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Elijah Muhammad's Prophets: From the White Adam to the Black Jesuses

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Abstract

Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam from the mid-1930s until 1975, wrote extensively about Adam, Moses, and Jesus. His *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* bear little resemblance to the older accounts in the Qur'ān and the Bible or to the traditional *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* material. His focus was his racialist mythology into which he placed appropriate racialized versions of Adam, Moses, and Jesus. Although seemingly at odds with biblical and qur'ānic accounts, he constantly cited and alluded to these texts in order to support his novel understanding of them. In so doing, Elijah Muhammad created a modern, nontraditional, and wholly new and independent branch within the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* aimed at mid-twentieth century African Americans.



Introduction

“The prophets of Islam include: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Job, David, Solomon, and Jonah.” So far it sounds quite traditional, but in the very next sentence, Elijah Muhammad is quite untraditional: “the people of Islam are the black people, and their numbers are made up of the brown, yellow and red people...”¹ The leader of the Nation of Islam from the mid-1930s until his death in 1975, Elijah Muhammad devoted significant attention to a select few biblical and qur’ānic prophets, particularly Adam, Moses, and Jesus.² Yet he felt no need to conform to the older accounts in the Qur’ān and the Bible, nor did he devote the same attention to Muḥammad.³ Moreover, he seemed unaware of the traditional *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* material. His primary goal was to reinterpret the figures of Adam, Moses, and Jesus to fit his racialist mythology. He self-identified as a Muslim and was well-versed in the Qur’ān, but did not adopt or even adapt much of the Qur’ān’s own reinterpretation of these prophets. Although seemingly at odds with biblical and qur’ānic accounts, he constantly cited and alluded to these texts in order to support his novel understanding of them. In so doing, Elijah Muhammad created a modern, nontraditional, and wholly new and independent branch within the genre of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* aimed at mid-twentieth century African Americans.

Racial mythology

Although humanity’s origins lie further back, Elijah Muhammad’s racial mythology begins 66 (or 60) trillion years ago, when Allah, having failed to unite humanity under one language, sought to destroy them by blasting the original planet into earth and moon. Only the Tribe of Shabazz survived and then settled on the best parts of the earth, the Nile Valley and Mecca where Allah gave them “a thorough knowledge of self and his guidance,”⁴ that is, the religion of Islam.⁵ The more important history begins 6,600 years ago, with a black but malevolent scientist: Mr. Yakub, the god and maker of the white race.⁶

¹ Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Newport News: United Brothers Communications Systems, 1992 [1965]), 68.

² For a detailed history of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, and for an analysis of his formulation of Islam, see Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³ For a full discussion of Elijah Muhammad’s understanding of Muḥammad and his accomplishments, see Herbert Berg, “Elijah Muhammad’s Redeployment of Muhammad: Racialist and Prophetic Interpretations of the Qur’ān,” in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (eds.), *Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 321–345. It is clear that Elijah Muhammad either was unaware of or had no interest in the *sīrah*.

⁴ Elijah Muhammad, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, November 24, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

⁵ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 5, 1957, Magazine Section, 2.

⁶ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 31–32.



According to Elijah Muhammad, Yakub's preaching in Mecca led to his exile to an island called Pelan in the Aegean Sea along with his 59,999 followers. Through a perverse 600-year selective breeding program that he set in motion, he "grafted" or created an increasingly lighter and wicked race by controlling who married whom and by killing all the black babies.⁷ After 200 years it resulted in a race that was entirely "brown," and after 200 years more, one that was all "yellow or red." And finally, after yet 200 more years, the result was an entirely pale white, blue-eyed race of people who by their very nature were evil. Following Yakub's instructions, this race then returned to the Holy Land of Mecca.⁸

There they tried to gain control of the righteous in Mecca. When the trouble they made led to bloodshed, the king had them rounded up and drove them to Europe.⁹

They suffered divine chastisement for the first 2,000 years on this continent for their trouble-making and for causing war and bloodshed among the original black people, who had not suffered from wars, exploitation and enslavement before the creation (grafting) of this people by their father, Yakub.¹⁰

Isolated from the civilized world for 2,000 years and without divine guidance, they became savages, like wild beasts. They went naked, became hairy, ate raw food, and even started walking on all fours and living in caves and tree tops, climbing the latter for protection at night and jumping from one tree to another. As the Qur'ān points out in Sūrat al-Mā'idah 5:60, some were cursed by Allah and turned into swine and apes—in fact a self-inflicted curse when some sought to graft themselves back into being black but succeeding only in producing the gorilla.¹¹

⁷ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, November 8, 1958, 12.

⁸ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 50, July 18, 1959, 14.

⁹ In an odd etymology, Elijah Muhammad explains that "EU stand for hills and cavesides of that continent and ROPE means a place where that people were bound in." Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 267. Elsewhere, he argued that "this name means a place where people are roped in. This was done to punish the devils for causing trouble in the Holy Land [i.e., Mecca] 6000 years ago." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, 14.

¹⁰ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 266. It should be noted that Elijah Muhammad often used non-standard grammar and spelling. These have not been corrected in quotations.

¹¹ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 103–104 and 119–120. Why would Allah permit the existence of this evil race? Here Elijah Muhammad proffers Q Anfāl 7:14, in which Satan asks for, and is granted, a respite until the Day of Resurrection. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 134.

