

Original Paper

Darkness as a Concept, Its Presence in Culture

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the darkness that we find in all myths (from Sumer to China). In many ancient mythological texts, darkness appears as the initial stage of the world, known as chaos. The most ancient characteristics of chaos are the role of the womb in which the world is born, the presence of some kind of energy in it, leading to the further construction of the universe.

However, this source of life and creation has another name, which rather than referring to the original structure, refers to the place where the primeval Chaos was located. This is the Abyss. In most mythologies, the abyss is identified with the world Mother, who, without anyone's intervention, generates the next generation of gods, orders the world (such as the Egyptian Chickpeas, the Greek Nyukta), or turns out to be a victim (Tiamat). The Sumero-Akkadian abyss of Abzu, in its inaccessible depths, holds the mysterious powers of «me», without which gods are not gods, and people are not people.

In other words, Darkness is the absence of light sources in general, it is the cause of life and order, it is the state of the world before any light source. In earlier (or later?) According to the ancient Sumerians, Tiamat was a Moon goddess, whose cult was overthrown by sun worshippers (Marduk, who defeated Tiamat, was the sun god). The connection between darkness and the lunar deity can also be traced in the Greek version of the Apocalypse, where the «number of the beast – 666 – XEC» in its ending had the letter «tau», symbolizing the Greek goddess of the Moon Selene (ΣΕΛΗΝΗ).

Since a person is born in the darkness of the mother's womb, but his being reveals light, darkness has received a negative connotation in various cultures, opposite to light, harmony and order. That's why «wandering in the dark» means not seeing the way, losing meaning, remaining alone, dying, sinking into the abyss, and, in other words, falling out of culture, getting forgotten, ceasing to be human. On the other hand, it is the struggle against Darkness (chaos, abyss) that is the deepest, most powerful

motivation of a person, forcing him to create a cultural space in order to remain in the memory of future generations.

Keywords

darkness, myth, ancient cultures, moon goddess, chaos, abyss, concept

Darkness... Unlike all the previous ones, which had not only an artistic, but also a completely physical embodiment, darkness is an intellectual concept, a kind of cognitive assumption, i.e., in other words, the essence of darkness is greater not only on the scale of a human personality, but also of the entire material creation. Nevertheless, one cannot say that darkness has not left its mark on world culture, in particular, the philosophical and esoteric teachings associated with it, in art, and, of course, in the most ancient cosmogonic myths.

Naturally, in the most ancient mythological texts, darkness acted as the initial state of the world, disordered and syncretic, known as Chaos. The mythopoeic concept of chaos is a product of a relatively late epoch, which presupposes a certain level of speculative thought about the origins and causes of existence. The most archaic cultures practically do not know the concept of chaos, and, conversely, the idea of chaos was especially fully, widely and successfully developed in the ancient Greek tradition at the junction of the mythopoeic and natural philosophical periods.

The specificity of human thinking is its associativity, i.e., in other words, a person needs to find a certain natural object whose characteristics had a number of common features with a philosophical concept in order to make it a symbol that can be applied to a metaphysical substance. Such characteristics of chaos, which are regularly repeated in various traditions, include its connection with the water element. In the water element, the ancients saw infinity in time and space, the mixing of all elements (an amorphous state of matter that excludes not only objectivity, but also the existence of the elements and the basic parameters of the world in a separate form), disorder and, consequently, maximum destructive tendencies. Such an association with the ocean testified to the removal of chaos from the sphere of the predictable (a complete accident that excludes the category of causality), in other words, chaos in the form of the water element represented the utmost distance from the human sphere, from the logos, mind, and word. It was no accident that death could be found in the chaotic influx of waves, sinking into the depths, but at the same time, water was an essential element of life for all early cultures.

Therefore, the most ancient characteristics of chaos are the role of the womb in which the world is born, the presence of some kind of energy in it, leading to the further construction of the universe.

The earliest known concepts of chaos, Sumerian and Ancient Egyptian, probably date back to the 3rd millennium BC (BC). The earliest written handwritten sources, namely the Sumerian-Akkadian cosmological poem «Enuma Elish», describe the beginning of the creation of the world in this way.

