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“RISE UP, O LIGHT OF THE LORD”: AN APPROPRIATE AND DEFENSIBLE ETYMOLOGY FOR CUMORAH

Paul Hoskisson

Abstract: *This article explores issues with past suggestions concerning the etymology of the name Cumorah and suggests a slightly updated etymology, “Rise up, O Light of the Lord.” It then suggests that Book of Mormon references to the Hill Cumorah appear to confirm the proposed etymology, thus becoming an apt description of the Restoration.*

No one should be under the illusion that scholarship in the humanities is an exact science. There are rules, to be sure, with acceptable and unacceptable methodologies, with non sequiturs and sequiturs, with good data and bad data. Knowing that definitive answers in the humanities are often ephemeral is nowhere more important than in the attempt to provide an etymology for Book of Mormon names, including the subject of this essay: the geographic name *Cumorah*. In fact, definitive explanations of Book of Mormon names are not possible, partly because we do not know for sure what language lies behind Joseph Smith’s translation of the plates.¹ Until we have access to the plates and have learned how to read them, the best we can do is to offer an etymology based on educated guesses. What follows is an educated guess about the name *Cumorah*.

One of the first issues to clear up is that *Cumorah* is a geographic name and may not follow in all aspects the patterns evidenced in personal names. Nevertheless, I have assumed that *Cumorah* would

1. Mormon 9:32–33 only offers comments about the script used on the plates and says almost nothing about the language behind the script. For more about the language possibilities, see Book of Mormon Onomasticon, “Introduction,” <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php?title=Introduction>.

follow the same general lexical and semantic patterns I have used in preparing the majority of the etymologies of names in the digital Book of Mormon Onomasticon at <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu>. A major lesson of that onomasticon is that most of the entries reflect ancient Hebrew patterns.

Years ago, David A. Palmer and Robert F. Smith independently proposed that *Cumorah* means “Arise, O Light.”² As these authors pointed out, the Hebrew verb *qūm*, “arise/rise (up),” along with the Hebrew noun *’ôr*, or the feminine form *’ôrah*,³ meaning “light, flame, fire,” together yield the meaning, “rise up, (O) light.” This explanation of *Cumorah*, “Rise up, O light” is a very tempting etymology, given the significance of the Hill *Cumorah* in Latter-day Saint scripture and Restoration history, and even prefigures the “glad tidings from *Cumorah*” of Doctrine and Covenants 128:20.⁴

This etymology seems especially appealing because of repeated allusions to light in the scriptures, the most compelling example being Isaiah 60:1: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” The presence alone of “light,” “shine,” and “arise”

2. David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 21, and Robert F. Smith, “Oracles & Talismans, Forgery & Pansophia: Joseph Smith, Jr., as a Renaissance Magus” (typescript draft, August 1987). Smith attributes this idea to Eldon and Welby Ricks.

3. For the feminine form (which is far less common in the Hebrew Bible than the masculine form), see Esther 8:16, Psalm 139:12, and Isaiah 26:19, though two of these three are plural in form. Some would suggest that the suffix *ah* could be a cohortative. Many Semitic languages do have a cohortative form ending in *-ā*, including Hebrew. However, the cohortative in Hebrew “occurs (with few exceptions) only in the 1st person.” *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970) §48b. That means it is unlikely that a first-person cohortative suffix, *-ā*, would be attached to a third-person jussive, with the meaning “shine” [O light].

4. Additionally, light in a symbolic sense can be a metaphor for revelation. See Numbers 27:21; 1 Samuel 28:6; Isaiah 2:5; 51:4; and Proverbs 6:23. Even the early members of the Restoration understood light as metaphor, as, for example, in the words of Parley P. Pratt’s hymn “An Angel From on High,” *Hymns*, no. 13, second verse, referencing *Cumorah* and the Book of Mormon.

