

Leaving and Arriving

From November 2014 to February 2015 I embarked on a journey.

- Partly a journey on my understanding on faith, culture, architecture and religion
- Partly a reflection on the experience of transition, movement and pilgrimage
- And partly a travel diary

I am grateful for the Bill and Margaret Best travel fund for making this possible and for the study leave provisions enjoyed by ministers in our church.

The search begins

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem" Matthew 2:1

Someone once asked me how many Magi came to visit the new born Messiah? And I answered 'three'. But of course we have no idea how many came. There could have been 1, 30 or 300 for all we know. "We three kings" ? - don't think so. Caspar ?, Melchior ? and Balthazar ? Who are these people? We are told that there were three gifts - gold, frankincense and myrrh, but how many people would you need to carry them? And who were the Magi from the East?

Scripture, Christmas pageants, romance and received tradition all get intertwined in this story.

The Zoroastrian's call their priests 'magi'. So were these Zoroastrian priests from Persia coming to worship the messiah? And what was the influence of Zoroastrianism on the development of Jewish religious thought ? - especially given that Cyrus the great was named 'messiah' by the prophet Isaiah?

I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the Lord Almighty." Isaiah 45

I've got a reading list from Professor Maurice Andrew and a ticket to Persia to visit Cyrus in his home town - and ask a few questions....

The primary text I'm using for this journey to the land of the magi is: Erhard Gerstenberger and Siegfried S. Schatzmann " Israel in the Persian period: The fifth and Fourth Centuries BCE."

It's pretty dense going but there is no doubt that the activities of Cyrus and the Achaemenid empire (see Isaiah, Nehemiah, Ezra etc) had a profound impact on the fortunes and thinking of the people of Israel following the destruction of the temple in 587 BCE by the Babylonians.

Leaving

On Friday November 7 I complete my role as Assembly Executive Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

But first of all I started selling things

If you look carefully you can see me in the reflection of my black car. I'm taking pictures of the scratches so that people will know what they are getting on the on-line auction on Trade Me

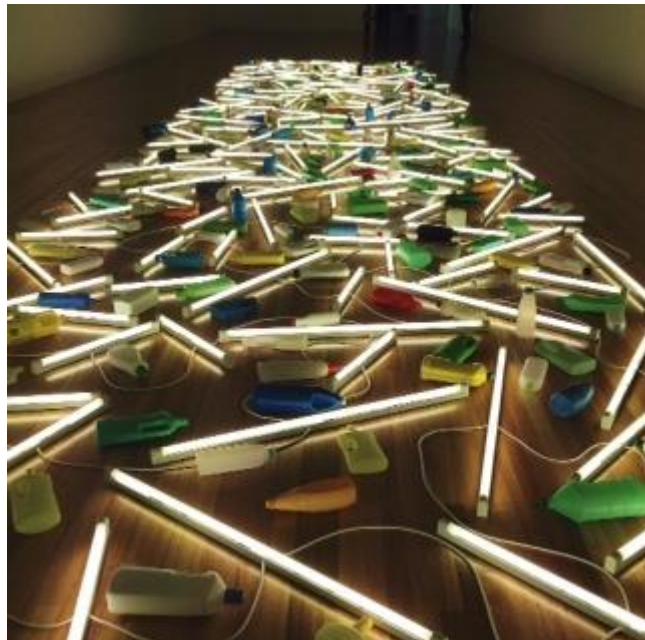


Peter Peryer Trinity 2007

Journey to the light

The Gospel of John begins at the point of creation. The Word becoming flesh. The light which shines and which is not overcome with darkness.

Culbert's work seems like a pathway. The first stage in our journey takes us north east as the sun shines over the Tarawera mountains. Johnny Cash is singing "when the man comes around".



This is Bill Culbert's *Daylight flotsam Venice*. part of a body of work he created for the Venice Biennale. Art critic Justin Paton says :

" Up close, the work has the mesmerising and somewhat spectral presence of phosphorescence on a night-time ocean."

Turkeys

All journeys, especially where the destination remains uncertain, have their distractions. These two were running along the road in the opposite direction to where we were going. "Go back to Egypt or Wellington - or wherever you are from !" they might have been saying.



Source: instagram.com

The Noah's Ark of Trees

Not many people seem to know about this place 30 km's out of Gisborne. It holds the largest Southern Hemisphere collection of Northern Hemisphere trees .

