



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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March Meeting (Online): Stefano Ionescu, “Tracing the Ottoman Rugs in Transylvania”



Meeting Details

Date and Time: 11 AM (EST), on **Saturday, March 13**

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet!

Directions: Jim Sampson will email invitation links to members; to receive the Zoom login, you must register before the meeting by clicking on the link in Jim’s email. Non-members should email jean.hoffman@jeanhoffman.com to get an invitation link.



Stefano Ionescu, and a view of Lotto and small-pattern Holbein rugs in Saint Margaret’s Church, Mediaș, Transylvania

Transylvania is the repository of the richest and best-preserved group of small-format Anatolian rugs outside the Islamic world—almost four hundred examples (including fragments) attributable to the golden age of Ottoman rug weaving. On March 13, Stefano Ionescu will tell NERS attendees and guests how these rugs arrived in Transylvania, and why they entered the patrimony of the Protestant Churches. Then he’ll take us on a virtual visit to some notable church collections, with an eye to viewing the best

examples, including Ushaks, Holbeins, Lottos, Selendis, and a wealth of “Transylvanian” rugs. The presentation will draw on his new ideas and latest findings about these carpets—including the nature of their “intentional imperfections.” He will conclude by showing some unpublished examples of the Bistritza collection held in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, and will briefly report on a project of weaving high-quality Anatolian copies of these rugs, to be displayed in the Bistritza Parish.

Born in 1951 in Transylvania, Stefano has lived in Rome since 1975. An independent scholar, he is the major expert on the corpus of Anatolian rugs surviving in his homeland. His first book, *Antique Ottoman Rugs in Transylvania* (2005), was awarded the Romanian Academy Prize in Art History. The first edition of his *Handbook of Fakes by Tuduc* was published on the occasion of his 2010 lecture to NERS on that topic. He is a *HALI* contributor and a Joseph V. McMullan Award recipient.

More Programs of Interest

April 24: Fred Mushkat on Weavings of Nomads in Iran



Camel chest band (det.), Qashqa'i, Fred Mushkat Collection

Noting the recent publication of his *Weavings of Nomads in Iran: Warp-faced Bands and Related Textiles*, NERS invited Fred Mushkat to be our April speaker. Too late—he was already scheduled to share his findings in a George Washington University/Textile Museum-sponsored Rug and Textiles Appreciation Morning. We encourage our members, and all who have viewed our past Zoom presentations, to register for this event, on **Saturday, April 24, at 11 AM (EDT)**: <https://museum.gwu.edu/rug-and-textile-appreciation-morning-weavings-nomads-iran>

May 15: Good, Better, Best



Wedding trapping for a camel (det.), Salor, TM 1979.35.6

In 1995, longtime NERS president Mark Hopkins devised “Good Rug, Great Rug,” in which panelists considered two or more rugs (shown as slides), and rendered judgments (often witty as well as enlightening) on the rugs’ relative merits. The program became a staple and was exported to ACOR. Now, thanks to GWU/TM Rug and Textile Appreciation Mornings, it will be revived in Zoom-friendly form, as “Good, Better, Best.” With Wendel Swan moderating, experts Ben Evans (*HALI*), Mary Jo Otsea (formerly Sotheby’s), and Detlef Maltzahn (Rippon Boswell) will offer their informed takes on what makes one rug merely okay and another one truly great. Audience members get to vote, too. Register for this event, on **Saturday, May 15, 11 AM (EDT)**, at <https://museum.gwu.edu/rug-and-textile-appreciation-morning-good-better-best>

Upcoming Auctions

Mar. 13, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Online-Only Auction
Mar. 27, Vienna, Austria Auction Company, Fine Oriental Rugs XXIV
Apr. 1, London, Christie’s, Arts of the Islamic and Indian Worlds, including Oriental Rugs and Carpets
Apr. 22, Philadelphia, Material Culture, Oriental Rugs from American Estates

Apr. 26, Vienna, Dorotheum, Oriental Carpets, Textiles, and Tapestries
Apr. 27, Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets
May 29, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Spring Auction
Sept. 4, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Orient Stars II (Rugs from the Heinrich Kirchheim Estate)

Photo Credits

p. 1: Stefano Ionescu **p. 2:** GWU/Textile Museum **pp. 3–7:** Jim Ford (figs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 8–13); Dallas Museum of Art (fig. 3); Harvard Art Museums (fig. 6); Chester Beatty Library (fig. 7); Balpinar and Hirsch, *Carpets of the Vakıflar Museum* (fig. 14) **pp. 8–12:** Alberto Levi, with images courtesy of John Taylor, <https://www.rugtracker.com/2017/10/rugs-of-golden-triangle.html> **pp. 13–19:** Grogan & Company

January Meeting Review: Jim Ford on Early Persian Medallion Rugs and Their Legacy

By Jim Adelson



On January 9, in our third online meeting, author and rug-industry veteran Jim Ford addressed NERS members and viewers from literally all over the world. His topic, drawn from his recent book *The Persian Carpet Tradition*, was titled “The Early Persian Medallion Carpets and Their Collectible Derivatives.”

