

# Inscriptions on the Icon of the Descent into Hell and the Resurrection of Christ with the Story of the Good Thief

Daniel E. Collins and Raoul N. Smith



Figure 1. Descent into Hell and the Resurrection of Christ from the collection of the Museum of Russian Icons.

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## About the Icon

The Museum of Russian Icons has a large icon of the Descent into Hell and the Resurrection of Christ (Figure 1, R2011.90, circa 1650) with an added narrative of the Good Thief. This paper presents a transcription of texts inscribed on the icon and their translations in preparation of a series of future analyses. For placement of text on the icon, see Figure 2 (Russian) and Figure 3 (English translation).

## Top

- [1] И дѣиѣ ѿверзоша<sup>1</sup> врата ꙗже рабонини в ра<sup>2</sup> ѿбруше  
илию ꙗже еноха и бесѣдова с ними ѿхрѣтове страсти и о  
себѣ сказа ѿ. Како его ꙗже спасе ꙗже свѣты се ра<sup>3</sup> посла ꙗ  
како емѣ вѣбрани пламѣноѣ орѣжие ѿ же показа емѣ  
вѣличны крѣстъ. Знамение и видѣе в ра<sup>4</sup> Прѣвницѣ [sic]<sup>1</sup> же
- And immediately the gates were opened, and the  
robber went into Paradise. And he found Elijah and  
Enoch and talked with them about Christ's suffering,  
and about himself he told them how the Lord had  
saved him and sent him to that holy Paradise, and  
how the fiery weapon had forbidden him [to enter];  
but he showed him the Lord's cross, the Sign, and  
entered into Paradise.  
The righteous ones
- [2] вшѣше в ра<sup>5</sup> [о] рѣпоша рабонника вси на зрѣ<sup>6</sup> ѿи  
вжасошася глаголю кѣмо ꙗже введе семо и кѣмо ꙗже врата  
ѿвѣзе [sic]<sup>2</sup> а прѣ на видѣе егда ли и<sup>3</sup> зде увити пришѣ  
[sic] еси или украси чѣмо прѣ на семо незавидѣ ꙗже рцы  
на ѿ ꙗже вѣща рече Прилижитеса кѣне<sup>4</sup> Да повѣдаю вѣ  
не за дѣло мое видѣо семо не бѣ [sic] во дѣ
- having entered Paradise, found the robber. All gazing  
upon him were awe-struck. They were saying, "Who  
brought you here? And who opened the gates for  
you? And [if] you entered before us, when [was it]?  
And have you come here before us<sup>5</sup> to kill or steal  
something? We do not resent your coming here  
before us; tell us." Answering them, he said, "Come  
near me, so that I may tell you. [It was] not due to my  
action(s) [that] I came here, for I was not wor-
- [3] ꙗже таковога свѣла о [sic] неіреченѣга рѣта но вѣка  
чѣвколюбе мѣлтивѣ введе ꙗже семо понеже спѣвникъ емѣ  
вѣ до смерти ꙗже пострада зѣ. прѣ рцы же слышѣше  
ѿ рабонника прославиша бѣ дарованны ради даровъ  
Грѣшникомъ
- thy of such light from the ineffable Paradise; but  
the Lord, the merciful Lover of mankind, brought me  
here because I was His companion unto death, which  
I suffered for Him."<sup>6</sup> The prophets, having heard  
from the robber, glorified God for the gifts given to  
sinners.

1 Sc. Прѣвницѣ.

2 Sc. ѿверзе (ѿвѣрзе). The initial graph is shaped like a horseshoe with the opening at the top, which is abnormal for both о and w. The author would suggest that it is actually an omega with a missing loop and that a superscript τ in the form τ (cf. Čerepnin 365, τ no. 7–9) which is attested elsewhere in the inscription, has been misinterpreted as the first component of the supralinear<sup>7</sup>.

