

Call for Chapters *Digital Humanities and Artificial Intelligence in African Studies*

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The integration of digital humanities (DH) and artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the production of knowledge in African Studies, offering new opportunities for innovative analysis, dynamic visualisation and cross-cultural research. This shift has the potential to reimagine cultural heritage, widen access to diverse narratives, and amplify marginalised voices. However, it also raises urgent questions regarding equitable access, the representation of African languages, and the suitability of methodologies.

The edited volume, *Digital Humanities and Artificial Intelligence in African Studies*, to be submitted to the Digital Humanities Research Series of Bielefeld University Press, addresses a rapidly evolving landscape. While we have not signed a contract yet, both the series editors and the publishers have given a positive signal.

The urgency stems from the rapid advances in AI and the risk that African voices will once again be marginalised, thereby reinforcing existing biases. Bringing together contributions from scholars, independent researchers and practitioners based in Africa, Europe and beyond, the volume spans DH, AI, metadata, linguistics, literature, art and history. It aims to foster dialogue between the Global North and South at the intersection of African epistemologies and digital methods. Moving from description to design, it charts practical pathways and partnerships for the ethical and equitable development of DH and AI across the continent. DH in African Studies is approaching a tipping point: projects and methods are proliferating across the continent and beyond. However, the landscape remains fragmented. This edited volume addresses this issue by mapping the field and facilitating ongoing dialogue between disparate initiatives.

From punch cards to AI-driven workflows, DH have broadened scholarly methods and access. This shift was accelerated by the pandemic, and building on mass digitisation, DH now supports large-scale text analysis, pattern detection, and cross-cultural comparison. However, the pipelines that produce AI-ready data are political (Zaagsma, 2023): decisions regarding selection, description and access influence training corpora and dictate what AI can “see”. The concentration of Global South materials in Global North institutions, alongside context-insensitive deployments (Aiyegbusi, 2018), reproduce the recurring “digital saviour” logic (Limb, 2007; Shringarpure, 2020) and fuel demands for digital sovereignty and equitable participation (Kévonian et al., 2022; Layne, 2022). The politics of digitisation therefore preconfigure the potential and limitations of AI in African Studies.

Language and epistemic representation compound these issues. Current large language models (LLMs) underrepresent African languages, and digital scholarly infrastructures remain optimised for English, reinforcing Anglophone paradigms and Western epistemologies (Fiormonte, Ricaurte and Chaudhuri 2022; Spence and Viola 2024). Closing these gaps through improved datasets, benchmarks, and adaptation would open new opportunities for African Studies and enable genuinely multilingual, cross-cultural scholarship. To realise this potential, AI must be adapted and deployed responsibly. Here, “implementation” refers to integrating AI into research and institutional workflows, not merely training models. Foundation models and open-source tools support local adaptation, but deployment must confront entrenched inequalities in funding, infrastructure, bandwidth, language support, and skills development. Market-driven DH can exacerbate disparities, privileging tools and design choices from the Global North and raising questions of legitimacy and sustainability in resource-constrained settings (O’Sullivan 2022; Holmes, Jenstad and Huculak 2023). Moreover, open access must be balanced with community rights and epistemic justice.

While recent initiatives on digital sovereignty in Africa have centred on policy, regulation, and digital rights, this book shifts attention to methodological practice. It asks how DH methods and AI transform research in African Studies, and how we can design, evaluate, and sustain these methods under African conditions. We move from governance about AI to practice with AI. Researchers across the continent already prototype multilingual, multimodal, and community-responsive workflows that change how we study African languages, texts, material culture, and place. To address these transformations systematically, our discussions are organised around three interconnected thematic axes that capture both technical innovations and epistemic shifts.

While we seek contributions grounded in African Studies, we would like the authors to reimagine DH from an African perspective. We welcome papers on one of the three following topics, especially from scholars and practitioners based in Sub-Saharan Africa:

1. Transforming Research Methods through AI and Digital Tools in African Studies

This axis asks a fundamental question: how are AI and DH methods changing the study of African cultures, languages, and histories? Participants will present concrete uses of AI to analyse multilingual texts, employ computer vision to study visual culture and historical artefacts, and develop digital mapping to trace cultural movements and connections. We will evaluate what works for different kinds of African cultural materials, identify adaptations required for local contexts, and specify where computational approaches can complement—rather than replace—interpretive scholarship. The goal is clear: practical guidance for integrating these methods while preserving the interpretive richness that defines the humanities.

2. Building Sustainable Research Infrastructures from African Perspectives

Moving beyond policy discourse, this axis asks what it takes to build and sustain digital research capacity within African institutions and communities. We will examine practical obstacles—limited connectivity, unstable funding, and scarce training data for local languages—and showcase South–South collaboration models that have navigated these constraints. Participants will share strategies for developing tools that utilise available

resources rather than assuming high-end infrastructure. Key questions include how to keep research outputs accessible to the communities being studied, how to train the next generation of African DH scholars, and how to secure sustainable funding that does not depend solely on institutions in the Global North. The focus is on concrete, scalable approaches to durable capacity.

3. Centring African Knowledge Systems in Digital Research Design

This axis poses a methodological challenge: how can digital research tools respect and incorporate African ways of knowing? Rather than retrofitting existing techniques to African materials, we explore how African epistemologies can shape the tools themselves. Case studies will show community knowledge informing database structures, oral traditions testing text-centred analytical frameworks, and local classification systems improving standard metadata schemas. We will consider protocols for culturally sensitive materials, interface design that does not privilege European languages, and criteria to ensure that AI systems trained on African data primarily serve African research needs. Here, decolonisation moves from critique to construction.

Timeline

15 December 2025

Deadline for submitting a title and a 250-word abstract to the editors
(frederick.madore@zmo.de and vincent.hiribarren@kcl.ac.uk)

January 2026

Selection of contributors

31 August 2026

Full chapter drafts due to the editors

September-November 2026

Editorial review and feedback

January 2027

Authors return revisions by end of January

February 2027

First draft of the entire manuscript, ready for external peer review