

ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XLII

HELSINKI 2008

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CIL VIII 19 REVISITED*

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The Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology at the University of Reading owns a stone inscription from Roman North Africa,¹ which has been incorporated in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* as *CIL VIII 19*.² The stone originally was found in Leptis (or Lepcis) Magna, modern-day Al Khums, Libya, perhaps best known for being the birthplace of Rome's emperor Septimius Severus. Following a rather intriguing journey through Britain,³ the monument was presented to the University of Reading in 1961.⁴ I examined this inscription several times in 2007 and 2008, and it turned out that previous editions and studies were rather unsatisfactory; a re-assessment therefore seems to be in order.

The monument is an average-sized, rather unspectacular grey limestone pedestal (86 x 62 x 62 cm), lacking ornaments except for the double-framed, countersunk (by ca. 1.5 cm) panels on all four sides.⁵ The upper rear corners of the porous stone are worn off entirely, and in addition to that the stone, due to extended exposure to British weather badly worn anyway, shows several minor

* I wish to thank my colleague Amy C. Smith, Curator of the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, for giving access to the material and permission to re-publish this inscription. Also I wish to thank Virginia L. Campbell for kindly correcting the language of this paper.

¹ Inv. no. 2005.8.14.

² *CIL VIII 19* (cf. p. 1144. 2289) = *IRT* 693 = *AE* 1962, 97.

³ J. M. Reynolds – J. B. Ward Perkins, *The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, London 1952 (= *IRT*), 173 ad no. 693, for example, thought that the inscription was lost.

⁴ For a more extensive discussion of this inscription's rather illustrious story and early history of publication cf. J. M. R. Cormack, "Habent sua fata sepulcra", *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* 58 (1960) 49–51 (with Plate I), esp. 49–50 and the postscript (dated March 1961) on 51. Cormack's article has been reported in *AE* 1962, 97.

⁵ The existence of such an area on the backside cannot be verified due to the way the inscription is displayed in the museum (with its backside towards a wall): I owe this information to Cormack (above n. 4) 50.

damages and fractures on all sides. Originally the whole stone was polished. The top may have supported some kind of sculpture or some other adornment, as there are three faint triangular impressions (side length about 1.5–2 cm), but their original date and purpose cannot be ascertained. Only the front panel is inscribed, however, there is a 3 cm descending diagonal line in the top right corner of the panel on the right-hand side, most likely an accidental slip of the stonecutter's chisel. No traces of colour can be seen. The inscribed panel at the front is 60 x 35.5 cm, the other panels' measurements vary slightly. The lettering is leaning towards the acturia, though close to a rather careless quadrata at times,⁶ and the letters' height is consistently reduced from line to line (1: 7–8 cm; 2: 6–7 cm; 3: 6 cm; 4: 5.5–6 cm; 5: 4.5–5.5 cm; 6: 3.5 cm; 7: 2.5–3 cm). The letters of lines 1–5 are cut into the stone much more profoundly than the smaller ones of lines 6–7. The letter T usually sticks out to the top, there are *I longae* in lines 3 and 6, and words are regularly divided by triangular interpuncts. The name of the deceased is followed by a *uacat* of some 6 cm in line 2. The stonecutter aimed at a centered disposition of the text, but clearly in parts struggled with the execution of the inscription, as, e.g., the condensed letter spacing towards the end of line 1 proves.

The text of the inscription reads thus:

Domitiae Rogatae. (uac.) *Vixit*
annis XXIII.
M(arcus) Iulius
5 *Cethegus*
Phelyssam uxori
carissimae fecit.

"To Domitia Rogata. She lived twenty-three years. Marcus Iulius Cethegus Phelyssam had this made for his most beloved wife."

Due to the rather poor state of preservation of the inscription, there are (closely related) problems in two areas, namely its reading and the onomastic material. Both aspects require brief discussion. The above presentation of the text, however, is beyond doubt.

⁶ See e.g. to what degree the shape of the letter M varies within the inscription (e.g. lines 1 and 4).

