

MALĀ'IKĀ

(A.) angels (Persian "angel" = *firishta*).

1. In the Qur'ān and in Sunnī Islam.

The form *malā'ika* is the broken plural in Arabic of a word going back to early North-West Semitic (there is no cognate in Akkadian), Ugar. *ml'k* "messenger", Aram. *mal'ak* and O.T. Hebr. *mal'āk* "messenger, angel", the root in Arabic being referred by the lexicographers and commentators to a root *m-l-k*, *'l-k* or even *l-'k* (see *LA*, xii, 272-4, 370-1; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, i, 150; Lane, *Lexicon*, i, 81c), which they consider original to Arabic. A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 269-70, following e.g. K. Ahrens, *Christliches im Qoran*, in *ZDMG*, lxxxiv (1930), 24, thought it fairly certain that the proximate source of the word in Arabic was nevertheless the Ethiopic *mal'āk*, pl. *malā'eket*, the usual equivalent in that language for Grk. *angelos* "messenger > angel"; the word was presumably a loanword into Ethiopic from Aramaic or Hebrew. Since it is so frequently used in the Qur'ān, Muḥammad's audience was obviously familiar with it, and it must have been a pre-Islamic borrowing. The singular in Arabic is normally *malak* without *hamza*, and so always in the Qur'ān; although *LA* in two places (xii, 274,8; 371,5) quotes the same verse as a proof that *mal'ak* does occur, but as an exceptional form (*shādhdh*). Both singular and plural in Arabic are used only in the sense "angel". In the Qur'ān it occurs twice in the dual (*malakayn*, II, 96; VII, 19); of the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt [*q.v.*, and *sihr*], and of Adam and Eve being tempted in the [VI 217a] Garden to believe that they may become angels. The plural occurs very often in the Qur'ān (in Flügel's *Concordance* under *l-'k*, 171) but the singular only 12 times (Flügel, under *m-l-k*, 183). These are of the people demanding revelation by an angel rather than a human being (*bashar*, VI, 8, 9, 50? XI, 15, 33; XVII, 97; XXV, 8); women think Joseph an angel for his beauty rather than a human being (*bashar*, XII, 31); an angel's intercession (*shafā'a*, LIII, 26) does not avail; twice as collective for angels, beside the *'arsh* (LXIX, 17), and in rows and rows (LXXXIX, 23).

In XXXII, 11 "the angel of death" (*malak al-mawt*) occurs but not by name; see 'izrā'īl, and references in tradition in Wensinck, *Handbook of early Muhammadan tradition*, 22b. Djibrīl, the angel of revelation, is named three times (II, 91, 92; LXVI, 4); cf. traditions on him in Muslim, Constantinople 1333, i, 109-11 and other references in Wensinck, 59. In Qur'ān XXVI, 193-5, Djibrīl unnamed, is called "the Faithful Spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*); he brings down the revelation to the *kalb* of Muḥammad in a clear Arabic tongue. There are other descriptions of him, still unnamed, in LIII, 5-18 and LXXXI, 19-25, as appearing plainly to Muhammad in revelation. He, as "our Spirit" (*rūḥanā*), was sent to Maryam (XIX, 17). He is called "the Holy Spirit" (*rūḥ al-ḥudus*) in XVI, 104 and Allāh aided 'Isā with the name (II, 84, 254; V, 109). Mikā'īl (variant Mikāl) is named (II, 92) as an angel of the same rank as Djibrīl; see a long and apparently true story of how his naming came about in al-Bayḍāwī (ed. Fleischer, i, 74, 18 ff.); in traditions he, with Djibrīl, appears to Muḥammad and instructs him; he does not laugh (Wensinck, 152b); Muḥammad called the two his *wazīrs* of the angels. To Isrāfīl [*q.v.*], the angel with the trumpet of resurrection, there is no reference either in the Qur'ān or in canonical traditions, but very much in eschatological legend. In Qur'ān, XLIII, 47, the tortured in hell call to the keeper of hell, "O Mālik!" and in XCVI, 18, the guards of hell are called al-Zabāniyya, an otherwise unused word, meaning apparently, "violent thrusters" (*LA*, xvii, 55); the number of these, LXXIV, 30, is nineteen, and they are asserted specifically to be angels, apparently to guard against the idea that they are devils; they are called "rough, violent" (*ghilāḥ shidād*). Another class of angels are those "Brought Near" [to Allāh], *al-muḥarrabūn* (IV, 170); these praise Allāh day and night without ceasing (XXI, 20); al-Bayḍāwī calls them also *al-'alawīyyūn* (on Qur'ān, II, 28; ed. Fleischer, i, 47, 23); and *al-karrūbiyyūn* (כרובים) on Qur'ān, IV, 170 (ed. Fleischer, i, 243, 25) as those that are around the *'arsh*. The same term, *muḥarrab*, is used of 'Isā (III, 40) as he is in the company of the angels nearest Allāh; cf. 'Isā for his semi-angelic character. At the beginning of the Sūra of the Angels (XXXV) there is a significant description: "making the angels messengers (*rusulan*), with wings two and three and four; He increases in the

