

**SURPLUS OF MEANING OR SUSPENDING PHILOLOGY?:
SOME REFLECTIONS ON PHILOLOGICAL RAMIFICATION IN
CLASSICAL QUR'ĀN COMMENTARY**

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Abstract

This study examines the philological data criteria used for exploring the genuine meanings and denominators of Arabic verbatim of the Qur'ān by Muslim exegetes of the classical period, with a special focus on the philological ramification of the commentary of *dhālika l-kitāb* pattern in Q 2:2.

Having attained the status of a corpus (*kitāb*) in the aftermath of a very long-phased oral tradition, the Qur'ān's textus receptus reflects both portrayals of verbality and scriptural traits embedded in its Arabic verbatim yielded by the compilation process. The Qur'ān, representing a junction spot for oral and written traditions in Arab culture, is known to be molded according to the Arabic language register and also formalized the language's post facto grammar. In this vein, the Qur'ānic text bears a reflexive affiliation with its pertinent language. This article

Ilahiyat Studies

p-ISSN: 1309-1786 / e-ISSN: 1309-1719

Volume 15 Number 1 Winter/Spring 2024

DOI: 10.12730/is.1416368

Article Type: Research Article

Received: January 8, 2024 | *Accepted:* March 14, 2024 | *Published:* July 8, 2024.

To cite this article: Palanci, Merve. "Surplus of Meaning or Suspending Philology?: Some Reflections on Philological Ramification in Classical Qur'ān Commentary". *Ilahiyat Studies* 15/1 (2024), 3-29. <https://doi.org/10.12730/is.1416368>

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argues that the lingual reciprocity between the Qurʾānic text and its language underwent a critical suspension through commentaries when the case was Qurʾān's *al-kitāb*. In this article, the first layer of the data reflects the historical background of the term *kitāb*. Then, it construes the word within Qurʾān's cross-references. It exemplifies commentaries on the *dhālika l-kitāb* pattern, circumventing philological evidence. After elucidating different grounds leading to philological ramification, I argue that a philological inference from the Qurʾān nests in its fullest sense only when the commentator credits historical data and cross-references within the Qurʾānic content.

Keywords: Qurʾān, exegesis, philological exegesis, *dhālika l-kitāb*, surplus of meaning

Introduction*

Religion has played a crucial role in the spiritual life of Muslim society from the very outset, influencing almost every sphere of cultural activity. Quotations from the Qurʾān and the sayings of the Prophet are prevalent in all branches of Arabic literature. Given this background, it is reasonable to assume that religious influences also played a role in Arabic philology. This is particularly evident as the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth, especially the former, were prominent sources of Arabic grammar and lexicography.¹ In a manner analogous to the influence of the Vedas on Indian grammar, Homer on Greek grammar, the books of Confucius on Chinese grammar, and the Biblical Canon on Hebrew grammar, the impetus for the commencement of Arabic philological studies emanated from the meticulous examination of the Muslim Holy Book.

* While penning this article, I have benefited from my PhD dissertation that is achieved at Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Muhammed Coşkun.

¹ Whereas linguistic evidence extracted from the texts of ḥadīth genre was deemed improper for serving the grammatology of the Arabic language in the first century of Islam, lexicographical works of early period drew on it extensively from the very outset. L. Kopf, "Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology", *Studia Islamica* 5 (1956), 3; For a comprehensive early history of lexicographical tradition of Arabic language see Soner Gündüzöz, "Arap Sözlük Bilimi ve Sözlük Çalışmaları", *İslam Medeniyetinde Dil İlimleri: Tarih ve Problemler*, ed. İsmail Güler (İstanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2017), 23-64.

The Arabic scholarly tradition has indeed transmitted certain information indicating that even some of the earliest philologists were influenced in their professional pursuits by religious considerations. Notably, figures such as Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/771) and Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī (d. 213/828) expressed reservations about the compatibility of collecting ancient poetry and Bedouin sayings with the obligation imposed on every educated Muslim to engage in the study of religious literature. Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’, as recounted, fervently burned his extensive collection of philological notes in a display of piety, with the explicit intent of dedicating himself wholly to the study of the Qur’ān. Upon resuming his philological endeavors, he had to rely entirely on his memory. Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī, on the other hand, was primarily occupied by compiling the *dīwāns* of various Arab tribes. He transcribed the Qur’ān and placed the manuscript in the mosque of Kūfah upon completing the *dīwān* of any given tribe. This account evidently suggests that he undertook this practice as a means of atonement for having engaged in worldly pursuits.²

In fact, linguistic studies are known to have embarked upon the transition of the Qur’ānic text from oral to written form. Arabic linguistics made significant progress in the 2nd-4th centuries AH due to the challenges faced in transcribing the language. The development of Arabic linguistics was primarily driven by the need to overcome these challenges. Although there were no written texts other than the *mu‘allaqāt* before the Qur’ān became a codex, the emergence of Sībawayhi’s (d. 180/796) *al-Kitāb*³ is remarkable. Sībawayhi discussed

² Kopf, “Religious Influences on Medieval Arabic Philology”, 4.

³ Baalbaki scrutinizes the methodological principles and techniques inherent in Sībawayhi’s examination of the Arabic language and traces the evolution of these methodologies as shaped by subsequent grammarians. By situating the *al-Kitāb* within the milieu of early Arabic philological endeavors, he dissects numerous passages to elucidate the coherence of the author’s grammatical analytical system and the interconnectedness of his analytical instruments and concern. The text notably emphasizes Sībawayhi’s profound impact on the broader tradition of Arabic grammar throughout its entirety. Ramzi Baalbaki, *The Legacy of the Kitāb: Sībawayhi’s Analytical Methods Within the Context of the Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Although the main content of Sībawayhi’s book is based on the ideas of Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, it is important to note that the opinions of linguists, grammarians, and qirā’ah scholars, such as Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb, Akhfash al-Akbar, Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’, ‘Īsā ibn ‘Umar al-Thaqafī, Ibn Abī Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī, and Hārūn al-A‘war al-Qārī, also made significant contributions to the book.

issues related to Arabic grammatology depth in the 2nd century AH, showing the path of Arabic philology after the Qurʾān.⁴

As a tentative hypothesis, Goldziher (d. 1921) proposed that the categorization of the three parts of speech of Sībawayhi's *al-Kitāb* did not originate in Ḥijāz. There is no conclusive evidence supporting the notion that this theory, which implies the influence of Greek logic, had its inception there. He alludes to preliminary remarks in Sībawayhi's *al-Kitāb*, who introduced this division at the beginning of his book. As Sībawayhi's lifespan coincided with a period under 'Abbāsīd rule when Greek philosophy exerted a considerable influence on Arab intellectuals, Goldziher raises the question of a probable external influence, namely, Greek, albeit being hesitant in this argument.⁵

However, regarding the inception of Arab linguistic inquiry and its dependency on the Qurʾānic text,⁶ there is a broad consensus among scholars. Those who critically assess the data from the Arab tradition, as compiled by Flügel (d. 1870), generally concur that Abū l-Aswad al-Duʿalī (d. 69/688) can be acknowledged as the progenitor of Arabic grammar.⁷ However, tradition, unsatisfied with this attribution, credits 'Alī (d. 40/661), the caliph, as the individual who provided the initial impetus to the development of grammar as a science. Flügel, while earnestly presenting the pertinent details of this tradition, incorporates them into his scholarly reflections, ultimately concluding that Abū l-Aswad (d. 69/688) was the first to compose a grammatical work based on the information supposedly conveyed to him by 'Alī. Among 'Alī's contributions to Abū l-Aswad, significant emphasis is placed on his

Mehmet Reşit Özbalkıç, "Sıbeveyhi", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2009).

⁴ Mehmet Şirin Çıkar, "İlk Dönem Arap Dilbilimi", *Kur'an ve Dil: Dilbilim ve Hermenötik Sempozyumu (17-18 Mayıs 2001)* (Erzurum: Bakanlar Matbaası, 2002), 256.

⁵ Ignaz Goldziher, *On the History of Grammar Among the Arabs: An Essay in Literary History*, trans. Kinga Dévényi - Tamás Iványi (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 3-6.

⁶ Early studies on Arabic syntax and morphology in the post-Qurʾānic period can be exemplified in this respect. Classical treatises on Arabic rhetoric are the other denominator proving the normative role of Qurʾānic text over Arabic philology. Halim Öznurhan, "Kur'an'ın Arap Diline Tesiri", *İslâm Öncesi Araplarda Dil ve Edebiyat*, ed. Mustafa Çağrıncı (İstanbul: KURAMER, 2019), 119-126.

⁷ Gustav Flügel, *Die Grammatischen Schulen der Araber. Erste Abtheilung. Die Schulen von Basra und Kufa und die Gemischte Schule* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1862), 18-26.

observations regarding the categorization of speech into three parts: *ism* (name, i.e., noun), *fiʿl* (action, i.e., verb), and *ḥarf* (letter, i.e., particle).⁸

In a scholarly investigation exploring the impact of Greek abstraction on Arabic linguistic cognition, Versteegh asserted that certain facets of the discourse surrounding the *tawqīf*⁹ matter exhibited parallels with linguistic deliberations originating in Greek linguistic thought, revealing an external linkage with a special focus on the correspondingly equated *tawqīf* term. Furthermore, Versteegh proposed that the terminology employed in Arabic grammar was constructed upon a presumed Greek model.¹⁰ However, his recent scrutiny of several early Qurʾān commentaries has led him to reject his previous conjecture concerning external influences within the realm of grammar,¹¹ and Versteegh's reaffirmation underscores the pivotal role played by the linguistic structure of the Qurʾān in shaping the foundational rules of the Arabic language by dismissing the possibility of an external influence.

In summary, it is widely accepted that the formulation of grammatical rules and the linguistic principles of morphology and syntax in the interpretation of the Qurʾān, particularly in early linguistic commentaries, find their basis within the Qurʾānic text, which is the compiled form and *textus receptus*. This underscores a reciprocal relationship between the Arabic language, serving as the linguistic medium of the Qurʾān, and the Qurʾān itself, elucidating a nuanced interrelationship.

Contrary to the professed commitment of Qurʾānic exegetes to a disciplined philological approach, this article argues that their

⁸ Goldziher, *On the History of Grammar among the Arabs*, 3.

⁹ *Tawqīf* is the central term in Islamic theology, connotating the argument that the origins of language depend on divine interference. For theological approaches to the origins of language see Hulusi Arslan - Numan Karagöz, "Dilin Kökeni ve Teolojik Bağlamı", *Mesned İlahiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12/2 (Autumn 2021), 431-451.

¹⁰ C. H. M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 128-148.

¹¹ Mustafa Shah, "The Philological Endeavours of the Early Arabic Linguists: Theological Implications of the *tawqīf-i-ṣṭilāḥ* Antithesis and the *majāz* Controversy — Part I", *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 1/1 (1999), 29; Kees Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 19.

engagement was not always consistent with philological principles. Saleh posits that scholars, relying on philological deductions in Qurʾānic exegesis, often assume that commentaries faithfully represent the state of philological knowledge at their time of writing. However, this perspective overlooks the complex motivations that drove exegetes, as their work frequently aimed to navigate through philology while adhering to its rules. He suggested that scholars' reliance on classical dictionaries with the expectation of finding unbiased philological discussions of Qurʾānic roots is misleading. Lexicography and Qurʾānic studies are often intertwined, and dictionaries seldom challenge the interpretations of commentators. Instead, they tended to reinforce and complement the findings of these studies. He emphasizes the need to reconsider the assumptions about the relationship between philology, commentaries, and lexicons in understanding the meanings of Qurʾānic terms.¹²

Inspired by Saleh's remarks, this paper calls into question the reciprocity in relation through the following query: In formulating a philological understanding and interpretation of the Qurʾān as a linguistic corpus, does the Arabic grammatical framework developed subsequent to the Qurʾān possess standalone sufficiency in revealing the meanings of concepts and expressions in the Qurʾān's discourse? Alternatively, what are the ways of suspending philological evidence in commentaries that result in a surplus of meaning?

