

The Artistic Object as μάρτυς and the Formula μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων in Late-antique Epigrams for Public Monuments

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μαρτυρίην γὰρ Ἔρωσ μόνος οὐκ ἐφίλησεν
ἔμπνουσιν Phld. *Anth.Pal.* 5.4.3–4

IT IS A RATHER COMMON literary convention in laudatory poetry, particularly in inscriptions, that people, places, and things are “witnesses” to the deeds or the work of the honorand. The pattern is pervasive, especially in epigrams from the *Garland* of Philip.¹

This paper falls into three sections. In the first two I study late-antique laudatory epigrams for illustrious citizens that feature the motif of artwork (mostly statues) testifying to the honorand’s

¹ In Parmen. *Anth.Plan.* 222.4 = Gow-Page, *GP XV* 2627, the statue of Nemesis at Rhamnous bears witness to Attica of victory and of art; in Crin. *Anth.Pal.* 9.283.3 = *GP XXVI* 1919 = 26.3 Ypsilanti, mountains and rivers are depicted as witnesses of Germanicus’ victories over the Celts; in another epigram by Crinagoras, *Anth.Pal.* 9.419.4 = *GP XXIX* 1938 = 29.4 Ypsilanti, Pyrenean waters attest the fame of Augustus; in Antip. Thess. *Anth.Pal.* 9.238.1–2 = *GP LXXXIII* 535–536, the bronze statue of Apollo by Onatas bears witness to Zeus and Leto of their beauty; in Alph. *Anth.Pal.* 7.237.2 = *GP VI* 3543 Apollo is represented on Themistocles’ funerary monument as μάρτυς of his deeds. Also in Antip. Sid. *Anth.Pal.* 7.427.3–4 = Gow-Page, *HE XXXII* 398–399, the tombstone features four dice which represent (μαρτυρέουσι) the throw called “Alexander”; in Greg. Naz. *Anth.Pal.* 8.62.2, a table bears witness to the passing of Nonna, Gregory’s mother, while she was praying, while in Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 15.10.1, the sea and the waves should give testimony to a shipwreck. For the *Greek Anthology* I follow the text of H. Beckby, *Griechische Anthologie I–IV* (Munich 1967–68).

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deeds. In particular, I focus on the *iunctura* μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων, which marks a precise subcategory of public honorific inscriptions in which the artistic object acts as μάρτυς. Based on this review of the late-antique evidence, the third section shows that it is possible to trace back the original form and model of the conventional *iunctura* to μάρτυρές εἰσι in the classical age, when this expression is already attested in inscriptional poetry. I argue that the widespread motif of artwork, particularly statues, as “witnesses” in epigrams probably derives from the practice of calling upon gods and goddesses as witnesses. Late-antique inscriptions naturally ascribed to statues as the nearest representatives of the gods their own function as witnesses. They thus referred to them as μάρτυρες. This theme of the artistic object that bears witness likely in turn stimulated in late-antique honorific inscriptions the expansion of the original formula μάρτυρές εἰσι into μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων.

1. *The role of artwork as “witness” in late-antique honorific inscriptions*

The ekphrastic theme of the statue bearing witness to the achievements of the honorand was very popular, especially in late-antique epigrams. In this section I examine occurrences of this motif in inscriptions of the fourth to sixth centuries. A few examples were already collected by Federica Giommoni.² To these I add two. First, an inscription for the general Theodosius the Elder, whose στήλη in Ephesus acts as μάρτυς to his virtues (Merkelbach-Stauber, *SGO* 03/02/24 = *Late Statues of Antiquity-*

² F. Giommoni, “La testimonianza catalogica dei barbari: tra retorica e iconografia,” in D. Gigli Piccardi et al. (eds.), *Studi di poesia greca tardoantica* (Florence 2013) 135–147, at 138–143. The chapter focuses on the rhetorical *topos* of a list of subdued barbarians—a well-established convention to celebrate the emperor’s victories in both imperial panegyric and late-antique eulogistic epigraphy—as it appears in an epigram from the *Cycle* of Agathias (Arab. *Anth. Plan.* 39 = II Giommoni = *LSA*-476), which I discuss below. The “witness motif” is briefly touched upon at the beginning, solely in connection with barbarians as witnesses, and viewed through the lens of its visual impact in contemporary works of art dedicated to the emperor.

