



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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POSTPONED! October 29 Meeting: Jeff Spurr, “Off the Beaten Path” POSTPONED!



Jeff Spurr

On October 29, NERS member and frequent speaker Jeff Spurr’s “Off the Beaten Path: A Yen for the Obscure in Textiles, Basketry, and Beadwork” was to mark our return to in-person presentations. But a survey of our members has

revealed that many of us, despite being vaccinated, remain reluctant to gather in close indoor quarters. **We have therefore decided to postpone, yet again, Jeff’s presentation until, as he himself puts it, “a better, manifestly safer time.”**

Jeff’s eventual talk, originally given to the New York Hajji Baba Club in 2013, will address the whys, wherefores, and history of his collecting. Photographs of the walls of his apartment reveal some of that collecting range and its

changes through time, as well as the textiles, beadwork, and basketry representing the traditions that have primarily captured his attention. He could have selected other traditions but in this presentation focuses on those that have specially appealed to him—Kashmir shawls, Central Asian textiles, Kuba textiles, Pygmy barkcloths, Kirdi beadwork (from Cameroon), textiles of Sumatra, and textiles, beadwork, and basketry of Borneo.

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 the ambitious *Unusual and Overlooked: Antique Textiles from Central Asia*. He is a co-author of *Kashmir Shawls: The Tapi Collection*, published in 2012, and has written many articles for *HALI*. He serves on the Collections Committee of the Department of Islamic and Later Indian Art at the Harvard Art Museums and advises the Department of Textile and Fashion Arts at the MFA, Boston.



Kirdi beaded apron, Cameroon, speaker’s collection

November 7 Webinar Preview: Brian Morehouse Presents a Comparative Study of Yastik Designs



Brian Morehouse

In our November 7 webinar, titled “Yastiks: A Comparative Study of the Designs of Published and Unpublished Examples,” presenter Brian Morehouse will address a range of topics not covered in his 1996 book, *Yastiks: Cushion Covers and Storage Bags of Anatolia*, and will also include yastiks that have come to light during the twenty-five years since that book’s publication. Yastik weavers borrowed designs from both rugs and velvets, and Brian will illustrate the transfer of various motifs and design constructs. Most important, he will explore the changing visual language over time within certain yastik groups.

A native of Los Angeles, Brian is the author of the 1996 book and of the chapter “Yastiks: Contributing Factors to the Visual Vocabulary,” in the 2007 compendium *Weaving Heritage of Anatolia*. His other publications include a chapter in *Stars of the Caucasus* and articles in *HALI*. He is the organizer of Rug Collectors’ Weekend, a yearly event intended to promote interest in rug study and collecting.

Webinar Details

Date and Time: Sunday, November 7
1 p.m. Eastern STANDARD Time*

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

Directions: If you are an NERS member or have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this one. To view it, you must register beforehand via the link in the email. Non-members who have never before attended an NERS webinar should email jean.hoffman@jeanhoffman.com to get an invitation.

***Eastern Daylight Time will have ended at 2 a.m. on November 7. If you are in a different time zone, make sure to calculate time difference using EST, not EDT!**



Central Anatolian yastik, first half 19th century, presenter’s collection

November 19 Meeting Preview: Mike Tschbull Offers Practical Views on Transcaucasian Rugs

Meeting Details

We will survey members about attending this meeting. If we meet, we ask that all who come wear masks and be fully vaccinated

Date and Time: Friday, November 19, 7 p.m.

Place: Durant-Kenrick House, 286 Waverley Ave.
Newton, MA, 02458

Directions: From Boston and east, take Mass Pike to exit 127 (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 the LEFT.

From Rt. 128 and west, take Mass Pike to exit 127 (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: In accord with the city of Newton's mask mandate, food and drink will not be offered at this meeting.



Mike Tschbull

On November 19, NERS member and frequent speaker Raoul “Mike” Tschbull is currently scheduled to present “Transcaucasian Rugs: Practical Views on Color, Repair (or Not), and Design Evolution.” In his talk, Mike will address aspects of color—intensity, contrast, and changing tastes—and questions of repair or restoration versus “doing nothing.” Using four carpets as examples, he’ll also explore the development of certain Transcaucasian rug designs.

Mike is a longtime collector of village rugs and nomadic flatweaves; in 2015 six of his kilims were exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (see *View*, Apr. 2015, pp. 9–12). His publications include *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus* (1971) and many articles in *HALI*. His decades of research and collecting have now culminated in the large and splendidly illustrated volume *Qarajeh to Quba*, published by *HALI* in 2019.

NERS members attending the meeting are invited to bring Transcaucasian weavings for a show-and-tell following Mike’s presentation.



