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Martin Bommas on the Eton Myers Collection

Video introducing the Eton Myers Collection, currently on display at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

Title **Martin Bommas on Eton Myers (/schools/historycultures/departments/caha/research/videos/eton-myers.aspx)**

Duration 6.35 mins

At present Birmingham Egyptology lives in exciting times because we do have an exhibition on ancient Egyptian artefacts in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts currently, which has been opened on the 18th of June and it will finish by the 18th of January in 2012.

So this is quite a long period of time where you can come and see high class and high value ancient Egyptian artefacts which derive from a collection which was actually you know, organised by a single collector - by an individual collector. He is quite an interesting man I must say, his name is William Myers, he's an old boy from Eton and while being a soldier he was actually serving in Egypt and at that time - he didn't get too much time before he died, by the way - at that time he made the best of his stay there and started to collect ancient Egyptian artefacts,. We do not know why that happened but actually he's not the only one who at that time was fascinated by there - many individuals - I'm not talking about museums here, but individual collectors who had an interest in ancient Egypt at that time. Mostly these rich businessman or diplomats like the German Wilhelm Pelizaeus perhaps acquired some money to establish a very, very big collection which is now on display at Hildesheim in Germany. Myers unfortunately doesn't have the financial means of someone like Wilhelm Pelizaeus, but nevertheless, what he had, and what makes this exhibition interesting is that he was a man of great taste.

Although it did not have the money to buy let's say, big steel or large monuments, and he was restricted to what we now call minor art. He actually had access to a full range of objects that the big museums at the time like the Louvre or the British Museum or the Berlin Museum would not like to engage with. And this means that Myers in a very short period of time was able to collect probably the biggest collection in the world on ancient Egyptian faience. These beautiful blue shimmering objects, and I think it might be fair to say that this collection of blue faience that Myers worked on and collected and brought together actually is one of the biggest in the world. Highlights of these collections are then of course there blue faience bowls, the function of which is not fully understood by Egyptologists today, but this gives us quite a chance to use the Myers objects as a starting point for further research.

And the reason why we do have the objects now in the Barber Institute of Fine Art is because Eton College for a certain period of time, to precise, 15 years wants to give away their objects to make sure these objects are used in the university environment and also for research which means that part of these objects will be going to Charles Hopkins University in Baltimore, other objects will be staying with us at Birmingham where we can make fine use of them for teaching and research and especially postgraduate students are invited to work these objects as part of their research for an MPhil B for instance or even PhD. Dissertations we're well prepared to open the collections for those who want to work with them. Myers was not only interested in blue faience objects - there's much more that you can see in this stunning exhibition - for instance, a very rare example of a coffin lid from the 18th dynasty which is absolutely - I would say - the highest culture of coffin production at the time with a very interesting spell written on the back side of this coffin lid which then Imhotep – the owner of this coffin was able to read while he was lying in his coffin asking for protection of the sky goddess Nut. There are many details that you can see there - in this exhibition and although we call it minor art, this is not a minor exhibition. The collection of 70 objects that we have there on display is probably the finest that you can see currently in the UK. And this is another thing that I would like to stress here - the Eton Myers collection actually is not a very well-known amongst scholars, it's travelled the world for the last 15 years - objects went to America Museum of Fine Arts and went to Leiden and to Japan so the actually the objects travelled the world but in fact they were never really shown in England. And this is one of the - I would say once of the first opportunity where people can access these objects here in Birmingham and see them for the very first time.

What I personally find exciting is that one part of the research that we want to do with these objects will also be part of what we call a virtual museum. We want to create together with VISTA Centre, a virtual museum where everyone – by mouse-clicking actually - can have access to museum, have a look at all these objects you know images only, but you can turn them around, you can look inside a pot for instance, or you can see what's on the back side, things that you usually not see in museums will then be accessible for scholars, students, everyone who's interested in these things all over the world which is a very prestigious thing I would say and although there're many virtual museums around in the world now for instance Iraq museum will be a virtual museum as well, this is nearly for the first time that Egyptologists want to create a virtual museum that is accessible for students, scholars and the interested public alike. It will take us some more months to get this off the ground but when it will there it will be a very fine tool and also interesting even in times where the exhibition will then be closed.

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