

MAIMONIDES LECTURE ON SCEPTICISM

MONDAY
15 NOVEMBER 2021
18:00

How to Read the Torah: Linguistic and Hermeneutical Reflections on an Ambiguous Text

Konrad Schmid

The Torah is traditionally ascribed to Moses, but it is in fact an anonymous work by scribes who produced it as a written text between the ninth and fourth centuries BCE. Its oral traditions reach even back further, into the second millennium BCE. The complex result of this long composition history is an ambiguous, often contradictory, yet readable text, as its long reception history, foremost in Judaism and Christianity, demonstrates. If read closely, the linguistic shape of the Torah reveals an interesting set of checks and balances between its theological positions. It seems that its authors were not primarily concerned with narrative or legal consistency, but rather with creating a literary universe that includes a variety of theological perspectives. The historical hermeneutics that drove the redaction and composition of the Torah were geared towards retaining its ambiguity and actively soliciting the reader's affirmative, critical, and/or sceptical imagination, not to eliminating its material difficulties and making the task of reading as easy as possible.

Konrad Schmid is a professor of the Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism at Universität Zürich.

IN-PERSON/ZOOM

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