

# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 22 No. 1 September 2014

www.ne-rugsociety.org

## September 19 Meeting: Jeff Spurr on Kashmir Shawls in Persia



Opening the 2014-15 season at the Durant-Kenrick House, longtime NERS member Jeff Spurr will present "The Allure of Luxury: The Impact of the Kashmir Shawl on Dress and Design in Persia." In his talk, Jeff will illustrate the pronounced influence of Kashmir shawls on Persian dress over three centuries, and will consider the economic impact of their presence in Persia, including local efforts to emulate them. Finally, he will illustrate the ways in which shawl designs were transmitted to other media, especially carpets. For show and tell, he requests that members bring Persian and Caucasian rugs that may reflect design sources in Kashmir shawls.

Jeff is an independent scholar of Islamic textiles and a dedicated collector of non-Western textiles, basketry, and beadwork. He was employed for twenty-six years at Harvard, where he developed and managed collections of historical photographs of the Middle East and curated several shows at the Sackler Museum. For ACOR 8, in 2006, he organized and mounted the exhibition "Unusual and Overlooked: Antique Textiles from Central Asia." He is a co-author of *Kashmir Shawls: The Tapi Collection*, published in 2012, and has written many articles for *HALI*.

1. A Persian prince (detail of a Qajar royal portrait), ca. 1820

2. Jeff at a Textile Museum symposium



## September 19 Meeting Details

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Avenue Newton Centre, MA, 02458

**Directions: From Boston and east,** take Mass Pike to exit 17 and follow signs for Boston/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre St. for 0.1 miles. Go LEFT on Franklin St. for 0.3 miles. Turn RIGHT on Waverley and go 0.2 miles. House is on LEFT.

**From Rt. 128 and west,** take Mass Pike to exit 17, turn RIGHT onto Centre Street and follow directions above.

**From Watertown Square:** Take Galen Street (Rt. 16) toward Newton Centre for 0.4 miles. Continue to Washington St. toward West Newton/Newton Centre, making a U-turn over the Pike. At Newton Centre sign, go RIGHT on Centre Street and follow directions above.

Parking: On Kenrick Street. Parking places at the end of the Durant-Kenrick House driveway may be used for dropping off people or supplies, but NOT for parking during the meeting. Food: Provided by NERS Steering Committee members.

Please arrive before 6:45 to set up.

## October 24 Meeting: Meredith Montague and Buzz Dohanian on Rug Care

We who collect and prize oriental rugs often puzzle over the best way of caring for them. At the October 24 meeting, at ALMA, two experts will approach this issue from different professional standpoints.

Meredith Montague, who heads the Gabriella and Leo Beranek Textile Conservation Laboratory of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, will address the long-term preservation and care of carpets. As conservator at the MFA for over twenty years, Meredith is responsible for the storage, treatment, and display of carpets in the permanent collection of the MFA as well as those on loan from outside the museum. An integral part of her work is safely preventing damage from insects, water, dust, and light. Her talk will address recommended preventative-care routines, specific solutions to insect infestation, and storage and exhibition challenges.

Since boyhood, Armen Dohanian Jr., whom fellow NERS members all know as Buzz, has been involved with Bon Ton Rug Cleansers in Watertown, a business started by his grandfather. Armed with a BS in biochemistry from the University of Massachusetts and an MBA from Boston University, he joined the company full time in 1972, and has been active in several related professional associations. Buzz will discuss the current state of the cleaning and restoration industry in floor textiles generally, and will explain the specifics of Bon Ton Rug's approach to oriental rug care.

## October 24 Meeting Details

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place: Armenian Library and Museum of America** 

65 Main Street Watertown, MA 02472

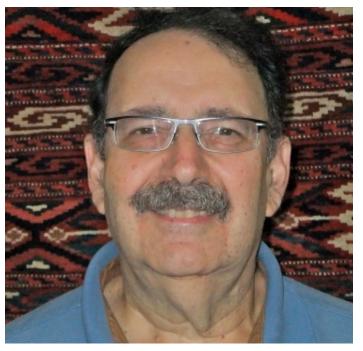
**Directions:** Go to Watertown Square. (Out-oftowners, get off the Mass Pike at exit 17 and follow the signs.) Take Main Street (Rt. 20) westbound (left turn if coming from the Pike). Church Street is at the first traffic light, and the museum building is on the right-hand corner.

