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The *Kalevala* and Finland's Atlantean Past

Willie Angervo's Esoteric History

DOI: https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.136053

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Nationalistic interpretations of history were prevalent in Finland until the Second World War. A unifying past for Finns was sought in antiquity, often influenced by interpretations of the *Kalevala*, regarded as the Finnish national epic. The *Kalevala* also inspired writers in the Theosophical Society, who promoted various alternative views of humanity's past. In this article, I analyse the late 1930s writings of Wilho "Willie" Angervo (1875–1938), a medical colonel and author who had a central role in the Finnish Order of the Star in the East and the Theosophical Society in his time. Inspired by the *Kalevala*, Angervo traced the origins of the Finns to the lost continent of Atlantis and aimed to revitalize the pre-Christian "faith of the forefathers". Dialogical narrative analysis is employed to explore how Angervo portrayed the Finns' past, combining Theosophical and nationalistic ideas to construct an ideal Finnishness. I argue that Angervo utilized the Theosophical timeline and concepts to construct a spiritually oriented national narrative for the Finns that would surpass any political quarrels and challenge both the Church and more military-oriented nationalism.

Introduction

Late 1930s Europe was simmering. Vehement nationalism contended with internationalist communism. Both challenged traditional religious denominations as well as new religious movements. Pre-Christian myths were reawakened for political purposes and militarism was on the rise. The optimism of the 1920s was beginning to feel unfounded. The cosmopolitan writer Olavi Paavolainen (1938, 10) described the atmosphere in 1938: "Everywhere in the world is boiling the lava of revolution, and scorched illusions are falling like a rain of ash over the era."[1] In this milieu, Wilho "Willie" Angervo (1875–1938), a medical colonel and prominent Finnish Theosophist, wrote in favour of patriotism but criticized war-mongering. Instead, he envisioned an "esoteric patriotism", a true essence of patriotism that lay in cultivating spirituality and acted as a precondition for the development of nations (Angervo 1937a, 4–10).

All types of nationalism need a grand historical narrative explaining what makes a certain nation stand out from the rest. Angervo's unconventional historical views drew a connection from speculative lost continents and magic-wielding heroes to the modern state of Finland. In this article, I will explore how Angervo portrayed the Finns' past, combining Theosophical and nationalistic ideas to construct an ideal Finnishness. The focus is on two of Angervo's late texts, where he expresses

1 All translations from Finnish to English are by the author of this article.

his ideas about the Finnish past: the short booklet *Isänmaa* (1937a, "Fatherland") and the posthumously published book *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* (1939, "The Faith of Our Kalevalaic Forefathers"). Historical representations within these works are analysed using dialogical narrative analysis.

There is no previous research on Angervo, so a brief overview of his life and writings is in order first. It is followed by an introduction to the theoretical and methodological approach used in the analysis, after which I discuss the nationalistic and Theosophical historical ideas in the context of pre-Second World War Finland. After that, I outline the main points of Angervo's historical narratives and proceed to analyse how they make use of a Theosophical framework in a national context to delineate Finnishness.

Willie Angervo as a Theosophist

Angervo was born as Wilho Kukkonen in 1875 in the North Savo parish of Rautalampi. He went to school in Jyväskylä and later moved to Helsinki to study medicine at the Imperial Alexander University. During his student years, he travelled abroad many times, visiting Berlin, London and Rome. After graduating as a Licentiate of Medicine in 1902 he worked in a county hospital and later in the Finnish army (*Ylioppilasmatrikkeli 1853–99*; *Mikkelin Sanomat* 1938). In 1909, Angervo joined the Theosophical Society of Finland and was actively involved in it until the end of his life, almost three decades later. His wife from 1903, the singer Anna Maria von Kothen, also became a long-time member (*Teosofi* 1935), as did their sons Juho and Kyösti. Angervo founded a lodge "Otava I" in his home town of Mikkeli in 1909. The lodge building was located next to the Angervo home and served as a stage for meetings and events along with accommodation for travelling Theosophists (Pohjanmaa 1937, 132; Kallinen 1914, 32).

In the early 1910s, a new paradigm started to divide Theosophists internationally when Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater started promoting the idea of the upcoming World Teacher, who many believed would appear in the body of the young Jiddu Krishnamurti. A separate organization, the Order of the Star in the East (OSE), was founded to prepare the world for this. This resulted, for example, in Rudolf Steiner's followers breaking away from the Theosophical Society. The schism reached Finland as well. Angervo sided with the messianic project and became the national representative of the OSE in 1913 (Wessinger 2013, 38; McDermott 2016, 264–65; Mela 1956, 215–18). He also contributed to editing *Idän tähti* magazine, focused on promoting the order's message, and translated Krishnamurti's speeches, which were published as books.

