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### Western Adoption of Ancient Egyptian Art and the Narratives it Perpetuates

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# Western Exhibitionary Display of Ancient Egyptian Art

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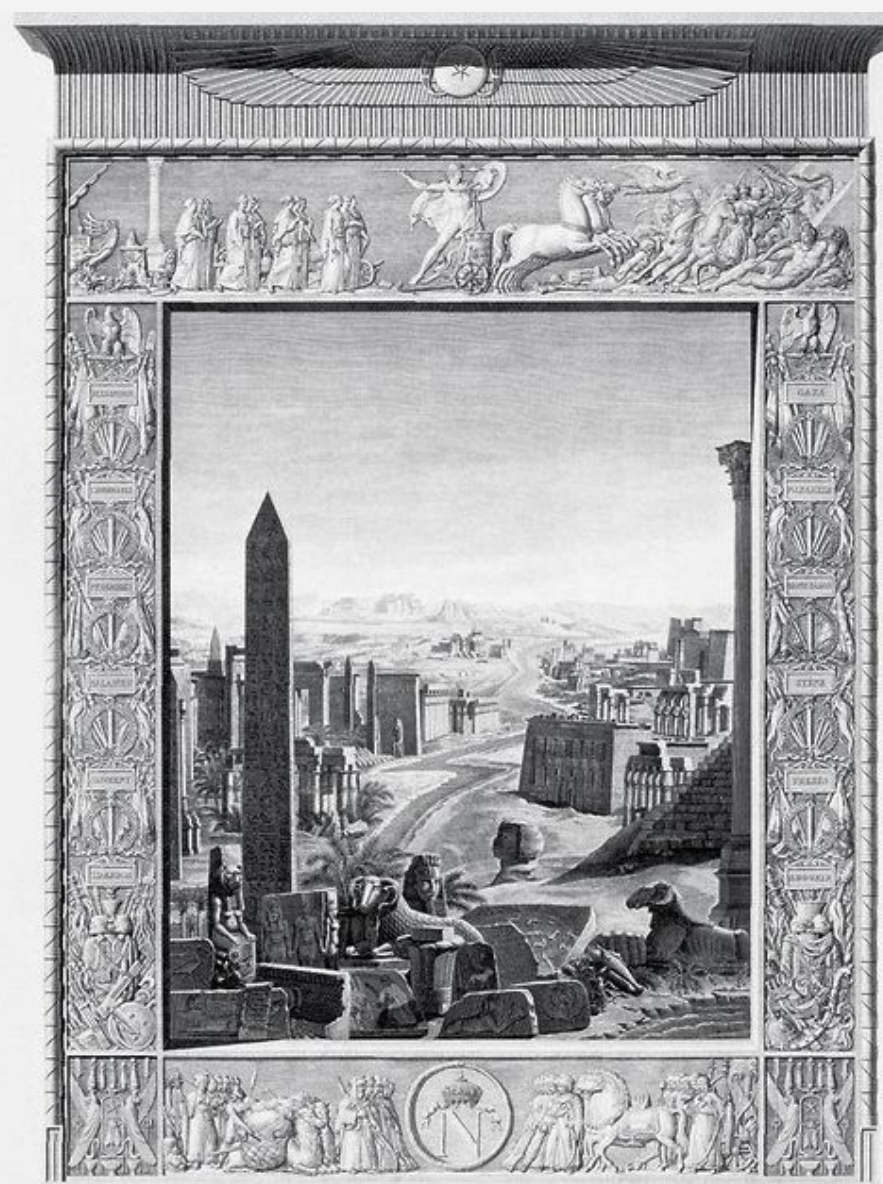
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## Background

- From 1798-1801 Napoleonic France occupied Egypt
- France pursued widespread documentation of Egypt from mapping to artifact acquisition
- Influx of new information on Egypt sparked European interest, and the *Description De L'Egypte* (a French collection of Egyptian maps, art and culture) furthered access to ancient Egypt to the populace
- In Europe and eventually America, Egyptian galleries would become a standard (and sometimes even a focal point) amongst the West's most prestigious museums by the 20th century



Frontispiece from *Description de l'Egypte*, 1809



Photograph of the Temple of Dendur (Metropolitan Museum Archive)

## Focus of analysis

Why do major museums devote so much gallery space to ancient Egyptian materials?

