'JAG 'DUL—A BON MOUNTAIN PILGRIMAGE IN DOLPO, NEPAL

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INTRODUCTION

This brief study of a specific mountain pilgrimage describes the process involved in its commencement and gives a short summary of the pilgrimage guide (dkar chag). The ‘opening of the door’ (sgo phyed ba) to 'Jag 'dul is an example that illustrates the promotion of Bon in the area of Dolpo.

Dolpo is a northwestern district of Nepal that borders Tibet and is said to have once belonged to the ancient kingdom of Zhang zhung.\(^1\) Later, jointly with the kingdom of Lo, it fell under the rule of Spu hrang, one of the principalities of the western Tibetan kingdom of Mnga’ ris.\(^2\) For several centuries Dolpo remained in a pivotal position between the kingdoms of Ya tse (with the Khasa malla) and those of western Tibet.\(^3\) At the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century the Gorkha gained power over Kathmandu Valley and Kali Gandaki Valley, including Lo. Dolpo as its dependency fell under their authority. After the unification of Nepal in the 19\(^{th}\) century, the ties with Lo were broken and a new border was established between Nepal and Tibet. The new fiscal authorities of Dolpo were accordingly based in Tripurakot (Tibrikot), in Jumla and today in Dunai.\(^4\)

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The secluded valley of 'Jag 'dul is located in a remote side-valley in the westernmost part of Dolpo. In the early days, before the valley was

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\(^1\) Namgyal Nyima Dagkar (1997: 693) in his article on Zhang zhung according to Bon sources and as told in oral accounts in Dolpo.

\(^2\) Jackson 1984: 10; Vitali 1996: 159ff.

\(^3\) Heller forthcoming.

\(^4\) Kind 2002: 12ff.
deserted, it used to be the location of a whole village comprising several houses, a small Bon dgon pa and some fields. Now all that remains are ruins left from the dgon pa and the village along with some stones carved with Bon and Buddhist sacred syllables.

According to oral sources, the founder of the Bon dgon pa was Nya gsom Blo gros rgyal mtshan, a descendant of the Nya rong lineage who had mediated on those meadows for over three years. Blo gros rgyal mtshan was the teacher of Tre ston Tshe dbang tshul khrims, an important person in the subsequent expansion of Bon in Dolpo. He not only stopped in 'Jag 'dul, he visited Smer phu, a small mountain retreat near the valley of Mdo rta rabs, Srib phyogs, Shel ri hermitage and Spung mo,5 where he paused for some time to teach disciples. Later he left for Kongpo Bonri in Tibet and never returned.

In those early days a trail winding through the high mountains connected 'Jag 'dul directly with the Bon monastery of Bsam gling6 in upper Dolpo. Strong ties were maintained and the lamas responsible for 'Jag 'dul dgon pa all came from Bsam gling. This major centre of Bon in Dolpo was established by Yang ston Rgyal mtshan rin chen in the 13th century.7

According to the lamas of Bsam gling he also built a meditation chapel in 'Jag 'dul. His footprint imprinted on a rock is one of the sacred sites on the pilgrimage. To illustrate how close Bsam gling was in those days I was often told how the fresh buckwheat bread did not even cool down on the way from 'Jag 'dul to Bsam gling.

As a result of landslides that wiped out the main bridge and the boulder on which it was fixed, the trail to Bsam gling became inaccessible. Direct communication and trade between the two monasteries and villages grew difficult. The 'Jag 'dul village moved southwards to the village now known as Yul ri skor (or 'Ur bkod, Nep. Hurikot) while the deserted valley of 'Jag 'dul became a place for meditation and summer pastures. The villagers of Yul ri skor still used to maintain close links with Bsam gling, but there was no lama who could support the local Bonpo community full time. So they applied to the village Spung mo and to the main monastery in India to send a lama.

5 Different spellings exist in local texts: Spung mo and Spud mo, pronounced Pungmo.
6 Bsam gtan gling is locally called by its short form Bsam gling, pronounced Samling.