

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.

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

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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^τ врата ꙗже рабонини в рѣ ѿверже
илию ꙗже еноха и бесѣдова с ними ѿхрѣтове страсти и о
себѣ сказа ѿ. Како его ꙗже спасе ꙗже свѣты се раі посла ꙗже
како емѣ вѣбрани пламѣноѣ орѣжие ѿ же показа емѣ
вѣличны крѣстъ. Знамение и видѣе в рѣ Прѣвницѣ [sic]¹ 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 рѣ [о] рѣпоша рабонника вси на зрѣѣ ѿи
вжасошасѣ гл҃лаху кто ти введе семо и кто ти врата
ѿвѣзе [sic]² а прѣ на видѣе егда ли и³ зде увити пришѣ
[sic] еси или украси что прѣ на семо незавидѣи пи рцы
на ѿ ѿ ѿвѣща рече Прилижитесѣ ко⁴не 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 us⁵ 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] той такового свѣла о [sic] неіречѣнаго рѣта но вѣка
чл҃вколюбе мѣлтивѣи введе ꙗже семо понеже спѣшникъ емѣ
вѣ до смерти ꙗже пострадаѣ зѣ. прѣ роцы 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."⁶ 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 supralinear⁷.

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 пострадаѣ, it must be a non-agreeing *relativum generale*; the agreeing form would have to be ꙗже ꙗже (ꙗжеже). 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 superscript⁸ alone. In colligation with 'suffer', зѣ plus the instrumental ordinarily means 'for the sake of.'

Right

[4] егда рѣ
вѣ инѣ
принде к⁴
нейречѣно⁸
раю и вѣбра
ниѣ емѣ пла
мѣное орѣ
жне ꙗ отве
ре врапа
и ѣде⁷ в раі,⁸

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
рѣвѣнника⁹
во спѣи рѣ¹⁰
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 врапѣ¹¹
адѣ со мно
жествѣ¹¹
аглскимъ¹¹
силамъ
прѣтеча
ху силы
гѣ ѣ вѣмѣ¹²
те врапа
кѣзи ва
ца [sic] и вѣме
те да¹³ ꙗ вѣ
чнѣѣ ꙗ вѣ¹³
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 тоѣ¹⁴
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 гѣ.

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 повѣ¹⁵
 дѣтѣвола
 свѣтазлапи
 ї предѣлпи дѣ
 и обѣзупи¹⁶ во
 ѿнѣ вѣчнѣнѣ
 дѣтѣвола плача
 ѿ глѣтѣ поми
 лѣи мѣта спрѣдѣ
 аде попрѣдѣ
 мен ѣ ради не
 ѿвѣзѣ вра¹⁷
 дѣдеже воѣ¹⁷
 ралпѣста вѣпѣ
 адѣ же р[е]че
 Ко дѣтѣвол[ѣ]
 Преглавѣниче
 Верзѣдѣ рѣ¹⁸
 вѣдѣниче дѣге¹⁸
 лскимѣ Си
 лѣ і спѣи по
 смехлѣ¹⁹ 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?”

15 Sc. повѣлѣ, with *jat* indicated by a *erok* (Čerepnin 375, no. 26). The supralinear mark indicated by [^] 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 *обѣрѣ-* (*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-_{AOR.3sg}’. On the basis of the imperative *обѣрѣниче* (or, more archaically, *обѣрѣтѣче*), 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 *дѣтѣльскѣ*. 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^с изве
де правѣні
ковъ^с изо
ада прѣи
споднаго
изо^с мы
Кромешныѣ
поспещни
цы моі иди
е в рѣ^с 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^с и верѣта
желѣнаѣ сломиша^с и затворы ѿпада оша и основанія
пѣничиѣ порасоша^с противни силы бежати начаша
дрѣ друга рѣх^с и дрѣ друга прѣпикающе^с 20 др прѣруго^с
спешах^с і ѿжасоша^с

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^с 21 ѿ недомышляюще вкѣ^с и воспрепаша,
ови 22 взираѣа споид^с, иниѣ на коленома лица зѣриваше
ѿ и ни па яко мрпвы, 23 иниѣ ѿжасѣ ѿдѣжими^с иниѣ в
прѣрачниѣ вертепы ісчезах^с 24 погда в оужасе Сеи хѣ^с
[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 ghostly³⁰ 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 *и* or *і* 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, *и* no. 6; *ibid.*: 365, *і* 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 ^с. Here, as elsewhere, I have transcribed this combination as ^с (*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. ѣъ. 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] лѣворѣднѣ ѿнѣ³¹ и овѣ^{жѣ} быша никогдѣ^{жѣ} было Кпо Црь
 рѣршивѣи нашѣ^{жѣ} дѣжавѣ^{жѣ} к нѣи сѣи ѿвѣцеваху Гѣ^{жѣ} крѣпѣ^{жѣ} и
 силѣ и непобѣдѣи во бранѣ пѣже немѣлише но скоро ѹники
 ѿведнпѣ^{жѣ} таже доселе здѣ пригалѣ^{жѣ} дер'жава 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^{жѣ} Воѣрениѣ^{жѣ} хѣ^{жѣ} по обѣщанию написѣ^{жѣ} нѣгородѣ^{жѣ}
 по^{жѣ}сѣ^{жѣ}кѣ^{жѣ} члѣвѣ^{жѣ}зъ ивѣ^{жѣ} Григорьев' снѣ^{жѣ} по про[з]ванию журавлѣ^{жѣ}
 и поспѣ^{жѣ} в домѣ^{жѣ} у покровѣ^{жѣ} [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^{жѣ}
 [or по?] себѣ^{жѣ} и [*titlo* with superscript +?] [at least
 18–20 illegible letters] елѣлѣ^{жѣ}.

