



The correspondence between Élisée Reclus and Pëtr Kropotkin as a source for the history of geography

Federico Ferretti ^{a,b}

^a Dipartimento di Discipline Storiche, Antropologiche e Geografiche, University of Bologna, Piazza San Giovanni in Monte 2, 40124 Bologna, Italy

^b UMR 8504 Géographie-Cités, Équipe E.H.GO, 13 rue du Four, 75006 Paris, France

Abstract

The State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) contains a corpus of around one hundred letters sent by Élisée Reclus to Pëtr Kropotkin between 1882 and 1905. The correspondence is mainly concerned with their geographical works, notably the collaboration of Kropotkin with the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* (1876–1894) and the Brussels edition of Kropotkin's *Orographie de la Sibérie* (1904), edited by Reclus. In this paper, we deal first with the importance of this source: it is an example of the material work of a network of geographers who were at the same time the founders of the international anarchist movement. We suggest the correspondence falls into two parts: the first period (1882–1886) when Reclus was in exile in Switzerland after the Paris Commune of 1871, and Kropotkin was in prison in France; and the second period (1888–1905) when the two anarchist geographers discuss the role of geographical education, historical geography in Europe and its part in the globalisation of their era. The archive also contains significant evidence of their relationships with British geography: Kropotkin lived in London and joined the Royal Geographical Society and was on familiar terms with leading Fellows, such as John Scott Keltie and Halford Mackinder. The paper addresses the significance of the correspondence for understanding the relationships between geography, politics and public education, and the role of these heterodox geographers in the construction of geographical knowledge. The paper is accompanied by the publication, for the first time, of an edited selection of the letters.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Reclus; Kropotkin; Keltie; Metchnikoff; *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*; Orography of Asia; Royal Geographical Society

In recent years, historians of geography have begun to consider the relationship between the celebrated 'anarchist geographers' of the nineteenth century, Élisée Reclus (1830–1905) and Pëtr Aleksejevič Kropotkin (1842–1921), and the mainstream publishers and scientific societies that welcomed them in spite of their political misfortunes, including long periods of exile and imprisonment.¹ Within Britain, for example, the anarchist geographers made common cause with leading members of the Royal Geographical Society, reflecting common interests in the educational and political aspects of geography. Gerry Kearns has argued that the support given to Kropotkin by British geographers needs to be seen in the context of a wider liberal tradition, which deserves to be celebrated: 'At the RGS we must include Bates, Keltie and Mill. Outside London

we should acknowledge Patrick Geddes, A.J. Herbertson and Herbert Fleure among others. Traditions of academic and political tolerance are valuable and fragile'.²

Early autobiographical and biographical works on Reclus and Kropotkin bear witness to the close and enduring relationship between the two leading anarchist geographers.³ However, very little direct correspondence between them survives either in Reclus' published *Correspondance* or in the French Archives. The present paper is based on new research in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, where the main part of the Kropotkin's personal archives has survived. The 'Anarchist Prince' returned to Russia in 1917, after a forty-year exile, taking his papers with him; and he died there in 1921, having failed to exert a libertarian

E-mail address: federico.ferretti6@unibo.it

¹ G. Kearns, The political pivot of geography, *Geographical Journal* 170 (2004) 337–346; S. Alavoine-Muller, Élisée Reclus face aux contraintes éditoriales de la Maison Hachette, *Colloque international Élisée Reclus et nos géographies. Textes et prétextes*, Lyon 7–9 Septembre 2005 (CD Rom); P. Pelletier, *Élisée Reclus, Géographie et Anarchie*, Paris, 2009; G. Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire, the Legacy of Halford Mackinder*, Oxford, 2009, 63–90, 163–194; F. Ferretti, Les Reclus et la Maison Hachette: la première agence de la géographie française? *L'Espace Géographique* 3 (2010) 239–252.

² Kearns, The political pivot of geography (note 1), 345.

³ P. Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, London, 1899; M. Nettlau, *Élisée Reclus Anarchist und Gelehrter (1830–1905)*, Berlin, 1928; P. Reclus, *Du protestantisme à l'anarchisme, les frères Elie et Élisée Reclus*, Paris, 1966; É. Reclus, *Correspondance*, Paris, 1911.

influence on the Revolution.⁴ His papers subsequently became the property of the state, perhaps as a result of his family's will or more likely by imposition of the Soviet regime. Prior to the opening of the Russian State Archives in 1992, however, it was virtually impossible for Western scholars to access these Kropotkin archives, as witnessed by historians such as Marc Veuilleumier and John Slatter.⁵ In view of this, it is understandable that the literature on Reclus and Kropotkin, including more recent studies, has barely begun to consider the significance of this correspondence for the history of geography in the late nineteenth century.

