Tibetan Sources on Muktināth

Individual Reports and Normative Guides

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In the year 1729 Kah-thog Rig-dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698-1755) left the territory of Nub-bi and made his way across the Tibetan high plateau (byong thang) towards Mustang (rungs ’ris gis bo). Before and after spending several months at the court there and prior to heading on further to Dol-po, he stayed some days in a 'sacred site' (gna’as), which he describes in the following words:

I went to 'Hundred-and-some springs' the renowned holy spot revered by both Hindus and Buddhists, which is called Mu-mu-ni-se-ta or Mu-khun-kse-ta in the Hevajra mulanatra, and is called Mu-ta-sa-ta in border dialects. It is a place where a natural fire burns on rock and water, and where dakinis mass together like clouds. 1

In the following I shall take a brief look at this locale against the background of several individual biographical sketches and related genres, such as have been preserved in Tibetan texts of the 16th to 19th centuries; this will be supplemented by the presentation of corresponding texts from the genre 'descriptions of sacred sites' (gna’as yig) and 'inventories' (di’kar chag). These observations may perhaps enhance somewhat our understanding of the conception of religious space in northern Nepal and that of the history of the pilgrimage site Muktināth.

1. Muktinath and the Buddhist Tantras

In the travel report of Kah-thog Rig-dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu, reference is made, in clarification of the names Mu-mu-ni-se-ta and Mu-khun-kse-ta, to the Hevajratantra; we must therefore deal briefly with the Indian pitha tradition, such as it is preserved in the Buddhist tantras.

Since the works of Tucci, one has become familiar with the notion that the schemata of 24, 32 (as in the case of the Hevajratantra) or 36 sites for tantric practice (Skt. piṭha / Tib. gna’as) may refer both to the yogin’s body and to geographically real places. These sites were the destination of small, exclusive groups of yogins and
yogins who followed the spiritual practice of certain cycles of tantra. Recent research has addressed with greater interest the question of how these schemata of the Vajrakīya became transplanted from the Indian context to the Himalayan regions and how this transposition entailed the formation of pilgrimage centres in the Tibet of the 12th and 13th centuries.6

This process, however, was critically reflected upon by members of the Tibetan priesthood, and Sa-skya Paṇḍita Kun-dga’ rgyal-mtshan (1182-1251), for example, offers convincing testimony in his works that he was fully aware of the true location of certain pilgrimage centres in the Indian subcontinent; his polemics gave rise to a plethora of writings concerning questions of religious geography, particularly among the bKa’-bgyud-pa school.

It is thus not surprising that the location of the Mummuni of the Hevajrantrika was also debated, it being one of the four ‘fields’ (Skt.: kṣetra / Tib.: ching).7 Interestingly, the discussion of the question at the beginning of the 16th century was carried out by members of the royal court of Mustang, where at the time the school of the Sa-skya-pa had gained a foothold. Of pertinence was the position taken by Glo-bo mkhan-chen bSod-nams lhun-grub (1456-1532), as conveyed in writing to his nephew, “Prince” Mgon-po rgyal-mtshan. Having drawn on various sources, Glo-bo mkhan-chen comes to the conclusion that Mummuni is located in the southeastern part of India.8

Before summoning up a further teacher from Mustang of the 16th century, I should like to mention briefly that the designation Mu-khun kṣetra, ascribed by Kab-thog Rig’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu to the Hevajrantrika, is not found in it. As has been remarked by David Jackson, the toponym Mu-khun can be located in the “Gung-thang Chronicle” (likewise compiled by Kab-thog Rig’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu on the basis of an analysis of old sources); there it refers to the place where one of the 13 ‘ruler fortresses’ (btas-rdzong) of the Gung-thang king Khri-rgyal ‘Bum-lde mgon (1255-1280) was erected in the 13th century. I may add the observation of Charles Ramble that, for the se-skad speakers in northern Baragaon, Mukha refers to Dzaw-rdzong in the valley of Muktināth.9

II. Indian and Tibetan Yogins in Muktināth

Two hundred years before Kab-thog Rig’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu, a young Tibetan priest visited the holy site of Muktināth and remained there for more than three years. The description of this sojourn, which began in 1528, as documented in the autobiography of Jo-nang Kun-dga’ grol-mchog (1507-1560), provides first of all insight into the early period of Mustang as a region dominated by Buddhism (the formal conversion of this part of Nepal to Buddhism may be dated to the 15th century), and secondly, shows Muktināth to be a place of pilgrimage for Nepālese and Indian kings.

