

Crystal-M Bennett O.B.E., D.Litt., F.S.A.
Susan Balderstone
Adjunct Professor in Cultural Heritage
Faculty of Arts
Deakin University
Melbourne
AUSTRALIA
susan.balderstone@bigpond.com
http://www.deakin.edu.au/CulturalHeritage_Centre/

Introduction

High above Petra on a sizzling summer day in 1980, Crystal Bennett struck a pose beside a helicopter on the summit of Umm el-Biyara. In a sense the resulting photograph illustrated two of her most defining characteristics—determination and an extraordinary networking ability. They were characteristics she shared with the ‘owner’ of the helicopter, the late King Hussein of Jordan.

The reason she was there that day was her determination to finish projects in Jordan that were part of her long pursuit of the biblical Edomites, “the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel”.¹ She returned in the 1980s to the three sites she had originally excavated in the 1960s and early ‘70s—Umm el-Biyara, Tawilan and Buseirah. Her excavations had been interrupted in 1975 by the request from the Department of Antiquities in Amman to direct the rescue dig on Amman Citadel. It was proposed to build a new museum on the Citadel adjacent to the existing museum and the Amman Citadel excavations occupied her for several years from 1975 to 1979. Once her obligations to the Department of Antiquities were fulfilled, and in spite of deteriorating health, she was intent on carrying out final field seasons at the Edomite sites preparatory to a definitive publication.

Crystal was indefatigable in obtaining widespread support for the work of the British and their associates in archaeology including from Jordanian royalty. The trip to Umm el-Biyara in 1980 was occasioned by her need before publication to check the survey of her 1960s excavations. She also recorded the location of a Graeco-Nabataean sanctuary discovered accidentally by a member of the local Bdul tribe while searching for her dog Maro on the last day of excavations on the summit. Princess Alia, who was keen to help with the work but was pregnant with her first child, prevailed upon her father King Hussein to provide helicopter transport to save both herself and Crystal (together with her security guard and myself as the surveyor) the long and difficult climb to the top. We were extremely grateful for this, although when it came time to leave, one of the two helicopters was found to have a mechanical problem and after ferrying us to the base, the other one could take only half the party back to Amman. Crystal and I returned by road – it was a very long day!

Early years

Crystal was born in the last year of World War I, 1918, on the Channel Island of Alderney off southern England. She studied English at Bristol University after attending

a Bristol convent. During World War II she worked for the British Ministry of Supply,² married and had a son, Simon. After the break-up of her marriage, she purchased her former husband's family home and moved in harmoniously with her ex mother-in-law.

In 1954 she began a post-graduate diploma in the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces in the West at London University. She directed her own excavations of a Roman villa south of London, and also a Romano-British temple near her home at Bruton in Somerset.³ She went on to a Diploma in Palestinian Archaeology under Kathleen Kenyon, working with Kenyon for the final season of excavations at Jericho in 1957-58. Subsequently she contributed to Kenyon's publication *Jericho Volume Two*.⁴ Crystal also worked with Kenyon on the Jerusalem excavations and was irrevocably bitten by the bug of biblical archaeology. She became interested in the Edomite site on Umm el-Biyara while working with Peter Parr's excavations at Petra. Beginning in 1960 with exploratory work, she conducted a seven-week season in 1963 and a short season in 1965. The key find was a clay seal stamped with the royal symbol and "Qos-gabr, King of Edom" in Phoenician lettering, dating it to around 670 B.C.E. – too late to be one of the kings referred to in Genesis, but at least hard evidence of the existence of an Edomite kingdom in the later period. In 1963 she replaced Peter Parr as assistant Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem.

Following the Six Day War in June 1967, Crystal spent time at the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem working on her material from Umm el-Biyara. J B (Basil) Hennessey, then Director of the British School recorded her "valuable assistance to the Director in the moving of the School from one premises to another".⁵ This was no doubt an experience that stood her in good stead later when she established a base for the Jerusalem school in Amman and then the fully-fledged British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History. Also at this time, in response to proposals by the occupying Israeli authority to redevelop the Muslim quarter of the Old City, the British School undertook an architectural survey of the targeted areas. Over a period of ten years from 1968 a team of architects made measured drawings of the Islamic buildings of Old Jerusalem, resulting in an extremely important record.⁶

The British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem

In 1970 Crystal was appointed Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, and for the next seven years struggled with the many practical difficulties arising from circumstances following the Six Day War. Since the School was now in Israeli occupied territory, a lengthy and tortuous border procedure had to be negotiated every time Crystal crossed the Jordan River from the occupied West Bank to work on her sites in Jordan. This was made doubly difficult by the need to carry documents and equipment subject to security searches, not to mention her dear dachshund Maro, from whom she was inseparable.

