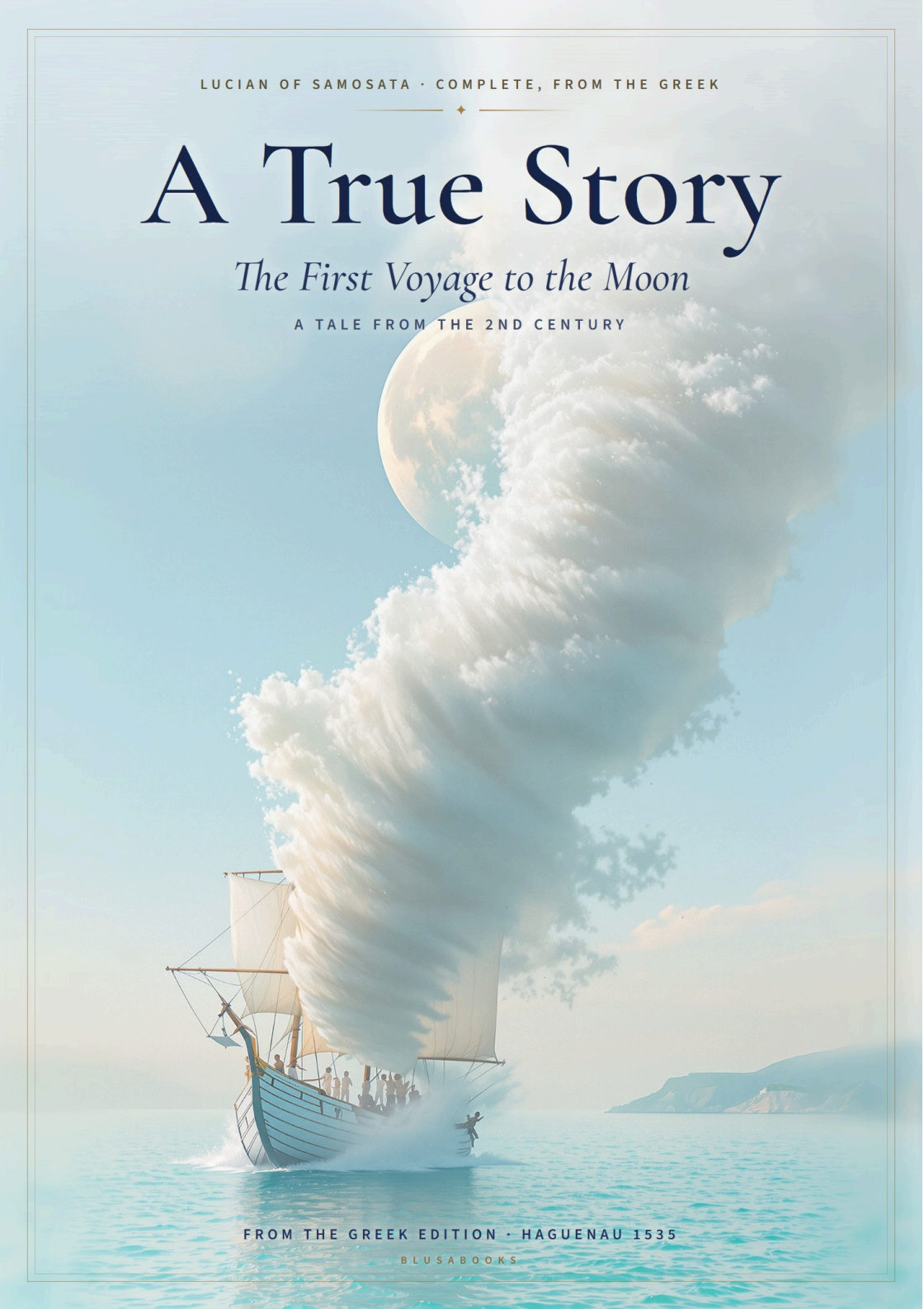
LUCIAN OF SAMOSATA · COMPLETE, FROM THE GREEK

A True Story

The First Voyage to the Moon

A TALE FROM THE 2ND CENTURY



FROM THE GREEK EDITION · HAGUENAU 1535

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A True Story

The First Voyage to the Moon (2nd Century)

Lucian of Samosata's tale of a flight to the Moon, a war between the Moon and the Sun, a giant whale and the Island of the Blessed. Complete in modern English from the Greek edition of 1535

BlusaBooks · MMXXVI

Modern English text, notes and commentary © 2026 SIA "Blusa Entertainment".

Source: Lucian of Samosata, *A True Story*, Books One and Two, in the collection «Λουκιανοῦ Σαμοσατέως μέρος πρῶτον / Luciani Samosatensis pars prima», Haguenau, 1535. Rendered into modern English from the Greek, from images of the pages of this edition; three pages (612, 634 and 638) missing from the scan were translated from the standard Greek text. Title page and the first pages of both books from the same edition.

