

The Motya Charioteer in the Feminine Mode

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Abstract:

The Motya Charioteer has caused many problems in the Greek art historical world since its discovery in 1979. Found on an Island off of Marsala, Sicily, the statue's location and style both bring up questions of patron, creation, and even date of production. The body is anachronistic with itself: stylistically, some parts are much older than others. The Charioteer is male, though he is also too soft, sensual, and feminine to be of the heroic male mode typical of the time. He defies categorization. Why is this statue so out of the norm for depictions of Greek victorious athletes?

Perhaps the answer lies with the "costume" of a charioteer itself. Men were generally depicted as being heroically nude, and women were always clothed in this time period. The exception to this rule is the charioteer, who was shown in his particular chiton, or light, loose gown. Because of this, conceivably the Motya Charioteer was placed within the "female" mode, which allowed the artist more liberties than he normally would have had when creating a sculpture of a victorious male athlete. Through examinations of other contemporaneous male and female sculptures, I start to unravel the potentially unanswerable questions surrounding the Motya Charioteer.

Keywords

charioteer, heroic nudity, heroic male mode, feminine mode, clothed, Greek sculpture

The Motya Charioteer is unique, even within the unusual genre of original Greek sculpture. He defies categorization; his body seems very fourth century, his head very fifth. The features of his face seem severe, while there is a suppleness, softness, and virtuosity seen in the carving of his body. He is most



Figure 1. The Motya Charioteer, 470-397 BCE, marble. Reprinted with permission from Museo Whitaker. Image courtesy of Hellenica.com.



Figure 2. The Motya Charioteer. Image courtesy of Paris Franz.

likely a victor in a chariot race, and yet is very feminine, soft, and highly sexually charged. He is clothed, but is clearly defined as a male. He is Greek in style, but found in a Carthaginian city. The Motya Charioteer evades classification, and, like the Getty Kouros, continues to provide more questions than answers about Greek art of the late fifth century BCE.

The most striking characteristics of the Charioteer are his large, sensuous, almost feminine s-curve, and the fact that he is clothed (figs. 1 and 2). In Ancient Greece, most male statuary was heroically nude, with the exception of charioteers and musicians. That being said, the Motya Charioteer is unique even among charioteers, for other examples we have, such as the Charioteer at Delphi (which was part of a large sculpture group erected in Delphi for a victorious Sicilian tyrant—Polyzalus of Gela—at the Pythian Games), are still very much in the male mode: frontal, stiff, and though clothed, heroic. The Motya Charioteer's face and hair look to be from about the same time as the Charioteer at Delphi, but their bodies could not be more anachronistic-looking or -feeling when compared against one another. Not only does this make the Motya Charioteer difficult to date, but it raises the question: why is the Motya Charioteer so out of the norm for depictions of Greek victorious athletes?

Not only do the aesthetics of the statue make it difficult to date, but other factors complicate the issue as well. The Motya Charioteer was found as wall fill in a new fortification wall, built between 405-397 by the Carthaginians and surrounding the island of Motya, just off the coast of Marsala, Sicily, intended to protect them against Dionysus of Syracuse. Because of this, his date must be before 397, as Motya was in fact taken over and sacked by the Syracusans in that year. Just a few years before, the Carthaginians had besieged and sacked many Greek cities, including Syracuse (though it was actually never taken by the Carthaginians), Gela, Akragas, Selinus (sacked 409), and Camarina, and therefore they possibly took the charioteer as booty, leaving the date it was made possibly as early as 480, as the original excavator and Malcolm Bell think. However, I think this is highly unlikely, due to the finesse of the design of the body.¹

An argument for an earlier date, of course, is the archaic face, with a hint of an antiquated severe style, with snail shell curls, large, heavy lidded almond-shaped eyes, and full, pouty lips. The hair is "wig-like" possibly due to the wreath that went above it, and possibly would have made more sense with its full accouterments.



Figure 3. Detail of the Motya Charioteer.
Author's collection.

