

Roundtable Position Paper Proposal Abstract
Mediterranean Seminar Spring 2024 Workshop

Dr. Richard P. Ibarra | History, USC

Title: Mediterranean Modularity: Tents and the (Re)Creation of Familiar Environments in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean and Beyond

This paper argues that artistic depictions and textual descriptions of Spanish tents provide a useful starting point for considering the ways this ephemeral architecture could lend itself to the recreation of familiar environments, even as they might require adaptation for different ecological conditions. Indeed, paintings and tapestries commissioned to depict military engagements and the chronicles describing them offer some clues as to how tents were constructed, used, and adapted to reflect usage throughout the Mediterranean and beyond, from the Netherlands to Mexico and Peru. To give some examples suggested by these materials: tents could produce a sense of security through the protection offered from various environmental forces (heat, cold, rain, sun, etc.), while also being amenable to making claims about the social and cultural status of its users and projecting hospitality, power, and a human presence. In addition to being mobile, tents were also modular and could produce spaces for many uses by both humans and animals. The material used in constructing tents could shift to reflect the environmental resources available in a particular place and the expediencies of immediate needs. However, they could also be commissioned in advance, drawing on past knowledge and materials that were expected to work in other places (although the success of these choices might be more limited than anticipated). From a utilitarian thatched construction to the the most elaborate embroidered silk and canvas pavilions, Spanish tents (re)produced familiar environments around the world while drawing on experiences developed in Mediterranean spaces.