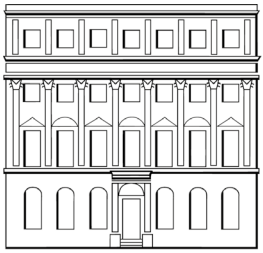

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ARTICLE

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A COMMON VISION OF GEOGRAPHY? PËTR KROPOTKIN AND THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, 1876–1921

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Upon entering Lowther Lodge, home of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) in South Kensington, the visitor passes through a portrait gallery. In the midst of eminent academics and explorers, one finds a bearded face that few would expect among the fellows of a gentlemanly society: that of Pëtr Alekseevich Kropotkin. Kropotkin's fame nowadays is as a Russian revolutionist and leading theorist of anarchism rather than a British geographer, but he in fact collaborated intensively—though informally—with the RGS and was on excellent terms with many of its leading members throughout the thirty years he spent in British exile and even after his return to Russia.

This remarkable connection has, on the one hand, been interpreted as emblematic of a contradiction between Kropotkin's professed revolutionary ideals and his everyday lifestyle. Martin Miller claims that, in England, Kropotkin

> began a pattern of writing accounts in scientific journals and attending teas with members of the establishment while simultaneously living the life of a revolutionary militant. In a sense, he belonged to both worlds, the one he was working to destroy and the one which was to replace it in the future.[1]

On the other hand, George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, Kropotkin's more sympathetic biographers, make an argument for 'Kropotkin's consistency' by relating an episode in which the ideological differences inevitably came to the fore. At a banquet held by the RGS, the anarchist sternly refused to toast the king and was embarrassed when the whole assembly rose to add a cheer for 'Prince Peter Kropotkin'—'a tribute to the courtesy and tolerance of English geographers', the authors argue.[2] Or potentially a provocation, since Kropotkin had been born into an

[1] Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago, 1976), 134.

[2] George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince: A Biographical Study of Peter Kropotkin* (London, 1950), 227. It is interesting to note that

aristocratic family but had rejected his noble title. The cordial reception of the Russian radical has similarly led historians of geography such as Federico Ferretti and Gerry Kearns to see evidence of a 'wider liberal tradition'[3] in the RGS, being aware of how important it was 'for intellectual societies to cultivate dissent.'[4]

In this article, I further assess the extent to which these contacts created problems of 'consistency' for both parties, and I argue that notions of 'liberalism' and 'tolerance' fail to offer a satisfactory explanation for both sides' willingness to bridge their obvious political divides. The unlikely cooperation between the revolutionary and the establishment society has implications reaching beyond the anecdotal interest of incidents such as the banquet. Informal associations were significant in an age when the professionalization of science was only just taking off—and, as we will see, geography as a discipline was a latecomer in terms of its institutionalization. Scholars remind us of the role of learned societies as networks of sociability: Felix Driver insists on the informality of gentlemanly science and its notions of expertise,[5] and Vincent Berdoulay urges us to 'put more emphasis on ideologies than on institutions proper' and to focus on the 'circle of affinity' beyond a scientific community.[6] Politics were never absent from such circles.

For this reason, this article also aims to resist arguments—sometimes put forth by either Kropotkin or members of the RGS themselves—that science and politics were neatly separable. Both sides understood their scholarly efforts as imminently political, and increasingly so over the nearly fifty-year period in question. Placing their geographical projects within their respective political and intellectual contexts, I show how Kropotkin's attempts to establish a scientific basis for his anarchism

Kearns and others who subsequently took up the anecdote replace 'king' with 'queen', suggesting an earlier date—or perhaps scepticism.

[3] Federico Ferretti, 'The Correspondence Between Élisée Reclus and Pëtr Kropotkin as a Source for the History of Geography', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 37/2 (2011), 216–22, at 216.

[4] Gerry Kearns, 'The Political Pivot of Geography', *Geographical Journal*, 170/4 (2004), 337–46, at 341.

[5] Felix Driver, *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford, 2001), 46–7.

[6] Vincent Berdoulay, 'The Contextual Approach', in David R. Stoddart (ed.), *Geography, Ideology, and Social Concern* (Oxford, 1981), 8–16, at 14.

and the Geographical Society's endeavours to professionalize and redefine its subject overlapped in a number of respects. This allowed for a fruitful debate; yet although both parties were aligned on the level of epistemology, their agreement nonetheless also encountered obstacles and hit clearly defined limits when it came to content. The informal connections between Kropotkin and the Royal Geographical Society thus provide a way to access the underlying political scripts of nineteenth-century geography and address the question of the place of Kropotkin—and anarchism—in British political culture more broadly.

Scientific Networks as an Entry Point

Kropotkin had not come to England as a scientist. He was an escapee from prison in Russia, where he had been arrested in 1874 (ironically on his way back from a lecture to the Imperial Geographical Society) for his involvement in a radical circle. England was an obvious destination for the relative freedom it granted to political refugees.[7] But despite the presence of a considerable exile community of Communards and other revolutionaries, Kropotkin found the situation in 1876 dire and he soon left again, thinking, 'better a French prison than this grave.' According to his memoirs, 'for one who held advanced socialist opinions, there was no atmosphere to breathe in.'[8] It was as a scientist that he first gained a foothold in Britain.

