



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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March 9 Webinar Preview: Alberto Boralevi on Forty Years of Exciting Carpet Finds

Trained as an architect, Alberto Boralevi comes from a family long active in the antiques trade. In 1986 he opened his own gallery, The Carpet Studio, in Florence. He is also a carpet and textile scholar, the author of numerous articles, books, and catalogues, and a consultant for museums such as the Stefano Bardini Museum in Florence, the Textile Museum of Prato, and the Azerbaijan National Carpet Museum of Baku, as well as for important private collections.

As Chairman of the International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC) Academic Committee, Alberto coordinated several past conferences and is currently organizing ICOC 15, which will take place in Istanbul from June 6 to 9, 2024.

In 2011, he received the Joseph V. McMullan Award for Stewardship and Scholarship in Islamic Rugs and Textiles from the Near Eastern Art Research Center. From 2013 to 2019 he was a board member of the Foundation for Jewish Cultural Heritage in Italy and participated in organizing the Uffizi Gallery exhibition *The Colours of Judaism in Italy*, curating the section devoted to Jewish textiles from the Near East and the Islamic World.

About his upcoming webinar, "Exciting Carpet Finds in Italy: Forty Years of Hunting for Unpublished Masterpieces," Alberto notes that, early in his involvement with carpets, he was struck by the words of Kurt Erdmann, who in a 1963 lecture had declared, "I am a museum man and have a good 'nose' for carpets and their presence. I believe that many examples are still preserved, the existence and value of which nobody knows, in Venetian as well as Florentine 'Palazzi'."

Thus inspired, Alberto began his search for such forgotten carpets, starting in Florence. Almost immediately, he came across two exceptional and completely overlooked examples, kept for centuries in the Pitti Palace and today known as the "Cairene Carpets of the Medici." That same year, he also discovered what may be the oldest Jewish carpet in existence: a parokhet from the Synagogue of Padua, made in Mamluk Egypt but with an Italian-influenced design.



Alberto Boralevi in 2013, seated on the huge Cairene Mamluk carpet that he discovered in the Pitti Palace

In 1983 Alberto presented these spectacular discoveries at ICOC 3, in London, and, as he modestly puts it, they "gave me a certain fame." At the time, he was thirty-two years old; now, more than forty years later, he can say that he has continued his research "through ups and downs." In this webinar, he plans to tell the story of his continuing finds over the years.

Webinar Details

Hosted by the New England Rug Society

Date and Time: Saturday, March 9, 2024, 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 one.

Or register with this link: <http://tinyurl.com/Boralevi12>

April 20 Webinar Preview: Tom Farnham, “Two Collectors, Too Long Neglected”



Tom Farnham

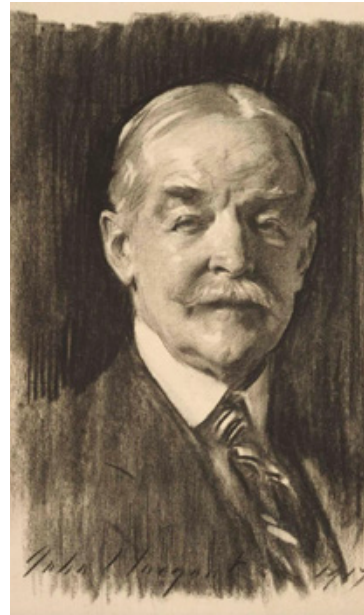
Carpet scholars have paid little attention to Henry Gurdon Marquand (1819–1902) or Denman Waldo Ross (1853–1935), in large part because neither man considered his collection a means to impress others or enhance his own prestige.

Denman Ross’s collection, which included more important fragments than intact rugs, was displayed neither in his home nor in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where it was housed. Instead, Ross used his fragments and other objects he donated to the MFA as teaching tools, to explain to his students his theories of design.

In all probability, Henri Marquand never thought his carpets constituted a collection. Their function, and that of his other furnishings, was to provide an aesthetically pleasing environment for him, his family, and his close friends. Few people outside that select group knew the rugs existed until after Marquand’s death, when they were sold at public auction and the prices realized bore testimony to their quality.

The time is long overdue to recognize Ross and Marquand as important carpet collectors. This presentation will show many of their beautiful and historically important rugs and fragments, which, like the individuals who collected them, deserve the attention of all of us who appreciate carpet art.