I guess they asked the same questions of Douglas Cook as they did of Noah, when Cook started collecting and planting trees more than 100 years ago. Single mindedness, vision, faith, some sense of a world worthy of our enterprises existing in a time beyond our own lives.

It seems like Noah, Cook's work also reflected his concern about the future of the world - at least as far as the destruction in Europe was concerned.

Perhaps when the Magi left Persia with all that expensive cargo, people might have wondered what they were up to as well?



Eastwoodhill Arboretum.

Source: [instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com/)



Matawhero Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church at Matawhero

This may be the oldest building owned by the Presbyterian Church. Bought off the Anglicans in the 1850's and spared by Te Kooti during the 1868 conflicts.

I'm reading Gerstenberger and Schatzmann's account of the place of the first Jerusalem temple built by Solomon some 700 years before Jesus. They emphasises that the temple, as God's dwelling place, was the centre of the entire cosmos. It's presence gave everything, including in some way, time itself, the ultimate reference point.

The need to build things, and especially those things vested with symbolism, (and sometimes to destroy them,) seems a profoundly human act, and something I am sure I will reflect upon over the coming weeks.



Tikitiki Church - East Coast

St Mary's Church Tikitiki

The interior of this church has a profound beauty – unlike almost any other I have visited.

It serves as a memorial to the Maori of the east Coast who died in the Great War. Built in the 1920's at the instigation of the Ngati Poru leader Sir Apirana Ngata.

A sign at the entrance welcomes people of all faiths. Stained glass images of Maori soldiers and long memorial lists of names of those who died in far off fields.

Service, sacrifice, giving up life for another, - all referenced to Scripture and by association, identification with Jesus's life.

From other historic accounts, ministers of the day held a breadth of views on the Great War and the sacrifices endured by the young men and women of New Zealand who served.



Lupins, Medlands Beach, Great Barrier Island

Stopping at home

For us, our home on Great Barrier has always been something of an oasis . Many hours spent here eating and drinking with friends and long walks on the beautiful Medlands beach discussing important things. Joined this time by our son, the daughter of the former girlfriend of a Canadian post graduate student (phew!) who was staying at Knox when I was a student there, and a brilliant young art historian completing her doctorate from Chicago university.

The best thing about any travelling is who you meet rather than what you see.



Putting on the Hijab

Iran air space

We've just entered Iranian air space after a flight from Great Barrier via Auckland and Dubai. Sandy has enthusiastically put on her hijab

Honouring the cultural and religious practices of others has, I have always found, provided a good starting point in building relationships. (The compulsory wearing of the hijab is a complex thing in Iran and strongly linked to the interplay between the country's religious and political influences.)

We can find in Scripture a directive for women to cover their heads – and hat wearing, at least in Church, continues to be the norm for women in our Pacific churches.

Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven (1 Cor 11) What are we make of such texts ?



Saint Sarkis Church, Tehran

The church in Tehran

Our first stop in Teheran is Sarkis Cathedral, the Armenian church near our hotel. The Church represents the largest Christian community in Iran. The pews were similar in style to First Church (Otago) but the lighting was better and it's hard to ignore a 5 m high scene of the Annunciation.



Outside the “House of Espionage”.

The House of espionage (formerly the American Embassy)

I asked if we could take a look around but the friendly guard indicated that that was not possible at this time. Apparently the former embassy is now used as some sort of hezbollah training academy.

There is no doubt that in 1953 the Americans (Kermit Roosevelt et al) with British support, helped fund and organise a coup against Iran's elected leader Mohamed Mossadegh

In 1978 and 1979 the area outside the embassy was the scene of mass demonstrations leading to the Shah's' departure and the return of Ayatollah Khomeini. There has been no diplomatic presence by America in Iran since that time.

I'm thinking here about the French and the Rainbow Warrior but I know it's a very weak analogy. But I guess anger and resentment are pretty universal emotions.

Every commentary I have read suggests that most people in Iran have a much more positive view of the US now and many people are hoping that the lifting of sanctions will improve their lot.



Another young ‘martyr’ from the 1980-89 Iran-Iraq war where almost 1 m people are thought to have died.

