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The Busayra Cultural Heritage Project's 2025 Season

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Long recognized as ancient Bozrah, the likely capital of the Kingdom of Edom, Busayra offers multiple opportunities to investigate Iron Age history and culture in southern Jordan. The 2025 season's principal goal was to investigate the eastern half of Building A, a largely horizontal 2,325 m² monumental building partially documented during Crystal Bennett's excavations (Bienkowski 2002, 57–109). The building's eastern half is organized around a rectangular courtyard with a cistern at its center. Adjoining rectangular rooms border the courtyard on three, or possibly four, sides. This courtyard is believed to be associated with a temple or palace due to the conspicuous red-cobbled threshold that leads out of the courtyard and a plastered corner niche and drain for bathing or libation rituals.

The Busayra Cultural Heritage Project (BCHP) prioritized site cleaning and preservation activities in and around Building A's eastern half. Spoil heaps from Bennett's excavations sitting inside the building were reduced in size and used to fill in deep and unstable excavation trenches that posed a threat to visitors. Reversible stone walls were erected to stabilize eroding trenches. Trash, loose stones, weeds, and modern sediment deposits were removed. These interventions improved the building's overall appearance and rendered it more interpretable for visitors.

The BCHP also examined Bennett's Building A architectural plans and section drawings, checking them for accuracy and making follow-up observations on the building's different phases. Sections that had collapsed were cleaned and photographed to produce updated records. Three modestly sized at-risk "islands" of stratified deposits were excavated so that their contents could be documented before collapsing. These excavations also improved Building A's appearance while answering questions about its architectural plan (Fig. 1).

The project also excavated the courtyard's southern perimeter wall that Bennett had partially documented in limited probes (Walls 12/34/37; Bienkowski 2002, 67, fig. 4.5). These walls were determined to be one architectural feature that stopped just short of Wall 8, the courtyard's eastern perimeter wall, offering a threshold into the unexcavated spaces south of Walls 12/34/37. Patches of plaster were preserved on the lower courses of Wall 34's northern face (Fig. 2). Deposits excavated on Wall 34's northern side contained fragmentary ceramic, bronze, iron, shell, and stone objects mixed into an unconsolidated matrix of burnt brick and plaster. Bowls of various forms and fragmentary cylindrical ceramic jars identified as Type E in Bennett's excavations dominated the ceramic vessel corpus (Bienkowski 2002, 9.47–49) (Fig. 3.1). Fragments of iron weapons were also recovered (Fig. 3.2). These materials sat on and above plaster Surface AA02.008 that ran up to Wall 34.

These results suggest that the eastern half of the building was intentionally destroyed during the 7th or 6th centuries BCE, possibly during the campaigns of the Babylonian king Nabonidus carried out ca. 550 BCE (Crowell 2007). These results also strengthen the conclusion that Building A's eastern half was left in disrepair during the later 5th and 4th centuries BCE, when the building's western half





Fig. 1. South and west portions of Building A's eastern courtyard after cleaning and preservation activities. (Photo by B. W. Porter.)

was reconstituted on the foundations of earlier 1st millennium BCE walls (Integrated Stage 3; Bienkowski 2002, table 14.1). Upcoming research will likely refine these observations.

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Fig. 2. Wall 34 (2) and associated Surface AA02.008 (1), looking south. One of Bennet's spoil heaps, now reduced in size, sits in the background (3). (Photo by B. W. Porter.)

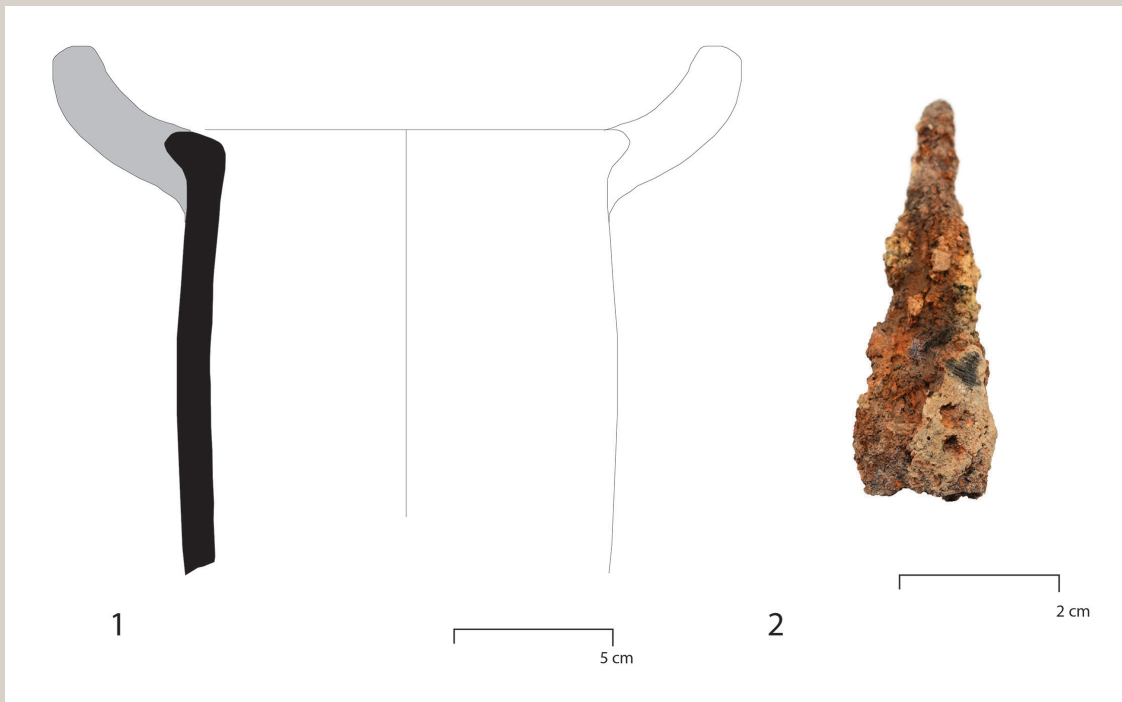


Fig. 3. 1: Profile drawing of ceramic vessel jar Type E frequently found in Building A courtyard (A02.28.2); 2: iron arrowhead found among destruction debris in courtyard (AA02.30.8). (Image by B. W. Porter.)

