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FSB Officers Sentenced for Stealing Gutenberg Bible

By The Moscow Times

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FSB Officers sentenced for stealing one of the few surviving Gutenberg bibles.

Three former Federal Security Service, or FSB, officers were sentenced by a Moscow military court Thursday for having stolen one of the few surviving Gutenberg bibles.

The men stole the two-tome copy printed in the 1450s from a safe at the Moscow State University in 2009, Interfax reported, citing the court's press service.

The officers were caught — and subsequently fired from the FSB — in 2013 when they attempted to sell the book. A collector to whom they were trying to sell the rare item alerted the FSB to the scheme, according to Moskovsky Komsomolets. They had asked for 40 million rubles ($1.2 million), Interfax reported.

Convicted ringleader Sergei Vedishchev was handed 3 1/2 years in prison, while Mikhail Lepkov got one year and two months. Viktor Puchka received a one-year sentence, but was

released for time already served in pre-trial detention.

Puchka claimed to have unknowingly stumbled into the crime by simply following orders from a superior, Moskovsky Komsomolets reported. He was ordered by Vedishchev to "pick something up" at the university and did not know what he was transporting, investigators determined.

The Gutenberg Bible was the first major book printed in Western Europe using movable type. Printed by Johannes Gutenberg in Germany, about 50 partial and complete copies of the book are known to have survived.

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