

**NO.67 SUMMER  
2005  
BENE LEGERE  
NEWSLETTER OF  
THE  
LIBRARY  
ASSOCIATES**

- [The Centennial Campaign for the Renewal of The Bancroft Library](#)
- [St. Catherine's Library Conservation Project](#)
- [Campus Art Installations Feature "Flying Books" and Foam Balls](#)
- [The Sam Spade Test of Berkeley Scholarship](#)

**The Library Associates**

Join more than 6,000 other friends, book lovers, alumni, and faculty who recognize that the influence of a great research library reaches beyond the university it serves to the many communities of which it is a part.

Library Associates receive complimentary copies of the quarterly newsletter *Bene Legere*, as well as invitations to special occasions at the Library. For more information on the Library Associates program, please write or telephone: The Library Development Office, Room

# The Sam Spade Test of Berkeley Scholarship

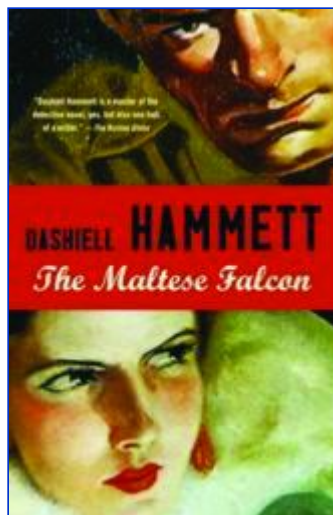
*by Thomas C. Leonard, Kenneth and Dorothy Hill University Librarian & Professor in the Graduate School of Journalism*

*and David A. Hollinger, Chair, Department of History & Preston Hotchkis Professor of American History*

Dashiell Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* has five beatings, four murders, three arrests, two druggings, and one trip to Berkeley for bibliographic instruction. In the decade before World War II, Americans were familiar with private eye Sam Spade, the "knock out" Bridget O'Shaughnessey, the Fat Man Casper Gutman and the perfumed Joel Cairo.

Published and republished in lowbrow and highbrow editions, Hammett's detective story was also made into three Hollywood movies in these ten years. By now, seventy-five years after they showed up in San Francisco, every tic of this dangerous crew has been gone over carefully. But not their encounter with Berkeley scholarship.

If you do not recall Humphrey Bogart, Peter Lorre, Mary Astor, Sydney Greenstreet, or others in John Huston's classic film sending anyone to Berkeley, that is because in 1941 the screen play streamlined Hammett's story. You will have to use your mind's eye to see the Fat Man, who "smiled complacently" and "held up three fingers" as he gave a stone-faced Bogart these "references" to a jeweled falcon from the Crusades.



With the pressured erudition that we have come to associate with graduate students taking oral exams, the Fat Man also cites work he has read in which "there's nothing said about the bird"-

Sam Spade "stumbled over the names of authors and their works" Hammett writes, convincingly. In the novel the detective recalls that his secretary has a relative in Berkeley's History department and sends her on the ferry from San Francisco to see if the references check out:

"Is it probable? Is it possible even barely possible? Or is it the bunk?" Sam Spade asks.

The Berkeley History professor determines: "none of your authorities or their works are out-and-out fakes." The answers to these bibliographic questions cause more grief than is normal in the academy. Sam Spade stays on the case and many more people do, in Hammettese, "take the fall."

131 Doe Library,  
University of California,  
Berkeley, CA 94720-6000;  
telephone (510) 642-9377.  
Or, [check our website](#).

But this begs the question: Did they know what they were talking about at Berkeley? As the University Librarian and the Chair of the History department, it is our job to care about this. Sam Spade had his famous code. We have ours. After plunging into *The Maltese Falcon* recently, we detect some taunting by Hammett. Spade worried when his secretary told him that the History professor was excited by the research possibilities.

"That's swell, as long as he doesn't get too enthusiastic to see through it if it's phoney," the detective said.

"Oh he wouldn't," the secretary says, firmly.