Zakatala rug fragment, speaker’s collection

December 4 and 11 Webinar Preview

Jim Burns, “Caucasian Rugs: Six Decades of Perspective on Design and Taste”

Webinar Details

Dates: Saturday, December 4, 1 PM EST
Saturday, December 11, 1 PM EST

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

Directions: If you are an NERS member or have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this one. To view this webinar, you must register beforehand via the link in the email. Non-members who have never before attended an NERS webinar should email jean.hoffman@jeanhoffman.com to get an invitation.



Jim Burns

In a two-part webinar to be held on successive Saturdays, December 4 and 11, NERS will host Jim Burns, presenting “Caucasian Rugs: Six Decades of Perspective on Design and Taste.” Jim will discuss examples of Caucasian weavings dating from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. His talk will cover rugs from the major weaving areas of the Caucasus, including Armenian production. With examples from his own collection, he will illustrate changes and modifications of rug designs over the centuries.

Jim is a Seattle trial lawyer who started his own firm specializing in product-liability litigation. But he is much better known to the rug community as a prominent collector and the author of three major books—*The Caucasus: Tradition in Weaving* (1987), *Antique Rugs of Kurdistan: A Historical Legacy of Woven Art* (2002), and *Visions of Nature: The Antique Weavings of Persia* (2010). In 2003 he was honored with the Joseph V. McMullan Award.



Star Kazak, ca. 1800, presenter's collection

As Precious as Gold: Rugs from the Ballard Collection at the Currier Museum, Manchester, N.H.

Thirty-two carpets and one tent from the renowned collection of James F. Ballard, lent by the St. Louis Art Museum, will be on display at the Currier Museum, in Manchester, N.H., from October 23 through February 27. Titled *As Precious as Gold: Carpets from the Islamic World*, the exhibition includes early

Spanish and Egyptian carpets, spectacular Anatolian rugs, and more.

The museum, located at 150 Ash Street, is open Thursdays through Sundays. For hours and ticketing information, see <https://currier.org/hours-admission/>.



Included in the Currier Museum exhibition: Anatolian “Lotto” rug, 16th century; Persian pavilion tent, 19th century; Anatolian medallion rug, 17th century

Other Rug and Textile Events

Auctions

- Oct. 27, London, Sotheby's
Arts of the Islamic World & India, including Fine Rugs and Carpets
- Oct. 28, London, Christie's
Art of the Islamic and Indian Worlds including Rugs and Carpets
- Oct. 30–31, Philadelphia, Material Culture
The Cathryn Cootner Collection: An Important Single-Owner Sale of Ethnographic, Tribal & Textile Arts
- Nov. 11, Stuttgart, Nagel
Rugs, Carpets, Textiles, Indian & Ethnological Art
- Nov. 21, New York, Nazmiyal Auctions
Antique and Midcentury Rugs

Exhibitions

- Through Jan. 7, 2022, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
Fabric of a Nation: American Quilt Stories
- Through Jan. 30, 2022, New York, Met Cloisters
Spain 1000–1200: Art at the Frontiers of Faith
- Through Mar. 6, 2022, Kansas City, Mo., Nelson-Atkins Museum
Weaving Splendor: Treasures of Asian Textiles

Future NERS Webinar

Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022: Tom Hannaher on Molas
(see preview in the next newsletter)

Photo Credits

p. 1: Jeff Spurr **p. 2:** Brian Morehouse **p. 3:** Mike Tschbull **p. 4:** Jim Burns **p. 5:** Currier Museum **pp. 6–11:** Michael Franses
p. 12: hali.com **pp. 14–19:** Jean Hoffman (figs. 1, 2, 10, 12), Rippon Boswell (figs. 3, 5–9, 11, 13), Sotheby's (fig. 4)

Webinar Review: Michael Franses on Ten Orient Stars Collection Masterpieces

by Julia Bailey



Michael Franses

On Saturday, September 4, The Textile Museum's regular Rug and Textile Appreciation Morning series featured Michael Franses presenting "Ten Masterpieces from the Orient Stars Collection." The ten weavings of the title were among seventy-five outstanding examples from the Kirchheim Collection illustrated and discussed in the forthcoming book, *Anatolian Tribal Rugs 1050–1750: The Orient Stars Collection*, written by Michael and several co-authors and published by *HALI*.

Co-sponsors of the webinar were NERS, the Hajji Baba Club, and *HALI*. The TM's Curator of Education, Lori Kartchner, introduced Michael, and I moderated the question-and-answer session that followed his presentation.

Due to technical issues at his end—Villa Vespucci, Florence—Michael pre-recorded his talk, but he spoke "live" during the Q&A. His slides of each rug were loaded with comparative examples and explanatory text; fortunately for his large and diverse audience (446 participants, from at least thirty-four countries) the entire program was recorded and remains available at <https://vimeo.com/channels/1643456>.

He began by pointing out a similar evolution in the collecting taste of George Hewitt Myers, founder of the Textile Museum, and Heinrich Kirchheim. Both were initially attracted to bold nineteenth-century Caucasian and Turkish rugs but ultimately added much earlier weavings to their collections.