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FOREWORD

A story that begins with a confession. This travel narrative, some 1,850 years old, opens with a sentence few travellers would dare to write: "In one thing at least I shall tell the truth: I say that I am lying." Then, with a perfectly straight face, the narrator tells how a whirlwind beyond Heracles' Pillars lifted his ship into the air and carried it for seven days to the Moon; how he found himself in a war between Endymion, king of the Moon, and Phaethon, king of the Sun, over the colonisation of the Morning Star; how the people of the Moon live without women, eat smoke and take out their eyes; how a giant whale swallowed him, ship and all, and whole nations lived inside its belly; how he was a guest on the Island of the Blessed with Homer, Odysseus, Helen and Pythagoras, saw the liars punished on the island of the wicked and visited the Island of Dreams. This is Lucian's "A True Story": one of the first works of science fiction in the world, and perhaps the funniest.

Who was Lucian. Lucian was born around 125 AD at Samosata on the Euphrates, in the Roman province of Syria, and died some time after 180. Greek was most probably not his mother tongue, yet he mastered it so well that he became one of the finest Greek stylists of his age. As a young man he travelled as a public speaker through Ionia, Greece, Italy and Gaul; later he lived in Athens, and late in life he held a post in the Roman administration of Egypt. About eighty works have come down to us under his name: the "Dialogues of the Gods", the "Dialogues of the Dead", "How to Write History" and many more. In almost all of them he laughs: at the gods, at philosophers, at superstition, at false prophets and at human vanity. Lucian is one of the great satirists of the ancient world.

What "A True Story" parodies. In his preface Lucian names his targets himself: Ctesias, who wrote about the wonders of India that he had never seen;

Iambulus with his happy islands in the southern sea; and all those who "wrote up their wanderings" with monstrous beasts and strange peoples. As the founder of all this buffoonery he names Homer's Odysseus, who told the king of the Phaeacians about the bag of winds, the Cyclopes and the magical transformations. Every page hides an allusion: to Homer, to Herodotus, who describes the customs of foreign peoples so seriously, to Aristophanes' comedy "The Birds" with its Cloudcuckooland, to the historians' lists of armies with their precise numbers. Lucian does not mock imagination; he mocks lies that pretend to be the truth. That is why his own lies are honest: he admits them on the very first page.

The first voyage to the Moon? Lucian wrote one more work about a flight to the Moon, the "Icaromenippus", in which the philosopher Menippus flies up to the Moon and on to Zeus on the wings of an eagle and a vulture. But it is in "A True Story" that we find everything that would later belong to science fiction: a voyage between heavenly bodies, alien forms of life, a war between worlds, colonies in space, and a traveller who comes home and calmly tells the unbelievable. That is why it is often called one of the first works of science fiction, even though Lucian himself wrote it as a joke against everyone who lies in travel books.

What it meant to later centuries. In the Renaissance Lucian became hugely popular; his dialogues were translated by Erasmus of Rotterdam and Thomas More. Johannes Kepler tells in his "Dream" that he learned Greek by reading these very two books of "A True Story", and that they were among the reasons for his own journey to the Moon (see our No. 85). Lucian's traces can be seen in Cyrano de Bergerac's "The World in the Moon" (No. 88), in Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" and in Voltaire's "Micromegas" (No. 92), where giants too travel between the planets and talk with a straight face about things that cannot be.

A book from 1535. Lucian's works were first printed in Greek at Florence in 1496 and were published again and again in the sixteenth century. The source of our translation is a small volume titled in Greek and Latin "Lucian of Samosata, Part One", printed at Haguenau in Alsace in 1535. Its title page bears the printer's

device, a head with two faces looking in opposite directions. "A True Story" fills pages 586 to 652 of the volume. The text is in Greek, set in sixteenth-century type in which many words are abbreviated and joined in ligatures, with no chapters and hardly any paragraphs. Blank spaces were left for decorated initials, with a small guide letter in the margin: they were meant to be filled in by hand.

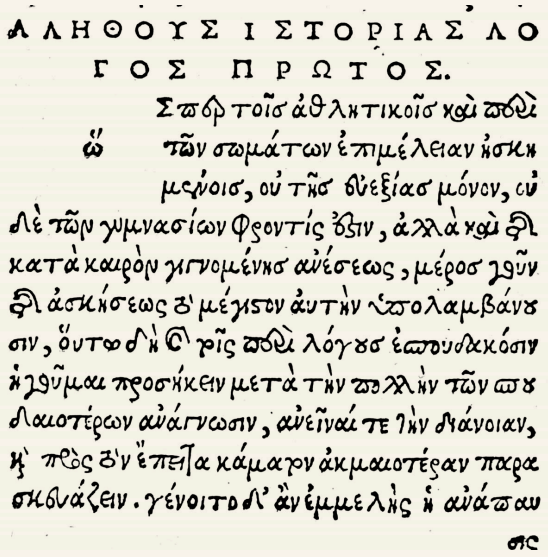
Our series "Other Worlds". "A True Story" is the oldest book in our series. It is followed by Kepler's "The Dream" (1634; No. 85), John Wilkins's "The Discovery of a World in the Moon" (1638; No. 86), Francis Godwin's "The Man in the Moone" (1638; No. 87), Cyrano de Bergerac's "The World in the Moon" (No. 88), Fontenelle's "Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds" (No. 90), Christiaan Huygens's "Cosmotheoros" (No. 91), Voltaire's "Micromegas" (No. 92) and Swedenborg's "Earths in the Universe" (No. 93). All of them ask the same question that Lucian asked more than fourteen hundred years before them: who lives up there?

