PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

ETHICS, ACCESS, AND THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL HERITAGE

Digital heritage projects promise to preserve artefacts, sites, and documents by converting them into data that can be copied, analysed, and shared. Yet the most difficult questions are no longer technical. They concern who has the right to record, publish, and profit from cultural material—especially when the people most connected to that material have historically had the least control over it. In this sense, digitisation is not only preservation; it is governance. Decisions about what gets scanned, how it is described, and where it is hosted become decisions about cultural authority.

A central ethical issue is consent, particularly for collections shaped by colonial histories. Many museums hold objects acquired during colonial rule or through unequal transactions, and digitising such holdings can feel like a second extraction if images and models circulate globally without consultation. The harm may not come from copying itself, but from losing authority over naming, description, and reuse. Critics increasingly describe this as digital colonialism: the transfer of cultural value into platforms and databases that are controlled elsewhere, accompanied by a language of "open knowledge" that can disguise older asymmetries.

Access is often framed as an unquestioned good, and there are strong reasons for that view. Open repositories can support research, education, and diasporic reconnection, allowing people to encounter heritage they cannot easily visit. However, open access can also expose vulnerable knowledge. Sacred objects, burial materials, and culturally restricted narratives may require controlled viewing, contextual guidance, or community-led framing rather than frictionless downloading. Ethical practice therefore involves deciding not only whether to publish, but how, for whom, and under what conditions, so that openness does not become a synonym for disregard.

The debate is sharpened by platform economics. Large-scale digitisation is expensive, and institutions often pursue sponsorships or licensing deals to cover scanning, hosting, and interface development. Critics argue that when heritage data becomes an asset, priorities can drift toward what funders value: visitor numbers, brand visibility, and marketable "flagship" pieces. Source communities may instead prioritise respectful representation, limits on reuse, or the correction of mislabelling. The conflict is not simply financial; it is normative. It asks whether cultural materials are treated as shared responsibilities or as strategic resources competing for attention in an online marketplace.

Even when institutions commit to openness, “access” is not equal in practice. High-resolution models require bandwidth, modern devices, and interfaces that work across languages and disabilities. When platforms are designed primarily for well-resourced users, digitisation can widen inequality while appearing inclusive, because the people least served by infrastructure are also least able to benefit from online heritage. A project may therefore expand global reach yet reduce local usability, especially if community members cannot easily download, annotate, or control how materials are presented.

Artificial intelligence will intensify these tensions by changing what counts as a “digital object”. Machine-learning tools can restore damaged texts, propose reconstructions of missing fragments, and generate synthetic views from incomplete records. These tools can be useful for research and education, but they also increase epistemological ambiguity: the boundary between measured evidence and interpretive inference becomes harder to see. Without clear labelling, AI-enhanced outputs may be mistaken for authentic records, and users may not realise which details are recovered from data and which are generated as plausible guesses. In heritage contexts, where authenticity carries moral as well as scholarly weight, confusion of this kind can undermine trust.

In response, many practitioners advocate data sovereignty, meaning that communities should have a meaningful role in how digital files are stored, described, and governed. This includes community-led metadata, culturally specific permissions, and rules that travel with a file when it is copied. Some projects use tiered access protocols: the public can view general information, while approved users access sensitive content under agreed conditions, sometimes with obligations not to repost or repurpose files. These models are imperfect, but they shift the default from “publish first, negotiate later” to “govern before circulation”, treating digitisation as a continuing relationship.

Long-term stewardship remains a challenge that connects ethics to infrastructure. Digital files degrade through broken links, platform collapse, and format obsolescence, so preservation requires migration, redundancy, and documentation over decades. Yet many projects are funded through a short grant cycle that pays for scanning but not for maintenance. When funding ends, institutions may quietly lose the capacity to update formats, repair repositories, or maintain access controls, producing a second kind of loss: not the destruction of objects, but the decay of the very digital systems meant to protect them. Stewardship therefore demands realistic funding plans, not only technical ambition.

Finally, the field is moving toward participatory models that treat communities as co-curators rather than audiences. Institutions may invite partners to correct descriptions, add oral histories, or supply alternative narratives that challenge a single “official” account. This can improve accuracy and legitimacy, but it also requires institutions to

share authority and accept disagreement as part of responsible representation. Overall, the future of digital heritage will depend on balancing openness with protection, innovation with transparency, and access with consent. The most credible projects will treat digitisation as responsibility, not merely a pipeline from object to upload.

Questions 27–31

Complete the summary below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

Ethical risks in digital heritage

In disputed collections, digitisation may be experienced as a second **27** ..... if material is shared without consultation. Although open repositories can help dispersed communities reconnect, they may also expose sacred objects, burial materials, and culturally restricted **28** ..... . Because digitisation at scale is expensive, institutions sometimes pursue sponsorships or **29** ....., which critics say may skew priorities. Meanwhile, machine-learning tools can generate **30** ..... from incomplete records. Therefore, clear **31** ..... is needed to prevent confusion between evidence and interpretation.

Questions 32–36

Complete the table below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

Challenges and responses in digital heritage

Topic	**Main risk or limitation**	**Response or consequence**
Platform economics	Heritage data may be treated as an **32** ....., allowing funders' priorities to influence decisions.	Source communities may prefer respectful representation and limits on reuse.
Inequality in practice	High-resolution models require **33** ..... and modern devices.	Poorly resourced users may gain less from online heritage.
AI and authenticity	AI outputs can blur the distinction between evidence and interpretation.	The resulting confusion can undermine **34** ..... .
Community governance	Communities should help determine how digital files are stored, described and governed.	Arrangements may include culturally specific **35** ..... .

Topic	Main risk or limitation	Response or consequence
Long-term stewardship	Short funding cycles may pay for scanning but not **36**	Preservation requires realistic long-term funding plans.

Questions 37–40

Select the correct answer.

37 What is the passage's main point about "open access"?
A It is always harmful and should be avoided.
B It can be valuable, but sensitive material may need controlled viewing or context.
C It matters only for researchers, not for source communities.
D It guarantees equality of access regardless of infrastructure.

38 Why does the passage say AI tools create a new problem for digital heritage?
A They prevent digitisation from being carried out.
B They remove the need for conservation entirely.
C They can make interpretive outputs appear to be authentic evidence.
D They always lower the quality of scans.

39 What does "data sovereignty" involve in the passage?
A Giving communities a meaningful role in how files are stored, described and governed.
B Requiring all heritage files to be owned by private companies.
C Eliminating restrictions on culturally sensitive material.
D Replacing museums with fully automated repositories.

40 Which option best reflects the passage's conclusion about the future of digital heritage?
A Technical scan quality is the only issue that matters.
B Sponsorship should decide what is digitised first.
C Innovation should override consent to maximise access.
D Digitisation must balance openness with protection and be treated as an ongoing responsibility.

Answer Key

27. extraction

28. narratives

29. licensing deals

30. synthetic views
31. labelling
32. asset
33. bandwidth
34. trust
35. permissions
36. maintenance
37. B
38. C
39. A
40. D