

THE DOGON DEBUNKED

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Introduction

Following is a brief overview of the Dogon and Sirius hypotheses:

Dogon and Sirius

<http://www.skeptdic.com/dogon.html>

The Dogon are a people of about 100,000 who dwell in western Africa. According to Robert Temple (*The Sirius Mystery*), the Dogon had contact with some ugly, amphibious extraterrestrials, the Nommos, some 5,000 years ago. The aliens came here for some unknown reason from a planet orbiting Sirius some 8.6 light years from earth. The alleged visitors from outer space seem to have done little else than give the earthlings some useless astronomical information.

One of Temple's main pieces of evidence is the tribe's alleged knowledge of Sirius B, a companion to the star Sirius. The Dogon are supposed to have known that Sirius B orbits Sirius and that a complete orbit takes fifty years. One of the pieces of evidence Temple cites is a sand picture made by the Dogon to explain their beliefs. The diagram that Temple presents, however, is not the complete diagram that the Dogon showed to the French anthropologists Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, who were the original sources for Temple's story. Temple has either misinterpreted Dogon beliefs, or distorted Griaule and Dieterlen's claims, to fit his fantastic story.

Griaule and Dieterlen describe a world renovation ceremony, associated with the bright star Sirius (sigu tolo, "star of Signi"), called sigu, held by the Dogon every sixty years. According to Griaule and Dieterlen the Dogon also name a companion star, po tolo "Digitaria star" (Sirius B) and describe its density and rotational characteristics. Griaule did not attempt to explain how the Dogon could know this about a star that cannot be seen without telescopes, and he made no claims about the antiquity of this information or of a connection with ancient Egypt.

Temple lists a number of astronomical beliefs held by the Dogon that seem curious. They have a traditional belief in a heliocentric system and in elliptical orbits of astronomical phenomena. They seem to have knowledge of the satellites of Jupiter and rings of Saturn, among other things. Where did they get this knowledge, he asks, if not from extraterrestrial visitors? They don't have telescopes or other scientific equipment, so how could they get this knowledge? Temple's answer is that they got this information from amphibious aliens from outer space.

Afrocentrists, on the other hand, claimed that the Dogon could see Sirius B without the need of a telescope because of their special eyesight due to quantities of melanin (Welsing, F. C. 1987. "Lecture 1st Melanin Conference, San Francisco, September 16-17, 1987"). There is, of course, no evidence for this special eyesight, nor for other equally implausible notions such as the claim that the Dogon got their knowledge from black Egyptians who had telescopes.

Carl Sagan agreed with Temple that the Dogon could not have acquired their knowledge without contact with an advanced technological civilization. Sagan suggests, however, that that civilization was terrestrial rather than extraterrestrial. Perhaps the source was Temple himself and his loose speculations on what he learned from Griaule, who based his account on an interview with one person, Ambara, and an interpreter.

According to Sagan, western Africa has had many visitors from technological societies located on planet earth. The Dogon have a traditional interest in the sky and astronomical phenomena. If a European had visited the Dogon in the 1920's and 1930's, conversation would likely have turned to astronomical matters, including Sirius, the brightest star in the sky and the center of Dogon mythology. Furthermore, there had been a good amount of discussion of Sirius in the scientific press in the '20s so that by the time Griaule arrived, the Dogon may have had a grounding in 20th century technological matters brought to them by visitors from other parts of earth and transmitted in conversation.

Or, Griaule's account may reflect his own interests more than that of the Dogon. He made no secret of the fact that his intention was to redeem African thought. When Walter van Beek studied the Dogon, he found no evidence they knew Sirius was a double star or that Sirius B is extremely dense and has a fifty-year orbit.

Knowledge of the stars is not important either in daily life or in ritual [to the Dogon]. The position of the sun and the phases of the moon are more pertinent for Dogon reckoning. No Dogon outside of the circle of Griaule's informants had ever heard of *sigu tolo* or *po tolo*... Most important, no one, even within the circle of Griaule informants, had ever heard or understood that Sirius was a double star (Ortiz de Montellano).

According to Thomas Bullard, van Beek speculates that Griaule "wished to affirm the complexity of African religions and questioned his informants in such a forceful leading manner that they created new myths by confabulation." Griaule either informed the Dogon of Sirius B or "he misinterpreted their references to other visible stars near Sirius as recognition of the invisible companion" (Bullard).

The only mystery is how anyone could take seriously either the notion of amphibious aliens or telescopic vision due to melanin.

<http://www.skeptdic.com/dogon.html>

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DEBUNKING

THE

DOGON

The following excellent material from <http://michaelsheiser.com/PaleoBabble/2011/06/the-sirius-mystery-you-dont-columbo-for-this-one/> is reproduced here as argument against Robert K G Temple and the Sirius mystery.

We would like to thank MSH for this excellent post:

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THE SIRIUS MYSTERY: YOU DON'T NEED COLUMBO FOR THIS ONE

Posted on **June 18, 2011** by **MSH**

<http://michaelsheiser.com/PaleoBabble/2011/06/the-sirius-mystery-you-dont-columbo-for-this-one/>

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[[UPDATE: Talk about good timing! I guess the person who wrote [this article](#), dated today, does need Columbo; --MSH]]

I'm hoping my reference to the venerable TV detective doesn't date me too much here!

