

# Astronomer Peter Barthel researches Santa books and gift wrap

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Correct illustration of the moon

The December 2011 issue of the international journal *Communicating Astronomy with the Public* will feature an article by Dutch astronomy professor Peter Barthel, analysing illustrations of the moon on gift wrap and in children's books, in the Netherlands and the USA. On the basis of research conducted during the winter of 2010-2011, Barthel concluded that the crescent moon and half-moon are often drawn incorrectly on gift wrap and in books dealing with Santa Claus and his Dutch peer Saint Nicholas, or Sinterklaas.

Where the illustrator would actually like to depict an evening event, often the third quarter moon - the morning moon - is drawn. This lack of knowledge concerning the physical origin of the moon phases is found to be widespread in the Netherlands but also clearly exists in the USA, and is quite possibly a worldwide phenomenon. The author also investigated

moon illustrations related to Halloween, finding similar results, and concludes: ‘Many people do not seem to know that a waning crescent moon rises around 2 or 3 a.m. ...’

Although Barthel spends most of his time investigating Active Galaxies and Active Galactic Nuclei, he also has a keen interest in science communication and education. ‘If this research stimulates people to see for themselves what the [moon](#) phase is during the evening – and to understand it – this tongue-in-cheek research will have been well worth the effort!’

**More information:** Preprint: [arxiv.org/abs/1111.5489](https://arxiv.org/abs/1111.5489)

Provided by University of Groningen

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