



# View from the Fringe

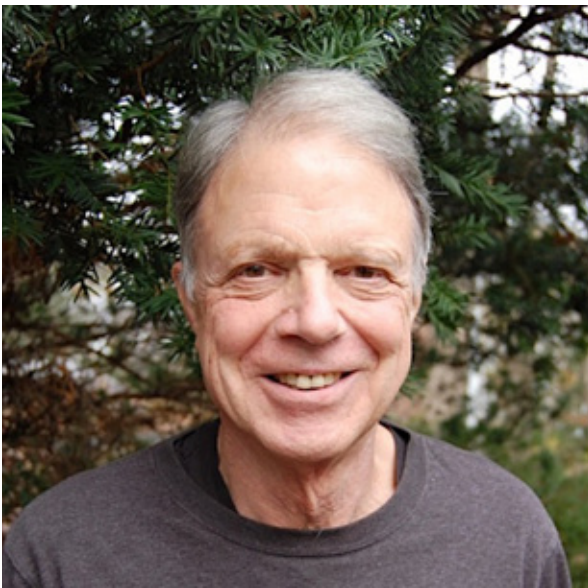
Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. 29 No. 5 December 2022

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

## Rescheduled Meeting: Mike Tschbull on Transcaucasian Village Rug Design and Color



**Mike Tschbull**



**Shirvan rug, speaker's collection**

### Meeting Details

**Date and Time:** Saturday, December 3, 3 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:** To be provided by members whose surnames begin with **A** through **H**. Please arrive early to set up.

The date of his talk now changed to **Saturday, December 3**, NERS member and frequent speaker Raoul "Mike" Tschbull will present "Sources and Evolution of Transcaucasian Village Rug Design and Color."

After 1802, when Russians initiated their takeover of the Transcaucasus, village-based commercial rug weaving began to develop. Designs came from everywhere; sophisticated dye use already had a long history in the area. This combination of fresh designs and expert dyeing yielded rugs that rivaled the beauty of those from any other region or culture. By the 1880s, production of these Transcaucasian rugs had boomed; by about 1920, under intense commercial pressure, it had almost completely crashed. Mike's presentation will examine the sources and changes in design and color of Transcaucasian village-based commercial rugs over this short period—how these rugs went from world class to pedestrian.

Mike is a longtime collector of village rugs and nomadic flatweaves. His publications include *Kazak: Carpets of the Caucasus* (1971) and many articles in *HALI*. The large and splendidly illustrated volume *Qarajeh to Quba*, published by *HALI* in 2019, is the most recent outcome of his decades of research and collecting.

Meeting attendees are invited to bring Transcaucasian rugs for a show-and-tell following Mike's presentation.



## December 10 Webinar Preview: DeWitt Mallary, “The Intrigue of Baluch Rugs”



**DeWitt Mallary**

According to DeWitt Mallary, rugs and bags bought, sold, and collected under the catchall name “Baluch” are the products of various weaving groups in different areas of northeastern Iran and northwestern Afghanistan. Given their diversity of designs and styles, trying to sort them out and deduce their interrelationships adds to their intrigue.

On Saturday, December 10, at noon ET, NERS will join Textile Museum Associates of Southern California in co-sponsoring DeWitt’s “The Intrigue of Baluch Rugs,” a webinar hosted by the George Washington University Museum and the Textile Museum as part of their Rug and Textile Appreciation Morning series.

A longtime member of NERS, DeWitt began collecting Baluch and Turkmen rugs in the 1980s and for the last twenty years has been a dealer in antique weavings. He has written for *HALI* and presented papers at ICOC, ACOR, and the Textile Museum. He edited the English edition of Jürg Ragoth’s 2016 *Turkmen Carpets: A New Perspective*, a monumental work about which DeWitt spoke to NERS in 2017. He currently teaches assorted rug courses at Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Dartmouth.

While DeWitt acknowledges that real understanding of Baluch rugs and bags requires handling them, his virtual presentation will include images of the finest examples of various Baluch types and discussion of what makes them outstanding.

### Webinar Details

**Co-sponsored by NERS,  
with The George Washington University  
Museum and The Textile Museum as host**

**Date and Time:** Saturday, December 10, noon ET

**Venue:** Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

**Registration:** If you have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this webinar.

Or register with this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/sej8d8rs>.



**Unusual Baluch prayer rug, Textile Museum Collection  
1974.31.14, gift of Dr. William H. S. Stevens**



## January 14 Webinar Preview: Ali Riza Tuna, “A New Perspective on Anatolian Kilims”

### Webinar Details

**Co-sponsored by NERS,  
with Textile Museum Associates  
of Southern California (TMA/SC) as host**

**Date and Time:** Saturday, January 14, 1 PM ET

**Venue:** Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

**Registration:** If you have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this webinar.

Or register with this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/NERSkilims1>



**Ali Riza Tuna**

On Saturday, January 14, at 1 PM ET, NERS will co-sponsor Ali Riza Tuna’s “A New Perspective on Anatolian Kilims,” a webinar hosted by Textile Museum Associates of Southern California. (A version of this presentation was also offered by the International Hajji Baba Society, on May 14, 2022.)

At first sight, Anatolian kilims impress by their colors and abstract designs. But what makes a “kilim design” immediately recognizable? How do we interact with a kilim despite our ignorance of its symbolic language? As a collector of Anatolian textiles for the last four decades and the author of the 2022 volume “From Myth to Art: Anatolian Kilims,” Ali Riza Tuna addresses these questions via an art-historical approach he terms “the anthropology of images.”

Ali Riza was born in Istanbul, received a French engineering degree, and prior to his retirement managed an international company in Geneva. Since 1980, he has been passionate about Anatolian textiles, both as a collector and as an independent researcher and lecturer. His research focuses on the aesthetics and design development of Anatolian carpets as well as kilims.

