

Monika Frazer-Imregh: *Életmód, asztrológia és mágia a reneszánszban*¹

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Monika Frazer-Imregh's Hungarian monograph *Életmód, asztrológia és mágia a reneszánszban* [*Lifestyle, Astrology and Magic in the Renaissance*], published in 2022 by the Károli Gáspár Reformed University and L'Harmattan Publishing House, represents an important contribution to research in the field of Renaissance philosophy and cultural history. The focus of the volume is Marsilio Ficino's *De vita libri tres* [*Three Books on Life*], which the author translated into Hungarian. Ficino's treatises – which he only later compiled into one volume – are outstanding Renaissance examples of the theurgic synthesis of lifestyle advice, astrological explanations, and natural magic.

By following the structure of the book, the reader gradually gains deeper insight into various aspects of Ficino's work, including its philosophical, medical, astrological, and religious dimensions, and can also form an idea of the work's later influence.

In the first chapter of the book, Monika Frazer-Imregh analyzes in detail the first publication of *Three Books on Life* and its various editions, including the original Latin text and its translations into German, French, Italian, and English. In the monograph, the development of individual translations and editions can also be tracked, with a particular attention to critical editions.

One of the special features of the work is the medical and philosophical interpretation of melancholy, which is a central element of Ficino's thinking. *De vita libri tres* is unique in that it treats melancholy not just as an illness, but, especially for people of wisdom, as a dangerous condition that can also be a source of creativity. Building on ancient traditions, especially the teachings

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of Hippocrates and Galen, Ficino discusses the role of humors in the development of mental and physical states. Black bile, which is responsible for the development of melancholy, deserves special attention according to Ficino, as it also influences the functioning of the *spiritus*, or 'spirit', which acts as a mediator between the body and the soul. An important new result of the monograph is the clarification of the ancient and medieval medical concept of *spiritus* by Ficino and his followers, as it differs greatly from the later classical philosophical concept of spirit. Interestingly, Ficino saw a possibility to alleviate melancholy not only in medical remedies, but also in astral magic, which is explained in detail in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, the third book of the work. The book then examines the themes of *De vita libri tres*. In the first book, Ficino focuses on the preservation of a healthy life, paying particular attention to the lifestyle of scholars and its effects on the harmony of body and soul. The second book discusses ways to achieve longevity, including dietary and lifestyle recommendations that are consistent with Ficino's medical and philosophical approaches. In the third book, Ficino discusses the close connections of the universe and the influence of celestial energies on human life. Astrology and magical approaches are given a prominent role, aiming to achieve harmony between the cosmos and human life.

The monograph also presents in detail the Renaissance Neoplatonic thinker's views on magic and astrology. Monika Frazer-Imregh emphasizes that in Ficino's philosophy, astrology and magic are not in conflict with the Christian faith, but are an integral part of it. Through this, the author sheds light on the complexity of Renaissance scholarly and religious discourse and how Renaissance man integrated magical and astrological knowledge into religion.

The third book addresses the concept of celestial energies and the world spirit. The role of the relationship between the world spirit and the human spirit is of paramount importance in Ficino's thinking, and the author thoroughly presents this aspect of the book. This section sheds light on the Hungarian aspects of the work, which have been given a separate sub-chapter. During the Renaissance, King Matthias and Archbishop János Vitéz of Esztergom were the most significant Hungarian patrons of astrology. Ficino knew about their activities through his Florentine friends who visited Buda and highly appreciated them, and even dedicated the third book of *De vita* to King Matthias.

The afterlife of *De vita libri tres* also plays a prominent role in the book, representing the third unit of thought. The author shows how Ficino's work survived into the 16th century and how it influenced philosophical and medical discourses. She analyzes in detail the influence of *De vita* on the work of Oxford

scholars and especially Robert Burton, paying particular attention to references in Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

The Appendix of the book contains a summary of the contents of the medieval Arabic magical manual entitled *Picatrix*. This is significant not only for the purpose of analyzing Ficino's work, but also for illuminating its broader cultural and historical context. *Picatrix* contains doctrines related to astral magic that Ficino examines from the perspective of Neoplatonic theurgy, and attempts to refute or prove their acceptability through a critique of common sense.

The book includes a chronology of Ficino's life, a list of his works and translations, and an almost complete bibliography of Ficino research, which help the reader to map out further directions for research.

The special value of the monograph lies in the fact that it not only reveals to the reader Ficino's work and its philosophical, medical and religious aspects, but also describes its later influences, the various translations of the work and its followers. The book provides a comprehensive overview that allows for a more complete understanding of the *Three Books on Life*, while also clearly presenting the complexity of Renaissance philosophy and culture. With its understandable language, it can be useful "even for a broader readership," as stated in the preface's objectives.

