



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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November 11 Meeting: Mitch Rudnick on the Making of the Rudnick Collection



Rosalie and Mitch at the MFA in 2013

On November 11, at Grogan & Company, Boston, collector and longtime NERS member Mitch Rudnick will present "The Making of the Rudnick Collection." Opening with an update on and salute to Rosalie, his wife and collecting partner, Mitch will explain how their passion for Caucasian rugs began, how their tastes evolved, and how they funded their acquisitions. His talk will include many "tales of the chase" as well as excerpts from Rosalie's essay, "Ode to Rug Collecting." He will illustrate his presentation with actual rugs from the walls of Michael Grogan's Charles Street gallery, where the entire Rudnick Collection will be on display prior to its auction on November 20.

Mitch grew up in Brookline and Rosalie in Salem, Mass. They were married in 1957 and have three grown children (and six grandkids). Mitch was a vice president of Hampshire Manufacturing and subsequently of Preview Products, maker of women's winter boots. In 1983 he acquired MDA-Biarritz, a firm specializing in summer shoes—Basque espadrilles. Rosalie worked for nursery schools in Lincoln and later as a decorating consultant for paint stores in Lincoln and Waltham.

Nov. 11 Meeting Details

Time: 7 p.m.

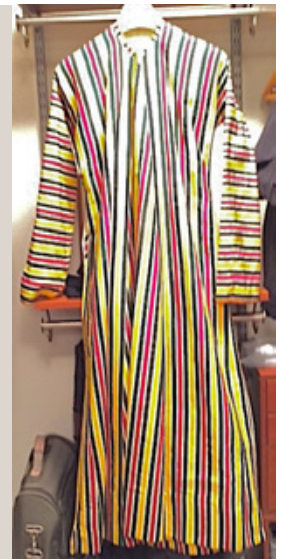
Place: Grogan & Company, 20 Charles Street
Boston, MA 02115

Directions and parking:

<http://groganco.com/contact/directions/>

Reception: hosted by Grogan & Company
preceding the presentation.

NOTE: Everyone who plans to attend this
meeting is asked to reply to Joel Greifinger
(chair@ne-rugsociety.org) by Monday, November 7.



Mitch's Ottoman coat

In 1983 the couple "discovered" Caucasian rugs and embarked on a collecting quest that would last until 2015. In 1988, Rosalie's interest led her to join Judy Smith and Kate Van Sciver in founding the New Boston Rug Society (later NERS), of which Rosalie was president for twelve years. She and Mitch were instrumental in fundraising for, and lending to, the NBRS exhibition *Through the Collector's Eye*, which debuted at the RISD Museum, Providence, in 1991 (as part of the first ACOR, in Boston) and traveled to the Textile Museum the next year. When ACOR returned to Boston, in 2006 (see <http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/rug134a.pdf>), a special exhibition at the Park Plaza Hotel featured forty-four rugs from the Rudnick Collection; in the spring of 2013, the Museum of Fine Arts exhibited six Rudnick rugs and hosted NERS members at a show and tell of ten more (see <http://ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v21n1-09-2013.pdf>, pp. 4–6).

As an added attraction for those attending the meeting on November 11, Michael Grogan will auction off an antique Turkish dress coat of Mitch's (**above right**), with proceeds going to NERS.

February 24 Meeting: Jeff Spurr on the Development of Prayer Rugs



Jeff Spurr

On February 24, at First Parish, Lincoln, longtime NERS member Jeff Spurr will present “Ends and Means: Islamic Prayer Rugs in Context.” In his talk, Jeff will focus on the nexus of religious themes, devotional concerns, visual imagery, and practical matters that resulted in the development of prayer rugs. To this end, he will address the artistic and architectural environment that frames and informs these objects, starting from the beginnings of Islam. (As a preamble to Jeff’s talk, see the virtual exhibition *Islamic Prayer Rugs and Related Textiles* on the NERS website: <http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/gallery/prayer-rugs-fall-2002/ners-prayer-rug-intro.htm>.)

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 exhibitions. For ACOR 8, in 2006, he organized and mounted *Unusual and Overlooked: Antique Textiles from Central Asia*. He is a coauthor of *Kashmir Shawls: The Tapi Collection*, published in 2012, and has written many articles for *HALI*.

For show and tell following Jeff’s presentation, members are encouraged to bring prayer rugs and related textiles.

February 24 Meeting Details

Time: 7:00 p.m.

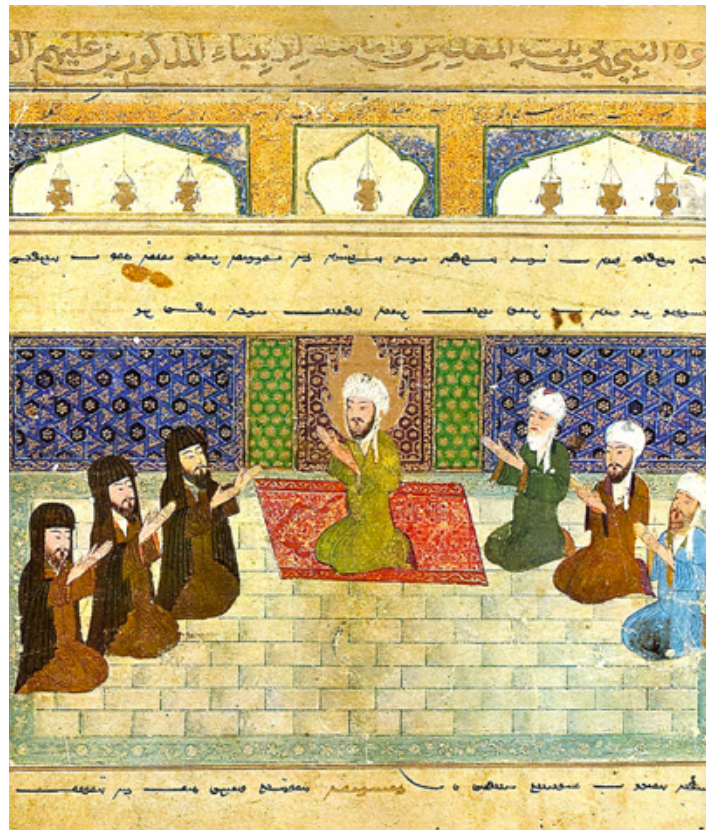
Place: First Parish, 14 Bedford Road,
Lincoln, MA 01773

Directions: From Rt. 95 (128), take exit 28B, Trapelo Road West. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there’s a white planter in the middle of the intersection). Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on the right. First Parish is on your left.