«When the sky is not named above,
And the land below was nameless.,

Apsu the Primordial, the Creator,
Mother Tiamat, who gave birth to everything.
They mixed their waters together ...» (Note 1)

In the poem «Enuma Elish» Tiamat is described as a dragon with lion's fangs, crocodile jaws, bat wings, lizard paws, eagle claws, python body. This is how the ancient Babylonians depicted the ancestress in the relief, in which the supreme god of the Babylonians, Marduk, fights with her. Tiamat seemed to be an ancient boundless salty ocean that mixed its waters with the world's fresh ocean of Abzu. When Abzu and Tiamat mixed their waters, Lahamu and Lahmu were born, the first gods who gave birth to the deities Kishara and Anshara (top and bottom), who in turn gave birth to the sky god Anu, and he Enki, the god of the underworld. In the cosmic battle of the elder and younger gods, Tiamat was defeated and killed by Marduk. After her death, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers flow out of her eyes. The etymology of the name Tiamat, according to the American sumerologist Thorkild Jacobsen and the Swiss professor of classical philology Walter Burkert, (Note 2) is twofold: on the one hand, the name could come from the word «tamtu» or the Greek thalassa, meaning sea. This can be seen as the significance of water for life, as the substance of all living things. On the other hand, in our opinion, the ancient roots of this name seem to be more likely, combining two words of Sumerian origin «ti» – breath, life and «ama» – mother.

Similar processes are described in ancient Egyptian sources. In the cosmogonic myths of Ancient Egypt, chaos is embodied in the image of the primordial ocean of Nun (a word that entered the Indo-European languages, the root «n» - compare «nothing»,) characterized by non-existence, the absence of heaven, earth, and the created world. Inside the Nun (a) is the creator Atum («The Negator of darkness»), who uses the Nun to create all things by destroying the waters of chaos (as follows from the Book of Pyramids (§ 1040 a-d). Among the deities created by the creator from Nuna, there are pairs of infinity, a pair of invisibility, a pair of male and female. According to Egyptian sources, the creation of the world out of chaos is reversible: the world not only constantly resists the forces of the chaos surrounding it, but can also be turned back into it (the threat of Atum's displeased behavior of the gods in the Book of the Dead (ch. 175): «I will destroy everything that I have created. The world will turn back into Nun... as it was in the beginning».

The Vedic mythology of ancient India also contains similar descriptions of chaos. Among the most famous examples is a picture of what preceded creation. This is how this source describes chaos: «Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning. The indistinguishable abyss is all this» (Rigveda, X 129, 1-2, 3). In this abyss of chaos, a single something breathed «without shaking the air», «and there was nothing else but it» (Rigveda, X 129, 2). This One, enclosed in the void, was generated by the power of heat, the primary source of the created world was desire (tapas). In other versions, desire and the beginning of creation are associated with the golden germ of Hiranyagarbha floating in chaos, the primordial ocean. According to the versions of the Shatapatha Brahmana (II 1, 6), the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (V 5, I), Brahman, a deity with creative potentials, arose from the golden

egg of Hiranyagarbha floating among the world's waters embodying chaos. Next, the three-faced Brahman creates Prajapati, and Prajapati creates the gods.

In Chinese mythology, chaos appears primarily as the birthplace of the beginning, the development of which ultimately leads to the emergence of the universe. In Taoist sources, in particular, the text «Tao te Ching», attributed to the philosopher Lao-(Lai)tzu (VI-V centuries BC), it is said (ch. 25) that in chaos, before heaven and earth appeared, the formless Tao was born, which can be considered the mother of the Celestial Empire. This Tao acts as a creative organizing principle, giving birth to a triad, and from the triad the whole world is born.

In Confucian writings, chaos is formless and the elements are mixed; creation begins with the fact that pure «Qi» («qi» in Confucian conceptions, undifferentiated primordial matter) becomes heaven, cloudy «qi» becomes earth. The book «Huainan Tzu», created in the 1st century BC during the early Han Dynasty, which mixed Taoist and Confucian ideas to one degree or another, tells us that two deities emerged from chaos and began its ordering.