Martyrs

One of the things we first noticed when arriving in Iran were the huge black flags flying everywhere and the numerous photos and posters depicting the faces of mostly young men. Two things were happening:

First, we had arrived soon after Ashura. Ashura is the festival sacred to Shia Islam where followers remember the betrayal and death of Hussain at the battle of Karbala in 680. The issue (over simplified) was around the split between those who saw Hussain as the legitimate leader of Muslims because of his blood line to Muhammad (Shia) and those who saw that leaders only need to have come from Muhammad’s tribe.(Sunni). Shia represent only 10-15% of all Muslims but they are by far the dominant Muslim group in Iran. The re-enactment of Hussain’s death is a dramatic and passionately expressed event.

Secondly, the hundreds of thousands of young men who died in the Iran-Iraq conflict are all identified by Iran’s religious leaders as ‘martyrs’. The young men depicted on posters and photos everywhere we travelled are a constant reminder of their deaths.

The theology of Shia Islam, the dominant theological perspectives of the country’s religious leaders, Iranian nationalism and politics all intersect in the constant reminders of past suffering, loss and death.

Maybe there is some historical alignment in NZ with a portrayal by some religious leaders from another generation who would speak of the deaths of young people in the Great War as dying for 'God, King and country?' The 'Lest we Forget' memorial boards adorning so many churches touch on themes not easily unravelled.



The Tomb of Cyrus the Great

At Pasargadae

We visited Cyrus's tomb on a rather stormy and cool day after a drive of about 90 minutes from Shiraz. It is near a small town but still seemed a somewhat lonely and windswept place.

Plutarch wrote of it in 90 AD referring to Alexander the Great's visit there. Apparently the tomb bore this inscription....

"O man. Whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know you will come – I am Cyrus, son of Cambyses, who founded the empire of the

Persians and was king of the East. Do not grudge me this spot of earth which covers my body “

Cyrus may have died in battle in 530 BC

Isaiah speaks of Cyrus as a messiah raised up from among the gentiles.

Ezra 1.2 gives Cyrus some words:

“Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia. The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judea.”



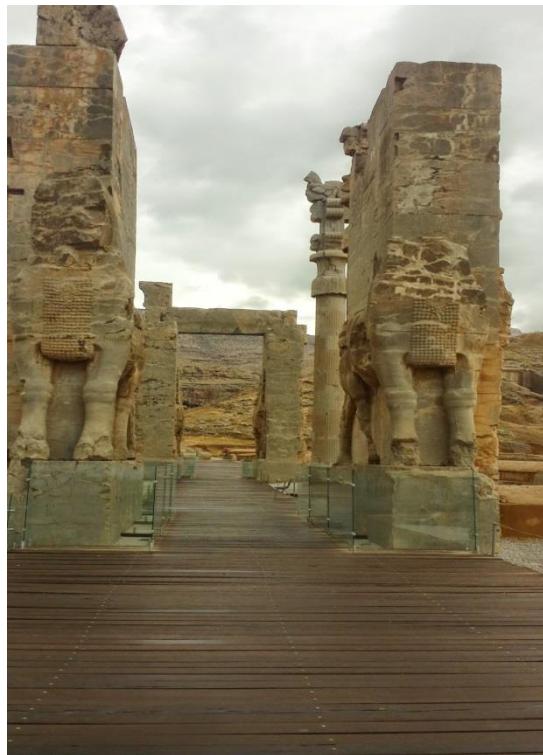
Fare-e-Kiani relief, Persepolis. A symbol of zoroastrianism, although no one seems quite sure what the symbols originally meant. They probably relate to the zoroastrian belief in a fravashi or guardian angel. Gets complicated with the adoption of this image by the Pahlavi shahs of the 20th Century for their nationalist ideology and rhetoric. Still used by zoroastrians today - though many Iranians seem to wear the symbol to make some statement in regard to their views of the present ruling establishment.

11 notes

Cyrus and Zoroaster

There is good evidence that Cyrus the Great followed the teachings of Zoroaster and that the Achaemenid empire adopted many of the associated religious practices and beliefs.

Mary Boyce, in her book "Zoroastrians, their religious beliefs and practices" notes that a number of Greek historians including, Aristotle identified Zoroaster (aka Zarathustra) as a Persian prophet and called him "Master of the magi." (Zarathustra lived somewhere around 1000 BC. Ahura mazda is the name given to the Zoroastrian God)



Entrance to Persepolis

Persepolis

Persepolis was a capital of the Achaemenid empire. Built by Darius (who followed Cyrus) and his son Xerxes. (Both figures mentioned in the Old Testament or Hebrew scriptures)

Inscribed above the main entrance are the words:

"A great God is Ahura mazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king over many, one lord over many"

I'm thinking how most, if not all our Presbyterian churches have some dedication to God on their outside - "to the glory of God' or similar. In the Reformed tradition we dedicate buildings rather than consecrate them.

