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Towards a thousand birchbark letters

[Note on the 2009 version. This review appeared in *Russian Linguistics* 19, 1995, 109-123. One or two typos apart, the present text does not depart from the printed version. However, in the absence of the relevant glyph, Old Cyrillic ѣ has been used instead of the common ligature consisting of the upper part of ы written on top of ѓ. This happens only a single time (birchbark letter 664 as quoted in section 2 under (b)) and does not affect the argument. In addition the endnotes (p. 121) have been changed to footnotes and the page numbers of the original edition have been added as in the following example: “the [112] phenomenon”, meaning that “the” is the last word on p. 111 and “phenomenon” the first on p. 112.]

В.Л. Янин, А.А. Зализняк, *Новгородские грамоты на бересте (из раскопок 1984-1989 гг.)*, Москва: Наука, 1993, 348 стр.

1. Introduction

In the ninth volume of *Новгородские грамоты на бересте* (НГБ), just over a hundred new birchbark documents are published which came to light in Novgorod and Staraja Russa between 1984 and 1989. This amounts to an increase by some 15% of the total corpus. Since two thirds of the new texts date from the twelfth century or the early decades of the thirteenth, the corpus of birchbark letters predating the Mongol conquest has grown by as much as 35%.

By 1989, 710 birchbark documents had been found in Novgorod and 53 elsewhere: Staraja Russa 23, Pskov 8, Tver' 2, Moscow 1, Smolensk 15, Mstislavl' 1, Vitebsk 1, Zvenigorod Galickij (near L'vov) 2.¹ It is a pity that НГБ covers only Novgorod and Staraja Russa. If some way could be found to include texts from elsewhere, the value of the series would be considerably enhanced. As things are now, the reader is prevented from forming an independent judgement about such major discoveries as Smolensk 12 and Zvenigorod 2.²

Of the additional material contained in НГБ 9, the following is most relevant from a linguistic point of view:

¹ In the first half of August 1993 the number of Novgorod texts reached 752 (A.A. Zaliznjak at a public lecture in Novgorod on 13-8-93).

² Pskov 6 and 7, both important additions to the corpus, were recently published by Zaliznjak, Kolosova and Labutina (1993).

- Editions of twenty-four brief inscriptions on miscellaneous objects (НГБ 9, 112-122). The total number of inscriptions published in НГБ now stands at 42.³
- Comments by Zaliznjak about some 150 texts published in earlier volumes of НГБ or elsewhere (НГБ 9, 123-189). These comments continue the notes in НГБ 8, 181-217 (Zaliznjak) and 220-251 (Janin). Since most texts of any importance published in the first seven volumes of НГБ have by now received improved interpretations, quoting a birchbark letter on the basis of the edition, as is still done sometimes, is courting disaster.
- Notes by Zaliznjak on linguistic issues (НГБ 9, 191-321). The most important new elements contained in these notes will be briefly summarized and commented on in sections 2 and 3 of this review.
- A glossary by Zaliznjak, complementing the one published in НГБ 8 with |110| the lexical material yielded by the new texts and the improved readings of texts published in earlier volumes (НГБ 9, 322-343).

Like the previous volume, НГБ 9 is essential reading for anybody interested in medieval Russian; even those who are not interested in birchbark letters cannot afford to ignore the chapters on linguistic issues.

It goes without saying that not even НГБ is spared the workings of Murphy's law. This is particularly noticeable in the case of the chronological indications which are provided with each birchbark text on the basis of the layer of soil in which it is found. Recent years have shown that chronological information is occasionally distorted at some point along the trajectory that links the archeologists' field notes with the relevant indications in НГБ. A typical example is provided by 65, which the edition assigned to a layer with dates in absolute terms corresponding to 1281-1299 (НГБ 2, 65; НГБ 8, 307). The text happens to mention roubles and on the basis of the date as originally given this is a suspiciously early reference (cf. Janin 1965a, 163). Decades later, V.A. Burov (1986, 221) took another look at the field notes and discovered that in reality the text was found in a later layer (1299-1313), which brings it in line with other early references to the new monetary unit (cf. already НГБ 8, 225). It has turned out lately that similar mistakes are less exceptional than one would like them to be. Lack of explicitness on this score is a disturbing characteristic of НГБ 9. For more details see Appendix 1.

