

**DON'T SHOOT THE MESSENGER: PART TWO**  
**PRAGMAPHILOLOGICAL NOTES ON BIRCHBARK LETTERS NOS.**  
**497 AND 771 FROM NOVGOROD AND NO. 2 FROM ZVENYHOROD**

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**SUMMARY**

This paper deals with the pragmatics of three birchbark letters from medieval Rus'. I argue that all three letters are 'communicatively heterogeneous' (Gippius 2004; see also Dekker 2014 in this volume): they consist of different sections that have different authors or are aimed at different addressees. This pragmatic feature has already been established for the first letter to be presented, no. 497 from Novgorod (see Schaeken 2011a), but I will return briefly to this extraordinary text and offer a parallel from another historical corpus of personal letters, which displays exactly the same communicative scenario as proposed for no. 497. In the case of the other two letters, I propose that there is a change of addressee in the second part of no. 771 from Novgorod and a change of author in the second part of no. 2 from Zvenyhorod. In both instances, the messenger is involved: he is directly addressed in the second part of no. 771 and probably takes over the role of author during the course of the letter from Zvenyhorod.

**1. Introduction**

This paper builds on previous work on the communicative structure of birchbark letters from medieval Rus', more particularly that of A.A. Gippius in his groundbreaking article "К прагматике и коммуникативной организации берестяных грамот" (2004). Gippius's research concentrates on a special type of letters that he calls 'communicatively heterogeneous' ('коммуникативно неоднородные тексты'). They reflect written communicative speech acts that are explicitly or implicitly composed of separate discourse units with different referential perspectives: "оформленное как единый текст письменное сообщение распадается на части, обладающие различной ролевой структурой, то есть имеющие разных авторов или адресатов" (Gippius 2004: 185). For a further discussion of communicative heterogeneity in birchbark letters, see Dekker in this volume (2014, §§ 1-2).<sup>1</sup>

In a recent article – entitled "Don't shoot the messenger" – on Novgorod birchbark letter no. 497 (N497, where N stands for Novgorod), I emphasized

<sup>1</sup> For other recent publications on the communicative structure of birchbark letters, see Collins (2011), Gippius (2012: 243-245), Gippius and Schaeken (2011), and Schaeken (2011b; 2012b: 131-159).

that the messenger and the spoken word play a crucial role in the composition and reception (understanding) of communicatively heterogeneous letters: “The messenger can participate actively in the communication between the sender and the addressee: he can be the composer and writer of the text; he can be authorized by the sender to elaborate orally on the content for the addressee; he can be the reader of the message to the addressee; and he can even be a beneficiary of the business dealt with in the letter” (2011a: 7; see also Dekker 2014, §5).

In this paper, I will first return to N497 and show that there is a perfect typological parallel for this unique letter. I will then discuss two other birchbark documents, N771 and no. 2 from Zvenyhorod (Zv2), and argue that in these two letters the messenger also has an explicit role in the written communicative event.

## 2. Novgorod no. 497 revisited

I recently proposed a new reading of N497, which is dated to the mid-fourteenth century (Schaeken 2011a, including a transcription with glosses). Several arguments can be adduced to substantiate the hypothesis that the letter, which at first sight appears to be fully coherent, consists of two different messages. The first part (Part A in Fig. 1 below) is an invitation sent by Gavriła Postnja to his family, asking them to visit him: “Greetings from Gavriła Postnja to my brother-in-law Grigorij, [my] *kum*, and to my sister Ulita. May you come to the city [Novgorod – JS], to my happiness, and not depart from our request. May God give you happiness”. The second part of the letter (Part B in Fig. 1) is Grigorij and Ulita’s reply: “We will all not depart from your request”:

