Chapter xxviii is so different in construction and tone from the rest of the book of Job that many hold it to be an interpolation, either by another hand, or from another work of the same author. The special character of the chapter derives from the simplicity and regularity of its prosodic form, with three strophes, a refrain, and a procession of doublets almost all containing the most basic form of Hebrew verse, so-called synonymous parallelism. The three strophes respectively expound

1. the exhaustive exploration of the earth by human beings;
2. their failure to find or locate Wisdom and Understanding;
3. that exclusive knowledge of their nature and location which is the prerogative of the Lord.

There are two blemishes in this regularity. One is the unequal length of the three strophes. This is relatively simply corrected by transposing vv. 7 and 8, which are thematically misplaced in the first strophe, to a new, but probably their original, place after v. 12. The second is the fact that in the MT the six lines after v. 2 are arranged as two triplets instead of as three doublets. Long ago, David Yellin suggested that they be “restored” as three doublets, but he had no useful suggestion as to how this should be done.

The first two lines of the present three-line v. 3 form a self-contained pair which fits correctly into its context and the theme of the first strophe—the exhaustive exploration of the earth by human beings; see “Love and Death at Ebla and their Biblical Reflections”, in J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (ed.), Love and Death in the Ancient Near East (Fs M. H. Hope; Guildford, 1987), p. 95.


For köper in this negative sense, see 1 Sam. xii 3 and Amos v 12; cf. Prov. xiii 8; Shad almost always has the connotation of a “bribe”; cf. V. P. Hamilton, “Shad”, TWOT II, p. 914; see e.g. Prov. xvii 23.

Cf. Wright (n. 8), p. 91: “It was, after all, open to a man who discovered or suspected that his wife was adulterous to divorce her privately rather than expose her publicly and demand her execution—even if the latter might be his proper legal duty.”

THE STONE OF DEEPEST DARKNESS:
A MINERALOGICAL MYSTERY (JOB XXVIII)

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beings. It reads "He puts an end to darkness and explores to the uttermost boundaries." Adopting Yellin's suggestion, we shall therefore put these aside and concentrate on 3c and v. 4, examining them as though they formed two distichs.

The fundamental meaning of \( n\ell h \) is an intermittent stream, a wadi. There is some evidence of a secondary sense as "valley", but this probably is restricted to the kind of gully in the land carved out by a wadi. At first sight, neither a wadi nor any sort of valley seems at all appropriate to the verse we reconstruct from 3c and 4a:

\[ n\ell h \]

The first phrase, for phrase it is without trace of a verb, is the gloomy and foreboding "the stone of deep darkness and the shadow of death".\(^2\) Certainly this does not make any contact with the two lines which precede it; nor seemingly with the following line. The phrase, in its literal sense, while redolent of the catacomb, is devoid of meaning. The foreboding expression, \( l\ell p w\ell s\ell m\ell w\ell t \), is to be found also in Job x 21 and 22. There it describes the Underworld.\(^3\) By substituting "the Underworld" for the expression, we may advance towards an understanding of this verse. "The stone of the Underworld" does have a meaning. It is surely lava. R. Gordis\(^4\) had some inkling of this, but translated only the word \( n\ell h \) as lava, allowing \( l\ell p w\ell s\ell m\ell w\ell t \) to represent, as in the rare weak compromises with this verse, dark colours.\(^5\) His version is "The lava, dark and pitch-black".

All that any prescientific person knew about lava was that it erupted from time to time and ran in streams down the sides of volcanoes and then solidified. It is the only "stone" that spontaneously forms rivers. The most economical way of expressing this in Biblical Hebrew is surely by the clause \( w\ell s\ell m\ell w\ell t \), i.e., it breaks out as an intermittent stream. I therefore suggest that the beginning of this verse be interpreted as:

The very substance of the Underworld erupts a stream.

The remainder of the verse, \( m\ell m \) reveals the relevance of this. The rare construction \( m\ell m \) means "from with", or "beside", and a \( m \) is a "sojourner" in a verbal sense.\(^7\) So what this verse is asserting is that even so rare and perilous an event as the exteriorization of the interior of the earth—a volcanic eruption—is witnessed by some member of this ubiquitous race.