



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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



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.

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://tinyurl.com/9ab2h26>.)

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.

March 24: DeWitt Mallary on Jürg Rageth's New Study of Turkmen Rugs



DeWitt Mallary, and a detail of the book jacket of Jürg Rageth's *Turkmen Carpets*

On Friday, March 24, at the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, DeWitt Mallary will again speak to NERS—this time on his colleague and friend Jürg Rageth's important two-volume compendium, *Turkmen Carpets: A New Perspective*.

Jürg first became interested in the radiocarbon dating of textiles to help answer questions about Anatolian kilims; this interest developed into a symposium and exhibition, and then a book presenting his findings. After European collectors of Turkmen rugs asked him to apply his methods to Central Asian weavings, Jürg devoted the next fifteen-plus years to an ever-expanding interdisciplinary study of Turkmen carpets. (In 2008, he himself spoke to NERS on Central Asian design traditions.) Jürg's resulting magnum opus, published at the end of 2015, combines radiocarbon dating results, analyses of dyes and information about their use,

March 24 Meeting Details

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Place: Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Ave.
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 members whose names begin with **R** through **Z**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and plan to stay afterwards to clean up.

historical data, and art-historical methodology to arrive at new conclusions about certain types of Turkmen pile weavings. DeWitt, who edited the English translation of the book, will present an overview of Jürg's monumental project and some selected examples of the data and theories he espouses.

DeWitt began collecting Baluch and Turkmen rugs in the 1980s. He has written for *HAL* and spoken at ACOR, ICOC, and rug-society meetings across the U.S. and in Europe. In 2009, he became a full-time dealer in a wide variety of collectible antique rugs and textiles. He took on the editing of Jürg's book in 2012.

For a show and tell following DeWitt's talk, members are invited to bring one or two smallish (e.g., *chuval*- or *torba*-size) Turkmen items.

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



1. Mitch Rudnick addresses NERS members at Grogan & Company, amid rugs from the collection and a portrait of Rosalie

On November 11, in a tribute to his wife, Rosalie, Mitch Rudnick spoke about the making of their Caucasian rug collection. Michael Grogan hosted the talk at his Charles Street gallery, where the Rudnick rugs were on display prior to their auction the following week (1). (See Yon Bard's report of the Rudnick sale, pp. 6–7). Mitch noted that the occasion was bittersweet, given Rosalie's decline due to Alzheimer's disease, and yet a perfect opportunity to recall the joy that the rugs had brought them, the adventures of pursuit, and the friendships gained along the way. Across from the speaker's dais was an oil portrait of Rosalie at seventeen, painted by her late brother, Joseph Ablow. "She still looks like that," said Mitch.

The Rudnicks' collecting started in 1983, Mitch explained, when a burst pipe in their Lincoln home flooded their wall-to-wall carpeting. With the insurance money, Rosalie sought rugs of a different sort: she started by visiting oriental rug dealers in Concord, Keene, and Newburyport.

Trying to absorb everything she could, she soon expanded her research to auctions, books, and catalogues.

Early on, Rosalie had to get over a major emotional hurdle. After meeting longtime Seattle collector Jim Burns, she lamented, "He's already got them all!" and feared that she'd started collecting too late. The encounter with Burns, along with her exposure to more Caucasian rugs, dramatically raised her own collecting standards. This, Mitch observed, also ratcheted up the financial requirements. Rosalie had funded her initial purchases from money given her by Mitch's father, but now the costs were much higher, necessitating the selling of lesser pieces in order to buy new acquisitions. The chase for rugs also widened to include visits to the major antique Caucasian rug sources in London, Paris, Munich, Istanbul, and beyond. Luckily, Mitch's business in women's shoes required frequent travel, and with Rosalie accompanying him, they were able to pursue rugs in many places.



2. Sumak bagface, lot 1 in the auction (where its hammer price was \$27,500)



3. Splendid if worn Moghan rug, lot 17 (sold for \$12,000)

Mitch then singled out eight pieces from the sale, to illustrate stories behind the making of the collection. About lot 1, a Shabsavan sumak bagface (2), he commented, "I never really wanted to be a bag collector, but Rosalie wanted to expand the collection." John Wertime had told them that the Shabsavan were closely associated with the Caucasus, and that made it okay. Dealers Arky Robbins and Clive Loveless contacted the Rudnicks about a bagface that had been with Eberhart Herrmann, and showed them a transparency of the piece. Rosalie said, "We're buying it, no matter what it costs," although that ultimately turned out to be five times more than any other bagface they'd ever heard of.

