

Mission, Relationships and Agendas Embodied in Objects: Formation of the Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection of Ovamboland (1900–1932)

Kaisa Harju

kaisa.harju@oulu.fi

History of Science and Ideas, PO Box 1000, 90014 University of Oulu

Disciplinary field of study: History

ABSTRACT

Colonial encounters in the late 19th and early 20th century increased European interest in African ethnographic objects. Among the most efficient collectors were missionaries, who already had well-established contact with people whose material culture was then acquired for museums, academia, and private collections. However, missionaries could hardly dictate the content of their ethnographic collections, coproduced as they were by the Africans who donated and sold them the artefacts, or acted as cultural brokers in this process. Based on this premise, my paper investigates how the Karl Emil Liljeblad collection came about. To this day it remains one of the largest missionary collections in Finland of material belonging to the Ovambo culture from Northern Namibia. The article asks, how the differing agendas of the Ovambo and Finnish missionary-ethnographer, Karl Emil Liljeblad, affected what was actually collected. This study is based on the historical analysis and comparison of artefacts in the Liljeblad collection in conjunction with Liljeblad's letters, diaries, and ethnographic manuscript. It concludes that the collection was determined by both the status and interests of Liljeblad, as well as the decisions, motives, and customs of the Ovambo.

Keywords

ethnographic collection, missionary ethnography, Namibia, Finland, Ovamboland

DESCRIPTION OF THE AUTHOR

Kaisa Harju is a doctoral student in the History of Science and Ideas at the University of Oulu, in Finland. Her thesis – Exporting Expertise: Somalia-Finland Tuberculosis Control Support and Training Project, 1980–1990 – examines the cross-cultural transfer of medical knowledge and practice as a part of Finland's health care development aid. Her research interests include the history of cross-cultural interaction, especially in the fields of missionary work and development cooperation, medical history, and the history of material culture.

Mission, Relationships, and Agendas Embodied in Objects: The Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection of Ovamboland (1900–1932)

1. Introduction

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, procuring ethnographic objects from Africa for personal collections and museums was a common hobby and source of additional income for many missionaries, explorers, traders, and other colonials. Brought to Europe and the United States, the objects were seen as sufficient objective proof of the inferiority of other cultures and displayed in museums and exhibitions that propagated Eurocentric images of Africa and Africans as being less developed.¹ As part of the shared history of Namibia and Finland,² and as part of broader missionary-based knowledge about Ovamboland, the Finnish missionary collections were no exception - they had an impact on Finnish images and conception of Africa.³ Finnish missionaries, not only had Ovambo artefacts in their homes, but also sold them on to raise money, and staged lectures and missionary exhibitions about them.⁴ In this way, they were raising support for the mission by portraying Ovambo people in the early 20th century as heathen and backward compared to Finns.⁵

Indigenous people had little to say over how their material culture should be presented in the west, yet they had a crucial impact on the content of the ethnographic collections that would represent them. As Robin Torrence and Anne Clarke have pointed out, the artefacts chosen were the result of a negotiated exchange between outsiders and those indigenous people who decided what to give Europeans and what to withhold.⁶ In this article, I explore agency in the context of this exchange by analysing Karl Emil Liljeblad's collection of artefacts from Ovamboland, dating from the early 20th century. It remains the second largest collection of Ovambo material in Finland and the largest one known to have been singlehandedly collected by a Finnish missionary.⁷ Yet in spite of its size, there has been only a little previous historical research on the Liljeblad collection⁸, on how Finnish missionaries collected ethnographic items in Ovamboland, or on the role of the Ovambo people in this process.⁹ In

¹ Coombes 1997, 159-160; O'Hanlon 2000, 3.

² The contents of all known Namibian collections in Finland are listed in Anssi Taskinen's (2004) *Namibiana in Finland II*. This inventory does not include private collections or those kept by congregations.

³ Koivunen 2011, 14–16, 152–153.

⁴ Koivunen 2011, 24–46.

⁵ For the first exhibitions of Finnish Missionary Society, see Koivunen 2011, 85–94, 112–131, 151.

⁶ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 182–183.

⁷ For comparison, see Taskinen 2004.

⁸ The present article is based on my unpublished Master's Thesis (2014) written in Finnish. It is the most extensive analysis of the Karl Emil Liljeblad collection. Jaana Skyttä (2010) has also briefly examined Liljeblad's personal history and how his ethnographic manuscript and collection got from Ovamboland to the University of Oulu, Finland.

⁹ Historian Leila Koivunen has done valuable research on the Finnish missionary exhibitions of Chinese and Ovambo objects. As a part of her study, she has also shortly addressed the early ethnographic collecting of Finnish missionaries in Ovamboland by using especially missionary pioneer Martti Rautanen as her main

the light of cross-cultural interaction, and referring to the vast existing research on indigenous agency in ethnographic collecting,¹⁰ the present article therefore examines how the agendas and motives of the Ovambo in the early 20th century differed from that of the missionary and collector, Karl Emil Liljeblad (1876–1937), and how this was reflected in the material artefacts that were either offered or chosen for the collection.

The article is based on various historical sources contained in three archive collections in Finland. These consist of the Main Catalogue of the Liljeblad Collection; Liljeblad's ethnographic manuscript – *Afrikan amboheimojen kansantietoutta* [Folklore of the Ovambo People of Africa] and his correspondence, diaries and notes.¹¹ This research faces the same methodological challenges that trouble most historical studies of ethnographic collections. Although we have a large range of objects that physically represents cross-cultural interaction and exchange between the collector and indigenous people, Emil Liljeblad wrote almost nothing about his collecting activities. We thus lack the written and oral sources that could tell us exactly how and when the objects were acquired, and to whom they belonged to in the first place. To further complicate matters, those sources that we do have give us only Liljeblad's perspective on collecting, as there are no sources that were produced by the Ovambo. Another factor is that the main catalogue, which names and describes what each object was used for, was composed years after Emil Liljeblad's death by his daughter Aune Liljeblad (1905–1990). Unfortunately it lacks information on the explicit historical context and people involved in procuring the objects for the collection.

The fragmentary nature of historical evidence is commonly accepted. O'Hanlon, for instance, has pointed out that collecting was usually carried out alongside other activities, and was considered such a normal part of everyday colonial life that it was rarely mentioned in diaries and letters.¹² One should also bear in mind that the emphasis on individualised object histories is only a relatively recent development in the field. In the early 20th century, objects

example. See Koivunen 2011, 23–50. Also Kaisa Grönholm and Matti Peltola have shortly assessed ethnographic collecting of Rautanen. See Grönholm 1983. Peltola 1996, 127–128.

