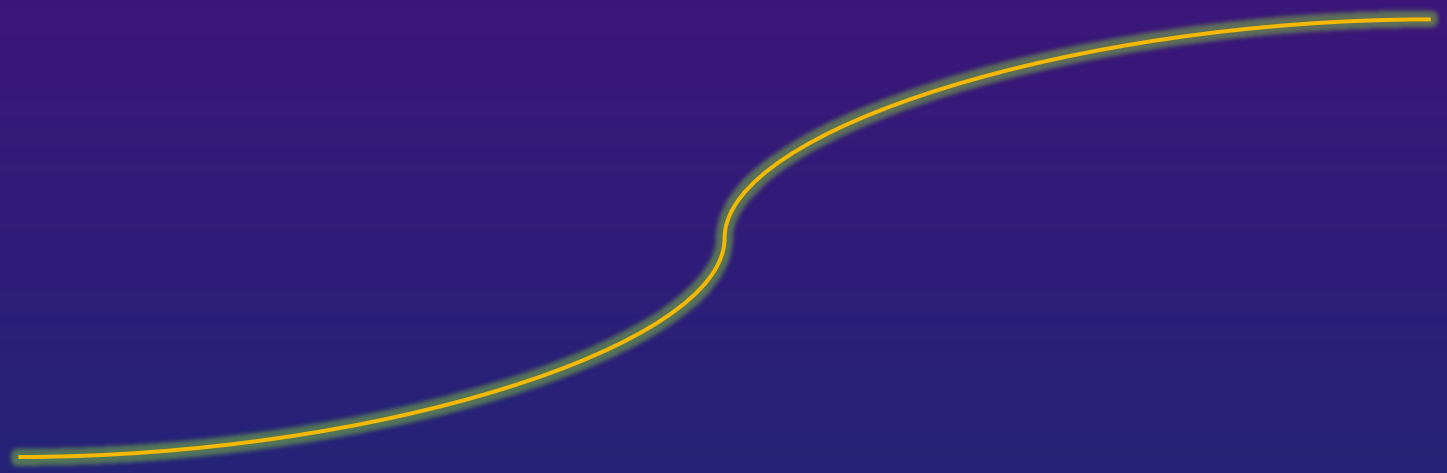


Amherst, Hampshire, Mt. Holyoke, Smith, & the University of Massachusetts

THE SPATIAL HUMANITIES IN THE FIVE COLLEGES

John Caris
Smith College

Andy Anderson
Amherst College

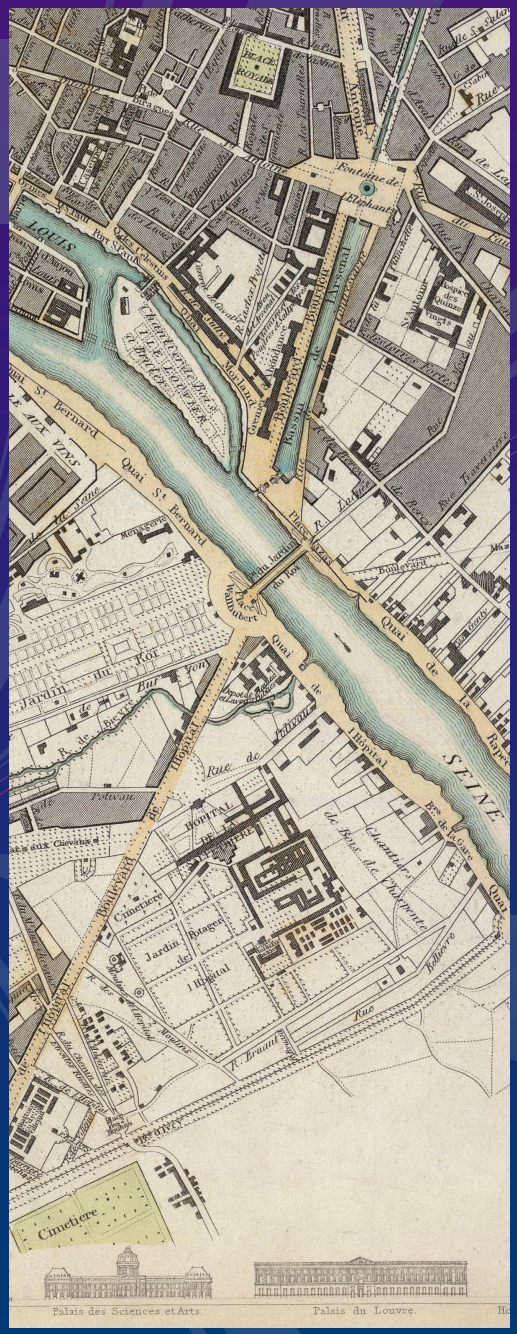
Digital Humanities

- A plethora of new tools and methods for transforming and studying the materials of traditional humanities research, e.g.
  - OCR and text encoding
  - Digital photography, now with GPS
  - 2D and 3D scanning

