[Page 1]***Abstract:*** *Jeffrey R. Chadwick has previously called attention to the name ?RYH (Seraiah/Sariah) as a Hebrew woman’s name in the Jewish community at Elephantine. Paul Y. Hoskisson, however, felt this evidence was not definitive because part of the text was missing and had to be restored. Now a more recently published ostracon from Elephantine, which contains a sure attestation of the name ?RYH as a woman’s name without the need of restoration, satisfies Hoskisson’s call for more definitive evidence and makes it more likely that the name is correctly restored on the papyrus first noticed by Chadwick. The appearance of the name Seraiah/Sariah as a woman’s name exclusively in the Book of Mormon and at Elephantine is made even more interesting since both communities have their roots in northern Israel, ca. the eighth–seventh centuries BCE.*

In 1993, Jeffrey R. Chadwick noted the appearance of the Hebrew name ?RYH (????), typically rendered *Seraiah* in English, as a woman’s name on an Aramaic papyrus from Elephantine and dated to the fifth century BCE.[1] As also pointed out by Chadwick, Nahman Avigad has argued that the Hebrew name ?RYH(W) should be rendered as *Saryah(u)*, rather than the usual *Serayah(u)* — which would make the English spelling *Sariah* instead of *Seraiah*.[2] Thus, according to Chadwick, the attestation [Page 2]of ?RYH as a Hebrew female name at Elephantine provides strong supporting evidence for the appearance of a Hebrew woman named *Sariah* in the Book of Mormon (1 Nephi, headnote; 2:5; 5:1, 6; 8:14).[3]

Paul Y. Hoskisson, however, urged caution about this evidence since the papyrus in question (Cowley-22) has a lacuna requiring restoration of both the final *h?* (?) in ?RYH and the *bet-?resh* (??) of the Aramaic word *brt* (???), “daughter,” which is the key indication that the individual in question is a woman.[4] Thus, Hoskisson cautioned, “restorations cannot provide absolute proof but rather at best a suggestion.”[5] He considered it a good sign that “other scholars accept the possible existence of this feminine name in relative temporal proximity to the beginnings of the Book of Mormon,” but Hoskisson ultimately felt “a clear-cut example of the name for a female would be more helpful.”[6]

Chadwick argued, however, that “the comparative context of the papyrus leaves little doubt that the reconstruction is accurate,” and it is really “the extant final *t*” of *brt* that “assures us that the person was [Page 3]a daughter, not a son.”[7] In the most recently published translation and transcription of this papyrus, Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni would seem to agree. In their hand-drawing of the Cowley-22 papyrus (see Figure 1),[8] they represented the restoration of the final *h?* (?) in ?RYH and the *bet-resh* (??) of *brt* as being “nearly certain.”[9]

