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Translations of Kepler's Astrological Writings

Part I, Section 1.4. Kepler and Michael Mästlin on their Sons' Nativities, 1598

Translated by Cornelia Linde and Dorian Greenbaum; annotated by Dorian Greenbaum

Michael Mästlin was Kepler's mathematics professor at Tübingen and subsequently became a lifelong friend and correspondent. Though some scholars have claimed that Mästlin was an opponent of astrology,¹ others find evidence that, in fact, he considered astrology to be valid at least for certain natural and political phenomena;² he also taught the rudiments of astrological principles to students at Tübingen.³ As this series of letters shows, Kepler and Mästlin also corresponded on astrological interpretations of their own family members, in this case their two sons.

Taken from Opera Omnia 1, pp. 297-99; Gesammelte Werke 13, letter no. 89, pp. 179-83; GW 13, letter no. 97, pp. 208-209; GW 13, letter no. 99, p. 228.

Kepler in Graz to Mästlin in Tübingen, 15 March 1598 (excerpt)

[OO 1, p. 297; GW 13, p. 183] I come to astrology. And since it would be all too drawn out (*prolixum*) to explain the reasons of my intention, which were absolutely necessary because of your men, I would like to

¹ See, e.g., R. A. Jarrell, 'Astrology at the University of Tübingen' in *Wissenschaftsgeschichte um Wilhem Schickard*, ed. Friedrich Seck (Tübingen, 1981), pp. 9-19, here p. 17 (cited in Methuen, p. 129 [see note 2 below]).

² See Charlotte Methuen, *Kepler's Tübingen: Stimulus to a Theological Mathematics* (Aldershot/Brookfield, VT/Singapore/Sydney, 1998), pp. 129, 132.

³ See Friederike Boockmann's essay earlier in this volume, p. 6.

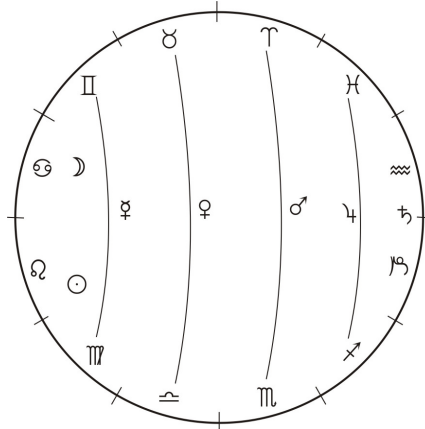
prove this opinion of yours wrong by means of an example, as if either I were presenting a whole, complete astrology, or as if no prediction could be made without houses, terms, faces and triplicities (about which I also expressed doubts in my book). I am talking about these triplicities which are measured by means of the signs, so that if Mars is in 29° 59′ Aries [a], he would be in his own triplicity; but if in 0° 1′ Taurus [s], he would be in the triplicity of the Moon and would have different powers.⁴ I am not talking about the triangulations (*de triangulationibus*) which occur when the three regions of the sky are designated, for each of their separate ages, through the conjunctions of the superior planets; nor about the terms in which they are fixed by the nature of the planets; nor about the houses⁵ where one is higher in the zodiac than another one or where the Sun, coming into (*existens*) that house, causes different weather through the course of the year.⁶

⁴ Kepler is slightly confused in his use of terminology here; or he is using the technical term ‘triplicity’ in a different way than normal astrological practice at the time. The triplicities are associated with the elements of the zodiac signs: fire and Aries, Leo, Sagittarius; earth and Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn; air and Gemini, Libra, Aquarius; and water and Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces. Each of the seven classical planets is assigned to a triplicity as its lord, based on the sect (night or day) of the chart and the planet. For example, the Sun is the triplicity lord of the fire signs in the day, but Jupiter at night. Though Mars is the domicile lord of Aries, it is not one of the fiery triplicity lords. So Mars in Aries would be in its own domicile, but not its own triplicity. The Moon, however, is a triplicity lord of earth signs at night.

