

The Russo-Japanese War on the Shelves of New College Library

The Russo-Japanese War has been described as ‘World War Zero’—a conflict which ushered in many of the developments that would dominate the battlefields of the twentieth century, such as trench warfare, barbed wire, and the terrifying power of heavy artillery.¹ The defeat of a European by an Asian power also gave a tremendous fillip to anti-colonial nationalism across the British and French empires, while reinforcing lurid European fantasies of being overwhelmed by the massed forces of East Asian powers.² This had first been given currency by Kaiser Wilhelm II’s hysterical response to the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and was also invoked by Russia’s General Kuropatkin in his sombre reflections on the defeats suffered by the armies he had commanded in Manchuria, in which he warned that Russia’s defeat was a defeat for all Europeans.³ It would find later echoes in fiction, from H. G. Wells’s *The War in the Air* (1908) to the openly racist Fu Manchu stories of Saxe Rohmer. Even while the war was still being fought the general public across Europe and North America had an inexhaustible appetite for stories of the fighting, which rapidly made their way into popular fiction, in the English-speaking world usually with a strong pro-Japanese slant.⁴ Both Russia and Japan produced weekly or monthly chronicles of the fighting—in the Japanese case these were also summarised and published in English, with a view to making their case internationally.⁵ The war received extensive coverage in the press of all the European powers, and several newspaper correspondents would later produce highly coloured accounts of key events such as the siege of Port Arthur.⁶ Meanwhile European governments took a keen interest in the conflict as a testing-ground for the latest military and naval technology, given that it had been almost forty years since the last major European war. Britain, France, Germany, the United States, and even Switzerland despatched military observers to the Far East, who were then responsible for producing detailed official histories. Together with those published by the Russians and Japanese themselves, these were intended to provide specialised tactical and technical information to their respective General Staffs, while examples from them were used for military examinations, but they have since become invaluable sources for historians.⁷ The aftermath of the war also saw the publication of a slew of Japanese and Russian war memoirs translated into English—altogether a remarkably varied legacy of published sources which until the much later opening of Japanese and Russian archives formed the core of most histories of the war.⁸

¹ John W. Steinberg ‘Was the Russo-Japanese War World War Zero?’ *Russian Review* 67 (1) (2008), 1–7.

² David Schimmelpenninck Van Der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001), pp. 206–10.

³ A. N. Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War*, trans. Captain A. B. Lindsay (London: John Murray, 1909), vol. 2, p. 200; he expanded on the reasons for defeat at greater length in A. N. Kuropatkin, *Zadachi Russkoi Armii* (St Petersburg: V. A. Berezovskii, 1910), vol. 3, pp. 378–435.

⁴ Herbert Strang, *Kobo: A Story of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Blackie, 1905) and idem, *Brown of Moukden: A Story of the Russo-Japanese War* (London: Blackie, 1906); Emilio Salgari, *L’eroina di Port-Arthur: Avventure Russo-Giapponesi* (Turin: Speirani, 1904); Allen Upward, *The International Spy: Being the Secret History of the Russo-Japanese War* (Chicago: M. A. Donohue, 1905).

