

LEVELED BOOK • Z¹

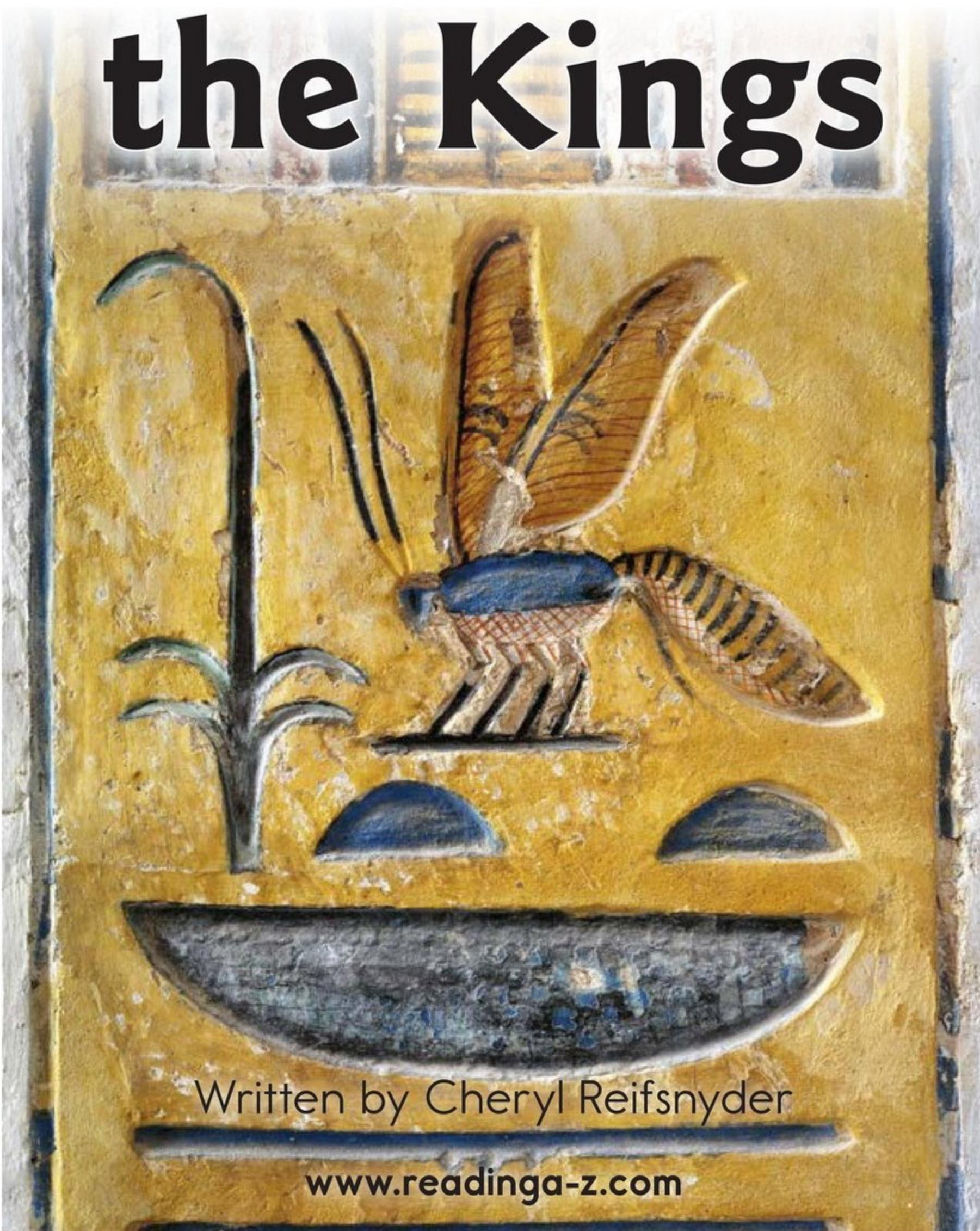
Valley of the Kings



Written by Cheryl Reifsnyder

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Focus Question

Why is the Valley of the Kings a significant part of Egypt's history?

Words to Know

animate
culminate
debris
decomposing
dynasties
gypsum

hieroglyphs
mummified
parallel
pharaohs
quarried
sarcophagus

Front and back cover: The burial chamber of King Tutankhamen

Title page: A section of a mural from the tomb of Siptah

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Correlation

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Treasure

In November 1922, a British archaeologist named Howard Carter uncovered the stairs to the tomb of King Tutankhamen (toot-an-KAH-muhn). Not only was this a new discovery in Egypt's Valley of the Kings—an area that explorers had thought was "played out"—it was the first tomb found with its royal seal intact.

Tutankhamen was one of the least important **pharaohs** buried in Egypt's Valley of the Kings. With only four chambers, his tomb was one of the smallest, but more than five thousand objects were crammed into the tomb—many of them solid gold. Tutankhamen's golden funeral mask, inlaid with colored glass and semiprecious stones, has become one of Egypt's most famous treasures.

