

Translation or transliteration, what is the right thing to do?

Sample Translators Notes (abridged):

I have given great attention to the accuracy of the translation with respect to the original. By the same token, many compromises had to be made in order to make the work readable to a broad English speaking audience. Please keep this in mind as you might stumble upon an error or an inconsistency. The pagination of the English version adheres to the original pagination wherever possible so as to facilitate easy comparison on dual panels

I have learned a lot as a result of this process and I can highly recommend translating as therapy. As much as photography has taught me how to look, translating has taught me to read and to listen carefully. I have also found through research of my own that I am in disagreement with many of the conclusions drawn by many of the sources used compose this book, much source material seems to have been convoluted which heavily taxed my own interpretation and my aim for accuracy. Some of the original terminology is no longer in common use and had to be altered. Languages morph over time and create major challenges for the interpreter. I have written such pages as close to the original meaning as I could interpret them What appears to be peculiar, and at times confusing English, arises from an attempt to create an image in modern English of how accounts were originally written, described and conceived. Many have advised against translating these pages all together, yet I feel such a translation does serve a purpose and at least attempts to convey a flavor of how much of the information came to be in our hands today. (Just consider the confusion that arises from the various spellings and names of the town of Bratislava: Bratislava = Pressburg = Presburg = Preßburg..... ; (needless to say: We take much for granted.)

About the documentation section – Source Literature, pages 125 to 144. There are occasions when neither translating nor interpreting can serve to transmit the necessary information to make the content of pages carry into another language without becoming a hopeless jumble of chaotic nonsense and actually counteracting the purpose of a translation. I have made an honest effort to stick to the original whenever possible; I hope I succeeded.

Running into Errors:

Excerpt from a recent book about Franz Xaver Messerschmidt

What is the translator to do when he/she encounters an error? Translate it?

Speculations and Observations by the Translator:



Johann Baptist Straub
Churbayerischer Hof-Bildhauer
1718 - 1788

FXM's uncle, J. B. Straub, is holding what appears to be the head of a dead man. Using dead bodies for anatomical studies may have upset young Franz Xaver's psyche at an early age and may thereby have left a lasting imprint on his personality. This may well explain some of FXM's rowdy behavior in Graz and elsewhere: The rowdy conduct, the fencing and other boisterous acting out. Any parent knows such conduct is a sign of inner turmoil and likely a sign of fear.



To this day, the Freemasons use a ceremonial hanging rope in a hazing ceremony, where members are punished for having committed a transgression against the brotherhood. The depicted rope would have been too thin to actually hang a man, thus making the title "The Hanged Man" (cat. no. [91](#), "Ein Erhängter") even more ludicrous. Perhaps FXM had heard about or seen such a procedure in his own engagement with the Freemasons. Perhaps he perceived himself as being persecuted or punished by the collective.

It should also be mentioned that, according to leading forensic pathologists engaged in the reconstruction of the human countenance, the expressions in FXM's "Character Heads" certainly go beyond what the muscles can render and thus take the grimaces into the conceptual realm.

Erroneous onset:

Other observations (as linguist and as artist) have to do with the interpretation of FXM's utterances about his theory of "Verhältnisse" as described by Friedrich Nicolai's travel accounts. Note that the word "Verhältnisse" can be understood as "proportions" or be read equally well as "relationships". One must bear in mind that FXM was not accustomed to extensive dialog; he sought and worked largely in an isolated manner. A man obsessively engaged in work that left little time for chit chat. I think that FXM's utterances were misread by the art historians to have meant "proportions" when he actually tried to speak of "relations" (as in *cause and effect*.)

I have also come to the conclusion that to this day there are no concise words to explain what might have been the core of Messerschmidt's theories, the translator has to circumscribe these missing terms which makes the translation seem clumsy at times. In my opinion, FXM was speaking about connectedness, the relationship of facial expression to events in the rest of the

body, e.g.: The idea that a pain in a specific part of a body would result in a specific facial muscle response that would in turn upset the otherwise perfectly serene balance of the face. This would certainly correlate with his pinching himself under the ribs to induce pain and the subsequent observing of his face in a mirror to see what his facial response would be (see pg. [77](#) and note [542](#)).

Reading the artists utterances as addressing “relationships between face and body” makes FXM look much less mentally ill and much more congruent with someone excited about a possible discovery that no one else had considered. Such an interpretation also ties in with the conceptual dimensions inherent in the serenity of an Egyptian statue projecting the perfect conceptual balance of a god-like being; as was surely the case in the drawing of an Egyptian sculpture that FXM had treasured so much. Viewing the heads in this light may also yield a more conclusive grouping of the “Character Heads”. Much has been made of “FXM’s satyrs”, these, most certainly didn’t refer to the horny, hairy legged, creatures infesting ancient mythological forests, but to FXM’s propensity to biting humor, his practical jokes and love of satire.

FXM appears to have been a man of few letters, leading me to conclude that his words were equally few. When he spoke, he was as abrasive as men are who do not have much time to play social games. He was an honest man with a sense of humor, proud of his independence and self-reliance. He abhorred the manipulations and underhandedness that his clients, fellow faculty and fellow students expected from him. The pressure of reconciling his own tendencies and beliefs, coupled with exposure to the chemicals of his trade including lead and other toxic substances, must surely have resulted in some physiological impact on his brain; if I had to venture a guess I would bet on a blocked blood vessel filling up and exerting pressure on his brain as a result of stress to explain some of his admittedly odd behavior.

I do not believe that a full mental illness had gripped him. As an artist myself, I feel that the confusion of a recluse over a multitude of emotions and issues for which no psychological remedy was available at the time, lead him to less than scientific conclusions, as well as actions and severe reactions to the world around him. He may well have been one of the first real artists in an ocean of craftsmen, crafty men and sociopaths. He learned to deal with these and his own demons in his own way perhaps failing to express the complexities of his own thoughts in the acceptable ways of his time.

All art is a form of self therapy.