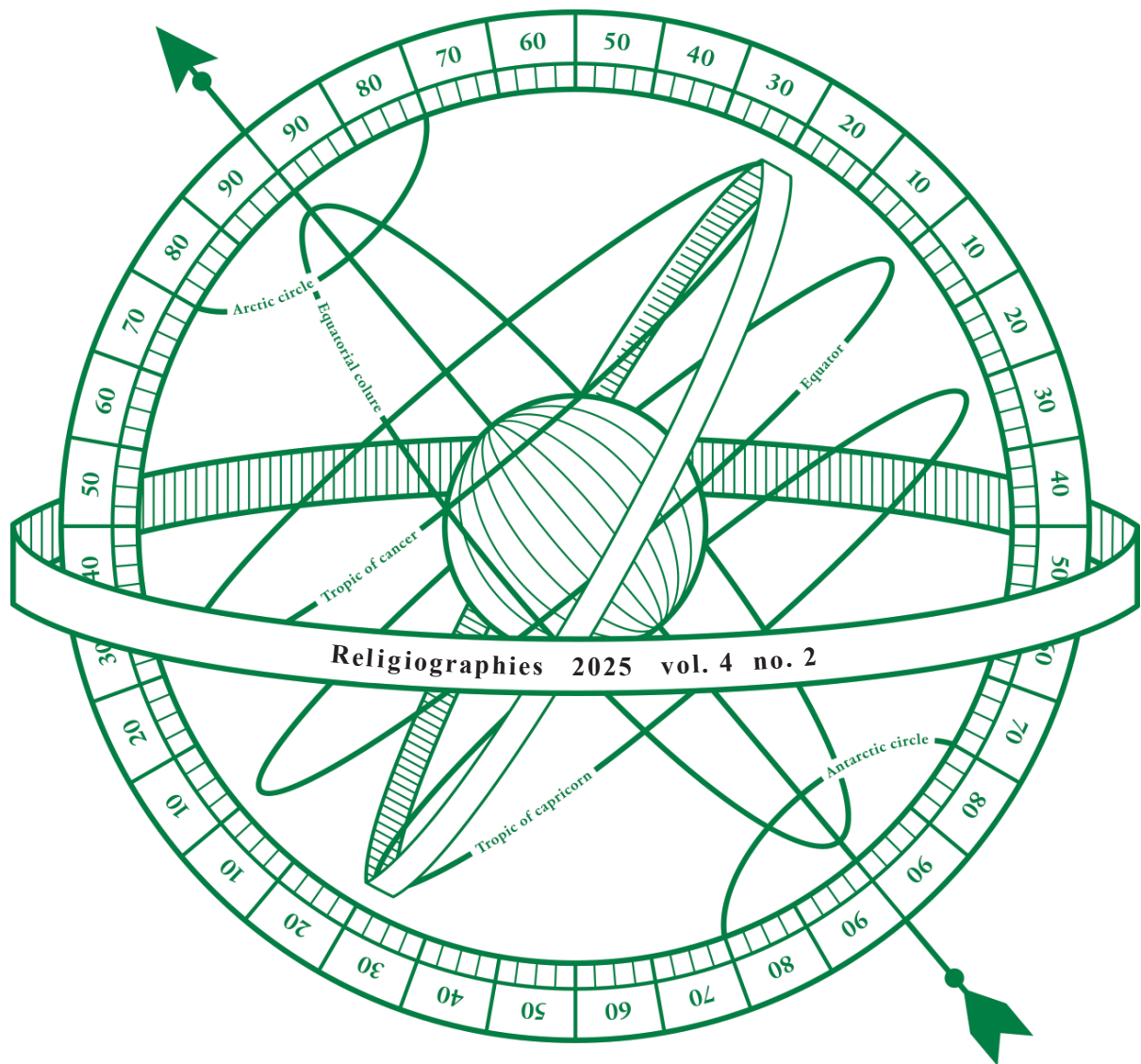


# *Religiographies*



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# A Finnish Fin-de-Siècle Synthesis of Idealized North and South

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the esoteric ideas of the Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (1870–1946). Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that most languages had their origins in Finnish. He also claimed that the ancient Egyptian language and culture were of Finnish origin. Wettenhovi-Aspa studied painting and sculpture in Paris in the 1890s, where Swedenborg's ideas, theosophical ideas on the unity of divinities and mythological texts, and the interest in ancient Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Oriental cultures converged. As for the culture of the Nordic countries, it was seen as inspirational by both local artists and, for example, Swedish and Finnish artists as well. Wettenhovi-Aspa was also influenced by contemporary writers such as August Strindberg and Joséphin Péladan. From the 1910s onwards, Wettenhovi-Aspa combined these idealized notions of Northern and Southern cultures in his literary works concerning language and history. He emphasized the nature of the Finnish language and The Kalevala as the source of a secret wisdom. This article examines the origins of Wettenhovi-Aspa's occult synthesis of Northern and Southern ideals and the various ways he represented those ideals in his writings from the 1890s to the 1930s.



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According to the Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (né Sigurd Asp, later Wetterhoff-Asp, 1870–1946), Finns had a great past: the Western civilization in its entirety was of *Fenno-Celtic* or *Fenno-Egyptian* origin. He claimed that the civilization of ancient Egypt had been created by ancestors of the contemporary Finnish people. For Wettenhovi-Aspa, *The Kalevala*, the national epic of the Finns, was a holy book and a source of secret wisdom, and the pure and uncorrupted Finnish language was the closest surviving relative of the original biblical languages of mankind.

In Wettenhovi-Aspa's thought, the occultural and national romanticist idealization of Nordic cultures and an occultural interest in ancient Egypt converged. He sought to demonstrate the hidden connection between the cultures of north and south, both of which were idealized among the fin-de-siècle artists. Wettenhovi-Aspa's multifarious activities and controversial views often provoked reactions ranging from amusement and confusion to embarrassment and offence. These reactions seem to have prevailed in later interpretations: in Finnish newspapers and periodicals of the post-war decades, Wettenhovi-Aspa was marginalized as a quaint curiosity of the past or demonized as a representative of extreme nationalism and irrational pseudohistory.<sup>1</sup>

However, when studying Wettenhovi-Aspa's agency in contemporary sources, an ambivalent reality is revealed, in which the protagonist himself often played many roles at the same time. For instance, his appearance in *Fyren*, the fin-de-siècle Finnish-Swedish magazine known for its humor and satire, was characteristic, as he could be present both as a caricaturist and an object of parody or satire in the same issue. This article is an attempt at mapping out and studying his esoteric ideas and how they epitomize an occultural transfer between Nordic and Southern cultures.

Wettenhovi-Aspa also had contemporary sympathizers. In November 1915, Pekka Ervast (1875–1934), a leading Finnish Theosophist and editor-in-chief of the Theosophical monthly journal *Tietäjä*, described a lecture he had heard to the readers of his journal:

I recently listened to a lecturer who was extremely fascinating. Mr. Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, formerly known as a painter, later as the initiator of a canal proposal and most recently the author of the book *Finlands Gyllene Bok*,<sup>2</sup> gave a presentation in Swedish at the New Student House in Helsinki on Egyptian hieroglyphs and of their relation to the Finnish language, making evident, as in his book, that he, besides his other activities throughout his life, and at least in recent years exclusively, has conducted extensive research in the field of linguistics. His appearance as a speaker was calm, serious and self-aware. "Here I stand. I have done a lot of research and thinking. I know what I want. You can laugh at me, for you cannot see what I see. But I know what I believe." His voice echoed resonant and bright. He did not rant, did not get excited, did not try to "orate." With scientific dryness he presented his views. But these views! The hall was only half full of the audience—educated and academic audience—but this presentation was after all a true landmark event in our cultural life. Now think about it: at a

1

Even the writers of the only biography about Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa were not free of this tradition of prejudice, although some effort towards a broader perspective is evident. See Harry Halén and Tauno Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello: Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan elämä ja teot* (Helsinki: Otava, 1984). In academic research Wettenhovi-Aspa was rarely even mentioned in the twentieth century, despite his agency in many areas of life and the potential of the large corpus of his writings on various contemporary subjects as historical sources. In recent years his existence as an artist has been recognized again, as some of his works have been displayed, e.g., in several exhibitions of the Finnish National Gallery.

2

"The Golden Book of Finland." All translations are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.



A portrait of Wettenhovi-Aspa probably taken in France in the late 1890s, with his recent medals from various French art exhibitions and competitions. From the cover of the exhibition catalogue *Expositiones Artis Finlandensis Liberae. Katalog jämte några ord om konst och konstnärer* (Den fria utställningen, Helsingfors 1900).

time of crisis when learned people consider it almost a shame to believe in anything great, idealistic and sublime, at a time when civilized manners require that a master or doctor with a few years of superficial learning sneers at “the dreamer,” who devotes his life and his soul to a cause—at such a time a man will appear, who wholeheartedly commits himself to a research of his own, who intuitively foresees a marvellous final solution, and who, with all the force of his sincerity, believes and trusts to the vision of his spirit! Isn’t such a man admirable in his originality? Does he not deserve our respect? Isn’t his appearance A landmark case?<sup>3</sup>

That same year, Wettenhovi-Aspa had published his work *Finlands gyllene bok* (“The Golden Book of Finland”),<sup>4</sup> in which Wettenhovi-Aspa presented ideas he had been developing for some time about the Finnish language as the original language among the world’s languages. For Wettenhovi-Aspa, who was a native Swedish speaker and wrote his manuscript mostly in Swedish, it was important to also publish the work in Finnish. “The Golden Book of Finland” was published as a translation, *Suomen kultainen kirja* by J. Raekallio only a few weeks after the original work.<sup>5</sup>



Artists Eero Nelimarkka, Ali Munsterhjelm, Sigurd Wettenhovi, Aspa, and Santeri Salokivi in Turku, Finland in 1912. Finnish Heritage Agency.

Wettenhovi-Aspa’s views were similar to those of the Theosophists, and they showed interest in his views in the 1910s. In 1916–1917 Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote several articles for the Theosophically oriented weekly magazine *Sunnuntai*, edited by prominent Finnish writers Eino Leino (1878–1926) and L. Onerva (1882–1972). He also published a series of articles in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* entitled “Kalevalan teos-oppi—teosofia” in 1916. However, Wettenhovi-Aspa’s views differed from those of the Theosophists in their originality, such that a closer connection to the Theosophical movement proved to be im-

3

“Kuuntelin äskettäin erinomaisen mieltäkiinnittävää luennoitsijaa. Herra Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, ennen tunnettu taidemaalarina, sittemmin kana-vaehdotuksen laatijana ja nyt viimeiseksi kirjan ‘Finlands Gyllene Bok’ (Suomen kultainen kirja) tekijänä, piti ruotsiksi esitelmän uudella ylioppilastalolla Helsingissä Egyptin hieroglyfeistä ja niiden suhteesta suomenkieleen, osottaen tällä, kuten kirjallaankin, että hän muiden harrastuksiensa ohessa pitkin elämänsä ja ainakin viime vuosina yksinomaan on tehnyt laajoja tutkimuksia kielitieteen alalla. Hänen esiintymisensä puhujana oli tyyntä, vakavaa ja itsetietoista. ‘Tässä minä seison. Olen paljon tutkinut ja ajatellut. Tiedän mitä tahdon. Te voitte minulle nauraa, sillä te ette näe, mitä minä näen. Mutta minä tiedän mitä minä uskon.’ Hänen äänensä kaikui sointuvana ja selvänä. Hän ei intoillut, ei lämmennyt, ei yrittänytään ‘puhua.’ Tieteellisen kuivasti hän toi asioitaan esille, mutta nämä asiat! Sali ei ollut kuin puolillaan yleisöä—koulunkäynnistä ja akadeemista yleisöä—mutta tällöinen esitelmä oli sittenkin merkkitapaus kulttuurielämässämme. Ajatelkaa nyt: meikäläisellä murrosajalla, jolloin oppineet ihmiset pitävät miltei häpeänä uskoa mihinkään suureen, ihanteelliseen ja ylevään, jolloin sivistys vaatii, että muutaman vuoden ulkoluvuilla vernissoitu maisteri tai tohtori ivahymyllä katselee ‘haaveilijaa,’ joka omistaa elämänsä ja henkensä jollekin aatteelle—sellaisella ajalla ilmestyy mies, joka sielunsa koko hehkulla antautuu tutkimuksiin omin päin, joka henkensä intuisiolla aavistaa ihmeellistä loppuratkaisua ja joka vilpittömyytensä koko voimalla uskaa ja luottaa henkensä näkemykseen! Sanokaa, eikö semmoinen mies ole omaperäisyydessään ihailtava, eikö hän ansaitse meidän kunnioitustamme? Eikö hänen esiintymisensä ole merkkitapaus?” [Pekka Ervast], “Toimittajalta” [anonymous editorial], *Tietäjä: Teosofinen aikakauskirja* 12 (1915): 495–96.

4

Among other things, Wettenhovi-Aspa participated with his book in the ongoing language strife in Finland. The previous year, Swedish-speaking students of the University of Helsinki, who were enthusiastic about Pan-Germanist nationalistic ideas, had published a book called *Svenskt i Finland* (“Swedish/Swedishness in Finland”) emphasizing the importance of Swedish civilization in Finland. Wettenhovi-Aspa responded to many of the views presented in *Svenskt i Finland* with his ideas about the Finnish language. Svenska studentsen partidelegation, eds. *Svenskt i Finland: Ställning och strävanden* (Helsingfors: Söderström & Co, 1914). Pekka Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit. Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan (1870–1946) näkemykset suomen kielestä ja suomalaisten historiasta” (master’s thesis, University of Turku, 2010), 60–66, <http://www.utupub.fi/handle/10024/92657>. See also Matti Klinge, *Vihan veljistä valtiotalousmaailman: Yhteiskunnallisia ja kansallisia näkemyksiä 1910- ja 1920-luvuilta* (Porvoo: WSOY, 1972), 53–54, 107–8.

5

[Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok I: Svar på “Svenskt i Finland”* (Helsingfors: n.p., 1915); [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultain-*

possible. Esoteric movements and ideas were present at different stages of Wettenhovi-Aspa's life: in the 1890s he participated in Joséphin Péladan's *Salons de la Rose+Croix* in Paris; in the 1910s he related his research to Finnish Kalevala-centered Theosophy, and in the early 1920s he was one of the founders of the newly established Masonic Lodge in Finland.<sup>6</sup> However, he did not commit himself to any particular esoteric movement for a longer period of time, which was characteristic of many of his contemporaries.

