Astrological Approaches to Melancholy:
the Works of Marsilio Ficino and Robert Burton

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Introduction

With the dawning of the renaissance, all kinds of ancient knowledge found its way back to revolutionize the scholarly playing field. One such revolutionary event was the permeation of medical thought with astrological and magical notions. Medical thought, which was predominantly concerned only with the human microcosm, was now being transformed by iatromathematics into “astral medicine”–the combination of astrology and medicine. Focus was thereby expanded to include the principle of correspondence between the human microcosm and the larger astral macrocosm. This transformation, although already in the works during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, matured during the renaissance through the works of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Giovanni Gioviano Pontano (1426-1503), Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486-1535) and Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541), also known as Paracelsus.

With this transformation of medical thought, the topic of melancholy was given new life, especially with regards to the melancholy genius and inspiration. The idea of melancholy stems from the theory of the four humours, which was introduced in antiquity by Hippocrates (ca. 460 B.C.E.) and further developed by Galen (129-210 C.E.). During antiquity, the four humours – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – were each held to contain a different set of qualities (hot, dry, moist and cold) and were seen as the building blocks of the human body. Melancholy or melancholia is the name for one of these four humours, namely that of black bile. At first only predominantly related to human physiology, Aristotle (ca. 4 B.C.E.) was perhaps the first who started the psychologization of melancholia as a temperamental constitution dominated by black bile, linking it to genius. This psychological concept of melancholia became once again an object of fascination during the Renaissance, where it was linked to both genius and madness.

As such, melancholy – a disease and disposition often associated with madness, mania and a deep feeling of fear and sorrow – has been framed throughout history as the disease of geniuses, scholars and learned people. According to Jennifer Radden, melancholy has

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1 Klibansky et al., Saturn and Melancholy, 94.
2 Klibansky et al., Saturn and Melancholy, 94; and Saif, “The Arabic Theory of Astral Influences in Early Modern Medicine”, 624; For more on the Arabian astrology and medicine and its influence on western medical though see also: Saif, “Between Medicine and Magic”, 316; For the reference to “astral medicine” see Hirai, “The New Astral Medicine”, 268; For more on iatromathematics see also; Sudhoff, Iatromathematiker, vornehmlich im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert, 1902.
4 Klibansky et al., Saturn and Melancholy, 95.
7 Grant, “Dietetic Responses in Galen to Madness”, 61.
different meanings ... [which] seem to accumulate and coexist, creating ambiguity and resonance as centuries go by. Melancholy is both a normal disposition and a sign of mental disturbance; it is both a feeling and a way of behaving. It is a nebulous mood but also a set of self-accusing beliefs.\(^8\)

In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), the English scholar and cleric Robert Burton (1577-1640) describes just how chaotic the notion of melancholy was during his time, stating: “The Tower of Babel never yielded such confusion of tongues as this chaos of Melancholy doth variety of symptoms.”\(^9\)

Furthermore, melancholy took the shape of “the temperamental genius” in the Florentine Neoplatonic and hermetic philosopher Marsilio Ficino’s *De vita libri tres* (1489), in which he enhanced empathy and appreciation of the intellectual’s artistic sensibility and popularized the idea of humoral psychology.\(^10\)

Astrological knowledge is woven throughout this work on the melancholy of learned people, who were believed to be under the burdening influence of the planet Saturn.\(^11\) The present paper will investigate the astrological approaches to melancholy that emerged during the Renaissance. In particular, I will elaborate upon the approaches of Marsilio Ficino and Robert Burton. To start, I will discuss the ancient notion of melancholy as one of the four humours. Secondly, I will elaborate on the astrological theories of Arabic astrologers which were highly influential for the development of astral medicine during the Renaissance. Thirdly, I will dive deeper into the astrological causes and cures of Ficino that are laid down in his *de Vita*. And at last, I will discuss and investigate the astrological elements of Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

**Melancholy in Antiquity**

The term melancholy has meant different things over the course of history stretching all the way back to antiquity. The etymology of the term ‘melancholy’ goes back to the Greek *melankholia*, which consists of a combination of the words *melas/melan-* meaning ‘black’ and *khole*, meaning ‘bile’.\(^12\)

Black bile was one of the four elements within the doctrine of the four humours, together with phlegm, yellow bile, and blood. This doctrine is based upon three ancient principles. The first principle is that of the macrocosm and microcosm, based on the conviction that the part reflects the whole and vice versa. The second principle refers to the idea that there is a numerical expression of the body’s structure and spiritual existence. The third principle encompasses the theory of harmony and symmetry and is based on the idea that there exist a perfect proportion in parts, materials, and faculties.\(^13\)

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\(^8\) Radden, ed., *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ix.


\(^10\) Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 23.


\(^12\) Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady*, 39.

\(^13\) Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 4.
The Hippocratic *The Nature of Man*, dating back to 400 B.C.E, is considered the first text to clearly present the theory of the four humours and is found in the Hippocratic Corpus, a collection of medical essays attributed to the great Greek doctor. Interestingly, the author of *The Nature of Man* is in actuality not Hippocrates himself but his student and son-in-law Polybus. Nevertheless, in *The Nature of Man*, these four humours are said to make up the body of man. Perfect health or *crasis* is attained when “these elements are duly proportioned to one another” and disease occurs when this *crasis* is disturbed. The Greek *Crasis* or *krasis* is equivalent to the Latin *temperament* and can be understood as a person’s natural constitution. In case a person’s humoral mixture is in the right balance it is called *eukrasia*, as opposed to *dyskrasia* in case of an uneven balance.

