

ARUSHA

GALLERY

The best translations into English do not, in fact, read as if they were originally written in English. The English words are arranged in such a way that the reader sees a glimpse of another culture's patterns of thinking, hears an echo of another language's rhythms and cadences, and feels a tremor of another people's gestures and movements.

- Ken Liu, Translator's Postface to *The Three Body Problem*



Balneum, 15th C., f.3v, detail, © The University of Edinburgh

We spend most of our lives hovering on thresholds, receiving and translating messages from the eternally alien outside so that we can study them in our private inner worlds. We take the fruits of our studies and curate our thoughts and deeds and images into shows, archives, or artefacts that tell ourselves the stories of who we are, or ask ourselves questions, or form expressive gestures that we use to create identity by association. And we communicate that hopefully into the outside - in the hope that others' translations of our messages will be accurate.

Over time, humans (and possibly some other animals) have developed shorthands like language and ritual to speed up and increase the accuracy of translation. But because we did not do this all together at once in a big meeting circle under some trees, we now have two layers of translation. We have to take the language, gestures, and ritual context of the other into account when trying to understand what their message is, and what it means for us. Two thresholds to cross before the inner meets the outer and the other.

So, how do we stand at the threshold of communication with the Balneum? A 600 year old manuscript about ritualised medical bathing in 15th century Latin, translated into French, translated into English by a gallery with Google, translated into meaning, translated into an exhibition by curators

ARUSHA

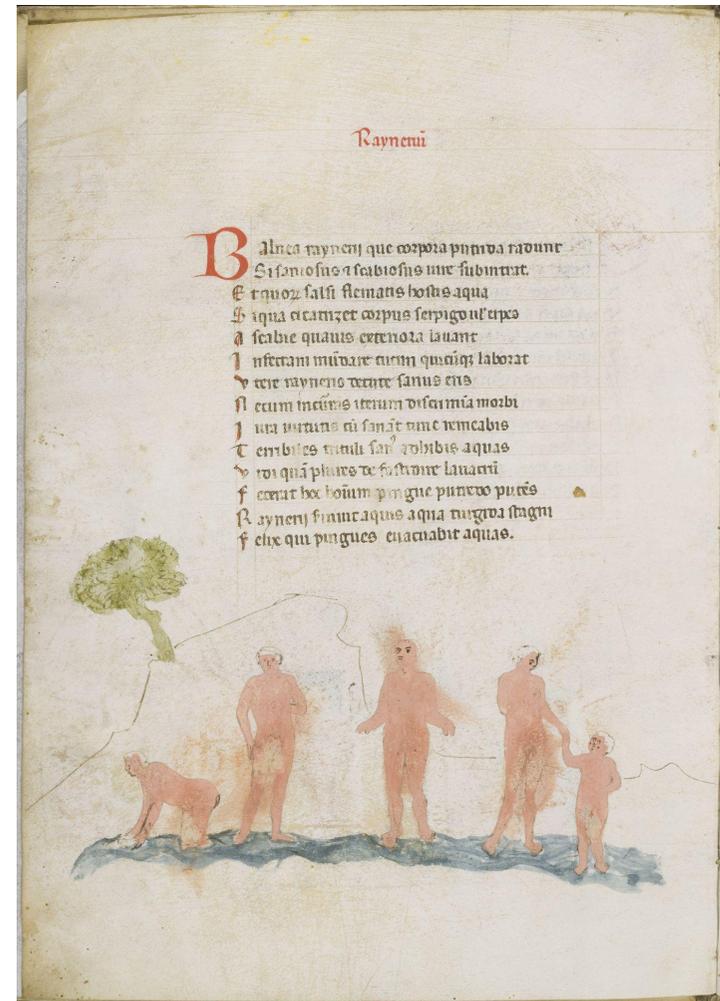
GALLERY

and artists. A kaleidoscope of meaning, bouncing around different worlds, culminating in artworks arranged in a space, to be encountered and translated by people, interpreted according to their understanding, and carried with them in their little worlds.

And what are we translating? We are taking a message about the act of bathing, to heal, to thrive, to clean, into our own understanding and inner language. Ritual baths in sacred or medicinal springs, taken communally, affecting each individual uniquely - a bath like a communication is to each their own. Many cultures globally have a living history of ritual bathing - and yes I'm including the bubble-bath and champagne 'me time' of the 20th century woman with disposable income and probably an adjustable shower head.

Through Christian baptismal, the classical idea of the Lethe, Conjure washes, Islamic w'udhu, hot spring healing and midwinter plunges; bathing to wash away more than dirt or in another sense to bring yourself into a fresh state of being is an ancient and widespread human behaviour that has developed into a set of rituals and lessons. These rituals and lessons are designed to communicate the means by which we can join the ranks of the washed - the renewed, whole, the born again, the clear. But although to submerge yourself in the waters and wash away the past and the pain is an almost universally recognised threshold, many bathing practices or mythical baths are culturally or temporally specific.