I argue that Wettenhovi-Aspa was essentially a *seeker*.<sup>7</sup> In this article, the description of how Wettenhovi-Aspa's agency and participation in the various esoteric movements and currents is a description of occulture in the making. However, as a seeker Wettenhovi-Aspa was also a *bricoleur*, as defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss, a jack-of-all trades using whatever was at hand.<sup>8</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa's seeking of the truth, as well as his agency in general, were defined by unintentionality and chance. That said, wouldn't a certain lack of intention, and even an aversion to systematic thinking, in favor of intuition, characterize a *seeker* when we talk about occulture?

### Becoming an Artist

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa was born in Helsinki in 1870 as the third child of Georg Asp, Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at the University of Helsinki, and Mathilda Asp (née Wetterhoff<sup>9</sup>), a teacher of gymnastics and a social activist in the women's rights movement.<sup>10</sup> Sigurd initially started school in Helsinki. At different stages he went to a Swedish-speaking lyceum for two years, but was mostly taught by private teachers his parents had hired for him and his siblings. At the age of twelve, he was sent to boarding school in the northern Schleswig town of Christiansfeld.<sup>11</sup>

Christiansfeld, in present-day Denmark, a small town founded by the Moravian Church, belonged to Prussia at the time. The language of instruction at the international boarding school was German, and in addition to compulsory Latin, it was possible to study French, English, Danish, and Swedish. There is no exact information about Sigurd's language studies, but he later published texts in all those languages except Latin. The religious and pedagogical basis of the school was in the Moravian religion, but a significant number of pupils were of other Christian denominations as well as Judaism. Moravian pedagogy has been characterized as a combination of discipline and kindness, and despite its discipline, the school of Christiansfeld was freer than most Prussian or Danish boarding schools of the time.<sup>12</sup> Sigurd's literary and artistic interests were acknowledged, and he was allowed to produce a play he had written for the school stage, including set design and costumes.<sup>13</sup>

In 1886, sixteen-year-old Wettenhovi-Aspa<sup>14</sup> moved to Copenhagen, where he studied fine arts as an apprentice to court painters, and from 1886 to 1887 at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. From 1891 to 1892, Wettenhovi-Aspa studied at the *Kunstnernes frie studieskoler*, founded under artists Kristian Zahrtmann (1843–1917) and Peder Severin Krøyer (1851–1909) as an alternative to the conservative Royal Academy. Wettenhovi-Aspa made his debut as an artist at the

*en kirja I*, trans. J. Raekallio (Helsinki: n.p., 1915).

6

Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 106–7, 110; Reijo Ahtokari, "Salat ja valat: Vapaamuurarit suomalaisessa yhteiskunnassa ja julkisuudessa 1756–1996," *Bibliotheca historica* 54 (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000): 110, 117, 119, 343; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 293–95. See also Pekka Pitkälä, "Suomen kansan menneisyys ja pyramiidein pyhä taika: Muinaisten kulttuuriryhteyksien kansallisromanttinen etsijä Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa," in *Uuden etsijät: Salatielten ja okkultismin suomalaisen kulttuurihistoria 1880–1930*, ed. Maarit Leskelä-Kärki and Antti Harmainen (Helsinki: Teos, 2021), 65–91.

7

On the concepts of *seeker* and *occulture* see especially Nina Kokkinen, "Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art," *Aries* 13, no. 1 (2013): 7–36; Nina Kokkinen, "Artists as truth-seekers: Focusing on agency and seekership in the study of art and occulture," *Approaching Religion* 11, no. 1 (2021): 4–27. In the latter article Kokkinen writes about the prominent Finnish artist Akseli Gallén-Kallela as a seeker. Gallén-Kallela (1865–1931) was a friend of Wettenhovi-Aspa and a fellow artist of the same generation. They remained friends and sustained correspondence even after Wettenhovi-Aspa had moved on from visual art to his writings, which are the subject of this article.

8

Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 27–33.

9

Sigurd's mother was known as Mathilda Wetterhoff again from 1891 on, after the couple's divorce.

10

Georg Asp had studied and done research in Stockholm, Prague, Leipzig, and Jena, and his wife Mathilda had familiarized herself with the pedagogy of both Swedish and German gymnastics during these periods abroad. The couple became known especially as pioneers and developers of women's gymnastics, school gymnastics, and medical gymnastics in Finland. All of their children went abroad to study and pursue careers in sciences, arts, and business: Valborg or Vala Danning (née Asp, 1868–1953), also known by the pen name of Widar Wide, became a writer and lived in Denmark for many years after marrying composer Christian Danning. Bertel Asp (1873–1936) was an engineer who became rich from his inventions and moved to the Philippines. Thore Asp (1875–1947), a doctor in political science, banker, and businessman, moved to Argentina. Artist and art teacher Ragnar Asp (1877–1966) and Gudrun Asp (1882–1973), who became a doctor in ichthyology, ended up in Sweden with their mother Mathilda after the divorce of the parents in 1891 and lived the rest of their lives there. The success of his siblings probably inspired some of Sigurd's multifarious endeavors. Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 14–19; Leena Laine, "Asp, Mathilda (1840–1920)

Finnish Art Society's<sup>15</sup> autumn exhibition at the *Ateneum* in Helsinki, 1891. In the autumn of 1892, he received a grant from the Finnish Art Society for a study trip to Paris, where he stayed at first for three years. He returned to Finland with his French wife, Divina (née Pailard, 1861–1915)<sup>16</sup> in 1895, but lived in Paris for several long periods during the same decade, as well as later in his life.

The 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s were the most active periods of Wettenhovi-Aspa's artistic career: during that time, he participated in exhibitions in the Nordic countries, Germany, and France. At the same time, his caricatures and articles were published in newspapers and magazines in several European countries besides Finland.<sup>17</sup>

### New Acquaintances and the Origins of Wettenhovi-Aspa's Esoteric Interests

The years spent in Paris in the 1890s had a decisive impact on Wettenhovi-Aspa's later activities. In Paris, he studied sculpture with the Finnish sculptor Ville Vallgren (1855–1940) and wrote about the city's art exhibitions and theatre performances for the Helsinki newspapers *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Nya Pressen*. Wettenhovi-Aspa had already exhibited his works in the spring of 1893. He was invited to attend the Rose+Croix salon of Joséphin Péladan (1858–1918), an art critic and writer who combined Catholic mysticism and esoteric ideas and theorized about symbolistic art.<sup>18</sup> Vallgren had already participated in the Péladan Salon the previous year in its first exhibition, and was considered one of the key artists of Rose+Croix salons. Of the six Rose+Croix salons between 1892 and 1897, Vallgren participated in three and Wettenhovi-Aspa in two. In 1893, Wettenhovi-Aspa exhibited a relief of the maiden Aino of *The Kalevala*, which was original enough to be noted in newspaper criticism out of three hundred works. The tone of the criticisms was positive, although the work could be considered either immature or peculiar.<sup>19</sup> In the 1895 Rose+Croix salon, Wettenhovi-Aspa exhibited two funerary urns. His mentor Ville Vallgren had achieved success with urns in the salons of previous years, and one of them was purchased by the State of France. The symbolism and design of Wettenhovi-Aspa's urns were however very different; instead of Vallgren's grieving female figures, he presented more grotesque imagery of death with grim reapers, and the works were a departure from the tradition of classical vases or urns.<sup>20</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa described the Rose+Croix salon to *Hufvudstadsbladet* readers as a protest against realism and naturalism: "One wants to see fantasy, poetry, ideas; one wants to have bread instead of stones."<sup>21</sup> He characterized the salon as the most modern in Paris, as well as the only one with a declared program.<sup>22</sup> In Péladan's salon, certain subjects were prohibited—for example, history paintings, still lifes, landscape paintings, and depictions of contemporary life. By contrast, Catholic, mystical, mythological, or oriental religions, life studies, and allegories were preferred. Péladan's symbolist and occult theories, as well as imagination, fantasy, and the mythological atmosphere of his salon, appeared to have greatly influenced the young Wettenhovi-Aspa. Using the name Sâr Mérodack (King Marduk), Péladan's writings also included references to Egyptian, Babylonian

voimistelunopetuksen kouluttaja," *Suomen kansallisbiografia* (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000), <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/>; Lars-Folke Landgren, "Asp, Georg (1834–1901) anatomian professori, voimistelunopetuksen kehittäjä," *Suomen kansallisbiografia* (Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2002), <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/>; Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 4–5.

11

Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 21–25; Jens Holdt, "Kostskolerne i Christiansfeld," *Sønderjyske Aarbøger* 56, vol. 1 (1944): 113.

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Jens Holdt, "Elev-Fortegnelse fra Christiansfelds Kostskoler 1775–1891," *Sønderjyske Aarbøger* 55, vol. 1 (1943): 3–4, 17–18, 45–48; Holdt, "Kostskolerne i Christiansfeld," 95–96.

13

Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 24–25.

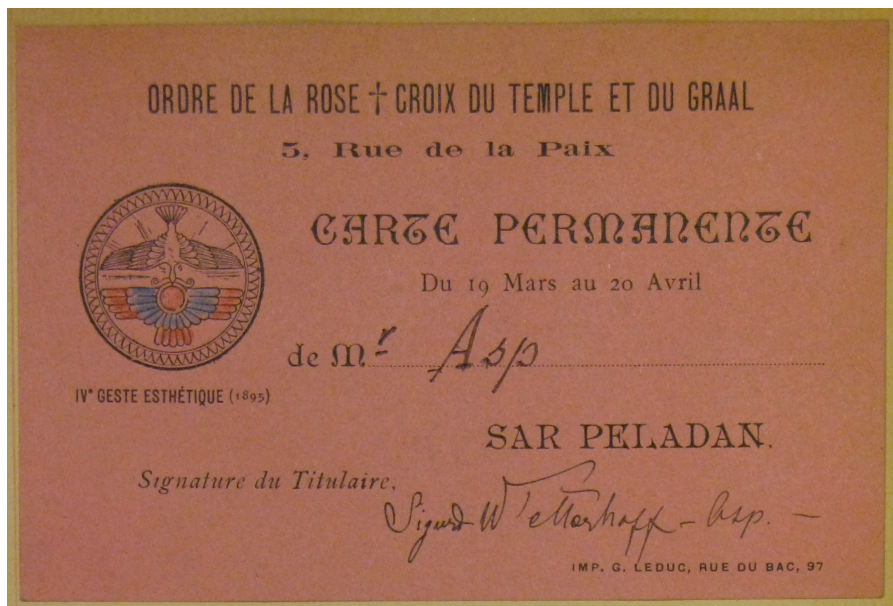


One of Wettenhovi-Aspa's funerary urns exhibited in the Salon de la Rose+Croix of 1895 as reproduced in 1912 in Öhquist, *Suomen taiteen historia*, p. 550. An original photograph of worse quality of the same urn can be found in Wettenhovi-Aspa's scrapbook, FNG, SWA.

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For the sake of consistency and clarity, I use the name Wettenhovi-Aspa, although in the early 1890s he still used the name Sigurd Asp, and from about 1890 to 1914 the name Wetterhoff-Asp, which he still used in some newspaper articles as late as the 1920s. The artist often appeared with only his last name, and friends called him by the nickname Asp or Aspa. His official name was Georg Sigurd Asp, but already in Denmark in 1890 he had added his mother's surname Wetterhoff to his name and signed his works "S. W.-Asp." In Parisian newspapers, Wetterhoff-Asp was already a more common name in the exhibition reviews of the spring of 1893. The name Sigurd Asp appeared in the 1890s, especially in Swedish-speaking contexts, until about 1895, after which the name form Wetterhoff-Asp seems to have become established. The Finnicized name Wettenhovi-Aspa was not made official until 26 September 1939, even though he

and other ancient cultures. Péladan was inspired by the Orient and considered himself a descendant of the ancient Chaldeans. Péladan's example probably also led Wettenhovi-Aspa to ancient cultures and the East.<sup>23</sup> There was interest in Eastern cultures throughout the 1800s, and in Paris in the 1890s, artists were influenced by the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Japan.<sup>24</sup>



Carte permanente of Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, issued by Sar Peladan, for the Salon de la Rose+Croix of 1895. Wettenhovi-Aspa's scrapbook, FNG, SWA.

In Paris, Wettenhovi-Aspa also became acquainted with the writer August Strindberg (1849–1912), who at the time sought to redefine the natural sciences by turning to monism, which emphasized the unity of all existing things; the Swedenborgian theory of correspondence; and neo-alchemy, which rejected modern science. Strindberg had adopted his monistic views especially from the ideas of the German naturalist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel.<sup>25</sup>

Strindberg was influenced by and found support for his ideas in occultist and alchemist circles in Paris. According to Strindberg, the chemical elements could change into each other because everything was essentially of the same origin. Later in the 1910s, Strindberg and Wettenhovi-Aspa discussed the origins of the world's languages.<sup>26</sup> In addition to Haeckel's monism, Strindberg was influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg, from whom he had adopted the idea of the common origin of languages and the notion of Hebrew as a seminal language. All matter was of common origin according to the monistic principle, and languages were also related and of the same origin.<sup>27</sup>

### Similarities: Wettenhovi-Aspa and the Enchantment of Etymology

The writings published by Wettenhovi-Aspa in the 1910s and 1930s were intrinsically linked to the atmosphere of his youth, where the demands of materialism and positivism had given way to open-minded spiritual exploration. An original feature of Wettenhovi-Aspa's works

had used the name since about 1915. At that time, he published his book *Finlands Gyllene Bok I* under the name Wettenhovi-Aspa, after having tried alternative Finnish translations. See Pekka Pitkälä, "Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute Concerning the Common Origins of the Languages of Mankind 1911–1912," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 29 (2020): 50, 78, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.89215>.

15

Finska Konstföreningen / Suomen Taideyhdistys, established in 1846.

16

Wettenhovi-Aspa taught his wife sculpture and the works of Divina Asp / Wetterhoff-Asp were shown from 1895 to 1901, e.g., in exhibitions of Finnish artists at the Ateneum, exhibitions of the Tampere Art Society, and "free exhibitions" organized by Wettenhovi-Aspa in Finland and the Nordic countries. According to Halén and Tukkinen, Divina Wetterhoff-Asp fell ill with "manic-depressive psychosis" in 1907 while her husband was abroad, and in 1908 she was admitted to Lapinlahti Psychiatric Hospital in Helsinki for treatment. The illness "worsened into schizophrenia" and Divina Wetterhoff-Asp died in Lapinlahti on August 15, 1915. On Divina Wetterhoff-Asp, see Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Jutelmia ja muistelmia 1890-luvun Parisista ja August Strindbergin Inferno-vuosista: Paljon mukana olleena Strindbergin ystäväinä kertonut Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa* (Helsinki: Kirja, 1927), 79–101, passim; Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 5, 8, IV; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 53–56, 62, 65–66, 74–75, 116, 121, 124, 142–47, 156–58, 160–61, 166–68.

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Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 20–33, 37, 65; Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," I–IX; Pitkälä, "Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute," 54–55.