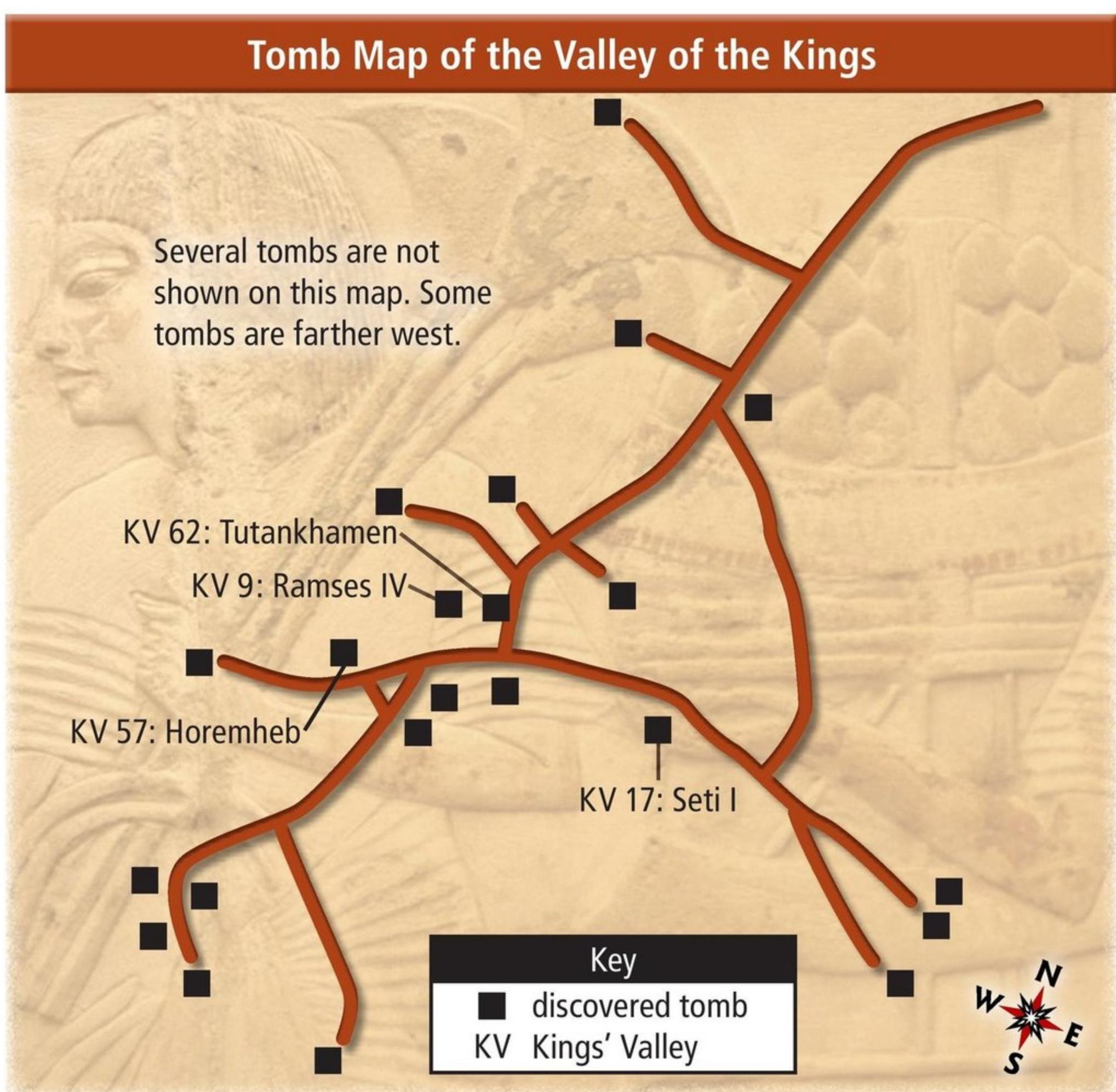
Tutankhamen's solid gold death mask was placed on the head and shoulders of the king's mummy.



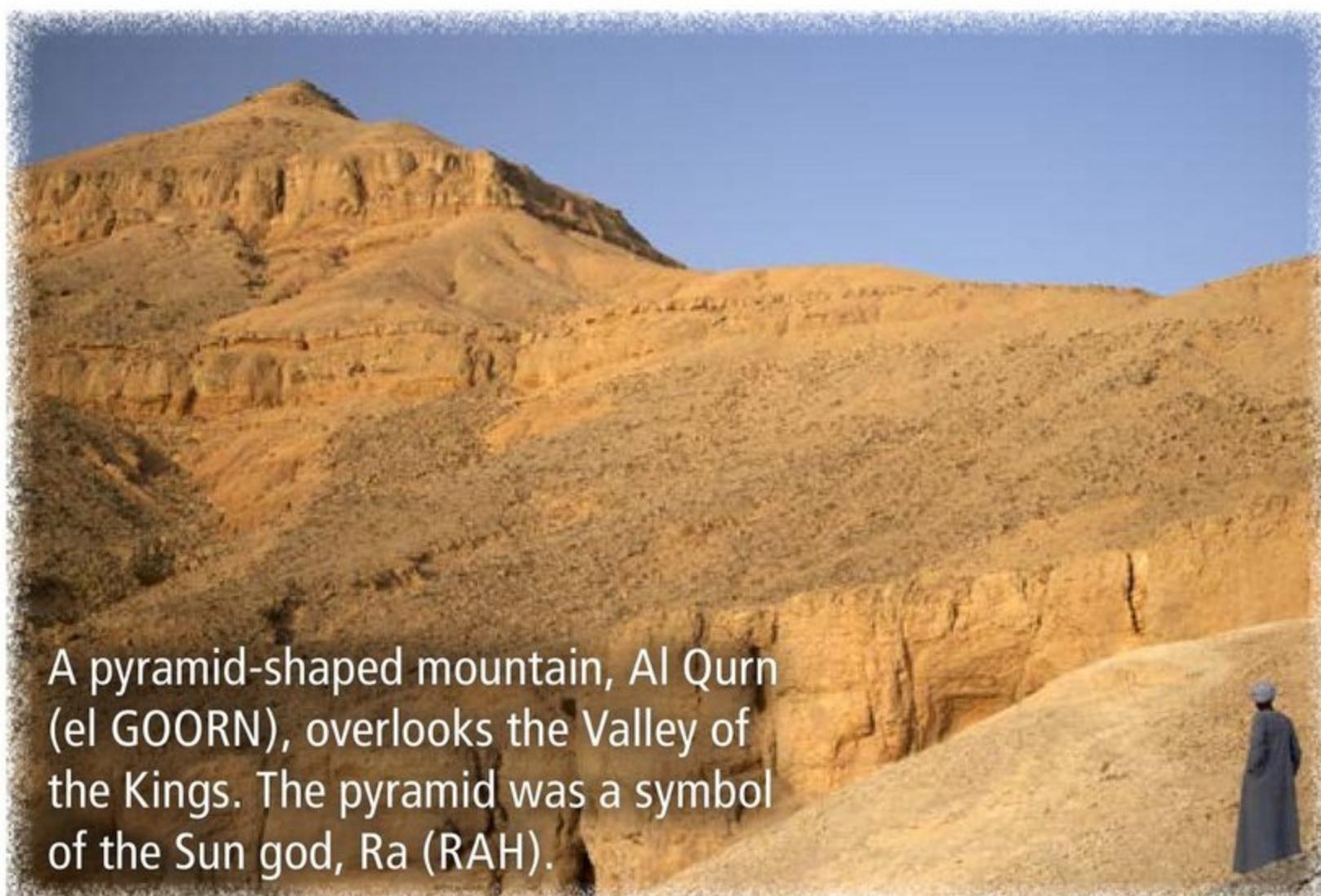
What Is the Valley of the Kings?