In this context, the *al-kitāb* in the Qurʾān has been chosen as an illustrative example to ground the argument of this paper. First, it is important to explore the manifestation of the concept of *al-kitāb* in the historical context of the Ḥijāz region during the 1st/7th century. The concept is a distinguishing link between oral and written traditions. This historical background provides the meta-textual context of the Qurʾān, helping to reveal the semantic domain of *al-kitāb* in Arab oral culture before the Qurʾān was codified. Next, the meanings assigned to *al-kitāb* within the intratextual context of the Qurʾān are addressed. Finally, this text manifests the philological deductions that lead to a

¹² Waled Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qurʾānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity", *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 651-652.

surplus in the meaning of a specified, referred to as “ramification”, by citing classical exegeses within the framework of Q 2:2.

1. From Nonliterate to Literate Culture: *Kitāb* as a Junction Spot in a Revelatory Epoch

Oral tradition, the primary and still widely prevalent method of human communication, goes beyond simple conversation. It encompasses a dynamic and highly diverse auditory medium for the evolution, storage, and transmission of knowledge, art, and ideas. It is often contrasted with literacy, with which it interacts in numerous ways, and with literature, where it interacts in terms of size, diversity, and societal impact. For thousands of years before the advent of writing, a relatively recent development in human history, oral tradition, as the exclusive mode of communication, played a crucial role in establishing and sustaining societies and their institutions. Furthermore, various studies conducted across six continents have demonstrated that even in the 21st century, with increasing literacy rates, oral tradition continues to be the predominant form of communication. Our current understanding of oral tradition relies not on documents, which are essentially written interpretations of oral traditions, but on insights gained through direct study of societies heavily reliant on oral tradition as a primary form of communication.¹³

The sacred texts of Judaism¹⁴ and Christianity, as well as the Qur’ān, originated within the cultural contexts of their respective societies, succeeding in a long-phased oral tradition.¹⁵ Writing has been a

¹³ For psychodynamics of orality and basic proponents of orally based thought and expression see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2012), 31-74; For orality of literacy in hermeneutical sense refer to Recep Alpyağıl, *Kimin Tarihi Hangi Hermenötik?: Kur’ân’ı Anlama Yolunda Felsefî Denemeler I* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2018), 87-91.

¹⁴ The classical Rabbinic tradition, encompassing legal, discursive, and exegetical aspects, asserts its identity as Oral Torah, transmitted orally in an uninterrupted chain, tracing its authority back to divine revelation given to Moses at Sinai. Despite this claim, since the third century C.E., the tradition has been codified in written text. Martin Jaffee, through careful examination and analysis of evidence, demonstrates that the Rabbinic tradition, as it exists today, evolved through a reciprocal interpretation of both oral and written modes. Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE-400 CE* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ For the oral tradition in Semitic religions in pre-Islamic period see Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*; Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Oral

common aspect of daily life for many centuries in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. In contrast, the western region of Arabian peninsula, where the Qurʾān was revealed, did not have a tradition of extensive literary production. Nevertheless, the Qurʾān was revealed through a significant literary genre embedded in Arabic verbatim in this context. Although archaeological evidence for this region, particularly during the sixth century, is limited, there are indications of a modest spread of literacy even in this area.¹⁶

In contrast with the scarcity of writing acts and the tradition of compiling books, poetry, and oratories were widely accepted during the era of the Qurʾān's revelation, and sources reported that literacy was limited in Arab society, where oral culture dominated. Even in Mecca, the most important religious and commercial center of the Arab Peninsula in the 1st century AH, few people could write. Al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892) stated that only seventeen people were literate.¹⁷ Therefore, it is fair to say that the society in which the Qurʾān was revealed was a nonliterate society that can also be termed "preliterate". This means that not only were the majority of people nonliterate, but they also lacked the habits and concepts that come with literacy. Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845) noted in his *al-Ṭabaqāt* that writing was not well known among the Arabs and that, among the companions, only Rāfiʿ ibn Mālik (d. 3/625) knew how to write.¹⁸

As the literacy rate was limited, only a small number of individuals were capable of writing down the revealed Qurʾānic verses. The narratives transmitted from the Prophet forbidding the act of writing Prophetic sayings may well be taken as one of the fundamental features of oral culture in Arab society that is characterized by the

narrative techniques in Rabbinic Judaism and Islamic tradition bear an apparent kindred features as analyzed by Toprak in detail. See Mehmet Sait Toprak, *Talmud ve Hadīs: Karşılaştırmalı Bir Araştırma* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınları, 2012), 58-130.

¹⁶ Peter Stein, "Literacy in Pre-Islamic Arabia: An Analysis of the Epigraphic Evidence", *The Qurʾān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009), 255-256.

¹⁷ Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyá ibn Jābir ibn Dāwūd al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1988), 454.

¹⁸ Dücane Cündioğlu, *Sözlü Kültür'den Yazılı Kültür'e Anlam'ın Taribi* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 1997), 107.

authority of speech and narrative chain,¹⁹ and pejorative connotations regarding writing in the first generation of Islam indicate a hesitant attitude toward the act of writing in the first epoch of Islam.²⁰ Additionally, the scarcity of writing materials resulted in the prevalent absence of the concept of a “book” in the cultural atmosphere of the region. Nevertheless, it is inaccurate to claim that Arabs were entirely unfamiliar with books and writing materials. They were familiar with the Jews and Christians who possessed religious texts and were aware of the books they held in high regard. When the term “book” was used, they associated it with the books belonging to these religious groups, which the Qurʾān refers to as *abl al-kitāb*.²¹ Therefore, it is possible to consider the Qurʾānic text as a distinguishing link between the oral and written periods in Arab culture. The attribution of the name *kitāb* to the Qurʾān holds another significant meaning related to the religious atmosphere on the pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula. In this period, the epithet *abl al-kitāb* (People of the Book) was the opposite and counterpart of the epithet *ummī* (unlettered). While the former referred to Jews and Christians, the latter referred to pagan Arabs.²² In this vein, Türkan meticulously manifests the fact that the presence of the two subject segments in the society of pre-Islamic Ḥijāz and its environs leads us to identify two distinct identity groups, albeit portraying similarities at the same time. The defining characteristic of the People of the Book is their identification with sacred scriptural knowledge. Conversely, illiterate Arabs find common ground in Kaʿbah. The *sharīʿah*, which is based on scriptural knowledge, consists mainly of explicit injunctions and was transmitted by the prophets. In contrast, the *sharīʿah* to which the illiterate Arabs adhered was primarily concerned with observing the sacred symbols, rituals, and prohibitions associated with the pilgrimage. The descendants of

¹⁹ For the phenomenological nature of oral narratives, see Toprak, *Talmud ve Hadīs*, 64-65.

²⁰ According to Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/729), the generation of the Companions believed that the Israelites deviated from the right path due to the books they inherited. As a result, they were not in favor of written documentation of knowledge. To understand the Companions’ attitude towards writing, see Cündioğlu, *Sözlü Kültür’den Yazılı Kültür’e Anlam’ın Tarihi*, 111-115.

²¹ Hidayet Aydar, “Kur’an’da Kitap Kavramı ve Bir Kitap Olarak Levh-i Mahfuz”, *İstanbul Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 2 (2000), 65.

²² Naşr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥbūm al-naşş: Dirāsah fī ‘ulūm al-Qurʾān* (al-Dār al-Bayḍāʾ: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfi al-‘Arabī, 2013), 53-54.

Ishmael had no prophetic experience prior to Islam. Nevertheless, both segments reflected the practical applications of the Prophet Abraham in their way of life. There are differences and similarities between religious and social behavior, and their consequences are shaped by these two identity substrates. Theoretically, we are faced with two different cultural developments: one formed by fixed information consolidated in a text and the other by the physical possibilities offered by a form of worship. The authority of the former is directly proportional to the mediation between the adherents and the text, while in the latter, it depends on the ability to mediate between the rules of worship and the custodianship of the places of worship.²³

The mere mention of numerous book- and writing-related concepts in the Qurʾān, during a time when oral culture was dominant, suggests that the verses aimed at social transformation through revelation. This social transformation serves as a foundation for mental transformation through concepts related to the book and writing.²⁴

On the other hand, the first generation of Muslims did not view the Qurʾānic text as a scripture to be studied directly in textual form due to the lack of widespread written culture. It is important to consider these factors when analyzing their perceptions of the Qurʾānic text.²⁵ The Qurʾān, being a “parole”²⁶ at the very outset, was transmitted into a corpus recorded in Arabic “language” in a scriptural form after its compilation.

The main objective of writing down the Qurʾān was to preserve it from any alteration or distortion.²⁷ Neuwirth highlights the fact that the

²³ Selim Türcan, *İlk Dönem Kurʾan Tasavvuru ve Dönüşümü -Kimlik ve Kitâb İlişkisi Bağlamında-* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Dissertation, 2007), 69-70.

²⁴ Toprak, *Talmud ve Hadîs*, 39.

²⁵ Muhammed Coşkun, *Modern Dünyada Kurʾan Yorumu* (İstanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2018), 18.

²⁶ The Qurʾān reflects a wide range of oratory characteristics embedded its verbatim. Oral expression codes, such as reiterations of the narratives, oaths, and catechetic expressions, together with context-based remarks are the main hallmarks in the Qurʾānic discourse. For a comprehensive analysis of oral expression types in the Qurʾān, see Süleyman Gezer, *Sözlü Kültürden Yazılı Kültüre Kurʾan* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2015), 162-249.

²⁷ Emphasizing the steps taken to ensure the preservation of oral narratives, oral tradition exemplifies the meticulous efforts of religious communities in safeguarding assembled parchments and scrolls with reverence. This process

authority of writing is attributed to the divine origin of the Qurʾān. This recognition of “writing” as the principal means of conveying authority brought about a profound transformation in the Arab worldview, particularly in the communities directly influenced by the Qurʾān’s proclamation. The transition was from a mainly tribal culture that focused on collective rituals and oral traditions to a new universal culture characterized by textuality and discourse. This transformation aligns with what Guy Stroumsa, an Oxford historian of religions, called a significant “religious mutation of late antiquity”.²⁸

However, this significant development has led to a continuous need for literacy activities and the increasing use of writing in Arabic from the perspective of Arab cultural history. The establishment and advancement of Arabic linguistics was facilitated by this, which also ensured the preservation of oral heritage, including that inherited from the pre-Islamic era, by transforming it into a written, permanent form.²⁹ However, the transition of the Qurʾān from the spoken word to a written text presented the challenge of interpretation.

Before the compilation process in relation, the Qurʾān had not been a written text meant to be read by its addressees at its core. In essence, this text did not originate from a single instance but rather developed over approximately twenty years, arising dialectically from independent events and occurrences. As such, it constitutes a speech

marks the transition of scriptures from oral tradition to written documents, highlighting their reception and development; see Siobhán Dowling Long - Fiachra Long, *Reading the Sacred Scriptures: From Oral Tradition to Written Documents and Their Reception* (London, New York: Routledge, 2017).

²⁸ Angelika Neuwirth, “The ‘Discovery of Writing’ in the Qurʾan: Tracing an Epistemic Revolution in Late Antiquity”, *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Tafsir Di Nusantara* 2/1 (2016), 31.