He is currently leading a project to renew conservation of the Seljuk rugs in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, and is sponsoring the reweaving in Turkey of early Anatolian rugs now lost to us save for their depiction in Renaissance paintings. (See the review of his NERS talk on that subject in the April 2015 issue of *View*, pp. 4–8)



**Hotamiş kilim (detail), 1800 or earlier**



## February 11 Webinar Preview: Gunnar Nilsson, “Swedish Textiles from 1680 to 1850”



**Gunnar Nilsson**

In this NERS webinar Gunnar Nilsson will explore Swedish textiles, starting with such better-known types as *röllakan*, embroideries, and Flemish weaves. Then he will introduce lesser-known types, which never come up in foreign auctions or major Swedish sales. Although such less familiar textiles are mostly of middling or low quality, they include a few outstanding pieces that can easily compete with the best Flemish-weave and *röllakan* examples.

Gunnar is a resident of Göteborg, on the west coast of Sweden. He holds master's degrees in both technical engineering and business administration. Now retired

from his career in the energy field, he devotes his time to gardening, family activities with his wife and three grown children, and textile collecting.

His collecting began in the early 1980s: he was first attracted by the bold colors of Caucasian rugs and then turned to Anatolian rugs. In the early 1990s he discovered Swedish textiles, which he primarily collects today (although now and then he acquires Anatolian rugs and yastiks).

Gunnar has published articles about Swedish textiles in *HALI* 195 (Spring 2018), 199 (Spring 2019), and most recently in *HALI* 213 (Autumn 2022).

### Webinar Details

**Host:** NERS, with co-sponsors

- The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum
- Textile Museum Associates of Southern California (TMA/SC)

**Date and Time:** Saturday, February 11, 1 PM ET

**Venue:** Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

**Registration:** If you have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this webinar. Or register with this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/NERSweb>



Carriage cushion, *röllakan* (double interlock tapestry), 48 x 121cm, Skytts *härad* (county), southwestern Skåne, inscribed and dated (in mirror reverse) END-IHS 1780



# Webinar Review: Walter Denny, “What the Hell Is That?”

by Jim Adelson



**Walter Denny**

On September 24, Professor Walter Denny inaugurated the third season of NERS webinars, as he had the first one. His presentation this time was titled “What the Hell Is That?—Encountering Unknown Carpets in Museum and Private Collections and the Marketplace.”

Walter opened with an example of what, not long ago, had been among the unknowns: pentagonal weavings (Turkmen asmalyks) the function of which he initially had no idea. It was only in seeing an example that itself depicted a wedding procession that he realized these were trappings woven to adorn the sides of the bride’s camel. In other words, the study of carpets is a relatively recent scholarly discipline, largely dating from after WW II, and many discoveries

have occurred within Walter’s period of interest in them.

He then listed various reasons why carpets can present identification puzzles: They may depict subjects previously unknown on rugs, as does, for example, the Padua Torah curtain **(1)**, publicized by Alberto Boralevi. They may have undergone changes since they were woven; the Barbieri carpet in the Metropolitan Museum **(2)**, for instance, has had its original wool plucked out and replaced in a different color. They may include unexpected design elements, such as the rare inscriptions on a kilim in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston **(3)**. They may utilize unexpected materials, as does a prayer rug of standard “Transylvanian” type woven in silk pile. Finally, they may combine several of these peculiarities.

When carpet scholars encounter such puzzles, they may wrongly assume an unfamiliar rug, if raggedy and old (like the Valentiner rug **(4)** in the Met) has to be marvelous



1



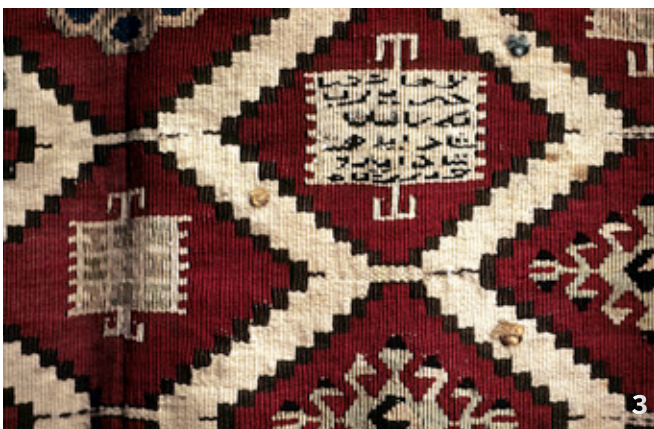
2

**1. Mamluk Torah curtain (parokhet), Egypt, ca. 1500–1550. Museo della Padova Ebraica, Padua**

**2. Repiled Pulitzer/ Barbieri Mamluk carpet, Metropolitan Museum 1970.135**

**3. Anatolian kilim (det.), 19th century, MFA 06.2453**

**4. Valentiner carpet (det.), 18th-century Caucasian (?), Metropolitan Museum 08.208.2**



3



4



and valuable. Or that a rug seemingly unique in design must be fake (Charles Grant Ellis's view of the Chehel Sutun prayer rug **(5)**). Or that a rug can't possibly be as old as claimed (Kurt Erdmann's judgment regarding the Pazyryk carpet). Or that a carpet that neatly fits one's theories must be authentic (Walter's own error, he confessed, about a rug he took to be an early Ushak derivative, but whose chromium dyes proved it was a twentieth-century fake **(6)**).

Problems arise, according to Walter, when new carpet types come to light. Such pieces may cause us to resort to "explanations of convenience," rather than scientifically based conclusions. Early in Walter's academic career, for instance, he was invited by Charlie Ellis to study and photograph carpets in the Great Mosque of Divriği. Three

large carpets there, one with Turkmen motifs, another that Ellis had prejudged from pictures to be Northwest Persian, and a third suggesting a Caucasian sunburst carpet, all, upon close inspection, proved to have been woven in Anatolia **(7)**. Many other carpets from Divriği were—and, in Walter's opinion, remain—unique survivors, with no comparable relatives and no firm indication of their age or place of origin.