The Valley of the Kings is probably the most magnificent burial ground in the world. It houses the tombs of almost every pharaoh of Egypt's golden age, a period known as the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom spanned the rule of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Egyptian **Dynasties**, a period of about five hundred years, from 1550 to 1080 BC. There are sixty-three known tombs in the valley.

Tomb Map of the Valley of the Kings



During this time, the ancient city of Thebes (now known as Luxor) was Egypt's capital and religious center. Thebes had many temples honoring the Egyptian empire's pharaohs, whom ancient Egyptians believed joined the gods after death. A royal tomb required a location where a **mummified** king could be left undisturbed while his spirit journeyed to the afterlife.



A pyramid-shaped mountain, Al Qurn (el GOORN), overlooks the Valley of the Kings. The pyramid was a symbol of the Sun god, Ra (RAH).

A vast desert wadi (WAH-dee)—a steep-sided valley—on the other side of the Nile River provided the perfect location, for practical reasons. Tombs could be chiseled from the soft, plentiful limestone formations found there. The valley's steep cliffs and single access point made it relatively easy to guard, and its location—several hours' walk from Thebes—helped discourage tomb robbers.

Preparing for the Afterlife

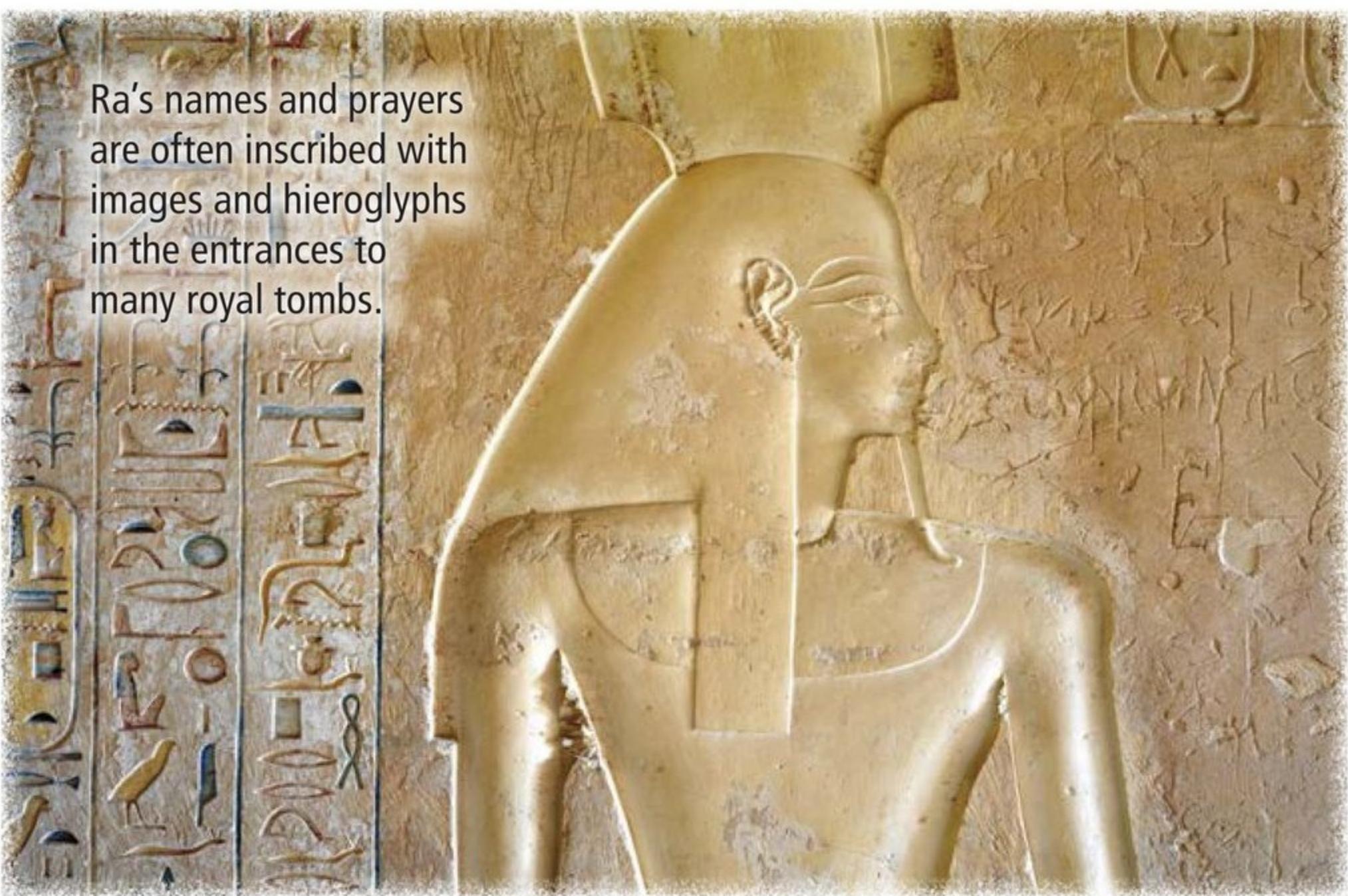
Ancient Egyptians considered a pharaoh's tomb almost as important as the palace in which the pharaoh lived. A tomb protected the physical body, which ancient Egyptians believed could return to life after burial. After death, the pharaoh's body went through a seventy-day mummification process to keep it from **decomposing**. Priests removed and mummified internal organs and placed them inside a stone box known as a *canopic chest*.