⁵ I think this is a reference to the houses of the chart, not the domiciles of the planets.

⁶ ‘I am talking ... course of the year’ was written in the margin of the manuscript.

Figure 1. Diagram of the planetary dignities in signs
[GW 13, p. 183]



For why should the 5 planets distribute the terms (*finēs*) of the signs, with the exception of the Sun and Moon?⁷ Certainly *these* frills (*nugae*) are palpable: Saturn and the Sun are opposed by the quality of their heat, [and] thus their exaltations in Aries [♈] and Libra [♎] are opposed.⁸ Jupiter and Mars are in a certain way opposed in humour, and thus the former is exalted in Cancer [♋] and the latter in Capricorn [♑].⁹ Likewise Venus and Mercury are of differing nature, [and] therefore the former is exalted in Pisces [♓] and the latter in Virgo [♍];¹⁰ but the Moon is exalted in Taurus [♉], for she is opposed to Mars, whose house is in Scorpio[♏].¹¹

⁷ Kepler is referring to the divisions of a sign into 5 portions, each ruled by a planet, which are called ‘terms’ (usually *termini* in Latin). In the most popular systems the Sun and Moon are excluded as term rulers.

⁸ The heat of the Sun and the coldness of Saturn are opposed, as Aries and Libra are opposed in the zodiac (and using Stoic qualities for the elements, fire [hot] and air [cold] are also opposed).

⁹ Jupiter is a wet (and hot) planet, exalted in Cancer, a water sign; Mars, a dry (and hot) planet, is exalted in Capricorn, an earthy (and dry) sign.

¹⁰ Venus is a wet planet, and Mercury a dry one.

¹¹ The wet Moon is opposed to dry Mars; yet paradoxically, the Moon is exalted in Taurus, an earth sign (cold and dry), and Mars’ domicile is Scorpio, a water (cold and wet) sign. The analogy Kepler makes here is not as exact as the

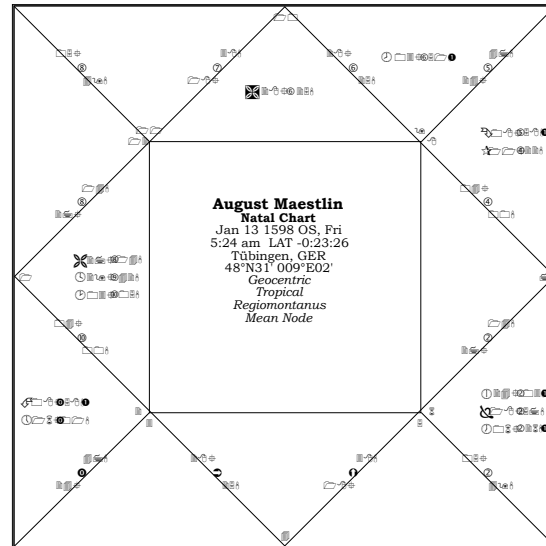
And who attributed to God, the Creator, this mis-matching division of 12 in 7? It certainly seems to be extremely old, for up to now, as is written in Aristotle, the Sun is believed to be below Venus and Mercury [r ♀].¹² For then the calculation of the order is certain. But also the lords of the trigons (*triangulum*), as you [GW 13, p. 184] know, have the same origin. These frills may be powerful (*valeant*), but real things (*realia*) may be powerful in another way, and this means they should be dutifully considered. For this whole reasoning is constructed to mirror the variety of events, in the same manner as if either there was no infinite variety in the mingling of aspects or that every variety whatsoever of the events is from the sky, which is what I correctly oppose together with the theologians.¹³ O best of teachers, am I not acting correctly if I commit myself to convince the learned and the philosophers that the activity of the sky is properly established? I act therefore as the Jesuits do: they improve many things, in order to make men Catholics. Rather, I do not act like that, for those who defend all frills are like the Jesuits; I, who I retain the core after having discarded the frills, am a Lutheran astrologer. But look, I did not want to say that much. Therefore I will get to my example.

preceding ones, for this would be an example of what is called 'mixed reception', between different dignities (in this case exaltation and domicile).

