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THE CHARIOT AND THE PENTATEUCH

THE great Cambridge Ancient History is sometimes very reckless in its treatment of Bible statements, especially the chapter in Vol. II on "The Rise of Israel," by Dr. Stanley Cook. Nevertheless it is a wonderful compendium, which has placed the key of knowledge in the hands of ordinary people about a great variety of interesting topics. "Chariots" are a case in point. We wonder if any reader has been seized with the same curiosity as the writer of this article. Studies in the authorship of the Pentateuch somehow led him to be anxious to know when the first wheeled vehicles ran upon this world's roads, and where. The connection between chariots and the date of Genesis may not appear very obvious, but perhaps it will become clearer ere we are done. In pursuing his quest the writer consulted all the leading available encyclopædias, English, French and German, and the great Bible dictionaries. Their information proved extraordinarily conflicting, and often very meagre; as it now turns out, very misleading too. The French and German books proved the most glaringly inaccurate of all. The fullest and most definite was the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. "Egypt," it says, s.v. *Chariot*, "was the land from which the Hebrews obtained their supply"; and, somewhat characteristically ignoring Genesis, it adds: "Before the eighteenth dynasty, 1500 B.C., chariots and horses were unknown in Egypt." It also assigned to the Hittites a chief place in introducing chariots into Syria from Egypt, somewhere about the fifteenth century B.C. That pretty well sums up ordinary, scholarly opinion until quite lately. But, thanks to the Cambridge historians and others, the mists have rolled away and the true facts begin to emerge.

Even the Cambridge histories are already out of date. For, at Kish in Iraq, in January, 1928, the Americans discovered two chariot wheels, pre-Sumerian, i.e., of actually 3200 B.C. or earlier. They are wooden discs two feet in diameter, with rims two inches deep, and studded with copper nails on the outer surface. The width between the wheels is 4 ft. 6 in. They were found in two tombs—complete four and two-wheeled chariots, with the bodies of four wheels and one platform perfect. The felloes of these wheels are secured to the solid wood by copper nails with large

round heads, and the axle turns with the wheel. These are by far the oldest chariots known. The *Camb. Anc. Hist.*, I, 311, says: the chariot appears about 2,000 B.C., when we find the men of Babylon going to war in chariots drawn by asses. But such vehicles were of little consequence or use till the arrival of the horse. The trained horse was first broken in in the Far East, and, says our History, had an influence upon man's progress not less marked than that of the motor car or the aeroplane.

The Hittites had much to do with the introduction of the horse. When do they come in? Here too our histories have been quite revolutionised within the last few years. Prof. Frederic Hrozný, of Prag., our latest authority, art. *Hittites*, in *Encyclop. Britan.*, 1929, is quite confident they were Indo-European in race, even as we are; and he is fairly confident he has found traces of them even in the twenty-fifth century B.C. What is interesting to us is, that, at the very outset of his article, he accepts all the Old Testament references to the Hittites as historical, with "confirmation" for them in Egyptian evidence. These Hittites seem to have had their cradle among the glens of Asia Minor. The Cambridge History says they first dawn upon us at Accad near Babylon, about 1926 B.C. But, says Don. Mackenzie, *Anct. Civilisation* (1927), 142, the Hammurabi dynasty in Babylon was brought to an end by a Hittite raid from Boghaz Keui, their capital; and a tablet of the famous Hammurabi himself, he of the well-known Code, say a century earlier, shows us the horse already in Babylon. These early Babylonians dubbed it "the ass from the East," whilst the Hittites called it more vaguely "the beast from the East."