¹⁰ Since the 1980s, anthropologists and historians have shown increasing interest in ethnographic collections obtained from colonial encounters. James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) is one of the classics on western anthropological collections and museum displays. In brief, there are two main ways of approaching the subject in the colonial era: the first examines the collections and exhibitions in terms of how they helped the formation of a western identity (e.g., Clifford 1988; Coombes 1997; Koivunen 2011); while the second (especially in article collections from the 2000s onwards) focuses on the social relations and local agency involved in amassing these collections in the field (e.g., Byrne, Clarke, Harrison and Torrence (eds.) 2011, *Unpacking the Collection. Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum.*)

¹¹The following archives are (1) the Karl Emil Liljeblad Archive in the National Archives of Finland in Oulu, (2) the Private Archive of Risto ja Helmi Liljeblad in Yli-Ii; (3) The Kaarle Krohn Archive in the Literary Archives of Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki. All these situate in Finland. Many of the letters in the Karl Emil Liljeblad Archive are either handwritten copies or photocopies from the Finnish Missionary Society Archives made by Aune Liljeblad. I have verified their coverage from the original sources in the National Archives of Finland in Helsinki. I have also familiarized myself with the physical objects of the collection during my work at the University of Oulu in 2010–2011.

¹² O'Hanlon 2001, 9.

were valued more as self-explanatory specimens of indigenous culture, than in terms of how and where they came from.¹³ This means that there is little information on the sources of individual objects, although it is possible to examine the process of negotiation and exchange on a more general level. Inspired by Torrence and Clarke's assemblage analysis to determine indigenous agency in ethnographic museum collections,¹⁴ I will focus on object groups to get round the fact that historical details regarding certain individual objects may be absent. The object groups are defined by a common usage and follow sub-categories defined in the main catalogue by Aune Liljeblad. Her typology is presented in the table below. The subgroups are marked with a letter-number combination (for example B5).¹⁵

¹³ O'Hanlon 2001, 5, 26.

¹⁴ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 183–184.

¹⁵ The table presents only Emil Liljeblad's collecting activities. Therefore, the object group B8 does not contain any artefacts as they were added to the collection after Emil Liljeblad's death by Aune Liljeblad. Similarly, the sub-category F1 House and furniture is probably created for Aune Liljeblad's later acquisitions. In above table, the group contains a miniature roof frame of Ovambo house (F1-2) and hay that was used as a construction material for the roof (F1-3). It is also important to notice that sub-categories G5 staffs, G6 King's symbols of power and G6 tobacco equipment under the category of G Art Handicrafts contain utility and status object that most likely were not considered as art during their active usage in Ovamboland. Since this categorisation seems to be based more on interpretation of Aune Liljeblad than actual purpose of the objects, I assess these object groups from the viewpoint of their original usage.

Table 1. *Object Groups in the Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection (1900–1932)*

THE KARL EMIL LILJEBLAD COLLECTION (1900–1932)			
A "MAGICAL ITEMS"	81	C3 Bows	5
A1 Wise man's charms	65	C4 Arrows	50
A2 Other charms	16	C5 Quiver	3
B CLOTHING AND JEWELLERY	93	C6 Clubs	3
B1 Dolls	5	C7 Sling	1
B2 Bridal ornaments	3	D TOOLS AND PROFESSIONAL EQUIPMENT	27
B3 Omba ornaments	4	D1 Main economic activities	20
B4 Ivory ornaments	17	D2 Handicraft manufacturing	7
B5 Bracelets	10	E HOUSEHOLD ITEMS	71
B6 Necklaces	4	E1 Pottery	3
B7 Ankle bands	9	E2 Dishes and container from palm leaf, wood and calabash	68
B8 Combs	0	F OVAMBO HOUSES	3
B9 Headdress	15	F1 House and it's furniture	2
B10 Cosmetics	4	F2 beds	1
B11 Women's clothing	3	G ART HANDICRAFTS	51
B12 Women's belt	9	G1 Musical instruments and drums	8
B13 Men's belts	2	G3 Drawings and paintings	2
B14 Men's other clothing and jewellery	5	G4 Wooden sculptures	26
B15 Iron knife in copper stealth	3	G5 Wooden staff	2
C WEAPONS	79	G6 King's symbols of power	2
C1 Knives and daggers	9	G7 Tubacco instruments	11
C2 Spears	9	K MISCELLANEOUS	2
		IN ALL	407

Source: National Archives of Finland, Oulu (NAFO), Karl Emil Liljeblad Archive (KELA), Aune Liljeblad Collection (ALC) F. Main Catalogue of Liljeblad Collection (MCLC).

Torrence and Clarke combine the archeological concept of assemblage with the notion that ethnographic collections resulted from “social interaction constructed through cross-cultural exchange”. The assemblage is understood as “a set of objects found in association with each other” and museum as “an archeological site”, which forms a burial context for assemblage. This archeological perspective puts emphasis on understanding processes that led to the formation of assemblages in museums. Since the assemblages are an outcome of social interaction between local communities and outsiders, it is possible to examine strategies of exchange on the basis of relative proportion and character of the objects found from “the site”.¹⁶ I compare the above groups of objects to the historical source material (regarding social interaction between Liljeblad and the Ovambo) by looking at their physical properties; the object numbers in each and proportion of the collection as a whole; and the presence and absence of certain objects in them. This allows some general conclusions to be drawn about the agendas involved in negotiating and assembling the Liljeblad Collection. In this respect, Ovambo agency is assessed by critically reading Liljeblad’s letters, diaries and notes – paying particular attention to any clue given as to their role in the process. Meredith McKittrick has stated that although missionary records are affected by missionary attitudes and motives and don’t “represent ‘reality’ per se”, they are nevertheless “products of both European and African contexts.” The Ovambo mediated knowledge of their culture - and also objects in this case – according to their own agendas and motives, and the local context is at least described by the missionaries, even if seen only from their perspective.¹⁷

2. Karl Emil Liljeblad in Ovamboland

Karl Emil Liljeblad spent two periods as a missionary (1900–07 and 1912–19) in Ovamboland and made one ethnographic field trip (1930–32) there amassing a total of 407 Ovambo objects and 225 “natural samples”¹⁸ for his collection. Ovamboland was first a German, then South African colonial administrative area in present-day Northern Namibia, and it became one of the first and longest lasting points of contact for Finns in Africa after the arrival of the Lutheran Finnish Missionary Society (FMS) there in 1870. In 1886, a border was formed between German South West Africa and Portuguese Angola which split the Ovambo people in half. This left eight Ovambo polities on the German side, where Finnish missionaries continued to operate: Oukwanyama, Ondonga, Uukwambi, Ongandjera, Ombalantu, Uukwaluudhi, Uukolonkadhi and Eunda. Not only did these polities - or kingdoms – share customs and a similar language, but clan affiliations also created strong ties between them.

¹⁶ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 182–184.

¹⁷ McKittrick 2003, 220–222. See also Heintze 2011, 20–22.

¹⁸ For example, ostrich feathers, elephant tusks, insects and botanical specimens.

