

Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 24 December 1854

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[0001]

Nº I.

with a Note

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

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.

~~[-x Note See Journal vol xxiv page 291]~~

In my last letter, dated ~~October~~ 20th 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,

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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 .

‡ The 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.* to Loanda, the
~~This position is slightly altered from that in Vol XXIV p302~~
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
Insert from sheet II. 2^d Sheet
purposes. 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 test ing the
difference between of the prices [^] given between by the ~~eCape~~ 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

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chief and principal men on the banks of the 3
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

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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. ‡ The 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~~
‡ Two of the prisoners being little girls,
shorter marches than usual were
made; & the actual distance may
therefore be not more than eighty miles.
‡ Though 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.

‡ The party having returned together
with an embassy of Masiko's principal
men, bearing a present and friendly

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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. ‡ The 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. ‡ They
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. ‡ The 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. ‡ Their supreme good is a cow, and they never pray.

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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. ‡ The 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

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history so far as they could extract it from 7

my companions, was given. "† The 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". † The 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.

† The spirit of trade is strong in all Africans, and the Balonda chiefs we visited, all highly approved of our journey, ~~re~~ . 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

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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. ‡ This 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

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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.-
 ‡ The town of Katema stands a short distance beyond in 11° 35' 37" S. Lat. and 22° 47' East Longitude. † The Lake Dilolo, from which the Lotembwa takes its rise, is 3 or 4 North

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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.
 ‡ The 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
 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.

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The Chikapa (Lat 10° 38') about 60 yards wide, flowing 11
 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.

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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 Parat 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 together with a wonderful lack of animal life. on elevated positions ^ ~~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 ‡ Table 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~~ This presents the same mountainous appearance to a person coming from the West.- ‡ The 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

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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 Some ~~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. ‡ There is no lack of food, Manioc or the Tapioca plant is the staff of life, and requires but little labour for its cultivation. ‡ The seasons seemed to allow of ~~their~~ planting or reaping all the year round. ‡ The 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. ‡ The more we yielded, the

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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. ‡ These felt their danger, and usually became more amicable. ‡ They never disputed the proposition that the ground they cultivated, alone belonged to them, and all the rest of the country to God. ‡ This 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

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of the generous creatures. I had paid away 18
 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.
 ¶ On 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 possession 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

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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 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~~ The 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 5th Sheet No 1

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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 cruizers, 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 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

Note * The Americans it is said do not hesitate to cooperate with slavers, while the English traders cannot. Ed.

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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. ‡ The Casai , according to the report of Matiamvo's people whom we met , flows East North-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 this most laudable efforts would produce. These rivers drain such a vast extent of populous slave producing territory, ^ that they assume features of peculiar interest. ‡ The 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.

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~~My present intentions are to return to the Zambesi
by nearly the same route I followed in coming
here. And a~~ After 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 [^] atunya,
23 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.
‡ The confluence of the Chobe is only two days
distant from the waterfall , but the river is
very rocky and dangerous before reaching
that point. I ~~reached~~ approached Loanda labouring
20 to follow 19, sheet 4
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
Insert from "Extracts" 14 Jan 1855 - 21
ship, fattened and eaten" I ~~was laid prostrate~~
for a long time by severe indisposition , and
owe my life, under God, to H. M. Commissioner
Edmund Gabriel Esq^{re} , the only Englishman
whom I know in the city. His unwearied
kindnesses and generous hospitality to
both me and my companions, enable me

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~~now to return to my duty with renewed
health and spirits.~~ In order that, should
24 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