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OBSERVATIONS ON THE LONGEST BIRCHBARK LETTER
( NOVGOROD 531)*

1. INTRODUCTION

With 166 words, N531 is the longest private letter on birchbark known at present. It is a remarkable document referring to what must have been a dramatic episode in the life of several people. The text also deserves attention because in some respects it appears to run ahead of what was usual at the time it is commonly assumed to have been written (late twelfth or early thirteenth century).

Important as N531 is, there is some doubt about what exactly it tries to express. In this article we would like to offer an interpretation that accounts for more features of the text than the interpretations that have been proposed so far. In the course of the discussion it will turn out to be necessary to pay attention to problems of chronology and several linguistic issues, in particular the use of окончальное ожье.

2. THE TEXT: BASIC INFORMATION

N531 was discovered in 1976 (НГБ 7, 10) in the section of the Trinity Excavation (Троицкий раскоп) now known as “усадьба Б” (Zaliznjak 1995, 344), cf. the map in НГБ 8, 5 (“усадьба А”, lower right corner).

The layer in which the text was found and that has to provide the primary evidence for a chronology has been specified differently in different accounts:

(1) The edition states that N531 was found “в траншее, выкопанной для дренажа раскопа, в ярусах 13-14” (НГБ 7, 130). As a matter of fact, the actual chronology given (“рубеж XII-XIII vv.”, o.c., 131) accords better with 13 than with 13-14.

(2) Janin specifies the years between which N531 was written as “1196-1213”, which corresponds to layer 13 (НГБ 8, 309, cf. also НГБ 8, 6).

(3) In his recent book on the language of medieval Novgorod, Zaliznjak puts N531 at the end of the twelfth or in the first half of the thirteenth century (1995, 343), presumably corresponding to the layers 12 and 13.

In recent years the chronology of quite a few Novgorod birchbark texts has been shifted around in similar fashion. As yet there has been no explicit discussion of the reasons for these modifications, which, by the way, rarely exceed one generation (for some examples see Vermeer 1995a, 116-118).

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The stratigraphic facts as evaluated at present allow for the possibility that N531 was written as late as 1250. This point has to be stressed because in the collective consciousness of berestologists N531 counts as “early”, i.e. as written before circa 1220 (ΗГБ 8, 91). This feeling is now reinforced by the fact that Zaliznjak puts it in his “ΠοΔράζελ Π Π”, which brings together texts written “ок. 1160 — ок. 1220 г.” (1995, 295).

A facsimile (“пропись”) of N531 by M.N. Kislov can be found in the edition (ΗГБ 7, between pp. 132 and 133). The piece of birchbark is inscribed on both sides. Zaliznjak (1995, 344) quotes it as follows:

(A) Inner side:

+ Ω ΔΝΣ ΠΟΚΛΟ ΚΟ ΚΛΗΜΑΤΕ ΒΡΑΤΕ ΠΚΠΟΑ ΠΟΠΑΛΟ Ο ΜΟΕΜΟ ΘΡΗΓΑΜ ΚΟΟΗΑΤΗΗρ 

Α ΗΤΛΕ Η3ΒΕΤΑ ΕΛΘΓ ΛΚΧΕΛΜΙ ΚΑΚΟ ΕΟΥ ΒΟ3ΛΟΚΗΛΟ ΠΟΡΒΓΟΓ Η Α ΜΟ Α 

ΕΛΘΗ ΕΗ ΑΔΗΛΗ ΛΗ ΕΝ ΜΟΛΟΒΗ ΕΜΟΓ | ΤΑΚΟ ΚΑΛΑ | Α ΑΛΛΑ ΡΟΓΚΟΓ | ΛΑ ΔΑ ΨΑΤΕ ΤΥ Π ΒΡΑΤΕ ΓΩΣΠΟΔΙΗΝ ΓΟΗΟΙΝΙΗ ΔΑΛΑ ΡΟΥΚΟΥ | ΑΖΑ ΖΑΤΕ ΤΥ Υ ΓΟΗΓΟ ΒΡΑΤΕ ΓΟΗ ΠΟΛΟΙΝ ΓΟΗ ΑΜΟ ΤΑΚΟ 

(B) Outer side:

ΟΪΚΟ ΒΟΥΔΟΥ ΛΟΗΗ ΝΑ ΜΟΗ ΕΤΡΟΥ ΟΓΕ ΒΟΥΔΟΥ ΛΟΗΗ ΠΡΙ ΚΟΛΟ ΒΟΥΔΟΥ ΔΑΛΑ ΡΟΥΚΟΥ ΖΑ 

ΑΤΕ ΤΟ ΤΕ Α ΕΟ ΒΙΝΗ | ΤΟ ΠΑΚΟ ΒΡΑΤΕ ΠΟΝΓΑΛΑΒΟ ΚΟΤΤΟΡΟ ΕΤΡΟΥ ΖΕΛΟ ΝΑ ΜΑ Ν ΠΟΡΟΥΚΟΥ 

Α ΒΟΥΔΟΥ ΛΟΗΗ ΝΑ ΤΟΜΟ ΤΟΒ Υ Ε ΕΤΡΟΥ Α ΜΟΤΖΕ ΒΗ ΤΥ ΤΕ ΜΑ Χ ΠΟΤΕΚΙ ΝΕ ΖΕΡΑ 

ΝΑ ΒΕΔΟΡΑ Ν ΔΑΛΑ ΜΑ Δ ΟΥΚΗ ΚΟΥΝΗ ΛΟΗΗΜΙ Σ ΒΛΕΒΤΟΛΟ ΜΑ ΖΑΚΛΑ ΠΟΣΗΛΑ ΠΟΖΟΛΑ 

ΜΕΝΕ ΒΟ ΠΟΣΤΟ Ο ΑΖΟ ΠΡΟΧΑΝΑ ΟΓΙ ΟΝΟ ΠΟΕΧΑΛΟ ΠΡΟΧΕ Α ΚΕΛΑ ΤΑΚΟ | ΑΖΟ ΣΟΛΟ : Α: 

ΔΕΒΡΑΛΟ ΠΟ ΠΡΙΝΕΝΕ ΣΚΕΡΑ 

In order to understand the text one has to be aware of the “бытовые” orthographic conventions adhered to by the person who wrote the letter:

— The letter ι is consistently avoided; in its place, ε is written, e.g. Lsg ΠΟΩΛΟΗΛΑ <νιζλοζηλ>, ΑΖΟ, ΣΟΛΟ.

— The letter υ is in most cases replaced with ε, e.g. ΙΠΛ ΛΟΕΠΗΙ, ΑΣΓ ΔΟΥΕΡΗ, ΑΣΓ ΙΣΓ ΕΛΑΕΔΗ; however, unlike ι, υ is not completely absent: in some cases it is written appropriately (e.g. ΦΟΡΟΔΛΛ, ΑΣΓ ΔΟΥΕΡΗ); occasionally it substitutes for ε, e.g. ΑΣΓ ΕΟ(Ε)ΤΡΟΥ (2x, alongside ΑΣΓ ΕΤΡΟΥ, ΝΣΓ ΕΟ(Ε)ΤΡΑ).

