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ARTICLE

# Digital Archaeological Visualization and Consensus-Based Ethics in the Other Eyes Project

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**Abstract**
The Other Eyes Project was established to explore the creation of avatars in an immersive reality environment using archaeological data to explore the past. An integral part of this endeavor was to review ethics regarding the excavation and interpretation of human skeletal remains and the digital representation of past people. We examine the specific context of Romano-British archaeology in terms of the history and development of archaeological practice in England and the role of public archaeology in the formation of identity and white ethnonationalism while discussing complex issues of stakeholders and understanding intersectional identity in the past and present. We describe this process and introduce an alternative approach for ethical research in archaeology: creating a diverse community of researchers and drawing from anarchist methods.

**Uittreksel**
Het "Other Eyes Project" is opgezet om te onderzoeken hoe avatars worden gecreëerd in "immersive reality"-omgevingen die gebruikmaken van archeologische data om het verleden te verkennen. Een integraal onderdeel van dit initiatief is een ethische reflectie op het opgraven en interpreteren van menselijke skeletresten en hoe dit leidt tot digitale representaties van mensen uit het verleden. In dit artikel onderzoeken we de specifieke context van de Romeins-Britse archeologie tegen de achtergrond van de geschiedenis en ontwikkeling van de archeologische praktijk in Engeland en de rol die publieksarcheologie speelt bij identiteitsvorming en wat we wit etno-nationalisme noemen. We bespreken in deze context complexe vraagstukken rondom verschillende belangen van betrokkenen en hoe we een beter begrip kunnen krijgen van intersectionele identiteit in heden en verleden. Dit artikel beschrijft zowel het proces als een alternatieve benadering voor beter ethisch onderzoek in de archeologie: het creëren van een diverse onderzoeksgemeenschap op basis van anarchistische methodes.

**Keywords:** avatars; digital archaeology; ethics; representation; Roman archaeology

**Trefwoorden:** avatars; digitale archeologie; thiek; representatie; Romeinse archeologie

The Other Eyes Project (OEP), funded by a United Kingdom Research and Innovation–Arts and Humanities Research Council grant, used existing osteobiographical interpretive data to create digital avatars. The project began in January 2020 and ended in December 2022. The team comprising archaeologists and technologists created a mixed-reality experience based on human remains excavated from Roman period cemeteries in York between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries. This mixed-reality experience tested research questions regarding the construction and use of human/anthropomorphic avatars in archaeology to understand human experience in the past and present.

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**Figure 1.** The gladiator (*left*), with scar visible on the left forearm; the Ivory Bangle Lady (*right*). These avatars were developed in cooperation with BetaJester, a video-game development company and subject to feedback from other OEP members.

We created two avatars as part of this experience. The first was the so-called Ivory Bangle Lady, a Roman period female who may or may not have grown up in York and, at the time of reconstruction, was thought to have a biological affinity with North African populations (Leach et al. 2010). The Ivory Bangle Lady is named after the grave goods that accompanied her burial, and it is important to note we do not necessarily know her gender identity. She was named Julia Tertia in her depiction on the BBC (Hingley 2019:254) yet is still known most commonly as the Ivory Bangle Lady. The second avatar was a Roman period male of Middle Eastern origin (Martiniano et al. 2016) who may have been a gladiator (Figure 1).

The two avatars interacted in a reconstructed Roman dining room based on material culture found in Yorkshire and that is now on display at the Yorkshire Museum. Participants, outfitted with immersive head-mounted displays, explored the reconstructed dining room, facilitating an interaction with both digital avatars and objects (Morgan 2026; Morgan and Crowe 2025; Figure 2).

This mixed-reality environment blended purely virtual assets with tangible manifestations of material culture, including physical seating and garments. We also deployed scent-emitting cubes to further engage users with a multisensory experience (sensu Eve 2017). The experience was around 10 minutes long and did not include a structured narrative or formal prompts that dictated user engagement. The experience was evaluated using formal pre- and post-experience questionnaires and short interviews. Users were also filmed, and their in-headset experience was recorded (Figure 3); detailed analyses of these data are forthcoming in future publications. It is important to note that OEP was not conceived as a heritage attraction but as an exploration of specific research questions regarding embodiment, empathy, and digital reconstruction of past people.

The questions proposed by OEP included the following: How can we ethically represent the interests of the people we investigate when they cannot consent? Who are the modern stakeholder communities for the Romano-British? What are the ethics of "resurrecting" past people based on bioarchaeological evidence? Can these ethics inform the representation, curation, and perpetuation of digital persons?