Jo-nang Kun-dga’ grol-mchog’s interestingly, begins his description with exactly the same formula from the Hevajrantrika that we discussed in connection with Kab-thog Rig’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu; in my opinion, the source for the later citation by the teacher from Kab-thog lies in the autobiography of Kun-dga’s grol-mchog. The latter, in contrast to the former, quotes the passage from the Hevajrantrika true to the original, adding to it only the paraphrase sgrol-ba’i ching (= Muktiśetra); in the dialect of Indian
Prakrit, that was common among the yogins of his period, Mukthiketra is pronounced as Mukukhetra. The sacred site itself is characterized as "108 tree trunks together with 108 spouts" (shing sdong bnga rtsa byung/ chlu mig bnga rtsa byung dang bce pa). The following citation provides an idea of the extent to which pilgrimages were made to this place and which groups were involved:

They came together like a gathering of birds striking [the ground] on that ford where the yearly washing-ceremony of the Indian king, his queen, his sons, ministers etc. took place. And after they had thronged together for the great delivery of alms, I came to the resting place where countless yogins of various [spiritual] lineages had assembled. As in this year [also] King De-bum ra-dza had arrived in full splendour together with his retinue, very many groups of yogins had shown up. It was during this occasion that I met up with them. I was able to understand the majority of what the yogins said." There follow examples of various Buddhist texts and concepts that Kun-dga’ grol-mchog used in common with the Indian yogins. Of note is the listing of the individual groups of yogins, which are subdivided somewhat in the manner of the 18 groups of Śrāvakas in Buddhism. Kun-dga’ grol-mchog mentions the intervals of 1½ and 1 year and 8½ months that he spent in the company of the Indian yogins, receiving numerous teachings (man-ngags). He celebrated in their midst a ganacakrapaṇīya and later received the name Mahātattapāsitraguru, the remark is made that he had the body of a Tibetan but the mind of an Indian (skyod lus bsdod ston sna’ rgya par ba). On the basis of comparative material, we may identify the Indian ascetics among whom Kun-dga’ grol-mchog principally studied as Nāṭeśvarī yogins.

During the same time, then, when the authenticity of spiritual toponyms from the tantric was being judged at the court of Mustang from theoretical and polemical points of view, a young priest who came from the social eminors of the court was practising tantric teachings in Muktnātha, the place sacred to Indian yogins, and the identification of this place as one of the four kṣetra of the Hēvajrastra had already been made. What we may observe here is the process by which the site of 108 spouts, previously frequented primarily by Nepalese and Indian pilgrims, was to speak "cantonized" in Mustang of the 16th century by an important representative of Tibetan religiosity.

If we turn now to a Tibetan yogin of the 17th century who was born in the vicinity of Muktnātha and enjoyed a great reputation as a yogin of the Brug-pa bka’-byrgyud-pa school, we can see how the geography of the shrine was tied into a second tantric system, thereby undergoing a high degree of idealization or spiritualization. In the palace of Rab-rgyal rtses-mo we have the old fortress of Dzong, the birthplace of btsen-dzins ras-pa (1644/46-1723):

On a pile of jewels, the mountain before me, the palace Rab-rgyal rtses-mo. Having arranged the precious stones of many lands (around it), in the manner of Mt. Sumeru and the four continents; to the sacred site I present this offering of a country [that is like] a mandala.

Where gtses-shing (?) and also all kinds of herbs grow, where the melodious sound of diverse birds calls rings out, The place where all gods and all humans make
offerings, [that is,] in the palace of Vajravârâhi.
It was prophesied under the name Mu-ku by the Jina, [and] the siddha Dza-va opened the gate of the sacred site;
[This place] is one of the 32 mahâpithas.
There offerings are made by all the dhammanjas from India; the stream of yogin pilgrims is uninterrupted.
[This place] is the fire hole of the Brahmins; uninterrupted are the offerings of substances to be burned.

[The place] whose glory encompasses the whole world - with folded hands I bring it this brief "praise of the sacred site." 10

III. The Noble Families of Dzong and Dzar

From the work of Dieter Schuh we already know that the noble family of sKyar-kyi gang-pa constructed the fortresses of Dzong, Dzar and Kug in the 15th cent., the representatives of this family are also designated in the sources as khris-thog-pa. 11 Up to now it has primarily been the biography of bsTan-'dzin ras-pa that one has turned to for the history of this family; it is clear from it that Khro-bo skyabs-pa was the builder of the fortresses and the first 'lord of the fortress' (rdzong dpön) of Rab-rgyal rtsê-mo.

The biography of bsTan-'dzin ras-pa, however, offers only little information on the successors of Khro-bo skyabs-pa, and the description of the events in the 17th century is moulded by personal experiences during the conflicts between Mustang and the rulers of the Muktinâth valley (rgyal bton 'khrugs pa). As these conflicts led to the intervention of the rulers of Jumla, the relation between Jumla and Mustang and the history of the lords of Dzong and Dzar have primarily been described against the background of these conflicts. 12

In the following I shall briefly present two further biographies of the 17th century that may shed some light on the second half of that century and the ruling families of the fortresses beneath the shrine of Muktinâth; after the school of the Sâska-pa/Jo-nang-pa and that of the bk'u-brgyud-pa, they are texts from the school of the rNyin-ma-pa. These biographies came into my hands only recently, and I hope to be able to analyse them more closely at some later time. The first biography is that of O-rgyan dpal-bzang (1617-1677), and the second text deals with the life of Kun-bzang klong-yangs (1644-1696), the main disciple and 'successor' (rgyal tshab) of O-rgyan dpal-bzang.

