

INSCRIPTIONS

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Egypt Centre, Swansea

Issue 39

November 2014

In this issue:

Next Lecture	1
A peep into the tomb of King Tut	2
<i>by Anne Houlton</i>	
The Continuing Adventures of Ianto the Tidy, the only Welsh Pharaoh...	2
<i>by Anon</i>	
About our contributors: Dulcie Engel	2
Editorial	3
41 st BAFM Conference	3
<i>by Sheila Nowell</i>	
Memories of Claire	4
Dylan Thomas and Ancient Egypt	5
<i>by Dulcie Engel</i>	

Claire Edwards



The Friends of the Egypt Centre send their sincere condolences to the family of Claire Edwards, long-time Volunteer at the centre and former Chair of the Friends, who died on 14 September. See Page 4 for tributes to this remarkable lady who touched the lives of many staff, volunteers, friends and visitors.

**Save the date for
The Egypt Centre
Christmas sale**

**Thursday 4th, Friday 5th,
Saturday 6th December**

**10% off exclusively for University staff,
Friends of the Egypt Centre members,
volunteers, and members of the
Egyptological Society of Swansea.**

This three day sale is a perfect opportunity to purchase unique and beautiful gifts for all the family ranging from jewellery, scarves, books, and stocking fillers for kids!

For an extra special Christmas gift come and see our exclusive range of Egyptian inspired jewellery hand-made by Sarah Elam.

**Join us from 10am—4pm
for free wine and mince pies!**

Next Lecture

Wednesday 3 December 2014 at 7 p.m., Fulton House

Kasia Szpakowska

Armed and Dangerous:

**An iconography of protective
Middle and New Kingdom demons.**



A peep into the tomb of King Tut

Tutankhamun's tomb was left intact and not plundered until 1922 largely because, when the Valley of the Kings flooded, its entrance became silted up with sand and residue from the river. A recent television programme stated this as a fact. When Howard Carter in 1922 opened up the tomb wall he was filled full of awe and amazement; and he famously said to his sponsor, the Earl of Caernarvon, that he saw "wonderful things." He wrote: "At first I could see nothing as the hot air was escaping from the chamber causing the candle to flicker, but presently as my eyes grew accustomed to the light, details of the room emerged slowly from the mist, strange animals, statues and gold— everywhere the glint of gold."

The main inner chamber was crammed full of objects needed for use in the afterlife, as well as the sarcophagus. Wooden furniture and statues overlaid with gold, shabti figures, gold jewellery with lapis lazuli, items made from alabaster, a chariot, a bed and a wooden *sennet* board game were all included. The sheer number of items, their size and opulence were indeed impressive.

Unfortunately, the sponsor of the expedition, the Earl of Caernarvon, did not die from 'the Pharaoh's curse' but more prosaically from an infected mosquito bite.

As Tutankhamun died in his teens, in recent years scientific tests on his skeleton have concluded that the physical injuries to his head and ribs were most likely to be caused by him either falling from a horse, or from a chariot during a race.

by Anne Houlton

The Continuing Adventures of Ianto the Tidy, the only Welsh Pharaoh...

The excavation team have been hard at work revealing the final resting place of this tidiest of Pharaohs. After excavating through several strata of coal and coal dust they chanced upon a door emblazoned with cartouches and an exhortation. It read "Congratulations you have found the final resting place of Ianto, Ianto the Tidy... please leave a message after the beep as I am currently in a state of ma'at and cannot be disturbed. Tidy."

Following excessive and correct recording of every aspect of the tomb entrance, the team broke through the door to be confronted by a strange guardian statue which featured an inscription which read:

"Ew name's not on the list, ew's not coming in."

Hopefully by the next issue further news will be available.



by Anon

About our contributors: Dulcie Engel

[Inscriptions welcomes contributions right across the spectrum from humorous to erudite. We thank Dulcie Engel for her fascinating article on Ancient Egypt's influence on Dylan Thomas, see pages 5-8. Here Dulcie introduces herself – Ed]

I was born in London in 1959, and studied languages (French & German) at Bristol University, then linguistics at MA and PhD level at Reading University, specialising in the usage of French past tenses.

For most of my career I have been a teacher of some sort: mainly teaching French language and linguistics at university level, but also teaching English as a Foreign Language to adult learners.

I have worked as a volunteer at the Egypt Centre since April 2014. I currently come in 2 mornings a week and work as a gallery assistant in both 'houses'.

