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Ässhäk

Tales from the Sahara

A FILM BY ULRIKE KOCH

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Ässhäk

Tales from the Sahara

A FILM BY ULRIKE KOCH

In a world that fluctuates between the extremes of burning heat and chilling cold, the magnificence of the starry sky and the scant light of a campfire, the Tuareg have made their home in the vastness of the Sahara. This nomadic tribe's love for beauty, music and poetry lives on still today.

A Tuareg's search for his runaway camel leads us through sand and rock formations to the wells, campsites and markets of his legendary folk. In keeping his tribe's oral tradition, storyteller Ibrahim Tshibrit explains that his "tall tales" will one day become the truth. The Marabut, honoured as a holy man, is the keeper of a centuries-old mosque and pre-Islamic traditions. He offers insight into his work as, for example, he prepares a curative draught comprised of written passages taken from the Koran. We also meet Tuareg women and young girls, whose hands set the rhythm of their life. By playing the Imzâd, the one-stringed fiddle, they remind the men of the values of their folk, which has managed to survive until now—most likely only because the desert has offered them shelter.

The Tuareg introduce us to a world where "Ässhäk"—respect for other human beings, patience and mindfulness – ultimately guides their lives.

After the great success of her film "The Saltmen of Tibet", Ulrike Koch took on the challenge of portraying the unique life and world of the Tuareg.

ÄSSHÄK – TALES FROM THE SAHARA is the result of an extensive and internalized encounter with the desert and its inhabitants. Filmed from a respectful viewpoint, it reveals an archaic way of life filled with creative depth, a different perception of time and a glimpse of the desert's sheltering sky.

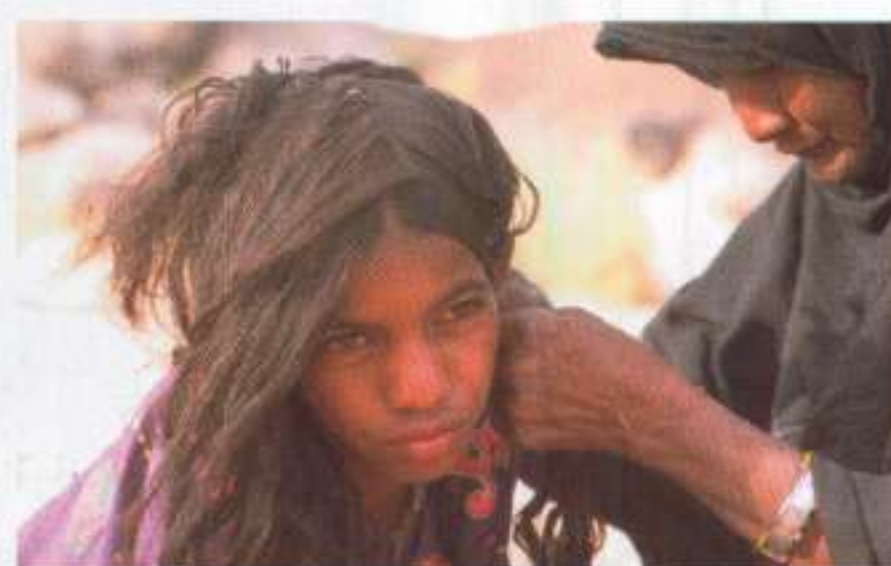
"Those familiar with the Tuareg know that the term "Ässhäk" is of great importance to them. You can see it in many different shades: the manner in which they solve their problems, their behaviour towards one another and towards all other creatures as well. It is not only the key to their social life, it also renders their survival in the desert environment possible, where every step must be taken carefully. Their entire culture revolves around it." Ulrike Koch

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"Ässhäk means to live according to worthy principles and rules of proper behaviour, as is the will of God. Ässhäk and the fear of God are one and the same. It means respecting all living creatures. It is also the origin of the men's veils used to cover their mouths. And even though the women wear no veils, they carry Ässhäk in their hearts." Tshibrit, the storyteller



"The Aïr's real treasure is its women. Its true magic lies in its women. And even the magician's creed lies in its women." Ibrahim al-Koni



"Caravanning through the flat Ténéré is the most difficult. The caravan guides, the Madugu, are true experts of the desert. When the sky is clear at night, they can identify every single star. The starry sky is their home. When you fall asleep on the camel's back and then wake up, you just look to the heavens to know where you are." Tshibrit, the storyteller

