The title of Zaliznjak's *Древнево-городской диалект* monumentally understates the scope of the book by conveying the suggestion that it is merely a description of the medieval dialect of Novgorod. It is much more. It is primarily a carefully updated and superbly structured edition of all worthwhile birchbark documents known at present (Novgorod ones and others), surrounded by much useful auxiliary material, among which a synchronic description of the medieval Novgorod dialect happens to be included.

At present over 800 birchbark documents have been brought to the surface (of which some 760 in Novgorod) and it has become difficult for the non-specialist to get and stay oriented amidst the wealth of intricate material, in particular because the nine volumes of the Academy edition (*Новгородские грамоты на бересте*) are all to varying degrees obsolete and a considerable body of secondary literature has arisen in recent decades.

While the texts have become ever more difficult of access, the language of the birchbark letters has started to contribute fundamental new elements to our knowledge of medieval Russian, so that the subject can no longer be ignored on account of its alleged marginality.

*Древнево-городской диалект* is a resoundingly successful attempt to make the birchbark material accessible without sacrificing standards of rigour. The book is strongly to be recommended to anybody who is interested in the past of the Russian language.

The central part of the book (pp. 211-580), which contains the texts, is structured in such a way as maximally to facilitate access to them:

First, texts that contribute little or no linguistic material have been either left out or relegated to separate sections, where they are merely listed, usually without comment. This leaves extra space for the approximately 400 items which constitute the hard core of birchbark literacy and are treated in depth.

Second, the texts are presented as much as possible in chronological order. It is fascinating to read through the entire corpus in one sitting and see the language evolve from a marginal Common Slavic dialect to a stage already reminiscent of modern Russian.

Third, texts that are mutually related by involving the same persons are presented together.

Fourth, all texts have been provided with excellent translations.

Fifth, all texts have been provided with commentaries, which are constructed according to a fixed (but not rigid) model that enables the reader to find similar information always in the same place. The commentaries concentrate on linguistic
matters, but discussion of extra-linguistic points is included whenever necessary.

The central part of the book is surrounded by sections containing auxiliary material:

— A brief general introduction (3-8).

— A description of the medieval Novgorod dialect, primarily on the basis of the Novgorod birchbark letters (9-210), but by no means shunning the information provided by other sources. The description is a continuation of the relevant sections of NGB 8 (89-181) and NGB 9 (190-321), to which reference is made all the time.

— Several registers, most important of which is a vocabulary in which all attestations of all attested lexical items are identified (590-687). The vocabulary is an expanded and updated version of the one that was first published in NGB 8 (260-306), with additions and corrections in NGB 9 (322-343).

As was to be expected, Zaliznjak does not limit himself to merely reporting knowledge that was already available elsewhere. Древлінійоводський діалект, though suitable as an introductory handbook of the more ambitious kind, is also a research monograph in which new results are reported. The remainder of this review is intended to draw attention to some of these results.

The texts. Of the Novgorod birchbark documents unearthed between 1990 and 1993 (those numbered from 711 through 752) besides only a preliminary edition of some twenty selected highlights has been available (Janin, Zaliznjak 1994). Древлінійоводський діалект not only treats those texts much more adequately, but also adds some twenty others, leaving only four items inaccessible, undoubtedly tiny fragments of negligible importance (712, 716, 738, 751).

New readings and interpretations of known birchbark texts are legion, ranging from minor details in the majority of items to the complete overhaul of such texts as 193, 234, 241, 377, 482, and 496.

The identification of groups of texts written by a single person (called “blocks” in berestology) is advancing apace. The principal novelties are the following: 607 and 562 have turned out to be fragments from a single text that can now be read in its entirety (pp. 228-229); the following blocks are new or have been expanded: 683/685/721 (Domanëk, pp. 268-269); 686/730 (pp. 322); 573/606 (p. 371); 649/650 (p. 372); 293/295 (p. 388, with reservations); 218A/220/196 and 218B/215 (pp. 401-404); 498/499 (p. 471, with reservations). Conversely, it has turned out that 121 was written by two hands (p. 250).

Historical phonology. Two new observations are particularly intriguing:

First, it has turned out that a small number of Novgorod birchbark texts reflect PSI