It is not unusual for different birchbark letters to turn out to have been written by the same person. Such sets of texts are generally referred to as "blocks". In НГБ 8, 90, Zaliznjak lists seventeen blocks known or suspected at the time. In НГБ 9 no list is given, although so much has happened in the meantime that the earlier list has lost most of its relevance. For a tentative update I refer to Appendix 2.

³ The inscriptions (надписи) are now numbered consecutively, as follows: 1-9 (НГБ 1, 44-49); 10, previously known as "деревянная азбука" (НГБ 3, 79-81); 11-18, previously known as "надписи на деревянных счетных бирках" 1-8 (НГБ 8, 81-86); 19-42 (НГБ 9, 112-122). The politics with respect to inscriptions are not quite clear. The unique "Свинцовая грамота" (НГБ 5, 154-155) is not included among the inscriptions, nor are the "цилиндры" published by Janin (1982), apart from the one that was published in НГБ 1, 44-45, which is listed as "надпись 2".

2. The historical period

The linguistic evidence provided by the birchbark letters from Novgorod and Staraja Russa is important along two dimensions. First, since among the enormous number of medieval texts the amount of Russian uncontaminated by Church Slavonic is very small, the birchbark letters have considerably broadened the factual base for the study of medieval Russian. Second, texts written in the early period (the eleventh, twelfth and early thirteenth centuries) display an entire series of consistently maintained linguistic features, betraying the existence of a clearly defined Novgorod dialect. HГБ 8 provided a thorough treatment of a whole series of issues (orthographic, phonological, inflexional, etc.) on which the birchbark evidence is informative. HГБ 9 takes a new look at most of those issues in the light of the evidence now available and adds discussion of several new ones. [111]

A minor but intriguing orthographic novelty brought up in HГБ 9 concerns the use of the letters *o* or *w* preceding abbreviations meaning “8” and “lord”. Both stems involved had doublets, one of which started in *o*- and one of which did not: (*v*)*osъm*- and (*g*)*ospod*-. Zaliznjak argues that this use of *o* or *w* is intended to convey the message that the doublet beginning in *o*- is to be read. The phenomenon is by no means limited to birchbark texts. (HГБ 9, 233-241.)

The most important new phonological insights offered by HГБ 9 have to do with the elimination of the weak jers. The earliest extant birchbark letters were written by people in whose language the weak jers were still independent phonemic segments. In texts written by members of subsequent generations, the gradual loss of the weak jers as phonemic segments can be closely followed. Nobody interested in Slavic diachronic linguistics can afford to ignore Zaliznjak’s meticulous analysis of this process. (HГБ 9, 241-258, 269-270.).

It turns out that in non-final position the weak jers became optional in the second quarter of the twelfth century at the latest; they were finally lost shortly before or after 1200. Alongside the establishment of absolute dates, the insight that the weak jers were for a time optional is important here. It is interesting to note in this context that the pattern of line-final word division found in the Old Church Slavonic *Savvina kniga* also appears to imply that the weak jers were optional in the language of the scribe (Schaeken 1994, 375-379).

With respect to the way optional weak jers are expressed in writing there is a perceptible difference between “бытовые” and “книжные” orthographic systems, in other words: between systems that permit the use of *o* and *e* (and, in practice, *ѣ*) to render jers (and *vice versa*) and those that do not (see further HГБ 8, 100-109). People following “бытовые” orthographic practices expressed optional jers more frequently than those who preferred a “книжный” system.

As a consequence of the loss of the weak jers, the letter *ь* (including, *ceteris paribus*, its “бытовые” equivalents *ѣ* and *ѥ*) was reinterpreted as a marker for indicating the palatality of a preceding consonant. At the stage where the weak jers were optional, the letter *ь* (etc.) could render either a full-fledged vowel preceded by a palatal consonant or, in case the vowel was not realized, just palatality: the letter *ѣ*, on the other hand, became redundant. The difference becomes noticeable as soon as the weak jers

are no longer obligatory segments: “уже во 2-й четверти XII в. в грамотах книжного типа процент утраты <ь> на письме в два раза ниже, чем для <ь>”. (НГБ 9, 256).

