Shikongo shaKalulu, Nakambale and shared memories.
Olukonda historic mission station as a cultural memory and heritage site
Kim Groop*

Abstract
In 1992, the old Finnish mission station Olukonda in the Oshikoto Region of northern Namibia was declared a national heritage site. This was the first such heritage declaration after Namibia gained its independence in 1990. In this article, I examine the Olukonda station from a historical and cultural memory perspective. The legendary missionary Martti Rautanen – or Nakambale – resided at the site between 1880 and his death in 1926, and he is buried at Olukonda together with most of his family members. Olukonda is the site where the relationship between the king(s) and the missionaries was tested, shaped, and consolidated. At Olukonda Finnish-missionary Lutheranism was gradually adopted by Ondonga society, and eventually Olukonda would become a site which the Ovambo would view as a part of their own heritage. In the article, I discuss remembrance and forgetting, time demarcations, and the different understandings of decisive events of the past. I argue that Olukonda is the main site which nurtures the memory of the Lutheran past in northern Namibia, but also that, at Olukonda, various mission and church related memories intermingle with nationalism and Ovambo culture.

Olukonda as a Lutheran mission station
The work of the Finnish Missionary Society in Namibia dates back to the year 1870 when six missionaries and two carpenters arrived at Omandongo in the Ondonga kingdom. The missionaries responded to an invitation by King Shikongo shaKalulu which was communicated through the Rhenish missionary Hugo Hahn some years earlier. More importantly, however, they believed that they had been called by God who had opened a

* Kim Groop is a university teacher, associate professor and researcher in Church History at Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland. He has been studying the history and legacy of Christian mission and European colonialism in Tanzania, but also in Namibia where he resided between 2003 and 2006. Groop has taken a particular interest in issues relating to cultural memory. Here he has focused on Protestantism, pietism and mission from a (trans)cultural perspective, in Finland and Africa, but also on the ‘re-building’ of sites of cultural and religious memory in the former German Democratic Republic. E-mail: kim.groop@abo.fi

1 Since 1985, the Finnish Missionary Society has been known in English as the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.
door to Ovamboland. For 18 years, Omandongo would be the centre of the Finnish mission in the Ondonga kingdom. In 1871, Missionary Kaarle Emanuel Jurvelin founded a secondary station at Olukonda some 20 kilometres to the west, close to the residence of Shikongo shaKalulu’s nephew, and heir apparent, Kambonde kaNankwaya. The missionaries also attempted to expand into the neighbouring kingdoms Ongandjera, Uukwambi, and Oukwanyama, but failed to win the respect of the local rulers. Within three years, the Finns had abandoned these new stations, and for the next three decades, they would focus on their work in Ondonga. The missionaries were as dependent on the friendly disposal of the kings and chiefs as any indigenous Ovambo was. If the king so wished the missionaries would have to leave, or risked being killed. In the Ovambo polities, the king or chief had virtually absolute power.

Even in Ondonga, the relations between the missionaries and the ruler were characterised by mutual suspicion. Apparently disappointed with what the Finns offered Shikongo shaKalulu frequently hampered the mission by preventing people from participating in mission activities or from selling foodstuffs and cattle to the missionaries. The eastern part of the Ondonga kingdom continued to be a troubled place for the missionaries. Under dramatic conditions, the missionaries fled from the eastern stations Omandongo and Omulonga in September 1888, this time threatened by chief Nehale. Missionaries and Christians alike moved to Olukonda, which would become the new centre. To the missionaries King Kambonde kaMpingana, who ruled over western Ondonga, was considered friendlier than his brother Nehale. Although many missionaries would reside at Olukonda during the first decades of missionary presence, this site would come to be

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2 Matti Peltola, Sata vuotta suomalaista lähetystyötä 1859–1959 II: Suomen lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia, Helsinki, Suomen lähetysseura, 1958: 41. I take the liberty here of viewing those missionaries’ year with Hugo Hahn at Otjimbingwe as training and the arrival at Omandongo as the real start. The name Ovamboland or Amboland was used by early travellers, but also by the Finnish missionaries, to describe an area in what is today northern Namibia and southern Angola. The Ovambo peoples consist of eight tribes with different dialects. The name Ovamboland is still often used today, although it is considered more politically correct to refer to the four regions, which the Ovambo inhabit: Omusati, Ohanguena, Oshana, and Oshikoto.


4 Missionstidning för Finland, 1876: 109.


7 Peltola, Sata vuotta: 43-44; Paunu, Suomen: 17-74.

8 Missionstidning för Finland, 1889: 6-8.

9 Frans Hannula, Missionstidning för Finland, 1889: 21; Missionstidning för Finland, 1889: 8; 1891: 3, 43f.
particularly connected with Martti Rautanen— or Nakambale as he was called locally. In 1880, after the missionary Gustav Skoglund had died from malaria, Rautanen was chosen to take his place at Olukonda. With few interruptions, Rautanen would live at Olukonda for more than 40 years.

Martti Rautanen was born in Ingria close to Saint Petersburg in 1845. He was brought up in a relatively poor family, his father having died when he was only 12 years old. Serfdom was still practiced in Russia until 1861 and for a short period Rautanen toiled on the farm to ensure the survival of his family, while also serving at the estate of Duke Shuvalov. Rautanen had little official education. His mother Anna had taught him how to read. Rautanen had also studied Christianity under the supervision of the local parson prior to his confirmation, and the parson had provided him with some basic schooling. Entering the seminary of the Finnish Missionary Society in Helsinki in 1862 was therefore a golden opportunity for Rautanen, and he was probably the one working the hardest to succeed in his studies. Since the missionaries were to serve as pastors in overseas missions, they had to be examined before the chapter. Uuno Paunu of the Finnish Missionary Society wrote that Rautanen was struggling with his studies and that it was uncertain whether he would be given a chance to take the examination. Nonetheless, Rautanen passed and he was installed as a missionary together with four other co-students in June 1868. Two weeks later the young missionaries departed for Africa. Despite a shaky start, Rautanen would achieve relative success in South West Africa. In 1883, he was elected the local leader of the missionaries. Apart from his position as a leader of the work in Ovamboland, Rautanen had all the duties of a missionary including teaching, preaching, healing, and building. In his spare time, he would also engage in gathering plants, both for his own collection and also for private and public collections in Finland and Germany. Maybe the lion’s share of his spare time was spent turning Oshindonga, the Ondonga language, into a written vernacular, and thereafter translating texts. With a little help from other missionaries, and much help from local collaborators,

