

# Tibetan Sources on Muktināth

## Individual Reports and Normative Guides\*

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In the year 1729 Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu (1698-1755) left the territory of Nub-ri and made his way across the Tibetan high plateau (*byang thang*) towards Mustang (*mnga' ris glo 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' (*gnas*), 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-ṭa or Mu-khun-kṣe-ṭa in the *Hevajra mulatantra*, and is called Mu-ṭa-ṣata in border dialects. It is a place where a natural fire burns on rock and water, and where dakinis mass together like clouds.<sup>1</sup>

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' (*gnas yig*) and 'inventories' (*dkar 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.

### I. Muktinath and the Buddhist Tantras

In the travel report of Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu, reference is made, in clarification of the names *Mu-mu-ni-se-ṭa* and *Mu-khun-kṣe-ṭa*, to the *Hevajratantra*; we must therefore deal briefly with the Indian *pītha* 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. *pītha* / Tib. *gnas*) 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

yoginis 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 *Vajrakāya* 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.<sup>2</sup>

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'-brgyud-pa school.

It is thus not surprising that the location of the **Munmuni** of the *Hevajatantra* was also debated, it being one of the four 'fields' (Skt.: *kṣetra* / Tib.: *zhing*).<sup>3</sup> 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-pas 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 **Munmuni** is located in the southeastern part of India.<sup>4</sup>

Before summoning up a further teacher from Mustang of the 16th century, I should like to mention briefly that the designation **Mu-khun kṣeta**, ascribed by Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu to the *Hevajatantra*, 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 Kaḥ-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' (*btsan-rdzong*) of the Gung-thang king Khri-rgyal 'Bum-lde mgon (1253-1280) was erected in the 13th century. I may add the observation of Charles Ramble that, for the *se-skad* speakers in northern Baragaun, **Mukha** refers to **Dzar-rdzong** in the valley Muktināth.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Indian and Tibetan Yogins in Muktināth

Two hundred years before Kaḥ-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 (1507-1566), 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 Nepalese and Indian kings.

Jo-nang Kun-dga' grol-mchog,<sup>6</sup> interestingly, begins his description with exactly the same formula from the *Hevajatantra* that we discussed in connection with Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu; in my opinion, the source for the later citation by the teacher from Kaḥ-thog lies in the autobiography of Kun-dga' grol-mchog. The latter, in contrast to the former, quotes the passage from the *Hevajatantra* true to the original, adding to it only the paraphrase *sgrol-ba'i zhing* (= Muktikṣetra); in the dialect of Indian

Prakrit that was common among the yogins of his period, **Muktikṣetra** is pronounced as **Mukutakṣetra**. The sacred site itself is characterized as '108 tree trunks together with 108 spouts' (*shing sdong brgya rtsa brgyad / chu mig brgya rtsa brgyad dang bcas pa*).<sup>7</sup>

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 rā-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."<sup>8</sup>

There follow examples of various Buddhist terms 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 8-9 months that he spent in the company of the Indian yogins, receiving numerous teachings (*mān-ngag*). He celebrated in their midst a *gaṇacakrapūja* and later received the name Mahātapasitraguru; the remark is made that he had the body of a Tibetan but the mind of an Indian (*kyod lus bod sems rgya gar ba*). On the basis of comparative material, we may identify the Indian ascetics among whom Kun-dga' grol-

mchog principally studied as Nāṭeśvarī yogins.<sup>9</sup>

During the same time, then, when the authenticity of spiritual toponyms from the tantras was being judged at the court of Mustang from theoretical and polemical points of view, a young priest who came from the social environs of the court was practising tantric teachings in Muktināth, the place sacred to Indian yogins, and the identification of this place as one of the four *kṣetra* of the *Hevajratantra* 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 so to speak "canonized" 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 Muktināth and enjoyed a great reputation as a yogin of the 'Brug-pa bka'-brgyud-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 rtse-mo we have the old fortress of **Dzong**, the birthplace of bsTan-'dzin ras-pa (1644/46-1723):

On a pile of jewels, the mountain before me,  
the palace Rab-rgyal rtse-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 maṇḍala.

Where *gtse-shing* (?) and also all [kinds of]  
herbs grow; where the melodious sound of  
diverse bird calls rings out,

The place where all gods and all humans make

offerings, [that is,] in the palace of Vajravārāhī:

It was prophesied under the name Mu-ku by the Jina, [and] the siddha Dza-vi opened the gate of the sacred site;

[This place] is one of the 32 *mahāpīṭhas*.

