

Extra Research Colloquium ZODIAC



Alfred Jeremias, Handbuch der altorientalischen Geisteskultur, Leipzig 1913, p. 247

The Viper in the Sun, the Lion in the Moon, and the *lumāšu* Ancient Mesopotamian Pareidolia in Sun and Moon

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The dark Mare and bright “highlands” on the lunar surface have always inspired people to see certain shapes in the lunar disc. The most common pareidolic images seen on the Moon are a human figure or an animal. Narratives tell the underlying stories and explain how and why that image came to be on the Moon. For the tradition of Ancient Mesopotamia, we have both an image incised into the surface of a Late Babylonian clay tablet (VAT 7851) and what can be understood as a verbal description of this image in a Neo-Assyrian text (VAT 8917 rev. 5-6; KAR 307). Both sources have been discussed in detail but interpreted differently.

Jeanette Fincke will present the result of her collations of both the graphic image and the description. Her reinterpretation of the scene is based on comparisons with seal impressions and steles as well as other published and unpublished text passages. The term *lumāšu*, which the dictionaries interpret as “poetic term for star; (zodiacal) constellation”, plays an important role here.