From Rt. 2, take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at the light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270° to cross Rt. 2 at the light). Proceed 0.9 mile to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. First Parish is on your right.

Parking: Park in the lot behind the parish house, along the street, or in front of Bemis Hall if that building is dark and not in use.

Food: Provided by members whose names begin with **H** through **P**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and stay afterwards to clean up.



Muhammad on a prayer rug, surrounded by precursor prophets. Detail of a page from a *Mi'rajnama*, Herat, 1436.

September Meeting Review: Wendel Swan on Swedish Folk Textiles



1. Wendel Swan with his deer-in-octagons *agedyna* (carriage-cushion cover), woven in *röllakan* (interlock tapestry) technique

NERS opened its 2016–17 season on September 16, with return speaker Wendel Swan **(1)** presenting “Swedish Folk Weaving for Oriental Rug Lovers.” At the outset of his talk, Wendel noted that this was a relatively new area of interest for him, although his grandparents on his father’s side had emigrated from Sweden. Until about a decade ago he had been aware only of the colorful costumes of the Sami people of Lapland.

Then, at the 2006 Boston ACOR, Wendel had seen an early-nineteenth-century cushion cover with a green field and motifs—eight-pointed stars and tulip forms—that reminded him of Anatolian weaving. He bought it, and it launched his broader interest in Swedish folk textiles. In these weavings, he continued to notice motifs seemingly related to those of Anatolia, the Caucasus, or Turkmen areas, prompting him to wonder how such “oriental” designs might have come to Sweden. He learned that the Vikings, or Rus—peoples preceding today’s Swedes—had made their way to Istanbul and the Caspian as early as the ninth century, and that the fourteenth-century Marby Carpet, one of the



2. Tulip-design *jynne* (chair-cushion cover) made in *röllakan* technique

oldest extant Anatolian rugs, was discovered in central Sweden, although how and when it arrived there is unknown.

The heyday of Swedish folk weaving, Wendel said, extended from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century. In contrast to Middle Eastern textiles, most of those from Sweden were decorative rather than utilitarian. They utilized different structures and materials (such as linen) and didn’t have borders with a separate repertoire of motifs.

During this golden period, wood was a prevalent building material in Sweden, and better-off Swedish families lived in timber farmhouses. Such homes typically had a single, open multifunction room, with separate areas used for storage and work (including weaving). Textiles were displayed on special occasions, such as weddings, and otherwise stored in trunks, which perhaps accounts for the survival and good condition of many older examples. Wendel’s illustrations of historical Swedish farmhouses he had visited showed *röllakans* (literally, “back cover”) atop chairs and benches, and more delicate *dukagangs* (brocaded panels) hung on the rafters.

Röllakans were most commonly made in double- or single-interlock slit-tapestry weave. One of Wendel’s examples was a double-interlock tapestry chair-cushion cover, or *jynne*, with a tulip motif **(2)**. Wendel remarked that the face and the back of this *jynne* had different structures; they were separate pieces that had been joined. A second



3. Twist-stitch *agedyna* (carriage-cushion cover), dated 1821 and inscribed with the maker's initials

jynne had an eight-pointed star as a central motif and an atypical “S” border. Wendel compared the border motif to “S” forms in a Shahsavan reverse soumak and a Dazkırı *yastık*. A third *jynne*, woven in wool, had been modeled directly on a Persian *khorjin*.

Another type of double-interlock *röllakan*—the *täcke*, or bed cover—typically had geometric patterns. Many *täckes* bear dates; Wendel showed examples ranging from 1734 to 1840. Some also carried their weaver’s initials, and one even had her full name.

Wendel proceeded to *agedynas* (carriage-cushion covers), which he noted were made in several different structures and are especially popular with collectors. His first example was patterned with twist-stitch embroidery; its blue field had medallions that he likened to Anatolian or Turkmen motifs (3). Additional examples, with dates ranging from 1753 to 1799, featured different interpretations of eight-pointed stars; he compared one such piece, with three large stars, to a Caucasian pile *mafrash* panel. In addition to abstract motifs, Wendel continued, *agedynas* also feature animals—birds, reindeer (1), and a mythical creature called a river horse—that relate specifically to Scandinavian culture.



4. Flemish-weave *agedyna* with two Annunciation roundels in a garden setting

He next moved to *flamskväv* (Flemish weave), named after the technique of Flemish tapestries. Via the use of eccentric wefting, *flamskväv* enables the weaver to produce relatively smooth curves, allowing for a representational design vocabulary of military motifs, royal figures, and even such well-known religious scenes as the Annunciation (4) and the Crucifixion. Some larger-format examples of *flamskväv* include a great array of colorful motifs; it’s clear from their complexity that they were woven from cartoons rather than memory.

Wendel then returned to twist-stitch embroideries, which were typically executed on plain linen grounds and often dated: one, bearing the ultra-specific date of April 18, 1811, had possibly been made to cover a kneeling cushion used at a wedding on that day. Many of these twist-stitch embroideries bear a design resemblance to Anatolian, Persian, or Caucasian weavings; one suggested “tulip Afshar” rugs to Wendel (5, 6); another, dated 1784 and decorated with three colorful pinwheel motifs, reminded him of Lakai embroideries (although he acknowledged that pinwheel devices occurred in other Swedish art forms, indicating that there may have been models more local and immediate than any from Central Asia).



