

BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF RIYADH

life of the desert is amazing considering the transience of his stay. Unlike other famous Westerners, such as St. John Philby and T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"), whose extensive knowledge of the Arabs came from years spent among them, Doughty was simply a visitor. He remained in Arabia for only 21 months and returned to England when his visit was over. He never again saw the land that had lured him halfway around the world. That is why his achievement seems so miraculous. He held a mirror to Bedouin life, as in the masterful literary portraits that give drama and sparkle to his pages. Here is his description of the Nimrod of Khyebar.

"Amm Mohammed – endowed with extraordinary eyesight – was more than any in this country, a hunter. Sometimes, when he felt himself enfeebled by this winter's (famine) diet of bare millet, he would sally, soon after the cold midnight, in his bare shirt, carrying but his matchlock and his sandals with him: and he was far off, upon some high place in the Harra, by the day dawning, from whence he might see over the wide volcanic country."

Doughty took notes day by day instead of leaving the book he had in mind to his memory and creative imagination. Although he was far more interested in the people than in anything else, he managed to record scientifically the geology of the peninsula, the topography from the Syrian border to Mecca, the character of the towns along the way. He noticed everything from the historic inscriptions of Mada'in Salih to the pumpkin gardens of Jiddah.

Although most of his obsessions are recorded in words, many are recorded in pictures as well, for he was a skilled draftsman. His drawings include topographical reproductions such as those of the plain of Tebuk and the mountains of Anaz. He lets the reader see what the ancient coins of Arabia looked like, and how the Syrian rock inscriptions appear today.



There are diagrams of town architecture and Bedouin tents. But the greatest achievement of Doughty as illustrator of his book is the splendid map he drew of the areas where his Arabian odyssey took him. He called it "A Sketch Map Itinerarium of Part of North Western Arabia and the Negd." A cartographer's delight because of its accuracy, the map is also a reader's delight because of its brilliant colouring and stylised layout.

Doughty was so meticulous with his facts and figures, so authentic in his drawings and diagrams, that to this day travellers carry his Arabia Deserta as a guidebook.

With a scholar's devotion to a subject he loves, Doughty laboured over his manuscripts for nine years before it went to the printer. During this decade he lived in England almost as a recluse, gratified when St. John Philby brought a party of Arab friends to see him during World War I. Travels In Arabia Deserta occupied Doughty through three editions.

What was Charles Montagu Doughty's most memorable achievement? Doubtless he himself would have pointed to the legend he left behind in Arabia. The Arabs still were talking about their remarkable visitor when T.E. Lawrence arrived years later. Lawrence wrote: "I spent nine months in Western Arabia, much of it in the districts through which he had passed, and I found that he had become history in the desert." Doughty died in 1926 at Sissinghurst, Kent.

Charles Montagu Doughty was a brave, adventurous and enthusiastic man and his characteristics have been remembered throughout the past 80 years. Doughty House is privileged to be influenced by such a remarkable man and we try to live up to his great qualities as much as we can.

