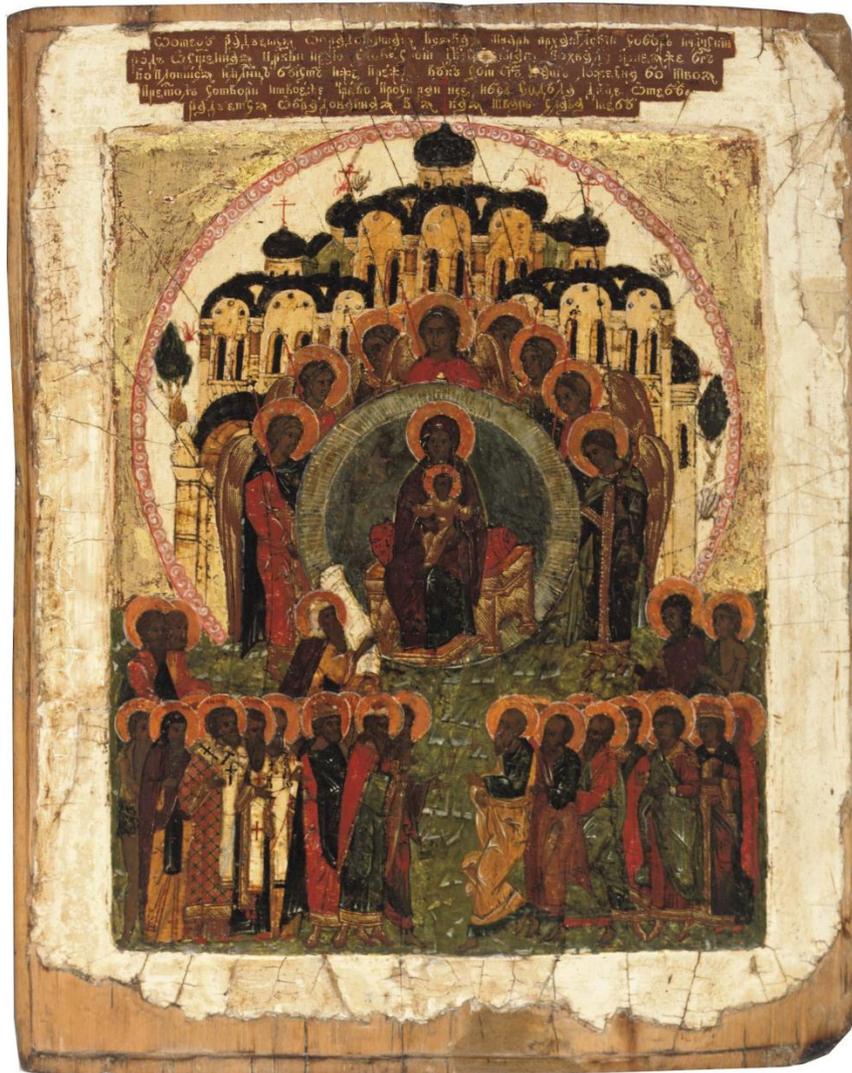


**Observations on some lexical and paleographic features of  
an inscription on Icon R2007.46,  
“Mother of God, In thee rejoiceth”**

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Mother of God (Βογοροδιца/Theotokos), *In thee rejoiceth* icons, one of the oldest icon types honoring her, began appearing in Russia at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup>, beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> Their appearance is related to changes in the order of service in the liturgy. What had previously been a silent prayer was replaced with a sung composition of a text written by the eighth century Byzantine poet and theologian St. John Damascene (c. 676-749).<sup>2</sup> This text<sup>3</sup> is from the liturgy of St. Basil the Great and substitutes for the “Dostojno est” in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom (c. 349-407). Instances of the icon were painted in the Moscow area by iconographers at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century for iconostases in the Moscow Kremlin, the city of Dmitrov, and the Kirillo-Belozersk monastery.<sup>4</sup>

The Greek text reads:

«*Επί Σοι χαίρει, Κεχαριτωμένη, πάσα η κτίσις,  
αγγέλων το σύστημα και ανθρώπων το γένος.  
Ηγιασμένη Ναέ και Παράδεισε λογική, Παρθενικόν κάυχημα,  
εξ ης Θεός εσαρκώθη και παιδίον γέγονεν ο προ αιώνων υπάρχων Θεός ημών.  
Την γαρ Σην μήτραν θρόνον εποίησε και την  
Σην γαστέρα πλατυτέραν ουρανών απειργάσατο.  
Επι Σοι χαίρει, Κεχαριτωμένη, πάσα η κτίσις, δόξα Σοι.»<sup>5</sup>*

The Old Orthodox Prayer Book<sup>6</sup> translates the hymn into Church Slavonic as follows:

Ѡ тебѣ радуется въбрадованная всакая тварь, англѣскїи соборъ, и члческїи  
родъ. Ѡ всщенная церкви, раю словесныйи, двѣственаа похвало, из неже бгъ  
воплотиса и младенецъ бысть, прежде вѣкъ сыйи бгъ нашъ. ложесна бо твоа престоль  
сотвори, и чрево твое пространнѣе небесъ содѣла двице. Ѡ тебѣ радуется  
въбрадованная всакая тварь, слава тебѣ.

And then, in parallel, into English thusly:

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<sup>1</sup> Бобров Ю. Г. *Основы иконографии памятников христианского искусства*, Москва: Художественная школа, 2010:208ff.

<sup>2</sup> He was an Arab who lived in Damascus, Syria (which is why he is called John Damascene) and, as with many Christian Arabs, worked for the Caliph of that time, Abd al-Malik, as a high ranking finance officer. His name was Mansur ibn Sarjun (Sergius) Al-Taghlibi. He entered the priesthood at the Monastery of Mar Saba in Palestine in 735, where he is buried. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\_of\_Damascus). As a native of Damascus he probably spoke Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, a Semitic language, like Arabic and Hebrew; but as a priest he probably wrote in Greek. See Horrocks, Geoffrey “Language” in Jeffreys, Elizabeth, John Haldron and Robin Cormack *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> It is part of the Oktoix/Deiparous Octoechos, the Book of Eight Tones of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

<sup>4</sup> See frizia.agni-age.net/icon/t\_rad.htm and *Treasures from Moscow: Icons from the Andrey Rublev Museum*, Clinton, MA: Museum of Russian Icons, 2010, p.62. Also of interest is Гусакова В. О. *Словарь русского религиозного искусства*, Saint Petersburg: Avrorra, p.165.

<sup>5</sup> From ru.wikipedia.org.

<sup>6</sup> *Old Orthodox Prayer Book*, second edition, Erie, PA: Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), 2001 p. 112.

*In thee rejoiceth all creation, O thou who art full of grace: the assembly of archangels and the race of men. O hallowed church, mystical paradise, glory of virgins, of whom God, our God before the ages, took flesh and became a child. For He made thy body a throne, and thy womb He made more spacious than the heavens, O Virgin. In thee rejoiceth all creation, O thou who art full of grace: Glory to thee.*

The *In thee rejoiceth* icons attempt to portray the statements in the text.<sup>7</sup> In the Museum's icon, the Mother of God is sitting on a throne holding the Christ child seated on her lap. Just above and behind the two is the assembly of angels (8 in our icon; 7 in the Andrey Rublev; many more in others—so clearly some are representing angels and those with 9 or fewer—perhaps archangels). Above the angels/archangels is a depiction of a church (the heavenly Jerusalem) surrounded by paradise (stylized trees, very much elaborated in the Rublev icon). At her feet are representatives of mankind in the form of saints, with St. John Damascene at her right foot holding a scroll. On some of these icons the beginning of the Damascene text is written on the scroll.

### The text on 2007.46

On the Museum's instantiation of the icon the complete text of the hymn appears at the top of the icon.



