



## **Geisteswissenschaften International Nonfiction Translators Prize (GINT)**

### **Jury Statement for Winner Dr. Lydia Jane White**

In this fifth competition of the Geisteswissenschaften International Nonfiction Translation Prize, entrants were asked to translate an excerpt from **Mischa Meier's** groundbreaking work **Geschichte der Völkerwanderung Europa, Asien und Afrika vom 3. bis zum 8. Jahrhundert n.Chr.**, published in Germany by C. H. Beck in 2020, and awarded the wbg-Wissen!Prize in 2021.

This text posed a set of unique semantic, syntactic, and scholarly challenges. The jurors sought out submissions that demonstrate a fine understanding of the text and an ability to convey its content and style persuasively to a new English-language readership.

We are pleased to declare two winners in this year's GINT competition: **Lydia J. White** and **Frances Clarke**. Both translators have demonstrated considerable skill in conducting research to familiarize themselves with the terminology and historical context for this complex piece. They deconstructed and reconstructed complex structures to attain translations into English that are marked by accuracy and flair.

We were particularly impressed by **Lydia White's** nuanced use of tense structures, sophisticated grasp of footnote and other scholarly conventions, and exquisite attention to lexical and historical detail. The winning translators show that they have what it takes to make their mark in the field of nonfiction translation.

**The jury congratulates both winners and looks forward to reading their future translations from German.**

Geisteswissenschaften International and C.H. Beck publishers will present the winning translations in an online Translation Slam on 9 November 2021. The event will start with an introduction of author Mischa Meier and his award-winning book. Afterwards, the two winning translations will be compared live on stage. Moderated by Emma Rault, a member of the GINT jury, Lydia J. White and Frances Clarke will discuss their individual approaches to semantic, syntactic, and scientific challenges. After an interesting hour devoted to translation the audience is invited to ask questions and to network with the participants.

The international jury was composed of: Shelley Frisch, distinguished translator, instructor, author, and jury chair; Sarah Pybus, translator and winner of the first GINT Prize in 2015; Emma Rault, translator and winner of the GINT Prize in 2017; and Paula Bradish, translator and foreign rights manager at Hamburger Edition.

Please note [Lydia White's Sample Translation](#) on the following pages

## Mischa Meier: The History of the Migration Period: Europe, Asia, and Africa from the Third to the Eighth Century CE

### 1.2.2

#### The religious factor

The Mother of God's personal intervention to miraculously wrest Constantinople from the clutches of the barbarians did not just have a profound impact on those who lived through it but would also shape generations of Byzantines for centuries to come.\* For the Romans, receiving divine assistance in the struggle against the barbarians was nothing new. A few years before he invaded Rome (396), for example, Alaric had been prevented from breaching Athens's city walls by the goddess of the city, Athena, and mythical hero Achilles.† Several decades before that, the Sasanian King Shapur II (†379) had been forced to give up his occupation of the Roman fortress in Nisibis (now Nusaybin in South-East Turkey) by the miraculous powers of Jacob (†338), the city's ascetic bishop. In 540, a relic of the Cross in Syrian Apamea protected the population against the invading Persians, and, in 542, Sergios the martyr spared the city that bore his name and housed his relics from Persian conquest. Similarly, in 544, a miraculous image of Christ defended Edessa (now Urfa, Turkey) against the invading Persians, while, at some point in the fifth century,‡ a "heavenly host" (*militia caelestis*) delivered what is now the city of Marsas (in Gironde, France) from Saxon occupation. Miracles such as these were not unique to late antiquity, to which reports (later with a Christian slant) about the "rain miracle" attest, said to have protected Marcus Aurelius's army against the Quadi in 173 CE. For Constantinople, however, the events of 626 marked the pinnacle of a very specific development that first gained momentum during the fifth century and picked up considerable speed in the sixth century, before heading straight toward the dramatic summer of 626. From that point on, it was clear to all: Constantinople was the city of the Mother of God. Since the fifth century, the veneration of the Virgin Mary had been experiencing a sustained boom at the Bosphorus. It was the controversies surrounding the issue of Christ's divinity or humanity – which reached their first peak with the codification of the Virgin's role as Theotokos (literally: "the one who gives birth to God") at the 431 Council of Ephesus – that first drew special attention to Mary, while the saintly ambitions of the emperor's sister Pulcheria did their part. Emperors now started building more and more churches

dedicated to Mary, relics of the mother of God began turning up, and, when plague ravaged the *Imperium Romanum* on a devastating scale in 541/42, Mary rose to become one of the most important saints for the stricken population. The emperors joined in with the Marian piety sweeping society, from which point on increasing references to the miracles and legends of the Virgin can be found in the sources. The poet Romanos the Melodist, considered to be a singer inspired by Mary, used the *kontakia* (a particular form of hymn) that he sang during services to popularize the veneration of Mary, Marian feast days were added to the calendar – and, ultimately, the Theotokos herself stepped in save “her” city in 626.<sup>29</sup>