There are still some elements on the face that show carving virtuosity. The chin is small and defined, and the lips, though full, show more personality than most severe-style mouths, which tend to lack expression (fig. 3). These characteristics make at least the bottom half of his face look like an individual rather than just a stylized generic face. His face is rather badly damaged, making it look perhaps more poorly done than it was, but either the face has been archaized, or the sculpture was in some ways extremely advanced for its age, particularly in the sculpting of the body.

The Motya Charioteer is often dated to a rather early date in the 5th century BCE due to the severe stylization of his face typical of that era. Many scholars say that perhaps because the sculpture was created in Sicily, there were earlier advancements of body style, but that the face is the clear indicator of time it was created. I think, however, that it is more likely that it was actually sculpted at a much later, classical date, and that the face was purposefully archaized, for ultimately I think to create such a beautiful body and personalized aspects of the face, the sculptor must have been from a later date. Styles were perpetuated, especially in Sicily, and it was not uncommon to use older styles long after they had originally been produced. One such example is the statue of the "Goddess of Morgantina," which was created between 425-350 BCE, and yet looks as though her head should have been part of Temple E's metopes, which were completed at least 25 years before this sculpture was created. It is as if the Goddess was created by a member of the Selinus school that did the temple, the similarities are so astounding.² I think, as Sicilians (and all Greeks as well) were keenly aware of their pasts, it was not uncommon to perpetuate older styles and maintain some semblance of carrying on important traditions (connecting the patron to the powerful who came before), even while experimenting with new styles.

Furthermore, it seems the earlier date is often given because we have textual evidence suggesting that the early Sicilian tyrants made dedications similar to the Motya Charioteer

after documented victories at the Pan-Hellenic Games. In the absence of texts, there is no significant reason to conclude that this sculpture is from the earlier, rather than later period. In fact, it seems more likely that the opposite is true, and that a sculptor would introduce archaizing features rather than foreshadowing a future Pan-Hellenic style.

Perhaps taking for granted that the statue at Motya is Greek, or even a charioteer, is a mistake. Many scholars rather believe that it is a Punic statue; and that his garment, rather than being the *xystis*, or ankle-length *chiton*, that charioteers wore, could be the daily wear of Carthaginians. The Carthaginians also apparently wore high belts, similar to the one depicted on the Charioteer. The two holes in the front of the belt, therefore, would have held a metal brooch. Anna Maria Bisi, in an extensive examination of Greek-style sculpture in Punic contexts, gives the strongest argument that the Motya Charioteer is Greek by pointing to the absence of known parallels for freestanding sculptures from Punic sites.³ Furthermore, it was not uncommon for the Carthaginians to take art they liked from cities they had conquered, and many Greek pieces from all over Sicily were later found in Carthaginian sites (such as a bull statue from Akragas, which was returned to the city by the Romans after the fall of Carthage).⁴

Since I accept the sculpture of the Motya youth as Greek, the fact that it is clothed and wears a high belt solidifies it in my mind as a charioteer. Sandro Stucchi identifies it as Daedalos, who escape from Crete to Sicily on wax wings, due to attachments on his back, but the position of the arms and chiton seem to indicate otherwise. The attachments at its back most likely indicate that the charioteer was part of a larger group, further adding to the suggestion that it was, in fact, a charioteer in a chariot victory monument.⁵

On many depictions of charioteers, including the Delphi Charioteer, a high-waisted belt is also present⁶. There is argument about whether the chest-band was used to hold the *chiton* in the wind, to give the charioteer an important full range of motion with his arms (in which case the holes in front would have held a metal clasp), or whether the belt was used to attach him to the chariot in order to help keep them within it while participating in a dangerous sport. Because race-chariots were barely modified war chariots, they had open backs—in war, speed was of the essence, and extra weight was therefore removed—and it was very easy for charioteers to fall out and be trampled by other chariots while going around the hairpin turns in the race track⁷. The holes in the front, therefore, would connect to “rein”-like pieces attached to the

horses. While the danger of the sport leads me to believe the charioteers would be connected in some way to the cart or horses, the belt probably served a double use to also keep the *chiton* in place. Because the style is Greek, the idea of charioteers in this garb is Greek, and this type of statuary is not found in Carthaginian culture, it seems most likely that this sculpture was created by a Greek workshop, either in Greece or on Sicily, for a Greek patron.

