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Philippus Rubellianus (*CIL* VI 32512): A Public Slave Formerly Owned by Rubellius Plautus?*

An anonymous index card from the archive of the Epigraphy Lab at Sapienza Universiy of Rome, which was kindly brought to my attention by Silvia Orlandi, provides information – including an image and a facsimile – on a Latin inscription from Rome mentioning a (*servus*) *publicus* (fig. 1).[1] The epigraphic monument is not unpublished, although I did not include it in the catalogue of my monograph on public slaves,[2] as the reading of its text in the *editio princeps* did not appear immediately relevant to the subject of the book.

The inscription was first published in 1881, among the additions to the first part of *CIL* VI («*Additamenta ad corporis vol. VI partem primam*»), specifically concerning the inscriptions of public slaves («*Tituli publicorum*») in the fourth volume of the *Ephemeris Epigraphica* (fig. 2).[3] One of the two authors of the section, either Eugen Bormann or Wilhelm Henzen, specified that he had edited the text on the basis of an anonymous annotation in the papers of Giovanni Battista de Rossi («*In schedis Rossii nescio a quo descripta*») as follows:

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[1] IV.l.2.3 (F), Neg. 11.34. I am deeply grateful to Silvia Orlandi for providing me with the document and all the relevant information, as well as for her permission to publish it. I also thank Alberto Dalla Rosa for his comments on a previous version of this text. The two anonymous reviewers have also offered highly valuable advice for improving this article. Finally, I would like to thank Simon Jarvis for his assistance in polishing the English text.

[2] Luciani 2022.

[3] *EphEp* IV 882.

- - - - - -
[- - -]L · AVR[- - -]
PHILIPPI · IVS
RVBELLIANVS PVBLICVS

The transcription of the text – although incorrect in line 2 and therefore not referable to the distinct nomenclature of a public slave – and the reference to the findspot, i.e. the Domitilla burial ground along the via Ardeatina («*effossa in coemeterio Domitillae via Ardeatina*»), align perfectly with the image and location details provided by the index card from the Epigraphy Lab archive at Sapienza University of Rome («S. Domitilla - Museo annesso alla catacomba n. 629»). Conversely, the discovery year provided by the *Ephemeris Epigraphica* («a. 1874») constitutes information that is not included on the index card.

All the information provided in the *Ephemeris Epigraphica* was repeated verbatim in entry no. 32512 of the fourth volume (part two) of *CIL* VI published in 1902, although the editor, Christian Hülsen, raised some doubts about the correctness of the reading of line 2 («*V. 2 vix recte descriptus*») (fig. 3).[4]

The inscription was also mentioned by Ernst Diehl in the critical apparatus of an entry concerning a different Christian epigraphic text, compiled in 1925 within the first volume of the *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (fig. 4).[5] This mention is completely inexplicable, as the two epigraphic monuments bear no relation to one another.

In the early 1980s, Antonio Ferrua, who undertook a vast survey of the numerous pagan inscriptions found in the area of the catacombs of Domitilla,[6] noticed that the text recorded in *CIL* VI 32512 corresponded to a fragmentary inscription kept in the local museum. Without publishing an image or a facsimile of the monument, but providing its dimensions («frammento alto cm. 15,5, largo 31,5 e spesso 2 circa, con belle lettere che vanno da cm 3,3 a 2»), Ferrua emended the reading proposed in *CIL* VI 32512 – and thus also that offered in *EphEm* IV 882 – for the first two lines («si deve leggere nel secondo verso PHILIPPVS e nel primo verso sopra PPHVS conserva i piedi delle lettere LEMVRI»). Ferrua also emphasised that the inclusion of the epigraph in the *ILCV* collection was inexplicable («io non capisco come abbia potuto il Diehl metterla nella sua silloge,

[4] *CIL* VI 32512.

[5] *ILCV* 767A: *Hic situs Nota/tus servus fide/lissimus* (*palma*). This inscription had previously been published by Angelo Silvagni in 1922, in the first supplement to the first volume of the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*: *ICUR* I 3679.

[6] Ferrua 1980-82. On the chronology of the pagan inscriptions found in the *praedium Domitillae* (spanning from the late Republican age to the late third century CE, with a peak in the early second century CE due to various epitaphs of imperial freedmen), see also Pergola 1979, 316, 331, and, more recently, Pagliari – Cecchini 2018, 114.

