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ḥokmā, bînā and tebûnā in Biblical Hebrew—

A Semantic Study

Michael Vass Fox

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the require-
ments for Ordination.

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to describe fully the meaning and interrelationship of three words, hokmā, bīnā and tᵉbūnā. These words are of central importance in biblical wisdom literature and are used frequently elsewhere in the Bible. A full understanding of these words is an essential part of the study of biblical wisdom literature.

A complete semantic study must include more than meaning. It must consider the semantic field formed by the words in question. The semantic field theory was developed by J. Trier as a method for applying the principles of structural linguistics to semantics. Words do not exist in isolation; they are in constant relation with other words in the language. This relation determines their linguistic value.

The meaning of the words is described by categorizing their senses. The meaning of a word is a summary or abstraction of the senses of that word. "Sense" refers to the ways in which a word can be used. The following outline of the senses of hokmā, bīnā and tᵉbūnā is used:

I. Practical sagacity: the knowledge and ability that cause a man to succeed in his everyday life and occupation.

II. Ethical-religious wisdom: Wisdom of divine origin that teaches moral rectitude and inspires ethical action.

III. Speculative wisdom: understanding of life and the phenomenal world.

IV. A formal technique for attaining the latter; a
discipline of learning. Ecclesiastes uses this
sense when speaking of the enterprise or tradition
that sought speculative wisdom, rather than of
that wisdom itself.

V. Personification of wisdom (mainly Proverbs 8).
Since the three words are used in senses I, II, III, and
V, they are completely synonymous, if we exclude sense
IV, which is Ecclesiastes' idiosyncratic and late usage
of ḥokmā.

The synonymy is on the cognitive level. But on
the level of style differences appear. Study of the
distribution of the three words shows a distinctive
pattern of occurrence. When joined in series or when
in parallelism, ḥokmā is invariably first. bînā and
tᵉbûnā are words of lesser stylistic importance.
They are tacked on to ḥokmā for emphasis, never the
other way around. There is no distinction between
bînā and tᵉbûnā.

On the level of meaning-content, no articulation
appeared in the field formed by these words. Their
semantic value could not be described. But by broadening
Trier's semantic field to include the factor of style,
articulation appears and the field may be described. With
this addition, the semantic field can include homoionyms,
words that are synonyms on the conceptual level but
differ on the stylistic (emotive-aesthetic) level.

CONTENTS

ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā in Biblical Hebrew--

A Semantic Study

There are many studies of Israelite wisdom as an intellectual, religious, social and literary phenomenon. This is not one. This is not a study of wisdom or wisdom literature itself, but of three words for wisdom, ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā. But a semantic study of these terms will throw light on Biblical wisdom and wisdom literature, because ideas are built from words, and ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā are three of the most significant words in Biblical wisdom literature.

ḥokmā occurs 149 times[1] in the Bible, 88 times in the wisdom books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, which comprise about 9% of the Bible). bînā occurs 36 times,[2] 22 times in the wisdom books. tᵉbûnā occurs 40 times,[3] 23 in the wisdom books. Their occurrences in the wisdom books are more or less evenly distributed, except that bînā and tᵉbûnā do not occur in Ecclesiastes, and the frequency of occurrence of ḥokma in Ecclesiastes is more than three times as great as the frequency of its occurrence in the other wisdom books: ḥokmā occurs in Ecclesiastes once every 7.21 verses, in Proverbs once

every 24.07 verses, in Job once every 59.4 verses.
Ecclesiastes' vocabulary is idiosyncratic in use as well
as in distribution, as we shall see.

I have included plural forms alongside the singular
forms of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā, because there is no
apparent distinction in meaning between the plural and
singular; that is, a plural or apparently plural form
does not necessarily show plurality. bînôt occurs once,
in Isa 27:11, כי לא עם בינות הוא "For he is not a people
possessing bînôt." There is nothing in the verse to
suggest a special meaning for this plural form.
tᵉbûnôt occurs five times (Ps 49:4, 78:72, Prov 11:12,
28:16, Job 32:12). In Ps 49:4 and Job 32:12, tᵉbûnôt
may mean "wise sayings," but not necessarily. It may
be a plural with abstract force, but since the singular
itself is often abstract, there is no noticeable dif-
ference in meaning. Even if the plural sometimes carries
the idea of a plurality of sayings, the singular can
also have that sense, as in Prov 5:1, ולתבונתי הט
אזנך "Incline your ear to my tᵉbûnā," where tᵉbûnā
refers to the series of maxims he is about to speak.
In Ps 78:72, ובתבונות כפיו ינחם "and by the tᵉbûnôt
of his hands he led them," there is no clear plurality
involved. (תבונות כפיו is parallel to כתם לבבו, and
expresses a qualityoof character, not a plurality of
wise acts.) ḥokmôt occurs five times (Ps 49:4, Prov 1:20,

9:1, 24:7, and Prov 14:1, reading ḥokmôṯ for ḥakmôṯ).
In Ps 49:4, it appears to be a plural form because it is
parallel with təḇunôṯ. Prov 24:7 is obscure. In Prov
1:20, 9:1 and 14:1 it is clearly singular, because in
these verses ḥokmôṯ is the subject of singular verbs and
the referent of feminine singular possessive morphemes.
But ḥokmôṯ is probably not a plural form. The plural
would be read *ḥăkāmôṯ, like ʿărālôṯ from ʿorlā (Josh
5:3). ḥokmôṯ is a Canaanite form (from Canaanite *ḥukmatu)
which was preserved alongside ḥokmā.(Albright, VTS III, p.8).
It may be that təḇunôṯ in Ps 49:4 arose because the
writer felt ḥokmôṯ to be plural. At any rate, there is
no provable difference between פי ידבר חכמות "My mouth
will speak ḥokmôṯ in Ps 49:4 and פי צדיק יהגה חכמה "The
mouth of the righteous utters ḥokmā" in Ps 37:30.
So the plural and pseudo-plural forms can be considered
together with the singular forms.

This study is confined to the nominal forms ḥokmā,
bînā, and təḇûnā. We cannot assume that there is an
immediate correlation between the various grammatical
forms of one root. The possession of ḥokmā in certain
of its senses may not make a man a ḥākām. "Craft" and
"crafty" in English have considerably different ranges
of meaning. The noun "undertaker" has lost its con-
nection with the verb "to undertake" and is now associ-
ated with the verb "to take under." A study of that noun

would go astray if it were to proceed from the verb.
A fuller study of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā might consider
the verbal, adjectival and other nominal forms of their
roots, but our three words can be sufficiently studied
by themselves.

I will consider the semantic field of the three words
in addition to their meanings. A thorough semantic
study today cannot stop with a listing of the meanings
of the words it considers, but it must go beyond the
individual words to consider the field they form.
According to Ullmann, "a 'Copernican revolution' has
taken place in semantics with the development of the
concept of the semantic field"(Semantics, p. 160).
First I will discuss the important theory of the se-
mantic field and its possible application to this study.
Later I will consider the semantic field formed specifically
by the words ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā.

The founder of structural linguistics, Ferdinand
de Saussure, provided the theoretical basis for the con-
cept of the semantic field (in Trier's terminology,
linguistic field--sprachliches Feld or lexical field--
lexikalisches Feld). This basis is the pregnant idea
of "value" (valeur): "Language is a system of inter-
dependent terms in which the value of each term re-
sults solely from the simultaneous presence of the others"

(Saussure pp. 114 f.). That is, the content of a word
is determined not only by its signification, but by its
place in a system of related words. Each word is limited
by the "pressure" of words used to express related
ideas. Saussure illustrates the difference between
signification and value with this example:

> Modern French mouton can have the same
> signification as English sheep but not
> the same value, and this for several reasons,
> particularly because in speaking of a piece
> of meat ready to be served on the table,
> English uses mutton and not sheep. The
> difference in value between sheep and mouton
> is due to the fact that sheep has beside it
> a second term while the French word does not
> (Saussure p. 116).

Expressed in more general terms:

> The characteristic role of language with
> respect to thought is not to create a material
> phonic means for expressing ideas but to serve
> as a link between thought and sound, under
> conditions that of necessity bring about
> the reciprocal delimitations of units.
> Thought, chaotic by nature, has to become
> ordered in the process of its decomposition
> (Saussure, p. 112).

The profound significance of Saussure's concept of
value is that it broke with the previous atomistic
approach to vocabulary and moved to an organic approach,
which saw vocabulary as a system--not a list--of lexical
items. This move toward structural thinking in linguis-
tics was related to the rise of Gestalt psychology
in the decades preceding Saussure's work. (In Trier's
work the influence of Gestalt psychology was more
explicit.)