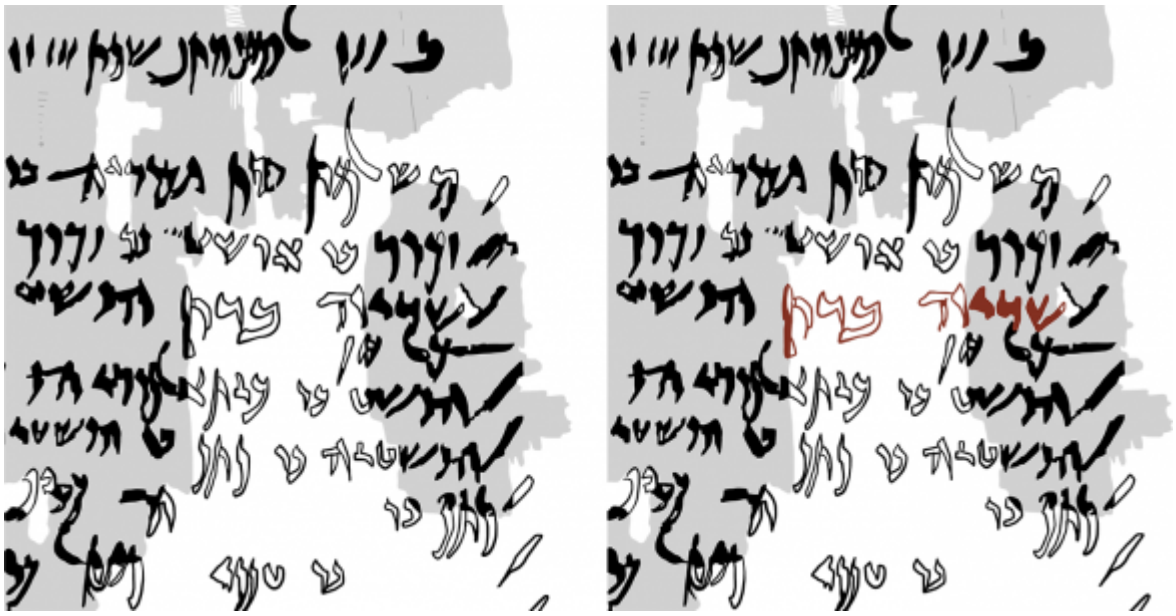

Figure 1. Left: Illustration of Cowley-22, by Jasmin G. Rappleye, based on the drawing by Ada

Yardeni in *Textbook of Aramaic Documents* 3:227 and foldout 32. Right: Same image, with *?ryh brt*, “Seraiah (Sariah) daughter of,” highlighted. The “hollow strokes” used to represent the restored portions indicate that the restorations are considered “nearly certain.”

Nonetheless, new evidence that completely satisfies Hoskisson’s call for a more “clear-cut” example has been found. Porten and Yardeni [Page 4]document ?RYH as a Hebrew feminine name not once, but twice among the Aramaic documents at Elephantine.[10] A list of names on an ostracon found there, dated to the second half of the fifth century BCE, includes *?ryh brt* […] ([…]???? ???), “Seraiah daughter of […].”[11] The name of Seraiah’s (or Sariah’s) parent is broken off, but both “Seraiah” (*?ryh*) and “daughter” (*brt*) are attested in full,[12] thus providing an undeniable example of ?RYH as a female name (see Figure 2).

This would seem to meet Hoskisson’s demands for more “clear cut” evidence. Furthermore, this clear attestation of ?RYH as a female name at Elephantine provides reassuring evidence that Cowley-22, which comes from the same period, is indeed restored correctly as “Seraiah, daughter of Hosea.”

In light of Lehi’s ancestors coming from northern Israel (1 Nephi 5:14, 16), ca. 720 bce,[13] it is also interesting to note that, according to Karel van der Toorn, the Jewish community at Elephantine ultimately has its roots in northern Israel, ca. 700 bce.[14] After surveying the evidence from deity names in the Aramaic texts, van der Toorn concludes, “the entire picture of the religious life at Elephantine and Syene strongly suggest that the historical core of the communities came from Northern Israel.” He [Page 5]further notes “the emigrants from Northern Israel would have entered Egypt by way of Judah” and suspects “some of them stayed in Judah for a significant length of time” before migrating to Egypt sometime in the seventh century bce.[15] Therefore, the founders of the Elephantine community were likely contemporaries of Lehi or his parents and were similarly Israelites of northern stock who initially settled in Judah.

These details add to the significance of these two references to women named ?RYH (Seraiah/Sariah) at Elephantine. In both the Hebrew Bible and the epigraphic evidence from Judah, ?RYH(W) is only attested as a male’s name.[16] While this could simply be due to the limitations of [Page 6]our available data set,[17] it is also possible the attestation of ?RYH as a woman’s name both in the Book of Mormon and at Elephantine and *only* in these sources, reflects a specifically northern Israelite practice.

Figure 2. Top, left: Illustration of Elephantine Storeroom 2293, by Jasmin G. Rappleye, based on the drawing by Ada Yardeni in *Textbook of Aramaic Documents* 4:211. Top, right: Same image, with *?ryh brt*, “Seraiah (Sariah) daughter of,” highlighted. Bottom: Detail of *?ryh brt* from the ostracon.

In any case, with the certain reference to a woman named ?RYH on an ostracon from Elephantine, there can no longer be any doubt that *Seraiah/Sariah* was a Hebrew woman’s name in the mid-first millennium bce.

[Page 7]Appendix: “Sariah” in Aramaic Texts from Elephantine

The following transcriptions and translations are adapted from Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986–1999), 3:226–228; 4:211.