²⁹ Ali Bulut, “Sözlü Gelenekten Yazılı Geleneğe Geçiş ve Bunda Kurʾan’ın Etkisi”, *İslam Öncesi Araplarda Dil ve Edebiyat*, ed. Mustafa Çağrıncı (İstanbul: KURAMER, 2019), 108.

act³⁰ that involves a speaker, an addressee, and an extratextual context.³¹

According to Dindi, the Qurʾān underwent a two-facet alienation to itself, and the compilation process constituted the second and most crucial process. First, the divine discourse and its connotations, beyond its inherent transcendent metaphysical essence, underwent a transformation within a distinct milieu – specifically, the 1st/7th-century Hijāz region. It assumed form within the intellectual and imaginative framework of the Arab intellect, alienating into its linguistic and cognitive paradigms within this cultural context. As a consequence of this alienation, it can be posited that the divine discourse fundamentally became estranged from its inherent nature and essence.³² To elaborate, the initial divergence of the discourse from its divine origin, subsequent descent onto the human plane in the 1st/7th-century Hijāz region, and the articulation of its universal message within the contours of their beliefs and cognitive patterns engendered the initial form of estrangement. This inaugural estrangement need not necessarily be construed pejoratively; instead, it might be viewed as an organic process. The crux lies in the conveyance of the God’s message

³⁰ Austin and Searle proposed the Speech Act Theory, which posits that every speech act is also an action. This means that some acts can only be carried out through speech. Every speech is an act or at least leads to an act. Austin used the term “Illocutionary Act” to describe the speech act. The term “Perlocutionary Act” is used to express the situation of speech leading an act. Scriptures perform some kinds of acts through utterances or provide some acts occur on the acceptors as well. For types of speech acts, see J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 94-101.

³¹ Ömer Özsoy, “‘Çeviri Kuramı’ Açısından Kur’an Çevirisi Sorunu”, *2. Kur’an Sempozyumu Tebliğler - Müzakereler 4-5 Kasım 1995* (Ankara: Bilgi Vakfı Yayınları, 1996), 264; Austin and Searle proposed the Speech Act Theory, which posits that every speech act is also an action. This means that some acts can only be carried out through speech. Every speech is an act or at least leads to an act. Austin used the term “Illocutionary Act” to describe the speech act. The term “Perlocutionary Act” is used to express the situation of the speech leading an act. Scriptures perform some kinds of acts through utterances or provide some acts occur on the acceptors as well. Therefore, Speech Act Theory is crucial to understanding verses of the Qurʾān. For a detailed analysis of the Qurʾān from the perspective of speech act theory, see Hasan Er, *Dinî Sözcelerinin Edimselliği* (Bursa: Bursa Uludağ University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Dissertation, 2019).

³² Alienation of a word within a speech is a Ricoeurian theory. For details see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Dennis B. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 37-59.

and its incitement of the recipient toward specific actions. Consequently, the actual pernicious estrangement arises from the second form, the metamorphosis of a vibrant, dynamic discourse,³³ i.e., oral communication/speech, which supplements the meaning, envelops, and essentially embodies the meaning and message, into a textual form through detachment from the contextual elements of space and time, the historical-cultural milieu inherent in this spatial and temporal framework.³⁴

Thus, starting from the era of the *Tābi‘ūn* (second generation/successors), the Qur’ān ceased to be a spoken discourse³⁵ within the dynamic flow of life and historical challenges as it had been in the first generation. It had transformed into a codified book, and the dynamic interaction with the first generation had transitioned into a paradigm dominated by narratives and *its own* language. It was now a *kitāb*, a book with a start and end. Its being a scripture seems to have led Qur’ān commentators of the classical period to equate *al-kitāb* with the Qur’ān itself in its complete form, creating an apparent ramification in philological deductions from corresponding verses hosting this. To unveil the wide-range semantics of *al-kitāb* in the Qur’ān, the application of intratextual references is crucial. This approach is expected to unveil an intratextual basis. Then, explanations of the exegetes will be provided.

³³ The dynamic nature of the Qur’ān towards its addressees is clearly evident in “say-statements”. Say-statements are not simply one of the rhetorical devices used in the Qur’ān; they demonstrate its fundamental sense of itself. The Qur’ān is a record of God’s centuries-long address to doubting, questioning, searching, and straying humanity. It is the place where the Arabs are finally brought into the conversation directly, through divine revelation. Divine revelation is an authoritative response to what people are saying, as Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/787) described it as *jawāb^m li-qawlibim*. So, it naturally awaits its opportunity. Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 64.

³⁴ Emrah Dindi, *İlâhî Kelâmın Kendine Yabancılaşması: Hermeneutik Bir Soruşturma* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2021), 29.

³⁵ The main discursive property of Qur’ān’s rhetoric makes itself evident in implied speaker and addressee pronouns like “I”, “You”, “We”. Application of personal pronouns in question is a hallmark for indicating Qur’ān’s oral nature succeeding its compilation. For analysis of this property of the Qur’ān, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 224-255.

1.1. *Al-Kitāb* as the Source of Divine Prescription

The concept of *kitāb*, frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān, is closely related to revelatory events. However, considering God’s intervention in history through both creation and revelation, the proposition that the foundation of communication between God and humans, which is revelation, is both existential and intellectual appears to be justified. Divine will, in this sense, manifests itself not only through revelation, opening itself to humanity but also through the act of creation, demonstrating its will. It should be noted that within the scope of revelation and the book, the sovereignty of the Supreme Creator over the laws of creation is also considered. Therefore, the concept of the “book” is one of the fundamental concepts that elucidates God’s relationship with existence and humanity.³⁶

The concept in question has various meanings. It refers to the oral revelation conveyed by Prophet Muḥammad, which had not yet been compiled into a written manuscript, the Torah given to Moses, the revelation sent by God to previous communities and prophets, the transcendent source where God inscribed all His knowledge, decisions, decrees, and guidance based on the revelation possessed by the monotheistic believers referred to as the People of the Book, and any written document such as letters and records. After the Qurʾān was transcribed and standardized into a codex in the mid-1st century of the Hijrah, the terms “book” and “the book of Allah” have been commonly used to refer to all the verses compiled in the manuscript.³⁷

Although various aspects of the meanings of the word *kitāb* in the Qurʾān have been discussed, making a definitive distinction among these meanings³⁸ is challenging. For example, it is difficult to separate the meaning of God’s having knowledge of the death of everything on earth, such as the knowledge of everything else, and that nothing will happen without His permission, as stated in Q 3:145, from the divine decrees that are binding on the believers, also referred to as *kitāb*

³⁶ Mücteba Altındaş, *Kurʾan’da Kitap Kavramı* (Ankara: Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Dissertation, 2012), 5.

³⁷ William A. Graham, “The Earliest Meaning of ‘Qurʾān’”, *Die Welt des Islams* 23/24 (1984), 361-362.

³⁸ For such a classification, see Abū l-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Jawzī al-Baghdādī, *Nuzbat al-a‘yun al-nawāzīr fī ‘ilm al-wujūh wa-l-nazā’ir*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Karīm Kāzīm al-Rāqī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1984), 525.

Allāh, as mentioned in Q 4:24. Similarly, it is challenging to separate the context of Q 6:165, which mentions God's writing His mercy upon Himself, from verses stating that all the deeds of His servants are recorded by God (Q 3:181) or by angels (Q 10:21). Grouping them based on their contexts is challenging, as each group can be inclusive of the others.³⁹

In the self-references of the Qur'ān, the concept of the *kitāb* (book) is frequently encountered.⁴⁰ While researchers have mostly examined the similarities between the concepts in the language structure of the Qur'ān related to revelation and the book and those in the beliefs of the Near East in the context of the late ancient era, the Qur'ān itself does not claim uniqueness when presenting its own bookish quality. In fact, words derived from the root k-t-b, which are related to the concept of writing, are often used in the tradition of divine revelations, of which the Qur'ān is also a part, or within the framework of God's relationship with the created beings.

Andani points out that Qur'ānic verbatim embodies a hierarchy of *kitāb*. Transcending *kitāb*, as the source of divine prescriptions, differs from Arabic Qur'ān(s)/recitations. According to the Qur'ān, there is one celestial divine writing that is transcendent in nature and variously called *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* (Q 85:21-22), *kitāb makhnūn* (Q 56:77-80), *kitāb mubīn* (Q 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 12:1-3, 26:1-3, 27:1, 27:75, 28:1-2, 34:3, etc.), *kitāb ḥakīm* (Q 10:1), *umm al-kitāb* (Q 13:39, 43:4), and often just *kitāb* (Q 6:38, 18:49, 20:52, 22:70, etc.). He refers to transcendent *kitāb* as the "revelatory principle", which denotes the archetypal and ontological source of Qur'ānic revelation.⁴¹ The transcendent *kitāb* of God's knowledge, records, and deeds remains "carefully distinguished from the Arabic Qur'āns uttered by Muḥammad within the discourse of the Qur'ān".⁴²

³⁹ Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self-Image*, 4-5.

⁴⁰ The Qur'ānic verses qualifying Arabic Qur'ān revealed to the Prophet as *kitāb* are as follows: : 2:87, 2:89, 2:176, 3:3, 3:7, 4:105, 4:127, 4:136, 4:140, 5:48, 6:114, 6:155, 7:196, 16:64, 16:89, 18:27, 21:10, 28:86, 29:45, 29:47, 29:48, 29:51, 35:31, 38:29, 39:23, 39:41, 42:15, 56:30. However, there exist other verses presenting *kitāb* distinct from Arabic Qur'ān, such as 10:37, 12:1-2, 15:1, 27:1, 41:3, 43:2-4, 56:77-80.

⁴¹ Khalil Andani, *Revelation in Islam: Qur'ānic, Sunni, and Shi'i Ismaili Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Near Eastern Studies, PhD Dissertation, 2019), 55.

⁴² Andani, *Revelation in Islam*, 56.

Similarly, Madigan observes that the Qurʾān consistently maintains a clear distinction from the concept of *kitāb* by consistently referring to it in the third person. It extensively focuses on activities such as observing, proclaiming, defending, and defining the *kitāb*, emphasizing that they are not interchangeable entities. However, the Qurʾān does not treat the *kitāb* as a static entity detached from itself. Instead, it highlights the dynamic process of “reciting” as the means through which the *kitāb* is revealed and engages with humanity. Thus, the frequent use of the term *kitāb* in connection with the revelations to the Prophet signifies a concern about their source, composition, and, consequently, their authority and truthfulness rather than the manner of display or eventual storage.⁴³

One of the commonly used terms for God’s all-encompassing book that includes virtually everything is *kitāb mubīn* (Q 6:59, 10:61, 11:6, 34:3, 27:75). This particular *kitāb mubīn* is prominently featured in the introductions of Meccan sūrahs, which present Muḥammad’s Arabic recitations. Numerous Middle Meccan sūrahs contain announcements of revelations that revolve around the terms *kitāb mubīn* and Qurʾān. Many of these sūrah openings allude to the signs of a physically absent *kitāb mubīn*:⁴⁴

Alif Lām Rāʾ. These are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*). We have sent it down as an Arabic Qurʾān; happily, you will understand. (Q 12:1-3)

Alif Lām Rāʾ. These are the signs of the *kitāb* and a clear Qurʾān (*Qurʾān mubīn*). (Q 15:1)

Tāʾ Sīn Mīm. These are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*). (Q 26:1-2)

Tāʾ Sīn. These are the signs of the Qurʾān and a clear *kitāb* (*kitāb mubīn*). (Q 27:1)

Tāʾ Sīn Mīm. These are the signs of the clear *kitāb* (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*). (Q 28:1-2)

Ḥāʾ Mīm. A clear *kitāb* (*wa-l-kitāb al-mubīn*) was used. Behold We have made it an Arabic Qurʾān; happily, you will understand. In addition, behold it is in the *umm al-kitāb* with Us, sublime indeed, wise. (Q 43:1-4)

⁴³ Madigan, *The Qurʾān’s Self-Image*, 181-182.