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Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 5–8, V–VI; Pitkälä, "Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute," 54–55; Sasha Chaitow, *Son of Prometheus: The Life and Work of Joséphin Péladan* (Munich: Theion, 2022), 120–25.

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Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa's scrapbook, 1890s, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki, Archive Collections (FNG), Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa Archive, 1892–1942 (hereafter cited as FNG, SWA); Mary Slavkin, "Dynamics and Divisions at the Salons of The Rose-Croix: Statistics, Aesthetic Theories, Practices, and Subjects," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2014), 39–40, 56, 110, 293, 295, [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc\\_etds/385](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/385).

20

Wettenhovi-Aspa's scrapbook, FNG, SWA; see also Johannes Öhquist, *Suomen taiteen historia*, trans. Helmi Setälä (Helsinki: Kirja, 1912), 544–45, 550; Ylinka Barotto, "Ville Vallgren," in *Mystical Symbolism: The Salon de la Rose+Croix in Paris, 1892–1897*, ed. Vivien Greene (New York:

was the search for connections between Finnish and Egyptian cultures.

Wettenhovi-Aspa recalled later that he had started comparing Finnish and Egyptian languages in Paris when he visited the collections of Egyptian art in the Louvre and papyrus interpretations for a painting of Cleopatra.<sup>28</sup> In his “Golden Book of Finland,” he said he paid attention to several Egyptian words that reminded him of the Finnish language. For example, the word *Kemi* was an ancient word for Egypt and a Finnish place name. Egypt’s ancient Egyptian name was *Kemet*, meaning “black earth,” which referred to the fertile mud spread by the floods of the Nile.<sup>29</sup> The goddess of the earth, *Maat* (in Wettenhovi-Aspa *Má*) resembled the word *maa*, which is Finnish for earth; and the goddess of truth and wisdom, *Thoth* (in Wettenhovi-Aspa *Tott*), was similar to the word *totta*, which is Finnish for true. The words *puna* (“red”), *sini* (“blue”), and *meri* (“the sea”) correspond with each other exactly in modern Finnish and ancient Egyptian.



S. WETTERHOFF-ASP: CLEOPATRA.

Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, *Kleopatra, Egyptin viimeinen kuningatar* (“Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt”). 1894. Oil on canvas 200 × 300. *Katalog öfver den fria utställningen 1898 i Ateneum* (1898), plate [12].

Wettenhovi-Aspa’s own research was largely based on etymological evidence he conceived of himself, according to which, for example, the word meaning sphinx was of Finnish origin: *Harmakis* meant grey cat, which is *harmaa kissa* in Finnish. In this respect, Wettenhovi-Aspa’s studies resembled the Gothicist historiography of the Swedish Empire of the seventeenth century. Etymological evidence was typical for science in the 1600s, as was the presentation of one’s own language as a close relative to the languages of *The Bible*.<sup>30</sup>

It was not until the 1910s that Wettenhovi-Aspa began to express

Guggenheim, 2017), 100–101.

21

“Man vill se fantasi, poesi, idéer ; man vill ha bröd i stället för stenar,” Sigurd Asp [Wettenhovi-Aspa], “Rose+Croix Salonen i Paris,” *Hufvudstadsbladet*, April 20, 1893.

22

Asp, “Rose+Croix Salonen i Paris.”

23

Wettenhovi-Aspa’s scrapbook, FNG, SWA; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 5–8, V–VI; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” 54–55; Sasha Chaitow, “Return from Oblivion: Joséphin Péladan’s Literary Esotericism,” *The Occult in Modernist Art, Literature, and Cinema*, ed. Tessel M. Bauduin and Henrik Johnsson (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), 113–36; Chaitow, *Son of Prometheus*, 267–68, 310–21. Péladan had a distinct view on ancient Chaldeans and Egyptians, see Chaitow, *Son of Prometheus*, 269–76.

24

Salme Sarajas-Korte, *Suomen varhaissymbolismi ja sen lähteet: Tutkielma Suomen maalaustaiteesta 1891–1895* (Helsinki: Otava, 1966), 10, 43–45, 84–87.

25

A[xel] B[erndtson], “Bref från Paris. Strindberg, ‘Fadern’ á théâtre de l’oeuvre,” *Nya Pressen*, December 21, 1894; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” 55–57; See also Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Jutelmia ja muistelmia*.

26

See Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute.”

27

August Strindberg, *August Strindbergs Samlade Verk 35: Naturvetenskapliga skrifter I, Antibarbarus* (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet; Norstedts, 2010), 25–44 (*August Strindbergs Samlade Verk*, “Nationalupplagan” of Strindberg’s Collected Works, hereafter cited, e.g., as Strindberg, SV35); Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 31–34, 45–51; Henrik Johnsson, *Det oändliga sammanhanget: August Strindbergs ockulta vetenskap* (Stockholm: Malört, 2015), 219–20, 225–26; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” 60–63.

28

*Kleopatra, Egyptin viimeinen kuningatar* (“Cleopatra, the last queen of Egypt”), 1894, Oil on canvas 200 × 300. See *Katalog öfver den fria utställningen 1898 i Ateneum* (1898), plate [12], and the untitled four-page catalogue supplement with details and prices of the exhibited works; the work was sold in 1901 in Copenhagen and its current whereabouts are unknown. The painting of Cleopatra was completed in 1894 and in the same year he also made a painting on the theme of Osiris. Egyptian motifs figured occasionally in Wettenhovi-Aspa’s works of visual art. Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 28–29; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman*

these ideas in public. At the same time, Theosophists in Finland began to express national-romantic views more visibly than before. This was also when Strindberg began to publish his comparative studies on languages.

According to Strindberg, all modern languages could be traced back to Hebrew and all languages were related. By contrast, Wettenhovi-Aspa saw Hebrew as a decayed remnant of the original biblical language that had been destroyed in Babel. The Finns had survived Babel and the confusion of tongues and subsequent “Indo-Germanic transitions,”<sup>31</sup> which is why the original language of humanity was preserved in its purest form in Finland. Wettenhovi-Aspa placed the primordial home of humanity in Java, which, according to him, was humanity’s lost paradise. The theory was supported by contemporary findings in the 1910s of prehistoric human remains found in Java. The people of the *Maa-laji* (“earth species,” cf. the Malays) living in Java were forced to spread throughout the world due to overpopulation. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, the language of the original *Maa-laji* people was close to the current Finnish language. He found remnants of the original language in China, Japan, and India, and especially in Egypt. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, the Egyptian pyramids, or in Finnish *pyhät raamit*, “sacred frames” of the tombs of the pharaohs, imitated the volcanoes in Java. The *Maa-laji* people migrated through India and Egypt to Stone Age Europe and finally to Finland.

Based on contemporary testimonies and written sources, Wettenhovi-Aspa began to devote himself to the study of languages and history in 1909–1910. These studies may have initially been prompted by August Strindberg’s views on borrowed elements of the Finnish language in his book *En ny blå bok* (1908).<sup>32</sup> According to Strindberg, Finnish was “true Esperanto,” a language with almost nothing original.<sup>33</sup> Between 1911 and 1912, Strindberg corresponded actively with Wettenhovi-Aspa and two other Finns: Elias Lönnqvist (1875–1949), a railway station manager from Kuurila, and Lieutenant Theodor Finnilä (1868–1920) from Vaasa. The Finns tried to prove Strindberg wrong about his language studies and draw his attention to Finnish instead of Hebrew. From Strindberg’s point of view, the idea of the common origin of the world’s languages was essential: he considered Wettenhovi-Aspa, Lönnqvist, and Finnilä to be his followers, and explained his views to them in long letters with etymological word lists. The press also followed the debate between Strindberg and the Finns: Strindberg wrote about the correspondence in the Swedish newspaper *Afton-Tidningen* and Wettenhovi-Aspa replied in *Åbo Underrättelser*, a Swedish-language newspaper in Turku, Finland. Theodor Finnilä allowed a couple of letters sent by Strindberg to be published in the Helsinki newspaper *Hufvudstadsbladet*, and the satirical magazine *Fyren* also reported the discussion in detail, illustrated with caricatures. The debate ended due to Strindberg’s poor health and his death in the spring of 1912.<sup>34</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his etymologies and notions of history publicly for the first time in a series of newspaper articles published in *Hufvudstadsbladet* and in *Uusi Suometar* in 1911, and in his book *Finlands Gyllene Bok / Suomen kultainen kirja* (“The Golden Book of Finland”) published in 1915.<sup>35</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s he developed his ideas further and focused increasingly on Egypt. In the book *Kalevala*

*kello*, 121, 123–24, 206, 402.

29

On Egypt’s ancient Egyptian name Kemet, or “black earth,” see Rostislav Holthoer, *Muinaisen Egyptin kulttuuri* (Helsinki: Otava, 1994), 11. Wettenhovi-Aspa drew attention to the occurrence of the place name *Kemi* in connection with a river valley in Northern Finland as well: *Kemi* did not mean black earth at all, but he explained the name through the word *kemesk*, which means “mystical, semi-dark, mysterious twilight” in the Sámi language. According to him, the words “alchemy” and “chemistry” were of the same origin. Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, “Till frågan om “Värdsspråkens rötter.” Filologiska ströftåg och meditationer af Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp. III,” *Hufvudstadsbladet* August 19, 1911. In his book *Kalevala ja Egypti: Suomen kultainen kirja II* (“The Kalevala and Egypt: The Golden Book of Finland II,” 1935), Wettenhovi-Aspa had already rejected the explanation of Egyptian words with the help of the Sámi language and accepted the explanation of the word *Kemi* as “the land of black soil.” At the time, he explained that the word “alchemy” originated in Lower Kemi, i.e., Lower Egypt, where the art of embalming was highly developed. [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti: Suomen kultainen kirja II; Riemujuhlajulkaisu Kalevalan satavuotispäiväksi 28/II 1835–28/II 1935* (Helsinki: n.p., 1935), 24; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 29; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” 58–59.

30

Maurice Olender, “Europe, or how to escape Babel,” *History & Theory* 33, no. 4 (1994): 5–25; Jan Balbierz, “Strindberg bland hieroglyfer,” *Strindbergiana* 20 (2005): 28–35.

31

“[I]ndogermaniska förskjutningar,” Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp, “Till frågan om “Värdsspråkens rötter.” Filologiska ströftåg och meditationer af Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp. I,” *Hufvudstadsbladet*, July 9, 1911.

32

Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute.”

33

“Däremot synes ordförrådet i finskan vara hämtat ur alla världens språk, vilket gör finskan till ett sannskyldigt esperanto.” Strindberg, SV66 (*En ny blå bok*, 1908, 1999), 837. In Sweden the Esperanto movement was already strong in the 1890s, and spread from there to Finland, so that by 1907 the Finnish Esperantists already had their own association. Strindberg’s words were probably understood by most contemporaries both in Sweden and in Finland.

34

Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute.”

35

Wetterhoff-Asp, Sigurd, “Till frågan om

*ja Egypti: Suomen kultainen kirja II* (“The Kalevala and Egypt: The Golden Book of Finland II”), published in 1935 to celebrate the centenary of the publication of *The Kalevala*, he compared Finnish mythology with the Egyptian and Classical mythologies: Osiris was the supposed equivalent to Lemminkäinen in *The Kalevala*, and Kullervo was a reincarnated Egyptian sun god and, at the same time, Heracles of the Greeks and Hercules of the Romans.

### Relations with Theosophists and Different Views on *The Kalevala*

In terms of the politics of history Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa related his writings, not unlike the contemporary Fennomanian<sup>36</sup> historiography, to the goals of the idea of nationalism, in which emphasizing the great past of the nation was a central part of creating national consciousness. Wettenhovi-Aspa’s project was to create mythology for the Finnish nation. This goal was linked to the aspirations of Romanticism, for which the nationalism that emerged in his studies was essential. From his point of view, academic methods and academic approval were secondary issues; producing nationalistic research and nationalistic literature was also essential. The contemporary academic study of borrowed elements in the Finnish language and *The Kalevala* could not serve this national romantic goal.

In his work, Wettenhovi-Aspa referred to the German archaeologist and linguist Gustav Kossinna (1858–1931), according to whom Finns were the native people of Northern Europe and inhabited German territory 5,000 years ago. According to Kossinna, who was already heavily criticized in his own time, the distinct cultures identified based on archaeological finds were produced by groups of people who differed from each other both in terms of language and race.<sup>37</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa also referred to the Viennese professor Heinrich Winkler (1848–1930), according to whom Finnish and Japanese were from the same Uralic-Altai language group.<sup>38</sup> The origins of the Finnish people and the classification of the Finns among human races, as they were understood in contemporary science, were a subject of scientific debate and speculation during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>39</sup> From this speculative debate Wettenhovi-Aspa picked whom he thought to be the most suitable scholars of his time as authorities to refer to in his own writings.

For Wettenhovi-Aspa, Finnish was the seminal language, and as such it also had an aspect of holiness. The language from which all other languages descended could explain the true meanings of words from other languages, and could thus shed light on the history of mankind. Wettenhovi-Aspa studied the Finnish language, its hidden wisdom, and Finnish folklore from this point of view in the same spirit as the Theosophists of his time. The aspiration to see connections to ancient Egypt and other ancient cultures in the poems of *The Kalevala* was also common to Wettenhovi-Aspa and several Finnish Theosophists.

In “The Golden Book of Finland,” and in the preceding articles in *Hufvudstadsbladet* and *Uusi Suometar*, Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his view that the Finnish language and Finnish folklore had remained

“Världsspråkens rötter.” Filologiska ströftåg och meditationer af Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asp,” I–IV, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, July 9, 1911, July 31, 1911, August 19, 1911, October 7, 1911; Vedenhovilinnan Aspa-Haapets [Wettenhovi-Aspa], “Kysymykseen ‘Maailmankielien juurista’: Filologisista partio-kulkuja ja aprikoitsemisia,” *Uusi Suometar*, November 5, 1911; S. W. Aspa-Haapets, “Kysymykseen ‘Maailmankielien juurista,’ II,” *Uusi Suometar*, December 10, 1911; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*.

36

Fennomania was a Finnish nationalist movement that started in the first decades of the nineteenth century, demanding official recognition for the Finnish language and culture. See more, e.g., Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” 74.

37

About Kossinna see, e.g., Inkeri Koskinen, *Villi Suomen historia: Välimeren Väinämöisestä Äijäkupittaan pyramideihin* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2015), 184–85; Aira Kemiläinen, *Suomalaiset, outo Pohjolan kansa: Rotuteoriat ja kansallinen identiteetti*, *Historiallisia tutkimuksia* 177 (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura, 1993), 221–25; Aira Kemiläinen, *Finns in the Shadow of the “Aryans”: Race Theories and Racism*, *Studia Historica* 59 (Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1998), 172–75.