As for jers in word-final position, a *terminus ante quem* for their loss can be derived from the evolution of word-final *-мь. After a certain stage the texts start writing -мъ (or -мо) instead of earlier -мь (etc.), indicating loss of palatality of word-final soft /m’/. Since it is reasonable to assume that before palatality could be lost the final *-ь had to be dropped, the new reflex implies that the person who wrote the text no longer pronounced word-final jers. Examples of the [112] phenomenon become frequent in the second half of the twelfth century, indicating that word-final jers had been eliminated by 1150 at the latest. Attestations in one or two earlier texts (e.g. 644) suggest that eventually the loss may turn out to be even older. (НГБ 8, 126; НГБ 9, 263-265.)

After prepositions and prefixes originally ending in a weak jer, initial o- is optionally changed into a-, e.g. к аѣцѣви (404), сараѣти (211). Examples occur in texts dated between the middle of the twelfth and the early years of the fourteenth century (НГБ 9, 258-263).

Apart from developments involving weak jers, НГБ 9 brings up the following points:

- In НГБ 8 (119-122), Zaliznjak drew attention to a possible example of *kl* reflecting word-initial *tl-: клѣць ‘лещ’ (169). As is well-known, such reflexes are common in material from Pskov. Zaliznjak now interprets this state of affairs as follows: “В древненовгородском койне сосуществовали оба типа рефлексов (например, *привезли* и *привели*)” (НГБ 9, 199). For the time being, this has no support in the attested facts. Apart from клѣць, which is in a class by itself, all examples (which are admittedly few) have *l*, thereby confirming the evidence of other Novgorod texts, where *kl* and *gl* are exceedingly rare. At present such facts as are available indicate that the Novgorod dialect (or *koine*) had *l* < *tl/dl at least in non-initial position.
- Zaliznjak adduces evidence for a minor change which appears not so far to have been noticed: *ml’* > *n’*, e.g. енѹци (227) < *eml’učī. The discussion of this point is a nice example of Zaliznjak’s ability to extract significant information from seemingly unpromising material. (НГБ 9, 202-204.)

Novgorod inflexion was remarkably innovating. By the time of the earliest texts, several functional distinctions had been lost (e.g. that between the *ā*-stem Gsg and DLsg) and the functionally redundant difference between hard and soft inflexion patterns was well on its way towards complete extinction. Coupled with the absence of alternations involving velars, the system as a whole must have been among the simplest in the contemporary Slavic world. New insights reported in НГБ 9 involve the following endings:

- The msc o-stem Apl ended in -ě, e.g. колотоѣѣ <кѣлѣтъѣѣ> (644). In the course of the twelfth century, the ending began to penetrate into the Npl as well, gradually replacing the inherited ending -i. (НГБ 8, 138; НГБ 9, 218-219.)

- The inherited neuter NAdu in *-ě* is not attested at all, whereas there are reliable attestations of *-a* from the final decades of the twelfth century onwards: *ДѢВА ЛѢТА* (113). (HГБ 9, 219-220.)
- Most pronominal *o*-stems show *-i-* in those case forms in which *-ě-* is inherited, e.g. *ti-* instead of *tě-* as in 1pl *тими* (335). These instances |113| of *-i-* are too early to be attributed to a phonetic merger of **ě* with **i* in the relevant position and they must be due to the influence of the *jo*-stems. At a later stage (fourteenth century) we find *-y-* instead of *-i-* (e.g. *тѣми*, 536). Apparently the hard consonant found in such forms as *togo* was generalized, thus practically obliterating the difference between the pronominal inflexion and that of the long adjectives. (HГБ 8, 105-106; HГБ 9, 225-226.)
- The long form of the adjective has produced a surprise. As is well known, in Russian the endings of the pronoun have replaced the inherited endings in all oblique case forms, e.g. Gsgmn *novogo*, Gsgf *новоѣ* etc. Whenever a form in, say, *-ago* appears in a Russian text, it used to be regarded as a Slavonicism. The birchbark letters now show that older forms survived into the historical period at least in the north. All early attestations of the Gsgmn have *-ago*; *-ogo/-ego* starts appearing in the thirteenth century and the only later attestation of *-ago* (369) occurs in a religious formula, suggesting that by the fourteenth century the ending had become a Slavonicism. Early attestations of the Gsgf and DLsgf have *-ě-* as the first element of the ending, which is in accordance with the corresponding ending of the *ā*-stems (GDLsg *-ě*), e.g. Gsg *сѣмѣѣ* (526). The endings *-ěě* and *-ěi* (and their later reflexes) appear to have survived longer than *-ago*, still being quite common in the fourteenth century. These findings have important consequences for such issues as the stylistic interpretation of medieval Novgorod texts, because forms that used to be considered Slavonicisms have now turned out to be nothing of the kind. (HГБ 9, 220-224.)
- There are several attestations of a 1pl form *esme* (HГБ 9, 228-229). The 1pl in *-me* is a well-documented feature of the Novgorod and Pskov dialects. It is virtually limited to the verb ‘be’ and the imperative (cf. Sobolevskij 1907, 161).⁴ The distribution of this ending shows clearly that it originated in athematic paradigms; indeed, the chances are that it is the regular reflex of the Proto-Indo-European athematic ending of the 1pl (see Kortlandt 1979, 63-64).
- The Nsg msc of the present participle ends in *-a* even in thematic presents with a stem ending in a hard consonant (Leskien’s classes I and II), rather than in *-a* as is normally the case in Old Russian, e.g. *вѣзѣма* (Staraja Russa 17). (HГБ 9, 229-231.)

