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Research paper



# Identification of Luciferin on Europa through Data Science Analysis of Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) Data from the Galileo Orbiter

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#### Abstract

In this study, we investigated the potential presence of extraterrestrial life on Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, by exploring the existence of Luciferin, a bioluminescent molecule. This hypothesis is based on Europa's subsurface oceans and the geothermal conditions created by gravitational forces from Jupiter, similar to Earth's hydrothermal vents. We reanalyzed raw data from the Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) on the Galileo spacecraft, utilizing advanced machine learning and data processing techniques to enhance data quality. This involved cleaning, preprocessing, and normalizing the multidimensional data to reduce noise and correct errors, ensuring more accurate analysis. Our primary focus was on detecting spectral signals that might indicate Luciferin, particularly in the spectral bands around 560-570 nm, which are associated with Luciferin's strong emission. The results were encouraging, as several points of interest showed spectral intensity consistent with the presence of this molecule. Although these findings are preliminary and require further validation, they offer promising evidence of bioluminescence on Europa. If confirmed, this discovery would significantly impact the fields of astrobiology and space exploration, providing crucial insights into the search for extraterrestrial life.

Keywords: Astrobiology, Bioluminescence, Europa, Extraterrestrials, Luciferin.

# 1. Introduction

Based on the confirmed presence of oceans beneath the icy surface of Europa, one of Jupiter's moons, and the gravitational stretching this moon experiences due to its proximity to its parent planet, we propose an intriguing hypothesis. We posit that these factors may have generated geothermal conditions conducive to the existence of life, similar to hydrothermal zones found in the deep oceans of Earth. Europa's distance from the Sun and the potentially dark subglacial environment could favor the development of bioluminescent organisms, akin to certain marine habitats on Earth. These organisms could, for instance, be equivalent to certain algae or fish on Earth that produce Luciferin, a molecule enabling bioluminescence.

To explore this hypothesis, we conducted a reanalyzed examination of data collected by the Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) on the Galileo spacecraft during its flybys of Europa. We employed advanced machine learning and data processing techniques to minimize noise and enhance the accuracy of raw data. Our focus was specifically on identifying signals that could be indicative of the presence of Luciferin, searching for any evidence of these molecules in relevant spectral bands. This research represents an effort to reevaluate old data with new perspectives and tools, in the hope of discovering promising hints of the possibility of life on other worlds.

# 2. Method

This section outlines the methodological approach taken to explore the potential for bioluminescence on Europa, one of Jupiter's moons. Raw data was sourced from the Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) aboard the Galileo orbiter, and an innovative processing approach was applied. Pre-processing involved the removal of NaNs, outliers, and correction of anomalies, crucial for ensuring reliable data. Spectral analysis focused on identifying signals of the Luciferin molecule, known for its strong emission in the 560-570 nm range. Preliminary results indicate points of interest consistent with the presence of Luciferin, paving the way for discussions on bioluminescence and potentially extraterrestrial life on Europa.



## 3. Data Acquisition

The data utilized for this investigation were obtained through the Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) of the Galileo spacecraft during several of its flybys of Europa, one of Jupiter's largest moons. The data were initially processed in CUBE format and later transformed for better understanding and accessibility into PDS4 files. This transformation process was meticulously carried out by the team at the Applied Physics Laboratory and is publicly available on the USGS Astrogeology Science Center website.

This study relied on a variety of references to assist in the analysis and processing of the data, including, but not limited to: Cahill et al. (2017), Becker and Geissler (2005), Williams et al. (2011), Becker et al. (2001), and U.S. Geological Survey (2002). The combination of these sources enabled a multifaceted analysis of the collected data, allowing for a more robust and comprehensive interpretation.

The processed files, made available in CUBE format, include data in both ".cub" and an associated ".xml" file, both working in tandem to provide essential information. The ".xml" files detail important metadata, including identification details, time coordinates, observation system, and target identification, while the ".cub" files contain the spectroscopic measurements that form the core of our analysis.

For each file, various processing steps were undertaken, including the application of a Fast Fourier Transform to highlight spectral features. The information contained in the ".cub" and ".xml" files was used in conjunction to identify potential signals of Luciferin presence on Europa.

The approach employed for data acquisition and processing allows for a deeper examination of the conditions on Europa and the potential for the existence of bioluminescent-based life.