38

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, 89–97; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 254–55; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 69.

39

See Kemiläinen, *Finns in the Shadow of the “Aryans”*; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 57–58, 68–70.

intact “in the Finnish forests.” The Migration Period, and Western civilization, which Wettenhovi-Aspa saw as decadent, had not spoiled the original language and original wisdom.<sup>40</sup> Views emphasizing the purity and originality of Nordic cultures appeared among symbolists and Theosophists in the 1890s in Paris, where Wettenhovi-Aspa began his artistic career. Finland’s National Romanticist art was born in the same environment and atmosphere. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), one of the founders of the Theosophical movement, considered *The Kalevala* to be a sacred book and pointed out its connections to Asian myths. *The Kalevala* was an adequate source of spiritual knowledge for the Theosophical movement, which emphasized equality of divinities. Both European Theosophists and Finnish National Romanticist artists saw a new renaissance of the human spirit incubating in pristine Scandinavia and Finland.<sup>41</sup> The ideas of the epoch developed in interaction with each other; National Romanticism combined nationalism and various currents of mysticism.

In the 1910s, *The Kalevala* was diligently studied among Finnish Theosophists. The studies of Kaarle Krohn, a leading figure in Finnish research on *Kalevala poetry*<sup>42</sup> and Finnish folklore, famous for his geographic-historic method, were lacking spirit according to the Theosophists. This was also echoed by Wettenhovi-Aspa, according to whom Krohn wanted to deprive the Finnish people of *The Kalevala* by researching elements borrowed from other nations in the epic.<sup>43</sup> Among Theosophists, *The Kalevala* was interpreted especially by Pekka Ervast, who in 1916 published his book *Kalevalan avain* (*The Key to The Kalevala*), considered the most important Theosophical interpretation of *The Kalevala*.<sup>44</sup> Like Blavatsky, Ervast considered *The Kalevala* as a holy book equal to *The Bible* and other religious texts. In his work, Ervast also touched briefly on Wettenhovi-Aspa’s views and mentioned the relations between Finns and Egyptians: “[. . .] The speculation is probably too bold.”<sup>45</sup> As reinterpreters of *The Kalevala*, Ervast and Wettenhovi-Aspa were also in a similar position: both stood against the mainstream of academic research.<sup>46</sup> Ervast felt that Wettenhovi-Aspa’s thinking was close to his own aspirations and was ready to encourage him, although for the time being he doubted the existence of Finnish-Egyptian connections.

For Ervast and other Finnish Theosophists, the connections between Finnish and Egyptian mythology were not only the ideas advanced by Wettenhovi-Aspa, but also those of Väinö Valvanne, one of the most important contributors to the *Tietäjä* magazine who had written an article in 1911, entitled “Reincarnation in the Kalevala.”<sup>47</sup> Valvanne compared *The Kalevala* and Egyptian mythology based on Classical sources and, among other things, presented the view that the Finnish myth about Lemminkäinen and the Egyptian myth of Osiris were essentially the same. Valvanne’s article was published only a month after the comparisons between Lemminkäinen and Osiris presented by Wettenhovi-Aspa in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, and it is probable that both had independently come to the same conclusions. Valvanne did not mention Wettenhovi-Aspa in his article.<sup>48</sup>

In his review of “The Golden Book of Finland,” Pekka Ervast stated that Wettenhovi-Aspa’s intuition brought him “close to the facts of the occult notion.”<sup>49</sup> According to Ervast, the prevailing view among

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Wetterhoff-Asp, “Till frågan om ‘Världsspråkens rötter,’ I–IV;” “Kysymykseen ‘Maailmankielien juurista;’ S. W. Aspa-Haapets, “Kysymykseen ‘Maailmankielien juurista,’ I–II; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, 5–7, 30, passim; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, 9–11, 37, passim.

41

Nina Kokkinen, “Totuudenetsijät. Vuosisadanvaihteen okkulttuuri ja moderni henkisyys Akseli Gallen-Kallelan, Pekka Halosen ja Hugo Simbergin taiteessa,” Turun yliopiston julkaisuja, Scripta Lingua Fennica Edita 469 (Turku, University of Turku, 2019); Marja Lahelma, “From Nostalgia to Where...? National Romanticism, Esotericism, and the ‘Golden Age of Finnish Art,’ ” in “European Revivals: From Dreams of a Nation to Places of Transnational Exchange,” special issue, *FNG Research* 1 (2020), <https://research.fng.fi/2020/01/20/european-revivals-from-dreams-of-a-nation-to-places-of-transnational-exchange/>; Sarajas-Korte, *Suomen varhaisymbolismi* 57, 258–60, 331–32; Jöns Carlson, “Kalevalan salainen oppi,” in *Kalevalan kulttuurihistoria*, ed. Ulla Piela, Sepo Knuutila, and Pekka Laaksonen, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 1179 (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2008), 416–17; Erkki Anttonen, “Kalevalan uskonnollisia ja teosofisia tulkintoja 1900-luvun kuvataiteessa,” *Kalevala kuvissa: 160 vuotta Kalevalan innoittamaa suomalaista taidetta*, ed. Riitta Ojanperä, Ateneumin julkaisut 55 (Helsinki: Ateneum, 2009), 185.

42

The Finnish national epic *The Kalevala*, compiled by Elias Lönnrot and first published in 1835, is based on a vast corpus of *Kalevala poetry* or *runic song*.

43

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, 86; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 72–73; Carlson, “Kalevalan salainen oppi,” 424.

44

Pekka Ervast, *Kalevalan avain* (Helsinki: Teosofinen kirjakauppa ja kustannusliike, 1916).

45

“[...] spekulatit vielä lienevät liian rohkeita,” Ervast, *Kalevalan avain*, 280.

46

Before publishing his magnum opus, *Kalevalan avain* (“The Key to The Kalevala”), Ervast had presented Wettenhovi-Aspa’s views in the Finnish Theosophical Society’s journal *Tietäjä*. P[ekka] E[rvast], “Kirjallisuutta. Wettenhovi-Aspa: Finlands Gyllene Bok,” *Tietäjä: Teosofinen aikakauskirja* 7–8 (1915): 309. At the beginning of this article I quoted Ervast’s description of the lecture by Wettenhovi-Aspa, which appeared in the *Tietäjä* magazine in December 1915. Ervast admired Wettenhovi-Aspa’s courage in expressing his views, although he could not fully support them. He wanted more evidence of Wettenhovi-Aspa’s theories

the Theosophists considered the Finns to be “some tribe of the seventh Atlantean subrace.”<sup>50</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa’s theories would mean that the Finns belonged to the sixth, Akkadian subrace of the fourth root race of Atlantis, which also included many peoples in the Mediterranean region. Ervast and many other Theosophists assumed an ancient continent of Atlantis was buried at the bottom of the sea. For Ervast, this also involved the concept of a special “Atlantean” and prehistoric human type who understood nature better and whose daytime consciousness was organized as in a dream.<sup>51</sup> Atlantis was also referred to by the aforementioned Väinö Valvanne, according to whom the similarities of *The Kalevala* with Egyptian and Greek mythology could be explained by a common Atlantean past and origin.<sup>52</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa occasionally made a passing reference to Atlantis in his work; he described the British Isles as “an Atlantean, then Egyptian, Phoenician, and finally a Roman colony.”<sup>53</sup> However, the theory of Atlantis was not of any great importance in his oeuvre.<sup>54</sup>

What Wettenhovi-Aspa and Pekka Ervast had in common was not only the unique combination of Theosophical thought and patriotic ideology, but also the view that the peaceful nature of *The Kalevala* made the epic particularly sublime. In *The Kalevala*, disputes were resolved by singing rather than by sword, which had led some contemporary Swedish-speaking Pan-Germanist extremists in Finland to reproach *The Kalevala* for the lack of “cheerful military spirit,” according to them typical of Germanic epics. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, *The Kalevala* was therefore the result of a more advanced culture than the Germanic culture.<sup>55</sup>

### The Hidden Theosophical Wisdom of *The Kalevala*

In 1916 and 1917, Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote several articles and poems for the Theosophically oriented *Sunnuntai* (“Sunday”) weekly magazine. Some of the articles dealt with *The Kalevala* and the Finns’ connections to Egypt, but the editor Eino Leino also published his translations of Wettenhovi-Aspa’s poems and his articles on other topics.<sup>56</sup> The magazine’s contributors also included Pekka Ervast and J. Raekallio, who translated Wettenhovi-Aspa’s *Finlands Gyllene Bok* into Finnish. Wettenhovi-Aspa’s views on the Finnish language, world history, and *The Kalevala* were presented in his articles “Kulttuurin kulta-ura Europassa,” the two-volume “Kalevala-tutkielmia” and “Sfinksin salaisuudet.”<sup>57</sup>

In his “Kalevala-tutkielmia” (“Studies on *The Kalevala*”) Wettenhovi-Aspa criticized the Germanic peoples for their jealous attempts to take credit for the poems of *The Kalevala*. He stated that Finns were allowed to keep *The Kalevala* as their property at a time when it was considered “just a childish fantasy of the Ural-Altaiic birch bark culture.” The Germanic people’s interest had been awakened when they had discovered that *The Kalevala* contained “Theosophy, philosophy, cosmology, and astronomy—as well as physical-mathematical, physiological and anatomical, even magical-pharmacological information, etc.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time as the Germanic peoples tried to take credit for *The Kalevala*, they also tried to show that the Finnish language was of Germanic origin in terms of vocabulary, according to Wetten-

about the ancient connection between Finns and Egyptians before formulating his final opinion on the subject: “I want to hear more—much more—about his evidence, because his ideas arouse my deepest interest.” Ervast, “Toimittajalta,” 495–98. Before his death, Ervast was said to have regretted that his contribution to the study of *The Kalevala* was ignored by academic researchers. Carlson, “Kalevalan salainen oppi,” 421–22.

47

V[alvanne], V[äinö] H[eikki], “Jälleensyntyminen Kalevalassa,” *Tietäjä* 7–8 (15 August, 1911): 196–210.

48

Wetterhoff-Asp, “Till frågan om ‘Värlsdsspråkens rötter,’ I;” Valvanne, “Jälleensyntyminen Kalevalassa,” 196–209; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*.

49

“[...] lähelle salatieteellisen näkemyksen tosiseikkoja,” Ervast, “Kirjallisuutta,” 309.

50

“[...] seitsemännän atlantilaisen alarodun jonakin heimona,” Ervast, “Toimittajalta,” 497.

51

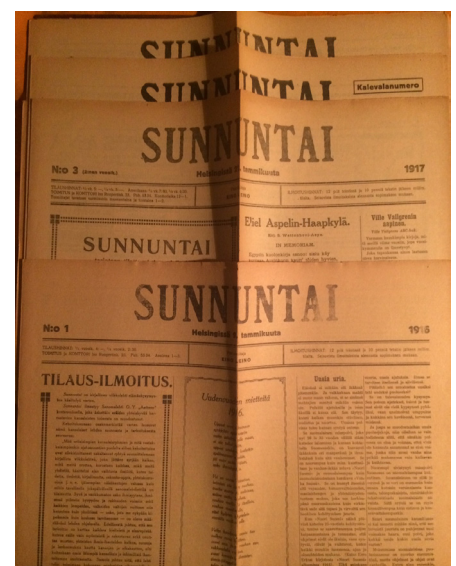
Ervast, “Toimittajalta,” 497; Anttonen, “Kalevalan tulkintoja kuvataiteessa,” 191–92.

52

Valvanne, “Jälleensyntyminen Kalevalassa,” 204–5; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” passim.

53

“[...] atlantilainen, sitten egyptiläinen, foiniikkialainen ja viimein roomalainen siirtola,” [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalatutkielmia II,” *Sunnuntai*, March 5, 1916.



Issues of the weekly periodical *Sunnuntai* from 1916–1917.

hovi-Aspa. As can be seen from the quote, Wettenhovi-Aspa considered *The Kalevala* to be a multidisciplinary source of knowledge, by no means just poetry as such. In his articles, Wettenhovi-Aspa pointed out the connections between the Finnish language and *The Kalevala* with Egypt and European culture and clearly stated his position that the connections he showed were not the result of “borrowing” between languages and cultures, but the concrete migration of the ancient Finns across Europe. Wettenhovi-Aspa disapproved of the scholars of his time for assuming that Finns would have remained within the borders of their country and at least had no influence in Western Europe.<sup>59</sup>

In a manner befitting a Theosophically oriented journal, Wettenhovi-Aspa expressed his views on the Finnish origin of the names given to God; God had been a “sower” in its original sense, and so the “Hebrews” had already named him *Jupiter*, in the dialect *Jovispaater*, based on the Finnish words *jyvän piittaaja*.<sup>60</sup> According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, during the captivity of Babylon, the word changed to *Javan*—*Javas*, based on the Sanskrit word *Java*, which in turn was synonymous with Finnish *grain*. Later Hebrew variants included the forms *Yahweh* and *Jehowa*. Wettenhovi-Aspa concluded his writing by describing in Theosophical style the origin of various forms of God’s name, also mentioning “The Forger of the Firmament,” the epithet for Ilmarinen of *The Kalevala*: “It is evident that the infinite and incomprehensible World Soul cannot in itself attribute to itself any name known to us humans, but when the human spirit became aware of the existence of the World Soul, all sorts of names were given according to how He was thought of at the time, sometimes as a Forger of the Firmament, sometimes as a Sower, as a Father, etc. These titles and words of respect were passed on as a legacy from generation to generation as the ‘name of God.’”<sup>61</sup>

More directly than in his articles in the *Sunnuntai* magazine, Wettenhovi-Aspa discussed Theosophy in a series of four articles published in *Helsingin Sanomat* in 1916 entitled “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia.”<sup>62</sup> In the first article in the series, he stated that *The Kalevala* was at least as justifiably suitable as the basis of a Theosophical worldview as the Eastern religions: “All that H. B. [sic] Blavatsky and A. Besant sought in the religions of Great Asia, we find in our old poems and folklore, and by means of our ancient language.”<sup>63</sup> In his writings, Wettenhovi-Aspa denied metempsychosis and argued that the ancient Egyptians did not believe in it either, because they even embalmed corpses at great expense. Quoting *The Kalevala*’s poem “Aino,” he stated that even the ancient Finnish belief was that man united with the universe after death. Wettenhovi-Aspa stated that the ancient Finnish pre-Christian worldview was Theosophical in nature. This manifested itself in the representation of the connection between the visible and invisible worlds, as in *The Kalevala*: “the birch moans, the bush sighs, the pine speaks; Animals converse with humans, who also understand the language of birds. There’s a spirit in stones, too. In all particles lives ‘haltia’<sup>64</sup> (“In-halt” as the Germans still say).”<sup>65</sup> He explained that in ancient Egypt animals were worshiped precisely because of “creative power” manifested in them, not because the animals were reincarnated humans. This creative force, he explained, also resides in inanimate matter: “The sharper microscopes (magnifying apparatuses)

54

Valvanne, “Jälleensyntyminen Kalevalassa,” 204–5. Elias Lönnqvist, one of Strindberg’s three Finnish correspondents on languages, and Wettenhovi-Aspa’s apprentice on comparative language studies, also wrote about Atlantis. See, e.g., Elias Lönnqvist, *Suomenkieli kaikkien kulttuurikielten avaimena II* (published by the author, 1945), 154–83; Pitkälä, “Wettenhovi-Aspa, August Strindberg and a Dispute,” *passim*. Lönnqvist mentions Theosophists, but in his conceptions of Atlantis he relies above all on Plato, Heinrich Schliemann, and Hermann Wirth, who served as the director of the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* in the 1930s. More about Wirth below. Lönnqvist, *Suomenkieli*, 154–83. About theories concerning Atlantis, see also Koskinen, *Villi Suomen historia*, 40–43.

