



Type: Journal Article

Liahona: “Prepared of the Lord, a Compass”

Author(s): Calvin D. Tolman

Source: *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*,
Volume 51 (2022)

Published by: The Interpreter Foundation

Page(s): 211-252

Abstract: This study assesses some of the interpretations of the name Liahona, which are unsatisfactory from a linguistic perspective. Since a dialect of Hebrew is the most likely underlying language of the Book of Mormon, the approach taken in this study parses the word Liahona into three meaningful segments in Hebrew: l-iah-ona; a Biblical Hebrew transliteration would be l-Yāh-ʔōnā. This name is a grammatical construction that attaches the prepositional prefix l- to Yāh, the name of “the Lord,” followed by the noun *ʔōnā. The preposition l- in this context denotes the following name as the agent or the one who is responsible for the following noun, i.e., l-Yāh designates the Lord as the agent, author, or producer of the *ʔōnā. Languages are complex, and etymological conjectures in ancient languages are hypothetical; therefore, the explanations and justifications presented here, of necessity, are speculative in nature. Etymological explanations have to involve the complexity of linguistics and sound changes. The hoped-for result of this study is that a simple and reasonable explanation of the meaning of Liahona will emerge from the complexity, and a more reasonable translation of Liahona will be the result.

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 51 · 2022 · Pages 211- 252

Liahona: “Prepared of the Lord, a Compass”

Calvin D. Tolman

Offprint Series

© 2022 The Interpreter Foundation. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 444 Castro Street, Suite 900, Mountain View, California, 94041, USA.

ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

The goal of The Interpreter Foundation is to increase understanding of scripture through careful scholarly investigation and analysis of the insights provided by a wide range of ancillary disciplines, including language, history, archaeology, literature, culture, ethnohistory, art, geography, law, politics, philosophy, etc. Interpreter will also publish articles advocating the authenticity and historicity of LDS scripture and the Restoration, along with scholarly responses to critics of the LDS faith. We hope to illuminate, by study and faith, the eternal spiritual message of the scriptures—that Jesus is the Christ.

Although the Board fully supports the goals and teachings of the Church, The Interpreter Foundation is an independent entity and is neither owned, controlled by nor affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or with Brigham Young University. All research and opinions provided are the sole responsibility of their respective authors, and should not be interpreted as the opinions of the Board, nor as official statements of LDS doctrine, belief or practice.

This journal is a weekly publication of the Interpreter Foundation, a non-profit organization located at InterpreterFoundation.org. You can find other articles published in our journal at Journal.InterpreterFoundation.org.

LIAHONA: “PREPARED OF THE LORD, A COMPASS”

Calvin D. Tolman

Abstract: *This study assesses some of the interpretations of the name Liahona, which are unsatisfactory from a linguistic perspective. Since a dialect of Hebrew is the most likely underlying language of the Book of Mormon, the approach taken in this study parses the word Liahona into three meaningful segments in Hebrew: l-iah-ona; a Biblical Hebrew transliteration would be l-Yāh-ʔōnā. This name is a grammatical construction that attaches the prepositional prefix l- to Yāh, the name of “the Lord,” followed by the noun *ʔōnā. The preposition l- in this context denotes the following name as the agent or the one who is responsible for the following noun, i.e., l-Yāh designates the Lord as the agent, author, or producer of the *ʔōnā. Languages are complex, and etymological conjectures in ancient languages are hypothetical; therefore, the explanations and justifications presented here, of necessity, are speculative in nature. Etymological explanations have to involve the complexity of linguistics and sound changes. The hoped-for result of this study is that a simple and reasonable explanation of the meaning of Liahona will emerge from the complexity, and a more reasonable translation of Liahona will be the result.*

The root and meaning of the word *Liahona*, only mentioned once in the Book of Mormon (Alma 37:38), has been a topic of conjecture and debate for decades. In this paper I briefly evaluate four earlier studies or comments on the etymology of the word. Each study varies in its methodology and therefore comes to different conclusions. There is general agreement that *Liahona* is divided into three parts. Each study translates the first segment *L-* as “to.” The second element is identified either as *Yah* or *Yaho*, the short form of *Yahweh*, that signifies “the Lord.” There is no agreement in these studies as to the phonemic construction of the third element, i.e., what word it represents, what its phonemes are,

how it is pronounced, and how it is to be translated. None of the earlier treatments identify the third element as a physical object; the Liahona is described as a round ball of fine brass with spindles (1 Nephi 16:10). An acceptable etymology of *Liahona* should at least take its physical characteristics into account in addition to its interpretation as a compass. The interpretation of *Liahona* given in the translated text is “a compass — and the Lord prepared it” (Alma 37:38). Since these studies do not address the Liahona’s physical characteristics nor its function, they fall short of an acceptable etymology for this name.

As I make clear shortly, I propose that the name *Liahona* is also parsed into three acceptable grammatical elements of Biblical Hebrew. The first element *L-* is a preposition that attaches to a name [-*iah-*] that is followed by an object [-*ona*]. In this grammatical construction *L-* does not signify “to,” but denotes that the named person [-*iah-*] is the agent, actor, author, or the one responsible for the object [-*ona*]. This proposal necessitates a lengthy discussion on the justification for this interpretation taken from the Bible and from epigraphic Hebrew texts of the pre-exilic period.

The second element of *Liahona* is *Yāh*, the short form of the divine name *Yahweh*, “the Lord.” There are no *l-Yāh-* expressions in the Masoretic Text, so a few *l-Yahweh* expressions are documented to demonstrate how this expression can be interpreted. The preposition *l-* occurs with other names in the Biblical text, and examples are given that show that it denotes the named person as the agent, author, or producer of the object. The *l-Yāh* expression identifies *Yāh* as the one who produced the object [-*ona*], or as interpreted in Alma 37:38, the one who prepared it.

The third element in the name *Liahona* is proposed to be **ʔōnā*.¹ This has the structure of a legitimate word in Hebrew, but it does not occur in any known Hebrew inscription or text. I propose a workaround by postulating a reconstruction of **ʔōnā* as it would have occurred as a proto-Semitic word. The next step is to look for cognates (words that have a common origin) of the reconstructed word in related Semitic languages. Principles of historical linguistics and sound changes are utilized to identify possible cognates in other Semitic languages. Cognates are found in Akkadian, Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Arabic. The fundamental meaning shared by these cognates is “vessel.” The conclusion is that **ʔōnā* denotes “a vessel.” The name *l-Yāh-ʔōnā* literally translates as “prepared the Lord a vessel.” The interpretation of this name is given to us by the translator Joseph Smith as “a compass, and the Lord prepared it.” The Nephites would not have had a word that signified

a magnetic compass that indicated directions, but they would have had a word for vessel — **ʔōnâ*. A vessel is a portable physical object and qualifies as an appropriate designation for the Liahona. The proposed etymological translation of *Liahona* is “the Lord prepared a vessel,” and the interpretation is “the Lord prepared a compass.”

Reynolds and Sjordahl Propose a Meaning for *Liahona*

The etymology of the name *Liahona* has been of interest to some members of the church for a long time. Reynolds and Sjordahl divide *Liahona* into three parts.

L is a Hebrew preposition meaning “to,” and sometimes used to express the possessive case. *Iah* is a Hebrew abbreviated form of “Jehovah,” common in Hebrew names. *On* is the Hebrew name of the Egyptian “City of the Sun” *L-iah-on* means, therefore, literally, “To God is light,” or, “of God is light.” That is to say, God gives light, as does the Sun.²

Reynolds and Sjordahl propose the Hebrew name of the Egyptian city *ʔōn* [Genesis 41:45, 50] as the final segment. The city *ʔōn* “was celebrated for worship of sun-god Ra & hence called also sun-city.”³ Reynolds and Sjordahl likely conclude that *ʔōn* is the closest word in the Hebrew Bible that would correspond with -ona, the final segment of *Liahona*. However, the final *a* is not found in *ʔōn*. They explain where they believe the *a* came from. “The final *a* reminds us that the Egyptian form of the Hebrew name *On* is *Annu*, and that seems to be the form Lehi used.”⁴ This does not adequately explain the final *a* of *Liahona*. The *a* in *Annu*, does not follow the *n* but precedes it; the final *a* in *Liahona* follows the *n*. “This etymological explanation is rather unlikely because ancient Near Eastern people did not mix languages, especially in the onomasticon.”⁵ One may ask, how is the interpretation “to God is the light” compatible with the interpretation of *Liahona* as a compass (Alma 37:38), a physical object? There is a significant semantic difference here.

Curci Defines *Liahona*: “To Yahweh is the Whither”

Jonathan Curci also parses *Liahona* into three Hebrew segments: *l-* “to” + *iaho*, a theophoric indicator of Yahweh, i.e., “the Lord,” + *ōna* “whither,” “an adverb meaning direction or motion to a certain place.” Curci gives a literal translation, “To YHWH is the whither,” signifying “The Direction (director) of the Lord.”⁶ Curci’s study of the etymology of the word *Liahona* identifies the first part as *Liaho* “to (of)

the Lord.”⁷ He identifies the last part of *Liahona*, ‘*ona* (I prefer to write *aleph*, a glottal stop, with the IPA symbol ʔ. It is more visible and less likely to be confused with *ayin* ʕ, a pharyngeal voiced fricative.) that he derives from the Hebrew adverb ʔānāh,⁸ e.g., ʔānāh ʔēlēki “whither wilt thou go?” (KJV), and “where are you going?” (NIV) (Genesis 16:8). The adverb ʔānāh derives from ʔān “where, whither” plus -āh, the *he locale* or directional *he*, that indicates the direction toward a place.⁹ Curci suggests that the ā vowel is pronounced as an open o.¹⁰ There is no way to know for certain the exact phonetic pronunciation of these vowels in 600 BC.¹¹

If Curci’s ʔānāh “whither” is the source of -ʔona, and if the Tiberian system of pronunciation were used, then both ā’s should be pronounced ɔ̄ (a low back rounded vowel) as in ʔōnō, this would result in **liahoʔōnō*, which would be transcribed **liahono*. If the long ā is a low back open vowel, then we would get **liahana*. Neither of these matches the spelling in the Book of Mormon, thus Hebrew ʔānāh “whither” is likely not the meaning of the last part of *Liahona* (-*ona*). Curci’s literal translation “to Yahweh is the whither,” uses an adverb in the place of the concrete noun *compass*, and his explanation of his interpretation is “the direction of the Lord.” Here he uses an abstract noun in the place of a concrete noun, i.e., a portable object “a compass.” There is a semantic disconnect between his explanation (abstract noun) and his interpretation (adverb) and the actual physical object (concrete noun) — “a round ball of curious workmanship, and it was of fine brass” (1 Nephi 16:10).

Bowen’s Interpretation: “To Yahweh, Look!”

