its way to the less affluent." Some designs first woven in silk were adapted to wool tapestry, so that they could be given wider distribution.

Julia turned next to Islamic-period silks from the Buyid (932-1055) or Seljuk (1038-1194) dynasty. Many such textiles were discovered in 1924-1925 at an excavation at Rayy, near Tehran. These silks used repeat designs that featured real and mythical animals, in roundels or latticework. In addition, Arabic script became a major element in the design. Museums and collectors eagerly sought these silks, which sparked both a wave of forgeries and intense controversy over whether particular pieces were real or fake. In the 1990s, advances in carbon dating and inscrip-

tion reading provided the tools to determine authenticity. This exhibit has both real and fake examples.

During the Buyid and Seljuk eras textiles were so precious and esteemed that they influenced other media. Metalwork and tiles, in particular, drew from design approaches that originated in textiles. In 14th-century Persia, luxury manuscripts too became an important artistic medium, and their illustrations showed how textiles looked and were used. For example, one painting from a huge Mongol-period *Shahnameh*, depicting a hero's funeral procession, shows textiles used to cover coffins; these are similar to a fragment of dotted silk velvet exhibited nearby.

Eventually, manuscript painting determined the design of textiles themselves. Three silks in the exhibition feature scenes inspired by 16th-century Shah Tahmasp I's conquest of Georgia, with Safavid soldiers in distinctive tall, pointed turbans leading male and female prisoners. These textiles were originally part of court robes—Julia remarked "Imagine a whole court wearing advertising."

In the 16th century, the most common pictorial theme of Persian textiles (and carpets) was the royal hunt. The exhibition includes a velvet roundel, probably part of a tent ceiling, with unbelievably fine detail of hunters and their prey. This piece was reputedly captured by Turkish sultan Suleyman the Magnificent in the mid-16th century and in turn was awarded to Prince Sanguszko of Poland after the Siege of Vienna in 1683. For contrast, the exhibit included a wonderful 17th-century vase carpet fragment showing animal combat scenes, from the Marshall and Marilyn Wolf collection in New York.

In 17th-century textiles, the representation of human figures inspired by legend and history waned, and poetic garden imagery occupied a more central place. This coincided with royalty's switch to patronizing more public forms of art, such as architecture, rather than lavish manuscripts that reached a limited population. Floral imagery continued to be popular into the 19th century, when Rasht, a city in

Continued on page 8



NERS News

NERS website is on the air! If you have Internet access, you can visit our new site at <http://www.ne-rugsociety.org> thanks to **Bob Alimi's** valiant efforts in setting it up. It is hoped that the site will prove to be useful to current members by providing online access to items such as past Newsletters, the current season's schedule of events, email access to Steering Committee members, etc. Additionally, it will provide increased visibility to NERS and one more avenue by which New England rug enthusiasts can learn about our organization.

The site consists of several sections, organized as follows:

- **About NERS** provides visitors with a description of who we are and what we do, and includes an invitation to join.
- **Meetings** attempts to capture the flavor of a typical NERS meeting for those considering joining.
- **Newsletter** presents the current Newsletter and provides access to past issues.
- **Literature** provides a bibliography of books, articles, and book/exhibition reviews authored by *NERS members*.
- **Rug Links** offers direct access to other Web sites of possible interest to NERS members and site visitors.

An online NERS gallery of rugs is in the works: member contributions are most welcome! Interested NERS members are invited to select a favorite piece or two from their collections for inclusion in the online gallery. Submissions can be in the form of prints or slides which will be scanned and returned (mail to Yon Bard at the address at the bottom of this page; please write your name on each piece and enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope), or as digital images (email to webadmin@ne-rugsociety.org). A brief descriptive text (perhaps including a structural analysis) should be included, and please specify

whether you want to be identified as the owner. You can take a peek at a prototype NERS gallery by visiting <http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/ners-demo/gallery.htm>.

We also ask that if you have any rug-related publications to your name, please check out the online listing of publications by NERS authors. If you have any additions to make, please provide the information and we will update the web page.

Any comments regarding the website can be sent to webadmin@ne-rugsociety.org.

We welcome the following new members:

Marjorie Langan, Cevat Kanig, Kevork Kechichian, Ercan Korkmaz, and Pamela and Preston Mason.

We thank the following members for their additional contributions to the Society:

• **Patrons:** Jim Adelson & Debbie Sheetz, Bashir Ahamed, John Collins, George Grillo, Michael & Nancy Grogan, Tom and Ann Hannaher, Mark & Margie Hopkins, Jo Kris, Peter Pap, John Patterson, Mario & Caroline Ratzki, Sheryl Read, Beau Ryan, Peter Walker.

