



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 24 No. 4 April 2016

www.ne-rugsociety.org

April 21: Collector Series, Honoring Yon Bard

April 21 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 **A** through **G**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and stay afterwards to clean up.



Yon Bard

Yonathan ("Yon") Bard was born in Vienna and grew up in Tel Aviv. Following a stint as a charter member of the Israeli Air Force, he came to America to study chemical engineering. When he encountered what were then newfangled computers, however, he decided to make them his career: he went to work for IBM, where he specialized in computer performance analysis until his retirement, in 1991.

At about that time, circumstances conspired to get Yon interested in oriental rugs, and he quickly became an avid collector. He joined NERS (then the New Boston Rug Society) in 1992. He has served on the society's steering committee almost from the beginning, and he edited its newsletter for fifteen years. He has given several talks at NERS and ICOC

meetings (where some of his pieces were exhibited), and in 2006 he and Jim Adelson were co-curators of the exhibition "Rare and Unusual Turkmen Rugs," at the second Boston ACOR.

In his talk, Yon will give "a blow-by-blow account of his road to Turkomania." This will be followed by a slide show illustrating various aspects of his collecting interests, such as unique (as far as he can tell) pieces, sub-collections (small groups of unlike pieces that share some unusual trait), mystery pieces of unknown origin or purpose, and others as time may permit. He will end by discussing some unanswered questions about Turkmen weavings, in the hope of getting answers from his audience. He will also bring a few selected examples from his collection for "touch-and-tell."

May 21: NERS Annual Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show-and-Tell



Come rain or come shine: NERS picnickers enjoying post-lunch show-and-tell in 2016 (top) and 2015

The annual NERS picnic, the final meeting of the 2016–17 season, will be held on Sunday, May 21, 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. 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 (**see photos above**). 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 21 **Time:** Noon to 4 p.m.

Place: Gore Place, 52 Gore Street, Waltham, MA 02453

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.

February Meeting Review: Jeff Spurr on Prayer-Rug History



1. Jeff Spurr, making his introductory remarks



2. Folio of a Qur'an frontispiece, early 8th century, discovered in Sana'a



3. Mihrab from the mosque of Caliph al-Mansur, 754–75

On February 24, NERS member Jeff Spurr—our most frequent speaker, on a wide range of topics—addressed us once again **(1)**. His presentation, “Ends and Means: Islamic Prayer Rugs in Context,” expanded upon his introduction to the 2002 NERS online exhibition *Prayer Rugs and Related Textiles* (see <https://tinyurl.com/9ab2h26>) and his 2003 *HALI* article on the same subject (*HALI* 127, pp. 105–11).

Jeff began by crediting the 1974 Textile Museum exhibition *Prayer Rugs* and the catalogue essay by Richard Ettinghausen as milestones from which our understanding has grown. He noted that, within the general category of Islamic art—items made by or for Muslims—there is a subset of articles used specifically in the practice of Islam.

Even in its earliest days, he continued, Islam achieved glorious cultural heights, exemplified by the late-seventh-century Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem, and the early-eighth-century Great Mosque of Damascus, whose distinctive architectural forms inform prayer-rug vocabulary. Similar imagery is seen on a stunning double-folio frontispiece from a contemporary Qur'an: schematically representing a columned mosque, it depicts a mihrab as well as hanging lamps and a garden with cypress trees **(2)**.

Jeff then turned to the functional links between prayer rugs and the five pillars, or core principles, of Islam. The second pillar, *salat* (devotional prayer), requires ritual purity, including a means of separating the person praying from the ground. Palm-fiber mats may have been one such means; an early source describes Muhammad himself performing prayer on a mat (*khumra*). The familiar term *sajjada* does not appear in the sources until the mid-tenth century. The earliest

specific references to prayer carpets date from the eleventh and twelfth centuries; they are found in discarded documents cached in the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Fustat. The term they use, *musallayat*, may well refer to communal prayer rugs.

Jeff next considered the identifying motif of prayer rugs: the mihrab. As a three-dimensional architectural form, the mihrab—the indicator of a mosque's Mecca-facing wall—emerged early; he illustrated one **(3)** originally from the Baghdad mosque of Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (r. 754–75). When mihrab imagery first appeared on rugs is unknown; the earliest depiction of such a rug, featuring a lobed mihrab inscribed “Allah,” is in a Persian manuscript created between 1330 and 1343 **(4)**.