722; A.D. 390):

Εὐδικίης, μῶλοιο, σαωφροσύνης, ἀρετῶν
μάρτυς ἐγὼ στήλη Θεοδοσίῳ τελέθω.

To justice, to toil, to temperance, to the virtues, I, the statue
dedicated to Theodosius, stand as witness.

Second, an honorific inscription for the proconsul Eustathius on his statue base, in which the statue conventionally speaks in the first person and declares that it testifies to the good and noble things he did, as well as to those that the assembly did for him in return (*SGO* 05/01/09 = *LSA*-516; Smyrna, fourth/fifth cent.):

εἰκὼν Εὐσταθίου πέλω, φίλος· εἰμὶ δὲ μάρτυς
ἀμφοτέρων κραδίης πα[ν]ετήτυμος, ὅσσα μὲν αὐτὸ[ς]
βουλὴν ἐσθλὰ ἔοργε πονεύμενος, ὅσ(σ)α δὲ βουλή
ἀνθυπάτων τὸν ἄριστον ἀμείψατο κυδαίνουσα.

I am the statue of Eustathius, friend. I bear true witness to the purpose of both sides, to all the noble things that he has done working hard for the council, and to all the things that the council, holding him in honor as the best of proconsuls, has done in return.

In Agath. *Anth.Pal.* 1.36.5–6 = 17 Viansino the picture of Theodorus, the illustrious *magister officiorum* and *proconsul Asiae* in the mid-sixth century, portrayed while receiving the insignia of office from the archangel, testifies to his gratitude, for he faithfully had the archangel's grace toward him painted in colors:

τῆς δ' εὐγνώμοσύνης μάρτυς γραφίς· ὑμετέρεην γὰρ
χρῶμασι μιμηλὴν ἀντετύπωσε χάριν.

This picture testifies to his gratitude, for he faithfully depicted your grace towards him in colors.

An epigram by Michael the grammarian on an icon of the poet and historian Agathias Scholasticus claims (lines 3–4) that his hometown, the city of Myrina, gave him this portrait as a testimony of his love and his own literary skill (*Anth.Plan.* 316 = *SGO* 05/04/01 = *LSA*-663 and *LSA*-2494):

... καὶ πόρε τήνδε
εἰκόνα, καὶ στοργῆς μάρτυρα καὶ σοφίης·

(The city) gave him this portrait as a witness to his love and his literary skill.

The “witness” motif endures down to the Byzantine era. For example, it is expressed by the verb μαρτυρέω in votive epigrams or inscriptions for small objects (Rhoby, *Byz. Epigramme* II no. Me28; France, before 1204):

καὶ πρὶν ὑπουργεῖ τὸ τρύβλιον Δεσπότη
 κεῖνῳ μαθητὰς ἐστιῶντι τοὺς φίλους
 καὶ νῦν ὑπουργεῖ τοῖς μειλιγμοῖς Δεσπότη·
 μαρτυρεῖ τοῦτο δῶρον εἰσειργασμένον.

For previously the bowl served that Lord when he entertained his beloved pupils, and now it is used for the offerings to the Lord. This is witnessed by the gift made for this purpose.

No. Te6.2 Rhoby (Meteora, fourteenth cent.):

ὡς μαρτυρεῖ τὸ λύθρον ἐν τῇ φιάλῃ.
 As the blood in the bowl testifies.

Especially in Byzantine epigrams for sacred objects, like the two just quoted, the offering “testifies” or “bears witness” to the religious devotion of the donor. The motif is also featured, again with μαρτυρέω, in the epitaph for Basil II (d. 1025), buried in the church of St John the Evangelist near the Ἐβδομον in Constantinople (lines 15–16):³

καὶ μαρτυροῦσι τοῦτο Πέρσαι καὶ Σκύθαι,
 σὺν οἷς Ἀβασγός, Ἴσμαήλ, Ἄραβ, Ἰβηρ.

And this is witnessed by the Persians and the Scythians, [and] with them the Abasgians, the Ishmaelites, the Arabs, and the Iberians.

The different peoples listed as witnesses could have been actually carved in Basil’s funerary monument or, by exploiting the power of ekphrasis through allusion, they might have been only evoked in the mind of the reader.