Matthew Bowen proposes an Egyptian explanation for the meaning of *Liahona*:

Regarding the preposition *l-* in *Liahona*, the liquids *r* and *l* were frequently indistinguishable or interchangeable in Egyptian writing ... There was, in fact, no standardized writing for *l* as distinct from *r* in Egyptian until Demotic times (600 BC–AD 400) ... many words with *l* and *r* continued to be spelled interchangeably. ... the interchangeability of *r* and *l* in Egyptian writing and the significant semantic overlap between Egyptian *r* and Hebrew *lē* make them handy candidates for interlingual calquing. Thus, the final element -*na* (-[ʔ]nāʔ) can be accounted for as an Egyptian element, *Liahona* need not be considered a ‘Hebrew’ expression per se, particularly if the *lē-* can be viewed as a calqued form of the

Egyptian preposition *r*. The possible objection that Liahona constitutes a mixed-language construction is mitigated if not obviated. ... The syntax of *Liahona* emphasizes the divine name *yāhō* in a fronted prepositional phrase.¹²

Here Bowen supports his interpretation that *Liahona* is Egyptian. The object of the preposition *l-* is *yāhō*, i.e., *lyāhō*, “**liahu* > **liaho* (*û* > *ō*).” Bowen doesn’t clarify if **liaho* is the Hebrew form or the Egyptian form (the preposition *l-* and the divine name *Yāhō* are Hebrew). Bowen also assumes that the prepositional phrase is “followed by a verbal construction.” He proposes that the final segment *-na* derives from the Egyptian imperative verb *nw* that is pronounced **-naw/-nao*. “It is also possible that the Lehitese pronounced [*ʔi*]*nw* as – [*a* > *o*]*na*.”¹³ There are problems with this proposal from a linguistic standpoint. The vowels *i*, *a*, and *o* in the same environment following a glottal stop cannot just be changed at will to satisfy a proposal; this is not how vowels change. If the initial syllable *ʔi-* of *ʔinw* deletes leaving only *nw* that vocalizes as **naw/nao*, and if Lehi used only this half of the Demotic imperative verb, then this could explain the final *-na*. However, Lehi lived in Jerusalem and spoke Hebrew, so why would a partial Demotic verb get mixed in with the obvious Hebrew *lě-yāhō-ʔ*? Another problem with Bowen’s proposal is that he expects the final syllable *-na* of *Liahona* to be a verb. Bowen states: “I propose an Egyptian explanation that provides the expected verb.”¹⁴ A verb as the final segment is not required nor necessary in this type of grammatical construction, as will be shown in my discussion of the prefix *lamed*. The verb that Bowen settles on is Demotic *ʔinw*, an imperative verb “look!” or “see!” Bowen’s interpretation of *Liahona* is an imperative statement: “‘To Yahweh, look!’ — that is, ‘Look to the Lord!’ or ‘Look to God!’”¹⁵ The *Liahona* is described in the Book of Mormon as “a round ball of curious workmanship, and it was of fine brass” (1 Nephi 16:10¹⁶). It is a physical instrument of some kind that is interpreted “a compass.” A compass is a concrete noun not an imperative statement. It is not necessary to go to Egyptian to define the nature of this marvelous instrument, when the first part of the name is Hebrew. Bowen’s proposal doesn’t account for the physical characteristics of the name *Liahona*.

There is substantial evidence that the original “language of the Book of Mormon is probably not Egyptian. ... The original language of the Book of Mormon is based on a dialect of Hebrew.”¹⁷ The Egyptologist John Gee makes this observation:

The term *language* occurs forty-three times in the Book of Mormon, and can represent both script (Mosiah 1:4; 8:11; 9:1; 24:4; 3 Nephi 5:18; Ether 3:22) and speech (1 Nephi 1:15; 3:21; 5:3, 6, 8; 10:15; 17:22; 2 Nephi 31:3; Omni 1:18, Alma 5:61; 7:1; 26:24; 46:26; Helaman 13:37), and thus it is often ambiguous (e.g. 1 Nephi 1:2).¹⁸

Gee comes to this conclusion: “With the original tongue of the Nephites being Hebrew, what is Egyptian must be the script. A Hebrew dialect written in Egyptian script fulfills all the conditions set forth by both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith for the ‘language’ of the Book of Mormon.”¹⁹ Sidney B. Sperry long ago came to the conclusion that the spoken language was Hebrew and the written language was a “reformed Egyptian” script.²⁰

At the end of the record of Mormon, Moroni writes, “we have written this record, according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large, we should have written in the Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also. And if we could have written in the Hebrew, behold, ye would have had none imperfection in our record” (Mormon 9:32–33). This specifies that the record was written in Egyptian characters (indicating a script and not the spoken Egyptian language) that did not always express the nuances of their spoken Hebrew language, thus there were imperfections in the text. “None other people knoweth our language [script], therefore he [the Lord] hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof” (Mormon 9:34), that is, the Lord would provide the interpretation of the “reformed Egyptian” script and the underlying Hebrew-derived Nephite language. Lehi, as a relative of Laban, likely learned this script from his father or grandfather, therefore he could read the plates of brass, and Nephi used this same script to write his record in his native Hebrew by using the “reformed” Egyptian script.²¹ A spoken language can be written in different languages or writing systems as long as the language or script can represent the phonemes and morphemes of the spoken language. Also, it is no surprise that the spoken Hebrew of the Nephites “hath been altered by us” in the thousand years since the time of Nephi. Spoken languages naturally change over time.

There are many who conclude that “the language of the Egyptians” in 1 Nephi 1:2 refers to both Egyptian speech and Egyptian script.²² It is true that there are a number of Egyptian derived names in the Book of Mormon narrative,²³ but this by itself does not justify concluding

that they spoke the Egyptian language. These Egyptian type names may have become part of the Israelite culture during their long sojourn in the land of Egypt. The names may have persisted in Joseph’s lineage (his wife was Egyptian), and they are also likely to be on the plates of brass.

Spendlove’s Interpretation is an Exclamation: To Jehovah!

Loren Spendlove offers another explanation for *Liahona*. He writes:

its derivation [is] based on the Hebrew language. ... I also believe that the initial part of the word derives from the Hebrew לִיְהוָה (*le’yaho*, meaning “to or toward Jehovah”). Generally speaking, the various explanations often vary from each other only in the final syllable of the word *Liahona*, *-na*. I propose that the final syllable in *Liahona* comes from the Hebrew particle נָא (*na*), described by Koehler and Baumgartner as a “particle giving emphasis,” and by Brown, Driver and Briggs as a particle of “entreaty or exhortation.” It has also been described as a “pleading for what is desired.” In the Hebrew Bible this word is translated most often as *now*, *please*, *oh!*, *I beseech thee*, or *I pray thee*. However, none of these translations really do service to this Hebrew word. I would describe נָא (*na*) as an exclamation without any translatable meaning in English. Perhaps it could be best rendered as simply ! (exclamation point). If we join the particle נָא (*na*) to the initial part of *Liahona* (לִיְהוָה *le’yaho*) we arrive at לִיְהוָה נָא (*le’yaho-na*), *to Jehovah!*, or *toward Jehovah!*²⁴

Spendlove’s interpretation agrees with the general consensus that *Liaho-* is a combination of the Hebrew preposition *le*, meaning *to*, with the theophoric element *yaho*, a form of the divine name Yahweh (or Jehovah) — that is, “to Yahweh,” or “to the Lord.” Spendlove proposes that the final syllable *-na* is an exclamation without any translatable meaning in English, i.e., it is an exclamation. A problem with this interpretation is similar to Bowen’s in that *na* is a particle and not a concrete noun like a compass. The *Liahona* is a physical object whose interpretation in English is a compass, so how is it possible to get the interpretation of “a compass” out of an exclamation “to Jehovah!”?

Parsing *Liahona* into Meaningful Segments

The word *Liahona* should not be divided into syllables based on possible English pronunciation and syllable patterns, for example, it could be

pronounced in English either lée-a-hóe-na or líe-a-hóe-na. I have heard it pronounced both ways. A more appropriate way to determine the probable ancient pronunciation and meaning would be to parse the word into meaningful segments based on Biblical Hebrew grammar. The first Hebrew segment is the letter *l*- or *lamed* that is a prefixed preposition that attaches to a substantive (in this case, a name), and in this phonemic environment it has no vowel.²⁵

The second meaningful segment is *-iah-*. This is a short form of the name of the Lord or Yah. The Book of Mormon spelling follows the Greek or Septuagint system using *iota*, *i* for Hebrew *yod*, *y*. The theophoric element *-iah* occurs as a suffix on some Book of Mormon names.²⁶ Since the *yod* in *-iah-* is a consonant, I prefer to use *y* instead of *i*. Scholars believe the full name of the Lord, the Tetragrammaton or four letters *Yhwh*, is pronounced *Yahweh*.²⁷ The short form *yh* or *Yāh* occurs as a suffix on many names, and it is also a stand-alone name (Exodus 15:2; 17:16; Psalm 68:4 plus 20 more). It is also the final name in the phrase, *halālū-yāh* “praise ye *Yāh* (the Lord)” (Psalm 105:45 plus many more). Of the above scholars, who have proposed the etymology of *Liahona*, only Reynolds and Sjordahl choose *yh* or *Yāh*, the short form of *Yahweh*, as the second segment in *Liahona*. Curci, Bowen, and Spendlove choose the other short form *yhw* that is vocalized in the Masoretic Text as *yəhō-* when it is a prefix and *-yāhū* when it is a suffix. The form *yhw* only occurs as a prefix or a suffix in names. The problem with *yhw* or *yahw* as a prefix is that the vowel *a* deletes or reduces to schwa in propretonic position (two syllables before the tone or stress) based on Masoretic pointing, and the consonant *w* changes to the vowel *ô*, e.g., *yəhōʔāhāz* (2 Kings 10:35). The suffix vocalization of *yhw* is *-yāhū*, where *a* lengthens and *w* changes to the long vowel *ū*, e.g., *ʔābīyāhū* “Abijah” (2 Chronicles 13:20).²⁸ Only Curci discusses this issue. His answer is that *-yaho-* is the middle of the word.²⁹ The final syllable is *-na* that he proposes comes from *ʔānāh* “whither.” He merges the *o* of *-yaho-* with the first syllable *ʔā-* of *ʔānāh* to get *ʔona*.³⁰ Bowen and Spendlove keep the final syllable *-na* as a separate entity. The selection of *-yaho-* as the middle segment creates problems of interpretation; *yhw* only occurs as a suffix on theophoric names with the vocalization *-yāhū*. If the vowel *o* is part of the middle segment, then the final syllable *-na* has to function as a meaningful element in the name that identifies the object as a compass. If *Yāh* is selected as the middle segment, as Reynolds and Sjordahl do, then the final segment has two syllables, which is more acceptable as a Hebrew noun. If *Yāh* can be a stand-alone name for the Lord, then it can be prefixed by the

preposition *l-*. The name *Yāh* occurs as a stand-alone name in these scriptures: Exodus 15:2; 17:16; Psalms 84:5; 68:19; 78:12; 89:9; 94:7, 12; 102:19; 115:18; 118:5, 14, 17–19; 122:4; 130:3; 135:4; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4; 38:11; and it is the final name in the *halləlû-Yāh* expression about twenty-five times in Psalms.

With *Yāh* as the middle segment, *o* becomes part of the third segment and not part of the divine name. The final segment is, therefore, two syllable *-ona*. Hebrew words begin with a consonant not a vowel. The most likely choice for the first consonant is the *aleph*, transliterated *ʔ*, a glottal stop; this results in the word **ʔona*. Neither English nor Greek have a letter that represents a glottal stop, so the glottal *ʔ* is not transliterated, it is simply ignored when spelling Hebrew names, e.g., *ʔādām* “Adam,” *ʔabrām* “Abram.” Biblical Hebrew has long and short vowels, but these are not evident in the transliteration of Book of Mormon names. The conclusion is that the name *Liahona* can justifiably be parsed into three Hebrew segments *l-Yāh-ʔōnā*.

The Lamed Prefix

The prefixed preposition *l-* in Biblical Hebrew has a broad semantic range, so there are a number of possible interpretations for it. Koehler and Baumgartner give twenty-six nuanced definitions of the prefixed *l-*.³¹ Languages are complicated. Choosing only the first definition of *l-* “to, toward” to solve the meaning of *Liahona* is not the only approach. Each definition should be looked at to see which one best fits the context. In a grammatical construction where *l-* attaches to a name or title that is associated with an active verb, then the interpretation “to” is appropriate, e.g., Jonathan “gave it to David” (l-David) (1 Samuel 18:4), “They have ascribed (credited) unto David” (l-David) (1 Samuel 18:8), “Thus shall ye say to David” (l-David) (1 Samuel 18:25). This is the grammatical construction that Bowen expects in his analysis of the name *Liahona*.³² However, if the verb in this grammatical construction is passive then the meaning of *l-* is not “to,” but *l-* signifies the agent or originator — “the one who performs the action,”³³ e.g., “blessed be Abram by God [*l-ʔēl*] Most High” (NIV Genesis 14:19). In other words, the expression l-God does not mean “to God,” but means that God is the originator or agent of the blessing, and this is best expressed in current English with *by*. The KJV translates [*l-ʔēl*] “of God.” *Of* in the 15th century introduced the agent or originator of the action; today we would say *by*, as per NIV translation. The English preposition *of*, like the Hebrew preposition *l-*, is very complex in its many uses.³⁴

