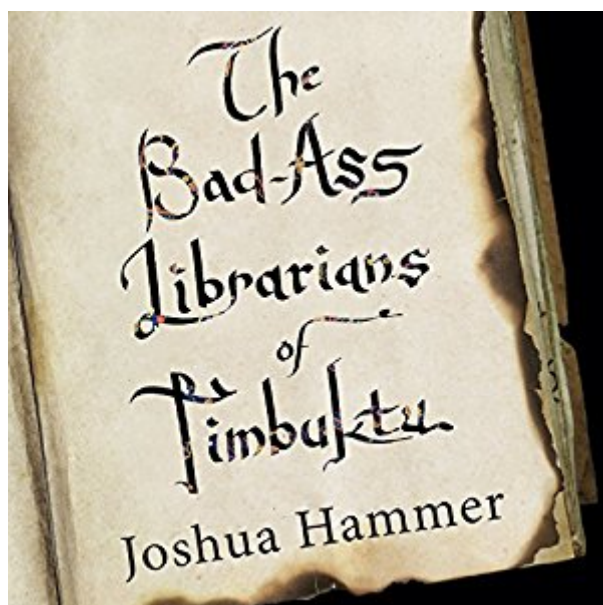


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# Bad-Ass Librarians Of Timbuktu: And Their Race To Save The World's Most Precious Manuscripts



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

Timbuktu is one of those words that just sounds exotic and interesting - or so I thought when I

discovered it on the globe as a child. That it was an Islamic center of learning in Africa was something I discovered in *Scales of Gold*, a novel in the Niccolo series by Dorothy Dunnett. Her hero ends up there and is caught up in the violence of one of its periodic political upheavals. Then as I read more and more about Islamic history in Africa, the importance of this city was impressed on me. The destruction of such a center of learning and such a repository of books would rival the destruction of Alexandria. I first heard about Joshua Hammer's book as he was interviewed on the PBS Newshour, and I immediately ordered it. I am glad I did because it is a truly amazing story of how a man dedicated to saving the literary and religious heritage of his city and people saved it from destruction by the jihadists sweeping down into Mali to destroy it from Libya. After seeing what cultural destruction was wrought at the hands of jihadists in Afghanistan, there is no doubt that if Al Qaeda of the Islam Maghreb has found these documents they all would have been destroyed. They did destroy what they did find. But one librarian, Abdel Kader Haidara, prevented the destruction of Timbuktu's heritage. My deep thanks to Mr. Hammer for bringing us this story. Now the quibble. I do not know who decides supporting documentation for non-fiction books. The person who decided that one incomplete map, incorrectly identified as a "map of Timbuktu" (it isn't; it's a map of Mali) as the front inside cover would be sufficient was quite wrong. Mali isn't a country that most people know well.

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