Similarly, at the Turkish and Islamic Museum (TIEM), in Istanbul, Walter and Charlie saw mystifying examples including a pair of enormous central-medallion carpets **(8)** subsequently linked by structure to much smaller "chessboard" rugs now thought to have been woven in Syria. More unfamiliar carpets, for instance a fragment with çintamani motifs, were to be found in the collection of the Vakıflar Museum.

**5. Prayer rug, probably 15th century, formerly in Chehel Sutun Palace, Isfahan; now Tehran Carpet Museum**

**6. Tuduc star-variant design rug, after 1925, formerly Wolf Collection**

**7. Display of three Anatolian carpets from the Great Mosque of Divriği, early 1970s**

**8. Detail of a huge carpet with a large-medallion Ushak layout but a "Damascene" structure, 16th century, TIEM 850**





Next among his "What the hell?" carpets, Walter turned to "market newcomers"—for instance, the early animal carpets, reportedly sourced in Tibet, that have now made their way to public collections. Some are of previously unknown design (9); until recently, the existence of others was known only from Italian Renaissance painting (10).

Among initially baffling rugs from private collections, Walter discussed a group of four silk carpets formerly belonging to the Love family, who donated them to the Met in 1966 and 1967. One reproduced the design of a famous

Safavid pictorial velvet; another had the look and metallic brocading of a Polonaise carpet. Dye analysis revealed both to be twentieth-century productions. But a third rug from the same collection was a genuine, if late, Polonaise. The final, and strangest, Love carpet had pictorial scenes—clearly European derived—in field and borders (11, 11a). After initially assuming it was modern, Walter and the Met examiners concluded that it was a highly unusual example of a seventeenth-century Persian rug, likely made in Kashan, that borrowed much of its imagery from European prints.



9. "Faces" carpet fragment, ca. 1050–1200, formerly Kirchheim Collection, now Museum of Islamic Art, Doha



10. Animal carpet, 14th century, Metropolitan Museum 1990.61



11. Silk pictorial carpet with European imagery, 17th century, gift of C. Ruxton Love, Metropolitan Museum 67.2.2



11a. Detail of 11, showing female figure in lower-right main border, plus the narrow outer border whose design resembles one seen on later Kashan rugs



Even familiar and much-admired museum carpets can be puzzling. The Niğde Carpet (**12**), on view in the Met's Safavid gallery, is said to have come from the Niğde Mosque in Turkey, and formerly belonged to Joseph V. McMullan. Why, if it was made in Safavid Persia, does it have the narrow borders one would expect in rugs from the Transcaucasus? In Walter's eyes, the Niğde, however well known and admirable, is nevertheless a "What the hell?" carpet.



**12. The Niğde Carpet, Northwest Persian (?), Metropolitan Museum, 86.251**

In contrast, Walter observed, "Not everything that's fascinating is beautiful." A notably "old, weird, and ugly" Anatolian carpet in the Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), Vienna, for instance, is filled with inscriptions, some legible and many not. Walter confessed that however fascinating the carpet, he might have put more effort into deciphering it if it were more attractive.

Some otherwise classifiable rugs may have "What the hell?" details. A pair of huge carpets, one in the Met and other in the Textile Museum (**13**) are of the central-medallion type traditionally assigned to early sixteenth-century Northwest Iran. On close inspection, both carpets include tiny male figures (**13a**) wearing the "baton" turbans characteristic of early Safavid headgear. But these figures are rendered in a rustic, schematic style typically encountered on, say, nineteenth-century Caucasian village rugs. What are they doing on huge, formal, and centuries-old urban carpets?



**13 (above). Inspecting an early 16th-century carpet, GWU Museum/Textile Museum R.33.1**

**13a. A tiny, schematic male figure, wearing a Safavid "baton" turban, in the border of the carpet above**



Among other "What the hell?" aspects of carpets are strange shapes (e.g., that of a "beveled" vase-technique carpet in the Met), unusual blendings of styles (a Mamluk-Ottoman transitional carpet (14)), baffling structures, and bizarre or one-off designs (a Caucasian rug picturing a mountain scene seemingly copied from a box of Swiss chocolates).

Summing up, Walter reminded his audience of carpets' low survival rates over the centuries, making for many a "What the hell?" example. Carbon-14 and dye analyses can help in rug identification, he said, but must be used judiciously. Learning from past hubris, he recommended "creative procrastination"—waiting to see if "somebody [else] comes up with something." In closing, he advised his worldwide audience to "expect the unexpected, respect the unexpected, and ENJOY the unexpected."

Following his presentation, Walter answered audience members' questions, posed by Jean Hoffman. A selection of these questions follows.

One webinar attendee asked whether fakes were widespread. Walter answered that fakes were especially numerous in the early twentieth century, when less was known about old rugs. But since then some scholars have also erred by rejecting genuinely antique rugs as forgeries. Although new technologies have helped in identifying fakes, anyone who is involved in this field is sooner or later going to get fooled.

Another questioner wondered what Walter thought of Jim Ford's views that early medallion carpets were not made in Tabriz, and that some predate the Safavid period. Walter replied that he too considered certain of these medallion carpets—including one in the MFA, Boston—to be pre-Safavid. He thought the group came from Northwest Persia but was less sure about assigning them specifically to Tabriz. *[Editor: For more of Jim Ford's views on early Persian medallion carpets, listen to the recording of his NERS webinar, on January 9, 2021, or read the review of his presentation in the March 2021 edition of this newsletter.]*

To a question about a group of carpets in Kyoto, Japan, Walter replied that, thanks to the Ph.D. thesis of Dr. Yumiko Kamada, these had been convincingly traced to the Deccan in India.

