

IRAN SCENES

Jameh mosque, Yazd

Picture: Jeremy Thomas



Finally in this series, a word about Islam. Iran is unique in being the world's only Shia Muslim state, all other Muslim countries being from the majority Sunni sect. The word 'Shia' is an abbreviation of an Arabic phrase meaning 'follower of Ali'. Ali was Mohammed's son-in-law, and it is to him that leadership of the Islamic faith is deemed to have passed on Mohammed's death. The circumstances surrounding this disputed succession appear to have been more about politics than anything, and doctrinal differences between the Shias and Sunnis are not great. They hold the same core beliefs, and most would regard all Muslims as brothers in the faith.

Central to Islamic life is the mosque, basically a hall in which Muslims can gather for prayer, but also a centre for religious education and jurisdiction. Mosques are open not only for formal religious services but at other times too. They are often beautiful buildings, with their own attractive style of architecture and decoration, free from the images of the human form so often found in other places of worship. The minarets on this mosque in Yazd rise to forty-eight metres, and are covered in exquisite glazed tiles dating back to the fifteenth century.

Although Islam recognises Jesus as a prophet, it has no place for him as Son of God, a concept which it finds objectionable, and which is therefore a major obstacle to a Muslim being converted to Christianity. If John's vision of the star falling from heaven to unloose locusts from the bottomless pit (Rev. 9:1-3) is a symbol of Muslim armies being used by God against part of the 'Christian' world, then it is an accurate depiction indeed of the speed and overwhelming numbers with which they came, finally conquering Constantinople, the last remnant of the Roman Empire. It was specifically for idolatry that God's judgements came (v. 20), of which Islam—for all its shortcomings, Biblically speaking—cannot be accused.—*Jeremy Thomas*