As a child, I was fascinated by Ancient Egyptian artefacts. I have very early memories of seeing mummies in the British Museum, and the Bolton museum (where my grandparents lived). In 1972, my mother took me to the Tutankhamun exhibition in London, I remember the queues and the gold mask quite vividly. In turn, I went with my husband and children to the 2007 Tutankhamun exhibition at the O2. My daughter was passionate about Egyptology since doing a project at primary school; over the years I made quite a few visits to the Egypt Centre with my children and my nephews. My daughter completed the Swansea Egyptology MA in 2009, and her enthusiasm was wonderful. She gave me a fabulous commented tour of the Egyptological galleries at the Louvre. I have also made a point of visiting collections at the Ashmolean in Oxford, Harrogate Museum, Bristol museum, Brighton museum, and the Museum of Classical Art in Mougins. I have plans to visit the Petrie museum soon, and would love to go to Turin, Berlin, MOMA and of course Cairo!

As a linguist, I am particularly interested in the writing systems of Ancient Egypt, and my childhood fascination with mummies persists, as illustrated in this article. I also love the intricacy of the amulets and jewellery.

by Dulcie Engel





Editorial

Welcome to Issue 39 of *Inscriptions*, the first in the 2014-2015 Academic Year.

The Editor and his wife were deeply saddened to hear of the death of Claire Edwards, which occurred while we were away on holiday. We remember Claire fondly as a very charming and capable lady, passionate about all things Egyptian and brimming with energy for getting things done. She will be sorely missed by all connected with the Egypt Centre.

We will also shortly be saying goodbye to another inspirational Chairman, but this time for a happier reason. **Ken Griffin**, who is currently in the hot seat, will be spending much of the coming year abroad involved in various exciting digs, and has decided he has to relinquish the chairmanship. We extend our sincere thanks to Ken for his work as Chairman and wish him every success in his excavations.

Another issue of *Inscriptions* is planned for the New Year, so we will be grateful for more contributions, whether chatty or scholarly! You can send it in hard copy or electronic form. Please address it to the Egypt Centre and mark it for my attention.

Mike Mac Donagh

41st BAFM Conference

In two years from bid to the actual conference the 41st Annual Conference and AGM of the British Association of Friends of Museums took place at the Marriott Hotel Swansea on 26th-28th September. The conference theme was "**Keeping Heritage Alive**".

We arrived on the Friday about midday to set up in the foyer with literature and pop ups about the Egypt Centre and it was already a hive of activity. I had expected to accompany the tour to the Egypt Centre but found I was also doing the Richard Burton Archives and Singleton Abbey. Being a tour guide is now off my list for ever! Later the Deputy Leader of the City and County of Swansea, Councillor Christine Richards, welcomed delegates at a reception hosted by Swansea Museum, and Gareth El Tawab, the curator, gave a tour. There followed a buffet at the Marriott.

After registration on the Saturday, the Chair of BAFM welcomed everyone and introduced the first speaker, Dr David Fleming, Vice president of the Museums Association, who spoke on how museums can preserve the past and the present for future generations in view of the current cuts in public expenditure. After coffee Huw Bowen spoke on safeguarding the future of

Swansea's Industrial past. This was very funny, interspersed as it was with Swansea City v Cardiff jokes, not to mention sheep jokes! After lunch speakers were Gareth El Tawab of Swansea Museum, Jenni Spencer Davies of the Glynn Vivian Gallery and Steph Mastoris of the National Waterfront Museum, followed by our very own Syd Howells who spoke about the use of child volunteers. Syd was of course the best and had the most "groupies" around him afterwards. We then left to take Syd back to the Egypt Centre in a blaze of reflected glory.

The evening started with a reception given by the Lord Mayor, Councillor Ceinwen Thomas, at the Brangwyn Hall, followed by a quick peek at the newly refurbished Brangwyn Panels and then a tour of the council chamber, which was very impressive. Then off to the gala dinner at the Marriott. The after dinner speaker was Dr Alwyn Humphreys who at the end of his talk conducted everyone in singing *Calon Lan* and *We'll keep a welcome in the hillsides*. No tours for me on the Sunday morning!