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10 It is not known when the nickname Nakambale — the man who wears a hat, or basket — was given to Rautanen. This nickname is also inscribed on his gravestone at Olukonda.
13 Peltola, Martti Rautanen: 18f.; Saarisalo, Etelän: 12; Kohonen, Rautainen: 27f.
14 Missionstidning för Finland, 1868: 105; Paunu, Suomen: 92-97. Part of Rautanen’s struggles in the seminary may have been due to his treatment by the director of the Finnish Missionary Society, K. J. G. Sirelius, which according to Rautanen limited his motivation. Letter from Martti Rautanen to K. J. G. Sirelius in Saarisalo, Etelän: 21-24. Apart from the five candidates from the missionary seminary in Helsinki, one of the missionaries had been trained in Hannover. See Paunu, Suomen: 69f., 94, 96f.
15 Saarisalo, Etelän: 130; Peltola, Martti Rautanen, 109.
16 Peltola, Martti Rautanen: 116-128.
he had translated the New Testament into Oshindonga by 1902. In 1923, he declared that the whole bible had been translated.\(^\text{17}\) Two years later, he was awarded an honorary doctorate for his life-time achievements.\(^\text{18}\)

The first two decades of Finnish activities in the Ondonga kingdom were largely discouraging. The missionaries had difficulties in obtaining food, other supplies, and local assistance. There was little trust between Ovambo and Finns, and their salaries were so low that they had to start trading informally to survive.\(^\text{19}\) The missionaries were also hampered by the many deaths due to tropical diseases. However, there were three important breakthroughs in the 19th century. The first significant change for the better was the improvement in relations between the missionaries and the kings towards the end of the 1870s. Several times the mission stations had been broken into, and cattle and other property had been stolen.\(^\text{20}\) Missionary Gustaf Skoglund complained in 1877 that the king (Kambonde kaNankwaya) was “friendly, but didn’t protect the missionaries”, and that the people likewise were “friendly but didn’t come to Sunday service”.\(^\text{21}\) While the security would improve when the missionaries’ reputation improved — as a result of their providing medical care to the king and his subjects — the people would still not come to church. In 1881 Rautanen wrote that the people were using the same excuse as the king — “otse tatu zini oonguo, we despise clothes” — as a reason for staying away from church. The missionary made it clear that the people were “following the example of the king and dare not do otherwise”.\(^\text{22}\) Of course, the visible difference between those who had become Christians and those who had not — the novel habit of wearing clothes instead of animal skins — was only one of many. Still it provided the king and his subjects with a visible reason to reject education and church activities at Olukonda. Suspicion prevailed on several levels. While trust between king and missionary was growing the king was still not ready to let the Finns roam freely. There were many, seemingly unbridgeable, cultural differences between Ovambo traditional life and Finnish Lutheran Christianity, but little readiness on either side to negotiate conditions which both parties could accept.

The second change came some 10 years later when it appears that King Kambonde kaMpingana had become somewhat less suspicious of the mission schools and Sunday services. This, clearly, was a result of a confidence which had been built up over many years — again not least through the missionaries’ providing medical care for him and his family. Towards the end of the 1880s, after nearly 20 years of work, the Finnish field started to grow. This positive development was followed with great interest in Finland. In

\(^{17}\) Peltola, *Sata vuotta*: 190; Peltola, *Martti Rautanen*: 264, 268. Nonetheless, the bible was not published until in 1954. For this, see Peltola, *Sata vuotta*: 241.


\(^{20}\) Peltola, *Martti Rautanen*: 82-84.


September 1890, at least 14 newspapers in Finland reported that 52 people had been baptised at Olukonda, and that there were 280 Christians in the Finnish mission field. The third breakthrough in the Ovambo mission concerned the missionaries' health. For the most of the 19th century, the missionaries had regularly suffered from malaria and many missionaries, wives, and children had succumbed to the African fever. For instance, six out of nine of Martti and Frieda Rautanen’s children died at a young age.

The year 1897 was a turning point when the missionaries started treating malaria with quinine, which they found that “next to God, had helped them the most”. The missionary survival rate improved considerably due to this discovery. In hindsight, it is surprising that the missionaries did not use quinine at an earlier date, given the fact that other missionaries in Africa were already aware of the drug much earlier. For instance, David Livingstone (1813–1873) had effectively treated himself with quinine during his travels.

On the 29 September 1889, the first church building in Ovamboland was inaugurated at Olukonda. Construction had already started in May the previous year after it had become clear that the schoolhouse was too small for the growing parish, i.e. when missionaries and parishioners from Omandongo and Omulonga had moved to Olukonda. The church building was 17 metres long and seven metres wide. It was built from sun-dried bricks, with a thatched grass roof, and an earthen floor. Together with the parishioners at Olukonda Rautanen also built a new mission house in 1893. The house was built in the same style as the church. Both the church and mission house have survived until today.