Kropotkin was a geographer and explorer of some renown. As a member of the Russian Imperial Geographical Society, he had published on the orography of Asia, studied the effects of glaciation in Finland, corrected the Humboldtian hypothesis on the orientation of mountain rims in Siberia, and predicted the existence of a land mass in the northern Arctic.[9] With the special permission of the tsar,

[7] Cf. James W. Hulse, *Revolutionists in London: A Study of Five Unorthodox Socialists* (Oxford, 1970), 1–3. Hulse traces this tradition back to Voltaire and quotes Kropotkin's positive mentions of Britain as a place of exile for radicals across Europe.

[8] Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 2 vols. (London, 1899), ii. 251.

[9] Pëtr Kropotkin, *Obshchii ocherk orografii Vostochnoi Sibiri* (Saint Petersburg, 1875); Pëtr Kropotkin, *Issledovaniia o lednikovom periode: S kartami, razrezami i risunkami v osoboi broshiure* (Saint Petersburg, 1876).

he had even been allowed to continue his research in prison before he escaped. Soon after his arrival in London, Kropotkin, looking for a source of income, approached the subeditor of *Nature*, John Scott Keltie, to offer his services as a translator. Under a pseudonym he produced notes for the journal on recent scientific publications in Russian, German, French, and the Scandinavian languages, but was soon forced to reveal his identity when asked to give his views on his own work. Not only was Keltie strangely unconcerned to have employed a notorious fugitive, according to Kropotkin's account, he was indeed 'very much pleased to discover the refugee safe in England.'[10] This suggests that Keltie shared the widespread sympathy among British liberals and even some conservatives for the victims of Russian despotism.[11] The Society of Friends of Russian Freedom was able to draw on an important current of public hostility to the tsar's regime, which reached back to the days of Alexander Herzen's exile in London in the 1850s and 1860s.[12] Kropotkin's Russianness may well have made his politics more palatable in Victorian polite society, which prided itself on its liberal cosmopolitanism and celebrated eccentricity.

When Kropotkin found himself imprisoned again—his apparent preference for a French jail over London having been granted when he was arrested in Lyon in 1883—Keltie and other British scientists also petitioned for him to be released and allowed to work.[13] Keltie and Kropotkin continued to discuss problems of geography for the rest of Kropotkin's life, most of which he spent in England. Ferretti sees Keltie as 'a sort of literary agent for Kropotkin in Great Britain',

[10] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 187.

[11] Keltie took a lively interest in Russian affairs; e.g. in RGS Collections, CB7, Keltie to Kropotkin, 25 Dec. 1880, he states that he is in contact with Russian emigrants; and in another letter written on 12 Feb. 1893 he asks: 'Do you see my Russian friends from time to time?'

[12] John Slatter, 'Our Friends from the East: Russian Revolutionaries and British Radicals, 1852–1917', *History Today*, 53/10 (2003), 43–9; also John Slatter, 'The Correspondence of P. A. Kropotkin as Historical Source Material', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 72/2 (1994), 277–88, at 286: '[the Society] successfully changed British attitudes towards Russia by turning previously largely Russophobic British public opinion into a more nuanced attitude—support for the Russian people but opposition to its oppressive government'.

[13] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 273.

having introduced him to editors such William Robertson Smith and James Knowles.[14] In so doing, Keltie was a crucial connection not only for Kropotkin's contributions to the society's *Geographical Journal*, but also to the country's most important scientific and general interest publications, among them *The Nineteenth Century*, *Encylopaedia Britannica*, and *The Times*.

Keltie was also Kropotkin's point of access to the Royal Geographical Society. The Scottish geographer joined the society in 1883 and became its assistant secretary in 1892. His correspondence with Kropotkin, held at the RGS archives, contains mentions of visits, enquiries about each other's health, and regards to wives and children. Kropotkin's association with the society is in fact best thought of as a personal connection; the relationship was never formally recognized and it is difficult to tell which party would have been more interested in officializing ties. After his return to England in 1886, Kropotkin became a regular visitor to the society, frequently gave lectures, and published over forty articles in the *Geographical Journal* on topics ranging from the teaching of physiography to the desiccation of Eurasia. His expertise was undoubtedly most in demand when it came to the Russian Empire, where he had been on expeditions to some of the remotest parts. He met many of the RGS's most influential fellows—assistant secretaries like Henry Walter Bates, librarians like Hugh Robert Mill, and presidents like Douglas W. Freshfield and Halford Mackinder, who nowadays is mainly known as one of the founding fathers of geopolitics.[15] It appears that there was even talk of offering him a fellowship in 1892. Woodcock and Avakumović claim—without providing sources—that Kropotkin refused the fellowship, his reason being that 'he could not join a society under royal patronage.'[16] This seems unlikely for a man who had been a member of a society under imperial patronage. Besides, while he is explicit on his reasons for turning down the invitation to become secretary of the Russian Geographical Society, his memoirs (which are not

[14] Federico Ferretti, 'Publishing Anarchism: Pyotr Kropotkin and British Print Cultures, 1876–1917', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 57 (2017), 17–27, at 22.

[15] Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and Empire: The Legacy of Halford Mackinder* (Oxford, 2009), 263–95 offers a detailed comparison of Kropotkin's views and Mackinder's 'geopolitics'.

[16] Woodcock and Avakumović, *The Anarchist Prince*, 227.

devoid of tales of sacrifice and suffering for the cause) fail to mention an English offer of a fellowship.[17] The only document directly referring to this episode tells a rather different story; in a letter to Keltie and Freshfield, all Kropotkin writes is:

> I feel extremely obliged to you for the steps you took in asking my admission to the fellowship of the Geographical Society. I need not say that I always take the greatest interest in the Society's work and if I can be useful in any way in aiding it, I shall always be delighted to do so.[18]

This makes it sound improbable that Kropotkin would have refused formal admission to the society, and more likely that the 'steps taken' failed to pave the way for this outcome.

