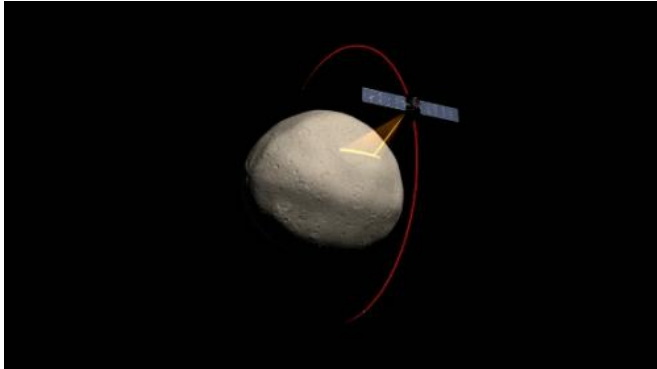


The faces of Vesta (w/ video)

24 June 2011



expected to capture the spacecraft on July 16th, 2011. The space probe will then accompany the asteroid for approximately a year. Dawn's stay at Vesta is the first prolonged visit to a main belt asteroid. It will also be the first visit ever to a protoplanet, a body that never quite became a full-fledged planet. Scientists expect Vesta to render information on the early phase of planet formation.

Provided by JPL/NASA

An artist's rendition of Dawn spacecraft gathering spectral data from Vesta. (Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/UCLA/McREL)

(PhysOrg.com) -- New images of the asteroid show the first surface structures and give a preview of the Dawn mission's coming months.

Although about 189,000 kilometers still lay between NASA's [space probe](#) Dawn and the [asteroid Vesta](#), the latest images taken by the [camera system](#) on board show a heterogeneous surface structure. "Even though in this early approach phase the camera system mainly serves navigational purposes, the images are beginning to show us a new, unique world", says Dr. Andreas Nathues from the Max-Planck-Institute for Solar System Research (MPS) in Germany, Framing Camera Lead Investigator.

The newest images now reveal first [surface structures](#). "In many surface regions we see patterns that might well be craters", says Dr. Holger Sierks from MPS, one of the mission's co-investigators and responsible for the development of the camera. In the next weeks as Dawn continues its approach of the asteroid, the scientists will be able to confirm this first analysis.

[NASA's](#) space probe Dawn has been on its way to the asteroid Vesta since 2007. Vesta's gravity is

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