‘The Most Important Books which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire’: Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library

Ekaterina Rogatchevskaia

In the second half of the nineteenth century, London was considered the headquarters of the future Russian revolution and the First International. Prince Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev were among those who settled in London in the 1880s and the 1890s. The community of Russian émigré intellectuals, who continued their scholarly and revolutionary activities in England, congregated around the British Museum, and there is evidence that they played a significant role in developing its Russian collections.

The materials held in the British Library corporate archives show that the British Museum authorities were responsive to readers’ requests and on many occasions would go the extra mile to accommodate their needs. On the other hand, the Russian readers were always eager to disseminate the results of their scholarly and revolutionary activities by donating their publications to the British Museum Library. In 1882, Kropotkin sent to the British Museum a nearly full set of a revolutionary newspaper Le Révolté: organe socialiste which he established in Geneva in 1879. Here is his cover letter that is now held in the British Library corporate archives:

55 Myddelton Sq-re
April 27.82

Dear Sir
I forward you with this letter a copy of the Révolté anarchist paper, published in Geneva, – the last nearly complete copy (the 1st number missing) which is to be find [sic] at the publishing office of the paper, – as well as a few Socialist pamphlets.

I am, Sir,
Yours truly
P. Kropotkin

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Eighteen years later, in 1900, Kropotkin enquired about this newspaper, but it is not very clear from his letter whether he needed to consult it, or just wished to check with the British Museum Library if they were still keeping his donation and were happy to accept missing issues:

Viola, Bromley Kent
March 31, 1900

Dear Sir,
Would you be so kind as to let me know in which shelve [sic] are your collections of
Le Révolté
La Révolte
Temps nouveaux.4

If some years are missing I should be most pleased to complete them, as I just now I have them.
I beg to enclose a few pamphlets for your library.
Yours very truly

P. Kropotkin

[Notes made by the BM staff]: N 1, 8 March 1879 to 28 Febr 1885 in the libr.

7°9690.a
Mr <…>g
Nothing at all <refers to N3 on the list, Temps nouveaux.5

[Notes made by the BM staff]: Le Révolté Organe socialiste, Paris and Geneva
N 2, 8 March 1879 To 28 Febr 1885 in the libr.6

At present the British Library holds a microfilm of Le Révolté: organe socialiste, as the original hard copy was sent as donation to the Catholic University of Leuven (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) as part of de-duplication exercise of 1996–1998.7

In his article ‘Russian political émigrés and the British Museum Library’8 R. Henderson mentioned that Kropotkin’s name appears almost every year in the Donation Register9 and he contributed a great deal to the Russian collections. However, another cover letter held in the archives is dated 1892. It is possible that Kropotkin did not enclose letters with his every donation, or that these letters have not survived.

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4 P. Kropotkin contributed to this newspaper as well.
5 This title is now held at the BL on microfilm.
6 DH 4, vol. 75, 1899-1900, pp. 224-5.
7 See more about this: http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/news/disposal
8 R. Henderson, ‘Russian Political Émigrés and the British Museum Library’.
9 Also in the Corporate Archives, held in the DH 53 sequence.
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13 Woodhurst Road
Acton W
December 6, 1892

Registered BM 6 Dec 1892.

Dear Sir,
I post you today a copy of my last French book and several socialist pamphlets which I beg you to accept for to the British Museum Library.

I am, dear Sir,
Yours very truly,
P. Kropotkin

[Later added and underlined by a different hand]: Prince.

[To]: The Chief Librarian
Of the British Museum

The book Kropotkin donated to the British Museum was his work La Conquête du Pain with a preface written by Élisée Reclus (British Library shelfmark 08276.f.74; signed by author). The next letter that accompanied Kropotkin’s donations which is held in the archives was sent in 1910. It shows that Kropotkin stayed in touch with the British Museum and that other pieces of correspondence might have existed, but not survived:

Reg[istered] 30 Nov 1910

Villa Muswell Hill Road N
November 29, 1910

[Notes made by the BM staff]: Fortesque 30.11.1910
With four large parcels

Dear Sir,

I am forwarding to you four parcels with the Russian newspaper of which I spoke to you, Русь (Rus). The paper was often prosecuted, and many numbers of it are missing. It had also to change its name, & appeared as Novaya Rus (Новая Русь) and even as Syn Otechestva (Сын Отечества). I am sending all I have had during the years of the Russian Revolution – taking advantage of your kind permission to send them as they are, without putting in order.

I should be very pleased if you accept them from me for the Library. The paper was very bold and contained lots of information not to be found elsewhere. e.g. the information of Vladimiroff about the horrors on the Moscow–Kazan Railway after the Moscow attempt of interaction.

I have also a probably full collection of the renewed Société Nouvelle, published in Brussels, which I shall be delighted to send to you, if you care to have it, and accept it from me. It represents an advanced suppression of Belgium Will you have. [sic]

I am, dear Sir,

Yours very truly,
P. Kropotkin

‘The Most Important Books which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire’: Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library

[To]: The Chief Librarian British Museum Bloomsbury

PS. If you found that the Rus is of no value for the British Museum – be so kind have it destroyed. I have no room to store it.

[Notes made by the BM staff]:
PP.4479,c
La Société Nouvelle
Années 1-XIII
1885-1897 in BM
Last part wanted
Discontinued

The British Library holds Rus’ and Novaia Rus’ in the newspaper library exactly for the years 1906-1909, which suggests that it was the set donated by Kropotkin. As Kropotkin stated in his letter, this newspaper had to change titles quite frequently, and at various points between 1903 and 1908 was called Molva (Talks), Rus’, Oko (Eye), XX vek (20th century), and Novaia Rus’. The editor in chief was Alexei Alexeevich Suvorin, son of a prominent Russian author and journalist Alexei Sergeevich Suvorin, publisher of the famous Novoe Vremia (The New Times). Oko is also held in the British Library, which might mean that it was acquired separately from Kropotkin’s donation. In the catalogue, it is quite rightly linked to the previous and later titles Rus’ and Novaia Rus’. In the political spectrum the newspaper occupied a place close to the Kadets.

In his letter, Kropotkin, however, made a mistake linking another short-lived (December 1904-December 1905) daily newspaper Syn Otechestva (Fatherland’s Son; the last two issues – under the title Nashi Dni (Our Days); editor – G. I. Shreider, publisher – S. I. Iuritsyn) to Rus’. Syn Otechestva expressed political views of the far left and later became a tribune for socialist revolutionaries. The BL has an incomplete set of this newspaper (nos 22-113: 16 March-28 June 1905). Kropotkin’s confusion may have been due to the fact that in August 1905 Pavel Miliukov, the Kadets leader throughout, published an article in Syn Otechestva where he praised the 6 August Manifesto on the convocation of the Duma. However, in the autumn the newspaper started to boycott the Duma elections.

It seems that by sending Rus’ to the British Museum Kropotkin was disposing of the materials that he needed for his work The Terror in Russia (London, 1909) in which he referred to V. Vladimirov’s book Ocherki sovremennykh kaznei (The Sketches of Present Executions, Moscow, 1906). Of course, Kropotkin must have been aware of another book by Vladimirov, Karatel’naiia ekspeditsiia otriada leib-gvardii Semenovskogo polka v dekabr’skie dni na Moskovsko-Kazanskoj zheleznoj doroge (Moscow, 1906) based on his articles previously published in the newspaper Rus’.