¹² In Plato, *Republic*, Book X, and in Aristotle (see *Metaphysics*, especially Book Λ), the sequence of the planets is Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Moon. The Ptolemaic model has this sequence: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon. For an explanation of Aristotle's system, see N. R. Hanson, *Constellations and Conjectures*, ed. W. C. Humphreys, Jr. (Dordrecht, Holland/Boston, 1973), pp. 63-88, esp. p. 68, Figure 24, which gives a diagram illustrating the Aristotelian order of the planets.

¹³ Kepler is urging that the effects of the stars be based solely on physical causes ('real') like the aspects which he espouses; furthermore, not everything is caused by the stars.

Figure 2. August Mästlin's birthchart, created with a modern calculation program (Solar Fire Gold) from the date and time in the letter¹⁴



A son, August, was born to you on 13 January (Old Style) at 5:24 a.m. A son, Heinrich, was born to me [OO 1, p. 298] between 23 and 24 January (Old Style), a bit after midnight. But about your son. His Midheaven is 28° Libra [z], Ascendant 27° Sagittarius [c]; Mars [♂] is just before the seventh house, perhaps even in the 7th, as if [the birth] had happened a bit earlier. The planetary configuration of the chart is extremely powerful. They say that a comet has been seen now for three weeks. If that is so, for I have not seen it, I do not doubt that from those three planets, Jupiter [y] and Mars [♂] stationing near each other, Jupiter trining Saturn [Fy ʰ] for a long while and Mars in platic square to Saturn [□ʰ,♂].¹⁵ I am of the opinion that even if a comet itself is bigger than the earth and also extremely high, even though it is running [through the sky], it is an offspring of the earth. Why? For always, whenever there are comets, a strong configuration of Saturn and Jupiter

¹⁴ No birthchart for August has been found in the Kepler manuscripts.

¹⁵ Jupiter went into trine, and Mars into square, with Saturn by sign in November of 1597. Mars separated from its square with Saturn in January of 1598, when it retrograded into Gemini. ('Platic' means an aspect which is not exact.)

[♃, y] has occurred shortly before or, equally strong, that when Mars is stationary, it then has the same powers, as it is superior and, indeed, is slow. But the configuration, as you know, and the aspect, are on Earth, not elsewhere in the sky.

Figure 3. Michael Mästlin's birthchart in Kepler's Hand
 [Pulkovo XVIII, 223r]



Figure 4. Mästlin's Nativity transcribed from Kepler's drawing

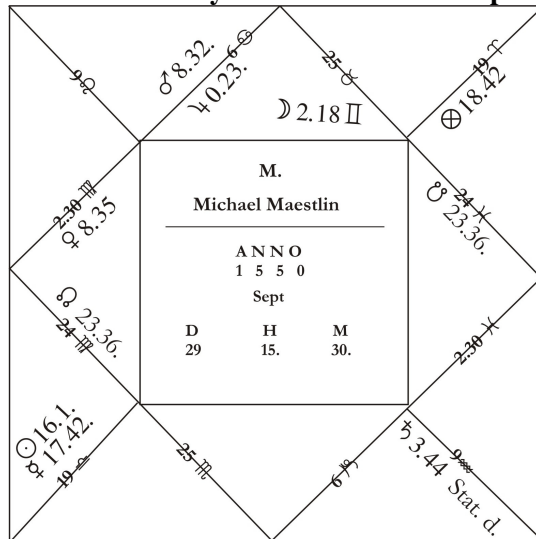
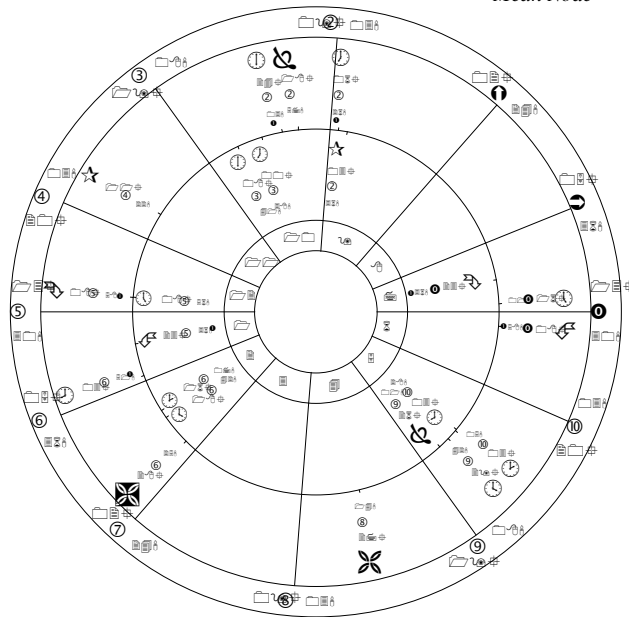


