



# View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 26 No. 3 May 2019

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

## May 3 Meeting: Jim Opie on South Persian Tribal Weavings



Jim Opie  
now (left)  
and in 1978  
(seated at  
right in the  
Vakil Bazaar,  
Shiraz)

### May 3 Meeting Details

**Time:** 7:00 p.m.

**Place:** Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Ave.  
Newton, 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.

On May 3, Jim Opie, author and longtime dealer in Portland, Oregon, will present "Perspectives on South Persian Tribal Weavings." The topics he'll address include "the ethnological picture and why it matters," "tribal-in-fact vs. tribal-in-name," "lingering design-origin questions," and "the twentieth century: guns, oil, and the end of traditional nomadism." He'll share rugs that reveal "the nature of the weaver" and ask the audience to ponder with him how this is so. Finally, he'll show a rug woven as a man's legal will.

Jim's first trip to Iran, in 1970, led to a career-long specialty in South Persian tribal rugs. In *Tribal Rugs of Southern Persia* (1982), he characterized the weavings of various tribes and included notes on how he conducted business in the bazaar. In 1992 he published *Tribal Rugs: Nomadic and Village Weavings from the Near East and Central Asia*, which has been translated into several European languages. He encouraged the "vegetable-dye renaissance" in Iran and later developed a line of rugs made by village women in Afghanistan.

Members are invited to bring their South Persian tribal pieces for a show-and-tell after Jim's presentation.



## May 19: NERS Annual Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show-and-Tell



**Show-and-tell (top) and moth mart at the 2018 picnic**

The annual NERS picnic, the final meeting of the 2018–19 season, will be held on Sunday, May 19, 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. 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 19

**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.



## March Meeting Review: A Trio Considers “Whither the Market?”



### 1. “Whither the Market?” panelists, moderator, and NERS audience

On March 22, at Durant-Kenrick House, Newton, NERS Steering Committee member Jean Hoffman moderated a panel she herself had proposed and organized: its subjects were the current and future directions of rug collecting and the market. Participating panelists were Peter Pap, Lawrence Kearney, and Alan Varteresian (all of them NERS members), each offering his perspective from forty-plus years of involvement with rugs **(1)**. Since discussion meandered considerably among topics, this review groups comments thematically.

#### *Personal History in Rug and Textile Collecting*

Peter started in the rug business in 1974, as a twenty-year-old stockboy at rug dealer Brooks, Gill and Company in Boston. He chased rugs as a “picker,” and eventually opened his own rug business, first in Keene and then in Dublin, New Hampshire. Of his Dublin store he lamented, “It was my Field of Dreams; I built it and they didn’t come.” He then began selling at antique shows, and opened a second gallery in San Francisco, which he has recently closed to refocus on the Dublin location.

Lawrence **(2)** indicated that he started collecting rugs in graduate school, at a time when he didn’t have much money. He described his initial, powerfully appealing impression upon encountering a rug: “This is not from my world—it’s from a different world.”



### 2. Lawrence Kearney listens to Alan Varteresian

Alan **(2)** grew up among rugs, but collecting them wasn’t a family tradition; he observed, “I really don’t know a case where a child of a rug collector is interested.” He himself started collecting in his forties, “not young.” First he bought Persian rugs, then Caucasian; ultimately he concentrated on Turkmen pieces, whose fascination he compared to “a Bach fugue.”





**3. Armenian rug dealers of Boston, in an undated photo**

Noting "I'm interested in rugs because I love beauty," Jean added her own story. She grew up with two rugs, both of them from an uncle who, as a border customs agent, had obtained rugs as bribes, although it wasn't clear whether these were actually part of his "receipts" or just funded by his extracurricular income.

#### *Past Sources of Rugs for New England Collectors*

Alan cited Hagop Bogigian as founder of one of the first rug shops in America, opened in Boston in 1882. He distributed a handout that included an 1895 picture of the store, on Beacon and Park Streets, and an early photo of other Boston rug dealers who joined Bogigian (3). They were followed by a second generation, of whom Moustapha Avigdor, known for his incredible eye, was the most famous and influential. Successors included eminent dealers further afield, such as Eberhart Herrmann of Munich and Vojtech Blau in New York. "I got most of my best rugs from dealers," Alan said; "If you're straight, they'll come to you." There were, however, a number of Armenians who, suspicious of one of their own, wouldn't sell to him. As a high school teacher he had a ready supply of Anglo-Saxon colleagues, and would pay "the WASPs" a commission to buy things he wanted.

