

# Leeds Studies in English

**Article:**

Alan S. C. Ross, 'OWN Bjarmar: Russian Perm', *Leeds Studies in English*, 6 (1937), 5-13

**Permanent URL:**

[https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=134414&silos\\_library=GEN01](https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134414&silos_library=GEN01)



*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

## OWN. BJARMAR : RUSSIAN PERM'

In *Ohthere*<sup>1</sup> I have reached the conclusion that the OWN. *Bjarmar* (King Alfred's *Beormas*) were, in all probability, Northern Karelians. ORuss. *Per(e)m'* was admittedly applied to the territory of the Northern Karelians (in the form *Kolo-Perem'*—see *Ohthere*); but its chief use was with reference to the Komi (both the people and their territory) of the Vychegda (Old Perm') and of the Kama (Great Perm'). Despite this geographical discrepancy, OWN. *Bjarmar* and Russ. *Perm'* are obviously interrelated words; they have indeed always been accepted as such. In the present article I endeavour to elucidate the details of the relationship.

The difficult problem presented is concentrated solely in the difference between the initial consonants, *b* in OWN. *Bjarmar* : *þ* in Russ. *Perm'*. The vocalism presents no special difficulties; OWN. *Bjarmar* falls into the category of words like *bjarga* with later *a*-breaking of *e* caused by a preserved *a*. This later breaking was probably nearing completion by the early ninth century and the line of development was presumably *ea* > *éa* > *eá* > *íá(ja)*.<sup>2</sup> OWN. *Bjarmar*<sup>3</sup> therefore may be taken to represent an earlier \**Berma-*.

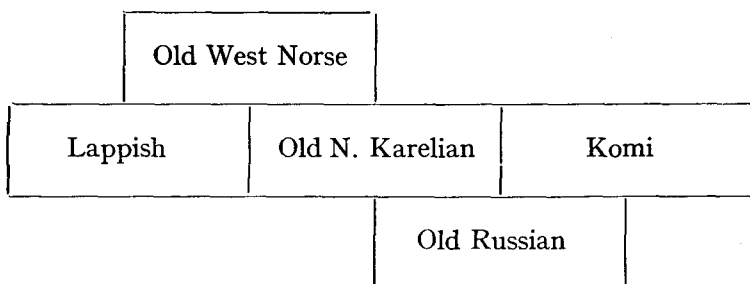
In the problem under discussion five languages play their part: Old West Norse, Lappish, 'Bjarmian' (i.e. Old Northern Karelian), Komi and Old Russian. The theoretical possi-

<sup>1</sup> *Abbreviations*. These are as in my book "The *Terfinnas* and *Beormas* of *Ohthere*" (*Leeds School of English Language Texts and Monographs*, No. VII, now in the press)—here quoted as *Ohthere*.

<sup>2</sup> BN §93 and note 1.

<sup>3</sup> I discuss the complicated question of the English representation of Norse breaking-diphthongs at length in a forthcoming article. It will therefore be sufficient to state here that *Beormas* with its *eo* is the form we should expect in this OE. dialect corresponding to an OWN. *Bjarma-* < \**Berma-*.

bilities as to the 'routes of borrowing' may be concisely indicated by the following diagram:—



which is to be interpreted as meaning that the word can only have passed from one language to another situated in a partition immediately adjacent—thus it may have passed directly from Lapp. to ONKar. and from ONKar. to ORuss. but not directly from Lapp. to ORuss.<sup>4</sup>

These five languages differ considerably in their initial *p/b*-phonematology. OWN. has both a *b*- (or  $\beta$ -?<sup>5</sup>) and a *p*-phoneme. ORuss. also has both a *b*- and a *p*-phoneme. MnKar. has an initial *p*-phoneme and, of rarer occurrence, an initial *b*-phoneme. But the voiced initial stops of Karelian are clearly a recent development<sup>6</sup> and for the ONKar. of the Bjarmar we may safely postulate a state of affairs identical with that of PrBF.—no voiced initial stops, only unvoiced.<sup>7</sup> The position in Komi is somewhat doubtful. It has often been considered that PrPermian, like PrBF., had only *p*-, *t*-, *k*-

<sup>4</sup> The following possibilities are therefore left out of consideration as too improbable:— 1) OWN.—Komi (see *Ohthere*); 2) OWN.—ORuss.; we need not seriously consider the suggestion that the Scandinavians of the more southerly parts of Russia got the word from the Russians and then passed it on to other Scandinavians who in turn applied it in the north—nor the converse suggestion; 3) Lapp—Komi (see *Ohthere*); 4) Lapp—ORuss.; Vasmer IV, 178 conveniently summarises his conclusions: "Ursprünglich müssen also die Russen von den Lappen durch die Westfinnen [i.e. Northern Karelians] getrennt gewesen sein"; see also Wiklund p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> LSE iii, 5.