Turning to the subject of nomadism in Anatolia, Michael credited Harald Böhmer's and Josephine Powell's recent ethnographic studies, and summarized the history of Anatolia during the fifteenth century, the era to which many of the Kirchheim Collection rugs can be dated.

Then came the ten masterpieces, ordered by age based on their carbon-14 datings. The youngest (ca. 1550–1600) was a green-ground runner with repeated red *çintamani* motifs un-outlined and stacked in vertical columns (1). Suggesting that its design roots lay in kilims, Michael compared it to the two other known pile rugs with the same design, plus medallion-design Karapinar pile rugs and Ottoman kilims with related borders.



1. Runner with green field and red çintamani, Karapinar region, ca. 1550–1600



2. Rug with octagonal central medallion and two smaller hexagonal medallions, Central Anatolia, ca. 1500–1600

Next was a rug (ca. 1500–1600) with a field containing an octagonal central medallion, two hexagonal smaller medallions, and quartered cruciform-medallion corners (2). Possibly made somewhere between Ushak and the Ladik region, it had a cloudband border with extra ornaments that Michael interpreted as pomegranate stems and stylized creatures.



3. Rug with eight-pointed star medallion and quartered-medallion corners, Western Anatolia, ca. 1500–1550

A beautiful if fragmentary yellow-field rug (ca. 1500–1550) featured a delicate central medallion and quartered-medallion corner ornaments (3). Michael compared a motif with inward-pointing arrows at the very center of the central medallion to the primary gul on an early Tekke main carpet, and the white “double crosses” (like tic-tac-toe grids) in the rug’s border to similar motifs on a Tekke “bird” asmalyk.



4. Field-within-field rug with “fabulous creatures” border, Western Anatolia, ca. 1500–1550

Distinguishing the fourth rug was a field-within-field layout that included a central medallion and three sets of corner devices (4). Michael suggested that the “Talish rosette” at each end of the outer field was the tribal emblem of Uzun Hasan, ruler (1453–1478) of the Aqqoyunlu Turkmen. He digitally reassembled the quartered corner devices to form medallions whose features he compared to Saryk and Yomud guls. Finally, he noted that the rug shared minor-border designs with a considerably younger (ca. 1600–1650) “keyhole” rug also



5. Medallion-and-anchor-pendants rug with “fabulous creatures” border, Central Anatolia, ca. 1450–1500

in the Orient Stars collection. This to him suggested the slow design evolution of rugs made by widely scattered tribal groups.

He introduced his fifth rug (ca. 1450–1500) with a comment from Walter Denny, a co-author of the new book, who advised caution in interpreting rug motifs as zoomorphic (creature-based). Nonetheless, in this gorgeous “anchor pendants” rug (5), Michael himself saw creatures galore, both in the rug’s hexagonal field lozenges and in its various craggy, asymmetric border elements.



6. “Fabulous creatures” lattice rug, Ladik, ca. 1450–1500

Michael’s sixth rug (ca. 1450–1500) featured a lattice-design field **(6)**; in its repeated medallions he detected still more stylized creatures, including phoenixes and birds. To the viewer attuned to Michael’s way of seeing, the borders of this rug likewise might appear suggestively zoomorphic.

The next rug (ca. 1300–1350), even though fragmentary, left no doubt about its weaver’s zoological intentions. One of five “early animal carpets” discovered in Kathmandu and likely preserved for centuries in Tibetan monasteries, it showed the remnants of two octagonal medallions containing pairs of creatures with long necks, peaked backs, and single raised forelegs **(7)**. Because of their dromedary-like humps, Michael tentatively identified them as camels.

A rug of strikingly similar design is clearly depicted in an illustration of a dispersed, 1330s Persian manuscript known as the “Great Mongol” *Shahnama* **(7a)**. The main border of the Kirchheim rug, and of three others in the group, features interlacing pseudo-Kufic, or “kufesque.” Curiously, there also exist in Japan several Mongolian rugs, dating to ca. 1385–1435, with the same highly distinctive Arabic-script-based border pattern.



7. Rug with overlapping animals in octagons, Central or Eastern Anatolia, 1300–1350



7a. *Zahhak Consults the Physicians at Court* (detail), painting from the dispersed “Great Mongol” *Shahnama*, Tabriz, 1330s, Freer Gallery of Art 1923.5



8. Rug with overlapping creatures with faces, probably Kurdish, possibly Iran, ca. 1100–1150

The last, and oldest, pile rug that Michael showed **(8)** was another fragmentary animal carpet (ca. 1100–1150). Its mysteriously abstract, composite creatures included antlered animals plus other forms with seemingly human heads defined by eyebrows, eyes, noses, mouths, rouged cheeks, and flowing hair **(8a)**—hence the name “Faces Rug” by which this unique fragment is known.



