

ANCIENT SKIES

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Official Logbook of the Ancient Astronaut Society

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THE DOGON MYSTERY

BY ERICH VON DANIKEN*

A few years ago, I read in a newspaper that a British astronomer, Robert Temple, had written a book which confirmed my theories. He had shown that specific details of the system of the star Sirius were handed down in the age-old mythology of the Dogon tribe, exhibiting knowledge they could not possibly have had according to their level of culture. Temple, it said in the report, had proved that from the earliest times the Dogon had the position, gravitation and orbit of Sirius' invisible satellite.

I was electrified by this report.

Who were the Dogon people? I had never heard of them. And, who was Robert Temple?

I bought a lot of books about the Dogon and their mysterious knowledge, including The Sirius Mystery (1), written by Robert K.G. Temple. A fascinating book. I wrote to him to congratulate him on his discovery. A few months later we met in London.

Contrary to the report, Temple turned out to be an American linguist, not a British astronomer. However, he is a Member of the Royal Astronomical Society, which proves his scientific qualifications.

In 1931 the French anthropologist, Dr. Marcel Griaule, visited the Dogon people who now live on the Bandiagara plateau and in the Hombori Mountains of the West African Republic of Mali. It was an encounter that bewildered and fascinated Griaule. He heard about a complicated and difficult mythology which seemed to be impenetrably bound up with the stars. Among the tribes there were ceremonies that were repeated, and even today can be repeated, only once every fifty years. Each generation has to prepare new masks for these ceremonies, and for centuries the Dogon have stored these masks away as a kind of village archive to give future generations information about the past.

In 1946, Dr. Griaule visited the Dogon again, this time with the ethnologist, Dr. Germaine Dieterlen, who later became the General Secretary of the Societe des Africanistes at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris.

In 1951 the two scholars published the results of their four years of research under the title A Sud-

*This article is based upon a chapter in the author's book, According to the Evidence, which was published in Great Britain in hardcover by Souvenir Press, London. The book was published in the U.S in hardcover by G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and in paperback by Bantam Books, New York, both under the title Von Daniken's Proof. Mr. von Daniken's latest book in English is available in hardcover from Souvenir Press, London, under the title The Gods and Their Grand Design. His address is Baselstrasse 10, 4532 Feldbrunnen/50, Switzerland.

anese Sirius System (2). While this ethnological account of the myths of an African tribe was read seriously by only a small circle of experts, a time-fuse was smouldering away in that account which exploded some twenty-five years later.

What is it that is so astonishing about the myths of the Dogon? Dreams, religious superstitions, phantasmagoria, or accurate knowledge?

Griaule and Dieterlen learned that the knowledge of the Sirius system was held by four groups of Sudanese people: the Dogon, the Bambara and the Bozo of Segu, and the Minianka of Kutiala. The authors begin with a statement that should be kept always in mind:

"For our part the documents assembled have not given rise to any hypotheses or research into their origin. They were simply arranged in such a way that the testimony of the four most important tribes could be combined in a single book. There was never any question of finding out how people, who possess no instruments at all, can chart the course and special characteristics of practically invisible stars."

Every fifty years the Dogon celebrate their Sigui Feast. The point of this ceremony is the desire to renew the world. Po Tolo, the star of Sigui, determines the date of the feast. Po is the smallest grain known to the Dogon. The botanical name for Po is Digitaria Exilis, thus Griaule and Dieterlen call the Po star "Digitaria." It is significant that the Dogon call the tiny star Po after the tiniest grain known to them.

According to Dogon mythology, Digitaria revolves around brightly shining Sirius once every fifty years and this satellite is invisible. Moreover, the Dogon explain, Digitaria is the heaviest star and determines the position of Sirius, in that Digitaria revolves around Sirius on its course.

Dogon mythology dates back to the dim mists of time. But where does it get this uncanny knowledge about Sirius and Sirius B (Digitaria) that was not known to modern astronomy until the last century?

In astronomy Sirius is known as the Dog Star, because it is a star of the first magnitude in the constellation Canis Major ("Dog"). Hence, we get the term "Dog days" for the hot, sultry period of July and August, which follows the heliacal rising of Sirius, the brightest star of the heavens, 8.5 light years away from Earth.

In 1834 the Konigsberg astronomer Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel first discovered that the motions of Sirius were irregular; that it did not move in a straight line but rather like a kind of wave. After 12 years of plotting the positions of Sirius at regular intervals, Bessel confirmed his suspicion that something influenced Sirius' orbit. He called the invisible something "Sirius B." It was impossible

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to see Sirius B with the telescopes then available, and astronomers assumed that it was a star giving off no light.

