

Book hunters

Ancient civilisations possessed a vast amount of knowledge that was documented in hundreds of thousands of manuscripts. At the end of the Roman Empire, the majority of these cultural treasures vanished. Book hunters often risked their necks to track down ancient manuscripts and preserve them for future generations. One of the most spectacular projects of this kind is the Sinai Palimpsests Project at St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai. Medieval monks recycled ancient parchment by scratching off old texts and writing on the parchment again – so-called palimpsests. Using spectral imaging, American scientist Michael Phelps examined parchments found in the hollow area of a staircase with some spectacular results: 180 palimpsests were discovered. Another important operation to rescue ancient books received less attention. When Islamist rebels seized the ancient Mali city of Timbuktu in 2012, library curator Dr. Abdel Kader Haïdara organised a secret and highly dangerous mission to evacuate boxes full of handwritten historical scripts on wooden boats and by donkey to Bamako. Stephen Greenblatt, author of bestselling books on book hunters, accompanies us in this film.

We want to present modern and ancient bookhunters. One of the most important bookhunter of the Renaissance is Cardinal Basilius Bessarion. He lived in the 15th century in Italy and had to face the decline of his home culture, the devastation of Byzantium. Hence he started to collect books wherever he could. His collection was the basis of one of the most beautiful libraries of the world, the “Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana” in Venice. We want to follow his way in Venice and Rome.



Short

At the end of the Roman Empire, hundreds of thousands of manuscripts of the ancient world disappeared. Without the help of courageous people who often risked their lives to track down these documents and preserve them for future generations, much of this heritage

would no longer exist. On the trail of historical and modern-day book hunters.



Syriac NF frg 46, fragment of a palimpsest manuscript from the New Finds, St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai, Egypt

Logline

On the trail of historical and modern-day book hunters: scientists, historians, book lovers and librarians who demonstrate untiring effort and often take great risks to preserve our cultural heritage.

Core statement

One of the last untrodden treasures of ancient literature has miraculously survived the time in the oldest monastery in the world, in the Katharinenkloster on the Sinai. There are ancient manuscripts in Latin, Greek, and Arabic. A five-year international project took place there, largely to the exclusion of the public. Scientists from all over the world have photographed the old manuscripts, and in such an uncertain area the contents were kept for posterity. The researchers have particularly electrified the enormous accumulation of palimpsest. Some of the ancient texts survived in the so-called Palimpsesten, as "Scripture under the Scriptures". Parchment was expensive, in the medieval scriptories manuscripts were bought as "old paper", the writing scraped and rewritten.

Ancient literature lost in the Middle Ages can be rediscovered here as "Scripture under the Scriptures". The researchers have already discovered an ancient language, which until now has only been known by indirect sources.

A quantum leap in the deciphering of the "writing under the writing" is the modern technique of the multispectral cameras. The Sinai Palimpsest Project works with them. There are 5 machines worldwide, only one of them is mobile and is located in Hamburg. There, historians and natural scientists jointly decipher Palimpseste. They travel around the world with the camera to scan manuscripts in libraries.

Their interdisciplinary work has been unique worldwide and has never been documented for television.

The modern bookhunters have owed their predecessors that they have still something to explore at all. For the early Middle Ages in Europe were predominantly anti-literary, books were regularly burnt. Christian rulers and church fathers warned against the reading of ancient authors or they were altogether equal forbidden. Why education, if one should believe? And yet, it was monks who kept books

safe. Even erotics have survived the times. The role of Cassiodor, a monk from the 6th century, can not be considered highly enough. Without Cassiodor, many ancient books would be lost today. Its importance for the transmission of European knowledge has never been cinematic or even appreciated in literature. We would like to portray him and other booksellers of the story.

The tradition of some ancient authors depended on a silk thread. Much is lost. And sometimes stupid theft ensured that the only copy of a book was preserved. This is the case with Tacitus, without whom we would now know very little about Germanys early history. Let us give an example of the story of the adventurous survival of the books of Tacitus.



Father Justin from the Katharinenkloster on the Sinai. He has already agreed to the shooting.

The bookhunters

There were bookhunters at all times in history. But especially important were those who, in times of great upheaval, collected books and tried to save what was still to be saved. The decline of the Western Roman Empire was such an incision, but also the crusades, the plundering of Constantinople by the Turks, up to the French Revolution, and one of the greatest book-destroying actions of all time: the Reichsdeputationshauptschluss 1803, in whose consequence monasteries were secularized and their book Million times in the paper mill. However, not only political upheavals endangered knowledge and culture. Of course, incredible many libraries are simply burned. But the most important were the great media changes in history: from papyrus to parchment, from the scroll to the book, from the majuskel to the Carolingian minuscule. Only those books were transferred, which were also worth in the eyes of the contemporaries. Today, we are not doing anything else: only the content is digitized, which we consider important. But values of value can change. Euripides,