Sealed by Moroni’s hand,
It has for ages lain
To wait the Lord’s command,
From Dust to speak again.
It shall again to light come forth
To usher in Christ’s reign on earth.

together in one verse in Isaiah 60 should be enough to convince anyone of the appropriateness of the suggestion from Palmer and Smith.⁵

In support of the suggested etymology, "Rise up, O light," the Book of Mormon itself might be hinting about its relationship with the Hill Cumorah. In Mormon 8:14–16, Moroni, the last contributor to the abridged record of his people, clearly declares to the reader that he is the one who will hide "up this record unto the Lord." Moroni further declares that "whoso shall bring [the Book of Mormon] to light" from the darkness where he would bury it, "him will the Lord bless. For none can have power to bring [the Book of Mormon] to light [from where it was buried] save it be given him of God. ... And blessed be he that shall bring [the Book of Mormon] to light; for it shall be brought out of darkness unto light, according to the word of God; yea, it shall be brought out of the earth, and it shall shine forth out of" the darkness where it had been buried.⁶ In fact, Moroni is the resurrected being who would guide Joseph Smith to the location where Joseph would find the record that would "shine forth out of darkness" and would initiate the Restoration that is destined to enlighten the whole earth.

Yet over the years, I have resisted this attractive and beautiful derivation because of a technical issue with the grammar, namely subject/verb disagreement.⁷ As understood by the authors of previous explanations, including my own previous analysis, the ending *-orah* on Cumorah appears to correspond with the Hebrew feminine word for light, *'ôrah*. As a Hebrew feminine noun, *'ôrah* would require a Hebrew feminine verb form. If the first part of Cumorah, *cum-*, corresponds with the Hebrew verb *qûm*, which means "rise (up)," it would require the feminine imperative verb form *qûmî*,⁸ which properly can be represented

5. Other verses also speak of light, such as Isaiah 49:6: "And I will give thee as a light of the Gentiles" (my own translation of the Hebrew *ânētatîkâ lē'ôr gôyîm*). The Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation is "I will also make you a light of nations." Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). The King James translation reads, "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles."

6. I purposely avoid using the name *Cumorah* in this paragraph and elsewhere in this paper to obviate any discussion of the "One Cumorah" versus "Two Cumorah" theories.

7. Even though English subject/verb disagreements in the received English text of the Book of Mormon are well documented and therefore not unprecedented, subject/verb disagreement should not be brushed aside when considering the transcriptions of the ancient names in the Book of Mormon.

8. The feminine form occurs in Isaiah 60:1 (quoted above), *קומי*, *qûmî*.

in English as *cumi*. (This is the precise transliterated form that the Aramaic cognate of Hebrew *qūm* takes in the King James transliteration in Mark 5:41, *Talitha cumi*, “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.” Notice the vocative nature of this cognate Aramaic verb.) Thus, the feminine imperative with the feminine noun would yield *cumiorah*. This reading could be construed as a possible source of Cumorah if various rules of Hebrew syntax are brushed aside. For instance, in the Hebrew feminine imperative *qūmī*, the final long *ī* vowel would not disappear for one main reason — it is phonemic and therefore necessary to indicate the feminine imperative. In other words, *cumiorah* is philologically difficult if not impossible to reconcile with Cumorah.⁹

Likewise, the received form, Cumorah, is not congruent with masculine forms either. The masculine imperative from Hebrew *qūm* would, in an English transcription, conveniently become *cum*. The masculine form of Hebrew *’ôr*, “light,” would become *or* in an English transcription. The two English transcriptions of the masculine forms together would yield *cumor* without the final *-ah* of the received text. In other words, without doing speculative phonetic gymnastics, neither the masculine forms alone nor the feminine forms would account for the received English form *Cumorah*.¹⁰ Therefore, as attractive as this suggested etymology might be, “Rise up, O Light” has not been championed in the original Book of Mormon digital onomasticon but mentioned only as an attractive but questionable etymology.¹¹

9. In fact, given the likely nature of the Nephite language and script (a melding of Hebrew and Egyptian), each consonant and each vowel of the received form of a Book of Mormon name needs to comport with the consonants and vowels of the assumed source language of the Book of Mormon vorlage.

