

THE EXODUS

Part II

The Chariot Wheels in the Gulf of Aqaba, or Red Sea

by Mary Nell Wyatt

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In our last newsletter, we examined the route taken by Moses and the great multitude as they fled Egypt. We will now examine the evidences which tell us exactly who were the Egyptian royalties involved and the approximate date the Exodus occurred. This is a subject that gets quite involved and we will only be able to present a bare frame of reference in this publication. Bear with us, as we will attempt to present a large amount of information in a short space.

THE CHARIOT WHEELS

We will begin with the chariot wheels that Ron and the boys found in the Gulf of Aqaba. In 1978, on their first dive at the site, they found these chariot remains. Like Noah's Ark, these were not in perfect condition and required careful examination to see exactly what they were. They were covered in coral, which made it difficult to see them clearly, but it appears that the coral was the agent the Lord used to preserve them.

They found numerous wheels- some were still on their axles, and some were off. They found chariot cabs without the wheels, also:

EXO 14:24 ...in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, 25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drove them heavily:

So far, this coincided with the Biblical account. They found several 6-spoked wheels, as well as an 8-spoked wheel. And finally, in 1988, Ron found the 4-spoked gold chariot wheel, which looks almost perfect. The reason this one was so well preserved is that coral does not grow on gold. The wood inside the gold "veneer" was deteriorated, which made it very fragile and for that reason, he has not attempted to retrieve it from the water.

The significance of these wheels is of extreme importance to the dating of the Exodus and determining which dynasty was involved. Back in the late 70's, Ron actually retrieved a hub of a wheel which had the remains of 8 spokes radiating outward from it. He took this to Cairo, to the office of Nassif Mohammed Hassan, the director of Antiquities whom Ron had been working with. Mr. Hassan examined it and immediately pronounced it to be of the 18th Dynasty of ancient Egypt. When Ron asked him how he knew this so readily, Mr. Hassan explained that the 8-spoked wheel was only used during the 18th Dynasty.

This certainly narrowed the date. We began to thoroughly research the Egyptian chariot and soon discovered that the fact that Ron and the boys found 4, 6 and 8 spoked wheels places the Exodus in the 18th Dynasty according to numerous sources, such as the following:

"Egyptian literary references to chariots occur as early as the reigns of Kamose, the 17th Dynasty king who took the first steps in freeing Egypt from the Hyksos, and Ahmose, the founder of the 18th Dynasty. Pictorial representations, however, do not appear until slightly later in the 18th Dynasty...." (From "Observations on the Evolving Chariot Wheel in the 18th Dynasty" by James K. Hoffmeier, JARCE #13, 1976)

Here, we learn that it was only at the beginning of the 18th Dynasty that the chariot comes into use in the Egyptian army. The Bible mentions that in the time of Joseph, chariots were in use, but apparently they weren't developed sturdily enough for use in war until much later.

The author goes on to explain how it was only during the 18th Dynasty that the 4, 6 and 8 spoked wheels are used- and that monuments can actually be dated by the number of spokes in the wheel:

"Professor Yigael Yadin maintains that during the earlier part of the 18th Dynasty, the Egyptian chariot was 'exactly like the Canaanite chariot:' both were constructed of light flexible wood, with leather straps wrapped around the wood to strengthen it, and both utilized wheels with four spokes. In Yadin's eyes, the four-spoked wheel is diagnostic for dating purposes; it is restricted to the early part of the 18th Dynasty. It remained in vogue, he says, until the reign of Thutmose IV, when 'the Egyptian chariot begins to shake off its Canaanite influence and undergo considerable change.' Yadin believes that the eight-spoked wheel, which is seen on the body of Thutmose IV's chariot, was an experiment by the Egyptian wheelwrights, who, when it proved unsuccessful, settled thereafter for the six-spoked wheel. So widespread and meticulous is the delineation of the number of wheel spokes on chariots depicted on Egyptian monuments that they can be used as a criterion



ing whether the monument is earlier or later than 1400 BC." (Quoted from the same source as above.)
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 For more information on the chariots of the Egyptian army, let's go to the Biblical account, when Pharaoh and his army go after the multitude:
 Exod 14:6 And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: 7 And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them.
 The license may be available at michelle@ronwyatt.com

This verse makes it quite clear that the Pharaoh took every chariot in Egypt- his own, his generals (or "Captains") and a group called his "chosen" chariots, which seem to be in addition to his regular army ("all the chariots of Egypt").