Important sections of HГБ 8 were devoted to syntactical issues and to attestations of otherwise poorly documented lexical items. In HГБ 9, special attention is given to the following points, which, by the way, do not seem to be limited to Novgorod: |114|

⁴ In the southern half of the East Slavic linguistic territory the ending *-mo* was for a time limited to exactly the same categories as *-me* in the north (Shevelov 1977: 253-254).

- (a) Clitics have turned out to obey “Wackernagel’s rule”, as they still do in several other Slavic languages, notably Serbo-Croat. (НГБ 9, 280-298.)
- (b) Many birchbark letters contain attestations of a particle *tī*, which can be paraphrased roughly as ‘I want you specifically to be aware of ...’. Despite its formal identity to the clitic Dsg of the 2sg personal pronoun, Zaliznjak argues that synchronically it is a different word, which occupies a different slot in the sequence of clitics and can be combined with clitic datives in such examples as the following: (...) Пришъли гривъноу. А Давыдъ ти ми не въдалъ (...) ‘Send a/the *grivna*. The reason why I ask (*tī*) is that Davyd has not given [it] to me’ (664). In Russian Church Slavonic, free use of *tī* is rare; after the early years of the thirteenth century the particle becomes exceptional even on birchbark, perhaps because it was phonetically reduced to /t’/. (НГБ 9, 298-308.)
- (c) The preposition *въ* is often used in a meaning close to modern Russian *за*, e.g. Се Жадъке пославъ абетника дова <ѡѡа> и пограбѣла ма въ братни долгъ <ѡлгѣ> ‘I herewith state that Žadke has sent two *jabetniks* who have robbed me to compensate for my brother’s debt’ (235).
- (d) Everybody who has seen some medieval Russian probably remembers that *въ-* can be prefixed to *dati* ‘give’ apparently without adding its usual value ‘into’. Zaliznjak reviews the attestations and shows that there is a semantic difference: *въdati* means ‘give’ in the sense of ‘bring along’, whereas *dati* is used primarily in the meaning ‘permit, let’. In a similar way, *въ-* is prefixed to *сѡлати*, giving it a value that is apparently close to modern Russian *прислать*. After about 1300 this use of *въ-* becomes sporadic. (НГБ 9, 309-312, 314-317.) In this context I cannot help wondering if the prefix *въ-* may not have been productive, adding the value ‘bring along’ to any suitable verbal stem. There are suggestive examples of *въložiti* (160, 439) and **въкупити* (Vitebsk 1 and 271); in 502 *вънити* appears to mean something along the lines of ‘arrive with information for somebody’.
- (e) Zaliznjak draws attention to the use of the perfective present tense in such examples as Чемоу не восолещи, чето ти есемо водала ковати? <Чему не въсьлещи, чѡто ти есьмъ въдала ковати?> ‘Why aren’t you sending the thing I have given you to make?’ (644). In modern Russian such sentences require an imperfective present tense. Zaliznjak refers to this use as “презенс напрасного ожидания”. (НГБ 9, 275-279.)

