

## **CONNECTION AND HISTORY BETWEEN FINLAND AND ONIIPA**

Finland and Namibia has enjoyed a good lasting relationship. Recently in the year 2019, the Embassy of Finland in Namibia hosted a remarkable celebration to mark 150 years of Finland and Namibia friendship.

However, the notable connection between Finland and Namibia with Oniipa in particular, was through the missionaries work.

### **ARRIVAL OF MISSIONARIES IN NAMIBIA**

The first group of missionaries, among them was Martti Rautanen, nickname Nakambale, set for on the sand of Walvis Bay on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1869. Then they spent a year in Otjimbingwe, where Martti Rautanen met a lady by name Frieda, and then arrived in Owamboland, to be precise in a village called Omandongo, on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1870.

### **ARRIVAL AT ONIIPA POPULARY KNOWN AS A HOME FOR THE FINNISH**

From Omandongo, the missionaries spread to Olukonda-Oniipa and other Kingdoms. In 1887, the Aandonga late King Shikongo Shakalulu allocated them a piece of land to build a home, but due to staff shortage only in 1889 Frans Hannula started building a home in Oniipa, joined later by Albin Savola. The old main building from 1891 is still there. The main building has now been turned into a historical Museum called Nakambale Museum (Nakambale is a Namibian nickname for Martti Rautanen). To the main building, there is also an extension of typical traditional structure. In essence, the Museum is named after Martti Rautanen

### **MAJOR WORK BY THE MISSIONARIES**

Besides preaching and teaching the bible, they started learning Oshindonga and soon started writing elementary school books and grammar, and started translating passages from the bible, and also hymns. They also started treating wounds and some illness... but only in 1908 the first medical doctor, Selma Rainio and a trained nurse arrived, and started building Onandjokwe Hospital, first a small one, but over the decades it grew to become a major hospital in Owamboland-North Namibia. Onandjokwe Lutheran hospital is situated in the vicinity of Oniipa too. Onandjokwe Lutheran Hospital is the oldest hospital and now a referral hospital Northern Namibia.

### **IMPACT MADE DURING THEIRS STAY**

The first baptism took place in Omulonga in 1883. By 1900 there were some 200 Christians in Ondonga. In early 1900's training of schoolteachers also started in Oniipa. Later Oniipa was home to teachers Training Seminary, which later in 1954 moved to Ongwediva. Women were trained in Okahao later also women started being trained in Ongwediva. I am a living testimony and a beneficiary; after Namibia attained its independence I was privilege to be trained as a teacher in Ongwediva.

## **BIBLE TRANSLATION**

The missionaries also translated the bible. The translation was completed in the year 1920, but first only the New Testament was printed, the whole bible was published 1956.

## **PRINTING MACHINE**

The first. In 1925 the first printing machine was bought and they started printing the paper called **Osoondaha** (Sunday Paper). Later Omukwetu, **Omukwetu** paper is still printing mostly church related news.

In 1925, the first seven pastors were ordained, among them Pinehas Kambonde for Olukonda and Juuso Ngaikukwete from Oniipa. By that time, there were about 20.00 Christians.

In 1954, when there were 90.000 Christians, the Evangelical Lutheran Owambokavango Church was established, with a missionary, Birger Eriksson as the church leader, followed by Alpo Hukka and Bishop Leonard Auala (a Namibia) in 1960.

Church leader/missionary Bierger Erikson died in 1969. His son Tatekeulu (Elder) Olle Erikson is back here in Finland. We accord him with much respect as he continue to hold the legacy of his late father in high esteem.

## **SAD MOMENT/MIXED FEELINGS FOR US NAMIBIANS: TIME TO LEAVE**

Little by little the number of Finnish missionaries decreased, so when the country became independent in 1990 there were fewer than 20 missionaries left. The Owambokavango Church was renamed to The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, and has today over 800.000 members and almost 200 ordained pastors. The last permanent Finnish missionary later moved from Oniipa to Windhoek in the year 2000, but there has been short term ones also later. Today the only ones left, although they are now in Finland because of Corona, are Sakari Löytty music work, Päivi Löytty development of diaconical work.

