

WMU Department of Comparative Religion

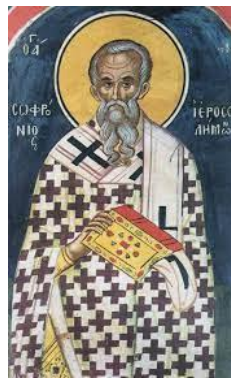
Sophronius of Jerusalem: Apocalyptic Responses to Earliest Islam

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When: November 9th, 2024

Time: 1:00 pm

Where: Moore Hall 2016



When Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638 CE) was made bishop of the holy city in 634, the Christian Byzantine Empire was at a turning point. After decades of war against the Sassanian Persian Empire, the early followers of the Prophet Muhammad had begun to spread East, conquering beleaguered Persian and Roman settlements and began to turn their attention to the Holy Land. While Byzantine leaders seemed disinterested in or incapable of defending the periphery, it fell upon Sophronius to assist his flock in identifying and comprehending what this new force and their unexpected victories meant for the Christian Romans. The letters and sermons of Sophronius of Jerusalem are an important witness to initial Christian understandings of Islam, and depict an increasingly desperate bishop pleading for his congregation to repent, seeing the early Muslims as an inhuman agent of divine wrath placing both Christians and Muslims into an apocalyptic narrative. This paper considers what these important documents can tell us about Christian Byzantine identity in the face of a crisis which forever changed the landscape of the Byzantine world.

Dr. Ryan Strickler is Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Newcastle (Australia). He received his PhD from Macquarie University (Sydney), after earning MAs in History and Classics at the University of Kentucky, and an MA in Comparative Religion from WMU. He has published articles on Christian and Roman identity in the Byzantine World, with a special focus on Apocalyptic discourse during periods of crisis.