FRANKFURT 1634 · COMPLETE, WITH KEPLER'S NOTES

The Dream

or, Lunar Astronomy

KEPLER'S JOURNEY TO THE MOON



JOHANNES KEPLER · 1634

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The Dream, or Lunar Astronomy

Kepler's Journey to the Moon (1634)

Johannes Kepler's tale of a journey to the Moon and its inhabitants, with all 223 of the author's notes and the Selenographical Appendix. Complete in modern English from the Frankfurt edition of 1634

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

Source: Johannes Kepler, *Somnium, seu Opus posthumum de astronomia lunari*, published by his son Ludwig Kepler (printed partly at Sagan in Silesia and completed at Frankfurt, 1634). Rendered into modern English from images of the pages of this edition; title page, Kepler's diagrams and the ornament from the same edition. Plutarch's dialogue On the Face in the Moon, printed in the same volume, is not included in this book.

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FOREWORD

A dream about the Moon. One night in Prague in 1608, the Emperor's mathematician Johannes Kepler spent a long time watching the stars and the Moon, fell asleep, and in his dream read a book brought from the Frankfurt book fair. It tells of an Icelandic boy, Duracotus, whose mother Fiolxhilde, a herb-woman from the foot of Mount Hekla, knows how to summon a daemon from Levania, the name the Moon's inhabitants give to their world. The daemon explains how, during an eclipse of the Moon, a man can be carried to Levania along the Earth's shadow, what the traveller suffers on the way, and how the sky, the days and nights, our Earth and the living creatures that dwell there look from the Moon. It is a fairy tale, but beneath it lies serious astronomy: Kepler shows that to anyone standing on his own globe, his world seems motionless and the heavens seem to turn. If it seems so to the people of the Moon, then our own feeling that the Earth stands still is no proof either.

Who Kepler was. Johannes Kepler was born in 1571 in Württemberg and died in 1630 in Regensburg. He studied at Tübingen, where his teacher Michael Maestlin introduced him to the teaching of Copernicus that the Earth goes round the Sun. In 1600 Kepler became assistant to the Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe in Prague, and after Tycho's death in 1601, Imperial Mathematician to Emperor Rudolf II. From Tycho's precise observations he worked out the first two laws of planetary motion (1609): the planets move in ellipses, and their speed changes. He published the third law in 1619. He also wrote on optics and the telescope, compiled the Rudolphine Tables (1627), the most accurate planetary tables of his time, and was one of the first to support Galileo's telescopic discoveries in public.

How the Dream came about. The idea was old: as early as 1593, the Tübingen student Kepler prepared a disputation on how the heavens look from

the Moon. He wrote the story itself around 1609, before Galileo turned his telescope on the Moon. The manuscript long remained unpublished, but copies passed from hand to hand. Between 1620 and 1630 Kepler gradually added 223 notes to the story. In them he reveals the secrets of the dream, calculates, explains, jokes and remembers; they are longer than the dream itself and are among the most personal pages Kepler ever wrote. The book also contains the Selenographical Appendix, Kepler's letter to the Jesuit Paul Guldin about the round hollows on the Moon that can be seen through a telescope.

His mother's trial. One of the bitterest notes tells what happened to Kepler's family. His mother Katharina was accused of witchcraft in 1615 and imprisoned in 1620, and Kepler himself travelled to Württemberg to defend her. In 1621 she was acquitted, but she died the following year. Kepler was convinced that copies of his Dream had fed the rumours: in it a herb-woman summons daemons. His answer was to publish the book all the same, with notes that explain every hint.

