

SOVIET ATLANTIS:
BETWEEN SCIENCE FICTION
AND ESOTERIC COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: The paper concentrates on the history of the myth of Atlantis in twentieth century Russian culture. It traces the transmission of Atlantis narratives starting from artistic and esoteric circles of the early twentieth century, through Soviet science fiction, to the esoteric revival of the 1980s. Contemporary fictional literature is understood as a modern, secularized form of mythology, intrinsically connected to traditional mythological narratives. The story of Atlantis, as one of these narratives, played an important role in Russian esoteric and fictional literature. The transmission of the Atlantean narrative through the Soviet period is analyzed herein and can benefit scholars in several ways. It shows how esoteric narratives can change and assume a fictional nature to survive in hostile and highly secularized environments. It also contributes to the understanding of particular aspects of contemporary Russian spiritual life related to the revival of Russian esoteric communities, which began during the Perestroika and continued after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also contributes to the study of twentieth century Russian cultural history, as well as to the academic study of esotericism.

Keywords: Soviet literature, Atlantis, science fiction, symbolism, Western esotericism, anarcho-mysticism

This paper provides an overview of the transmission of the myth of Atlantis through the Soviet era and its revival in contemporary Russian esotericism. By no means complete, it intends to emphasize the intimate relationship between artistic and esoteric narratives about the supposedly lost continent. It is argued that art, and particularly fictional literature, can assume the role of a new mythology in modern society, surviving by stating its fictional character, yet powerful enough to inspire imagination and return to its claims of reality when social conditions allow such change. With roots leading to Plato, the myth of Atlantis inspired generations of esoteric authors, especially since the late nineteenth century, when the idea of ancient civilizations was widely popularized by Helena Blavatsky and her fellow Theosophists.

One of the places where this myth enjoyed a warm welcome was the Russian Empire. There it became a major source of inspiration for symbolists, a poetic movement originating in France. Symbolist poetry, as one of the creators of the movement Jean Moréas (1856–1910) emphasized, attempted “to dress the Idea in a sensible form” (Moréas 1886: 150). The followers of the movement opposed materialistic tendencies of nineteenth

century culture as well as restrictive religious institutions and looked for inspiration in esotericism and ancient mythology. The myth of the primordial homeland of humanity inspired by a gamut of esoteric sources played an important role in Russian symbolist poetry.

After the socialist revolution in October 1917 and the following civil war, the Soviet Union was established in 1922. And despite the country's materialistic ideology, the myth of Atlantis surprisingly persisted in different forms, including science fiction and fringe science. Soviet fiction during the 1920s was still under the powerful influence of prerevolutionary artistic circles, which meant even writers who were not actively involved in esoteric communities could transmit ideas derived from them. This allowed the myth of Atlantis to leak into the new mainstream and survive the complicated period of the 1930s, when the Soviet government under Joseph Stalin (1878–1953) repressed all organized esoteric movements. As Matthias Schwartz has pointed out, Soviet science fiction “constituted an extremely popular genre that, until the end of the Soviet Union as a strictly materialistic and atheistic state, offered occult belief systems and thoughts in a fantastic estranged form” (Schwartz 2011: 212). In the mid-1980s, during the liberalization of Soviet culture known as Perestroika, the myth of Atlantis became a source of inspiration for a new generation of spiritual leaders.

That science fiction can serve as a new type of mythology is not a new idea. The dividing line between fictional literature and myth is often thin. One might define art as a myth in which people do not believe anymore. This can be illustrated with fairy tales. According to Soviet folklorist Vladimir Propp, the plot of a fairy tale is often similar to the plot of a myth, and developed from it, yet there is a gap between the myth and the fairy tale. As Propp puts it, “stories about Hercules are very similar to our fairy tales. However, Hercules was a god with an established cult. A hero of a fairy tale, on the other hand, even if he travels to get golden apples, just as Hercules did, is a fictional character for us” (Propp 1946: 16). A fairy tale, therefore, constitutes an intermediary step between myth and fictional literature. In terms of narrative, it is still closely connected to myth, yet it tells this previously sacred story as fiction.

Science fiction, in turn, is close to fairy tale by its nature. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. pointed out, “most of what is classified as SF owes more to the structure of the fairy tale than to any scientific ideas it purports to explore.” (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 2018: 231–232). Soviet literary scholars and the science fiction community understood this connection well. For instance, in 1972, the philologist Tatiana Chernyshova published an article under the title “Science Fiction and the Creation of Myth in our Age”, which appeared in the science fiction anthology *Fantastika-72*. In this article, Chernyshova claimed that contemporary science fiction demonstrates epistemological traits similar to ancient mythology, serving as a method to construct a worldview based on a combination of scientific

knowledge and intuitive analogies, thus completing a view of the world by filling gaps that science cannot fill for one reason or another (Chernyshova 2004: 349).

An artist, therefore, can act as a creator of myths. Sometimes this relation to mythology is implicit, in other cases artists explicitly perceive themselves as creators of new myths, such as J. R. R. Tolkien or George Lucas. Their fictional texts have clear mythological origins and, even though people do not usually perceive them as real, they influence social reality. If an artistic form is powerful enough to seize the imagination to an extent that people begin to perceive it as real, the story can reclaim its mythological status. We can observe this process, for instance, in some of the Tolkien fan communities in post-Soviet countries where people claim to have genuine mystical experiences based on Tolkien's oeuvre (Zorya 2018).¹

The story of Atlantean mythology developed in esoteric and artistic circles in the fin de siècle Russian Empire and survived during the Soviet period as fictional literature and fringe science to resurface in the 1980s, though somewhat different, demonstrates yet another form of the same process.

1. The Myth of the Lost Continent in Early Twentieth Century Russia

In the early twentieth century, prior to 1917, the Russian Empire was a place filled with multiple esoteric communities, including Theosophical, spiritualist and masonic groups. These groups, which were closely tied to academic and artistic circles, transmitted the idea of Atlantis into fin de siècle Russian culture.

The most important source of these ideas was Helena Blavatsky (1831–1891), whose works were influential in the Russian Empire, where she was born and raised. Although she left her homeland to travel, eventually becoming an American citizen, then moving to India, and spending her last years in Europe, Blavatsky maintained connections with Russia all the while, and had a number of followers there.² Another esoteric author with close ties to Russia who promoted the topic was the former Theosophist and founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolph Steiner (1861–1925). Steiner, not unlike Blavatsky, had close connections to Russia. His second wife, and later his heir as leader of the Anthroposophical movement, Marie Steiner-von Sivers (1867–1948) came from Poland, at that time a province of the Russian Empire. Thanks to her influence, Steiner developed a close connection with his Russian followers. This affection was mutual. Suffice it to say that one of his followers in Russia was the leading symbolist

1 On the importance of Tolkien in post-Soviet culture see also Hooker 2003.

2 See Carlson 2015 for the history of Theosophical movement in the fin de siècle Russia.

writer and poet Andrei Bely (1880–1934), who wrote two books defending Steiner’s ideas and his memories of him. In these books, Bely describes Steiner’s lectures as “the most important event in one’s life” which “shook and clarified the mind” of whoever attended it (Bely 2000: 35).

