

New Discoveries in Ancient Egypt

by Bryan Brown

from *Junior Scholastic*

¶1 For years, people have looked with awe upon the burial riches of ancient Egypt's Pharaohs (Kings). The famous tomb of King Tutankhamen (*TOO-tan-KAH-men*), found in 1922, **contained** so many treasures, it took 10 years for archaeologists to remove them all. More than 5,000 items were found in Tut's four-room burial chamber—everything from jewelry to gold masks to drinking cups!

¶2 But newer discoveries have **revealed** that a few Pharaohs went to the afterlife with more than just objects. Some even brought their servants!

¶3 Recently, archaeologists from New York University, Yale University, and the University of Pennsylvania Museum have made some startling discoveries at the **ancient** graveyard of Abydos (*eh-BYE-des*). Near the 5,000-year-old tomb of the Pharaoh Aha, they found six connected graves.

¶4 Archaeologists think the bones in the graves are those of officials, craftsmen, and servants in Aha's royal court. The discoveries confirm a long-held suspicion among historians—that individuals were sacrificed in order to serve their ruler's needs in the afterlife.

Words to Know

awe: (*n.*) a feeling of great respect or admiration

startling: (*adj.*) very unusual or surprising

confirm: (*v.*) to show that something is definitely true, especially by providing more proof



Close Reading

Key Ideas and Details

1. Identify where the author's main claim is introduced. What is the author's purpose in writing this article?

Academic Vocabulary

2. Why does the author choose to use the word *ancient* in **paragraph 3**?



Parentheses

Parentheses (like this) indicate that the reader should place less emphasis on the enclosed material.

Key Ideas and Details

3. Explain what was startling about the discovery in the ancient graveyard. Use details from **paragraph 4** to support your answer.



Dashes

Dashes—like this—usually show emphasis. They are often used in the middle of a sentence.



Text Structure

4. Why does the author use the subheading “A Gigantic Leap” above **paragraph 5**? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Key Ideas and Details

5. Identify details that the author uses to elaborate on his claim about servants being sacrificed. What new information is offered in **paragraphs 5–7**?

Writing

6. Review the details in **paragraphs 5–7**. What type of information does the author include to convey the importance of Aha?