3. The prehistory of the Novgorod dialect

In НГБ 8 and 9 no systematic attempt is made to reconstruct the changes that gave rise to the Novgorod dialect as it is attested in the early birchbark letters. By a curious reversal of normal priorities, НГБ 9 devotes considerable effort to [115] interpreting the prehistory of the dialect in extralinguistic terms. Zaliznjak starts from the observation that in close proximity to Novgorod a clear-cut boundary is located between two different varieties of East Slavic which he regards as the descendants of East Slavic tribal dialects:

- In the west a dialect characterized by features that made it stand out rather conspicuously among other varieties of East Slavic (no Second Palatalization, Nsg in *-e*, *kl/gl* < **tl/dl*, etc.).
- In the east a dialect that was much closer to the East Slavic average (Second Palatalization, Nsg in *-ь*, *l* < **tl/dl*, etc.).

The western dialect is held to continue the language of the northern or Pskov branch of the East Slavic tribe of the Kriviči, whereas the eastern dialect is traced back to the tribe of the (Il'men) Slověne. The language actually attested in Novgorod is assumed to be the outcome of a prehistorical process of dialect mixture:

“на протяжении нескольких веков здесь складывался особый смешанный тип говоров, в котором соединился ряд важнейших западных черт с некоторыми восточными, а также развились некоторые специфические черты. Именно он отражен в подавляющем большинстве берестяных грамот и может быть обозначен как древненовгородский диалект в узком смысле” (НГБ 9, 192).

I cannot help being sceptical about this theory, which Zaliznjak develops in somewhat greater detail elsewhere (1988a, 1988b) and which owes much to publications by S.L. Nikolaev (1988, 1989, cf. also 1990).

First, the theory is based on a typical *Stammbaum* scenario: two homogeneous dialects are held to have given rise to the actually attested facts by a process of mixture. No attention is paid to the drawbacks (primarily methodological) inherent in such scenarios, such as the way that dialect mixture is invoked in order to explain any conceivable combination of characteristics (effectively robbing the concept of empirical content) or the nasty artifacts *Stammbaum* scenarios tend to produce.⁵

Second, the proposed identification of the western dialect with the language of the Pskov branch of the Kriviči gives rise to an awkward problem. Such information as is available places the Slověne squarely in the Novgorod area and even attributes the founding of the town of Novgorod to them, whereas the Kriviči are put quite some distance away. Against this background, the conclusion that the Kriviči contributed significantly more features to the Novgorod dialect (or *koine*) than the Slověne is odd.

The artifacts that tend to plague any *Stammbaum*-cum-dialect-mixture approach are nicely illustrated by Zaliznjak's interpretation of the Nsg in *-e* in Novgorod. He holds that the ending “было свойственно в первую очередь севернокривичским говорам и именно из них вошло в древненовгородское койне” (НГБ 9, 208). Since it is not the Kriviči, but the Slověne that are on record [116] as having inhabited the Novgorod area and since the dialect of the Slověne is held to have had the normal Slavic *o*-stem Nsg in *-ь*, which was identical to the ending of the Asg, we have to assume that at a certain prehistoric stage the inherited ending *-ь* was abandoned and the attested Nsg in *-e* borrowed from elsewhere. This is a very unlikely result, because it forces one to believe that as a consequence of dialect mixture, the distinction between Nsg and Asg was reintroduced in the msc *o*-stems. Now reintroduction of pre-

⁵ It is not unusual for investigators who explicitly reject the *Stammbaum* approach to historical dialectology to crucially depend on it in their actual work, as Trubetzkoy (1925, 290) observes in the case of Šaxmatov, and Shevelov (1982, 356) in that of Xaburgaev.

viously suppressed distinctions is not the normal outcome of dialect mixture. It presupposes a sociolinguistic situation in which the autochthonous inhabitants of Novgorod regarded adoption of the language of their western neighbours as a highly desirable goal. Note in this connection that in the historical period, the Nsg in *-e* was steadily losing ground to *-ь* (HГБ 8, 131).

4. Conclusions

Birchbark studies are flowering. HГБ 9 shows that a mere 15% increase in the total corpus of texts can improve significantly our knowledge of the language of medieval Novgorod. It is unlikely that the point of diminishing returns has been reached and from a linguistic point of view there is every reason to go on digging.

