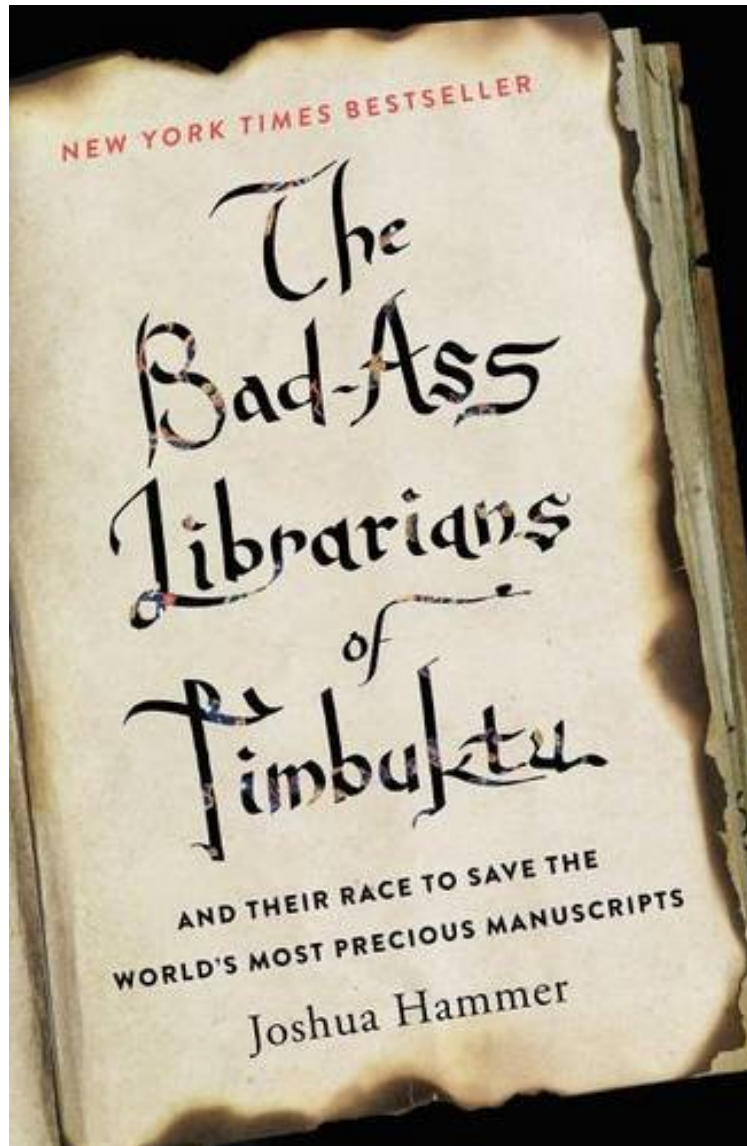


[Free] The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the Worlds Most Precious Manuscripts

The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the Worlds Most Precious Manuscripts

Joshua Hammer

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Joshua Hammer : The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the Worlds Most Precious Manuscripts before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu: And Their Race to Save the Worlds Most Precious Manuscripts:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A Great Story, but Incomplete By Julian I. Silk The book contains a

great story. It is certainly the best version of the story that will be written, as Mr. Hammer was on the scene and is clearly acquainted with the characters. But the organization of the book could be improved, as we get discussions of medieval rulers of Mali that occur sporadically without a complete context of what is happening (it was never clear whom the tolerant Muslim rulers were and in which eras they ruled, and whether something else explained their relative success), much more in terms of maps could be provided (one has to return to the front cover, which has the only map) frequently, and the indexing could be improved. It is also something of an irritant to anyone who has read Alistair Horne's "A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962", that Mr. Haidara's name, "Abdel Kader", is never connected with the Algerian rebel leader of the 1800s revolt against the French. On this, see[...] and[...]. It turns out that Abdel Kader was a relatively tolerant leader himself, and the question of his name's influence on Mr. Haidara is never explored. His family's influence, aside from setting him on his course, isn't explored in as much detail as one would like, either. So the book, which is short, is incomplete. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Read this book. By Susan Was listening to audio version, but bought paperback to keep things straight and to easily refer back. Excellent guide to issues in this little known (to Americans) part of the world. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This was a very good primer on West African culture. By J. O'Brien WOW! This was a very good primer on West African culture, the terrorists, the efforts to save a cultural heritage, but it whets one's appetite for more. There is a site on line devoted to these manuscripts and the chapter notes give many sources one can look up for more information. Well, written by an author who seems earnest about his subject.