Way back in 2009 I wrote the only [post](#) on this blog about the so-called "Sirius Mystery." This mystery has to do with how a primitive African tribe, the Dogon, had advanced knowledge of a system of stars that make up what we see with the naked eye as one star — Sirius. My post was brief, directing readers' attention to another brief, but well done, post on the [Bad Archaeology](#) website devoted to the subject, as well as two articles on how the Dogon could have visually seen "beyond" the single star Sirius. (After all, that is the issue — how did they know that naked eye Sirius is actually a cluster of stars?) It doesn't take much imagination to discern that this is serious (pardon the pun) fodder for ancient astronaut believers.

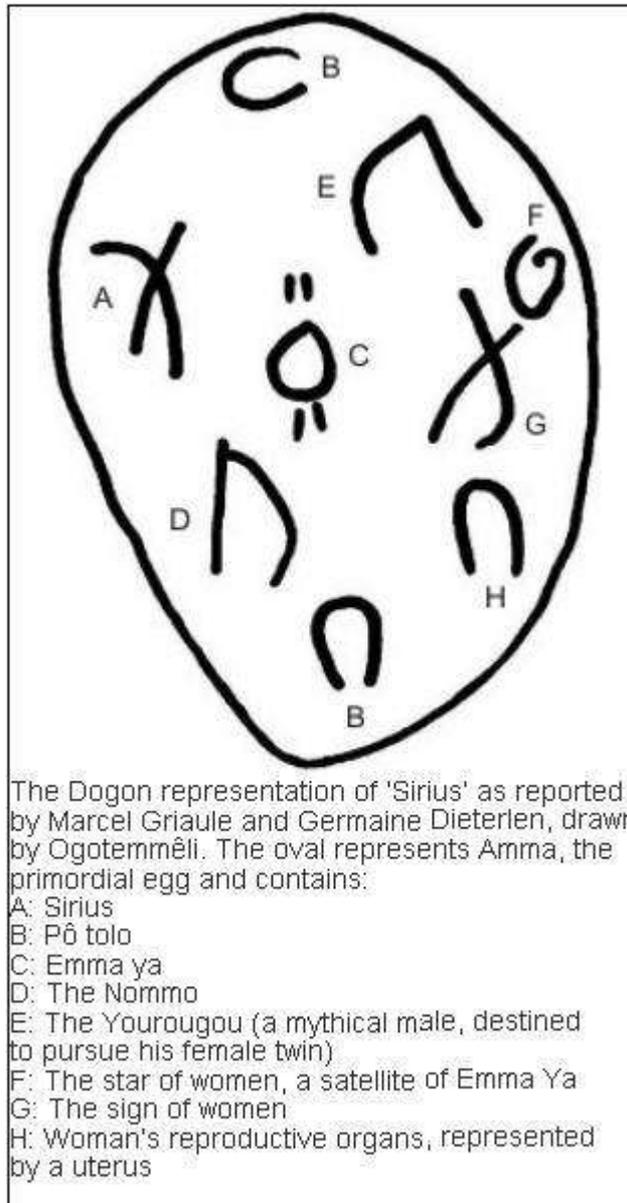
It's time to revisit the "Sirius Mystery" in a bit more detail. There has been some additional recent work on the subject by anthropologists to which I want to draw your attention. But to make it easier to follow, let's start at the beginning.

The Dogon and Sirius

The Bad Archaeology page on the Sirius Mystery has summarize the basic details well:

In 1976, Robert K G Temple (born 1945), an American living in the UK, published what was to become a seminal work of Bad Archaeology, The Sirius Mystery. A revised edition was published in 1998 with the new subtitle New scientific evidence of alien contact 5,000 years ago.... Temple begins with the work of Marcel Griaule (1898-1956) and Germaine Dieterlen (1903-1999), a pair of French anthropologists who worked in what is now Mali from 1931 to 1956. They reported an apparently anomalous knowledge of astronomy that formed part of the traditional lore of the Dogon, a people of the central plateau of Mali. This knowledge is alleged to include accounts of the rings of Saturn, the presence of four moons orbiting Jupiter and, most surprisingly of all, an account of two companions of the star Sirius. Griaule first published this data in Dieu d'eau ('God of Water', 1948), in which he records his conversations with a blind hunter, Ogotemméli, who claimed to have extensive knowledge of Dogon lore, much of which was restricted to certain tribal elders. Griaule and Dieterlen were

able to synthesise the cosmogony from Ogotemméli's statements. Temple was most impressed by the Dogon belief in a complex system of stars making up what we see as the single star, Sirius. This is the brightest star in our skies and, according to the Dogon, as reported by Griaule and Dieterlen, is actually a bright star with several smaller (even 'invisible') companions. Focusing especially on a representation of the system drawn by Ogotemméli (who, it must be remembered, was blind), Temple recognised the highly elliptical orbit of Sirius B, a white dwarf first photographed in 1970, around the principal star of the system, Sirius A. Moreover, Temple found reference to a third component of the system, dubbed Sirius C by the astronomers who accepted its existence (its existence had been suggested but never observed). According to the Dogon, this knowledge had been imparted by the Nommo, fish-like water spirits, in the distant past.