From the cases examined above, we conclude that the motif of the statue bearing witness to the achievements of the honorand is a key poetic convention of inscriptions on artifacts,

³ S. G. Mercati, “Sull’epitafio di Basilio II Bulgaroctonos,” *Bessarione* 25 (1921)137–142 = Mercati, *Collectanea Byzantina* II (Bari 1970) 226–231.

monuments, and buildings, a convention sanctioned by imperial power or, more generally, bearing the official authority of a formal literary code. The use of μάρτυς peculiar to Christians⁴ (“martyr” or “witness to the truth”)⁵ likely shaped the “witness theme” in late-antique honorific epigrams with ekphrastic implications: the task of bearing witness is performed by mute statues, which bear real and living testimony though fixed in marble to the eyes of the viewer (or visualizing reader).

2. *The iunctura μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων*

A group of epigrams for honorific statues that give expression to the “witness theme” feature the *iunctura* μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων. Alan Cameron studied it in his work on Porphyrius and other charioteers from fifth/sixth-century Constantinople but limited his analysis to very few examples.⁶ This formula appears to have been a favorite of late-antique epigrammatists. In this section I review all its occurrences and expand previous studies to include its variants and adaptations. I show that the expression was not only good literary phrasing: its political significance suited the formal language of inscriptions in late antiquity. My approach allows me to reconstruct the original form of the *iunctura* against the strong conventional background on which it rests.

The formula μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων occurs in the clausula of the pentameter in Anon. *Anth.Plan.* 353.2 = *LSA*-361, one of the epigrams carved on the decorated bases of the bronze statues of Porphyrius in the Hippodrome:

⁴ In late-antique honorific inscriptions for eminent dedicatees the word μάρτυς is never employed in the Christian sense of “martyr.” This use, however, is common e.g. in Book 1 (Christian epigrams: 5 occurrences) and Book 8 (epigrams of Gregory of Nazianus: 17 occurrences) of the *Greek Anthology*. For a comprehensive survey of the word family of μάρτυς in Nonnus see F. Vian, “Μάρτυς chez Nonnos de Panopolis: étude de sémantique et de chronologie,” *REG* 110 (1997) 143–160.

⁵ E.g. Greg. Naz. *Anth.Pal.* 8.118.6 μάρτυρες ἀτρεκίης. Cf. also the use of μαρτύρομαι in *Anth.Pal.* 8.169.1.

⁶ A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford 1973) 91.

Εἰ φθόνος ἡρεμέοι, κρίνειν δ' ἐθέλοιεν ἀέθλους,
πάντες Πορφυρίου μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων.

If envy would keep quiet and they should be willing to judge the contests, all bear witness to Porphyrius' labors.

Everyone is a witness to the glorious deeds of Porphyrius. The *iunctura* is found adapted in other poems of roughly the same age. But before we look at such adaptations, consider the epigram in *Anth. Plan.* 39.4 = II Giommoni = *LSA*-476, by Arabius Scholasticus (one of the *Cycle* poets), which is dedicated to an icon of Longinus, *hyparchos* in A.D. 537–539 and 542 and *magister militum* in Constantinople in 551:

Νεῖλος, Περσίς, Ἴβηρ, Σόλυμοι, Δύσις, Ἄρμενίς, Ἴνδοί
καὶ Κόλχοι σκοπέλων ἐγγύθι Καυκασίω
καὶ πεδία ζείοντα πολυσπερέων Ἀγαρηνῶν
Λογγίνου ταχινῶν μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων·

The Nile, Persia, the Iberian, the Solymoi, the West, Armenia, the Indians, the Colchians near the peaks of Caucasus, and the burning plains of the widespread Hagarenes are witnesses to the swift labors of Longinus.

A list of peoples and places perhaps fixed in marble (including the river Nile) act as witnesses to Longinus' deeds. An epigram by Leontius Scholasticus (*Anth. Plan.* 37.1–2 = XV Giommoni = *LSA*-477) offers another instance. It celebrates Peter Barsymes, *comes sacrarum largitionum* (A.D. 542 and 557/8–560), *patricius* (542), *praefectus praetorio Orientis* (543–546 and 555–559), and honorary consul:

Πέτρον ὀράς χρυσεῖσιν ἐν εἵμασιν· αἱ δὲ παρ' αὐτὸν
ἀρχαὶ ἀμοιβαίων μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων·

You see Peter in his golden robes, and the offices beside him bear witness to his alternating labors.