Besides, the humours were each said to have different qualities corresponding to the elements and the seasons, entailing that each of the four humours predominates in one the four seasons. Such connections were made based on correspondences between the elemental qualities of each humour and each season, and created by Empedocles, which was later included in the Hippocratic texts. Phlegm, inhabiting the qualities cold and moist, is held to correspond to the winter season, as is deemed most dominant in man during that season. The second humour, blood, being hot and moist, becomes most dominant in spring. Yellow bile, being hot and dry, dominates the summer season and black bile, which is cold and dry, dominates in autumn. The humoral qualities, hot, dry, moist and cold, are also the fundamental qualities of the four elements, fire (hot and dry), air (hot and moist), water (cold and moist) and earth (cold and dry). Nevertheless I must note, the four humours are not exactly the four elements in the Empedoclean sense, however they do correspond by analogy and inhabit analogous functions. Consequently, one’s temperament or character is determined by the humour that is most dominant within the physique of a person. To give a fitting example, when a person’s natural constitution is dominated by black bile, that person has a melancholic temperament. The same accounts for the three remaining temperaments: sanguine (blood), choleric (yellow bile) and phlegmatic (phlegm).

Furthermore, although *The Nature of Man* functioned as the foundation of the doctrine of the four humours and as the discoverer of black bile, this treatise did not invent the idea of the
'melancholic temperament'. The work does include a minor discussion of the melancholic constitution, but it does not make any further mention of the later formulated relationships between the humours and the bodily organs and psychological characteristics. Melancholy as an illness is mentioned in an older Hippocratic treatise called *Airs, Waters, Places*, and stated as likely to arise at the start of autumn for those with bilious constitutions. Both discussed Hippocratic treatises give two types of melancholy, which were later explained by Rufus of Ephesus in the first century AD. The first type can be described as *natural* melancholy, caused by virtue of a person’s already melancholic constitution. The second type can be described as *acquired* melancholy, caused by an unhealthy diet, where bile becomes degraded and turns into black bile due to excess dryness in the body.

The ‘melancholic state’ was described in Hippocratic times as *melancholikon*, which is the adjective derived from *melancholiē* and thus ‘relates to melancholy’. This state relates to its narrow sense; to the diagnosis for the illness of melancholy. Its wider sense was developed much later somewhere around 4th century AD in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problem 30.1*, which describes *melancholikon* as more of a psychological mental state caused by black bile and the melancholic temperament. Hippocrates thus focussed specifically on the illness of melancholy and characterised the illness by symptoms of mental change, such as fear, misanthropy and depression; disturbances of the mind, such as madness; troubles of speech or paralysis of a part of the body; and epilepsy. A later text, the *Letter of Hippocrates to Philopoemen*, further describes melancholics as people who ‘are sometimes taciturn and solitary,’ who ‘love deserted places’ and ‘avoid company,’ ‘[i]n the same way people who are passionate about acquiring knowledge abandon all other preoccupations in order to obtain knowledge.’ Hippocrates therefore makes a clear distinction between the person suffering from melancholic illness and the wise man; a distinction which is not necessarily made within Aristotelian melancholy, ascribing the melancholic temperament to ‘great men’ and those who have an inclination towards the arts, philosophy, politics, and poetry. This demonstrates a shift in the notion of melancholy, and the melancholic temperament was now associated with heroes possessing mythical superhuman greatness who got punished with madness by an insulted god, such as Hercules, Ajax and

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32 This problem is traditionally attributed to Aristotle, although modern scholars are more inclined towards Theophrastus. See: Pigeaud, *Aristote, L'homme de génie et la mélancolie*, 54–56; However, Eijk, “Aristotle on Melancholy”, 139–168, sees no disagreement between the views of Aristotle and those of Problem 30.1.; See also: Jouanna, “At the Roots of Melancholy: Is Greek Medicine Melancholic?”, 235, 257, 258.
34 Jouanna, “At the Roots of Melancholy: Is Greek Medicine Melancholic?”, 244.
35 ‘Aristotle’, Problem XXX.1; see also: Jouanna, “At the Roots of Melancholy: Is Greek Medicine Melancholic?”, 237.
Bellerophon.\(^{36}\) The melancholic temperament now possessed a ‘sinister sublimity,’ a divine gift that is both a blessing and a curse.\(^{37}\)

**Arabic influences and Iatromathematics**

Though it was predominantly absent from European medieval medicine, the connection between the macrocosm and microcosm made its way back into Renaissance thought through the rediscovery of the ancient Greek texts and the works of Arabic Medieval scholars, consequently transforming medicine into iatromathematics.\(^{38}\) Medicine came to be combined with astrology, meaning that the question whether one was melancholic or not, became heavily depended on the planetary ruler and other aspects within one’s natal horoscope.\(^{39}\)