Jim began by noting his long career—fifty-four years—in the oriental carpet trade, starting in 1967 as an export salesman for the London importer OCM (Oriental Carpet Manufacturers), selling Persian carpets in Germany. He spent his first three months just studying rugs, learning from books and looking at OCM-imported rugs, before talking to any customers. As he began to travel the German-speaking market, his rug education was expanded by visits

to carpet-rich museums in Berlin and Vienna. Within ten years, he began his first book, *Oriental Rug Design*, intended to tell readers how to identify rugs by their layout and motifs. Directly following its 1981 publication, Jim began researching the origins of some of the designs he had documented.

First he noticed the collectors: although King Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey had amassed famous collections, it wasn't until the third quarter of the nineteenth century that the wider western world woke to the possibilities of collecting antique carpets (meaning pile rugs, not kilims). Collectors and museums acquired distinctive examples such as the “Emperor's Carpets,” the Ardebil Carpets, the Vienna silk hunting carpet, and others.

While these masterpieces were unique or at most woven in pairs, the same buyers also acquired a substantial group of early Persian carpets that shared a single repertoire of central-medallion, ground, and border designs. Approximately eighty of these, currently scattered in museums and private collections in North America, Europe, and the Near East, have survived. To Jim, they merited closer study.

Although many questions about this group remain unanswered, Jim concluded that most were woven in Persia between 1480 and 1580. One of the earliest extant examples—datable to circa 1505 by his reckoning—was a medallion carpet given to the Textile Museum by Joseph McMullan (1). In its main border are small human figures, one of them (2) in the sort of headgear worn by the Shiite supporters of the Safavid rulers. This turban style, known as the *tāj-i Ḥaydarī*, included a columnar projection whose form evolved rapidly—from relatively short and thick in the earliest years of Safavid rule to tall and narrow a quarter-century later. The turban projection depicted in the McMullan carpet border is of the thicker form seen in a manuscript painting dating to about 1505.



1. Early Persian medallion carpet (det.), ca. 1505, Textile Museum R.33.1.1, Gift of Joseph V. McMullan



2, 3. Turbans as shown in the border of fig. 1 and in a detail of a ca. 1505 painting detached from a Nizami *Khamsa*, Keir Collection, Dallas Museum of Art K.1.2014.739



4. Medallion carpet (det.), ca. 1580, Bardini Museum 730/456

Like styles of Persian dress, the designs of the medallion carpets also evolved. Compared to the McMullan carpet (1), a circa-1580 carpet now in the Bardini Museum, Florence, is more refined in every aspect, from its cartouche border and cloudband-and-palmette ground to its elegant medallion (4).

Where were these medallion carpets made? Jim thought Arthur Upham Pope erred when, in 1931, he declared the group to be Safavid court carpets, produced in Tabriz. Unlike acknowledged court carpets, which are finely woven and often include silk, rugs in the medallion group have a fairly low knot count—some as low as ninety per square inch—and lack any silk whatsoever. Nor did Tabriz weavers use the asymmetrical knot, a feature of every one of these medallion carpets. Rather than luxurious court weavings, these carpets were commercial products, made in considerable quantity.

If they didn't originate in Tabriz, then where? Despite their relatively low knot count, they were woven to a high design standard. Their medallions (5), Jim showed, derive from Chinese cloud collars, a feature of Persian nobles'



5. Carpet (det. of medallion), ca. 1505, Met Museum 64.311



6. Portrait of Sultan Husayn Bayqara, ruler of Herat, wearing a cloud collar, ca. 1480, Harvard Art Museums 1958.59



7. Cloud coils surrounding the dedicatory inscription of a manuscript copied for Turkmen ruler Pir Budaq, Shiraz, 1459, Chester Beatty Library Per 135, folio 1r

clothing depicted in manuscript painting throughout the fifteenth century (6). Likewise, the vine scrolls in their fields appear in the illuminations of fifteenth-century Persian manuscripts, as do the designs of their borders. In particular, these design elements seem most closely related to the decorative style of manuscripts produced in royal *kitabkhanas* (design studios) linked to the Timurid and Turkmen rulers of fifteenth-century Shiraz.

