



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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www.ne-rugsociety.org

January Meeting: Dr. Mehemmet Deviren on Reproductions, Fakes, and Frauds and How to Spot Them

Antique rugs have always been prized. However, with the passage of the decades they have become ever harder to come by and more expensive to acquire. New productions of rugs using natural dyes and made from high quality materials have to some extent filled the gap. Still, connoisseurs of old rugs know that there is nothing like the look and feel of an old rug, with its colors mellowed by time and its wool made shiny by long use.

A cottage industry has recently arisen that attempts to make reproductions of antique rugs and kilims, complete with an old look and feel. Some of these rugs are made from wool unraveled from old kilims, some are rewoven onto old foundations that come from worn-out antique rugs, and all are distressed, polished and abraded so as to make them appear old. They are not necessarily made to deceive the unwary buyer and pass as old, but sometimes they do. Dr. Mehemmet Deviren will tell us about how these rugs are made and show slides that detail the methods used to achieve their old look. In addition to showing slides of these rugs and their production he will bring some actual examples of these "old" rugs for you to examine and handle. By the end of his presentation you will have some idea of what to look for in rugs when you are trying to tell old from new and real from fake.

At the speaker's request, no cameras may be brought to, nor photographs taken, at the meeting.

January/March Meeting Details

Date: Deviren: Friday, January 25

Rageth: Friday, March 14

Time: 7:30PM

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: \$5 guest fee for non-members

Directions:

From Rte. 95 (128) take the Trapelo Road West exit (#28B) in Waltham. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there is a white planter in the middle of the intersection.) Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 miles to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your right. **The parish house is on your left.**

From Rte. 2 take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270 degrees to cross Rte. 2 at the light.) Proceed 0.9 miles and you will see Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. **The parish house is on your right.**

Parking:

In back of the parish house plus along the street. It's OK to park in front of Bemis Hall **provided the building is dark and not in use.**

March Meeting: Jürg Rageth on Design Transitions of Central Asia, 600-1900 AD

The March meeting of the New England Rug Society will feature Jürg Rageth of Reichen, Switzerland, one of the world's most well-known authorities on dye analysis and carbon dating in oriental rugs.

Jürg is president of the Basel Rug Society, and the author of numerous papers and articles on rugs, textiles, dye analysis, and carbon dating. Before turning his attention to the scientific examination of rug history, Jürg was a dealer in antique Anatolian kilims.

Using examples of pre-10th century Central Asian textile designs, Jürg will illustrate a continuous design tradition that has lasted over 1000 years. His talk will focus on Salor carpet design, with examples from about 1500-1900 AD. He will compare these designs with examples of 9th century Central Asian textiles and textile representations taken from Sogdian wall paintings.

Jürg will support his presentation with evidence

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November Meeting: Mary Jo Otsea on The State of the Market By Jim Adelson

On November 16th, Mary Jo Otsea spoke to NERS about the auction market for Oriental Rugs. Mary Jo is Senior Vice President and Worldwide Director of the Carpet Department at Sotheby's, where she has been for 24 years. She commented that she's been there longer than her new assistant has been alive!

Mary Jo started her talk by saying "I'm only going to show you the star pieces ... why not?" She began with two of the most expensive carpets ever sold at Sotheby's: a Khorassan carpet that went for \$2.2M in December 2005, and a Louis XIV Savonnerie carpet that brought \$1.2M in 1992. Not all of her selections were as pricey—a piece that was deaccessioned by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1987 sold for \$16K.

Sotheby's recent benchmark was the Vojtech Blau auction in December 2006. This sale from the estate of the well-known New York dealer grossed almost \$5M for 106 lots. The top-selling carpet in that sale was a Mughal carpet hammered down for \$380K, and a Bakshaish carpet with dragon motifs not too far behind at \$330K.