10. Note that none of the variant spellings of *Cumorah* in the earliest Book of Mormon text, the printer’s manuscript (the original manuscript is not extant for the instances of Cumorah), solve the issue of subject/verb disagreement of “Rise up [masculine], O Light [feminine].” According to Royal Skousen, the printer’s manuscript reads Mormon 6:2, *Camorah* (once, but corrected by Oliver Cowdery to *Cumorah*); Mormon 6:2, *Cumorah* (once); Mormon 6:4, *Cumorah* (twice); Mormon 6:5, *Comorah* (once); Mormon 6:6, *Cumorah* (twice); Mormon 6:11, *Comorah* (once); and Mormon 8:2, *Cumorah* (once). The 1830 Book of Mormon consistently spells the name of the hill *Camorah*, while the 1837 has the consistent spelling *Cumorah*. Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, 2nd ed., six parts (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies and Brigham Young University Studies, 2017), 3770.

11. I am responsible for the current July 2023 form of the entry for *Cumorah*. Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Cumorah,” last edited July 9, 2023, <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/CUMORAH>.

Nevertheless, lately I have come to believe that the suggestion "Rise up, O Light," with a technical tweak and additional words, can and should be embraced as the most likely etymology. In order to justify setting aside the seeming subject/verb disagreement, I need to explain a relatively little-known feature of Hebrew names: hypocorism. Because hypocorism is not exactly a household word, I will give a brief explanation using English examples and then move on to Hebrew instances.¹² While my initial explanation of hypocorism that follows is necessarily quite technical, a plain language summary follows after the initial discussion of hypocoristica.

Various forms of diminutives, pet names, nicknames, shortened names, caritatives, etc., come under the hypocorism umbrella. For example, an ordinary *dog* can become a cute, "little" (diminutive), and beloved (caritative) *dog* by adding a long *ī* vowel, *doggie* or even *doggy*. Native English speakers have no problem recognizing what the addition of a long *ī* vowel does and can apply it to other names and nouns almost indiscriminately. But not all hypocorisms in English result from just adding a long *ī* vowel. A different hypocoristic form of the personal name *Susan* can be produced by truncating *Susan* to become *Sue*. Alternatively, replacing the *-an* of *Susan* with the long *ī* vowel turns *Susan* into the hypocoristicon *Susie*. Thus, both *Susie* and *Sue* are hypocoristica of *Susan*.

Hebrew also can create hypocoristic names, but in different ways than English. The two most common ways in Hebrew are to shorten the name by eliding one or more elements of the name, and/or by replacing an element of the name with a shorter element. To illustrate this process in Hebrew, I will use an integral part of the etymology of Cumorah proposed in this paper, namely, the Hebrew noun for "light," *'ōr*.¹³

12. It is inherently dangerous to use a language like English from one language group, Indo-European, to help explain a language like Hebrew in a totally different language group, Semitic. In the case at hand, hypocorisms in English and in Hebrew share a few of the concepts but even fewer of the particulars. Yet at times, comparing apples to oranges is instructive.

13. For the purposes of this paper, I will, with Martin Noth, not distinguish between Hebrew *'ōr*, אור, and *'ūr*, אור. Usually, the former is associated with daylight, and the latter is associated with firelight. Martin Noth, *Die Israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der Gemeinsemitischen Namengebung* (1928; repr., Hildesheim, DEU: Georg Olms, 1966), 168–69. All translations and paraphrases of Noth's German text are mine. See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), CD-Rom Edition. For an example of mixing daylight (as a metaphor for the God of Israel)