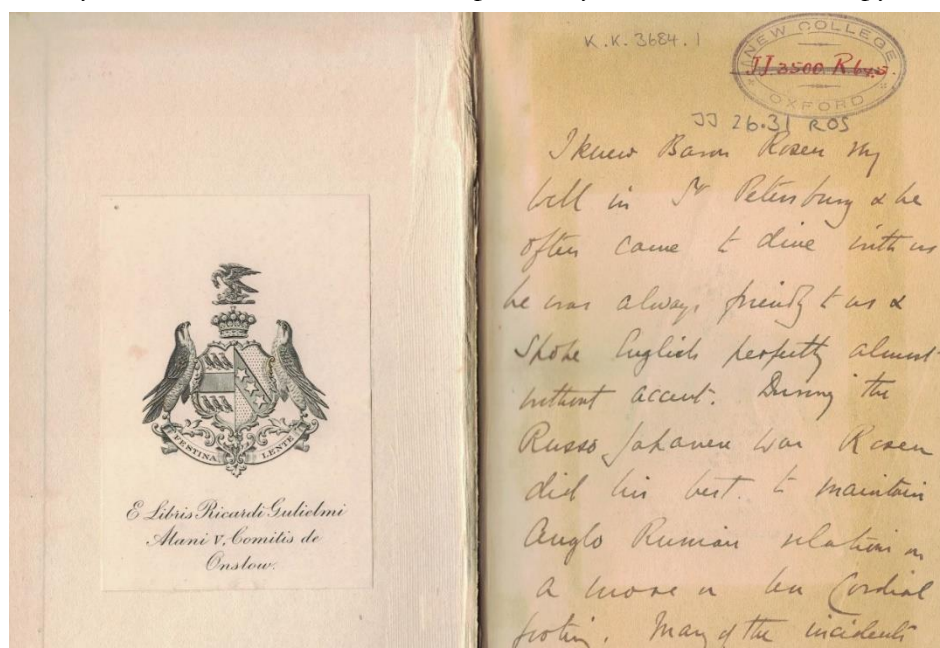
⁵ Col. Dubenskii (ed.), *Letopis’ Voiny s Yaponiei*, nos.1–52 (St Petersburg: R. Golike & A. Vil’borg, Feb 1904–March 1905); F. I. Bulgakov (ed.), *Illustrirovannaya Letopis’ Russko-Yaponskoi Voiny*, 14 vols. (St Petersburg: A. S. Suvorin, 1904–5); Wasuke Jikamura (ed.), *The Russo-Japanese War Fully Illustrated*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Kinkodo Publishing Co., 1904–5), and *Nichi-Ro Sensō shashinbō* (= *The Album, containing the Photographs and Pictures Regarding the Russo-Japanese War*), 2 vols. (Tokyo: Kinkodo Publishing Co., 1904).

⁶ For example, B. W. Norregaard, *The Great Siege: The Investment and Fall of Port Arthur* (London: Methuen, 1906).

⁷ Henri Rouvier and Paul Monconduit, *Opérations maritimes de la guerre russo-japonaise: historique officiel publié par l’état-major général de la Marine Japonaise* (Paris: Librairie Militaire R. Chapelot, 1910–11); *The Official History of the Russo-Japanese War*, prepared by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, parts 1 and 2 (London: HMSO, 1906 and 1909); see further J. H. Anderson, *The Russo-Japanese War on Land 1904–1905*, 2 vols. (London: Hugh Rees, 1909–11).

⁸ For example, Lieut-Gen. N. A. Tretyakov, *My Experiences at Nan Shan and Port Arthur with the Fifth East Siberian Rifles* (London: Hugh Rees, 1911); Nagao Ariga: *La Guerre Russo-japonaise au point de vue continental et le droit international d’après les documents officiels du Grand État-major japonais* (section historique de la guerre de 1904–1905) (Paris: A. Pedone, 1908).

New College has the richest collection of these works to be found in any Oxford library, largely thanks to two important twentieth-century bequests: that of Mr David Mann (Modern History, 1956), and of diplomat Richard William Alan Onslow, Fifth Earl of Onslow (Modern History, 1895), with some additional books from the collection of historian and cricketer Sir Foster Cunliffe (Modern History, 1895) which were left to the college after he was killed in France in 1916.⁹ By his own account Onslow (then Viscount Cranley) spent more time hunting foxes than studying while at New College, though he did manage to leave with a pass degree, which was more than many of his aristocratic contemporaries managed.¹⁰ After some time at a crammer to gain a grounding in languages, Onslow entered the diplomatic service at the second attempt in 1901. Although entrance was now by an (ostensibly) competitive examination, the Foreign Office was still a highly exclusive organisation where considerable private wealth was needed to eke out the nugatory salary afforded to junior diplomats, so his aristocratic origin was very much the norm even for junior diplomats.¹¹ After brief stints in Madrid and Tangier, Onslow arrived in St Petersburg shortly before the war with Japan broke out in February 1904, and recorded a (literally and figuratively) frosty atmosphere, since the Anglo-Japanese naval treaty signed the year before made many Russian officials look on the British mission with hostility and suspicion.¹² While his account of his time in St Petersburg spends more time on the technicalities of bear-hunting than the progress of the war, the interest he took in it can be gauged by the sheer number of books relating to the Russo-Japanese conflict that bear his bookplate which are now in New College Library.¹³ These are sometimes accompanied by annotations—in a copy of the memoirs of Baron



