

because of the hieroglyphic system in use among them prior to contact.

Edwards concludes with an excellent summary chapter that places his study in both historical and contemporary context. Of special value are his suggestions for improving aboriginal community libraries in Canada and other parts of the world. This book should be required reading for any librarian serving the needs of aboriginal peoples.

In summary, this provocative, well-written, well-edited, and thoroughly documented study deserves a place on the "must read" list of any academic librarian interested in the history of libraries, the social implications of Western notions of literacy, and/or the provision of library services to aboriginal peoples. Brendan Edwards and Scarecrow Press are to be commended for making this important study available at a relatively reasonable price.—*Wade Kotter, Weber State University.*

**Knuth, Rebecca.** *Burning Books and Levelling Libraries: Extremist Violence and Cultural Destruction.* Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006. 233 p. \$39.95 (ISBN 0275990079). LC 2006-2747.

Readers of this lucidly written, excellently organized, and passionately argued book may never be able to view libraries the same way again; libraries, the author demonstrates, are not just information portals or storehouses of ideas, but something more dangerous and often feared: they are battlefields.

Knuth, Chair of the Library and Information Science Program at the University of Hawaii, where she is also an assistant professor, received great praise for her previous volume, *Libricide: The Regime Sponsored Destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century* (2003). In this sequel of sorts, she teases out themes introduced there, but goes further afield. Knuth states her prejudices plainly: "I am a liberal humanist with a deep respect for intellectual freedom and individual rights." Despite disclaimers of not being a

historian, political scientist, or sociologist, she nevertheless displays deep familiarity and ease in these disciplines and she quotes liberally and well from her wide reading. In her writing, she synthesizes diverse bodies of knowledge that range from international studies to comparative sociology of genocide. All, however, are tools, serving the broader goal of documenting the flashpoint nature of libraries in totalitarian and/or extremist states, or merely in the gaze of those individuals harboring inflexible, rigid, and/or rabid ideas.

To set up her thesis, Knuth first explains biblioclasm, a word not of her coining, but one linked to iconoclasm—the destruction of images someone finds corrupting. She notes the modern manifestations of biblioclasm and, like an epidemiologist tracking the breakouts of a virus (of vandalism), she traces its flare-ups from the Enlightenment forward, from Robespierre to Milosevic. She then routes her readers into the realms of psychology and sociology to parse the six identified motivations for vandalism. Some stem from play or malice; others erupt from vindictive, acquisitive, tactical, and/or ideological motives. These provide the author with the tools to deconstruct acts of cultural destruction throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries.

Knuth links the seemingly mindless and mind-numbing cultural and human tragedies together by types of conflict and the perpetrators' uses (and abuses) of power. The episodes in Part One document local struggles in which libraries were destroyed for political reasons or at the behest of ethnic protests. A chapter describes in brisk yet full detail an attack on a library of South African materials by left wingers in Amsterdam, and another presents various Hindu/Buddhist/Muslim (Shiite and Sunni) attacks on various sects, including their libraries. She marshals her facts and numbers well, with precise prose laying out the devastation to books, archives, cultural institutions, and

individual lives. Chillingly, she shows that libraries are attacked because they promote a differing point of view. She summarizes by noting that "if the central belief system accommodates pluralism, and the government is not overly influenced by one ethnic group, then books and libraries are fairly secure."

When this is not the case is more than amply demonstrated in Part Two. Three chapters eerily echo each other, demonstrating what happened in the aftermath of power struggles in various epochs and areas; she shows the horrors that resulted when ideologues tried to build utopias, purify their societies, and consolidate their power. Knuth neatly and effectively discusses book burning in pre-World War II Germany, specifically the destruction of Magnus Hirschfeld's Berlin Institute for Sexual Science; she moves to an explication of "the secular fanaticism and auto-Genocide of Cambodia," and finishes the section examining the fundamentalism that led to the destruction of Afghanistan's cultural heritage.

Her language is plain, which befits a description of horror, the anecdotes culled from personal memoirs are moving, and the figures she quotes, appalling. She notes that during the reign of the communist regime in Cambodia, "an estimated 80 percent of written works in the Khmer language were lost." She does not minimize the human costs by any means, but adds up everything. In the chapter on Cambodia, in particular, Knuth quite successfully shows the skeletal horror perpetrated by those wanting to wipe the slate clean, and plunge the country back into an illiterate agricultural state where minds were not infected by any ideas. It is no exaggeration to say that what happened there, as the author sums up with a quote, is that those wanting to create heavens often succeed in making hells instead. Libraries and cultural depositories were targeted because they encouraged thought and comparison and gave free reign to opposing ideas that the ideologues found threatening.

The final section examines the fates of libraries in times of war, revolution, and power vacuums. Returning to World War II atrocities, such as the firebombing of Dresden, Knuth shows how the Axis's declaration of total war triggered a mirror image action by the Allies; the following chapter focuses on civil wars and civil unrest in Africa and Europe; and the concluding chapter assesses America's culpability in the looting of Iraqi cultural treasures in the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. Until this point, the book has been a paragon of synthesis and scholarship. All quotes are briefly noted in the text and complete bibliographic citations follow each chapter's end. But in the final section, the author, who duly noted her liberal humanistic viewpoint in the introduction, stands to lose some of her audience as she appears to be less objective in discussing very recent comments and actions. When she refers to the words and strategies of President Bush and puts them in context with the previously expounded themes she has deftly and repeatedly demonstrated, she is on very firm and defensible ground, but at other points, her language (even to one who personally agrees with her) seems partisan; and the appearance of a personal note in the text, "It is chilling to admit this about my own country," is startling.

Such faults are few, the virtues, many; the book is so excellently put together and argued that one finds it hard to believe in the hopeful coda that ends the book. Knuth has so succinctly summed up dozens of biblioclasm tragedies, so neatly and agonizingly explained how politics, human psychology, and the heft of history lead to such events, that it is hard to conceive that they will not happen again. If policy makers read this book, a must for all library schools and those concerned with the fate of humankind and their culture, then we may very well be spared the repeat of such destructive tragedies.—*Harlan Greene, College of Charleston.*