

## Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 24 December 1854

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)  
[0001]

[1. Journey from the Confluence of [the] Leeba & Leeambye  
to Loanda]

[N<sup>o</sup> I.  
with a Note] [1.]

Pungo Andongo, Angola.

24<sup>th</sup> December 1854

Sir Roderick Impey Murchison

Sir

I have been in the habit of addressing my letters for the Royal Geographical Society to the care of Lieut<sup>t</sup> Colonel Steele, but from some notices which I have seen in the Newspapers since my arrival in Angola, I conclude that, that gentleman has gone to the seat of war in the East. On that account, and knowing the interest which you take in such matters, I beg you will allow me the liberty of sending my communications on Geography to you.

[~~See Journal vol xxiv page 291~~] In my last letter[,] dated ~~October~~ [20<sup>th</sup> September,] 1853 x

I reported my return to the town of Sekeletu on the river Chobé after having visited the country of the Barotsé, and the river Leeambye or Zambesi as far North as its confluence with the Leeba. I enclosed also, a sketch of the river with the Latitudes and Longitudes of the different points at which I had made observations,

[0002]

[2] and mentioned my intention of proceeding to Loanda in order if possible to open a path whereby commercial intercourse might be maintained with the West

coast as a means of ameliorating the condition of the people in the Interior[.]  
†[T]he present communication is intended to convey a sketch of the journey from the point at which my last terminated viz. the confluence of the Leeba and Leeambye, Lat. 14° 11 3 South[;:] Long. 23° 40 30 East. ~~[This position is slightly altered from that in Vol XXIV p302]~~ to Loanda, the capital of the Portuguese possessions in Western Africa.

Sekeletu, who by the abdication of his sister, now possesses the chieftainship[.], and the principal men of the tribe[.] entered cordially into the project of opening a new road for commercial purposes. [Insert] [from sheet II. 2<sup>d</sup> Sheet] Men[.], ~~oxen and canoes were generously furnished. Also~~ [F]our elephants' [.] tusks ~~[were also entrusted to me for sale for the purpose of]~~ by which to test [ing] the difference ~~[between] of [the] prices [^] [given] between [by] the c[C]ape [traders,] and other white traders [men], [;:] and which I subsequently disposed of [^] [them] with that object in view and for his [Skeletu's] advantage at Cassangé~~ Taking leave of the [0003]  
[3] chief and principal men on the banks of the Chobé[.], my company consisting of none but [men of] Zambesians and these chiefly Barotsé, we descended that tortuous river to its junction with the Leeambye, ~~then entering it~~ [which] we [ascended,] ~~visited~~ [visiting] Sesheké[.], and the different villages on its banks, at each of which orders had previously been issued "that we must not be allowed to become hungry". On reaching the country of the Barotsé, we learned that a foray had been made by one of the under-chiefs, and [^] [that] several villages had been destroyed in the very direction we intended to take. Having demanded the return of the prisoners as the only means of ensuring our safety[.], I succeeded in getting eighteen into my charge, [^] [and] these were restored to their relatives[.], as we approached their different habitations in our progress up the river. As we had previously seen, the Leeambye makes a sharp bend away to the Eastward[.], from the confluence of the Leeba, and ~~comes~~ [flows]

from ~~the~~ East to ~~the~~ West. But the  
Leeba comes from the North, so we  
supposed that by ascending it we should  
approach the source of the Coanza. And  
by descending [the latter]it might at last reach  
Loanda. We discovered afterwards

[0004]

[4] that the Portuguese map, which represents  
the Coanza [as]arising in the East, is erroneous.  
With the above impression however, we  
ascended the Leeba[,] [for 40]forty or 50 miles[:]  
~~And~~ [when] a cataract preventing farther progress  
in canoes, we remained a few days  
waiting for a party which had been  
detached at the confluence, before commencing  
the journey on ox back. ‡[T]he party ~~having left~~[was sent from]  
the junction, with five captives belonging  
to Masiko, a Barotsé chief who lives  
East of that point, & proceeded in the  
same direction during five days. ~~But~~  
‡[T]wo of the prisoners being little girls,  
shorter marches than usual were  
made[:] & the actual distance may  
therefore be not more than eighty miles.  
‡[T]hough travelling Eastward thus far,  
they [party] did not again come near the Leeambye.  
From this, and the fact that we could  
get no more information about it  
in the North, it may fairly be inferred  
that this noble river [^] [the Leeambye] holds an Easterly  
and Westerly course for a considerable  
distance beyond where we left it.

