



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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October 23 Meeting (Online): Walter Denny, “Rugs in the Metropolitan Museum That Will Never, Ever, Be Hung in the Galleries”



Walter Denny

**What's
its story?
Pulitzer
Mamluk
medallion
carpet,
aka Barbieri
Mamluk
blazon rug,
Egypt,
ca. 1468–96,
Metropolitan
Museum
of Art,
1970.135**



October 23 Details

Day and Time: Friday night, 7:30 PM (EST)

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet!

This will be our first online meeting, via Zoom.

Directions: Jim Sampson will email invitations; you must RSVP to get a meeting ID and passcode.

The collections of most art museums include works that were acquired over time from a variety of sources and reflect evolving collecting taste, scholarship, exhibition standards, and museum missions. Restricted exhibition space means that only a limited number of these works—especially large items such as carpets—can be on display at a given time. The Antonio Ratti Textile Center of the Metropolitan Museum of Art makes all of the Met's many hundreds of carpets, excepting extremely large or fragile ones, available for direct study by scholars. In this illustrated talk, Walter Denny will discuss a series of rugs that are highly unlikely ever to be put on exhibition, and will explore the variety of interesting reasons that they nonetheless remain parts of the Met's permanent collection.

Walter, who last addressed NERS at our September 2013 meeting, is now on sabbatical during his fifty-first year in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he is University Distinguished Professor. From 2007 to 2014 he was also Senior Scholar in Residence in the Department of Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. His current scholarly projects include a comprehensive survey of the history of the knotted-pile carpet in the context of Islamic art. He is the author of *How to Read Islamic Carpets* (Yale University Press, 2014) and many other books and articles, on Iznik ceramics as well as carpets. (See his website, www.wbdenny.com.)

November 21 Meeting (Online): Hadi Maktabi, “Rug ’n’ Roll, COVID & Co.”



Hadi Maktabi, shown in front of an inscribed Kirman pictorial rug in his collection

On Saturday morning, November 21, at ten sharp—a time chosen to accommodate the seven-hour difference between our time zone and his—carpet dealer, scholar, and author Hadi Maktabi will speak to us from Beirut.

Although born into the fourth generation of the Middle East’s oldest carpet-dealing dynasty, Hadi initially majored in mathematics, writing his master’s thesis in number theory. Switching gears, he completed a PhD in Islamic art and carpet studies at Christ Church College, Oxford, under the tutelage of James Allan and the late Jon Thompson. For more than ten years Hadi taught at the American University of Beirut while serving as an advisor to several museums, including the Victoria and Albert. In 2014 he established the Hadi Maktabi Gallery for Rare Carpets, which serves collectors and homeowners all around the world. In 2018 he co-curated the landmark Louvre exhibition *L’Empire des Roses*, the first show dedicated to Persian arts of the Qajar period (1785–1925), to which he lent four royal Qajar carpets from his personal collection. The following year marked the publication of his book *The Persian Carpet: The Forgotten Years, 1722–1872*, which finally put post-Safavid, pre-Ziegler Persian carpets on the map.

Under ordinary circumstances, NERS would have invited Hadi to tell us about that groundbreaking 2019 book. But the double whammy of Covid and the devastating explosion in Beirut on August 4 has changed his focus. About the talk he now plans, he explains, “Carpet dealing is said to always have been a risky profession. In this lecture, I will go over how both the market and academia have shifted due to the global pandemic. With everything going online, various factors change, and new ones come into play. My talk will touch on the Beirut blast as well as the fundraising campaign we launched online in its aftermath.”

November 21 Details

Day and Time: Saturday, 10:00 AM (EST)

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet! This will be our second online meeting, via Zoom.

Directions: Jim Sampson will email invitations; you must RSVP to get a meeting ID and passcode.

The Department of Textile and Fashion Arts, MFA, Boston, and Its Staff: A Valedictory

By Jeff Spurr

After a brilliant online presentation on the color purple, given this past June 23 by Pam Parmal, David and Roberta Logie Curator of Textile and Fashion Arts (TFA), Lauren Whitley, Senior Curator, and Meredith Montague, Head of Textile Conservation at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, I wrote them the following message:

*Dear Pam, Lauren, and Meredith,
I so appreciated your splendid introduction to the world of purple this week. Your collective performance reminded me of what a treasure the MFA has had in its wonderful TFA staff, so knowledgeable of the field, of the collections, and of how to discuss textiles on every level.*

I am truly desolated that your happy and effective crew will soon be no more. Some clearly do not appreciate the elementary fact that your loss is an irretrievable loss to the Museum, and a loss to us all.

*Warmest regards and very best wishes,
Jeff*

When this presentation was being planned as the last part of a series on major colors employed in the production of textiles across space and time, who could have imagined that it would be the last one *ever* for the Department of Textile and Fashion Arts, with their world-class collections, including an ever-advancing one of modern and contemporary fashion arts? Who could have guessed that the splendid staff of the TFA, who seemed to have inexhaustible energy to assist users, and who possessed extraordinary depths of knowledge covering nearly all textile traditions known to us, would soon be no more? This is not simply one of the countless incalculable but expected losses resulting from the baleful reign of COVID-19; it is also the result of administrative incompetence, skewed values, and warped decision-making.

Before proceeding, I would like to offer a backward glance at the history of the department and the presence of textiles in the MFA's collections. The original site of the museum, founded in 1870, was in Copley Plaza, in a building opened in 1876. In 1909, the MFA moved to Huntington Avenue, where it has remained, though augmented by a series of expansions culminating, in 2010, with the wing housing the Art of the Americas. Like the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (founded in 1852 and moved into its current premises in 1857), the initial intent of the MFA was to gather the arts and crafts of the world in the service

of advancing industry, in its case that of New England. Given that the textile industry had been particularly prominent in these environs, textile collecting was a primary aim from the beginning.

Following the 1909 move, the MFA established a textile study room to serve students, designers, and many others; it proved immensely popular. In 1919, **Gertrude Townsend** was offered the job of Assistant in Charge of Textiles in the Department of Western Art. In 1926, she became Keeper of Textiles in the newly established Department of Decorative Arts of Europe and America. In 1930, as textile collections burgeoned under her management, Townsend was made Curator of the new Textile Department, the first department in an American museum exclusively dedicated to textiles.

Though the MFA was an energetic purchaser of world textiles, especially with Townsend taking the lead, gifts played an important role from the beginning. As early as 1878, Edward William Hooper, Treasurer of Harvard College, donated forty-five Peruvian pre-Columbian textiles to the museum, initiating its astonishing collection.

