



Forschungskolloquium im Sommersemester 2025 von Altorientalistik und Vorderasiatischer Archäologie



Mittwoch, 21. Mai um 16:15 Uhr
Raum 0.2051, Fabeckstr. 23/25

Stephanie Langin-Hooper (SMU Dallas):

*Sealing your Fate: Zodiac Astrology,
Movement, and Replication in Hellenistic
Babylonia.*

Detail of clay bulla with seal impression depicting a lion, crescent moon, and crab.
Iraq, c. 305-64 BCE. Musée du Louvre: AO 5688-1. (S. Langin-Hooper)

With the arrival of Greek peoples after the conquests of Alexander the Great, new seal types (carved gemstones in rings) and new seal iconography (particularly the Greek gods) were introduced to Babylonia. Seals with Mesopotamian imagery also underwent a transformation in this period, with the scenes of worshippers before altars predominant in the Neo-Babylonian period being largely replaced by gods and divine creatures associated with constellations and the practice of temple astronomy and astrology. The introduction of the Greek gods and the unprecedented interest in Babylonian astrology on Hellenistic Babylonian seals have not previously been linked in the scholarship. Yet, if we look beyond the differences in the cultural origin of these seal motifs, we discover that these images share many features: deities and supernatural creatures are depicted in motion and often appear poised to exit the pictorial plane of the seal; deities give gifts or protection, even when not part of their typical attributes; and deities that influence or change the future were preferred.

This talk will propose that many Hellenistic Babylonian seal images were made in response to changing Babylonian ideas about divine agency, as particularly encapsulated in zodiac system: the gods were now believed to make active choices to reveal themselves and their intentions toward the human world through the appearance and movements of the moon, planets, and constellations. Seal imagery that portrayed the gods as a dynamic presence – quickly moving, suddenly appearing, poised to exit – reflected these new Babylonian beliefs. This paper will also explore the possibility that these ideas of divine agency, along with the artworks that represented them, impacted the development of the religious concept of divine epiphany around the Hellenistic Mediterranean.