Inscr. Lat. christ. Veteres, n. 767 A nota»), dating the text to the early second century CE and noting its clearly non-Christian origin (fig. 5).[7]

The details regarding the location of the inscription («S. Domitilla – Museo annesso alla catacomba n. 629») and its dimensions («Altezza c. 13. Larghezza c. 32. Spessore c. 3»), as provided by the anonymous index card from the Epigraphy Lab archive at Sapienza University of Rome, coincide with – or are comparable to – those provided by Ferrua; by contrast, the indication of its material («marmo») constitutes new information. An examination of the photograph confirms Ferrua's emendation of the text engraved in line 2: PHILIPPHVS instead of PHILIPPI · IVS. At the same time, however, the visual evidence casts serious doubt on the proposed reading of line 1.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the monument and the possible reading of its text, I conducted an autoptic examination of the monument in Rome.[8] The fragmentary rectangular slab of red marble (height: ca. 15.2 cm; width: ca. 33 cm; depth: ca. 3.5 cm) currently hangs on the left wall of the main staircase leading into the Basilica of the catacombs of Domitilla in Rome (fig. 6).[9] Based on my reading, I propose the following diplomatic transcription of the engraved text (letters h.: 2.2 cm in line 1 that, however, has not survived in its entirety; 3.3 cm in line 2; 2.4 cm in line 3, apart from the small V of 1.3 cm included in the C), which is enclosed in a moulded frame (inscribed area: h. 12; w. 25.7):

- - - - - - ?
MẠ[·]+[··] Ḷ·L·MVR+[- - -]
PHILIPPHVS
RVBELLIANVS PVBLICVS.

At the beginning of line 1, the diagonal strokes of an M and the first oblique stroke of an A are still discernible; conversely, the following character is lost. Next, the lower part of a single curved stroke, perhaps belonging to a C rather than an R, is visible, followed by a small lacuna of no more than two letters. A horizontal stroke – likely the base of an L – survives at the centre of the line. Next come the upright stroke and the base of another L (rather than an E, as Ferrua had suggested), clearly followed by an interpunct. The letters M, V, and R are then visible, followed by the lower end of an upright stroke.

[7] Ferrua 1980-82, 400 no. 86.

[8] Date of autopsy: 19/02/2026. I am very grateful to Piero Crescenzi for granting me permission to study the epigraphic monument and to Fabio Prezioso for his extremely helpful assistance.

[9] Inv. no. 2225; editions: *EphEp* IV 882 = *CIL* VI 32512; cf. Ferrua 1980-82, 400 no. 86.

The presence of two consecutive Ls suggests that the entire text of line 1 contains the nomenclature of a freedwoman, recorded as *L*(*uci*) *l*(*iberta*). Her *gentilicium* may well have been the very common Marcia, which is far more frequent than other compatible *nomina* beginning with MA[·]C or MA[·]R, such as Maccia, Maecia, Macria, or Marria.[10] Her *cognomen* may have been Murra, the most common among the Latin names starting with MVR,[11] or, most likely, Murtis, a variant spelling of the well attested Greek name Myrtis.[12] Theoretically, additional text may have been engraved above the surviving line 1, perhaps recording the nomenclature of one (or more) individual(s) who would have thus been the dedicatee(s) of the monument. However, the shape of the slab – which is relatively thin and therefore unlikely to have been particularly tall – does not preclude the possibility that the inscription contained only the nomenclature of two deceased individuals in the nominative case.

Therefore, I propose the following transcription, also based on a facsimile (fig. 7):

- - - - - - ?
Ma[*r*]*ç*[*ia*] *L(uci*) *l*(*iberta*) *Murṭ*[*is*],
Philipphus (*sic*)
Rubellianus publicus.

... (?) Marcia Myrtis, freedwoman of Lucius, (and) Philippus Rubellianus, a public (slave).

