

## THE EARTH OF GENESIS 1:2 ABIOTIC OR CHAOTIC? PART II

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### 1. *Ḥōšek and ʿal ~ penê in Gen 1:2*

#### *Etymology of \*ḥšk*

Before specifically considering the Hebrew term *tʿhôm* in the OT and in the literature of the ANE, we analyze the Hebrew words *ḥōšek* and *ʿal ~ pʿnê* in Gen 1:2. *Ḥōšek* is a masculine singular noun that means “darkness, obscurity,”<sup>1</sup> “darkness,”<sup>2</sup> “darkness, obscurity,”<sup>3</sup> “Finsternis kosmisch,”<sup>4</sup> “oscuridad, tinieblas, lobreguez, sombra.”<sup>5</sup>

Words similar to the Heb root *ḥšk* exist in Phoenician, Punic, biblical and extrabiblical Aramaic, as well as in later Semitic languages. This root does not appear in Ugaritic and Akkadian texts. In the MT the verb only appears in the Qal form “to be/come to be dark” and Hiphîl “make dark, darken.” The noun *ḥōšek* means “darkness, obscurity.” The derived nouns include *ḥʿšekâ* “darkness,” *maḥšak* “dark, secret place,” and the adjective *ḥašok* “dark.”

The root appears 112 times in the OT, once in Aramaic (Dan 2:22). The verb appears 17 times (11x in Qal and 6x in Hiphîl). The noun *ḥōšek* appears 79 times, *ḥʿšekâ* 8 times, *maḥšak* 7 times, and the adjective only once (Prov 22:29).<sup>6</sup>

In Egyptian, the term for darkness is *kw*, in Sumerian it is *kukku*,

<sup>1</sup>BDB, 365.

<sup>2</sup>W. L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 119.

<sup>3</sup>E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 236.

<sup>4</sup>L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner und J. J. Stamm, eds., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament* (KBS) (Leiden: Brill, 1967-1994), 1:347.

<sup>5</sup>L. A. Schökel, *Diccionario Bíblico Hebreo-Español* (Madrid: Trotta, 1994), 286.

<sup>6</sup>TDOT, 5:245.

which is represented by the double writing of the sign GI<sub>6</sub> which means "black" and "night."<sup>7</sup> In the Targums and in Talmudic and Midrashic literature *hōšek* is interpreted as "darkness."<sup>8</sup>

In Gen 1:2 *hōšek* is used to refer to the primeval "darkness" that covered the world. In Gen 1:3ff, God created light and "separated the light from the darkness." The separation is conceived both in spatial and temporal terms. In Gen 1:5 God "called the darkness night."<sup>9</sup> This name is more than an act of identification; by naming darkness God characterized it and expressed its nature and even indicated his control over it.<sup>10</sup> God, who created light and darkness as separate entities, on the fourth day of creation put them under the "laws" of the heavenly lights which separated "light from darkness" (Gen 1:18).<sup>11</sup>

The function of darkness in the cosmos is later explained in texts such as Ps 104:20, where the function of the light and the darkness is to indicate the amount of time for the everyday life routine of animals and human beings.<sup>12</sup> In many texts, *hōšek* is equivalent or parallel to "night" (Josh 2:5; Job 17:12; 24:16; Ps 104:20). The word appears more times in Job, Psalms, and Isaiah than in all of the other biblical books together.<sup>13</sup>

The OT emphasizes that darkness is under God's control (2 Sam 22:2; Ps 18:2 [28]; Job 1:8; Isa 42:16; Jer 13:16). The ninth plague of Egypt (Exod 10:21-23) illustrates: "So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness [*hōšek*-<sup>ca</sup> *pēlā*] covered all Egypt for three days."<sup>14</sup> This event was extraordinary since Pharaoh, the son and the representative of the sun-god, was considered the source of light for his country. The darkness directly attacked the great sun-god of Egypt. Another example of God's power over darkness occurs in the desert when the Lord used darkness to protect his people (Exod 14:20; Josh 24:7).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 246-247.

<sup>8</sup>M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalami, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Title, 1943), 511.

<sup>9</sup>TWOT, 1:331.

<sup>10</sup>N. H. Ridderbos, "Genesis i.1 und 2," in *Studies on the Book of Genesis*, ed. Berend Gemser, *Oudtestamentische Studien*, v. 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 239. This author notes that God gave a name to darkness and discusses the importance of giving a name in the OT.

<sup>11</sup>TWOT, 1:331.

<sup>12</sup>TDOT, 5:249.

<sup>13</sup>TWOT, 1:331.

<sup>14</sup>All scriptural texts are taken from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

<sup>15</sup>TDOT, 5:249-250.