The printed catalogue of the Russian State Archive, the Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF), states that the Kropotkin archive contains a total of 6,220 folders. Reclus' name appears in the list of the most significant correspondents, though the catalogue does not specify the size or precise details of the papers.⁶ On consulting the archive directly, it became apparent that it includes a significant collection of around one hundred letters sent by Reclus to Kropotkin. Copies of a further fifteen letters from Reclus are also available in the *Institut Français d'Histoire Sociale* and in his published *Correspondance*.⁷ (Apart from some relatively insignificant letters preserved in the *Bibliothèque nationale de France*, most of Kropotkin's letters to Reclus do not survive.)⁸ The newly-identified contents of the Russian archives thus represent a significant addition to the existing corpus of evidence concerning relations between Kropotkin and Reclus. The material they contain on the two anarchists' relationships with the scientific establishment, and on the material and editorial aspects of their work more generally, sheds light on the practical concerns of Europe's leading anarchist intellectuals. These matters were not insignificant especially given that neither of them held university chairs and both made a living from their writing.

The corpus of evidence represented by this correspondence can be divided into two main parts. The first, from 1882 to 1886, contains the letters sent by Reclus to Kropotkin when the latter was a prisoner in Lyon and Clairvaux. Having been expelled from Switzerland in 1881 after Tsar Alexander II's assassination, Kropotkin was at this time the focus of an anti-anarchist operation by the French police. He remained a prisoner from December 1882 to January 1886, when he finally found refuge in Britain. The legal bases of the accusation against him were so flimsy that Reclus wrote to the Lyon judge offering himself up for arrest, on the grounds that he was guilty of the same crime as his friend: that of simply being an anarchist. 'Tell me the place, the day and the hour. At that moment, I will knock on the doors of the prison you designate.'⁹ The main subject of the letters between the two geographers during this period is their scientific business, especially plans for publications, and sometimes the efforts

that Kropotkin made in prison to contribute to the instruction of the other prisoners. The lack of extensive political discussion in this correspondence may reflect, in part, the fear of prison censorship. However, the fact that the topics of discussion remain essentially the same in the second phase covered by the correspondence – the period between 1888 and 1905, when both men were free – suggests that these concerns with publication and education were genuine and significant. To judge from these letters, the main preoccupation shared by the two most celebrated anarchists of the age was not in fact political conspiracy but their work as geographers.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it is to make the newly-identified correspondence in the Russian archives more widely available to an international audience in the form of a selection of letters, transcribed in an *Appendix* available in the online version of this paper. Secondly, it is to examine the implications of the contents of the letters in the light of the existing literature on Reclus and Kropotkin, especially the evidence concerning the relationship of these anarchists with powerful institutions and more specifically the connection between their scientific work and their politics.

The context: Reclus and Kropotkin

While the names of Reclus and Kropotkin are relatively well known to geographers today, the rediscovery of their writings is in fact relatively recent. Reclus was the subject of several scholarly works published in English and in French during the nineteen seventies and eighties.¹⁰ More recently, his work has received increasing attention with international conferences organised in Lyon, Montpellier and Milan in 2005 the centenary of his death.¹¹ Most of the new studies explore less well-known aspects of his writing: whereas early papers in the journal *Hérodote* dealt mainly with *L'Homme et la Terre*,¹² several of the recent works deal with Reclus' huge-multivolume work, the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*,¹³ which he planned and edited when he was exiled in Switzerland, following his participation in the 1871 Paris Commune. At the same time, together with Mikhail Aleksandrovič Bakunin (1814–1876) and Kropotkin, Reclus helped to found the international anarchist movement, whose first organization was built in French Switzerland in the years 1872–1877.¹⁴ Recent scholarship has sought to situate Reclus' political and scientific contributions in their appropriate social, historical and cultural contexts, and this has required new archival research as well as new interpretations of his published writings. Further biographical evidence concerning Reclus, has also emerged from studies in the Russian and French archives.¹⁵

⁴ G. Woodcock and I. Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince: a Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin*, London, 1950; D. Shub, Kropotkin and Lenin, *Russian Review* 12 (1953) 227–234; F. Planche and J. Delphy, *Kropotkine*, Paris, 2006.

⁵ M. Veuilleumier, James Guillaume, sa vie, son œuvre, in: J. Guillaume (Ed), *L'Internationale, documents et souvenirs*, Paris, Lebovici, 1985, XV; J. Slatter, The correspondence of P. A. Kropotkin as historical source material, *Slavonic and East European Review* 72 (1994) 277–288.

⁶ V. Mironenko, *Fondy Gosudarstvennogo Arkhiva Rossiiskoi Federatsii po Istorii Rossii, 19 – nachala 20 vv.*, Moscow, 1994, 254–255.

⁷ Institut Français d'Histoire Sociale, Dossiers Élisée Reclus, 14 AS 232; É. Reclus, *Correspondance*, Vol. II, Paris, Schleicher, 1911, 268, 311, 320, 328; É. Reclus, *Correspondance*, Vol. III, Paris, Costes, 1925, 205, 213, 222, 231, 243, 300, 301, 312, 326.

⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits Occidentaux, Nouvelles Acquisitions Françaises, 22914, f. 231–240.

⁹ Reclus, *Correspondance* (note 7), Vol. II, 267.

¹⁰ G. Dunbar, *Élisée Reclus Historian of Nature*, Hamden, 1978; M. Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: the Odyssey of Élisée Reclus*, Montreal, 1988. Two special journal issues on Reclus were published in *Hérodote* 3 (1981), and *Revue Belge de Géographie* 34 (1984).

