
Barbara Mertz

Egyptologists and mystery lovers throughout the world joined the Oriental Institute in marking the passing of Barbara Mertz in August 2013. Barbara was the author of two nonfiction books on Egyptology, *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs: A Popular History of Ancient Egypt* and *Red Land, Black Land: Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, which have remained in print for more than thirty years. Writing as Elizabeth Peters, Barbara was the author of the beloved Amelia Peabody series of thirty-seven mystery-suspense novels, many set in Egypt. Under her Barbara Michaels pseudonym, she produced an additional twenty-nine suspense novels.

Barbara was born in Canton, Illinois, and moved to the Chicago suburbs as a schoolgirl. At thirteen, she was introduced to the Oriental Institute on a visit with an aunt. She attended the University of Chicago and recalled that she was “supposed to be preparing myself to teach ... I took two education courses before I stopped kidding myself and headed for the Oriental Institute.” She earned her bachelor of arts, master of arts, and doctorate from the University of Chicago, specializing in Egyptology. Positions in academia were highly competitive and Barbara did not receive appropriate encouragement to enter that job market. Instead, she married, raised children, and began writing, incorporating her vast knowledge of Egyptology into her many books.

Barbara was a frequent visitor to Chicago House in Luxor, where she conducted research for her novels in the library and at various archaeological sites. She is remembered fondly by the generations of Chicago House staff as a valued friend, a dedicated supporter, and an insightful colleague. Her zest for life, sense of humor, and passion for adventure made her a most welcome house-guest. A long-time member of the James Henry Breasted Society, Barbara provided generous support for a number of Oriental Institute initiatives in Egyptology including the Epigraphic Sur-



vey, archaeological fieldwork, and climate-control improvements for the Oriental Institute Museum.

It would be difficult to measure the impact that Barbara Mertz has had raising awareness of ancient Egyptian civilization and on popular interest in Egyptology. Her nonfiction works and novels have promoted an accurate understanding and appreciation of ancient Egypt among lay audiences, and she has likely inspired many of her readers to continue learning about this fascinating civilization and to visit modern Egypt. Barbara Mertz will long be remembered as an alumna and dear friend, an author committed to historical accuracy, a steadfast scholar, and a dedicated advocate for Egyptology. All of us at the Oriental Institute are proud of our association with this remarkable woman.
