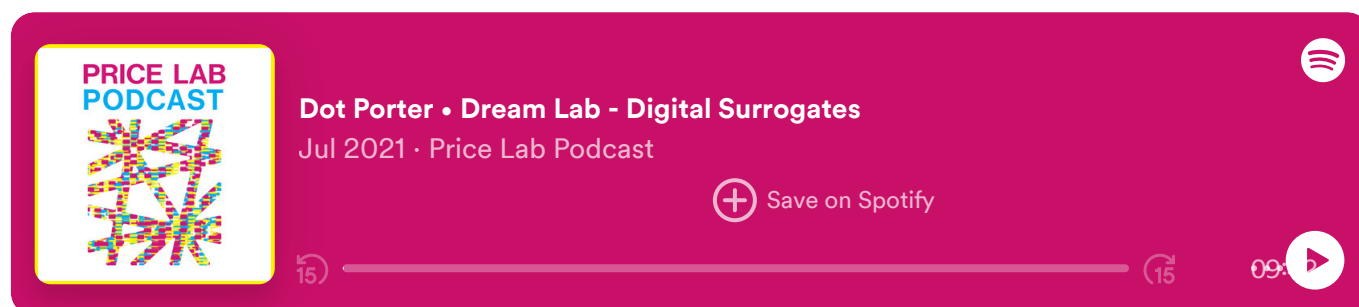


## Pre-Class Reflection:

- [Listen to this podcast episode](#), in which Dot Porter (Curator of Digital Research Services at UPenn's Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies) is being interviewed by Stewart Varner (Managing Director of the Price Lab at UPenn).



- Manžuch, Zinaida. "Ethical Issues in Digitization of Cultural Heritage." *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2017, pp. 1–17.
- Kropf, Evyn. "Will That Surrogate Do? Reflections on Material Manuscript Literacy in the Digital Environment from Islamic Manuscripts at the University of Michigan Library." *Manuscript Studies: A Journal of the Schoenberg Institute for Manuscript Studies*, 2016, pp. 52–70.

## Andrew

2:41 PM Manžuch's and Kropf's articles opened my eyes to the world and the complications of the digitization process. What particularly interested me are its ethical concerns. For example, minority groups are mostly represented in museums, archives, and libraries in a Western-centric viewpoint with selection biases that can also conflict with a culture or society's worldview and traditions. I am curious, then, on a broader level, how much website interfaces and the structure of the Internet/World Wide Web is Western-centric and complicate the cultural views of the object's culture by extension. Moreover, Kropf mentions how the Cambridge viewer 'Gallica' "nicely allows the user to scroll through while the image view remains fixed." Do the user interfaces and descriptions influence Western psychological biases? Another aspect I am interested in is the legal side of digitization, especially the example of the right to be forgotten concept from the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (2016). As stated in the article, this complicates the incentives between the public interest and personal privacy, and I feel like this could lead to messy legal cases. From what I've read, these ethical concerns seem too recent to allow for setting legal rules, responsibilities, and boundaries. For now, the ethics of digitization and the digital world in general are still in their infancy, and thus it unclear to what extent digitization and the internet silences minority voices or personal privacy, amongst many other things.

## Raphaela Gold

3:47 PM I really enjoyed listening to the podcast and learning about Dot Porter's journey of becoming involved with digital humanities work. It corrected an assumption I didn't even realize I'd been making – that people who engage with digital humanities either don't respect or understand non-digital humanities. I thought it was really interesting that Dot studied paleography and codicology in library school prior to becoming a digital humanist, and that even while she manages some of Penn's digital collections, she also curates physical collections.

My takeaway from the podcast was that in order to be a successful digital humanist, one must first truly understand the physical objects one is digitizing. I appreciated how Dot recognized that online, you lose something's physicality: you can't see how big a manuscript is, how far the book opens, what it's like to turn the pages. But with her videos, the Dot tries to bring viewers of her archives as close to that experience as possible. I also thought it was important that she brought up the colonial history of archival storage and argued that curators shouldn't be quiet about that history, putting it frankly, "We need to be having these conversations. We were colonial powers and so we stole stuff. Digital collections should reflect that as well."