5. Twist-stitch *agedyna*, ca. 1825, with color palette and lattice design reminiscent of “tulip Afshar” rugs



6. Detail of the field of a “tulip Afshar” rug, Iran, presumably late 19th century



7. *Trensaflossa jynne* with central medallion



8. *Trensaflossa jynne* (detail showing ground and pile)



9. Perfectly executed *agedyna* combining *trensaflossa* and embroidery, likely created with the use of a pattern

Embroideries, Wendel noted, are the least desired of Swedish folk textiles. Their structure nevertheless offered their makers considerable design freedom: curvilinear forms, for instance, were much easier to achieve with stitching than via most weaving techniques.

Returning to woven structures, Wendel introduced *trensaflossa*, a half-pile technique in which designs are rendered in pile on a flatwoven ground (7). [Reviewer's note: many Turkmen tent bands use this general structure.] One example depicted a central potted plant on a green ground (8). A subgroup of *trensaflossas* also include embroidery (9).

Other Swedish textile types utilized brocading or appliqué. What Wendel believes to be his oldest Swedish piece, possibly from around 1700, is a *jynne* made with appliquéd pieces of cloth—possibly from old military uniforms—and, in the center, an embroidered garland

surrounding its maker's initials (10). Bolder and more geometric in conception is a pieced *jynne* of similar age in the Khalili Collection, with a multipointed star as its primary design (11).

Wendel's final type of Swedish weaving was the *rya* (pile) "rug," which actually has served as a floor rug only during the last century. Ryas originated as bed covers, placed pile-side down to provide warmth. Like *gabbeks* of Iran, they are comparatively coarse and long-piled.

Wendel concluded his presentation by joking that if he had converted any oriental-rug lovers to Swedish folk weavings, he could suggest where to get them: a rug store in Stockholm boldly trumpeting its "Everything Must Go" sale.

Following his presentation, there were numerous questions from the audience. To one about dyestuffs, Wendel replied that local plants were used, along with



10. *Jynne* made with appliquéd fabric (possibly from a military uniform) and embroidery, probably ca. 1700



11. Pieced *jynne* with geometric star forms, ca. 1700, in the Khalili Collection



12. Wendel holds Lawrence Kearney's twist-stitch *agedyna*; the Flemish-weave example rests on the floor.

imported cochineal and indigo. Asked whether, in *trensaflossa*, the pile was inserted while the foundation was being woven, he answered that he believed so. As to whether there existed weaving centers with organized workshops, Wendel responded that, to his knowledge, weaving was home-based. Questioned about the profusion of Swedish folk weaving from 1750 onward, he pointed to the growth in the population and the market for such pieces in the century prior to the beginning of industrial production, around 1850. Finally, to a question about whether there were historical accounts about the weaving, Wendel ruefully replied that he didn't know Swedish well enough to explore sources in that language, and that there are few publications on the subject in English.

For show and tell, Wendel displayed a few of the pieces that he had illustrated in his talk, including one *agedyna* with facing reindeer in octagons (1), another that he'd likened to a tulip Afshar (5), and a third that combined *trensaflossa*



13. Small twist-stitch square (*jynne?*), dated 1827
14. Wendel addresses his attentive NERS audience



with embroidery (9). Lawrence Kearney also brought pieces from his own collection, including two *agedynas*. One, in Flemish weave, depicted the Annunciation within two roundels separated by a reindeer motif; another, in twist-stitch embroidery, displayed interlaced medallions and a meander border (12). Lawrence's final offering, a small twist-stitch square, was dated 1827 and featured an eight-pointed central star and a blue-black border with multicolored corners (13). Several other people also brought textiles, all of which were judged to be mid-twentieth-century.

Many thanks to Wendel for treating NERS members to our first-ever session on Swedish folk weaving (14). Whatever the relationship of these textiles to Middle Eastern weavings, Wendel showed that they have undeniable merit and visual appeal of their own.

Jim Adelson

October Meeting Review: Michael Franses on Early Rugs and Flatweaves

Michael Franses has created a unique and uniquely productive role for himself in the modern history of the study, appreciation, and collecting of great oriental rugs and textiles, and has enjoyed unequalled access to museums and private collections worldwide, and to the market.

One of Michael's many endeavors has been the creation of an unparalleled visual archive for rugs and textiles. This is worth emphasizing, since this discipline—the effort at serious documentation that causes him to seek out and know numerous examples of many classes of carpets and textiles—assists him whenever he launches a particular project.

In recent years, his paramount initiative has been the documentation of all known ancient—especially pre-Islamic—carpets and tapestries. These were the subject of his NERS presentation on Friday, October 14; we were fortunate to hear it, since he has given this version only once before, in Wiesbaden, in September. As Michael explained, one goal of this initiative has been a major exhibition of these early and often totally unknown weavings. He had hoped that it could be held at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, so that the famous fourth-century BCE Pazyryk Carpet, found preserved in permafrost in a Scythian kurgan (burial mound) in Siberia, could be included. (A study group had decided that the Hermitage could not lend it to another venue.) Unfortunately, that exhibition was canceled in 2007. Another extremely ambitious exhibition, planned for Doha this year, would have displayed not only many ancient rugs and textiles, but also great carpets dating up through the seventeenth century. Earlier this year it too was canceled.

Michael commenced with a quick historiographical review of the evidence for early weavings developed over the course of the twentieth century, starting with the discovery of Neolithic spindle whorls in the Near East (understandably associated with animal domestication, specifically of sheep and goats), and the possible evidence for kilims represented in painted murals from the Anatolian site of Çatalhöyük on the Konya plain (populated from the eighth through the sixth millennium BCE)—this purported evidence tragically compromised due to controversies surrounding the methods employed by the leader of the first excavation, James Mellaart. Michael further cited pictorial evidence for pile-woven robes worn by Sumerian dignitaries in the third millennium BCE and by later dynasts in Mesopotamia, and mentioned a Sumerian piled textile discovered at Ur by Leonard Wooley during his excavations there (1922–1936). Illustrated here (although not shown by Michael) is a Sumerian statue representing a standing figure wearing a partially piled robe **(1)**, making clear that it is not simply contrived of a sheepskin with intact fleece, which may have been the original inspiration for pile.