Lot 6, a Shabsavan sumak saddlebag (see p. 7, fig. 5), was Mitch's next example. A dealer had showed them an intact pair of bags, which they immediately wanted. The asking price, however, was a lot more than they were willing to spend. When they said so, the dealer offered to separate the two bags and sell them one of them. After the purchase, they worried that he might have kept the better bag for himself, but when he showed it to them, they concluded that theirs was at least equal if not superior.

On their travels in Turkey, Rosalie and Mitch got to know dealer and travel guide Vedat Karadağ. In addition to new-production kilims for the summer store they had opened in New Hampshire, Vedat helped them look for antique Caucasian rugs. (Their requests to see dealers' oldest pieces, Mitch reported, were for some reason received with suspicion.) Lot 17, a Moghan (3), was one of their best finds; Rosalie was undeterred by its worn condition. Mitch called it the most outstanding rug in the collection.

In 1990 Michael Grogan had acquired an exceptional Caucasian pictorial rug—lot 39 in the sale (see p. 7, fig. 3). Planning to auction it, he first called the Rudnicks; Mitch said both he and Rosalie were grateful for that call and their opportunity to buy the rug outright. Rosalie thought of it as a dowry rug, depicting a bride and groom as well as others at the wedding celebration, each individual rendered uniquely. Mitch said he estimated it to be about 125 years old.

Turning to lot 60, a colorful white-ground Kuba prayer rug (see p. 6, fig. 1), Mitch related that he and Rosalie were visiting Eberhart Herrmann's Munich shop, and took five pieces back to their hotel on approval. Although Herrmann hoped they'd buy several, this one was their only purchase. When they returned home, they got a call from Louise Woodhead, then the oriental rug expert at Skinner, who said she knew of a Caucasian rug she was sure would

appeal to Rosalie. When Louise showed her the picture, Rosalie replied, “We own it!”

Rosalie and Mitch bought lot 61, a chevron-striped Shirvan prayer rug (4), from Concord dealer Steven King. A decade earlier, fellow NERS member Alan Varteresian had discovered it in a candy store in Wells, Maine, and over several years had managed to convince the store owner to sell it. Rosalie and Mitch themselves owned the rug for many more years before they found out this fact about its provenance.

Lot 81 was a miniature sumak bagface with a pictorial design of a couple (5). Almost by accident, Rosalie spotted it in the office of a dealer in Konya. She *had* to have it—and sure enough, she got it. She had already discovered a long, reverse-sumak panel of a *mafrash*—lot 82—in Vienna, while she and Mitch were at the 1986 ICOC. The owner told her that a couple of other dealers had been in previously and said they would return to buy the piece. At this very moment the owner looked outside and saw them approaching—“them” once again being the duo of Arky Robbins and Clive Loveless. So Rosalie and Mitch snapped up the *mafrash*, to Arky and Clive’s frustration. Later that day, Rosalie showed it to Eberhart Herrmann. He tried to buy it from her on the spot, but she replied, “I haven’t owned it long enough!”

After relating these adventures, Mitch concluded with a summary of Rosalie’s collecting observations, quoting from a talk Rosalie herself had given in 1999. She was drawn to Caucasian rugs, she wrote, because of their bold designs, angular lines, and strong colors. She hadn’t thought of herself as a collector, but she got great satisfaction from searching for rugs and learning about them. Upon first encountering a piece, her reactions were not academic; she had to feel excitement. She found that she would begin to get very nervous if she hadn’t done anything “ruggie” for a while. She acknowledged that she may have made errors in some of her purchasing decisions, but about them she philosophized, “My mistakes are my tuition.”

Within her family, Rosalie noted, “My children thought I was crazy, and my husband humored me.” Jim Burns and his wife, Stephanie, were friendly and helpful. She enjoyed certain rug people she saw often, such as Mike Tschebull, and others she encountered less frequently, such as Ulrich Schurmann and his wife.