As a charioteer, then, the sculpture would most likely have been created to celebrate a victory at a pan-Hellenic game, like the Olympic games or the Isthmian games. Such a beautiful and large commemoration would be unlikely for a small, local competition⁸. Victors were allowed to have poetry, such as Pindar's, written about them, and were allowed to erect statue groups celebrating their victories either at the sanctuary or within the agora of their hometown. Because it was found in Sicily, Malcolm Bell assumes that the sculpture must be of a chariot race won by one of the Sicilian tyrants. Many Sicilians won during the 470's, when Malcolm Bell dates the charioteer. I don't agree with his dating, but even if it was correct, it is hard to accept that the charioteer is a depiction of one of the winning tyrants themselves. Bell's argument is based on the fact that these tyrants, such as Hieron of Syracuse, loved to commemorate their victories, to prove their Greekness and legitimacy, and had many Odes by Pindar created for them, as well as erecting monuments to themselves and their victories (such as the Delphi Charioteer).⁹ It is hard to agree with his assessment that this statue can be a depiction of the tyrants or their children themselves, because it seems strange that they would allow such a sexualized and effeminate, non-powerful depiction of themselves, especially in a time that they were worried about their image in other Greeks' eyes.

The Charioteer is possibly a depiction of a tyrant's own charioteer, and not a tyrant, though even still it seems unlikely to depict the charioteer, alone, as the victor, and in such a sexualized fashion. The charioteer himself would not have been important, or the one crowned with a wreath, especially in the hometown of the victors, where the patron's glory was vital in keeping both power and prestige.

Furthermore, on mainland Greece we have indications of exactly what style of statuary the Sicilian tyrants tended to commission, and it does not look like the Motya Charioteer. The Delphi Charioteer is an example. The tyrants favored very dignified pieces, and particularly monuments created by the famous school of Aegina, of which they commissioned many for themselves.¹⁰ It stands to reason that the same aesthetic preferences they had on

the mainland would transfer back to Sicily, especially as they clearly felt they were in competition with the mainland Greeks. Due to its style, it seems unlikely that the tyrants would have been patron of a statue like this, but the Charioteer has to have been commissioned by someone.

Unfortunately, very little information is left from the Sicilian “democratic” period between the fall of the Sicilian tyrants in the late 460s and the rise of Dionysius I at the end of the century.¹¹ The fact that we don’t have as much information about this period as we would like, however, doesn’t mean that the rulers (oligarchs) or aristocracy in the Sicilian city-states weren’t still active and engaged in the arts, or in the Pan-Hellenic Games. I think it is very possible that later oligarchs or aristocrats dedicated the Charioteer, and purposefully archaized it to hark back to an earlier heroic age in Sicily: the time of the tyrants. Continuing the traditional look of the dedication’s head and face, would express power, prestige, and continuity with their great past, while at the same time having an advanced sculptor of the day create a sculpture in line with then-current techniques and tastes in the piece’s classical body. The statue could easily have been created between 440-415 (after the “wet drapery” style became more popular throughout Magna Graecia) during the “democratic age,” possibly coming from Gela where victorious charioteers (being wreathed by Nike) continued to be popular symbols on coinage, and where there continued to be wealthy and powerful families. Furthermore, the people of Gela were famous for being horse and chariot racers, making them ideal candidates for a statue of this nature.¹²

Richard Neer also dates the Motya Charioteer to around 440 BCE. He thinks that the face is purposefully archaic and not emotive, to give a more “regal” impression, while the drapery of the overly tight “wet drapery” style *chiton* is in a way archaizing as well. It shows the new virtuosity of the sculptor in creating realistic, naturalistic anatomy, while still covering up the fact that it is not yet perfectly mimetic, not yet completely true to real life.¹³ Though perhaps this is in part true, the expression (expressiveness) of the body motion clearly aids and also is aided by the drapery style, so I think there is more to the decision to use drapery than just a tautological realization that the artist has not yet achieved the highest level of classicism.

