



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 23 No. 4 May 2016

[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

## May 22 Meeting: Annual Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show and Tell



### Browsing the pre-lunch moth mart at the 2015 picnic

The annual NERS picnic, the final meeting of the 2015–16 season, will be held on Sunday, May 22, at Gore Place, the lovely grounds of the former governor's mansion in Waltham. We'll again have a huge, enclosed tent with water and electricity, adjacent bathroom facilities, tables and chairs for all, and plenty of lawn space for mingling and spreading out rugs (see the 2015 photo above). Supply your own picnic lunch, and NERS will provide soft drinks, tea, and coffee.

Lunch will be preceded by the ever-popular moth mart; we invite all members (dealers or not) to bring things to sell, swap, or give away. Past offerings have included rugs, bags and trappings, kilims, and other textiles; books and periodicals; and even tribal jewelry and clothing.

Following lunch, there's the last show and tell of the season. Bring one or two of your treasured items to share with fellow members—mystery textiles or rugs, exotic specimens you think we should know more about, or wonderful new acquisitions you want to show off.

### Picnic Details

**Date:** Sunday, May 22

**Time:** Noon to 4 p.m.

**Place:** Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham

**From the Mass Pike:** Take exit 17 and follow signs to Rt. 20 westbound (Main St. in Watertown). After 1.5 miles, turn left onto Gore St. at the second of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on right). Proceed 0.2 miles on Gore St. Turn left (through center island) to Gore Place entrance.

**From Rte. 128:** Take exit 26 onto Rt. 20 eastbound (it starts out as Weston Road and becomes Main St.). After 3.3 miles turn right on Gore St. at the first of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on left). Proceed on Gore St. as above.

**From Newton:** Go north on Crafts St. Turn right (at traffic light) on North St. Cross the Charles River and go straight. The street eventually becomes Gore St. Entrance to Gore Place will be on right.

**Parking:** Use the parking area on the estate grounds.



On February 26, Susan Lind-Sinanian (1), curator of textiles at the Armenian Museum of America (ALMA), presented “Stitching to Survive: Handworks of Armenian Widows and Orphans, 1896 to 1930.” Interspersing textile images with historical photographs, many of orphanages housing Armenian survivors of genocide, Susan spoke about two primary textile categories—needlework and rugs—that offered widows and orphans a means of survival.

Among Armenian laces, Susan showed examples produced in orphanages in Istanbul and Malatya. Some of these laces came directly to the United States, but others traveled a more circuitous route: Susan's husband, Gary, noted an instance of edging lace going to Puerto Rico and

## 2. Near East Relief (NER) price list of Armenian women's and girls' handwork offered for sale in the United States



being added to baptismal garments that were then exported to the U.S. In addition to lace, Armenian craftswomen also found commercial success with various forms of embroidery; Susan illustrated examples from Marash and Aintab.

Rug weaving, she explained, was a long-established craft in Armenia; rugs were made for local consumption, using a traditional pool of designs. A growing Western middle class created an export market, for which Armenian rug weavers—including orphaned refugees **(4)**—used different styles and designs.

An example is ALMA's Agin Rug **(3)**, woven in 1898 by orphans of the 1896 Agin massacre. Modeled after Turkish prayer rugs such as those from Ghiordes, it is woven entirely in silk and includes an inscription, in English, from the New Testament. Clearly created for sale in the West, it was first purchased by an Englishman.

**3 (right). ALMA's silk Agin Rug, inscribed, "The Orphans of Agin, 1898" and "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren then these least ye did it unto me" (after Matthew 25:40)**