3 The two clear components are joined with a diagonal crosshair; hence the author is interpreting this as a *vjaz*-like ligature of л и и. Syntactically, this makes sense, given that the narrative sentences in this text typically begin with conjunctions.

4 The superscript м appears as a straight diagonal—a form known in 17th-century cursive; cf. Čerepnin 365, м no. 7).

5 Literally, 'And before us hither we do not envy you.'

6 Tentative reading. If ꙗже is the direct object of пострада, it must be a non-agreeing *relativum generale*; the agreeing form would have to be да ꙗже юже (ѿже). The prepositional phrase зѣ cannot be a time expression, since it does not mention a time interval; in the meaning 'after, following', зѣ takes the instrumental, which would not be rendered with a superscript<sup>8</sup> alone. In colligation with 'suffer', зѣ plus the instrumental ordinarily means 'for the sake of.'

## Right

[4] егда рѣ  
вѣ инѣ  
принде к<sup>4</sup>  
нейречѣно<sup>8</sup>  
раю и вѣбра  
нини емѣ пла  
мѣное орѣ  
жне ꙗ отве  
ре врапа  
и ѣде<sup>7</sup> в раі,<sup>8</sup>

When the robber came up to the ineffable Paradise, the flaming weapon forbade him [to enter], and he opened the gates, and he went into Paradise.

[5] Посла гѣ  
рѣвѣнника<sup>9</sup>  
во спѣи рѣ<sup>10</sup>  
и дастъ емѣ  
крѣное знаменіе,

The Lord sent the robber into the holy Paradise and gave him the Sign of the Cross.

[6] Гѣ прѣде  
ко врапѣ<sup>11</sup>  
адѣ со мно  
жествѣ<sup>11</sup>  
аглскимъ<sup>11</sup>  
силамъ  
прѣтеча  
ху силы  
гѣ ѣ вѣмѣ<sup>12</sup>  
те врапа  
кѣзи ва  
ца [sic] и вѣме  
те да<sup>13</sup> ꙗ вѣ<sup>13</sup>  
чнѣѣ ꙗ вѣ<sup>13</sup>  
де цѣрь сла  
вы ѣ же  
ѣзвѣнѣрь  
гѣголѣ кѣ  
ѣсть цѣрь сла  
вы силы гѣѣ  
рѣша Гѣ крѣ  
пѣ и силенъ  
Гѣ силѣ вѣ  
врани тоѣ<sup>14</sup>  
ѣ[с]ть цѣрь  
славы,

The Lord came to the gates of Hell with a multitude of angelic forces. The Lord's forces ran in front: "Raise up your gates, O princes!" And the infernal gates were raised, and the King of Glory came in. Hell, from within, [was] saying, "Who is the King of Glory?" The Lord's forces said, "The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle—He is the King of Glory!"

7 The transliteration of the supralinear mark is tentative.

8 The final letter resembles a small *spiritus* atop a larger one.

9 The supralinear mark is tentative.

10 There may a faint supralinear mark above the superscript и.

11 The *titlo* curves downward over the гл.

12 The ꙗ is shaped like a tilde rotated 90° to the left. Cf. Čerepnin 375, ꙗ no. 2–3.

13 The ꙗ is shaped like a tilde rotated 90° to the left; it has a small crossbar or dot at about half-mast.

14 The ꙗ is shaped like a tilde rotated 90° to the left.

[7] ѿ Ангѣлѣ гнѣ,  
 ѿвали ка  
 мѣнь ѿдъ  
 верерѣ [sic] гро  
 ба бѣ ини  
 же спрежа  
 хѣ гдѣ  
 страха  
 ѿмертве  
 ша,

The angel of the Lord removed the stone from the door of the tomb. The soldiers guarding the Lord seemed dead from fear.

