

Immersive Global Middle Ages

A proposed National Endowment for the Humanities Institute for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities

Overview

Experiencing other times, places, and cultures through immersive technology is a rapidly-growing methodology in research and teaching. Unfortunately, the hardware, software, expertise, and institutional support to build these experiences are not evenly available. The institute's design is a gateway skill- and capacity-building initiative that cultivates and mentors participants who are seeking to employ immersive technologies in research, teaching, and public outreach for any world region during the Global Middle Ages (500-1500 C.E.). Participants will:

- Explore and apply a digital Annales School of interdisciplinary research process within the context of the Global Middle Ages;
- Discuss significant thematic issues that frame and inform how immersive technologies are employed; and
- Acquire and master the research process, design approach, virtual object creation, city-scale model prototyping, and public delivery of an immersive medieval city/community using SketchUp Pro software.

At the completion of the 28-month institute of virtual and in-person workshops, each of the fourteen participants will deliver and present a substantive project that demonstrates their mastery of immersive digital humanities and medieval global theory, applied methods, and production.

Participant Eligibility & Capacity Building

All are welcome to apply. Recognizing the need to address digital divides in higher education, this institute will prioritize the professional development of participants who are members of underrepresented ethnic, cultural, and religious communities; women; diverse gender identities; and those who work at institutions serving those communities. Given that many participants will lack the necessary robust computing hardware and software needed to participate in the workshops, the institute will award technology stipends of \$3,800 to participants for the purchase of an Alienware R11 computer customized for immersive technology, monitor, keyboard/mouse, and a 3-year onsite support/warranty; an Oculus Rift headset; and a two-year license for Trimble SketchUp Pro modeling software. We will address infrastructure development for a variety of institutions. Expenses to attend the in-person workshops are also covered by the institute.

Why the Global Middle Ages?

At the intersections of medievalism(s), multidisciplinary epistemologies, and globalization, the Middle Ages were not only a Western European and Christian experience, but one that was global, interconnected, culturally diverse, and with many centers of cultural and political authority.

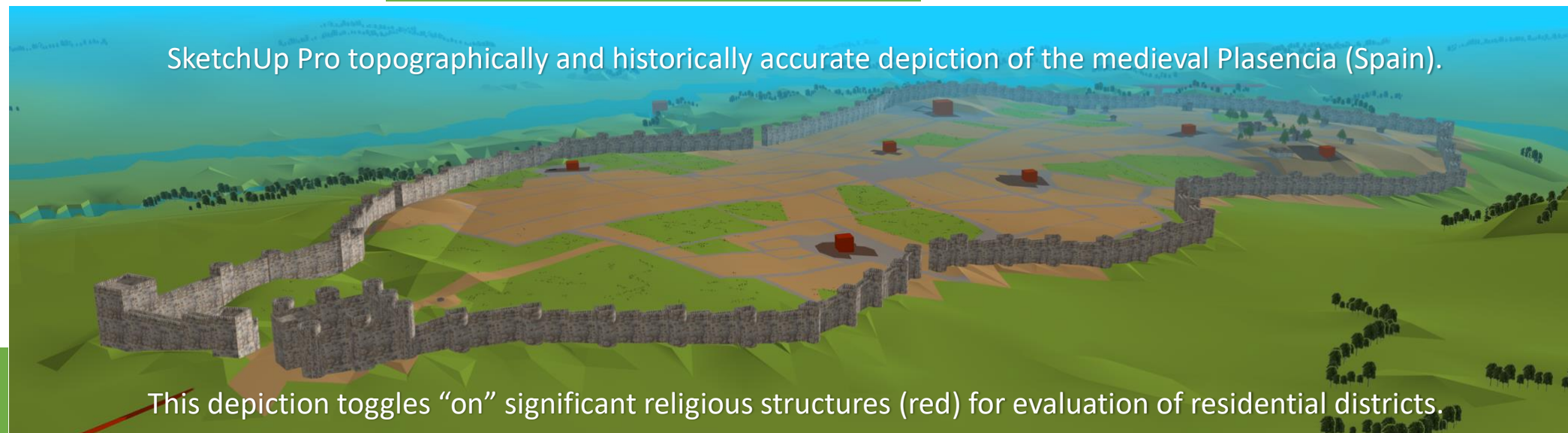
[The Global Middle Ages] privileges no academic discipline, geographic locale, or culture – neither continent, ocean, nor 'system' – but conjures with an uncentered planet that encompasses a multitude of formations simultaneously seen as interdependent and discrete, dynamically transforming themselves, and offering multiple kinds of worlding in 'deep time'

— Professor Geraldine Heng, Institute Advisor

Co-Principal Investigators

Roger Martinez-Davila is an associate professor of History, with an emphasis on the Spanish Middle Ages and digital humanities, at the University of Colorado. He is author of *Creating Conversos: The Carvajal-Santa María Family in Early Modern Spain* (2018) and "Telling Stories: Historical Narratives in Virtual Reality" (2017).

Lynn Ramey is professor of French and faculty director of the Center for Digital Humanities at Vanderbilt University. Ramey is the author of *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages* (2014) and *Christian, Saracen and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (2001). Co-director of the Global Middle Ages Project, she is in charge of the digital portal.



Workplan & Curriculum

The intensive series of fourteen monthly virtual workshops (January 2022-December 2023) and two four-day in-person workshops at the University of Colorado—Colorado Springs (summer 2022) and Vanderbilt University (summer 2023) will ensure the project meets its primary goal of shepherding humanists through a comprehensive immersive reality curriculum culminating in our participants' delivery of their own substantive projects. Through its curriculum, the institute will facilitate the integrative investigation of cultural, religious, economic, political, and environmental dynamics and factors that shaped global medieval communities. We accomplish this by creating geographically accurate, 3D medieval cityscapes that use digital-layering of qualitative and quantitative data gathered from primary sources (literary, administrative, ecclesiastical, royal, and municipal manuscripts), maps and plans (Google Earth/digitized antiquarian maps), and secondary studies (monographs, document collections, journal articles). Theoretical issues surrounding global interdisciplinary work are at the heart of this institute and particular attention will be paid to developing the processes to continue this work after the institute ends.

SketchUp Pro allows participants to create original digital artifacts (objects, devices, architecture and structures, terrain, persons, flora and fauna) and generate immersive cityscapes and historical communities, eliminating humanists' dependence on computer scientists or external contractors to build their worlds. SketchUp Pro exports "standalone" immersive environments without complicated technical processes and can be experienced in a web browser. Moreover, using SketchUp Pro, the user can "toggle" descriptive data "tags" and "section planes" that visually communicate different lenses of analysis, for example, the religious identity of residents who resided in individual houses in a city.