4. Illustration showing Muhammad on a prayer rug, from a *Tarikhnama* of Bal'ami, 1330–43, Freer Gallery of Art



5. Ottoman court prayer rug with lamp and columns, late 16th century, Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait

In manuscript illustration, being depicted on a carpet of any design, including one featuring a mihrab, connoted a person's elevated status. A 1479 miniature, for example, pictures a sufi, having been refused passage on a ship, being transported across a river on his prayer rug. In this instance, themes of religious purpose, personal eminence, and magic are combined.

In addition to the shape of architectural mihrabs, other features associated with them—including columns, pendant lamps, and paradisiacal-garden flora—also made their way onto prayer rugs. Jeff showed one late-sixteenth-century Ottoman court prayer rug that featured a mihrab unadorned save for a hanging lamp and delicate columns (5), and another whose mihrab was filled with what he termed a “riot” of flowers.

On Mughal prayer rugs the floral elements multiplied: the arch of one noble example from around 1640 contained an outsized blossoming plant that Jeff interpreted as a tree of life (see p. 7, fig. 4); on a “millefleur” specimen from around 1800, a profusion of blossoms sprang from a vase, and cypress trees flanked the arch in place of columns.

Certain Mamluk-style and later Turkish prayer rugs incorporated motifs representing another aspect of *salat*—that is, the ablutions required before prayer. Jeff interpreted



6. Cairene prayer rug with basin and ewer, ca. 1530, Pergamon Museum, Berlin

the octagonal device in the lower field of a so-called reentrant rug (6) as a water basin; the presence of a ewer directly above it lent his interpretation credence.

Unlike these courtly examples, Jeff noted, most prayer rugs were produced by weavers working in cottage-industry settings, where motifs evolved, or rather devolved, gradually losing their significance and integrity. He showed examples whose hanging lamps had been transformed into inverted ewers, or whose columns were impossibly balanced on floral sprigs.

In many mosques, Jeff explained, multiple-niche carpets known as *safs* were the preferred floor covering. Via their arcaded design—often including hanging lamps—*safs* (the term derives from the word for “rank” or “row”) served to organize communal worshippers in orderly rows. Among Jeff’s examples were the antique *safs* that once carpeted the Ottoman imperial mosque at Edirne, and, in jarring contrast, the machine-made replacements that now cover the same vast floor. From farther east, an Ersari-Beshir Turkmen *saf* from a Bukharan mosque and one from Khotan both echoed the original “architectonic” imagery, albeit in much altered form.

The earliest extant *saf*—produced in fourteenth-century Iran—was not piled, but rather made in a cotton flatweave



7. Sequined embroidery (*pulak-duzi*), Isfahan, late 19th century, private collection

technique known as *zilu*. Anatolia produced kilim *safs*; Jeff showed one, possibly from the eighteenth century, on which the “arcades” had become independent arched enclosures, each with the vestige of a hanging lamp.

Jeff concluded his talk with Persian and Indian textiles—tent panels and domestic hangings—that appropriated prayer rugs’ arches, cypresses, and other paradisiacal motifs. Examples included painted and block-printed *kalamkari* from India and Persia, and Persian embroidered (7) or appliquéd hangings. Not made for explicit devotional use, their prayer-rug-derived iconography, according to Jeff, nevertheless “cast a protective aura over the spaces marked by their presence.”

Following his prepared remarks, Jeff took questions from the audience. As to whether the terms “prayer rug” and “*saf*” were interchangeable, he again described the former’s single niche and use by an individual, in contrast to the latter’s multiple niches and communal function. In answer to a query about whether “double-niche prayer rugs” were aptly named, he responded that the term was nonsensical and irritating, because their layout, with spandrels at every corner, denies the visual definition of a prayer rug and must represent an autonomous design not indicative of that function. Asked whether he had considered Torah curtains, he replied that these were often produced in the same areas as prayer rugs



8. Post-presentation show-and-tell: Jeff considering one of the two Fachralo Kazak prayer rugs brought by NERS members

and often employed related imagery; he cited a famous example woven in Cairo for an Italian synagogue. Responding to a broad question about regional differences, he contrasted the weavings of Morocco and Indonesia, areas with completely different geography and traditions. He again stressed that *salat* mandated that prayer be performed on something clean, whether prayer rug, reed mat, or other surface.