#### *Present Interests of Rug Collectors and Other Buyers*

Peter suggested that there should be a category with a term like "rug enthusiast," separate from "rug collector." Alan echoed this sentiment, noting "I don't think there's much of a change, really . . . You're either a collector or a decorator."



**4. A member offers a bleak view of future rug collecting**

Lawrence commented that about 20% of the people at Skinner auctions are under forty, and those buyers are typically looking for decorative rugs.

Peter observed that tribal rugs are not highly esteemed in their countries of origin, which tend to value city rugs; tribal creations are more valued in the West. He added that it's important to cultivate buyers other than rug "collectors"—people who don't have their tastes shaped by, for instance, Skinner and Rugrabbit.

At this point an audience member (4) volunteered, "What's collecting?—a 'mental disorder.' You're never going to have another group of collectors like us. The new generation, their brains are wired differently."

Reflecting greater optimism, Peter offered his projections about the existence—and tastes—of the next wave of collectors. He predicted that millennials will embrace the concepts of "one of a kind" and "handmade." He also opined that we're nearing the end of a fifteen-year cycle of bland, "neutral-color" rug preferences; a focus on intense colors, as exemplified by trendy "British Maximalism," is on the way in.

#### *Market Trends, Today and Tomorrow*

Lawrence commented that rugs are fabulous forms of abstract art, very reasonably priced and particularly attractive to those whose art-buying experience comes from other media. He also noted that some of what used to be considered "collectible"—1880s Kazaks, for example—can now be termed "decorative." Peter followed up with the observation that "in a healthy market, people buy collectible



#### **5. Panelists Peter, Lawrence, and Alan, with moderator Jean, ponder a comment from the audience**

rugs for decoration." When the market is strong, he said, lesser pieces "draft," cyclist-like, behind great ones, getting close in price; in a weak market, their prices fall back.

Some years ago, he added, the American market was buoyed by European dealers buying for resale in Europe because of a significant price differential. This dynamic is now much reduced; some European rug and textile markets, such as that in Italy, have largely collapsed.

How people acquire rugs has also changed dramatically; Peter noted the growing willingness of newer aficionados to buy online, and he predicted that's how rug commerce will work in the future.

An audience member asked Peter about antique shows. He answered expansively that these were formerly charity events with organizing committees made up of collectors, who guaranteed sales by the dealers they invited. In such places as Columbus, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia, important collections were formed from what East Coast dealers brought there. Over time, however, committees' attention turned to pre-show parties, the better dealers dropped out, and the rest made fewer, if any, sales. Now only a few shows survive.

#### *The Auction Scene*

Lawrence, given his immersion in the auction business, offered several comments on the function and future of that market. Some people, he said, are simply auction buyers—they need the validation of other bidders.

Considering his most recent sale at Skinner, he was amazed at how much some lots—early Chinese and certain Turkmen weavings in particular—sold for. At the same time, he was equally amazed at how little some other things—an eighteenth-century Yomud main carpet, for one—brought. He related that his sell rate for that auction was 89%, and that he typically sees 65% sell rates for Skinner online auctions. Christie's, Sotheby's, and Bonham's, in contrast to Skinner, set higher reserves and sell in the range of 45% to 50% of their offerings—and that, Lawrence said, is why they don't have rug departments anymore.

Our great thanks to Jean for organizing and moderating the lively panel, and to Peter, Lawrence, and Alan (5) for informing and entertaining us with their experiences, observations, and prognostications.

*Jim Adelson*

## **April Meeting Review: Coming in September**

Due to deadline constraints, the review of the April 12 meeting, "Collectors' Choice: Four Steering Committee Members Present Some of Their Favorites," will appear in the September issue of this newsletter.



