

Epitaph for a mother



Date	c.AD 50-150.
Material	White Marble
How was it made?	The inscription is carved into the marble. The holes beneath it have been drilled right through to the other side.
What is it for?	Marking a burial niche in a “columbarium” shared tomb.
Where is it from?	Rome
What does it say?	<p>Text d(is) m(anibus) / L(ucius) ° Aurelius ° Sabinus ° / Fabiae ° Sabinae ° matri / pientissimae ° fecit</p> <p>Translation: ‘To the spirits of the dead. Lucius Aurelius Sabinus set this up for Fabia Sabina, his most devoted mother.’</p>

More information:

- The little dots in the inscription (called interpuncts) mark the spaces between words to make them easier to read.
- The epitaph has been broken in half and a piece was lost before it came to Oxford. The earliest records of it include a fourth line (“pientissimae ° fecit”), now missing.
- Lucius Aurelius Sabinus has taken his third name (called the cognomen) from his mother. This indicates that both were free citizens.

Topics to investigate: Roman family and the role of mothers; What was a columbarium and how were burials there organised? What did Romans believe about the spirits of the dead (“Dis Manibus”)? What were the holes in this object for and what does this tell us about how the Romans honoured their dead relatives?