THE ASCENSION AND THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL[1]

The problems connected with John's specific use of the word *hypsoun, hypsôthênai* (Jn. 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34) need no introduction. In the present essay we intend to study four aspects of the question:

1. The specific theological connotation of "Exaltation" in the Fourth Gospel.
2. The association of the "Exaltation" of Christ and His Ascension into heaven.
3. The Aramaic terms underlying John's Greek words.
4. The origin of the Johannine usage.

All four questions, we hope to show, are intimately connected and are considered separately merely for the purpose of clarity.

I. THE THEOLOGICAL CONNOTATION OF *hypsoun, hypsôthênai.*

The Fourth Gospel uses the word *hypsoun* or its passive form *hypôsthênai*, in three passages (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34) and in each instance the verb is predicated of the Son of Man whom the Jews are "to lift up" (8:28) or who must be "lifted up" (3:14; 12:32-34). In each case, too, the words are spoken by Christ himself. In this peculiar mode of speech Christ is clearly referring to his death, and to his death by crucifixion. Christ's own words in 3:14 and John's reflection in 12:33 place this beyond all doubt. More than the mere fact of his death is, however, implied by the word. By his "Exaltation" the Son of Man becomes the Saviour and centre of the new community of believers. "So must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14b-15); "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then will you know that I am he . . ." (8:28a); "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (12:32a).

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[1] This is the development of a theme already broached in *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (Analecta Biblica, 27; Pontifical Biblical Institute: Rome, 1966), pp. 145-49, where a more extensive bibliography can be found.

2. THE "EXALTATION" ASSOCIATED WITH THE ASCENSION.

A point not generally noted by expositors is that in 3:14 and 8:28 the lifting up of the Son of Man comes immediately after reference to his ascension (3:13) and to the fact that heaven is his proper dwelling place (8:23-26). The transition from one theme to the other is scarcely fortuitous and merits consideration in any effort tending to determine the origin of the Johannine usage.

The first occurrence of the word is found in Christ's discourse to Nicodemus (3:14) immediately after Our Lord's words reminding him that "no one has ascended (*anabebêken*) into heaven but he who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (3:13).

The context of the second occurrence of the term (8:28) is somewhat parallel to the first. As in 3:13f, so too here, Christ is referring to his ascension in language the Jews cannot grasp.

> Again he said to them, "I go away (*hypagô*), and you will seek me and die in your sin; where I am going (*hypagô*), you cannot come" (21). Then said the Jews, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'where I am going, you cannot come'" (22). He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above . . ." (23) . . . They did not understand . . . (27). So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he . . ." (28).

In both these texts, then, Christ passes from mention of his ascension to that of his being "lifted up". That the transition is not accidental will appear clearer when we have considered the two following points.

3. THE ARAMAIC UNDERLYING *hypsôthênai*.

Authors have for some time sought to determine the Aramaic word underlying Jn. 12:32-34, a term which gave rise to the crowd's question in 12:34. In 12:32 Jesus told the Jews that when he would be lifted up (*hypsôthô*) from the earth he would draw all men to himself. In the following verse John interprets this as referring to the manner of Christ's death, i.e. by crucifixion. It is a true reflection of the author but need not be the exact meaning of the word used by Christ. The crowd, apparently, also took the words of Christ to refer to his death, as they remark that they understood from the Law that the Messiah is to remain forever, and find a difficulty in the fact that one who has implicitly announced himself as the Messiah is to be lifted up. The problem facing anyone who holds these to be the words of Christ and of his audience, or at least to represent an Aramaic original, is to find an Aramaic term which means "to die", and which can, at the same time, be translated "to be lifted up", "exalted".

Various Aramaic words have been put forward. E. A. Abbott[2]

[2] *From Letter to Spirit* (=Diatesserica, part III), London, 1903, note 3 to [1003 c,] p. 360.

believed the word rendered by *hypsoun* in 3:14, and here used in the passive, was *zeqap*. The same view was advanced by C. Lattey in French[3] in 1912, and in English[4], in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, 1918-1919. In the same issue of the English journal F. C. Burkitt raised objections to the view of E. A. Abbott. According to Burkitt[5] "the 'lifting up' implied in *zqp* and its derivatives is of the nature of 'fixing', 'hanging', 'staking', or 'straightening', hardly ever of 'raising to a higher level' "[6]. The word, then, does not correspond to "exalt" in the Johannine sense and could not be used of a "lifting up" such as the ascension was.

