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**Marcello Palingenio Stellato's *Zodiacus Vitae* as a work of Renaissance humanism:  
a historical and literary monograph**

The doctoral dissertation is devoted to the one of influential Latin-language works of the Italian Renaissance - the didactic and philosophical poem *Zodiacus vitae* (1536). Until now, research on *Zodiacus* undertaken by European scholars focused on two aspects: the poem's philosophical context and inspirations, and filling in the blanks in the biography of its author – Palingenius; Polish comparative literary studies chiefly examined the poem's influence on Mikołaj Rej's *Wizerunk własny żywota człowieka poczciwego* (1558). Although signalled by some scholars, the literary contexts of the poem (which take center stage in the thesis) have largely been left on the margins. This dissertation aims to close this research gap, evident in Polish as well as international studies, and examine the poem through a literary lens.

Several points warrant this type of examination and provide its *raison d'être* in a broader perspective - the immense and lasting popularity of *Zodiacus* that spanned several centuries can be credited not only to the richness of its philosophical inspirations and moral teaching but also to the key concepts of Renaissance thought and culture that it discusses, and its plethora of meaningful themes, metaphors and images, which became a crucial factor in the poem's reception and which found their way to the works of eminent 16th- and 17th-c. poets and men of letters across Europe, including Poland. Despite clear influence of *Zodiacus* on the writings of the most prominent Old Polish poets, there have been no Polish-language monographic studies that would examine the poem's literary aspects, consolidate and update current state of research, and provide broader contexts for its analysis – this is the main purpose of the dissertation.

Chapter one, "Palingenius and His Work," is a brief introduction into the complex issues of the biography of *Zodiacus'* author, and the editions of the poem - from its 1536 *editio princeps* published in Venice to contemporary ones.

Chapter two, "Poeta Lutheranus?", discusses the poem's popularity among readers of various Protestant denominations and whether *Zodiacus* subscribes to the Reformed thought; in examining selected passages of the poem that appear to be affirmative of the Protestant arguments against the catholic church, it is shown that the common denominator for this decidedly non-Lutheran work and several of Martin Luther's postulates were anticlerical writings of early Renaissance humanists.

Chapter three, "The Title," presents a discussion of the significance of the name of the poem and proposes a rhetorical interpretation: the author's counter-hypothesis is that Palingenius understood a 'zodiac' as a tool used to organize all-encompassing encyclopaedic knowledge.

In chapter four, the influence of Renaissance humanism on Palingenius' work, especially the concepts of education, moral philosophy and universal knowledge, is discussed.

Chapter five, "*Zodiacus Vitae* As a Didactic Poem", focuses on the literary genre of Palingenius' work. Based on the defining features of *genus didascalicum* as laid out in literary theory, the analysis shows to what extent the poem remains faithful to that definition and where it diverges from it, discussing its references to didactic literary tradition and attempting to justify some of its inconsistencies. In this chapter *Zodiacus vitae* is also presented in overview of the modern didactic poetry.

In chapter six, "Palingenius' Poetic Manifesto," the discussion proceeds to the artistic manifesto of the author and how it makes his poem an expression of a conscious and courageous disregard for the humanist *decorum*.

Chapter seven, "Topics," presents the subject matter of Palingenius' work. Special emphasis is made on the gnostic themes, their possible sources and their many recurrent variants in the poem; the occurrences of those in students' 'commonplace' books and the hypothesis of *Zodiacus* being a vector of those themes are also given due attention.

The next two chapters are devoted to Books III and IX, two of the most 'epic' parts of the poem, and they focus on establishing the literary and philosophical sources of Palingenius' imagery. Book III, discussed in chapter eight, "The Garden of Pleasure", tells the story of the poem's speaker meeting Epicurus and proceeding with him to the Garden of Pleasure (*Voluptas*), whereas Book IX, examined in chapter nine, "The Afterlife and the Platonic Universe of *Zodiacus*," focuses on the poem's complex vision of the universe. In these powerful images, the diverse philosophical ideas that gave life and framework to *Zodiacus* shine through.

The final two chapters present the readership and reception of Palingenius' poem in Old Polish literature and culture. Chapter ten, "Readership and Reception of *Zodiacus Vitae* in Poland and Silesia in 16th and 17th Centuries," outlines a new map of popularity of the poem, citing its presence in personal book inventories, public book collections and school and monastery libraries. An analysis of copious amounts of marginal notes in the extant copies of the poem sheds some light on the aspects of the poem that were of most interest to its readers. The final chapter continues that discussion and examines the evidence of *Zodiacus* being read and studied in the Protestant schools in Poland and Silesia in 16th and 17th centuries.

The study undertaken in the thesis points to possible new directions of *Zodiacus*' influence and expands the knowledge of its reception in Early Modern Poland, which warrants a stipulation that *Zodiacus*' marginal position should be reexamined to acknowledge its inspirational impact on Old Polish literature and culture.