— The letter ό is completely avoided and consistently replaced with ε, e.g. ΔΣΓ ΚΑΙΜΑΤΕ, ΧΟΤΕΛΟ.

3. OUTLINE OF THE PROBLEM

Alongside anonymous ΛΟΔΛΛΕ and ΔΕΒΡΑΛΕ, the situation depicted in N531 involves
six or seven persons: Ana, her brother Klimjata, her husband Fedor, her (unnamed) daughter, her (unnamed) son-in-law, a person called Ksnjatin, and, finally, a person called Voeslav, who may or may not be the same person as Ana’s son-in-law.

In the opening sentences, Ana asks Klimjata to take action in a conflict between her and Ksnjatin. Fedor has “chased her out” because he has been apprised that in his absence Ana and her daughter have accepted liability for Ana’s son-in-law and paid money to a person or persons whose name(s) is/are not mentioned; in addition he has learned that Ksnjatin has referred to the two women in strongly derogatory terms (‘whore’, ‘slut’).

In the central part of the letter, Ana tells Klimjata how she expects him to act towards Ksnjatin; if witnesses turn out to confirm Ksnjatin’s position and, most importantly, if they confirm that she accepted liability for her son-in-law, she is prepared to face the consequences.

In the final sentences, Ana describes the circumstances under which the money was paid.

Our principal point of disagreement with the interpretations proposed so far concerns the role of Ksnjatin. According to the edition what he does is accuse Ana and her daughter of having disposed of money that was not theirs:

"Дочь Анны давала деньги в рост, соблюдая все существующие правила. Однако очевидно, что она распоряжалась не своими деньгами, а деньгами Коснятина, причем делала это в отсутствие своего мужа, которому, как это следует из существа дела, деньги для отдыхи в рост были поручены Коснятином. По всей вероятности, Коснятин заподозрил, что доход с его денег получается бесконтрольно зятьем и всей семьёй Анны. Сама Анна поручителем за зятья не была и нанесенное ей оскорбление считает бесосновательным" (НГБ 7, 133).

Although Zaliznjak is noncommittal about the exact details, as far as the central issue is concerned he adopts the edition’s view: “Коснятин обвиняет Анну в том, что она поручилась (дала руку) за зятью (в какой-то его финансовой операции)” (НГБ 8, 213).

In the traditional view, it is because of Ksnjatin’s accusations that Fedor has thrown Ana out on the street. Her letter to Klimjata has to be interpreted as a counterattack. This interpretation strikes us as unsatisfactory for several reasons, of which the following are the most important:

First, it necessitates strained interpretations of the meaning of the verb близкохати and the noun негіт. These points will be taken up in section 4, sub (4), (5) and (9).

Second, it fails to make sense of many details. If one takes the letter at face value, the crucial element of the case as presented by Ana is her assertion that she had not accepted liability for her son-in-law, implying that she was under no obligation to pay a debt owed by him. Against this background the fact that nevertheless money
was paid, as described in the final sentences, remains profoundly mysterious. If, as the traditional interpretation assumes, her wrongdoing consisted in having loaned her husband's and/or Ksnjatin's money to her son-in-law, the question whether or not she stood surety for him would seem to be purely academic and the importance she attaches to the point makes no sense. This is not the only problem. In the last sentence of the letter, Ana describes how Ksnjatin was quoted as saying: "I am sending four dvorjane to get the money". What is the purpose of mentioning this point? Why does she consider it necessary to go into such a seemingly minor detail as the number of subordinates Ksnjatin is sending?

The traditional interpretation leaves too many elements unexplained to be regarded as the final word on the matter.

4. SENTENCE-BY-SENTENCE COMMENTARY

In this section the text will be examined sentence by sentence, starting from the division into sentences and the translation as given by Zaliznjak (1995, 345).

(1) + ᾳΗΗΗ ΠΟΚΛΟ(ΗΟ) κο ΚΛΙΜΑΤΗ.

Translation: Οτ ΑΗΗΗ ΠΟΚΠΟΗ

In the opening sentence the word poklon is incompletely written (покло). This is nothing unusual, cf. покло (N539, N414), пклонъ (N339), пклон (Pskov 7), покло (N65), покло (N177). However, the text contains a striking number of rather similar mistakes (most of them obvious), some of which were noticed by the person who wrote the letter and were corrected on the spot. This may show that the letter was written in a hurry or under pressure (Zaliznjak 1995, 345-346).

N531 has been assumed to be earliest birchbark letters to contain поклонъ in the opening sentence (Zaliznjak 1995, 345). This important point will be taken up below (section 6).

The name Klimjata is mentioned in two other birchbark texts that have been assigned to the final decades of the twelfth or the early part of the thirteenth century, so that it has been assumed that the same person was involved (see Zaliznjak 1995, 343):
— In N725 (final decades of the twelfth or first half of the thirteenth century), Remša requests Klimjata and Pavel to tell the archbishop that he (Remša) has been maltreated and deprived of his liberty without being in debt.
— N671 (between the eighties of the twelfth century and the beginning of the second decade of the thirteenth) contains a list of persons who have been identified with some plausibility as the "хозяева усадеб, расположенных поблизости от перекрестка Пробойной и Черницкой улиц" (Zaliznjak 1995, 348). Janin (as reported by Zaliznjak, ibid.) has argued that N671 may list the names of one or two
persons who are reported by the chronicles to have perished in a military operation that took place in 1194. If correct, this identification has important chronological consequences. After all, if Klimjata was a “хозяин усадьбы” by 1194 at the latest, he can hardly have been born after 1175 and may have been much older, which diminishes the likelihood that N531 was written in the latter part of the first half of the thirteenth century, as allowed for by the stratigraphic facts.

However attractive these identifications are, it should be kept in mind that Klimjata was a common name in medieval Novgorod and that it is likely that other persons of the same name were around while Ana was alive. Indeed, Klimjata is also the name of the person who wrote N707, a letter that was found not far away from N531 in “усадьба Π” of the Trinity Excavation in a stratigraphic position the edition assigned to the period between the fourth and the eighth decade of the thirteenth century (НГБ 9, 99, 103) and that was later reevaluated as the final third of the thirteenth century (Zaliznjak 1995, 407). Since, as we have seen, the stratigraphic facts as interpreted nowadays leave room for the possibility that N531 was written as late as the middle of the thirteenth century, its Klimjata may have to be identified rather with the one that wrote N707 than with the one addressed in N725 and mentioned in N671 (assuming that they are the same person).

(2) крате господине, попечалуй о моем орофе коснатьню.

Translation: Господин брат, вступи́сь за меня́ перед Коснатьном в моем деле́ (или: позаботься о моей тя́ббе с Коснатьном).

On the syntax of the sentence see Zaliznjak (1995, 347).

