

A Thematic Analysis of Heritage and Civilisation Conference Presentations

Note: The following analysis is based on the content of the conference presentations. While I believe it offers a fair representation of the explicit and implicit themes across contributions, it is inevitably shaped by my own interpretive lens. It should not be read as a universal or finalised ‘scientific’ interpretation, nor is it intended to be restrictive.

I have used the themes outlined in the original book proposal as a conceptual anchor, while fully recognising that—as projects evolve—so too do their thematic trajectories. This analysis is therefore not designed to foreclose creative development or emergent directions.

- Ali M.

Presentation Themes in Relation to Proposal Themes

Purpose

- To identify **thematic clusters** emerging from the conference presentations
- To map these themes in relation to the seven proposed themes in our **book proposal**
- To enhance overall **coherence** across the volume
- To identify and assess potential **thematic gaps**
- To inform and refine the editorial framing, especially in the **Introduction**
- To evaluate whether, and to what extent, the proposed themes should be revisited—whether due to overlap, shifts in emphasis, or to better reflect the substance of the contributions

Definitions and Themes

1. Themes in our Book Proposal (shown in red in all following tables)

The book proposal suggested the following seven broad (and interrelated, thus not mutually exclusive) themes:

1.1. Heritage & Civilisational Analysis

Explores the **intersection** of heritage and civilisational studies, focusing on how each shapes and informs the other. This theme foregrounds mutual contributions, interrogates conceptual interplay, and examines heritage’s role in civilisational self-understanding and global historical hierarchies.

1.2. Heritage, Civilisation & Intergovernmental Organisations

Addresses the influence of **IGOs (e.g., UNESCO)** in propagating civilisational ideas through various means, particularly through heritage governance. It evaluates how these bodies set standards, influence policy, and contribute to strategic cultural diplomacy and identity articulation on the global stage.

1.3. Heritage, Civilisational Analysis, Identity & Historical/Cultural Memory

Investigates how **identity and memory** are constructed through the lens of civilisation and heritage. It considers how civilisational memory legitimates identity, belonging, and difference, and how these elements are mobilised in heritage discourse across scales.

1.4. Civilisations, Heritage & Territorial Boundaries

Focuses on how heritage and civilisation intersect with **territoriality**, territorial (spatial) claims, border dynamics, and regional disputes. It explores how space is civilisationally mapped and heritage is weaponised in boundary-making or contestation processes.

1.5. *Heritage, Civilisation & Geopolitics*

Examines the use of heritage and civilisation in **geopolitical strategy**. This includes the assertion of soft power, civilisational narratives in multipolar contexts, and heritage's role in shaping regional and global political alignments.

1.6. *Heritage, Civilisation & Scale*

Explores the **scaling** of civilisational and heritage narratives across spatial levels—from the local to the global. It critically reflects on how actors navigate universal and particular frameworks to enhance legitimacy and cultural capital.

1.7. *Ethical Considerations in the Use of Civilisation & Heritage*

Addresses the **moral dimensions** of employing civilisational and heritage narratives. It questions whose pasts are remembered or excluded, the politics of representation, and the ethical responsibilities embedded in heritage scholarship and practice.

2. Conference Presentation Themes (shown in green in all following tables)

Based on the content of the conference presentations, they may be mapped onto the following categories.

2.1. *Strategic Narrative*

Contributors examined how coherent storylines are crafted through heritage and civilisational discourse to advance political, ideological, or cultural aims. These narratives are performative—constructed by states, institutions, or communities to legitimise action, mobilise publics, and assert authority. Strategic narratives align values, shape identity, and project influence in domestic and international contexts.

2.2. *Temporal Manipulation*

Presenters explored how temporal frameworks—past, present, and future—are restructured in heritage and civilisation discourse. Techniques such as anachronism, periodisation, nostalgia, and foresighting were used to recast historical trajectories in service of contemporary agendas or anticipated futures. This theme draws implicitly on the work of Koselleck (e.g. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, 2004), and foregrounds the politics of time as a mechanism for legitimising or obfuscating narratives.

2.3. *Border-Making*

Some presentations engaged with the role of heritage and civilisational categories in shaping and contesting borders—geographical, cultural, symbolic, or epistemic. They traced how heritage claims anchor territorialisation, how civilisational identities define inclusion and exclusion, and how space becomes meaningful through cultural reference. Bordering processes were situated within broader logics of nationalism, geopolitics, and historical claims.

2.4. *Geopolitics & Multipolarity*

This theme explored how heritage and civilisational discourse is mobilised in the contestation of global order,

particularly in a context of a rising multipolarity and against the background of multiple modernities. Contributors examined how rising powers use heritage to challenge Western hegemony, reframe alliances, and construct alternative global imaginaries. Heritage here functions as a strategic asset in shaping geopolitical identities and spheres of influence.