Text Structure

7. How does the time period that is discussed in this section relate to the time line on the opposite page?

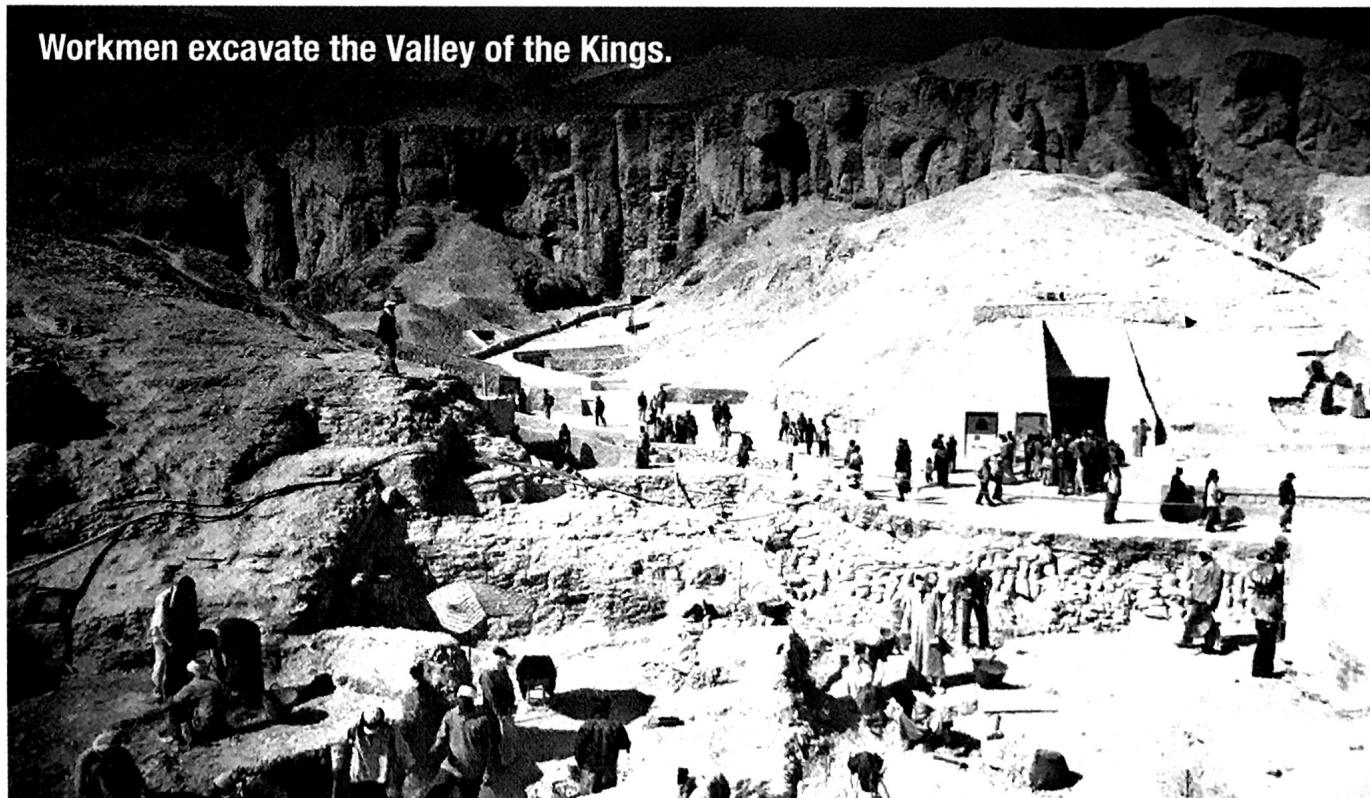
A Gigantic Leap

¶5 The kingdom of ancient Egypt lasted for 3,000 years, beginning around 3100 B.C. Historians often call Aha, also known as Menes (*MEE-nez*), the first Pharaoh. Many credit him with **uniting** Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt into one kingdom.

¶6 Egyptian civilization “took a gigantic leap under the ruler Aha,” says David O’Connor, who is leading the excavations at Abydos.

¶7 The human sacrifices offered for Aha also “indicate a great change of royal power,” says Laurel Bestock, a member of the Abydos team. During Aha’s time, Egyptians began to view their king as a god, or a divine representative.

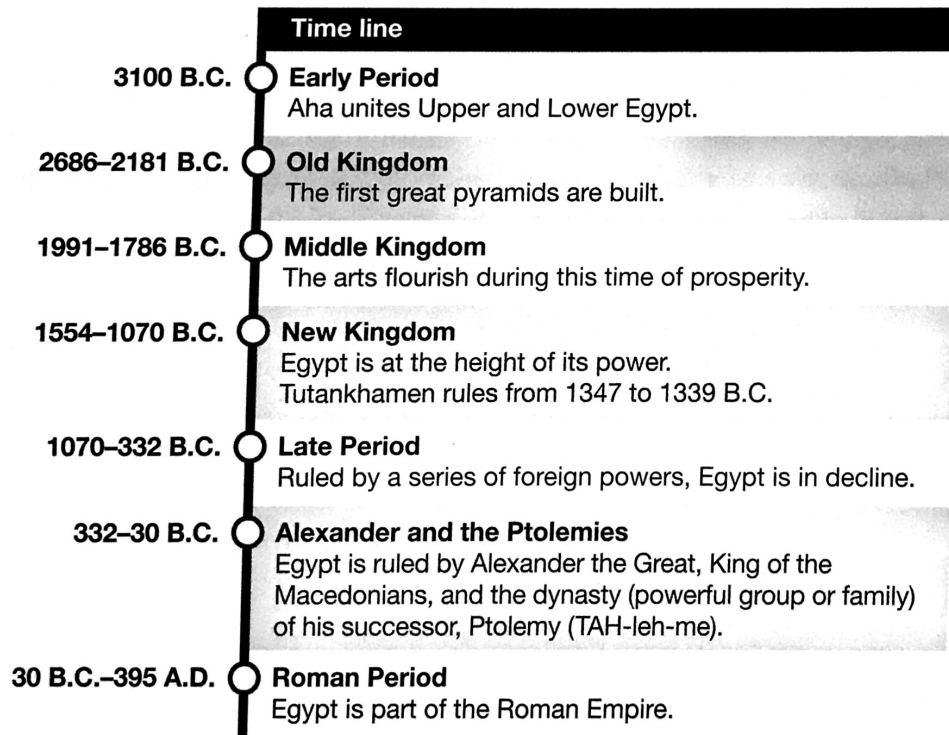
Workmen excavate the Valley of the Kings.