<sup>6</sup> See H. Ojansuu, *Karjala-aunuksen äännehistoria* [Karelian-Aunus phonology] p. 1 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See E. N. Setälä, *Yhteissuomalainen äännehistoria* [Gemeinfinnische Lautlehre] p. 1 ff.

phonemes initially and that the initial *b*-, *d*-, *g*-phonemes found in Modern Komi and Udmurt are all due to secondary developments. But Uotila p. 2 considers it more probable that both series existed in PrPermian. The position in Lapp. is very complicated and has formed the subject of a detailed study by P. Ravila<sup>8</sup>. His conclusions may be summarised as follows. To the initial voiceless stops, *p*, *t*, *k* of Finnish there are four possible correspondences in the MnLapp. dialects *viz.* 1) voiceless stops *p*, *t*, *k*; 2) half-voiced stops *B*, *D*, *G*; 3) voiced stops *b*, *d*, *g*; 4) voiced spirants *β*, *ð*, *γ*. These sounds usually appear in sandhi-series; thus in the dialect of Maattivuono there is a variation between initial *p*, *t*, *k* in isolated words or following voiceless sounds and initial *B*, *D*, *G* following a voiced sound. Some such variation was probably present in PrLapp. itself and, without going further into the question, we may say that, in all probability, the Russian Lappish of the period of the Bjarmaland voyages had voiced spirants *β*, *ð*, *γ* corresponding to the initial *p*, *t*, *k* of PrBF. in many positions in the sentence.

From these phonematological considerations it follows that a form with initial *p* will change to one with *β* on being borrowed into the Russian Lappish of the period (at least in many positions in the sentence) while a form with initial *b* or *β* will change to one with *p* on being borrowed into ONKar.<sup>9</sup>

Taking into consideration the two fixed points in our argument, OWN. *b* and ORuss. *p*, and bearing in mind the fact that a change *b*, *β* > *p* is only possible on one of the four Karelian 'frontiers' and a change *p* > *β*, *b* only on one of the two Lappish 'frontiers', it is clear that the following solutions

<sup>8</sup> "Sananalkuisesta ja -loppuisesta konsonantismista Maattivuonon lappalais-murteessa" [On the initial and final consonantism in the Lappish dialect of Maattivuono] SUSA xlv. 6.

<sup>9</sup> For the first of these changes we may compare Lapp. *báha* < Finn. *paha* 'evil' (Wiklund p. 24) and for the second Finn. *palje*, pl. *palkeet* 'bellows': Goth. *baigs* ON. *belgr* etc. (E. N. Setälä, *Bibliographisches verzeichnis der in der literatur behandelten älteren germanischen bestandteile in den ostseefinnischen sprachen* s.v. *palje*; also LSE iii, 4).

as to the route of borrowing are the only ones theoretically possible:—

(1) OWN.  $\beta$ ,  $b$  [ $>$  Lapp.  $\beta$ ]<sup>10</sup>  $>$  ONKar.  $p$  [ $>$  Komi  $p$ ]  $>$  ORuss.  $p$ .

(2) Lapp.  $\beta$  ( $>$  OWN.  $\beta$ ,  $b$ )  $>$  ONKar.  $p$  [ $>$  Komi  $p$ ]  $>$  ORuss.  $p$ .

(3) ONKar.  $p$  ([ $>$  Komi  $p$ ]  $>$  ORuss.  $p$ )  $>$  Lapp.  $\beta$   $>$  OWN.  $\beta$ ,  $b$ .

(4) Komi  $b$ ,  $p$   $>$  ONKar.  $p$ <sup>11</sup>  $>$  Lapp.  $\beta$   $>$  OWN.  $\beta$ ,  $b$ .

(5) ORuss.  $p$  [ $>$  Komi  $p$ ]  $>$  ONKar.  $p$   $>$  Lapp.  $\beta$   $>$  OWN.  $\beta$ ,  $b$ .

