

STUDIA ORIENTALIA
EDIDIT SOCIETAS ORIENTALIS FENNICA
XIV:2

NOTES ON WAGONS AND CHARIOTS
IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

BY

ARMAS SALONEN

HELSINKI 1950
SOCIETAS ORIENTALIS FENNICA

Notes on Wagons and Chariots in Ancient Mesopotamia

by

Dr. *Armas Salonen.*

The material on which we have to base our knowledge of the Babylonian means of transportation by land, *i. e.* wagons, chariots sledges, portable chairs etc., is not as rich as that dealing with the means of transportation by water. It is true that there is plenty of material for investigation, but it does not give us as exact or as accurate a conception of the facts as does the material dealing with boats and ships. We have among the latter, for example, wonderful harbour documents which provide us with precise information on the dimensions and the number of different parts of the freighters of various sizes and kinds (the Babylonian boats were mainly freighters). The dock documents from Ur III period even enable us to reconstruct the Babylonian vessels! But — *miserabile dictu* — we do not possess similar material for an investigation of the dimensions and the number of the different parts of the wagons and chariots.

In a way, the same is true of Egypt. The Old Egyptian sources contain much less material for the investigation of land transportation methods than for that of water transport. Horses and chariots are first mentioned in the 15th and 16th dynasties, when the horse became familiar to the Egyptians (*cf.* STEINDORFF—SEELE, »When Egypt Ruled the East» p. 274). In the Egyptian Dictionary of ERMANN—GRAPOW (»Wörterbuch der Ägyptischen Sprache») I have found only about 60 words connected with horses and chariots, the meanings of the greatest part of which are still obscure. I would

like to point out, incidentally, that the Egyptian terms for travelling by chariot were — naturally — derived partly from terms used for travelling by boat and ship. *E. g.*, *n'j* in the earlier period meant »to travel by boat», in the later period »to travel by land»; as early as in the Pyramid texts *h d j* meant »stromabfahren», and later »nordwärts reisen, nicht zu Schiff»; *h n j* in the Pyramid texts meant »to row», and from the 20th dynasty on »to travel by chariot».

The importance of the chariot, as is well known, is connected with that of the horse, which became really familiar to the Babylonians relatively late. While it is true that the horse was already known in Mesopotamia in the first half of the 3rd millennium, it did not become popular until much later, in about the middle of the 2nd millennium. The Code of Hammurabi, for example, does not mention the horse or even the chariot. It mentions, however, the draught wagon, *eriqqun* (written ^{GIŠ}MAR-GID₂-DA) which was drawn by other draught-animals and used in Mesopotamia before the horse was popular (*cf.* §§ 271—272). On horses in the Ancient Near East see especially POTRATZ, »Das Pferd in der Frühzeit».

The most important source for investigation of the Babylonian means of land transportation is the first part of the 5th tablet of Ḫ A R-r a = *hubullu*. Wagons, chariots, and their parts are also mentioned in Sumerian economic texts, and nearly everywhere in the rich Sumerian and Accadian literature (historical texts, official and private letters, legal contracts, omen texts, hymns, epics etc.). Important also is the archaeological material, *i. e.* models of wagons and chariots made of clay or some other material, drawings on reliefs, seals etc. Unfortunately, the archaeological material we have dates from the Sumerian and Assyrian times. I know of no picture of wagons or chariots from the Old Babylonian period (which the 5th tablet of Ḫ A R-r a = *hubullu* deals with!).


The first 99 lines of the 5th tablet of Ḫ A R-r a = *hubullu* list chariots and wagons and their various parts. This list is a continuation of the description of means of transportation in general, begun in the last part of the 4th tablet, where boats and ships and their components are listed (see my »Die Wasserfahrzeuge in Babylonien»).

The 4th tablet ends in a catchline $g^{15} m a r = nar-kab-tum$, which enables us to restore the first destroyed line of the 5th tablet. In my opinion, the fact that $\underline{H} A R-r a = hubullu$ devotes more attention to boats and ships than to wagons and chariots, indicates that boats and ships provided the principal means of transportation — at least in the southern part of the Land of the Twin Rivers, which was cut up into smaller or bigger islands by numerous canals (ancient Venice on a larger scale!).