What do these installations convey to audiences?

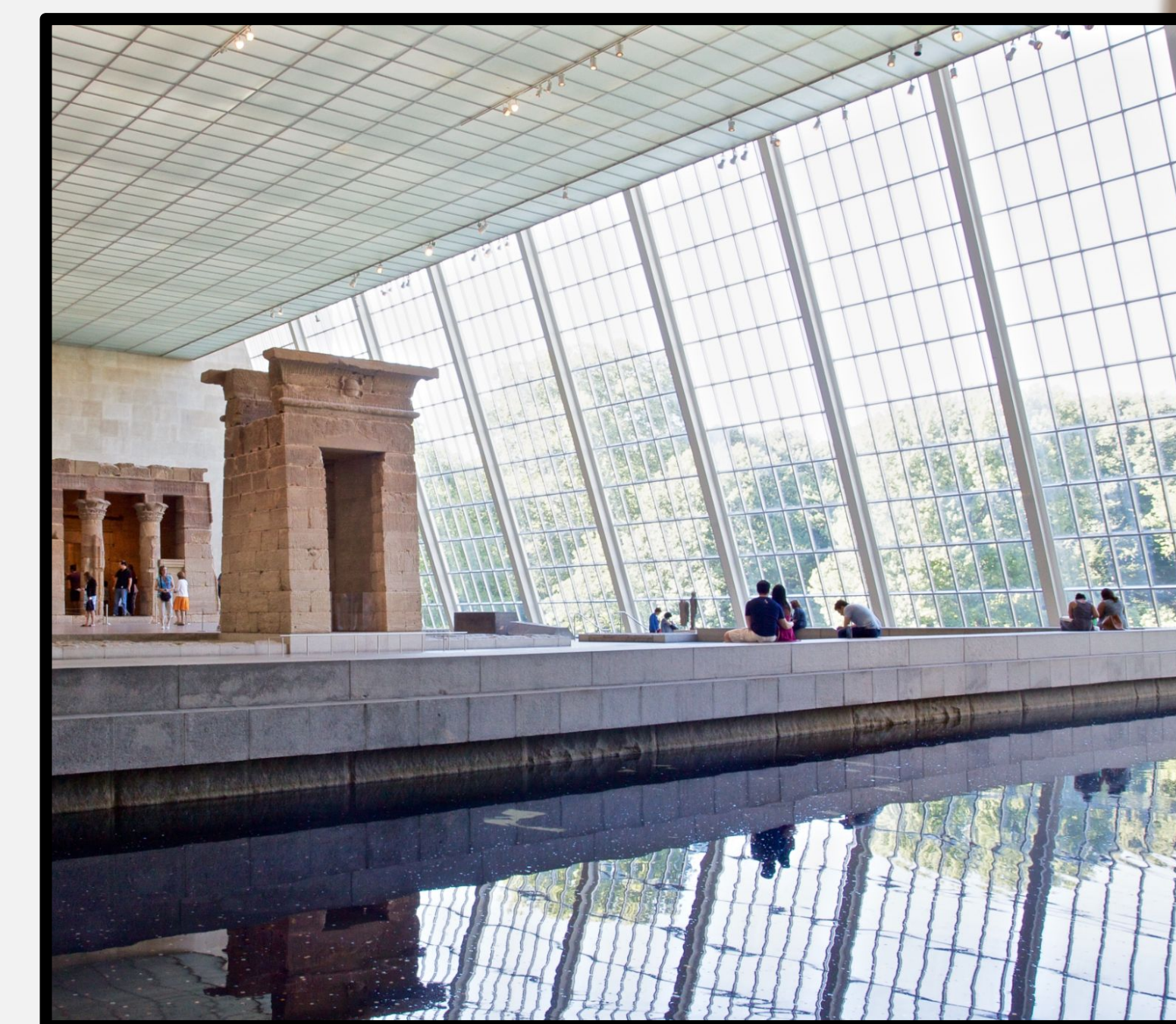
## Methods

This study addresses the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition of its Egyptian collections, as a case study, looking specifically at the gallery devoted to the Temple of Dendur in the Sackler Wing