The monument – which appears to have been funerary in nature and is here dated to the second half of the first century CE, or to the very early second century CE at the latest[13] – records Marcia Myrtis, a freedwoman of Lucius (Marcius), and Philippus Rubellianus, a *publicus*, that is, a slave of the Roman people. The two individuals may have been partners in a *contubernium*: unions between public slaves and freedwomen are relatively common both in Rome and across the wider Roman world.[14] The additional name of the public slave, Rubellianus, can safely be identified as an *agnomen* derived from the name of his previous master before he entered public ownership.[15] Inscriptional evidence shows that the majority of the *servi publici* in Rome bore *agnomina* alongside their single name and the

[10] Cf. Solin – Salomies 1988, 109, 112-113, and 115 for Matria, which was a *gentilicium* extremely rare in the Roman world.

[11] Solin – Salomies 1988, 365-366.

[12] Solin 1996, 519; Solin 2003², 1178-1179. A variant spelling of Philippus is also attested in line 2.

[13] For this later chronology, see Ferrua 1980-82, 400 no. 86; Solin 1996, 252; Solin 2003², 236.

[14] Luciani 2022, 247-250.

[15] Luciani 2022, 27-28 with previous bibliography.

indication of their public status.[16] While public slaves without an *agnomen* were likely acquired on the slave market at public expense, those bearing one became public property as they were sold or gifted to the Roman people (i.e., the state) by private individuals, or else inherited or confiscated by the commonwealth.[17]

In this particular case, the *agnomen* Rubellianus is a *hapax legomenon*, as it is not recorded in any other source. It certainly derives from a *gentilicium*,[18] which can only be Rubellius.[19] Interestingly, a funerary inscription from Karales (Sardinia) confirms the existence of relationships between the Marcii and Rubellii families contemporary with the inscription in question; indeed, it was engraved on the rock wall of a hypogeum tomb – dating to the second half of the first century CE – by Caius Rubellius Clytus for his two wives: Marcia Hellas, daughter of Lucius, and Cassia Sulpicia Crassilla, daughter of Caius.[20] The coincidence between the *praenomen* of Marcia Hellas's father in the epitaph from Karales and that of Marcia Myrtis's patron in the one from Rome, as well as the chronology of both inscriptions, suggests that they refer to the same social *milieu*.

Rubellius is a *nomen* that was not common throughout the Roman world; in Rome, it is mostly attested by inscriptions linked to the Rubellii Blandi,[21] a senatorial family from Tibur related to the Octavii Laenates and the imperial household.[22] The most notable member of the family was undoubtedly C. Rubellius Blandus – the son of a praetor and governor of Crete and Cyrenaica, and the grandson of an *eques* renowned as a teacher of rhetoric: he was a *consul suffectus* in 18 CE, married Julia Livia (Tiberius' granddaughter) in 33 CE, and later served as governor of the Roman province of Africa Proconsularis.[23] His marriage to Julia produced several children, one of whom may have been Rubellia Bassa, who married C. Octavius Laenas, the maternal uncle of the emperor Nerva.[24] Another son of C. Rubellius Blandus and Julia Livia was Rubellius Plautus, who in 60 CE was forced by the emperor Nero to retire to his family

[16] Luciani 2022, 27 with note 42, 250.

[17] Luciani 2022, 26-29.

[18] Kajanto 1982, 154. Cf. also Solin – Salomies 1988, 393.

[19] Schulze 1966[2], 220, 443; Solin – Salomies 1988, 171.

[20] *CIL* X 7697 = *CLE* 808; cf. also Floris 2005, 115-119 no. 24.

[21] Only 49 entries for "rubelli" and three for "rubeli", filtered from 542,296 total entries, are present in EDCS – Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss / Slaby (search date: 08/04/2026): 11 of these entries relate to inscriptions from Rome, six of which mention members of the Rubellii Blandi family. See also Díaz Ariño 2019, 230 with notes 25 and 26.

[22] *PIR*[2] R 106-116. Cf. also Syme 1982, 78 = Syme 1988, 191, who emphasizes the rarity of the *gentilicium*.

[23] *PIR*[2] R 111. Cf. also Vogel-Weidemann 1964, 109-115 no. 10; Syme 1982 = Syme 1988, 177-198; Syme 1983, 14 = Syme 1988, 235; *PIR*[2] R 108-110; Eck 2001b, 1144 no. 3.

