

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

This poster is inspired by MA final work titled "Ancient and Middle Bronze age terracotta chariots from Syrian Jezira, case-studies from Tell Arbid and Tell Barri".

Tell Arbid and Tell Barri are located, 20 km apart, in the Syrian Jezira, more precisely in the so-called Khabur triangle area. On both sites layers dating back to Hfnd and early Hnd mill. BC were exposed that show many similarities in architectural and material evidences. Such concordances have been reconstructed also for what concerns terracotta wheeled vehicles.

Texts provide the first attestations about wheeled vehicles' usage: on inscribed tablets found in level IVa in Uruk, pictographic signs represent sledges, some supported on four wheels. During the Hfnd mill. BC, wheeled vehicles were identified mainly by a sumerogram ⁶⁵GIGIR while later two terms become more frequently used: ⁶⁵MAR.GID.DA (*urruqa*) for wagons and four-wheeled chariots and ⁶⁵GIGIR (*narkata*) for two and four-wheeled chariots used for transporting people. These terms can be found in many literary and archive texts. Glyptic has yielded numerous images related to wheeled vehicles that can be grouped into five main themes: mythological scenes, ceremonies, war, hunting and processions. Chariot images relating to war can be found also on the standard of Ur on the so-called "war panel", where a procession of four-wheeled vehicles, named "battle cars", is represented. Two more chariot images, quite damaged, are represented on the Eannatum stele. Few examples of actual full-sized wheeled vehicles have been found. The only ones have been discovered in graves in Kish and at the royal cemetery of Ur.

The typology presented below has been developed after a study of 52 chariot models (complete and fragments) that have been found at Tell Arbid and Tell Barri. This typology is mainly based upon morphological features of the models that have been analyzed as follows: 1. number of wheels, 2. body morphology, 3. position of the axle, 4. specific features.

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



Type I

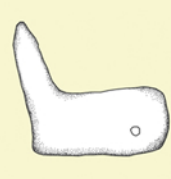
Number of wheels: 2

Body morphology: Simple platform body with a shape tending to rectangular with rounded corners. Simple frontal shield with a rounded upper part. Draught pole parallel to the ground.

Position of the axle: The axle is always body-integrated and it's located in the rear part of the model.

Specific features: All models are made of dark brown clay. Chronologically speaking these models are the most ancient of the analyzed examples. They are dated back to the first half of the Hfnd mill. BC.

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



Type II

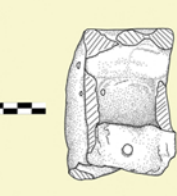
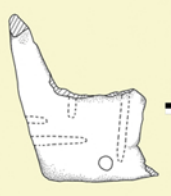
Number of wheels: 2

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 draught pole is oblique to warrant more stability to the vehicle.

Position of the axle: The axle can be integrated or external to the body, in this latter case have 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, half-moon or fish-tail shaped. On the rear part there is a small trapezoidal appendix 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 drove the chariot, standing or seated, the other stood on the rear appendix, according to the pattern proposed for the four-wheeled vehicles represented on the Standard of Ur. Based on this data we can consider these vehicles as a lighter and faster version of the four-wheeled "battle car".



Type III

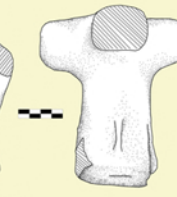
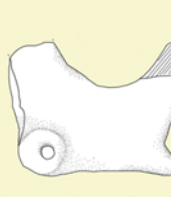
Number of wheels: 2

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

Position of the axle: The axle is always projected out of the body, with a circular section. It can be found, in most cases, in the front part of the model, just below 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-tail shape, sometimes pierced with two holes. A trapezoidal appendix 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 ones are incised lines and stamped circles, while the most complex ones, mould-shaped images of gods, mainly come from southern Mesopotamia.

Functional analysis: The chariot, as the previous one, was mainly created for human transportation, probably for just one person, standing or seated. The shape of the body, without 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 mould shaped one) we can say that it probably was a chariot used for ceremonies.



Type IV

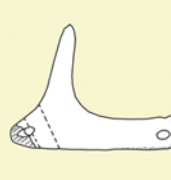
Number of wheels: 4

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

Position of the axle: The frontal and rear axles are integrated in the body, the first 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-tail shape, as we can note in numerous glyptic images. The seat is a small parallelepiped that makes a 90° angle with the rear appendix. The decoration on the shield consist of incised lines and stamped circles.

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



Type V

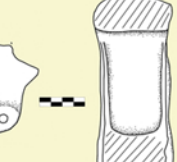
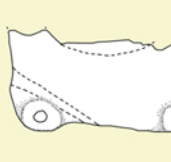
Number of wheels: 4

Body morphology: Rectangular body, with domed lower part and plain upper section. The vertically prolonged lateral edges create a box between the frontal shield and the seat. The draught pole is oblique.

Position of the axle: The two axles 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 parallelepipedally shaped seat makes a 90° angle with the rear appendix. The predominant decoration is an "x" of 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 the transportation both of persons and goods. The first case is well represented in the Standard of Ur, to which this type of vehicles owns its named: "battle car".



Type VI

Number of wheels: 4

Body morphology: The body has a shape tending to rectangular, with a plain platform and domed cover. The draught system is different from the previous types characterized by a parallel or oblique draught pole. In this case, two or three semi circular, holed appendices, vertically set, are located at the front of the platform.

Position of the axle: The axles with circular sections are external to the body, in some cases they do not form a continuous cylinder between the right and left side, but are separated.

Specific features: The cover usually bears some decoration. The most common consist of incised lines, creating geometric motives or a grid, probably resembling the material used for the real wagon's cover. In some cases we have figurative relief motives, framed in the grid (Tell Bi'a).

Functional analysis: This type of chariot was suitable for transportation of goods. Considering that a few terracotta models of this type come from Southern Anatolia 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 Anatolian peninsula towards the steppes of northern Syria and back. They probably followed two main routes: along the Middle-Euphrates and through the Tur Abdin.

