



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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August 13: NERS Picnic, with Moth Mart and Show-and-Tell



Picking and picnicking in August 2022: the moth mart (left) and lunch under the trees

Please join other members (and guests) for a late-summer NERS picnic, to take place this year on Sunday, August 13.

We will again convene at Gore Place, the lovely grounds of the former governor's mansion in Waltham, with plenty of lawn space for mingling and spreading out rugs, tables and chairs for all, and adjacent bathroom facilities. Should rain threaten, there's a huge tent with water, electricity, and side panels that open for ventilation. Supply your own picnic lunch, and NERS will provide soft drinks, tea, and coffee.

Lunch will be preceded by the ever-popular moth mart; we invite all attendees (dealers or not) to bring things to sell, swap, or give away. Past offerings have included rugs, bags and trappings, kilims, and other textiles; books and periodicals; and even tribal jewelry and clothing.

Show-and-tell will follow lunch. Bring one or two of your treasured items to share with fellow attendees—mystery textiles or rugs, exotic specimens you think we should know more about, or new acquisitions you want to show off.

Please come! We welcome all who can attend this relaxed, convivial, and rug-rich event.

Picnic Details

Date: Sunday, August 13 **Time:** Noon to 4 p.m.

Place: Gore Place, 52 Gore St., Waltham, MA 02453

From the Mass Pike: Take exit 17 and follow signs to Rt. 20 westbound (Main St. in Watertown). After 1.5 miles, turn left onto Gore St. at the second of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on right). Proceed 0.2 miles on Gore St. Turn left (through center island) to Gore Place entrance.

From Rte. 128: Take exit 26 onto Rt. 20 eastbound (it starts out as Weston Road and becomes Main St.). After 3.3 miles turn right on Gore St. at the first of two adjoining traffic lights (Shell station on left). Proceed on Gore St. as above.

From Newton: Go north on Crafts St. Turn right (at traffic light) on North St. Cross the Charles River and go straight. The street eventually becomes Gore St. Entrance to Gore Place will be on right.

Parking: Use the parking area on the estate grounds.

Webinar Report: Gunnar Nilsson, “Swedish Textiles from Skåne, 1680–1860”

By Lloyd Kannenberg



Editor's note: With shock and sadness, we have learned that Gunnar Nilsson died on March 28, from what a friend described as “an extremely aggressive and deadly cancer,” diagnosed only four or five weeks previously. NERS is honored to have hosted Gunnar in delivering his outstanding webinar.

Gunnar Nilsson

Our February 11 webinar, co-sponsored by The GWU Museum/Textile Museum and Textile Museum Associates of Southern California, featured Gunnar Nilsson, speaking from his home in Sweden. His subject was textiles made in southernmost Sweden between 1680 and 1860. While this was not the first NERS encounter with Swedish weavings (see *View* XXIV, no. 2, pp. 3–6; XXVI, no. 3, pp. 6–8; and XXVIII, no. 1, pp. 8–10), it was the first time we were privileged to host a native son. Gunnar, an independent scholar specializing in the folk textiles of Skåne, has a magnificent collection, from which he generously chose examples for his lecture.

He began by pointing out how precisely the biography of most Skåne textiles can be read—not only where and when they were made but often even the name of the maker. Over the years covered in his talk, Skåne was organized into twenty-three *härad* (civil jurisdictions), a term still used to localize the origin of textiles made in Skåne. In addition, textiles dated and initialed to commemorate special occasions are quite common. Finally, the extensive

and meticulous estate inventories that Swedes have maintained over centuries not only can verify data at hand but also provide names of owners, makers, and family members. Gunnar modestly noted that the accuracy of the geographical specification of textiles in Skåne probably has no equal anywhere else in the world.

Turning next to the objects themselves, he noted the four different sizes most frequently seen among Skåne textiles. The chair cushion (*jynne*) is roughly a square about 50 centimeters on a side. The rectangular carriage cushion (*agedyna*) is about a meter long and 50 centimeters wide. The bench cover (*bänkalängd*) is usually about 3 meters long, with a width like that of a carriage cushion. Finally, a bedcover (*täcke*) is, well, the size of a bed.

Of the many techniques used in making Swedish textiles, only three are well known outside Sweden—namely, double interlock tapestry weave (*röllakan*), wool embroidery (*schattérsöm* and *tvistsöm*), and Flemish weave (*flamskväv*). Other techniques, of venerable ancestry and still familiar throughout Sweden, are seldom recognized beyond Scandinavia. Gunnar pointed out that these lesser-known weaves (see p. 6) may be used alone, in combination with *röllakan* on bench covers, or as the reverse sides of cushions. Some are quite simple, but there are among them first-class examples as beautiful as they are rare.

Gunnar presented a generous array of Skåne textiles, which he organized into four sections. The first three focused on the familiar techniques: *röllakan*, wool embroidery, and



1. Röllakan and krabbasnår bed cover, Färs härad, mid-18th century or older

Flemish weave. The fourth section he devoted to textiles woven in five of the techniques developed and used in olden times by the peasant weavers of Skåne: *munkabälte* ("monk's belt"), *dukagång* ("table path"), *krabbasnår* ("crab trap"), *upphämta* ("up catch"), and *trensaflossa* ("part pile"). Select representatives of the textile types in each section are described and illustrated in this report; to see them all, view the recording of Gunnar's webinar, which is available to NERS members.

Röllakan

Besides the use of double-interlock tapestry weave, *röllakan* textiles are characterized by wool wefts and, usually, linen warps. Although *röllakan* was woven throughout southern Sweden, the production of the small county of Skåne excelled in both quantity and quality.

A bed cover (1) was a striking opener, its seven wide bands woven in alternating *röllakan* and *krabbasnår*. The colors and variety of patterns attested to its age; Gunnar said that it was likely one of the oldest weavings made in Skåne.

A carriage cushion (2) was doubly interesting: not only was it dated and initialed, but a great-grandson of the

weaver had attested to its provenance. On it, the dangerous mythical water horse *bäckahästen* appeared thrice.

A bench cover (3) was woven in nine bands, four each in *röllakan* and *dukagång*, and one in *krabbasnår*, each band separated from its neighbor by narrow "T" borders. As in Gunnar's first example, its combination of techniques and variety of colors and patterns were characteristic of older weavings.

Gunnar dated another *röllakan* carriage cushion (4) to between 1800 and 1830. Of a lighter palette, its lightning pattern seemed reminiscent of Florentine bargello, suggesting cultural cross-pollination. He noted that the symmetry of its pattern, together with its softened colors, created a soothing effect.