Iatromathematics is the combination of medicine and astrology and forms a practice that investigates not only the lower/physical causes but also the higher/celestial causes of a medical problem, as to identify its source and advise a proper course of action in order to solve it.\(^{40}\) Reference to the heavens in relation to medicine was already found in the Hippocratic work *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, stating that “the contribution of astronomy to medicine is not a very small but a very great one.”\(^{41}\) However, the nature of astral agency in relation to medicine is rather vague in the works of ancient Greek philosophers. Proclus attributed the influence of celestial bodies to their divine souls,\(^{42}\) a view shared by the Neoplatonist philosopher Iamblichus and the astrologer Julius Firmicus Maternus.\(^{43}\) This view was prevalent in Hellenistic astrology, yet these classical sources do not contain a scientific or rational theory of astrology.\(^{44}\) Such a naturalistic and explanation of astrology can be synthesized from the occult works by three Arabic early modern thinkers: Abu Ma’shar al-Balkhi (787–886), Ya’qub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (c. 801–873), and pseudo-Majriti (ca. 11 C.E.).\(^{45}\)

Abu Ma’shar’s *Great Introduction*, who Ficino was familiar with, bases the theoretical and philosophical foundations of astrology on the Aristotelian principles of generation and corruption and states that “the terrestrial world is connected to the celestial world and its motions by necessity.”\(^{46}\) Therefore, due to the power of the celestial world – the heat produced by its motions – terrestrial things, generated and corruptible, are affected.\(^{47}\) Consequently, the celestial movements are

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\(^{36}\) Cf. ‘Aristotle’. Problem XXX.1 (below, pp. 18-29), where the previously mentioned heroes “and many others” are quoted as melancholics.; Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 16.

\(^{37}\) Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 16-17.

\(^{38}\) Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 94-95.

\(^{39}\) Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 94-95.

\(^{40}\) Abu Ma’shar, Kitāb al-madkhal al-kabīr ilā ‘ilm ahkām al-nuṣūj (The Great Introduction), 13–5.


\(^{42}\) Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 284.


\(^{46}\) Abu Ma’shar, Kitāb al-madkhal al-kabīr ilā ‘ilm ahkām al-nuṣūj, 19–20

responsible for the changes in seasons and humours and the physician must thus understand that the higher celestial causes correspond to the lower natural causes as a necessary consequence.\textsuperscript{48} Abu Ma’shar claims that the natural things receive their qualities from the higher planetary bodies under which they can be placed. In this sense, human bodies are also formed by the planets and therefore an astrological chart can show inclinations to illness and recovery.\textsuperscript{49}

The theory of Al-Kindi adds a magical element and illustrates how man can harness the astral influences or the celestial rays to help mankind. In his De radiis stellicis, man, as a microcosm, is given an generative ability based on the principle of microcosm and macrocosm, which gives man the ability to harness the stellar rays (the virtues of the stars) by the power of intention.\textsuperscript{50} This was also the way by which talismans are believed to get their power; the magus, by his ability of “preternatural generation,” becomes a channel through which these stellar rays are poured into the talisman.\textsuperscript{51}

The last work by pseudo-Majriti, the Picatrix, has been stated as the work on astral magic of the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{52} The Picatrix is considered to be a book of magical instructions on how to create medicinal talismans, among other things.\textsuperscript{53} This work reflects the theories in the works of Abu Ma’shar and Al-Kindi and explains that astral magic works through the knowledge of the sympathies and antipathies between the used materials.\textsuperscript{54} Sympathies and antipathies can be determined by analogy; for instance, if two natural things are generated by the same planet, there exists sympathy between them and can therefore act upon each other.\textsuperscript{55} Same can be said for two natural things that have opposite natures, which causes antipathy between the two – as the planets by which they are generated are also opposites.

What the above meant in medical terms is three-fold. As every natural form is connected to its celestial counterpart, the physician/astrologer can diagnose by relating the maladies of the organ to celestial conditions. Secondly, through prediction of unhealthy earthly conditions the physician/astrologer can prescribe precautionary actions accordingly. Thirdly, the physician/astrologer/magus can know the astral properties of stones, plants, herbs and other natural

\textsuperscript{50} Al-Kindi, De Radiis Stellicis (On the Stellar Rays), 44, 46–47.
\textsuperscript{51} Al-Kindi, De Radiis Stellicis, 48–49.
\textsuperscript{52} Kahane, et al., “Picatrix and the Talismans”, 574.
\textsuperscript{53} Pseudo-Majriti, Das Ziel des Weisen (Picatrix), 21–22, 35.
\textsuperscript{54} Pseudo-Majriti, Das Ziel des Weisen (Picatrix), 24.
\textsuperscript{55} Pseudo-Majriti, Das Ziel des Weisen (Picatrix), 86, 96–97; Abu Ma’shar, Kitāb al-madkhal al-kabīr ilā ‘ilm ahkām al-nujūm, 21–22.
things and can therefore make medicines targeting both the physical and astral causes of a medical problem.\textsuperscript{56}

**Renaissance Melancholy**

The coming together of the four humours and astrology is illustrated in Figure 1, found in the *Quinta Essentia* (1574) of the German alchemist and astrologer Leonhart Thurneisser zum Thurn (1531-c.1595).\textsuperscript{57} The image contains an androgynous figure, with a female half (left side) and a male half (right side). The female side is connected to the feminine elements (water and earth) and to the two related temperaments (phlegmatic and melancholic). The male half is associated with the masculine elements (fire and air) and with the sanguine and choleric temperaments. Throughout the image the twelve zodiac signs are illustrated that relate to the four seasons in pairs of three: Spring (Aries, Taurus, Gemini); Summer (Cancer, Leo, Virgo); Autumn (Libra, Scorpio and Sagittarius); and Winter (Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces).

