

LEVELED BOOK • W

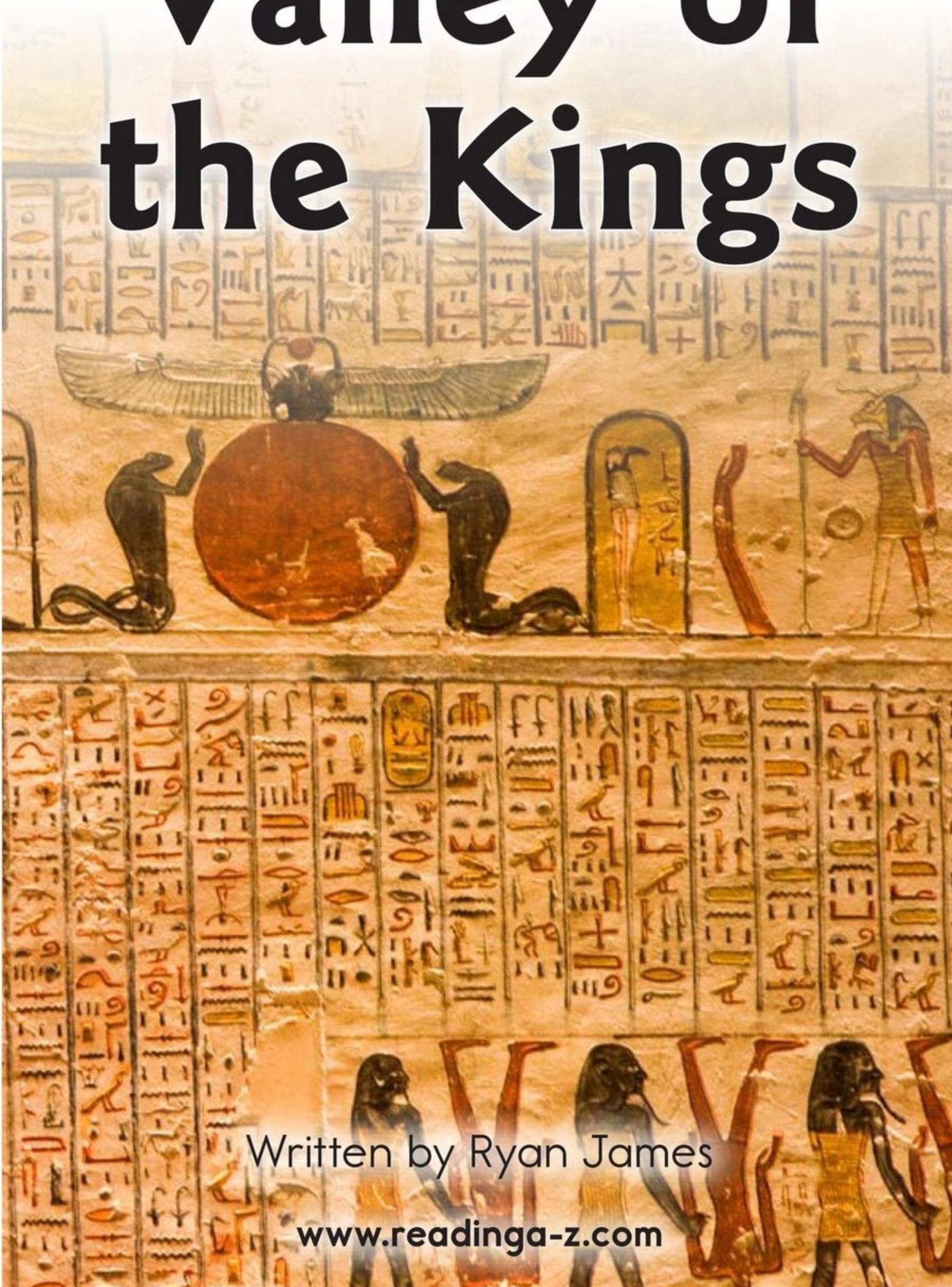
Valley of the Kings

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Focus Question

How can Egypt's past be revealed
by studying the Valley of the Kings?

