

Histoire d'О

So, we are left wondering, how did Ѡ get into Unicode 1.1? Could it be, possibly, that someone got the initial repertory of cyrillic letters from Dal's dictionary? The *Толковый словарь живаго великорусскаго языка* [Interpretative dictionary of the living Great Russian language] by Vladimir Ivanovič Dal' (1801-1872) is perhaps the greatest work of Russian lexicography. In the first edition (1861-68) between the letters Ю and Я Dal' included a paragraph headed А.Ѡ.Ѣ.Ѳ. in which he discussed cyrillic letters no longer used in Russian, in which, *inter alia*, he said that “Ѡ равняется Ѧ, и ставилось только какъ грамматическое отличие” [Ѡ is equal to Ѧ, and was put only as a grammatical distinction]. The letter here is quite clearly U+047B, but the diacritic above it—a long thin line slightly sloping to the right—is unclear: it may be intended for a macron, or a grave (though it is hard to say why either of these should be placed over this letter), or may just be a bit of loose quadding.

In the second edition, which was published in 1880, thus after Dal's death but from his own annotated copy of the first edition and additional notes, with minimal editorial interference from the publishers, the line above has become a titlo, and “ставилось” [was put] is changed to “оставалось” [remained], but the letter is still quite clearly Ѣ, in other words the standard broad o with a titlo. The third and fourth editions (1903-09 and 1912-14), edited by Baudouin de Courtenay, retain the wording and typography of the second edition as far as this phrase is concerned.

However, the most accessible edition of the dictionary at the time when Unicode 1.1 was being produced was that of 1981. This gives the impression of being a facsimile of the second edition: it reproduces its title-pages to each volume, and follows its layout, spelling and typographical peculiarities. It is only by reading the very small print of note 20 on p.vi of vol.I that one realises that it is nothing of the sort: “Данное издание представляет собой точное воспроизведение путем набора второго издания Словаря Даля” [This edition is an exact reproduction by means of typesetting of the second edition of Dal's Dictionary] – in other words, it has been completely reset. In fact, not a single page corresponds exactly in content and layout to the original (and there are 683 of them in the relevant volume, instead of 704 in the original second edition). In this edition the Ѣ has finally turned into an Ѡ, leaving us with the interesting possibility that U+047C-047D in fact perpetuates a misprint.

All of this is speculative, of course, but it certainly fits in with the rest of the history of this character.