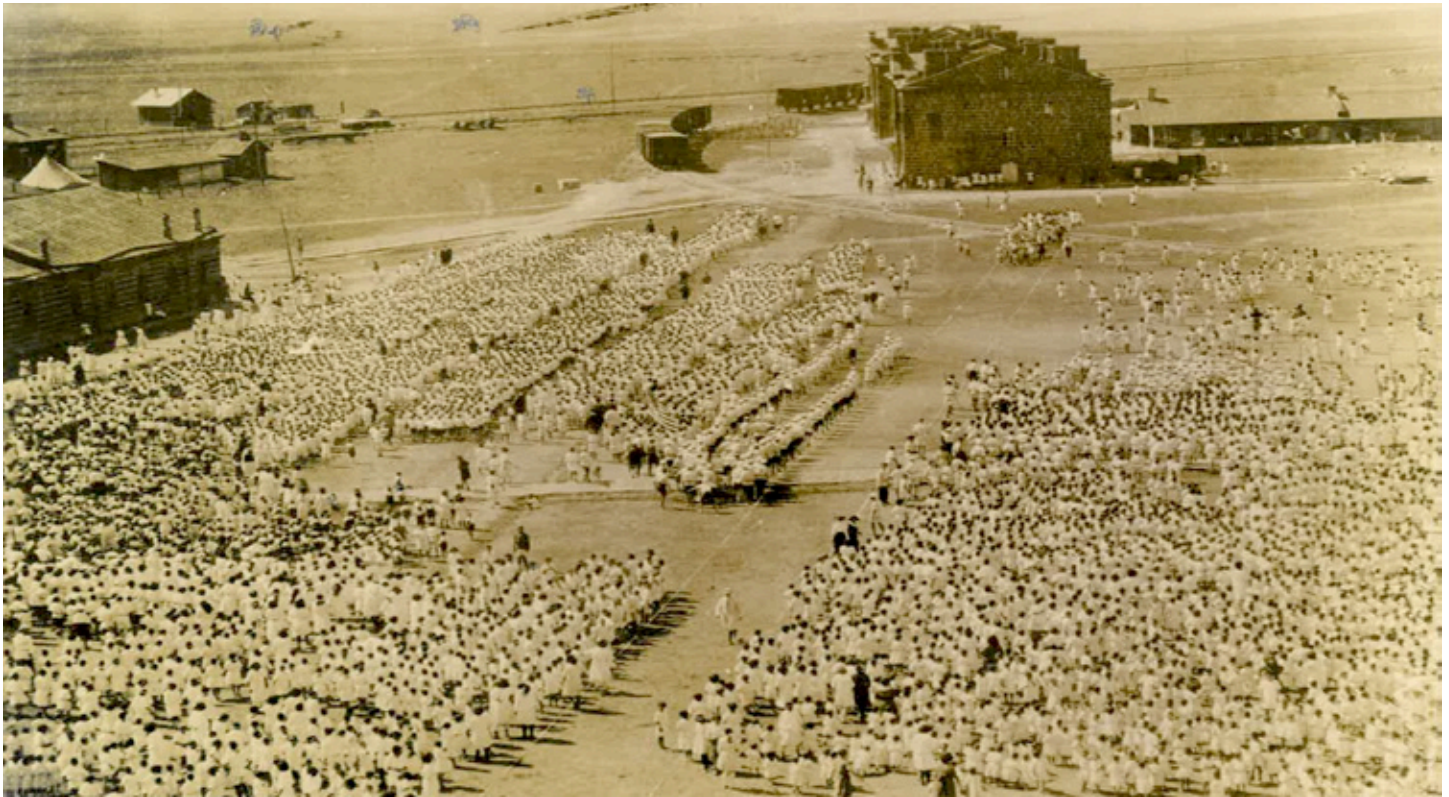


**4. Photo of NER orphanage in Aintab (Gaziantep), showing girls weaving rugs and sewing, and boys working leather**



Another orphan rug in ALMA's collection was woven in Gyumri, Armenia, where the US-led Near East Relief (NER) established a vast orphanage (5) on a former czarist military

base. The long Armenian inscription that runs across the top and bottom of the Gyumri Rug (6) includes a date of 1927 and tribute to the "American Committee" (NER).



5. Girls assembled at "Orphan City," Gyumri, in 1925



6. Gyumri Rug on display at ALMA in 2014: whole view and detail showing a small section of the Armenian inscription



Susan also illustrated orphan-related rugs created for reasons other than commerce. The Coolidge Orphan Rug, woven by orphaned girls in Ghazir, Lebanon, was donated to President Calvin Coolidge in 1925 in gratitude for NER's efforts to establish, fund, and support such orphanages (7, 8).



**7. The large Coolidge Orphan Rug (18' 5" x 11' 7"), shown with other rugs in Ghazir, Lebanon, ca. 1925**



**8. The Coolidge Orphan Rug on brief display at the White House Visitor Center, November 2014**

Another example of non-commercial orphan rugs was the so-called Tooth Rug. Dr. H. H. Srabian, a dentist for NER, observed that dental health in the orphanages was terrible, and in response organized an educational campaign. As one facet of the effort, he personally designed a rug promoting mouth cleanliness, had it woven at Ghazir, and arranged for it to be prominently displayed at whichever NER-run orphanage held the best oral-hygiene record in a given year. (For more on the "Tooth Rug," see p. 7 of the March 2016 newsletter.)