Given these questions, one of the primary objectives of the project was the formation of a rigorous, transparent, ethical framework for the project. These questions also take on additional weight in view of the changing understanding of the background of the Ivory Bangle Lady, issues regarding the use of the past for anti-immigrant sentiment in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, and the overwhelming rise of visualizations using generative artificial intelligence.




**Figure 2.** Coauthor Eleanor Drew demonstrating the OEP experience in the Yorkshire Museum.



**Figure 3.** The recording setup for the OEP experimental data, showing a video camera and recording screen to the left.

The research undertaken in support of this work ranges widely, encompassing digital heritage, technoself studies, Romano-British archaeology, bioarchaeology, anarchist organization and thought, and ethical considerations tied to representation. This article is innovative because it brings these disparate

fields, voices, and issues together in conversation while prefiguring our approach to this work through consensus-built principles.

Consequently, this article is not just many authored but multiply authored, although we attempted to provide a unified authorial voice. Together we have tried to create a new intervention in the digital representation of the dead that reflects the social impact of archaeology. To contextualize this work, we review a selection of discussions of ethics from bioarchaeology and their application to digital interpretations of Romano-British archaeology. This frames our exploration of the political context of the past and of identity within the United Kingdom, in which we note the resonance and disjunctures with ethical frameworks formed in North American and Australian contexts. We distinguish our work by investigating issues of representation, ethics, and consensus within anarchist thought. This contrasts with the liberal, statist framing of codes of ethics within archaeology.

Our alternative approach included a project consensus process to shape the ethics of OEP. By describing this process, we present a way for navigating contentious issues within archaeology through consensus and advocacy for past people, as well as through generative communication and respect within affinity groups, rather than a top-down, globalizing process framed by institutional codes. We do this not to create an ideal, a model, or another static document but to describe uncertainty, experimentation, and curiosity within an ethics of care (sensu Bergman and Montgomery 2017). Accordingly, this article manifests the many discussions, diversions, and the opening up to other peoples' expertise that comprise the consensus process. The reader should understand disjunctures as reflecting the work of consensus, finding our way through uncertainty together, and being transparent about that process.

## Representation, Digital Bioarchaeology, and Ethics

At the outset, OEP was designed to contend with ethical issues regarding representation of the dead and to review approaches to the subject within bioarchaeological science and digital heritage. This intention was included as one of the major research questions in our grant proposal, where we asked: "What are our ethical responsibilities involving visual and embodied representations of people in the past that incorporate biological data?" The first goal was to "develop a rigorous, transparent, ethical framework for the digital reconstruction, visualisation and transmission of past people using bioarchaeological evidence." We clearly recognized the centrality of ethical considerations, particularly given the participants in the project and the subjects of interpretation. OEP was designed to use previously published data, not to directly engage in a new primary investigation or the display of human remains. Even so, the use of previous archaeological investigations for representations is always fraught because they are subject to previous biases and contextual inequities. Furthermore, research within the project evolved, and we had to reevaluate the potential gains and risks against our given codes. Thus, we describe our attempt to navigate the ethics of representation, digital bioarchaeology, and bioarchaeological life histories with particular attention to the context of the mobilization of the past by others in support of white ethnonationalism in the United Kingdom.

Representations and reconstructions of the past within archaeology are a contested issue (e.g., Colomer 2002; James 1999; Lowenthal 2015; Moser 1992, 2001, 2009). Feminist critiques of these representations have focused on othering, gender stereotyping, and erasure (Berman 1999; Dowson 2006; Gero and Root 1990; Gifford-Gonzalez 1993; Sørensen 1999; Tringham 1991; Wiber 1994). The introduction of photorealistic computer graphics added considerable anxiety to this discourse (Bateman 2000; Frankland 2012; Jeffrey 2015; Morgan 2009; Roussou and Drettakis 2003; Shanks and Webmoor 2013; Watterson 2015). The London Charter (Beacham et al. 2006; Denard 2012) and the Seville Principles (Bendicho 2013) emphasize (among other principles) transparency, authenticity, rigor, and documentation of the techniques and decisions made while creating 3D representations of heritage. As such, transparency and documentation of our decisions in OEP motivated the publication of our efforts to form an ethical structure for this project. Although these established principles regarding digital representation offer general directives, the specifics of OEP required interrogating bioarchaeological ethics, particularly regarding the investigation and representation of past individuals.

Bioarchaeologists have cogently identified problems that arise when conducting research on human remains and then disseminating this research through a globalized media. For example,

Zuckerman and colleagues (2014:516; citing Lincoln 1995) draw from relational ethics, which emphasizes "mutual respect, dignity and connectedness in relationships between the researcher, the 'researched' and their communities, and the importance of moral responsibility within those relationships." The justification for studying human remains, especially those of contingent communities, is that they can tell stories that are not visible by other means. The examination of human remains can supply direct information about power, oppression, and privilege and therefore recover the agency and singularity of the dead (Zuckerman et al. 2014:514). Finally, they emphasize that research that is conducted on human remains must be useful to contemporary society (Zuckerman et al. 2014:515).

