

Transcriber's Notes: Standard Operating Procedures

By Matthew Neal Preston II

This work is a transcription of the text found in the photocopies of the handwritten letters from George Santayana to Baron Albert von Westenholz. There are 242 pages of letters, which comprise 60 letters from Santayana to Westenholz (ranging from 1903 to 1937), as well as some additional letters, manuscripts, photographs, and drawings. I arranged the letters in chronological order—with photos at the end. As far as I know, there are no expansions or abbreviations to these letters available.

The transcription format on the Digital Santayana website provides 1) a digital image file of each page of the original letters written to Baron Albert von Westenholz from George Santayana—the “original”—which displays on the left; and 2) a typed version of each original—the “transcription”—which displays on the right. Each “original” is one page and at time multiple “originals” comprise a single letter. I used standard orthography and punctuation attempted to reproduce a verbatim transcription. As such, and to keep the text as clean and readable as possible, I implemented the following standard operating procedures:

- Instead of using only the text from each original in its respective transcription, I included all the text from each complete letter in the transcription that corresponds with each of the originals that are a part of the complete letter. Some of the complete letters include more than one original. I did this to allow the reader to see the originals in the context of the complete letter of which they are a part. Additionally, I have highlighted the text within each transcription that corresponds with its respective original. The transcriptions that correspond with only one original have no highlighted text.
- When Santayana's letters contain a greeting or a closing (e.g., “Dear Westenholz”, “yours ever”, and “best wishes”), I could not consistently discern when a clear and intended comma was written. I did not want to infer any punctuation that was not intended by Santayana. I realized that many of Santayana's punctuation choices were stylistic, and some of them were often differed in their agreement with varying contemporary style guides (e.g., AP style and APA

style). I wanted to best maintain the integrity of Santayana's letters, and I felt that the best way to do so—including uniformity as an objective—was to place a comma only when I thought one was clearly intended. When I was unsure, I did not insert a comma. I also chose to space every opening and closing greeting uniformly despite variance in the spacing on the originals. I applied the same method of uniform spacing for page headers and postscripts.

- Santayana's closings had many different formats for his name. In some letters, Santayana would write his name as "G. Santayana", while in others he would use "GS" or "G.S". I decided not to implement any method of uniformity for the way Santayana wrote his name at the ends of the letters as I felt changing these signatures would undermine the integrity of the letters and Santayana's intent.
- Some of the text within some of the originals seems not to have been a part of the letter when it was written. Examples of this include various comments, marginalia, and text inserted with carats. Some of this "inserted text" I transcribed as [Inserted text reads:]. In such instances, everything after the colon and before the closing square bracket is the inserted text. I did this for situations in which I could not conclude that Santayana wrote the text. When I believed that Santayana was the writer of the inserted text, I simply included the text in the transcription as if it were not inserted at a later point in time.
- I interpreted and maintained all symbols (e.g., macron—"ā"—vs. breve—"ǎ") even when I knew the symbol would not have been used normally. I did this to maintain the integrity of the letters that Santayana wrote and because I was unable to determine with complete accuracy which uses were proper and which were not. It became apparent to me that, at least in some situations, Santayana would place a symbol above certain characters to indicate a vowel when the character in question was possibly indistinguishable from another—either as a result of his penmanship or for some other reason (e.g., to distinguish between "u" and "n"). Examples can be seen when he writes in languages other than English as well. But, in other situations he used the marks appropriately. This may cause some confusion because some characters do use the corresponding symbol that Santayana used, while others do not.

- For paragraphs and indentation, I noticed that some sentences—which in some cases also begin new ideas—begin on new pages. However, in some of these situations, Santayana indented the sentence to begin a new paragraph, and in others he did not. As such, I maintained the indentation and separation of paragraphs only as made apparent by Santayana’s own hand. The exception to this rule is the case in which the sentence ending on the previous page ended with enough space for Santayana to put the beginning of the text that begins on the next page on the previous page, but he chose not to do so. This made it apparent to me that the sentence beginning on the subsequent page was intended to begin a new paragraph.

- Throughout the letters, Santayana used capitalized letters inconsistently. This has been an issue for transcribers of Santayana’s other works as well. Unfortunately, no consistency has been determined for these variants. Common examples of these variants are the words “and”, “the”, and “summer”. In these situations, for the sake of uniformity, I chose to use lowercase letters if the word was not the beginning of a sentence or part of a title. Even though this matter is arguably stylistic, I thought it would cause less confusion for the reader if there were some consistency.

- There are quite a few times that Santayana seemed to underline certain letters for emphasis but did not underline the entire word (e.g., terrain). In some instances, these gaps in underlining are obviously intentional, but in other instances they are not. As such, I chose to underline—in the transcriptions—exactly what was underlined by Santayana in the originals. If the underline fell underneath the base of any letter or character, then I considered that a part of the underlined portion of the text.

- While typing the transcriptions, the versions of Microsoft Word that I used had an issue with underlining. To be more specific, there were times that underlined characters would not show the line below them. I found that if I thickened the line then I could always see it. So, I chose to use a thicker line when underlining characters in the transcriptions. I used this method only for single underlines that were not part of words set in superscript or subscript.

- George Santayana was an avid user of the em dash. In his handwriting, Santayana was inconsistent regarding spaces before and after em dashes. In order to avoid any confusion, I placed spaces before and after each use of the em dash.

- One of the most difficult aspects of the transcription of the Westenholz Letters was differentiating Santayana's semicolons from his colons. Grammatically these two punctuation marks are often interchangeable. I found that Santayana's uses were inconsistent with the understanding that both colons and semicolons can be used to separate independent clauses and that colons can be used to separate independent clauses from dependent clauses. I chose to use the symbol that I thought best reflected what Santayana wrote in the original, unless it did not conform to any standards with which I was familiar (e.g., the use of a semicolon between an independent and a dependent clause).

- There are a few originals that have incomplete text, missing text, or damage to the page. I utilized the rest of the compilation of letters as a template to supply what I thought was the most appropriate text in all such cases.

- In the few instances that Santayana made an obvious typographical error (e.g., misspelled a word), I chose not to correct the error to maintain the integrity of Santayana's originals.

- Santayana preferred the British spelling of words to the American spelling (e.g., recognise > recognize). One of the biggest issues this presented in transcribing Santayana's letters was in differentiating his use of the letters "z" and "s"—which was almost completely impossible to differentiate at times in his cursive handwriting. I chose not to modernize or adjust Santayana's writing at all, but I also did not choose to use only the British spelling when possible. This is because there were some instances in which one character was obviously being used over another although it did not align with the British spelling of the word. Despite what might have been Santayana's intent for his published works, I transcribed the character I believed he actually

wrote on the original letter. I accomplished this by making a comparison to Santayana's other letters in which the same or similar characters were used.

- The intimate and conversational nature of the Westenholz Letters allowed Santayana to mention the names of many people, places, and things without clearly identifiable references. I provided identifying notes when available information made it possible to do so.

- Another challenging aspect of this project was discerning Santayana's writing in languages other than English (i.e., German, Latin, French, Spanish, and Greek). I mainly applied three resources to determine what Santayana wrote. The first was linguee.com, which is a language service that translates words and phrases in multiple contexts. The second was google.translate.com, which provided a rough translation for the text I had at each stage of my transcriptions. With this service, I was able to understand the gist of what Santayana was trying to say, which allowed me to incrementally determine what the text said. I also consulted scholars who were more familiar than I with the works and penmanship of George Santayana and speakers of the respective languages. With these resources, I believe that I came up with a complete and accurate transcription of Santayana's letters to Baron Albert von Westenholz.

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References

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