Rosen, who had been the Russian minister in Tokyo when Port Arthur was attacked, Onslow notes that 'he was always friendly to us & spoke English perfectly, almost without accent. During the Russo-Japanese War Rosen did his best to maintain Anglo-Russian relations on a more or less cordial footing'.¹⁴

New College Library, Oxford, JJ 26.31 ROS

⁹ Cunliffe played cricket for the university, Middlesex and the MCC. A Fellow of All Souls, he was the author of *The History of the Boer War*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen, 1901–4) 2 vols.

¹⁰ The Earl of Onslow, *Sixty-Three Years: Diplomacy, the Great War and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1945), pp. 42–51, New College Library, Oxford, NC/ONS.

¹¹ T. G. Otte, *The Foreign Office Mind: The Making of British Foreign Policy 1865–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.24–9, 240–59.

¹² Keith Neilson, *Britain and the Last Tsar: British Policy and Russia, 1864–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 246–7.

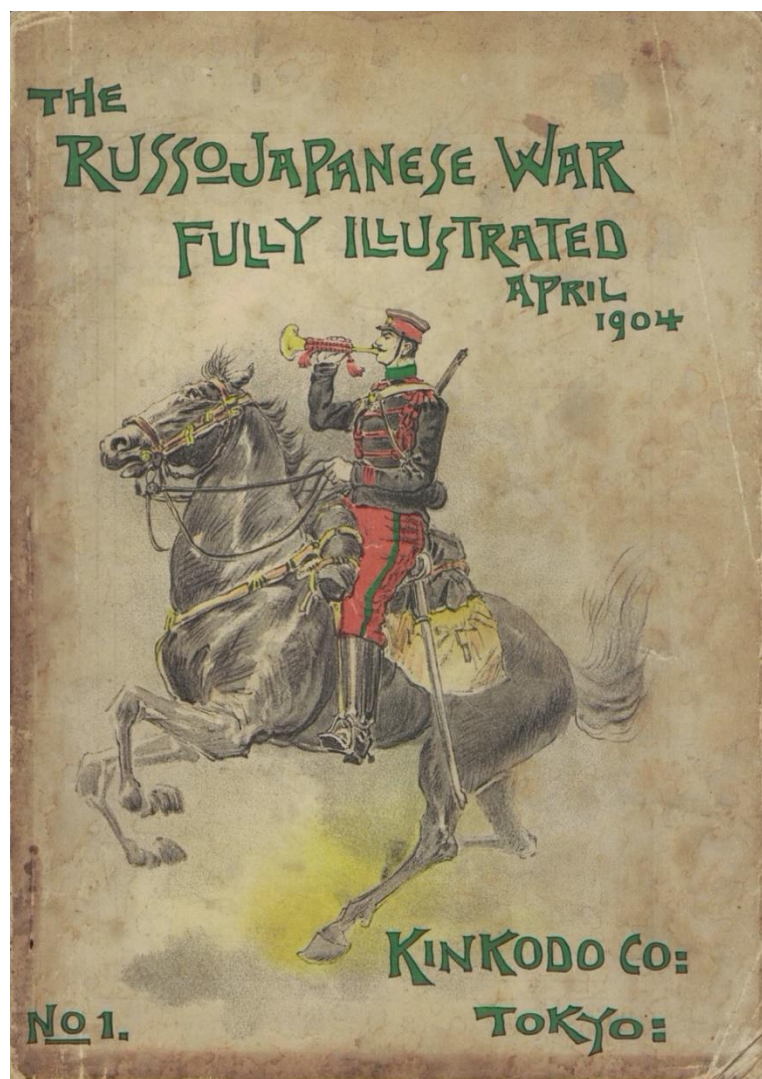
¹³ Onslow, *Sixty-Three Years*, pp. 88–132.

