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Martin Bommas on Egyptology

Video of Martin Bommas discussing his interest in ancient Egyptian texts and rituals.

Title **Martin Bommas on Egyptology (/staff/profiles/caha/bommas-martin.aspx)**
Duration 4.49 mins

My name is Martin Bommas, I'm senior lecturer in Egyptology, and today I would like to describe what I'm doing as an Egyptologist. One of my special fields is religious texts, I'm interested in Pharaonic religion, and this especially in the ritualistic side of it. So I want to find out how rituals actually work, and what differences there are between ceremonies and rituals. And one ritual that is of particular interest for those who have an interest in ancient Egypt, is a ritual called the 'ritual of opening the mouth'. This ritual is a very ancient ritual, we have it already roughly at the beginning of the Egyptian civilization around, well, 3000BC, but this ritual is still fashionable in ancient times when the Romans were in Egypt so this is a very old ritual and also a ritual that goes for a very long time.

Now the funny thing about this 'ritual of opening the mouth' is that you find it mostly in the context of funerary cults especially as part of burials. But this ritual's also carried out for statues, even for temples. And I think it might be fair to say that this is a ritual that you need to have if you want to make objects ready for purpose - fit for purpose. Therefore you can have temples and mummies because mummies are objects before they are later buried, and temples.

Currently I was asked to edit a papyrus which contains the first sections of this 'ritual for opening the mouth' - and the papyrus I'm now working on is actually what contains the recitations that are necessary to carry out this rite. During the New Kingdom which is a period which stretches from 1550 to roughly 1070, the 'ritual of opening the mouth' was carried out on a daily basis wherever statues were produced or temples were inaugurated, or a deceased was brought to his final burial place.

And you will imagine that you have loads of these papyri that contained recitations for this 'ritual of opening the mouth' but in fact the papyrus I work on is the only surviving document we do have which is really strange. It's even more strange that it's never been published. Now because there's such a well documented ritual I can easily compare the fragments I do have, which are currently kept in the Turion Museum in Italy, I can fairly easily compare them with the other evidence we do have ad so I can reconstruct the first five scenes of these rituals in quite some detail and these five scenes contain purification rites, and they're accompanied by a song, which has the title 'Pure, Pure' - that's - I think fits quite well with a purification rite anyway, but what makes this text especially interesting is that the Turin fragment I'm working on actually a 'ritual of opening the mouth' performed for Imhotep the First, one of the earliest kings of the 18th dynasty in Egypt was later worshiped as, well, some kind of a patron saint in the [unclear], and he had his - obviously his funeral temple there in Thebes and there these rituals were carried out, probably on a weekly basis, on a daily basis, we don't know. But the important thing is that this papyrus I work on does not date to the time when Imhotep the First died, presumably 2 or 3 hundred years afterwards as far as I can tell by the form of the script I'm dealing with... and this is quite important because it tells us that although Imhotep the First as a pharaoh is dead, he still receives not only worship by people living in [unclear], there were still funerary cults going on, on probably a regular basis. Imhotep the First is interesting because he was never buried in the Valley of the Kings so he had his tomb somewhere else - we don't know where this tomb actually is and we do not know where this temple is. This 'ritual for opening the mouth' fragment tells us quite a deal about ritual practise in ancient Egypt, especially during the New Kingdom and this is why I'm looking forward to finish this papyrus edition very soon.

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