Transliterated into contemporary Cyrillic, it reads:

*Ѡ о тебѣ радуется обрадованная всякая тварь архангелѣи  
 соборъ и члѣскѣи родъ Ѡсценная цркви и раю словесный дѣвственная  
 похвало изнеяже бгѣ воплотися и млнць бысть иже прежде вѣкъ сый  
 бгѣ нашъ ложесна бо твоя престоль сотвори и твоеже чрево  
 пространнее пѣсь содѣла Ѡ тебѣ радуется обрадованная всякая  
 тварь слава тебѣ<sup>8</sup>*

The Museum of Russian Icon's *In thee rejoiceth* icon dates to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. There are visible cracks in the gesso in relatively straight or slightly curved lines, some of them

<sup>7</sup> The icon is 24 cm x 30 cm. It is the only one of its type in the Museum's collection.

<sup>8</sup> The difficulty in reproducing the titlos and other finer features of the text should still allow the reader to interpret the more gross features of the text. The finer points are discussed later.

extending through the whole icon. Some of them correspond to cracks in the wood, as evidenced especially at the top of the icon but also, to some extent, at the bottom. The cracks at the top of the kovcheg appear through the gesso so that they form a line from the wood into and out of the painted surface. These cracks in the kovcheg for the most part, however, do not go very far into the wood; one does at an angle. Most of the cracks in the gesso are vertical.

On the top frame of this icon is the five-line text written in gold on a brown background. This background is only part of the top frame, which, like the rest of the frame, is white. The brown paint is raised above the white, suggesting that the whole frame had been brown and all but the top of the frame, in order to preserve the text, had been removed later. Remnants of the brown are still visible around the whole frame, suggesting that the brown section is indeed original to the icon and not added at a later time. In addition, cracks in the edge of the brown section show a lighter brown below the reddish brown. And in the middle of the text, in the second line, part of the brown is chipped revealing the white gesso below.

That the icon has been restored, in addition to the removal of the brown, is further exemplified by the nimbi, which are an orange color, and the gold behind the heavenly Jerusalem, which is a different shade than in the inscription and in the assists.

There are at least two versions of the Russian text readily available on the web:

*О Тебе радуется, Благодатная, всякая тварь, ангельский собор и человеческий род. Освященный Храме и Раю словесный, девственная похвало, из Нея же Бог воплотился и Младенец бысть, прежде век Сый Бог наш: ложесна бо Твоя Престол сотвори и чрево Твое пространнее небес содела. О Тебе радуется, Благодатная, всякая тварь.*  
([www.pravoslavie.ru/sm/070312170140.htm](http://www.pravoslavie.ru/sm/070312170140.htm)<sup>8</sup>. This same translation appears in the ru.wikipedia.org entry)

and

*О Тебе радуется, Обрадованная, всякая тварь, архангельский собор и человеческий род. О, священная Церкви, и Раю словесный. Девственная похвало, из неяже Бог воплотился, и младенец бысть, иже прежде век сый Бог наш. Ложесна бо Твоя престол сотвори. И твое же чрево пространнейши небес содела Девице. О, Тебе радуется обрадованная всякая тварь, слава Тебе.* (frizia.agni-age.net/icon/t\_rad.htm)

The Museum's icon is more similar lexically to the second version than to the first.

We will begin an analysis of the text with its lexicon and will later describe some of the graphic features of the writing which are different from most of the icons in the Museums' collection and, although not unique, somewhat rare in our and in other collections.

## 1. Lexical issues

To help simplify the analysis of the lexical differences, let us examine them in tabular form:

Greek	Icon 2007.46	Old Orthodox Prayer Book	Pravoslavie	Frizia site
<i>Ἐπί Σοι</i>	о тебе	о тебѣ	О тебе	О тебе
<i>Κεχαριτωμένη</i>	обрадованна	обрадованна	благодатная	обрадованная
<i>ἀγγέλων</i>	архангѣльскѣи	ангѣльскѣи	ангельский	архангельский
<i>Ἦγιασμένε Ναε̅</i>	о Сщѣнна цркви	о ѿсщѣнна церкви	Освященный храм	О, священная церкви
<i>προ αἰώνων</i>	иже прежде вѣкъ	прежде вѣкъ	прежде век	иже прежде век
<i>τὴν Σὴν γαστέρα</i>	твое чрево	чрево твоє	чрево твоє	твое же чрево
<i>πλατυτέραν οὐρανῶν</i>	пространнее небесъ	пространнѣе небесъ	пространнее небес	пространнейши небес
<i>ἀπειργάσατο</i>	содѣла двѣце	содѣла двѣце	содела	соделе Девице