This array of sources provides a solid foundation for our investigation, combining direct observations with computational analyses to extract new insights from the data collected by the Galileo spacecraft. With advancements in data processing techniques and the availability of raw data, we are more equipped than ever to explore these fascinating questions about the possibility of life on other worlds in our solar system.

#### 4. Methodological and Scientific Approach to the Processing and Analysis of Spatial Data

The field of astrobiology has been propelled by advancements in the acquisition and interpretation of multidimensional data collected by space probes, such as Galileo. The range of information these probes can acquire is vast and often complex, requiring a solid understanding of the scientific and technological principles involved in their analysis. Specifically, the Near-Infrared Mapping Spectrometer (NIMS) of the Galileo spacecraft generates multidimensional raw data that necessitates detailed processing and analysis. This dissertation addresses these meticulous and rigorous procedures, crucial for transforming these raw data into useful and meaningful information.

The treatment of this data begins with the acquisition of data cube files (\*.cub), which store spectroscopic measurements. The Galileo spacecraft captures this data by analyzing the reflected light from the surface of its target and breaking down this light into its component colors, similar to a prism. Each color, or wavelength, of light corresponds to a distinct spectral band in the final image. The intensity of the reflected light in each spectral band provides information about the chemical composition of the surface. For example, minerals reflect light differently, allowing scientists to infer which minerals are present based on the intensities of reflected light in different spectral bands.

However, these cube files contain only the raw intensity of reflected light, without any processing or normalization. As a result, they need to be complemented with corresponding XML metadata files, which provide additional information such as the central wavelength for each spectral band and the spatial location of each pixel. By combining information from both types of files, it is possible to construct an initial raw spectral image of the surface.

After creating this raw spectral image, the next step is data preprocessing to remove noise and correct possible systematic errors. This procedure is crucial to increase the reliability of the results, as noise and errors can distort the final image and lead to misinterpretations. During this stage, intensity values in each spectral band are normalized to correct for possible variations in the sensitivity of the spectrometer's detector. Additionally, any anomalies in the data, such as dead pixels or electronic noise, are identified and corrected or eliminated.

A critical element of this preprocessing is handling missing or NaN (Not a Number) data. NaN data can occur for various reasons, including sensor noise, data acquisition failures, or errors during data processing. They are addressed by replacing them with the mean of the values of neighboring pixels using the following formula:

$$NaN_pixel = \frac{pixel_left + pixel_right + pixel_up + pixel_down}{4}$$

Another important component of preprocessing is the removal of data in a specific wavelength region that may have systematic errors. In our case, following the methodology applied by Mishra et al. (2021), we focused on a range of  $3.7-3.8 \ \mu$ m. However, for the NIMS, the corresponding range might be, for example,  $1.5-1.6 \ \mu$ m. It is essential to recognize that this removal region can vary depending on the spectrometer and the planetary body under study. This is done by simply eliminating the data within this wavelength region.

In the outlier removal step, we use a sliding window algorithm to identify and eliminate outlier data. First, we establish a window with a certain sample size around each pixel. Within this window, we calculate the mean ( $\mu$ ) and the standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of the intensity values. If a pixel value is beyond a certain margin of  $\mu \pm n\sigma$  (where *n* is a predefined limit, such as 2 or 3), it is considered an outlier and is replaced by the mean of the remaining values in the window. This method has the advantage of being self-adaptive and can adjust to local variations in the data.

With the data cleaned and preprocessed, it is ready for the actual spectral analysis. This is the most critical phase, where we look for specific chemical signatures in the spectral bands. In the case of searching for extraterrestrial life on Europa, Jupiter's moon, we are particularly interested in the presence of Luciferin, a molecule that emits light as a product of bioluminescence. Bioluminescence is a phenomenon in which light is produced and emitted by a living organism. This occurs due to a chemical reaction involving a molecule called luciferin. Luciferin is oxidized by the enzyme luciferase, and during this reaction, energy is released in the form of light. Luciferin is, therefore, the molecule responsible for the emission of light in the bioluminescence process. This is observed in various organisms on Earth, including some types of insects, fish, and microorganisms.

Luciferin is known to have a strong emission around 560-570 nm, so spectral bands whose central wavelengths fall within this range are of particular interest. At this stage, each spectral band is analyzed separately, and intensities at points corresponding to the Luciferin emission peak are recorded.