2. *Röllakan* carriage cushion, Skytt's *härad*, inscribed and dated (in mirror reverse) END-IHS 1780



4. *Röllakan* carriage cushion, southwest Skåne, 1800–1830



3. *Röllakan*, *dukagång*, and *krabbasnår* bench cover, Herrestads or Ingelstads *härad*, circa 1750



5. *Schattersöm*-embroidered chair cushion, Villands *härad*, ca. 1820–40



7. *Tvistsöm*-embroidered bed cover, Oxie *härad*, dated 1806



6. *Schattersöm*-embroidered carriage cushion with *trensaflossa* border, Vämmanhög's *härad*, dated 1839 and initialed EHD



8. *Schattersöm*-embroidered carriage cushion, likely Rönneberga *härad*, dated 1756 and initialed BPD

Embroidery

According to Gunnar, state inventories dating as far back as the sixteenth century list wool-embroidered chair and bench cushions as possessions of middle-class families of Malmö. Toward the end of the seventeenth century the use of such cushions tapered off among the bourgeoisie, replaced by fixed covers. At about the same time, embroidered cushions were taken up in rural communities. Earlier examples are more likely to have been made on commission by professionals; later ones were probably the work of peasant wives or daughters. Wool embroidery divides naturally into two distinct categories: *schattersöm*, where the pattern is worked on a homespun (*vadmal*) base; and *tvistsöm*, a twisted chain stitch that covers the entire underlying surface. The former looks something like crewel embroidery, the latter like needlepoint.

One of Gunnar's first examples was an early nineteenth-century chair cushion (5) impressive for the technical quality of its floral design and the symmetrical perfection of its execution. Without a doubt it was professionally made,

on commission. The farm woman who ordered it would ordinarily have added date and initials, but for reasons unknown that last step was never taken.

There followed an example of a combined-technique weaving: an unusual carriage cover (6) with a bold floral-embroidered field framed by a *trensaflossa* border. A magnificent bed cover (7), its renaissance pomegranate pattern embroidered in *tvistsöm*, was dated 1806 (although Gunnar convincingly argued that it was probably much older) and had no fewer than four sets of initials. He noted that it is one of only three bed covers of this design, the oldest dated 1691. A much-simplified version of the pattern was used in carriage cushions dating from the late 1700s to about 1800.

Depicting a fashionably dressed couple within a wreath (8), the oldest known embroidered carriage cushion with this design provided a peek at the way the Swedish upper class, rather than the peasantry, lived back in 1756, when the cushion was created. Unlike the other wool-embroidered motifs, which include the couple amid flowers and birds, two angels are rendered in silk.



9. Flemish-weave carriage cushion with bird pairs in wreaths, southwest Skåne, 1760s or earlier



11. Flemish-weave carriage cushion with unicorns, Bara härad, dated 1784 and initialed BID



10. Flemish-weave carriage cushion with royal couple and "lion castle," Oxie härad, initialed END, 1780s



12. "Naive" Flemish-weave carriage cushion with roosters in exuberant vegetation, dated 1822

Flemish weaves

According to Gunnar, how Flemish weaves migrated from Flanders and France to Skåne is something of a puzzle, but the greater mystery is how and when they took that last step from the urban bourgeoisie to the rural peasantry. There is no documentation whatever. We do know that professional male weavers were producing Flemish weaves in both Stockholm and Malmö from the late sixteenth through the seventeenth century, and that from the beginning of the eighteenth century women in rural areas took up the work. Flemish weaves are weft-faced, with their designs executed in wool, either in Gobelin (dovetailed) tapestry technique or, more typically, in a non-interlocking technique that leaves slits where straight edges meet. In the finished weavings, the linen warps run horizontally.

Gunnar's first example of Flemish weave was a very early carriage cushion, dating to the 1760s or even before. It featured striking flora and, within wreaths, birds remarkable for all facing in the same direction (9). In every other example of this design, the paired birds on the left face those on the right.

A second carriage cushion (10) exemplified the ability of Flemish weave to "paint a picture," here of a royal couple galloping toward what Gunnar termed "the lion castle" [possibly a representation of Gripsholm Castle, which houses the stuffed remains of a lion given to Swedish King Frederic I in 1751]. Gunnar said this cushion was made about 1780 by a very skilled weaver, and that there were only four in this design, none of which copies another.

A carriage cushion bearing a date of 1784 and the initials BID depicted two unicorns lying under trees (11). One of the three known carriage cushions with this motif, it has a wealth of beautiful flowers, but the most interesting thing about it is that its maker has been identified as Boel Jönsdotter of Winningetorp, Hyby socken (parish), Bara härad. She made the cushion for her stepson.

Gunnar said that, as far as he knew, the only truly naïve Flemish-weave textile was a carriage cushion depicting two comically misshapen roosters among outsized foliage, all on a rare aubergine ground (12). It made every other example of Flemish weave look serious and disciplined, with no room for artlessness.

Lesser-known weaves: *munkabälte*, *dukagång*, *krabbasnår*, *upphämta*, and *trensaflossa*

Familiar only in Sweden, textiles woven in these weft-patterning techniques have been made for at least 150 years. Despite their lack of wider recognition, Gunnar maintained that the best examples rival *röllakan*, embroidered, and Flemish-weave textiles in color, splendor, and venerable tradition.

Munkabälte is the local term for a weaving technique employed throughout Sweden. A plain weave patterned by floating wefts in simple geometric compositions, it was most often used for bed covers, but can also be found on carriage cushions. Gunnar's first example was an exquisitely colored, "star"-patterned bed cover initialed AMD and dated 1796 (13).

Another technique, *dukagång*, was used to produce a type of drapery known as *dragduk* (14). *Dragdukar* were brought out of storage to adorn the houses of southern Sweden on special occasions, a tradition at least 250 years old. Even more impressive was their length: often 7 to 10 meters (about 33 feet), and sometimes 15 meters (over 49 feet) or more.

Dukagång was also used in carriage cushions—for example in the outer panels of a dual-technique carriage cushion (15) whose "double hook"-ornamented central panel and narrow separating bands are woven in *krabbasnår*.

An early bench cover, dating to about 1750 (16), likewise combines *krabbasnår* and *dukagång*, but just barely. Only one of the thirteen differently patterned wide bands—fourth from the right—is done in *dukagång*. The variety of patterns in the bands is quite imaginative, and the many colors are a delight.