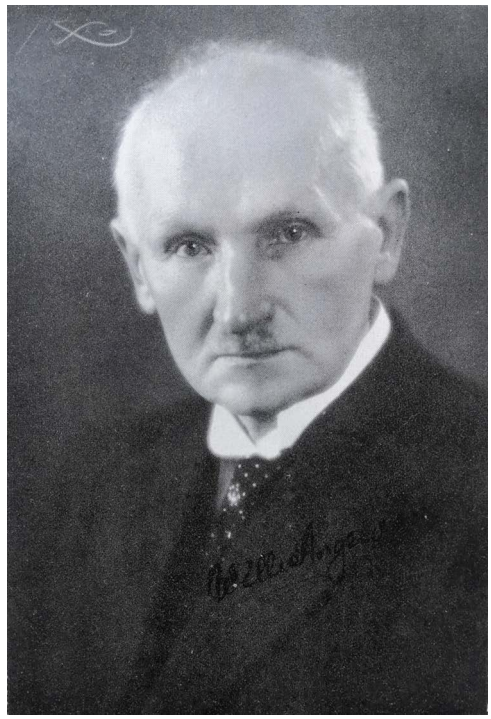
The First World War marked another divide in the Theosophical Society when its leaders took the side of the Allies against Germany, despite their principle of universal brotherhood. This led its leading Finnish figure, Pekka Ervast, to distance himself from the organization. Finland's secession from Russia and the Civil War that followed in 1918 also affected the Theosophical circles. Ervast eventually parted with the society and founded his own: Ruusu-risti ("Rose Cross") (Ervast 1920, 338–43). The World War also halted Theosophical publishing activities and the translation of H. P. Blavatsky's magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine* into Finnish (Uranus 1937, 234).

After Ervast had refused to continue as the General Secretary of the Finnish section of the Theosophical Society in 1917, Angervo took the position for one year (Pohjanmaa 1937, 65–66). Angervo

was actively involved in the OSE through the 1920s but published only one book during the decade: a medical guidebook, funded by the Ministry of Defence (1927). Krishnamurti himself disbanded the OSE in 1929 and distanced himself from the role of World Teacher (Wessinger 2013, 42). Angervo seems to have kept his high appreciation of Krishnamurti even after that, as evidenced in his later writings (Angervo 1934a, 3).

In 1930, Angervo moved from Mikkeli to Helsinki, where he founded the still functioning lodge called Blavatsky (*Mikkelin Sanomat* 1938). It has been suggested that Angervo got the initiative to establish the new lodge, focusing on the study of "original theosophy", from the Austrian healer and occultist Valentin Zeileis (Carpelan 2012, 25). Angervo served as editor-in-chief of *Teosofi* magazine from 1933 to 1937. He also continued the translation of *The Secret Doctrine* after nearly two decades (Pohjanmaa 1937, 115). Angervo's translations were first published in *Teosofi* from 1935 and later in printed volumes. He continued giving lectures regardless of health problems until the end of his life in 1938 at the age of 63. In obituaries, Angervo's contemporaries described him as a popular speaker who had a wide circle of friends and great proficiency in languages (*Mikkelin Sanomat* 1938; Pohjanmaa 1938).

During his lifetime Angervo published at least eleven books and four shorter booklets. His writings were also frequently published in the Theosophical magazines *Tietäjä*, *Idän tähti* and *Teosofi*. His extensive literary works include collections of speeches (1914, 1915a, 1936), a play (1916a), a pro-vegetarian pamphlet (1916b), a book and a leaflet promoting the OSE (1915b, 1916c), a leaflet about the development and future mission of the Theosophical Society (1917), poetry (1919,



Author photo of Willie Angervo from his book *Elämän salaisuus* (1936).

1934b), the medical guidebook mentioned above (1927), a treatise about Jesus (1937b), and an allegorical novel (1937c). *Isänmaa* (1937a) and *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* (1939), discussed more thoroughly in this article, are meant for different kinds of audiences and have different focuses, but touch on the same subject of the history of the Finns. Together they paint a more comprehensive picture of Angervo's historical views than they would separately.

Isänmaa is a twenty-page booklet that deals with patriotism from the perspective of Theosophy. Its frame story tells of the writer's journey abroad, where he meets other nationalities, reads *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom* (Jinarajadasa 1919) and ponders questions of homeland, nationlessness, the Finnish past and its future. *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* is a book-length treatise on the *Kalevala*, a highly influential nineteenth-century

poetic work, explored from a metaphysical and historical point of view. Both texts were published by Mystica, a publishing house run by Fredrik Heliö, Angervo's fellow member from the Blavatsky Lodge of Helsinki (Carpelan 2012, 25–26). Angervo claims that the ancestors of the Finns lived in Atlantis, used forces unknown to modern men and practised a religion derived from primordial wisdom religion that was suppressed by the Church but revitalized with the national awakening. He also criticizes historical research for not giving enough attention to old mythological sources and Western time calculations for being too limited (Angervo 1939, 221–22, 95–96). As we shall see, Angervo was not alone in his efforts to unveil history's deeper significance.

Methodological and theoretical considerations

Angervo's larger historical narrative is analysed here using dialogical narrative analysis (DNA). I build upon the approaches of Arthur W. Frank (2012) and Hanna Meretoja (2021), both drawing on the ideas of the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. The dialogical approach acknowledges narratives to be in constant dialogue with the surrounding world and other narratives. Stories are not born *ex nihilo* but utilize available conscious and unconscious narrative resources. They also anticipate some kind of response and have consequences for both their author and the recipients.

According to Frank (2012, 35), "DNA's interest is in hearing how multiple voices find expression within any single voice". This can be done by asking a series of questions about narrative resources, circulation, affiliation, identity and "what's at stake" (pp. 44–46). Employing Frank's ideas I have analysed the research materials in light of the following question: 1. What available narrative resources are recognizable in Angervo's texts? These include Theosophical ideas, well-known characters, national myths and common tropes. 2. How are his narratives "framed to anticipate certain readers" (p. 45)? 3. Who are the "us" of Angervo's narratives and who are demarcated as the others of the story? 4. How do Angervo's texts define the essence and future possibilities of Finnish people? 5. How does he defend his chosen position(s) with his historical claims?

