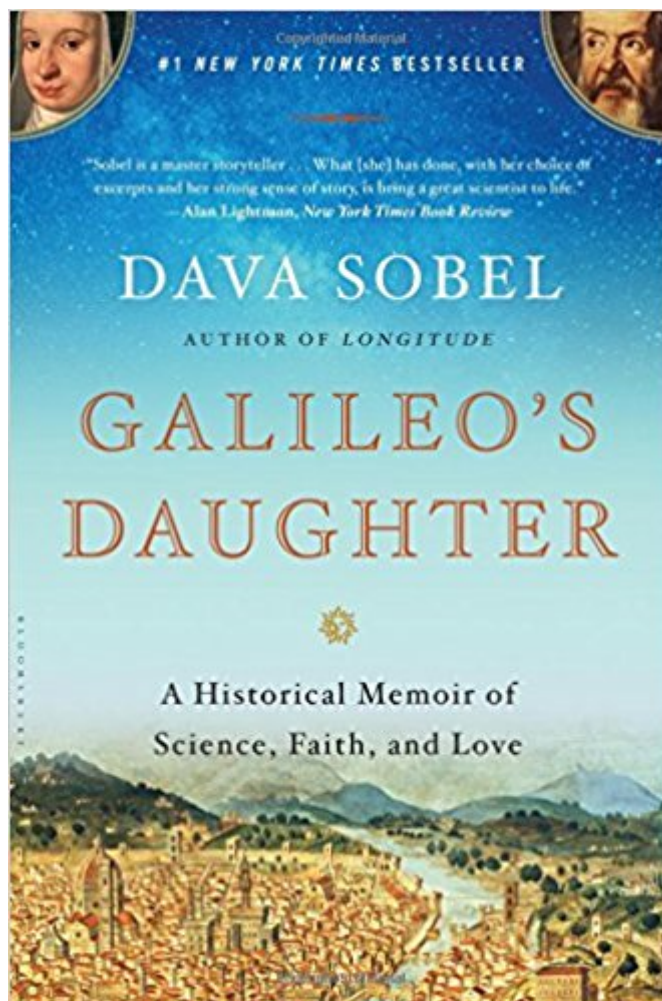


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# Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir Of Science, Faith, And Love



## Synopsis

Inspired by a long fascination with Galileo, and by the remarkable surviving letters of his daughter Maria Celeste, a cloistered nun, Dava Sobel has crafted a biography that dramatically recolors the personality and accomplishments of a mythic figure whose early-seventeenth-century clash with Catholic doctrine continues to define the schism between science and religion-the man Albert Einstein called "the father of modern physics-indeed of modern science altogether." It is also a stunning portrait of Galileo's daughter, a person hitherto lost to history, described by her father as "a woman of exquisite mind, singular goodness, and most tenderly attached to me." Moving between Galileo's grand public life and Maria Celeste's sequestered world, Sobel illuminates the Florence of the Medicis and the papal court in Rome during the pivotal era when humanity's perception of its place in the cosmos was about to be overturned. During that same time, while the bubonic plague wreaked its terrible devastation and the Thirty Years' War tipped fortunes across Europe, Galileo sought to reconcile the Heaven he revered as a good Catholic with the heavens he revealed through his telescope. Filled with human drama and scientific adventure, Galileo's Daughter is an unforgettable story. Praise for Galileo's Daughter : "[Sobel] shows herself a virtuoso at encapsulating the history and the politics of science. Her descriptions of Galileo's ideas...are pithy, vivid, and intelligible."-Wall Street Journal

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Everyone knows that Galileo Galilei dropped cannonballs off the leaning tower of Pisa, developed the first reliable telescope, and was convicted by the Inquisition for holding a heretical belief--that

the earth revolved around the sun. But did you know he had a daughter? In *Galileo's Daughter*, Dava Sobel (author of the bestselling *Longitude*) tells the story of the famous scientist and his illegitimate daughter, Sister Maria Celeste. Sobel bases her book on 124 surviving letters to the scientist from the nun, whom Galileo described as "a woman of exquisite mind, singular goodness, and tenderly attached to me." Their loving correspondence revealed much about their world: the agonies of the bubonic plague, the hardships of monastic life, even Galileo's occasional forgetfulness ("The little basket, which I sent you recently with several pastries, is not mine, and therefore I wish you to return it to me"). While Galileo tangled with the Church, Maria Celeste--whose adopted name was a tribute to her father's fascination with the heavens--provided moral and emotional support with her frequent letters, approving of his work because she knew the depth of his faith. As Sobel notes, "It is difficult today ... to see the Earth at the center of the Universe. Yet that is where Galileo found it." With her fluid prose and graceful turn of phrase, Sobel breathes life into Galileo, his daughter, and the earth-centered world in which they lived. --Sunny Delaney --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Despite its title, this impressive book proves to be less the story of Galileo's elder daughter, the oldest of his three illegitimate children, and more the story of Galileo himself and his trial before the Inquisition for arguing that Earth moves around the Sun. That familiar tale is given a new slant by Sobel's translationAfor the first time into EnglishAof the 124 surviving letters to Galileo by his daughter, Suor Maria Celeste, a Clarisse nun who died at age 33; his letters to her are lost, presumably destroyed by Maria Celeste's convent after her death. Her letters may not in themselves justify a book; they are devout, full of pious love for the father she addresses as "Sire," only rarely offering information or insight. But Sobel uses them as the accompaniment to, rather than the core of, her story, sounding the element of faith and piety so often missing in other retellings of Galileo's story. For Sobel shows that, in renouncing his discoveries, Galileo acted not just to save his skin but also out of a genuine need to align himself with his church. With impressive skill and economy, she portrays the social and psychological forces at work in Galileo's trial, particularly the political pressures of the Thirty Years' War, and the passage of the plague through Italy, which cut off travel between Florence, where Galileo lived, and Rome, the seat of the Pope and the Inquisition, delaying Galileo's appearance there and giving his enemies time to conspire. In a particularly memorable way, Sobel vivifies the hard life of the "Poor Clares," who lived in such abject poverty and seclusion that many were driven mad by their confinement. It's a wholly involving tale, a worthy follow-up (after four years) to Sobel's surprise bestseller, *Longitude*. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business