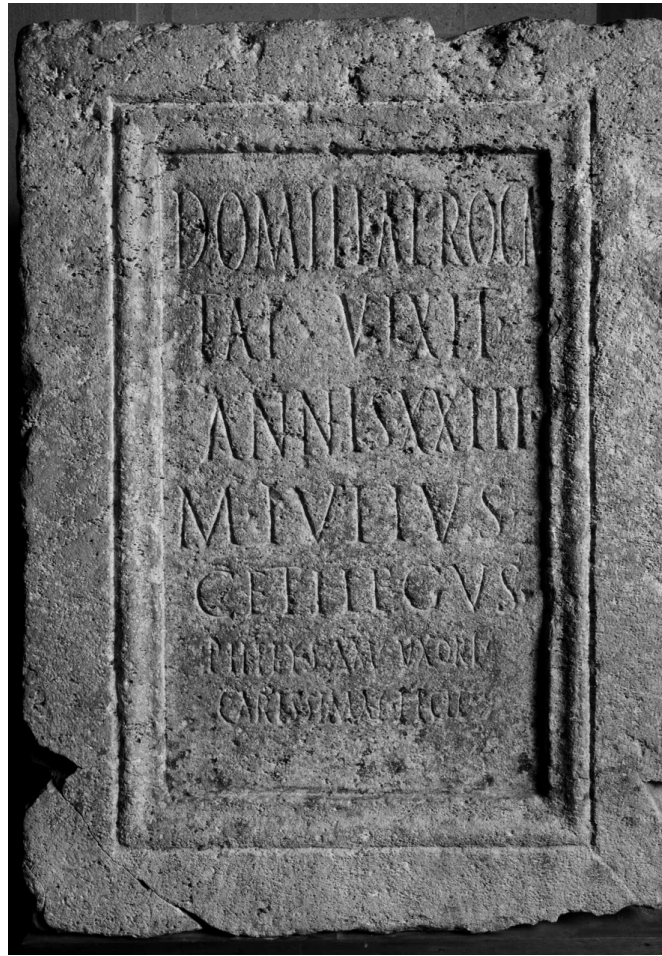


Fig.1. CIL VIII 19: front view (published by permission of the Ure Museum).

1–2 *Domitiae Rogat|tae*: *Rogatus* -a is among the commonest African cognomina,⁷ and it has been argued that this is due to an implicit reference to the deity of Baal.⁸

⁷ The cognomen itself seems to be of imperial age, cf. H. Solin, "Die innere Chronologie des römischen Cognomens", in *Actes du Colloque International sur l'onomastique latine organisé à Paris du 13 au 15 octobre 1975 par H.-G. Pflaum*, Paris 1977, 103–146, esp. 131, see also H.-G. Pflaum, "Spécificité de l'onomastique romaine en Afrique du Nord", in *Actes du Colloque International sur l'onomastique latine organisé à Paris du 13 au 15 octobre 1975 par H.-G. Pflaum*, Paris 1977, 315–324, esp. 318.

⁸ Cormack (above n. 4) 51 refers to W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church. A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, Oxford 19702, 79 for this; Frend's source is S. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l'Afrique du Nord*, IV: *La Civilisation Carthaginoise*, Paris 1920, 497. But see, even earlier, J. Toutain, *Les cités romaines de la Tunisie. Essai sur l'histoire de la colonisation romaine dans l'Afrique du nord*, Paris 1894, 184–186 (whence, e.g., L. R. Dean, *A Study of the cognomina of soldiers in the Roman legions*, Diss. Princeton 1916, 112–113): "Les cognomina *Rogatus* et *Rogatianus*, qui étaient eux aussi très populaires en cette région,

4–6 *M(arcus) Iulius* |⁵ *Cethegus* | *Phelyssam*: After an endless debate over this particular part of the inscription (including *uariae lectiones* for line 6, such as *Thiysaae* [Ali Bey], *Phicissiam* [Durand, hesitantly approved in *CIL* VIII p. 2289] and *Chrysalu* [Osann]), J. M. R. Cormack, in an important article in *The Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, pointed out, that the inscription seems to have *Philyssam*,⁹ a conclusion that had already been reached by H. A. Hamaker about 120 years earlier.¹⁰ Careful re-examination, however, suggests it is *Phelyssam* (with an *-e-* rather than an *-i-*): both the upper and the lower part of the third letter show what may have been interpreted as extended serifs, and there is a very short middle horizontal stroke, that can be noticed when actually touching the stone or looking at a squeeze (in fact very similar to the *-e-* in *fecit*, line 7).