Another attendee asked if the illustrations in Persian or other Islamic manuscripts provide as much information about carpets as do European paintings. Walter responded that some manuscript paintings, such as illustrations in the early fourteenth-century "Great Mongol" *Shahnama*, are useful. Many of the rugs depicted in later Persian and Ottoman manuscripts, however, seem to be based

on their artists' imaginations rather than their observation of actual rugs.

Asked whether all carpets were woven by women, Walter answered that most nomadic carpets were woven by women, as were cottage-industry rugs. Large carpets, on the other hand, were often made in workshops by underage males. Nevertheless, Walter emphasized, carpets are "a women's art form—the great women's art form."

Finally, an audience member wondered if there were collections that Walter hadn't yet seen but wanted to, to which Walter replied that although several email inquiries from individual collectors awaited his attention, discovering truly outstanding private collections was a problem. He was nevertheless convinced that wonderful carpets—ones that "even Michael Franes" hadn't seen—were still out there, and he hoped that academically inclined younger people were around to study them when they emerged.

For this presentation, his second NERS webinar, we are again most grateful to Walter. There's no question that, should we confront a "What the hell?" carpet, Walter would be exactly the person we'd want at our side. He'd help us try to solve its mysteries, and we'd be educated and entertained in the process!



**14. Mamluk-design carpet with Ottoman-style tulips and lappets (det.), ca. 1560, formerly Herbert Ostler, Munich**



# Field Trip Report: Marilyn Denny and Gerard Paquin Collection Highlights

by Jim Adelson

On October 1, collectors Marilyn Denny and Gerard Paquin generously shared selected rugs and textiles from their collections with fellow NERS members, who journeyed to the Amherst/Northampton area for a fall "field trip." We travelers split into two groups, each group visiting one location in the morning and the other after lunch.

For space reasons, Marilyn's selections were shown at the home of her ex-husband, Walter Denny, who added a few items of his own to the display. Before talking about specific pieces, Walter and Marilyn recounted some memories of their early rug days, in the late 1960s, when they came to know several of the longtime, deeply knowledgeable Boston dealers. Those dealers understandably befriended them; at a time when oriental rugs were less than popular and mainly attracting an older audience, here were these very young aficionados! Some of the pieces we saw were acquired in those early days; others were more recent additions.

Marilyn first showed two beautiful fragments of an Anatolian yastik **(1)**, which replicated with uncanny accuracy the eight-pointed medallions found in certain Salor trappings. The migration of Turkmen populations to Anatolia is well known, yet it is uncommon in Anatolian weaving to see Central Asian motifs preserved so exactly.

A Turkmen highlight was a spectacular Chodor trapping **(2)**, acquired from a Vermont doctor, John Gilbert, and published in Louise Mackie and Jon Thompson's *Turkmen: Tribal Carpets and Traditions*, the volume accompanying the watershed 1980 Turkmen exhibition at the Textile Museum. Once again, Marilyn's clear admiration for the piece was one of the reasons that Gilbert was willing to sell it to her.

Another of her "stop-you-in-your-tracks" items was likely Persian but of uncertain purpose, although she and Walter conjectured that it was a type of animal trapping or cover **(3)**. In format it bore some resemblance to Turkmen door surrounds, but its scale made that interpretation less plausible.



**1 (top left).**  
**Fragments**  
**of an Anatolian**  
**yastik**

**2 (left).**  
**Chodor trapping**

**3 (top right).**  
**Horse cover (?),**  
**probably Persian**



A Caucasian rug, possibly Gendje, had geometric field motifs and vivid primary colors, especially the very saturated, un-abrashed madder red of its field (4). (At another point, Walter commented that madder, used to produce many shades of red, was relatively abundant and cheap, whereas other dyestuffs, including indigo, were scarcer and more expensive, so often used more sparingly.)



4. Genje (?) with a brilliant red field



5. Pieced and embroidered Uzbek felt (detail)

The closing *pièce de résistance* from Marilyn's collection was a stylistically Kungrat felt from Uzbekistan—actually a mosaic of separate felt pieces of different shapes that had been sewn together and then embroidered (5). Recently, Marilyn related, she had learned that a dealer she'd long known and trusted was getting rid of his felts. So she got in touch, telling him, "Send me the best one you have"—and was rewarded with this splendid example.

For some of us, this was our second opportunity to see Gerard's collection. (For an illustrated report of that first visit, in November 2015, see *View from the Fringe*, March 2016, pp. 6–9.) Gerard still had all the pieces we saw then, and it was a distinct pleasure to revisit these "old friends"; this writeup features other items from his collection. Like Marilyn, he collects rug and textile treasures originating in different areas and utilizing different formats and techniques.

One of his pile pieces, a fragmentary Anatolian prayer rug (6) obtained from a dealer in Istanbul, was extremely dirty when he got it, but "cleaned up nicely." Because of its similarity to a rug in the Kirchheim Collection, Michael Franses illustrates it in *Orient Stars 2*, dating it between 1650 and 1750. Gerard also showed us a picture of a contemporary fake he'd seen, with exactly the same field design.



6. Fragmentary Anatolian prayer rug, 17th–18th century





**7. Small, colorful Senneh kilim**



**8. Ersari bagface with ikat-derived field design**



**9. Lakai Uzbek woman's long, silk-embroidered hair ornament (detail)**



**10. Miniature silk jajim saddlebag, Azerbaijan**



**11. Uzbekistan suzani, Ura Tube or Nurata**



**12. Exceptionally fine Shahsevan sumak bagface**

Gerard next shared a small, finely woven Senneh kilim, noting that it, unlike many such kilims intentionally faded through chemical washing, retained its brilliant color (7).

An Ersari bagface (8), which Gerard owns jointly with Marilyn, featured a design derived from an Uzbek ikat textile. It had silk highlights, although its main distinction was its excellent and beautifully colored wool.