- Guests enter a large space, grandiose in size, that houses the Temple
- The Temple is mostly illuminated by natural light with glass panels lining one wall
- An artificial "Nile" sits in front of the temple, along with sculptures of Egyptian gods
- Guests are encouraged to walk within the Temple, feeling its presence and peaking inside its walls



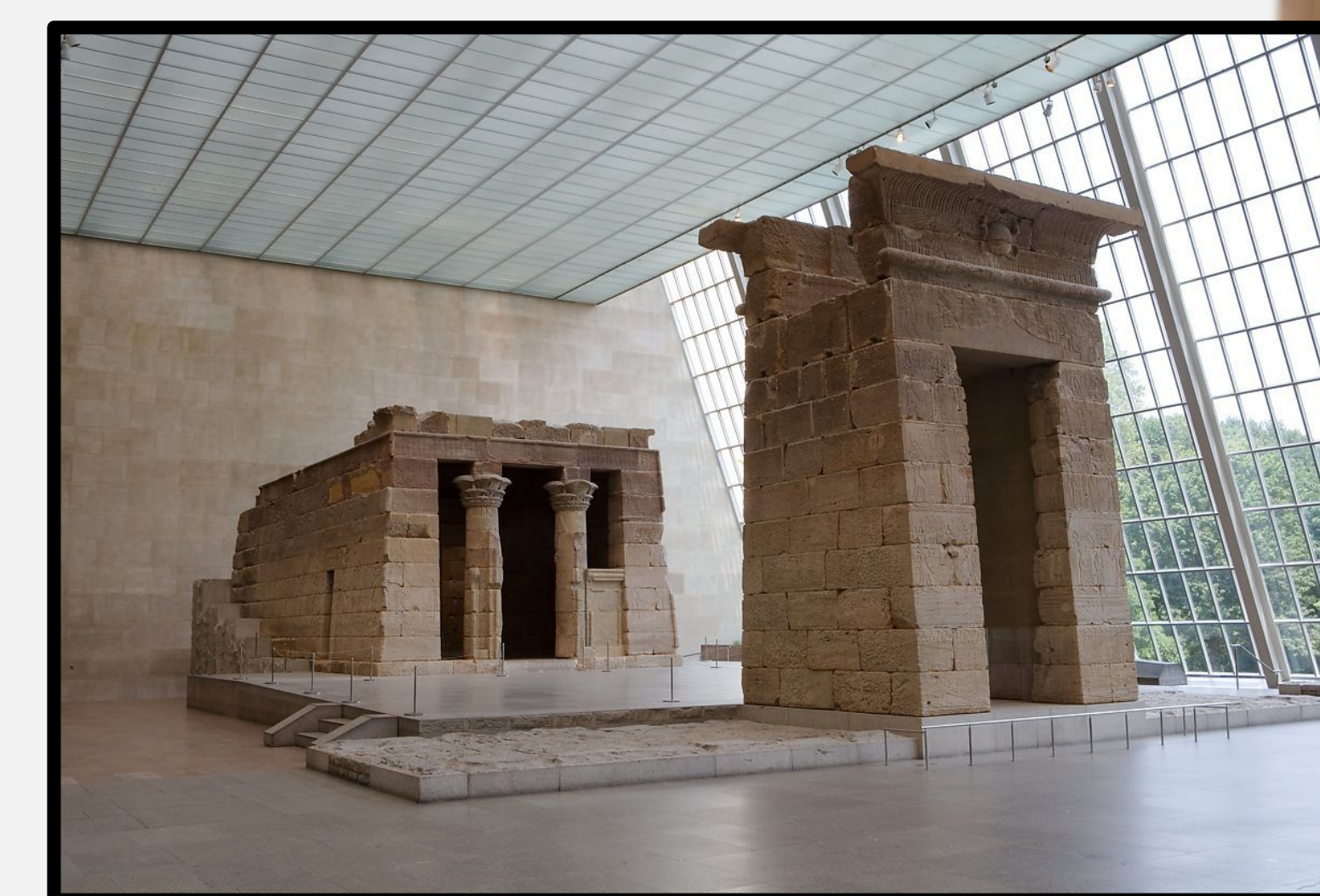
National YoungArts Foundation Inaugural Gala dinner at the Temple of Dendur



Temple of Dendur at The Met (photo: Lydia Liu)



