Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of Book of Mormon Names

Journal of Book of Mormon Studies

Title   Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of Book of
Mormon Names

Author(s)

Abstract   Over two hundred proper names of peoples or places
appear in the Book of Mormon text. Although some of
those names appear in the Bible, a large majority of them
are unique to the Book of Mormon. Paul Y. Hoskisson
leads the Onomasticon Project, which seeks to identify
and interpret Book of Mormon names using standard
principles and methods. This article introduces five subse-
quent articles that demonstrate to nonspecialists how this
type of research can and should be applied to the Book
of Mormon. Prepared scholars—Hoskisson, Jeffrey R.
Chadwick, Dana M. Pike, John A. Tvedtnes—display the
type of interchange that is required to clarify and settle
the issues surrounding Book of Mormon proper names.
This article also introduces two additional articles that
complement the onomastic discussion.

Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of Book of Mormon Names

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
RONALD CROSBY

Introduction

Over two hundred proper names of peoples or places appear in the Book of Mormon text. Some of those names occur in the Bible, so we can gain added understanding about them from research by Bible scholars. But a large majority are unique to the American record. For those names we would like to know more. For instance, knowing the etymology or linguistic origins, and their original meanings, could shed light on obscure portions of the text. From what Old World languages, if any, did the names descend? What might this information tell us about relationships among the different peoples in the record and about their history? Moreover, do the names tell us anything about how Joseph Smith translated the record? Are the names products of that prophet's imagination, as some critics charge, or do

they have actual sources in ancient tongues? These and other questions are legitimate areas of inquiry for researchers. Some research has already gone on to identify and interpret Book of Mormon names.[1]

Paul Y. Hoskisson, professor of ancient scripture at BYU, has for a number of years been leading out in an effort called "The Onomasticon Project" (*onomasticon* is the technical term for a list of proper names) begun over a decade ago under FARMS sponsorship.

Research on the names in the Bible and in other ancient texts has established standard principles and methods that must be followed in research of this type. If Book of Mormon studies are to take advantage of what has already been learned about such matters, and if we wish LDS research to be accepted by other scholars, our investigations should proceed along established lines. In failing to do so—that is, if

merely impressionistic methods were employed—unreliable conclusions could be reached, undermining the credibility of the research and misleading both believers and nonbelievers. The accepted procedures for onomasticon research have rarely been stated or exemplified in terms that nonspecialists can appreciate. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate to nonspecialists how this type of research can and should be applied to the Book of Mormon.

Sound research to shed light on exotic names is complicated. Only those with a strong base of knowledge in one or more of the languages that are thought to be involved are able to participate fruitfully in the process. In the case of Book of Mormon names, that means that researchers must thoroughly control at least one of the background Near Eastern languages: Hebrew, related Semitic languages such as Akkadian or Arabic, Egyptian, Coptic, or neighboring tongues like Greek and Sumerian. Those of us who have not attained the required level of control of ancient languages have to be more than cautious; we need to be appropriately skeptical of any off-the-wall proposals. Well-meaning Latter-day Saints have frequently tried to treat Book of Mormon names without appropriate preparation. The results of ill-prepared, speculative efforts have confused, not helped, our understanding.

In this article, a group of prepared scholars have been invited to display the type of interchange that is required to clarify these matters. Readers will discover multiple viewpoints that have arisen in analyzing just two Book of Mormon names, Lehi and Sariah. Disagreements are not harmful but necessary, because they point out where more data and better reasoning must be brought to bear to settle the issues. It is in the nature of scholarly discourse about such a complex topic that someone puts forward a proposal about what a name means, where it came from, and how it was pronounced. Others then agree or disagree. From the clashes and agreements in the experts' views, we hope that clarification may result. Also characteristic of this kind of discussion is the need to deal with technical linguistic and philological data. Participants usually need to refer to highly footnoted scholarly publications to support their arguments.

This journal is not the proper place to carry on high-level technical communication. To do so would intrude too much on our limited space and the patience of nonexpert readers. But this one time, we consider it valuable for anyone interested in this topic to be exposed to the scholarly process. Further detailed studies of the Book of Mormon onomasticon will no doubt be pursued by the handful of qualified people engaged in the work via the FARMS Occasional Papers series or in other publications where the length of arguments and footnotes is less constrained than in the *Journal.* One thing we bystanders can learn is patient respect for the fact that the experts' arguments, that so forbiddingly demand knowledge of ancient texts, are making progress. Light is slowly being shed on the proper names of the Nephite scripture. We need to understand that despite disagreements on details, understanding of this topic is moving along. But we'll have to be patient as the laborers in the field struggle toward consensus. And just possibly, some people who had not considered participating in the interchange will be stimulated to prepare themselves and wade in. Professor Hoskisson, a specialist in Akkadian, begins our discussion with his interpretation of the names Lehi and Sariah. Then three other language specialists offer their views on what he has said. Finally the original author responds to the critiques.