With respect to the form and the use of the verbal stem ΠΕΜΛΛ- there is quite a bit of variation: the verb can end in -iti and in -ovati, it can be active and reflexive, it can be construed with the instrumental and with the preposition о, the prefix но- can be present or absent. Although it is unlikely that all of this variation was random, the number of attestations on birchbark is still insufficient to understand the reasons in all cases. The other examples of active (но)печаловати о are used in such a way that we prefer a translation along the lines of ‘take steps, take action’, see N698/N699, N302, and the examples the dictionaries traditionally translate as ‘хлопотать, просить’ (Sreznevskij) or ‘ходатайствовать, просить’ (Словарь русского языка XI-XVII вв., cf. Zaliznjak 1995, 347).

(3) а ныне известа ему людеми:

Translation: Сделай ему теперь через людей (или: при людях) [следующее] заявление о его неправоте:

The collocation а нынè is usually translated along the lines of ‘and now’, ‘а теперь’. In our view such translations are awkward because they suggest a transition to something new, whereas а нынè nearly always stresses the continuity with what went before and can often better be translated as ‘hence, consequently, therefore’.
For further discussion see section 7.

The rare verb нязвётель is convincingly interpreted by Zaliznjak as ‘заявить о чем-либо правонарушении, предъявить жалобу, обвинение’ (ΗГБ 8, 177). It was recognized in the edition already (ΗГБ 7, 131) that нязгета is to be read as an imperative (cf. also ΗГБ 8, 177).

The form эмог refers to Ksnjatin. As a matter of fact all unspecified third persons singular of Ana’s letter can be interpreted as referring to him.

The form людеми <ljud’mi> combines two difficulties. First, the semantics of люде are very unspecific: in addition to just meaning ‘people’, it occurs with such specialized values as ‘witnesses’ or ‘subordinates’; some of the instances of люде that occur further on clearly refer to witnesses. Second, the prepositionless instrumental is without serious parallels. That it is unlikely to be a superficial mistake, as was assumed by the edition (ΗГБ 7, 131), is shown by the second attestation of prepositionless людеми further on in the same letter (ΗГБ 8, 177). Whereas ten years ago, Zaliznjak (ibid.) argued that людеми can be understood as ‘in the presence of witnesses’, he now prefers an interpretation as ‘через людей’ (1995, 347), without, however, completely rejecting his earlier view. We prefer to stick to the earlier interpretation, which, though not so far attested elsewhere, is best in accordance with the fact that the other instances of люде in the text can most plausibly be interpreted as ‘witnesses’, in particular the second instance of людеми.

(4) “како есн везложна пороюкоу на мою сестроу и на дочерь ен, назовало есн сь(с) troch мою ко(ψ)ровоу и дочере владею, а гпинеза федо(ρο) прехако, оуелышаво то слово н въгонало ес(с) troch мою н хотело хотати”.

Translation: “После того, как ты обвинил в поручительстве мою сестру и дочь ее, назвал сестру мою курвою (менее вероятно: коровою), а дочь блядью, то теперь Фед (Фелор), приехавши и успышав об этом обвинении, выгнал сестру мою и хотел убить”.

This is the beginning of the нязвётъ Ana wishes Klimjata to pronounce.

In view of the fact that the person who wrote the letter simplifies double letters (e.g. враче), in accordance with what is usual on birchbark, it is conceivable that we have to read έν (н) назовало. This does not affect the interpretation of the text.

The principal problem here is везложна пороюкоу, which Zaliznjak interprets as ‘accused of having accepted liability (or having put up bail) for somebody’. In order for this interpretation to be possible, the frequent verb въздовжитъ has to be read as ‘adduce, put forward’, a value that is otherwise unattested and that is postulated on the basis of the attested meanings of въздовгтъ (ΗГБ 8, 213).

In our view this strained reading is an undesirable consequence of the conception of Ksnjatin’s role introduced by the edition. Let us see what happens if we take the text literally. The verb въздовжитъ means, as one would expect on the basis of the meanings of its component parts, ‘put on top of’; when combined with
abstract objects (e.g. prerogatives, tasks, punishments) this basic meaning yields values like 'assign, impose, burden with'. If one translates the phrase ΒΟΣΑΟΪΑΟ ΠΟΡΟΥΧ ΜΑ ΜΟΥ ΣΕΤΡΟΥ ΜΗ ΝΑ ΔΟΧΕΡ ΕΗ as literally as possible in accordance with the attested meanings of ΒΟΣΑΟΪΑΟ one gets 'imposed liability on my sister and her daughter', or 'burdened my sister and her daughter with liability', implying that what Ksnjatin has done is put the ladies in a position that they stood surety for somebody and therefore had to pay a debt owed by him or her to Ksnjatin.

This explains why Ana denies so vigorously that she has accepted liability for a third party, despite the fact that ultimately the money was paid: apparently she was left with no choice.

It turns out that Ksnjatin has done two things:

(a) He has forced Ana and her daughter to stand surety for a third party. Later on it will become clear that the third party is Ana's son-in-law and that the ladies have actually parted with a substantial sum of Fedor's money.

(b) He has used abusive language with respect to the two ladies.

Faced with these facts, Fedor has "chased her away". Although the former point is presumably the central issue, the addition of the latter point is by no means a superfluous embellishment: as was pointed out by the edition already (ΗΓΒ 7, 132), calling a married woman a slut was a serious offense. If Ana can make her accusation stick, Ksnjatin will have to pay a considerable fine.

As for ΣΑΟΒΩ, it, like ΛΚΑΙΕ, is a very unspecific word. Apart from meaning 'word', 'letter', 'the gift of speech' it can refer to almost any type of oral or written utterance, e.g. 'homily, advice, conflict, permission, order'. What does it refer to here? We are told that Ana's husband Fedor came home, heard "το ΣΑΟΒΩ" and chased his wife away. Presumably το ΣΑΟΒΩ somehow refers to the dispute between Ksnjatin and Ana.

(5) Α ΗΊΛΜίμΑ, ΓΟΣΦΟΙΗ ΒΡΑΤΕ, ΣΟΓΑΔΑΟ ΣΟ ΒΟΕ(Σ)ΛΑΒΟΜΟ, ΜΟΛΟΙΝ ΕΜΟΥ: "ΤΑΚΟ ΕΗ ΒΟΣΑΟΪΑΟ ΤΟ ΣΑΟΒΩ, ΤΑΚΟ<ΚΟ> ΔΟΚΕΔΗ".

Translation: A теперь, господин брат, посоветовавшись с Воеславом, скажи ему (Коснятину): "Раз ты возведь это обвинение, так докажи".

Then Ana asks Klimjata to confer or, more probably (given the value of the attestations of ΣΟΓΑΔΑΤΗ in Sre/nevskij), to come to an arrangement with a person called Voeslav. We are not told who he is.

The collocation "ΒΟΣΑΟΪΑΟ ΤΟ ΣΑΟΒΩ" combines two problematic words we have come across already. If here again, το ΣΑΟΒΩ is interpreted as the dispute between Ksnjatin and Ana, we find that what Ana wants Klimjata to express is the fact that Ksnjatin has "imposed that dispute" on her and her daughter.