A member show-and-tell concluded the evening. Caucasian prayer rugs were best represented; they included an Akstafa with *botehs* in its field, two Fachralo Kazaks (8), and a Shirvan Marasali with a typical lattice. Likely the oldest Caucasian example was a prayer rug assigned by its owner to Kuba; it featured an unusually wide border with large rosettes. Four Anatolian pieces included kilims attributed to Ladik, Nuzumla, and Sivrihisar and a lone Anatolian pile weaving: a Ladik prayer rug with tulips hanging upside down below the main field. Three rugs originated farther east: one was a possible Ersari with a stylized arch, the second either Tekke or Saryk, and the final one possibly Kirghiz.

Our many thanks to Jeff, who as always wove together complex threads—cultural, religious, historical, artistic, and commercial—and this time gave us a richer understanding of Islamic prayer rugs.

Jim Adelson

March Meeting Review: DeWitt Mallary on Jürg Rageth's *Turkmen Carpets*

On March 24, dealer and NERS member DeWitt Mallary spoke on selected aspects of Jürg Rageth's two-volume *Turkmen Carpets: A New Perspective*. DeWitt was the editor of the English translation of the book—an undertaking originally expected to last six months, but ultimately extending over three years.

Before turning to *Turkmen Carpets* and the research behind it, DeWitt commented, "I'm not here shilling books," since the print run of 500 copies has already sold out. He then reviewed the chronology of the project, starting with the publication in 1997 of Jürg's *Anatolian Kilims and Radiocarbon Dating: A New Approach to Dating Anatolian Kilims*. At that time, some European collectors of Turkmen rugs approached Jürg, asking if the same technology could be applied to their pieces, and expressing interest in such a project. An initial group of carpets from private collections was carbon-14 tested in 1997, and more pieces from Russian museums followed in 1998, leading to a symposium in 1999 to discuss the results. Although Jürg had perhaps expected to publish his findings not long thereafter, DeWitt characterized him as "a consummate master of scope creep." Many other aspects of Turkmen rugs would pique Jürg's curiosity; his focus on dyestuffs and then on mordants, for example,

added years to the project, and the book was published only at the end of 2015.

DeWitt then shared some of the carbon-dating results, starting with a few older examples for which the data clustered most clearly. (He did not attempt to explicate the methodology and technology of carbon dating, or of possible issues in its application to carpets, other than to emphasize that it was deemed most useful for pieces at least 250 to 300 years old.) Some of these initial examples included a Salor main carpet from the Hecksher collection dated to the second half of the sixteenth or first half of the seventeenth century **(1)**, a Qaradashli main carpet from a private collection dated to the first half of the seventeenth century, a Tekke main carpet from the Munkacsi-Jeffries collection dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth century, and a Turkmen *torba* formerly in the Hecksher collection dated to the seventeenth century.

DeWitt then focused on a complete Turkmen tent band **(2)**, which in 1975 had shown up at Rippon Boswell (then in Basel), where it was catalogued as "Yomut, mid-nineteenth century" and sold for \$690. Its 1998 carbon-dating results indicated that it was much older, the two most likely date ranges being 1520–1602 and 1622–74. Using other approaches, its



1. Salor main carpet, 2nd half 16th or 1st half 17th century (Hecksher Collection, San Francisco)



2. Tent band (detail) from a private collection, 17th century, with arrow indicating red produced from cochineal

potential age could be gauged more narrowly. Dye analysis showed the presence of Mexican cochineal, used in Central Asia only after 1550. Mordant analysis detected tin, whose use for this purpose was discovered in 1610. So the three types of analyses combined put the likely date of creation between circa 1610 and 1670. Similarly, carbon-14 testing of an Arabatchi main carpet yielded probable date ranges of 1492–1600 and 1614–57, but the presence of Mexican cochineal and use of a tin mordant limited the age range to the seventeenth century.