I hope we succeeded in our aim of promoting the work of the Egypt Centre especially with child volunteers and increasing the profile. It was hard work, many meetings, some fraught, but the feedback I have had was that it was a great success and one of the best conferences ever. Many first time visitors to Swansea were so impressed that they said they would return for longer.

by Sheila Nowell



A hive of activity at the BAFM conference



Syd and Sheila enjoy a well-earned cup of coffee





Memories of Claire

Claire Edwards was a Volunteer at the Egypt Centre from 2001 to 2014. The reason she gave for volunteering was: 'Retirement begins to pall and I am anxious to get my brain working again! Having worked for the Wales Tourist Board I enjoy meeting people and helping with gaining information.'

Claire was an exceptional education leader; children loved listening to her explaining the wonders of ancient Egypt and she was always ready to take a new volunteer under her wing.

Claire will always be remembered for her 'Harry Potter' themed costume activity! This was so popular and the children were totally enthralled by Claire's claim to be a teacher at Hogwarts! Claire would ask the children to close their eyes as she took them on a magical carpet ride travelling across continents and back in time to ancient Egypt. Claire wasn't impressed when we moved the large framed print of a tomb painting that she used for this activity!

Claire loved to tell others about the Egypt Centre and was always sending visitors from the Tourist Information Centre where she worked. Claire was awarded a volunteer award for advertising the museum.

Claire became Chair for the Friends of the Egypt Centre and actively raised funds for her beloved museum, organising very popular garden parties as well as being a founder of the Griffiths Memorial Lectures. Claire loved socialising and made friends for life with other volunteers, even going on holiday with them to Egypt and Germany too!

*Wendy Goodridge
Assistant Curator*



Claire was a very thoughtful person. In 2006 Prince Charles and Camilla came to visit the Egypt Centre and other parts of the University. Egypt Centre staff and volunteers, including Claire, were involved in entertaining the royal couple and the University organised a lunch for the academic members of staff who had been involved. When Claire found out that this did not involve Egypt Centre staff she decided to do something about it.

After the visitors had left the Centre and gone onto their lunch, Wendy and I were making the shop area ready for our 'normal' visitors. We received an urgent message from upstairs and both of us, Claire said, were required urgently. So, we dashed upstairs wondering what disaster had occurred. The upstairs gallery seemed fine so we went to check on the bar area next to the Taliesin. Claire had organised a surprise strawberries and sparkling wine lunch for us all. There was no disaster.

*Carolyn Graves-Brown
Curator*

I can't remember the exact date that Claire applied to volunteer but it was sometime in 2001. I can remember her application form and thought 'perfect'. How right I was. I can remember our first meeting, in the shared area, I think Claire wore a beautiful scarf and was incredibly smart (as always). She had had an impressive and varied career which included over 30 years' teaching experience which I thought might come in handy. I was thinking 'Tuesday Claire'..

We had a great time chatting about what she had done and how she could help us and I remembered thinking what a kind person she was. She immediately became 'posh Claire'. I don't know why because I don't think we had any other non-posh Claires at Egypt Centre. And I'm not sure if she ever knew I called her posh Claire!

I used to love sitting having chats about life, love, the universe etc. and I can remember she was so very supportive when I had another 'life' crisis! I can remember telling her about where I'd

been the previous weekends and what I'd got up to (not everything) ...oh, the look of horror on her face. But I think she loved my stories. She used to have a great laugh at my fashion sense and my tattoos!

Her skills with children and adults of all ages and abilities were priceless. She always had time for everyone and had great advice.

I missed everyone a lot when I left Egypt Centre, I still do, and I was saddened to hear of Claire's passing. I'm sure that she will be greatly missed but I'm also sure she is looking down on us having a great time. Thanks for the memories Claire. xxx

*Stuart Williams
Volunteer Manager @ Egypt
Centre, 2000-2008*

I first encountered Claire when I joined the Friends of the Egypt Centre. At that time she was Chair of the Friends and an ever-present figure at all lectures and events. It was clear that here was a formidable woman with a passion for Egyptology, performance and people. Claire was unafraid of anything and I recognised in her a similar anarchic spirit, ready to do battle with all that life threw in her way.

Later when I was fortunate enough to become Volunteer Manager at the Egypt Centre, Claire was an invaluable presence, always willing to help out, and I was sad when she decided to retire from volunteering with us. In typical style Claire was making a comeback à la Frank Sinatra when she sadly took her bow.

A lovely woman who will be much missed by us all.

'All the world's a stage' – W. Shakespeare.