Finally, Susan showed us a rug (9) associated with the influential Armenian writer and diplomat to Japan, Diana Apcar. It was woven in Yokohama by two younger Armenian women, Anna Galstaun and Rartoohi Arratoon, in the winter of 1921–22. The weavers, having created a pattern based on a Turkish rug in the Apcar family, rendered their finer "copy" entirely in Japanese silk. Apcar's grandson, Lionel Galstaun, donated the rug to ALMA.

Many thanks to Susan for sharing her knowledge of the handworks of Armenian widows and orphans, and for throwing light on the creation and subsequent history of these treasures via the extensive textile and photographic holdings of ALMA.

*Jim Adelson*



**9. Silk rug woven by Armenian women in Yokohama, Japan, 1920–21**



## March Meeting Review: Lawrence Kearney at Skinner



**1. Lawrence Kearney (right) chats with NERS members Alex Gibber and Eva Fridman at the Skinner preview**

On March 11, amid rugs and textiles to be auctioned at the upcoming rug auction in Boston, Skinner's Director of Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets Lawrence Kearney **(1)** spoke to a large and attentive mix of NERS members and sale previewers. His talk was entitled "The Story of Rugs Is the Story of Civilization."

Lawrence opened his presentation by noting that in 2009 archaeologists had found, on the floor of a cave in Georgia, remains of twisted and dyed flax fibers. These dated from more than thirty thousand years ago, preceding human agriculture by some twenty thousand years. Lawrence labeled such twisted fibers a significant technology, which humans would utilize for ropes, cloth, and (eventually) weavings like the ones we treasure.

Moving forward many centuries, Lawrence divided these treasured oriental weavings into three broad categories, based on the social context of their making: tribal, village, and urban workshop. He credited this useful categorization to Jon Thompson's 1983 book *Oriental Carpets: From the Tents, Cottages and Workshops of*



**2. Turkmen girl learning to knot on her toy loom**



**3. Yomud *torba*, lot 38 at Skinner's March 13 sale**

*Asia* (originally titled *Carpet Magic*), which he heartily recommended, calling it "the best book ever written on rugs."

Tribal rugs, Lawrence explained, were made by pastoral women for use in every facet of life—as floor coverings, storage and transport bags, space dividers, and more. He showed photos of such items in daily use, including one image of Shahsavan nomads in migration, their pack animals piled high with bags. Explaining that the simplest rugs were made on basic ground looms that the nomads could transport and set up easily, he added an endearing photo of a Turkmen toddler learning to weave on her own tiny loom **(2)**. He then illustrated a number of tribal rugs or textiles in the Skinner sale, including Anatolian kilims, a *gabbah* carpet, a Yomud *torba* **(3)**, a Yomud tent band fragment, a Shahsavan sumak panel, and an unusual set of Shahsavan kilim bags made entirely of silk.

Turning to village and cottage-industry rugs, Lawrence noted that "villages were by and large farming communities, not flock communities," and that weavings were not quite as central to life as in tribal settings. For the most part,





**4. West Anatolian rug, lot 41 at Skinner's March 13 sale**

weavers of village rugs and textiles made them not for their own use, but rather to sell to others. Rug weavers therefore were not necessarily using the designs of their mothers and grandmothers, but rather what the market dictated. Again picking examples from the Skinner sale, Lawrence showed a West Anatolian village rug (4), Kazak rugs, a Shirvan prayer rug, a Talish runner, a Kazak bagface, a Swedish needlepoint cushion cover, a Bijar rug, and a Bakshaish rug.

Since village rugmakers wove from memory rather than from patterns, their rugs, according to Lawrence, were still a weaver's art. In making larger rugs and kilims, he explained, novice weavers would often work in the middle, while those with more experience would take on the greater challenges of outer field and borders. Even the most adept weavers, working from memory, usually couldn't manage graceful corner solutions where side and end borders met.

By contrast, urban or workshop rugs were made with the aid of designs drawn on paper; Lawrence showed a photo of workers in a design studio coloring in a pattern. This multistep process made designers more prestigious and weavers less so. In fact, for one type of workshop product—Kashmir shawls—both design and production



**5. Chinese silk and metal-thread carpet, lot 87, the top lot (\$28,290 with premium) at Skinner's March 13 sale**

became so specialized, involving as many as seventeen different roles, that when ranked by importance the weavers were second from the bottom!

