

Opponent's written statement on Pauno Soirila's doctoral dissertation "Monumental Tradition: UNESCO and the Making of Cultural Heritage in International Law, 1954–2003"

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I have been appointed by the Faculty of Law at the University of Helsinki to serve as Opponent for the public defence of *Pauno Soirila's* doctoral dissertation, "Monumental Tradition: UNESCO and the Making of Cultural Heritage in International Law, 1954–2003". The defence took place on 28 November 2025, and in this piece, I present the written statement submitted to the faculty as part of the Finnish doctoral procedure. The statement is structured around seven specific criteria for examination:

1. Whether it contains new scientific knowledge

In my view, the manuscript makes a distinctive and original contribution to the field. It belongs to a new generation of scholarly literature in international cultural heritage law that, rather than focusing on specific domains or types of heritage, attempts to create a global and cross-regime narrative and argument about cultural heritage in international law. Doing so helps shed new light on the operation of the international law of culture, and to break silos. The thesis does this type of work very effectively, in my view, clearing the threshold for this criterion.

2. Whether it demonstrates critical thinking on the candidate's part

I believe the thesis contains very strong and original critical thinking. The candidate challenges received wisdom in the field throughout, and does so through engagement with the relevant scholarship. As one example among many, Chapter 2, in its examination of the 1954 Hague Convention, makes an important point that distinguishes it from available literature: that the Hague Convention was meant to address heritage of "international" importance, but that practice has turned it into "national" importance. Therefore, I believe the thesis meets this criterion.

3. Whether it demonstrates profound familiarity with the field

The thesis amasses a wide range of literature and primary sources. It is meticulously written, showcasing engagement with all the key authors in the field. It identifies in the archival material engagement with all the great tensions in the field, too, whether they are textually explicit or implied in the archival materi-

al. This type of analysis would not be possible if the candidate were not deeply familiar with international cultural heritage law, and heritage studies.

As one example, Chapter 3 centres on the 1970 Convention on cultural objects. Here, the thesis seems to hit its stride. The chapter is thorough, insightful, and the entirety of the discussion ties neatly into a conversation about definition. It is particularly useful that the author highlights the use of soft law instruments as early battlegrounds for what eventually became the treaty. This sequence with respect to cultural objects was the first time UNESCO did what became the strategy for all its cultural heritage treaties, and the thesis skilfully connects the soft law instruments (and definitional debates within and around them) to the drafting of the 1970 Convention. The author also ties the debates in the 1970 Convention neatly to the conclusions from the previous chapter, thus creating a nice sense of crescendo within the thesis.

Therefore, I am of the view that the thesis meets this criterion.

4. Whether it demonstrates mastery of research methods and their application

The thesis adopts and deploys very effectively a wide range of methodological tools, particularly archival work and discourse analysis, coupled with doctrinal legal methodologies. In my view, the methods work very effectively to advance the argument. While at times I disagreed with some of the choices the author made in deploying these methods, and thought some of it could have been done more effectively, there is no doubt that the candidate masters the methodologies at play, and therefore the thesis also meets this criterion.

5. Whether it is scientifically convincing

In my view, absolutely. The argument is well-executed and compelling. International heritage law would benefit from being more aware of the running themes that appeared in the negotiation of the different definitions in UNESCO treaties. Only historical analysis can show us how those definitions came about, and the seeds those treaty-making processes intentionally or otherwise planted for future legal developments. Definitions of different types of cultural heritage, in other words, do not operate in isolation from one another, and there is more to hold the field together than to justify the perpetuation of its analysis and implementation across silos. It is a simple, original, and compelling argument, that makes a significant contribution to the field.

One significant example is in Chapter 5. In it, the author discusses human rights to set up important themes for the book. It is a compelling conversation about the work of human rights in making sense of the category of cultural heritage in international law, setting up themes like dark heritage, which comes later in the chapter, and is a heritage phenomenon that rescues a lot of threads of abandoned projects in other treaties, and tries to resolve them through different means. The chapter overall offers very insightful observations, and does important analytical work in the thesis in establishing a running thread for this chapter with the rest of the manuscript. It is an excellent chapter: thorough, insightful, connects to the key tensions and themes from previous chapters, and introduces new ones.

Therefore, I am of the view that the thesis also meets this criterion.

6. Whether it contains justified results

The results are well-argued and justified. The evidence marshalled in the thesis is put to very effective use to make the conclusions seem almost obvious, and that it is surprising that no one has connected these dots before. That is the mark, in my opinion, of very good scholarship. I therefore believe that the thesis also meets this criterion.

7. Whether it demonstrates scientific integrity and adheres to the ethical norms of research

Yes. All citations are appropriate, there is no indication of plagiarism or of abuse of relationships with sources. The archival material was collected ethically and with due attribution. Therefore, the thesis meets this final criterion as well.

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Overall, I am grateful for the opportunity to engage with this manuscript. It is original, methodologically rigorous, sophisticated, and makes a clear contribution to the knowledge in the field. It demonstrates deep knowledge of the field in questioning some of the fundamental assumptions in scholarship.

I believe the thesis is strong. It was overall a pleasure to read, the research is extensive, and it makes a useful contribution to the field. In my view, the thesis clears the threshold for the award of a PhD, and I commend the author on the work.