‡[T]he party having returned together  
with an embassy of Masiko's principal  
men, bearing a present and friendly

[0005]

2<sup>d</sup> sheet

[5] message, we left the river and proceeded  
N.N.W. through a portion of the country  
called Londa; the paramount chief of which  
is well known to the Portuguese by the title  
of Matiamvo. ‡[T]he inhabitants, ~~or~~ [called]Balonda  
belong to the true wooly-headed negro race,  
and differ remarkably from the Bechuanas  
and other tribes in the South, in their treatment  
of females, and [^] [in the] practice of idolatry. ‡[T]hey  
swear by their mothers, and never desert  
them&[: they] allow the women a place and voice  
in their public assemblies, and frequently

elevate them to the chieftainship. Near every village we observed an idol, consisting either of an image formed of grass and clay, intended to represent a lion or alligator, or a block of wood, on the top of which the human face was rudely carved. In cases of sickness or of non-success in hunting, offerings are made and drums beat before them[se] [^] [idols,] during whole nights. ‡[T]he Bechuanas on the contrary, swear by their fathers, - glory in the little bit of beard which distinguishes them from the sex which they despise, - And, though they have some idea of a future state, it exerts but little influence on their conduct. ‡[T]heir supreme good is a cow, and they never pray.

[0006]

[6] The first Londa chief of importance whom we visited[,] is called Shinté or Kabompo. His town stands on Latitude 13° South. [(13° 0 21 )] We were recieved in what they consider grand style. ‡[T]he old chief sat under a species of figus indica, on a raised seat, having some hundreds of women behind him, all decked out in their best, and that best was a profusion of red baize. Some drums and primitive pianos [instruments] made of wood, were powerfully beaten-[:] and different bands of men,- each numbering about 50 or 80 persons,- well armed with large bows and iron-headed arrows, short broad swords and guns,- rushed yelling towards us from different quarters. As they all screwed up their faces so as to look very ~~savage and serious~~ [^] [fierce & savage][,] I supposed they were trying whether they could not make us take to our heels. But they knelt down and made their obeisance to Shinté, which in all this country consists in rubbing dust on the upper and front part of the arms, and accross the chest. When several hundreds had arrived, speeches were delivered, in which my

[0007]

[7] history so far as they could extract it from my companions, was given. "‡[T]he Bible containing a message of peace", "the return of two captives to Shinté",- "the opening of a new path for trade"

&c. &c. were all described. "Perhaps he is fibbing, perhaps not<sup>2</sup>; they rather thought he was.["]  
 "But as they were good hearted, and not at all like the Balo-bale, or people of Sekeletu, and had never done any evil to any one, Shinté had better treat him well and send him on his way". ‡[T]he women occasionally burst forth with a plaintive ditty, but I could not distinguish whether it was in praise of the speakers or of themselves. And when the sun became hot, the scene closed.

Shinté came during the night and hung [around my neck] a particular kind of shell, which is highly valued, ~~to [around] my neck~~, as a proof of the greatest friendship, and [^] [he] was greatly delighted with some scriptural pictures which I shewed him from a Magic Lantern.  
 ‡[T]he spirit of trade is strong in all Africans, and the Balonda chiefs we visited, all highly approved of our journey, ‡[E]ach expressed an earnest hope that the projected path might lead through his town. Shinté~~having~~ facilitated our progress to the next important chief, [^] [named] Katema, & we [0008]