¹¹ The proceedings of these meetings are now available in: M. Schmidt di Friedberg (Ed), *Élisée Reclus: natura ed educazione*, Milan, 2007; R. Creagh (Ed), *Élisée Reclus, Paul Vidal de la Blache, la géographie, la cité et le monde, hier et aujourd'hui, autour de 1905*, Paris, 2009; *Colloque international Élisée Reclus et nos géographies. Textes et prétextes*, Lyon 7–9 Septembre 2005 (CD-Rom). The most up-to-date international bibliography on Reclus is available at the site <http://raforum.info/reclus/>.

¹² É. Reclus, *L'Homme et la Terre*, Paris, Librairie Universelle, 1905–1908; *Hérodote* 3 (1981), special issue on Élisée Reclus.

¹³ É. Reclus, *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, Paris, 1876–1894.

¹⁴ M. Enckell, Élisée Reclus, inventeur de l'anarchisme, in: Creagh (Ed), *Élisée Reclus – Paul Vidal de la Blache*, 39–44.

¹⁵ F. Ferretti, Comment Élisée Reclus est devenu athée: un nouveau document biographique, *Cybergeo, revue européenne de géographie* (2010) <http://cybergeo.revues.org/index22981.html>; F. Ferretti, Élisée Reclus e Pierre-Jules Hetzel. La corrispondenza tra l'anarchico e l'editore (1867–1881), *Storicamente* 5 (2009), http://www.storicamente.org/01_fonti/reclus-hetzel.htm

For his part, Kropotkin is still better known for his political biography than for his geographical writings, with a few notable exceptions.¹⁶ Nevertheless, he spent a great part of his youth exploring the Siberian and Arctic lands, and throughout his life he earned his livelihood from his geographical publications. As a Cossack officer in search of his ‘dreams of a Siberian Mississippi’,¹⁷ Kropotkin made several scientific expeditions in the region between the Lake Baikal and the river Amur in the years 1861–1867. In subsequent years, working for the Imperial Geographical Society of St Petersburg, he elaborated his original theories on the orography of Asia and on the desiccation of Eurasia following the last glaciations.¹⁸ His great monograph in Russian remained unfinished because of his arrest as a member of the ‘Tchaikovsky’ revolutionary circle, but he was already known in Western Europe for his articles published in the German geographical periodical *Petermanns Mitteilungen*.¹⁹ In 1876, after an adventurous escape from the Fortress of Peter and Paul, Kropotkin arrived in Britain, where he eventually obtained support from John Scott Keltie (1840–1927), the sub-editor of the journal *Nature* and future secretary of the RGS.

Maison Hachette and the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*

Kropotkin lived in Switzerland from 1877 and became the most important collaborator on the sixth volume of Reclus’ *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, which dealt with Siberia and Russian Asia.²⁰ After his expulsion from Switzerland in 1881, Kropotkin was replaced by another Russian anarchist, Lev Ilič Mečnikov (1838–1888), known as Léon Metchnikoff, a very important figure in this milieu of anarchist intellectuals.²¹ Nevertheless, Kropotkin continued to collaborate with Reclus in the years which followed: in fact, as confirmed by their correspondence, this work remained his main concern during his subsequent period of detention in France.

At the beginning of his imprisonment at Lyon, in January 1883, Kropotkin wrote to Keltie: ‘The chief question for me, at present, is to know if I shall be allowed, at least during one part of my stay, to pursue my scientific work.’²² For this reason, he subsequently reported to Keltie, ‘my wife has addressed, more than a fortnight ago, a demand to the ministry for transferring me to Paris, where I would find the necessary materials for collaborating with Reclus for his volume on Asia Minor and Persia.’²³ This proposal evidently failed, as Kropotkin was transferred from Lyon to Clairvaux, where he stayed until his liberation in January 1886. Nonetheless, his work for the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* continued through this period, having its origins in Reclus’ proposal to the Maison Hachette for a second edition of the fifth volume, dealing with Scandinavia and European Russia, not only to update statistical information, but also to create work for his network of collaborators. The first part of

the Reclus-Kropotkin correspondence in the Russian archives documents the work of these authors, through the almost daily exchange of books, articles, letters, press-proofs, between Reclus’s study and Kropotkin’s prison cell.

One of the main issues at stake in Reclus’ negotiations with Hachette during the twenty-year work on the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* was the salary to be paid to his assistants, including the cartographer, the secretary and the many scientific advisors, who were all both scientists and anarchists. This suggests that the team as a whole constituted a kind of network in which the principles of ‘mutual aid’ were put into practice, starting with the distribution of paid scientific work. In one of his letters to Kropotkin, for example, Reclus suggested the possibility of pressing Hachette to publish new editions which would sustain him after his release from prison: ‘If you have no particularly profitable literary or scientific works, I could suggest, during my next trip to Paris, the re-printing of one or two of our volumes and in this case you could help me.’²⁴