As mentioned earlier the text is a megalynarion<sup>9</sup> from the liturgy of St. Basil (Tone 8). Proceeding from the first word and continuing through the text, one notices that in the Museum's version (and not the other two versions) there are two ο's right at the beginning of the text. The first ο (early Cyrillic Ѡ) is often the vocative particle, commonly translated into English as 'Oh' and functioning as an interjection. Why it is there, especially with no space following it, is difficult to explain other than, perhaps, carelessness on the part of the scribe. An interesting fact that helps to corroborate this speculation is that the first sentence of the poem is repeated at the end and here the second ο does not appear.

The fifth word in the Museum's version—обрадованная--differs from the text for this hymn in the Pravoslavie site. In this site the word is благодатная which Sreznevskij 1893 I:97 glosses first as the Greek κεχαριτωμένη, the word in the Greek text (which translates as 'full of grace'), followed by the Russian gloss исполненный благодати 'full of grace.' Sedakova 2008:214 defines обрадованная as a synonym of благодатная. Sreznevskij 1893 II: 538 defines the former, обрадованная, as 'наименование Богородицы,' that is, 'an appellation for the mother of God.' So it is reasonable to translate both words as in its traditional English phrasing 'full of grace.'<sup>10</sup>

A third lexical difference appears in these versions. The Museum's text and the frizia text both have variants of the word архангельский where the pravoslavie and Wikipedia texts have

<sup>9</sup> A megalynarion is a hymn.

<sup>10</sup> The same word appears in the final line of the text so that in all versions, whatever appears in the first instance also appears in the second.

ангельский. Why ‘archangels’ in two and ‘angels’ in the other two? In the Greek text the word αγγέλων appears. It means ‘angels,’ not ‘archangels.’ Tradition has it that there are nine archangels and our icon has ten nimbi portrayed (two partial ones behind the central angel). It may be that the scribe did not see the two nimbi behind the central angel (they are difficult to see, or perhaps the two partial ones in the back were added later) and assumed they were archangels (assuming the scribe knew the tradition and wrote the inscription after the icon was painted).

The next string in the table is the phrase Ὁ Ὅσ̄енная цр̄кви. It is a noun phrase in the Vocative case singular. D’yachenko defines the adjective св̄ащенный as ‘separate from the ordinary’ and lists it in numerous derived and compound forms. In addition he lists two synonyms for it in separate entries-- освященный and посвященный. Whether the choice of these synonyms was conditioned by region or register is not known.

As for the use of церков versus храм (the Greek word used means ‘temple’), in the Museum’s icon collection, when the scene on an icon depicts an Old Testament scene, such as a presentation (сретение) at a temple, the word храм is often, but not consistently, used. The comparative use of these two words requires additional study of a still larger body of icons.

The word иже in the next phrase means ‘he who.’ In the context of the rest of the sentence it is a syntactic way of emphasizing the concept of God, rather than treating the rest of the sentence as a simple parenthetical phrase.

The phrase твое чрево on 2007.46 corresponds to the same two words metathesized in two of the sources and the emphatic же added in the Frizia text to emphasize the concept of ‘your!’ Whether these are solely stylistic differences or whether they are functional is not clear.

The word пространнее is a comparative while the form in the Frizia text is in the superlative.<sup>11</sup>

In the phrase содѣла двѣ the first word is a verb meaning to make or do in the aorist, 3<sup>rd</sup> singular. The second of the two words is the word девица in the Vocative singular. Why this word is omitted in the Pravoslavie version is not clear.