R. Ross Holloway compares the Motya Charioteer’s head to those on the Metopes of Temple E in Selinus (which was sacked in 409 by the Carthaginians), and though the faces are similar, the bodies and the clothing are so different I do not think it

is as clear that the Charioteer is of Selinuntine workmanship as Holloway claims. The changes made in the body seem rather sudden, as decoration of Temple E was finished in 450 BCE.¹⁴ The Selinuntine style emphasized grace at the expense of movement, and also had a type of “mannerism” which was in a way purposefully archaizing (to add “grace;” this may explain the Motya Charioteer’s archaized face), but the Charioteer is so full of movement and life (at the expense of the archaizing “grace” of the Metopes) that I think it is very clear that the same style workshops did not create both types of statuary.¹⁵

Because of its great size (1.8 M tall without feet), it has been claimed that the Motya Charioteer must be a depiction of a god like Apollo¹⁶. I have an issue with this explanation as well, as I cannot think of a context in Sicily in which a statue of Apollo would be crowning himself as a charioteer. Furthermore, I do not think that his size is indicative of divinity, for it easily could be meant to express the heroism and grandeur of the patrons, and there would be no reason for them not to create a large statue group of themselves.

Having decided that the Charioteer was at least created before 397 BCE, by a Greek workshop for a Greek audience, the next questions become if we can date it more exactly, and perhaps more interestingly, if we can explain the sensuality so obviously seen in this statue and so rare among male Greek sculpture. While there is plenty of erotic art in a Greek context, rarely is it found in freestanding sculpture, particularly for athletes, who were supposed to represent the ideal man, the ideal warrior. As the epitome of man, male sculptures were nude to depict the strength, perfection, and the ideal of beauty in warriors. They were not supposed to be soft and sensual, despite not wearing clothes.

Assuming the statue is Greek, its sensuality poses serious problems. As it does not show the Greek ideal of manly perfection, it seems odd that it would be the image of a Greek victor. Greeks often depicted foreign “barbarians,” such as Carthaginians and Persians in clothing, quite femininely, and with a large phallus, as the charioteer has. The Carthaginians, however, would not have participated in Greek chariot games, and would therefore not be crowning themselves with a wreath, as the shoulder position suggests this statue is doing¹⁷. The solution, I think, is in the fact that the statue is a charioteer, and from Magna Graecia, and was therefore considered by other Greeks to be slightly more “barbarous.” By being slightly “foreign,” the Motya Charioteer falls into that slightly more feminine genre to begin with, unlike the very masculine and distinctly Greek Delphi Charioteer. Furthermore, the



Figure 5. The New York Kouros, 600 BCE, marble. Reprinted with permission from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image courtesy of Artstor: www.artstor.org.



Figure 4. Kritios Boy, 480 BCE, marble. Reprinted with permission from the Acropolis Museum. Photographed by Socratis Mavromati.

fact that the Motya Charioteer is clothed puts him firmly into the feminine, and therefore sensual, mode.

From the very beginning of monumental Greek sculpture, females, like Nikandre or the Lady of Auxerre, are always clothed. Males, like the New York Kouros (fig. 4), are almost exclusively nude. Nudity, as Larissa Bonfante says, is a costume, designed to show the courage, strength, and hardness of the perfect male figure. These statues are designed to show *kalokagathia*, beauty and goodness. In the case of Greek male statuary, it is moral beauty, not overtly sensual or sexual attractiveness¹⁸ that is being emphasized. As history progressed, depictions of men became more realistic and less stylized, but that did not stop Greek sculptors from retaining idealized standards of male perfection. Depictions of men are stiff and frontal, which is a strong, non-seductive position to begin with, and the statues emphasize their courage and power as opposed to depicting sensuous curves and titillating softness and coyness.

