



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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www.ne-rugsociety.org

February 23 Meeting: Mike Tschebull on Jajims



Mike Tschebull

On February 23, at First Parish, Lincoln, NERS member and repeat speaker Raoul “Mike” Tschebull will present “Why Warp-Faced Covers Are Collectible: Jajims of the Transcaucasus and Iran.”

Iranian and Transcaucasian warp-faced covers—jajims in the vernacular—have a long history and many uses, serving as bedding or bedding covering, protection for nomads’ packs, padded seating, quilt tops, and yard goods.

In his presentation, Mike will emphasize jajims from East Azerbaijan and the Transcaucasus, but will also show Lur, Qashqa’i, and Chahar Mahal examples. In addition, he will include objects that illustrate the long history of warp-faced weaving.

Mike is a longtime collector of Transcaucasian and East Azerbaijani village rugs and nomadic flatweaves, as well as of Bakhtiari bags. He is president of the Near Eastern Art Research Center and is a past ACOR Board member. Best known for his catalogue *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus* (1971), he has also published many articles in *HALI*.

Members are invited to bring jajims for show-and-tell following Mike’s presentation.

February 23 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.



Detail of warp-faced plain-weave wool jajim with finger-woven surround, East Azerbaijan, Iran

March 23: Louise Mackie Presents “Symbols of Power: Islamic Lands Dressed Up”



Louise Mackie, signing *Symbols of Power*

Luxury textiles were symbols of power, wealth, and status in Islamic lands, where they set standards of beauty and drove economies. They were essential embellishments in lavish ceremonial pageantry, adorning rulers and their courts, palaces, and tents. Islamic dress took distinctive forms, whether loose, untailored garments, tunics and wraps, or fitted-sleeve coats worn with trousers. Rulers frequently bestowed elaborate robes of honor on courtiers and visiting dignitaries. This presentation will feature a rich variety of luxury textiles that were vital components in dressing up the Islamic lands.

In 2016, Louise Mackie retired from the Cleveland Museum of Art, where since 1998 she was the curator of its renowned textile collection and of its holdings of Islamic art. In 2015 she published her extensive survey, *Symbols of Power: Luxury Textiles from Islamic Lands, 7th–21st Century*,

March 23 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 **H** through **P**. Please arrive before 6:45 to set up, and plan to stay afterwards to clean up.

which has now has received four awards. Before coming to Cleveland, Louise served as department head and curator of textiles and costumes at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. She trained in textiles and carpets under Irene Emery and Charles Grant Ellis at the Textile Museum, Washington, where, from 1971 to 1980, she was curator of the Eastern Hemisphere Collections.

While at the Textile Museum, Louise co-wrote the groundbreaking catalogue of the 1980 exhibition *Turkmen: Tribal Arts and Traditions*. She is also a co-author of the lavish volume *IPEK: Imperial Ottoman Silks and Velvets*, published in 2001. She is a founding director and past president of the Textile Society of America and has served on advisory committees of the Textile Museum and the Centre International d'Etude des Textiles Anciens (CIETA), in Lyon, France.

November Meeting Review: Nick Wright and Thom Mond on Tibetan Rugs



1. Nick Wright leading off the presentation, with a plentiful array of Tibetan goods to discuss

On November 17, at the Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, longtime rug dealers Nick Wright and Thom Mond treated NERS members to a joint presentation on Tibetan rugs. The pair brought many examples (1), and used these, in preference to PowerPoint slides, to illustrate their points.

Nick led off by describing how his romance with Tibet started with his boyhood stamp collecting, which inspired him to learn about geography and remote places. Regarding Tibetan rugs, he then enumerated “a canon of the literature.” Starting with H. A. Lorenz’s *A View of Chinese Rugs* (1973), he noted that Tibetan weavers generally use a unique, continuous knotting technique, rather than the individual knotting common to other rug-making regions. His next bibliographic citation was Philip Denwood’s *The Tibetan Carpet* (1974). While talking about it, Nick remarked that Tibetan rugs were usually not made for the floor, which, in rural areas, was likely to be dirt. He then mentioned a 1984 Textile Museum exhibition catalog [Diana Myers, *Temple, Household, Horseback: Rugs of the Tibetan Plateau*]. Recent publications included articles by Thomas Wild in *HALI* and *Carpet Collector*, and Elena Tsareva’s contribution to the catalogue of a 2016–17 exhibition [*From the Land of the Snow Lion*] at the Five Continents Museum, Munich. Last, he cited Marla Mallett’s writing on the structure of Tibetan rugs.