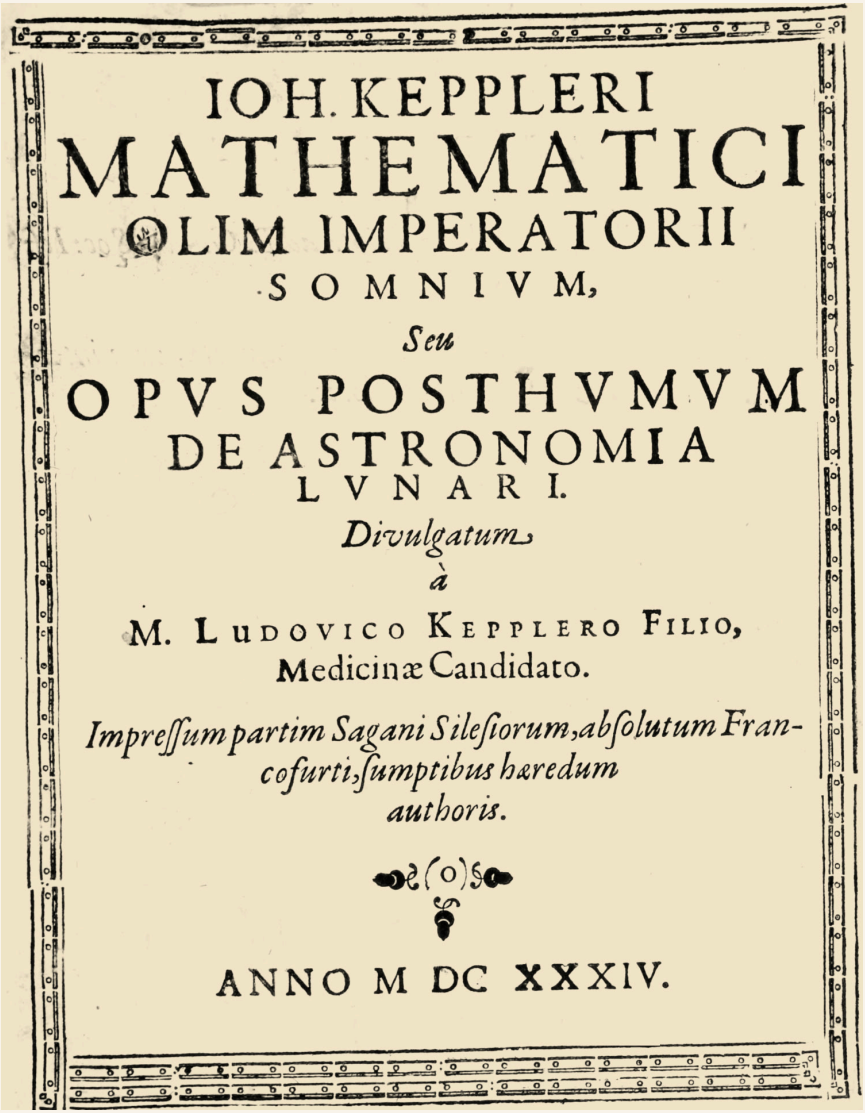
A book published after his death. In 1630 Kepler began to print the Dream at Sagan in Silesia, but in November of that year he died. The work was continued by his son-in-law, the physician and astronomer Jakob Bartsch, but he too died, in 1633. The book was completed by Kepler's son Ludwig, a student of medicine, and published at Frankfurt in 1634 with a dedication to Landgrave Philipp of Hesse. The bitter words of that dedication about a "dream that brought death" open the book. It appeared in the middle of the Thirty Years' War, and the family was almost without means.

One of the first works of science fiction. The Dream is often called one of the first works of science fiction. Kepler does not only dream; he calculates. The journey must begin during an eclipse, because it lasts only a few hours; the shock of the start is as violent as a cannon shot; in space there is unbearable cold and it is hard to breathe; halfway, where the pull of the Earth and the Moon balance, the body moves onward by itself. He calculates the lunar day and night correctly: together, about one of our months. And he tries to imagine what creatures must be like that live in a world with two weeks of scorching heat and two weeks of

frost: huge, short-lived and serpent-like, hiding in caves and roaming in herds as they follow the waters.

Our series Other Worlds. Kepler's Dream stands at the beginning of the series. After it come John Wilkins's The Discovery of a World in the Moon (1638; our No. 86), Francis Godwin's The Man in the Moone (1638; No. 87), Cyrano de Bergerac's The World in the Moon (1657; No. 88), Fontenelle's Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds (1686; No. 90) and Christiaan Huygens's Cosmotheoros (1698; No. 91). All of them ask the question Kepler asked first: what does a world that is not ours look like?