In the fifth century BCE, a slight S-curve was added to male statuary, as they gained the contrapposto stance, as seen in the Kritios Boy, made in 480 BCE (fig. 5). Even with a slight curve to the hips, and the softness of the body of the younger boy, Kritios Boy's body lacks the jauntiness and sensuality of both female sculptures from the same time and of the Motya Charioteer. The Riace Bronzes, dated to exactly the same time period as the Motya Charioteer, (460 to 430 BCE) have a very different attitude than the Charioteer. Though they both have all of their weight on one foot, causing one of their hips to be pushed out in a similar fashion, the bronzes are very hard. They are overly muscled, tight, and strong. Though they stand in a relaxed attitude, there is no doubt that they are very "manly" men, and nothing in their depiction connotes a sensuousness that resembles the sexuality of the Motya Charioteer. The Charioteer has been dated to around the same time as Warrior B, with the claim that Warrior B has a similar S-curve to the Charioteer. An examination of the back of Warrior B, however, reveals that the actual curvature of his body is very minimal, and that his back and hips are almost straight from behind. Unlike the Motya Charioteer, whose whole body is actually curving and twisting, Warrior B's apparent S-curve is purely superficial. This difference could be explained by the difference in the materials from which the statues are composed; but as the tensile strength of bronze makes motion easier to produce, Warrior B should actually have more real curvature to the spine than the Charioteer, if these are contemporaneous.



Figure 6. Roman marble copy of a Greek original, The Canon, Polykleitos, 450-400 BCE. Reprinted with permission from il Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali, the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

The curvature through the trunk of Warrior B looks similar to the rotation of the body typically seen in Polykleitos (who actually carries out the rotation, which creates a more easily moving posture), who worked primarily after 450 BCE. Warrior B is probably before Polykleitos, as the sculptor shows indications of, but not a completion, of the body rotation. The sculptor of the Motya Charioteer easily could have been influenced by Polykleitos (who also often worked in marble), as the Charioteer carries out the full rotation of the body, dating it to a time after 450 BCE.

Perhaps this is because the Riace bronzes depict warriors, who had to be tough and hard. Ultimately, however, the Greeks used athletics to prove their manliness and capability on the battlefield, with events that tested running skills in armor, and jumping on and off chariots in motion. Artists such as Polykleitos, who sculpted in the same period, between about 450 and 420 BCE, liked to depict athletes, like the Charioteer, and they are still certainly not sumptuous, but masculine like warriors. In fact, Polykleitos liked to depict even squatter, more masculine and overly muscled idealized men than in previous eras. The Canon of Polykleitos, created between 450 and 400 BCE, and the Diadumenos, created in 420, are perfect examples of beautiful men that are still very strong, masculine, hard, and frontal (fig. 6). They are ideal, but they are not trying to excite their audience: they are supposed to express symbolic warrior perfection.

It is not until the late fourth century, at least fifty years after the Motya Charioteer was created, that we see any semblance of sensuality in male sculpture. Even then, however, it seems to be used with gods that are traditionally quite feminine themselves¹⁹. One example is the statue of Hermes and the Infant Dionysus, created by Praxiteles between 350 and 330 BCE. Hermes has a large S-curve and slightly more sensuous lines, however the sculpture is not as blatantly jaunty and sexual as the Charioteer, even though both Hermes and Dionysus are often depicted as very womanly.

Female sculptures, on the other hand, start slyly depicting the curves of their bodies through their clothing. Korai, such as Kore Acropolis 682, created between 530 and 520, start pulling at their skirts hard enough to show the shape of their legs underneath. Kore Acropolis 678, created as early as 540-530, is very revealed and provocative from behind, as her *chiton* clings seductively to every inch of her legs. Though they are always clothed, this revealing clothing adds sensuality. The idea of false modesty adds a titillating and exciting effect. A more modern example of this phenomenon is de Goya's *Maja Desnuda* (Nude



Figure 7. Amazon, after Polykleitos, marble, 440 BCE. Reprinted with permission from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image courtesy of Artstor: www.artstor.org.

Maja), painted in 1800, and his Maja Vestiti (Clothed Maja), painted in 1803. When he painted his original, completely nude Maja, there was an outrage over her blatant sensuality, and he was forced to repaint her with clothing on. Determined to prove to his contemporaries that painting nude females was not a bad thing, de Goya's Maja Vestiti is considerably more overtly sexual than Maja Desnuda, even though she is completely covered.²⁰ The Greeks understood this paradox, and used drapery to their advantage when creating their female statuary.