Astral magic was seen as a means of harnessing the divine and attracting benevolent planetary forces to counteract the malevolent ones.\textsuperscript{58} Saturn has been regarded as the most important celestial body for melancholy, and believed to have the power to cause the melancholic traits and characteristics.\textsuperscript{59} Those with a Saturnine horoscope were therefore believed to be especially susceptible to melancholic sufferance. The Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino revived the pseudo-Aristotelian ideas of melancholy and united these with Platonic notions about the inspired madness or frenzy of poets, seers and heroes.\textsuperscript{60} Not only the classical texts were of great influence on him, scholars have stated that the re-emergence of astral magic also depended in a way on a “second revelation of Arabic philosophy and sciences.”\textsuperscript{61} Ficino talks about melancholy at great length in his *Three Books on Life*, a

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\textsuperscript{56} Saif, “The Arabic Theory of Astral Influences in Early Modern Medicine”, 618.
\textsuperscript{57} Thurneisser zum Thurn, *Quinta Essentia*, 1570.
\textsuperscript{59} The connection between melancholy and Saturn was made by Arabic astrologers, see: Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 127-133; and Bell, *Melancholia*, 138.
\textsuperscript{60} Klibansky et al., *Saturn and Melancholy*, 17.
\end{flushleft}
book he wrote as a medical work for the learned scholar.\textsuperscript{62} This work gives three causes that conspire against the scholar’s health: the natural, the mental and the celestial. The natural cause points to the pursuit of knowledge, which causes the soul to draw into itself, making it more earth-like and therefore more susceptible to accumulate black bile.\textsuperscript{63} Second, continuous inquiry leads to frequent mental agitation, which dries up the brain making it cold and dry.\textsuperscript{64} Celestially, Mercury and Saturn, with their cold and dry qualities, were seen as the two planets that drive the scholar’s pursuit for knowledge – thus exerting a melancholic influence.\textsuperscript{65}

Ficino (born on the 19 October 1433, at 1:26 PM, in Figline Valdarno, Italy) believed he was heavily under the influence of the malefic planet Saturn. Ficino’s astrological ideas were frequently expressed in his Letters.\textsuperscript{66} In one of these, he expressed his heavy saturnian burden to his friend Giovanni Cavalcanti, where he stated:

Saturn seems to have impressed the seal of melancholy on me from the beginning: set, as he is, almost in the midst of my ascendant Aquarius, he is influenced by Mars, also in Aquarius, and the Moon in Capricorn. He is in square aspect to the Sun and Mercury in Scorpio, which occupy the ninth house. But Venus in Libra and Jupiter in Cancer have perhaps, offered some resistance to this melancholy nature.\textsuperscript{67}

However, Ficino corrects this statement in the Letter to Prenninger, where Ficino states Venus to have been in Virgo and Jupiter in Leo.\textsuperscript{68} Generally, within astrology it is believed that the planet which rules the sign of the chart’s

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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Birth_Chart_of_Marsilio_Ficino.png}
\caption{Birth Chart of Marsilio Ficino}
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\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Saif1} Saif, “Early Modern Astral Magic: Marsilio Ficino”, 107
\bibitem{Saif2} Saif, “Early Modern Astral Magic: Marsilio Ficino”, 107; cold and dry are the two qualities of earth and of the melancholic humour.
\bibitem{Saif3} Saif, “Early Modern Astral Magic: Marsilio Ficino”, 107; See also: Ficino, Three Books on Life, 113-115.
\bibitem{Clydesdale} Clydesdale, “Jupiter Tames Saturn”: Astrology in Ficino’s Epistolae, 118.
\bibitem{Letters} The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, Volume 2, 33-34.
\bibitem{Prenninger} See his inserted birth chart; and the Letter to Prenninger: Ficino, Opera omnia, 901-902.
\end{thebibliography}
ascendant, rules the chart as a whole. Ficino therefore believed that Saturn, ruler of the sign Aquarius, was his chart ruler or “significator.” Besides, Saturn itself was rising on the ascendant, giving it more power. And on top of that, Ficino believed that not only his ascendant but also his Moon (in Capricorn) was under the heavy influence of Saturn, as it is the ruler of Capricorn as well. Ficino’s perception of melancholy resembled that of the Aristotelian Problem, as he describes the melancholic nature as a “unique and divine gift” to Cavalcanti, and his De vita acknowledges the four humours as the medical basis for the melancholic humour or black bile.

In the preface of the third book of his De vita, Ficino stated his intention to imitate the Arabs and ancient philosophers who studied the heavens in order to know themselves, since he believed that self-knowledge would lead to a long life and happiness. In the third book, Ficino explains how to attract properties from the stars. The content of this book as well as the rest of the books rests on the claim that each “celestial thing,” such as a planet or star, rules the things that can be grouped under it (body parts, plants, animals, stones, things, etc). In line with the former discussed philosophy of the Arabic astrologers, Ficino states that just as the quality and motion of any member […] extend to our other members, so in the cosmos the acts of the principal members move all the rest, and the inferior members easily receive from the highest, which are ready of their own accord to give.

