

Letter to [Edmund Gabriel?], 8 March 1861

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Rovuma Bay

8th March, 1861

My dear Friend,

By our new vessel which touched at Loanda I hear that you are gone to England. I take the liberty of intruding on your holiday with a subject that is of some importance in the geographical world, and concerning me as an attempt by a literary friend to deprive of the honor of being the first European that crossed the continent and throw discredit on my statements.

In 1853 or 4 (I quote from memory) I met a S^r Silva Porto of darkish color, but having straight hair which was cut short, at Linyante and in the Barotse country (nalide). He told me that he had attempted to go eastwards but had been prevented from proceeding more than a few days beyond where I met him. His attempt was made during the same time that I was ascending to the Barotse, and having met there, his attempt could not possibly have been far. He stated also that he had sent his people by a southern route eastwards, and they too had been compelled to return after proceeding but a short distance. He invited me to go with him westwards as he was then only waiting for the rains to begin his homeward journey, but I declined in order to avoid slave company and a slave path. I was much longer on the unknown route I adopted than he and when I was in your house his Journal was being printed

[0002]

printed piece meal in the 'Boletin'. His meeting with me was noticed in his Journal and so was my waggon, &c, but not a syllable about his having crossed over to Mozambique.

You told me that when the Arabs came to Banguela that the Government of Loanda offered a conto of Reis and an honorary

Captaincy in the army to any one who would accompany them to the East Coast but none volunteered. Porto's difficulties and inability in attempting to go East were one of the reasons that induced me to go West. I had not the smallest ambition to accomplish the feat I was afterwards led to perform.

Now, a M^r Macqueen has produced a Journal to the R.G.S. in which it is fraudulently made to appear that Porto went over to Mozambique, and discovered all that we have since made known. It is I believe published in the 'Proceedings' of the R.G.S. but this additional piece was certainly not published at Loanda, and M^r Macqueen seems to be the victim of a literary fraud, and through him the Geographical Society. Have you any objection to give to Sir Roderick Murchison your recollections of the publication. Porto is now said to have been sent by the Governor of Loanda and to have returned /54 (when I was with you) from Mozambique. He could not have done so without your knowledge surely and had he done so the Portuguese minister who claims the honor for his country would not have gone back to 1815 to two black men who

[0003]

who only came to Tette (Blue Book, 1856-7).

You may remember too, that when I wished for two [...] , the Governor on E. do Amiral in politely aiding me in reference to them, made mention of the anxiety of the Government to ascertain the possibility of crossing to the East coast, and spoke quite in accordance with your statement to me that no one had then been found among his countrymen to attempt it.

If you have no objection to state your recollections on these points to Sir Roderick, you will enable the Society to judge how far it has been imposed on by a literary fraud concocted by some one from the information we have since given about Shirwa & Nyassa. I think M^r Macqueen has been duped by some zealous Portuguese.

We are now off the Rovuma and in search of an entrance into the interior of Eastern Africa exterior to Portuguese claims; the

river promises well. No bar & no bottom across the mouth with a line of seventeen fathoms. A large body of water a mile wide rushes out, but this is the rainy season. You will hear all about the Oxford & Cambridge Mission at home. I have persuaded Bishop Mackenzie to post-pone his landing for three months, he will then be into the ~~most~~ three most healthy months of the year. He is at Johanna. My heart rejoices at the prospect of the gospel ~~soon~~ being soon planted in this trodden down land.

If we get an overland route to Nyassa's North-

[0004]

North-end we shall prefer it, though it be three times as long as that past Murchison's cataracts up Shire. We shall soon be able to give information about Rovuma. We now wait only for coals. As soon as we do that every body knew all about it long before. Why publish what they knew first.

Sorry to hear of our poor friend Brand's death. God grant that we may do something of good before our time is past. I made a mistake in giving our prescription substituting Calomel for Rhubarb, and now add the true formula.

(signed) David Livingstone