

The Amazing and Intriguing Dogons **By Leon Dixon (2010)**

The first thing about the Dogons that captures one's attention and imagination is that they are perhaps the only African ethnic group that was never captured. How could this be? They live in the upper hills and cliffs of Mali, and according to legend, the Europeans could not get up there to them because they were very adept at throwing rocks and boulders to prevent them from doing so. (This was before the days of airplanes.)

So how did the world learn of them? Much of the credit goes to the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule. He began his study of the Dogons in 1931. After observing his interest and inquiries of them about their culture for 16 years the Dogons elders held a meeting wherein they decided that his perseverance and character were serious enough that they should reveal to him their "inner knowledge." They assign a knowledgeable priest, Ogotemmêli to instruct him. Ogotemmêli met with him for thirty-three days revealing the more esoteric concepts of their religion and culture. This resulted in a thirty-three chapter book, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, wherein the discussion of each day is documented. Griaule and others, mainly his assistant Germaine Dieterlen, continued with their studies of the Dogons. After Ogotemmêli's death, and later that of Griaule, Dieterlen finished another more indepth book that they had been working on entitled *The Pale Fox*.

Griaule and Dieterlen's study of the Dogons revealed that they had in-depth knowledge of the companion stars Sirius A (one of the brightest stars) and Sirius B (a very small extremely dense star and invisible to the naked eye). They even had a seven-hundred year old celebration of the fifty year orbit that Sirius B makes around Sirius A. They are on record of having this knowledge of astronomical phenomena even before that of modern scientists. As the MIT physics professor Kenneth Brecher put it: "The problem for us, therefore, is how the Dogon could have known a host of astronomical facts, all of which are invisible to the naked eye. ... *They have no business knowing any of this.*"¹

But there is even more to be ascertained from the studying the Dogons. To paraphrase W.E.B. Du Bois, always out of Africa comes something new.

The latest purveyor comes from a seemingly unlikely source—Laird Scranton. Scranton is a software engineer whose work includes both maintaining old programs and writing new ones. During his leisure time, he was reading a book about unsolved mysteries when he came upon a chapter summarizing Robert K.G. Temple's book, *The Sirius Mystery*. The mystery to be solved in this case was how the Dogons acquired all of their knowledge about the Sirius companion stars. Temple's discussions on the Dogons roots in ancient Egypt (as he perceived them) spurred his interest, as he also had been reading about the sphinx and the pyramids. In pursuit of his developing interest, he was naturally led to Griaule's book, *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*, and later to *The Pale Fox*.

The more he read and studied, the more he became fascinated with the similarities between the Dogon's cosmology, words and symbols and those of ancient Egyptians. Scranton points out how the skills necessary to maintain old computer programs helped him use the Dogon information to help better understand and decipher the hieroglyphs. (He gives the examples of decoding variable names such as "INVNO" and "STXPCT" to mean "invoice number" and "state tax percent."²)

The valuable asset that the Dogons bring to this endeavor stems from the fact that their culture has remained intact and uncorrupted all of these years due to the fact that they were never captured. They are a living repository of ancient culture. Because they are still alive and practicing their culture in its original form, their symbols and words can be used as a modern day analogue of the "Rosetta Stone." Scranton states, "The many persistent similarities between the Dogon and Egyptian religious symbols and lifestyles lead to a natural suggestion that modern Dogon society could actually represent a modern remnant of ancient Egyptian culture."³

In addition to this, Scranton also shows the similarities of the symbols of the Dogons and ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs to those of modern science pertaining to the big bang, atomic and quantum structure, and string theory! Inferring that the ancients had far deeper insight and knowledge than we had heretofore realized!! He has written two books wherein he analyzes his findings: *The Science of the Dogon: Decoding the African Mystery* and *Sacred Symbols of the Dogon: The Key to Advanced Science in the Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. In them he displays similarities of illustrations from Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Brian Green's *The Elegant*

Universe to those in Griuale and Dieterlen's books, *Conversations with Ogotemméli* and *The Pale Fox*.

As phenomenal as the reach of the Dogons across the African continent is, it is also worth noting their reach across the Atlantic. In 2002 Charles A. Cerima published a book, *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, Patriot*. In it he discusses how a Dogon prince became the grandfather of Benjamin Banneker. Banneka, as he called himself (Banne being his given name and Ka his family name⁴), was very adept at predicting the weather and prevailing winds such that he could advise when and how to plant crops.

Of Benjamin Banneker Cerima writes: "... in the late 1700s, Benjamin Banneker reportedly said that Sirius was both his favorite star and his lucky star, and called it a double star many years before professional scientists of the advanced world confirmed that fact."⁵

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¹Adams, Hunter, III: "African Science," *The Journal of African Civilizations* (November, 1979) p. 6.

²Scranton, Laird: *The Science of the Dogon: Deciding the African Mystery*, Inner Traditions, 2002, p.10.

³Scranton, p.82.

⁴Cerami, Charles A.: *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, Patriot*, Wiley, 2002, p.5.

⁵Cerami, p.218.

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Cerami, Charles A.: *Benjamin Banneker: Surveyor, Astronomer, Publisher, Patriot*, Wiley, 2002.

Griuale, Marcel; *Conversations with Ogotemméli*, Oxford, 1965.

Griuale, Marcel & Germaine Dieterlen: *The Pale Fox*, Continental Foundation, 1986.

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—*Sacred Symbols of the Dogon: The Key to Advanced science in the Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs*, Inner Traditions, 2007.

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