Response to Paul Hoskisson's "Lehi and Sariah"

Dana M. Pike
dana_pike@byu.edu
In this article Pike responds to Hoskisson’s conclusions about the etymology of the names Lehi and Sariah. He agrees with Hoskisson that Sariah is a theophoric name, which was common in ancient Israel and means “My prince is Jehovah.” However, he suggests that the name should be grammatically distinguished from the masculine biblical personal name Seraiah. Although he offers an additional possibility for the meaning of the name Lehi, he agrees with Hoskisson’s suggestion that the name means “cheek.” The remainder of the article discusses the challenge of doing onomastic analysis on ancient non-English names when only an English form is available and further mentions the frequency of giving newborns in ancient Israel names of a religious nature.
Sariah
As indicated by Paul Hoskisson, there can be little, if any, doubt that the name Sariah is a Hebrew compound theophoric name: šar + yah, “Jehovah is prince,” or šariy + yah, “my prince is Jehovah.” A theophoric personal name is one in which one of the elements is a divine name or title (such as in the name just cited). This type of personal name was very common in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East in general (e.g., Elijah, Isaiah, Nebuchadrezzar). Note, however, that Hoskisson states that the name Sariah “would be related to the masculine biblical personal name Seraiy, “Jehovah is prince.” Several people mentioned in the Bible bear the name Seraiah, šēṣā + yah(u) (see 2 Kings 25:18; Jeremiah 51:59), but it is usually interpreted as consisting of a verbal form of širḥ plus the divine name: “Jehovah prevails/rules.” Thus the first elements in the names Sariah and Seraiah derive from related linguistic roots but should be grammatically distinguished. Of course, these observations are based upon the preserved vocalizations—Sariah as found in the Book of Mormon, and Seraiah in the Masoretic Text (the traditional, vocalized text of the Hebrew Bible). While it is possible that the name šryḥ(u) found on Israelite stamp seals could be vocalized šariy.yah, Sariah, it is usually vocalized Seraiah, following the pronunciation of the biblically attested form because it is thought that one of these seals belonged to Seraiah, the brother of Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe (see Jeremiah 51:59–64).

Lehi
Professor Hoskisson has done a good job of reviewing what are the most likely explanations of the name Lehi. And he rightly observes that we cannot, at present, be certain about which option is the correct one. This is not because we don’t know the languages of the ancient Near East, but because close onomastic parallels from ancient Israel are lacking. In our efforts to find similar forms elsewhere we must always weigh the differences in time, place, and linguistic relationship (e.g., is a name from the same time as Lehi but from a more distant relative of the Hebrew language “better” evidence than a name more chronologically removed but more proximate to the language family tree?). One example Hoskisson did not mention is the Phoenician name šmlhy found at Elath. The element šṁ is understood to be a divine name or appellative, and the element lḥy is generally connected with the Arabic element to which Hoskisson made reference in discussing his second option (see his comments on Qatabanean). Thus it makes sense to regard the name Lehi as a shortened version of such a form, but again, as Hoskisson notes, if we accept the vocalization of the name Lehi as presented in the Book of Mormon, then the element preserved in the Phoenician name and later in Arabic—if we can assume consistent pronunciation—is more challenging phonetically. At present, I tend to favor the first option identified by Hoskisson, the Hebrew word ḫy, as the most likely explanation of the meaning of the name Lehi. This word is employed.
several times in the Bible with the sense of “cheek” (e.g., 1 Kings 22:24; Psalm 3:8; Lamentations 1:2).

**General Comments**

First, discussing the names Sariah and Lehi provides an opportunity to comment on the challenge of doing onomastic analysis on ancient non-English names when only an English form is available. This is one of the great challenges in working with the names in the Book of Mormon. For example, the Hebrew letters *he* (h) and *het* (h) are both usually rendered in English by the letter *h*. In the case of the name Lehi we are confident that the middle letter in the original form was *het*, not *he*, because the combination *l-h-y* does not occur in Hebrew, but the combination *l-h-y* does. Unfortunately, we are not always able to be so certain regarding several letters. We are thus dependent on the vocalizations that have come to us from Joseph Smith and his scribes, primarily Oliver Cowdery. Can we be certain that these vocalizations reflect ancient pronunciation? Do we know enough about the translation process from reliable, informed sources to be confident about this matter? I am not sure that we know enough to eliminate all questions.¹

Second, I have some concern about the way Hoskisson closes his comments on the meaning of the name Sariah and all three of the suggested meanings for the name Lehi. To label the meaning of these names as “suitable” or “appropriate” or “fitting” for the prophet and his wife is fine as a casual comment from hindsight. But I hope that readers do not think that our assumed appropriateness of a name has any bearing on analyzing the meaning of a name. This should never be a determining factor. Unless we are notified in the text that a person’s name was changed as an adult (e.g., Jacob to Israel) or a name was divinely indicated for a newborn child (e.g., Hosea’s children), then we must assume that the parents chose a name for the child that seemed suitable to them. Many, if not most, of the names given to newborns in ancient Israel were of a religious nature; such names were often chosen for the sentiment they contained, such as the parents’ expression of gratitude for their infant, devotion to Jehovah, and so on. This means that many names would qualify as being “appropriate” for prophets, their wives, and righteous Israelites in general. But the vast majority of ancient Israelite children were not given a name that their parents knew would be appropriate to some particular function or office their child would fill as an adult. I don’t think Hoskisson was implying that this was the case, but I don’t want anyone to misunderstand his remarks.
constitute verse 2 and the first half of verse 3.


24 See, for example, "The Indian Hunter" (["Oh! how do you wish to 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 Hass Fillman, comp., The Best Loved Poems of the American People (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 625; or "Metamorph" 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 to a height, like armed 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.

25 Elis 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 Desert," which later she lengthened and "Mormonized" this poem, retitling it "The Lamanite." It was published in the Deseret News, 20 September 1835. The expanded version promises that "The scales will fall which now becloud their eyes; / And they, in turn, will come to know it.


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., 279.

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

29 Author unknown, "We would 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 poem to open first person lament; all three hymns printed with this article use this device.


32 The tune paired with this text in the Psalmodia (#12) is "See, the conquering hero" from George Frideric Handel's Judas Maccabaeus (New York: Vanguard, 1957), a high expectation indeed from a congregation!

33 Louise L. Greene Richards, "The Savior at Jerusalem" in Desert Sunday School Songs, #131.


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, communal usage 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 hymnbooks is rather mod- est, other kinds of music make rich use of Book of Mormon materials. The impor-
tance of Book of Mormon songs for the Primary organization has already been mentioned; although the book of Mormon blogging in Children's Songs lists only twelve songs, many of these are immensely popular, and they play a cru-
sial role in illustrating young Latter-day Saints with the Book of Mormon. A great deal could be written about the significance of the Book of Mormon in the works of various Latter-day Saint composers, including Leroy Robertson's "Osiris from the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Leroy Robertson, 1933) and Crawford Gates's score for the Hill Cumorah Pageant, Music from the Hill Cumorah Pageant: America's Worship for Christ, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, VVCOT 4188 (1988).

37 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., "Her Name," 3 Nephi (1974). Much later she lengthened and "Mormonized" this poem, retitling it "The Lamanite." It was published in the Deseret News, 20 September 1835. The expanded version promises that "The scales will fall which now becloud their eyes; / And they, in turn, will come to know it.

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