Tom Farnham, a professor of American history for thirty years, developed an interest in oriental rugs late and totally by chance. Nevertheless, beginning in 1996, rugs



Portraits by John Singer Sargent of the two collectors: (left) Dr. Denman Waldo Ross, 1917, charcoal on paper, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 17.3175 (right) Henry G. Marquand (detail), 1897, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art 97.43

and the histories of those who owned them quickly became an obsession. His publications since then have examined collectors, dealers, and groups, including Charles T. Yerkes, George Hewett Myers, James F. Ballard, Stefano Bardini, F. R. Martin, and the Hajji Baba Club.

Tom served as chair of the Academic Committee of the Eleventh International Conference on Oriental Rugs (ICOC 11), in 2007, and co-edited *Oriental Carpet and Textile Studies VII*, a 2011 volume of selected papers from ICOC 10 and 11.

A recipient in 2009 of the Joseph V. McMullan Award for Stewardship and Scholarship in Islamic Rugs and Textiles, he is currently a Research Fellow of the Textile Museum and a board member of the Near Eastern Art Research Center.

Webinar Details

Hosted by the New England Rug Society

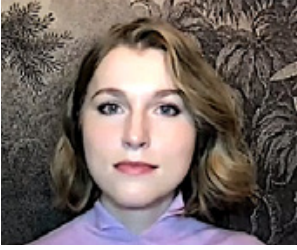
Date and Time: Saturday, April 20, 2024, 1 PM ET

Venue: Your desktop, laptop, or tablet

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

Or register with this link: <http://tinyurl.com/NERSfbfringeTF>

February 10 Webinar Report: Margaret Squires on the Chehel Sotun Carpet



Margaret Squires

On February 10, NERS hosted Margaret Squires, presenting “Piece by Piece It Disappeared: Reconstructing the Chehel Sotun Carpet.” Her work on this “disappeared” carpet is part of her current dissertation research, on the relationship of carpets to

architecture during the Iranian Safavid period (1502–1722)—specifically, on how these carpets would have been experienced by someone who saw them in the places for which they were made. Such an investigation is complicated by the fact that no Safavid-era carpet remains in its original site in a Safavid building. Any experiential study of carpets must therefore rely either on Safavid-period textual sources or—if the carpets stay put long enough—on the reports of later observers.

The building of particular interest here, Margaret explained, is a royal garden palace, the Chehel Sotun (“Forty

Columns”), built in Isfahan in 1646–47 **(1)**. Before discussing it further, or considering the existing documentation of its namesake carpet, Margaret sought to convey her own experience in viewing a single fragment of that carpet, now in the Museum of Applied Arts, Frankfurt **(2)**. (According to her digital reconstruction, the thirteen known fragments represent only a quarter to a third of the original carpet.)

Surprised and awed by the huge size and scale of the Frankfurt piece, Margaret realized that someone standing on the intact carpet in its intended setting would have felt overwhelmed, “like a miniature person.”

The fragments reveal that the Chehel Sotun Carpet would have had a floral lattice design on a rich red ground surrounded by blue-green borders, as is also seen in some pashmina-piled carpets from Mughal North India **(3)**. The Chehel Sotun carpet has sheep’s-wool pile, however, and is much less finely knotted than these Mughal carpets; Margaret agreed with its assignment, by scholars Steven Cohen and Yumiko Kamada, to the Deccan, in Central India.

1. The Chehel Sotun palace, Isfahan, completed in 1646–47



2 (near right). Fragment of the Chehel Sotun Carpet, Museum of Decorative Arts, Frankfurt, 13.308

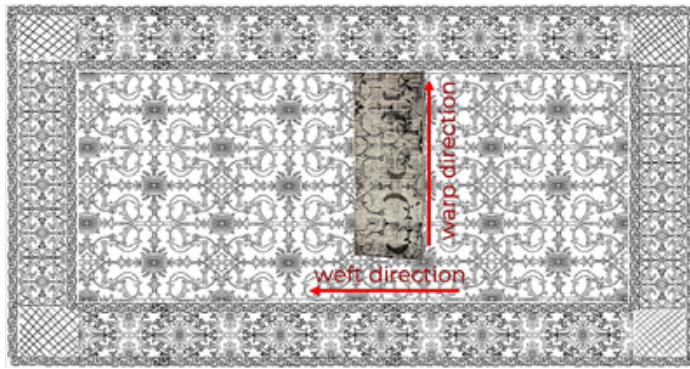


3. Detail of a pashmina carpet with a floral lattice field design, North India, mid-17th century, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, T 60





