

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^o I.
with a Note][1.]

Pungo Andongo, Angola.

24th 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^t 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.

In my last letter[, dated ~~October~~ 20th September,] 1853[~~See Journal vol xxiv page 291~~]
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^d Sheet] ~~Men, oxen and canoes were generously furnished. Also four elephants' tusks were~~
~~also entrusted to me for sale for the purpose of by which to testing the difference between of the~~
~~prices given between by the CeCape traders, and other white tradersmen,; 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^d 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"; 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, ~~and~~ each 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 ~~rustie~~ 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^d 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 Lokaloeje:[,][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. These 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. The 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. The 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.

The 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. The 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. The forests consist of lofty evergreen trees, standing close together and interlaced with great numbers of gigantic climbers. The 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. On this account, I never trusted to the watch alone for longitudes - [NP.] [New Para] the streams with which the country is well supplied, differ remarkably in the directions in which they flow. Many 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 of about 2000 feet,] which to me seemed about the same height as ~~t~~[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~~[T]his presents the same mountainous appearance to a person coming from the West.- ~~t~~[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]4th 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~~[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~~[T]he seasons seemed to allow of ~~their~~ planting or reaping all the year round. ~~T~~[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.
Θ[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[~~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 5th Sheet No 1] [0017] 5th sheet[Continued from 4th 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 Captⁿ 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 cruisers 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 Esqre, the only Englishman whom I know in the city. His unwearied kindnesses and generous hospitality to both me and my companions, enable me 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