My reading of Angervo's historical interpretations is also informed by Meretoja's theories on counter-narratives and master narratives. According to Meretoja (2021, 37–38), master narratives are generally implicit and found underlying public discourses. They are models on which many materialized narrative artefacts, such as historical books, are based. I will give some examples of these in the next section. Counter-narratives, on the other hand, are more often explicit and found in material form. They resist dominant master narratives by challenging their *narrative assumptions*. For example, Angervo (1939, 64) challenges the Judaeo-Christian narrative's assumption of Abrahamic religions as heralds of monotheism by claiming that "in all the religions of ancient peoples, the concept of deity was absolutely monotheistic". Of primary interest here is Angervo's use of nationalistic and Theosophical narratives, the former being hegemonic during the period of interest while the latter, despite its relative popularity, was more of a countercultural (e.g. Faxneld 2012, 206–07). I will discuss these next.

National narratives

History writing in Europe had been strongly linked to nation-building since the birth of modern nationalism in the late eighteenth century. Finland officially became

an independent state only in 1917, but the sense of nationhood gradually increased after the area became an autonomous part of the Russian Empire in 1809 after centuries under Swedish rule. Two important influential Finnish nationalists of the nineteenth century were Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806–81) and Elias Lönnrot (1802–84). Snellman was a philosopher, writer and statesman who strove to improve the status of the Finnish language at a time when only Swedish, a minority language, was used in official contexts. Lönnrot was a physician, a reformer of the Finnish language and a folklore collector. He is best known for the *Kalevala*, which he created by combining and reorganizing material from folk poems into an epic form (see Wilson 1976, 36–40).

The *Kalevala* consists of fifty poems that include different episodes loosely connected by a story about rivalry between the people of Kalevala and their antagonists in Pohjola ("The North"). The epic starts with the creation of the world and ends with the departure of the old sage Väinämöinen. It includes heroic deeds, magic and tragic deaths. One of the *Kalevala*'s best-known plotlines is about a fortune-bringing machine called the Sampo. In the story, the folk of Kalevala steal the Sampo from Pohjola, which leads to a chase and a battle that results in the Sampo's destruction.

It should be noted that the larger unifying narrative of the *Kalevala* was constructed by Lönnrot and is not found in the original poems he used. While considered a Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*'s original poems were largely collected from Aunus, Viena Karelia and Ingria, which were not part of the Grand Duchy of Finland. Lönnrot also "nationalized" the source poems by, for example, altering the language and dialect (Anttonen 2014, 77).

A major motivation behind the making of the *Kalevala* was a need to find the Finnish past. After its release, the *Kalevala* played a big part in sparking interest in Finnish history and defining how pre-Christian times were imagined (Wilson 1976, 41–53). It was interpreted historically by Lönnrot himself (1849, iv–v) and countless researchers and dilettantes thereafter. The epic's main settings were located in many actual places and times, reflecting national identity discussions of the time (Siikala 2008, 324).

The first Finnish-language history of Finland was published in 1839–40 by Lönnrot's student J. F. Cajan. J. V. Snellman (1847) welcomed the publication of the book but was critical of Cajan's pejorative depiction of pre-Christian tradition. Snellman's defence of pagan beliefs later inspired Angervo to write *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko*, as he relates in the foreword (1939, 5). A much more influential representation of Finnish history than Cajan's turned out to be Yrjö Koskinen's 1881 *Suomen kansan historia* ("History of Finnish People"). Following nineteenth-century German romanticism, Koskinen presented Finns as a unified folk who had wandered from the same primordial home and fought against foreign conquerors. The nationalistic emphasis remained prevalent in historiography until the Second World War (Ahonen 2017, 13, 20–27).

Historical narratives in Finland shared many elements with others. According to the scholar of nationalism Anthony D. Smith (1999, 62–70), all nationalist movements have myths of ethnic descent that explain communities' 1. temporal origins, 2. location and migration, 3. ancestry, 4. heroic age, 5. decline, and 6. regeneration. In addition to the *Kalevala*, other works of epic poetry such as *Ossian*, the *Edda* and the *Nibelungenlied* were also used by nationalist historians to reconstruct heroic golden ages. Derek Fewster (2008, 191) agrees

that Smith's model applies to the central constructions of Finnish antiquity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While the stories of the *Kalevala* represented the golden age, the era between the Swedish Crusades and the nineteenth century was seen as the age of decline. A case in point here is Jalmari Jaakkola, an influential historian in the nationalistic historiographical tradition of the so-called First Republic of Finland (1918–45), who in his *Suomen varhaishistoria* ("Protohistory of Finland") wrote that "Kalevala poetry" is "a living example of the high human standard at the end of our ancient independence" (Erkkilä 2015, 361, 369; Jaakkola 1935, 475).

Although the semi-historical Swedish Crusades and conquests that led to the Christianization of Finland in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were seen as foreign oppression, Christianity itself was not generally presented in negative terms. Instead, the idea of "national Catholicism"[2] was part of the pre-Second World War discourses of ancient Finnishness (Fewster 2008, 194–195; 2006, 344) and nationalistic histories were typically written from an explicitly Christian point of view. Still, the pre-Christian times had an important role in the narratives as they aimed to show the antiquity of Finnishness.