The *Cambridge History* is clear that it was the Kassite (Indo-European) race from the further East who introduced the horse to the Mesopotamian plains. This must have been long before these Kassites became lords in Mesopotamia (say 1750 B.C.). For it is no less clear that the well-known invasion of Egypt by the Hyksos or Shepherd Kings from Mesopotamia took place before 1800 B.C., and these Hyksos then for the first time introduced horses and chariots into Egypt. Indeed they largely owed the remarkable success of their invasion to their possession and skilled use of these. "The deft craftsmen of Egypt soon mastered the art of chariot making" (*Camb. Anc. Hist.*, II, 43); and chariots were speedily in use there for war, for state purposes, and for travel. The new *Encyclop. Britan.*, 1929, s.v. *Carriage*,

confirms this : " As early as 1500 B.C. the Egyptian two-wheeled chariot had reached a high state of perfection." The chariot's use soon extended to Asia Minor and Greece ; and the aged Nestor, *Iliad* iv, 303-308, suggests that chariots were already old-fashioned—*ᾠδε καὶ οἱ πρότεροι*.

And now we must come to the connection of all this with the date of the Pentateuch. More radical Old Testament critics incline to set little value upon the historical statements in the Pentateuch, because they hold them to belong to a period long after the events they narrate, and to be deeply tinged by religious prejudice. More conservative scholars contend strongly for the substantial historicity of the Old Testament narratives, and insist that, in substance, they must have existed in writing long before the radical school allow. It is almost undisputed that Joseph lived in Egypt in the days of the Hyksos kings. And if our Genesis were in no part put in writing till nearly a thousand years after the days of Joseph, as many, perhaps most Old Testament critics contend, then the writers would be more than likely to make anachronisms, and to mention things as existing in use long before they actually did. It is therefore noteworthy that there is no reference in Genesis either to horses or to wheeled vehicles until we meet Joseph in Egypt ; so that old Genesis is here much more accurate than the new *Encyclop. Biblica*.

In Genesis we have three references to chariots, xli. 43, xlvii. 29, l. 9 ; and the Hebrew word there is practically the same as that used in Egypt in Joseph's day. In Hebrew it is *merkabab*, in Egyptian, *markabata*. This last is plainly a loan word from the Semitic speech which the Shepherd Kings must have brought with them from Babylon. The references in Genesis are thus very nearly the earliest authentic notices of horsed chariots in history. The same is true about the "waggon" in Genesis xlvii. 19. These were simpler vehicles with solid wheels, fit for carrying all Jacob's plenshings down to Egypt. The Hebrew word *ă'glab* merely denotes a thing that rolls on wheels ; and here again the Egyptian word *agartha* is in root the same, and plainly a loan word from the Semites too.

Speaking of anachronisms, the mention of "children of Heth," that is, stray settlers of Hittite blood, at Hebron, in the days of Abraham, Genesis xxiii., has been widely held as a glaring case of anachronism, or at any rate, as a great puzzle ; because, until recently, the Hittites had never been heard of outside the

Old Testament till after 1500 B.C., or, say, six hundred years after Abraham. But now, as we have seen, Prof. Hrozný holds that we have traces of them long before Abraham; and both he and Don. Mackenzie accept the Genesis references to the Hittites as quite authentic. So Genesis xxiii. actually gives us one of the very earliest mentions in history of those mysterious yet mighty and chariot-loving Hittites, who, we now know, formed once upon a time one of the great empires of the world.

Even more confidently, and until very recently, the mention of Philistines in Genesis xxvi., in the days of Isaac, was pointed to as a plain anachronism. But Dr. R. H. Hall, a high authority, in *Camb. Anc. Hist.*, II, 294, is clear as to "the appearance of Philistines on the Phæstus disk in the Middle Minoan (Cretan) period, not later than 1600 B.C."; whilst hitherto Philistines had been denied as found in history till after 1200 B.C. It is now well ascertained that the Philistines were of Cretan origin and that Abimelech, name of the Philistine king of Gerar in Genesis xxvi., is "simply the title given to every Cretan Commissioner sent there to take charge." The date of Isaac is of course before 1600 B.C., so that we cannot yet speak of the early finding of Philistines in Palestine as confidently as we can of the Hittites. But the diligent excavations now going on at Beth Pelet under the veteran Flinders Petrie, give us great hope that the sought-for early evidence will soon be forthcoming.

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