Past studies tended to see in Genesis 1 an antagonism between light and darkness, the scheme of Marduk's fight against the monster of chaos that is described in the Babylonian creation myth.<sup>16</sup> It must be emphasized that nowhere in the OT is mention made of a battle or dualism between light and darkness. Neither is the primeval ocean or darkness considered a chaotic power or mythical enemy of God. God is the creator of both light and darkness (Isa 45:7); his kindness transcends the antithesis of light and darkness (Ps 139:12).<sup>17</sup>

E. J. Young indicates that darkness in Gen 1:2 was merely one characteristic of the unformed earth. Man could not live in darkness, and the first step in making the earth habitable was the removal of darkness.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Young presents the theological meaning of darkness by stating that God named the darkness, just as he did light. Both are therefore good and well-pleasing to him; both are created, and both serve his purpose, making up the day. Thus, darkness is recognized in Genesis 1 as a positive good for man.<sup>19</sup>

In a recent study about darkness in Gen 1:2, based on the text rather than on past exegesis, Nicolas Wyatt proposes some interesting points: (1) The literary structure of the verse is important to the interpretation and the meaning of *ḥōšēk*; therefore, "darkness" corresponds in some way to *ruah ʿēlōhîm* "God's spirit."<sup>20</sup> (2) If *ruah ʿēlōhîm* denotes some divine quality, *ḥōšēk* must denote some similar quality; an example is Ps 18:1, where darkness appears as the place of invisibility and possibly the place of the Deity (see Deut 4:11, 23, where darkness seems to be the appropriate environment for the divine voice); darkness is a figure of invisibility.<sup>21</sup> (3) The logical structure of the verse implies the initial stages of the Deity's self-revelation: it is an unusual account of a theophany. Gen 1:2 refers to God's invisibility in the context of a primeval cosmogony.<sup>22</sup>

In short, the term *ḥōšēk* "darkness" refers to an uninhabited Earth, where human beings could not live until God created light. Furthermore, the logical structure of the verse implies the Deity's self-revelation, an unusual account of a theophany.

<sup>16</sup>H. Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895), 3-120; cf. also C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 104.

<sup>17</sup>*TDOT*, 1:157.

<sup>18</sup>E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 35 n. 33.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 21, 35 n. 33.

<sup>20</sup>Nicolas Wyatt, "The Darkness of Genesis 1:2," *VT* 43 (1993): 546.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 547-548. Cf. also I. Blythin, "A note on Genesis i .2," *VT* 12 (1962): 121.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 550-552.

<sup>c</sup>al ~ p<sup>e</sup>nê

<sup>c</sup>al ~ p<sup>e</sup>nê is a preposition + masculine plural noun construct which means "face . . . surface, upon the face of the deep,"<sup>23</sup> "face = visible side: surface, p<sup>e</sup>nê t<sup>e</sup>hôm, p<sup>e</sup>nê hammāyim,"<sup>24</sup> "face, surface,"<sup>25</sup> "superficie del océano = superficie de las aguas."<sup>26</sup>

In Hebrew, as in other Semitic languages, the noun appears only in plural. *Panim* is one of the most frequent words in the OT, appearing more than 2100 times. However, in the vast majority of the texts *panim* is joined to a preposition (which may be l<sup>e</sup>, min or <sup>c</sup>al) thus making a new prepositional expression. In many such texts the nominal meaning ("face") has been lost.<sup>27</sup>

*Panim*, especially when related to concepts such as country, land, sea, and sky, means "surface," mainly in the construction <sup>c</sup>al ~ p<sup>e</sup>nê. The preposition <sup>c</sup>al ~ p<sup>e</sup>nê related to concepts such as <sup>ʔ</sup>dāmâ "land, ground"; <sup>ʔ</sup>ereš "land, country"; māyim "water" (Gen 1:2); t<sup>e</sup>hôm "primeval abyss" (Gen 1:2) means "on (the surface of)" or "towards (the surface)."<sup>28</sup> This construction is important in determining the etymology and the meaning of the Hebrew word t<sup>e</sup>hôm.

## 2. Etymology of \*thm

The Hebrew word t<sup>e</sup>hôm in Gen 1:2 is translated into English as "deep." In the Greek LXX it is translated ἄβυσσος "abyss."<sup>28</sup>

T<sup>e</sup>hôm is a feminine singular noun that means "primeval ocean, deep,"<sup>29</sup> "deep sea, primeval ocean,"<sup>30</sup> "Urmeer, Urflut,' als ein der Schöpfung voransgehendes Element,"<sup>31</sup> "océano, abismo, sima, manantial. Especialmente el océano primordial, abisal, en parte subterráneo, que

<sup>23</sup>BDB, 816, 819.

<sup>24</sup>Holladay, 293.

<sup>25</sup>Klein, 513-514. It is related to the Phoenician פנח (= face), see Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1936), 137; Ugaritic pnm (= into); Akkadian panu (= face, surface); Syriac פניתא (= side).

<sup>26</sup>Schöckel, 793. Translation: "surface of the ocean = surface of the waters."

