

A Few Words on the History of the Muktinath Valley

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Literary and archaeological sources are supplementary and complementary of each other. Informations derived from the literary sources are confirmed by archaeological evidences. Literary sources like chronicles, travel narratives, oral narratives in many cases are mostly fictitious. They need to be verified on the basis of scientific investigations. The literary sources also include agreements between the states, decrees of the rulers, royal charters with royal seals, copper plates, royal receipts, royal legal documents, autobiographies and other documents etc. These archival sources authentically prove the historical events. For exploration of these evidences, documentation and analysis of these documents, and interpretations of the contents special investigation is needed. Comparative study of the literary sources also reveal the truth. Thoughts should be given to distinguish historical truths from fairy tales. Myths and legends sometimes are treated as historical facts. Special attention is needed in revealing the truth.

This special issue deals with research reports of the Nepalese archaeologists and the German researchers on the history and archaeology of the Muktinath Valley. Prof. Dr. Dieter Schuh in collaboration with Wandu Lama, Monika Kretschmar and M. L. Karmacharya writes the

first part of the report entitled "Investigations in the History of the Muktinath Valley and Adjacent Areas". It is based on literary sources specially the archival sources. The author has given his thoughts on the anthropological and political history of the Muktinath Valley. The report deals with his study relating to the inhabitants of the Valley from the 13th to the 17th centuries. The author has analytically studied their political history. So in his report the author has tried to show the ethnic nature of the inhabitants of the Valley.

The Muktinath Valley is a holy place of pilgrimage both for the Hindus and the Buddhists. The author has extensively studied the accounts of many scholars about the Muktinath Valley. His comparative study has thrown more light to trace the history of the area. His scientific approach has set a model for the future researchers. He says that the section of the Valley of the *rJoi* river extending downstream from Muktinath to Kag has been mentioned in local names as *Jar-rjoi-yul-drug*. Briefly, it is referred as *rJoi*. The ruined castle of *Rab-rgyal-rce* was originally the seat of the king of the whole valley. The valley is fertile. Its inhabitants were the subject to the town of Dzar and, its kings. To give an account of the history of the Valley the author quotes the word, *Se-rib. Se-*

rib was a geographically distinct political and cultural unit situated adjacent to *Glo*. It is guessed that it included the districts in the upper Kali Gandaki Valley. This regional term was used until around the end of the seventeenth century. Today it is apparently forgotten and appears to live on only in name, *Se-skad*. The author says that the name, *Se-skad*, is used as an expression for the villages situated north of Kagbeni, Tshug, Taye, Tsele, Gyaga and Te. The word *se-rib* is interpreted as an abbreviation of *se-rib-kyi-skad*. (*serib* language)

The author says that the inhabitants of the Muktinath Valley speaking Tibetan dialects refer to Thakali and Manangi as *se-skad*. They identify their own language as *bod-skad*. *Se-skad* speakers also refer to Gurung and Tamang languages as *Se-skad*. The author mentions that with the aid of the materials, investigated so far the area originally occupied by *Serib* cannot be identified but it has been located adjacent to *Glo* and in the thirteenth century it included the districts near to Lubra. The author mentions that a table presented by Jackson, representing 246 students who in the 13th century assembled around a *Bon* priest (Tibetan priest) in *Serib* makes it clear that at that time *Se-rib* certainly embraced a wider area than that made up by the five villages in which *Se-skad* is today spoken.

To answer the question who were the inhabitants of *Se-rib* the author says that *Se-skad* speakers of the villages situated north of Kagbeni mention that their language is not a Tibetan dialect. The author says that *Se-skad* is classified as Tibeto-Burmese language and does not belong to the sub-group of Tibetan languages. *Se-skad* speaking people say that their language is much closer to Manangi than to Thakali.