Another great example of the use of drapery to assert sensuality is found in the Ludovisi Throne, created around 440 BCE. The main panel depicts Aphrodite being born out of the water, with two handmaidens ready to help her. Though she is fully clothed, the sculpture style is the beginning of the "wet drapery" type, and through her sheer *chiton* the viewer can see almost everything. She is, as the goddess of love, intended to be highly sexualized, and is much more sensual than the naked prostitute depicted, rather demurely, on the side panel. Amazons, like the one depicted by Polykleitos in 440, tend also to be much less covered up than Aphrodite, and yet are not sensual (image 7). Without being covered, and as a warrior, the Amazon is much more in the male genre and less in the coy, sensual, female mode.

The fifth century saw a huge increase in the idea of wet, or wind-blown drapery used to show all the beautiful curves of the female body while still ostensibly covering them up. There are too many beautiful examples of sculptures of this nature to name them all, but some particularly fine examples include the images on the Balustrade of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis, the Paionius Nike at Olympia, and the Aphrodite by Kallimachos.

Kallimachos' Aphrodite, created between 450-400 BCE, is beautifully voluptuous (fig. 8).²¹ Her "wet" drapery hugs every curve; you can even see her bellybutton through her clothing. Though one breast is exposed, the drapery itself adds greatly to her sensuality, with folds emphasizing her pubic

triangle and the dramatic cock of her hips. Without the clothing, her playful seduction would be gone, and the emphasis on her more sensual aspects would be lost. The Paionius Nike at Olympia, created in 420 BCE, is a key example of wind-blown drapery. As Nike touches down, the wind from flying pulls back her drapery, pulling tightly against her legs, belly, and breasts. She is slightly turned, heightening the softness and curviness of her body, adding sensuality; she is diametrically opposed to the frontal hardness of male statuary at the same time. All of the Nikes that grace the balustrade at the Temple of Athena Nike are beautiful



Figure 8. Venus of Arles, based on a Praxiteles, 375-340 BCE, marble. Reprinted with permission from the Louvre.



Figure 9. Venus of Arles, based on a Praxiteles, 375-340 BCE, marble. Reprinted with permission from the Louvre.



Figure 10. Venus de Milo. Reprinted with permission from the Louvre.

representations of the sensuous female form visible through drapery. Finished in 410 BCE, each of the Nikes twists and contorts in different positions, to show different aspects of their bodies, doing everyday things. A particularly famous example is the Nike tying her sandal. Bending over and lifting her leg, her drapery still clings to her rounded body. Her full breasts hang down, causing folds and highlighting them and the roundness of her soft belly. She is not fat, but rather quite a toned female, yet still there is a softness about her, with long organic lines, which makes her both feminine and sensuous. Her dress is falling off her shoulders slightly, showing a little bit of skin, which is intended to be even more exciting. Had she been totally nude, her nakedness would be nowhere near as interesting, and the viewer would have lost the desire to see just a little bit more.

Eventually, Praxiteles did the unthinkable and created a nude female statue for the Island of Knidos in 350 BCE, but she still maintains that sense of “false modesty.” She achieves it by covering herself up and turning slightly away, keeping a playful coquettishness and seductiveness. Praxiteles also created a clothed Venus which is unfortunately lost, though the Venus of Arles, a half-clothed beauty, is based on an original by Praxiteles, created between 375-340 (fig. 9). Since then, many female statues have used the Knidia’s form as their basic design, but the one female statue considered most sensual is the Venus de Milo, sculpted between 130-100 BCE²² (Image 10). Unsurprisingly, the sexiest sculpture is not completely nude, but rather her clothing seems to just accidentally be slipping down, giving a taste of her beauty underneath but still leaving the viewer wanting more. While the softness and curves of the female form are a main contribution to the sensuous nature of classical female sculptures, they are certainly helped by the clothing’s partial revelation of the body. As a genre, female sculptures are clothed for most of the Greek period, and even after nude female sculpture appears, they frequently return to being clothed for sensual purposes, like the Venus de Milo.