The mummified body was then placed inside several nested coffins that were in turn placed inside a stone **sarcophagus**. Carved from blocks of granite or quartzite, a sarcophagus could weigh up to 9 metric tons (10 T).

Egyptians believed that the tomb also protected the spirit of the deceased as it traveled through the underworld. Priests placed protective amulets into the mummy's wrappings and statues of protective gods in the sarcophagus.

Howard Carter removes a covering of Tutankhamen's third, innermost coffin.





Spells and prayers, known as funerary compositions, covered the tomb's walls and ceilings—and sometimes the sarcophagus—in long columns of **hieroglyphs** and images. Some were intended to restore the body to life. Others, placed inside the sarcophagus, were meant to frighten away demons that might try to sabotage the soul's journey.

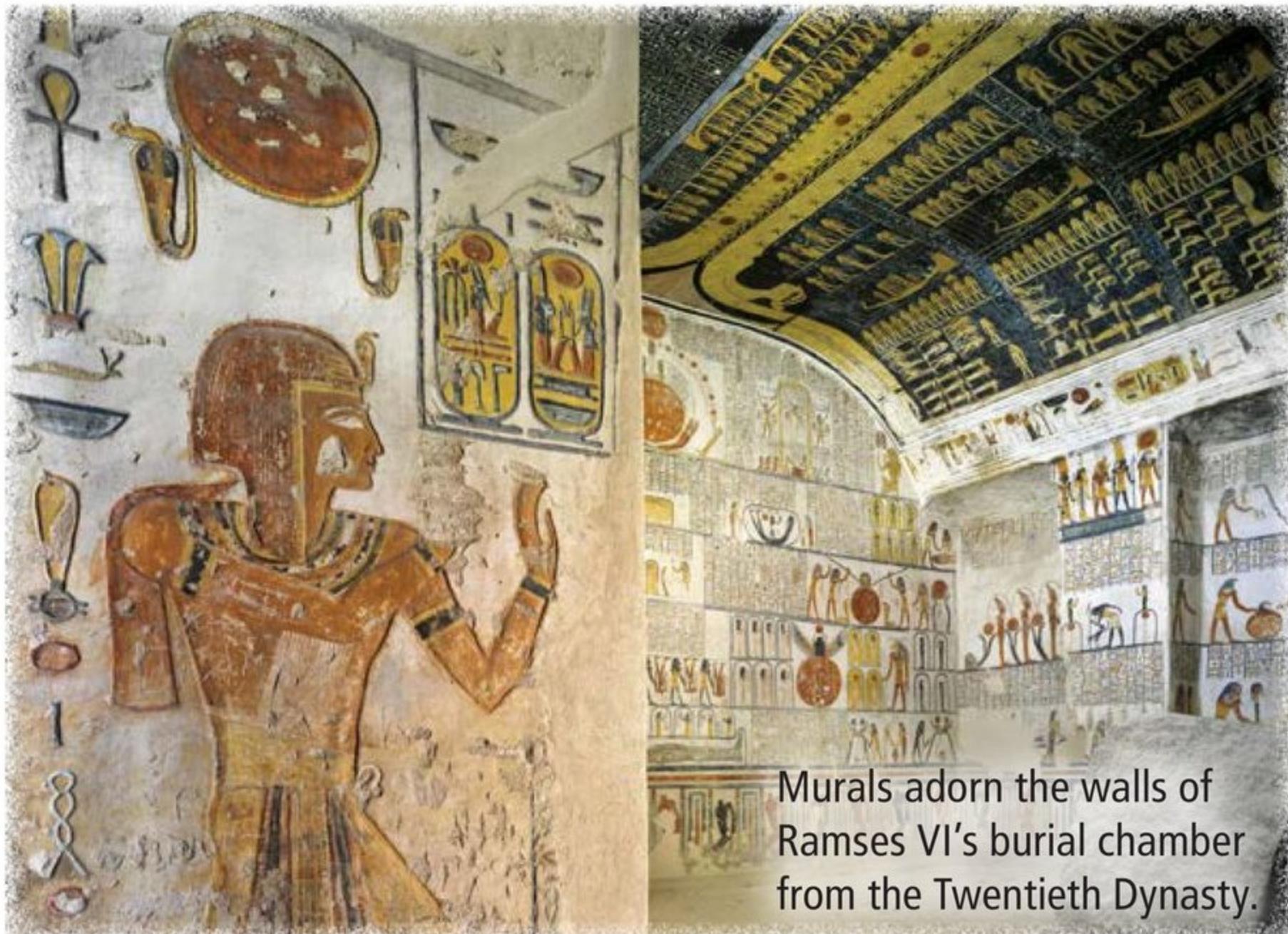
Funerary compositions served another purpose as well: they provided guidance for the soul's trials along its journey to the afterlife. The ancient Egyptians believed that the pharaoh's soul had to travel west through the underworld with the Sun god, Ra. While accompanying the Sun god, the soul would encounter numerous obstacles and dangers.

Royal tombs held a wide variety of supplies—everything a king might need or want in the afterlife. Storerooms were filled with wooden models of equipment, such as boats and chariots. The storerooms also held personal items, such as cosmetics, clothing, and board games, as well as everyday items, such as furniture and lamps. They were filled with treasures, including precious gems, golden jewelry, and artwork. Baskets of fruit, boxes of preserved meat, and pots filled with juice and other beverages were also placed in the tombs.