For instance, the "cloud coils" that surround the medallion of a 1459 Shiraz manuscript dedicatory roundel (7) also edge the central medallions of carpets in this group (4, 5) but never appear on Safavid court rugs. Jim concluded that the design of these medallion carpets originated in a sub-royal Shiraz *kitabkhana*, although where the carpets themselves were actually woven remains an open question. Possibly they were commercial knockoffs of now-lost carpets made for the Shiraz court. Their large size (up to forty feet in length) at least hints at court inspiration, and certainly indicates a wealthy clientele with spacious living quarters.



8–10 Derivatives of the early Persian cloud-collar medallion carpets: Bijar and Karaja rugs and a Karabagh runner (det.)

Jim then turned to the “collectibles” part of his talk. First he showed some early medallion carpets that are known to have existed but are now missing. One example, which Murray Eiland reported to be in the Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco, in 1985, has since disappeared. Others were war casualties, either destroyed outright or carried off from Berlin by Russian forces at the conclusion of World War II. Still others were sold privately or at auction and remain in private hands. All of these, Jim said, are “treasures to be had.”

More easily obtainable are certain nineteenth-century rugs whose designs derive from the early medallion carpets. Knowledge about design transmission during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is scant, but elements of early Persian medallion rugs clearly percolated into village folk art. Among Jim’s “collectible derivatives” was a Heriz

carpet whose unusual split-leaf border illustrated his point that nineteenth-century village weavers often chose to reuse only a single feature from the early medallion rugs.

Carpet weavers of Bijar were leading adopters of the early carpets’ cloud-collar medallions, using variants of them as repeat patterns or as central motifs on plain or Herati-patterned grounds (8). But as Jim’s images showed, cloud-collar medallions also appeared on rugs from Chahar Mahal, Karaja (9), and the Caucasus. (The use of the Turkish knot in all these areas, he pointed out, did not hinder weavers’ ability to render curvilinear forms.) His Caucasian examples included a Karabagh runner with multiple medallions (10) and a so-called Eagle Kazak, whose namesake motif he considered a cloudband-collar-medallion descendant.



11. Farahan rug

Central Persian rugs, too—in particular Farahans (11) and Mohtasham Kashans (12)—feature strikingly derivative central medallions and sometimes borders.

Returning to Heriz carpets (13), Jim showed more examples with design elements drawn from the early medallion carpets. Quoting Cecil Edwards's observation in *The Persian Carpet*, "I am not aware of any Heriz carpets which may be ascribed, with assurance, to a period before 1800," Jim then wondered, "Where before 1800 did they get the design from?" and encouraged collectors to search for the missing links. As a suggestion, he showed a rug identified in Balpinar and Hirsch's *Carpets of the Vakıflar Museum* as seventeenth-century East Anatolian (14); its central medallion and cartouche border were not only derived from the early medallion carpets but also strikingly Heriz-like. Could it be an intermediary, made in western



12. Mohtasham Kashan rug

Azerbaijan rather than Anatolia? Concluding with that question, he encouraged his audience to join the hunt.

Following his presentation, Jim responded to questions and comments submitted during his talk and posed by host Jean Hoffman. To the first query, about current interest in old Persian carpets, he replied that, since he was no longer trading in Persian goods, he couldn't answer, other than noting that limits on the import of Persian rugs into the U.S. has had an undesirable effect.

Another viewer commented that Shiraz-made rugs were documented as having been imported into Egypt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, to which Jim responded that yes, he notes that fact his book; moreover, Ghazan Khan (the late-thirteenth-century Mongol ruler of Iran) had his new palace in Tabriz completely carpeted with rugs from Shiraz.

The next question concerned Sanguszko carpets, which



13. Heriz carpet

also have medallions. Jim answered that these rugs share the peculiar structure of Kirman "vase" carpets, and noted that he had illustrated one of them in his book. [Ed.: *In his book (pp. 239–41), Jim considers the designs of Sanguszko carpets, with the exception of the split-leaf border on one example, "not relevant to our study of the medallion carpets."*]

Another viewer asked about symmetrically knotted Persian medallion carpets such as the one "illustrated on the dust jacket of the Keir Collection book." [Ed.: *That carpet, which is indeed one of Jim's early medallion rugs, is actually catalogued as Persian-knotted in Spuhler's Islamic Carpets and Textiles in the Keir Collection, p. 89.*] Jim noted that a Turkish-knotted example (a sixteenth-century silk court rug rather than one of the early medallion group) is pictured in his book. To the question of why Persian court carpets from the early period have not survived, he explained that they, too, would have been silk, and simply wore out.