But why do we do this at all? There seems to be a certain kind of idolatry associated with any such endeavour perhaps.



Griffin at Persepolis

Griffin, Cherubim, Ziz, Phoenix, Garuda,Karabu

It seems that many ancient cultures share a similar images of a powerful winged creature who had some role in serving the divine. Psalms refer to a Ziz , Cherubim guards entrance to the Garden of Eden and Ezekiel makes reference to the winged cherubs and in the New Testament there is reference in Hebrews Chapter 9. There may be reference to such a creature in the Zoroastrian symbol I posted earlier.

New year's Festival of Norouz

One of Persepolis's functions was to serve as the host of the ancient Zoroastrian festival Norooz. Each year representatives from each country

under the rule of Persia would bring gifts to Persepolis to show their loyalty to the king and the empire.

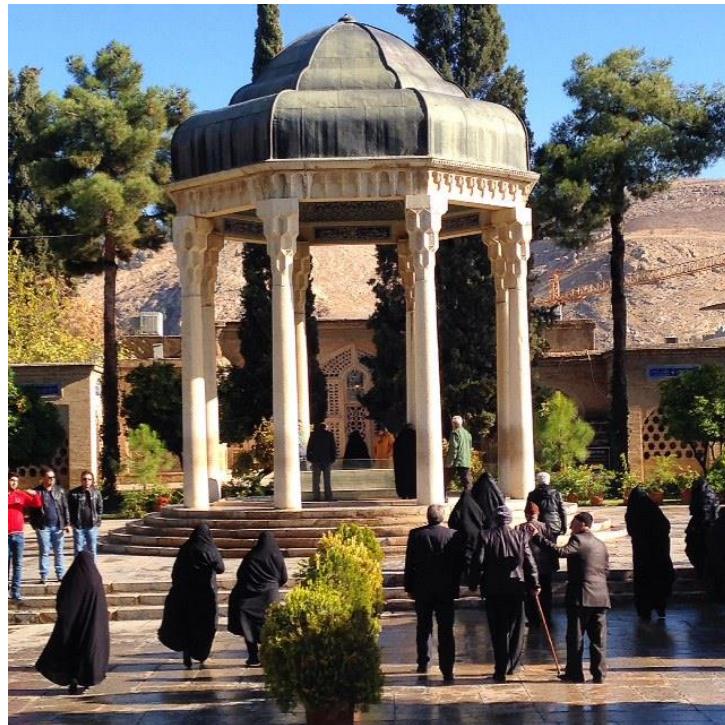
The reliefs at Persepolis show images of Jewish figures, along with others from the empire, bringing their gifts . Each gift reflects the qualities and skills of the culture represented. The gift bringers are frequently represented holding hands with each other. A sign of peace and celebration.

Five hundred years later we will hear of the magi, the priests of Zoroaster, bringing precious gifts to the infant Jesus. It is a connection I made in my own head but perhaps this is too big a leap to make?



The cultures and people of the Persian empire, including Jews, , bringing gifts to Persepolis to celebrate the Zoroastrian festival of Nowruz, the new year identified with the spring equinox.

500 years later Zoroastrian priests, the magi, would bring gifts to Jesus at Christmas, a date that coincides with shortly after the Northern Hemisphere winter equinox, with days just starting to lengthen again.



The tomb of Hafez

Hafez 1329-1390

The tomb of Iran's greatest poet is in Shiraz.

We visited here on a late Autumn morning. The depth of feeling, almost adoration for this poet was palpable. People placed their hands on the tomb, some wept, and the caretaker wiped the tomb almost constantly.

I was reading "The Soul of Iran" by Afshan Molavi who emphasises that the places of pilgrimage for Iranians are almost exclusively the tombs of poets and prophets (not, for example, politicians or war heroes)

The ruling theocracy apparently has very mixed feelings about Hafez, who vilifies religious hypocrisy but whose work stands at the heart of Persian self identity.

I've bought a book of his poetry - which I know so little about.

"Even after all this time, the sun never says to the earth "you owe me"

Look what happens with a love like that. It lights the whole sky.

Hafez

The magi of Yazd

Yazd is an ancient desert town in southern Iran. The Zoroastrian community has lived there from a time before records began.