## 2. Paleographic issues

Graphically, and more specifically paleographically, that is, with respect to the shapes of the letters in the text, the shapes of the letters in the inscription at the top of the icon and those used in labeling the figures in the field of the icon are different from each other. This suggests that the fonts differ, in that one is used in the inscription/title of the icon and a different one in the field of the icon for labeling personages, etc. This is not at all unusual. As a matter of fact it is quite a

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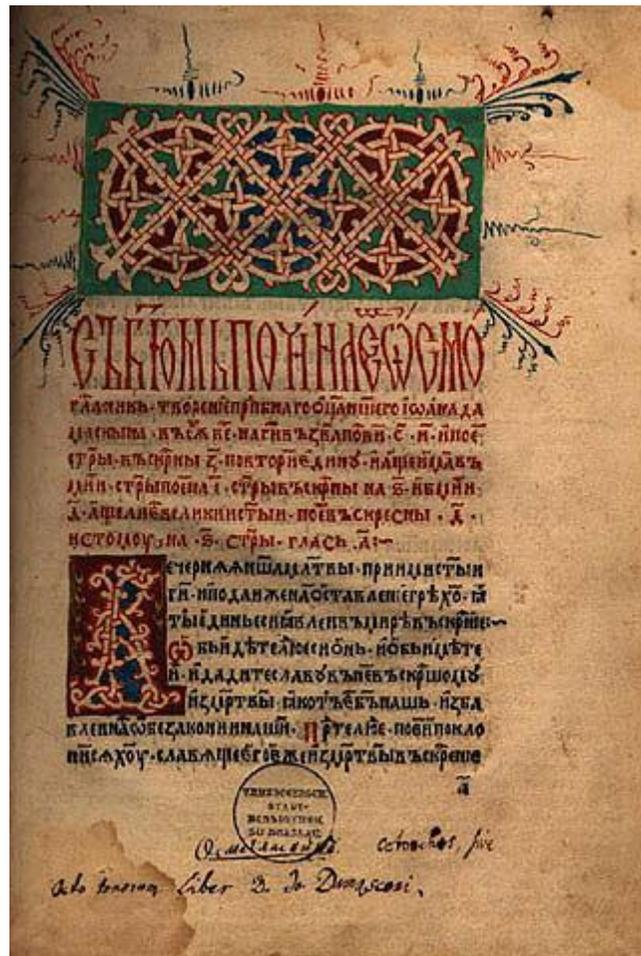
<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that there are two different allographs of e at the end of the word in the Museum’s icon, an analysis of their distribution beyond this one icon would be interesting if it does occur elsewhere.



Glagolitic was dropped later<sup>14</sup> by their disciples and a new form of the alphabet was created, based on the Greek majuscule (capital/upper case) letters, in the 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century. This new form of the alphabet is called Cyrillic. Early Russian Cyrillic handwriting and printing use a form of script of the type called устав/ustav, what in English is called ‘uncial.’ The uncial form of letters in Cyrillic then has many similarities to Greek uncial. What characterizes an uncial form of writing includes letters having a vertical orientation, no ascenders or descenders (letters going above or below the main body of the letter), little or no distinction between majuscule and minuscule, and no linking of letters in sequence.

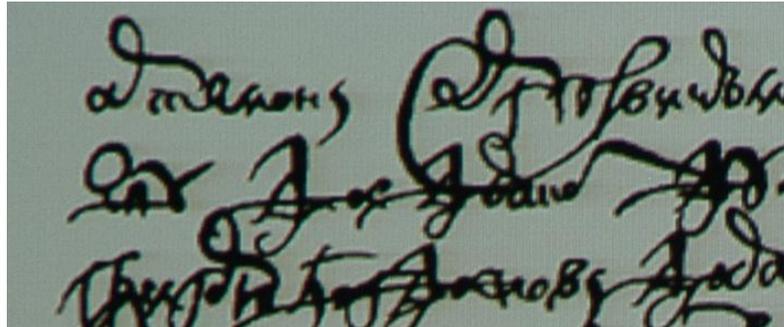
In the 14<sup>th</sup> c., and therefore in most extant icons, the writing is in a style called полуустав/ poluustav (semi or half uncial). In poluustav there are ascenders and descenders, there is more of a rounding of the letters, and there is a development of superscripts.

The following is supposedly the first *printed* book in Cyrillic, printed in Cracow, Poland in 1491. It is an Oktoikh. It uses a poluustav font:



<sup>14</sup> It continued to be used to some extent in Croatia at least into the 17<sup>th</sup> c. There do not appear to be any icons in existence, however, with writing in Glagolitic (Marina Vicelya, personal communication).