Holyoke, Massachusetts
1877 Perspective Map

Spatial Humanities

- Geospatial relationships are consequential in many aspects of the humanities.
- Many of these new tools, such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), make it significantly easier to collect, analyze, and understand spatial data embedded in digital materials.



Paris in 1834, *Maps of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. Vol. 1.*

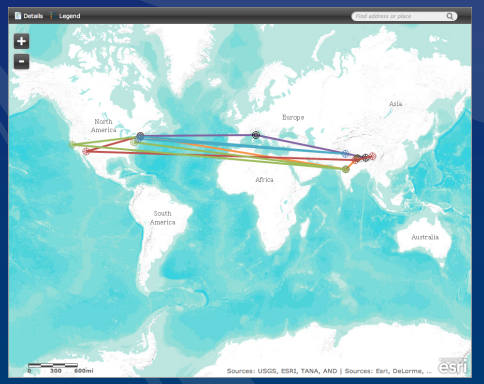
Amherst College Projects 1

- Digital humanities work began several years ago, by building a mapping platform for urban and cultural studies called *Cityscapes*.
  - Navigation through streets and terrain;
  - Overlaying historical maps;
  - Creating place marks linking photos, sound clips, videos, and textual commentary;
  - A type of collaborative presentation.
- Tokyo, Paris, Berlin …

Asakusa, Tokyo, Japan in 1680, 1799, 1858, 1892, 2009

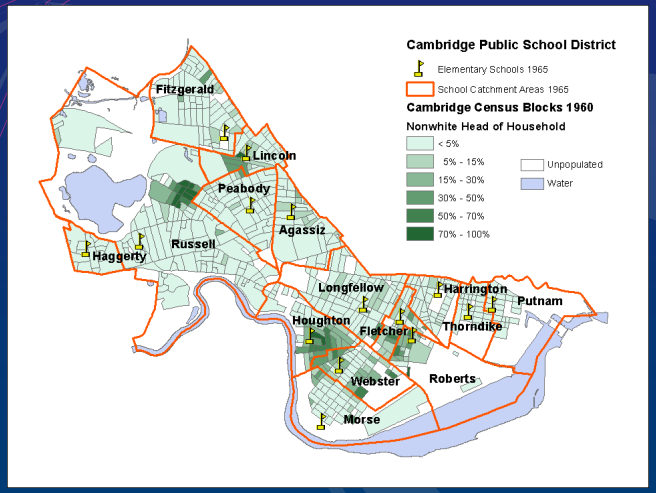
Amherst College Projects 2

- Online maps for various projects:
  - Pioneer Valley Soundscapes: a project exploring the connection between sound and place by documenting the musical communities and acoustic terrain of the Pioneer Valley in Western Massachusetts. [Google Maps & Fusion Tables]
  - Beyond Shangri-La: an oral history project combining the history and culture of Tibet, past and present, with the personal stories of Tibetans residing in Western Massachusetts. [ArcGIS Online]



Amherst College Projects 3

- A semester course, *Cities, Schools, and Space*:
  - Urban studies and educational history, designed to
    - visualize the spatial evolution of inequality in urban communities (in particular Cambridge, Massachusetts);
    - analyze past, present, and future strategies to equalize educational opportunity in American cities.
  - A research "tutorial" exposing students to:
    - archival analysis;
    - oral interviews;
    - GIS.