The implication of Saussure's structural approach
for lexicology is that in describing a vocabulary it
is not sufficient to list the words and their sig-
nifications. Somehow the relations between the words
must be indicated, i.e. the system must be represented.

Jost Trier provided a technique for describing a
lexical system with the idea of a linguistic field.
Corresponding to every "conceptual field" there is
a lexical field that is articulated into a word-mosaic
and that covers the entirety of the conceptual field.
A word acquires meaning only through its relation to
other words in the field. Thus, within the conceptual
field of color the word "blue" gains its meaning by
being limited by the words "green", "black", "blue-grey",
etc. Were there only three words for colors, those
three would divide up the spectrum and determine each
others' value.

A word is not articulated immediately from the
total vocabulary. Each word is articulated from a
field of a higher order, and that linguistic field is
itself articulated from a field of a higher order, and
so on, until the various orders of fields have combined
into a total vocabulary (Trier, Das Sprachliche Feld,
p.430). Trier describes his concept of the structure
of vocabulary in his definition of linguistic fields:

> Felder sind die zwischen den Einzelworten
> und dem Wortschatzganzen lebendigen sprach-
> lichen Wirklichkeiten, die als Teilganze mit

> dem Wort das Merkmal gemeinsam haben, dass
> sie sich ergliedern, mit dem Wortschatz
> hingegen, dass sie sich ausgliedern. Die
> Ordnungshöhe ist dabei gleichgültig. (Trier,
> Das Sprachliche Feld, p. 430).

The ultimate linguistic field of every language corresponds to the entire universe (of that society, we must add), but each language will articulate the universal conceptual field differently (Trier, Behagel-Festschrift, pp.198ff.)

It should be noted that in spite of his stress on the idea of articulation and in spite of his use of the mosaic as a model, Trier does not regard the field boundary lines as clearly delimited or the field areas as contiguous with no overlapping, as he has been thought to maintain (Ullmann pp.158f., Oehman p.130). On the contrary, he regards as an argument in favor of his system (as opposed to Jolles' and Portzig's) that in his more realistic system. . .

> . . .die Aussengrenzen des Feldes offenbar
> recht ungewiss sind, die Zahl der Bestandteile
> unordentlicherweise zu- und abnehmen kann,
> und die Binnengrenzen, weit davon entfernt, als
> klare mathematische Grenzkonturen sich zu
> erweisen, in Wahrheit vielmehr Ueberschneid-
> ungszonen und schwankende Uebergangssäume
> darstellen, und also nichts der Ipsenschen
> Definition gemäss ist (Das Sprachliche Feld,
> p.447).

This principle of fluid boundaries and overlapping areas is clearly borne out by the field of the words considered in this investigation.

Trier saw the value of his linguistic field theory

as lying mainly in two types of studies, diachronic
studies within one language, and comparative linguistics.
In Der deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes
(1931) (summarized in Das Sprachliche Feld), he offered
a striking example of the value of his approach for
historical linguistics. He brought the idea of the "re-
grouping" (Umgliederung) of words into fields to a
study of intellectual terms of Middle High German and
showed how the regrouping reflected a significant change
in the society's view of thought and intellect.
But it is not necessary to enter historical or compar-
ative linguistics to utilize successfully the semantic
field technique. In a synchronic lexical study the se-
mantic field technique is of great value, or even
essential, in finding the value (in the Saussurian
sense) of the words under investigation and the particular
Weltansicht behind those words.

The question of correlation between a semantic field
and thought brings us into the problem of ethnolin-
guistics, which is as difficult as it is important,
but can only be touched upon here. The semantic field
was devised as a technique for describing a national
Weltansicht, Humboldt's term for the particular way
in which each linguistic group views and structures the
world. Trier worked with Humboldtian presumptions
throughout. He begins his essay thus: "Durch die

Zwischenwelt der Sprache hindurch ist uns das Sein gegeben. Sprache bietet uns Sein dar," (D. Sprachliche Feld, p.428) and "Gliederung ist das allgemeinste und tiefste Wesenmerkmal aller Sprache /Humboldt7" (ibid.p.429). Recently James Barr published an excellent polemic against the too loose and poorly considered use of Humboldtian assumptions in Biblical studies (The Semantics of Biblical Language, Oxford 1961). He effectively criticizes the various ways in which Biblical scholars take sub-sentence linguistic units and syntagmatic relationships of Biblical Hebrew and Greek and derive from them ideas about a supposedly corresponding Biblical theology. In particular he criticizes working from "vocabulary stocks"(pp. 34 seq.). But to a large extent, the examples of the approach that he criticizes are straw-men. Their fault is that they jump from the lexical unit to the theological idea. The theological idea is on the cognitive level, a consciously developed level of thought. An unpredictable individual thought-process determines the outcome of the movement from lexical unit to theological idea. But on a less gross level of thought, before the individual shaping of the idea comes into play, could there be a correspondence between vocabulary structure and thought-structure (Weltansicht)? I think that it is legitimate to see correspondence between the lexical unit in its field and a more immediate, unde-

veloped, area of human thought--a subliminal structuring

of reality. That is to say, the ancient Greek who

included the colors greenish-yellow and red in the term

ōchrŏs saw the colors as well as we do, and if asked to

distinguish between them could certainly do so, but on a

sub-cognitive level he joined the two colors, so that if

he were asked to match groups of colored objects, he

would most likely match greenish-yellow and red, which

an English speaker would never do. The Modern Hebrew

speaker is capable of recognizing the difference between

study and learn, but he probably usually thinks of these

two activities as one, because in his vocabulary structure

they are joined in one word, lāmad. The reality of

this structuring of thought through language is shown

by the definite resistance to distinguishing "study"

from "learn" on the part of a Hebrew speaker beginning

the study of English.

Trier's work on Middle High German intellectual

vocabulary still offers the most striking and verifiable

evidence for the correspondence of vocabulary structure

and Weltansicht. In Middle High German around 1200,

part of the field of "intellect" was covered by three

words, wîsheit, kunst and list. Kunst is the higher,

courtly range of knowledge, including social behavior.

List is the lower, technical range of skill and knowledge,

including magical knowledge. Wîsheit can serve for

either type of knowledge, but also means both of them

together. It is a synthetic term, viewing man as a totality, and combines _sapientia personalis_ and _sapientia Dei_.

In 1300 three terms cover the field of knowledge, _wisheit_, _kunst_ and _wizzen_. The content of the three terms and their interrelationship have changed. _Wisheit_ is no longer a synthetic term, but refers specifically to religious or mystical knowledge. The courtly and social connotations have disappeared from the _kunst-wizzen_ duality. "The distinction between spiritual wisdom and mundane skill results in a loss of the catholic outlook peculiar to the earlier system" (Ullmann p.166).

The earlier, atomistic approach to lexicology would have seen that one word left, another entered, and would have noted the individual changes in meaning, but it would not have seen the fundamental change in structure.

A complete semantic study today must take into account the semantic field of the words being investigated and the possible implications this has for understanding the _Weltansicht_ of the language community. However, too much should not be claimed for ethnolinguistics at this early stage in its development.

The meaning of ḥokmā, bînā, tᵉḇûnā

It is helpful to distinguish between meaning and sense. The senses of a word are the ways in which the word is used, or the things to which it refers. There may be many senses within one meaning; this is called polysemy. The meaning of a word is a summary or abstraction of the senses of that word. Thus the meaning of "assault" is "accost, attack." But the word has several senses: it can be used of one person attacking another physically, of a military charge, of one person attacking another with words, in legal terminology, of a threat to do harm, etc. These senses are quite different from each other, but the language abstracts what they have in common, which abstraction is the meaning of the word "assault." I will describe the meaning of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉḇûnā by categorizing their senses and describing them. These senses are closely related, and the words can be used as labels for the totality of the senses, but the words are usually used of one sense in particular. This flexibility of words in encompassing several senses in one meaning is a source of richness in language.