However, their identities were quite separate in both physical and political terms.¹⁹ With the exception of Ombalantu, each polity was ruled by king, who also controlled use of the land and long-distance trade. The basic economic and social unit was the family, consisting of man, wives, and children living in a homestead. Women were responsible for growing crops and men for raising cattle. Other economic activities included hunting, fishing, trade, and crafts like pottery, drum-making and blacksmithing. Central concepts in the Ovambo spiritual world-view were that of a creator-god, Kalunga, and various ancestral spirits that could either protect individuals or harm them with diseases, misfortune, and death.²⁰

Both Emil Liljeblad and his wife, Alma Liljeblad (1877–1965, nee Kestilä), were among the most educated missionaries in the Finnish Ovamboland Mission during the early 20th century.²¹ After arriving there in 1900, Liljeblad worked in several polities. He founded the missionary stations at Onayena in Eastern Ondonga (1902), and Nakeke in Onganjera (1903), and while on leave in Finland (1908–1911), he studied theology. In 1911, Liljeblad qualified to become a minister and teacher of geography and religion. During his second term as a missionary, he founded the Teacher Seminary in Oniipa in 1913 and was the headteacher there until his resignation from the FMS in 1919.²² At that point he returned to Finland where he worked as a vicar and pastor. It was not until 1930 that he returned to Ovamboland, but this time as an ethnographic researcher. The trip was scientific by its nature: it was funded by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters and the Alfred Kordelin foundation and was originally the idea of three professors: Arthur Hjelt (1868–1931), Kaarle Khron (1863–1933) and Aukusti Niemi (1869–1931). Although the first objective was to collect oral folklore of the Ovambo, Liljeblad also took on extensive missionary work.²³ The trip resulted in 4800 handwritten pages of folklore (in the Ndonga dialect), catalogues of Ovambo kings, Ovambo songs recorded onto 21 wax phonograph cylinders, almost 200 photographs, and a “great amount of ethnographic objects”.²⁴

In the early 20th century it was common for ethnographic collections to aim at being as comprehensive and authentic as possible.²⁵ Based on the content of his collection, Liljeblad was no exception - he did not concentrate on any specific type of object but collected a range of both natural samples and objects that illustrated different aspects of everyday life for the Ovambo: amulets and belts for healing and protection, healer and diviner instruments, jewellery and hairpieces, weapons, wands, agricultural implements, other professional tools, wooden cups, containers made from palm leaf and calabash, tobacco containers, musical instruments, and wooden sculptures. Natural samples ranged from botanical specimens and

¹⁹ Shigwedha 2006, 116–118.

²⁰ For more, see Miettinen 2005, 35–56.

²¹ Ylimaunu 2005, 23–24, 33.

²² Skyttä 2010, 309.

²³ Skyttä 2010, 316–318.

²⁴ National Archives of Finland, Oulu (NAFO), Karl Emil Liljeblad Archive (KELA) Dc:2, Copy of the report of the results of Liljeblad's research trip to the ministry of education. Helsinki 29 August 1932.

²⁵ O'Hanlon 2000, 9–10, 22. For authenticity, see also Buschmann 2000, 57.

insects to the physical parts of large animals (anything from antelope horns to elephant faeces).²⁶ Only objects compatible with an ‘authentic’ image of traditional African life were included in the collection.²⁷ People in the west generally believed Africa to be a continent which had no history before colonial contact. African tribal cultures were understood to be timeless and to have remained unchanged up until Europeans discovered them.²⁸ Liljeblad evidently shared this view, claiming that Ovamboland’s historical development was a direct result of Christianity.²⁹ In reality the Ovambo, and especially the elite, had used various European objects long before the presence of missionaries.³⁰

O’Hanlon has observed that, from the late 19th century, ethnographic collecting became a growing intellectual pursuit around the world.³¹ Missionaries (such as Liljeblad) clearly played a pivotal role as producers and mediators of the ethnographic material. Due to their daily interaction with indigenous communities and being there on a fairly long-term basis, missionaries generally had a better chance of procuring objects. They not only knew the language and customs, but also developed ties with the local community which would have given them access to objects not ordinarily available to travellers just passing through.³² So even if missionaries in Ovamboland were not the only Finns gathering ethnographic artefacts in Africa,³³ they certainly had a better chance of acquiring a comprehensive collection than, say, traders or migrant workers.

Missionaries had begun to collect Ovambo objects, albeit at different rates, right from 1870 when the mission began. According to Koivunen, most missionaries only took home a few objects as personal souvenirs, but others amassed bigger collections.³⁴ The most famous of these Finnish missionary collectors was probably Martti Rautanen (1845–1926). As well as natural samples, Rautanen sold a total of approximately 600 ethnographic artefacts from the late 19th and early 20th century to different museums in Europe and Africa; 127 of which were bought in 1891 by the History and Ethnography Museum of Imperial Alexander University in Finland. Its collections later became a part of Finland’s National Museum, where also Martti Rautanen collection is now stored. Koivunen has assessed that Rautanen decided to sell the objects to the History and Ethnography Museum instead of the FMS because of his scientific orientation, the better economic situation of the museum and, therefore, ability to pay for the objects and the fact that the collection management policy of the FMS was still practically

²⁶ Table 1.

²⁷ NAFO, KELA, Aune Liljeblad Collection (ALC) F, Main Catalogue of Liljeblad Collection (MCLC).

²⁸ Coombes 1997, 120–121; Clifford 1994, 227–228, 231; Heintze 2011, 33–34.

²⁹ NAFO, KELA, ALK Bfc, Emil Liljeblad to Jooseppi Mustakallio. Ontananga 31 January 1907.

³⁰ Shigwedha 2006, 173, 194–195; Siiskonen 1990, 103–104.

³¹ O’Hanlon 2000, 5–6.

³² Harries 2005, 243–245; See also O’Hanlon 2000, 16.

³³ Koivunen 2018, 342–346.

³⁴ Koivunen 2011, 24–25.

nonexistent.³⁵ In the early 20th century, the FMS started to take more interest in its collections by establishing Museum room in 1901 and organising the touring Finnish Mission exhibitions in 1911–12 and in 1926–28.³⁶ In 1931, it founded Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission Museum, which aim was to raise support for the missionary work.³⁷ Some 1500 Ovambo objects from several missionaries were sold or donated to the FMS in 1873–2013 and stored and exhibited in Mission Museum till its closure in 2013.³⁸ The objects were transferred to the National Museum in 2015.

Although the Mission Museum collection also contains acquisitions from the later periods of Ovamboland Mission and, therefore, does not represent the collecting activities of the late 19th and the early 20th century as such, the three collections form a general picture of what type of objects missionaries brought to Finland. As Liljeblad's activities were part of an already existing tradition, it is not surprising that the objects he amassed are very similar to those in other missionary collections in Ovamboland, or indeed Africa. Although missionaries found religious artefacts particularly interesting, they also collected everyday objects used for economic, spiritual, decorative, or domestic purposes.³⁹ Due to fragmentary historical evidence, it is impossible to determine exactly when Liljeblad consciously started his collection and whether individual objects date from the missionary periods or the ethnographic research trip. It does seem likely, however, that the collecting had begun before 1907. Liljeblad spent his first two years in Ovamboland familiarising himself with the local language and working at the Olukonda mission led by Martti Rautanen⁴⁰ - who may well have set an example as a collector himself. In 1902–1907, Liljeblad gathered and sold 130 botanical samples for Finland's Natural History Museum,⁴¹ and there are also a few ethnographic objects in his personal collection that date from this period.⁴² In 1907, collecting was being directly encouraged by the FMS,⁴³ and Liljeblad participated as a guide in its first missionary exhibition in Finland in 1911.⁴⁴

³⁵ Koivunen 2011, 35–43. For the Martti Rautanen collection, see also Peltola 1996, 127–128; Grönholm 1983, 84–86.

³⁶ Koivunen 2011, 44–59, 108–111.

³⁷ Koivunen 2011, 137–139.