Two other articles in this issue complement the onomasticon interchange. John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matt Roper have collaborated to document striking new artifact finds from the Holy Land that seem to prove that certain names used in the Book of Mormon were in use in Israel before the Book of Mormon record was begun. Hence those names did not originate in Joseph Smith's imagination, as some claim, but are evidence of the Israelite origins of the record.

In the article that follows, Mary Jane Woodger informs us about some of the problems involved in deciding how Book of Mormon names have been pronounced, as shown by the pronunciation guides included in English-language copies of the Book of Mormon. An interesting note by Frederick M. Huchel works through the phonetic characters used in the Deseret Alphabet to point out how some leading figures in the LDS Church, many of whom had heard Joseph Smith speak the names, were pronouncing Book of Mormon names in the mid– to late–nineteenth century. None of this material defines a standard of pronunciation that Latter-day Saints today "ought" to adopt, but these contributions make us more informed about and tolerant of attempts to understand what the names signify.

constitute verse 2 and the first half of verse 3.

23 William W. Phelps, "An angel came down from the mansions of glory," in Smith, *A Collection of Sacred Hymns*, #16.

24 See, for example, "The Indian Hunter" ("Oh, why does the white man follow my path, / Like the hound on the tiger's track?") by the English poet Eliza Cook (1818–1889), one of three Cook poems anthologized in Hazel Felleman, comp., *The Best Loved Poems of the American People* (New York: Doubleday, 1936), 625; or "Metacom" by John Greenleaf Whittier: "My father loved the white men, when / They were but children, shelterless, . . . / Nor was it given him to know / That children whom he cherished then / Would rise at length, like armëd men, / To work his people's overthrow," *The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1894), 489. Eliza R. Snow was also fond of this tradition. One of her first published poems (in 1830, five years before she became a Latter-day Saint) was "The Red Man of the West": "The Great Spirit, 'tis said, to our forefathers gave / All the lands 'twixt the eastern and western big wave," *Ohio Star*, 31 March 1830. Much later she lengthened and "Mormonized" this poem, retitling it "The Lamanite." It was published in the *Deseret News*, 20 September 1865. The expanded version promises that "The scales will fall which now becloud their eyes, / And they, in faultless purity arise."

25 Grant Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17/3 (1984): 59.

26 Parley P. Pratt, "When earth in bondage long had lain," in Young, Pratt, and Taylor, *A Collection of Sacred Hymns . . . in Europe*, (1840), #258.

27 Parley P. Pratt, "The solid rocks were rent in twain," in ibid., #259.

28 Parley P. Pratt, "O who that has search'd in the records of old," in ibid., #260.

29 Author unknown, "Ye wond'ring nations, now give ear," in ibid., #250.

30 When the plight of the Indians was treated in popular poetry, it was common for an Indian persona to speak a first-person lament; all three hymns printed with this article use this device.

31 Felix Bartholdy Mendelssohn, "Consolation," in *Songs without Words* (Boston: O. Ditson, 1906), #9.

32 The tune paired with this text in the *Psalmody* (#212) is "See, the conq'ering hero" from George Frideric Handel's *Judas Maccabeus* (New York: Vanguard, 1974)—high expectations indeed from a congregation!

33 Louisa L. Greene Richards, "The Savior at Jerusalem" in *Deseret Sunday School Songs*, #131.

34 J. Marinus Jensen, "A Voice Hath Spoken from the Dust," in *Hymns of the Church* (1950), #291.

35 This hymn is not listed under the Book of Mormon heading in the topical index! The text is aesthetically satisfying because of the inclusive, ecumenical use it makes of the Book of Mormon, but apparently its connection with its source is therefore more abstract.

36 Although the Book of Mormon presence in our modern hymnbook is rather modest, other kinds of music make rich use of Book of Mormon materials. The importance of Book of Mormon songs for the Primary organization has already been mentioned; although the Book of Mormon heading in *Children's Songs* lists only twelve songs, many of these are immensely popular, and they play a crucial role in familiarizing young Latter-day Saints with the Book of Mormon. A great deal could be written about the significant role of the Book of Mormon in the works of serious Latter-day Saint composers, including Leroy Robertson's *Oratorio from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Leroy Robertson, 1953) and Crawford Gates's score for the Hill Cumorah Pageant, *Music from the Hill Cumorah Pageant: America's Witness for Christ*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, VVOT 4188 (© 1988). Other examples are numerous. K. Newell Dayley has provided a musical setting for 3 Nephi 13–14, "I Come unto My Own," Ralph G. Rodgers Jr. (lyrics), *III Nephi (Oratorio)*, Promised Valley Playhouse, LP 14457 (© 1978). In addition, popular vocal music written for the Mormon market has used the Book of Mormon with great success; as fairly free-form works, without the strict requirements of meter and rhyme found in a hymn stanza, these songs often use unparaphrased text. An example familiar to many English-speaking LDS people is "Oh, That I Were an Angel" (Alma 29:1; music by Wanda West Palmer).