⁴⁴ Andani, *Revelation in Islam*, 53.

Ḥā' Mīm. A clear *kitāb* (*wa-l-kitāb al-mubīn*) was used. We sent it down in a blessed night. We are ever-warned. (Q 44:1-3)

The announcements of the Qur'ānic sūrahs (Q 12, 15, 26, 27, 28) refer to the “signs of the clear *kitāb*” using the remote demonstrative pronoun *tilka*, in contrast to the proximate *bādhībī*. This language choice implies that this *kitāb* and its signs are absent and not immediately present to the audience of the Arabic Qur'āns. These instances bear resemblance to the phrase *dhālika l-kitāb* (that is the *kitāb*) found in Q 2:2. This has led to confusion among Qur'ān commentators regarding the true reference of “that *kitāb*” as opposed to “this *kitāb*”. The introductions of sūrahs 12, 43, and 44 assert that this very same *kitāb mubīn* has been “sent down” in the form of Qur'āns. The Qur'ānic phrasing in the aforementioned sūrah proclamations, particularly the “signs (*āyāt*)” referred to in these proclamations (e.g., “*tilka āyāt al-kitāb al-mubīn*”), does not pertain to the actual verses of the Arabic Qur'āns. Instead, they allude to God's signs and decrees in the cosmos and history. The Prophet's recitations of the Qur'ān effectively describe “those signs” of the *kitāb* in the Arabic language for his community. In addition, if the *kitāb mubīn* is the realm of God's knowledge, records, and deeds, then “those signs of the *kitāb mubīn*” must be something absent from the audience hearing the Qur'ān. Therefore, it is fair to say that the pronoun *tilka/ dhālika*, instead of *bādhībī/ bādhā*, demonstrates this “distance” between the revelatory principle of the Qur'ān, namely, *al-kitāb*, and its product, the Qur'ān.⁴⁵

1.2. Surplus in the Meaning of *al-Kitāb*

When we examine the exegesis works, it can be observed that commentators sometimes display conflicting interpretations regarding the distinction between the divine address revealed to Prophet Muḥammad and the transcendent *Kitāb*, in other words, the Qur'ān's self-references as the product of this address and the transcendent *Kitāb*, which is the source of the divine speech. As far as I detected, there are four main grounds leading to philological ramifications within the interpretations found in classical exegesis works regarding the meaning of the phrase “the book of which there is no doubt (*al-*

⁴⁵ Andani, *Revelation in Islam*, 54.

kitāb lā rayb fīhī)” in verses 1-2 of al-Baqarah, which mentions the unquestionable Book, revealing this dilemma.

Sample 1: Philology Through Narratives

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767) claimed that Q 2:2 was revealed when Prophet Muḥammad invited two Jews to Islam, and they objected, stating that “no book had been revealed after the time of Prophet Moses. According to him, the *dhālika l-kitāb* in the verse refers to the Qurʾān they denied, and the function of the pronoun in the verse is similar to *hādhā*.⁴⁶

Similarly, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) interprets the pronoun *dhālika* in the verse as referring to the Qurʾān itself. Based on narratives from Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-688), Ibn Jurayj, and Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 103/721), he argues that it is linguistically appropriate to refer to something distant as if it were close, concerning the pronoun’s reference, because anything related to a ruling and its news is understandable to the addressee, even if it implies something other than what is now and nearby. It can be used instead of “this” in the same way a person conveys a conversation to another, replacing “that” with “this”.⁴⁷ However, he also records the other interpretation stating that the phrase probably refers to the Torah and the Gospel. Accordingly, when this interpretation is directed toward this perspective, there is no objection to it because, in that case, it signifies an informative reference to something absent, and it is valid in philological terms.⁴⁸ Similarly, Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) mentioned that the term *al-kitāb* in the verse refers to the book promised and sent to Moses and Jesus in their own languages.⁴⁹

Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), relying on the same narration from Ibn ʿAbbās, said that *al-kitāb* in the verse refers to the Qurʾān.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Abū l-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shihātah (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 2010), 1/81.

⁴⁷ Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Giza: Dār Hijr, 2001), 1/228-229.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1/230.

⁴⁹ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sarī ibn Sahl al-Zajjāj, *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān wa-i-rābubū*, ed. ʿAbd al-Jalīl ʿAbduh Shalabī (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1988), 1/66.

⁵⁰ Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Asʿad Muḥammad Ṭayyib (Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1997), 1/34.

On the other hand, Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) highlights another narration from Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136/754) that we do not encounter in the abovementioned exegetical works: *Al-kitāb* in the verse refers to the preserved tablet, implying that in the preserved book, there is no doubt.⁵¹

The sample philological deductions given herein reveal how commentators interpret the same pronoun in the verse based on different narrations. Each commentary, which relies on specific narrations to reveal meaning, ended in various philological interpretations. Despite the variations in the narrations, the texts suggest there is a selective process in choosing which narrations to use in the commentary, which leads to overlooking philological evidence. Al-Ṭabarī and Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī, drawing on different narrations, assign significantly different meanings to the same expression in the verse, resulting in a kind of surplus of meaning.

Sample 2: Philology Through Theological Premises

Al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) stated that the synonymous use of *dbālika* and *bādbā* has a linguistic background. He emphasized that *dbālika* should refer to something distant, stating that it points to the parts revealed before Sūrat al-Baqarah in the Qurʾān.⁵²

When we look at al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) exegetical work, the background of this deduction comes to the forefront as a Muʿtazilī opinion that is probably affiliated with the doctrine of createdness of the Qurʾān.⁵³ Al-Rāzī points out that this inference was first initiated by

⁵¹ Abū l-Layth Imām al-Hudā Naṣr ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwiḍ et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1993), 1/88-89.

⁵² Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Abl al-sunnab: Taḥṣīr al-Māturīdī*, ed. Majdī Bāsallūm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2005), 1/372.

⁵³ For the extensions of the theological doctrine of createdness of Qurʾān within exegetical works, see Huzeyfe Yalçın, *Tefsirlere Yansıyan Mezhebî Yorumların Kriği: Halku'l-Kurʾān Örneği* (Mardin: Mardin Artuklu University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master's Thesis, 2021), 28-78. For the influence of theological doctrine of Qurʾān's createdness over the notions of revelation, see Harun Ögmüş, "Halku'l-Kurʾān Tartışmasının Vahyin Allah'tan İnsana İntikaliyle İlgili Telakkiler Üzerindeki Etkisi", *Selçuk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 28/28 (2009), 19-46.

Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816),⁵⁴ who was one of the prominent figures of the Basran Mu‘tazilah.⁵⁵

Sample 3: Philology Through Hermeneutics

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) argued that the pronoun refers to the articulated and finished letters “Alif, lām, mīm” in the verse context. According to him, something articulated and completed is now distant in its ruling, and it is pointed to as *dbālika*, similar to its counterpart in Q 12:37 (*dbālikumā mimma ‘allamanī Rabbi*).⁵⁶ Actually, what the exegete does corresponds to philosophical hermeneutics in modern terms. He questions the distance of the parole between the source of it and the addressee, revealing some kind of comprehension act that is kindred to the “fusion of horizons” theory.⁵⁷

Sample 4: Philology Through Discourse Analysis

Al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) summarized the ramifications of the interpretations of the term *al-kitāb* in the verse, stating that those who believe it refers to the Torah and the Bible differ regarding the addressee of the verse. According to them, those who argue that the addressee is Prophet Muḥammad say that it means there is no doubt in this Qur’ān mentioned in the Torah and the Bible. However, those who claim that the addressee is the Jews and Christians say that the promised book that will come to them is the Qur’ān revealed to Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁸

On the other hand, the statement in the verse that there is no doubt about *al-kitāb* complicates the understanding of the word as the

⁵⁴ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1420), 2/259.

⁵⁵ Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Esam, Ebū Bekir”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 1995).

⁵⁶ Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūb al-ta’wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1407), 1/32-33.

⁵⁷ The fusion of horizons is a crucial concept in hermeneutics, a philosophical and interpretive approach to comprehending texts and communication. This idea was developed by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer in his influential work, *Truth and Method*, published in 1960. For the English translation of the work: Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer - Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2006).

⁵⁸ Abū l-Hasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Baṣrī al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-‘uyūn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Maḥsūd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥīm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), 1/67.

Qurʾān. It is well established in various verses that the opponents of Prophet Muḥammad always question the source and scriptural quality of revelation. Indeed, in Q 2:23, there is a challenge to those doubts. While al-Zamakhsharī states that “the verse does not deny the ability of anyone to doubt the Qurʾān, rather it declares that the Qurʾān is not a place of doubt and carries clear evidence”, this commentary seems to overlook the hierarchy between *al-kitāb* as the source of Qurʾān and the Qurʾān itself.

Moreover, when we compare all the verses where the expression “there is no doubt in it (*lā raybʿ fīh*)” لا is used in the Qurʾān, we see that this phrase is always used to qualify aspects related to the unseen that is away from human reach, implying a distance. For example, at Q 3:9, 3:25, 4:87, 6:12, 22:7, 40:59, 42:7, 26:32, and 45:32, the phrase “there is no doubt” qualifies the judgment day. Additionally, in such verses as Q 15:1, 10:37, 27:1, and 32:2, *al-kitāb* and the Qurʾān are mentioned separately, indicating that interpreting *al-kitāb* as the Qurʾān is presumptive.

However, whereas the Qurʾān and *al-kitāb* are both separate in verses, exegetes did not hesitate to equate the terms with the scriptures preceding the Qurʾān or the Qurʾānic corpus itself. For example, al-Ṭabarī, relying on a narration from Mujāhid, stated that the *al-kitāb* in Q 15:1 refers to the divine books before the Qurʾān, namely, the Torah and the Gospel.⁵⁹ However, al-Māturīdī mentioned that the “clear book” in the verse could refer to either the Qurʾān being recited to them or the books of previous nations that existed before the Prophet Muḥammad.⁶⁰ Al-Zamakhsharī, claiming that the demonstrative pronoun at the beginning of the verse refers to the entirety of the sūrah’s verses, implied that the Qurʾān and the term *al-kitāb* in the verse are synonymous.⁶¹

Similarly, in Q 27:1, *al-kitāb* and the Qurʾān are presented as distinct entities, and commentators’ preferences regarding the content of *al-kitāb* are generally similar to those in Q 15:1. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, asserted that the term *kitāb mubīn* refers to the Qurʾān.⁶² Muqātil explained the definition of *kitāb mubīn* as the manifestation

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 14/5.

⁶⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt Abl al-sunnah*, 6/419.

⁶¹ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2/569.

⁶² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 18/5-7.

of its commands and prohibitions, indicating that he also understood *al-kitāb* as the Qurʾān.⁶³ Al-Zamakhsharī suggested that the term *kitāb mubīn* could be attributed to the preserved tablet or understood as referring to the Qurʾān itself. He argued that the ambiguity in the term aimed to highlight its grandeur, comparing it to attributing one synonymous attribute to another, similar to saying both are manifest.⁶⁴

In summary, the interpretation of the term *al-kitāb* in various Qurʾānic verses is subject to different perspectives among classical commentators. While some identify it with the Qurʾān itself, others associate it with the divine Scriptures preceding the Qurʾān, such as the Torah and the Gospel. The differences in interpretation highlight the complexity of understanding certain Qurʾānic terms and the diversity of perspectives among commentators, as well as the inadequacy of philological deductions when they are not accompanied by intratextual references.