55

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, 65–66; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, 79–80. Pekka Ervast’s pacifism was based on the biblical Sermon on the Mount and in *The Kalevala*; he found support for this ideology. Anttonen, “Kalevalan tulkintoja kuvataiteessa,” 195–96.

56

Leino’s translation of Wettenhovi-Aspa’s poem *Suomen Kansalle*, “To the Finnish People,” which contained references to Egypt, was also published in *Sunnuntai*. The poem featured Wettenhovi-Aspa’s central ideas, such as the Finns’ connection to Egypt and thoughts about the ancient wisdom preserved in Finland and the forthcoming new era of greatness. S[igurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Suomen kansalle,” trans. Eino Leino, *Sunnuntai*, January 9, 1916. Eino Leino also published the poem in his next poetry book, see Eino Leino, *Leirivalkeat: Runoja* (Helsinki: Kirja, 1917).

57

[Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kulttuurin kulta-ura Europassa,” “[“Golden Furrow of Culture in Europe,”] the title contains an agricultural etymology of the word “culture,” explained with Finnish “kulta-ura,” a factitious word that refers to plowing furrows in the fields before sowing, in the Valley of the Nile in Ancient Egypt] *Sunnuntai*, January 16, 1916.; [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, Kalevalatutkielmia I, *Sunnuntai*, March 5, 1916; Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalatutkielmia II;” S[igurd]; Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Sfinksin salaisuudet” [Secrets of the Sphinx], *Sunnuntai*, March 25, 1917.

58

[...] vain urali-altailaisen tuohisivistyksen lapsellisena kuvitelmana [...] teosofiaa, filosofiaa, kosmologiaa ja astronomiaa—sekä fyysismatemaattisia, fysiologisia ja anatomisia, vieläpä maagil-lisfarmakologisia tietoja y.m.” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalatutkielmia I.”

59

Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalatutkielmia I–II.”

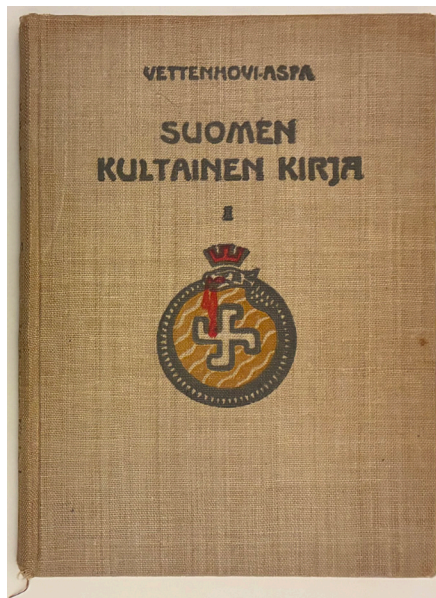
60

This is untranslatable nonsense as a whole, but *jyvä* means grain and *piittaaja* could be translated as someone who takes care of, or cares for something.

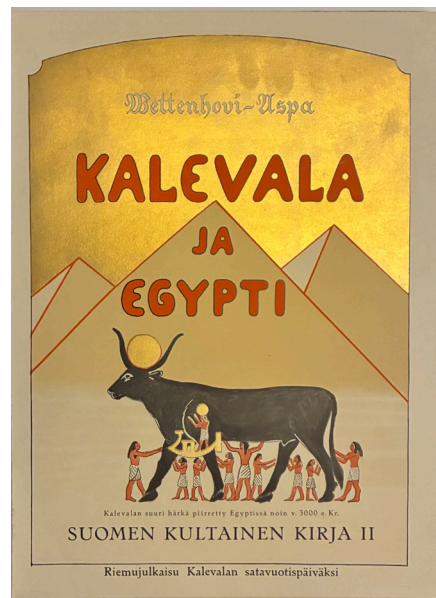
are invented, the more life will be seen in millions of particles. And at last, we also come to fully understand that the force attached to ‘dead’ matter is not dead at all, but real life. Then the stones do not only live, but also speak, as in *The Kalevala*.<sup>66</sup>

According to Wettenhovi-Aspa the poetry of *The Kalevala* was about the deep connection of the Finnish people to nature. He saw “Western civilization” as a threat to maintaining this connection. He presented the view, which had already existed among Theosophists at the end of the nineteenth century, that the ancient wisdom had been preserved in the northern forests:

It is a great misfortune for our Theosophy (“Teos-oppi”), for our people and mankind, that so-called ‘Western civilization’ tries, like a nightmare, to suppress and kill by silence everything that would be enlightening the whole world in our folk poetry, proverbs, and fairy tales. The Finnish people of Finland are the ancient abode of true Theosophy. Here, ancient wisdom has been preserved throughout the ages, as if protected by ice and snow, cherished by the ancient, wonderful Finnish language.<sup>67</sup>



*Suomen kultainen kirja* (“The Golden Book of Finland”) of 1915.



*Kalevala ja Egypti. Suomen kultainen kirja II* (“The Kalevala and Egypt – The Golden Book of Finland II”), published in 1935 to celebrate the centenary of the publication of *The Kalevala*.

Wettenhovi-Aspa also expressed this view in other words in “The Golden Book of Finland,” published in 1915.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the content, the work was linked to Theosophical literature by the Theosophical symbolism that appeared on the covers. The linen binding had a snake biting its tail printed on the cover, a crown, and a swastika, on which blood from the snake’s tail dripped. Both symbols still appear today in the emblem of the Theosophical Society and had already been used by the international Theosophical movement in the 1800s. Ouroboros, the snake eating its own tail, symbolizes, among other things, eternity and infinity, and the swastika epitomizes the solar system, incessant movement, and creation. In relation to the content of Wetten-

61

“On selvää, että ääretön ja käsittämätön maailmanhenki ei itsessään voi omistaa itselleen mitään meille ihmislapsille tunnettua nimeä, mutta kun ihmishenki heräsi tajuamaan maailmanhengen olemassaolon, sai tämä kaikenlaisia nimityksiä aina sitä mukaa, miten häntä kulloinkin ajateltiin, milloin taivaankannen takojana, milloin kylväjänä, isänä j.n.e. Nämä arvonimet ja mainesanat menivät ‘Jumalan nimenä’ perintönä suvusta sukuun.” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalatutkielmia II.”

62

[Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia, I–III,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, February 10, 1916, February 20, 1916, March 9, 1916. Wettenhovi-Aspa presents an etymology of the word Theosophy, based on the Finnish words “teos” and “oppi,” and related to *The Kalevala*. The title of the article could be translated as “The Doctrine of the Opus Kalevala = Theosophy,” or more freely, “Theosophy, or how to read *The Kalevala*.”

63

”Kaikkea sitä, mitä H. B. Blavatsky ja A. Besant etsivät suuren Aasian uskonnoista, löydämme me vanhoista runoistamme ja perintötiedoistamme, ikivanhan kieleemme avulla.” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia I.”

64

A kind of spirit in Finnish mythology; can also be translated as “elf.”

65

”[...] koivu valittaa, pensas huokailee, honka puhuu; eläimet keskustelevat ihmisten kanssa, jotka myös ymmärtävät lintujen kieltä. Kivissäkin on henki. Kaikissa kappaleissa asuu ”haltia”. (”Inhalt” kuten saksalainen vieläkin sanoo).” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia I.”

66

”Mitä terävämpiä mikroskoopeja (suurennuslaitteita) keksitään, sitä enemmän elämää tullaan näkemään hiukkas-miljooneissa. Ja vihdoinkin opitaan myös täysin käsittämään, että ‘kuolleeseen’ aineeseen kiinnitetty voima ei olekaan kuollutta voimaa, vaan todellista elämää. Silloinpa kivetkään eivät ainoastaan elä, vaan myös puhuvat, kuten Kalevalassa.” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia I.”

67

“On teos-opillemme, on koko kansallemme ja ihmiskunnalle suurena onnettomuutena, että n. s. ‘länsimainen sivistys’ kuin painajainen koettaa tukahuttaa ja vaitiololla tappaa kaiken sen, mikä olisi koko maailmalle valistukseksi kansanrunoudessamme, sananlaskuissamme ja saduissamme. Suomen suomalaisen kansa on todellisen teosofian ikivanha asuinsija. Täällä on ikivanha viisaus säilynyt kautta aikojen kuin jään ja lumen suojelemana, ikivanhan, ihanan suomen kielen vaalimana.” Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia I.”

68

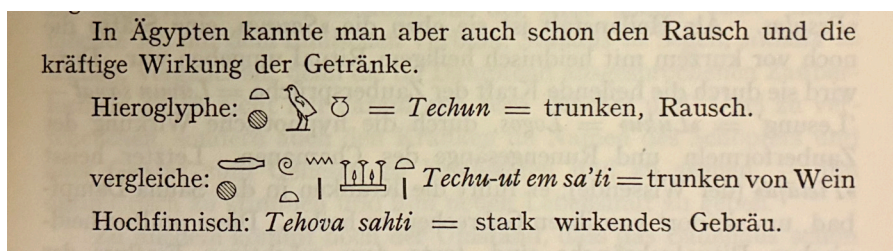
Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, 5–7, 30,

hovi-Aspa's book, the emblem was precisely a symbol of eternity; in his work, he emphasized the essence of *The Kalevala* and the Finnish language as a preserver of hidden wisdom.<sup>69</sup>

In 1922, Wettenhovi-Aspa was reviving Finnish Freemasonry after a one-hundred-year hiatus under the Russian regime. At the founding meeting of the Suomi Lodge No. 1, the composer Jean Sibelius, who had promised to compose ritual music for the Finnish Freemasons, and Wettenhovi-Aspa, who had been appointed as the historian of the lodge and author of the history of Finnish Freemasonry, were exempt from the membership fee. Sibelius fulfilled the task assigned to him with his *Musique Religieuse*, Op.113, but Wettenhovi-Aspa produced only a few articles in newspapers and magazines in his role as a historian. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa the Masonic rituals originated in ancient Egypt. He suggested a national ritual based on *The Kalevala* and *The Bible* for Finnish Freemasons. Wettenhovi-Aspa's plans for Finnish Masonic rituals were not carried out. He had already stopped attending lodge meetings in the 1920s but he never resigned from the Freemasons. This was not uncommon behavior among his fellow artists.<sup>70</sup>

### The Kalevala and Egypt

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa's works of the 1910s were placed in the context of Theosophical literature of the same period and he participated in discussions among Theosophists. That said, they embodied national romanticist ideals, which were not foreign to theosophists either. A distinctive feature of Wettenhovi-Aspa's works was the search for connections between Finnish and Egyptian cultures. Egypt was constantly present in Wettenhovi-Aspa's lectures and writings, but apparently, he still felt uncertain about his research on Egypt in the 1910s, so he did not publish more extensively on the subject. In the 1930s, he had not only had time to develop his ideas for years, but had also gained a wealthy supporter and partner, Doctor of Pharmacy and pharmacy owner Hanna Lappalainen (1881–1966), who spared no expense in acquiring Egyptological literature from abroad, making it possible for him to publish his works.<sup>71</sup>



An example of the use of the hieroglyphic alphabet from *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt*. Wettenhovi-Aspa connects the Ancient Egyptian language with *sahti*, the traditional Finnish farmhouse ale. Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung*, 137.

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa was an early advocate of Egyptological research in Finland. In his writings, he demanded several times the establishment of chairs of Egyptology in Finnish universities. With these demands, it was not essential that he try to prove connections between

passim; Vettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, 9–11, 37, passim.

69

Vettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, book cover; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, book cover.

70

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, "Frimurarfesterna i Helsingfors," *Hufvudstadsbladet* August 22, 1922; S[igurd] W[ettenhovi]-Aspa, "Frimureriets kulturallians; Amerika – Finland," *Veckans Krönika: Illustrerad veckoskrift*, September 9, 1922; S[igurd] W[ettenhovi]-Aspa, "Salaseurain historiaa" *Suomen Kuvalehti*, September 23, 1922; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 293–95; Ahtokari, *Salat ja valat*, 110, 117, 119, 343; Reijo Ahtokari, *Ruusu, miekka ja risti: Puoli vuosisataa kristillistä vapaamuurariutta Suomessa* (Helsinki: Suomen Rose Croix yhdistys ry., 2008).

71

See, e.g., [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *The Diamondking of Sahara* (Helsinki: n.p., 1935); [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt: Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen*, Eingeleitet von Philipp Paneth (Leipzig: Genius-Verlag 1935); Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*; [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, *August Strindberg intim: Aufzeichnungen eines Zeitgenossen* (Helsinki: Kommissionsverlag K. F. Puomies Buchdruckerei A. G., 1936); [Sigurd]: Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt: Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen*, Zweite Auflage (Helsinki: Kommissionsverlag K. F. Puomies Buchdruckerei A. G., 1936).



Hieroglyphic alphabet imported from Berlin in the 1930s for printing Wettenhovi-Aspa's books in 1935–36. Media Museum and Archives Merkki, Helsinki, Finland. (Collection of K. F. Puomies printing house, Helsinki. Photograph by Annika Johansson).

Finns and Egyptians in his own research. He saw the study of ancient Egyptian culture as intrinsically valuable, justifying its importance by, for example, Egyptian influence on Greek culture.

The first of Wettenhovi-Aspa's studies focusing on Egypt was *Kalevala ja Egypti: Suomen kultainen kirja II* ("The Kalevala and Egypt: Golden Book of Finland II"), published in 1935 to celebrate the centenary of *The Kalevala*. Outwardly impressive and illustrated by the author, the work presented the connections between the poems of *The Kalevala* and ancient Egyptian and Classical mythology. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, the Finnish-Egyptian connection was evidenced by, for example, the names of Egyptian gods, as discussed above.