The author shows that the inhabitants of *Se-rib* belong to non-Tibetan members of a Tibeto-Burman ethnic group. By quoting *Glo-bo-mkhan-c'hen*, a great scholar of Tibetan origin of the 15th century, descended from the ruling family of *Glo*,

the author states that the inhabitants of *Se-rib* were of Indian origin and were descended from the Pandavas. On the basis of former geographical size of *Serib* the author says that it is not clear whether the Muktinath Valley belonged to *Serib*. It has been observed that the present inhabitants of the six villages of the Muktinath Valley speak a Tibetan dialect. The same applies to the inhabitants of Kagbeni and a few other villages situated on the - looking from the Muktinath Valley - opposite side of the Kali Gandaki river. The Tibetan speakers of these settlements were considered Bhotias. Their architectural and dresses style, their marriage customs and their family and village organisations looked like Tibetan. However, they are surrounded by non-Tibetan settlements. To the north of *Glo* there are five *Se-skad* speaking villages. To the south lies Thakali villages and to the east beyond the Thorang pass the Manangi settlement is located.

Prof. Dr. Dieter Schuh has critically analysed several narratives which are regarded as the sources of the history of the Muktinath Valley. They are the orally related literature found in this area. The narratives so far investigated by Vinding, Ramble and Shuler are not presentable. Vinding's work about the history of Garab Dzong situated near Thini are not the translations of the original narratives but rather subjective interpretations by the author.

To begin with, the author makes mention of two chronicle-like narratives. They refer to the clan history of an aristocratic family living today in Dzar. They are said to have formerly ruled over the Muktinath Valley. The aristocratic family bore the clan name Tsampal Thukci [Jampal Thogyé (Schuler) and Jampal Thogyal (Rambler)]. The narratives give an account of the history of the clan. Their history is closely bound up with the establishing of the castles of Dzong and Dzar. The other narrative comes from Sonam Palkye of Dzong. Both the narratives were recorded in 1983. The original texts in Tibetan language and the translated version in English are included in this

report. These narratives are oral literature. They need interpretation, editing, translating for proper assessment. They illustrate events, name of the sites where the event took place. They need comparative study to confirm the events. Critical examination of the narratives take us to the literary elements revealing the historical statements.

The report mentions that the differences between the two narratives lies in the fact that the narrators and listeners generally have actual historical and geographical links with the characters involved and the places mentioned. The author further says that it is not clear in both that the family whose history is being told is not just any family. But on the contrary, one narrative is based on the still well known family of *dPal-mgon-khro-rgyal*. The author makes a note that both the edited and translated narratives represent the clan history of the most aristocratic families of the Valley. While interpreting them he states that the history of this clan told here is directly related to its special status, the ideology of which is reaffirmed through the story.

While examining both the stories the author quotes the first one V1. According to it, the founders of the Tsampal Thukci family were two brothers of the Hindu Thakuri caste who migrated from Jumla to Mustang, where they worked for the King of Mustang. They established the castle of Kag and Dzong.

According to the second one V2, the castle of Dzong was built by Pultun Thowo cewo. No indication can be found of the origin of the founders of the castle. Comparing this evidence with the results of our historical investigations elaborated upon later it appears that the origin of the family to be found in V1 is a later adulteration. The founder of the castles of Kag and Dzar descended from a noble family from Tibet. His name is mentioned in historical sources as *Khro-Skyabs*. The historically untenable tracing of the Tsampal Thukci family to Hindu Thakuri predecessors finds a parallel with the Thakalis.

According to Furer Haimendorf's report, the myth of the origin of the Thakalis is linked with Sinja, the capital of the Malla dynasty and subsequently the kings of Jumla. These myths state explicitly that the ancestors of the four Thakali clans lived at one time at Sinja. In this regard Dr. D. Schuh remarks that "with the integration of the Muktinath Valley into the sphere of influence of Jumla and its later inclusion in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal, its inhabitants, descended from an old west - Tibetan aristocratic lineage, became slowly subordinate to a more highly ranked caste of Hindu origin. A corresponding alteration of the clan's history was inevitable". Thus it is clear that myths only should not be treated as the source of history of any time.

Dr. D. Schuh has also mentioned one other narrative, i.e. V3 which he got in 1985 from *dPal-mgon-khro-rgyal*. The narrator tells his family story in Lhasa dialect. The content of this version does not differ significantly from the version recorded by M. Kretschmar V1.

