

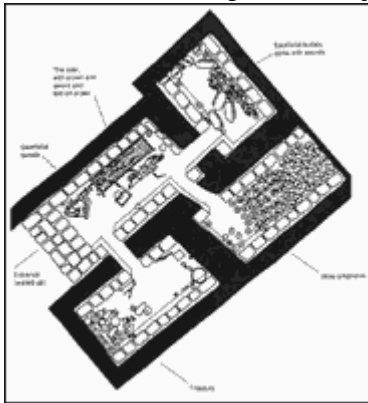


### 3. The X-Group Period (ca. A.D. 320-550)

#### **X-Group Royalty**

The large and rich tumulus tombs found at the sites of Ballana and Qustul suggest that there was an elite class during the X-Group Period. These elite tombs were found by the Second Archaeological Survey to Nubia in 1931. A few of the Ballana and Qustul tumuli may have belonged to kings. Unlike the Napatan and Meroitic royal pyramids, many of the Ballana and Qustul tombs had not been robbed, which enabled Emery, one of the discoverers, to describe how they had been built: A ramp was cut down into the ground from the surface; at the end of this ramp, a series of brick-walled rooms with vaulted roofs was built inside a large pit dug into the earth.

These rooms were filled with such objects as the tomb owner would need in the afterlife - furniture, cooking utensils, jewelry, weapons, wine, and food. The tomb owner was buried on a



bed in the room nearest to the main entrance, and his sacrificed wife was placed either beside him or in another room. The entrance to the tomb was blocked, and the bodies of sacrificed horses, camels, donkeys, and dogs, as well as human servants, were placed in the ramp. After the pit and ramp were closed, a large mound of earth was piled on top.

Most of the objects found within these tombs, except for the pottery, were apparently imported from Byzantine Egypt. At this time, Christian images begin to appear beside the Hellenistic motifs that began much earlier, and foreshadow the Christianization of Nubia, which was to take place around A.D. 550.

A specific group of objects found in the Ballana and Qustul tombs suggests that the individuals buried here represented some continuation of Meroitic royal traditions. Near the heads of ten of the Ballana burials were found crowns, broad circles of silver decorated with gems. The motifs on the crowns include representations of the Egyptian god Horus and the Egyptian goddess Isis. Three of the crowns have a sculptured ram's head wearing the Egyptian plumed crown (the atef crown) on the rim. These Ballana crowns look very similar to the crowns represented in Meroitic tombs and temples. This suggests a connection to the preceding Meroitic Period, though no evidence supplies information about the origins of the Ballana kings.