

Adam Cast Forth:
The First Sentence of Doughty's
Arabia Deserta

Despite the ingenuity and hard work of dedicated scholars such as D. G. Hogarth, Barker Fairley, Anne Treneer, Ronald Storrs and most recently Richard Bevis,¹ the problem of the basic motivation of Charles Doughty's journey into "Arabia Deserta" has not been solved. Since Doughty apparently did not understand his own reasons for this voyage of geographical and self discovery, a permanent romantic aura of endless striving for a mysterious and perhaps unattainable goal continues to surround Travels in Arabia Deserta and its main character, Doughty himself. Scholars have taken Doughty's vague statements of purpose, which appear in the prefaces to the second and third editions of his masterpiece, as mere starting points rather than conclusions for their own research into his character. In the second preface Doughty writes:

Of surpassing interest to those many minds, which seek after philosophic knowledge and instruction, is the Story of the Earth, Her manifold living creatures, the human generations and Her ancient rocks.

Briefly, and with such views as these, not worldly aims, a disciple of the divine Muse of Spenser₂ and Venerable Chaucer...I wandered on....

In the third he adds an additional reason for his journey:

While the like phrases of their nearly-allied and not less ancient speech, are sounding in our ears, and their like customs, come down from antiquity, are continued to the days of the nomad Hebrew Patriarchs...And we are the better able to read the bulk of the Old Testament books, with that further insight and understanding, which comes of a living experience (p. xvi).

But two and a half years of suffering in a hostile climate seem to demand stronger motivation than a desire