However, despite the widespread focus on the Mother of God, this event was primarily the expression of a ubiquitous, all-embracing piety that, in its practical implications – processions, joint public prayers, the building of churches, the rise of theological and in sum Christian literature, the sacral exaltation of the emperor and the ceremoniousness surrounding him, the religious coloring of warfare, the growth of iconolatry, etc. – had long determined everyday life for the Byzantines. The profound penetration of religion into all spheres of life – we refer to this process as “liturgization” – began in the mid-sixth century and provided renewed stability to a population at risk of losing the ground beneath its feet due to severe catastrophes (earthquakes, floods, plague, hunger), wars, and disappointed expectations about the return of Christ; supplied a population on the verge of collapse with fresh powers of cohesion, thereby giving it the opportunity not just to master a gargantuan challenge that had made a sustained attack on its collective mentalities but also to do what was required to consolidate. This created the conditions necessary to survive subsequent threats – not least the occupation of the city by Avaric-Persian forces during one of the most dangerous military crises ever faced by the Byzantine Empire. But this tremendous stabilization came at a huge cost. The liturgization of Eastern Roman-Byzantine society had demanded tribute: religion was now everywhere, and religious symbolism held sway over all of the forms of expression at society’s disposal. As the center of the world, Constantinople was indeed the city of the Mother of God, but Mary was shielding a people that now saw itself as a conglomerate of saints, an empire that, from this standpoint – at least in theory – no longer had need for earthly weapons, even though its inhabitants were surrounded on all sides by hostile barbarians; an empire dominated by emperors whose sacrality had taken on previously unknown dimensions: Justinian I (527–565) had brought himself into dangerous proximity to

Christ. After defeating the Persians, Heraclius had himself celebrated as the new David and the new Constantine, surrounding himself with an eschatological, messianistic air during the events held in 630 to celebrate the restitution of the relics of the Cross taken from Jerusalem by the Persians in 614, and outdoing even Justinian's affectations to present himself as *kosmorhýstes* ("savior of the world") – a term coined specifically for this purpose. In fact, it was this kind of atmosphere that made it possible for the 626 vanquishing of the barbarian threat to mutate into a salvific event, reinforcing the Byzantines in what for them was already a guiding certainty: as long as Constantinople stood, as long as it did not end up in the wrong hands, and as long as it was not destroyed – as long as there was a divinely protected Roman "inside" clearly demarcated from a barbarian "outside," the earthly realm would survive. The fate of the Christian world thus hinged on the bastion at the Bosphorus remaining intact: this was at the heart of Byzantine "imperial eschatology."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Zos. 5.6 (Athens); Theod. *Hist. rel.* 1 PG 82.1304D, see also PEETERS 1920 (Nisibis); Procop. *BP* 2 (2).11; Evagr. *HE* 4.24; MEIER <sup>2</sup>2004, 365–373 (Apamea); Evagr. *HE* 4.28 (Sergiopolis); Evagr. *HE* 4.27, see also MEIER <sup>2</sup>2004, 398–401 (Edessa); *VBib.* 7; cf. Gregory of Tours. *Glor. mart.* 59 (Marsas). – "Rain miracle": BIRLEY <sup>2</sup>1997, 316 ff.; ISRAELOWICH 2008. – For more literature on the history of the veneration of Mary in late antiquity, see ch. 11.1.1, note 14. – Scholars are increasingly examining the significance of religion in relation to various aspects of the "migration period," in particular with regard to questions of ethnicity; see, for example, POHL 2009a, 446 ff.; 2012a; STEINACHER 2012, 106; POHL/HEYDEMANN 2013a; 2013b. HEYDEMANN 2013; 2016b reveals how religious community-building processes were captured in ethnic terminology, thereby merging ethnicity and religion with each other.

<sup>30</sup> On liturgization, see ch. 11.1.1. – On the Eastern Roman Empire as a community of saints under the protection of God, see: Coripp. *Laud. Iust.* 3.333; Cosm. *Ind.* 2.66–76, esp. 66 and 74–75; cf. MACCORMACK 1982, 293–295; MEIER 2004a, 163 f. – On the sacralization of Justinian and Heraclius: Meier <sup>2</sup>2004, 547 ff.; 2016b; DRIJVERS 2002, 184 ff.; KRESTEN 1991/92, 502, note 13; 2000 (Heraclius). – On Heraclius as *kosmorhýstes*, see Georg. Pisid. *In Bonum* 7; *Heracl.* 1.70; *Sev.* 452; *Hex.* 1800 (ed. TARTAGLIA); see also ch.11.2.1 and MEIER 2015b. – On Byzantine "imperial eschatology," see PODALSKY 1972; ALEXANDER 1985; PERTUSI 1988; BRANDES 1997, 25; 2005a.

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## Translator's remarks

\* I have used the Chicago Manual of Style and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as the basis for the text's orthography but have more or less kept the original formatting of the citations in the endnotes.

† As I was unable to ascertain the rationale behind the spelling of names without talking to the author, I have chosen to translate the names in this text using the familiar Anglicized forms. It was unclear to me why the name of King Shapur II, for example, was rendered in its Middle Persian spelling as "Šābuhr" and some other names written using their transliterated Greek spellings, but not, for example, the city of Athens (in Greek Athína) or Saint Jacob (in Greek: Iákobos; in Aramaic: Ya'qôḇ).

‡ "at some point in the fifth century" – information added by LJW. It struck me that years were provided for all the other events but not for this one. My research showed that most of the reports on this Saxon occupation missed out the year. Only one text that I was able to find during my brief research, written by Philip de Souza, provided the information about the occupation having taken place "some time in the fifth century" (Philip de Souza: *Piracy in the Graeco-Roman World* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], 230). I would recommend to the author that this event therefore be mentioned more toward the beginning of the list, as it precedes some of the other events chronologically.