The first part of the 5th tablet of $\underline{H} A R-r a = hubullu$ dealing with chariots and wagons can be divided into five sections (see my »Der Abschnitt »Wagen« der 5. Tafel der Serie $\underline{H} A R-r a = hubullu$ = SO XI: 3): 1:o. lines 1—58 deal with the 2-wheeled chariot, *nar-kabtu*; 2:o. line 59 gives the name of an unknown kind of chariot or wagon, *sabarru*, without any detailed description; 3:o. lines 60—65 describe a $g^{15} m a r-š u m = majāltu$ which, according to its Accadian etymology (»Ruhendes, Liegendes«) can hardly be a wagon from our point of view, but from the Babylonian point of view was a kind of wagon because it was drawn by an ox or some other draught-animal. [Line 63, in which the name $g^{15} K U M-m a r-š u m = šu-da-at KI-MIN$ (= *ma-a-a-al-tu*), occurs, perhaps the part of the *majāltu* around which the draught-animal was driven (root *šādu*), I would compare with line 325 of the 13th tablet of $\underline{H} A R-r a = hubullu$, which gives the name of the draught-animal: $g u_4- g^{15} m a r-š u m = alap ma-a-a-al-tu_4$, translated by Dr. L. OPPENHEIM, JNES IV.3 171 as »ox of the *majāltu* wagon (?)«]; 4:o. lines 66—70 list names of whips etc., apparently because they were important in driving the draught-animal of the *majāltu*; 5:o. The last lines of our text, lines 71—99, describe the 4-wheeled wagon, *eriquu* [after which follows a list of agricultural equipment, bridged by $g^{15} z a r-d u_3$ »wagon with rake« (*z a r = magrānu* from the root *grn* »to heap up«)]¹.


As already mentioned, the first line of the 5th tablet can be restored as $g^{15} m a r = nar-kab-tum$. The original form of the sign $m a r$

¹ Or is $z a r-d u_3$ perhaps a Semitic loan word from the Accadian root *srd*?

() is »die Deichsel und der Wagenkasten mit dem Sitz des Fuhrmanns» (ŠL 307. 1 and 29; HERZFELD, AMI VI. 202)¹. In Sumerian texts ^gis m a r denotes the draught wagon, usually ^gis m a r-g i d₂-d a = *eriquu* (cf. ^gis m a₂-g i d₂-d a). In Accadian texts ^Gis M A R is, as far as I know, hardly ever used as an ideogram for *narkabtu*, although H A R-ra equates it with *narkabtu*. The Accadian Synonym list »D» (VON SODEN, ZA XLIII. 233 ff., Pl. 8—9) has in line 199: *mar-tur-ru-u* = $\Upsilon\Upsilon$ (= *nar-kab-tu*₂) »little m a r», but the line before even has *e-ri-qu* = *nar-kab-tu*₂! Moreover, II R 16. 36 b (a proverb discussed by MEISSNER, MAOG III. 3 34 f. and by G. MEIER, ZA XLV. 210 in a note) equates a dialectical form of m a r, namely g a r (pronounced η a r?), with *narkabtu*: ^gis g a r š u g i m e-n a n a m *nar-kab-ta a-m[ah-har-ma]* »I have to draw a wagon» (cf. ^gis g i g i r š u g i = *ma-ha-rum ša*₂ ^Gis *narkabti*, II R 27. 43 g; for š u g i = *mahāru* »lenken», *māhiru* »Wagenlenker» cf. also UNGNAD, AOf XIV. 5/6. (1944) p. 256 note 38: *muluš u-g i* »Perseus»)² It is very likely that ^gis m a r and ^gis m a r-g i d₂-d a were originally the usual words for the 4-wheeled draught wagon, and not for the chariot. In Hittite texts, however, ^Gis M A R-G I D₂-D A is used also for the 2-wheeled war-chariot; the Storm God for example rides on the ^Gis M A R-G I D₂-D A — *tišarita* (GÜTERBOCK, Or. NS XII. 4 356 f.)