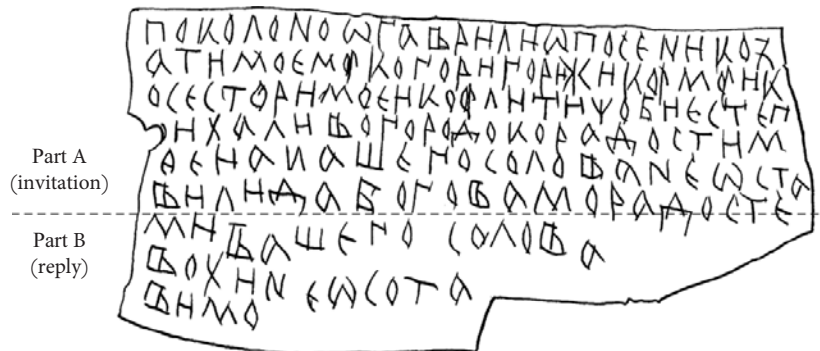


Fig. 1: Drawing of N497 (Arcixovskij and Janin 1978: 91). See <http://gramoty.ru> for a photograph.

Since N497 does not show any palaeographic or linguistic differences between Part A and Part B, we have to assume there was a single author, and that author must have been the messenger who carried the letter. He wrote the

invitation on behalf of Gavriila Postnja and took it to Gavriila's family, where he wrote down Grigorij and Ulita's answer, directly below the initial message. It is therefore not surprising that the letter, which was clearly sent out of the city, was recovered six centuries later (in 1972) in the place of its origin, viz. Novgorod: the messenger fulfilled his task and took the letter back to Gavriila, now including the reply from his family members.

N497 is unique in the birchbark corpus; there are no other documents containing a letter and a reply to it in the same handwriting.<sup>2</sup> Although there is compelling evidence to support the proposed interpretation, it could be seen as a flaw that there are no other examples of this rather unexpected reading of N497. However, I would like to draw attention to an exact parallel in a very different historical corpus of personal letters, which shows that the reconstructed communicative scenario for N497 is not so strange after all. The same scenario has also been suggested for a Greek papyrus from the Roman period of ancient Egypt (second century A.D.), which is kept in Leiden under the identifier P.Leid.Inst. 42 (edited by Hoogendijk and Van Minnen 1991: 177-180 and Plate XXVII).<sup>3</sup> This badly damaged papyrus consists of a letter with the answer written below it, and is translated as follows (idem: 179):

“Heras to Taphes my sister, many greetings,  
Above all I pray you and your family are in good health. You should know that I have written to you twice and you have not written to me in answer to any of the letters. Receive from ... sandy-coloured sandals and a hair shirt and ... of a fruitcake and ... and dates ... that you make the account (?) ... you will write to me.  
Goodbye.

To Heras my sister, very many greetings,  
Above all I pray you are in good health. I write you, until I come up, to thank you for the clothing. I do homage (to the god) on behalf of you.  
*Verso:* To Philadelphia, give to my sister Heras.”

The full text of P.Leid.Inst. 42 is written in a single hand, although two different pens can be discerned: one for Heras's letter and one for Taphes's reply, including the address on the back. The editors conclude: “The two letters will have been written, at different times, by the same person, so the carrier of the letter probably acted as scribe as well” (idem: 178; see also Bagnall and Cribiore 2006: 36). This is exactly what must have happened in the case of N497. In both instances there are clear indications of two separate writing events (one

<sup>2</sup> Note that N736 (early twelfth century; *DND* 263-265) also consists of a letter (on the outer side of the birchbark) and a reply (on the inner side). However, the two messages are written in different hands. See further Schaeken (2011a: 6-7; 2012a: 211-212).

<sup>3</sup> See also <http://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.leid.inst.;42> for basic details and a transcription of the text.

for the initial letter and one for the reply): the use of different pens in the text on papyrus and the difference in layout of the text on birchbark (straight lines in Part A and wavy lines in Part B; see Fig. 1 above and Schaeken 2011a: 5-6). In addition, the replies in the two documents lack the usual greeting formulas: in N497 the formulas are completely absent, whereas in P.Leid.Inst. 42 Taphes's reply "ends without even a real salutation. Of course, there was not much room left for the second letter, and Taphes could keep it short [...]. Besides, she was coming up to her sister, anyway" (Hoogendijk and Van Minnen 1991: 178). The same also applies to N497: as Grigorij and Ulita had accepted the invitation, they were about to visit Gavrila anyway.