Equally important for the formation of metahistorical narratives in the late Russian Empire were texts by French occult writers such as Fabre d’Olivet (1767–1825) and Alexandre Saint-Yves d’Alveydre (1842–1909), who some Russian writers referenced as a source of inspiration (Shakhmatova 2017: 67). D’Olivet in particular developed a complex historical narrative featuring four consecutive “races” – Yellow, Red, Black, and White. Two of them, Red and Black, claimed the name “Atlanteans,” which, according to d’Olivet, meant “masters of the universe” (Godwin 2011: 41). D’Alveydre, who to some extent was inspired by d’Olivet’s writings, referenced Atlantis on several occasions, although he was more interested in another mysterious place – Agartha – which is presumably located inside the earth and preserves “a language and a script, known as ‘Vattan’ or ‘Vattanian,’ which are the primordial ones of mankind” (Godwin 2008: 4). The ideas of d’Olivet and d’Alveydre influenced Russian esoteric communities primarily through Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), better known as Papus, and triggered the fascination with ancient civilizations and languages. Encausse developed d’Olivet’s narrative of four races that once dominated the Earth and eventually gave birth to contemporary civilizations. He also combined these ideas with ideas of the French seer Lois Michel (1816–1883) who thought that the Earth initially consisted of five small planets, four of which later joined into one, while the fifth remained separate and then became the Moon. Each of the primordial continents therefore derived from one of these small planets (Godwin 2011: 48–49). Encausse was popular in the late Russian Empire and even visited it, thus serving as a mediator of French esoteric literature. And since French was part of the standard educational curriculum of Russian aristocrats, it was easy for French esoteric literature to enter Russia.

The image of cyclical time and prehistoric civilizations appeared repeatedly in early twentieth century Russian poetry. Among symbolist poets in particular Atlantis was a common reference. Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), for example, begins his 1914 poetical cycle “Builder” (Stroitel’) with a depiction of underwater vestiges of Atlantis:

Atlantis has drowned,
The secret is hidden.
Some carousing fish only
In its palaces aren’t forbidden. (Balmont 1914: 304)

In a similar manner, Valery Bryusov (1873–1924), who was deeply involved in occult practices himself, begins his 1918 work “Cresset of Thought” (Svetoč Mysli) in the following manner:

First cresset of the sacred words
 Lemurians, giants morose, ignited,
 Atlanteans to skies it elevated. (Bryusov 1986: 286)

In 1912 Velimir Khlebnikov (1885–1922), a poet who was close to symbolist circles in the early period of his literary career, but later on became a key figure of Russian futurist movement, wrote a poem “Downfall of Atlantis”, which described the tragedy that ended the history of this mythical continent. Khlebnikov’s interest in Atlantis went hand-to-hand with a broader fascination with historical cycles that presumably rule great civilizational turbulences. Khlebnikov aspired to discern hidden patterns of history, to learn the law that governs it. The same year he wrote the poem about Atlantis, Khlebnikov published a small book, *Teacher and Student* (Učitel’ i Učenik), in which he advanced a theory according to which periods of 173, 317, 365, 413, 461, 951, and 1383 years govern the development of civilizations (Khlebnikov 1912: 6). The end of each cycle is marked, according to Khlebnikov, with wars and other catastrophic events. Although he did not mention Atlantis in *Teacher and Student*, it seems noteworthy that he wrote a poem about Atlantis at the same time when he was developing his theory of historical cycles.

In other words, the interest in Atlantis in Russian poetic circles was not exclusively artistic. With roots in Theosophical and Anthroposophical literature, images of lost civilizations were embedded in a broader esoteric context. While Khlebnikov developed his theories about hidden patterns in the history of civilizations, Bryusov attended Theosophical meetings and spiritualist séances, practiced yogic exercises and meditation (Mannherz 2012: 79). It is not surprising then that he also wrote a non-fiction book *Teachers of Teachers* (Učitelja Učitelej), in which he described human history in a manner similar to the esoteric literature of his era. From memoirs of his contemporaries we know that not only was Bryusov an ardent believer in the historical reality of Atlantis, but that he also planned an expedition to West Africa to find lost Atlantean colonies – an enterprise which was jeopardized by World War I and the following revolution (Rychkov 2017: 81).

According to Julia Mannherz, Bryusov was a “quite typical” figure for metropolitan circles of the early twentieth century (Mannherz 2012: 79). Even the journey to Africa as part of the spiritual search of Russian intelligentsia seems to be common both as a literary narrative and as a real pilgrimage. Thus, in Bely’s novel *Petersburg* the main character ends up traveling to the Nile on a spiritual quest, while the Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov (1853–1900) actually traveled to Egypt, where he experienced a mystical vision of Sophia (Mannherz 2012: 102). Helena Blavatsky, of course, provides yet another example of a similar kind.

One of the movements with prerevolutionary roots that flourished until the end of 1920s among the Russian intelligentsia was mystical anar-

chism. This movement was based on a combination of Russian anarchist philosophy with elements of Gnosticism and fin de siècle occult literature. Its followers believed that human beings are spiritual individuals who are mere travelers in this material world, one among many others. They were concerned with maintaining personal autonomy in the face of oppressive political and spiritual hierarchies, and developed a network of spiritual seekers, many of whom belonged to artistic and academic circles. The list of prominent figures close to the movement included, among others, the film director Sergei Eisenstein (1898–1948) (Nikitin 2003, vol. 1: 17), the writer of historical novels and translator of *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* Georgy Shtorm (1898–1978) (Nikitin 2003, vol. 1: 8), and the mathematician and philosopher Vasily Nalimov (1910–1997) (Nalimov 1994: 36).

In legends that spread among the followers of this movement and influenced esoteric thinkers throughout the Soviet period Atlantis appeared as part of their core mythology. Atlantis, according to the legends, existed in the midst of the Atlantic Ocean in ancient times “when the white sun that has not yet become yellow illuminated our earth” (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 47). It was a home for a mighty race of giants, Atlanteans, who lived side by side with the first modern people, Hyperboreans. The Human species had only begun to form, and the entire material world was full of chaos. Human beings suffered tremendously and prayed, so that their prayers reached spiritual beings of a higher order called Laegs. They descended on Earth and connected themselves with Atlanteans and Hyperboreans. They became their Guardian Angels, and their union resulted in the formation of spirit and astral bodies within human beings, in addition to physical bodies and souls the humans had already developed (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 13).

The people of Atlantis were skillful magicians and controlled the elements of nature (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 13). At the same time, the legends describe Atlantis as a technologically advanced civilization, with a deep knowledge of the universe and a long lifespan, which employed powerful machines for a variety of tasks, including personal mechanical wings that allowed Atlanteans to fly. The social order of Atlantis was an anarcho-socialist utopia. In the Atlantean society, “houses and other buildings did not cluster in the cities, but were located at a distance from one another” (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 47). Thanks to advanced technologies, the production of goods was easy and abundance made it possible to satisfy all the needs of Atlanteans, thus making money and trade unnecessary – anybody could go to a warehouse and order whatever they need. In addition, they did not have laws and usual power structures – instead, every Atlantean intuitively knew how to act properly (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 13). Overall, it was a golden age of humanity.

