

DOGON PEOPLE: AFRICA'S ANCIENT GIFTED ASTRONOMY TRIBE

Dogon people

The early histories are informed by oral traditions that differ according to **the Dogon clan** being consulted and archaeological excavation much more of which needs to be conducted.

Because of these inexact and incomplete sources, there are a number of different versions of the **Dogon's origin** myths as well as differing accounts of how they got from their ancestral homelands to the Bandiagara region. The people call themselves '**Dogon**' or '**Dogom**', but in the older literature they are most often called '**Habe**', a Fulbe word meaning '**stranger**' or '**pagan**'.

Dogon man weaving a cloth (Its believe that Dogons were originators of Kente weaving technic in ancient time.)





Dogon Kente on display

Certain theories suggest the tribe to be of ancient Egyptian descent. They next migrated to Libya, then somewhere in the regions of Guinea or Mauritania. Around 1490 AD, fleeing invaders and/or drought, they migrated to the Bandiagara cliffs of central Mali.

Carbon-14 dating techniques used on excavated remains found in the cliffs indicate that there were inhabitants in the region before the arrival of **the Dogon**. They were **the Toloy culture** of the 3rd to 2nd centuries BC, and **the Tellem culture** of the 11th to 15th centuries AD.

Dogon people pounding grains

The religious beliefs of **the Dogon** are enormously complex and knowledge of them varies greatly within Dogon society. **Dogon religion** is defined primarily through the worship of the ancestors and the spirits whom they encountered as they slowly migrated from their obscure ancestral homelands to the Bandiagara cliffs.

There are three principal cults among the Dogon;



- *Awa*
- *Lebe*
- *Binu*

- **The Awa** is a cult of the dead, whose purpose is to reorder the spiritual forces disturbed by the death of **Nommo**, a mythological ancestor of great importance to **the Dogon**.

*Members of the **Awa cult** dance with ornate carved and painted masks during both funeral and death anniversary ceremonies. There are 78 different types of ritual masks among **the Dogon** and their iconographic messages go beyond the aesthetic, into the realm of religion and philosophy.*



*The primary purpose of **Awa dance** ceremonies is to lead souls of the deceased to their final resting*

| *place in the family altars and to consecrate their passage to the ranks of the ancestors.*

- **The cult of Lebe**, the Earth God, is primarily concerned with the agricultural cycle and its chief priest is called a **Hogon**.

All Dogon villages have a **Lebe shrine** whose altars have bits of earth incorporated into them to encourage the continued fertility of the land.

According to **Dogon beliefs**, the **god Lebe** visits the hogons every night in the form of a serpent and licks their skins in order to purify them and infuse them with life force.

The hogons are responsible for guarding the purity of the soil and therefore officiate at many agricultural ceremonies.



Nowadays, the **Dogon blacksmiths** forge mainly scrap metal recuperated from old railway lines or car wrecks. So, little by little, the long process of iron ore reduction, which demands a perfect knowledge of fire and its temperatures, has been abandoned.

One of the last smelting was done in Mali, in 1995, by the **Dogon blacksmiths**. The event became the subject of a film which was entitled 'Inagina, The Last House of Iron'. Eleven blacksmiths, **who still hold the secrets of this ancestral activity**, agreed to perform a last smelt. They gathered to invoke the spirits.

They sunk a mine shaft, made charcoal, and built a furnace with earth and lumps of slag. The last furnace - **or Inagina** - meaning literally the **'house of iron'** gave birth to **69 kilos of iron of excellent quality**.



With this, the blacksmiths forged traditional tools intended for agriculture, the making of weapons, and jewelry for the **Dogon people**.

Youdiou Dances - During the Dama celebration, Youdiou villagers circle around two stilt dancers. The dance and costumes imitate the tingetange, a long-legged water bird. The dancers execute difficult steps while teetering high above the crowd.

- **The cult of Binu** is a totemic practice and it has complex associations with the **Dogon's** sacred places used for ancestor worship, spirit communication and agricultural sacrifices. **Marcel Griaule** and his colleagues came to believe that all the major **Dogon sacred sites** were related to episodes in the **Dogon myth of the creation of the world**, in particular to a deity named **Nommo**.

Binu shrines house spirits of mythic ancestors who lived in the legendary era before the appearance of death among mankind. **Binu spirits** often make themselves known to their descendants in the form of an animal that interceded on behalf of the clan during its founding or migration, thus becoming the clan's totem.

The priests of each **Binu** maintain the sanctuaries whose facades are often painted with graphic signs and mystic symbols. Sacrifices of blood and millet porridge the primary crop of **the Dogon** are made at the **Binu shrines** at sowing time and whenever the intercession of the immortal ancestor is desired.

Through such rituals, **the Dogon** believe that the benevolent force of the ancestor is transmitted to them.

Kananga masks form geometric patterns and represent the first human beings. **The Dogon** believe that the **Dama dance** creates a bridge into the supernatural world. Without the **Dama dance**, the dead cannot cross over into peace.

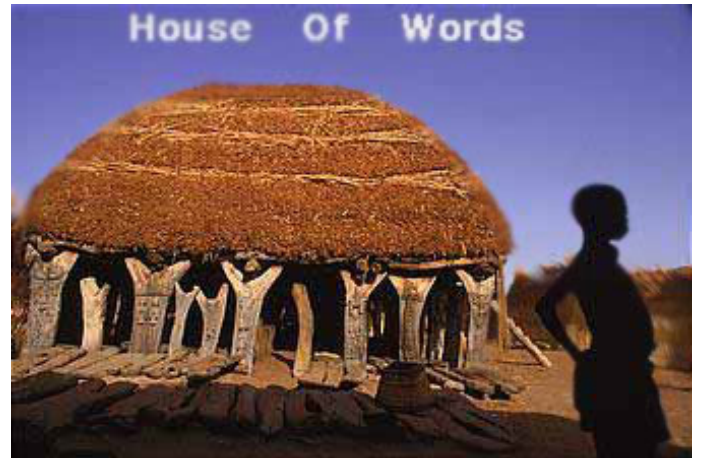


Their self-defense comes from their social solidarity which is based on a complex combination of **philosophic and religious dogmas**, the fundamental law being the worship of ancestors. Ritual masks and corpses are used for ceremonies and are kept in caves. **The Dogons** are both Muslims and Animists.

A **'Togu Na' - 'House of Words'** - stands in **every Dogon village** and marks the male social center. The low ceiling, supported by carved or sculptured posts, prevents over zealous discussions from escalating into fights. Symbolic meaning surrounds the **Togu Na**.

On the Gondo Plain, Togu Na pillars are carved out of Kile wood and often express themes of fertility and procreation. Many of the carvings are of women's breasts, for as a Dogon proverb says, "The breast is second only to God."

Unfortunately, collectors have stolen some of the more intricately carved pillars, forcing village elders to deface their **Togu Na posts** by chopping off part of the sculpted wood. This mutilation of the sculpted pillars assures their safety.



Amaguime

Dolu, a diviner in the village of

Bongo, performs a ritual. He derives meaning and makes predictions from grids and symbols in the sand. At dusk, he draws a questions in the sand for the sacred fox to answer. The **Dogon people** believe the fox has supernatural powers.

The Dogon may ask questions such as: "Does the man I love also love me?" or "Should I take the job offer at the mission church?"

In the morning, the diviner will read the fox prints on the sand and make interpretations. The fox is sure to come because offerings of millet, milk and peanuts are made to this sacred animal.

TOP



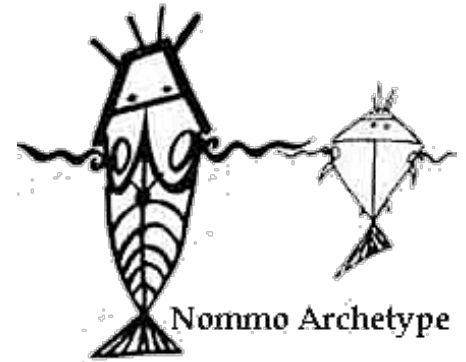
According to **Dogon mythology**, **Nommo** was the first living being created **by Amma**, the sky god and creator of the universe.

Nommo was the first living being created



He soon multiplied to become six pairs of twins. [This is a metaphor for our original 12-strand DNA. Our present physical DNA contains 2 strands which hold the genetic codes for our physical evolvement.]

One twin rebelled against the order established **by Amma**, [This is a metaphor for one source/soul splitting into two polarities - yin /yang, when it enters into the electro-magnetic energies of third dimension] thereby destabilizing the universe. In order to purify the cosmos and restore its order, **Amma** sacrificed another of **the Nommo**, whose body was cut up and scattered throughout the universe. This distribution of the parts of the **Nommo's body** is seen as the source for the proliferation of **Binu shrines** throughout the **Dogon region**.



The **Dogon** say that their astronomical knowledge was given to them by **the Nommo**. The Dogon elder, **Ogotemelli**, describes them variously as having the upper part as a man and the **lower portion as snake**; or as having a ram's head with serpent body.

Author **Robert Temple** describes **the Nommo** as amphibious beings sent to Earth from the **Sirius** star system for the benefit of humankind. They look like **Merfolk; Mermaids and Mermen**. [Metaphor: amphibius - referring to the flow of the collective unconscious - creational source].

After the **landing in a space ship**, something with four legs appeared and dragged the vessel to a hollow, which filled with water until the vessel floated in it. **The Dogon**, call this **spaceship 'Pelu Tolo'** or '**Star of the Tenth Moon**'.



These aliens supposedly came from **the Sirian star system**. Their spaceship spiraled down from the sky. It landed somewhere to the northeast of the **Dogon's present homeland**.

There was a great noise and wind. The ship landed on three legs, skidded to a stop, scoring the ground. Four legs appeared and dragged the vessel to a hollow, which filled with water until the vessel floated.

At the same time a new star was seen in the sky, which possibly was a large space ship. The star was described by **the Dogon** as having a circle of reddish rays around it. This circle of rays was like a spreading spot yet it still remaining the same size.