Our edition. This is a complete translation, sentence by sentence, of both books of "A True Story" from the Greek text printed in Lucian's collected works at Haguenau in 1535. Nothing has been left out or retold. Lucian's coarseness, his gods, his erotic jokes and the horrors of his wars are kept as they are in the original; a calm explanation, where one is needed, is given in the notes at the foot of the page. Three pages (612, 634 and 638) that are missing from the scan of the 1535 edition have been translated from the standard Greek text. At the front of the book is the title page of the 1535 edition, at the beginning of each book its first page from the same edition, and in the text there are modern colour illustrations. At the end comes a commentary: "In plain words", "What Lucian parodies" and "What science says".



The original title page: "Lucian of Samosata, Part One" in Greek and Latin, with the printer's device of a two-faced head; printed at Haguenau in 1535

BOOK ONE


ΑΛΗΘΟΥΣ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ ΛΟ
ΓΟΣ ΠΡΩΤΟΣ.
Σωφρ τοῖσ ἀθλητικοῖσ καὶ πρὸὲ
ὥ τῶν σωμάτων ἐπιμέλειαν ἀσκη
μενοισ, οὐ τῆσ ὐεξίασ μόνον, εὐ
λὲ τῶν γυμνασίων ϕροντίς ὄσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ϕι
κατὰ καιρὸν γιγνομένησ αὐέσεως, μέροσ ζῆν
ϕι ἀσκήσεως σ' μέγιστον αὐτὴν ὑπολαμβάνε
σιν, ὅυτω σ' ἡ ῾ρῖς πρὸὲ λόγουσ ἐσπουδακόσιν
ἡ ζῆν μαι προσήκειν μετὰ τὴν πρὸλλὴν τῶν πρὸ
λαιοτέρων αὐάγνωσιν, αὐεῖναί τε τὴν διάνοιαν,
ἡ πρὸσ ὅ'ν ἔπει῀α κάμαγον ἀκμαιοτέραν παρα
σκευάζειν. γένοιτο λ' ἂν ἐμμελὴσ ἡ αὐάπαυ
σισ

"The True Story, Book One" in the edition of 1535 (page 586); the blank before the first word was left for a decorated initial

Athletes, and all who devote themselves to the care of the body, think not only about keeping fit and about their exercises; they also think about rest taken at the right moment — in fact they count it the most important part of training. In just the same way, I believe, those who take literature seriously ought, after long reading of the weightier authors, to let the mind relax and make it fresher for the labours still ahead. And that rest would suit them best if they kept company with the kind of reading that offers not merely plain entertainment drawn from wit and charm, but also displays some food for thought not unworthy of the Muses — which is what, I suppose, they will think of the present work. For they will find it attractive not only for the novelty of its subject, nor only for the charm of its

plan, nor because I have told all sorts of lies plausibly and with a straight face, but also because every single thing I relate is a not-so-innocent jibe at certain of the old poets, historians and philosophers, who have written a great many marvels and fables. I would even name them, if they were not going to be obvious to you from the reading itself.

Ctesias, son of Ctesiochus, of Cnidus,* wrote about the land of the Indians and the things to be found there — things he had neither seen himself nor heard from anyone else telling the truth. Iambulus† also wrote a great deal of astonishing stuff about what lies in the great sea. Everyone can see it is a fiction of his own making, and yet the subject he composed is not without its charm. Many others, choosing the same course, have written up what they call their own wanderings and travels abroad, describing the size of wild beasts, the savagery of men and the strangeness of their ways of life.

The founder and teacher of all this sort of buffoonery is Homer's Odysseus, who told Alcinous and his court‡ about winds kept in slavery in a leather bag, about one-eyed men, eaters of raw flesh and savages of every kind, and besides about many-headed creatures and his companions changed into beasts by drugs — any number of such marvels, which he spun for the Phaeacians as for simple, credulous folk.

Well, when I had read all these writers, I did not much blame the men for lying, since I saw that it was already the custom even among those who promise to teach philosophy. What did surprise me about them was that they thought they could write untruths and nobody would notice. So I myself, out of vanity, was eager to leave something to posterity, so as not to be the only one with no share in the freedom of storytelling. And since I had nothing true to relate — for nothing

* A Greek physician at the Persian court around 400 BC. His book on India was famous for dog-headed men, one-footed men and other wonders.
† A Hellenistic author who described a voyage to the "Islands of the Sun" somewhere in the southern ocean, a happy land of strange people; his story survives in a retelling by Diodorus.
‡ In Books 9–12 of the "Odyssey", Odysseus tells his adventures at the court of Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians: the bag of winds, the Cyclops, the man-eating Laestrygonians, Scylla, and Circe's magic.