To save precious centuries-old Arabic texts from Al Qaeda, a band of librarians in Timbuktu pulls off a brazen heist worthy of Oceans Eleven. In the 1980s, a young adventurer and collector for a government library, Abdel Kader Haidara, journeyed across the Sahara Desert and along the Niger River, tracking down and salvaging tens of thousands of ancient Islamic and secular manuscripts that had fallen into obscurity. *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* tells the incredible story of how Haidara, a mild-mannered archivist and historian from the legendary city of Timbuktu, later became one of the world's greatest and most brazen smugglers. In 2012, thousands of Al Qaeda militants from northwest Africa seized control of most of Mali, including Timbuktu. They imposed Sharia law, chopped off the hands of accused thieves, stoned to death unmarried couples, and threatened to destroy the great manuscripts. As the militants tightened their control over Timbuktu, Haidara organized a dangerous operation to sneak all 350,000 volumes out of the city to the safety of southern Mali. Over the past twenty years, journalist Joshua Hammer visited Timbuktu numerous times and is uniquely qualified to tell the story of Haidara's heroic and ultimately successful effort to outwit Al Qaeda and preserve Mali's literary patrimony. Hammer explores the city's manuscript heritage and offers never-before-reported details about the militants' march into northwest Africa. But above all, *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* is an inspiring account of the victory of art and literature over extremism.

****New York Times Book Editors' Choice**** This is, simply, a fantastic story, one that has been beautifully told by Josh Hammer, who knows and loves Mali like some farmers know their back forty. At a time of unprecedented cultural destruction taking place across the Muslim world, Abdel Kader Haidara, the savior of Timbuktu's ancient manuscripts and this book's main character, is a true hero. If you are feeling despair about the fate of the world, *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* is a must-read, and a welcome shot in the arm. (Jon Lee Anderson, author of *The Fall of Baghdad*) [*The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu*] has all the elements of a classic adventure novel [and] it is a story that couldn't be more timely. . . . Suffice it to say that [the librarians] earn their bad ass sobriquet several times over. Riveting skullduggery, revealing history and current affairs combine in a compelling narrative with a rare happy ending. (Seattle Times) *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* . . . vividly captures the history and strangeness of [Timbuktu] in a fast-paced narrative that gets us behind today's headlines of war and terror. This is part reportage and travelogue . . . part intellectual history, part geopolitical tract and part out-and-out thriller." (Washington Post) I've long known that the versatile Joshua Hammer could drop into the midst of a war or political conflict anywhere in the world and make sense of it. But he has outdone himself this time, and found an extraordinary, moving story of a quiet and successful act of great bravery in the face of destructive fanaticism. (Adam Hochschild, author of *King Leopold's Ghost* and *To End All Wars*) Part history, part scholarly adventure story and part journalist survey of the volatile religious politics of the Maghreb region. . . . Hammer writes with verve and expertise. (New York Times Book Review) "A picaresque and mysterious adventure that rushes across the strife-torn landscape of today's Mali, *The Bad-Ass Librarians* tells the unlikely but very real story of a band of bookish heroes from Timbuktu and their desperate race past dangerous checkpoints, through deserts, and often in the dead of night to save a culture and a civilization from destruction. Josh Hammer has seen firsthand how ordinary people can respond with extraordinary heroism when faced with evil. He also gives us a dramatic example of what it means to stick with a story; he knows this one from the beginnings in the late 1300s up until the present day, with its extremism and acts of cultural repression and erasure. Hammer has an unerring sense of what matters and his storytelling is impassioned and fun at the same time." (Amy Wilentz, author of *Farewell, Fred Voodoo*) "Gripping [and] ultimately moving. . . . History depends on whose stories get told and which books survive; in Timbuktu, thanks to Haidara and his associates, inquiry, humanity, and courage