The representation of Peter's offices (ἀρχαί) next to his portrait are witnesses to his achievements as honorary consul and as *praefectus praetorio Orientis*. Perhaps Peter's offices were personified and painted standing by him—the first *praefectura*, then the consulship, and once again the *praefectura* (a second time), the

genitive ἀμοιβαίων alluding to the fact that the two prefectures alternated with the consulship.

As to adaptations of the formula μάρτυρες εἰσι πόνων, the closest parallel identified by Cameron dates back to the second or third century A.D. It is an inscriptional poem from Rome (*GV* 1937.1–2 = *IGUR* 1328):

ἀθάνατ[ος] μερόπων οὐδεις ἔφν· τουῦδε, Σεβήρα,
Θησεύς, Αἰακίδαί, μάρτυρες εἰσι λόγου·

No man is immortal: to this statement, Severa, Theseus and the sons of Aeacus testify.

A further adaptation is echoed by an epigram (*Anth.Plan.* 38 = VIII Giommoni = *SGO* 20/11/03 = *LSA*-484) by John Barbu-callus (another *Cycle* poet) on an εἰκὼν of Synesius Scholasticus “erected in Berytus on the occasion of his victory in battle” (εἰς εἰκόνα Συνεσίου σχολαστικῷ ἐπὶ νίκη μάχης ἀνατεθεῖσαν ἐν Βηρυτῶ):

Οὐχὶ παρ’ Εὐρώτᾳ μόνον ἄνδρες εἰσὶ μαχηταί,
οὐδὲ παρ’ Ἴλισσῷ μνάμονές εἰσι δίκας·
ὡς ἀπὸ τᾶς Σπάρτας, ὡς αὐτᾶς ἄστὸν Ἀθάνας
Συνέσιον Νίκα καὶ Θέμις ἠγάσατο.

Not only by Eurotas are there warriors, and not only by Ilissus are there men mindful of justice. Victory and Themis revered Synesius as if he were from Sparta, as if he were a citizen of Athens itself.⁷

The Athenians dwelling by the Illyssus are not the only ones who remember (μνάμονές εἰσι) to act and live according to justice. In this epigram the Eurotas and the Illyssus, the respective rivers of Sparta and Athens, to our surprise do not bear witness to the glorious deeds of their compatriots (as rivers often do in laudatory poems). Here they are replaced by men who take up the role of μάρτυρες. It is important that, from a formal and stylistic point of view, the words μνάμονές εἰσι δίκας are modeled precisely after μάρτυρες εἰσι πόνων. This attests that, at least

⁷ Cf. also Anon. *Anth.Plan.* 351.1 = *LSA*-361 κήρυκες ἀμεμφέες εἰσὶν ἀγώνων, where the structural parallel is close to μάρτυρες εἰσι πόνων, but the meaning differs.

within this genre, the latter was recognized as an established poetic formula which, like all formulas, could be modified and adapted to suit new contexts and expressive needs. It is uncertain whether the two rivers were depicted in Synesius' monument. From what we know about typical ekphrastic play, we can assume that the elements and figures denoted as witnesses in the epigrams for Porphyrius and Longinus, and in the second-century Roman inscription and the epitaph of Basil II, were actually represented in the monuments. It also seems quite certain that the offices mentioned in Leontius' epigram for Peter Barsymes were actually depicted (and probably personified).

In inscriptional contexts like those analyzed above, both the image and the accompanying text combine to bear joint witness: the text refers to, clarifies, and amplifies the representation, enhancing its authority and expressive power. The interpretation of such epigrams must always bear in mind the inextricable bond between text and image. This facilitates a suitable appreciation of the "witness theme" and prevents traditional labels from dulling its original sense. Even if the "witnesses" were not represented in the artwork, the evocative power of the written word could call to the reader's mind relevant images from suitable contexts, such as those seen, for example, during the triumphs celebrated in the Hippodrome of Constantinople.