In 1862, the American optician Alvan Clarke, who had made himself a reputation as a constructor of many large telescopes, used a telescope with a lens 47 cm in diameter and found the hitherto invisible Sirius B in the position postulated by Bessel! It had not been possible to make out the brightness of the newly discovered satellite because of its minimal distance from the ultra bright Sirius. Sirius B was not in the shadow of Sirius, but in its excessively bright light.

Meanwhile, Sirius B was registered as a white dwarf, which has a very great density, but a luminosity of only about 0.0003 per cent. In relation to Sirius (now called "Sirius A"), Sirius B has a density of 0.43:27000! Sirius B has a diameter of only 41000 kilometers, but has the same mass as our Sun. Because of its incredible mass, Sirius B is able to influence the orbit of the larger and much brighter Sirius A in a rhythm of 50.04 + 0.09 years, by directing it along a repeating wave-like line.

Based upon Griaule and Dieterlen's first-hand research, including diagrams of the Sirius system and its movements made by the Dogon elders in the sand, Temple concluded that the drawings of the elliptical orbit of Sirius B around Sirius A and a modern astronomical diagram of the orbit, as well as linear extensions of both, are virtually identical.

Temple states at page 24 of The Sirius Mystery:

"The similarity is so striking that the most untrained eye can immediately see that the general picture is identical, in each instance. There is no need for perfectionists to get out their slide rules or measuring tapes. The fact is demonstrated, and it is that the Dogon have an accurate general knowledge of the most unobvious and subtle principles of the orbiting of Sirius B around Sirius A."

In other words, modern knowledge and the wisdom of ancient myths coincide completely!

For hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, the Dogon have known these facts about the Sirius star system:

- That the tiny star Digitaria (Sirius B) guides Sirius A, and revolves around it, although they knew it to be invisible to the naked eye.

- Digitaria is infinitely small.

- Digitaria's orbit around Sirius A lasts about 50 years.

- Digitaria is the heaviest star.

When the Dogon tradition relates that Digitaria revolves around itself in less than a year we do not know whether they are talking about a terrestrial or a Digitarian year, but I find it amazing enough that a primitive African tribe should know anything about a heavenly body's own rotation. The knowledge that our Earth rotates on its own axis is not so very old. Yet the Dogon have known since very ancient times that a whirlwind motion is the basic movement of the world! Today everyone knows that the galaxies rotate with a spiral motion.

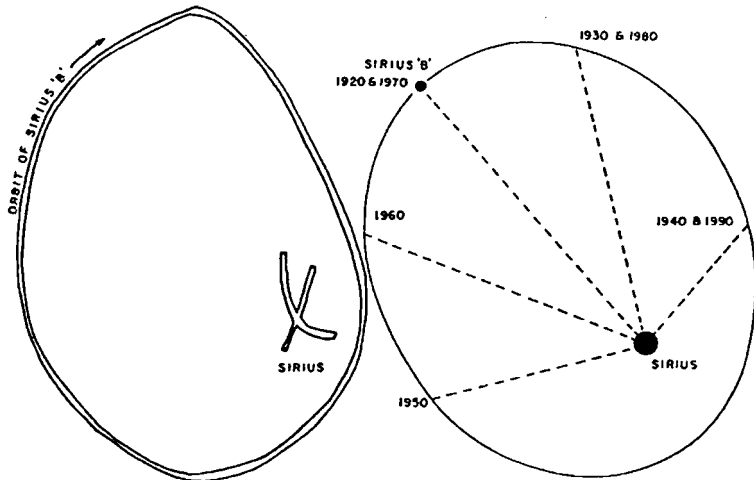
The Dogon knowledge of the Sirius star system is even more complete than modern astronomy has yet discovered. Dogon myths tell of the star Emme Ya, a female star bigger than Digitaria but four times lighter in weight, which also orbits Sirius A, but in a larger orbit and in the same direction as Sirius B, once every 50 years, and that Emme Ya has a satellite of its own! Further, the Dogon say, there is still a third satellite of Sirius to which they give the name of "Shoemaker," which is supposed to be further away from Sirius than all the others and that it revolves in the opposite direction. It is not yet possible to check the details about Emme Ya and the Shoemaker, because we lack the astronomical apparatus to locate the satellites of a star 8.5 light years away, but based upon what has been discovered thus far, astronomers should take the lessons of the Dogon myths seriously.