Do we really have the books and are we afraid to follow the evidence?

Answering these questions reveals quite a lot about how scholars work at Berkeley and our resources to satisfy them.

Berkeley's core research collection sits under the Memorial Glade, where sun bathing and frisbee throwing are the main activities. The majestic north entrance of Doe is handy, and a five-minute break would be enough to select the Fat Man's first and last references, *Les Archives de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean* and an original edition of the *Memoirs of the Verney Family*. These volumes came to us soon after they were published in Paris and London at the end of the 19th century. They now live, with more than two million companions, in the light and airy space that honors former UC president David Gardner.

Any Berkeley student is free to check these out and to read them on the lawn if they choose.

Carutti's 600-page tome on a Sardinia king requires a one-day wait, because it is stored at the Richmond Field Station (along with 3.5 million works we own). Time has not been kind to this edition of 1897 and in 1990 we made a reader's copy on microfilm. Berkeley's Library has not invested in Paoli's work on the Knights of Malta, published in Rome. We did not need to. UCLA has archived this book and we can order it from a storage facility we share for delivery in two days. Turning the pages of this 1781 edition, readers today will think they are handling linen.

A student could learn exactly what we have, and place their requests, without stepping into our Library. Indeed, they could do this with frisbees overhead (if they brought their laptop) because our Air Bears wireless service stretches across Memorial Glade.

Great libraries are not built for hypothetical readers, let alone fictitious readers. Real people drive collections, reflecting the changing world and its current problems. The clash of Christian and Islamic civilizations engages the campus today and it is important to understand how this estrangement began. This year we will find hundreds of thousands of dollars in our budget to add to the venerable works that, somehow, were memorialized in Dashiell Hammett's yarn about the Bay Area and a statue dear to the Crusaders.

Some of the most exciting courses we offer will use what we acquire. History professor Maria Mavroudi, for instance, is building up our resources in

Byzantine history. She has won a "genius" award from the MacArthur Foundation along the way.

Like other faculty, we have worked hard on strategic academic plans, and they are wiser (if not better written) than Dashiell Hammett's hard-boiled fiction. But when we went back to Sam Spade, we found fresh lessons for scholars. The private eye should be remembered as a poster boy for the need for Berkeley students to understand many cultures and global networks. The intriguing bunch he chased around San Francisco was Hong Kong based and Istanbul bound and the Falcon itself was brought in by a ship in the China trade. Hammett had the detective uncovering documents in Arabic, as well as the European scholarship. In the first Hollywood film of the novel, Sam Spade used his knowledge of Chinese to solve the crime. John Huston's film dropped the linguistic feat but added something better: loving attention of the camera on the Chinese newspapers that wrapped the Falcon. This is how one of our great collections at the Center for Chinese Studies Library was built in the 1950s, taking the newsprint wrapping that came out of Mao's China at a time when newspapers were banned at the border. In this case at least, creative minds in Hollywood and creative minds on campus were not so far apart.

The Maltese Falcon made its appearance in the popular imprints and movies that Americans in the Great Depression used to stretch their imaginations. Universities with great libraries still have this mission.

Are there clues to lost treasures in the Berkeley Library then? Alas, we only ask questions, offer leads, then step back and let readers find out.

#### References

J. Delaville Le Roulx's Les Archives de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean

Paoli's Dell' origine ed insituto del sacro militar ordine

Carutti's Storia del Regno di Vittorio Amadeo II

Lady Francis Verney's Memoirs of the Verney Family during the Seventeenth Century

[\[top\]](#) [\[prev\]](#) [\[next\]](#)

---

[HELP / FAQ](#) | [CATALOGS](#) | [COMMENTS](#) | [HOME](#)

---

[Copyright](#) © 2006 by the Library, University of California, Berkeley. *All rights reserved.*

Document maintained on server: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/> by the [Library Development Office](#)

Originally published Summer 2005. Server manager: [contact](#)