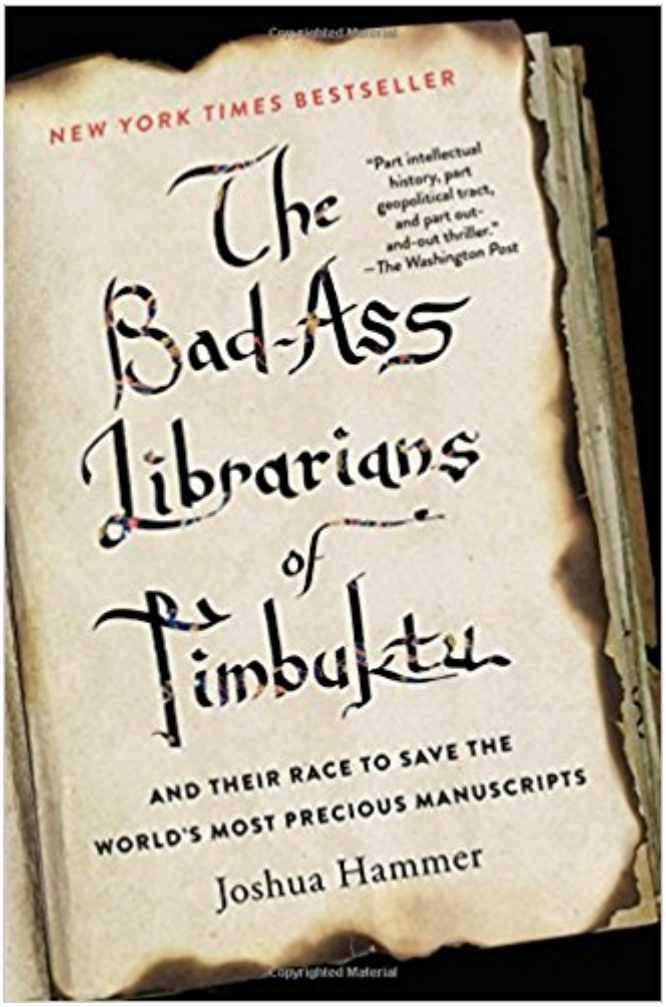
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The Bad-Ass Librarians Of Timbuktu: And Their Race To Save The World's Most Precious Manuscripts