So the white race remained until several futile attempts to civilize them began. The religion of Yakub before his fall had been Islam,¹² as it was for all of the black prophets sent to this evil race, the first of whom was Moses, and the last, Jesus.¹³ Both warned them to submit to the will of Allah; both failed.¹⁴ Muhammad's later mission kept them "bottled up" for another 1,000 years, until—with Columbus' voyage in 1492—they were set free from their European prison.¹⁵ These white devils then sought to dominate the whole world by murdering, pillaging, and raping. Their greatest sin was to enslave members of the original black humanity for 400 years and rob them of their religion, Islam. But their sin, even their existence, would not endure forever. The imminent destruction of these devils was heralded when the Great Mahdi, Allah in person, Mr. Fard Muhammad, came to Detroit in 1930 to find this lost Nation of Islam in the wilderness of America.¹⁶

Although this myth might seem somewhat far removed from the more familiar accounts of the Islamic prophets, Islam remains central to it. Islam is the only true religion, the original and natural religion of the "Blackman." It is as eternal as black humanity itself, and spiritual, mental, physical, social, and economic freedom from the white devil is only possible by returning to that religion. Christianity, for Elijah Muhammad, "is one of the most perfect black-slave-making religions on our planet."¹⁷ It made blacks worship a false, white god (and so worship the very devils who had enslaved them). Blacks were taught to turn the other cheek in the face of oppression and wait until the next life for justice. Islam, by contrast, offers freedom, justice, and equality now, under the leadership of the true god, Allah, in the person of Wali Fard Muhammad. All this is supported by the Qur'ān and the Bible. Although the Bible is described as a

¹² Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 5, 1957, Magazine Section, 2. See also idem, *The Supreme Wisdom: The Solution to the So-Called Negroes' Problem* (Newport News: The National Newport News and Commentator, 1957), 31.

¹³ "Moses and Jesus are the most outstanding prophets in the history of the Caucasian race for the past 4,000 years." Idem, "The Day of America's Downfall," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, January 29, 1965, 1.

¹⁴ Idem, "What is Islam?" *Muhammad Speaks* 4, May 14, 1965, 9.

¹⁵ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 104; "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, August 18, 1956, Magazine Section, 2. "Since 1492, the people of the white race have been allowed to spread over the face of the earth." Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 267.

Muhammad, born in the Seventh Century after the death of Jesus, the last sign of that last one coming with Allah (God) in the judgement or end of the devil's rule. Muhammad turned on the light (Islam) in the ancient house (Arab Nation) that had burned low since the time of Ibrahim (Abraham) and cleaned it up for the reception of a much brighter light of the Mahdi (Allah in Person) and His people, which will come from the West out of the house of the infidels.

Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also Berg, "Elijah Muhammad's Redeployment of Muhammad," 321–345.

¹⁶ Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10.

¹⁷ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 70.



“graveyard” and “poison book,”¹⁸ it is also “a book that was prepared purposely as a warning to us in North America.”¹⁹ As for the Qur’ān, it is

The book that the so-called American Negroes (The Tribe of Shabazz) should own and read, the book that the slavemasters have but have not represented it to their slaves, is a book that will heal their sin-sick souls that were made sick and sorrowful by the slavemasters. This book will open their blinded eyes and open their deaf ears. It will purify them. The name of this book, which makes a distinction between the God of righteous and the God of evil, is: Glorious Holy Qur-an Sharrieff. It is indeed the Book of Guidance, of Light and Truth, and of Wisdom and Judgement. But the average one should first be taught how to respect such a book, how to understand it, and how to teach it.²⁰

Elijah Muhammad also taught, “The Holy Qur’an will live forever. Why? Because it has Truth in it. I will not say it has some Truth in it. It has all Truth in it if you understand.”²¹ Only he, however, understood these truths in the Bible and the Qur’ān, including the obscured histories and hidden symbolism of its prophets.

Adam

Once Elijah Muhammad wrote that Islam was the “same religion Allah gave to everyone of His Prophets from Adam to Muhammad, the last.”²² However, Adam is not normally counted among the prophets, for Adam is the progenitor of only the white race, who “refused to submit (accept Islam) and for this rejection, he was punished with exile and a death sentence placed upon his race.”²³ Elijah Muhammad explained the Adam and Eve stories in the Qur’ān and in Genesis thus:

¹⁸ The Bible is criticized, among other things, for charging God with adultery (with Jesus’ mother Mary), Noah and Lot with drunkenness, and Lot with incest. Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom: Volume Two* (Hampton: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems, n.d.), 60.

¹⁹ Elijah Muhammad continues: “It is not for Jews nor for Greeks. It speaks of none but the Black man of America and his falling away from Islam, our forefather’s religion and following after strangers (devils) and their religions. It exhorts them to cease the worship of Idols (Christian God) which our forefathers knew not nor did they fear or regard such gods... The whole contents of the Bible that you have predict the return of us back to Islam and Asia, our home.” Muhammad, “A Warning to the Black Man of America,” *Final Call to Islam* 1, August 18, 1934, 2. This ambivalence towards the Bible is not unprecedented in Islam, in which the scripture is seen as hopelessly corrupt, but also as a source of some genuine truth and prophecies about the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁰ Idem, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 50–51; *Message to the Blackman*, 92.

²¹ Idem, *The Theology of Time*, transcribed by Abass Rassoull (Hampton: U.S. Communications Systems, 1992), 379.

²² Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, 10.

²³ Ibid. Thus, Elijah Muhammad usually begins his list of prophets with Noah, though his focus is on Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, each of whom had significant interactions with the devil white race descended from Adam.