4. Durbar carpet (folded double), India, ca. 1650



5. Margaret's digital model of the Chehel Sotun carpet, showing the placement of the Frankfurt fragment



6. Modular silk carpet(s) from the tomb of Shah Abbas II, Qum, 1671

No known Safavid-era sources mention the carpet, but nineteenth-century observers record its continued presence in the Chehel Sotun. In 1808, British diplomat and novelist James Morier mentions seeing it on the floor of the audience hall. But by the 1880s, Iranian historian Jabari Ansari reports it to be disappearing “piece by piece” from “behind the palace.”

In 1903, in his *History of Oriental Carpets before 1800*, F. R. Martin writes that, while portions of the carpet are still in place, “numerous fragments of it have appeared in the bazaars in Constantinople.” Martin complains about the exorbitant price of these fragments but nevertheless furthers the mythology of the carpet by committing to print the highly dubious “tradition that it was transported from India to Isfahan on the backs of two elephants.”

As to the carpet's date, it was clearly old when Morier saw it; Margaret argued that it must have been woven and imported sometime between 1647 and 1722, when the Safavids were toppled by Afghan invaders and the palaces of Isfahan fell into disuse.

A carpet that covered the audience hall of the Chehel Sotun would have measured a vast 9 x 18 meters (29.5 x 59 feet)—making it more than three times the size of the renowned Ardabil Carpet. It would have had a width twice that of a huge Indian durbar (audience) carpet in Jaipur **(4)**.

To understand how the Chehel Sotun Carpet could have been made, Margaret used digital tools to trace the designs of the existing fragments and generate a line drawing of the whole carpet. (A partial rendering, long in the V&A Museum and published in 1922 by Kendrick and Tattersall, proved to have inaccurate motif proportions and a corner design seemingly based on guesswork.) When mapped onto the drawing, the Frankfurt fragment, its warps running its length, turned out to be a transverse section of the carpet **(5)**. This implied that the warps of the entire



7, 8. Talar and throne iwan of the Chehel Sotun

carpet ran the carpet's short dimension. Had the carpet been woven in one piece on a single loom, that loom would have been an implausible fifty-nine feet wide (stretching, as Margaret noted for the benefit of any Boston Red Sox fans in her audience, from home plate to the pitcher's mound at Fenway Park). Thus the Chehel Sotun carpet must have been what Margaret termed modular: woven in multiple sections.

Contemporary modular carpets exist from both Safavid Iran and Mughal India: one example is a twelve-sided, two-part Persian silk carpet **(6)** made to surround the tomb of Shah Abbas II, in Qum. Where the two halves of that carpet meet, there are no borders; the field design of each half comes all the way to the edges—an example of what Margaret called “full bleed.” This allows the patterning of the separately woven halves to appear continuous. Such a “full bleed” scheme, Margaret hypothesized, was also used for adjoining sections of the Chehel Sotun carpet.

She then returned to the building for which the carpet was made and in which it was used. Part of a larger royal precinct in Isfahan, the Chehel Sotun, erected as a setting for feasts and ceremonies, is approached through a garden with a rectangular pool. From its tall, multi-columned talar, or porch **(7)**, the visitor enters a narrower “pseudo-talar,” whose focal point is a mirrored throne iwan, or niche **(8)**.



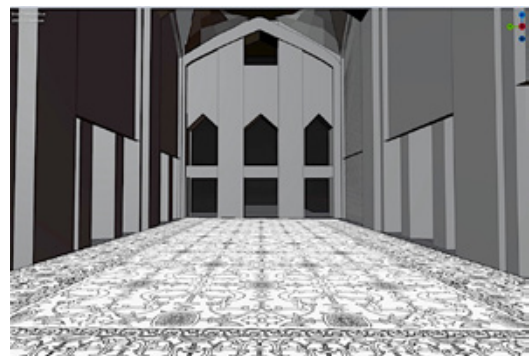
9. Audience hall, Chehel Sotun: view of the vaulting and its decoration

A small door at the rear of the niche offers access, not to an even smaller space, but rather to a lofty audience hall—its three domes brilliantly illuminated (9) and its walls featuring large-scale figural paintings. The present-day visitor, however, experiences a mismatch between these rich decorations and the blank floors underfoot (10). In its intended place (11), the Chehel Sotun Carpet would have complemented the colorful domes and walls and added a sense of superhuman scale. In addition, it would have served the practical function of muffling the noise of the festivities within the hall.