Lawrence likewise illustrated his points about workshop rugs and textiles with examples from the Skinner sale. These included a Lavar Kerman rug; an Ushak carpet; silk rugs from Tabriz, Qum, Isfahan, and Hereke; several of the aforementioned Kashmir shawls; a silk-velvet saddle blanket; and an Ottoman embroidered panel. His final choice was a silk-pile and metal-brocaded Chinese imperial carpet (5): carpets woven for royal courts, he noted, naturally represented the pinnacle of urban weaving.

Our thanks to Lawrence for bringing Jon Thompson's categories to life with his remarks and illustrations, and also to Skinner for hosting our meeting.

*Jim Adelson*



## ARTS EAST RETURNS: BOSTON CYCLORAMA, JUNE 10–12



*Mingle with collectors and see great antique rugs and textiles!*

The **Antique Rug and Textile Show (ARTS) East**, the premier rug and textile event on the East Coast, will be held June 10–12 in Boston's historic South End. The show will give visitors the chance to browse through some of the best antique rugs and textiles available on the market, to mingle with fellow collectors, and to attend special events. (For reports and photos of last year's ARTS East, in Dedham, see *HALI* 184 [Summer 2015], pp. 122–3; and pp. 10–11 of the September 2015 *View from the Fringe*.) Plans for ARTS East are nearly complete. Events are summarized here, but keep checking <http://artsrugshow.org> for updates.

**Location:** Cyclorama at the Boston Center for the Arts, 539 Tremont Street, Boston. For directions and parking information, see Visitor Resources on the ARTS East website.

**Opening reception, with light refreshments:** June 10, 1 to 8 p.m. Advance online registration is recommended (and substantially discounted).

**Public admission:** Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12, 10 to 5 p.m.

**Exhibitors:** Approximately twenty international dealers of antique rugs and textiles.

*Ann Nicholas*



From the upcoming ARTS East: detail of a *shadda* fragment offered by Ulrike Montigel (left); Moghan sumak bagface offered by James Cohen (right). In the center, Rich Blumenthal in Andy Lloyd's booth at the 2015 show.



## April Meeting Review: Three Members Consider “Good, Better, Best”



**1. Left to right: speakers John Clift, Richard Belkin, and Yon Bard**

The April 1 meeting pioneered a new program format, featuring short talks by three NERS members **(1)** on weaving types of particular interest to them. John Clift focused on Anatolian kilims with a specific design, Richard Belkin on Akstafa rugs, and Yon Bard on Yomud *chuva*s; each speaker showed several examples, ranking them as “good,” “better,” or “best” of type.

John Clift's topic was Anatolian kilims exhibiting what he labeled the “turtle motif” **(2)**. He pointed out the various parts of the so-called turtle, complete with head and tail, and indicated that kilims with this motif were made in two sizes: a smaller one possibly used for wrapping bodies for the burial ceremony, and a larger one perhaps displayed during migration to summer pastures.

Kilims of this design were woven in a number of towns in central and western Anatolia: Afyon, Balıkesir, Burdur, Gaziantep, Isparta, and Manisa. John's research suggests



**2. Small Anatolian kilim with the “turtle” motif**



**3. John Clift's “good” Anatolian kilim**



that they were the product of Hotamish Turkmen, but this has not been specifically documented.

John commented that the design of "turtle motif" kilims was progressively simplified through the nineteenth century, and that he found the older, more complex versions more interesting. They tended to have a specific color palette, including green and violet (the shades of which changed during the 1800s), burnt orange, and two different reds. The older examples of course had only natural colors, but late ones utilized synthetic dyes, indicating that the design persisted over a long period.

John's "good" example (3) had three closely stacked, very similar renditions of the motif in question. By contrast, his "better" example (4) had more space between its three

motifs, the one in the middle being a smaller variant of those at either end. Carbon dating by European dealer Jürg Rageth indicated this kilim to be about 300 years old. Turning to his "best" example (5), John conceded that it was not quite as old as the previous one, having been carbon dated to an age of 250 years. What elevated it to first rank in John's eyes was the more varied rendition of its primary motif.

Richard Belkin's presentation focused on Akstafa rugs and some of their folk-art designs. He said that he had long been interested in Akstafas, even though as a group they aren't very old, generally dating to about 1860 or 1880. On a map, he highlighted Azerbaijan, to the west of the Caspian Sea; zeroing in, he attributed Akstafa rugs to the village of Saliyani in southeastern Azerbaijan. The area was heavily influenced



**4. John's "better" Anatolian kilim**



**5. John's "best" Anatolian kilim**



by surrounding countries and cultures—Persia, Turkey, and particularly Russia, which gained supremacy in the early nineteenth century. These three outside powers influenced art as well as politics in Azerbaijan.