Let us take a look at the devil's creation from the teachings of the Holy Qur-an. "And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth one who shall rule, the angels said: 'What will Thou place in it such as will make mischief in it and shed blood, we celebrate thy praise and extol Thy holiness.'" (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff 2:30). This devil race has and still is doing just that—making mischief and shedding blood; and the black nation whom they were grafted from (when your Lord said to the angels): "Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape." (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff, 15:28) The essence of black mud (the black nation) mentioned is only symbolic, which actually means the sperm of the black nation; and they refused to recognize the black nation as their equal though they were made from and by a black scientist (named Yakub).²⁴

As for the "Fall of Humanity," that too refers only to the white race's progenitors. "Adam and Eve (the father and mother of the white race—Yakub is the real name) refused the religion of Islam (peace) because of their nature in which they were made."²⁵ Elsewhere, he clarifies that the 59,999 "men and women who went with Yakub were the real Adam of the Bible and Qur-an who lost Paradise (the holy land of Arabia)."²⁶ The punishment of mortality was in fact a prophecy about the imminent contemporary destruction of the race. "Adam and his race refused to submit (accept Islam) and for this rejection, he was punished with exile and a death sentence place upon his race."²⁷ As for the expulsion from the Garden,

According to the Bible (Gen 3:20–24), Adam and his wife were the first parents of all people (white race only) and the first sinners. According to the Word of Allah, he was driven from the Garden of Paradise into the hills and caves of West Asia, or as they now call it, 'Europe,' to live his evil life in the West and not in the Holy Land of the East.

The cherubim with the flaming sword were Muslim guards who, for 2,000 years, prevented the Adamic race from returning to Asia to make mischief.²⁸

Elijah Muhammad is not entirely consistent with the analogies he draws from the Adam and Eve story, subordinating the scriptural narrative and its figures to his racial mythology in various ways. For example, he also described the serpent, whose "greatest desire is to make the righteous disobey the law of righteousness," as the white race. Moreover,

²⁴ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also his questions to preachers about Adam; "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, October 18, 1958, 14.

²⁵ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, August 10, 1958, 14.

²⁶ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 27, 1958, 14.

²⁷ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, January 4, 1958, 10.

²⁸ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 133.



The Bible's forbidden tree (Gen. 2:17) was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This also tells us that the tree was a person, for trees know nothing! This tree was of knowledge [that] was forbidden to Adam and Eve. The only one who this tree could be is the devil. After deceiving Adam and his wife, he has been called a serpent due to his keen knowledge of tricks and acts of slyness, who made his acquaintance with Adam and his wife in the absence of the presence of God. Since this is the nature of a liar, he can best lie to the people when truth is absent.²⁹

As a result, the serpent was cursed, and Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Paradise 6,000 years ago, where they continued to try to cause believers in Allah to fall. In the extended metaphor of the serpent, the head of the serpent is "the religious leaders of the human beast serpent."³⁰ The tree of life, incidentally, is the nation of Islam and the cherubim protecting the Garden of Eden are Muslims, which he supports using Q Baqarah 2:36.³¹

Noah and Abraham

Since Adam—as the symbol and progenitor of the white race—can hardly, therefore, be a prophet of Allah for Elijah Muhammad, his list of prophets usually begins with Noah and Abraham. Noah is most often mentioned as one who was mocked and scorned for predicting the imminent punishment of the world (just like Elijah Muhammad was and did), but was vindicated when mockers and disbelievers were punished.³² This interpretative approach sets the pattern for Elijah Muhammad's *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*; they are more about contemporary black-white issues in America than they are about the past. In this regard, they resemble the more traditional *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, which are often shaped by the narrative of Muḥammad's life.

Abraham is mentioned mainly in two contexts: his prayer for a future prophet and the black stone, both of which are given a contemporary racialized twist. Elijah Muhammad concurred with the Qur'ān that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian.³³ But he took that claim to mean his descendants are not the Jews nor the Christians. The covenant he made does not, therefore, apply to the Israelites, nor to any whites.³⁴ Both Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Ishmael are "also a sign of what would take place in the Last Days on finding and returning the lost-found people of Abraham an[d] his son, Ishmael."³⁵

²⁹ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, November 29, 1958, 12.

³⁰ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 6, 1958, 14.

³¹ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 50, July 11, 1959, 14.

³² Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, July 26, 1958, 14; "The Resurrection of our People," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, February 19, 1965, 1.

³³ Q Āl 'Imrān 3:67.

³⁴ Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, April 19, 1958, 14.

³⁵ Idem, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 45.



The prayer of Abraham for a messenger to be raised from among his descendants in Q 2:129 was much discussed by Elijah Muhammad. He argued that Mecca had seen many messengers, including Abraham and Ishmael. He combined this observation with Q Sajdah 32:3 (“that thou mayest warn a people to whom no warner has come before that they might walk aright”³⁶) to argue, “the prayer of Abraham does not refer to the raising up of a prophet in Arabia, but of a prophet among that particular seed or people of his, who must be searched for, located and found, a teacher must be given to them from Allah to teach and warn them of the purpose of Allah and the purpose of the Messenger being raised among them.”³⁷ Abraham, according to Elijah Muhammad, would have been black, and so decidedly not the biological or spiritual progenitor of Jews and Christians. More oddly, however, he also seems to dismiss or ignore the significance of the traditional Muslim claim that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arabs and so the inhabitants of Mecca. What matters to Elijah Muhammad is that he and they are black.

As for the black stone that Abraham is traditionally thought to have set in the Ka’bah when he built it and that Muhammad helped restore to its position, its importance lies entirely in its symbolism. Abraham was said to have “made a sign with a small, unhewn black stone and set it in the Holy City of Mecca and veiled it over with a black veil which will not be unveiled and destroyed or discarded until he whom the sign represents is returned (the last messenger and his followers).”³⁸ Jesus, too, spoke of the future messenger represented by that stone in Mark 12:10 as the stone rejected by the builders that became the cornerstone; Jesus’ stone and the black stone symbolize the same thing. Moreover, when Muhammad put the black stone back in its place in the Ka’bah, for Elijah Muhammad this demonstrated that Muhammad was not the “fulfiller of the sign,” “but rather of that which the stone represents”—that is, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.³⁹

³⁶ *The Holy Qur-an*, trans, Maulvi Muhammad Ali (4th rev. ed.; Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1951). Elijah Muhammad cites the first edition of this translation of the Qur’ān almost exclusively; it is thought that this was the edition of the Qur’ān Fard Muhammad had given to him.