Turning to the rugs themselves, Nick displayed a Tibetan saddle cover with Sinicized motifs, obtained around 1985 and clearly using chemical dyes. More such pieces, all with different designs, caused him to ask rhetorically, “How many design types are there?” Commenting, “Tibetans are using everything they can see,” he showed an example featuring tigers and a phoenix sporting American-flag wings (2).



2. Saddle cover with eclectic imagery



3. *Khaden* with “frog’s feet” and medallions

Beginning about 1910, he explained, the decline of the Ching dynasty meant more freedom for Tibetans, whose wealth increased due in part to their export of state-sponsored weaving, some of which went to Beijing.

A saddle cover made between 1920 and the 1940s was finely and tightly woven—from a cartoon, not just the weaver’s imagination. Its highly saturated indigo dye, Nick said, was uncommon. He then showed a bedding rug; produced on a backstrap loom, its pile was looped, not knotted, and it had four wefts between rows of loops. He commented that the use of more wefts, as in this example, was typically a sign of age.

He next turned to *khaden*, or sleeping rugs placed on raised platforms. He attributed his first example, measuring about one by two meters and displaying tree-of-life imagery,



4. Member admiring a “horse jewel”

to a city workshop. By contrast, his second *khaden* was country-made; such *khaden*, he said, were usually a little shorter and wider, their dimensions varying more because they were woven for specific individuals. (At this point, Thom commented on the *khaden*’s design motifs, known as “frog’s feet”; in Tibet, frogs were regarded as mystical beings.)

Nick’s next *khaden* featured the “frog’s foot” design rendered in multiple colors rather than one. His final example had an added central medallion and two gul-like motifs (3).

Nick concluded his portion of the presentation with weavings in different formats. The first was a woman’s striped, flatwoven skirt. Next came a “horse jewel” (4)—a small pile article placed on the forehead of the lead pack animal, supposedly to bring luck. A bell-strap was perhaps made to be worn by a yak, and a woven slingshot had a pile pocket to hold the stone.



5. Dated (?) Tibetan rug

Thom Mond began with the issue of judging the age of Tibetan rugs. Most of them, he noted, are undated. But he held up one exceptional example, on which “1956” appeared—twice—in prominent Arabic numerals (5). This was puzzling, he said, since he would otherwise have dated the rug to the turn of the twentieth century. (Tibetans used more than one calendar, however, so an earlier weaving date was a possibility.)

Thom next explored Tibetan religious carpets, explaining that they were made by weavers brought into the monasteries. He introduced monastic bench covers (6): typically used for sitting or sleeping, these tended to be heavy and to feature primary colors. He showed various examples with a warp-faced-back structure; one, from the Sikkim-Bhutan region, contained considerable yak wool. (Nick here observed that these warp-faced-back pieces were similar in assembly to Uzbek *julkhyrs*—that is, woven in strips and joined.)



6. Two monastic bench covers, and the warp-faced back of the one on the right

Thom then showed other Tibetan pieces, including pillow covers, a sampler, and an embroidery assembled from small pieces. He speculatively compared the peony motifs of a Tibetan pile rug to more geometric forms on a type of Daghestan flatweave.

Nick and Thom ended by summing up the characteristics of Tibetan rugs: their varied techniques, their lack of design standardization, their predominantly wool foundation (cotton being limited and later), and their non-portability—typically, these rugs were heavy! Many thanks to both of them for sharing their knowledge at our first-ever session devoted to Tibetan weaving. We also appreciate their bringing so many actual examples for our direct examination and enjoyment.

Jim Adelson

Tribal Night at the Museum of Fine Arts

On December 13, thirty-plus collectors or enthusiasts—most of them NERS members—gathered in the Textile and Fashion Arts Study Room of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, to view some of the museum's tribal rugs, bags, and other articles (1). Curator (and NERS member) Lauren Whitley had arranged the showing as prelude to an envisioned exhibition of nomadic rugs and textiles at the museum.