2.5. *Memory & Ethical Silences*

This theme addressed the politics of absence, omission, and denial in heritage discourse. It raised questions about whose memories are foregrounded or suppressed, why such exclusions occur, and to what effect. Presentations reflected on issues of trauma, marginalisation, and historical injustice, and on the ethical responsibilities of heritage actors in confronting silencing mechanisms and dominant civilisational scripts.

2.6. *Scalar Shifts*

Presenters analysed how civilisational and heritage discourses shift across spatial scales—from the local and intimate to the national and global. This theme considered how meaning is rescaled, the power effects of scale, and how scalar framing mediates authority, legitimacy, and visibility. Scalarity was shown to intersect with governance structures, representational politics, and transnational cultural flows.

2.7. *Critical Translations (Rethinking Theory in Heritage and Civilisation)*

At a meta-theoretical level, this theme engaged with how conceptual frameworks in heritage and civilisation studies travel, adapt, or are reinterpreted across disciplinary and geopolitical contexts. Presenters foregrounded epistemological pluralism, the politics of translation, and the transformation of dominant paradigms in light of emerging knowledge formations and regional perspectives.

I have mapped the presentation themes against the seven proposed themes from our book proposal and arranged the results in **Table 1** below.

[DTC] = Direct Thematic Correspondence.

This indicates that the contributor explicitly and substantively engaged with the theme in question. It typically reflects:

- Clear conceptual alignment with the theme
- Sustained (not incidental) engagement throughout the contribution
- A theme that forms part of the central argument or theoretical framework

[P,I,S-A] = Partial, Interpretive, or Supplementary Alignment.

This designation refers to a more indirect or contextual connection to the theme. It includes cases of:

- Partial relevance, where a theme is touched upon but not developed
- Interpretive alignment, where the theme can be reasonably inferred or framed by the editors, even if not named explicitly
- Supplementary appearance, where a theme is present in supporting material or examples but does not structure the main argument

These gradations are not evaluative but are meant to support editorial clarity. They also highlight areas where light reorientation could strengthen coherence across the volume.

What follows is a thematic mapping exercise intended to assist in organising the volume and identifying opportunities for deeper conceptual alignment. It is meant to serve as a working guide, open to refinement and discussion.

July 2025

Proposal Theme		Heritage & Civilisational Analysis	Heritage & Intergov. Orgs	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries	Heritage & Geopolitics	Heritage & Scale	Ethical Considerations
Presentation Theme	Strategic Narrative	[DTC]: Steele, Prozorova, Mozaffari [P,I,S-A]: Hanscam, Baillie	[P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Paludan-Müller	[P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Hanscam	[DTC]: Boyle, Mozaffari, Prozorova	[DTC]: Boyle, Steele, Mozaffari	[P,I,S-A]: Smith, Mozaffari, Nørskov	[DTC]: Mozaffari [P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Hanscam, Boyle, Steele
	Temporal Manipulation	[DTC]: Boyle, Steele, Smith [P,I,S-A]: Hanscam, Paludan-Müller	[P,I,S-A]: Vainikka, Paludan-Müller, Hanscam	nil	nil	[P,I,S-A]: Vainikka, Paludan-Müller, Hanscam	nil	[P,I,S-A]: Hanscam, Boyle, Steele
	Border-Making	[P,I,S-A]: Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	[DTC]: Boyle, Baillie, Prozorova, Mozaffari, Smith	[P,I,S-A]: Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	[DTC]: Boyle, Baillie, Prozorova, Mozaffari, Smith	[DTC]: Boyle, Baillie, Prozorova, Mozaffari	nil	[P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Nørskov
	Geopolitics & Multipolarity	[P,I,S-A]: Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	[P,I,S-A]: Paludan-Müller, Mozaffari	[DTC]: Mozaffari, Boyle, Prozorova [P,I,S-A]: Smith	[DTC]: Steele, Prozorova, Mozaffari, Boyle, Smith	[DTC]: Steele, Prozorova, Mozaffari, Boyle, Smith	nil	[DTC]: Mozaffari [P,I,S-A]: Prozorova, Steele
	Memory & Ethical Silences	[P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova	[P,I,S-A]: Nørskov (possibly)	[DTC]: Baillie, Prozorova, Hanscam [P,I,S-A]: Boyle, Steele, Nørskov	[P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Mozaffari	[P,I,S-A]: Boyle, Steele, Nørskov	nil	[DTC]: Paludan-Müller, Mozaffari [P,I,S-A]: Baillie, Prozorova, Hanscam, Boyle, Steele, Nørskov
	Scalar Shifts	[P,I,S-A]: Boyle, Steele, Prozorova	[DTC]: Smith, Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	nil	nil	[P,I,S-A]: Boyle, Steele, Prozorova	[DTC]: Smith, Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	[DTC]: Mozaffari, Paludan-Müller [P,I,S-A]: Steele
	Critical Translations	[DTC]: Rundell, Mozaffari, Smith	[P,I,S-A]: Hanscam, Boyle, Paludan-Müller	nil	nil	nil	nil	[DTC]: Paludan-Müller, Mozaffari [P,I,S-A]: Hanscam

Table 1. Intersections between Proposal and Presentation themes. The ‘nil’ cells represent a potential thematic gap (see the next table), and the ochre cells may represent interesting overlaps we can use as editors to heighten the book’s cohesion.

