



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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A Season Curtailed by COVID-19



March: Collector's Night, Honoring Jeff Spurr



April: Joel Greifinger, "Kurdish Rugs Three Ways"



May: Mete Mutlu, "Anatolian Village Pile Rugs"



May: Annual Picnic, Moth Mart, and Show-and-Tell

Days before stay-at-home advisories were issued, we decided to protect our members by canceling the March 20 meeting, honoring NERS member and frequent speaker Jeff Spurr. His presentation, "Off the Beaten Path: A Yen for the Obscure and Underappreciated in Textile Art and Basketry," would have shown us the wide range of his collecting: Kashmir shawls, Central Asian textiles, Kuba textiles, Pygmy barkcloths, Kirdi beadwork from Cameroon, textiles from Sumatra, and textiles and basketry from Borneo. For a summary of Jeff's accomplishments and more about the presentation he had "all ready to go," see the first page of the previous (March 2020) issue of *View*: <https://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v27n3-3-2020.pdf>.

As it became clear that the impact of the new coronavirus would be increasingly dire and lasting, NERS Chairman Joel Greifinger decided that the remaining events scheduled for the 2019–20 season likewise had to be cancelled. One—the April meeting—was his own presentation, titled "Kurdish Rugs Three Ways." Synopses of Joel's planned talk and his remarkably varied career likewise appear in the March newsletter (page 2).

Coming to Newton from Chicago in early May, Mete Mutlu, the owner of Yoruk Rug Gallery, was scheduled to present "Anatolian Village Pile Rugs of the Nineteenth Century," showing us how to differentiate among these appealing rugs by their designs, colors, and weaving characteristics. One of his examples—a Bergama that he dates to circa 1850—is illustrated here; he was planning to bring more rugs with him and to ask members to supply others from their own collections for a direct, in-the-wool tutorial.

Later in May, the spacious grounds and big white tent of Gore Place will be empty of our presence; the annual picnic, moth-mart, and always diverse and entertaining show-and-tell will sadly not go on.

We of course lament the curtailment of our warm gatherings, but we hope our members stay safe and healthy so that, one and all, we can resume meeting when the danger of this contagion has decisively passed.

Eye Candy: A *Harshang Kelleh* Fragment



1. Fragmentary *kelleh* with *harshang* design

The curmudgeon rug collector is suspicious of serendipity. "It's too big, it has condition issues, and anyway it isn't really the kind of thing I collect. Moreover, I should be shedding rugs, not accumulating them." And yet—serendipitously encountering a substantial fragment of a *kelleh* (gallery carpet), mid-nineteenth century at the latest, with a classic *harshang* design in a riot of colors, what can a curmudgeon do?

So here it is (1). If this fragment seems too big (6'8" top to bottom, 7'4" side to side), what are we to say of a complete *harshang kelleh*? An example sold by Christie's (2)

measures 20'7" by 6'10"; Joseph McMullan's rug, now in the Metropolitan Museum (3), is 22'9" by 8'9"; and the Pope-Bernheimer Khorasan *kelleh* (4) is 20'11" by 8'11" .

Fortunately our fragment is big enough to capture the field design common to this trio of rugs. On an extremely dark blue ground, a column of motifs directed alternately upward and downward stretches lengthwise along the center line, flanked on either side by columns of motifs directed right and left along axes orthogonal to the center line; these alternate with "in and out" motifs oriented along diagonals from top left



2. NW Persian *harshang*-design *kelleh*, ca. 1800, sold at Christie's, London



3. McMullan NW Persian *harshang*-design *kelleh*, 19th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 68.219



4. Pope-Bernheimer *harshang*-design *kelleh*, Khorasan, dated 1223 (1808) sold at Dorotheum, Vienna

to bottom right and top right to bottom left. The implication of an infinite repeat of alternating columns of vertically and horizontally oriented motifs is carried to the side borders.

Borders of the fragment and the carpets pictured here by no means represent the full range of border systems found in this family (e.g. 5). But even though *harshang* is Persian for “crab,” I have never seen a *harshang kelleh* with a Caucasian “crab” border (6). [Editor’s note: Whoever coined it (see p. 4), the term *harshang* is used only in rug literature. The Persian word for “crab” (خرچنگ) is properly transliterated *kharchang*.]



