

Karanog, Wealthy Capital of a Lower Nubian Province

Karanog, a provincial capital of the Meroitic kingdom during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D., provides our richest glimpse into a culture found only in Lower Nubia. It was partially excavated by C. Leonard Woolley and D. Randall-MacIver for The University Museum in 1907. The excavated area of the town contained both elite and lower order houses. From the cemetery came a vast array of objects representative of Meroitic daily life. Most of these objects were made in Nubia, but some were imported from Roman Egypt.

The models shown here, part of the exhibit Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa, were fabricated by Chris Ray, in collaboration with David O'Connor and Stacie Olson, from plans and descriptions of the 1907 excavations. They vividly evoke the setting, in life and death, of the *peshito*—the princely governor who stood at the peak of the social pyramid in Lower Nubia.

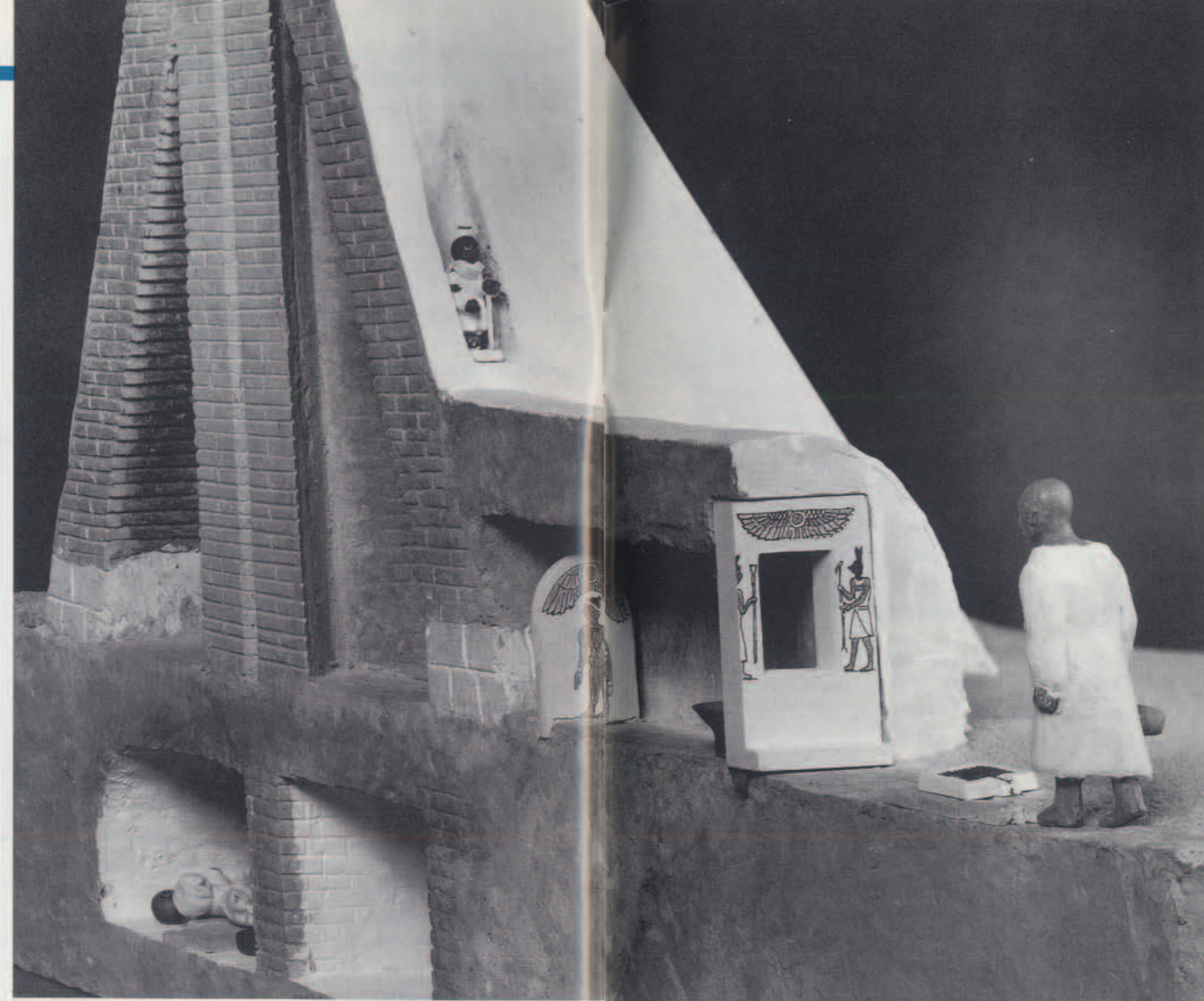


Figure 2. A governor's tomb. Meleton, a governor of Lower Nubia, was buried in the richest of all the tombs in the Karanog cemetery (see also Dafa'alla, Fig. 15b, this issue). Below ground, two chambers housed several burials. Meleton's, which had been completely plundered, was in the front chamber.