Osteobiography has become increasingly used to create a life narrative for past individuals, drawing from their skeleton. Hosek and Robb (2019:2) argue that osteobiography "forms an indispensable tool within a broader, emerging humanistic bioarchaeology." They directly question the utility of the traditional practices of naming and representation based on human remains in museums (Hosek and Robb 2019:5). Geller (2019), discussing a "bioethos," complicates osteobiographical work, presenting issues with naming of human remains and facial reconstruction; she also considers the impact of technological advances such as aDNA on life histories. Her emphasis on the careful consideration of the individual and their contemporary legacy is of particular relevance to our study.

Bioarchaeologists have also identified additional responsibilities when representations of human remains are digitized and shared online (Hassett 2018). Many of these considerations revolve around the curation, accessibility, openness, copyright, and archiving of 3D models (Ulguim 2018) and digital bioarchaeological data (Hassett 2018). Robbins Schug and colleagues (2021) outline ethical guidelines for 3D scanning, curation, and printing of human remains. Huffer and coworkers (2019) discuss the ethics of research on human remains depicted on social media by nonspecialists, particularly regarding machine learning and privacy. Similar concerns regarding privacy, accessibility, and sustainability are raised by digital archaeologists and heritage specialists (Colley 2015; Dennis 2020; Richardson 2018). The digital depiction of human remains is still contentious, and so the consent of descendants or otherwise affiliated communities is important but sometimes can be hard or impossible to determine or obtain (Ulguim 2018).

Williams and Atkin (2015) note the "curse of context" in which online spaces decontextualize human remains for a pluralistic audience with differing cultural and religious backgrounds. Online spaces are not open to all and are problematic for inscribing practices and mores that are generated by structurally dominant voices within these spaces (Richardson 2018). For example, the prohibition of the photographic depiction of human remains is widely accepted by archaeologists within the United States (who dominate online discussions) yet not globally (see Ferrándiz 2013; as discussed in González-Ruibal 2018). Ulguim (2018) argues for good practice, including consent by relevant stakeholders, access and use conditions set according to local requirements, and sensitive contextual metadata for human remains depicted online that link with osteobiographical data, the burial context, and other interpretive data (see also Bohling 2025). As such, digital bioarchaeology has contributed immensely toward the ethical representation of human remains online. Although OEP has benefited tremendously from codes and recommendations from digital bioarchaeology, issues of representation within OEP center on the use of bioarchaeological data to create digital representations of past people, rather than depictions of human remains.

Even though digital bioarchaeological ethical discussions involve the interpretation and presentation of human remains, as Jeffrey (2015) notes, there can be a considerable divergence between the subject and the digital representation of this subject. This is further complicated by the specifics of OEP, which does not depict human remains but creates inhabitable reconstructions of past people. The hesitancy in representing human remains does not normally relate to facial reconstructions, yet they can be controversial in terms of skin color and prejudiced perceptions of past people (Brophy 2018). Other controversial depictions of the dead include digitally manipulated photographs and videos. Deepfakes allow dead people and artifacts to smile, move, and even sing (Westerlund 2019). Some find these representations unethical or inappropriate, falling into the uncanny space wherein the dead or apparently inanimate become unsettling as they approach verisimilitude with the living (Brooks 2021). For example, there was considerable backlash against the digital re-creation of a vocal sound from the mummy

of Nesyamun (Howard et al. 2020). Its reception by the public and other museums and researchers was summarized by Matić (2021), who noted its contribution to the perception of Egyptology as a "cursed discipline" (García 2014). This complicated relationship with digital representations of the dead, skeletal or fleshed, inert or animated, vocal or silent, can reveal a great deal about archaeological subjectivity, globalization through social media, and increased calls for decolonization of the discipline.

Black and Indigenous bioarchaeologists have engaged with the ethics of display, engagement, and museum curation of past people in ways that are important to this discussion. Although their publications have primarily focused on research conducted in North America, they are helpful in considering our current and future work in the United Kingdom. Blakey's (2022) deep engagement with the ethical treatment of the remains of diasporic populations, critique of anthropological and archaeological methods, and attendance to descendant populations are an obvious touchstone for this work. Similarly, Watkins (2020:20) notes that "making liberatory praxis integral to current and future disciplinary projects" is essential for changing the structural conditions of the discipline. She cites Sylvia Wynter's "biocentricity" in creating normative categories that "idealize humanity as White, Western, and male," while others are cast as nonhuman (Watkins 2020:20). This resonates with the perceived notion of Romans as white, Western, physically fit, able-bodied, and male (e.g., Bond 2017), which OEP is working to counter through the deliberate selection of subjects, as explained more fully later.