³⁷ Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 249.

³⁸ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 3, 1957, 10.

³⁹ Ibid. “Moreover, Muhammad’s replacing and repairing the sign (the stone) was a sign of the work of the Mahdi, who would, in His day, raise and put into proper place that which the stone now serves as a sign of. Oh, that you would only understand the Scriptures. The Christians think the stone was Jesus. The Muslims think that it represents Muhammad 1,370 years ago... There certainly is a surprise in store for both worlds (Islam and Christianity) in the revealing of this last One.” Ibid., 10. As a result, the importance of the black stone should now lessen: “also recognized [as a Muslim] is anyone bowing down and kissing the black stone, which I knew the utmost of the science of it. Not because I felt the black stone was giving me salvation, but because I know what it is there for. It will be removed one of these days soon. Because when a sign has served its purpose, that’s all of it.” Idem, “Future of American So-Called Negroes...,” *Muhammad Speaks* 1, April, 1962, 16.

Moses

The figure of Moses has several overlapping elements: Moses' prophecy about a future prophet, Pharaoh as a symbol of white America, and Moses' mission to the white race. Elijah Muhammad often compared himself to Moses. Initially, in 1934, Moses was the one who first prophesied the coming of Fard Muhammad in Deuteronomy 18:18: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."⁴⁰ But later this prophecy seems to be redirected to the coming of Elijah Muhammad.

In Ancient times, Allah, raised Moses to lead the lost people of Israel from the land of the Pharaohs and into the land of their own, and in our time he has raised this humble, devoted and divinely-missioned black man who has opened the only road towards an exit from the holocaust that is descending upon America by Allah in retaliation for the evil it has brought upon the world—particularly upon black mankind.⁴¹

He even chastised other Muslims who thought the prophecy refers to Muhammad, for he and the Arabs never suffered slavery.

The Orthodox Muslims think this refers to... Muhammad of nearly 1400 years ago [that he] was a prophet like Moses.... But they forget that Moses was a man who was raised in a house of bondage under a king who held him and his people in bondage to him and to his false worship of God and religion.... [Muhammad] does not compare with the prophecy of a man like Moses, for there was no king singled out who opposed Muhammad in Mecca. There was no separation of the Arabs from any slave masters and a destruction of the slave masters.⁴²

Thus, he saw African Americans as the Hebrews under Pharaoh, with white America as a modern Pharaoh. Moses' people, like African Americans, did not know the scriptures before their prophet appeared. Pharaoh, like white America, "had them worshipping in his false religion. Therefore, Moses had to preach a new God and a new religion to the Hebrews, and give them a new concept of God and His religion."⁴³

⁴⁰ Idem, "A Warning to the Black Man of America," 1–2.

⁴¹ Idem, "Editorial," *Muhammad Speaks* 5, September 24, 1965, 1.

⁴² Idem, "Muslim Prayer Service," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, May 28, 1965, 8.

⁴³ Idem, "Stand Up for True Freedom: We Need Not Have Fear of Future," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, January 31, 1964, 9. See also *The Supreme Wisdom*, 20; *Message to the Blackman*, 251. In hammering the point home, Muhammad states:



Thus the focus of Elijah Muhammad was often as much on Pharaoh and on the Israelites who stubbornly refuse to accept their messenger.

They will fail and be brought down to disgrace as Pharaoh's magicians and himself were by Allah and Moses, His servant... They felt that shouldn't believe Moses' representation of God by any other name than God Almighty, regardless to Moses' stress upon JEHOVAH as being the God of their Fathers. Pharaoh had not used that name (JEHOVAH), so Israel wouldn't accept it until a showdown between Jehovah and Pharaoh.⁴⁴

When Moses was sent to bring his people out of bondage to independence, they preferred to stay and even to help Pharaoh, and Pharaoh feared their might should the Israelites ever unite. So he plotted to keep them subjected by killing off the male children, just as the American whites encouraged African Americans to use birth control. Elijah Muhammad warned, "They are seeking to destroy our race through our women. Do not let them trick you."⁴⁵ Elsewhere he made the analogy explicit: "If today a Moses were in your midst and he said, 'The God of your fathers sent me' and 'the Government of America has deceived you as to the knowledge of God and has you indirectly worshipping yourselves,' wouldn't your reply be the same as the one given to Moses? That is right. You are asking me that."⁴⁶ As for his rivals and detractors, they were modern day Korahs—Korah being the leader of the rebellion against Moses in Numbers 16:

It took the destruction of the people of Korah by Almighty God to make Israel understand that it was God who had appointed Moses to lead them and that self-made leaders such as Korah would not work in the way of delivering Israel [to] another country. Because Allah had chosen Moses to act as a guide for Israel, and all other self-made leaders would be failures. He sent poisonous and fiery serpents against them to bite and kill those who rebelled. So this is a warning and a sign for us today.⁴⁷

The white man of America is like Pharaoh in Egypt. He, the modern Pharaoh, is trying to control the 22 million so-called American Negroes as Pharaoh did the Israelites in Egypt. The white man's control over the so-called Negro makes them helpless in trying to follow Allah and His servant into a land they call their own and where they can rule themselves as other nations are doing.

Idem, "Protection of the Faithful," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, April 2, 1965, 1.