In July 1910, the Finnish Missionary Society celebrated the 40th anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries in Ovamboland and Ondonga. The mission society reported in the bulletin Missionstidning för Finland that “2,000–3,000 blacks, Christians and pagans alike” had gathered at Olukonda. The change during these four decades was striking. From having been a dangerous place for the missionaries, it was now reported with pleasure that the participants “sat seriously and in an orderly manner on their seats, listened to the brothers’ preaching and participated in prayers and hymns”. Moreover,

[T]he pagan kings and chiefs in general [had] respect for our missionaries, in particular for our old brother M. Rautanen, who for 40 years had lived among

23 See for instance “Tietoja Afrikasta”, Satakunta, 18 September 1890.
27 Botolf Björklund, Missionstidning för Finland, 1891: 43f.
28 Missionstidning för Finland, 1894, 121-123.
29 Missionstidning för Finland, 1910: 149 (my translation).
them as the only remaining one of the 10 jaunty young men, who 40 years ago arrived in this land for the first time.\textsuperscript{30}

In 1908 a medical clinic was opened at Oniipa some 10 kilometres to the north, by Medical Doctor Selma Rainio. Three years later this clinic would develop into the Onandjokwe Hospital. In 1913, a teacher seminary was established at Oniipa, by Emil Liljeblad, and in 1922 Missionary Nestor Wäänänen established a theological seminary.\textsuperscript{31} Through these new institutions, Oniipa would gradually grow into the centre of the Lutheran work in Ovamboland. When the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC) was founded in 1954 it was logical to place its headquarters at Oniipa. As a consequence of developments at Oniipa, the importance of Olukonda gradually diminished. Nonetheless, Olukonda would remain an important centre for the missionaries well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. After Martti Rautanen’s death in 1926, his wife Frieda continued to live at Olukonda until her death in 1937, and, after her, their daughter Johanna Rautanen lived at Olukonda until her death in 1966. Johanna Rautanen was the last of the Rautanen family to be buried at the old cemetery at Olukonda.\textsuperscript{32}

The connections to the kings

In an interview Seppo Kalliokoski, who for many years served ELCIN as a missionary carpenter, frequently drew attention to the connection between Olukonda and the Finnish mission to the Ondonga king.\textsuperscript{33} In Kalliokoski’s understanding, the missionaries had travelled to Ondonga and made their entrance at Omandongo as a direct response to King Shikongo shaKalulu’s request. Kalliokoski further maintains that the present king Immanuel Kauluma Elifas’ frequent references to Shikongo’s calling as a clear signal that nothing has changed in this respect.\textsuperscript{34} Swapo General Secretary Nangolo Mbumba confirms Kalliokoski’s standpoint on the closeness between the Ondonga king and the mission.\textsuperscript{35} This relationship was cemented through Martti Rautanen’s close relationship with several subsequent kings. The first king with whom Rautanen built a long-standing relationship and wrote fondly of was Kambonde kaNankwaya (1874–1883) or Kambonde I. Kambonde I did not want the mission, but he learned how to benefit from it in a way that both he and the mission accepted.\textsuperscript{36} In several letters to the Finnish Missionary Society bulletin, in 1883, Rautanen describes his good relationship with

\textsuperscript{30} Missionstidning för Finland, 1910: 150 (my translation).
\textsuperscript{32} Peltola, Martti Rautanen: 357-359.
\textsuperscript{33} Seppo Kalliokoski is an advisor to King Immanuel Kauluma Elifas – as is Swapo General Secretary Nangolo Mbumba.
\textsuperscript{34} Interview Seppo Kalliokoski, 24 November 2016, Helsinki.
\textsuperscript{35} Interview Nangolo Mbumba, 30 December 2016, Otjiwarongo.
\textsuperscript{36} Saarisalo, Etelän: 93-99.
Kambonde kaNankwaya. For instance in 1883, he wrote that he had given the key to the king when he was away travelling.37

Kambonde kaNankwaya was an alcoholic and Rautanen had given him medicine many times when he was suffering due to lengthy bouts of drinking. Towards the end of 1883 the king’s health deteriorated. Rautanen gives a moving description of his last moments with the king:

I left immediately and I took with me the medicine – suspecting that the disease was delirium tremens – that had a good effect on him last year when he was suffering from the same disease. […] His eyes rolled wildly, as if searching for an object, and occasionally he tried to speak in broken and incomprehensible sentences. The trembling and sweat came occasionally over him and stopped again for a while. When such attacks were in the offing, he looked at me with beseeching eyes, and strangely enough, when I put my hand on his shoulder and with the other seized his hand, he became calmer. […] Now, he was in full consciousness, so that I could talk to him a little, and I told him mainly that nothing, or no one, but God could help him. He listened to me with a peaceful and friendly expression. I gave him drugs again and when it got dark, I went home. When I took leave, he held my hand in his for a long time, and asked me to come to him in the morning. Call me even in the middle of the night, if you are in any need of my help, I said.38

The next morning Frieda Rautanen baked bread for the king, and as Rautanen heard that the king’s condition had improved somewhat, he decided to return only in the evening when the king’s condition usually got worse:

I was not mistaken. He had just returned to his inner rooms, and the disease again began to attack him with new strength. Now he was unconscious once again and even worse than yesterday. The sick man’s condition seemed to me already very precarious. No longer did he want any medicine, and I did not bother him with that either, because I already saw that human help was in vain, unless God himself worked a miracle. Having been with him for a while, during which he seemed to see all sorts of objects, which he either asked to be taken away or brought to him, I went home, with very little hope of his recovery. In the evening after sunset, when I had started baptismal instruction with the catechumens, I was asked to come to the king straight away. I was on my way immediately, after having brought a candle and it did not take long before I was standing next to my friend. I do not want the friends of the mission to take offence that I call a pagan king my friend, because we always called each other that. So did many of the older [missionary] brothers, and he them. Nor, am I ashamed to call him my friend, because for the Lord’s sake, I loved him from the heart. And, I often noticed that he loved me too. On my words “Kume kandye” (My friend), I got no answer. He had breathed his last.39