creation what He wills"; this has had much effect on later descriptions and pictures. They are guardians (*ḥāfiẓīn*) over mankind, cognisant of what man does and writing it down (*kātibīn*; LXXXII, 10-12), in **XXI, 94** the writing down is ascribed to Allah himself. In **LXX, 4**; **LXXVIII, 38**; **XCVII, 4**, there occurs the very puzzling phrase "the angels and *al-rūḥ*". Al-Bayḍāwī on the first two passages shows how perplexing the distinction was found (ed. Fleischer, ii, 356,5, 383,4): "the *rūḥ* is an angel set over the spirits (*al-arwāḥ*); or he is the whole genus of spirits; or *Djibrīl*; or a creation (*khalk*) mightier than the angels"; cf. too, al-Ḳazwīnī's *ʿAdjāʾib*, ed. Wüstenfeld, 56. For spirits and the conception "spirit" in Islam, see *rūḥ*. In the [VI 217b] *Ḳurʾān* there is no reference to the two angels, Munkar and Nakīr, who visit the dead man in his grave, on the night after his burial, and catechise him as to his Faith. Thereafter, if he is an unbeliever, his grave becomes a preliminary hell, and if he is a believer, it becomes a preliminary purgatory from which he may pass at the Last Day into paradise; it may even, if he is a saint, be a preliminary paradise. This is called technically the Questioning (*suʾāl*) of Munkar and Nakīr and, also, the Punishment of the grave (*ʿadhāb al-kaḥr* [q.v.]). This doctrine, similar to the Lesser Judgement of Christian theology, is one of the *ṣamʿiyyāt* (to be believed on oral testimony) and is based on the implicit meaning of *Ḳurʾānic* passages (XIV, 32; XL, ii, 49; LXXI, 25) and upon explicit traditions (al-Taftāzānī's commentary on al-Nasafī's *ʿAḳāʾid*, Cairo 1321, 109; the *Mawāḳif* of al-ʿIdjī with commentary of al-Djurdjānī, Būlāḳ 1266, 590 ff.). There is a still fuller account and discussion by the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Ḳayyim al-Djawziyya (Brockelmann, II, 106, no. 23) in his *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*, Ḥaydarābād 1324, 62-144, §§ vi-xiv.

The angels are also called the heavenly host, or multitude (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*, XXXVII, 8; XXXVIII, 69) and guard the walls of heaven against the "listening" of the *ḍjinn* and *shayṭān*. See further on this under *siḥr*.