*Syd Howells
Volunteer Manager*





Dylan Thomas and Ancient Egypt

2014 is the centenary of the birth of the world-famous poet and prose writer Dylan Thomas, at 5 Cwmdonkin Drive, Uplands, Swansea on 27th October 1914. Swansea was his home for the first 20 years¹, the place that inspired his writing throughout his short life, and the place where his early poems were written.

Among the many celebrations and events to mark this anniversary was an exhibition of his early notebooks at the Dylan Thomas Centre² in Swansea. The very first poem in the first notebook from 1930 is entitled ‘Osiris, come to Isis’³, written at the age of fifteen, and dated April 27th. The poem ‘uses Egyptian mythology to make some shaky pronouncements about love’⁴.

Before we examine the text, a short explanation of the mythological references is necessary. Geb (Seb here⁵) the earth god and Nut the sky goddess were the parents of two sons, Osiris and Seth (Set here), and two daughters, Isis and Nephthys. Osiris and Isis were also the parents of Horus; Isis was also worshipped as mother of the sacred Apis bull. She took over many of the attributes of the cow goddess Hathor, and is usually depicted wearing the solar disc and cow horns associated with Hathor. Later, Hathor was married to Horus.

To very briefly summarise one version of the legend, Seth killed his brother the king, Osiris, and seized the throne. Isis magically resurrected Osiris and conceived Horus. Horus avenged his father’s death and became king of the living, while Osiris became king of the

underworld. Seth was cast into the desert, where he ruled as the god of chaos and evil. [*Papyrus Chester Beatty I somewhat differs —Ed*]

As deities, Osiris was associated with death, resurrection and fertility. Isis was seen as a protectress and mother figure. Their son Horus was the embodiment of divine kingship, and it is his four sons that protect the organs placed in canopic jars during mummification.⁶

Dylan’s familiarity with the legend can be seen from a cursory selection of lines from the poem⁷:

...
*Osiris was the son of Seb and Nut
A glacial god, a strongly muscled boy...
Watery-handsome like a spotted stoat
No parhelion⁸ in the Egypt skies
But symbol of the sun’s fierce throat...
Osiris, Osiris, father of Horus...
born again in the belly of Apis⁹...
Opening his eye and dreaming of Isis*

⁶ There are numerous sources for this legend and the traits of the gods. A useful reference is Shaw and Nicolson (1995).

⁷ Maud (1967) has edited the notebooks for publication.

⁸ A parhelion is a phenomenon also known as a phantom sun, or sun dog: a pair of bright spots either side of the sun. Dylan seems to be very fond of this word as it occurs in other texts (see Goodby 2013: 131). The phenomenon is noted as occurring in Egypt in Phillips (1800: 87). Furthermore, according to an online dictionary: ‘There are records among the writings of the Ancient Egyptians that discuss two suns in the sky, and one that discusses the sun setting in the east, or moving backward’ (askdefinebeta.com). However, Carolyn Graves-Brown (Egypt Centre) has found no record of such Egyptian writings. The authors of the definition may have confused Egyptian ideas of the Duat with what today we would call a sun dog. The Duat, according to the Egyptians was the underworld through which the sun god Ra travels on a boat, from sunset (west) to sunrise (east). The sun rising in the morning is his rebirth by Nut. This might have been misinterpreted by the authors as an Egyptian belief in two suns or the sun setting in the east or moving backwards.

The Akkadian Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (c.2230 BC) clearly depicts two suns, or perhaps stars, in the sky, possibly representing gods. Thanks to Carolyn Graves-Brown for bringing this to my attention.

⁹ As pointed out earlier, Apis was a bull, not a cow!

*Lying with Set or the bull, or both
Side by side of the Nile’s white cloth...
Makes him desire Seb’s fair daughter
Earth and sky, with her sacred cow
Who gave her horns on the flat-haired
brow
She sits on a disced and symbolled
throne...
He thought of Isis and her lotus staff...
Apis must come to the cow...
Or the cow to Apis...*

As one commentator put it, ‘Thomas, who must have read a book on Egypt, was fascinated with pyramids and mummies’¹⁰. However, there is rather more to Dylan’s interest in Egyptian mythology. Kleinman (1963) suggests he was very familiar with Egyptian myths and customs and the Book of the Dead, and is one of many commentators who note the importance of the themes of love, death and rebirth in Dylan’s poetry. That this is already clear in an early poem written before his 16th birthday is of some significance.