In a phrase where a noun follows the prefixed name instead of a verb, the prefixed *l-* denotes something similar to the construction that has a passive verb, i.e., the named person is the originator of the object. For example, there are many psalms that are attributed to David as the author, and many begin with *l-* prefixed to his name, *l-dāwid* “of David” (Psalms 25–27). The introduction to many of David’s psalms include the word *mizmôr* “psalm” either before or after *l-David*, e.g., *l-dāwid mizmôr* (Psalm 24) or *mizmôr l-dāwid* (Psalm 23) “a psalm of David.” It doesn’t seem to make any difference in meaning if *mizmôr* precedes or follows *l-dāwid*. The noun, in this case *mizmôr* “psalm,” functions like the passive verb “blessed be” where *l-God* is the originator or the one doing the blessing, while *l-David* is the originator or author, the one doing (writing) the psalm. The prefixed *l-* in this case is an expression of the subjective genitive (the subject or originator of the object). Gesenius writes that the introduction: *A psalm of David*, indicates that it properly belongs to David as the author. “Moreover, the introduction of the author, poet, &c., by this *Lamed auctoris* is the customary idiom also in the other Semitic dialects, especially in Arabic.”³⁵ The *lamed* of authorship is also evident in Psalms 17 and 86 “a prayer of David” *tp̄illāh l-dāwid*, in Psalm 90 “a prayer of Moses” *tp̄illāh l-mōšeh*, and Habakkuk 3:1 “a prayer of Habakkuk” *tp̄illāh la-ḥābaquq*.³⁶ It seems reasonable to interpret the *lamed* in these examples as authorship, since the written prayers of these three individuals would have originated with them.³⁷

In Biblical Hebrew when “to, unto, or toward” the Lord is expressed, it can be done with the full preposition *ʔel*, e.g., “Cain said unto the Lord [*ʔel-Yahweh*]” (Genesis 4:13); “mine eyes are ever toward the Lord [*ʔel-Yahweh*]” (Psalm 25:15); priests “came near to the Lord [*ʔel-Yahweh*]” (Exodus 19:22). When the preposition *ʔel* “to” is accompanied by an active verb, it denotes “motion to or direction toward.”³⁸ Likewise, when the prefixed *lamed* has the meaning of “to, unto, or toward” there is an active verb in the grammatical construction.³⁹

The *l-Yāh* construction does not occur in the Masoretic Text, but the other prefixed preposition *bet* does, as in *b-Yāh* (Psalm 68:4[5]; Isaiah 26:4). The *l-Yahweh* construction is the one that occurs in the Masoretic Text. When *l-Yahweh* is accompanied by a passive verb, it denotes that the Lord is the originator or agent, e.g., Saul said to Samuel, “blessed be [*bārûk*] thou of the Lord [*l-Yahweh*].” (1 Samuel 15:13). When the *l-Yahweh* phrase is accompanied by a noun, it also signifies that the Lord is the originator or agent, e.g., *l-Yahweh hayəšûsāh* (Psalm 3:9[8]), literally “*l-Yahweh the salvation*.” How is this to be understood? The

KJV has “salvation *belongeth* unto the Lord,” where *l-* is translated with a possessive significance, in that the Lord owns or possesses salvation. If *l-Yahweh* means that Yahweh is the originator (subjective genitive), then *l-Yahweh hayəšûšāh* can be translated “Yahweh is the originator or author of salvation.” The NIV translates *l-Yahweh hayəšûšāh* “From the Lord comes deliverance.” The NIV translation indicates that deliverance comes from or originates (*lamed auctoris*) with the Lord; this is more in line with the concept that the Lord [*l-Yahweh*] is the originator or author of deliverance or salvation.

The prophet Jonah, after being swallowed by the great fish, prayed to the Lord and promised to complete his mission, then he said: *yəšûšātāh l-Yahweh* “Salvation is of the Lord” (KJV Jonah 2:9[10]); “Salvation comes from the Lord” (NIV). The subjective genitive interpretation of *l-Yahweh* denotes that Yahweh is the originator or author of salvation in this verse.⁴⁰

If we apply the subjective genitive interpretation to the first part of the name *Liahona*, we get a better understanding of what *l-Yāh-* signifies, i.e., that *Yāh* is the originator of **ʔōnā*, “the compass.” The Book of Mormon plainly explains what the interpretation of *l-Yāh-* is, but unless we have the correct understanding of the Hebrew phrase it won’t be recognized. Alma gives us the name of the ball or director — “our fathers called it *Liahona*, which is, being interpreted, a compass — and the Lord prepared it” (Alma 37:38). “Our fathers” surely refers to Lehi and Nephi, the first possessors of it, who likely gave it the name *Liahona*. There are two parts to the name *Liahona* and two parts to its interpretation. The second part of the name is **ʔōnā*, the interpretation is “a compass,” and the first part of the name is *l-Yāh*, the interpretation is “the Lord prepared it.” It is important to understand that in Hebrew syntax (word order) the modifier follows the head noun, while in English the modifier precedes the head noun; therefore, the last part of the name is interpreted first in English, and the first part is interpreted last. The first part of *Liahona*, as discussed above, is *l-Yāh*, which signifies that the Lord is the originator or the one who made the object; to paraphrase the words of Alma, the Lord was the one who prepared it. The semantic similarity between originator, author, and preparer is recognizable. The originator is the source of the product, an author produces a written product, and a preparer produces a finished product that is ready for use.

In the writings of Nephi, the *Liahona* is referred to by its interpretation not by its name, i.e., “the compass [**ʔōnā*], which had been prepared of the Lord [*l-Yāh*]” (1 Nephi 18:12).⁴¹ This clause is semantically equivalent to

Alma's statement, "a compass — and the Lord prepared it" (Alma 37:38). The only difference is *which* is added before *prepared*. In Biblical Hebrew the relative pronoun *which* can precede the prefixed *lamed*, e.g., *ʔāšer l-*. The *ʔāšer l-* construction "may be used instead of *l* in some cases in order to give more precision or more emphasis."⁴² An example is the first line in Song of Songs: *šîr haššîrîm ʔāšer lišlômôh* "The song of songs which is Solomon's" (Song of Solomon 1:1). Here in KJV *āšer l-išlômôh* is translated as possessive genitive, Solomon's, i.e., the songs belong to Solomon. But if *āšer l-* is translated as a subjective genitive then Solomon is the originator or author — the one who produces the songs, i.e., "Song of Songs which are authored by Solomon." Solomon is accredited for three thousand proverbs and a thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32). If we use the Book of Mormon phraseology we would get, "Song of Songs, which had been prepared of Solomon." I believe the phraseology in Song of Solomon 1:1 is equivalent to this Book of Mormon phrase: "the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord" **hāʔōnā ʔāšer l-Yāh*.

There are other statements involving the compass that may not have included the *l-Yāh* expression, but conveyed its intended meaning with a verb.⁴³ These expressions are even more explicit in crediting the Lord for its manufacture, such as: "and also the ball or compass which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord" (2 Nephi 5:12); "and the ball or director which led our fathers through the wilderness, which was prepared by the hand of the Lord" (Mosiah 1:16).⁴⁴ The phrases "prepared by the hand of the Lord," and "prepared of the Lord" are semantically equivalent, the first statement leaves no doubt as to who prepared it. The preposition *of* in this case is an expression of the subjective genitive, where the subject is the agent, the originator, the doer, the maker.⁴⁵ The most likely interpretation of the first part of the name *Liahona*, *l-Yāh*, based on the Hebrew and scriptural evidence discussed above, is not "to the Lord," but is "prepared of/by the Lord," i.e., "the Lord prepared [*l-Yāh*] a compass [**ʔōnā*]" to guide Lehi and his family to the promised land.

The Prefix *Lamed* in Epigraphic Sources

I believe that it is important to look at extra-Biblical sources to see how the information from the epigraphic record can illuminate our understanding of the nuanced meanings of the prefixed preposition *l-* that occurs on a name followed by a noun. This is the same syntax as the segments in *Liahona*, i.e., *l-* (prefix), + *Yāh* (name), + **ʔōnā* (noun). This same grammatical construction is found in many epigraphic

sources from the pre-exilic period (before 586 BC). Inscription #1 in tomb I from Khirbet El-Kôm (Qôm), dates to the mid-seventh century BC, and contains an inscription with a prefixed *lamed* before a name: *lšwpy bn ntnyhw hšdr hzh*, and is translated: "Belonging to šOphai, son of Nethanyahu, (is) this tomb-chamber."⁴⁶ The noun in the inscription, "this tomb-chamber," occurs last in the phrase following *l-šOphai* and his father's name. "The accepted principle in Hebrew epigraphy is the *lamed* prefixed to a proper noun not preceded by a verb should be considered possessive."⁴⁷ However, if *lšwpy* (*l-šOphai*) is interpreted as subjective genitive, then šOphai was the agent or originator, the one who made or produced the tomb-chamber. If we use the interpretation in the Book of Mormon, then *l-šOphai* means that šOphai prepared the tomb-chamber. šOphai may have hewed the tomb-chamber out of the stone, and left his name on the wall, indicating that he had made the tomb. Compare this to NIV translation of Isaiah 22:16: "What are you [Shebna] doing here and who gave you permission to cut out a grave for yourself here, hewing your grave on the height and chiseling your resting place in the rock?" šOphai may have hewed out the burial place in the soft rock just like Shebna, and wrote his name on the rock, becoming either the preparer (subjective genitive) or the owner (possessive genitive) of the burial chamber or both, the interpretation being ambiguous.

Tomb II at Khirbet El-Kôm contains a memorial inscription (#3) that leaves a blessing on the deceased and was apparently written by the person who is named last, his name being prefixed by the *lamed*, *l-šOniyahu* "(written by) šOniyahu." This is interpreted as a *lamed auctoris* (subjective genitive) signifying that the named person is the originator or author of the inscription and not the owner or occupier of the tomb.⁴⁸ The *lamed* in Tomb II inscription #3 of Khirbet El-Kôm refers to the person who wrote the inscription. The *lamed* in Tomb I inscription #1 could refer to šOphai as the owner of the tomb-chamber, or it could refer to šOphai as the one who prepared or hewed the tomb-chamber.

Some inscriptions on Samaria ostraca employ the *lamed* before personal names that are "receipts written in the royal storerooms, when the delivery arrived." The receipts are for wine or oil that was delivered to the royal storehouse by the individuals named on the pot sherd. The word order is, *l- + name + noun*, e.g., ostracon No. 10: *lšhnšm . nbl . yn . yšn* "(belonging) to Ašinošam. A jar of old wine;" and ostracon No. 18) *lgdyw . nbl . šmn . rḥš* "(Belonging) to Gaddiyau. A jar of fine oil." Yadin suggests that the named individuals were the owners of big estates, and are "the producers of the wine or oil sent to the palace."⁴⁹ If

Yadin's suggestion is correct, then the inscription should be translated as subjective genitive and not possessive genitive, i.e., "produced by *Aḥinoṣam*, a jar of old wine" and "produced by *Gaddiyau*, a jar of fine oil." The *lamed* on these ostraca identifies the person as the one who produces or prepares the oil or wine.

A decanter from the Hebron district dating to the eighth or seventh century BC records "both the name of the owner and the contents: 'Belonging to *Yaḥzeyahu*, wine of *Kḥl*.' *Koḥel* is probably the place after which the wine was named."⁵⁰ If this phrase is translated with the subjective genitive, it means that *Yaḥzeyahu* produced the wine of *Koḥel*.

Incised jar-handles from wine jars that were found at Gibeon record the site name *gbʿn* along with the *lamed* on personal names. "It is believed that these were wine-jars for commercial use and that the inscriptions record the name of the vineyard where the wine was produced and the name of the owners."⁵¹ If the *lamed* is seen as subjective genitive, then the *lamed* identifies the owners as the ones who produce (prepare) the wine.

Many hundreds of jar handles dating to the seventh century BC have been found that bear royal seal impressions that include the prefixed *lamed* on the word for king *l-mlk*, which is interpreted as possessive genitive, "belonging to the king." It is believed that these *lamelek* vessels either had a capacity guaranteed by the crown, or that the vessels were manufactured at a royal pottery factory in a city whose name also appeared on one of the handles.⁵² "A jar from Lachish is incised *bt lmlk*, 'royal *bāt*,' indicating the royally approved measure of capacity."⁵³ The *lmlk* impressions on jar-handles could mean that they were the personal property of the king, or if interpreted as subjective genitive, it would mean that the king was responsible for manufacturing them through his loyal subjects to be used as the royal standard for trade, taxes or tribute. This interpretation is supported by the NIV translation of 1 Chronicles 4:23: "They were the potters who lived at Netaim and Gederah; they stayed there and worked for the king." The potters were apparently making pots (jars) for the king in those places, which probably had good clay for making pottery, and they would stamp them as a product of the king *lmlk*, a royal jar.