<sup>27</sup>E. Jenni and C. Westermann, *Diccionario Teológico Manual del Antiguo Testamento*, trans. R. Godoy (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1985), 2:548-549.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2:561, 563.

<sup>28</sup>A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

<sup>29</sup>BDB, 1063; Holladay, 386.

<sup>30</sup>Klein, 693.

<sup>31</sup>KBS, 1558.

aflora en lagos, pozos, manantiales, y está presente en mares y ríos (de ahí su uso en plural), . . . superficie del océano.”<sup>32</sup>

*T<sup>e</sup>hôm* is the Hebrew form of the Semitic word \**tiham*-(at-) “sea,” which in Akkadian appears as the usual term for “sea” *ti<sup>3</sup>āmtum* (later *tām̄tu*).<sup>33</sup> In the Targums, as well as the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature, *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* is interpreted as “deep, depth, interior of the earth.”<sup>34</sup>

The construct relation between *al* ~ *p<sup>e</sup>nê* and *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* (as well as *e<sup>c</sup>al* ~ *p<sup>e</sup>nê* and *hammāyim*) contributes to the determination of the meaning of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm*.<sup>35</sup> Arguing against taking *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* as a personified being, A. Heidel points out:

If *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* were here treated as a mythological entity, the expression “face” would have to be taken literally; but this would obviously lead to absurdity. For why should there be darkness only on the face of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* and not over the entire body? “On the face of the deep” is here used interchangeably with “on the face of the waters,” which we meet at the end of the same verse. The one expression is as free from mythological connotation as is the other.<sup>36</sup>

Thus the expression *al* ~ *p<sup>e</sup>nê t<sup>e</sup>hôm*, “on the surface of the *t<sup>e</sup>hôm*,” indicates that it does not refer to a mythical being but to the mass of waters.<sup>37</sup>

### *Supposed Babylonian Origin of tehôm*

B. W. Anderson, among others, assumes that there is some kind of relationship or linguistic dependence between the Babylonian *Tiamat* and the Hebrew *t<sup>e</sup>hôm*.<sup>38</sup> Scholars who followed Gunkel have maintained that the

<sup>32</sup>*Schöckel*, 792. Translation: “ocean, abyss, chasm, spring. Especially the primeval, abyssal ocean which is partly underground, and outcroppings in lakes, wells, springs, and is present in seas and rivers (hence its use in plural) . . . surface of the ocean.”

<sup>33</sup>Jenni and Westermann, 2:1286.

<sup>34</sup>Jastrow, 1648.

<sup>35</sup>See B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 240-241. See R. Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic, Part 1,” *AUSS* 36 (1998): 259-276. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka indicate: “A noun can be used in close conjunction with another noun to express a notion of possession, of belonging, etc. . . . The genitival relationship is expressed by the close phonetic union of the two nouns, the first of which is said to be *constructed* on the second. . . . The two nouns put in a genitival relationship form a compact unit, and theoretically nothing must separate them” (*A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 14/I,II [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991], 1:275; 2:463). Finally, C. L. Seow points out: “The words in such a construct chain are thought to be so closely related that they are read as if they constituted one long word” (*A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995], 116).

<sup>36</sup>A. Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 99.

<sup>37</sup>Jenni and Westermann, 2:2190.

<sup>38</sup>B. W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism*

author of Genesis borrowed the Babylonian name *Tiamat* and demythologized it. But, as Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew *t'hôm* were an Akkadian loan-word, it should have a phonetic similarity to *ti'āmat*.<sup>38</sup> In fact, there is no example of Northwestern Semitic borrowing Akkadian /ʔ/ as /h/.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, it is phonologically impossible for the Hebrew *t'hôm* to be borrowed from the Akkadian *Tiamat* with an intervocalic /h/, which tends to disappear in Hebrew (e.g., /h/ of the definite article /ba-/ in the intervocalic position).<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, *t'hôm* cannot linguistically derive from *Tiamat* since the second consonant of *Ti'āmat*, which is the laryngeal alef, disappears in Akkadian in the intervocalic position and would not be manufactured as a borrowed word. This occurs, for instance, in the Akkadian *Ba'āal* which becomes *Bel*.<sup>41</sup>

All this suggests that *Tiamat* and *t'hôm* must come from a common Semitic root *\*thm*.<sup>42</sup> The same root is the base for the Babylonian *tāmtu* and also appears as the Arabic *tihāmatu* or *tihāma*, a name applied to the coastline of Western Arabia,<sup>43</sup> and the Ugaritic *t-h-m* which means "ocean" or "abyss."<sup>44</sup> The root simply refers to deep waters and this meaning was

in the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 15-40; see H. Gunkel, "Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Biblical Creation Story," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. W. Anderson, Issues in Religion and Theology 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 42, 45.