Of course, the most interesting document in the British Library archives is Kropotkin’s letter to the British Library authorities where he presented a plan for further development of the Russian collections and suggested the ways in which this could be achieved. In A History of the British Museum P. R. Harris wrote:

In 1888 Prince Kropotkin complained about the lack of Russian books in the Museum, and sent a long list of desiderata. Richard Garnett wrote a memorandum on the subject, stating that the ordering of Russian books had been almost entirely neglected between 1874 and 1887, so Kropotkin’s complaint was justified.12

Interestingly, Kropotkin’s letter of 1888 is held in the volume of official correspondence: Trustees’ Minutes and Reports of the Keepers of Printed Books13 together with Richard Garnett’s report to his senior colleagues.

In a previous article on the history of the Russian collection in the British Library14 I suggested that it was very likely that Kropotkin’s letter did not come as a total surprise for Garnett, then Assistant Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum. Moreover, he might have been aware that the letter was in preparation, because the moment the letter was received at the British Museum strangely coincides with the time when Garnett accepted responsibilities for selecting foreign printed material, including material in Russian. This new reallocation of responsibilities was caused by the death of Garnett’s colleague J. W. Porter (both of them were Assistant Keepers of Printed Books and were equal in the administrative hierarchy). Porter was in charge of selection from 1870 till 1887, and these years were not the best for foreign acquisitions for a variety of reasons, including Porter’s personal lack of interest in and passion for foreign collections. For example, in 1883, Albert Cohn, a representative of the principal supplier of foreign books, complained to G. Bullen, Keeper of Printed Books, Porter’s and Garnett’s boss, that he had not sent “any suggestions for the last 18 months, as the Museum was very slow in responding”, which in his view meant that “in this way the Museum is losing hundreds of books which may never turn up again on the market”.15

Having met quite a few Russian émigré intellectuals through the younger generation of the Garnett household (mainly his daughter Olivia and daughter-in-law Constance), Richard Garnett probably privately heard complaints about insufficient recent acquisitions and inadequate state of the collection. And his position as selector of Russian books was a chance to draw the Keeper’s attention to this problem.

17 Roxborough Road
Harrow on the Hill
August 7, 1888
PB

Registered N 2918, 8 Aug 1888

My dear Sir,

I take the liberty of enclosing a list of desiderata for the Russian Department of the British Museum.

Some of the works named in the enclosed list are necessary to complete the collections of the Museum. Some others – are new and are most necessary for every student of Russia.

In the first place permit me to mention the necessity of some Russian newspaper [sic] for the years 1862–81. The Museum has a file of Russian newspapers until 1862, and another file beginning in 1881 (the Golos,16 and later on, the Novosti).17 But there

13 DH 2 (Correspondence, Trustees’ Minutes and Reports of the Keepers of Printed Books), vol. 41, 1888, vol. 2.
17 Gazeta dlaia vsekh (St Petersburg, 1871–1876). Daily. Publishers and editors at different times were: Iu. S. Shreier, N. S. L’vov, P. V. Novitskii, et al.; continued as Novosti (1877–1880), Novosti i Birzhevaia gazeta 1880 (from no. 171 – 1906). See Lisovskii, op. cit., no. 1085. BL holdings: 16 Feb. 1883–13 Feb. 1906. The BL catalogue record for this title mistakenly includes a cross-reference to Golos. Perhaps Kropotkin did not mean that Novosti was a continuation of Golos, but it is very likely that his ambiguous phrase was a source of the mistake in the catalogue.
is a gap of 20 years, and as I saw it some time ago there is no means of finding in London any information upon Russian events of that period.

To fill the gap I should propose to get two newspapers of the years 1862-81. The difference in the tendencies and even of the information given by the Moscow Press and the St Petersburg Press is so wide that one St Petersburg and one Moscow paper are absolutely necessary. I should propose therefore to get either the Golos since its foundation in 1864 till 1881, or the St Petersburg Vedomosti since 1862 till 1881 – as representation of St Petersburg Press, – and Katkoff’s Moskovskaya Vedomosti (NB with the Sovremennaya Letopis!) since the foundation of the paper until now. A mass of information being published in the St Petersburg Press which never appears in the Moscow Gazette, one of the two just named St Petersburg papers is necessary, together with the Moscow Gazette – At present the Novosti and the Novaya Vremya would fairly represent the newspaper Press.

2. As to reviews. The Otechestvennyia Zapiski (of which the B.M. has a most valuable full collection) having been suppressed, there are two reviews which took their place: the Russkaya Mysl (neo-Slavophile to some extent) and the Svyervnyi Vvestnik. Both contain most valuable contributions, and ought to be kept regularly.

3. There is a great want of official publications. Most of these which the B.M. has, terminate with the years 1862–67. I mention some of them in the enclosed list; the titles of others will be found in the Bibliography which I give every year when reviewing Russia in the ‘Statesman’s Yearbook’. But the whole of them is very costly, so that, will you permit me to suggest the following:

   If letters (in French) be written to:
   a) the Director of the Statistical Committee, P. P. Semenoff;
   b) the Director of the Statistical Department of the Ministry of Finance
   —” of Justice
   —” of Ways of Communication
   —” Public Institutions

18 The BL holdings of Moskovskie Vedomosti (1756-1917) are incomplete: 19 April 1873; 21 March 1874; 1 Jan. 1892-17 July, 7 Nov. 1914; 1 Jan. 1915-25 Oct. 1917. According to Lisovskii, op. cit., no. 6, from 1887 the newspaper was edited by S. A. Petrovskii, which Kropotkin probably did not know. The BL did not acquire a weekly supplement Sovremennaa Letopo, as Kropotkin suggested.

19 It is not quite clear what title Kropotkin means here: Moskovskaia gazeta, politicheskia i ucheno-literaturnaia, 1866-1867 (Lisovskii, no. 879), or Moskovskaia gazeta. Ezhegodnaya politicheskia i obshchestvennaia, 1882-1884 (Lisovskii, no. 1570). Neither title is held at the BL.

20 Novoe vremia. Gazeta politicheskia i literaturnaia, 1868-1917 (Lisovskii, no. 964). BL holdings: no. 4253-4940, 5331-14907 (1 Jan. 1888-28 Nov. 1889; 1 Jan. 1891-26 Oct. 1917). At the moment, only a microfilm version is held, but it probably means that there used to be an original.

21 Now available in the BL on microfilm or as a facsimile edition.

22 The serial started in 1880 in Moscow and after the October revolution was published abroad.

23 Severnyi vestnik. Zhurnal literaturno-nauchnyi i politicheskii, 1885-1894 (Lisovskii, no. 1776). The BL holds random issues and a full set on microfilm.

24 Searches performed on the BL electronic catalogue show that the Library holds over forty various statistical official publications produced in the Russian Empire in the 1860s. For the following decades, the amount of titles decreased and reached only about twenty titles per decade.

25 In the later 60s Kropotkin used to work together with Pert Petrovich Semenov-Tian-Shanski in the Statistical Committee of the Ministry of the Interior, where the latter was Head of the Russian National Statistics Service (1863-1897).