The seeming contradiction could be solved by interpreting the pagan beliefs as prefiguring the Christian revelation. This strategy was used by Zacharias Topelius (1818–98) in his highly influential *Maamme kirja* ("The Book of Our Land", Swedish original *Boken om vårt land*). Topelius was a prolific author and university professor whose *Maamme kirja* and its dozens of editions were widely used as geography and history textbook in Finnish schools until the 1940s. Although it describes the ways of pagan Finns and summarizes the *Kalevala*, much of the book's argumentation is explicitly based on the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Mikkola 2004).

Topelius (1876, 263–64) also interprets the *Kalevala*'s last poem as telling of the Virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus, although neither is mentioned in the original text. Similarly, Koskinen (1881, 22–23) represents the old sky god Ukko as a kind of local version of the Christian God before the Christianization: "More purely than most nations during their paganism, the members of the Finnic peoples have clarified for themselves the concept of a single supreme god who created the world and still rules it." Koskinen's and Topelius's books can be seen as exemplary narrative artefacts, or material manifestations, of the dominant implicit narrative of Christian Finland, still common in Angervo's time.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, more unconventional historical theories also made use of the *Kalevala*. These include the writings of Rudolf Dillström and Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, which received mainstream attention, as was typical of the time. Although they went further in their claims than contemporary academic research, for example by writing about ancient Finnish kings and the *Kalevala*'s connections to Egypt, they participated in nationalistic history culture, where the idea of Finland's "ancient independence" was common (Koskinen 2015; Välimäki and Ristilä 2021, 409–11; Pitkälä 2010, 102–03). Theosophical interpretations of the Kalevalaic past were also part of this larger conversation about the Finnish past. What distinguished them was the priority they gave to the spiritual meanings conveyed by history.

2 Sweden, along with the area of Finland within it, broke from the Catholic Church during the sixteenth-century Reformation.

Theosophical historiography meets the *Kalevala*

A unique view of the past forms a large part of central Theosophical works such as Blavatsky's two-volume *The Secret Doctrine*. The book presents a complex cosmogony with "the progressive development of everything, world as well as atoms" (Blavatsky 1888a, 43). All levels of this development go through seven phases, with our Earth currently at its fourth and most material "Round" (Blavatsky 1888b, 47). Humanity, it is suggested, has developed through so-called root races and their sub-races, the first of which were sexless ethereal beings. The first humans as "physical sexual creatures" did not appear until the third race of Lemurians, who lived in the now-lost continent of Lemuria (p. 680). According to Blavatsky, only a few giant statues and ruins have survived from that era. Atlantis, the dwelling place of the fourth root race, on the other hand, would have been seen as the "first historical land, were the traditions of the ancients to receive more attention than they have hitherto" (pp. 263, 8.) Following the Theosophical timeline, we are now living in the epoch of the fifth root race, of the Aryans.[3]

Lemuria was originally adopted from the nineteenth-century scientific hypothesis that tried to explain how lemurs had spread to different continents. Blavatsky certainly was not the first to write about Atlantis, either, but many later Theosophists and occultists interested in Atlantis and Lemuria were influenced by ideas presented in *The Secret Doctrine*. Speculations about the lost continents were further explored by William Scott-Elliot and Leadbeater, among others, who made use of clairvoyant "investigations" of the past (Hammer 2004, 104–08; Scott-Elliot 1925, viii; Besant and Leadbeater 1913, 1).

The *Kalevala* was also seen as a source of ancient and metaphysical truths among esotericists. Blavatsky was inspired by John Martin Crawford's English translation, published in 1888. In the same year, *Lucifer*, a magazine she edited, featured a text about the *Kalevala* and the Finns. There it is stated that the *Kalevala* is at least 3000 years old and "[t]he last proof of the universality in time and space of that grand system of philosophy, called by its disciples the Archaic Wisdom Religion, or the Secret Doctrine" (Blavatsky 1888c, 149). The *Kalevala* is also quoted in the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine* (Blavatsky 1888b, 14, 26), again as an expression of single wisdom religion. These notions of the epic's antiquity and hidden universal wisdom proved to be important to later writers as well. Rudolf Steiner was also familiar with the *Kalevala* and discussed it in a lecture when visiting Helsinki in 1912 (Carlson 2008, 422).

The first Finnish writer to deal with esoteric interpretations of the *Kalevala* was Herman Hellner, an important figure of the early Finnish Theosophical movement (see Ahlbäck 1995). In 1904, Swedish Theosophical Society's magazine *Teosofisk Tidskrift* published his lecture "Kalevala ett teosofiskt diktvärk" ("Kalevala a theosophical work of poetry"), which dealt with similarities between the epic and Theosophical ideas (Hellner 1904). It was followed by Martti Humu's self-published work *Kalevalan sisäinen perintö* ("The Inner Heritage of the *Kalevala*") in 1909. The author behind Humu's pseudonym was the writer and translator Maria Ramstedt, who had previously published a series of articles about ancient Finnish religion (Harmainen 2013). She may have been the first to make the connection between the *Kalevala* and

3 On the development of the Theosophical concept of the Aryan race see Lubelsky 2013.

Atlantis. Humu traced "ancient Finns" and the *Kalevala* in its oral form to the seventh sub-race of the Atlantean root race, which in Theosophical theories means Mongolians (Humu (1909) 2005, 9; Jinarajadasa 1922, 35–36). The view of Finns as Mongolians was common through the nineteenth century until the first decades of the twentieth century, and was also more or less supported by Blavatsky, who had written that despite their "mysterious" origin, the Finns are "evidently related to peoples now settled on the tablelands of Tibet and Central Asia" (Aro 1985; Blavatsky 1888c, 149).

