

Bestiarium Mesopotamicum: Animal Omens in Ancient Mesopotamia

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The poster describes the activities and preliminary results of the project “Bestiarium Mesopotamicum”, led by Niela De Zorzi at the University of Vienna (Institut für Orientalistik) in collaboration with the Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities (ACDH, ÖAW). The project, financed by the Austrian Science Fund for three years (2018-2021), examines the Ancient Mesopotamian divinatory series known by its incipit as “If a city is set on a height” (*Šumma ālu ina mēlê šakin*). This composition collects unsolicited terrestrial omens taken from the diviners’ physical, every-day surroundings, including human and animal behavioural omens. *Šumma ālu* is not only the larger divinatory composition from Ancient Mesopotamia (ca. 13.000 omens distributed over more than 100 thematic chapters or “Tablets”), but also the most multifaceted. This notwithstanding, and, despite the fact that large parts of it are available in recent editions, interpretative studies on the series are conspicuously rare. The project addresses this knowledge gap by focusing on the section of the divinatory series *Šumma ālu* which deals with the appearance and the behaviour of animals, Tablets 22-40 and 63-79. On the philological level, the project aims to update and improve the current editions of Tablets 22-40 and edit the hitherto unedited bird omens Tablets 64-79. On the interpretative level, the project seeks to explore the interconnected hermeneutic system underlying the presentation of animals in *Šumma ālu* by combining methods of textual criticism with modern digital methodologies and concepts and methods taken from human-animal studies and historical anthrozoology.