Not only did Rautanen call Kambonde kaNankwaya his friend, but he also called him his king. After having remained by Kambonde’s side “until he began to cool” Rautanen exclaimed to those present that “our king Kambonde was dead!” He also expresses his

37 Rautanen, Missionstidning för Finland, 1883: 148.
39 Ibid.: 117 (my translation).
loyalty towards the king to the readers of the article by writing that “our [the missionaries’] king Kambonde is dead”. Rautanen not only served the kings medically, but also as their advisor in delicate political matters. In his relation with the subsequent kings — Kambonde kaNankwaya (1874–1883), litana yaNekwiyu (1883–1884), Kambonde kaMpingana (1884–1909), Kambonde kaNgula (1909–1912), and Martin Nambala yaKadhikwa (1912–1942) — his political role would become ever greater. The kings sought his advice on all kinds of matters involving the Europeans, but also on how to act in relation to other kings and chiefs. Interestingly the missionaries had been invited because Shikongo shaKalulu had welcomed Europeans. He wanted goods and services, which he believed that the missionary presence would provide (directly or indirectly). However, little more than a decade later the kings needed the same missionaries as advisors and as shields against the Europeans. For Martti Rautanen it was clear that if the kings did not threaten the colonial authorities there would be no reason for a colonial invasion of their kingdoms. For instance, he and his colleague Albin Savola advised Kambonde kaMpingana not to engage in military action against the Germans in 1904, and again in the Herero-Nama uprising in 1905–1907. This is an episode, which Nangolo Mbumba draws attention to, i.e. Kambonde kaMpingana’s decision not to follow his brother Nehale in 1904 and attack German posts in what is today the Etosha national park. Kambonde’s decision was a direct result of his trust in his Finnish advisors.

It is difficult to write categorically about such a gradual development as the Ondonga kings’ growing trust in and improving relationship with the Lutheran mission. Nonetheless, I would like to mention the year 1912. That year Kambonde kaNgula was (as the first king) baptised on his deathbed, and later the same year his successor Nambala yaKadhikwa was baptised. Nambala yaKadhikwa chose Martin as his new name after his teacher Martti Rautanen. By doing this, he confirmed his relationship with the Finnish missionary and took it to a new level. Through becoming Rautanen’s namesake — or mbushe — the king came as close to being Rautanen’s relative as one may in Ovambo tradition without having the same parents. This closeness between King Martin and Missionary Martti can still be seen today at the cemetery where the king is buried.

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40 Ibid. (my translation).
42 Eirola, *Ovambogefahr*: 82f.
44 Interview Mbumba. For a thorough interpretation of Nehale’s raids, see Eirola, *Ovambogefahr*: 166-169.
next to the Rautanen family grave. By becoming Martti Rautanen’s namesake, King Martin confirmed not only his own relationship with the missionary, but also the relationship between the Ondonga kingdom and Finnish Lutheran Christianity. Ultimately, the Lutheran pastors became envoys of the king. Nangolo Mbumba, who was born at Olukonda, tells a story about his own grandfather, which illustrates this. The grandfather had once confronted the pastor at Olukonda, Pinhas Kambonde, with a gun when he had, against his will, been elected to participate in a training course in Engela in Kwanyama:

So they confronted each other, the one with a gun in his hand, and the other one being chased around the church. Then Pinhas Kambonde said: This church is here because of the authority of Kambonde Mpingana. […] Are you ready to shoot me and go and report to the king? So to emphasize again that the authority to have parishes there to practice religion had already been granted by the traditional leader, though Kambonde Mpingana was not a Christian. […] My grandfather ended up going [to Engela] and when he came back he was a changed man.

Fig. 1: Ondonga king Martin’s last resting place next to the Rautanen family grave.


Interview Mbumba.
There are many similar episodes like the one Mbumba recalled, which show how the Ovambo kings and society would come to view the work at places like Olukonda, Oniipa and Omulonga as a part of their society, and today, by extension, as their own heritage.48 This sense of ownership has frequently been demonstrated at Olukonda, for instance through the building of a fence around the cemetery, something that was called for by the king and paid for, at least in part, by a local businessman.49 This close relationship has also been institutionalised in the church where the king, since the 1970s, has had his own chair not far from the altar, and in symbolic gestures like when the king recently laid the first brick in the building of a new church in Olukonda.50

Becoming a national heritage site

As Oniipa grew as a centre within the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (from 1984 the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, ELCIN) the opposite happened with Olukonda. The only buildings left from Rautanen’s time – the mission house and church – were slowly deteriorating. According to former bishop Tomas Shivute, it was the continued presence of Finnish missionaries at Olukonda, until the 1960s, which kept the buildings from destruction.51 However, the initiative to save and develop Olukonda came from within ELCIN. In the 1970s, ELCIN decided that it had to take action lest the historical buildings be destroyed and in 1976, the church was renovated.52 Shortly before independence, ELCIN also took the initiative to have Olukonda proclaimed as site of national heritage. According to Kalliokoski, it was district parson Festus Ashipala who introduced the idea.53 Help and funding was also provided from Finland. In the early 1980s Seppo Kalliokoski renovated the roof on the missionary house and in 1989 he refurbished the building to serve as a temporary UNHCR shelter for returning refugees.54 Finnish foreign minister Pertti Paasio was influential in providing funding for this project. After a visit at Olukonda in 1990 when he saw the sorry state of the future Namibian heritage site, he actively looked for means to finance the renovation of the church and mission house. This he also mentions in one of his books.55

In 1994, Martti Eirola, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland, was hired to assist ELCIN in turning Olukonda into a museum. Eirola had a personal relation to Olukonda