³⁸ Taskinen 2004, 6.

³⁹ Figure 1. On the content of non-Finnish collections from Africa, see Cannizzo 1998, 156–164; Coombes 1997, 170.

⁴⁰ Ylimaunu 2005, 61.

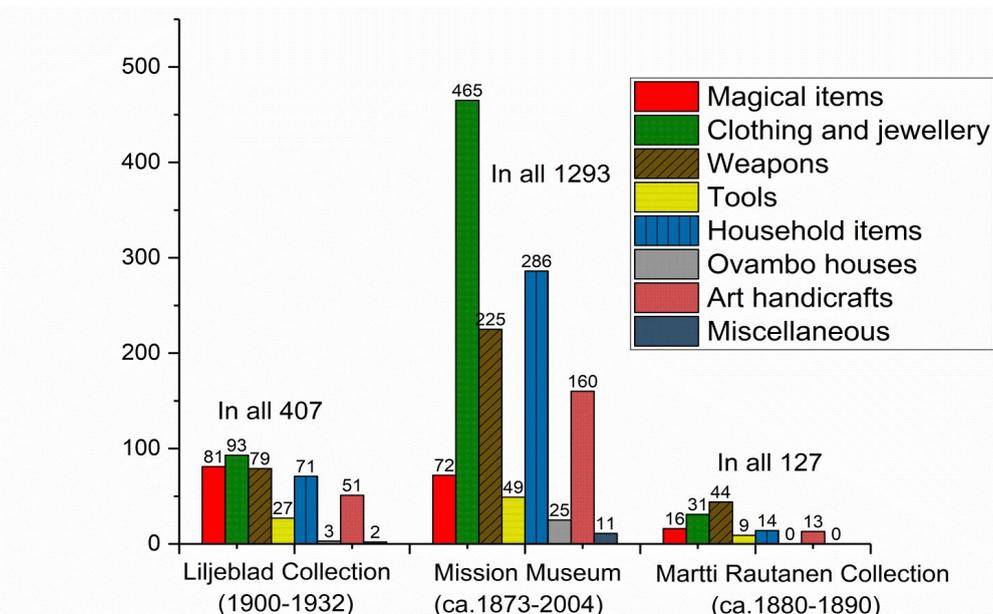
⁴¹ Taskinen 2004, 35.

⁴² NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, K4 *Valkoisen miehen pääkallo* and C1-1 *Veitsi*.

⁴³ Koivunen 2011, 42.

⁴⁴ Skyttä 2010, 305.

Figure 1. *Ovambo Objects in the (i) Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection prior to his death, (ii) Finnish Mission Museum, and (iii) Martti Rautanen collection*⁴⁵.



Sources:

1) Liljeblad Collection: NAFO, KELA, ALC F. MCLC 2) Mission Museum: Taskinen 2004, 6-13.3) Marri Rautanen Collection: Rautanen 1983, 18-83.

Missionaries collected objects for a number of reasons: to have personal souvenirs, to earn additional income by selling artefacts on, and to be able to illustrate their accounts of foreign cultures and missionary work back home.⁴⁶ All these agendas seem to have been present in Liljeblad’s collecting. He had the collection on display in what was called “the Africa Room” in his Finnish parsonages in Kirvu (1920–22), Simpele (1922–24) and Ruskeala (1924–1937).⁴⁷ According to his daughter, Maija Liljeblad, the exhibition “increased the knowledge of that third world [...] for example by giving lessons about witchcraft”.⁴⁸ Thus, the objects were used as concrete illustrations of Ovambo life, Liljeblad’s experiences, and the need for Christianity in Ovamboland. This home exhibition was not just for local parishioners though, as it was even visited by Carl Gustaf Mannerheim - Finland’s military leader and President (1944–46).⁴⁹ In addition to his own collection, Liljeblad sold objects in the 1930s at least to the Finnish War Museum. In 1931–32, he also gathered objects for the Finnish Missionary Museum, for

⁴⁵ The weapons, clothing, and household items in the Mission Museum are rough estimates made by Taskinen in 2004. It received new donations until it was closed in 2013. Thus, these figures can give only a general indication.

⁴⁶ Livne 2011, 65; Coombes 1997, 161–174; Gardner 2000, 45.

⁴⁷ Skyttä 2010, 309–310. See also Photo 1.

⁴⁸ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bda:6, Maija Liljeblad to Aune Liljeblad, 25 March 1971 Turku.

⁴⁹ Skyttä 2010, 319.

which purpose the FMS had given him a budget of 15 pounds.⁵⁰ Liljeblad's acquisition contains unique and expensive rarities such as an ekola drum, "the power stone of Ovambo kingdom", "the power stone of Ohango", "the ancient regal staff" and "the ancient regal shoulder strap". In all, Liljeblad gathered 67 artefacts for the Finnish Mission Museum,⁵¹ where he hoped that the objects would increase interest in the Ovamboland Mission.⁵²



Photo 1. *The photo of Emil and Alma Liljeblad in "the Africa room" in Ruskeala, Finland. The University of Oulu has two photos of the Africa Room. This photo might be dated prior to the ethnographic field trip as it contains fewer objects than the second photo. Source: Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection, University of Oulu, Finland.*

Liljeblad also differed from other Finnish missionaries in at least two ways. Firstly, he brought more Ovambo objects to Finland than any other missionary.⁵³ As some objects were destroyed when the Oniipa mission station burnt down in 1932,⁵⁴ his ethnographic endeavours may even have exceeded Rautanen. Secondly, although Liljeblad had probably

⁵⁰ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Matti Tarkkanen to Emil Liljeblad, 20 June 1931.

⁵¹ NAFO, KELA C:2, "Luettelo Suomen lähetyksseuralle hankituista ja luovutetuista Ambomaalaisista esineistä v 1932". 28 September 1932, Ruskeala; "Sotamuseolle L. Afrikan Ambomaalta sota-aseita."

⁵² NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Emil Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen, Ruskeala 28 September 1932.

⁵³ Figure 1.

⁵⁴ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Emil Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen, Olukonda 10 May 1932.

collected objects from all the above groups already during his missionary periods⁵⁵, he acquired most of his artefacts on the ethnographic field trip,⁵⁶ which was one of its kind in the context of the Finnish Ovamboland Mission.

