

Tibetan Anatomical Knowledge and the Personal Physician of the Fifth Dalai Lama

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Classical medical literature in Tibet includes comprehensive anatomical knowledge. In the focus of my presentation is an anatomical text written by DAR MO SMAN RAMS PA BLO BZANG CHOS GRAGS. Mainly thanks to his skills in eye-surgery, this well-known scholar, surgeon and physician became one of the personal doctors of the Fifth Dalai Lama. BLO BZANG CHOS GRAGS is known to have studied human corpses in order to find anatomical structures such as bones, joints, ligaments, or blood and nerve vessels as they were described in classical medical texts. Some of his anatomical findings can be regarded as confirmation of an older commentary. In other cases, mainly with regard to his results of the examination of the skeletal and locomotor system, but also to important internal blood vessels, BLO BZANG CHOS GRAGS appears to have made new contributions or at least substantial emendations of older descriptions. Later he became director of the newly established Medical College at the 'Iron Hill' (lcags po ri) in Lhasa.

The subject is part of my recent research project supported by the Austrian Science Fund (P 26129-G21). The lecture starts with a general overview of the history of anatomical knowledge and its transfer across Asia. It is followed by a description of BLO BZANG CHOS GRAGS' life and the development of Tibetan medicine in the seventeenth century in general. The final part shows examples of his anatomical achievements and discusses biomedical identifications of Tibetan anatomical terminology in modern anatomical publications from Tibet.