Despite these frustrations, Crystal persevered in her search for the Edomites. In view of Nelson Glueck's identification of the Iron Age site of Tawilan⁷ near Wadi Musa as the largest Edomite site in the Petra area and his identification of it as Teman, mentioned in the 'Edomite king-list' of Genesis 36.31-39, she excavated there from 1968 -1970 and

again in 1982. She uncovered a domestic farming settlement of the 8th/7th centuries BCE, and discovered the first cuneiform tablet to be found in Jordan,⁸ a livestock contract drawn up in the Harran in north Syria. However the date of the settlement was again too late to enable identification with any kings predating Israelite kings as mentioned in Genesis.

Crystal moved on to Buseirah, identified with the Bozrah mentioned in Genesis 36.33 in connection with the list of kings. There she excavated in three seasons 1971-1974, with a final season in 1980. At Buseirah the settlement also dated no earlier than the 8th century BCE and demonstrated strong Assyrian influences. In 1971 she briefly surveyed the Wadis Dana and Fenan, recording the Edomite mining sites by means of aerial photographs with helicopter assistance. In January 1980 she returned to this area to undertake a short season of soundings. I surveyed for her during a memorable excursion later that year.

The early excavation seasons in the late 1960s and early 1970s were undertaken with considerable logistical difficulties. These Iron Age sites in southern Jordan were naturally protected by being located on high points or spurs, surrounded by steep wadis and usually accessible only by a steep paths or a narrow neck of land. Piotr Bienkowski records⁹ that only a person with Crystal's organizational skills, network of contacts and determination could have succeeded in mounting the early excavations at Tawilan and Buseirah. She used her wide network of contacts to engage assistance with transport of material and equipment, including help from the Jordanian Army. Bienkowski notes that despite being Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem she worked virtually unaided in Jordan. At first she took a room at the old Philadelphia Hotel located downtown opposite the Roman Theatre. Storage of finds was arranged in the basement of the Roman Theatre, but unfortunately heavy rains in 1969 flooded the basement and rendered much of the pottery unusable for stratified, chronological research.¹⁰ In 1970 she rented a flat near the British Council at her own expense as the office and base for British excavations.¹¹

Amman

In 1975 Crystal was invited by the Department of Antiquities in Amman to direct the rescue excavations on the Amman Citadel, on the planned site of the new museum. This project made it imperative to establish a larger base than her rented flat and with the support of Kathleen Kenyon she found a large house opposite the University of Jordan. Under the combined lobbying of Crystal, Kenyon and others, the British Academy eventually agreed in 1978 to establish this as a separate British Institute for Archaeology and History in Amman.¹² From there the Amman Citadel team set out each early morning in the Institute's Land Rover for the dig site, usually collecting me from my flat at the Third Circle on the way.

My warmly remembered association with Crystal began in 1977. Following a serious accident involving her assistant director and architect during the 1976 season she found herself without an architect/surveyor. I had accompanied my husband, an Australian newspaper correspondent to Jordan on his appointment to cover the Middle East for the

Melbourne Age and *Sydney Morning Herald*. Previously I had worked as an architect in London and Melbourne, designing and documenting housing, schools and office buildings, but I welcomed the opportunity to do something different in Jordan. The companionship offered by Crystal and her team during my husband's considerable absences in Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Syria in the course of his job was my lifesaver. I became as passionate about the history and archaeology of Palestine as any of them, to the extent of reporting on archaeology for the *Jordan Times* in 1977-1978.

It seemed that Crystal knew everyone. Her parties were amazing fun. Her hospitality and kindness were known and greatly appreciated by the local Jordanians and expatriates alike. She made the most of any opportunity to provide interesting site visits and social events for her dig teams. Two particular occasions in the middle of 1979 stand out in my memory. One was a visit she organized through Princess Alia to the royal stables located on the road to Salt. There we were given a wonderful display of Arab horses by the Spanish director. It was a beautiful place in a pine-treed valley; the stables being arranged around a series of courtyards with central, tiled fountains.

The second was the grand party Crystal hosted for the opening of the British Institute in Amman for Archaeology and History following the approval for its establishment by the British Academy. I personally organized the completion of some internal building alterations to the house. It was a glittering event held at that house high up on the hill opposite Jordan University, with candles illuminating the large terrace under a balmy, mid-summer evening sky. My husband was in Amman and able to attend—Crystal welcomed us by saying “come and meet my tobacco millionaire,” and then proceeded to introduce us to many of her long time Jordanian friends including former prime ministers and the Mayor of Amman. She had been appointed formally as the Director of the British Institute at Amman on November 1, 1978.¹³

Many of Crystal's friends and colleagues visited the Institute and were always included in whatever was happening. Regular visitors were her son Simon and her stalwart friend Jean Black. The latter had the Registrar's responsibilities on almost all of Crystal's projects.