## Left

[8] Гдѣ повѣ<sup>15</sup>  
 дѣтѣвола  
 свѣтазлапи  
 ї предѣлпи дѣ  
 и обѣзупи<sup>16</sup> во  
 ѿнѣ вѣчнѣнѣ  
 дѣтѣво<sup>17</sup> плача  
 ѿ глѣтѣ поми  
 лѣи мѣта спрѣдѣ  
 аде попрѣдѣ  
 мен ѣ ради не  
 ѿвѣзѣ вра<sup>18</sup>  
 дѣдеже во<sup>17</sup>  
 рѣлѣста вѣпѣ  
 аде же р[е]че  
 Ко дѣтѣвол[ѣ]  
 Преглавѣниче  
 Вѣрзѣдѣ рѣ  
 вѣдѣниче дѣге<sup>18</sup>  
 лскимъ Си  
 лѣ і стѣи по  
 смехѣлѣ<sup>19</sup> не  
 рѣ ли тебѣ не  
 противитѣста  
 емѣ

The Lord commanded [His servants] to bind the Devil and consign him to Hell and throw [him] into the eternal fire. The Devil [was] crying and saying, “Have mercy on me, the wandering one, o Hell; exert yourself for my sake; do not open the gates until He goes back!” But Hell said to the Devil, “Three-headed Verzaul, corrupter of the angelic forces and mocker of the saints, didn’t I tell you not to oppose Him?”

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- 15 Sc. повѣлѣ, with *jat* indicated by a *erok* (Čerepnin 375, no. 26). The supralinear mark indicated by <sup>ˆ</sup> in the transliteration looks like an elongated shallow *z*. The superscript *л* may have been corrected from an *а*.
- 16 This form is evidently a corruption. The expected infinitive of the verb *обѣрѣти* (*обѣрѣ-*) ‘throw would be *обѣрѣшати*. Conceivably, during the copying process, a passage of direct speech with imperatives was converted into a narrative report with infinitives embedded under *повѣлѣ* ‘command-<sub>AOR.3sg</sub>’. On the basis of the imperative *обѣрѣти* (or, more archaically, *обѣрѣти*), and *i*-stem infinitive was then produced by back-formation.
- 17 The superscript *н* in *дѣдеже* differs from the form usual for this scribe in that the right vertical is curved; the result looks like a ligature of *н* and *е*. Cf. Čerepnin 365, n no. 5.
- 18 The more usual abbreviation for ‘angelic’ is *дѣтѣлѣкѣ*. According to Uspenskij, this was a salient abbreviation for Muscovite bookmen and, later, for Old Believers; omission of the *titlo* was supposed to signify a fallen angel. Here, the abbreviation may be an archaism, or it may reflect a certain lack of ecclesiastical sophistication on the part of the scribe.
- 19 The superscript *л* appears in a form that Čerepnin (366) considers typical for 16th-century cursive, with the left leg curving around to join the apex of the right (ibid.: 365, л no. 8).

[9] Гдѣ<sup>с</sup> изве  
де правѣні  
ковъ<sup>с</sup> изо  
ада прѣи  
споднаго  
изо<sup>с</sup> мы  
Кромешныѣ  
поспещни  
цы моі иди  
е в рѣ<sup>с</sup> со  
ндоу Ба бо  
ради приидѣ  
сѣмо,

The Lord led forth the righteous from the uttermost hell, from the outer darkness: “My helpers, come to Paradise with Me; for I have come here for your sake.”

## Bottom

[10] ѿбне приспѣпль Гѣ Врата адова сокрушиша<sup>с</sup> и верѣта  
желѣнаѣ сломиша<sup>с</sup> и затворы ѿпада оша и основанія  
пѣничиѣта порѣасоша<sup>с</sup> противни силы бежати начаша  
дрѣ друга рѣахѣ и дрѣ друга прѣпыкающе<sup>с</sup> 20 др прѣруго<sup>с</sup>  
спешахѣ і ѿжасоша<sup>с</sup>

As soon as the Lord entered, the gates of Hell were destroyed, and the iron bolt was broken, and the locks fell away, and the prison foundations were shaken. The enemy forces began to run; they were shoving one another and jostling one another and rushing in front of each other and were terrified.