Psalm 27:1 reads in Hebrew *yhw̄h ʾōrî*, “Jehovah is my light,” rendered into English by the King James Bible translation as “The Lord is my light.” Because most biblical personal names are theophoric, meaning they contain the name or title of a deity, a case can be made that the personal name *Urijah*, *ʾūrîyāh*, in 2 Kings 16:10 and in 2 Samuel 11:3 was inspired by the declaration of the theological belief that “Jehovah is my light.” In the Hebrew nominal sentence name *ʾūrîyāh*, *Jehovah* is represented by *yāh* and is the theophoric element (meaning it represents deity), while *light* is the predicate complement, thus yielding the meaning “Jehovah is (my) light.”¹⁴ The Hebrew Bible contains other variations on the name, including *ʾūrîʿēl*, “God is (my) light,” in 1 Chronicles 15:11, albeit with a different theophoric element, and the plene form *ʾūrîyāhû* in Jeremiah 26:20 (though the King James rendering somewhat disguises the plene spelling of the Hebrew form with the transcription *Urijah*).¹⁵ In other words, the theological concept that “Jehovah is (my) light” takes various forms in Hebrew personal names.

However, of importance for the discussion here is another variant based on *ʾōr*, though not without some controversy. According to some scholars, an even shorter version of *ʾūrîyāh* appears in several places in the Old Testament, namely *Uri*, from Hebrew *ʾūrî*.¹⁶ The name could mean “my light.” For most scholars there would be no question about the meaning if Martin Noth, the great 20th-century German Semitist, had not listed *Uri* among the hypocoristica (short names), with suffixed *î*¹⁷ in his magisterial work on Hebrew personal names published nearly a hundred years ago.¹⁸ That is, the name *ʾūrî*, rather than mean “my light,” is a shortened version (hypocoristicon) of *ʾūrîyāhû*, *ʾūrîyāh*, or *ʾūrîʿēl*.¹⁹

and firelight, see Isaiah 10:17: “And the light of Israel (*ʾōr yiśrāʿēl*, אֹרֶי־יִשְׂרָאֵל) shall be for a fire.”

14. With Shmuel Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 475, I have put parentheses around *my* because the *i* vowel in Hebrew in this case can be interpreted as either a *hireq compaginis*, which has no semantic value (*Gesenius’ Grammar*, §90k–n), or as the first person singular possessive pronoun.

15. For this form of the name and translation in biblical period inscriptions, see Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 475.

16. See Exodus 31:2, 35:30, 38:22, 1 Chronicles 2:20, and 2 Chronicles 1:5.

17. Noth, *Personennamen*, 38, *ʾūrî* (as #65 in his “Namenregister” on page 235) is listed as having the vocalic ending *î*.

18. The fact that the book was reissued in 1966 as a photographic reprint is a measure of its importance.

19. Noth, *Personennamen*, 168, and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, s.v. “אורי.”

Note that, as is often the case with many hypocoristica, the hypocorism does not indicate the precise theophoric element that it displaces in the syntax of the name.

Though by no means pervasive, hypocoristic names were fairly common in the biblical period. Noth devoted over four pages to "short names" ("Kurznamen," as he called them) and enumerates seven different hypocoristic affixes connected to these (often shortened) Semitic names turning them into hypocoristica.²⁰ The contemporary Israeli scholar Shmuel Ahituv in discussing Hebrew and cognate language names in the biblical period designates by my count 61 names as hypocoristic among the 318 names in the corpus he studied.²¹ If this ratio is indicative of biblical period West Semitic names, it means that almost 20% of these names are hypocoristic.

The most common affixed hypocoristic element, by my count in Noth, was the long vowel *ī* represented by the Hebrew letter *yod*, as in *'ūrī* mentioned above, followed by the long vowel *ā*, which can be represented in Hebrew by either *heh* or *aleph*.²² As examples of *heh* and *aleph* alternating as hypocoristic elements, Noth cites *b'r'* versus *b'rh*, *'zr'* versus *'zrh*, and *šm'* versus *šm'h*.²³ Some of the variation between the Hebrew hypocoristic endings *heh* and *aleph* can be confusing because some Hebrew hypocoristica end in an *aleph* but are represented by *-ah* in the King James translation. For example, *Uzzah* in 2 Samuel 6:1 is the King James reflection of the Hebrew *'zzā*, זצא. This personal name *Uzzah* is then, by the way, another example of a Hebrew hypocoristic.²⁴

After this slight diversion to explain hypocorism, I can turn to why, with this additional understanding, I changed my mind about "Rise up, O Light" being the most preferable etymology. While browsing for

20. Noth, *Personennamen*, 36–41, expounds on and gives examples of Semitic hypocoristic names, including Hebrew names.

21. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 474–88.