The form ΤΑΚΟΚΟ has traditionally been read τάκο, with the syllable κο written twice by mistake (ΗΓΒ 7, 132; ΗΓΒ 8, 213; Zaliznjak 1995, 345). We would like to
suggest that κο may be the well-known particle: modern Russian ка, also amply attested as ko. Whereas in modern Russian we would expect the particle to follow the imperative, here it is placed after тако in accordance with Wackernagel’s rule (see Zaliznjak’s discussion in НГБ 9, 280-298). The position and use of κο has a parallel in the following sentence from N109: Α πάντα κα ποστάν κα τόμου μούχεμη γράμτου, έ λον έν τήν κο αίσα 'send therefore a letter to that man, [to see] if the slave girl is with him/if he has a slave girl'.

Zaliznjak translates the sentence Ana wants Klimjata to pronounce as ‘Раз ты возвел это обвинение, так докажи’. Although this yields satisfactory sense it does not stand in a very obvious relationship with the original sentence as read nowadays. The construction of the sentence (тако ..., тако ...) is sufficiently unusual to consider the possibility that the sentence Ana wants Klimjata to pronounce ends with слого: ‘тако ешь возложило то слого’ ‘that is the way you (Ksnjatin) have imposed that conflict’, and that the words тако κο доваран are intended for Klimjata: ‘that is the way you (Klimjata) have to prove [the case]’, ‘that is the way I want you to proceed’.

By the way, as far as we can judge it is by no means certain that the reading доваран corresponds to the intentions of the person who wrote the letter. Between до and вел the facsimile given by the edition shows a conspicuous gap into which three (or perhaps two or four) letters could have fitted; actually something is visible both immediately after до (a vertical dash) and immediately before вел (a c-like formation). There are no similar gaps elsewhere in the text. All this diminishes the chance that до and вел belong together. This point will have to be looked into by people who have access to the original text.

(6) Δже ти воздомолови коснатино: “Δαла рохов <λ> за зьте”, ть же, браце господине, молови емо<у> тако: “Оже бохов людин на мои се(ч)трых (оше бохов людин, при ком бохов дала рохов за зьте), тο τε έ βο βиνε”.

Translation: Если же скажет Коснатино: “Она поручилась за зять”, — то ты, господин братец, скажи ему так: “Если будут свидетели против моей сестры, если будут свидетели, при ком она (букв.: я) поручилась за зять, то вина на ней (букв.: на мне)”.

This introduces the last of the dramatis personae: it turns out that the person whose debt to Ksnjatin is at the center of the letter is Ana’s son-in-law. We may wonder if he is the same as the person called Voeslav, with whom Ana wants Klimjata to confer or come to some arrangement. It is easy to come up with reasons why contact between Klimjata and Ana’s son-in-law may have been judged desirable. It may have been necessary to hear his version of what had happened, or to agree to a common course of action, or to get him to put up the money himself, or perhaps even to prevail upon him to give himself up willingly to Ksnjatin. However, it is not completely excluded that Voeslav was somebody else, e.g. a
prominent citizen whose help may have been judged necessary. According to Ksnjatin, Ana "ΔΕΛΔΑ ΡΟΥΚΟΥ ΖΑ ΖΑΤΕ", i.e. was legally responsible for her son-in-law; if Ksnjatin is right he was entitled to the money and if it would turn out that Ana has acted without Fedor's consent that is not his (Ksnjatin's) problem.

The situation whereby persons accept liability for others or are otherwise under an obligation to pay money owed by others (often members of their family) to third parties is quite common on birchbark. In some cases people that have been forced to pay money hold, like Ana, that it is all a mistake and that in actual fact they are under no obligation to pay anything, whatever other people may think, cf. N235: "(...) σε χαζάκι πολλά από τους αδεινίκα, ίπνον ια μάρα τομάνο, μαρά τομάνο, έντομα έντομα μπάου μπάου, ίπνον μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπάου, μπάου μπά0
At this point the reader may wonder: if Ana is right in holding that she was under no obligation to pay her son-in-law’s debt, why was the money paid nevertheless? The remaining part of the letter is devoted to this fundamental issue.

In the first of the two sentences Ana states that her daughter has given the money under circumstances that lessen her guilt in two ways:

First, she has publicly expressed her disagreement. The traditional interpretation, which implies that Ana’s daughter gave the money willingly, forces Zaliznjak to assume that “по-видимому” she used the word “безобидно” (НГБ 8, 177), which is awkward considering the fact that the verb is used in its technically correct meaning earlier on in the letter. It now turns out to be unnecessary.

Second, she has demanded a collateral, which, if granted, would presumably have converted the transaction into a loan. Note that the same witnesses that can testify to her she did demand a collateral.

To begin with, the word pogost and the fact that Ksnjatin has the authority to summon Ana to the pogost strongly suggest that Ksnjatin is a travelling tax-collector (“даниник”) rather along the lines of the person called Sava, who wrote N724. If that is true, the money Ana’s son-in-law owes Ksnjatin is probably taxes he was unable or unwilling to pay. The fact that it is not Ana herself, but her daughter who has turned over the money (although the money is obviously Fedor’s) is probably a consequence of the fact that it is the daughter’s husband whose debt is at issue.

The word pogost also suggests that the whole affair takes place not in Novgorod itself but somewhere else in the Novgorod lands. If Ksnjatin is a travelling tax-collector, as we think he is, he has probably moved on already and can be contacted only in Novgorod, which is one of the reasons why Ana writes to Klimjata, who probably lived in Novgorod, where N531 was found.

Note however that the essence of the story does not change if the debt would turn
out to be a private one.

Furthermore, there is information in the final words of the letter. In the traditional interpretation, грешен is a Dsg depending on не in its distributive meaning. The problem about this view is that it implies that the final sentence is excessively elliptic, as is illustrated also by Zaliznjak’s translation. The sentence makes however perfect sense if грешен is taken as an Apl depending on не in its meaning ‘in order to get’, as used in several other Novgorod birchbark letters (notably N8 and N345). It can then be translated quite literally as follows: “Я шлю четырех дворян за гривнами серебра”. This explains why Ana’s daughter-in-law turned over the money at all: she was intimidated. The numeral is essential and provides a third reason lessening Ana’s daughter’s guilt: faced with the prospect that Ksnjatin would send as many as four subordinates she had no alternative but to hand over the money.

Finally, the fact that Ksnjatin refers to the money as “грешен сы(ре)бра” shows that it is a substantial sum.

Despite all this, the meaning of the passage remains to some degree conjectural.

The stretch “и посольбо мёне во погосто” obviously means ‘he summoned me to the pogost’. The ‘he’ is Ksnjatin. The stressed form мёне (used in preference to the clitic form мы) opposes Ana to her daughter, who is the subject of the previous sentence (see on this point Zaliznjak 1995, 346).

The stretch “и апо (н)ехал” obviously means ‘and I (Ana) came/arrived’. But where was it that she came/arrived? Against the background of the previous sentence it is most likely that it was the pogost.

The stretch “оже око посольбо пошло, а дела тако: (...)” means ‘because he (had) left, uttering the following words: (...’). Where was it that he spoke those words? At Anna’s, after summoning her to come to the pogost? At the pogost, before travelling on to some other place? We prefer the former possibility, but the latter is not excluded.