In the Zoroastrian faith, the body is made pure by the presence of the spirit. When a person dies, the spirit departs and the body becomes impure and therefore should not be buried and contaminate the earth - considered one of the four pure elements. (earth, wind, fire and water). Hence the towers of silence on the outskirts of the city where bodies were once left to decompose and eaten by carrion. (Bodies are now buried in concrete lined graves in Yazd, but other communities maintain the towers)

Zoroastrians worship at 'fire temples' where a priest, or magi, tends the fire and places on it the sandalwood, cypress (and others prescribed types of wood) brought by worshippers. The fire is seen as representative of God's presence.

Scripture, orthodoxy, culture and traditions

There is probably no better place than Isfahan, in southern Iran, to reflect on the interplay of scripture, tradition and culture - and the web of stories which interconnect them.

A few kilometers, and a very pleasant walk from the Cathedral, is a 17th century mosque with one of the most stunning interiors you will see in Iran -the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque on the Naqsh - Jahan Square.

With the prophet Muhammad forbidding any images to be placed in mosques because of his concerns about idolatry, Mosques fill their spaces with calligraphy representing various scriptures from the Quran.

When Muslims visit the Vank Cathedral I assume they must be all too aware of the Quran's prohibitions.

The muslim prayer, the shahada, in its short form declares that "there is no god but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God."

A concern muslim's have with Christianity, and perhaps the images of the epiphany with God's revelation to the gentiles in the magi imagery

highlights this, is a view that Christianity veers into polytheism. Muslims identify Jesus as a prophet who has a very important role to play in their eschatology, but only God can be worshipped. (of course the early church argued the nature of Christ's divinity for centuries)



Magi - Vank Armenian Cathedral, Isfahan

The entire interior of the Cathedral is painted with images that tell the Gospel story.

With the images well above eye level it was difficult getting a photo - this one was taken by our friend Eva.



Zoroastrian priest at the Fire Temple in Yazd. It seems quite reasonable to identify him as a magi - though the etymology of the word is far from straight forward. There is no doubt that the word has been used since the 6th Century BC to denote a follower of Zoroaster. It comes from the word maguano, the religious caste of the medes into which Zoroaster was born. However, under Greek influence the word took on a multitude of meanings, primarily associated with the practitioners of magic and astrology. In the Gospel of Matthew the word *magos* is transliterated as magi, who visit the infant Jesus, but elsewhere in the Bible, the same word is translated as magician.

The fire and priest are behind a large glass panel which separates them from the public - if you look carefully you can see Sandy's reflection in the glass - she took this, along with most of the other photos I am using for this blog..

Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Mithras

A further overlay in the story of the magi is the connection with Christmas and the worship of Mithras

The emperor Aurelian declared, around 270 AD, that December 25 (the winter solstice) to be the official birthday of Mithras,. The emperor Constantine was a follower of Mithras until he declared December 25 the

official birthday of Jesus in 313 AD and adopted Christianity as the state religion.

Mithra was seen as the son of Ahura Mazda - the same God worshipped by Zoroastrians. However the cult of mithras was developed in Roman times .

The connections between the Mithras Roman mystery cult, the worship of the victory of the sun at the solstice, the connections with Zoroastrians, the symbolic images of the sun (and, for many Islamic countries the use of the crescent moon perhaps), some of the symbols present on mosques, the adoption of others religious and cultural practice into early Christianity - are all subject to significant scholarship and well beyond the parameters of this blog. But interesting.

I'm looking forward to reflecting more on these interconnected stories as we travel in a few weeks to the heart of the Byzantine empire.

When Jesus was born Iran was the central part of the parthian empire. While it came under significant influence from Greek thought and culture, its rulers claimed to be the rightful successors to Cyrus and the Achaemenid empire. They eventually adopted some form of Zoroastrianism as the official religion and supported the magi in their work.



Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan. This is a stunning mosque to visit - the use of natural light to highlight various segments of calligraphy, the beauty and shape of the structure - just wonderful.



According to Wikipedia: Construction of the mosque started in 1603 and was finished in 1619. It was built by the chief architect Shaykh Bahai, during the reign of Shah Abbas I of the Safavid dynasty

Young Iranians

More than half of Iran's 75 m plus population are under 35 years old. They are literate, urban, IT savvy and have relatives living overseas. While 98% of Iranians are identified as Muslim, a recent Economist article describes Iran as Muslim in the same way that Italy is Catholic. A strong cultural and historical identification, but with low participation - especially among the young. This view was reinforced in the conversations we had with younger people.