After Liljeblad's death in 1937, his oldest daughter Aune Liljeblad took responsibility for the collection by organising it and eventually donating it to the University of Oulu.⁵⁷ She created the main catalogue (1970–1985) by gathering information on objects and categorising them according to their usage.⁵⁸ Object names reflect her world-view, influenced by her background as a teacher of Christianity with missionary parents. This can be seen for example with her referring to Ovambo healing objects as "magical items".⁵⁹ Aune Liljeblad also added 62 objects and 6 natural samples to the collection in 1958–59 and 1970–1984,⁶⁰ and she continued her father's "home museum" tradition exhibiting items at her home in Helsinki.⁶¹ After her death, the collection was transferred to the University of Oulu, where it has been on display in various permutations over the past 25 years. Some objects may well have been added to the collection by Liljeblad's relatives in this time, or Aune Liljeblad's cataloguing may have been incomplete as, according to the latest inventory, there are now 523 objects in the collection.⁶² Since the origins of 53 objects are unknown, they are not analysed in this article.⁶³

Since death discontinued Emil Liljeblad's ethnographic work, it is difficult to assess, whether he had any further plans for the deposition of his collection. Aune Liljeblad, however, wanted scientific recognition for his father's work.⁶⁴ In this respect, neither the National Museum nor the Mission Museum was necessarily a compelling option. Since its opening in 1916, the National Museum was mostly interested in Finnish material culture. For example, Martti Rautanen collection had not been on display during Aune Liljeblad's lifetime.⁶⁵ The Mission Museum, on the other hand, was not scientific by its nature.⁶⁶ Also, it constructed a collective presentation of Ovamboland Mission rather than highlighted ethnographical accomplishments of individual missionaries. Emil Liljeblad was born in Oulu, where no similar collections

⁵⁵ See Photo 1. Also, Aune Liljeblad noted that Emil Liljeblad "supplemented" his collection during the ethnographic research. This would also indicate, that he collected objects broadly already during his missionary periods. NAFO, KELA, ALC F "E. Liljebladin kotimuseon historiikka".

⁵⁶ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, G "Taidevälineitä ja taide-esineitä", p. 4.

⁵⁷ Skyttä 2010, 324–325.

⁵⁸ See all the notes of Aune Liljeblad in NAFO, KELA, ALC F.

⁵⁹ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, "A Taikavälineet".

⁶⁰ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC.

⁶¹ Skyttä 2010, 324.

⁶² Inventory of the Emil Liljeblad Collection. Word-document of the University of Oulu.

⁶³ These objects consist of Liljeblad's personal belongings, similar jewellery he had collected, and unattached parts of broken artefacts.

⁶⁴ Skyttä 2010, 323–324.

⁶⁵ Koivunen 2011, 42–43.

⁶⁶ Skyttä 2010, 323–324.

existed. The university, at least in theory, offered a place for the collection to become a subject for scientific research.

3. Being on Good Terms

“Early on the morning of Christmas day, when I had just got up, someone knocked on my door. I opened it and what do I see. A shepherd comes in and hands me the skull saying ‘Here is a Christmas present for you’. I was surprised at first, but then took it and gave him a small gift for his trouble.”⁶⁷

Received as a gift from Ovambo shepherds in 1900, this human skull is one of the first “artefacts” that Karl Emil Liljeblad added to his ethnographic collection. It is also one of the few objects that has contextual information about how it was acquired. The skull demonstrates three points that I am going to make in this section. First, the Ovambo were often quite eager to exchange with missionaries. Second, it was relatively easy for missionaries to receive a certain type of object in their collections when the Ovambo took the initiative like this. Third, although Liljeblad had ideas about what a comprehensive and authentic collection should be, this could not be realised without the Ovambo actively taking part.

In her study on how Methodist missionary George Brown amassed his collection in Melanesia, Helen Gardner has pointed out that the constant exchange of goods was an integral part of the relationship between missionaries and locals; not only as a way to obtain material resources, but also to strengthen social ties.⁶⁸ Despite the different cultural context, this would also apply to how Finnish missionaries and the Ovambo interacted. Liljeblad most likely acquired his collection through trade and reciprocal gifts, which missionaries understood to be a common means of expressing good will⁶⁹. Although the skull mentioned in the quote above was a rare gift to receive, it is nonetheless a good example of this custom, as Liljeblad returned the favour with “a small gift” of his own. Ovambo, like the shepherd mentioned above often offered gifts independently like this, and they knew they would get something in return. Liljeblad describes mainly exchanging European goods like clothes, glass beads, and matches for Ovambo cattle and grain.⁷⁰ However, he also mentions

⁶⁷ Translated by M. Núñez. See Núñez et. al 2012, 252–253. See also NAFO, KELA, ALC F MCLC, K4 *Valkoisen miehen pääkallo*.

⁶⁸ Gardner 2000, 39–44.

⁶⁹ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc, Emil Liljeblad to Josef Mustakallio. Ondonga, Ontananga 28 June 1906; Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen, Oniipa 24 December 1917. For gifting as gratitude, see also Siiskonen 1990, 70.

⁷⁰ Private Archive of Risto and Helmi Liljeblad (ARHL), Yli-li. Emil Liljeblad’s diaries (ELD), see for example 29 June 1900, 12 July 1900, 29 September 1902, 20 October 1902, 10 November 1902. NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Emil Liljeblad to Joosef Mustakallio. Ongandjera, Nakeke 3 August 1903 and 7 September 1903.

receiving knives and wooden dishes as gifts, as well as ostrich feathers, ivory, and leopard fur from the king.⁷¹

In addition to any personal desire they may have had to gain material goods, missionaries felt this exchange was a way of earning the trust of the Ovambo. They needed to trade anyway for basic supplies, and an extra income for their relatively precarious lives in Ovamboland was welcome.⁷² As Siiskonen has pointed out, the Ovambo rulers saw missionaries first and foremost as traders, advisers, and a way to access European goods, so exchanging gifts was also a means of staying on good terms with them as well as any Ovambo converts. The priority of Finnish missionaries was to Christianise Ovamboland, but if the kings were dissatisfied with them in any way, they would be expelled from their territories, as they had been from Oukwanyama in 1872 and Ongandjera in 1873.⁷³ Liljeblad had also had firsthand experience of banishment when King Nehale drove him out of Onayena in 1903, apparently due to Liljeblad's short temper or his refusal to sell the king tobacco.⁷⁴ In 1904, Liljeblad was also expelled from Ongandjera as King Shaanika suspected that he was involved in a political conspiracy.⁷⁵ According to Eirola, missionaries were inextricably involved in Ovambo politics. They influenced a polity's internal and external affairs as advisors and mediators between German colonial rule and the king. As leaders of missionary stations, they also had pastoral power over their parishioners.⁷⁶ Missionaries could thus be at once beneficial to the king as advisers and suppliers of goods, but at the same time a potential political threat.

In assemblage analysis utilized by Torrence and Clarke, presence (or absence) of highly valued items indicates the closeness of social tie between outsiders and indigenous groups. They were given as a strategic exchange to cement social relations with high-status outsiders.⁷⁷ Accordingly, the Liljeblad collection reflects the attempts of Liljeblad and the Ovambo elite to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship. The natural samples of big game⁷⁸ and expensive omba (seashell) and ivory jewellery⁷⁹ were most likely a token of appreciation from the local elite, as these objects were considered luxury items among the Ovambo.⁸⁰ Ostrich feathers and ivory were commonly traded with Europeans.⁸¹ However, the collection also contains rare and unique gifts that probably required a more established

⁷¹ ARHL, ELD, see for example 25 December 1900, 5 June 1902, 22 July 1902, 24 December 1902, 22 June 1903, 29 April 1904.

⁷² Siiskonen 1990, 129–131.

⁷³ Siiskonen 1990, 125–126. See also Miettinen 2005, 87–90.

⁷⁴ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc, Liljeblad to Josef Mustakallio. Onajena 9.3.1903.

⁷⁵ Peltola 1958, 145–147.

⁷⁶ Eirola 1992, 51–52.

⁷⁷ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 185, 189.