This statement shows another foundational principle of Ficino’s medical philosophy: that of microcosm and macrocosm; or as above, so below. His medical doctrine is based on capturing “the gifts of the celestials” through additional preparation so that the celestial bodies are more inclined to give away their gifts. Ficino states that before those gifts can be captured, one must properly prepare and purge one’s spirit through natural things. To “draw the most from the spirit of the world,” one is advised to nourish oneself with plants and other living things, as they are “still clinging, as it were, to mother earth.” Besides, spending time outside under the rays of the Sun and the stars, and smelling the odour of herbs, flowers, trees and fruits, are all said to restore and invigorate one’s spirit. Also, Ficino advises to investigate which star would be beneficial for the natal chart of a given individual.

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69 In Astrology, the ascendant (AC) is the left axis of a natal horoscope. Just as the sun rises and sets, the ascendant marks the point where the zodiac belt rises, as opposed to the descendant (DC), the right axis, where the zodiac descends. Thus, one’s ascendant or ‘rising sign’ is the zodiac sign which was rising at the horizon at the time of one’s birth.

70 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 20.

71 Faint survivals can be found in medieval poetics, see Curtius, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages, 474-475; Ficino has translated, often for the first time, the Platonic works which deal with them and predominantly relied on the text of ancient authorities; see also Allen, The Platonism of Marsilio Ficino: A Study of His 'Phaedrus' Commentary, Its Sources and Genesis, 230, n. 5 and 6.


73 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 251; Cf, Saif, “The Arabic theory of astral influences in early modern medicine”, 611.

74 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 289: “that through the rays of the stars opportunely receives, our spirit properly prepared and purged through natural things may receive the most from the very spirit of the life of the world.”

75 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 291.

76 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 291.
and to “beg grace” from especially that star until it gives the individual the gift it seeks.\textsuperscript{78} An example is given by Ficino in the following statement:

If you want your body and spirit to receive power from some member of the cosmos, say from the Sun, seek the things which above all are most Solar among metals and gems, still more among plants, and more yet among animals, especially human beings; for surely things which are more similar to you confer more of it. These must be […] taken internally, especially in the day and the hour of the Sun and while the Sun is dominant in a theme of the heavens.\textsuperscript{79}

According to Ficino, the “Three Graces” are the lesser fortune Venus, greater fortune Jupiter and the Sun, and these planetary bodies were believed to be useful in counteracting Saturn’s melancholic effects.\textsuperscript{80} Jupiter is regarded as the “mediator” between the Sun and Venus.\textsuperscript{81} The two bad planets are Mars and Saturn of which Mars is seen as the lesser misfortune/malefic and Saturn as the greater misfortune.\textsuperscript{82} In description of the planet Jupiter, Ficino characterises it as Jovial in his third book on life.\textsuperscript{83} Consequently, should one wish to counter Satumine influences, doing and using Jovial things is advised. A similar observance can be found in the Picatrix – a work recognized as influential for Ficino – which connects Saturn to sadness and other melancholic diseases and states Jupiter as the planet to call for help.\textsuperscript{84} For example, one could: (1) “take physical exercise in Jupiter’s day and hour and when he is reigning”; (2) use Jovial things such as silver, topaz, sapphire, jacinth, crystal, coral, beryl, spodum, green and aery colours, wine, sugar, and white honey; and (3) focus on thoughts and feelings which are Jovial, i.e. steadfast, composed, religious, and law-abiding.\textsuperscript{85} Furthermore, dancing as a form of exercise and singing hymns to Venus and Jupiter at the right time, while invoking their divine names, is said to draw down the planets’ beneficial influences.\textsuperscript{86} One could also seek company of Jovial men, which are described as “sanguine, hand-some, and venerable.”\textsuperscript{87} Jovial Animals are the lamb, eagle, peacock, and the young bullock.\textsuperscript{88} Other means of attracting Jovial energies – and often used by great philosophers – are describes as the wearing of white clothes and being out in the open air.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{78} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 255.
\textsuperscript{79} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 249.
\textsuperscript{80} Aakhus, “Astral Magic in the Renaissance: Gems, Poetry, and Patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici”, 204
\textsuperscript{81} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 263.
\textsuperscript{82} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 34
\textsuperscript{83} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 249
\textsuperscript{84} Pseudo-Majriti, \textit{Das Ziel des Weisen (Picatrix)}, 207; See also Saif, “The Arabic theory of astral influences in early modern medicine”, 618-626.
\textsuperscript{85} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 249.
\textsuperscript{86} For more on the “divine names’ and Ficino’s hymns see: Klitenic Wear, “Ficino’s Hymns and the Renaissance Platonic Academy”, 146.
\textsuperscript{87} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 249.
\textsuperscript{88} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 249.
\textsuperscript{89} Ficino, \textit{Three Books on Life}, 253.
Ficino regarded the Sun, Mercury and Jupiter as the three planets to partially influence everyone by default. In Juxtaposition to Saturn, which is not described as bestowing a common quality upon humans in general and rather influences a specific group of individuals. These individuals are described as “divine or brutish, blessed or bowed down with the extreme of misery.”