The Novgorodian *posadskij čelovek*³² 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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Russian Script

- [1] "И азие ѿверзошася врата и иде рѣбонни в рѣ ѿнзрете ѿнилю и еноха и бесеѣдова с ними ѿсхрѣтове спростий но себѣ сказа и. Како его гѣ спасе иво сѣтѣи сѣ раі посла і како емѣ вбрани пламенеѡ орѣжие ѡ же показа ему вѣличны крѣпѣ. Знамение и вниде в рѣ Прѣници [sic] же
- [2] вшѣше в рѣ [o] репоша рѣбонника вси на зрѣшѣ "И вжасошася Гл҃глаху кто тѣа введе семо и кто ти врата ѡвѣзе [sic] а прѣ на вниде егда ли и zde убити пришѣ [sic] еси или украси что прѣ на семо незавиди ти рцы на ѡ и ѿвѣща рече Прилижитеса кѡне Да повѣдаю вѣ Не за двло мое внидо сѣмо не вѣ [sic] во до
- [3] пои такового свѣла о [sic] неирѣченѡго рѣта но вѣка чѣвколюбе мѣпиви введе мѣа Семо понеже спѣшникѣ емѣ вѣ до смерти іаже поспрада за прѣ роцы же слышашѣ ѿ рѣзбонника прославиша бѣ дарованны ради даровѣ Грѣшникомѣ

[8] Гдѣ повѣ дѣявола сѣвазати і предапти а и овежиши во ѡнѣ вѣчны дѣяво плача і гл҃хѣа поми лѣи мѣа Стрѣна аде поспради мен е ради не ѿвѣза вѣрѣ додеже воѣ рѣпѣста вѣспѣ адѣ же рѣече Ко дѣявол[ѣ] Преглавниче Вѣрзаѡле рѣ вѣрѣниче аге лѣскимѣ Си лѣ і сѣтѣи по смехалѣ не рѣ ли тебе не противитѣста емѣ



[4] егда рѣ вѣ ниѣ прииде к ѿ неирѣченѡ раю и вѣбрани емѣ пла мене орѣ жие і отвѣ рѣ врата і иде в раі,

[5] Посла гѣ рѣбонника во сѣтѣи рѣ і дасѣ емѣ крѣное знамение,

[6] Гдѣ при іде ко вратѡ адво со мѡ жеспво агл҃скимѣ сѣ иламѣ прѣпеча ху силы гѣ іа воми те врата кѣзи ва ца [sic] и вѡме те ѣта гѣ чнѣта і вни де ѿрѣ сла вы а же ѿзвнѡпрѣ гл҃гол іа кѣп ѡест ѿрѣ сла вы Силы гѣа рѣша Гдѣ крѣ по и сѣленѣ Гѣ силѣ вѣ врани пои е[с]тъ ѿрѣ Славы ,

[9] Гдѣ извѣ де правѣні ковѣ изѡ ада прѣни споднаго изѡ мѣ Кромешныѣ поспѣщни цы моі иди е в рѣ сѡ нѣю вѣ во ради придо сѣмо,

[7] ѿ Англѣ гѣнѣ, ѿвали ка мень ѿдѣ верерѣ [sic] гро ва вѣ ниѣ же спрежа хѣ гѣ спраха ѡмертвѣ ша,

- [10] "Азие пристѣпла Гѣ Врата адова сокруш ишаѣта и верѣта желѣнаѣ слошѣста и затво рѣ ѿпад ѡша и основа нѣта пѣничнѣта поѣрасошѣа противни силы вежали начаша дрѣ дрѣга рѣвахѣ и дрѣдрѣга прѣтыка юще др прѣрѣгѣ спѣшахѣ і ѡжасошѣа
- [11] ѿвладѣша ѿ и недомышлѣающе вкѣпѣ и воспрегѣаша, ови взираѣа спѡта, инѣ на коленѡма лица зѣрывашѣ и ни пѣа яко мрѣтвы, инѣ вожаѣо ѿ ѿдежими инѣ в прѣрачнѣи вертепы ісчеза хѣ тогда во оужасе Сеи хѣс [sic] глѣвы сѣтѣи гл҃гашѣ Кто сѣе етъ ѿрѣ сѣвы
- [12] твѡрѣди. ине и овѣа быша никогдѣа было кто ѿрѣ рѣрѣшѣи нашѣ дѣжавѣ к ни сѣ ѿвѣвѣваху Гѣ крѣпо и силѣ и непѡведи во вранѣ пѣеже немѣлипе но скоро ѣники ивѣдѣте іаже досѣе зѣв приалѣ дерѣжава Ваши,
- [Inscription] Сѣи вѣрѣа вѡкрѣниѣ хѣво по овѣщанию написѣа нѡгороде по сѣакѡ чѣвкѣз ивѣ Григорьевѣ сѣнѣ по про[з]ваннѡ журавлѣ и поспѣа в домѣ у покрова [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 вѣ и сло вѣнѡ [or по?] сѣсе и [titlo with superscript чѣ] [at least 18–20 illegible letters] елѣлѣ.

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?"

[9] 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."



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

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

[10] 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] 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—

[12] 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."

[Inscription] The Novgorodian *posadskij čelovek* 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...