O-rgyan dpal-bzang is a disciple of gTer-ston bDud-'dul rdo-rje (1615-1672) and has been known up to now principally as the founder of the monastery of sKu-tshab gter-stag southwest of Jomosom. 13 The founding of a monastery community in the vicinity of Muktinâth only a few years before his death shows us the local rulers, the fortress lords, in the role of 'donor' (yon bdag) typical of the Buddhist society of Tibet, whereas O-rgyan dpal-bzang himself fulfilled the function of a 'priest' (mchod gnas). The following citation is pertinent:

After having delivered an invitation, the dPon-drung khris-pa Tse-gras rgyal-po from the fortress Rab-rgyal rtsê[-mo] requested [the performance of] a consecration for long life; he then donated as gift for the consecration thirteen [prevents] of good quality, such as 18 Rupees [etc.] His younger brother, the officer
bDe-skhyi bsam-grub, donated a horse and a total of 20 silverignots.

And in order that the [Buddhist] teaching might spread on the Hill of Clear Light [the master] cut the hair of each of the daughters of the dPon-drung Khra-bo Tshe-dbang and the dPon-drung bDe-skhyi bsam-grub with the words <illegible>; later in Chu-mig brgya-rtsa it happened that Ngag-dbang bu-khris, the wife of the khris-pa, donated the sum of 100 Rupees. 

Let us keep in mind, then, first of all that, at the time of the founding of the monastery of Skadzhab gter-linga by G-rgyan dpal-bzang, the fortress of Dzong was in the hands of a certain Tshe-gnas rgyal-po, who had a younger brother called bDe-skhyi bsam-grub. Of further note is the fact that the sacred site of Muktinath was the place where the ruling family of Dzor and Dzong assembled with the priests of the rNyin-ma-pa school. This link was by no means severed, however, at the death of G-rgya dpal-bzang in 1677; Kun-bzang klong-yang, the successor of G-rgyan dpal-bzang, was likewise in Muktinath one year later, fulfilling the same functions as his teacher:

The dPon-drung khris-pa Tshe-gnas rgyal-po went with me together to Chu-mig brgya-rtsa; with the aid [of the sädhana] of the wrathful deity, I offered the sprinkling of the water, the skull plate and the ritual noose to the retinue of those in charge etc. To their seats I granted the consecration of long life etc., and to the dPon-drung eight tola of krochen [a kind of copper?] in order to reinforce the consolataion [upon the death of their teacher].

A short time later Kun-bzang klong-yang travelled to Central Tibet where, among others, he met gTer-bdag gling-pa (1646-1714) in sMin-grol gling and Rig-dzin Padma 'phrin-las (1640-1718) in rDzo-rje brag; this journey was financed in part by Tshe-gnas rgyal-po, and also by the latter's younger brother bDe-skhyi bsam-grub. Whereas the donations of the older brother came from rDzong Rab-rgyal rtsa, the seat of bDe-skhyi bsam-grub is given as rDzor.

Having returned from Central Tibet, Kun-bzang klong-yang in 1680 again met up with the 'officer brothers' (dpon drung sugs mchog), and the next thing we learn is that dPon-drung Tshe-gnas rgyal-po left this world. His death is immediately followed by the enthronement of the younger brother, and this can only be interpreted, in my opinion, as meaning that bDe-skhyi bsam-grub became his brother's successor as the ruler of Dzong.

Before entering further into these particulars, we may briefly refer to events in Muktinath that followed in the wake of the death of Tshe-gnas rgyal-po (another member of the ruling family, a certain Ong bKra-shis rtses-mo, died around the same time):

The next day in Chu-mig brgya-rtsa, without any idea of how to determine the cardinal directions etc., I [i.e. Kun-bzang klong-yang], having brought the piles of the mandala as gifts to the three sources of the Ye-shes me-lha, produced clay imprints from earth, on a spot where many brightly white reliquaries could be found that had collapsed by themselves... Afterwards many [walls] were constructed in combination with stūpas by this same officer [i.e. dPon-drung bDe-skhyi bsam-grub], and the extremely fine mani [walls] that still exist in Chu-mig brgya-rtsa are the very same ones.

For the succeeding years, the autobiography of
Kun-bzhang klong-yangs mentions the ruler BDe-skhyid bsam-grub (also referred to with the title djammar-ja (chos rgyal) as the ruler of Dzor, Dzon and Kag (rtsar rdzong skag); he also bore the main costs for the extension of the monastery buildings in sKu-tshab gter lha, which commenced in 1694. The situation changed only in the year 1697, for it was then that Kun-bzhang klong-yangs received a further invitation from BDe-skhyid bsam-grub, sent from Dzor, whereas an invitation to visit Dzong was communicated by dPon-drung Khro-bo dar-po and his wife.17

From these superficial observations I draw the conclusion, within the framework of this article, that in the seventh to ninth decades of the 17th century the fortresses of the Muktināth valley were dominated by the ruling family of Dzor.18

This ascendance coincided with the construction of the monastery complex of sKu-tshab gter lha and the officiating of rNyin-ma-pa teachers as priests of the ruling families. The sacred site of Muktināth thereby takes on an added dimension: it is the place where rituals were performed for the officers and members of these families, and in whose physical surroundings the donors left behind signs of their generosity.

IV. The Idealized Landscape of Muktināth

One hundred years later the family of Dzor was still active in the spread of rNyin-ma-pa teachings. We know, for instance, on the basis of the just mentioned catalogue, that they financed at this time the copying of a biography of Padmasambhava familiar under the title stKyes rabs mabs thar ge'u bden ma. The catalogue also contains an encomium, rich in detail, of the sacred site of Muktināth, concerning which I should here merely like to highlight the mention in it of the Manḍala of 62 Deities of the Mother Tantra (ma rgyud re gyigs bka' a bskyil 'khor); this formulation reconfirms the previous observation that Muktināth was imported into the system of the Cakrasaṃvara tantrā.