8a. Detail of one of the faces



8b. Detail of the “kufesque” outer border

The rug’s offset knotting and colors indicated to Michael that it could have been woven by Kurds in Northwest Persia; he suggested that its strange creatures might be symbolic echoes of the region’s once-prevalent Zoroastrianism. In contrast, he noted, the rug’s “kufesque” outer border **(8b)** indicated its weaver’s familiarity with the design vocabulary of Islam.



9. Fragment of a skirt with totemic symbols, wool weft-faced plainweave, 383–197 BCE

10a. Kilim depicting camels, wool double-interlocking tapestry weave, 487–379 BCE

10b. Socks with paired chicks, wool balanced tabby/weft-faced plainweave with discontinuous weft patterning, 404–209 BCE

Not only did the Kirchheims acquire the earliest available Anatolian rugs; they also sought ancient textiles with designs that, in Michael's words, "might have inspired the Turks" of both Central Asia and Anatolia. Thus the last of Michael's ten masterpieces were a fragment of a wool skirt (383–197 BCE), found in Mongolia and tentatively attributed to the Saka culture (9), and, grouped as one, a wool kilim (487–379 BCE) and pair of socks (404–209 BCE), perhaps Iranian. On the two-color, possibly camel-wool kilim (10a), ten dromedaries—no doubt about their species—surrounded an eleventh one enclosed in a rectangular "corral"; on the socks (10b), where a yellow dye was introduced, there appeared equally naturalistic, confronted chicks.

Michael concluded his presentation with a validating quote from Voltaire: "In antiquity everything is symbol or emblem. The whole of nature is represented and disguised."

During the Q&A that followed, questions and comments flooded in, leaving this moderator struggling to keep pace. Voltaire's dictum notwithstanding, some questioners were

skeptical about the creatures purportedly lurking in the fields and borders of rugs Michael had shown. Others had doubts regarding the "tribal" designation that Michael bestows on the Orient Stars collection as a whole. Still others wondered if, given the format of these rugs, they were really made by nomads. One participant questioned the reliability of carbon dating. One asked if Michael believed that the animal rugs had actually survived for so many centuries in Tibetan monasteries. Another inquired whether the dyes used in the rugs had been analyzed, and how the colors had stayed brilliant when the rugs themselves were so distressed. The last questioner got personal: "Comes the revolution, Michael, which of these ten rugs would you save?" Michael's "live" answers—relaxed, fluent, and lengthy—bolstered the convictions he had put forth in his pre-recorded talk. Considering that they're fully available online, I won't summarize them here, except for a single, irresistible spoiler: the rug Michael would save was, perhaps predictably, the rarest and weirdest one of the lot—the Faces Rug.

Jeff Spurr Comments on the Orient Stars Film



Title frame showing a view of Florence from the Villa Vespucci, where the Orient Stars film was made

The following, penned off the cuff, was initially an email to a friend, which I introduced in the subject heading as “from a member of the Flat Earth Society,” referring to an arguable assertion by Michael Franses in the film commented on below. It amounts to a review of the recent HALI-produced film and virtual tour, Fabulous Creatures: Anatolian Tribal Rugs 1050–1750, addressing the seventy-five rugs in the forthcoming book about the Orient Stars collection. In the film (viewable at <https://hali.com/news/the-orient-stars-collection/>), principal discussant Michael is accompanied by Alberto Boralevi, Chairman of the Academic Committee of ICOC, and Anna Beselin, Curator of Carpets and Textiles at the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin. This informal review discovered plenty to attend to in the film, and so only by implication addresses certain points made in Michael Franses’s fine webinar talk [reviewed by Julia Bailey, pp. 6–11]. I should note that both film and talk exhibited the high production values we have come to expect from anything associated with HALI. The text of my letter, edited slightly for this public venue, follows:

I watched the Orient Stars film. To be frank, I thought the whole thing was pretty darned stilted, which is to say scripted to a fare-thee-well, considering that it was supposed to involve a conversation amongst experts, at least in part. In fact, Alberto Boralevi deserves credit for the only moment of genuine spontaneity when he presumed to differ with Michael on one point, and their exchange did not end up on the cutting-room floor.

It was wonderful to be provided with such an intimate view of so many great rugs, though I question the logic of including the ancient add-ons at the end, particularly that tapestry-woven dress fragment, interesting as it is. Distractions from the main topic. For some reason, not every rug was treated to a complete close-up view and I felt a little cheated there,

given my eye issues. Still and all, it is a very good thing that the film was made and made readily available.

I credit Michael for being the one person on earth who has seen more great old and ancient rugs and textiles than anyone else living and has documented many of them. Though our encounters have been few, he has been generous with me on a couple occasions. That said, I fundamentally differ with him on some essential issues.