Regarding weavings more salient to his immediate concerns, Michael cited Kurt Erdmann's unpublished observation from the 1920s concerning the probable representation of woven carpets (due to the designs and the occasional representation of fringes) on carved Assyrian, Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman stone pavements. In 1933, Maurice Dimand published a fragment of a Coptic-period symmetrically knotted cut-pile rug **(2)** that manifestly reflected contemporary mosaic floors, a model that Michael

1 (near right). Limestone statuette of a praying Sumerian man wearing a partially piled robe, Iraq, ca. 2500 BCE, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden B1940/5.1



2 (far right). Rug fragment, symmetrically knotted in wool, reflecting a contemporary mosaic floor pattern, Egypt, Coptic period, 4th–5th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art 31.2.1



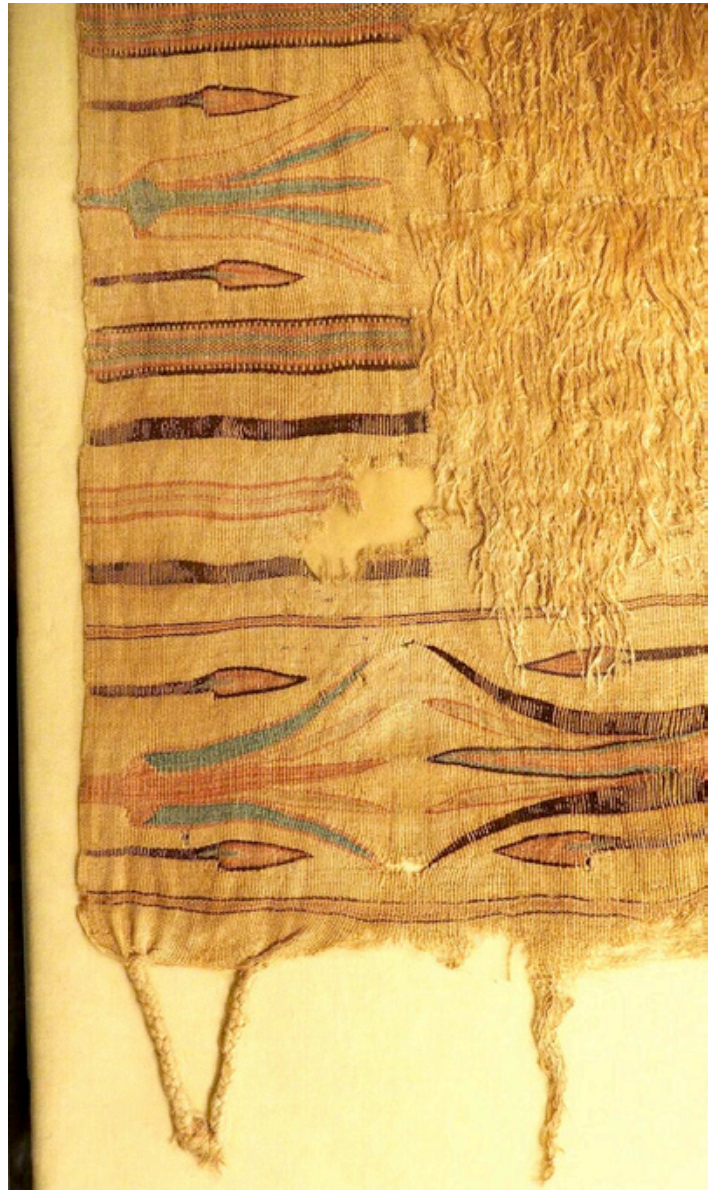


3. Wall painting (detail), Tomb of the Shields, Tarquinia, ca. 500 BCE, showing geometric-design textiles and a Greek wave border

repeatedly cited with respect to other traditions addressed in his talk.

Alongside many mosaics, Michael illustrated a mural painting decorating an Etruscan tomb from the vast necropolis at Tarquinia, whose painted tombs date as far back as the seventh century BCE. That mural, from the Tomb of the Shields (third to second century BCE), depicts the Feast of Velthur Velch (3). It includes textiles with distinctive geometric designs covering the feasting couch and its cushions; below this, Michael emphasized a wave border characteristic of the art of Greece and its inheritors, a feature found in several of the rugs he showed us.

Michael's lecture comprised images of approximately



4. Linen textile, tapestry weave and looped pile, Egypt, ca. 1400 BCE. Egyptian Museum, Turin, S.8528

150 carpets, tapestries, and garments (from among well over 500 examples that he has documented)—mainly pile rugs, but some flatweaves as well, largely dating from the eighth century BCE through the eighth century CE. The principal exceptions were a couple of pharaonic covers in linen (4), from an Egyptian New Kingdom tomb dating to circa 1400 BCE: these exhibit long, symmetrically knotted pile centers (which Michael likened to Anatolian *filikli* bed rugs), surrounded by very refined, broad tapestry-woven borders. They had been published by Elizabeth Riefstahl in 1944.