An impression of a seal or signet ring appears on small pieces of clay called *bullae* (plural) or *bulla* (singular) that are used to seal papyrus documents. The papyrus has a written message, and it is folded or rolled up and tied with cord or string, and then a small piece of clay is placed on the cord to which an impression is made with a signet ring or a seal

that bears the name of the individual sending the document.⁵⁴ The *bullae* usually breaks when the document is opened. Most of the *bullae* contain the name of a person prefixed with the *lamed*.⁵⁵ This was like sealing the letter or document; if the cord were untied the clay seal would break, since it is very fragile. The backsides of the *bullae* show the impressions of the cords and/or fibers of the papyrus. Some edges of *bullae* even show the fingerprints of the one making the impression. Many hundreds of these seal-impressions have been found giving an "eloquent testimony to the widespread use of papyrus for letters and documents in the time of the Monarchy."⁵⁶ The seal-impressions on the *bullae* with the prefixed *lamed* are usually interpreted as possessive genitive, meaning that the papyrus letter belongs to the person. However, if the subjective genitive interpretation is employed, then the named person is the agent, the one responsible for it, i.e., the one who "prepared" it. This is equivalent to *lamed auctoris* (the author or originator), e.g., the psalms (of/by) l-David.

The *lamed* on personal names or titles on jar-handles is ambiguous meaning that the wine or oil either belonged to the person or to the king, or that the wine or oil was prepared or produced by the person or by the king. Similarly, the *lamed* on the ostraca from Samaria that is prefixed to the names of the owners of big estates designates them as the producers of the wine or oil that was sent to the palace. The dates of all of these examples of the prefixed *lamed* are from the time of Lehi or earlier in the pre-exilic period, and were written with the Old Hebrew alphabet. If the *lamed* is translated as the subjective genitive in these examples, then the interpretation of *l-* as an agent, originator, author, or preparer matches the interpretation of *l-Yāh* in *Liahona*, i.e., the Lord is the agent, originator, or preparer of the compass **ṣōnā*.

The *lamed* prefixed to a proper name or title in the above epigraphic examples is an abbreviated phrase. When all that is available is the space on a signet ring or on a stamp, the message has to be short and simple. As a result, the *lamed* carries the semantic load, its meaning being determined by the context and by the thing (noun) it refers to. The ambiguity is to know if it is possessive genitive or subjective genitive to arrive at the intended meaning. The main take away of this discussion is that there are three components to these phrases: 1) the prefixed *lamed*, 2) the name, and 3) the product. The product may be an inscription, a papyrus letter, a psalm, a prayer, a tomb-chamber, wine, oil, or any other thing including a compass.

If the *lamed* prefixed on a proper name was only interpreted as ownership (possessive genitive) in Lehi's day, then it is very likely that

the *l-Yāh* of *Liahona* would signify “belonging to Yah.” However, this interpretation does not fit the interpretation given in the Book of Mormon. The text reads: “Liahona, which is being interpreted a compass — and the Lord prepared it” (Alma 37:38). The interpretation in Alma is not that the compass “belonged to” the Lord, but that he “prepared” it. The Lord was the originator, the one who prepared and provided the Liahona for Lehi, so the first segment *l-* is interpreted here as subjective genitive to agree with the narrative in the Book of Mormon.

A Possible Semitic Origin and Meaning for **-ʔōnâ*

If the analysis that **ʔōnâ* is the final segment in *Liahona* is correct, then the assumption is that there should be a Semitic noun **ʔōnâ* in Biblical Hebrew. However, this noun is not found in the Hebrew Bible, thus the difficulty begins. In Modern Hebrew *ʔōnâ* (plural *ʔōnôt*) is a “deed of purchase.”⁵⁷ A deed of purchase isn’t suitable, since it doesn’t match the description of a round brass ball with pointers that can direct one to the promised land, so this is likely not a meaning that makes much sense as a compass. If the noun **ʔōnâ* is not found in the Hebrew Bible or any other ancient Hebrew texts, that does not mean that there never was such a word in the language. Ancient written Hebrew texts only contain a fraction of the actual words of the language. Since **ʔōnâ* is not known to exist in early Hebrew writings, it may be possible that a cognate (a word with the same linguistic derivation) to **ʔōnâ* exists in another Semitic language. To find a cognate, it is necessary to postulate what the Proto-Semitic word might have been, and then to look for possible cognates in other Semitic languages. Each Semitic language would have slightly different changes in their consonants and vowels, so the proto form of **ʔōnâ* would develop differently in related languages.

The first step is to identify the original consonants and vowels of a Proto-Semitic (PS) word that could develop into **ʔōnâ*. To do this requires some knowledge of the sound changes that occurred in the historical development of words from PS to Biblical Hebrew. The original PS vowel system consisted of three vowels: short and long /i/-/ī/, /a/-/ā/, and /u/-/ū/.⁵⁸ The Hebrew vowels *o* and *ō* were not part of the PS vowel system, therefore, the vowel *ō* in **ʔōnâ* must derive from another PS vowel. The Hebrew vowel *ō* derives from at least three sources: 1) the PS long vowel **ā* raises to *ō* when stressed, this is called the Canaanite Shift for it occurs early in the development of the language;⁵⁹ 2) the diphthong **aw* changes to *ō*;⁶⁰ and 3) PS **u* changes to *ō* by two paths, a) in a stressed closed syllable,⁶¹ and b) pretonic **u* changes to *ō* in an unstressed open

syllable.⁶² The most likely origin of \bar{o} in *l-Yāh-ʔōnā* is from the third option, Proto-Semitic $*u$, since it is an open unstressed syllable.⁶³

Most Hebrew word stems have three consonants and one or two vowels. The variation of vowel quality and how they relate to the consonants determines the meaning of the word. The "sequence of vowels [is] called a melody, ... and the arrangement of consonants and vowels [is] called a template."⁶⁴ Different arrangements of vowels and consonants form patterns that define word classes.⁶⁵ In Semitic literature, the three consonants q-t-l are used as substitutes for the true stem consonants, whatever they may be, and the vowels retain their original quality. It is a convenient way to discuss the various template patterns and vowel melodies in Semitic languages without writing the true consonants for each word separately.

The final vowel in *Liahona* likely derives from PS $*a$. There is no apparent consonant following the final vowel; this may indicate that the final third root (III) consonant is a weak consonant like $*w$ or $*y$ that either deletes or contracts with the vowel. The vowel melody with $*u$ in the first syllable and $*a$ in the second syllable forms the PS *qutal* noun pattern. From PS, "The expected regular development to Hebrew is *qutal* > *qōtāl*. This pattern is almost unattested" in Hebrew.⁶⁶ The *qutal* noun pattern is more evident in Arabic. Arabic has some verbal nouns with a *qutā* pattern that lacks a final consonant, "which may be considered the III-weak reflex of *qutal*, found with both III-*w* and III-*y* roots."⁶⁷ In other words, III-weak is the third consonant of the stem that is either $*w$ or $*y$. "In [Classical Arabic] III-weak roots ... with *a* before the final radical, the stem ends in $-\bar{a}$."⁶⁸ In other words, the third consonant *w* or *y* deletes or contracts with the vowel causing it to lengthen, i.e., *qutaw* or *qutay* > *qutā*. *Qutā* is the expected template and vowel pattern that would develop from PS $*ʔunaw$ or $*ʔunay$ > $*ʔunā$. The resultant $*ʔunā$ develops into $*ʔōnā$ when *u* changes to \bar{o} .

The final (III-*w*) Proto-Semitic consonant $*w$ changes to $*y$ in Central and Northwest Semitic languages, including Arabic, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Canaanite and Hebrew among others.⁶⁹ The reconstruction of $*ʔōnā$ would be $*ʔunáy$ in the Northwest Semitic languages, but for Proto-Semitic it is likely $*ʔunaw$. In the development of Hebrew, the final stressed *-ay* of $*ʔunáy$ changes to $-\bar{a}$, for example, *Šaráy* (Sarai in Genesis 11:29) changes to *Šarā* (Sarah) by this sound change.⁷⁰ The unstressed pretonic open $*u$ of $*ʔunā$ changes to \bar{o} by natural sound change rules resulting in $*ʔōnā$.

The Cognates of *ʔunaw and *ʔunay

The ancient Semitic language that has the largest corpus of words is Akkadian, an East Semitic language. The name derives from the third millennium BC kingdom of Akkad. The language is also called Assyrian or Assyro-Babylonian from the latter kingdoms of Mesopotamia. The language was written in cuneiform script that wrote syllables containing both consonants and vowels. The later Semitic alphabetic scripts did not write the vowels, but only wrote the consonants. The best source for Akkadian or Assyrian words is *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* that is usually referred to as the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary or CAD with some twenty-one volumes.⁷¹

The PS word *ʔunaw would not look like this in Akkadian. The first consonant *aleph* ʔ- is “lost in most environments,”⁷² so ʔ would not be written in Akkadian. The final *-aw* also changes; “the Akkadian diphthong *aw became ū.”⁷³ As a result, we would need to look for a word like *unū* in the Akkadian dictionary. In volume twenty, there is a noun *únūtu* that is both masculine and feminine signifying “1. merchandise, goods (OA), 2. Equipment, gear, tools, 3. Utensils, furnishings, vessels, belongings.”⁷⁴ The *-t-* in *únūtu* is the feminine marker, and final *-u* is a case ending.⁷⁵ The PS feminine form of the noun would likely be *ʔunawt- that develops into Akkadian *únūt-*. The *aw > ū sound change happens with PS *mawt- that changes into Akkadian *mūt-* “death.”⁷⁶ The feminine form of the noun prevails over the masculine form, possibly because it has two consonants. The Akkadian stem *unūt-* derives from PS *ʔunawt- by established sound change rules, and it signifies, “merchandise, equipment, tools, utensils, vessels or belongings.” The *Liahona* is a piece of equipment or a vessel made of brass that contains spindles and writing that gives direction to Lehi on his journey to the promised land.

The Cognate *ʔunay in Aramaic

An Aramaic cognate of Akkadian *unūt-* shows up on the ninth century BC Tell Fekherye inscription. A bilingual inscription is engraved on the front and back of a basalt statue of a standing man. There are thirty-eight lines of Akkadian text in cuneiform script on the front, and there are twenty-three lines of Aramaic in alphabetic script on the back.⁷⁷ The Akkadian noun *ú-nu-te* is on line 27. “It is uncertain whether the noun *ú-nu-te* should be considered as a Babylonian form.” “This word often designates ‘vessels’, but its semantic range is wider and it can be used for any ‘movables’, even the statue.”⁷⁸ Lipinski translates the Akkadian

in line 27, "movables of the temple of Adad, my lord."⁷⁹ The translation of *únūte* into Aramaic is *m'ny'* (vowels are not written in this script. The *aleph* or glottal stop ' , I write with ?). Lipinski translates *m?ny?* as movables rather than vessels.⁸⁰ "The word *m'ny'* is generally translated by 'vessels', but it can designate all kinds of implements and utensils in clay, wood, leather, stone, copper, iron, silver, gold, also weapons, musical instruments, pieces of furniture, even garments in linen or wool." ... "The [Aramaic] expression *m'ny' zy bt Hdd* is exactly paralleled in Ezra 5,14 by *m'ny' dy byt 'lh'*."⁸¹ The Aramaic of Ezra 5:14 transliterates and vocalizes as: *mā?nāyyā? dī-bēt-?ēlāhā?* "the vessels of the house of God." I see the Aramaic word *mā?nāyyā?* parsing into three parts: *mā-* is a noun prefix;⁸² *-?nāy-* is the triconsonantal stem or root; and the suffix *-yā?* indicates a plural emphatic that denotes a determinate or definite noun.⁸³ The Aramaic construct form of "vessels" develops from the absolute *ma?nāy* that loses stress; the final syllable *-ay* "in a closed secondary-accented syllable it becomes *-ēy*."⁸⁴ This results in the construct form *mā?nēy bēt-?ēlāhā?* "vessels of the house of God" (Ezra 6:5).