This statement holds Aristotelian influences, as one can recognize the blessing/curse dichotomy. Saturnine materials mentioned by Ficino are all materials that are somewhat earthy, dusky and leaden, as well as the stones smoky jasper, lodestone, and chalcedony. Saturn is also said to have a connection to gold, because Saturn and gold are both considered to be rather heavy. Gold is also described as similar to the sun, and additionally, the Sun is in all metals in the same way that the Sun is in all planets and stars. Saturn is regarded as the “greater malefic” and harmful by nature, and although one with a melancholic nature must be careful with all things Saturnine, the force of Saturn remains to be described as useful in the same way as doctors of Ficino’s time used to use poisons in their cures. In connection, Ficino gives the examples of opium and mandrake – plants which can be both poisonous and beneficial depending on the amount taken.

Besides limiting the use of plants, materials and other things to avoid melancholy, the melancholic is also encouraged to pay attention to the mind, as Ficino explains that the quality of one’s “spirit” can easily bring one under Saturn’s influence. For a mind submerged in solitude, constancy, theology, exoteric philosophy, superstition, magic, agriculture and sorrow finds itself under the influence of Saturn. To counter this, a mind should focus on Jupiterian things, such as civic and honourable occupations, commonly known as philosophy, civil religion and laws. Another important aspect of Ficino’s philosophy is the theory of the “spirit of the world” (spiritus mundi) – also called “the heavens” and “quintessence” – which is regarded as the energetic force through which everything in the world is created. This idea of the World Spirit, generally attributed to the Neoplatonic tradition, arguably has its basis in the Picatrix, which elaborates on the cosmic spirit and its intermediary function and role in astral causation. As such, based on the principle of macrocosm and microcosm, all living things contain a like spirit. In his Three Books on Life, Ficino lays down steps to make one’s spirit more like this mentioned “quintessence.” Sun is given major importance here, as he states that “all the celestial goods […] are all contained in the Sun.”

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90 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 251, Ficino states this as in agreement with “the Arab astrologers”, for more on this statement see: Compagni, “Picatrix latinus. Concezioni filosofico-religiose e prassi magica”, 237-337.
91 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 251.
93 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 253.
95 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 253.
96 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 253.
97 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 253.
98 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 257; See also Hirai, “The New Astral Medicine”, 268.
100 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 257.
101 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 259.
medicinal purging, illuminating the spirit by “luminous” things, rarefying and strengthening the spirit through care, and making the spirit celestial to the highest degree by exposing it to the rays of the Sun. Ficino elaborated on ways to make the soul more solar in Chapter IV of the third book. For instance, to clear the spirit one is advised to collect and use Solar things in periods when the Sun is strongest – in Leo or Aries and when Sun aspects Moon – and exercise, rest and be out in the sun, all the while taking caution not to dry oneself out by the Sun’s heat. Things to avoid are “sad, gross and dusky things,” which are, as discussed, described by Ficino as Saturnine. Additionally, astrologers believed that the Jovial and Solar “favors” or gifts are transmitted through the two “messengers,” Mercury and Moon. For optimal transmutation through the Moon, the best place for her is to be in the air signs (especially Aquarius, but also Libra and Gemini), her own house (Cancer), her exaltation (Taurus), or the house of Jupiter or Sun (Sagittarius and Leo). The best possible aspects for Moon transmutation were believed to be a trine (120°) or a sextile (60°) to Jupiter. Accordingly, the periods of time when such heavenly aspects were happening were considered the best times for the use of Jovial things. In case the use of Jovial things was not possible, mixing together Solar and Venereal things are given as a suitable alternative.

Moreover, Ficino believed that the spirits of celestial bodies could be drawn into talismans, which could be worn to receive their gifts. According to Frances Yates, Ficino’s supposed rationale behind the workings of talismans is that certain “images would become form of the Ideas, or a way of approaching the Ideas at a stage intermediary between their purely intellectual forms in the divine mens and the dimmer reflection in the world of sense, or body of the world.” Thus, in the “semi-divine role” of the “priestly Magus,” one could maintain the cycle by which the highest divine world unites with the world soul and the lower world. Similar to what Al-Kindi stated, the Magus acts as an intermediary and an embodiment of that which unites all things, in order to become a vessel through which the higher spirits can be drawn down and instilled into talismans to have a

102 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 259.
103 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 261. Although he does not mention Saturn in this precise paragraph, the terms sad and dusky are associated with Saturn in other parts of the book; See for instance p. 253, where dusky is used to describe saturnine colours.
104 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 265.
105 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 263.
106 Venereal means things that have a Venus Nature or that can be placed under Venus; Ficino, Three Books on Life, 265.
medicinal effect. Ficino and Agrippa often recommended engraving images of astral deities, such as Jupiter’s magic square. This mathematical square also appeared in Albrecht Dürer’s famous engraving, called Melancholia I, which is seen as an illustration of the artistic notion of Ficino’s melancholy genius.

The planets were not the only sources believed to harbour gifts and powers; the fixed stars were also believed to harbour the energies of different planets. For instance, the star Algol is said to possess a nature that is Saturnine and Jovial, the constellation Pleiades is regarded as Lunar and Martial, and Aldebaran is seen as Martial and Venereal. Just as the planets, things such as materials, herbs etc., could be placed under the fixed stars, and thus, with such knowledge one could choose and use those particular things in agreement with the energetic profiles of the planets from which one is seeking help. According to Ficino, a favourable star for melancholy people is “the Heart of the Lion” (twenty-first degree of Leo), since the things placed under it, garnet, swallowwort, and mastic, are said to repress melancholy.