Words to Know

afterlife
archaeologist
chambers
chariots
dynasties
hieroglyphs

humidity
limestone
mummification
pharaohs
sarcophagus
scribes

Front and back cover: The entrance to the tomb chamber of Ramses V and Ramses VI

Title page: Hieroglyphs and paintings in the tomb chamber of Ramses V

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World Landmarks
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Valley of the Kings



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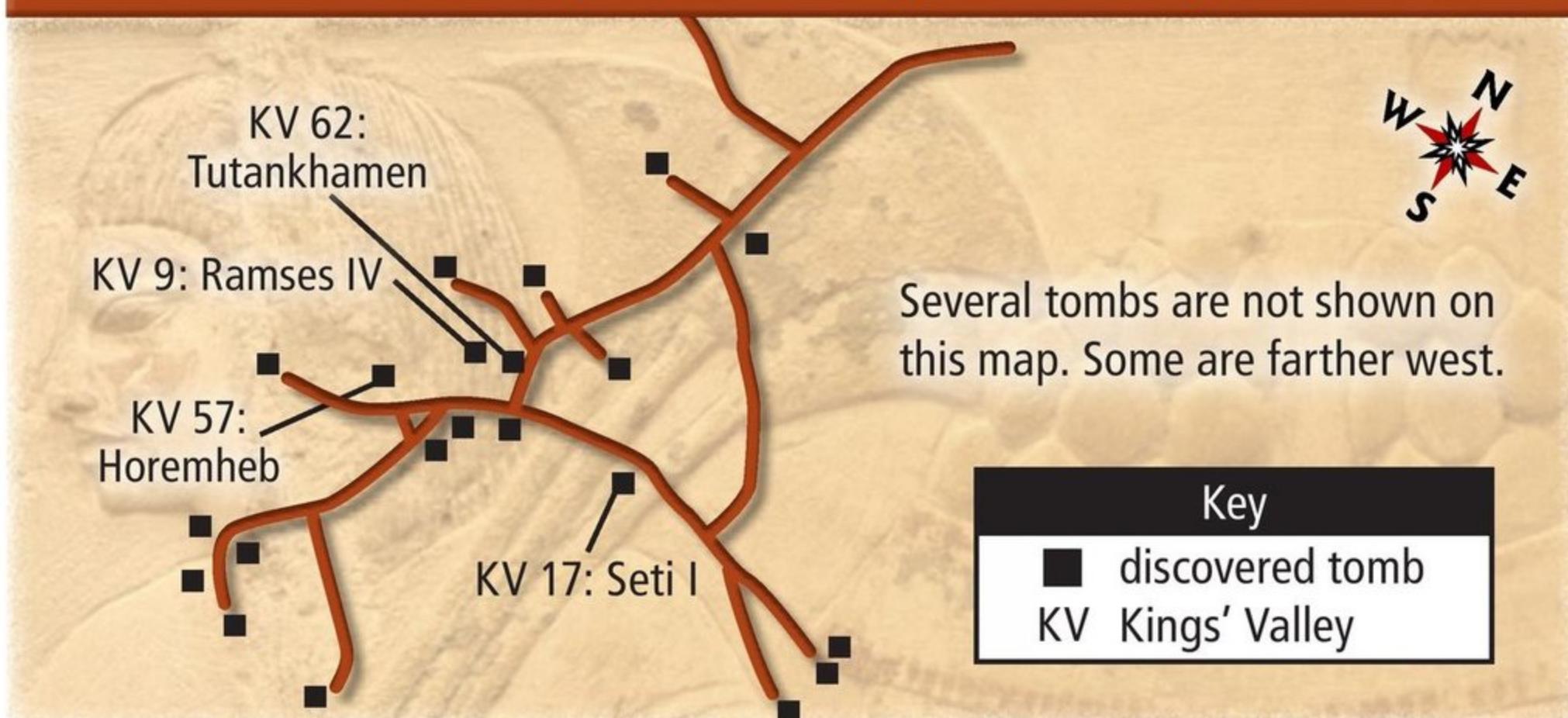
Howard Carter (left) found King Tutankhamen's small four-chamber tomb. It was packed with priceless objects.