### 3. Novgorod no. 771

N771 was found in 1996 during excavations at the Trinity site (*Troickij raskop, usad'ba E, kvadrat 1467*), located in the medieval quarter known as People's End (*Ljudin konec*), on the Sophia Side of the city, south of the Kremlin. A preliminary edition was published by Janin and Zaliznjak (1997: 28-29). The text was subsequently included in the tenth volume of the Academy edition (Janin and Zaliznjak 2000: 64-65) and in the second edition of Zaliznjak's *Drevnenovgorodskij dialekt* (DND 532).

The document (13.1 × 6.9 cm) is dated stratigraphically between the end of the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century, while extra-stratigraphical evidence places it in the first two decades of the fourteenth century (DND 532).

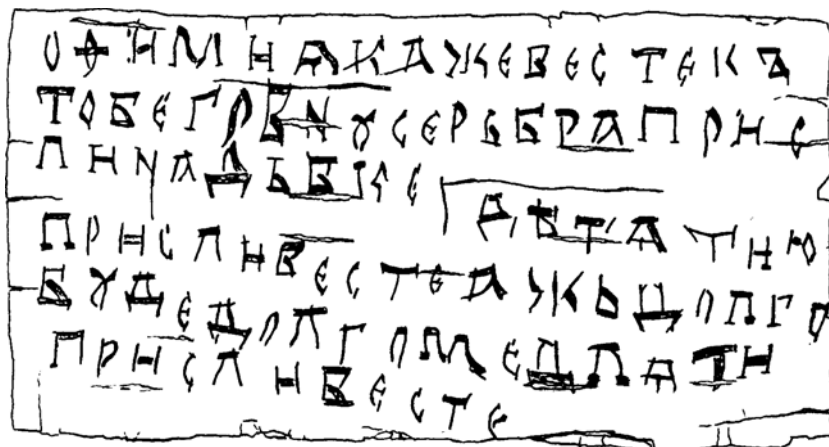


Fig. 2: Drawing of N771 (Janin and Zaliznjak 2000: 65). See <http://gramoty.ru> for a photograph.

Edition, normalized transcription and translation (according to *DND* 532):

1	ОФИМИА	КАЖЕ	ВЕСТЕ	КЪ
	ofimija	kaže	věstʹ	kъ
	Ofim'ja-NOM	give-PS.3SG	notice-ACC.SG	to
2	ТОБЕ	ГРИВНА	СЕРЕБРА	ПРИС-
	tobě	gr(i)vnu	serebra	pris-
	you.sg-DAT	grivna-ACC.SG	silver-GEN.SG	
3	ЛИ	НА	ДЪВКЕ	ДѢТАТИЮ
	li	na	děvkē	dětjatiju
	send-IMP.2SG	on	girl-LOC.SG	boy-INS.SG
4	ПРИСЛИ	ВЕСТЕ	АЖЬ	ДОЛГО
	prisli	věstʹ	ažʹ	dolgo
	send-IMP.2SG	notice-ACC.SG	if	long-ADV
5	БЪДЕ	ДОЛГО	МЕДЛАТИ	
	bude	dolgo	medljati	
	be-FUT.3SG	long-ADV	delay-INF	
6	ПРИСЛИ	ВЕСТЕ		
	prisli	věstʹ		
	send-IMP.2SG	notice-ACC.SG		

“Ofim’ja gives you notice: send a silver grivna for the girl. | Send notice with the/a boy [about this]. If you happen to be long delayed long [sic], [also] send notice.”<sup>4</sup>

N771 is a warning sent by a creditor, Ofim’ja, to an unnamed addressee, who has bought a slave girl but has not yet paid up. The letter begins in an unusual way, with a second-person pronoun rather than the name of the addressee. Gippius has pointed out that this implies that the letter was intended to be read aloud rather than handed to Ofim’ja’s delinquent customer: “Текст представляет собой точную запись устного объявления, которое посланец Офимьи должен был сделать не названному по имени адресату, адресной формулы как таковой здесь нет” (2009: 290; see also *idem* 2004: 211, 217; 2012: 243).