26 It was perhaps at Kropotkin’s suggestion that the British Museum curators acquired Sbornik statisticheskikh vremen Ministerstva Iustitsii for the previous years (BL shelfmark: S.N.73/3) and subscribed to Statisticheskii sbornik Ministerstva putei soobshchenia (BL shelfmark: S.N.26/2.(3.)) which stopped only in 1915.
they surely will all send their publications with the utmost courtesy: P. P. Semenoff will be delighted in doing so, and the Statistical Committee is the most important of all. Once it is made, the B.M. will continue to receive them every year especially if it designates an agency at St Petersburg.

[in the margin]: They publish also Journals, of which the J. of Min. of Public Education\(^\text{27}\) and Min. of Ways & Communications\(^\text{28}\) are most valuable. The History of the Min. of States Domains is the most valuable for the history of Russ. peasantry.

4. As to Scientific Serials I hardly could try to illustrate the importance of Scientific work done in Russia now. But it is almost impossible to have these works in London.

A letter written also to P. P. Semenoff, the President of the Geogr. Society, or Baron Osten-Sachen (the Vice-president)\(^\text{29}\) would permit the B.M. to complete its collections of the publications of the Russian Geographical Society – and this is the more necessary as they cannot be found in any public geographical library of the United Kingdom.

As to the publications of the branches of the Russ. Geogr. Soc. (the West. Siberian Branch at Omsk; the East. Siberian at Irkutsk; the Orenburg Branch at Orenburg; and the Caucasian at Tiflis), only the Caucasian branch regularly sends its publications to the B.M.\(^\text{30}\) And these publications are the more important for the Library, as after a few years the publications of the branches, printed in a few copies, can be had nowhere. The stock of the East Siberian Branch has all burned during the Irkutsk conflagration and the earlier volumes of the Zapiski (Memoirs) of the East Siberian branch can be had for no amount of money, even at St Petersburg, or Irkutsk.\(^\text{31}\)

All these would be gladly sent, if the B.M. applies by letters (in French) and especially so if it proposes in exchange its most valuable classified catalogue of modern acquisitions.

As to the nearly twenty other scientific societies, they surely will send their publications on a new demand of the B.M. If the step is decided to be done, I shall gladly send the addresses of nearly all the Russian Scientific Societies.

Let me mention now, at last, one of them, the Memoirs of which I missed myself very much, as I do not receive them myself. Probably, they could be found at [sic] London only at the Geol. Soc. and the Roy. Soc. The British Museum’s collection is discontinued long time. I mean the Mineralogical Society of St Petersburg.\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^{27}\) The BL holds an almost full set of Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo prosveshcheniia, even for the 1870s and 1880s – the years that Kropotkin was complaining about (BL. shelfmark: P.P.1213).

\(^{28}\) The BL holds Zhurnal Putei sobshchenii and its continuation Zhurnal Glavnogo Upravleniia Putei sobshchenii i publicnykh zdani, but stopped acquiring it in 1862 (shelfmark: P.P.1804.d.).

\(^{29}\) Fedor Romanovich Osten-Saken (1832-1916) was a prominent Russian scientist, scholar and public figure. In the 60s and 70s he worked in the Asian branch of the Ministry of the Interior, and from 1875 became Head of the Department of Interior Relations at the same Ministry and stayed in this post for almost twenty-five years.

\(^{30}\) This observation is true.

\(^{31}\) The BL holds over 200 volumes of various series of Zapiski Imperatorskogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva (at shelfmarks Ac.6130 - Ac.6130/6), including those published by local branches (at shelfmarks Ac.6130/9, Ac.6130/21, etc.). Perhaps some of them were still in process and Kropotkin could not find these titles in the Catalogue. On the other hand, he may just have wanted to have complete sets of all geographical publications being a specialist in this discipline himself.

\(^{32}\) Perhaps Kropotkin meant Verhandlungen der Russisch-Kaiserlichen Mineralogischen Gesellschaft. Jahre 1842-58 (BL. shelfmark: Ac.3229). There is also a set of Materilay dlia geologii Rossi za 1870-1885 gg (shelfmark: Ac.3229/3).
In ten or twenty years the publications of all these societies esp. of the remote ones, like Ural, Orenburg, etc., will be bibliographical rarities even in Russia. And they contain such an amount of most valuable matter! (see figs 2-5)

3. As to separate works, I mention those which I came across, without pretending to be full in my list.

Excuse me kindly, dear Sir, for those unrequited hints, but I thought they would be welcome as I know that the B.M. spares no trouble in keeping its collections at the usually high standard. And I need not add that anyone who has worked in the B.M. Library cannot but conceive a kind of attachment for that exemplary institution and feel the deepest gratefulness to all those who manage it.

Believe me, dear Sir.

Yours very truly,

P. Kropotkin

[Enclosed]

Desiderata for Rossica
Registered N 2919, 8 Aug 1888

1. Two Russian newspapers (St Petersburg and Moscow) for 1862-81.
2. The Novosti and the Novoye Vremya for the present year. [The Russkiya Vyedomosti is also a valuable newspaper].
3. Knijnyi Vzystnik. Bibliographical fortnightly. Lists of all books publ-d in Russia. Consists of all reviews. 1884 sq (3 rbls = 6 sh per year)
4. The Syevernii Vystnik – Rysskaya Mysl Two monthly reviews. St Petersburg (each 14 rbls = 28 sh per year, post free at London).
5. Vostochnoyie Obozrenie (eastern Review) – 1881 sq. Publ-d formerly at St Petersburg now at Irkutsk by B. M. Yadrintseff (10 rbls = £1 per year). Most valuable information about Siberia & Turkestan. The back years 1881-87 ought to be had also.
6. Vyestnik Promyshlennosti (Industrial Review (Russian industrial life, petty trades, etc. [sic]) St Petersburg 1884 sq Monthly; 12 rbls =24 sh per year.
8. Sbornik svedenii o Kavkaze (Material for the knowledge of Caucasus Tiflis 1872 sq (all last volumes missing).

[Notes made by the BM staff]: Ac.6130/22 Russ. Geogr. Soc of St Petersburg 1869, etc.
To be had from Mr Seidlits the Secr. Of the Caucasus Statistical Committee

9. Memoirs (Zapiski) & Bulletins (Izvestia) of the Russian Geogr. Soc. & its branches (see letter)
Statistical Committee at Ministry of Interior
Statistical Committees at Ministries of Justice, Ways & Communications,
Finance, Public Instruction, States Domains
11. Scientific periodicals of the Sc. Societies:
a) at all Universities
b) Ural Naturalists
c) Mineralogical Society etc, etc.
Separate works

