HEBREW \textit{RHM} = ‘‘RAIN’’

In his commentary on the Psalms and elsewhere, M. Dahood has convincingly demonstrated that Hebrew \textit{tôb} may occasionally have the meaning ‘‘rain’’ as well as its usual meaning ‘‘good’’.\textsuperscript{1} From among the many passages he cites, we exemplify \textit{tôb} = ‘‘rain’’ with the following passages:

\textit{Jer.} v 24-25 And say not in their hearts
\hspace{1em} ‘‘Let us fear Yahweh our God
\hspace{1em} Who gives rain (\textit{geșem}), the latter and the former, in its season,
\hspace{1em} Who watches for us the weeks appointed for harvest’’.\textsuperscript{2}
\hspace{1em} Your iniquities have diverted these things.
\hspace{1em} Your sins have withheld the rain (\textit{haṭṭôt}) from you.

\textit{Ps.} lxxxv 13 With a crash Yahweh will give forth rain (\textit{haṭṭôt})
\hspace{1em} And our land will give forth its produce.

Dahood also cites one Ugaritic verse where \textit{tbn}, the nominal form of \textit{tb}, ‘‘good’’, may signify ‘‘rain’’. \textit{CTA} 19 (1 Aqht) I. 45-46: \textit{bl tbn ql b’l} is perhaps to be translated ‘‘no rain with the voice of Baal ( = thunder)’’ in accordance with the context.\textsuperscript{2}

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In his most recent publication on the subject, Dahood refers to a letter of S. Kaufman in which it is noted “that in some South Arabic and Arabic dialects, rahmat, ‘mercy’, also means ‘rain’”. It is therefore not surprising to find that Hebrew rhm, in its various forms, may also signify “rain” at times. That is to say, rhm, “pity” > “rain”, exhibits the same semantic development as tōb, “good” > “rain”. The following passages amply demonstrate this conclusion.

Ps. cx 3 bemádré qōdeš
mērehem mišhār
bēkā tal yaldūtekā
In holy splendor,
From the rain of the dawn,
For you the dew of your youth.

It is not my intention to solve the numerous difficulties of this verse, but rather merely to point out that when parallel to tal yaldutekā, “the rain of the dawn”, rehem mišhār should be translated “the rain of the dawn” in the light of South Arabian rhm, “rain”. The collocation of “youth” and “dawn” is known from elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Qoh. xi 10), and thus we should assume similar parallel significations for tal and rehem.

Isa. xlix 10 lō‘ yir‘ābū uwrō‘ yismā‘ā‘
wrō‘ yakkēm šārāb wašāmēš
ki mērahōmām yēnaḥgēm
uwrō‘al mabbū‘ē mayim yēnaḥlēm
They shall not hunger nor thirst,
And hot wind and sun shall not strike them,
For he that causes rain will lead them,
To the springs of water he will guide them.

In the context of scorching heat, thirst, and water, we may note the meaning “causes rain” for mērahōmām (parsing the suffixed mem as enclitic?). This verb would be a denominative from the postulated Hebrew rhm, “rain”. Given the striking synonymous parallelism of yēnaḥgēm and yēnaḥlēm in the second half of the verse, it is easy to see why mērahōmām should mean “causes rain” parallel to “the springs of water”. Note that the two sources of water commonly referred to in the Hebrew Bible, those above and those below (e.g. Gen. i 7), are both mentioned as a cure for the thirsting community
in Exile. The above translation of Isa. xlix 10 does not deny that the traditional rendering "he who loves them" may be simultaneously inherent; thus we have an instance of polysemy or multiple meaning not unusual in Hebrew poetry.  

Hos. i 6 qērāʾ ʾšmāh lōʾ ruḥāmāh  
ki lōʾ ʾōṣîp ʿod  
ʿārahēm ʾet-bēt yišrāʾēl  
ki nāšōʾ ʾēssāʾ ʾālāhem  
Call her name "Lo-ruhama",  
For I will not continue  
To have pity on/cause rain upon the house of Israel,  
Or pardon them at all.

This passage and the following ones from Hosea i-ii show a continual use of the polysemy obtained from recognizing the two meanings of rhm, "pity" and "rain". Thus Lo-ruhama, the name of Hosea's second child, means not only "not pitied" but also "not rained upon". This second meaning, hitherto unrecognized, fits nicely into the opening chapters' and indeed the entire book's concern with the fertility cult in ancient Israel. Similarly, ʿārahēm signifies not only that God will not have pity on Israel but also that he will not cause it to rain upon Israel. The main aim of the fertility cult was to produce rain; the prophet is stating that this apostasy will have the totally opposite effect.