From this information, Temple goes on to theorize that the "fish-like water spirits" were extraterrestrials. He finds proof for his notion from the Babylonian writer Berossus who wrote of a hybrid fish-man who "emerged from the Persian Gulf to teach humanity various arts of civilisation. This creature is thought to be the Uan (or Uanna) of Babylonian myth, sometimes identified with Adapa, the equally mythical first king of Eridu, also identified by some with Atrahasis, the hero of the Babylonian version of the flood legend." ([Bad Archaeology](#))

While this string of non-sequiturs on the ancient Mesopotamian material is interesting enough, I want to stick to the item that started Temple down this rabbit hole: the Dogon knowledge of Sirius.

Recent Work on the Dogon and Sirius: 1980s and 1990s

In my earlier post on this subject, I linked readers to two essays from the book *Blacks in Science: Ancient & Modern* (Journal of African Civilizations), by Ivan Van Sertima (Transaction Publishers, 1983). The [first essay](#) speculated about whether the Dogon may have had a primitive optical instrument and, more importantly, how early Chinese records indicated that astronomers had been able to make **naked eye** observations of one of Jupiter's moons. Another example came from an 1852 letter from a missionary who documented the same observation. Further, under optimal conditions, people in contemporary times with good visual acuity can see two galaxies (M31, the Andromeda) and M33 (a spiral galaxy in the constellation Triangulum) **with the naked eye**. These examples are concrete, secure parallels to the Dogon knowledge of the Sirius cluster. No aliens needed. The article went on to discuss techniques used by ancients for making such observations (called "dark eye" techniques). The second essay discusses how the Dogon may have been able to see Sirius B, a star in the cluster that, due to its high magnitude, should not be viewable to the naked eye. Collectively, these essays show there is no reason to suspect that a member of the ancient Dogon tribe, or others at any other place on the globe, thousands of years ago, could not see these things. This undermines the entire premise of Temple and his Sirius Mystery.

The Bad Archaeology site notes:

... by the time Temple had published the second edition of The Sirius Mystery in 1998, the whole question of the Dogon's apparently inexplicable knowledge of Sirius had been blown apart. No-one had questioned Griaule and Dieterlen's findings until the early 1990s. And this is where the problems for the hypothesis began. In 1991, the anthropologist Walter van Beek undertook fieldwork among the Dogon, hoping to find evidence for their knowledge of Sirius. As the earlier authors had indicated that around 15% of the adult males were initiated into the Sirius lore, this ought to have been a relatively easy task. However, van Beek was unable to find anyone who knew about Sirius B. As ought to have been obvious from the outset, Griaule and Dieterlen's reliance on a single informant – Ogotemméli – severely compromises the validity of their data. But it gets worse. The Dogon themselves do not agree that Sigu tolo is Sirius: it is the bright star that appears to announce the beginning of a festival (sigu), which some identify with Venus, while others claim it is invisible. To polo is not Sirius B, as it sometimes approaches Sigu tolo, making it brighter, while it is sometimes more distant, when it appears as a group of twinkling stars (which sounds like a description of the Pleiades). All in all, the 'inexplicable' astronomical knowledge turns out to be too confused to bear the interpretation put on it by Griaule and Dieterlen.

The research of van Beek (and co-authors) alluded to above can be found in this 1991 article:

Walter E. A. van Beek, R. M. A. Bedaux, Suzanne Preston Blier, Jacky Bouju, Peterlan Crawford, Mary Douglas, Paul Lane, Claude Meillassoux, "[The Dogon Restudied: A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule \[and Comments and Replies\]](#)," *Current Anthropology* Vol. 32, No. 2 (Apr., 1991), pp. 139-167

The abstract of the article notes:

"This restudy of the Dogon of Mali asks whether the texts produced by Marcel Griaule depict a society that is recognizable to the re- searcher and to the Dogon today and answers the question more or less in the negative. The picture of Dogon religion presented in Dieu d'eau and Le renard pale proved impossible to replicate in the field, even as the shadowy remnant of a largely forgotten past. The reasons for this, it is suggested, lie in the particular field situation of Griaule's research, including features of the ethnographer's approach, the political setting, the experience and predilections of the informants, and the values of Dogon culture."

Note: In what follows, van Beek uses the following abbreviations for books written by Griaule on the Dogon:

DE = In *Dieu d'eau: Entretiens avec Ogotemmeli* ["God of Water: Conversations with Ogotemmeli"] (Griaule 1948, hereafter DE); this is the book that made Griaule world-famous. It was published before his collaboration with Dieterlen — the next book:

RP = *Le renard pale* ["The Pale Fox"] (Griaule and Dieterlen 1965, hereafter RP); this book is the one referred to by Bad Archaeology. It is the one that contains most of the material about Sirius and the Dogon.