48 Interview Martti Eirola, 24 November 2016, Helsinki; Interview Filemon Amaambo, 27 December 2016, Onipa; Interview Kalliokoski.
49 Interview Tomas Shivute, 2 January 2017, Windhoek; Interview Kalliokoski.
50 Interview Mbumba; Interview Shivute; Interview Kalliokoski.
51 Interview Shivute; interview Mbumba.
54 Interview Kalliokoski.
55 Pertti Paasio, Minä ja Mr Murphy; Iyväskylä, Gummerus, 1996: 18f.; Interview Kalliokoski.
where he had spent part of his childhood, and he had recently defended a doctoral thesis on Ondonga history. The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission employed him with funds provided by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. During a three and a half year long project, Eirola and co-worker Raimo Holopainen were in charge of the renovation of the houses at Olukonda and turned the mission house into a museum.\textsuperscript{56} Despite assistance from Finland, it should be stressed that the project was ELCIN’s from the first initiative to completion.\textsuperscript{57} Many ordained and lay members were also active in the project. Among these were King Immanuel Kauluma Elfas who took a leading role as a supporter of the projects at Olukonda, and Rev. Petrus Shipena who for many years served as chair of the museum board.\textsuperscript{58}

In October 1992, President Sam Nujoma declared the Olukonda mission — the mission house, old church and cemetery — a national monument.\textsuperscript{59} Under the section Historical Interest in the Government Gazette the site is described as follows;

\begin{quote}
The Nakambale Mission House and Church are the oldest buildings of their kind in far northern Namibia. The former was built in the early 1870’s and the latter in 1889 under the direction of the famous Finnish missionary, Reverend Martti Rautanen, who was popularly known as “Nakambale”. In the cemetery adjoining the church were buried amongst a number of traditional leaders, “Nakambale”, members of his family and a number of the members of the Olukonda Parish.\textsuperscript{60}
\end{quote}

Two things are worth noting about the above text. Firstly, it refers, wrongly, to the previous mission house, which Missionary Tolonen had finished in 1875. The house standing today was built by Rautanen and the Olukonda parishioners in 1893.\textsuperscript{61} The church, therefore, is the older of the two buildings, and the mission house is only a few years older than the house in Onipa, which was built in 1897–1898.\textsuperscript{62} Secondly, it is apparent that the old mission station at Olukonda is intimately connected with the Ovambo cultural memory of Martti Rautanen. Moreover, through the phrasing in the declaration, the connection to Nakambale was further cemented. No longer was Olukonda an ordinary old Finnish mission station, but it became primarily the site in Namibia where the memory of Rautanen was institutionalised. By extension, through Martti Rautanen’s good reputation, the work of the Finnish Missionary Society in northern Namibia was also acknowledged. Olukonda has come to be associated with Rautanen in the same way as the Onandjokwe Hospital is associated with Selma Rainio. Both sites serve as institutionalised cultural memories, which in themselves do not tell all

\begin{footnotes}
\item[56] Interview Eirola.
\item[57] This is something which Eirola himself stresses (E-mail: Eirola to Groop, 11 March 2017).
\item[58] Interview Kalliokoski; interview Eirola.
\item[61] Missionstidning för Finland, 1894: 121-123.
\item[62] For the Onipa house, see Albin Savola, Missionstidning för Finland, 1900: 12f.
\end{footnotes}
that much about the work of these two individuals, but, which simply remind Namibians of the missionary past in this part of Namibia.

Olukonda has been acknowledged by high profile political and societal leaders. When the Nakambale museum was inaugurated in 1995 to mark the 150th anniversary of Martti Rautanen’s birth, both Presidents Martti Ahtisaari of Finland and Sam Nujoma of Namibia were present.63 The Nakambale museum has three patrons; Ondonga King Immanuel Kauluma Elifas, and the wives of the presidents Martti Ahtisaari and Sam Nujoma; Mrs Eeva Ahtisaari, and Mrs Kovambo Nujoma.64

As a part of the museum, a traditional Ovambo homestead was built. The purpose was to complement the museum’s representation of missionary life with glimpses of local culture, or, as Ian Fairweather notes, to offer “a ‘traditional’ homestead […] where guests could sample local cuisine and watch demonstrations of ‘traditional’ activities.”65 The historic parts of Olukonda (the Nakambale museum, church and cemetery) fit well within what UNESCO has defined as “cultural heritage” which is “a monument, group of buildings or site of historical, aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value”.66 Nowadays this kind of cultural heritage would be termed tangible, as opposed to intangible. The concept of intangible heritage was defined by UNESCO in 2001.67 According to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, intangible heritage is equivalent to folklore, with the exception that “there has been an important shift in the concept to include not only the masterpieces but also the masters.”68 The cultural homestead outside the nationally declared (tangible) cultural heritage would fit as intangible heritage. It was not a part of the original mission station, but is a later addition. However, and more importantly, the homestead is merely an empty shell if the local people do not demonstrate their culture to the visitors. The homestead and its demonstrations — as a recent addition — are not a part of the official cultural heritage, but a part or an extension of the museum. Nonetheless, the homestead is a popular tourist attraction, and is highlighted in the Namibian guidebooks. In addition, this part of Olukonda is an aspect which may in part explain why Olukonda was declared a site of national heritage. In fact, Olukonda was the first location to be declared a national monument after independence.69 It is extraordinary that the heritagisation of the Olukonda mission happened at a time when it would have been logical for the young

63 Interview Eirola; interview Kalliokoski.
68 Ibid.: 164.
69 Interview Eirola.
nationalist — and maybe socialist — leadership to postpone projects highlighting the European presence in Namibia. Despite several conflicts between Christianity and culture, there has never been a prevailing view — at Olukonda or elsewhere in the north of Namibia — that the Finnish mission had inflicted such damage on local culture that it should not be commemorated. On the contrary, the mission has always been viewed as something that was recognised by the kings, valued for the development it gave rise to, and incorporated into local society.

Fig. 2: The old Olukonda church which was inaugurated in 1889

Photo by the author.