22. The *Journal of Biblical Literature* guidelines suggest transcribing the Hebrew character ה with *hê*. However, to avoid confusion with the English personal pronoun *he*, I have opted for the purposes of this article for the transcription *heh* of the Hebrew character ה. Similarly, I have opted for *aleph* as the transcription of Hebrew א to better represent its pronunciation. The King James translation/transcription of biblical Hebrew names cannot be relied on to represent with exactness the original Hebrew. See the discussion at the end of this paragraph.

23. Respectively Noth, *Personennamen*, 238 (#240), 253 (#1053), 259 (#1368).

24. See *ibid.*, 38, 160 (#1036).

a different topic, I serendipitously came across an Ammonite²⁵ personal name that pulled me up short and demanded that I reconsider “Arise, O Light.” The Ammonite name in question, *’wr* (אורא, *aleph, waw, resh, aleph*, a cognate of Hebrew *’ōr* discussed above) without affix no doubt means “light.” With affix it was probably pronounced *’ōrā* or perhaps *’ūrā* and, more importantly, it pointed me in the direction of hypocoristica.

The name appears around the time of Lehi on an Ammonite stamp seal.²⁶ Because the *-ah* on the end of the geographic name *Cumorah* is most likely a suffix, most previous explanations (including my own) assumed that the *-ah* was, as mentioned above, the English transcription of the common Hebrew feminine suffix הַ, *-āh* (also transcribed into English as *-â* following the *Journal of Biblical Literature* guidelines). Indeed, accepting the *-ah* as a feminine noun marker was integral to Palmer’s and Smith’s explanation and was the main reason that I was leery of their proposal.

However, as I realized from the Ammonite personal name, the suffix transcribed as *-ā* need not be seen as the transcription of a feminine noun ending. Indeed, the pervasive form of the feminine ending is *heh* with a long /a/ vowel (הַ, *-āh*), but the Ammonite name ends in an *aleph* and not a *heh*. It was that hypocoristic *aleph* that allowed me to see that a long *ā* vowel, such as the *-ah* ending on *Cumorah*, can be a hypocoristic element and not always a feminine noun marker.²⁷ A further quick search revealed that both an *aleph* and a *heh* can function as hypocoristic elements often with a vocative aspect.²⁸ Thus, the *aleph* and the *heh* on the end of the names mentioned above (*b’r’/b’rh*, *’zr’/’zrh*, *šm’/šm’h*),

25. Ammonite was spoken during the biblical period in the area east of the Jordan River Valley. It was not only geographically close to Hebrew, but it is also linguistically closely related to Hebrew. Both Ammonite and Hebrew belong to the Northwest Semitic language group.

26. Nahman Avigad, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*, revised and completed by Benjamin Sass (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1997), 364 (no. 988).

27. In an email to the author on September 11, 2023, Jan Wilson suggested that the ending on *Cumorah* might be the locative *-ah*, הַ ending, making a plausible translation of “Rise up toward (the) light!” (See *Gesenius’ Grammar*, §90a–c.) This reading certainly solves the subject/verb disagreement and is therefore syntactically possible. However, I think that the symbolism of God’s light (the Restoration) arising from *Cumorah*, as I propose below, comports better with the Book of Mormon scriptures in Mormon 8:14–16 cited above.

28. Noth, *Personennamen*, 38, wrote, “Often on the shortened names ... a vocalic ending is attached, usually with a vocative meaning.”

and the *aleph* on the end of the Ammonite personal name *'ōrā*, can represent a hypocoristic element.