I recommend the article to readers, as it has a very good summary of Dogon cosmology (pp. 140-141, 148-151), drawing on DE and RP, and the fact that the cosmological recounting of the single informant of Griaule and Dieterlen (Ogotemmêli) **differs** from all other Dogon accounts. This means that, among other issues, the source upon which Robert Temple based his ancient astronaut speculations are quite idiosyncratic, as the Bad Archaeology site noted. Van Beek goes even further than that, though. Quoting from his re-study, Van Beek notes that the views of Ogotemmêli are simply not recognizable to those leaders he talked to (p. 148) and "that Sirius is a double star is unknown; astronomy is of very little importance in religion. Dogon society has no initiatory secrets beyond the complete mastery of publicly known texts . . . The water spirit Nommo is not a central figure in Dogon thought and has none of the characteristics of a creator or a redeemer . . . Cosmological symbolism is not the basis of any Dogon cultural institutions . . . Confronted with parts of the stories provided by Ogotemmeli or given in the Renard pale, my informants emphatically state that they have never heard of them." (p. 148)

On page 149 van Beek adds:

Is Sirius a double star? The ethnographic facts are quite straightforward. The Dogon, of course, know Sirius as a star (it is after all the brightest in the sky), calling it dana tolo, the hunter's star (the game and the dogs are represented by Orion's belt). Knowledge of the stars is not important either in daily life or in ritual. The position of the sun and the phases of the moon are more pertinent for Dogon reckoning. No Dogon outside the circle of Griaule's informants had ever heard of sigu tolo or p6 tolo, nor had any Dogon even heard of eme ya tolo (according to Griaule in RP Dogon names for Sirius and its star companions). Most important, no one, even within the circle of Griaule informants, had ever heard or understood that Sirius was a double star (or, according to RP, even a triple one, with B and C orbiting A). Consequently, the purported knowledge of the mass of Sirius B or the orbiting time was absent. The scheduling of the sigu ritual is done in several ways in Yugo Doguru, none of which has to do with the stars." (pp. 149-150)

In a nutshell, the foundation of Robert Temple's *Sirius Mystery* (and the nonsense that has accrued to it since its publication) consists of three conversations with one Dogon tribesman, whose ideas differ from all subsequent Dogon elders interviewed to date. (And then there are the flaws in what Temple does with this idiosyncratic musings). Nice. A word like "flimsy" doesn't begin to tell the story.

Contemporary Work on the Dogon: 2004

In 2004 Dr. van Beek published an essay in a scholarly journal that is, in essence, a retrospect of his work on Griaule of 1991 and the Sirius silliness:

Walter E. A. van Beek, "[Haunting Griaule: Experiences from the Restudy of the Dogon](#)," *History in Africa* 31 (2004), pp. 43-68

Van Beek begins the article whimsically:

"It really was a chance occasion, just before Christmas 2003. On my way to the Dogon area I had greeted my friends in Sangha, and was speaking with a Dutch friend, when a French tourist lady suddenly barged into the hall of the hotel and asked me: "There should be a cav-

ern with a mural depicting Sirius and the position of all the planets. I saw it in a book. Where is it?". My friend smiled wryly, amused by the irony of situation: by chance the lady had fallen upon the one who had spent decennia to disprove this kind of "information". "In what book?" I asked, and named a few. It was none of these, and she could not tell me. Cautiously (maybe she had planned her whole trip around this Sirius "experience") I explained to her that though there was a lot to see, this particular mural did not exist. She left immediately, probably convinced she stumbled on a real ignoramus."

I wonder what book the lady had read (!)

Van Beek's essay tells the reader how his decades-long interest in the Dogon began (it had nothing to do with Griaule) and how that interest drew him into pop (cult, fringe) archeology and anthropology. It's an interesting, light read for the most part. Some excerpts are worth citing for our purposes here:

But at the time-we are writing 1979 for the start of my own field-work-the Griaule ethnography had already come under criticism. The most severe came from a Belgian dissertation by Dirk Lettens, defended at Nijmegen University under Albert Trouwborst (Lettens 1971). Later, after the publication of my Current Anthropology article, Trouwborst-with whom I shared many interuniversity committees, as well as the board of the Dutch Africanist Association-confided me that at the time he thought Lettens overly critical: surely it could not have been that bad. But Lettens was right on target. His title, Mythagogie et Mystification, still is unsurpassed as a characterization of Griaule's post-1948 writings. Although criticism was given in many countries, (Saccone 1984), the discussion through David Tait (1950), Mary Douglas (1967, 1968) and eventually James Clifford (1983) was to be much more influential. (p. 48)

One wonders why Robert Temple's work on the "Sirius Mystery" fails to interact with these criticisms of Griaule. Simply put, that isn't how scholarship is done.