Different views were also presented. Väinö Valvanne, a Theosophist and Angervo's associate in the OSE, wrote about similarities between Egyptian mythology and the *Kalevala* (Valvanne 1911, 69). At the same time, Wettenhovi-Aspa published similar theories about the connections between Finnish and Egyptian mythology in the newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet* and later in *Finlands Gyllene Bok* (1915). Ervast was sympathetic towards Wettenhovi-Aspa's theories and deduced that if true, they would mean that Finns descended not from Mongolians but from the same sub-race as Egyptians: the Akkadians (Ervast 1915, 497; Pitkälä 2010, 91–92). Angervo wrote in favour of Akkadian origins in the foreword of his *Kalevala*-inspired play *Kaukomieli* in 1916 and still in the 1930s (Angervo 1916a, 9; 1934c; 1937a, 14). However, in *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* Angervo seems to have changed his mind about this theory and writes that it is more likely that "Kalevalaic people" operated in the early days of the proto-Aryan race (Angervo 1939, 30). This shift was part of a larger trend among Finnish Theosophists (Harmainen 2020, 190).

Pekka Ervast was also greatly influenced by the *Kalevala*. He continued the work of the recently deceased Ramstedt in *Kalevalan avain* ("The Key to the *Kalevala*") in 1916. Angervo's *Kaukomieli* (1916a) came out at the same time. Ervast thought these two works complemented each other: Angervo's play as an explanation of the inner meaning of the story of Lemminkäinen and his own as a psychological and philosophical occult interpretation of the whole of the *Kalevala* (Ervast 1917). Both included some historical speculations, but not to the extent of Angervo's later writings.

Angervo's historical narrative

Angervo's historical narratives in *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* and *Isänmaa* can be roughly divided into four different periods: 1. the creation and early stages of humanity; 2. the end times of Atlantis; 3. the thousand-year battle under the pressure of Christianity; 4. the re-awakening of national religion in the 1800s. Events between these periods are implied only in passing. Next, I will describe the main points of Angervo's historical narrative. Regarding the *Kalevala*, it should be noted that these historical views are only one side of Angervo's interpretation and that he devotes more pages to its metaphysical reading.

Angervo presents the *Kalevala*'s creation myth as "perhaps the most complete fragment of the faith of our forefathers" and consistent with other religions (Angervo 1939, 39). In the *Kalevala* story, Ilmatar, the spirit of air, descends to the sea and becomes pregnant from the air and water, after which a pochard lays six golden and one iron egg on her knee. The eggs break and the world is formed from the pieces. Ilmatar then gives birth to the wise hero Väinämöinen, one of the epic's main characters. Angervo interprets Ilmatar's descent as the condensing of spirit-matter to lower levels. Seven pochard eggs represent different cycles, with the iron egg symbolizing

the material era of Kali Yuga (pp. 44–50). Väinämöinen represents both the collective mankind and "demiurge", a creative deity from which it develops (p. 125).

According to Angervo, the treeless land where Väinömöinen rises from the sea at the end of the *Kalevala*'s first poem is probably the lost continent of Lemuria. This early home of humanity is then described as evolving alongside its inhabitants (Angervo 1939, 53–59). Eventually Väinmöinen is interpreted in a new role as a "high human leader" or Manu. Angervo envisions the early stage of the "Kalevalaic race" living in harmony with nature and its forces or "daemons". Here he defends the seemingly superstitious beliefs in the spirits of nature that are in many ways present in the *Kalevala*: "Let's call it paganism – if desired – but in any case their presentation is based on a sounder philosophical foundation than any half-scientific or human sophistry based on churchly nit-picking." The second poem's giant oak represents the "paradisiacal tree of the knowledge of good and evil of the Finnish race", the cutting of which symbolizes preventing excessive materialism over a long period of time (pp. 66–73).

Angervo dates the succeeding events to the age of Atlantis. He locates Pohjola, the home of the *Kalevala*'s antagonists, in northern Atlantis. In *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* they represent the fading Atlantean race, who have fallen into selfishness and pleasure-seeking. These "sons of darkness" also practise black magic. Kalevala, the home of the epic's heroes, represents the next step in evolution: an early Aryan race. They live in the southern part of Atlantis, practise white magic and respect the laws of nature (Angervo 1939, 74, 129, 223). The previously published *Isänmaa* had a reverse role for the Finns in this era. There Angervo writes:

> Brighter than ever before, the past of Finnish people glinted before my mind's eye. I saw the immense period of prosperity of the Akkadian root race – in their plateaus split by coves of the wide sea. I saw how, with great respect, they cherished their old Atlantean cultural heritage – although the proto-Aryans around them, with their high cultural achievements, did what they could to overshadow the archaic beauty of their heritage. (Angervo 1937a, 14)

However, in both versions, Finnish culture is presented as derived from remote antiquity and in conflict with another group of people. In *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko*, Angervo claims that in addition to the *Kalevala*, memories from the times of Atlantis have survived in other myths and holy books, such as the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. Angervo bases many of his arguments on reading the *Kalevala* side by side with them. The most authoritative of these is the *Book of Dzyan*, which he considers to be the oldest (Angervo 1939, 97, 31).