<sup>38</sup>D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 46. Tsumura maintains that the Hebrew form that we should expect would be similar to *\*ti'āmat < ti'ōmat > t'ōmāt* which would later change into *\*t'ōmā(h)* with a loss of the final /t/, but never *t'hôm* with a loss of the whole feminine morpheme /-at/.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Heidel affirms: "But to derive *t'hôm* from *Ti'āmat* is grammatically impossible, because the former has a masculine, the latter a feminine, ending. As a loan-word from *Ti'āmat*, *t'hôm* would need a feminine ending, in accordance with the laws of derivation from Babylonian in Hebrew. Moreover, it would have no *h*. . . . Had *Ti'āmat* been taken over into Hebrew, it would either have been left as it was or it would have been changed to *ti'āma* or *te'āma*, with the feminine ending *a*, but it would not have become *t'hôm*. As far as the system of Semitic grammar is concerned, *t'hôm* represents an older and more original formation than does *Ti'āmat*, since the feminine is formed from the masculine, by the addition of the feminine ending, which in Babylonian and Assyrian appears, in its full form, as *-at*" (*Babylonian Genesis*, 100, n. 58). Cf. also Westermann, 105. This author, agreeing with Heidel, adds that there is general consensus on the opinion that *t'hôm* and *Ti'āmat* come from a common Semitic root, and that the appearance of *t'hôm* in Gen 1:2 is not an argument to demonstrate the direct dependence of the Genesis story on the *Enuma elish*.

<sup>41</sup>TWOT, 2:966.

<sup>42</sup>Heidel, 100.

<sup>43</sup>U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 23-24.

<sup>44</sup>Heidel, 101; see also Westermann, 105.

maintained in Hebrew as a name for water in the deep ocean.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the popular position that the Hebrew *t'hôm* was borrowed from the Babylonian divine name *Tiamat*, to which it is mythologically related, lacks any basis.<sup>46</sup>

Well-known Assyriologists such as W. G. Lambert, T. Jacobsen, and A. W. Sjöberg have discussed the supposed connection between Genesis 1 and the *Enuma elish*. These scholars doubt the influence of Mesopotamia on the mythological and religious concepts of peoples living along the Mediterranean coast; instead, they see a strong influence of that region on Mesopotamia.<sup>47</sup> W. G. Lambert pointed out that the watery beginning of Genesis is not an evidence of some Mesopotamian influence.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, he saw no clear evidence of conflict or battle as a prelude to God's division of the cosmic waters.<sup>49</sup> T. Jacobsen also maintains that the story of the battle between the thunderstorm god and the sea originated on the Mediterranean coast, and from there moved eastward toward Babylon.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, in some ancient Mesopotamian creation accounts, the sea is not personified and has nothing to do with conflict. In those traditions, the creation of the cosmos is not connected to the death of a dragon as it is in the *Enuma elish*.<sup>51</sup> Tsumura concludes that since some accounts never associated the creation of the cosmos to the theme of the conflict, there is no reason to accept that the earlier stage, without the conflict-creation connection, evolved into a later stage with this connection.<sup>52</sup> Frankly, the evolutionary process should be reversed: from an earlier stage *with* the mythological conflict-creation connection to a

<sup>45</sup>TWOT, 2:966.

<sup>46</sup>See also Tsumura, 47.

<sup>47</sup>A. W. Sjöberg, "Eve and the Chameleon," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 218.

<sup>48</sup>W. G. Lambert, "A New Look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1-11*, ed. R. S. Hess and D. T. Tsumura, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 96-113, especially 103.

<sup>49</sup>Lambert, 96-109.

<sup>50</sup>T. Jacobsen, "The Battle between Marduk and Tiamat," *JAOs* 88 (1968):107.

<sup>51</sup>Tsumura quotes as an example a bilingual version of the "Creation of the World by Marduk," which belongs to the Neo-Babylonian period and describes the creation of the cosmos without mentioning any theme of conflict or battle. In this myth, the initial circumstances of the world are described simply as "all the earth was sea" (49).

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

more recent stage *without* the mythological conflict-creation connection.

In conclusion, the Hebrew term *t'hôm* is simply a variant of the common Semitic root *\*thm* "ocean," and there is no relation between the account of Genesis and the mythology of *Chaoskampf*.

### *Supposed Canaanite Origin of tehôm*

Since the discovery of the Ugaritic myths, a Canaanite origin for the conflict between Yahweh and the sea dragons has been widely propounded. This motif is thought to be related to creation and is proposed as a basis of a supposed *Chaoskampf* in Gen 1:2.