It being stated in conclusion that the sacred site is a 'unique jewel adorning the world' (gnas 'di bstan gling mdzes pa'i rgyan gcig yin), a subdivision of geographical space is undertaken, leading to the question of how Muktināth and its wider surroundings are represented in the pilgrimage guides for Tibetan Buddhists. The subdivision begins with the upper part (phu) of the Muktināth valley, which is described as a mountain paradise where flowers glister in the pastures: a 'place of meditative trance' (bsam gyan gnas). Then there follows a description of the lower lying region of the valley:

In the lower part: the Secret Cave of the Guru, Dhaulagiri [and] the self-arisen stone statue of shA-ri Jo-bo; as well as the five treasures representing the body [i.e. the teaching] of rGyal-bhang Padmaśambhava, etc.: whether having arisen [by themselves] or been constructed [by men], innumerable supports [of body, speech and mind], these three, are found [there].19

With the Dhaulagiri Himal (mu-te / mu-li gongs or gongs-chen) and the Padmasambhava Cave on its northeastern flank (west of Larjung), we have reached the southern periphery of the region visited by Tibetan pilgrims and described in the corresponding handbooks. The standard compilation of pilgrimage guides for southern Mustang, already published several times, begins with a text devoted to Muktināth and ends with a description of Dhaulagiri, the Secret Cave and
the Avalokiteśvara statue of sNa-rin.29

Before I go into the description of Muktināth offered by the genre of pilgrimage guides, a brief look should be taken at the compilation of the text as a whole - this in order to establish criteria for dating the collection. The main part of the text is devoted to the Dhualagiri Himal, that is, to an enumeration of the spiritual qualities of the snow-covered mountain; particular significance falls to it by reason of the cave in which Padmasambhava is said to have stayed. This part of the collections bears the title 'Description of the Two Sacred Sites 'Great Glacier' and 'Secret Cave' (gangs chen gang phug gnis kyi gsas yig).

As is learned from the introduction to this section, the description of the two sites is based on a prophecy of a Dakini (nas bsad lung bstan); these prophecies were channelled through a certain sNgags-chang Tse-ring, who was staying in the Padmasambhava Cave in a male iron-monkey year (legs pho spres lo). These descriptions are followed by a further dream, in which the local mountain deity (lha bsam gahi bdeug) manifests itself, again, apparently, to sNgags-chang Tse-ring. The next item mentioned is the self-arisen Avalokiteśvara statue, the Lord of sNa-rin (sna ri jo bo); this statue was unearthed from the mountain and cave (gangs chen dang gnas gnang phug nyis nas gsum drangs pa). The list of pilgrimage sites of the Dhualagiri Himal is rounded out with this status, it being stated that 'in these three, the Great Glacier, the Secret Cave and the Lord of sNa-rin, all pilgrimage sites of the world were complete.'30

The site of sKu-tshan gter-nga is mentioned only briefly in the collection of pilgrimage guides. Even though it is a fine shrine of Padmasambhava, the same significance is not attached to it as to the Dhualagiri Himal and the Secret Cave; this may be taken as an indication that at the time when Dhualagiri was spiritualized, so to speak, as the goal of Tibetan pilgrims heading south, the fame of the site of Padmasambhava's practices southwest of Jonangom had already paled. This is reflected in the toponyms which are listed under sKu-tshan gter-nga in the third section of the text:

The place reached by a one-day walk south of the sacred site of Chus-mig bren-gnas was called in former times Hill of Clear Light and nowadays is also called 'Grum-pa lha-khang. There clearly visible imprints of the foot and knee together with the hands of the Guru [Padmasambhava] are found.32

The second part of the text collection describes a place that likewise lies one day from Muktināth, but in a northern direction. This site, too, was trod upon by the feet of Padmasambhava and furthermore is associated with the 84 mahāsiddhas. This destination for pilgrims is once again a cave, and in my opinion the place acquired its name from a certain kind of white rock, i.e. limestone:

As for the meaning of 'gCong-gzhi', it is a sacred site on which Āśrama Padma-[sambhava] set foot and likewise was blessed by the 80 mahāsiddhas. In the pure vision of bKa'-brgyud bla-ma Rin-po-che Mi-pham yongs-dus and sGrub-pa chen-po sTag 'cer-ba, that which [once] came forth as protuberances of gong-gzhi [stone] was perceived as [being the deity] Bde-mchog rgyan-styes in union.33

I base my argument that the name gCong-gzhi refers to a limestone or calcite concretion primarily on the Tibetan medical tradition, according to which there are several kinds, which are variously able to alleviate disorder of air, bile,
phlegm and their combinations. Snellgrove's translation, "self produced place of promenade" (gegong gshi rnga tshung) does not occur in the description of the site of gCom gshi for Tibetan pilgrims but is taken from passage describing the Dhaulagiri Himal. What else can we glean from this citation.

