Review: The Digital Penn Museum
By Arianna Maxwell | February 7, 2019

The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology – commonly called the Penn Museum – was founded in 1887 to bring together artifacts that symbolize the history of humanity. With extensive collections in archaeology, artifacts recovered from the past by excavation, and ethnology, the objects and ideas collected from living people, the Penn Museum – whether in the galleries or through the online Digital Penn Museum – is a place to discover the cultures of Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Mediterranean. The Penn Museum encourages everyone to explore the origins of human history.

The Penn Museum imparts information about its collections to the public via The Digital Penn Museum – a web-based platform that provides various digital resources – that draws upon the Museum's EMu collections management system. The collections stem from the 300 research projects undertaken by the Penn Museum throughout the world, and from the contributors of the artifacts, archival films, articles, and websites. This information (data, images, and text) is made available for limited non-commercial, educational, and personal use only.

The Digital Penn Museum's navigable layout is organized into various sections: Highlights, Objects, Map, Videos, Articles, Blogs, and Websites. Within each section are sub-sections, allowing users to narrow down and access the resources they are searching for. For example, under the Objects section, users are presented the options: Search Object Collections, Highlights by Section, Objects on Display, About, Help, and Download Datasets (Figure 1). These sections and sub-sections allow the user to easily navigate through the content and resources offered.
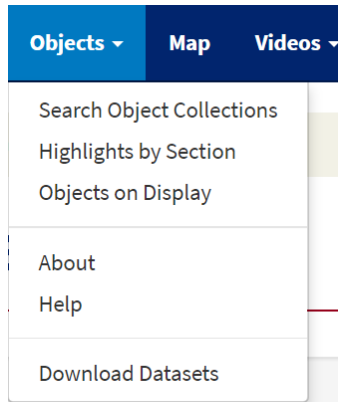
Figure 1: Dropdown menu of the Objects section.

The Collections, Object Location Map, Lecture Series, Archival Films, Expedition Magazine Articles, Websites, and Interactives are all the resources and content offered by the Digital Penn State Museum. The "Teachers & Students" section on the Penn Museum website has online resources for K-12 teachers, like world-renowned collections, teaching resources, and activities. Students attending the University of Pennsylvania have access to collections for class projects, independent research or other student projects. Penn instructors have firsthand access to some of the finest collections of art, artifacts, and rare books and manuscripts of the world, and can further understand and research these objects using the Digital Penn Museum.

A Collections Search is displayed on the home-page of the Digital Penn Museum, with a Keyword and Advanced Search. Users can Submit Query or View All Records and have the option of browsing through the records by icons or in a list (Figure 2). The Search Collections page categorizes the objects by Name, Period, Culture, Site, Material, Technique, and other categories to condense the search. Users also have access to view the object record, where details about the item, a description, current and past exhibition, and a bibliography are displayed when an object is selected.

Figure 2: Collections Search

The Object Location Map allows easy browsing and discovery of objects in the collection via a geographic interface that uses place names and geocoded locations (Figure 3). The Object Location map is powered by Google and has similar features when viewing, like dragging Pegman onto the map to open Street View. On the top left, users are presented the option of Map and Satellite. When Map is selected, a checkbox to show the terrain appears. When Satellite is selected, a checkbox to show the labels appears. Users can zoom in and out on the map or click on one of the numbered blobs to refine the search down to a specific place name. Clicking the link attached to that place name, users will be presented with the search results of all the objects associated with that place name in the online collections database.
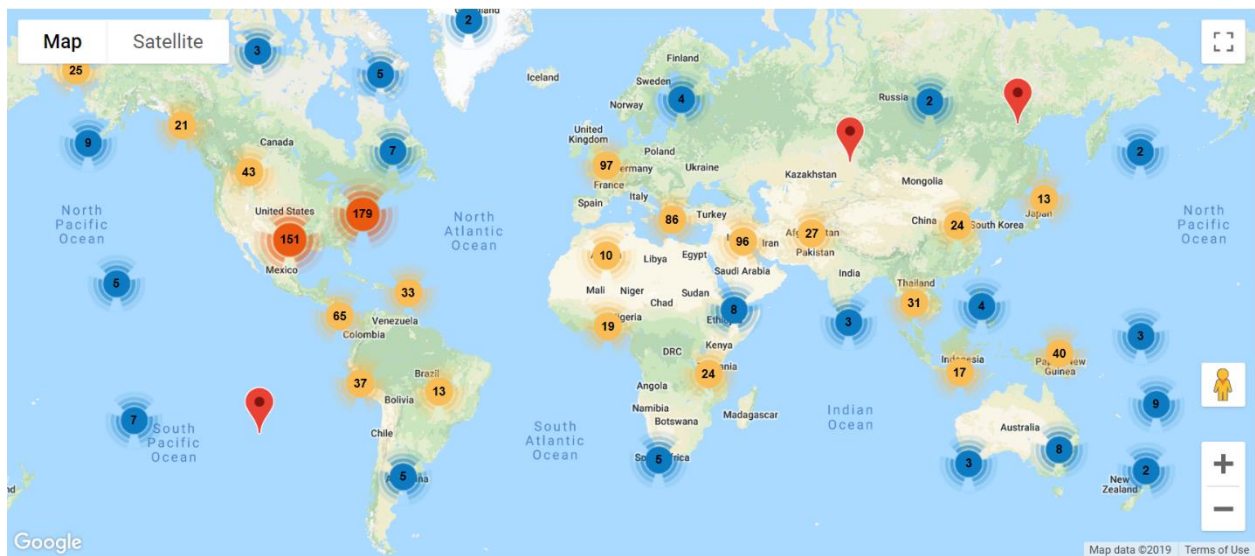