The Motya Charioteer (Images 1 and 2), being clothed, is therefore much more like female statues than male ones. Because he is in the female mode, and not a Greek mainlander, the artist had the ability to make him as feminine and sensual as was desired, which was apparently a primary goal. His hip is cocked out dashingly, and his body is in a long, sensuous s-curve. His sheer *chiton* creases against his bent leg, showing that he is muscular, but the muscles just above his pelvic crease are relaxed, and soft, like that of female statues. His hand is jauntily

placed upon his hip, slightly pulling his *chiton* away from his body, in the exact same place, and with the same effect, as the korai who pull at their garments. His hand is pressed ever so slightly into his flesh, which reacts and moves against his fingers. This is extremely sensual, and feminine, as it shows soft flesh, rather than the rock-hard muscular flesh of typical korai. Though he has a very muscular buttocks, from the back, he could easily be an acropolis Korai, such as Kore Arc. 678, whose back is exposed and is very muscular as well. The Motya Charioteer has been quite damaged, but the indications of a large phallus still exist. Greeks favored small phalluses, an indication of higher status, and tended to depict only foreigners and slaves as so well-endowed. Perhaps it is there to show his "foreignness" as a Sicilian, or to ensure that the viewer knew, as feminine as it is, the sculpture is male; a large phallus ensures no one could mistake this.

There is reason to worry that, as a charioteer, particularly as one so sensuous, viewers would mistake the sculpture as a female. Though there are many stories of male charioteers, and though chariot-racing it was known to be a very difficult, physically taxing, extremely dangerous sport, there are also stories of important female charioteers²³. The most famous include Selene, Nux, Eos, and Artemis. Furthermore, there are depictions of Nike as the charioteer for Zeus, and females that are abducted or about to be married are often shown, alone, in a marriage chariot²⁴. Even Athena is occasionally depicted in chariots, though usually with Herakles, because she was considered to be the creator of the chariot. Amazons are also shown driving their own chariots.²⁵ Even in Homeric times women could at least drive certain kinds of carts or chariots; Nausicaa drives a mule chariot into the city.²⁶

There are some depictions of charioteers that are more androgynous than this one. One such example is on a red-figure kylix at the Getty Museum, where on the exterior, a young charioteer drives a three-horsed chariot. The charioteer looks like a girl, wearing a long garment fastened at the waist, but has short hair. The interior shows a youthful kithara player, with Nike in front of him. The charioteer, despite the boyish short hair, is wearing the same garment as Nike and other goddesses²⁷. The hairstyle unfortunately does not tell us definitively that charioteer is a boy, since there have been other depictions of female figures with similar styles.²⁸ The chariot is going full speed, implying a race, which is emphasized by the musical agon in the Tondo—the only use for having Nike depicted would be to show victory in a competition. Of course, the Motya Charioteer would have had to be a boy to compete in chariot races--though by the 2nd Century

females could own racing chariots—and win his wreath, but as an artistic subject genre, this gendered division of practices it was not always perfectly clear, even in race scenarios.

A similar monument with feminine-looking males is the Nereid Monument, by Xanthos, in Lycia, between 390 and 380 BCE. There is a Greek, who is heroically nude, fighting two clothed Persians. The Greek has over-emphasized, rock-hard muscles and a small phallus. The two Persians look soft underneath their drapery, even appearing to have breasts, and they possess oversized phalluses. Of course they are clothed as Persians, “Barbarians,” but it is interesting to me the degree to which the artist portrayed them as feminine, even though they are warriors. I think that the artist wanted to emphasize their lack of masculinity, and to focus on the fact that they lack the skill and strength for war. More importantly, being clothed puts them into the feminine mode, and gives the artist the permission to play with their forms.