In addition to Jürg's various analytic methods, DeWitt presented some of his observations regarding Turkmen designs, many of which, according to Jürg, come from sources other than the Oghuz Turks. For example, the *sainak* motif, seen in the borders of Tekke or other *ensis*, can be related to quadruple spiral designs dating from as early as the Bronze Age and possibly serving to ward off evil spirits (3). Jürg links the *ak su* (literally, "white water") pattern found on weavings of several Turkmen groups

to watercourses from a garden-design tradition going back to Sumerian and Assyrian antiquity; such watercourse imagery appears over the centuries in both high- and folk-art forms.

In contrast to Turkmen motifs of ancient origin, DeWitt noted, Jürg considers certain design elements to derive from near-contemporary Mughal and Safavid sources. The floral motifs in the *elems* of one type of Yomut main carpets, for example, likely originated in Mughal single-flowering-plant depictions. An old (second half of the seventeenth century) and obviously deluxe all-pile tent band has related single-flower motifs (4). In addition, certain multiple-gul Yomut carpets, Jürg argues, owe their design to the in-and-out palmettes on a group of Safavid carpets: the asymmetry of the *keipse* and "C" guls on the earliest of these Yomut carpets supports this thesis.

DeWitt concluded with Jürg's acknowledgment that his own twenty years of research have by no means reached the end of the story, and that "there's lots more work to be done."



3. *Sainak* outer-border motifs on an 18th-century Tekke *ensi* (detail), compared with three early amuletic forms



4. Flowering-plant motif on a pile tentband (detail), 2nd half 17th century, compared with the field designs of two Mughal pashmina carpets, both ca. 1640

A member show-and-tell of some twenty Turkmen pile weavings followed DeWitt's talk. Understandably, these were less ancient than the ones highlighted in his presentation or featured in Jürg's book, although one member had had his six-gul Tekke *torba* (5) carbon-14 dated at the University of Arizona. Its probable date range extended from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth century; the owner thought that it was perhaps from around 1800. Another member brought two Chodor *chuvals* (6) and asked the audience for opinions on which of the two was older, and whether carbon-14 dating would reveal that. The general

response was that the two pieces were probably fairly similar in age—close enough that the date ranges yielded by carbon-14 testing wouldn't show a difference. From looking at the selection of members' pieces in the show-and-tell, it appeared that the "typical" analytic tools, focusing on design, structure, and materials, would yield more insights than carbon-14 dating.

Our thanks to DeWitt for his selective and clear introduction to Jürg Rageth's book, and to our members for their enthusiastic turnout (7) and show-and-tell offerings.

Jim Adelson



5. Tekke *chuval*, carbon-14 dated late 17th–early 19th century

6. Two Chodor *chuvals* in one member's collection

7. Members and guests fill the room at the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, as Dewitt begins his presentation

Upcoming Events: Rugs, Textiles, Related Arts

Auctions

Apr. 22, Vienna, Austria Auction Company, Fine Oriental Rugs VII
Apr. 25, Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets (see notice of related event, p. 9)
Apr. 25, London, Bonhams, Islamic and Indian Art
Apr. 26, London, Sotheby's, Arts of the Islamic World
Apr. 27, London, Christie's, Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds (including carpets)
Apr. 28, London, Christie's So. Kensington, Art & Textiles of the Islamic & Indian Worlds
May 20, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Teppich Engelhardt Liquidation Sale
June 11, Boston, Grogan & Company, June Auction

Exhibitions

Until Aug. 27, New York, Metropolitan Museum, *Carpets for Kings: Six Masterpieces of Iranian Weaving*

Fairs

Apr. 4–9, London, Battersea Park, Decorative Antiques and Textiles Fair

Photo Credits

p. 1: Dora Bard; **p. 2:** Jim Sampson; **pp. 3–5:** Julia Bailey (figs. 1, 8), Jeff Spurr (figs. 2–7); **pp. 6–8:** Jürg Rageth (figs. 1–4), Doug Bailey (figs. 5–7); **p. 9:** MFA Boston (top); Peter Pap (bottom)