Wettenhovi-Aspa continued to base his argument largely on etymology. He explained the etymology of the name *Egypt* by referring to the Kupittaa spring in the city of Turku. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, Egypt was *Aiguptos* in Greek, and in original "*Fenno-Egyptian*," *Äijänkupittaa*, which meant the great spring, the Nile.<sup>72</sup>

In *The Kalevala and Egypt*, the etymologies were accompanied by other kinds of material; the central content of the work was the comparison of mythologies. Among other things, Wettenhovi-Aspa compared the creation story of *The Kalevala* with Egyptian conceptions of the origin of the world. He also explained the great bull of *The Kalevala* as a metaphor for the Nile and found equivalents for Väinämöinen in the Greek Orpheus and Apollo, which, according to him, were based on Egyptian mythology.<sup>73</sup> In one chapter Wettenhovi-Aspa also briefly discussed the connections between Lemminkäinen in *The Kalevala* and Osiris of Egypt, which he had already written about in 1911.<sup>74</sup> In addition to comparing etymologies and myths in this book, he also compared Egyptian hieroglyphs to traditional Finnish house marks and embroidery.<sup>75</sup>

*The Kalevala and Egypt* was illustrated by the author with numerous drawings interspersed within the text and with plates bearing illustrated verses from *The Kalevala*. The front pages proudly announced that "in this book real ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, acquired from Berlin by K. F. Puromies Printing House, O.Y., have been printed for the first time in Finland."<sup>76</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa's life-companion<sup>77</sup> and sponsor Hanna Lappalainen wrote in 1941 that she had ordered several hieroglyphic alphabets from Germany for the printing of the book, and at the same time mentioned the deplorable state of Finnish Egyptology: "Since our country does not have a chair of Egyptology, we do not have hieroglyphic printing alphabet either."<sup>78</sup> In earlier publications by Wettenhovi-Aspa, hieroglyphs had been self-drawn.

*The Kalevala and Egypt* did not contain any direct references to Theosophy. In the book, Wettenhovi-Aspa discussed, for example, the connection with nature in *The Kalevala*'s poem "Aino" and wrote of the hidden wisdom of *The Kalevala* in a Theosophical way, but without explaining this connection.<sup>79</sup>

Nor did the reception of the work recognize its Theosophical features but rather emphasized its peculiarity or strangeness. In the biggest Finnish newspapers of the time, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Uusi Suomi*, *The Kalevala and Egypt* were discussed by the newspaper columnists Tiitus (pen name of Ilmari Kivinen) and Olli (pen name of Väinö Nuorteva) in their humorous causeries.

72

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 24–25.

73

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 77–82, 89–91, 109–14.

74

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 83–85, tables "Osiris – Panu – Lemminkäinen" and "Lemminkäinen's mother." For Osiris and Lemminkäinen, see also Wetterhoff-Asp, "Till frågan om 'Värlsdsspråkens rötter,' I;" Wettenhovi-Aspa, "Kalevalan teos-oppi = teosofia I."

75

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 29–31.

76

"Tässä kirjassa on ensi kerran Suomessa painettu todellisia muinaisegyptiläisiä hieroglyfiä, mitkä K. F. Puromiehen Kirjapaino O.Y:n toimesta on Berlinistä hankittu." Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, [2], passim.

77

The couple lived together from the beginning of 1930s until Wettenhovi-Aspa's death in 1946, but never married, which was considered highly unconventional at the time, especially for an elderly couple. Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 16.

78

"Kun meidän maassamme ei ole egyptologian oppituolia, ei meillä myöskään ole hieroglyfistä painoalfabeettia." Hanna Lappalainen, "Välähdyksiä Wettenhovi-Aspan elämäntyöstä" [last part of a series of four articles], *Forum* 1–2 (1941): 7. The hieroglyphic printing alphabet imported to Finland in the 1930s for printing Wettenhovi-Aspa's books is preserved in the collections of Media Museum and Archives Merkki, Helsinki.

79

Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 137–39.

In his causerie, Olli presented Wettenhovi-Aspa's views in a neutral tone. He stated that he refrained from evaluating the work because he had heard the author would curse anyone who dared to disagree with him. Finally, Olli mentioned that the work proves the originality of its author: "We are convinced that the work as a whole has at least made its author deeply convinced of the Egyptian origin of *The Kalevala*. And the readers for the author's originality."<sup>80</sup> Tiitus's review began with the exclamation, "A remarkable book!" and continued with examples of the work's content. At the end of his introduction, written in a positive tone, Tiitus praised the patriotic spirit of Wettenhovi-Aspa's work: "Be that as it may, there has never been a more broad-minded and imaginative friend of Finnishness and the Finnish language than Wettenhovi-Aspa!"<sup>81</sup>

The author Ilmari Kianto (1874–1970) reviewed *The Kalevala and Egypt* in the newspaper *Ajan Suunta* in more depth than the cause-rie writers.<sup>82</sup> Kianto was a friend of Wettenhovi-Aspa, and his text reflected an understanding of the author of *The Kalevala and Egypt*. According to Kianto, it had to be remembered that Wettenhovi-Aspa did not want to present himself as a scholar, even though he dealt with subjects studied by scholars. This deflected possible attacks, although according to Kianto, Wettenhovi-Aspa wished nothing more than attacks to defend his views. Kianto also pondered, in a way that is rare for contemporaries, how to deal with Wettenhovi-Aspa's writings:

Should we take Aspa's linguistics seriously, or is the entire *Golden Book* series just conjuring tricks and unparalleled grim humor? Wettenhovi-Aspa has become a great sage who in all seriousness reels off his truths—with a twinkle in his eyes. We shout to him in chorus, "You're crazy!" but he answers, like Väinämöinen, stroking his silver beard: I tell tales of ages long forgotten, / Now the legends of creation, / Once familiar to the children, / By our children sung no longer, / In these mournful days of evil, / Evil days our race befallen.<sup>83</sup>

We laugh at this poor old man, but he waves his hand and says, smiling: look at who laughs last—truth will out.

Lucky fellows, those who have a fly buzzing inside their head! In the head of Wettenhovi-Aspa, there is not only an ordinary fly—there is a real Ancient Egyptian buzzbugs, a desert wasp, a gigantic hornet.<sup>84</sup>

Kianto's view seemed to be that the work deliberately contained both humor and more profound food for thought, presented as shamanist visions rather than with academic orthodoxy. According to Kianto, Wettenhovi-Aspa placed himself above his critics with his ambiguous writing, which could prove to be serious in its humor, or contain humor presented in a serious tone.<sup>85</sup> According to Kianto, Wettenhovi-Aspa was "[. . .] the most broad-minded, wide-ranging sage and witch of our obscure antiquity, the sorcerer, the medicine man, the magician and shaman, whose investigative soul wanders the banks of the rivers of Egypt thousands of years ago [. . .]"<sup>86</sup> Kianto treated Wettenhovi-As-

80

"Olemme vakuutettu siitä, että teos kokonaisuudessaan on saanut ainakin tekijänsä syvästi vakuutetuksi Kalevalan egyptiläisperäisyydestä. Ja lukijat tekijän omaperäisyydestä." Olli [Väinö Nuorteva], "Väinämöinen egyptiläisenä," *Uusi Suomi*, February 27, 1935.

81

"Merkkillinen kirja! [...] Oli miten oli, suuripiirteisempää ja omaperäisempää ystävää ei suomalaisuudella ja suomen kielellä ole ollut kuin Wettenhovi-Aspa!" Tiitus [Ilmari Kivinen], "Kalevala ja Egypti," *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 19, 1935.

82

*Ajan Suunta* was the newspaper of the far-right party Finnish Patriotic People's Movement (IKL, *Isänmaallinen Kansanliike*). Ilmari Kianto was not a regular contributor to the newspaper or a party member.

83

Kianto quotes *The Kalevala* from memory, combining verses. The quote is translated by paraphrasing *Rune III* from *The Kalevala: The Epic Poem Of Finland*, vol. 1, trans. John Martin Crawford (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1898), 27, 37.

84

"Onko meidän otettava ihan vakavasti Aspan kielitiede, vai onko koko kultainen kirjasarja pelkkää silmänkääntäjätemppeulua ja ennenkuulumatonta hirtehuumoria? Wettenhovi-Aspa on noussut suureksi tietäjäksi, joka vakavasti jymähtyttelee totuuskiansa—veitikka silmäkulmassa. Huudamme hänelle kuorossa: Sinä olet hullu! mutta hänpä vastaa kuin Väinämöinen haroen hopeaista partaansa: Puhun syntyjä syviä, / Asioita ainoisia, / Joit' ei laula kaikki lapset, / Eikä pojat puoletkana / Tällä inhalla iällä / Katovalla kannikalla! Me nauramme tälle utralle ukolle, mutta hän huiskauttaa kämmentään ja huomauttaa hymyhuulin: katsokaapa, kuka viimeksi nauraa—totuus ei pala tuleksakaan. Onnenmyyrät ne ihmiset joilla on kärpänen päässään! Wettenhovi-Aspan päässä ei ole ainoastaan tavalista kärpystä—siellä pörisee oikea muinaisegyptiläinen pörriäinen, aavikon ampiainen, hiiden herhiläinen." Ilmari Kianto, "Wettenhovi-Aspan eriskummallinen riemujuhlajulkaisu: "Kalevala ja Egypti," *Ajan Suunta*, April 3, 1935. The last paragraph of the quote is based on Kianto's poetic imagination rather than on common idioms of the Finnish language.

85

Kianto, "Wettenhovi-Aspan riemujuhlajulkaisu"; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Kalevala ja Egypti*, 26.

86

"[...]meidän hämärän muinaisuutemme suuripiirteisin, leveäeleisin tietäjä ja noita, velho, poppa ja myrrys mies, taikuri ja šamaani, jonka tutkijasielu vaeltelee tuhansien vuosien takaisilla Egyptin virttojen rannoilla [...] Kianto, "Wettenhovi-Aspan riemujuhlajulkaisu.

pa's book as a work of art and praised its inventive patriotic spirit. For readers, there was no reason to get caught up in the details, but to understand the broad outlines.<sup>87</sup>

In 1935, when *The Kalevala and Egypt* was published, Wettenhovi-Aspa also published an extensive German-language work, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt. Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen*. The book summarized Wettenhovi-Aspa's views presented in his "Golden Books" and other publications on the "Fenno-Egyptian origin of the culture of the Old World," as the title of the book indicated. The German edition contained extensive glossaries comparing Finnish and Ancient Egyptian, as well as other languages such as Japanese.

### Seeking International Audiences

The publisher of the first edition of the *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt* was announced as Genius-Verlag in Leipzig. The publishing house was also said to be based in Amsterdam, Zurich, and Vienna. Behind the title of publisher was the author and journalist Philipp Paneth, who had come to Finland from Prague in 1935 to write a book with the working title *Das Reich ohne Rassen*. In Finland, Paneth was also a representative of several international news agencies and the publishing house Genius-Verlag. The Finnish police soon began to suspect Paneth's actions, and according to the police's investigation, there was no publishing house called Genius-Verlag in the cities mentioned. The news agencies Paneth referred to also consisted solely of himself. Paneth had also stated that he was a correspondent for the *New York Times*, which turned out to be false. The Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs had provided him with support to write his book, among other things, and a police investigation had been launched due to suspicions that had arisen in the ministry. It was decided to deport Paneth from the country, and the police eventually took him to a ship by force. The incident attracted attention in the press, and the anti-Semitic periodical *Siniristi* ("Blue Cross") also attacked Wettenhovi-Aspa in its article, claiming he had invited an "international Jewish fraudster" to promote his book in a "Masonic spirit." The author of the *Siniristi* magazine was also irritated by Paneth's claim in his book that Jews would be particularly tolerated in Finland and that Finland would therefore be "Das Reich ohne Rassen," a raceless state.<sup>88</sup>

*The Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt* attracted less public attention in Finland than *The Kalevala and Egypt*. The book was apparently thought of as an extended translation, and it was not considered necessary to present Wettenhovi-Aspa's views again during the same year.

Of course, the German-language work was primarily intended for an international audience. In Europe in the 1930s, Wettenhovi-Aspa's works, influenced by the Theosophical-occult and national romanticist discourses of the *fin-de-siècle*, were now associated with a new reference group: the study of Aryan origins and the ancient history of the Northern peoples that had emerged in National Socialist Germany. Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his Egyptocentric theory most prominently in the 1930s, and also in German, so it is worth discussing the rela-

"Kansainvälinen juutalaishuijari Suomen vapaamuurarien luottamushenkilönä" ("An international Jewish fraudster as a trustee of the Finnish Freemasons"), *Siniristi* 1 (1936): 8–11; "Lupasi tehdä Suomi-propagandaa, kirjoittikin politiikkaa. Tri Panethin vierailu muodostui kalliiksi erälle tšekäläisille liikkeille. Hän jätti laskunsa maksamatta joutuessaan karkoitetuksi maastamme" ("He promised to promote Finland, he wrote politics. Dr. Paneth's visit was costly for some of the local businesses. He left his bills unpaid when he was expelled from our country"), *Helsingin Sanomat*, January 7, 1936; [Pseudonym] X, "Tri Paneth: Karjalan ja Inkerin ystävä! Ulkopoliittisia näköaloja" ("Dr. Paneth: Friend of Karelia and Ingria! Foreign Policy Perspectives"), *Ajan Suunta* January 8, 1936; Jari Hanski, *Juutalaisvastaisuus suomalaisissa aikakauslehdissä ja kirjallisuudessa 1918–1944* (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2006), 275–76. Despite the investigations of the Finnish police, Genius-Verlag was not a completely non-existent publishing house, but at least a business name of Philipp Paneth; between 1932 and 1935, Paneth published at least five books, which were reportedly published by Genius-Verlag at the locations mentioned above. While in Finland, Paneth had also been the editor-in-chief of a magazine called *Maailman kaiku* ("The Echo of the World"). Its three sample issues in the autumn of 1935 published articles by foreign journalists and politicians translated into Finnish. The Finnish editor in charge of the latter two issues was Pertti Uotila, a friend of Wettenhovi-Aspa. The magazine did not publish articles under Wettenhovi-Aspa's name, but every issue advertised his book, and it is likely he participated in the making of the magazine in some way. The author of the *Siniristi* magazine said that Wettenhovi-Aspa and Paneth had jointly edited and published the magazine. The publication of the magazine ceased with Paneth's expulsion, and his apparently completed books *Das Reich ohne Rassen* and *Finnen bedrängt* also remained unpublished, with the exception of excerpts published in the magazine *Maailman kaiku*.

tionship between Wettenhovi-Aspa and the Third Reich in more detail in this context.