Mary Jo offered a number of comments in conjunction with examples from the Blau sale. She indicated that "the market for classical carpets has seriously increased." On the other hand, she also observed that "we sell half of our rugs to people who are furnishing houses." The Blau auction was one of several examples that sales of well-known individual collections bring out more energetic bidding than similar pieces in regular carpet auctions. To quote Mary Jo, "the Blau factor brought in a lot of people ... they weren't even carpet buyers ... just buying what they thought was the very best." As illustration, she showed a Kazak that sold for \$60K in the Blau sale, and another (in this reviewer's view, nicer one) that sold for \$15K a short time earlier. She also presented two Shirvan Marasali prayer rugs, with the Blau example selling for \$90K and the other one for \$25K, although in this case the designs were different, and the Blau piece was extremely finely woven.

Mary Jo turned to examples outside of the Blau sale to make other points. Aside from classical carpets and very top-end pieces, market results have appeared flat over recent years. For example, a Ferahan carpet



Khorassan carpet, detail (\$2.2M)



Kazaks: Blau (left, \$60K), other (right, \$15K)

has sold three times at Sotheby's—in 1985 for \$25K, in 1997 for \$27K, and again in 2004 for \$25K. She also illustrated the impact of color on sale results by means of two Caucasian Karagashli rugs with similar designs: one with light-blue background sold for \$50K in 1999 and again for the same amount in 2005, while a dark-blue background piece sold for just under \$6K (see photos on next page). Of course price reflects different quality levels, even within a single design type. Mary Jo talked about a number of Star Kazaks that Sotheby's has sold: two lesser, more crowded examples going for \$8K and \$15K respectively, while a more spacious example sold for \$60K in 1990. Also in 1990 Sotheby's achieved a record for this rug type with a Star

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November Meeting

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Kazak that brought \$286K. Mary Jo stated that “provenance does contribute a lot,” with a Mughal carpet in the Getty sale that fetched \$270K. She has observed a “frenzy in an auction that has less to do with the property than the provenance.”

The presentation concluded with some comments on Sotheby’s carpet policies and recommendations on buying/selling carpets at auction. Mary Jo indicated that Sotheby’s has a minimum expected lot value of \$5K for carpets. She said that she tries to construct balanced sales including pieces from different weaving regions, and also with a mix of pieces intended for collectors and for decorative uses. She believes there is still a market for collector carpets, but cautioned that there are some pieces that don’t do well at auctions—those that are too fragile for the level of handling expected in previews, and those that don’t photograph well. She finished with guidance for the audience. To buy at auction, all that is needed is to come and bid, or to leave bids or place them over the phone. To sell a piece, Sotheby’s will naturally need to see the piece in advance and agree on estimates and reserves with the consignor. The estimates are based on sales of similar pieces, although Mary Jo also wants to encourage bidding by making the estimates a little enticing, convincing prospective bidders that pieces are obtainable. When a piece sells, Sotheby’s takes its commission and pays the consignor 35 days after the auction.

Mary Jo fielded many questions after the presentation. The first question was about adjusting future expectations after an unusually high or low price for a single piece; Mary Jo indicated that she looks for more than one result to convince herself that a given price level is not a fluke. Another attendee asked her why there was only one Turkmen piece in the current catalog, to which she replied that you can’t conjure them up if they aren’t there. She was asked to compare Grogan’s and Skinner’s, to which she responded “I’m not going to go there—I’ll let you judge.” An audience member who had attended Sotheby’s auctions in New York asked about nearly empty sales rooms, with the majority of the action in absentee and phone bidding, and Mary Jo confirmed that in-person attendance/bidding is light. She



Blue-ground Karagashlis: light (\$50K), dark (\$6K)

was asked about bidding on lots herself, and she indicated that laws vary in different venues, but in New York she’s prohibited from bidding personally on a weaving that they’re auctioning.