⁷⁸ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, I1-8 rhinoceros, I1-13b-I1-13e elephant's tusk, I1-17a - I1-17c ostrich feathers.

⁷⁹ Table 1, B3-4.

⁸⁰ Big game was considered the property of the king. See Siiskonen 1990, 60. For more on ivory, see Vilhunen 2003b, 56. For more on omba (jewellery made from seashells), see Shigwedha 2006, 167.

⁸¹ Siiskonen 1990, 97, 196.

relationship with the elite. These include a white oxtail from an unknown king,⁸² knives in copper sheaths, also considered a royal gift of honour;⁸³ and a white spear from the warlord, Kalola, which Liljeblad received while a missionary.⁸⁴

A high number of common items indicates the eagerness of local communities to engage in exchange with Europeans.⁸⁵ As Ovambo rulers controlled long-distance trade, missionaries were an important source of popular trading goods for non-elite Ovambo.⁸⁶ They also provided useful services like treatment for illnesses, education, and work opportunities in the missionary stations.⁸⁷ Sometimes they even sheltered people who had fallen out with the elite.⁸⁸ It has been suggested that many Ovambo objects of the Finnish Mission Museum and the Martti Rautanen Collection were obtained as a token of friendship or reward for such services.⁸⁹ Such gifts from non-elite Ovambo in the Liljeblad Collection include simple weapons like arrows,⁹⁰ and a large number of common, homemade wooden and palm leaf dishes.⁹¹ Based on the similar proportions of handicrafts and weapons in all major Finnish collections from Ovamboland,⁹² it was relatively easy for missionaries to obtain these objects. Handicrafts and weapons were typically made to be traded with Europeans by indigenous communities as they were easily replaceable and did not contain any particular social or religious value. For this reason, they also featured heavily in the collections of travellers passing through.⁹³ The Ovambo eagerness to trade with missionaries can also be seen with a closer examination of the traits and variations of the objects. Many of the palm-leaf containers as well as wooden snuff boxes in the Liljeblad collection appear to have been specifically manufactured by the Ovambo to trade and make useful social connections - they are unused, portable, and decorated with ornamental patterns such as crosses to attract missionaries.⁹⁴ Indeed, Torrence and Clarke have pointed out that some types of object from indigenous communities were designed to be sold to Europeans as “ethnographic objects”.⁹⁵ The

⁸² NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, G6-2 Oxtail.

⁸³ Table 1, B15.

⁸⁴ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3 Emil Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen. Onguediva 27 July 1931.

⁸⁵ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 186–187.

⁸⁶ Siiskonen 1990, 191–194. For the popularity of European commodities, see also Shigwedha 2006, 195, 209–210.

⁸⁷ Miettinen 2005, 90–93; Eirola 1992, 52.

⁸⁸ Miettinen 2005, 260.

⁸⁹ Vilhunen 2003a, 23. Grönholm 1983, 14.

⁹⁰ Table 1, C.

⁹¹ Table 1, E2 and C.

⁹² Figure 1.

⁹³ Torrence & Clarke 2011, 32–33; Harrison 2011, 65–69; Tygesen 2006, 80.

⁹⁴ See for example, NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC E2-70,2 tablet decorated with leaves; E2-72 round lidded basket; G7.

⁹⁵ Torrence & Clarke 2016, 185.

wooden sculptures in Liljeblad's collection are most likely such 'dazzlers' as they seem to have been of no real use to the local community.⁹⁶

As the Ovambo were actively offering goods, it is difficult to assess whether Liljeblad sought out particular objects during his missionary periods or whether he was simply offered items by the Ovambo. Although he did not write about his collecting activities before the ethnographic field trip in the 1930s, Liljeblad clearly had some interest in Ovambo culture. Gardner has argued that missionaries' silence on the issue of gathering a large personal collection like this might have been because it sat uneasily alongside their Christian idea of modesty.⁹⁷ If acquiring cattle and other material possessions from the Ovambo was already considered suspect in terms of Christian morals, the idea of missionaries overtly admitting to being traders endangered the whole Christian project.⁹⁸ Liljeblad's attitude certainly reflects an ambivalent relationship to these exchanges. He condemned the practice of asking for gifts as a "shameful begging habit of the Ovambo" and saw trade to acquire more wealth than required for personal needs as equally repellant.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, as explained earlier, Liljeblad needed to exchange goods to continue his work as a missionary. His uneasiness with this, and the fact that most of his letters were addressed to his superiors at the FMS, might explain his reticence to write more about his collecting activities. During his first missionary term, Liljeblad only mentions cattle as a gift,¹⁰⁰ but it is equally possible he might have also asked for ethnographic objects. The fact is that there are no sources to verify if this was the case or not.

Given Liljeblad's convictions and his strict, uncompromising character, it seems unlikely that he would have asked for items on such a large scale during his second term, since he criticised both the Ovambo and other missionaries for "begging". In 1917, he wrote that he had given in to the "shameful begging habit" during his first term because other missionaries had persuaded him and because he was scared of "being ripped off by the king's constant begging"; but by the second term he had "quit begging entirely".¹⁰¹ It is also important to note that although Liljeblad saw having knowledge of Ovambo customs as necessary for effective missionary work¹⁰², there is no sign of any ethnographic research interests guiding him to seek out particular objects. Aune Liljeblad later wrote that much more of the collection was actually gathered in the two years of ethnographic field trip in the 1930s than in the 15 years Liljeblad spent as a missionary in Ovamboland.¹⁰³ So although his collection began to grow while still a missionary, it seems he did not actively seek out objects at this stage; receiving

⁹⁶ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, G4. For more on carved dolls as gifts for Europeans, see also Vilhunen 2003b, 68.

⁹⁷ Gardner 2000, 44.

⁹⁸ Siiskonen 1990, 129.

⁹⁹ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3 Liljeblad to Jooseppi Mustakallio, Olukonda 23 April 1902.

¹⁰⁰ ARHL, ELD, 28 November 1902.

¹⁰¹ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen, Oniipa 24 December 1917.

¹⁰² NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Liljeblad to Jooseppi Mustakallio, 31 January 1907.

¹⁰³ NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC, G "Taidevälineitä ja taide-esineitä", pp. 4.

them instead as a consequence of his missionary work. Interesting objects may well have been bought, but sporadically.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the Ovambo were in a position to affect the collection at this early stage in its formation by deciding what objects were appropriate as gifts or payments.

4. Purging and Salvaging Objects

“Jairus j’Uuanga recounts the following from the present day. Namuûkuaja j’Uusiku wanted to become a Christian. She started to attend school and decided to leave her healer’s basket (onkiinda). On her walk to school, she was attacked by spirits (asisis) who captured her and threw her to the ground [...]. The spirits asked “Why did you abandon your objects and forsake our cause? You must continue as a diviner and help God’s people. We are God’s people too. Don’t abandon your onkiinda because if you do, you will die [...]. Stay at school but hold on to the onkiinda.” The old wife could not face burning the onkiinda, but she did want to learn about God. She decided to keep the onkiinda but give up divination [...]. Now she wants to try again and see if the spirits still reproach her [...] This old diviner woman sold the onkiinda to me, Emil Liljeblad, on 6th May 1932.”¹⁰⁵

The two largest groups of objects in the Liljeblad collection are “clothing and jewellery” and “magical items”, consisting of amulets and pelts (invested with spiritual power) and the various instruments of healers and diviners.¹⁰⁶ The Finnish Mission Museum and Martti Rautanen Collection also include large amounts of Ovambo clothing and jewellery. However, Liljeblad collected significantly more spiritual objects than any other Finnish missionary.¹⁰⁷ He also apparently gathered 16 of the 72 spiritual Ovambo objects that were in the Finnish Mission Museum.¹⁰⁸ In this section, I demonstrate that Liljeblad received most of the spiritual objects - like the above onkiinda - and certain parts of the clothing and jewellery during his ethnographic fieldwork. In addition to the distinct nature of the collections, the difference between the amounts can be explained by the change in Liljeblad’s collecting activity as well as the increased availability of these objects in the 1930s.