Yet not everything was perfect in Atlantis. The problem was that Atlanteans were inseparably connected to Laegs, and Laegs, although they were benevolent and powerful spiritual beings, over time developed nos-

talgia for their spiritual home. This unconscious nostalgia affected Atlanteans, too. They decided to attempt an ascension to higher spiritual realms. They tried suicides, asceticism, and, finally, elemental magic. Neither of these helped to achieve their spiritual goal, yet because of their magical experiments Atlanteans destroyed the balance of elements thus provoking a catastrophe that destroyed the Atlantean civilization.

Thanks to their technologies, Atlanteans survived the catastrophe and later on mixed with ancestors of contemporary humans. Over time, descendants of Atlanteans were less and less capable to communicate with their Laegs, who now existed in a drowsy state, though still connected to human beings. Not every person has a Laeg, but those who belong to a mystical order – one manifestation of which was an Order of Templars – whose goal is to awake Laegs and with their help return to a path of spiritual evolution of humanity (Nikitin 2003, vol. 3: 14).

To sum up, before and immediately after the revolution of 1917, the idea of Atlantis was omnipresent in Russian urban esoteric and artistic circles; not only, however, as an artistic metaphor, but as a belief tightly connected with esoteric convictions of Russian writers and poets of this time.

The situation changed dramatically in the following years. By the end of the 1920s, after the death of Vladimir Lenin (1870–1924) and the rise of Joseph Stalin as a leader of the young Soviet Union, the political and ideological environment began to shift. Esoteric ideas were eventually ousted from the mainstream discourse and many of their followers were imprisoned or even sentenced to death. For the Soviet myth of Atlantis, however, this was not the end of the story.

2. Soviet science fiction: from Atlantis to Mars and back again

The Soviet government was a proponent of atheism and materialism, and, with the rise of Stalin, esoteric communities were decimated for political reasons through repression. This, however, did not mean that esoteric imagery vanished from literature. Since it had already been popular in artistic circles, it survived in fiction, particularly science fiction, which became a powerful new stream in Soviet society from the 1920s onwards.

As Dominic Esler pointed out, Soviet ideology relied on science and its development because the communist transformation of society would not succeed without technological progress. Popularity of science fiction can therefore be explained by this intimate connection between science and communist ideology, as well as science fiction's "willingness to part from conventional reality", which made it more compatible with revolutionary ideas than realist literature, which artistically reproduced and thus solidified the status quo (Esler 2018: 118–119). Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. explained the importance of science fiction by pointing out its role

as an instrument of legitimization in Russian and Soviet culture which has a long history going all the way back to Romantic tradition. Despite the fact that, on the surface, Romanticism and revolutionary “scientific” ideology might seem like opposites, according to Csicsery-Ronay, “to the degree that Russian propagandists of ‘scientific’ utopianism presented their views through the paradigm of the fairy tale, the tale was also used to create an image of science as the treasure chest of magical tools with which history’s hero – the Russian nation, the proletariat, or Socialist Man – would create the promised utopia (Csicsery-Ronay Jr. 2018: 236).”

Two notable appearances of Atlantis in Soviet science fiction are Alexey Tolstoy’s (1883–1945) novel of *Aelita* (1923) and Alexander Belyaev’s (1884–1942) short novel *The Last Man from Atlantis* (Poslednij Čelovek iz Atlantidy).

Belyaev wrote *The Last Man from Atlantis* in 1925. The story does not provide any esoteric references; it is limited to pure science fiction. The author treats Atlantis as a scientific hypothesis about an ancient continent that might have existed in ancient times in the Atlantic Ocean. One of the sources of Belyaev’s Atlantean narrative – probably, the most important one – is explicitly mentioned in the text. It is a book by the French author Roger Dévigne, *The Lost Continent: Atlantis, the Sixth Part of the World* (Belyaev 1957: 231). This book was published in France in 1924, a year before Belyaev’s story, and was translated into Russian in 1926. It seems that Belyaev was familiar with the French original and used it as a source of inspiration.

The story opens with description of a contemporary American millionaire, Mr. Solley, who wants to ensure his immortal glory by doing something magnificent. After a long contemplation, he decides to sponsor a marine research expedition in hope of finding the lost city of Atlantis. Month after month the expedition seems futile, but after an exhausting search they finally find the ruins of the city. What we read in the second part of the story is a reconstruction of the last days of Atlantis, supposedly written by one of the scholars who worked with the expedition.

We learn from this depiction that Atlantis was a highly hierarchical structure, with nobility and priests controlling resources. The power of Atlantis rested upon the exploitation of slavery, and slaves were actually the most creative social group, who contributed to the well-being and power of the state. Priests, however, control others by means of a monopoly on knowledge. In Belyaev’s fiction the story of Atlantis loses its esoteric fragrance of a mysterious ancient civilization. The mystery is only an illusion, created to control people by greedy priests who want to avoid competition. The most important secret of the priests, revealed to selected students during initiation into highest echelons, is that there is no mystery at all – all priests have is empirical knowledge collected over centuries, which they hide from others (Belyaev 1957: 297). The true se-

cret is not a kind of mystical knowledge but an absence of such mysteries; there are no gods, and spirits that priests summon during their rituals are nothing but artificial illusions (Belyaev 1957: 298).

This story reflects a general criticism of religion during the 1920s. What is said is aimed not only at the Atlantean priests, but also at religion in general. The book combines criticism of religion with the propagation of ideas of equality and social justice, widespread in the communist literature of this period. Finally, it presents the story of Atlantis not as a mysterious spiritual truth, but as a scientific hypothesis that might or might not be proven in the future, just as in any work of science fiction; and also just as in any work of science fiction, the fictional setting is only an excuse to talk about social issues of contemporary society.

A completely different appearance of Atlantis can be seen in the novel *Aelita*, published by Alexei Tolstoy two years prior to *The Last Man from Atlantis*. At first glance, Tolstoy's novel is centered around a classical science fiction narrative – a voyage to Mars. The name of the novel, *Aelita*, is that of a Martian princess, one of the main characters. At first glance, a story like this would not be related to Atlantean mythology, and yet as soon as Soviet cosmonauts arrive on Mars and begin talking to *Aelita*, they learn that the ancestors of Martians were Atlanteans who came to Mars after a massive catastrophe on Earth destroyed their civilization.

