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

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1. Ḥōseḵ and ḫal-ʾpenē in Gen 1:2

Etymology of Ḥōseḵ

Before specifically considering the Hebrew term ʾthōm in the OT and in the literature of the ANE, we analyze the Hebrew words ḥōseḵ and ḫal-ʾpenē in Gen 1:2. Ḥōseḵ is a masculine singular noun that means “darkness, obscurity,”1 “darkness,”2 “darkness, obscurity,”3 “Finsternis kosmich,”4 “oscuridad, tinieblas, lobreguez, sombra.”5

Words similar to the Heb root Ḥōšk 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/be come to be dark” and Hiphil “make dark, darken.” The noun ḥōseḵ means “darkness, obscurity.” The derived nouns include hʾšēḵā “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 Hiphil). The noun ḥōseḵ appears 79 times, hʾšēḵā 8 times, maḥšak 7 times, and the adjective only once (Prov 22:29).6

In Egyptian, the term for darkness is kkw, in Sumerian it is kukkū,

1BDB, 365.
6TDOT, 5:245.
which is represented by the double writing of the sign GI, which means "black" and "night." In the Targums and in Talmudic and Midrashic literature  היה שֵׂעָך is interpreted as "darkness." In Gen 1:2 היה שֵׂעָך 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." 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. 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).

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. In many texts, היה שֵׂעָך 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.

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 היה שֵׂעָך covered all Egypt for three days." 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).

Ibid., 246-247.

M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumin, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalami, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Title, 1943), 511.

TWOT, 1:331.

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.

TWOT, 1:331.

TDOT, 5:249.

TWOT, 1:331.

All scriptural texts are taken from the New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

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. 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).

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. 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.

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 הָּאָשׁ; therefore, “darkness” corresponds in some way to רְעָה תְלֹהֵם “God’s spirit.” (2) If רְעָה תְלֹהֵם denotes some divine quality, הָּאָשׁ 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. (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.

In short, the term הָּאָשׁ “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.


17TDOT, 1:157.


19Ibid., 21, 35 n. 33.


22Ibid., 550-552.
"al ~ p‘nê

"al ~ p‘nê is a preposition + masculine plural noun construct which means "face . . . surface, upon the face of the deep,"23 "face = visible side: surface, p‘nê t’hôm, p‘nê hammâyim,"24 "face, surface,"25 "superficie del océano = superficie de las aguas."26

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’, min or "al) thus making a new prepositional expression. In many such texts the nominal meaning ("face") has been lost.27

Panim, especially when related to concepts such as country, land, sea, and sky, means "surface," mainly in the construction "al ~ p‘nê. The preposition "al ~ p‘nê related to concepts such as "dānâ "land, ground"; ēres "land, country"; māyim "water" (Gen 1:2); t’hôm “primeval abyss” (Gen 1:2) means "on (the surface of)" or "towards (the surface)."28 This construction is important in determining the etymology and the meaning of the Hebrew word t’hôm.

2. Etymology of *thm

The Hebrew word t’hôm in Gen 1:2 is translated into English as "deep." In the Greek LXX it is translated ἀβυσσός "abyss."28

T’hôm is a feminine singular noun that means "primeval ocean, deep,"29 "deep sea, primeval ocean,"30 "‘Urmeer, Urflut,’ als ein der Schöpfung vorangegendes Element,"31 "oceano, abismo, sima, manantial. Especialmente el océano primordial, abisal, en parte subterráneo, que

23BDB, 816, 819.
24Holladay, 293.
25Klein, 513-514. It is related to the Phoenician פָּנָה (= face), see Z. S. Harris, A Grammar of the Phoenician Language (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1936), 137; Ugaritic 〈 (= into); Akkadian PANU (= face, surface); Syriac ΚΣΑΣ (= side).
26Schöckel, 793. Translation: "surface of the ocean = surface of the waters."
29BDB, 1063; Holladay, 386.
30Klein, 693.
31KBS, 1558.
aflora en lagos, pozos, manantiales, y está presente en mares y ríos (de ahí su uso en plural), . . . superficie del océano.  

