Lehi and Sariah Comments

John A. Tvedtnes
Tvedtnes adds to the onomastic discussion of the names of Lehi and Sariah in this article. He suggests that scholars should not be dissuaded by the fact that the name Sariah is found only for men. He discusses the difference between etymology and attestation of names. In the first article of this discussion, Hoskisson concluded that personal names containing parts of the body are rare in all the ancient Semitic languages. Tvedtnes, on the other hand, finds numerous examples of personal names derived from body parts. He concludes with his analysis that Sariah means “Jehovah is (my/a) prince” and that Lehi means “cheek, jawbone.”
Hoskisson writes that “the name Sariah is not attested, as far as I am aware, in an ancient Near Eastern source.” He seems not to be aware of the 1993 article by Jeffrey R. Chadwick. The name is also known from three seals and two bullae. Hoskisson cites “the masculine biblical personal name Seraiah” as a comparison with Sariah. Actually, the vocalization Seraiah may be incorrect. Vowels were added to Hebrew at a late stage and were not written in Old Testament times. Thus the name could have been vocalized Sariah at an earlier time. Indeed, this makes much more sense for Hebrew šar (“prince”) + Yāh (“Yah,” the abbreviated form of the divine name sometimes rendered “Jehovah” in English). We should not be dissuaded by the fact that the name is found only for men on the seals and bullae found in Israel. Even the name Solomon, generally associated with the Israelite king of that name, is attested on a bulla for a woman. Sariah could mean either “Jehovah [Yāh] is prince” or “Jehovah is my prince,” in the same way that the biblical name Ahijah can mean either “Jehovah is a brother” or “Jehovah is my brother.”

This brings up a point that we should stress in all of our name research, i.e., the difference between etymology and attestation of names. Determining possible etymologies for nonbiblical Book of Mormon names is, in many cases, a relatively simple matter. A viable etymology lends evidence for the authenticity of the name. But some Book of Mormon names have defied establishing a meaning. Among these are Abish, Himni, and Hagoth, all of which are now attested from Hebrew inscriptions found in Israel. The attestation of a name in such an inscription provides stronger evidence than does a viable ancient Near Eastern (especially Hebrew and Egyptian) etymology.

Hoskisson objects to Lehi being equivalent to the Hebrew term lehi on the grounds that “personal names containing parts of the body are rare in all the ancient Semitic languages.” He then follows Nibley’s suggestion that derives Lehi from √hyy, “(belonging) to/for the living one.” He does not tell us, however, that names beginning with prepositions (the l- in this case) are even more rare. Moreover, among the personal names deriving from body parts are Shechem (“back, shoulder,” fifty-four times in the scriptures), Rosh (“head,” Genesis 46:21), Bohan (“thumb,” Joshua 15:6; 18:17), and Seir (“hair,” Genesis 36:20–21). In Joshua 19:25, we have the place-name Beten, which means “womb, belly.” Nibley and Hoskisson want to derive Lehi from a place-name, La-hai-roi, meaning “(belonging) to/for the living one who sees me,” but for some reason reject a tie to the biblical place-name Lehi (“jaw, cheek,” Judges 15:9, 14, 19). I find this a rather strange approach. Occam’s razor would dictate that we opt for the simplest etymologies. In the case of Sariah, it is “Jehovah is (my/a) prince,” while in the case of Lehi it is “cheek, jawbone.”
constitute verse 2 and the first half of verse 3.


24 See, for example, "The Indian Hunter" ("Oh do the deer 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 Feldman, comp., The Best Loved Poems of the American People (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 426; or "Metacomet," by John Greenleaf Whittier, "My father loved the white men, when / They were but children, shelterless, / Nor was it given to him to know / That children whom he cherished then / Would rise at length, 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. Ellis R. Snow was also fond of this tradition. One of her first published poems (in 1880, five years before she became a Latter-day Saint) was "The Red Man of the Great Lakes," in The Great Plains, the Sun, and Our Forefathers Gave / All the lands to the eastern and western big wave," Ohio State University, March 1980. Much later she lengthened and "Mormonized" this poem, retitling it "The Lamartine." It was published in the Deseret News, October 19, 1885. The expanded promises that "The scales will fall which now bedazzle their eyes, / And they, in turn, partake of the immortal." 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, "I who that has search'd in the records of old," in ibid., 260.

29 Author unknown, "We would ring nations, now we give ear!" in ibid., 259.

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


32 The tune paired with this text in the Paducah (212) is "See, the song's Among heroes" from George Frideric Handel's Judas Maccabaeus (New York: Vanguard, 1957), high expectations indeed from a congregation!


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, emotive language it uses as part 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 modest, other kinds of music make much richer 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 Mormonheading in Children's Songs lists only twelve songs, many of these are immensely popular, and they play a crucial role in individualizing 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 "You Are 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, VCOT 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. (lyric), J.R. Nix (music), "O Sing unto the Lord" (© 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 upsurpuns a musical experiment. An example familiar to many English-speaking LDS people is "Oh, That I Were an Angel" (music by Wanda West Palmer).


38 Desert Sunday School Song Book (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1889).


40 Conversation with the author, 30 November 1999.

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2b See Genesis 17:17–19 (Isaac); Genesis 30:8 (Nabatéans); 1 Samuel 4:21–22 (Shauliah).


2c See Jeremiah 4:13–14; 43:6; 44:1; Ezra 2:2; 7:1; Nehemiah 10:2; 11:11; 12:1, 12; Jeremiah 40:8; 51:9; 51:16; 52:24.


2e Response to Paul Hammond's "Lehi and Judah." Dana M. Pike


Lehi and Sarah Comments

John A. Tvedtnes


3 Ibid.

Response to the Comments

Paul Y. Hammond


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

3 "sânuš" is interpreted as "she is," god has