The Aramaic stem *?nāy* is the semantic core of the word. This stem has the three consonants of the proposed proto word for **?ōnā*, which is **?unāy* in the Northwest Semitic languages and **?unaw* in Proto-Semitic. The original first vowel **u* is pretonic in an open syllable, and the phonetic rule of Aramaic is: "Short vowels in a pretonic open syllable become shewa, and are not lengthened as they often are in BH [Biblical Hebrew]."⁸⁵ We know that the deleted pretonic vowel is **u* from the Akkadian cognate; the first consonant is ?; and the last syllable is *-ay*, i.e., *?nāy*, a perfect match for the proposed proto noun. Therefore, the reconstructed **?unāy* is a reasonable possibility based on ancient texts and historical linguistic principles of sound change.

Koehler and Baumgartner discuss Aramaic **mā?n* "receptacle, vessel" and its possible cognates in other Semitic languages. They include Canaanite *anayi* "ship" (El-Amarna 245:28; CAD A/II: 106a), Akkadian *unūt-* "equipment", Ugaritic *?nyt* [the feminine form] and *?ny* "ship," Arabic *?inā?* "receptacle, eating dish," and Hebrew *?ōnī* and *?ōnīyā* "ship." They write: "the underlying root of the sbst. [substantive] is uncertain; it could be Hebrew II *?nh* [originally *?ny* (see p. 70)] ... with the meaning 'to grasp, contain', or perhaps even **'un* 'to be strong, be massive'."⁸⁶ The triconsonantal *?ny* shows up as a cognate in Classical Arabic.⁸⁷ This evidence, I believe, increases the possibility that the proto

form *ʔunay was a real word that developed into Hebrew *ʔōnā by regular sound change rules, and was a word in pre-exilic Hebrew.⁸⁸

*ʔōnā may have been more commonly spoken in the Northern Kingdom, where Lehi's tribe (Manasseh) lived, being closer to Aramaic and Ugaritic speakers. In the Southern Kingdom, *ʔōnā possibly was displaced by *kēli* that has the same meaning, i.e., "article, utensil, vessel."⁸⁹ The plural is *kēlīm*. *Klî* has a broad range of meaning including objects made of any material. It is translated as "jewels" (Genesis 24:53), "weapons" (Genesis 27:3), "stuff" and "household stuff" (Genesis 31:37), "sacks" (Genesis 42:25), "vessels" (Genesis 43:11), "instrument" of cruelty (Genesis 49:5), "furnishings" of Tabernacle (Exodus 25:9; 31:7), "utensils" on a table — dishes, pans, bowls, jars (Exodus 37:16), "a thing" (garment) of skin (Leviticus 13:52), earthen "vessel" (Leviticus 14:50), wooden "vessel" (Leviticus 15:12), "instrument" of iron (Numbers 35:16), "weapons" (Deuteronomy 1:41), "armour" (1 Samuel 14:1), and "bag" (1 Samuel 17:40). If *klî* became the common expression for "things," then it likely superseded or displaced the more restrictive word *ʔōnā that had earlier been used for sacred temple vessels of precious metals or movable (portable) royal objects in the king's palace. The simplest explanation, in my opinion, is semantic overlap. *Klî* replaced *ʔōnā and became the word of choice for all the above-mentioned things, thus *ʔōnā fell out of favor and was not written in the Masoretic Text. Lehi knew that the Lord had provided the Liahona, so why would he use *klî*, the common term for any household object, rather he would use the older Semitic term for sacred metal objects associated with the temple.

Languages are always changing both phonetically and semantically. Some words in a language may last for thousands of years, while other words may last a century or two or even a few decades before passing out of favor. Just because *ʔōnā does not show up in the Bible or in any Hebrew epigraphic records doesn't mean it never existed in pre-exilic Hebrew, especially if closely related languages had cognates of that word. The presence of cognates in closely related languages suggests the possibility that such a word may have existed in early Hebrew. We don't have enough information, and we may never get confirmation of this word's existence in Hebrew unless someone wrote it down, and it has been preserved in some record that has not come to light.

Etymological explanations, comparative linguistics, and philological arguments are very complicated. There are no easy answers, and conclusions are always tentative. If *ʔōnā had existed in the Bible then Reynolds and Sjordahl would have solved the problem long ago. My attempt

here has been to use the principles of historical linguistics to approach the etymology of *Liahona* from a new perspective, and to arrive at a reasonable translation of *Liahona*. Translating the last part of *Liahona*, -ona or *ʔōnâ, as a vessel, a portable metal object (a noun) makes more sense to me than translating -ona as ʔon the “sun city” that represents “light;” -(o)na as “whither,” an adverb; -na as Egyptian imperative “look!,” a verb; or -nâʔ as an exclamation point. I propose that the translation of *Liahona* is: “a vessel prepared of the Lord,” and the interpretation is: “a compass prepared of the Lord” (Alma 37:38).

Translation vs. Interpretation

It is important to distinguish the difference between translation and interpretation. There is semantic overlap in these terms. Interpretation is explaining, making clear or explicit the meaning of a word so it can be understood within a language or culture, while translation transfers the meaning of a word from one language or culture to a word in another language or culture with comparable meaning. A translation is an interpretation, but an interpretation is not necessarily a translation. For example, the translation of the final segment in *Liahona*, *ʔōnâ, is proposed to be “a vessel,” since that was a word they likely had in their language. However, *ʔōnâ is interpreted into English as “a compass,” because of what the instrument (vessel) was able to do. The interpretation *compass* is the closest meaning in the English language that describes how the ball or director functions, but *compass* falls short of conveying the full functional range of the *ʔōnâ “the vessel.”

Nephi was able to ascertain the exact direction they were traveling by means of the ball or director, not only in reference to the four directions, but in reference to sixteen directions on the compass.⁹⁰ The ball or director was more than a compass. A compass has one magnetic needle that points north-south. The director has two spindles, one likely was a magnetic spindle that pointed north to establish a reference point,⁹¹ while the other spindle pointed to the direction they should travel. The second spindle operated by another spiritual force that was connected to their “faith, and diligence and heed” (1 Nephi 16:28–29). There was also writing on the ball that “changed from time to time” (16:27–29). The *Liahona* was a marvelous vessel (*ʔōnâ) prepared of the Lord (*L-Yāh*) to guide Lehi and his small group to the promised land.

The concept of an instrument with a magnetic spindle that pointed toward the north was unknown to Lehi and his contemporaries, therefore, they would not have had a word for it in their language. Lehi

and Nephi called it **ḡōnâ* that denotes “a vessel,” and it was prepared by the Lord, *l-Yāh*. The prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery during the translation likely never knew, as most readers of the Book of Mormon, that the phrase “prepared of the Lord” [*l-Yāh*] was the first part of the name. Most readers probably assume that the name *Liahona* only refers to the instrument, the “ball or director,” and they would not associate the phrase “prepared of the Lord” as part of the name. The general assumption is that the phrase “the Lord prepared it” was there because the Lord provided the instrument not that this phrase was part of the name.

Alma explains to his son Helaman “concerning the thing which our fathers call a ball, or director — or our fathers called it *Liahona*, which is being interpreted a compass — and the Lord prepared it” (Alma 37:38). The name *Liahona* is only used once in the Book of Mormon, and it is in this verse.⁹² “Our fathers” likely refers to Lehi and Nephi since they are the ones who found it and used it in their journey through the wilderness and on the sea to the Promised Land. The everyday language of Lehi and Nephi was Hebrew, and this increases the likelihood that the term *Liahona* derives from Hebrew for that is what they called it (*qārāʾû*), i.e., the name that they gave it.⁹³ The interjection “being interpreted a compass — and the Lord prepared it” defines the term *Liahona* for a modern reader, but who is responsible for this insertion? Did Alma insert this phrase to clarify to Helaman, who may not have known what the archaic word meant?⁹⁴ Or, did the redactor Mormon insert the interpretation of *Liahona* as a compass prepared of the Lord for the benefit of those who would receive his abridgement? Or, did the insertion “being interpreted a compass — and the Lord prepared it” happen in the divinely assisted translating process? The answer as to who inserted the interpretation is important to know, since it would help us understand what the definition of “compass” is.⁹⁵ If Alma or Mormon inserted the interpretation of *Liahona* as a “compass prepared of the Lord,” then the word “compass” would refer to its round or circular shape, or an instrument to draw circles, for that is what the KJV word translated as “compass” signifies in Biblical Hebrew.⁹⁶ It is unlikely that the Nephites or Lamanites would have manufactured an instrument like a magnetic compass, and they would not have had a word for such an instrument. Neither Alma nor Mormon likely had a word in their language comparable to English *compass* that meant an instrument with a magnetic spindle that pointed to the north; therefore, they would not be responsible of the insertion of the interpretation. Furthermore, Mormon and Alma had the *Liahona* in

their possession, as it was part of the sacred relics and records. They knew its name and how it functioned. Alma used the Liahona as a teaching prop to explain to Helaman the importance of faith and following the direction of the Lord (Alma 37:40–47). There would be no motivation for them to explain its meaning in the record; it was part of their culture. However, the translator would have to give an explanation of its name by using comparable words that could be understood in English.

If the insertion “being interpreted a compass — and the Lord prepared it” is part of the divinely assisted translation process by Joseph Smith to help us understand the meaning of *Liahona*, then the word “compass” is not the literal translation of a Nephite word, but it is an interpretation into a modern English word that best defines the instrument. Royal Skousen might call this a “cultural translation.”⁹⁷ Brant A. Gardner points out that some Book of Mormon expressions “necessitate some conceptual distance between the plate text and the translation.”⁹⁸ “The idiomatic phrase makes sense in Joseph’s time but had no referent in ancient America. It cannot be a literal translation of a plate text idiom using Mesoamerica as the plate text culture.”⁹⁹ His final conclusion is: “Although the meaning of the language might have been on the plates, the form of the resulting translation cannot represent a literalist translation of the plate text.”¹⁰⁰ I believe that *compass* is a cultural and not a literal translation from the plate text. It is an interpretation of its function that we understand, and not a word in the Nephite language. The Nephites and Lamanites likely never had a magnetic compass or a word for it, but they had the word *vessel*, so the proposed literal translation of *Liahona* is, *L-Yāh-ḏōnā* “prepared the Lord, a vessel;” and its literal interpretation is “prepared the Lord, a compass.” The word *compass* is the most appropriate English word that describes the function of the Liahona, and the Lord, as the agent, prepared it.

Summary

Previous explanations of the origin and meaning of *Liahona* have not given a satisfactory account of its fuller meaning as an object that the Lord prepared. The interpretation of the *lamed* prefix *l-* as “to, toward” is not suitable in the grammatical construction of a prefixed *l-* attached to a name followed by a noun. The *lamed* prefix more likely designates the following name as the agent or originator or the person who is providing or producing the object (a noun). These types of grammatical constructions have been identified in the Hebrew Bible and by examples from extra-Biblical epigraphic texts. The general interpretation of

the prefixed *lamed l-* in this type of grammatical construction is that it designates the possessor of the object (possessive genitive), i.e., “belonging to.” However, in many of these grammatical constructions, *l-* is best interpreted as subjective genitive, where the named person is the agent, originator, author, or producer of the object. This is more in line with the interpretation given in the Book of Mormon that the Lord is the one who prepared (produced) the round ball made of fine brass.

The second segment in *Liahona* is *-iah-*, the short form of the divine name Yahweh or Yāh. Yāh occurs many times in the Bible as a shortened Yahweh. It can stand alone as a name, or it can serve as a suffix on a name. On the other hand, the *yhw* short form is only used as the prefix *yāhō* or the suffix *yāhū* as part of a name, therefore, it is highly unlikely that *-yaho-* is the second segment of *Liahona*. The origin and meaning of the third segment of *Liahona* has been the most difficult to ascertain. There is no appropriate word in the Hebrew text that fits the description of a round ball made of fine brass with spindles. Reynolds and Sjødahl pick the Hebrew name of an Egyptian city *ʔōn*, based on the phonemes, as the likely source of *-ona*, but it lacks final *a*, and a city is not a round brass ball and neither is light. Curci combines the final *o* of *yaho-* with *ʔānāh*, the adverb indicating direction toward, to get *ʔona* “whither,” but *whither* is an adverb not an object that is round like a ball and made of fine brass. Bowen and Spendlove focus on the final syllable *-na*, and search for its meaning. Bowen goes to Egyptian and finds an imperative verb that somewhat matches the phonetics, but an imperative verb doesn’t describe the round brass ball with spindles. Spendlove picks the Hebrew particle *nāʔ* as the final syllable that he says is not translatable and is an exclamation, but this doesn’t describe the ball or director that has two spindles and is made of fine brass. These explanations inadequately define the interpretation given in the Book of Mormon that the *Liahona* is a compass prepared by the Lord.