One other narrative available to the author from *Chi-med-rdo-rje* from Dzarkot, i.e., V4. That narrative includes the incidents that led to the immigration of the Thakali clan from Dzong to Dzar and those that led to the intervention of the King of Jumla and the resulting military conflicts. These versions agree with V1.

Comparing these narratives we find similar as well as different versions about the same incident. In V4 the names of the two brothers who came from Jumla were mentioned as Bir phumpa and Tshewang phumpa. It was also mentioned that the King of Lo decides to separate the two brothers, because together they are too powerful. He has the remaining brother murdered by an arrow. The corpse of the victim is kept in salt to preserve it until his brother's return. According to V2, the men of the castle of Dzong had the clan name Pultun Hritar. It refers that the Thukci brother left the service of the King of Lo after seven years because the King treated him so badly.

According to the author, V2 mentions that the other brother returns with the bride, to learn from the King that his brother has died due to illness. His second wife, who lives in Lo, tells him the truth regarding the cause of his brother's death, and warns him against staying in Lo. He decides to leave the country but the King of Lo persuades him to stay. V4 mentions that the returnee finds his brother's preserved body and decides to feed it to the birds. As the corpse is being chopped up, he notices that his brother has been murdered with an arrow. The author tries to derive the informations of the incident related to the clan history comparing the versions of these narratives. He tries to confirm this incident by comparing them. Moreover, these narratives reflect the cultural features of the ethnic clan. These features show the distinctive features of the clan. The author tries to arrive at genuine established historical facts by historical and critical assessment of the narratives of the type under discussion.

From the accounts of V1, V3 and V4 the author draws the following skeleton plot. "Two ancestors of a *dPon-po* family now living in the Muktinath Valley are subjects of the King of Lo (Lo Manthang), and work for him. The King's ministers, like the King himself, are afraid of the powers of these two brothers. One of the two is sent to Ladakh. In his absence, the one who stayed at home is murdered. The surviving brother flies to Jumla where he enters into an alliance with the King of Jumla in order to revenge the King of Lo. This results in the separation from Lo of the Muktinath Valley, to become ruled by descendants of the surviving brother under the sovereignty of Jumla. At a later date, the *dPonpa* moves from Dzong to Dzar.

Moreover, the author shows that the foundation of the castles of the Muktinath Valley, occurred in the second half of the 16th century, the dispute between *rJoñ-dpon* of the Muktinath Valley and the King of Lo and separation of the Muktinath Valley from Lo and its integration into Jumla, dates from the 17th century.

So on the basis of the narratives no historical sequence can be established. To quote the author, "Reliable information regarding the history of the Muktinath Valley cannot be obtained from them alone." To conclude, the author says that these comparable orally handed down stories are the only historical sources and exclusive use of these materials would produce very inadequate results.

In his report the author also makes mention of the history of Muktinath in the 18th and the 19th centuries. In this connection he makes the survey of the political situation and the downfall of the rulers of the Muktinath Valley in the 19th century. The author mentions that the castles of Kagbeni, Dzar and Dzong are located at the points of geographically strategic importance. They do not only control the Muktinath Valley but also important roads into Manang and Mustang. Kagbeni is the main entrance to southern Mustang. The ruins of the castles show bygone grandeur and royal splendor. With the decline of the earliest economic prosperity and military might the former rulers of the valley have sold the ruins of the castle. So it is clear that the ruin of the castles has resulted not from military action but from economic problem. Large sections of Kagbeni castles are still well preserved. If it is not preserved, it will be threatened by earthquakes.

The author says that the Muktinath Valley was divided into upper and lower valley. The upper valley contained six villages i.e. Khyinga, Phutra, Dzong, Dzar, Phurang and Chonkor. The lower valley included the valley floor and the terraces of the river Dzong down from Khyinga to Kagbeni. The seven settlements of the Muktinath Valley was referred to as Baragaon which means twelve villages lying on the right bank of the Kali Gandaki. It included Tiri, Phalak, Dankar-dzong, Pangling and Sangdag. Baragaon was originally an administrative name probably used by Rana Government in the 19th century.