Lans (2021) cites Black feminist scholarship as a decolonizing tool used to reinterpret the dead and discusses the work of artist Adrian Piper on racial ambiguity as informing her work. She provides the example of Merrian, a woman who died of pulmonary tuberculosis in 1894 in the Almshouse Hospital in New York City; that institution's human remains are curated in the Huntington Collection held by the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History in Washington, DC (Lans 2021:136). Merrian was originally classified as "White" on her death certificate, but this was crossed out and replaced by "Black." Yet in other documents she is designated as Black. Because the other patients at the hospital were white, Lans wonders "if she was mistaken for white and therefore sent to the Almshouse hospital, where she was later revealed to be Black" (Lans 2021:136). This mirrors the ambiguity of ethnicity in OEP. Through aDNA analysis of skeletons, archaeologists are finding that both forensic ancestry guidance for cranial morphology and measurements are an inaccurate tool for identifying African or Asian ancestry in archaeological skeletal remains. For example, in a forthcoming publication, Hella Eckardt and colleagues have found that in light of more recent evidence from ancient DNA, this initial characterization of the Ivory Bangle Lady may be inaccurate. There is also ambiguity in understanding intersectional personhood and expression in Roman Britain.

As such, the issue of stakeholder consent is challenging for OEP for several reasons. In the United Kingdom, the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials states that there is no legal obligation to trace the next of kin for burials older than 100 years, but that it "would be ethical to accord views of living close family members," particularly in excavations of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century burial grounds (Mays 2017:4). Because the human remains under examination by OEP are more than 1,500 years old, contacting direct descendants is not possible. Descent, affiliation, and stakeholder consent are convoluted subjects in the United Kingdom that are often tied to nationalism, colonialism, and racism. This is significant: whereas the concept of indigeneity is welcome and key to archaeology in many places, the notion of an Indigenous British archaeology is tied to white ethnonationalism (Kirwan and Stirrup 2013; Richardson 2024). A homogeneous, solely white "Indigenous" British population is contrary to archaeological evidence that demonstrates the ubiquitous, ongoing, diverse populations that existed in antiquity and that persist today (Eckardt and Müldner 2016; Gretzinger et al. 2022; Schiffels and Sayer 2017).

The issue of British stakeholders can be demonstrated by the academic and public debate that started when the Pagan group, the Council of British Druid Orders, requested reburial of human remains from the Alexander Keiller Museum, located in the Avebury UNESCO world heritage site (Moshenska 2009:815). Sayer (2009:202) notes that American and Australian case studies are known in the United Kingdom, but claims based on neo-pagan identity are not commensurate with the claims to historical cultural identity among Indigenous people. Yet he and Moshenska (2009:815) both identify a growing need for "involvement of, and consultation with, local communities, non-professional archaeologists

and other interested parties." However, Moshenska (2009:816) further notes the problems of some neo-pagan assertions of the connection between people and where they were buried. The problem of white ethnonationalism is also present in medieval English studies (Allfrey 2021) and affects how archaeologists and heritage professionals interpret and represent Black or Brown people in the United Kingdom (Montgomery Ramírez 2021).

These issues are demonstrable in OEP through the examples of the Ivory Bangle Lady and the presumed gladiator, both of which have isotopic evidence supporting their migration to York after childhood. Although attitudes regarding Neolithic or medieval identity in the United Kingdom differ from those regarding Roman Britain, the latter are also fraught. Beard and Henderson (1999) identify an "insistent duality" showing a dissonance between ideas of Roman Britain as British or foreign or as an enemy occupation or part of the larger story of the island. Representations of Roman Britain exemplified in the British Museum and the Museum of London reinforce positive representations of the Roman army and imperialism and could benefit from postcolonial critique (Polm 2016). Hanscam (2019) notes the Romano-British archaeological ties to reactionary populism present in Brexit debates regarding migration and identity and the racist reactions to media related to the Ivory Bangle Lady (see also Eckardt and Müldner 2016). Bonacchi (2022:173) further develops the populist understanding of Roman Britain in her analysis of Brexit-themed Facebook posts, which were "evoked to call for stricter border controls and tougher immigration policies" and the end of bureaucracy and certain political classes. It was also mobilized by "Remain positions for notions of plurality through multiple migrations."[1]

Even so, a broader engagement with ethics in Roman archaeology in the United Kingdom is surprisingly low; Kamash (2021:2) notes the "inertia and apparent lack of willingness to enact fundamental change (within Roman Archaeology)" and recommends several initiatives to decolonize the discipline: these include diversifying participation through visiting scholarships, broadening content presented at conferences, and tackling structural issues including freedom of movement for scholars across international borders.