The staff managing the Parisian offices of Hachette, the major publishing house in France at the time, would have been well aware that some of the proofs of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* were being sent to the editorial office directly from a prison, by authors who were considered to be dangerous subversives by the authorities. Reclus thus wrote to Kropotkin in January 1883 as follows: ‘After examining this proof, if you don’t find much to change, please send it to Mr. Schiffer, *Bureau des Impressions, Librairie Hachette*.’²⁵ Kropotkin received payments from Hachette, including the 1200 francs he was given for the correction of the fifth volume (equivalent to four months salary for the editorial secretary), as suggested by Reclus: ‘As Hachette has asked me how much I would pay for the corrections, I set the sum of 1200 francs. If you find this proposal acceptable, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can make a start on the work, which is pressing.’²⁶

At this time, in Hachette’s central offices on Boulevard Saint-Germain, we find many heterodox intellectuals participating in Reclus’ networks, including the cartographer Paul Pelet, the Swiss anarchist James Guillaume, the two Reclus’ brothers Onésime and Elie and their cousin Franz Schrader, who corresponded with Kropotkin to obtain information about Russia and Asia: ‘*Mon cher Kropotkine*, in one or two days I will send you a map of Russian Asia, I hope you will correct it. Élisée told me that your health is good, and I am happy for that. I will keep you informed about the latest news.’²⁷ The extent of anarchist involvement in the production of volumes for the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* needs to be understood in the context of the anarchist commitment to the principle of ‘geography for all’. While Reclus and Hachette signed an agreement stipulating that contributors to the *Nouvelle Géographie* should not discuss politics, the prospect of producing

¹⁶ C. Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism (1872–1886)*, Cambridge, 1989; H. Hug, *Peter Kropotkin (1842–1921), Bibliographie*, Berlin, 1994; M. Miller, *Kropotkin*, Chicago, 1976.

¹⁷ M. Bassin, *Imperial Visions: Nationalist Imagination and Geographical Expansion in the Russian Far East, 1840–1865*, Cambridge, 1999, 143.

¹⁸ P. Kropotkin, *The Orography of Asia*, *Geographical Journal* 23 (1904) 331–361; P. Kropotkin, *L’Orographie de la Sibérie*, Brussels, 1904; T.K. Ivanova and V.A. Markin, Pëtr Aleksejevič Kropotkin and his monograph ‘Researches on the Glacial Period’ (1876), *London Geological Society, Special Publications* 301 (2008) 117–128.

¹⁹ P. Kropotkin, *Reise in Olekminsk-Wotmischen Gebiet*, *Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes geographischer Anstalt über wichtige neue Erforschungen auf dem Gesamtgebiet der Geographie von Dr. A. Petermann* 13 (1867) 161–166; P. Kropotkin, *Die bisher in Ost-Sibirien barometrisch bestimmten Höhen*, *Mitteilungen aus Justus Perthes geographischer Anstalt über wichtige neue Erforschungen auf dem Gesamtgebiet der Geographie von Dr. A. Petermann* 18 (1872) 341–345.

²⁰ É. Reclus, *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*, Vol. VI, *Asie Russe*, Paris, 1881.

²¹ P. Jud, *Léon Metchnikoff (Lev Il’ic Mecnikov), 1838–1888: ein russischer Geograph in der Schweiz*, Zürich, 1995; S. Konishi, Reopening the ‘opening of Japan’: a Russian-Japanese revolutionary encounter and the vision of anarchist progress, *American Historical Review* 112 (2007) 101–130; F. Ferretti, *Il mondo senza la mappa, Élisée Reclus e i geografi anarchici*, Milan, 2007.

²² Manuscripts, Royal Geographical Society with IBG, P. Kropotkin to J. Scott Keltie, 22 January 1883.

²³ RGS, P. Kropotkin to J. Scott Keltie, 12 February 1883.

²⁴ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Fondy P-1129 [hereafter GARF, 1129], op. 2 khr 2103, f. 124, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 7 November 1886.

²⁵ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 5, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 2 January 1883.

²⁶ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 18, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 16 December 1883.

²⁷ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 44, F. Schrader to P. Kropotkin, 1884.

a new science that would be available to all was, according to Reclus, already a political goal,²⁸ while being consistent with Hachette's editorial commitment to popular education.²⁹ A shared broadly liberal outlook and a profound interest in science on both sides of this partnership thus enabled a significant collaboration between the members of a rather conservative editorial milieu and a network of revolutionary scientists: there was a market for such works, and that was enough for the publishers.

Journals and articles

Reclus also sought out opportunities for Kropotkin to publish articles in the major scientific reviews. As this suggests, his network was not limited to 'isolated' or 'marginal' scholars: while he and his colleagues were banished from the University scene because of their political views, they were nevertheless much nearer the mainstream in the world of scientific publishing. Reclus' proposal to publish one of Kropotkin's works in the *Revue de Géographie* is emblematic. 'Do you want me to propose your article on geographical education to Mr. Drapeyron, director of the *Revue de Géographie*?', asked Reclus in 1883; 'I think he is a little angry with me because in a recent letter I told him what I think about the Academies and Academic titles, but I think we remain on good terms with each other.'³⁰ The *Revue* first appeared in 1877 and was intended to promote the extension of geographical education in schools and although Ludovic Drapeyron was certainly no revolutionary,³¹ he admired and respected Reclus. In the event, Kropotkin's paper on geographical education was finally published in the *Nineteenth Century* and became a classic of anarchist pedagogy.³² This choice of journal stemmed from Kropotkin's developing relationship with British geographers. At this moment, Keltie was publishing his influential report on Geographical Education,³³ a call for a major diffusion of Geography in British schools and universities. According to Kearns, 'Copies of Keltie's report were sent to supporters of the cause, including his friend Peter Kropotkin, at that time in prison in France. As his contribution to the campaign, Kropotkin then wrote "What Geography Ought to Be".'³⁴ Meanwhile, other friends of Reclus, such as Metchnikoff and the Hungarian Attila de Gerando, published their work in the *Revue de Géographie*. According to Marie-Claire Robic, some features of Reclus' geographical outlook – notably his debt to the work of Carl Ritter – were also shared with Paul Vidal de la Blache, the father of the *Géographie Humaine*.³⁵