Hos. i 7 ʾwet-bēt ʾyēhūdāh ʿārahēm  
But I will have pity on/cause rain upon the house of Judah.

This passage immediately follows the preceding passage. Although Israel has fallen into disfavor with God, Judah has not and will therefore receive both God's compassion and his rain. That God can cause rain to fall upon Judah but not upon Israel recalls the geographic distribution of the fourth, seventh, and ninth plagues (Exod. viii 18, ix 26, x 23).

Hos. ii 6 ʾwet-bānehā lōʾ ʿārahēm  
And I will not have pity on/cause rain upon her sons.

The second meaning of ʿārahēm in this colon is easily seen when we note that it follows the tricola "I will make her like the wilderness, set her like the dry land, and slay her with thirst" in Hos. ii 5. The
number one way of transforming arable land into wasteland is to deny rain, a fact which the Israelites well knew.

Hos. ii 25 úzrəqtiḥā li bā'ārēṣ
wəriḥamti 'et-lō' ruḥāmāh
I will sow her to me in the land,
And I will have pity on/cause rain upon ‘‘Lo-ruhama’’.

The continual use of ṭhm in the first two chapters of Hosea comes to a head in this final verse. The agricultural prosperity described in Hos. ii 24 is possible only by means of 1) God’s sowing (zrē) and 2) God’s rain (ṭhm). The polysemy of ṭhm in all the above four passages is additional material for those who have recognized the many layers of meaning throughout Hosea. Indeed, the prophet himself warned us of the many hidden meanings in his work with his closing words: “Whoever is wise will understand these things, whoever is prudent will know them” (Hos. xiv 10).

The above passages amply demonstrate that Hebrew ṭhm occasionally bore the meaning “rain” as well as “pity”, cognate with South Arabian ṭhm. In closing, it remains to observe that the early rabbis were apparently aware that ṭhm could mean “rain”. First, I quote Rabbi Yohanan’s remarkable statement about the forbidden bird ṭhadmd in Lev. xi 18 (ṭhadm in Deut. xiv 17): “Ṭhadm is the ṣəraqaq, and why is it called ṭhadm? Because when the ṭhadm comes, ṭhāʾēm comes to the world’’ (B. Ḥullin 63a). This passage has universally been taken to mean that the ṭhadm bird betokens the coming of rain upon the world. Second, I call attention to the interpretation of Gen. ii 5 given by Rabbi Asi (or Ashi): “This teaches us that the plants were coming forth but stopped just below the surface of the soil until Adam came and sought ṭḥāʾēm for them, and then the rains came … Rabbi Nahman bar Papa had a garden and he planted seeds in it but they did not sprout, he then sought ṭḥāʾēm and the rains came” (B. Ḥullin 60b). Third, I quote the final benediction which the rabbis instituted to combat prolonged drought: bārūk ḥattāh yəwh hammaṭrəḥēm 'al hā'ārēṣ (M. Ta’anit II 4). In the light of the Arabic and South Arabian evidence, the biblical examples cited, and the above Talmudic statements, is there any doubt that this prayer should be translated “Blessed are you, O Lord, who cause rain upon the earth”? Finally, we have the story of Rabbi Honi who prayed for rain but could not produce any. Next he drew a circle, stood inside it, and said “‘I swear by
your great name that I will not move from here ‘ad šetérahem ʿal bāneka’], at which time rain began to fall (M. Taʿanit III 8). The Hebrew should no doubt be translated “until you cause rain (to fall) upon your children”.

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4 The South Arabian data may be found in two works cited by Kaufman: M. Bittner, Studien zur Laut- und Formenlehre der Mehri-Sprache in Südarabien (Vienna, 1909), pp. 39-40; and le comte de Landberg, Études sur les dialectes de l’Arabie méridionale I (Leiden, 1901), pp. 480, 586. A more recent publication which may be consulted is T. M. Johnstone, Ḥarsūsi Lexicon (London, 1977), p. 103, where Ḥarsūsi rehemet/rehayem and diminutive rehmanot, “rain”, Mehri rehemet, “rain lying on the ground”, Ḥarsūsi and Mehri serhāum, “to rain”, and Šerī serhim, “to rain”, are all cited. Note that South Arabian has both nominal and verbal forms of ṭhm, “rain”. The Arabic evidence is cited by Bittner, p. 40, and by R. B. Serjeant, South Arabian Hunt (London, 1976), pp. 35, 76-7, 99 n. 146, 113 n. 402, 126. The latter quotes the 19th century poet ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq, who uses rahmah in the sense of “rain”. The title of Serjeant’s book refers to the southern part of Arabia, but not to the South Arabian language; the language of al-Ḥaqq’s work is Arabic. I am grateful to Professor J. A. Emerton for this reference and also for kindly supplying me with copies of the appropriate pages of Bittner and le comte de Landberg. The meaning “rain” for rahmat is not to be found, however, in the standard dictionaries such as E. W. Lane, Arabic-English Lexicon (London, 1863-93), and H. Wehr and J. M. Cowan, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (Wiesbaden, 1961), or in the various dialect dictionaries. The same is true of G. Schuttermayr, “RHM — Eine lexikalische Studie”, Biblica 51 (1970), pp. 499-532; this article is a comprehensive review of Hebrew ṭhm and its cognates, but it is limited to the meaning “love, pity”.

