The lecture will be a synthetic exposition of the main arguments of my current book project. The title of the book, "The Slow Fall of Babel," means to be a metaphor for what I think happened to the linguistic views of Christians in Late Antiquity. Babel, in this case, is not just a reference to a biblical story about a single dramatic event in the distant past that allegedly once and for all had changed the linguistic makeup of humanity. It is rather an allegory of the predominantly monolingual or bilingual worldviews typical of the ancient Greco- and Latinophone intellectuals prior to the advent of Christianity. Their gradual erosion – a slow process of discovering and internalizing the fact that there are other languages and their speakers and on-going attempts to interact with them from the distinctly Christian standpoint – is the Slow Fall of Babel that took place in hearts and minds of at least a good number of early Christian writers and intellectuals whose compositions have survived and who represented various languages and literary traditions. This experience became formative for the development of specific Christian identities in later periods. Yet, the links between languages and religious affiliations were not deemed to be absolute in Late Antiquity. Christian writers mentioned language differences when the polemical purposes of their narratives required it, but usually did not imply that language was a formative factor of one’s confessional identity.

Yuliya Minets studies intellectual and social processes in Late Antiquity with special attention to the history of early Christianity, the relationship between its different branches, and their connections with traditional Greco-Roman culture, Rabbinic Judaism, and later with Islam. She received her B.A. and M.A. in history from the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” and an M.A. in Medieval studies from the Central European University. Her first dissertation analyzed the narrative strategies that Palladius of Helenopolis, an important early Christian writer, employed in his works, the Dialogue on John Chrysostom and the Lausiac History. After she received a degree of Candidate of Science in History (Kyiv, 2011), the Ph.D. program at the Catholic University of America expanded her vision of Christianity through the study of the Syriac and Coptic languages, as well as problems of multilingualism and language contacts in the past. Her current project is on the role language played as a factor of group identity in late antique Christianity.

Tuesday, November 13, 2018
4:30 p.m.
Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103