Two documents of the time of Rana Bahadur Shah dated 1790 and 1792 mention Topal Bista of

Dzarkot as the ruler of Barhagau besides other areas. After the conquest of Jumla by Gorkha in 1789 south Mustang fell under Gorkha rule. According to the documents, Topal Bista of Jharkot (Dzar) was given the district of Barhagau (Baragaon), Nar, Manang as free estate (*birta*) and granted the right to impose road and commercial taxes traditionally imposed in Kag. It is also noted that the term Baragaon was used up to the first half of the 19th century. It also included other territory besides the twelve settlements. On the basis of other documents it is evident that the five *Se-skad* speaking villages north of Kagbeni also belonged to the administrative unit of Baragaon. Tsharka, lying on the route from Kagbeni to Dolpo also was included in it. These documents confirm the supreme authority of rulers of the castles of the Muktinath Valley in both criminal and civil law.

It is also mentioned that Prime Minister Kaji Damodar Pande in 1803 had issued a decree to the rulers of the castles of the Muktinath Valley which allowed to keep 10% of the fines by the rulers of the Muktinath Valley collected from such sentences. The author also gives an account of documentary evidences which have given legal authorities and *birta* to the rulers of the Muktinath Valley.

It was the obligation of the rulers of the Muktinath Valley towards the Gorkha rulers that they had to deliver yearly tributes to Gorkha rulers (*sirto*) and toll revenues (*jagat*). The annual tribute was delivered in person. If they fail to deliver in person the King punished him with fine.

The documents of 1809 and onwards mention Kagbeni and Baragaon. It shows that they had no control over Manang and Nar. In 1812 their control had diminished drastically.

In the beginning of Rana rule the administrative structure of Baragaon changed drastically. In 1866, 18 villages including Kagbeni, Dzar, Putra and Purang, the whole area of the Muktinath Valley and Baragaon was handed over to General Jagat Jung Bahadur Kunwar, the eldest son of

Jung Bahadur. The right to levy taxes and deduct the tolls and to dispense justice were sold to the highest bidders. The 19 villages recorded 19 different people who presided over these villages as Mukhiyas in 1866-67. These events sealed the political and economic hegemony of the rulers of the Muktinath Valley.

In his report Dr. D. Schuh makes mention of the political position of northern Mustang during the transition of power from Jumla to the King of Gorkha.

In 1798 King Rana Bahadur Shah issued two legal documents by quoting Dinesh Raj Pant. The author mentions that the Gorkha King granted nobility and aristocracy of the captured area estates as *Birta* or gave them the status of dependent small kingdoms if they sided with the conquerors in good time and supported their campaign. In the royal charter of 1790 written in copper plate, the legal arrangements were made which granted Mustang the status of a small dependent kingdom. It includes other provisions too.

The other document of King Rana Bahadur Shah, drawn in 1790 which belongs to the archives of the current Raja of Mustang shows how little the old internal position of the *sDe-pa* of Mustang was affected by the new balance of power in Nepal.

The copper plate of 1790 shows that the conflict between Mustang and Jumla goes back to the second half of the 17th century. Mustang had to pay a tribute to Jumla and had to give greater part of its areas. In the war between the rulers of Gorkha and Jumla Mustang took the side of Gorkha. As a reward Mustang received a portion of the areas which had been lost to Jumla. The tribute paid to the King of Jumla was paid to the King of Gorkha. The area of Baragaon which before 1700 had belonged to Mustang was not again placed in the domain of Mustang. The Muktinath Valley was gradually separated from Mustang.

Tribute payment to Lhasa continued until 1790.