The most unusual aspect of the name of the dedicant, without a doubt, is the last part, *Phelyssam*. This male name apparently is Punic in origin.¹¹ Evidence for the name is thin, to say the least, but there are two further, unrelated instances in Latin inscriptions from Leptis Magna:¹²

dérivent sans aucun doute d'une idée religieuse et morale, l'idée de prière." This has been taken into account by J. S. Reid, *Municipalities of the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 1913, 315 (whence, e.g., M. L. Gordon, "The Nationality of Slaves under the Early Roman Empire", *JRS* 14 [1924] 93–111, esp. 108). Furthermore, cf. H. Herzog, "Namensübersetzungen und Verwandtes", *Philologus* 56 (1897) 33–70 and I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina*, Helsinki 1965, esp. 81–82 (and more often).

⁹ Cormack (above n. 4).

¹⁰ H. A. Hamaker, *Diatribes philologico-criticae aliquot monumentorum Punicorum nuper in Africa repertorum*, Leiden 1822, 48.

¹¹ See G. Di Vita-Evrard, "Prosopographie et population. L'exemple d'une ville africaine, Leptis Magna", in W. Eck (ed.), *Prosopographie und Sozialgeschichte. Studien zur Methodik und Erkenntnismöglichkeit der kaiserzeitlichen Prosopographie. Kolloquium Köln 24.–26. November 1991*, Köln – Wien – Weimar 1994, 293–314, 299 with n. 28 (where the author of that paper – accidentally? – got the name *M. Iulius Cethegus Phelyssam* right, without any indication where her reading stems from): "La chose va de soi: *mutatis mutandis*, on pense aux premiers grands notables du Ier s. qui ajoutaient un nom latin à leur onomastique punique, pour la rapprocher, autant que faire se pouvait, de celle des citoyens romains, alors que le commun de leurs semblables se contentait de leur onomastique punique." Unevidenced claims by A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus. The African Emperor*, London – Batsford 1988², 213: "'Phelyssam' certainly seems Libyan rather than Punic (cf. *IRT* 698 for the form 'Felyssam' at Leptis)." For the copious problems posed by finding evidence for language contact between Latin and Berber / Libyan see J. N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language*, Cambridge 2003, 245–247.

¹² Useful, though not without major problems, is K. Jongeling, *North-African Names from Latin Sources*, Leiden 1994. As for *CIL* VIII 19, Jongeling had not checked the best sources for his work and therefore created a nonsensical entry *Thiysaae* (p. 142), noting that the

IRT 615 *Senatus p(opulus)q(ue) Lepcitanor(um) | C(aio) Macri f(ilio) C(ai) Annonis | n(epoti) Phelyssam ob colum|nas et superfic(m) et fo|rum stratum honoris | caussa decreuerunt | Balitho [M]acri f(ilius) [C]o[m]modus - -*.¹³

IRT 698 *[- - - o]rnator simul mortalitat[i - - - | - - -gin]ae Felyssam uxori obsequentissim[ae - - -]*.¹⁴

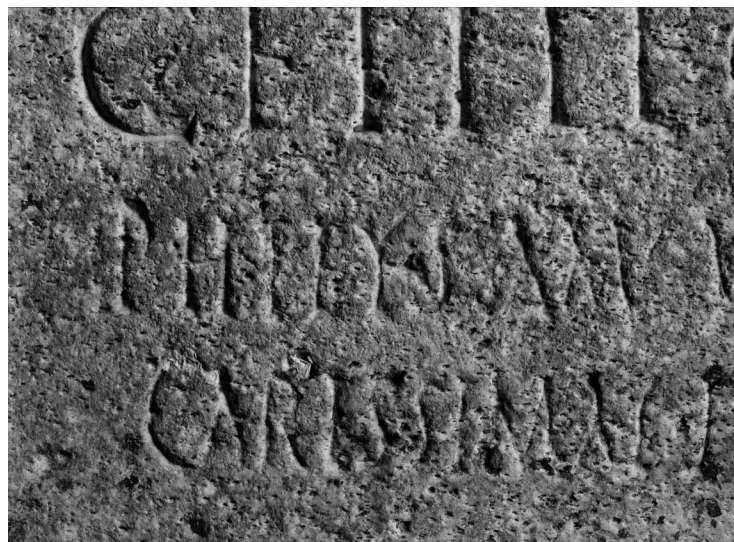


Fig. 2. Detail: beginning of line 6.