1. Works mentioned on enclosed BM demand ticket.33
3. Дриль. Малолетние преступники (Juvenile offenders). Moscow. 1887-83. 2 vols (3 rb 50 c).
4. В. Короленко Очерки и рассказы. Moscow. 1887. 1 руб. 50 (Korolenko’s Novels) [Added in the margins: Young Russian novelist].
5. id. Слепой музыкант. (Blind Musician). Moscow. 1887. 75 kop. [Museum note: related to both items: Works in BM].
6. Григорий Мачтет. Силуэты (Matchett’s Silhouettes) Moscow. 1887 (2 rbls.).36
7. Шабельская. Наброски карандашом (Shabelskaya’s Sketches in Lead Pencil). St Petersburg. 1887
8. Вольский А. Жена. (Volsky’s ‘Wife’). St Petersb. 1888 (2 rbls)37
9. Веев, Гаршин. Рассказы (Garshin’s Novels [sic]. New edition 1888)38
10. Saloff’s Novels (Салов. Повести и рассказы) 2 vols.39
11. ibid. Ольшанский молодой барин (The young landlord of Olshansk) 2 rb 50 c.40
11а. Линев Среди отверженных (Amongst the outcast, by D. Lineff) Moscow 1888 Tr. 50
12. С. Венгеров Критико-библиографический Словарь русских писателей Biographical Dictionary of Russian Writers) facs 1–20 (in progress) [Note: in BM].
13. Каптерев. Патриарх Никон и его противники. St Petersburg 1887 (most valuable) (Patriarch Nikon and his adversaries)
14. D. Mendeleyeff. Inquiry into dissolutions (Исследование водных растворов по удельному весу) St Peter 1887
15. Зерцалов Новые данные о земском соборе 1648-49 Moscow 1887 (new data about the Zemskiy Sobor)41
16. Лазаревский Описание Старой Малороссии (Description of Old Little Russia) Kieff 1888 in progress42
17. И. Кауфман Кредитные билеты (Kaufman’s Russian Paper-money) [Note: be [sic] the capital work on finance].43

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33 This document has not survived.
34 It looks like Kropotkin took information about the books he was suggesting from some sales catalogues, as he quoted prices as well. However, some of the titles he added from memory, as there are quite a few bibliographical mistakes in his list. In this case it should be: Сергеевский, Н. Д. «Наказание в русском праве XVII в.». СПб.: А. Ф. Цингерлиг, 1887. According to the modern Russian spelling the variant Sergeievskii is also possible.
35 The first volume of this edition appeared in 1884.
36 This book was acquired later, in the second edition (Moscow, 1896), shelfmark 012591.f.61.
37 A. Vol’skii is a pseudonym of a woman writer A. A. Lachinova. The book suggested by Kropotkin was acquired fairly soon: the BL copy at shelfmark 012589.g.10 bears an acquisitions stamp of 25.09.1889.
38 This book at shelfmark 012589.e.44 also bears the same stamp, acquired on 25.09.1889.
39 This edition at shelfmark 012264.h.4 came to the Library at the same time, 25.09.1889. Ол’шанский молодой барин was acquired later in a different edition.
40 This book at shelfmark 012589.e.43 is from the same shipment, acquired on 25.09.1889.
41 The copy at shelfmark 9008.i.18.(1.) bears an acquisition stamp of 08.04.1890.
42 The first volume of this edition was also acquired on 25.09.1889 (shelfmark: 10292.k.6).
43 The BL copy at shelfmark 8227.dd.27 was also acquired on 25.09.1889. The full title of the book is: «Кредитные билеты, их упадок и восстановление», СПб.: Тип. В. С. Балашева, 1888.
18. id. Russian finance [Note: in BM].
19. Первольф Славяне т. 1 (Pervolff’s The Slavonians) Warsaw 1885.
21. Бржеский Государственный долг России (Brzeski. Russian Debenture) St Petersb 1884.
22. Прутгавин Раскол. Сектантство vol. 1. 1888 (Nonconformism by Prugavin) St Petersb 1888.
23. Глеб Рупенскиy’s Works 8 vols St Petersb (12 rbls).
24. Ядринтсефф’s Siberian Recueil (Сибирский сборник) 3 or 4 vols.
25. Багалей. Очерк из истории колонизации и быта степных окраин (Colonisation of Steppes). Moscow, 1887. vol. 1st 3 rbls. [Note: in BM].
27. Субботин. Материалы для истории раскола за первое время 8 томов (Materials for the early history of Non-Conformist 8 vols) In progress.
28. А. Павлов Кормчая книга, как источник брачного права. 1887. 456 pp. (Pavloff’s Materials for the history of law of marriage [sic]) (3 rbls).
29. Опочинин Русский театр. Его начало и развитие. 1887 (Opochinin. History of Russian Theatre).
30. О. Миллер. Осетинские труды (Prof. Miller’s Ossetian studies). 3 fascicules 1887.

[Notes: id. = idem, BM = British Museum, 3 rbls = three rubles, St Petersb = St. Petersburg, [sic] = otherwise written as non-Latin alphabet in the text, etc.]
'The Most Important Books which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire': Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library

31. Проф. Замысловский. Учебный атлас по русской истории, изд. 3е. (Text-Atlas of Russian History by Prof. Zamyslovsky), 3rd edition 1887 (5 rbls)56
32. Андреевов. Очерк истории Вольнской земли. (History of Volynia). Kieff, 1887.
33. А. Н. Maikoff’s Verses. Complete edition (vol. publ-d in 1888, containing his verses of 1883–1888 is not for selling)57
34. Семёвский Крестьянский вопрос в России в XVIII и XIX веках. 2 тома (Semevsky’s Peasantry Question in the XVIII and XIX centuries) 2 vols (6 rbls)58
35. В. О. Корш. Всеобщая история литературы. Fasc. 1-22nd. (Korsh’s General History of Literature (NB Slavonic and Early Russian!))59
36. Зварницкий Запорожье в остатках старины и преданиях народных (Zvarnitsky’s The Zaporog Cossacks in their traditions and songs) 2 vols with plates. (6 rbls)60
37. К.Кавелин Задачи этики. Спб. 1888. problems of Ethics, by Kavelin (1p. 50)61
39. Пругавин Русская земельная община в трудах ее местных исследователей (Prugavin. Russian Village Community) Mosc. 1888. 1p. 50
40. Кареев Н. Историческая философия Гр. Толстого (Prof. Karyeeff. Hist. philosophy of Count Tolstoy) St Petersburg 1888. 60 c.

As mentioned above, Garnett probably needed this letter of complaint and Kropotkin’s suggestions to express his views on the state of the collections. He immediately wrote his report to the senior British Museum officials enclosing Kropotkin’s letter:

August 10, 188865

The ordering of Russian books was almost entirely neglected from 1874 to 1887: it is not, therefore, surprising that Prince Kropotkin should find many deficiencies.