There is a **Dogon drawing of the spaceship hovering in the sky**, waiting for **the Nommo** who landed on the Earth. It represents three stages of '**Pelu Tolo**' when it is spurting different amounts of blood or flames [as if it crash landed].

They called **the Nommo 'Masters of the Water'**, 'The Monitors', 'The Teachers or Instructors', 'Saviors', and 'Spiritual Guardians'.

The Dogons believe their gods are already here.

TOP

by Ellie



The **Dogons** have a unique distinction.

Supposedly when they left Egypt and migrated to Mali where they brought with them sacred knowledge in the form of oral traditions - perhaps handed down by the ancient priests of Egypt. There are oral tradition about interaction with **Amphibious Gods** who came to Earth from the **star Sirius (now called Sirius A)**.

The 'Dog'on Tribe and the Dog Star Mystery



Dogon man, holding a sacred stick and artistic carvings.

Dogon astronomical lore goes back at least 5000 years. This knowledge most likely dates back to the time of the

ancient Egyptian priests - who stored their knowledge as their civilization was destroyed. This knowledge was too be part of our collective unconsciousness - to be remembered - to be brought to the public - when it was time for humanity to make great changes. These changes are reflected in all ancient prophecies. The information is about creation by Geometry - Mathematical patterns or formulas. We sense change in our thinking and our souls. We dream unusual dreams about changes and look for Magic in our lives, movies, books, TV shows. We experience beyond third dimension.

The souls of children, teens and young adults are often called **Indigo Children - Children of the Blue Ray** sense this. They are telekinetic sometimes moving objects - or bending objects with their minds.

Dogon tribe children

This collective unconscious is **a program of grids**. The **Dogon draw grids**. They understand the nature of our reality, based on an electromagnetic grid program that stores memory - **The Matrix is the grids**.



Following the pattern of the grids..... **Dogon legend** came with them from Egypt based on the ancient religions and the mystery school teachings of Isis and Osiris. It all begins in the area that was **Sumer** - The Cradle of Civilization - but in truth the area that surround the **Great Pyramid**. The Egyptian Goddess **Isis** is identified by the Egyptians with

the **star Sirius**. The **Dogons knew about Sirius** long before modern man discovered the star system. Their religious tradition, dating back to their Egyptian roots, was later imparted through Greek migratory patterns. The name **Sirius** was given by the ancient Greeks.

Planet Earth has many metaphors, archetypes and symbols that help us understand the nature of our creation. To this end we study the heavens and celestial blueprints and the physical planet, to unravel secrets buried until it was time.....

In the late 1930s, **four Dogon priests** shared their most important secret tradition with two French anthropologists, **Marcel Griaule** and **Germain Dieterlen** after they had spent an **apprenticeship of fifteen years living with the tribe**.

These were secret myths about the **star Sirius**, which is 8.6 light years from the Earth.

The priests said that **Sirius** had a companion star that was invisible to the human eye. They also stated that:

- *the star moved in a 50-year elliptical orbit around Sirius,*
- *that it was small and incredibly heavy,*
- *and that it rotated on its axis.*

Initially the anthropologists wrote it off publishing the information in an obscure anthropological journal, because they didn't appreciate the **astronomical importance** of the information.

What they didn't know was that since 1844, astronomers had suspected that **Sirius A** had a companion star. This was in part determined when it was observed that the path of the star wobbled. In 1862 **Alvan Clark** discovered the second star making **Sirius a binary star system** (two stars).

In the 1920's it was determined that **Sirius B**, the companion of Sirius, was a white dwarf star. White dwarfs are small, dense stars that burn dimly. The pull of its gravity causes Sirius' wavy movement. **Sirius B** is smaller than planet Earth.

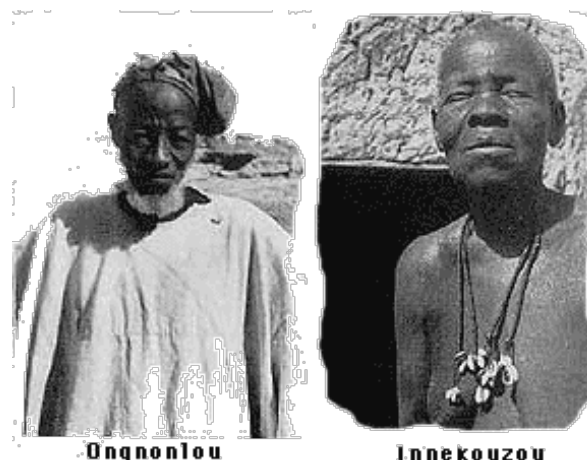
The **Dogon name for Sirius B is Po Tolo**. It means star - tolo and smallest seed - po. Seed refers to creation. In this case - **human creation**. By this name they describe the star's smallness. It is, they say, the smallest thing there is. They also claim that it is the heaviest star and is white in color. The Dogon thus attribute to **Sirius B** its three principal properties as a **white dwarf**: small, heavy, white.

The earliest Egyptians believed **Sirius - 'Sothis'** - was the home of souls that have crossed over. This belief is also shared with **the Dogon**.

Creation is linked to **the Great Pyramid** which links to **Orion** in the **Kings Chamber (male)** and to **Sirius** in the **Queens Chamber (female)**, **Isis**.

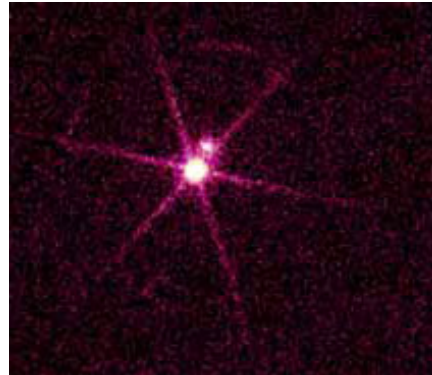
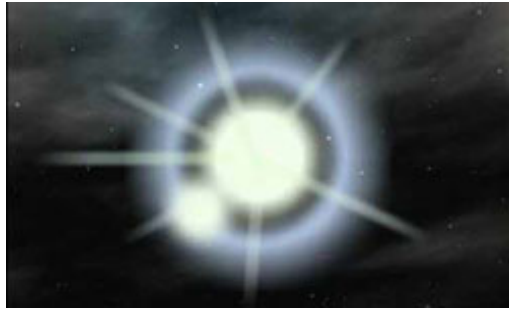


Not far from **the Pleiades**, The Seven Sisters, the sky is like a big giant map of messages, a blueprint, if you will, of creational patterns. Ancient civilizations named the planets and created myths about them, all linked to the heavens



and gods who created humans and came to Earth from the sky.

Isis and Osiris, Zeus and Hera, **Amma** and his female counterpart. He had to have one as this matrix and grid is all based on opposites - polarities - like a magnetic (north and south).



The Star of Isis is called Sothis, or Sirius and is the brightest star in our night sky. **The Dogon** also describe this 'star' specifically as having a circle of reddish rays around it, and this circle of rays is 'like a spot spreading' but remaining the same size.

The **Dogons** have described perfectly the **DNA pattern** made by this elliptical orbit created by the two stars as they rotate make around each other. They believe **Sirius** to be the axis of the universe, and from it all matter and all souls are produced in a great spiral motion.

The **Dogon** also claimed 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**.



Sirius C translated from the **Dogon language** into English is called the "**Sun of Women**". It is described by **the Dogon** as "**the seat of the female souls of living or future beings**". Its symbol contains two pair of lines that are relevant features of a **Dogon legend**. The Dogon believe that **Sirius C** sends out two pairs of beams and that the beams represent a feminine figure.

Some of the ancient **Egyptian temples**, such as the **Temple of Isis at Denderah**, were created so that the light of the helical rising of Sirius would travel down the main corridor to place its red glow upon the altar in the inner sanctum of the temple. When that light reached the altar, the beam of light from Sirius was transformed into **Sothis**, the Star Goddess, Isis.

In a manner of speaking, the same belief system was involved in the **Greek Temples**, such as the Parthenon, which were oriented to receive the beams of light from **the Pleiades** into their inner sanctums, where the beams were then transformed into seven women. As the beams from **the Pleiades** entered the **Egyptian temple of Hathor** it became the seven Hathors female judges of mankind.

Within



the **Dogon tradition**, those pairs of feminine figures beamed down from the Star/Sun/Planet of Women to their original home near the **Hoggar mountains** bringing many aspects of civilization to the ancestors of their tribes.

Dogon oral traditions state that for thousands of years they have known that the Earth revolves around the Sun, that Jupiter's has moons and that Saturn's has rings.

The **Dogons calendar** is quite non-traditional in that its fifty year cycle is based neither on the Earth's rotation around the Sun (as is our Julian calendar) nor the cycles of the Moon (a lunar calendar). Instead, the **Dogon culture** centers around the rotation **cycle Sirius B** which encircles the primary star **Sirius A** every 49.9 - or 50 years.

Dogon Creational Myths



An old man of Dogon Tribe

The Dogon people are an indigenous tribe who occupy a region in Mali, south of the Sahara Desert in Africa. There are about 100,000 members in the tribe.

They are a reclusive tribe of cave and hillside-dwelling farming people inhabiting a sparse, rocky plateau in southeastern Mali, West Africa. They live in the Homburi Mountains near Timbuktu.

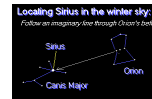


Isolated topographically and culturally from the outside world for countless centuries, they may well appear on first sight to be exceedingly unlikely receptacles of highly advanced astronomical knowledge which only goes to show just how easily we can be deceived by outward appearances.

They are believed to be of Egyptian descent. After living in Libya for a time, they settled in Mali, West Africa, bringing with them astronomy legends dating from before 3200 BC. The first Western scientists to visit and study **the Dogon** people were French anthropologists **Drs Marcel Griaule** and **Germaine Dieterlen**, who initially made contact with them in 1931, and continued to research them for the next three decades, culminating in a detailed study conducted between 1946-1950. During their work, these anthropologists documented the traditional mythology and sacred beliefs of the Dogon, which included an extraordinary body of ancient lore regarding **Sirius** the brilliant, far-distant Dog Star.