Burkitt himself[7] believes we have a word exactly corresponding to *hypsoun* in the Aramaic term *'rym* and in the Heb. *hrym*. J. Bonsirven,[8] too, opts for the *Ithp*. of this word, i.e. *'trm'*, as the equivalent of John's *hypsôthênai*. The difficulty with this word is that, while it does suit the meaning "to be lifted up", "to be extolled, exalted", there is no evidence that it was used in the sense of "to be crucified" or "to die". And Jn. 12:34, we may recall, appears to imply that the Jews took the word underlying *hypsôthênai* as referring to Christ's death.

The Aramaic scholar C. C. Torrey[9] considered that the word underlying the Greek of Jn. 12:32-34 was *'stlq*, the reflexive of *slq*. In the reflexive this word means "to be raised up" (in lofty, literary contexts), and (in more common usage) "to go away", "to depart". In Jn. 12:34, then, the Jews would have taken Christ's words of 12:32 to mean: "When I depart from the land" (i.e. into foreign parts), and would have raised as objection that, according to their beliefs, the Messiah was to remain (in Palestine) forever.

The first meaning (i.e. "to be exalted") of the Aramaic word chosen by Torrey fits the Johannine context very well. The same can scarcely be said of the second signification of the term, i.e. "to go away". Jn. 12:33 is a major difficulty for this meaning of the word in the preceding verse. The author of the reflection we find in 12:33—and we can presume he knew Aramaic and understood the significance of what Christ had said—took the Semitic equivalent of *hypsôthênai* of 12:32 to refer to Christ's death, if not to the exact manner of this death.

[3] "Le verbe *hypsoun* dans saint Jean", *Recherches des sciences religieuses* 3 (1912) 597f.
[4] "The Semitisms of the Fourth Gospel", *Journal of Theological Studies*", 20 (1918-19) 330-36, esp. p.335.
[5] "On 'Lifting up' and 'Exalting' ", *ibid.*, pp.336-38.
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, p.337.
[8] "Les aramaïsmes de s. Jean l'évangéliste?", *Biblica* 30 (1949) 405-32, esp. 430.
[9] ' "When I am Lifted up from the Earth' John 12, 32", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932) 320-22.

We believe, however, that C. C. Torrey has chosen the right Aramaic word to explain *hypsôthênai*, but, unfortunately, has stopped short of the meaning that really suits the context, i.e. *'stlq* in the meaning of "to die".

Slq[10] is a Hebrew and Aramaic word with a rather wide range of meanings. According to the lexica, not all the forms of the word in one language correspond exactly to that of the other. It is not easy to say how far, in the spoken language, this was the case, but one may presume that a certain amount of contamination would have taken place, and that the meaning attested for one language may well have been used in the other, though we have no evidence of this in the lexica or written sources. We give here the relevant meanings of the root *slq* as found in Jastrow's dictionary.

1. Qal: "to go up; to go away". Peal: the same, and "to rise".
2. Piel: (a) "to remove; cause cessation; suspend".
   (b) "to lift up; to raise, esp. to tuck up the trail of a garment"; part. pass., "to be lifted up; too short". Pail: "to remove".
3. (Heb.) Hithpael, Nithpa.: "to be dismissed, removed; to rise;" esp. (with or without *min ha-'ôlam*) "to be called away from this world, *to die*" (*Tos. Hog.* 2, 5; *Gen. R.*, 62; *Ex. R.*, 52 and frequently in this sense).
   (Aram.) Ithpa., Ithpe.: "to remove one's self, rise, go away; to be removed; taken away; *to die*".

Jastrow gives no instance of the Aramaic form bearing the sense "to die" and neither do Levy or Buxtorf. It may be this fact that led C. C. Torrey to omit this meaning of the word in his study. Yet, from the fact that the corresponding Hebrew form is attested in this sense, one could surmise that the Aramaic *Ithp.* could also bear it. It is, moreover, no question of mere surmise as we find the Aramaic *'stlq* used in the sense of "to die" in the Palestinian Targum[11] to the

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[10] For occurrences and the meaning of this word see J. Buxtorf, *Lexicon chaldaicum, talmudicum et rabbinicum*, ed. Basle, 1640, cols. 1490-92; ed. Fischer, Leipzig, 1875, pp. 747f.; J. Levy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim*, pp. 167f.; *id.*, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, (2nd ed. 1924; reprint 1963, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft: Darmstadt), vol. 3, pp. 536f.; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* Pardes Publishing House: New York, 1950), p.997.
[11] For the special importance of this see work referred to in note 1; cf. also "Targumic Studies", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*", 28 (1966) 1-19; "The Aramaic Translations: a Newly recognised Aid for New Testament Study", *Scripture* 18 (1966) 47-56.