¹⁴ Baron Rosen, *Forty Years of Diplomacy*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1922), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 26.31 ROS.

Other highlights from the Onslow collection include an account of the war's origins published in 1905 by Dr Kan'ichi Asakawa, a lecturer in the History of East Asia at Dartmouth College;¹⁵ *Rasplata* (the reckoning)—a translation of the diary of Commander Vladimir Semenov of the Imperial Russian Navy, who experienced both the siege of Port Arthur and the Baltic Fleet's doomed voyage around the world to its destruction in the straits of Tsushima;¹⁶ journalist Douglas Story's *The Campaign with Kuropatkin*, a racy and impressionistic account of the series of land battles in Manchuria that ended with the Russian defeat at Mukden, and the English translation of the

account of the war by General Kuropatkin himself, only parts of which were ever published in Russian.¹⁷

The Mann collection was given to the college in 2015 by Anne Kriken Mann, the widow of the late David Mann. Unlike the books from Onslow which are on the general shelves in the stack, it has been preserved as a separate collection. It is without a doubt the single most comprehensive collection of works on the war in Oxford, containing the only copy of the German and Swiss official histories of the war to be found in any university or college library.¹⁸ The jewel of the collection is the Kinkodo Company's lavishly illustrated English-language history of the war, designed to convey a Japanese perspective to a largely sympathetic Anglo-American audience. This is the only copy of the Kinkodo history in Oxford, and while it was originally incomplete, this has recently been rectified with an additional purchase.¹⁹ Thanks to the Mann bequest the library also has complete sets of both editions



New College Library, Oxford, Mann248

¹⁵ Kan'ichi Asakawa, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Causes and Issues* (London: Archibald Constable, 1904), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 3.3 ASA.

¹⁶ Vladimir Semenov, *Rasplata (The Reckoning)* (London: J. Murray, 1909), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 26.31 SEM. (Another copy is also held in the Mann collection: New College Library, Oxford, Mann245.)

¹⁷ Douglas Story, *The Campaign with Kuropatkin* (London: T. W. Laurie, 1904), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 26.31 STO; A. N. Kuropatkin, *The Russian Army and the Japanese War: Being Historical and Critical Comments on the Military Policy and Power of Russia and on the Campaign in the Far East*, trans. A. B. Lindsay, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1909), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 26.31 KUR.

¹⁸ E. Reventlow, *Der Russisch-Japanische Krieg: mit zahlreichen Text-Illustrationen, Kunstbeilagen und einer mehrfarbigen Karte des Kriegsschauplatzes* (Berlin: C.A. Weller, 1906), New College Library, Oxford, Mann232; Fritz Gertsch, *Vom Russisch-Japanischen Kriege 1904/1905*, 4 vols. (Bern: Verlag von Ch. Künzi-Locher, 1907–10), New College Library, Oxford, Mann268–71.