## A Decorative Rya



**1. Decorative rya (*prydadsrya*) made in 1843 in Bohuslän, Sweden (author's collection)**

*Rya* (plural *ryor*) is the Swedish term for any Scandinavian long-pile rug. *Ryor* were woven throughout Sweden and Finland (which was part of Sweden from the early thirteenth century until 1809), although Viveka Hansen (*Swedish Textile Art*, London, 1996) says most are from Finland. Historically, *ryor* were not used on the floor but as bedcovers—"sleeping rugs," if you will. From a humble origin as covers for soldiers and boatmen, they evolved into two distinct species: strictly utilitarian *slitrya* and decorative *prydadsrya*. I know of no *slitryor* outside a museum. Decorative *ryor* typically celebrated

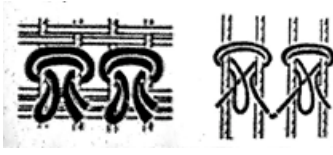
special occasions—weddings, birthdays, and the like—and were often initialed and dated like the more familiar Scandinavian folk weavings. The weaving techniques and designs of Swedish and Finnish *ryor* are so similar that in many cases, according to Hansen, it is almost impossible to distinguish between them.

Not so this example (1), although there is certainly nothing exceptional about its basic structure. Like many other *ryor*, it is woven in two panels, sewn together. (Single- and three-panel *ryor* are also known.) Also typical is the large





2. Partially cut loop pile of a Bohuslän rya



3. "Double Turkish" (partially cut loop) knots



4. Decorative rya with floral design, 1740

number of weft shoots between knot rows—rugs with up to two dozen (!) are known. The weaving technique is likewise common among *ryor*; it is very similar to that of *julkhyrs* in leaving almost none of the design visible on the back.

Its unusual features, however, are by no means hidden. The broad expanse of white pile in the field, for example, is of undyed cotton. Such extensive use of cotton is rare in *ryor* made before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, upon examining the pile itself, we find not tufts but a mass of little loops (2).

The knots are of standard symmetric or Turkish form, but the yarn creating the knot has been "folded" so that one side of the knot ends in the loop, and the other side in a pair of tufts (3). The tufts are buried in the mass of loops. This remarkable configuration is called a "doubled Turkish knot," but we could equally well call it a "partially cut loop knot." This knotting variant is always found in *ryor* having generous amounts of cotton pile.



5. Bohuslän rya illustrated in Sylwan, *Svenska Ryor*

Finally, the design of this example is unusual. Typical decorative-rya motifs are taken from the same repertoire as those of the familiar folk weavings: pointed and lobed stars, flowers, and so forth, augmented with designs from pattern books and samplers (4). *Ryor* with partially cut loop pile draw their motifs, indeed their whole layouts, from a different design pool. Remarkably, we can trace that pool back to oriental carpets—Ottoman carpets in particular.

What then do these clues tell us? Vivi Sylwan's *Svenska Ryor* (Stockholm, 1934), the definitive reference for these weavings, provides the answer. Use of the doubled Turkish knot is unique to rugs made in Bohuslän, a province facing the Skagerrak on the northernmost part of southern Sweden's west coast, and only in Bohuslän was there extensive use of cotton yarn in the earlier *ryor*. Sylwan even takes us a step further: within the various districts of Bohuslän, a given design was often associated with a single parish. The design of this rya is associated with Spekeröds Parish, Inlands Nordre District (5). The Swedish name for the central motif is *krabba*, or crab. Hansen describes it (p. 89) as a large palmette, which suggests its origin in oriental carpets.





**6. Detail of the central “crab” or palmette motif on Lloyd’s 1843 Bohuslän rya**



**7. Border palmette on a fragmentary Ottoman Cairene carpet, Istanbul or Bursa, ca. 1600, Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna**



**8. Detail of the central motif on the undated Bohuslän rya illustrated by Sylwan**

Bohuslän’s decorative *ryor* are sufficiently unusual that Sylwan devotes one of her six chapters (p. 120 ff.) to these rugs alone. As a consequence we can answer, at least in part, the obvious question: how did Bohuslän *ryor* achieve this unique position? The presence of cotton is most easily explained. The fibers used in *ryor* are wool, flax, hemp, and cotton. Of these, only cotton is not native and must be imported. Until the late nineteenth century, importation was restricted to certain “staple ports” such as Stockholm and Göteborg, and imported goods were subject to high tariffs; an expensive, exotic product like cotton was therefore a prestige item in the peasant household. The reason cotton appears in abundance in Bohuslän and only in Bohuslän is almost certainly that the province, located at the North Sea mouth of the Skagerrak and possessing Sweden’s largest archipelago after Stockholm, offered unparalleled opportunities for smuggling.

