

## Free Mustache Rides: CIL IV.8939-40

This paper is concerned with an ambiguity in a Pompeiian inscription. CIL IV.8939-40 reads as follows:

Maritimus

cunnu liget [a] II

II

virgines ammittit

Marguerite Johnson's translation, "Maritimus licks cunt for four asses. Virgins he admits (free)," forms the foundation of our investigation (Johnson 2022). The numeral "IIII" within the inscription references the customary pricing structure of Pompeiian sex work, denoting asses as the unit of payment. Johnson's inclusion of "free" at the inscription's conclusion hinges on the multifaceted nature of the verb "ammittit." This verb can signify either "to admit" – as interpreted above (free of charge) – or "to send away." Krenkel (1981) suggests a unique interpretation, positing that "ammittit" implies "sends them away as virgins," implying that Maritimus engages in cunnilingus without engaging in penetrative intercourse, thus preserving the virgins' marital prospects.

The ambiguity surrounding the meaning of "ammittit" proves challenging to resolve, as it hinges on the assumed prefix. Notably, there are four plausible interpretations of "ammittit" in this context: welcome, admit gratis, turn away, and send away. These definitions arise from the prefix assimilation of either "ab" or "ad" in front of "mitto." While some readers advocate for a simple "welcome" interpretation based on the assimilation of "ab + mitto" to "amitto," Krenkel's 1981 work introduces nuanced readings, suggesting that Maritimus' standard price is two asses

and he will not accept virgins for that price. Additionally, it pertains to the concept of virginity, proposing that he refrains from penetrative sex with virgins, limiting his interactions to oral sex (Krenkel 1981). Johnson's unique interpretation posits that Maritimus provides cunnilingus for virgins free of charge.

This paper adopts a multidisciplinary approach, first exploring the literary evidence surrounding cunnilingus in Roman society and subsequently examining the material evidence, including Pompeian graffiti and artwork that depict or allude to the practice. These sources collectively illuminate the cultural context and shed light on the broader implications of the inscription.