Identifying Thematic Gaps in the Volume

Drawing on **Table 1**, we can identify several **critical gaps**—points where a conceptually significant connection between a presentation theme and a proposal theme appears absent (marked as “nil”). These are summarised in **Table 2**.

Such absences should not be viewed as shortcomings, but rather as opportunities to strengthen the **coherence**, **coverage**, and **intellectual connectivity** of the volume. Many of the themes involved are foundational to cross-field dialogue, and addressing them—whether explicitly or through subtle reframing—can significantly enhance the book’s analytical depth.

Filling these gaps helps to:

- Avoid conceptual blind spots
- Promote a more balanced treatment of heritage–civilisation relations
- Increase integration across contributions

We suggest two general approaches for addressing these absences:

- **Editorially**, by drawing attention to them in the Introduction, or weaving them through chapter transitions and comparative commentary
- **Collaboratively**, by inviting contributors to consider incorporating these dimensions more explicitly into their chapters, where appropriate

In this context, an “*editorial opportunity*” refers to actions we, as editors, can take to thematically reinforce the volume—whether through framing, synthesis, or structural alignment.

Presentation Theme	Book Proposal Theme	Critical Gap	Editorial Opportunity	Justification
Temporal Manipulation	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis	Yes		Memory is manipulated through temporal framings; necessary for coherence.
	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries	Yes		Time-based heritage claims underpin territorial legitimization.
Temporal Manipulation	Heritage & Scale		Yes	Time perception affects scale awareness; relevant but not foundational.
Scalar Shifts	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis	Yes		Scalar perspectives structure memory politics and identity framing.
	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries	Yes		Scalar logic supports how territorial boundaries are narrativized.
Critical Translations	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis	Yes		Translation shapes civilisational memory and identity across contexts.
	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries	Yes		Translations impact the expression and interpretation of territorial heritage.
Critical Translations	Heritage & Geopolitics		Yes	Geopolitical narratives depend on interlingual framing; important but not structurally essential.
	Heritage & Scale		Yes	Conceptual overlap possible, but not central to volume’s thesis.

Table 2. Thematic gaps in the volume

Pairing of Authors to Address Critical Gaps and Foster Cross-Field Dialogues

In many cases, **minor editorial suggestions** or **modest reorientation by contributors** could help align individual chapters more closely with the overarching thematic structure of the volume. To support this, we propose a set of **primary** (ideal) and **secondary** (complementary) pairings of contributors.

These pairings are intended to encourage:

- Thematic reinforcement
- Conceptual bridging
- Cross-field reading and mutual feedback

The suggestions are based on shared concerns, contrasting approaches, or the potential to address identified thematic gaps. They are offered as invitational rather than prescriptive, and *we genuinely encourage contributors to consider them* as part of an open, collegial exchange that will enhance the coherence of the volume as a whole.

The editorial notes below are framed as collegial prompts intended to support refinement and conceptual dialogue. They reflect opportunities for deepening alignment with the volume’s thematic architecture, but remain entirely optional.

Contributor(s) in Cross-Field Dialogue	Presentation Theme	Proposal Theme
Hanscam, Vainikka	Temporal Manipulation	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis
Boyle	Temporal Manipulation	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries
Smith, Paludan-Müller	Scalar Shifts	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis
Paludan-Müller, Nørskov	Scalar Shifts	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries
Rundell, Paludan-Müller	Critical Translations	Identity, Memory & Civ. Analysis
Rundell	Critical Translations	Heritage & Territorial Boundaries

Table 4. Primary author pairings: addressing thematic gaps through targeted dialogue (mutual feedback).

Contributor(s) in Cross-Field Dialogue	Justification	Gaps Supported
Boyle & Baillie	Boyle’s strategic-civilisational narratives complemented by Baillie’s ethical-memory focus	Temporal Manipulation ↔ Ethics
Steele & Paludan-Müller	Steele’s temporal theorisation intersects with Paludan-Müller’s ethical-scalar concerns, inviting richer dialogue across time and governance	Geopolitics ↔ Heritage & Scale
Nørskov & Hanscam	Both explore memory through different lenses—archaeological vs. political	Memory & Ethical Silences ↔ Identity
Vainikka & Prozorova	Vainikka’s scalar-temporal design complements Prozorova’s geopolitical-cultural narratives of strategic heritage	Temporal Manipulation ↔ Civilisational Analysis
Rundell & Baillie	Rundell’s theory could find concrete ethical-political resonance via Baillie	Critical Translations ↔ Ethical Considerations

Table 5. Secondary author pairings: opportunities for conceptual synergy and cross-thematic dialogue (mutual feedback).