Margaret acknowledged that certain questions about the patronage of the Chehel Sotun Carpet remain unanswered. Why, for instance, wasn't the carpet woven in Iran? In practical terms, the Deccan was known for producing very large carpets. Politically, the Safavids, who were then warring with the Mughals over control of Kandahar, were natural allies of the Deccani rulers, with whom they carried on an extensive artistic exchange. Whoever commissioned the Chehel Sotun Carpet, the prevailing Safavid-Deccani alliance likely figured in its creation.



10. Richly painted walls and vaulting of the audience hall, and its contrasting bare floor



11. Digital rendering by Margaret of the Chehel Sotun Carpet in its original place

In her conclusion, Margaret again noted the role of the carpet in emphasizing the grand scale of the Chehel Sotun audience hall. In addition, she said, the carpet defied the long-held notion that a rug's completeness was determined by the technical limitations of the loom. Hence the Chehel Sotun Carpet and other bespoke carpets of its time represent a design revolution indebted to both architect and weaver.

After her presentation, Margaret fielded audience questions posed by webinar lead Jean Hoffman. Among these were queries about which fragments Margaret had been able to examine, what digital tools she used for her reconstruction, whether the separate sections of the carpet had been joined or simply juxtaposed, how the edges of the sections had been finished, and whether there were additional modular carpets made in Iran at the time.

Margaret's entire presentation, including her answers to these and other questions, is available to all New England Rug Society members. We thank her for sharing her detective work in tracking the remaining fragments of the Chehel Sotun Carpet, for virtually reconstructing it, and for allowing us to picture it, if only imaginatively, in the spectacular architectural setting of which it was once an integral part.

Julia Bailey

The Kaffel Collection at Grogan & Company: My Preview Picks

By Richard Belkin

For more than forty years, I have collected Kuba and Shirvan rugs, with an occasional purchase of a Tekke torba or a Ferahan carpet. For much of that time, auctions held by Grogan & Company, now in downtown Boston, have been an excellent source for the viewing of quality antique carpets, as Michael Grogan's connections to the rug-collecting community are strong, and the consignments he can attract are usually of good quality and age, often sourced from the top American collections. His current auction, offering carpets collected by the late Ralph Kaffel and his wife, Linda, continues that pattern.

I will not here recount the history of Mr. Kaffel's artistic and business successes, which gave him the resources to assemble a group of wonderfully colorful, interesting, and occasionally rare rugs and carpets, and to publish a classic and well-regarded book, *Caucasian Prayer Rugs*. [Ed.: A brief biography of Ralph Kaffel is included in the front matter of the auction catalogue; for a longer one, see Daniel Shaffer, "The Kaffel Index," *HALI* 217: 64–71.] I will simply pick some of my favorite lots from the sale and expound upon why I find them beautiful or meritorious, using only my own criteria for their selection. I've written this article well before the auction, so the monetary results [shown, including buyer's premiums, in the captions] will have had no influence on my opinions.

The Anatolian (Turkish) rugs in this sale are strong, with a number of very attractive examples being offered.

Old Anatolian rugs are not common, either in collections I am familiar with or in dealer inventories, so the chance to examine some really good ones, made before 1860 or so, is not to be missed.

Lot 15 (1) is an antique Konya village rug with a pumpkin-colored ground—a color that, in my experience, is only seen in weavings dating from the mid-nineteenth century or earlier. The rug also has a similarly early aubergine dye, and a row of Turkmen-like small medallions in its upper end border. As seen from across the room as one enters the Grogan & Company gallery, this rug has design spacing and a folk-art glow that reflect Mr. Kaffel's excellent taste as a collector.

Lot 11 (2) is a squarish and equally spacious Konya prayer rug that looks to be mid-nineteenth century or earlier. The upper central field is a clear yellow, and a lovely pinkish color appears in some minor design elements. The rug is in good condition, retaining decent pile and most of its original ends and sides.