1. When an animal is an animal, it looks like an animal no matter how stylized it has become or how fanciful it is (e.g., two-headed, etc.). It stands out as an essentially unitary thing even when the designer has combined it with another form, as with devolved dragon-and-phoenix designs—or human-faced mystery monsters. It is fascinating that, in the case of the only known relic related to the remarkable rug just referenced, those mysterious faces were replaced by stars. It would appear that the second weaver was even losing track of the fact that something anthropomorphic or zoomorphic was involved, although the “object” represented in her rug remained complex and distinctive. Wouldn’t you give your eye teeth for the whole sequence of related pieces over decades or centuries? History and chance just leave us with flashes of light illuminating small parts of a vast, dark plain.

What are not and never were zoomorphic are bits and pieces of vegetal decorative systems—especially vine scrolls—that have come somewhat loose from the overall schema in the process of stylization through time. They are no more animals than the images some people detect in cloud formations. I marvel at how tenacious such notions are. I will never forget wandering through the one particularly fantastic exhibition of Anatolian carpets and rugs in Istanbul in 2007, during ICOC IX, with a friend and a newly-met acquaintance, both well known in the world

of rugs and textiles. My friend, whom I like and respect, nevertheless insisted on seeing zoomorphic forms under (or, rather, in) every bush! At least we managed to banter our way through that stupendous show.

2. Always a bad thing to bring up James Mellaart (the original excavator of Çatalhöyük). His lack of discipline—especially regarding controlled documentation and exposition of the evidence—led to the greatest scandal in ancient Near Eastern archaeology of the second half of the twentieth century. I know because my first undergraduate major at the University of Chicago was archaeology and art of the ancient Near East, and it was much talked about. Mellaart single-handedly (albeit temporarily) ruined for decades one of the great archaeological sites ever unearthed, though a renewed and more disciplined effort has been undertaken in recent years. That his speculations helped spawn the cockamamie “Mother Goddess” cult back in the day is equally unfortunate, and those notions should be laid to rest—at least with reference to kilims woven during the last few centuries—not brought up to distract from the brilliance of the objects on view. This was instantiated most dramatically concerning the so-called *elibelinde* or “hands-on-hips” motif, which seems to have been a fanciful appropriation, indeed an excision, from a larger image representing what an Ottoman carnation had devolved into after generations of kilim weavers had done their work. (I will add here that any thesis that demands the acceptance of cultural and artistic continuity over thousands of years and despite profound changes in populations, societies, cultures, and subsistence practices, given that change is ever present, and all without intervening evidence, entails a leap of faith into something fundamentally other than true understanding.)

3. I am of the Marla Mallett school regarding Anatolian nomadism and kilims—namely, that those fully engaged in nomadism rarely weave pile rugs, favoring flatweaves. One might also call it the Josephine Powell school. When I brought Josephine to Boston-Cambridge after proposing that she donate her professional photographic oeuvre to Harvard (which she graciously agreed to do), I arranged for her to give what proved to be a brilliant talk to NERS. Her research showed that the presence of kilims in mosques in Western and Central Anatolia could be correlated through time with historical Ottoman census/taxation surveys recording populations of nomadic peoples as they slowly shifted their annual terrain over centuries. Ah bureaucracy!

Thus, I totally concurred with the person who questioned the notion that all of these fine pile rugs were made by Turkic nomads. Their scale, character, and consciousness of urban

traditions—especially Persian—demand at least a cottage industry, but urban workshops seem more likely in several instances. Historical references that I read decades ago (so would be hard pressed to come up with readily) speak of urban workshops in Anatolia even in the medieval period, and we know how abundant they were in Ottoman times.

In a related point, people seem to fail to grasp the degree to which more recent Turkmen populations of Central Asia were sedentarized—or partially so, at the least. Sure, someone had to manage and move the flocks, but, in most instances, these populations were settled for part of the year (and some for the whole year round) in villages, where the weaving and use of pile carpets would be far more convenient than on the road. There are plenty of Turkmen flatweaves, though they have none of the character of the pile weavings, and contrast rather poorly with the flatweaves of their tribal Uzbek distant cousins.

Yes, I am sure that the Seljuk rulers loved their tents, just as did the Mongols and the Timurids (as described in Clavijo’s reports of Timur’s palaces at Shahr-i Sabz and Samarkand). So did the Ottomans, Safavids, Mughals, and even the Qajars, but that does not define the totality of their existence and the whys and wherefores for their pile-rug production—not simply royal production but for the general population.

Finally, as in the case that Josephine reported on, pious tribal nomads did indeed donate their kilims to mosques, but countless pious Muslims donated their rugs of every sort to mosques in Anatolia, and not simply for the quasi-functional reason that the new generation was producing replacements, which, after all, rather diminishes the piety of the act.