Another proposal for collaboration came from Percy Willam Bunting, who was appointed editor of the *Contemporary Review* in 1882. According to Reclus, writing to Kropotkin in March 1883, Bunting was seeking contributions specifically on 'ideas about the

social question and about its relationship with contemporary politics after 1870. He assured me that in his journal I have complete freedom of speech.'³⁶ Reclus thought that Kropotkin, who wrote better English than him, would be able to make a better job of the article; and furthermore, it seems that this journal paid its collaborators well. The *Contemporary* also published a paper by Metchnikoff which anticipated the Kropotkinian theory of mutual aid. In this paper, Metchnikoff addressed the status of the discipline of sociology: dissatisfied by the definitions given by both August Comte and Herbert Spencer, he insisted that the premises of social cooperation were observable both in the early human societies and in the groups of animals, starting from the simplest unicellular organisms. According to Metchnikoff, 'natural science teaches us that association is the law of every existence. What we call society in common speech is only a particular case of that general law.'³⁷ As James White has pointed out, 'since Metchnikoff did not accept that sociology is the study of the human phenomenon alone and argued that among animals social groupings based on cooperation take precedence over the family, his definition is much wider than Comte's.'³⁸

The political aim of such work was the scientific foundation of a theory that could accommodate Darwinian evolutionism while at the same time asserting cooperation (rather than competition) as the main factor of evolution in human societies. Metchnikoff developed his theory further in his main work *La civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques*, arguing that the highest level of social evolution would be a society where the cooperation is not imposed, but applied spontaneously in every aspect of social life, that is, the anarchist society. 'So, the sociological progress is in inverse relation to the degree of coercion, constriction and authority deployed, and in direct relation to the role of will, freedom, anarchy.'³⁹

Only a few years later, Kropotkin began to publish his first papers concerning the theory of mutual aid, papers which were later assembled in one of his most famous books under this title.⁴⁰ Much has been written on Kropotkin's engagement with Darwin and neo-Lamarckianism, and this subject goes well beyond the scope of the present paper.⁴¹ However, it is clear from newly-available archival sources that the early elaboration of the theory of mutual aid was a common project involving collaboration between Reclus, Metchnikoff and Kropotkin and their professional relationships in Switzerland and France in the years between 1880 and 1886. In this context, Reclus effectively acted as a key intermediary in a broader international network of writers and publishers: as he wrote to Kropotkin in September 1884, 'I'll give your letter to Léon [Metchnikoff], who is now in Geneva. Nevertheless, he sent to the *Contemporary Review* a paper which seems to me very good and which you'll appreciate, I think, assuming it will be accepted, as I hope.'⁴²

²⁸ S. Alavoine-Muller, Élisée Reclus ou la géographie pour tous, in: Creagh (Ed), *Élisée Reclus – Paul Vidal de la Blache*, 213–225; F. Ferretti, La vérité du regard: l'idée de paysage chez Élisée Reclus, *Projets de paysage, Revue scientifique sur la conception et l'aménagement de l'espace* 2 (2009) http://www.projetsdepaysage.fr/fr/la_verite_du_regard_l_idee_de_paysage_chez_elisee_reclus.

²⁹ J. Mistler, *La Librairie Hachette de 1826 à nos jours*, Paris, 1964; J.Y. Mollier, *Louis Hachette (1800–1864): le fondateur d'un empire*, Paris, 1999.

³⁰ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 119, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 1883.

³¹ V. Berdoulay, *La formation de l'école française de géographie*, Paris, 1981.

³² P. Kropotkin, What geography ought to be, *Nineteenth Century* 18 (1885) 940–956.

³³ J. Scott Keltie, *Geographical Education: Report to the Council of the Royal Geographical Society*, London, 1885.

³⁴ Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire* (note 1), 67.

³⁵ M.-C. Robic, De la relativité: Élisée Reclus, Paul Vidal de la Blache et l'espace-temps, in: Creagh (Ed), *Élisée Reclus – Paul Vidal de la Blache*, 306–307.

³⁶ GARF, Fondy P-1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 13, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 5 March 1883.

³⁷ L. Metchnikoff, Revolution and Evolution, *Contemporary Review* 50 (1886) 415.

³⁸ J.D. White, Despotism and anarchy: the sociological thought of L. I. Mechnikov, *Slavonic and East European Review* 54 (1976) 398.

³⁹ L. Metchnikoff, *La civilisation et les grands fleuves historiques*, Paris, 1889, 28.