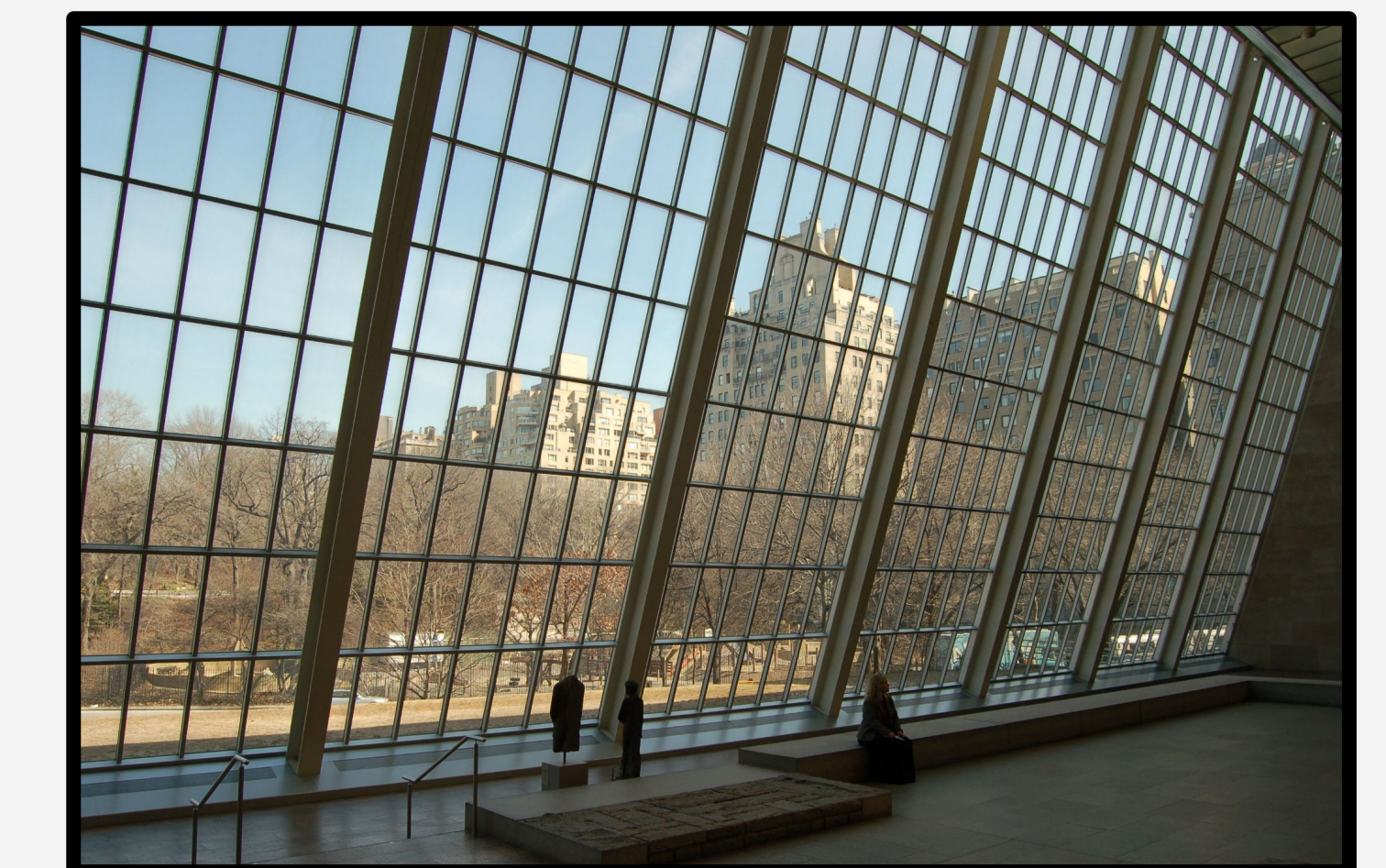
The Temple of Dendur between two statues of Amenhotep III (Metropolitan Museum Archive)