In my view, the ruling theocracy seems very much identified with a generation once or even twice removed from the young people we talked to. It will be interesting to see how the



Midnight on the banks of the Caspian sea

Following the Magi west

We saw very little evidence of Iran's involvement with the war against ISIS. However, within the complexity of Middle Eastern politics, there was no secret of Iran's support of Hezbollah, the Assad regime in Syria or the Shi'ites in Iraq - all opposing the intentions of ISIS. who, by this time, were in control of large part of northern Iraq and Syria.

Probably a lot easier to follow the magi to Bethlehem 2000 years ago than now.

So we decided to do the next best thing and catch a train east from Iran to the heart of Christendom's Byzantine empire, Constantinople. At the time Jesus was born it was called 'Byzantium' .

Fellow travellers

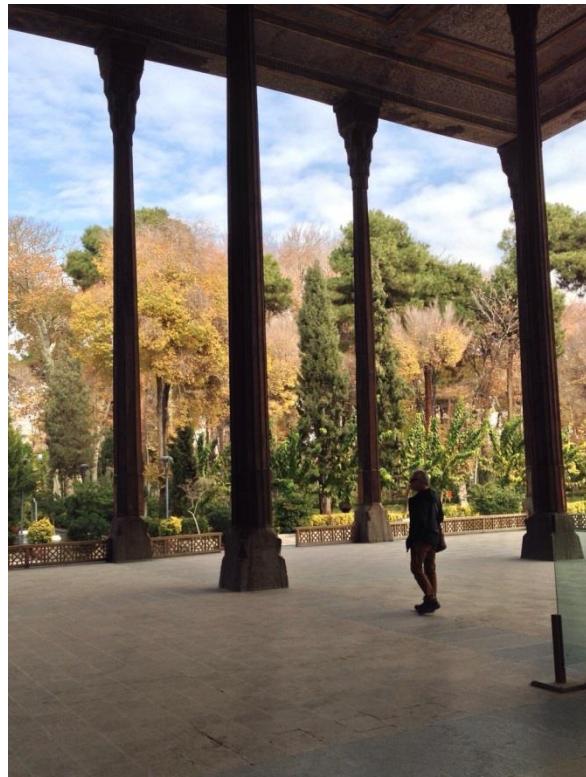
The most wonderful thing about travel, and especially slow travel, and choosing to stay at places where you see and eat with others, is the people you meet.

On our long train journey to Ankara, we had the amazing good fortune to share a cabin with the remarkable Eva- Maria Rugel and her lovely and very smart daughter, Christina. Eva is the photogrphaher behind the touring exhibition detailing the experience of german immigrants to Australia. <http://www.memoriesinmyluggage.com.au/>

She left her husband and son in Tabriz. They had set off months ago from Australia, in a campervan called 'Bruce' to drive from Singapore back to their native Germany. What an amazing adventure they were having.

Eve and Christina were taking a few days out to visit friends and family in Istanbul before rejoining Bruce, husband and son, in eastern Turkey.

The three night train trip took on a party atmosphere after we crossed the border into Turkey. Hijabs came off, music started and the dining car filled with Persians, Azeris and Kurds (plus a few other travellers) all enjoying the excitement of being in a different country with different rules and expectations.



In paradise?

Reflecting on Iran

This is me at the Chehelsotoon Palace in Isfahan.

An extraordinary building surrounded by a walled garden with a large ornamental pool.

All through our travels in Iran we came across these beautiful Persian gardens.

The word ‘paradise’ comes from a word found in the Zoroastrian holy book, the *Avesta*. Originally it referred to a walled garden or park, but in both the Zoroastrian tradition and Christianity, as well as in Judaism and Islam, the word paradise came to mean a great deal more.

The beauty of the ancient and not so ancient buildings, the poetry, but most of all the extraordinary welcome and hospitality of the people, made Iran an extraordinary and quite transformative experience for us

And, BTW, According to wikipedia: In the 2nd century AD, Irenaeus distinguished paradise from heaven. In Against Heresies, he wrote that only those deemed worthy would inherit a home in heaven, while

others would enjoy paradise, and the rest live in the restored Jerusalem (which was mostly a ruin after the Jewish–Roman wars but was rebuilt beginning with Constantine the Great in the 4th century). Origen likewise distinguished paradise from heaven, describing paradise as the earthly “school” for souls of the righteous dead, preparing them for their ascent through the celestial spheres to heaven

Incidentally, if the garden of Eden has a specific location, then it could easily be located close to our departure point from Iran, near the city of Tabriz.

