

The Dogon and the Sirius Star

Fact or Coincidence?

With a population of about 300,000, the Dogon are an ethnic group located mainly in the administrative districts of Bandiagara and Douentza in Mali, West Africa, and believed by some anthropologists and historians to be of Egyptian descent. Relatively unknown beyond West Africa, the Dogon are famous for their religious teachings that claim astral knowledge of the star system, Sirius, which is also linked with the Egyptian goddess Isis (Egyptians refer to Sirius as the “Dog Star”). Dating back thousands of years, this knowledge, which has largely been preserved through oral traditions, was only discovered by modern astronomers in the 19th and 20th centuries. Questions have therefore been raised as to the Dogon’s source of information.

Dogon folklore maintains that knowledge of Sirius, which is approximately 8.6 light years from the Earth, was handed down to them by amphibious beings—*Nommo* (which means “to drink”)—whom they encountered as they slowly migrated from their obscure ancestral homelands to the Bandiagara cliffs. According to the tale, the aliens came from the Sirius star system in a spaceship and appeared with human torsos and snake-like lower portions. Similar spirit entities can be found in Babylonian, Accadian, and Sumerian myths. There are Dogon artistic illustrations of the alleged spaceship and the *Nommo* whom they also refer to as “Masters of the Water,” “The Monitors,” “The Teachers or Instructors,” “Saviors,” and “Spiritual Guardians.”

The Dogon legend was first brought to popular attention by Robert K.G. Temple in his book, *The Sirius Mystery* (1977). At the center of the legend is that Sirius has a companion star that is invisible to the eye and so difficult to observe, even through a telescope. It is for this reason that no photographs of the star were taken until 1970. According to Temple, in the 1930s four Dogon priests first shared their secret belief with two French anthropologists, Marcel Griaule and Germain Dieterlen after they had spent an apprenticeship of 15 years living with the ethnic group. The Dogon priests maintained that Sirius has a companion star that is invisible to the human eye. They also explained that the star moves in a 50-year elliptical orbit around Sirius, that it is small and incredibly heavy, and that it rotates on its axis. In spite of these thought-provoking assertions, the German

anthropologists disregarded the claims of the priests, unaware, however, that since 1844 Western astronomers had suspected that Sirius has a companion star (and with this speculation referred to Sirius as “Sirius A” and the probable other as “Sirius B”).

In the 1920s it was indeed confirmed that Sirius B exists as the companion of Sirius A. Smaller than planet earth, it is a white, dense, dwarf star that burns dimly. The Dogon name for Sirius B is *Po Tolo*, which means, *smallest seed (po)* and *star (tolo)*. “Seed” in this context refers to creation, perhaps human creation. *Po Tolo* thus describes the star’s smallness, which the Dogon refer to as “the smallest thing there is,” though they also describe it as heavy and white. Astronomers and scientists were bewildered by the astronomical precision of the Dogon claim, especially since the people do not have telescopes or other scientific equipment.

The Dogon also maintain that a third star, *Emme ya—sorghum female*—exists in the Sirius system. Larger and lighter than Sirius B, this star revolves around Sirius A as well. It has not been proven to exist, though some people have called it Sirius C. When Temple first issued his book in the 1970s, there was no solid evidence of a Sirius C. In 1995, however, two French researchers, Daniel Benest and J.L. Duvent authored an article in the *Astronomy and Astrophysics* journal titled, “Is Sirius a Triple Star?” Based on observations of motions in the Sirius system, they suggested the possibility of a small third star there.

In addition to their knowledge of Sirius B, Dogon oral traditions state that for thousands of years they have also known that the Earth revolves around the Sun, Jupiter has four major moons and Saturn has rings.

While controversy persists over the Dogon source of information on Sirius, the accuracy of their assertion continues to confound scientists and astronomers.

-- Philip U. Effiong

References & Further Reading

“Dogon Nommos, Sirius Amphibious Gods.” *Biblioteca Pleyades*. N.d. Web. 25 Dec. 2008.

“Dogon Tribe – Nommo.” *Crystalinks*. N.d. Web. 1 Jan. 2009.

“Dogon Tribe.” *Fusion Anomaly*. 17 Dec. 2004. Web. 12 Jan. 2009.

Fortuna, Nick. "The Religion of the Dogon." The College of New Jersey. N.d. Web. 22 Dec. 2008.

Krystek, Lee. "The Dogon, the Nommos and Sirius B." *The Museum of Unnatural Mystery*. 1998. Web. 6 Jan. 2009.

"Sacred Sites of the Dogon, Mali." *Sacred Sites*. 1982-2013. Web. 20 Dec. 2008.

"The Dogon and the Sirius B star." *Ufopsi*. 12 Apr. 2007. Web. 15 Jan. 2009.

Copyright © 2013 Philip Effiong