

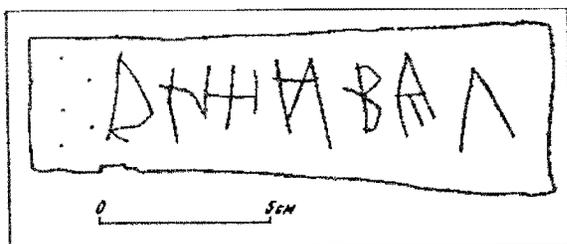
A READING OF NOVGOROD BIRCHBARK DOCUMENT № 680

The latest volume of *Новгородские грамоты на бересте* (НГБ 9, edited by Janin and Zaliznjak 1993) contains editions of 96 birchbark letters (№ 615-710) and 24 inscriptions (№ 19-42) from Novgorod and 9 birchbark letters from Staraja Russa (№ 15-23). Each individual edition is provided with a transcription of what the editors can read on the drawing. The only two exceptions are Novgorod № 669 and 680. In the preface of the latest volume, both documents are listed by Janin among the finds “имеющих лишь подражательный письму характер” (НГБ 9, 4). In the case of № 669 (cf. НГБ 9, 58), the validity of this description is not obvious. Judging from the drawing, the document could just as well be a small fragment of a running text consisting of at least two lines. Unfortunately, the visible information seems to be too scanty to identify any part of the text.

At first sight, № 680 does look like something that has been described by the editors as a “грубое подражание надписи” (НГБ 9, 65). However, upon closer inspection, the document turns out to contain a meaningful piece of information.

Like all the other birchbark texts from Novgorod that are listed in НГБ 9, № 680 was found in the Trinity excavation. According to its stratigraphical dating, the document belongs to the period between the twenties and the early forties of the twelfth century. This makes № 680 one of the oldest finds of the Trinity excavation (cf. the chronological lists in НГБ 9, 3, 103).

A computer scan of the drawing (cf. НГБ 9, 65) looks as follows:



Judging from its relatively broad margins, we may assume that № 680 is not a fragment but a complete document. A first glance at the text suggests that we are dealing with six elements. However, the second element is much too complex to be identified as a single letter. I conclude that it is a combination of at least two letters.

The easiest part to read is the end; the last three elements clearly represent the

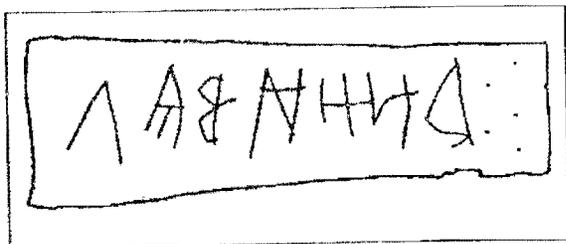
letters **в**, **ж** and **л**. The last letter immediately raises a problem, because words on birchbark that end in a consonant-letter are very rare. Among the few attested cases are **вогощ** № 114, **лѣшевѣн** № 116, **панфил** № 173, and **в городицѣнѣх**, **ополош** and **пакостил** in Staraja Russa № 10. (See also НГБ 8, 124; note that the previous reading in № 487 has convincingly been reinterpreted as **жила** in НГБ 9, 172.) This raises the question of whether the letter **л** is really the end of the sequence. As is well-known, not all texts on birchbark run from left to right; cf., № 46 (reading letters from the first and second line alternatively), № 522 (running from top to bottom), № 674 (mirror writing) and Inscription № 22 (boustrophedon). In the case of № 680, I propose that the sequence of letters should be read from right to left.

After the first three letters **л**, **ж** and **в**, the fourth element represents either an **н** or a mirror-reversed **н**. In view of the fact that № 680 belongs to the period before the jer shift, the second possibility is unattractive, because it would yield an unexpected consonant cluster of **в** plus **н**. As a consequence, we have to read **н** and assume that an erroneous mirrored **н** has been corrected.

The first component of the penultimate element looks like a **ц**. However, this reading would leave the horizontal and vertical strokes on the left without any suitable explanation. I think there are two ways of interpreting the combination: as **н** plus **н** or as **н** plus mirror-reversed **ц**. In both cases, the two letters are connected by a small horizontal bar, a practice for which a parallel can be found in Inscription № 28 (cf. НГБ 9, 116): **лн** in **къмелннѣ** (on birchbark ligatures involving **н** without a connecting bar, see Vermeer 1992, 389-390). Admittedly, both interpretations show an atypical rendering of the second letter. The horizontal bar of the **н** and the **ц** is cracked. The same holds for the vertical bar on the left side of the **н** (which is much longer than the one on the right) as well as the **ц**.

The last element is difficult to identify. As far as I can see, it represents a mirrored **л** that is shaped in a rather clumsy way. Assuming that the last letter but one is a **ц**, it has to be pointed out that six out of seven letters can be read mirror-reversed. The only exception is the letter **в**. In this respect, the document is written in the same way as № 674 (cf. НГБ 9, 61-62).

A mirror-reversed computer scan of the drawing of № 680 looks as follows:



As a result of this analysis, I propose the reading **ЛВНИНА** OG **ЛВНИЦА**. In both cases I believe we are dealing with a derivative of a personal name **ЛВВЫЯ**. In Old Russian the same stem is attested in the name **ЛВВКА** (cf. Туников 1903, 237). If one prefers to read the possessive adjective **ЛВНИНА**, a perfect parallel can be found in № 431 (cf. НГБ 7, 37). This document also consists of a single possessive adjective: **ИЛНИНА**, derived from **ИЛВА**. The alternative **ЛВНИЦА** can be compared with the name **ОНДРНИЦА** in № 645 (cf. НГБ 9, 43), derived from **ОНДРЪИ**.

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