Appendix 1. HГБ 9 and the chronology of birchbark texts

An important recent addition to the literature about Novgorod is P.G. Gajdukov's book about the *Nutnyj raskop* (1992a). The *Nutnyj raskop* has yielded twelve birchbark letters, all of which have been published in HГБ 8. Gajdukov is regarded as a specialist on dating techniques and in that capacity he is often consulted by the authors of HГБ 9. What he has to say about the birchbark texts of the *Nutnyj raskop* (o.c., 78-82) is disturbing: it turns out that in the majority of cases the information given in the edition and reported more exactly in HГБ 8, 309, is at variance with the field notes as reported by Gajdukov:

- 576. 1420-1427 vs. 1364-1390. Also discrepancy with respect to place ("square" 49 vs. 42).
- 577. 1420-1427 vs. 1364-1377.
- 578. 1412-1420 vs. 1364-1377.
- 579. 1412-1420 vs. 1356-1377 (most probably 1356-1364).
- 580. 1377-1399 vs. 1345-1356.
- 582. 1253-1303 vs. 1288-1327 (most probably 1288-1308).
- 583. 1253-1303 vs. 1288-1327 (most probably 1288-1308).
- 587. 1212-1253 vs. 1276-1288. |117|
- 590. 1182-1212 vs. 1065-1109 (most probably 1065-1085).
- 591. first half of 11th century vs. most probably thirties of 11th century.
- 593. first half of 11th century vs. most probably fifties of 11th century.
- 610. 1387-1412 vs. 1364-1390.

A second sample of texts offers similar evidence. In HГБ 9, 181-185, Zalznjak investigates possible historical implications of eleven 12th-century letters. In order to get the chronology absolutely straight he made Gajdukov go over the original field notes. In three cases (79, 165, 222) the indications as given by the edition were confirmed; in two (80, 231) the relevant information could not be located ("обнаружить грамоту в чертежах П.Г. Гайдукову не удалось"). In the remaining six cases Gajdukov's findings clash with either the indications in the edition or the ones given by Janin (HГБ 8, 307-308) or both, as follows (for clarity's sake, Gajdukov's information,

which is given in terms of layers has been translated into absolute dates according to the system used in НГБ 8, 307-310):

- 117. Same layer, but discrepancy with respect to place. Edition: “у мостовой Великой улицы”; НГБ 8, 308: “усадьба Ж”; Gajdukov: “мостовая Великой улицы между усадьбами А и Ж”.
- 225. НГБ 8, 307: 1177-1224; Gajdukov: 1161-1197, most probably 1177-1197.
- 226. НГБ 8, 307: 1177-1224; Gajdukov: 1161-1197, with a possible preference for 1177-1197.
- 235. НГБ 8, 308: 1134-1162; Gajdukov: 1161-1177.
- 239. Unclearity with respect to place. Edition: “на мостовой Великой улицы”; НГБ 8, 208: “усадьба И”; Gajdukov: “мостовая Великой улицы между усадьбами К и И”.
- 336. НГБ 8, 308: 1096-1134. Gajdukov: no layer specified, but assigned “к 10-м – 30-м годам XII в.”; in terms of the system used in НГБ 8, 307-310 this implies a shift to layer 20 exclusively (1116-1134).

This second sample confirms the picture as given by Gajdukov’s investigation of the *Nutnyj raskop* texts: discrepancies are frequent, but usually relatively minor, rarely involving more than half a century.

One does not know what to think of all this. In НГБ 9, some of the texts that are reexamined by Zaliznjak on pp. 124-178 are provided with chronological indications that clash with those published earlier. The reasons for the differences are nowhere explained, nor is the general context made explicit: have all 150 texts commented on in НГБ 9 been systematically checked and is it only in the case of the fifteen-odd items in which the date has been explicitly changed that such a change turned out to be necessary? Or has only part of the texts been checked? And what about the 450 texts that are not explicitly discussed in НГБ [118] 9? One hopes the problem will be addressed in НГБ 10.

Appendix 2. Blocks and related matters

No list of blocks is provided in НГБ 9. This appendix is intended to make up for that omission, to the extent that that can be done on the basis of the available literature. Four types of cases are listed:

- (A) Two or more pieces of birchbark which together constitute a single text.
- (B) Pieces of birchbark which are catalogued as distinct documents but have turned out to be fragments of a single text.
- (C) Different texts written by a single person.
- (D) Single birchbark documents that were written by more than a single person (Zaliznjak mentions two cases in НГБ 8, 90).