He noted that several pile-woven articles antedating the Pazyryk Carpet have now been discovered. Noteworthy among them for its antiquity is a striking and unique horse



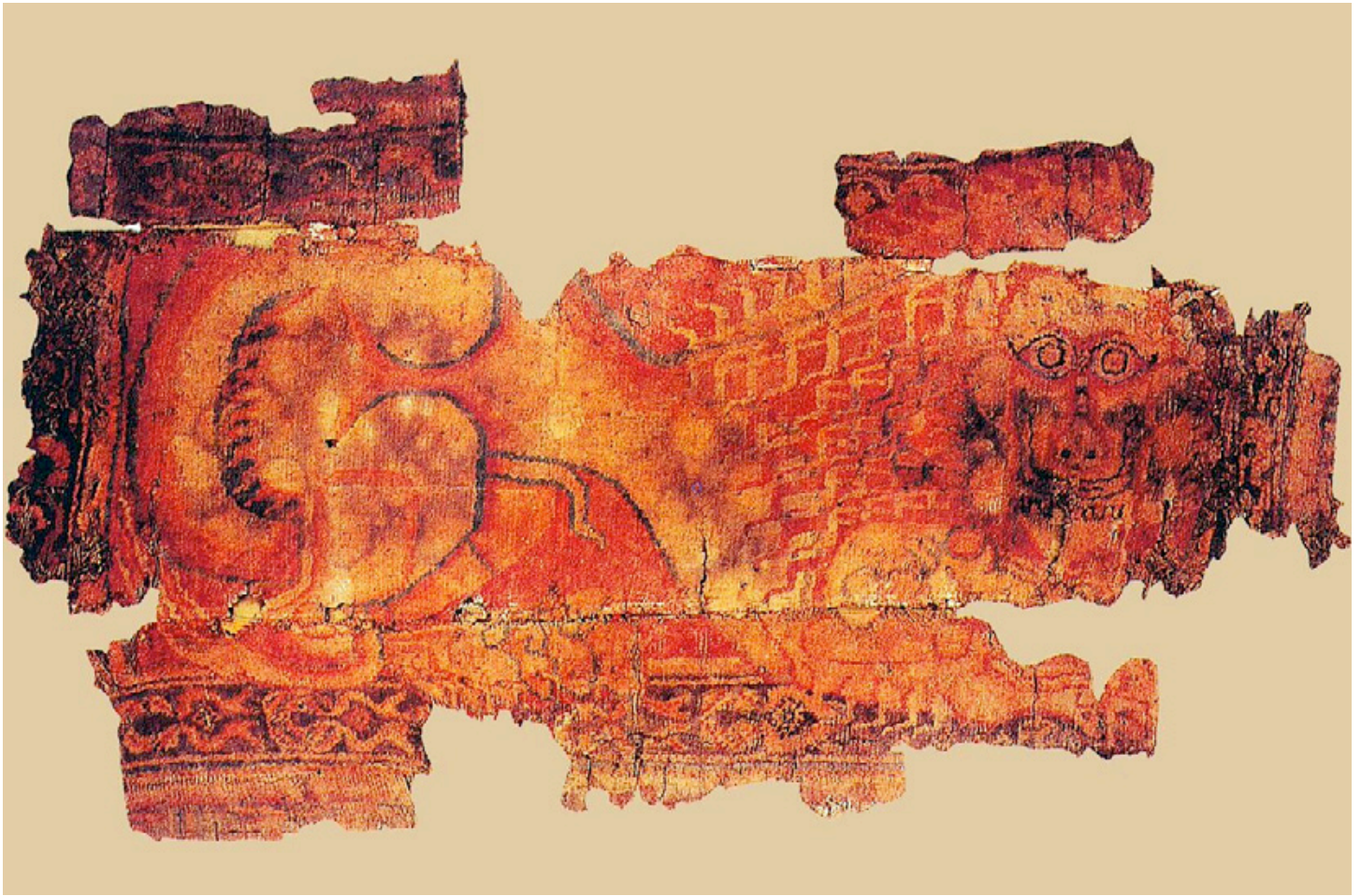
5. Knotted-pile saddle cover, wool, probably Luristan, carbon-14 dated to 800–364 BCE, private collection, Geneva

cover (5) that emerged in Iran many years ago, which carbon-14 dating suggests may have been woven as early as the seventh century BCE. It appears to employ natural wools to represent ibex against a light ground, oriented as they would be seen when the blanket fell down the sides of the horse. Remarkably, the upper pair on each side are depicted as if craning their necks to see behind them—as far as I know, a unique perspectival manifestation in early and medieval rugs. I am not certain to whom Michael ascribes this amazing object; however, given the frequent presence of the ibex in Luristan bronzes, the high incidence of horse-harness fittings among them, and the splendid isolation of the ibex against an utterly plain ground free from other stylistic frills, an attribution to Luristan makes sense to this writer.

Michael also introduced us to a fragmentary ancient Persian rug sold at Christie's London in 2011, attributed to the Sasanians of the fifth century CE. Within bands of tapestry weave at top and bottom, its piled field featured rows of lions, which Michael very reasonably likened to the striking polychrome-tile friezes from the Ishtar Gate at Babylon—the lion everywhere in the ancient Near and Further East evoking power and rulership, whether shown singly, in sculptural pairs at the entrance to palaces, or walking in single file, as on the Christie's rug.

Although Egypt and Persia were thus represented in his survey, it is sites further east that have revealed more rugs, and that have excited Michael's greatest attention. He has placed many of them under the "Bactrian" rubric, by which he seems to be applying a cultural stamp more than a political one. Bactria was a Central Asian region that

centered on the Oxus (Amu Darya) and comprised parts of modern-day northern Afghanistan, eastern Turkmenistan, southern Uzbekistan, and western Tajikistan. The Bactria that interests us is the Hellenistic political and cultural complex resulting from the settling of Greek soldiers in the region as the army of Alexander passed through, stopping for two years due to the obstreperous resistance of the locals. After Alexander's death, the region passed to the Seleucids, based far to the west in Syria, but an independent Greco-Bactrian kingdom, established in 245 BCE, served to create a cultural paradigm that continued under the rule of successive migratory peoples who conquered the region, especially the Sakas (Scythians) and the Yuezhi, an Indo-European people. The longer-lived successor state was led by a Yuezhi subgroup, the Kushans (circa first to fourth century CE), who extended their rule further southeast into India (as had the Greco-Bactrians proper) and northeast into modern-day Xinjiang, but remained centered on Gandhara (straddling what are now Afghanistan and eastern Pakistan). That vast and vital political unity helps explain why a broad class of heavy-pile rugs sharing a distinct Hellenistic idiom should have been discovered from Afghan caves to the Taklamakan Desert (which includes the Tarim Basin)—environments that insured their survival. A second explanation lies in the pervasive trading habits in the region and beyond over countless centuries. From the dating of rugs in this distinctive "Bactrian" idiom, it is clear that it continued long after the Bactrian state itself met its demise; the sculptural arts of Gandhara likewise demonstrate the staying power of the Hellenistic style.