Of the suggestions that have hitherto been made the following deserve discussion:—

(I) In his *Altenglisches Lesebuch für Anfänger* (Glossar s.v. *Beormas*), M. Förster makes the suggestion that the word *Bjarmar* reached the Scandinavians *via* Lappish (i.e. Solutions 3, 4 or 5) which, as we have seen, would entail a change of the initial  $p$  of the Russian form to  $\beta$ —hence OWN.  $b$  ( $\beta$ ?).<sup>12</sup> This would admittedly be an excellent suggestion if Ohthere's *Beormas* were the only *Bjarmar* we knew of; the *Bjarmar* of *Biarmia citerior* lived in contact with the Turja-Lapps (see *Ohthere*) and Ohthere probably knew Lappish but not 'Bjarmian' (see *Ohthere*) and might thus well have taken his name for the *Beormas* from Turja-Lappish. But many of our Norse references are to the Dvina-*Bjarmar* and there seems no good reason for assuming that the Scandinavians took the name of the Karelian *Bjarmar* from the Lapps; it is far more probable that they took it from the *Bjarmar* themselves.

(II) J. Kalima, *Die russischen Lehnwörter im syrjänischen* p. 100 and note 1 (with references to further literature) is inclined to accept the connection with Komi *parma* 'wooded height'. He deliberately refrains from discussing the Norse form but it

<sup>10</sup> Alternative, extra, stages in square brackets.

<sup>11</sup> ORuss  $p$   $<$  ONKar.  $p$  or Komi  $p$ .

<sup>12</sup> We should of course have to assume that the Lappish sound was, so to speak, excerpted from actual sentences and was moreover closer to OWN. initial  $b$  ( $\beta$ ?) than to  $v$  at the time of borrowing (cf. LSE iii, 4 ff.).

is clear that his hypothesis must be equivalent to our Solution 4, taking an initial Komi *p*, not *b*. Apart from any etymological difficulties on the Finno-Ugrian side, Kalima's suggestion therefore suffers from the same disadvantages as Förster's (Solutions 3, 4 or 5), discussed above.

(III) Tallgren p. 118 note 1 says "Finnish 'Perämaa' (cf. Beormia [sic])=backwoods, periphery." This suggestion that OWN. *Bjarmar* and Russian *Perm'* are connected with Finn. *perämaa* appears to be current in certain Finnish literature—I have noticed it also Jaakkola p. 272 and O. J. Tuulio, *Du nouveau sur Idrīsī* p. 173. It is due to J. A. Sjögren (see his *Gesammelte Schriften* i, 295). The morphology of the Russian forms is alone sufficient completely to disprove it: ORuss. *Perm'*, *Perem'* and the derivatives *perm-jäne*, *permjaki* can only be explained from a form with final *-i* (see further p. 13).<sup>13</sup> It is moreover impossible to explain OWN. *Bjarmar* as originating from a Karelian form corresponding to Finn. *perä-maa*. In view of the decisive evidence of the Russian forms the detailed argument on this point, which would take considerable space, may perhaps be dispensed with. It will suffice to say that we should have to (1) return to the hypothesis of a passage through Lappish with change of initial ONKar. *p* to Lapp. *β* and (2) postulate a form \**Bjarm* neut. or \**Bjorm*, \**Bjarma* fem. 'Biarmia' whence \**Bjarmi* pl. *Bjarmar* by analogy (see p. 11). In the first place it is highly improbable that the medial vowel of *perämaa*, which must have remained—in some form—in Lappish, would appear syncopated in OWN., even assuming borrowing to have taken place at the period of the earliest Scandinavian-Bjarmian contacts and, secondly, it is quite impossible that a Norse form with *ja* or *jǫ* could have arisen by breaking—for breaking was certainly complete by this time (see p. 5). In fact, if the ungrateful task of guessing what form the ONKar. cognate of

<sup>13</sup> In this connection it may be noted that the second vowel of the form *Perem'* is presumably an analogical svarabhakti—cf. *pésen'* beside *pésn'* 'song' (see N Durnovo, *Ocherk istorii russkogo jazyka* p. 165).

Finn. *perämaa* would have assumed in OWN. after passing through Lappish were to be attempted, some such form as \**Bera-má* or \**Beri-má* would appear to be the most likely solution.