Parking: Turn right on Church Street and enter the municipal lot on the right. Most meters are free after 6 p.m., but check to make sure!

Food: Members whose last names begin with H through P will provide food. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and stay to clean up afterwards.



**Meredith Montague** 



**Buzz Dohanian** 

## NERS Co-Chair Report for the 2013–14 Season

#### Leadership

Ann Nicholas and Julia Bailey have completed their fourth season as co-chairs of NERS. Ann's major roles are managing the speaker program and arranging meeting venues. Julia edits and produces the newsletter and runs meetings. Other Steering Committee members who keep NERS going are Lloyd Kannenberg and Louise Dohanian, who transport our amplification system and screen as well as food supplies; Joel Greifinger, who with Rich Blumenthal handles the digital projection equipment; Jim Sampson, who manages our membership rolls and distributes newsletters and other announcements; Bob Alimi, our webmaster; newsletter writer Jim Adelson, who so ably reports on speaker presentations; and other regular or occasional newsletter contributors Jeff Spurr, Ann, and Lloyd. Jeff posts upcoming meetings on www.RugRabbit.com. Yon Bard is our meeting photographer. Richard Larkin fills in as needed, as does our newest committee member. Rich Belkin, who found us our new Durant-Kenrick venue and provided various supplies for our meetings there.

#### Meetings and speakers, 2013–14 (see photos on p. 13)

Meetings during the past season focused on museum collections and installations of rugs and textiles, on the carpet-auction scene past and present, on private collecting, and on rugs of far-distant or near-local origin.

In September, at Lincoln First Parish, Walter Denny presented an overview of recently opened Islamic museums or galleries, praising or critiquing the display of carpets in Qatar's Museum of Islamic Art and the Louvre, and giving us an insider report of carpet installation at the Metropolitan Museum.

At the October meeting, at ALMA in Watertown, Lawrence Kearney introduced us to the artistry of Americanmade modernist and Art Deco hooked rugs, showing dozens of arresting examples from his collection.

In November, at a new venue—the historic Durant-Kenrick House in Newton—ACOR-sponsored speaker Koos de Jong put on an elaborate multimedia show devoted to the history of saddle rugs and other horse-related weavings from China and elsewhere. For drama, Koos even included movie clips from Mongol: The Rise of Genghis Khan, showing hordes of sword-wielding horsemen and deadly archers.

In February, again at the Durant-Kenrick House, Lee Talbot enlightened us about the under-construction facilities of the Textile Museum and the TM's planned inaugural exhibition, "Unraveling Identity: Our Textiles, Our Stories."

Regaling us with tales of his personal journey from auction-house intern to gallery owner—including thirty-five years of auctioning oriental rugs—Michael Grogan hosted the March meeting at his Dedham headquarters.

The April meeting, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, featured a gallery tour by Gerard Paquin of ten exceptional rugs and bags from his collection, followed by a viewing of rarely seen MFA carpets and textiles (see pp. 4-7).

The May picnic, at Gore Place, Waltham, concluded the season with a large moth mart and a lively post-lunch showand-tell (see pp. 8-10).

#### **Finances and Membership**

Our finances have remained sound; we again ended the season with a budget surplus, due to the generosity of our member-speakers. Membership in NERS, which had jumped in the 2012-13 season from 124 to 131, dropped back to 122, but we added four new members—Erica Jorjorian, Catherine Reurs, and Susan and Michael Zellmann-Rohrer—and Thom Mond rejoined us after a hiatus. We continue to be one of the largest and most active American rug societies. True to our name, the great majority of our members hail from New England (with every state represented). But a few of us are from farther away: New York (2), Florida (2), Illinois (1), and Texas (1), plus an international member from Austria.

Special acknowledgment is due to our Supporting and Patron members, whose "above and beyond" generosity has helped maintain our financial health.

Supporting members for 2013-14 are **John Clift**, Jeremy and Hanne Grantham, David Lawson, Gary and Susan Lind-Sinanian, Barbara and Ken Matheson, Selma Newburgh, Ann Nicholas and Rich Blumenthal, Klaudia **Shepard, Tom and Peggy Simons, Steve and Harmony** Spongberg, and Alan Varteresian.