The sources of the designs and the knots are less certain. Ottoman carpets, even smuggled ones, were far beyond the means of any peasant. How then did they get access to them? The local story goes like this: Tomas Dyre (1605–51) was a Danish-born nobleman who settled in Bohuslän and died there. His estate inventory lists six decorative *ryor* woven by his wife, Margareta Huitfeldt (1608–83), a noble in her own right and much the more important member of the couple. It is alleged that she patterned her rugs after Ottoman carpets purchased by her noble family, and that after her death these *ryor* came

into possession of the village. Now lost, along with the original Ottoman models, Huitfeldt’s rugs were copied over succeeding generations by the locals (6, 8). The story is unverifiable, but it indicates the most probable route traveled by the Ottoman designs (7). As for the source of the partially cut loop pile—who knows?

There is a lot more to say about *ryor* in general and Bohuslän *ryor* in particular, but I will leave you to read Sylwan’s book yourself.

### Specifications

*Dimensions:* 132 x 203 cm = 4’6” x 6’8”

*Warp:* Linen, about 33/10 cm

*Weft:* Undyed wool-cowhair blend, about 12 between knot rows

*Pile:* Twined wool and cotton, doubled Turkish knot

*Inscription:* A B S D 1843

*Origin:* Sweden, Bohuslän, Inlands Nordre District, Spekeröds Parish

*Lloyd Kannenberg*

### Photo Credits

**p. 1:** Jim Opie **p. 2:** Jim Sampson **pp. 3–5:** Jim Sampson (figs. 1, 4), Julia Bailey (figs. 2, 5), Alan Varteresian (fig. 3) **pp. 6–8:** Lloyd Kannenberg (figs. 1–6, 8), A. Volker, *Orientalischen Knüpftteppiche im MAK* (fig. 7) **p. 9:** Bruce Baganz (fig. 1), Grogan (fig. 2), Jean Hoffman (fig. 2 inset), Marilyn Denny (fig. 3) **p. 10:** Skinner (top two rows), Grogan (bottom row) **p. 11:** Jim Sampson (top), *HALI* (center)



## 2019 Rug Collectors' Weekend in Santa Ynez: Two NERS Attendees Report

**1. Shahsavan bags, front and back**

**2. Ex-Rudnick Collection Shahsavan bags (detail) with inset showing Gerard discussing them**

**3. Central Anatolian prayer rug**



**Gerard Paquin summarizes:** The April rug weekend in Santa Ynez, California, is an unusual event. There is no publicity or website for it. Rather, it is by invitation only, as the organizers, Brian Morehouse and Bethany Mendenhall, prefer to keep the numbers manageable for what is truly a hands-on rug experience. The venue is a Marriott hotel two and a half hours north of Los Angeles, in wine country.

The weekend opens Friday evening with a dealers' fair. Saturday is devoted to structured presentations on various groups of rugs. All sessions feature actual rugs and textiles, with no use of images, and allow ample time for close examination of the pieces afterwards. Sunday is devoted to examining the rugs that attendees have brought, and an important factor in the weekend's success is the fact that all who come are expected to bring a few of their own pieces to show, and—if they so choose—to speak about.

The quality of material in Saturday's structured sessions was high, with many rare and beautiful examples. Attendance is about the maximum the organizers want, with just under a hundred attendees, plus twenty-four dealers. Plans for next year's event are already in the works.

**Jean Hoffman elaborates:** The Santa Ynez weekend was a feast for the eyes, minds, and hearts of the collectors and dealers who attended. It began Friday, April 5, with a dealers' show organized by repairer/dealer Fazle Solak. Knowledgeable sellers from Turkey, the U.K., and the U.S. not only brought interesting pieces but also participated in the discussions.

Saturday's program opened with the presentation of the annual Joseph V. McMullan Award to Michael Rothberg. Then came Gerard Paquin and Bruce Baganz's session on Shahsavan sumak weavings. Bruce brought a double bag

whose strikingly colorful plain-weave back had been featured on the cover of *HALI* 127 (1). Among the other wonderful items shown was a small double bag from the Rudnick collection (2).

*Asmalyks* were the topic of Saturday's second session, by Alan Rothblatt and Michael Rothberg. Among the trappings shown, two bird *asmalyks* were particularly mind-blowing, even to a non-Turkophile.