Line 8 of H A R-ra 5th tablet, or perhaps even some earlier line (we do not know because the first lines are broken), gives the usual ideogram for *narkabtu*: ^gis g i g i r. *g i g i r* has at least three forms:

g i g i r  (ŠL 486), *g i g i r*₂  (ŠL 511. 27 and 43), and

 *g i g i r*₃ (ŠL 503 f.) which indicate the wheel, originally with a hub and no spokes; the later sign forms add the spokes. For syllabic

¹ FALKENSTEIN, ATU p. 56 note 5 does not consider the sign MAR a picture of a wagon. According to him it pictures a hoe (op. cit. N:os 592—93).

² So no ideogram ^Gis GAR-ŠU-GI exists for *narkabtu* »Wagen, Handwagen», as DEIMEL, ŠL 597,287 proposes.

writings of *gigir* see *e. g.* POEBEL, HGT 111 Rev. III. 2, 112 Rev. II. 18: *gi-gi-ir* = *gigir*; 2nd tablet of *diri-dir* = *sija-ku watru*, III. 252 f (MAOG III. 3): *gi-g[i-ir]* // [g^{is}] *gigir* // *nar-kabtu*; *ki-min* // [g^{is}] *gigir* // *KI-MIN*.

gigir has been explained as shortened form of **giri-giri*, *giri* meaning »to run» (see DELITZSCH, SGL 92 V; DEIMEL, ŠL 10.11 compares *giri* »laufen» with *gir*₃ »Fuss, Schritt»). At all events, if shortened from **giri-giri*, we would expect to find also a form **gigri*, as we have *didli* from **dili-dili* etc.

There is no doubt that *gigir* is the 2-wheeled chariot. Of possible interest is perhaps a Neo-Sumerian text, ITT II.₂ 694, which tells us about chariots, *gigir*, ploughs, *apin*, and beds, *nad*, supposed to be repaired. The damaged chariot is called ^{g^{is}}*gigir al-zira* and it is said that it has only one wheel, *dubbin-bi 1-am₃* (the other one apparently dropped off).¹

*nār-kabtu*² of course is a fem. *maqtal*-form from the root *rkab* »vehic». Wagons³ and chariots are fem. in Accadian, as are boats and ships (*cf.* my »Wasserfahrzeuge» [= SO VIII. 4] p. 11²)⁴. We can find the same feature in many languages. — From the same root *rkab* we also have *rukubu* for »wagon» and »chariot», as well as for »passenger ship» (*cf. op. cit.* 22). The root *rkab* is also used in other Semitic languages for »chariot», Hebrew מְרִכְבָּה (fem.), Aramaic מְרִכְבָּה (fem.) Ugarit (Rās Šamrā) *mrkbt* (fem.) (*e.g.* RŠ 11844 [RA XXXVII. 1/2. 24] lines 6 and 8: *ḥrś mrkbt* [*cf. ḥrś qtn, ibid.*]), as a loanword in Egyptian (New Kingdom) *mrkbt* (fem.), Coptic

¹ Incidentally *gigir* is also a part of the »hoe», *mar*, *e.g.* in a Schüler-tafel to *ḤAR-ra* 7th tablet: SMN 2560.5 (RA XXXVI. 89 f, from Nuzi): ^{g^{is}}*gigir-mar* without an Accadian equivalent; the following lines give *eme*; *igi*, *kak*, *numun*, and *litur₂* of the *mar*.

² It is very unlikely that we have a »Nebenform» *nerkabtu* as MEISSNER, MAOG III. 3, proposes on the basis of the 2nd tablet of *diri-dir* = *sija-ku-watru* III. 252 (see above); the sign *nir* has also the value *nar*!

³ For *eriqu* fem. *cf. e.g.* the Cappadocian passage BIN VI Nr. 258.15 f.: [1 *e*]-*ri-qum qa₂-dum* [*li-w*]-*ti₂-ša* »1 draught wagon with its (:her) cover».

