



# CONSTRUCTING CULTURE: REPRESENTING AFRICA AND ANCIENT EGYPT IN MUSEUMS

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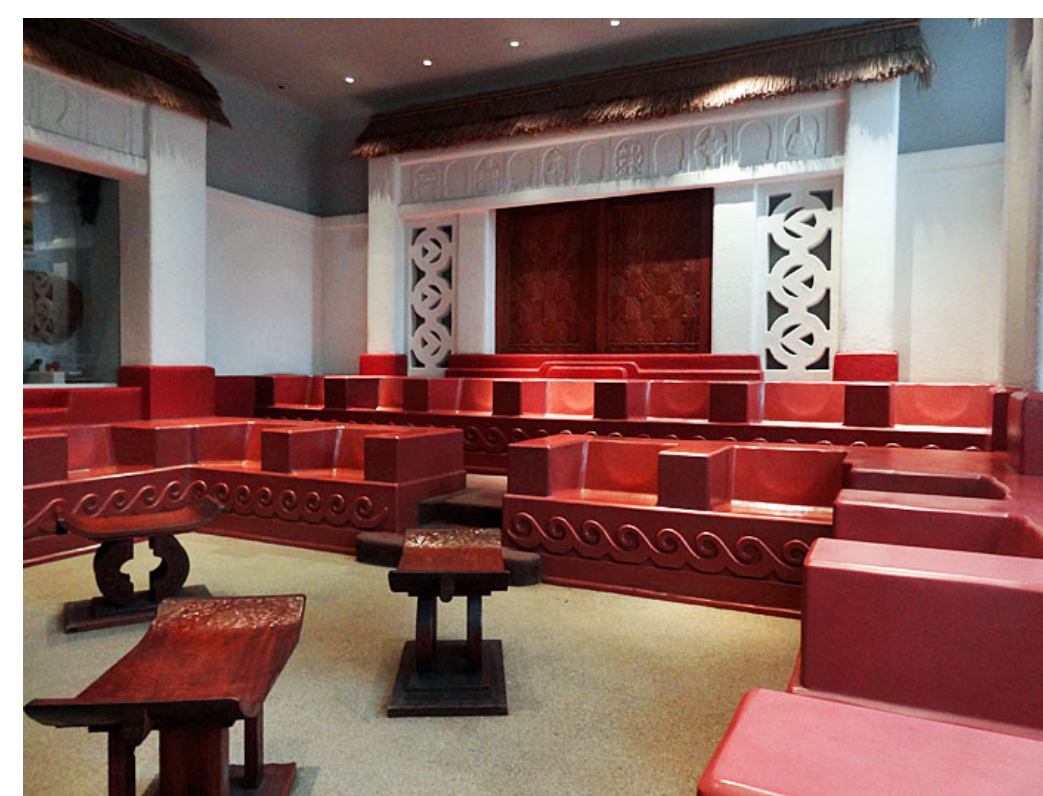
Archival Scholars Research Award

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## INTRODUCTION

Although Egypt is located in Africa, many have the perception that it is not part of the larger continent. When considering Africa in museum and educational displays, contrasting views of the ancient Egyptians within larger African culture may link to varying display techniques utilized for African and ancient Egyptian objects in educational institutions. I am investigating the ethics associated with these differing displays on a local scale by comparing institutions within Pittsburgh. My research focuses on case studies of the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History and the African Heritage Room at the Cathedral of Learning. I am specifically interested in determining how display techniques impact visitors' understandings of culture as well as observing the viewpoints of museum professionals involved in the creation of these spaces. As an Archival Scholars Research Award recipient, I have spent this semester utilizing the African Heritage Room archives to gain background information for my analysis of this space.

## KEY INSTITUTIONS



**The African Heritage Room** is one of the Nationality Rooms at the Cathedral of Learning. It displays the diversity of all African nations by including ancient Egyptian culture within the discussion of African heritage.

**The Carnegie Museum of Art** displays African and ancient Egyptian art in two galleries that are separate, but directly beside one another. The African Art gallery contains works from many African nations, while ancient Egyptian objects are located in the Art Before 1300 gallery and displayed alongside pre-modern objects from India, Greece, China, and more. These galleries are currently being renovated for the Carnegie International and will be curated by an African curator.