It is difficult to be sure about the question why Anna is writing all this. One interpretation (on which however we do not insist) is the following: the fact that Ana has been at the pogost can be misinterpreted as a sign of willingness to go along with Ksnjatin. She explains that she could not afford to disregard Ksnjatin’s summons because on leaving her he had threatened to use force.

5. FACTUAL BACKGROUND: TRANSLATION

We can now see what happened. At a moment when Fedor was away from home, Ksnjatin demanded from Ana and her daughter that they pay a debt Ana’s son-in-law owed him, claiming that they had accepted liability for him. The women were unwilling to comply with Ksnjatin’s demand, denying that they had any responsibility in the matter and knowing full well that they were not in a position
to take on such a weighty obligation without Fedor's consent. However, when Ksnjatin threatened to use force Ana's daughter turned over the money, taking care to do so in a way that showed she was acting under duress. During his dealings with the two women, Ksnjatin was heard to use some powerful invective.

Some time after all this had happened, Fedor came home, heard that Ana and her daughter had paid his son-in-law's debt out of his money and threw Ana out on the street, threatening to kill her on the spot. This forced Ana to ask her brother to take matters in hand.

Our interpretation given above yields the following English translation, which is intended as a crib and does not pretend to be idiomatic:

From Ana a greeting to Klimjata.

Brother and lord, take action in my lawsuit vis-à-vis Ksnjatin. Accuse him in front of people [i.e. witnesses] [as follows]: “Since you have imposed liability on my sister and her daughter and have called my sister a whore and her daughter a slut, Fedor, after coming home and hearing about that case, has thrown my sister out and has wanted to kill her”.

Then, lord and brother, after coming to an arrangement with Voeslav, tell him [Ksnjatin]: “That is the way you have imposed that case”. That is the way you have to prove [the case]. If Ksnjatin says: “She accepted liability for her son-in-law”, then you, brother and lord, tell him this: “If there turn out to be people [i.e. witnesses] against my sister” [here the viewpoint shifts from Klimjata to Ana] — if there turn out to be people in whose presence I accepted liability for my son-in-law, — then I am guilty. You from your part, brother, after investigating what case and liability he has adduced against me and if it turns out that there are people [i.e. witnesses] confirming it, [I am] not your sister and not my husband's wife; kill me then without heeding Fedor.

My daughter gave the money in front of people [i.e. witnesses], registering protest and demanding a collateral. I (for my part) was summoned to the pogost and went there because he [Ksnjatin] left [me], saying: “I am sending four dvorjane to get those silver grivna's”.

6. MODERN FEATURES OF N531

Assuming the correctness of the traditional hypothesis that N531 was written in the decades immediately preceding or following 1200, it is the earliest birchbark letter to use ΠΟΚΛΟΗΤ in the opening formula (see, e.g., Worth 1984, 322, cf. also Worth 1990, 440, Figure 2; Zaliznjak 1995, 345, cf. the table, o.c., 31). This point requires some discussion in the light of the changed evaluation of the stratigraphic evidence (see section 2).

The only attestation of ΠΟΚΛΟΗΤ of possibly similar age occurs in Tver' 1 (Zilina 1987), which has been assigned to the end of the twelfth or the first quarter of thirteenth century (Zaliznjak 1995, 377). For two reasons the corroborative value of the Tver' attestation is however limited. First, epistolary conventions cannot be expected to have been everywhere at all times the same, particularly in periods of change. Second, against the background of the fact (noted above, section 2) that
even in the case of Novgorod, stratigraphic dates are subject to constant (if relatively minor) modifications, it would be foolish to be very confident about Tver', which has been much less thoroughly researched.

The other early attestations of ΠΟΚΛΟΗ-Κ are:

— N600, which like N531 was originally assigned to the end of the twelfth or the first quarter of the thirteenth century (ΗΓΒ 8, 60) or the years 1196-1213 (ΗΓΒ 8, 309), has since been shifted to the period between the second and the fourth decade of the thirteenth century (Zaliznjak 1995, 385).
— N199 and N147 have both always been assigned to the twenties or thirties of the thirteenth century (Zaliznjak 1995, 386, 388, cf. ΗΓΒ 8, 307). Of these two documents, N199, which belongs to the celebrated collection of birchbark documents attributed to 'мальчик Офим', is particularly important because it shows that at the time it was written, children who were being taught to write had to produce opening formulas containing ΠΟΚΛΟΗ-Κ.6

After the middle of the thirteenth century ΠΟΚΛΟΗ-Κ is quite frequent, cf. N707 (nowadays assigned to the final third of the thirteenth century), N481, N148, N412, Pskov 7, N395, N328, N67, N65, N55, to mention texts that were written in the second half of the thirteenth century or the early years of the fourteenth.

In other words, the earliest convincing attestations of ΠΟΚΛΟΗ-Κ do not predate the twenties of the thirteenth century and may well be one or two decades younger (N600, N199, N147).

Since we know Ana has a grown-up daughter, she has reached an age at which she cannot be expected to run ahead of her time with respect to behavioural conventions. Note also in this connection that the Klimjata who wrote N707 used ΠΟΚΛΟΗ-Κ, like Ana, whereas the letter from Remša to Klimjata and Pavel (N725) prefers ΠΟΚΛΛΑΗΝΗ (on these letters see further section 4 sub (1)).

In several other respects, too, N531 has a somewhat modern look:

(1) It combines a clear preference for the non-dialectal o-stem msc Nsg in -δ with the use of the dialectal Gsg and NApl ending -έ. As one of us has shown elsewhere (Vermeer 1997, 40-42), this pattern is very frequent from the second quarter of the thirteenth century onwards. Earlier examples are sporadic and may not reflect systematic preferences.

(2) It contains two examples of loss of final -ι, το τε <to τε> and the imperative ΜΟΛΟΒΕ (corrected on the spot into ΜΟΛΟΚΜ). The earliest text in which loss of final *-ι in the particle ι is attested is N502 (second half of the twelfth century); the value of the attestation is diminished by the fact that the text is not written in the Novgorod dialect. The next attestation is found in N705, a text that stratigraphically belongs to the first half of the thirteenth century, but opens with ΠΟΚΛΛΑΗΝΗ and is slightly more archaic than N531 in other respects as well7. A further example appears only in the final decades of the thirteenth century: N411. At later stages the
phenomenon is quite common. (See further НГБ 9, 304-308 and the relevant entries of the vocabulary in Zaliznjak 1995). The earliest example of loss of -’/i in the imperative (Staraja Russia 10) is problematic because the text is not from Novgorod and has an unusual orthography. Other examples are all quite late. (See further НГБ 8, 144-145; Zaliznjak 1995, 121). Note in this connection also the loss of the final vowel in пако <пакъ>, corresponding to earlier пакъ or паки (cf. Zaliznjak 1995, 420).

(3) The text has two attestations of line-final word division after a consonant: кокначиной, назовало. This practice is exceptional before the second quarter of the thirteenth century and fairly regular later on (see Schaeken 1995, 95-97).

