

Letter to George Grey, 1 June 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

River Shire 1st June

1859

Private

My Dear Sir George

We have lately discovered a very fine Lake by going up this river in the steam Launch about one hundred miles and then marching some fifty more on foot. It is called Shirwa and Lake Ngami is a mere pond in comparison. It is moreover particularly interesting from the fact reported by the natives on its shores that it is separated by a strip of land of only five or six miles in width from Nyanja or rather Lake Nyinyesi = the stars, which Burton has gone to explore. We could hear nothing of his party at Shirwa and having got no European news since you
[0002]

kindly sent some copies of the "Times" last year we are quite in the dark as to whether he has succeeded or not. Lake Shirwa has no outlet and its waters are bitter but drinkable. It abounds in fishes. Leeches alligators & hippopotami. We discovered also by examining partially a branch of the Shire called Ruo that one portion of Shirwa is not more than 30 miles distant from a point that may easily be reached by this Launch which by Newspaper measurement draws 13 inches, and actually 31 inches, the Lake Shirwa is very grand. It is

surrounded on all sides by lofty green
mountains - Dzomba or as people
nearest it say Zomba is over 6000
feet high of same shape as Table
mountain but inhabited on the top
others are equally high but inaccessible
It is a high land region - the Lake itself
being about 2000 ft above the sea
[0003]

It is 20 or 30 miles wide - and
50 or 60 long. On going some way
up a hill we saw in the far distance
two mountain tops rising like little
islands on a watery horizon. An
inhabited mountain island stands near
where we first came to it. From the
size of the waves it is supposed to
be deep. M^r Maclear will shew you the map.

D^r Kirk and I with 15 Makololo
formed the land party, the country
is well peopled and very much
like Londa in the middle of the
country - many streams rising
out of bogs, the vegetation nearly
identical also. Never saw so
much cotton grown as among
the Mang-anga of the Shire &
Shirwa valleys - all spin and
weave it. These are the Latitudes
which I have always pointed out
as the cotton and sugar lands
they are pre-eminently so, but
[0004]

such is the disinterestedness of some people
that labour is exported to Bourbon instead
of being employed here. The only trade the
people have is that of slaves; and the only
symptoms of impudence we met were
from a party of Bajaua slave traders
but they changed their deportment instantly
on hearing that we were English and
not Portuguese. There are no Maravi at
or near Shirwa. They are all West of
the Shire so this Lake can scarcely be
called "Lake Maravi but the Portuguese
know nothing of it, but the Minister who
claimed [(Blue book for 1857)] the honour of first traversing the
African continent for two black men
with Portuguese names, must explain

why they did not cross Shirwa. It lies
some forty or fifty miles on each side
of the Latitude of Mozambique.

(they came to Tette only & lacked at
least 400 miles of Mozambique). We go
back to Shirwa in July and may
make a push for Nyinyesi but say
nothing at present about it. We have
not told the Portuguese how near Shirwa is to them. We let that come to them from
our own Government but they mean to
claim all by setting up a station forthwith at
the mouth of this river! David Livingstone