There offerings are made by all the *dharmarajas* 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."<sup>10</sup>

### III. The Noble Families of Dzong and Dzar

From the work of Dieter Schuh we already know that the noble family of sKyar-kya gang-pa constructed the fortresses of **Dzong**, **Dzar** and **Kag** in the 15th cent., the representatives of this family are also designated in the sources as *khri-thog-pa*.<sup>11</sup> 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 dpon*) of Rab-rgyal rtse-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 Muktināth valley (*rgyal blon '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.<sup>12</sup>

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 Muktināth; after the school of the Sa-skyapa/Jo-nang-pa and that of the bKa'-brgyud-pa, they are texts from the school of the rNying-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-lnga southwest of Jomosom.<sup>13</sup> The founding of a monastery community in the vicinity of Muktināth 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 khri-pa Tshe-gnas rgyal-po from the fortress Rab-rgyal rtse[-mo] requested [the performance of] a consecration for long life; he then donated as gift for the consecration thirteen [presents] of good quality, such as 18 Rupees [etc.] His younger brother, the officer

bDe-skyid bsam-grub, donated a horse and a total of 20 silver ignots.

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 Khro-bo Tshe-dbang and the dPon-drung bDe-skyid bsam-grub with the words <illegible>; later in Chu-mig brgya-rtsa it happened that Ngag-dbang bu-khrid, the wife of the khri-pa, donated the sum of 100 Rupees.<sup>14</sup>

Let us keep in mind, then, first of all that, at the time of the founding of the monastery of sKu-tshab gter-lnga by O-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-skyid bsam-grub. Of further note is the fact that the sacred site of Muktināth was the place where the ruling family of Dzar and Dzong assembled with the priests of the rNying-ma-pa school. This link was by no means severed, however, at the death of O-rgya dpal-bzang in 1677; Kun-bzang klong-yangs, the successor of O-rgyan dpal-bzang, was likewise in Muktināth one year later, fulfilling the same functions as his teacher:

The dPon-drung khri-pa Tshe-gnas rgyal-po went with me together to Chu-mig brgya-rtsa; with the aid [of the sādhana] 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 sons I granted the consecration of long life etc., and to the dPon-drung eight tola of *khro-chen* [a kind of copper?] etc. in order to reinforce the consolation [upon the death of their teacher].<sup>15</sup>

A short time later Kun-bzang klong-yangs 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 rDo-rje brag; this journey was financed in part by Tshe-gnas rgyal-po, and also by the latter's younger brother bDe-skyid bsam-grub. Whereas the donations of the elder brother came from rDzong Rab-rgyal rtse, the seat of bDe-skyid bsam-grub is given as rDzar.

Having returned from Central Tibet, Kun-bzang klong-yangs in 1680 again met up with the 'officer brothers' (*dpon drung sku mched*), 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-skyid 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 Muktināth that followed in the wake of the death of Tshe-gnas rgyal-po (another member of the ruling family, a certain Ong bKra-shis rtse-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-yangs], having brought the piles of the maṇḍala 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 maṇi [walls] were constructed in combination with stūpas by this same officer [i.e. dPon-drung bDe-skyid bsam-grub], and the extremely fine maṇi [walls] that [still] exist in Chu-mig brgya-rtsa are the very same ones.<sup>16</sup>

For the succeeding years, the autobiography of

Kun-bzang klong-yangs mentions the ruler bDe-skyid bsam-grub (also referred to with the title *dharmaraja* (*chos rgyal*)) as the ruler of Dzar, Dzong and Kag (*rdzar rdzong skag*); he also bore the main costs for the extension of the monastery buildings in sKu-tshab gter lnga, which commenced in 1684. The situation changed only in the year 1687, for it was then that Kun-bzang klong-yangs received a further invitation from bDe-skyid bsam-grub, sent from Dzar, whereas an invitation to visit Dzong was communicated by dPon-drung Khro-bo dar-po and his wife.<sup>17</sup>

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 Dzar.<sup>18</sup>

This ascendance coincided with the construction of the monastery complex of sKu-tshab gter-lnga and the officiating of rNying-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 Dzar was still active in the spread of rNying-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 *sKyes rabs mam thar ga'u bdun 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 Maṇḍala of 62 Deities of the Mother Tantra (*ma rgyud re gnyis lha'i dkyil 'khor*); this formulation reconfirms the previous observation that Muktināth was imported into the system of the *Cakrasamvaratantra*.

It being stated in conclusion that the sacred site is a 'unique jewel adorning the world' (*gnas 'di 'dzam 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 glisten in the pastures: a 'place of meditative trance' (*bsam gan gnas*). There then 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 sNa-ri Jo-bo; as well as the five treasures representing the body [i.e. the teaching] of rGyal-dbang Padma[sambhava], etc.: whether having arisen [by themselves] or been constructed [by men], innumerable supports [of body, speech and mind], these three, are found [there].<sup>19</sup>

With the Dhaulagiri Himal (*mu-le / mu-li gangs* or *gangs-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-ri.<sup>20</sup>

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 Dhaulagiri 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 collection bears the title "Description of the Two Sacred Sites 'Great Glacier' and 'Secret Cave'" (*gangs chen gsang phug gnis kyi gnas yig*).