A Central Anatolian Karapinar, lot 25 (3), features a design more traditionally Persian, with a central medallion, quarter-medallion corners, and a spacious floral border. The brown in the medallion and border wonderfully complements the salmon color of the field; the medallion seems to float on the field, with its spartan use of secondary ornamentation. Like lot 15, this rug grabs the eye and says, "Look closer at me—I am an exceptional old weaving."



1. Lot 15, Konya rug, \$38,400



2. Lot 11, Konya prayer rug, \$9,600



3. Lot 25, Karapinar rug, \$23,040

Lot 33 (4), an East Anatolian Kurdish long rug, offers the interested collector and rug enthusiast an opportunity to view and examine “hands-on” a genuinely old, museum-quality rug dating, in my opinion, to the eighteenth century. I hope anyone interested in the difference, in materials and construction, between truly old rugs and younger ones—say, a century-old Milas or Makri—has taken the opportunity to examine this rug, with its superb wool quality and its wonderful early aubergine and peach dyes. Certain rugs from the Jim Dixon Collection offered at Bonhams Skinner had the same glowing wool quality and brown dyes as are found in this carpet, which like them must belong to the so-called Golden Triangle group. [Ed.: Alberto Levi, “The Golden Triangle Syndrome,” *HALI* 214: 100–113, indeed includes and illustrates this Kaffel rug in his article; see p. 110, fig. 23.]

As for the Anatolian kilims, my choice for my home would be lot 37 (5), from Erzerum. Although not the oldest of the Kaffel rugs, it has about the most “modernist” composition one could ask for—just as colorful, interesting, and balanced as Picasso or one of his contemporaries might have produced.



4. Lot 33, East Anatolian Kurdish rug, \$35,200

(One design suggestion, though: I personally think a goat or two roaming in the verdant green, mountainous mihrab would have looked super.)



5. Lot 37,
Erzerum
prayer kilim,
\$5,440

Second on the auction menu are Caucasian rugs. As I noted before, Mr. Kaffel wrote a book on rugs from this area, so we may expect his own holdings to be wonderful. The one many collectors would find most interesting is lot 57 (6), a Star Kazak. I myself have seen only four of these rare rugs, this one being in the best condition. Even though its inscribed date puts it in the late nineteenth century, it has the narrow border typical of earlier Star Kazaks and has good, deep colors, especially its teal green. The opportunity to see and handle such a rarity up close up is invaluable.



6. Lot 57,
Star Kazak,
\$70,400



7 (left). Lot 74, Akstafa rug, \$12,800



8 (above). Lot 81, Marasali prayer rug, \$19,200



9 (top right). Lot 78, Shirvan prayer rug, \$17,920

10 (right). Lot 96, Alpan Kuba rug, \$11,520



Next on my list of favorites is lot 74 **(7)**, a carpet that the catalogue identifies as Daghestan, but that I would call Akstafa. Its narrow size and pastel palette are of an Akstafa type that might have come from a single weaving area or even family; the inverted-leaf main border, soft green outer border, and randomly yet expertly spaced tribal and geometric field elements are masterful, and the multicolored animal forms add a personal, exuberant touch. This is a joyful rug.

Lot 81 **(8)** is a finely drawn Shirvan Marasali in superb condition. Carefully organized, it lacks the extemporaneous quality of lot 74; its dyes are more saturated, and its field somewhat more crowded, pointing to a date at the end of the nineteenth century rather than earlier. Still, the botehs in the field are worthy of individual examination, and the gold “flames” surrounding many of them lend punch to the field composition. As a collector of eastern Caucasian weaving, I find this my favorite rug in the sale. I know of one other example nearly identical in every respect, including the two horizontal pairs of scissors flanking the top of the mihrab, so this is not a unique masterpiece of tribal art, but more likely the product of a workshop—the Caucasian version of, say, a Mohtashem Kashan.

Lot 78 **(9)** is another Shirvan prayer rug, and its inclusion here shows my fondness for these weavings. This example is of a rarely found type with multicolored diagonal

stripes covering the field and being intersected by the mihrab arch. Notably in this example, the stripes in the spandrels are aligned with those enclosed by the mihrab, a difficult feat of weaving. Again, this carpet also looks to have its original sides and ends. The brown-tinged mulberry hue of the outer borders is unusual and must have been hard to achieve.