It is most likely that he found the books on Ancient Egypt in his father’s study: ‘He himself recorded how...he would sit in his father’s dim book-lined ‘den’ and read indiscriminately, until his eyes hung out. D.J.’s¹¹ shelves contained ‘nearly everything that a respectable highbrow library should contain’.¹² And Goodby (2013: 255) reminds us of the popularity among the modernist writers of *The Golden Bough* by J. G. Frazer, first published in 1890. Its discussion of different belief systems from a cultural perspective was highly influential on writers Thomas admired, such as W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and James Joyce¹³. This book could easily have had a place on D.J.’s bookshelves.

As well as being an avid reader, young Dylan was a keen cinema-goer, and the following anecdote shows another memorable induction into Ancient Egypt. In 1950, at his last reunion with his old Swansea friends all

¹⁰ Tindall (1962: 73). See also Goodby (2013: 131): ‘there are a number of Egyptian and classical references’.

¹¹ Dylan’s father, D.J. Thomas, English master at Swansea Grammar School.

¹² Lycett (2003: 36).

¹³ See Rossman (1974: 420–423).

¹ He died in New York on 9th November 1953, aged 39.

² Loaned by the University of Buffalo, to whom they were sold (by Dylan) in 1941. They were on display in Swansea from 31/05 to 4/09/2014.

³ Coincidentally, Bob Dylan (who famously changed his surname in homage to Welsh Dylan) wrote a song called ‘Isis’ which features on the 1976 ‘Desire’ album. It includes the lyrics *I married Isis on the fifth day of May...we came to the pyramids all embedded in ice...I broke into the tomb but the casket was empty...*

⁴ Ferris (1977: 56)

⁵ Both Seb and Keb are known variations of Geb (<http://www.ancientegyptonline.co.uk/geb.html>).





together¹⁴, the men ‘decided to re-enact a film about Egyptian tombs that had terrified them as children at the Uplands fleapit. Dylan played the Egyptologist while Vernon was the tomb robber, and Dan was the mummified pharaoh, posing in an old zinc bath that they turned upright and used as a tomb’¹⁵.

Furthermore, we know Dylan frequently visited Swansea Museum. In his broadcast ‘Reminiscences of Childhood’¹⁶, he describes walking through the centre of Swansea ‘past the blackened monuments of civic pride and the museum, which should have been in a museum’. Apparently, as a reporter on the South Wales Daily Post (1931-32), he used to sleep off the excesses of too much beer at lunchtime in a quiet corner of the museum¹⁷. He would have been very familiar with one of the star attractions, the Egyptian mummy of the priest Hor (c. 250-200BC), which came to the museum in 1888¹⁸.

Following the discovery of Tutankhamun’s tomb by Howard Carter in November 1922 (when Dylan was 8 years old), there was an increased

interest in the west in all things ancient Egyptian. A wave of ‘Tut mania’ swept the west. The interest manifested itself not just in mummy films, but also in decoration, fashion and building¹⁹. Indeed many cinemas and other public buildings were designed to look like Egyptian temples, both in the UK and the USA. A Swansea example of Egyptian architectural influence is the Art Deco Oystermouth Library, built in 1935, shortly after Dylan left Swansea for London.

All these cultural influences must have worked their way into Dylan’s writing, and their continued presence is seen in other work. Indeed, the early notebooks were the source of much of the material in his published works, particularly the first two collections of poetry.

Vernon Watkins (2013: 25) says of his first published collection, *18 Poems* (1934): ‘They were intricate poems, packed with sexual imagery. They were explorations of the universe always related back to the poet’s own body, to his forbears, to time and dissolution, to birth and its mystery.’

The collection includes ‘My world is pyramid’, where the pyramid comes to represent protection from the outside world, its function being to keep the dead safe for their rebirth in the afterlife²⁰:

*My world is pyramid. The padded
mummer
Weeps on the desert ochre and the salt
Incising summer.
My Egypt’s armour buckling in its sheet
I scrape through resin to starry bone
And a blood parhelion.*

Mummification took place in the desert on the west bank of the Nile and was carried out by bandagers/embalmers supervised by priests. Natron salt was used as a preservative and drying agent, and the body was coated with resin²¹.

The armour could refer to the layers of bandages, the shroud, the wooden coffin or the stone sarcophagus, all protecting the body.

In his second published collection, *Twenty-five Poems* (1936), three more poems make use of Egyptian funerary imagery, and illustrate some degree of familiarity with the mummification process²².