T'hôm is the Hebrew form of the Semitic word *tiham-(at) “sea,” which in Akkadian appears as the usual term for “sea” ti'āmtum (later tāmtu). In the Targums, as well as the Talmudic and the Midrashic literature, t'hôm is interpreted as “deep, depth, interior of the earth.”

The construct relation between `al-p'né and t'hôm (as well as e`al-p'né and hammā'yim) contributes to the determination of the meaning of t'hôm. Arguing against taking t'hôm as a personified being, A. Heidel points out:

If t'hôm were here treated as a mythical 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'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 mythical connotation as is the other. Thus the expression `al-p'né t'hôm, “on the surface of the t'hôm,” indicates that it does not refer to a mythical being but to the mass of waters.

Supposed Babylonian Origin of tehôm

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author of Genesis borrowed the Babylonian name *Tiamat* and demythologized it. But, as Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew *t יהומ* were an Akkadian loan-word, it should have a phonetic similarity to *tיוֹמêt*. In fact, there is no example of Northwestern Semitic borrowing Akkadian /h/ as /h/. Moreover, it is phonologically impossible for the Hebrew *t יהומ* to be borrowed from the Akkadian *Tiamat* with an intervocalic /h/, which tends to disappear in Hebrew (e.g., /h/ of the definite article /ha-/ in the intervocalic position).

Therefore, *t יהומ* cannot linguistically derive from *Tiamat* since the second consonant of *Tיוֹמêt*, 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 *Bа’al* which becomes *Bel*.

All this suggests that *Tiamat* and *t יהומ* must come from a common Semitic root *thm*. The same root is the base for the Babylonian *tāmtu* and also appears as the Arabic *thāmata* or *thāma*, a name applied to the coastline of Western Arabia, and the Ugaritic *t-b-m* which means “ocean” or “abyss.” The root simply refers to deep waters and this meaning was


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38D. 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 *tיוֹמêt* < *tיוֹמêt* > *t יהומ* which would later change into *t יהוממ(h)* with a loss of the final /h/, but never *t יהומ* with a loss of the whole feminine morpheme /-at/.

39Ibid.

40Heidel affirms: “But to derive *t יהומ* from *Tיוֹמêt* is grammatically impossible, because the former has a masculine, the latter a feminine, ending. As a loan-word from *Tיוֹמêt*, *t יהומ* would need a feminine ending, in accordance with the laws of derivation from Babylonian in Hebrew. Moreover, it would have no h. . . . Had *Tיוֹמêt* been taken over into Hebrew, it would either have been left as it was or it would have been changed to *t自豪* or *t自豪*, with the feminine ending a, but it would not have become *t יהומ*. As far as the system of Semitic grammar is concerned, *t יהומ* represents an older and more original formation than does *Tיוֹמêt*, 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 יהומ* and *Tיוֹמêt* come from a common Semitic root, and that the appearance of *t יהומ* in Gen 1:2 is not an argument to demonstrate the direct dependence of the Genesis story on the Enuma elish.

41TWOT, 2:966.

42Heidel, 100.


44Heidel, 101; see also Westermann, 105.
maintained in Hebrew as a name for water in the deep ocean. 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.

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. W. G. Lambert pointed out that the watery beginning of Genesis is not an evidence of some Mesopotamian influence. Moreover, he saw no clear evidence of conflict or battle as a prelude to God's division of the cosmic waters. 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.

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*. 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. Frankly, the evolutionary process should be reversed: from an earlier stage *with* the mythological conflict-creation connection to a

\[^{45}\text{TWOT, 2:966.}\]
\[^{46}\text{See also Tsumura, 47.}\]
\[^{47}\text{A. W. Sjöberg, “Eve and the Chameleon,” in In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G.W. Ahlström (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 218.}\]
\[^{49}\text{Lambert, 96-109.}\]
\[^{51}\text{Tsumura quotes as an example a bilingual version of the “Creation of the World by Marduk,” which belongs to the Neo-Babylonian period and describes the creation of the cosmos without mentioning any theme of conflict or battle. In this myth, the initial circumstances of the world are described simply as “all the earth was sea” (49).}\]
\[^{52}\text{Ibid.}\]
more recent stage without the mythological conflict-creation connection.