In Ovamboland, Finnish missionaries considered both “magical items” and Ovambo clothing to be an external manifestation of heathenism and therefore something that needed to be eliminated. To become a Christian, the Ovambo had to give up their objects of spiritual power (such as the onkiinda) and preferably start wearing European clothes. Women also had to cut

¹⁰⁴ For more on this, see O’Hanlon 2000, 12–13.

¹⁰⁵ NAFO, KELA Dd:3, “Henget koittavat estää luopumasta tietäjän toimesta”.

¹⁰⁶ See table 1.

¹⁰⁷ See figure 1.

¹⁰⁸ NAFO, KELA C:2, “Luettelo Suomen Lähetysseuralle hankituista ja luovutetuista Ambomaalaisista esineistä v 1932”.

off their hairpieces.¹⁰⁹ The confiscation of religious objects and clothing was common to many missionary movements. The objects were usually either burned, as implied in the above quotation, sold on to other collectors, or included in missionary collections, where the objects demonstrated existing cultural traits of the indigenous groups, their need for Christianity, and the latter's victory over the "heathenism" because the objects had been successfully confiscated.¹¹⁰ Liljeblad's descriptions show that this "changing out of heathen clothing" was in some instances overseen by missionaries,¹¹¹ which would have given them ample opportunity to freely collect both the spiritual objects and Ovambo clothing they had confiscated. It is most likely that Liljeblad, as a missionary, also obtained some of the objects in his collection this way, since he displayed Ovambo items, "used as instruments for witchcraft", already during his lecture at Mission festival in Rautajärvi in 1921.¹¹² Having given up these objects for secular or spiritual reasons, the Ovambo were not necessarily always aware that Liljeblad and other missionaries would be preserving the very same items in Finland that they were systematically eradicating from Ovamboland.

Nevertheless, obtaining spiritual objects was not always easy, even for missionaries. Indigenous communities would usually exclude these items from transactions with outsiders.¹¹³ According to Hiltunen, it was considered taboo to reveal religious practices in Ovambo communities too.¹¹⁴ Although it is difficult to assess whether all non-Christian Ovambo strictly followed this taboo, it seems plausible that Liljeblad obtained most of the spiritual objects in his collection from Ovambo converts. Despite the FMS having been there decades already, the Christianisation of Ovamboland was still in its infancy during Liljeblad's periods as a missionary;¹¹⁵ and, as we see from the quotation above, not even converted Ovambo were giving up certain objects without a fight. However, though Liljeblad may well have exaggerated his personal achievements as a researcher, his letters with such examples, as this diviner's decision to finally sell her onkiinda, do suggest that the Ovambo were by the 1930s more willing to give up their objects than previously. In a letter to Professor Krohn in 1931, Liljeblad wrote that he now had the chance to buy rare "regalia" and "magical objects" that were "previously thought to be almost impossible to get".¹¹⁶ He also described being the

¹⁰⁹ Missionaries saw Ovambo clothing as unchaste and sinful, and getting them to change their clothes was often practically less difficult than trying to separate secular from spiritual accessories. Löytty 2006, 169, 187 and footnote 5.

¹¹⁰ Coombes 1997, 163–177; Cannizzo 1998, 161, 163; See also Koivunen 2011, 26.

¹¹¹ ARHL, ELD 3 May 1902; NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc: 3 Liljeblad to Jooseppi Mustakalliolle. Ongandjera 27 September 1904.

¹¹² Kotimaa 28 October 1921.

¹¹³ Torrence and Clarke 2016, 189; Livne 2011, 63; Cannizzo 1998, 163–164.

¹¹⁴ Hiltunen 1993, 16–17.

¹¹⁵ Miettinen 2005, 90.

¹¹⁶ Finnish Literary Society (FLS), The Literary Archives (LA), The Kaarle Krohn Archive (KKA), The Letter Collection of Kaarle Krohn (LCKK) III:48:1, Emil Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, 3 February 1931 Ondonga.

“first male-observant” at a girls’ initiation ceremony, Ohango,¹¹⁷ which earlier that century had been concealed from missionaries.¹¹⁸

The changed religious, economic and social situation in Ovamboland probably had an effect on the Ovambo readiness to sell spiritual objects. Mass conversions had started in the 1920s¹¹⁹, and therefore less Ovambo were bound by taboo rules. Although there is no research on the subject,¹²⁰ increased contact with Europeans traders and colonial powers, and the migration for work of young Ovambo men might have also diminished the cultural significance of these objects among the Ovambo. Miettinen points out, for example, that after they got labour contracts, some of the workers seemed to “appreciate everything that was ‘modern’”.¹²¹ A famine in 1930 and knock-on effect of the Great Depression increased unemployment.¹²² The Ovambo might even have felt obliged to sell these objects to Liljeblad to earn some extra income.

One must not forget, though, that most of the Ovambo were still non-Christian.¹²³ As we saw with the onkiinda, conversion was not a straightforward exchange of one belief system for another. Old and new religion might have lived alongside each other in people’s lives and had different levels of meaning. Although Liljeblad’s onkiinda story could be interpreted as a typical trophy tale for Christianity, where the missionary-hero finally rids the diviner of the heathen object that still holds her in its thrall, it could also be seen as a carefully calculated move on the part of the diviner to take leave of her onkiinda without it getting burnt. Torrence and Clarke have pointed out that some indigenous people in Papua New Guinea would leave harmful spiritual objects outside the community by giving them to missionaries.¹²⁴ It cannot be said for sure, how extensively the Ovambo used this strategy of purging objects from the community, but if it was used, Liljeblad was certainly a convenient target for the onkiinda and other such objects, as he was leaving Ovamboland that same year.

Besides any Ovambo agendas there may have been, the nature of Liljeblad’s ethnographic research itself may also explain the substantial number of “magical items” and clothes and jewellery of a certain kind in his collection. His ethnographic field trip was motivated by the “salvage paradigm”, according to which the authentic and “traditional” customs of Africans - especially religious - were expected to die out with the coming of Christianity and Europeans.¹²⁵ The aim of the field trip was thus to collect knowledge about the spiritual customs of

¹¹⁷ NAFO, KELA Da. Afrikan Amboheimojen kansantietoutta, 1842–1857.

¹¹⁸ Skyttä 2005, 63.

¹¹⁹ Miettinen 2005, 90.

¹²⁰ Except on changes to Ovambo clothing - see Shigwedha 2006, 215–226.