We are usually led by our translation of ḥokmā as "wisdom" and tᵉḇûnā and bînā as "understanding" and also by our consciousness of the distinction between the verbal uses of the roots to think that these words refer to fundamentally different types of mental acti-

vity. We tend to think that $t^e\hat{b}\bar{u}n\bar{a}$ and $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$ are as-
sociated with b$\hat{e}$n "between" and mean the ability to
draw distinctions, understanding in the sense of per-
ception, more or less "native intelligence." ḥokmā
tends to be thought of primarily as knowledge, erudition,
and the quality of having that knowledge and erudition
(other senses, such as "skill" are recognized, of
course). However, these words cannot be distinguished
from one another as types of mental activity. The three
words join native intelligence, mental activity, and
content of that activity in one meaning. $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$ clearly
can refer to content of knowledge, as is shown by the fact
that $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$ occurs as the object of yd^c more times than
of any other verb (six, including participial forms as
verbs), e.g. Prov 4:1:　שמעו בנים מוסר אב והקשיבו לדעת בינה
"Hear, sons, the instruction of the father, and hear-
ken to know $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$." $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$ can also refer to mental ability,
as in Prov 3:5:　ואל בינתך אל תשען　". . .and rely not upon
your own $\hat{b}\bar{\imath}n\bar{a}$. $t^e\hat{b}\bar{u}n\bar{a}$ can refer to content, as in
Prov 5:1:　לתבונתי הט אזנך　"Incline your ear to my $t^e\hat{b}\bar{u}n\bar{a}$,"
and to mental ability, as in Isa 44:19:　ולא תבונה לאמור
"Neither is there knowledge nor $t^e\hat{b}\bar{u}n\bar{a}$ חציו שרפתי במו אש וכו'
/in the idolator/ to say, I have burned half of it in
fire etc." ḥokmā can mean mental ability, as in Job
39:17:　כי השה אלוה חכמה ולא חלק לה בבינה　"For God has de-
prived her /the ostrich/ of ḥokmā, and has not allot-

ted to her bīnā." And ḥokmā can mean content, as in

Prov 1:2: לדעת חכמה ומוסר "To know ḥokmā and moral in-

struction." So these words cannot be distinguished by

mental ability versus content. Probably that was not

a relevant distinction for the ancient Hebrew speaker,

who used one word to encompass activity and attainment.

We may note that of the thirteen words the Septuagint

uses to translate ḥokmā, bīnā and tebūnā, four are

used for all three of the Hebrew words, two are used

for two of the three, and the other six occur only

once or twice each. The translators apparently saw

no distinctions among these three words.

As we shall see, from the point of view of the

whole language, these three words are almost complete

synonyms, at least with regard to their meanings.

(They can be distinguished on the level of style,

as we shall see later.) They cover virtually identical

semantic fields. At any one point in time the words

may have differed substantially, but we do not have

a workable means of dating Biblical material, and even

if we did, we do not have enough material to permit

several complete synchronic semantic studies.

The best way to map the meaning of each word is

to outline its various senses. If the outline is too

broad, we are in danger of obscuring distinctions

between words. If it is too detailed, the paucity of

occurrences of some of the words might lead us to draw

false distinctions, just because by chance some of the

smaller categories are not filled. Any outline is

necessarily arbitrary--it imposes a neatness on thought

that is not necessarily there. But the alternative is

to state a general impression of the word's meaning that

does not do justice to the multiple senses of the word.

The only criterion for a "word-map" such as will be offer-

ed is workability: How well does it account for the

actual uses of the words? How well does it describe the

terrain covered by the senses of the words?

I have found the following outline of the meaning

of hokmā, bīnā and tĕbūnā to be the most workable.

It is divided primarily according to area of wisdom/

understanding. That is, when it says that a man has

hokmā, what is the area of his knowledge or understand-

ing referred to in this verse?

    I. Practical sagacity

        a. In a broad sense: general reasoning ability,

           ability to comprehend, native intelligence.

        b. Statecraft: ability and knowledge neces-

           sary for a ruler and his advisors.

        c. Technical knowledge: craftsmanship, skill.

   II. Ethical-religious wisdom.

 III. Speculative wisdom: understanding of life and

      the phenomenal world.

 IV. A formal technique for attaining this, a

      discipline of learning.

V. Personification of wisdom.

One occurrence can include more than one category,

as may be the case in 1K 11:41, but this is rare.

Much more frequent are the cases where the category

is unclear, as in Deut 4:6: ‏ושמרתם ועשיתם כי הוא חכמתכם

‏ובינתכם לעיני הגוים אשר ישמעון את כל החוקים האלה‎"Observe and do

‏וכו'‎
them, for it is your ḥokmā and your bīnā in the eyes of

the nations who will hear of all these statutes and

say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and under-

standing people.'" I think the author has something

quite specific in mind, but it is unclear just what.

He may mean that the nations will see your law code and

compare it with their juridical wisdom, or he may mean

that just as the nations have a literature of spec-

ulative wisdom which claims to understand life, you have

a Torah, which will impress the nations who will com-

pare it with their wisdom literature, or he may mean that

the nations will see your Law as proof of your general

intelligence and reasoning ability. Likewise, does

1K 10:24 refer to Solomon's judicial sagacity, i.e.

they came to hear him hold court, or to his speculative

wisdom, i.e. they came to hear his mešalīm and širīm?

However, if at least one certain occurrence can be found

for a category, that category is established as a sense

of that word. Also, I would stress the interrelatedness

of the senses. Practical sagacity is recommended by the ethical-religious wisdom (i.e. Proverbs), which would include practical sagacity in everyday affairs as an ethical-religious norm. The boundaries between the sub-categories are especially fluid. But for the most part the various senses can be distinguished.

In the exegetical footnotes at the end of this essay I consider certain difficult verses that are not discussed in the body of the paper.

I. Practical sagacity.

hokmā, bīnā and tᵉbūnā can refer to the knowledge and abilities that cause a man to succeed in his every-day life and occupation or in an activity he has under-taken. In this sense the words do not necessarily have a positive connotation. Whether the connotation is positive, negative or neutral depends on the author's opinion of the activity and the subject in question.

a. General reasoning ability, ability to com-prehend, or native intelligence, and the comprehension itself (the following sub-categories are perhaps nar-rower uses of this sub-category). E.g. Job 39:17: /The ostrich does not have enough sense to take care of her young,/"for God has deprived her of hokmā, and has not allotted to her bīnā." hokmā and bīnā are the qualities that would enable her to perform her daily

duties. Isa 44:19: ולא ישיב אל לבו ולא דעת ולא תבונה לאמר

חציו שרפתי במו אש ... ואחרן לתועבה אעשה לבול עץ אסגוד ?

"He does not consider it in his heart, neither is there
knowledge nor t^{e}būnā /in him/ to say, 'I have burned
half of it in the fire. . .And shall I make the residue
of it into an abomination? Shall I fall down to the
stock of a tree?'" Here t^{e}būnā means the ability to
follow out a simple syllogism. Occurrences:

ḥokmā: 2S 20:22, 1K 2:6, Jer 9:22[4], Prov 21:30[5], 24:3[6],
Ecc 2:9, 2:21, 2:26[7], 7:10[8], 9:13[9], 9:15, 9:16[7] (2X),
9:18?[7], 10:1, Job 39:17.

bînā: Isa 33:19, Ob 1:7, Prov 3:5, Job 20:3, 39:17,
39:26.

t^{e}būnā: 1K 5:9?, Isa 40:28, 44:19, Ps 147:5 (of God),
Prov 20:5[9], 21:30[5], 24:3[6], Job 26:12.

b. Statecraft: abilities and knowledge applying
to a ruler and his advisors. This includes juridical,
administrative, political and military knowledge and
astuteness. 2Ch 1:10 shows that military and juridical
wisdom are in the same basic category: ועתה חכמה ומדע תן

לי ואצאה לפני העם הזה ואבואה כי מי ישפט את עמך הגדול הזה

ys' wbw' refers to military leadership. Špt means
both judge and rule, although a particular use may be
restricted to one sense (cf. 1S 8:5,6,29, Mic 4:14
/=king7 and in general the term šopēt in Judges).
Ḥokmā is used of the king of Tyre's shrewdness in
financial affairs in Ezekiel 28. In Isa 11:2, rū^{a}ḥ

ḥokmā ûbînā refers in general to the Messianic king's

rulership abilities. Isa 29:14, ואבדה חכמת חכמיו ובינת

נבניו תסתתר "And the ḥokmā of his wise men will perish
and
∧the bînā of his men of understanding will be hidden,"

may refer to these same talents but with reference

to royal advisors. Joshua received rûᵃḥ ḥokmā, as a

result of which "the children of Israel hearkened to

him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses (Deut

34:9). These talents may be held by persons other than

officials, e.g. 2S 20:22, the wise woman of Abel Beth-

maacah. Occurrences:

ḥokmā: Deut 34:9, 2S 20:22, 1K 3:28, Isa 10:13, 11:2,

29:14[10], Jer 49:7[11](2X), Ezek 28:4, 28:5, 28:7[12],

28:12[12], 28:17[12], Prov 21:30, 2Ch 1:10, 1:11, 1:12.

bînā: Isa 11:2, 29:14[10], 1Ch 22:12[13]

tᵉbûnā: Ezek 28:4, Ob 1:8[14], Ps 78:72.

c. Technical knowledge and skill, craftsmanship.