To me, these points felt closely related to both the Manzuch and the Kropf readings. The colonial and largely Western history of stealing, displaying, reproducing materials belonging to other cultures remains incredibly visible and prevalent, especially at institutions of higher education like Princeton. Just this past year, Princeton promised to return 10/11 objects stolen from Italy which it had in its possession. Manzuch seemed to propose that digital archives have the power to make these types of returns easier and also allow more recognition for social groups which have not historically been recognized. On the other hand, there have been many examples of people not being recognized on digital platforms too, and one also needs access to storage and digital skills in order to even construct a digital collection, leading to access-based discrimination in the field.

The Knopf reading about digital surrogates also seemed to echo Dot's points about first needing to understand physical manuscripts before turning to digitalization. While this seems like it would be very effective for those digitizing the objects, because it forces them to think perhaps even more deeply about the physical items than they otherwise would have, I'm not sure whether the same would go for the viewer, who still has never worked with the physical objects. To me, something will always be lost when you stop working with the physical, no matter how good of a surrogate you create.

## Anya Kalogerakos

9:53 PM When I first looked at the postcards for this week, I avoided the question of hypothesizing how viewing the postcards digitally may differ from viewing them in person because I didn't really think there would be a difference. After doing the readings for this week, I realize that is a very "english survey respondent" response of me (as the Kropf reading discusses). Much of what Kropf discussed as important features of a manuscript which are relatively difficult to communicate in a digital format are details which I would never have considered—hence, I understand why Kropf argues that education in digitization is critical. I am curious to see what may surprise me about the postcards in person, as there is always going to be some data missed in digitization. Hopefully, as new ideas circulate about how to represent the data that often gets missed in digitization (such as taking video orientations for manuscripts), we will decrease the amount of data that gets left out/ignored. This goes for the communities that are typically underrepresented or improperly represented in digitization efforts. Ideally, new narratives and perspectives will emerge in the work of "memory institutions" as more are educated and involved in the process of digital collection making.

## Alison Fortenberry

5:39 PM I really enjoyed the podcast's discussion of how we interact with digitized material, and how that affects our understanding and use of those materials. I never really considered the fact that when I'm clicking through archived works, I'm interacting with the material in a totally new way, often different from how the creator intended. The physical experience of interacting with a source directly opens up the ways in which we can interact with it. Digitized materials let us see qualities of the source, but actually holding and feeling the materials allows us to gather so much information that really can't be conveyed just through

digitization. The discussion of object surrogates in Kropf's paper was really interesting in light of the podcast's discussion. I appreciated the discussion of the lengths archivists go to to capture multiple aspects of a text or manuscript outside of the text alone. While the spine of a book or its cover won't be relevant to every person using a digitized text, providing that kind of detail allows for interactions with sources that more closely resemble interactions that would occur in person. The data about how English and Arabic speakers interact with digitized manuscripts makes a strong argument for the necessity of training and thoughtfulness in for interactions with digitized materials. I really enjoyed the ideas discussed in the Manzuch reading of digitization as a means to better tell stories of cultural heritage, though the discussion of outside sources encouraging marginalized groups to archive their histories in some ways feels like an imposition. I support the idea of cultural heritage not being told from the perspective of oppressors, but when it is not piloted by a community itself, there is an obligation to either provide digitization resources, or to remove systemic bias from larger archives.

## Melissa Woo

7:28 PM The podcast was an interesting consideration of the intersection between physical and digital engagement with cultural heritage. Dot's emphasis on the necessity of understanding the physical attributes of manuscripts before digitization resonates with the concerns raised by Manžuch and Kropf. The discussion highlighted the need for a balanced approach that acknowledges the limitations of digital surrogates, as they can only capture certain aspects of the original material. It was also interesting to hear about the colonial history of archival storage, echoing Manžuch's argument that digital collections should reflect and address such historical complexities. I always thought of digitalization as a democratization of sorts, given that it makes content more accessible to people who otherwise may not be able to interact with content at all. But, I now see that there are very real issues relating to access-based discrimination, which is in line with the broader ethical issues discussed by Manžuch. The Knopf reading about digital surrogates also seemed to echo Dot's points about first needing to understand physical manuscripts before turning to digitalization. While this seems like it would be very effective for those digitizing the objects, because it forces them to think perhaps even more deeply about the physical items than they otherwise would have, I'm not sure whether the same would go for the viewer, who still has never worked with the physical objects. I do agree, though, that something will always be lost when you stop working with the physical, no matter how good of a surrogate you create