Cultural memory and amnesia

There are several interesting aspects to the Ovambo cultural memory of the Finnish mission in Namibia. With cultural memory, I am referring to Jan and Aleida Assmann’s definitions of cultural memory as separate from individual and communicative memory.\textsuperscript{20} The Assmanns distinguish between three dimensions of memory. The \textit{individual} memory

lives with, and it dies with, the individual. The communicative memory concerns personally experienced memories among individuals in a collective – memories that are communicated for instance in the family. The communicative memory does not last more than three generations, or at a maximum 80–100 years, since the memory dies with its carriers. The third dimension, the cultural memory, is more distant. Whereas the communicative memory has an informal character, and can be reshaped when someone in the collective brings in new or different aspects, the cultural memory is institutionalised, and it reaches far back in time. It is a more static memory, maintained through buildings and monuments, symbols, texts etc.  

Jan Assmann compares the “polarity between communicative and cultural memory to that between everyday life and the festival”. Whereas the communicative memory has an everyday character, the cultural memory is more ceremonial, or is “imbued with an element of the sacred”. As forms for cultural remembrance, Assmann mentions texts, dances, images, and rituals. In our times cultural memory is supported by libraries, museums, schools, theatres, concert halls, orchestras, churches, synagogues, mosques, teachers, librarians, priests, rabbis, sheiks or mullahs. Without “institutions, media, and specialists”, writes Jan Assmann, “a cultural memory is not possible”.

According to this definition, there would not be much communicated memory of Martti Rautanen left. He died in 1926, more than 90 years ago. His memory has undergone a certain institutionalisation through the establishing of a cultural heritage site and museum at Olukonda. Nonetheless, in 2016 there were still people who had vivid memories dating back to Rautanen’s times. One of them is Nangolo Mbumba. Mbumba’s grandparents were converts who had been baptised by Rautanen, and his parents were baptised as infants by the same missionary. Memories of the missionary were passed on to Mbumba by his parents. Nonetheless, when Mbumba speaks about Rautanen and Olukonda, he draws attention to his own personal experience with more recent missionaries, such as his teacher Lahja Lehtonen at Oshigambo High School from 1960 onwards. To some extent, he understands the older missionaries such as Martti Rautanen through more personal experiences with more recent missionaries. This is a common feature of remembrance of the Finnish-Namibian past, which I have noticed in many talks and interviews over the past 10 years. The older history is supported by more recent personal experiences, wherein the cultural memory of Lutheranism in northern Namibia, before the foundation of the Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church in 1954, has been substantially affected by personal encounters that are more recent.

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72 Assmann, Cultural Memory: 38.

73 Assmann, Gedächtnis: 24. This can be compared with Pierre Nora, who emphasised that sites of memory – lieux de mémoire – exist only because of the fact that there are no longer any environments of memory – milieu de mémoire. Cf. Pierrea Nora, “Between memory and history: les lieux de mémoire”, Representations, 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory, 1989: 7-24 (7).

74 Interview Mbumba.
In the cultural memory of the Ovambo, the efforts of the Finnish Missionary Society have made a lasting impression. The missionaries are mostly talked about with respect. Ian Fairweather calls Martti Rautanen a “twentieth century Owambo folk hero”. One of the keys to their success was their ability to respect and cooperate with the local authorities, and, in particular, the Ondonga kings. Without doubt, German missionary Hugo Hahn of the neighbouring Rhenish Missionary Society played a key role in the early Finnish mission in Ovamboland. He conveyed the invitation from King Shikongo shaKalulu to the Finnish Missionary Society; he trained the first missionaries for a year at Otjimbingwe before having them escorted to Omandongo and Shikongo’s court.

Fig. 3: King Shikongo shaKalulu’s memorial stone at Omandongo (photo by the author).

76 Paunu, Suomen: 115-145.
Matti Peltola writes that Shikongo shaKalulu died in 1874 “of the consequences of drinking and lewd life” and that the king “until the end of his life remained foreign to the gospel message, and sought only to take advantage of the white teachers”.77 This side of his life is often played down. In the Finnish and Namibian cultural memory, Shikongo shaKalulu is primarily remembered as a king who called for missionaries. At Omandongo where Shikongo is buried there is a memorial stone celebrating the fact that the king was the first to accept Finnish missionaries settling and preaching the gospel in Ondonga. The text also states that the first service was held by the Finnish missionaries on the 9 July 1870. Lastly the text highlights that the king had told the missionaries that “it is a good thing that you came here and we are willing to do whatever you tell us”.78

Seppo Kalliokoski was present at the celebrations when the stone was unveiled in 1985. He emphasises how specific the king as well as the other speakers were in emphasising, and even thanking God, “that he used a pagan king to call missionaries to our tribe”.79

Of course, this depiction of Shikongo — in text and speech — is only accurate in the literal sense of the text; the pagan king called for missionaries, and all of this is true. Markus Huss, Ulla Manns and Hans Ruin write in connection to other similar memorials that, the past is constantly communicated and materialised in different ways, and is thus portrayed and takes place in the cultural collective memory. Through museum exhibits, arts, media, literature and music, in monuments and street names, on squares and in parks one is told about a past that often proves to be contained in a certain desired future. The preserved and institutionalised memories often legitimise a certain story about what has been and what is prevailing, with different underlying political agendas.80

There is a limit to how much you can write on a stone. Shikongo shaKalulu’s welcoming of the missionaries may seem praiseworthy. What the stone does not tell the person reading the inscription, however, is that there was a rather short honeymoon after the arrival of the missionaries. Paunu writes that Shikongo shaKalulu “was ill-disposed towards the mission and the missionaries, whom he hated and despised wholeheartedly, though he did not carry out direct hostilities.”81 Of course, all memorials provide a highly simplified message. The spectator is being informed about a certain deed (information that may be accurate). At the same time, he or she becomes even more uninformed, through obtaining a biased or a simplified version of the truth. Nonetheless, the text is