Since the word **ʔōnā* is not found in Hebrew texts, my approach is to reconstruct the word as it might have been in Proto-Semitic by using established sound change rules of historical linguistics, and to look for cognates in related languages to see if any of them might shed light on this problem. The word **ʔōnā* can be reconstructed in Northwest Semitic as **ʔunay-*, and as **ʔunaw-* in Proto-Semitic. The Akkadian cognate *unūt-* signifies “equipment, tools, utensils or vessels.” The Aramaic cognate *mʔny* signifies “vessels” of the temple and other portable objects. The Arabic cognate *ʔināʔ* signifies “vessel, container, receptacle, or kitchen ware.” The Ugaritic cognate *ʔnyʔ*, *ʔny* signifies “a ship;” they were close

to the Mediterranean Sea, so a vessel of the sea is a likely adaptation. The related Hebrew word *ʔōnîyâ*, *ʔōnî* signifies “a ship,” a vessel of the sea. The presence of cognates in closely related languages increases the likelihood that **ʔōnâ* was a legitimate word in pre-exilic Hebrew. The word **ʔōnâ* probably fell out of favor in the language and was displaced by *klî* that covers the same semantic range, thus **ʔōnâ* does not occur in the Masoretic Text.

The structural sequence of the segments in the name *Liahona* follow typical Hebrew word order (VSO), where the prefixed *lamed* represents the verb, *l-* “prepared” + the subject, *Yāh* “the Lord” + the object *-ona* [*ʔōnâ*] “a vessel,” i.e., “prepared the Lord a vessel.”¹⁰¹ Normal English word order would be “the Lord prepared a vessel (SVO).” Alma’s explanation places the object first that is a Hebrew technique to give more emphasis to the object,¹⁰² “Liahona, which is being interpreted **a compass** — and **the Lord prepared it**” (Alma 37:38). It is proposed that **ʔōnâ* “vessel” is an appropriate Semitic word for the physical object; it is portable; it is a container with spindles; it indicates directions; it is made of fine brass; and it is interpreted “a compass.”

If the above explanation of the etymology of *Liahona* is correct, then this unusual word derives from the Semitic languages of the Ancient Near East, the Book of Mormon is truly an ancient record whose underlying language is a dialect of Hebrew, and Joseph Smith Jr. had to receive divine assistance to be able to translate the plates of Mormon into the Book of Mormon. As the three witnesses testified, the plates “have been translated by the gift and power of God, ... wherefore we know of a surety that the work is true.”

Calvin D. Tolman graduated from University of Utah with a B.A. in Anthropology and an M.A. in Linguistics. He worked for forty years in the printing industry operating a web press and supervising and managing the pressroom. He is interested in the archaeology of Mesoamerica, especially the Maya. He attended the Maya Meetings in Texas at Austin for about twenty-five years. He has studied biblical Hebrew from a historical linguistic approach analyzing vowel changes from Proto-Semitic to biblical Hebrew. His church service includes a mission in West Mexico 1964–66, counselor in a bishopric, stake executive secretary, high councilor, bishop, and stake patriarch. He married Nancy Ann Byers. They have six children, nine grandchildren and four great-grandsons.

Endnotes

- 1 The asterisk /*/ represents a reconstructed word or one that does not exist in the Hebrew text.
- 2 George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1959), 4:178.
- 3 Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 58. Literally “House or temple of the sun” (Jeremiah 43:13).
- 4 Reynolds and Sjodahl, *Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4:178.
- 5 *Book of Mormon Onomasticon*, s.v. “Liahona,” <https://onoma.lib.byu.edu/index.php/LIAHONA>. Jonathan Curci writes: “The linguistic distance between the Egyptian element *annu* and the ‘*ona*’ of *Liahona* makes the connection merely hypothetical and, most importantly, does not reflect the interpretation of ‘compass’ or ‘director’ offered in the Book of Mormon.” Jonathan Curci, “Liahona ‘The direction of the Lord’: An Etymological Explanation,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 16, no. 2 (2007): 62, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol16/iss2/8/>.
- 6 Curci, “Liahona ‘The direction of the Lord’: An Etymological Explanation,” 61.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 63, 65. Curci writes נָנָ (ʔnʔ) for ʔona; aleph is the first consonant only and not the third consonant. This may be an oversight or a typographical error.
- 9 The adverb ʔān “where” derives from an earlier form *ʔayn, where the diphthong ay under stress changes to ā, resulting in ʔān (Gary A. Rendsburg, “Monophthongization of aw/aw > ā in Eblaite and in Northwest Semitic,” in *Eblaitica: Essays on the Ebla Archives and Eblaite Language*, ed. Cyrus H. Gordon, Gary A. Rendsburg [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], 103, 105, 112). The Proto-Semitic short vowel *a lengthens to ā when the diphthong ay contracts or monophthongizes. Biblical Hebrew has long and short vowels. They are traditionally distinguished in transliterations by adding a macron ā or a circumflex â to the short vowel; â is sometimes used in final position to represent -āh.

- 10 Curci, “Liahona ‘The direction of the Lord’: An Etymological Explanation,” 65.
- 11 The short vowel *a* (*pataḥ*) was likely a low central vowel. There were originally three short vowels in Proto-Semitic or Common Semitic: high/close front palatal /i/, high/close back velar /u/, and low/open back /a/, and three corresponding long vowels /ī/, /ū/, and /ā/ (Edward Lipinski, *Semitic Languages: Outline of A Comparative Grammar*, 2nd Edition [Leuven, BE: Peeters Publishers, 2001], 158.) If the short vowel *a* were a low central vowel, then the long vowel *ā* (*qameṣ*) would likely be a low back open vowel—this is the Sephardic tradition of pronunciation. In the Tiberian system of pronunciation, the short *a* (*pataḥ*) is a low back open vowel, and the long vowel *ā* (*qameṣ gadol* “big *qameṣ*”) is a low back rounded vowel *ā* (Joshua Blau, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010], 105). The *qameṣ* in the Tiberian system not only indicates the long *ā* or *ā*, but it also indicates a short vowel *o* in an unstressed closed syllable called *qameṣ ḥaṭuṭ* “shortened or quickened *qameṣ*” or *qameṣ qaṭan* “little *qameṣ*.” The *qameṣ qaṭan* derives from Proto-Semitic **u*, while *qameṣ gadol* derives from Proto-Semitic **a*. The merger of the two historically distinct phonemes occurs in the Tiberian pronunciation, but the Sephardic pronunciation preserves the historical distinction; *qameṣ gadol* is low, back, unrounded *ā*, while *qameṣ qaṭan* is the back rounded vowel *o*. The Qumran orthography of the Dead Sea Scrolls preserves the historical distinction, since *qameṣ qaṭan* is sometimes written with *waw*, this indicates that *o* derives from Proto-Semitic **u* (Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. ed. [Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011], 37n2).
- 12 Matthew L. Bowen, “Look to the Lord! The Meaning of Liahona and the Doctrine of Christ in Alma 37–38” in *Give Ear to My Words: Text and Context of Alma 36–42: The 48th Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Kerry Hull, Nicholas J. Frederick, and Hank R. Smith (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2019): 278, <https://rsc.byu.edu/give-ear-my-words/look-lord-meaning-liahona-doctrine-christ-alma-37-38>.
- 13 Ibid., 279.
- 14 Ibid., 277.
- 15 Ibid., 276.

- 16 Book of Mormon citations from Royal Skousen, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 46.
- 17 John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* 6, no. 1 (1994): 95, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol6/iss1/5/>.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 80. One would expect that an Egyptologist would recognize if the original language of the Book of Mormon were Egyptian. However, he determines that the original language is a dialect of Hebrew.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 96.
- 20 Sidney B. Sperry, *Book of Mormon Compendium* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958), 32–33.
- 21 “The most economical historical explanation of his statement is that the system of writing known to Lehi₁ and Nephi₁ was in use in the Near East for at least 1,000 years — from the origin of the brass plates in Egypt (Joseph₁, the probable person who adapted it to write Hebrew, dates nominally to around 1600–1700 BC) through the early sixth century BC. The system then was transferred to Nephi₁’s/Lehi₁’s Mesoamerican land of promise, where it continued being used to the fourth century AD.” John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 226.
- 22 For the Egyptian explanation see Robert F. Smith’s discussion of Hebrew vs. Egyptian. Robert F. Smith, *Egyptianisms in the Book of Mormon and Other Studies* (Provo, UT: Deep Forest Green Books, 2020), https://www.google.com/books/edition/EGYPTIANISMS_IN_THE_BOOK_OF_MORMON_AND_O/y4IdzgEACAAJ?hl=en.
- 23 Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 192–96.
- 24 Loren Spendlove, “And the One Pointed the Way: Issues of Interpretation and Translation Involving the Liahona,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 26–27, <https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/and-the-one-pointed-the-way-issues-of-interpretation-and-translation-involving-the-liahona/>.

- 25 The *l-* when added to a word creates a CC consonant cluster, which in normal speech requires a slight vocalization ə, a schwa, to give salience to the *lamed*. If the word already begins with a CC, then an epenthetic short vowel *i-* inserts, e.g., *šmûṭél* "Samuel" (1 Samuel 1:20) > *lišmûṭél* "unto/to Samuel" (1 Samuel 3:9). If the epenthetic vowel is pretonic and the word is under full stress, the vowel has more sonority and is *ā*. If it is before a guttural with a composite schwa, the epenthetic vowel takes the full value of the composite schwa. For more rules see Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 309–11, 444–46, 454–55, 458; and J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 26–28.
- 26 Some Book of Mormon theophoric names that have *-iah* or *Yāh* as the final syllable are: Amalickiah, Mosiah, Sariah, and Zedekiah. The formation of these names parallels Hebrew names such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Obadiah, and Zechariah.
- 27 William F. Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 43, no. 3/4 (1924): 370–78.
- 28 The *j* is equivalent to the consonant *y*, thanks to European spelling. Abijah is also spelled with the suffix *-iah*, *ʔābīyāh* "Abiah" (1 Samuel 8:2). There is a third short form of Yahweh, *yw* that comes mainly from the Northern Kingdom. (Angel Sáenz-Baldillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 65.) *Yw* is vocalized as *yaw*. As a prefix *yaw-* changes to *yô-* being unstressed, e.g., *yôʔāhāz* (2 Chronicles 36:2), and as a suffix *yw* is vocalized *-yaw* or *-yau*. This form occurs mainly in the epigraphic texts.
- 29 Curci, "Liahona 'The direction of the Lord': An Etymological Explanation," 64. The deletion or lengthening of vowels depends on the location of the stress, not the location of the segment. The stress, then, must be on the *o*, and not on the final vowel. Therefore, the vowel *a* of *-yaho-* would lengthen, i.e., *l-yāhō-nā*. The final vowel *ā* has to be long or it would delete by the sound change rules.
- 30 Ibid., 65.
- 31 Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 508–10.

- 32 Bowen assumes that there is an active verb in the name *Liahona* and chooses -nw from the Egyptian imperative verb *?inw* to represent the final syllable -na. In Hebrew sentence structure the verb normally appears first VSO. This is why Bowen calls the fronting of the prepositional phrase “a kind of hyperbaton, which denotes a ‘departure from ordinary word order,’ or hysteron proteron, a ‘form of hyperbaton’ with ‘syntax or sense out of normal logical or temporal order.” The problem is that an active verb is not always necessary in association with *lamed* prefixed to a name.
- 33 Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 114. In the following example, the Qal passive verb is *bārûk* “blessed be.”
- 34 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “of” as a preposition in about sixty ways. Example #14: “Introducing the agent after a passive verb. The usual word for this is now *by*, which was prevalent by the 15th cent.; *of* was used alongside *by* until c1600. *Of* is subsequently found as a stylistic archaism in biblical, poetic, and literary use.” Example #15: “Following a noun, as the head of a postmodifying noun phrase. Sometimes called the subjective genitive. ... ‘the sonatas of Beethoven’ or Beethoven’s sonatas.” #15a “Expressing the relation of agent (doer or maker).” #15b “Indicating the creator of a work: made, written, painted, etc., by.” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. “of, prep,” last updated March 2022, <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.slcp1.org/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/130549>.
- 35 Emil Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. and ed. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §129 c. See also, Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 445. The Latin word *auctor* means, one who gives increase -- originator, causer, founder, creator, author, doer; Wiktionary, s.v. “auctor,” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/auctor#Latin>.
- 36 When the *lamed* is used in this structure the head noun is not in the construct state. In Biblical Hebrew the subjective genitive can be expressed in the construct state as well, without adding the prefixed *lamed*. See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 142–44. The construct state expresses a genitive relationship between two nouns; the first or head noun is unstressed and may experience vowel changes. When *lamed* is prefixed to the name

it functions as a paraphrase for the genitive possessor or author (Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §119c, 129c); compare construct *ben-yišay* "the son of Jesse" (1 Samuel 20:27) with absolute *bēn lyišay* "a son of Jesse" (1 Samuel 16:18), and construct *tṗ illat-šabdākā* "the prayer of thy servant" (1 Kings 8:28) with absolute *tṗ illāh lḏāwid* "a prayer of David" (Psalm 86).