Skinner April 23 Preview to Include Refreshments and Talk by Julia Bailey

On Sunday, April 23, the first day of previews for its April 25 sale of fine oriental rugs and carpets, Skinner will host a reception and slide talk by Julia Bailey, former NERS co-chair and present editor of this newsletter. The preview (at Skinner's Boston gallery, as is the auction) runs from noon to 5; light refreshments will be offered at 2:30, followed at 3 by Julia's presentation, "Flower/Power: The Legacy of Persian Carpets," which she summarizes as follows: "Most Persian rugs made before the sixteenth century are now lost; our best idea of what they looked like comes from manuscript paintings. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, according to these paintings, rugs generally exhibited small-scale, abstract, geometric designs. But during the sixteenth century, under Safavid rule, carpets gained a new, more naturalistic vocabulary, representing both courtly life on earth and a hoped-for afterlife in a tree- and flower-filled garden paradise. In addressing the design evolution of Persian carpets, I'll present some of the most illustrious sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Persian carpets and show how their artistry has influenced more modern Persian rugs, including examples in the current auction." For further information and directions, see <http://www.skinnerinc.com/auctions/3004B>.



Silk hunting carpet (border detail), ca. 1530, MFA, Boston

Peter Pap to Host a May 13 Event for NERS Members and Their Guests

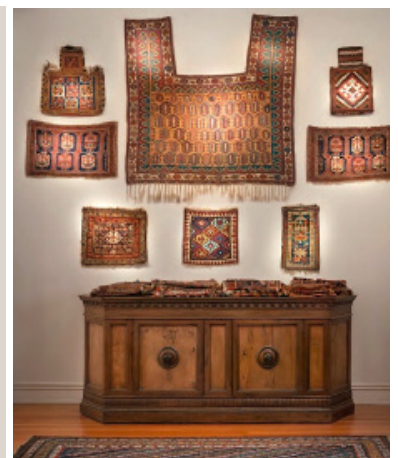
From April 28 through May 27, well-known carpet dealer Peter Pap will present *Artful Weavings: Featuring the John Corwin Afshar Collection* at his gallery in Dublin, New Hampshire. Also included in this sales exhibition are outstanding items from the Baganz, Price, Swan, and Cook collections—approximately 200 pieces in all. (For an online exhibition preview, see <http://www.peterpap.com/>.)

A fellow member of NERS, Peter invites us and our guests to visit the Dublin gallery on Saturday, May 13. He will provide lunch and offer us a special showing of *Artful Weavings*, at which he will tell us the story behind the Corwin Collection and highlight some of his favorite pieces. Make your own travel arrangements, and plan to arrive by noon. **RSVPs required!**—reply directly to Peter by May 5 to let him know how many people in your party will be attending.



Event Details

Date: Saturday, May 13
Time: Noon to 3:00 p.m.
Place: Peter Pap Oriental Rugs Inc.
1225 Main St., Dublin, NH 03444
Directions: See Google Maps at
<http://peterpap.com/contact.cfm>
RSVP (by May 5): inquiries@peterpap.com
or (603) 563-8717



Editorial contributors to this issue: Julia Bailey (editor),
Jim Adelson

Distributor: Jim Sampson

NERS 2016–17 Steering Committee: Jim Adelson,
Julia Bailey, Yon Bard, Richard Belkin, Louise Dohanian,
Joel Greifinger (Chairman), Lloyd Kannenberg, Richard Larkin,
Ann Nicholas, Jim Sampson, Jeff Spurr

The New England Rug Society is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Our meetings are held seven or more times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information and renewal forms are available on our website, www.ne-rugsociety.org; by writing to the New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 6125, Holliston, MA 01746; or by contacting Jim Sampson at jahome22@gmail.com.



The New England Rug Society

P.O. Box 6125

Holliston, MA 01746

In this issue:

Apr. 21: Collector Series, Honoring Yon Bard	1
May. 21: Annual Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show-and-Tell	2
Feb. Meeting Review (Jeff Spurr on Prayer-Rug History)	3
Mar. Meeting Review (Mallary on Rageth's <i>Turkmen Carpets</i>)	6
Calendar, Photo Credits	8
Special Events: Skinner Lecture, Peter Pap Dublin Show	9