Nearly a century after Ficino, the English scholar Robert Burton also dedicated an entire work to melancholy, namely The Anatomy of Melancholy. Robert Burton, who named himself Democritus Junior after the ancient Greek Democritus, describes himself as a “Divine” by profession and physician by inclination. He believed he was suffering greatly from melancholy himself and described the person suffering from it as experiencing mental anguish, depravation, fear and sorrow, without fever or a specific cause. As such, Burton’s definition of melancholy partly separated itself from the Hippocratic notion of melancholy, which includes fever as a symptom. By Burton, melancholy is primarily viewed as a mental illness, a psychological condition, affecting firstly the brain and secondly the heart, and caused by either the bodily spirits alone, or by both the bodily spirits and the humours. When it comes to astrology, Burton often avoided the making of hard statements concerning its validity. Yet, he seems to give it credit on many occasions. A printed volume with works of Cyprian Leowitz and John Dee was found, which Burton used as a notebook. Inside and throughout this volume there are about forty something pages with notes and tables full of astronomical and astrological data written by Burton. Furthermore, Figure 3 shows the front cover of his The Anatomy of Melancholy and immediately we can see astrological imagery throughout the

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110 Al-Kindi, De Radiis Stellicis, 48–49.
111 Klibansky et al., Saturn and Melancholy, 326.
113 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 277.
114 Mugwort and diamond are placed under Algol; crystal, the herb diacedon, and fennel seeds are placed under the Pleiades; and ruby, spurge and woodruff under Albedaran, see Ficino, Three Books on Life, 277.
115 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 279.
engravings. The symbol of the Moon is given together with excessive jealousy (zelotypia); Saturn with Democritus Abderites; hypochondria (hypocondriacus) with Saturn and the hard aspects (conjunction,
quartile and opposition); superstition (superstitiosus) with Jupiter, Sun and Mercury; and mania (maniacus) together with Mars and/or Moon conjunct Saturn and Mercury in opposition.\footnote{Klibansky et al., Saturn and Melancholy, illustration 112.}
On the controversy around astrology during his time he states: “I will not take upon me to decide the controversy myself.” Instead, Burton expressed opinions of other writers on the question whether astrology can be consulted in search for a cure. In his discussion, opposing voices are stated as claiming “there is no use of it, an ill-advised art followed by those ignorant ones who are on the look-out for fame.” Nevertheless, various later scholars have seen through his dismissive attitude towards astrology and instead described him as “an exact mathematician” and “curious calculator of nativities.” In support of this, Burton stated Paracelsus in his book to exemplify a physician in support of astrology and describes him as one who depends upon it to find a man’s malady, cure, time of cure, and time of gathering and administering herbs. He also often quoted Neoplatonist astrologer Giovanni Pontano, whose *De rebus coelestibus* (1494) contained the effects of planetary conjunctions in detail. Overall, he did give credit to both the astrological approach, as well as, the natural or material approach to melancholy, ascribed to the Galenists and ancient philosophers. On top of that, Burton’s quiet fascination with the study of cosmography, is demonstrated by the fact that he acknowledged his horoscope as burdened by the two “bad planets,” and states: “Saturn was the Lord of my geniture, culminating [...], and Mars principal significator of manners, in partile conjunction with mine Ascendant.” He also blames Saturn and Mars as being major causes for disease in general and substantiates this with the example of an astrologer under the name of Leovitius, exemplifying that this
man “free from the hostile aspects of Saturn and Mars […] could not remember that ever he was sick.”

As for melancholy, primary causes are stated as coming from “the heavens, planets, stars.” Thus, it is plausible to suggest that Burton had a partial astrological view on melancholy, as the topic of astrology occurs regularly throughout his work and even includes a horoscope in his own handwriting. Some even believed he predicted his death through his own natal horoscope. On the topic of the power of the heavens, he states: “they lead, not drive: and so gently incline, that a wise man may resist them; the wise man will rule his stars: they rule us, but God rules them.” Burton saw the heavens as God’s instrument “or a great book, whose letters are the stars” and which one could learn to read. Burton differentiates between generous and bad types of melancholy, where the generous kind is believed as caused by, for instance, a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the sign of Libra, and the bad kind by a Saturn Moon conjunction in Scorpio. In further elaboration of the astrological causes of melancholy, Burton quotes Jovianus Pontanus (1426-1503):

Mercury in any geniture, if he shall be in Virgo, or Pisces his opposite sign, & that in the horoscope, irradiated by those quartile aspects of Saturn or Mars, the child shall be mad with melancholy. Again, He that shall have Saturn or Mars culminating, the other in the 4th house, when he shall be born, shall be melancholy, of which he shall be cured in time, if Mercury behold them. If the Moon be in conjunction or opposition at the birth time with the Sun, Saturn or Mars, or in a quartile aspect with them (from a bad quarter of heaven, Leovitius adds), many diseases are signified, especially the head and brain is like to be mis-affected with pernicious humours, to be melancholy, lunatic, or mad.

One new cause of melancholy is given here, that of the Moon in hard aspect – conjunction (0°), quartile (90°) and opposition (180°) – to the Sun in the natal horoscope. Yet again, Saturn and Mars in hard aspect with either Mercury or the Moon are stated as a major cause of melancholy.