Recently, J. Day stated that Gen 1:2 was a demythologization of an original myth of *Chaoskampf* coming from the ancient Canaan.<sup>53</sup> He suggested that the term *t'hôm* can be traced back to the early Canaanite dragon myth.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, he understands the Hebrew term *t'hôm* as a depersonification of the Canaanite mythological divine name.<sup>55</sup>

However, scholars have pointed out that the myth of the *Baal-Yam* conflict in the existing Ugaritic texts is not related to the creation of the cosmos;<sup>56</sup> the storm god *Baal* is not a creator-god as is *Marduk* in the *Enuma elish*.<sup>57</sup> In the *Baal* cycle there is no evidence that he creates the cosmos from the bodies of defeated monsters as does *Marduk*.<sup>58</sup> In Ugaritic mythology, *El* is the creator-god; as the creator of humanity he is called "Father of humanity."<sup>59</sup> No other god fulfills any role in the creation of the cosmos.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, if the account of the creation in Genesis were a demythologization of a Canaanite dragon myth, the term *yam* "sea" should appear at the beginning of the account, but this term does not

<sup>53</sup>J. Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 53.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>M. S. Smith, "Interpreting the Baal Cycle," *UF* 18 (1986): 319f; J. H. Gronbaek, "Baal's Battle with Yam—A Canaanite Creation Fight," *JSOT* 33 (1985): 27-44; Tsumura, 64-65.

<sup>57</sup>Tsumura, 64.

<sup>58</sup>J. C. L. Gibson, "The Theology of the Ugaritic Baal Cycle," *Or* 53 (1984): 212, n. 16.

<sup>59</sup>C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), 19.483; J. C. De Moor, "El, The Creator," in *The Bible World: Essays in Honor of Cyrus H. Gordon*, ed. G. Rendsburg et al. (New York: KTAV, 1980), 171-187; Tsumura, 144-148.

<sup>60</sup>See also P. D. Miller, Jr., "El, the Creator of Earth," *BASOR* 239 (1980): 43-46.

appear until Gen 1:10, in the plural form *yammîm*.<sup>61</sup> As Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew term *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* came from a Canaanite divine name and was later depersonified, the term would be something like *\*t<sup>e</sup>āhôm*. There is no evidence that the term *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* in Gen 1:2 is a depersonification of a Canaanite mythological deity.

### 3. *\*Thm in the Old Testament*

The term *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* appears 36 times in the OT, 22 in singular and 14 in plural.<sup>62</sup> This Hebrew term appears without an article in all texts but Isa 63:13 (singular) and Ps 106:9 (plural).<sup>63</sup> *T<sup>e</sup>hôm* always means a flood of water or ocean (abyss); there is no type of personification. The word appears in a context of creation<sup>64</sup> with no mythical reference.<sup>65</sup> The word is used to designate a phenomenon of nature.<sup>66</sup> Many times *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* is parallel to *māyîm* “water”<sup>67</sup> or *yām* “sea.”<sup>68</sup>

*T<sup>e</sup>hôm* also means “deep waters, depth” as in Ps 107:26: “They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths.” Translated as “depth” it acquires in some contexts the meaning of “abyss or depth” that threatens human existence.<sup>69</sup>

The depth of the ocean is also presented as bottomless. Thus, *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* is conceived in some texts as a source of blessing.<sup>70</sup> The texts that consider *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* a source of blessing make it impossible to believe that the basic

<sup>61</sup>Tsumura, 62, 65.

<sup>62</sup>See A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 1219-1220. The 22 texts in singular are: Gen 1:2; 7:11; 8:2; 49:25; Deut 33:13; Job 28:14; 38:16, 30; 41:24; Pss 36:7; 42:8 (2x); 104:6; Prov 8:27, 28; Isa 51:10; Ezek 26:19; 31:4, 15; Amos 7:4; Jonah 2:6; Hab 3:10.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 1220. The 14 texts in plural are: Exod 15:5, 8; Deut 8:7; Pss 33:7; 71:20; 77:17; 78:15; 106:9; 107:26; 135:6; 148:7; Prov 3:20; 8:24; Isa 63:13.

<sup>64</sup>Job 38:16; Pss 33:7; 104:6; Prov 3:30; 8:24, 27-28.

<sup>65</sup>Westermann, 105.

<sup>66</sup>Job 38:30: “when the waters become hard as stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen?”; *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* is, in this instance, the mass of water that freezes due to intense cold.

<sup>67</sup>Exod 15:8; Ps 77:17; Ezek 26:19; 31:4; Jonah 2:6; Hab 3:10.

<sup>68</sup>Job 28:14; 38:16; Pss 106:9; 135:6; Isa 51:10.

<sup>69</sup>Exod 15:5; Neh 9:11; Job 41:23; Pss 68:23; 69:3, 16; 88:7; 107:24; Jonah 2:4; Mic 7:19; Zech 1:8; 10:11; “marine depth” Isa 44:27; “depths” Pss 69:3, 15; 130:1; Isa 51:10; Ezek 27:34. *T<sup>e</sup>hôm* has this meaning in the song of the Sea in Exod 15:5, where the destruction of the Egyptians is described: “the deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.”