Since the pharaohs would need servants in the afterlife, the tombs also held hundreds of carved figurines called *shabtis* (SHAB-teez). *Shabti* means “answerer,” and each shabti figurine was carved with a spell to **animate** it at its master’s call.

King Tutankhamen was buried with 413 shabti figures. These wooden or stone statuettes provide valuable information about ancient Egyptian beliefs and customs.





Murals adorn the walls of Ramses VI's burial chamber from the Twentieth Dynasty.

What's in a Tomb?

Tombs found in the Valley of the Kings share many common features. Most are decorated with elaborate paintings and hieroglyphs; many have the same series of halls and rooms as well. An initial entryway leads into a hall the ancient Egyptians called the “passage of Ra” because it was often decorated with images of the Sun god’s different forms and names. Farther along, the “hall of hindering” often contains a deep well excavated in the floor. Experts think this pit may have deterred robbers or protected against flooding.

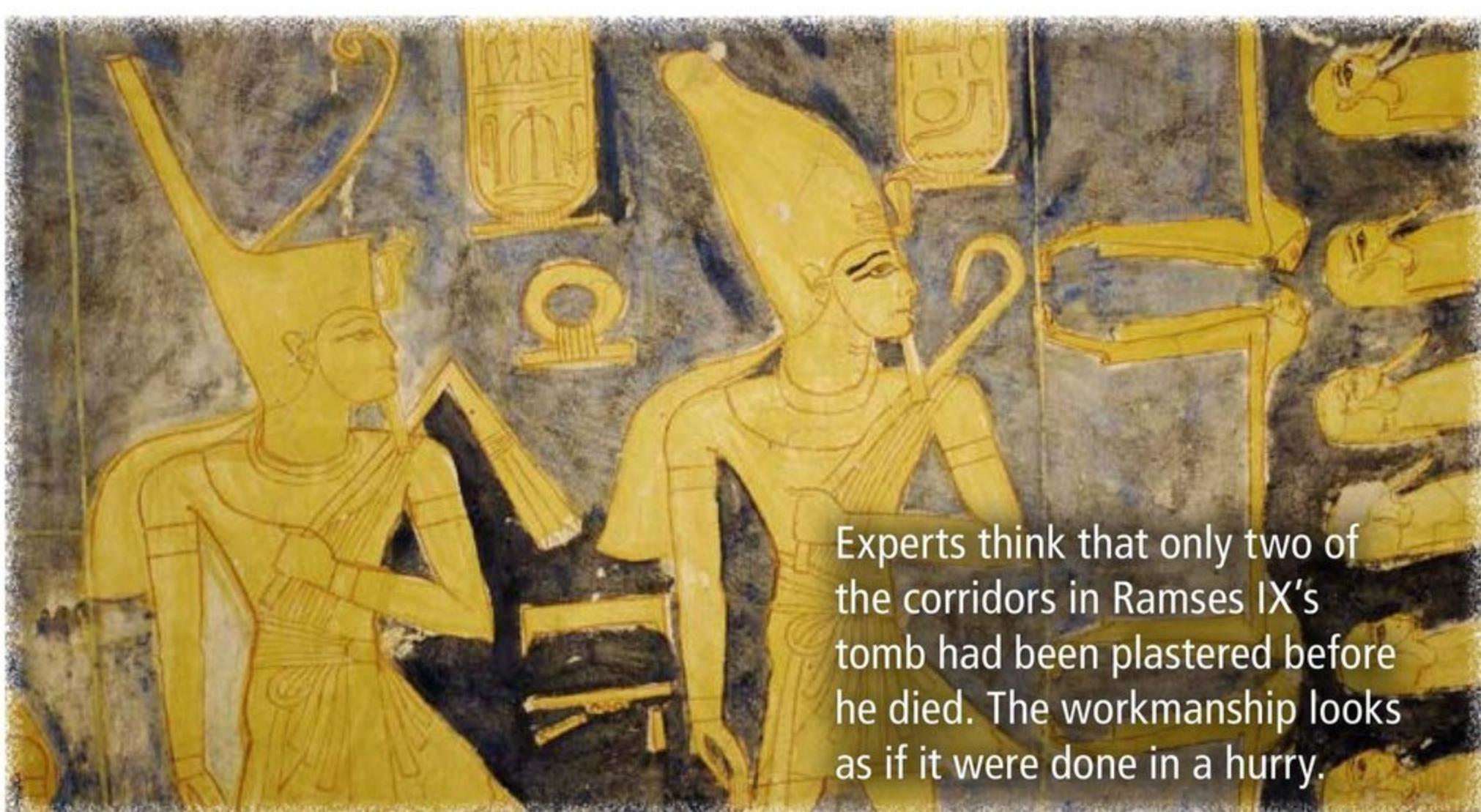
The tombs all **culminate** in the burial chamber, which the Egyptians sometimes called the “House of Gold.” Storerooms that open off most burial chambers were used to hold furniture and supplies.

Constructing a Royal Tomb

Although the tombs have many things in common, no two tombs in the Valley of the Kings are identical. Each was constructed and decorated according to the tastes of the ruler.