The last poem of the *Kalevala*, widely seen as an allegory for the arrival of Christianity and abandonment of heathenry, is also located in ancient times. In the poem, a chaste young woman called Marjatta becomes pregnant from eating a lingonberry and gives birth to a miraculous son, who is christened as king of Karelia. Angervo sees a resemblance to ancient temple priestesses in Marjatta's character. He suggests that the story essentially tells of the time when regular human leaders replaced the godly dynasties, comparable to those said to have ruled in Egypt (Angervo 1939, 271–77).

The events after the theft of the Sampo in the *Kalevala* are interpreted by Angervo

as symbolizing the moving of the new race from the old continent (Angervo 1939, 230–31). After this and the departure of Väinämöinen, there is a long temporal gap in the analysed texts. Chronologically, what is narrated next is the spread of Christianity in historical times, which is presented solely in a negative light: "Nation after nation was forcibly coerced to the church's confession of inconsistencies." In Finland, this meant replacing the ancestral monist faith, based on the ancient Wisdom religion, with dualism in a "thousand-year battle" (pp. 279–83). What followed was "the darkest night of my people": slavery under the rule of foreign nations, an abandonment of native religion and adoption of foreign languages and ways (Angervo 1937a, 15).

Instead of succumbing to despair, Angervo saw a "dawn breaking", starting with the nineteenth-century Finnish nationalist project. Through first-hand experience of tradition, found in the *Kalevala*, Finns can "raise their eyes toward higher spiritual values that they currently had" and unite "our unbrotherly people" (Angervo 1937a, 19–20). In future, this national religion should form the basis for Finland and could secure its place among other independent nations (Angervo 1939, 16–17).

A Theosophical gaze into a national past

Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko doesn't directly mention any Theosophical sources but it is clear that Angervo's historical interpretations of the *Kalevala* lean heavily on Theosophical ideas. This was also noted in the contemporary reviews of the book (Partanen 1939a, 1939b). Angervo locates most of the *Kalevala*'s events on the continent of Atlantis, in the same way as Humu and Ervast (1916, 158–59), which is in line with Blavatskian interpretations of the age of Atlantis as the first "historical era", judging from old mythologies. Angervo also refers to the *Book of Dzyan*. This allegedly ancient text forms the basis of *The Secret Doctrine* but is only known through Blavatsky's quotations.

Instead of Theosophical writers, Angervo vaguely refers to "occult science" (Fin. *salatiede*). There are also some similarities between Blavatsky's comments on the *Kalevala* and Angervo's interpretations. Both note the correspondence between the pochard bird of the *Kalevala*'s creation story and the Hindu or "Brahmanic" Kalahamsa bird (Blavatsky 1888c, 151; Angervo 1939, 49). Thus authority is given to old mythologies rather than modern writings. Of course, this was common in Theosophical writing in general, illustrated by Blavatsky herself (1888a, vii) by explaining that the contents of her work were "to be found scattered throughout thousands of volumes embodying the scriptures of the great Asiatic and early European religions". On the other hand, Angervo also refers to scientists by name many times, as, for example, when he talks about Lemuria (Angervo 1939, 54). This could be seen as a way of gaining legitimization but also an effort to reconcile science and religion, a common feature in modern occultism (see Pasi 2006, 1366).

If *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* introduces Theosophical ideas to the nationalist narrative, the focus of *Isänmaa* is on bringing nationalist ideas into Theosophy. The booklet is explicit in its references to Theosophical sources. It refers to *The Secret Doctrine* and *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom* and speaks directly to Finnish Theosophists, whom he explicitly encourages to unite the divided nation (Angervo 1937a, 8, 16–20). The well-known nineteenth-century nationalists, Snellman and Lönnrot, are called "ambassadors of Manu and Bodhisattva", and the survival of the

Finnish people through past struggles is explained by their not yet having developed "racial and national characteristics" to the fullest (pp. 14–15).

The Theosophical timeline, which makes use of calculations in Hindu texts, is used by Angervo to move the Finnish past to a distant prehistory among other developed civilizations. He gives several examples of advanced cultures in his interpretation of the *Kalevala*. One is the interpretation of the Saari ("Island") episodes of poems 11 and 29. Angervo (1939, 182) describes Saari as a highly civilized, legally and systematically organized society, nothing like the "circumstances of primitive folk". He also notes that tribes of Kalervo and Untamo in the Kullervo episode (poems 31–36) had advanced from wandering nomads to permanent settlements that lived off farming and livestock breeding. They were also able to use magic (pp. 248–49). In Angervo's view, the ancient advancement lay not so much in technological development as in the art of harnessing supernatural forces and use of clairvoyant abilities. He states that the present era can perhaps capture forces of nature mechanically but that doesn't mean that our historical era is the only one to express a high level of cultural advancement. For example, one of the *Kalevala*'s most famous stories, the war of the Sampo, is said to have been fought using supernatural powers (pp. 224–26).

A few stylistic features need to be considered here as well. Both *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* and *Isänmaa* include segments where Angervo shifts to a more poetic style and describes history visually. This could hint at a use of clairvoyant methods in the vein of Besant and Leadbeater (1913, 1), who wrote that clairvoyance could be used to study the past and that this latent power could be "developed by anyone who is able and willing to pay the price demanded for its forcing, ahead of the general evolution". Angervo himself (1939, 22) states that the conclusions of "disciplines" that try to reveal the past with clairvoyance are premature since they are "still in their infancy in the scientific sense". However, he also explains that "inner vision, intuition, is necessary to comprehend the *Kalevala*" and its "historical side" (p. 26). Angervo (p. 41) writes, for example, how "series of images flicker in consciousness" when discussing the *Kalevala*'s creation myth. In *Isänmaa* (1937a, 14–16), the whole depiction of the Finnish past is depicted as "seen".