¹⁹ *The Russo-Japanese War Fully Illustrated*, ed. Wasuke Jikamura, 10 vols. (Tokyo: Kinkodo Publishing Co., 1904–5), New College Library, Oxford, Mann248–52 and Mann252a–d.

of the War Office's multi-volume collection of reports from British officers attached to Russian and Japanese forces (with copious maps);²⁰ a complete set of Herbert Wrigley's enormous journalistic chronicle of the war;²¹ Cassell's popular multi-volume illustrated history;²² the famous war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett's memoir of the siege of Port Arthur, where he was attached to the Japanese forces;²³ General Sir Ian Hamilton's well-known memoir of his time attached to the Japanese Staff during the war;²⁴ Evgenii Nozhin's scathing account of the incompetence and poor military leadership that cost the Russians Port Arthur;²⁵ and Russian naval officer Nikolai Klado's description of the war at sea.²⁶

What is the value of the collection, taken as a whole? It would certainly not be possible to write anything approaching a comprehensive history of the war itself using the materials in New College Library. It lacks publications in Japanese or in Russian, such as M. E. Barkhatov and V. V. Funke's six-volume history, published in 1907, or the many articles on the war that appeared in official publications such as the Russian Main Staff's *Voennyi Sbornik*.²⁷ The centenary of the war in 2004–5 saw a slew of publications that drew on Russian and Japanese archives to transform our understanding of the conflict on the ground.²⁸ Where the New College collection *is* particularly valuable is in understanding the contemporary reaction and interpretation of the conflict around the world. The Russo-Japanese War was a media war which took place in the full glare of international publicity, and which until the outbreak of the First World War seemed to be the last word in the application of technical modernity to warfare. In Russia it also, of course, ushered in the last phase of the Tsarist regime's existence with the Revolution of 1905. The works in New College Library allow us to understand the reception of Japanese and Russian wartime propaganda, the packaging of war as entertainment in newspapers and novels, and the attempts by military professionals to learn lessons from the Russian and Japanese experience—lessons that would mostly turn out to be misleading when war returned in 1914. It is also worth noting how important it is to have *physical copies* of what are often large-format, lavishly illustrated works, accompanied by myriads of maps of the seat of the war in the Far East, battlefields and sieges. Digital reproductions are not and never will be an adequate substitute for paper when it comes to works such as these.

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²⁰ *The Russo-Japanese War: Reports from Officers Attached to the Japanese Forces in the Field*, 15 vols. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1905–6), New College Library, Oxford, Mann253–67; *The Russo-Japanese War: Reports from British Officers Attached to the Japanese and Russian Forces in the Field*, 3 vols. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1908), New College Library, Oxford, JJ 3.3 GRE)—this copy was part of the Cunliffe legacy.

²¹ Herbert Wrigley Wilson, *Japan's Fight for Freedom: The Story of the War between Russia and Japan* 3 vols. (London: Amalgamated Press, 1904), New College Library, Oxford, Mann278–80.

²² *Cassell's History of the Russo-Japanese War*, intro. Arthur Diósy, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1904–5), New College Library, Oxford, Mann450–2.

²³ Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *Port Arthur: The Siege and Capitulation* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1906), New College Library, Oxford, Mann231.

²⁴ Ian Hamilton, *A Staff Officer's Scrap-book during the Russo-Japanese War*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), New College Library, Oxford, Mann242–3)—there is also a second copy from Sir Foster Cunliffe's library, New College Library, Oxford, JJ 11.2 HAM.

²⁵ E. K. Nojine, *The Truth about Port Arthur*, trans. A. B. Lindsay (London: John Murray, 1908), New College Library, Oxford, Mann230.

²⁶ Nicolas Klado, *The Battle of the Sea of Japan* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), New College Library, Oxford, Mann246.

²⁷ M. E. Barkhatov and V. V. Funke, *Istoriya Russko-Yaponskoi Voyny*, 6 vols. (St Petersburg: T-vo R. Golike & A. Vil'borg, 1907–9)—available digitally at <<https://runivers.ru/lib/book4738/>> (Accessed: 16 December 2020).

²⁸ See David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, 'Rewriting the Russo-Japanese War: A Centenary Retrospective', *The Russian Review* 67 (1) (2008), 78–87. The papers in *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective: World War Zero*, ed. John W. Steinberg *et al.*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2005–7) are particularly good.