



# The Egyptian Oracle

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*in collaboration with*

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The priest interrogates two audience members playing the part of neighbors in a dispute. Next, the priest will appeal to the spirit of Horus in the sacred boat (left) for judgment.

The Egyptian Oracle performance is a live reenactment of an authentic public ceremony from ancient Egypt's Late Period. We project our Virtual Egyptian Temple on the wall at life scale extending the physical theater into virtual space. The temple is not a film, not a static image, but a true three-dimensional space, which the audience navigates during scene changes. The central actor is a high priest, an avatar controlled by a live human puppeteer, hidden offstage. The supporting actress stands in front of the screen, in costume, mediating the experience. Audience members represent the Egyptian populace acting out brief roles in the drama. Finally, the sacred boat (left) is another puppet also controlled by the puppeteer. In the drama, the will of the temple god moves the boat. This 90-second video is better than any explanation:

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

The show conforms to a high level of historical accuracy, suitable for any museum setting. Members of the audience come before the god with questions and problems to be solved. The priest poses questions to the god, and interprets the movements of the boat as divine revelation, with the force of law; the processional Oracle was an essential feature of Egyptian public life during this period. The National Endowment for the Humanities (USA) funded the development of the performance, evaluation, and open-source software (HD-5120910).

Educational theater has a long history in museums and special events at K-12 schools. They are an important and useful way to excite students about the subject matter, and convey certain ideas that are not well represented any other way. These events are best employed as part of a larger curriculum; they can illustrate ideas not easily represented otherwise and help students synthesize information they recently learned in the classroom. Egyptian Oracle is designed for children 8-12 years of age, although older children and adults enjoy it too.



The spirit of Horus moves the sacred boat to choose the woman (center) for a great honor.

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. More broadly, we wish to sharpen their empathy for other cultures, and connect ancient civic life with that of today. We also wish to investigate the educational power of this low cost technology, which we will open source at the end of the project. The same approach could represent other times, places, scales and topics. The puppet could be a Roman emperor, a dinosaur, or Mr. Protein, guiding the audience through a human cell. By mixing physical and virtual reality, we gain many of the advantages of both, achieving a more immersive experience for the students.

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