Pentateuch (Fragment Targum[12], Dt. 32:1 and Neofiti[13], Nm. 11:26 and twice in Nm 21:1).

This Aramaic word suits Jn. 12:32-34 admirably. Christ told the Jews that when "lifted up" (*hypsôthô*) from the earth he would draw all men to himself, which the author of the Fourth Gospel (Jn. 12:33) takes to refer to his crucifixion and the crowd (12:34) to refer to his death. If the word used by Christ was '*stlq*, the Greek rendering and the crowd's question are explained. The fundamental meaning of the Semitic word (*slq*) is "to go up, to raise". The *Ithpe.* would mean "to be raised up, to die", which is sufficient reason for the question posed by the crowd (12:34) and for the interpretation of 12:33 as well. The Greek word *hypsôthênai* is a literal rendering of the Semitic, but, of course, does not imply 'death' as the Semitic word does.

EVIDENCE FROM LUKE 9, 51 AND OTHER SOURCES.

Jn. 12:32-34 is not the sole text indicating that behind *hypsoun*, *hypsôthênai*, in the twofold sense of "death" and "glory", there stands the Aramaic '*stlq*. The Aramaic *Ithp.* is the passive of *slq*, "to go up" and literally means "to be made to go up"; "to be taken up". It could equally well be rendered in Greek by *anelêmphthê*. This word is frequent in the N.T. and is the usual biblical expression for being taken into heaven (Mk. 16:19; Acts 1:2.11.22; 10:16; 1 Tim. 3:16; cp. 1 Mac. 2:58; Ben Sira 48:9; 49:14; 2(4) Kgs. 2:11). John, using the active voice, has *anabainô* (6:2; 20;17; cf. Acts 2;34; Eph. 4;8-10).

In the *Pss. of Sol.* 4, 20[14] we find death expressed by the strange word *analêmpsis*, "assumption"[15], The "receptio" of *Assump. Mosis* 10, 12 [16],

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[12] An English translation of this has been made by J. W. Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with the Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum*, vol. II for Leviticus-Deuteronomy, (Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts: London, 1865).

[13] This complete text of the Targum to the Pentateuch was recognised for what it really is in 1956. It is in the Vatican Library but was falsely catalogued as the Targum of Onkelos; see further *New Testament and Pal. Targ.*, pp. 28f. It is now being translated into English and should appear in English dress next year. The text of Genesis has already been translated (June 1966).

[14] Greek text with French rendering in J. Viteau, *Les Psaumes de Salomon. Introduction, texte grec et traduction* (Documents pour l'étude de la Bible, Letouzey et Ané: Paris, 1911), pp. 266f. English translation by Gray in R. H. Charles' *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1913; reprint 1963), p. 637.

[15] Outside of the *Pss. of Sol.* 4, 20 and Lk 9:51 the word does not occur in this sense in Greek; see Liddel-Scott-Jones *s.v.* p. 111a.

[16] English translation by R. H. Charles, *The Assumption of Moses* (Adam and Charles Black: London, 1897). This work, (in appendices) has "the Latin Version of the Assumption of Moses critically revised and emended together with the unemended Latin text of the sixth century MS. in the Milan Library". The Latin text to 10, 12

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in apposition with "mors", may also be none other than a synonym for "death". The *Psalms of Solomon* are translated from a Semitic original, containing a number of translation Greek substantives that are proof of this[17]. What more natural than to assume that *analêmpsis* is another of these, derived from the Hebrew or Aramaic root *'slq*, "to be taken up", "to die"?

The same is true of Lk. 9:51, occurring in a passage which is very probably translated from an Aramaic original.[18] *Analêmpsis* of this verse refers to Christ's death in Jerusalem, but embraces the entire process of Christ's "exaltation", i.e. his Resurrection and Ascension as well as his Death. In other words, *analêmpsis* of Lk. 9:51 has the same twofold meaning of "Death" and "Exaltation" as *hypsoun, hypsôthênai* of the Fourth Gospel. The Greek words of both evangelists would then represent a single Aramaic *'slq*.

It is possible that behind *hypsoun* of Jn. 8:28 there stands the Hebrew or Aramaic intensive form of *slq*. The qal or fundamental meaning, "to rise", would have as intensive (Piel, Pail), "to lift up, to raise". This we find verified for the Heb. Piel, but no example of the corresponding Aramaic Pail in this sense is given in the lexica. This, of course, does not mean it did not bear it. We can recall what has just been said of the Ithp. form *'slq*.