Aelita describes the history of Atlantis, also referred to in the novel as the City of a Hundred Golden Gates, as a succession of “races” that built and ruled the city. The African people of the Zemze tribe founded the city. Zemze, as explained in the book, were heirs of yet another people that since time immemorial inhabited a huge continent of Gwandana located in the Pacific Ocean and later swallowed by its waves. The Zemze were tall and very strong, which allowed them to subdue other tribes and to establish their empire. More importantly, they possessed abilities that we may call extrasensory: “at distance they could feel the nature and form of things, just as a magnet feels the presence of another magnet” (Tolstoy 1963: 365). Zemze tribe kept moving westwards from Africa, until they found a land good enough to live on. There they established a city and created a pyramid as a symbol of its soundness. Using their hieroglyphic language, they started to write down their knowledge. They ruled the surrounding tribes – “red people” from the west – which they conquered and made a part of their empire.

Resistance to Zemze power constantly grew among the red tribes, and eventually one of their leaders united them and overthrew the Zemze lords. He created a new dynasty which assimilated Zemze and their knowledge. The new dynasty expanded the territory of the empire now called Hamagan both to the east, in Africa, and to the west, in Americas, building fortresses and pyramids as symbols of their power.

Later on, the new dynasty was overthrown by yet another nation,

known as “Sons of Aam”. They were people “with olive skin, long fiery eyes, and noses that looked like beaks” (Tolstoy 1963: 366). Unlike previous rulers of the city, they were not militant and avoided battles, relying more on their knowledge. They did not conquer the city. Instead, they came peacefully and over time accumulated enough power, finances, and knowledge to overthrow the previous dynasty and become new rulers of Atlantis – a name that they started to call the city. Sons of Aam were deeply interested in Zemze magical abilities. They studied ancient lore and developed in themselves magical powers that allowed them to treat illnesses with spells and do other miraculous things (Tolstoy 1963: 366).

An important part of Atlantean culture was a new religion established by the Sons of Aam. It was the cult of the Sleeping Head, and pyramids became its temples. This religion was the glue that kept the empire together. It was ecumenical, open to all tribes and races. However, it also had an esoteric part which priests taught only to a meticulously selected group of students. It included secrets of Zemze philosophy and magical powers. The secret doctrine of the cult was the following:

The true world is invisible, intangible, one cannot hear, taste, or smell it. The true world is a movement of the mind. The beginning and the final goal of this movement cannot be comprehended. Mind is matter, more solid than stone and faster than light. Looking for a resting state – as all matter does – mind falls asleep, becomes slower; we call that embodiment of mind into matter. Eventually the sleeping mind condenses into fire, air, water, and earth. The visible world consists of these four elements. A thing is a temporary condensation of mind. <...> The mind in a crystal is a mind in a perfect rest. The mind in the interstellar space is in perfect motion. A human being is a bridge between these two states of mind. Through the human being, the mind manifests itself into the visible world. His legs grow from a crystal, his belly is the Sun, his eyes are stars, his head is a chalice that is open into the universe. (Tolstoy 1963: 367–368).

Later on, disenchanted by the incapability of lay people to comprehend their subtle philosophy, Atlantean priests decided to develop an external form of their cult, and established a clear religious system that would appeal to all people. Thus, they created the cult of the Sun and built its main temple – an enormous golden pyramid – in the City of a Hundred Golden Gates. Tolstoy implies that religions of Central America and Northern Africa later developed from this cult of Sun-god, saying that in the West the Sun-god was depicted as a feathered snake, while in the East it was depicted as a human with a bird’s head (Tolstoy 1963: 368).

Later on, the Sons of Aam were overthrown by nomads who came from the far east and belonged to the “yellow race.” They worshipped the Moon and stars, and a prophetess led them to the Atlantean land. They conquered the land, then assimilated Atlantean culture and learned Atlantean philosophy, leading the empire in a new era of blossom. The name

of the first ruler that they chose was Tubal – most likely, a reference to the Biblical character Tubal from Genesis 10, although the depiction of his reign and the whole history of eastern nomads in the story of Atlantis bears more similarities to the history of the Mongol Empire.

New rulers rebuilt the city of Atlantis, introducing brand new defense towers with seven angles, they also restored the great pyramid, now embellished with golden plates. More importantly, they reclaimed old esoteric knowledge and further developed the “Science of Knowledge.” This science they separated into two levels. On the first level, students had to train their bodies, will, and mind to prepare themselves for the secret knowledge. When this was achieved, they proceeded to the next level which included “the knowledge of nature, the universe, and formulae through which a matter of directed mind can control nature” (Tolstoy 1963: 372). The essence of the renewed secret doctrine was contained in the following words:

In a human being the most powerful of the world’s powers – the matter of the mind – slumbers. Like an arrow that will strike its aim if a bowstring is charged properly and a trained hand aims the bow, the slumbering matter of mind can become charged with the bowstring of the will and aimed with the hand of knowledge. The power of knowledge directed thusly is limitless. (Tolstoy 1963: 372)

In this era, Atlanteans, according to Aelita’s story, built the Egyptian Sphinx, a symbol of knowledge, as well as the Seven Wonders of the world, including “the Labyrinth, the Colossus in the Mediterranean Sea, Pillars to the West of Gibraltar, the Observatory of Poseidon, the statue of sitting Tubal, and the City of Lemurs in an island in the Pacific Ocean” (Tolstoy 1963: 372). Memories of this period were preserved in subsequent legends as the Golden Age of humanity.

Yet Atlanteans’ philosophy, the same thing that provided them with their magnificent powers, also destroyed their civilization, because it had a fatal flaw. The flaw was related to the fact that Atlantean philosophy perceived the universe as a product of the mind, thus opening a possibility to believe that the universe is nothing but a dream. Over time, this system collapsed into solipsism, leading to rejection of the world and other human beings, and to the development of egoism and collapse of the society. The destruction of Atlantis was related to a series of natural disasters that Atlanteans, with their degenerated solipsistic philosophy of egocentrism and hedonism, could not withstand. However, by that time they also developed a new technology – flying egg-like ships which used the power of plant seeds – and on these ships some of the Atlanteans saved their lives by launching themselves to Mars (Tolstoy 1963: 372–374).

In Tolstoy’s exposition of Atlantean beliefs we notice a plethora of hidden esoteric references, such as the notion of matter as embodied mind, understanding human beings as a bridge between Earth and cosmic con-

sciousness. Characterizing these aspects of the novel, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal states that esoteric contents in Tolstoy's worldview are "derived from Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Fedorov, and Cosmism" (Rosenthal 1997: 25). Indeed, Tolstoy had been interested in esotericism since at least 1908, when he attended a lecture by Rudolph Steiner in Berlin (Tolstaya 2013: 339). Even though he later confessed that he had not understood most of it, probably because of his limited proficiency in German, it was still true that Tolstoy was deeply connected to esoteric circles. His wife, Natalya Kradnievskaya, was a Theosophist and visited lectures of Peter Ouspensky in Saint Petersburg in 1912 (Tolstaya 2013: 338).