Temple Funds Contributors List
Text: Cowley-22 (C3.15), col. 1, lines 1–4
Date: ca. 419/400 BC

Transcription

1. ??? ???? ???? ?????? ?? ??? ??? ???? IIIII ??????? ??? III ?
   [II] ???? ???? ???? ??? ?
2. II ???]?[? ??? ???]?[? ?? ????? ??? ?
3. II ????]?? ???[? ?? ???? ??? ?
4. II ???]? ??[? ???? ?? ???? ??? ?

Translation

1. On the 3rd of Phamenoth, year 5. This is (= these are) the names of the Jewish garrison who gave silver to YHW the God each person silver, [2] sh(ekels):
2. Meshull[em]eth daughter of Gemar[ia]h son of Ma?seiah: silver, 2 sh.
3. Zaccur [son of Ose]a son of Zaccur: silver, 2 sh.
4. Serai[ah daught]er of Hosea son of ?arman: silver, 2 sh.

Storeroom Names List
Text: Elephantine Storeroom 2293 (D9.14), concave lines 1–5
Date: ca. 450–400 BC

Transcription

1. […]?
2. [… ?]???
3. […]?????
4. [… ?]????? ??
5. […]???? ???

Translation

1. H[…]
2. Isla[? …]
3. Abioresh[…]
4. Jehotal daugh[ter of…]
5. Seraiah daughter of[…]

Editor's Note: *Book of Mormon Central (https://bookofmormoncentral.org/) has just published a blog post and video that are directly related to this article. See them at VIDEO: New Archaeological Evidence for Sariah as a Hebrew Woman's Name .*

1. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Notes and Communications: Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 2 (1993): 196–200; reprinted in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 6–10.
2. See Nahman Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae From the Time of Jeremiah: Remnants of a Burnt Archive* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 46–47. It is noteworthy that although Avigad continues to follow the traditional spelling of the name as *Serayah(u)* when transliterating the name, in his definitive work on Hebrew seals, Avigad indexed the name under *?r(r)*, meaning "ruler." If this is the correct etymology of the name, then *Saryah(u)* is indeed the more correct spelling. See Nahman Avigad, rev. by Benjamin Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, The Israel Exploration Society and the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997), 538.
3. In addition to his initial paper (see n1 above), see also Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "The Names Lehi and Sariah — Language and Meaning," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 32–34, 77; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi in the Samaria Papyri, and on an Ostracon from the Shore of the Red Sea," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 19, no. 1 (2010): 14–21.
4. See A. Cowley, ed. and trans., *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 67, 71; Bezalel Porten, *Archives from Elephantine: The Life of an Ancient Jewish Military Colony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 320, cf. pl. 11. The female name *Seraiah* is also mentioned on pp. 142, 144n121; 250n31, 333 of *Archives from Elephantine*. In "Notes and Communications," Chadwick was up front about the need to restore some of the text but noted that, given the context and spacing on the papyrus, the restoration of *?ry[h br]t* was virtually certain, as evidenced by the fact that both Cowley and Porten provided this exact same restoration, which no scholars have ever questioned.
5. Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Response to the Comments," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 38. Previous to this, Hoskisson had said "the name Sariah is not attested as the name of a female, (as far as I am

aware), in an ancient Near Eastern source." Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Lehi and Sariah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 30.

6. Hoskisson, "Response to the Comments," 38, 77n2.

7. Chadwick, "Notes and Communications," 196. This is because "son" in Aramaic would simply be *br* (??), without the *t* (?).

8. Based on this illustration, which is from Porten and Yardeni (see Fig. 1 caption), it looks like even most of the *tav* (?) in *brt* is missing, which may suggest to some that this restoration is less certain than Chadwick implies. However, the context makes it virtually certain that the text had either *br* (??), "son" or *brt* (???), "daughter," and the long partial stroke that is present makes just *br* impossible.