The last Caucasian rug that caught my eye was one that I missed coming into the gallery but luckily noticed on my way out: an Alpan Kuba, lot 96 **(10)**, hung on an unlit wall opposite the entrance. It is in excellent condition, its indigo field radiant and its multi-cord selvages and macramé ends intact. As is noted in the sale catalogue, its main border design of stylized botehs is rare and possibly unique. This late-nineteenth weaving may not be quite old enough for some collectors, but I am not one of them. I like rugs in good condition, and this example has been superbly maintained.



11. Lot 142, Afshar rug, \$3,840



12–14 (clockwise from top left). Lot 168, Tekke “bird” asmalyk, \$52,480; lot 202, Salor trapping (jollar), \$83,200; lot 204, Salor trapping (jollar), \$64,000



15. Lot 171, Arabatchi chuval, \$8,320



16. Lot 176, Ersari asmalyk, \$15,360

Among Persian rugs, certainly the one with the most modern and free-form appearance is an ivory-ground Afshar, lot 142 (11). Its unrestrained design elements float about the field, seemingly in continual motion, unattached to any grid. Georges Braque could have put it in one of his paintings. The gold ground of its leaf-and-blossom main border is perfectly complemented by the blue of the flanking minor borders. Although the soft wool of older South Persian rugs is often worn, corroded, or eaten by moths, this example, which I would date to the 1870s, is in remarkably good condition.

Mr. Kaffel was not known to me as a Turkmen collector, but there are some wonderful Turkmen examples in this sale. Most enthusiasts will of course be interested in the bird asmalyk, lot 168 (12), or the two Salor jollars, lots 202 (13) and 204 (14). I myself favor Kaffel's Arabatchi chuval and Ersari asmalyk, both of which have well-organized and deliberately “unspontaneous” designs that appeal to my Turkmen-collecting taste.

The “three-gul” design of the Arabatchi, lot 171 (15), is not rare, but the Kaffel chuval is less dark than most other examples and has good pile and original sides. I like the monumental scale of its guls.

I find the Esari asmalyk, lot 176 (16), with its navy blue or green guls arranged in orderly diagonal rows, to be beautifully spaced. From across the room the red and white flowers within each gul are like little lights shining from the madder field, and the star border across the bottom adds an archaic touch. The weaver has “signed” her composition with a small comb near the top of the arch. The flatwoven finish of the upper end appears to be original; I would date this asmalyk to 1870 or before.

All in all, the Kaffel Collection sale presents an opportunity to view and handle far better rugs than are usually found at area auctions. Grogan & Company's hospitality and generosity of spirit in welcoming those of us interested in examining these fine weavings is to be commended.

Two Recent Single-Collection Auctions: What NERS Members Bought

At the December 4 Material Culture sale of rugs and textiles collected by Russell Fling, and again at Grogan & Company's January 21 auction of the Ralph and Linda Kaffel Collection, NERS members seized the opportunity to view and acquire items of respected and well-documented provenance. As shown here, members' new acquisitions span the breadth of the "rug belt."



1. Central Anatolian rug fragment, lot 30, Grogan & Company Kaffel sale (henceforth Grogan-Kaffel), \$4,160 (all prices include premium)
2. Central Anatolian rug fragment, lot 31, Grogan-Kaffel, \$2,048
3. Konya prayer rug, lot 11, Grogan-Kaffel, \$9,600
4. Central Anatolian yastik, lot 41, Grogan-Kaffel, \$4,480
5. Marasali prayer rug, lot 81, Grogan-Kaffel, \$19,200
6. Zeikhur prayer rug, lot 83, Grogan-Kaffel, \$4,800
7. Kazak prayer rug, lot 71, Grogan-Kaffel, \$7,680





