

# YOU CAN decode ROMAN TOMBSTONES

at the Roman Baths Museum in Bath

*Tombstone inscriptions follow a set pattern, but there are many variations, omissions and additions.*

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

**D M** (Dis Manibus) to the ghost-gods

**NAME** : praenomen, nomen,  
father's name (patronymic) (- F or - FIL),  
voting tribe  
birthplace  
cognomen (3<sup>rd</sup> name)

**VIXIT ANN** (os) he/she lived for ... years

**STIP** (endiorum): how many years in the army

**H F C** (Heres Faciendum Curavit)  
the heir had the stone made  
the heir often adds his/her name and relationship

**H S E** (Hic Situs/a Est) here he/she lies

## LIST A NAMES

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

### MEN

**Antigonus**

**Gaius Calpurnius Receptus**

**Gaius Tiberinus**

**Julius Vitalis**

**Lucius Ulpius Sestius**

**Lucius Vitellius Tancinus**

**Magnus** (Magni = of Magnus, or Magnus's)

### WOMEN

**Calpurnia** = female version of Calpurnius. *Freedmen and Freedwomen would be given the name of their ex-master when they were freed.*

**Trifosa** : this Greek name means 'Delicious' or 'Gorgeous' - her only name when she was a slave.

**Mercatilla** : she is described as 'Liberta' and 'Alumna'

**Rusonia Aventina** : *Rusoniae Aventinae* - 'TO ..'

## LIST B BIRTHPLACE

**C / Cives** = citizen or tribesman/woman

**CR** = Roman citizens

**Hispanus Cauriensis** = of Caurium in Spain

**Natione Belga** = from the Belgic tribe of Hampshire or possibly northern France

**Mediomatrica** = of Metz

**Nicopoli** = from Nicopolis

**SERGIA TRIBU** = from the Sergian voting-tribe

*Membership of a voting-tribe meant a person was a Roman citizen with the right to vote in Rome regardless of where they came from*

## LIST C STATUS, JOB or ARMY RANK,

**ALUMNA** = foster-daughter

**CONIUNX** = wife

**F, FIL, FILIA** = daughter

**F, FIL, FILIUS** = son

**HERES** = heir (but often the heir's name is given)

**L, LIB, LIBERTUS / A** = freedman / woman (ex-slave)

**SACERDOS DEAE SULIS** = priest of the goddess Sulis

**EMERITUS** = veteran, retired soldier

**EQ, EQVES** = cavalryman

**EX COLEGIO FABRICENSIVM ELATUS** = funeral organised by the Guild of Armourers

**FABRICIENSIS** = armourer

## LIST D LEGION or SQUADRON

**LEGIO** = Legion **ALA** = Cavalry squadron

Several legions were given honorary names :

**LEG II AVGVSTA** = 2nd Augustan *The Emperor's*

**LEG XX Valeria Victrix** = 20th Courageous & Victorious  
*named after Boudica's rebellion 60-61 A.D.*

**ALA VETTONVM** = squadron of Vettones, all members granted Roman citizenship (**C.R.**) by the Emperor Vespasian, presumably for their part in the invasion of Britain in 43 A.D.

## LIST E ROMAN NUMERALS

**V** = 5

**VI** = 6

**X** = 10

**XI** = 11

**XV** = 15

**XVI** = 16

**XX** = 20

**XL** = 40

**L** = 50

**LX** = 60

**Annus** = year **Mensis** = month **Dies** = day

## LAYOUT

### Dedication to the Underworld Gods.

*"-is" and "-ibus" endings mean "TO" in Latin.*

### Dead person's name(s): praenomen & nomen

(Only Roman citizens had 3 names). **LIST A**

### Whose son he was.

*"-i" ending means "OF" or apostrophe S in Latin.*

### His voting-tribe **LIST B**

### His 3<sup>rd</sup> name (cognomen)

### His birthplace **LIST B**

and his rank in the army **LIST C**

### The number and name of his Legion or cavalry Regiment. **LIST D**

*"-is" ending means "OF" or apostrophe S in Latin.*

### His / her age. **LIST E**

### Number of years' army service. **LIST E**

### Who had the tombstone made.

### He lies here.

*For a woman, it would be 'hic sita est'*

## TRANSLATION

To the gods of the ghosts.

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Marcus Curatius Modestus

Marcus' son.

In the Sergian voting-tribe. ↑  
(Modestus)

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from Trier, a Centurion

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of the 20th Legion *Valeria Victrix*  
'Courageous & Victorious'.

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He lived for 42 years.

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19 years of paid army service.

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His heir had the tombstone made.

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Here he lies

DIS MANIBUS

MARCUS CURATIUS

MARCI FILIUS

SERGIA MODESTUS

TREVERI >

LEGIONIS XX V V

VIXIT ANNOS XLII

STIPENDIORUM XVIII

HERES FACIENDUM CURAVIT

HIC SITUS EST

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