Take note, until 1960 all education and training of people was proved by the churches, only then the government took over. The church now only owns Oshigambo and Nkurenkuru High Schools, among the best in the county. The churches also provided all health services, only in the 1960's government started giving financial support, but the church was still running all hospitals and clinics except the new Oshakati and Rundu hospitals. Still when Namibia became independent Onandjokwe and Nkurenkuru schools were run by ELCIN. Now the government took over.

**NB:** Finland has also played a role in the Independence of Namibia through another famous Finnish Martti, **President Martti Ahtisaari**, he remains a well-known figure in Namibia. It should be noted that, besides preaching the gospel, missionaries also laid a foundation for Socio-economic development of Namibia.

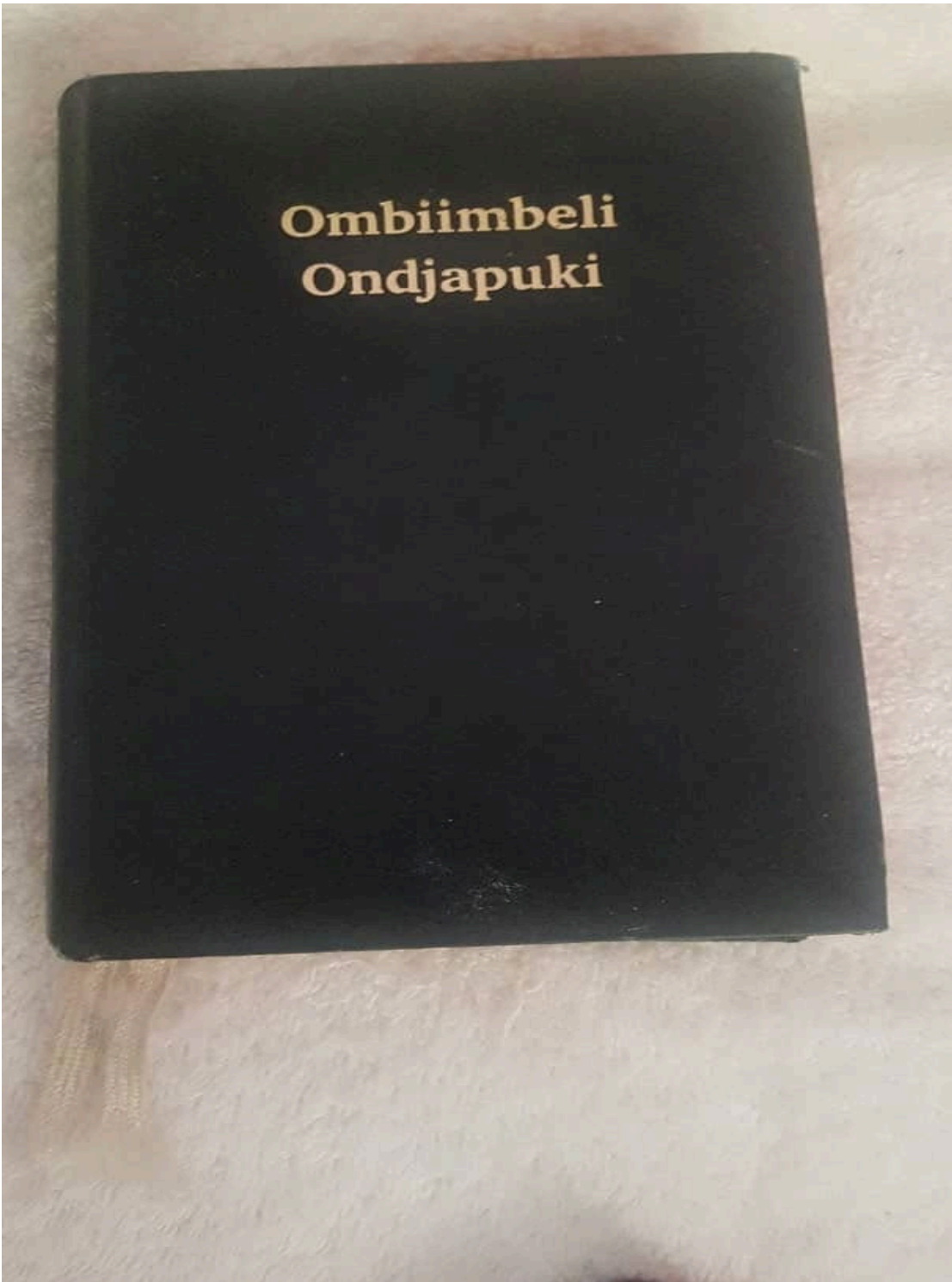


Figure 1:

Ombimbeli Ondjapuki: The Holy Bible

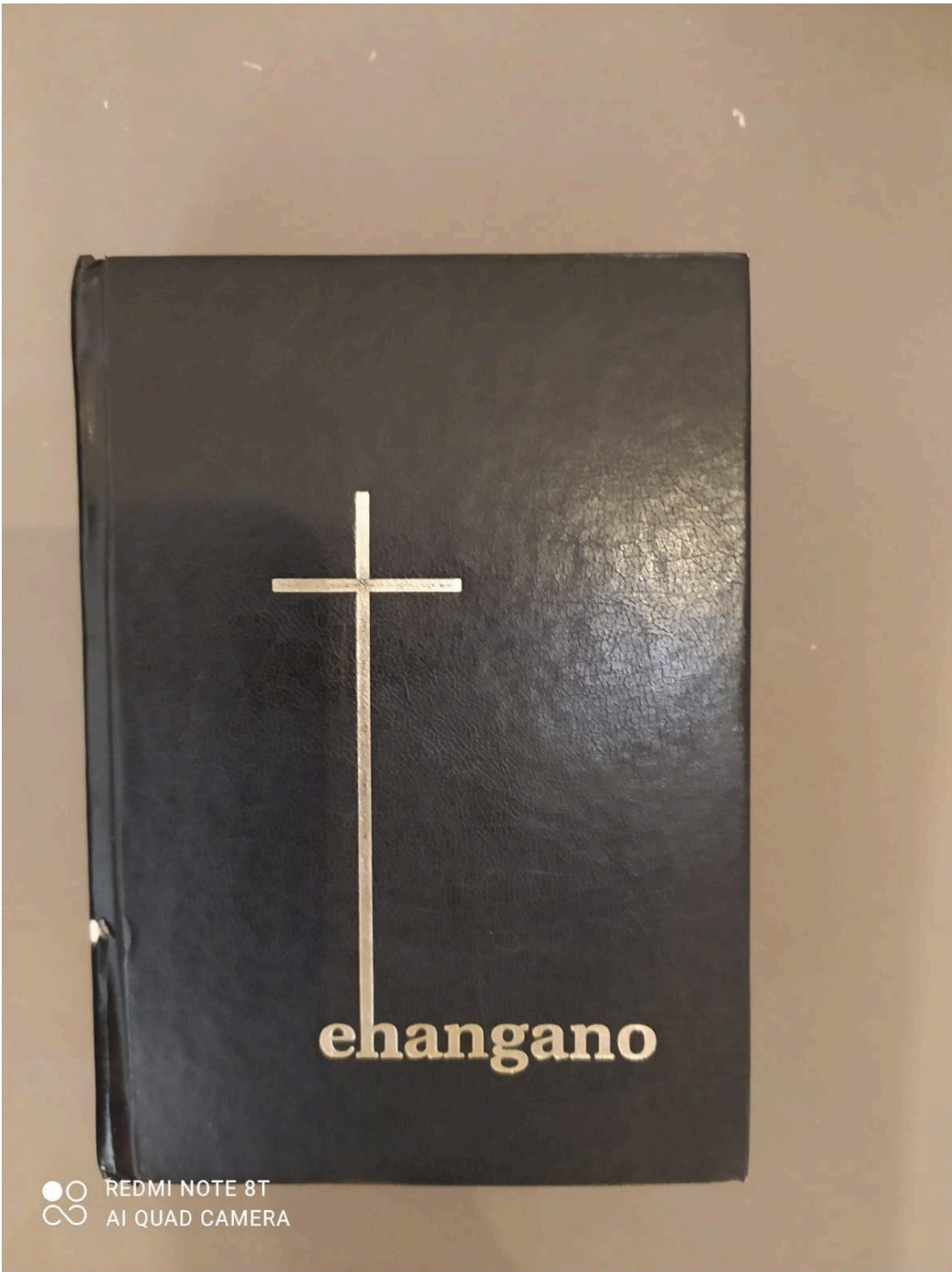


Figure 2: Eimbilo Ehangano (Hymn Book)