I can hear the critics asking if we can really believe the investigations by the two French scholars. When Griaule and Dieterlen published their report in 1951, a landing on the moon still seemed to be pure fantasy and my books on the ancient astronaut theory were not to come out for almost twenty years, so they could not have been infected by my imagination. Why would two reputable scholars invent such a story? They did not. They brought factual material out of Africa.

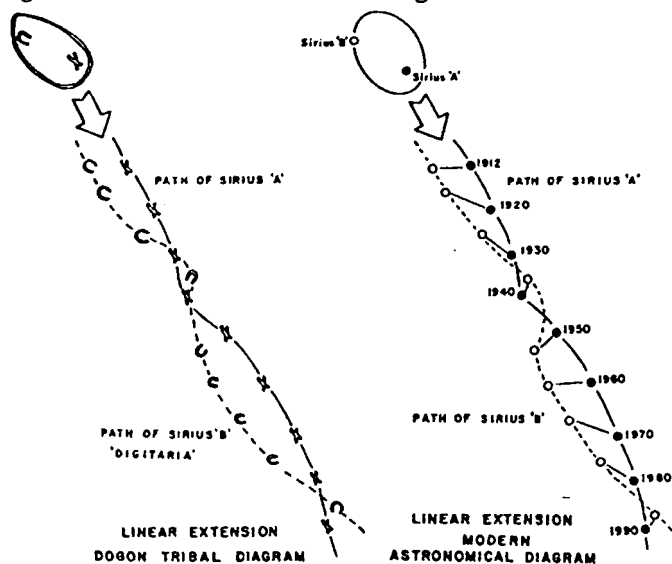
It is worth considering whether an African explorer could not have introduced the extraordinary knowledge of the Sirius system into the Dogon mythology. In fact, when Temple's book was published in the U.S. the astronomer Carl Sagan was asked by the press how the Dogon could have come by such uncanny knowledge of the universe. His sage response was that missionaries had imparted the knowledge to the Dogon!

One must admit in all fairness that the Dogon knowledge of the Sirius system is simply inexplicable. The wooden ceremonial masks marking the Sigui every fifty years form a collection filed away in uninterrupted sequence which scholars have dated to

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Left: Dogon sand drawing of orbit of Sirius.
Right: Modern astronomical diagram.



LINEAR EXTENSION
DOGON TRIBAL DIAGRAM

LINEAR EXTENSION
MODERN
ASTRONOMICAL DIAGRAM

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the beginning of the fifteenth century. I invite anyone who can show me knowledge of the Sirius B system in the storehouse of verified western knowledge of that time to make an immediate journey to Mali.

The Dogon also observe rituals connected with their family beer receptacles which enable us to draw inferences about very, very old Sigi celebrations. From time immemorial every Hogon (village chief) had to weave a container from the fibers of a special tree. It was a water-tight, woven vessel into which the first ritual beer was poured. This beer was served to every family in small portions and they mixed it with their own brew. During the Sigi ceremony the family "beer barrels" must be brought into contact with the Hogon's receptacle. After the festival all receptacles are hung on the main beam of the Hogon's house in clearly arranged and permanent series. The patriarch, Ongnonlu Dolo, one of the oldest Dogon in the district, relates that his great-grandfather had had eight more, much older vessels, in addition to the ones hanging in his house. Apart from the evidence of the masks, the first Sigi celebration can be traced back to the twelfth century by the beer containers. But ethnologists are by no means sure that the first celebration should be dated to this period. They attribute another 1,000 years to the Sigi celebrations, because so far as is known the Dogon have not always lived in the same geographical territory. It is assumed that they immigrated to Mali from regions as yet unknown. Regardless of when they began, Sigi ceremonies would not have been possible without knowledge of Sirius B.

If I postulate that the Dogon must have got their knowledge from extraterrestrials, the bright boys will object that Sirius B is not a planet and consequently no extraterrestrial beings could have come from it. I would never claim that they did. Nor do we find this in the Dogon myths. They mention only satellites.

There has been a good deal of discussion on whether a double-star system could have planets and if then a planet could exist at all inside the vital zones of two suns. In general, science rejects the idea of planets with suitable conditions for life revolving around double stars, because the planets, conditioned by the complicated gravitational relations between the two suns would have to trace an "impossible orbit" around their two central bodies.

Those are current opinions. They cannot be proved. We cannot make out planets in other solar systems with the telescopes available today. But whether or not the Sirius system has planets does not alter the fact that the Dogon have known Sirius B from the earliest times - without mirrors and double-bottomed boxes and without telescopes of any kind.