Figure 5. Bi-wheel comparing Michael and August Mästlin's charts¹⁶

<p>Inner Wheel Michael Mästlin Natal Chart Sep 30 1550 OS 3:30 a.m. LAT -0:51:21 Göppingen, Germany 48°N42', 009°E40' <i>Geocentric, Tropical</i> <i>Regiomontanus</i> <i>Mean Node</i></p>	<p>Outer Wheel August Mästlin Natal Chart Jan 13 1598 OS 5:24 a.m. LAT -0:23:26 Tübingen, Germany 48°N31', 009°E02' <i>Geocentric, Tropical</i> <i>Regiomontanus</i> <i>Mean Node</i></p>
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But have a look at the relationship between the charts (*themata*). You have a conjunction of Sun and Mercury [$\odot \propto$] and he has that as well. You both have a posterior Mercury [\propto].¹⁷ You have a trine of

¹⁶ Modern calculation (with Solar Fire Gold) for Michael Mästlin's chart using the time recorded by Kepler, which results in slightly different positions than those Kepler calculated. The planetary relationships Kepler describes below, however, do not change. Note: because Kepler calculates his charts from noon (in this case, 15:30 hours from noon on 29 September), the actual birthdate is 30 September.

¹⁷ Mercury (at 29° Capricorn) is behind the Sun (at 3° Aquarius) in longitude; but it is oriental (it will rise ahead of the Sun). Michael Mästlin's Mercury (18°

Saturn and the Moon [F[♄] ♃], and he has an approximate sextile of Saturn and the Moon [G[♄] ♃]. You have an approximate trine of Saturn and the Sun [F[♄] ☉], and he has that as well. Where you have Saturn [♄], he has the Sun and Mercury [☉, ☿], where you have the Moon [♃], he has Jupiter [♃], where you have Venus [♀] he has the South Node [L]. Your Venuses [♀] are opposed. You have Jupiter and Mars [♃, ♂] near each other; he has that as well. Where you have Jupiter [♃], he has Mars [♂], approximately. Then I recall that most of your family have something bad in the seventh house. This is the case here as well: Mars is very close to the seventh. There is a certain amount to be deduced from that which causes me to fear for his life. For the full Moon, the Milky Way ascending and Mars opposite to it, and the Sun so precisely in trine to Saturn seem to signify that they will be hurtful to the brain and the eyes, that he will be epileptic. They also cause him to be liable to falling or hunch-backed. But the trine of the Sun mitigates all this. He will be thrifty and steadfast due to Mercury [☿] and the Sun [☉] in trine with Saturn [F[♄]], of outstanding, profound and industrious nature because of the same aspect. The best craftsman, due to Mars [♂] in Gemini [♊] and the closeness (*confinium*) of the solstice [degree] in the 7th. He will be quarrelsome and domineering because of that. Such people are often experts on fire arms. But for the same reason I doubt whether he will be victorious. However, if he lives, he truly will come out great. For he has a [grand] trine of Saturn, Jupiter, Sun and Mercury [♄ ♃ ☉ ☿], which are extremely strong aspects. Therefore see what December will bring when, after the moisture (*humectatio*) from Jupiter [♃] transiting the 7th, hot Sun [☉] and Mars [♂] follow. If there are fogs, as I believe, the little child will hardly be free from epilepsy; for these are [GW 13, p. 185] analogous.¹⁸ Certainly the position of Jupiter is not good, not because of Gemini inasmuch as it is in its fall¹⁹ (for bright fixed stars are with it, on account of which it is powerful);²⁰ but for the reason that he [Jupiter] has