- 37 The phrase, "the book of the chronicles of the kings [*l-malkē-*] of Israel" (1 Kings 14:19), suggests that the writings were prepared by or for the kings. Likewise, "the account of the chronicles of king [*la-mmélek*] David" (1 Chronicles 27:24). The expression *of* in these translations is ambiguous. Similarly, the phrase *Book of Mormon*, was it written with the *lamed* as in, *sēṗer l-Mormon* or was it written in the construct state *sēṗer-Mormon*? In either case, Mormon is the agent or originator of the book -- "I made this record out of the plates of Nephi" (Mormon 6:6). He is also the owner of the record (plates), which he gave to his son Moroni. Likewise, the *plates of Nephi*, (*lūḥōt l-Nep̄î* or *lūḥōt-Nep̄î*) have their origin with Nephi, son of Lehi. Nephi was the original owner and producer of the plates (1 Nephi 9:2), thus *of* is interpreted both ways, i.e., the originator and the possessor of the plates. The interpretation doesn't have to be either – or, it can be both.
- 38 Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 39.
- 39 Some examples where *l-* is interpreted as "to, unto" (note the associated verb): "Ye shall keep ... a feast to the Lord [*l-Yahweh*]" (Exodus 12:14). "We will ... sacrifice to the Lord [*l-Yahweh*]" (Exodus 8:27). "I will sing unto the Lord [*l-Yahweh*]" (Exodus 15:1; Psalm 13:6). "Thou hast said unto the Lord [*l-Yahweh*]" (Psalm 16:2). A psalm "of David [*l-dāwid*]" who spake unto the Lord [*l-Yahweh*]" (Psalm 8:1 heading). In the Masoretic Text the pointing of the prepositional prefix is *la-*. The tradition is that the name of God is not spoken so they substitute *šāḏōnāi* "lord" for Yahweh, and the prefixed preposition becomes *la-* in this environment, thus *la-šāḏōnāi* refers to the Lord. See Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, §102m and Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 310.
- 40 This agrees theologically with several scriptures: "And being made perfect, he became the **author** of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9); and "Looking unto Jesus the **author** and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2); and "relying alone

upon the merits of Christ, who was the **author** and the finisher of their faith” (Moroni 6:4). If we substitute the Book of Mormon interpretation, we get -- “Salvation is **prepared** of/by the Lord.” This sounds familiar in many scriptures, e.g., “Then shall the king say ... inherit the kingdom **prepared** for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34); “for he is the same yesterday, today, and forever; and the way is **prepared** for all men from the foundation of the world” (1 Nephi 10:18); “and the way is **prepared** from the fall of man, and salvation is free” (2 Nephi 2:4); “they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was **prepared** for them from the foundation of the world” (2 Nephi 9:18); “the atonement which has been **prepared** from the foundation of the world, that thereby salvation might come to him that should put his trust in the Lord” (Mosiah 4:6); see also Mosiah 18:13; Ether 3:14; Doctrine and Covenants 128:5, 8.

- 41 The separation of **ʔōnâ* “compass” from the phrase *l-Yāh* “prepared of the Lord” is an indication that they are two distinct nouns, where the nouns may occur in any order the same as *mizmôr l-dāwiḍ* or *l-dāwiḍ mizmôr* “a psalm of David” (Psalms 23, 24). In the interpretation they are separated, but in the written name they are conjoined, i.e., *l-Yāh-ʔōnâ* -- *Liahona*.
- 42 Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 446. The Biblical Hebrew expression *ʔāšer l-* contracted to *šel* in Mishnaic Hebrew (Ibid.). This contracted preposition is used extensively in Modern Hebrew meaning, “of, from, belonging to, made of” (Reuben Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary* [Israel: Massada Ltd, Chemed Books, 1990], 2621).
- 43 The Hebrew verb *hēkîn* means, to establish, set up; and to fix, make ready, prepare (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 466), and may have been used to express the actions of Yahweh when he prepared the compass for Lehi. For example, “which was prepared for my father by the hand of the Lord” *ʔāšer-hēkîn lēʔābî bëyaḍ-Yhwh* (compare Esther 7:10).
- 44 The “ball or director” is substituted for “compass” in this phrase. The description *ball* designates its form or shape, while *director* indicates its function or how it worked.
- 45 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “of,” #15. “Following a noun ... sometimes called the subjective genitive.” #15a “Expressing the

relation of agent (doer or maker)." #15b "Indicating the creator of a work: made, written, painted, etc., by."

- 46 William G. Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kôm," *HUCA* 40–41 (1969–1970): 151.
- 47 Nahman Avigad, "Hebrew Epigraphic Sources," *The Age of the Monarchies: Political History*, *The World History of the Jewish People*, ed. Abraham Malamat (Jerusalem: Massada Press Ltd.) 1979): 4:27n315–17.
- 48 Dever, "Iron Age Epigraphic Material from the Area of Khirbet El-Kôm," 159–62. See also Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallaxic Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 367–68.
- 49 Avigad, "Hebrew Epigraphic Sources," 26–27. The older interpretation is that the items were sent from a place *l*-“to” a named official, this interpretation is defended by Aharoni and Rainy. However, there is no verb *sent* that precedes the *lamed* in these inscriptions, so “to” may not be the most appropriate interpretation of *l*-.
- 50 Avigad, "Hebrew Epigraphic Sources," 35.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 35.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 36.
- 53 *Ibid.*, 35. A “bath” is a liquid measure (*Bible Dictionary* [Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979], 789).
- 54 Robert Deutsch, "First Impression: What We Learn from King Ahaz's Seal," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 24, no. 3 (May/June 1998): 54.
- 55 Avigad, "Hebrew Epigraphic Sources," 37.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 57 Alcalay, *The Complete Hebrew-English Dictionary*, 40.
- 58 Lipinski, *Semitic Languages: Outline of A Comparative Grammar*, 106–7. Sáenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language*, trans. John Elwolde (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 20.

- 59 Blau, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*, 21. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 39, e.g., the Qal participle **kātibu* > **kōtibu* > *kōtēb* “a writing.”
- 60 Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 40, 43; e.g., the construct noun “death of” **mawt* > *mōt* and **yawm* > *yôm* “day,” and Hiphil verb “he begat” **hawlīd* > *hōlīd* (Genesis 11:27), *hawšīb* > *hōšīb* (Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §69i).
- 61 Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 39–40. Qal Jussive verb “may he arise” **yaqum* > *yāqôm*, and noun “whole, all” **kull* > *kōl*. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 177 **gadul* > *gādōl* “great.”
- 62 Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 39–40, e.g., f.sg. adjective **qaruba* > *qarōbā* “near.” This sound change is most evident in Pual verb forms, whose first vowel is PS **u*, followed by a geminate consonant (CC), but some consonants don’t double, like *r* and the gutturals; in this case PS **u* > *ō*, e.g., **burrāk* > *bōrāk* “he was blessed;” *yābōrāk* “he shall be blessed” (2 Samuel 7:29). Some other examples from the gutturals are: *dōhū* “they are cast down” (Psalm 36:13); *dōšākū* “they are quenched” (Psalm 118:12); *tōhar* “be cleansed,” participle *məṭōhārā* “she is cleansed” (Ezekiel 22:24).
- 63 In Biblical Hebrew “the primary stress occurs most commonly by far on the ultima, i.e. the last syllable” (Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 57). The last heavy syllable generally takes the stress, unless there are prosodic reasons otherwise.
- 64 Joshua Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 41.
- 65 The seven main verb paradigms each have their own template, and the nouns have a great variety of templates. John Huehnergard lists sixteen templates for triconsonantal nouns in “Biblical Hebrew Nominal Patterns,” in *Epigraphy, Philology, and the Hebrew Bible: Methodological Perspectives and Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of Jo Ann Hackett* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 28, https://www.academia.edu/19710971/2015_Biblical_Hebrew_Nominal_Patterns. Each pattern affects the meaning of the word. See also Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, 43.

- 66 Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, 221. Some Hebrew masculine nouns with the qōtāl vowel pattern (many with dubious etymologies) are: ʕōlām (Genesis 9:12) “long time, duration, futurity” (Samaritan Pentateuch has ūlām, this suggest PS *u) (Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 798); šōpār (2 Samuel 6:15) “horn, trumpet;” kōbāʕ (Ezekiel 38:5) “helmet;” ḥōtām (Exodus 28:11) “signet-ring, seal;” dōnāḡ (Psalm 22:15) “wax;” gōrāl (Leviticus 16:8) “lot” such as a stone or other object used in casting lots; ʔōšār (Proverbs 15:16) “treasure;” and ʔōpān (Ezekiel 1:16) “wheel,” (the Syriac or Aramaic emphatic is ʔufnā that also suggests PS *u, see Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 23). The qōtāl vowel pattern though rare does exist in Biblical Hebrew for masculine nouns. Many of these examples are manufactured objects. The Liahona was a manufactured object.
- 67 Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, 219.
- 68 Wolfdietrich Fischer, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 43.
- 69 This is a distinguishing feature of Central Semitic and is most evident in III-w verbs that merge with III-y verbs (John Huehnergard, “Features of Central Semitic,” in *Biblical and Oriental Essays in Memory of William L. Moran*, ed. Agustinus Gianto (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2005), 179–80, https://www.academia.edu/234665/2005_Features_of_Central_Semitic. See also, Blau, *Phonology and Morphology of Biblical Hebrew*, 102. Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 188.
- 70 Rendsburg, “Monophthongization of aw/ay > ā in Eblaite and in Northwest Semitic,” 110. The final /h/ is epenthetic, it is added to indicate that the final vowel should be stressed. The same thing occurs on III-h verbs that were originally III-y/w verbs. The epenthetic /h/ indicates final stress no matter what the vowel is (Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §75c).
- 71 Martha T. Roth, ed., *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 21 vols. (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956), <https://oi.uchicago.edu/research/publications/assyrian-dictionary-oriental-institute-university-chicago-cad>. Hereafter referred to as CAD.

- 72 John Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 587.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 588.
- 74 CAD, 20:172.
- 75 Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, 6–7. “**Most feminine singular nouns** have *-t* or *-at* after the base, *-t* if the base ends in a single consonant or in a vowel, *-at* if the base ends in two consonants.”
- 76 *Ibid.*, 588. Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, 77–79, lists PS **qaww* > Akk *qû-* “thread, line,” **θawr* > Akk *šūr-* “bull,” **yawm* > Akk *ūm-* “day,” and **qawl* > Akk *qūl-* “voice.” All these examples show the **aw* > *ū* sound change.
- 77 Edward Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II* (Leuven, BE: Peeters Publishers, 1994), 19.
- 78 Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, 45; Lipinski transliterates the second *u* as short, instead of *ū*. Greenfield and Shaffer transliterate it long *unūte*, and translate it as “objects’ rather than more usual ‘vessels’ since the statue seems to be included (?)” They also reference *unūt bītīm* “temple vessels” in Hittite contexts (AHw, 1423, 6 and 9a). Jonas C. Greenfield and Aaron Shaffer, “Notes on the Akkadian-Aramaic Bilingual Statue from Tell Fekherye.” *Iraq* 45, no. 1 (1983): 112, 115.
- 79 Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, 37.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 49.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 64–65.
- 82 In Biblical Hebrew the primitive prefixes *ma-* and *mi-* (*mā-* and *mē-* in open syllables) convert a verb into a noun. “Nouns with preformative *m* are mainly abstract nouns, nouns of place and nouns of instrument.” (Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 235–36). The *mā-* in *māʔnayyāʔ* identifies it as a noun. The prefix *m-* has a nominalizing affect on the active and passive participles of Aramaic verbs *Pael*, *Haphel*, *Aphel*, and *Shaphel*. (Alger F. Johns, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1972], 32). Another Semitic feature is that the prefix merges with the word stem, which results “in the elision of the vowel of the first stem-syllable.” (M.M. Bravmann, *Studies in Semitic Philology*, Studies

in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 6 [Leiden, NL: E.J. Brill, 1977], 73).