Treasure Beyond Imagining

In November 1922, a British **archaeologist** named Howard Carter discovered 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. The tomb held more than five thousand objects, many of them solid gold. Tutankhamen's golden funeral mask has become one of Egypt's most famous treasures.

Tutankhamen was one of the least important **pharaohs** buried in the valley. His tomb was one of the smallest, with only four small **chambers**. Yet it held so many treasures that experts are still listing them almost a century after Carter's discovery.

Tomb Map of the Valley of the Kings



Valley of Kings

The Valley of the Kings houses the tombs of almost every pharaoh of Egypt's golden age, a period known as the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom took place during the rule of the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Egyptian Dynasties. It lasted from 1550 to 1080 BC.

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 Egyptians believed joined the gods after death. However, a royal tomb required a remote location.

A network of steep-sided valleys across the Nile River provided the perfect location. Tombs could be carved from the **limestone** found there. The valley's steep cliffs and single access point made it relatively easy to protect from robbers.



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

The Afterlife

To the ancient Egyptians, a pharaoh's tomb was important because it provided safe passage to the **afterlife**. A tomb protected the physical body, which ancient Egyptians believed could return to life after burial. After death, the body of the person who had died went through a seventy-day **mummification** process to keep it from breaking down. Priests removed and mummified internal organs and placed them inside a stone box.

Next, the mummified body was placed inside nested coffins that were, in turn, placed inside a stone **sarcophagus**. Carved from solid stone, the sarcophagus could weigh up to 9 metric tons (10 T).

Egyptians believed the tomb also protected the pharaoh's spirit as it traveled through the underworld. Priests placed protective amulets, which they believed had powers, inside the mummy's wrappings.

Spells and prayers covered the tomb's walls and ceilings—and often the sarcophagus—in long columns of **hieroglyphs** and images. Some were intended to restore the body to life. Others were supposed to frighten away demons.

Hieroglyphs also provided information the soul might need for its journey to the afterlife. Ancient Egyptians believed the king's soul had to travel through the underworld with the Sun god, Ra. Writings on tomb walls described the Sun god's travels through the underworld and warned what dangers the soul would face. They also told how to overcome challenges such as demon-guarded gates and questions in the Hall of Judgment.



Ra's many names and prayers are often inscribed with images and hieroglyphs in the entrances to royal tombs.