Richard used five examples to illustrate the characteristics of Akstafas. His first was a prayer rug, "not quite a classic," since it had an atypical border design. It included several folk-art motifs, such as a bird that he identified as a chicken. He thought the rug was on the later side, dating perhaps to 1890–95, based on the relative symmetry of its field motifs. He compared this first prayer rug to another with a square-topped rather than arched mihrab. Its animal motifs were not symmetrically placed: a vertical series of birds on the right side of the field had no counterparts on the left.

He then turned to his "good," "better," and "best" examples, all of them long rugs (6). Each one had facing pairs of large birds—perhaps peacocks—in its field. (These peacocks are the motifs most closely associated with Akstafa rugs.) Richard speculated that such birds may have appealed to Persian taste; Akstafas were woven for sale, rather than for use by the weaver's family, and towns over the border in Persia represented the nearest market. In addition, his

"good" example had other, smaller birds embedded within its main-border elements. He felt that this rug might actually be the oldest of the three.

Nevertheless, Richard's next rug had several features that, in his eyes, made it better than the first. One of its peacock pairs was inverted. It had a greater range of color, with blues, greens, and generous amounts of purple. Finally, it included a beautiful quadruped (Richard termed it a farm animal) within a few of its main-border motifs.

Richard's "best" rug featured the largest number of whimsical and fanciful elements; its level of "weaver inventiveness" made it his favorite. The drawing and color of the signature Akstafa peacocks showed the most variation. Two dromedaries appeared at the top and other imaginative animal figures farther down the field. The cast of characters even included two women, whom Richard identified as the weaver and her sister.

Yon Bard began his presentation by asking rhetorically, "Why collect Yomud *chuvals* when there are probably more of them than any other type of Turkmen weaving?" His answer: if even ten percent of all these *chuvals* are any good, that gives a lot to work with. In addition, these bags display



6. Richard Belkin's Akstafa long rugs, held up at the show and tell: "good" (right), "better" (center), and "best" (left)





7, 8. Yon Bard's examples of a typical (left) and a "good" (right) Yomud *chuval*

tremendous variety, particularly compared with Salor three-gul *chuvals* or Tekke *torbas*.

Yon showed a standard Yomud *chuval* (7), pointing out its typical features: nine *chuval* guls in the field, arranged in three rows of three, with minor guls in between them. In Yon's example, the minor gul was of the type called *chemche*. The main border of Yon's example had a ground color different from that of the main field and a repeated design motif whose vertical and horizontal forms differed slightly. A secondary border used a common motif known as "running dog."

With a nod to April Fool's Day, Yon then informed us that, in addition to Yomud *chuvals*, he also collected ducks, or at least photos of them. Showing his shot of a Northern Pintail, he opined that this species was high up in the "better" category. (That the bird had been spotted at a nearby reservoir was also a plus; he didn't have to go far to "collect" its image.)

Returning to Yomud *chuvals*, Yon displayed several more examples to illustrate some of their design variations. One of these, formerly in the Straka collection, used the *kepse* gul, a motif encountered much more often in Yomud main carpets and *torbas* than in *chuvals*. It also had a colorful motif repeated in the *elem*, or skirt—the area below the field that had been undecorated in his initial, standard example. Next he showed what he called a "Karadashli" *chuval*, commenting that "people have made a sport of trying to associate *chuvals* with particular subtribes" of the Yomud group. The most distinctive feature of this example was its four rows of four rare hexagonal or octagonal guls in the main field. Next came a "Memling gul" *chuval*, with main guls in four rows of five, and a secondary gul of almost equal size. To end this introductory section, he showed a nine-gul *chuval* with otherwise standard features but

an uncommon, diamond-shaped secondary gul.

Before launching into his "good," "better," and "best" examples, Yon considered some factors used in assigning such rankings. "Beauty" for instance: judging it is subjective, and can vary by period. For instance, certain nineteenth-century Turkish prayer rugs were considered beautiful by early twentieth-century rug aficionados but lack much appeal in the eyes of today's collectors. Assessments of beauty, he concluded, wind up being based on personal taste. He then cited variation—how different is this piece from other ones?—as a possible aesthetic criterion. Finally, he brought up provenance, saying, "I'd rather have a rug that Napoleon walked on than a similar one that only I walked on."