[11] ѿблѣдиша<sup>с</sup> 21 ѿ недомышляюще вкѣ<sup>с</sup> и воспрепаша,  
ови 22 взираѣа споидѣ, иниѣ на коленома лица зѣриваше  
ѿ и ни па яко мрпвы, 23 иниѣ ѿжасѣ ѿдѣжими иниѣ в  
прѣрачнѣи вертепы ісчезахѣ 24 погда в оужасе Сеи хѣ<sup>с</sup>  
[sic] 25 глвы 26 ѣпы глгаше 27 Кпо се епъ 28 црѣ сѣвы 29

They grew pale, not understanding altogether, and began to tremble. Some, gazing, are standing still; others, on their knees, were covering their faces; others had fallen like [they were] dead; others were overcome with terror; others were disappearing into ghostly<sup>30</sup> caverns. At that time, all [were] in terror, and Christ at the head of the saints was saying, “Who is this King of Glory—

20 The supralinear mark involves a short slash plus a long back-slash. I have interpreted this as a form of superscript *u* or *l* known in 16th and 17th-century cursive, in which there are two parallel back-slashes, with the left one shorter than the right—sometimes to such an extent that it looks like a period (cf. Čerepnin 362, *u* no. 6; *ibid.*: 365, *l* no. 7). Syntactically, it makes good sense for there to be a conjunction here, as in the preceding clause.

21 The initial supralinear has the form <sup>с</sup>. Here, as elsewhere, I have transcribed this combination as <sup>с</sup> (*spiritus aspiratus plus varia*).

22 The supralinear mark on the initial vowel is illegible.

23 The *titlo* has the form of a thick *tilde* and extends over the three letters рпв.

24 The supralinear mark on the initial vowel appears as a thick dot.

25 There is a clear superscript *s* in addition to the *s* on the line. I think this may be a form of haplography: *xs sz glvy* ‘Christ from/at the head of the saints’. This would account for the fact that the following verb is singular. However, *s glavy* is an unexpected way of expressing the concept ‘at the head of’. One alternative may be to correct the reading to *xs sz glva* ‘Christ the head/leader of the saints’. The epithet *head* is attested for Christ.

26 The *titlo* has the form of a thick *tilde* and extends over the three letters лвь.

27 The *titlo* has the form of a thick *tilde* and extends over the three letters лгл.

28 Sc. ѣв. There are traces of a superscript, but they are illegible.

29 The *titlo* has the form of a thick *tilde* and extends over the three letters лвь.

30 The word *prezračьnyi* should mean ‘transparent, pellucid’, which seems improbable in this context. This may be a case of hypercorrection in an *akan’ejekan’e* dialect. The word *prizračьnyi* ‘ghostly, phantom; deceptive; in a vision’ makes some sense in the context.

[12] пѣворѣднѣ ѿнѣ<sup>31</sup> и овѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> быша никогдѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> было Кпо Црь  
 рѣршивѣи нашѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> дѣжавѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> к нѣи сѣи ѿвѣцеваху Гѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> крѣпѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> и  
 силѣ и непобѣдѣи во бранѣ пѣже немѣлише но скоро ѣники  
 ѿведнпѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> таже доселе здѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> пригалѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> дерѣжава Ваша,

the One doing [these things]? These things [that] have taken place—never was there [the like] [before now]. Who is the King who has destroyed our realm?” The [heavenly] forces replied to them, “The Lord, strong and mighty and undefeated in battle! Therefore, do not delay, but quickly bring forth the prisoners whom your realm here has taken up to now.”

### Scribal inscription

Сѣи ѿвѣрѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> Воѣрениѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> хѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>во по обѣщанию написѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> нѣгородѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>  
 по<sup>жѣ</sup>сѣдѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>кѣ члѣвѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>зъ ивѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> Григорьев<sup>жѣ</sup> снѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>зъ по про[з]ванию журавлѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>  
 и поспѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> в домѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> у покровѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> [7–8 illegible letters; *titlo*  
 with superscript over the second or third letter;  
 ending with *asz?*] [3–5 illegible letters; *titlo* with  
 superscript over the second letter] на въ и сло вневѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>  
 [or по?] себѣ<sup>жѣ</sup> и [ *titlo* with superscript +?] [at least  
 18–20 illegible letters] елѣлѣ<sup>жѣ</sup>.