A long, narrow strip, finely embroidered in silk, had served as an Lakai Uzbek woman's hair decoration (9). Its many motifs, with no exact design repeats, showcased the creativity of the woman who designed and embroidered it.

A small jewel of his collection was a silk jajim double bag (10), which he attributed to Azerbaijan. Its pommel hole, reinforced with plain, salmon-colored silk, would have kept the bag in place atop the animal carrying it.

Among Gerard's suzanis, an especially graceful one (11)

had a border associated with Ura Tube but a spacious field design of a dozen "Nurata" blossoming plants, all different.

A last highlight was a Shahsevan soumak bagface—the most finely woven example Gerard had ever seen, also noteworthy for its variety of motifs and colors (12).

Both Marilyn and Gerard have collecting foci but also seek and enjoy a wider variety of rugs and textiles. In fact, in discussing his collecting, Gerard said that he found too much that he liked, and didn't want to limit himself to a single category or area. The diversity of Marilyn's collection reflects a similar approach. It's great to see that even after many decades, these two collectors continue to find and acquire new types of weavings that appeal to them, and to keep them together with pieces acquired many years ago. We're very grateful to them for having shared with us both longtime favorites and prized newcomers!



# Webinar Review: Luca Brancati, “Afghan War Rugs, 1979–2022”

by Jim Adelson



**Luca Brancati**

On October 8, Luca Brancati engaged a worldwide audience in his webinar “Afghan War Rugs, 1979–2022.” He pointed out at the start that the term “war rugs” refers to

rugs made during multiple wars, from 1979 to the present, with the rugs in question differing and evolving accordingly. He divided the war-rug phenomenon into four periods—that of the Russian occupation (1979–1989), the Mujahidin-civil war-Taliban era (1989–2001), the U.S. and coalition presence (2001 to 2021), and the as-yet-undefined future. His primary focus in this webinar was on rugs of the Russian-occupation period.

Next he explained why he thought Afghan war rugs are important: first, they are historical records of what was

occurring at the time, and second, they allow us to watch the evolution of certain design motifs from their very beginning. He reinforced his opinion with other quoted sources, and with the fact that a war rug was included in the 2001 British Museum-organized *The History of the World in 100 Objects*.

Among the different ways of classifying war rugs, Luca said that he uses age and provenance. He then presented the oldest known example, the “Göl Rachman” carpet (1), named for an inscription in the upper right corner of its field. Acquired by a Swiss dealer in 1982, it appeared in the first museum exhibition of war rugs, held in 1993 at the Museum Angewandte Kunst (MAK), Vienna.

A distinctive motif in the earliest war rugs is a house with “arrowhead” chimneys. One of the examples Luca showed—a storage bag (2)—had floral and bird motifs traditionally found in carpets from the area, plus arrowhead-chimney houses, vehicles, helicopters, and even Kalashnikov rifles. On this



**1. War rug with “Göl Rachman” in Arabic script (circled), 1982 or before, now Biblioteca Afghanistanica, Liestal**



**2. Early-phase storage bag with arrowhead-chimney houses and helicopters in rows, Farah area, Brancati Collection**



bag, and on a subsequent mixed-technique carpet, the helicopters were arrayed in rows, like figures in the then hugely popular video game “Space Invaders.”

Where were these rugs made? The great majority, according to Luca, came from villages in northwestern Afghanistan, around the cities of Herat, Farah, and Qala-e-Naw. He then showed three rugs of a type with the trade name Sarkilimdar, all from the Qala-e-Naw area; their main portions were rendered in pile on flat-woven grounds, and they had extended kilims at both ends. He illustrated several examples depicting landscapes with war being waged in the upper zones (3).

Next Luca considered a more commercial carpet type known (for reasons unclear) as Zakini. Zakini rugs (4) were workshop products made from patterns; they were more common and less expensive than Sarkilimdar, and became popular in the West. In the late 1980s, as Soviet ground operations continued, good wool and dyestuffs grew scarcer,

and Zakinis underwent what Luca called “design involution”—the loss of intricate detail and connection with the original models.

So-called refugee war rugs were woven in great numbers by various displaced populations—not only Afghans—in camps in Pakistan, Iran, and elsewhere. Luca showed an early 1990s example (5) made in Pakistan. (A gift to him, it was the newest rug in his otherwise Russian-occupation-period collection.) It depicted the expected repertoire of tanks and helicopters, plus a large central Kalashnikov rifle. In contrast to Zakini rugs, it—like many other such refugee rugs—has a cotton foundation and a relatively stiff handle.

After 2001, war rugs gained a new source of imagery: the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center was depicted both on refugee rugs and on Afghan Sarkilimdars, whose landscapes now included towering skyscrapers.



**3. Sarkilimdar landscape rug, Qala-e-Naw, Brancati Collection**



**4. Zakini rug, Farah area, Brancati Collection**



**5. Refugee war rug, Pakistan, early 1990s—the only post-Russian-occupation war rug in the Brancati Collection**



Often lumped with war rugs are “map rugs” (6–8), which downplay or omit armaments in favor of cartography. These rugs too were woven in Afghanistan and in refugee camps, mostly after the Soviet withdrawal. The renowned Italian conceptual artist Alighiero Boetti, who designed a series of world-map embroideries executed by weavers in Afghanistan and Pakistan, is sometimes credited with inventing map rugs. But Luca rejected this attribution, arguing that they instead derived their designs from school atlases.

Are war rugs art? Luca maintained that he has always treated them as such, staging exhibitions of his collection in art galleries. In addition, they have been included in an Art Basel 2007 installation and discussed in art magazines, and have inspired the work of other contemporary artists.

Following his presentation, Luca took questions from his webinar audience. Asked whether the rugs were commercial, Luca replied that, in his opinion, they initially were not, but wartime conditions forced some Afghans to sell them and weave replacements.

Had the spread of war rugs and their designs from village to village been “natural,” or were there perhaps dealers encouraging it? Luca hypothesized that dealers might have taken rugs from place to place, where they were copied. Eventually dealers or organizations involved in the refugee camps may have provided wool.