Another question covered the expenses for the consignor if the piece doesn’t sell; Mary Jo clarified that only catalog illustration and insurance expenses would apply—there is no commission for unsold lots. She also remarked that 35%-40% of lots do go unsold, on average, in Sotheby’s regular carpet sales, while single-collection sales like the Blau sale in 2006 and the Thompson sale in 1993 sold almost every lot. A subsequent question asked what type of person buys the most expensive rugs, and Mary Jo replied that it’s often not rug people, but very wealthy individuals who want what they believe to be the best of type. A follow-up question asked whether these “non-ruggies” work with consultants, and she indicated that some do use consultants, while others choose to decide on their own.

An attendee asked whether Sotheby’s is starting to see buyers from new areas, like Russia and China, and Mary Jo responded “not yet,” explaining that they’d seen a few buyers from these countries for other types of items, but not for Oriental carpets. A different area of questioning explored how Sotheby’s determines whether a rug has been previously stolen, and she said that detections have been coincidental—there are no central records that they can check.

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November Meeting

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Another attendee asked whether rug restoration increases or decreases value. Mary Jo indicated that it depends on the quality of the restoration. She also added that she has pulled some rugs from the sale if it was discovered during previews that they had too much restoration.

The inquisitive audience continued questioning, asking what percent of sales go to collectors vs. dealers, and to European vs. US buyers. Mary Jo replied that most high-end sales go to private individuals, and the geographical split for buyers is approximately 50% to the US, and 50% to Europe and the Middle East. Another attendee asked if they made a conscious decision between offering a piece in New York or in London, and Mary Jo described a recent change in London's approach, where they've noticed that they only get certain types of buyers at carpet sales, and have therefore moved some pieces to more widely attended general Islamic sales in London. However, they generally don't move pieces between New York and London.

The next questioner inquired whether Mary Jo thought that the Sotheby's name commands a premium at auction. Mary Jo responded that it's the consignor's

identity, rather than that of the auction house, that can command the premium. The last question concerned whether fakes were becoming more prevalent, and Mary Jo said that they are seeing an increased number, with suzanis and Qashqa'i pieces providing the greatest numbers of forgeries.

After the multitude of questions, several members showed pieces for Mary Jo to evaluate for possible sale at Sotheby's. The first piece was a Northwest Persian carpet, which she attributed to Serab or Hamadan, and estimated at \$800-\$1200, so it would fall well below Sotheby's minimum. The second piece was an East Anatolian or Kurdish carpet with a stepped diamond design and a number of restorations. Mary Jo remarked that "it's not for Sotheby's." Next came a Shirvan prayer rug with botehs, for which Mary Jo observed "not for Sotheby's, but getting closer." A Heriz followed—still not for Sotheby's. The last proffered rug was a huge Kazak with a very graphic design. Mary Jo dated it to the 1910s or 1920s, but said "that will take a great photograph," estimated it for \$7K-\$10K, and said they'd be glad to have it.

NERS offers many thanks to Mary Jo Otsea for sharing her examples and insights with us!

Member Profile: Carl Strock—Pieces for His Soul **By Ann Nicholas**

Over Carl Strock's garage door is an architectural ornament from the Batak people of Sumatra. Two living room walls are lined with books and the remaining wall space is adorned with textiles and calligraphy. Nestled in a corner of the stairway to the second floor is a funerary pole figure from the Montagnard people of Vietnam. The second floor hallway is lined with ornate sheets of calligraphy interspersed with textiles woven by his mother.

If a fire threatened his house, what would he want to save? "This textile and the Montagnard figure," Carl replies without hesitation. The textile, a pre-Columbian weaving from the Sihuas culture of Southern Peru, is prominently displayed in the living room [1] (see pictures on next page). "It has been carbon-dated to 200-300AD," he reveals, "but it is its timeless dazzling pattern of beautiful fluidity that fascinates me endlessly."

The Montagnard funerary sculpture [2] reflects his Vietnam experience. "I was opposed to the War," he explains, "but I felt it was important to do more than just picket and demonstrate. I joined the American Friends Service Committee and was assigned to the International Red Cross and lived among the Montagnards in Vietnam's central highlands. Their village entrances were guarded by funerary poles, tall wooden posts with carvings at the top.