Although there is no evidence that Kropotkin had enemies within the society, his name is strangely absent from its internal publications. There is no mention of him in the council minutes of the period in which his nomination would have been debated; neither does he appear on any of the lists of referees published during the forty years of his acquaintance with Keltie—even in those fields (orography, Siberia) where his expertise was undoubtedly recognized. The fact that Kropotkin's anarchist friend Élisée Reclus was featured in both the council minutes and the referee lists—and was even awarded the society's gold medal 'for eminent services rendered to Geography as the author of *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle*' in 1894[19]—implies that there was no categorical exclusion of radicals from the highest honours bestowed by the RGS (although it might have been more complicated for an anarchist living and agitating in Britain).

However, even liberals like Keltie seem never to have taken Kropotkin's political engagement very seriously, or at least they pretended not to. When Kropotkin was refused entry into Switzerland in 1913, Keltie sardonically commented: 'it is very stupid of the Swiss to make such

[17] State patronage as a possible source of conflict goes entirely unmentioned in the chapter of his memoirs devoted to his rejection of the position of secretary of the Russian Geographical Society in 1871; Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 7–17.

[18] RGS Collections, CB7, Kropotkin to Keltie, 30 Jan. 1892.

[19] A list of RGS medals and awards since 1832 can be found at [https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/QSDT4].

a fuss about an old man like you who are past your plotting days.'[20] No RGS member ever made an effort to engage with anarchist political positions, and they tried to keep it to a bare minimum when they had to. Keltie famously opened his obituary for Kropotkin by stating that 'this is not the place to deal in detail with Kropotkin's political views, except to express regret that his absorption in these seriously diminished the services which otherwise he might have rendered to Geography.'[21]

Towards Anarchist Science

If Keltie politely held that the RGS's *Journal* was 'not the place' for politics, the question remains whether Kropotkin regarded the Royal Geographical Society as 'the place to deal with his political views'. Even if Ferretti makes a well founded argument that Kropotkin used academic, and specifically geographical, outlets to promote the anarchist cause, his prime motivation for connecting with learned societies was scientific. We should not underestimate the sincerity of Kropotkin's passion for science. In a letter to Keltie he enthused:

> The idea of opening the discussion on the Desiccation of Asia pleases me so much that this morning, as soon as I got your letter, I sat to write down the main points, and to sketch two maps showing the extension of the Caspian Sea at the end of the Glacial Period.[22]

His correspondence with Keltie—as well as with anarchist scientists such as Reclus[23] and Marie Goldsmith[24]—leaves no doubt that his interest in science was genuine and that his geographical scholarship

[20] RGS Collections, CB7, Keltie to Kropotkin, 15 Dec. 1913.
[21] John Scott Keltie, 'Obituary: Prince Kropotkin', *Geographical Journal*, 57/4 (1921), 316–19, at 317.
[22] RGS Collections, CB7, Kropotkin to Keltie, 2 July 1903.
[23] Ferretti, 'Correspondence'.
[24] Michel Confino (ed.), *Anarchistes en exil: Correspondance inédite de Pierre Kropotkine à Marie Goldsmith, 1897–1917* (Paris, 1995); Michel Confino and Daniel Rubinstein, 'Kropotkine savant: Vingt-cinq lettres inédites de Pierre Kropotkine à Marie Goldsmith. 27 juillet 1901–9 juillet 1915', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, 33/2 (1992), 243–301.

was not just a means of securing a livelihood, as sometimes suggested. The case of scholars with more formal affiliations, such as the biologist Goldsmith or Lev Mechnikov, professor of geography in Neuchâtel, illustrates that scientists with professed anarchist leanings did not position themselves in opposition to institutionalized academia. Moreover, as I have mentioned, notions of professionalism took hold in geography only gradually, and Kropotkin's position beyond the academies and universities was hardly exceptional.

In most of his letters to Keltie, Kropotkin asks him for books or maps held at the society; he also made extensive use of its facilities, where he could freely pursue his scientific work. His loose ties to the RGS were easily compatible with his ideal of an anarchist research community. In *The Conquest of Bread* (1892) he criticizes the promotion of science by the state—'Should [the scientist] ask help of the state, which can only be given to one candidate in a hundred, and which only he may obtain, who promises ostensibly to keep to the beaten track?'[25]—and praises the model of the voluntary learned society. However, in its current form, even this model is subjected to harsh criticism:

> What is defective in the Zoological Society of London, and in other kindred societies, is that the member's fee cannot be paid in work; that the keepers and numerous employees of this large institution are not recognised as members of the Society, while many have no other incentive than to put the cabalistic letters FZS (Fellow of the Zoological Society) on their cards. In a word, what is needed is a more perfect co-operation.[26]

It seems more than likely that this was a veiled address to a 'kindred society' that Kropotkin knew far better than the Zoological Society. Yet Kropotkin, too, was able to distinguish between his ideals and the reality of the scientific community of his time. When asked to give his opinion on the award of the RGS gold medal to the geographer Pëtr Semenov, he replied: 'Semenoff [*sic*] is a Russian functionary and ready to serve under liberal and reactionary ruler alike and of course has no personal sympathy of mine, but scientifically, I think . . . your

[25] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, ed. Marshall S. Shatz (Cambridge, 1995), 101. [26] Ibid. 102

choice was not bad.'[27] Miller goes so far as to claim that 'Kropotkin only made the most rudimentary attempts to relate anarchism to modern physical science' and gives the example of an analogy between the equilibrium of the planetary system and the harmony of spontaneously moving individuals.[28] This is probably more telling of the author's understanding of science than of Kropotkin's.