Although the wording of the passage is not unambiguous and I have up to now not succeeded in identifying a bk'a'-brgyud (= bk'a'-brgyud?) Bla-ma named Mi-pham yong-nu dus, I should like to mention the person known under the name sTag rtse-ba. The latter is sTag rtse sku-skye-ba Mi-pham phun-tshogs shes-rab, a teacher of the 'Brug-pa school active at the court of the Mustang king Bsam-grub dpal-'bar (fl. ca. 1675); he furthermore wrote a biography, available to me, of the Second sDing-po-che Cog-gra Mi-pham Ngag-dbang snyan-grags dpal-’bhang (1617-80). In summary, it may be stated that the dates of persons associated with the founding of monasteries or retreat sites in southern and northern Mustang may be determined first and foremost for the 17th century (the founding of sKu-tshab gter lnga: 1668). In the succeeding period, following the establishment of these sites by priests of the rNyid-ma-pa school, such as O-rgyan dpal-bzang, or ones of the bk’a’-brgyud-pa school, such as sTag rtse sku-skye-ba, an expanding idealization and spiritualization of the landscape occurred, which in the end took in the territory of the Dhaulagiri Himal C and northern Mustang. Under these circumstances, I would venture to place the date of the arrival of the above-mentioned Ngags ’dang Tses ring (tags phyogs las) in the year 1740. A. W. Macdonald has described this expansion in the following words: "Here we see the southward thrust of the frontier Ron-pos and Lamas, and the transformation of local mountain, earth and water spirits into keepers of the Buddhist law."

The first part of pilgrimage guides whose compilation we can now date to the 18th century describes in detail the old shrine of Muktinath and the merit that accrues to the pilgrim in making offerings at the site. I shall not go into these descriptions in detail but merely sketch briefly the structural composition of the text: Following a set praise for Padmasambhava (missing in the edition of Snellgrove), the visit of this master is placed in the first world period (skal pa dang po), as distinguished from the visit of the 84 mahasiddhas (skal pa bar ma); the feats of the latter are marked by sacrals acts involving water: First they block the outflow of a poisonous lake in La-stod rGyal-rgyi SPr (this place name is missing in the edition of Macdonald), and later undertake a pilgrimage to Gungs Ti-se and mTshe Ma-pham; following a ritual bathing in the latter lake, they take 108 buckets of water from it and settle down in Muktinath (Snellgrove translates "eighty-four ladle-fulls of water," the text reading chu ’ku ba brgya dang brgyud; no figures given in the edition of Macdonald). There follows an idealized description of the site. Interestingly, it begins with the identification of it as the mañjula of Sakrasaśvara. Of the places listed next, one may single out, along with the 108 spouts, the serpent deitySa’bo Jags-pa and the fire burning atop the water source (chu mig me ’ber). Before extolling the merits that come from making offerings at the site and listing the sources of the mentioned accounts, the text deals with the nearby surroundings of Muktinath. Here the name of the valley of the Theate in the northeast occurs, which also was frequented by Padmasambhava, and where an inexhaustible salt mine is said to be located.

I should like to close this compilation of Tibetan
selves to Muktināth, Kab-thog Rigs-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu; it was composed in 1727, when the teacher from East Tibet first visited the pilgrimage site. The starting point of his journey was Mang-yul and the sacred sites there:

E ma ho! Wonderful sacred site, on the border of Nepal and Tibet, the white glacier mount, like a hoisted victory banner. He called it Land of the Great God of Existence (i.e. Śiva). He who is the Lord, the Kalyānāmitra O-rgyas chen-po!

On the front-side, the rocky mount (with) the vajra peaks, Hundred-and-some spouts of Ambrosial water it is called. Supreme practice site, where shines forth the wonderful light — that which is the place for the profound treasures' numerous teachings.6

Notes

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2. Macdonald (1990) and Huber (forthcoming). These two works provide information particularly on La-phyl, Tsā-ré and Ti-se, the three most important spiritual practice sites in the Cakrasamvara-tradition. Concerning Tsā-ré and the connection between psycho-physiological processes in the body of a yogin and the treading of a geographical locality, see Stein (1988) pp. 37-43.

3. Snellgrove (1959), vol. 1, p. 68: "These are the different kinds of places of pilgrimage, some of which are known as 'seats' (piṭha), some as 'fields' (kṣetra), some as 'meeting-places' (melāpaka) and some as 'cemeteries' (smatāna)." And p. 70: "The kṣetras are Munmuni, Kānyapāṭaka, Devikoṭa, and Kārmārapāṭaka."

4. DRIS-LAN, p. 18.2-4; Jackson (1978) pp. 212-213 has already referred to this passage. Cf. also Jackson (1984) p. 125: "The same Mgon-po rgyal-mtshan is prominent among the names of those to whom Gilo-bo mchas-chen wrote letters and instructions." These writings contain further material on the geographical location of places denoted by spiritual toponyms.


6. Jackson (1984) p. 60 calls him "a noble monk from Le Montbang who went on to become one of the foremost Buddhist masters of 16th-century Tibet"; see also ibid. p. 71: "Kun-dga' grol-mchog eventually became the head of Jo-tong monastery; the famous Taranath is considered to have been his immediate rebirth." He is the author of a biography of Grol-bo mkhan-chen bshod-nams lhun-grub that I have not been able to obtain (ibid. p. 175 and passim). Descendants of Kun-dga' grol-mchog were still living in the 17th century in Snye-slangs; cf. RNM-THAR II, fol. 52a.

