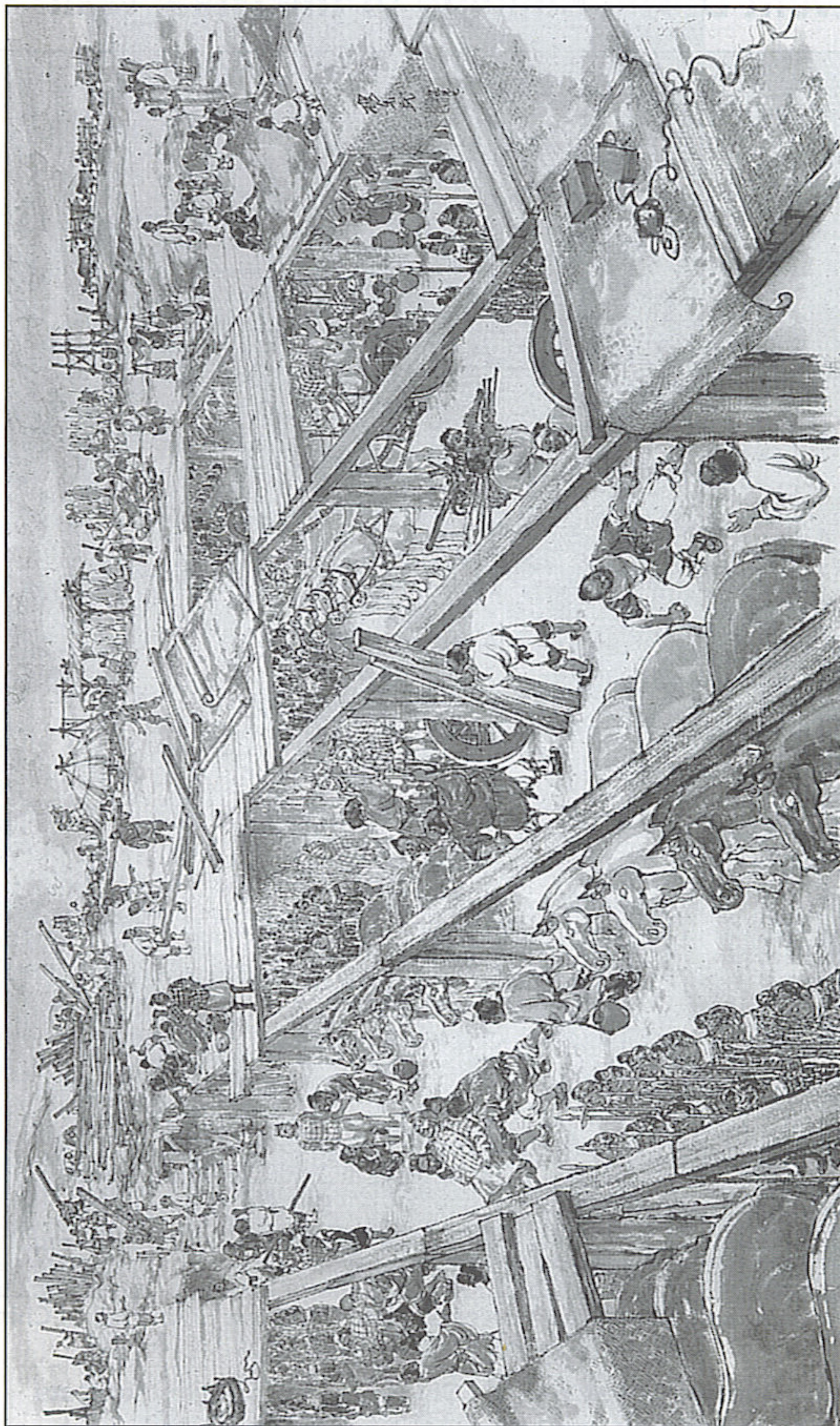


Event E: The Emperor's Death and Burial



In this image, we see many workers and artists constructing the magnificent tomb of Qin Shi Huang Di.

Focus Question: What is unique about the death and burial of Qin Shi Huang Di?

Information About the Emperor's Death and Burial

The Emperor's Search for Immortality

- Despite the many achievements of Qin Shi Huang Di (pronounced CHIN-SHIH-HWONG-DEE), ancient Chinese writings reveal he was “unable to find happiness.” At the root of Qin Shi Huang Di’s unhappiness was his terror of death and his desire to live forever, or be *immortal*. Therefore, Qin Shi Huang Di was thrilled when he met a group of magicians in 219 B.C.E. who wanted to search for an immortality potion, or *elixir*. Eager to become immortal, the emperor immediately sent “thousands of youths and maidens” to help the magicians search for the magic potion. Unfortunately, the party was never heard from again.
- In 212 B.C.E. a magician told Qin Shi Huang Di that evil spirits were to blame for the emperor’s failure to find the immortality potion. The magician warned the emperor that he would never achieve immortality unless he hid from the evil spirits. As a result, the emperor built a large network of secret passages and covered pathways so he could travel unseen among his 270 palaces. According to ancient Chinese texts, “After this time, no one knew where [the emperor] was...all was determined within his...palaces.”

The Death and Burial of Qin Shi Huang Di

- In 210 B.C.E. after more than ten years as emperor of China, Emperor Qin died unexpectedly at the age of 49 while searching for an elixir of immortality. While no one knows the exact cause of his death, some scholars think he may have accidentally poisoned himself by drinking various potions in an effort to gain immortality. The emperor’s advisors worried that the news of his death might cause chaos throughout the land. Therefore, Qin Shi Huang Di’s top advisor, Li Si (pronounced LEE-SUH), attempted to keep his death a secret until the emperor’s body was returned to the capital city of Xianyang (pronounced SHEE-AHN-YAHNG). Li Si concealed Qin Shi Huang Di’s death by having food delivered to the emperor’s covered carriage and issuing fake imperial announcements. The procession eventually reached the capital, where Qin Shi Huang Di was laid to rest in one of the ancient world’s most magnificent tombs.
- Ancient Chinese writings report that work began on Qin Shi Huang Di’s tomb when he inherited the throne at age 13. About 700,000 workers built the emperor’s tomb, which covered eight square miles and was located inside Mount Li (pronounced LEE) near the city now known as Xian (pronounced SHEE-AHN). Many of the tomb workers were buried alive with the emperor because Qin Shi Huang Di’s son did not want graverobbers to learn about the tomb’s many treasures. According to ancient writings, the tomb contained an underground city made of bronze, with rivers and seas filled with mercury. The tomb also contained marvelous tools, precious jewels, and rare objects. Artisans made crossbows into traps so that any graverobbers would meet sudden death. Most amazing of all, artists crafted an entire army of soldiers made of fired, unglazed clay, called *terra cotta*, for the tomb. So far, archeologists have discovered several thousand unique life-size figures, including archers, foot soldiers, chariot drivers, and horses. The terra cotta army faces forward, to lead the emperor into the next world.