Quoting a department document, "In 1886, **Denman Waldo Ross** (1853–1935), MFA trustee, professor of Design at Harvard University, and noted collector of global art, donated 700 textile fragments to the MFA that embodied the principles of design excellence." Socially well connected, Denman Ross, who taught at Harvard, was a theorist of design and an avid collector of arts and crafts in the service of his design theories. If one searches the MFA's online collections simply using his name, the resulting set comprises no fewer than 11,492 items. In addition to his own paintings and many other media, this figure includes approximately 3,000 textiles, broadly defined, ranging from a so-called Polonaise carpet (woven in Isfahan in the seventeenth century) to pre-Columbian textiles, and representing many other traditions as well. Ross's gifts included both whole pieces and fragments—the latter, I assume, because he believed that one could gain an effective understanding of many designs on the principle of *pars pro toto*. It is no accident that the MFA group honoring those who have given works of art to the museum is named the Denman Waldo Ross Society.

From a TFA document titled "Questions about Collections": "The collection also includes a range in terms of quality. This is a result of the early collecting habits of Denman Waldo Ross, who believed that one could not understand what a great object was unless one



1. Detail of the MFA's Mughal pictorial rug (93.1480)

understood the not so great. Because of this the MFA's textile and fashion arts collection is fairly unique in the US, containing many masterworks as well as works of lesser quality that provide a broader cultural and artistic context. The collection is a significant resource for visitors who are interested in the history of the textile and fashion arts and not only in masterworks."

Anyone who thinks seriously about the manifold role of textiles and dress in economic, social, and political terms knows how true and important this view is. That said, in its essence, Ross's theoretical work, borrowing from scientific ideas, emphasized abstract design elements, resulting in his important text, *A Theory of Pure Design: Harmony, Balance, and Rhythm with Illustrations and Diagrams* (1907).

As a minor footnote re Denman Ross's gifts: on my very first visit to the rug stores in the TFA, back in about 1983, I encountered an astonishing sight: several enormous, essentially room-sized Senneh kilims, devoid of interesting design and featuring very muted colors. Given what Senneh kilims are known for—fineness of weave and design and, usually, a similarly refined palette largely inspired by Kashmir shawls, I could scarcely imagine that such things existed, let alone that they could be found in a museum. I turned to Jean-Michel Tuchscherer, the curator at the time, and said, "These should go first on your deaccession list."

Between the years 1943 and 1953, **Elizabeth Day McCormick**, of Chicago, gave to the MFA her vast and exceptional collection of 5,000 textiles, items of apparel, and accessories from around the world, plus salient books and prints—the single most important such gift the department ever received. With her donation came the first major items



2. Detail of the MFA's greatest "Mamluk" carpet (61.939)

of fashion; subsequent additions resulted in the department's change of name, in 2000, to Textile and Fashion Arts.

Rugs in the MFA

The MFA's rug collection, although not known for its breadth or depth, nevertheless includes several wonderful pieces. The earliest great acquisition (93.1480), a gift, is a unique Mughal pictorial rug (1) from the reign of Emperor Akbar, made in his royal atelier in Lahore. It combines the powerful Persianate influence of Akbar's time with the exuberance and fancifulness of much of the best work in the Indian spirit (including local architecture and imagery):

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/71487/pictorial-carpet?ctx=154c6450-77b0-47c3-95a1-41b5d89ca959&idx=25>

It is presently on view at the MFA, were the museum fully open.

Exceptional among the museum's rugs is its Safavid silk hunting carpet (66.293), a true masterpiece acquired by museum purchase:

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/49170/hunting-carpet?ctx=22d48c8e-6225-453b-81c0-c98710a515bb&idx=6>

It dates to around 1530, during the reign of Shah Tahmasp, whose patronage resulted in the apogee of Persian carpet production. Such extraordinary carpets as this were designed by the best artists in the shah's *kitabkhāna*, or royal workshop. Its presence suggests what could have been if the MFA had ever decided to compete in this domain with the Met, the Textile Museum, or the Philadelphia Museum.

One of my favorites, also acquired by purchase, is a jewel-like "Mamluk" rug (61.939) made in Cairo around 1550, under Ottoman rule (2). It was produced for the



3. Student group viewing two of the MFA's Nigerian textiles formerly in the author's collection

European market, where prestigious objects such as this adorned the tables of the great and the wealthy:

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/115331/carpet?ctx=e64cc6a3-e028-4693-b587-cbba54d638d1&idx=21>

A particularly weird marvel is another Mughal product of the Akbar period (04.1697). An early Denman Ross donation, it was part of a carpet hacked up and dispersed by some dealer back in the day; its fellow fragments are now in many collections. Whereas the MFA titles it a “grotesque” carpet, Walter Denny calls it “the vomit rug”:

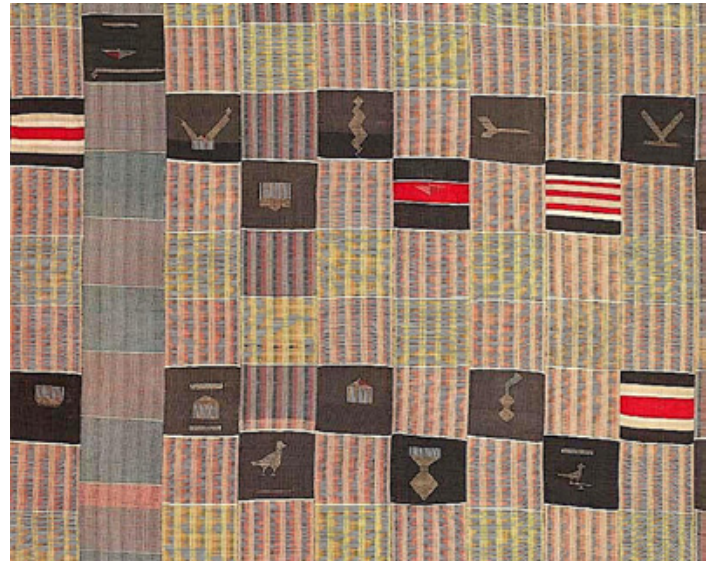
<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/72874/fragment-of-a-grotesque-carpet?ctx=f0aa9a4f-1dd7-4905-bd0b-2029b533ab71&idx=27>

Textiles in the MFA

The MFA's textile collections are so extraordinary it is impossible to do them justice here. Its Japanese Noh robes, for instance, are world famous. While some are remarkable in the boldness of their design, an example of the more elegant sort (11.3903) was created in the eighteenth century; it is from the collection of **William Sturgis Bigelow** (who was also the source of many of the MFA's astonishing Japanese woodblock prints):

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/28297/noh-costume-atsuita?ctx=b8516964-d107-41c7-b8c0-86922bb052dc&idx=6>

Bigelow was one of those far-sighted Yankees who went to Japan in the late nineteenth century and realized that the modernization program commenced under the Meiji Restoration was leading to the disappearance of traditional Japanese arts. Hence he collected them



4. Detail of a Ewe man's wrapper, Togo (2004.676)

avidly while they were still available in abundance.