⁴⁰ P. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, London, 1902.

⁴¹ Á. Girón, Kropotkin between Lamarck and Darwin: the impossible synthesis, *Asclepio*, 40 (2003) 189–213; Á. Girón, *Introducción*, in: P. Kropotkin (Ed.), *La Selección Natural y el Apoyo Mutuo*, Madrid, 2009.

⁴² GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 41, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 27 September 1884.

Geography and politics

What was at the stake politically for these authors of geographical works, beyond the simple necessity of earning their daily bread? First and foremost was the hope for a genuinely popular education: for Reclus and Kropotkin, geographical writing was one means of accomplishing the political task of educating the young people to whom many of their works were addressed. In their view, the modern teaching of scientific geography would be an ally of the future Revolution; in contrast, the ancient methods of teaching with authority, which involved the simple repetition of names and lists, were represented as symbols of the repressive state and its power. 'Ah! Those vile schoolteachers, who have no other aim than to silence and punish!' exclaimed Reclus in a letter to Kropotkin written in April 1893: 'However, you said it: *tout se tient*. The same society, the same teachers. The same master, the same knave!'⁴³

The educational effort of anarchists such as Reclus and Kropotkin was aimed at adults as well as children, and in particular at supporting the instruction of workers. The aim to distribute the work widely was not simply a matter of overall sales, but about the number of people which the writings could actually reach. Reclus put it in this way, in one of his letters to Kropotkin: 'Instead of publishing your studies in the *Bulletin de la Société Géographique de France* [sic], which nobody reads, why not publish them in a popular collection?'⁴⁴

The constant stream of scientific works which Reclus supplied to Kropotkin while he was in prison were augmented by more general titles, and Kropotkin found a use for many of the works in the prison library which he organised in collaboration with other anarchists, including Pierre Martin. They also appealed the citizens of Lyon to donate further books for the purpose. Reclus was encouraging: 'I do not think it would be difficult to organize an exchange between the town and the prison. If the books were not considered lost but were returned to their owners after not too long and in good condition, I think that the prisoners should be able to get almost all the books they need.'⁴⁵ The Maison Hachette also made its own contribution through supplies from its rich geographical library, directed by Elie Reclus, who was in constant touch with Kropotkin's wife, Sophie, then in Paris. Élisée thus wrote to Kropotkin (in 1883) in the following terms: 'With regard to the institute's library, I don't know who you could ask. My brother [Elie] will let Sophie know if it will be possible. Since I heard of it, I have put together a list of the works we have to order.'⁴⁶

We also find some interesting remarks in letters written to Kropotkin while he was in prison by Metchnikoff, on Reclus' account, to ask for the reception of the packets of books or printer's proofs. Writing in French, the two Russian exiles sometimes touched on the political problems of their own country. For example, in one letter to Kropotkin, Metchnikoff discusses his own studies on the persecution of the Jews in Russia: this letter demonstrates that the leftist critique of anti-Semitism has a long history in the milieu of anarchist geographers.⁴⁷ And in one of his

last letters, Reclus expressed his joy at the news of the 1905 Russian Revolution.⁴⁸

Europe and the world

In the second part of this correspondence, covering the period between 1888 and 1905, one of the most important topics of discussion was the position of Europe in an era of what we now call globalisation, a subject on which Reclus contributed one of the first substantial analyses. Reclus was also an early critic of the crimes of colonial rule, which he witnessed personally during his frequent visits to Algeria.⁴⁹ One of his most notable objectives in undertaking the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* project was to spread the knowledge of non-European peoples within Europe itself, in order to promote mutual respect: in the course of this study, Reclus came increasingly to appreciate that although it still had political and colonial primacy, Europe was no longer the centre of the world. As he wrote to Kropotkin in 1885: 'Events are precipitating in such a way that they are taking on an historical dimension. This fever of colonisation, if that is the right word, is one of the most interesting phenomena. I perceive more and more that the non-Aryan peoples, including Chinese people, are not 'negligible quantities'.⁵⁰

On the conclusion of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* project in 1894, Reclus and Kropotkin worked for a short time on a projected new edition of the great work in English. This edition was designed to have fewer volumes (seven or eight), and was also to be reorganised with Europe receiving somewhat less attention compared to the French edition. According to the Plan, the old continent occupied no more than two volumes, and Russia was included in the third volume with China and Japan, in recognition of the reorientation of a significant aspect of global politics and the world economy around the Pacific area. Reclus listed the sequence of intended volumes in a letter to Kropotkin written in October 1894: '1. Mediterranean Europe and France. 2. Rest of Europe except Russia. 3. Russia, China and Japan. 4. Asia, Indochina, Australia. 5. Africa. 6. North America. 7. South America.'⁵¹

At this point, Reclus was in search of a new publisher as Hachette were unwilling to consider publication of either a new edition of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* or his proposed *Géographie Comparée*.⁵² Any projects requiring an English publisher were referred to Keltie. In November 1894, for example, Kropotkin wrote to Keltie on Reclus' behalf, asking for assistance in finding a publisher:

Élisée Reclus has sent me, a fortnight or so ago, a copy of the letter he has addressed to you. Do you approve of his Plan? And so you think it will find a good editor? In a letter, he writes that a point of chief importance for him would be to have the possibility of doing the work. With the Hachette, part of the royalty was sent to him in advance, so much every month. This enabled him to have his staff of secretary and cartographer and to progress so rapidly as he did with the Universal Geography. Should that be possible with an English publisher? What do you think of the General Plan?