9. See Bezalel Porten and Ada Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, 4 vols. (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1986–1999), 3:226–28, foldout 32, which shows "hollow strokes" for the restored portions of *?ry[h brt]* on line 4. In the introduction, they explain: "Whenever possible, fragmentary documents have been restored, and we have been careful to distinguish between nearly *certain* and highly *probable* restorations. The former are drawn with hollow strokes; the latter with single strokes and printed with different script in the transcription and translation" (3:vi, emphasis in the original). Their transcription of this portion of line 4 is *?ryh [br]t*, and the translation is "Seraiah [daught]er," all in the same script, further indicating that it is a "nearly certain" restoration.

10. Bezalel Porten and Jerome A. Lund, *Aramaic Documents from Egypt: A Key-Word-in-Context Concordance* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 416 lists C3.15.4 (= Cowley 22) and D9.14.5 (= Elephantine Storeroom 2293). Illustrations, transcriptions, and English translations of these are available in Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, 3:226–228; 4:211. For reference, I've provided transcriptions and translations of the relevant excerpt of each of these texts in the appendix. Both of these attestations are mentioned briefly in the Book of Mormon Onomasticon entry for "Sariah," but the significance of this second, certain attestation in answering Hoskisson's previous criticism is not mentioned. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. "Sariah," accessed February 4, 2019, https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/SARIAH.

11. Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, 4:211.

12. The final *tav* (?) in *brt* is partially restored, but enough of the letter is there to make it quite clear.

13. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and His Land of Inheritance," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 87–93.

14. Karel van der Toorn, "Anat-Yahu, Some Other Deities, and the Jews of Elephantine," *Numen* 39, no. 1 (1992): 80–101. Jared Ludlow also states that the Jews at Elephantine seem "to have had strong ties to the former northern Israelite kingdom because of its unique worship practices and reliance on Aramaic as its mother tongue." Jared W. Ludlow, "A Tale of Three Communities: Jerusalem, Elephantine, and Lehi-Nephi," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 31.

15. Van der Toorn, "Anat-Yahu," 96. Stephen Rosenberg similarly argues that the founders of the Elephantine community "originated in the former northern kingdom" based on the design and layout of their temple and dates their arrival to ca. 600 bce and suggests they were acting in "defiance of the centralizing reforms of 622 bce by Josiah, which obviously caused much dismay among the remaining peoples of the northern kingdom." Stephen G. Rosenberg, "The Jewish Temple at Elephantine," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67, no. 1 (2004): 12. Similar arguments have been made about Lehi. See Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret Barker," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 449–522; Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 87–99. On the other hand, Bezalel Porten downplays the elements that van der Toorn and Rosenberg see as indicative of northern origins and suggests they came from Judah, ca. 650 bce, and were trying to escape Manasseh's regime. Bezalel Porten, "Settlement of the Jews at Elephantine and the Arameans at Syene," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 451–470. Either way, all parties agree that the origins of the Jewish Elephantine community date to sometime between 700 and 600 bce, placing their roots very close to the setting of the Book of Mormon's opening chapters.

16. See 2 Samuel 8:17; 2 Kings 25:18, 23; 1 Chronicles 4:13–14; 4:35; 6:14; Ezra 2:2; 7:1; Nehemiah 10:2; 11:11; 12:1, 12; Jeremiah 36:26; 40:8; 51:59, 61; 52:24. For Hebrew epigraphy, see Avigad, *Hebrew Bullae*, 46–47, 103–104. See also Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, 122, 134, 163, 189, 237. The frequent attestation of ?RYH as a masculine name has been pointed out many times by Latter-day Saint commentators, with

Tvedtnes, Gee, and Roper noting “the name seems to have been common in the time of Jeremiah, a contemporary of Lehi and his wife Sariah.” John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, “Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 43. See also Hoskisson, “Lehi and Sariah,” 30; Chadwick, “Names Lehi and Sariah,” 34; John A. Tvedtnes, “Lehi and Sariah Comments,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 1 (2000): 37.

17. In particular, we should be aware that women are more predominant at Elephantine, and thus more frequently named in documents from that area. Therefore, it is generally more likely that names used for women would be attested in its corpus — which may be the reason ?RYH is found as a woman’s name there and not elsewhere. On women at Elephantine, see Annalisa Azzoni, “Women of Elephantine and Women in the Land of Israel,” in *In the Shadow of Bezalel: Aramaic, Biblical, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Bezalel Porten*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta (Boston: Brill, 2013), 3–12.