I will briefly focus on traditions dear to my heart. The museum is graced by a fine collection of Kashmir shawls, and owns that impossibly rare thing, a fully intact seventeenth-century long shawl from the classic period (45.540):

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/48429/shawl?ctx=2ad42edd-e988-48fd-a6d7-d3827c779bdf&idx=61>

A couple of other examples are out there, but this one represents the apogee—a miracle of refinement, technical weaving skill, and survival from the early period of decorated shawls.

As some know, I have been a dedicated collector of African textiles for a very long time. Over a decade ago, twenty-five of them ended up at the Royal Ontario Museum. Since then, I had been working with Pam Parmal to slowly transfer much of my collection to the MFA, principally by sale but also by gift. One image above (3), shows a student group—brought to the TFA Study Room on April 10, 2017, by Stephen Hamilton, Boston artist, academic, and expert on Nigerian weaving and resist-dyeing—looking at a couple of Nigerian textiles that came from my collection.

I had also been seeking out great and unusual pieces on the market, which I would steer to Pam. One of these is a supreme example of Ewe weaving (2004.676), a man's wrapper (4) that I encountered at a show in London in 2004:

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/452030/mans-wrapper?ctx=f409552b-42f8-4ea5-a5b0-b939c908ef40&idx=20>

Most Ewe people live in Ghana, and their splendid textiles

were woven in narrow, warp-faced strips augmented by technically challenging supplementary-weft decoration. This rare textile, on the contrary, was woven in Togo, where a smaller Ewe population lived, and uses a wide, weft-faced strip. About a dozen such examples survive, of which this amazing textile is the most unusual and complicated of them all, employing complementary-weft weaving (reversed color values on either side) augmented not only by extra-weft weaving of largely pictorial motifs, but also by blocks of concatenated bands of color. Nothing else like it exists.

I will close this look at collections with one of the MFA's utterly amazing Paracas mantles (31.501):

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/36603/mantle?ctx=2a77c98a-2d2d-42d5-8832-8ab60c8c1637&idx=26>

Purchased by the MFA back in 1931, it represents a high point of a collection richly endowed with pre-Columbian woven, embroidered, and tie-dyed textiles. Though its imagery may be inscrutable, its magnificence speaks for itself.

The TFA: Its Staff and Their Work

Over many decades, the TFA established itself as a uniquely integrated collection of collections. The department added a curator for jewelry in 2006; it has begun focusing for the first time on fiber art, and given new attention to Native American and African textiles, which in all comprise approximately 45,000 objects. Though the rug and carpet collection may not be distinguished overall, it includes critical pieces, and the department's impressive collections in nearly all other arenas far exceed the range of those in the Textile Museum.

Given the TFA's excellent, three-person conservation section, departmental integration was complete, truly a model for handling the daunting responsibilities that these collections entail. All the department really lacked was a curator for Eastern Hemisphere (or non-Western) textiles. After Diane Mott left that position in 1994, Julia Bailey served as her successor, part-time, until 2002. Shortly after Julia left, Ann Coleman, then head of the department, invited me to lunch with her and the rest of the staff. She asked me whether I would be interested in joining the Visiting Committee, "Not for your deep pockets, mind you." She explained her decision not to continue any Eastern Hemisphere position, noting that that had left them in something of a lurch. Would I make myself available whenever my expertise (deep in certain areas, shallow but existing in a lot more) might be required? I agreed, and did. Pam Parmal schooled herself in Chinese textiles, outside my purview. Eventually, Lauren Whitley was asked to focus



5. Gerard Paquin talks to NERS members about pieces from his collection exhibited at the MFA in 2014

on "Oriental" (i.e., Middle Eastern and Central Asian) rugs, which she did with an occasional assist from me and Julia. It was Lauren who, in 2016, augmented the MFA's less-than-stellar holdings of nomadic and village rugs with estimable auction purchases of a Luri kilim and a Kuba prayer rug from the respective collections of Ignazio Vok and Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick.

In her added role, Lauren effectively exploited the high walls on the second floor—the "Upper Colonnade" within the MFA's rotunda—for small but memorable rug exhibitions, which became occasions for special NERS evening meetings hosted by the TFA. The first such event, in February 2011, was Lauren's special tour of textiles on display in the new Art of the Americas Wing, plus a talk by Julia on four distinguished Caucasian rugs from the MFA collection, shown in the Upper Colonnade. It should be noted here that, in overseeing the regular rotation of textiles and costumes in the fifty-three galleries of the new wing, the TFA took on a huge job, necessitating constant labor by curators and conservators alike.

In February 2012, Lauren hosted another evening event for NERS, occasioned by an exhibition of four antique Chinese carpets, two owned by the MFA, the others by a museum benefactor. Her presentation of these rugs was followed by a special showing of textiles and rugs in the TFA study room and a walkthrough of the exhibition *Beauty as Duty: Textiles and the Home Front in WWII Britain*.

For its March 2013 meeting, NERS members, led by Lawrence Kearney, toured an exhibition of rugs owned by NERS members Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick, followed by a lengthy show-and-tell of further Rudnick pieces. In April 2014, Gerard Paquin led NERS members through the display, likewise mounted in the Upper Colonnade, of ten rugs and bagfaces from his fine collection (5); in March of the following year, NERS members got to view a spectacular group of kilims

from Mike Tschebull's collection, selected by Mike, Julia, and Lauren in concert (with me as witness). Mike discussed them and, separately, gave a slide talk on the origins of Caucasian rug designs. The discovery on the kilims of moths (probably brought into the museum on a visitor's coat) signaled the swan song for such happy collaborations. At one last meeting, in September 2017, NERS members gathered in the TFA study room to view quilts from the collections of both the MFA and friend and lender Jerry Roy, who with assistant curator Jennifer Swope discussed the many examples on display.

Surveying the TFA Collections

An important milestone in the further development of the collections was occasioned by the fact that the old TFA quarters had been in the way of the massive building project for the new American wing, so brand-new quarters were provided, with some of the holdings moved offsite. Before all of this was accomplished, the TFA staff was tasked with reviewing all the objects in the collections—every last one—assessing their artistic and cultural value and updating their accession records, which were corrected where necessary or provided if none were to be found. Pieces long overlooked or not known to exist (in the MFA's attic, for instance) were revealed and identified. Each object was to receive a conservation review, and everything was to be rehoused. This was a monumental task requiring an enormous amount of work, with volunteers pitching in where possible. I, for one, reviewed the whole collection of Kashmir shawls, providing new identification and dating, and grading everything, as requested, either "1" (masterpiece), "2" (valuable for the collection), or "3" (candidate for deaccession). Being me, there were lots of pluses and minuses. As a follow-up footnote, the world's largest and ugliest Sennehs were deaccessioned!