As is learned from the introduction to this section, the description of the two sites is based on a prophecy of a Dakinī (*gnas bshad lung bstan*); these prophecies were channelled through a certain sNgags-'chang Tshe-ring, who was staying in the Padmasambhava Cave in a male iron-monkey year (*lcags pho spres lo*). These descriptions are followed by a further dream, in which the local mountain deity (*lha btsan gzhi bdag*) manifests itself, again, apparently, to sNgags-'chang Tshe-ring. The next item mentioned is the self-arisen Avalokiteśvara statue, the Lord of sNa-ri (*sna ri jo bo*); this statue was unearthed from the mountain and cave (*gangs chen dang gu ru gsang phug gnyis nas gdan drangs pa*). The list of pilgrimage sites of the Dhaulagiri 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-ri], all pilgrimage sites of the world were complete."<sup>21</sup>

The site of sKu-tshab gter-linga 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 Dhaulagiri Himal and the Secret Cave;

this may be taken as an indication that at the time when Dhaulagiri was spiritualized, so to speak, as the goal of Tibetan pilgrims heading south, the fame of the site of Padmasambhava's practices southwest of Jomosom had already paled. This is reflected in the toponyms which are listed under sKu-tshab gter-linga in the third section of the text:

The place reached by a one-day walk south of the sacred site of Chu-mig brgya-rtsa 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.<sup>22</sup>

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 Ācārya 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 rTse-ba, that which [once] came forth as protuberances of gcong-gzhi [stone] was perceived ās [being the deity] Bde-mchog lhan-skyes in union.<sup>23</sup>

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" (*gcong gzhi rang byung*) does not occur in the description of the site of **gCong-gzhi** for Tibetan pilgrims but is taken from passage describing the Dhaulagiri Himal.<sup>24</sup> 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 **bKa'-brgyud** (= **bKa'-brgyad**?) **Bla-ma** named **Mi-pham yongs-'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-bzang** (1617-80).<sup>25</sup>

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 **rNying-ma-pa** school, such as **O-rgyan dpal-bzang**, or ones of the **bKa'-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 vision of the above-mentioned **sNgags-'chang Tshe-ring** (*lcags pho spres lo*) in the year 1740.<sup>26</sup> A. W. Macdonald has described this expansion in the following words: "Here we see the southward thrust of frontier **Bon-pos** and **Lamas...**, and the

transformation of local mountain, earth and water spirits into keepers of the Buddhist law."<sup>27</sup>

The first part of pilgrimage guides whose compilation we can now date to the 18th century describes in detail the old shrine of **Muktināth** 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 **mahāsiddhas** (*skal pa bar ma*); the feats of the latter are marked by sacral acts involving water: First they block the outflow of a poisonous lake in **La-stod rGyal-gyi Śrī** (this place name is missing in the edition of Macdonald), and later undertake a pilgrimage to **Gangs Ti-se** and **mTsho Ma-pham**; following a ritual bathing in the latter lake, they take 108 buckets of water from it and settle down in **Muktināth** (Snellgrove translates "eighty-four ladle-fulls of water," the text reading *chu ku ba brgya dang brgyad*; 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 **maṇḍala** of **Cakrasaṃvara**. Of the places listed next, one may single out, along with the 108 spouts, the serpent deity **dGa'-bo 'Jogs-pa** and the fire burning atop the water source (*chu mig me 'bar*). Before extolling the merits that come from making offerings at the site<sup>28</sup> and listing the sources of the mentioned accounts, the text deals with the nearby surroundings of **Muktināth**. Here the name of the valley of **sTed** 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



sources on Muktināth with a song (*mgur*) of Kaḥ-thog Rig-'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 Kalyānamitra O-rgyan 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.<sup>29</sup>

## Notes

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1. Jackson (1978) p. 212 and id. (1984) pp. 7-8 & 11-12 (note 11). The source of this quotation is *RNAM-THAR V*, pp. 144.6-145.2. Before the two

visits to Muktināth, Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu stayed with 'high-ranking officers' (*dpon drung che gras*) who went by the title of *khri-thog-pa* ('enthroned ruler'); see *ibid.* p. 146. The seat of this family is the fortress of Dzar (*dzar rdzong*); see also note 14.

2. Macdonald (1990) and Huber (forthcoming). These two works provide information particularly on **La-phyi**, **Tsā-ri** and **Ti-se**, the three most important spiritual practice sites in the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* tradition. Concerning **Tsā-ri** 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. I, p. 68: "These are the different kinds of places of pilgrimage, some of which are known as 'seats' (*pīṭha*), some as 'fields' (*kṣetra*), some as 'meeting-places' (*melāpaka*) and some as 'cemeteries' (*śmaśāna*)." And p. 70: "The *kṣetras* are Munmuni, Kāruṇyapāṭaka, Devikoṭa, and Karmārapāṭaka."

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 name Mgon-po gyal-mtshan is prominent among the names of those to whom Glo-bo mkhan-chen wrote letters and instructions." These writings contain further material on the geographical location of places denoted by spiritual toponyms.