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Synopsis

To save ancient Arabic texts from Al Qaeda, a band of librarians pulls off a brazen heist worthy of OceanÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Eleven in this Ã¢â ¬Å“fast-paced narrative that isÃ¢â ¬Â¦part intellectual history, part geopolitical tract, and part out-and-out thrillerÃ¢â ¬Â• (The Washington Post).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 were crumbling in the trunks of desert shepherds. His goal: to preserve this crucial part of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s patrimony in a gorgeous library. But then Al Qaeda showed up at the door. Ã¢â ¬Å“Part history, part scholarly adventure story, and part journalist surveyÃ¢â ¬Â¦.Joshua Hammer writes with verve and expertiseÃ¢â ¬Â• (The New York Times Book Review) about how Haidara, a mild-mannered archivist from the legendary city of Timbuktu, became one of the worldÃ¢â ¬â„¢s greatest smugglers by saving the texts from sure destruction. With bravery and patience, Haidara organized a dangerous operation to sneak all 350,000 volumes out of the city to the safety of southern Mali. His heroic heist Ã¢â ¬Å“has all the elements of a classic adventure novelÃ¢â ¬Â• (The Seattle Times), and is a reminder that ordinary citizens often do the most to protect the beauty of their culture. His the story is one of a man who, through extreme circumstances, discovered his higher calling and was changed forever by it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice Ã¢â ¬Å“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.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Jon Lee Anderson, author of The Fall of Baghdad)Ã¢â ¬Å“[The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu] has all the elements of a classic adventure novel [and] it is a story that couldnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t be more timely. . . . Suffice it to say that [the librarians] earn their Ã¢â ¬Å“bad assÃ¢â ¬Â• sobriquet several times over. Riveting skullduggery, revealing history and current affairs combine in a compelling narrative with a rare happy ending.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Seattle Times)Ã¢â ¬Å“The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu . . . vividly captures the history and strangeness of [Timbuktu] in a fast-paced narrative that gets us behind todayÃ¢â ¬â„¢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)Ã¢â ¬Å“IÃ¢â ¬â„¢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 quietÃ¢â ¬â •and successfulÃ¢â ¬â •act of great bravery in the face of destructive fanaticism.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Adam Hochschild, author of King Leopold's Ghost and To End All Wars)Ã¢â ¬Å“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.Ã¢â ¬Â• (New York Times Book Review)"A picaresque and mysterious adventure that rushes across the strife-torn landscape of todayÃ¢â ¬â„¢s Mali, The Bad-Ass Librarians tells the unlikely but very real story of a band of bookish heroes from Timbuktu and their desperate raceÃ¢â ¬â •past dangerous checkpoints, through deserts, and often in the dead of nightÃ¢â ¬â •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 TimbuktuÃ¢â ¬â„¢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)Ã¢â ¬Å“Hammer has pulled off the truly remarkable hereÃ¢â ¬â •a 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.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Scott Anderson, author of Lawrence in Arabia)Ã¢â ¬Å“This book is a particularly adventurous and impressive example of the fact that, even with time, water, fire, mold, and termites, humanity remains the greatest threat to books and our literary, historical, and creative heritage.Ã¢â ¬Â•Ã Â (San Francisco Chronicle)"While the destructive acts of Islamic extremists worldwide capture headlines, countless stories of heroic resistance rarely receive attention. Award-winning journalist Hammer shines a light on one such episode of bravery and defiance. . . . Bad-Ass Librarians is a rousing salute to ordinary civilians who make a stand to preserve cultural heritage against all odds." (Discover Magazine)"Hammer tells the dramatic story of how, during the period of Islamist rule, a group of Timbuktu residents saved some 350,000 ancient manuscripts that had resided in the city since its medieval heyday as a great center of learning and scholarship. . . . In addition to weaving a great yarn, Hammer also provides a fascinating history of Timbuktu and its books and a well-informed account of the struggle against Islamist extremism in the Sahel." (Foreign Affairs Magazine)Ã¢â ¬Å“There are nail-biting moments when everything hangs in the balance [and] one can almost imagine the movie version. . . . Excellent.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Dallas Morning News)"Gripping. . . . The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu tells the tale of how a gutsy collector saved thousands of documents. . . . It was only because of Abdel Kader Haidara and a group of brave librarians that these manuscripts about poetry, music, sex, and science did not end lost in the desert or up in smoke." (Salon)Ã¢â ¬Å“On one level, The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu is a thriller that revolves around one long chase scene, as librarian race through the deserts of Mali trying to salvage a trove of precious manuscripts from jihadists hell-bent on their destruction. The stakes in this chase are no less than civilization itself. On another level, Joshua HammerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book is about a struggle between Islamic ideologiesÃ¢â ¬â •one jihadist, inflexible and violent, and the other open and intellectual. Joshua HammerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book could not be more relevant to todayÃ¢â ¬â„¢s events.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Barbara Demick, author of Nothing To Envy: Ordinary Lives in