In conclusion, the Hebrew term *tehôm* 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. He suggested that the term *tehôm* can be traced back to the early Canaanite dragon myth. Therefore, he understands the Hebrew term *tehôm* as a depersonification of the Canaanite mythological divine name.

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; the storm god *Baal* is not a creator-god as is *Marduk* in the *Enuma elish*. In the *Baal* cycle there is no evidence that he creates the cosmos from the bodies of defeated monsters as does *Marduk*. In Ugaritic mythology, *El* is the creator-god; as the creator of humanity he is called "Father of humanity."

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


54Ibid., 50.

55Ibid.


57Tsumura, 64.


60See 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*. As Tsumura points out, if the Hebrew term *t'hôm* came from a Canaanite divine name and was later depersonified, the term would be something like *tâhôm*. There is no evidence that the term *t'hôm* in Gen 1:2 is a depersonification of a Canaanite mythological deity.

3. *Thm in the Old Testament*

The term *t'hôm* appears 36 times in the OT, 22 in singular and 14 in plural. This Hebrew term appears without an article in all texts but Isa 63:13 (singular) and Ps 106:9 (plural). *T'hôm* always means a flood of water or ocean (abyss); there is no type of personification. The word appears in a context of creation with no mythical reference. The word is used to designate a phenomenon of nature. Many times *t'hôm* is parallel to *mâyîm* “water” or *yâm* “sea.”

*T'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.

The depth of the ocean is also presented as bottomless. Thus, *t'hôm* is conceived in some texts as a source of blessing. The texts that consider *t'hôm* a source of blessing make it impossible to believe that the basic
meaning of the Hebrew term is a "hostile mythical power." 71

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. 72

Gen 7:11 notes that nibq'ê êkkol āmar y'ènôt t'hôm rabbâh wa'èrubbêt ha'èrmâyim niptâhû, "all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened." The verb bâqa'ê appears here in the Niphal perfect 3 plural common; it means "burst open," 73 "be split, break out," 74 "to split, to break forth," 75 "was cleft, was split, was broken into," 76 "sich spalten, hervorbrechen." 77 This verb frequently appears in the biblical literature in connection with the outflowing or expulsion of water. 78 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. 79 The parallelism in Gen 7:11b is marked by a precise

71Jenni and Westermann, 2:1290.
73BDB, 132.
75Holladay, 46.
76Klein, 81. Ugar. bqê (= to cleave, to split), Arab. facqa'a (= he knocked out, it burst, exploded), ba'aja (= it cleft, split).
77KBS, 143.
79Hasel, 70.
chiastic structure. 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.

The Hebrew of Gen 8:2 is similar to that of Gen 7:11b in terminology, structure, and meaning. The two Niphal verbs in 8:2 (wayyissāk ‘rū “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‘ c ‘ú “burst forth” and niptāhū “were opened”), and semantically, with the inversion of the phenomenon that begins with the flood in Gen 7:11b (nibq‘ c ‘ú “burst forth” and niptāhū “were opened”) and ends in Gen 8:2 (wayyissāk ‘rū “had been closed” and wayyikkālē “had been kept back”).

The quadruple use of the verb in passive voice

80 A nibq‘ c ‘ú burst forth
B ‘kkol - mā ‘y’nōt t’hōm rabbāh all the springs of the great deep
B’ wa”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’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‘ c ‘ú // niptāhū (Job 32:19; Num 16:31b-32a; Isa 41:18), rabbāh // rubbōt (see J. S. Kelso, “A Note on Gen 7:11,” CBQ 35 (1973): 491-493); and between, nibq‘ c ‘kkol - mā ‘y’nāt t’hōm rabbāh \ wa”rubbōt haššāmāyim niptāhū, verb + subject \ subject + verb (\\ antithetical parallelism). See also A. Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 107.