Conclusion

Understanding a phrase or the equivalent of a word in the linguistic structure of the Qurʾān is not merely confined to conceptually analyzing through linguistic-based methods or making direct inferences through analytical propositions. To comprehend a language, a discourse inevitably entails understanding the speaker of the discourse, the language encompassed by the discourse, the society inherent in this language, the culture of this society,⁶⁵ and the instruments of this culture related to time and space – essentially, understanding both linguistic and nonlinguistic elements in depth within a holistic framework. This unity inevitably requires transcending the confines of language, delving into what lies beyond language – into the initially unseen and imperceptible phenomena left

⁶³ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3/296.

⁶⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3/346.

⁶⁵ The relationship between language and society has led to its characterization as a “social institution”. Sociologists have examined the inseparable connections and relationships between language and society from various perspectives, while linguists and anthropologists have conducted extensive research in this field. For a comprehensive literature review on the connections between language, society, and culture, please refer to the following work: Doğan Aksan, *Her Yönüyle Dil: Ana Çizgileriyle Dilbilim* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2007), 64-68; Also see Christine Jourdan - Kevin Tuite, *Language, Culture, and Society: Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

behind by language. The structure of sentences in the Qurʾān, which is distinct from analytical propositions, always carries the character of an oral address alongside it.⁶⁶

Considering the Qurʾān's relationship with the oral tradition and its possession of a spoken discourse genre before being compiled into a corpus, it is possible to answer the question posed in this article. The language and stylistic attributes of the Qurʾān contain distinctive expression codes that reflect the oral culture of the time when it was revealed. The meanings conveyed by the words of the Qurʾān go beyond the text itself. Consequently, the meanings of the Qurʾānic discourse are not limited to the text alone. They exist predominantly within the historical and cultural context in which the discourse is situated, namely, within history.

From the time of the Tābiʿūn onward, the Qurʾān underwent a transformation. It evolved from being a spoken discourse integrated into the dynamic fabric of life and historical challenges, as it was during the first generation, to becoming a codified book. Dynamic engagement with the initial generation gave way to a paradigm dominated by narratives and the inherent language of the Qurʾān itself. It transitioned from a living discourse to a fixed book, with a defined beginning and end. The term *kitāb* (book) became synonymous with the Qurʾān in its complete form, leading commentators from the classical period to associate the term *al-kitāb* directly with the Qurʾān. While the demonstrative pronoun *dhālika*, in contrast to the proximate *bādhībī*, denotes a remote object, implying that *dhālika l-kitāb* and its signs are absent and not immediately present to the audience of the Arabic Qurʾān, the exegetes bypassed philology, leading to a surplus of meaning in the verse.

Exegetes performing deductions from Q 2:2 occasionally suspended the philological data in various ways. They applied to narratives that may well lead to contradictory deductions when the exegete does not apply to intratextual references within the Qurʾānic text or the historical background. Theological premises are the other agencies leading the exegete to bypass philological evidence; thus, the act of exegesis reveals a surplus in the meaning of corresponding verses or vocables. Applying hermeneutics is another way of obtaining

⁶⁶ Dücane Cündioğlu, *Anlamın Bubarlaşması ve Kur'an -Hermeneutik Bir Deneyim II-* (İstanbul: Kapı Yayınları, 2013), 34.

a surplus of meaning. Philology through hermeneutics encompasses analytical reasoning, overlooking the fact that Qur'ānic discourse is intertwined with its *sui generis* rhetorical properties and its historical background, which defuses analytical reasoning.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

FUNDING

The author received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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RAËLISM: AN UNCONVENTIONAL RELIGIOUS PATHWAY TO TRANSHUMANISM

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Abstract

Raëlism is a controversial new religious movement that originated in France in the 1970s and has since spread around the world. The movement's core tenets are rooted in science, technology, and freedom and can be summarized as a blend of science and spirituality, millenarianism, revelation, story, pseudoscience, and reinterpretation. Raélians believe in the extraterrestrial origin of humanity and promote the pursuit of higher consciousness, inner peace, individual empowerment, and peace-building. To this end, the movement offers a series of seminars that aim to provide a transformative experience for

İlahiyat Studies

Volume 15 Number 1 Winter/Spring 2024

Article Type: Research Article

p-ISSN: 1309-1786 / e-ISSN: 1309-1719

DOI: 10.12730/is.1442273

Received: February 24, 2024 | *Accepted:* June 13, 2024 | *Published:* July 8, 2024.

To cite this article: Yeşilyurt, Büşra – Yeşilyurt, Muhammet. "Raëlism: An Unconventional Religious Pathway into Transhumanism". *İlahiyat Studies* 15/1 (2024), 31-59.
<https://doi.org/10.12730/is.1442273>

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participants and leads various social initiatives and projects at a global level. Although Raëlism has gained popularity among some individuals, it has also been the subject of substantial criticism and controversy, particularly because of its unconventional views on sexuality and its alleged support for human cloning and genetic engineering. Nonetheless, the movement continues to be a subject of interest and scrutiny for scholars, journalists, and the curious. This article provides an overview of the history, ideology, and practices of the Raëlian Movement and its relationship with transhumanism.

Keywords: History of religions, new religious movements, Raëlism, transhumanism, extraterrestrial creation

Introduction

The Raëlian Movement is named after its founder Raël, who was born Claude Maurice Marcel Vorilhon in 1946. He was formerly a French sports car journalist and a test driver (Palmer, 2004) for a car racing magazine, *Autopop*. Having been claiming contact with extraterrestrials (ETs) since 1961, Vorilhon stated that he had received messages about humanity's future during an encounter aboard an extraterrestrial spacecraft (Rael, 2005a). While it is normal that extraordinary details are present in an alien story, Vorilhon's memoir of his initial contact with ETs features very intriguing details. Vorilhon later identified the ETs that visited him as members of the advanced alien species "Elohim", whose name means "those who came from the skies" (Battal, 2023) in Hebrew (Rael, 2005b). Vorilhon contended that the Elohim, who, according to Vorilhon's definition, are responsible for the creation of life on earth (Battal, 2023), gave him straightforward instruction to return at the same time other days, equipped with the Bible and a means to record information or take notes (Rael, 2005b). After a week of intense Bible study, Vorilhon assigned himself a new identity as the messianic prophet "Raël" and a new purpose as the earthly ambassador of the Elohim, claiming to have the same common father with Jesus, the Elohim Yahweh (Bigliardi, 2023; Shamir, 2020). He then announced a new doctrine that would form the intellectual basis of the religious movement that he would establish and lead

(Gallagher, 2010). In 1974, he founded the Raëlian Movement, naming it after himself, as allegedly bestowed by the ETs (Vorilhon, 1974).

The Raëlian Movement's unorthodox religious exegesis manifests in its interpretation of the Bible and the role that the Bible played in the establishment and evolution of the movement (Gallagher, 2010). Raëlist belief is rooted in an extraterrestrial foundation and centers on extraterrestrial creation, sexual identity, and spiritual awareness. The movement asserts that ETs created humanity and will return to guide humans toward transhumanism, surpassing physical limitations. The idea that life on earth was created by ETs hence requires rejection of traditional theistic beliefs. Raëlism also argues that human spirituality was shaped by the Elohim (Palmer - Sentes, 2012; Rael, 2005b; Gregg, 2014). Furthermore, the movement has distinct philosophical and psychological viewpoints that engage with the concept of trauma to further reinforce its religious conviction and control, which is evident in the movement's Happiness Academy initiative (Bauduin, 2015).

Raëlism regards individual and communal sexual identity as the means of spiritual enlightenment and personal fulfillment (Gregg, 2014) and, therefore, assigns particular importance to feminine and sexual issues in its ideology, tenets, social and religious activities, etc. Among new religious movements (NRMs), the Raëlian Movement is notable for its progressive and exploitative behavior, given its prophetic message and interpretive methods, which set it apart from other religious movements (Bigliardi, 2015). Specifically, Raëlism distinguishes itself through its emphasis on sexual identity, its focus on science and technology, its fierce advocacy for cloning, and its challenging stance against the beliefs and practices of the world's established religions.

The particular importance that Raëlism attaches to science and technology lies in its claim that technology is the main means used to create life on Earth by the Elohim and that it will once again be the sole tool that humans use to achieve eternal life (Sinani, 2013; Houtman - Aupers, 2010). This pronounced emphasis on science and technology embodies the movement's main relation to transhumanism and differentiates it from other NRMs, not to mention traditional religions (Bigliardi, 2023).

Transhumanism questions traditional notions of human nature and individuality, promoting the adoption of technology that significantly

enhances human capabilities (Sorgner, 2021; Szabados, 2020). This focus on technical advancement invites contemplation of the shifting essence of human spirituality. This intersection stimulates debates over the essence of spirituality in the context of technological development, as individuals navigate their spiritual identities in light of technological advancements and enhancements. Furthermore, transhumanism embraces and even sparks discussions on the use of advanced technology, such as artificial intelligence, genetic technologies, and nanotechnology, for life extension and other potential human enhancements (Sorgner, 2021). Pursuing technological enhancement to overcome fundamental human limitations and achieve superintelligence, superlongevity, and super well-being (Lima - Belk, 2022; Simon, 2018) and eventually immortality is central in transhumanist thought. Although harshly criticized, transhumanism's vision of transcending human limitations through technological means has significant implications for various fields, sparking debates in education, ethics, medicine, sports (Eriksen, 2021), and, of course, religion.

The relation between transhumanism and religion fundamentally concerns the intersection of scientific progress and spiritual beliefs. Transhumanism is a philosophical and cultural movement that advocates the utilization of science and technology as a tool to enhance the intellectual, physical, and psychological capabilities of humans, but remarkably, it lacks a spiritual basis. Nevertheless, it gradually maintained ties with religious affairs and later led to the emergence of religious movements that are now called religious transhumanism because the established religious teachings are based on the ideas of a creator, God, and the afterlife. As all such transhumanist ideals are considered to defy the central position of God, transhumanism raises ethical and philosophical questions about the implications of human enhancement technologies for making profound modifications in human capacities (Szabados, 2020).

As highlighted above, the Raëlian Movement's integration with transhumanism is notable in that both transhumanism and Raëlism regard technology as a force that can either create life on a dead planet or enable existing life to survive infinitely. Raëlians hold the deep conviction that ETs, i.e., Elohim, will eventually guide humanity toward transhumanism. Aligning with transhumanist ideals, Raëlians

believe that technological advancements, including genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence, can lead to the achievement of transhumanism, which, within the framework of Raëlism, involves genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence to improve human health, intelligence, and lifespan (Vorilhon, 1974).

Raëlism's core tenets are deeply influenced by transhumanist philosophy. It has also inspired and influenced transhumanist thought over time and fostered advances in the field of transhumanist research. While Raëlism has been criticized for its influence on transhumanism, contending that its unconventional beliefs are potentially detrimental and can lead to the development of dangerous and unethical technologies, the Raëlian vision of transhumanism is highly optimistic and utopic in contrast to more cautious and realistic views on the potential dangers of transhumanism (Vorilhon, 1974).

In fact, the Raëlian Movement promotes an unconventional discourse significantly influenced and shaped by transhumanism and human enhancement technologies. Thus, a unique fusion of transhumanism and Raëlism is reflected in the movement's distinctive approach to spiritual and technological advancement, aiming to achieve human transcendence through both technological and spiritual means (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016). The pronounced place of Elohim in the Raëlian narrative adds a spiritual dimension to transhumanist discourse, presenting a vision where technological progress and spiritual evolution converge.

As an NRM that questions and challenges conventional religious ideas and practices, the Raëlian Movement has often faced criticism but nonetheless has managed to receive acclaim for its advocacy of peace and harmony. Currently, Raëlism is the world's largest UFO-inspired NRM (Gregg, 2014).

This study aims to address in detail the Raëlian Movement from different aspects and perspectives and with reference to transhumanism.