In November 1887 the matter was taken in hand: a new arrangement was concluded in much more favourable terms than the former and the arrears since 1883 have or

56 It looks like the 3rd edition of this atlas is missing not only in the BL, but also in the Russian National Library; they also have other editions of this work. Interestingly, the BL does not have any of the over twenty books written by E. E. Zamyslovskii.
57 Maybe Kropotkin meant the Complete Works in 3 volumes, 5th edition, published by A. F. Marks in 1888 in St Petersburg. It is not clear whether Kropotkin was aware of the fact that the Library had the 4th edition published just in 1884 (shelfmark: 011586.g.56).
58 A copy at shelfmark 08276.k.9 was acquired on 08.04.1890.
59 Kropotkin meant the work by Valentin Fedorovich Korsh «Всеобщая история литературы», СПб, 1880.
60 It is very clear that Kropotkin wrote «Зварницкий». However, he referred to the work by a Ukrainian historian Dmitrii Ivanovich Evarnitskii (in Ukrainian – Дмитро Іванович Яворницький) «Запорожье в остатках старины и преданиях народ». СПб, 1888. The book is held at shelfmark 9476.f.6 and was also received on 25.09.1889.
61 Shelfmark 8408.i.29; acquisition date 08.10.1932.
62 Shelfmark 10790.i.10; donated 14.03.1908.
63 A copy at shelfmark: 8277.e.44 (acquired 25.09.1889).
64 The correct title: Кареев Н. И. «Историческая философия в романе Л. Н. Толстого ‘Война и мир’». СПб., 1888. A copy at shelfmark 011840.g.71; acquired on 25.09.1889
65 DH 2/41. 1888, vol. 2. See fig. 1 below.
shortly will be made paid. The bibliographies for 1882–88 cannot be found, and it will be necessary to receive fresh copies. The bibliographies of 1875–79 were marked, but so far as can be ascertained but a small proportion of the orders were actually given. It will take undesirable time to ascertain which of the books require to be ordered. All arrears, however, will eventually be made good.

Any complete works registered by Prince Kropotkin should be ordered as his recommendations. As respects periodicals, it will be advisable to wait until the sum which it may be right to devote to processing them can be more accurately appreciated.

The suggestion to invite donations seems a good one, but it will be for the Principal Librarian to carry it out.

Russian books are now kept a long time out of the catalogue, being held back until sufficient titles have accumulated to form a part. It would be better to print them in slip, as for the Gallery catalogue: they could afterwards be published as a part, if thought desirable.

R. Garnett.

Out of thirty-nine books recommended by Kropotkin six had already been acquired by the Library but were not in the Catalogue. Of the remaining thirty-three titles on the desiderata list, ten were ordered from a commercial supplier immediately and received on 25 September 1889; two more on 8 April 1890, and one later, in 1896. All items were purchased, as the British Museum authorities were not interested in expanding personal and institutional relations with Russian scholars or organizations, although Garnett did his best. The other nine books found their way into the Library collections in the twentieth century, but there was no direct link between these acquisitions and Kropotkin’s recommendations.

Although Kropotkin’s desiderata list bears a strong mark of his scientific and scholarly interests, it was compiled as a general recommendation for improving selection of Russian material. Eight years later another well-known Russian émigré in London, Vladimir Burtsev, in his four letters to the British Museum also put forward many suggestions for acquisitions, but these were very specific titles that he needed for his personal research at the time:

Letter 1:
[Notes made by the BM staff]:
Ansed March 3, R<ichard>G<arnett>

29 Francis St
Gower St
WC
March 2nd 1896

Sir,
I take liberty [sic] to address you once more with regard to some books which are of the utmost moment to me in my present work, but are at the same time either

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66 Despite the fact that Kropotkin’s complaints were taken seriously and the situation significantly improved, in 1891 Asher and Co., the principal supplier of foreign material, criticized the Museum for holding back on payment of £700 which was due almost a year earlier (DH 4/49, 1891, A-C).

67 New accessions were printed on slips and pasted direct on to the backing sheets of the laid down volumes of the GK, by thin lines of paste at the top and bottom edges, so that the slips could easily be removed if the arrangement had to be altered (A. H. Chaplin, GK: 150 Years of the General Catalogue (London, 1987), p. 93 and illustration on p. 136). I am indebted to P. R. Harris for this information.


70 This is the first letter that has survived in the archives.
not entered in the Catalogue or not to be found in the Museum at all. It is with the utmost reluctance that I thus trouble you with my request, but I feel compelled to do so in view of the fact that the Librarian who has under his charge the department of Russian books, Mr Naake, has been somewhat ignoring my applications made as far as 2 or 3 years ago, whilst at the present moment, owing to some rumors of a political character emanating from certain quarters, he not only cannot see his way of entering into personal conversation with me, but never even takes held [sic] of my applications in writing. I hope therefore, that you will forgive me if I, as my last resource, apply directly to you.

These are the most important books which, not being found in the Museum, I would strongly recommend to acquire.

1. Index to the ‘Russian antiquities’ (‘Указатель к «Русской старине»') for the years 1888-1890 (price 3/-) as well as the Alphabetical Index to the years 1883 (price 1/-). For the announcement of the latter vide ‘Russian antiquities’ 1870-1895 (P.P.3554.dd), whilst of the Index there are only two parts – for the years 1870-1887.

2. Index to the ‘Memoirs of the Academy of sciences’ (‘Указатель к Запискам Академии наук’), parts III, IV & V, the first two being in the Museum (2050.e). About the Index vide the ‘Encyclopaedia’ of Andreyevsky (012215.l) under the word ‘Библиография’ (‘Bibliography’).

3. Zabelin ‘Index to the Memoirs of the historical Society’ (Забелин: «Список и указатель статей в сборниках Историч. Общества»), price 2/-, and can be seen in the catalogue of Shibanoff, No 41, p. 8. I may point out that these Memoirs of the Hist. Society are in the Museum (ac.7880/4) only for the period 1815-1875 and no later, though marked in the catalogue as ‘in progress’, which by the way, is, unfortunately, too often the case with many a book. I feel confident that on application to that learned body the British Museum could easily get all its publications gratis.

4. Zablotsky-Desiatovsky ‘Count Kiselev and his times’ (Заблоцкий-Десятовский: «Гр. Киселев и его время»), St Petersburg, 1882, 4 vols.

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71 A Pole, John Naaké worked in the British Museum for thirty-nine years (1860-1899) and had to leave the service owing to mental illness. He started as a transcriber at a very low rank but, being a long-standing member of staff with expertise in Slavonic languages, at the end of the nineteenth century Naaké had a reputation as the principal specialist in Russian and Slavonic holdings and a kind of a caretaker of the Slavonic collections. Burtsev wrote about this in his article about the British Museum which he published under a pseudonym: N. Viktorov, ‘Britanskii Muzei’, Istoricheskiy Vestnik, lxx (1895), pp. 256-86.

72 It is not very clear what Burtsev is hinting at, but maybe Naaké’s behaviour have been a result of his progressive illness.

73 The British Library seems not to have acquired the missing volumes suggested by Burtsev.

74 The series Zapiski is held at shelfmark Ac.1125/48. In the British Museum subject classification the 2050 sequence was used for dictionaries and catalogues, although indexes for the above series are not held at this shelfmark any more.

75 Three copies of Entsiklopedicheski slovar’ (pod red. I. E. Andreevskogo), 82 vols (St Petersburg, 1890-1907) are now shelved at 012224.f.1, 12218.c.1 and HLR 037.1 (Open Access).

76 See Antikvarnaia toorgolca P. Shibanova (Moscow, 1887-1914) (BL shelfmark: 2711.at.62). Petr Vasil’evich Shibanov was a well-known Moscow antiquarian books dealer, who started his business in 1841 in Samara, and later moved to Moscow. He died in 1892, and the firm was inherited by his son, Pavel Petrovich (1864-1935), also a prominent Russian and Soviet book dealer and bibliographer, author of the above mentioned catalogue.