Smith College Projects 1

Smith College Projects 2

Smith College Projects 3

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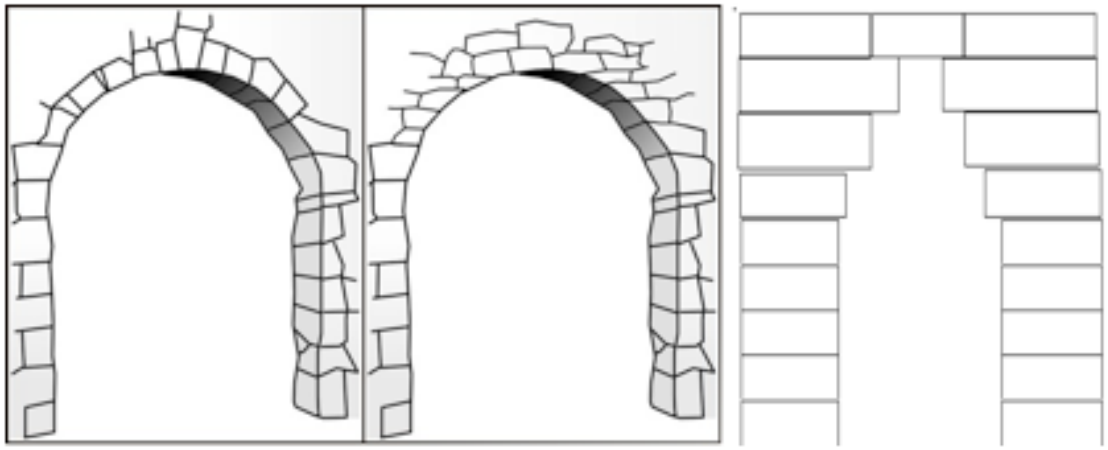


- 1 Site: **The Red house (corbel vaults?)**
  - Named because of red border along the portico
  - Small temple set on a raised platform with stairway
  - Private rear chamber
  - Heavy stone blocks (like the traditional block masonry of the Peten)
  - Missing the fine cut masonry of the Puuc
  - the specialized boot-shaped stones are not used for vaulting and the arched doorway is not present at Chichén like it is at Uxmals
- Global Pair #1: Corbeled gallery in the walls of the citadel, Tiryns, Greece ca. 1400-1200 BCE

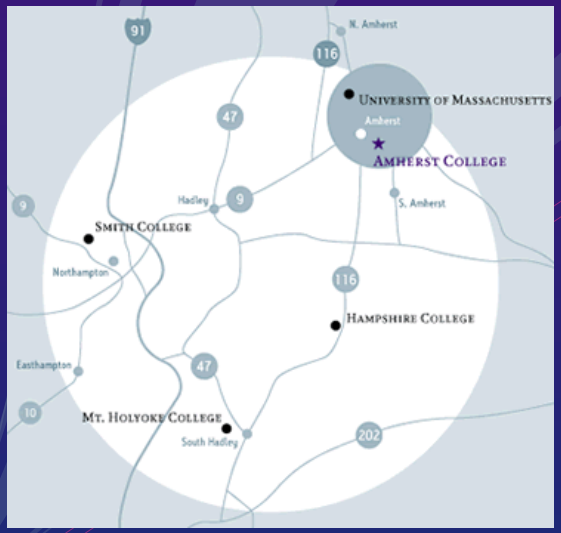
Foundation Support for DH

- The National Endowment for the Humanities has established an Office of Digital Humanities, supporting Institutes for Advanced Topics in DH such as Spatial Narrative and Deep Maps: Explorations in the Spatial Humanities.
- The Five College Consortium in 2011 began a Digital Humanities Initiative with support from the Mellon Foundation.

From John Corrigan, *Words in Space: GIS, Data Mining, and the Visual Display of Religion*

Five College DH Grants

- The Five Colleges: 2,200 faculty members and 30,000 students in western Massachusetts.
- Received three grants from the Five Colleges:
  - Expanding *Cityscapes* to Other Institutions and Usages
  - Digitizing Historic Maps
  - Workshop on *Spatial Techniques for the Digital Humanities*

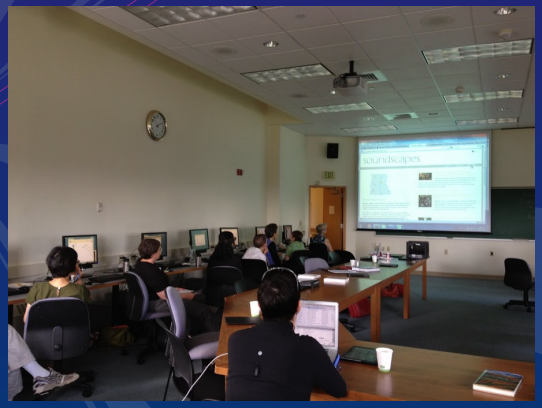


Spatial Techniques for the DH

- We (together with Cory Keeler) developed a faculty workshop focusing on the activities, content, and media of interest to humanists.
- Goals:
  - Demonstrate local examples;
  - Inspire with expert presentation;
  - Provide hands-on learning;
  - Promote networking, discussion, and discovery.
- Grant helped pay for our own education!