⁴³ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 55, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 7 April 1893.

⁴⁴ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 10, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 7 March 1883.

⁴⁵ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 7, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 9 February 1883.

⁴⁶ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 16, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 10 April 1883.

⁴⁷ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 1747, f. 10, L. Metchnikoff to P. Kropotkin, 1883.

⁴⁸ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 122, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 1905.

⁴⁹ F. Deprest, Reclus et la colonisation de l'Algérie, Colloque international *Élisée Reclus et nos géographies. Textes et prétextes*, Lyon 7–9 Septembre 2005 (CD-Rom); F. Deprest, *Géographes en Algérie (1880–1950), savoirs universitaires en situation coloniale*, Paris, 2009; F. Ferretti, L'egemonia dell'Europa nella *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* (1876–1894) di Élisée Reclus: una geografia anticoloniale? *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 117 (2010) 65–92, <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00487181/fr/>.

⁵⁰ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 45, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 8 February 1885.

⁵¹ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 57, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 5 October 1894.

⁵² An early title for what became *L'Homme et la Terre*.

That such a work is wanted and that Reclus is the man to do it – is no doubt.⁵³

Eventually, Reclus abandoned the idea of a second edition of the Universal Geography and chose instead to dedicate himself to the new work, whose project was originally proposed to Heinemann. As he wrote to Kropotkin in December 1894, ‘The remake of my *Géographie* would probably prevent me from making my *Céographie Comparée* (...) Apparently an intermediary, a London publisher, Heinemann, would be willing to publish my book, even in the original version. We will talk about that with you and Keltie.’⁵⁴

On scientific solidarity

Kropotkin’s work on the orography of Asia was published by both the *Geographical Journal* and the Brussels *Institut Géographique*, founded by Reclus at the end of the century. Reclus hoped that cooperation with the British geographers might mitigate the financial difficulties of the *Institut*. As he wrote in jocular tone to Kropotkin, in July 1901: ‘Go and meet ‘your old Keltie’ who is also mine, and ask him for advice, which will be excellent if accompanied by a good number of guineas.’⁵⁵

Reclus and Kropotkin were also involved in a collection of geographical books planned by Halford Mackinder (1861–1947), the leading conservative geographer in Britain who was nevertheless on good terms with the two anarchists. According to Kearns, Mackinder had long admired Reclus and wrote an enthusiastic review of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* when the RGS honoured the French geographer with a medal in 1894.⁵⁶ Mackinder, like Kropotkin, was also a frequent visitor to the RGS at this time: indeed, they ‘must have met several times, although we know, from published records, of only a few such occasions.’⁵⁷ Mackinder and the publisher Heinemann invited Reclus and Kropotkin to collaborate in the production of a series of world regional geography books in which Reclus took responsibility for Western Europe and Kropotkin, the Russian Empire. The two anarchist geographers compared notes on how to harmonise their respective contributions to the series. As Reclus wrote in January 1898, ‘You have sent me, with request to send it back, some quick notes about the plan of your book for the Mackinder collection: I used them to make sure our two books fit together. However, I hope we have the chance to meet and talk together about that before work is finished.’⁵⁸

While this publication did not materialise, not least because ‘there clearly was a problem with this series and with Mackinder’s management of it’,⁵⁹ the proposal reflects the high reputation of Reclus and Kropotkin in British geographical circles, as also confirmed by the support at the RGS for some of Reclus’ projects such as the Great Globe and the Spherical Maps.⁶⁰ The former was a proposal to build a gigantic globe in relief at the scale of 1:100,000

with a diameter of 127.5 m, for the Paris Universal Exposition of 1900. This was intended as a material symbol of Reclus’ Universal Geography and was designed to represent the globe as a unique space where all the men could live as brothers.⁶¹ This project had the active collaboration of both Patrick Geddes, who worked on a relief map of Scotland intended to become a part of the Globe,⁶² and Kropotkin, who wrote to Keltie asking him: ‘Could not the Royal GS support it?’⁶³ The project finally foundered for lack of finance, though it had the public support of the most prominent British geographers.

For their part, Kropotkin and Reclus held leading members of the RGS in high esteem: when Reclus had to advise a friend going to London, for example, he thought first of Keltie. As he put it in a letter to Kropotkin in 1903, ‘What advice would you give our friend? Will it be good for him to go to London, present himself to our good comrade Scott Keltie and get to know the people he could meet at the Geographical Society, the Royal Society and other places where intelligent people gather?’⁶⁴ The definition of ‘intelligent people’ here provides a good indication of the spirit of scientific solidarity which, for Kropotkin and Reclus, was no less important than its political equivalent. Such expressions of sympathy and forms of collaboration with organisations like the RGS did not require the anarchist geographers to abandon their political beliefs. At this time, figures such as Reclus and Kropotkin, like Mackinder himself, were as well-known for their political ideas as for their scientific works. And, as Kearns and others have demonstrated, politics was never far from the surface of discussions at the RGS itself. In the 1903 discussion which followed the presentation of the Reclus’ Spherical Maps at the RGS in 1903, for example, ‘Mackinder urged public authorities to spend more on maps and models for geographical education. Mindful perhaps of Mackinder’s commitment to building up the British navy, Kropotkin referred directly to defence spending.’⁶⁵ Notably, Kropotkin suggested that it would be better to spend money on the provision of new schools than on new weapons: ‘When so much money was spent on useless things, such as ironclads and the like, surely they ought to be able to find the money for what was absolutely essential in carrying on the work of education!’⁶⁶