Their priests told them of a secret Dogon myth about the star Sirius (8.6 light years from the Earth). The priests said that Sirius had a companion star that was invisible to the human eye. They also stated that the star moved in a 50-year elliptical orbit around Sirius, that it was small and incredibly heavy, and that it rotated on its axis.

Sirius - which we now call **Sirius A** - was not seen through a telescope until 1862 and was not photographed until 1970.



The Dogon name for **Sirius B** (*Po Tolo*) consists of the word for star (*tolo*) and "*po*," the name of the smallest seed known to them. By this name they describe the star's smallness -- it is, they say, "the smallest thing there is." They also claim that it is "the heaviest star," and white.

The tribe claims that *Po* is composed of a mysterious, super-dense metal called *sagala* which, they declare, is heavier than all the iron on Earth. Not until 1926 did Western science discover that this tiny star is a white dwarf a category of star characterized by very great density. In the case of **Sirius B**, astronomers have estimated that a single cubic metre of its matter weighs about 20,000 tons.



Many artifacts were found describing the star system, including a statue examined by **Dieterlen** that is at least 400 years old.

They go on to say that it has an elliptical orbit, with **Sirius A** at one foci of the ellipse (as it is), that the orbital period is 50 years (the actual figure is 50.04 +/- 0.09 years), and that the star rotates on its own axis (it does).

The **Dogon** also describe a third star in the Sirius system, called "*Emme Ya*" ("Sorghum Female"). In orbit around this star, they say, is a single satellite. To date, *Emme Ya* has not been identified by astronomers.

In addition to their knowledge of **Sirius B**, the Dogon mythology includes Saturn's rings, and Jupiter's four major moons. They have four calendars, for the Sun, Moon, Sirius, and Venus, and have long known that planets orbit the sun.

The Dogon say their astronomical knowledge was given to them by **the Nommos**, amphibious beings sent to Earth from Sirius for the benefit of mankind. The name comes from a **Dogon** word meaning 'to make one drink', and **the Nommos** are also called '*Masters of the Water*', the '*Monitors*', and the '*Teachers*'.

Nommos

The Dogon tells the legend of **the Nommos**, awful-looking beings who arrived in a vessel along with fire and thunder. After they arrived here - they put out a reservoir of water onto the Earth then dove into the water.



Watching the Nommo arrive

There are references in the oral traditions, drawings and cuneiform tablets of **the Dogons**, to human looking beings who have feet but who are portrayed as having a large fish skin running down their bodies.

The Nommos were more fishlike than human, and had to live in water. They were saviors and spiritual guardians: "The Nommo divided his body among men to feed them; that is why it is also said that as the universe "had drunk of his body," **the Nommo** also made men drink. He gave all his life principles to human beings."

The Nommo was crucified and resurrected and in the future will again visit the Earth, this time in human form. Later he will assume his amphibious form and will rule the world from the waters.

Dogon mythology is known only by a number of their priests, and is a complex system of knowledge. Such carefully guarded secrets would not be divulged to friendly strangers very easily. If the star *Emme Ya* is eventually discovered in the Sirius system, this would give considerably weight to **the Dogon's story**.

The Nommos, who could live on land but dwelled mostly in the sea, were part fish, like *merfolk* (mermaids and mermen). Similar creatures have been noted in other ancient civilizations - Sumer, Babylonia's **Oannes**, Acadia's **Ea**, Sumer's **Enki**, and Egypt's goddess **Isis**. It was from **the Nommos** that the Dogon

claimed their knowledge of the heavens. The Dogon also claimed that **a third star (Emme Ya)** existed in the Sirius system. Larger and lighter than Sirius B, this star revolved around Sirius as well. And around it orbited a planet from which the **Nommos** came. (**Sirius A**).



Beautiful Dogon girl enjoying her meal

The Sirius Mystery

According to **Robert Temple's** Book *The Sirius Mystery*, **the Dogon**, a tribe of about 100,000 in western Africa, have had contact with extraterrestrials. 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 know 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. There are a number of other astronomical beliefs held by **the Dogon** which are curious; e.g., traditional belief in a heliocentric system and elliptical orbits of astronomical phenomena; knowledge of satellites of Jupiter and rings of Saturn, among other things. Where did they get this knowledge, if not from extraterrestrial visitors? They don't have telescopes or other scientific equipment, so how could they get this knowledge?

Dogon Planet

Carl Sagan concludes that *the Dogon* could not have acquired their knowledge without contact with an advanced technological civilization. He suggests, however, that this civilization was terrestrial rather than extraterrestrial. 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. As **Sagan** notes, if a European had visited the Dogon in the 1920s and 1930s, conversation would likely have turned to astronomical matters, including *Sirius*, the brightest star in the sky and the centre 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 beyond their understanding brought to them by visitors from other parts of Earth and transmitted in conversation. (**Sagan** notes that some of the discussion of the day involved the nature of white dwarfs, for example. *Sirius B* is a white dwarf, an extremely dense star, e.g., about a ton to the cubic inch.)

Chronologically, the earliest of these amphibious entities would appear to be *the Babylonian fish-people*. They were known to the Babylonians as *the Annedoti*, which translates as 'repulsive', but notwithstanding their unappealing appearance they were sufficiently influential for the Babylonians to accept their teachings and acquire from them the fundamental tenets of civilization. The most *august member of the Annedoti was Oannes*, portrayed in ancient Babylonian depictions as a curious, complex hybrid of human and fish, with a bearded man's head beneath the head of a fish, and the body of a fish borne upon the back of a man's body.

According to Babylonian legends, this aquatic deity would come on land during the day to teach the people, and would dive back at night into the Persian Gulf, where he lived in an underwater palace called the *Apsu*. Was *Oannes* the original *Nommo*?

Equivalent to *Oannes* in the religion of the *Philistines* at Philistia (in what is now Israel) was a human-bodied, fish-tailed deity called *Dagon*. Further to the west, Pharos in northern Egypt was said to be the home of 'the Old Man of the Sea' a shape-shifting amphibious deity known as *Proteus*, son of Oceanus and renowned among the ancient Greeks as an oracle. Significantly, their traditional legends specifically claimed that he often sheltered in a cave to avoid the *heat of Sirius*.





source:http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/esp_dogon03.htm



Dogon country lies to the south of the river Niger not far from Mopti and Djenne. The region is composed of three zones : the plateau, the cliffs and the lower plains. The plateau rises like an immense fortress to a height of approximately 300 metres above surrounding plains. It is delimited by the Bandiagara escarpment, a cliff of more than 200 km long, which runs from southwest to northeast. The plains of the Seno-Gondo lie to the southeast.



Dogon Tribe girl from Mali

Successive waves of migrants populated the area. Over the ages peoples from different horizons had to share, not without harm, a same territory. Today the originality of Dogon country resides in its ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. A homogeneous Dogon society does not exist.

Like so many other farming societies, the Dogon have no centralized power structure. Political and religious authority very much belong to the village elders. Each region has its own traditions. Variants in belief, myth and history abound.



Dogon farmer

The face of the cliff is strewn with open caves. Overhanging rocks prevent the rain from entering. The predecessors of the Dogon sought protection from the elements in these natural shelters. They built cylindrical constructions made of earth which were used, among others, as granaries and graveyards. In the Sixties & Seventies, a team of Dutch archaeologists carried out excavations in the cliff area and brought to the world's attention the existence of two distinct cultures :

The Tolo culture : A large open cave overlooking the Tule valley, near to Sangha, contains a series of ancient constructions. Carbon-14 testing techniques show that these buildings date back to the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. The Tolo" left no other traces of their passing.





However, further archaeological investigations brought to light the richness of the Tellem culture. The Tellem reached the Bandiagara escarpment by the 11th century. Skeletal remains and a great many objects could be identified : clothing, household goods, glass jewellery, earthenware, wooden headrests, etc. Their houses were most probably built on the rocky slopes at the base of the cliff. The heavy seasonal rains erased any traces.



The Dogon reached the cliffs by the 14th century and thus shared with the Tellem the same territory for some two hundred years. According to oral tradition, the Tellem moved south-eastwards and were supposedly absorbed by the Kurumba of today's Burkina Faso.

However, anthropometric research held by the Dutch archaeologists in the Sangha region demonstrated that Tellem and Kurumba are dissimilar. These studies are not representative of the whole cliff population. Chased away from their homeland, residual groups of people must have set off across the plains where, as an ethnic minority, they merged into a wider network of local populations and communities.



Today, the people of the Seno-Gondo plain who wear the name "Ganame" say they descend from the Tellem. They live in Koro, Arbinde, Kayn and Yoro (Seno-Gondo's border zone with North Yatenga). Patronymic names often refer to mythico-historical events.

According to Youssouf Tata Cissé (Malian ethnologist) "Ganame" is a deformation of "Ganama" which means "people from Ghana/Wagadu". Could it be that the arrival of the Tellem in the cliff area is somehow linked to the various waves of Soninke migrants who descended from the North after the collapse of the Ghana empire in the 11th century? The origin of the Tellem remains obscure but the many artefacts they left behind (textiles in particular) are material proof of a rich culture. It has not yet been possible to determine whether Tellem textiles were imported or locally woven. Till today archaeological remnants of weaving equipment have not been found. Whatever the case is, the wearing of clothing that is woven using highly refined techniques is typical for a society that has not only a rural but also, to some degree, a merchant economy.



Dogon kids

The Dogon also mention the Nongo as a people who were contemporaries of the Tellem. They are credited as the sculptors of a particular statuary style. Unfortunately no findings were made within an archeological context. No matter how difficult it may be to separate myth from reality, the Dogon say that descendants of the Nongo live in the SenoGondo plain at Bay. According to H el ene Leloup the Nongo may be linked to the Samo of the Yatenga province in Burkina Faso.