A surprising number of the items on display—including

a much-admired, intact set of Shahsavan sumak saddlebags (2)—had entered the MFA during the first two decades of the twentieth century. These early acquisitions also included a Turkmen *torba* and two fragmentary tent bands (3) donated by art theorist Denman Waldo Ross, whose omnivorous collecting enriched the MFA's overall holdings by some eleven thousand objects. (For more about Ross, see <http://www.ne-rugsociety.org/early-rug-collectors.htm>.)

Julia Bailey



1. Lauren Whitley (center, in two curatorial white gloves) addressing NERS members and other attendees
2. Half of a Shahsavan sumak-faced *khorjin*, purchased by the MFA in 1913 from John Gorakian
3. Two Turkman tent-band fragments, donated by Denman Waldo Ross in 1916 (below) and 1924 (above)

The Artistic Eye: Hodgkin and Alexander Rugs at Sotheby's London



Sir Howard Hodgkin, with one of his paintings



Von Hirsch garden carpet fragment, NW Iran, £224,750



"Portuguese" carpet fragment, Khorassan, £137,500



Mughal animal and palmette carpet fragment, Lahore, £87,500

Last fall, rugs from two art-world notables brought stunning prices in London. On October 24, Sotheby's offered the home and studio furnishings of British painter Howard Hodgkin, who died the previous March. Among the sale's 454 lots were Indian paintings and drawings (of which Hodgkin was a devoted collector), Islamic tiles, and classical carpet fragments **(above)**.

On November 7, Sotheby's annual carpet sale included twenty lots—most of them early Turkish village rugs **(below)**—from the collection of British-born architect Christopher Alexander. Several had been exhibited at the de Young Museum during the San Francisco ICOC in 1990; all were subsequently published in Alexander's *A Foreshadowing of 21st Century Art*.

Complete listings for both sales are posted on Sotheby's website. See also <http://www.hali.com/news/season-of-mists/>.

Julia Bailey



Christopher Alexander with Lotto carpet, £81,250



Karapinar rug fragment, £309,000



Eastern Anatolian runner fragment (detail), £309,000



Konya fragmentary rug, £125,000

Five Star Quartet: Finale



Alpha (α)



Beta (β)



Gamma (γ)



Delta (δ)

First, a big thank you to the brave souls who participated! And special thanks to Julia Bailey and Jim Sampson for Getting Out the Vote.

The inspiration for this little exercise was the popular “Good Rug, Great Rug” series that Mark Hopkins created: thank you, Mark! It was meant to be fun—the very opposite of a deep, furrowed-brow analysis of tapetological aesthetics. No issues of structure, dyes, symbolism, or what have you—just “Do you like it? If so, why?” Unfortunately I wasn’t sufficiently clear that for each piece a 1 to 10 rating was sought (so that a respondent could have given the same rating to more than one bagface), not just a ranking between them. As a result the variety of responses was even more diverse than expected.

The number of participants was sufficiently small that we can accommodate a full tabulation of the rankings and ratings:

Ranking				Rating			
1.	2.	3.	4.	α	β	γ	δ
α	δ	γ	β	9	6	7	8
δ	γ	α	β	6	4	7.5	9
α	δ	β	γ	7	4	4	6
δ	γ	α	β	—	—	—	—
δ	γ	α	β	4	1	5	9
α	β	—	—	—	—	—	—
γ	δ	—	—	—	—	—	—
α	γ	δ	β	10	2	7	5
β	γ	α	δ	—	—	—	—
δ	γ	α	β	5	4	6	7
γ	α	δ	β	8	4	10	6
γ	α	δ	β	7	3	8	6
γ	δ	α	β	6	4	8	7
α	β	γ	δ	8	7	6	4
β	γ	α	δ	5	9	6	4
γ	δ	α	β	5	4	8	7
γ	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
γ	δ	α	β	5	3	8	6

Clearly there are no winners or losers among the members of the quartet. Every piece made the top (1.) ranking at least twice. Only Alpha escaped the bottom (4.) ranking. Gamma had the most top rankings. Beta had the most bottom rankings.

