

Russian Studies in at the Slavonic Library

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Allow me to quote a paragraph from an article I published in the Newsletter of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (January 1991): "Helsinki is an ideal place for Soviet and Russian studies and related fields such as Baltic and Finnish history, nationalities policy, folklore, and culture. Its Slavonic Library, as is generally known, was a repository of virtually all books and journals published in the Russian Imperial period. It is also legendary among those who have worked there over the years for the extraordinary efficiency of the staff, the rationalism of its layout (with all the eighteenth and nineteenth century journals right in the reading room in open stacks), and the exceptional convenience of the work environment."



Scholars who have had to face some of the difficulties of the Library of Congress, the Bibliothèque nationale, the Lenin Library in Moscow, or the Leningrad Public Library are indebted to the high level of labor economy that this library affords them. Students of Eastern and Central European history, society, and culture will also find it a rich storehouse of information. But Helsinki is no longer a place to be earmarked solely for eighteenth and nineteenth century studies. The Slavonic Library, though weaker than Soviet collections on the period 1917-53, has acquired an enormous fund of Soviet newspapers, periodicals, books, and numerous memoirs, monographs, and critical studies in all areas of history, politics, and culture."

Now let me add a few personal remarks. I first came to the Slavonic collection in 1969 when it was housed in the main university library and there found a wealth of material for my first book *The Women's liberation Movement in Russia*, covering the years roughly 1860 to the 1930s. I have spent every summer at the new location on Neitsytpolku since 1979 in addition to several stays of six-seven months. During the 1980s I did much of my work on the second book *Revolutionary Dreams* here and in

Leningrad. Work on the third book, Russian Popular Culture was divided between Helsinki, Leningrad, and Moscow. Of course much material for these books came from archives and libraries in Russia; but my main base was always the Slavonic Library – for the reasons mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

One of the great attractions of the site on Neitsytpolku is open access to newspapers and periodicals. Modern historians are not content with reading specific articles on microfilm. Browsing through the pages for relevant or unexpected items and looking at the illustrations and advertisements are essential for cultural historians or indeed any historian with imagination and curiosity. The Slavonic Library is the only place I know where this can be done comfortably and efficiently. I have many colleagues who come all the way over here just for the chance to look through old newspapers and journals under these excellent conditions.

At the present I am working on my fourth book, *In Old Russia*, a two volume study of life, society, and culture in the 19th century Russia. There is simply no better place in the world to block out the main research for this book than the Slavonic Library. There is no end to the sources – delivered within minutes – on literature, theater, ballet, opera, art, music, and every-day life in the capitals and provinces. I will visit Russian libraries to fill in the gaps, but the bulk of the book will be researched and written here.

I would like to add the hope, shared by many of my colleagues who have worked over the years at the Slavonic Library, that when this library is moved from its present site it be moved to quarters adjacent to the main university library; that the present system and staff be retained; and that the journals be shelved in a reading room as they now are and that the newspapers are readable in the original form of bound volumes. This would preserve the glories of the present system, integrate the two libraries, and make it easier for readers to consult Western books and articles in conjunction with their specialized research on Russian and Slavic subjects. My heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Slavonic Library for the years of dedicated service to scores of scholars from all over the world, a service that has imprinted itself on the scholarship about Russia over the last half century.

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