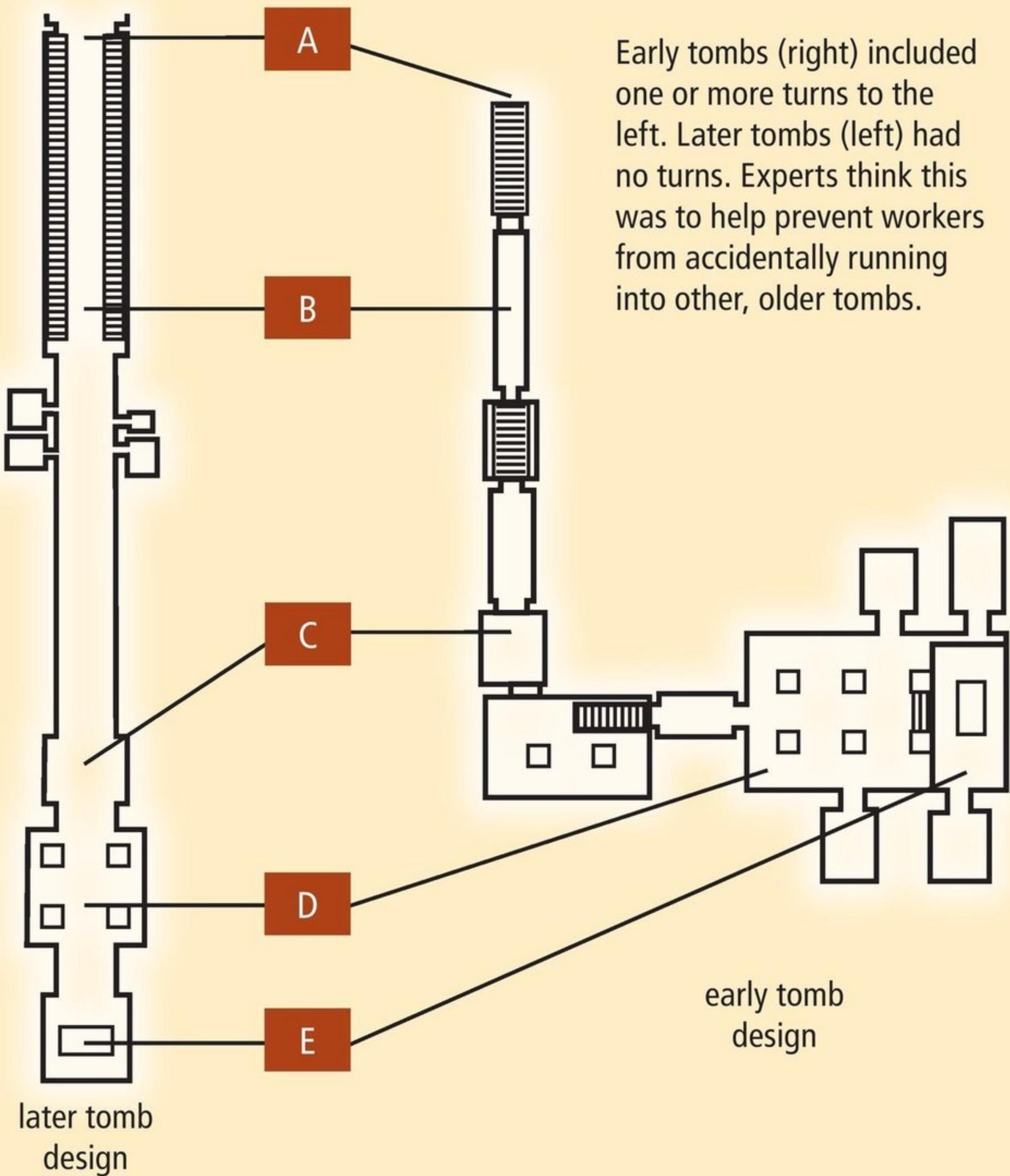
Work on a tomb began while a king was alive. When a king died, the tomb builders had only seventy days to finish their work. At that point, the mummification of the dead pharaoh would be complete and the burial had to take place.

If a tomb wasn't finished, workers might cut corners to get ready in time, leaving paintings or rooms half-finished. In some cases, such as when King Ramses IV died before his tomb was finished, workers recut an existing chamber to make it work as the burial chamber. In other cases, the king was buried in a different tomb.



Experts think that only two of the corridors in Ramses IX's tomb had been plastered before he died. The workmanship looks as if it were done in a hurry.