⁴⁴ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, December 29, 1956, Magazine Section, 2; See also *Message to the Blackman*, 208.

⁴⁵ Idem, "Muhammad Speaks," *Muhammad Speaks* 2, January 15, 1963, 9. See also Muhammad, "Truth is the Best Guidance," *Muhammad Speaks* 2, April 15, 1963, 1 and 4.

⁴⁶ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.



Elijah Muhammad wrote less about a more intriguing and seemingly contradictory narrative about Moses—the portrayal of him as the first prophet to the white race after 2,000 years of exile in Europe. Whites had remained trapped in Europe for these 2,000 years ever since they had been expelled from Mecca. Elijah Muhammad anachronistically had Muslim soldiers armed with swords patrolling the border to “prevent the devils from crossing” during this period.⁴⁸ But after 2,000 years of this exile, “Moses according to the Bible and Holy Qur-an, raised the devils up to civilization. Read John 3:15: ‘And as Moses lifted up the serpent (the white race) in the wilderness (in Europe) even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.’”⁴⁹ When challenged that Judaism was 5,700 years old, and so older than Islam, Elijah Muhammad replied,

The white race including the Jews, are only 6,000 years and they spent 2,000 year[s of] that time in the hills and caves of Europe without any religion or civilization. Only a few of them escaped that punishment and they remained there until the birth of Moses, who was their first prophet or guide to lead them back to civilization and the knowledge of Islam.⁵⁰

During Moses’ mission to civilize the white race “to take their place as rulers, as Yakub had intended for them. Musa (Moses) became their God and leader”; he brought them out of the caves, taught them to believe in God, to wear clothes, to cook food, and to use fire. But they were so evil that Moses had to build a ring of fire around him at night. Once they gave him so much trouble that he took dynamite up on the mountainside and killed 300 of them telling them, “Stand there on the edge of this mountain and you will hear the voice of God... Moses taught the devils that if they would follow him and obey him, Allah would give them a place among the holy people. Most of them believed Moses, just to get out of the caves.”⁵¹ Those few who followed him left their caves behind and became the Jews.⁵²

The chronology is confusing. It is not clear if these events and those with Pharaoh are related, though Elijah Muhammad usually equates Jews, Hebrews, and Israelites. Moses was said to have spoken

⁴⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁹ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 27, 1958, 14.

⁵⁰ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 12, 1957, Magazine Section, 2.

⁵¹ Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 120–121. See also Hatim A. Sahib, “The Nation of Islam” (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1951), 152–153.

⁵² Jews are defined by Moses: “Believers in Musa (Moses) and the Torah are referred to as Jews or Hebrews. The Jews or Hebrews believe that Musa (Moses) was a Jew, who brought them the Torah.” Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 17.



Egyptian Arabic,⁵³ and the Israelites were said to have loved the Egyptians, who were evil and so attacked by fiery serpents. This is quite an odd description given that Egyptians are in Africa and normally described as black by Elijah Muhammad, and all whites would then still have been exiled in Europe. Incidentally, Elijah Muhammad also claimed Nimrod was born as an opponent to Moses' teachings. Thus the teachings of Moses lasted not 2,000 years, but only 1,700, for they were cut short by the 300 years of Nimrod's opposition.⁵⁴ Be that as it may, clearly the figure of Moses is subservient to the framework of Elijah Muhammad's racial mythology, and scripture, whether the Bible or the Qur'ān, is read primarily as prophecies about the end times in America.⁵⁵

Jesus

Elijah Muhammad's treatment of Jesus is far more complex than that of Adam or Moses.⁵⁶ As he wrote in 1957, in the Bible and the Qur'ān, "you have two Jesus' histories!"⁵⁷

One of the main things that one must learn is to distinguish between the history of Jesus two thousand years ago and the prophecy of the Jesus who is expected to come at the end of the world. What we have as a history of the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago often proves

⁵³ "Originally the Torah (Old Testament) was given to Musa (Moses) 2000 B.C., who spoke ancient Egyptian Arabic." Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 30 1956, 2; *The Supreme Wisdom*, 12. "The law of the Jews, which was given to them by Musa (Moses)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 19, 1957, 10. See also *Message to the Blackman*, 93–94.

⁵⁴ It was Nimrod who was born on December 25, not Jesus, who had been born during the first or second week of September according to Elijah Muhammad. Idem, "Christmas!" *Muhammad Speaks* 10, December 25, 1970, 15.

⁵⁵ Moses is occasionally invoked in other cases. For example, when he argues that resurrection does not mean a physical resurrection but the mental resurrection of the Black Nation, Elijah Muhammad writes, "Moses didn't teach a resurrection of the dead nor did Noah, who was a prophet before Moses." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, July 7 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

⁵⁶ For a fuller discussion of Elijah Muhammad's bifurcated Jesus(es), see Herbert Berg, "Elijah Muhammad's Christologies: The 'Historical' Jesus and the Contemporary Christ," in Dawn-Marie Gibson and Herbert Berg (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Nation of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 174–189, from which some of the material in this section is adapted.

⁵⁷ Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10.



to be that of the Great Mahdi,⁵⁸ the Restorer of the Kingdom of Peace on Earth who came to America in 1930 under the name of Mr. W. D. Fard.⁵⁹

In terms of *qiṣaṣ*, the Jesus of two thousand years ago may be of greater relevance, but not for Elijah Muḥammad, who preferred to focus on the one of the end of the world.