Shi’ite practice seems to have been different enough to make any such donations to regular mosques rare in Persia in later times, with its Shi’ite majority after Isma’il’s religious/cultural revolution, but the purposeful weaving of zilus for mosque floors long antedates Isma’il. Of course, the population of the Caucasus was largely Shi’ite as well, at least in the later centuries when dominated by the Safavids. But I do believe that for losses of cultural heritage, including what might have been found in mosques, we must also take into account the Tsarist scorched-earth practices as the Russians brought the Caucasus under their control over the decades starting about 1800—not to mention the impact of the Soviets on religious expression in later decades.

Anyway, these are some thoughts regarding this most stimulating exposition of old, intriguing, and beautiful Anatolian rugs.

Jeff

Orient Stars 2: A Report on the Auction That Wasn't

by Jean Hoffman



1. Anatolian rugs and fragments from the Orient Stars 2 collection at Rippon Boswell & Co.

The Orient Stars 2 (“OS2”) auction by Rippon Boswell **(1)** was cancelled, due to the consignors’ acceptance of an offer to purchase the entire collection on behalf of a museum. Rippon Boswell’s head, Detlef Maltzahn, said that an announcement by the museum will be forthcoming, and that “the collection will be made accessible to the public.” Detlef further shared that the sale meets the spirit of Heinrich Kirchheim’s plan, “for the later donation of the collection to the Berlin Museum.” While the identity of the museum has not been revealed, speculation I heard centered on museums in the E.U.

The auction cancellation was announced September 24, just days before the scheduled October 2 auction date and after a reported September 23 deadline for a decision by the consignors—the heirs of Heinrich Kirchheim—on any offers, suggesting that the final deal came together at the last minute. Over the few months prior to the auction, Michael Franes had approached numerous museums and potential donors, plus some collectors, about making pre-emptive bids for the entire collection. Rumors of these efforts fed speculation among rug cognoscenti about what would happen to, in Maltzahn’s words, “the world’s largest collection of historic Anatolian carpets outside the two major museums in Turkey.”

While I am among many Anatolian rug enthusiasts disappointed not to have been able to bid on, much less

win, one of these glorious rugs or fragments, OS2 was a complicated collection to keep intact once its visionary collector had died, consisting as it did of exceptionally old rugs, most of them fragmentary and many in condition that could best be described as commensurate with their age. This mix appealed to different people with varying budgets, and didn’t appeal to others. One condition-conscious German collector, for instance, was reported to have looked at the fragments and asked, “What are these?”

Rippon Boswell’s conditions of sale state that the firm sells “in the name and for the account of [their] consignors.” Consignors have the right to accept bids, including, in the case of this single-owner sale, bids for the entire collection. The OS2 collection consists of ninety-five pieces remaining in the Orient Stars collection; with three books, the auction would have had ninety-eight lots. The entire Kirchheim collection evolved over time, as initially documented in the first book, *Orient Stars: A Carpet Collection* (published by Kirchheim and HALI Publications in 1993). When exhibited in 1993, at ICOC 7 in Hamburg, it comprised 218 carpets. OS2 is “considerably smaller in numbers but much more substantial, and [represents] the . . . collection as it was in 2006, the year of Heinrich Kirchheim’s death,” according to Detlef. The consignors—Kirchheim’s eight heirs—include his widow, Waltraut, and their children and grandchildren, as well a later partner of Kirchheim and their child. Both



2. View of the “Anchor Carpet” through a doorway of the Rippon Boswell gallery

Sotheby’s and Christie’s competed with Rippon Boswell to win the auction mandate.

Despite cancelling the auction, Rippon Boswell graciously hosted several days of previews and a reception on the evening of October 1. After four delightful days in Wiesbaden, discussing OS2 with knowledgeable collectors and dealers, I’ll try to put in perspective what might have been the market for the collection by breaking it down into four rough categories:

1. About nine to ten masterpieces, bidding on which would likely have been competitive, with prices greatly exceeding estimates. For comparison, the top-selling rugs in the Christopher Alexander auctions at Sotheby’s, in November 2017 and April 2018, each fetched around \$400,000. Some collectors thought a few OS2 masterpieces might have soared higher than the top Alexander pieces.

2. Five historic flatweaves, some with high estimates, for which there is a limited market.

3. About twenty-five nice or even great rugs if in a different auction, but these Caucasians and others paled next to the best OS2 pieces.

4. Approximately fifty-six fragments, the toughest to guess at for possible auction results. Some are wonderful and might have sold at multiples of their estimates. Some—including worn, small study pieces or souvenirs of this great collection—would probably have sold at or below their estimates, or failed to sell.

Dealers I spoke to concurred on the logic of a deal for the entire collection put together by Rippon Boswell at a price rumored to be in the range of \$6–9 million, in contrast to the \$14–16 million reportedly asked for the entire collection during the earlier approaches by Michael Franes to museums and select collectors. Pricing comparisons for OS2 pieces are few; as Detlef put it, “The ancient Anatolian rugs and fragments were ‘priceless,’ in the sense that no prices for such objects have, with a few exceptions, previously been established at auction because material of this kind usually does not appear on the open market.” One comparison would be the aforementioned Sotheby’s sale of the first part of the Christopher Alexander collection (twenty-two lots, sold on November 7, 2017), which approximated \$2 million at the then-current exchange rate.