It may be objected that the Semitic word *slq* or *'slq* does not, *per se*, connote crucifixion, which form of death is seen in *hypsôthênai* and *hypsoun* of the Fourth Gospel. This can be granted,- but, then, neither do the Greek words, and the Aramaic one, with its natural meaning of ("to lift up"), "to die", is much more apt for the purpose than the Greek one.

has "a morte receptionem", emended to "a morte—receptione—m(ea)" (op. cit., pp. 88f.). *Receptio* is taken as the rendering of *analêmpsis*. Charles, however, *ibid*. p. 44, followed by Carl Clemen in E. Kautsch's *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, vol. 2 (Mohr[Siebeck]: Tübingen, 1900), pp. 312, 328, takes "receptio" as a later insertion,—added when the original text was glossed to make the work refer to Moses' assumption into heaven. "Receptio" of 10, 12 would then mean "assumption into heaven" rather than "death". Schmidt and Merx (referred to in Kautsch, p. 328, note e), however, took "mors" and "receptio" as a double rendering of the same phrase, and probably rightly so. It is possible that we have another instance of "to be taken up"="to die" in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*, Fragment I, 1, 19: "And the Lord cried out aloud saying: My power, *my* power [=*Heli, Heli* of Mt. 27:46?], thou hast forsaken me. And when he had *so* said, *he was taken up*" (in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1955), p. 91). An English translation of *Ass. Mos.* 10, 12 can also be seen in Charles, *Apoc. and Pseud.*, II, 422.

[17] Cf. Viteau, op. cit. (note 14), pp. 105-25, esp. pp. 109-11; *Apoc. and Pseud.*, II, p. 627.

[18] Cf., e.g., A. Plummer, *The Gospel according to S. Luke*, (International Critical Commentary, Clark: Edinburgh, 4th ed. 1901, 1905 reprint), p. 260.

PLAY ON ARAMAIC WORD IN TARGUM TO NM. II, 26; 21,I.

It is worthy of note that the Aramaic word *'stlq* is the subject of word-play[19] in two of the three instances in which it occurs in the Palestinian Targum. The first is in Neofiti Nm. 11:26 which runs as follows:

> "Behold, quail ascend (*h' slwy slqyn*) from the sea .... Behold, Moses the prophet will be taken up (*mstlq*) from the camp (i.e. will die). . . . Gog and Magog ascend (*slqyn*) on Jerusalem . . ."

The same is true of Neofiti Nm. 21:1 which speaks of the deaths of Aaron and Miryam.

> And when the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who was living in the south, heard that Aaron, the pious man for whose sake (or "merit") the clouds of Glory used to lead the Israelites, had died (*'stlq*) and that Miryam, the prophetess, for whose sake (or "merit") the well used to ascend (*slqt*) for them, had died (*'stlqt*, "was taken up"), and that Israel had reached the road by which the spies came up (*slyqw*) . . .

This word, then, was already the subject of word-play in Jewish liturgical texts and could very easily be taken over by Christ or St. John.

ARAMAIC WORD-PLAY IN JN. 7:33-35; 8:21-28?

The word-play on the Aramaic words *slq*, *'stlq* may well be found outside the three passages of John where *hypsoun*, *hypsôthênai* occur. Two other passages, in large sense parallel, merit consideration. These are 7:33-35; 8:21-28, where Christ's references to his departure (*hypagô*) are not fully understood by the Jews and leads to observations, just as *hypsôthênai* in 12:22-34 did.

Hypagein is a favourite verb in the Fourth Gospel where it is often used of Jesus' departure, of his "going to God" (cf. 7:33; 8:14.21; 13:3.33-36; 14:4f.28; 16:5.10.17). We may recall that "to depart, to go away" is one of the usual meanings of *'stlq*, and that chosen by C. C. Torrey as the Aramaic term underlying *hypsôthênai* in Jn. 12:32-34. Since the fundamental meaning of the Aramaic word is "to ascend", it was an appropriate one for Jesus' withdrawal from men and of his return to the Father.

If we take it that Jn. 7:33-35 originally stood in Aramaic we find a series of word-play comparable to that of Neofiti Nm. 11:26.

> Then Jesus said: "I shall be with you a little longer and then I will go (*hypagô; mstlq?*) to him who sent me . . ." The Jews said to one another: "Where does this man intend to go (*poreuesthai, lmstlq'?*) that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go (*poreuesthai, lmstlq'?*) to the Dispersion among the Greeks . . .".

[19] For this feature of the Palestinian Targum see M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2nd ed., 1954), pp. 241-44.