There was never a dull moment on the work front either. Not only were there the excavation seasons on Amman Citadel in 1977, '78 and '79, but Crystal made sure I was also introduced to other teams associated with the British Institute including the Australians at Pella and the Dutch at Deir Alla, and of course the Department of Antiquities in Amman. With Crystal herself there were other one-off experiences, such as the Umm el-Biyara expedition mentioned above. Another similar, one day event was an excursion with Princess Alia, her mother Queen Dina, Crystal, Michael Macdonald and a few others from the Institute to Dhra near Kerak in the south, for the purpose of mapping the soundings Crystal had excavated earlier that year in January. We progressed in cavalcade—the royals in front in the limousine, then an escort car of soldiers with the rest of us following on behind. It was a terrible day—hot and dusty, not good for using a pre-

WWII brass theodolite on the side of bare, steep sloping hill. This was made bearable, however, by a wonderful local family who provided us with rugs and cushions and plates piled with fresh lettuces to supplement our picnic lunch by the springs and orchards at Kerak.

Crystal maintained a stringent publication schedule, publishing year by year following each season of excavations. This can be seen from the attached publication list. The punishing work load of directing several series of excavations together with running the Institute accommodation, organizing supplies, vehicles and functions in the face of considerable difficulties and frustrations, at the same time delivering a continuous stream of publications no doubt took its toll on her health. It always seemed to me that Crystal did a superhuman job, in what was often quite a lonely occupation in between influxes of visitors. There was no assistant director or full time research position at the Institute in those days, although she did have strong domestic support from Hamze Ghazzawi, the Institute's long-serving, Palestinian cook/housekeeper. Hamze had begun work with the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem and moved with Crystal to Amman.¹⁴

The British School accommodated several other excavation teams at different times, as well as her own. These included members of Basil Hennessey's Sydney University excavation team working at the Chalcolithic site of Teleilat Ghassul in the Jordan Valley. There, in 1977, the exciting recovery of wall paintings of what appeared to be a religious procession and shrine dating from 4,000 BCE created a major buzz.¹⁵ The wall paintings were carried up from the site to the British School where they were conserved by Annie Searight and a team from UNESCO before being placed on display in the museum on Amman Citadel. The Teleilat Ghassul excavations had been begun by Basil Hennessey in 1967 while Director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. The Six Day War of June that year halted the work until 1975, by which time Basil had become Edwin Cuthbert Hall Professor in Middle Eastern Archaeology at Sydney University.

In the winter of 1979 the Sydney team had their first season of excavations at Pella, a tell located by a permanent spring in Wadi Jirm al-Moz further north in the Jordan Valley. This time the team occupied a dig house which I had been commissioned to build for them. Crystal in her usual hospitable way still accommodated anyone who wanted to stay during weekend visits to Amman from the excavation site. She had provided invaluable assistance during the fitting out of the dig house, storing equipment and provisions and procuring all the bedding. The dig house is a large extension to an existing stone cottage on the site above the small oasis that has extensive views across the Jordan Valley to Beisan and the Vale of Esdraelon. From late winter through to early summer the site was immersed in a sea of wild flowers. We had several enjoyable picnics at Pella over the following few years—it was a favorite place to take visitors and never failed to impress Crystal's important contacts.

In 1980 the first international conference on the History and Archaeology of Jordan was held at Oxford with the strong support of HRH Crown Prince Hassan. Crystal was instrumental both in its initiation and in involving Prince Hassan among many other influential supporters. One again her network of contacts was invaluable. Around this

time I spent a short period standing in for her at the Institute while she was in hospital. This provided me a first hand insight into the day-to-day issues and problems of running such an enterprise. Many visitors arrived without warning at all hours of the day and night looking for various services—sustenance, showers—not always possible, as water supplies were erratic.

Final publications

Crystal's health deteriorated considerably during the early 1980s and she retired from her position as Director in November 1983, although she returned to act as guide and mentor for the State visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1984. From Amman she moved to Lefkara in Cyprus, where she had renovated a traditional village house and planned to write up a final publication on the Edomites, based on what had essentially been her major research interest and effort. During the next couple of years my husband and I visited her both in Lefkara and at her home in Bruton. The latter was an unobtrusive but large, manor house dating from the 16th century, with an extensive walled garden. She had earlier generously allowed us to stay there during a visit to England in the winter of 1981. It was clearly a place dear to her heart and she was very much at home as the 'lady of the manor.' During our visit in 1984 she seemed well and optimistic about the outcome of her work.

