Lehi and Sariah Comments

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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”) + יָה (“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 so, Solomon, generally associated with the Israelite king of that name, is attested on a bulla for a woman. Sariah could mean either “Jehovah [Yah] 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 1-l-yy, “(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," "O what does the hunter on your 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, 1965), 625; or "Metaphor" by John Greenleaf Whittier: "My father loved the white men, when / They were but children, shelterless; / Not weit it gave him to know / That children whom he cherished then / Would rise at length, as 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. Elias 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," the Great Spirit, He says, to our forefathers gave / All the lands to the eastern and western big wave;" Ohio Star (March 28, 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 promises that "The scales will fall which now bedeck their eyes; / And they, in turn, shall partake of the promises."


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: "We wound nations, now we give ear!" in ibid., #250.

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


32 The tune paired with this text in the Psalmodia (#212) is "See, the coming hero" from George Frideric Handel's Judas Maccabaeus (New York: Vanguard, 1957), with high expectations 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, exumative 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 hymnbooks is rather modest, other kinds of music mark 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 reformulating 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 Omotions from the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Leroy Robertson, 1933) and Crawford Gates's score for the Hill Cumorah Paganus, Music from the Hill Cumorah Paganus: America's Witness for Christ, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, VCVT 4188 (1988). Other examples are numerous. K. Newell Dayley has provided a musical setting for 3 Nephi 13:1-14, "I Come unto My Own," Ralph G. Rodgers Jr. (lyric), 3 Nephi (Gospel Music, 1978). The Great Prophet: America's Witness for Christ, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, VCVT 4188 (1988). In addition, popular vocal music written for the Mormon mother 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" (music by Wanda Pestal).

37 Alfred Tennyson (lyric), Crawford Gates (music), "The King and Wild Hills," in Hymns, (1885), #251.

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


40 Conversation with the author, 30 November 1999.

Seeking Agreement on the Meaning of the Book of Mormon Names

1 Several researchers have worked on monono- mastic 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 I. Smith privately distributed several papers that are still unpublished. John A. Tvedtnes did the same; in addition see his A Phonemic Analysis of Nephiite and Jaredite Name" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1977), 147-56.

2 Translation from the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1915 edition.

3 See the similar construction in Nahum Zadok, The Pre-Hellenistic Jaredite Anthropology and Protophraphy (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 61, "Lit. 'W.' Of God's Eterny' (PE) 'O Nefiy (my light')."

The Names Lehi and Jared—Language and Meaning

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

1 Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997), cols. 148, 147, 145, 143, 141, 140. The name also appears in Lachish Letter #1.

2 Exod. 3:19-22; 14:15 and 14, 486.

3 If "Alahushar the Elder" were implied, the word הַשָּׁר הָאֵל (hashar ha-él) would need to include an initial ה (he) representing the direct object he and would need to appear in a position following the name Alahushar, as an adjectival title.

4 Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Lehi and Jared," in ibid.


10 Nahman Avigad, Hebrew Bible from the Time of Jerimiah (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 47.

Response to Paul Hoskisson's "Lehi and Sariah"

Dana M. Pike


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


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3 Ibid.