5. Jackson (1978) pp. 212-213 and Ramble (1987) p. 21 (cf. Ramble (1984) p. 161 concerning the state of the ruins); for the Tibetan text of the "Gung-thang Chronicle" see *GDUNG-RABS*, p. 108: *ta mang se mon kha gnou du / glo smad mu khun srin rdzong brtsigs*. Macdonald (1989) p. 170 notes the difficulties in identifying the group of the Se-mon Tamang and calls this citation "the

oldest historical mention of Tamang in Nepal." Cf. also Vinding (1988) p. 172: "The Tamang sermon is probably a reference to the Tamang Thakalis."

6. Jackson (1984) p. 60 calls him "a noble monk from Lo Monthang 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-nang monastery; the famous Tāranātha is considered to have been his immediate rebirth." He is the author of a biography of Glo-bo mkhan-chen bsod-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-shangs; cf. *RNAM-THAR II*, fol. 52a.

7. *RNAM-THAR I*, p. 386.1-2; concerning the alternative name of Muktināth, i.e. **Muktikṣetra** ('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. *RNAM-THAR I*, p. 386.3-6: ... *rgya gar gyi rgyal po / btsun mo / sras blon po sogs lo dus la khru kyi 'jug ngogs der bya dus (= 'dus) btab pa ltar 'tshog (= tshogs) cing / sbyin gtong rgya chen po la bsmeygs nas / ... / rigs tha dad pa'i mal 'byor pa dpag tu med pa 'du ba'i bsti gnas ga la ba der phyin pas / de lo de bum rā dza 'khor bcas gzabs sprod byas byon pa la bsten (= brten) / dzo ki tshogs shin tu mang ba 'dus 'dug pa'i skabs de dang 'dzom / kho bos dzo ki'i skad phal cher go...* King De-bum rā-dza can be identified as Dibum or Dimma, one of the Mallakings of Parbat (the

alternative name of Parbat being Malebum). On this king, the third ruler of Parbat who expanded the domains of the kingdom in 1488 see Shrestha (1984/85) 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 Muktināth and the first descriptions of the pilgrimage site from western sources see Kirkpatrick (1811) p. 287 and Hamilton (1816) pp. 272-273.

9. *RNAM-THAR I*, pp. 387.2-390.6. Cf. the list of yogins (*ibid.* p. 387.2-3) with that in *RNAM-THAR III*, p. 535.5-6. The latter passage was dealt with by Tucci (1931) pp. 686-687. There he writes of "Nāthapanthins, though of a specific Buddhist branch." In the same text, the group of Nāṭeśvarī yogins is mentioned along with their exponent Tirthanātha; Kun-dga' grol-mchog studied under disciples of this Tirthanātha in Muktināth.

10. *ZHAL-GDAMS*, fol. 50b/4-6: *mdun ri rin chen spungs pa'i steng / pho brang rab rgyal rtse mo la / yul phran mang po'i khra (= phra) bkod nas / ri rab gling bzhi'i tshul du ni / mandal yul gyi mchod pa 'bul / gtse shing sman sna kun kyang skye / bya skad sna tshogs skad snyan sgrog / lha mi kun gyis mchod pa'i gnas / rdo rje phag mo'i pho brang du / rgyal ba'i lung bstan mu ku zhes / grub thob dza vis gnas sgo phye / gsum cu so gnyis gnas chen yin / rgya gar rgyal kun gyi (= gyis) mchod / dzo ki'i gan (= gnas) bskor rgyun mi chad / bram ze mams kyis (= kyi) hūm (= hom) khung yin / bsreg rdzas mchod pa rgyun mi 'chad (= chad) / grags pas 'dzam gling kun la khyab / thal sbyar gnas bstod bsdus tsam 'bul.* This designation of Muktināth as a palace of Vajravārāhī suggests that bsTan-'dzin ras-pa localized the site within the system of the *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*; this is expected, given that he himself spent many years at the most

important spots associated with this tantric cycle: in Tsari, at Kailasa and in La-phyi. Contradicting this is the mention of the list of 32 *pīṭha*, which comes from the *Hevajratantra*. Concerning the concept of 'gate of a sacred site' (*gnas-sgo*) and its being opened by a "héro fondateur," see Stein (1987) p. 189. Might the siddha Dza-vi be Grub-chen Dzā-ha-bhi, whose teachings reached 'Brig-gung Rin-chen phun-tshogs (1509-1557) by way of Vajranātha?

11. Schuh (1990) p. 6 and Schuh (1992) p. 102; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 37: "at a later point in time the *dpon-po* of Dzong resettled in Dzar." Concerning *khro-bo skyabs-pa*, see *ibid.*, p. 108. Ramble (1984) pp. 106-107 provides a brief survey of the settlement of the Muktināth valley by the noble family and the sequence of fortress constructions: Kag → Dzong → Dzar; concerning the name of the fortress of Dzar he writes: "The name is said to signify the superiority of its location over that of Dzong..." Cf. Ramble (1987) p. 226.

