

Delta Sources and Resources

The University of Arkansas
Virtual Museum
Online Resource
<http://sdc.cast.uark.edu>
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The University of Arkansas Virtual Museum is an online project jointly created and maintained by the Center for Advanced Spatial Technologies (CAST) that features a number of 3D models of artifacts from the collections of the Arkansas Archaeological Survey (ARAS) and the University of Arkansas Museum. Some 210 artifacts, cataloged by year of acquisition and number (Accession Number), have been digitized and are viewable and manipulable in the Gallery section of the website. The virtual museum is of interest mainly to archaeology researchers, teachers, and aficionados who wish to virtually examine clay pots, tools, and artwork of the indigenous cultures of the region, particularly the Mississippian (with representative samples of Carden Bottoms Phase pottery and other Caddoan finds, for example). However, there are also some artifacts that represent paleo-historical cultures as well as some much more recent material culture. The object viewer allows users to adjust lighting, fully rotate the object to observe from all angles, zoom in and out, and find measurements. The surface layer of the digital scan can also be removed so that details emerge that may be obscured by the original coloration and decoration or the discoloration and degradation caused by time and damage: incised and carved marks on some objects are thus more easily seen. One drawback to the site is the minimal description of the artifacts. However, multiple searchable fields from a pulldown menu for each entry do provide some historical and cultural context. Following a brief descriptive name, each entry has a field for "Cultural Affiliation," "Geographical Region," "Time Range," and "Repository." For instance, item number 1927-5-37 is a "Bottle, teapot, Ceramic" from the Carden Bottoms Phase in the Arkansas River Valley circa AD 1500-1700 and held by the UA museum. The collection can be filtered by these fields as well. One caveat: not all fields are complete for every artifact. Still, there is enough summary information for most entries for the feature to be useful. An advantage of the virtual museum is that many of the indigenous artifacts included have been repatriated to descendant communities and are displayed on the website by permission of these descendant groups. By making them available virtually, professional and amateur researchers may centrally view objects of initial interest that otherwise could be difficult to examine without travel and permission to see them. In times of shrinking research and travel budgets, this benefit is especially important. While the project is in its early stages, the website briefly discusses planned expansions to the virtual museum, such as adding additional pages with more contextual information and linking newly scanned objects to specific projects and educational initiatives. While by no means a

vast database at this point, the Virtual Museum shows great promise for future growth. Even at its current modest size, researchers and teachers will find value in the resource. Let us hope it continues to expand.

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