As can be seen on the drawing, the birchbark is divided into two parts by perpendicular strokes in the middle of line 3, before the word ДѢТАТИЮ “with the/a boy”. According to Zaliznjak, this separator was inserted to prevent a false reading because of the ambiguous syntax of the sentence: “Слово *дѣтатию* отчеркнуто слева и сверху: таким способом Офимья показала, что отсюда начинается новая фраза. В данном случае разделительный знак действительно важен: он предотвращает ложное чтение ‘Пришли за девочку гривну серебра с ребенком’” (*DND* 532). However, if this

<sup>4</sup> Russian translation (*DND* 532): “Офимья сообщает тебе весть. Пришли гривну серебра за девочку. С ребенком пришли [об этом] весть. Если [тебе] придется долго медлить, то [тоже] пришли весть”.

were the case, one would have expected the third line to be continuous and straight, and the separator to have been squeezed in afterwards, between **ДЪВКЕ** and **ДЪТАТИЮ**. The fact that there is an unusually large space between the two words, and that **ДЪТАТИЮ** is written at a slightly lower level than the words preceding it, suggests a graphic division that was not made to separate two words within the same text, but rather to separate two discourse units: one before the boundary mark and one after. Is it possible that N771 actually consists of two messages to different addressees? Against the background of the well-established category of communicatively heterogeneous birchbark letters, such an assumption is not inconceivable. Since the birchbark was not intended to be handed to the unnamed addressee at the beginning of the letter, as mentioned above, the words written on the birchbark were only known to the messenger. In addition, it should be noted that in the *DND* reading it is not clear how the text after the boundary mark relates to the beginning of the letter; it is somehow awkward that Ofim'ja first delivers a straightforward warning to pay the debt and then asks for a message to notify her about the money, and also if there is some delay. These considerations give rise to the assumption that the letter contains two independent messages.

I argue that the second message, after the separator, was intended as a memorandum to the messenger (see also Schaeken 2012b: 157). The author of N771 tells him to send a message “with the/a boy” (a servant) if he should be detained long on his errand. A thematic parallel can be found in N259/265 from the end of the fourteenth century (*DND* 600-601). This fragmentary letter begins: “An order from Grigorij to Domna. I have sent you a bucket of sturgeon...”. The second fragment says: “... And don't stay out there very long (*or*: And you yourself don't stay out there) ([Δ] САМО ТАМО НЕ ЛЕЖ[И]) – you go back to Luga. And you, Repex, listen to Domna, and you, Fovr”. In this communicatively heterogeneous text, the phrase “And don't stay out there very long” is most probably directed to the letter's messenger, who has to take the valuable bucket to Novgorod (see Gippius 2004: 220). Whereas the messenger of N259/265 is instructed not to hang around and to return as soon as possible, the messenger of N771 is asked to send notice in the event of a delay.<sup>5</sup>

Other examples of communicatively heterogeneous birchbark letters in which the messenger is directly addressed by the author are N406 (second

<sup>5</sup> The explicit request for a response is not unusual in correspondence on birchbark. For example, in N422 (mid-twelfth century; *DND* 297-298), Mestjata, who is out of town on business, writes to some of his associates in Novgorod: “If you need anything, send to me, and give [the messenger] a letter”. In no. 10 from Toržok (second half of the twelfth century; *DND* 452), Onufrija is writing to ask his mother to deliver a horse and coat to Lazar' and to send his messenger Petr back to him: “... and send [Petr] himself here. If you don't send him, send me news of that”.

half of the fourteenth century; *DND* 593-594, Gippius 2004: 197-198) and no. 12 from Smolensk (mid-twelfth century; *DND* 344-346, Gippius 2004: 199, 227-228). In N406, which is addressed to the landlord Ofonos (“And we bow to you, Lord Ofonos”), the messenger is instructed in the last sentence how to negotiate with the landlord about annual tribute payment: “And if he (i.e. Ofonos) begins to ask for [anything for his] wife or son, [offer him] for [his] wife 2 squirrel-skins, and for [his] son a squirrel-skin”. Similarly, on the back of the Smolensk letter (“From Ivan to Rusila”), the messenger is given the instruction: “If he (i.e. Rusila) somehow begins to dodge (?), don’t you dare to say something (i.e. to start negotiations with Rusila)”.