In National Socialist Germany, studies on the origins of culture and Aryan antiquity had gained state-recognized status. A key role in these aspirations was played by the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*, a research institution under the SS led by Heinrich Himmler, whose first director from 1935 to 1937 was the Dutch-born philologist Herman Wirth (1885–1981). Wirth had suggested that the ancient Northern race originated in the sunken Atlantis and created a civilization and a writing system inherited later by other peoples.<sup>89</sup>

Herman Wirth was mentioned in some published reviews of *The Kalevala and Egypt* and *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt*. Wirth was referred to, for example, by Arthur Gleye (1867–1937), a linguist from Riga, Latvia. Gleye had studied comparative linguistics at the University of Tartu and worked as a lecturer in German at Tomsk University. He stated that “Wirth was an ‘antipode’ of the theories of Wettenhovi-Aspa.” According to Gleye the strong patriotic foundation of the studies was a common feature for Wirth and Wettenhovi-Aspa, as well as the assumption of the historical influence of the Northern people in the south. Gleye was in favor of Wettenhovi-Aspa—in his own research, the ancient Cretans were a Finnic people.<sup>90</sup>

Another writer who referred to Wirth was the architect and sculptor Ilmari Wirkkala, who had published nationalist works on the historical significance of the ancient Finns. Wirkkala explained Wirth’s theory of Atlantis and stated he had interpreted writings dating back thousands of years through Sumerian, Sanskrit, and Hebrew, although according to Wirkkala, 90 percent of his example words were in plain Finnish and thus easy to explain. Wirkkala stated that Wirth’s work *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* had “almost the status of *The Bible*” in Germany. Although Wirkkala did not support Wirth’s theories, he admired the patriotic attitude of both Wirth and Wettenhovi-Aspa, and believed this type of research should have been further pursued in Finland as well.<sup>91</sup> He considered Wettenhovi-Aspa’s *The Kalevala and Egypt* to have broadened horizons and wished that Finnish researchers would follow Germany’s example:

[Wettenhovi-Aspa] is one of the most monumental champions of this trend, starting from the premise that by proving a nation its great and true origins, the nation itself can be raised to a height, to a sense of great unity and to a strong national elevation. It is only in the last decade that this kind of “scientific” research has risen to its full bloom in nations striving for national integrity, and the distribution of works in dozens of editions has produced miraculous results. When we know, for example, what racial theory means in Germany today, we can only sense the influence of the works of one scientist, Hans Günther, and yet there are German scholars who in their criticisms say that Günther turns everything upside down. It has seemed all the more strange for me, that there are Finnish scholars who think that even these critics are still impossibly extreme in their conclusions, at least—when it comes to the influence of the Finns in ancient Europe.<sup>92</sup>

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Heather Pringle, *The Master Plan: Himmler's Scholars and the Holocaust* (New York: Hyperion 2006), 53–62, passim; Malte Gasche, *Der “Germanische Wissenschaftseinsatz” des “Ahnenerbes” der SS 1942–1945: Zwischen Völkung der “völkischen Gemeinschaft” und dem Streben nach “Erlösung.”* Studien zur Archäologie Europas, Band 20 (Bonn: Habelt, 2014), 44–48, passim; Peter Staudenmaier, *Between Occultism and Nazism: Antroposophy and the Politics of Race in the Fascist Era* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89–90; Julian Strube, “Nazism and the Occult,” in *The Occult World*, ed. Christopher Partridge (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 341.

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Arthur Gleye in the *Mitauer Nachrichtenblatt* newspaper (published in Jelgava, Latvia) on April 18, 1936, quoted in book advertisement leaflets *Wettenhovi-Aspa'n fenno-egyptiläispropagandasta ulkomailla* (Helsinki: K. F. Puromies, 1936) and *Wettenhovi-Aspa's philological nyorientering på erövringstag ute i Europa* (Helsinki: K. F. Puromies, 1936). By the time Gleye’s book review was published, Wettenhovi-Aspa had already sent his book to Wirth, but Gleye and Wettenhovi-Aspa probably corresponded with each other. The posthumous work of Arthur Gleye, *Die Wiedergeburt der westfinnischen Geisteskultur* (Tallinn: Eesti kirjastusühisus, 1937) also has references to the works of Wettenhovi-Aspa. Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote a positive review of the book in the Estonian magazine *Uus Eesti*. See Gleye, *Die Wiedergeburt*, passim; S[igurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Läänemere soomesoo vaimukultuuri uuestisünd,” *Uus Eesti*, May 6, 1937; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 314–16. Arthur Gleye also wrote about Wettenhovi-Aspa’s work in the *Libausche Zeitung* (published in Liepāja, Latvia), and many other reviews appeared in Estonian, Latvian, and Hungarian newspapers. See the advertisement leaflets *Wettenhovi-Aspa'n fenno-egyptiläispropagandasta ulkomailla* and *Wettenhovi-Aspa's philological nyorientering på erövringstag ute i Europa* and Lappalainen, “Välähdyksiä,” 11–14. Wettenhovi-Aspa already referred to Gleye in the first part of “The Golden Book of Finland,” see Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Finlands Gyllene Bok*, 120–21; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Suomen kultainen kirja*, 130–31; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 108.

91

Ilmari Wirkkala, “Kalevala ja Egypti,” *Aitosuomalainen*, May 28, 1935, 7–9. On Wirkkala, see Koskinen, *Villi Suomen historia*, 180–90. Elias Lönnqvist, at least, kept up with Wirth’s research in Finland; he even replicated Wirth’s bibliography in *Der Aufgang der Menschheit* as a supplement to his own book *Suomenkieli*, 200–206.

92

[Wettenhovi-Aspa] on eräs monumenttaalisimpia sen suunnan esitaistelijoista, jotka lähtevät siitä, että osoittamalla kansakunnalle sen suuri ja oikea alkuperä, itse kansa voidaan nostaa korkealle, suuren yhteyden tuntoon ja voimakkaaseen kansalliseen nousuun. Vasta viimeisen vuosikymmenen aikana on tämänlaatuinen “tieteellinen” tutkimus

Wirkkala's references to racial theory and the German race theorist Hans Günther (1891–1968) say more about his own ideas than about Wettenhovi-Aspa's work. Wettenhovi-Aspa mentions races occasionally in his oeuvre,<sup>93</sup> but rather as a loosely used synonym for a people or ethnic group than as an articulated concept of race. He did not believe that racial characteristics were culturally significant. Wettenhovi-Aspa stated on many occasions that he opposed anti-Semitism and acted against it at different stages of his life: for example, in 1920 he condemned the publication of the Swedish-language translation of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in Helsinki in a newspaper article.<sup>94</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa, who sought to reach international audiences, promoted his work by sending copies of his book in German between 1936 and 1937 to European researchers who expressed like-minded views, more traditional university professors, as well as heads of state such as Kemal Atatürk and Kaiser Wilhelm II. In the catalog of the Kemal Atatürk library, the work is still mentioned, marked “gift signed by the author.”<sup>95</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa could use the polite thank-you letters received for the promotional copies in the advertising of his work.<sup>96</sup>



Akseli Gallén-Kallala, *Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspan muotokuva* (“Portrait of Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa”). 1919. Oil on canvas 29 × 31,5. Finnish National Gallery / Ateneum Art Museum (Photograph by Yehia Eweis). The bottle, carafe and glass in the portrait were probably an intentional reference to Wettenhovi-Aspa's activism against the Finnish Prohibition Act which had entered into force the same year, on June 1, 1919. Wettenhovi-Aspa campaigned against the alcohol prohibition legislation by writing a book with instructions to make various alcoholic beverages at home. It was released both in Finnish and in Swedish, and was an instant success. See Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 72–73, II. He also exhibited his caricatures on the subject and of the politicians who supported the act. According to Wettenhovi-Aspa, wine was an ancient Fenno-Egyptian invention, and he did not hesitate to use this as an argument in the debate. The prohibition act in Finland, however, lasted until 1932.

noussut kansalliseen eheyteen pyrkivissä valtakunnassa täyteen kukkaansa ja teosten levittämisellä kymmenin painoksin on tullut ihmeitä tekeviin tuloksiin. Kun tiedämme esimerkiksi, mitä rotuoppi merkitsee Saksassa nykypäivinä, voimme aavistaa vain yhden tiedemiehen, Hans Güntherin, teosten vaikutuksen, ja kuitenkin on saksalaisia tutkijoita, joiden arvostelujen mukana Günther asettaa kaikki asiat pääläelleen. Sitä merkillisemmältä on tuntunut allekirjoittaneesta, että on meikäläisiä tiedemiehiä, joiden mielestä nämä arvostelijatkin ovat vielä aivan mahdollottoman äärimmäisiä päätelmissään, ainakin—kun on kysymys suomalaisten vaikutuksesta muinaisessa Euroopassa.” Wirkkala, “Kalevala ja Egypti,” 7.

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A modern reader would consider many of these occasional references as unequivocally racist. See, e.g., Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung*, 126–27.

94

Wetterhovi-Aspa [Wettenhovi-Aspa], S[igurd], “Har Finland en judefråga?” *Judisk Krönika: Tidskrift för judarnas nationella kultur och samhällsintressen*, May 15, 1920. In his 1927 memoir, he recalls the Dreyfus affair of 1895, during which he was amazed at Strindberg's anti-Semitic attitudes. Wettenhovi-Aspa also stated that Strindberg had since then totally changed his attitude towards the Jews, as he eagerly began to study the Hebrew language. In connection with the Dreyfus case, Wettenhovi-Aspa was also sending telegrams of support from Finland to Mrs. Dreyfus and the writer Émile Zola, who participated in the case with his famous article *J' Accuse*. His speech against antisemitism at the time was published in the journal *Humanitas* in 1898. Wetterhoff-Asp, Sigurd: “Sigurd Wetterhoff-Asps andragande vid mötet för aflåtande af ett sympatitelegram till fru Lucie Dreyfus,” *Humanitas* 1 (1898): 28–30; Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Jutelmia ja muistelmia*, 112–13.

95

Catalogue of the Kemal Atatürk Library. Atatürk ve Kurtuluş Savaşı Müzesi / Kitaplık [https://www.anitkabir.tsk.tr/03\\_muzeler/kitaplik\\_vw.html](https://www.anitkabir.tsk.tr/03_muzeler/kitaplik_vw.html).

96

Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 105, 108.

## The Reception of Wettenhovi-Aspa by the Third Reich

Wettenhovi-Aspa actively sought to find kindred spirits abroad. Perhaps thanks to Wirkkala or Gleye, he also sent the work to Herman Wirth at the *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*. The correspondence Wettenhovi-Aspa preserved among the manuscripts he left behind clearly indicates that the copy sent in October 1935 had not arrived. In a separate letter sent at the same time as the book, he had asked Wirth to give his opinion on it, and in February 1936 *Ahnenerbe's* general secretary, Wolfram Sievers, wrote to Wettenhovi-Aspa that the book had not arrived.<sup>97</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa immediately sent Wirth another copy. In the cover letter, he apologized for the fact that Wirth had not received his copy and said he would personally take care of sending the book this time. On the letterhead, his title was printed as *Fennoägyptolog*.<sup>98</sup> The cover letter and the accompanying work probably reached Wirth, although apparently, he never sent the feedback requested by Wettenhovi-Aspa—even a critical reply letter probably would have contained some sentences polite enough to be useful in promoting the book. It is not known how much Wettenhovi-Aspa knew about the institution run by Wirth, but he may have thought it possible to obtain financial or other support from *Ahnenerbe*. The generous research funding provided by the department attracted a wide range of researchers from universities and beyond.

At the end of the 1930s, Wettenhovi-Aspa knew the Finnish Yrjö von Grönhagen (1911–2003), who was on the payroll of *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*, and who in the 1930s made recordings of rune singers in Karelia on behalf of his German employer. Grönhagen had been appointed director of the Indo-Germanic-Finnish research institute at *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* in February 1936, when Wettenhovi-Aspa sent his book to Wirth.<sup>99</sup>

In the end it was thanks to Grönhagen that the book did not go unnoticed in *Deutsches Ahnenerbe*. Wettenhovi-Aspa himself had already sent two copies of his books to *Ahnenerbe*, but via Grönhagen the book made its way to Heinrich Himmler, at the top of the institution.<sup>100</sup>

It seems the SS-Reichsführer was at first enthusiastic about the book<sup>101</sup> and ordered the newly appointed head of *Ahnenerbe*, Walther Wüst (1901–1993), to read and assess it. In the archives of *Ahnenerbe* there is a letter dated October 25, 1937, in which Himmler commented on Wüst's statement about *Kulturursprung*.<sup>102</sup> Wüst and Himmler agreed on the fallacy of Wettenhovi-Aspa's views. Himmler stated that he was one of those researchers who “sees only a couple of sectors in a circle and therefore imagines those sectors as the origins of the whole circle.”<sup>103</sup> According to Himmler, the history of the Finnish and Egyptian languages had been influenced by the common, millennial past of both nations under the central state of Atlantis and its ruling class. The Finnish and Egyptian languages may have had common features, but this did not indicate the ancient kinship of Finns and Egyptians, but rather that the language and culture of both peoples had been marked by Atlantean colonial domination. According to him, the same influence of Atlantean culture was evident in most other languages, such as Chinese and Japanese.<sup>104</sup>

Herman Wirth's continued influence on Himmler speaks to the

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Wolfram Sievers to Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa 2.10.1936, Turku University Library, Manuscript Collections, Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa's Manuscript Collection (hereafter cited as TUL, SWA), KK IV 184: XI: 6.



*Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt: Kommentare zu den vorhistorischen Völkerwanderungen.* (Genius-Verlag 1935)

98

Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa to Hermann Felix Wirth, c/o Deutsches Ahnenerbe, February 13, 1936 (carbon copy), TUL, SWA, KK IV 184: XI: 7.

99

Pringle, *The Master Plan*, 77–78, 81–90, 97–98, 302–3, passim; Pitkälä, “Pyramidit, pyhät raamit,” 109, 111. See also Yrjö von Grönhagen, *Himmler's Secret Society (Himmlerin salaseura, 1948)*, trans. and annotated by Ike Vil (Porvoo: Star Regulus Press, forthcoming 2025), passim. It was through Yrjö von Grönhagen that Wettenhovi-Aspa also became acquainted with the English-born Theosophical occultist Gaston de Mengel, who was also active in France, and who also lectured his Theosophical-oriental doctrines to the National Socialists in Berlin. According to von Grönhagen, de Mengel spent a few days at Wettenhovi-Aspa's villa in Vilniemi. Grönhagen, *Himmler's Secret Society*, 22, 141–42; Ike Vil, *Chasing the Green Dragon: French Occult Conspiracy, Nazi Mysticism, and Gaston de Mengel's Journey to the East* (Porvoo: Star Regulus Press, forthcoming 2025), 263–67.