Van Beek continues:

*All these discussions, however, were based on secondary sources. It was astonishing how little genuine fieldwork had been done after Griaule's untimely death in 1956. The publication of *Le Renard pale* was clearly the outcome of his own work, finished by Germaine Dieterlen. She was still publishing, wholly within his tradition. The same holds for the only other major publication based on field data, the work of Genevieve Calame-Griaule, his daughter. She published a major study on Dogon language cum culture, in which she combined her father's approach with the results of her own linguistic research. . . . The problem started with what is still the best known publication of Griaule, his small book describing his talks with a blind Dogon elder Ogotemmelli, under the title *Dieu d'eau* (Griaule 1948) (=DE above), translated in English under its French subtitle: *Conversations with Ogotemmelli*. . . . The book was a tremendous success and was translated into over twenty languages. (p. 49)*

*Griaule's ethnography proved to be incoherent. Griaule's later publications, which incidentally never could match his first success nor receive the wide circulation and renown of Ogotemmelli, depicted yet another Dogon culture. The posthumously published *Le Renard pale* (Griaule/Dieterlen 1956) and the articles leading up to it (Griaule 1954, Griaule/Dieterlen 1950) came up with even "deeper" myths, systems of classification, and a totally different creation story, at least with a totally different construction of the myth. These two sets of creation myths, of 1948 and 1956, are totally inconsistent with each other ... (p. 50)*

Renard pale (= RP above) picked up one major following, somewhat to the embarrassment of Dieterlen. One of its spectacular "findings" had to do with astronomy. The Dogon ritual calendar allegedly was dominated by a star system, that of Sirius, the main star in the constellation of Canis Major. The message of the book was that Sirius had a small white dwarf companion, Sirius B, whose revolving time punctuated the long-term rhythm of Dogon ritual life, such as the famous sigi cycle. An even smaller companion (the presumed Sirius C) then circled Sirius B. The notion of Sirius as a double star is an astronomical fact (though Sirius C is not known and has never been observed). But then, how did the Dogon know this?

The naked eye cannot detect the white dwarf. The most extended treatment of this problem was given by Robert Temple in a book that has long haunted popular astronomy, The Sirius Mystery, published in 1976, (reprinted in 1999). Temple took the Dogon data as unvarnished truth and questioned how this knowledge arrived at the Bandiagara cliff. He found the answers in Egypt, and thus became a kind of trailblazer for a whole generation of authors who were even less restrained. For those convinced of extra-terrestrial visits to the planet Earth, an idea very much in vogue during the late seventies ... "Cosmonautologists" like von Diniken [sic], Guerrier (1975) and many others of their ilk had a field day with this material and the Dogon enigma quickly became established as one of the pillars in their empirical grounding of the "flying saucer vision" and extraterrestrial interpretations of the pyramids. In their reasoning the implications of the Dogon "facts" were clear: there was no way the Dogon without any astronomical instruments could know these exotic facts. Definitely this implied that they must have been taught these astronomical lessons by extraterrestrials. Thus, the Dogon notion of Sirius B (C was conveniently forgotten) came on a par with the riddles of the Gizeh pyramids, the Nazca lines and Stonehenge. (pp. 50-51)

The article has a good deal else. I especially like the part where, after years spent becoming accepted by the Dogon, he began to carefully expose them to the ideas that Griaule had "learned" from Ogotemmelli, only to have his Dogon friends burst out laughing! One of the major services is van Beek's lengthy descriptions (with illustrations) of how Griaule came to create the myths of the Dogon himself (which were uncritically absorbed by Temple and passed on to the populace in his book). Basically, there was a good amount of cultural mis-communication. Van Beek relates several anecdotes you can read for yourself, but his own epiphany in this regard is worth quoting here:

Recently, in her excellent study of Dogon masks, Anne Doquet has zoomed in on one aspect I rather neglected, i.e. the conversations with Ogotemmelli themselves, and the fieldwork genesis of the first "Griaulian myths" (Doquet 1999:90-91). Analyzing Griaule's field notes in detail from microfiches, she noticed the two-fold influence Griaule had exerted on the material he collected with the old man. This period, from 20 October 1946 to 2 December 1946, marked his famous conversations. The field notes are a haphazard collection of references to Dogon symbols and pieces of mythology, a veritable bricolage of odds and ends, without coherence or internal consistency. However, the book gives an account of a series of systematic revelations, each startling myth and intricate symbol tying in nicely with the great revelations of the former day, and logically leading to the revelations yet to come. Recently, in her excellent study of Dogon masks, Anne Doquet has zoomed in on one aspect I rather neglected, i.e. the conversations with Ogotemmelli themselves, and the fieldwork genesis of the first "Griaulian myths" (Doquet 1999:90-91). Analyzing Griaule's field notes in detail from microfiches, she noticed the two-fold influence Griaule had exerted on the material he collected with the old man. This period, from 20 October 1946 to 2 December 1946, marked his famous conversations. The field notes are a haphazard collection of references to Dogon symbols and pieces of mythology, a veritable bricolage of odds and ends, without coherence or internal consistency. However, the book gives an account of a series of systematic revelations, each startling myth and intricate symbol tying in nicely with the great revelations of the former day, and logically leading to the revelations yet to come. (p. 59)

Van Beek's account of how his 1991 critique of Griaule and his co-author Dieterlen was received — by Dieterlen herself — is also of interest:

*Before submitting it to the editor, I decided to give Dieterlen a chance at first reaction. She read English only with difficulty, as I knew, so I translated the article into French, sent her a copy, and made an appointment. When I arrived at her apartment in Paris, she received me as gracefully as ever. She had been expecting a publication for some time, and appreciated my effort to give her the chance at a first reaction and my effort at making a (passable) French version. She had also admired the French version of the Time-Life book (Pern/Alexander/van Beek 1982) I had sent her some time before. In that publication I had avoided the question of Griaulian validity, as a book for the general public should not be burdened with a detailed academic debate. I braced myself for a long critique, but she had just one question: "Pourquois le publier?" Only that, why publish? **She had no answer to my arguments, in fact during our two-hour conversation that followed she never ventured***

into the content of the article at all, but just pleaded not to publish it. It was, evidently, also the most difficult question to answer, and one I had been reflecting on very long. I answered, truth- fully I think, that publishing is the very soul of science, and that debate is the way to proceed in getting closer to the truth. She had no comments on that, but instead started reminiscing on the past. (pp. 62-63; emphasis mine – MSH)

Think about that. The only other person alive who could rebut van Beek's criticisms of the Dogon "knowledge" had nothing to say in rebuttal, even in private. All she wanted was for the criticisms not to be published.

How telling.

<http://michaelsheiser.com/PaleoBabble/2011/06/the-sirius-mystery-you-dont-columbo-for-this-one/>

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THE POST FROM "BAD ARCHOLOGY"

http://www.badarchaeology.com/?page_id=585

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The Sirius Mystery

In 1976, Robert K G Temple (born 1945), an American living in the UK, published what was to become a seminal work of Bad Archaeology, *The Sirius Mystery*. A revised edition was published in 1998 with the new subtitle *New scientific evidence of alien contact 5,000 years ago*. Some have gone so far as to suggest that this book was the primary inspiration for the so-called 'New Egyptology' of Graham Hancock, Robert Bauval and their imitators. Even if this is a rather hyperbolic assessment of the book's impact, it has to be said that Temple is in a class above most Bad Archaeologists: he presents an apparently secure thesis, backed up with rigorous scientific data of a type that most others in the genre eschew.

Anthropological underpinnings

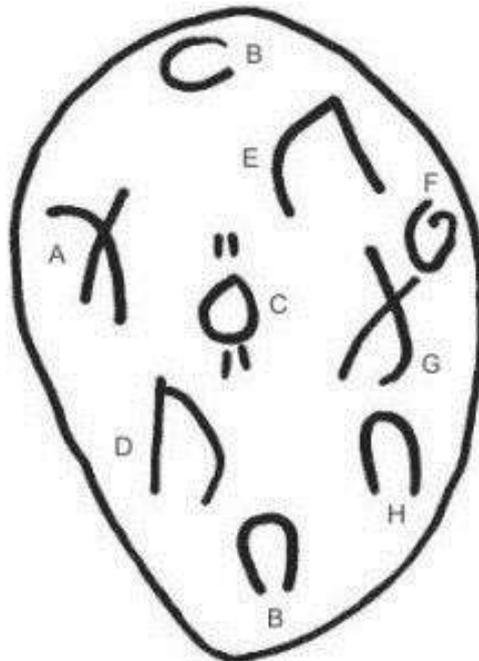


Ogotemméli, the sole source of data used in The Sirius Mystery

Temple begins with the work of [Marcel Griaule](#) (1898-1956) and his student [Germaine Dieterlen](#) (1903-1999), a pair of French anthropologists who worked in what is now Mali from 1931 to 1956. They reported an apparently anomalous knowledge of astronomy that formed part of the traditional lore of the [Dogon](#), a people of the central plateau of Mali. This knowledge is alleged to include accounts of the rings of Saturn, the existence of four moons orbiting Jupiter and, most surprisingly of all, an account of two companions of the star Sirius. Griaule first published this data in [Dieu d'eau: entretiens avec Ogotemméli](#) ('God of water: conversations with Ogotemméli', 1948), in which he records his conversations with a blind hunter, Ogotemméli, who claimed to have extensive knowledge

of Dogon lore, much of which was restricted to certain tribal elders. Griaule and Dieterlen were able to synthesise the cosmogony from Ogotemméli's statements.

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The Dogon representation of 'Sirius' as reported by Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen, drawn by Ogotemméli.