It seems evident that the instruction in the second part of N771 conveys that in the event of a delay the messenger should send notice with a specific servant (“with the/a boy”). However, the syntax and semantics of Ofim’ja’s words require some further comments.

First, the word for “long” (ДОЛГО) is mistakenly written twice (lines 4 and 5), which has been explained by Zaliznjak as follows: “Офимья решила поставить это слово в другое место фразы, но первое *долго* не зачеркнула” (*DND* 532; see also *idem*: 260, with references to other birchbark letters where the same type of mistake is found).

Second, the conditional clause АЖЬ ДОЛГО БУДЕ ДОЛГО МЕДЛАТИ can depend on either the preceding or the following main clause, which are identical: ПРИСЛИ ВЕСТЕ (lines 4 and 6). It is possible that the author first wrote “Send notice with the/a boy” and then decided to clarify her instruction: АЖЬ ДОЛГО БУДЕ ДОЛГО МЕДЛАТИ ПРИСЛИ ВЕСТЕ.

Third, the proposed reading leaves room to interpret the phrase БУДЕ ДОЛГО МЕДЛАТИ in two different ways. As argued above, it can be directed to the messenger, which presupposes a second-person dative subject (\**ažb tobě dolgo bude medljati*). However, it can also refer to the unnamed debtor, which would imply a third-person dative subject: \**ažb emu dolgo bude medljati*, i.e. “if he happens to be long delayed (with the payment of the silver grivna)”.<sup>6</sup> Compare the same construction in N370 (second half of the fourteenth century; *DND* 588-590), where the third-person subject is explicitly mentioned: АЖЕ ЕМУ · БУДЬТЬ · СИДИТЬ ... “if he is to stay (, we don’t have the strength to stay)”. Ofim’ja was perhaps thinking that the messenger’s delay would be dependent on the debtor’s delay, which would make it irrelevant to specify the subject and would explain the absence of an overt dative subject.

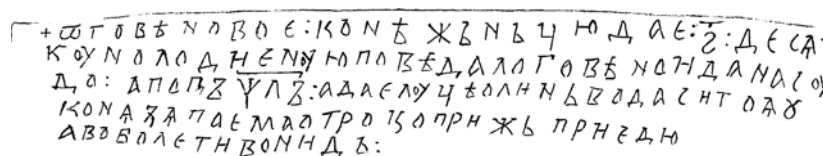
Whatever the exact meaning of the last sentence may be, I think there is enough evidence to plausibly assert that N771 is a communicatively heterogeneous letter, of which the second part is addressed to the messenger: “Send

<sup>6</sup> I owe this insight to S.M. Mikheev (personal communication).

notice with the/a boy. If there happens to be a long delay long [sic], send notice”.

#### 4. Zvenyhorod no. 2

Zv2 is one of three birchbark documents that were excavated in 1988-1989 in Zvenyhorod, located in Galicia (Halyč), in the west of present-day Ukraine. It was first published by Svješnykov (1990: 128-130) and later included in *DND* (346-347); see also Nimčuk (1992: 12-14), Fałowski (1998: 72-76) and Mel’nyk (2011: 192-194).



The document (approx. 6.5 × 30 cm) is dated stratigraphically between the 1110s and 1130s; extra-stratigraphical evidence places it in the first four decades of the twelfth century (*DND* 346).

Fig. 3: Drawing of Zv2 (<http://gramoty.ru>). For a slightly different drawing and also a photograph, see Svješnykov (1990: 129) and Mel’nyk (2011: 192).