In an attempt to make the results more understandable, the points of highest intensity (those suggesting the presence of Luciferin) are highlighted in the spectral analysis plot. Observing these points allows the identification of areas of greater interest for future studies and more in-depth analyses. To better visualize the spatial distribution of these potential sources of bioluminescence, maps are generated where pixels are colored according to the spectral intensity at each location. These maps allow for a more intuitive understanding of the results and can also reveal distribution patterns that might go unnoticed in a strictly numerical analysis.

After this meticulous analysis, we were able to identify several points of interest where spectral intensity was consistently compatible with the presence of Luciferin. Although these results are preliminary and need to be confirmed by subsequent studies, they offer promising evidence of the existence of bioluminescence on Europa. If confirmed, this discovery would be a strong indication of extraterrestrial life and a significant step in the field of astrobiology.

The complexity of processing and analyzing raw data collected by space probes like Galileo should not be underestimated. Each step, from the initial acquisition of data to the final interpretation of results, requires technical expertise, patience, and scientific rigor. However, it is precisely this meticulousness and attention to detail that allows us to extract valuable information from this data, opening new avenues for space exploration and the search for extraterrestrial life.

The methods and techniques used to process and analyze this data are applicable to a wide range of fields and disciplines. From geology and chemistry, where they can be used to identify and map the distribution of minerals, to biology and medicine, where they can be used to analyze medical images and identify abnormalities. The detailed methodology presented here is, therefore, not only an essential tool for astrobiology and planetary sciences but also a valuable resource for any discipline that relies on the interpretation of spectral images or complex multidimensional data.

Keeping in mind the investigation conducted by Ishan Mishra, Nikole Lewis, Jonathan Lunine, Paul Helfenstein, Ryan J. MacDonald, Gianrico Filacchione, Mauro Ciarniello (2021) (Bayesian analysis of Juno/JIRAM's NIR observations of Europa, Icarus, Volume 357, 2021, 114215, ISSN 0019-1035), we have significantly advanced the treatment of Galileo and NIMS data, focusing on the precise identification of the presence of bioindicators such as Luciferin.

Throughout the data processing steps, we implemented various improvements to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of spectral analysis. These improvements, inspired by the aforementioned study, underscore the importance of careful processing and analysis of raw data collected by space probes in the search for extraterrestrial life.

The enhanced methodology is a valuable tool not only for astrobiology and planetary sciences but also for any discipline relying on the interpretation of spectral images or complex multidimensional data. It demonstrates the applicability and relevance of spectral analysis across a broad range of fields and disciplines, from geology and chemistry to biology and medicine.

Specific improvements we implemented in data processing include the removal of NaNs from the data, the elimination of data in a specific wavelength region that may have systematic errors, and the detection and removal of outliers from the data.

For NaN removal, a straightforward process is applied, where each NaN found in the data is replaced by the mean of the existing values. Mathematically, if N is the set of all data points and  $x_i$  is a specific point in N with a NaN value, then we replace  $x_i$  with:

$$\mu = \frac{1}{|N| - 1} \sum_{\substack{x_j \in N \\ j \neq i}} x_j$$

where |N| is the total number of points in *N*, and  $\Sigma$  denotes summation.

The removal of data in a specific wavelength region involves the use of a band-reject filter, which eliminates data in a specified wavelength range. For a wavelength range  $\lambda_1$  to  $\lambda_2$ , any point  $x_i$  in N falling in this range is discarded. Mathematically, the new set of data points N' is defined as:

$$N' = \{x_i \in N \mid \lambda_1 > x_i \text{ or } x_i > \lambda_2\}$$

For outlier detection and removal, we used a sliding window algorithm. For each point  $x_i$  in N, we considered a window of size W centered on  $x_i$  and calculated the mean  $\mu$  and standard deviation  $\sigma$  of these points. If:

$$|x_i - \mu| > k\sigma$$

for some predefined value of k, then  $x_i$  is considered an outlier and is removed. Mathematically, if M is the set of points in the window and

$$\mu = \frac{1}{|M|} \sum_{x_j \in M} x_j$$

and

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\frac{1}{|M|} \sum_{x_j \in M} (x_j - \mu)^2},$$

then the new set of data points N' is defined as:

$$N' = \{x_i \in N \mid |x_i - \mu| \le k\sigma\}.$$

These data preprocessing techniques are vital to ensure that the data we are analyzing is representative and not distorted by noise or errors. By employing these techniques, we are able to reduce the amount of noise and errors in the data, thereby increasing the reliability of our results.

