

# IRAN SCENES

## Door knockers, Abyaneh



Picture: Jeremy Thomas

The village of Abyaneh is one of the most fascinating in Iran. At the end of a valley road, some distance from the main highway, and at some altitude, it's another place where time seems to have stood still. Buildings are made from mud brick, and lanes are far too narrow and twisted to allow access to motor vehicles. Its relative isolation has maintained significant cultural differences from the rest of Iran, too: many villagers still wear traditional dress, and the local dialect uses words going back 1,500 years to the days of the Sassanid Empire.

Particularly curious is the detail in the photograph—a wooden door with two different types of knocker. The one on the right is much heavier, and makes a deeper sound than the lighter one on the left. They date from times when men and women were kept apart. Men went out to work and to conduct business, while women stayed at home with their children and other females, and in fact seldom left the house. Visitors would use the appropriate knocker to announce their arrival—men the larger one, women the smaller—the distinctive sounds ensuring that only someone of the same gender as the caller opened the door!

Attitudes towards women in Iran remain very different from what we are used to in the West. The wearing of *hijab* (including the headscarf, compulsory everywhere outdoors for all females over the age of nine) is enforced by on-street 'fashion police' who require ladies showing too much hair to adjust their dress. One finds oneself with mixed feelings about such things. A culture placing great emphasis on the importance of personal modesty appeals greatly, and the gross sexual immorality of Western society is simply not visible in Iran. Yet at the same time it is clear that women often remain regarded as second-class citizens. Only the coming Kingdom will strike the right balance between high moral values and true equality in the sight of God, in Iran as in the rest of the world.—*Jeremy Thomas*