

Title: Prince Kropotkin and the Russian Book Collection at the British Museum  
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Systematic acquisition of Russian and other foreign language material at the British Museum Library started in the 1840s, and was initiated by Antonio Panizzi, then Principal Keeper of Printed Books. As knowledge of the Russian language was a rare skill in nineteenth-century Britain, the ups and downs in the collection development were directly linked to the personal interests and stands of the people in charge of the collection. Despite the fact that neither scholar of Slavonic cultures William Ralston, nor people with decent linguistic expertise, such as H. Wilson and J. Naaké, ever got fairly senior positions in the Museum, by the 1860s-1870s the Russian book collection was well-established and widely acknowledged as the best one outside Russia. Therefore, it could be argued that a history of the collection complements our understanding of the history of Slavonic and Russian studies in Britain.

This paper concentrates on the analysis of an unpublished letter by Prince Kropotkin to the British Museum authorities, where he points out at some gaps in the holdings and makes certain suggestions of what should be acquired. The letter is held in the British Library archive (DH2, 41, 1888, vol. 2, 8 Aug. 1888). The fact that it was filed as part of official correspondence and immediately followed by an official report written by Assistant Keeper of Printed books Richard Garnett makes it notable right away. It also gives cause to think that Garnett, having developed some interest in Russia through his daughter Olivia and daughter-in-law Constance, had known about Kropotkin's intention to write such a letter, and maybe even encouraged it. The study of Kropotkin's desiderata list also tells a lot about the collection, its users and those responsible for it.