Phelyssam, however, is not the only part of the male name in *CIL VIII 19* that deserves brief mention: *Cethegus* is another interesting aspect. It first appears as a cognomen of the patrician Corneliis during the Republic and also (perhaps unrelated?) during the early Empire,¹⁵ at least at the level of the Roman nobility,

reading is "highly uncertain". S. Aurigemma, *Africa Italiana* 8, 1940, 40 n. 3 reports that L. Della Vida thought the name was "di origine probabilmente numidica, non punica" (accepted by Cormack [above n. 4] 51, as it were); cf. also R. Bartoccini, "Una chiesa cristiana nel vecchio foro di Lepcis (Leptis Magna)", *RAC* 8 (1931) 23–52, esp. 39: "Non conosco altri esempi del nome *Felyssam*, che potrebbe ritenersi d'origine numidica piuttosto che punica." Jongeling (see above) 118 tentatively suggests to relate it to the Berber name *pelaz* (evidence for this name itself, however, is not without problems, see Jongeling [see above] 117).

¹³ Same person attested in *IRT* 338, without *Phelyssam*; see Jongeling (above n. 12) 118 (for the name) and Birley (above n. 11) 213 (for the person).

¹⁴ See Jongeling (above n. 12) 46.

¹⁵ Cf., in addition to the obvious entries in the *RE*, e. g. R. Syme, "Personal Names in Annales I–VI", *JRS* 39 (1949) 6–18, esp. 11.

then, the name appears to be well-attested especially in the second and third centuries AD. and in the eastern part of the Roman empire.¹⁶

These observations match what has been said with regards to the date of this inscription: the online database of the Ure Museum roughly dates the monument "2 c. AC" (sic!). J. M. R. Cormack (naming Joyce Reynolds as his authority for this) claims that "[t]he lettering would probably date the inscription in the middle of the second century".¹⁷ Whereas Cormack's approach is rather haphazard, given the very limited precision and reliability of dating exclusively based on letter-shapes, one could indeed justify a mid-second century AD date of origin based on both letter-shapes and the evidence of the onomastic material.

Finally some brief remarks regarding another peculiarity of this inscription that has previously been ignored: the continuous reduction of letter sizes. When looking at the inscription from a reasonable distance, the inscribed text seems to be divided into two major sections. Within lines 1–5, letter sizes vary by 3.5 cm altogether, the name of the deceased written largest, the name of the dedicant written smallest, still the lettering looks fairly consistent. Lines 6–7, then, as a second section of text, appear to be much smaller, and this for a good reason: within the first section, usually in any line at least some letters are just as high as letters of the line that precedes. No such connection exists between lines 5 and 6 – there is a clear 1 cm difference in height, and this causes the optical impression, assisted by the aforementioned fact that the letters of lines 6–7 were cut into the stone less profoundly. This is remarkable with regards to the fact the name of the dedicant, Marcus Iulius Cethegus Phelyssam, is written over this line break and, interestingly enough, it is just the native African element of that name that happens to appear in the part that is written in smaller script.¹⁸ It seems very unlikely, then, that this has happened by chance (never mind the minor inaccuracies in the inscription's execution otherwise): it all seems to imply that the person who drafted the text and prepared it for cutting intentionally presented the official (so to speak) and 'Roman' part of the inscription in larger script and the more private section (that

¹⁶ Cf. M. Kajava, "Roman Senatorial Women and the Greek East. Epigraphic Evidence from the Republican and Augustan Period", in H. Solin – M. Kajava (edd.), *Roman Eastern Policy and Other Studies in Roman History. Proceedings of a Colloquium at Tvärminne 2–3 October 1987*, Helsinki 1990, 59–124, esp. 79–80.

¹⁷ Cormack (above n. 4) 50.

¹⁸ On further cases of 'mixed' names see Adams (above n. 11) 213 ff.

could be interpreted as a sentence of its own right) *Phelyssam uxori carissiae fecit*, containing the indigenous name, in smaller lettering.¹⁹

So what makes this inscription so interesting, then, is the presence of different strategies of people to combine their indigenous heritage with their display of what might be considered 'Roman identity', as to be seen from their personal names. Whereas the female, at first glance, appears to have two perfectly Roman names (Domitia Rogata), well in keeping with the onomastic practice of that time, her cognomen Rogata in fact is a typical African one, relating to indigenous religious concepts. Her husband, then, bears an indigenous name (Phelyssam) in addition to three not exactly unusual Roman names (Marcus Iulius Cethegus), however he only 'advertises' the Roman *tria nomina* in large letters, while that part that identifies him as a local is written much smaller (yet by no means suppressed), inspiring the idea that this part of him could almost be more 'private' than his 'official' Roman identity.

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¹⁹ This lends support to the general observation made by Di Vita-Evrard (above n. 11).