The author notes that until the first half of the 18th century announcements to the King of Mustang came generally from the Tibetan sovereign in the form of royal legal documents. Moreover, the author gives a reference of a treaty approved by the Chinese Emperor (gon-ma-chenpo) which forms the foundation of the Tibetan borders. Hereafter following 1793 the Tibetan Government was no longer allowed to issue legal documents for the areas beyond Tibetan border. It is clear that after the setting of the borders between Nepal and Tibet in 1793 Mustang was definitely included within the territory of Nepal. With this, the remaining earlier legal claim of Tibet was forfeited. For historical significance the author cites the letter of the Regent.

To conclude the report, Dr. D. Schuh has mentioned the account of the political dependency between Mustang and Jumla in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Quoting A. H Francke the author says that the military conflict has taken place in 1723. Tek Bahadur Shrestha mentions another military conflict between Jumla and Mustang in 1719. Jakson refers that the battles between Mustang and Jumla were supposed to have taken place in 1652. Quoting Hamilton the author says that many states of western Nepal including Baisi and Chaubisi recognised suzerainty of Jumla which was nominal. A peace treaty was drawn up in Tibet which regulated many small political units including the area of modern day Mustang. In this regard the author refers to a document which is lying in the palace of the King of Mustang. The contents of the documents date from before the conquest of Jumla by Gorkha in 1789. The treaty dates back to 1705. It was the treaty between the rulers of Parbat and Mustang. Hamilton refers that the capital of Parbat at that time was Beni. Parbat covered the southern part of trade route between Tibet and Nepal. The peace treaty mentions the inter-dependency of Mustang, Jumla and Parbat. Mention has been made about the second treaty between the Vikrama Shahi, the ruler of Jumla,

and Narayan Malla, the ruler of Parbat, at the beginning of the 17th century.

Around the middle of the 17th century Mustang seemed to be dependent on Jumla. Mustang had to pay a tribute to Jumla in the form of 929 rupaiñā and five horses annually before the conquest of Jumla by Gorkha. It had to pay 71 rupaiñā to the Tibetan administration in Lhasa. This is evident from the documents analysed by the author. Jumla's exercise of sovereignty over Mustang was established by at least the reign of Virabahadur Shahi i.e. the 1630s. For the period of about 150 years Mustang belonged to the states dominated by Jumla. However, the relationship between them was not free of conflict. For example, there was a quarrel in 1754 which was finally settled by an agreement negotiated by the 7th Dalai Lama. This intervention is mentioned in his auto-biography of 1755. The author has mentioned this account in detail.

The author also mentions that the attempt of Lhasa administration to establish sovereignty over Jumla was not successful. The rising military power of the Gorkhas swept away the kingdom of Jumla a few decades later. It even threatened Lhasa so severely that they could only be warded off with the aid of Chinese intervention.

The conflict that began in 1754 caused separation of *dGe-luñ* from Mustang and its immediate attachment to Jumla. This reduced the size of Mustang and limited to *sMon-thañ* and *gCañ-grañ* as the domain of the King of Mustang. In 1836 Mustang was closed to annihilation before the subjugation of Jumla by Gorkha.

The next report by Angela Simons, Werner Schon and Sukra Sagar Shrestha entitled "The pre-historical settlement of Mustang" presents the first results of the 1993 archaeological investigations in the cave systems and connected ruined sites.

The joint archaeological team of HMG, Department of Archaeology and Cologne University worked in the spring campaign in 1993

in two regions of southern Mustang at the Kali Gandaki Valley. These sites are Chokhopani at Thak Khola and rocky bar of the village Dzong, opposite the village site of Dzar (Jharkot) at the find spot of Mebrak. The report mentions that an initial rescue excavation was carried out in the eastern shaft of Chokhopani. The team could find three burial caves and numerous grave goods. The artifacts included pottery, bronze and copper jewelry, beads of carnelian, bone and faience, bodkins made of schist. As a result of the analysis of the cave remains 14c-date of calBC 777 ± 19 is available.

At the base of the south face, which faces the Chokhopani River at its confluence with the Kali Gandaki from the east numerous cave remains were found. The team found that almost all the cave rooms were the results of human activity and not the natural caves. Excavations over there revealed several occupation levels containing charcoal and bones. They showed radio-carbon date of calBC 785 ± 26 . Excavations at the base of southfall showed the remains of inhabited caves. Discovery of the graves and traces of settlement at Chokhopani representing prehistoric period seemed to be significant to understand the early settlement of Mustang.