81 Hasel, 71.

82 “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 ‘rū now had been closed
B mā ‘y’nōt t’hōm the springs of the deep
B’ wa”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’hōm // haššāmāyim. Above all there is a phonological, grammatical, and semantic equivalence between wayyissāk ‘rū // wayyikkālē and between mā ‘y’nōt t’hōm \ wa”rubbōt haššāmāyim wayyikkālē, verb + subject \ subject + verb (\\ antithetical parallelism).

83 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.\textsuperscript{84} 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.\textsuperscript{85}

Thus, not even here is \textit{t'hôm} used in a mythical sense. The word designates subterranean water that breaks the surface of the earth, thus producing the catastrophe.\textsuperscript{86} 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. \textit{T'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 \textit{t'hôm}.\textsuperscript{87} Jenni and Westermann conclude their discussion of \textit{t'hôm} by pointing out that "if one wishes to establish the theological meaning of \textit{t'hôm}, one must conclude that \textit{t'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."\textsuperscript{88}

4. *Thm in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew term \textit{t'hôm} is \textit{thm} which appears in Ugaritic literature in parallel with \textit{ym}. It also appears in the dual form \textit{thmtm}, "the two abysses," and in the plural form \textit{thmt}.\textsuperscript{89} The basic meaning is the same as in Hebrew, "ocean, abyss."\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{84}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85}Hasel, 71.
\textsuperscript{86}See also Jenni and Westermann, 2:1291.
\textsuperscript{88}Jenni and Westermann, 2:1291.
\textsuperscript{90}Gordon, 497. See also S. Segert, \textit{A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 203. Segert points out that the meaning of the dual \textit{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] [El went out] to the shore of the sea and advanced to the shore of the ocean.\(^91\)

Del Olmo Lete points out that the Ugaritic thm is a cognate of the Hebrew t’hôm and translates the word as “océano.”\(^92\)

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

\[22\] thmt. “mn. kbkkm of the oceans to the stars.\(^93\)

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

\[12\] mb g’t. thmt. brq [ ] the ocean(s) the lightning.\(^94\)

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.\(^95\)

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

\[45\] bl. sr’. thmtm without watering by the two deeps.\(^96\)

Other ANE languages use forms of the thm root to describe a large body of water. The Akkadian ti’ämtum or tâmtum also means “sea” or “ocean” in the earliest texts, dated before the Enuma elish.\(^97\) In the Babylonian account of the flood, the Atra-Hasîs epic, the expression “the barrier of the sea” (nahbala tiamtim) appears 6 times. In turn, tiamta “sea” is used in parallel to naram “river,” with a common meaning for both.\(^98\)

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\(^{91}\) J.C.L. Gibson, Canaanite Myths and Legends, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1978), 124.

\(^{92}\) 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.

\(^{93}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{94}\) Ibid., 108.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 59.

\(^{96}\) Ibid., 115.

\(^{97}\) 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\(^{64}\) atima tiamtim in’ar (SAG.GIS.RA) he vanquished Lagas as far as the sea
kakki (\(^{65}\) TUKUL-gi) su in tiamtim imassi He washed his weapons in the sea.

\(^{98}\) Ibid.
In Eblaite ti-₇-a-ma-tum commonly means “sea” or “ocean.”

The evidence indicates that the Ugaritic term *thôm* is a cognate of Hebrew term *thôm* and both mean “ocean.” In addition, cognate words from other ANE languages have the same meaning and come from a common root, *thôm*.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, both the OT and the Ancient Near Eastern Literature indicate that the term *thôm* in Gen 1:2 must be interpreted as a lifeless part of the cosmos, a part of the created world, a purely physical concept. *Thôm* 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. Certainly there is no evidence that the term *thôm*, as used in Gen 1:2, refers at all to a conflict between a monster of the chaos and a creator-god.

There is no evidence of a mythical concept in *thôm*. 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 *thôm* 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

99Ibid., 56.


frit; 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 tebo^m 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.\(^\text{103}\)

\(^{103}\)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.