12. See Jackson (1978) pp. 220-221 and the synopsis in Ramble/Vinding (1987) p. 9 and Vinding (1988) p. 173 (same wording); for a more detailed view of the political dependency between Mustang and Jumla in the 17th and 18th centuries, cf. Schuh (1992) pp. 59-78. For the description of bsTan-'dzin ras-pa, see RNAM-THAR IV, fols. 1a-3b and ZHAL-GDAMS, fols. 46a-47a.

13. For a description of sKu-tshab gter-lnga, see Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) pp. 186-187 and *id.* (1979) pp. 79-81 and *passim*. For the text and translation of *Sku tshab gter lnga 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-rgyan 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 gsal sgang*). The place is also called 'the site of the Guru's (i.e. Padmasambhava's) practices' (*gu ru'i sgrub gnas 'od gsal sgang*): *ibid.* fol. 323a.

14. RNAM-THAR VII, fol. 323b/3-6: *rdzong rab rgyal rse nas dpon drung khri pa tshe gnas rgyal po'i* (= pos) *spyān 'dren zhus nas tshe dbang zhus pas dbang yon du a* (= a las) *bcu brgyad kyi mtshan pa bcu gsum mtshan bzang po zhig phul cing / khong gi cung po* (= gcung po) *dpon drung bde skyid bsam grub kyis rta gcig dngul nyi shu'i g'tam brangs* (= rnam grangs) *phu* (= phul) *zhing 'od gsal gang* (= sgang) *der bstan pa rgyas phyir bra ba* (= grva pa)... *zer dpon drung khro bo tshe dbang dang dpon drung bde skyid bsam grub gnyis pa'i sras mo re re skra cad* (= bcad) / *slar chu mig brgya rtsar khri pa'i btsun mo ngag dbang bu khrid kyis a las brgya drang* (= grangs) *zhig phu* (= phul) *'byung ngo*. The custom of having the daughters of the princely family ordained by a teacher of the rNying-ma-pa school was kept up for over another 50 years, as the biography of Kaḥ-thog 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 gras mams kyi* (= kyis) *zhabs gus chos 'brel zhus shing so so'i sras mo re yang chos sgor bcug pa sogs dad chos btsun gsar ma mang zhig byung*.

15. RNAM THAR II, fols. 32b/6-a/2: *dpon drung khri ba tshe gnas rgyal po dang nge* (= nged) *rang lhan du chu mig brgya rtsar phebs / sme rtsegs* (= brtsegs) *sgo nas khrus gsol dbu thod kha rtags* (=

btags) *do dam 'khor la sogs phul / sras mams la tshe dbang sogs dang dpon drung du khro chen dngul brgyad sogs thugs gsos (= gso) spangs (= dpangs) mthor phul.*

16. RNAM-THAR II, fols 45a5-b/1: *sang nyin phyogs rtsis sogs kyi mam rtog med par chu mig brgya rtsar ye shes me lha rtsa gsum gyi dkyil 'khor phung po yon du phul pas sku gdung shin tu dkar ba rang log mang du 'dug par sa tsha tsha btab;* and fol. 46a/1-2: *de phyin dpon drung de nyid gyi (= gyis) mañi mchod rten spel mar bzhengs pas da lta'i chu mig brgya rtsar gyi mañi shin tu mtshan 'che ba 'di yin no.*

17. RNAM-THAR II, fols. 53 b/6-54a/3. The family of dPon-drung Khro(-bo) dar(-po) also received teachings from bsTan-'dzin ras-pa; the latter conferred on them a consecration when he returned to the Muktināth valley, which probably occurred around this time. See ZHAL-GDAMS, fol. 51a/5-6: *de'i dus dpon drung khro dar yab yum khu dbon kyi khrom dbang gi dbang gzhi gting zhing sna len bzang po mdzad.*

18. See also DKAR-CHAG I, p. 9.1, where Tshengnas rgyal-po is listed under the lineage of the rulers of Dzar. 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 by Kun-bzang klong-yangs; cf. RNAM-THAR II, fols. 83b/2-3 and 84b/1-6. Whereas the first passage tells of an invitation from Dzar, we find the prince shortly thereafter in sKag rdzong rtse, where he is placed on the throne by 'Dzum-lang rgyal-po Bir-ba-dhur. 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 ru'i gsang phug mu le gangs / rang byon rdo sku sna ri*

*jo bo dang / rgyal dbang padma'i sku tshab gter lnga sogs / 'khrungs dang bzhengs sogs grangs med rten gsum bzhugs.* Between the upper and lower parts, in the middle (*bar*), lies Dzar and the 'six governed regions' (*rgyal khab drug*); these latter probably coincide only partially with the six villages of the Muktināth valley, as one of the territories is called *gnyan yod* (?).

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 are missing). The first mention of this pilgrimage guide is found in Tucci (1956) pp. 10ff., where also the mountain name of Mu-le is connected with the region of the Bārbung Khola: "Mu luñ (rMu luñ), the valley of Mu, rMu." On the location of the cave complex, see Gebauer (1983), p. 76.