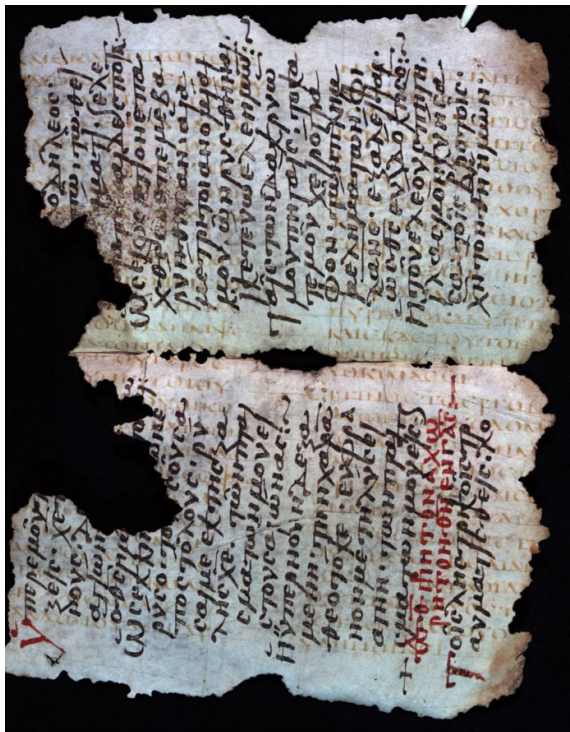
Sophocles, and Aeschylus are the three great masters of Greek tragedy. Aristotle, in his poetics, calls the most famous tragedy poets of his time, but he does not name any of these names.

To date, the fury of belligerent parties is a cultural heritage. The so-called IS has already burned many libraries. The Christian Orthodox Katharinenkloster lies in the Islamic core prayer. The bedouins of the surrounding area are becoming increasingly radical. How long will this famous monastery be safe? Concern for the cultural treasures of the monastery - especially the books - is a motive to digitize the manuscripts as quickly as possible.

The Katharinenkloster in Sinai, Unesco World Heritage site and seat of one of the most precious handwriting collections worldwide, is facing a threat from Islamists. Additional checkpoints are set up on the roads

Police said the police were escorted by the police, said Father Justin, the monastic librarian, in an interview of the German Catholic news agency KNA on Thursday.

August 2015



Folio of Greek NF MG 99, a palimpsest manuscript from the New Finds, St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai. Greek written over Greek.



Pseudocolor image of Greek NF MG 99 from principal component analysis (Roger Easton). Undertext appears black.

With the help of the multi-spectral cameras, the original font can be made visible.

The Sinai Palimpsest Project

For five years researchers from all over the world worked in the Monastery St. Katharinen.

They came with state-of-the-art technology. They have photographed the books, while multispectral cameras were used when a palimpsest was discovered. 160 Palimpseste, this is the incredible record. By the end of the year, researchers from all over the world are evaluating the palimpsests. The German Byzantinist Claudia Rapp from the University of Vienna is responsible for the lead. A member of the project team discovered the alphabet of Caucasian Albanian in the erased texts, a language whose existence was suspected, but so far only known from indirect sources. Also unknown texts and medical tracts are among the rediscovered texts. By the end of the year the results of the project will be put online. In the monastery one is already preparing for the next task. 400,000 pages of manuscripts are to be photographed. Now comes the Syriac-Arabic literature. When Palimpseste come to the fore, they are scanned with the aid of the multispectral camera. Father Justin is the librarian's librarian. He is pushing the project forward - four machines will be set up this year, with two specialized technicians working in layers. We thus have the opportunity to complete a project with the Results and to present a new project. To date, no camera team has accompanied the project. The editing permission for the monastery by Father Justin and in Vienna by Professor Rapp is available. As a filming location, the monastery offers in addition to the historical library exquisitely beautiful pictures.



Arabic New Finds 8, 16v and 17r: Visible light image.



Arabic New Finds 8, 16v and 17r: Image captured in UV illumination through a blue filter. Full-page illustration of medicinal herb, 5th century CE.

Under the manuscript the drawing of a medicinal plant can be seen.

Cassiodor, the educated monk

The famous library of Alexandria, it was estimated, had more than 700,000 papyrus rolls on their shelves. The antique knew already as practical things as window glass and extensive irrigation systems. She was familiar with fish farming and architecture, to name just a few examples. All this knowledge was lost. In the ancient world, several million books must be circulated. How would mankind have developed if it could have continually built upon acquired knowledge? The nagging pain around this lost knowledge first captured a monk in

554 AD. Cassiodorus came from the Roman nobility, and was later in the service of the Goths. He was at home in both cultures: the Roman and the Christian, and he knew what was lost to cultural assets. At the time of Cassiodorus the Roman empire was already past, Italy was devastated after the invasion of the Goths. Thus, not only libraries were lost. Only a few people could read and write at all. In the seclusion of southern Italy, he founded the monastery Vivarium. For his monks, he wrote a monastic charter, which meant that they should read and write every day. Expressly also texts from ancient, ie "pagan" authors. These books should monks include in libraries, according to Cassiodor. This once again made Europe the place where libraries were located, but Cassiodor's library was no luck. The monastery was destroyed soon after Cassiodor's death. Only insiders know where there are still traces of the famous monastery of Vivarium.