The universality of bathing rituals does not automatically entail the translatability of them from one context to another.



Balneum, 15th C., f.7v, © The University of Edinburgh

ARUSHA

GALLERY

In an analogous manner the universality of languages (for humans at least) does not automatically entail the translatability of meaning from one to another. With the Balneum and with *Bathing Nervous Limbs*, we have the advantages of imagery in addition to text - crude maybe, in the manuscript's case - but there. We can see the illuminator's translation of text into pictures of pink people robed and disrobing in blue and red cloaks, gesturing to body parts the water they're approaching will make whole. An example of what was found meaningful to them.

But they, like the manuscript's author, lived and died six hundred years ago in a world even more alien than ours. No human world is entirely alien, but the world of the Balneum is not easily touchable, smellable, or interrogable. At least, not solely through the manuscript, text, and illuminations. So for curators and artists and audience members today, attempting to translate all this for themselves and then communicate the meaning they have found to others, the task is deep and layered.

Like an amateur translator who is not fluent in the language and syntax of the text which entices them, artists and curator alike will reach for a combination of concordances, homonyms, onomatopoeia, syntax, context, guesswork, dialect, medium, and all the other clues to make meaning out of the messages they find in the world. They will search their inner-life 'library' for references, plugging phrases and particles hopefully (or faithfully) into google, and understand what they understand from the text and topic. Then they take it away to their inner world and pour over it until they have a message to share.

Translation, like bathing, like making art, like communication, like curation, like sickness, and like meaning, is a personal and transformative

practice. Ultimately, what I can offer from my inner world to add to the kaleidoscope of meanings spiralling out from the Balneum into this artistic project is not merely my thoughts on all this, but also my participation: four sections of the text translated by an amateur with imperfect Latin, imperfect history, and an imperfect ear, but as much of a desire to hear and understand messages from others as any other human alive.

ARUSHA

GALLERY

Raynerius

The Baths are of the Raynerii which heal decaying bodies,
with the two men who are the enemy of it (decay), salt and phlegm.
If from the creeping scars of the body you wish to creep,
A disease on the exterior that you want washed.
For whomever works to clean infected skin
Use the Raynerius, the skin will be healthy
If you do not (/if you cease) you incur the dangers
of the disease again The bank waters are terrible
with the healthy
I have seen many of them who dislike/fear the layer/flake/crust
(presumably eczema or similar skin condition?)
This has made the people rich, like decay, rotting.
The Raynerii, controlled by the waters of the lake, are
waterlogged and swollen Happy to be fat (rich) emptying
the waters.

Outside the Cave

The water that is outside the cave next to the sea beach
Is a crippling burden to stomach worms
But harms (those who suffer from) dropsy,
when it is sweet to drink: It does not have its
power when consumed and can be harmful.
Gently heated it is used to refresh the limbs
It heals injured lungs and liver
It is an antidote for the heart (a broken heart/poison that affects the
heart?) and a good (friendly) cough medicine.
(for) a dry fever heat, drench the members (arms and legs).

The route (of the water) is taken through a hidden world
To help with ailing skin
And the ancients say that it is miraculous (enough) to speak of
Outside the cave where the water bubbles

ARUSHA

GALLERY

Prato

It is the waters of the people/parish of Prato of which
the Balneum speaks Believed by many to be (the one
in) the work of Cicero

There is a difficult way which leads to the
lower regions (medical) And he is seeking a
water for sickness

This well reported excerpt invites consideration

It alleviates the hernias of the body heavy with humors (liquid).

It is said that it marvellously softens hard muscles

And the head, and shoulders for their correct drawing.

It wipes away fattiness and ulcers before the eyes.

In both the body lends support,

When wet with cold sweat it's time to avoid (it)

And do not drink it when (your) hands/limbs are warm.

Trituli

This ancient place is like entering the back of a tortoiseshell,
A house ingeniously carved from under a rock.

Here the diseased may change shape to their full form (?)

Which it is said anything given to the water may be able to.

It is enough of a thing to be wondered at, to
see them stand erect. This comes on a stream
that is sent only once (per day):

These are some of the first waves, and some

Having been thinned with flowing flows back whence it came.

This is more than long Bethesda does once a year (?).

One quickening motion of disease

This water has moved many on his daily journeys

Rheumatism flees / It strengthens the head of the stomach,

Frees (you) from dropsy, it is all put to flight.

Phelgmatics profit from it, and it prevents fever.

Sukayna Powell, 2021