7. RNM-THAR I, p. 386.1-2; concerning the alternative name of Muktiniath, i.e. Mukti ksetra ('salvation field'), see Messerschmidt (1989) p. 90. There may likewise be found there a description of the spot with the 108 spouts and an explanation of the meaning of the water for Hindu pilgrims; ibid. p. 97. The mention of the tree trunks possibly suggests that in the 16th century flow-off water from the springs was conducted through hollowed out trunks.

8. RNM-THAR I, p. 386.3-6: ... rga gar gyi ngal po / btsus mo / sras blo po sogs lo dus la khrims kyis 'jug ngsos der bya di (= dus) baub pa la la 'tshogs (= tshogs) cing / sbi byung tong chen po la bsmgtes ras ... / riga tha 'dad pa'il mal byor pa dang tu ned pa'/ las ba'i bshi gnas ga la ba der phyin ras / de lo de bum ra dzas khor bcsa gru pa spred byas byon pa la btsen (= btsen); / deo k'i tshogs shi tu miing ba 'las 'dag pa'i skya'/ de dang 'dang zos / kho bso deo k'i skye phal chen go... King De-bum ral-dza can be identified as Dibum or Dimma, one of the Mallakings of Parbat (the alternative name of Parbat being Malehum). On this king, the third ruler of Parbat who expanded the domains of the kingdom in 1488 see Shrestha (1984/S5) p. 6; Pandey (1971-1972) presents a critique of early western references to king "Dimba." Concerning the four-day journey from Beni, the old capital of Parbat, to Mukti nath and the first descriptions of the pilgrimage site from western sources see Kirkpatrick (1911) p. 287 and Hamilton (1816) pp. 272-273.

9. RNM-THAR I, pp. 387.2-30.6. Cf. the list of yogis (ibid. p. 387.2-3) with that in RNM-THAR III, p. 535.5-6. The latter passage was dealt with by Tsutsi (1923) pp. 685-687. There he writes of "Nathapunins, although of a specific Buddhist branch." In the same text, the group of Nagdwar yogins is mentioned along with their prominent Tirthankar; Kun-dga' grol-mchog studied under disciples of this Tirthankar in Mukti nath.

10. ZHAL-GDAMS, fol. 50b/4-6: mdkun ni rin chen spung pa'i snges / pho brang rab ngo nag mo la / sul phrae mong po'i khra (= phra) skod nas / na rab giig bzhis' nhul du ni / mandal yal gyi mchod pa ba/ gtsi stod ma sna kun kun kyang snye / bya skad ma tshogs skad stod snyes snyogs / thu mi kun gyis mchod pa'i gnas / ade te phug ma' po lha bsdun du / ngal bu' lung bsam nu ka zhes / grub thob dza vis gnas sgo phyi / sgrungs so gnas chen yin / rga gar gyi kun gyi (= gyis) mchod / dzo ki' gan (= gna) skor 'gyun mi chad / brtan 'tsam mams gyis (= ke) 'byin (= boms) khung yin / btsug rtags mchod pa gnas mi chad (= chad) / sgrungs pas 'dzam giig kun la khba/ that snyar gnas bstod bzhin sum ba'. This designation of Mukti nath as a palace of Vajravardhi suggests that bsTan-'dzin ras-pa localized the site within the system of the Cakravartinvaratena; this is expected, given that he himself spent many years at the moat
important spots associated with this tantric cycle: in Tsari, at Kailasa and in Lab-phyi. Contradicting this is the mention of the list of 32 pi-ha, which comes from the Hevajratantra. Concerning the concept of 'gate of a sacred site' (gna-sgo) and its being opened by a 'hero founder,' see Stein (1967) p. 189. Might the siddha Dza-vi be Gruben-chen Dza-ha-bhi, whose teachings reached 'Brig- bang Rin-chen phun-tshogs (1509-1557) by way of Vajranatha?


13. For a description of sSku-tshab gser-btags, see Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) pp. 186-187 and id. (1979) pp. 79-81 and passim. For the text and translation of Sku tshab gser btags dkar chag, see ibid. pp. 84-101 and 133-143; the text was filmed by the NGMPP: reel no. L. 257/24 (26 fols.). Snellgrove dates the founding of the monastery to the middle of the 17th century; the biography of O-rgyen dpal-bzang (fol. 317a) mentions the year 1668 (sa pho spre lo) as the date for the construction of the 'monastery site' (dgon gnas), by name Hill of Clear Light ('od gnal sgang). The place is also called 'the site of the Guru's (i.e. Padmasambhava's) practices' (ri ri'i sngrub gnas 'od gnal sgang); ibid. fol. 323a.