(IV) K. Tiander suggests that OWN. *Bjarmar* ORuss. *Per(e)m'* is ultimately of Germanic origin, that it passed from OWN. into ONKar. (with change of *b* > *p*) and thence into Russian<sup>14</sup>—i.e. Solution 1 (omitting the terms in square brackets). The details of Tiander's suggestion are entirely unacceptable—indeed he appears to write with a magnificent disregard for the most elementary canons of Germanic philology—but the suggestion that the route of borrowing was OWN. > ONKar. > ORuss. is a probable one. And on general grounds Tiander's suggestion (OWN. *β*, *b* > ONKar. *p* > ORuss. *p*<sup>15</sup>) is by far the most probable since it is the only hypothesis under which the Scandinavians took their name for the Bjarmar from the Bjarmar themselves. There is moreover a satisfactory etymology for OWN. *Bjarmar*<sup>16</sup> considered as a native Norse word. Since the OWN. word is nowhere recorded in the singular we have no means of deciding, on purely Norse grounds, whether the nom.sg. would have been a strong \**Bjarmr* or a weak \**Bjarmi*; in general, masc. -*ǒ*- and -*n*-stems inflect alike in the plural. It is however clear that the word must be weak<sup>17</sup> by origin for a concrete -*mǒ*-stem is hardly possible in IndE. OWN. sg. \**Bjarmi* must therefore be a weak

<sup>14</sup> *Zhurnal ministerstva narodnago prosveshchenija* Series VII, Part cccxxxiii, 16 ff.

<sup>15</sup> There is no need to assume the extra possibilities in square brackets.

<sup>16</sup> The word *permi* 'merchant' which is found in the Suomi-Finnish dialects of Northern Karelia is probably intimately connected with our word (SS ii, 76 note). It might be suggested that a word meaning 'merchant' was applied to the peoples in question because of their trading activities (see *Ohthere*)—cf. the name *Sart* to Skt. *sārtha* 'caravan' and particularly Khotan Saka *sāitka* 'merchant'. But a word of this meaning is found nowhere else in Finno-Ugrian and would indeed be without an etymology. Hence the converse suggestion, that the word *permi* 'merchant' was taken from the name of the people—cf. Skt *yavani(ka)*- 'female attendant on a king' lit. 'Greek woman': Gk *laōn*—seems the more probable. (See further p. 12).

<sup>17</sup> The strong OE. *Beormas* does not of course militate against this suggestion; the normal correspondence between English and Norse speakers must have been ON. -*ar* = OE -*as* in the nom.acc.pl.masc. and this would have obtained whatever the provenance of the Norse -*ar*.

denominative formation (of type Lat. *praedo* to *praeda*)<sup>18</sup> to an OWN. \**Bjarmr* masc., \**Bjarm* neut. (< IndE. \**bher-mō-*) or \**Bjǫrm* fem. (< IndE. \**bher-mā-*) 'Biarmia,' with *-mō-*, *-mā-* suffix<sup>19</sup> to a root *bher-*. But we have no trace of this original form of the name in Norse itself for it has been eliminated in favour of a type in *-land*, *Bjarmaland* (cf. *Frakk-land* 'France,' *Grikk-land* 'Greece,' *Kyrjala-land* 'Karelia'). It is however clearly attested by the use of *Biarmia*<sup>20</sup> (instead of \**Biarmalandia*) as the normal form in Scandinavian-Latin.<sup>21</sup>

Elaborating a suggestion of Tiander's (*op. cit.*), I take this IndE. root *bher-* to be that given as *bher-6* in WP (ii, 162) with the meaning "hervorstehn, eine Spitze oder scharfe Kante bilden; Kante, Ecke, Spitze" (as in Serbo-Croat *brdo* 'mountain, hill' Ukrainian *bérdo* 'precipice, steep place' OE. *brant* 'high, steep' OIcel. *borð* 'margin, edge'). Our postulated \**Bjarm* would then, if we suppose a metathesis IndE. \**bhermō-* > \**bhremō-*, be identical with late MHG. *brēm* 'edge' (cf. also MnHG. *brāme* 'edge') while closely parallel words would be Icel. *barmr* 'edge (of a brook etc.)' MnNorw. *barm* 'edge, shore' MnDu. *berm* 'berm' (< IndE. \**bhor-mō-*, masc.) and ME. *brimme* MnE. *brim*.<sup>22</sup>

The original meaning of OWN. \**Bjarm(r)*, \**Bjǫrm* 'Biarmia' would thus be something like 'edge, shore.' But it would be profitless to attempt to decide whether the 'edge' referred to was the 'edge' of the known world (see *Ohthere*) or merely the 'shore' of the White Sea.

It appears thus that the Scandinavians gave the name \**Bjarm(r)*, \**Bjǫrm* to the country of the Northern Karelians

<sup>18</sup> See F. Kluge, *Nominale Stammbildungslehre der altgermanischen dialekte* §§16-17 and cf. *Teutones* (i.e. weak) to IndE. \**teutā-* (> Goth. *þiuda* etc.).

<sup>19</sup> K. Brugmann, *Kurze vergleichende grammatik der indogermänischen sprachen* §423. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Beside *Biarmia* formed on *Biarmes* 'the Bjarmar.'