The oval represents Amma, the primordial egg and contains:

- A: Sigu tolo (identified as Sirius)
- B: Pô tolo
- C: Emma ya
- D: The Nommo
- E: The Yourougou (a mythical male, destined to pursue his female twin)
- F: The star of women, a satellite of Emma Ya
- G: The sign of women
- H: Woman's reproductive organs, represented by a uterus

Using myths

Temple needed to explain how an obscure Malian tribe might have gained such an unexpected insight into the make-up of the Sirius star system. He did this by proposing a link between the Dogon and Egyptian Bronze Age civilisation, in which Sirius played an important symbolic role, its rising at dawn announcing the onset of the all-important annual Nile flood. According to Temple, the Dogon were guardians of the oracle of Amun-Rē' at the desert oasis of Siwa and were the descendants of the Argonauts. He identifies Sirius with the god Anubis (*Anpu*), as the Greeks referred to Sirius at the Dog Star and Anubis is depicted as a jackal. Searching for an ancient origin for the Nommo, he turns

to the Babylonian writer Berossos (Greek Βήρωσος, Akkadian *Belreūšu*, fl. early third century BC), whose mostly lost *Babyloniaca* Book I describes a part-man, part-fish being that emerged from the Persian Gulf to teach humanity various arts of civilisation. This creature is thought to be the Uan (or Uanna) of Babylonian myth, sometimes identified with Adapa, the equally mythical first king of Eridu, also identified by some with Atrahasis, the hero of the Babylonian version of the flood legend.

Temple suggests that Uan was an extraterrestrial visitor who imparted civilisation to the ancient Sumerians, much as von Däniken had suggested rather earlier. However, the detailed anthropological data supplied by Temple was much stronger evidence than anything provided by von Däniken and was therefore superficially more convincing.

The system implodes

However, by the time Temple had published the second edition of *The Sirius Mystery* in 1998, the whole question of the Dogon's apparently inexplicable knowledge of Sirius had been blown apart. No-one had questioned Griaule and Dieterlen's findings until the early 1990s. And this is where the problems for the hypothesis began. In 1991, the anthropologist Walter van Beek undertook fieldwork among the Dogon, hoping to find evidence for their knowledge of Sirius. As the earlier authors had indicated that around 15% of the adult males were initiated into the Sirius lore, this ought to have been a relatively easy task. However, van Beek was unable to find anyone who knew about Sirius B. As ought to have been obvious from the outset, Griaule and Dieterlen's reliance on a single informant – Ogotemmêli – severely compromises the validity of their data.

But it gets worse. The Dogon themselves do not agree that *Sigu tolo* is Sirius: it is the bright star that appears to announce the beginning of a festival (*sigu*), which some identify with Venus, while others claim it is invisible. *To polo* is not Sirius B, as it sometimes approaches *Sigu tolo*, making it brighter, while it is sometimes more distant, when it appears as a group of twinkling stars (which sounds like a description of the Pleiades). All in all, the 'inexplicable' astronomical knowledge turns out to be too confused to bear the interpretation put on it by Griaule and Dieterlen. It is probably no coincidence that Griaule was a keen amateur astronomer and used his knowledge to rationalise an extremely confusing traditional lore that the Dogon themselves could not agree on.

Robert Temple ought to have known about van Beek's fieldwork long before the second edition of *The Sirius Mystery* was published. He also made basic mistakes in his interpretation of Egyptian, Greek and Mesopotamian mythology that undermines his account of the origins of the Dogon's supposed knowledge. The Egyptians did not identify Sirius as the Dog Star – that was a Greek idea – so it cannot be linked with Anubis. Indeed, Sirius (*Spdt* in Egyptian) was specifically identified with Isis, as the constellation known to the Greeks as Orion (the hunter whose dog was represented by Sirius) was identified by the Egyptians with Osiris, the husband of Isis.

Ultimately, *The Sirius Mystery* presents no real mystery. It uses discredited anthropological data, muddled mythological interpretation and lots of unconfirmable speculation. It has become a classic text of Bad Archaeology.