In describing his "good" example (8), Yon noted that its *chemche* minor guls had a number of quirks. The bird or butterfly (or bat) main-border motif was conventionally drawn in the vertical borders, but unusually compressed in the horizontal ones. The reciprocal ram's-horn element used in the minor borders was relatively rare, as were the motifs in the *elem*. Finally, the *chuval* had an atypical structure, utilizing both symmetric and asymmetric-open-right knots.

Yon then pointed out the unconventional form of the *chemche* minor guls of his "better" *chuval* (9), noting that they "really sparkle." He also highlighted the wool quality of this *chuval*, adding that he always feels compelled to touch it: even though it may be 150 years old, its wool feels as if it just came off the sheep.

Yon's "best" example (10) did indeed exhibit "variety," incorporating many unusual elements—major *C*-guls, four-in-one diamond minor guls, and a rare main-border design. Its colors were pleasing. But Yon stated that he still found it hard to articulate precisely what elevates it to the level of "best."





9, 10. Yon's examples of a "better" (left) and a "best" (right) Yomud *chuval*

Following the three talks, attendees enjoyed a show and tell. Each of the speakers had brought one or more of the pieces from his presentation. Members supplied additional examples; the number of Yomud *chuvals* in the room demonstrated their popularity with collectors.

Big thanks to John, Richard, and Yon for volunteering

to speak, for sharing their knowledge and interest, and for bringing in their own rugs for other members' examination and enjoyment.

*Jim Adelson*

*And big thanks to Jim Adelson himself, who conceived of and organized the session, in addition to writing this report. —Ed.*

## Rug and Textile Events

### Auctions

May 23, Los Angeles, Bonhams, Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets

May 28, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Spring Auction: Collectors' Carpets

June 5, Boston, Grogan & Company, June Auction

### Exhibitions

Until May 8, St. Louis Art Museum, "The Carpet and the Connoisseur: The James F. Ballard Collection of Oriental Rugs"

Until June 19, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Chinese Textiles: Ten Centuries of Masterpieces from the Met"

Until June 25, London, Brunei Gallery, "World Ikat Textiles: Ties That Bind"

### Exhibitions, cont.

Until July 2, Milan, Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, "Carpets in Painting (XV–XIXth Centuries)"

Until July 10, Birmingham (Ala.) Museum of Art, "All the Colors of the Rainbow: Uzbekistan Ikats from the Collection of Peggy Slappey"

Until July 24, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Court & Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs"

Until July 31, Dallas Museum of Art, "Spirit and Matter: Masterpieces from the Keir Collection of Islamic Art"

### Fairs

June 10–12, Boston Center for the Arts (Cyclorama), ARTS East (see p. 8)

## Photo Credits

**p. 1:** Jim Sampson **pp. 2–5:** fig. 1, Julia Bailey; figs. 2–6, ALMA; fig. 7, [glendalearts.org](http://glendalearts.org); fig. 8, [mcclatchydc.com](http://mcclatchydc.com); fig. 9, ALMA  
**pp. 6–7:** fig. 1, Julia Bailey; fig. 2, Jon Thompson, *Carpet Magic*; figs. 3–5, Skinner **p. 8:** ARTS (top); Ulrike Montigel, Şerif Özen, James Cohen (bottom, left to right) **pp. 9–13:** fig. 1, Doug Bailey; fig. 2, Catherine Cootner, *Anatolian Kilims*; fig. 3, Belkis Balpınar and Udo Hirsch, *Flatweaves*; figs. 4, 5, Jürg Rageth, *Anatolian Kilims and Carbon Dating*; fig. 6, Doug Bailey; figs 7–10, Yon Bard **p. 14:** Rippon Boswell **p. 15:** Skinner **p. 16:** Christie's **p. 17:** Isguhi Shirinian



## Exceeding Expectations in Wiesbaden: Flatwoven Abstraction

Rippon Boswell's second auction of the Ignazio Vok Collection, on March 12, featured eighty-eight more of the collector's distinguished suzanis and flatweaves. (For the superlative online catalogue, see [www.rippon-boswell-wiesbaden.de/en/online\\_catalogue\\_collector\\_carpets/](http://www.rippon-boswell-wiesbaden.de/en/online_catalogue_collector_carpets/).) Below are four kilims and a warp-faced *jajim*, all with painterly "color-field" aspects, whose hammer prices far surpassed their presale estimates. **Thanks in part to NERS donations over the years, one (lower right) is coming the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.**