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Dava Sobel's extraordinarily readable biography of Galileo is as much a portrait of the mind of a genius as it is a tapestry of Renaissance Italy. What infuses this masterful book with life, however, are the quirky, intelligent letters written to him by his daughter. Cloistered in a convent from the time she was a young girl, Suor Maria Celeste's loving correspondence to her father reveals the human side of Galileo. But the scope of Sobel's book encompasses more than the sum of its parts - in the final analysis, we are treated to the inner workings of a surprisingly "modern" approach to science (not least of which was the concept of a sun centered planetary system) in the face of malevolent censorship by the Catholic church. When Galileo is condemned of heresy, Sobel's book illuminates the political machinations behind the church's case, so that we understand the motivations (some of them nasty and personal) that fueled the fire. More importantly, we feel for the all too frail Galileo, under house arrest in the twilight of his life, and cheer when the centuries finally celebrate the genius that he was. I won't spoil the ending for you, but it is a genuinely moving surprise. Brava Dava Sobel!

This book is a life of Galileo as told from his letters to and from his daughter, Maria Celeste. A reading of this book enables one to really appreciate Phil Glass' Opera: "Galileo, Galilei" which is currently being presented by the Cincinnati Opera Company. The book is so well done that it reads almost like a novel and at times brings one to tears when one considers the injustices both Galileo and Maria Celeste had to endure. I recommend this book highly....a great read.

It is amazing how great this man's mind was, and the obstacles he had to overcome to bring reason around his scientific discoveries. The author helps you understand how difficult it was to prove his theories, and how the church wielded complete authority over everything, including scientific theories versus religious belief. A better understanding of the political power of the church during this period is portrayed clearly.

I read this book when it came out and loved it. For some reason, though, I decided to read it again recently. I found the second read much more enjoyable than the first one. This book contains so much information on Galileo, his work, and daily life during the time. The way Sobel weaves in the daughter's letters is amazing. She brings in the church and convent life. Of course, the church plays a big role as Galileo ages. I love this book. It was well worth reading a second time. Sobel is a great

writer and has the ability to give us the love between father and daughter. This book is doubly wonderful if you've visited Florence, Tuscany, Venice or Rome. Those areas play a big role in the book. If you have an interest in science then the book is even richer. Love it!!

The literary work, *Galileo's Daughter*, is a historical account of correspondence between Galileo Galilei and one of his children, Suor Maria Celeste. While the book starts out reading like a history book, it quickly becomes an interesting look at a topic most everyone is familiar with - the study of the heavenly bodies. Suor Maria Celeste is one of Galileo's two daughters who joined a convent at a very young age. During her years at the Convent of San Matteo, she wrote extensively to her father of her life while eagerly awaiting the letters from Galileo. Galileo would write to her of his discoveries and trials. Galileo had the audacity and courage to challenge the prevailing thought of the age that the earth was the center of the universe. He agreed with Copernicus that in fact it was the sun that held that role. The church thought his study to be heretical and condemned his discoveries. However, when his friend, Cardinal Barberini became Pope Urban he was given more opportunity in pursuing his thoughts about the sun centered universe. He believed that these truths would only glorify the Word and deeds of God. I thought that one of the most interesting statements in the book was "Who better than Galileo to propound the most stunning reversal in perception ever to have jarred intelligent thought. We are not the center of the universe" (Sobel 153). I would strongly recommend this book to anyone who has any interest in learning a new and deeper analysis of Galileo's studies and I am looking forward to Dava Sobel's next literary work.

I've had so much enjoyment reading this very well written book, it's almost sad to be done with it. First, Dava Sobel truly does an immense amount of research into her story outline before she writes. There is well woven bit of information in all the characters speech. It all works to lend the correct time and place to the book. Galileo is seen working on his projects such as grinding the telescope glass because he has always been fascinated by the sun. His list of discoveries is very long. We see his daughters play a large role in how and why his decisions are made.

This wonderful read is best experienced in concert with, and after, Sobel's "A More Perfect Heaven." The latter chronicles the life of Nicolaus Copernicus, his life, theories, and the ordeal of publishing his work, accomplished only at his death. The last part of "Heaven" and all of "Galileo's Daughter," deal with the great scientific-religious conflict of the day in a most interesting way, when the telescope brings "focus" to Copernicus' work, which, had been largely ignored apart from the

scientific community until proof of his theories started to appear. Both books offer an intimate look at the life and times of two titans of intellect. They also offer a perspective of similar scientific-religious debates of today, such as the "new Earth" debate. If you buy one, buy both!

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