The report mentions that preliminary investigations of the anthropologists have revealed that in the contents of one slipped funerary cave the remains of at least 14 adults, three youths and two children were found.

The report makes it clear that the burial remains from the south face belongs to the pre-historic phase of around 800 B.C.

The report also gives an account of the investigations in cave systems and ruins of Mebrak in the upper Muktinath Valley. The ruins of Mebrak lies near Dzong (Jhong) in the upper Muktinath Valley. The team worked in the easternmost part of the cave system known as 'B-System' by Dr. A. Simons. The team called it the 'sky-scraper'. The cave's chamber appear seven

storeys above one another to 30m. The view from the upper caves led some 90 m down to the River Dzong and to the village of Dzar (Jharkot) on the opposite bank.

The two interesting features of this cave system are, firstly, the cave chamber location 40 on the fifth storey and the cave-complex location 42 above that in the sixth floor. The cave chamber location 40 shows the distinctive feature of the last use of the room. The entrance was partly obstructed through collapsed daub-walls. The clay bricks of different sizes and construction provided evidence of separate building phases. The report elaborately makes mention of the artifacts found in the cave system which included even the fragments of paper with Tibetan writing, artifacts of leather and wood and a sandstone slab, into which the mantra "Om mani padme hum" had been engraved. A radio carbon date gained from one of the baskets shows that this final abandonment of the cave chamber occurred around the middle or the end of the 16th century (calAD 1567 ± 59). The dendrochronological analysis of a wooden beam which was used as a threshold confirms this date (1540). On the floor above location 40 there were preserved the remains of the former gallery connecting the cave chambers. The gallery forms the entrance to the complex cave chamber location 42. The report is illustrated by the diagram of the structures and also gives the isometric view of the cave room. The report also shows the signs of distinct occupation and abandonment phases. Further, the report says that investigation work in the cave has not yet been complete. It will be continued in the next campaign.

The report also gives an account of the findings of the excavations in the two ruined houses in the site of Mebrak. These ruined houses lie on the river terrace in front of the cave systems. There were first trial trenches in 1992. The stratigraphical analysis hitherto has revealed that the walls were erected during different periods but were continually adjusted to meet the new conditions. The team was concerned with the question of the

relationship of the houses with the neighbouring cave systems or entrance, whether the occupation and abandonment phases within the two settlement types run concurrently.

The report also includes a brief account of the survey in upper Mustang. The team visits north Mustang, the area to the north of Kagbeni to Lomanthang. The team makes investigations near Lo, one near Dhe and two in the area of Tsele and Tetang. The team gives remark that the characteristic of the cave system in northern Mustang in many cases is well preserved whereas as one can deduce rudimentarily such system in the Muktinath Valley. The cave system over there in north Mustang shows the important settlement processes of the Himalayan region.

The report points out that a multipartite cave system with two surviving stairways exist below the settlement of Tsele in the Valley of the Gyakar Khola to the western side of the Kali Gandaki Valley. To the east of Lomanthang the castle like cave system of Mardzong is situated. It consists of several storeys with remains of galleries together

with beam-slots of earlier wooden porches, as well as a tower on the plateau of the cave system. The cave system of Dhe displays a well refined and well preserved infrastructure. In Mardzong paintings survive from the latest phases. A cave system near Luri is partly used as a religious centre. The *gomba* signifies the entrance to a richly painted cave-chorten. The rooms on different floors were connected with ladders and trap-doors. There are also inhabited caves from Choser to the north of Lo. In Marang to the south of Lo, members of a household live in a certainly older caves. Thus the report shows that people have still access to caves.

To conclude, the report mentions that "the cave system represents a settlement type which keeps the neighbouring fields free for cultivation and not restricted by development. Moreover, the complicated cave-systems represent a suitable form of settlement in this arid high mountainous environment providing optimal protection against strong winds and extreme fluctuations in temperature."