77 The BL kept acquiring later issues of this important series, although the set is not complete.

78 Held at shelfmark 010795.k.14; acquired on 17 November 1896, it bears the plate of Alexei Ivanovich Shuvalov placed over some other stamp and a hand-written note: ‘Купилъ 22 июня 1883 Харьковъ’ (‘ Bought on 22 June 1883 Kharkov’).
5. Barsukoff: ‘Count Muravyoff’ (Барсуков: «Г. Н.Н. Муравьёв»), Moscow, 1891, 2 vols. If I’m not mistaken I saw these books some three years ago when with your kind permission I inspected together with Mr Naaké all the Russian books not entered on the Catalogue. I have requested since to procure this book several times, but to no purpose.

6. N. M. Lissovsky [sic]: ‘The Russian Periodical Literature’ (Лиссовский [sic] «Рус. Периодическая Печать») for years 1709-1894 [sic]. St Petersburg, 3 vols. I should recommend to apply to the author himself: it could then be got cheaper and easier, as the book has been printed only in 3[…][?] copies. Mr Lissovsky’s address may be found in his new continued publication: «Библиограф» (‘Bibliograph’).

7. Suvorin: ‘All Russia’ (Суворин: «Вся Россия») being a description of that country. 1894.


9. ‘Bibliographie de la Russie’ (in French) par G. A. Garnier 1892 (vide «Bibliographie de la France» – B.B.Rd. 5. p. 586) I have entered this book long since in the libri desiderati, but with no further effect.

10. ‘V. V. Stasov’s works’ 1894-1895. There is in this book much valuable information on libraries and the St Petersburg Library particularly (В. В. Стасов. Сочинения).

11. Bilbasoff: ‘Catherine the Great’ (Бильбасов: «Екатерина Великая»). There is in the B. Museum (010795.g.22) a German translation of the work – always unfortunately in binding – Berlin 1891-1893, but I cannot find its Russian original which is of great importance to me at the present moment. The book is prohibited in Russia and its first volume, the only one published there, costs about £10.0.0. There is, however, a far cheaper edition in Berlin in 2 vols. Which I would earnestly ask you to procure – if it is not, indeed, prohibited.

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79 Barsukov, Graf Nikolai Nikolaevich Murav’ev-Amurskii po ego pis’manam, ofitsial’nym dokumentam, sovremennikov i pechatnym istochnikam (Moscow, 1891). Held at shelfmark: 10795.h.33; acquired 6 February 1900. Burtsev was mistaken: I found the invoice that clearly suggests that the book was indeed acquired in 1900.

80 Held at shelfmark 11905.d.24; acquired 17 November 1896.

81 Burtsev meant the series Russkii kaledar’ (1872-1916) which was published by A. Suvorin in St Petersburg (shelfmark P.P.2458.z.). This was a general reference publication which also included statistics, advertising and some visual material. From 1895 Suvorin established a new similar edition under the title Vsia Rossiia. Therefore, Burtsev’s reference looks confusing.

82 Interestingly, this title was also suggested by Kropotkin (see no. 22 on his desiderata list; reference 48). As the book was acquired in 1896 it is very likely that it was bought in response to Burtsev’s request.


84 Burtsev probably means Stasov’s Works 1847-1886, published in 3 volumes in St Petersburg in 1894; held at shelfmark 7705.d.4; acquired 11 December 1895. Of course, considering a significant cataloguing backlog at that time, it is not surprising that the book was not available.
already in the Museum. I shall be extremely obliged if I be informed [sic] as soon as the books is acquired.85

With regard to the periodical publications the absence of which is very conspicuous, I will only point out at the present moment the ‘Kieff Antiquities’ («Киевская старина»)86 – a magazine published in Kieff from 188487 and of which one number was, to my knowledge, received by the British Museum from the publishers themselves. If it is impossible to procure this magazine for the whole period of its existence which it would be however, desirable and not difficult, its price being very low – its series at least for the recent years should be acquired. One must always bear in mind that the best literature in Russia, and till more so [sic], the historical literature appears always in form of magazine articles, its book shape being merely reprinting. The British Museum therefore can very easily gather everything valuable in Russian literature by the simple means of keeping the Department of Russian periodical publications as completely and up-to-date as possible.

I shall now draw your attention to some shortcomings in the section of Russian books in the Reading Room. On one hand [sic] there are totally antiquated and generally used dictionaries of Sokolov (2051.a),88 4 vols. of Smirdin (2050)89 which may be safely moved from the shelves of the Room to some other place of the Museum; whilst on the other hand, the continuation of Mezhov’s valuable Catalogue of Russian books (2050.c).90 is not to be found in the Reading Room: there is only the catalogue for the years 1825-1873, whilst that for the period 1873-1899 is somewhere else (11900.bbb).91 It would be therefore very desirable if this book be put in the Reading Room together with the same catalogue index to his magazine articles 1855-1865 under the heading of ‘A history of Russian general literature’ (now 11904.i.12)92 1 vol., and his ‘Historical bibliography’ 1865-1875, 8 vols (now 011901.ee.4).93

85 Burtsev is not quite right. Bilbasov planned to publish twelve volumes of Istoria Ekaterina Vtoroi. The first two volumes, Ekaterina do votsarenia, 1729-1762 and Votsarenie Ekateriny 1762-1764, were printed by ‘tipografiia I. N. Skorokhodova’ in 1890 and 1891 respectively. In the second volume, Bilbasov made public documents related to the murder of Peter III, which irritated Alexander III, and the entire print run was taken out of circulation and destroyed. Volumes 3-11 were never published, but volume 12 in two books: Die Literatur bis zu Katharinas Tode (1744-1796) and Die Literature nach Katharinas Tode (1797-1896) was published in Berlin in 1896-97. I could not find a ‘German translation’ in the catalogue. The BL holds the 1895 London edition at shelfmark 010795.ee.18 (the first two volumes in Russian), which was purchased (not acquired as a legal deposit copy) on 11 September 1895, but was probably in the backlog, and Burtsev could not see it. It is not clear what German edition Burtsev referred to.

86 Held at shelfmark Cup.900.m.20. Acquired much later. A monthly Russian-language periodical on history and ethnography published in Kiev (1882-1907) which played a significant role in Ukrainian culture. In the last year of its existence it was published in Ukrainian. Alexei Andrievskii, Dmitrii Bagalei, Nikolai Kostomarov and many other prominent historians were among the authors. In 1992, the journal was revived under the title Kyrics’ka starovyna.

Here Burtsev is mistaken about the year: see above.

88 Perhaps Burtsev meant: B. A. Sokolov, Slovar’ istorii estestvennoi: Tsarstva zhivotnykh, rastenii i iskopaemykh, na latinskom i rossiiskom iazykakh (Moscow, 1801 (now at 7005.f.31).

89 A. F. Smiridin, Rozpis’ Russikim knigam dlja chtenia iz biblioteki A. Smirdina, sistematicheskim poriadkom raspolozheniya, 4 vols (St Petersburg, 1828-1847). Now held at shelfmark 2320.a.20.