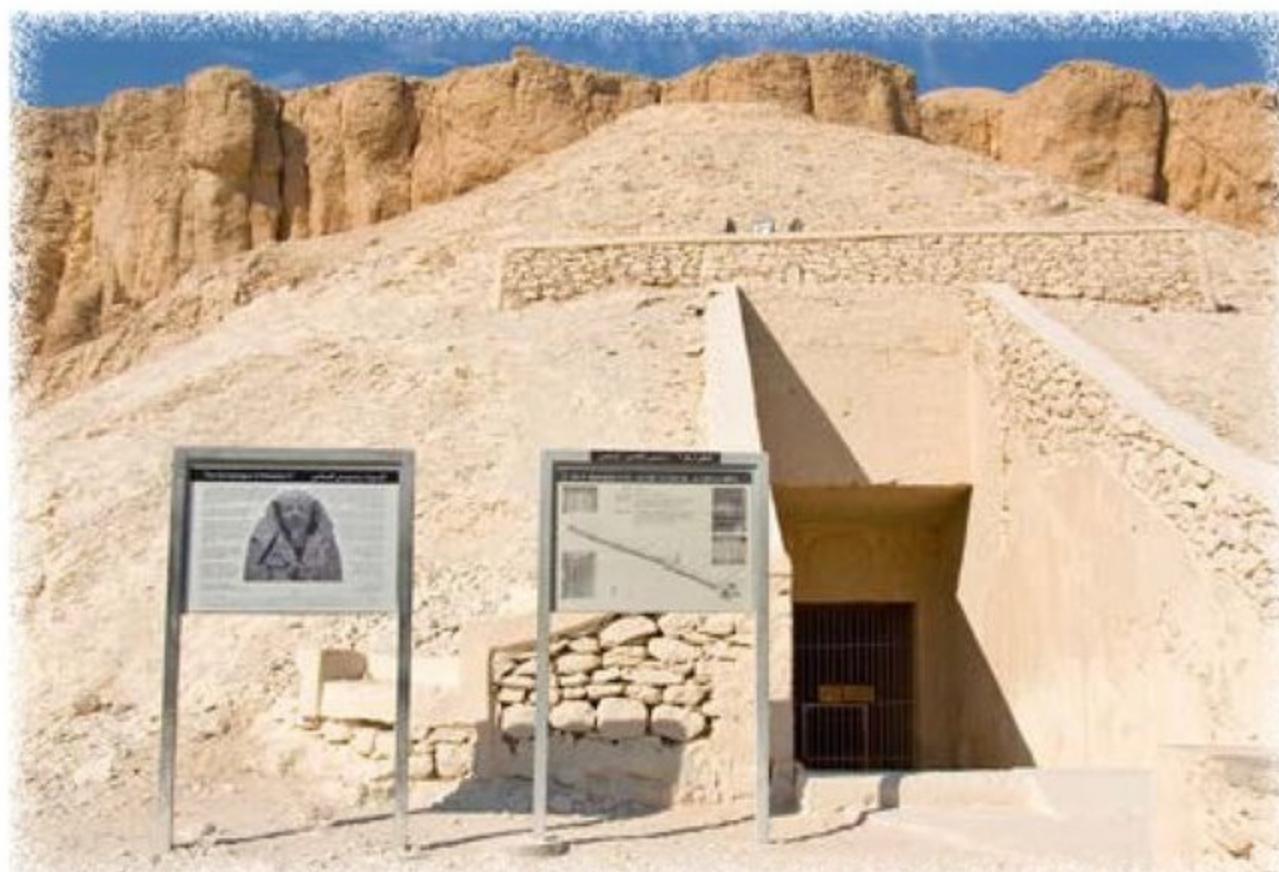
Tomb Layouts



Common Tomb Chambers

- A** entrance
- B** passage of Ra
- C** hall of hindering (contains deep well)
- D** chariot hall (contains sets of pillars; no chariots have ever been found here)
- E** burial chamber

The appearance and layout of the tombs in the Valley of the Kings changed over time. Tombs built over three thousand years ago during the early part of the New Kingdom (the Eighteenth Dynasty) tended to be smaller than those built by later pharaohs, and they were usually built with one or two ninety-degree left-hand turns in their floor plan.



Even today, workers build walls above tombs to keep falling debris from cluttering entrances.

Tomb locations changed over time as well. During the early part of the New Kingdom, royal tombs were positioned at the bottoms of cliffs, where rainstorms would send water and **debris** down to cover a tomb's entrance. Later rulers usually positioned tomb entrances on lower-lying slopes. This may be because later tombs were designed to be reopened after burial or because the Valley of the Kings was becoming crowded. Also, a tomb built in a straight line was less likely to run into other tombs.

Experts think tomb construction began almost as soon as a new king began his rule. Selecting the tomb's location was a critical first step, performed by the vizier (vi-ZEER), the highest court official, together with senior workmen. If they didn't choose the right location, the tomb might need to be replanned or moved. More than once, an initial choice was abandoned after workers had begun cutting the tomb.

A Community of Workers

Most of the excavation of Dier al-Medina happened between 1922 and 1951.



About four hundred tomb workers and their families lived in a village called Dier al-Medina, about 1 kilometer (0.6 mi.) south of the Valley of the Kings. Much of what we know about the Valley of the Kings comes from the writings left behind in this village.

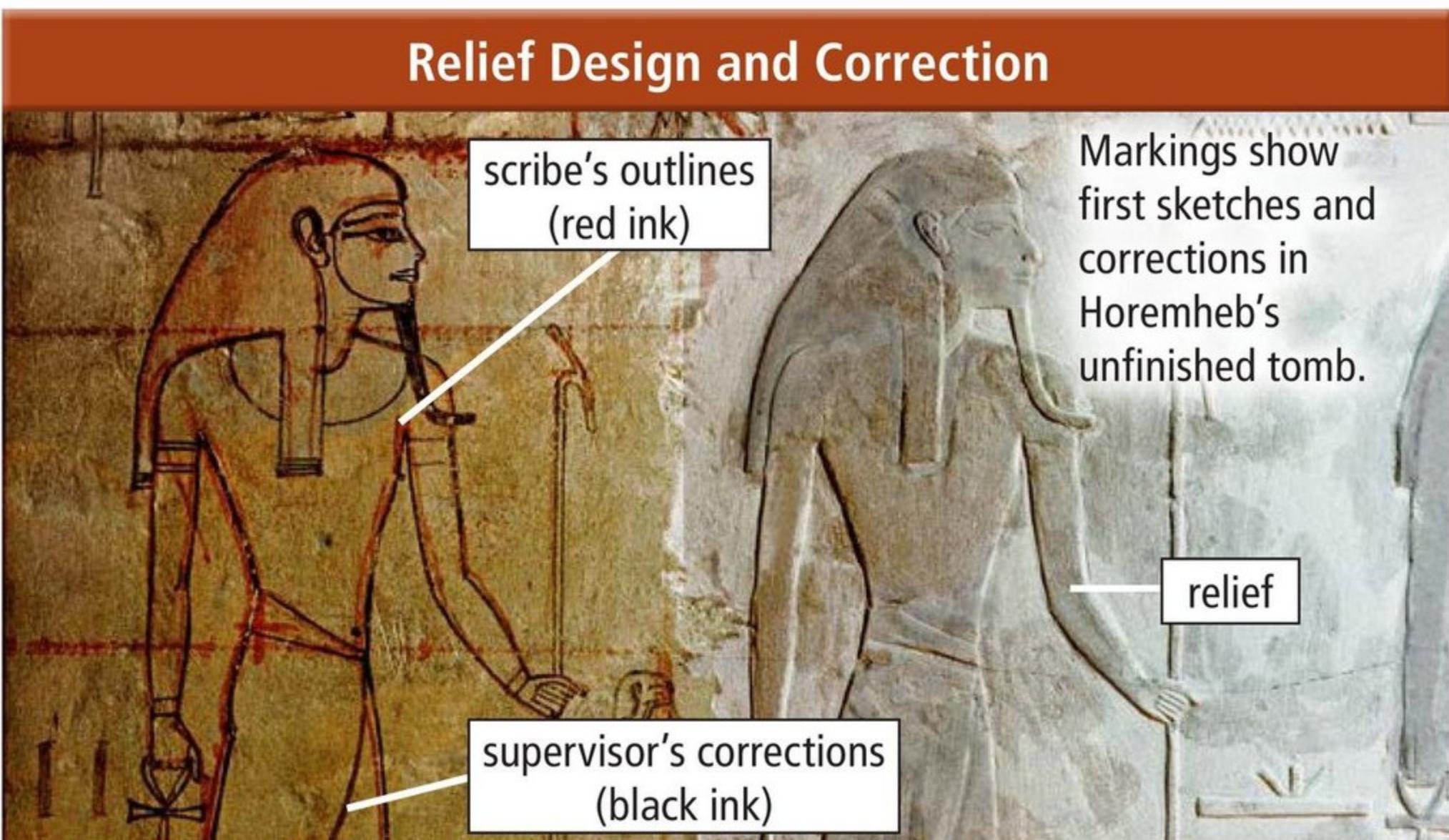
The tombs had to be cut directly into the limestone bedrock. Work crews first **quarried** rough passages using copper or bronze chisels, wooden mallets, and hand axes with stone blades. Initially, only one or two men at a time could cut in the passage's close quarters. Other workers formed a basket brigade to remove debris.