13. *Munkabälte* bed cover, Vämmanhögskåne härad, dated 1796 and initialed AMD

14. Two sections of a *dukagång* hanging (*dragduk*), Färs or Frosta härad, dated 1807 and initialed KID

15. *Dukagång* and *krabbasnår* carriage cushion, central Skåne, circa 1810–1840

16. *Krabbasnår* and *dukagång* bench cover, Frosta härad, 18th century

Upphämpta is typically used for bed covers. Gunnar's rare example boasted an unusually large color range: red stars and blue-gray rhombuses covered the field, which was surrounded by a border of yellow, light green, and black squares (17).

In *trensaflossa*, designs are formed by *rya* (pile) knotting, leaving partially exposed, flatwoven grounds, nearly always in plain weave. One of Gunnar's *trensaflossa* carriage cushions (18) featured a field with three eight-pointed stars, surrounded by a rug-like system of guard stripes framing a zig-zag border. Its patterned-twill ground weave, called *kypert*, made this cushion unique.

Gunnar declared the design of a final *trensaflossa* carriage cushion to be "one of the most interesting . . . that exists" (19). In the center was a festively dressed trio between the initials MMD and the date 1801, likely commemorating a wedding. Above and below the commemorative scene were large floral medallions; on a few other *trensaflossa* cushion covers a third such medallion replaces the human figures.

After Gunnar's lecture, Jean Hoffman fielded an array of questions from webinar attendees. In answer to one of the first—whether there were museums in Sweden that have folk textiles on exhibition—Gunnar recommended Nordiska Museet, in Stockholm, and Kulturen i Lund, in Skåne. Another attendee asked whether the cushions were padded, and

if so, with what materials. Gunnar replied that goose down was the standard stuffing, and grass an occasional alternative. To a question about dyes, he answered that most colors, from yellow to black, were obtained from native flora, while cochineal was imported in quantity from the New World. As to how the colors of these centuries-old textiles remained fresh and vibrant, Gunnar pointed out that it depended on how carefully they were stored, but also noted that they were made to be used, not permanently tucked away. Regarding materials, Gunnar noted that backings never included cotton and reiterated that embroidery threads were wool. In closing, Jean asked Gunnar if, among all his Skåne textiles, he had a favorite. He did indeed: it was the cushion cover with the threesome of mythical water horses (2).

Our thanks to the co-sponsors of this webinar for their support, to attendees for their interest in exploring unfamiliar territory, and to organizers Jean Hoffman and Julia Bailey. Above all, we are grateful to Gunnar, who offered us a wonderful introduction to the textiles of Skåne—a province of "rugdom" unfamiliar to many. We are saddened by his unexpected death and extend our condolences to his family and friends.

17. *Upphämpta* bed cover, probably Luggudde haräd, dated 1850 and initialed SIS



18. Cushion cover featuring eight-pointed stars and zig-zag border in *trensaflossa* on a unique *kypert* ground, southwestern Skåne, dated 1840 and initialed KHD



19. *Trensaflossa* carriage cushion with festively dressed figures, Skjots haräd, dated 1801 and initialed MMD



March 18 Webinar Report: Gerard Paquin on Crosscurrent Influences in Turkish Rugs and Textiles

By Jim Adelson and Julia Bailey



Gerard Paquin

On March 18, in a webinar hosted by NERS and co-sponsored by the New York Hajji Baba Club, Gerard Paquin presented “Silk and Wool: Crosscurrent Influences in Turkish Rugs and Textiles.” At the outset, Gerard said he would be talking not only about the transfer of designs, but also the reasons for these borrowings; that he would next focus on the design and format of yastiks (cushion covers); and, finally, that he would explore how Turkish rugs and textiles fit into and defined their architectural environment.

Gerard’s initial, and classic, example of design transfer was that of a circa-1300 Chinese textile **(1)**—a luxury silk damask, found in a Mamluk tomb in Egypt—that provided

inspiration for an early fourteenth-century Turkish pile rug **(2)**. The weaver of the Turkish rug adopted the lotus-flower motif—not native to Turkey—but rendered it in a more Anatolian form, with a stepped and less curvilinear shape, and added Turkic ram’s-horn motifs. Gerard contrasted similar “Seljuk” rugs of this sort—their limited tone-on-tone palette and repeated small field motifs surely originating in textiles—with the more colorful, larger-patterned Turkish rugs shown in Persian manuscript paintings and exported to the West.

Already important in Anatolia for more than a thousand years, silk textiles took on unprecedented economic and artistic prominence after the Ottomans consolidated power in the fifteenth century. A manuscript celebrating Sultan Mehmed III’s 1596 conquest of Eger, Hungary, includes a painting of an Istanbul victory parade at which attendees wear silk robes, and where long lengths of lustrous, patterned silks—unlike pile rugs, they are light enough to be held up—are used as deluxe barriers **(3)**.



1



2



3

1. Chinese silk damask fragment, ca. 1300, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 46.156.20

2. Anatolian pile rug (detail), early 14th century, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts (TIEM), Istanbul, inv. no. 688

3. Double-page manuscript illustration of the victory parade celebrating Sultan Mehmed III's conquest of Eger, Topkapı Palace Museum, Istanbul, H. 1609

Several of the “crowd control” silks in the painting have ogival-repeat designs. Such designs, Gerard continued, were extremely popular in Ottoman Turkey; utilized on earlier Mamluk silks, they were also favored by Italian weavers. Ogival motifs were well suited for the drawloom; that they repeated at short intervals made them easier to weave than designs with longer, or no, repeating elements. Moreover, a length of ogival-repeat fabric (4, 4a) could be cut into sections that could then be joined side-by-side to make wide panels.

These ogival-repeat silk textiles provided the inspiration for many humbler Turkish pile rugs. In one instance, a seventeenth-century Ushak carpet (5) mimicked the carnation, tulip, and hyacinth-filled ogives of a silk textile panel, complete with vertical divisions suggesting the side selvages of each joined length of silk.

An Ottoman kilim (6) likewise appeared to derive its design from a silk textile panel. Or could the textile have imitated the kilim? Gerard explained that silk textiles—expensive and prestigious items—would logically have been the models for less-costly and easier-to-produce kilims and pile rugs. Furthermore, in drawloom setup and weaving, a pattern with small repeats was easier to execute; there was no such technical advantage in the making of a kilim or rug.