The *Ḳurʾān* lays stress on the absolute submission and obedience of the angels to Allah "To Him belong those who are in the heavens and in the earth and those who are with Him (*indahu*) are not too proud for His service (*ibāda*) and they do not become tired. They praise, night and day, without intermission" (XXI, 19, 20). "They do not anticipate Him in speech and they labour on His command (XXI, 27). At the creation of Adam they are distinguished in this respect from him and his future race: "while we praise Thee and sanctify Thee" (II, 28). Over the Fire there are set certain terrible and powerful angels, "they do not rebel against Allāh as to what He commands them and they do what they are commanded" (LVI, 6). But does this absolute obedience extend to impeccability (*ʿiṣma* [q.v.]?) The *Ḳurʾān* is emphatic as to their obedience, but is in contradiction as to their created nature and as to their relationship in that respect to the *ḍjinn* and to the *shayṭāns*. Thus in several passages in the *Ḳurʾān*, the story is told of the creation of man out of clay and that the angels were bidden by Allāh to prostrate themselves to him. This they all did "except *Iblīs*" (*illā Iblīs*; II, 32, VII, 10; XV, 31; XVIII, 48; XXXVIII, 74). *Iblīs*, therefore, must have been an angel; as al-Bayḍāwī says, "If not, the command to them did not apply to him and his being excepted from them was illegitimate" (ed. Fleischer, i, 51, 21). This would mean that the angels were not impeccable. But, again, in **XVIII, 48**, the statement is expanded, "except *Iblīs*; he was of the *ḍjinn*; so he departed from the command of his Lord" (*fasaḳa ʿan amri rabbiḥi*). Further, in **VII, 11**; **XXXVIII, 77**, *Iblīs* pleads in justification that man was created of clay (*ṭīn*) but he of fire (*nār*); and the *ḍjinn* are acceptedly created of fire; "fire of the *ṣamūm*" in **VI, 27**, "of a *māridj* of fire" in **LV, 14**. The meaning of *māridj* is unknown; *LA*, iii, 189, 13-19, gives a number of contradictory explanations, but it is probably an unidentified loan-word. *Iblīs* and the *ḍjinn*, then, were created of fire; but there is no statement in the *Ḳurʾān* as to the material out of which the angels were formed. A tradition traced back to ʿĀʾiṣha is the foundation of the accepted position that the angels were formed of light: "The Prophet said, 'The angels were formed of light (*khulīqat min nūr*) and the *ḍjānn* were [VI 218a] formed of a *māridj* of fire and Adam of that which was described to you" (Muslim, Constantinople 1333, vii, 226; al-Bayḍāwī, i, 52,4). Another difficulty in the doctrine of the impeccability of the angels is the *Ḳurʾānic* statement as to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* referred to above. These two angels are supposed to have yielded to sexual temptation, to be confined in a pit near *Bābil* and there to teach magic to men. But, it is answered, (a) the *Ḳurʾān* says nothing of their fall; (b) teaching magic is not practising magic; (c) they always first warn those who come to them, "We are only a temptation (*fitna*); so do not disbelieve" (*Ḳurʾān*, **II, 96**); cf. further, al-Taftāzānī on the *ʿAḳāʾid* of al-Nasafī, Cairo 1321, 133.

In al-Bayḍāwī on Ḳur'ān, II, 32, there is a long discussion of the angelic nature (ed. Fleischer, i, 51, 20 to 52,8) which, however, runs out in the despairing statement that knowledge on the point is with Allāh alone (*al-ʿilm ʿinda-llāhi*). Perhaps Iblīs was of the *ḍjinn* as to his actions (*fīʿlan*) but of the angels as to species (*nawʿ*). Also, Ibn ʿAbbās has a tradition that there was a variety (*darb*) of the angels who propagated their kind (this has always been regarded as an essential characteristic of the *ḍjinn* and of the *shayṭāns* as opposed to the angels) and who were called *al-ḍjinn*; and Iblīs was one of these. Or, that he was a *ḍjinnī* brought up among the angels and identified with them. Or, that the *ḍjinn* were among those commanded to prostrate themselves to Adam. Or, that some of the angels were not impeccable, although that was their characteristic in general, just as some men, e.g. the prophets, are guarded against sin but most are not. Further, perhaps a variety of the angels are not essentially different from the *shayṭāns* but differ only in accidents and qualities as men are virtuous or evil, while the *ḍjinn* unite both, and Iblīs was of this variety. The tradition from ʿĀʾiṣha is no answer to this explanation, for light and fire in it are not to be taken too precisely; they are used as in a proverb, and light is of the nature of fire and fire of light, they pass into another; fire can be purified into light and light obscured to fire. So al-Bayḍāwī.