Blocks are usually identified on the basis of paleographic considerations. Although most blocks are obvious once they have been discovered, it is occasionally difficult to reach agreement, sometimes because the evidence is limited and sometimes because different investigators have different ideas about how much internal paleographic

variation one can reasonably expect from a single person. For this reason and because new blocks are still being discovered even among old material, at present any list can only be provisional. Since the matter is still fluid anyhow, I have taken the liberty of adding one or two suggestions (cf. in particular C8, C10, C21, D3, D4). If the relevant block is discussed adequately in the edition, no reference to literature is given.

- (A1) 698 + 699 (sixties to nineties of 14th century, Evan).
- (A2) 519 + 520 (end of 14th/beginning of 15th century, Mosii).
- (A3) A special case of a single text written on more than a single piece of birch-bark is provided by 419 (nineties of thirteenth century to 1311), which consists of several pieces of birchbark sewn together to resemble a book.
- (B1) Smolensk 8 + Smolensk 9 (12th century, Jarovec?). Avdusin and Mel'nikova (1985, 206-207).
- (B2) 662 + 684 (fifties to nineties of 12th century, anonymous).
- (B3) 683 + 685 (fifties to nineties of 12th century, Domaněg). Evidence has nowhere been presented. Janin mentions in passing that the two texts constitute “по-видимому, фрагментами одного и того же документа” (HГБ 9, 14). The edition (HГБ 9, 70) mentions the identification as a mere possibility and is not even convinced that the letters are written by the same person.
- (B4) Smolensk 5 + Smolensk 7 (second half of 12th century, anonymous). Avdusin and Mel'nikova (1985, 203, 206).
- (B5) Smolensk 2 + Smolensk 3 (1230-1270, anonymous). Avdusin (1966, 323).
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- (B6) 214 + 217 (1268-1281, anonymous). Povetkin as reported by Zaliznjak, HГБ 9, 138. See also below, C11.
- (B7) 320 + 337 (1299-1313, anonymous). HГБ 9, 153. See also below, C14.
- (B8) 191 + 192 (1299-1313, anonymous). HГБ 8, 235.
- (B9) 266 + 275 (1369-1382, Sidor). Janin (1965a, 146; HГБ 8, 241), HГБ 9, 149-151.
- (B10) 259 + 265 (1396-1409, Grigorija). Janin (1965a, 144-146). See further below, C21.
- (B11) 469 + 494 (1387-1416, anonymous). HГБ 9, 169.
- (C1) SRu16/SRu18 (1102-1143, anonymous). Mironova (1990, 218); HГБ 9, 106.
- (C2) 115/118 (1177-1197, Prokša).
- (C3) 549/558 (1196-1213, Mina). Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 177) now questions this identification.
- (C4) 664/710 (mid fifties 12th century – early twenties 13th century, anonymous?). 664 purports to have been written by Dobroška, 710 by Съмъjun. The edition concludes that the person who wrote the two texts may have been a “professional” scribe (say a priest) who wrote letters for other people (HГБ 9, 102, 194-195).
- (C5) 219/223/230 (1177-1224, anonymous). Vermeer (1992, 408-412).
- (C6) 436/437/439 (1190-1228, anonymous). Zaliznjak (HГБ 8, 90n) argues that 439 does not belong here because the letters и, х and з look different from their counterparts as written in 437 (436 contains no attestations of the crucial letters

and could go with either 437 or 439). To my mind the differences, though present, may not be fundamental and since the three texts have a great deal in common it may be preferable to regard the matter as open. Note that 436 and 439 are linked by containing the earliest reliable Novgorod attestations of line-final word division after a consonant (see on this Schaeken MS).

- (C7) 643/666 (mid 12th century – late twenties 13th century, Serafijan).
- (C8) 199/200/201/202/203/204/205/206/207/208/210 (1224-1238, Onfim). Although the edition and Janin (1965a, 52) argue that 201 does not belong here, Zaliznjak (HГБ 8, 90) lists 201 together with the other texts without arguing the case.⁶
- (C9) 61/68 (1238-1281, anonymous). Žukovskaja (1959, 68).
- (C10) 215/218B (1268-1281, anonymous). Povetkin as reported by Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 140). This supercedes an earlier view by Janin (1965a, 164-165; HГБ 8, 237), who regarded 215, 216, 217, and 218 as fragments of a single text.⁷ On paleographic grounds I think it is likely that 211 was written by the same person.⁸
- (C11) 212/214 + 217/216 (1268-1281, anonymous). Povetkin as reported |120| by Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 138). On Janin's earlier view concerning these texts see the previous entry.
- (C12) 706/709 (fourties to eighties of 13th century, Milost).
- (C13) 636/704 (first half of 13th century – end of 13th/beginning of 14th century, anonymous).
- (C14) 320 + 337/322/328 (1281-1313, Evfim'ja). Vermeer (1992, 423-424).
- (C15) 409/410 (1281-1313, anonymous). Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 163).
- (C16) 354/358 (1313-1382, Oncifor Lukinič). Oncifor Lukinič is attested by the chronicles between 1342 and his death in 1367; he was *posadnik* from 1350 to 1354.
- (C17) 98/100 (1340-1382, Nufrij).
- (C18) 184/185 (1369-1382, anonymous). Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 138).