From his correspondence we know that Tolstoy himself struggled to find an intermediary position between "mysticism" and "positivism." He wrote, "I cannot call myself a mystic, but I also do not want to call myself a realist; however, there is the unconscious, something on the fringe between the two, that takes a real image and paints it not with a mystical attitude, God forbid, but with something for which I do not know a name" (Cited from Tolstaya 2013: 340). This interest brought Tolstoy to esoteric topics, which were very popular at that time in artistic circles. Speaking about origins of particular esoteric elements in *Aelita*, Elena Tolstaya traces them to William Scott-Elliot's *The Story of Atlantis*, Rudolph Steiner's books, publications in the Theosophical journal *Rebus*, and bestselling novels by the Russian writer Vera Kryzhanovskaya-Rochester, which were published in the first decade of the twentieth century and which popularized the idea of an Atlantean retreat to Mars among the Russian-speaking audience (Tolstaya 2013: 341–342).

The impact of Alexei Tolstoy and his novel on Soviet science fiction literature was tremendous. Tolstoy made a stellar career as a writer achieving three Stalin Prizes – one of the highest civilian honor in arts and sciences – in 1941, 1943, and 1946. The book received three cinema adaptations in 1924, 1980 (in Hungary), and 1981 (as a television play). In 1975, asteroid 2401, discovered by Soviet scientists, was assigned a name "Aelita." In 1981, a science fiction festival and a prestigious award for science fiction authors called "Aelita" was established.

Meanwhile, Atlantis remained a part of the historical horizon of Soviet literature, in science fiction as well as in fringe science. In 1965, the Strugatsky brothers, who were among of the most esteemed Soviet writers, in their story "Monday Begins on Saturday" (Ponedel'nik načinaetsja v subbotu) described a library of a fictional Scientific Research Institute of Sorcery and Wizardry by telling that it "was full of the most interesting books of all languages and epochs, from the language of Atlanteans to Pidgin English" (Strugatsky 1965: 96). The same year the Ukrainian writer Oles Berdnyk published a story *The Heroic Deed of Vaivasvata* (Podvig Vajvasvaty), focused on the destruction of Atlantis. The story was heavily influenced by Hinduism, Theosophical ideas, and by the author's contacts with the Roerich family (Heller 2011:193–194). One year later, in 1966, a

non-fiction book named *Atlantis* by the Polish astronomer Ludwik Zajdler (1905–1985) was published. In it Atlantis is treated as a plausible, if controversial, historical hypothesis. The book was translated and officially published in Moscow. In the editorial, the Russian editor stated that “atlantology,” i.e. the investigation of Atlantis as a scientific hypothesis, had become an interdisciplinary field attracting astronomers, geologists, and oceanologists (Zajdler 1966: 5). In his book, Zajdler provides an overview of the whole body of Atlantean mythology and tries to connect the story of Atlantis with certain historical and astronomical events which, as he believed, might prove its plausibility. Notably, among other authors, Zajdler referenced Valery Bryusov’s arguments for the historical reality of Atlantis (Zajdler 1966: 44). This demonstrates a continuity between early 20th century Russian narratives about Atlantis and Soviet fiction and non-fiction literature. Publications like this, although far from being part of the Soviet academic mainstream, still appeared and stirred up interest in the lost continent among those who were curious enough to seek.

In 1985, the Soviet writer Victor Potapov published a science fiction story called *The Third Story of Aelita* (Третий Рассказ Аелиты), conceived as a sequel to the Alexei Tolstoy novel. The story abandons the space travel component and focuses on the history of Earth after the collapse of Atlantis. According to the story, during the catastrophe in the last days of Atlantis, while some Atlanteans moved to Mars, others remained on Earth. The surviving Atlanteans tried to rebuild their empire and disseminate the remaining knowledge from Atlantean libraries, yet they could not keep peace with each other, and fought in destructive battles that killed many people and destroyed what was left of Atlantis.

Meanwhile, descendants of Zemze people did not perish, but kept their culture “in forests of a continent located to the south of India and to the east of the land of black [people]” (Potapov 1985: 238). On this mysterious land in the Indian Ocean they started a new civilization, which survived the Atlantean catastrophe and gradually became the most significant power after the fall of Atlantis. When they realized that there was no more Atlanteans to stop them from moving north, they commenced the conquest of India, and later other regions. According to the customs of Zemze people, they built the pyramids of stone as a symbol that the place was solid; later on, they transformed them into burial places for Zemze kings.

The Zemze rejected philosophy that had led the Atlantean Empire to destruction. Instead, they introduced a renewed doctrine that is described in the following words:

The human mind is just a part of an absolute universal mind, the goal of which is to know itself. In the space between stars it exists without form and without body. It is a shadow, an echo, a thought without a body, which does not see and does not know its essence and *raison d'être*. In order to know itself, it

embodies itself in matter. However, matter itself has no soul; it is motionless and cannot be truly instrumental in learning the essence of the nature. That is why the abstract mind created living matter, the apex of which is the human being. He is the eyes and ears of the universal idea, he is its soul that struggles to eternally study the universe. (Potapov 1985: 239–240)

The symbol of Zemze people was a spiral that was a symbol of eternal motion of the mind. The spiral defined the form of labyrinths that they built in the northern regions of Earth. They thought that the stillness was inimical to the mind and that it should remain in constant development – otherwise, a universal idea in its endless motion would eventually pulverize it – just as it did with the Atlantean Empire.

What Potapov described as Zemze philosophy significantly resembles Hegelian dialectics. This should not surprise us though, because in the Soviet Union, thanks to his influence on Karl Marx, Hegel was one of the idealist thinkers widely available to readers. To follow Hegel meant being an intellectual rebel, and writers who were not satisfied with official atheism would turn to Hegelianism, searching for a philosophical alternative. Authors with esoteric interests were not an exception in this regard. In order to gain an opportunity to develop and publish their ideas in a situation of all invasive censorship, scholars would choose to embed their own ideas in historical narratives about Hegel, Kant, Ancient Greek, or Indian philosophy. Similarly, fiction writers put their ideas in fictional narratives associated with distant places and mythical civilizations of the past or the future. In both cases this allowed authors to keep the necessary distance from these ideas and made their publication more defensible in the face of censorship.

One of the most interesting aspects of *The Third Story of Aelita* is that, while describing thoughts of one of the story's protagonists, engineer Los', the author provides an insight into the importance and persistence of Atlantis in esoteric narratives of modern culture:

It was a wisdom of millennia that unified and explained everything: secrets of Egyptian pyramids, mysteries of yogic doctrines, legends about deluge and flying chariots, monuments of Easter Island that endlessly look into the sky, inexplicable similarities between the rectangular script of this island, square stamps from ancient Indian cities, strange similarities between them and ancient Chinese hieroglyphics, symbols of Kuna people, ornamentals of Sumatra and Polynesia. Los' recalled recently discovered gigantic stones placed by unknown people for unknown reasons along the shores of Western Europe. He recalled mysterious stone labyrinths located in different places from the White Sea to British Islands, and many other things. (Potapov 1985: 242)

In other words, the myth of Atlantis in Western Esotericism serves as a glue connecting many historical events into one single coherent narrative. A narrative that allows the creation of a holistic and meaningful picture of history and, at the same time, entices by promising a univer-

sal language and a universal culture. Indeed, if contemporary knowledge and cultures are derived from the same Atlantean home, it means that there is a common historical core, a common and universal tradition that could be restored by esoteric reading of contemporary sciences, philosophies and spiritual doctrines.