The issues at the intersection of bioarchaeology, digital representation of the dead, and white ethnonationalism create a controversial landscape that researchers must navigate. In exploring the circumstances of the project in the United Kingdom, we provide an example that draws from critiques situated within the United States and Canada but within a different context. This is not an attempt to globalize or homogenize research ethics within archaeology but to provide an understanding of this specific context, within a greater milieu of white ethnonationalism and the ethical tensions in sensitively representing past people in archaeology.

## Other Eyes in Context

These ethical tensions are central to the research that comprises OEP. The project aimed to understand past people through digital embodiment, creating avatars based on bioarchaeological data; it brought together a team with expertise in digital archaeology and interpretation, bioarchaeology, and Roman archaeology. The avatars we created reveal the complexity of ethical treatment and digital reconstruction of the dead.

During the first project meeting we broke into discussion groups, considering four individuals to focus our research on. With each potential set of human remains, we considered the following questions:

- What are the ethical issues you see arising from this individual?
- What do you think is important to represent about this person?
- What would most make you feel like you are walking in this person's shoes?
- Without thinking about current restrictions imposed by technology, what would be the ideal implementation of this project?

We focused on the Ivory Bangle Lady and the presumed gladiator, who may or may not have been enslaved (3DT-26), both of which were excavated in the city of York. Details of the selection, interpretation, and construction of the digital representations of these avatars are found in Morgan and Crowe (2025). Important to the discussion of the ethics of representation are that the Ivory Bangle Lady was at the time interpreted as a young, high-status, mixed-race woman (Leach et al. 2010:141),

whereas the presumed male adult gladiator had Middle Eastern ancestry and would have had altered upper limb mobility as a result of sustaining multiple injuries during their lifetime (Caffell and Holst 2012; Hunter-Mann 2005; Martiniano et al. 2016). This had considerable implications for the ethics of this project, because Roman period Britain is often misunderstood as white, rather than reflecting the multiethnic population demonstrated through archaeological research (Hingley 2019).

Although the composition of the project team was problematic from the outset, after selecting these two individuals for investigation, it became untenable. The project team, although "diverse" in terms of nationality, disability, and academic career path, was almost exclusively composed of people who are coded as white. Team member and coauthor Kamash is a British Iraqi archaeologist who is deeply involved in decolonization efforts within archaeology and was involved in the beginning of the project as an adviser, but her inclusion was not sufficient to adequately address the issues of representation within OEP.

British archaeology has a severe lack of diversity: although the general UK workforce has become increasingly less white since 2002, archaeology has not followed this trend. In 2020 a survey of the profession revealed that 97% of UK archaeologists are white (Aitchison et al. 2021). Plummer Sires (2021:958) notes "the discrimination, the racism, the isolation" that she faced in the museums and heritage sector, which resonates with this survey data. Kamash (2021) more specifically locates the whiteness in Roman archaeology through the analysis of conference data from the Roman Archaeology and Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conferences and the 2019 Roman Archaeology Teaching Survey. She found that only 2.4% and 2.2% of session organizers and paper presenters were from ethnic minorities, a much lower figure than the 15% ethnic minorities represented in the wider UK population (Kamash 2021:8). Diversity and inclusion are central problems within British archaeology, which was reflected in the initial composition of the OEP team. Although there are some complexities with identifying stakeholders for the United Kingdom's Roman past, the Ivory Bangle Lady has been an important figure to Black communities that struggle to see themselves in a British past often presented as overwhelmingly white.

The project leader requested that the European Society of Black and Allied Archaeologists (ESBAA) serve as advisers to OEP, albeit unpaid. ESBAA is "a collective of anti-racist archaeologists from across Europe, West and Southern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and North America (which was) founded and is led by women of colour" (Brunache et al. 2021). Its manifesto calls for "working towards decolonization, increasing opportunities for archaeologists of colour, creating restorative spaces for archaeologists of colour, sharing resources, and fostering collaboration, ally-ship and mentoring" (Brunache et al. 2021:296). Further, it encourages white archaeologists to "get comfortable engaging in uncomfortable conversations" (Brunache et al. 2021:297). Several ESBAA members became involved according to their capacity and interest. It must be noted that most participant positions, except for the main project investigators, were unpaid and were only compensated for transportation, food, and accommodation; this situation is typical within such a grant. We were able to mobilize this collaboration to support other initiatives, including the 2022 Heritage Jam—a three-day game-creation workshop featuring the work of ESBAA and focused on decolonization—which is discussed later. The contributions of ESBAA members have been central to the creation of OEP's ethics statement and our thinking about the avatars and featured prominently in the testing, implementation, and publication stages of the project.

