

28 February 2022  
Nicosia, Cyprus

Dear friends of Kalevala,

welcome to this event and reception marking the Kalevala Day which is celebrated in Finland as an official flag-raising day and simultaneously the Day of Finnish culture.

As many of you know, the Kalevala has been sometimes considered an epic comparable to Homer's Iliad and Odyssey.

It was Elias Lonnrot (1802-84), a country doctor and folklore scholar who created the Kalevala on the basis of his expeditions. You will hear more about him in the following video.

The first version of the Kalevala appeared on 28.2. 1835 and ever since, that day has been celebrated as Kalevala Day, the birthday of Finnish culture. The New 1849 edition appeared some 15 years after the original. The New Kalevala has been so far translated into 61 languages and it is the most translated Finnish work of all time.

First Turkish versions of the Kalevala were published in 1917. The last translations of the epic in Turkish was made in 1965 and again in 1982. I am pleased to mention that translation to Greek has been done in 1992 by Maria Martzoukou, who will make a presentation soon in the following video.

The Kalevala was published when Finland was an autonomous part of the Grand Duchy of Czarist Russia (from 1809 to 1917). The new Kalevala started to play an important part of the Finnish nation building and represented an affirmation of national memory. The battle between good and evil presented in the Kalevala was an allegory for the need for an independent Finland. The Kalevala represents also peace and it is very much what we Finns are.

Dear friends,

the Kalevala is an important part of the development of Finnish language and literature, it has enriched the Finnish music, arts and culture in general. The figures of Kalevala are human and even fragile, as we all are. The Kalevala is telling more about human relations than about wars, it tells about sentiments and power of words. The nature, even locally produced food, berries, mushrooms rye bread etc. are important elements in the stories.

The Kalevala has been present in theaters and concerts, movies and even in comic series like Don Rosa's Donald Ducks Tale of the Sampo. Finnish author Mauri Kunnas, well known about his books to children pictured the adventures of canine characters, dogs and cats in their roles and spirit of the Kalevala. And to many, it is clear that J. R. R. Tolkien's story about Lord of the Rings was strongly affected by Kalevala, demons and magical plants and animals.

The illustrations with a Kalevala theme by Akseli Gallen-Kallela decorated the Finnish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition in 1900 with Kalevala frescoes on the arches. Gallen-Kallela's paintings have built the Finnish identity and are considered to be treasures of national art.

It is worth of mentioning that the most famous Finnish composer's, Jean Sibelius', Kullervo Symphony about Kalevala was born more than one hundred years ago.

Here in Cyprus it is worth of telling that one of the most important Finnish writers, Zacharias Topelius wrote the libretto for Princess of Cypern, set by Fredric Pacius , who also wrote the music to the poem which became Finland's national anthem.

In the story Topelius moved scenes from poems in the Kalevala to a new setting, the island of Cyprus. The events take place partly on the island of Cyprus and partly in Finland, partly in the world of ancient fables and partly in the world of the Kalevala.

Lemminkäinen, who is considered to be one kind of womanizer, arrives on the island of Cyprus. The daughter of the King of Cyprus, Princess Chryseis, falls in love with Lemminkäinen.

Lemminkäinen brings the princess with her homeland to Finland and names her Kyllinen, but Chryseis does not want to adapt to a foreign country and the role of a housewife.

An expedition from Cyprus arrives to retrieve the princess. Chryseis admits that he loves Lemminkäinen, but finally escapes, changes her mind and meet again Lemminkäinen, who does not recognize Chryseis anymore.

Later, Lemminkäinen is mortally wounded by an arrow fired by a blind shepherd from Ostrobothnia and is already sinking into Tuonela, but his mother's love makes him come to life. Chryseis praises his new homeland, Finland, but dies at the end of the last show on a cliff.

The most famous single part of the Cypriot princess is the song Hellas barn (Laps 'Hellaan), which is known as the patriotic song due to the Finnish words written later.

Topelius wrote the play for the opening (November 28, 1860) of Helsinki's new theater building, which is still known as the Swedish Theater.

The Swedish-speaking Topelius opposed language disputes. The presentation of a work on the Kalevala at the opening of the Swedish-language theater was intended as an amicable gesture between language groups.

So, to finish my speech I am happy to invite the Director of the Finnish Institute at Athens, Dr Petra Pakkanen to send her greetings via the video. After Petra Pakkanen, Senior Administrator, Translator at Finnish Institute at Athens, Maria Martzoukou will tell us more about Kalevala in Greek and then we invite all participants here present at the Finnish residence to enjoy Kalevala style pies and other food and drinks.

Thank you!

Ambassador of Finland to Cyprus  
Harri Mäki-Reinikka