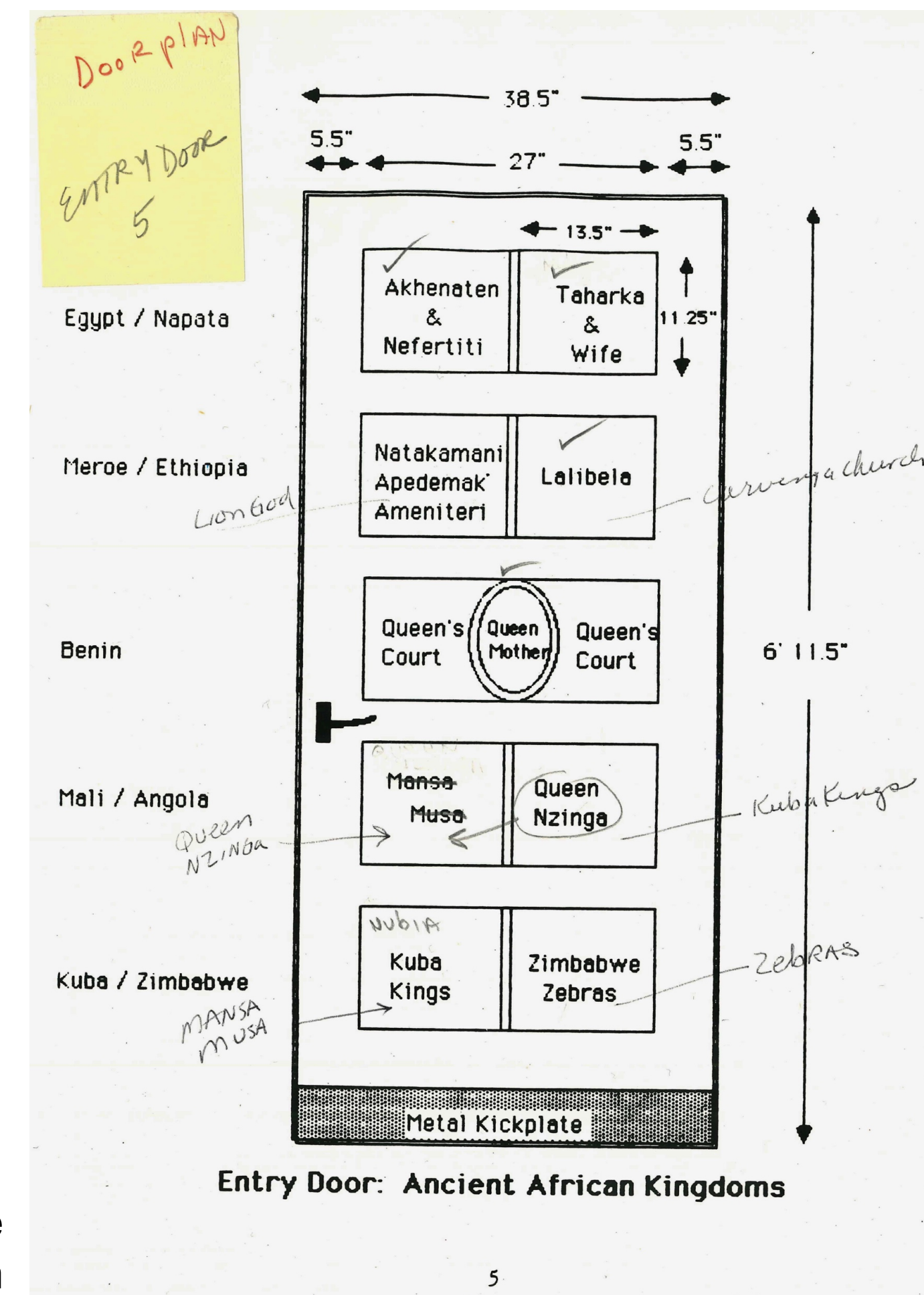


**The Carnegie Museum of Natural History** displays its ancient Egyptian collection in the Walton Hall of Ancient Egypt. Although the institution has an African collection, it is used solely for research purposes and is not available for public viewing. The Walton Hall of Ancient Egypt is in the process of being renovated with a tentative opening in 2021.

## ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

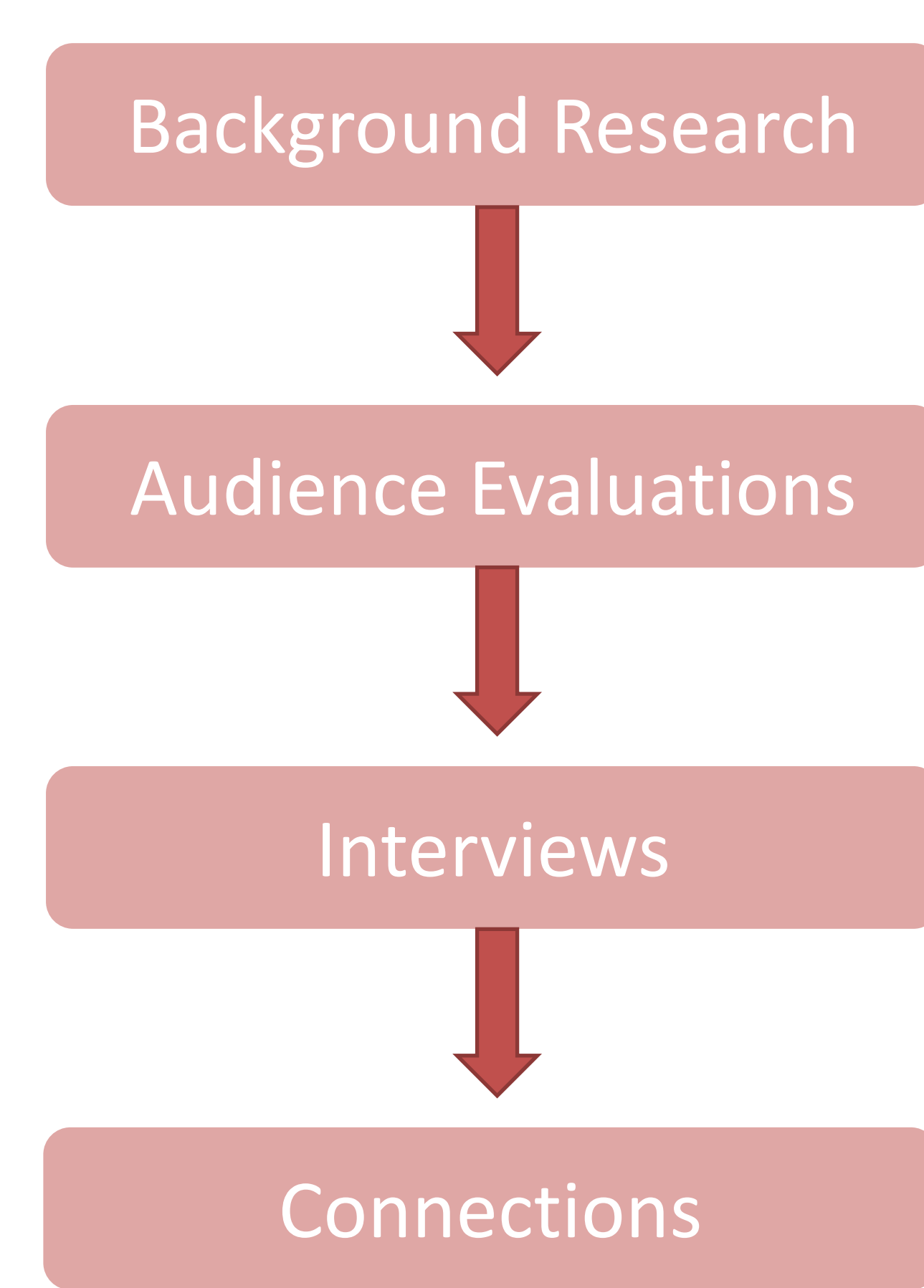


(Above) Boxes of the African Heritage Room archival documents



(Right) Layout of the entry door to the African Heritage Room

## METHODS



- (1) **Background Research:** collect information from the African Heritage Room archives by finding materials that are relevant to my project
- (2) **Audience Evaluations:** design and administer questionnaires for visitors of the African Heritage Room based on discoveries from the archives
- (3) **Interviews:** speak with multiple individuals involved in the creation of the African Heritage Room or who are on the Room's committee
- (4) **Connections:** find relationships between responses of visitors and professionals to determine how the Room impacts perceptions of African culture and connect these findings to results from the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History

## DISCUSSION

By working with these archival materials, I have gained a tremendous amount of background knowledge that will contribute to my creation of the questionnaires and interview guides for the African Heritage Room. My analysis of the African Heritage Room will allow me to compare the responses that I receive for each of my key institutions. Since the Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History and the African Heritage Room present very different display techniques for African and ancient Egyptian objects and cultural imagery, it will be interesting to see how, if at all, these spaces impact individual perceptions of African history and nations. By examining the differences and similarities in my findings, I will be able to pinpoint specific elements that are beneficial to visitors' experiences in these settings. This will enable me to make suggestions for improvements that can be made during the creation of new exhibitions and galleries.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Erin Peters for her continuous support throughout my research and for presenting me with numerous opportunities to develop museum experience. I would also like to thank librarian archivist Zachary Brodt for providing me with the necessary skills to effectively utilize the African Heritage Room archives this semester.



(Above) Photos of E. Maxine Bruhns and Ralph Proctor's visit with E. Harper Johnson, who was a historical painter and was interested in assisting with the creation of the African Heritage Room