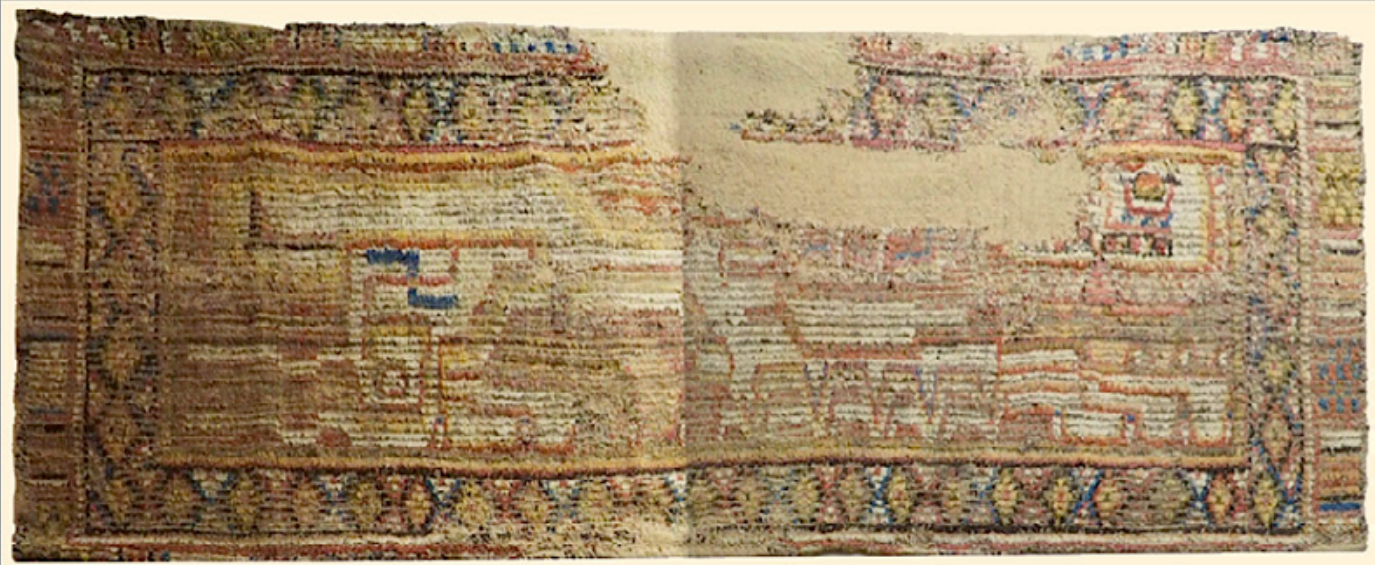


6. Pile rug depicting a seated lion, Bactrian region, 1st century BCE–4th century CE, Xinjiang Institute of Archaeology, Urumqi, 95BYM15:1

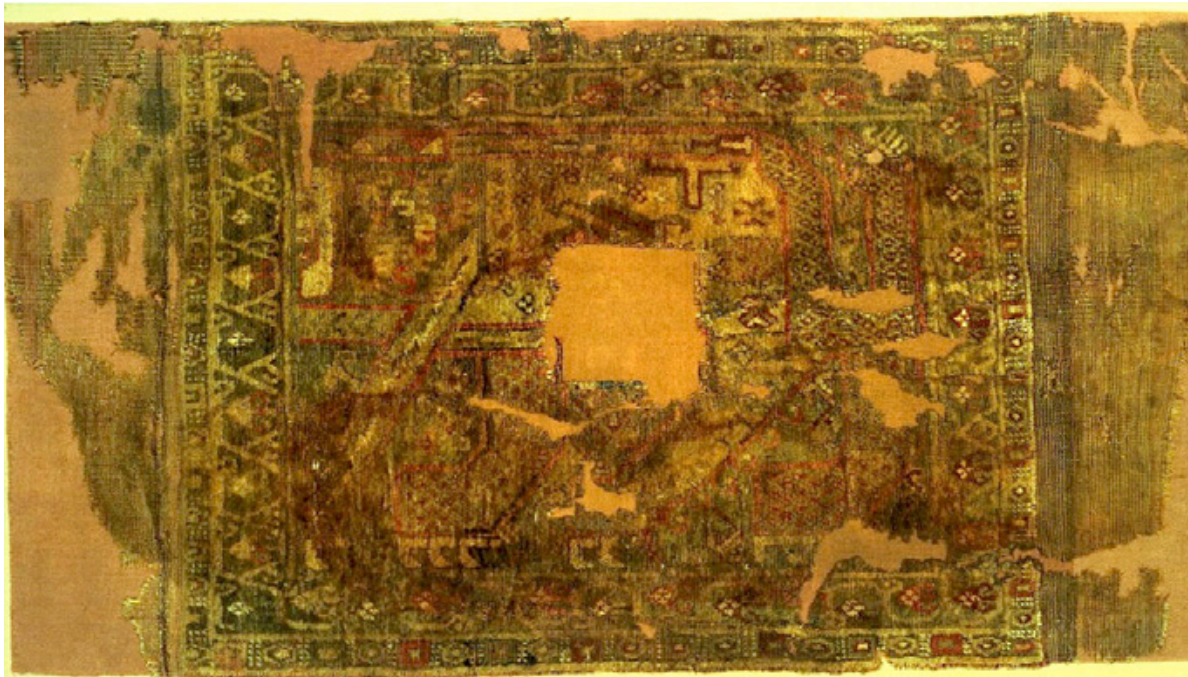
So what are these rugs like? They are not overly large and have a very meaty pile. Michael indicated that they display a remarkable array of knotting techniques, often utilized in the same rug, despite the fact that they are not finely made. Many, probably the majority, have zoomorphic imagery, real or imagined: deer, Bactrian and dromedary camels, tigers, and doubtless other animals, but also mythical winged beasts of various types. The most prominent motif, however, is the lion. The standard representation shows the body in profile, with a massive head turned to face the viewer. A “classic” form of the type is seen striding, but on one stunning piece, found in Yingpan, Xinjian, and dated to between the first century BCE and the fourth century CE, the lion is seated (6). Its head, mane, massive haunches, and claws are dramatically highlighted, and its right-rear paw and front foreleg and paw extend into the border, which seems to feature some sort of floral repeat. (This cross-border effect is one that Michael also