In the seventeenth century there is a development of cursive script (скоропись/skoropis'), that is, a writing style designed to increase the speed of writing especially by linking letters in a sequence. It is at this time, especially in the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> c. under the reign of Peter the Great (1672-1725) that this flourishes with the development of гражданский шрифт (civil or chancery script).<sup>15</sup> A sample of this cursive script follows:



Most of the writing on icons, even today, appears in poluustav Cyrillic. The distinction between ustav and poluustav also is a bit strained for Cyrillic. It is like forcing a distinction that is made for Latin and other languages but which does not hold well for Cyrillic. The distinctions between the two are quite few. And as for cursive, again, what many authors call cursive for Cyrillic can be considered variants or later developments of poluustav and not the type of cursive found in chancery texts. And that is especially the case with the writing on this icon. It is the variants from 'standard' poluustav that is intriguing on this icon. They are not the usual poluustav that appear in most icons, even those being painted today. This is not the only icon that has writing with these letter shapes, however, and they may belong to some yet to be identified geographical or iconographic school. (This will require further research.) The particular letters in question are those that in Old Russian normally look something like а б е ж р у ы я ъ.<sup>16</sup> These appear below with their correspondences on the icon:

а	
б	
е	
ж	
р	
у	
ы	
я	
ъ	

<sup>15</sup> It is also at this time that literary texts, especially poetry became written in a very flowery and baroque/mannerist style including even manipulating the lines of a poem into a shape befitting the text.

<sup>16</sup> This is the Lazov font which is used throughout this paper when capturing Old Russian.

Čerepnin<sup>17</sup> 1956 is perhaps the best source for tracking the shapes of letters in Cyrillic from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the 18<sup>th</sup> since it organizes the shapes by century. Of course, these examples of individual letters could not have been gleaned exhaustively. One really has to consider them as samples of some of the shapes that can be found in documents of those centuries.

From those tables, samples of a similar (none are exactly the same) to ours occur in 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> century cursive texts. The examples of б similar to ours occur in cursive texts of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For е the examples occur in the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 17<sup>th</sup> century cursive. The version of ж in our icon does not appear in any of Čerepnin's tables. Versions of the p in the icon are similar to versions in 11<sup>th</sup> c. uncial to cursive 17<sup>th</sup> c. but have a slightly different width. The y is quite similar to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c. cursive examples in Čerepnin. For ы there is one 14<sup>th</sup> c. semi-uncial example and a 15<sup>th</sup> c. and later cursive forms. The form of the я is most similar to a large set of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c. examples. The shape of the ѣ has no examples in all of Čerepnin's tables and should probably be considered ideolectal unless other research proves that wrong.

This icon, R2007.46, was dated by Christie's auction house and confirmed by Geza von Hapsburg, as 16<sup>th</sup> century and, in particular, ca. 1575. This date was probably posited based on the iconography. The results of our study of the paleography of the icon however suggests a 17<sup>th</sup> century provenance. This is based on the frequency of occurrence of particular shapes of letters outlined in the exposition above. In particular, 4 out of the 7 letter shapes have instances in the 15<sup>th</sup> c., 5 out of the 7 occur in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and 6 out of 7 occur in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, two of this last set of 6 do not occur earlier.

Now the underlying assumption about dating an icon based on its paleography is predicated on a variety of assumptions. Perhaps the most important one is that the writing on icons is painted almost contemporaneous with the image, both in execution and in style. The latter is very tenuous since it is well known that the writing on icons, executed shortly after the icon has been painted, is usually done in an old style, in part, to grant it legitimacy.

Another assumption is that Čerepnin's data are exhaustive—that he compiled a list of all the different occurring varieties of shapes of letters from all possible documents of each period. Clearly, this would have been impossible.

My conclusion that the icon might have been painted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century does suggest that another look at it might be warranted.

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<sup>17</sup> Черепнин, Л. В. *Русская палеография*, 1956. Чаев, Н. С. и Л. В. Черепнин. *Русская палеография* Москва, 1946. Also of use are Карский, Е. Ф. *Славянская кирилловская палеография*, Москва 1979 (1st ed. 1928), and Шчепкин, В. Н. *Русская палеография*, Москва 1879 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1918).