77 Peltola, Martti Rautanen : 79 (my translation).
78 Inscription on Shikongo shaKalulu’s memorial stone at Omandongo. The original text reads: “Mpaka opwa lala omukwaniika Shikongo shaKalulu eya a li zimine aatumwa yotango aasoomi ya tule mondongayu uvithe elaka eteye melongelokalunga lyotango mondonga, lya ningwa kaatumwa aasoomi meti 9 lya juli 1879. Shikongo shaKalulu okwa tile ‘ne omwa ninganawa sho mwe yaashihe tamu shi tu lombwele, otwa hala oku shi ninga’.”
79 Interview Kalliokoski (my translation).
81 Paunu, Suomen : 179. It can be noted that Paunu was working for the Finnish Missionary Society and had first-hand information from the missionaries who knew King Nehale.
important to the group of supporters and sponsors behind it. In this case, the message on the stone is intended to put the mission in perspective. It firmly declares that the Finnish missionaries did not come of their own accord to impose their ideology on the Ovambo, but were responding to a call from the king. The mission was incorporated into the Ondonga kingdom and, by extension, was taken up by other Ovambo subgroups and was turned into a local concern.

Andrus Ers has in his research given focus to the concept “year Zero”; an idea of a radical demarcation to the past. According to Ers, the idea of the adoption of a kind of zero point is central in military science and medicine, but can also be adopted and found elsewhere. It can, for instance,

denote the point of impact for bombing, the point in time at which a military operation goes from the planning stage to execution, or index cases in the spread of an epidemic. In its current form, contemporary history is organized around a number of such zero points. To name just some of the most significant examples: the end of WWII in 1945 became Germany’s Stunde Null; the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were described as zero points, and the site of the 11 September attacks was dubbed “Ground Zero. […] [M]odernity has been characterized by a continual search for the end of history, a point at which we can be said to have arrived, to be complete or redeemed, a point at which the truth of humankind and society has been revealed once and for all. It is apparent that Ers has been inspired by Reinhart Koselleck — not least Koselleck’s work on the French revolution and the revolutionary calendar as a clear demarcation between old and new time. In general, as Koselleck seems to show, much of the scholarly focus has been on discerning and separating the ‘beforehand not yet’ and ‘afterward no longer’, between a dark and primitive past and an enlightened future, between the Middle Ages and modernity, etc. The definition of and divisions between these epochs is seldom straightforward. One inconsistency, as Koselleck demonstrates, is the lack of sharpness in determining the years of epochal breaks but also, in a second step, the difficulty in making exact demarcations between the epochs. Another possibly even more straightforward problem is determining which epoch shift(s) to observe or celebrate as “year zero” or the birth of something new in a collective. It seems to me that Ers’ and Koselleck’s considerations make sense in the northern Namibian context. There are not only one, but at least two distinguishable ‘years zero’ in Ovambo, and at Olukonda, and to some extent the two are conflicting. Viewed chronologically the first of these demarcations is the year 1870, when Christianity came

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84 Koselleck, Practice: 154f.
85 Ers, “Year zero”: 158.
to the north of what is today Namibia. Shikongo shaKalulu’s memorial stone highlights this year and its significance as a demarcation between epochs. Moreover, the importance of the stone reaches well beyond the Ondonga kingdom, as Shikongo was a highly influential king. This place, Omandongo, and this year, 1870, mark the arrival of Christianity to the Ovambo North. But in the minds of the people — then and now — not only the Christian religion, but also civilisation and development made their first appearance. When suggesting, as I sometimes do, that Christianity also brought about changes in culture, the interviewees instead prefer to highlight the positive development which Finnish mission started. Many times the interviewees have brought the situation before 1870 into the discussion as a dramatic alternative, suggesting that critics of the church (and civilisation) may also want to return to wearing animal skins. The state before the arrival of Christianity in the Namibian north is emphasised as a state to which few want to return.

The other “year zero” which is clearly visible in Namibia is 1990, when Namibia gained its independence. Interestingly, focus on independence in Ovambo has been increasingly connected with a longing for “authentic tradition”. Swapo and the Namibian government have, for instance, supported the Olufuko festival in Outapi. This festival has brought about a renewed interest in a female initiation — a rite-de-passage that the Finnish missionaries never accepted. Celebration around the Shikongo memorial stone and celebrating Namibian independence are thus in conflict to a certain extent. The former celebrates the Ovambo king’s successful calling for missionaries and development whereas the latter celebrates independence from former influences and the return to traditions and traditional values.

The importance of Olukonda

When Olukonda was declared a national monument the physical structures, were at the centre of attention as the “oldest buildings […] of their kind in northern Namibia”. All of my informants highlighted the significance of the historic buildings. Tomas Shivute describes it thus:

Olukonda was the first mission station, which is still existing. Because other sites like Omandongo, if there was a small building it is no more there. It’s only the cross. And then you have also Omulonga where the first Ovambos were baptised — there is nothing. You can say, eha! you see that field? The first Christians were baptised there. But there is nothing. But when you come to Olukonda then at least you can tell that this is the place it is the only one except for […] [the newer station] Onipa.80

86 Interview Kallikoski.
87 Interviews Mbumba; interview Shivute; interview Amaambo.
90 Interview Shivute.
However, there seems to be more to Olukonda than the architectural legacy of a 150-year-old mission. One of the purposes of investing in Olukonda, and establishing a museum, was to offer a place where school classes and the local public could learn about their history.\footnote{91 Interview: Magdalena Kanaante, 26 December 2016, Olukonda.} The intention was to open not only a mission museum, but, as importantly, a museum of local history. In fact, as stressed by Martti Eirola, “one of the ideas from the perspective of the [Finnish] Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to preserve the old cultural heritage and in this way to strengthen [Namibian] national identity”.\footnote{92 Interview Eirola (my translation).}