Who might these "600 chosen chariots" have been? This group seems too small to have been a division of the army. We do not know the exact number in a "squadron", but we do have information that a pharaoh, one of his names being Rameses II, had an army of 20,000 troops, which was divided into 4 divisions. This would imply that each division consisted of 5,000 troops. But the army took more than just soldiers, many times. To get a little insight, we need to understand a bit about the Egyptian government and economy.

"The priests and military men held the highest position in the country after the family of the king, and from them were chosen his ministers and confidential advisers, 'the wise counselors of Pharaoh,' and all the principal officers of state." (From "The Ancient Egyptians- Their Life and Customs" by Sir J. Gardner Wilkinson, 1854, vol.1, p.316.)

The priesthood and the military were closely associated- the Egyptian government was a combination "church and state", so to speak. Their system of "gods" was quite elaborate and we can't possibly present an accurate description of their religious system in this limited article. But for our purposes, we need to understand that there were many, many gods in ancient Egypt- but the ultimate "god" was the one represented as the "sun". This god was known throughout the various times as Amon, Aten and Re or Ra, among other names. And it was this "ultimate god" that the pharaoh was considered the "earthly embodiment" of.

The divisions of the army were named after the gods, ie. "the first army, that of Amon, the army of Re, the army of Ptah and the army of Sutech". When the army set out to war, elaborate ceremonies were performed at the various temples, asking the various gods to give them victory over their foes. Then, booty that was gained as a result of victories was dedicated to the priesthoods and temples of the deities. All military victories were directly attributed to the favor of the gods.

Sometimes, the priests would accompany the army to the battlefield in hopes that the "god(s)" would show special favor in their endeavors. And the evidence at hand shows that when Pharaoh and his army set out after Moses and the great multitude, he took with him the all priesthood of all the gods of Egypt. After all, he had seen the power of the true God, the great "I AM". If the Egyptian army ever needed supernatural intervention by the hands of their so-called "gods", it was at this time. We believe that every priest of every god was summoned to accompany the army as they went after Moses and the multitude, as well as all the ministers of state.

All of this is leading up to a discussion of the gold-veneered, 4-spoked chariot wheel Ron found in 1988. Since he found it on the Egyptian side of the Gulf of Aqaba, that indicates that whoever was driving that particular chariot was at the rear of the army. It makes sense to us that a priest, who is not trained in battle, would be in this position at the rear of the army. Also, a gold chariot would not be practical for battle- these chariots were more "ceremonial" than those used by the chariotry.

We also know that the priesthood were given gold chariots, which were booty of various foreign defeats. There is an inscription of Thutmoses III (18th Dynasty) which relates: *"He went forth, none like him, slaying the barbarians, smiting Retenu, bringing their princes as living captives, their chariots wrought with gold, bound to their horses."*

In fact, we have many, many inscriptions of the kings of the 18th Dynasty receiving gold-plated foreign chariots, either as spoils of war or as tribute received from conquered peoples. There are, as well, inscriptions telling that these gilded chariots were many times dedicated to various temples and gods, which meant that the priests would receive these chariots.

We do know from inscriptions that the king did go to war in a "glittering chariot of electrum" as stated in one of Thutmoses III's inscriptions- but, we doubt very seriously that he would have remained at the rear of the army. However, Dr. Bill Shea of the Biblical Research Institute, told us a few days ago, that he believed it was possible that the pharaoh may have been at the rear of the army.

With all of this information, we feel we may conclude that the gold wheel most likely belonged to a member of the priestly caste who was accompanying the army, or possibly a high minister of state. If it had belonged to the pharaoh, it would have probably had his "cartouche" or name on it- and the one Ron found did not have this, at least not on the exposed side. Either way, we have evidence from ancient tombs that the Egyptians constructed wheels of this design, and also the Retenu (Syrian) chariot wheels were of this same design and size.

These drawings are from "The Ancient Egyptians" by Sir J. Gardiner Wilkinson, and are taken from 18th dynasty tombs and monuments. They show a depiction of a Retenu (Syrian) chariot and also Egyptians constructing chariots- both of these wheel-designs are consistent with the 4-spoked, gold veneered wheel Ron found.

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