Just as ḥokmā, bînā, and tᵉbûnā refer to the knowledge

and ability that make a king succeed in his work, so

do they refer to the knowledge and ability that make

the skilled worker succeed in his work, as in Exod

36:1: ועשה בצלאל ואהליאב וכל איש חכם-לב אשר נתן ה' חכמה

ותבומה בהמה לדעת לעשת את כל מלאכת עבדת הקדש לכל אשר צוה ה'

"Then Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled worker

/lit. 'every man who is wise of heart'/ in whom the

Lord has put ḥokmā and tᵉbûnā to know how to do all

the work connected with the service of the Sanctuary

shall do all the Lord has commanded." In Ps 107:27
hokmā is used of nautical skills. hokmā and bînā
are used in this sense with regard to God, as in Jer
10:12, עשה ארץ בכחו   מכין תבל בחכמתו   ובתבונתו נטה שמים
"He made the earth by his power; he established the
world by his hokmā; and by his t^{e}bûnā he stretched out
the heavens." The sense of the words is not fundamental-
ly different when used of God, except when this sense
of the word hokmā enters into the personification of
wisdom, as we will see later. Occurrences:
hokmā: Exod 28:3[15], 31:3, 35:26, 35,31, 35:35, 36:1,
36:2, 1K 7:14, Ps 107:27, 1Ch 28:21, divine: Jer 10:12,
51:15, Ps 104:24, Prov 3:19.
bînā: 1Ch 12:33[16], 2Ch 2:12.
t^{e}bûnā: Exod 31:3, 35:31, 36:1, 1K 7:14, divine:
Jer 10:12, 51:15, Ps 136:5, Prov 3:19.

II. Ethical-religious wisdom.

This is the type of wisdom recommended and exem-
plified by the Book of Proverbs. Its main purpose is
to get people to behave morally. Speculation about
life and the cosmos is of very minor importance in the
wisdom referred to by the words hokmā, bînā and
t^{e}bûnā in this sense. The equation of hokmā and
ethical behavior is seen in Prov 4:11:   בדרך חכמה הוריתיך
הדרכתיך במעגלי ישר   "I have taught you in the way of

hokmā, led you in paths of rectitude." hokmā is the

antithesis of evil behavior: כשחוק לכסיל עשות זמה

וחכמה לאיש תבונה "Acting lewdly is a pleasure for a

vicious man, but hokmā /is a pleasure/ for a man of

t^ebūnā (Prov 10:23).

The theme verse of the Book of Proverbs shows

that its system is a fundamentally religious system:

יראת ה' ראשית דעת חכמה ומוסר אוילים בזו "The fear of

the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; hokmā and

moral instruction fools despise" (da^cat = hokmā,

cf. Prov 9:10). hokmā starts with the fear of God

(yir'at YHWH could be translated "religion," in the

sense of internal, personal, religion). The antithesis

of fear of God/religion is the despising of hokmā and

mūsār, moral instruction. Even when Proverbs recommends

practical sagacity and industry in everyday affairs

it is speaking within a religious system, as may be

seen in the following consideration. Proverbs

concludes by applying its ethical-religious system to

women. Prov 31:10-31 describes at length the ideal

woman as one who is industrious and intelligent in her

commercial and household activities. The poem reaches

a climax with the verse: אישה יראת-ה' היא תתהלל "A

woman who fears the Lord is to be praised!" (Prov 31:30).

This woman, by virtue of her intelligence and industry

in practical matters, is religious. Her hokmā is

identical with her fear of the Lord. Practical sagacity

is generally one of the norms of ethical-religious
wisdom, but not without restrictions. Prov 21:30
says that practical sagacity that is "against the
Lord" is futile: אין חכמה ואין תבונה ואין עצה לנגד ה'
"There is no ḥokmā and there is no tᵉḇûnā and there
is no counsel against the Lord." V. 31 restates the
point of v. 30 more specifically applied: סוס מוכן

      ליום מלחמה ולה' התשועה "The horse is prepared for the
day of battle--but victory is of the Lord." Ethical-
religious wisdom, by its very nature, cannot be "against
the Lord." But practical sagacity, which is usually
part of the ethical-religious normative system, some-
times can be outside it. Prov 21:30, 31 excludes
such irreligious practical sagacity.

      Prov 2 presents the program of the Book of Proverbs.
Here we can see the essence of ethical-religious
wisdom. The father (or teacher) says, if you listen
to my ḥokmā and tᵉḇûnā and seek eagerly for bînā and
tᵉḇûnā . . .   אז תבין יראת ה' ודעת אלהים תמצא "Then you
will understand the fear of the Lord, and knowledge
of God you will attain" (v. 5). He will comprehend
yir'at YHWH (which is the same as daᶜat ᵉlōhîm) because
God is the source and giver of ethical-religious
wisdom: כי ה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה "The Lord gives
ḥokmā; from his mouth comes knowledge and tᵉḇûnā" (v. 6).
ḥokmā in this sense is not man's own reason; it is
something external to it. It is not primarily his

native intelligence or something he figures out for himself. In Prov 28:26, בוטח בלבו "he who trusts in his own heart" (lēḇ = intellectual ability in Proverbs, cf. 17:16) is the opposite of הולך בחכמה "he who walks in ḥokmā" (that is, in the "straight paths" that are the same as ḥokmā, cf. Prov 4:11). Almost all occurrences of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā in Proverbs are in the sense of ethical-religious wisdom. Occurrences:

ḥokmā: Isa 33:6[17], Ps 37:30, 51:8[18], 90:12[19], 111:10, Prov 1:2, 1:7, 2:2, 2:6, 2:10[20], 3:13, 4:5, 4:7 (2X), 4:11, 5:1, 9:10, 10:13, 10:23, 10:31, 11:2[21], 13:10, 14:6[22], 14:8, 14:33, 15:33, 16:16[23], 17:16, 17:24, 18:4[24], 23:23, 24:14, 28:26, 29:3, 29:15, 31:26[25], Ecc 7:12[26] (2X).

bînā: Isa 27:11[27], 29:24, Prov 1:2, 2:3, 4:1, 4:5, 4:7, 9:6, 9:10, 16:16, 23:4, 23:23.

tᵉbûnā: Deut 32:28[28], Isa 40:14[27], Prov 2:2, 2:3, 2:6, 2:11, 3:13, 5:1, 10:23, 11:12, 14:29, 15:21, 17:27, 18:2, 19:8, 28:16.

III. Speculative wisdom: an understanding of human life and earthly and cosmic phenomena.

This type of wisdom could be called "philosophy," more or less in the Greek sense of the term. That is not to say that there was Greek influence on Hebrew wisdom, or that the methodology was the same,

but there is a similarity in their approach and concerns.
Both used unaided human reason to understand the
meaning of life and the nature of the universe.❡ This
type of wisdom is the concern of the Book of Job.
The author finally rejects the possibility of attain-
ing such wisdom, but he naturally uses the words in
this sense while discussing this speculative wisdom.
Job's friends think they have it, but Job says they
do not and cannot.   In Job 42:7 God says that Job
spoke correctly, by which he means that Job was right
in denying that the comforters had wisdom of this sort.
The wisdom song of ch. 28 states the point of the
whole book.   It says that man has great technological
powers.   He can mine into the hidden depths of the
earth.   But. . .   והחכמה מאין תמצא ואי זה מקום בינה
"whence can ḥokmā be attained, and where is the place
of bīnā?" Wisdom in this sense, the fathoming of the
secrets of life and cosmos, is beyond man's reach.
His wealth cannot start to buy it.   God alone has
this wisdom, and he tells man: הן יראת ה' היא חכמה
וסור מרע בינה   "Behold, the fear of the Lord--that is
ḥokmā and turning away from evil is bīnā."   Man
cannot comprehend the meaning of life or the nature of
the cosmos; ethical- (stich b) religious (stich a)
wisdom is the only kind man can have.

Agur's message (Prov 30) is basically the same as
the Book of Job's, a rejection of speculative wisdom
in favor of ethical-religious wisdom as the only wis-
dom for man. Agur says that he is ignorant, does not
have human intelligence, and has not learned wisdom--
speculative wisdom (vv.2,3). But he does have religious
knowledge--da°at q°dôšîm, (cf. Prov 9:10, where da°at
q°dôšîm is parallel to yir'at YHWH).[30] Agur's religious
knowledge, which he has although he does not have ḥokmā
(in sense III) consists of recognizing the unequalled
majesty of God and the purity of his words, and of a
series of ethical maxims. Agur, like the author of
Job, prefers ethical-religious wisdom to speculative
wisdom, so his poem is fitting for the Book of Proverbs.