## Pippa LaMacchia

10:38 AM The podcast and two articles really nuanced my understanding of digital humanities and how it intersects with humanities in general. Coming into this course, I thought that digital humanities was just a "subgenre" of the field but I think they are connected in a slightly different way — particularly after listening to the podcast and reading Kropf's article. While digitization takes directly from a physical archive I have realized that perhaps the more important distinction is learning how to use both. Digital archives are only going to become more and more essential to modern research but I think it may be important to shift our use of digital resources to supplement and augment study of original artifacts. The conversation in the Manzuch article is also a vital one to have as the field continues to develop. There is a give and take between making resources available because of their digitization and digitizing them properly and ethically. Asking questions about funding is also essential because, in response to the podcast, it is vital to fully understand the artifact that one is digitizing to do it properly (which therefore means that objects can be poorly digitized), This has broader implications into the quality of materials that become more accessible and who has access to "better" or "worse" quality archives.

## James Sowerby

3:22 PM This week's materials were really interesting and actually have gotten me more interested in exploring special collections here. I've gone there a couple times before in other classes and have always enjoyed seeing the gallery in Firestone when it has an exhibition, but I feel like the podcast and the readings have done a lot for me to expand my awareness of my browsing and research. When I went to see some medieval codices last year, for example, I didn't fully appreciate what information was available to me then—in comparison to the digital surrogate versions, for example. Indeed, last semester, when I discovered in my Modern Fiction class that Firestone had a first edition typeset copy of *Ulysses*, I only looked at the digitized version. For that book, which is brought with such interesting paleographic errors and other mistakes, I feel the actual physical copy could be really interesting, within the framework of Kropf's article, to see how the layout of the text appears in person. Because we had read the Gabler edition in my class, which went back to fix all of the mistakes and correct the formatting of the first editions, I was unfamiliar—like the English survey respondents—of the benefits to close physical analysis. Regardless, I thought Manžuch's article was very illuminating and distilled the importance of a lot of the elements of digitization and preservation that we have talked about thus far. For me, it very much does hinge on this question of ethics, particularly around access. I wouldn't have expected there to be downsides to digitization like with Indigenous knowledge. I very much assumed that all digitization, even if it does not fully capture the actual object, would be good in the name of preservation and distribution.

## Clay Glover

4:54 PM I really enjoyed listening to Dot's podcast. When examining the digital postcards, I did not really think about how the experience would have differed in person. Feeling the texture of the material, analyzing the size of the cards, and observing the material quality of the preserved document would all have added to the experience of studying it. Thankfully, it seems like Dot is providing ways to gain a more physical experience even while analyzing the material digitally. I also enjoyed reading Manžuch's and Kropf's articles. As Manžuch writes, there is and definitely will continue to be discrepancies in what material is preserved. Documents from European areas will unfortunately be digitized at higher rates than in non-Western regions. However, there are ways to reduce this discrepancy, such as providing government subsidies to digitization efforts that stipulate certain materials from underrepresented cultures must be preserved. In Kropf's work, I found it interesting to read how there is a problem as digitization efforts may mean fewer resources may be devoted and less time spent cataloging ancient manuscripts. However, I would respond to this by arguing that it could possibly be easier to catalog materials once they are digitized, as more groups across the world can work on projects and can collaborate more easily. In addition, programs could eventually be developed to potentially catalogue the materials and work on such projects instead of humans. (edited)