When it comes to Burton’s cures for melancholy, his approach is not expressly rooted in astrology yet there is noticeable consistency with physicians, such as Ficino, who did have an astrological approach. Burton lists exercise and recreational activities as a cure for melancholy, activities which are termed as Jovial by Ficino. Moreover, the perpetual motion of the heavens and planets are given as the reason why humans should also “ever be in action”; a statement very much in agreement with the principle of microcosm/macrocosp. Music and wine are also opted as cures,

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describing it as a “tonick to the saddened soul” to expel grief, fears and heaviness, and to revive sad hearts, and the vital and animal spirits.140 With regards to plants and herbs, Burton deems hot and moist plants and herbs, such as bugloss, to be good against melancholy.141 Ficino takes a similar approach, also advising things with hot and moist qualities and ascribing them to Jupiter, blood and the element air in his de vita.142 Ficino lists herbs such as cinnamon, saffron, sandal and roses, most of which are also mentioned by Burton.143 Furthermore, mugwort is mentioned both by Ficino – who places it under Saturn and Jupiter – and Burton as a suitable herb against melancholy. Additionally, whereas Burton makes mention of violets because it is good for the spleen – the organ believed as the seat of melancholy144 – Ficino recommends violets as it refers to the lesser fortunate Venus, Moon and Mercury.145 In Burton’s discussion of precious stones, metals and minerals, garnet (granatus) is believed to resist sorrow and be good for the heart; a stone Ficino classifies as Jovial, Martial and related to Leo.146 Jacinth and topaz are also stones mentioned by Burton, which Ficino believed as being endowed with the properties of the Three Graces.147 Same accounts for coral and chalcedony, mentioned by both scholars and of which Ficino groups the first two under Jupiter and Venus and the last under only Jupiter.148 On the other hand, Burton’s passage on gold involves a discussions of critiques and praises on the precious metal and therefore diverts from Ficino’s predominantly positive outlook on it. Where Ficino favours gold as it relates to the Sun – and thus good against Saturn’s melancholy – Burton discusses the critiques of Erastus, who advised against the ingestion of gold and says it to be poison.149 This gold as poison association calls to mind Ficino’s statement “doctors sometimes use poisons” and his discussion on gold and Saturn, stating that gold is solar and within Saturn, just as the Sun is in all planets.150

Conclusion

As this paper demonstrates, the concept of melancholy has gotten many shades and faces over the course of Western history. We have seen how it was first described by the ancient Greek Hippocratic philosophers in ancient medical theory as black bile, one of the four bodily humours. Where the Hippocratic philosopher associated melancholy with merely physical disease, Aristotle gave

140 Burton, et al. The Anatomy of Melancholy, 478
141 Burton, et al. The Anatomy of Melancholy, 565
142 Burton, et al. The Anatomy of Melancholy, 297
144 Geller, “Melothesia”, 78; Rubin, “Melancholy”.
147 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 301; Burton, et al., The Anatomy of Melancholy, 567.
150 Ficino, Three Books on Life, 253.
melancholy a psychological shade and linked it to the mythological hero and genius. Melancholy became the unfortunate fate of the great genius, a fate both a blessing and a curse.

We have also seen how the faint references to the heavenly causes of the ancient Greeks matured in the works of Early Modern Arabic philosophers, who developed the naturalistic and rational explanations for astrological influences that were often missing from the ancient works. These works can be somewhat seen as the missing links between ancient medical knowledge and the flourishing of astral magic and astral medicine during the Renaissance. The Arabic works also aided in the further psychologization of melancholic illness, which was now seen as a mental condition frequently suffered from by scholars. Genius and madness were often seen as two sides of the same melancholic coin and in soothing its burden, renaissance scholars looked at stars for diagnoses and cures.

Both Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy and Ficino’s De vita, contain self-diagnoses of melancholy based on their natal horoscopes. While De vita is a major work with both natural and astrological approaches against the burdening effects of a melancholic disposition, Burton’s work is less focused on astral magic and more on natural remedies. However, the conducted research suggests that Burton was nevertheless, and perhaps greatly so, aware of celestial causes. And although, his remedies did not directly refer to the heavens, many of his given cures seem to correspond with the Jovial cures of Ficino. Both these scholars show a different type of physician; while Ficino heavily based his medical rationale on astral magic, Burton did not make much explicit reference to the stars. His writing on astrology is rather ambiguous and one could argue that he purposely used ambiguous wording to avoid controversy. Despite that, Burton was aware of the celestial influences and he and Ficino had two important things in common. Robert Burton and Marsilio Ficino both blamed their melancholic suffering on the celestial imprints that were made upon them at birth and south cures with the heavens in mind. The research demonstrates Ficino’s explicit astrological approach to healing melancholy and many of the Jovial cures given by Ficino overlap with Burton’s cures. All in all, even though he did not directly base the healing properties of melancholy curing things on astral influences, it seems as though Burton’s approach includes a more indirect reference to astrology. One that was at least fiercely fueled by his own saturnine horoscope.

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Appendix

*Figure 6* The Horoscope of Robert Burton, found in Cajori, F., “Burton's horoscope and the date of his birth”, *Popular Astronomy*, vol. 36, 1928, 9.

*Figure 7* Image retrieved from: Markus Asper, Philip van der Eijk, Markham J. Geller, Heinrich von Staden and Liba Taub (eds.), *Melothesia in Babylonia*, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014.