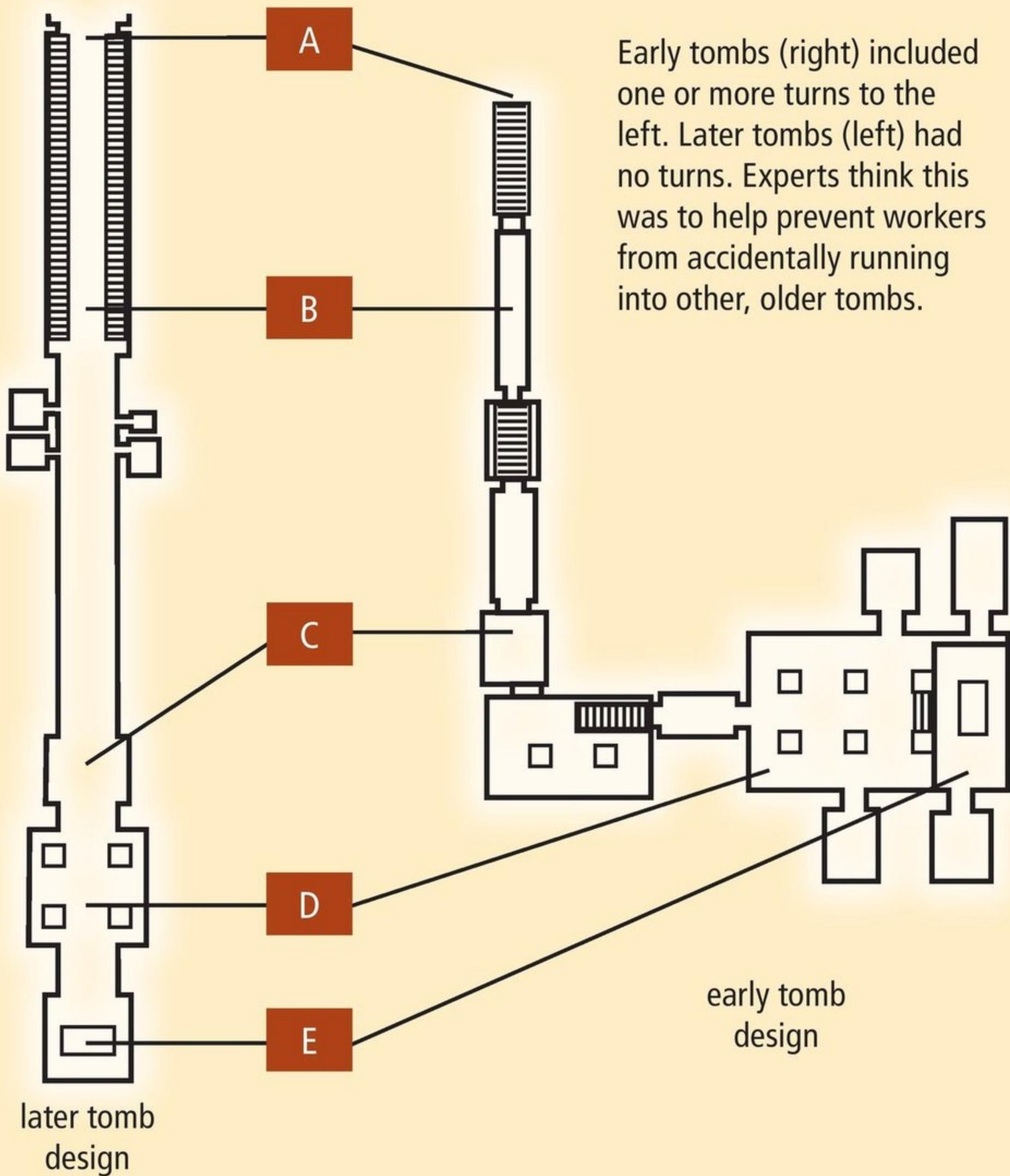
Royal tombs held everything a king might need in the afterlife. Storerooms were filled with wooden models of equipment, such as boats and **chariots**. They held personal items, such as makeup, clothing, and board games, and everyday items, such as furniture and lamps. The tombs held treasure to enjoy—expensive gems, golden jewelry, and artwork. They even held things to eat and drink.

Since the pharaohs would need servants in the afterlife, the tombs also contained hundreds of carved figures called *shabtis* (SHAB-teez), or “answerers.” Each shabti was carved with a spell to bring it to life to serve its master.



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

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

Tomb Construction

Most tombs in the Valley of the Kings have similar layouts. An entryway leads into a hall the Egyptians called the “passage of Ra,” which is decorated with images of the Sun god’s forms.

In many tombs, one room has a deep well cut into its floor. Some experts think this pit may have been intended to slow down tomb robbers or for protection in case of flooding.

The tombs all ended in the burial room, which often had attached storerooms filled with supplies.

Although they are similar, no two tombs in the Valley of the Kings are identical. Each was constructed and decorated according to the tastes of the current ruler—up to a point.

Even though tomb builders began while the king was still living, tombs took years to complete. Once a king died, the tomb builders had only seventy days to finish their work. That’s when the mummification of the dead pharaoh would be complete and burial had to take place.

If a tomb wasn’t finished, workers might cut corners to get it ready in time, leaving paintings or rooms half-finished. Sometimes, the king was simply buried in a different tomb than the one he had been building.

The appearance and layout of the tombs in the valley changed over time. Tombs built during the early part of the New Kingdom tended to be smaller than later tombs. Unlike later, straighter tombs, early tombs were usually built with one or two ninety-degree turns.

Experts suspect this change may have occurred because the Valley of the Kings was becoming crowded. A tomb built in a straight line was less likely to run into neighboring tombs.