[8] We ~~came~~ again ~~to~~ [reached] the Leeba in Latitude 12° 8' South and 22° 55' East Longitude. It had assumed the same Easterly and Westerly course as the Leeambye. After crossing it, we were obliged to go almost due North, in consequence of the plains of Lobalé on our West, being flooded and impassable. It happened to be the rainy season, and never did twenty-four hours pass without frequent drenching showers. All the streams were swollen so as to appear considerable rivers[;] but as they were generally furnished with rustic bridges, we may infer their flow to be perennial. Several extensive plains were crossed with the water standing more than a foot deep[;] and broad vallies also, along which the water flowed fast towards the Leeba, ~~and~~ deep enough to wet our blankets, which we used as pads on the oxen, instead of saddles. Both this and the water in the rivers was so clear, that in using the ~~rustic~~ bridges over the latter, though they were submerged breast deep, we

could easily see the sticks on which  
to place our feet. ‡[T]his clearness of  
the water, which we observed in the  
Zouga, Chobé and Leeambye, at the  
times of inundation, is the result of  
the rains falling on a mat of grass, so

[0009]

3<sup>d</sup> sheet

[9] thick, as to prevent the abrasion of the soil. As  
the tropical rains cause the plains of Lobalé  
to present a similar phenomenon, it may  
not be unreasonable to conclude that the  
water of inundation of the Barotsé-valley, and  
lower parts of the Zambesi, is supplied by  
copious rains in the North, and as the  
natives reported[,] comes chiefly from Lobalé.

We suffered less detention, than might be  
expected from the swollen state of the rivers;  
for though we had to swim some of them,  
all except two boys knew the art; and we  
ever stopped to dry our clothes, unless it  
were in the afternoons. We got drenched either  
by rains or rivers, two or three times everyday;  
but the sun was hot and we suffered no  
inconvenience. If however, we arrived at  
our sleeping place damp, or got our blankets  
wet, intermittent fever was sure to follow.

the more important rivers, or those we  
crossed in canoes, were the Lokaloje-[,][([the village  
of Soanamolopo about 3 miles N.N.W. of the  
ford, stood in Latitude 11° 49 42 South, and  
22° 52 East.):-] The Lotembwa, upwards of  
100 yards broad, [^] [and] one of the principal feeders  
of the Leeba, was crossed in 11° 40 S. Lat.-  
‡[T]he town of Katema stands a short distance  
beyond in 11° 35 37 S. Lat. and 22° 47 East  
Longitude. ‡[T]he Lake Dilolo, from which  
the Lotembwa takes its rise, is 3 or 4 North  
[0010]

[10] of Katema's town, [^] [and] consequently may [^] [be] reckoned  
in nearly the same Longitude, and between  
11° 30 and 11° 32 S. Lat. We went round  
the Western or smaller end of this Lake, ~~there~~ [where]  
it was not 1/2 a mile broad, but the other  
end is said to [^] [be] broader (perhaps 6 miles), and  
as it has large waves, it is probably deep.  
It contains many fish, and we saw marks  
of many hippopotami on its banks. Repeated

attacks of intermittent [^] [fever] had [^] [at length] made me so weak  
 and giddy, [^] [that] I could with difficulty stick on the  
 ox; and as Katema did not appear very  
 willing to let me sleep at the broad [^] [part,] I did  
 not feel much inclined to press the subject.  
 ‡[T]he giddiness and confusion of mind were[, combined]  
 with the excessive cloudiness of the weather,  
 great annoyances in making observations;  
 but I took as many as possible at  
 every important point. After crossing  
 a water-covered plain beyond Dilolo,  
 we came to streams flowing in a totally  
 different direction from those we had  
 left. ‡[T]hese were the feeders of the Casai  
 (Kasye) or Loké, which we found flowing  
 N.E. and E.N.E. ‡[The] [^] [Casai] is about 120  
 yards broad, and flows in a deep valley,  
 finely wooded and beautifully green. ‡[T]he  
 Latitude of the ford was 11° 17' South.  
 [The] confluence of the Chihune and ~~Chihombo~~ (by the Longe)  
 both small streams, the latter however had  
 canoes on it, is 10° 57' 31" [S. Lat.] Long. 20° 29' 30" E. [Long.]  
 [0011]  
 [11]The Chikapa [(Lat 10° 38')] about 60 yards wide, flowing  
 West Nor-West; and when entering upon Portuguese  
 territory, the Quango or Coango about 150 yards  
 wide and flowing [s] nearly due North. ‡[T]he  
 Latitude of the ford was 9° 50' 28". I waited  
 four days for a lunar observation, but in vain[,][as]  
 the sky was always covered with clouds. To  
 these may at present be added Cassange, the  
 farthest inland station of the Portuguese-[,]  
 Here [where]  
 I had a clear sky, and made many observations,-  
 Lat. 9° 37' 29" South, [Long.] 17° 43' 30" East.

