

Letter to Andrew Smith, 31 May 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

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River Zambesi 31st May

1859

My Dear D^r Smith

A point which we once had under discussion in your house came so forcibly back to my mind a short time ago that I felt bound to write to you by the earliest opportunity and let you know that I fear I misled you in saying that the Balonda have square huts. of their own innate notion. We have just been into a country almost identical with Louda. It is high - has the very same vegetation and abounds in flowing streams rising in bogs. and there I saw reason to doubt squares among pure aborigines. We went up the Shire about one hundred miles in this steamer in a first trip. In a second we passed our former point - a rapid or cataract - on foot. and proceeding northwards in a mountainous region for some forty miles discovered a magnificent Lake called Shirwa. It is about 20 or 30 miles broad and fifty or sixty long - and seperated according to native report from a much larger lake called Nyinyesi = the stars, by a strip of land only

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only five or six miles broad. Shirwa itself is distant from a branch of the Shire called Rus only 30 miles so we have a prospect of opening up all Eastern Africa with land carriage of not more than fifty miles. We could hear nothing of Burton's party but Nyinyesi is the Nyanja or Nyassa which is believed to reach well up to the Equator. Well so much by way of preface. When up there and travelling on foot we always slept outside the huts except

twice. and remembering your idea of round huts
I found you were perfectly right. Only when
we came to any village where native traders
had been did we see an attempt at the square
walls yet round roof. Where no traders had
been all were round both walls and roof
this must have been the case in Louda though
then I did not have the cause. The Bechuanas
make nothing square except pitfalls - I

imagine in imitation of the four feet of the
animal. the Barouse make their huts of
a half moon shape but when travelling

make sheds which I think may glide into
squares - Stakes are planted in a slanting direction
and bushes stuck in opposite them so as to form
oblong sheds. In the Manganja country where

we were this sort of shed was built on
a platform and an end or two ends put
in making a rude approximation to a square
some of the Manganja had lean-tos to their huts
these were square or approaching to it. Otherwise
I think you are quite right in setting down
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all untutored tribes as building round huts. The
Manganya make a frame for the outer walls.

then make the roof in it as one puts a
filtering paper into a funnel. It is made ready there
and then turned over on to the walls. Excuse the
scrawls and believe that I felt sorry when by
longer observation I found that I had misled you
the Balanda whom I saw with square walls.
probably imitated native slave traders huts. They
had however straight walls with sharp well
made angular corners for their sheets.

We have had fever but of so mild a
form that D^r Kirk and I failed to recognise
it for many months. It was quite unlike
what I suffered so much from when destitute
of every comfort; and resembled closely
"common colds." their frequent recurrence
in the same individual with the same symptoms
at last led us to believe it was fever. One
had sore bones. all over sore &c. another got
heady having had brain fever as they call it
once at the Cape. Another looked as if he had

a bilious attack and another as if he had a fit of indigestion. We begin to suspect that colds everywhere may be the effect of malaria. We cure it quickly by what I discovered when alone, a pill of Resin of jalap, calomel, and quinine: as soon as the bowels move, relief is obtained. We then give quinine to complete the cure. This quinine is no prophylactic that we can see. I never found it prevent a single attack in my own person nor in others. We [0004] are well because well provided for, and we take the quinine partly for the dram, and partly to prevent you folks blaming us after we are dead! As for the Portuguese - they ought to die of fever. They all have syphilis either congenital or acquired from the priest to the pagan - a dirty crew "sames" - a species of itch is about universal & nobody is ashamed of it. Dr Kirk and I have been more exposed to malaria than the others yet we have escaped. The Kroomen take it and call it the same as they get at Sierra Leone

The Shirwa region is high we rose 1500 feet above the ship in ten days short marches. Mount Bzomba or Zomba is over 6000 feet high. yet people live on its top which may be fifteen miles broad. Shirwa water is bitter like but possibly not the same as a weak solution of epsom salts. Has plenty of leeches, fish & alligators. I shall be able to give you some photographs of the people for your work on ethnology if you are not in a great hurry with it. My brother takes them. The peculiarity of this region is expansion of the alae nasi and the head prolonged upwards & backward. No other peculiarity. Good legs like Europeans often seen our artist, Bowes, fails miserably with natives. He makes a mixture of west coast African South Australian with a dash of Patagonian in a colour indistinguishable.

My very kindest
salutations to Mrs Smith. David Livingstone

Dr Peters of Berlin has I believe worked up the zoology of this region. We caught a young elephant but one of the Makalolo in a fit of excitement wounded it so that it died. Mrs L was at Kuruman I believe. We expect a stronger vessel out to take us

up the rapids above Tette

My address is care of Admiral, Sir Frederick Grey KCB Cape of G. Hope