1. Religious Framework

The very foundation of the Raëlian Movement is intricately tied to the prophetic figure of Raël and to an enigmatic event reminiscent of God's first revelation to the prophets, as relayed in mainstream

religions, such as Islam. However, its religious discourse is distinguished by a series of unique features, such as the claim that the messenger in the encounter, which is the cornerstone of its belief system (Bigliardi, 2015), is defined not as an angel of God but as a member of an advanced alien species, Elohim, who have allegedly created life on earth by technological means.

Philosophical examinations of NRMs have shed light on Raëlism's distinctive philosophical foundations, which advance a unique set of religious beliefs and practices (Sakellariou, 2013). The cosmology of the Raëlian Church, aligned with modern science, further contributes to its departure from traditional religious cosmologies (Chryssides, 2000). The emphasis on the extraterrestrial touch in creation and on science and technology as tools for human advancement and transhumanism make Raëlism stand out as a UFO religion. The movement's optimistic outlook, rejecting traditional concepts of sin and guilt, underscores its unique approach to spirituality, highlighting personal development, scientific progress, and the pursuit of immortality. This rejection of traditional concepts frees Raëlians from feelings of shame and allows them to focus on personal growth and self-improvement. Instead of dwelling on past mistakes, Raëlism encourages its followers to embrace their potential and strive for a fulfilling life. The Elohim are regarded not only as the creators who mark the origins of humans but also as guides who will shape their destiny. The Elohim are also responsible for the transmission of advanced knowledge to humanity. Since the time of the early humans, the Elohim, as benevolent creators and teachers, have been guiding humanity toward its full potential through knowledge transmission (Vorilhon, 1974). Vorilhon asserts that prophets or founders of former religions, such as Buddha, Moses, and Muḥammad, are transhumans who were contacted by the Elohim earlier and who were given the advanced knowledge and holy messages to pass on to humans on Earth. As such, Vorilhon argues that he was the modern-day prophet, last contacted by the Elohim, and that he was taken by them to their planet, where he was given the chance to meet Buddha, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad (Rael, 1978).

1. 1. Exotheology

The term "exotheology" was coined in the 1960s or 1970s, contemporaneous with the introduction or announcement of Raëlism,

transhumanism, UFOs, etc., to refer to the study of theological matters in relation to alien intelligence, potential theological ideas that ETs may hold, or how humans' theological beliefs may be affected by proof of and/or engagement with ETs. Exotheology studies the implications of discovering life beyond Earth on religious beliefs and connects with astrobiology (Parkyn, 2023), examining the potential for life in the universe.

For Raëlism, the significance of exotheology is that it addresses existential questions arising from potential contact with extraterrestrial life and encourages interdisciplinary dialog. It also explores theological implications for human spirituality and understanding. In general, exotheology offers a framework to address ethical and existential considerations and to reevaluate traditional theological ideas and hypotheses. Within Raëlism, exotheology manifests as a synthesis of UFOlogy and religion. Specifically, this framework captures the impacts of discovering extraterrestrial life on the movement's beliefs about human origins and the Elohim's role in the alleged scientific creation of life on Earth. It presents a distinctive view of the potential influence of extraterrestrial life on religious narratives and beliefs, which is an important aspect of its uniqueness among NRMs. The movement's practices, such as sensual meditation, and beliefs influence its exotheological perspective (Gregg, 2014).

1. 2. Intelligent Design and ET Creation

The concept of intelligent design, as hypothesized by Raëlism, asserts that the creation of life and humanity was neither an evolutionary process nor a consequence of random coincidences. Instead, it was an outcome of advanced scientific genetic engineering processes that were planned, implemented, and controlled by an advanced extraterrestrial species known as the Elohim.

In this respect, the concept of intelligent design is a fundamental belief that is common in nearly all mainstream religions, which suggests that the complexity of life and the universe is best explained by the existence of an intelligent creator or designer. What distinguishes Raëlism is that this concept is intertwined with the idea that the Elohim possess advanced scientific knowledge and capabilities that enable them to design and create life on Earth (Sentes - Palmer, 2000). This perspective differs from traditional religious creationism in that it attributes the origins of life to an extraterrestrial

intelligence rather than a divine deity and the might needed for creation not to godly powers unique to God but to mere science that can moreover be achieved by anyone through research and experimentation.

The Raëlian concept of intelligent design also involves the belief that humanity was not set loose or left unwatched. The Elohim's creation is an ongoing and interactive process, and they maintain a vested interest in the development and progress of humanity. In this respect, Raëlians believe that the Elohim will eventually return to the Earth (Zeller, 2011) to guide humanity toward transhumanism when humanity has reached a sufficient level of scientific and ethical advancement. This belief indicates that Elohim are motivated by scientific progress, personal development, and the pursuit of a harmonious future for humanity. In Raël's view, harmony refers to being free of money, sickness, and war (Rael, 2005b).

1. 3. Becoming Creator

The founder and alleged prophet of Raëlism asserts that humanity may also have the capacity to create or contribute to the creation of life on other planets with the advancement of human scientific knowledge and technology, similar to the Elohim who possess advanced scientific knowledge and capabilities, which enabled them to design and create life on Earth.

In line with this view, endeavors toward spreading or expanding life beyond Earth are based on factual claims, and humanity is now attempting to terraform Mars or Venus. The latter does not truly entail creating life from scratch but rather trying to transform other planets similar to Earth and to transfer the existing life forms from Earth to these planets. Nonetheless, such projects and related research still reflect humanity's reliance on and conviction in science and technology in becoming a creator or cocreator by achieving such great targets, as espoused by several religious transhumanist movements. In this regard, the Raëlian emphasis on the role of science and rationality in shaping humanity's future and its potential to contribute to the development of life in the cosmos is arguably grounded in the scientific community at the governmental and international levels.

1. 4. The Spiritual Discourse of Transcendence

Raëlism's spiritual discourse is a mosaic composed of complex elements of millenarianism, revelation, story, pseudoscience, and

reinterpretation that sets it apart from other traditional theological frameworks. This unique blend contributes to Raëlism's distinct religious characteristics and differentiates it from other emerging religious movements (Bigliardi, 2015).

The spiritual discourse of Raëlism is based mainly on intertwining elements of science and spirituality and comprises a synthesis of transcendence, divinity, and the pursuit of higher consciousness, which are central themes in its belief system (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016). Raëlism's emphasis on humanity's transcendence is manifest in the belief in extraterrestrial contact and humanity's creation by advanced beings known as the Elohim. This narrative highlights the aspiration to overcome traditional human limitations and acknowledges the Elohim as divine entities with advanced capabilities.

The pursuit of higher consciousness is another crucial theme in Raëlism's spiritual discourse. The movement advocates for shedding cultural norms and embarking on a journey toward higher awareness through the body and senses. Rejecting traditional notions of possession and relational belonging, Raëlism encourages followers to pursue higher consciousness by liberating themselves from cultural baggage.

Raëlism's spiritual narrative also involves a reinterpretation of divinity that challenges traditional religious constructs. Raëlism presents the Elohim as advanced beings who have played a pivotal role in the spiritual evolution of humanity. The transmission of advanced knowledge from the Elohim to humanity redefines traditional notions of divinity.

Furthermore, aligning with a quest for scientific and spiritual advancement within a millennial context (Sentes - Palmer, 2000), the movement views technology not only as a material tool but also as an indispensable means for achieving spiritual goals (Grünschloß, 2016). Unlike mainstream religions and traditional religious movements, which may view technology with skepticism, Raëlism recognizes the potential of technology to enhance human consciousness and spiritual growth (Botz-Bornstein, 2017). For instance, the implementation of human enhancement technologies is a shared concern across Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, stemming from ethical, moral, and theological considerations, which revolve around issues of playing God, altering the inherently perfect creation of Allah/God, and the

potential consequences of such interventions for future generations. Raëlism, in contrast, regards these technologies as conduits for transcending human limitations and achieving a higher state of being through the responsible and ethical use of technology (Kiran et al., 2015) to make advancements in genetic engineering, nanotechnology, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and other emerging technologies and accelerate human evolution, eventually realizing the transhuman future. In this future, such technological advancements will contribute to enhanced intelligence, extended lifespan, and freedom from disease and death and will create immersive experiences fostering self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and spiritual exploration.

1. 5. Symbolism

The promotion of Patriarch Hassoun as a cardinal was one of the important developments for Eastern Christians. Since Basilios Bessarion.

1. 5. 1. Swastika of Enlightenment

The swastika, which is also known as the armed cross, is an ancient and widespread symbol that can be found in nearly every part of the world, especially in ancient sites (Flaherty, 2021; Chryssides, 2000; Urban, 2015). Although there is no consensus as to what the symbol actually represents, Raélians argue that the swastika represents all-positive concepts, such as good luck, prosperity, and harmony. Despite being controversial, the choice of a swastika as the movement's symbol is grounded in Raëlism's reinterpretation of ancient symbolism, reclaiming the swastika's original meaning and repurposing the symbol to represent the Raëlian vision of a future where humanity transcends its current limitations and achieves a state of transhumanism. This symbolism is also tied to the cyclic nature of all processes in the universe, where the swastika in the center is claimed to mean that everything is cyclic, with the top becoming the bottom and the bottom, in turn, becoming the top (Rael, 2005b).

Another symbol, as ancient and widespread as the swastika and even controversial to some extent, is the six-pointed star, which is currently mostly associated with Jews and the state of Israel. The Raëlian symbol combines the two symbols, a six-pointed star featuring a stylized swastika in the center (Urban, 2015; Hanson, 2005), and is called the "Swastika of Enlightenment".

The six-pointed star is known as the Star of David (or Shield of David), the Seal of Solomon (Wells, 2006), or simply the hexagram. However, the difference is that the hexagram does not have to be equilateral, and the parallel sides do not have to be horizontal. The seal of Solomon is three-dimensional and interlaced, while the star of David is two-dimensional and overlapped. Therefore, the Raëlian symbol consists of a stylized combination of the seal of Solomon and the swastika.

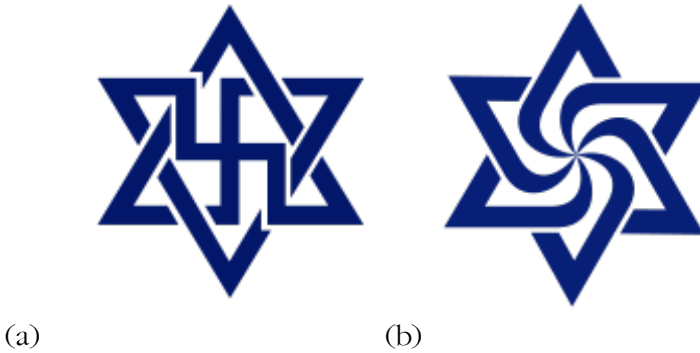


Figure 1. Symbols used by Raëlism: (a) Swastika of Enlightenment, the universal symbol; (b) Raëlian symbol with the swirling shape substituted for the swastika that was used in Europe and America between 1991 and 2007.

The symbol aims to represent the harmonious integration of science, technology, and spirituality and plays a crucial role in conveying the synthesis of Raëlism and transhumanism. The four arms of the swastika, intertwined with the seal of Solomon, symbolize the four pillars of Raëlism: scientific progress, personal development, sensual love, and collective harmony. These pillars signify the interconnected aspects of human existence that must be nurtured in balance to achieve transhuman goals. The spiral form within the swastika further symbolizes the continuous process of evolution and transformation, representing the Raëlian belief in humanity's ongoing advancement toward the transhuman condition with enhanced intelligence, extended lifespan, and the ability to manipulate matter and energy. However, the stylized swastika in the center of the six-pointed star has often been criticized due to its resemblance to the Nazi swastika, and Raëlians have been accused of fascism and racism and

of not respecting victims of the Holocaust. Raël then decided to form an alternative logo to be used in America and Europe, where the swastika was replaced with a swirl (*The Washington Post*, 16.11.2023; Chryssides, 2000). In 2007, the alternative symbol was discarded, and the original swastika symbol was restored. Since then, the original symbol has been the only Raëlian symbol used worldwide (Urban, 2015).