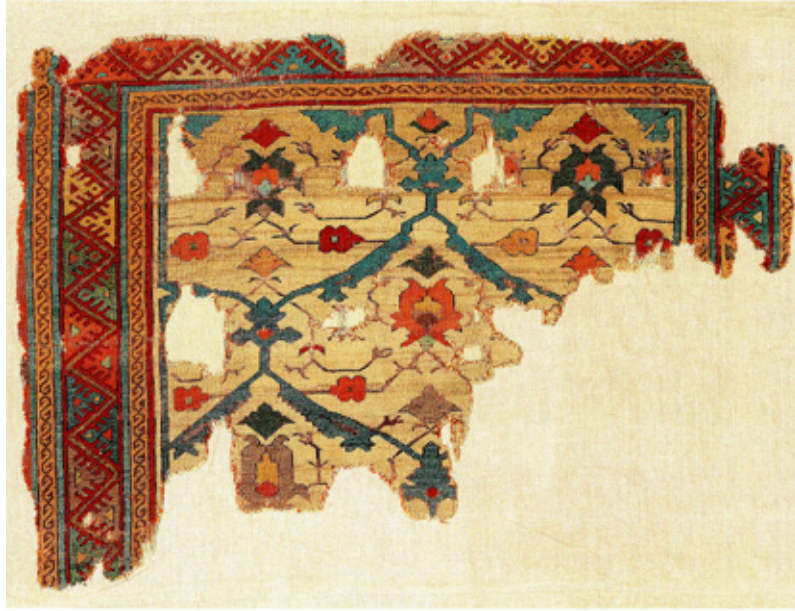
4, 4a. Length and detail of Ottoman silk velvet, 17th century, MFA Boston 95.1329

5. Fragmentary Ushak carpet echoing the design of an Ottoman textile panel, 17th century, Vakıflar Museum, Istanbul, inv. no. E-110

6. Fragmentary Ottoman kilim (detail) with design derived from a silk textile, 16th century, Mevlana Museum, Konya



7. Ottoman or Italian velvet, 16th century, MFA Boston 04.1628



8. Fragmentary carpet with *rumi* lattice derived from a textile, possibly 15th century, Gerard Paquin Collection



9. Anatolian rug with transformed lattice, 17th century, TIEM inv. no. 699



10. Ottoman manuscript cover, ca. 1568, Topkapı Palace Museum H. 1339



11. Ottoman velvet yastik, 17th century, MFA Boston 77.272



12. Anatolian wool yastik, 19th century, formerly Lawrence Kearney Collection

One sort of ogival-repeat design popular in silks featured a lattice formed of split leaves known as *rumi* (7). As Gerard showed, rug weavers readily adopted the *rumi*-lattice layout of silks. Once the design had moved to pile, it could then undergo continuing rug-to-rug evolution. He showed a series of *rumi*-lattice rug comparisons, maintaining that one fragmentary rug (8) was likely close in appearance and clarity to the early textile (no longer extant) that had inspired it, and demonstrating how

later generations of rugs, while preserving some of the details of the original, gradually lost the overall lattice effect (9).

After providing more examples of silk-to-wool design transfers, Gerard took up his second topic: yastiks and their design sources. He started with a “two-hop” example, showing how Ottoman velvet yastiks (11) derived their general format from manuscript covers (10), and how, in turn, they inspired later wool yastiks (12).



13. Anatolian wool yastik, 19th century, Gerard Paquin Collection



14. Ottoman velvet yastik, 17th–18th century, GWU/Textile Museum 1.79



17. Anatolian wool yastik, likely ca. 1800, last sold by Austria Auction Company, Apr. 25, 2020, lot 37



15. Ottoman velvet length, 16th–17th century, MFA Boston 77.263



16. Ottoman velvet yastik, 16th–17th century, MFA Boston 77.268



18. Ottoman velvet yastik, 18th century, London art market

In its central medallion, a nineteenth-century wool yastik (13) echoed the radiating "peacock feathers" and hyacinth-blossom pendants of a century-earlier velvet yastik (14). Instead of scalloped, flower-filled corners, however, the weaver of the wool yastik kept to her natural idiom of outlined, angular brackets.

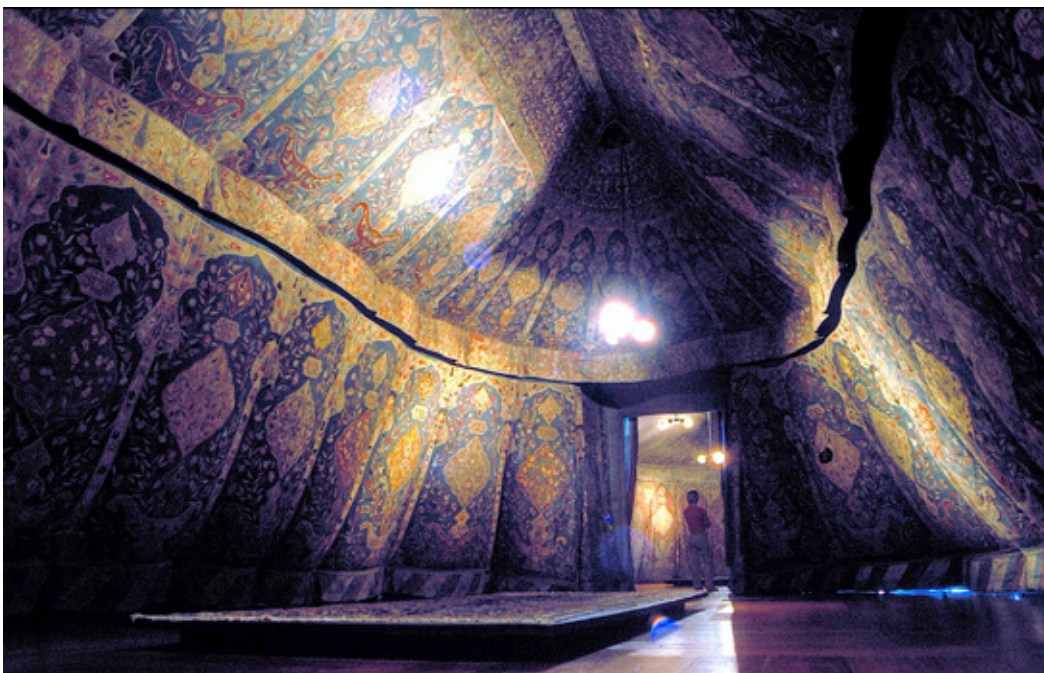
Many wool yastiks, Gerard noted, have at each end a series of pointed elements known as lappets (12). These lappets did not derive from book covers but are common on velvet yastiks. Gerard surmised that, in weaving long lengths of velvet on a drawloom (15), the addition of rows of lappets at programmed intervals served to create a series of individual, usable objects—namely, cushion covers (16). Wool yastiks adopted the lappets

of their velvet predecessors, even though, in pile knotting, there was no technical advantage in doing so.