"One day I came upon a deserted village, and I thought about taking one," he remembers. "But I realized that would be too much like the looting and pillaging of war, so I left them standing. I often thought about these haunting figures." After he returned to the States a dealer told him they were rare market items costing maybe \$10,000, and he doubted he would ever have

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Member Profile: Carl Strock

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one. Much later he saw one at a decorator's warehouse in New York City. Asked about it, the dealer replied, "I'm asking \$240, but you can have it for \$180."

Carl's wife, Pearl, is from the Philippines. He delights in displaying objects that were used in Philippine villages a generation ago and asking guests to guess how they were used. One large clay vessel, which my husband, Rich, likens to Marcel Duchamp's Dada period urinal, was the brazier that Pearl's parents used for cooking before they had a stove. Her parents vacillate between amusement and thinking he's a little nuts for wanting to have these old objects. He understands their feelings: "It would be like someone asking to display your rusty old lawn mower as a piece of art."

Carl is a columnist for the Schenectady (New York) Gazette and lives in Saratoga Springs. He has also been a journalist in Southeast Asia. A member of NERS since the early 1990s, he drives over three hours to attend meetings. "Being a member has increased my knowledge of textiles and allowed me to understand weavings through other people's eyes. Writing is another important way I learn and understand things," explaining his motivation for writing articles for both the now-defunct *Oriental Rug Review* and *HALI*, including one on Peruvian textiles in *HALI* 96 (1998).

Our members know Carl for the pre-Columbian textiles and Persian weavings he brings, but he collects many things, including calligraphy from non-Western cultures. At first glance they seem to be just stunning graphic patterns [3]. Then as he identifies them, "This one is Burmese, that one Tibetan, and here Arabic," it becomes evident that the patterns are indeed writing.

"I find the patterns that people use to represent the texture and rhythm of speech is as intriguing as speech itself," he says. "When I was a child, my mother had a large loom in the living room. I often watched her weave and was delighted by the patterns she made. Today patterns still fascinate me, whether they are woven like textiles and baskets or drawn as words and thoughts."

In his dining room are shelves holding baskets from the Philippines, many woven by the Bontoc people of the highlands. "I am captivated by their patterns and uses," he explains. "This one is for storing rice, that one



Top:
[1] Carl Strock with
Pre-Columbian
weaving; Sihuas
culture, Southern
Peru

Left:
[2] Montagnard
funerary pole
figure; Vietnam
central highlands



Member Profile: Carl Strock

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for carrying a rooster to a cock fight, and here is a *koppit*.” He has several *koppits*, nested sets of woven pouches men use like purses [4].

Once when he and Pearl were traveling on a bus in a primitive part of the Philippines, he spotted an old man carrying a wonderful *koppit*. At Carl’s urging, Pearl approached the man and asked to buy it. The man shook his head, and even when she upped the offer, he still shook his head. Finally as the bus was arriving at its destination, Carl asked her to try one more time. By this time the man was annoyed, and pointing to his *koppit* said, “Antique!”

Looming in the dining room corner is a large mask from the male puberty rites of a Baining Mountain tribe of New Britain Island. “Thirty years ago I had the opportunity to observe this rite.” He continues, “As part of the ceremony, the boys make these five-foot high masks out of bark cloth, light a large bonfire, and dance around it wearing only a mask and a sheath covering their penis. A four inch propeller dangles from the sheath’s end. When the ceremony is over, the masks are thrown into the fire and consumed. As it ended I asked one boy if he would sell his mask for five dollars. He did, but his sheath cost me another fifty cents.”

Is there a theme to the pieces displayed throughout the house? “Well, my collection is eclectic, but there is one. I think Lawrence Kearney said it best—“These are the things my soul would wear.””

But there is one room where he has nothing displayed. It is decorated with a chintz-covered sofa, lacy pillows, vases, and family pictures. “That’s Pearl’s living room. The secret to a lasting marriage,” he confides, “is having two living rooms.”