<sup>70</sup>Gen 49:25: “blessings of the deep that lies below”; Deut 8:7; 33:13; Ps 78:15; Ezek 31:4.

meaning of the Hebrew term is a "hostile mythical power."<sup>71</sup>

In some texts, *t'hôm* refers to "subterranean water," as in Deut 8:7: "a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills." This is a description of the land of Canaan being watered by fountains and springs fed by subterranean waters. We find a similar picture of *t'hôm* in Ezek 31:4: "The waters nourished it, deep springs made it grow tall; their streams flowed all around its base and sent their channels to all the trees of the field."

The texts generally used to explain the term *t'hôm* are Gen 1:2 and the verses related to the flood (Gen 7:11; 8:2). Before considering the word in the flood story, it must be noted that H. Gunkel had a powerful influence on the exegesis of these verses through his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895). In that work he derived the term directly from the Babylonian *Tiamat*, the mythical being and the feminine principle of chaos, thus maintaining a basically mythical meaning. Hasel has rightly pointed out that this direct derivation is unsustainable, for in the OT *t'hôm* never refers to a mythical figure.<sup>72</sup>

Gen 7:11 notes that *nibq<sup>e</sup> û kkol ~ ma<sup>e</sup> y<sup>e</sup> nôt t'hôm rabbāh wa<sup>a</sup> rubbôt haššāmayim niptāhû*, "all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened." The verb *bāqa<sup>e</sup>* appears here in the Niphal perfect 3 plural common; it means "burst open,"<sup>73</sup> "be split, break out,"<sup>74</sup> "to split, to break forth,"<sup>75</sup> "was cleft, was split, was broken into,"<sup>76</sup> "sich spalten, hervorbrechen."<sup>77</sup> This verb frequently appears in the biblical literature in connection with the outflowing or expulsion of water.<sup>78</sup> In Gen 7:11 the phrase refers to the breaking open of the crust of the earth to let subterranean waters flow in unusual quantity.<sup>79</sup> The parallelism in Gen 7:11b is marked by a precise

<sup>71</sup>Jenni and Westermann, 2:1290.

<sup>72</sup>G. F. Hasel, "The Fountains of the Great Deep," *Origins* 1 (1974): 69; Jenni and Westermann, 2:1290.

<sup>73</sup>BDB, 132.

<sup>74</sup>D.J.A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 2:249.

<sup>75</sup>Holladay, 46.

<sup>76</sup>Klein, 81. Ugar. *bq<sup>e</sup>* (= to cleave, to split), Arab. *facqa<sup>a</sup>* (= he knocked out, it burst, exploded), *ba<sup>e</sup>aja* (= it cleft, split).

<sup>77</sup>KBS, 143.

<sup>78</sup>Exod 14:16, 21; Judg 15:19; Neh 9:11; Job 28:10; Pss 74:15; 78:13, 15; Prov 3:20; Isa 35:6; 43:12; 48:21.

<sup>79</sup>Hasel, 70.

chiastic structure.<sup>80</sup> In short, when considering the Hebrew terminology and the literary structure of Gen 7:11b, it is evident that the bursting forth of the waters from the springs of the “great deep” refers to the splitting open of springs of subterranean waters.<sup>81</sup>

The Hebrew of Gen 8:2 is similar to that of Gen 7:11b in terminology, structure, and meaning.<sup>82</sup> The two Niphal verbs in 8:2 (*wayyissāk<sup>c</sup> rû* “had been closed” and *wayyikkālē* “had been kept back”) indicate the end of the impact of the waters on the earth; in the chiasm they correspond to each other both grammatically, with the two Niphal verbs of Gen 7:11b (*nibq<sup>c</sup> ū* “burst forth” and *niptāhū* “were opened”), and semantically, with the inversion of the phenomenon that begins with the flood in Gen 7:11b (*nibq<sup>c</sup> ū* “burst forth” and *niptāhū* “were opened”) and ends in Gen 8:2 (*wayyissāk<sup>c</sup> rû* “had been closed” and *wayyikkālē* “had been kept back”).<sup>83</sup> The quadruple use of the verb in passive voice

<sup>80</sup>A *nibq<sup>c</sup> ū* burst forth

B *kkol ~ ma<sup>c</sup> y<sup>c</sup> nōt t<sup>c</sup> hōm rabbāh* all the springs of the great deep

B' *wa<sup>a</sup> rubbōt haššāmāyim* and the floodgates of the heavens

A' *niptāhū* were opened

The chiastic structure A:B:B':A' indicates that the waters below the surface of the earth flowed (were expelled) in the same way that the waters on the earth fell (were thrown). In B: B' there is a pair of words which are common parallels in biblical literature, *t<sup>c</sup> hōm // haššāmāyim* (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13; Ps 107:26; Prov 8:27). But above all there is phonological, grammatical, and semantic equivalence between *nibq<sup>c</sup> ū // niptāhū* (Job 32:19; Num 16:31b-32a; Isa 41:18), *rabbāh // rubbōt* (see J. S. Kselman, “A Note on Gen 7:11,” *CBQ* 35 (1973): 491-493); and between, *nibq<sup>c</sup> ū ~ ma<sup>c</sup> y<sup>c</sup> nōt t<sup>c</sup> hōm rabbāh \\  
wa<sup>a</sup> rubbōt haššāmāyim niptāhū*, verb + subject \\  
subject + verb (\\  
antithetical parallelism). See also A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 107].