Was the Göl Rachman rug created by a single weaver, who then shared her design more widely? Luca noted that some of the war-related motifs on rugs were originally adopted from widely distributed design-academy protest art. With the exception of one inferior copy, the Göl Rachman

rug is unique, and the circumstances of its creation and influence are unclear.

Were the war rugs woven by women or men? Luca thought both—primarily mothers and their daughters at the beginning, but men and women of various ages in the refugee camps.

Did the Russian occupiers encourage rug production? Luca responded that, to the contrary, his research had turned up no indication of Russian sponsorship. A few individual Russian soldiers may have returned home with war rugs, but most wanted no reminders of the unhappy experience of Afghanistan. Nor were war rugs’ negative portrayals of Soviet occupation welcome in Russia, which blocked exportation of the rugs to Western Europe.

Did the Mujahidin, out of patriotism, purchase war rugs? Luca said he had heard of this, but only after the Russian retreat. He added that he had seen refugee rugs made in Peshawar with designs that might be aimed at such patriotic buyers.

Was the wool used in war rugs from local sheep, or did the weavers have to import it? The wool of the early rugs, Luca answered, was undoubtedly from local sheep. Later, during what became a ground war, Russian destruction included animals; rugs were woven with inferior materials, including wool from dead sheep, or from imported wool provided by relief organizations.

This is the first NERS session in this writer’s memory to be devoted to rugs conceived and made entirely within our lifetimes—rugs for which contemporary documentation is still to be had. We appreciate Luca’s dedicated gathering of, and research on, Afghan war rugs, we thank him for sharing both.



6–8 (left to right). Map rugs: Herat area, after 1989; Mashad-area refugee camp, before 2000; Herat area, after 2001; all Vittorio Bedini Collection



# Auction Report: Picks from the October Dixon Collection Sales at Bonham Skinner

## By Richard Belkin

This October, Bonhams Skinner conducted another two auctions of rugs from the estate of the noted California collector Jim Dixon. Mr. Dixon was an avid and active seeker of older rugs from many weaving areas, with a concentrated interest in Caucasian and Anatolian weavings from before 1875. It is my good fortune as Oriental Rugs and Carpets Consultant at Bonhams Skinner to have had the opportunity to view and examine all of the rugs selected for these sales. Here are some lots that I found most interesting, the first ten from the "live" auction on October 19, and the last five from the online auction that ended October 20.

Lot 15: a beautifully designed, early nineteenth-century Anatolian village rug **(1)** with a lovely rose field and a nice pumpkin-colored border. The trident-like main field ornament had plenty of room to stretch in all directions. It sold for a very modest \$1530 (all prices include a 28% buyer's premium.)

Lot 25: a mid-nineteenth-century Anatolian rug—a yatak or sleeping rug **(2)**. It sold for \$20,400, and was worth every bit of what it brought. It had everything one would want in an old collectible village rug: age, color, design, size (5' x 6'), and good condition, with decent pile throughout. Over the years all the dyes used had mellowed to soft pastel shades.

Lot 31: the oldest Anatolian Şarkışla rug I have ever seen **(3)**, with a primitive and expressive design that the later examples must have used as a model. It sold for \$22,950.

Lot 37: a Genje with an often-found striped field and latchhook border **(4)**, but with exceptionally fine wool and vibrant dyes, including an excellent orange or pumpkin and a gold that was nearly yellow. It sold for \$2805 and will reside in a well-known West Coast collection.



**1. Lot 15, Anatolian village rug**



**2. Lot 25, Anatolian yatak**



**3. Lot 31, Anatolian Şarkışla rug**



**4. Lot 37, Caucasian Genje rug**



Lot 48: a rare eastern Caucasian prayer rug with an Afshan field design and red-ground Kufic border **(5)**. I have seen only one other prayer rug with this field design. This one sold for \$3187.

Lot 50: a black-field Marasali prayer rug **(6)**. These are not as uncommon as was thought twenty years ago, a fact perhaps reflected in this rug's relatively low selling price of \$3570. It was also a bit worn and not as early as others considered more worthy, but it was very colorful and had an uncommon main border usually found on gold-field Marasali prayer rugs. Its colors included an excellent green, gold, and blue.

Lot 57: a large fragment of a 400-year-old Anatolian Ushak medallion carpet **(7)**, which sold for only \$11,575. I myself had never seen an Ushak medallion carpet for sale—how many folks have? This fragment may have been worn and just sixty percent of the original carpet, but I thought it was rare and great.

Lot 69: a Beshir main carpet **(8)**, with excellent pile and condition throughout, and exceptional wool with a lovely, luminous quality. It sold for \$8,925, less than it was worth some years ago, and reflecting the current somewhat depressed prices for Turkmen weavings.



**5. Lot 48, eastern Caucasian rug**



**7. Lot 57, Ushak medallion carpet fragment**



**6. Lot 50, Marasali prayer rug**



**8. Lot 69, Beshir main carpet**



Lot 72: a genuinely old if somewhat faded carpet of Caucasian origin **(9)**, but showing design elements of early Persian carpets. Its cypress trees, floral intertwining vine border, fine gold-field inner border, and precisely crafted cloudband field medallions all suggested an early eighteenth- or even a seventeenth-century weaving. Of museum quality, the carpet sold for a modest \$12,112.

Lot 81: an absolutely wonderful, complete, and fairly early (ca. 1750) Northwest Persian gallery carpet **(10)**, with some unobjectionable wear through the center, original ends and sides, and a solid foundation with no rot. The border had a classic eighteenth-century cypress tree and floral shrub design. I thought it was a museum-worthy example of Islamic art, worth at least \$25,000, but it only brought \$12,750. I hope whoever hangs it on a mansion wall appreciates what it is.