5. Trefoil, strapwork, and kufesque borders on *harshang* rugs



6. So-called crab border on a Caucasian rug, ca. 1880



7. A vertically aligned motif on the fragment (fig. 1)



8. A diagonally aligned motif on the fragment (fig. 1)



9. Greek anthemion architectural ornament



10. Mud crab (*Scylla serrata*)

My last sentence raises a question of terminology. What is the *harshang* motif? Rugdom provides two competing answers. One identifies as *harshangs* the motifs aligned vertically (7), the other those aligned diagonally (8).

I am told that Cecil Edwards introduced *harshang* into the rug vocabulary in 1935, but even if that is correct, I am not at present able to say for certain what he meant by it. Nevertheless there are such excellent reasons to prefer one definition to the other that I cannot resist inflicting them upon you, recognizing in advance that I will change no one's mind.

We start with another motif name, the palmette. Originally it seems to have been applied to the Greek anthemion (9), an architectural ornament seen in such structures as the Erechtheion. The "palmette motif" is mentioned in the third (1902) edition of Mumford's *Oriental Rugs*, so ruggies had certainly adopted it by that date at the latest. Since this motif has long been recognized

as a palmette, why would Edwards or anyone else invent a new name for it?

On the other hand, in these and other rugs, the diagonal motif is a prominent feature and deserves its own name. Consider then a crab (10): its claws extend ahead of it and bend toward each other, while its swimming legs (the hindmost, paddle-ended ones) extend behind it and also bend toward each other. The diagonal motif is just a floral crab, but of course a Persian one, a *harshang*. There is even an affinity between the *harshang* motif and the Caucasian "crab" border, both of which feature two pairs of arms bent toward each other. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the *harshang* motif is not a poorly drawn pinwheel or swastika, devices whose arms all bend either clockwise or counterclockwise.

With the terminology settled, we turn to the three pairs of *harshang* motifs in our fragment. The drawing of the two lower pairs is somewhat shaky. What does this say about the weavers? Not, I think, that they were unskilled; the clarity



11. Emperor's Carpet (detail), 2nd half 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 43.121.1

of the palmettes and other figures argues against that. Instead it suggests their unfamiliarity with the *harshang* motif itself. They seem to have caught on by the time they reached the uppermost pair.

But the *harshang* motif was by no means a novelty when our fragment (or rather the rug from which it came) was woven, as witness the three other examples shown. The Pope-Bernheimer *kelleh* is dated 1223, or about 1808 CE, and recognizable *harshang* motifs are found on rugs even older than that. Perhaps the *harshangs* in our fragment are mute witnesses to the time required for designs in carpets of the nobility to trickle down to commercial productions. Where should we seek the spring from which the trickle arose?

My best candidate for the “dawn *harshang*” is found, with a little squinting and a lot of wishful thinking, in the famous “Emperor's” carpets, one of which is in the Metropolitan Museum (**11**) and the other in the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), Vienna; both carpets are dated to



12. Seley Carpet (detail), late 16th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978.550

the second half of the sixteenth century. A worthy rival, the Met's Seley Carpet (**12**), a wonderful example in the medallion-rug family, is perhaps a little later.

But now it's time to forget the scholarly malarkey and enjoy the fragment, with a silent “thank you” to whoever rescued it.

Technical Details

- Size: 6'8" top to bottom, 7'4" side to side
- Warp: Undyed white wool, Z2S, some depression
- Weft: Undyed cotton, 2-ply, 2 shoots between knot rows
- Pile: Wool, symmetric knots, average about 9 vertical and 9 horizontal knots/inch
- Colors: Left as an exercise for the reader
- Sides: Reinforced, over selvages of two paired warps
- Ends: Missing; green stitched-on cotton tape secures the raw warp ends

Lloyd Kannenberg

Austria Auction Company's April 25 Sale: The Power of Provenance

At his Vienna gallery on April 25, Udo Langauer, head of Austria Auction Company, held a 76-lot auction of oriental rugs, Ancient Egyptian objects, and Chinese bronzes. Whereas most of the antiquities remained unsold, the rug offerings proved that, pandemic notwithstanding, well-heeled buyers are still eager to compete for old, rare examples of distinguished provenance or published renown. The four top lots are shown here; their sale prices do not include premiums.