North Korea)Ã¢â ¬Å“Hammer crafts a thoughtful history of the Middle East and Africa in a narrative that goes beyond the one- and two-dimensional views that are popular today [and] provides a geopolitical explainer that gives context to the development of radical Islam. . . . The bookÃ¢â ¬â„¢s title isnÃ¢â ¬â„¢t overstated. Haidara, and those who aided him, truly are Ã¢â ¬Ëœbad-ass.Ã¢â ¬â„¢Ã¢â ¬Â• (Fort Worth Star-Telegram)Ã¢â ¬Å“The sources of TimbuktuÃ¢â ¬â„¢s vitalityÃ¢â ¬â •the connections to travel and trade that once made it a meeting place for West Africans and a haven for writÃ Â- ing and learningÃ¢â ¬â •have been destroyed, and HammerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s book, to its great credit, makes us see what a loss that is.Ã¢â ¬Â• (New York Review of Books)"Hammer does a service to Haidara and the Islamic faith by providing the illuminating history of these manuscripts, managing to weave the complicated threads of this recent segment of history into a thrilling story." (Publishers Weekly)"[A] vivid, fast-paced narrative. . . . Hammer draws on manyÃ¢â ¬â •often dangerousÃ¢â ¬â •visits to the city and interviews with major players to chronicle the efforts of Abdel Kader Haidara to save priceless literary and historical manuscripts. . . . A chilling portrait of a country under siege and one man’s defiance." (Kirkus Reviews)Ã¢â ¬Å“AtÃ Â once a history, caper and thriller.Ã¢â ¬Â• (The Economist)Ã¢â ¬Å“A jaunty gem of a book.... The greatest merit of The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu is that it convincingly repudiates extremist Islamism at the quotidian level, at which it does not pose a global threat: it is objectionable not just because it imperils Westerners, their friends and the existing political order, but also because it is socially and intellectually retrograde, and abusive of the people it purports to protect.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Survival (International Institute for Strategic Studies))Ã¢â ¬Å“As precarious and fraught with obstacles as any Hollywood heist. . . . Both a moving story of quiet heroism and a fascinating glimpse into a country little-known in the U.S., The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu will appeal to historians, bibliophiles and those who love a good heist narrative.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Shelf Awareness)Ã¢â ¬Å“Illuminating reading.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Booklist)Ã¢â ¬Å“An engaging, well-plotted historical adventure that will appeal to history and book lovers.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette)"Engrossing. . . . To call this book a page-turner is to diminish it; the suspense that Hammer creates is vital, but itÃ¢â ¬â„¢s his shrewd reporting on cultural terrorism--and those who fought against it--that makes The Bad-Ass Librarians so important. No book lover should miss it." (Fine Books & Collections Magazine)Ã¢â ¬Å“Hammer gives the badass librarians of TimbuktuÃ¢â ¬â •who outwitted al-Qaeda, saving ancient Arabic texts from being destroyedÃ¢â ¬â •their due.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Vanity Fair)Ã¢â ¬Å“An engrossing tale, complete with a dangerous smuggling operation.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Bustle (Best Books of April))Ã¢â ¬Å“[A] powerful narrative. . . . HammerÃ¢â ¬â„¢s clearly written and engaging chronicle of the achievements of

Timbuktu, the risks presented to this area, and portraits of several brave and dedicated individuals brings to light an important and unfamiliar story.Ã¢â ¬Â• (Library Journal)"Gripping." (Houston Chronicle)"Hammer exposed my ignorance. Without thinking about it, I had accepted the conventional wisdom . . . but The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu provides irrefutable evidence that culture and learning in Africa were far more advanced than in Europe by the 16th century when Timbuktu flourished as a center of learning." (Washington Independent Review of Books)"Journalist Josh Hammer deftly offers up a string of interconnected tales, ranging from ancient Islamic scholarship to in-fighting in US political circles to French military campaigns and the rise of radical extremists throughout Africa. . . . But always front and center is the fate of these manuscripts and how their very existence puts a lie to the hateful extremism fueling the terrorists who would destroy them. Librarians are always bad-ass but even the most hardcore would have to tip their hats to the brave ones depicted here." (BookFilter)

Joshua Hammer was born in New York and graduated from Princeton University with aÃ Â cum laudeÃ Â degree in English literature. He joined the staff ofÃ Â NewsweekÃ Â 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.Ã Â Hammer is now a contributing editor toÃ Â Smithsonian and Outside, a frequent contributor to theÃ Â New York Review of Books, and has written for publications including theÃ Â New Yorker, theÃ Â New York Times Magazine,Ã Â Vanity Fair, theÃ Â CondÃƒÂ© Nast Traveler, theÃ Â 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.

Completely fascinating piece of non-fiction!! This is a must read for historians and political scientists!This is for the million and millions of people who know little or nothing about a part of Africa with great intellectual history. The reader also will learn the source of ISIS’s ideas which are not original with their groupAbove all, there is the glorious realization that the people of Mali, and its surroundings, were advanced in medicine, science, and literature far above much of Europe during the same time period..

I learned so much that I think the majority of the world does no know, understand or appreciate about the good and the bad in the West and North African desert.

Well written and informative. I am learning so much about ancient civilizations. Anyone who reads this will have to rethink their opinions on the Arabic civilization.

I would have liked more details about the adventures of getting the libraries out of Timbuktu and less about the history of Jihadism in Africa. That said, as I finally got to the section of the book that actually deals with the fall of Timbuktu it was clear that my appreciation for what they went through and the why the risked so much was much deeper for having read the earlier chapters on history.

An very well written narrative of how close Islamic Fundamentalists came to destroying one of the most important book repositories in the entire Islamic world. The Salafist reactionaries cared nothing for Islamic learning, only that some of the books had heretical ideas. The story is not done, but might possibly have a happy ending. The real story is of the attempted take-over of Northern Africa by the Salafists, and how the African community resisted in the aftermath of the fall of Libya.

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.

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.

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.

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