With this should be compared the scholastic discussion in the *Mawākiḥ* of al-ʿIdjī, with the commentary of al-Djurdjānī, Būlāḳ 1266, 576. In it the objector to the ʿisma of the angels has two grounds": (a) their urging upon Allāh that he should not create Adam showed defects (slander, pride, malice, finding fault with Allāh) in their moral character; (b) that Iblīs was rebellious, as above. These grounds are then answered scholastically. Then various Ḳur'ānic texts, as above, on the submission and obedience of the angels are quoted. But it is pointed out that these texts cannot prove that all of them, at all times, are kept free from all sins. The point, therefore, cannot be absolutely decided. Individual exceptions under varying circumstances may have occurred, just as, while the *shayṭāns* as a class were created for evil (*khulīkū li 'l-sharr*), there is a definite tradition (*Sharḥ* by al-Māturīdī on *al-Fiḫ al-akbar* ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, Ḥaydarābād 1321, 25) of one Muslim *shayṭān*, a great-grandson of Iblīs, who appeared to Muḥammad and was taught by him certain sūras of the Ḳur'ān.

The story of Hārūt and Mārūt suggests that the angels possess sex, although they may not propagate their kind. But "they are not to be described with either masculinity or femininity" (*ʿAkāʾid* of al-Nasafī, Cairo 1321, 133). Al-Taftāzānī and the other commentators in this edition explain that there is no authority (*naḳl*) on this point and no proof by reason (*ʿaql*); it should, therefore, be left unconsidered and that, apparently, was the course followed by al-ʿIdjī [VI 218b] and al-Djurdjānī. They may have sex and not use it. In that respect, man, who has in himself the possibility of sin and must himself rule his appetites of lust (*shahwa*) and of anger (*ghadab*), has a higher potentiality of excellency than the angels (al-Bayḍāwī on II, 28, ed. Fleischer, i, 48, 28).

This leads to the second question as to the angels which scholastic theology has considered, the relative excellency of angels and men, and especially, of angels and prophets. This is stated shortly by al-Nasafī, 147: (a) "The Messengers (*rusul*) of mankind (*al-bashar*) are more excellent than the Messengers of the angels; and (b) the Messengers of the angels are more excellent than the generality of mankind; and (c) the generality of mankind are more excellent than the generality of the angels". Al-Taftāzānī develops the theme that there is general and indeed necessary agreement on the excellency of the messengers of the angels over mankind in general, but that the other two statements (a and c) will bear argument. He urges (a) the prostrating of the angels to Adam; (b) that Adam was taught all the names of things (Ḳur'ān, 29); (c) that Allāh "chose" (*iṣṭafā*) Adam and Nūḥ and the family of Ibrāhīm and the family of ʿImrān over all created things (*alā 'l-ʿālamīn*, III, 30); and (d) that mankind achieves excellencies and perfections of knowledge and action in spite of the hindrances of lust and anger. But the Muʿtazilīs and the "philosophers" (*al-falāsifa*) and some Ashʿarīs held the superior excellence of the angels. They urged (a) that they were spirits, stripped of materiality (*arwāḥ mudjarrada*), complete actually, free of even the beginnings of evils and defects, like lust and anger, and from the obscurities of form and matter (*ḡulumāt al-hāyūlā wa 'l-sūra*), capable of doing wonderful things, knowing events (*kawāʾin*), past and to come, without error. The answer is that this description is based on philosophical and not Muslim principles. (b) That the prophets learn from the

angels, as in *Qur'ān*, **XXVI, 193**; **LIII, 5**. The answer is that the prophets learn from Allāh and that the angels are only intermediaries. (c). That there are multiplied cases both in *Qur'ān* and in tradition where mention of the angels precedes that of the prophets. The answer is that precedence is because of their precedence in existence or because their existence is more concealed (*akhfā*) and, therefore, faith in them must be emphasised. (d) In *Qur'ān*, **IV, 170**, "*al-masīh* does not disdain to be an '*abd* to Allāh nor do the angels" must mean, because of linguistic usage, that the angels are more excellent than 'Īsā. The answer is that the point is not simple excellency but to combat the Christian position that 'Īsā is not an '*abd* but a son to Allāh. In the *Mawāḳif*, 572-8, there is a similar but much fuller discussion which involves a philosophical consideration of the endowment—mental, physical, spiritual—of all living creatures from immaterial spirits to the lower animals (*al-bahīma*).