The examples reviewed above, including the variants, show that the expression *μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων* was an established poetic formula in late antiquity. This conventional unit belongs to a language code that falls within the so-called "stile moderno," that is, the language and meter codified in late-antique literary poetry, of which the supreme exponent is Nonnus of Panopolis.⁸

⁸ For this reason it is called "Nonnian," though it was not originally developed by him. On the definition of the "stile moderno" see, e.g., M. Whitby, "From Moschus to Nonnus: The Evolution of the Nonnian Style," in N. Hopkinson (ed.), *Studies in the Dionysiaca of Nonnus* (Cambridge 1994) 99–155; G. Agosti and F. Gonnelli, "Materiali per la storia dell'esametro dei poeti

Strong support for this statement is provided by Nonn. *Dion.* 46.29 ἐπιμάρτυρές εἰσι κεραυνοί, which may have played a decisive role in licensing its adoption as an approved formula. It was certainly entrenched in the poetic language of artwork carved, hammered, or painted for public display, and endorsed by secular power. Its use in inscribed verses marked the message as official. The depiction of monuments as witnesses (or of elements represented on them) was a common practice in laudatory inscriptions for statues exhibited in public spaces. This was perceived by the audience as a conventional motif of public poetry focused on self-representation.

3. *The origin of the expression μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων*

The use of μάρτυς, or of cognate compounds and derivatives of it, is often accompanied by a genitive. This is abundantly attested in the *Greek Anthology*.⁹ The expression μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων

cristiani greci,” in M. Fantuzzi et al. (eds.), *Struttura e storia dell’esametro greco I* (Rome 1995) 289–434.

⁹ Antig. *Anth.Pal.* 13.28.5 = Page, *FGE I* 37 μάρτυρα Βακχίων ἀέθλων; Call. *Anth.Pal.* 6.311.2 = Gow-Page, *HE XXVII* 1172 νίκης μάρτυρα τοῦ Ῥοδίου; Hedyf. *Anth.Pal.* 5.199.6 = *HE II* 1836 = 2.6 Floridi ὕπνου καὶ σκυλμῶν τῶν τότε μαρτύρια; Anon. *Anth.Plan.* 268.2 ἠὲ σὺ τῆς κείνου μάρτυς ἀκεστορίης; Anon. *Anth.Plan.* 279.6 χερμάδι τοῦ κόμπου μαρτυρίην κομίσαι; Alph. *Anth.Pal.* 7.237.2 = Gow-Page, *GP VI* 3543 ἀμοτέρων μάρτυρα; Euen. *Anth.Pal.* 11.166.2 = *GPXI* 2339 πλούτου μάρτυς; Euen. *Anth.Plan.* 166.4 = *GPXI* 2341 μάρτυρα τῆς τέχνης; Parmen. *Anth.Plan.* 222.4 = *GP XV* 2627 νίκης καὶ σοφίης Ἀτθίδι μαρτύριον; Antip. Thess. *Anth.Pal.* 7.369.2 = *GP XLIX* 338 Πανελλήνων πύθεο μαρτυρίας; Phil. *Anth.Pal.* 7.234.4 = *GP XXXI* 2842 ἐς προτέριην ἔργων ἄρσενα μαρτυρίην; Phil. *Anth.Pal.* 6.236.2 = *GP II* 2643 Ἄκτιακοῦ πολέμου κείμεθα μαρτύρια; Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 3.15.6 μύθων ἐσθλῶν μάρτυς; Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 7.331.4 πιστὸν ἐμοῦ βίτου μάρτυρα σωφροσύνης; Greg. Naz. *Anth.Pal.* 8.118.6 μάρτυρες ἀτρεκίης; Pall. *Anth.Pal.* 10.54.3–4 τοῦδ’ ὁ τυραννίσεως Διονύσιος Ἡρακλείας / τῆς ἐν τῷ Πόντῳ μάρτυς; Jul. Aegypt. *Anth.Pal.* 6.18.2 γηραλέων ... μαρτυρίην ῥυτίδων; Jul. Aegypt. *Anth.Pal.* 6.19.4 δόρου ... μαρτυρίην; Jul. Aegypt. *Anth.Pal.* 7.583.3 μάρτυρα μόχθων; Maced. *Anth.Pal.* 9.645.3 = 26 Madden μάρτυς ἐγὼ πρώτη γενόμην Διός; Anon. *Anth.Plan.* 344.5 ἐπιμάρτυρα νίκης; Leon *Anth.Pal.* 9.578.8 τοῦτων δὲ μάρτυς; *SGO* 04/02/06.2–4 = *LSA*-654 (Sardis, fourth cent.) Ἀχόλιος, / ᾧ βουλή μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν χάριν

follows this same syntax. In this final section I propose a possible origin for this formula. From my discussion, deities in epigrams containing the expression *μάρτυρές εἰσι* emerge as having played a key role in the development of the *μάρτυς* theme.

