

Elhadji Koumama's Children

Elhadji and his wife, Kola, live in Agadez, the only real city in the northern two-thirds of Niger, with their five children. Their courtyard is the meeting place for the many Koumamas who live in the neighborhood. Family and community are very important to Tuaregs.

Amina, the oldest daughter, is a gorgeous 14 year old in her fifth year of primary school. She is an outstanding student and will be going on to "college" (high school plus) in 2008. Kola is especially proud of her daughter's academic achievements as she did not have the chance to go to school.



Son Smalie is 10. Last year he went to a bush boarding school because the public schools in Agadez are a disaster-teachers often don't show up and when they do they have 70 to 80 children in a class with no books. Although he learned a lot he missed his family. This year he is attending a new school in Agadez that just opened. Smalie now makes tea for the household, an important task that he takes seriously.

Abdul, shown here, is 8 and rather quiet but with the greatest twinkling eyes.



He loves to play in the street with his cousins. He is looking forward to going to school with Smalie next year.

Almost from her birth in September 2001 Izara has been the dynamo. Strong willed and a born



leader, she leads the neighborhood pack, sometimes to the dismay of her parents. She loves her preschool and also will be starting at a new school in the fall.



Baby Fatima, now almost 2, has enormous brown eyes and a sweet smile. Her personality mirrors Izara's. Kola confesses that two Izaras may be too much for her to handle!

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Welcome!

Welcome to the Tuareg Jewelry monthly newsletter. Here we will bring you news of the Koumama family, Niger, upcoming events and other interesting tidbits.



www.tuaregjewelry.com

Inquiring Minds Want to Know ... What do the markings on my jewelry mean?

You may have noticed some rather unusual markings on the back of the jewelry you purchased. Those markings are the engraved names of the craftsmen who made your jewelry. To identify their work, craftsmen write their names using *Tifignagh*, the Tuaregs' written alphabet. Each artist signs his pieces by engraving his name in Tifignagh. The name Tifignagh is possibly from the phrase *tifin negh*, which means 'our invention'. Shown



here is Maha, one of the craftsmen, holding a sign on which he has written his name in Tifignagh.

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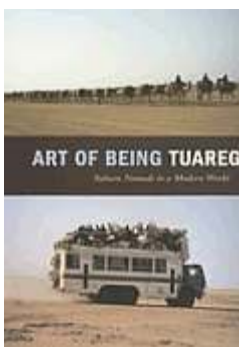
Other "Inquiring" topics being considered for editions include:

- Where do the Tuaregs get the silver to make the jewelry?
- Where do they get the ebony?
- What steps are taken to make jewelry?
- What should I use to polish my purchase?
- Do Tuareg women make jewelry too or do they make something else?

The Art of Being Tuareg Exhibition

Elhadji and several of his relatives are prominently featured in an exhibition entitled "The Art of Being Tuareg." It premiered at the Fowler Museum at UCLA in 2006 and will reopen at the Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. It will be featured there from May 30 to September 3. The next stop for the exhibition is the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art where it will remain from October 10, 2007, to January 27, 2008. Elhadji and two of his cousins will do silver jewelry demonstrations at the Cantor in late May and June. His father's widow, Hadija, will make her first trip to the western world to demonstrate the art of leatherworking. Many Tuareg women produce an array of leather goods. More information about these events will be available from the exhibition sites and in future newsletters.

Tom Seligman, the Director of the Cantor Center and the curator of the exhibition has edited a lovely



book, also called "The Art of Being Tuareg." It is available from the University of Washington Press and Amazon.com in both soft and hard cover. It has some of the best illustrations of Tuareg items I have seen in print. It is a great book to learn about the Tuareg people and culture. It is especially good for jewelry enthusiasts wanting to learn more about the *Inadan* -- the jewelry makers.

If you have an "Inquiring Minds" question that you would like for us to answer in a future newsletter, please send us an email at the address below:

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