Patron members, who support NERS at the highest level, are Jim Adelson and Debbie Sheetz, Doug and Julia Bailey, Rich Belkin, Louise and Buzz Dohanian, Michael and Nancy Grogan, Lloyd and Susan Kannenberg, Lena and Charles Nargozian, Rosalie and Mitch Rudnick, and Beau Ryan. Thank you all.

In conclusion, we the co-chairs extend to every NERS member our warm thanks for your support during the past season. We hope that, in the forthcoming months, you'll continue to offer the encouragement, enthusiasm, and constructive ideas so necessary to keeping our society vital and rewarding.

Julia Bailey and Ann Nicholas

## April Meeting Review: A Night at the MFA, with Rugs from Gerard Paquin's Collection

On April 25, NERS members and guests gathered at the Museum of Fine Arts for the annual Collector Series session. This year, the museum was exhibiting ten rugs and bagfaces from the collection of Gerard Paquin, and Gerard himself talked about them.

He began by describing the selection process, praising curator Lauren Whitley, who had picked the items on display for their appeal to the general museum-going public and their suitability for the gallery where they were being shown. He told how Lauren, in reviewing his collection, had said, "That one's too big for the space, that one's too small, that one's too tattered, that one's too . . . wonky."

The first stop on the gallery tour was in front of a South Persian carpet, which Gerard said had been sold to him as a Qashqa'i. Nevertheless, he believed it to be Khamseh, and cited its ivory warps, less fine weave, and larger color blocks as bolstering his attribution. He had acquired the carpet from a dealer in Venice—not when he first saw it, but at ICOC two years later. Gerard felt that it dated to the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

He next explained the rug's "double" iconography. Its corner lions with suns rising behind them represent ancient symbols of Persia (1). The Khamseh were more closely allied with the Qajar rulers of Persia than were the Qashqa'i, and the Persian symbolism reflects that loyalty. Another type of iconography apparent on the rug is that of "everyday life"—birds and animals, plus some human figures. In addition, Gerard pointed out what he called a "shield motif," to which he would return.



1. Detail of Gerard's Khamseh rug, showing lion-and-sun symbols, birds, schematic animals, and "shield motifs"

The second rug on the tour was a fragmentary, earlynineteenth-century Tekke main carpet (see Through the Collector's Eve, cat. 42, online at www.ne-rugsociety.org/ gallery/collectors-eye/ce-navframe.htm), which in Gerard's opinion offered "quite a nice antidote to the chaos and busy-ness" of the Khamseh. Its simpler forms, he pointed out, were conveniently repetitive for a nomadic weaver, more easily learned from her mother. Despite having lost a vertical row of guls at the right and at least one horizontal row across the bottom, this main carpet retained both balance and proportion. It nevertheless included random motifs—a kochak device and a comb-like motif—in just one area of field or border. Such carpets as this, he observed, attested to nomads' wealth.

Continuing around the Upper Colonnade Gallery, Gerard led attendees to a group of three pile pieces (2). One of them (co-owned by him and fellow NERS member Marilyn Denny) was a Middle Amu Darya/Ersari bagface that Gerard dated to the mid-nineteenth century. Its design was derived from prestigious silk ikat textiles of Uzbekistan; Gerard pointed out a small amount of silk in its woolen pile. Two



2. Gerard discussing knotted-pile bags in the exhibition

Northwest Persian pieces hung below it: on the bottom a mafrash side panel with a traditional herati border design used in its field, and in the middle a double saddlebag featuring small crosses within a diagonal lattice.

Gerard then proceeded to a group of three bagfaces woven in soumak technique (3). On the lower left, a Shahsavan example featured a central octagon within a square—a design he said was drawn from Anatolian carpets. In the quadrants of the octagon were four motifs that plausibly represented stylized dragons. Above this piece was a salt bag from Karabagh. Gerard described Karabagh as a fairly arid region without much color, making the chromatic range of the salt bag all the more remarkable. Cotton was used for its white field, to further accentuate the design elements. Gerard also attributed the third soumak bagface, with bold diagonal stripes, to Karabagh. He observed that the z-like motifs within the stripes could also be seen as forming diagonals in the direction opposite the stripes, and that these z-motifs shrank and disappeared as they approached the border—yet another way of capturing energy and movement in the design.