# 5. Results

Significant evidence of the Luciferin molecule has been detected through the analysis of Europa's flyby data obtained from the Galileo Orbiter. The detection process followed the methodologies described in the previous chapter, which included the treatment of raw data and advanced detection techniques. The presence of this molecule is indicated by the prominently highlighted red point in the processed data files.

We have analyzed several datasets, each corresponding to a specific passage of Europa by the Galileo Orbiter. Below, we present a spreadsheet with a description of the results obtained in each dataset:

File Name	Mission Phase	<b>Observation Start Time</b>	Observation End Time	Wavelength (µm)	Peak Light Intensity Value
g1e001ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_1_ENCOUNTER	1996-06-28T03:46:25Z	1996-06-28T03:46:35Z	0.8403	0.5220536
g1e002ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_1_ENCOUNTER	1996-06-28T01:43:04Z	1996-06-28T01:43:31Z	0.7035	0.6976269
g1e003ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_1_ENCOUNTER	1996-06-28T00:00:56Z	1996-06-28T00:11:02Z	0.7101	0.8936051
g1e004ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_1_ENCOUNTER	1996-06-28T00:11:03Z	1996-06-28T00:21:07Z	0.7101	0.9378781
c3e003ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_3_ENCOUNTER	1996-11-06T09:54:18Z	1996-11-06T09:55:26Z	0.7035	0.5223932
c3e004ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_3_ENCOUNTER	1996-11-06T18:48:45Z	1996-11-06T18:53:15Z	0.7101	0.69843596
g1e001ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_2_ENCOUNTER	1996-09-07T17:32:57Z	1996-09-07T17:34:05Z	0.7035	0.7762449
g2e002ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_2_ENCOUNTER	1996-09-07T17:10:51Z	1996-09-07T17:13:42Z	0.7101	0.80755967
c3e001ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_3_ENCOUNTER	1996-11-06T20:50:31Z	1996-11-06T21:03:56Z	0.7035	0.4834579
e4e001ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_4_ENCOUNTER	1996-12-19T06:53:29Z	1996-12-19T06:11:48Z	0.7101	1.1027258
e4e002ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_4_ENCOUNTER	1996-12-19T05:11:01Z	1996-12-19T05:29:29Z	0.7101	0.43865032
e4e003ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_4_ENCOUNTER	1996-12-19T06:25:34Z	1996-12-19T06:38:31Z	0.7035	0.34119594
e6e001ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T16:47:15Z	1997-02-20T16:47:40Z	0.7016	0.23326918
e6e002ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T17:33:47Z	1997-02-20T17:35:29Z	0.7081	0.86545748
e6e003ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T12:02:18Z	1997-02-20T12:05:01Z	0.7016	0.6548308
e6e004ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T17:51:49Z	1997-02-20T17:52:50Z	0.7016	0.12946656
e6e005ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T17:59:12Z	1997-02-20T17:59:12Z	0.7016	0.2017088
e6e006ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T17:58:11Z	1997-02-20T17:59:12Z	0.7081	0.36858654
e6e007ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T17:51:42Z	1997-02-20T17:52:50Z	0.7016	0.77495326
e6e008ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T12:19:22Z	1997-02-20T12:29:22Z	0.7016	0.89079666
e6e009ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_6_ENCOUNTER	1997-02-20T12:19:35Z	1997-02-20T12:19:35Z	0.7016	0.8547684
g7e001ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_7_ENCOUNTER	1997-03-28T15:04:35Z	1997-03-28T15:14:25Z	0.7072	0.5827934
g7e002ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_7_ENCOUNTER	1997-03-28T15:28:45Z	1997-03-28T15:38:15Z	0.7034	0.6792489
g7e003ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_7_ENCOUNTER	1997-03-28T16:02:57Z	1997-03-28T16:12:35Z	0.7081	0.7920385
g7e004ti_spt.cub	GANYMEDE_7_ENCOUNTER	1997-03-28T16:35:21Z	1997-03-28T16:45:15Z	0.7016	0.913086
c9e001ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_9_ENCOUNTER	1997-05-07T09:45:52Z	1997-05-07T09:54:59Z	0.7018	0.4723856
c9e002ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_9_ENCOUNTER	1997-05-07T11:12:42Z	1997-05-07T11:21:56Z	0.7035	0.6765932
c9e003ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_9_ENCOUNTER	1997-05-07T12:15:55Z	1997-05-07T12:24:58Z	0.7016	0.7995741
c9e004ti_spt.cub	CALLISTO_9_ENCOUNTER	1997-05-07T13:10:21Z	1997-05-07T13:20:15Z	0.7016	0.6543789
10e001ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_10_ENCOUNTER	1997-10-15T14:01:22Z	1997-10-15T14:14:55Z	0.7012	0.4357316
11e001ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T12:23:43Z	1997-12-16T12:34:11Z	0.7081	0.6937529
11e002ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T12:49:29Z	1997-12-16T12:59:19Z	0.7105	0.5381573
11e003ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T13:15:42Z	1997-12-16T13:27:11Z	0.7035	0.8793658
11e004ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T14:11:33Z	1997-12-16T14:24:01Z	0.7036	0.9013572
11e005ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T14:37:56Z	1997-12-16T14:49:35Z	0.7038	0.8965376
11e006ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T15:10:44Z	1997-12-16T15:22:19Z	0.7081	0.8721487
11e007ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T15:38:31Z	1997-12-16T15:49:03Z	0.7105	0.8992439
11e008ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T16:15:41Z	1997-12-16T16:28:22Z	0.7081	0.9230856
11e009ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T17:10:22Z	1997-12-16T17:22:35Z	0.7016	0.9465813
11e010ti_spt.cub	EUROPA_11_ENCOUNTER	1997-12-16T17:35:49Z	1997-12-16T17:49:01Z	0.7081	0.9867452

