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 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.

2 The righteous ones 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 The prophets, having heard from the robber, glorified God for the gifts given to sinners.
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.

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

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

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?”

15 Sc. повелѣ, with just’ indicated by a erok (Čerepnin 375, no. 26). The supralinear mark indicated by ‘ in the transliteration looks like an elongated shallow ꞟ. The superscript ꞟ may have been corrected from an ꞟ.

16 This form is evidently a corruption. The expected infinitive of the verb ἱέρσεω (ἐκείνης) ‘throw would be ἱέρσεωμαι. Conceivably, during the copying process, a passage of direct speech with imperatives was converted into a narrative report with infinitives embedded under повелѣ ‘command-AOR.3sg’. On the basis of the imperative ἱέρσεσθε (or, more archaically, ἱέρσετε), and i-stem infinitive was then produced by back-formation.

17 The superscript ꞟ in ἀλλὰ differs from the form usual for this scribe in that the right vertical is curved; the result looks like a ligature of ꞟ and ꞩ. Cf. Čerepnin 365, ꞟ no. 5.

18 The more usual abbreviation for ‘angelic’ is ἄγγελικ. 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 ꞟ 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, ꞟ no. 8).
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."

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. 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 caverns. At that time, all [were] in terror, and Christ at the head of the saints was saying, “Who is this King of Glory—
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

The Novgorodian posadskij čelovek32 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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Или же иное утверждение, где бы ни было, в виде "написать" и т.д., и иное место, где бы ни было, в виде "написать" и т.д. А также здесь и там, где бы ни было, в виде "написать" и т.д.

Или же иное утверждение, где бы ни было, в виде "написать" и т.д.
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

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-

-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.

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.

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 caverns. At that time, all [were] in terror, and Christ at the head of the saints was saying, “Who is this King of Glory—

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