For Elijah Muhammad, this latter Jesus was, of course, Fard Muhammad, but he is not unrelated to the former Jesus. The two are not independent, since most of the biblical and even qur'ānic references to or descriptions of Jesus were reinterpreted symbolically to make them prophecies about Fard Muhammad. According to Elijah Muhammad, "Nearly 75 per cent [of the Bible story of Jesus] is referring to a future Jesus, coming at the end of the white races' time, to resurrect the mentally dead, lost members (so-called Negroes) of the Tribe of Shabazz. This Jesus is now in the world."⁶⁰ In particular, Jesus' proclamations about the "Son of Man" were to be understood as prophecies about Fard Muhammad.⁶¹ Even Elijah Muhammad's description of Fard Muhammad's mission drew on the passion of Jesus:

He (MR. FARD MUHAMMAD, God in Person) chose to suffer three and one-half years to show his love for his people, who have suffered over 300 years at the hands of a people who by nature are evil, wicked, and have no good in them. He was persecuted, sent to jail in 1932, and ordered out of Detroit, Mich., May 26, 1933. He came to Chicago in the same year, arrested almost immediately on his arrival and placed behind prison bars. He submitted himself with all humbleness to his persecutors. Each time he was arrested, he sent for me that I may see and learn the price of TRUTH for us, the so-called American

⁵⁸ The use of the title of Mahdi and of Arab names led Josef van Ess to hypothesize a connection between Fard Muhammad and the Druze. He felt that the doctrinal similarities between Fard Muhammad and the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākīm were glaring: both were God on earth, both disappeared but promised to return, and both reinterpreted the afterlife. See Josef van Ess, "Drusen und Black Muslims," *Die Welt des Islam* 14 (1973): 203–213. This suggestion is intriguing because there are several other similarities between the Nation of Islam and the Druze, including the deification of an *imām*, rejection of shari'ah, and a symbolic interpretation of the Qur'ān. It seems more likely, however, that Elijah Muhammad's concept of the Mahdi came from Ahmadi literature. See Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad* (Makers of the Muslim World; Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 32–33. Determining exactly how "Mahdi" entered into the vocabulary of the early Nation of Islam would shed light on the mysteries that still surround Fard Muhammad and the source of the teachings he transmitted to Elijah Muhammad.

⁵⁹ Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 20, 1957, 10. Speaking of the Bible, he wrote, "the second half (the New Testament) was revealed to Isa (Jesus) 2000 year[s] ago (who spoke both Arabic and Hebrew)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 23, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

⁶⁰ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10.

⁶¹ See, for example, idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 19, 1957, Magazine Section, 2; "Says So-Called Negro is the Biblical Lost Sheep," *Mr. Muhammad Speaks* 1, Special Edition, 1961, 3. Elijah Muhammad did not identify himself with Jesus, rather he interpreted all qur'ānic verses containing "Messenger of Allah" as references to himself.

Negroes (members of the Asiatic nation). He was well able to save himself from such suffering, but how else was the scripture to be fulfilled?⁶²

Elijah Muhammad employed the same technique to deal with references to Jesus in the Qur'ān; they were prophecies about Fard Muhammad. For example, Elijah Muhammad argued that only Fard Muhammad merited the Qur'ānic epithet *masīḥ*, relying on the commentator of his copy of the Qur'ān who had suggested that *masīḥ* (the Arabic cognate of messiah) does not mean “anointed one” but “one who travels much” (apparently based on a false etymology from the Arabic verb *mashā*, “to go”).⁶³ This title obviously did not apply to “the Jesus of two thousand years ago,” who traveled only in “the small state called Palestine.”

The Mahdi is a world traveler. He told me that he had traveled the world over and that he had visited North America for 20 years before making himself known to us, his people, whom he came for. He had visited the Isle [sic] of the Pacific, Japan and China, Canada, Alaska, the North Pole, India, Pakistan, all of the Near East and Africa. He had studied the wild life in the jungles of Africa and learned the languages of the birds. He could speak 16 languages and write 10 of them. He visited every inhabited place on the earth and had pictured and extracted the language of the people on Mars and had a knowledge of all life in the universe. He could recite by heart the histories of the world as far back as 150,000 years and knew the beginning and end of all things.⁶⁴

Much time could be spent unpacking this passage, but my point here is that for Elijah Muhammad, biblical and Qur'ānic passages about Jesus were first and foremost prophetic references to Fard Muhammad and secondarily (and perhaps only incidentally) references to the “Jesus of two thousand years ago”—just as Qur'ānic references to Allah were about Fard Muhammad.

As for the earlier, “historical” Jesus, Elijah Muhammad provided what amounts to a wholly new gospel. In 1957 he wrote a history of Jesus over several weeks in his column “Mr. Muhammad Speaks” in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, once the most widely circulated African-American newspaper. He prefaced his narrative by asserting that Jesus was not the future prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18, nor the child and prince of peace of Isaiah 9:6, nor the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. This new gospel begins with Mary, whom her father disguised in his clothes and a beard made out of goat hair to protect her from the insults of the white devil as she looked after the livestock. However, after he left to oversee the construction of a mosque, a severe dust storm arose. She called on Joseph, an old man whom she loved, to assist her with

⁶² Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 23, 1956, 2. A slightly edited version appears also in *The Supreme Wisdom*, 15.

⁶³ Elijah Muhammad came to this lexical *tafsīr* from the translation of the English Qur'ān by Maulvi (Mawlana) Muhammad Ali. In his footnote to Q 3:45 (verse 44 in his edition), Ali states “The literal significance of *Masīḥ* is either *one who travels much* or *one wiped over with some such thing as oil*.... Jesus Christ is said to have been so called because *he used to travel much*....” *The Holy Qur-an*, 154, n. 424.