14. Rug fragment, eastern Anatolia (?), 17th century, Vakıflar Museum, Istanbul, Inv. A-1

A different viewer wanted to know if spandrels on some of the medallion carpets were indicative of relative age. No, Jim answered; they, like pendants, were simply a design choice.

Asked if there are surviving Timurid carpets, he responded that some of the early medallion carpets—perhaps as many as ten—may date from the late-Timurid period, and that Jon Thompson had suspected the great compartment carpets in the Met and Lyon might also be Timurid. Answering remaining questions, Jim affirmed that cloud-collar medallions still appear on Persian rugs, and that the dyes in the early medallion carpets were certainly vegetal, with the occasional use of expensive cochineal.

Our thanks to Jim Ford for sharing his knowledge about early Persian medallion carpets, and for showing us that, however remote our chances of collecting the originals, their derivatives are to be found all around us.

February Meeting Review: Alberto Levi on “Tibetan Golden Triangle” Rugs

By Jim Adelson

On February 20, Milan rug dealer Alberto Levi presented “Rugs of the Tibetan Golden Triangle” to NERS members and Zoom guests worldwide. His talk focused on a group of non-Tibetan rug fragments found in Tibet, and on where they originated and how they got there.



After earning a degree in chemistry from NYU, Alberto explained, he returned to Milan to work for a small pharmaceutical company, doing so from a space in the warehouse of his father, an oriental-rug wholesaler. Thus exposed to many antique oriental carpets and to colorful characters in the trade, his interest in rugs blossomed, further nourished by books and catalogues. “Like every good organic chemist,” he joked, “I became a full-time antique oriental rug dealer.”

In 1992, a group of four miscatalogued carpets appeared at auction in Milan; in his Auction Price Guide writeup for *HALI*, of which he was now a contributing editor, Alberto assigned one of these—a symmetrically knotted variant of an early Persian central-medallion type—to an area encompassing Northeast Anatolia, the South Caucasus, and Northwest Persia, for which he coined the term “Golden Triangle.”

At about the same time, Alberto heard about heretofore unknown carpets being found in Tibetan monasteries. Carbon dated to the Seljuk period [twelfth through fourteenth century], these didn't look anything like the so-called Seljuk carpets preserved in Anatolia, but rather had designs of large-scale animals, some with human faces. Soon an early silk carpet with a chessboard depicted next to its central medallion also surfaced. At this point, Alberto decided that he needed to go to Tibet.

He and a friend flew to Kathmandu, Nepal, and embarked on a four-day minibus ride to Lhasa. Finding only Tibetan rugs in the shops around the Potala Palace, they learned that the Snowland Hotel, in downtown Lhasa, was the official hangout for rug pickers in Tibet. There they likewise saw Tibetan rugs, old and reasonably priced, but there were no Seljuk treasures to be had. They did, however, find something else: pile fragments with designs seemingly derived from Caucasian embroideries, reassembled into a Tibetan-format saddle rug (1).

More such fragments appeared, sometimes grouped with seventeenth-century Ningxia fragments, as if they'd emerged from the same place. Giving up his Seljuk rug quest, Alberto then, and on subsequent trips to Tibet, turned to searching out these western oddities, which he named “Tibetan Golden Triangle” rugs.



1. Fragments of a Golden Triangle rug repurposed as a Tibetan saddle rug

Some of them, he learned, had already left Tibet and found their way into private hands. One, owned by a Boston collector, featured a central medallion and a field with cartouches and star-filled octagons (2); its structure, in Alberto's opinion, resembled that of a sixteenth-century Ushak. He compared its overall field design, and that of two other fragments, to the quincunx, or "2-1-2," design of a rug found in the Great Mosque in Divriği and now in the Vakıflar.

A rug auctioned at Sotheby's in 2004 had a cloudband-filled medallion clearly anticipating cloudband Karabagh rugs, but with a central-medallion-and-cartouche-border format inspired by early Persian medallion carpets (3).

The strapwork-arabesque main border of another central-medallion carpet (4) showed that it too was indebted to what Alberto termed the Safavid Tabriz or Northwest Persian design pool [but that previous speaker Jim Ford would maintain is the Shiraz design pool], a major source for many of the Tibetan Golden Triangle rugs.



3. Rug with a cloudband central medallion



2. Medallion rug fragment in a Boston collection



4. Medallion rug with a strapwork main border

Alberto Levi, "Rugs of the Golden Triangle," cont.

