

**RE-TRANSLATING THE BYZANTINE PASCHAL TROPARION
“ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΤΗ” INTO ENGLISH
ON THE BASIS OF THE TWO PARTICIPLES:
(ΠΑΤΗΣΑΣ & ΧΑΡΙΣΑΜΕΝΟΣ)**

Studium hoc plura peruestigat incepta translationis in anglicum sermonem veteris byzantini troparii *Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*, quod opus est ignoti auctoris et unum ex antiquissimis exemplis hymnographiae christianae. Peculiariora elementa lexicis biblicis et grammaticae graecae attentius enucleantur ad novam et accuratam interpretationem textus attingendam.

Pascha is the feast of feasts, and no other day in the Orthodox calendar is celebrated with such majesty and splendor. The Byzantine paschal troparion: *Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*, which is chanted many times by the Orthodox Church from the first Sunday of the Easter and throughout the Paschal Season until the Thursday of Ascension¹, is an ancient and a brief troparion as well². This troparion is known in the Orthodox Church as one of the oldest examples of the Early Hymnography and is referred to in all known sources as an anonymous work³.

This hymn consists of three short phrases:

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη⁴ ἐκ νεκρῶν,
θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας,
καὶ τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι ζῶν ἠρισάμενος.

The aim of the present short paper is to show the significance of the usage of the two aorist participles (*πατήσας* of *πατέω* & *ἠρισάμενος* of *χαρίζομαι*) and what they could imply, whilst at the same time giving an accurate translation of the hymn on the basis of an enhanced understanding of these two aorist participles.

¹ Oswald Hugh Edward Burmester, ‘The Greek Kirugmata, Versicles and Responses, and Hymns in the Coptic Liturgy’, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 2 (1936) 364-395 and Youhanna Nessim Youssef, ‘Liturgical Connections between Copts (Anti-Chalcedonian) and Greeks (Chalcedonian)’, *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 114/4 (2000) 394-400.

² *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὰ Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια*, Ἀθῆναι 1963, 2^{ος} τόμ., σ. 611.

³ Θ. Δετοράκης, *Βυζαντινὴ Φιλολογία, Τὰ πρόσωπα καὶ τὰ Κείμενα*, Ἡράκλειο Κρήτης 2003, τόμ. α', σ. 121.

⁴ It is worth taking into consideration that, in the Bible, the verb used for referring to Christ's resurrection is “ἠγέρθη” (cf. *Mt* 28: 6, *Mk* 16: 6 and *Lk* 24: 6). Only Saint John used the verb “ἀνίστημι” thus: “Ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι” = “That he must rise from the dead” (20: 9). The first of the Bible writers to use the verb “ἀνίστημι” in the aorist tense was Saint Paul thus: “εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη...” = “For if our faith is that Jesus died and rose again...”, (*1 Thess* 4: 14).

Although this hymn is very concise it is very expressive. It summarizes in few words the events of the last three days of the Holy Week, which run as follows:

1. The Good *Friday* (θανάτω θάνατον πατήσας),
2. The Bright *Saturday* (τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι ζωὴν χαρισάμενος)⁵ and
3. The Easter *Sunday* (Χριστὸς ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν).

This is the correct order of the events as depicted in the Gospels; since Christ first trampled death through his own death (θανάτω θάνατον πατήσας) on the Good Friday, bestowed life to those who were in tombs or Hades (τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι ζωὴν χαρισάμενος) on the Bright Saturday and finally and most importantly He rose up from the dead (ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν) on the Easter Sunday.

We notice here that the hymn contains one subject which is (Χριστός), one leading verb in the aorist tense (ἀνέστη) and two participles in the aorist tense too (πατήσας) and (χαρισάμενος). These two aorist participles, beside summarizing the events of the last three days of the Holy Week, they indicate the chronological order of these events as well, i.e. Good *Friday*, Bright *Saturday* and the Easter *Sunday*. The type of these two aorist participles is adverbial “temporal” which expresses time showing “when” something happened. It is rendered into English either with words “after” or “when”... had+pp⁶ or with the reduced adverb phrase “having+pp”.

As for the various translations of the hymn into English, there are many such used in English speaking countries. The official translation, however, used by the Greek Orthodox Church, for example in Archdiocese of America, has been in use since the late 1960s and it runs as follows:

Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and upon those in the tombs bestowing life⁷.

⁵ According to several passages from the *New Testament* it was on this day that Christ performed in spirit the Harrowing of Hades (Latin *Descensus Christi ad Infernos*) and raised up to Paradise those who had been held captive there, particularly Adam and Eve and the righteous men and women of the Old Testament times, cf. *Mt* 12: 40; *Acts* 2: 24, 27, 31 and *Eph* 4: 8-10). Saint Gregory the Nazianzenus says that: “Ἀποθνήσκει, ζωοποιεῖ δέ, καὶ καταλύει τῷ θανάτῳ τὸν θάνατον. θάπτεται, ἀλλ’ ἀνίσταται. εἰς ἄδου κάτεισιν, ἀλλ’ ἀνάγει ψυχάς, ἀλλ’ εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἄνεισιν”, *De Filio* (Oratio 29), 20, 31-34 = “*He dies, but He gives life, and by His death destroys death. He is buried, but He rises again; He goes down into Hell, but He brings up the souls, and ascends to Heaven*”, Oratio 29, Philip Schaff & Henry Wace (edd.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series, vol. VII*, Christian Literature Company, New York, 1894, p. 309. We call to mind a homily attributed to St. Epiphanius of Cyprus with title “*Homilia in divini corporis sepulturam*”, MPG 43, 440-464.