A special version of the ordering of chaos is represented by a rather late Chinese myth (III century A.D.) about the first man Pangu. According to this myth, the universe was originally a formless chaos. Over time, a universal egg emerged from the chaos, from which Pangu later emerged. It is believed that with a swing of a huge axe, Pangu separated Yin from Yang and created the cloudy part (Yin – earth, feminine) and the light part (Yang – sky, masculine). To prevent Yin and Yang from joining, Pangu pushed the sky away from the earth every day. When Pangu made sure that the earth and sky would not unite and did not need his participation, he died. Pangu's breath became wind, his voice became thunder, his left eye became the sun, and his right eye became the moon. In the late myth of the first Pangu man, one can see both Vedic influences about the golden egg, and Confucian views about pure and turbid «qi», and even Egyptian and Sumerian ideas about the feminine and masculine principles of creation.

From the ancient Sumero-Akkadian myths, two stages of the embodiment of chaos can be distinguished. The first is the filling of the entire space with the world ocean, in the depths of which was the mother of all things Nammu, and the second is the inseparable fusion of the divine married couple Kishara and Anshara, disrupted by their son Enlil, who tore his parents apart (a possible influence on the myth of Pangu). In the Sumerian version, it is significant that the threat to primordial chaos arose with the birth of Enlil (the word «lil» means wind), the emergence of the air element. Its airy substance was, in fact, the first filling of outer space and the first carrier of motion.

Similar functions of destroying the primordial ocean of chaos in Egyptian mythology are performed by the son of Atum - Shu («void»), the god of air and wind, who divided and kept heaven and earth separate from each other.

From all the above mythological texts, written in different countries and at different times, one can deduce something in common: Darkness was presented as Chaos, as the first matter, which from itself

(or with the help of a spouse) gave birth to the first gods, and itself became the material for building the universe. Chaos was destroyed (ordered) as a result of the birth of light and the god of wind, air.

However, this source of life and creation has another name, which rather than referring to the original structure, refers to the place where the primeval Chaos was located. This is the Abyss. In the Scandinavian mythology of the Elder Edda, it is described as follows:

«At the beginning of time, there was

no sand, sea,

or cold waves in the world;

there was no earth or firmament yet,

the abyss shone, ...» (Note 3) In most mythologies, the abyss is identified with the world Mother, who, without anyone's intervention, generates the next generation of gods, orders the world (such as the Egyptian Chickpeas, the Greek Nyukta), or turns out to be a victim (Tiamat). The Sumero-Akkadian abyss of Abzu, in its inaccessible depths, holds the mysterious powers of «me», without which gods are not gods, and people are not people. In Scandinavian mythology, the abyss was understood in a more specific sense, as the Ginungagap abyss, bounded in the north by cold and dark Niflheim and in the south by warm and bright Muspelsheim, which harbors the future cosmos in the form of the first man Ymir.

The Orphics called the abyss an eternal, immeasurable chaos, not made with hands, from which everything is born, everything is mixed together, into an invariably unified and boundless.

The biblical version of the legend of the abyss, preserved in the book of Genesis and in some other parts of the Bible, was very strongly influenced by the Babylonian scheme, although the image of chaos-abyss appears here in a strongly demythologized form. The world abyss (Hebrew: *tehom*, a word related to Akkadian Tiamat) is no longer described as something eternal, absolute, and inherently independent, but as something created by the creator. In the book of Job (38:11), the Lord says, «hitherto you will reach and not pass, and here is the limit of your arrogant waves». However, the abyss-sea, being secondary in time, created and limited in its possibilities by the creator, exists as a kind of reversibility of order into chaos. God not only threatens with a flood (which is not a simple flood, but an abyss released by God's permission), but also frees the abyss (*tehom*, depths) from obstacles (Gen. 7, 11). But even in this case, God retains control over the chaotic flood.

Another feature of the Hebrew (biblical) concept of the images of the abyss is that all those who resist God and try to disrupt the world order are placed in the sea waters, i.e., in the remnants of the abyss on earth (for example, the monster Leviathan, the dragons Tannin, Rahab (female snake-like creature). This name appears in Psalm 89:5-12, Isaiah 51:9-10, and Job 26:12). Consequently, the biblical tradition proceeds from the distinctly God-fighting meaning of the abyss.

