

## Revisiting the Legacy of Lubosi Lewanika King of Barotseland (1842-1916)

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“Liwaniika”, “Tautona”, “Lion King”, The Litunga, The Earth, these are just a few of the *litumo*, praise names given to the King, Litunga of Barotseland, Lubosi Lewanika, during his reign. February 4, 2016 marked the centennial of his death and the beginning of a yearlong commemoration of his extraordinary life and influence on the Barotse and the world.

He was born in 1842 near Nyengo, Barotseland from the Luyana lineage and was the son of Litia and grandson of the Great Barotse King Mulambwa. His mother was born in Senenga and his father was born near Lialui, and so from the moment of his birth he was a symbol of the unity of both sections of the Kingdom, which at the time was occupied since 1838 by the southern Sotho people nicknamed Makololo.

By 1856 his father Litia decided to ally himself with the Kololo invader King Sekeletu, who killed him shortly after but spared his young son Lubosi. The Kololo were eventually overthrown in 1864. Lubosi was embraced by Litunga Sipopa Lutangu after the defeat and expulsion of the Makololo and the restoration of the Luyana Dynasty. Lubosi was installed as Litunga in August 1878

Drama and luck would follow him from the moment of his birth and Lubosi which means the “escaped one”, would navigate uncharted waters for the rest of his life for himself and the Barotse. Lubosi would have to contend with not only consolidating an empire that was based on a system of kinship and gift economy still fragile from years of occupation but also negotiate alliances and protection from external pressure that included the neighboring Ndebele, European missionaries, traders, explorers, and the endless white men’s wars, which culminated into the scramble for Africa from 1884. From the 1880’s, the Anglo-Boer war as well as the wars in Zululand, Matabeleland, Xhosaland would be a world he stepped into. Deciding to seek protection status from Queen Victoria for Barotseland, he would forge an alliance with Khama of Becheuanaland and the Bamagwato and find his way all the way to London as a special guest and instant international celebrity as one of a few African Kings invited to the coronation of Edward VII.

Lewanika would witness massive social change with the death of Queen Victoria which began in earnest with the signing of the Trade Concessions of the 1880’s and finish with compromising much of his power to the British South Africa Company and the British and leaving Barotseland into the hands of his son Litia in the middle of the First World War in 1916. He left clear policies intact for the abolition of slavery, .....

As a people we are very fortunate to witness key moments in his life and the history of Barotseland through the newly invented Eastman Kodak camera. Over the next thirteen months we will share primary sources of Lewanika from sketches, paintings, diary entries by missionaries, concession hunters and traders as well as examine key moments during his life and times to help us charter our current troubled waters. Like children, history is life longing for itself.