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Heinrich Himmler to Yrjö von Grönhagen, April 28, 1937, authenticated copy from 1940 in the archives of Valttiollinen Poliisi (The State Police, the security agency of Finland from 1937 to 1949), Kansallisarkisto (KA, Finnish National Archives),

understanding of history in the letter, built around the ancient Atlantean master race. The recipient of the letter, Walther Wüst, had been appointed head of *Ahnenerbe* in early 1937 because Hitler could no longer tolerate Wirth. Wirth's views on the ancient civilization of Atlantis and, for example, the replacement of Christianity with Germanic paganism were politically too risky for the Führer. Himmler was thus forced to get rid of Wirth. Wüst, dean of the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Munich and professor of "Aryan culture and linguistics," was an academically distinguished Sanskrit scholar and a member of the National Socialist Party. With the change of director, *Ahnenerbe*'s activities became more like a university research institute. Instead of Atlantis, well-known civilizations were to be studied, and *Ahnenerbe* researchers were now required to have academic merit.<sup>105</sup>

Himmler's letter also indicates that Wüst had raised the issue of a possible ban on Wettenhovi-Aspa's book. Himmler stated this was impossible because the book had been published in Helsinki, Finland. According to him, books like this typically received little publicity; Wettenhovi-Aspa's should therefore be harmless. Himmler concluded by stating he believed that, for all the absurdity in the book, it would contain "a few adequate pieces to the great mosaic of world history."<sup>106</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa's views did not fit in with National Socialist ideology: according to him, the Germans spoke a language that had degenerated from the original language, and their civilization was thus at a lower level than that of the Finns. In Wirth's view, literacy had been brought to Egypt by the native Aryans of Atlantis from the north, while Wettenhovi-Aspa thought that Finns had migrated from Egypt through Europe to the north, having first created a civilization in the south. The book sent by Wettenhovi-Aspa to *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* and the articles he wrote in German were mainly attempts to make the ancient language and culture of Finland known to Germans, who did not understand they were descendants of an ancient Finnish culture and were thus alienated from their origins. For him, the ancient common past of Europeans, a common original language and culture, was an argument for calling on the peoples of Europe to live in harmony with each other. He ended *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung der alten Welt* by urging the peoples of Europe to live peacefully with each other as descendants of a common Fenno-Egyptian ancient culture.<sup>107</sup>

Yrjö von Grönhagen's expeditions to Karelia commissioned by Himmler sought, by their very nature, Aryan origins among the Finns. Himmler even displayed the image of rune singer Timo Lipitsä with his *kantele*<sup>108</sup> like an icon in his office and commissioned Grönhagen to acquire ten *kanteles* for SS use.<sup>109</sup> However, Grönhagen lost his position as head of department after Wüst took over the leadership of *Ahnenerbe*, coincidentally on the same day that Himmler wrote the letter concerning Wettenhovi-Aspa's book to Wüst.<sup>110</sup> Like Wirth, Grönhagen was not fired, but was allowed to remain with *Ahnenerbe*: he was ordered to complete his studies at the expense of the research institute. Himmler's great enthusiasm for Finland somewhat faded around this time, which may already have been evident in the letter about *Kulturursprung*. The attention Wettenhovi-Aspa's work received was, of course, an indication of the interest in Finland.<sup>111</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa's attitudes towards National Socialist Germany

Helsinki; EK-Valpo I 1919–1944; Personal Files; A3860, Valpo file on Yrjö von Grönhagen. See also Ike Vil, *Chasing the Green Dragon*, 263–64. I am grateful to Ike Vil for letting me read and cite his aforementioned forthcoming book, and his forthcoming translation of Yrjö von Grönhagen's memoirs of his *Ahnenerbe* days, first published in Finnish in 1948. He also generously shared the contents of the Valpo file on Yrjö von Grönhagen with me for this article.

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Heinrich Himmler to Yrjö von Grönhagen, April 28, 1937; KA; Valpo A3860, Grönhagen.

102

Heinrich Himmler to Walther Wüst, October 25, 1937, authenticated copy in Heinrich Himmler's correspondence archive, Das Bundesarchiv (BA), Berlin-Lichterfelde; Einrichtungen der NSDAP; Parteigliederungen und angeschlossene Verbände; NS 21 Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft "Das Ahnenerbe;" 1. Der Kurator; 1.2. Schriftumsausschuss; NS 21/364 Bd. 7 1936–1945. Pitkälä, "Suomen kansan menneisyys," 87–89.

103

"Es ist selbstverständlich, dass alle diejenigen, die einen Sektor oder zwei Sektoren eines Kreises ansehen, leicht diese beiden Sektoren für den Ursprung des Ganzen halten." Heinrich Himmler to Walther Wüst, October 25, 1937; BA; NS 21/364 Bd. 7 1936–1945.

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Heinrich Himmler to Walther Wüst, October 25, 1937; BA; NS 21/364 Bd. 7 1936–1945.

105

Pringle, *The Master Plan*, 92–98; Gasche, *Wissenschaftseinsatz*, 48–50; Strube, "Nazism and the Occult," 341.

106

"Was das Buch selbst anlangt, so können wir es garnicht verbieten, da es ja in Helsingfors erschienen ist. Andernteils erscheinen diese Art Bücher doch so unter dem Ausschluss der Öffentlichkeit, dass sie keinen Schaden anrichten, und zum Dritten glaube ich, dass bei allem Unsinn, der darin enthalten ist, doch von Hunderttausenden von Mosaiksteinchen, die das wahre Bild der Entstehung der Weltsystems und ihrer Geschichte darstellen, auch in diesem Buch ein paar Steinchen enthalten sind." Heinrich Himmler to Walther Wüst, October 25, 1937; BA; NS 21/364 Bd. 7, 1936–1945.

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"Völker Europas, besinnt Euch Eueres gemeinsamen Ursprungs, Eurer einst gemeinsamen Sprache und Urkultur, reicht Euch in Frieden die Hände, denn Ihr seid alle Kinder des fenno-ägyptischen Älternhauses." Wettenhovi-Aspa, *Fenno-Ägyptischer Kulturursprung* [462]; see also Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 85–88.

108

A traditional Finnish and Karelian plucked string instrument.

were not unequivocally positive or negative. In an article “Finland und die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa” written for the *Forum* magazine during the Interim Peace<sup>112</sup> in 1940, Wettenhovi-Aspa pointed out, in German, that German place names were based on the “original Aryan language”<sup>113</sup> spoken in Finland. In the same article, he wrote about Hitler as the “George Washington of Europe,” who, fighting against big business and British imperialism, was creating the “United States of Europe.”<sup>114</sup>

Wettenhovi-Aspa’s opinions on Hitler were at their most positive during the Continuation War (1941–1944), when Finland and Germany were allied against the Soviet Union. During the Winter War (1939–1940) in which the Soviet Union attacked Finland, Finland gained much sympathy from the West and the Allies. At the beginning of the Continuation War, the Soviet Union became part of the Allies against Germany, and for practical reasons, Finland was virtually allied with Germany, which provided an important source of material assistance.

At that time, Wettenhovi-Aspa wrote a poetic greeting to Hitler and the German people for the *Forum* magazine and painted two portraits of Hitler, probably intended for school education.<sup>115</sup> However, Wettenhovi-Aspa’s literary legacy also included a manuscript in which he considered the presence of Germans in the Baltic Sea a threat to peace and wrote about the justified bitterness felt by the Northern peoples because of Germany’s ruthlessness.<sup>116</sup> In the years preceding World War II, Wettenhovi-Aspa had admired the United States rather than Germany. In his poem “American Future,” published in English in the *Forum* magazine in 1938, he predicted that the United States and Japan would jointly rule the world, while Europe and England would take a back seat.<sup>117</sup> Apparently, the Germans’ success in the early stages of World War II and Finland’s alliance with Germany made him reconsider his views. Germany, in his opinion, was also an important counterforce against the Soviet Bolsheviks.

### ... Ancient Egyptian Buzzbugs, a Desert Wasp, a Gigantic Hornet Inside his Head

Wettenhovi-Aspa’s studies published in several languages in the 1910s and 1930s and his efforts to prove the existence of a seminal language resembled the Gothicist historiography practiced in seventeenth-century Sweden. Gothicist historians sought to legitimize Sweden’s great power with a glorious past. The Swedish language was studied to find connections with biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, and the Swedish Empire was considered to have been ancient Atlantis, the primeval home of human civilization. At this time Finland was a Grand Duchy of Sweden. In Finland and the Academy of Turku there were also Gothicist aspirations to etymologically prove that Finnish was close to the biblical languages.<sup>118</sup> Wettenhovi-Aspa has often been portrayed as a curiosity, a late-born Gothicist whose writings have been seen either as purely humorous parodies of the nationalist culture and academic world of his time or, by contrast, as grandiose and desperate scholarly aspirations of an eccentric artist.

However, Wettenhovi-Aspa must be understood as part of the Western esoteric currents of his era. He was a representative of a larg-

109  
Pringle, *The Master Plan*, 88–90.

110  
Pringle, *The Master Plan*, 97–98; Gasche, *Wissenschaftseinsatz*, 147–49.

111  
About Ahnenerbe’s relations with Finland see also Gasche, *Wissenschaftseinsatz*, 145–51, 184.

112  
A period of peace lasting ca. 15 months, between the Winter War and the Continuation War and between the Soviet Union and Finland.

113  
”[A]rnische Ursprache,” [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Finland und die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa,” *Forum* 3–4 (1940): 77.

114  
Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Finland und die Vereinigten Staaten von Europa,” 77–80.

115  
Varia 7, certificates, etc., TUL, SWA, KK IV 184: XI: 7. In the 1930s and 1940s, Wettenhovi-Aspa painted portraits of prominent men, including a series of U.S. presidents purchased by the U.S. Embassy. An important motive for making these kinds of portraits was probably to earn a living. Varia 7, certificates, certificate of the portrait of the Marshal of Finland painted by S. W.-A., TUL, SWA, KK IV 184: XI: 7. [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Finnischer Gruss an Deutschland und seinen Führer,” in “Sondernummer für Deutschland,” special issue, *Forum* 1–2 (1942): 1–2; Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 344–45.

116  
Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 343–44.

117  
[Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “American Future (A prediction about the future of the United States—written by a Finn in 1920),” an offprint from *Forum* 6–7 (1938): 19. On Wettenhovi-Aspa’s relations with the United States, see Halén and Tukkinen, *Elämän ja kuoleman kello*, 291–300, passim; Glenda Dawn Goss, *Vieläkö lähetämme hänelle sikareja? Sibelius, Amerikka ja amerikkalaiset: 24 tarinaa*, ed. and trans. Martti Haapakoski (Helsinki: WSOY, 2009), 153–57. In the bilingual article “America – Finland. Debit – credit. America – Finland Debit and credit” Wettenhovi-Aspa underlined the importance of Finnish-born immigrants in the United States. See [Sigurd] Wettenhovi-Aspa, “Amerika – Suomi: Debet – credit. America – Finland: Debit and credit,” *Forum* 9–10 (1936): 21–23.

118  
For Gothicist historiography, see Tero Anttila, “The Power of Antiquity. The Hyperborean Research Tradition in Early Modern Swedish Research on National Antiquity,” *Acta Universitatis Ouluensis B Humaniora* 125 (Oulu: University of Oulu,

er cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This cultural movement was characterized by an interest in Ancient Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Oriental civilizations, and Classical Antiquity on one hand and idealized cultures of the Nordic countries on the other. This movement manifested itself both in arts and religious and intellectual movements such as Theosophy, and in numerous ways, which could be best described with the concept of *occulture*. At the same time, especially in small countries like Finland and Sweden, an interest in building nationality by investigating and inventing ancient national myths emerged. These interests were combined in Wettenhovi-Aspa's texts. I argue that Wettenhovi-Aspa's writings represent occulture in a unique way, as he sought to combine the Northern and Southern ideals at the same time, in the particular, historical context of Finland. He was also an internationally very mobile and well-connected artist, representing European currents of thought in general.

Wettenhovi-Aspa's writings reflected the influences adopted in Paris during the 1890s: visual artists were oriented towards the art of ancient cultures, read Theosophists and Swedenborg, and expected a new renaissance to emerge in Scandinavia and Finland, among Northern cultures regarded as pure and uncorrupted. Finnish artists were also influenced by a strong nationalist ideology, which was fueled by language struggles in their home country and later by anti-Russification efforts. Wettenhovi-Aspa was inspired by the writer August Strindberg, who sought the roots of the world's languages in Hebrew and, in the 1890s, also sought to undermine established notions of the natural sciences.

The last productive period of Wettenhovi-Aspa's literary activity took place in the mid-1930s, after which he published only a few writings. His articles were published especially in the *Forum* magazine, which operated from 1934 to 1942. In the 1940s, Wettenhovi-Aspa was still writing his visions of the reorganization of the Suez Canal for the newspaper *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti* ("Finnish Social Democrat").<sup>119</sup> He also wrote manuscripts, but he no longer published books.

The general attitude of Wettenhovi-Aspa's contemporaries towards him was of varying degrees of amusement and astonishment, and at the same time acceptance of his patriotic ideas. The articles written by the causerie writers Olli and Tiitus and the author Ilmari Kianto on *The Kalevala and Egypt* give an idea of the different aspects of this attitude. Kianto's article also described the atmosphere in which Wettenhovi-Aspa presented his ideas and his status as a quick-witted eccentric of the artistic community, with an Ancient Egyptian fly buzzing inside his head.<sup>120</sup>

This atmosphere and the humorous sounding board of Wettenhovi-Aspa's ideas are also illustrated by an episode related to Sibelius in the 1930s: in the summer of 1936, Sibelius received two American journalists, Cornelius Vanderbilt and Jack O'Brien, at Ainola, his home in Järvenpää. On the same summer day, Ainola was also visited by Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa, who may have arranged a meeting with Sibelius for Vanderbilt, as he knew both. Americans were able to read about the discussions on that day in *Time* magazine published on Finland's Independence Day in December 1937. In the interview, Sibelius

2015), 143–54, and Erkki Urpilainen, *Algot Scarin ja göötiläisen historiankirjoituksen mureneminen Ruotsissa 1700-luvun alkupuolella*, *Historiallisia Tutkimuksia* 171 (Helsinki: Suomen Historiallinen Seura 1993), 141–42.

119

Pitkälä, "Pyramidit, pyhät raamit," 18, XVII.

120

Kianto, "Wettenhovi-Aspan riemujuhlajulkaisu."

first expressed his views on Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and other composers, but then added, with a twinkle in his eye: “All good composers lived in Egypt 5,000 years ago.”<sup>121</sup>

121

[Cornelius Jr. (IV) Vanderbilt and Jack O’Brien], “Music: Finland’s King.” *Time*, December 6, 1937; Glenda Dawn Goss, *Sibelius: A Composer’s Life and the Awakening of Finland* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 149–50, 155–57.

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