The use of положь and the concentration of other relatively recent features in N531 provide an important reason to consider the possibility that the letter was written in the decades between 1220 and 1250, which, as we have seen, is allowed by the stratigraphic evidence as interpreted nowadays. This would mean that N531 is not an “early” birchbark text in the sense of НГБ 8, 91 and that it belongs in “Раздел В” of Zaliznjak (1995).

7. THE USE OF a ныне

As was indicated above (section 4 sub (3)), if the collocation a ныне is translated as ‘and/but now’ or ‘a теперь’, the result can be awkward. Consider the following example:

N109. (...) кокначь еси робоу палъсова, а ныне ма в’ томъ ала кънагъннн. а ныне са дружина по ма пороцина. а ныне ка посля к’ томоу мойжеви грамотоу, е ли оу него роба. (...) 

The fragment contains three attestations of a ныне; if each attestation is translated as ‘and now’, we get: “You bought а/the slave girl in Pskov. And now the princess has arrested me because of that. And now the дружина has put up bail for me. And now send that man a letter, to ask ...”. This translation obviously does not make optimal sense. The first and second now actually refer to different points in time, which is awkward. Moreover, the coherence of the sequence of actions disappears from sight under the impression of mere juxtaposition created by the use of and now.

As for the third a ныне, it is worthy of note that in other texts, too, a ныне is often used to introduce imperatives; in such cases the text preceding a ныне contains the background or motivation for the request or order expressed by the imperative. The translation ‘and now’ suggests that there is no connection with the preceding text, which is awkward. This holds for two of the three attestations in N531 and for such examples as:

N167. (...). ио ии, господине, попечилиеса [ч]оромами. а н(и)ны после своо человекъ.
THE LONGEST BIRCHBARK LETTER

N135. (...) ци къло живота твоего и моего, то все взлам, а самого смертно казнить. а понеже, осподин(e), пещалесь дѣтымъ моимъ.

The phenomenon is far from being exceptional; it is also found in N317, N477, N538, undoubtedly also in N231 and possibly in N272. Translations that imply discontinuity in such cases are at variance with the manifest intentions of the originals.

8. THE USE OF ОЖЕ

There are thirty-seven attestations of ОЖЕ in thirty texts. In six cases the text is excessively fragmentary or otherwise uninformative and Zaliznjak refrains from providing a translation (N107, N400, N430, N232, N347, N385). In two thirds of the attestations that have been translated the modern Russian equivalent given is 'если'. In the remaining third of the cases various other equivalents are given, most of which reflect an interpretation as a relative pronoun 'what', shading into a conjunction 'given the fact that, because'. A closer examination of the examples shows that this picture is somewhat misleading.

Since a relation exists between the value of ОЖЕ and the tense of the clause introduced by it we are going to deal separately with the different types of cases. To begin with there are fifteen examples of a past tense.

N752. (...) а въ сию недѣлю цѣть до мѣняѣ зѣла имѣшш, ОЖЕ е[ч]и кв. мѣшкѣ нѣ приходиапъ? (...)

The woman who wrote the letter is wondering why the recipient has failed to turn up when she expected him. Translation: 'Что за зло ты против меня имѣшь, чтво въ эту недѣлю (или: въ это воскресенье) ты ко мнѣ не приходилъ?' This translation incorporates the value 'given the fact that'. The value 'if' is out of the question because the recipient's failure to turn up is the subject of the letter and is treated as 'given.'

N605. (...) а сорной ми, ОЖЕ мнѣ лио мѣшеалуе (...) 

The monk who wrote the letter is explaining why he has failed to honour an appointment. The tone and substance of the letter suggest that the recipient is very angry about this. Translation: 'А зазорно мнѣ, что ты злое мнѣ говорилъ'. Since the negative attitude of the recipient is treated as 'given', 'if' is impossible.

N105. + ть сьмѣка къ куолоутѣкѣ. ОЖЕ то кен казале несѣдѣ вѣкрѣчѣ тыхъ дѣлъ, комъ то еш приходиае въ рохъ[ч] бъ лазѣ(в)ѣкѣмъ, тѣмѣдъ вѣдале оу менѣ лазѣкѣ перѣсдале[ч] овѣ.

Translation: 'Что [касается того, что] ты говорил Несде про тѣ деньги, то ...' Here again, 'if' would yield nonsense. On te see Zaliznjak in НГБ 8, 160.

N603. (...) вѣбаета, ОЖЕ а тако не докѣлп. ТАЖА ВАША. (...) 

Translation: 'Вы (двоє) знаете, что я тяжбы не выиграл. Тяжба ваша'. This is
one of two cases in which ούχε has been interpreted as introducing an object clause depending on a verb of knowing. Although this interpretation is conceivable (there is a parallel in N548), we would like to draw attention to the possibility of the following reading: ούχε α τάξαν τον τούτο, τάξα τάξα. ‘You know: since I did not win the law-suit, the law-suit is yours’. Whichever solution is correct, it is obvious that ‘if’ would not yield acceptable sense.

N603. (...) τρύψε χένα μοια ζαπλάτηλα 20 γρινέν, ούχε εστί ποσοελίμεν
ά(ά)β(ά)δ(ά)β(ά) δ(ά)β(ά) ι(ια). This is the continuation of the previous example. Translation: ‘Τεθερρ χένα μοια ζαπλάτηλα 20 γρινέν, κοιτήνια (ουή: κοιτήνια) κινεύζο ραίνα δαβύττου’. This is the only example in which the translation has ‘κινεύζο’, which is a natural extension of the value ‘what’. Alternatively, ούχε could mean ‘in view of the fact that’. Obviously, ‘if’ would yield nonsense.

N531. (...) ροπ άπθε χένα πρι(ρη)δαλα, ούχε εστί ποσοελίμεν προμε, α ρεκα τάκα: "άζε ομο ιο 4
dωράττο προ γρινένε σχ(ρη)εβάδα”. Here again, ‘if’ would not yield coherent sense.

In all seven examples ‘if’ is impossible. The remaining eight examples of ούχε combined with a past tense are all to varying degrees ambiguous. This holds in the first place for a series of three examples in which the verb in the clause beginning with ούχε has a meaning like ‘sell’ or ‘trade’:

Staraja Russa 8. (...) ούχε εστί προσάλε, το κάδανε σελό άπθε κτόκακσρο (. . )
Pskov 6. (...) προ κόλο. ούχε κέτε δε στρογγόδαλε, το προσάλε σε πρόστα, ζανόδα
ού μανο κοπαλλα εστε βελέ. (. . )
Vitebsk 1. ὁ στήπαρα κοι κηκίλοβνι. ούχε εστί προσάλε πόρτα, α κουπι μη χιμτα σα 6
γρινένε. αλι έστι εστι νε προσάλε, α κουπι μη λιετέμε. αλι εστι προσάλε, α δοβρο
cτήκαρα ούκοππι μη χίτα.

Although in all three cases the translation has ‘εστι’, it is obvious that ‘что
[κακακεστα]’ and ‘помому что’ would also have been possible because it is unclear
whether the writers of the letters are reacting to a known fact or providing for a
contingency.

