

## **JAYRAN - Article by Mary Hill**

*(freelance writer who lives with her husband in Tehran)*

*Jayran: Tribal Women and the Chanteh is a remarkable book. Chantehs are small woven bags that are used to keep the personal affects of tribal weavers. Many who know much about tribal carpets and gelims are still unfamiliar with the Chanteh. Mr. Homayounpour has used a brilliantly innovative approach to introduce this most personal type of tribal weaving. The author uses the particulars of one such imagined tribal weaver who is introduced in the text in her own voice. The ruminations of this woman, Jayran, pull the reader deeply into the experience of tribal life and so contextualize the environment in which such treasures are produced.*

*Although not a carpet weaver myself, I did weave one very small carpet and so have the personal experience of tying the knots of a carpet and watching it reveal itself. It is very tedious work which takes time and I appreciated Mr. Homayounpour's discussion of the meditative mind of Jayran as daydreaming is a part of any such work.*

*Although the weavings in this book are obviously all done in a tribal context as opposed to a dark workshop weaving environment, Mr. Homayounpour is deeply sympathetic also to the difficulties of life for tribal women. We are reminded that these women lacked basic rights, were inferior to the fathers, husbands and brothers around them and led lives filled with exhausting work from morning until night. But he also succeeds in revealing the vitality of their life. There is a directness, a vivacity and a freshness to the experiences that he describes. It is intriguing that all of these characteristics are all part of modern art as well and indeed some of the weavings look very modern.*

*The attention to detail in the book is also noteworthy. There is no slip cover. The matte cover photograph shows a startlingly vivid, nearly life-sized head of Jayran in front of a weaving with her arm threading some wool. It is a beautiful cover and somehow looks as if, like a beautiful well worn carpet, it will age well. In the photograph, Jayran is written in wool at the top, although I must admit that I like the way her name looked in Farsi better as it is shown in the Farsi portion of the book. In general, the photography is excellent. The texture of the wools is palpable and the quality of the Chantehs shows superb workmanship*

*So many ethnographies have been written about tribal people by anthropologists who record with such detail what they see. And although much information has been saved about cultures that won't last, the flavor of their lives is often missing in these accounts. It is this flavor of life in a tribal community that comes through in this book. A similar kind of rendering can be observed in another book about the Lur people of Iran written by the anthropologist Erika Friedl called Women of Deh Koh. The author also allows these women to speak in their own voices about their lives. There is no actual village called Deh Koh either. Like Jayran in Mr. Hamayounpour's book, it is an amalgamation of many. Because it is an intimate portrait, it leaves a genuine memory.*

*This book has obviously been a labor of love for the author who has been very successful in sharing the depth of his love and learning for this art. Although the reader does learn things about designs and motifs, dyes used and other technical information, it is the feeling for the weaver's life experience that this book manages to convey which make these very intimate weavings so special.*