3. Three soumak bagfaces

The tour progressed to a Milas prayer rug (see p. 13, **bottom center)**, which Gerard termed more citified—finely drawn and woven—than many other Anatolian prayer rugs. He noted that Milas rugs had been very popular in the 1920s and '30s, but were less so in the 1980s and '90s, when collectors were seeking true tribal art. Gerard's Milas had several precisely executed motifs, including leafy forms in the spandrels traceable to sixteenth-century Turkish drawing. The "shield motif" that Gerard had pointed out on his Khamseh rug recurred five times on the Milas, stacked up the middle of the mihrab. Gerard traced it back to Mongol-era Persian painting (specifically, a battle scene where it decorated a warrior's shield) and speculated that it functioned as an apotropaic, or good-luck, device.

Contrasting with the Milas was a coarser and less fluidly drawn prayer rug from the Sivas region of eastern Anatolia (4). Its central field bore four numerical dates—two corresponding to 1853 and two to 1854—flowers, and unidentified motifs that Gerard said added interest for the collector. Its flatwoven ends were remarkably well preserved: because they had been folded and sewn under, even the horizontal cords around which the continuous warp turned at the ends of the rug were still intact.



4. Contemplating Gerard's Sivas-region prayer rug



#### 5. Detail of the MFA's Polonaise rug

After the conclusion of Gerard's gallery tour, attendees had the opportunity to view some rarely exhibited rugs and textiles from the MFA's own holdings, selected and commented on by Lauren and Julia Bailey. The first was a Polonaise carpet (5), one of many such rugs made in seventeenth-century Isfahan, but so named because some of them wound up in Polish possession. Polonaise rugs are characterized by relatively coarse silk pile and brocading in metal-wrapped silk. Many have faded significantly, but this example retained much of its original color—brilliant greens in particular. It was donated to the MFA by the prominent collector and benefactor Denman Waldo Ross, who had acquired it before 1907 for \$7500, then a fairly large sum. Next was a so-called Indo-Persian carpet (6), given to the MFA in 1966 by Islamic-art collector (and vineyard owner) John Goelet. Like the Polonaise carpet, it was also likely from Isfahan, the seventeenth-century capital of Persia. Indo-Persian carpets, made in sizes from small to gigantic, were exported in large numbers to the West, and were particularly favored in Portugal, where many are still found. Smaller rugs like this one were often placed on tables, and as a



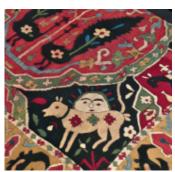
6. Viewing the MFA's "Indo-Persian" rug



7. Detail of one of the MFA's Azerbaijan embroideries

consequence survived in good condition. This rug's red field and blue border are typical of the group, as are its perfectly resolved corners, indicating that it was woven from a pattern rather than the weaver's memory.

Then came four Azerbaijani embroideries. The first and most striking (7) had bold, craggy vegetal motifs familiar from Kazak or Karabagh rugs (although embroideries like this are thought to predate the rugs). A running stitch used for outlines was visible on the back of the cotton ground, but colored areas were filled via a surface-darning stitch confined to the front, thereby requiring less silk thread. With the rest of the major texile collection of Elizabeth Day McCormick, the embroidery came to the MFA in 1943. A second embroidery included birds and cypresses. A third featured prominent corner images of an animal of indeterminate species (there was good-humored debate about whether a lion or a sheep was intended) with the sun rising behind it (8), comparable to the lion-and-sun motifs on Gerard's Khamseh rug (9). A fourth embroidery displayed a hunting scene plus a depiction of Layla and Majnun, classic lovers from Persian poetry.



8. MFA embroidery motif



9. Paquin Khamseh motif



10. MFA Ottoman velvet fragment with cintamani motifs

Finally, attendees viewed two silk-velvet fragments. One was a colorful nineteenth-century Bukharan piece donated in 2006 by Guido Goldman, whose ikat collection had been

exhibited at the MFA nine years earlier. The other, woven in Bursa, was much earlier—late 1400s—and probably once part of an Ottoman royal kaftan (10). Its *çintamani* motifs—trios of balls alternating with paired wavy lines were popular in many media of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including woodwork, ceramics, and textiles.