90 V. O. Mezhov, Sistematicheskii katalog russkim knigam, prodaiushchimsia v knizhnom magazine A. F. Bazanova, 5 vols (St Petersburg, 1869-1875). Vladimir Izmailovich Mezhov was one of the most prominent and prolific Russian bibliographers of the nineteenth century and published hundreds of books and articles. Keeping up-to-date with his works was crucial for any scholar of Russia.

91 Here Burtsev probably means the series Sistematicheskaya rozpis’ knigam, prodaiushchimsia v knizhnom magazine A. I. Glazunova v Moskev (St Petersburg, 1867-1889). These books are still shelved at shelfmark 11900.bbb.36.

92 V. I. Mezhov, Istoria russkoi i Vseobshchei slovesnosti (St Petersburg, 1872). Still at the same shelfmark.

93 Russkaya istoricheskaya bibliografia (St Petersburg, 1861–1890). Mezhov compiled this bibliography only for the years 1865-1876; the years 1850-1864 were covered by P. P. and B. P. Lambin. Now held at shelfmark Ac.1125/156. In 1892-1893 Mezhov published a ‘prequel’: Russkaya istoricheskaya bibliografia […] 1800-1854, 3 vols. Held at shelfmark 2330.e.13.
Besides I should recommend to place in the Reading Room the following indexes:
1. the above named to the ‘Russian Antiquities’ (P.P.3554.dd),
2. to the ‘Historical Messenger’ (Историч. Вестник) (P.P.3554.de).
This magazine is to be found in the Museum for the years 1880–1896,
3. to the ‘Russian Archives’ (Рус. архив) which could be found with the January number of the Magazine 1894. The Magazine itself is for the period 1863–1896 (P.P.4842.da.);
4. to ‘All the articles of the Russian Reviews for the years 1830–1884’ compiled by B. Popoff, 1885 (011902.f).

I would at last suggest for the Reading Room the beautiful Encyclopaedia of Anreyevsky (012215.l) as well as the above mentioned Suvorin’s ‘All Russia’ or his Almanach [sic!] for the last year (P.P.2458.z).

All these books are of absolute necessity to every Russian for frequent references, and in giving them a little room amongst the 20000 volumes that adorn the Reading Room you will confer a real boon on every one of us: when I say this, I’m speaking not only in my own name, but also in that of my friends working in the Museum: Mr Volkhonsky, Rothstein, Litvinoff and others.

Of the catalogues I beg to send you herewith is of the Antiquarian firm of Shibanoff I mentioned before, the latest issues. I have marked in them some important publications at a total sum of about £8.0.0. – publications both rare and valuable not to be got at any other time. I should recommend to send your orders directly to Shibanoff himself, and not to a Berlin agent as was the usage in the past they will be assented thus cheaper and proper [?] and – what perhaps still more important – with the utmost care. Besides, some of the rare books Shibanoff is reluctant to sell to a private person preferring always a scientific institution. I shall be extremely obliged if I’m allowed, as soon as these books of Shibanoff are received, to look through them, as it will take some time before they are entered in the Catalogue.

The other catalogue is the Naryshkin library, which I received for the British Museum.

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94 Russkaiia starina: ezhemesiachnoe istoricheskoе izdanie (St Petersburg, 1870–1918), 175 vols.
96 The British Library holds an imperfect, but nearly full set of this periodical until its closure in 1917.
97 Russkii archive: istoriko-literaturnyi sbornik (Moscow, 1863–1917); also a monthly, but for a short period was published once in two months. Several indexes were published, and Burtsev refers to the last one, published in 1894 which covered the first thirty years of the periodical (1863–1892). Edited by a prominent historian P. I. Bartenev, this magazine published the most significant number of primary sources if compared with similar Russian periodicals, including those mentioned by Burtsev. Interestingly, the circulation was not really wide, but increased dramatically from 280 copies in 1863 to 1300 by the 1890s.
98 See n. 75.
99 I was unable to find out what Burtsev referred to.
100 See n. 81.
I will only add a few more words to this too long, perhaps, letter. All the above pointed out books are of the utmost importance and value; should, however, the authorities of the British Museum see their way in the purchase of Russian books to exceed the narrow limits I restricted myself within. I shall be only too glad to look through the catalogue of other firms and make out a list of needful books and periodicals.

With sincere apologies for troubling you.

I am, Sir, Yours faithfully,

V. Bourtseff

PS. May I add that owing to the scientific interest attached to Shibanoff’s Catalogues they should be marked and entered in the catalogue of the Museum?
V.B.

Letter 2:

[Notes made by the BM staff]: Ansed R<ichard> G<arnett>

29 Francis St
Gower St
WC
17.3.96

Dear Sir,

I’m very grateful to you for your kind letter and attention paid to my suggestions. I will take now once more the liberty of addressing you on a matter of a more private character than before in the hope that it will meet your indulgence no less than my former application.

In the additional MSS of the British Museum under the Press Mark 31911 there are ‘autobiographical Memoirs of the Princess Dashkova’, presented by Mrs Catherine Anne D. Brooke, nee Bradford. These Memoirs constitute one of the most important documents for the History of Modern Russia, and were published in an English translation in 1840 by Mrs Willmot-Bradford – a translation somewhat inaccurate and abridged. The same defects mark the Russian and other version which moreover

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Mrs Catherine Anne Daschhaw Brooke nee Bradford was a daughter of Martha Bradford nee Wilmot, who translated Dashkova’s memoirs. About the two Irish sisters Martha (1775-1873) and Catherine (1773-1824) Wilmot who visited Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century as guests of Princess Dashkova see The Russian Journals of Martha and Catherine Wilmot 1803-1808, edited, with an introduction and notes, by the Marchioness of Londonderry ... and H. M. Hyde (London, 1934); held at shelfmark 010290.ff.12. The Memoirs were presented to the British Museum in 1882.

Memoirs of the Princess Dashkaw, Lady of Honour to Catherine II (London, 1840) (held at shelfmark 1202.h.20.). Interestingly, the manuscript had been examined by Prince Alexei Lobanov-Rostovskii, Russian Ambassador in England, and at present also contains his notes that give the result of a comparison, made in December 1880, of this manuscript with another autograph copy of the Memoirs, recently found in the archives of Prince Vorontsov.
were made not from the original French but from that English edition, which I just mentioned. Now, for the centennial anniversary of the death of Catherine II I am preparing on behalf of a Scientific Society in Russia a Russian version of those Memoirs as well as all their addenda which are mentioned in the Museum Catalogue, with extensive historical and miscellaneous notes, appendices, etc. My study and close examination of the Memoirs lead me, however, to the conclusion that either in the possession of Mrs Brooke or of her heirs must have been left some other documents relating to Catherine or Dashkova, or, perhaps, even Alexander and others. It would be clearly a great thing to me if I were able to come into communication with those persons – Mrs Brooke or her heirs – and request them to allow me to publish the rest of the documents in their possession. Besides, I could get some information from them as to some points relating to the English version and others, as well as to the life of Mrs Willmot-Bradford, etc. I could be able, perhaps, to obtain her portrait, some of her letters, etc. In view of this I resolved, however reluctant to trouble you, to apply to you again and to ask you, if possible to let me know the address of the said Mrs Brooke or her heirs which must be in the Museum. Besides I should be extremely obliged if you would favour me with your advice as to the best mode of getting with them into communication, if it is advisable at all. I am fully aware how great and bold a claim it is both on your kindness and time; but the work I undertook is so important and valuable for Russian science that I felt compelled to do everything in my power to try and make the undertaking as much a success as possible. I will further ask you whether there are not other documents in the B. Museum relating to the same subject and epoch but are not entered in the Catalogue? If so, please let know. And then – this I speak with the utmost forbearance – whether I cannot be permitted to see the correspondence that had been passed between the Museum and Mrs Brooke with regards to her presentation of the memoirs of the former, as I may find there some valuable information?