⁴ *eleppu*, however, became masc. in Neo-Babylonian, *cf. op. cit. s. v.*

ΒΕΡΕΘΩΟΥΤΟ. In Arabic, however, صَرْكَب (masc.) > Syriac ܘܪܟܒܐ (masc.) means both »wagon» and »boat, ship», صَرْكَبَة being nom. un.

narkabtu was the 2-wheeled war chariot and the royal hunting chariot of the king. The oldest occurrences of this word are to be found in the Cappadocian tablets (dating after 2100 B.C.) where it is written syllabically *na-ar-ka-ab-tum*¹. The word, however, begins to occur with greater frequency at the time the horse began to be used in war, *i. e.* after 1500 B.C. Most occurrences of *narkabtu* in Accadian date from Assyrian times. *narkabtu* is often mentioned in contrast with *šumbu*, »draught wagon»: the draught-animal of the *narkabtu* is the horse, that of the *šumbu* being *parú*, »mule». We have *narkabtu* + *sīsē* and *šumbu* + *parê*. I have not found a single passage where the draught-animal of *narkabtu* represents any other animal than *sīsū*. As a war chariot *narkabtu* is described more closely as *narkabat tāhāzi*.

narkabat šēpā or *narkabtu ša šēpā* has usually been translated »Leibwagen.» What *narkabat šēpā* actually means is still unknown to us. We have, in the Neo-assyrian texts, *ša šēpā*, *zuk šēpā*, *pithal šēpā*, and *amēl narkabat šēpā*. *ša šēpā* and *amēl narkabat šēpā* occur as titles in JOHNS, ADD. There are very few references to *narkabat šēpā*. Of interest is a passage in the annals of Sargon (WINCKLER, line 222 f.²): *i-na ug-gat lib-bi-ja it-ti* ^{GIŠ}*narkabti šēpā-ja u* ^{ANŠE}*pit₂-hal-lum-ja ša ašar sa-al-me i-da-a-a la ip-par-ku-u a-na* ^{URU}*as-du-di āl šarru-ti-šu hi-it-mu-ḫiš al-lik-ma* »In a sudden rage I marched quickly — (even) in my *narkabat šēpā* and (only) with my cavalry which never, even in friendly territory, leaves my side — against Asdod.» Here Sargon seems to stress the fact that he was in such a hurry that he had to take his *narkabat šēpā* as being the nearest chariot he

¹ In Hittite texts the Sumerogram for *narkabtu*: GIŠG I G I R denoting the »chariot», must be distinguished from *huluganni* »wagon» (see GOETZE, JCS I. 81₁).

² Dr. L. OPPENHEIM drew my attention to this passage.

had; he had no time to take his special war chariot. We would say »he rushed off without his clothes.» So it seems very likely that *narkabat šēpā* was not a war chariot. It may have been a royal »Reisewagen»¹

A synonym of *narkabtu* in Neo-assyrian is *mugirru* < **mugarriru*, participle IP¹ from the root *grr* »to run»². This word occurs often in the Assyrian Deeds and Documents published by JOHNS. It is usually the chariot of the king. Of interest is a passage in ADD, Nr. 822. 7, which gives us the Assyrian name for »cartwright»:

nangar mugirri, written *nangar mu-gir*. Compare WINCKLER, Altor. Forschungen II p. 21 Col. A line 15: [LU₂]NANGAR *mu-gir-ri* together with LU₂NANGAR *eleppē* (= GIŠMA₂MEŠ) brought by Assarhaddon from Egypt! — But what is meant by the professional name which is written LU₂NANGAR.APIN *mu-gir₂-ri* (ADD Nr. 336. Obv. 3)?