A comparison of Kropotkin's writings published in scientific journals with those in the anarchist press does reveal significant differences, however, and not just of tone. In his *Geographical Journal* article 'The Great Siberian Railway' (1895) he discusses purely technical and geological aspects of railway construction with an underlying enthusiasm for the project, omitting the authoritarian nature of its conception[29]—a position which seems to run against the idealized vision of a railway network continuously growing together from free agreement that he envisioned three years earlier in *The Conquest of Bread*.[30] Similarly, *Fields, Factories and Workshops* (1898) argues for an increase in food production but, unlike the comparable figures and calculations in *The Conquest of Bread*, leaves out the revolutionary justification of such claims.[31] In a letter to Hugh Robert Mill, he harshly criticizes the censorship of science in Russia, but does not refer to any restrictions, official or conventional, imposed on scientists in Britain.[32] The boundaries between adapting to different audiences and self-censorship can be porous. However, the above examples also illustrate that the subjects he addressed in both his anarchist writings and his geographical texts tended to overlap. Moreover, Kropotkin's own understanding of the relationship between politics and science—and geography in particular—evolved considerably over the period in question. This is mirrored to some extent in his relationship with the RGS.

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[27] RGS Collections, CB7, Kropotkin to Keltie, 1 May 1897.

[28] Martin A. Miller, 'Kropotkin', in John A. Hall (ed.), *Rediscoveries: Some Neglected Modern European Political Thinkers* (Oxford, 1985), 85–104, at 95.

[29] Peter Kropotkin, 'The Great Siberian Railway', *Geographical Journal*, 5/2 (1895), 146–54.

[30] Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, 117; Kropotkin gives the tsar's decision to build the Saint Petersburg–Moscow connection in a straight line as a negative example.

[31] For a comparison of the two, see Hulse, *Revolutionists in London*, 61.

[32] RGS Collections, HRM 3, Kropotkin to Mill, 6. Mar. 1895.

Kropotkin saw himself as a scientific geographer and a militant anarchist at the same time. His interest in geography had been kindled during his journeys in Siberia as a young tsarist official in the 1860s and—if we are to believe his retrospective account—it was the very same experiences that lay at the source of his political orientation. His encounters with peasants and political prisoners made him 'appreciate how little the state administration could give to them'[33] and that the central government only worsened their plight. While both his scientific and political engagement date back to the 1860s, a close reading of his scientific output suggests that it was only during his English exile that he began to develop a theory explicitly combining the two.

Throughout his career as a scientist, Kropotkin, a prince who had abandoned his noble title, regarded the production of science by elites as problematic.[34] In the early 1860s he felt that the pursuit of scientific inquiry raised a moral dilemma between the joy he derived from geographical exploration and the fact that the funds enabling him to pursue his research had to be taken from the hungry.[35] Only in the future anarchist society, with the division of labour abolished, Kropotkin foretold, would science cease to be a luxury, leaving everyone able to indulge in its pleasures. Nonetheless, there was a significant evolution in how he conceived of his own role as a scientist towards the end of the century: he came to recognize that science itself and he as a scientist could be useful even in the present.

Having—critically—read Henri de Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Herbert Spencer and imbibed the positivist spirit of his age, Kropotkin became increasingly optimistic about the possible social benefits of scientific progress. Geography was especially important in Kropotkin's scientific worldview for its broad disciplinary sweep, propaedeutic qualities, and progressive teleology. As I will discuss

[33] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, i. 196.

[34] Peter Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, trans. David A. Modell (Philadelphia, 1903), 5: 'Besides, it must not be forgotten that men of science, too, are but human and that most of them either belong by descent to the possessing classes, and are steeped in the prejudices of their class, or else are in the actual service of the government.'

[35] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 19–20.

below, the very same properties were singled out by RGS members seeking to champion their discipline. Kropotkin proposed 'objective' analysis of the resources of a given terrain to improve their distribution; he looked at ways of rationalizing food production; and he studied the role of migration patterns in speciation. The deduction of general laws using scientific methods thus became the focus of his political work too. The fact that his scientific work could be made relevant to his anarchist project reinvigorated it and gave it a renewed justification. In 1894 he boldly stated that:

> The philosophy which is being elaborated by the study of sciences on the one hand and anarchy on the other, are two branches of the same great movement of minds: two sisters walking hand in hand. And that is why we can affirm that anarchy is no longer an utopia, a theory; it is a philosophy which impresses itself on our age.[36]

Given this unbridled faith in science as a force for progress, Matthew S. Adams has noted that '[i]n terms of his overarching methodology, Kropotkin appears to the modern reader as a quintessentially Victorian thinker.'[37]

But Kropotkin also pursued more specific aims in associating anarchism with science—first, as a response to the scientific pretensions of Marxism. Anarchism was not bourgeois, utopian, or backwards; instead, it was more scientific than Marxism because it had rid itself of all metaphysical elements, relying exclusively on the deductive–inductive method.[38] Second, buttressing his anarchist ambitions with a scientific grounding also allowed him to target public opinion outside the socialist camp. Adopting the vocabulary of science endowed anarchism with a sense of calm rationality. This seemed particularly urgent in an age when anarchism had extremely bad press—in 1895, the *Gentleman's Magazine* described anarchism as 'a malignant fungoid

[36] Pierre Kropotkine, *Les temps nouveaux: Conférence faite à Londres* (Paris, 1894); translation from Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the Rise of Revolutionary Anarchism 1872–1886* (Cambridge, 1989), 2.