• **Supporting Members:** Jeremy & Hanne Grantham, Lloyd & Susan Kannenberg, Lawrence Kearney, Phil & Sharon Lichtman, Mitch & Rosalie Rudnick, Klaudia Shepard, Tom Stocker & Jim Alexander.

Changes in our steering committee: We salute Gail Homer for her generous contributions to the Steering Committee on the occasion of her recent departure from its ranks. And we welcome two new members, Tom Hannaher and Bob Alimi. Tom has initiated the new Collector's Lead-Forwarding Program, and he'll also work with John Clift and Gillian Richardson to keep our meeting refreshments abundant and refreshing. As our most recent addition to the NERS team, Bob has created and will maintain our NERS website as an information source

Continued on page 7

Newsletter contributors and helpers: Yon Bard (editor), Jim Adelson, Julia Bailey, Dora Bard, Mark Hopkins, Ann Nicholas, Sheryl Read, Janet Smith

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



Upcoming Rug Events

NERS 2001/2 Meetings:

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

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

5/18: Picnic and Show & Tell.

Auctions:

Christie's, London, 2/13, 4/10, 4/25

Sotheby's, London, 2/27

Christie's, New York, 4/8

Sotheby's, New York, 4/10

Skinner, Boston, 4/20

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 5/1

Nagel, Stuttgart, 5/7.

Conferences:

ACOR 6 is scheduled for 4/25-28 in Indianapolis.

Registrations are still being accepted! Refer to www.acor-rugs.org for information.

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, extended until 3/17/02. Organized and curated by our own Julia Bailey. See review on page 5.

NERS News

Continued from page 6

for both our membership and new NERS members. In addition, we send our thanks to other members of the NERS Steering Committee for keeping us viable and thriving: Mark Hopkins, Jim Adelson, Julia Bailey, Yon Bard, Sheryl Read, Janet Smith, and Jeff Spurr.

Lead-Forwarding Program: send your collection preferences to NERSLeads@aol.com to enroll in this program.

Newsletter news: as you can infer from the

Collector's Profile by-line on page 3, Ann Nicholas has volunteered to relieve Sheryl Read of her reportorial duties. In addition to writing collector profiles, Ann is planning to poll members on various rug-related topics and publish the results in these pages. Lawrence Kearney has also volunteered to provide us with occasional material in the form of interviews with rug dealers. We welcome these initiatives which should provide interesting reading for our subscribers.

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 mopkins@netway.com.

NERS 2001/2 Steering Committee:

Mark Hopkins (President) 781-259-9444

Jim Adelson

Bob Alimi

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

John Clift

Tom Hannaher

Sheryl Read

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



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

Continued from page 5

Northwest Iran, produced very bright textiles with flannel backgrounds, contrasting flannel inlays, and elaborate embroidery to hold the inlays in place—gaudy or even kitschy to today's Western eye.

Devotional textiles tended to avoid human or animal imagery, and instead utilized highly accomplished permutations of Koranic text. A particularly clever, “folksy” *qalamkar* (resist-printed cotton) in the exhibition uses script to form the images of two lions—symbolizing Ali—flanking a tree, whose leaves spell Allah, Muhammad, and the Shiite imams.

The main use for fine textiles was in clothing, the cut of which changed relatively little from the 16th to the 19th centuries. Men and women alike wore colorful and decorative garments. Before 1850, even chadors, which are now black and anonymous, were white and sometimes vividly patterned; a white chador in the exhibition is embroidered with flowers, serpents, and even poetry. One significant fashion change involved the embroidered, diagonal-striped

trousers worn by well-off women until about 1850. At that time, Qajar ruler Nasir al-Din Shah traveled to France, where he saw ballerinas in tutus, and on his return he outfitted the ladies of his court in short skirts, petticoats, and white stockings. Persian women cut up their outmoded trousers and sold the fragments to collectors.

The exhibition includes two 19th-century Shahsavan textiles—a complete *mafrash* and a wonderful double *khorjin*. The *mafrash* (bedding bag) in particular demonstrates the adaptation to nomadic weaving of bird-and-flower design themes that most likely originated at court.

Our thanks to Julia for a talk that included many perspectives, from weaving to related arts, history, commerce, fashion, collecting, and more. Double those thanks for her willingness to give her talk *twice*, in order to split the group into more manageable units (and certainly much more for all her work in organizing the exhibit in the first place). The exhibit has been extended through March 17—don't miss it!



New England Rug Society
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