2. Festivals, Rites, and Rituals

2. 1. Festivals

Raëlians adopted their own calendar that began with the bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. This first day of the Raëlian calendar is commemorated as a festival by the Raëlians. The New Year festival also functions to remind members of the destructiveness of humankind and that the Age of Apocalypse is underway (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023).

In addition, Raëlians celebrate three other festivals each year on the anniversaries of Raël's claimed encounters with the Elohim on October 7th (the second encounter in 1974, during which Raël claimed to have met prophets such as Jesus, Muḥammad and the Buddha on board the spacecraft (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023) and December 13th (the first encounter in 1973 in which Raël was anointed as the chosen prophet) and the first Sunday in April, on which day Raëlians believe the Elohim created the first humans, Adam and Eve (Palmer, 2004).

2. 2. Transmission Rite

Like many other religious movements, Raëlism has rites and rituals. The most important and essential rite performed in Raëlism involves the admission and initiation of individuals to become Raëlians. A novice to Raëlism must be baptized in an initial rite called "transmission" or "transmission of the cellular plan" (Bigliardi, 2015). The baptism ritual itself is very similar to Christian baptism in that one guide member sprinkles water onto the forehead of the new member (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023). The initial transmission rite is a significant and sacred ceremony that marks the formal acceptance of an individual into the Raëlian community and represents the beginning of their journey within the movement.

This initiation rite is performed by upper-level members, such as priests or bishop guides. The transmission rites are performed four times a year on the days of Raëlian religious festivals (Hippert, 16 Nov

2023). While the Raëlian calendar begins on August 6th, and the festival commemorating the first creation celebrated on the first Sunday in April is the fourth of the festivals in a Raëlian calendar year, it is regarded as the first performance of the rite, commemorating the first ritual performed by Raël to baptize 40 novices in 1976 (Palmer, 2004).

The rite emphasizes the sacred nature of newcomers' commitment and likely holds deep cultural and spiritual significance within the movement, transmitting the values, beliefs, and cultural and spiritual heritage of Raëlism to new members (Marinescu, 2021; Pérez, 2013). A key ritual involves purported telepathic communication with ETs, during which the guides form a human chain of participants by interlocking their hands with one another to improve connectivity. Raëlians believe that this practice facilitates the transmission of the genetic code of every new member to the Elohim, who meticulously documents their genetic information. This information will help the members be recognized by Elohim on the day of judgment when the Elohim return. The Elohim possess the capability to guarantee the eternity of Raëlian believers by potentially replicating the bodies of each member through cloning. For this purpose, new members are required to sign a contract granting morticians permission to cut out a section of bone from the forehead, also referred to as the "third eye", after their death. This piece of bone, which is the source of the genetic code to be used in cloning the individual, is then carefully packaged in ice and sent to Raël, who will personally deliver it to the Elohim (Hippert, 16 Nov 2023). Nevertheless, there are no records as to whether this procedure has ever been carried out.

The transmission ritual may also involve embodied practices that symbolize the commitment and sacrifice of the individual as they align themselves with the teachings and principles of the movement (Gregg, 2014).

2. 3. Sensual Meditation

One of the central rituals in Raëlism is a guided meditation called "sensual meditation", which is outlined by Raël in his book *La méditation sensuelle* (Palmer - Sentés, 2012; Rael, 2002). This practice focuses on enhancing the five senses, promoting heightened awareness of the physical world and the beauty of the universe as well as transmitting love and telepathic links to the Elohim and achieving harmony with infinity (Palmer, 1995). Raëlians believe that this sensory

awareness is not only essential for spiritual growth but also serves as preparation for the technological advancements that will lead to transhumanism. The ritual creates a connection between immediate sensory experience and the broader goal of evolving toward a transhuman state. All Raëlians are, therefore, encouraged to participate in sensual meditations where they are often guided by streamed instructions, audio, or visualization (Palmer, 2004; Rael, 2002).

2. 4. Collective Meditation

Collective meditation is a significant ritual where Raëlians gather to meditate together, focusing on the Elohim and the principles of Raëlism. This collective meditation is believed to create a powerful energy field that promotes individual transformation and contributes to the collective evolution of humanity toward transhumanism. The ritual emphasizes the communal aspect of the Raëlian experience, reinforcing a shared commitment to spiritual and technological advancement (Rael, 2002).

2. 5. Awakening Seminars

The Raëlian Church arranges summer gatherings that are allegedly intended to serve as educational platforms guiding individuals through transformative self-discovery and personal development. The activities are known as awakening seminars and involve a variety of activity stages, including daily lectures given by Raël, sensual meditation sessions, periods of fasting and feasting, testimonials, and a range of alternative therapies, as well as a controversial cross-dressing activity to explore the fluidity of gender expression and self-observation of one's own genitals and masturbation.

Raëlians use these seminars as platforms to build friendships or engage in sexual affairs or intercourse. Participants wear white togas with name tags, and they employ colored bracelets to indicate their engagement preference in the seminars, i.e., whether they want solitude, social interaction, or companionship.

Stage Name	Activity
Introduction to Raëlian Philosophy	Overview of the movement's core principles, teachings concerning the Elohim, rejection of traditional religious doctrines, and emphasis on individual and communal sexual identity
Self-Exploration and Identity	Activities and discussions related to personal experiences, beliefs, and values, with a focus on individual and communal sexual identity
Mindfulness and Meditation	Incorporation of mindfulness and meditation practices, cultivation of deeper connection with inner selves, engagement in guided sessions aimed at enhancing awareness, relaxation, and inner peace
Consciousness Expansion	Exploration of topics related to consciousness expansion, the nature of the mind, perception, and the interconnectedness of living beings. Introduction of concepts from neuroscience, psychology, and metaphysics to broaden participants' understanding of consciousness
Exploration of Extraterrestrial Connection	Belief in extraterrestrial creators (the Elohim), discussions of humanity's potential connection with extraterrestrial civilizations, the implications for human evolution, and messages conveyed through Raëlian teachings.
Scientific and Spiritual Synthesis	Bridging the gap between science and spirituality, the harmonious coexistence of scientific knowledge and spiritual insights, and the role of scientific understanding in shaping a positive future
Promotion of Peace and Tolerance	Emphasis on a culture of peace and understanding and principles for positive personal change
Community and Networking	Building connections with like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of community and mutual support aligned with Raëlian philosophy and seminar topics

Table 1. Stages of Awakening Seminars

While the specifics of the seminars may vary based on the participants' evolving needs and interests, a typical awakening seminar generally includes the stages listed in Table 1. However, the main goal is to provide a transformative experience in line with Raëlism's principles of individual empowerment, scientific understanding, and the pursuit of peace.

3. Ideology, Social Movements, Activities, and Projects

The Raëlian Movement encompasses a notable ideology and global social movements. The foundation of Raëlism is an ideology rooted in the principles of science, technology, and freedom. Raëlians actively organize and spearhead many social events and projects on a global scale. In line with the fundamental tenets of Raëlism, their social movements, activities, and projects involve the scientific-oriented initiatives of high-tech topics such as human cloning and genetic engineering, global peace, and the protection of human rights, particularly women, sexual identity, and freedom. They organize activities aimed at promoting social change and boosting awareness in many communities and initiatives worldwide.

3. 1. The Happiness Academy

In pursuit of promoting personal growth, well-being, and happiness, a significant initiative named The Happiness Academy was established by the movement to reinforce and promote the rejection of traditional religious constructs and to further highlight personal development, self-fulfillment through self-awareness and emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and the pursuit of a fulfilling and harmonious life. The academy offers a range of workshops, seminars, and educational programs designed to provide participants with tools for enhancing their emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being and for empowering them to cultivate happiness, resilience, and a positive outlook on life (Bauduin, 2013; Id., 2015).

The academy itself can be viewed as a manifestation of Raëlism's commitment to fostering a more harmonious and compassionate society and its advocacy for a more empathetic and interconnected world (Bauduin, 2015).

3. 2. Clonaid Organization

The Raëlian Movement views cloning as a natural progression of human technology and a tool for achieving a higher state of being; it,

therefore, advocates for cloning as a means of achieving immortality and transcending human limitations (Machado, 2010). In line with this view, the Clonaid organization was founded in 1997 and is registered in the Bahamas as a nonprofit organization (Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023).

The establishment of Clonaid reflects the Raëlian focus on the integration of advanced knowledge and advanced technology in genetic engineering, regenerative medicine, and nanotechnology for achieving biological immortality, cognitive enhancement, and life extension (Vorilhon, 1974). With Clonaid, Raëlians aim to develop cloning technology, which they believe holds the key to immortality (*The Washington Post*, 16 Nov 2023; Sinani, 2013). As such, the contract for the collection and conservation of a frontal bone portion, which was addressed under the Transmission rite in the Rites and Rituals section, is (to be) processed by Clonaid for cloning purposes (Bigliardi, 2015). Nevertheless, the biotechnology company Clonaid is often perceived as a cult (Simon, 2018).

Clonaid was the first company to publicly announce its intention to offer human cloning services. The declared goal was to provide couples with the option of cloning their deceased children (Palmer, 2001), emphasizing that cloning was a form of assisted reproduction rather than human engineering (Alcíbar, 2008). The organization's public statements and activities sparked debates about the ethical implications of human cloning, the potential benefits and risks of advanced technologies, and the role of religion in shaping societal attitudes toward technological progress. Despite this controversy, Clonaid continued to assert its commitment to providing human cloning services. The movement garnered notable attention upon the announcement of the successful cloning of a baby girl called Eve (Battal, 2023) by the director, senior Raëlian Brigitte Boisselier (Alcíbar, 2008; Machado, 2010), but no definitive evidence of successful human cloning has been produced. The organization's claims were met with skepticism by the scientific community, yet many experts have raised concerns about the ethical implications of human cloning, including the potential for psychological harm to the cloned child and unknown long-term health effects.

The movement's advocacy for cloning technologies and Raël's lobbying efforts before the U.S. Senate to remove restrictions and

prohibitions on cloning reflect Raëlism's contentious stance with regard to human cloning (Heyking, 2005). However, its plans to establish a cloning facility in the United States have met with legal challenges (Szabados, 2020; Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023).

In 2002, citing ethical concerns surrounding human cloning, Clonaid announced its intention to focus on animal cloning research and development. Currently, Clonaid remains an active organization, but its human cloning ambitions have largely been abandoned due to scientific and legal challenges. It pursued to continue human cloning activities in other countries where such research is legal (Clonaid.com, 13 Nov 2023). However, the organization continues to promote Raëlism and its beliefs about technology's potential to enhance human well-being and to advocate for cloning as a potential tool for medical advancements and environmental conservation.

Overall, Clonaid's activities have significantly contributed to broader discussions about the responsible development and application of technology, the potential impact on human society, and the role of ethical considerations in shaping the future of transhumanism.

3. 3. Geniocracy

Religions and religious movements often establish their own community and moral norms to regulate and shape societal, legal, and even economic systems. In this respect, the Raëlian Movement has a governance system that prioritizes decision-making based on demonstrated intelligence and competence rather than traditional democratic processes. This system, aligning with the Raëlian emphasis on rationality, science, and knowledge as drivers of societal progress, was termed "geniocracy" by the movement's founder, Claude Vorilhon.