When a hypocoristic element appears in a name in the position where a theophoric element normally would be, the hypocoristic element is said to represent a shortened version of the theophoric element. It is not that the hypocoristic element is per se theophoric, but the element can be said to be a theophoric hypocoristicon if the creation of the hypocoristicon involves eliding or replacing a theophoric element. Thus, if Ammonite *'ōrā/'ūrā* is a shortened version of a name morphologically similar to Hebrew *'ūrîyāhû* (or any other theophoric element), then the *aleph* on the end of the personal name can be thought of as a theophoric hypocoristic ending representing an elided Ammonite deity, analogous to Hebrew *'ūrî'ēl*, "God is light."

When a theophoric element in a name has been replaced by a hypocoristic element, the deity's name that was replaced by the hypocoristicon cannot be readily identified. For example, the feminine personal name in 1 Samuel 1–2, *Hannah*, *ḥannâ*, חַנָּה, is according to Martin Noth most likely a hypocoristic name.²⁹ Yet the hypocoristic ending on *Hannah*, the *-āh* (חָ), does not reveal which theophoric element it represents. When comparing other names containing the Hebrew lexeme *ḥēn*, the name *Hanniel*, in Numbers 34:23 comes to mind.³⁰ The suggestion that *Hannah* is a shortened form of *Hanniel*, "God is grace," is not readily apparent in English. The shortening becomes apparent only when viewing the Hebrew originals, *ḥannâ*, חַנָּה, versus the supposed longer form, *ḥannî'ēl*, חַנְיָאֵל.³¹

29. The Bible Dictionary in the Latter-day Saint edition of the Old Testament states that "Hannah" means "Grace." In a broad sense this is certainly true. The name is built on the Hebrew noun *ḥēn* (see Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, s.v. "חֵן"), which does mean "grace," "charm," "favor." The noun form *ḥēn* is congruent with the Hebrew verb form *ḥnn*, meaning "to favor" and that in some forms means "to implore favour, compassion" (Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, s.v. "חָנַן"). As far as I can tell, there is no feminine form of the noun *ḥēn* that ends with *-ah*. That is one of the reasons why, no doubt, Noth, *Personennamen*, 187n4, states חַנָּה and חַנָּה are both "derived from the perfect form" *ḥan* and not from *ḥānan*, and that the affix /a/ is not the feminine form marker, but rather is the much used hypocoristic suffix ("nicht für Femininzeichen, sondern für die viel gebrauchte hypokoristische Endung").

30. My colleague David Calabro reminded me in an email on December 22, 2022, that *Hanniel* might be translated "God's grace."

31. It needs to be said at this point of the discussion that, like most languages, Hebrew has a natural gender and a grammatical gender. For example, the Hebrew word for "city," עָר, is grammatically feminine, but is not marked by a feminine

In some instances, when a hypocoristicon occupies the position normally taken by the theophoric element, the document may provide a link or hint to the identity of the elided deity. For example, biblical names in an Israelite context would suggest an Israelite deity. With names in the Book of Mormon, however, we are not blessed with a plethora of information. We cannot rely on the geographic origin of the text, or the perceived language in which the text was composed. As is the case with nearly all Book of Mormon names, we must rely on educated guesses, based primarily on the assumption that Hebrew language and Israelite culture with an admixture of Egyptian influence pervade the Nephite record.

In the case at hand, with Cumorah, which is attested in a Nephite language text and arguably in a Nephite geographic area, the most likely elided theophoric element would no doubt have been a form of one of the many Hebrew designations for deity, e.g., “El,” “Jehovah (Yahweh),”³² “Elohim,” “Most High God,” “Mighty One,” etc. In the Hebrew Bible, “light” is paired with both *Jehovah* and *El*, as seen above. But, given that we do not know which theophoric elements were employed in the Nephite onomasticon, as a nod to a somewhat ambiguous situation, *Jehovah* or *El*, I offer a generic King James Bible English theophoric designation that English speakers will have no problem recognizing, namely, “the Lord.” Therefore, given my explanation that the *-ah* on Cumorah is not a feminine ending, but most likely a hypocoristic ending with a vocative aspect, I can now concur with Palmer and Smith that the Book of Mormon geographic name *Cumorah*, with my slight addition to their etymology, may be interpreted as “Rise up, O Light of the Lord.”³³

ending, neither is there anything about a “city” that is naturally feminine. And yet the noun is feminine. Beginning language students can easily confuse grammatical genders with natural genders. It should be noted here that names of females in the Old Testament need not contain a grammatical feminine marker. *Hannah* is probably the best example of this.