## Talia Goldman

6:45 PM This week's group of readings has been my favorite so far, particularly in the discussion throughout the material of the relationship between digital humanities and issues of provenance and the display of cultural objects in memory institutions. In the podcast, Dot Porter mentions the need to recognize many memory institutions, including 'elite' universities, are part of colonial powers, and that every couple of years, objects from the manuscript collections at Penn are repatriated. I spent a lot of time last semester thinking about repatriation of objects in art museum collections in my freshman seminar, and while completing these readings, I found myself asking how digital tools may help address some of the complexities in issues of repatriation. Could there be an extensive database of repatriated objects, digitized in high-quality,

educating the public about the complex world of cultural heritage property, while encouraging museums to repatriate more objects? Similarly, I was interested in Manzuch's mention of encouraging Indigenous communities to take an active role in digitally preserving "intangible heritage" (Manzuch 5) and the need to include Indigenous community members in "selection, metadata and information systems development, and maintenance processes, making them equal partners in digitization" (Manzuch 5). To me, the idea applies the question of ownership versus stewardship of cultural heritage objects to the digital world. The Kropf reading, through describing the challenges of maintaining the physical properties of a manuscript in a digital surrogate, emphasizes the importance of including manuscript-literate scholars in the digitization process, which allows for a level of quality and care for the object itself that I think is also a central concern in issues of repatriation and the display of cultural objects.

## Helen Gao

10:44 PM The podcast's discussion of how digitization results in losing of the physical aspects of objects reminded me of our discussion in class about how technological developments have changed our experiences of things like music and TV shows. The curator also reminded us of how complicated the digitization process is, and all the considerations that go into creating digital collections, which connects to the article on the ethical issues of digitization. The issues raised in the article were not things that I had previously given much thought to, but they are very interesting and complicated (not just from a logistical perspective). It was reassuring to see that we are working on addressing concerns like accurate representation by involving community members in digitization, but there are still some issues, such as the conflict between public and private interests, that are unsolved. Learning about the "right to forget" was also very interesting, and I think it connects to the "Datasheets for Datasets" article in that it raises questions about weighing the importance of preserving older versions of Internet data against giving people the right to change their minds about their personal information being online. Additionally, the point made in the podcast about how different interfaces give different experiences ties in nicely with the "Will That Surrogate Do?" article, as not all digital surrogates are created equal. It seems that even though digital surrogates try to capture as much information as possible about the original object, we still lose a lot of the physical metadata mentioned in Pomerantz's introduction that we read last week.

## Layla Williams

11:09 PM I think the podcast's address of all the work that goes into the digitization of an object is helpful for understanding the practical limitations of creating a digital archive. We always talk about the benefits of digitization but never the time or the people it takes to create these resources. I am particularly thinking about the resource that allows someone to literally flip through the pages of a manuscript in order to analyze the tactile features that might be unavailable in a surrogate form of a text. Moreover, I did not necessarily know what a surrogate was in the field of the digital humanities before reading Kropf's piece. It is interesting to learn the relationship between the surrogate, digitized archives, and the metadata of a particular object. The surrogate might be like a copy of the original object's information without it necessarily being an exact duplicate; the digitized version might include a transcript and description; and the metadata describes the aspects of the object that might be relevant to trace for scholarly discussion. And that is just my simplified understanding of digitization! Something else that was brought up through the readings was the prevalence of presentism within the way we view the archive. Is this inherent to creating an archive? During the period, the people were using these items for their own purposes and day to day lives rather than creating them for the purpose of preservation. So, does that mean that any archival work is

inherently influenced by presentism? Can you create an archive from the perspective of those who created the materials?

## Colin Brown

11:14 PM The big takeaway for me this week is the inequalities and lack of access that still exists in digitization. When we started talking about DH, a big plus that we discussed was that it allowed many more people to access humanities information because anyone with an internet connection could look at it. As such, it was a bit startling to read about all the injustices that still exist in the field. Manzuch points out how funding origins can place higher priorities on what gets digitized, and Porter points this out as well in the podcast when she mentions that many collections around the world are not digitized due to a lack of funding. Additionally, from Kropf's paper, I started thinking about how it takes a lot of work, and importantly a good deal of technical expertise to convert some texts and images to digital data. So I think it then becomes an issue of who has access to this tech and knowledge. And also, if the digitizer doesn't do much of this work themselves, it limits the scholars who can use the surrogates to those who know the technology. All of this exacerbates current inequalities that already exist. Finally, it was unexpected but also refreshing to see these big digitization experts reaffirm the importance of also working with the actual physical copies of the things. There is certainly a lot of valuable information lost in the digitization process, so it's certainly not perfect.