This category includes Naturweisheit of the sort
that was probably the content of Solomon's parables
and songs on flora and fauna (cf. Alt, Die Weisheit Salomos).
It may include the ḥokmā that he showed the Queen of
Sheba, especially if ḥîdôt means "perplexing questions" 1K10:1
(Koehler-Baumgartner).

The ethical-religious wisdom of Proverbs also claims
to understand human life, but this understanding is
always implicitly normative; it leads to and actually
is moral behavior. ḥokmā etc. in the sense of spec-
ulative wisdom is not directed toward behavior.
It is static, in that it has no goal beyond itself.

Occurrences:

ḥokmā: 2S 14:20,[31] 1K 5:9[32], 5:10[32] (3X), 5:14[32] (2X), 10:4[33], 10:5[33], 10:7[33], 10:8[33], 10:24, Ps 49:4[34], Prov 30:3, Job 4:21[35], 11:6[36], 12:12, 12:12[37], 13:5[38], 15:8[31], 26:3[39], 28:12 (2X), 28:18, 28:20, 28:28, 32:7, 32:18, 33:13[40], Ecc 1:16[41] (2X), 8:1?[42], Dan 1:4?[43], 1:17?[43], 1:20?[43], 2Ch 9:3, 9:5, 9:6, 9:7, 9:22, 9:23.

bînā: Jer 23:20, Prov 30:2, Job 28:12, 28:20, 28:28, 38:4, Dan 1:20?[43].

tᵉbûnā: 1K5:9[32], Job 12:12?[37], 12:13[38], 32:12.

IV. A formal intellectual discipline for attaining understanding of human life and the universe.

There is a subtile but significant difference between ḥokmā in sense III and ḥokmā in sense IV (as opposed to the sub-categories of sense I, where the differences are often obvious but not so significant). There was an enterprise: men sought to understand human life and the cosmos. The understanding that they attained and the mental ability with which they attained it was called ḥokmā, bînā or tᵉbûnā—sense III. Then hokma was applied to the enterprise itself—sense IV. Sense IV is a metonomy of sense III. Sense IV is ḥokmā as a rᵉᶜāyôn, a pursuit. This is

exclusively Qoheleth's use of the word. He applies it
to the intellectual discipline that sought understand-
ing of life and the cosmos, rather than to that under-
standing itself. These two senses correspond to the
senses of "philosophy" in the following two sentences:
"He has a philosophy of life"--sense III, and "He is
studying philosophy"--sense IV.

Qoheleth is actually attacking the validity of the
speculative wisdom school of thought. When he says
ḥokmā he is usually referring to the wisdom enterprise.
Qoheleth states his program in 1:13:   ונתתי את לבי לדרוש

"I set my heart to   ולתור בֿחכמה על כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים
search and examine by means of ḥokmā everything done
under the sun." He is going to use the ḥokmā-tech-
nique to investigate life, in order to see how that
technique works. He states his conclusion in advance

ואתנה לבי לדעת חכמה ודעת הוללות ושכלות ידעתי שֿגם זה הוא רעיון

But as I applied   רוח: כי ברב חכמה רב כעס ויוסיף דעת יוסיף
                                                        מכאוב
my mind, I learnt that wisdom and knowledge are madness
and folly. Yes, I perceived that this, too, is chasing
after wind" (1:17f,Gordis' translation). He restates
the conclusion of his search in 8:16f.:   כאשר נתתי את לבי

לדעת חכמה ולראות את הענֿוֿֿ אשר נעשה על הארץ כֿי גם ביום ובלילה שנה

בעיניו איננו ראה: וראיתי את כל מעשה האלהים כי לא יוכל האדם למצוא

את המעשה אשר נעשה תחת השמש בשל אשר יעמל האדם לבקש ולא ימצא וגם אם יאמר

החכם לדעת לא יוכל למצא:

"When I set myself to acquire wisdom and see all the
activity taking place on the earth, I saw that though
a man sleep neither by day nor by night he cannot
discover the meaning of God's work which is done under
the sun, for the sake of which a man may search hard, but
he will not find it, and though a wise man may think he
is about to learn it, he will be unable to find it"
(Gordis' translation). Notice how the word hehākām
is used here in a sense corresponding to sense IV.
Qoheleth does not say that the hākām actually is wise;
on the contrary, he does not have knowledge. Rather,
Qoheleth is using hehākām in a formal sense--a man
who engages in the hokmā-enterprise. I doubt that
Qoheleth would have called the content of the supposed
knowledge of the "wise-man" hokmā, for when used of the
knowledge itself (sense III) it implies correct un-
derstanding, which Qoheleth felt was unattainable.
(The author of Job also felt that hokmā in sense III
is unattainable. Therefore when he used hokmā etc.
in sense III, he either puts the words into the mouths
of the comforters, who think they have it, or, when
Job, God or the anonymous author (ch. 28) use the words
in this sense, it is invariably in a sarcastic,
questioning or negating context.)

Only hokmā is used in sense IV. As the main term
for speculative wisdom, it naturally was chosen as the

label for the intellectual discipline that sought
to understand the meaning of life and the world by use
of unaided human reason.   Occurrences:

ḥokmā: Ecc 1:13, 1:17, 1:18, 2:3[44], 2:12[45], 2:13?,
7:11, 7:23[46], 7:25, 8:16, 9:10.

V. Personification of wisdom.

Personification is a metaphor with some quality,
activity or thing as the tenor and a human being as
the vehicle.   The brilliance of the personification
of wisdom in Proverbs lies in the way the several
senses of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā are combined as the
tenor, for which a woman is the vehicle.   This figure then
includes all types of ḥokmā etc., except for sense IV,
and something said of one type of ḥokmā will apply to
another.   By thus giving ḥokmā and its correlatives
such a broad scope, the importance of ethical-religious
wisdom is elevated.   Emphasizing the importance of
ethical-religious wisdom is the didactic purpose of
the personification poems.

The main personification poem is Prov 8.   Vv.
1-3 set up the figure of ḥokmā/tᵉbûnā calling to man.
In vv. 4-13 she praises herself in general, but the
emphasis is on her ethical-religious character (cf.
especially v. 13).   In vv. 14-17 she says that rulers
rule by her.   Now in the back of the listener's mind
is the knowledge that kings who rule successfully have

hokmā. Although this type of hokmā is not necessarily
a positive quality, it is here brought into connection
with ethical-religious wisdom, and so that same type
of wisdom that guides a man in his everyday behavior
takes on regal importance. In vv. 18-21 she joins
righteous paths and riches. Behind these statements
may be the awareness that hokmā in the sense of practical
sagacity naturally leads to riches, but here riches
are a product of ethical-religious wisdom. In vv.
22-31 she becomes a figure of cosmic significance,
reaching back to the time before creation. The reader
knows that "The Lord by hokmā founded the earth,
established the heavens by t^{e}būnā" (Prov 3:19), and that
the Lord "made the earth by his power, established the
world by his hokmā, by his t^{e}būnā stretched out the
heavens" (Jer 10:12, 51:15). At first hokmā etc. in
such statements probably meant no more than technical
skill on a divine plane. But such statements allowed
the poet of Prov 8 to claim divine, primal origin for
the personified hokmā: ה' קנני ראשית דרכו קדם מפעליו מאז

מאז "The Lord created me at the beginning of his do-
minion /Albright, VTS III, p.7/, before any of his
works, of old"(v.22). After all, if God used hokmā
to make the world, she must have been there before
the world. hokmā says, ואהיה אצלו אמון "And I was
with him as a master artificer" (v.30, for 'amōn

see Albright, VTS III, p.7). Technical skill personified
is naturally a master artificer.

The personification of speculative wisdom is not
explicit, but it may be a factor in the cosmic scope
of vv. 22-31, for if any type of wisdom delved into
the far reaches of time it was speculative wisdom.
Possibly this wisdom poem is an implicit synthesis
of ethical-religious and speculative wisdom.

Having proved her royal and cosmogenic importance
ḥokmā can well claim obedience and offer reward and
punishment in vv. 32-36.

bînā and tᵉbûnā are just other names for the
personified ḥokmā. In 8:1 ḥokmā and tᵉbûnā call out,
but they are clearly the same person, as the rest of
the poem shows. I would translate 8:15b as "I, bînā,
have might," but even if this is to be understood as
"I am bînā, I have might" (which is less clear), the
identification of bînā with ḥokmā and tᵉbûnā is com-
plete. Occurrences:

ḥokmā: Prov 1:20, 7:4, 8:1, 8:12, 9:1, 14:1[48].

bînā: Prov 8:14, 7:4.

tᵉbûnā: Prov 8:1.