[37] Matthew S. Adams, *Kropotkin, Read and the Intellectual History of British Anarchism: Between Reason and Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2015), 50.

[38] Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, 38.

growth on the body politic.'[39] More generally, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, politicians and the emerging mass media stirred up an image of anarchists as fanatics, terrorists, and assassins, thus giving the movement its first—decidedly negative—publicity. Although the most notorious acts of propaganda by the deed occurred outside Britain,[40] there was a widespread moral panic, reinforcing the British uneasiness with revolutionary immigrants.[41] When the German anarchist Johann Most was tried for endorsing the assassination of Alexander II in a newspaper article, the Grand Jury deemed the piece 'brutal and un-English.'[42] Recognition by eminent British academics—and especially by the largest scientific society in London—was intended to have a positive effect on Kropotkin's prestige and that of anarchists more generally. Haia Shpayer-Makov has shown how Kropotkin's affiliation with science, alongside his aristocratic origins and manners, was a crucial ingredient in his overwhelmingly positive image in Britain as an 'anarchist saint' by the early decades of the twentieth century.[43]

I have alluded to the very prominent role played by geography within this scientific project.[44] Kropotkin promoted a holistic understanding

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[39] Cited in Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin in Britain, 1886–1917', *Albion Quarterly*, 19/3 (1987), 373–90, at 373.

[40] One exception being the Greenwich bomb incident; for a (geographical!) reading of it, see Ronald R. Thomas, 'The Home of Time: The Prime Meridian, the Dome of the Millennium, and Postnational Space', in Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2003), 23–39.

[41] Hermia Oliver insists that although London became 'the headquarters of international anarchism', this remained very much an immigrant phenomenon: 'anarchist beliefs had nothing in common . . . with the English radicalism of the 1860s or later', nor with the federalists or the Manhood Suffrage League. Even later anarchist tenets in England did not grow out of the English General Council of the First International in 1864, but were only very slowly established by the exile community and their converts. Hermia Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (London, 1983), 5 and 148.

[42] Cited ibid. 18.

[43] Shpayer-Makov, 'The Reception of Peter Kropotkin', 379.

[44] This being another difference between the Marxist and anarchist conceptions of science; cf. Yves Lacoste, *La géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre* (Paris, 1976), 96.

of science—a synthesis that came close to collapsing science into geography as well as into anarchism:

> Anarchism is a world-concept based upon a mechanical explanation of all phenomena, embracing the whole of nature—that is, including in it the life of human societies and their economic, political, and moral problems . . . Its aim is to construct a synthetic philosophy comprehending in one generalisation all the phenomena of nature—and therefore also the life of societies.[45]

In this 'world-concept', geography was the all-encompassing model that described the relationship between man and his environment in all its aspects, ranging from the more efficient organization of production through to decentralization, a justification of federalism, and even ethical lessons. While Kropotkin was arguably more interested in making anarchism more relevant through the medium of geography, his redefinition of geography's potential paralleled the RGS's quest for relevance in a number of significant ways. It is here that we have to look for reasons why the society's engagement with Kropotkin was not called into question as the latter increasingly turned his back on a purely physical understanding of geography and, from the late 1880s onwards, his political and scientific agendas became ever more entangled. On the contrary, the evolution in Kropotkin's thought seems only to have reinforced his connection with the RGS.

Shared Epistemologies, Different Programmes

Kropotkin frequented the Royal Geographical Society in a time of important transformations that touched upon the identity and function of the discipline. In 1885 Keltie published an influential report on the state of geography in British schools and universities, which he described thirty years later as the beginning of a 'crusade' for 'the improvement and elevation of geography and a better recognition of the subject in education.'[46] The two aspects of this crusade were seen

[45] Kropotkin, *Modern Science and Anarchism*, 53.

[46] Cited in J. M. Wise, 'The Scott Keltie Report 1885 and the Teaching of Geography in Great Britain', *Geographical Journal*, 152/3 (1986), 367–82, at 367. John

as interdependent—higher standards of research would result in a higher standing in schools and universities, and vice versa. Both were equally dependent on a more precise definition of the proper object of geography.

In the late nineteenth century, the outlines of 'geography' remained inchoate. To a large extent, this was due to the nature and structure of the Royal Geographical Society itself as the main body representing the subject—a body composed of adventurist explorers and arm-chair scientists. Driver tellingly describes the tensions between its members' conflicting aspirations: 'the RGS was a hybrid institution, seeking simultaneously to acquire the status of a scientific society and to provide a public forum for the celebration of a new age of exploration.'[47] While the latter ensured much of geography's popularity, it also threatened its scientific soundness. Within the RGS, a faction of geographers—incidentally those most likely to be in touch with Kropotkin, and often more middle-class in background—were making the case for professionalization and institutionalization; yet this redefinition was not to be made at the expense of the discipline's characteristic breadth.