‡[T]he country of the Balonda through  
 which we passed, was both fertile and beautiful  
 Dense forests alternate constantly with open  
 vallies covered with grass resembling fine  
 English Hay [meadows]. the general surface, though  
 flat, seems covered with waves disposed  
 lengthways from N.N.E. to S.S.W. ‡[T]he  
 crest of each of these earthen billows, is  
 covered with forest, four or five miles  
 broad; while the trough about a mile wide,  
 has generally a stream or bog in the centre  
 and [with] the habitations and gardens of  
 the inhabitants on the sides. ‡[T]he forests consist  
 of lofty evergreen trees, standing close together  
 and interlaced with great numbers of  
 gigantic climbers. ‡[T]he trees covered with

lichens, and the ground with mosses and ferns, indicate a much more humid climate, than is to be found in the South.

[0012]

[12]the only roads through these [^] [dense] thickets are small winding foot-paths-[:] And as an attempt to stop an ox suddenly, only makes him rush on, we were frequently caught [^] [by the overhanging climbers,] and came to the ground, ~~erown of the~~ head foremost.

ø[O]n this account , I never trusted to the watch alone for longitudes - [NP.] [New Para]†[T]he streams with which the country is well supplied, differ remarkably in the directions in which they flow. m[M]any were flowing southwards; but a distance of about 20 miles brought us to streams running North East, and in much deeper vallies. I suspected that we were travelling on an elevated table-land, because the current of the Zambesi and other rivers was rapid, and we had large Cape-Heaths and Rhododendrons, which grow on elevated positions [^] [together with a wonderful lack of animal life.]~~But~~[This proved to be the fact for] when we were about 40 miles E.S.E of the Quango we came upon a sudden descent [^] [perhaps øf about 2000 feet,] which to me seemed about the same height as †[T]able Mountain at the Cape. Ninety or one hundred miles [^] [west] from this descent, appeared[ed] as it were a range of mountains, but it is only the edge of ~~another~~ [similar] table-land, identical with that on the margin of which we stood. ~~And~~†[T]his presents the same mountainous appearance to a person coming from the West.- †[T]he intervening valley is call Cassange, and through it flows the Quango and other rivers.[Let part of letter dated 20 August 1854 follow here beginning at the 2nd page as marked.] [13]

[0013]4<sup>th</sup> sheet

[16]This country as compared with [^] [that to] the South is well peopled. We came to villages, every few miles and often passed as many as ten in a day. s[S]ome ~~villages~~ were extremely neat; others were so buried in a wilderness of weeds, [^] [that] though sitting on the ox in the middle of the village, we could see only the tops of houses. †[T]here is no lack of food, Manioc or the Tapioca plant is the staff of life, and requires but little labour for its cultivation. †[T]he seasons



seemed to allow of ~~their~~ planting or reaping  
all the year round. ‡[T]he Balonda were all  
extremely kind, and indeed, had they been  
otherwise, we should have starved; for there  
is no game, and all the goods which I had  
brought from the Cape, were expended before  
we started, except[ing] a few beads. [N.P.]When  
~~however~~, we came near to the Portuguese  
possessions, the tribes altered very much  
for the worse: [^] [and the Chiboqui so annoyed us by] heavy fines ~~were~~ levied  
on the most frivolous pretences, [that we changed  
our course from N.W. to N. This did not relive us long for when we came  
nearer Cassange, we found our route obstructed by the M'bangala who demanded] ~~and at~~  
~~length among the Cheeboqui, payment of~~  
"a man, an ox, or a gun" ~~was demanded~~  
for leave to pass at all. A refusal on  
our part was [^] [sometimes] followed by ~~the~~ [a] whole tribe  
surrounding us, brandishing their swords, arrows,  
and guns, and tumultuously vociferating  
their demands. ‡[T]he more we yielded, the  
[0014]