During the funerary cult activities, which were periodically repeated, the priest approached the pyramid from the east. Food and libations for the dead were placed on a stone offering table. Beyond, a small chapel housed a stela which established the merits and prestige of the deceased, thus inspiring the continuation of the cult. (The stela depicted here may not actually have belonged to Meleton's pyramid.) In this reconstruction, a niche in the pyramid face shelters the deceased's ba statue.

Tomb G 187, Karanog cemetery

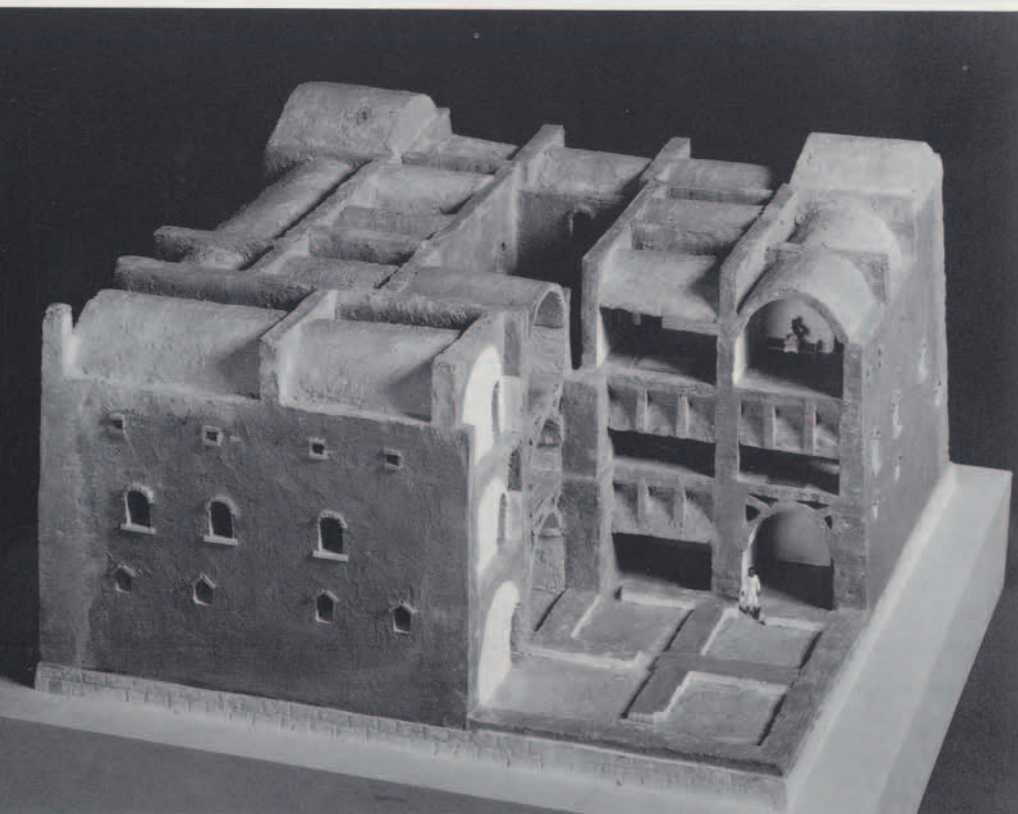


Figure 3. Ba statue, garbed in princely regalia, from Meleton's tomb. Ba statues are winged figures representing the soul of the deceased, able to fly up to join the sun god in its endless cycle of birth and rebirth. Nubian versions of this Egyptian concept may have been placed in a niche in the face of the tomb pyramid, as shown in Figure 2, rather than inside. This statue, found in a robber's hole beside the tomb, is now in the Cairo Museum.

From C. Leonard Woolley and D. Randall-MacIver, *Karanog: The Romano-Nubian Cemetery*, Vol. 4 (Philadelphia: The University Museum, 1910), Pl. 2

Figure 1. The governor's palace. At Karanog, University Museum archaeologists discovered two structures unique in Meroitic archaeology. Each of these structures was a palace used by the *peshitos*, or governors, of Meroitic Lower Nubia (see Dafa'alla, Fig. 16, this issue). The model depicts the larger building, occupying almost 650 square meters (7000 square feet).

Built of mud-brick, the palace stood three stories high and had vaulted ceilings and roofs. A central well provided air and light to the interior. On the ground floor were the governor's reception halls and offices, along with service rooms and storage magazines. His residence occupied much of the second floor, together with service and servants' rooms. The third floor was probably similarly divided.



Christopher Ray started making things at an early age. Since graduating from Reed College with a degree in biology, he has managed exhibition programs, taught, and constructed models and dioramas for a number of public and private institutions. In 1983, he

formed Ray Museum Studios, and since that time has completed several models for The University Museum, including a Northwest Indian village and temples from the Maya site of Tikal, Guatemala, in addition to those for the Nubia exhibition.