As Cameron notes, “it would be superfluous to cite examples of so common a theme.”¹⁰ But the pervasiveness of the theme does not prevent the search for the original model of this *iunctura*. In a funerary verse inscription (*GVI* 1457 = *CEG* 82 = 12 Tentori Montalto) from Kokkina Chomata (Lemnos), dating to the second half of the fifth century B.C. and dedicated to an *ἄωρος*, familiar wording appears in the clausula of line 4:¹¹

[ἄκ]ρωσ μὲν σοφίας μέτρο[ν ἐπι]στάμενος
καὶ ψυχὴν ἀγαθός· τούτω[ν μάρ]τυρές εἰσιν ἐμ[οί].

Knowing the measure of wisdom at the farthest point and noble
in soul: I have witnesses to this.

The inscription consists of an elegiac distich, followed by a pentameter and a final, irregular pentameter with an extra foot. The deceased fell in battle for his fatherland. The anonymous speaker states that he has witnesses (*μάρ]τυρές εἰσιν ἐμ[οί]*) that testify to the wisdom of the dead and of his brave soul. The formula *μάρτυρές εἰσι* occurs in a Hellenistic literary epigram too. In Diosc. *Anth.Pal.* 5.56.7–8 = Gow-Page, *HE* I 1469–1470 = 1.7–8 Galán Vioque, an erotic poem on the charm of the poet’s mistress, we read:

ἀλλὰ τί μὲν κυσὶν ὀστέα; μάρτυρές εἰσι
τῆς ἀθυροστομίας οἱ Μίδεω κάλαμοι.

εἰκόνα βαιὴν / στήσαμεν, εὐνομίας μάρτυρα πιστοτάτην; Kaibel 905.5 = *I.Cret.* IV 323 = L. Robert, *Hellenica* IV (1948) 89–94 = *LSA*-785 (ca. fourth cent.) Δίκης ἐπιμαρτυρα θεσμῶν; *SGO* 02/09/09.6 = *ala2004* 41 = *I Aph2007* 8.608 = *LSA*-225 (Aphrodisias, mid-fourth cent.) *μάρτυς σῶν καμάτων*.

¹⁰ Cameron, *Porphyrus* 91.

¹¹ Perhaps under the influence of *Il.* 3.280, ὑμεῖς μάρτυροι ἔστε. For “they bear witness to ...” and further parallels see also A. Harder, *Callimachus. Aetia* II (Oxford 2012) 629–630 on Callim. *Aet.* fr. 75.48 Pf. = 174.48 Massimilla ψήφου δ’ ἂν ἐμῆς ἐπιμάρτυρες εἶεν.

But why do I point out bones to dogs? Midas' reeds bear witness to impertinent loquacity.

This is a very close stylistic parallel, which proves that the phrasing was codified within the epigrammatic genre as formulaic. Finally, let us consider the following, from an epitaph (*IG II² 13165.1–2 = GVI 1058*):

Εἰμὶ μὲν ἐκ Πιρέως, ἱερὰ δέ με ἐδέξατο Ἐλευσεῖν
ζήσασαν σεμνῶς· μάρτυρές εἰσι θεαί.

I come from Piraeus, but the sacred land of Eleusis received me after I lived in an honorable way: the goddesses bear witness to this.

It is a funerary inscription from Eleusis for a woman who had lived σεμνῶς, as the goddesses testify. It dates to the third/fourth century A.D.

From the evidence thus far we may conclude that μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων likely rests on an original formula μάρτυρές εἰσι, which the three instances reviewed above prove to be a codified epigrammatic expression. Of these, the epigram from Lemnos might be its earliest attestation. Moreover, I believe that the Eleusinian epitaph serves as a link that clarifies, best exemplifies, and marks as completed the transition from the conventional phrasing μάρτυρές εἰσι to μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων, the standard form in late-antique honorific epigrams. It also illuminates the general development of the theme of the statue as witness.