[24] *PIR*[2] R 116; Eck 2001a. Cf. also Groag 1924, 425-436; Syme 1983, 13 = Syme 1988, 234; Raepsaet-Charlier 1987, 536-537 no. 667; Cornell 2013, 624; Hillard – Beness 2015, 756.

estates in Asia – on suspicion of organizing a plot against him – and was subsequently put to death there in 62 CE.[25] Rubellius Plautus had previously married Antistia Pollitta,[26] and Tacitus mentions children (*liberi*) from this marriage:[27] one of them may have been Sergius Rubellius Plautus,[28] mentioned on a *fistula* (lead pipe) discovered in Rome,[29] who would have been an adult under the Flavians.[30]

After his death in 62 CE, Rubellius Plautus was posthumously expulsed from the senate,[31] and his possessions were likely confiscated,[32] with some of them certainly passing into the hands of Nero, who was able to dispose of them at his own discretion. Tacitus, indeed, reports that the emperor gave Plautus's estates (*praedia Plauti*), together with Burrus's mansion, as ominous gifts (*infausta dona*) to his wife Octavia, Claudius's daughter; this served as a sort of recompense after she was divorced by Nero under the pretext of sterile wedlock, while he in the meantime married Poppaea.[33] It is possible that both the family estates that Rubellius Plautus held in Asia (*per Asiam*)[34] and the *saltus Blandianus* in Africa – which Plautus had likely inherited from his father[35] – were transferred to the imperial treasury (*fiscus*). This may well have occurred because the condemned Rubellius Plautus was related to Nero.[36] Alternatively, it is conceivable that a procedure was followed similar to the one decreed by the Senate in 20 CE after Piso's suicide and condemnation, when his Illyrian estate was returned to Tiberius because it had originally been granted to Piso as a gift by Augustus.[37] If Rubellius Plautus – or his father Rubellius Blandus – had received estates through revocable grants from an emperor,[38] these properties may well have been decreed to be returned to the *princeps*.

[25] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 22, 57-59; Cass. Dio LXII 14, 1. Cf. also *PIR*^{2} R 115; Eck 2001b, 1144 no. 5.

[26] *PIR*^{2} A 778. Cf. also Raepsaet-Charlier 1987, 88-89 no. 72.

[27] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 59, 1.

[28] Vogel-Weidemann 1982, 112; Eck 2001b, 1144 no. 5. *Contra PIR*^{2} R 115, where Klaus Wachter endorses the interpretation of the *fistula* pertaining to Rubellius Plautus the elder.

[29] AE 1954, 70. Cf. also Syme 1982, 68 = Syme 1988, 183; Eck 1995, 172.

[30] Syme 1958, 628.

[31] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 59, 4.

[32] For this idea see *PIR*^{2} R 115 and Eck 2001b, 1144 no. 5. Since his son – arguably named Sergius Rubellius Plautus – was allowed to inherit a house in Rome where the aforementioned *fistula* was found, Alberto Dalla Rosa has suggested a *partial* confiscation: Dalla Rosa 2021, 130.

[33] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 60.

[34] Tac. *Ann.* XIV 22. Cf. also Dalla Rosa 2014, 338 note 28.

[35] Eck 2001b, 1144 no. 5. Cf. also De Romanis 2003, 722 note 30.

[36] Maiuro 2012, 113 with note 298.

[37] On the *SC de Cn. Pisone patre*, see Eck – Caballos – Fernández 1996.

[38] On the practice of assigning patrimonial properties to friends and relatives by means of revocable grants, initiated by Augustus, see Rathbone 1993, 109-110.

At the same time, however, other assets belonging to Rubellius Plautus, including slaves that he must certainly have owned,[39] may well have passed to the public treasury (*aerarium*). This would align with the customary practice of confiscating the property of individuals convicted of grave political crimes and converting it into public possession (*publicatio bonorum*).[40] Instead of being sold at auction – which was perhaps the more common fate for the confiscated slaves of private citizens[41] – one of Rubellius Plautus's slaves, namely Philippus, might have directly become a *servus publicus*, retaining the reference to his former owner in his *agnomen* Rubellianus. If one assumes that Philippus was a young slave in the early 60s CE, he could well have survived his former owner by some decades – a lifespan consistent with dating the inscription mentioning him to the second half of the first century CE, or the very early second century CE at the latest. If correct, this interpretation would confirm that the allocation of the *bona damnatorum* was divided between the *aerarium* and the *fiscus* as late as the second half of the first century CE, and that the practice of transferring convicts' property entirely and systematically to the *fiscus* did not become the rule until the late second century.[42]

Alternatively, a less historically grounded – and perhaps less compelling – hypothesis is that Philippus was a former slave of another member of the Rubellii Blandi (possibly one of Rubellius Plautus's siblings), who was subsequently sold or gifted to the Roman people, thereby becoming a *servus publicus*.