Wouter J. Hanegraaff (2017) has suggested that both first- and second-generation Theosophists relied on a specific type of clairvoyance, based essentially on the use of active imagination while being fully conscious. This distinguishes the Theosophical clairvoyant method from the spiritualist one, also popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in which trance states were common. Hints of studying the past this way are already evident in Blavatsky's 1876 letter to her sister, quoted by Hanegraaff (p. 4): "Slowly century after century, image after image float[s] out of the distance and pass[es] before me as if in a magic panorama." This could be straight from Angervo's pen. The foreword of *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* includes a segment where Angervo describes the arrival of Christianity in Finland and the struggle to maintain Finnish lands and "national religion" seen with the mind's eye. There Angervo writes: "Past my eyes rolled images enlivened by pages of history. I saw the Swedish king, Eric the Holy, and bishop, Saint Henry, with their ships reaching the Finnish coast to bring supposedly only beatifying Christianity in the form of Rome's Catholic Church" (1939, 7). In addition to the possible resort to Theosophical methods, the section about

Christianization is also revealing in its reinterpretation of common nationalist narratives, which I will discuss next.

Reinterpreting the story of the Finns

Reliable sources about the so-called First Swedish Crusade in the 1150s are scarce. Nonetheless, some of its events, such as the baptism of the first Finns that Angervo (1939, 7–8) describes in his book, have been imagined many times in art and books (see Fewster 2006, 106–11, 140). Angervo uses these narrative resources but shifts his focus more to the Finns' response to the new Christian doctrine. He describes the Finns' suspicion of the Christian customs and the slow and forceful abandonment of the old ways, writing how "outwardly, out of necessity, one had to seemingly submit to the power of the church, but the truth of the forefathers remained beating in the most secret blood of the heart" (1939, 7–9). Here it is implied, contrary to common sentiment, that deep-down, Finns never really adopted the Christian faith. Angervo further explains that the remains of a suppressed ancient religion can be rediscovered in the *Kalevala* (p. 15).

The last chapter of *Kalevalaisten esiisiemme usko* includes a detailed comparison of Christianity and the original "faith of the forefathers". Angervo states that no sign of church dogmatism is to be found in "the Kalevalaic worldview" (1939, 279). In addition, many *Kalevala* scholars would be wrong to date the whole of the *Kalevala* to the Christian era on the basis of the story of Marjatta, since "there is no credible basis for that to be found in the literal story of the *Kalevala* and even less in the Kalevalaic spirit" (p. 264). Key elements of the old religion include fundamental oneness of everything instead of the dualism of good and evil, the divine origin of man rather than being created in God's image and human development through initiations (pp. 279–91). These principles are all found in Theosophical writings (e.g. Blavatsky 1888a, 14–17, 206–07).

While the Finnish religion, consistent with Theosophy, is depicted as originating from common universal wisdom, Angervo (1937a, 19) emphasizes its uniqueness and writes about "consanguinity" and "unique vibrational tuning". In his view, every race and nation has its special mission in the "Grand Scheme of Life" (p. 8). Discovering the Finnish past is important for Angervo since it is used by him to demonstrate the spiritual path the young nation should follow. He states this explicitly in his 1934 article, where he writes that it is time to "continue where our development ended in the olden days" (Angervo 1934c, 264). Although Angervo changed his mind about the racial origins of the Finns from Akkadians to Aryans, he maintained the underlying story of the people's struggle to keep their ancient heritage. In both versions, the connection between the prehistoric past and the present is used to promote the idea of the Finns as a distinctive people who are not dependent on their country's current dominant religion.

Angervo's interpretation of the *Kalevala*'s stories also paints a picture of an ideal for the Finns that is not centred around military valour, although armed defence of "home, land and national religion" is spoken of in an appreciative tone (Angervo 1939, 9). For example, the three herculean tasks attempted by Lemminkäinen, one of the *Kalevala*'s heroes, are interpreted as stages of "arhat initiation" (pp. 190–200). Arhat, originally a Buddhist concept denoting an enlightened being, is, according to Blavatsky (1888a, 206), the fourth out of seven grades of initiation. In Angervo's reading of the *Kalevala*, achieving it includes controlling sexual desires

and transcending one's personality. This contrasts with militarized and masculinized representations of the Finnish past that gained popularity during the interwar period, exemplified by Jaakkola (Fewster 2006, 320–30; Erkkilä 2015, 369–70). Angervo (1937a, 10) also explicitly states in *Isänmaa* that the power of the native land should be sought in the realms of spirituality, not in the destructive power of its military. In writing about the "myth of the heroic age" of early nationalism, Anthony D. Smith (1999, 66) argues that the heroes tend to demonstrate the qualities that were "felt to be so conspicuously lacking in the present generation", such as courage and wisdom. In Angervo's narrative, these virtues are often interpreted in a framework of spiritual development.