Another design group was characterized by large, directional palmettes alternating with smaller floral forms (5) or "Talish" rosettes (6). A characteristic feature of the group—and of many other Golden Triangle rugs—was the presence of small

disks or squares in alternating colors, often in the rugs' guard stripes. Despite their design similarities, however, rugs in this group varied greatly in the density of their knotting and the materials (wool or goat hair) used in their foundations (5a, 6a).



5, 6. Fragmentary palmette rugs with characteristic multicolor disks or squares in their guard borders



5a, 6a. Back details of the rugs above, illustrating their differing foundation materials and knot density

A second Boston-collection fragment from Tibet (7) featured small "snowflake" devices, palmettes, and cloudbands in an apparently overall design, again with disks and squares in the guard borders. Of the star-octagon main border,



7. Fragment of a rug with an overall field pattern and a star-octagon border seen only on rugs sourced in Tibet

Alberto said that he had never encountered it in a rug not sourced from Tibet. He compared it to a similar border motif on a Seljuk rug in the Vakıflar.

Not all the "Golden Triangle" rugs came from Tibet: Alberto showed one that had belonged to, and seemingly puzzled, both Wilhelm von Bode and Kurt Erdmann. Many more examples (most but not all from Tibet) followed, expanding on the various design categories Alberto had already discussed. Several were derived from early Persian medallion carpets (8); others were suggestive of Caucasian carpets with floral, sickle-leaf (9), or dragon designs. The majority were symmetrically knotted, but



8. Central-medallion rug with a cartouche main border



9. Rug with a sickle-leaf field design

there were exceptions: for instance, three Boston-collection fragments of the same large carpet were asymmetrically knotted on severely depressed warps, giving them a Bijar-like handle (10).

How, then, did all these Caucasian/Northwest Persian/eastern Anatolian rugs get to Tibet? In a Facebook rug group, Alberto related, his friend Peter Scholten had shared the discovery, by longtime Tibetophile and rug hunter Thomas Wild, of a key article stating that, by 1682, Armenians had established a trading post in Lhasa.

[H. E. Richardson, "Armenians in India and Tibet," *Journal of the Tibet Society*, vol. 1 (1981): 63–67]:

http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/jts/pdf/JTS_01_05.pdf

Tibet had been unified earlier in the seventeenth century by the fifth Dalai Lama, leading to prosperity and the renovation of many palaces and monasteries. These refurbished buildings needed carpets. Locally woven Tibetan rugs being traditionally small, pillar rugs were ordered from China and, the reasoning goes, rugs in sizes suitable for use as audience and ceremonial carpets were likely commissioned and obtained from the Golden Triangle by the Armenian merchants.



10. One of three fragments of a large carpet with asymmetrical knotting and pronounced warp depression

As for the locale from which these rugs were commissioned, Alberto suggested the greater Tabriz area, with its documented Armenian population, its diverse ethnic groups, and its access to Anatolia and the Caucasus. He concluded with the proposal that, rather than trying to identify the exact ethnic or tribal origin of these early rugs, we should accept their syncretism and be satisfied with the term "Golden Triangle."

Following his presentation, Alberto responded to many audience questions, posed by webinar host Jean Hoffman. Asked whether the Armenians who brought the rugs into Tibet might have sourced rugs from areas other than the Golden Triangle, such as Central Asia, Alberto answered that most of the rugs display Golden Triangle designs and structures. A few look as if they could be Uzbek, however, so a Central Asian origin for some remains a possibility.

Another attendee, noting the rugs' different appearance, asked about a reference book for their designs. "Reference books?—I don't think so. . ." Alberto replied; rather, he felt, the Armenians likely had certain designs they distributed to specific areas around Tabriz, to be executed in different sizes and qualities to fit different budgets.

Another participant asked about the relationship of eight-pointed Seljuk tiles to the characteristic border motifs of Tibetan Golden Triangle rugs. Alberto replied that, while there might be a relationship between those tiles and Anatolian rugs of the Seljuk period, the seventeenth-century Golden Triangle rugs were more likely derived from rugs nearer them in date, rather than from much-earlier architectural elements.

A self-described "contrarian" proposed that the Golden Triangle rugs were simply what the Armenian traders found available in various villages, not what they commissioned. Alberto argued that if that were the case, then near-identical rugs would remain in the West. Instead, the Tibet-sourced rugs tend to have certain distinctive features, suggesting that they were commissioned with specific characteristics.