After Mitch’s talk, several people offered comments about Rosalie. Jeff Spurr described the warmth of his first meeting with her and Mitch at Arthur T. Gregorian’s store in Newton. Rosalie and Mitch’s daughter Betsy spoke about Rosalie’s passion for rugs, as did Michael Grogan. Following



4. Striped Shirvan prayer rug, lot 61 (sold for \$18,000)



5. Miniature sumak bagface with figures, lot 81 (\$5,000)

the remarks, Michael auctioned off a Turkish coat generously donated by Mitch, with proceeds to benefit NERS.

All of us who have known Rosalie have benefitted from her love and knowledge of rugs, and from the many opportunities she gave us to see them. Even today, NERS remains indebted to her original energy and vision in getting our society off the ground. Our many thanks to Mitch for the poignant recollections and humorous anecdotes he shared with us. Our gratitude, too, to Michael Grogan, for hosting us amid those treasured Rudnick weavings.

Jim Adelson

Auction Report: Rudnick Collection at Grogan & Company

One of the year's main rug events took place at the Grogan gallery on the afternoon of Sunday, November 20. This was the much-anticipated sale of the Rosalie and Mitchell Rudnick Collection, consisting mainly of Caucasian rugs. Most of the pieces that we in NERS have come to know and love over the years were included in the sale. While the Rudnicks had sought out Caucasian rugs of the early nineteenth century, there were also numerous later pieces: even these were of the highest quality, never run-of-the-mill. In addition to the Caucasians there was a smattering of Anatolian, Persian, and Central Asian rugs and textiles, as well as seven lots of books and journals.

The salesroom was filled to capacity with dealers and collectors from the U.S. and abroad, as well as a good number of NERS members, some of whom came primarily for the show, others actually to bid. At least two were successful.

Some high-end rug collections have not fared very well in recent sales. The present auction, in contrast, did well: all but five pieces were sold. The fact that there were no reserves was no doubt instrumental in bringing that to pass (one wonders why those few did not sell; I guess nobody had

the chutzpah to place ridiculously low bids). In spite of the no-reserve policy, the results were respectable, though not great. The total take was \$618,800 (all figures reported here are hammer prices, excluding the 22% buyers' premium), with low and high estimates totaling \$451,300 and \$815,300, respectively. While these figures seem to show that the estimates were, on the whole, accurate, it should be noted that estimates are often set below expectations, in order to encourage bidding, in which case the results here may be considered disappointing. I have often wondered, though, to what extent estimates affect the actual bidding; while an experienced dealer or collector may have a good sense of what a piece is actually "worth," collectors new to the field often have to rely on the estimates to decide how much they are willing to bid. I suggest that some auctioneer run an experiment in which randomly selected pieces are given estimates that are deemed low, while others are given the putatively "correct" estimates. The results of the two sets could then be compared to see which set performed better. But I digress!

The sale ran smoothly, with nothing very exciting happening. Top earner was lot 60 **(1)**, a Kuba prayer rug with pastel colors and a field of hooked medallions, dated 1225 (1810). It sold for \$50,000, to the MFA. In second place was lot 54 **(2)**, a Caucasian prayer rug of unusual design,



1. Lot 60, Kuba prayer rug, bought by the MFA for \$50,000



2. Lot 54, fine Caucasian prayer rug, sold for \$42,500

dated 1247 (1821), that sold for \$42,500. On the other hand, lot 39, the famous pictorial Kuba wedding rug (3), fetched only \$13,000—a disappointing result—probably due to its attribution to the second half of the nineteenth century. When it comes to rugs, it is “age before beauty!”

As is common in such affairs, most bids came from external sources. Of the 102 lots sold (e.g., 4, 5) it appeared that forty-two went to phone bidders, ten to the internet, and another ten to left bids (these numbers may be slightly inaccurate, since it was sometimes difficult to tell where the winning bid came from). The live bidders in the room came away with forty pieces. I wonder why the phone was so much more popular than the internet; the latter medium seems to me to be more convenient, allowing one to follow the entire auction from the comfort of one's home. [Ed.—Price was doubtless a factor: buying a Rudnick rug via either of the two available online platforms, Invaluable and Bidsquare, added an extra 5% to the buyer's premium.]

Kudos to Michael Grogan for running the auction with his usual good humor, and for producing an outstanding catalogue with wonderful illustrations. I am sure that the catalogue will become a much sought-after reference work.

