



الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ



*Praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the
Worlds;*

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

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Appendix VII

Thamud Inscriptions at al Hijr

(see 26:141-159; 15:80-84; 7:73-79)

Mr. C.M. Doughty traveled in Northwestern Arabia and Najd in the 19880's, and his book Arabia Deserta form one of the most notable of Arabian travel books. It was first published in two volumes by the Cambridge University Press in 1888, and has recently gone through several editions. The edition I have used is the unabridged one-volume edition printed in London in 1926. the reference in this Appendix should be understood to refer to that edition.

Doughty travelled on the old Pilgrim Caravan from Damascus as far as Mada'in Salih, and then parted company with the Pilgrims and turned into Najd. Mada'in Salih (the Cities of Salih), is one of the stations on the Syrian Pilgrimage route, about 180 miles north of Madinah.

Tabuk, to which the Holy Prophet led an expedition in A.H. 9 (see introduction to Surah 9), is about 170 miles farther to the northwest, and Ma'an Junction about 150 miles still farther.

Mada'in Salih's was also an important station on the prehistoric gold and frankincense (bakhur) route between Yemen and Egypt on Syria. In sacred history it marks the ruined site of the Thamud people to whom the prophet Salih was sent, whose she-camel was a symbolic Sign and is connected with Salih's history. See [note 3208 to 26:155-157](#). To the west and Northwest of Mada'in Salih are three Harrat or tracts of volcanic land covered with lava, stretching as far as Tabuk.

This is how Doughty describes his first view of Mada'in Salih, approaching from the northwest.

"At length in the dim morning twilight, as we journeyed, we were come to a sandy brow and a straight descending place betwixt cliffs of sandstones. There were some shouting in the forward, and Aswad bid me look up, 'this was a famous place, Mabrak al Naqah'" (the kneeling place of the she-camel of Salih).

"It is short, at first steep, and issues upon the plain of al Hijr, which is Mada'in Salih; where the sun coming up showed the singular landscape of this valley plain, encompassed with might sandstone precipices (which here resemble ranges of city walls, fantastic towers, and castle buildings), and upon them lie high shouldering sand drifts. The bottom is sand, with much growth of desert bushes; and I perceived some thin sprinkled volcanic drift. Westward is seen the immense mountain blackness, terrible and lowering, of the Harrat." (Arabia Deserata, p. 83, vol. 1).

Doughty took some rubbings of some of the inscriptions which were accessible to him and they were studied by the great Semitic scholar M. Ernest Renan and published by the Academic des Inscriptions et Belles-Letters. Renan's Report in French is printed as an Appendix to Chapters IV, V, and VI of Arabia Deserta (pp. 180-187, vol 1) and M. le Marquis de Vofgue's Note (also in French) on the Nabataean sculptured Architecture at Mada'in Salih at pp. 620-623, vol 1.

The general result of these studies may be summarized. The sculpture and architecture are found to be of the same kind as the Nabataean monuments at Petra (for which see [note 1043 to 7:73](#)).

At Petra there are no dated Inscriptions preserved, but at Mada'in Salih we have several.

There are at Mada'in Salih perhaps 100 sepulchral rock-hewn chambers, in some of which are found human bones and remains, showing that the Nabataeans knew the art of embalming, and used linen of the same kind as was used in ancient Egypt.

The tombs are dedicated in perpetuity to named families, and the named Nabataean kings have, each the epithet "loving his people". There are flat side-pilasters, and the figures of four-footed beasts, eagles, and other birds are discernible.

Besides the sepulchral chambers, there is a great Hall or Council Chamber (Diwan), 25 ft x 27 ft x 13 ft. this may have been a Temple.

The gods worshipped there were those whose names we know from other Nabataean sources-Dusares, Martaba, Allat, Manat, Ka'bah'is, and Hubal. Allat, Manat, and Hubal are also known to us in connection with the idols of the Pagan Quraysh of the times of Ignorance. It is interesting to find the word Mesjeda (Arabic Masjid) already used here for "place of worship". Triads of stones were worshipped as gods.

The Inscriptions have dates from 3 B.C. to 79 A.C. within this short period of 82 years we can see something of the

development of Semitic paleography. The writing becomes more and more cursive with the years, we have here a central point between Old Armenian, Square Hebrew, Palmyran, Sinaitic, Kufi and Naskh.

We may treat the Nabataeans as historical, as we have established dates. The Thamud were prehistoric, and occupied sites which were afterwards occupied by the Nabataeans and others.

The kneeling place of Salih's she-camel (Mabrak al Naqah) and the well of the she-camel (Biru al Naqah), and a number of local names keep alive the race memory of an ancient Arabic people and their prophet Salih.



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