Maintaining the synthesis of physical and human geography meant searching for a new and intellectually plausible narrative that would provide the field with the same coherence it had once enjoyed, but which the discredited teleological accounts of the beginning of the century could no longer offer. The historian David Livingstone has referred to this attempt to justify geography as a broad church—combining its identity as a physical science with that of a social science—as the 'geographical experiment'.[48] In this wider context, the

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

[47] Driver, *Geography Militant*, 24. David Livingstone goes further and claims that its high-ranking membership 'made the RGS rather different from some of the other scientific societies and gave it a rather dilettantish, amateurish image'; David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise* (Oxford, 1992), 158–9. On its 150-year anniversary, the RGS celebrated its history of pioneering explorations with a publication: Ian Cameron, *To the Farthest Ends of the Earth: 150 Years of World Exploration by the Royal Geographical Society* (London, 1980).

[48] Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, 175–8.

RGS geographers came up with strikingly similar strategies to those developed in Kropotkin's 'scientification' of anarchism. While the trends and the larger debates were indeed comparable, however, we must also be careful to distinguish between some of their answers.

The first line of attack in the campaign to ensure geography's legitimacy, as I have mentioned already, was to establish a better grounding in the academic landscape. Keltie's 1885 report on geographical education in Britain had pointed to the desolate state of teaching in schools and made a case—through comparison with Continental Europe—for establishing chairs of geography at British universities. The Royal Geographical Society sponsored the lectureships in geography at Oxford and Cambridge for the first fifty years of their existence and fought for its admission as a Tripos exam subject.[49] While Mackinder, who held the position at Oxford, was beginning to attract a growing number of students to his lectures by 1893, the situation in Cambridge was much less promising. John Young Buchanan withdrew from the lectureship, finding it disappointing, and freely admitted that the new lecturer would need to be more apt at enthusing undergraduates for geography. The RGS was looking for a popular and engaging speaker, and it seems likely that some thought of appointing Kropotkin to the position—a man who, in part through his political activity, was widely seen as fitting the bill. This rumour has frequently been taken up in scholarship, yet it can only be traced back to a few lines in the memoirs of John Mavor (a Canadian friend of Kropotkin's), written over three decades later. In his recollections, Mavor claims that Kropotkin refused the position because he 'did not care to compromise his freedom.'[50] Once again, and for reasons that are open to speculation, Kropotkin's own account is silent on the affair.[51] Judging from his correspondence with Hugh Robert Mill, it seems more likely that

[49] David R. Stoddart, 'The RGS and the Foundations of Geography at Cambridge', *Geographical Journal*, 141/2 (1975), 216–39.

[50] John Mavor, *My Windows on the Street of the World* (London, 1923), 75.

[51] Mavor claims that William Robertson Smith, editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and professor of Arabic at Cambridge, was the one to suggest Kropotkin's appointment. There is no evidence for this in his correspondence, held in Cambridge University Library, and the only biography, Bernhard Maier, *William Robertson Smith: His Life, his Work and his Times* (Tübingen, 2009), does not mention the confirmed connection between Kropotkin and

he sought employment in the University Extension Programme—a range of summer and evening classes aimed at the public. In a letter written in 1893, the same year as the vacancy at Cambridge, Kropotkin gives a list of lectures for his planned application and thanks Mill 'for the interest you took.' Yet he is uncertain about the prospects of success: 'we shall see what will be the results.'[52] The episode is significant because it shows how Kropotkin was interested in promoting the cause of geography at universities; his famous 1885 essay 'What Geography Ought to Be' was in fact a complement to the Keltie report.

Education was certainly a major concern in Kropotkin's thought, and his emphasis on geography was also linked to its supposedly exceptional ability to shape young minds.[53] Unlike ancient languages or mathematics—the former being irrelevant and the latter too complex—geography opened the path to understanding the world, including in an ethical sense. In 'What Geography Ought to Be', Kropotkin argued that '[geography] must teach us, from our earliest childhood, that we are all brethren, whatever our nationality', and that, against war, egoism, and national jealousies, it could serve as 'a means of dissipating these prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity.'[54] Only geographical knowledge could change the perception of people who

> from their tenderest childhood . . . are taught to despise 'the savages', to consider the very virtues of pagans as disguised crime, and to look upon the 'lower races' as upon a mere nuisance on the globe—a nuisance which is only to be tolerated as long as money can be made out of it.[55]

While agreeing with Keltie's report on the relevance of geography and the need for a holistic approach to teaching it, Kropotkin struck

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Robertson Smith. Henry Yule Oldman was appointed lecturer instead of Kropotkin.

[52] RGS Collections, HRM3/12, Kropotkin to Mill, 17 Nov. 1893.

[53] Élisée Reclus pursued a similar educational project involving the construction of a large globe; Gary S. Dunbar, 'Elisée Reclus and the Great Globe', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 90/1 (1974), 57–66.

[54] Peter Kropotkin, 'What Geography Ought to Be', *The Nineteenth Century*, 18/106 (1885), 940–56, at 943.