identified in certain Late Antique figural mosaics.) The outer border of the rug consists of shaded bands, another common feature of this textile tradition, and also present in the mosaics. On yet another exceptional lion rug, in pristine condition, the shoulder and mane of the lion push the upper border outwards. Such breaches of border-field integrity are rare in rugdom.

A few of these lion rugs exhibit abstraction beyond the norm. Michael showed one, of mat size, where the creature’s body was impossibly constricted and the head, facing the viewer as usual, dominated all else. Another example (7), dating to about the same period as the seated-lion rug, is one of four similar pieces, all unusually woven with the design upright, hence on a wide loom. It features knotted pile throughout, though the outer border is made to suggest fringe all the way around. The “lion,” which here seems reduced to a rather distorted face and massive claws, does include a Buddhist form of swastika on its haunch.



7. Knotted-pile rug with abstract lion in the field, outer borders suggesting fringes, and inner borders derived from mosaic pavements, Central Asia, 1st century BCE–4th century CE, Bazhou Museum, Korla, Xinjiang, 89BYM13:1



8. Knotted-pile lion rug said to have been found at Fustat, 7th–9th century CE, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1986.4

The well-known lion rug in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco **(8)**, purportedly found in Fustat, must have been subject to a similar process of progressive abstraction (common in rugs not woven from a cartoon). The lion's rear legs are placed one above the other, and, contradicting the privileging of head and face on the Bactrian-style rugs, its head has been inexplicably reduced to a mere vestige.

It seems to be another point at the end of the lineage, and one can only wonder about its true history.

The inner border of the “fringed” lion rug **(7)**, about as broad as the outer, comprises a series of diamonds placed point to point, one of many border forms that appear to be modeled on visual ideas present in mosaics. These include the Greek wave and Greek key, checkerboard designs,



9. Small knotted-pile rug perhaps made as a sitting mat, with palmettes in lattice and a leaf border, Bactria, Central Asia, 1st to 3rd century CE, Xinjiang Museum, Urumqi, 84K2.1

and lattice forms. A significant group of such rugs feature undulating motifs, sometimes formed of leaves. Mosaic-derived ideas also appear in the fields of these rugs: a lovely little mat in Hellenistic style (9), datable to the first- to-third century CE, reflects this. Its field exhibits a floral motif akin to a palmette repeated within a lattice, whereas its border comprises a row of leaf forms placed within an in-and-out bright blue line. Michael suggests that it might be an under-saddle rug, but it is clearly too small for that function, and too small and improperly shaped to be an over-saddle rug. With its four tassels, it most likely served—whether on a chair, a dais, or the ground—as a sitting mat for a distinguished person.

Michael believes that these “Bactrian” rugs are tribal pieces, though I wonder whether they would have adopted such classicizing ideas and power images (big cats) in that context. They certainly were meant to be used in cold weather, perhaps as bed rugs. That said, many of them have a robust simplicity rather out of sync with the exceptional elegance of extant work from the broad Bactrian cultural tradition.

Anyone who saw the exhibition *Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Afghanistan* knows the refinement of the objects made in the region during much of the period at the center of this carpet survey.

One fragment that Michael showed us, featuring rearing goats drawn in a truly elegant, classicizing manner, did suggest that it was a genuinely urban version of this tradition.

Clearly, many local traditions were reflected in this carpet array. One fantastically colorful group had designs too complicated to register when shown in passing, but were obviously distinct, as Michael indicated. A small rug, which he classed among the central Bactrian group, comprised two registers: the upper containing a figure seated in Buddha-like fashion, and the lower occupied by two youths with black ringlets (lovers?), seemingly from a separate universe. What story was it telling? We will never know. In sharp contrast was a large rug dominated by two confronted tigers, their bodies depicted in profile as on the many lion rugs. Three yellow forms rose behind the powerful animals; the complex background above them consisted of the lush foliage of three trees, the yellow forms being their trunks. This situational

imagery, largely lacking in the other rugs, was most striking.

Michael also showed us several flatweaves made in a variety of techniques, including brocading and tapestry weave, and exhibiting various designs, often abstract and reflecting mosaic pavements. Perhaps the simplest was a weft-faced kilim consisting of two loom widths, featuring brilliantly colored narrow bands (10), which Michael attributed to the Saka (Scythians). It was found in Nepal, having presumably ended up in a monastery—one of the great mother lodes of ancient textiles after destruction inflicted by the Chinese conquerors, first in the 1950s but more importantly during the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution.

Michael did not exclusively address rugs. He showed a group of striking and complex skirts, always fashioned in three distinct registers employing different techniques. The lower registers were decorated with brilliant designs, including rows of celestial deer, in strong colors. All these garments were preserved in graves in the Taklamakan Desert. Carbon-14 dating places various examples of them between the eighth and third century BCE.

As I noted when introducing Michael, the only ancient rug with which most people are acquainted is the Pazyryk Carpet, which has provided a tantalizing hint of a lost world of rug weaving. Michael's extraordinary images restore that lost world, even if they leave us with countless questions, some to be answered by future research, some forever unanswerable.

Jeff Spurr

Author's note: This overview has been selective and synthetic, given that my notes are essentially illegible, the numbers of textile objects shown were so abundant, and the images available for illustration were so few. Any errors are mine; my independent flights of interpretation should be obvious.