[17]the more unreasonable the mob became, till  
at last, in order not to aid in robbing  
ourselves, we ceased speaking after telling  
them that they must strike the first blow.  
My men who were inured to fighting by  
Sebituane, quietly surrounded the chief and  
councillors. ‡[T]hese felt their danger, and  
usually became more amicable. ‡[T]hey  
never disputed the proposition that the  
ground they cultivated, alone belonged  
to them, and all the rest of the country  
to God. ‡[T]his being the idea in the native  
mind, they readily admitted, that they had  
no right to demand payment for  
treading on the soil of our common Father.  
But they pleaded custom; slave traders,  
always gave them a slave. [^] [~~But~~] My companions  
being all, ~~the~~ free subjects of Sekeletu, had  
as good a right to give me, as I had  
to give one of them, [^] [; and] the affair usually  
ended by our agreeing to give each  
other food in token of friendship. I had  
to part with an ox; and their part  
of the contract was sometimes fulfilled  
by sending [us] two or three pounds of the  
meat of our own animal, with ~~so~~  
many expressions of regret at having  
nothing else to give. It was impossible  
to avoid laughing at the coolness  
[0015]

[18]of the generous creatures. I had paid away my razors, shirts and everything I could dispense [with], but though I shewed these extortioners the instruments and all we had as being perfectly useless to them, the oxen, men and guns [^] [still] remained. "You may as well give what we ask for [^] [as] we shall get the whole tomorrow, after we have killed you";- or "you must go back from whence you came and say we sent you";- were some of the witticisms, which, with hunger, were making us all sulky and savage. If Sekeletu had allowed my companions to bring their shields, I could not have restrained them; but we never came into actual collision, and as far as we are concerned, the way is open for our return. ¶[O]n the last occasion [^] [on which] we parted with an ox, objections were raised against one which had lost his tail, because they imagined a charm had been inserted in the stump, which might injure them, [and] the remaining four ~~which we still~~ [^] [in our] possessed [ion] very soon exhibited the same peculiarity of [in] their caudal extremities. [Attempts have frequently been made by the Balonda & other distant tribes to open up commercial intercourses with the Portuguese and these have always been rendered abortive by the borderers]

In order not to tire you with a longer ~~deliberation~~ [account] of vexations, which were making us misanthropic, and more anxious to pass than visit a tribe, I may mention, that, having in the beginning of April reached the banks of the Quango, which was [0016]

[19] swollen and its muddy waters flowing rapidly, I had [^] [at length] made up my mind to part with my blanket and coat to the ferrymen for a passage. But a young Portuguese sergeant, Cypriano De Abreu made his appearance, and enabled us to enter Portuguese territory without farther annoyance. Senhor Neves of Cassange performed a brother's part to me in the time of need-[,] ~~And~~ [and] indeed, the Portuguese everywhere exhibited the greatest kindness all the way to Loanda

[Insert 20,21,22,23,24]

~~I shall not attempt in this letter to give any account of~~ [T]he Province of Angola farther than, except in parts near the coast it is one of [possesses] great fertility and beauty;

[and] its capabilities both agriculturally and commercially  
are of a very high order. Indeed I do not  
fear contradiction in asserting it to be the  
richest in resources in [of] Western Africa. The [Begin No.2 with this]  
[The] commerce of Angola has been remarkably  
neglected by the English for though the city of  
Loanda contains a population of eleven thousand  
souls clothed chiefly in the produce of  
English looms, and though in many parts  
of the Interior cheap Glasgow And Manchester  
goods constitute the circulating medium,  
there is not a single English house established  
at the capital. For this anomaly various  
reasons are assigned, the most cogent  
[Continued 5<sup>th</sup> Sheet No 1]  
[0017] 5<sup>th</sup> sheet