## Emanuelle Sippy

12:29 AM The tensions between digitization and the lasting importance of working with physical objects struck me in the podcast and reading for today. Porter spoke about the size of a manuscript, how far it opens and what it feels like to turn the pages, as well as why she creates video orientations to digitized objects to fill in these missing components as much as possible vis a vis the still-"mediated" form. Kropf tracked the differences in training among Arabic and English survey respondents and the fact that Arabic survey respondents were far more knowledgeable about the benefits of working with physical objects. The discussion of the continued relevance and importance of working with physical objects even amidst the expansion of digitization also related to questions Manžuch raised about authenticity and the dangers of reproduction and manipulation. Drawing on scholars MacNeil and Mak, he suggests that "the notion of authenticity is a social construction" (10). Moreover, the questions Manžuch raised about how community-led digital archives can threaten "objectivity" and "neutrality" were then complicated. The archival methods of dominant cultural or "memory institutions" were neither neutral nor objective. Moreover, the language of "memory institutions" showcases that while these actors have often viewed the material objects exclusively in the past, for many communities, these objects are also part of present-day rituals, knowledge production, and everyday life. These embodied uses further affirm the continued importance of the objects' physicality.

## Ethan Haque

1:46 AM I've worked on large scale digitization projects in the past and the readings + podcast this week reflected many of the thoughts I've had in reflecting on my own experiences. Getting digitization right is hard. The computational aspect is its own beast, but just consider everything that could go wrong when taking images of flat objects. One project I had worked on involved a bunch of ancient manuscripts that were protected inside plastic sleeves and the plastic sleeves had a bunch of metadata like the item's shelfmark. Often times the object inside the sleeve was not rectilinear with the sleeve itself so you either had to choose to align the content with the horizontal axis or the sleeve with the horizontal axis. Unfortunately, the digitization process was sloppy and required thousands of man-hours to correct and get

the data into a form where it could be served in an online database that was usable. One of the goals of that project was to transcribe a bunch of the documents served online and provide translations. Lots of the transcribed documents were just sets of letters to and from different people who were long dead. If that were me, though, I wouldn't want someone reading my mail even if I had died. Of course, whether we can have wants after we die is a more philosophical issue, but this just adds to the complexity of digitization, and the Manzuch article goes in depth about these kinds of issues. Of course, transcription and translations are fine arts and nothing compares to physically reading the text off the original document in its original language, but there are certain things we simply cannot do with physical documents that we can do in their digital form. For example, combining fragments of documents together to form a whole using digital pieces, perhaps from several different collections, is a lot easier to do on a computer than in person for lots of ancient manuscript datasets.

## Yaashree Himatsingka

3:11 AM I was most struck by the gaping resource and power disparities between different groups undertaking digitization projects. What's the solution to this? The Price Lab podcast drew attention to the lack of transparency in the digitization process, noting how allowing colonialism seeps into the digital archiving of cultural heritage and that institutions are "really quiet about it" when materials get repatriated. Additionally, funding inequalities across the globe means that digitization happens unequally, and Kropf noted how the uneven geographic and political distribution of Arabic manuscripts is actually making digital surrogates more attractive. And Manzuch discussed the emergence of "community archives" as a democratizing force in the field, emphasizing how they reveal the impact of power dynamics, political, and legal contexts on memory institutions. But at the same time, the need for "bibliographic literacy" to navigate digital collections and the fact that the volume, format, and quality of a digitization project depends on available resources (which historically marginalized communities have fewer of) means that digitization projects are only going to perpetuate historical divides? I'm probably missing something because I feel pessimistic about the skewed global distribution of resources and what that spells for the nature, scale, and kinds of digitization projects that are and will be prioritized.