

A letter written in 2018 from Naum Kleiman, former long-time director of the Moscow Cinema Museum

Dear Su Friedrich,

As far as I know, Esfir Tobak was never (or maybe only as a very young person) a negative cutter. In the 1930's and beginning of 1940's she was director's assistant for editing (in Russian: *assistent rezhissera po montazhu*). Later she became "montageur" (a kind of "editing director").

Esfir (or Fira) was an orphan child from Odessa (her parents were killed during the civil war). She grew up in the Orphanage and learned there to cut negative (helping the Odessa Film Studio). Till her last days she was proud that in the 1920's she became the first "young pioneer" of Odessa. And the Orphanage sent her to Moscow in the beginning of 1930's, when Mosfilm studio was established. Ester found her place in the cutting department.

She was very dedicated to Eisenstein while working with him on "Bezhin Meadow," "Alexander Nevsky" and "Ivan the Terrible". She saved for Eisenstein 1200 clippings from "Bezhin Meadow" and some sequences from "Ivan the Terrible." Eisenstein wrote an essay about her, "*Strekoza i Muravei*" (The Dragonfly and the Ant). It was published in 1969 in the 5th volume of his old 6-volume collection of writings, and in 1997 again in the Russian 2-volume edition of his "Memoires." Please, ask your Russian friends to read for you this essay. There is a short article about her on the website JEWISH.RU [which is included on the women editor's website as a separate PDF].

She promised us many times to write her memories, but I never have seen a trace of her manuscript. But there were two of her speeches during the Eisenstein conferences in Moscow in 1968 and 1998; the texts must be somewhere in the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art (RGALI).

All the best,

yours NK