32. For two examples among many pertinent examples of Jehovah as the theophoric element in personal names, consider the biblical period Hebrew personal names *Uriah*, אֱוִירְיָהּ, in 2 Samuel 11:3, and *Uriyahu*, אֱוִירְיָהוּ, in the first line of Arad ostrakon #31 in Ahitub, *Echoes from the Past*, 135.

33. My colleague David Calabro suggested that the spelling of the hill as *Camorah* once in the printer’s manuscript (but corrected by a different scribe to *Cumorah*) and all nine times as *Camorah* in the 1830 Book of Mormon (see footnote 10 above) could represent a precative or jussive and could be translated as “Let the Light of the Lord Arise.” David Calabro, email message to author, December 2022 and May 17, 2023. The *cam-* would be the transliterated form of the precative perfect form *qām*. This form of the name, *Camorah*, would be playing off the Hebrew precative forms

Note that Cumorah would not be the only hypocoristicon in the Book of Mormon. As explained in the entry for *Alma* in the online Book of Mormon onomasticon, <onoma.lib.byu.edu>, this common Book of Mormon name is composed of the lexeme *ʿlm*, “hero, young man,” plus the hypocoristic ending *aleph*, /ʾ/, or *heh* /h/, in the normal place of a theophoric element, yielding the meaning of “Young man of God.”³⁴ In fact, to illustrate the variability of hypocoristic affixes, the late Hebrew attested personal name *Alma*, *ʿlm*, appears twice in a Hebrew Bar Kokhba letter, once with a suffixed *aleph*, *ʿlmʾ* and once (in the same document!) with a suffixed *heh*, *ʿlmh*.³⁵

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, though geographic names should follow the semantic and lexical norms for the assumed language of the vorlage, geographic names do not need to follow with exactness the naming conventions of personal names. Nevertheless, an early anonymous reviewer raised the question of whether there are examples of precativ forms among Hebrew names. Though the question may be moot with regard to the geographic name *Cumorah*, I have nevertheless chosen to provide examples of Semitic personal names with precativ forms.

In Hebrew and other Semitic languages, the precativ forms range from first person (cohortative forms), to second person (imperative

as in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light,” a very attractive suggestion indeed. As Robert F. Smith reminded me in an email on September 4, 2023, Parley P. Pratt’s words, “to light come forth,” in the hymn “An Angel From on High,” mentioned earlier, may be the first instance of a modern viable etymology for *Cumorah*.

34. For all the technical explanations, including the interchange between the initial *gaiyin* and *aiyin* see Book of Mormon Onomasticon, s.v. “Alma,” <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/ALMA>, last edited September 7, 2023.

35. Hugh Nibley was the first to notice that the personal name *ʿlmʾ/ʿlmh* in the Bar Kokhba letter may represent the Book of Mormon name *Alma*. *ʿlmʾ* with *aleph* appears at the end of the fourth line from the top of the letter, and *ʿlmh* with *heh* is found at the beginning of the fourth line from the bottom. Yigael Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt against Rome* (Tel Aviv: Japhet Press, 1971), 177. The original publisher of the letter, Yigael Yadin, along with Hugh Nibley and myself read the name as *Alma*. Hugh W. Nibley, “Bar-Kochba [sic] Zigaël Yadin [sic],” *BYU Studies* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 121. However, in the subsequent scholarly publication of this letter, this name has been reinterpreted as Aramaic *ʿallimaʾ*, “strong, powerful.” See *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters: Hebrew, Aramaic and Nabatean-Aramaic Papyri*, ed. Yigael Yadin, Jonas C. Greenfield, Ada Yardeni, and Baruch Levine (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology, and Israel Museum Shrine of the Book, 2002), 47.

