CHARIOT TERRACOTTA MODELS FROM TELL ARID AND TELL BARRI
A TYPOLOGICAL AND FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

This paper is inspired by the final work titled “Ancient and Middle Bronze Age terracotta chariots from Syria, Jordan, and Israel” by Tell Arid and Tell Barri. The chariot models from Tell Arid and Tell Barri are located in the Syrian desert, more precisely in the so-called Tell Khallet triangle area. On both sites, during the turn of the 3rd millennium BC and earlier, BC, these complexes show many similarities in architectural and material evidence. This convention has been reconstructed for the main consumption terracotta wheel-built vessels.

Chars provide the first nutrients about wheel-built vehicles’ imagery. Terracotta models found in Levant, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Near East represent bridges, sometimes supported on four wheels. During the Early Iron Age, BC, wheel-built vehicles were identified mainly (by a zoomorphic LG5BIR while later two terms become more frequently used) MBII-III G3 (Tell Barri) for wagons and four-wheeled chariots and LG5BIR (Tell Arid) for two and four-wheeled chariots used for transporting people. Terms can be found in many literary and archaeological sources. Glyptic inscriptions are numerous images related to wheel-built vehicles that can be grouped into many themes mythological scenes, ceremonies, war, hunting, and processions. Chariot imagery relating to war can be found on the sarcophagi of Ur, where a generation of wheel-built vehicles, named “battle cars”, are represented. Two main car images, quite different, are represented on the lid of the ancient city. Few examples of actual wheel-built chariots have been found. The only ones have been discovered in graves in Kish and as the royal cemetery of Ur.

This field has been recently developed, a study of BC terracotta models complexes and fragments that have been found at Tell Arid and Tell Barri. This typology is mainly based on morphological features of the models that have been analyzed as follows: 1 number of wheels, 2 body morphology 3 position of the axles, 4 specific features.

This study confirmed the recognition of six different chariot models types. This study combined with information obtained from textual evidence, glyptic and depictions on stone offers a possibility to reconstruct the form and mode of use of the ancient chariots.

**Type I**

**Number of wheels:** 2

- **Body morphology:** Simple platform body with a deep tapering to rectangular with rounded corners. Simple frontal shield with a rounded upper part. Driveway pole parallel to the ground.

- **Position of the axle:** The axle is always body-parallel and it is located in the rear part of the model.

- **Specific features:** All models are made of black burnished clay. Chronologically speaking these models are the most ancient of the analyzed examples. They are dated back to the first half of the 1st millennium BC.

- **Functional analysis:** Considering the body shape and the absence of a horn, we can assume that these were quite lightweight, one-man vehicles, where the driver needed to stand.

**Type II**

- **Number of wheels:** 2

- **Body morphology:** Body with a shape tending to rectangular. The vertically prolonged body’s edges create a box between the frontal shield and the seat. The driveway pole is oblique to warrant more stability on the vehicle.

- **Position of the axle:** The axe can be integrated or external to the body, in this latter case it has a circular section. In most cases it is located under the central part of the body.

- **Specific features:** The frontal shield’s upper part can have different shapes: rounded, square-like, half-rounded, fully-rounded, or squared. On the rear part there is a small rectangular appendage that makes a 90° angle with the seat. Some models have decorations on the frontal shield or upon the body of incised lines and stamped circles.

- **Functional analysis:** These models represent a chariot which was chiefly built for human transport (up to two persons). One driver in the chariot, standing or seated, the other man on the rear appendage, driving the pattern proposed for the four-wheeled vehicles represented on the Ur excavations. Based on this data we can use these vehicles as a lighter and more frequent version of the four-wheeled “battle car”.

**Type III**

- **Number of wheels:** 2

- **Body morphology:** Body with a shape tending to rectangular, long and narrow, slightly narrower between the frontal shield and the seat. The driveway pole is oblique.

- **Position of the axe:** The axe is always kept outside of the body, with a circular section. It can be seen in most cases, in the form part of the model, but the frontal shield less frequently. It is located in the model’s rear part.

- **Specific features:** As in the previous type, the upper part of the frontal shield can take on various shapes. Most frequently it is a half-moon or a fish-shaped shield, sometimes jointed with two halves. A triangular appendage is always present, but in this type it creates an obtuse angle with the seat. Some models have decorations, quite frequently upon the frontal shield. The most simple models are incised lines and stamped circles, while the more complex ones, model-shaped images of gods, mainly come from southern Mesopotamia.

- **Functional analysis:** The chariot, as the previous one, was mainly used for human transportation. Models can be distinguished by standing or sitting. The shape of the body, the vertically prolonged edges protecting the charioteer, shows that this type probably was not used for military purposes. Considering the rich decoration upon the frontal shield (above all the model depicted ones) we can assume that it probably was a chariot used for ceremonies.

**Type IV**

- **Number of wheels:** 4

- **Body morphology:** Body with a rectangular shaped platform, plain upper surface between the frontal shield and the seat and oblique driveway pole.

- **Position of the axe:** The frontal and rear axes are integrated in the body, the front below the shield and the other below the seat.

- **Specific features:** In some models the frontal shield is slightly curved. The upper part is often in a fish-like shape, so we can see in numerous glyptic images. The seat is a small platform shaped that makes a 90° angle with the seat appendage. The decoration on the shield consists of incised lines and stamped circles.

- **Functional analysis:** Based on the shape of the body and the parallels with the type EI, we can assume that also this type was used for ceremonies, as appears in such contexts on numerous seal impressions, many of them dated to EDII.

**Type V**

- **Number of wheels:** 4

- **Body morphology:** Rectangular body with dented lower part and plain upper section. The vertically prolonged frontal edges create a box between the frontal shield and the seat. The driveway pole is oblique.

- **Position of the axe:** The two axes in most cases are external to the body, with circular sections. The frontal one is below the shield while the rear one is below the seat.

- **Specific features:** The upper part of the shield is in most cases rounded. The parabola-shaped appendage makes a 90° angle with the seat appendage. The predominant decoration on all of them is incised lines on the shield and vertical lines on the body’s edges. Less frequent are stamped circles, mainly located on the shield.

- **Functional analysis:** This chariot type is suitable for transportation both of persons and goods. The first case well represented in the Standard of Ur, to which this type of vehicles were named: “battle car”.

**Type VI**

- **Number of wheels:** 4

- **Body morphology:** The body has a shape tending to rectangular, with a plain platform and dented cover. The dented edges are from the previous types further refined by a parabolic or oblique driveway pole. On one or two of them semi-circular dipped appendages, semi-circular, are located at the front of the platform.

- **Position of the axe:** The two axes in circular sections are external to the body, in some cases they do not form a continuous cylinder between the sides and the foot ends, but are separated.

- **Specific features:** The cover usually bears some decoration. The most common consists of low lines, creating geometric motifs or a grid, probably representing the material seat (or the seat cover). In some cases we have figurative relief motifs, framed in the grid (Tell Barri).

- **Functional analysis:** This type of chariot was probably used for transportation of goods. Considering that a few terracotta models of this type come from Southern Assyria and Northern Mesopotamia, we can suppose that they were associated with a nomadic or semi-nomadic population that seasonally moved from the lower areas of the Tigris-Euphrates towards the steppe of northern Syria and Iraq. They probably followed two main routes along the Euphrates and through the Tur Abdin.

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