The actual occupants of the Bandiagara escarpment reached their new homeland by the end of the 14th century.



Dogon Market

The Dogon are divided into four tribes : the Dyon, Arou, Ono and Domno. According to oral tradition they joined the cliff area near the village of Kani Bonzon. From there, they spread over the plateau, the escarpment and the plains of the Seno-Gondo. Each tribe followed a different itinerary (detailed description of the dispersion of the four tribes in " Les âmes des Dogons" - G.Dieterlen - 1941). Historical reality seems more complex.

Dogon immigration from the Mande probably occurred in successive waves over a time span of several centuries. To the south of the Seno-Gondo plain lies the Yatenga province. This vast territory is scattered with traces of settlements dating back to a period covering the 10th/15th centuries : ancient water wells, funerary jars, pottery fragments and slag heaps stemming from an old and intense metallurgical extraction activity.

Today, the Mossi and Kurumba ascribe these remnants to the Dogon (Kibse in Moore/language of the Mossi). To what do these Kibse correspond? Were they part of the first immigrants from the Mande who settled down in today's Yatenga ? Or are they an autochthonous population who merged with the newly arrived Dogon? Whatever the case is, by the 14th/15th century the Kibse/Dogon left their Yatenga homeland and linked up with other Dogon groups already established up north near to the cliff area. The Mossi and Kurumba took over their territory.



The encounter of the Dogon-Mande with their new neighbours and predecessors brought about a considerable blending of cultures. This is well illustrated by the stylistic diversity of Dogon architecture and sculpture. Long before their arrival from the Mande, the West of the plateau witnessed the birth of Djennenke/Soninke style sculptures. From the 15th century onwards stylistic extensions appeared in the N'duleri and Bondum regions. Whereas on the other side of the plateau Tellem statuary came into being. All these styles are incorporated into Dogon art. On the other hand, masks are of Voltaïc influence. Various Dogon and Mossi masks share stylistic similarities. Their lengthy stay in the Yatenga also explains why the Dogon speak Voltaïc related languages.



Dogon Fetish house

As regards architecture, it reflects a variety of geographical zones, the constraints that these zones impose and the diversity of the people who live there.

The Pignari : The plateau gently slopes down to the flood plains of the Niger river. The region is scattered with detached tabular hills.

After the collapse of the Ghana empire in the 11th century (today's Mauritania), migrants from the north occupied new regions in the vicinity of Djenna. Their arrival more or less coincided with the installation of the Tellem in the cliff area.

Niongono : Its founding dates back to the 12th century. Its inhabitants speak AmpariKora, a speech variety initially spoken by the Degoga clan, an old people who preceded the Dogon of the Karambe clan (Statuaire Dogon - Hélène Leloup - page 104). The village was erected on a horseshoe-shaped hill. Isolated on its rocky peak, the village is a true fortress. Its location and defensive conception allowed the village to survive the assaults of the Mossi, Peul and Songhai invaders through the ages.

Crammed together, the buildings on top of the hill are two or three storeyed and are all cylindrical in shape. There is no space for inner courtyards and granaries are integrated into the houses. The roofs are flat and, as so often in Dogon country, are used for drying and storing various food items. The base of these buildings are made of stone so as to diminish damages caused by heavy rainfall. Today islam is the predominant religion in the Pignari.



The Lowel-Gueou : Since Middle Ages, succeeding kingdoms extended their area of domination along the shores of the Niger. There were times of peace and unrest. The inhabitants of the Lowel-Gueou, N'Duleri and Bondum regions were joined by newcomers, who came in successive waves, seeking refuge in the cliffs and on the plateau.



Dogon Huts for storing grains

Kargue : The villagers are of Djennenke descent ("those of Djenne" in Songhay). This term covers various groups of people from the Inner Niger Delta who live within the Djenne sphere of influence. They are muslim and speak a Bozo dialect called Janna-Ma. They are ethnically related to the Saman of the Waduba region. The mosque is built on top of a rocky slope and the village is spread out below.



Dogon boy using calabash pot to water a farm, Mali

Dani Sare : Just like Kargue, the inhabitants are of Djennenke descent. The village is built on a large rocky hill. Its location must have been chosen for its defensive qualities. Its architectural style is marked by austere and rectangular buildings. The mosque stands in the center of the village.



Young boy of Dogon tribe with an awesome haircut,Mali

Bounou : The villagers say they are Dogon. However, their origins remain obscure. They are not historically tied to the Dogon of the Bandiagara cliffs. They settled down in the area before their neighbours of Djennenke descent. They speak Bangi-Me. Linguists consider it to be a language isolate with no known relatives. Bounou's architectural style is totally different from that of Kargue and Dani Sare. The village is made of two-storied buildings that look like enormous cubes with rounded off contours. The availability of palm wood made it possible to build in such a manner. The roofs are used for the usual household tasks.



Bara : Its inhabitants are related to those of Bounou. It seems Bara means "we will never leave". The escarpment above the village contains ancient granaries. These constructions were already in place before the founding of Bara. Nobody seems to know who built them. Further archaeological research may eventually date these structures.

The Bondum : The region is inhabited by descendants of the Tombo, an old warlike people. A 16th century manuscript from Timbuktu mentions the "Tombola, name of one of the many tribes who profess a pagan cult" ("Statuaire Dogon - page 32" - Hélène Leloup). They arrived in the area well ahead of the Dogon-Mande, Fulani and other river-related cultural groups. It is only from the 15th-16th century onwards that these newcomers will gain in influence.

Borko : The village is located at the far end of a closed valley. To get there one has to cross vegetable gardens that stretch out as far as the eyes can reach. Water supply is guaranteed by local springs. Caimans have made it their habitat. They are sacred to the villagers. It is their totem (ba-binu). One day a foreigner who happened to be a Bozo killed a caiman. His life was spared because of the existing Joking relationship (Mangu) between the Dogon and Bozo people. It shows how the inhabitants of Borko (Kassambara clan of Bamana descent) and the Dogon from the Bandiagara cliffs, though different in origin, share similar beliefs. The observance of the Mangu and the belonging to a totemic clan (the caiman) is a clear manifestation of a common cultural identity. As regards the Mangu, hereunder the definition as given by Denise Paulme in Organisation Sociale des Dogon (page 277) : "a pact concluded between two regions, two villages, two families, two castes. It is a service rendered by one collectivity to another collectivity, that it will have saved from a great danger or of which it will have spared a member guilty of a grave fault."

The architectural style, however, seems close to that of the neighbouring plains to the north. The villagers remember the times when, under the reign of Askia Mohamed (ruler of the Songhai Empire - 15th century), a Songhai

representative visited the village. Today the house, though not in use, that was allocated to him is still there. It is said that he left behind some personal belongings.



Dogon Cliff Houses

Tintam : The village lies on the plateau in an area difficult of access. Its isolation and nearly impregnable location may explain why its inhabitants remained animist. However, with time passing, the village architecture and its statuary art were deeply influenced by Djennenke, Songhay and Dogon culture. The past intense metallurgical activity of Tintam is evidenced by huge slag heaps and fragments of old furnaces that can still be seen today on the outskirts of the village (see photo below). These are the remnants of an old flourishing industry : iron was probably used for the manufacturing of arms and agricultural implements. There was no lack in commercial outlets on the plateau and in the neighbouring plains.



Dogon grain storage houses with an artistic architectural styles

Samari : As so many villages on the plateau, Samari took refuge on a rocky hill. A characteristic of the region are the many buildings that have a doorway placed in a niche.

In "L'architecture Dogon", W.Lauber sees similarities between these entrances and the traditional Mauritanian front porch. The outside walls of the houses at the periphery of the village look as if being fortified against enemy attacks. The North Central plateau suffered a lot at the hands of the Fulani. Their installation at Dè on the plateau dates back to the 15th century. They were a constant threat to the region.

In Saoura kourou ancestral traditions and Islam seem to complement one another. The youngsters of the village follow their religious education at the coranic school and at the same time, old traditions and seasonal rituals are not being neglected. The Odompilou feast is held in the dry season. The dancing starts towards sunset and stops late at night.

For many hours the villagers dance to the beat of huge drums. Many male dancers wear women's clothing such as scarfs and amber necklaces. This disguise symbolizes one of the most common themes in Dogon rituals : fecundity and renewal of the land and, by extension, of the Dogon people.



. The old village of Saoura koum no longer exists. Its site is situated close to the actual village. Well aligned stones on the ground show the contours where buildings used to be. Parts of old defense walls with embrasures are still in place. The inhabitants of the new village explain that their ancestors had to defend themselves against bands of Fulani horsemen.

The Arou and Dyon tribes live in the Sangha area. No matter what their tribal origin is, they both wear the surname Dolo. Family names often evoke the circumstances of the installation of the first migrants. The name Dolo refers to water holes discovered by a hunter's dog in the vicinity of today's Sangha.



Dogon girl in Sangha village, Mali

The Dyon settled there first. In "Les Devises des Dogon", S. de Ganay explains the meaning of Dogon names (Tige). Each tribe, region, village and village quarter has a name that refers to a mythic or historic event. These names inform us on itineraries taken and describe the circumstances of the migrants' arrival in their new habitat. In the same way, an individual's first name refers to events surrounding his/her birth.



Male and Female Granaries. Dogon granaries come in two types, male and female. Male granaries (on the left) are used for storing grains such as millet. It is the man's job to distribute the millet to be used in that day's cooking. Male granaries are usually a bit larger and, unlike female granaries, have more than one door for access. The female granary is used for storing other foods, jewelry, clothing, pottery and other personal belongings. Apparently men are NOT allowed to ever enter a female granary. Songho, Mali

The Sangha agglomeration consists of 13 villages. Some like Diamini-Na and Sangui are set back from the cliff on the plateau and others like Bongo and Gogoli stretch out up to the edge of the escarpment. The village of Sangha itself is divided in two parts separated by the "field of the Hogon" : Ogol-Da and Ogol-Ley.



gogoli bongo ogol da

Each family house is composed of a central courtyard surrounded by several buildings and granaries. Many of these houses have an entrance hall; a place where the elderly who no longer leave home like to spend their day. It is a good place to stay in contact with the other villagers. The edges of the roof terraces are protected with low walls. The roofs are used for drying and storing various food items. Houses, roofs and outside walls are uniformly plastered. The whole looks like some abstract composition made of forms with smooth angles and contours.