## Ethics and the Consensus Process

We first created a set of principles that would guide our research of these past people. They were informed by the discussions of bioarchaeologists and other ethicists in archaeology as noted earlier. Morgan drafted the initial document drawing from her experience in creating the Dilmun Bioarchaeology Ethics Statement (2009), which she coauthored with Alexis Boutin regarding the analysis and visual documentation of human remains and artifacts in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum at UC Berkeley. This initial document was a motivating force for the International Visual Studies Association's more general ethics statement and preceded other documents (Papademas and the IVSA 2009). Although innovative at the time, this previous ethics statement drew from established codes of conduct, including the World

Archaeological Congress's 1989 Vermillion Accord on Human Remains and the 2005 Tamaki Makau-rau Accord on the Display of Human Remains and Sacred Objects.

In developing a set of principles for OEP, Morgan wanted to move away from codes of conduct that appealed to institutions or liberal regimes for legitimization and enforcement, which González-Ruibal (2018) identifies as deontological codes. He also reviews general criticisms of ethical codes that situate them as static and bureaucratizing. Importantly for this project, González-Ruibal discusses ethics and its association with "morals, virtuous behaviour and policy" in contrast to *politics*, which invokes "equality, enfranchisement, conflict, power asymmetries, social justice, political economy, and capitalism" and most recently identity (González-Ruibal 2018:346). Ethics within archaeology generally call on prescriptive rules created by institutional bodies or seek to create codes of conduct that are not crafted through a consensus of all involved. González-Ruibal calls for a more nuanced engagement with ethics that makes use of broader philosophical work and engages with complex situations without imposing a moral authority (González-Ruibal 2018:355).

Our attempt at a more nuanced political engagement benefits from recent work within anarchism geared to understanding an affirmative, creative, joyful ethics without appeals to institutional authority. As Bergman and Montgomery (2017:30) state, "The space beyond fixed and established orders, structures, and morals is not one of disorder: it is the space of *emergent* orders, values, and forms of life." In general, anarchist thought has its own lineages and debates; we touch on currents within anarchism that should be understood to be more capacious than the treatment we give them here. Although theory-based discussions of ethics and digital representation are critically important to understanding research questions at the center of OEP, their implementation and conduct during this research are equally important. As Graeber (2004:6–7) and others have noted, anarchism "is primarily concerned with forms of practice." The prefigurative framework of anarchism calls for people to conduct themselves as they would act to ideally construct the future; in other words, the means create the ends (Borck 2019). Consequently, we formed a consensus process that drew from anarchist thought to prefigure the process of creating our ethical principles, so we would begin as we meant to carry on throughout the project.

During this process Morgan asked OEP members Laura Hampden and Zena Kamash to consider participating as direct advocates for the proposed avatars. Our process was partially informed by Vizenor (1986:320), who argues that "tribal bones as narrators could be considered the real authors of their time and place on the earth; the representation of their voices in a court would overturn the neocolonial perspectives, written and invented tribal cultures." Although his argument is situated within the specific context of Indigenous remains and rights within the United States, his assertion that human remains should be represented and advocated for by empathetic voices was compelling. Kamash advocated for the presumed gladiator with ties to the Middle East and with a disability. Hampden advocated for the Ivory Bangle Lady, with consideration of the individual's potential North African origins and mixed race. Both are highly skilled and experienced archaeologists with histories of advocacy. They were asked to engage with this role to ensure that their perspectives and the appropriate level of care were followed for the past individuals. Kamash reflected on her experience:

> I was extremely conscious of the responsibility of this role. I did not take the decision lightly to take it on and considered my suitability with care. While I feel I can legitimately advocate for Middle Eastern archaeologists in the present, I am not a man, I do not have a physical disability, nor have I experienced enslavement in the Roman world. Taking on this role, therefore, required me to draw on my own lived experiences as an othered person in contemporary British society at the same time as finding empathy for the experiences of someone different to me. I feel that being mixed race, and so constantly negotiating multiple identities (e.g., Hirsch 2018:137), gave me some of the tools needed to perform this complex balancing act.

Kamash's reflection demonstrates the contemporary context of her positionality as an advocate, as she mobilized her lived experience to empathize with the past person, while still identifying elements of the intersectionality of experience that were distinct from her own. At the end, we held a consensus vote on the entire document and then sent it out to the project members who were not able to participate in the discussion, who had additional comments.