⁶⁴ Muhammad, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 20, 1957, 10.



the animals. Three months later her father noticed Mary's weight gain, discovered that she had become pregnant by Joseph, and feared that he would have to kill her in accordance with Jewish law.⁶⁵

Joseph, however, was approached by an old prophetess who told him not to deny the child for he "is the one prophesied in the Holy Qur-an as being the last prophet to the Jews." Joseph, it seems, was only willing to claim the child after he was told that his son would become a prophet. She then taught him how to protect the child from the Jews. Though Mary and Joseph had been engaged since childhood, they had not married. Joseph had a wife and six children, the latter of whom Elijah Muhammad thought were the brothers mentioned in Mark 3:31–32. Joseph, however, asked Mary's father permission to take care of her.⁶⁶ After the birth of the child, Mary fled on a camel to Egypt, for both Joseph and Mary were not white but "Aboriginal Egyptians," in order to protect herself (as an unwed mother) and Jesus from Jews, who were "his enemies." Among the "black people" of Egypt, he was safe. In his early teens, an old prophet befriended him and taught him, "you are the one who, the Holy Qur-an says, will be the last prophet to the Jews."⁶⁷

After completing his schooling with the old prophet, Jesus returned to the land of the Jews; he made no attempt to teach the Arabs and blacks in Egypt and Africa, for he was never meant to be their prophet—a point Elijah Muhammad emphasized to demonstrate that no African American should follow this Jesus.⁶⁸ In Jerusalem, he taught the religion of Islam, but all but a few Jews rejected him. After twenty-two years, Jesus learned that this "infidel race" could not be reformed and they would continue "to do their devilment" for 2,000 more years. So, he decided to sacrifice his life for Islam. So one rainy Saturday morning as he taught under the awning of a store, the Jewish store owner called the authorities because Jesus was interfering with his sales. Two officers were sent to arrest him. They came hastily because of the \$1,500 reward if he were brought in alive, \$2,500 if dead. He left with the officer who reached him first, who made him an offer. He was poor with a large family, and since Jesus was planning to give himself up to be killed,

⁶⁵ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 10, 1957, 10.

⁶⁶ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 17, 1957, 10.

⁶⁷ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 24, 1957, 10. Elijah Muhammad also emphasized, however, "We must not forget that Jesus was not a member of that race. Jesus belonged to the black nation... If Jesus was a member of that race, he would have been a devil. Again, Jesus would not have declared that the Jews were devils. (John 8:44)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10.

⁶⁸ Elijah Muhammad was perplexed (and exasperated) that any African Americans were Christians:

There are any number of scripture[s] in both the Bible and Holy Qur-an [saying] that Jesus was a prophet sent to the House of Israel alone. We have no scripture of him teaching anywhere else but among the Jews. He was not a universal prophet (not sent to the whole world). He made no attempt to teach Arabs nor the blacks of Egypt or Africa. According to the history of his disciples, none of them carried Jesus' name and teachings into the countries of the black nation.

Paul, one of the greatest preachers and travelers of Jesus' followers made no attempt to teach the black nation; nor travel into their countries. (I just can't see how the so-called Negroes think that he is their Saviour, when he didn't save the Jews to whom he was sent, and he has not saved the so-called Negroes from the slavery of white Americans).

Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 31, 1957, 10.



why not let him kill him painlessly? Jesus agreed and leaned against a deserted, boarded up storefront with his arms stretched out “like a cross.” The officer struck Jesus through the heart. He died so quickly that he remained frozen in that position. He was embalmed and buried in that position too.

No Christian is allowed to see the body, unless they pay a price of \$6,000 and must get a certificate from the Pope of Rome. The tomb is guarded by Muslims. When Christians are allowed to see Jesus’ body, they are stripped of their weapons, handcuffed behind their backs, and well-armed Muslim guards take them into the tomb. But, Muslims can go to see his body at any time without charge.⁶⁹

Whether this narrative was merely a product of either Elijah Muhammad’s or Fard Muhammad’s imagination is unknown. It may well have been influenced by Q Nisā’ 4:157, “‘Verily we killed the Messiah Jesus son of Mary and messenger of God.’ They did not kill him nor crucified him. But it was made to appear to them [as though he had been].” Yet Elijah Muhammad did not cite this uniquely apt Qur’ānic verse. The intent behind some of the details, particularly Jesus dying in a cross-like posture, is obvious. It is etiological. Moreover, stating that Jesus remains buried in Jerusalem and still under Muslim guard made an equally clear point. The historical Jesus is not coming back; “again, know that Jesus was only a prophet and cannot hear you pray any more than Moses or any other dead prophet.”⁷⁰ African Americans must not look for salvation from the historical Jesus, but from the contemporary Christ.

Elijah Muhammad’s deviations from biblical accounts of Jesus are not surprising, given that he described the Bible as being “translated into English by the enemies of Jesus.”⁷¹ And he told African-American Christians, “Your Bible is poison, double-crossing itself.” And yet he stated that he was “not trying to condemn the history of Jesus as being false; but rather [I] am trying to put the meanings and signs, or miracles where they belong.”⁷² Later he added, “The Bible is very questionable, but it can be, and is now being understood, for God has revealed her hidden secrets to me.”⁷³ This was a remarkably ingenious (if not a wholly novel) tactic, for it allowed Elijah Muhammad to employ the scripture best known by his

⁶⁹ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 7, 1957, 10. Another version of the birth and death of Jesus is available in a 1992 publication: Elijah Muhammad, *The True History of Jesus: Preacher of Freedom, Justice & Equality: Islam* (Chicago: Coalition for the Remembrance of Elijah, 1992). Parts of it are verbatim reproductions of this series of columns, whereas other parts seem derived from earlier accounts. Still others are later paraphrases of the same material. The only unique materials here are about Jesus’ sojourn in southern Europe, where he gave his famous Sermon on the Mount, but realized he was too early to preach the message of freedom, justice, and equality.