[Continued from 4<sup>th</sup> No 1 & to be inserted with it  
in No 2 page 8 together with next page] of these appears to be, that those who first attempted  
to develop a trade, unfortunately accepted bills  
on Rio Janeiro in part payment of their  
cargoes, at a time when the increased numbers  
and vigilance of our cruisers, caused the  
bankruptcy of many houses, both in Rio  
and Loanda. Heavy losses were sustained  
and Angola got a bad name in the mercantile  
world in consequence. No attempt has ever  
been made since. Still, with the same difficulties  
and burdens as the English encountered, the  
Americans carry on a flourishing trade with  
Loanda. [\* note] [Note \* The Americans it is said do not hesitate to  
cooperate with slavers, while the  
English traders cannot. Ed.] And as a very large proportion  
of the goods imported in other ships are  
English manufactures, taken in exchange  
for colonial produce which has gone by the  
expensive and circuitous route of Lisbon,  
i.e. produce on which the expense of port dues,  
freight, commission &c. is paid from Loanda  
to Lisbon, and again thence to London.  
And as the same round of expenses is incurred  
on English manufactures, a British merchant  
carrying merchandise direct to and from England  
and dealing in Loanda in a liberal spirit,  
would almost certainly establish a lucrative  
trade

In connection with this subject I may be  
allowed to call your attention to the Rivers  
Casai and Quango. these are reported by  
intelligent natives, who profess knowledge of the country

[0018]

and it is [are] believed by Portuguese traders ~~that they~~ [to] join somewhere North of Cassange and form the Congo or Zaire of Capt<sup>n</sup> Tuckey. the directions in which I saw those rivers flowing[,] appear to favour the idea. ‡[T]he Casai[,] according to the report of Matiamvo's people whom we met[,] flows East Nor[th]-East even beyond the residence of their chief[,] and as that is a month or 300 miles from the ford, if it really makes a large bend round to the N.W. after that we can form an idea of the great importance of the attempts of Commander Bedingfield and others[,] to establish licit commerce in the Congo. It is scarcely possible to estimate the ultimate effect which success in [t]his most laudable efforts would produce. These rivers drain such a vast extent of populous slave producing territory, [^] [that] they assume features of peculiar interest. ‡[T]he influence of the English squadron on the coast is powerfully felt throughout the country. Of this I have observed ample evidence, and no wonder this is the case[,] for it makes one proud of his countrymen to witness the zeal and energy with which the officers of our cruizers apply themselves to the suppression of the trade in slaves. [The above to No 2 see preceeding page.]

[0019]

~~My present intentions [^] [are] to return to the Zambesi by nearly the same route I followed in coming here. And [23]a[A]fter making any arrangements [^] [with Sekeletu] that may be deemed necessary, try [^] [I propose] to descend the Leeambye to Quilimane. It may be advisable in order to avoid the waterfall of Mosio [^] [a]tunya, to cross overland from Sesheké to the river Maninché or Loengé (Bashukulompo R.)[,] buy or beg a canoe[,] and descend [^] [in] it to the Leeambye. ‡[T]he confluence of the Chobe is only two days distant from the waterfall[,] but the river is very rocky and dangerous before reaching that point. [20 to follow~~  
19, sheet 4]I reached [approached] Loanda labouring under ~~disease~~ [^] [severe illness] and extremely anxious as to what I should do for the support of my companions who without exception are the best I ever travelled with[,] and who bravely followed me[,] though told by the blacks of

every village West of Cassange[,] that "the white man was taking them down to the coast for sale[,] and they would all be taken on board ship, fattened and eaten"[Insert from "Extracts" 14 Jan 1855 -- 21] I was laid prostrate for a long time by severe indisposition[,] and owe my life, under God, to H. M. Commissioner Edmund Gabriel Esq<sup>re</sup>[,] the only Englishman whom I know in the city. His unwearied kindnesses and generous hospitality to both me and my companions, enable me [0020] now to return to my duty with renewed health and spirits. [24]In order that, should I succeed in reaching Mosambique or Quilimane, I may not have [suffer] the same dejection of spirits in my approach[,] I presume to request that any of our officers who may be on that coast, be directed to make enquiries respecting my arrival [^] [towards the end of 1855]. I am known to some of the subjects of the Imaum of Muscat by the name of "Naka" (Doctor)

In conclusion I cannot omit mentioning, the very great courtesy of the Portuguese Authorities; and as their habitual politeness was in strict accordance with the wishes of the Government of Portugal, it is of the greater value.

Begging to be excused for presuming to make an Alternative of you in the absence of my friend[ Colonel Steele]

I am Sir,

Your Most Obedient Servant

David Livingston