¶8 Experts think individuals in Aha's court were poisoned during the royal ritual. Still, tests on the skeletons do not reveal any signs of physical trauma. Court members may have thought they were gaining **eternal** life by following their King into death.

¶9 There are also bodies in graves linked to the tomb of King Djer, Aha's successor. But O'Connor believes that the Pharaohs stopped making human sacrifices by the end of Egypt's First Dynasty, in about 2986 B.C.



Words to Know

ritual: (*n.*) a ceremony that is always performed in the same way, in order to mark an important occasion

trauma: (*n.*) serious injury

dynasty: (*n.*) rulers from the same family



Close Reading

Academic Vocabulary

8. What does the evidence in **paragraph 8** reveal about how and why humans were sacrificed?

Key Ideas and Details

9. How does the author further develop the idea that servants were sacrificed for their kings?

Words and Phrases in Context

10. Explain the significance of the phrase "following their King into death" in **paragraph 8**. What does the author mean by *following*?

Text Structure

11. What information is provided by the time line that is not given elsewhere in the article?

Close Reading

**Key Ideas and Details**

12. What is the historical importance of this new discovery in the Abydos cemetery? How is it different compared to previous discoveries?

Words and Phrases in Context

13. Describe the “boat graves” that the author mentions in **paragraph 11**. Why were they created?

Writing

14. Why does the author include quotations in **paragraphs 11 and 12**? Explain why the strategy is useful in this context.

Key Ideas and Details

15. How does the information about the disturbed graves emphasize the importance of the discovery?

A Jumble of Bones

¶10 Abydos was one of the most important burial grounds in ancient Egypt. The city was also a major center for worship of Osiris (*oh-SY-rihs*), the god of the dead.

¶11 O’Connor has been digging at Abydos since 1967. His teams have excavated fleets of full-size wooden boats in “boat graves,” and even the bones of donkeys. “The king would need transportation in the afterlife,” archaeologist Matthew Adams explains.

¶12 The graves of Aha’s servants were discovered about a mile from the Pharaoh’s tomb. Among the bones, archaeologists found jars with Aha’s royal seals. Bestock told JS that the graves have been “heavily disturbed” by ancient tomb robbers. “In three cases we found parts of a single body,” she says. “In two cases there were only jumbled [mixed-up] bones.”

Words to Know

excavated: (*v.*) carefully dug up in order to find ancient objects, bones, etc.

seal: (*n.*) a stamp made of metal or wax with a distinctive design used to authenticate a document or container



¶13 **Scholars** divide the time line of ancient Egypt into as many as 10 historical **periods**. The kingdom was ruled by 31 dynasties until Alexander the Great conquered it in 332 B.C. One of the greatest generals in history, Alexander spread Greek culture across much of the known world with his **conquests**.

¶14 In 30 B.C., the Romans defeated Queen Cleopatra, the last of the rulers who followed Alexander. Roman rule began to weaken when the empire split apart in 395 A.D. After that, the glory of ancient Egypt began to disappear under **waves** of new conquests and foreign control.

¶15 Today, clues to the great mysteries of one of the world's great civilizations are being dug out of the desert bit by bit. In Abydos, archaeologists have uncovered the tombs of all eight kings of the First Dynasty. But O'Connor's team believes that there are many more bones of the First Dynasty officials and servants to be found.

¶16 "There is still a lot of exciting work to do!" says Bestock.

Words to Know

scholars: (*n.*) intellectual, well educated people; people who know a lot about a specific topic

periods: (*n.*) particular lengths of time, with beginning and end points

waves: (*n.*) sudden increases in a particular behavior, activity, or feeling



Close Reading

Text Structure

16. What important information about the grave site at Abydos does the author save for the last section? What might his purpose have been in doing so?

Academic Vocabulary

17. Explain why "waves of new conquests" ended Egyptian rule.

Words and Phrases in Context

18. Why does the author use the word *glory* in association with ancient Egypt in **paragraph 14**? What does the word's connotation reveal about the author's perspective?

Writing

19. How does the work of archaeologists like Bestock change the way people look at history? Explain your answer using details from the text.