The Novgorodian *posadskij čelovek*<sup>32</sup> Ivan, son of Gregory, by nickname Crane, wrote this icon, the Resurrection of Christ, in accordance with [his] promise and placed it in the Church of the Intercession...

31 The *titlo* has the form of a thick *tilde* and extends over the entire abbreviation.

32 In 17th-century Russia, a petty merchant or artisan subject to state taxation and bound by law to a specific settlement.

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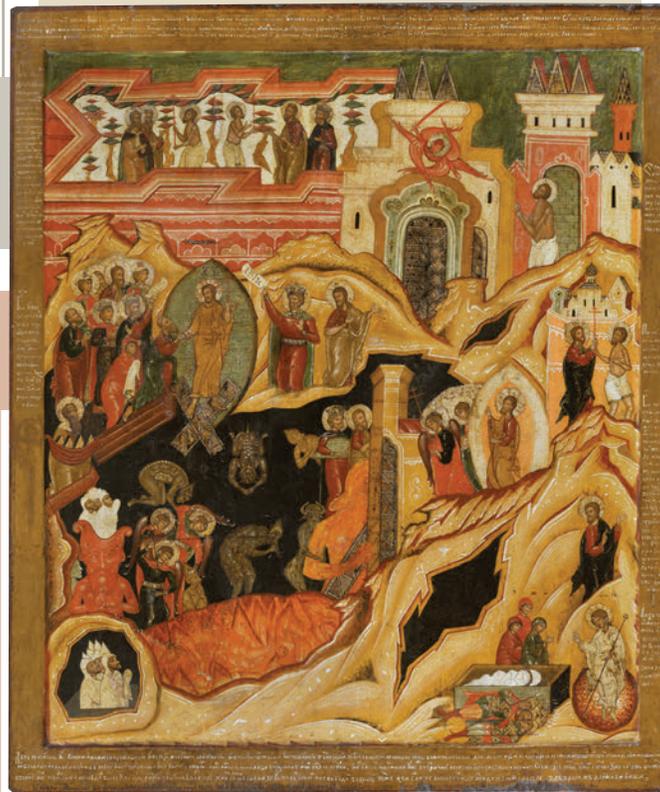
## English Translation

[1] And immediately the gates were opened, and the robber went into Paradise. And he found Elijah and Enoch and talked with them about Christ's suffering, and about himself he told them how the Lord had saved him and sent him to that holy Paradise, and how the fiery weapon had forbidden him [to enter]; but he showed him the Lord's cross, the Sign, and entered into Paradise. The righteous ones [2] having entered Paradise, found the robber. All gazing upon him were awe-struck. They were saying, "Who brought you here? And who opened the gates for you? And [if] you entered before us, when [was it]? And have you come here before us to kill or steal something? We do not resent your coming here before us ; tell us." Answering them, he said, "Come near me, so that I may tell you. [It was] not due to my action(s) [that] I came here, for I was not wor-

[3] -thy of such light from the ineffable Paradise; but the Lord, the merciful Lover of mankind, brought me here because I was His companion unto death, which I suffered for Him." The prophets, having heard from the robber, glorified God for the gifts given to sinners.

[8] The Lord commanded [His servants] to bind the Devil and consign him to Hell and throw [him] into the eternal fire. The Devil [was] crying and saying, "Have mercy on me, the wandering one, o Hell; exert yourself for my sake; do not open the gates until He goes back!" But Hell said to the Devil, "Three-headed Verzaul, corrupter of the angelic forces and mocker of the saints, didn't I tell you not to oppose Him?"

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