



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST: ETHICS AND ACCESSIBILITY IN DIGITAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Digital archaeology is frequently celebrated as a democratic turn in heritage: a student can rotate a high-resolution model on a laptop, and a diaspora community can explore images of places that are difficult to visit. Yet transforming artefacts into files also transforms authority. Description becomes metadata, interpretation becomes curation, and reuse becomes a question of permissions rather than proximity. What looks like “access” from one perspective can look like extraction from another, particularly when digitisation reproduces older inequalities in who speaks for the past. For this reason, debates about photogrammetry, 3D scanning, and online archives are increasingly framed not only as technical progress, but as a political and ethical reallocation of power.

A core issue is consent, and it extends beyond the narrow legal question of ownership. Many collections were assembled under unequal conditions, through colonial administration, coercive collecting, or research practices that did not treat source communities as decision-makers. Digitising such material can feel like a second extraction, because it multiplies circulation without necessarily returning control. Even where institutions hold legal title, moral authority may remain contested. For communities whose heritage includes sacred objects or human remains, the concern is often not scanning itself but the loss of governance over how materials are displayed, annotated, and narrated. A polished online exhibit may appear respectful while still violating cultural expectations about privacy, handling, or who may speak about the object’s meaning.

Access, therefore, is not simply a matter of bandwidth or platform design. It also involves cultural protocols: rules about who may view certain knowledge, under what conditions, and for what purposes. Open-access ideals can collide with traditions that restrict images of particular artefacts, locations, or ancestral remains to defined audiences. In response, some projects implement tiered access: general contextual information is made public, while sensitive images, precise site coordinates, or downloadable files are limited to approved users. Such systems can be technically straightforward, yet ethically complex, because they force designers to decide which categories count as sensitive and who has the authority to make that classification. The deeper question is whether “openness” is being treated as a universal good, or as one value among others, negotiated with those who bear cultural responsibility for the material.

Economics complicate these choices further. High-quality digitisation requires equipment, skilled labour, and long-term storage, and these costs encourage institutions to seek



sponsorships, partnerships, or licensing revenue. Funding can shape not only what is digitised, but what is foregrounded: high-visibility objects, spectacular sites, and content that performs well in public relations campaigns may be prioritised over less photogenic but culturally significant material. Critics describe this as a market logic of heritage, where traffic, branding, and donor preferences influence curatorial attention. In this context, “access” can become a commodity, and the people most closely connected to an object’s history may have the least influence over how it is packaged for online audiences.

Technology is accelerating the debate by expanding what counts as a “digital record”. AI tools can reconstruct missing fragments, enhance damaged inscriptions, and generate plausible visualisations from incomplete evidence. Such outputs may be useful as hypotheses, teaching tools, or aids to interpretation, but they also intensify epistemological ambiguity. The boundary between measurement and inference becomes difficult to see when a reconstruction is visually seamless. If generated elements are not clearly labelled, users may mistake them for primary records, and uncertainty can vanish behind a polished surface. The problem is not that reconstruction is inherently illegitimate—archaeology has always reconstructed—but that the authority of computation can make interpretation look like capture, and narrative look like fact.

Long-term stewardship is another ethical pressure point. Digital files can be lost through broken links, obsolete formats, or platform failure, and a “public archive” can quietly decay when maintenance is unfunded. Ethical practice therefore includes migration plans, redundancy, and documentation describing how models were produced, what parameters were used, and what assumptions guided reconstruction. Metadata matters because future users need to evaluate provenance, error margins, and the difference between scanned surfaces and inferred fills. Yet short grant cycles often fund scanning and launch events rather than ongoing stewardship, creating archives that are impressive at release but fragile over time. Sustainability, in digital heritage, is less about uploading once and more about committing to continuous care.

Participation is often presented as the remedy for these asymmetries. Crowdsourcing can add transcriptions, tags, and alternative narratives; community co-curation can correct mislabelling and broaden interpretation beyond institutional voices. Done well, participation increases trust and accuracy because it treats knowledge as relational rather than proprietary. Done poorly, however, it becomes tokenism: local people provide labour, names, or “authenticity”, while decision-making power remains elsewhere. Participation is ethically meaningful only when governance is shared—when communities can veto, redirect, and set conditions, rather than merely contribute content to an already-defined platform.



A further complication is inequality of expertise and infrastructure. Wealthy universities and museums may have servers, software licences, and specialist staff to process dense datasets, while local teams become dependent on external partners for access to their own digitised heritage. This dependency can be reduced through training, open formats, and agreements that keep control of files and permissions in the region of origin.

Increasingly, these debates are framed through indigenous data sovereignty: the principle that communities should govern data about their people, places, and cultural materials, including how it is stored, interpreted, and reused. The future of digital archaeology will therefore depend on balancing openness with protection, innovation with transparency, and access with consent—treating digitisation as an ongoing relationship rather than a one-time upload.

Questions 27–31

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

Ethical tensions in digitising heritage

Once heritage becomes digital, decisions about reuse may depend on **27** rather than physical proximity. A central issue is **28**, because some communities may view digitisation as a second extraction if governance is not shared. Access debates are not merely technical; they can involve cultural **29** that restrict audiences for certain material. AI-based outputs can increase epistemological ambiguity by blurring the boundary between measurement and **30** unless generated elements are clearly **31**

Questions 32–35

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

32 The passage suggests that tiered access may restrict sensitive images as well as precise coordinates and downloadable files.

33 The passage indicates that donor priorities can influence which items receive attention in digitisation projects.

34 The passage implies that uploading models once is sufficient to keep a digital archive usable over time.

35 The passage states that digital archaeology projects usually spend more on software licences than on staff training.



Questions 36–40

Select the correct answer.

36 Why does the passage argue that AI reconstructions can mislead users?

- A** They prevent accurate photogrammetry from being carried out on fragile objects
- B** They can make inferred elements look like measured records if uncertainty is not visible
- C** They make it impossible to include community narratives or alternative interpretations
- D** They remove the need for metadata, documentation, and long-term storage

37 What is presented as a key limitation of short grant cycles?

- A** They typically fund long-term stewardship but leave scanning under-resourced
- B** They require institutions to charge licensing fees to ensure public access
- C** They often support digitisation launches without funding ongoing stewardship
- D** They prevent the use of open formats and block documentation practices

38 According to the passage, what is the risk when participation is handled poorly?

- A** Communities may provide labour or legitimacy without gaining decision-making power
- B** Sensitive objects will automatically be removed from digital platforms
- C** Platform failure becomes inevitable because crowdsourcing is unreliable
- D** Donors lose interest because visibility and branding opportunities disappear

39 Which approach is mentioned as reducing dependence on external partners?

- A** Restricting digitisation to projects led solely by large universities
- B** Removing all access limits so that any user can freely reuse files
- C** Prioritising sponsorship agreements to secure permanent platform stability
- D** Training local teams, using open formats, and keeping permissions in the region of origin

40 In the final discussion, ethically credible digitisation is best understood as

- A** a one-time upload followed by unrestricted reuse by any user
- B** a process where legal ownership resolves questions of moral authority
- C** an ongoing relationship balancing openness, protection, and transparency
- D** a strategy for maximising traffic, visibility, and institutional branding

Answer Key

27. permissions

28. consent

29. protocols



- 30. inference
- 31. labelled
- 32. TRUE
- 33. TRUE
- 34. FALSE
- 35. NOT GIVEN
- 36. B
- 37. C
- 38. A
- 39. D
- 40. C