

EXHIBITION

Books under fire

FROM LEUVEN TO TIMBUKTU

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY LEUVEN

04·07 > 13·09·2015





Arson, deliberate destruction and devastation – this has been the sorry fate of several libraries: Alexandria, in a distant past, and, more recently, Sarajevo. Often, this unfortunate destiny is a direct outcome of political or religious struggle. And libraries of course are defenceless.

The same goes for the University Library of Leuven. At the start of the First World War, on 25 August 1914, the library of the KU Leuven was set on fire. The intellectual heritage developed by the university over five centuries was lost forever. This cultural atrocity prompted a wave of protests worldwide. But also today, one century later, cultural heritage may literally find itself in the line of fire. In 2012 the library of Timbuktu (Mali) was in jeopardy. Unique manuscripts could be saved and a selection of these works is on display here.

From Leuven to Timbuktu, from 1914 to today. *Books under fire* offers a memorable story on destroyed and threatened heritage and the general outcry it causes. The exhibition focuses not only on people's resilience and their inventiveness, which ensures the proper organization of restorative efforts, but also on the solidarity that enables new projects geared to reconstruction and preservation.

The library fire is commemorated in the summer of 2015 by an exhibition, an accompanying publication and an international conference. The opening of the exhibition gets the library's new summer programme off to a flying start.

Exhibition In the night of 25 August 1914 German troops set fire to a large part of the city of Leuven. The university library also lay in ruins. *Books under fire* presents the events of that dramatic night by means of striking photos and documents of the time. They show how a devastated city aroused itself and slowly recovered from this catastrophe. The library fire became a worldwide symbol for threatened cultural heritage and was internationally condemned. Large-scale assistance initiatives got under way.

Threats to cultural heritage are ever present, even now. In Timbuktu (Mali) more than hundred thousand manuscripts were saved and secreted away to a safer place. The solidarity of the Malian people has protected this extraordinary cultural heritage in a time of crisis. A selection of these unique manuscripts is now on display in Leuven.

IN COOPERATION WITH:
BOZAR – TIMBUKTU RENAISSANCE



Quranic fragment, written on fish skin, 11th century



Library tower
smoke drawing by Sofie Muller (KU Leuven)

'The American Library'

More than 300 American institutions contributed financially after the First World War to the re-building of the Leuven university library. On the occasion of this exhibition the links with those benefactors are being revived. By means of quotes some present-day representatives of those sister institutions are being heard in the epilogue of *Books under fire*.

Work by the Belgian artist Sofie Muller forms a contemporary part of the exhibition, with smoke drawings very much to the point, and the installation *Clarysse*. The latter refers to Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), about a censored future without books. Fahrenheit 451 is the temperature at which books will burn. In the exhibition 'snow whites' are on display: burned books, found after the fire.



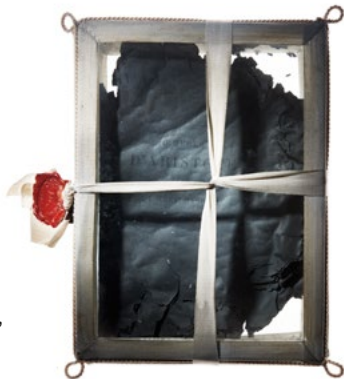
One of many benefactors,
inscribed on the library walls

Publication *De Boekenwereld* [Book World] is a popular-academic periodical for lovers of books and prints. It focuses on graphic design, typography, and the recent history of the book.

The July edition is largely dedicated to the exhibition *Books under fire*. The destruction of the library, the international outcry and the aid that followed are central to the main article. In short contributions you can read more about the 'snow whites', about the controversial lettering on the balustrade and about the second destruction during the Second World War. Fundraising is the main topic of the two following articles. The first one addresses the Timbuktu manuscripts and the international campaign helping to preserve this heritage. The second article tells about the fundraising that came about in the wake of 1914. Finally the reader is acquainted with the work of Sofie Muller for the university library.

This edition is for sale in the university library for € 12.50. Information about subscription is to found at www.vantilt.nl

*An example of a 'snow white',
preserved in a sealed box*



Summer programme From Saturday 4 July the university library presents her new summer programme. From then on the library building is also open on Saturdays and Sundays, 10.00–17.00. You can not only visit The Library Tower but also the Grand Reading Room and the current exhibition.

The bells ring out over Leuven with *Ladeuze Bells*. Each Saturday in July and August you can hear *Ladeuze Bells Light*, a carillon performance to accompany your shopping. Each Sunday in July and August there is *Ladeuze Bells Classic*, a carillon concert that you can enjoy on a bench, a terrace or in the garden of the library. Saturdays and Sundays, 16.00–17.00.

International conference The KU Leuven is organizing, together with the Goethe-Institut Brüssel and British Council Brussels, the international conference *What do we lose when we lose a library?* from 9–11 September 2015. The focus is on the vulnerability of libraries and their collections, both physical and digital.

All information about this conference can be found at www.boekenondervuur.be



Abdel Kader Haidara, Timbuktu
© Brent Stirton · National Geographic

Visit University Library Leuven

Mgr. Ladeuzeplein 21, 3000 Leuven, tel. +32 (0)16 32 46 60

Open every day from 10.00 to 17.00

Tickets cost € 7.50 or € 10. Discounts available. For an overview of all prices, visit our website. Tickets are for sale at the reception desk of the University Library.

Half of the income from sale of tickets for *Books under fire* goes to a fund that supports the conservation of the Timbuktu manuscripts.

There are guided tours for individual visitors and for groups. Children can take part in a special scouting expedition.

All the information you need to prepare for your visit can be found at www.boekenondervuur.be

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