Broad uses of ḥokmā

Occasionally ḥokmā is used broadly, to cover more
than one category. In each of these cases it may be

just that the context is insufficient, but a wider in-
terpretation of the word seem justified. 1K 10:23

(2Ch 9:22):   ויגדל המלך שלמה מכל מלכי הארץ לעשר ולחכמה

"King Solomon became greater than all the kings of the
earth in wealth and hokmā. This verse is a summary
of Solomon's reign. hokmā here would include his
administrative-juridical skills, his speculative wisdom,
perhaps also ethical-religious wisdom. The verse
speaks of the whole man. Similarly 1K 11:41. Jer
9:22 may be talking about any type of wisdom a man might
possess, but excluding ethical-religious wisdom, because
hokmā here does not have a positive connotation: כה אמר ה'

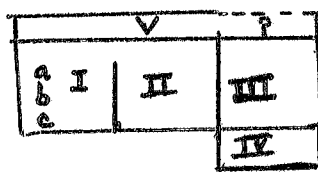אל יתהלל חכם בחכמתו ואל יתהלל הגבור בגבורתו אל יתהלל עשיר בעשרו

<—— "Thus says the Lord, let not the
wise-man glory in his hokmā, and let not the mighty man
glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his
riches."

        Completely obscure: Prov 24:7, Ecc 10:10.

The Interrelationship of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā:

A Segment of a Semantic Field.

The meaning of ḥokmā can be diagrammed thus:

I. Practical sagacity

       a. In a broad sense:
general reasoning abil-
ity, ability to com-
prehend, native intel-
ligence.

       b. Statecraft: ability to
rule and advise ruler.

       c. Technical knowledge:
craftsmanship, skill.

II. Ethical-religious wisdom.

III. Speculative wisdom: under-
standing of life and the
phenomenal world.

IV. A formal technique for
attaining III, a discipline
of learning.

V. Personification of wisdom.

The broken line between I and II indicates that ethical-
religious wisdom included practical sagacity as one of
its norms. The subgroups of I are really only different
facets of one sense and are often not distinct,
so they are not given distinct areas. The dotted
line of V over III indicates that the personification
of speculative wisdom is not made explicit but it is
likely that this type of wisdom was a factor in the
formation of the personified figure. Sense IV, Qoheleth's
use of the word, comes off of III because it is a formal-
ized, metonymic development of III only.

A. The stylistic interrelationship of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā.

bînā and tᵉbûnā fit the same area as ḥokmā, ex-
cept for category IV. Now Ecclesiastes is certainly
later than the rest of the wisdom literature. Most
likely no Biblical wisdom literature besides Ecclesi-
astes is post-exilic.[49] Ecclesiastes is probably third
century, maybe fourth. If this chronology is correct,
then in pre-exilic Hebrew, at least for the periods
covered by texts that use these words, ḥokmā, bînā
and tᵉbûnā were completely synonymous--on the level
of meaning.

But that is not to say that they were identical
inaall respects. Distinct differences appear when we
consider their interrelationship on the level of
style. Style is a very difficult thing to define, but
I will offer a working definition. "Style" refers
to supra-lexical patterns that are not determined by
needs of meaning, but rather by emotive and aesthetic
reasons. By "meaning" I refer only to the referent of
the word on the cognitive level. (A word can have
explicit emotive content, e.g. "nasty," in which case
the emotive content is part of the meaning.) When
stylistic patterns are broken, the meaning is not
changed, but the emotive or aesthetic tone is.

There are two kinds of style, individual style
and communal style. In the latter case, the linguis-
tic community shares certain stylistic patterns, and
it is these that are relevant here.

The stylistic pattern relevant to describing

ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā I will call ordered collocation.

Collocation is the frequent joining of two words, either

side-by-side or in parallelism. Ullmann (p.113)

describes collocation as a way in which synonyms are

frequently handled by speakers of a language, but the

words in collocation do not have to be synonyms. When

synonyms are collocated, it is usually for some type

of emphasis, e.g. "kith and kin," "hearth and home,"

"forever and aye." Often one member of such a collo-

cation is obsolete except in that phrase. A language

tends to economize by losing synonyms. A stylistic

formality such as collocation helps preserve them.

(In Rabbinic Hebrew, when collocation of these words

ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā was no longer used, the latter

two words were virtually lost from the productive

language.) Other words besides synonyms may be joined

to express a stereotyped meaning distinct from the

words used separately, e.g. ṭôb wārāᶜ probably means

"everything," "more or less" means "approximately."

ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā are ordered collocations;

that is, when they appear together they are almost

invariably in a specific order. There are several

ordered collocations in Hebrew, including ḥēn waḥesed,

ṭôb wārāᶜ, tôhû wabôhû, yāmîn ûsᵉm'ôl (not *ḥesed waḥēn,

*rāᶜ waṭôb etc.). These are ordered collocations in

series. Ordered collocations also appear in parallelism,
e.g. rôš//qadqôd, ʿôlām//dôr wādôr, kôs//qubbaʿat, רֹאשׁ
ʾôhel//miškān, bāyit//hêkāl. The three synonyms ḥokmā,
bînā and tᵉbûnā, become distinct on a stylistic level
as ordered collocations.

As ordered collocations in parallelism: Whenever
ḥokmā appears parallel to bînā or tᵉbûnā (13 and 10 times
respectively), ḥokmā is first, e.g. Prov 3:13: אשרי אדם

מצא חכמה|ואדם יפיק תבונה "Happy is the man who has
found ḥokmā/ and the man who has received tᵉbûnā."
Also Prov 4:5: קנה חכמה|קנה בינה "Get ḥokmā/ get bînā.
tᵉbûnā occurs only once parallel to bînā; there the
order is bînā:tᵉbûnā (Prov 2:3). ḥokmā occurs in
parallelism with a variety of words; in 30 out of the
32 times that it appears in parallelism it is first.
bînā does not appear parallel to such a variety of words
as ḥokmā does. bînā appears in parallelism 15 times,
in 12 of which it follows ḥokmā. tᵉbûnā appears in
parallelism 22 times (13 with ḥokmā), 21 times last
(counting the tripartite parallelism of Prov 24:3 as two
parallelisms).

These three words, then, show distinctive patterns
of parallelism. When ḥokmā is parallel to bînā or
tᵉbûnā, it is invariably first. (ḥokmā is almost
always first even when parallel to other words.)

As ordered collocations in series: ḥokmā occurs
in series with tᵉḇūnā 9 times; it is always first.
ḥokmā occurs in series with bīnā 4 times, always first.
Examples: 1K 7:14   וימלא את החכמה ואת התבונה ואת הדעת
"He was filled with ḥokmā and tᵉḇūnā and knowledge."
Deut 4:6   כי הוא חכמתכם ובינתכם "For it is your ḥokmā
and your bīnā."   tᵉḇūnā occurs in series 9 times,
7 times with ḥokmā. Those 7 times it follows ḥokmā.
bīnā appears in series 5 times, 3 times with ḥokmā,
always after it (this includes Prov 23:23, where the
series is ḥokmā ūmūsār ūbīnā). bīnā does not occur
in series with tᵉḇūnā. The three words never occur
together in series. Perhaps it was felt to be excessive
synonymy to collocate the three.

So the invariable pattern is this: ḥokmā is first
in collocation with bīnā or tᵉḇūnā. The latter two
are added on to the more basic word ḥokmā for emphasis,
not vice versa. We may perhaps say that there is some
kind of stylistic "movement" from ḥokmā to bīnā or
tᵉḇūnā, but not the other way.

ḥokmā, bīnā and tᵉḇūnā are what Ullman calls
"pseudo-synonyms," or "homoionyms" (Semantics, p.109).
That is, they are "co-extensive and interchangeable
from the cognitive but not from the emotive and evoc-
atory angle, like 'liberty--freedom,' 'hide--conceal.'" (ibid.).
But to "emotive and evocatory" we have to add "aes-

thetic," because there is an element of word-use that
does not seem to be either cognitive or emotive; a
word may have a certain "feel," although that "feel" does
not evoke any particular emotions. At any rate, bînā
seems to be entirely synonymous with tᵉbûnā, from
whatever angle.

B. The semantic field of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā.

How may these findings be described in terms
of the semantic field theory? First of all, the three
words constitute a segment of a field, not a complete
area. Several other words would have to be considered
were we to investigate the semantic field of wisdom/
understanding: śēkel, dēᵃā, daᶜat, mᵉzimmā, taḥbûlā,
ᶜormā, mûsār, and lēb. However, if language is, as the
structuralists maintain, an organic unity in which no-
thing exists apart from its relations with other lin-
guistic units, then we can do a partial study of a
semantic field. Three words (even two) can be sub-
jected to structural analysis, as they were in Trier's
study.