Regardless, even upon becoming public property, Philippus Rubellianus maintained contact with the Marcii family through his partnership with a freedwoman of Lucius Marcius – Marcia Myrtis – thereby tapping into a wider

[39] One of his freedmen is mentioned by Tac. *Ann.* XIV 58 (*libertus Plauti*). Several freedmen/-women and other individuals bearing the *gentilicium* Rubellius and Greek *cognomina* attested in Rome, Sardinia, Sicily, and the Iberian peninsula are thought to be former slaves of the Rubellii Blandi (Díaz Ariño 2019, 230 with notes 25-26), thus suggesting that the members of this family – quite unsurprisingly – owned slaves and freed dependents.

[40] On the *publicatio bonorum* see Salerno 1990; Talamanca 1991-92; Dyjakowska 2012; Piacentin 2022, 34-35.

[41] On this see Eder 1980, 31; however, he underestimates the events of 82 BCE (Sulla, as dictator, confiscated all the property of the proscribed men he considered public enemies, including 10,000 slaves who became *servi publici*, before receiving freedom, Roman citizenship, and the *nomen* Cornelius after Sulla himself; cf. App. *BC* I 100; Luciani 2022, 51-52) and of 58 BCE (Clodius and Cato debated over the *agnomen* – whether *Clodianus* or *Porcianus* – to be assigned to the, presumably numerous, slaves confiscated from King Ptolemy of Cyprus and made *servi publici*; cf. Cass. Dio XXXIX 23, 2; Luciani 2022, 27, 52). Slaves of private individuals who were transferred into public ownership after confiscation, thereby becoming *publici*, may have been far more numerous than we can infer from the sources.

[42] Maiuro 2012, 85, 113-115; Dalla Rosa 2021, 129. Cf. also Ferrari 2020.

network of connections that, as the inscription from Karales attests, already linked the Rubellii Blandi's enslaved and freed people to the Marcii even outside Rome.

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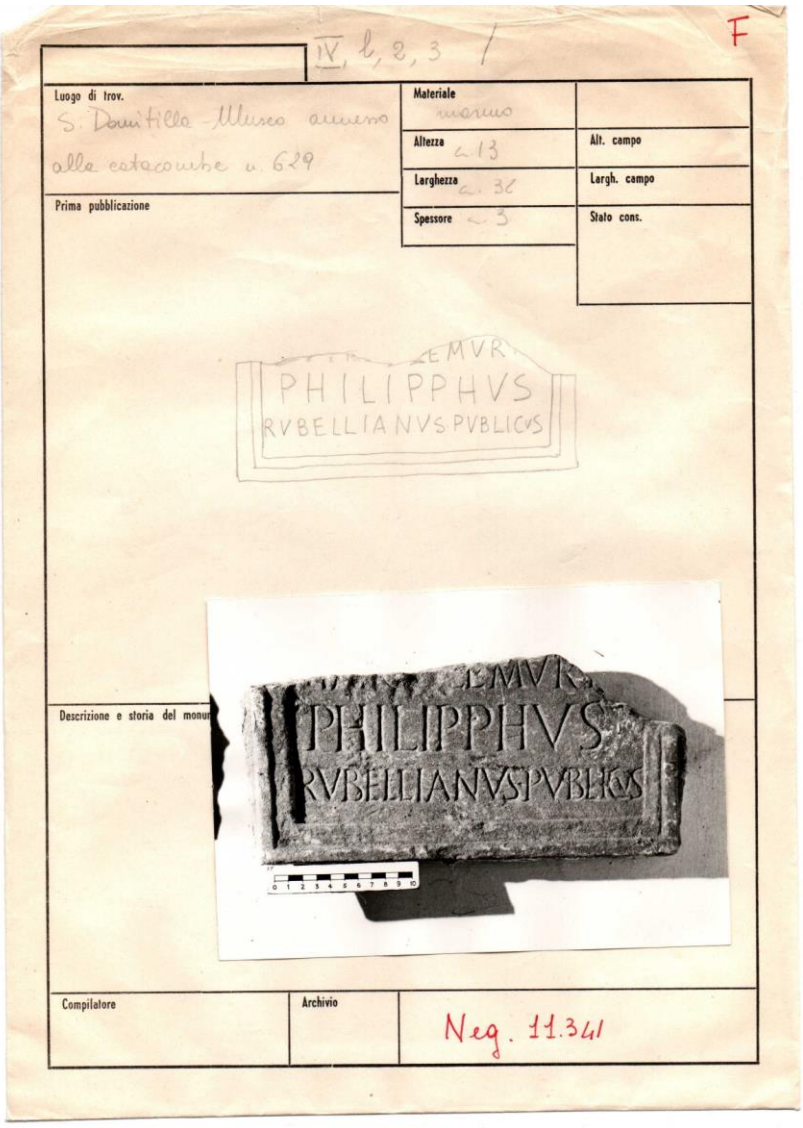
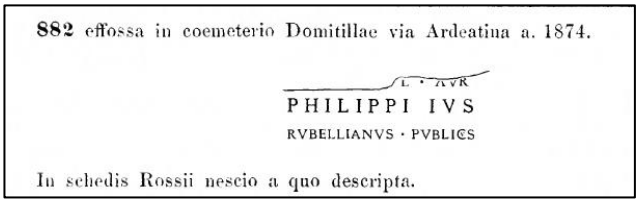