According to Wikipedia:

David M. Rohl (British Egyptologist and former director of the Institute for the Study of Interdisciplinary Sciences) posits a location for the legendary Garden of Eden in Iranian Azerbaijan, in the vicinity of Tabriz upon which the Genesis tradition was based. According to Rohl, the Garden of Eden was then located in a long valley to the north of Sahand volcano, near Tabriz. He cites several geographical similarities and toponyms which he believes match the biblical description. These similarities include the nearby headwaters of the four rivers of Eden, the Tigris (Heb. Hiddekel, Akk. Idiqlat), Euphrates (Heb. Perath, Akk. Purattu), Gaihun-Aras (Heb., Gihon), and Uizun (Heb. Pishon)^[16]

دانشگاهی و تحقیقاتی		پست الکترونیک		موتور جستجو	
• شناسه نامه	• قرآن	• حق مهل دینا	• رزسیدن	• مهدو	• ناریمای فراخوانده شده امکان بذر نمی باشد. جهت رسیدگی به گزارشات و سکایات اینجا کلیک کنید.
• حوزه علمیه	• دل طوف	• شهروند	• اینتل نیمات	• جامائیس	
• پاسخگویی به شبههات	• موبدور	• وطن مهل	• پیاره مهل	• پارسی خواه	
• نیمات	• راسخون	• مهل فا	• اینفل نیمات	• دینیابات	
• تلاحدوخت	• نصرتی وک	• اینفل ابرانسل	• اینفل موذت		
ایران		ایران		جستجو	

جامعه محاذی		اشتراک گذاری فایل		خانواده و سرگردانی	
• پارسی بلگ	• جوان بلگ	• پیکو قابل	• ازدواج	• خانواده سیر	• ناریمای فراخوانده شده امکان بذر نمی باشد. جهت رسیدگی به گزارشات و سکایات اینجا کلیک کنید.
• بلگ اسکان	• پرسنی بلگ	• پرشمن گگ	• رسایه هرور	• حق سیر؟	
• مر افزار چت اپطاهها	• هف و بلگ	• فارسی بی وی	• درک نرم افزار ایران	• مشاوره	
• شنکه افسران	• سرزمین عمارتی	• سافت گذر	• یک موبایل	• کودکان ایران	
• برنامه نویس	• شاب کبیر	• فیلم های آموزشی	• نرم افزار های مدنی باز	• سیکه بلوتوث ایران	
ایران		ایران		ایران	

کار و سرمایه ایرانی		خبری		علمی و آموزش	
• مجتمع یاری حوزوی	• فرآنگ حاتم الاندیسا	• خبرگزاری فارس	• اینما	• نشریات ایران	• نیخنگان جوان
• گوئیچ حول آن اینکس	• فروشگاه شهروند	• خبرگزاری هرور	• اینسا	• رشد	• پاروی کتاب
• پژوهش اکترونیک	• سرویس هاک یستند	• واحد هرگز خبر	• نایاب	• پایگاه های سلامت	• پایگاه های سلامت
• قلایر نایاب	• سازمان فضایی ایران	• روزنامه کیهان	• رجانبور	• مدارک علمی ایران	• پایگاه دادات برشكایان
• نازنیک	• و پرینت	ایران		• فرهنگ لغت هوشیار	• اقت نامه
ایران		ایران		ایران	

What you see when you try to access Tumblr in Iran

Four weeks without access to Tumblr

I've been travelling in Iran for a few weeks and could not access Tumblr or Facebook as well as a number of other social media and news sites.

Interesting questions about role of the state in controlling access to sites which the state sees as being harmful. However, what it does mean is that I'm way behind on my blogs around my search for magi.

In India now where I will keep searching...





Hagia Sophia

For almost a thousand years this was the largest church in Christendom - dedicated to God's Holy Wisdom, or the logos, the word which became flesh in Jesus. A huge building for a huge idea.

I first came here in 1981 when, as far as I remember, I was the only visitor to the place, and you just wandered in. (it's located just over the road from the Pudding Shop, which even then, was a kind of hang out for the last of those who were doing the classic overland 'Hippy trail' that stretched from Istanbul, via Kabul, to Kathmandu, Goa, and finally ending on a beach in Bali.)