In the case of Vitebsk 1, ‘если’, though possible, does not yield an optimal
outcome. Zaliznjak translates the letter as follows: ‘От Степана к Нежили. Если
ты продал одежду, купи мне ячменя на 6 гривен. Если же чего-нибудь еще не
продал, то пошли мне сами эти вещи. Если же продал, сделай милость, купи
мне ячменя’.

Zaliznjak draws attention to the curious fact that in this interpretation the final
sentence appears to repeat the beginning of the letter, which runs contrary to
normal birchbark practice. Hence we prefer a translation based on ‘что’: ‘(...) As for the clothes you have sold, buy for me barley for [the] six grivny. If there is something you have not sold, send it to me as it is. But if you have sold [it, something], please, buy barley for me’.

Our reconstruction of the background is the following: Nežil has left with a certain amount of “партъы”. He has written to Stepan that he has already sold a portion of the “партъы”, asking for instructions what to do with the six grivny he has received. Stepan instructs him to buy barley for it and then turns to the portion of the “партъы” that had not yet been sold when Nežil asked for instructions and tells him to send back anything that has not yet been sold and buy barley for money he has received for such “партъы” as he has sold\(^8\). This eliminates the repetition that Zaliznjak rightly objects to.

N439. (...) оже ти не возвало мате мапин, волажи ю с ко прочесмо ко мне. (....)

The example resembles the three previous ones. Here again, the translation has ‘если’, but ‘in view of the fact that’, ‘with respect to the fact that’ or ‘since, because’ would have been equally possible.

N627. (...) оже еси звчйле моего доброления, а прислати ти (...)

Translation: ‘Ты, можешь быть, забыл, как я тебе делал добро, а ты должен прислать...’. This free translation probably reflects an interpretation along the lines of ‘In view of the fact that you have forgotten about my benefaction, [I want to remind you that] you have to send...’.

N222. (...) ожь ти ны вжали колюбаж, ок тыкий жрыкве, скоть по людьмо. (....)

Since the situation is unclear, both ‘если’ (Zaliznjak’s choice) and ‘since, because’ are possible.

In the case of N400 and N430 too little information has been preserved and Zaliznjak rightly refrains from offering a translation.

The number of attestations of оже combined with an (imperfective) present tense is limited and most of them are ambiguous:

N644. (...) а не сестра а камо, оже тако дьлаете, не исполвить ли ничего же. (...)\(^9\)

Translation: ‘А [тогда] я вам не сестра, если вы так поступаете, не исполняете для меня ничего!’ In our view a translation as ‘in view of the fact that, because’ is also possible, perhaps even preferable. After all, the woman who wrote the letter is reacting to the fact that the recipient has not so far delivered the goods she has ordered.

N548. (...) а въыде, ожь к вась есть тъварь олексымь.

Translation: ‘Я же знаю, что у вас есть товар Олески (Олексь).’ As far as we can see, this is the only possible interpretation and ‘если’ would make no sense.

N222. ожь [А]н право запишань с(а), а а дяю книжку дыжаскоау грынову съербра, едую с нимо, ожь ма татъмо [по]ставали.

The translation has ‘если’. Although this may be defensible we strongly prefer ‘in
view of the fact that', because 'if' does not explain the imperfective presents and εδού: 'Since they are really denying [the point at issue], I am giving the prince's детску a silver grivna and riding with him, because they have put me in the position of a thief'. By the way, it is curious that the addition of μι does not seem to give rise to an 'if-like' value. The same holds for the presence of μι in αλι as used in N605: a пришша еστι αλι звонили 'A пришли мы (двоё), когда [уже] звонили'.

In the four remaining cases, εκεί is combined with the present tense of χόρτος:

N8. (...) εκεί χότьщи коровь, α εδεισι по корову, а вэзі три гривны.

Smolensk 12. (...) εκεί хucheи пь-ъне, а присьлам (,...)

N107. ... εκεί χοтшш пннг(н) ... ζητο τи токана во роукахе ...

N232 (12th century; not included in Zaliznjak 1995). (...) α ожк χошет ...

Unfortunately, all four examples are ambiguous because they do not contain enough information to know what exactly is going on. N8 is clearest. Zaliznjak translates: 'Если хочешь корову и едешь за коровой, то вси три гривны'. However, even here not enough is known about the situation and it would be perfectly possible to say 'Since you want the cow and are coming to get the cow, bring three grivny'. The same holds for Smolensk 12: the translation has 'если', but the text is too fragmentary for us to understand what is going on and 'because' (or whatever) would have been equally possible. The other two texts are even worse.

Despite the small number of examples this confirms the picture obtained on the basis of attestations of оке combined with past tenses: such examples as are not ambiguous point to a value somewhere along the continuum running from 'what' to 'because'.

The future tenses yield a different picture. Under "future tenses" we understand perfective present tenses (including будь и perfective present gerunds used as main verbs) and compound tenses containing будь. We start with the perfective present tenses.

N271. (...) γυγοу ми, κλαναо са, νεβα α υ ανдреа, υже прода, возми υ него грамоту. (,...)

Zaliznjak translates: 'Если продает, возьми у него грамоту'. In our view this is plausible.

In two texts the writers detail measures to be taken if or in view of the fact that a prince is going to war:

N332a. (...) εκεί кнадь понде, присьлн нвана хрошькнин(ий/а шедо) къ и ерьтн и цят[т] и κ[σ][ν]те (,...)

N404. (...) εκеі понде кнадье, а поним коре ох, федора и седо возим (...)

In both cases Zaliznjak’s translation uses 'если'. However, the situation is ambiguous and in principle a translation along the lines of 'Given the fact that the prince is going to war, ...' would also be appropriate. In the case of N332a this is however unattractive because the person who wrote the letter appears to have provided for an alternative in case it would turn out that the prince would not "go":
the stretch ...[не] пойдет ... can be interpreted with Zaliznjak as the remainder of a clause meaning ‘Если же я не пойдёте, [то] не присилай’.

In one case a gerund is used:

N82. (...) прикажи ко двору. ожь ти придя върыть, да водян ро... (...)

Zaliznjak translates: ‘Если же приедешь вором, то дай ...’. Against the background of the preceding sentence, a translation along the lines of ‘in view of the fact that you will arrive on horseback, ...’ would make no sense.

We now turn to examples containing быду as a main verb.

N531. (...) "оже бохдой люди на мою сы(е)тров (оже бохдой люди, при комо бохдой дало роков за здет), то те а бо вине”.

The situation points unambiguously to a value ‘if’ in both cases. See further section 4, sub (6).

N271. (...) оже ти тв не быде векса и ...

This is the continuation of a letter treated above in which the writer requests the recipient to buy oats (in addition to several other things). Although the letter is fragmentary, Zaliznjak’s translation ‘Если же там не будет овса ...’ is considerably more plausible than a translation along the lines of ‘Given the fact that you won’t find oats there/here’.

Two examples that Zaliznjak translates аs ‘если’ are in fact ambiguous:

N68. (...) ожь ти быдь гость, мын ждн. (...)