21. Snellgrove (1979) p. 168: *gangs chen gsang phug jo bo 'di gsum la / 'jam bu gling gi gnas kuu 'di la tshangs* (Macdonald (1979) p. 253 reads *changs*). Concerning the white stone statue of Avalokiteśvara in Narshang, above Larjung, see Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 181. Before the text in conclusion once more urges pilgrims, on the basis of cautionary examples, not to fail to visit these three sites before going on further to India, a text bearing the title '*Byung ba bzhi lha'i gnas yig*' is interposed. The remark by Macdonald (1979) p. 244 about the prophecy concerning the land of Thag must be viewed in connection with these deities: '*o na shar phyogs thags zhes bya bar 'gro na 'byung ba bzhi'i lha mams 'dren bya dgos gsungs so.*

22. DKAR-CHAG II, pp. 67.6-68.2: *gnas chen chu mig brgya rtsa nas lho phyogs su nyin lam gcig phin pa ni / sngon kyis (= kyi) 'dus (= dus) 'od gsal*

*gangs* (= *sgang*) *zhes su grags / da lta 'grum pa lha khang yang zer / zhes pa gu ru'i zhabs rjes dang / zhabs pus kyis* (= *kyi*) *rjes / pyag gnyis ka'i rjes bcas gsal bar bzhugs shing*. Both names, **'Od gsal gangs** (= *sgang*) and **'Grum-pa lha-khang**, are also found in the text of Macdonald (1979) p. 248. In Snellgrove (1979) p. 158 (= p. 112), the distinction between two chronological phases is missing along with the name **'Grum-pa lha-khang**. The etymology of the latter toponym may be the name **sGrom-bu lha-khang**; see RNAM-THAR VIII, p. 437.2-3: 'When I arrived at the Temple of the [Stored] Chest, the seat of Kunbzang klong-yangs, in order to encounter the five treasures that represent the body [i.e., the teaching of Padmasambhava]...' (*..kun bzang klong yangs kyi gdan sa sgrom bu lha khang la sku tshab ger lnga mjal du phyin dus*). This information, furnished by Padma dBang-'dus (\*1697), dates to the decades of the 1730's or 1740's, i.e., to approximately the same time as the visits of Kaḥ-thog Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu to southern Mustang (cf. notes 1 and 29).

23. DKAR-CHAG II, pp. 66.6-67.2: *gcong gzhi zhes bya ba / slob dpon padmas kyang zhabs kyis bcags shing / grub chen brgyad bcus kyang byin gyis brlabs pa'i gnas chen / skabs brgyad* (= *bka' bryud?*) *bla ma rin po che mi pham yongs 'dus dang / grub thob chen po rtag rse ba'i gzigis shang la / gcong bzhi* (= *gzhi*) *'bur du thon pa'i 'di nyid ni / bde mchog lhan skyes yab yun du gzigis shing*. The first description of this cave by a visitor from the West is in Tucci (1953) = (1977), p. 56, under the name Self-Arisen Stūpa (*rang byung mchod rten*): "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 Dhaulagiri. Tucci's identification of one of the figures formed from stone as mNga'-ris Jo-

ba, i.e. Atiśa, is thus not valid; it is rather the previously mentioned Avalokiteśvara statue sNari Jo-bo.

24. See Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 189 for a description of the cave and the expression *gcong-gzhi rang-byung*. Cf. also Snellgrove (1979) p. 117: "Like a wish granting gem is the Self-Produced Place of Promenade" (= p. 162: *yid bzhin nor bu gcong gzhi rang byon 'khrungs*), and fn. 40 concerning the problems this passage poses. If, on the contrary, one translates as 'here has appeared the self-arisen [formation of] *gcong-gzhi* [stone], the wish-granting gem', then the problems dissolve. For the different kinds of limestone (proper spelling *cong-zhi*) in Tibetan materia medica see Parfionovitch, Y. et al. (1992) pp.17, 61, 173, and 217.

25. Concerning King Bsam-grub dpal-'bar, see Jackson (1984) p. 150: "He revered the venerable Rtag-rtse-ba Mi-pham-shes-rab-phun-tshogs as his chief preceptor." A block print edition of his "Collected Works" was filmed in 1986 by the NGMPP (L 100/1 - L 100/27); the biography of the Second sDing-po-che Cog-gra is located in the National Archives/Kathmandu, 242 fols. (= AT 33/1).

26. As Snellgrove (1979) p. 113, fn. 37 has already remarked, several manuscripts read the name as *yon bdag mtshan can sngags 'chang tshe ring* (one of them being DKAR-CHAG II, p. 68.6: *bdag yon bdag gis* (= *gi*) *mtshan can...*). Might he not be a member of the princely family of Dzar, which figured in the 17th and 18th centuries as 'donors' (*yon bdag*) to the rNying-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

Bon-po cannot be treated within the framework of this article. On Muktināth (*chu mig brgya-rtsa*) in the works of Bon-po scholars of the 20th century, however, see LAM-YIG, p. 28 and BSTAN-'BYUNG, p. 494. Cf. also the map in Cech (1992) p. 392 (opp.): *Chu-mig brgyad* (sic) *cu rtsa gnyis*. Concerning the circumambulation of the sacred site by adherents of the Bon-po school during the Yartung festival, see Ramble (1984) pp. 157-158 = (1987) pp. 230-231.