- 83 Some may say the *m-* is the first root consonant, but this is not compatible with Akkadian that likely has a deleted *ʔ-* as the first root consonant. If *m-* were the first radical, we would expect the cognates in related languages to have *m-* as the first radical. The aleph *ʔ* is the second consonant in the noun *mʔnyʔ-*, but it is the first radical of the three consonantal stem *ʔny*. The final emphatic plural is usually *-ayya*, but I see the final root syllable *-ay* merging with the plural suffix, therefore, I interpret *-ay* as the final syllable of *ʔnay* a three consonant word. CAD, 1A2:106, lists *anaya* as a West Semitic word (probably **ʔny*) that means “ship,” a type of vessel.
- 84 Alger F. Johns, *A Short Grammar of Biblical Aramaic*, 7.
- 85 Ibid., 6.
- 86 Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 1910.
- 87 The Arabic noun *ʔinâʔ* may derive from the same three Central Semitic consonants *ʔny*, but the first vowel is *i* rather than *u*. The proto form **ʔunay* may have developed into Arabic *ʔinâʔ* “vessel, container, receptacle; plate; dish; kitchen ware.” The plural form *ʔāniya* preserves the third consonant *y*. (Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, [Arabic–English] 4th ed., ed. J. Milton Cowan [Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, Inc.1994], 40). III-weak roots “with *a* before the final radical, the stem ends in *-ā*.” “In morphemes with *-ā* in the final syllable of the stem, *ʔ* appears between the final sound of the stem and the inflectional ending.” (Wolfdietrich Fischer, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic*, trans. Johnathan Rodgers [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002], 43). The final *hamza* may be a replacement of the third consonant /w/ or /y/.
- 88 The Central Semitic root $\sqrt{ʔny}$ likely developed two nominal stems **ʔunáy* and **ʔúny*. The early Semitic noun **ʔuny* developed into the Hebrew masculine noun *ʔōnî* “ship,” and early Semitic noun **ʔunáy* developed into the proposed Hebrew noun **ʔōnā* “a vessel.” The development of **ʔúny* > **ʔúnî* as final **y* changes to the vowel *î*. After PS **y* changes to *î*, the stress shifts to the final long vowel *î*. The open **u* reduces to *ō*, a *ḥatef qames*, that functions the same as a vocal shewa, but derives from PS

**u* resulting in *ʔōnî* “ship, fleet” (1 Kings 9:26). The feminine form of this noun is *ʔōnîyâ*. The feminine morpheme **-at* that later becomes *â*, attaches to the noun stem **ʔuny* > **ʔuny-ât*. The final vowel prevents the original **y* from changing to a vowel. An epenthetic **i* inserts to separate the consonant cluster *ny*, and then the pretonic epenthetic vowel lengthens. The prepretonic first stem vowel **u* is replaced by the *ḥaṭef qameṣ ǝ*, e.g., **ʔunyât* > **ʔuniyâ* > *ʔōnîyâ* “a ship” (Proverbs 30:19). The feminine plural is *ʔōnîyōṭ* “ships” (Genesis 49:13). There is one example in the Biblical text where “ships” is written with a *w* following the *ʔ* *aleph*, which may refer to the *o* sound that derives from the original **u*, *ʔōwnîyōṭ* (2 Chronicles 8:18). Other III-y nouns with similar developments are **ṯaby* > **šābî* > *šəbî* “gazelle” (Deuteronomy 12:15); **gady* > **gādî* > *gəđî* “kid” (Genesis 38:17); and **lahy* > **lāhî* > *ləhî* “jaw, cheek” (Judges 15:15). The unstressed, open PS **a* reduces to *a*, *shewa*, when the stress shifts to the final long vowel. These PS forms are found in Fox, *Semitic Noun Patterns*, 75–78. Some examples where PS **u* develops into stressed *ō* and unstressed *ǝ* are: **qudš* > *qōdeš* “holiness” (Exodus 28:36), plural **qudašîm* > *qōdāšîm* “holy things” (Exodus 28:38); **ḥudš* > *ḥōdeš* “month” (Genesis 7:11), pl. *ḥōdāšîm* “months” (Genesis 38:24); **šupr* > *šōpēr* “fawn” (Song of Solomon 2:9), pl. *šōpārîm* “fawns” (Song of Solomon 4:5); **gurn* > *gōren* “threshing floor” (Genesis 50:10), pl. *gōrānōṭ* “threshing floors” (1 Samuel 23:1); see Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 274.

- 89 Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 479–80. Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 478–79.
- 90 Nephi was able to describe their direction of travel within the sixteen parts of the compass, i.e., “nearly a south-southeast direction” (1 Nephi 16:13); “following the same direction ... in the borders near the Red Sea. ... we did travel for the space of many days” [likely in the same direction day after day parallel to the shore of the Red Sea] (16:14–15); “traveling nearly the same course as in the beginning” (16:33); and “we did travel nearly eastward from that time forth” (17:1). The coastline of the Red Sea in Saudi Arabia runs in a south-southeast direction according to our compass or directional system. Why didn’t Nephi just say they followed the shore of the Red Sea? Why did he have to give the exact direction? The fact that the word *nearly* is used three times suggests that Nephi knew what the exact direction was. An

instrument like a magnetic compass would be required for him to know in fine detail the exact direction they were traveling. One English definition for *compass* is: “An instrument for determining the magnetic meridian, or one’s direction or position with respect to it” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “compass.”)

- 91 Alan Miner (in *The Liahona, Miracles by Small Means* [Springville, UT: Cedar Fort Inc., 2013], 29) makes this observation: “Lehi and Nephi oriented themselves to a specific *direction* (‘south-southeast’) — a direction that is found *written* on modern-day compasses If the working of the Liahona were completely miraculous, would Nephi have even cared to repeatedly note such a specific direction as south-southeast? And if the aim of Lehi’s party was to just follow the direction where the Lord caused the spindle to point, why would there be any need for Nephi to record and repeatedly refer to such a specific direction as south-southeast? Wouldn’t it have been more practical under such a situation for Nephi to refer to any direction as either ‘northward,’ or ‘southward,’ or ‘eastward,’ or ‘westward’? There would be no reason to get any more specific. ... It seems to me that without any magnetic spindle pointing north as a reference, and without an adjustable 360-degree set of marking for directions—directions which were also divided into sixteen divisions—it would be very difficult for any person traveling through the desert to claim that they were traveling in a south-southeast direction.”
- 92 One may wonder why the name *Liahona* only shows up in Alma’s account some five hundred years later but does not show up in the translation of Nephi’s writings where it is referred to as *the compass* (1 Nephi 18:12, 21; 2 Nephi 5:12). Jonathan Curci (“Liahona ‘The direction of the Lord’: An Etymological Explanation,” 97) suggests that the chronology of the translation provides the answer. The Book of Alma was translated before the writings of Nephi. Since the interpretation of *Liahona* was given in Alma, it was not necessary to give the name again, only the English interpretation as “the compass, which had been prepared of the Lord” (1 Nephi 18:12).
- 93 The Hebrew term for “call, called” is *qārāʾ* that has six nuanced meanings: 1) to call, cry, utter a loud sound; 2) to call unto someone; 3) to proclaim; 4) to read aloud; 5) to summon; and 6) call=name. (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 894–96). For example, “Adam **called** his wife’s name Eve” (Genesis 3:20),

“And my people would that we should **call** the name of the place Nephi; wherefore, we did **call** [name] it Nephi. And all those who were with me did take upon them to **call** [name] themselves the people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 5:8–9); and “the people who were now **called** [named] Lamanites” (2 Nephi 5:14).

- 94 Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part Four, Alma 21–55* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2007), 4: 2371. Skousen attributes the insertion “Liahona, which is, being interpreted a compass” to Alma, “because the particular name for the object, (namely, *Liahona*) was no longer current in Alma and Helaman’s time, it was necessary for Alma to provide the interpretative language for his son Helaman.” On the other hand, if Alma knew the name and function of the Liahona, who told him? It was in the plates of Nephi, and Helaman had access to these plates, so he would know these things. However, would either Alma or Helaman know what *compass* meant in this context?
- 95 These same questions could be asked of Irreantum (1 Nephi 17:5), Rabbanah (Alma 18:13), Rameumptom (Alma 31:21), deseret (Ether 2:3), and Ripliancum (Ether 15:8). Is it the author or the translator that inserts the interpretation of these unfamiliar names? I believe the most reasonable answer is the translator, since he is responsible for conveying the meaning of the ancient text into understandable English. The author of the record knows these words for they are part of his language and culture. They are natural expressions in his language that are included in the ancient text, so he would not need to define them with other terms. These words are strange to us, so the translator included the words and then provided their interpretation in English. Some words like *curlleoms* and *cumoms* were likely not translatable in English, so they were not interpreted. Moroni was concerned about the translation of the records with its imperfections, and he comments: “But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written and also that none other people knoweth our language. And because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof” (Mormon 9:34). It seems reasonable to conclude that it was the Lord who provided the English interpretation of these foreign names to Joseph Smith Jr. as he dictated the record to his scribes.

- 96 The KJV translation of *compass* refers to something round or circular *yāsōḇ sābīḇ* (1 Kings 7:23–24, 35); to encompass *hassōḇēḇ* (Genesis 2:11); “set a compass” *ḥūḡ* (Proverbs 8:27); to compass (go around) *lišḇōḇ* (Numbers 21:4); or an instrument to draw a circle *maḥūḡāḥ* (Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 295). None of these words have any phonemic similarity with the last part of the name *Liahona*, and they have nothing to do with a magnetic compass.
- 97 Royal Skousen, “The History of the Book of Mormon Text: Parts 5 and 6 of Volume 3 of the Critical Text,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 109–10, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4988&context=byusq>. “Word examples like *bar* and *Bible* argue that the English translation of the Book of Mormon depends on words that first showed up in medieval English. This finding implies that these words did not appear as such on the plates themselves and were therefore introduced into the text during the translation process. But this does not mean that the entire translation of the Book of Mormon is paraphrastic or that it was a fiction created by the Lord. My own personal experience with the text has convinced me that the Book of Mormon is the history of real people and describes real events that occurred in their lives, but at the same time the text also shows the direct influence of the translation process. It is important to realize that the overall text of the Book of Mormon proper ... could very well represent a literal translation despite various cases of cultural translation.”

Skousen uses the word *Bible* (2 Nephi 29:3–6) as an example of a word that is a cultural translation; the word *Bible* dates to medieval times or later and would not have been written by Nephi on the plates. The Old French word *adieu* (Jacob 7:27) is such a translation. It connotes a farewell to beloved friends commending them to God, but *adieu* was not written on the plates; there must have been a Hebrew phrase or word that conveys the intended meaning of *adieu*. The name *Mary*, the mother of Jesus Christ (Mosiah 3:8; Alma 7:10) may be a cultural translation, and was likely written *maryām*, an early form of Miriam (before the first *a* attenuated or raised to *i*). The Septuagint has *Μαριαμ* (iota = yod) (Exodus 15:20). The last syllable *-ām* may or may not have been on the plates. The name *Jesus Christ* may also be a cultural translation, as is *baptism* and other so-called anachronisms.

I believe that *compass* is a cultural translation, since it is an instrument that we understand. The Nephites likely never had the word *compass* that was a directional finding device with a magnetic spindle that pointed toward the north, but they had the word *ʔōnâ “a vessel,” and incorporated it into the name *Liahona*, a vessel prepared of the Lord.

98 Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 185.

99 *Ibid.*, 188.

100 *Ibid.*, 195.

101 Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 169. “The typical word order for a verbal clause is verb – subject – object (VSO).” This is the order of the segments in *Liahona*.

102 Arnold and Choi, 170. See also Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §142.