Georgia Frank, Colgate University

“Picturing Psalms: Pilgrims’ Processions in Late Antique Jerusalem”

When chanting psalms, according to Athanasius of Alexandria, the words “become like a mirror [eisoptron] to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul [psychès kinêmata]” (Epistle to Marcellinus, 12; trans. R. Gregg [1980], 111). This image-making property of the psalms also shaped early Byzantine liturgical practices. This paper explores the role of the psalms in pilgrims’ experiences of the holy places in and around Jerusalem during the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Notably, responsorial psalms wove a fabric of images and emotions to guide Christians in the commemoration and perhaps even experiencing of biblical events. This “soundtrack” to processional, calendrical worship (or, the stational liturgy, as it is called) also provided mental images that shaped the liturgical year. This exploration of the image-making force of song can reveal parallels between different liturgical seasons. Thus, I shall focus on the echoes psalmody generated between the festival of Epiphany and Easter in fourth-century Jerusalem and what those echoes might reveal about the sensory and affective experiences of lay Christians in early Byzantium.