

North Khorasan's Kormanj nomads preserve tradition of Jajim weaving

Iranica Desk

Among the colorful and richly patterned handwoven textiles of the Kormanj nomads of North Khorasan Province, one familiar and enduring name stands out: Jajim. A thick, striped textile related to kilim and pallas, Jajim is known locally in the Kormanji Kurdish dialect as "Jajam." It is a legacy of generations who combined wool, color and patience to create a warm and durable floor covering while weaving some of their beliefs and aspirations into its patterns.

Jajim weaving is listed as part of Iran's intangible cultural heritage and is now recognized as one of the traditional indigenous crafts of the province.

Unlike many other woven textiles, Jajim is made by joining narrow woven strips. Its warp consists of fine, colorful wool threads that are more numerous than those used in a kilim's foundation, while a single-colored wool weft passes through them. After beating and pressing, the threads form a strong and durable textile, according to chn.ir.

The use of natural cotton and wool fibers gives Jajim strength and resistance to wear, making it a long-standing companion of



nomadic life. It was used to make saddle bags, grain and fodder bags, floor coverings, rugs, carpets and bedding wraps, as well as warm outer garments during migration. Jajim was therefore not merely a household textile but a practical item designed for a life of movement and migration. Its form also made it easy to load onto horses and camels.

The patterns found in North Khorasan Jajims emerged from this way of life. The region's Kormanj communities, who traditionally lived among rolling hills and were known for their peaceful and conservative way of life, favored diagonal lines and deep, muted colors. Their highly distinctive abstract designs

were created largely by women who may have had no formal knowledge of aesthetics but produced remarkable patterns through creativity, skill and patience.

Small checkered flowers, geometric motifs and designs inspired by plants and animals each tell a story about the beliefs, ideas and traditions of the community. These motifs have been passed down from one generation to another, often within families.

The exact origins of Jajim weaving remain unclear, partly because textiles are not durable archaeological materials and rarely survive over long periods. However, based on old



Jajims preserved by local residents and interviews with community members, the tradition can be traced back at least five generations.

In the past, Jajim weaving was one of the most important crafts practiced by Kormanj women and girls. Families would order Jajims and prayer rugs

every year, whether for household use, as souvenirs or as gifts for newlyweds and items for their dowries.

Jajims were used as coverings for traditional Korsi heaters during winter nights, as covers for mattresses and quilts in affluent households, and as partitions between women's and men's gathering spaces. They were an essential part of Kurdish households. The weavers were mainly housewives and girls who used their free time alongside their daily activities to produce Jajims from pure wool, using colorful handspun yarn and carefully arranged patterns. Production in nomadic

and rural communities was largely seasonal and part-time. Most of the textiles were made for household use, although some were exchanged or sold in local markets, contributing to family income. The self-sufficiency of nomadic communities was reflected in these textiles as well.

Despite this long tradition, Jajim weaving has experienced ups and downs over the past two or three decades. As the traditional use of Jajim, particularly as a quilt and bedding cover, declined, weaving temporarily lost popularity. Renewed public interest and the development of new applications, however, have helped revive the craft.

Today, Jajim is used to make wall hangings, bed-

spreads, saddles, bags, furniture covers, car-seat covers, floor coverings, bread cloths, prayer rugs, cushions, slippers, prayer mats, socks, bedding wraps, tablecloths and a variety of garments. These new uses have helped revive the craft and create new demand for Jajim products.

Nevertheless, the craft continues to face challenges. A number of dedicated workshops are working to preserve traditional Jajim weaving, but the craft still suffers from limited demand. When there is no market for a handmade product, production naturally declines, while relatively few institutions or individuals provide sustained support.

At a time when almost any pattern can be reproduced quickly by machines, there is increasingly little room for traditional handmade crafts. The survival of this valuable heritage may ultimately depend on renewed public appreciation for the work of artisans and the stories embedded in these textiles. By purchasing and using Jajim in its new forms, consumers can help keep this traditional craft alive and prevent it from disappearing into the fabric of forgotten traditions.

Reading Room

Jalaluddin Homaei; a man who wrote Isfahan

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To understand the spirit of Isfahan, it is not enough to admire the intricate tilework of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque or listen to the rushing waters of the Zayandeh Rud River. One must also read the words of a man who devoted much of his life to documenting the city. Jalaluddin Homaei was not merely a literary scholar, historian or jurist. With deep affection for his birthplace, he explored Isfahan's neighborhoods, architecture and cultural heritage and sought to preserve the city's character through his writing. In Iran's cultural and literary history, Jalal al-Din Homaei is remembered not only as a scholar, jurist, historian and poet, but also as one of the prominent chroniclers of Isfahan. Born and raised in the city, he developed a deep intellectual and emotional attachment to it that remained with him throughout his life.