However on visiting Cyprus for Christmas 1985 we found that illness had forced her to permanently return to Britain. Sadly she was not able to complete her final reports, although it is wonderful to see that Piotr Bienkowski, who had worked with Crystal at Tawilan and Buseirah has now brought her material together with that of others working on the period and published these sites.¹⁶ Simon Bennett notes in his forewords to these publications that the perspective taken and interpretations made have diverged from those of his mother. This is not surprising given the difficulties at the time and the work undertaken by other scholars in the field in the decades since Crystal's pioneering work. As Simon indicates – the early years of the Tawilan excavations were carried out in a difficult political climate. In particular, as Bienkowski records, the civil war in Jordan in 1970 resulted in all the photographs from the 1970 Tawilan season being destroyed by order of Naif Hawatmeh of the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine.¹⁷ Bienkowski also points out that the methods of excavation and recording were less rigorous, systematic and specialized in 1968 than is expected now. On the other hand, the methods implemented by Crystal's generation were a considerable improvement on earlier ones as attested by Adnan Hadidi's account of the development of excavation methods in his tribute to Kathleen Kenyon¹⁸ on the occasion of her 70th birthday.

The main area of divergence, as referred to by Simon, seems to be that Crystal had ascribed a relatively settled kingdom or nation state status to the Edomites, on the basis of her interpretation of the evidence as she had found it. Bienkowski, with the benefit of a wider view encompassing later work by others concludes that the Edomites comprised a heterarchical state of largely independent tribal groupings. He proposes that these groups were held together by bonds of cooperation and allegiance to a supra-tribal authority/monarchy, which was recognized and accepted as kings by the Assyrians.¹⁹ He points out that Crystal's excavations at Buseirah neither proved nor discounted the

site's identification with the biblical Bozrah. No occupation was found dating to the thirteenth century BCE, which is the generally accepted period of the passage of the Israelites coming from Egypt through Edom and being refused passage by an Edomite king as recorded in the Old Testament (Numbers 20: 14-21). However, as John Bartlett makes clear, the interpretation of the biblical references to Edom is not straightforward.²⁰ It is possible that the earlier, pre-Israelite kingdom Edomite leaders were based elsewhere, but by the time the history was written down only the later place names were known.

The excavations on Amman Citadel uncovered substantial Byzantine occupation followed by large Umayyad settlement. The work was brought together in a final form by Alastair Northedge who had served as Crystal's assistant director on two of the rescue dig seasons and had subsequently carried out his own excavations at different locations on the Citadel in conjunction with the Department of Antiquities. He had established that the northern part of the Citadel, originally a Roman temple and temenos, had been redeveloped by the Umayyads as a large palace, fronted by a cruciform audience hall that comprised the major standing remains. The combined work was published in 1992 as British Academy Monograph in Archaeology No. 3, *Studies on Roman and Islamic Amman, Volume I: History, Site and Architecture*,²¹ and dedicated "In Memoriam Crystal-M. Bennett, O.B.E., F.S.A. (1918-1987)."

Crystal died at her home in Bruton, Somerset on 12 August 1987, shortly before her 69th birthday.²² Her many friends and colleagues still remember her with great affection. Her dedicated professional work, her unflinching diplomacy in a difficult Israeli/Palestinian context and her great personal charm endeared her widely. She was awarded the O.B.E. by Britain in 1977 "for services to archaeology in Jordan," and in 1983, an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree was bestowed upon her by Trinity College, Dublin. If there was an award for sterling friendship she would surely have that also.

Acknowledgments

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² 'In Memoriam Crystal-M. Bennett O.B.E., D. Litt., F.S.A.,' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30, 1986: 9.

³ 'Crystal-M. Bennett O.B.E., D. Litt., F.S.A., An Appreciation,' *Levant* 19, 1987: 1-2.

⁴ *Levant* 4, 1972.

⁵ *Levant* 1, 1969: viii.

⁶ 'Crystal-M. Bennett O.B.E., D. Litt., F.S.A., An Appreciation,' *Levant* 19, 1987: 2.

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- ⁷ ‘Explorations in Eastern Palestine II,’ 1935, *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 15, New Haven, CT: 82-83.
- ⁸ ‘In Memoriam Crystal-M. Bennett O.B.E., D. Litt., F.S.A.’ *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 30, 1986: 9-10.
- ⁹ *Busayrah: Excavations by Crystal-M. Bennett 1971-80*, CBRL Monograph: Oxford University Press, 45.
- ¹⁰ *Excavations at Tawilan in Southern Jordan*, Council for British Research in the Levant (CBRL) Monograph: Oxford University Press, 17.
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- ²⁰ ‘Biblical Sources for the Early Iron Age in Edom’, 1992 in Bienkowski, Piotr (ed.) *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7: J. R. Collis Publications in association with National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside: 18.
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