Certainly, patriotism or "esoteric patriotism" is essential in Angervo's historical views. In *Isänmaa* (1937a, 18–19) he promotes nationalistically inclined ideas of Theosophy among Theosophical circles, writing that he doesn't want to "criticize anyone for the lack of patriotism" but hopes that it doesn't lead away from the path that might have taken many lifetimes. This seems to be aimed at contemporary Theosophists who held more cosmopolitan views. In general, modern Western esoteric trends were applied and interpreted in different national contexts in various ways. For example, in German-speaking countries theories of Atlantis were merged with *völkisch* ideology, whereas in France esotericists promoted more universally oriented ideas. Many also saw, like Angervo, that their own country had a special role to fulfil for the benefit of mankind (Harvey 2003, 667–68; Davies 2007, 105; Trzcińska 2015, 179). Within the Theosophical context, there were ongoing tensions between different political aims, nationalism versus universal brotherhood and Eastern influences versus local traditions. In Finland, this was evident, for example, in varying reactions to the 1918 Civil War (e.g. Blumenthal 1919, 28–29).

Angervo's narrative is directed at people he considers Finns, who share a common "Old Testament", that is to say, the *Kalevala*, and common "blood" (Angervo 1937a, 16–20). In addition to the fact that Angervo wrote specifically in Finnish, he anchors his historical views not, for example, in archaeological records but in the epoch whose plot Finnish people at that point were more or less familiar with. Using well-known characters and plotlines evokes the imagination of the reader. Lively descriptions of the Christianization of Finland and people's struggles thereafter likewise allude to recognizable representations of history.

In *Isänmaa*, Angervo offers a kind of cautionary tale about a national history gone wrong in his interpretation of Jewish history. He writes about meeting an old rabbi "exiled from a certain superpower" and unable to return to his ancestral homeland in Palestine. Angervo then "could only imagine what horrible pictures went past his [the rabbi's] mind's eye". Angervo envisions how Jews were divided into parties, had power struggles between rich and poor, forgot their law and eventually lost their sense of nationhood. Only after this does he describe their forced exile and diaspora. He suggests this wouldn't have happened if they had kept their "patriotic duty" (Angervo 1937a, 11–13).

Antisemitic stereotypes and accusations were part of the media landscape of Finland in the 1920s and 1930s, although not as common as in many other Western countries because of the small size of the local Jewish population (Kuparinen 2008, 277–85). Angervo's narrative echoes a common understanding of Jews as stateless wanderers. In *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme*

usko he also writes that the Jewish Old Testament is not as valid a mythical source as the *Kalevala* and many others since it is too young and its mythological material is copied from older sources (Angervo 1939, 20–21). This could be seen as criticizing the foundations of Christianity à la Blavatsky and possibly also adopting her ideas of the Semites as the "people perhaps least spiritual of the human family" presented in *Isis Unveiled* (Lubelsky 2013, 342–44; Blavatsky 1877, 434). It is also noteworthy that all of the hardships of the Jews, described by Angervo, appear to have parallels in the early-twentieth-century Finnish conflicts, which seems to imply that the fate of the Jews could befall Finns as well.

Conclusions

According to Arthur W. Frank (2012, 50), "Storytelling is a dialogue of imaginations". In this article, I have explored how the Finnish past was imagined using narrative resources from the domains of Theosophy and nationalism. Angervo makes use of characters, well-known in Finland, from the *Kalevala*, popular historical representations of medieval Christianization and nineteenth-century national awakening. In many respects, his narrative follows the mainstream conception of the common roots of modern Finns and, more broadly, the nationalist model of ethnic descent that was typical in the 1930s. While many of his contemporaries placed "Kalevalaic" antiquity in the Iron Age and Middle Ages, Angervo found traces of Finnishness on long-lost continents much further in the past. There he relied on ideas drawn from modern Western esotericism, particularly Theosophy, and used many elements familiar to those acquainted with that kind of literature. This includes depictions of Atlantis, occult forces and ancient advancement. At the same time, it seems that Angervo consciously framed his narratives differently for different audiences, avoiding direct references to Theosophical sources in *Kalevalaisten esi-isiemme usko* and appealing to them in *Isänmaa*.

By placing Finnish ancestry in prehistorical antiquity Angervo envisioned a unifying core of true Finnishness that was viable for the future and deeper than any contemporary internal conflicts. An essential part of it was the "faith of the forefathers", which was represented as older than Christianity and deriving from an original wisdom religion, thus undermining the Church's position in Finland. In addition to the *Kalevala*, Angervo sought legitimacy for his claims from science, "occult science", various mythologies and alternative methodologies, particularly the intuitive interpretation of sources, and possibly clairvoyance. This enabled him to challenge narratives of straightforward progress or Christian salvation. Instead, Angervo's history is a story of evolution and devolution of a spiritual kind, inextricably linked to race and its "unique vibrational tuning". True Finnishness was highlighted by contrasting it with the fallen race of Atlanteans, foreign oppressors and nationless Jews.

For Angervo, the Finnish past was not a historical curiosity but a meaningful account that situated the people he considered his kind within a larger whole. It seems that he understood Theosophy as a kind of counter-cultural approach in the turbulent times of the late 1930s, writing how the task of the Theosophist "is not to go with the flow, not to be a weeder in the strips ploughed by various internationals and fighting 'mein Kampfs' – not to be a weeder at all, but a sower" (Angervo 1937a, 17). Placed in the grand narrative of history, his ideas served not only as tools of critique but also as a model for the future spiritual development of the Finns. ■

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