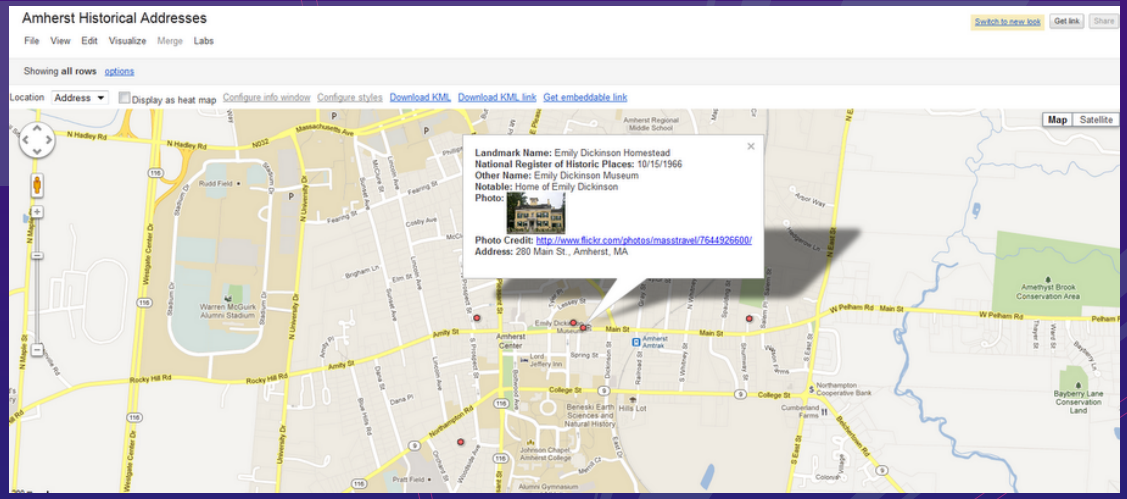
Survey of Five College Humanists

- To determine content of workshop:
  - Georeferencing (Positioning scanned maps) 66% *****
  - Cartography (Preparing maps for publication) 49% *****
  - Collaborative Mapping (Multi-user mapping) 49% *****
  - Mash-ups (Combining data with a web map) 46% *****
  - 3D visualization 43% *****
  - Geotagging (Assigning coordinates to photos) 40% *****
  - Data Publishing (Attaching metadata) 29%
  - Other visualizations of data 29%
  - Animation of geotemporal data 26%
  - Social Network Mapping & Analysis 26%
  - Spatial Statistics 23%
  - Cartograms (Distorting spatial regions) 20%
  - Crowd Sourcing 17%
  - Data Conversion (Between different formats) 17%
  - Geocoding (Street-addressed data) 17% *****
  - GPS - Global Positioning System 14% *****
  - Geoparsing (identifying place names in text) 3% *****



DH Workshop

- Two days in August 2012



- Eight themed sessions:
  - Relatively simple approaches on the first day: Google Docs+Maps, Cityscapes, Hypercities, Google Earth
  - More complex techniques on the second day: ArcGIS
- 20 faculty from four of the Five Colleges
- Keynote presentation…

Exploring the Spatial Humanities

Spatial Techniques for the Digital Humanities

13 Aug 2012

Merrick Lex Berman

China Historical GIS Project [CHGIS]
Center for Geographical Analysis
Harvard University

DH Post-Workshop Survey Response

- The workshop design, duration, and venue were appropriate.
- All found the sessions somewhat or very useful/interesting for their teaching or research.
- Some participants found the computer exercises rather tedious, but acknowledged the benefit in knowing details of the techniques.
- Several planned to incorporate what they learned in their research or teaching, and expressed interest in additional assistance.

The Future

- We expect to see more projects coming our way.
- Faculty at the other colleges besides Amherst and Smith don't have the same type of support!
- New grants available: perhaps a workshop for support people?

Digital Humanities Resources

- Many examples of digital humanities are discussed and catalogued at sites like:
  - http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/checking-in-with-digital-humanities-questions-answers/
  - http://dhcommons.org/projects
  - http://www.digitalhumanities.org/
- A cascade of new books address the subject, in particular the spatial humanities.