Gerard then showed several examples of wool-pile yastiks with repeating, textile-derived designs. While it is not usually possible to identify a specific textile model for a wool yastik, one instance of direct borrowing seems clear: a wool yastik (17) that shares the minimal borders, ladder-like flowering or fruiting plants, and small central medallion of a velvet (18). Only the orientation of these design elements is different: in keeping with the economies of drawloom weaving, the leaf motifs switch direction at the center of the velvet, whereas the weaver of the wool yastik keeps her plants growing one way up.



19. Lower half of a painting depicting a nomadic encampment replete with textiles, Tabriz, ca. 1540, Harvard Art Museums 1958.75



20. Massive Ottoman tent, 17th century, Wawel Royal Castle, Krakow, WV46

Finally, Gerard turned to the use of rugs and textiles in defining architectural space. As he showed, evidence of this practice was observed and depicted by a sixteenth-century Austrian artist visiting Ottoman Istanbul, and by Persian painters as early as the fourteenth century. A sixteenth-century Persian painting in the Harvard Art Museums, for example, depicts an encampment scene in rich detail. In the lower portion of the painting (19), men meet in a tent whose interior walls are covered with loom-width, ogival-repeat

textiles. Their sitting spaces are defined by carpets and felts. To the upper right of the scene, acknowledging the origin of such textiles, the artist has even included a woman spinning wool with a drop spindle.

Gerard noted that the tradition of nomadic tent life was basic to Turkic culture—that the Seljuks, Mongols, Timurids, and Ottomans, who ruled empires and patronized the arts, all celebrated their nomadic heritage. The Ottomans, he said, “did it big,” as evidenced by their grand imperial tents (20).

21. 16th-century velvet yastik with composite flowers, made in Venice for the Ottoman market, Gerard Paquin Collection



In summary, Gerard noted that rugs respond to fashion by creatively adapting textile designs, that they overlap with textiles in appearance and use, and that, like textiles, they function as portable architecture. Ultimately, though, he encouraged balancing his academic approach with the appreciation of rugs' and textiles' artistic ingenuity and beauty: "The best reward is looking at the stuff."

Following Gerard's presentation, Jean Hoffman moderated a typical quick-question, short-answer session, selections of which are summarized here. Some attendees were unacquainted with the terms *rumi* and "lappets" and wanted clarification. Gerard answered that *rumi* is not a reference to the famous mystic poet. Related to the word "Rome," *rumi* in this context designates a split-leaf arabesque motif native to Anatolia and Persia and distinguished from imported Chinese ornament. By "lappets," Gerard meant the pointed motifs at the ends of many yastiks. These forms are also found on, for example, Mamluk textiles and architectural barriers. But on the drawloom they conveniently divide lengths of fabric into functional objects.

Noting that Gerard had shown Ottoman textiles with such recognizable flowers as carnations and tulips, one questioner asked whether some also depicted "fantasy"

or composite blossoms. Gerard answered that yes, this practice was very common. Returning to the slide of a velvet yastik (21), he pointed out tulips and pomegranates growing on the same stem, and rose calyxes and even tiger stripes nestled within tulip heads.

A later inquiry concerned forms that Gerard, on another velvet, had identified as peacock feathers, but that were elsewhere described as flowers. What was their actual source? Gerard replied that [in addition to the sorts of creative stylization he had already noted] it was more difficult to depict forms in a textile medium than with, say, a brush on ceramic vessels. Looking to other arts for the sources of certain textile motifs, including the ones in question, might aid in their identification.

Several viewers had noted unexpected use of greens and blues in the ground color of wool-pile yastiks and wanted to know if there was particular significance to the choice of various colors. Gerard replied that, while green was said to be associated with the Prophet Muhammad, he didn't feel that association played a role in yastik coloration. Rather, in his view, color choices were a matter of what local dyestuffs were available, and of the joy yastik makers took in using a variety of bright colors.

What were yastik backs made of? The backs of wool-pile yastiks, Gerard explained, were also wool. When such a yastik was woven, the weaver would create its pile face and then use the same set of warps to weave an equal length of unpiled material for the back. When taken from the loom, the plain-woven back and the pile face were joined and stuffed to become a pillow. For silk-velvet yastiks, Gerard didn't know about the backs, since they haven't survived. He added that it's rare in the West to see even wool yastiks with their backs intact. Americans and Europeans used yastiks as small rugs rather than cushions, and, since the backs were unneeded and added to shipping costs, they were cut off during export from Turkey.

Gerard ended by posing questions that he himself finds fascinating. Say a rug weaver, inspired by a textile, copies its design. What happens to the design then, and when her daughter and her daughter's daughter make their own successive copies? How long does the design persist before it becomes distorted? How directly is a rug related to a textile source? Often, Gerard concluded, "You're just guessing."

We thank Gerard for his insights on design transfer—insights that are both specific to his Anatolian examples and applicable to a broad range of others. We're additionally grateful to him for illustrating his comments with delectable silks and wools from many sources, including his own collection.

April 16 Meeting Review: Prayer Rug Show-and-Tell, with Jeff Spurr Introducing

By Jim Adelson



Jeff Spurr

On April 16, veteran speaker Jeff Spurr came prepared to introduce our prayer rug show-and-tell meeting. In an unprecedented technical failure, however, the projection system would not work at all, and offered no way for Jeff to show the images essential to his scripted presentation. Off

the cuff and seemingly unfazed, he obligingly summarized its major points. (Since he is writing a second article on the topic for *HALI*—the first having appeared in *HALI* 127 [Mar.–Apr. 2003]: 105–11—he asked that certain facts and interpretations addressed in his spontaneous digest not be reported here.) Despite the technical snafu, no attendee left early, and people relished both Jeff’s extempore summary and the following display and discussion of members’ prayer rugs and related textiles.

In his opening remarks, Jeff emphasized the role of the mihrab—the prayer niche in the mosque that orients worshippers to Mecca. That architectural element, when reflected in the designs of rugs and other textiles, serves the same purpose of directing the worshipper. The prayer rug also establishes a clean place for prayer, separating the person praying from the ground. (A prayer rug is not

specifically required for this function; there are many examples of reed mats and other textiles used in this way.) Prayer rugs also can be hung on the wall.

Islam also does not require dedicated designs on prayer rugs; designs came from Ottoman, Mughal, and other sources. Kashmir shawls, for instance, provided motifs, particularly botehs, that were popular for prayer rugs. The cypress tree was an early and common prayer-rug image.