The average ratings for Alpha, Gamma, and Delta cluster around 6.7, and the average rating for Beta is 4.3. The averages don’t tell us much, though. To see why, suppose everyone had rated one of them, say Delta, a 5: then the average rating for Delta would obviously be 5. But its average would also be 5 if six people had rated it 1, six rated it 9, and one rated it 5! Averages miss the spread in the ratings. In the first case (zero spread), there is unanimous agreement; in the second, the 1 to 9 spread indicates (nearly) maximum disagreement. Unfortunately the spreads are unhelpful for this poll: Alpha has a spread of 4 to 10, Beta 1 to 9, Gamma 4 to 10, and Delta 4 to 9. Very large disagreement for all of them! So we must ask: *What were our participants thinking?*

Happily, they have provided answers in their comments on the criteria they used to evaluate the members of the quartet. These comments are so extensive that *in toto* they take up seven typescript pages, much more than this newsletter can reasonably accommodate. The following is therefore an edited selection. For each bagface, I’ve included one positive and one negative comment.

Alpha

Positive: Has tall, well-spaced, consistently drawn stars and not-too-obtrusive small ornaments—a nice variety of geometric and floral. Its borders are restrained in number and color, complementing rather than constraining and competing with the field.

Negative: The borders are boring; the design is crowded with too many secondary ornaments, and there isn’t enough color variation.

Beta

Positive: Has the most space in the field. Stars have room. Border to field proportion good.

Negative: The drawing of the stars is uneven with those at the top significantly depressed as are the top and bottom borders. The loss of a border does not help this piece in any way.

Gamma

Positive: I like the multitude of colors, especially the inner border. The white main border sets off the field. Stars are well formed, outlined nicely by white.

Negative: The spacing is so crowded that it loses the negative space effect. The inner S-borders are compressed too much and so lose some of their effect, and here too the design is crowded with too many secondary ornaments.

Delta

Positive: Has good spacing; the negative space works; the “stars” are not compressed; both borders are nicely proportioned and the individual elements are distinct.

Negative: Squashed stars; fussiness. It is very flat, somehow the borders are pressing in on the field.

More than one respondent commented that judgments depended too much on image quality, which was uneven and of insufficient clarity. Another suggestion was that this exercise should be done “live” at a regular meeting, so that members could examine the actual pieces. Unfortunately that would be a practical impossibility for the bagfaces here. To explain why, I will conclude this report with a tabulation of image sources:

- Alpha was offered on eBay in 2005.
- Beta was published in *Oriental Rugs from Atlantic Collections*, plate 114.
- Gamma was published in Joseph McMullan's *Islamic Carpets*, plate 57.
- Delta was published in John Wertime's *Sumak Bags*, plate 26.

Lloyd Kannenberg

Rug, Textile, and Related Events

Auctions

Feb. 3, Vienna, Austria Auction Company, Antique Oriental Rugs X
Feb. 11, Boston, Grogan & Company, The Winter Auction
Feb. 28, Vienna, Dorotheum, Carpets, Tapestries, and Textiles
Mar. 10, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Poppmeier Collection

Exhibitions

Until Feb. 11, Houston, Museum of Fine Arts,
Bestowing Beauty: Masterpieces from Persian Lands
(Hossein Afshar Collection)
Until May 7, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Portable Storage: Tribal Weavings from the Collection
of William and Inger Ginsberg
Until May 28, Saint Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum,
Greek Island Embroideries
Until Feb. 2019, Sarajevo, National Museum of Bosnia and
Herzegovina, Safavid Carpets from the Mahan Shrine:
Sarajevo Fragments
Feb. 24–July 5, Washington, Sackler Gallery,
The Prince and the Shah: Royal Portraits from Qajar Iran
Mar. 10–July 9, Washington, Textile Museum,
Binding the Clouds: The Art of Central Asian Ikat

Fairs

Feb. 8–11, San Francisco, Fort Mason Center,
Tribal & Textile Art Show; Peter Pap, Artful Weavings

Future NERS Meetings

- April 27:
Tom and Peggy Simons,
“Pakistani Textiles”
(Durant-Kenrick House, Newton)
- May 20:
Annual Picnic, Moth Mart, and
Show-and-Tell
(Gore Place)

Photo Credits

p. 1: Mike Tschebull; **p. 2:** Louise Mackie; **pp. 3–5:** Jim Sampson (figs. 1, 3, 5, 6), Julia Bailey (figs. 2, 4); **p. 6:** Jim Sampson (fig. 1), Yon Bard (fig. 2), Julia Bailey (fig. 3); **p. 7:** pps.org (top left), theculturetrip.com (bottom left), Sotheby's (all rugs); **p. 8:** Lloyd Kannenberg

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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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