To questions about carbon dating, Alberto replied that few pieces have been tested, and added, "I'm not a big fan of carbon dating . . . I don't think it gives us the answer." He acknowledged that some people think these rugs are much older than the seventeenth century—that they're Timurid or even Seljuk. But he added, "I don't see the reasons why."

Our many thanks to Alberto for introducing us not only to the characteristics of the Golden Triangle group but also to the hows and whys of their presence in Tibet. His large audience greatly appreciated his talk, as evidenced by such Zoom comments as "I'm awestruck" and "Brilliant."

Previewing Grogan & Company's *The Fine Rugs and Carpets Auction*

By Richard Belkin

Greetings fellow rug collectors,

On Jan 29 in this year of the Covid plague, we were fortunate enough to have the distraction of an auction of antique oriental rugs and carpets at the Boston gallery of Grogan & Company, located on nearly 300-year-old Charles Street in downtown Boston. Michael Grogan, the principal owner of the gallery, has been auctioning antique rugs in Boston since the mid-1980s, first at a location on upper Commonwealth Avenue with eighteen-foot-high ceilings and tall glass windows, and later in an industrial-warehouse-like brick building near the Charles River in Dedham, Mass. Both of these sites were of some architectural merit, which added to the enjoyment of viewing the groups of rugs and carpets Michael had gathered to sell.

His current location, on the first floor of a 120-year-old mixed-use and condominium building very near the Boston Public Garden, combines the best aspects of Boston—great architecture, public outdoor space and people-watching, decent food, and the opportunity to view and maybe buy a really nice antique oriental rug at auction. What more could one ask? Of course, because of the pandemic, in-person previewing of this latest sale was carefully organized, but I still had ample opportunity to examine all the lots, and my observations of some of them follow.

Many of the rugs in the sale were the property of the famous collector/dealer/author James Opie. His knowledge and expertise in the field of South Persian weavings is extensive—perhaps unrivaled—and lots 80 through 145 were items from his own collection. In addition to this predominantly South Persian group were thirty rugs that had been sold to collectors by the late North Shore dealer John Collins, who especially loved Bijars.

In addition there were a few truly notable non-Persian offerings. Lot 71 was an antique Salor three-gul *chaval* (1) (which had been shown off at a New England Rug Society picnic in May 2019). Being a collector of Turkoman weavings myself (in the under-\$3000 price range), I examined this one pretty closely. Its condition was excellent but showing just enough wear to convince me it had seen some use and was an original early-nineteenth-century example, maybe from 1830–40. Its blue *S*-borders and skirt with trees were what I would expect to see in a Salor of this age; its minor guls were beautifully designed and simply and clearly rendered. There were three diamond-shaped dots over each of the center guls that I found very interesting. An unusual, apricot-color dye was used in the center of a few of the flowers in the border. After seeing this *chaval* at Grogan's, I went home and looked through my past catalogs from

Rippon Boswell and Eberhart Herrmann and found two examples of old Salor *chivals* with this distinctive color in the same limited areas; both were cataloged as “around 1800.” Having seen only two similar Salor *chivals* in the past, my opinion of this one is not that expertly informed, but I know enough to say it was a relatively old, rare, and well-executed example in great condition, and a treat to see. Many other local Turkmen enthusiasts also enjoyed examining it, opining on its age, and guessing what its eventual selling price would be.



1. Lot 71, Salor *chaval*, \$60,000 [Ed.: Although this preview was written well before the auction, hammer prices have been added to all the captions]



2. Lot 34, Mohtasham Kashan rug, \$32,500



3. Lot 75, Farahan Sarouk rug, \$1,900



4. Lot 16, fine Qashqa'i rug, \$15,000



3a. Border detail of a Sarouk carpet (lot 68), \$4,000

An antique Mohtasham Kashan rug (2), lot 34, was another superb weaving. Last auctioned at Christie's in 1992, it had formerly been in the Carl Meyer-Pünter Collection, published in 1917, and so has a century-old provenance. The quality of the dyes used, the gold field color, the size (8 ft. 3 in. x 5 ft. 2 in.), the still-flexible condition of the foundation, and the overall complexity of the design made this a top example of an old, formal Persian rug. I found the design of the side borders, whose middle elements are more spread out than those in the corners and focus attention on the central medallion, to be a masterful touch.

The other formal Persian rug that I liked was lot 75 (3), a small Farahan Sarouk with a wide range of colors and the best floral border found in these turn-of-the-century Sarouks. Of note was the fact that the corners of the main border were gracefully resolved with angled corner elements. Often on these rugs, one or both side borders end crudely where they meet the top and bottom borders (see, for instance, a later Sarouk carpet (3a), lot 68 in the sale).