According to Jeff, there was far greater emphasis on prayer rugs in Sunni tradition, although both Sunni and Shi’a adherents did produce and use them. Many later examples, especially from the Caucasus and Persia, were made for export to Europe and the U.S. rather than for local or religious use.

After Jeff’s shortened introduction, the session turned to the sizeable show-and-tell, of which representative examples are described and illustrated here. The initial focus was on Baluch weavings, starting with a stark kilim whose plain, camel-colored ground included a minimal prayer arch defined by extra-weft brocading **(1)**.

Baluch pile rugs followed. One featured a classic tree-of-life design and distinctive if common hand motifs, which would have guided the worshipper’s hand placement during prostration **(2)**. Often referred to as “the hand of Fatima” (the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter), the motif is also considered generally protective.



1. Baluch prayer kilim with brocaded prayer arch



2. Baluch prayer rug with prominent hands in spandrels

Another Baluch prayer rug (3) likely was made in Afghanistan, according to its owner. At its bottom was an uncommon, contrasting panel, in some ways resembling a Turkmen *elem*.

The next example (4) was smaller in size, leading people to wonder whether it was possibly a child's prayer rug; a motif at the top of its mihrab (4a) suggested a *mohr*,

or clay tablet used by Shi'a Muslims, the clay preferably derived from the earth of a great Shi'a shrine located in Karbala (in today's Iraq) or Mashhad (in northeastern Iran).

Two other Baluch prayer rugs illustrated the concept of relative age. One had a squarish format, often considered a characteristic of older weavings (5); the other (6) was modern, likely woven for the market rather than for religious practice.

3. Baluch prayer rug with contrasting end border



5. Baluch rug with squarish proportions suggesting greater age



4 (right). Small Baluch prayer rug with possible representation of a *mohr* within the prayer arch



4a (above). Detail, showing the possible *mohr* representation



6. Modern Baluch rug made for the market



Following the Baluch examples, two rugs were the only representatives of their areas of origin. A fragmentary three-niche Khotan saf (multi-niche prayer rug) had the colorful palette typical of such weavings (7). Despite its arched format, a silk Heriz fragment (8) was probably not conceived as a prayer rug, since it bore a verse by a Persian Sufi poet referring to a tavern, and since serpentine dragons encircled the columns in its field.

Caucasian prayer rugs were more numerous; members had brought a half-dozen examples. Of three attributed

to Shirvan, two were labeled as Marasali, based on the distinguishing botehs in their main borders and fields. They shared another Marasali characteristic: wide variation of color and design in their field botehs. One of the two (9) was dated 1307 (1890 in the Gregorian calendar). The other was somewhat squarer, possibly indicating that it was earlier (10). In discussing these two rugs, Jeff noted that one of his earliest *HALI* articles (*HALI* 105 [July–Aug. 1999]: 75–76) was devoted to the design of Marasali prayer rugs.



7. Joined fragments of a Khotan saf

8. Top fragment of a Heriz silk rug with Persian mystical poetry and dragon imagery

9. Marasali prayer rug, dated 1307 (1890)

10. Wider-format Marasali prayer rug

The third Shirvan rug (11) had an uncommon niche shape, hand motifs, and riders and their mounts depicted both within the niche and in the surrounding field.

The other Caucasian rugs included a Kuba with a so-called double niche (12). Jeff noted that the concept “double-niche prayer rug” is oxymoronic, since a unidirectional design orientation is essential for prayer. Another audience member recalled that a previous NERS speaker had offered an

explanation of the “double niche” design. (It turned out this was Stefano Ionescu, in his March 2021 webinar; Stefano had reported that, in 1610, Sultan Ahmed I, noting that carpets with mihrabs, inscriptions, and other religious iconography were being sold to non-Muslims, had decreed this practice illegal. The weavers responded by adding a “counter niche,” transforming the mihrab into an approximately symmetrical, medallion-like shape. Well aware of the significance of the prayer-niche design, they had to deviate from it to comply with the law. Reminded of Stefano’s point, Jeff responded that no evidence from rugs of the period in question indicated any pause in the production of manifestly designed prayer rugs.)

The final Caucasian rug was remarkable for its abrupt change of field design, which included a large human figure (13). In retrospect, Jeff considers the rug’s “niche” actually to be an elaborate but otherwise characteristic comb, so despite the placement of that motif, the rug itself is not even notionally a prayer rug—rather simply an unusual example of a figural Kazak.



11. Shirvan "head and shoulders" prayer rug



12. Kuba rug with opposing arches



13. Kazak rug with large human figure in upper field

The next show-and-tell item was much different in design, geographical origin, and function. The owner explained that her grandmother, a Hindu from India, had owned and sat upon this small, square textile (14) while saying her prayers. Understandably it had no mihrab (although its design was decidedly asymmetrical), and its motifs differed from those of other weavings in our session.