37 Alfred Tennyson (lyrics), Crawford Gates (music), "Ring Out, Wild Bells," in *Hymns*, (1985), #215.

38 *Deseret Sunday School Song Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1899).

39 Noel B. Reynolds, "The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century," *BYU Studies* 38/2 (1999): 7.

40 Conversation with the author, 30 November 1999.

Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of Book of Mormon Names

1 Several researchers have worked on onomasticon studies over recent decades. Hugh Nibley started the genre with several chapters in *Lehi in the Desert* and *The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952). Robert F. Smith privately distributed several papers that are still unpublished. John A. Tvedtnes did the same; in addition see his "A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names," *Society for Early Historic Archaeology Newsletter and Proceedings* 141 (December 1977): 1–8. Joann Carlton, a Semiticist in southern California, with John W. Welch produced a 1981 FARMS Paper, "Possible Linguistic Roots of Certain Book of Mormon Names." A particularly useful introduction to the field is Paul Y. Hoskisson's "An Introduction to the Relevance of and a Methodology for the Study of the Proper Names of the Book of Mormon," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist

and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:126–35.

Lehi and Sariah
Paul Y. Hoskisson

1 See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, 3rd ed., rev. Walter Baumgartner, Johann Jakob Stamm, and Benedikt Hartmann (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 53. See for example the "Name List" in Appendix 3 of Jeaneane D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 334ff.; for this reference I wish to thank my colleague Dana M. Pike of Religious Education at BYU. The biblical personal name Ozni and its gentilic Oznite (see Numbers 26:16) and Azaniah (see Nehemiah 10:9), though related to the word for "ear," are probably denominative verbal forms. See Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon*, 27. For a listing of other possible body parts used in names, see Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names*, Appendix 3, sub ʾzn, ḥyh, yd, ʿyn, and pnh.

2 *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, L:150. I would like to thank Jonathan Gimmel for finding this rather obscure example.

3 Paul Haupt, a German-American scholar working around the turn of the last century, was one of the first to derive the personal name *lhy* from "cheek" or "jawbone." Hugh Nibley downplayed this interpretation, preferring Nelson Glueck's reading "Lahai," thus suggesting the biblical place name Lahai-roi in Genesis 24:62 and 25:11. See Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 239.

4 Hani Hayajneh, *Die Personennamen in den qatabänischen Inschriften* (New York: Olms, 1998), 226, sub LḤY, "Er möge leben, (O Gott NN)." Under the same entry, Hayajneh does not exclude the meaning "Beauty (of God)." Note the semantic parallel in Akkadian, *lú-ba-li-lṭ*, in I. J. Gelb, *Glossary of Old Akkadian* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1957), 156–57.

5 Translation from the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1950 edition.

6 See the similar construction in Ran Zadok, *The Pre-Hellenistic Israelite Anthroponymy and Prosopography* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 61; "Lāʾel (W)' Of God/El'; *Lnry* (PE) 'Of Nry (my light')."

The Names Lehi and Sariah—Language and Meaning
Jeffrey R. Chadwick

1 Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), seals #8, #174, #175, #511, #1072. The name also appears in Lachish Letter #1.

2 Ibid., seal #145 and p. 496.

3 If "Aḥazyahu the Elder" were implied, the

word זקן (*zaqen*) would need to include an initial ה (*h*) representing the direct object ha and would need to appear in a position *following* the name Aḥazyahu, as an adjectival title.

4 Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Lehi and Sariah," in this issue.

5 See Genesis 17:17–19 (Isaac); Genesis 30:8 (Naphtali); 1 Samuel 4:21–22 (Ichabod).

6 Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *JBMS* 2/2 (1993): 196–200.

7 Arthur E. Cowley, ed. and trans., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 67.

8 Ibid., xv; Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 320.

9 See 2 Samuel 8:17; 2 Kings 25:18; 23:25; 1 Chronicles 4:13–14; 4:35; 6:14; Ezra 2:2; 7:1; Nehemiah 10:2; 11:11; 12:1, 12; Jeremiah 40:8; 51:59, 61; 52:24.

10 Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 47.

Response to Paul Hoskisson's "Lehi and Sariah"
Dana M. Pike

1 See, for example, F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 976, s.v., שׂריה; *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 1994–), 3:1356, s.v., שׂריה.

2 E.g., Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1997), 163, #390.

3 Frank L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), 180, 338, 418.

4 See Mary Jane Woodger, "How the English Pronunciation of Book of Mormon Names Came About," in this issue.

Lehi and Sariah Comments
John A. Tvedtnes

1 Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *JBMS* 2/2 (1993): 196–200; reprinted in John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 6–10.

2 See John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," in this issue.

3 Ibid.

Response to the Comments
Paul Y. Hoskisson

1 Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *JBMS* 2/2 (1993): 196–200.

2 In the original article I could have added more examples of the masculine name שׂריהו, but it seemed to me unnecessary. A clear-cut example of the name used for a female would be more helpful.

3 רפאל is interpreted as רפא-אל, "god has