Seeing and touching the OS2 collection was a highlight of my rug-collecting career, and the four days spent with other collectors and dealers from the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East were a joy. My rush at walking in the gallery door and encountering the “Anchor Carpet” (2) made up for six hours of masked trans-Atlantic flying, my first international trip since Covid restrictions were put in place. After months without travel and with few opportunities to meet in person, it felt special to gather and view these beautiful works of art with rug collectors, dealers, friends, a few NERS-webinar attendees whom I hadn’t met, and the auction-house team.



3. Rippon Boswell OS2 lot 53, the “Anchor Carpet”

My admiration of the OS collection began a few years ago with a copy of *Orient Stars: A Carpet Collection* that I won in a Skinner auction. (That first book is now referred to as “OS1” to differentiate it from the long-promised OS2 book awaiting publication by *HALI*.) On February 22, 1994, Heinrich Kirchheim had inscribed what was now my book to someone he “most enjoyed meeting in Boston.” This inscription is the closest I got to the collector, yet his collection and book have inspired my love of rugs.

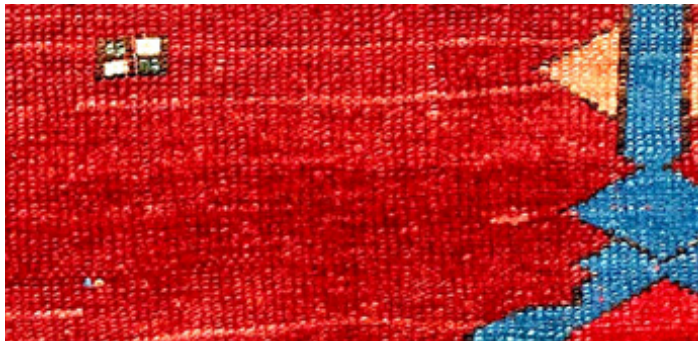
My favorite rug in the OS1 book and in the OS2 “non-auction” preview is the “Anchor Carpet” (3) (no. 198 in OS1



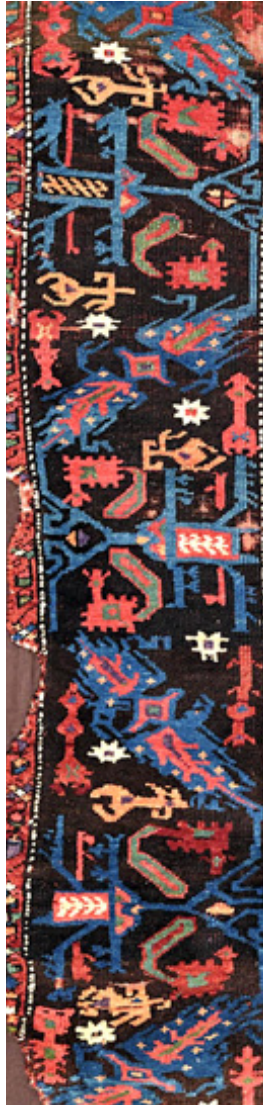
4. “Color Carpet,” formerly Alexander collection

and lot 53 in Rippon Boswell’s online and printed OS2 catalogue). Described in the catalogue as being from Karapinar and dated 1400–1500, the rug was estimated between €120,000 and €150,000, which I thought low for this masterpiece. According to information provided by Detlef, the carbon-14 analysis, by ETH in Zurich, done for Heinrich Kirchheim and dated May 6, 2002, gave the carpet a 100% probability dating between 1416 and 1482.

The “Anchor Carpet” has been much published, including on the cover of *HALI* 206, but even the excellent, high-resolution photographs on Rippon Boswell’s website cannot do justice to the power of its colors. I found the astonishingly rich red similar to the red field of Christopher Alexander’s “Color Carpet” (4), lot 35 in Sotheby’s London auction of April 23, 2018. About this rug, Alexander had written, “Of the carpets in the collection, this might be called the masterpiece of color” (*A Foreshadowing of 21st Century Art: The Color and Geometry of Very Early Turkish Carpets*, New York [1993], p. 142).