Trier rather dogmatically dismisses the idea of
synonymy (he uses the word in a sense peculiar to him-
self /Das Sprachliche Feld, p.448/). But synonyms do
exist, at least on the cognitive level, so it is
difficult to use his technique with synonyms. If the
semantic field is to be thought of as corresponding to

a conceptual field, then hokmā, bīnā and t^ebūnā simply

cover one unarticulated section of the conceptual field

(leaving out Qoheleth's idiosyncratic and late usage).

This difficulty arises because Trier's system over-

emphasizes the intellectual side of language in setting

the total lexical field over against a Begriffsfeld.

(See Ullmann's critique of Weisgerber, whose approach

is closely allied with Trier's, Semantics p.163, and

Oehman p.131.) The structure of a language is cer-

tainly ordered by more than concepts;vocabulary structure

must also be considered in terms of its emotive and

aesthetic functions.

But Trier's method can be modified to enable it

to handle synonyms on the conceptual level that differ

on the stylistic level, i.e. homoionyms. Using

Trier's metaphor of a mosaic parallel to the con-

ceptual field, we could say that the three words

under consideration are three tiles in the same area,

one on top of the other. Now this image leads us to

the suggestion of adding a third dimension to Trier's

two-dimensional mosaic. This third dimension would

represent the aesthetic-emotional value of a word,

just as the two-dimensional mosaic represents the

conceptual value. This modification would not only

help describe a set of homoionyms, but also the stylis-

tic peculiarities of any speaker, who may use words

to refer to the same things as other speakers, but for whom the words have different evocatory and aesthetic values.

Thinking now in terms of a third dimension, we see that there is after all articulation in the field covered by the three words. We are glad to be able to recognize articulation again, because, as Saussure tells us, "language is the domain of articulations. . ." (Course, p.112). Trier says, "Da das Grundwesen der Sprache Gliederung ist, ist jedes einzelne Stück Ergebnis der Gliederung" (Sprachliche Feld, p.429). A description of language that leaves out significant articulations is therefore insufficient.

The semantic field of ḥokmā, bînā and tᵉbûnā on the stylistic level can be described thus: bînā and tᵉbûnā are words of lesser stylistic weight; they hang on ḥokmā. The presence of ḥokmā can evoke bînā or tᵉbûnā, but not vice versa. But even on the stylistic plane, bînā and tᵉbûnā cover an unarticulated area.

Since the other two terms being investigated were not used by Qoheleth, I cannot discuss the semantic field of his vocabulary, since a semantic field is formed only by relations between words.

In conclusion we may speculate on the possible
relation between the semantic field of ḥokmā, bînā and
tᵉbûnā and an underlying pattern of thought corresponding
to that field. On the conceptual plane, these words
cover a broad area of wisdom, knowledge and mental
ability, from the ability to sew a beautiful garment
to natural science, from knowledge of divinely com-
manded right behavior to understanding of divine purposes
in human life, from nautical skills to the prudence that
keeps you away from loose women. Since ḥokmā, bînā and
tᵉbûnā all cover all these areas and more, it appears
that there was a fundamental catholicity in Hebrew
thought, similar to the catholicity of medieval
thought that Trier describes. The senses of ḥokmā,
bînā and tᵉbûnā are all grouped under each of the
three words. We may say that the Hebrews (as represented
by the texts that use these words) thought in terms of
the integral man and structured their vocabulary
accordingly, and in turn their thought pattern was
structured by their vocabulary. This is to say that
a language which assigned separate words to the var-
ious areas of mental activity and did not have words
that included all these activities (synthetic terms)
would be the opposite of biblical Hebrew in this
regard. We would say that such a language represented
a Weltansicht that fragmented mental activity, whereas
in the Hebrew Weltansicht mental activity was an
integral, unified process.

NOTES

1. Including Prov 14:1, reading hokmôt for ḥakmôt.

2. Excluding בִּינָה Job 34:16, which according to its accent is imperative. ואמנם= ואם (Tur-Sinai).

3. Excluding כתבונם, Hos 13:2, a hapax which certainly should be read כתבנית with LXX κατ' εἰκόνα.

4. Jer 9:22. This need not refer to any special class of wise men. hokmā is here parallel to might and wealth, which are personal possessions, so it probably just means "intelligence" or practical knowledge in general. It would not include ethical-religious wisdom, because such wisdom would not be in opposition to השכל וידע אותי.

5. Prov 21:30. One of the rare cases in Proverbs where hokmā and t^ebûnā are morally neutral.

6. Prov 24:3. It is through practical sagacity that a house is built and furnished, but practical sagacity of the right sort is part of the ethical-religious wisdom.

7. Ecc 2:26, 7:19, 9:16, 9:18. These are quotes from conventional wisdom (Gordis). 9:18 may refer more specifically to political-military wisdom.

8. Ecc 9:13--18. Qoheleth speaks of the practical sagacity and intelligence of a poor man and how it was despised, and he takes this as an argument against speculative wisdom, which is the subject of his book.

9. Prov 20:5. The אישׁ tᵉbūnā is able to fathom another's
   thoughts. Here, just "an intelligent man," but
   again, this practical intelligence is recommended
   by the ethical-religious wisdom.

10. Isa. 29:14. "Er denkt dabei offenbar an Weise
    als eine Gruppe der selbstsicheren Politiker, deren
    Deportation er 3, 1-3 ankündigt" (Fichtner, ThL 2,
    1949, p.77).

11. Jer 49:7. Here ḥokmā probably refers to political-
    military shrewdness rather than to Edom's supposedly
    renowned wisdom literature, because the taunt
    deals with Edom's political-military collapse.

12. Ezek 28:7, 12, 17. In these verses ḥokmā is a
    metonomy for things acquired by economic skills.
    V. 12 is obscure, but ḥokmā may be taken as in the
    other vv., where similar terminology is used.

13. 1 Ch 22:12. This occurence is included in the cate-
    gory of royal wisdom because of the association of
    bīnā with ויצוך על ישראל.

14. Obad 1:8 probably refers to the same event as Jer
    49:7, the dissolution of Edom's political-military
    wisdom.

15. Exod 28:3 etc. rūaḥ in these passages means simply
    "natural faculty." rūaḥ ʾelōhīm means a natural
    faculty given by God, not necessarily "a divine
    spirit" or "the spirit of God."

16. 1 Ch 12:33. An obscure verse. The most likely

suggestion is that יודעי בינה לעתים refers to knowledge
of astronomy and/or calendation, both of which are
technical skills.

17. Isa 33:6. Difficult verse. ḥokmaṯ along with
daᶜaṯ is, as the text stands, in construct with
yir'aṯ YHWH. You can have "wisdom" and "knowledge" of
yir'aṯ YHWH just as you can "understand" it, cf.
Prov 2:4, where אז תבין יראת ה' is parallel ודעת אלהים תמצא.
ḥokmaṯ. . .yir'aṯ YHWH means religious knowledge,
understanding.

18. Ps 51:8 is in this category because ḥokmā is par-
allel with 'emeṯ, a word with definite ethical-
religious connotations.

19. Ps 90:12. Within the context of this penitential
prayer, lᵉḇaḇ ḥokmā means the intellectual dis-
position that will keep one on the moral path.

20. Prov 2:10. V. 10 states the reason for v. 9.

V. 9: אז תבין צדק ומשפט ומישרים כל מעגל-טוב.

V. 10: כי תבוא חכמה בלבך ודעת לנפשך ינעם. (Tran-
slate: "For wisdom will have entered your heart
and knowledge become pleasant for you.") That
is to say, as a result of acquiring ḥokmā and daᶜaṯ
you will have ethical acumen, understanding ṣedeq
and mišpaṭ and knowing the right path. These
verses set up the equation, ḥokmā = ethical knowledge
and behavior, as does Prov 4:11.

21. Prov 11:2. In Ezek 28, ḥokmā carries the connotation
of hubris. Within the ethical-religious wisdom,

hokmā is the opposite of hubris, as in this verse,
where hokmā is directly antithetical to zādôn
and is called a quality of the modest.

22. Prov 14:6. lēṣ is often a synonym for the wicked
and ungodly; it always contains the element of
lack of moral seriousness. The scoffer's desire
for wisdom is not explained. It can be surmised
that he wanted it for its material benefits (Toy).

23. Prov 16:16. This verse is sort of a chorus sum-
ming up the content of the chapter, which contains
ethical-religious precepts. Frequently the verses
praising the value of hokmā serve as "choruses"
and introductory exhortations and serve to organize
the didactic material.