Edition, normalized transcription and translation (according to *DND* 346):

1	+ ѿ	ГОВѢНОВОЕ :	КО	НЕЖЬНЫЦЮ	ДАЕ	:ѣ:	ДЕСА[Т](О)
	ot	gověnovoe	kъ	něžnyŋsju	dai	3	desja[t](o)
	from	Goven's-GEN.SG.F	to	Než(e)nec-DAT	give-IMP.2SG	6-ACC	ten-GEN.PL
2	КОУНО	ЛОДИНУЮ	ПОВѢДАЛО	ГОВѢНО	ИДА		НА СОУЗ
	kunъ	lodiinuju	rovědalъ	gověno	ida		na su-
	kuna-GEN.PL	boat's-ACC.SG.F	say-PERF.SG.M	Goven-NOM	go-PTC.PS.A.NOM.SG.M		on
3	ДО :	А	ПОПЪ	ПЛА :	А	ДАЕ	ЛОУЦЪ
	dъ	a	popъ	p(b)s(a)lъ	a	dai	lucъ
	judgment-ACC.SG	and	priest-NOM.SG	write-PERF.SG.M	and	give-IMP.2SG	Luka-DAT
	ОЛИ	НЬ	ВОДАСИ	ТО	А	Ъ	
	oli	ne	vōdasi	to	ja	u	
	if	not	give-PS.2SG	then	I-NOM	from	
4	КОНАЗА	ПОЕМА		ОТРОКО	ПРИЖЬ		ПРИЕДЮ
	kōnjazja	poima		otrokъ	priže		priěd[u]
	prince-GEN.SG	take-PTC.PS.A.NOM.SG.M		official-ACC.SG	together		come-PS.1SG
5	А	ВО	БОЛЕ	ТИ	ВОНИДЬ :		
	a	vъ	bole	ti	vōnide		
	and	in	more-ACC.SG.N	you.SG-DAT	come in-PS.3SG		

“From Goven’s [widow] to Neženec. Give sixty boat-kunas (i.e. sixty kunas for the boat). Goven said [this], going to Judgment, and the priest wrote [it] down. And give [it] to Luka. If you don’t give [it], then I will come, taking an



official (constable) from the prince with me; and it will go into more [expense] for you.”<sup>7</sup>

Zv2 is a letter from a widow to someone who was in debt to her late husband, Goven; she is acting on instructions that he gave while “going to Judgment” (**ИДА НА СОУДО**), i.e. while dying (see Gippius 1991),<sup>8</sup> and that were recorded by his spiritual father (see also Franklin 2002: 184). While the text seems relatively straightforward in translation, it actually features a grammatical complication, which may be of pragmatic interest: the present active participle **ПОЕМА** from *pojati* ‘to take’ in line 4. The participle should agree with the subject of the main clause; this is in the first person, and one might therefore think that it refers to the author, Goven’s widow. The problem is that it is grammatically masculine rather than feminine (*\*poemiči*), which was pointed out by Vermeer (1999: 74; see also Schaecken 2012b: 159).

Gippius (2004: 200) has convincingly argued that Zv2 is an example of a birchbark letter in which the messenger – in this case Luka – is mentioned explicitly:

“... вдова Говена, требуя с Неженца возвращения денег за лодью (**ДАЕ :Ѣ: ДЕСА[Т](О) КОУНО ЛОДИЕНОУЮ**), затем дублирует это требование: **А ДАЕ ЛОУЦѢ**. Лука здесь – явно посланец Говеновой вдовы, явившийся к Неженцу за деньгами. Упоминание его имени потребовалось для заверения адресата в том, что податель грамоты действительно уполномочен автором получить с него долг, а не является самозванцем.”

Gippius’s observation gives rise to the hypothesis that masculine **ПОЕМА** rather than feminine *\*poemiči* marks a change in referential perspective, from Goven’s widow to Luka, the messenger who is to act on her behalf. Accordingly, it will be Luka who delivers the warning “... I will come, taking an official (constable) from the prince with me” if Neženec refuses to pay. A change of perspective seems particularly plausible if Luka is not only the messenger but also the writer of the letter; he starts from the widow’s viewpoint, then naturally switches to his own when he becomes the focus of the utterance. This scenario would make Zv2 a communicatively heterogeneous text, in which the messenger is first mentioned in the third person (**А ДАЕ ЛОУЦѢ** “And give [it] to *Luka*”) and then takes over himself, in the first person

<sup>7</sup> Russian translation (DND 346): “От Говеновой [вдовы] к Неженцу. Дай шестьдесят кун ладейных (т. е. за ладью или на ладью). [Так] сказал Говен перед смертью (букв.: идя на суд), а поп записывал. Дай [их] Луке. Если же не дашь, то я возьму у князя отрока и вместе [с ним] приеду – это тебе станет в большую сумму”.