In conclusion one word about Bilbasoff’s work on Catherine II, of which I spoke in my former letter. The Russian original text of it is of great moment to me for quoting, and if it resolved to procure it, I should be very much obliged (as the first part of my work must appear no later than in six weeks) if I could see it as early as possible. By applying for it in Berlin it can be got in one week and would then largely assist me in my edition of Dashkova’s Memoirs. Anyhow, I would respectfully ask you to order the German version of this book to be brought back from ‘the binding department’ at the earliest: it has been there for over 6 months.

I am Yours faithfully,

V. Bourtseff.

Letter 3:

29 Francis St
Gower St
WC
9.4.96

108 The version published in Paris in 1859 was also a secondary translation, from the English translation of the French original (held at shelfmark 12264.a).

Dear Sir,

I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your esteemed letter and am very thankful for the kindness with which you have treated my recent as well as all my former requests.

I am, Sir, Yours faithfully,

V. Bourtseff

[Notes made by the BM staff]:
One of the Periodicals offered for sale viz. ‘Russkoe Bogatstvo’ is in the B.M. – the rest not required.

J. T. N[ake].

Letter 4:

9.12. 96

15 Augustus Rd
Hammersmith W
Dec 2nd 1896

Dear Sir,

Allow me to approach you with a request, which, I trust, will meet with your full attention in as much as it relates to the matter of a very great importance to all students of Russian literature. In my description of the Russian department of the B.M. (‘Historical Messenger’ 1895, Jan) I have already mentioned the one point in which that otherwise rich department fails more than in other other [sic] point, & this is, the total absence of Russian papers for whole, & those most important periods – chiefly 1862-1881. This is the most significant that for years previous to that period, this is before 1862 there are in the Museum some five or six of the best newspapers, which are anything but easy to acquire. Now, Mr Volevsky, who has in Regent St a translation bureau has made, by my request, some valuable purchases of Russian papers for me. Some of them I have acquired already, and I beg to draw your attention to some announcements of newspapers which, in my mind, present great interest to the B.M. These publications are generally speaking very rare, but on the present occasion they can be got easily enough.

I cannot find sufficient words to recommend them to you.

In case you agree, I should suggest that you should apply to the bookseller yourself without having recourse to intermediaries: this will work more smoothly & will involve less expenses [sic]. Besides, for the Museum everything will be done with great [sic] readiness, promptitude & cheapness than for anybody else. There is no need for sending money in advance: you may ask the books either all or in part to be sent at once, the payment will be made on receipt.

108 See reference n. 71.
I recommend particularly the following:
1. Letter No 1. The weekly ‘Voice’ (Голос – Golos) 1872-1882. In the Museum this is only for the years 1881-1883. A most influential + valuable paper. £13-17 for the whole (P.P.9683).

I shall be extremely obliged if in case you decide to acquire the above, you let me know of it and grant me permission as soon as received, to avail myself of them. For me, as well as for other Russians – Kropotkin, Volkovskiy + others it would be very important if ‘Golos’ + ‘Nedelya’ be acquired as quickly as possible.

I remain
Yours faithfully,
V. Burtsef.

PS. If desired I could send the Russian Librarian some other letters received by Mr. Volevsky with marks + notes on the most important + cheap books.

V. B.

As seen from these letters, all Russian émigrés played an active part in advising and suggesting material for the Russian collections. Of course, their choices were informed by their research interests, but also this is a rare example of involvement on such a big scale. The Russians who lived in Britain and used the British Museum Library ‘appropriated’ the Russian collections and were happy to share their knowledge of the culture and the book market, as well as their passion for the collections and responsibilities for its growth.

Appendix I

The following information has been kindly supplied by P. R. Harris.

‘In the early 1880s the lower gallery of the Reading Room was cleared of the sets of periodicals, which were not much used, and the shelves there were filled with reference books and standard works which were often called for by readers. A catalogue of these works was compiled by G. W. Porter who had arranged the books on the gallery, A Catalogue of Books placed in the Galleries of the Reading Room of the British Museum (1886) (P. R. Harris, A History of the British Museum Library 1753-1973, p. 355).

When the catalogue of the reference books on the ground floor of the Reading Room was published in 1859, the pages of two copies were pasted into a guard book, and additions to the collection were added on transcribed slips which were pasted in to the guard book adjacent to the printed pages of the original catalogue. (After 1880 these additions were on printed slips, instead of on the transcribed MS entries produced on the Wedgwood Manifold Writer.) (Harris, p. 254).

I think that a similar process was applied in the case of the catalogue of books in the gallery. As this was not published until 1886, the additional entries would have been on printed slips, not transcribed manuscript slips.

See also Kropotkin’s request and reference (n. 16 above).
Nedelia: gazeta politicheskia i literaturnaia (St Petersburg) (Lisovskii, no. 880). Not held.
Den’: Ezhenedel’naiia gazeta (Moscow) (Lisovskii, no. 722). Not held.
After printing of the General Catalogue began in 1880, entries for accessions were printed in seven classes of accessions parts –

1. New English books
2. New foreign books
3. Older English books
4. Older foreign books
5. Main titles from the old transcribed catalogue, finally revised
6. Fully revised cross references to the main titles in the new printed catalogue
7. Oriental material, arranged by languages

Classes 1 and 2 were printed monthly, 3 to 6 every 3 months and 7 as occasion required (see A. H. Chaplin, *GK: 150 Years of the General Catalogue*, p. 54).

Entries for additions to the catalogue of Reading Room reference books were not included in these accessions parts, but printed as galley-type slips, which were then cut up and pasted in to the laid down catalogue of Reading Room reference books. I think that the same applied to the catalogue of gallery books, and Garnett was suggesting that entries for Russian books could be treated in the same way to get them in to the General Catalogue more quickly, with the possibility that accession parts for Russian material could be printed later.”
August 10, 1888

The ordering of Russian books was almost entirely neglected from 1874 to 1887; it is not, therefore, surprising that Prince Kropotkin should find many deficiencies.

In November 1887 the matter was taken in hand; sure arrangements were concluded in much less work for favourable terms than the past, and the results since 1888 have been or shortly will be made good.

The bibliographer for 1882-88 cannot be found, and it will be necessary to procure fresh copies of his list.

Fig. 1. Garnett to the Trustees. DH 2/41. 1888, vol.2.
‘The Most Important Books which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire’: Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library

Fig. 2-5. Kropotkin to Garnett. DH 2/41. 1888, vol. 2.
Fig. 3.
‘The Most Important Books which I Would Strongly Recommend to Acquire’: Petr Kropotkin and Vladimir Burtsev in Correspondence with the British Museum Library

Fig. 4.
Fig. 5.