Thus, the story of Atlantis is a myth, but as any other myth it serves important functions. It is an origin story, and as such it explains who we are and where we come from; it contributes to the formation of our identity, allowing us to feel the unity with other human beings, and creating a structured cosmos from the chaos of human history. Myth is an essential part of human culture. It can exist in explicit form, as we saw in the case of the legends of mystical anarchists; and, in a secularized modern society – especially if a particular society is inimical to such myths – it may assume a new form, the form of art.

Looking at the evolution of the narrative of Atlantis, Victor Potapov's story demonstrates a turn from social problematics and socialist ideology towards a philosophical and metahistorical, almost explicitly esoteric narrative – though in the form of science fiction. This reflects the change of social climate during the Perestroika, which included a turn to the spiritual in Russia. One of results of this process was the return of esoteric narratives to the cultural mainstream. In other words, with Perestroika, new developments in the social context created an opportunity for a triumphal return of Atlantis as an esoteric narrative.

3. Rebuilding Atlantis: A post-Soviet Esoteric Revival

In the late-Soviet and post-Soviet context the topic of Atlantis became an integral part of a search for a new historical identity, which played an important role in the growing interest for ancient civilizations that could help to make sense of Russia's history. This strategy is evident, for example, in the oeuvre of Alexander Asov (born 1964), a Russian esoteric and pagan writer famous primarily for *The Book of Veles*, as well as literature dedicated to the "reconstruction" of hypothetic ancient Slavic sources deviating significantly from standard historical reconstructions.

Asov began to write in the late 1970s, publishing short stories and poetry in newspapers. By the 1990s he had turned to non-fiction and began to write for the journal *Science and Religion* (Nauka i religija), where he published articles on a variety of topics, from ozone holes to geomancy. Among these pieces a series of articles about Atlantis appeared in 1991, his first attempt to address this topic. A collection of these articles was published in 2001 as a book under the title *Atlantis and Ancient Rus'*, which since then has been republished several times (an expanded version of the book has a title *Atlantis, Hyperborea, and Ancient Rus'*). In this book, Asov compares the stories of Atlantis with Slavic folk-tales, claiming that

Slavs were heirs of the Atlantean esoteric knowledge (Asov 2017: 12–13). Asov describes two ancient civilizations, Hyperborean in the north and Atlantean in the south. The Atlantean civilization, in its turn, included Western Atlantis, located in Atlantic Ocean, and Eastern Atlantis, located somewhere in the Caucasus region near the Black Sea (Asov 2017: 222). The original Atlantean civilization collapsed in a deluge around the year 11150 BCE (Asov 2017: 309). Later on, some of its survivors settled around the Black Sea until, around 4000 BCE, a new deluge almost destroyed this culture. After that, some Atlanteans moved to the Middle East to give birth to the Sumerian civilization, while others remained in the Black Sea region and were assimilated by Hyperboreans, who moved there from the north during the 2-3 millennia BCE (Asov 2017: 9).

Slavic nations, according to Asov, are primarily descendants of Hyperboreans; however, Slavic priest-magicians, called the volkhvs, assimilated both Hyperborean and Atlantean lineages of esoteric knowledge, especially the knowledge of astrology (Asov 2017: 293). Combining different mythological narratives and folklore, Asov claims that an ancient king Svyatogor, based on a gamut of mythological characters, was a ruler of Eastern Atlantis who established this synthetic esoteric tradition (Asov 2017: 294). Through the daughters of Svyatogor, this astrological knowledge came to Slavic peoples in a form of two books. The Black Book contained secrets of power, death, and destruction, while the White Book included everything related to the divinity, life, creativity, and so on. Both books complemented each other and together created a holistic view of the universe. However, the knowledge in the Black Book was so dangerous that its improper usage eventually became the reason for the destruction of Atlantis (Asov 2017: 219–221).

It is important to note that for Asov writing a sacred history of Slavic people is the essential key to understanding of who they are, what they need to do, and where they ought to go. On a practical level, that means the necessity of reconstructing the knowledge of Hyperborean and Atlantean civilizations to get new insight about the past as well as the future. Asov does this by publishing books and establishing, near Gelendzhik, a museum of Slavic culture dedicated, among other things, to promotion of narratives about Slavic Atlantean legacy. Nowadays the museum acts as a center for festivals, attracting followers of multiple esoteric and religious movements (Asov 2017, 334, 340). Its creators claim to restore and teach Atlantean astrological knowledge and magical practices, as well as explore archeological sites presumably related to Atlantis.

Looking at the past and looking into the future are closely interconnected in post-Soviet spirituality, and thus Atlantean myths can intersect organically with references to Soviet science fiction in the post-Soviet Russian esoteric fiction. For example, Evdokia Luchezarnova (born 1952; prior to 2002 Evdokia Marchenko), the creator of a movement called *Radastea*, uses works by the Soviet writer of science fiction and historical

novels Ivan Efremov (1908–1972) to show how a person who wants to learn properly from history should first of all develop a skill to perceive things from the perspective of “eternity and infinity” (Marchenko *Liberation*: 8–10). Efremov, according to Marchenko, was capable of this skill that we desperately need to develop as well. When such a novel perspective is achieved, it becomes easy to restore the holistic view of history, one which includes the knowledge of primordial civilizations such as Atlantis.

Luhezarnova tells a history of Atlantis mostly in line with the Theosophical tradition. She also claims that at the end of their civilization Atlanteans “de-solidified” in the pure energy and transformed into algae and silt. They are not, strictly speaking, dead; instead, their energy is constantly present in the contemporary world, it interacts with modern people, and assumes new forms in our society (Luhezarnova 2002: 22). Atlantis, therefore, is a legacy that is always with us and, to some extent, is a key to our future. In a quite literal sense, we build our civilization from Atlantean material, just like an artisan makes a pot out of clay which, as stated before, contains the energy of the lost and dissolved continent (Marchenko *Knowledge*: 232).

Another prominent spiritual leader who developed her ideas during the late-Soviet period and early 1990s, and addressed the topic of Atlantis was Victoria Preobrazhenskaya (also known as Marina Tsvigun and Maria Devi Christos, born in 1960). In her narrative about Atlantis its fate is explained through astrological symbolism with a substantial influence of Theosophical literature and writings of Helena Roerich, who is especially important for Preobrazhenskaya (Preobrazhenskaya 2014: 431). In her autobiography, Preobrazhenskaya also mentions some fiction writers who influenced her during her early years (Preobrazhenskaya 2014: 50). This list includes Jules Verne, who, in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, describes how his characters visited Atlantis. We can assume that the Jules Verne’s book might be Preobrazhenskaya’s first exposure to the image of Atlantis and only later her interest in the lost continent shaped and developed through reading esoteric literature.