5. Lot 89, Shekarlu rug, \$3,750

Among the South Persian rugs, there were three that stood out to me: lots 16 and 41, both Qashqa'i, and lot 89, a Shekarlu. Lot 16 (4) had the finest of weaves, with silk wefts. On a lovely ivory wool ground, the field motifs of lot 89 (5) were uncrowded enough to show each one off to best advantage, and executed with precision and artfulness not often achieved in South Persian weavings. All three rugs had excellent condition, knot density, and brilliance of color.



6. Lot 80, Khamseh bird rug, \$14,000



8. Lot 29, Bergamo rug, \$8,000



7. Lot 104, Qashqa'i rug, \$3,000



9. Lot 43, Mujur prayer rug, \$5,000

Jim Opie must like rugs with lots of birds, as there were a total of ten of them in this sale. The most attractive was lot 80, a Khamseh with an unusual gold field color, complementary black shrubbery, and blue chickens arranged in a beautifully organized manner (6). Lot 104, a Qashqa'i (7), was another nice weaving, featuring design elements that could easily have been of South Caucasian origin. In excellent original condition, with good, unrepaired pile, it was big—7 ft. 8 in. x 5 ft. 10 in.—and had terrific design appeal and good dyes, including a strong gold in the two central diamonds.

Among the Turkish rugs being offered was lot 29 (8), an old Bergamo that retained both kilim ends and had a dynamite border combination and a field design derived from early Anatolian carpets of the large-pattern Holbein type. Lots 42, a Milas, and 43, a Mujur, were excellent examples of more common Anatolian prayer-rug types; the Milas had a deep aubergine-purple especially prominent in its main border, and the Mujur included an exceptional teal green in its spandrels (9). It looked to me to be 1860-ish.



10. Lot 78, Moghan prayer rug, \$7,500

There were also quite a few very good Caucasian rugs in the sale. Lot 78 (10) was listed in the catalog as a “rare Moghan yellow-ground prayer rug”; it had eight-sided guls filling the center of the field and, to the sides, amulets and animals reminiscent of good Akstafa rugs. Although closer inspection revealed that its selvages had been rebound, it was indeed an exceptional weaving.

Lot 27, an old, blue-ground Kazak (11), was equally good, despite having quite a bit of wear through the center. Its design was an uncommon one, with large, weird animals in the central medallion, looking as if they were grazing in an ivory enclosure. The composition of the field was eye-catching: Memling guls were stacked above and below the ivory central medallion in the middle, so that the viewer’s eye was guided up and down a central axis, but enough space remained on either side for six human figures in striped clothing, dancing or strolling through the usual good-luck or tribal motifs present in many old Caucasian rugs. A well-spaced red border with Turkmen-like motifs enclosed the field. The design of this rug is not unique, having appeared on Kazaks in a couple of Eberhart Herrmann catalogs from the 1980s and in at least one previous Skinner auction, but such rugs are rarely offered for sale and embody exuberant folk art at its best. This one was acceptably dusty, as if it had come off the floor of some old New England bedroom the day before, never having been rewoven or repiled—just what any collector wants to see.

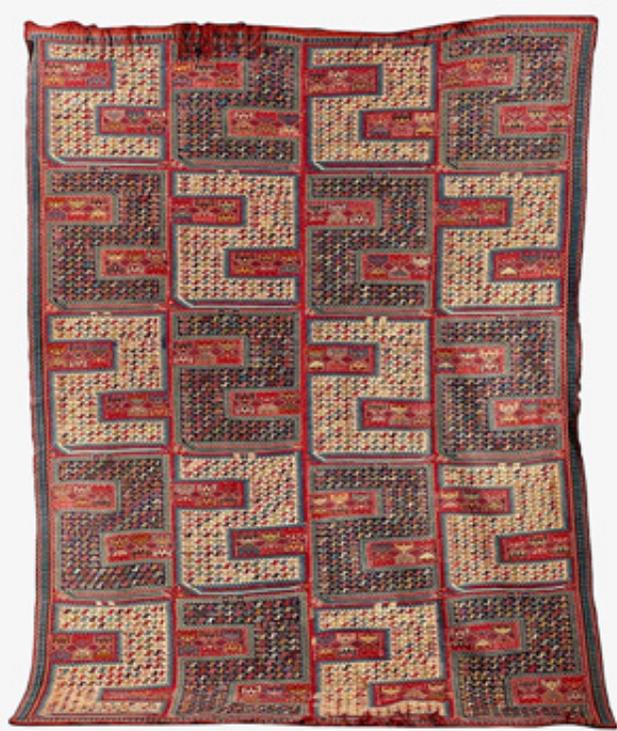


11. Lot 27, Kazak rug, \$7,000



12. Lot 22, Lori Pembak Kazak, \$16,000

Other good Caucasian rugs included lot 22, a large (8 ft. x 6 ft. 5 in.) Lori Pembak Kazak (12) in great condition, with a spacious design and a fine green; lot 24, a Lenkoran long rug with full, glossy pile; and lot 168, a Talish long rug in full pile except for deep corrosion of the black wool, its central panel a shimmering blue—a most desirable rug for



