

Bertha Porter (1852-1941) and Rosalind Moss (1890-1990) by Barbara S. Lesko

One of the most important research tools for Egyptologists and archaeologists has been for many years the remarkable publication, the *Topographical Bibliography of ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*. This vital resource, which has gone into a second revised edition to keep it up to date, had been conceived by Professor Adolf Erman of Berlin in the last decade of the 19th century. Professor F. Llewellyn Griffith of Oxford actually set in motion the project, when he was still at the British Museum, by financing it and hiring Bertha Porter, a professional bibliographer with the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Little information is available on Porter, except that she was born in London to Frederick William Porter, an architect, and his wife and that she moved in literary circles and was also interested in psychical research. In preparation for her new job, Miss Porter studied hieroglyphs with Griffith and later with Professor Kurt Sethe at Goettingen. Never visiting Egypt herself, Porter depended wholly on publications, photographs and drawings and verifications by others in the field. She collected and organized the references on which the entire enterprise would be established. It was time consuming and challenging work and in 1924, Miss Porter took on as assistant another student of Professor Griffith's, Rosalind Moss. Miss Moss was an energetic woman of independent means and a trained and published anthropologist, who was willing to travel to Egypt to undertake verification of the information to be published in their first volume: *The Theban Necropolis* (1927). Their fruitful collaboration continued until Porter's retirement in 1929, at which time Moss continued the project, producing seven volumes, including largely augmented revised editions of the original three volumes, due to the vast increase in new material that appeared since the project's beginnings.

Moss in turn took on as her editorial assistant, Ethel W. Burney, the widow of Oxford's Oriel Professor of Hebrew, and together they maintained a huge file of slips at the Griffith Institute at Oxford where, by 1938, the *Bibliography's* records had been transferred. A small staff of part-time salaried assistants was installed, including Helen Murray, a South African, who stayed on the staff at Oxford as archivist until her retirement in the 1980's and later Jaromir Malek, a student from Prague's Institute of Egyptology, who is the current editor. The Two Ladies, as Egyptologists came to call the pair of Moss and Burney (after a duet of important ancient Egyptian goddesses) loved to travel and were hospitable hostesses, remembered as especially kind to shy young scholars, and good company to all colleagues as well as extremely meticulous and dedicated researchers whose requests for information were cheerfully met by scholars who realized that the ladies did not spare themselves to produce the most reliable publication in the field.

Whereas, originally the *Topographical Bibliography* aimed at covering all monuments in Egypt, under Rosalind Moss efforts now expanded to include sites in the Sudan and the Egyptian oases and inscribed objects in museums world-wide. Their work took them far afield to remote archaeological monuments and distant museums--all in the interest of gathering correct information, whether it be for identification, the exact position of texts or scenes, the confirmation of ancient names and titles, plans of the monuments, and, once objects came to be included, original provenance, history of ownership and publication, requiring examination of auction catalogues and museum acquisition cards, as well as published volumes.

The constant appearance of new publications called for continual updating of the fileslips. Miss Moss dedicated over 50 years to this enterprise, worked six days a week from 9 AM to 7 PM, and never drew a salary. She visited Egypt many times, visiting all accessible sites, often by donkey. From 1938 on, Ethel Burney joined her on such travels. Miss Moss lived into her 99th year and has been called "one of the most

remarkable figures of Egyptology” in the Twentieth Century. Rosalind Moss was granted an Hon.D.Litt from Oxford in 1961 and retired in 1972, having provided a unique and profoundly useful research tool, which continues to be updated and published.

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