<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Toločko’s alternative explanation of the expression **ИДА НА СОУДО** (2008), which seems highly unlikely for several reasons.

(ОЛИ НЬ ВОДАСИ ТО А ... ПРИЕДУ “If you don’t give [it], then I [i.e. Luka] ... will come”).

A similar shift of perspective occurs in the first line of the outer side of N531 (early thirteenth century; *DND* 416-420), where the writer of the letter, Ana, formulates a statement that she wants her brother Klimjata to make. She begins by referring to herself in the third person: “If there turn out to be people (witnesses) against *my sister* (i.e. Ana) ...”. However, in the course of the sentence she shifts to her own first-person perspective: “... – if there turn out to be people before whom *I* (i.e. Ana) stood surety for [my] son-in-law, then *I* (i.e. Ana) am at fault”. As Zaliznjak notes: “Разумеется, психологически эти сбои легко объяснимы – но только в том случае, если Анна писала письмо сама. У писца для подобных ошибок никаких психологических оснований не было бы. Таким образом, перед нами почти наверное автограф Анны” (*DND* 419).

The hypothesis proposed in relation to Zv2 is merely an alternative for the existing reading, because the grammatical issue at stake is more complicated. For active participles (present and past) we have to take account of the historical development of loss of agreement in gender and number. The data for the gradual loss of agreement in birchbark and parchment documents are presented in §4.26 of *DND* (184-185), although **ПОЕМА** in Zv2 is not listed in that paragraph. In the early period of Old Russian (until c. 1220), loss of agreement appears to be attested only sporadically. In §4.26 only the past participle **ВЪЗЪМЪШИ** (from *vъzjati* ‘to take’) in N119 from the first half of the twelfth century is mentioned as an early – and moreover ambiguous – example of disagreement on birchbark. See also elsewhere in *DND* (273), where the text of N119 is discussed: “Причастие *възъмъши* может быть согласованным или не согласованным по роду (правда, второе малохарактерно для ранне-др.-р. периода ...)”. For the later period, the thirteenth and especially the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, we find abundant cases illustrating that the principle of agreement in gender and number had been lost. For example, in N692 from the early fifteenth century (*DND* 661-662), which is a last will of a woman called Marija (probably a nun), we read: “I, Marija, [a servant of God], departing this life, write a testament during my lifetime”. For “departing” the masculine form of the present participle of *otxoditi* is used (**ЎХОДА**), whereas it evidently refers to a woman (see *DND* 185).

Although **ПОЕМА** in Zv2 is explicitly classified in the glossary of *DND* (785) as a masculine form (“прич. през. ед. м.”), not as “прич. през. (несогл.)” like e.g. **ВОЗМА** in N354 (*DND* 719),<sup>9</sup> what we are dealing with here might actually

<sup>9</sup> In §4.26 of *DND* the present participle **ВОЗМА** (from *vъzjati* ‘to take’) in N354 (mid-fourteenth century) is treated as a case of disagreement. The letter is a petition with instructions from Ončifor (Lukinič) to his mother and includes the clause: “... and go with Obrosij to Stepan, having taken [my] share”. One would have expected the feminine form \**vъzътици* for “having taken”

be the earliest unambiguous attestation on birchbark of loss of agreement. If this is indeed the case, the participle could refer to any gender (thus either to Goven's widow or to Luka) and there would be no compelling reason to prefer the new interpretation to the existing one; it would merely be a plausible alternative.<sup>10</sup>

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(see also *DND* 551). However, this is not a definite instance of disagreement because N354 is a communicatively heterogeneous text, in which the change of addressee from Oncifor's mother to the servant Nester, who has to perform some tasks, is not indicated explicitly (see Gippius 2004: 189-190 and also *DND* 550). The instruction "... and go with Obrosij to Stepan, having taken [my] share" is actually addressed directly to Nester; thus the masculine form БОЗМА is not necessarily a case of disagreement of gender.

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