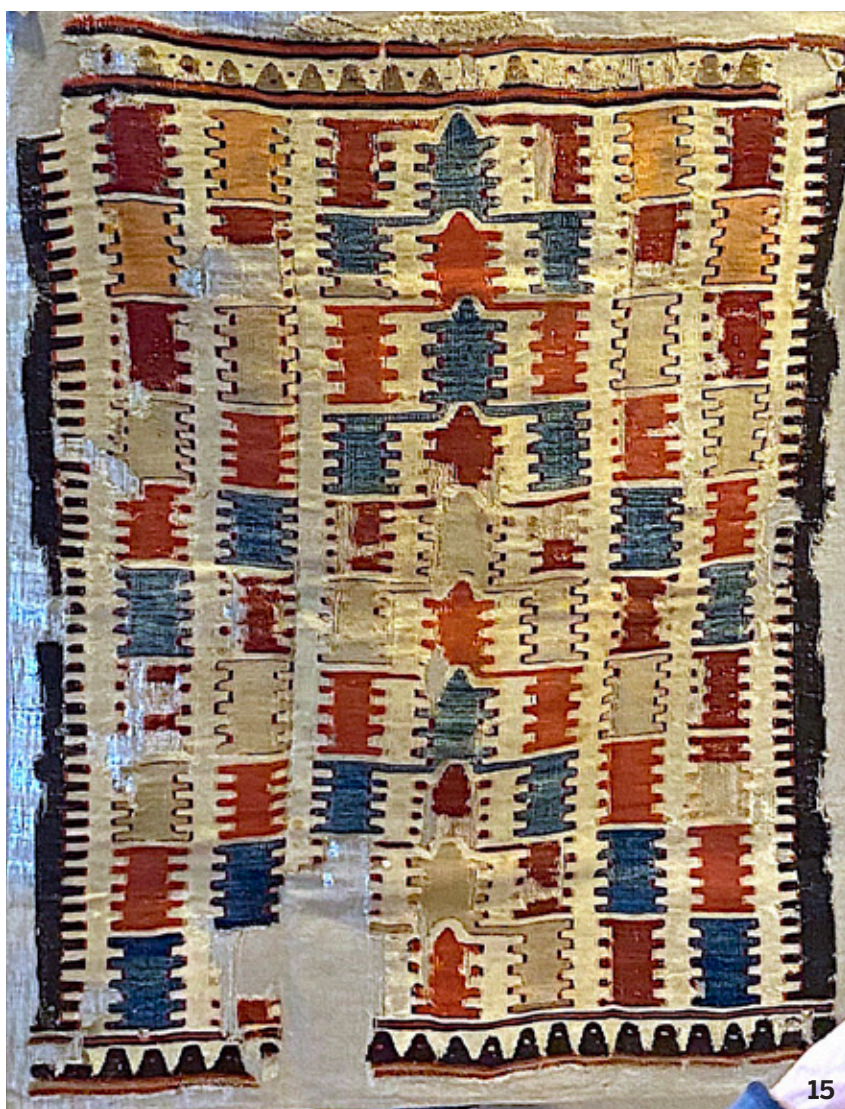
14



16

The show-and-tell concluded as it had begun, with non-pile textiles in prayer format. One was an Anatolian kilim attributed to Sivrihisar (15), with vertically stacked, directional central motifs that might collectively represent a mihrab (although there was some debate about that among attendees).

The remaining pieces all originated in Central Asia. One was an Afghan dhurrie (16), in the tradition of dhurries from India but likely made in Maimana, in northwestern Afghanistan. Like its Indian cousins, it was the product of prison labor.



15

14. Velveteen square, used by owner's Indian grandmother as a seat during Hindu prayer

15. Sivrihisar kilim with arched central motifs

16. Dhurrie probably made in Maimana, Afghanistan

An Uzbek prayer velvet from Tashkurgan (now called Khulm or Kholm), northern Afghanistan, was embroidered in silk on silk velvet and backed with typical Russian printed-cotton trade cloth (17).

One of the two final items of our show-and-tell was a Lakai *joinamaz*, or prayer panel (18). Brought by Jeff, who dated it to the early twentieth century, it had the fine silk embroidery on a silk ground (here of watermelon color) and the *zhiak* trim characteristic of Lakai suzanis. The last item, also Jeff's, was an Uzbek silk-ground prayer suzani of distinctive style (19), which may or may not be attributable to the Lakai.

Our great thanks to Jeff for his flexibility in summarizing his prepared introduction and for his informative comments during the show-and-tell. Everyone further interested in prayer rugs should watch for his future *HALI* article on the subject. And for making the session a joy, credit goes to the audience members who brought their own prayer rugs and shared their knowledge.



17. Embroidered Uzbek prayer velvet, northern Afghanistan

18. Lakai silk-ground *joinamaz* (prayer panel), Uzbekistan

19. Uzbek silk-ground prayer suzani, possibly Lakai

Carpet & Textile Forum Draws Enthusiastic NERS Attendance

*Editor's note: The newly named Carpet & Textile Forum—formerly Rug Collectors' Weekend—took place May 2–4 in Buellton, California. In the words of attendee Jean Hoffman, “NERS members from New England to Hungary, and especially our West Coast members, were there in force.” Two other attending members from New England—**Judy Smith** and **DeWitt Mallary**—provide brief accounts here.*

Judy writes: For a total immersion in the rug-and-textile world, there is no better place to be than the Carpet & Textile Forum, a three-day annual event outside of Santa Barbara. Early this May, around eighty-five collector/enthusiasts, including sixteen dealers, cloistered in the hotel spaces dedicated to the program.

We were treated to themed presentations showcasing relevant samples from personal collections, a dealer's room overflowing with items on the walls and floor, and a show-and-tell session.

I particularly enjoyed Frances Plunkett's discussion of her ok bash pieces (1). These oddly shaped bags were used to cover the ends of tent poles. Each bag is made in one piece and sewn closed, and when it is opened up it lies flat and creates a different aesthetic. I had never been interested in these before, but her selection, with exceptional wool and unusual designs, presented a powerful grouping—a niche collection at its finest. She was even able to purchase a new one at the dealer's fair.

I also loved the velvet ikats that Michael Lubin, Michael Rothberg, and David Reisbord had assembled. These lush treasures were mostly panels but also included complete robes. Colors, graphics, and most of all their feel make these textiles prized possessions.

The late John Wertime was specially lauded for his knowledge of textile art—bags in particular—and for sharing it through publications and conversations. Bruce Baganz, Gerard Paquin, and Fred Mushkat presented about fifty salt bags, many of which had come from John's collection. It was quite amazing to see so many together and to make comparisons. The presenters called special attention to examples in which the design of the field extended into the neck of the bag.

Mike Tschebull showed sizeable, chunky gabbehs whose vibrant color, bold, largely geometric designs, and long pile impart a sense of joy. These are fairly recent and offer us a new collecting option.

Many dealers were also collectors, buying from and selling to one another and taking part in all the sessions. Many have known each other for decades and have shared experiences, trips, and sales. Three were from Turkey: Fahrettin İçik, Vedat Karadag, and Adnan Aydın. Among other dealers, Alberto Levi was there from Milan, and Andy Lloyd from the U.K. Fazli Solak, from Berkeley, is a restorer, rug cleaner, and dealer; Noah Bolour is a young dealer from Los Angeles. DeWitt Mallary had a colorful display of tribal weavings, and Casey Waller from Santa Fe offered some Central Asian hats. There was a warm, personal relationship between the dealers and the collectors that permeated the atmosphere.

The show-and-tell brought out about fifty examples from individual collections. After they were presented, they were all laid out on tables. In this world of electronic images, we felt very lucky to be among such high-quality items, and to be able to see and touch them (2). Save May 14–16, 2024 on your calendar—you won't be sorry!



1. Frances Plunkett presents examples of Turkmen ok bash



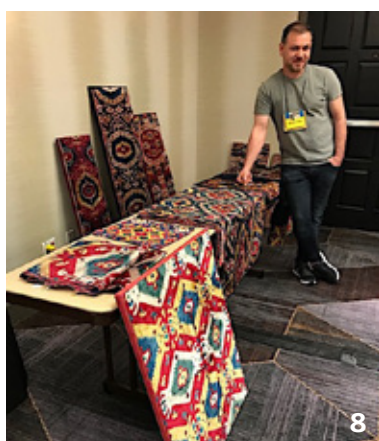
2. Not just see and touch: Vedat Karadag "sniff tests" Mike Tschebull's double-sided gabbeh (held by Gerard Paquin)

DeWitt comments: The primary difference between the Carpet and Textile Forum in Buellton, California, and other “academic” conferences is the use of actual examples, rather than pictures, to illustrate the presentations.