forms), through second and third person (jussive forms).³⁶ For example, Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light,” is the King James translation of a Hebrew third person jussive, *y^ohî ’ôr*, “Be light!” The biblical name *Reuben* in Genesis 29:32, which can be interpreted as “Look, a son!” is perhaps the most recognized Hebrew personal name that is a jussive/imperative.³⁷ But there are other examples of jussives and imperatives in Semitic names. Aḥituv, in his discussion of biblical period Hebrew and cognate language names, lists six names that contain a jussive or an imperative: *Y^ohaw’ēlî*, “Let the High (the god) live”;³⁸ *K^omošyāt*, “May K^omoš come!”;³⁹ *P^oga’qôš*, “Plead with Qôš”;⁴⁰ *Qôlāyāw*, “Trust, hope in YH(W)”;⁴¹ *Šub’ēl*, “Return, O God”;⁴² *Š^oḥanyāhû*, “Return, O YHW!”;⁴³ and possibly a seventh with particular importance for my discussion of Cumorah, *Q^orab’or*, “Come near, O Light,” or “light has come near.”⁴⁴ Though not readily apparent in English-language texts, perhaps the best known Semitic name containing an imperative is the East Semitic name *Nebuchadnezzar*. The transcription of the Babylonian form of his name, *Nabû-kudurri-ušur*, “[the god] Nabu, protect the heir,” contains the imperative form *ušur* from the Babylonian verb *našāru*, “to watch over, protect, preserve.” Thus, precative personal names are not unknown in the Semitic onomasticon.

36. Normally, an imperative is thought of as a second-person form. Most Semitic languages also have precative forms for first- and third-person verbs. The cohortative form appears almost exclusively with first-person forms and may be translated as “Let me...” or “Let us...” The jussive form is used for second- and third-person verb forms (both singular and plural, male and female), and like the cohortative can usually be rendered into English with “Let him...,” “Let her...,” “Let them...,” etc. As with the cohortative, the particle *nā’* and other particles can be used to emphasize the jussive aspect. *Gesenius’ Grammar*, §109a-b.

37. “She called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction” (Genesis 29:32). Though this explanation of Reuben may be later folk etymology, the imperative or jussive nature of the verbal element in Reuben is not suspect.

38. Aḥituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 482.

39. *Ibid.*, 483.

40. *Ibid.*, 486.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*, 487.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 486. Aḥituv translates this name as a past tense form, “light has come near.” He then suggests the name could also be an entreaty; therefore, my vocative translation, “Come near, O Light.” “Let the light come near” would capture the jussive aspect.

One last word about geographic names. While the name *Cumorah* in the Book of Mormon at times also applied to the territory and land around the Hill Cumorah (Mormon 6:2–6), the name *Cumorah* itself may be referring more to the record buried there than to any geographic feature of the hill. Instructive in this regard is the story in Judges 15:9–17. This incident involves a geographic location that the King James translation renders as “Lehi” in verse 9. However, as verses 16 and 17 make clear, the location received its name after the battle in which Samson “slew a thousand men” “with the jawbone [*lehi*], of an ass” from the Hebrew *l^hhî-hămôr*, (לְהִי־תַגְוֹר). Additionally, no doubt the Mount of Transfiguration in the New Testament was called by that name only after the transfiguration took place. Is it then not possible that Cumorah received its name proleptically in anticipation of the fulfillment of prophetic foresight (as quoted above from Mormon 8:14–16) of what would take place there? Leaving aside the implications of the two-Cumorah theory, the territory and land in upstate New York surrounding that hill certainly qualify as the geographic territory where the Light of the Lord would arise and shine forth in the Restoration. What more meaningful and significant name for that hill or area could there be than “Rise up, O Light of the Lord.”

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