

Read the passage below and then answer questions 39 to 50.

The Unusual discovery

One of the most amazing things about the discovery of a 2,000 year old cemetery in the Bahariyah Oasis in Egypt was that no one was looking for it. No one even knew it existed. It had been completely buried by sand.

In 1996, a donkey belonging to a guard at the nearby temple stumbled into a hole in the sand a mile from the temple. When the guard peered into the hole, he saw something shining brightly. He reported the discovery to Egyptian archaeologists right away.

However, the archaeologists did not begin serious digging immediately. They did not have the workers or the money. So they made a quick survey of the site, and then covered everything up again. They wanted to hide it from thieves and protect it from exposure to the sun and weather. Finally, in 1999, they had enough money to begin exploring the site.

On their very first day of work, after digging only several feet into the sand, they found a lot of mummies. Mummies are dead bodies that have been preserved for a long time. They are mostly found in Egypt. One of them had an especially beautiful mask. It was not a pharaoh's mummy, though. It turned out that none of the tombs in this cemetery belonged to royalty. Most of the people buried here came from families that grew rich by trading in wine.

The most spectacular of these mummies have masks made of plaster covered with a thin layer of gold. Many are in wonderful condition. And because grave robbers never found these tombs, everything that was buried with them is still there. Most of the mummies have been left where they were found, but a few of the best preserved ones are on display in the Bahariyah Museum, where the public can take a look at them.

Two mummies were found lying side by side and were probably a husband and a wife. His mask and chest plate were decorated with religious figures. Her head was turned in his direction, indicating that the husband had died first.

Two other mummies are of children. Archaeologists think they were brother and sister because they were found together. The boy was probably about five years old. His mask with its painted eyes and features are so real - he almost seems alive!

Did archaeologists find treasures in these tombs? It depends on what you mean by "treasures." They have not found any solid gold, but they have discovered all sorts of objects. The people buried in the cemetery may have thought some of these items would be useful in the afterlife. Or some may have been intended as gifts to the gods. For example, archaeologists have unearthed small statues of various gods. They have found many pieces of jewelry - necklaces, bracelets and anklets - made of copper, glass, ivory and semi-precious stones.

They have also discovered many pottery pieces used for storing, cooking or serving food. There were some bronze Greek and Roman coins too. And in the children's tombs, they found toys - carved animals for the children to play with in the afterlife.

Archaeologists will be able to learn more about these people and their way of life by further studying their mummies and the things buried with them. And so many mummies were buried in the Valley of the Golden Mummies that excavation and learning will continue at the site for years to come.

(Adapted from *Secrets of the Past* by World Book, Inc. 2002)