<sup>21</sup> If we prefer the third of our hypothetical forms, \**Bjǫrm*, it would remain to explain the discrepancy between this and Saxo's form *Biarmia* with *ia* instead of *io* (cf. Saxo's *Biorn* = *Bjǫrn*); the form might however simply be due to the influence of *Biarmi*.

<sup>22</sup> Several different IndE. forms might be suggested for this word; its history has been further complicated by the influence of the unrelated (see WP ii, 159) OE. *brim*, ME. *brim* 'sea.'



and *Bjarmar* to these people themselves. The Bjarmar then took over the name *\*Bjarm(r)*, *\*Bjorm* for their own country. We may safely postulate *\*Permi*<sup>23</sup> as the form in which any one of the OWN. forms *\*Bjarmr*, *\*Bjarm*, *\*Bjorm* would assume in ONKar. We have already discussed the change of OWN. *b* to ONKar. *p* (p. 7). The *e* of ONKar. *\*Permi* is clearly attested by that of ORuss. *Perm'* but the representation of OWN. *ja*, *jø* by ONKar. *e* again (cf. p. 5) confronts us with the difficult problem of Old Norse breaking. Breaking caused by a lost vowel (as in *\*Bjarm(r)* < *\*Berma-*, *\*Bjorm* < *\*Bermō-*) is usually considered to be some 150 years in advance of that caused by a preserved vowel (as in *Bjarmar*),<sup>24</sup> but the form of the name of the country may have been influenced by the name of the people in OWN. At all events it is impossible to ascertain the details; all we can say is that the *e* of the ONKar. form was a 'Lautersatz' for some stage of the breaking-series (either early or late) *e* > *e<sup>a</sup>* > *éa* > *eá* > *iá* (*ja*) or *e* > *e<sup>u</sup>* > *éu* > *eú* > *iø* (*jø*). The final *-i* of the postulated ONKar. *\*Permi* is also clearly attested by ORuss. *Perm'* and its derivatives (see below); this addition of a final *-i* to a loan-word ending in a consonant<sup>25</sup> is a common feature of Baltic Fennic languages with final vowels (e.g. Finnish). It is well-exemplified by the MnFinn. forms of international words such as *bentsiini*, *traktori*. (If we prefer the masc. *\*Bjarmr* as the postulated OWN. form, then, for the correspondence *\*Bjarmr* : *\*Permi*, we may compare Finn. forms such as *-tai* (as in *maanantai* 'Monday' etc.) < *\*-taγi*, *-taki* : ON. *dagr*).

<sup>23</sup> This *\*Permi* which is thus the name of a country cannot be the source of the Suomi-Karelian *permi* 'merchant' discussed on p. 10; nor can *permi* correspond to the name by which the inhabitants of *\*Permi* called themselves—they would presumably have used some such form as *\*permalainen* to mean 'a man of *\*Permi*' (cf. Finn. *Suomi* 'Finland': *suomalainen* 'a Finn'). Suomi-Karelian *permi* probably reflects the postulated OWN. form *\*Bjarmi* 'a Bjarmian' directly—with the normal change of *b* > *p* (p. 7) and the representation of an OWN. breaking-diphthong discussed below.

<sup>24</sup> BN §93 and note 1.

<sup>25</sup> The final vowel of either of the forms *\*Bjarm*, *\*Bjorm* would have been lost a long time before the period of the Scandinavian-Bjarmian contacts; this change was probably complete by the year 800 (see A. Heusler, *Altisländisches Elementarbuch* §108).

*Perm'*, an *-i*-stem—the *-i*-stem is further attested by the derivatives *permjáne*, *permjaki* 'inhabitants of Perm'' (with *-ja-* as contrasted, for example, to *slov-ák*)—is precisely the form we should expect an ONKar. \**Permi* to assume in ORuss. But whereas OWN. \**Bjarm(r)*, \**Bjorm* and ONKar. \**Permi* are the names of countries, ORuss. *Perm'* is applied primarily to the people<sup>26</sup> of the country. Such a use is however quite common in ORuss.; for example, Finn. *Suomi* 'Finland' > ORuss. *Sum'* 'the Finns' is, both in its morphology and its semantics, an exact parallel to the postulated ONKar. \**Permi* > ORuss. *Perm'*.

ALAN S. C. ROSS.

<sup>26</sup> The fact that OWN. *Bjarmar* was applied to the Northern Karelians, whereas ORuss. *Perm'* was applied chiefly to the Komi, affords a problem, not in philology but in historical geography.