In 1970, Mme. Genieve Calame-Griaule published the book Black Genesis (3) based upon material belonging to her deceased father. It contains answers to the question: where did the Dogon get their knowledge? Amma was the original and only god. Amma created the stars out of clouds of earth which he hurled into space!

This old tradition is very reminiscent of the Big Bang Theory, currently accepted by science as the most probable explanation of the origin of the universe. The Belgian physicist and mathematician Georges Lemaitre introduced it. It postulates that milliards of years ago all matter was concentrated into one primordial atom, a heavy mass of matter in the universe, which constantly pressed inwards on its core. The forces multiplied so powerfully that the lump of matter exploded and shattered into billions and billions of parts. During a long, long period of consolidation the parts assembled into an infinite number of galaxies.

Is the name of the God "Amma" a substitute for this Big Bang process? The Dogon Priest Ogotemmelì put this on record:

"The vital force of the Earth is water...This force exists even in stone, for moisture is everywhere...Nommo descended to Earth and brought grains from plants, which already grew in heavenly fields...After creating the Earth, plants and animals, Nommo created the first pair of humans, from whom later eight human ancestors issued. These ancestors lived to an incredible age."

If you are at all familiar with the mythologies of all five continents, you will find it natural that Nommo returned "to heaven" when his work was done. But the statement that "water exists even in stone" is new and staggering. A daring idea of the myth-teller, when you think that he saw masses of unexploitable and useless stones lying around in the Savanna and the Sahara.

Water does exist in stone, but that is a brand new item of knowledge. When all possibilities for the survival of men in manned space-stations on the moon were being examined, scientists carried out experiments with stones. They discovered an admittedly expensive technique for extracting hydrogen and oxygen molecules and linking them up.

We are indebted to Ogotemmelì for traditions which seem to be quite mysterious. He put on record that the very first human ancestors had tried to seek out their creator Nommo in heaven, but although they were all like one another in their being, they had always had to live apart and they were not allowed to visit each other. One of them, who later became the first smith on Earth, disregarded the ban and visited another woman. Ogotemmelì says:

"Since that had made them unclean, they had to separate from each other. And so that they could live, they went down to Earth...for there they purified themselves."

I at once think of quarantine!

We assume that Nommo, as an extraterrestrial, did not grow up on our planet for he had no terrestrial forebears. So Nommo, who lived in the cosmos, altered existing, but in his view underdeveloped, life "in his own image" by deliberate artificial mutation. This "ennobled" form of life then continued to grow under the conditions on the planet Earth. Out of and against this environment it developed defences against terrestrial bacteria that endangered life. The mutated life immunized itself within its living space. In order not to risk his own life, Nommo could not meet his own creations even in "heaven." They were forced to return to their own kind on Earth where they "purified" themselves.

Fourteen years after their first account, Griaule and Dieterlen published more material on the Dogon's knowledge of the Sirius system in their book The Pale Fox. (Le renard pale)(4). Their reports showed that the Dogon's astronomical knowledge went far beyond the system they had already investigated. They also handed down information about our solar system, Jupiter and Venus. The Dogon were familiar not only with the Sirius calendar, but also they possessed a solar calendar and had a special agricultural agenda.

The Dogon knowledge is centuries old. At no time did the Dogon have any optical or astronomical aids; nor did they know how to use algebra, nevertheless they have been familiar with items of knowledge which have only been available to us for a hundred years. The Dogon mystery has been discussed in the famous scientific periodical Nature (5) by Michael Ovenden, Professor of Astronomy at the University of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, who tried to find explanations for the inexplicable:

"In order to understand the survival of ancient traditions among the Dogon, we have only to remember that a leading Moslem university was flourishing at Timbuctu in Mali during the sixteenth century. The traditions of the Greeks, Egyptians and Sumerians flowed through Timbuctu."

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So what? What difference does that make? Whether the Dogon were the first to know the most accurate details about Sirius B or whether the knowledge was even older and already familiar to the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Sumerians, does not alter the fact at all. For up to now there is no other accurate tradition about Sirius B except the Dogon one!

I even accept Professor Ovenden's "explanation" if that is what it is supposed to be. It leads back into an even more distant past.

Footnotes:

- (1) The Sirius Mystery was published in 1976 in hardcover by Sidgwick & Jackson, London. It was published in the U.S. in paperback by St. Martin's Press, New York.
- (2) Journal de la Societe des Africanistes, Tome XXI, Fascicule 1, Paris, 1951.
- (3) Marcel Griaule, Schwarze Genesis, Freiburg.
- (4) Tome 1, Fascicule 1, Institut d'Ethnologie, Musee de l'Homme, Palais de Chaillot, Place du Trocadero, Paris, 1965.
- (5) "Mustard Seeds of Mystery", Nature, Vol. 261, June 17, 1976.