The geographical zone of the better known cliff architecture extends from Kani Kombole to Damasongo. The cliff stands more than 300 metres high. The upper part of the cliff is scattered with open cave sites. Its base is a slope made of piled up boulders of rock. The villages have been erected midway where the cliff's face and the slope meet.

Pegue Toulou : The lower part of the village is built on the slope among the rocks and the upper part gives the impression of being glued against the cliff's wall. Dogon houses and Tellem constructions merge together. Many of these ancient cave dwellings are still in use and serve as granaries or collective burial places to the Dogon. There are two ways to reach the village : either one follows meandering tracks going up the slope from the plain below. Or one descends through narrow openings in the face of the cliff.

The traditional Dogon house is made of a central room which is flanked by a cylindrical room (the kitchen), by two rectangular side rooms and by an entrance hall. As usual, the terrace serves as a storing space for foodstuffs. The traditional granary with its conical roof made of millet thatch is a familiar site in many parts of Dogon country. In the cliff area, slope declivity and the narrowness of surface available for construction are such that the base of many granaries is to be supported by pillars or stone walls.

Yougo Dogorou : The patronymic surname of Yougo Dogorou's inhabitants is Doumbo which means "rock". The elderly say this name refers to Bamba, a region where they stayed temporarily before moving to and settling down on the isolated mountain of Yougo. Bamba is " bamba dumboo dumbu " meaning " rock, the rock of Bamba " .



Yougo Dogorou is unique. It is perched next to the top of an isolated mountain separated from the cliff. A gigantic rock, called "the anvil", rises next to the village. Open caves sheltering Tellem and Dogon constructions overhang the village. In ancient times the inaccessibility of the site protected Yougo Dogorou against the outside world. Today its isolation has the opposite effect. Most of the adult population moved to the villages of the Seno-Gondo plains where working conditions are far easier. The village is inhabited by a few families and some elderly people who are the guardians of the local altars. On certain occasions family members and relatives will visit the village. On the death of an elderly parent, they will gather in numbers and participate in funerary rituals and dances.

The face of the cliff to the West of the village is strewn with open caves containing constructions left by the Tellem. The first Dogon migrants from the Arou tribe took up residence at the foot of this cliff. Traces of their passage are still visible. Old foundations can still be discerned and millstones lay around. There are no paths leading to this place. One has to make a way around and over huge boulders.



As regards traditional belief, two localities in Dogon country are of crucial importance. In both cases the Arou tribe assumes supreme authority :

Arou is the place of residence of the Hogon whose religious authority spans the whole land. As a priest of agrarian rites, he represents the Earth, fertility and life. He is to ensure the perpetuation of his people.



As regards Yougo Dogorou, this is where commences the Sigui, the ritual that commemorates the first ancestor who died in the form of a serpent (see page 42). The ritual takes place once every 60 years and symbolizes the renewal of generations.

It is also in this village that the sacred cave of Albarga is located, the old man of the myth who was discovered by Yayeme, the lady who confiscated the masks from the Andoumboulou. People come from afar to make sacrifices for protection against sorcery. Also, in case of serious problems having to do with masks, the village elderly will be consulted by visitors and matters will be discussed in the Togu Na bordering the central village square.



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Dogon hunter`s house

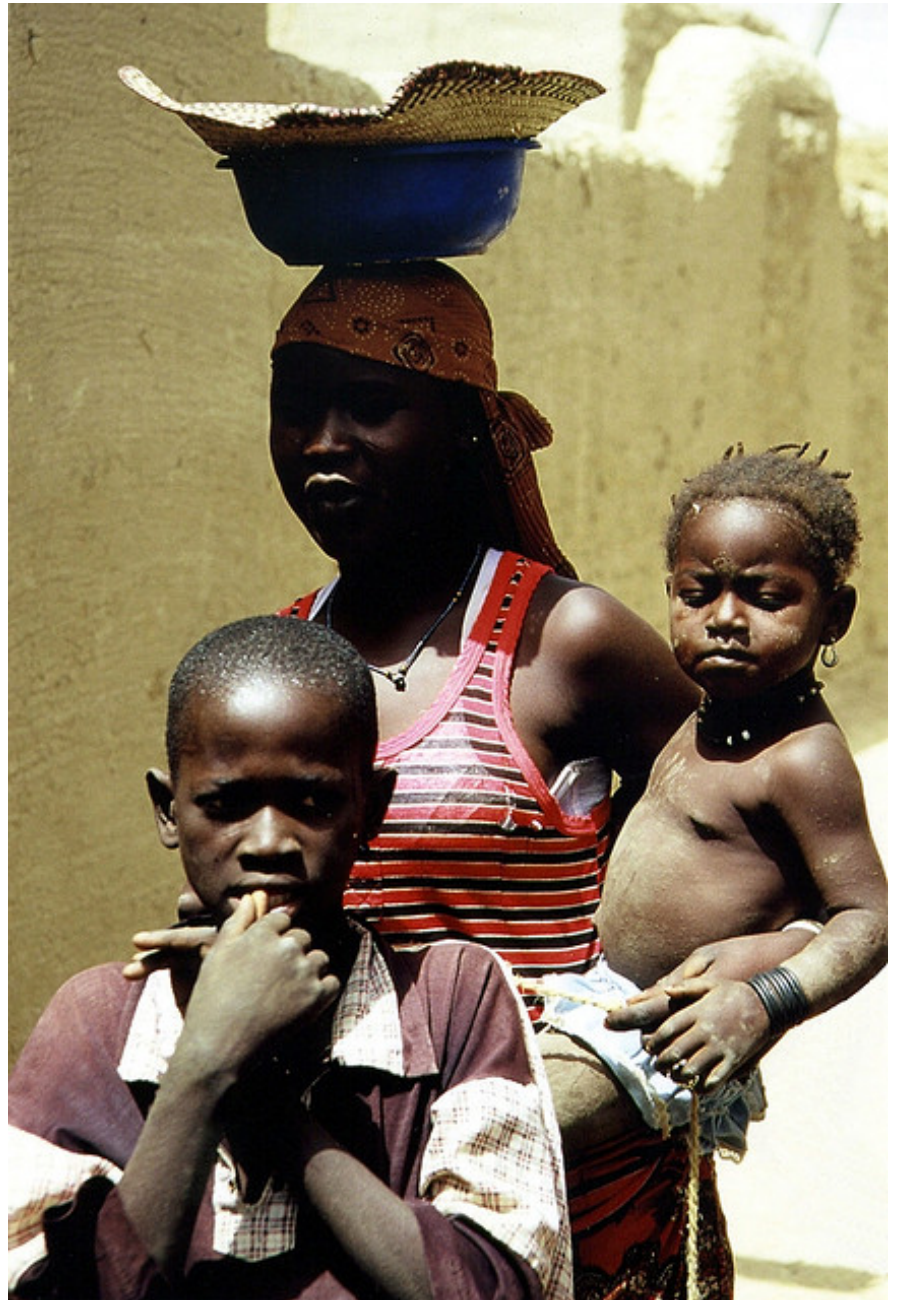
Marcel Griaule mentions in "Masques Dogons - page 765 " the existence at Yougo Dogorou of Albarga's walking cane which is used in rites for rain making. Today this rite is still of actuality. Villages in the region that suffer from severe drought may call for this cane to intervene and block the evildoers who are responsible for the lack of rain. Once every three years, a delegation from Yougo Na, Yougo Dogorou and Yougo Piri will visit those villages that asked for help. By means of the cane the culprit will be ritually uncovered and he will die within the three years that follow.

With time passing, people abandon Yougo Dogorou. Uninhabited houses are unkept. After a few rainy seasons they come crumbling down. The older constructions built inside the open caves seem to stand the test of time. But even then they do not always resist.

The population history of the Seno-Gondo/Yatenga Province is very complexe. The region is a cultural mosaic shared by the Samo, Fulani, Dogon, Kalamse, Mossi and Kurumba. Just like the peoples living along the shores of the Niger river, the inhabitants of this vast territory suffered from Middle Ages till colonial times at the hands of ever-shifting warlike powers trying to impose their supremacy.

Dogon Kids

Just like their contemporaries did in the Bandiagara escarpment (Tellem), the Kibse/Dogon left behind many traces of their ancient presence throughout the Yatenga province (see page 05). The 15th century territorial Songhay and Mossi conquests finally forced them out of their land. They had no choice but to join up with other Dogon groups living further up north towards the cliff area. The Kurumba and Mossi took over their old habitat. During the centuries that followed, Mossi, Bambara and Fulani warriors fought without end in order to gain control of the region. The native peoples of the plains were endlessly subjected to wars, raids and famines. They either blended with their new overlords or dispersed and sought refuge with allies or blood related groups (Dogon plateau to the north or Yatenga to the south). The dislocation and dismantling of whole communities was a recurrent and often predictable event for the peoples of the plains. The Fulani, Mossi and Bambara raids only stopped at the arrival of the French in the 19th century.





Dogon children standing on a cliff

Warlike societies, such as the Songhay, Mossi and Fulani, extended their domination to newly conquered land by establishing networks of small village chiefdoms. These are autonomous political entities composed of a group of villages. Authority belonged to the conquerors but the indigenous people, although of lower social status (captives & professional castes), kept their prerogatives as "earth priests" and owners of the land. In this type of community, the ruling elite and ancient inhabitants can be distinguished by their patronymic names.



Dogon people

The researcher Eric Jolly explains that the Tomo region (south-west of the Seno plain) is divided into village confederations (a dozen villages or more). In precolonial days, each confederation had its own army to oppose the invaders. In Dogon country, this type of regional union is exceptional because the Dogon have no centralized power structure. It is usual to handle political and religious authority at the village level only.