live on in the libraries." (Boston Globe)"A completely engrossing adventure with a sharp--and prescient--political edge. Josh Hammer, a veteran correspondent of numerous conflict zones, tells a fascinating story about the quest to save Timbuktu's priceless Islamic writings from the grasp of jihadists. This is an entertaining, and extremely timely, book about the value of art and history and the excesses of religious extremism." (Janet Reitman, author of *Inside Scientology*) Hammer has pulled off the truly remarkable herea book that is both important and a delight to read. The *Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu* is the wonderfully gripping story of Abdel Kader Haidara and the hundreds of ordinary Malians who, at great personal danger, endeavored to save the ancient fabled manuscripts of Timbuktu from destruction by Islamic jihadists. It is also an inspirational reminder that, even as the forces of barbarism extend their thrall across so much of the Muslim world, there are still those willing to risk everything to preserve civilization. A superb rendering of a story that needs to be told. (Scott Anderson, author of *Lawrence in Arabia*)

Author Joshua Hammer was born in New York and graduated from Princeton University with a cum laude degree in English literature. He joined the staff of *Newsweek* as a business and media writer in 1988, and between 1992 and 2006 served as a bureau chief and correspondent-at-large on five continents. Hammer is now a contributing editor to *Smithsonian* and *Outside*, a frequent contributor to the *New York Times* of Books, and has written for publications including the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Vanity Fair*, the *Cond Nast Traveler*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Atavist*. He is the author of four nonfiction books, including *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu*, and has won numerous journalism awards. Since 2007 he has been based in Berlin, Germany, and continues to travel widely around the world. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu Prologue

He shifted nervously in the front passenger seat of the four-wheel-drive vehicle as it approached the southern exit of the city. Down the tarmac road, in the pink light of the desert morning, two gunmen stood beside a checkpoint made from a rope strung across a pair of oil barrels. They were lean men with beards and turbans, Kalashnikov semiautomatic rifles slung over their shoulders. Take a deep breath, he told himself. Smile. Be respectful. He had already been arrested once by the Islamic Police, hauled before a makeshift tribunal, interrogated, and threatened with Shariah punishment. That time he had managed just barely to persuade them to set him free. He couldn't count on being lucky a second time. He cast a glance at the rear compartment. There, covered with blankets, lay five padlocked steamer trunks, each one filled with treasure: hundreds of illuminated manuscripts, including some from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Golden Age of Timbuktu. Encased in goatskin covers with inlaid semiprecious stones, they were gorgeous works composed by the most skillful scribes of the era, fragile pages covered with dense calligraphy and complex geometrical designs in a multitude of colors. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the terrorist group that had seized the north of the country four months earlier, had several times vowed on television and radio to respect them, but few in the city believed their promises. The extremists had declared jihad against anyone and anything that challenged their vision of a pure Islamic society, and these artifact treatises about logic, astrology, and medicine, paeans to music, poems idealizing romantic love represented five hundred years of human joy. They celebrated the sensual and the secular, and they bore the explicit message that humanity, as well as God, was capable of creating beauty. They were monumentally subversive. And there were thousands of manuscripts just like these hidden in safe houses in Timbuktu. Now he and a small team had set out to save them. The driver stopped at the roadblock. The two Al Qaeda gunmen peered into the car. Salaam Aleikum, he said, with all the equanimity he could muster. Peace be upon you. They were young men, barely out of their teens, but they had dead eyes and the hard, fanatical look of true believers. Where are you going? Bamako, he said, the capital in the south. The men circled the car, and peered into the back. Wordlessly they waved him onward. He exhaled. But they still had another six hundred miles to go.