<sup>81</sup>Hasel, 71.

<sup>82</sup>“Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky.”

A *wayyissāk<sup>c</sup> rû* now had been closed

B *ma<sup>c</sup> y<sup>c</sup> nōt t<sup>c</sup> hōm* the springs of the deep

B' *wa<sup>a</sup> rubbōt haššāmāyim* and the floodgates of the heavens

A' *wayyikkālē* had been kept back

The verb “had been closed” corresponds to “had been kept back” (A:A'); “the springs of the deep” correspond to “the floodgates of the heavens” (B:B'). The chiastic parallelism indicates that the waters below the surface of the earth stopped flowing (being expelled) just as the waters on the earth stopped falling (being thrown). The same pair of parallel words appears as in Gen 7:11b *t<sup>c</sup> hōm // haššāmāyim*. Above all there is a phonological, grammatical, and semantic equivalence between *wayyissāk<sup>c</sup> rû // wayyikkālē* and between *ma<sup>c</sup> y<sup>c</sup> nōt t<sup>c</sup> hōm \\  
wa<sup>a</sup> rubbōt haššāmāyim wayyikkālē*, verb + subject \\  
subject + verb (\\  
antithetical parallelism).

<sup>83</sup>Hamilton, 300.

indicates clearly that the flood was not a caprice of nature, but that both its beginning and end were divinely ordered and controlled.<sup>84</sup> The Hebrew terminology and literary structure of Gen 8:2 give it a meaning similar to that of Gen 7:11b: the splitting, open of springs of subterranean waters is envisaged.<sup>85</sup>

Thus, not even here is *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* used in a mythical sense. The word designates subterranean water that breaks the surface of the earth, thus producing the catastrophe.<sup>86</sup> In a similar way, modern scholarship understands the use of the term in Gen 1:2 is widely understood as "ocean, abyss, deep waters," therefore, as purely physical. *T<sup>e</sup>hôm* is matter; it has no personality or autonomy; it is not an opposing or turbulent power. There is no evidence of demythologization of a mythical concept of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm*.<sup>87</sup> Jenni and Westermann conclude their discussion of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* by pointing out that "if one wishes to establish the theological meaning of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm*, one must conclude that *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* in the OT does not refer to a power hostile to God as was formerly believed, is not personified, and has no mythical function."<sup>88</sup>

#### 4. \*Thm in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew term *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* is *thm* which appears in Ugaritic literature in parallel with *ym*. It also appears in the dual form *thmtm*, "the two abysses," and in the plural form *thmt*.<sup>89</sup> The basic meaning is the same as in Hebrew, "ocean, abyss."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>Hasel, 71.

<sup>86</sup>See also Jenni and Westermann, 2:1291.

<sup>87</sup>See M. Alexandre, *Le Commencement du Livre Genèse I-V* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1988), 81; P. Beauchamp, *Création et Séparation* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1969), 164; Cassuto, 24; Hamilton, 110-11, n. 25; D. Kidner, *Genesis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1967), 45; K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Broadman and Holman, 1996), 133-134; S. Niditch, *Chaos to Cosmos* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1985), 18; A. P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 107; N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 6; idem, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970), 22; Stadelmann, 14; G. von Rad, *El Libro del Génesis* (Salamanca: Sígueme, 1988), 58-59; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 16; Westermann, 105-106; Young, 34-35.

<sup>88</sup>Jenni and Westermann, 2:1291.

<sup>89</sup>See Gordon, where the word appears in Ugaritic texts: singular, 174; dual, 245, 248-249; plural, 3. See M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, ALASP 8 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2d ed., 1995): singular, 68; plural, 11; dual, 113.

<sup>90</sup>Gordon, 497. See also S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 203. Segert points out that the meaning of the dual *thmtm* is "(primeval) Ocean, Deep."

*Thm* appears in the cycle of “*Shachar and Shalim and the Gracious Gods*” (Ugaritic text 23:30). The parallel use of *ym* and *thm* is evident.

[30] [*il . ys*] *i . gp ym* [El went out] to the shore of the sea  
*wysgd . gp . thm* and advanced to the shore of the ocean.<sup>91</sup>

Del Olmo Lete points out that the Ugaritic *thm* is a cognate of the Hebrew *t’hôm* and translates the word as “océano.”<sup>92</sup>

The plural *thmt* appears twice. Line 3 c 22 of “The Palace of Baal” reads:

[22] *thmt . mn . kbbkm* of the oceans to the stars.<sup>93</sup>

The other example appears in the cycle of *Aqhat* (17 VI 12).

