

EABS/SBL 2018 (Helsinki)

Program unit: Biblical interpretation in early Christianity („imitation“)

Imitation in the Interpretation of Moses' Nativity Story: A Biblical Paradigm for Christian and Jewish Life

In the interpretation of Exodus 2 Jewish and Christian authors portray some characters as paradigms to imitate. In Philo's and Gregory of Nyssa's "Life of Moses" it is Moses himself who is interpreted as the ideal of Jewish resp. Christian virtue and perfection. Philo's Moses is the most perfect political leader, lawgiver, high priest and prophet. Especially his education is presented at length along Hellenistic conceptions. Thus, Philo presents the ideal of the perfect Jew in accordance with the Greek ideal of his time. Gregory of Nyssa takes up Philo's work for his own *Vita Mosis*. He also presents Moses as an ideal for men and women striving for perfection. His Moses is the paradigm for Christian mystics and ascetics. Gregory picks up a lot of motives from Philo, but there are striking differences. Whereas Philo is oriented toward a public life, Gregory's ideal is focused on the individual mystic; Philo's addressees are men like himself, whereas Gregory writes for ascetic men and women; Philo speaks about Jewish life in a Hellenistic environment, whereas Gregory's Moses is presented as the perfect Christian. This paper will – based on the parallels between the two interpretations of Exodus 2 – ask for the different assumption and presuppositions of both authors and the consequences for their respective presentations of Moses as a paradigm for Jewish or Christian life.