According to Preobrazhenskaya, Atlantis collapsed thirteen thousand years ago, during a shift from the Age of Cancer to the Age of Leo. As long as we live during a similar shift – from Pisces to Aquarius – we can expect similar catastrophic events leading to the creation of a completely new civilization in our lifetime (Preobrazhenskaya 2014: 385–386). This new civilization will be, at least to some extent, a reconstruction of the ancient Atlantis, as is evident from one of Preobrazhenskaya’s prophetic dreams:

I saw in a dream a new world similar to Atlantis. I saw from the Sky a country of an enormous size. Rings the size of the entire planet were everywhere. For all the buildings and everything around them was located in a form of circle-rings, as it had been in Atlantis. Indeed, I saw a new world on the Earth. (Preobrazhenskaya 2014: 124)

However, the most successful contemporary Russian esoteric author focusing on Atlantis is probably Boris Monosov. Little is known about his biography. Judging by the fact that he claims to have died in his previous incarnation at some point during World War II and was soon reborn in his current physical body, we can set his date of birth in the 1940s. It is also known that in 1994 he published what was probably his first esoteric publication – a tarot deck referenced as “Russian Tarot” or “Avvadon’s Tarot” (Avvadon is Monosov’s magical pseudonym) (Kostenko 2003). Almost a decade later, in 2001, he created a website and launched online courses of esoteric education in what he called back then the “Atlantis School of Magic,” later rebranded as the “Psychokinetic Association of Atlantis.”

His career as a magician aside, Monosov was also a fiction writer. He wrote, for instance, how in 2001 he participated in a literary contest with a short story “Universal Witch Doctor” (Universal’nyi Koldovatel’), featuring a young Atlantean magus Don as main character, which provides a glimpse into Monosov’s ideas about the lost continent (Monosov n.d.: 32). Later on Monosov included the story into the manual for his esoteric school, claiming that it reflects real information about Atlantis.

A style that mixes elements of fictional or semi-fictional narratives about Monosov’s previous lives and lost civilizations with more specific magical instructions and descriptions of Monosov’s cosmology is characteristic for his oeuvre. Another work written in a similar style is *Magic for Magicians*, which is claimed to be Monosov’s magical autobiography as well as a brief overview of the entire magical system. Notably, Monosov explicitly discusses parallels between his views and the Soviet science fiction, particularly Ivan Efremov and the Strugatsky brothers, attributing these similarities to the fact that Soviet fiction writers unconsciously obtained information from spiritual planes and transmitted it into their writings (Monosov 2007: 138–139). While Monosov claims that his books are exclusively based on his personal experience as a magus, he also mentions several authors, namely Rudolph Steiner, Charles Leadbeater, Pappus, and Carlos Castaneda, whose influence is evident in Monosov’s ideas (Monosov 2007: 280).

In all Monosov’s works, the legend of Atlantis plays a central role, because, as he explains, the egregor of Atlantis is one of the most developed and powerful egregors (Monosov n.d.: 6.). Egregor – a term that appears in Russian esoteric literature since at least the early 1920s when the Moscow esoteric leader Vladimir Shmakov (? – 1929) introduced it in his writings (Shmakov 1994: 609, 616ff) – refers to the spiritual representation of a group of people. Any established community, such as a family, a corporation, a church, a nation, etc., produces an egregor. An egregor is often considered a semi-conscious being that has its own will and capacity to act independently from individual members of a group that gave birth to the egregor. For instance, a war with a neighboring state might be fruitful for an egregor of a certain nation, and help it to spread

its influence on new territories, even if the same conflict was harmful for the people involved. Monosov defines egregor in the following manner:

Egregor is an energetic structure that consists of multiple organisms. Any complex organism can be, in turn, described as an egregor that consists of cells, tissues, or organs. Egregor is, first of all, a system that consists of multiple elements. Second, it is a system inside which there is a circulation of energies, and it can be described as an energetic structure. When multiple consciousnesses that constitute an egregor interact with each other, they give birth to a consciousness of an entirely new level. For instance, a consciousness of a human being is radically different from consciousness of its cell. Collective consciousness of an egregor is called a Genius of this egregor. (Monosov n.d.: 2)

According to the notion widespread in Russian esoteric communities, magi can use egregors as their instruments and deliberately construct egregors to accumulate collective magical power.

Monosov describes an egregor of Atlantis as an artificially constructed egregor that survived the destruction of Atlantis some 55–60 thousand years ago. Egregors of American, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian culture developed later from it, but Monosov believes that most elements of the ancient egregor of Atlantis were preserved in Kabbalah, while Christianity and Islam regained some elements of Atlantean knowledge because they developed on the foundation of Kabbalistic literature (Monosov n.d.: 6).

A symbol of Atlantis that allows a connection to its egregor is a seven-point star. To support the egregor, mages of Atlantis created pyramids all over their empire, which served them both as their living spaces and nodes of their power. The Great Pyramid located on one of the “Earth’s chakras” was the most important element of the entire network and a model for smaller structures. Inside this pyramid there was a pool with an intelligent squid who was an ally of Atlanteans. This little squid allowed Atlantean magi to communicate with the egregor of its species, which was closely connected to the egregor of Atlantis (Monosov n.d.: 7). As Monosov explains elsewhere, the squid in the pool was a totem that allowed connection to the mind of the Big Squid living in the ocean, which possessed mental capabilities greater than those of human beings (Monosov 2007: 150).

The totem, according to Monosov, is an invention of Atlanteans. It is a piece of magical technology that allows connecting to the mental bodies of animal species and communicating with them. In Monosov’s metaphysics, non-human animals do not possess individual mental bodies; instead, they have one mental body for the entire species, and totems were created to contact with them and control them (Monosov 2007: 148–149). Other Atlantean technologies included, according to Monosov, fetishes and creeds. Monosov defines the fetish as a figurine or statue that works as an accumulator of “biological energy” for magical purposes, while creeds which constitute core beliefs of different religious systems were instru-

ments created by Atlantean magi to control the energies of large masses of lay people for the benefit of Atlantean Empire (Monosov 2007: 148).

In Monosov's oeuvre the border between magic and technology is thin and fickle. He constantly uses the term "technology" to refer to magical and religious practices. As Monosov explains, "Atlantean religion was not different from their science" (Monosov n.d.: 7). For Monosov, religion is a magical science that people follow without knowing it. In other words, every religion is, so to say, a cargo cult which people follow without knowing what they do and why they do it. Concerning magi, Monosov claims that he, "as well as all magi, does not belong to any religious confession. Magi are not atheists, yet they are not believers, because magic is a science aimed to develop the mind in order to learn the secrets of the universe" (Monosov 2007: 10).

Unlike our modern civilization, Atlanteans in Monosov's mythology relied on biotechnologies rather than mechanical devices. Most of these "biotechnologies" were magical in nature. For example, Monosov describes multiple "programs" that were installed directly into the minds of Atlanteans and performed functions similar to contemporary technical devices, such as the alarm clock or translation programs (Monosov n.d.: 32, 43–44).