Geniocracy intersects with Raëlian theology and its commitment to individual and communal empowerment through knowledge to challenge established norms in favor of progressive approaches to societal organization, and it highlights the potential for scientific advancements to shape an equitable and harmonious society.

Feature	Justification/Argument
Intellectual Meritocracy	Geniocracy upholds intellectual meritocracy over traditional markers such as hereditary status or popularity and advocates that individuals with outstanding intellectual capabilities should guide and lead society.
Scientific Decision-Making	Raëlian geniocracy envisions decision-making based on scientific knowledge and rational thinking. Leaders should rely on evidence-based reasoning and scientific principles when formulating policies and making critical decisions.
Emphasis on Education	Education should develop and nurture intellectual capabilities. Educational systems should be designed to identify and cultivate potential genius in individuals from a young age.
Technologically Advanced Society	Scientific advancements should be utilized for the betterment of humanity. The application of cutting-edge technologies should be used to address societal challenges and enhance the overall well-being of individuals.
Ethical Considerations	Ethical considerations should be incorporated into decision-making. These principles should be prioritized by governments together with human rights and the well-being of all individuals.
Peaceful and Harmonious Coexistence	The ultimate goal is to create a society characterized by peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and collaboration. Therefore, conflicts should be resolved through reason, understanding, and the application of scientific principles.

Table 2. Key Features of Geniocracy within the Raëlian Movement

As listed in Table 2, key features of the geniocentric system include intellectual meritocracy, advocacy for scientific decision-making, a strong emphasis on education to nurture genius, envisioning a technologically advanced society, incorporating ethical considerations into governance, and aspiring to a peaceful coexistence.

Geniocracy serves as a cornerstone for the Raëlian vision of a utopian society where intellectual excellence and scientific progress

guide governance and societal structures, reflecting the movement's unique theological beliefs and its emphasis on rationality, scientific understanding, and the potential for societal progress through intellectual empowerment.

4. Intersection, Interaction, and Integration with Transhumanism

As an intellectual and cultural movement, transhumanism advocates for the use of science and technology to enhance human capabilities (Campbell et al., 2008), thus challenging traditional notions of human nature and the boundaries of personhood (Foith, 2013). It envisions a future where applied reason, coupled with technology, can eliminate aging and greatly enhance humans' intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities (Urgan, 2019) in the pursuit of morphological freedom and longevity while considering the precautionary principle and personhood (Szabados, 2020).

Transhumanists believe that human enhancement technologies should be widely available, with individuals having discretion over their use. Parents are also seen as having the right to choose enhancements for their children-to-be (Bostrom, 2005). This perspective reflects a commitment to individual autonomy and a positive view of technological progress in shaping the future of humanity.

Raëlism, on the other hand, focuses on the utilization of advanced technology and knowledge by extraterrestrial beings in shaping human existence and spirituality. It advocates for the integration of technology to overcome traditional limitations and transcend human conditions. In this respect, its emphasis on the transcendence of human limitations aligns with transhumanism's core principles, particularly in the pursuit of superintelligence, superlongevity, and super well-being (Lima - Belk, 2022).

The potential intersection between Raëlism and transhumanism lies in their shared emphasis on transcending traditional human limitations through advanced knowledge and technology. Both movements share an interest in advancing human capabilities and redefining traditional notions of divinity and personhood and envision a future where humanity evolves beyond its current state, effectively challenging conventional notions of personhood and human nature. Raëlism's

belief in extraterrestrial contact and the transmission of advanced knowledge resonates with transhumanism's focus on using technology to overcome human limitations. The core principles of transhumanism, including morphological freedom, human enhancement, and longevity, may resonate within Raëlism's philosophy of integrating scientific and spiritual elements for human evolution.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that while there may be conceptual overlaps, the distinct philosophical and spiritual foundations of Raëlism and transhumanism may present challenges to fully integrating their ideologies. Both Raëlism and transhumanism have distinct discourses, belief systems, and cultural contexts that may influence the extent to which they intersect and collaborate in shaping future visions of human potential and evolution.

Raëlism's approach to transhumanism is unconventional, combining religious beliefs with a strong emphasis on scientific progress and technological advancement. While the conceptual intersection with transhumanism is evident, the movement's integration of spirituality and technology is distinct. Namely, Raëlism blends scientific progress with personal transformation and seeks transhumanism not only through technological advancements but also through spiritual enlightenment. Raëlism moreover highlights that the Elohim's return to guide humanity and realize transhumanism will also take place once humanity reaches a certain ethical and moral level and establishes a social climate where peace, tolerance, and understanding are present among diverse cultures and belief systems. Raëlism's fusion of spirituality and technology offers a fresh perspective on the future of humanity, attracting individuals seeking a new paradigm for human evolution and advancement (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016).

4. 1. Becoming Divine through Technology

Raëlism blends pseudoscience, revelation, and the reinterpretation of traditional religious concepts (Gregg, 2012) to envision a future where humanity transcends its current limitations through the application of advanced knowledge and technology. The pronounced importance and value of technology as a conduit for spiritual enlightenment and transcendence is central to the movement's belief in extraterrestrial contact and the transmission of advanced knowledge. The movement's vision presents a radical departure from other religious movements by placing the power of transformation

exactly in the hands of humanity. In this respect, the ideas of Raëlism align with those of some religious transhumanist movements, such as Terasem, which asserts that God is technological (Yeşilyurt - Yeşilyurt, 2022).

Likewise, it is exactly technology and advanced knowledge that enabled the Elohim to reach a state of transhumanism characterized by enhanced intelligence, immortality, and mastery of matter and energy (Vorilhon, 1974) and to become the creators of life on Earth. The concept of technological deification is central in Raëlism; it maintains that humanity can achieve a state of divinity through the transmission and integration of advanced technology and spiritual principles under the guidance of the Elohim. In this respect, Raëlism views technology not as a threat to humanity but as an indispensable tool for realizing its full potential, including the attainment of divinity. Therefore, Raëlism and Raélians advocate for the development and application of technologies such as genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and artificial intelligence to overcome biological limitations, extend lifespans, and expand human consciousness (Lewis - Tøllefsen, 2016), thus reinforcing and reaffirming their pioneering position in transhumanist thought.

This embrace of transhumanist concepts reflects Raëlism's modern, science-oriented worldview and its belief in the potential of technology to transform humanity positively.

4. 2. Impact on Transhumanist Discourse

Raëlism's impact on the broader context of transhumanism is somewhat difficult to outline. Raëlism introduces a unique perspective that blends spirituality and technological advancement. This impact can be assessed through both the contributions Raëlism has made to transhumanist discourse and the challenges it presents to the broader transhumanist community.

4. 2. 1. Contributions to Transhumanist Discourse

The contribution of Raëlism to transhumanist discourse can be assessed in terms of four main aspects: a spiritual dimension, personal development, and sensual love, a positive outlook on technology, and a sense of community and shared purpose.

Raëlism injects a spiritual dimension into transhumanism by emphasizing self-awareness, consciousness expansion, and ethical considerations as integral components in the pursuit of transhuman

potential. This infusion challenges the prevailing notion of transhumanism as a purely scientific or technological endeavor, broadening its scope to include a more holistic approach to human enhancement. The Raëlian movement expands transhumanist discourse beyond technological advancement to encompass a more comprehensive view of human flourishing by passionately advocating for personal well-being and the appreciation of sensory experiences. This focus highlights the interconnectedness of physical and emotional aspects in the pursuit of transhuman goals.

Raëlism also contributes to a more balanced discourse on the role of technology in human progress through its positive stance toward technology, thereby refuting concerns about its potential negative impacts and encouraging responsible development and application for the benefit of humanity. Moreover, Raëlism fosters a sense of community and shared purpose among individuals who seek to redefine the paradigm of human evolution and encourages collaboration and mutual support in transhumanist pursuits. The cultivation of a shared sense of belonging strengthens the transhumanist movement and facilitates collective action toward common objectives.

4. 2. 2. Challenges to Transhumanist Discourse

Raëlism has undeniably influenced the transhumanist discourse by introducing unique perspectives, broadening the scope of discussion, and challenging traditional notions of human enhancement. However, the movement faces challenges related to the acceptance of its unconventional beliefs, practices, and ethical considerations and the scientific feasibility of the technologies it proposes.

First and foremost, Raëlism's core tenets involving extraterrestrial contact and guidance raise concerns about its credibility within the broader transhumanist community. Even as deemed mirth by some serious scientists and thinkers, the unconventional beliefs advanced by Raëlism make it challenging for some transhumanists to fully embrace its ideas. On the other hand, practices such as sensual meditation and the controversial use of the swastika symbol have drawn criticism and raised concerns about potential exploitation and manipulation. As addressed in a later section, this criticism has led to an update of the movement's symbol.

Another challenge against Raëlism is its passionate advocacy for technologies such as genetic engineering and cloning, which has sparked debates about the ethical implications of human enhancement. Furthermore, the strong emphasis placed on individual freedom by Raëlism raises concerns about the potential misuse of technology, which must indeed follow strict and clear ethical guidelines. Finally, several aspects of Raëlism's vision, such as digital immortality and achieving immortality through cloning (Machado, 2010), are viewed by many scientists as beyond the current scientific reality. The perceived lack of scientific feasibility challenges the movement's credibility and raises questions about its long-term viability.

Conclusion

By merging elements of spirituality and technology, Raëlism has had a substantial impact on the discussion of transhumanism. Its fundamental principles, which include the belief in extraterrestrial guidance and the pursuit of technological deification, distinguish this movement in the transhumanist landscape. The ideology of Raëlism advocates for the adoption of digital immortality and cloning, envisioning a future in which technology surpasses biological constraints. Raëlian rituals, such as sensual and collective meditations, serve as conduits connecting the spiritual and technological domains, equipping followers for progress and innovation.

The distinctive fusion of spirituality and technology in Raëlism has significant ramifications for both religious and technological discussions. It challenges conventional concepts of a deity, suggesting a reevaluation through technological advancement. This view attributes distinctive significance to spirituality in a rapidly progressing modern society. The emphasis on human development in Raëlism implies a possible transition toward religious engagement that is more individualized and based on direct experience. Raëlism's focus on ethical issues in the use of technology is in line with a more responsible attitude toward technology, which could result in the development of ethical rules and safeguards.

The convergence of Raëlism with transhumanism is a remarkable intellectual phenomenon that challenges existing frameworks of

human advancement and reimagines the influence of religion in our swiftly expanding society. The movement's notable capacity to integrate spirituality and technology highlights its pioneering approach to transhumanism, as demonstrated by its focus on individual growth, spiritual advancement, and intimate affection, combined with passionate support for scientific progress and technological development. This comprehensive viewpoint contradicts the common belief that technology is used only to enhance our physical and mental abilities. Instead, it suggests that technology can also support spiritual growth and help us obtain a deep understanding of our place in the cosmos.

Nevertheless, the unorthodox methodology of Raëlism may engender doubts in certain transhumanist circles regarding its trustworthiness, given its assertions of extraterrestrial encounters and direction from the Elohim. Furthermore, the prioritization of individual autonomy and support for advancements such as genetic engineering and cloning require meticulous ethical deliberation to avoid any abuse and promote responsible technological progress.

Ultimately, the convergence of Raëlism and transhumanism offers an intriguing subject for analysis, stimulating reflection on the simultaneous existence of spirituality and technology in relation to human capabilities. Although its unorthodox character has raised concerns, Raëlism presents novel viewpoints on the function of religion in our ever-changing society and the transformational potential of technology. This perspective extends beyond the realms of physical and cognitive abilities, encompassing spirituality and ethical considerations as well. As we explore the frontiers of transhumanism, the impact of Raëlism is expected to persist, shaping discourse and sparking creative opportunities for human evolution toward transhuman and post-human conditions.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

FUNDING

The authors received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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