¹²¹ Miettinen 2005, 261–262.

¹²² Miettinen 2005, 251.

¹²³ Miettinen 2010, 56–57.

¹²⁴ Torrence and Clarke 2016, 189–190.

¹²⁵ Coombes 1997, 117–121, 131; Clifford 1994, 66, 228, 231; O’Hanlon 2000, 10; Buschmann 2000, 56–57. Maxwell 2012, 174–175.

Ovambo in the name of science.¹²⁶ Liljeblad claimed that “the change [...] from heathenism to Christianity and a European way of life will be so rapid that it is only a matter of years before this past is beyond our reach”.¹²⁷ He still received natural samples and objects as gifts,¹²⁸ but unlike when he was a missionary, he also actively sought out and bought ethnographic objects from “eight linguistic areas of the Ovambo”.¹²⁹ He was aiming to collect oral folklore from all eight Ovambo communities¹³⁰ and was especially interested in spiritual objects, as these were ethnographic evidence of this folklore. This might be why these items were the only ones described as more than just “objects” in his letters and diaries from the research trip. He, for example, “bought various magical objects and asked how and what they were used for”,¹³¹ and acquired “magic items”¹³² such as “a witch belt, axes and horn”,¹³³ not to mention the above onkiinda. Compared to other missionary collections, Liljeblad’s contains significantly more hair ornaments and jewellery related to the Ohango ceremony,¹³⁴ which Liljeblad identified as a “religious-cultural custom” and formed one of the most important topics in his research.¹³⁵ Many spiritual objects in his collection are also mentioned in his ethnographic manuscript.¹³⁶

Liljeblad was not collecting this ethnographic material alone. He hired 25 of his former students from the Teacher Seminary at Oniipa to trace suitable informants and collect folklore and ethnographic artefacts.¹³⁷ Some of these objects ended up in the Finnish Mission Museum and some probably went to Liljeblad’s personal collection as well.¹³⁸ Using a local mediator in research was common among ethnographic collectors. Liljeblad was a typical ethnographer of the time in that he highlighted his own role, his linguistic skills, and well-established contacts in research, and wrote very little about his research assistants.¹³⁹ Thus, it is not clear how much of the ethnographic material was actually collected by Ovambo assistants and what their precise role was in acquiring objects. According to Liljeblad, his

¹²⁶ NAFO, KELA Dc:1, Copies of the letters of recommendation by Arthur Hjelt, A.R. Niemi and missionary director Matti Tarkkanen to ministry of education. 12 June 1930.

¹²⁷ FLS, LA, KKA, LCKK III:48:1, Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, 3 February 1931 Ondonga.

¹²⁸ FLS, LA, KKA, LCKK III:48:2, Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, Ondonga 27 May 1932.

¹²⁹ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3, Emil Liljeblad to Mirjami Liljeblad. Engela 2 May 1932.

¹³⁰ Liljeblad’s manuscript consists folklore from all Ovambo communities of Ovamboland. NAFO, KELA Da, Ambomaan kansantietoutta käsikirjoitus.

¹³¹ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc: 3, Emil Liljeblad to Mirjami Liljeblad. Engela 6 January 1931.

¹³² NAFO, KELA Dd, The travel diary of Karl Emil Liljeblad 12.1.1931–11.1.1933, 12–31 March 1931; FLS, LA, KKA, LCKK III:48:1, Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, 3 February 1931 Ondonga.

¹³³ NAFO, KELA Dd, The travel diary of Karl Emil Liljeblad 12.1.1931–11.1.1933, 21 April 1932.

¹³⁴ Table 1, B2 and B9.

¹³⁵ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3 Emil Liljeblad to Mirjami Liljeblad, Olukonda 2 December 1930.

¹³⁶ See for example NAFO, KELA, ALC F, MCLC A1-1,4,4 - A1-1,4,9 and KELA Da, Afrikan Amboheimojen kansantietoutta, pp. 280-282, 570, 592, 635, 822, 825, 1944–1945.

¹³⁷ FLS, LA, KKA, LCKK III:48:1 Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, Ondonga 3 February 1931.

¹³⁸ NAFO, KELA, ALC Bfc:3 Notebook ”Jäljennöksiä ja otteita Emil Liljebladin kirjeistä 1932 III”, Emil Liljeblad to Matti Tarkkanen, Ruskeala 28 September 1932.

¹³⁹ For comparison, see for example Heintze 2011, 29-30; O’Hanlon 2000, 16–17.

Ovambo assistants were enthusiastic about collecting ethnographic material but due to their other responsibilities had only limited time for these research activities.¹⁴⁰ In spite of this, it seems likely that the Ovambo played an important role in connecting Liljeblad to suitable leads and objects. For example Jairus Uuanga, who introduced Liljeblad to the diviner woman with the onkiinda, was also one of Liljeblad's informants.¹⁴¹ It is plausible that Ovambo assistants, as cultural brokers, enabled Liljeblad to gain access to the objects that were previously excluded from the exchange between Ovambo and missionaries. Without their contribution, Liljeblad would not have been able to gather such a large collection.

5. Conclusion

Due to unbalanced source material, we tend to overemphasise the role of missionaries in the creation of their ethnographic collections. However, as I have shown in this article, the Ovambo played an equally important part in determining the content of the Karl Emil Liljeblad Collection. Both elite and non-elite Ovambo had good reason to offer up their material culture in exchange for European commodities, to express friendship, and form social ties with missionaries. They designed and manufactured the objects and, as mediators of the local material culture and customs, regulated their availability for Liljeblad. The collection consists of a large amount of common household handicrafts and weapons because, in addition to their original purpose, the Ovambo had started to use these easily replaceable artefacts as trading articles that were offered to missionaries in the early 20th century. The collection also includes luxury items and culturally significant gifts that reflect the Ovambo elite's aim to stay on good terms with missionaries. In the 1930s, the Ovambo were also directly involved in collecting as they traced and bought various objects for Liljeblad. By then, the cultural and religious significance of the spiritual objects had started to diminish among the Ovambo. This probably explains why Liljeblad was able to collect a significant amount of spiritual objects compared to other Finnish missionaries. Therefore, along with Liljeblad's interests, the collection is very much a product of Ovambo agendas and of the religious, social and economic changes that occurred in Ovambo communities at the time, which affected their willingness to exchange certain objects.

The Ovambo collections in Finland embody the cross-cultural encounters between Finnish missionaries and the Ovambo. Today, however, none of these collections are on display in Finland. Since the closing of the latest exhibition of Liljeblad collection in 2017, its future at the University of Oulu remains as yet unknown. During the last decades, there has been an increasing amount of discussion as to whether ethnographic collections, such as Liljeblad's, should be returned to their countries of origin. If the collection stays in Finland, it would be easier to coordinate with the Namibians if it were digitalised. This would make it easier to access and allow people to gain a better understanding of the objects, their usage, and the cultural and historical value of the collection.

¹⁴⁰ FLS, LA, KKA, LCKK III:48:1, Emil Liljeblad to Kaarle Krohn, Ondonga 3 February 1931.

¹⁴¹ NAFO, KELA, ALC E2 "Kortistot ja tiedot folklorekertojista".

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Seija Jalagin, Kalle Kananoja and two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on the paper.

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