Of course one cannot rule out accidents of transmission: there may have been earlier attestations or other contemporary epigrams, now lost, that feature deities as “witnesses” with the same or similar language. Nonetheless, given its parallel structure, meaning, and metrical placement, it seems certain that μάρτυρές εἰσι is the *Ur*-formula and model for the late-antique μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων. At some point along the way, probably before the late-antique period or even the high imperial age,¹² the asso-

¹² Since the parallel of *GVI 1937 = IGUR 1328* (second or third cent.) provided by Cameron already shows a variation of the formula μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων.

ciation of “gods as witnesses” with the formula *μάρτυρές εἰσι* was expanded into the *iunctura* *μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων*, driven by the growth and expansion of the theme of the work of art as *μάρτυς* (especially statues).

It is hardly surprising that a god should be conventionally called upon as a universal witness.¹³ And the depiction of gods as *μάρτυρες* in the context of *μάρτυρές εἰσι πόνων* appears fully developed in the second or third century, as shown by the first couplet of the Roman inscription singled out by Cameron and quoted above (*GVI* 1937 = *IGUR* 1328), which offers a slight variant with demigods as witnesses (Theseus and the Aeacidae). Artistic embodiments of deities, whether statues, reliefs, or paintings, may play the same role in a representative mode. The shift of meaning is easily explained: in votive epigrams gods are witnesses to the dedicatee’s gesture, and their statues are most intimately proximate to them. Thus, statues can readily bear witness to the accomplishments of the honorand in laudatory epigrams.

To conclude, the formula *μάρτυρές εἰσι* was already attested in the classical age, specifically in connection with deities as wit-

¹³ The Sun, whether as Helios or Apollo, had been portrayed as the universal witness since Homer: *Il.* 3.277–280; Aesch. *PV* 91, *Eum.* 576, 594, 609; Soph. *Aj.* 845–849; Nonnus *Dion.* 17.283–284; Antip. Thess. *Anth.Pal.* 7.367.4 = Gow-Page, *GP* LXIII 416 Ἥλιε. See also Aesch. *Ag.* 632–633, where the herald believes that the Sun is the only one who knows whether Menelaus is still alive or dead; Alph. *Anth.Pal.* 7.237.2 = *GP* VI 3543, where Apollo is presented as *μάρτυς*; *GVI* 1498.1 = *CEG* 623, epitaph for Pantaleon (Piraeus, fourth cent. B.C.): the Sun and the parents of the deceased are called upon as witnesses to the kindness of the untimely dead. The guilty flee the Sun: Soph. *El.* 1493–1494; Eur. *HF* 1231–1232. In general, the sun and the stars observe human events: Anon. *Anth.Pal.* 7.357.2 on Dike’s all-seeing eye, and Crin. *Anth.Pal.* 7.633.3 = *GP* XVIII 1869 = 18.3 Ypsilanti, for the moon which “sees” (cf. M. Ypsilanti, *The Epigrams of Crinagoras of Mytilene* [Oxford 2018] 203). For the Hellenistic commonplace that stars observe mortal loves see J. D. Reed, *Bion of Smyrna* (Cambridge 1997) 175. Gods are also called upon in oaths as witnesses to ensure that the oath-taker will do as he promises. The inscriptional *μάρτυρες*, on the other hand, are witnesses for deeds done.

nesses. Since the “witness theme” was so common in epigrams, one may reasonably infer that μάρτυρες εἶσι, in association with a noun in the genitive case, developed into the standard official poetic *iunctura* μάρτυρες εἶσι πόνων. This formula marks a well-defined subcategory of late-antique honorific inscriptions for public monuments which often feature artistic elements (possibly illustrated) acting as μάρτυρες. This process must have been facilitated by the theme of the artwork as μάρτυς, based on the belief that statues, in particular, as visible embodiments of the gods, could easily bear witness on their behalf—especially if they should be of a deity who, like Eros, does “not desire a living witness.”¹⁴

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¹⁴ Cf. Phld. *Anth.Pal.* 5.4.3–4 = Gow-Page, *GPI* 3162–3163 = 7.3–4 Sider μαρτυρήν γάρ Ἔρωσ μόνος οὐκ ἐφίλησεν / ἔμπνουν.