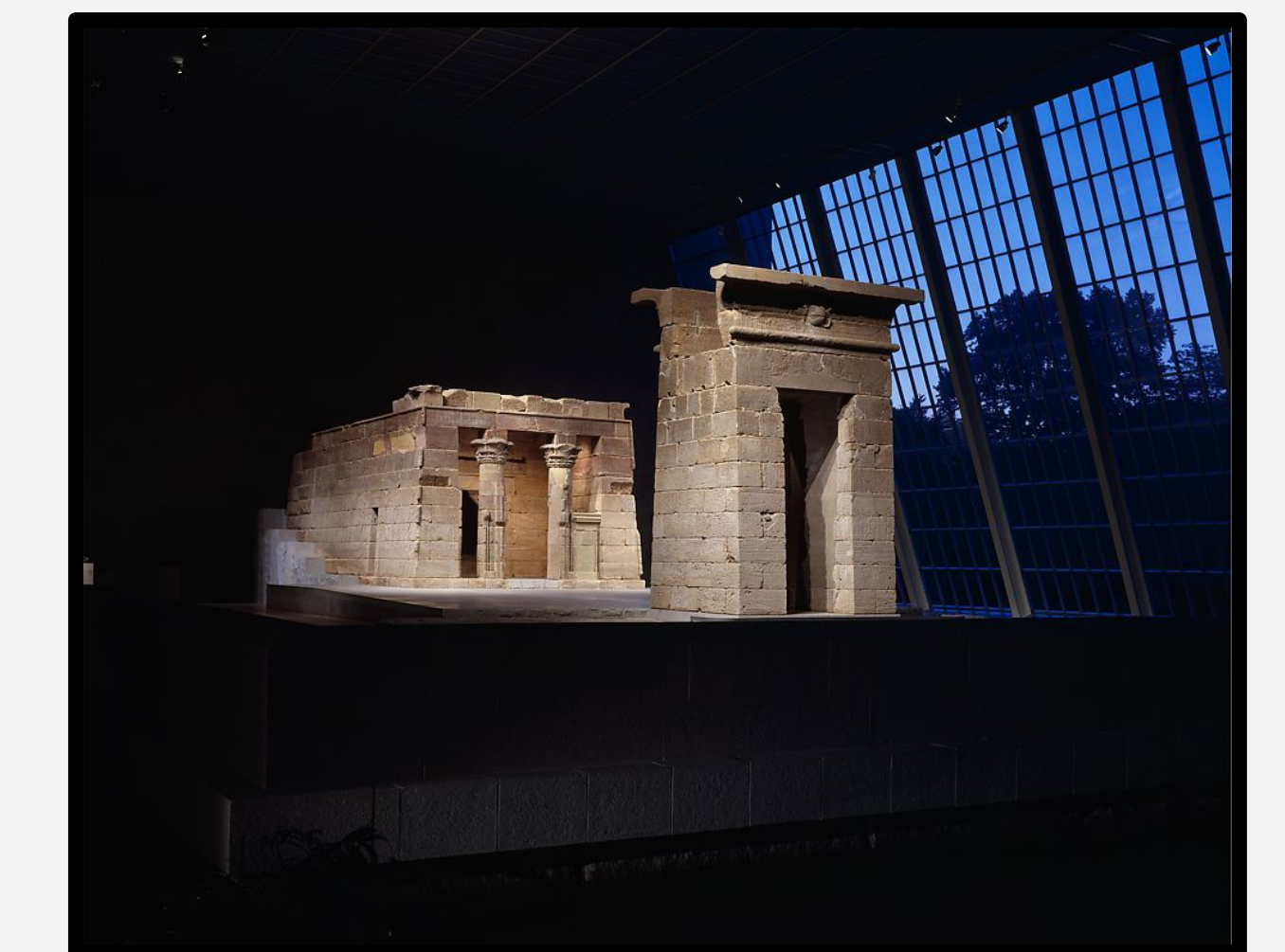
The Temple of Dendur at the Met (Metropolitan Museum Archive)

## Discussion

- The installation of the Temple's exhibit implicitly establishes a narrative of Egypt in relation to the West
- The exhibit asserts that ancient Egypt is part of New York's legacy.
- The West adopted ancient Egypt into its own narrative of Western civilization, thereby proclaiming ourselves as the inheritors of this ancient civilization



View of Central Park from the Sackler Wing, Metropolitan Museum of Art (Photo: Robert Young)



The Temple of Dendur at the Met (Metropolitan Museum Archive)

Western institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art implicitly assert an impression of Western cultural dominance by displaying the splendors of Ancient Egypt, in an attempt to rewrite history and forever alter the future.

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