Due to the biotechnological nature of their civilization Atlanteans did not construct cities, because their "living houses" required additional space to function properly (Monosov n.d.: 50). Thus, Atlantis is once again depicted as a rural utopia – somewhat similar to legends of mystical anarchists – rather than Plato's city on an island.

The destruction of Atlantis was the result of a war between Atlanteans and "Moon Pitrises" who were leftovers of the Lemurian race (Monosov n.d.: 10). The term "Pitris" is derived from the works of Helena Blavatsky, who redefined this Sanskrit term, which initially referred to several classes of spirits, including ancestral spirits, denoting "lunar ancestors" of the entire humanity (Blavatsky 1888: 227). In Monosov's cosmology Moon Pitrises were survivors of the Lemurian race incapable of further evolution and thus inherently inimical to Atlantean biotechnology:

The central question in their quarrel was the future evolution of humanity. The constant war was between those who developed new qualities and those who could not develop them and therefore were far behind. The first group needed to create a completely new world, the second could survive only in the old one. This contradiction still remains important and constitutes the reason behind most cataclysms that shatter the life of humanity. (Monosov 2007: 145)

According to Monosov, a military conflict between the two races led to their mutual annihilation. Atlanteans used the Great Pyramid to direct energy that destroyed the main command centers of the Pitris military. However, Pitris had a dead man's switch, which activated geophysical weapons and ensured mutual annihilation in case of an enemy attack.

“Powerful charges detonated in magma. They caused a huge tsunami. The genius of our planet was damaged. Continents were draining, atmosphere was burning, and everything alive was perishing” (Monosov 2007: 152). This is how Monosov describes the final minutes of Atlantis. The end of the empire, however, was not the end of the story. As was mentioned before, Monosov and his followers believe that Atlantean egregor is still alive and can be used by magicians who actively reconstruct it. Moreover, according to Monosov, Atlantean technology can also be reconstructed. One example of Atlantean biotechnical devices mentioned by Monosov is the so-called “sarcophagus.” It appears in a “Universal Witch Doctor” as a newly created, state-of-the-art Atlantean technology created initially to facilitate mental scanning of the space (Monosov n.d.: 36). In another book, *Psychotronika*, Monosov describes the sarcophagus as a machine created to facilitate the evolution of Atlanteans into magi, also referred to as an incubator (Monosov 2008: 43). Yet this is not only a story of distant past. Monosov and his students claim to construct two new sarcophaguses in contemporary Russia. On the official website of Monosov’s association one of its members says that the first one, created in mid-1990s, is located in Saint Petersburg, while the second one was created in 2012 in Ekaterinburg (AlterEgo 2013). Study groups that concentrate on multiple goals, mostly of initiatory nature, such as remembering previous lives, developing magical skills or correcting “karmic deformations”, use the sarcophaguses during their lessons (AlterEgo 2013).

At this point, Atlantis is no mere myth, it is not just a part of imagination anymore – it is making inroads into physical reality. It is fascinating to see how groups of magi such as Monosov’s association literally try to build, or rebuild, Atlantis in the contemporary world. A myth or a real place, one fact remains certain — there are people around us who literally materialize Atlantis of their dreams with their own hands.

Conclusion

The image of Atlantis played an important role in twentieth century Russian culture. Its roots can be found in urban esoteric networks of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which attracted many intellectuals from artistic circles and academia, as well as Russian nobility, eager for new adventures, and spiritual search. Helena Blavatsky provides a good example of a type of personality characteristic of the late twentieth century Russian esoteric milieu.

Blavatsky’s works were extremely influential for the development of Russian esotericism. This includes her narratives about ancient civilizations, first and foremost that of Atlantis. Blavatsky aside, Russian esoteric narratives were also influenced by Rudolf Steiner and French occultists, such as Saint-Yves d’Alveydre. An important medium of French esoteric

ideas in Russia was Gérard Encausse. This circle of authors remained a pivotal source for Russian esoteric narratives throughout all of twentieth century, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Prior to the 1917 revolution and right after it, in the 1920s, esoteric narratives were part of the Russian mainstream culture, and artistic and esoteric dimensions coexisted in tight connection. Many writers of this period perceived their artistic work as a continuation of their esoteric ideas and believed in the magical power of art and its power to change the world. Atlantis was for them not only a poetic metaphor, but also a real place that they were willing to explore – both by physical and metaphysical means.

When the situation changed, towards the end of the 1920s, the materialistic and atheistic ideology on the one hand and political repressions on the other hand, were a double blow for esoteric communities, which were forced into the underground for fear of political repression. In this situation, science fiction literature became a new medium for the myth of Atlantis in Soviet mainstream culture. Since early Soviet science fiction literature had developed in the same circles as esoteric communities did, Soviet writers, even if not necessarily adherents of esoteric ideas themselves, reproduced narratives about Atlantis in their literature. Additionally, new non-fiction literature that explored Atlantis as a fringe historical hypothesis appeared during the same period. Both types of literature represented a continuation of literary and esoteric circles from the early twentieth century, even though they did not present themselves as esoteric.

One might say that science fiction played a role of passing on a new mythology in the Soviet Union, assuming a form acceptable for an atheistic society – a form of a fictional narrative or a scientific hypothesis. With the change in political and social structure of the Soviet society during Perestroika and the following collapse of the Soviet Union these ideas reclaimed their esoteric status. Authors of the 1990s, who were exposed both to Soviet science fiction literature and to the esoteric primary sources, were well equipped to recognize an esoteric layer in the Soviet science fiction and move from writing fiction to constructing their own worlds, presuming Atlantis as a reality. In these new realities, Atlantis was no more a fiction, but an empirical fact of occult science based on memories from previous lives of a magus. Even more fascinating, these memories open a possibility to (re)construct Atlantis here and now. In these efforts, the myth of Atlantis found its way into material reality.

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Советская Атлантида: между наукой и эзотерическими сообществами

Резюме

Статья посвящена рассмотрению истории легенды об Атлантиде в российской культуре XX века. Анализируются истоки представлений об Атлантиде в литературных и эзотерических кругах начала XX века. Показано, что литературный образ Атлантиды в это время формировался под влиянием эзотерических учений о погибших цивилизациях, укорененных в теософии, антропософии и французском оккультизме XIX века. С нарастанием атеистической пропаганды в советский период художественная и научно-популярная литература становятся главными средствами сохранения и передачи легенды об Атлантиде, в то время как ее эзотерическая генеалогия отходит на второй план. Однако с началом новой массовой волны интереса к различным формам духовности в конце 1980-х, связанной с либерализацией советской культуры в ходе перестройки и последующим распадом Советского Союза, легенде об Атлантиде, сохраненной в художественной литературе, возвращается временно отошедшее на второй план эзотерическое наполнение.

Ключевые слова: Советская литература, Атлантида, научная фантастика, символизм, Западный эзотеризм, анархо-мистицизм

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