Our edition. This is a complete rendering, sentence by sentence, in modern English from the Frankfurt edition of 1634: Ludwig Kepler's dedication, the Dream, all of Kepler's notes, and the Selenographical Appendix with its own notes. Nothing has been left out or retold. Plutarch's dialogue On the Face in the Moon, printed in the same volume, is not included in this book. The words of the period, the spells, daemons and witches are left as they are in the original and quietly explained in footnotes at the bottom of the page. In the text of the Dream, Kepler's note numbers stand exactly where they stand in the original; in the e-book you can click any number to go to the note, and click the note's number to return to the story. In the same way the letters in the Appendix lead to their notes. The book opens with the title page of the 1634 edition; the notes contain Kepler's diagrams, and the Dream has modern colour illustrations. At the end there is a commentary: In plain words and What science says.



IOH. KEPPLERI
MATHEMATICI
OLIM IMPERATORII
SOMNIVM,
Seu
OPVS POSTHVMVM
DE ASTRONOMIA
LVNARI.
Divulgatum
à
M. LUDOVICO KEPPLERO FILIO,
Medicinæ Candidato.

Impreſſum partim Sagani Sileſiorum, abſolutum Francofurti, ſumptibus hæredum authoris.

ANNO M DC XXXIV.

The original title page: "The Dream of Johannes Kepler, formerly Imperial Mathematician, or a Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy. Published by his son Ludwig Kepler", printed partly at Sagan in Silesia and completed at Frankfurt, 1634

DEDICATION

To the Most Illustrious and Most Exalted Prince and Lord, Lord **Philipp**, Landgrave of Hesse*, Count of Katzenelnbogen, Diez, Ziegenhain and Nidda, etc., his Most Gracious Lord and Prince, etc.

Most Illustrious and Most Exalted Prince, Most Gracious Lord! When my father, Johannes Kepler, Imperial Mathematician, had grown thoroughly weary of the motion of the mass of the Earth, he began to dream of astronomy and of the motion of the body of the Moon — but what an omen this dream brought with it, who can say! For us, his children, it has proved most mournful indeed, although for him the fulfilment of the omen was pleasant enough, even greatly longed for. For while this Dream, once written, was going through the press, my father (alas!) was seized by a heavier sleep, a deadly one, and his spirit flew up beyond the region of the Moon into the ether (as we hope), leaving us, his children, exposed to the injuries of Mars and the miseries of this world, almost without any earthly support. The care of this printing had been taken over by that most famous and learned man, Dr. Jakob Bartsch †, Doctor of Medicine and Professor-designate of Mathematics at the Academy of Strasbourg, my brother-in-law; but before the work was finished he too was struck by a fatal illness and died.

Meanwhile I, having returned to Germany from a journey I had undertaken with a certain Austrian baron, and having had no news of my family's condition for two years, wrote to them from Frankfurt to Lusatia, asking them to let me know how they were and whether they were alive at all. And behold — my

* Philipp of Hesse-Butzbach (1581–1643), a lover of mathematics and astronomy with his own observatory; he corresponded with Kepler and supported him.
† Jakob Bartsch (c. 1600–1633), physician and astronomer, Kepler's son-in-law; after Kepler's death in 1630 he carried on the printing of the Dream, but died himself in 1633.

stepmother, a widow with four orphans and without money, came to me. And this at a most turbulent time, and to a place most unsuitable because of the high cost of food, bringing with her the unfinished copies of this Dream and begging for help from me, who myself need the aid and support of others. She also asks me to complete the copies of this Dream. But what good can I hope for from this Dream, when it proved fatal to my father and to my brother-in-law? And yet, since it befits a son not to hide so famous and honourable a name as his father's, but rather, if he cannot increase its fame by his own talent, at least to preserve it as best he can, I too could not refuse this request — indeed, I gladly took it upon myself.