Libra) is actually further along in zodiacal longitude than the Sun (15° Libra), but it is occidental (it will rise after the Sun).

¹⁸ That is, fogs and epilepsy. I am not aware of other instances where this analogy is made.

¹⁹ Jupiter in Gemini is in its detriment, not fall; but the point Kepler is making is the same regardless.

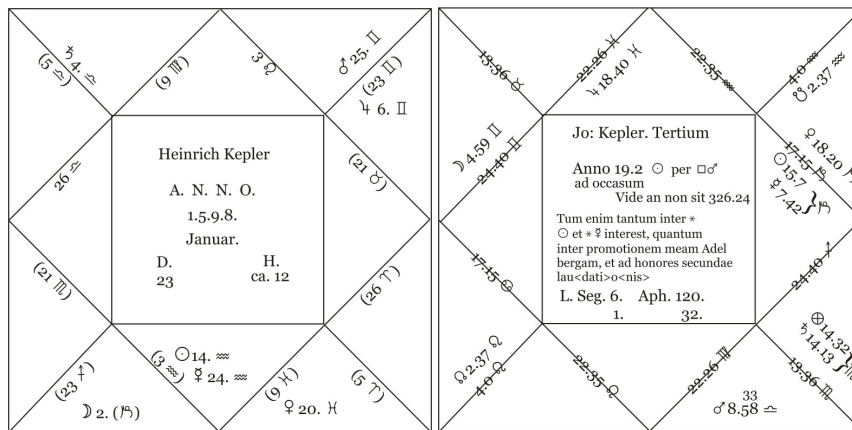
²⁰ Kepler is referring to the bright fixed stars in Gemini.

declined from the angle and is oppressed by Saturn [♄] from a superior (*altum*) trine in short ascension, which is equal in power to the square.²¹ These and things of this kind are also explained through a good and natural reason, even if something is not explained in outward appearance.

Commentary on the charts and the synastry that Kepler describes:
 What we have here is an extremely typical delineation of two birthcharts, which would not be out of place (and indeed, would be perfectly understood) in a conversation between modern astrologers. As we saw in the Kepler's comparison of his family's charts (**Part I.1.3** in this volume), it is standard practice to look for similar aspects in the charts of family members, as Kepler does here, and to look for both the relationship between the same planets – e.g., the Venuses of Mästlin and his son are opposed – and how the planets of one chart fall in the other – e.g., Mästlin has the Moon in Gemini, where Mästlin's son has Jupiter. Kepler even remembers a family tradition: malefics in the 7th house!

²¹ Saturn trines from the ninth house, above Jupiter in the sixth; because Gemini is a sign of short ascension, even though the aspect is a trine, it is a square 'in mundo'.