Dogon Man

French occupation facilitated the agricultural colonisation of the region. As peace returned to the area, existing and new villages had the opportunity to grow and develop. Many cliff villages have a "parent" village down in the plains. There is plenty of space and life is easier. The land is good for agriculture and the crops are often better than on the plateau. Their millet granaries are bigger than anywhere else in Dogon country. As stone is not available in the region, most constructions are made with mud bricks. Its manufacture is a true industry. Today animism loses its appeal in favour of Islam and village life is subjected to social and economic readjustments.

Architecture and traditional religion :



An elder of Dogon Tribe sitting near a traditional altar

Architecture, social organization and religion cannot be dissociated. The various types of buildings that form a village go together with the cults that govern religious life. There are four main cults :

The Wagem cult addresses the ancestors of the extended family.

The Lebe cult deals with the renewal of the land and of the Dogon people.

The Binu cult is to maintain harmony between the human community and the supernatural forces of the bush.



Dogon traditional masks displayed on a giant baobab tree

The Society of the Masks directs public rites enabling the transfer of the souls of the deceased to the beyond. But in contrast to the Wagem, Lebe and Binu cults, the Society of the Masks has no architectural edifice where to practice its cult. Masks represent the bush and its mysteries. Rites and sacrifices are performed in a natural cave outside the village.



Mosque and Market of Djenne

The mosque is still another place of worship. Today Islam is an important component of religious life in Dogon country and the mosque makes part of its architectural landscape.

The Ginna (associated with the Wagem cult) :

The house of the village founder is the center of the extended patrilineal family. The most senior member among the successors in direct descent of the founder is the lineage elder. He is head of the extended family, namely, the Ginna Banga. In case a village is made up of several quarters, then each quarter has its own Ginna. It is a two-storeyed building : the Ginna Banga lives on the ground-floor, the 1st floor is a granary store for the extended family and the ancestor altar, the Wagem, is located on the roof terrace. This altar consists in a set of bowls. Each bowl represents an ancestor. The founder, his successors and the other men of the village all have their own bowl. It serves as a receptacle for their souls. The purpose of the Wagem cult is for men to stay in contact and maintain a dialogue with their ancestors. On different occasions family members will make sacrifices on the altar. The Ginna Banga is in charge of the cult.

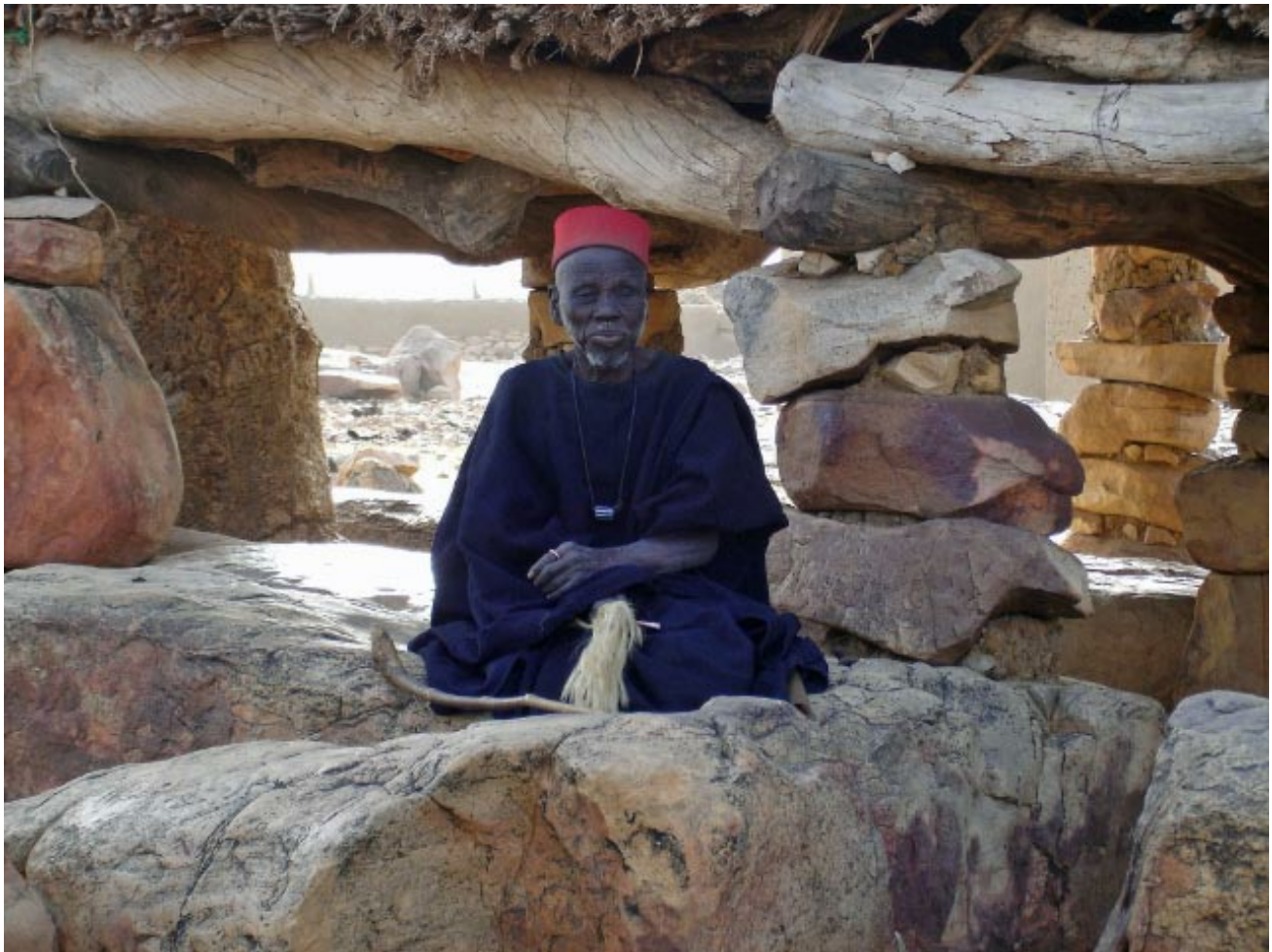
(a) The Gorou ritual : Once a year (December/January) each Ginna commemorates all ancestors of the extended family. Sacrifices are being made and the ancestors' souls come and drink from their bowls. It is also on this occasion that the men in charge at the Ginna decide whether time has come to start preparations for a new Dama, for example, the ritual that enables the recently dead to attain ancestor status. In case they want to go ahead with a new Dama, they will ask the Hogon to obtain permission from all other Ginnas in the village. If they refuse, a new request may be formulated a year later at the next Gorou. A Dama is very costly in terms of agricultural products needed for preparing beer and food. This is the main reason why the Dama ritual is so often postpone.



Dogon cult knife, the handle consists of two female figures, leaning against each other back to back. The female figures are made from dark brown patinated wood, standing in a half crouched position, the arms are held folded in front of their chests. The end of the handle is made of brass, decorated with cowrie shells. The blade resembles a spearhead, consists of brass and is decorated with a snake design.

The Gorou ritual is not only limited to the Ginna. Each family maintains at home an altar for their own deceased family members, some of whom are still very present in the hearts and minds of the living. It is called the Tirè Kabu.

(b) The Kikinu Mono ritual (= gathering of the souls) : Before the Dama, the souls of the recently deceased roam about the bush in the vicinity of the villages. The purpose for the Kikinu Mono ritual, which is held just after the Dama, is to enable the recently dead to attain their status as ancestors. On this occasion new bowls will be added to the family altars. The Kikinu Mono is held exclusively in the Tirè Kabu.



House of the Hogon (associated with the Lebe cult) :

The Lebe cult is associated with the agricultural cycle. It is addressed to Lebe Seru, the first ancestor of the Dogon who was buried in the Mande and has resurrected in the form of a serpent. He guided his people to their new homeland. Earth from his grave in the Mande was taken on the journey eastwards. At destination (near the village of Kani Bonzon) a first altar made of ancestral earth mixed with the one of the new land was erected. These were the beginnings of the Lebe cult. Their migration not yet completed, the four tribes (Dyon, Arou, Ono, Domno) took each a part of this first altar and spread over the plateau, the escarpment and the plains. After having reached their final destination, the members of each tribe (the Arou excepted) divided their part of the Lebe between themselves and founded new villages.



Atlantica-db

Lebe chief

Each village built an altar containing some of the ancestral earth. The Hogon is its chief priest. He is in charge of all religious and agrarian rituals that are to guarantee sufficient future crops and by extension to ensure the perpetuation of his people. Agrarian rituals, such as the Bulu, need the intervention of both The Hogon and the Binu priest : their activities complement each other. The notion of the "resurrected" Lebe is closely linked with the agricultural cycle : after the harvesting, follows the sowing. Each time life has the upper hand.

Hogon

The oldest man in the village will assume office as Hogon (except in Arou). He must observe many taboos. The traveller passing through will find it out soon enough : it is strictly forbidden to shake hands. Once enthroned, the Hogon no longer has the right to have physical contact with anyone. This is also valid for his wives and children. His first wife will prepare his meals. But chastity remains obligatory until death. Also, he is no longer allowed to leave the compound. Reunions will be held and people will be received at his house.

Unlike the other tribes, the Arou did not split up their part of the Lebe, and instead chose to erect a single altar at Arou-près-Ibi. The Hogon of Arou is elected to his post by leading members of the Arou tribe. It is not a post coveted by anyone. One does not choose to be candidate. Some members are just liable to be chosen as the next Hogon. He will be informed of the fait accompli. Various rituals will take place before his assumption of duties. For example, the newly elected must cease to exist as an ordinary human being. Symbolic funerals are to be held and celebrated. During this time he will retreat for some 10 days in a big cave not too far from Arou. The place is called Komo-Sese. After this period of isolation he will return to Arou. It is at this point in time that his nomination as Hogon will become effective.



