

Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991)

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Syracuse Scholar Winter 1979-1980*

Article 10

1979

Ruins at Gedi

Sally Bennett Segall

Follow this and additional works at: <https://surface.syr.edu/susolar>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Segall, Sally Bennett (1979) "Ruins at Gedi," *Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991)*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: <https://surface.syr.edu/susolar/vol1/iss1/10>

This Poetry is brought to you for free and open access by SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse Scholar (1979-1991) by an authorized editor of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Poetry: Sally Bennett Segall

Ruins at Gedi

1 The Owl

Gedi: An Arabian City
 Mysterious as five hundred years,
 Its walls and arches once again stones.
 One miracle of three stone steps
 Survives in the outline of a mosque.

Out of the well's chasm
 We startled an owl: it drifted up
 Up, on wide barred wings
 Banked into the wood and was gone,
 A living whole among fragments:

That link sought in the once-been
 Of deserted houses, the dead,
 All mute decay.
 A key to the unknown
 A Rosetta Stone.

2 The Pillar Tombs

The impulse upward
 Thrust from the safe
 Maternal nature of matter
 Is phallic or sacred.
 Skyscraper and church spire,
 Curiosity and question,
 Are signposts leading up
 Away from that dark earth:
 Our mother, our grave.

These pillars read
 "We, of earth, do not love
 This earth, our substance,
 But desire the formless transparency
 Beyond the rim of the circle."
 We submit to necessity
 But make our monuments
 To love.

"Gedi was an African-Arabian city built about A.D. 1200 out of the local coral rock. It was abandoned between A.D. 1500 and 1600; no one knows why. Perhaps it was a raiding tribe, an army marching on Malindi; or the water table may have sunk, forcing out the inhabitants.

"The pillar tombs are said to be phallic, although this significance is not often recognized by Arabs or Africans. It is possible that they are related to the naturalistic phallic pillars found on graves of the Hamitic people of Ethiopia and Somalia, or to the monolithic pillars of Madagascar. In either case, they are evidence of African elements in the culture of the coast."

Sally Bennett Segall

Sally Bennett Segall received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Syracuse University, where she is now an instructor in the English department. Mrs. Segall has published short stories and articles in local Syracuse magazines. The poems reprinted here were written in 1977, when she lived in Nairobi.