In ‘Should lanterns shine’, the sense of decay is palpable. The pigments could refer to the cosmetics painted on the face, or the painted death mask. And a beard was a symbol of kingship: pharaohs, both male and female, usually had false beards. Another association raised is that of the public mummy unwrappings attended by bearded Victorian scholars, which were often considered in a sexualised way as a stripping of the body. Although the beard could also belong to Old Father Time²³:

...
*The features in their private dark
Are formed of flesh, but let the false day
come
And from her lips the faded pigments
fall,
The mummy cloths expose an ancient
breast...
So fast I move defying time, the quiet
gentleman
Whose beard wags in Egyptian wind...*

According to Tindall (1962: 140-141): ‘With the boys of ‘Should lanterns shine’ and ‘My world is pyramid’, we visit Egypt to inspect mummies, which serve the poet now as images of printing...the poems are mummies of themselves. They are embalmed; yet publishing them is a kind of resurrection.’

The Egyptian imagery is continued in ‘Altarwise by moonlight’, with references to pharaohs, camels²⁴,

this colouring was due to the use of bitumen, hence the word ‘mummiya’, (bitumen in Arabic), then borrowed into many languages to describe the process and the body. (Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 192).

²² Dylan may well have read the classic account of mummification by the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 490-420 BC) in Book 2 of *The Histories*.

²³ Thanks again to Carolyn Graves-Brown for reminding me of mummy unwrappings and Old Father Time!

²⁴ Camels were only introduced to Egypt in the Roman period [although known earlier-Ed]

¹⁴ Daniel Jones the composer, Alfred Jones the artist, and Vernon Watkins the poet.

¹⁵ Janes (2014: 170). There were many films made in the 1920s, with titles such as ‘Tut-Tut and his Terrible Tomb’ (1923); ‘The Shadow of Egypt’ (1924); ‘Mummy Love’ (1926). See <http://www.ancientegyptfilmsite.nl>. Thanks to Caroline Franklin for alerting me to this website.

¹⁶ Written in 1942, first broadcast on the BBC in 1943. Text available in various collections of his stories and broadcasts.

¹⁷ Elaine Kidwell, a one-time librarian at Swansea Museum, also remembered Dylan as a “beautifully mannered” man. She told us how, in the late 1930s, after the pubs closed for the afternoon, he liked to call in at the museum. He had an understanding with library staff, who’d let him go down to the basement, where he’d promptly fall asleep in a comfy chair in the Gents. At closing time it was Elaine’s job to wake Dylan up and usher him out of the building to make sure he wasn’t locked in overnight’ (bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/profiling/DylanThomas...). Thanks to Adrian Metcalfe of the Lighthouse Theatre company, and Matthew Hughes, curator of the Dylan Thomas Birthplace, for helping me track this down. However this would be in the early, not the late 1930s.

¹⁸ Donated by Swansea-born Field Marshall Lord Francis Grenfell, acquired with the help of Egyptologist Wallace Budge (Sabine 1996).

¹⁹ In her review of the ‘Discovering Tutankhamun’ exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (24/07 -2/11/14), Kennedy (2014) writes: ‘images of the king or objects from the tomb appeared on jewellery, furnishing fabric, cigarette cards, penknives, biscuit tins and evening gowns’.

²⁰ See Tindall (1962: 73-75). Kleinman (1963: 103-118) also discusses the use of Egyptian imagery as part of his wider study of Dylan’s religious poetry.

²¹ The resin added to the already darkened colour of the skin, and the Arabs believed





shrouds, resurrection, deserts, bandages, linen, gold, masks, sand and triangles (pyramids?)²⁵:

(from sonnet IV)

...

*Shade without shape? the shape of
Pharaoh's echo?...
My camel's eye will needle through the
shroud...*

(from sonnet IX)

...

*This was the resurrection in the desert,
Death from a bandage, rants the mask of
scholars
Gold on such features, and the linen
spirit
Weds my long gentleman to dusts and
furies;
With priest and pharaoh bed my gentle
wound,
World in the sand, on the triangle
landscape,
With stones of odyssey for ash and
garland
And rivers of the dead around my neck.*

Of sonnet IX, Goodby (2013: 269) writes of the poet's entombment: 'the embalming technique is highly textualised, and he is consigned to the 'dusts and furies' of an Egyptian 'triangle landscape', as sterile as those in 'My world is pyramid'.'

