

THE MOZIA CHARIOTEER

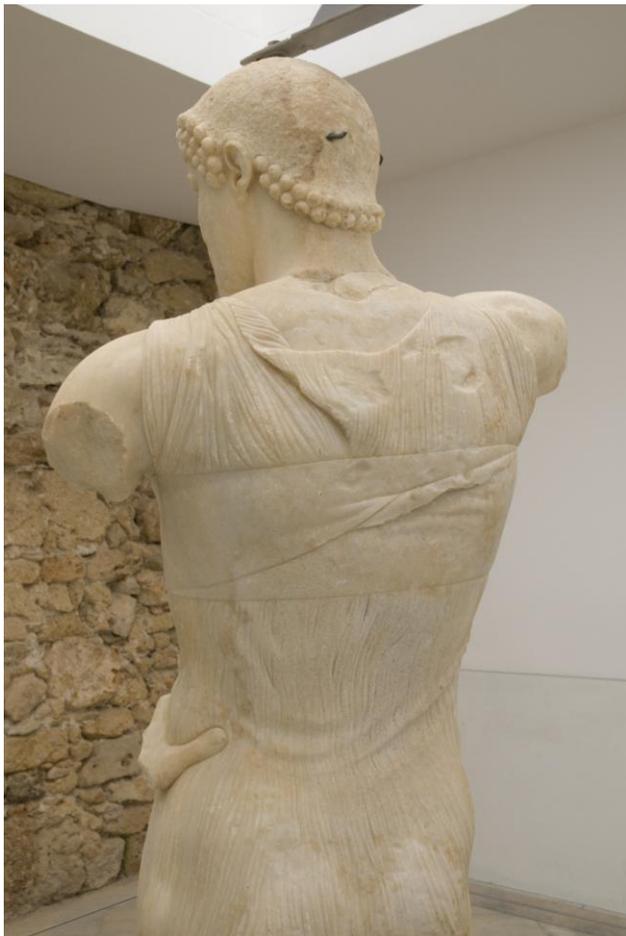
This extraordinary masterpiece of Classical marble statuary was discovered at Mozia, the earliest Phoenician colony in Sicily. It is unique within the context of fifth-century Sikeliote and Magna Graecian and even mainland Greece culture, owing to the contrast between the severe form of the head and the calligraphic rendering of the folds of the clothing, the unusual dynamism of the figure-arising principally from the torsion of the bust-and the exceptional sensuality suffusing the figure. These qualities have made the statue the subject of heated debate since its discovery, and as a result the hypotheses concerning the iconography, dating, context, and the artist who created it have varied and are often conflicting. Another factor that has complicated the interpretation is where it was found: a major city of the Phoenician West, which certain scholars are disinclined to believe could have fostered works of such importance and so strongly representative of the culture and ideology of the Greek world. Given this, and taking the sculpture as an emblematic example of the mixing of Punic and Greek cultures typical of the Mozia area, some have identified it as the commission of a Greek artist to depict a figure belonging to the Phoenician-Punic cultural sphere. The subject represented in this case has been identified as an Eastern priest or deity such as Baal, whose many epithets include "divine charioteer," or even Herakles-Melqart, whose iconography is well known in the East and in Cyprus.



Although these hypotheses are rationally formulated and make a significant contribution to our knowledge of the iconographies of Eastern culture, scholars are now almost unanimous - at the current stage of the various iconographic, stylistic, and historical analyses of the statue - in identifying the figure as a victorious charioteer in the Panhellenic games, who stands in triumphant pose holding up a laurel wreath or some other symbol of victory. This interpretation gives rise to the intriguing hypothesis that the statue might originally have been part of a monument erected at Akragas to commemorate the Olympic victory won of the tyrant Theron in the chariot race in 476 B.C., with the quadriga being driven by the charioteer Nikomachos. It has also been hypothesized, however, that the charioteer depicted might he Thrasyboulos of the Emmenids. The statue is therefore generally attributed to a major Greek master working during the period immediately preceding the mid-fifth century B.C., and it would have come to Mozia as part of the war spoils from one of the Carthaginian victories in the final years of the fifth century over the richest and most powerful Sikeliote cities of the time - Selinous, Himera, Akragas, and Gela.

In contrast to the widespread acceptance among archaeologists and an historians of the identification of the figure as a charioteer, there are a number of different hypotheses regarding the cultural context in which the work was created and even the fifth-century dating. Some scholars have observed echoes of the works of the master craftsmen at Olympia; others see characteristic typical of late Ionian Archaism. More recently a workshop in Selinous has been proposed as the place where this exceptional and original version of the iconographic type of the charioteer was mated. This hypothesis takes into account the features typical of this colonial frontier city, whose material record continues to astonish with its extraordinary artistic expressions and the lively results obtained in other areas of production, such as figured terracottas. Selinous is in fact the "ideal" place for explaining the originality of our Statue, which, **as** mentioned, has no equal in the category of works to which it belongs.

It is not possible to present here, for reasons of space, all the hypotheses that have been formulated over the years, beginning with the identification of the iconography of the work, but the context in which the sculpture was discovered can be outlined briefly. The statue was found on October 26, 1976, in the northeast sector of the island of Mozia during excavations in a potters' workshop (Zone K) and its immediate surroundings. It was lying on its back on the hard-earth floor of a large open-air area, situated between the workshop and the "Cappiddazzu" sanctuary, and was found amid a great accumulation of detritus, stones, and earth. The topographic and stratigraphic data seem to



indicate that this accumulation, which extended over the entire open-air area, constituted a sort of barricade, of which there was another nearby and parallel to it, created by the Mozians with building rubble, large architectural fragments, and miscellaneous materials. Before the extension of the excavations to the east (Zone K-east), the context in which the Statue was discovered suggested a *terminus ante quem* within the first decade of the fourth century B.C. On the basis of excavation data gathered later, however, it seems more likely that these barricades were raised during - not after - the siege of Mozia by Dionysos of Syracuse in 397 B.C., which ended with the destruction of the city.

The statue's head was detached from the body but resting in place, a sign that the break had been caused by the pressure of the earth. The absence of the arms, metal accessories, and base clearly indicate, however, that the statue was not in situ. Most probably it was erected in the nearby sanctuary and was taken to the place of discovery after being knocked down during the siege. It seems plausible that the Mozians, in hastily amassing rubble, pieces of crumbling buildings, precious materials such as a huge votive stone anchor, architectural elements including a capital in proto-Aeolian style, a large quantity of "acorn" missiles, and, not least, the statue, hoped perhaps to salvage these materials at the end of the fighting. The following year, Mozia was re-conquered by Carthage, but the barricades remained as we found them.

Maria Luisa Famà

The statue belongs to the State Heritage and is in the possession of the Sicilian Region. Like many other finds from excavations conducted since the 1960's, the statue is exhibited in the Giuseppe Whitaker Museum on the island of Mozia.

Mozia and its Museum, together with the materials in the Whitaker collection, objects excavated in the early 1900's by Joseph Whitaker, are all part of the Whitaker Foundation. Established in 1975, under the auspices of the National Academy of Lincei, its aim is to "increase cultural activities in Sicily, with particular reference to the study of the Phoenician-Punic culture, and to maintain the historical and artistic heritage that is protected on the island of Mozia."