

Medical Murals at Labrang Monastery

Katharina Sabernig (Universität Wien)

Thursday, December 8, 3:50 pm, Jindřišská 27, room No. 1 (2nd floor)

In the courtyard of the medical College at Labrang Monastery in China's Gansu Province the visitor finds a series of murals depicting the first and the second part of the Four Tantras in form of so-called unfolded trees. The murals are fascinating works of art illustrating traditional knowledge of Tibetan medicine. Their meaning is not obvious for the ordinary viewer but the ramifying structure, using leaves of different color and shape, is a guide through medical contents which an aspiring physician should become acquainted. The paintings are based on a text written by Dar mo sman rams pa Blo bzang chos grags), the personal physician of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Both didactically intriguing and visually captivating, they seem to be connected to the famous set of thangkas illustrating the Blue Beryl commentary of the Four Tantras compiled by Desi Sangye Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho) in a complementary way. After the destructive years of the Cultural Revolution, the original murals at Labrang Monastery have been repainted skilfully. They indicate a time of revitalisation of Tibetan Medicine and still form a vivid part of Labrang's medical culture.



Katharina Sabernig (MD/MA) is a lecturer in different fields of Tibetan Medicine at the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies of the University of Vienna and teaches related topics at the Medical University of Vienna. Beyond her research on the medical murals at Labrang Monastery in Northeastern Tibet (modern Gansu province) her interests focus on medical illustrations, history, terminology and development of contents in Tibetan medicine, particularly in the field of anatomy.

Personal website: www.katharinasabernig.at

Tibetan medical terms website: <http://crossasia.org/en/service/lab/tibetanterms.html>