The evening concluded with refreshments in the office area of the Textiles and Fashion Arts Department. From the surroundings it was clear that the staff, in the process of augmenting museum textile holdings, had also amassed a world-class collection of chocolates (now consumed) and decorative chocolate boxes (happily retained).

Our thanks to the department—particularly curator Lauren Whitley—for hosting NERS, and to Gerard Paquin for lending a selection of his rugs to the MFA and adding to our understanding and appreciation of them.

Jim Adelson

## Rug and Textile Events

#### **Auctions**

Boston: Sept. 28, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets London: Oct. 7, Christie's, Oriental Rugs and Carpets Los Angeles: Oct. 27, Bonhams, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets Oakland: Oct. 18, Hazara Gallery, Antique Carpets & Textiles Stuttgart: Sept. 9, Nagel, Rugs & Carpets, Ethnographic Art Vienna: Sept. 16, Dorotheum, Carpets, Textiles, and Tapestries Vienna: Sept. 16, Austria Auction Co., Fine Antique Oriental Rugs III Wiesbaden, Nov. 29, Rippon Boswell, Collectors' Carpets

#### **Exhibitions**

Boston, MFA: "Rugs from the Gerard Paquin Collection" (see pp. 4-7), through Oct. 6

Boston, MFA: "Kilims from the Collection of Raoul Tschebull," Oct. 7-July 7, 2015

Toronto, Textile Museum of Canada: "From Ashgabat to Istanbul: Oriental Rugs from Canadian Collections," Oct. 8-Apr. 19, 2015

#### **Fairs**

San Francisco: Oct. 16–19, Antique Rug & Textile Show (ARTS), Motel Capri

Satirana: Sept. 10–14, Satirana Rug and Textile Show, Satirana Castle, Italy

Vienna/Budapest: Sept. 15–21, International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC), various locations

### Photo Credits

p. 1 Sotheby's (fig. 1), Jeff Spurr (fig. 2); p. 2 Meredith Montague (I); Buzz Dohanian (r); pp. 4–7 Julia Bailey (figs. 1, 9), Doug Bailey (figs. 2-4, 6), Yon Bard (figs. 5, 7, 8, 10); pp. 8–11 Jim Sampson (figs. 1–3, 5–8), Julia Bailey (fig. 4), Yon Bard (figs. 9-23); pp. 11-12 Jim Sampson (fig. 1), Yon Bard (fig. 2), HALI (fig. 3), Lloyd Kannenberg (fig. 4); p. 13 (I to r): row 1 Yon Bard, Walter Denny, Walter Denny; row 2 Yon Bard (all); row 3 thomaspluck.com, Yon Bard, Yon Bard; row 4 Yon Bard, Textile Museum. Textile Museum; row 5 Yon Bard, Michael Grogan, Michael Grogan; row 6 Doug Bailey, Julia Bailey, Yon Bard

## **Future NERS Meetings**

- November 21, First Parish, Lincoln: John Collins, "Shahsevan Flatweaves"
- February (date and place TBA): Ali Riza Tuna, "Back to the Future: Reconstructing Extinct Anatolian Carpets from Renaissance Paintings" (ACOR-sponsored)

