

# **The Egyptian Oracle; Live Reenactment in Augmented Reality**

Abstract accepted for the conference of  
High-Tech Heritage: How Are Digital Technologies Changing Our Views of the Past?  
Amherst, MA, USA, May 2-4, 2012

Robyn Gillam, York University, York, ON, Canada  
gillam@yorku.ca

Jeffery Jacobson, PublicVR, Boston, USA  
jeff@publicvr.org

The Egyptian Oracle performance is a live reenactment of an Egyptian public ceremony from their later period, approximately 500 B.C.E. to the fall of Cleopatra. We project our Virtual Egyptian Temple at life-size scale, extending the physical theater into virtual space. Our sound system and audio spatialization techniques complete the effect.

The temple is three-dimensional space, which the audience navigates during scene changes. The main actor is the high priest, an avatar controlled by a live human puppeteer, hidden offstage. The main supporting actress, in costume, stands to one side but forward enough to view the screen. Audience members represent the Egyptian populace and take turns acting out brief roles in the drama. A sacred boat, bearing a shrine containing the spirit of the temple god, is another digital puppet also controlled by the puppeteer.

We modeled our performance on the ceremony described by the Saite Oracle Papyrus (Černy, 1962) and other sources. The priest poses queries to the spirit of the god, and the priest also interprets the movements of the boat as revealing the will of the god. The processional Oracle was an essential feature of Egyptian public life during this period, and its judgments had the force of law.

Our immediate goal is to show audiences how ceremony and drama were essential to ancient Egyptian culture, something not well represented in most museum exhibitions or textbooks. We also wish to encourage empathy for other cultures, and help audiences connect ancient civic life with today.

The National Endowment for the Humanities funded this project (HD-5120910), and we have staged the performance around Boston and Pittsburgh, including a museum and middle school. The target audience is middle-school children, but adults enjoy it too. We recommend clip from the performance:

<http://publicvr.org/oracle/introvid/>

