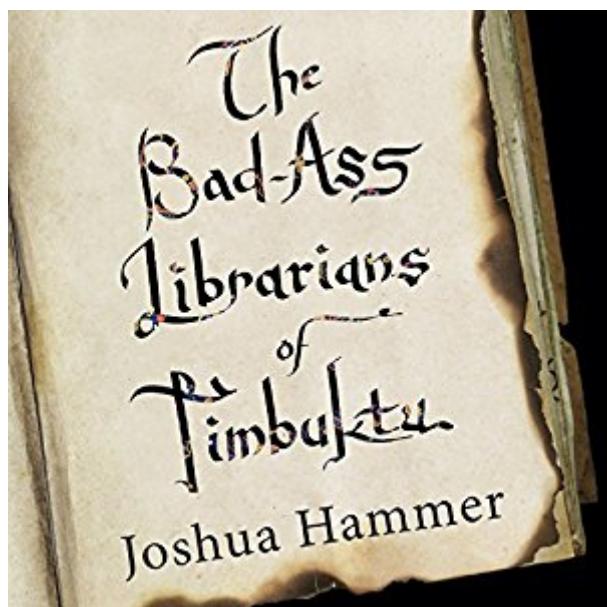


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Bad-Ass Librarians Of Timbuktu: And Their Race To Save The World's Most Precious Manuscripts



Synopsis

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 20 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 - and the world'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.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours and 2 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: HighBridge, a Division of Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: April 19, 2016

Language: English

ASIN: B01E7MUP2Y

Best Sellers Rank: #7 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Religion & Spirituality > Islam #9 in Books > History > Africa > West Africa #15 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > History > Africa

Customer Reviews

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 group. Above 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 they 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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