⁶ In reality the problem is more complicated. Let us start from the hand that wrote the major part of the inner side of 199 (the right-leaning strip) and call it "199A". It is obvious that 204, 206, 207, and 210 were written by the same person as 199A. By the way, I think the same holds for 331, which was found in the same place as the other Onfim texts, but appears to be significantly younger (1268-1299). All remaining texts (apart from 208, which provides too little material to be diagnostic) deviate from 199A. In the second strip on the inner side of 199 (let us call it "199B"), ж and к belong to a fundamentally different type. The outer side of 199, which provides little material (and which may be heterogeneous), uses a deviating ѳ, к and ѡ and avoids the vertical serifs characteristic of 199A. In 200 the round shapes of с and ѣ are strikingly different from 199A whereas the remaining letter shapes are similar to those encountered in 199A. In 201 the round shapes of с and ѣ are reminiscent of 200, but к and ж differ from those used in either 199A or 199B, again belonging to a fundamentally different type. In 202 the ж is different from 199A (it is the type of ж used in 201), but all the rest is OK, even the к. 203 differs from 199A in lacking serifs. 205 is confusing: the rounded shape of с and ѣ reminds one of 200 and 201, the ж and к are the ones found in 199B.

⁷ By an oversight, Vermeer (1992, 407) ascribes this idea to Zaliznjak.

⁸ This came up in a telephone conversation I had with Jos Schaeken in November 1993. Afterwards neither of us could reconstruct whose idea it was.

- (C19) 261/262/263/264 (1369-1382, anonymous).
- (C20) 177/253/254/258/268/269/277/280/290 (1299-1396, Maksim Onciforovič). Janin (1965a, 138-142; 1965b, 115) on 177/253/290, Vermeer (1992, 413-419) on the remaining texts. The chronicles mention Maksim Onciforovič under 1376.
- (C21) 130/133/134/187/259 + 265/278/281/286/403 (1313-1409, Grigorija). The edition on 134/259/265; Janin (1965a, 71) on 278/286; Medynceva (1984) on the entire block, cf. also Vermeer (1991, 340-349). On 259 and 265 see above, B10. It is conceivable on paleographic grounds that Grigorija also wrote 193 (1299-1313).
- (C22) 363/364 (1382-1409, Smen).
- (C23) 472/473 (1387-1416, anonymous). Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 169).
- (C24) 248/249 (1396-1422, anonymous). Zaliznjak (HГБ 8, 197).
- (C25) 19/122/129 (1396-1429, Esif). The edition on 122/129; Burov (1979, 223) on the entire block.
- (D1) 508 (1196-1213). The two sides were written by different persons (both anonymous). HГБ 8, 90.
- (D2) 332 (1197-1238). The two sides were written by different persons. The name of the person who inscribed the outer side was Kjur'jak.
- (D3) 218 (1268-1281). The case is unique. Halfway through the third line a different writer took over in mid-sentence (at the word *kuma*). Both writers are anonymous. Povetkin as reported by Zaliznjak (HГБ 9, 140). The person who wrote the second part of 218 probably also wrote 215 (see above, C10). To my mind it is likely on paleographic grounds that he also wrote 220.
- (D4) 330 (1238-1299). Jos Schaeken (personal communication 5-1-94) draws attention to the possibility that the inner side and the upper left corner of the outer side were written in a different hand from the one that wrote the remainder of the outer side.
- (D5) 390 (1281-1299). The edition and Janin (HГБ 8, 248) were of the [121] opinion that the two sides of this text were written by different persons (both anonymous). Zaliznjak does not adduce the text in his list (HГБ 8, 90), probably through an oversight: the grapheme used for *u* is different and several letters are written rather differently, in particular *з* and *д*.

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