In the '*Adjā'ib al-makhlūkat* of al-Ḳazwīnī, ed. Wüstenfeld, 55-63, there is an objective description of the angels in all their classes, in which the statements of *Qur'ān* and Sunna are adjusted to the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic universe with its spheres (*al-aflāk*), in accordance with al-Ḳazwīnī's general aim to give a picture of the created universe in its details and wonders. Yet apparently, while the angels possess the quality of "life" (*ḥayāt*) and are the inhabitants of the heavens and of the heavenly spheres (*sukkān al-samawāt*), they are not to be reckoned among the animals (*al-ḥayawān*). Al-Damīrī includes mankind and the *ḍjinn*, even the diabolic (*mutashayṭana*) *ḍjinn*, such as the *ghūl*, in his *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* but not the angels. Equally [VI 219a] acute and scholastic with the discussion in the *Mawāḳif*, and more spiritual than that by al-Ḳazwīnī, is al-Ghazālī's treatment of the mystery of the angelic nature in some of his specialist smaller treatises. For him, it is part of the general question of the nature of spirit to which his smaller *Maḍnūn* is devoted. See, too, the larger *Maḍnūn*, Cairo 1303, in *Rukn*, ii, 23 and the translation by W. H. T. Gairdner of his *Mishkāt al-anwār*, London, Royal Asiatic Society, 1924 *passim*. Muslim literature also takes account of non-Muslim ideas on the angels, such as those of "philosophers", Christians, dualists, idolaters. These will be found given briefly by al-Bayḍāwī on *Qur'ān*, **II, 28**, ed. Fleischer, i, 47, 18, and in more detail in al-Tahānāwī, *Dict. of techn. terms*, 1337 ff.

(D.B. MacDonald*)

2. In Shī'ism.

In Imāmī Shī'ism, angels are closely associated with the *Imāms*. Imāmī doctrine consistently upheld the dogma that the *Imāms*, just like the prophets, were more excellent before God than the angels with whom they shared in divine protection from sin and error ('isma), and leading theologians, like the *Shaykh* al-Mufīd, wrote treatises in support of it. The *Imāms* are, however, guided and aided by angels. According to a well-known Imāmī tradition, the *Imāms* could only hear the voices of the angels but could not see them, in contrast to the messenger prophets (*rusul*), who could see angels while awake and would converse with them, and to ordinary prophets who could hear and see them in their sleep. This was countered, however, by other traditions which affirmed that the *Imāms* also see the angels, and the restriction was held to apply only at the time of their receiving divine instruction through the angel. According to a tradition attributed to the *Imām* Ḍja'far, the angels regularly come to the *Imāms*, tread on their beds, attend their tables, come forth to them from every plant in its season, shake their wings above the children of the *Imāms*, prevent [VI 219b] beasts from reaching them and join them in every prayer. Angels will, according to Imāmī belief, appear in the sky at the advent of the Twelfth *Imām* and will call out his name; Gabriel and Michael will rally the faithful to swear allegiance to him. Imāmī doctrine adds to the Islamic angels of death, Munkar and Nakīr, who question and torment the dead in their tomb, a positive counterpart, Mubashshir and Bashīr, who are sent to the saintly dead to comfort them. According to some, they are the same pair as Munkar and Nakīr and merely change their function, while according to others they are a different pair.

In Ismā'īlism, the hierarchy of ranks (*ḥudūd*) of the spiritual world are sometimes described as angels. In particular, the triad of Ḍjadd, Faṭḥ and *Khayāl*, which mediates between the Universal Intellect and Soul and the prophets and *Imāms* in the physical world, are commonly identified with the archangels Ḍjibrā'īl,

Mikā'il and Isrāfīl. In an early Ismā'īlī cosmogony, seven Cherubim (*karūbiyya*) are named and described as having been created out of the light between the first two principles of the spiritual world. After them a group of twelve "spiritual beings (*rūḥāniyya*)" was created to form their counterpart. In later Ṭayyibī Ismā'īlism, the third to ninth Intellects of the spiritual world are called the seven Cherubim. Ismā'īlī doctrine, however, also recognises angels of a more conventional character. They are described as being all of a single substance, with only their names varying in accordance with their functions. Some inhabit the spiritual world, others the heavenly spheres, and still others the physical world in order to preserve all its regions. They are seen only by prophets and those who rise spiritually to become like prophets.

(W. Madelung)

1. In the Qur'ān and in Sunnī Islam.

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arts. *djabrā'il/djibrīl*, *hārūt wa-mārūt*, *isrāfīl*, *'izrā'il*, *mikāl*.

2. In Shī'ism.

The Imāmiyya: al-Madjlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*

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