In the stanza below from the poem 'I, in my intricate image', the scales may refer to the weighing of the heart scene, a judgement of a person's goodness to determine whether s/he would go into the afterlife:

...

*Man was the scales, the death birds on
enamel,
Tail, Nile, and snout, a saddler of the
rushes,
Time in the hourless houses
Shaking the sea-hatched skull,
And, as for oils and ointments on the
flying grail,
All-hollowed man wept for his white
apparel...*

The scales might also link to the animal imagery of the second line. The death birds on enamel probably refer to amulets placed within the bandages,

²⁵ 'One can...find him generating...new associations' by displacing words from their usual contexts (the Egyptian group of 'pyramid', 'mummy', 'crocodile' and 'desert' is one example)' (Goodby 2013: 134).

possibly winged scarabs, or more likely, ba-birds²⁶. The ba represented one's personality, and after death, the ba-bird flew between the tomb and the underworld. The flying grail could also refer to the ba-bird.

The animal in line 2 could be the crocodile god Sobek, or Ammut the devourer (head of a crocodile, foreparts of a lion, and rear of a hippopotamus), who consumed the hearts of evil people in the weighing of the heart scene. Oils and ointments were used to scent and soften the dried corpse before bandaging, and the hollowed man is clearly the eviscerated body of the corpse after the internal organs were removed. The saddler of the rushes could refer to the crocodile in his natural habitat. Rushes are important in the story of Osiris and Isis, as Isis hid her baby son Horus in the rushes to conceal him from Seth. The papyrus reed (similar to a rush) was the symbol of Lower Egypt.

The houses could refer to the House of Beauty (the tent where mummification took place), or the House of Death (the tomb).

In 1939, *The Map of Love* was published, a collection of 'seven stories, all fanciful and some surrealist, and sixteen poems'²⁷. In the story 'The Mouse and The Woman', we find echoes of 'Osiris, come to Isis', 'My world is pyramid' and 'Should lanterns shine':

*'Consider now the old effigy of time, his
long beard whitened by an Egyptian
sun...Parhelion and sun shine in the
same sky with the broken moon. Dizzy
with the chasing of moon by sun,...I run
upstairs to read again of the love of
some man for a woman'*

The same collection contains two further poems with Egyptian funerary imagery. 'O make me a mask' begins with references to the death mask and the wall of the tomb. As for enamelled eyes, we find artificial glass eyes on

²⁶ 'In order for the bodies of the deceased to survive in the afterlife, they had to be reunited with the ba every night, and Spell 89 of the Book of the Dead recommended that a golden ba-bird should be placed on the chest of the mummy in order to facilitate this reunion' (Shaw & Nicholson 1995: 47).

The death bird could also be Horus of the two horizons (The rising and setting sun), symbolised as a hawk-winged sun disc (Carolyn Graves-Brown).

²⁷ Ferris (1977: 177)

mummies, and richly decorated masks, such as that of Tutankhamun, made of gold inlaid with coloured glass and semi-precious stones. Dylan may be using 'spectacled' as a synonym for 'decorated'. The claws could then refer to the gold finger guards placed on mummies of the very rich²⁸. Or indeed, this could be a play on words, with the adjectives deliberately switched (spectacled eyes, enamelled claws). The 'wedjet eye' or Eye of Horus²⁹ does look spectacled³⁰. Alternatively, the eyes and claws belong to the gods and monsters of the underworld:

*O make me a mask and a wall to shut
from your spies
Of the sharp, enamelled eyes and the
spectacled claws...*

Ironically perhaps, a death mask was made of Dylan by the sculptor David Slivka in the Manhattan funeral home where he was laid out in November 1953. Slivka cast five bronzes from the mask, one of which can be seen at the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea (Fox 2010).

Watkins frequently referred to Dylan as a person hidden behind a mask: 'A writer's mask can be fatal to him, and it is certain that the image demanded of Dylan Thomas was accelerated by his popularity...His method was not to retreat from the mask, but to advance beyond it, and in that exaggeration remain completely himself' (Watkins 2013: 24). This poem shows some self-awareness of the dichotomy in Dylan's character.