**9. Lot 72, early Caucasian carpet**



**10. Lot 81, Northwest Persian gallery carpet**

From the online auction that ended the day after the live sale, here are my five favorites.

Lot 15: an Akstafa prayer rug that was a bit too worn and damaged for the average taste **(11)**. But it was an early example (ca. 1870) with an ivory field, and a good value at only \$828.

Lot 224: an early (maybe ca. 1800) Anatolian Ghiordes prayer rug **(12)**, these days not so often found in private hands (although Mr. Dixon had three or four). This one had a bit of wear, but a very spacious border. It brought \$4462.



**11. Lot 15, Akstafa prayer rug**



**12. Lot 224, Ghiordes prayer rug**



Lot 153: a very rare, previously published eastern Caucasian prayer rug **(13)**, with a Konagend-like field design on an uncommon red ground. This design combination resulted in a robust price of \$6120.



**13. Lot 153, eastern Caucasian prayer rug**



**14. Lot 215, Kazak rug**

Lot 215: a Kazak rug **(14)**, with wool and dyes of the very best quality. The design—five medallions flanked on each side by multicolored poles—is found only in earlier Kazak rugs, and the gold ground of the border seemed to glow. With these attributes overcoming its side and end damage, the rug brought a strong \$5355.

Lot 236: a Tekke main carpet **(15)**, with thirty-six large main guls, very good pile, and no significant condition issues. Although prices for Turkmen rugs seem to be a bit depressed these days, it elicited considerable presale interest from prospective bidders and sold for a solid \$6375.

As these fifteen interesting examples from the latest two Dixon-Collection auctions indicate, Jim Dixon had a good eye for old rugs. To use a baseball analogy, in what he acquired he always made contact and rarely swung and missed. There was something interesting and of merit in nearly all of the 368 rugs from these two sales, and it has been a treat for me to be able to handle and examine them.



**15. Lot 236, Tekke main carpet**



# President's Report: The 2022 Season and Beyond

By Jim Adelson

I'm happy to weave together this report of another very strong year for the New England Rug Society. Our stellar webinars have continued to draw bigger audiences with a series of appealing speakers and topics. In addition, we've been able to resume in-person programs of several types. Membership is at an all-time high. We launched a new NERS website, to which more features will be added. This foundation gives us a chance to meet some of our challenges, such as attracting new and younger members and getting help with the leadership and operational tasks of NERS. More on all of this below.

## Programs Past and Future

During the fall of 2021, spring of 2022, and into this fall, our excellent NERS webinars have included Brian Morehouse's "Yastiks: A Comparative Study of the Designs of Published and Unpublished Examples," the two-part Jim Burns "Caucasian Rugs: Six Decades of Perspective on Design and Taste," Tom Hannaher's "Painting with Scissors: Mola Art of the Guna (Kuna) Indians of Panama and Colombia," Alan Rothblatt's "Rare Turkmen Asmalyks," Michael Rothberg's "Saddlebags from Persia and the Caucasus," Walter Denny's "What the Hell is That? Encountering Unknown Carpets in Museum and Private Collections and the Marketplace," and Luca Emilio Brancati's "Afghan War Rugs: 1979–2022." Coming up are DeWitt Mallary's "The Intrigue of Baluch Rugs," Ali Riza Tuna's "A New Perspective on Anatolian Kilims" (both programs with other hosts but co-sponsored by NERS: see pp. 2 and 3 of this newsletter), Gunnar Nilsson's "Swedish Textiles from 1680 to 1850," and Gerard Paquin's "Silk and Wool: Crosscurrent Influences in Turkish Rugs and Textiles." Join us for these future webinars, and take full advantage of your member benefit to access the recordings for all NERS-hosted sessions! Once again, we're extremely grateful for Jean Hoffman and Julia Bailey's leadership, expertise, and dedication in lining up speakers and topics and undertaking the extensive preparation needed to make each webinar a success.

While still hampered by pandemic conditions and concerns, we held three in-person meetings, with Jeff Spurr's "Off the Beaten Path: A Yen for the Obscure in Textiles, Basketry, and Beadwork"; our traditional Picnic, Show-and-Tell, and Moth Market; and a field trip to see the collections of NERS members Gerard Paquin and Marilyn Denny (see pp. 10–12). Mike Tschebull's "Sources and Evolution of Transcaucasian Village Rug Design and Color." comes up very soon (see p. 1). We'll have additional in-person meetings in the spring of 2023. If these sessions

interest you but you're unable to attend, always look to the meeting reviews in this newsletter to get the highlights.

The Steering Committee has been talking about creating new themed exhibitions, showcasing members' pieces on our new website. If you have ideas for topics, or would like to get involved in the entertaining activity of putting together an exhibition, please send me a note at [jimadelson.newenglandrugsociety@gmail.com](mailto:jimadelson.newenglandrugsociety@gmail.com).

## Membership

As of this writing, NERS membership has reached 186, our highest level ever; 167 of those members are from the U.S., and nineteen from outside of the U.S. Worldwide access to our webinars no doubt prompts continued growth beyond our historical base, with 101 of our 186 members living outside the six New England states.

Except for those who joined or renewed in the last few months, all memberships expire December 31, 2022. Those of you whose membership is expiring then will receive an email reminder; please renew as soon as possible. The money from memberships lets us provide you with our webinar and in-person programs, store and make available all our recorded webinars, produce and distribute this newsletter, improve capabilities and access via our new website, make all our past online exhibitions available, communicate with you about our own and others' rug and textile activities, and more. If you're inclined to provide an additional donation with your renewal, as some members have, that's heartily appreciated.