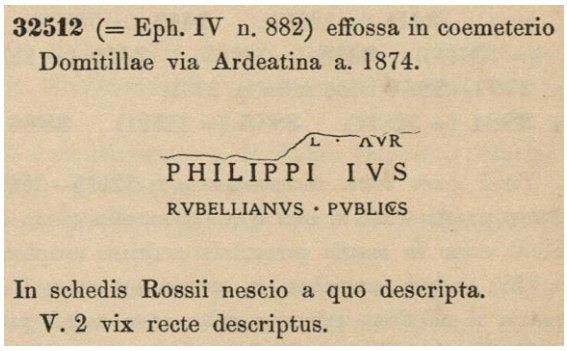
Fig. 1. Anonymous index card from the Sapienza Università di Roma Epigraphy Lab archive (IV.l.2.3 (F), Neg. 11.34)


882 effossa in coemeterio Domitillae via Ardeatina a. 1874.

L · AVR
PHILIPPI IVS
RVBELLIANVS · PVBLICS

In schedis Rossii nescio a quo descripta.

Fig. 2. The entry of *EphEm* 882


32512 (= Eph. IV n. 882) effossa in coemeterio Domitillae via Ardeatina a. 1874.

L · AVR
PHILIPPI IVS
RVBELLIANVS · PVBLICS

In schedis Rossii nescio a quo descripta.
V. 2 vix recte descriptus.

Fig. 3. The entry of *CIL* VI 32512

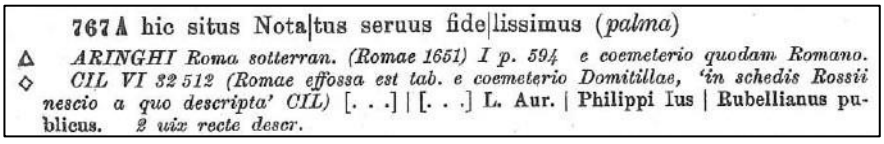

767 A hic situs Nota|tus seruus fide|lissimus (*palma*)
△ *ARINGHI Roma sotterran. (Romae 1651) I p. 594 e coemeterio quodam Romano.*
◇ *CIL VI 32 512 (Romae effossa est tab. e coemeterio Domitillae, 'in schedis Rossii nescio a quo descripta' CIL)* [. . .] | [. . .] L. Aur. | Philippi Ius | Rubellianus publicus. *2 uix recte descr.*