28. For a description of the summer festival in Muktināth and the ritual circumambulation of the sacred site by the Buddhist monks of Dzar and Purang that takes place on the occasion, see Ramble (1984) p. 157 = id. (1987) p. 230. On the collection of earth and water from Muktināth as sacred elements and their insertion into stūpas see also Mumford (1989), p. 97.

29. ZHAL-GDAMS I, pp. 25.6-26.1: *e ma ho / gnas ya la mtshan pa bal bod mtshams / ri gangs dkar rgyal mtshan 'phyar 'dra ba / khong srid pa'i lha chen gling du zhes / rje o rgyan chen po'i dge bsnyen lags / de mdun ngos brag ri rdo rje spo / chab bdud rtsi chu mig brgya rtsa zhes / sgrub gnas mchog ngo mtshar gzi byin 'bar / gter zab chos mang po'i bzhugs gnas lags*. In the colophon to the song (ibid. p. 28.3-4), Rig-'dzin Tshe-dbang nor-bu calls the place a 'border community of Mang-yul skyid-grong' (*mang yul skyid grong gi sde mthar thug pa bal bod mtshams 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 gsar-ba in Muktināth; Jest (1981) p. 67: "Two chörten represent the Jowo of Kyirong." Snellgrove (1961) = (1989) p. 200 describes a nun who looked after the needs of pilgrims in Muktināth; she was a disciple of Brag-dkar Rin-po-che. The latter is the spiritual leader bsTan-'dzin Nor-bu (1899-1958) from Brag-dkar rta-so in Mang-yul Gung-thang.