Special acknowledgment and thanks are due to our Supporting and Patron members, whose "above and beyond" generosity has helped maintain our financial health. Supporting members are **Donald Breyer, John Cliff, Michael Grogan, Barbara Kaslow, David Lawson, Richard Lerner, Sharon Lichtman, Gary and Susan Lind-Sinanian, Benjamin Mini and Branden Buehler, Stephanie and Brian Morehouse, Ann Nicholas and Rich Blumenthal, Gerard Paquin and Ann Benedict, Tim and Nina Rose, Michael Sampson and Tina Young, Bonnie Stern, and Chuck and Theresa Wagner.**

Patron members, who support NERS at the highest level, are **Jim Adelson and Debbie Sheetz, Doug and Julia Bailey, Nesli Basgoz, Richard Belkin and Meredith Laufer, Armen and Louise Dohanian, Carla Fita, Thomas Harris, Jean Hoffman, Ali Istalifi, Susan and Lloyd Kannenberg, Charles Nargoian, Lena Nalbandian, Amir Oskouei, Beau Ryan, Julien Lafayette Taibi, and Alan Varteresian.**



## The Steering Committee and Their Contributions

All of us benefit greatly from the dedication and contributions of the Steering Committee. This year sees significant changes in the committee, with the retirement of two longtime members, **Jim Sampson** and **Yon Bard**. Jim has served as both Membership Director and Treasurer, and Yon has at various times been Newsletter Editor, Meeting Photographer, and the keeper of our meeting database. We're very grateful for all they've contributed over the years. Happily **John Clift** has agreed to assume the responsibilities of Membership Director. This year also saw **Jean Hoffman's** departure from the Steering Committee, but we're extremely fortunate that she has continued as Webinar Leader. As the changes show, we need new people participating in leading and operating NERS. Right now, finding a new Treasurer is a top priority—please volunteer!

We're lucky to have committee continuity in other roles, with **Lloyd Kannenberg** and **Richard Belkin** supplying the requisites, from equipment to beverages, for in-person meetings. Both are contributors to *View from the Fringe*. **Jeff Spurr** is a *View* contributor and introduces in-person speakers. **Julia Bailey** assists with webinar content and brings our newsletter to life as its editor and producer. Chairman Emeritus **Joel Greifinger** rounds out the Steering Committee roster. **Ann Nicholas** continues as our ACOR representative. In addition to my leadership responsibilities, I serve as NERS Secretary, Webmaster, and regular *View* contributor.

We'd very much like to hear from members about our direction and activities, particularly how we can best include those of you who have joined us from remote locations. Please pass along any thoughts via the email opposite.

## Rug and Textile Events

### Auctions

Nov. 26, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell  
Major Autumn Auction  
Dec. 3, Vienna, Austria Auction Company  
Fine Antique Oriental Rugs XXXI  
Jan. 29, Boston, Grogan & Company  
The Fine Rugs and Textiles Auction

### Exhibitions

Until Feb. 12, Genoa, Palazzo Rosso  
Magnificent Sanguszko Carpets  
Dec. 11–May 18, Denver Art Museum  
Rugged Beauty: Antique Carpets from Western Asia

### Fairs and Conferences

Jan. 14–19, London, Battersea  
The London Antique Rug & Textile Arts Fair  
February 14–16, San Francisco, Fort Mason  
Tribal & Textile Art Show

## Future NERS Webinar

March 18, 2023, 1 PM

### Gerard Paquin, "Silk and Wool: Crosscurrent Influences in Turkish Rugs and Textiles"

If you have registered for a previous NERS webinar, you will receive an email invitation to this one.

Or register with this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/SilkWoolFringe>

**Reminder: Unless you joined NERS or renewed your membership in the last few months, your membership will expire December 31, 2022. Please renew as soon as possible, and (among other benefits) enjoy continued access to the recordings of all NERS-hosted webinars! Instructions and forms for joining or renewing are on our website, at <https://ne-rugsociety.org/membership/>**

## Photo Credits

**p. 1:** Mike Tschbull **p. 2:** DeWitt Mallary **p. 3:** Ali Riza Tuna **p. 4:** Gunnar Nilsson **pp. 5–9:** Alberto Boralevi (fig. 1), Walter Denny (figs. 2, 7, 13, 13a), MFA Boston (fig. 3), MetMuseum (figs. 4, 10, 11, 11a, 12), Azerbaijanrugs.com (fig. 5), Denny, *Classical Tradition in Anatolian Carpets* (fig. 6), Ertuğ, *Turkish Carpets* (fig. 8), Rippon Boswell (fig. 9), Rugtracker.com (fig. 14) **pp. 10–12:** Julia Bailey (figs. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12), Walter Denny (fig. 2), Gerard Paquin (figs. 7, 9, 11) **pp. 13–15:** Luca Brancati **pp. 19–21:** Bonhams Skinner



**Editorial contributors to this issue:**

Julia Bailey (editor), Jim Adelson, Richard Belkin

**Distributor:**

Jim Sampson

**Current NERS Steering Committee:**

Jim Adelson (President), Julia Bailey,  
Richard Belkin, John Clift, Joel Greifinger,  
Lloyd Kannenberg, Jeff Spurr

**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 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.

For more information and forms for joining NERS or renewing your membership, go to <https://ne-rugsociety.org/membership/>

**The New England Rug Society**

P.O. Box 6125  
Holliston, MA 01746

**In this issue:**

December Meeting Preview: Mike Tschbull on Transcaucasian Rugs	1
December Webinar Preview: DeWitt Mallary on Baluch Rugs	2
January Webinar Preview: Ali Riza Tuna on Anatolian Kilims	3
February Webinar Preview: Gunnar Nilsson on Swedish Textiles	4
September Webinar Review: Walter Denny, "What the Hell Is That?"	5–9
October Field Trip Report: Marilyn Denny and Gerard Paquin Collections	10–12
October Webinar Review: Luca Brancati on Afghan War Rugs	13–15
October Auction Report: More Dixon Collection at Bonhams Skinner	16–19
President's Report for the 2022 Season and Beyond	20–21
Calendar, Future Webinar, Renewal Reminder, Photo Credits	21