The Shutdown and Its Atrocious Aftermath

It is perfectly clear that all cultural institutions of every sort and scale have been placed under existential threat by the pandemic. In March, the very week before the Great Shutdown, I attended an evening lecture on the museum's medieval and Renaissance-era Hispano-Moresque silk textiles, followed by a dinner. There I encountered "elbumping" for the first time, but how could I know that this was to be the last hurrah? The MFA's response to the shutdown was swift: over three hundred staff members, largely junior ones, were furloughed, seemingly immediately. Soon thereafter, a "buyout" was offered to any staff member fifty-five years of age or older who had at least ten years' tenure at the museum. It was generous, and promises for continued employment being few, fifty-seven individuals accepted it.

The alarming thing was that many of the highly seasoned members of the TFA fell within the eligible cohort.

The MFA's previous director, Malcolm Rogers, adored textiles, and, after the department received an unexpected ten-million-dollar bequest, he loved them and the department even more. Indeed, he gave a bravura performance in Remis Auditorium devoted to *Greenery*, the splendid millefleurs tapestry designed and woven at William Morris's atelier in 1882. Nothing of the sort can be said about the present director, Matthew Teitelbaum, who has shown no interest in, and even active disfavor toward, the TFA. Furthermore, during this dire shutdown period, with the museum staff suffering and in disarray, he has put out a whole series of upbeat bulletins, never once reflecting upon what is happening to that staff, and thus to the MFA itself. (On September 8, he finally had a Q-and-A session on Zoom for a limited audience.)

Ultimately, even more staff members were "let go" than let themselves go. Given absolutely no encouragement to do otherwise, Pam Parmal, Lauren Whitley, and the department manager, Catherine Tutter, took the buyout, as did one of the senior conservators, Claudia Iannuccilli. Given that the vacated fashion arts position had not been filled as the shutdown began, only one junior textile curator—Jennifer Swope—remains, along with the jewelry curator, Emily Stoehrer. Mercifully, two textile conservators—Meredith Montague, the head, and Joel Thompson—have stayed, plus Allison Murphy, who is responsible for collections care.

So shouldn't this be an opportunity, as the museum revives, for gradually rebuilding the department with other promising junior professionals? Not according to Teitelbaum, who has taken this marvelous institution, carefully husbanded and augmented by so many hands and minds over so many years, and torn it apart, such that it can never be anything like what it was. Fashion arts have been placed under Contemporary Art, and, in a fit of genius, all the textile traditions of the world have been placed under American Art. In my view, this is an atrocity for which there is no excuse, and which should be reconsidered before the damage is permanent.

Author's acknowledgment: *Over many years, the TFA has produced various reports and prospectuses, often shared with their now-defunct Visiting Committee, of which I was a member. To help fashion this essay, I have gleaned information from some of these, from the MFA website, and from sources extrinsic to the MFA. Needless to say, all views expressed here concerning the present situation are mine alone.*

Hanna's Handiwork

By Joel Greifinger



1 (left). Farmhouse interior with *jynne* (seat cushion), *åkdyna* (carriage cushion), and *tække* (bed cover)
2 (right). *Bänkdynas* (bench covers) laid out along the walls

As collectors of nomadic, tribal, and village textiles and rugs, we are frequently awed and delighted by the craft and artistry of anonymous weavers, many from cultures about which we have scant reliable information for the period when the pieces were woven. Occasionally, a rug will have what appears to be a date, but we have little reason to believe that such an inscription accurately records the year that the rug was woven, since it is at least equally likely to have been copied from a high-status object in order to add something special, akin to a few knots of silk amongst the wool pile. We can enjoy speculating about the weaver's world and intentions for the weaving, but it's unusual to reach beyond the level of mere plausibility.

So, when I began collecting antique Swedish folk textiles some years back, undoubtedly one of the attractions of these household items was that, having been produced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in a culture with widespread literacy and numeracy, the

dates and initials woven into them were dependable evidence. Record keeping at the parish level provides a rich account of the lives and families of the female weavers from farm households, particularly in Skåne and other areas in southern Sweden, where these weavings were produced for dowries, the commemoration of holidays, and, preeminently, the demonstration to her community of a weaver's skill.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the handiwork of the women in these relatively prosperous farm households **(1)** began being chronicled and collected by such crusading advocates and textile historians as Lilli Zickerman and Emelie von Walterstorff, laying the groundwork for more-recent studies by Ernst Fischer and Viveka Hansen that filled out their social history. Massive collections, like those of the Nordiska Museet (Nordic Museum) and the Hemsjödens Samlingar (Swedish National Handicrafts Association), are available online; these show regional and local design and technical variations. For the collector looking for reliable details about a new acquisition, they're a treasure trove.

What brought this pleasure to a new level for me was obtaining a weaving of which, through research, I have been able to identify the maker and reconstruct a bit of her family and social circumstances. It is a *bänkdyna* or *bänklängd* (bench cushion), used on built-in benches along the walls in typical farmhouses of the region in that era **(2)**, and woven in *rölakan*, or double-interlock tapestry technique. It measures 93" x 25" (236 x 64 cm). Such pieces were often woven for dowries and used only on holidays or for celebrations. The rest of the year, they were stored in large, painted wooden trunks that are themselves now keenly collected **(3)**.



3. Painted, dome-top trunk used for storing textiles



4. Hanna's *bänkdyna* as it would be oriented on a farmhouse bench

This example (4) was woven by Hanna Hansdotter in the village of Jämshög, in the *härad* (county) of Lister, in Blekinge Province. Blekinge was the province west of Skåne, at the southern tip of Sweden, where such folk weavings proliferated at the end of the eighteenth century, their production eventually tapering off after the middle of the nineteenth. Jämshög, which has a current population of about 1,500, is in an agricultural area right at the border with Villands *härad* in next-door Skåne Province. In 1805, the Lister *härad* contained nineteen inhabitants per square kilometer, for a total of 10,429 in the county.

Hanna was originally from Härlunda *härad* in Småland Province, about fifty kilometers north of Jämshög. She was born on May 14, 1822, the illegitimate daughter of Hans and Elin, the latter a maid in the village of Ingemarsholm. Her father's occupation is unknown, and records for her mother only go back a single generation, to her grandparents, Ola and Karin. We don't know when or why she moved to Jämshög, but it is there that she married Sven Olsson (b. 1819), whose great-great grandparents had come to Jämshög in the early eighteenth century. Sven worked as a laborer and later as a carpenter for the more affluent farm households, as he and Hanna maintained a modest household of their own. They had two sons and two daughters, born between 1847 and 1855. Their oldest child, Ola, was the grandfather of the 91-year-old woman, who lives in Jämshög, from whom I obtained her great-grandmother Hanna's *bänkdyna*.