10. Wool tapestry-woven textile with colored bands, probably Saka, carbon-14 dated to 799–526 BCE, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, CO.196

Events: Rugs, Textiles, Related Arts

Auctions

- Nov. 1, London, Sotheby's, Rugs & Carpets
- Nov. 19, Vienna, Austria Auction Company, Fine Antique Oriental Rugs VI
- Nov. 20, Boston, Grogan & Company, The Mitchell and Rosalie Rudnick Collection of Caucasian Rugs
- Dec. 3, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Collectors' Carpets

Exhibitions

- Until Dec. 3, Berlin, Studio Bumiller, "Woven Paradise: The Martin Posth Collection"
- Until Feb. 12, San Francisco, de Young, "On the Grid: Textiles and Minimalism"
- Until Feb. 20, Washington, D.C., Freer/Sackler, "The Art of the Qur'an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts"
- Feb. 8–21, San Francisco, Peter Pap, "Afshar: The Corwin Collection"

Fairs

- Jan. 24–29, London, London Antique Rug and Textile Art Fair (LARTA); Battersea, Decorative Antiques and Textiles Fair

Future NERS Meetings

- March (date TBD):
DeWitt Mallary, "Jürg Rageth's New Study of Turkmen Rugs" (Probably Durant-Kenrick House, Newton)
- April 21:
Collector Series: Honoring Yon Bard (First Parish, Lincoln)
- May (date TBD):
Annual Picnic, Moth Mart, and Show and Tell (Gore Place)

Photo Credits

p. 1: Yon Bard (l), Mitch Rudnick (r); **p. 2:** Julia Bailey (top), Rose-Marie Séguy, *Miraculous Journey of Muhammad* (bottom); **pp. 3–6:** Julia Bailey (figs. 1, 12), Yon Bard (figs. 2, 5, 13), Jim Sampson (fig. 14), Wendel Swan (figs. 3, 4, 6–11); **pp. 7–13:** Jeff Spurr (figs. 1, 2, 5, 8), Michael Franses (figs. 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10); **p. 14:** Jennifer Carter (fig. 1), Aaron Usher (fig. 2); **p. 15:** Skinner

Kazak on the Ceiling: A John La Farge Project and Its Rescue



1. John La Farge's Sewan Kazak

"Every rug has a story." This one is about how a rug traveled from the Levant to Newport, Rhode Island, and became an iconic symbol for the rescue and restoration of an architectural treasure.

About 1850 a Yankee ship captain purchased a Sewan Kazak **(1)** in Damascus and brought it to the New World. In the 1870s it was put up for auction in Boston and acquired by John La Farge, the multitalented artist and craftsman who made his reputation with the murals in Boston's Trinity Church. He also designed and installed four windows for the church, one of the first applications of the layered opalescent glass whose manufacturing technique he had invented and then developed, later in bitter rivalry with Louis Comfort Tiffany (but that's another story).

In 1879 La Farge, a native of Newport, was commissioned to execute a comprehensive redecoration scheme for the sanctuary of the city's First Congregational Church—a project that would encompass not only stained-glass windows and wall murals but also painted ceilings. One stipulation imposed by the congregation was that the scheme would include neither figural representations nor Christian images. La Farge was glad to comply, incorporating decorative elements from Moorish, Byzantine, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian traditions. On the balcony ceilings, he planned to reproduce his Kazak rug. To the eyes of the congregation, it looked suspiciously cruciform, but fortunately La Farge managed to sell the idea that this "Mecca carpet" was authentically Muslim. (So much for the possibility of an Armenian provenance.) The painted image



2. Painting over a balcony in Newport's First Congregational Church

of La Farge's Kazak appears four times, twice over each balcony **(2)**.

La Farge was well pleased with his "Green Church," as he called it (after the dominant color of the walls). But over the years the building deteriorated as its congregation and the financial resources for its maintenance dwindled away. Hailstorms and hurricanes shattered many of the opalescent glass windows; overpainting and grime concealed much of the decorative work. Structural damage completed the grim picture. Less than a decade ago it was proposed to convert the building into condominiums. But in 2012 the sanctuary and parish house were instead deeded to the La Farge Restoration Fund and designated a National Historic Landmark. Structural repair and restoration are now underway, and work on the windows and interior is in prospect.

We are fortunate that the La Farge family donated his "model Kazak" to the Foundation. When restoration is complete it will be returned to its place of honor in the sanctuary. Its image is on the website www.lafargerestorationfund.org (go to "Explore" and "Ceilings"), which I urge you to visit. There you will find more details about the project, as well as information about visiting the "work in progress" on this rare example of architectural design.

Lloyd Kannenberg

Author's note: It is a pleasure to acknowledge here my indebtedness to La Farge Restoration Fund Board Member Andy Long for sharing his knowledge and enthusiasm during a most pleasant visit to the Newport Congregational Church.

Skinner Fall Rug Sale: Online Bidding Only

On October 21, Skinner held its first online-only auction of rugs and carpets. Those who could travel to Skinner's Boston showroom had the usual chance to preview the offerings directly, but distant would-be bidders, frustrated with inadequate images on Skinner's website, besieged department director Lawrence Kearney with last-minute requests for condition assessments. About seventy percent of the 417 lots on offer had sold by the time bidding closed; post-auction buy-it-now sales raised the total to seventy-two percent. Top lots were a silk-foundation Isfahan rug and a Serapi carpet (each bringing \$13,500 including premium). The most hotly contested collectibles included items from two New Yorkers, one anonymous and the other longtime Hajji Baba Club member Arlene Cooper.



Lot 175, antique Sarouk rug from a private NYC collection, sold for \$12,300 including premium



Lots 79 (above) and 80 (below), complete Tekke and Yomud tentbands from the collection of Arlene Cooper, sold for \$9,840 and \$11,070 including premium



Lot 137, Caucasian *shadda* (catalogued as *Shahsavan jajim*), sold for \$10,455 including premium



Lot 100, Mucur ("Mudjar") prayer rug from a private New York collection, sold for \$7,995 including premium

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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 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

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