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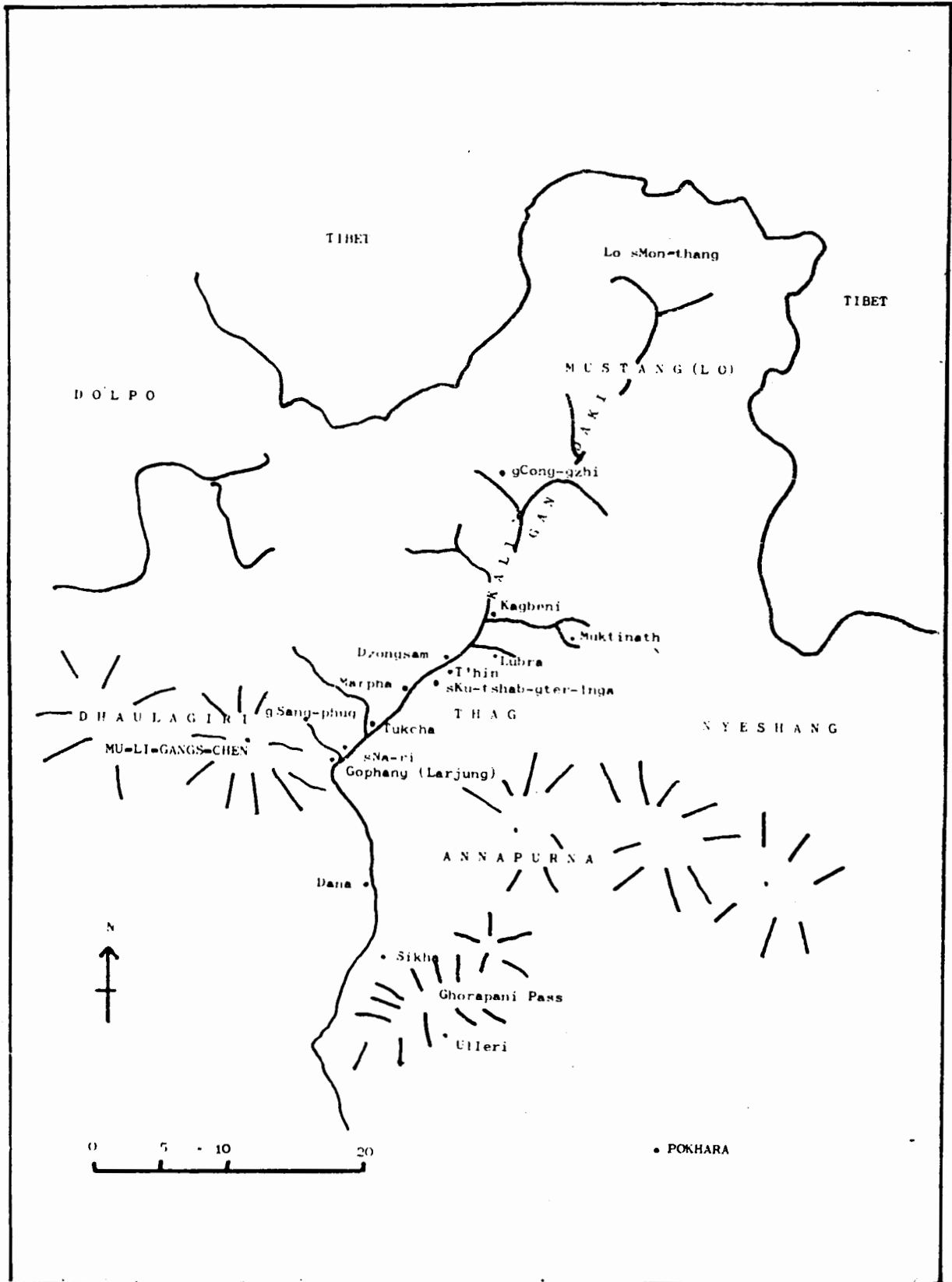
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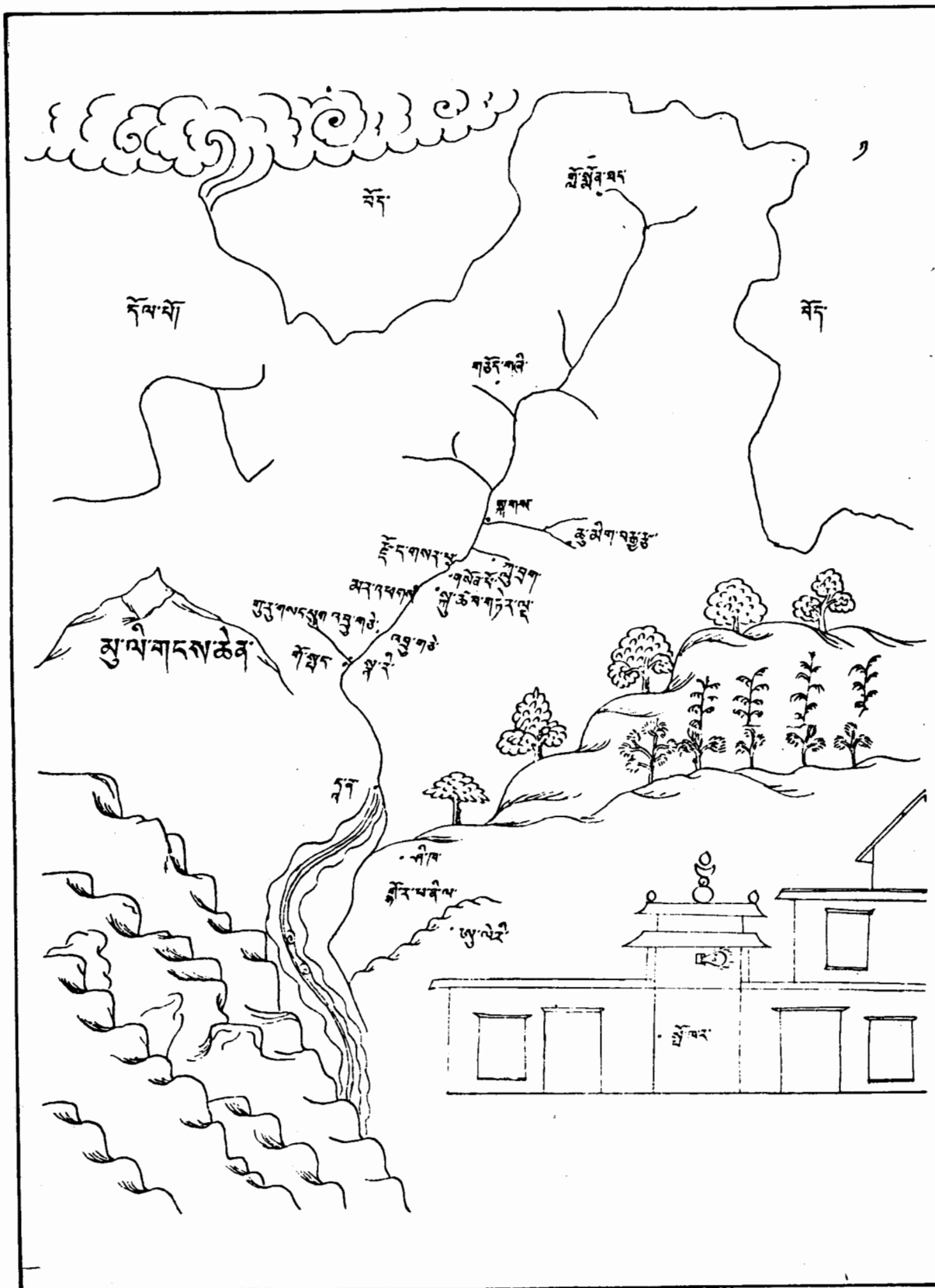


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(Drawn by mTshams-pa Ngag-dbang)