Figure 6. (l.) Heinrich Kepler's birthchart in the style of Kepler, positions from *Mira cognatio* [Pulkovo XXI, 429r-v] (positions in parentheses not in original text); (r.) Kepler's birthchart, drawn from the diagram in his own hand [Pulkovo XXI, 457v]



Another example, that of my little son. His nativity and mine both have a trine between Jupiter and Saturn, with Jupiter in later (*posterior*) degrees. Where I have the Ascendant, he has Mars; where I have the Moon, he has Jupiter; where I have Mars, he has Saturn [♄]; where I have the Midheaven, he has Mercury [☿]. I have an almost partile Mars-Mercury square [♄♁]; he has an almost partile Mars-Mercury trine [♄♁]. More can be investigated in this way. And so the Moon in square to Saturn, after an opposition with Mars [♁♄];²² Venus between a square with Mars [♁♄] and an opposition with Saturn [♁♄];²³ and Mercury in trine with Mars [♄♁] signify an insensitive (*durus*) person, because the planets which denote emotions are all in aspect to malefics. I fear for his eyes because of the Moon [♁], and am afraid of dangerous falls because of the three stationary planets. And since Venus and the Moon [♁] are oppressed, he is therefore born monstrous. For the penis, signified by Venus [♀] and the Moon [♁], is uncovered after Jewish custom, twisted

²² The Moon's next aspect is the square to Saturn; it opposed Mars when it was in Sagittarius.

²³ Venus at 28° Pisces has separated from her square with Mars at 23° Gemini, and when she gets to 3° Aries she will oppose Saturn.

back, and below the penis, next to the scrotum, he has another way for urine than other men have. The whole arrangement has the form of a cooked turtle in its shell, which is a favourite of my wife. But more troubles will arise for him from these positions (*locum*). Venus [r] in square with Mars [♁♂] means that he is impetuous and uncontrolled, Mercury [☿] in trine with Mars [F♂] means that he is extremely agile, fast and gifted. For Mercury [☿] is in the bright constellation Aquarius [♒] and in the fourth house (*domus*). It makes him careless, popular and easy-going. [OO 1, p. 299] Both make him very irascible. Moon [☾] in square with Saturn [♄♄] marks him as industrious, envious and greedy – and because of this aspect, of despicable manners. Except, because this square is of short ascension, it is of equal power to the sextile.²⁴ And an extremely bad solar revolution is awaiting him as well in the year 1601, which will either take me or him away (meaning in the natural sense).²⁵ From this you see that I do not reject anything from astrology, except for the useless instruments of the number-houses, and that arrogant presumption about specific prediction, such as if we say someone will be hung, to whom the sky could not equally mark dangers of water under the general complexion: or if we err in predicting death to somebody who at the time has barely escaped from a dangerous disease.²⁶ You see that this²⁷ will lead not to the contempt, but to the honour of our rank.

Concerning the dedication (of *Prodromus*),²⁸ I do not know how it has happened that, although I enjoy the best wishes of distinguished nobles, in the end I could not offer the book to this assembly. Many accuse me of carelessness. But I indeed had prepared whatever was necessary, and I

²⁴ The Moon in Capricorn is in a sign of short ascension.

²⁵ Heinrich Kepler's Solar Return for 1601 shows Leo rising, with its lord, the Sun, in the 6th house (illness) conjunct the Moon and Mars; and all three of these planets in square to Saturn in Scorpio on the cusp of the I.C., traditionally the 'end of the matter' and death. The 4th is also the house of the father, which perhaps is why Kepler said it could be 'me or him'. However, it is all moot, because Heinrich died in April of 1598.

²⁶ Kepler may have had this idea about universals vs. particulars from Röslin, who makes a similar comment in his delineation of Kepler's chart. See the delineation in Part I.1.1 of this volume, pp. 37-38.

²⁷ Kepler's new methods.

²⁸ *Mysterium Cosmographicum*.

had entrusted the whole matter to the marshal Honorius of Saurau, who moreover offered me his service by presenting the work without an entreating book. It was neglected. I was dismissed from him with these words: although it is delayed, it is not prevented for good. Of course, the transit was not lucky (if we consider the natural things), and perhaps I have to wait until the coming May or June, when Jupiter [y] transits [GW 13, p. 186] over the Ascendant. In the meantime, though, my creditors press upon me! Additionally, my private misfortune is joined to the public one, because the highest and best God took out of this life the dearest to me of all my patrons, the Doctor of Divinity Wilhelm Zimmermann, whose temperateness, integrity and aptness our church will desire for a very long time. He died early on the first of March (Old Style) after he had been in bed for nine weeks because he was spitting blood. And when during these days strong winds were blowing, and after noon of that day violently turbulent, his enemies said that the soul of a heretic was being carried through the air. He indeed died most blissfully and peacefully.