Organizer Brian Morehouse opened his session on Turkish prayer rugs by reviewing the background and history of prayer rugs, after which he showed numerous examples from across Anatolia. A rug brought by Marilyn Denny—one of the first she collected—stood out for its colorful beauty (3).

The fourth session was devoted to Tarim Basin rugs (Khotan, Yarkand, and Kashgar); Jim Burns, Hillary Dumas, Jay Jones, and Jim Dixon were the panelists.

The fifth and last session, with Mike Tschbull and Alan Campbell, focused on pairs of Akstafa rugs, plus some non-Akstafas, to illustrate the presenters' views on classification. We learned to look for a certain khaki color rather than relying solely on the presence of peacocks.

On Sunday a lengthy show-and-tell allowed attendees to share one piece with the group and display up to four more on long tables, with everyone, including the dealers and *HALI* editor Ben Evans, walking around and commenting. The show-and-tell provided a wonderful opportunity to see and touch rugs and debate about them with the experts. For example, the *yastik* I shared generated debate about whether it had madder-overdyed hair from an old camel or natural, undyed goat hair.

The opportunity to see so many wonderful rug people and weavings in Santa Ynez was well worth the cross-country flight for the ten NERS members who participated. I can't wait for next year.



## April 28: Skinner Fine Oriental Rugs and Carpets



Among the highlights (shown in detail) are an early Anatolian “Holbein” fragment (1), a Tekke “animal-tree” *ensi* (2), a Ningxia carpet (3), and rugs and kilims from the Cadle Collection (4, 5)



## May 5: Grogan Spring Auction



In addition to jewelry, paintings, and silver, Michael Grogan will offer 96 oriental rug lots, including the “tree-of-life” Senna rug and the Serapi carpet pictured here (left and right)



## May 5: Peter Pap Show and Reception, with Jim Opie Tour



NERS members and their guests are invited to join Peter at his Dublin Gallery, where Jim Opie (see p. 1) will lead a walking tour of the exceptional Persian village and nomadic rugs on view, many of them from the Timothy McCormack Collection. Light refreshments will be offered (but have lunch before you come).

### Reception Details

**Date:** Sunday, May 5      **Time:** 1 p.m.  
**Place:** Peter Pap Oriental Rugs Inc.  
1225 Main St., Dublin, NH 03444  
(603) 563-8717  
[inquiries@peterpap.com](mailto:inquiries@peterpap.com)

## June 24–30: *HALI*'s Fortieth Birthday Party

Registration is open for *HALI* London, in celebration of the 200th issue of *HALI* and forty years of publication. Events will include a two-day symposium, at the Courtauld Institute ("Carpets in Iran: 1400–1700") and the National Gallery ("Collecting and Collections"); a twenty-dealer fair at the Mall Galleries, near Trafalgar Square; guided visits to collections in and around London; and a post-conference tour.

Among the speakers in the lecture program are NERS member Mike Tschbull (talking about Transcaucasian rug designs) and several past NERS speakers, including Walter Denny, Jon Thompson, Michael Franses, Elena Tsareva, Stefano Ionescu, and Ali Riza Tuna.

To register, go to <https://halilondon.co.uk/>.



## Other Rug, Textile, and Related Events

### Auctions

Apr. 28 Boston, Skinner, Fine Oriental Rugs & Carpets  
(see p. 10)

May 1, London, Sotheby's, Arts of the Islamic World

May 2, London, Christie's, Art of the Islamic and Indian  
Worlds including Oriental Rugs and Carpets

May 5, Boston, Grogan & Company, The Spring Auction  
(see p. 10)

May 25, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Spring Auction

June 11–18, online, Christie's, An Important Private  
Collection of Kashmir Shawls

### Fairs and Conferences

June 24–30, *HALI* London (see above)

### Exhibitions

Until June 9, Ithaca, NY, Johnson Museum of Art, Traded  
Treasure: Indian Textiles for Global Markets

Until July 28, Los Angeles, LACMA, Power of Pattern: Central  
Asian Ikats from the David and Elizabeth Reisbord  
Collection

Until Oct. 6, New York, Metropolitan Museum, Art of Native  
America: The Charles and Valerie Diker Collection



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**ACOR Representative:** Ann Nicholas

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



**The New England Rug Society**

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