From the same root, *grr*, we also have *magarru* for which H A R - r a 5th tablet line 54 gives the ideogram ^{GIŠ}d u b b i n. — *magarru* means the »wheel of the chariot», *i. e.* »with which the chariot runs». It is sometimes used also for the »wheel of the draught wagon», *e. g.* UCPSPh X. 70. 30: 1 ^{GIŠ}eriqu (= ^{GIŠ}MAR-GID₂-DA) 5³ *ma-ga-ru*. In a Nuzi text, HSS XIII Nr. 439. 1, *magarru* is written ^{GIŠ} *ma-gar:1 tallu šamnuša* ^{GIŠ}*ma-gar*, oil for the wheel. The *magarru*-wheels are usually mentioned in pairs (*cf.* above UCPSPh. X. 70. 30!), Note especially the Nuzi passage, HSS XIII Nr. 326. 1 ff.: *amēlu*^{MEŠ} *ša* URU₅*silli-ja-wa il-te-nu-tu₄ ma-gar₃-re-e ša ki-ma ma-gar₃-ri-šu ma-aš-lu a-na* ^m*a-bu-uq-ga u₂-ma-al-lu-u₂* »the people of. S. will deliver 1 pair of wheels to A. that are like his wheels⁴». *magarru*, originally meaning »wheel (of the chariot)», developed to mean the »chariot»

¹ *narkabat bēlūtišu*, »chariot of his lordship», is a chariot which the king gives to another king as insignia of lordship.

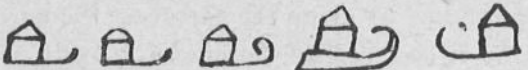
² UNGNAD, ZA XXXI. 51, attempts to explain it as a Sumerian loanword from *mugir*, an Emesal form of *gigir*. A form *mugir*, however, does not exist!

³ If not an error of the copyist for -4! The fifth wheel would then perhaps be a reserve wheel (??), which does not seem likely.

⁴ This passage is important because it clearly shows that *iltenūtu* (< *ište-nūtu*) means »pair».

itself (*pars pro toto*), e.g. KING, BBSk. Pl. 80—91. I. 36 ff. just like *šumbu* (<*šubbu < *šabbu) originally meant the »wheel of the draught wagon» (so according to H A R - r a 5th tablet line 92), then »draught wagon.» JOHNS, ADD Nr. 328 Rev. 9 gives us the name of »wheel wright»: *nangar magarri*, written ^{LU₂}NANGAR - ^{GIŠ}DUBBIN; the same professional name, written ^{LU₂}NANGAR-DUBBIN, occurs also in the Neo-Assyrian text TCL IX. 57 Rev. 20.

It would be interesting to know, incidentally, how *dubbin* »Kralle» came to mean »wheel». Perhaps the Mesopotamians had once used sledge-like means of transport (*travois*) like the Old American Indians, as Dr. L. OPPENHEIM suggested to me, i.e. two long poles with »Krallen ähnliche», curved ends to carry the load, drawn at the other end by draught-animals. These curved ends were then perhaps considered to be »wheels». Unfortunately we have no old Mesopotamian drawings of sledges; cf., however, the pictographic signs for

sledge , FALKENSTEIN, ATU, N:os 741—42 ¹, and the Šubad sledge WOOLLEY, UE Pl. 122—25.

In my »Wasserfahrzeuge» p. 15³ I already pointed out that names of boats never occur in Accadian names as elements, but they very often do in Sumerian names. The same seems to hold good of names of wagons and chariots. We know a great many Sumerian names containing *gigir* as an element, e.g. 1:o. deities: ^dgišgigir, ^dnin-gub-gigir-ra; 2:o. personal names: ^{lu₂}-^dgišgigir, ^{lu}-banda-gišgigir, ^{lugal}-gišgigir-ri, and ^{ur}-gišgigir; 3:o. names of temples: ^{e₂}-gišgigir; 4:o. festival name ^{giš}gigir, and 5:o. names of stars: ^{mulu}gišgigir etc.

The only cases where *narkabtu* occurs in Accadian names seem to be the local names: 1. ^{URU}ti-lu ša ^{GIŠ}narkabi »The Mound of the Chariot» (CHIERA, Declarations in Court, Publications of the Baghdad School II Text 135.10), and 2. ^{URU}amēl ^{GIŠ}narkabātū (:GIGIR-MEŠ-a-a) (JOHNS, ADD Nr. 396. 2).

¹ According to FALKENSTEIN, op. cit. p. 56, the sign for the wagon developed from the sign for the sledge (cf. N:o. 743).