But this work still lacks a patron. Among the soldiers scarcely one will be found, for they now care little about the astronomy of the lunar globe, and are rather forced to look about them so as not to be struck or wounded by the balls of muskets and cannon. Therefore I could find no one more worthy than you, Most Illustrious Prince, under whose patronage this little work might stand: for you are yourself most practised in the study of mathematics, wholly averse to the fury of war, and under your most gracious patronage you cherished our father while he was still alive. Therefore the orphans, firmly trusting that you will not deny your patronage either to them or to this little work, through me humbly commend themselves and this Dream to Your Most Illustrious Highness, praying with the most ardent prayers to God, Best and Greatest, that He may graciously deign to preserve Your Most Illustrious Highness, together with your Most Illustrious Consort, long in strength of body and soul, and to turn away from your lands every hostile attack and all the troubles of war.

And so, Most Exalted Prince, farewell for many, many years, for God and for your country. Given at Frankfurt am Main, on the 18th of September, in the year 1634.

Your Most Illustrious Highness's most devoted

M. Ludwig Kepler, Candidate of Medicine

THE DREAM, OR LUNAR ASTRONOMY

In the year 1608, when the quarrels between the brothers, the Emperor Rudolf and the Archduke Matthias, were raging*, and people commonly compared their actions with examples drawn from Bohemian history, I too, roused by the general curiosity of the public, turned my mind to reading about Bohemia. And when I had come upon the story of the heroine Libuše†, famous for her magic art, it happened one night that, after watching the stars and the Moon, I lay down in bed and fell into an unusually deep sleep. And in my sleep I seemed to be reading through a book brought from the fair, and this was its content.



An observer at the window looks at the Moon: so begins Kepler's Dream (illustration)

* Emperor Rudolf II and his brother Matthias fought for power in 1608, and Rudolf had to cede Hungary, Austria and Moravia to Matthias. Kepler was then living in Prague as Rudolf's court mathematician.
† Legendary Czech ruler and seeress who, according to tradition, founded Prague.

My[1] name is Duracotus, my homeland[2] is Iceland, which the ancients called Thule.[3] My mother was Fiolxhilde, whose[4] recent death has given me the freedom to write — something I have long burned to do.[5] While she lived, she took great care that I should not write. For she used to say that there are many pernicious haters of the arts,[6] who slander what they do not understand because of the dullness of their minds,[7] and who lay down laws harmful to the human race;[8] by these laws, she said, not a few have been condemned[9] and swallowed up in the chasms of Hekla*.[10] What my father's name was, she never told me;[11] she said that he was a fisherman and died an old man of a hundred and fifty, when I was in my third year, after he had lived some seventy years in his marriage.

In the first years of my boyhood my mother, leading me by the hand and sometimes lifting me onto her shoulders, often used to take me[12] up to the lower ridges of Mount Hekla,[13] especially around the feast of Saint John, when the Sun, visible for all 24 hours, leaves no room for the night.[14] She herself gathered certain herbs with many ceremonies and brewed them at home;[15] she made little bags of goatskin, and, carrying them inflated to the nearby harbour to sell to the ship captains, in this way she earned her living.

Once, out of curiosity, I cut open one of the bags that my mother was selling without knowing it, and spread out the herbs and[16] the linen cloths embroidered with the needle, which showed various characters; and so I cheated her of this small profit. My mother, burning with anger, gave me to a skipper as his own in place of the bag, so that she might keep the money. And on the next day he unexpectedly set sail from the harbour and, with a favourable wind,[17] headed as if for Bergen in Norway. After a few days,[18] when the north wind rose, he was driven between Norway and England; he made for Denmark and crossed the strait, since he had a letter from the Bishop of Iceland[19] to be delivered to Tycho Brahe the Dane, who lived on the island of Hven†. But I was violently ill from the tossing of the ship[20] and from the unaccustomed warmth of the air, being a boy

* A volcano in Iceland; in the Middle Ages it was believed to be an entrance to Hell or Purgatory.
† Hven, an island in the Øresund between Denmark and Sweden, where Tycho Brahe built his famous observatory Uraniborg in 1576–1597.