24. Prov 18:4. Perhaps best read with LXX meqôr
hayyîm (zōēs).

25. Prov 31:26. The specifically ethical-religious
content of hokmā in this verse is seen in its
parallelism with tôrat hesed.

26. Ecc 7:12. The two sayings in 7:12 sound like con-
ventional proverbs extolling wisdom as wealth-- and
life-giving, so hokmā here would refer to ethical-
religious wisdom. If it meant just practical
sagacity in everyday affairs, the first stich
at least would be tautological.

27. Isa 27:11. bînôt probably refers to moral discernment
here, because it is for the lack of this quality that
Israel is going to be punished without mercy.

28. Deut 32:28. Vss 28-29 refer to Israel, giving the reason why God has been forced to punish her. That reason is their lack of moral discernment. V. 28 could be connected with v. 29 and refer to Israel's enemies who do not understand God's direction of history.

29. Isa 40:14. 'õrah mišpāṭ always denotes ethical action, even though mišpāṭ itself can be morally neutral, so derek tebûnõt here means the right, ethical way.

30. Prov 30:3. Scott sees qedõšîm as an "intensive plural" referring to God, "the Holy One." It may mean angels, as in Ps 89:8, Job 5:1, 15:15, Zach 14:5. The suggestion that qedõšîm can be singular, referring to God, is supported by Hos 12:1 and Josh 24:19. At any rate, the meaning of daʕat qedõšîm is set by its parallelism with yirʾat YHWH in Prov 9:10. Scott carries down the lõʾ from the first stich, but this is unnecessary and strains the syntax.

31. 2S 14:20. This verse shows that angels have wisdom par excellence, and that their wisdom consists in knowing "everything that is in the earth." This phrase summarizes the object of speculative wisdom's quest. 2S 14:17 reads כי כמלאך האלהים כן אדני המלך לשמע הטוב והרע "Like an angel of God is my lord the king, understanding good and bad." ṭõb waraʕ probably means everything, the range of experience. (In 2S 14 it does not mean "good and bad," because the story is not about a judicial

decision between good and bad.) This divine and
angelic property of knowing everything may be the
point in question in Gen 3:22: "Behold, the man
has become as one of us, lādaᶜat ṭôb wārāᶜ--know-
ing everything" (at least potentially). Previously,
he knew the difference between good and bad, but his
experience was limited to his stable little world
in Eden. Likewise, Enkidu gains wisdom of the divine
sort after his fall from primal purity. The se-
ductress says, "You are wise, Enkidu, you are
like a god." (ANET p.75)

Job 15:7 f. reads: הראשון אדם תולד ולפני גבעות

חוללת: הבסוד אלוה תשמע ותגרע אליך חכמה:

"Were you the first man born? Were you brought
forth before the hills? Do you listen to the
divine council and take away for yourself ḥokmā?"
Pope says that this may refer to a legend of the
primeval man "who supposedly eavesdropped on the
divine council and appropriated divine wisdom
as Prometheous the fire." (grᶜ may mean "withdraw,
take away." The passive of that meaning with this
root occurs in Num 36:3, 27:4.)

Perhaps alongside the quest for wisdom, for
knowledge of the earth and cosmos, there was a
belief that this sort of knowledge is actually a
divine and angelic domain, where man's presence is
not entirely legitimate.

32. 1K 5:9, 10, 14. 1K 5:9-15 is a unit. The content
of the wisdom discussed in this unit is described in
vv. 12f. Solomon's wisdom was expressed in songs
and sayings, and consisted of some sort of Natur-
weisheit, which Alt identifies with Egyptian and
Mesopotamian Listenwissenschaft, which sought
to comprehend and classify the totality of phenom-
ena of the visable and invisable world (Alt,
Die Weisheit Salomos, p.140). Naturweisheit was
thus part of the speculative wisdom enterprise.

33. 1 K 10:4, 5, 7, 8. I would place the occurrences
of ḥokmā that are in the Queen of Sheba story in this
category because the ḥokmā she saw was in Solomon's
answers to her ḥîdôt, "perplexing questions " (Koehler-
Baumgartner Lexicon). But the term could have a
broader reference in this story, including both his
speculative wisdom and his practical sagacity in
statecraft.

34. Ps 49:4. The psalmist says that he will speak
ḥokmôt and tᵉbûnôt and then goes on to consider
why the righteous suffer and the evil prosper.
In searching for the meaning of human life and death
the psalmist is speaking in the speculative wisdom
tradition.

35. Job 4:21. The first stich is obscure. The context
is the transience and mortality of man. In this
context, the second stich probably means that man
dies, like a dumb animal, not understanding why.

36. Job 11:6. V.6 may be taken with v.7. Were God to
speak, he would tell you the hiddenness (ta^{c}ălûmōt as
abstract plural) of wisdom, i.e. that wisdom is
hidden from you. V.7, "Can you fathom the depth of
God/ Find the limits of Shaddai?" (Pope), supports
the understanding of v.6 as saying that God would
support Zophar's contention that wisdom is hidden.
Zophar accuses Job of presuming to have understanding
of God's purposes, then goes on to tell God's pur-
poses himself.

37. Job 12:12, 13. The chapter speaks of God's regulation
of nature and human life. Job says that elders do
not have the ability to comprehend this (v.12),
but God alone has ḥokmā and t^{e}būnā in these matters
(v.13).

38. Job 13:5. Job says that when the friends talk
about the meaning of life and God's purposes, they
are stupid, they have no wisdom. Silence would
be more of this type of wisdom than their speech.

39. Job 26:3. Job calls himself lacking in wisdom--he
has said all along that he does not understand life
and divine purposes--and says that his friends have
not counselled or helped him at all.

40. Job 32:13. "Beware lest you say, "We have attained
wisdom, but only God can rebut him, not man" (Gordis,
Job, p.288). The friends presume to understand
God's intentions and man's life.

41. Ecc 1:16. hokmā here does not refer to the intellectual discipline or technique that seeks understanding of life and the universe (sense IV), but rather to the content of that discipline, (presumed) knowledge and understanding of life and the cosmos (sense III). Qoheleth says that he experienced this so-called knowledge and therefore can pass judgment on the intellectual enterprise of seeking speculative wisdom. Vv. 17 and 18 give that judgment.

42. Ecc 8:1. A difficult verse. It is included in this category on the possibility that hokmat 'ādām in stich b is a restatement of [yôdē ca] pešer dābār in stich a. pešer is related to ptr, which means solution, interpretation (Gordis, Koheleth), hence, the true, underlying meaning. Perhaps read with Vul and Sym, translating, "Who is so wise. . .?" a sarcastic statement.

43. Dan 1:4, 17, 20. It is not quite clear what kind of knowledge Daniel and his associates learned, but the comparison with the hartummîm and 'aššāpîm in v.20 suggests that they learned magical and mantic arts, which may be considered part of the speculative wisdom enterprise, which also sought to fathom the secrets of the universe. In Dan 2:27 the hakkîmîn, 'ašpîn, hartummîn, and gāzrîn are the groups that customarily explain "secrets." hokmat bînā in 1:20

is an emphatic construct of synonyms.

44. Ecc 2:3. This verse is best handled following Gins-
berg, who puts bayyayin et beśārî after ʼanasseᵏā
in v.1. Qoheleth investigated ḥokmā and siklût
(usually translated "folly," perhaps "ignorance"
would be better). If vv. 4-9 tell of his experience
with siklût, it does not mean folly but ignorance,
a pleasure-filled life without seeking into the depths
of the universe or asking questions about the meaning
of life--the opposite of speculative wisdom.

45. Ecc 2:12. With Gordis: ". . .and saw that wisdom
was both madness and folly." Ecc 2:12 gives the con-
clusion of Qoheleth's investigation of ḥokmā.

46. Ecc 7:23. "All this I investigated using the wisdom-
technique; I thought I would become wise, but it was
beyond me." The wisdom-technique of understanding
the world failed. Same point as 8:17b.

47. Prov 7:4. The personification metaphor is not fully
developed in 7:4 seq. But that metaphor underlies
the command to call ḥokmā your sister.

48. Prov 14:1. Reading ḥokmôt for hakmôt and deleting
nāśîm.

49. It is extremely difficult to date wisdom literature
because its contents are not time-bound. This pre-
exilic dating of Job and Proverbs follows Albright
(VTS III, p.13f.). It is the relative dating of Job
and Ecclesiastes that is important for the purposes
of this study, and Ecclesiastes is certainly later,
probably from the middle of the third century BCE

(cf. Gordis, Koheleth, p.67).

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