8:21-28 merits special attention as, in the final verse, there occurs one of the three references to Christ's exaltation (*hypsoun*). If we accept an Aramaic original[20], we find another series of word-play and an explanation of the Jews' misunderstanding of mysterious words of Christ. This time the Jews' questioning is different from that of 7:33-35, though Christ's words occasioning it are the same.

> Again he said to them: "I go away (*hypagô mstlq?*), and you will seek me and die (*apothaneisthe; mstlqyn?*) in your sin; where I am going (*hypagô; mstlq?*) you cannot come" (8:21). (Christ is, of course, referring to his ascension).

Christ now answers in mysterious language that his proper home is heaven, implying that, by his departure (*hypagô, mstlq*), he meant his ascension (*mstlqwt'*). They failed to understand him.

> Then said the Jews, "Will he kill himself, (*mstlq*="to die"), since he says, 'where I am going you cannot come' " (8:22).
> So Jesus said: "When you have lifted up (*hypsôsête; tslqwn?*) the Son of Man, then will you know that I am he . . .".

4. THE ORIGIN OF THE JOHANNINE USAGE.

If we accept that behind *hypsôthênai* of Jn. 12:32-34 there stands the Aramaic '*stlq* we find an explanation of the rich overtones of this Greek word in the Fourth Gospel. The Greek term connotes glory; the same is probably true of the Aramaic one "to be lifted up", ("to be exalted") can easily be given this signification. We may have an example of this in Mt. 11:23 (par. Lk. 10:15) where *hypsôthêsê*, in the sense of being "exalted", "glorified" ("shall you be exalted to heaven") reflects '*lh* of the Hebrew Text of Is. 14:13. In the Targum this word is rendered by the Imperfect of *slq*. When John chose to express the death of Christ by *hypsôthênai* (='*stlq?*) he did so in order to bring out the connection of the death of the Son of Man with his ultimate "exaltation", his glory.

He probably had deeper reasons for using this particular word and for linking the death and glory of Christ. We have seen how the ideas of the Ascension of Christ and his "Exaltation" on the cross are connected in 3:13f. and, albeit in a less evident manner, in 8:21-28. The reason is clear, in our understanding of the Aramaic background to the passages referring to Christ's exaltation, i.e. the Aramaic underlying reference to the Ascension and Exaltation is the same.

The Aramaic for "ascend" is *slq*, and when Christ said he was to ascend (*anabainô*) into heaven (3:13) the Aramaic word he used would almost certainly have been from the root *slq*; it is the term used in the Oriental Aramaic of the Peshitta to render the Greek word in Jn.

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[20] On the question of the Aramaic origin of the Fourth Gospel, see bibliography in *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, pp. 145f., note 61.

3:13; 6:62; 20:17; Rm. 10:6; Eph. 4:8 etc. In Christian Palestinian Aramaic it is the word used in Rm. 10:6[21]. In Jewish Aramaic it is the word used for Moses' ascent to heaven (Targum Psalm 68:18, used in Eph. 4:8[22]; Targum of Palestine Dt. 30:12-14, which may underlie Rm. 10:6)[23].

As we have noted, outside of John the New Testament uses the passive (*anelêmphthê*) when speaking of Christ's Ascension, i.e. he was assumed, taken up, into heaven. This in Aramaic, would be expressed by '*stlq*, the passive of *slq*. It is the word used by the Peshitta and by Christian Palestinian Aramaic texts[24] (e.g. 1 Tim. 3:16) to render the Greek. From this it follows that '*stlq* can mean either the death of Christ or his "assumption in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16) to the right hand of God.

This being so, it was only natural, even apart from theological reasons, that the death and ascension of Christ should have been conjoined in early Christian theology, expressing its beliefs through the medium of Aramaic. It is this wealth of meaning we find in Jn. 3:14; 8:28 and especially in 12:32-34. In the last-mentioned text the Greek has wished to retain the richness of meaning of the original by rendering the Aramaic '*stlq* by *hypsôthênai*. Lk. 9:51 has, apparently, behind it the same Aramaic term, and there, too, as in John, it had the same dual meaning of Death-Assumption-in Glory. Unlike John, however, Luke or his Greek source rendered the Aramaic by another Greek word. The identity of concepts and the ambivalence of the presumed Aramaic term indicate that both Luke and John are dependent on the same Aramaic tradition.

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[21] Cf. *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary* edited by Agnes Smith Lewis (C. J. Clay and Sons: London, 1897), p. 5.
[22] Cf. *op. cit.*, (note 20 above), p. 79.
[23] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 70-79.
[24] Cf. Lewis, *op. cit.* (note 21), p. 21.