The drawing of the rosettes in the *bänkdyna* is characteristic of Lister *härad*, as is the palette, with its saturated blue and brilliant cochineal-dyed red. The patterns were handed down among the women in the community, and the *bänkdynas*, *åkdynas* (carriage cushions), *jynnes* (seat cushions), and *täckes* (bed covers) that were on display at special gatherings were both a source of status

and, as evidenced by household registers of the time, an important portion of the family's accumulated wealth.

As I mentioned, the primary technique used in this piece is *rölakan* (double-interlock tapestry weave), with wool wefts on linen warps and a warp density of about four per centimeter, as is quite typical. Between colored weft sections, *rölakan* produces clean transitions on the front and ridges on the back (5).



5. *Rölakan* (double-interlock tapestry technique): front and back details of Hanna's *bänkdyna*



6. Simple crosses at one end of Hanna's *bänkdyna*, with a remnant of *tvistränder* from the back fabric.

The backings of these cushions, although often of single-colored plainweave, could be decorated in a number of techniques. Surviving at one end of this one is a very small remnant of a decorative technique called *tvistränder* (6).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lilli Zickerman began to photograph and catalog the weavings still stored in family chests throughout the southern Swedish countryside. She eventually donated 24,000 photographs and illustrations, many of them hand-colored by Lilli and her brother, Sven, to the Nordiska Museet. Shown below (7, 8) are hand-colored photos of *bänkdynas* that had come from Jämshög.

Hanna's bench cover is now hanging in my bedroom, between two windows. It's often the first thing that I see upon waking.

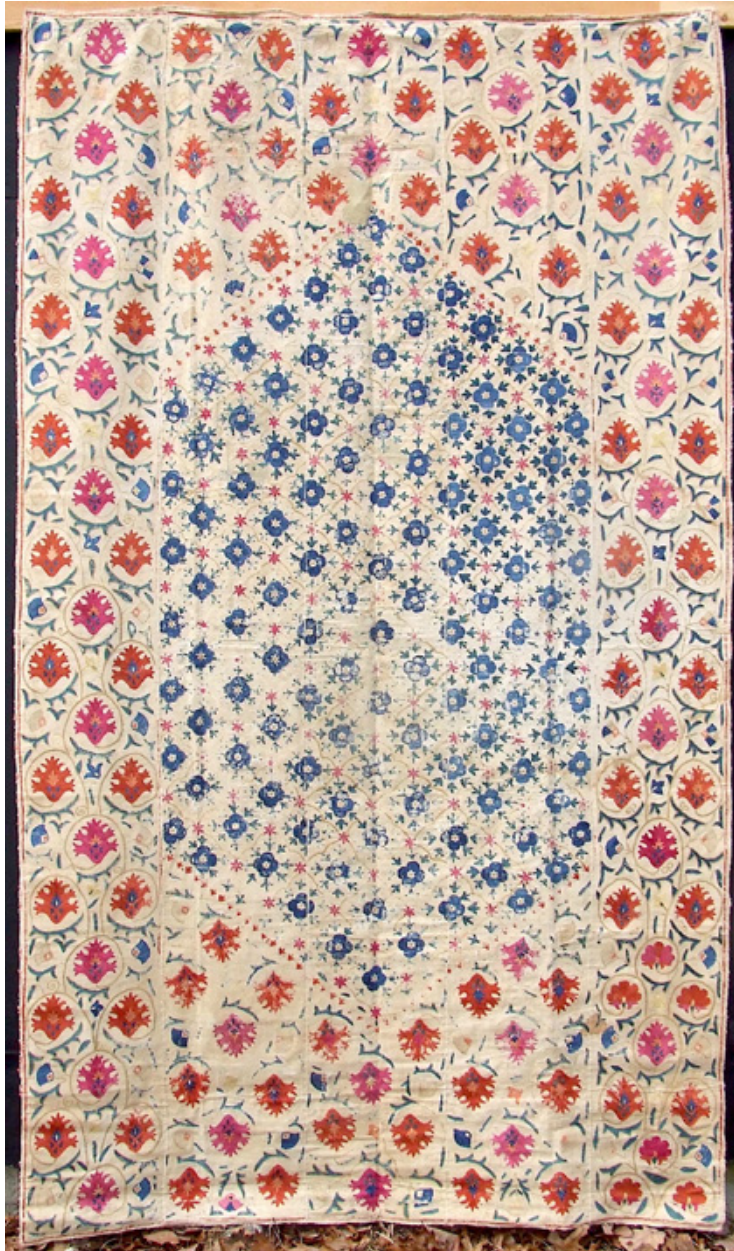


7. *Bänkdyna* from Jämshög, photographed by Lilli Zickerman and hand colored, Nordiska Museet



8. Fragmentary *bänkdyna* from Jämshög, photographed by Lilli Zickerman and hand colored, Nordiska Museet

A Kermina Suzani
By Lloyd Kannenberg
In Memory of Benjamin “Benny” Bolour



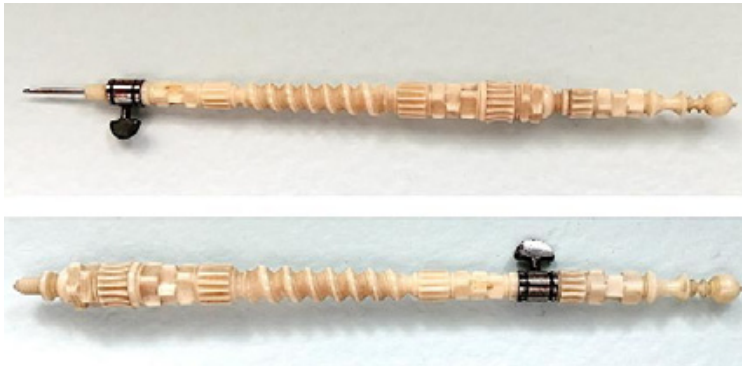
1. Kermina suzani, 18th century, 239 x 137 cm, author's collection

It was many summers ago, at a rug shop in Great Barrington, that I first took notice of a suzani. With saturated primary colors in a cascade of big red flowers and leafy vines, it occupied most of a wall and outshone the rugs that had drawn me in. I offered the proprietor \$500 on the spot. He was very nice about it, explaining that suzanis like his go for considerably more than that. He encouraged me to educate myself about these remarkable textiles so that we could have a serious conversation on my return visit.