Many of the talks featured interesting items from the collections of presenters and other collectors. The large display of salt bags (were there really fifty?) included examples from the collections of Bruce Baganz, Gerard Paquin, and Fred Mushkat, a number of them sourced from John Wertime, in whose honor this segment was presented (3, 4).

Peter Poullada discussed his ongoing work researching the ethnographic mix of tribal groups along the Amu Darya and showed three groups of chuvals (5), illustrating the differences between those of the Kizil Ayak, the Ali Eli, and a third group he posits as Ersari.

Perhaps most visually stunning, as well as very informative, was Michael Lubin’s presentation on Central Asian velvet ikats (6–8), which featured remarkable examples from his and Betty Lubin’s collection, and from that of David Reisbord. Michael Rothberg added some further commentary in relation to a few highly unusual examples of his own.



3. A wealth of salt bags from the collections of forum participants Gerard Paquin, Bruce Baganz, and Fred Mushkat, assembled in honor of the late John Wertime

4. Attendees, including Alberto Levi, view the salt bags

5. Peter Poullada’s Amu Darya chuvals

6. Central Asian velvet ikat coats and panels shown during collector Michael Lubin’s presentation

7. *HALI* editor Ben Evans and forum organizer Bethany Mendenhall admiring ikat velvet panels

8. Berkeley dealer and restorer Fazli Solak with more velvet ikat panels

More Jim Dixon Rugs and Fragments in Bonhams Skinner *Woven Gardens* Sale

Woven Gardens, the third auction of rugs from the Jim Dixon Collection, was held in the Boston gallery of Bonhams Skinner on April 27. Once again, the sale underscored bidders' interest in old rarities, their willingness to tolerate worn condition, and their embrace of fragments. Three of the higher-priced lots are pictured here, with the editor's added comments.



Lot 61, early Northwest Persian carpet, ca. 1800, 10'3" x 7'6", \$21,675 with premium

Rather than connected in a standardized overall pattern, the floral elements in the field of this carpet are discrete and varied. The beautiful border consists of charmingly non-uniform palmettes and cypresses encircled by blossoms. The "cable" wefts that show through the worn pile at regular intervals are also seen in many early Caucasian carpets.



Lot 22, "Golden Triangle" fragment, South Caucasus, ca. 1800, 7' x 3'10", \$8,287.50 with premium

For another fragment of the same carpet, see <https://www.rugtracker.com/2017/10/rugs-of-golden-triangle.html>, fig. 068. The spotted palmettes and strapwork border of both fragments have counterparts in an intact rug in the Museum of Islamic Art, Berlin (I 39/63): see fig. 24 of Alberto Levy, "The Golden Triangle Syndrome," *HALI* 214 (Winter 2022): 100–113.



Lot 111, Mughal carpet fragment, 17th century, 2' x 1'3", \$8,287.50 with premium

The flowering plants on this small fragment grow "sideways"—perpendicular to the warp direction. The fragment likely comes from one of the "shaped" carpets made in northern India in the mid-17th century (see Steven Cohen, "The 'Shaped' Carpets of Amer," *HALI* 202 [Spring 2020]: 50–61).

Preview: Lawrence Kearney Collection at Grogan & Company

Thirty-five select items from the collection of beloved dealer and NERS member Lawrence Kearney, who died unexpectedly in March 2022 (see <https://ne-rugsociety.org/newsletter/fringe-v29n2-4-2022.pdf>, pp. 10–12), will be offered by Grogan & Company in a live auction on June 1. Representing Lawrence's broad collecting tastes, the lots include rugs, textiles, and manuscript paintings. Photos and estimates are posted on the Grogan & Company website, <https://www.groganco.com/>; a few highlights from the auction are pictured here. A report of the sale will appear in the next issue of *View from the Fringe*.



Lot 3: East Anatolian rug fragment, 17th–18th century, 6'2" x 3'5", est. \$20,000–\$30,000; shown in NERS exhibition *Through the Collector's Eye*, cat. 3



Lot 8: Central Anatolian kilim, Sivrihisar or Kütahya, ca. 1800, 4'11" x 2'10", est. \$10,000–\$20,000



Lot 2: Anatolian yastik, ca. 1800, 3'3" x 2'2", est. \$5,000–\$10,000



Lot 25: Four-cornered Wari hat, Peru, 7th–9th century, height 4", est. \$2,000–\$4,000

Rug and Textile Events

Auctions

May 28–June 7, Marlborough, Mass., Bonhams Skinner
Fine Carpets & Rare Textiles (online only)
June 1, Boston, Grogan & Company
The Lawrence Kearney Collection (see above)
June 3, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell & Co., Major Spring Auction
June 10, Vienna, Austria Auction Company,
Fine Antique Oriental Rugs XXXIII
July 17, Philadelphia, Material Culture
Oriental Rugs from America Estates 59

Exhibitions

Until July 1, Washington, D.C., George Washington University
Museum and the Textile Museum, *Prayer and Transcendence*

Photo Credits

p. 1: Julia Bailey **pp. 2–7:** Zoom (inset), Gunnar Nilsson (figs. 1–19)
pp. 8–13: Zoom (inset); Metropolitan Museum (fig. 1); Gerard Paquin (figs. 2, 4, 4a, 6–8, 11–13, 15–16, 21); Bağcı, Çağmann, et al., *Osmanlı Resim Sanatı* (fig. 3); Balpınar and Hirsch, *Carpets of the Vakıflar Museum Istanbul* (fig. 5); Ölger, *Turkish Carpets from the 13th–18th Centuries* (fig. 9); Walter Denny (figs. 10, 20); Denny, *The Classical Tradition in Anatolian Carpets* (fig. 14); Austria Auction Company (fig. 17); Ben Mini (fig. 18); Harvard Art Museums (fig. 19) **pp. 14–19:** Doug or Julia Bailey (inset, figs. 2–17); DeWitt Mallary (fig. 1); Jeff Spurr (figs. 18, 19) **pp. 20–21:** Ernest Vojdani (figs. 1, 3, 6); Jean Hoffman (fig. 2); Stephanie Morehouse (figs. 4, 5, 7, 8)
p. 22: Bonhams Skinner **p. 23:** Grogan & Company

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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/>



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