The Ethical Principles of OEP are as follows (see https://sites.google.com/york.ac.uk/othereyes/project-updates?authuser=0):

> The principled treatment of human remains is a tremendous responsibility within archaeology. The Other Eyes Project seeks to create avatars based on the interpretation of Roman period human remains that will share the embodiment of past people with people alive today and allow/or invite people alive today to engage in the process of the embodiment of people in the past. It is therefore a top priority that we make our ideals and methods transparent and are accountable for the results of this project.
>
> This document forms the working principles of OEP. It has been brought to the OEP team for collective editing, then subjected to the consensus process. The intent of forming these principles is to conduct ourselves according to our shared intentions and values, rather than appealing to state or institutional power to determine boundaries. There will be an accompanying open access publication that will more fully describe the foundation of these principles within the ethics of bioarchaeology, digital archaeology, and egalitarianism.
>
> The OEP team includes those named directly in the research funding proposal and people brought in later as interested participants, advisors or advocates. The OEP team is hierarchical with the PI Colleen Morgan ultimately responsible for all outcomes and contingencies associated with the project. It is disingenuous to present OEP as a project with a horizontal power structure, as there are paid participants and unpaid participants. Regardless there will be efforts to redistribute power amongst all participants and to provide beneficial outcomes for all involved, according to need.
>
> **Guiding ideal:** When conducting research associated with this project, team members will ask themselves, does this work help to create a sense of connection or empathy with past people or between those currently alive and an understanding and acceptance of self?
>
> I. Our understanding of avatars is that they can enact past people, and are not representations or reconstructions, but are discrete entities. Neither the avatars nor the past people these avatars are modelled on can consent themselves and therefore must be advocated for in our consensus process and throughout the duration of OEP. Additionally we will find names and faces for the avatars and to better personify them (Geller 2019).
> II. The primary work of OEP is to use existing human remains and it is not necessary to use photographic/videographic representations of these human remains. If OEP is involved in the recovery or examination of human remains there will be further discussions regarding the specific conditions of the visual representation and display of these remains.
> III. Authorship of media and publications associated with OEP will be according to labour conducted in support of the media or publication, construed by default as generous to participants rather than restrictive. If a team member contributes to a particular aspect of the project, they will be entitled to authorship on resulting materials.
> IV. The OEP team members will endeavour to conduct research in a way that reduces the potential of inflicting harm upon themselves, project team members, project participants, the avatars or the dead people the avatars are based on. Any potential for harm will be first discussed with team members.
> V. If a member of the OEP team enacts harm or feels harm has been done to them, we will try to be gentle with each other, while remaining accountable. If team members behave in a manner that is destructive to themselves or to others, we will always speak up to question their actions and come to a resolution. Resolutions, when necessary, will be created using reparative and/or restorative justice principles, with an external mediator and will avoid retributive results.
> VI. All materials for OEP will be made available and archived with the Archaeology Data Service, with paradata attached. This is an attempt to make the project transparent, accountable, long-lived and possibly reproducible.

> This is a living document and may be modified with notification and discussion. If the proposed modification is major, then a consensus will be called for again.

The OEP principles emphasize care and the attention to the potential harm that may be caused by the project while not calling on institutional precedent or rehearsing technicalities. In addition to these principles, the project underwent an institutional ethics process overseen by the Arts and Humanities Ethics Council at the University of York, which considers anonymity, data protection, consent, and issues related to care for participants in the research.

## Discussion

After the initial framing of the OEP principles, the COVID-19 pandemic seriously diminished the capacity of the project members, aligning with the burden felt in other academic fields (e.g., Davis et al. 2022). Many were substantially affected by COVID delays and the compounded workloads in the days after lockdown. They found themselves overwhelmed with illness or other obligations, and participation has ebbed and flowed as a result. Almost all the project members are caregivers, and many are disabled, contingent/precarious workers, queer, or global majority/UK minority ethnic; some are a combination of all these. Some have graduated or switched jobs. In addition to academics, others work in developer-funded or compliance-related archaeology, and some are technologists, archivists, museum professionals, or students. The findings of Fulkerson and Tushingham (2019) that women, nonacademics, and marginalized groups face significant barriers in the publication of peer-reviewed articles resonated with our own experiences and in participation in this project. OEP continued past its original remit and end of funding (December 2022), and some publications are still forthcoming.

As the project progressed, a few of the original principles were challenged. For example, there was an opportunity to examine, scan, and reconstruct the skull of the gladiator; however, this would have brought Principle II into contention. The opportunity was discussed at a project meeting, but ultimately the skull was too fragmented to provide a more accurate facial reconstruction than an approximation created by BetaJester and thus it was not pursued. Additionally, the avatars were not given names beyond the "Ivory Bangle Lady" and "The Gladiator." These names have stuck, which may be because the ability to inhabit an avatar is aided by a more "generic" presentation of their persona. Even so, user testing has demonstrated the impact of these avatars, leading some participants in the experimentation to reconsider their relationship with the remains of the Ivory Bangle Lady, who is still on display at the Yorkshire Museum. Principle IV—the documentation of the decisions made during creation of the OEP experience—has been turned into an interactive hypertext to transparently convey the difficulties of representing past people (Morgan and Crowe 2025).

