

Decoding ROMAN

RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

at the Roman Baths Museum in Bath

Votive inscriptions follow a set pattern, since they were dedicated to a god or goddess to thank them for something they had done in response to a prayer.

Many words are abbreviated, have letters joined together (ligatures), or spill over from one line to the next, so the Romans often separated them with dots.

typical pattern

- **Name of God or Goddess**
- **The reason for the offering.**
PRO SE ET SUIS = for himself and his family
PRO SALUTE ET INCOLUMITATE = for the health and safety of ...
EX VISU POSSUIT = made after a vision, or holy dream.
- **Name of person making the offering, perhaps including their father's name** *patronymic* (- **F** or - **FIL**), **their job** **where they came from**
- **Dedication formulae such as**
D D (Dono Dedit): gave this as a gift
V S L M (Votum Solvit Libenter Merito) = kept his promise willingly and deservedly
SACRUM F (fecit) L M = made this sacred offering willingly and deservedly

Gods & Goddesses

Deae Suli Minervae to the goddess (dea) Sulis Minerva
(Celtic/Roman)

Loucetio Marti to Loucetius Mars
(Celtic/Roman god of War)

Nemetonae to Nemetona (Celtic)
Na (Diana) Sacratissima very sacred Diana
(Roman goddess of Hunting)

Numin[ibus] Aug[ustorum] to the Emperors' Divinities
The guardian spirit or divinity - numen - of a Roman Emperor was worshipped throughout the Empire: the first co-Emperorship was between Marcus Aurelius and his brother Lucius Verus from 161-169 A.D.

Suleviis to the Suleviae (an Eastern European name for a group of 3 Celtic Mother goddesses)

Virtuti et Numini Aug[usti] to the Virtue and Divinity of the Emperor

Abstract ideas like 'virtue' were often personified and worshipped

People

- Most people had one or two names and Roman citizens had three.
- Freedmen added their ex-master's name to their slave name.
- A name ending in "i" followed by **F** or **FIL** means the person's son: it is a *patronymic*.

Aufidius Eutuches a freedman (ex-slave)

Aufidius Lemnus a freedman (ex-slave)

Gaius Curatius Saturninus a centurion

Gaius Severius Emeritus a centurion

Lucius Marcius Memor a senior priest

Marcus Aufidius Maximus a centurion

Novantius : he was someone's father

Peregrinus : he was Secundus' son

Priscus : he was Toutius' son

Sulinus : he was Brucetus' son

Sulinus : he was Maturus' son

Vettius Benignus : a freedman (ex-slave)

status/job/rank in Army

civis, cives a citizen or tribesman/tribeswoman

f, fil, filius (or **filia**) a son (or daughter)

l, lib, libertus/a a freedman/freedwoman (ex-slave)

N.B. freedmen took the name of their ex-master.

se suisque / se et suis for himself and his family

haruspex a senior priest *who predicted the future after examining the organs of sacrificed animals*

lapidarius a stonemason

sculptor a stonemason

> or) a centurion

> regionarius a centurion in charge of the area

LEG = Legion

Leg II Aug(usta): 2nd Legion 'the Emperor's'
was based in Britain from c. 74 A.D.

Leg VI Vic(trix): 6th Legion 'Victorious' *was transferred to Britain c.122 A.D. with the Emperor Hadrian*

Leg XX V(aleria) V(ictrix): 20th Legion 'Courageous and Victorious' *named after the Boudican rebellion 60-61 A.D.*

Places

cives Carnutenus a tribesman from Chartres, in France

civis Treveri a citizen of Trier, in Germany

LAYOUT

Dedication to the god or goddess.

Notice the different spelling.

She is usually called **Dea Sulis Minerva** :
this is all in the *DATIVE* case, meaning 'TO'

Reason for dedicating this votive altar.

The goddess is thanked for looking after the former master of the person dedicating the stone.

His names end in "-i" (*GENITIVE case*) because it is the Latin equivalent of *apostrophe-s* or "**OF** Marcus"

"-is" and "-ae" are also Genitive endings

Name of person giving the stone as an offering.

Notice that when the slave Lemnus was freed he was given the name of his ex-master.

His Status

Formal dedication of the stone: Lemnus would have sacrificed to the goddess in advance and asked her to protect his ex-master. He would have promised to give her this votive altar as a 'thank-you' present for answering his prayer.

DEAE SULI

MINERVAE

PRO SALUTE

M_{ARCI} CURATI

MODESTI >

LEG_{IONIS} XX

V_{ALERIAE} V_{ICTRICIS}

CURAT_{IUS} LEMNUS

LIB_{ERTUS}

V_{OTUM} S_{OLVIT}

LIB_{ENTER} M_{ERITO}

TRANSLATION

To the goddess Sulis Minerva

for the safety

of Marcus Curatius

Modestus, a centurion

of the 20th Legion

'Courageous & Victorious'.

Curatius Lemnus,

his freedman (ex-slave)

has kept his promise (to the goddess)

happily and deservedly

The example shown here is fictitious - purely to illustrate the format.