Analyzing mythological sources, several conclusions can be drawn: 1. The Abyss is a kind of container of Chaos, where it, as the original one, acts as the beginning of creation, being the primary source of life; 2. mythopoetic descriptions of world catastrophes, cataclysms do not imply the complete

expulsion of chaos-abyss from the world of creation and order, but only its weakening and removal beyond the framework of culture. The remnants of chaos on earth are associated with horror, fear generated by formlessness, the lack of reliable boundaries between man and the kingdom of chaos. Chaos – the abyss is not only the source of life, but also its ending – the realm of death, which is also associated with fear, which is often described as the opposite of this world.

The reverse processes that turn an ordered creation into chaos – these motifs are represented with great poetic power in the Revelation of John the Theologian (Rev.13:18). Out of the abyss appears the beast, who is numbered, and his «number is man, his number is 666». Many interpreters have seen different symbols in this number over the centuries.

However, if we take into account the fairly obvious fact that the Apocalypse was created between 80-96 AD by a Greek and was written in ancient Greek, therefore, at that time the number mentioned in the Apocalypse was written as ΧΞϞ (combining the letters «chi», «xi» and «stigma»).

If we try to reveal the symbolic meaning of this letter number, it will be as follows: the letter «Chi» means space, and on a personal level, what belongs to a person. It is noteworthy that «Chi» is the twenty-second letter of the Greek alphabet, which goes back to the Phoenician (Semitic substratum), namely, the Creator used twenty-two sounds when creating the world, according to the Hebrew cosmogony. The letter «Xi» symbolized the fixed stars, whose power and authority were beyond doubt. This letter stood for the number «60», so beloved in Babylonian astrology. «Xi», the fourteenth letter of the Greek alphabet, also gives rise to certain associations, in particular, with the monochord of Pythagoras, stretched from gross materiality to the highest stars, passing through fourteen steps. One can also recall the «Hermes Tree», popular in the Middle Ages, a speculative tree of alchemical transformations, numbering fourteen stages.

The last character in this numerical combination is the old ligature that combined the letters Sigma and Tau, the eighteenth and nineteenth letters of the Greek alphabet. The symbol of sigma is the Lord of Death, Hermes the Psychopomp, the guide to the afterlife. It is noteworthy that the eighteenth letter was connected with the letter «Tau», which in antiquity served as the main pictographic formula for the designation of the human body. It is possible that the origins of this letter were ancient Egypt and the cross «ankh», which was the key to the world of death and eternal life.

If we combine the symbolic meanings of the number 666, expressed in Greek letters, then the number of the beast is a number that brings death, non-existence not only to man, but also to the higher stars, and to the cosmos as a world order.

Thus, in the biblical tradition, the role of chaos is not limited only to the cosmogonic cycle. Even after the creation of the cosmos, the universe is most often understood as a kind of center, as a visible surface; the periphery (outside and below) remains not only less orderly, but is sometimes interpreted as a remnant of the primary elements, usually weakened, muffled, but nevertheless existing, and at the end of the world threatening creation.

So, in the most ancient mythopoeic sources, chaos and the abyss are associated with Darkness. In Genesis (1:2) there are such lines: «The earth was formless and empty, and darkness was over the abyss...» Chaos, Abyss, Darkness are one cognitive concept, but if chaos is a structure, the abyss is a place, then darkness is a visual characteristic of this source of life and order. This is indicated by the fact that, for example, inside the Egyptian Nun, Atum is born (i.e., denying darkness), inside the Abzu, Nammu is born, which gave birth to all, etc. In other words, Darkness is the absence of light sources in general, it is the cause of life and order, it is the state of the world before any light source.

However, it is in the primordial darkness that light is born, which anticipates the image of Platonov's cave, in which there is already light, but you have to go out to it, overcoming the darkness around. In earlier (or later?) According to the ancient Sumerians, Tiamat was a Moon goddess, (Note 4) whose cult was overthrown by sun worshippers (Marduk, who defeated Tiamat, was the sun god). The connection between darkness and the lunar deity can also be traced in the Greek version of the Apocalypse, where the «number of the beast – 666 – XΞC» in its ending had the letter «tau», symbolizing the Greek goddess of the Moon Selene (ΣΕΛΗΝΗ). It is noteworthy that almost nothing has changed with the replacement of the letter designation of the number with the late Arabic numerals. The tripling of sixes is reminiscent of the triune goddess, which for the Greco-Roman pantheon was associated with traditional lunar-feminine symbolism: Selene (Moon) in the sky, Artemis (Diana) – the twin of Apollo, the moon goddess – on earth, Hecate (Trivia) – in the underworld, the kingdom of the dead. It is Chaos that gives birth to the personification of darkness (Erebus) and Nykta (Night), and they already give birth to Ether, Day, Hypnos, Thanatos, Geras (Hesiod, p. 217, 0700).