Tomb locations changed over time as well. Older tombs were usually at the bottoms of cliffs. Rainstorms would send water and earth down to cover the tomb's entrance. Later rulers usually positioned tomb entrances on lower-lying slopes.

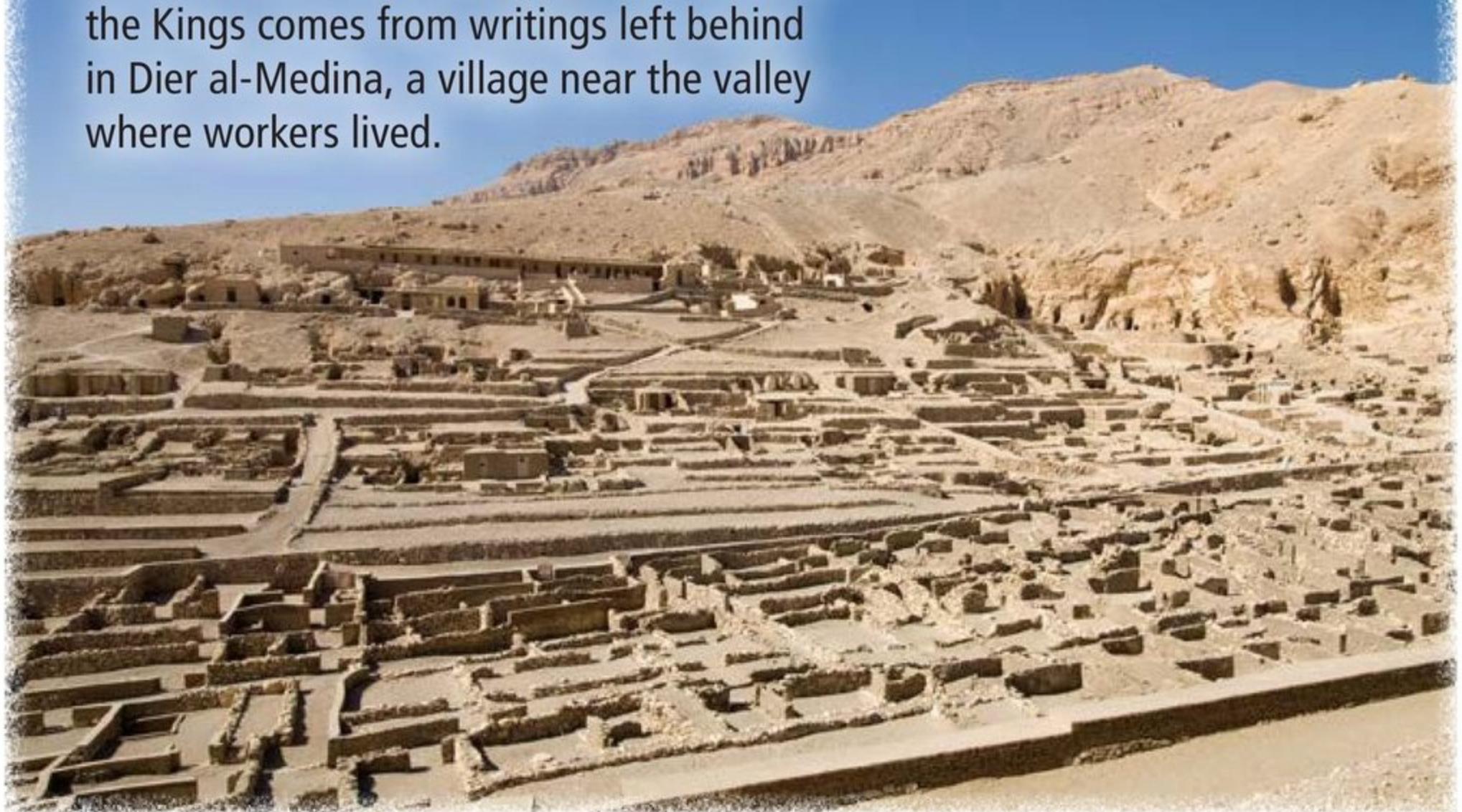


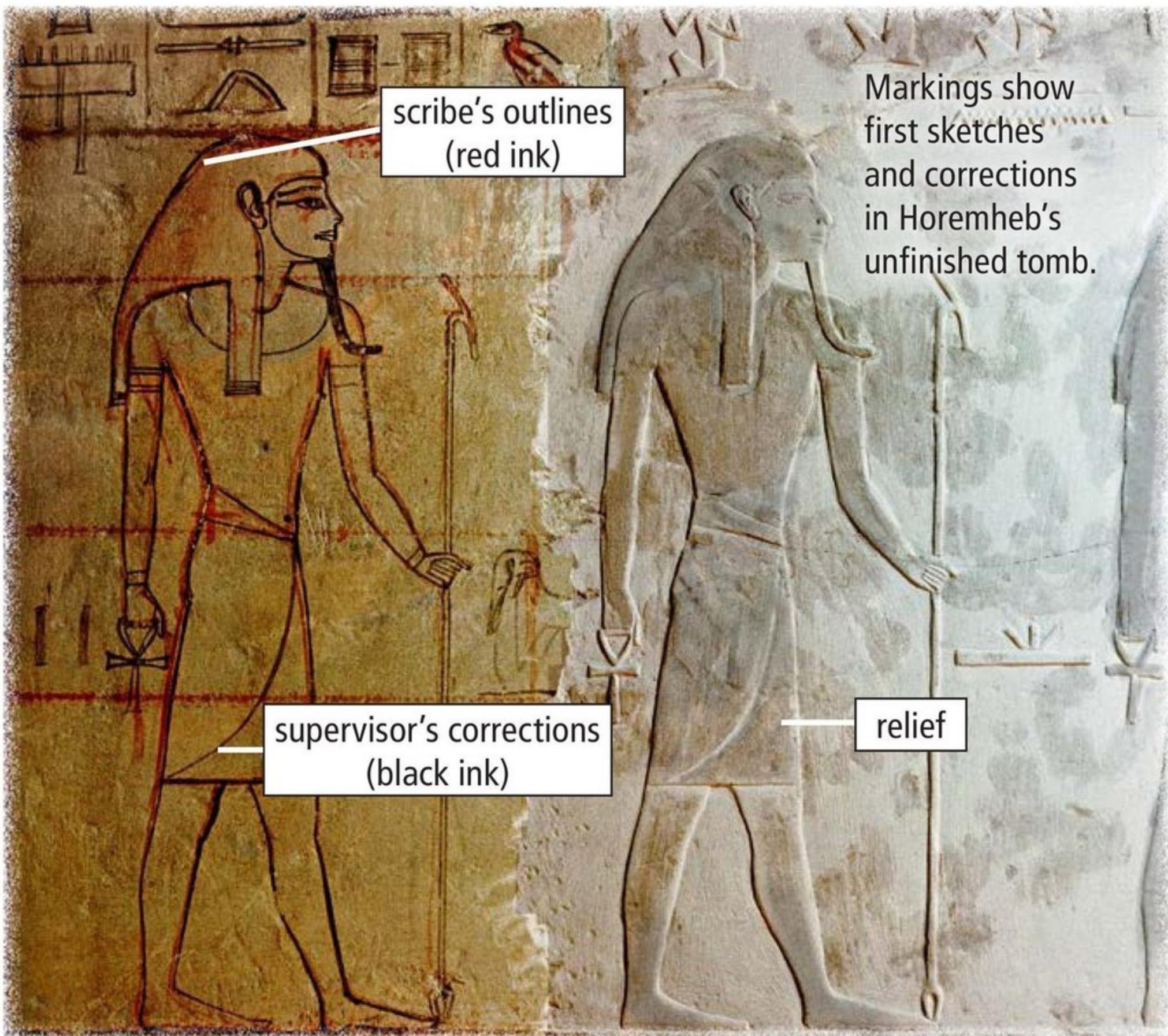
Experts think that only two of the corridors in Ramses IX's tomb had been finished before he died. The rest were done after his death—and the workmanship looks as if it was done in a hurry.