The foreman painted a line on the tomb's ceiling to provide a reference point for measurements as workers refined the walls, ceiling, and floor. Using only simple tools, workers created ninety-degree turns and **parallel** vertical walls with remarkable accuracy.

Decorations Fit for a King

Once work on a tomb had progressed far enough, specialists began to add decorations. Plasterers covered surfaces with white **gypsum** plaster. Scribes marked vertical and horizontal lines on their work surface, outlining areas for different scenes and texts. They sketched in hieroglyphs and figures. A supervisor followed the scribes, making corrections. After corrections were made, artists would add the finishing touches, painting blocks of color and filling in the details.

Sometimes, workers would carve a relief. This technique involved carving away portions of a scene to make certain things stand out. If the artists carved away the background, leaving raised figures, they created a *raised relief*. Details would then be carved into the figures before painting.



When the Egyptian pharaoh Horemheb died, his tomb was not completely finished. As a result, we can clearly see some of the steps involved in tomb artwork.

1. Scribes outlined text and scenes on the walls in red ink.
2. A supervisor reviewed the outlines and made corrections in black ink. He might correct a figure's proportions or note where an image was missing.
3. Artists then outlined the corrected images with black ink.
4. Artists added finishing touches, sometimes cutting away the background to leave raised figures.
5. Finally, artists painted the scenes.

The Valley of the Kings Today

In the early 1800s, treasure hunters flocked to the valley in droves. Like early tomb robbers, they removed anything of value to sell to wealthy collectors. That changed in 1857, when the Egyptian government established the Antiquities Service to protect the country's ancient monuments and artifacts. As a result, today's explorers use techniques designed to protect and preserve the tombs and their contents.

A special department of the United Nations designated the Valley of the Kings one of the first World Heritage sites in 1979. Over a million people visit the tombs each year.



By extracting tissues from mummies found in the valley, scientists can learn about diet, disease, and even the cause of death.



An average of four to five thousand tourists visit the Valley of the Kings daily.

Eighteen tombs are open to the public on a rotating schedule and, with the exception of Tutankhamen's tomb, visitors can see any three of the open tombs with their entry ticket. (Tutankhamen's tomb requires purchase of an additional ticket. The treasures originally found in Tutankhamen's tomb are housed in the Cairo Museum of Antiquities.)

People who accidentally touch the walls can discolor or damage the ancient paint and carvings. The rotating schedule of open tombs gives each tomb regular breaks from the crowds. Scheduled closures also provide time for tomb restoration and maintenance. Experts hope this will counter the effects of keeping the tombs open to the public.

Future Treasure

For decades after Howard Carter's sensational discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb, the Valley of the Kings yielded few new secrets. That changed in 1989, when Egyptologist Kent Weeks took a closer look at a tomb (KV 5) previously labeled "uninteresting." Clearing flood debris from the tomb revealed a previously undiscovered corridor leading to at least 150 chambers.

The Valley of the Kings is one of the richest archaeological sites in the world. If experts are correct, there is more history to be uncovered.



Scientists are busy excavating and studying the Tomb of the Sons of Ramses II (KV 5), the largest tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

Glossary

animate (<i>v.</i>)	to bring to life; to make lively or energetic (p. 9)
culminate (<i>v.</i>)	to reach the climax or end of (p. 10)
debris (<i>n.</i>)	scattered pieces of something that are left after the rest has been destroyed or is gone (p. 13)
decomposing (<i>v.</i>)	decaying, rotting, or breaking down into small parts (p. 7)
dynasties (<i>n.</i>)	series of rulers in a country who are from the same family (p. 5)
gypsum (<i>n.</i>)	a soft, white mineral used to make plaster (p. 15)
hieroglyphs (<i>n.</i>)	symbols or pictures used as writing, especially in ancient Egypt (p. 8)
mummified (<i>adj.</i>)	embalmed and wrapped in a burial cloth (p. 6)
parallel (<i>adj.</i>)	lying or moving in the same direction and an equal distance apart (p. 15)
pharaohs (<i>n.</i>)	the title given to kings in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
quarried (<i>v.</i>)	extracted or dug out stone, such as slate or marble, used for building (p. 15)
sarcophagus (<i>n.</i>)	a stone coffin or tomb from ancient times, often inscribed and elaborately ornamented (p. 7)

Valley of the Kings

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Connections

Writing

Research information about "The Curse of King Tut." Do you believe the curse is real? Why or why not? Write an essay explaining your answer, citing outside resources for support.

Social Studies

Choose a pharaoh who is buried in the Valley of the Kings. Write a biography about that pharaoh and make a poster highlighting the important events in his life.

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