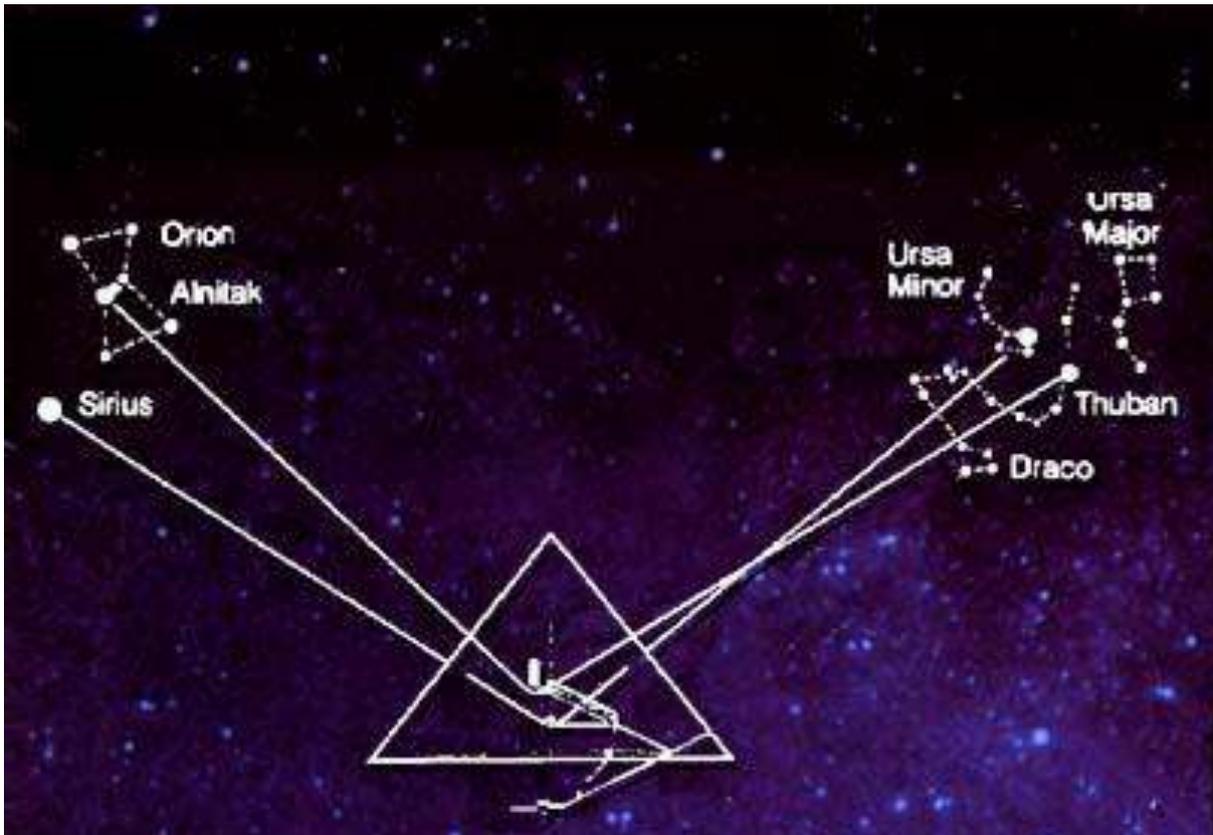
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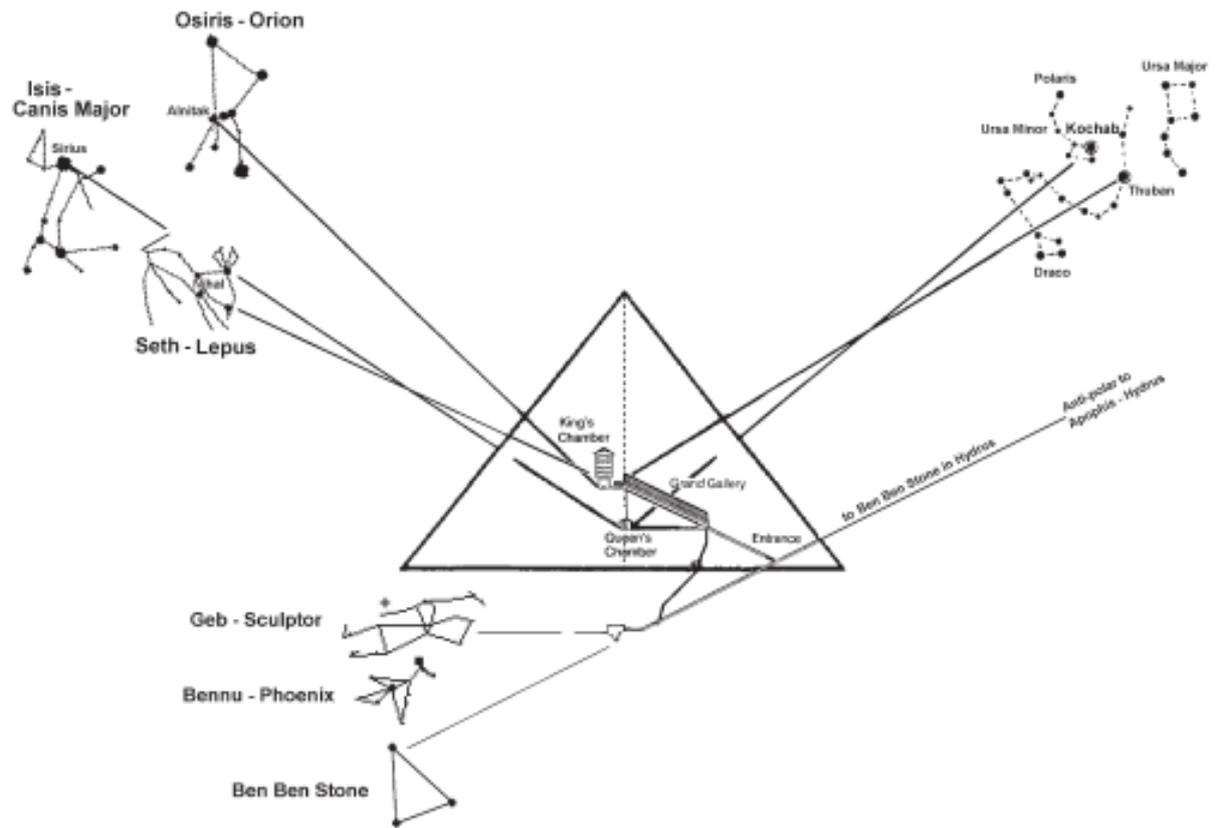
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SIRIUS AND THE GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA

Introduction

For interest, the following diagrams hypothesise the Great Pyramid of Giza and Star alignments, and the great question is: "If valid, what is the significance of the alignments?"





End

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