"Overachievers" from the second Vok Collection sale at Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, held on March 12, 2016

Above, left to right:

Lot 107, Karaman prayer kilim,  
est. €2,500–3,300, sold €11,590

Lot 174, Luri or Qashqa'i kilim,  
est. €3,500–4,500, sold €20,740

Lot 153, Azeri kilim,  
est. €3,000–3,700, sold €18,300

Far left:

Lot 129, Qashqa'i *jajim*  
est. €2,500–3,300, sold €11,590

Near left:

Lot 160, Luri kilim  
est. €6,000–7,000, sold €24,400  
to the Department of Textile and  
Fashion Arts of the MFA, Boston.

(Sale price includes buyer premium.)





## Exceeding Expectations in Boston: Medallion Variations

Skinner's March 13 sale (the catalogue is available online at [www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2884B/lots](http://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/2884B/lots)) included 331 lots: a miscellany ranging from antique Coptic fragments (mostly ignored by bidders) to modern, superfine silk pile rugs (all selling well above their modest estimates). Below are five Persian medallion rugs that easily surpassed Skinner predictions.



**Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Persian pile rugs that handily beat their estimates at Skinner, Boston, March 13, 2016**

**Above, left to right:**

**Lot 22, Persian silk rug,**

**est. \$800–1,000, sold \$4,305**

**Lot 69, Persian silk carpet,**

**est. \$1,500–1,800, sold \$11,070**

**Lot 104, Bakhshaish rug,**

**est. \$1,500–1,800, sold \$7,380**

**Near right:**

**Lot 11, Bijar Kurd rug,**

**est. \$300–400, sold \$1,968**

**Far right:**

**Lot 153, Bijar carpet,**

**est. \$1,500–1,800, sold \$15,990**

**(Sale price includes buyer premium.)**





## A Trio of Vase Carpets at Christie's



**1. Lot 100, 6' 9" x 9' 5" fragment of an enormous "vase" carpet, estimated £250,000–350,000, sold for £542,500**



**2. Lot 101, intact "vase" rug, 8' 3" x 5', estimated £1,000,000–1,500,000, sold for £962,500**



**3. Lot 102, incomplete "vase" carpet with birds, 10' 1" x 6' 5", estimated £400,000–600,000, sold for £794,500**

In June 2013, the so-called Corcoran sickle-leaf rug, a smallish but superlative "vase" carpet, fetched a stratospheric \$33,765,000 at Sotheby's (see *View from the Fringe*, Sept. 2013, p. 7). Admirers of Safavid-era carpets hence took note of Christie's April 19 offering of three more "vase" rugs, all unpublished and boasting a gilded Rothschild provenance ([www.christies.com/lotfinder/salebrowse.aspx?intsaleid=25991&viewType=list](http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/salebrowse.aspx?intsaleid=25991&viewType=list)). This time around, prices, although substantial, didn't soar. A red-ground fragment with ebullient palmettes (1) sold for £542,500. (The MFA, Boston, has another piece of the same once-vast carpet.) An intact rug, its relatively spare field dominated by sawtooth leaves (2), brought £962,500, less than Christie's low estimate. The oldest and rarest of the trio, with fanciful birds perched among its multi-layered flora (3), showed substantial wear and was missing its outer borders; bidders nevertheless pushed it to £794,500.



## In Memoriam: Varter Shirinian, 1958–2016

Varter Shirinian was a well-known and much-liked carpet dealer, for fourteen years the operator of his namesake emporium, Varter's Oriental Rugs, in Belmont, Mass. Anyone who walked through the door of his shop or ran into him at area auctions (where he was an avid bidder) was buoyed by his warmth, energy, and free-flowing conversation.

