

LESBIANTIQUITY

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**PANTOUS
MAKE HER
LOVE ME**

LESBIANTIQUITY © Georgina Barker (Portknockie: Sapphizdat, 2024)

Pantous translation, introduction, and notes © Georgina Barker 2024

Greek text from: Robert W. Daniel & Franco Maltomini, eds, *Supplementum Magicum*, vol. 1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990)

Back cover art: 'Inflamed Heart' © Emily Setzer 2024

THE TRANSLATOR

Dr Georgina Barker

I am the inventor of the Root & Branch translation method, which I developed to highlight the queerness of selected classical texts, drawing on my experience as a translator from Russian. I am the author of *SPQR in the USSR: Elena Shvarts's Classical Antiquity*, and the compiler and director of the verbatim play *Princess Dashkova, the Woman Who Shook the World*. I am currently researching receptions of Greek and Roman 'lesbianism' by Russian lesbians and bisexual women. I live in Scotland with my wife and my parrot.



ΠΑΝΤΟΥΣ

The 18-line (23 words + 1 picture) love spell SM 1.37¹ was inscribed on a pair of lead tablets, 8.8 cm high by 10.1 cm wide, which were nailed together at each corner with the writing facing inwards, and placed in the tomb of the man the spell adjures.² It was probably commissioned by a woman named Pantous in second-century Panopolis (modern-day Akhmim) in Egypt.³

In the spell, Pantous, daughter of Tmesiōs, demands the love of Nikē, daughter of Apollōnous. The spell is short and to-the-point: for its power it calls once on the soul of a dead man, naming him as Hōriōn son of Sarapous (unusually⁴) and including a drawing of his mummified body; it then twice makes its request for Nikē to fall in love with Pantous; and it ends by specifying ‘until/for 5 months’.

This phrase has caused confusion⁵ – why would a spell ask for only five months of love? or how could a child be born successfully after only five months? or is the spell promising success within five months? – but one interpretation (Eitrem’s, championed by Brooten) stands out as the likeliest. Five months refers to a trial marriage, common in this period – five months living together *agraphōs*, ‘unwritten’, after which the union could be formalised with a written contract.⁶

¹ SM = *Supplementum Magicum* (Daniel & Maltomini 1990).

² Daniel & Maltomini (1990) p. 115.

³ Magic spells were usually composed and written by scribes. Pantous’s name and gender are somewhat (but not very) debatable (see n. A9–10/B3–4 below). The spell has also been dated to the first centuries BC and AD, but the scholarly consensus is the second century AD (Daniel & Maltomini 1990 p. 115 n. 1). The placing of the spell at Panopolis is based on the name Tmesiōs, common on mummy labels from there (Daniel & Maltomini 1990 p. 116).

⁴ Dead souls are normally adjured anonymously (Daniel & Maltomini 1990 p. 115).

⁵ See Brooten (1996) pp. 92–3 n. 46.

⁶ Brooten (1996) p. 107.

Pantous's open⁷ seeking of a heterosexual-style marriage is very intriguing in what it might say about her character, gender-identity, and milieu⁸ – and very relatable.

Pantous's spell has elements in common with the other two lesbian spells from antiquity, Herais's and Sophia's.⁹ It shares their matrilineality, their mix of Greek and Egyptian names (though not Sophia's spell's magical syncretism), and their controlling, violent language (though far more muted than in Sophia's spell). It differs from them in not having any *voces magicae* (mystical gobbledegook), adjuring a real dead person rather than deities, and having a picture.

⁷ Brooten (1996 p. 108) points out that commissioning spells was probably a quite public act, involving visiting the scribe, reading aloud, and ritual placement of the tablets.

⁸ Brooten (1996 pp. 96, 107–9) speculates that Pantous may have been taking on a masculine persona, like Lucian's Megilla/os (see LESBIANTIQUITY 25), though notes that the act of commissioning a spell does not imply a male role, since women commissioned spells to attract men; Brooten also gives four examples of female same-sex marriage recorded as taking place in second- and early-third-century Egypt: Clement of Alexandria, Ptolemy of Alexandria, Iamblichos (see LESBIANTIQUITY 24), and the Sifra (p. 107).

⁹ See LESBIANTIQUITY 22 & 28.