[12] [ ] *mb g’t . thmt . brq* [ ] the ocean(s) the lightning.<sup>94</sup>

The dual *thmtm* is found in the cycle of “The Palace of Baal” (4 IV 22):

[22] *qrb . apq . thmtm* amid the springs of the two oceans.<sup>95</sup>

It also appears in the cycle of *Aqhat* (Ugaritic text 19 45):

[45] *bl . sr’ . thmtm* without watering by the two deeps.<sup>96</sup>

Other ANE languages use forms of the *thm* root to describe a large body of water. The Akkadian *ti<sup>3</sup>āmtum* or *tāmtum* also means “sea” or “ocean” in the earliest texts, dated before the *Enuma elish*.<sup>97</sup> In the Babylonian account of the flood, the *Atra-Hasīs* epic, the expression “the barrier of the sea” (*nabbala tiamtim*) appears 6 times. In turn, *tiamta* “sea” is used in parallel to *naram* “river,” with a common meaning for both.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>91</sup>J.C.L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 124.

<sup>92</sup>G. Del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaán* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 443. In this he agrees with Gibson, 159; cf. Del Olmo Lete, 635. In his study, this author notes also the occurrences of the plural *thmt* and the dual *thmtm*.

<sup>93</sup>Gibson, 49.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>97</sup>D. T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 55. Tsumura quotes the example from an ancient Akkadian text in which the term *tiamtim* is used in its common meaning “sea, ocean”:

*Lagas<sup>ki</sup> atima tiamtim in’ar (SAG.GIS.RA)* he vanquished Lagas as far as the sea  
*kakki (8<sup>u</sup> TUKUL-gi)-su in tiamtim imassi* He washed his weapons in the sea.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

In Eblaite *ti-à-ma-tum* commonly means “sea” or “ocean.”<sup>99</sup>

The evidence indicates that the Ugaritic term *thm* is a cognate of Hebrew term *t’hôm* and both mean “ocean.” In addition, cognate words from other ANE languages have the same meaning and come from a common root, \**thm*.<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, both the OT and the Ancient Near Eastern Literature indicate that the term *t’hôm* in Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as a lifeless part of the cosmos, a part of the created world, a purely physical concept. *T’hôm* is matter; it has no personality or autonomy and it is not an antagonistic and turbulent power. The “ocean/ abyss” opposes no resistance to God’s creating activity.<sup>101</sup> Certainly there is no evidence that the term *t’hôm*, as used in Gen 1:2, refers at all to a conflict between a monster of the chaos and a creator-god.<sup>102</sup>

There is no evidence of a mythical concept in *t’hôm*. Therefore, it is impossible to speak about a demythification of a mythical being in Gen 1:2. The author of Genesis 1 applies this term in a nonmythical and depersonified way.

The Hebrew term *t’hôm* in Gen 1:2 has an antimythical function, to oppose the mythical cosmologies of the peoples of the ANE. This antimythical function is confirmed by the clause in Gen 1:2c, “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” Here there is no fighting, battle, or conflict. The presence of the Deity moves quietly and controls the “waters,” the “ocean, abyss” to show his power over the recently created elements of nature. This interpretation is further confirmed in the following verses, particularly in Gen 1:6-10 where God “separates water from water” (v. 6); then says, “let the water under the sky be gathered” (v. 9); and calls the “gathered waters” by the name “seas” (v. 10). The whole process concludes in v.10: “and God saw that it was good.” All that God does on the surface of the waters and the ocean is good. These two elements are lifeless; they do not offer resistance or conflict to his creative

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>100</sup>Huehnergard points out that the form or root *thm* would be /*tahamatu*/ “the deep.” J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, HSS 32 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987). Huehnergard shows the relation of *thm* and the Sumerian: [*AN-tu*]<sub>1</sub> = Hurrian: [*a*]<sub>2</sub>-[*t*]<sub>3</sub>-*a-ni-wi* = Ugaritic: *ta-a-ma-tu*, (184-185).

<sup>101</sup>See G. F. Hasel, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *AUSS* 10 (1972): 6, n. 10.

<sup>102</sup>For a detailed discussion of the relation between *t’hôm* and the Sumerian, Babylonian, and Egyptian cosmogonies, see G. F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmogony,” *EQ* 46 (1974): 81-102.

*fiat*; they respond to his words, orders, acts, and organization with absolute submission. All this is contrary to what happens in the mythologies of the ANE, where creation is characterized by conflict or battle between powers (or gods) of nature.

In short, the description of *t<sup>e</sup>hôm* in Gen 1:2 does not derive from the influence of any Ancient Near Eastern mythology but it is based on the Hebrew conception of the world which explicitly rejects the mythological notions of surrounding nations.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>103</sup>Stadelmann agrees: "The subsequent acts of creating the heavenly bodies manifest the same antimythical view as we have noted in the cosmological presuppositions of the Priestly writer" (17). On the distinction between the Hebrew conception of the world and that of other peoples of the ANE, see *ibid.*, 178ff.