There are still very few institutions where Ovambo traditions are conserved or institutionalised. The Nakambale museum fills a void in this respect. It displays items and images, which are not available anywhere else, especially since the Kumbukumbu museum at the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Helsinki closed down in 2013.\footnote{93 Kumbukumbu, Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Museum, <http://lahetysseura.evianet.fi/kumbu_fi/www/kumbukumbu/etusivu> [accessed 21 February 2017]; interview Eirola; interview Kalliokoski.} While Christianity has influenced Ovambo culture, the Lutheran church and mission has gone to great lengths to preserve and present Ovambo culture at Olukonda. With the arrival of the first missionaries in the Ovamboland North, the collecting of local artefacts, and to some extent also folklore, also began. Similarly to how the memory of Nakambale is no longer a personal and communicated memory, but needs institutionalisation in order to survive as a cultural memory, the museum is an important vehicle for Ovambo cultural memory. It displays artefacts, photographs, and glimpses from the past, which many Ovambo visitors have forgotten or have never had or seen. Olukonda has come to play an important role, maybe not predominantly as a grand tourist attraction, but for Namibian school classes and people with a particular interest in Ovambo culture and history. Rather than being presented as something foreign, global, or separate from Ondonga and Ovambo culture, Olukonda is generally understood as a local site, mission station, and cultural heritage.

Nangolo Mbumba draws attention to the role of Olukonda in the independence struggle. Above all, he highlights the relationship between the Finnish mission — the missionaries and the education system — and the struggle for freedom:

The contribution of the Finnish missionary is no longer just measured in terms of the church work or the health or education work. It is also measured in terms of nationalism in Namibia [...] The missionaries were proud of us, that we did what we did, sacrificed a lot and we are a part and parcel of a new Namibia.\footnote{94 Interview Mbumba.}

Mbumba views the Finnish mission through political spectacles and political freedom as the ultimate goal. He emphasises the whole period from 1870 and the arrival of missionaries such as Martti Rautanen through to his own education under Finnish missionaries in the 1960s. To Mbumba Olukonda is not only the village where he was
born, but it is also the cultural heritage of a movement which ultimately led to national independence.

The final question remains as to who is responsible for maintaining Olukonda? Olukonda was built by Finnish missionaries, with money donated by supporters of the Finnish Missionary Society. To this day, it has been maintained predominantly with funds granted by the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, as well as by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Embassy of Finland.\textsuperscript{95} The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia owns the premises. Moreover, ELCIN is the heir to the Finnish Lutheran mission, and the institution, which carries on the work that the Finnish Missionary Society started in 1870. A third agent connected to Olukonda is the Ondonga King. Olukonda was given to the missionaries by Kambonde kaNankwaya, and the survival and wellbeing of the missionaries and pastors was ultimately in the hands of the kings. The present king, Immanuel Kauluma Elifas, is as connected to Olukonda as his recent predecessors were.\textsuperscript{96} The fourth player connected to Olukonda is the government of Namibia. Swapo General Secretary Nangolo Mbumba views Olukonda from the perspective of nationalism and independence, and he clearly indicates that he supports Olukonda as a national monument. Though he “agree[s] that we [government] need to do something to live up to the proclamation of Olukonda as a heritage site, that it is maintained”, he also highlights the fact that Olukonda is only one among several heritage sites proclaimed since 1990, including the Heroes Acre outside Windhoek, which are in a poor condition and need renovation.\textsuperscript{97} Although the Namibian government should not be counted out as a potential financial supporter for Olukonda, other monuments which were given national heritage status after independence are also entitled to similar support.

Olukonda enjoys wide and considerable respect in the north of Namibia, in church as well as in political circles. The Namibian government – as well as other Swapo politicians – has frequently demonstrated this respect through official and unofficial visits to the site. Many Ovambo politicians look to Olukonda as their cultural and spiritual heritage. Moreover, Swapo is dependent on the political realities and on popular support in the Ovambo North. Olukonda is a crucial location as it is where the Ondonga king resides. On the other hand, Olukonda is not a significant site to the Namibian population outside of the Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena and Oshikoto regions, and despite being labelled a national heritage site its significance is rather local. Even some Ovambo people may (silently) question the significance of Olukonda. A quarter of a century after independence Namibia is still much affected by its turbulent past, and what Marianne Hirsch

\textsuperscript{95} Interview Kalliokoski; interview Mbumba; interview Eirola.

\textsuperscript{96} Interview Eirola; interview Mbumba; interview Kalliokoski; interview Shivute. The king has been consulted and involved in most development projects at Olukonda. For instance, his architects designed the homestead at Olukonda, he was in favour of the fence built around the old cemetery at Olukonda, and he has contributed to the financing of the new (third) church at Olukonda.

\textsuperscript{97} Interview Mbumba.
would define as post memory. This means that many Namibians remember or view their past through their traumatic experiences during the turbulent decades before 1990. Namibia is still busy defining what national heroism is. Although Rautanen, Olukonda, and the beginnings of Lutheran work in Ovamboland may be widely revered, these are often measured against the struggle for freedom, or overshadowed by other individuals and sites, which are considered to have been even more important in the independence struggle. This is not to question the importance of Olukonda, but rather to stress the dualism of northern Namibian memory, as seen in this article for instance with the different ‘years zero’ – i.e. 1870 and 1990. While former missions like Omandongo and Olukonda may be sites where the arrival of Christianity (and development) is remembered, a place like the Heroes Acre outside Windhoek often tends to overshadow these older sites as it celebrates the memory of the much anticipated independence. Of the two kings, Nehale and Kambonde kaMpingana, Nehale is remembered at the Heroes Acre with his own memorial stone whereas Kambonde is not. Both brothers desired and feared Europeans, but while Nehale scared off the missionaries, Kambonde made good use of them. Largely as a result of this, Kambonde abstained from military action whereas Nehale did the opposite – and after independence would be regarded as one of the founding fathers of Namibia.

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