Yon Bard



3. Lot 39, Kuba pictorial rug, sold for \$13,000



4. Lot 55, Caucasian prayer rug, sold for \$37,500



5. Lot 6, Shaksavan sumak bag, sold for \$32,500

Collecting Notes: A Caucasian Embroidery Fragment



1. Members viewing the MFA's premier Caucasian embroidery (left), shown in its entirety (right)

Those NERS members who attended our April 2012 meeting at the MFA were treated to a close-up examination of a spectacular Caucasian embroidery **(1)** selected from the museum's collection by Lauren Whitley and Julia Bailey. (For an enlargeable image, go to <http://www.mfa.org/> and enter the accession number, 43.2046, in the "Search" box.)

The fragment illustrated below, in its entirety **(2)** and in detail **(3, 4)**, is a poor cousin to the MFA piece, but it nevertheless has some redeeming features. With dimensions of about 32" by 22" it represents roughly one-quarter of the original textile. Enough of the design therefore survives to permit a reasonable guess at what the complete textile looked like. The motifs are

drawn from the standard design pool of this group, but, so far as I have been able to discover, the overall pattern is original, not a copy of one already known. The colors show little fading and are typical of the palette seen on these embroideries. Repair work, where it appears, is not obtrusive.

Caucasian embroideries have occupied a niche in rugdom for quite some time. One appears on the back cover of the very first issue of *HALI*, and continues to pop up from time to time in auction reports (*HALI* 157, p. 143; *HALI* 185, p. 120). Images of these remarkable textiles find their place not only in *HALI* but also in many standard rug books, for example Schürmann's classic *Caucasian Rugs* and



2. Caucasian embroidery fragment



3. Detail, upper left



4. Detail, upper right



5. Kasim Ushag rug, Alberto Levi Collection



6. Caucasian embroidery sold at Sotheby's in 2014

Kirchheim's *Orient Stars*. Articles by Zsuzsa Gombos (*HALI* 26, pp. 26–29) and Jennifer Weardon (*HALI* 59, pp. 102–11) provide detailed analyses of the various types of stitching used and some historical background. The similarity between the Kasim Ushag pattern in Caucasian rugs (5) and the design of a number of these embroideries (6) has long been recognized, and Christine Klose (*HALI* 55, pp. 110–17) argues that their floral motifs evolved into the characteristic “ram’s horn” devices of Perepedil rugs.

Prevailing opinion assigns the origin of these textiles to Northwest Persia, since they share design elements with medallion and cartouche carpets of that region as well as with

Caucasian floral and dragon rugs. They are typically dated to the seventeenth, eighteenth, or early nineteenth century. It is natural to ask who made them. Originally they were called Azerbaijani embroideries in view of their supposed Northwest Persian origin, but examples have since been found further afield, and at least one very colorful piece is likely Armenian (*HALI* 179, p. 97). It therefore seems safest to refer to them generically as Caucasian embroideries.

One final note: As far as I can tell, Kaitag work has not been influenced, in either style or technique, by these embroideries.

Lloyd Kannenberg

Rug and Textile Events

Auctions

Feb. 5, Boston, Grogan & Company, February Auction
Mar. 25, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Vok Collection 3

Exhibitions

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), at Decorative Antiques and Textiles Fair
Feb. 9–12, San Francisco, Fort Mason Center, Tribal & Textile Art Show

Future NERS Meetings

- April 21:
Collector Series: Honoring Yon Bard
(First Parish, Lincoln)
- May 21:
Annual Picnic, Moth Mart, and Show and Tell (Gore Place)

Photo Credits

p. 1: Julia Bailey; p. 2: DeWitt Mallary (top), Jürg Rageth (bottom); pp. 3–5: Julia Bailey (fig. 1), Michael Grogan (figs. 2–5); pp. 6–7: Michael Grogan; pp. 8–9: Doug Bailey (fig. 1, left), MFA (fig. 1, right), Lloyd Kannenberg (figs. 2–4), rugrabbitt (fig. 5), *HALI* (fig. 6)

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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.



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In this issue:

Feb. 24: Jeff Spurr on the Development of Prayer Rugs	1
Mar. 24: DeWitt Mallery on Jürg Rageth's <i>Turkmen Carpets</i>	2
Nov. Meeting Review (Mitch Rudnick, Rudnick Collection)	3
Auction Report: The Rudnick Sale at Grogan & Company	6
Collecting Notes: A Caucasian Embroidery Fragment	8
Calendar and Photo Credits	9