In his correspondence with Keltie, Kropotkin repeatedly made reference to his political concerns, despite the fact that the RGS Secretary was hardly a close political ally. Nevertheless, Keltie and the RGS continued to give support to Kropotkin, Reclus and the other heterodox geographers discussed in this paper. The precise terms on which these anarchist geographers understood the relationship between science and politics requires further investigation. In this context, it will be necessary to give careful consideration to archival sources such as the ones examined in this paper, as well as published works.

Finally, it is worth noting that the correspondence between Reclus and Kropotkin contains substantial evidence concerning their methods of working. In general, Reclus directly oversaw all

⁵³ RGS, P. Kropotkin to J. Scott Keltie, 21 November 1894.

⁵⁴ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 59, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 3 December 1894.

⁵⁵ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 88, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 4 July 1901.

⁵⁶ Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire* (note 1), 185.

⁵⁷ Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire* (note 1), 79–80.

⁵⁸ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 66, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 13 January 1898.

⁵⁹ Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire* (note 1), 184.

⁶⁰ É. Reclus, A great globe, *Geographical Journal* 12 (1898) 475–487; É. Reclus, On spherical maps and reliefs, *Geographical Journal* 22 (1903) 290–293.

⁶¹ S. Alavoine-Muller, Un globe terrestre pour l’Exposition Universelle de 1900: l’utopie géographique d’Élisée Reclus, *L’Espace géographique* 31 (2003) 156–170; G. Dunbar, Élisée Reclus and the great globe, in: G. Dunbar (Ed), *The History of Geography*, New York, 1996, 12–22.

⁶² Bibliothèque de Genève, Département des Manuscrits, Ms. Suppl. 119, É. Reclus to C. Perron, 1 December 1895.

⁶³ RGS, P. Kropotkin to J. Scott Keltie, 29 January 1896.

⁶⁴ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 101, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 7 May 1903.

⁶⁵ Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire* (note 1), 80.

⁶⁶ H.J. Mackinder, E.G. Ravenstein, A.J. Herbertson, P. Kropotkin, M.C. Andrews, C. Sanderson and É. Reclus, On spherical maps and reliefs: discussion, *Geographical Journal* 22 (1903) 297.

phases of the production of his books, not only the text, but also the work of draughtsmen, cartographers, printers and binders: indeed, Hem Day compares the Reclusian geographical ‘workshop’ to the atelier of a Renaissance artist.⁶⁷ Reclus himself draws attention to these more practical concerns in his correspondence with Kropotkin: ‘Another very important thing: you cut the first proofs so much that now we have a holy terror of you and we ask you to not correct the proofs, but the handwritten version you have under your nose.’⁶⁸ Indeed, he often concludes his letters with a phrase all too familiar in the business of publishing: ‘Hurry up, please!’⁶⁹

Conclusion

The archival materials located in the Russian state archives confirm and extend some of the arguments made recently concerning the work of Reclus and Kropotkin, in several key respects. Firstly, it is clear that Kropotkin’s role in the compilation of the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* did not end with his arrest and imprisonment, but continued until the conclusion of the great work and indeed afterwards, for example in the unfinished project of a new English edition of the work. Secondly, the network of heterodox intellectuals which gathered around Reclus and Kropotkin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was not composed of ‘isolated’, ‘romantic’ or ‘marginal’ people: these were men and women

of science well placed to exert influence on the leading scientific societies and great publishing houses of the day. Thirdly, there were clearly political dimensions to the programme for the dissemination of geographical thought, which was the main preoccupation of both Reclus and Kropotkin: the realization of a network of material support for their comrades; the construction of a critical and secular education accessible to all; and the spreading, in the Europe of their time, of a tolerant knowledge of all other peoples around the globe.

Acknowledgements

For my research in Moscow, for comments on this article and for assistance with the editing of the French texts, special thanks to Sho Konishi, Francesco Benvenuti, Marie-Claire Robic, Irina Michailovna Galymzianova, Felix Driver, Hugh Clout and the three referees for the *Journal of Historical Geography*.

Supplementary material

Transcriptions of a selection of thirty-four letters to Kropotkin from Reclus and Metchnikoff, held in the Russian State Archives, can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.jhg.2010.10.001.

⁶⁷ H. Day, *Élisée Reclus en Belgique, sa vie, son activité, 1894–1905*, Paris, 1956, 27.

⁶⁸ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 78, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 23 November 1901.

⁶⁹ GARF, 1129, op. 2 khr 2103, f. 84, É. Reclus to P. Kropotkin, 8 June 1901.