Top: [3] Maghribi (North African form of Arabic) calligraphy

Bottom:[4] Man’s personal carrying pouch (*koppit*); Bontoc people, Philippines



What in the World?

WHAT IN THE WORLD? is a new feature highlighting photographs related to rugs or textiles. Dig through your photos of trips, textile meetings, exhibitions, and other serendipitous moments and share them with NERS members.

It is quite simple to participate. Send a digital image of your picture with a short paragraph explaining what the picture is, where it was taken, and why it appeals to you, to Yon Bard at doryon@rcn.com. The deadline for the next newsletter is February 15.

If your picture is not in digital format, Yon or Mark Hopkins can scan a photograph or a 35mm slide. For other questions, contact Ann Nicholas at annierich@att.net or call at 617-241-5387.

We're looking forward to your contributions!

Ann, Mark, and Yon

Here are our first two examples.



Definitely Mothproof

Italian artist Pietro Barzanti sculpted this fringed oriental carpet on the base of a five foot marble statue that decorates the Italian gardens of the Vanderbilt Mansion in Hyde Park, NY. Created about 1900 when oriental carpets were all the rage, it reminds us of how art reflects its time. Carpet attribution anyone?

Richard Blumenthal and Ann Nicholas

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based on art historical research and with results from radiocarbon dating and dye analyses. This combination of design analysis and scientific method shows a design progression that encompasses almost two millennia.

In addition to Jürg's talk on Central Asian designs, which he titles "Sagdak to Salor," he will also describe



Our Lady of Slim Pickin's

In the steamy equatorial town of Nauta, nestled in the Peruvian lowlands on the Marañon River, one of the Amazon's great western tributaries, I searched in vain for textile art. The cliché says, find indigenous decorative arts where the climate is warm and the living is easy. But here among the Cocama-Cocamilla people who have inhabited the Amazonian riverbanks for many centuries, there were no textiles, no carvings, no jewelry, no baskets, nothing except this concrete painted lady towering over the town's central park on a concrete fountain that didn't work. Finally in the open market I managed to find two colorful samples of wearable textile art. One said "Nike" and the other said "Boston Red Sox." If you're ever looking for textiles in Peru, head for the highlands.

Mark Hopkins

March Meeting

the methodology and limitations of carbon dating for textiles. The talk was a big hit at the most recent ICOC—so don't miss it. His talk at the 2003 10th ICOC in Washington DC, *Dating the Dragon & Phoenix Fragment*, was also outstanding. Members are encouraged to bring examples of early Central Asian textiles and rugs for discussion.



The Grogan Sale

By Yon Bard

I attended my first rug auction at Grogan's; it was the sale that accompanied Boston's ACOR 1 in 1992. Michael Grogan continued to hold fine rug sales for several years, but then dropped out of this business. It wasn't until 2006, with ACOR 8 in Boston, that Grogan returned to this arena. He seems to have decided to hold one sale every year and a half or so, and the second one was held in Dedham on December 10. Though the live audience was not very large, quite a few NERS members were in attendance. Even the long absent German dealer Eberhart Hermann made an appearance, snatching up several delicious plums. However, as seems to be the general case these days, many of the lots went to phone bidders. Indeed, a well known dealer or collector would arouse competitive interest if bidding in person—he or she is much safer bidding anonymously.

I'll present my personal take on a few of the pieces that I found interesting. The prices given are the hammer prices, not including the 15% buyer's premium. Pre-sale estimates are in parentheses. The picture legends are quotations from the catalog.

Among the few Turkmen pieces, lot 11, an enigmatic small trapping of unusual design, was the most interesting. Described merely as "Turkoman" in the cata-

log, it was deemed to be Yomud by some observers, but I think it's most likely Tekke, the evidence being the tight weave and thinness of the fabric. It fetched \$7,500 (2,000-4,000). The other Turkmen of interest, lot 72, was the very beautiful but fragmentary Yomud chuval which had been exhibited at ACOR 8 (www.nerugsociety.org/gallery/acor-turkmen/acor-turknavframe.htm). It brought a disappointing \$2,800 (3,000-4,000).