8. Herati-pattern Perepedil rug, lot 90, Grogan-Kaffel, \$14,080

9. Shahsavan sumak bag, lot 111, Grogan-Kaffel, \$2,880

10. Moghan reverse-sumak band, lot 117, Grogan-Kaffel, \$2,304

11. Sauj Bulagh rug, lot 141, Grogan-Kaffel, \$9,600

12. Bijar saddle cover, lot 152, Grogan-Kaffel, \$2,560

13. Senna saddle cover, lot 154, Grogan-Kaffel, \$2,880

14. Afshar or Khamseh rug, lot 143, Grogan-Kaffel, \$10,240



15. Yomud appliqué asmalyk, lot 74, Material Culture Fling sale, \$812

16. Urban Lakai-style hat, lot 280, MC-Fling, \$437

17. Tajik dervish hat, lot 265, MC-Fling, \$1,375

18. Chinese saddle cover, lot 79, MC-Fling, \$1,375

May NERS Meeting (in Person)

Durant Kenrick House, Newton, MA, date TBA
Joel Greifinger, "All Tradition Is Change:
Scandinavian Peasant Textiles 1750–1900"

Photo Credits

p. 1: Shannon Bool **p. 2:** Tom Farnham (top left), Wikimedia Commons (top right, both) **pp. 3–5:** Margaret Squires (fig. 4 from Daniel Walker, *Flowers Underfoot*, p. 120)
pp. 6–9: Grogan & Company **pp. 10–12:** Grogan & Company (figs. 1–14), Material Culture (figs. 15–18) **p. 13:** Jim Sampson

Upcoming Rug and Textile Events

Auctions

Feb. 26–Mar. 7, Marlborough, MA (online only), Bonhams
Skinner, Fine Carpets & Rare Textiles
Apr. 24, London, Sotheby's, Arts of the Islamic World & India
Apr. 25, London, Christie's, Arts of the Islamic and Indian
Worlds Including Rugs and Carpets
June 1, Wiesbaden, Rippon Boswell, Major Spring Auction

Exhibitions

Until June 1, 2024, Washington, GWU/Textile Museum
Irresistible: The Global Patterns of Ikat

Symposia and Conferences

April 10–11, Washington, GWU/Textile Museum
Cotsen Textile Traces Colloquium: [re]Think Silk
May 14–16, Buellton, Cal., Santa Ynez Valley Marriott
Carpet and Textile Forum
June 6–9, Istanbul
15th International Conference on Oriental Carpets

In Memoriam: NERS Member Eva Jane Neumann Fridman



Eva at the 2018 NERS picnic, showing fellow members an embroidered-and-lacework Ukrainian towel acquired on her travels. It reads, “Good morning.”

We have belatedly learned of the death, on January 15, 2023, of a longtime and loyal NERS member, Eva Jane Neumann Fridman. Born in 1935, Eva graduated from Radcliffe College in 1956 and in 1958 earned a master’s degree in social studies and psychotherapy from Simmons College. For more than sixty years she practiced clinical social work, seeing her patients until near the end of her life.

In addition to her local profession, Eva developed a profound interest in shamanism, particularly as followed in post-Soviet Russia and Mongolia. An inveterate traveler, she took the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Buryatia, in southern Siberia, in 1996, and the following year earned a Ph.D. from Brown University; her dissertation was later published as *Sacred Geometry: Shamanism among the Buddhist Peoples of Russia* (2004). Following its publication, admiring reviewer Tristra Newyear wrote (in *Mongolian Studies*, 2006):

[Eva Fridman’s] research centers [on] a series of interviews conducted at that time in the field with shamans, healers, lamas, lay people, and relevant local academics, as well as participant observation in shaman and healing events, and a series of general historical overviews discussing the evolution of shaman practice, social structure, and Buddhism . . .

The most striking feature of Fridman’s work is her personal excitement, engagement, and enthusiasm for her subjects and her subject. Her conviction and devotion to her project shine through her accounts of her experiences and conversations with the various people she encountered in the course of her research. As a healer herself—Fridman is a psychotherapist—she clearly feels a refreshingly profound connection to her material.

Over the ensuing years, Eva also edited or contributed to other important books on shamanism—a scholarly career of which most if not all her fellow NERS members were unaware. As a member of our society, Eva unfailingly brought textiles acquired in her travels for explication at our annual picnic show-and-tells, doubtless with the gentle intention of broadening our knowledge beyond the traditional “rug belt.”

Surviving Eva are her two sons, Nathaniel and Jeffrey, her daughter-in-law, Olga, and three granddaughters. To them we offer sincere if delayed condolences.

Julia Bailey

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

The New England Rug Society is an informal, nonprofit 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

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