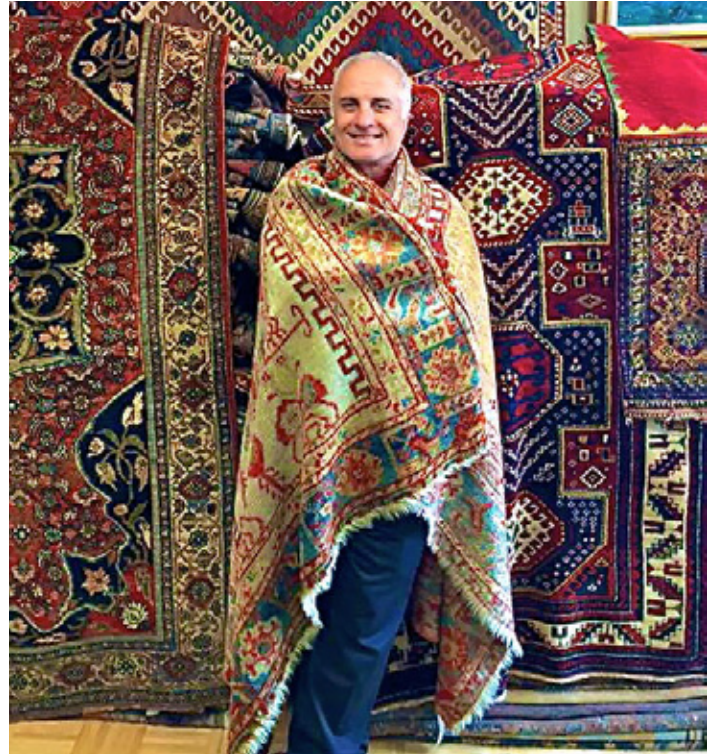
Varter wasn't a member of NERS, but when we invited him to Susan Lind-Sinanian's talk on Armenian orphan rugs (see pp. 2–5), he said he would gladly attend and bring along a treasured rug for show and tell. The meeting, however, was postponed due to a sudden snowstorm. Varter and his family went on a ski trip to Vermont, where, on an icy trail of Burke Mountain, he lost control, hit a tree, and died almost instantly. At the rescheduled meeting, those of us who had known him reeled with shock and sorrow. This glimpse of his life was provided by his widow, Isguhi, with details added by their son, Adam.

Born in Kayseri, Turkey, on January 12, 1958, Varter was the oldest of four brothers (the others, who survive him, are Margos, Gazaros, and Arman). When he was about ten, his family moved to Istanbul. Varter's father and uncle had previously established a rugmaking enterprise based in Kayseri, teaching village women in the area to weave (and thereby empowering them financially). In Istanbul the senior Shirinian brothers founded a large carpet-cleaning company. Varter attended a private high school; he liked rugs well enough, but wasn't interested in joining his elders' business.

In 1979, he came to the U.S., settling in Watertown. His brothers followed, and in 1983 their parents and grandparents joined them. Over the next two decades, Varter built and expanded his own rug business, manning a succession of area shops and warehouses.

But all those years a bachelor? At a wedding celebration in 1998, his mother, perhaps thinking it was high time for her oldest boy to settle down, spotted a lovely young woman, one Isguhi Dikranian, whom she recognized through social connections reaching back to Kayseri. Isguhi's mother, in fact, had once worked for Varter's father. Mrs. Shirinian proceeded to inform Varter that she had found him a wife.

Isguhi was born and grew up in Istanbul, after her parents moved there from the environs of Kayseri. About 1980 she and her family emigrated to Brussels. In 1998, she traveled to Watertown to attend the fateful wedding at which she caught the eye of Varter's mother. Two years later, green card in hand, Isguhi left Brussels for Watertown; she and Varter were married in 2002. Their daughter, Arlette, was born in 2003, and their son, Adam, in 2005. And gradually—perhaps this was inevitable—Isguhi, too, was drawn into the



**Varter Shirinian in his shop**

rug trade, learning every facet of carpet repair and, over the years, absorbing other aspects of the business. Now it is she who is running Varter's Oriental Rugs.

Publicly, Varter was a man of rugs, relishing both their artistic qualities and the social transactions of buying and selling them. More privately, by Isguhi's account, he was a family man in the fullest sense, devoted to his parents, brothers, and nieces and nephews, as well as to Isguhi and the kids. With young Adam, he loved to bike into Cambridge and Boston, and to fish for whatever species were biting in the Charles River (catfish, sunfish, herring, bass: mostly catch-and-release) or off Cape Cod (bluefish: keep, cook, and eat—delicious!). He loved Turkish music. He was a passionate human-rights advocate and environmentalist. He insisted on buying organic produce. As an astronomy buff, he was a devotee of the Science Channel. He liked all kinds of movies, from action flicks to French *cinéma*. He preferred playing sports—soccer and volleyball—to watching them. He had skied when he was younger but hadn't been on the slopes in years. Still, relishing a challenge, he took on a tough trail, starting at the top of the mountain. The two cousins who were with him say he was enjoying himself.

We miss Varter and mourn his sudden and much-too-early departure. To his entire family we extend our enduring sympathy.

*Julia Bailey*



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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](http://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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