⁷⁰ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, November 24, 1956, Magazine Section, 2. There may be an Ahmadi influence here; it seems likely that he was exposed to their literature and he used an Ahmadi translation of the Qur’ān.

⁷¹ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 27, 1957, 10.

⁷² Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10.

⁷³ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, November 9, 1957, 10.



audience, but make them utterly dependent on him for its correct interpretation. The Qur'ān was another matter, given that it contained “all truth.” However, most of that “truth” he simply did not cite. He only focused on Q Mu' minūn 23:50 (repeatedly), which speaks of Jesus and his mother Mary as a sign—which he understood as being a sign for the Jews that their rule and independence had come to an end, but, more importantly and as discussed above, as being “a sign or prototype of that which is to come.”⁷⁴

Having two Jesuses in the Bible and in the Qur'ān gave Elijah Muhammad the freedom to pick and choose which aspects of their accounts were to be interpreted to be distortions about the Jesus of two thousand years ago (who he argued was an irrelevant figure for African Americans, and certainly unworthy of worship) and which were to be interpreted as prophecies about the Jesus of the end of the world. When it came to the Qur'ān, however, Elijah Muhammad could simply ignore that which did not suit his needs—of which his followers were unlikely to be aware. In so doing, he was able to offer African-American Christians a new, contemporary black Jesus to worship in place of the ancient black prophet who should never have been worshipped.

⁷⁴ Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 3, 1957, 10; “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10. The signification is even more complex:

Jesus and his mother were a sign of the so-called Negroes' (the actual lost and found members of a chosen nation) history, among the devils, in the last days of the devils' [sic] time on earth. The birth of Jesus (out of wedlock) was a sign of the spiritual birth of the lost-found so-called Negroes in North America; who are out of their own people and country (out of the wedlock of unity) living and mixing their blood with their real enemies, the devils; without knowledge. Yusuf (Joseph) and Mary's childhood love of each other, at the age of six, and the promises to marry each other when old enough, was a sign of the love of Allah (God) for the lost-found, so-called Negroes, at the end of the devils' time (6,000 years). The visiting of Mary by Joseph, for three days under the cover of darkness, and in the absence of the father, and under the disguise of Mary's father's clothes and Joseph's wearing a goat's beard, was a sign of how Allah (God), who is referred to in the name “Mahdi,” would come under disguise Himself, in the flesh and clothes of the devils, for three days (three years), to get to the lost-found so-called Negroes and start them preginating with the truth through one of them, as a messenger, under a spiritual darkness.

Idem, “Mr. Muhammad Speaks,” *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10. Elijah Muhammad had no difficulty seeing signs hidden in the Qur'ān and Bible, nor with finding these signs to be polysemous.



Conclusion

Elijah Muhammad's *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* have a unified message and a coherent arc. The story of the white race begins with the white Adam, and after the failures of the black Moses and black Jesus to reform this devilish race, it ends with the black Christ. Adam, Moses, and Jesus are largely deprived of the context provided by the Bible or the Qur'ān, though Elijah Muhammad picks up some qur'ānic arguments, such as claiming that Jews and Christians persecuted earlier prophets (just as he was persecuted) and that Islam, as the religion of submission to the will of God, is clearly earlier than the other two.

Whether the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* are read as what really happened or as prophecies, they are always shaped and constrained by the framework of Elijah Muhammad's racial mythology. His main points are, one, that "The white race, by nature, cannot be righteous. Islam was taught to them from Moses to Muhammad, but they were never able to live the life of a Muslim believer and they can't do it today"⁷⁵; and two, that "Moses and Jesus were both examples of what was to come at the end of this world, not the end of Moses' and Jesus' world. Moses' and Jesus' lives were examples of what would take place among the so-called Negro in America."⁷⁶ Although at first glance this seems very unusual, this kind of appropriation or colonization of the legends of others for political or ideological functions is not. Yes, his mission was expressed in the biographies of his predecessors, but so was that of Muḥammad in the qur'ānic accounts of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Likewise, later Muslim communities expressed their identities within *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. Thus Elijah Muhammad, in terms of methodology, is not really "on the edge" of Islam.

Thus Elijah Muhammad's example is instructive about *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* in general, for it echoes various aspects of the traditional genre. Because Elijah Muhammad's theology is so racialized and so different from the earlier *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, it is obvious how that theology determined what figures and details he focused on and how he altered them. No doubt the same is true for earlier Muslims who produced and worked with this genre. But their stories entered into the acceptable range of understandings of the past; that is, they became part of the consensus. It may not always be as obvious that they too had a theological agenda and a mythic framework within which the stories the pre-Muḥammadan prophets of Islam were reconstructed. Elijah Muhammad's reformulations show just how easily *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* can be

⁷⁵ Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, December 1, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

⁷⁶ And just as Pharaoh plotted against Moses, so contemporary disbelievers plot against the last messenger. Idem, "Memo: From the Desk of Muhammad To: The Original Black People!," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, September 11, 1964, 5. After Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam, he was often described as the chief hypocrite. Minister Louis X (later Louis Farrakhan) compares Malcolm X to the rebel Korah and Judas, who betrayed Moses and Jesus respectively. Louis X, "Boston Minister Tells of Malcolm—Muhammad's Biggest Hypocrite," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, December 4, 1964, 11. Elijah Muhammad also invokes Korah. Muhammad, "Today is the Day in Which the God of Justice (Allah) Is Judging," *Muhammad Speaks* 5, April 22, 1966, 1–2.



made to serve a larger agenda. Thus, *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* have likely always been key to the project of mythmaking and social formation in Islam, whether by the Qur'ān or by later Muslims, including Elijah Muhammad.

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