There is already light in the night, the light of the night luminary, and it is no coincidence that lunar deities, such as Hecate, are depicted with a torch in her hands, with snakes in her hair (echoes of her chthonic origin), wandering among the graves. Black is present everywhere, or rather, different degrees of illumination of the space. Therefore, describing the end of time, the Revelation of John the Theologian – «the beast from the abyss» describes in cosmic realities the ka «sol niger» – the black sun rising from the world of the dead, from the world of Night, from the world of darkness. Alchemy echoes the Apocalypse, in which chaos becomes a «massa confusion» (an undifferentiated mass) from which a «Lapiz» solid, stone, and it is black in color arises.

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Thus, analyzing ancient sources, one can see the evolution of Darkness: from the absence of a light source at all, to the generation of Night and Darkness in itself, which generate light and day.

One of the oldest forms of the presence of darkness in the culture, reflected in the Old Testament when talking about subjects the Urim and Thummim (אֲרִימִים וְתֻמִּימִים). They are mentioned repeatedly in the Old Testament (Numbers 27:21, Exodus 28:15, Leviticus 8:8, Nehemiah 7:65), with which the high priest questioned God on behalf of the people or the king. The Urim and Thummim were inside the breastplate of the high priest, which was placed on the ephod (type of clothing). The Bible does not describe the Urim and Thummim themselves, nor the way they are used. However, it can be assumed that they represented some kind of divination practice and symbolized light (the Sumerian word «ur» means light, flame, fire), and darkness («tum» means absence of light, darkness). Obviously, there were several of these subjects, since these words are given in the plural of the masculine gender.

Darkness (chaos, abyss) has left its mark on world philosophy, in particular, according to Plato and the Pythagoreans, this primordial substance was the soul of the world. Darkness was not only an image of mythopoeic art, but it was also one of the scientific concepts that neither the early ancient cosmogonies, not Immanuel Kant, not a number of modern thinkers could do without.

Since a person is born in the darkness of the mother's womb, but his being reveals light, darkness has received a negative connotation in various cultures, opposite to light, harmony and order. That's why «wandering in the dark» means not seeing the way, losing meaning, remaining alone, dying, sinking into the abyss, and, in other words, falling out of culture, getting forgotten, ceasing to be human. On the other hand, it is the struggle against Darkness (chaos, abyss) that is the deepest, most powerful motivation of a person, forcing him to create a cultural space in order to remain in the memory of future generations. (Note 5) Consequently, the meaning and place of Darkness in world culture is twofold – on the one hand, it scares death and non-existence, and on the other, it is the «eternal engine» of human cultural development – from Gilgamesh's quest for immortality to modern space flights.

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Notes

Note 1. Quoted from B. Ignatiev's article «Strange Creatures» dated 04/5/2022. An electronic resource. Access mode: <https://nlo-mir.ru/starnyesushestva/tiamat.html> Quoted from B. Ignatiev's article «Strange Creatures» dated 04/5/2022. An electronic resource. Access mode: <https://nlo-mir.ru/starnyesushestva/tiamat.html>

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Note 3. Cit. on the Elder Edda. 1.: Leningrad Branch of the Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences, 1963, p. 260, Divination The Velvas – pp.9-16

Note 4. The number 666, which appears in the translations of this text, uses Arabic numerals that penetrated Europe in the Middle Ages. But even these late Arabic numerals add up to «9», i.e. the number marking the boundary of the natural numbers. Even in the inverted spelling, like 999, they again give «9», beyond which there is an abyss in which there are only innumerable combinations of natural numbers.

Note 5. It was known in ancient times. See the article by F. Foortai. «Courage as a path to immortality: towards the problem of visualizing the archetype of courage in Classical antique sculpture». // International Journal of Cultural Studies. International Journal of Cultural Research. «Thanatos and Culture», pp. 179-188, No. 1(22), 2016, Access mode: <http://www.culturalresearch.ru>