[55] Ibid. 942.

a very different note in his open critique of imperialism. Keltie had pleaded for geography with the argument that 'the interests of England are as wide as the world', and so the subject was 'a matter of imperial importance.'[56] Mackinder joined the debate with an even more explicitly imperialist defence of geography in schools,[57] and it has been pointed out that the very symbolism of the RGS's seal connected 'the quest for and acquisition of secret knowledge about exotic lands with military conquest and power.'[58] Kropotkin's supplement to Keltie's report flatly rejected such propositions, but the important point is that at no stage did Kropotkin frame his own opinion in opposition to Keltie's; rather, he presented his argument as a contribution to the common struggle for the recognition of geography's relevance.[59]

A similar pattern—endorsing a comparable framework while filling it with largely different content—also runs through the second, more profound aspect of 'the geographical experiment'. Livingstone has shown how geographers became involved in the most hotly debated scientific theory of the day: when reconceptualizing their field and placing it on a new theoretical foundation, they turned to Darwin's theory of evolution. Its reasoning was inherently geographical—Livingstone and Withers point out that '[i]n the "Darwinian Revolution," questions of biogeographical distribution, the relationships between organisms and habitat, and explanations rooted in the determining agency of geographical difference are central.'[60] By

[56] Keltie, *Geographical Education*, 83. The first issue of the RGS journal stated as the society's raison d'être that it was 'paramount to the welfare of a maritime nation like Great Britain, with its numerous and extensive foreign possessions'. Cited in Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, 167.

[57] For an excellent comparison of Kropotkin's and Mackinder's responses to the Keltie report, see Kearns, 'The Political Pivot'.

[58] Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas, 'Introduction', in Michie and Thomas (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Geographies*, 1–22, at 5.

[59] He sardonically comments that '[o]ur mercantile century seems better to have understood the necessity of a reform as soon as the so-called "practical" interests of colonization and warfare were brought to the front. Well, then, let us discuss the reform of geographical education.' Kropotkin, 'What Geography Ought to Be', 491.

[60] David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers, 'On Geography and Revolution, in David N. Livingstone and Charles W. J. Withers (eds.) *Geography and Revolution* (Chicago, 2005), 1–23, at 2; cf. David R. Stoddart, 'Darwin's

linking the physical aspects of geography with its human ones, evolutionary theory provided geographers with the conceptual umbrella they had previously lacked, as well as opening their discipline to a larger, often no less teleological vision of processes in the natural world. It was also where their interests intersected with Kropotkin's project.

Kropotkin's engagement with Darwinism is well known and came to dominate the work of his later years. The list of possible university extension classes he submitted to Mill in 1893 includes a series of lectures on 'The Origin and Evolution of Institutions for Mutual Protection and Support'. This is in fact one of the first mentions of his interest in the topic and a preliminary to the series of articles that would become *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902). In these texts, Kropotkin rejected Huxleian readings of Darwin, which interpreted the 'struggle for existence' as leading to inevitable clashes between individuals as well as races, thereby offering a naturalist justification for capitalist competition, war, and racism. Kropotkin worried that 'there is no infamy in civilised society, or in the relations of the whites towards the so-called lower races, or of the strong towards the weak, which would not have found its excuse in this formula.'[61]

Kropotkin's own anarchist formula has been summed up as 'Darwin without Malthus'.[62] He acknowledged the principle of the struggle for existence, but held that more weight needed to be given to environmental conditions and to other species as possible opponents in this struggle. Seen from this angle, the capacity for cooperation displayed by individuals, groups, and entire species became an instrument of survival. The Siberian tundra had convinced him that in an inclement environment, the *communal* struggle of societies and herds of animals trumped individual feats of strength. At all times, he insisted that his promotion of the role of sociability in evolution came closer to

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Impact on Geography', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 56/4 (1966), 683–98.

[61] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 317.

[62] Daniel P. Todes, *Darwin Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought* (Oxford, 1989) argues that this type of reading was embedded in the Russian reception of Darwinism; a similar view is found in Alexander Vuchinich, *Darwinism in Russian Thought* (Berkeley, 1988).

Darwin's own views, which had been perverted by his proselytizers. In his memoirs, Kropotkin notes that RGS members supported him in this, claiming that Keltie's predecessor as secretary, H. W. Bates, wrote to encourage him to publish his account: 'That is true Darwinism. It is a shame to think of what they have made of Darwin's ideas. Write it, and when you have published it, I will write you a letter of commendation which you may publish.'[63]

The support for Kropotkin from RGS members can also be accounted for by another similarity in their specific readings of Darwin. Like Kropotkin, the group of geographical innovators became worried that a focus on the physical features of a habitat alone threatened to look a lot like the crude environmental determinism of old. But to establish a more integrative vision of geography that would leave room for history and culture as influences on the course of evolution, a causal connection other than determinism was needed between the environmental and social aspects. To explain how certain accomplishments in the social world could lead to long-lasting advantages in the process of natural selection, they proposed a slightly modified version of Darwinism—one that included Lamarckian elements. The idea that changes occurring during an individual's lifetime could be passed on to offspring was important not only in restoring a possible role for environmental factors in the process of natural selection, but also in foregrounding agency—which in Kropotkin's case was especially relevant to the evolutionary rewards for altruistic actions.[64] Livingstone again has underlined the inspiration of neo-Lamarckian evolutionism as 'perhaps the key ingredient'[65] in the story of geography's academic institutionalization, discussing the cases of Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel, and William Morris Davis. Strangely, he leaves Kropotkin out of this particular debate, even while acknowledging that his theory represented 'a naturalisation of morality that was tantalisingly analogous in its conceptual structures to that of the Darwinian imperialists.'[66] Perhaps 'conceptual structures' alone cannot serve as a foundation for institutional cooperation after all. From the RGS's

[63] Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ii. 318.

[64] Cf. Álvaro Girón, 'Kropotkin Between Lamarck and Darwin: The Impossible Synthesis', *Asclepio*, 55/1 (2003), 189–213.

[65] Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition*, 189.

[66] Ibid. 255.

point of view, Kropotkin, with his prominence as an exotic society figure, would have been useful in resetting the terms of the debate; but officializing him and the political ideals he associated with geographical reform would have been a step too far.