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Brooten, Bernadette, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)

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ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore a variety of options for the text: any variants in the original < ^{Greek} _{Latin} > texts and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words of the original text, replicating when possible word order, root meanings of words, and grammatical gender $\left(\begin{array}{c} [n] \\ [f] \\ [m] \end{array} \right)$ of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

THE PANTOUS TEXT READING GUIDE

[] = supplemented text in the Greek

< > = corrected text in the Greek

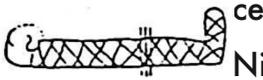
underdot (e.g. π̣) = a doubtful or missing letter in the Greek

Line breaks preserve the formatting of the tablets. The image is Daniel & Maltomini's very accurate line drawing of the original picture in its original position. Photographs of the tablets can be found in Boll (1910 pp. 14–15) and Brooten (1996 figs. 9–10).

SM 1.37

TABLET A

Hōriōn (Sarapous's [son]),
make and for-



ce

Nikē

5

(Apol-
lōnou-

s's [daughter])

to fall in lo-

ve with Pan-

10

tous,

whom [f]

tmesiōs bore.



TABLET A

Ὅριων Σαραπούτος,
ποίησον καὶ ἀνάγκα-



σον

Νίκην

5

Ἄπολ-
λωνού-
τος ἐ-
ρασθή-

ναι Πα<v>-

10

τοῦτ[ος,]

ἦν ἐτ[εκ-]

ε τμεσιῶσ.

TABLET B

make Nikē (Apol-
lōnous's [daughter])

to fall in love with Pantous,

whom [f] Tmesiōs

5

bore, <until for> 5
months.

TABLET B

ποίησον Νίκην Ἀ[πολ-]
λωνούτος

ἐρασθήναι Παντού-

τος, ἦν ἔτεκεν

5

Τμεσιῶς, ἐπὶ ε''

μήνας.

NOTES

A1 *Hōriōn*: the name of the dead man in whose tomb these spell tablets were placed (Daniel & Maltomini 1990 p. 115). His name is based on Horos, the Egyptian falcon-headed god (Brooten 1996 p. 92).

A1 *Σαραπούτος*; *Sarapous's*: the genitive functions as a matronymic. Her name is based on Sarapis, the Graeco-Egyptian god (Brooten 1996 p. 92).

A2-3 *ἀνάγκασον*; *force*: Eitrem's reading, preferred by Daniel & Maltomini (1990 p. 116) and me due to its frequent appearance in other spells (Sophia's spell uses words with this root – see LESBIANTIQUITY 28). Other readings are *ἀναποί[η]σον*, 'make up / prepare' (Boll); *ἀναπόδ[ι]σον*, 'make [her] come/step back' (Wünsch); *ἀνάπεισον*, 'persuade' (Preisendanz).

A3-4 A drawing of Hōriōn's mummy (from Daniel & Maltomini 1990 p. 116). (That is, Hōriōn's mummified body – not his mother Sarapous!)

A4, B1 *Nikē*: a Greek name meaning 'victory'.

A5-7, B1-2 *Ἀπολλωνούτος*; *Apollōnous's*: the genitive functions as a matronymic. Her name is based on the Greek god Apollo.

A7-9, B3 *ἐρασθῆναι*; *to fall in love*: *eros* – sexual love.

A9-10, B3-4 *Pantous*: her name appears as *Παιτούτος*, 'Paitous', on tablet A, and *Παντούτος*, 'Pantous', on Tablet B. Rather than the spell customer's name being spelled differently on the two tablets, it seems most likely that the second stroke of the nu was lost from Tablet A where the lead is worn at the edge, turning it into iota: ν → ι (Brooten 1996 p. 93 n. 47). I have corrected the text from *Παι-* to *Παν-*. The name is gender-neutral, and she was long presumed male, despite her repeated feminine pronouns (see Brooten 1996 pp. 93-6).

A12, B5 *Tmesiōs*: an Egyptian name meaning 'midwife'. The name is very common on mummy-labels from Panopolis, where there was a local cult of Heqet, goddess of childbirth (Daniel & Maltomini 1990 pp. 116, 117).

B5-6 *ἐπὶ ε' μῆνας*; *until/for 5 months*: the slashes next to the epsilon make it a numeral. The time phrase with *ἐπὶ* + accusative means 'up to / until' or 'for the length of' (CGL p. 545). Pantous wants a five-month trial marriage, perhaps leading to something more permanent (Brooten 1996 p. 107).



Emily Long

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