The traditional religion of the Dogon people in Mali, West Afrika, requires menstruating women to retreat to separate menstrual huts, allowing men to closely monitor their reproductive status and prevent cuckoldry.

Komo-Sese is a very large open cave. It shelters various Tellem and Dogon constructions : houses, granaries, altars and Binu shrines. On arrival from the Mande, the Arou tribe chose to settle down in this location. Not far from there, they erected the residence of the person who would become the first Hogon of Arou. The new dignitary had to be carried from the cave to his new house. Today, Komo-Sese is no longer inhabited but as part of his enthronement, the future Hogon is to spend some 10 days in this particular spot, after which time he will be brought on somebody's shoulders to his new and final residence.



Dogon people coming from Market

Rain altar, the Andugo. Sacrifices on the altar will cause rainfall. It is made of pottery fragments and "thunder stones" which are said to fall from the skies with thunder and lightning.

Several patrilineages make up a clan. Clan leadership belongs to the Binu priest. His mission consists in maintaining harmony between supernatural forces of the bush and clan members. They will call on him for all kinds of problems of a mystical nature (unexplained diseases, divination, etc ...). Whereas the responsibilities of the Ginna Banga are transmitted through succession, those of the Binu priest are acquired in a very different manner :



Dogon granaries and Crocodile Totem - Binou cult

The Binu is a supernatural and protective being that manifests itself to an individual in the form of an animal. Whilst walking through the bush, this individual will be given an object, such as a stone, as a sign of alliance (Duge). Ethnographic literature has it that the discovery of the Duge by the person in question is proof of his ability to communicate with the spirit world and that consequently it is his duty to assume responsibility as Binu priest. From there on, the new priest will wear the Duge in the form of a necklace. But in reality, the Duge is not just a stone found in the bush by a person in a trance-like state. It is rather the necklace itself which on the death of the priest, is hidden by family members until the day it is rediscovered by his successor. One says that the Binu "sleeps" until the day the Duge is rediscovered. Only one out of the three existing Binu's in Ogol-Da was active in early 2006.

Binu shrine near Arou-by-Ibi, Bandiagara, Mali

Clan members have a close relationship with a totemic animal or plant (ba-binu). In the village of Sibi-Sibi the Karambe clan's totem is a snake. One day an inhabitant of SibiSibi was saved from drowning by a water serpent. It was through the animal's intermediary that the Binu manifested its alliance with the Karambe clan. Since that day, it is strictly forbidden for the Karambe to hunt, kill and consume snakes.



Dogon man

In Sangha, the Walu (antelope - hippotracus) is Ogol-Ley's totem and the panther is Ogol-Da's totem. These animals are regarded as the protectors of the clans concerned and will not be hunted or eaten, nor will clan members dance with masks representing them. When a Dogon travels or sleeps in the bush his totem will look after him.

However there is a particularity to be noted between the two Ogols. Ogol-Ley respects both the Walu and the panther. As a sign of respect for their neighbours, Ogol-Ley considers the former as their second totem. As regards Ogol-Da, it does not consider the Walu as their second totem. Thus Ogol-Ley dances neither with Walu nor with panther masks. But for Ogol-Da only the panther mask remains taboo.

Binu shrine, Bandiagara escarpment, Mali

Today the Binu cult loses some of its influence. Other religions, science and the medical world in particular give alternative answers to the protective function of the Binu.

Binu shrines are single-chambered constructions decorated with reliefs and geometric designs. The white marks on the façades are millet gruel libations made during agrarian rites. These rites are to ensure the coming of the rain,

the regeneration of nature and abundant harvests.



Sangha building

The following constructions have no religious function but, the smithy excepted, are often adorned with fertility symbols, one of the major concerns in Dogon belief. At the founding of a village, the Togu Na and the menstruation hut are erected first.



The Togu Na is a shelter open on all four sides and supported by stone or wood pillars that carry a roof made of millet thatch. The ceiling is too low for a person to stand upright. Women have no access to it. It is a shaded place where men discuss village affairs and where they can rest. Manual crafts, such as weaving ropes and baskets, can be done there too. Both the Togu Na and the Ginna belong to the men making part of the same family lineage. In theory, there are in a village as many Togu Na's as there are Ginnas, for example, patrilineages.

In the plain of the Seno-Gondo the pillars are made of wood and are often ornated with representations of masks and symbols of fecundity : men and women with disproportionate sexual organs. The older pillars are of an archaic style and radiate a power that the newer ones seem to have lost. Many have been stolen and still continue to fuel the market for African antique. At first the original owners thought they could contain the problem by partially cutting off heads and breasts. All of this was done to no avail. The old Togu Na of Madougou is still in place. Some other Togu Na's have pillars that had to be rearranged and there are those, like the one in Youdiou, that have been ravaged by theft. This is how thieves go about their work : during the rainy season villagers work in the fields and, when night comes, they are fast asleep. This is when, under cover of the night and with the help of bad weather drowning any other noise, thieves go into action. On the plateau and along the escarpment, the Togu Na's have pillars made of stone and earth. Sometimes they are supported by circular piled up stone walls.

Menstruation hut (punulu) :



Dogon girl in Traditional Dogon Attire Mali.

The menstruation hut is situated on the edge of the village. Women having their periods are considered impure. This is where they sleep and have their meals during their so-called "state of impurity". It is a temporary way of exclusion from village life. These dwellings are circular in design. In "Villages perchés des Dogon du Mali - page 157", this round form makes J.C. Huet think of a confined enclosure like a pen separating women from the rest of the village. To back up his argument, he gives the example of the menstruation hut in Arou which is a circular enclosure without roof. The outside walls are often decorated with symbols of fecundity, for example, individuals with over-sized sexual organs.



Dogon mother breast-feeding her child

The smithy :

The smithy is a sober looking shelter consisting of a thatched roof resting on a piled up stone wall. Craftsmen like the smiths are divided into endogamous casts and live at the fringe of Dogon society. They do not marry with people outside of their community. There are two distinct casts : The Jèmè-na and The Irine.



The divination Dogon, Mali. Dogon elders tell the future with fox divination: land in a rectangular area bounded by stones is the place of ritual, A heap of stones symbolizes a question, ask the wise action of the Jackal, has the power to foretell the future. To attract the animal, are put of peanuts, returning at dawn the soothsayers to read the answer to decipher due to the traces left overnight inside the rectangle of divination.

The Jèmè-na plunge their roots in a faraway past. They live mainly in the Seno-Gondo plains. They were highly skilled in extraction and smelting techniques of iron ore. Colonial times gave access to other sources of supply and the trade of iron processing subsequently came to a halt by the late 1940s. Today remnants of old earthen furnaces can be found in many parts of the country. But who are these smiths and where do they come from? It is difficult to answer this question. However, the fact remains that Dogon smiths have been known since ancient times for their mastery. Between the 10th and 15th century, the Yatenga province already witnessed an intense metallurgical activity which has always been ascribed to the Kibse/Dogon. At the time of the Songhay and Mossi conquests, it was usual to remove smiths and other craftsmen from their home villages and settle them down elsewhere in conquered territory. Their technical know-how in manufacturing weapons and agricultural tools was vital to any power seeking control over the land. As a farming society, the Dogon of the plateau and Bandiagara escarpment lacked in craftsmen. In all logic, they turned to the smiths, established in the plains below, to learn the trade.



Dogon woman with baby grinding flour in front of traditional dogon grain storage sheds .

The Irine were originally Dogon farmers who learned the trade of blacksmithing from the Jèmè-na. They manufacture agricultural tools. In a recent past, they used pig iron which they bought from the Jèmè-na. The Irine also work wood. It is among them that the great Dogon sculptors are to be found. Apart from their craftsmanship with iron and wood, smiths are accredited with healing powers. They also intervene as mediators in conflicts that arise among villagers. This is a responsibility that they have in common with the Hogon. Smiths hardly ever live in their home village. They will settle in a village with an opening for employment. The Irine often wear the patronymic surname of their village of adoption. It is said that a Jèmè-na is free to take over a job held by an Irine whenever that would suit him. A decision an Irine can only but accept. In view of the smiths' mobility in time and space, one may wonder indeed what was their real impact on the evolution of "Dogon culture". The smith's working place may have an unassuming and sober look, the artistic creations that have been produced there are among the most dazzling manifestations of the Dogon cult system.

Altars :



Fetish wall, the Dogon people are largely Animist religion, and these fetish protect the village.

In practice, communication with the beyond is made through food and blood offerings on altars. There are altars at all levels of the community : individual, family, village and regional altars.



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Dogon people

The Mosque :

Although its spreading goes back to the 11th century, Islam was more or less limited to urban centers such as Djenne, Dia, Timbuktu and Gao. It was the faith of the elite in power and of the trading community. It is only after a series of holy wars in the 19th century that Islam definitely took root in rural zones and in Dogon country.

Djenne Mosque

Most villages have a mosque. Today's dynamism of traditional mud constructions manifests itself, among others, in a variety of mosques that show stylistic features that are characteristic of Dogon architecture. Mosques with façades composed of niches with checkerboard and triangular patterns became a familiar sight.

The mosque of Kani Kombole is a good example. It is situated at the foot of the escarpment. There is ample

space for building. The mosque is wide and its four sides are decorated with colonnades and niches. This is a clear reference to the façade of the Ginna namely, the traditional house of the extended family.



Mud Mosque at Kani Kombole

The mosque of Nando is a case apart. Its foundation seems to go back to the 12th century. It is older than the well-known mosques of Djenne and Timbuktu. In those days the Tellem were still the masters of the Bandiagara escarpment. Today many questions remain unanswered as to the circumstances of its founding. A local legend says that a giant built the mosque within a few days. Not far from Nando he left a footprint in the rocks (see photo hereunder). In those ancient times the only town close by and already converted to Islam was Dia (on the Diaka, arm of the Niger). Was the Nando region already a transit passage for early trans-Saharan trade routes linking West to Northern Africa ?



