

28. A Mirror of Beryl: A Historical Introduction to Tibetan Medical Science
Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653-1705)

Translated by Gavin Kilty

Written by one of the greatest authorities on Tibetan medicine, Desi Sangye Gyatso, the prolific author and regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the *Mirror of Beryl* presents a general overview of the theoretical and practical framework of the Tibetan medical system including a history of Tibetan medical science. Unlike his other well-known medical work *The Blue Beryl*, a detailed commentary on the four medical tantras, this work was composed as a self-standing independent volume. The treatise provides an authoritative presentation of the Tibetan medical understanding of the human physiology and anatomy, the various methods of diagnosis, such as pulse reading, urine analysis, the typologies of disease and their corresponding remedies, including surgical treatments. The work also presents a deeply informed historical overview on the development of the Tibetan medical science.

Desi's work provides an insight into the synthetic nature of the Tibetan medical system wherein the essentials of Indian Ayurveda and Persian medical theory and practice are incorporated into an indigenous Tibetan practice, including its pharmacology based primarily upon herbal and mineral remedies. To this day Desi's medical writings are used as principal textbooks in the Tibetan medical colleges both inside as well as outside Tibet, including the non-Tibetan regions like Mongolia and the ethnic Mongol regions of the present day Russian Federation and the vast area of the trans-Himalayan region in India where the Tibetan medical tradition has taken root since many centuries ago.

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