Although implementation of the principles has been mixed, the guiding ideal has remained a touchstone throughout the project. Perhaps more importantly, the relationships forged around the creation of the principles have continued and have led to further friendships and collaborations. One example is the 2022 Heritage Jam, a rapid-prototyping, game-creation workshop that explored "life in the decolonies." The Heritage Jam partnered with ESBAA and featured teams with diverse members who created digital games prefiguring a decolonized future. We also considered the time and effort involved with decolonizing projects for ethnic minorities who often face increased demands for their attention, often without adequate compensation. This is an ongoing problem: decolonization needs to be engaged with by everyone and should command the attention of white researchers without centering them within this work.

## Conclusions

The creation of a research community and set of principles as part of the OEP is a case study in ethically engaging with the representation of past people. Although using an advocacy model is imperfect, it highlighted our positionality and reframed the subject–object relationship within

representation in archaeology. Our research subjects could not consent as such but were carefully considered within their Romano-British milieu and the context of their current reception within white ethnonationalism in England. The ethics of "resurrection" of past people must be carefully considered, on a case-by-case basis, within a community of care and advocacy. We provide an example, but it must not be considered a blueprint or a throw-away reference. We urge other archaeologists to do this care work and to extend our communities to the past people we investigate.

Thinking about and advocating for the dead as active research participants are made possible by working with digital media. Although the avatars can never entirely be the individuals they are meant to represent, they force us to contend with our interpretation and representation of past people. Their creation brought us into conversation with white ethnonationalism, Black Britishness, and the shifting understanding of the past. During the time between the drafting of this article and its publication, the Ivory Bangle Lady underwent further investigation through ancient DNA analysis (Eckert et al. ). These analyses may change our perception of the identity of these past people, calling into question not only our representations but also our sense of connectedness as we inhabit digital bodies that recall past people.

Finally, advocating for the dead is complicated by the growing practice of creating past people through generative artificial intelligence. As these so-called agents proliferate, archaeologists must contend with our understanding and portrayal of past individuals. A popular YouTube channel, *Chloe vs History*, is hosted by a generated individual "Chloe," who "time travels" to different eras and encounters, confronts, and questions past individuals; it has garnered millions of views and thousands of comments. As discussed earlier, archaeologists have extensive experience in critiquing these uses and representations of the past but are less experienced in creating data-driven visualizations through a transparent, ethical framework. These features are crucial for future archaeological practice in visualizing past individuals.

What remains is our prefigurative practice of creating a research community through shared ethical principles that have been collectively imagined and implemented. In the case of OEP, a community centered around the ethical interpretation and visualization of human remains is not "community archaeology" as traditionally constructed, involving those outside heritage institutions who are or perceive themselves to be connected with the subject of investigation. A more inclusive community for this research may have reached beyond perceived cultural or genetic relations into those forged by immigration or those subjugated by colonial powers, although far from the colonial center. This would enhance the understanding of communities as those brought together by common interest and for mutual understanding, rather than perceived local, national, or ancestral affinity. Although our work highlighted ongoing disjunctures within archaeological practice between subject specialists (Romanists), digital archaeologists, bioarchaeologists, and ethics-led community-based research in archaeology, we also demonstrated the criticality and care with which such work can be undertaken. Forming these connections is crucial to addressing sensitive issues regarding the representation of past individuals but should also inform all archaeological research projects as the past is continually being weaponized for nationalism and racism.

As demonstrated through this realignment of practice demonstrated in OEP, we can create communities of care surrounding complex topics. Affinity-based collectives can navigate new situations together; shared values must be investigated and articulated but are subject to change. Working within the rigid structures of academic institutions and funding bodies can limit the scope and efficacy of truly emancipatory research, yet we are hopeful in the possibility of creating spaces where we can think and work together. The creation of these ethical principles was a prefigurative act, as we came together to understand how to conduct research through consensus within the project. Although these principles are not intended to create a definitive guide for others to cut/paste/implement or to create a rigid code that implies hierarchies of authority or "doing it wrong," this consensus process succeeded in bringing project members together to create, on a small scale, an environment of care and attendance to each other and to the dead.

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## Note

1. Remain refers to the voters who did not want to separate the United Kingdom from the European Union during the contentious 2016 vote and therefore wanted to "Remain."

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