The poem 'I make this in a warring absence' (originally entitled 'Poem to Caitlin'), merits these comments from Vernon Watkins, based on his discussions with Dylan: 'Dylan told me that he had gone down into the tombs of Egypt and must come up in eight

²⁸ For an image of Tutankhamun's gold finger covers, see: <http://www.wanderingeducators.com/best/traveling/tutankhamun-golden-king-and-great-pharaohs.html>

²⁹ Horus lost his left eye in his battle with Seth, and it was restored by Hathor. The eye came to symbolise healing and protection. An amulet of the eye was placed on the mummy, over the incision made on the left hand side of the body, in order to remove the organs.

³⁰ Thanks again to Carolyn Graves-Brown for her insights here. She also points out that the Egyptian mask was made not to hide, but to become more godlike.





lines...Of course the wonder he had experienced in reading about the opening of Tutankhamun's tomb is in the verse, and so, too, is the ninth sonnet of 'Altarwise by moonlight'...'(Watkins 2013: 62). This comment by a close friend and contemporary poet vindicates my earlier comment on the widespread cultural influence of 'Tut mania'³¹.

'I make this in a warring absence' also has many echoes of 'My world is pyramid', with the anatomist clearly referring to the embalmer. The unusual choice of 'emerald' to describe the bandages could be a reference to Caitlin's Irish roots, and also picks up the theme of precious stones in the last line quoted here³². Goodby (2013:213) is rather more scathing of the imagery: '...burial and rebirth—as in 'Altarwise', part IX—are expressed in Thomas's best cod-Egyptian mode':

...
Weighed in rock shroud is my proud pyramid
Where, wound in emerald linen and sharp wind,
The hero's hand lies scraped of every legend
Comes love's anatomist with sun-gloved hand
Who picks the live heart on a diamond...

And on a lighter note, in the story 'A prospect of the sea'³³ a young boy is seduced, partly by an alluring and fantastical Egyptian reference:

'I come from Amman valley,' said the boy.
'I have a sister in Egypt,' she said, 'who lives in a pyramid...' She drew him closer.
'They're calling me in for tea,' he said.
She lifted her frock to her waist.

In conclusion, Dylan had more than a passing fascination with Ancient Egypt. He grew up in a period of intense public interest in all things Egyptian, and particularly with those aspects related to funerary rites. He was extremely well read and had certainly seen a mummy up close in the museum³⁴. He returned to Ancient Egypt time and time again, at least from 1930 to 1939, as part of the rich battery of imagery at his disposal: Christian³⁵, Classical, Celtic, literary and natural. The themes of Ancient Egyptian legend and ceremony find universal echoes in those all so human concerns with birth, death, love, life and resurrection which are at the heart of his poetry.

The last words go to his great friend and fellow Swansea poet, Vernon Watkins: 'We were both Welsh, both Christian poets; we both loved the sea and lived by it. We both believed that it was good for living poets to learn from dead and ancient models rather than from their contemporaries' (Watkins 2003: xii)³⁶.

Clearly Dylan drew on ancient history as well as ancient poetry.

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³⁴ He probably knew the Egypt galleries in the British Museum too: 'Thomas first visited London in 1932 and, apparently, whilst at the British Museum began waxing lyrical over a piece of "abstract sculpture" only to be told it was a meteorite' (Sonin 2013). A few years later, Dylan lived in Fitzrovia, near the British Museum and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.

³⁵ The story of Isis and Horus has parallels with that of baby Moses in the rushes, and representations of the mother and child in paintings and statues foreshadow depictions of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus. And the Ancient Greeks were greatly influenced by Ancient Egyptian mythology, adopting many of their gods (so Thoth becomes Hermes for example).

³⁶ From Watkins's typed account of his first meeting with Dylan in 1935.

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Author's note

The author would like to thank Caroline Franklin (English Department, Swansea University) and Carolyn Graves-Brown (Egypt Centre Swansea) for their detailed comments, and Marian Whitehead (Norwich) for her general feedback on earlier drafts of this paper. Any remaining errors and omissions are my own.

³¹ Dylan's interest in these recent discoveries is also noted by Goodby (2013: 233 n.45)

³² Although, depending on the depths of Dylan's knowledge, it could refer to the green skin of Osiris, linked to rebirth (Carolyn Graves-Brown), or as Tindall (1962: 149), suggests, the emerald tablet of Thoth, god of wisdom. Kleinman (1963: 105) analyses the diamond and heart line as preservation of the heart (thanks to Caroline Franklin here).

³³ This is the title story in a posthumously published collection(1955), but it was first published in 1937, in *Life and Letters*. The collection also includes 'The Mouse and the Woman' (first published in 1936 in *Transition*).