The sale's "flagship" was a rare Persian garden carpet dated 1806 (lot 65; see picture on back page). It was over 19 feet long, and brought \$70,000 (30,000-50,000). It would undoubtedly have done even better had there not been areas of significant wear. The other stars of the show were two East Caucasians, a yellow ground prayer rug (lot 62) and a light-blue ground Shirvan (lot 79C)—each selling for a well deserved \$70,000 (20,000-40,000). On the other hand, the \$20,000 (10,000-15,000) brought by a Soumac bagface (lot 14) seemed on the high side.

A small Baluch prayer rug (lot 37) had a much tighter weave, satiny wool, and delicate handle, than is usual for this breed. It is hard to imagine it as a tribal

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Lot 11: "Rare Turkoman trapping"



Lot 37: "Fine Balouch prayer rug"



Lot 57: "Konya rug" (withdrawn)



Lot 62: "Fine and important Caucasian yellow ground prayer rug"

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Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, e-mail doryon@rcn.com



Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2007/8 Meetings:

April 11: The Lind-Sinanians on Armenian textiles (at ALMA)

May: Picnic & Show and Tell (date and location to be determined).

Auctions:

Skinner, Boston, 4/10

Grogan, Dedham, 3/2 (incl. rugs)

Christie's, London, 4/10

(Many auction houses appear not to have finalized their 2008 sale dates).

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Textile Heirlooms from the Indus Valley, from the collection of NERS members Tom and Peggy Simons, Worcester Art Museum, until 2/8/08.

Ahead of his time: The Collecting Vision of George Hewitt Meyers, The Textile Museum, Washington, DC, until 2/17/08.

For Tent and Trade: Masterpieces of Turkmen Weaving, DeYoung Museum, San Francisco, until 9/21/08

Overlapping Realms: Arts of the Islamic World and India, 900-1900, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA, until 2/10/08.

Tours

Bucharest - Transylvania - Budapest: Ottoman Carpets and Romanian kilims, 5/8-5/17; study tour organised by Alberto Boralevi and Stefano Ionescu. Stefano has supplied the following description:

“This tour starts in Bucharest, crosses Transylvania and reaches Budapest allowing us to see almost 300 Ottoman rugs preserved in the Lutheran churches and the museums of the region. We will also have a chance to become familiar with the Romanian flatweaves, the so called ‘scoartze.’

“During the tour we will have the chance to meet Lutheran pastors, collectors, museum curators, scholars and artisans and will visit some of the major attractions of the region: fortified churches, palaces, castles, medieval towns and uncontaminated nature. The program will be intense but well balanced, avoiding tiresome journeys. Hotels and restaurants have been chosen with particular care, in an attempt to escape the effects of globalization. As on previous tours we will have the pleasure of being guided through the rug collections by Alberto Boralevi, whose charm and knowledge of the Anatolian textile production are beyond question.

“Please contact me for any further details at (+39) 3488565778 or info@transylvanianrugs.com.” Information is also available at the website www.transylvanianrugs.com.

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. Its meetings are held six to eight times a year. Annual membership dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained on our website www.ne-rugsociety.org, or by writing to **New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773**, calling Mark Hopkins at 781-259-9444, or emailing him at mopkins@verizon.net.

NERS 2007/8 Steering Committee:

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The Grogan Sale

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product; yet, whatever suspicions one might have concerning its provenance, it was undoubtedly an object of beauty. It sold for \$9,000 (8,000-12,000).

A piece that aroused much attention at the pre-

views was an “early 19th century Konya” with unusual design (lot 57; see photo on page 8). Unfortunately, doubts apparently arose about its authenticity, and it was withdrawn from the auction. Perhaps it’s a fit subject to be discussed at our January meeting!



Lot 65: “Rare Persian Garden Carpet”



New England Rug Society
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