

## Letter to Thomas Maclear, 29 September 1853

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org)), 2020

[0001]

Town of Sekeletu, Linyanti 29<sup>th</sup> September  
1853

Thomas Maclear Esqre

My Dear Sir

Enclosed you will perceive a mass of manuscripts with which I take the liberty to trouble you - The faggot contains observations made at different parts of the country and I venture to send them such as they are because you mentioned that you preferred such to those which have passed through the adulterating process of an African calculation. If you read them backwards like Hebrew viz. beginning with the fifth or sixth page sheet I shall feel obliged for then you will be able to see the reason why I sent such poor things as those made from the Bamangwato Northwards I found or thought I found that our Longitudes of last journey were all wrong, our waggon stand instead of being in 26° is not more than 23° 48 or 50 - But I have not so much confidence in my calculations as to assert this without serious X misgivings - When I found that the Boers had destroyed my celestial map - I set off to work on the Lunars and persevered untill I think I have mastered the methods given in Thomson's Tables perfectly, I made many observations between Kuruman and this but working with the inverting telescope chiefly I placed no value on them - My chief aim was to acquire as much facility with it as with the small telescope, I have succeeded in this too, but when I found out longitudes were wrong I felt sorry I had not written down all my observations - Those I have put down are from the Bamangwato Northwards and were made in trying to work with the sextant fixed on a stand with a movable joint - they are very precise but the time required to get the mercury into the right position in turning from one object to another, and above all this difficulty of getting the instrument adjusted to the different angles in which Lunars are observed rendered this effort after many trials abortive - I thought however that you may be able to make something of them, perhaps determine whether the Longitude of the Bamangwato is right - I worked out many here before coming to the conclusion that 26° was wrong, and a new idea has lately entered my head which makes me fear that M<sup>r</sup> Morton may be right after all - I have been

[0002]

all along deducing my time at the station from Attitudes of the Sun taken in the morning or evening but the sun's declination has always until lately been North and I suspect the true time cannot be obtained when the station (Latitude of) and Declination are of contrary names I have not time at present to work out another being busy writing for the present which is the only opportunity I have had of transmitting letters to the South - you will please take notice of this source of error - Nobody requires to have all his wits about him so much as those he who have anything to do with the stars - My chief hope lies in the occultations few and inexplicit though these are -

I am now waiting for the commencement of the rains in order to proceed Westward on horseback - Slave merchants report it impossible to go in waggons There are so many rivers and thick forests - They are carried in hammocks slung to poles It does not look well - The slaves admired my walking and especially marching through small rivers which abound in the Barotse country without thinking I was doing anything extraordinary the Barotse who were with me called out "Hello Mambari your father is a child - you pépa him", a child's word for nurse - the poor fellows were quite of the same opinion - The heat is lessened when the rains commence So should my horse die the walk will not be so trying - I think of Londa though it is farther than Banguela because there are English living there - The Portuguese maps are all constructed from Native information - A French man received various honours for determining some points - and the Portuguese merchants assert that he was never known to have travelled in Western Africa at all - If I am permitted to follow out my plan I shall return - through Londa, the capital of a powerful state, down the Leeba - Should my return be prevented I shall not have any occultations for you, because I do not know the stars which are to be occulted in the next three months - But in January 1854 I see several which I believe I know Leonis for instance on the 16<sup>th</sup> if the moon is not too far down and <sup>1</sup> Scorpii - <sup>1</sup> D<sup>o</sup> both on the 23<sup>d</sup> The same stars may perhaps be seen on the 8<sup>th</sup> & 15 April but where I shall be it is hard to tell - I suppose it will be best for me to make multiple observations of Lunar distances

[0003]

I have enclosed a letter to Lieut<sup>t</sup> Colonel Steele. It is not 11 a private letter but intended for the Royal Geographical Society, so you need feel no hesitation in reading it - I feel rather anxious that you should peruse it in order to see whether I have said too much on the subject of the Longitude - If you will add a note

to correct my mistake it will make the communication so much more valuable - Your family M<sup>r</sup> Mann & M<sup>r</sup> Morton are welcome to a perusal if they wish it - Please just do with the observations whatever you think best - Send them to any of your friends who may take an interest in such things and draw your pen through my remarks about the calculation if it does not please you - The sketch is intended to give a correct idea of what I saw and no more - I took the bearings of every reach of the river both in ascending and descending - It became very long - In reducing it I may be wrong, so send a copy of the original for cleverer persons to do better - If M<sup>r</sup> Morton wishes to have a sketch of this too it is at his service; those who are at the head quarters of observations on Africa have the best right to early notices of any discoveries - You will observe how very like the drawings of the natives from which we constructed our map are to that made from actual survey - I have not worked out a Lunar of our farthest point North viz. the confluence the Leeba and Leeambye -

One of the slave merchants wished me to go Westward in his company - He was as kind to me when I was up at the Barotse as he could be, influenced probably by a letter from the chevalier Du Pratt. but the sight of gangs of poor wretches in chains was so much against the grain I resolved to proceed alone He could speak no language, but Portuguese - We managed to make a jargon - I caught all the words resembling latin added other Latin terms to these and when very much at a loss stuck in some big rough Dutch word to eke out the sentence. It is so wonderful how soon one believes he understands what is said, Cumming thought he could speak Sechuana when he knew about four words - I have heard him call out "Rhinoceros" when he wanted his servant to beat the oxen and he thought he must be understood because the whip was made of rhinoceros skin Pardon this gossip and

Believe me yours  
most Truly  
David Livingston

[0004]

Prepaid  
Thomas Maclear Esquire  
Royal Observatory  
Cape of Good Hope