5. "Anchor Carpet" central medallion
6. Square motif and colored knot in field



7. Left border



8. Top right bracket
9. Bottom right bracket

Having seen and touched both Alexander's "Color Carpet" and the "Anchor Carpet," I will go out on a limb and say that the "Anchor Carpet" is the true masterpiece of color. Its almost impossibly rich red field; large, brilliant-blue "anchors"; and stunningly simple green medallion with red hooks, abstract blue cloud-collar edging, and peach-and-purple-surrounded red, blue, and peach central "eye" (5)—these large, simple elements contrast not only with the four precisely drawn, spiky cartouches on each side of the long "anchors," but also with astonishing, tiny squares and even individual knots of color in the open field (6). All this glowing color, space, and precision is enhanced by what Michael Franses (*HALI* 206, pp. 52–61) calls a "fabulous creatures" border (7). One NERS member from Hungary, rug-photography specialist Simon Toth, observed that the angled red-and-blue "creatures" reminded

him of comets in their energy and movement. The four simple green corner brackets, muscular and archaically drawn, showed the care expended in weaving execution and color selection: at the top end of the rug these devices were outlined in peach bordered by a thin outer line of brown (8), and at the bottom end they were edged in peach with a thin, inner line of lavender (9). The wool was incredibly soft, tempting me to put my face up against it or lie down on it. (I did neither, but I daydreamed.)

I am left in awe of the "Anchor Rug" and wonder where it has been all these centuries. While it has the ragged edges found in so many other fragments that likely survived in mosques, including those in the OS2 collection, it seems unusual in its color intensity, the softness of its wool, and the preserved pile of its field.

While the “Anchor Carpet” was my favorite before I saw it and remained so after I had absorbed its stunning beauty, I did not expect to win it in the auction. My target piece, my love, was lot 46 in the Rippon Boswell catalogue and number 207 in OS1, where it was prosaically labeled “Lotto Prototype Fragment, 16th century” **(10)**. In the catalogue it was described as Western Anatolian, dated 1500–1550, and estimated at €12,000–15,000. Like many of Kirchheim’s greatest early pieces, it came from Garry Muse.

This fragment is wild yet powerfully composed. The portion of the rug remaining contains enough of the design

and is in good-enough condition that it can be read. The size (96 x 97 cm, mounted) is nice. It has a distinctive niche—elegant and centered, with vertical energy, sparking me to wonder if it might originally have been a prayer rug. It spoke to me of looking through a window topped by a grate.

The wool is soft; the wefts are of two different colors—dark aubergine and dark red—depending on the colors of the pile. Little dots precisely highlight the ends of hooks, and little buds (which say “Western Anatolian” to me) appear in the spandrels. The yellow “Lotto” motif is narrowly outlined in brown, which gives it dimension and float but not contrast.



10. The author and Turkmen collector Alan Rothblatt shake hands in front of the OS2 fragment they both covet

An exhibition review of OS2 would not be complete without touching on the so-called Faces Rug (Rippon Boswell, lot 29; OS1, 218, with an essay by Eberhart Herrmann; see also this *View*, p. 10), the oldest known rug from the Islamic period. Dating is given as “C14 = 1042–1218” in the Rippon Boswell catalogue, and “13th–14th century” in OS1. The carbon-14 dating reported by ETH Zurich and shared by Detlef gave 100% probability to dates of AD 1189–1283.

With its large, difficult-to-read creatures and spare but complex spatial design, the “Faces Rug” is unusual in photographs and even more startling in person. It has finely detailed elements—not only the faces but also precisely drawn, multi-legged animals with single horns and forked tails, and smaller, double-headed creatures floating in the deep-blue portions (11).



11. Creatures large and small on the “Faces Rug”

The rug has pink wefts and is more finely knotted than most of the other OS2 rugs and fragments. In its presence (12), several questions arose in my non-scholarly mind: Is the border anthropomorphic or pseudo-Kufic (13)? Many motifs, including the border elements and the various creatures, have “eyes”; the deep indigo field—perhaps not a field but part of a huge creature—also has irregularly scattered “stars.” Was this enigmatic rug made for a tomb? Might it represent a view into the afterlife for the weaver and her people of so long ago?

Rug tastes differ: some viewers of the OS2 exhibition loved the paler fragments, whereas my heart responded to the deepest of the old Anatolian dyes. But everyone I spoke with shared the hope that rug lovers will be able to see and study the collection at whatever museum it is bound for. Speculation centers on museums in Europe, but Rippon Boswell remains mum. Perhaps OS2 might even return home to Turkey, for the people there to enjoy and to draw visitors for years to come.



12. Faces: the author's, and one on the enigmatic rug



13. Outer border: script-based, anthropomorphic, or both?

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NERS is introducing two changes for the coming season, during which we will offer the most programs ever—both continuing our online presentations and resuming our in-person meetings. Our expanded programming and member communications have added to our operating costs, prompting our first dues increase in twenty years (see box at right). We are also moving to a calendar-year schedule, so your next dues payment will be in January 2022 and will extend your membership through December 2022. (Of course, we welcome early payment.) You can pay online: go to <https://www.ne-rugsociety.org/NERS-paypal.htm> and follow directions. Alternatively, you can mail a check, payable to NERS, to our Holliston address.

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 webinars and meetings are held seven or more times a year. Membership levels and annual dues are: Patron \$170, Supporting \$110, Couple \$80, Single \$60, Student \$30. Information and renewal forms are available on our website, <https://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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