1. Lot 36: East Caucasian dragon carpet, late 17th or early 18th c., 8'2" x 6'6", ex-"noble Central European house"
Published, e.g., in *HALI* 61, 67, and 70 Estimated €60,000–90,000, sold €65,000
2. Lot 35: The Bernheimer Star Ushak, Turkey, 16th c., 5'7" x 3'10", ex-Otto Bernheimer Collection, Munich
Estimated €40,000–60,000, sold €65,000
3. Lot 37: Yellow-ground *yastik*, Turkey, 17th c., 2'10" x 1'10", [purportedly] ex-F. R. Martin Collection
Published, e.g., in *HALI* 5, no. 2, and Morehouse, *Yastiks*, p. 30 Estimated €30,000–40,000, sold €34,000
4. Lot 30: Eagle-gul group II trapping, ca. 1800 or earlier, 2'2" x 5'4", shown at ICOC V (1986) and published in Rautenstengel and Azadi, *Kultur der Turkmen* (1990) Estimated €25,000–35,000, sold €44,000

Other Rug, Textile, and Related Events

Scheduled auctions (check whether in-person preview or auction attendance is permitted):

May 8, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Book Auction:
Literature on Carpets and Textiles
May 9, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, General Carpet Auction
May 30, Vienna, Austria Auctions, Fine Oriental Rugs XX
June 6, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Spring Auction
June 14, Boston, Grogan & Company, The Spring Auction
(includes decorative carpets)

Conference Cancellation

May 1–3 The Santa Ynez, CA, Rug Collectors' Weekend was canceled; the organizers are considering the possibility and practicalities of holding the event in 2021

Exhibitions (museums now closed; check for reopenings)

Until June 7, Minneapolis, Museum of Art
Turkish Rugs on Tudor Walls
Until July 5, Washington, GWU and Textile Museum
Delight in Discovery: The Global Collections of Lloyd Cotson
Until Aug. 23, Toronto, Aga Khan Museum
Sanctuary: Woven Rugs Designed by 36 Leading Contemporary Artists
Until Sept. 17, Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum
The Cloth That Changed the World: India's Painted and Printed Cottons
Until Nov. 16, San Francisco, de Young Museum
The Turkmen Storage Bag

Skinner Sale of Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets: Bidding from Home

With its galleries closed under Massachusetts's ongoing quarantine orders, Skinner concluded its first online-only sale of fine rugs and carpets on May 4. Of the 406 lots on offer, a respectable 78% found buyers. A huge Agra was the top lot; among collectibles, an Ersari main carpet attracted strong early bidding, and good Caucasian rugs were much coveted, as shown below. Prices listed include buyers' premiums.



Clockwise from top left:

- 1.** Lot 1358, Shirvan, 7'1" x 3'9", sold \$21,250 **2.** Lot 1103, Ersari main carpet, 8'5" x 6'10", sold \$17,500
3. Lot 1101, *Shadda*, Caucasus, dated 1304 (1886), 5'2" x 7', sold \$15,000 **4.** Lot 1025, Bordjalu Kazak, 6' x 6'1", sold \$13,750
5. Lot 1170, *Shadda*, Caucasus, 5'9" x 11'1", sold \$13,750 **6.** Lot 1027, Kazak prayer rug, 5'8" x 4', sold \$13,750

NOTE: We encourage members who bid successfully on one or more lots from this sale (or who buy rugs at another auction during the coming months) to inform our distributor, Jim Sampson (jahome22@gmail.com), and we'll plan to run another "What NERS Members Bought" column in the next *View*.

Photo Credits

p. 1: Jeff Spurr (top row); Joel Griefinger, redbubble.com, Jim Burns Collection (row 2); Mete Mutlu (row 3); Jim Sampson (row 4)
pp. 2–5: Lloyd Kannenberg (figs. 1, 7, 8); Christie's London, 4/23/2013 (fig. 2); Metropolitan Museum (figs. 3, 11, 12); Dorotheum, 9/24/2018 (fig. 4); John Taylor, rugtracker.com (figs. 5, 6); Sir Bannister Fletcher *A History of Architecture*, 7th ed. (fig. 9); wildfish.co.nz/portfolio/mudcrab (fig. 10) **p. 6:** Austria Auction Company **p. 7:** Skinner

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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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