Peeling Back the Onion (Domes) in the North Caucasus: Multi-Layered Obstacles to Effective Web-Based Research on Marginalized Ethnic Groups

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The Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

- 3rd-largest library in the U.S.*
- Largest public university library in the U.S.

3rd-largest U.S. collection of materials from and about Russia, Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus*

* Depending on who’s counting…
North Caucasus web archive = onion =

a multi-layered problem that makes you cry.

Onion domes: not just for Russian Orthodox cathedrals.
Chechen alphabet blocks

Amazing ethnolinguistic diversity within a small geographic area, with a long history of conflict and emigration.
| Kabardian and Abkhaz alphabets, c. 1920 - 1955 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Зэ зэ | кэ | я " | }s | g | d" | z |
| И и | i | i | i | i | i | i |
| К к | k | k | k | k | k | k |
| Кь кь | k' | k' | kj | k' | k | k' |
| Ке кæ | k"w | k'ä | ky | ky | k" | ku |
| Щ Щ | k' | k' | kj | k' | k | k' |
| Кь кь | k"w | k'ä | ky | ky | q" | ku |
| Л л | l | l | л | l | l | l |
| М м | m | m | m | m | m | m |
| Н н | n | n | н | n | n | n |
| О о | o | o | o | o | o | o |
| Q q | q (< 9") | q | q | q | w | y |

Kabardian alphabets [official and proposed] from the Arabic script, perhaps conceived in the 18th century for ecclesiastical purposes. (A. H. Kyper, 1960, p. 116-117)
OBSTACLES

Obstacle #1: Web archiving is hard.

Obstacle #2: Web archiving in the United States is hard.

Obstacle #3: This project is U.S.-based but international in scope.

Obstacle #4: Organizations are moving their entire web presences to social media (i.e., a Facebook group).
Many (most) of these countries are not archiving their own web content, via legal deposit or otherwise.
Obstacle #5: The political situation in and around the North Caucasus is difficult.
Obstacle #6: Issues associated with cultural and linguistic preservation.

Obstacle #7: This is a massively multilingual and multi-script project.

Obstacle #8: Institutional support.

Obstacle #9: To promote or not promote? (=legal/copyright/ethical issues)
The Circassian heritage/identity website cerkesarastirmalari.org (= “Circassian Studies”), based in Turkey
An unpublished bibliography by one of the English-speaking world’s leading Circassian Studies scholars
Early experiments with Latin scripts for Circassian – not held in any library on WorldCat
Important figures in North Caucasus history, literature, politics, etc. – a few examples

Jalalutdin Korkmasov, 1877-1937

Aleksandr Kazembek, 1802-1870

Khalimat Bairamukova, 1917-1996

Hasan al-Alqadari, 1834-1910

Abusupian Akaev, 1872-1931 (seated second from left), with other prominent Daghestani religious leaders
Sorbonne-educated head of the first Soviet government of Daghestan, 1921-1931

Jalalutdin Korkmasov, 1877-1937

Author of four novels, 14 books of poetry, the libretto for the first Karachai opera, and the first Karachai musical comedy, with her works translated into over 50 languages

Khalimat Bairamukova, 1917-1996

"The greatest scholar, historian, poet and educator of pre-revolutionary Daghestan," and author of a famous 1903 synthesis of Daghestani history

Hasan al-Alqadari, 1834-1910

I.e., these people and their works (and others like them) are severely under-studied in the English-speaking world - archiving the North Caucasus web can preserve works by and about them, and make them available to scholars over the long term

Abusupiian Akaev, 1872-1931 (seated second from left), with other prominent Daghestani religious leaders

Renowned Orientalist at Kazan University and St. Petersburg University

Aleksandr Kazembek, 1802-1870

His transcription of the Derbend-nameh is the ONLY North Caucasus Turkic source that has been cited with any frequency in English-language scholarship, and he is the only North Caucasus Turkic person with an English-language article devoted to him

# of mentions in the 2 million English-language dissertations in ProQuest’s Dissertations & Theses database: ~20

Beloved theologian, poet, publisher, scholar and educator responsible for the lion’s share of pre-revolutionary Kumyk publishing, who worked with Ismail Bey Gasprinski in Crimea and published an Arabic-language religious journal in Soviet Daghestan as late as 1928

# of mentions in the 2 million English-language dissertations in ProQuest’s Dissertations & Theses database: 1

# of mentions in the 2 million English-language dissertations in ProQuest’s Dissertations & Theses database: 0

# of mentions in the 2 million English-language dissertations in ProQuest’s Dissertations & Theses database: 0

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Translate this text into English:

"PICTURE OF ABUSUPIIAN + NO MENTION OF HIM WHATSOEVER IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP UNTIL 2015 AND FINALLY, A PICTURE OF BAIRAMUKOVA, WITH RESULTS OF A SEARCH FOR HER IN ANY ENGLISH-LANGUAGE DISSERTATION OR SCHOLARLY ARTICLE."
“Grandfather, do Kumyks even exist?”

“No, my son, that’s fake news.”
The website demokratikcerkesplatformu.org: the articles themselves have not been preserved in the Internet Archive, and now the website is gone and has been replaced by a Facebook group.
Jineps / Жьыныпс – Turkey’s main Circassian periodical ---their website has a complete pdf archive all the way back to the first issue (2005), but it’s not there in the Wayback Machine
vd.ag -- Official website of the press bureau of the Daghestan Vilayat (province) of the Caucasus Emirate (heir to the Chechen insurgency, subsequently absorbed into ISIS)

Sample article: “Hi, it's your sister, I'm writing to you from the Daghestan Vilayat of the Emirate of the Caucasus!” (available on archive.is)
Broader implications

Other parts of the world where the need to archive the web is equally urgent and equally fraught:

- Afghanistan (cf. selective archives/materials at the Library of Congress, the University of Nebraska, and available from East View)
- Crimea circa 2014 (who knew?)
- Turkey
- Hungary
- Indigenous/minority peoples worldwide

Can we rely on national-level legal deposit laws?

- Do not exist in every country
- Don’t necessarily capture all dimensions of conflict-prone regions like the North Caucasus

Preservation of indigenous/minority-related content should be done with the involvement, consent and input of the groups that are creating it
Questions:

Can I really rely on U.S. fair use doctrine to ward off any potential legal challenges from these websites/publishers/authors?

Should I not publicize this archive so as to minimize the chances of the websites in it getting into some kind of trouble with the authorities?

Should this be a dark archive for now so as to avoid both of these problems?

If so, is my library willing to spend money and staff time creating and maintaining an archive that our users won’t even see until some unspecified future date?
Thank you!

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