Experts think tomb construction started almost as soon as a new king began his rule. Selecting the tomb's location was an important first step. It was performed by high court officials and senior workmen. If they didn't make the right decision, they would have to stop work and choose a new location. More than once, the first choice was abandoned after workers had already begun cutting the tomb.

The tombs had to be cut directly into the limestone bedrock. Work crews first dug rough passages using copper or bronze chisels, wooden mallets, and hand axes with stone blades. Then they painted a line on the tomb's ceiling to use as a reference point for measurements as workers continued to build the walls, ceiling, and floor.

Much of what we know about the Valley of the Kings comes from writings left behind in Dier al-Medina, a village near the valley where workers lived.





Once work had progressed far enough, specialists began to add decorations. Plasterers covered surfaces with white plaster. **Scribes** sketched hieroglyphs and figures, and a supervisor followed, making corrections. After corrections were made, artists would finalize the artwork, painting blocks of color and filling in the details.

Sometimes, workers carved away portions of a scene to make certain things stand out. Carving away the background left a kind of art, called a *raised relief*. Artists carved details into the raised figures before painting the finished scene.

Modern Times

The United Nations named the Valley of the Kings one of the first World Heritage sites in 1979. Over a million people visit the tombs each year. Eighteen tombs are open to the public on a rotating schedule. With the exception of Tutankhamen's tomb, visitors can see any three of the open tombs with their entry ticket. Seeing Tutankhamen's tomb requires buying an additional ticket. The treasures originally found in Tutankhamen's tomb are now kept in the Cairo museum.

Unfortunately, the constant crowds have caused rapid temperature and **humidity** changes inside the tombs. Mold now grows on some of the tomb walls. People who accidentally touch the walls sometimes damage the ancient paint and carvings. The rotating schedule of open tombs gives the tombs occasional breaks from visitors and provides time for important repairs.



Visitors to the Valley of the Kings are encouraged to plan ahead and choose which tombs they will tour.



Tutankhamen's golden funeral mask has toured the museums of the world and is now kept with all of his tomb's treasures in the Cairo museum.

Tomorrow's Treasure

Today, the Valley of the Kings holds sixty-three known tombs, but more than one New Kingdom tomb remains undiscovered. The tombs of Ramses VIII and Thutmose II, as well as several queens and princes of the Eighteenth Dynasty, have yet to be discovered. These rulers were most likely buried somewhere in the Valley of the Kings.

The Valley of the Kings is one of the richest archaeological sites in the world—and experts think there are more treasures to be uncovered.

Glossary

afterlife (n.)	life after death; life after the physical body dies (p. 6)
archaeologist (n.)	a scientist who studies the remains of ancient cultures (p. 4)
chambers (n.)	rooms or other enclosed spaces, either natural or artificial (p. 4)
chariots (n.)	horse-drawn carriages with two wheels that were used in ancient times, usually for racing and fighting battles (p. 8)
dynasties (n.)	series of rulers in a country who are from the same family (p. 5)
hieroglyphs (n.)	symbols or pictures used as writing, especially in ancient Egypt (p. 7)
humidity (n.)	the amount of moisture in the air (p. 14)
limestone (n.)	a sedimentary rock formed from the remains of marine organisms (p. 5)
mummification (n.)	the process of preserving a dead body, which was practiced in ancient Egypt (p. 6)
pharaohs (n.)	kings in ancient Egypt (p. 4)
sarcophagus (n.)	a stone coffin or tomb from ancient times, often inscribed and elaborately ornamented (p. 6)
scribes (n.)	people who copy handwritten texts or record information in writing; writers (p. 13)

Valley of the Kings

A Reading A-Z Level W Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,317

Connections

Writing

Write a newspaper article about the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922. In your article, include the questions and answers you imagine would have been discussed in an interview with Howard Carter and other eyewitnesses.

Social Studies

Choose two pharaohs from Egypt's New Kingdom. Create a Venn diagram comparing the two pharaohs. Use information from the book as well as outside resources to complete your Venn diagram.

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