And so it began. Among the pleasures of my suzani education have been encounters with particularly striking pieces, among them the beautiful Kermina that's my subject here (1). I acquired it from the late dealer Benjamin “Benny” Bolour, of Los Angeles; it's still on his website. Thanks to Ali Istailifi's memorable presentation in March 2019 (see www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v26n2-3-2019.pdf, pp. 6–9) most NERS members already know a good deal about suzanis, but I would like to add a few comments relevant to this particular example.



2. Detail from an 1875 map of Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand



3. Carved ivory tambour hook, ca. 1830



4. Angelica Kaufmann, *Woman in Turkish Dress*, 1773, Pushkin State Museum, showing tambour embroidery

Suzanis were originally dowry pieces made by Uzbek and Tajik women, most commonly those living in the Bukhara Emirate (not Khanate, since in 1785 Shah Murad formally took power from the Genghisid Khans) of Transoxiana (roughly coterminous with modern Uzbekistan and northern Tajikistan). The map detail (2) shows part of this region, with the main production centers underlined in red. (You can almost always safely identify a suzani as a Bukhara, and if challenged simply say, “I was referring to the Emirate, not merely the town.”) Ali did not include Kermina in his list of suzani production centers, and with good reason: you will not find it on any modern map. Formerly one of the Emir’s stopping points on that part of the silk route between Bukhara and Samarkand (the road can be traced on the map), with the Russian conquest of Central Asia it dwindled from town to village to hamlet until finally, in 1958, it was “refounded” as Navoi, capital of the Navoi Viloyat, the second-largest administrative region in Uzbekistan. What is left of Kermina is the mud-brick Old Quarter of ultramodern steel-and-concrete Navoi.

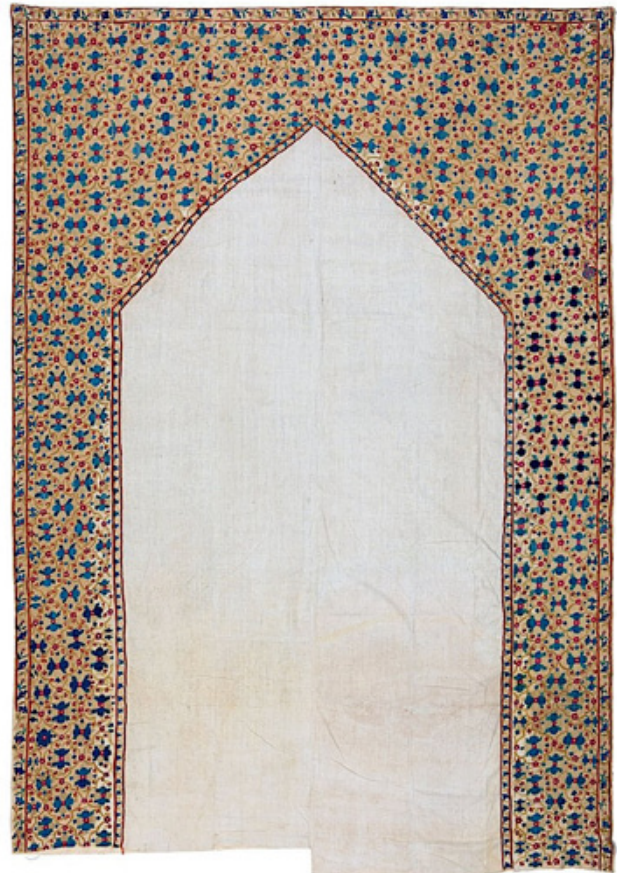
Russian enthusiasm for Central Asian textiles opened

new opportunities for Uzbek entrepreneurs. Suzanis in particular became commercial products. To meet the growing demand, more embroiderers were recruited, including large numbers of men (according to Franz von Schwarz, *Turkestan: Die Wiege der indogermanischen Völker* [Freiburg, 1900]). In the latter half of the nineteenth century new designs, new materials, and new “chemical” dyes made their appearance, with a consequent decline in quality.

Given the conquest and commercial pressures, it is remarkable that the embroidery techniques used did not change. As Ali told us, there were only four types: two different satin stitches, a buttonhole stitch, and tambour work. Of these I think tambour is the most interesting. Strictly speaking, it is not needlework but rather akin to crochet. The tambour hook (3) is the tiny metal equivalent of a crochet hook; with it the embroiderer produces a chain stitch. The foundation fabric must be kept taut, and since the work requires both hands, tautness is achieved by stretching the fabric on a circular (or occasionally rectangular) frame. The embroidery in its frame looks like a drumhead or tambourine (4), whence its (Western) name.



5. Ura Tube suzani, 19th century, 172 x 142 cm, formerly Vok Collection



6. Kermina "niche" suzani, 19th century, 250 x 174 cm, Austria Auction Company, Mar. 2014

The ancestor of tambour is the *ari* technique, originally developed by leather workers in India and used in Gujarat on embroideries made for the Mughal court and for export to Europe during the seventeenth century (see Heidi and Helmut Neumann, "Gujarati Embroidery in the N2H Collection," *HALI* 203: 104–9). After Aurangzeb's death, in 1701, both of these markets declined, but the technique survived and spread widely—to Europe, the Near East, and of course Central Asia. It is not surprising that Mughal designs also migrated to Central Asia, as exemplified by a magnificent suzani (5) that, in the unforgettable words of Penny Oakley (*HALI* 149: 47) "screams 'Mughal influence.'" Motifs and practices of many other cultures were also adopted by Uzbek embroiderers. Thus the unfinished bottom of a Kermina "niche" suzani (6) echoes the similarly unfinished bottom of the Kazakh *tus kiis* (7) made in the Altai mountains, and marks the Turkic ancestry common to Kazakhs and Uzbeks. According to Jakob Taube (in Ignazio Vok, *Suzani: A Textile Art from Central Asia*, vol. 1 [1994], 8–9), a suzani of this "niche" format and large size is a bridal bedsheet (*rūjžo*). Vok (*ibid*, pl. 36) adds,



7. Kazakh *tus kiis* (wall hanging), Altai mountains, 20th century, 125 x 223 cm, author's collection

"On the empty unembroidered area was meant to appear, according to common custom, proof of the bride's virginity."