5 As is pointed out by M. Dahood, Psalms III (Garden City, N.Y., 1970), p. 116.

6 Whether mishār should be repointed miššahar on the basis of the LXX’s πό ἑωραφόου or whether sahar should be read with the mem deleted as a dittograph (both possibilities are noted by BHS) is beyond the scope of the present study, but a few comments may be added. The latter suggestion seems to be an unnecessary altera-
tion of the consonantal text and may be rejected outright. The former is less objectionable, and it would give us a nominalized prepositional phrase *miššāhār*, like *bag-gilbōa* in 2 Sam. i 21; for other examples see D. Grossberg, *Nominalization in Biblical Hebrew* (unpublished dissertation, New York University, 1977). But even this change of the Masoretic vocalization may be unnecessary if we invoke the rule of *lactio difficilior* and simply accept *mišhār* as a by-form of *šāhār*.

7 Some exegetes may object to postulating an enclitic *mem* in a work as late as Second Isaiah, but the most thorough treatment of this morpheme has shown that it does occur in poetry datable to the 6th century; see D. A. Robertson, *Linguistic Evidence in Dating Early Hebrew Poetry* (Missoula, 1972), pp. 79-110, especially 108-9. Of course, it is also possible to treat the -*m* as the object of the verb and to translate *mērahāmām* as “he that causes rain upon them”.

8 The South Arabian verb with prefixed *še*- is in the causative-reflexive conjugation, while the Hebrew verb is in the intensive or Pi’el conjugation. But it is by now a commonplace to point out that the Hebrew Pi’el is sometimes causative; see A. E. Cowley (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar as edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch* (2nd edn, Oxford 1910 = 28th German edn), §52 g. Even when other Semitic languages use the causative, Hebrew sometimes has the corresponding verb in the Pi’el; e.g. Akkadian *ml* in the Š-stem corresponds to Hebrew *ml* in the D-stem, both meaning “to fill”. Moreover, Hebrew denominatives are almost always in the Pi’el; cf. G. K. §141 h.

9 Cf. G. Rendsburg, “Double Polysyem in Gen 49:6 and Job 3:6”, *CBQ* 42 (1982), pp. 48-51, and the references in n. 1. Less sure examples are the uses of *rihamtik* in Isa. lv 8 near *mē noaḥ*, “the waters of Noah”, and *wiraḥamēhā* in Isa. lv 7 in the context of thirst, water, and rain. I simply raise the question whether polysyem is intended by the prophet in these verses without pressing the issue. As is well known, the root *rhm* is one of Second Isaiah’s favorites, and so it appears ubiquitously in sections with and without rain imagery.


12 For example, in the 11th century, Rabbi Gershom ben Judah (d. 1040) wrote *bāʿa rahāmām lōlām ṭēlāʾ gēšāmīm, “rahāmām comes to the world—the rains”, and Rashi (d. 1105) wrote *rahāmām māṣār, “rahāmām means rain*. Cf. also E. Cashdan, *Hullin* (London, 1948), p. 343, n. 3, who states “rahāmām, i.e., rain”, and M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London and New York, 1903), p. 1467b, who translates the end of the passage as “mercy comes upon the world (it betokens rain)”.

13 The first statement is in Hebrew and the second in Aramaic. I am indebted to Professor Emerton for pointing this passage out to me.

14 My thanks are due to Dr Stuart Miller of Notre Dame University for pointing both this and the next passage out to me.

**“TAKING SOULS” IN PROVERBS XI 30**

The meaning of the second half of Prov. xi 30 is not clear; the verse reads:

pri ṣaddiq ʾēs ḥayyīm wĕlōqēaḥ nĕpāšôt ḥākām

that is,

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