⁶ William Watson Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb*, Sever & Francis, Cambridge 1865, p. 216, § 109, 1.

⁷ *Pentekostarion*, translated from the Greek by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts 1990, p. 27.

Others also exist, but in essence they differ little from the one noted above. Here I give examples of these various translations I have found for this troparion:

1. Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by death,
and on those in the graves, bestowing life⁸.
2. Christ is risen from the dead,
He trampled down death by death,
and to those in the tombs He granted life⁹.
3. Christ has risen from the dead,
by death He has trampled on death,
and to those in the graves (He has) given life¹⁰.
4. Christ is risen from the dead!
And death by his death is trampled.
And to those in the tombs he is granting life¹¹.

On translating this hymn into English some translators have fallen into an error since they translated the two aorist participles into English by adding “-ing” as in translation #1. A difficulty then arises in that by adding “-ing” these two participles (*πατήσας & χαρισάμενος*) seem to be concurrent events i.e. happening at the same time and as an adjunct to the action described in the leading verb (*ἀνέστη*). Adding to the verb “-ing” goes with the present participle. The rule of Greek grammar that applies for the present participle is that the action of a present participle goes simultaneously with the action of the leading verb. So translating the two participles by adding “-ing” means that the three actions “*rising up from the dead*”, “*trampling death*” and “*bestowing life...*” went on at the same time. So this formula with “-ing” fits for the present participle not for the aorist and thus a simple “-ing” translation misses the point.

Nor can we translate the two participles with the past simple tense, i.e. “*He trampled...*” and “*He granted...*” as in translation #2, since in this case the three verbs will seem to have happened one after the other, i. e. “*Christ rose up...*”, then “*He trampled death...*” and after that “*He granted life...*”. Thus the order of the actual events is distorted, and the significance of the aorist participles is definitely lost as well.

As for the translation #3, which has: “*He has trampled... & has given...*”, it is not clear enough that the translator realizes truly the way

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ Rev. Serapheim Dedes, St. Gregory Palamas Monastery, Perrysville, Pennsylvania (2006).

¹⁰ Hieromonk Ephraim Lash, <http://www.anastasis.org.uk/pascha.htm>

¹¹ John Anthony McGuckin (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, England 2011, vol. 1, pp. 180, 181.

of rendering the Greek aorist participles used in this hymn as he changed the tense of the two Greek participles from aorist into perfect tense using (has+pp.) and consequently the meaning is changed as well.

In translation #4 the translator changed the active mood of the Greek participle (πατήσας) into present tense in passive voice in English since he renders it as follows: “*And death by his death is trampled*”. The second participle of the hymn (χαρισάμενος), which is an aorist participle, is rendered by the present continuous tense thus: “*he is granting life*”!

It is, however, a known rule in Greek grammar, as H.W. Smyth remarks, of several aorist participles, that one may be relatively earlier in time than the other¹². So the aorist participle is used when one subject acted more than one action in the past, hence the action of the aorist participle precedes in time the action of the leading verb. That in turn means that the aorist participle is taken as temporal, in which case “*trampling death...*” and “*bestowing life...*” are chronologically prior to “*rising up...*”. But since the hymn is paschal and the hymnographer puts the action of the Easter Sunday at the first stichon, for the occasion of the happy Easter, we will re-translate it thus:

Christ rose¹³ out from among¹⁴ the dead,
Having trampled down death by death,
And upon those in the tombs
bestowed life.

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SUMMARIA

This study examines a number of attempts at translating into English the ancient Byzantine paschal troparion Χριστὸς ἀνέστη, regarded as an anonymous work, one of the oldest examples of early hymnography. The finer points of biblical vocabulary and of Greek grammar are carefully investigated with a view to arriving at a new and accurate suggested rendering.

Questo studio esamina alcuni tentativi di traduzione in inglese dell'antico tropario bizantino per la Pasqua Χριστὸς ἀνέστη, opera anonima considerata uno dei più antichi esempi di innografia. I dettagli del lessico biblico e della sintassi greca sono attentamente analizzati al fine di presentare una nuova e accurata resa del testo.

¹² Herbert Weir Smyth, *A Greek Grammar for Colleges*, American Book Company, New York 1920, p. 478.

¹³ In the case of this paschal troparion, indeed Christ “rose”, but He remains and forever “is risen”.

¹⁴ While perhaps falling outside the strict purpose which prompted the present contribution, it seems of interest to spell out somewhat explicitly the significance of the Greek preposition ἐκ here. Cf. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Word Studies: First Peter in the Greek New Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1942, p. 5.