The single-arch design of the *rūjžo* does not comport well with the double-arch format of our subject suzani (1), however. The small blue flowers surrounding the unadorned



8. Detail of the author's Kermina suzani

niche of the *rūjžo* have been transplanted to fill its entire field. (Such an array of blue flowers in their fields is a well-known, recurring theme in Kermina suzanis.) The flowers here are supported on a delicate and very finely worked lattice, each intersection secured with a tiny red flower. The curvilinear tendrils carrying the spiky flowers in the border are similarly rendered. These details are more easily seen in detail (8). A charming later example has a rectangular field and more robust and leafy tendrils in the border (9). The side borders of spiky flowers in three columns on our subject example are somewhat uncommon in Kermina suzanis. Here these flowers have a strong upward directionality that is reversed only in the section just below the field. The same cannot be said of the border flowers in another example (10), which are more freely done, to say the least.

It is, however, the double-arched field of our subject suzani that is its truly unusual feature. To date I have seen



9. Kermina *nim* suzani, ca. 1850, 161 x 111 cm, from Rachel Hassan, *Flowering Gardens along the Silk Road*, pl. 6



10. Kermina suzani, 18th century, 233 x 145 cm, [Sotheby's.com](https://www.sothebys.com/auctions/2000/kermina-suzani), Nov. 2000

11. Kermina suzani, ca. 1800, 226 x 183 cm, Peter Pap

12. Kermina *nim* suzani, 144 x 100 cm, Rippon Boswell, Nov. 2018

only two other Kermina suzanis with this form (11, 12).

In the somewhat later example (12), the spiky flowers in the border of our subject suzani (1, 8) have migrated to the field and turned blue. What is the source of this field shape?

An answer suggests itself if we replace the term "double-arched" with "hexagonal," and recall Ali's chart depicting the evolution of Bukhara suzanis (13). It begins with archaic large-medallion suzanis, in which the hexagonal field is common (14). Note that one branch of Ali's proposed evolution leads to the "charming later example" (9) mentioned above (and outlined in blue on his chart). Is it too much



13. Ali Istalifi's chart of suzani design development

of a stretch to see the hexagonal field of a quiet, even meditative suzani like ours as an echo of those mighty pieces? I suggest it only as a possibility.

But Ali's chart raises another issue. The eighteenth-century date that Bolour assigned to our subject suzani seems manifestly inconsistent with the "mid-nineteenth century onwards" dating that Ali gives the "charming" example (9). And yet there is a great difference between these two embroideries. The former (1, 8) has all the earmarks of a traditional suzani: a one-off design made as part of a dowry by the bride herself, perhaps with the help of her mother and her aunts. Although the work is beautifully done, the main aim was not perfection (as witness the crowding of the flowers in the upper right of the field) but faithfulness to the symbolic purpose of the piece. It was most definitely not made for the market. In contrast, the latter example (9)—from the Vok Collection, published in *Suzani: A Textile Art from Central Asia*, vol. 2 (2006), pl. 50, where it is dated "ca. 1850"—is finished to perfection, surely by a professional hand. We can even speculate that it was made to a standard design, since it has a near twin from the Poppmeier Collection



14. Large-medallion suzani, formerly Vok Collection, shown outlined in red on Ali's chart

(Rippon Boswell, Mar. 10, 2018, lot 62). Its commercial appeal is manifest. There is no shame in this commercial aspect of later products; after all, many of the greatest oriental rugs and textiles are workshop pieces. Indeed, it is well established that those great works were inspirational for village and tribal weavings. In the present case, however, I think the design influence runs in the other direction; our subject suzani is an archaic example of a design that achieved its full flowering, so to speak, in the lush gardens of its successors.

There is more, of course. What kind of flowers are the blue blossoms in the field? The little red ones anchoring the lattice? The spiky flowers in the border, and the tiny blue-and-silver, bell-shaped ones scattered, seemingly at random, in the border? And did you notice the six rounded, Ura Tube-style blossoms tucked into a corner? I am still learning!

Chairman's Report for the 2019–20 Season

Like so many of our usual activities, last year's NERS season came to an abrupt halt with the arrival of the novel coronavirus in early 2020. The programs in the first half of the season had been well attended and very well received. We were poised for a session spotlighting our own world-renowned textile collector, Jeff Spurr, in March, followed by a presentation on Kurdish weaving in April and one on Turkish village rugs in May. Then we would gather for our celebratory yearly wrap-up at our picnic and extensive show-and-tell. But like so many of our plans, both personal and in our country and the world, all of these had to be forgone to try to keep ourselves and each other safe.

At this socially distanced time of predominantly virtual connection, it's a pleasure to think back to our in-person meetings last fall. We started in September hearing from John Wertime, who brought his many decades of experience as a collector, scholar, and dealer to bear in a wide-ranging presentation on small weavings from Northwest Iran. These were pieces that John has collected and written about since he was one of the founding members of the almost-legendary Teheran Rug Society. In October, the geographical focus shifted to Tibet. Cheri Hunter took us through a spirited and visually opulent travelogue of her visit to Tibet's eastern grasslands that combined ethnography, history, and, of course, beautiful textiles. Later in October, Steering Committee member Jean Hoffman arranged for NERS members to visit the home of Ed and Deborah Shein and be given a tour of their American modernist paintings and furniture and their superb oriental rugs. In November, Shiv Sikri shared evidence for his hypothesis about some transcultural markings in the patterns of tribal rugs. After that meeting, we adjourned for the winter, expecting to resume at the same level of interest and engagement in the spring. That now feels like a long time ago.

Leadership

Functionally, the roles on the Steering Committee remained stable last season. Julia Bailey continues to edit and produce our acclaimed newsletter, which serves not only as a mechanism for communication but also as an informational and educational tool for the wider rug community. The lucid and detailed reports on speaker presentations by our Recording Secretary, Jim Adelson, allow the value of our meetings to spread far beyond the physical attendees. Jeff Spurr, Lloyd Kannenberg, and Yon Bard provide additional newsletter contributions. Jim Sampson manages our finances, keeps the membership rolls, and distributes newsletters and other announcements of interest to the membership. Yon, Jim S., and Julia are our meeting photographers. Jean Hoffman organized our field trip to the Sheins in October. Richard Belkin brings the lights and other equipment, and Richard Larkin supplies the coffee.

Jeff posts upcoming meetings on <https://rugrabbit.com/>. Jeff and I alternate introducing speakers at meetings. Ann Nicholas remains our representative on the board of ACOR. Our thanks again go to Martha Brooks for her ongoing administration of the NERS website.

My role as Chairman of NERS includes managing the speaker program, arranging meeting venues, and, if necessary, operating the digital-projection equipment. I also administer and update our Facebook page, which continues to attract new followers. I started as Program Chair in 2014 and became Chairman the following year. This upcoming season will be my last in those roles. I hope to remain on the Steering Committee but plan to pass along the responsibilities of the Chair.

