Origin and Migration of the Bakhtiari

- The Bakhtiari entered Iran from Syria during the 14th century.
- The name, Bakhtiari, may have described the administrative region and over time, the inhabitants, originally nomadic pastoralists.
- Tribal khans were well established by the 16th century and responsible for carrying out government wishes in exchange for land, grazing rights, and the ability to levy duty on goods and passage across their territory.
- Migration was central to social, economic, and cultural life, and Mal describes a nomadic encampment, part of the complex social structure of the Bakhtiari confederation. Mal also translates as property.

Structure and Final Thoughts

- Tablet weaving was one of the oldest significant textile traditions. Its practice spans centuries, continents and cultures. Tablet woven bands explore the intersection of cultural memory, ritual practice, and technical skill passed from generation to generation.

The Bakhtiari and the Horse

- Horses featured prominently in the history, art, and poetry of Persian culture and identity.
- Evidence suggests the Zagros plains inhabitants were among the first to breed, train and export horses.
- Taxes were paid by the Bakhtiari in horses/mules, the Qashqai in sheep, the Shahsavans in camels.
- Sixty percent of Bakhtiari territory is mountaneous, horses and mules were materially essential to migration, movement, and prosperity.

Mal Band Technique

- Mal Bands were used to secure property to horses/mules during migration.
- Warps were threaded through holes in soulah/dual (square leather cards). Bakhtiari cards or tablets were made of stiff leather, often from old shoes.
- The tablets are turned ¼ to ½ turn, often singularly, creating complex patterns. Technique and design passes from generation to generation.
- A sword shaped chough (wooden beater) compacts the weft shots.
- The Luri-Bakhtiari call this horizontal ground loom weaving, verves.

Dyestuffs

- Indigo dyeing is complex and performed by dedicated village dyers. Indigo is dyed on gray or brown wool, creating rich, dark tones.
- Rutan (powdered madder root) is dyed with an alum mordant, left in the sun for 10 days, running stream for 12 days, and then sun for 3-4 days.
- Pust-e-anar (pomegranate skins) dyed with an iron mordant produces black.

The Bakhtiari Mal Band

- The migration is central to Bakhtiari social and economic life and serves to define what it means to be Bakhtiari, it is virtually a ritualistic act.