Conclusion

The debates on education and evolution rallied scientists from a wide range of political backgrounds; however, political frameworks on all sides continued to set the limits of the terms of debate, and these were never crossed. The scientific nature of anarchism remained contested. Geographers certainly did not recognize it; Keltie diplomatically concluded that '[Kropotkin] was a keen observer, with a well-trained intellect, familiar with all the sciences bearing on his subject; and although his conclusions may not be universally accepted, there is no doubt that his contributions to geographical science are of the highest value.'[67] But Kropotkin's claim to be proceeding in a strictly scientific way was not universally accepted among anarchists either; Errico Malatesta for example berated Kropotkin: 'you have a theory and you look for facts to group together and support that theory.'[68]

It was the very specific circumstance of a broad debate on the limits and possibilities of geographical thought that allowed Kropotkin to take a surprisingly prominent place in the forums of the Royal Geographical Society. Kropotkin and his RGS counterparts were essentially discussing similar problems within the confines of the same paradigm, and this assured their mutual interest in each other's work. But the fact that Kropotkin was in conversation with imperialist conservatives like Mackinder as well as liberals like Keltie underlines that what united them was an adherence to a novel conception of geography rather than a common liberal tradition. While this certainly required a degree of tolerance, or at least a willingness to overlook many of Kropotkin's inferences, to treat politics as the driving force behind their association would be to massively overstate the case. And Kropotkin seems to have been well aware of this. Despite his own pleas for the interdependence

[67] Keltie, 'Obituary', 319.

[68] Cited in Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 13.

of geography and anarchism, he often neglected to mention the latter: his obituary for Reclus mirrors the one that Keltie would eventually write for Kropotkin, in that he briefly alludes to the deceased's political activities but praises his achievements in geography at length.[69] Scholars have suggested that Kropotkin's aristocratic origins and his position as a champion of people facing political persecution in Russia account for his relatively easy integration into British educated circles. But I think it is equally important to pay attention to reasons internal to the discipline of geography, given that many of the arguments put forward by Kropotkin in the popular press coincided with the reform strategies of the RGS. The interest of the Royal Geographical Society in its unorthodox associate has still not completely faded—the *Geographical Journal* reviewed the first two English-language biographies of Kropotkin,[70] and Nellie Heath's portrait of him, gifted in 1904, is still on display at Lowther Lodge. However, the recent rediscovery of Kropotkin as a geographer has come from the more marginal and explicitly radical side of the profession.[71]

For Kropotkin as a public figure, if not for anarchism, the legitimation he sought by reformulating his anarchist project through a realignment of his scientific project seems to have been relatively successful. The RGS provided contacts and networks, thereby granting him access to a larger audience. Eventually there was a shift in his popular perception which mapped onto the geographical area where

[69] Peter Kropotkin, 'Obituary: Elisée Reclus', *Geographical Journal*, 26/3 (1905), 337–43.

[70] G. R. C., review of George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Anarchist Prince: The Biography of Prince Peter Kropotkin* (London, 1950), in *Geographical Journal*, 117/2 (1951), 241–2; David Wileman, review of Martin A. Miller, *Kropotkin* (Chicago, 1976), in *Geographical Journal*, 144/3 (1978), 504–5.

[71] This rediscovery, in the English-speaking world, has centred on the journal *Antipode* and the work of Simon Springer—e.g. 'Anarchism and Geography: A Brief Genealogy of Anarchist Geographies', *Geography Compass*, 7/1 (2013), 46–60. Geographers also took part in the various conferences commemorating the centenary of his death. For my critique: Pascale Siegrist, 'Historicising "Anarchist Geography": Six Issues for Debate from a Historian's Point of View', in Gerónimo Barrera de la Torre, Federico Ferretti, Anthony Ince, and Francisco Toro (eds.), *Historical Geographies of Anarchism: Early Critical Geographers and Present-Day Scientific Challenges* (London, 2017), 129–50.

he spent much of his later years; in the words of Nicholas Walter: '[i]n continental Europe Kropotkin was thought of as an anarchist who happened to be a scientist, in the Anglo-Saxon world he was thought of more as a scientist who happened to be an anarchist.'[72] This is almost a paraphrase of Kropotkin's own letter to Marie Goldsmith, to whom he remarked that 'in England they know me as a scholar rather than as a political writer.'[73] His conscious effort to present himself as a heroic but humble figure played no small part in creating an image of a serious and dedicated scientist, and some of his letters to editors reveal how deeply he cared about his reputation as such.[74] However, the evolution of his reception should not be seen as England having 'tamed' Kropotkin.[75] As far as he was concerned, this was less a moderation of his revolutionary enthusiasm than a strategic reorientation—one that corresponded to a deeply felt renewal of his interest in geography once he had turned it into a political tool. If Kropotkin the scientist was a public figure known for integrity and as a moral authority, there was always hope that one day Kropotkin the anarchist would be too.

[72] In his introduction to Peter Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, ed. Nicholas Walter (Mineola, NY, 2010), p. x.

[73] Kropotkin to Goldsmith, 15 Aug. 1909, cited in Confino (ed.), *Anarchistes en exil*, 364.

[74] The Kropotkin–Keltie correspondence, held in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), f. 1129, op. 2, d. 74, contains a long exchange on a letter to the editors concerning one of Kropotkin's 'Recent Science' summaries in *The Nineteenth Century*.

[75] Hulse, *Revolutionists in London*, 9.

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