## May Meeting Review: Annual Picnic in Pictures

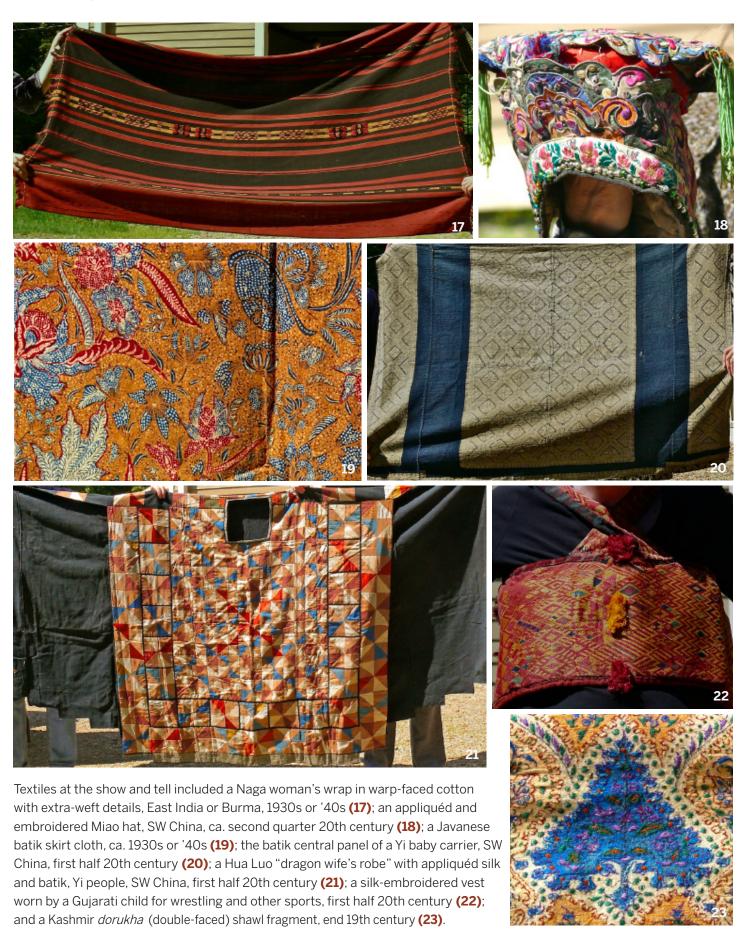
On May 25, threatening skies gave way to midday sunshine as about thirty-five NERS members arrived at Gore Place, renewed old ties, and combed the moth mart for new acquisitions (1-4). After a picnic lunch, they assembled under the trees (5) for an eclectic show and tell (6) that included cheerily informative audience and owner commentary (7–8).





East Caucasus rug with a directional field (14), a "Memling-gul" small rug of unidentified origin (15), and a Kuba Seichour with palmettes (16), perhaps the

design precursor of a well-known group of Caucasian kilims.



## Indigo Rug, Scarlet Story: A Question of Provenance

Editor's note: At the picnic, Lloyd Kannenberg yet again had a lengthy tale to tell about the provenance of one of his show-and-tell offerings (1). Here is a revised and expanded version of his remarks.

A Chinese rug (2): Who made it? When? It seems obvious: the blues, the borders, the spandrels, the central medallion, the opposing floral motifs—all say Baotou, first quarter of the twentieth century. But the four ideograms tell a different story. They translate roughly as "In commemoration of the establishment of unity," the motto of Ma Zhongying (3), one of the famous, or rather infamous, "Five Ma" warlord clique.

In the late 1920s General Ma attempted to conquer all of Xinjiang, and he almost succeeded. His methods were barbaric even by the abysmal standards of the warlord era. Describing Ma, Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (whose expedition was held captive by Ma's troops) waxed biblical: "Behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him" (Revelation 6:8). Defeat came only in 1934, when Stalin, concerned that a victorious Ma would turn next to Soviet Central Asia, ordered the Soviet Army to invade Xinjiang. Airplanes, tanks, and mustard gas did the trick.



1. Lloyd expounding on his rug



2. "Big Horse" rug, Yarkand (?), 1929-33 (?)

A lurid tale! But what is its relevance for the provenance of this rug? Sometime between 1929 and 1933 Ma ordered weavers in Yarkand (not Baotou) to produce about fifty rugs in this pattern for his staff. Look at the "Greek key" border: the corners are not resolved, as they always are in real Baotou rugs. The wefts are blue, a characteristic of Yarkand rugs of the time. Finally, the source of our information about Ma's ordering the rugs is George Roberntz, a Swedish missionary in Kashgar—would a missionary lie?

After Ma's defeat his officers were understandably anxious to get rid of anything associating them with the general, including of course their incriminating "motto" rugs. Roberntz's family bought several. This is one of six that



#### 3. General Ma Zhongying

survive in the West. It is interesting that its motto is intact, since attempts were made to remove the ideograms from other examples.