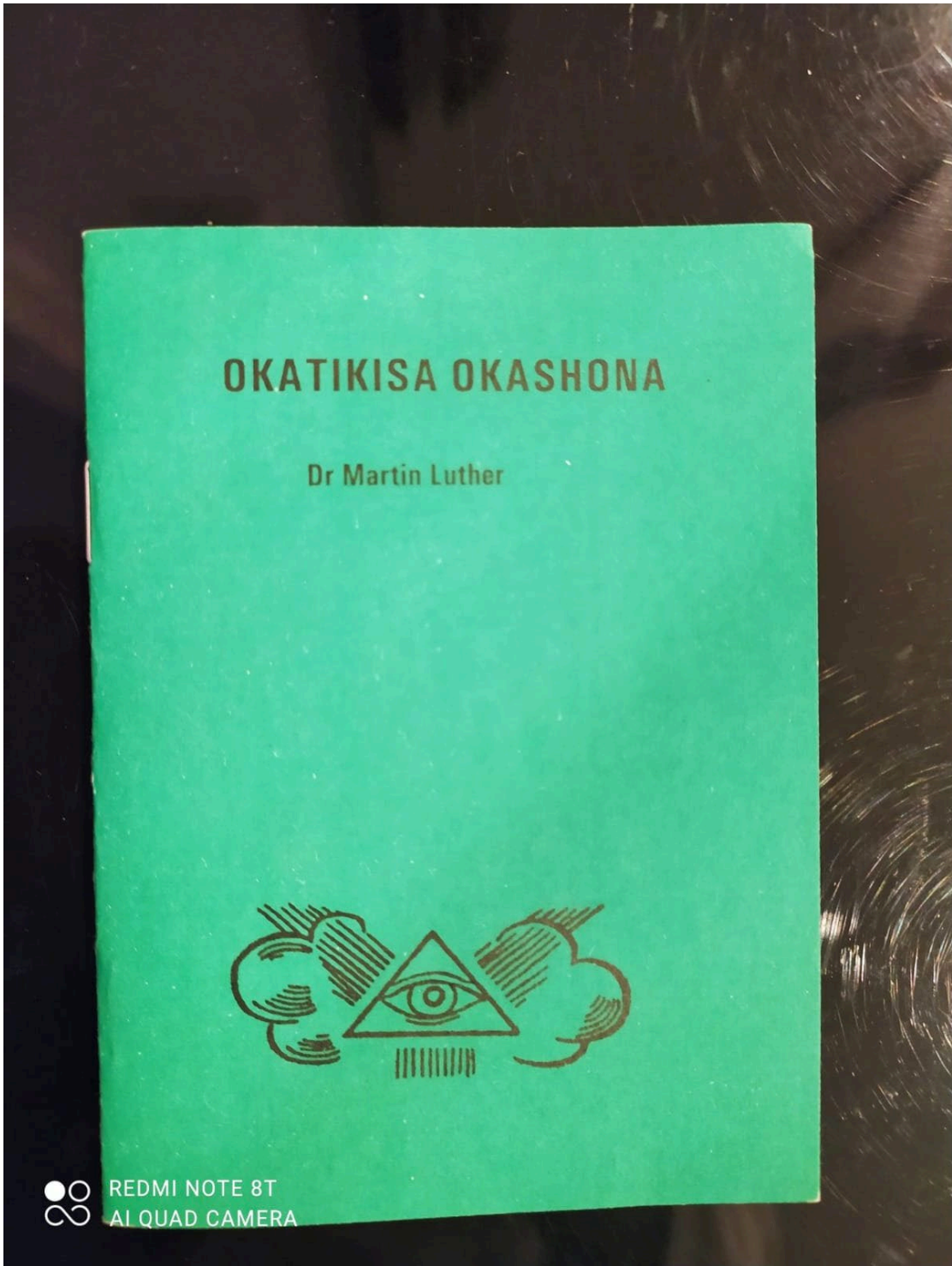


Figure 3: Okatikisa: Catechism (Katekismus)