Fig. 4. The entry of *ILCV* 767A

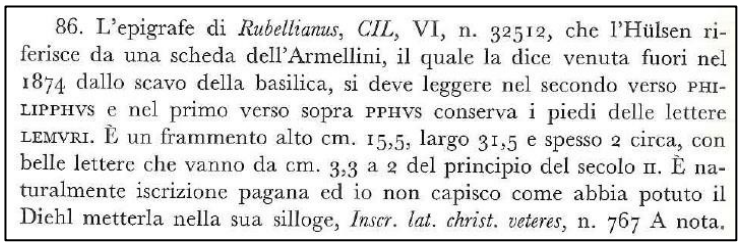

86. L'epigrafe di *Rubellianus*, *CIL*, VI, n. 32512, che l'Hülsen riferisce da una scheda dell'Armellini, il quale la dice venuta fuori nel 1874 dallo scavo della basilica, si deve leggere nel secondo verso PHILIPPHVS e nel primo verso sopra PPHVS conserva i piedi delle lettere LEMVRI. È un frammento alto cm. 15,5, largo 31,5 e spesso 2 circa, con belle lettere che vanno da cm. 3,3 a 2 del principio del secolo II. È naturalmente iscrizione pagana ed io non capisco come abbia potuto il Diehl metterla nella sua silloge, *Inscr. lat. christ. veteres*, n. 767 A nota.

Fig. 5. The entry of Ferrua 1980-82, 400 nr. 86

Fig. 6. The marble slab at the Museum of the Catacombs of Domitilla (Inv. nr. 2225; ©Archivio Fotografico Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra)

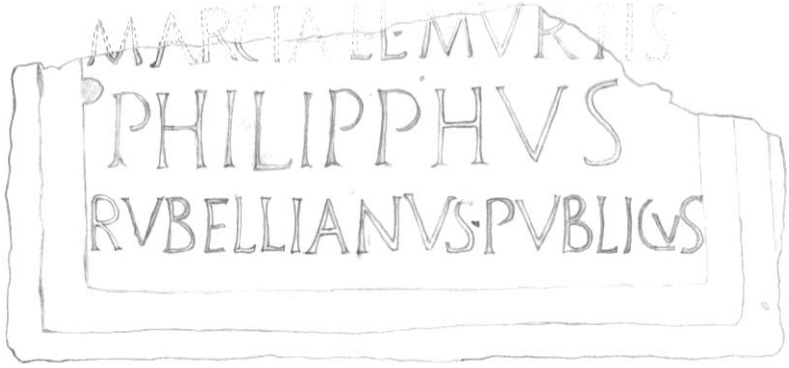


Fig. 7. Facsimile of the inscription (authors: Federica Gatto and Franco Luciani)

*Philippus Rubellianus (*CIL *VI 32512)*

Abstract

This article offers a re-examination and a new reading of the Latin funerary inscription *CIL* VI 32512, based on an anonymous index card from the archive of the Epigraphy Lab at Sapienza University of Rome and a subsequent autoptic analysis of the monument at the catacombs of Domitilla in Rome. The epitaph mentions Marcia Myrtis, a freedwoman, and Philippus Rubellianus, a *servus publicus* (public slave). The study focuses on the public slave's *agnomen*, Rubellianus, which derives from the *gentilicium* Rubellius; it argues that Philippus was originally a private slave of Rubellius Plautus, a prominent member of the senatorial family of the Rubellii Blandi who was executed by Nero in 62 CE. Following Plautus's death and the confiscation of his property (*publicatio bonorum*), Philippus was likely transferred directly to the public treasury (*aerarium*), becoming a public slave.

Questo articolo offre un riesame e una nuova lettura dell'iscrizione funeraria latina *CIL* VI 32512, sulla base di una scheda anonima proveniente dall'archivio del Laboratorio di Epigrafia della Sapienza Università di Roma e di una successiva analisi autoptica del monumento presso le catacombe di Domitilla a Roma. L'epitaffio menziona *Marcia Myrtis*, una liberta, e *Philippus Rubellianus*, un *servus publicus* (schiavo pubblico). Lo studio si concentra sull'*agnomen* dello schiavo pubblico, *Rubellianus*, derivante dal gentilizio *Rubellius*; si sostiene che *Philippus* fosse originariamente uno schiavo privato di Rubellio Plauto, un autorevole esponente della famiglia senatoria dei *Rubellii Blandi* fatto uccidere da Nerone nel 62 d.C. A seguito della morte di Plauto e della confisca dei suoi beni (*publicatio bonorum*), *Philippus* fu probabilmente trasferito direttamente all'erario pubblico (*aerarium*), diventando così uno schiavo pubblico.