Pskov 6. (...) оже боходье порожне, то бохдн к намо. (...)

In both cases a translation with ‘Given the fact that ...’ is equally plausible.

Twice, быду serves as an auxiliary verb:

N411. (...) ожь аль быдь матфейца, дерь сктеть (...)

Zaliznjak translates: ‘Если поймал (не указано, кто) Матфейца, хорошоанко его закуйте’. This is plausible. The second example is too fragmentary to allow an interpretation:

N277. ... ришмо, ожь бы(де)шь понмала се ... (...)

In N670, N347 and the late text N385 the tense of the verb cannot be determined. In one case, оже appears not to introduce a clause containing a verb:

N481. (...) послан грамоту оже кнгы на съть и нанитгу. (...)

Zaliznjak comments: “В сочетании грамоту оже кнгы союз оже выступает в очень редком значении ‘а такжэ’, ‘и’”, adding that there is only a single parallel instance in all of Old Russian. We would like to draw attention to the possibility that оже is used loosely in its attested value of ‘as for’, ‘что касается’.

The overview of the material has shown that examples of оже combined with a past or (imperfect) present tense are either ambiguous or reflect a value at some point along the continuum running from ‘what’ to ‘in view of the fact that, because’. Conversely, examples of оже combined with a future tense are ambiguous or reflect a value ‘if’.

This analysis is confirmed by the material in the dictionaries. Among nearly a
dozen examples exemplifying the value 'если', the Словарь русского языка XI-XVII вв. lists only two in which ОК is not followed by a future tense, one of which is a birchbark letter (N439) which in actual fact is ambiguous and hence does not exemplify the value 'if' at all. Among the other values of ОК there is hardly a single example in which it is followed by a future tense.

It is reasonable to suppose that ОК originated as the NAsg neuter singular of the relative pronoun НК and that the value as a conjunction meaning 'in view of the fact that, because' arose secondarily out of its original meaning, cf. also such cognates as SCr. jer 'because' (see further Fasmer 1986-1987). In Old Russian as written on birchbark a translation 'if' is appropriate only if the fact to which ОК refers is fundamentally uncertain because it is presented as not yet having taken place. In our view the meaning 'if' is not inherent in ОК, but arises if the basic meaning of ОК is combined with a future tense. The conjunction ОК, on the other hand, always means 'if'.

The use of ОК contains interesting chronological indications.

To begin with the form ОК does not occur in all periods. It is attested in several early texts (e.g. N752) and is still quite common in the thirteenth century (e.g. N68, N481, N411, Pskov 6, N437, not to speak of N531). But later examples are rare: there are as few as four fourteenth-century attestations in three texts, all three of them connected with the Mišinići: N385 (found in layers belonging to the final decades of the fourteenth century, but addressed to Oncifor Lukinić, who died in 1367), N277 (between the fourth and the beginning of the eighth decade of the fourteenth century, written by Oncifor's son Maksim), N271 (seventh or beginning of eighth decade of the fourteenth century).

There appears to be a chronological difference between the two types of combinations in which ОК can be used.

The earliest examples of combination with the past or present tense are very early (N752, N605, N644), whereas the most recent examples are not later than the first quarter of the thirteenth century (N8, N107, N222). On the other hand the earliest example in which ОК is combined with a future tense dates only from the final decades of the twelfth century (N82). The earliest but one attestation (N332a) dates from the period between the final years of the twelfth and thirties of the thirteenth century. All other attestations belong to the second half of the thirteenth century (N68, N411) or are even later (N277, N271). In N531 both types of attestations occur.

9. CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing we have argued that:
— N531 receives a coherent interpretation on the assumption that Ksnjatin has forced Ana and her daughter to part with a certain sum of Fedor's money on the
pretext that she (Ana) had accepted liability for her daughter’s husband
— Our reading of N531 removes the necessity for strained interpretations of

— There are no compelling reasons to identify the Klimjata to whom N531 is
addressed with the person of the same name addressed in N725 and mentioned
in N671. He may or may not have been the person who wrote N707
— The use of по какой taken in combination with the stratigraphic evidence as
recently reinterpreted suggests that N531 may have been written as late as the
second quarter of the thirteenth century
— The collocation α νομίζει often stresses continuity and logical coherence,
contrary to its most obvious translation ‘and now’, ‘а теперь’
— The conjunction оже if used with a past or present imperfective tense means ‘in
view of the fact that, against the background of the fact that, since, because,
поскольку’

NOTES

A The research for the above paper was partly financed by INTAS
B In December 1997, long after the proofs had been submitted, the authors received a
beautiful letter from A A. Zaliznjak containing comments casting a different light on several of
the issues treated in the article. Although at the present stage a discussion of Zaliznjak’s
findings is impossible we would like to mention two points
— We somehow failed to notice that our view of the semantics of α νομίζει (section 7) is
already to be found in R. Faccani, Iscrizioni novgorodiane su corteccia di betulla Udine, 1995,
pp 96-97, 112
— There are weighty reasons, mostly of a paleographic nature, for maintaining the early date
traditionally assigned to N531

1 The present article arose from a written critique (letter of 2-6-95) by Alexander Lubotsky
of the interpretation of N531 presented in Vermeer (1995b, 77-83), which in essence
reproduces the interpretation given in the edition (НГБ 7, 130-134) and modified by
Zaliznjak (НГБ 8, 213-214) Lubotsky argued that the central point of the letter (the role of
Княгинин had been thoroughly misunderstood and showed that the use of the important
conjunction оже differs fundamentally from that of оже. The principal improvements
proposed by Lubotsky have been incorporated in Vermeer (1996, 85-92)
2 On the problem of the exact form of the name see Zaliznjak (1995, 345)
3 The possibility that Voeslav may have been Ana’s son-in-law was brought to our attention
by Jos Schaeken
4 The person called Voiislaa who is mentioned in N509 is somewhat too early to be
identified with Ana’s Voeslav, the one who is mentioned in N50 is far too late
5 As Zaliznjak has argued convincingly (НГБ 8, 179), поручен is the technical term for a
person who is responsible for another person in the sense intended here
6 For some complications involving N199 see Vermeer (1995a, 121, note 6)
7 Still we cannot help wondering if this attestation is completely reliable. The form оже is
immediately followed by ρω, yielding a repetition of о that is not attested elsewhere. It is
possible that the person who wrote the letter first wrote down ατί, then added τι intending to end up with ατίτ, but failed to cross out τι (for a similar example cf. N509, Zaliznjak 1995, 304). On the other hand one is reminded of the superfluous τ in ατίτ in N109.

8 The only attestation of οκό is similar: N581 (...) οκό μη εσι προδαλή χιττό, τ[ρ] [ο] ... 

9 The perfective present неправилъ is what Zaliznjak has called a “презенс напрасного ожидания” (ΗΓΕ 9, 275-279) and refers to the present time.

10 Leaving aside Pskov 6 and Vitebsk 1, which may be later, but are not from Novgorod.

11 Unfortunately N404 lacks a stratigraphic date.

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