13. Lot 11, Caucasian *sileh*, \$8,500



14. Lot 33, South Caucasian runner, \$2,750



15. Lot 57, Heriz carpet, \$11,000

decorative home use. Lot 11 (13) was a turn-of-the-century Caucasian *sileh* flatweave in nearly perfect condition. Lot 33, an ivory-field South Caucasian runner (14), featured a spacious floral lattice and a red "dragon's tooth" border. Quite a few examples of this type, cataloged as early nineteenth century, have sold over the past few years—always for a lot of money. This is a puzzler to me, as I find

this design and color combination quite uninteresting. But mine is certainly a minority viewpoint.

Grogan's auctions always have a good selection of room-size decorative carpets. In this sale, lot 57, cataloged as a Heriz (15), was in great condition, had an eye-catching, decorative appearance, and will surely improve the look of any living room in which it finds itself. For a hallway, lot 66 was



16. Lot 63, Qasqa'i runner (det.), \$3,500

a 1900-ish Serab runner with good design and colors, but also quite a bit of wear that would need repair before it could be used. Lot 63 was a beautiful but very long Qashqa'i runner (16) with a complicated design; it looked to be in fine condition given the hard life that most runners get in the hallways of homes.



17. Lot 18, Qasqa'i rug, \$4,000



18. Lot 2, Bijar rug, \$8,000

Of the rugs that had been sold by John Collins, lot 18, a Qashqa'i (17) whose centralized design and colors were reminiscent of a Farahan Sarouk, was noteworthy. Its medallion floated on a blue-black field filled with a vigorous floral garland. The rug was of usable size (6 ft. 2 in. x 4 ft. 11 in.) and would look great as decorative art on any wall. Lot 2 was a Bijar scatter rug (18) with a dramatic version of the allover *harshang* design also found in eastern Caucasian Karagashli rugs, and was in superb condition. It got quite a bit of presale bidding.



19. Lot 9, Bijar carpet, \$8,500

A number of room-size decorative Bijar carpets from Mr. Collins were also offered, with the most attractive being lot 9, an 11 ft. 7 in. x 6 ft. 10 in. central-medallion carpet with a plain red field, gold corners, and an arresting floral border (19).

In addition, I found lot 150 (20) very interesting. It was cataloged as an Avar, a type of Caucasian rug with a spartan design of widely separated central and side elements, often with a medium-blue field and a purplish-brown border. But the weaver of this rug, it seemed to me, could have been a student of Picasso and Braque during their Cubist period, and the rug itself right out of the Museum of Modern Art—similar in design to typical Avars but stronger, more geometrically balanced, and better dyed. It also retained both its knotted ends, and, whereas most Avars are quite thin and even, its pile was thick, like a beaver's pelt.

Among the better small weavings was lot 157, a damaged but old Anatolian yastık with a lively soft-apricot color in the border (21); lot 140, a pair of late-nineteenth-century South Persian Qashqa'i saddlebags in "excellent-plus" condition, and lot 49, another Anatolian rug, damaged but quite old, with colors that looked to me to be early nineteenth century.



20. Lot 150, Avar rug, \$1,300



21. Lot 157, East Anatolian yastık, \$1,000

As I page through the auction catalogue that Michael Grogan had printed and distributed to all, I am reminded of just how beautiful his gallery looked with all these carpets hung on the walls and lying about the floor. In terms of merchandise attractiveness, this sale was near the top. Since this review was written long before the auction, I'll be interested to see if the rugs I liked got as much enthusiasm from the rug-buying community as they did in my commentary.

Ed.: For all the rugs in the sale, see https://www.grogan.com/auction-catalog/The-Fine-Rugs-and-Carpets-Auction_ORFPRITG1Y/

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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. Our meetings are held seven or more times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information and renewal forms are available on our website, www.ne-rugsociety.org; by writing to the New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 6125, Holliston, MA 01746; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



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