Finances and Membership

Our total membership edged down slightly, to 105, but we added ten new (or returning) members: Laura Byergo, Meredith Laufer, Benjamin Mini, Rachel Payton, Thomas Harris, Ted Hegarty, Donna Hill, Ed and Deborah Shein, and Mara Taylor. We remain one of the largest and most active American rug societies. The great majority of our members hail from (all over) New England, but we continue to have members from New York, Texas, and the United Kingdom and now have one from Ireland. Special acknowledgment is due to our Supporting and Patron members, whose "above and beyond" generosity has helped maintain our financial health. Supporting members for 2019–20 were Donald Breyer, John Clift, Richard Larkin and Martha Brooks, Gary and Susan Lind-Sinanian, David Lawson, Ann Nicholas and Rich Blumenthal, Mitch Rudnick, and Charles and Theresa Wagner. Patron members, who support NERS at the highest level, are James Adelson and Debbie Sheetz, Julia and Doug Bailey, Richard Belkin and Meredith Laufer, Louise and Buzz Dohanian, Thomas Harris, Jean Hoffman, Ali Istalifi, Lloyd and Susan Kannenberg, Lena and Charles Nargozian, Amir Oskouei, Peter Pap, Beau Ryan, Ed and Deborah Shein, Julian Taibi, and Alan Varteresian. Thanks to all.

Our upcoming 2020–21 season will obviously be quite different from those in our past. We are currently making plans for a number of virtual meetings, beginning with a tantalizing-sounding presentation by Walter Denny, who describes it as about "rugs in the Metropolitan Museum that you will never, ever see on display in the galleries—some of which are actually rather interesting in a horrifying sort of way." In addition to the presentations that we are producing, we are also making arrangements with other rug societies for sharing one another's programs.

Thank you for your continued support and engagement in this odd and disorienting period. We hope to see you all virtually, in our little boxes on our well-used screens.

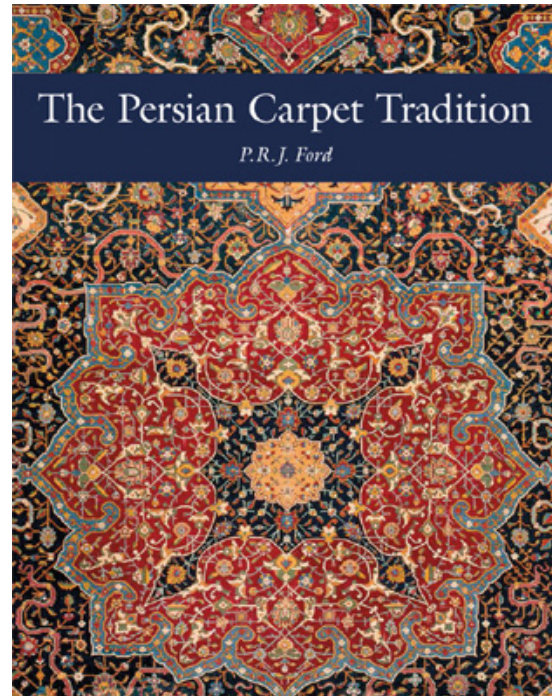
Joel Greifinger

P. R. J. (“Jim”) Ford’s *The Persian Carpet Tradition* Wins TSA Book Award

The Textile Society of America (TSA) has announced that the 2019 recipient of the R. L. Shep Ethnic Textiles Book Award is P. R. J. (“Jim”) Ford, for his *The Persian Carpet Tradition: Six Centuries of Design Evolution*.

Published by *HALI*, the book is a painstakingly researched and gorgeously illustrated account of the fifteenth-to-sixteenth-century “design revolution” that introduced to Persian carpets both a central-medallion scheme and a complex floral repertoire. Together or separately, these “revolutionary” design elements persisted or were revived on rugs made over the course of the following centuries. As Jim shows in the last chapters of his book, they eventually defined the look not just of modern Persian city carpets, but also of village and even tribal rugs within and beyond Iran.

NERS joins the TSA in extending congratulations to Jim for his impressive and long-in-the-making achievement. *The Persian Carpet Tradition* can be ordered from *HALI* and other booksellers.



Book jacket image: Rothschild medallion carpet (detail), first half of the sixteenth century, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CA20

Rug, Textile, and Related Events

Scheduled auctions

- Oct. 17, Vienna, Austria Auction Company
Fine Antique Oriental Rugs XXII
- Oct. 19, London, Christie's
Arts of the Islamic World, including Rugs and Carpets
- Oct. 21–29, Skinner, Marlborough, MA
Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets (online bidding)
- Nov. 21, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Autumn Auction

Exhibition (museum now closed; check for reopening)

- Until Nov. 16, San Francisco, de Young Museum
The Turkmen Storage Bag

Online museum collections to explore

https://hali.com/news/three-great-online-resources-for-antique-carpets-and-textiles/?mc_cid=0740245fd1&mc_eid=a14aed2446

Future NERS Meeting



Our December meeting, again online via Zoom, will feature NERS member and frequent speaker Mike Tschbull. Mike plans to tell us about the process of creating and bringing to print his recent book, *Qarajeh to Quba*, which presents outstanding Caucasian rugs from his collection, all dazzlingly photographed. Date, time, and title to be announced.

Photo Credits

p. 1: Walter Denny **p. 2:** Hadi Maktabi **pp. 3–7:** MFA Boston (figs. 1–4), Julia Bailey (fig. 5) **pp. 8–10** Viveka Hansen, *Swedish Textile Art: Khalili Collection* (figs. 1, 2), Per-Axel Hylta, *Skånsk Allmogekonst* (fig. 3), Joel Greifinger (figs. 4–6), Hemslöjdens Samlingar (figs. 7, 8) **pp. 11–15:** Lloyd Kannenberg (figs. 1, 7, 8), World Digital Library (fig. 2), elegantarts.com (fig. 3), pinterest.com (fig. 4), Rippon Boswell (figs. 5, 12, 14), Austria Auction Co. (fig. 6), Hassan, *Flowering Gardens* (fig. 9), Sotheby's (fig. 10), Peter Pap (fig. 11), Ali Istalifi (fig. 13) **p. 17:** *HALI* (top), John Howe (bottom)

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Distributor: Jim Sampson

NERS 2020–21 Steering Committee: Joel Greifinger

(Chairman), Jim Adelson, Julia Bailey, Yon Bard,
Richard Belkin, Jean Hoffman, Lloyd Kannenberg,
Jim Sampson, Jeff Spurr

ACOR Representative: Ann Nicholas

If you haven't already done so, please renew your NERS membership now, in any amount you feel comfortable contributing. You can pay online: go to www.ne-rugsociety.org/NERS-paypal.htm and follow directions. Alternatively, you can mail a check, payable to NERS, to our Holliston address (see the box opposite).

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.



The New England Rug Society

P.O. Box 6125

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