ERICH VON DANIKEN is currently on a three-week lecture tour to India, during which he will present lectures at the University of Calcutta and the University of Madras. His latest book in German, Der Tag an dem die Gotter Kamen, 11 August 3114 v. Chr., is now available from C. Bertelsmann.

JOHANNES and PETER FIEBAG's new book in German, Die Entdeckung Des Heiligen Grals, has been published by John-Fisch-Verlag, 23, rue des Genets, Luxembourg.

THE 12th ANNIVERSARY WORLD CONFERENCE of the Ancient Astronaut Society will be held on Friday and Saturday, September 20 & 21, 1985 at the beautiful new Hotel Nova-Park, in the heart of Zurich, Switzerland. The hotel is the largest in Switzerland with complete facilities. Any member interested in presenting a lecture at the Conference should send an English synopsis of the proposed lecture to the Society Headquarters, 1921 St. Johns Ave., Highland Park, Illinois 60035 USA. Lectures must be presented in either English or German and must not exceed 45 minutes in length. Lectures should be based upon original research or on field examinations of sites or artifacts in the ancient astronaut field. Slides may be used to supplement the text. Submission of a synopsis for consideration does not assure the member that the lecture may be presented. If selected for presentation at the Conference, a complete text of the lecture in English must be submitted to the Society in advance of the Conference and the author must assign to the Society the exclusive copyright to the lecture. No lecture fees will be paid to speakers and they must pay their own travelling expenses.

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MEMBER EXPEDITION TO GREECE AND TURKEY - 1985

A Member Expedition will depart Chicago on Tuesday, September 17, 1985 for Zurich, Switzerland. After two days of sightseeing in Zurich, the members will attend the 12th Anniversary World Conference of the Ancient Astronaut Society at the beautiful Hotel Nova-Park, in the heart of Zurich. The Conference will be held on Friday and Saturday, September 20 & 21, with a gala banquet to be held at the hotel on the evening of September 21. On Sunday, September 22, the group will fly to Athens, Greece.

Members who do not wish to attend the Zurich Conference, may meet the expedition in Athens on September 22. A full week will be spent exploring the archaeological sites on the Greek mainland, and another week will follow with a Mediterranean cruise of the Greek Islands, including Crete, Santorini and Rhodes.

On October 6, 1985, those members who do not desire to continue to Turkey will return to the U.S. The others will fly to Istanbul and then proceed to explore the ruins of Nemrud Dagh, Kaymakli, Derinkuyu and other sites in Southeastern Turkey. This group will return to the U.S. on either October 12 or 13.

A detailed itinerary and prices are not yet available; however, anyone interested in participating in all or part of this exciting expedition should contact the Society Headquarters as soon as possible.

THE GREAT WALL OF OAKLAND

It is a curious fact that one of the greatest pre-historic stone works in the United States is virtually unknown. The Great Wall of Oakland, a five foot high wall of stone, extended for approximately 40 miles, North to South, on the hills above Oakland, California.

Most of the wall has disappeared, having been torn down and used for building materials, as is the case of many archaeological sites, and as late as 1960, parts of it were bull-dozed away along Grizzly Peak. There are a few segments still intact on private ranch land.

A few petroglyphs were found on the wall about 80 years ago, which do not appear to have been of Indian origin. Some think they are Ogam, an Ancient European language, or even Polynesian.

No one knows who built the Oakland Wall, or for what purpose. Some think the early Spanish settlers built it, but there is no mention of it in the official Spanish records of the time. The Spaniards were noted for keeping detailed and accurate records of everything they did to impress the Crown.

Another theory is that the Catholic missions used slave Indian labor to build the wall, but this does not seem likely. Further, for what purpose would they have used it.

One theory is that the wall was to enclose cattle herds, but since the wall ran in a straight line on top of hills, this seems to be ruled out.

It has also been suggested that early Chinese explorers to North America may have built the wall.

Perhaps the same people built the Oakland Wall as built the Great Wall of Peru, which extends for approximately 50 miles West to East in the Northern part of that country. Vaughn M. Greene, 548 Elm Ave., San Bruno, California 94066 USA.

Petroglyph found on the Great Wall of Oakland. This has been interpreted as "Spanish" for "1803."