I remember the feeling of standing alone in such a building.

It was commissioned by the Byzantine emperor Justinian, consecrated as a church in 537, converted to a mosque by Mehmet the Conqueror in 1453 and declared a museum by Atatürk in 1935

Constantine, who, after his conversion, probably built the first church on this site a couple of centuries earlier, saw Constantinople as the new Rome and the centre of the Byzantine, empire.

I was reminded of a quote which I have just fond again:

"Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship; it moved to Greece and became a philosophy; it moved to Italy and became an institution; it moved to Europe and became a culture; it came to America and became an enterprise." - Attributed to American scholar Sam Pascoe



Feet and flash

Feet and flash

Walking around in the Hagia Sophia I became more interested in the way people interacted with the buildings and its images. Here, hundreds of people photograph a glorious mosaic of Jesus as Pantocrator. What are they thinking? Is there any relationship between the thousands who flock to observe these images expressing the mystery and glory central to the faith of the artists who created them, and the modern day observer frustrated that they can't use their flash?

From Turkey to India

My wife Sandy and I , have had for a long time a love for India, its people, vibrancy, colour, beauty and diversity. We arrived here after our time in Turkey.



Church and Mosque - Trivandrum. Down South people seemed to have a much more relaxed view of many things, including religious diversity.

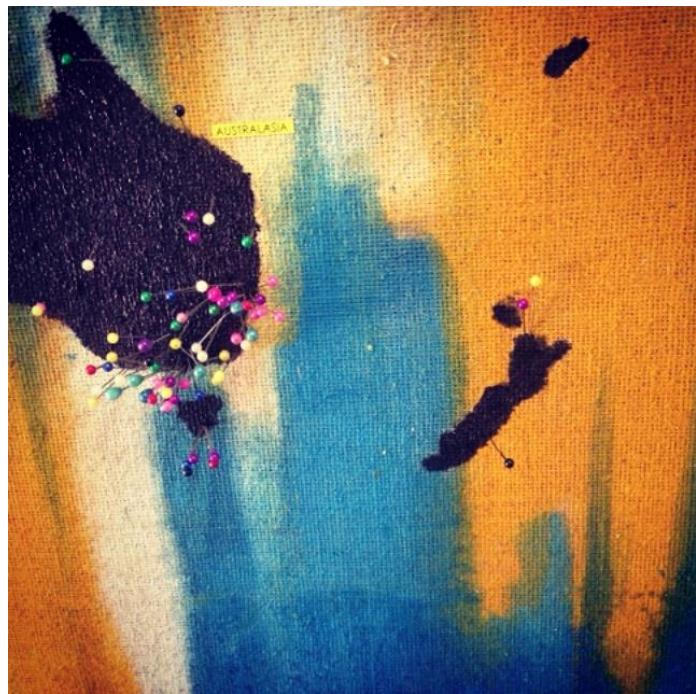


A market Ahmedabad selling imaged of Krishna and Jesus. No one knows of course what either of them looked like. How do you see the images and icons of one faith through the eyes of another?

Anish Kapoor's '*A perpetual Whirlpool*'

"If one is talking about sculpture then scale and skin is everything," declared Anish Kapoor. He was speaking from India, the birthplace of the acclaimed sculptor, where his latest installation was part of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. The skin of the object is what defines it, he goes on to explain, while scale creates a certain mystery around the object. Kapoor's latest work, *Descension*, has both of these elements.

Unexpectedly set into the gallery floor is a large, seemingly endless hole. In it, a vortex of black water perpetually froths and churns. The whirlpool alters the form, or skin, of the water creating a fury of liquid that invades the walls of the gallery. *Descension* was on view in a corner room at the Aspinwall House in Fort Kochi, a meaningful location because the room opens to views of a peaceful sea that creates a striking contrast to the powerful whirling vortex - *Colossal*, 2015



Visitor map - Kochi



Images of the fading old empire are everywhere –still





Back Home

Coming back to New Zealand - Aotearoa, to our home on Aotea or Great Barrier Island. For a moment, you see everyday things as a stranger - and then they become normal.

Starting anew

Sandy and I arrived at Clevedon. Wonderful people, and I have started a garden - beans! . It feels terrific to be part again of a faith community, and to embark on all the new challenges here at Clevedon and Kawakawa Bay

