

Critical Digital Archives. Travel, Translation, Transformation.

A Hybrid Symposium on Archives in and from the SWANA Region.



Sarri Elfaitouri. The Digital Reincarnation of Dust and Limestone

Critical Digital Archives. Travel, Translation, Transformation. A Hybrid Symposium on Archives in and from the SWANA Region.

21-22nd January
Senate House, London

This symposium aims to provide a forum for scholars, archivists, community and cultural organizations interested in critical approaches to digital archives containing materials from and about the SWANA (Southwest Asia and North Africa) region, understood as a geographic, historical, and cultural space. In this space, archives have been historically imposed, looted, extracted, dispersed, destroyed, but also rescued, rebuilt and reinvented, pioneering practices of resistance, reparation and return that raise compelling ethical, theoretical and practical questions for scholars and stakeholders (Ghaddar, 2025). Building on Itza Carbajal and Michelle Caswell's framework (2021), our approach seeks to advance a language-sensitive understanding of reparative archival practices that are attentive to and accountable for the technological, social, and environmental impacts of digital archives.

We are interested in digitisation as a transformative process that reshapes archival practices, knowledge production, and power relations.

Conceived as a collaborative, interdisciplinary, and horizontal forum, the symposium invites participants, both in person and online, to engage in discussion and exchange around three interconnected themes and interpretative lenses. Two keynote speakers - Sara Salem (LSE) and Amanda Egbe (UWE) - will act as discussants, facilitating collective reflection and dialogue around participants' contributions. The three themes of the symposium are Travel, Translation and Transformation:

Travel: Archives in Movement

This strand explores journeys and movement both as subjects represented in archival collections and as conditions shaping the archive itself, opening up questions of archival looting, dispersal and dispossession as well as care, stewardship, and reparation. Discussions may engage with spatial humanities approaches, including digital mapping and gazetteers; the displacement and mobility of archives; practices and ethics of archival solidarity and return; and questions of heritage, ownership, and identity from indigenous and diasporic perspectives.

Translation: Languages in the Archive

This strand will examine issues relating to languages and translation, both in the records and in the archival metadata that make them searchable by and accessible to stakeholders. We will especially welcome contributions reflecting on the role of metadata as descriptive as well as interpretative text, exploring the potential for linguistic, semantic and epistemological translations. We will also welcome contributions that explore the multilinguality of archival records as enduring representations of human activity and consider the practices and ethics of reparative translation in digital archives.

Transformation: Digital Futures and Ethics of Dematerialization

The third strand will look at digitisation as a transformative process for the archive that involves new materialities and highlights new absences. We aim to discuss the impact of digital projects on key stakeholders (users, subjects of records, source communities). We invite contributions on the fragility of digitised and born-digital heritage, as well as the specific biases and risks that digitalisation processes may introduce, particularly through the reproduction, by digital tools, of historical and ongoing harms to people and the environment. We also aim to assess the potential of digital technology, especially non-corporate and low-threshold, to act as vectors of resistance and tools against erasure.

Keynote speakers:

Sara Salem is an Associate Professor in Sociology at the London School of Economics. Her first book, published with Cambridge University Press, is entitled *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (2020). Her second book, co-authored with Mai Taha, is entitled *Anticolonial Radios: On the Sonic Lives of Internationalism*, forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. Along with Mai Taha, she curates Archive Stories, a platform exploring radical and creative archives.

Amanda Egbe is a Senior Lecturer in Media Production at the University of the West of England and leads Heritage Futures, a practice-led research programme building infrastructure for heritage at risk through archives, film, and digital systems. Her research focuses on how cultural memory is documented, governed, protected, transformed, or lost in contexts shaped by social change, technological transformation, environmental stress, and historical inequity.

Please send via email a 300 words abstract and short bio to b.spadaro@liverpool.ac.uk and v.vitale@sheffield.ac.uk

Deadline: 30 September 2026

Convenors:

Barbara Spadaro, University of Liverpool

Valeria Vitale, University of Sheffield

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A limited number of travel bursaries will be offered to participants travelling to the symposium in London.