Cardinal Bessarion - teacher and collector

The Greek Cardinal Bessarion came from Constantinople to Italy in the middle of the 15th century. In the Eastern Roman Empire, many ancient authors have been read and copied much longer. When Constantinople was overrun by the Turks in 1453, Bessarion hoped to find allies in Italy in the struggle against the invaders. When the plan failed, he began to save the heritage of his culture, as Cassiodorus almost 1000 years before. He went several times to Constantinople and collected hundreds of Greek manuscripts. The foundation for the unique collection of the Bibliotheca Marciana in Venice, a total of 482 Greek and 264 Latin manuscripts fall back upon him. The most famous of all: Venetus A, the most complete and beautiful version of Homer's Illias.

Teuchos. Center for Handwriting Research Hamburg - the Palimpsest

Many ancient authors are only handed down as scriptures under the Scriptures. To make this visible, a special research project was organized by Professor Brockmann from Hamburg. Prof. Brockmann is a specialist in ancient texts. His research project has just been approved for a further 4 years. Together with natural scientists, he studies ancient texts all over the world, he looks for Palimpseste and creates a database. For this purpose, he uses an improved mobile multispectral camera. Scientists accurately analyze paper structure and ink; The camera makes high-resolution images. But in the end the old philologist with a magnifying glass sits at his desk as before generations before him: the deciphering of the old texts can not replace a technique. He is a specialist in the manuscripts of Bessarion.

Tacitus

Essential books by Tacitus are preserved in only one copy. They encamped in German monasteries, in Corvey and Fulda. From there they disappeared - in one case, the Pope assigned a humanist to steal the only copy of the histories of the Tacitus. The monastery was later offered a copy for consolation. Fortunately the original was stolen! Because the original in Corvey was destroyed, like so many other books of the famous monastery library. Without Tacitus, the Germans would know little about their own, written early days. And yet, historian Johannes Fried writes, it might have been better that the Germania of Tacitus had been burned in Fulda. For the Germania became the ideological pillar of the National Socialists, who, however, took the text only selectively. Hitler persuaded Mussolini to leave him the only historical copy of Germania, but the owner did not want to give the book.

When Italy attacked Italy, Himmler sent an SS special unit to track down the book. The owner's family sat trembling in the cellar while the SS devastated his house. But the Nazis did not discover either the family or the book hidden in a laundry room. The Count finally brought the book to an underground bank deposit box in Florence in the 1960s to leave it to a library the following day. That was November 4, 1966 - the day when a flood ravaged Florence and also put the locker under water. The book, which is now in the National Library of Rome, has been restored for decades. The adventurous story of a single book!

The cinematic realization

We would like to accompany the modern bookhunters in their search for long-forgotten books. We want to visit the Katharinenkloster on Sinai and get to know scientists, who are also in danger of working for books. Father Justin will play a central role. Like Cassiodor 1500 years before him, he tries to save his library with modern means. We want to go to Venice with the Hamburg scientists and experience how handwritings are examined there.

The search for traces of the booksellers' ambitions is to be put into the scene as much as possible. Are there still traces of the monastery of Cassiodor? We accompany the dedicated professor Luciana Cuppo, who is looking for the remains of the monastery and is fighting for the archaeological location of the monastery.

At the same time, the stories of books and historical booksellers are narrated in a documentary style. The charm of the books and the beauty of the places are to unfold their effect in quiet, high-quality pictures. The documentation has different venues and people, it should always be time for the pause. Thus the Marciana in Venice and the Katharinenkloster are a feast for the eyes and this is to be shown to the spectator also in beautiful pictures. Reenactment is also to be used. Since the copying of the books was so important and central to the survival of the ancient books, writing scenes with monks in a Romanesque monastery are to be portrayed. In a Romanesque monastery with scriptorium, cloister and library must be rotated anyway, to represent the story.



The film therefore consists essentially of the following elements: The more moving part, which accompanies the current search and efforts of the researchers and builds a arch of tension.

The documentary section, which establishes ancient documents as true treasures, illustrates the importance of these treasures for our knowledge of and about our culture. Graphic novels or animated images, which make the historical-documentary part approachable and lively.

In order to ensure a visual balancing act between close-up detail and overwhelming

distances of dreamlike buildings and landscapes, the film is based on small cameras with a 35mm sensor. With this equipment, maximum flexibility is ensured in the reporty scenes with a lot of movement. But also a cinematic look can be created. Thus the leading role of this documentary can be captured by the ancient scriptures and their hunters by intelligent picture-design in cinema-optics, contrasting shots of overwhelming landscapes are captured, while at the same time the bookhunters are accompanied by their detective work. A Canon C300 and a Sony F55 should be considered. Through the interplay of moving and observing camera work, graphic elements and a modern cut, this film will deal with historical themes while at the same time taking a modern narrative language.

Susanne Brahms

History / Science

Length 52'

Film by Susanne Brahms

Co-Production Kinescope Film Bremen with TAG/TRAUM Filmproduktion for Radio Bremen/ARTE

Original Title Bücherjäger

Completion April 2017