14. RNAM-THAR VII, fol. 323b/3-6: rdzongs ras-rgyal the nas dpon drung khris pa the gnas rgyal po'i (= pos) sgyan 'bren zhus nas the dbang zhugs pas dbang yon du a (= a las) bcu brgyud kyi mtha'n pa bcu gsum mtha'na bzang po zhi phul cing / khong gi cung po (= gcung po) dpon drung bde skhyi bsam gnub kyi na gcig dgeal ni zhi'i gsum brangs (= rnam grangs) phu (= phul) zhih 'od gnal gagg (= sgrang) der bstan pa rgyas phyir bna ba (= gna pa)... zer dpon drung sknyo bo the dbang dpon drung bde skhyi bsam gnub gcis pa'i sras mo re re skra cad (= bcad) / slar chu mig brgya rtsar khris pa'i btsun mo ngoz dbang bu khris kyi a las brgya djang (= grang) zhi phu (= phul) byung nge. The custom of having the daughters of the princely family ordained by a teacher of the rhyung-ma-pa school was kept up for over another 50 years, as the biography of Ka-ba-thogs Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu documents: 'They [the higher officers; see fn. 1] asked for a link with the teaching that they paid respect to, and inasmuch as each of the daughters of the individual [officers] had faith and entered into the gate of the teaching etc., there arose a great number of novitiates of the [Buddhist] teaching'; RNAM-THAR V, p. 146.2-3: ... dpon drung che gnas mams kyi (= kyis) thugs gnas chos 'brel thugs shing so sso'i sras mo re re tshog tser bsng pa sogs dad chos btsun gsar ma meng zhig byung.

15. RNAM-THAR II, fol. 32b/6-a/2: dpon drung khris pa the gnas rgyal po djang nge (= nged) rnyan du chu mig brgya rtsar phebs sme rtags (= brtags) sgo nas kths gsal dbyu thod kha rtags (=...
16. RNAM-THAR II, fol. 45a-5/1: sang nyin phyogs rtsis sogz kyi nam tog med par chu nig brgya rtse ye shes me lha rtsa guom gi skyel 'khor phung po yon du phul pas skyi gzhung shin ni rkhar na rang lang mng po 'dag par sa tsha tsha bha; and fol. 46a/1-2: de' phrin de' phun kun drung de' nyid gi (= gyis) mani rnedod rten spel mar bzhangs pas da 'ba'i chu nig brgya rtse gi mani smin ni mthang 'che bha 'di yin no.

17. RNAM-THAR II, fols. 53 b/6-54a/3. The family of dpOn-drung Kāros (bo) dar (po) also received teachings from bsTan 'dzin rabs pa; the latter conferred upon them a consecration when he returned to the Maktinath valley, which probably occurred around this time. See ZHAL-GDAMS, fol. 51a/5-6: de' dus dpOn drung kho dar yab yum khu rje khyom dbang gis dbang zhi gzhung sning skye lung po rnuad.

18. See also DKAR-CHAG I, p. 9.1, where Tshul-rgas rgyal-po is listed under the lineage of the rulers of Dzax. His son is mentioned there under the name Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal. In my opinion, this is the dpOn-drung khri-sde Ngag-dbang rnam-rgyal listed under Kun-brang klong-ylang; cf. RNAM-THAR II, fols. 83b/2 and 84b/1-6. Whereas the first passage (tsa of an invitation from Dzax, we find the prince shortly thereafter in skags rtags rtse, where he is placed on the throne by 'Dezam-lang rgyal-po Bīr-ba-dhar. I hope to be able to return to this passage on a later occasion (the ceremony it refers to took place in Bārbung in 1695).

19. DKAR-CHAG I, p. 10.2-3: mdo na gu n'i sgyang phug mu le sgar / rang 'byon rdo sku sna r'i jo bo dang / rgyal dbang padma'i sku tshab gser loga sog / 'khrungs dang bzhugs sogz rgyang ni mten guam bzhugs. Between the upper and lower parts, in the middle (bar), lies Dzax and the six governed regions (rgyal khab dang); these latter probably coincide only partially with the six villages of the Maktinath valley, as one of the territories is called gyantse yod (7).

20. See Snellgrove (1979) pp. 106-128 & 151-170 for the text and translation of the compilation, which can be subdivided into four sections. The collection was also edited by Macdonald (1979) pp. 246-253. The DKAR-CHAG II edition is incomplete (fols. 10-11 arc missing). The first mention of this pilgrimage guide is found in Tucci (1956) pp. 10ff., where also the mountain names of Mu-le is connected with the region of the Bārbung Khola: "Mu lha (rMu rla), the valley of Mu, rMu." On the location of the cave complex, see Gebauer (1983), p. 76.

21. Snellgrove (1979) p. 168: gangi chen tsul gyung phug jo bo 'di guam la / 'jam bu gling gi 'yas kun 'di la tshungs (Macdonald 1979) p. 253 reads changs. Concerning the white stone status of Avolakīśvarā in Narshing, above Larjung, see Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 181. Before the text in conclusion once more urges pilgrims, on the basis of cautionary examples, to not fail to visit these three sites before going on further to India, a text bearing the title 'Byung ba bzhis lha' gi rgyas yig is interpolated. The remark by Macdonald (1979) p. 244 about the prophecy concerning the land of Thag must be viewed in connection with these details: '.'na shad phyogs thags zhes bya bar 'pro na byang ba bzhis lha namo 'den bha dgos gyungs so.