That is a rattling good story, but is it true? You would have thought so—after all, it was published in Peter Bichler's "Carpets of the Big Horse" (*HALI* 44, pp. 16–17), from which I have cribbed shamelessly. ("Ma" means "horse," and is also the Chinese form of "Muhammad.") But this account has been challenged by Sugiyama Tokutaro, in "Carpets of the Big Horse Revisited" (*HALI* 136, p. 69). He claims (among other things) that these rugs were ordered by Ma Zhongying's brother-in-law Ma Hushan from weavers in Khotan, and that five to six thousand were produced. He bases these claims on interviews with local Uyghurs, so they can't be dismissed lightly.

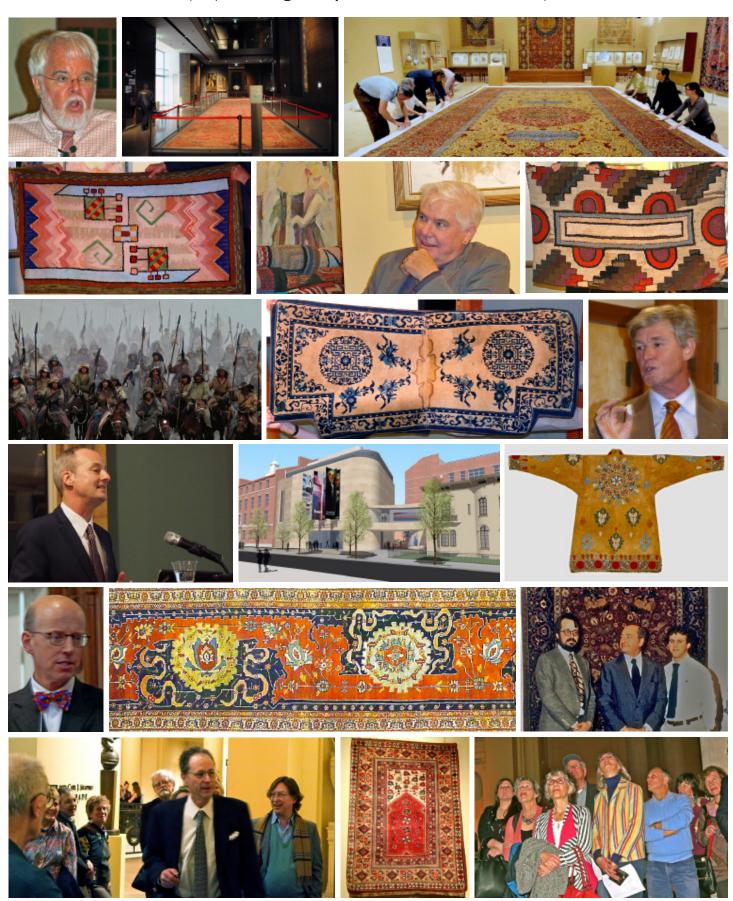
Who got it right, then, Bichler or Sugiyama? I have no

desire to be crushed between battling experts, but consider this: Bichler based his version on the memoirs of George Roberntz, published shortly after he retired, while Sugiyama relied on interviews that apparently took place after the turn of the millennium. The interviewees were therefore recalling events after the passage of about sixty eventful years. Moreover, Uyghurs were no friends of the warlords, who were Tungans (Muslims to be sure, but Han Chinese). There was even something of a language barrier between Uyghurs and Tungans, since Chinese was not the lingua franca of the Uyghur population when those events took place. So I incline towards Bichler's account. But Sugiwara may be onto something even so, for the warlord Ma Bufang, Ma Zhongying's cousin, also ordered "motto" rugs, probably from the same supplier. The squarish rug below (4) is one of his; the ideograms are obviously somewhat different from those of the "Big Horse" rug. If many warlords ordered "motto" rugs, that may account for the "five to six thousand" that were supposedly produced. In the end we are not likely ever to know for sure whether these rugs came from Kashgar, Yarkand, or Khotan, but they did not come from Baotou! Lloyd Kannenberg

4. "Motto" rug made for Ma Bufang, Ma Zhongying's cousin

# RearView Mirror: Last Season's Speaker Program

(see p. 3, **Meetings and speakers, 2013–14**, for identification)



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If you haven't already done so, please renew your NERS membership now! You can pay online using a credit card: go to www.ne-rugsociety.org/NERS-paypal.htm and follow directions. Alternatively, you can mail your check, payable to NERS, to our Charlestown 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 290393, Charlestown, MA 02129; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



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