The Motya Charioteer seems highly sexually charged because of his body position and the fact that it is just barely concealed behind a thin layer of clingy drapery. As a piece put up in the agora, or at the race site, he would have been looked at mostly by men. In a culture where homosexuality was very much a part of society, his sensuality, while rare for a male sculpture, has cultural precedence; yet since this sensuality is never seen with men, perhaps the sculpture pushes the envelope too much for its time. Malcolm Bell explains this idea perfectly in his article *The Motya Charioteer and Pindar's Isthmian 2*:

The sculpture meets with a strong response perhaps because of the artist's use for the male figure of the artistic device of transparency, which is otherwise associated almost exclusively with representations of women. Drapery that partially reveals sexual attributes may be sexually charged, whatever the sex of the body underneath. The structure of Greek society argues that the intended response to sculpture of either sex was primarily male. The Motya figure is the product of an age in which admiration for the athletic [not feminine] male body was widespread....it thus approaches more closely, and perhaps even exceeds, the limits of the expected or acceptable in representation.”²⁹

Though the mystery remains of who commissioned this work, when, and for what purpose, the Motya Charioteer is a very interesting Greek statue. The deeper one delves into his mysteries, the more complicated and confusing he becomes. While we may never know his exact story, it is easy to see that he

is a unique Greek male sculpture. His carving style appears to be Greek, his body language female, his position is that of a victorious athlete, and his physical location was in a non-Greek city. It may never be known why he was made the way he was, whether due to his clothing or the fact that he was foreign, and whether or not this made him better- or worse-received by his contemporaries. Like the barely concealed body, perhaps that only adds to his appeal.

Endnotes

¹ Bell, Malcolm. *The Motya Charioteer and Pindar's Isthmian 2*, JSTOR, 13.

² R. Ross Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 107

³ A. M. Bisi, "La statua di Mozia nel quadro della scultura fenicio-punica di ispirazione greca," *Statua marmorea*, 69-78.

⁴ Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 165.

⁵ Stucchi, Sandro, *La Statua Marmorea di Mozia, Atti della Giornata di Studio, Marsala, 1986*

⁶ Raschke, Wendy. *Female Charioteers in Greek Antiquity: Image or Reality?*, *Nikephoros: Zeitschrift für Sport und Kultur im Altertum*, (Jahrgang: 1994), 1.

⁷ Golden, Mark. *Equestrian Competition in Ancient Greece*, JSTOR, 337.

⁸ Bell, *The Motya Charioteer and Pindar's Isthmian 2*, 4.

⁹ Bell, *The Motya Charioteer and Pindar's Isthmian 2*, 14.

¹⁰ Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 98.

¹¹ Herington, C. J. "Aeschylus in Sicily," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 74.

¹² Jenkins, G. K. "Recent Acquisitions of Greek Coins," *The British Museum Quarterly*, 40.

¹³ Neer, Richard, *The Emergence of the Classical Style in Greek Sculpture*, 147.

¹⁴ Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 104.

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- ¹⁵ Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 106. For more discussion on the “Mannerist” style of the Selinus workshops, and how it descended from sculpture in Ionia, see G.M.A. Richter, *Korai*, London, 1968, nos. 37 and 38
- ¹⁶ Holloway, *The Archaeology of Ancient Sicily*, 107.
- ¹⁷ Arieti, James. *Nudity in Greek Athletics*, JSTOR, 432.
- ¹⁸ Bonfante, Larissa. *Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art*, JSTOR, 543-544
- ¹⁹ Csapo, Eric. *Riding the Phallus for Dionysus: Iconology, Ritual, and Gender-Role De/Construction*, JSTOR, 261.
- ²⁰ Krumrine, Mary Louise. *Goya’s “Maja desnuda” in Context*, JSTOR, 38-40.
- ²¹ Metropolitan Museum online catalogue, metmuseum.org
- ²² Herman Grimm, *The Venus de Milo*, Trans. Alice Millard, JSTOR, 1-2.
- ²³ Raschke, *Female Charioteers in Greek Antiquity*, 16.
- ²⁴ Segall, Berta, “The Earring with Winged Charioteer in the Classical Department,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts*, 50-51.
- ²⁵ Raschke, *Female Charioteers in Greek Antiquity*, 17.
- ²⁶ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Trans. Bernard Knox and Robert Fagles, (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition: 2006), part VI.
- ²⁷ Raschke, *Female Charioteers in Greek Antiquity*, 1-2
- ²⁸ Raschke, *Female Charioteers in Greek Antiquity*, 18
- ²⁹ Bell, *The Motya Charioteer and Pindar’s Isthmian 2*, 7.
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