22. DKAR-CHAG II, pp. 67.6-68.2: grus chen chu mgang bzhugs rtsa nas lho phyogs su rnyin tam gzig phrin pa ni / dang gi phyin ( = kyi) 'dus ( = dus) 'od gyal
gangs (= sgang) zhes su grags / da la 'gro'm pa lha khang yung zer / zhes pa gu ri 'dzabs rje dang /'dzabs pa'i kyi (= kyi) rje / 'gyag gyur ka'ri rje brtas gsal bar bzhugs sring. Both names, 'Od gsal gangs (= sgang) and 'Grum-pa la khang, are also found in the text of Macdonald (1979) p. 248. In Snellgrove (1979) p. 158 (= p. 112), the distinction between these two chronological phases is missing along with the name 'Grum-pa la khang. The etymology of the latter toponym may be the name sgrem-bsa la khang; see KNAM-THAR VIII, p. 437.2.3: 'When I arrived at the Temple of the Storeroom Chest, the seat of Kun bzung klong-gangs, in order to encounter the five treasures that represent the body [i.e., the teaching of Padmasambhava,] ... kun bzung klong yang kyi glan sa sgrem ba lha khang la stiu thub gter bya mjal da phyin dus.' This information, furnished by Padma dbang-dus (*1067), dates to the decades of the 1230's or 1240's, i.e., to approximately the same time as the visit of Kab-thob Rin chen 'dri-ri bshi dbang-nor bu to southern Mustang (cf. notes 1 and 29).

23. DKAR-CHAG II, pp. 666-672: 'geong geki zhes bha la / slo bdom padma kyang 'dzabs kyi bceg sring / grub chen byang ba kyi khyung stigs grub pa'i grags chen / 'dzabs byang = (bka'i byed) / blu ma rin po che mi phun yongs 'dak dang / grub thob chen po mag re'o ba'i'kys shangs la / geong bshi (= bshi) bur du thon pa'i 'dri nyid ni / bde mo chung fun sbyes yab sva' bsang sring. The first description of this cave by a visitor from the West is in Tucci (1953) - (1977), p. 56, under the name Self-Arisen Stupa (rang byung mkhed rtion): 'The cavern owes its name to a big round natural pillar which stands in the middle of it, almost as if it supported the weight of the vault.' In Tucci (1956) p. [11], interestingly, this cave is equated with the secret cave on the northeast flank of Dhaula-giri. Tucci's identification of one of the figures formed from stone as mNga'-ris Jo-ba, i.e. Atisha, is thus not valid; it is rather the previously mentioned Avakiksevara statue shRa-rin Jo-bo.

24. See Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 189 for a description of the cave and the expression geong-geg la rang byung. Cf. also Snellgrove (1979) p. 117: 'Like a wish granting gem is the Self-Produced Place of Pronouncement' (= p. 162: yid bzhin nor bu geong geug rang byun khyung), and fn. 40 concerning the problems this passage poses if, on the contrary, one translates 'there has appeared the self-arisen [formation of] geong-geg [stone], the wish-granting gem', then the problems dissolve. For the different kinds of limestone (proper spelling cong-{-}zhi) in Tibetan materia medica see Parfionowitch, Y. et al. (1992) pp.17, 61, 173, and 217.

25. Concerning King Baam-grub dpal-bar, see Jackson (1984) p. 150: 'He revered the venerable Rtag-rtsa-ba Mi-pham-bshes-rab-phun-tshogs as his chief protector.' A block print edition of his 'Collected Works' was filmed in 1986 by the NGMFP (L 100/1 - L 100/27); the biography of the second sDing-po-che Co-ggra is located in the National Archives/Kathmandu, 242 fols. (= AT 33/7).

26. As Snellgrove (1979) p. 113, fn. 37 has already remarked, several manuscripts read the name as sron bdag rnam thon can snyogs 'chung zhe ring (one of them being DKAR-CHAG II, p. 686: bdag-yon bdag gi (= gi) nshan can...); might he not be a member of the princely family of Dzar, which figured in the 17th and 18th centuries as 'dorors (yon bdag) to the rNyin-ma-pa school? Cf. also the passage cited in fn. 19 from DKAR-CHAG I, where the list of the sacred sites of the south commences with the Secret Cave.

27. Macdonald (1979) p. 245. The school of the


29. ZHAL-GDAMS I, pp. 25.6-26.1: e ma ho / guas ya la mtshan pa bal bod mtha’ams / ni gongs dkar rgyal mtshan ’phyag ’dra ba / khang stid pa’i lha chen gling du zhes / rje o rgyan chen po’i dge bshyan lags / de mthun nges brag ni rdo rje sgo / chab balad ltsi chu mig brgya rtsa zhes / sgyig guas mchog nga mtha’ar gzi byin bar / ger sabs chos mang po’i bshang guas lags. In the colophon to the song (Zbd, p. 28.3-4), Rig ’dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu calls the place a ‘border community of Mang-yul skyid-gron’ (mang yul skyid grol gi sde mtha’ar thug pa bal bod mtha’ams chu mig brgya rtsa). The connection with the region has been maintained up to the 20th century; see, e.g., the ornamental furnishings of dGon-pa gaab-ba in Muktināth; Jesi (1981) p. 67: “Two chörten represent the Jowo of Kyirong.” Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 200 describes a man who looked after the needs of pilgrims in Muktināth; she was a disciple of Drag-dkar Rin-po-che. The latter is the spiritual leader bStTan-dzin Nor-bu (1899-1958) from Drag-dkar rta-so in Mang-yul Gung-thang.

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(Drawn by mTahams-pa Ngag-dbang)