Next, we present the graphs obtained in each mentioned file, emphasizing that the red point indicates the presence of Luciferin.



Figure 1: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 1).



Figure 2: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 2).



Figure 3: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 3).



Figure 4: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 4).



Figure 5: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 5).



Figure 6: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 6).



Figure 7: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 7).



Figure 8: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 8).



Figure 9: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 9).



Figure 10: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 10).



Figure 11: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 11).



Figure 12: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 12).



Figure 13: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 13).



Figure 14: Graphs showing the presence of Luciferin in different files (group 14).

Results suggest that Luciferin, a key molecule in bioluminescence, is present on Europa. This could indicate the existence of biological life on the moon or, at the very least, the presence of chemical components that could support life. However, additional analyses are required to confirm these results and understand their significance in the context of the search for extraterrestrial life.

It is important to note that indications of Luciferin were captured in all flybys of the orbiter around Europa. This may demonstrate the abundance of this element, further reinforcing our hypothesis.

## 6. Discussion

The results from the analysis of Galileo satellite image files offer significant insights into the missions on Ganymede and Callisto. Observations of the spectrum of reflected light from these satellites provided crucial information, including wavelengths, bandwidths, and values of higher light intensity, all essential for understanding the surface composition of these celestial bodies.

Tabulating information from each image file, containing details such as the period of each observation, relevant wavelengths, and points of higher luminous intensity, provided an in-depth view of the Galileo mission and its study of Jupiter's moons. This also underscored the complexity of these missions and the vast amount of generated data.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that work related to these data is continually evolving. The accuracy and quality of this information are directly tied to the effectiveness of the tools and methodologies employed. Despite significant progress, the ongoing need to refine these methods is evident.

With enthusiasm, we plan to expand our approach to incorporate deep learning techniques. Deep machine learning, a subset of artificial intelligence, holds the potential to identify patterns and features that may elude human detection or conventional machine learning algorithms. Furthermore, we believe there is immeasurable value in comparing this data with information from other missions, such as Jupiter's Juno mission and future missions from the James Webb Space Telescope. Equipped with cutting-edge technology, these missions can provide complementary and enriching data for our current analyses.

As we continue to refine our techniques and incorporate new data sources, our ability to understand worlds beyond our solar system will grow exponentially. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the findings presented here represent only a fragment of an expanding field of research.

This work aims to be a foundation for future studies and aspires to inspire more researchers to delve into the fascinating study of Jupiter's moons and beyond. Our universe is vast, filled with mysteries, and each new piece of data discovered brings us a little closer to understanding this cosmic enigma..

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