Figure 3: Object Location Map with over 1,100 geocoded place names

The Penn Museum has an extensive collection of archival films (that have been digitized) and born-digital videos covering a range of archaeological and anthropological topics. More than 1,100 online resources can be browsed via their thumbnails below or using the navigation links on the left: Archival Films, Lectures, Educational & Other, and Playlists. Alternatively, users can search through the video collections using a Keyword or Advanced Search. The films vary in

content, ranging from India in the 1930s to The Golden Age of King Midas; Great Wonders: The Great Walls of China to the Cavalcade of Fibers. A description of the film, whether the film has sound, the duration, and how many views are all listed under the film.

Expedition is the full-color peer-reviewed members' magazine of the Penn Museum, that has been published since 1958. *Expedition* offers direct access to the latest findings of archaeologists and anthropologists around the world – many being Penn Museum scholars. Users can find a complete archive of nearly 2,000 articles published in *Expedition* up to last year. Special issues focus on themes, current excavations, research projects, or upcoming exhibitions. Users can Browse by Region (Africa, Asia, Egypt, Europe/Mediterranean, Mesoamerica, Near East, North America, Oceania, and South America) or by Issue.

The Penn Museum has created websites for Museum-related research projects, special exhibitions, and fun interactives since the 1990s. These legacy websites are slightly outdated, but consciously migrated to keep their content accessible. Under the Websites section of the navigation bar, users can browse through over 50 websites and discover some web gems from the past 20 years.

Users may want to bookmark an item in the collections or save a lecture or archival film and can do so by pressing the "Add to MyFinds" button. The MyFinds list created can be accessed by user on the far right of the navigation bar. The user is presented with two options: Submit MyFinds List or Reset List (Figure 4). The submission of MyFinds lists the objects and the records, but in the process of doing that, the records are now removed from the list. This is counterintuitive. The Reset List removes all the objects from the MyFinds list.

MY FINDS - DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

Submit your MyFinds list by using the Submit button below.   Remove all objects from your MyFinds list using this button.

     ≡ Submit MyFinds List   **🗑 Reset List**

Figure 4: MyFinds - Digital Collections

The Penn Museum discloses that not all records included in the collections have been reviewed for completeness or accuracy. The process is ongoing, and the Museum is welcoming user assistance in drawing attention to any particularly egregious omissions or inaccuracies. They provide an email for any questions or concerns that may arise about the objects or object information that is discovered in the database. As a work in progress, the Penn Museum "continuously strives to improve both the quantity and quality of the data contained within the online database".

The Digital Penn Museum is a user-friendly online database where users can experience the mystery of the ancient past and gain an understanding of humanity. The content and resources provided are easy to navigate and the records are full of exquisite details. Although there is no direct mention to who contributed to certain objects in the collection, the contributors and bibliographies are mostly cited. Regarding the "life cycle" of the Digital Penn Museum, it must be updated and maintained; new collections and records should be added and follow organization. Overall, the Digital Penn Museum is an outstanding web-platform for archaeological and anthropological collections.

Metadata:

Title: The Digital Penn Museum

Description: Digital content and resources offered by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

URL: https://www.penn.museum/collections/

Place: University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

Last Updated: 2019

Date Accessed: February 2019

Availability: Free