Commentary on Kepler's delineation of his son's chart, and his worries about the publication of Mysterium Cosmographicum:

Kepler is remarkably objective in the delineation of Heinrich's chart, though it must have upset him to talk about the boy's malefic aspects and what that might mean, to say nothing of the deformity of his genitals. It is clear from Kepler's mention of (transiting) Jupiter passing over his Ascendant and alleviating his troubles with publication, that he closely followed his own transits.

Michael Mästlin in Tübingen to Kepler in Graz, 2 May 1598, Old Style (Excerpt)²⁹

[GW 13, p. 208] [Pulkovo XV, 223r] I have received your most agreeable letter, most learned man, lord and very dear friend; for me, as well, the occasion of answering is very pleasant. But where should I begin? Perhaps from what has afflicted my heart with enormous sorrow beyond measure, and afflicts me even now?

A son was born to me, and also to you. Ah, would that yours turns out happier, and presents himself otherwise [for] you and your kiss. I hoped for my little son's long [GW 13, p. 209] life; I had faith that he would be

²⁹ Paragraph indentations inserted to improve readability.

the support of my old age ahead of my other children. I expected very much from him: others heartily congratulated me. I did not know what thanks to render to God, though I carefully solicited Him with the most ardent vows. Yet that joy of mine did not last. For he did not attain five weeks of age, since on Wednesday [die ☿], which was the 15th of February, he began to suffer from epilepsy, at the 8th hour of the night. Then on the following day, Thursday [die ♃], his whole little body was weakened with continual paroxysms, so that at 10 o'clock at night he breathed his last. Ah, where is my hope? my joy? those congratulations? They all ended in sorrow, tears and insurmountable sadness.

A son was born to me, not a daughter: and also at that time which I had greatly longed for. He received his name, Augustus, from Prince Augustus. I hoped for a future Augustus. Yet by death, indeed by dreadful epilepsy, those things which seemed the most happy omens, dissolved into nothing, etc. But where do I end up in paying too much attention to my feelings and emotions (regarding which, if I let myself go, I can barely, just barely, recover)?

It is Augustus who, in the glorious, august choir of Angels, has attained in a brief journey that which we chiefly hope for. But I, albeit I was not deceived by this omen, nevertheless, I interpreted this particular omen in a completely different way for myself. So may he live there, may he enjoy those things in reality which as yet we [only] hope for, because it so pleased God: meanwhile, however, my great longing for him has now left me. Notwithstanding that, as I consider (along with the subordinate causes) that he scarcely had a long future life, I thank God that I did not rejoice in that hope for long. The Lord gave, the Lord took away, may God's name be blessed³⁰ (ah, how painfully these things burst forth from my troubled heart). Yet may thy will be done, Lord. I cannot write more.

Kepler in Graz to Mästlin in Tübingen, 11 June 1598 (Excerpt)

[*OO* 1, p. 299; *GW* 13, p. 228] I send my utmost condolences on the death of your little son. I can well imagine how great your pain was because of my own, as the highest and best God likewise called my little son Heinrich away from life at that very time which, as I wrote to you, I had feared. For on the 1st of April his illness began, and on the 3rd of the same month, at noon, he was dead, sixty days less a half after his birth.

³⁰ Job 1:21.

From the paleness of the corpse they deduced that he had died because of an abscess in the head. No day alleviates my wife's longing for him. These words are in my heart: Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity.³¹ May God grant that your favourable invocations in other matters are valid.

³¹ Ecclesiastes 1:2.