

Shitanda, Mulupi (d. 1952)

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Mulupi Shitanda was chief of the Kabras people in Western Kenya. Although not an Adventist, he assisted the Adventists by designating land and granting it to the Adventists so Chebwai Adventist Mission could be established.

Early Life and Work

Chief Mulupi Shitanda was born among the Wanga people, into the court of Nabongo Mumia, King of the Wanga people of Western Kenya. The Wanga had dominion over various Luhya subtribes in Western Kenya, and Shitanda was appointed by King Nabongo to oversee the Kabras people. He moved to Malava, which was the seat of his chiefdom, administered from Mumias, the seat of the Nabongo. In 1929 the British colonial system was adopted and he was appointed headman.¹

In 1931 he was appointed chief of the Kabrasi location in what was then known as North Kavirondo district. It was in 1935 that he first encountered Adventists when he was approached by Petero Chetambe, an early Adventist evangelist, from his Kabras chiefdom.

Establishing the Chebwai Adventist Mission

Chetambe asked Chief Mulupi for assistance in obtaining consent to establish an Adventist Mission at Chebwai, a short distance from Malava. Chetambe owned some land at Chebwai which he offered the Adventists, but they still needed the consent of the local administration. Chief Mulupi was assured by Chetambe that a school would also be established at Chebwai to give the locals an education. Together with Spencer G. Maxwell, superintendent of the Kenya Mission, Chetambe visited Chief Mulupi who eagerly welcomed the Adventists to his chiefdom and promised to give them land. This was in sharp contrast to the neighboring Nandi district where the administration did not meet with the Adventists and even mounted an active resistance to them.

Adventism had reached Nandi through the work of David Sparrow, a South African settler farmer, who arrived among them in 1911. He helped establish the first church in western Kenya at Kaigat in northern Nandi in 1931. It was from the work at Kaigat that Petero Chetambe, a Luhya from North Kavirondo (Kakamega), had become

an Adventist in 1933. Following the deep frustration of trying to establish Adventist work among the Nandi, Chetambe decided to donate his land for the purpose of establishing the mission. In 1935 Chetambe offered four acres of his land to the church to establish the Chebwai mission and school. He got the Local Native Council to ratify the donation and promised more land. In 1935 the East Africa Union authorized the establishment of the North-West Kenya Mission to be based at Chebwai in North Kavirondo. It was to serve western and northern Kenya. A. W. Allen was appointed secretary of the new mission.

In May 1936 Allen wrote to the North Kavirondo District Commissioner, J. H. Clive, asking for permission to establish the Chebwai Mission.² Chief Mulupi actively supported the application, and the consent to operate was granted. He asked the residents around the area to present to the church another eight acres, bringing the initial grant to 12 acres. In 1936 Pastor Matthew Murdoch arrived in Chebwai to direct the new mission.³

Later Life

In February 1938, Chief Mulupi was appointed to the North Kavirondo Local Native Council which was based at Kakamega. Pastor Murdoch worked closely with Chief Mulupi until his departure in 1943. In his place, Pastor D. M. Swaine came, and by this time the Chebwai Mission had acquired another five acres to bring the total to 17. On the land was a full mission establishment that oversaw the work in Nandi, Trans-Nzoia to West Pokot, and Turkana. In 1945, Swaine approached Chief Mulupi with a request for an additional grant of land to expand the mission to include medical work and a boarding school. The Chebwai School was established in 1937, but it needed more land for further development. The Chief visited the area and spoke to the residents neighboring the school and offered them alternative land elsewhere so as to expand the Chebwai land.

The Chief, though a practicing Muslim, actively—even passionately—supported the Chebwai Adventist Mission. He actively encouraged his people to send their children to the school there. With such a warm welcome, the Adventist membership grew faster. Chief Mulupi actively lobbied the North Kavirondo Local Native Council to grant Chebwai additional land. In 1949 Chebwai was granted an additional 25 acres bringing the total acreage of the mission campus to 42 acres. This made Chebwai the largest mission campus in all of Kenya.⁴

Legacy

Chief Mulupi continued to make occasional visits to Chebwai until his death in 1952. He is best remembered for helping the denominational work of the Adventists even though he was a Muslim. A road is named after him on the Chebwai campus. The campus at present houses a primary school, a secondary school, and a teacher's college. All that would not have been possible had Chief Mulupi not helped. One of the earliest students at Chebwai was his nephew Aggrey Juma Kutondo, son of his older brother Kutondo Chesaka Shitanda.⁵ Kutondo joined the Chebwai Adventist School in 1949 and later became a pastor and rose to become the first executive director of the Western Kenya Field created in 1981. Kutondo was responsible for much of the Adventist work in

western and northern Kenya, helping to open up Turkana in Kenya's furthest north. The Western Kenya Field was elevated into a conference, and in 2015 it had grown so that it was split to create the Greater Rift Valley Conference and the North-West Kenya Conference. They are both under the West Kenya Union Conference.

SOURCES

Berry, J. K. "Chebwai Mission News Notes," *The Southern Africa Division Outlook*, January 15, 1949, vol. XLVII, 4.

Sang, Godfrey K. and Hosea K. Kili. *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*. Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017.

The Advent Survey. Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press, 1938.

NOTES

1. Godfrey K. Sang and Hosea K. Kili, *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya* (Nairobi: Gapman Publications Ltd., 2017), 30.

2. This correspondence is kept today at the Chebwai Adventist Mission, Chebwai Adventist Mission main office.

3. *The Advent Survey* (Grantham, UK: Stanborough Press, 1938), 8

4. K. J. Berry, "Chebwai Mission News Notes," *The Southern Africa Division Outlook*, January 15, 1949, vol. XLVII, 4.

5. Aggrey Kotondo, interview with author, Butali, near Chebwai, July 13, 2016.

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