Homaei, who wrote poetry under the pen name "Sana," was born in the land of the Zayandeh



Takht-e Foulad Cemetery
Isfahan

Rud and grew up amid the city's historic neighborhoods and distinctive architecture. For him, Isfahan was more than a birthplace or a geographical location; it was central to his worldview and intellectual development. He walked through the city's old neighborhoods, studied at its historic religious schools and lived in an intellectual environment shaped by centuries of scholarship. Isfahan had been home to such prominent figures as Sheikh Baha'i, Mir Damad and Mulla Sadra, whose intellectual legacy continued to influence the city. Asghar Montazerolqaei, a professor and researcher

of history, told IRNA that Homaei was born in 1899 in Isfahan's Paqaleh neighborhood, in a family home where art, mirror work, calligraphy and religious poetry were deeply rooted. Although Homaei's family had roots in Shiraz, a city renowned for its literary tradition, he developed his intellectual and scholarly identity in Isfahan. Through his major work "History of Isfahan," he sought to document the city that had long been a center of scholarship and the arts.

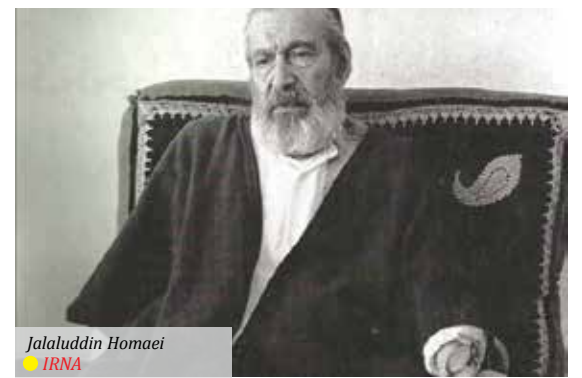
Homaei died in Tehran in the summer of 1980, after spending many years in the capital, where he taught students who later became prominent fig-

ures in Iranian culture. "Jalal al-Din Homaei's story and that of Isfahan is a story of deep attachment," Montazerolqaei said. After his death, Homaei's body was returned to his birthplace and, with great respect, buried in Takht-e Foulad, allowing him to rest in the city about which he had written so extensively.

If Isfahan's architecture represents the harmony of geometry, light and color in the material world, Homaei's scholarship reflected a similar harmony in the realm of ideas and words. His writings brought together history, literature, religion and philosophy, much as the city's architecture brings together diverse artistic and intellectual traditions. Homaei studied at the Ni-mavard School in Isfahan, one of the city's historic religious schools and a surviving example of its rich architectural heritage. There, he studied Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy and developed the scholarly foundation that would shape his later career. Living and studying in Isfahan's historic envi-

ronment also deepened his understanding of the relationship between form and meaning. This perspective was later reflected in his scholarly editions and studies of classical mystical texts, including works by al-Ghazali and Rumi. Isfahan taught Homaei that beauty lies not only in appearance but also in the relationship between different elements. His intellectual interests similarly ranged across a broad spectrum, from jurisprudence and philosophy to poetry, music and astronomy, while his devotion to the revered Imams remained a central part of his worldview.

Hossein Masjedi, an associate professor of Persian literature at Payam-e Noor University in Isfahan, said that Homaei, who used "Sana" as his poetic pen name, was an important representative of the literary return movement in Isfahan. His poetry and chronograms reflected both the literary traditions of the city and his personal attachment to it. Masjedi said Homaei completed his portrayal of Isfahan through both prose and poetry. His prose was not limited to academ-



Jalaluddin Homaei
IRNA

ic historical writing; he combined historical information with narrative and personal experience, making his accounts more vivid and accessible. Homaei's scholarly interests extended from jurisprudence and philosophy to mathematics, astronomy and calligraphy. Yet one of the strongest connections he maintained throughout his life was with Isfahan and, in particular, Takht-e Foulad, where he was eventually buried. Takht-e Foulad was more than a cemetery to Homaei. He regarded it as a repository of the city's history, art, mysticism and calligraphic tradition. He frequently walked among its graves and studied the lives of the scholars, mystics and prominent figures buried there.

Homaei understood that Isfahan's cultural significance lay not only in its palaces, mosques and bridges but also in the generations of scholars and artists associated with the city. He documented the lives of many prominent figures buried at Takht-e Foulad, helping preserve a record of Isfahan's intellectual and cultural history. His attachment to the cemetery and to Isfahan reflected a broader commitment to preserving the city's cultural memory. Through his prose and poetry, Homaei passed that memory on to later generations and helped ensure that the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Isfahan would remain part of Iran's cultural record.