

Charles Montagu Doughty

Researched by Oraina Zoghbi.

Here, at the British International School of Riyadh, besides an excellent education, we encourage enthusiasm, competition and sportsmanship.

Beginning in Year 3 up to Year 11, students in each class are divided into four houses: Doughty, Blunt, Palgrave and Pitts. These names originate from legendary explorers of Arabia. Each house is a team working together in athletic events and academically. Every once in a while, a sports competition is organized by the PE staff to persuade students to participate in various activities, including basketball, football, tennis, hockey, volleyball, running, swimming, track events and many more. Each house competes for a trophy, which is placed in our trophy armoire.

When I arrived in Year 3, I was placed in Doughty House and have never regretted it. We are a house that strives on fun and competition. I am proud to say that Doughty is an incredible team run by two very responsible house captains. We are constantly working our hardest, trying to accumulate those points to gain yet another trophy with our coloured band.

We represent Charles M. Doughty (1843-1926), an ambitious traveller of Arabia. He was born in Sussex, England in 1843. As the youngest son of a clergyman, his natural vocation was the church, but he had a taste for adventure and tried for a career in the Royal Navy instead. The naval doctors rejected him because of a slight speech defect, which never interfered with his subsequent linguistic accomplishments. Still thirsting for adventure and well grounded in the classics by his father, he decided to combine scholarship and travel. After mastering everything from geology to Greek and Arabic at London and Cambridge Universities, Doughty wandered across Europe, deciphering ancient Scandinavian inscriptions and tramping over Roman remains in Spain. But his destiny was calling him across the Mediterranean, across Syria, to the vast, fascinating Arabian Desert, and to the people who spoke the mellifluous language he found so enchanting.



He went to Damascus in 1876, joined a caravan headed into the desert, found the life of the nomad everything he had hoped it would be, and spent two years visiting one of the world's most interesting lands. The Bedouins welcomed him. He repaid the compliment by devoting to them a masterpiece of travel literature: *Travels in Arabia Deserta*. Now considered a masterpiece of travel literature, the book received little attention until it was reissued in 1921 with an introduction by T.E. Lawrence. Doughty's poems include the epic *The Dawn in Britain* (6 vol., 1906).

The superiority of this book to countless others written by visitors to Arabia is partly a matter of style. Doughty deliberately chose to write in the Arab idiom, as far as he could translate it into English. His sentences are not polished and sinuous in the tradition of Swift and Addison. They recall an earlier period when constructions were bolder and the flow of rhetoric was habitually interrupted by staccato interjections because it was meant to be spoken rather than read.

Doughty was in Arabia to learn about the desert and its peoples. He kept his eyes and ears open wherever he went, and every aspect of nomadic life was carefully recorded in his notebook. "The caravan, a long file of men and animals, is like a town on the march", Doughty remarks. "The camels, those indispensable members, plod along in bovine contentment, unmindful of heat or sand or occasional showers. The mules are less patient: they have to be goaded when they don't like the sun or the footing. The baggage sways from side to side as the sand gives way, perilously tilted but rarely falling off. The owners ride or walk, generally in good-humoured acceptance of the hardships of their way of life." Doughty rides or walks beside them, marvelling at their composure even when blistering sandstorms whip up.

He finds the camel drivers a beguiling tableau as they squat on the sand drawing patterns with their sticks until it is time to mount, after which they become the pilots of the caravan. They are also the first to know when it is time to halt, for they are sensitive to the diminishing strength of their desert steeds. The heat of the day is no time to be out on the burning sands. With expert speed tents are unfolded and set up, animals taken care of, and everyone retires indoors. Many of the caravaners promptly begin their siesta. Still, there is always someone stirring – camel drivers repairing harnesses, women cooking meals, children playing. They will all reappear in the writings of the English stranger who strolls among them and who can be seen busily jotting down notes when the flap of his tent is open.

The intimacy with which Doughty entered into the