Through the centuries, the regular plastering with mud explains why the mosque on the outside has a great resemblance with Dogon architecture. Inside the mosque, however, the walls are Islamic in design and are decorated with themes from the Koran : A pair of scales is weighing the souls of the deceased so as to determine who will go to heaven or hell.

On the plateau, land suitable for cultivation will never be used for any other purpose. Villages are built on hills that dominate the area. Kargue and Danisare are no exceptions to the rule. Space available for construction is limited. Both mosques stand high and their contours are adjusted to the uneven topography of the site.

Ningari is situated in the center of the plateau (Waduba) not far from Kani Gogouna, capital of the Saman. This group is ethnically related to the Djennenke of the Lowel-Gueou. But unlike them, they adopted the local language and culture of their Dogon hosts. The arrival of the Saman in Dogon country dates back to the 15th century. Just like the Dogon, the first migrants reached the south of the Bandiagara escarpment near the village of Kani Bonzon, and from there on, moved towards the center of the plateau. Their settlement in the Waduba is the result of many migrations that span some 300 years and that were caused by incessant conflicts along the shores of the Niger river. Dogon and Saman concluded alliances and shared a same territory in a relative peace.

Originally the Saman were no agriculturists like the Dogon. They were a warlike people making a living from plundering. This attitude served the Dogon to a certain extent as a rampart against the Fulani enemy located at Dè on the plateau to the east. In the 19th century, however, to extend their domination on the plateau, the Saman sided at first with the theocratic state of Sekou Amadou, and thereafter with El Haj Omar, the Futankobe conqueror. Both these states were leading a holy war in the region. The Dogon never forgave their Saman allies of their treachery. Among Dogon masks, one mask represents the "Samana". When this mask dances, it will make all kinds of funny

gesticulations and the spectators will laugh at it. Conflicts still arise on occasion. In the nineties the Saman in Kani Gogouna intended to build a new mosque at the site of an old Ginna (traditional house of the extended family). As the Saman have no rights on land ownership, the Dogon opposed the project and got their way after a tense spell of time that could have deteriorated into violence. The mosque of Ningari is stylistically close to the mosques of the Niger river bank. Today, after living for so many centuries on the plateau, the Saman say they are Dogon but they will not forgo their Djennenke identity.



Masjid (Mosque) in Djenne - Mali. The mosque of Djenne. The oldest and the highest rated of the Mali mosques.

The pinnacles of mosques are always exposed to rain. To limit water infiltration, they are topped by specially made earthenware.

In Tanga, however, the mosque's pinnacles are surmounted with overturned three-legged bowls. Archaeologists do know well this type of ancient earthenware that is commonly found in excavations in the cliff area (Tellem caves) and along the shores of the Niger. It looks as if the inhabitants of Tanga, having at their disposal a number of ancient pots, used these instead of the usual earthenware specifically made for protecting pinnacles. Next to the mosque's entrance there are still more pinnacles with pots. Do they serve any religious purpose or is it just a matter of using up the remaining pots ?

The Society of the Masks :



Masked dance performances are held on the occasion of funerary rituals (Dama & funerals). These rituals are governed by the Society of the Masks. This society gathers all circumcised men, young and old. Young boys become members after having been circumcised. Authority is established according to age. Many members sculpt their own mask.



Before, in mythical times, death did not exist. Instead, men metamorphosed into serpents. Yet, after the breaking of a taboo, the Dogon were exposed to death. The Society of the Masks celebrates the cult of the first ancestor who died in the form of a serpent after having transgressed a taboo. Ever since that time, death has been transmitted to men through contagion (not to be confounded with the ancestor Lebe Seru who resurrected and who is immortal).

The Society of the Masks is directed by the Wala Banga (chief of the mask altar). Amadingue Dolo was the Wala Banga of Sangha. He made part of the informants working for Marcel Griaule's team. Amadingue died in 1985. Ethnographic literature refers to the Awa Society. According to Amadingue Dolo the name Awa is wrong. The correct name is Jeme. In Sigi So (the secret language of the Sigui) Awa means Kanaga.



amadingue dolo - wala banga dancer sculpting his own mask kanaga dancers

Funerary rituals :

Funerary rituals consist of the burial, the funeral and the Dama.

The burial is held within a short period of time following death. After having wrapped the deceased in a mortuary blanket, the body is pulled up with ropes to the burial site higher up in the cliff. The face of the cliff is strewn with caves of which some serve as cemeteries. The blanket is recovered. Later during the funeral it will play a central part in the Baga Bundo ritual. On the plateau burial cave sites are located next to each village.



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The funeral (Yimu Gono) is held a few days later or even several months after that the body was laid to rest in the cemetery. The purpose of funerals consists in restoring harmony between the world of the dead and living. The soul of the deceased must be conducted to the hereafter.

The Dama marks the end of mourning and the passage of the soul of the deceased to the land of the ancestors. This ritual takes place around May/June. There is a small and a big Dama. The small Dama is still regularly held. It concerns one individual only. The big Dama concerns all villagers who passed away since the previous big Dama. Many years may go by between two Dama's; 10 to 12 years and even more). Before, the Dama entailed a human sacrifice. Today this practice has been abandoned.



The funeral (Yimu Gono) :

Most funerals are held between December and February. The harvesting is over, the granaries are full and the next sowing season will begin in a few months only. Since there is no work in the fields, men and women may go about other business. Time has come to organise funerals for those who passed away in recent months. A funeral lasts two or three days. Many visitors will come and offer condolences to the family of the deceased.



Dogon Dancer

Dances and mock battles (for example against the old Fulani enemy) are held day and night. Close relatives and visitors mime battle scenes in the village center, around the house and on the roof terrace of the deceased. They fire blank shots with locally made flint rifles and fight with spears, shields and lit torches. The noise is ear-splitting and the participants are, from time to time, enveloped in a cloud of burned gunpowder. The atmosphere is often festive.



Dogon Dancers

The more dramatically powerful moments take place on the roof terrace of the deceased. Some of his personal belongings are deposited there. In case he was an old war veteran, a life-size dummy dressed in military uniform will be clearly visible from all around.



Dogon Stilt dancers in action

Some dignitaries and close parents climb on the roof and sacrifice a goat. Rituals vary from village to village. In Kundu the goat is castrated before it is killed and is then thrown from the roof onto the ground. In Yougo Dogorou the animal is not castrated. Instead, after it has been killed, the one performing the sacrifice will take off the hide and leave the carcass on the roof. After the blood sacrifice it is the masked dancers' turn to mount on the terrace and dance. The purpose of these ritual activities consists in attracting the soul of the departed out of his house so that it may commence its journey to the Hereafter.

The dancers pay a last homage to the deceased and climb down the roof terrace. A close parent, a son or brother, remains alone on the terrace, kneels down, scratches the ground with his hands and throws earth over his shoulders. He is looking for the Kine (a component of the soul) of the deceased that is to return as the Nani (the respondent) in a newborn baby.

Meaning of the Nani : The deceased chooses among his descendants a respondent who when grown up, will make sacrifices to his ancestor on the Wagem altar (Gorou ritual). The act of transmitting a part of one's soul to a descendant, is a form of reincarnation.

In case the deceased leaves behind a widow then the same ritual is performed differently. For example, the masked dancer kneels down at the house's entrance and pays his respects to the widow who at the same time is looking for her late husband's Kine by means of a calabash that she is holding in her hand.

The funeral of the Hogon of Sangha :

His funeral was held in 1985 about six months after his death. The night preceding the first day of the funeral, a black chick is sacrificed and affixed to a thread suspended over the central village square of OgoI-Da. This is a purification ritual concerned with protecting upcoming events against witchcraft. The ritual is called Kezu.



Hogon's Residence

On the funeral's second day a ritual named Baga Bundo takes place : eight Kanaga and some fiber masks approach and kneel down around a mortuary blanket (i.e. the one used for the deceased's transport to the cemetery six months earlier). They hit the ground with millet stems. Evil spirits must be driven out from the blanket and the dancers are to pay their respects one last time to the defunct.

The role of women during funerary rites is certainly not negligible. But they do not participate in the masked rituals. When the masks dance, women are spectators and stay at a fair distance. The Ya Sigine priestess is the only exception to this rule. Masks represent death and are a threat to their fecundity. In Sangha however, the role of women during the Hogon's funeral differs widely from other funerary rituals. Sangha is split in two : Ogol-Ley and Ogol-Da. The "field of the Hogon" is situated in between the two villages. This is where most of the public events are held. Male mock combats alternate with young ladies imitating the masked dances. They do not wear wooden headpieces but their hairstyles, decorated with mirrors and glass beads, represent the masks. These female dances commemorate the origin of the masks. In mythical times a woman (Yayeme) discovered the masks before men took possession of them.

Usually funerals and the Dama ritual are held separately. This is not the case for the Dama of the Hogon in Sangha. It starts ten days after the beginning of the funeral and lasts three days. Some ten masks will dance at the occasion. But before the Dama can be held, the Wala (altar of the masks) must be purified. In fact, by ritually imitating the masked dances at the Hogon's funeral, the women have transgressed a taboo. As a result, corrective measures must be taken. This is where the Puro intervenes; a ritual enabling men to assert their authority over women. It is normally held independently from any other ritual. Sometimes men think that the women of their village committed an

offence and, to repair it, they must pay a fine. Following the dancing imitating the masks at the Hogon's funeral, the women have to pay a fine to the Wala Banga (chief of the mask altar). It is to pay for the purification of the Wala altar as otherwise the Dama cannot be held.



Dogon girls

The masks :

For the Dogon, the village space guarantees order and security. On the other hand, the ambivalence of the bush is notorious. It can be both dangerous and beneficial. It is the world of the invisible. There are all types of evil spirits roaming about. But the bush is also a source of life where food and medicinal plants abound. Wild animals have gifts for clairvoyance. When a Dogon travels and sleeps in the bush, his totem-animal.



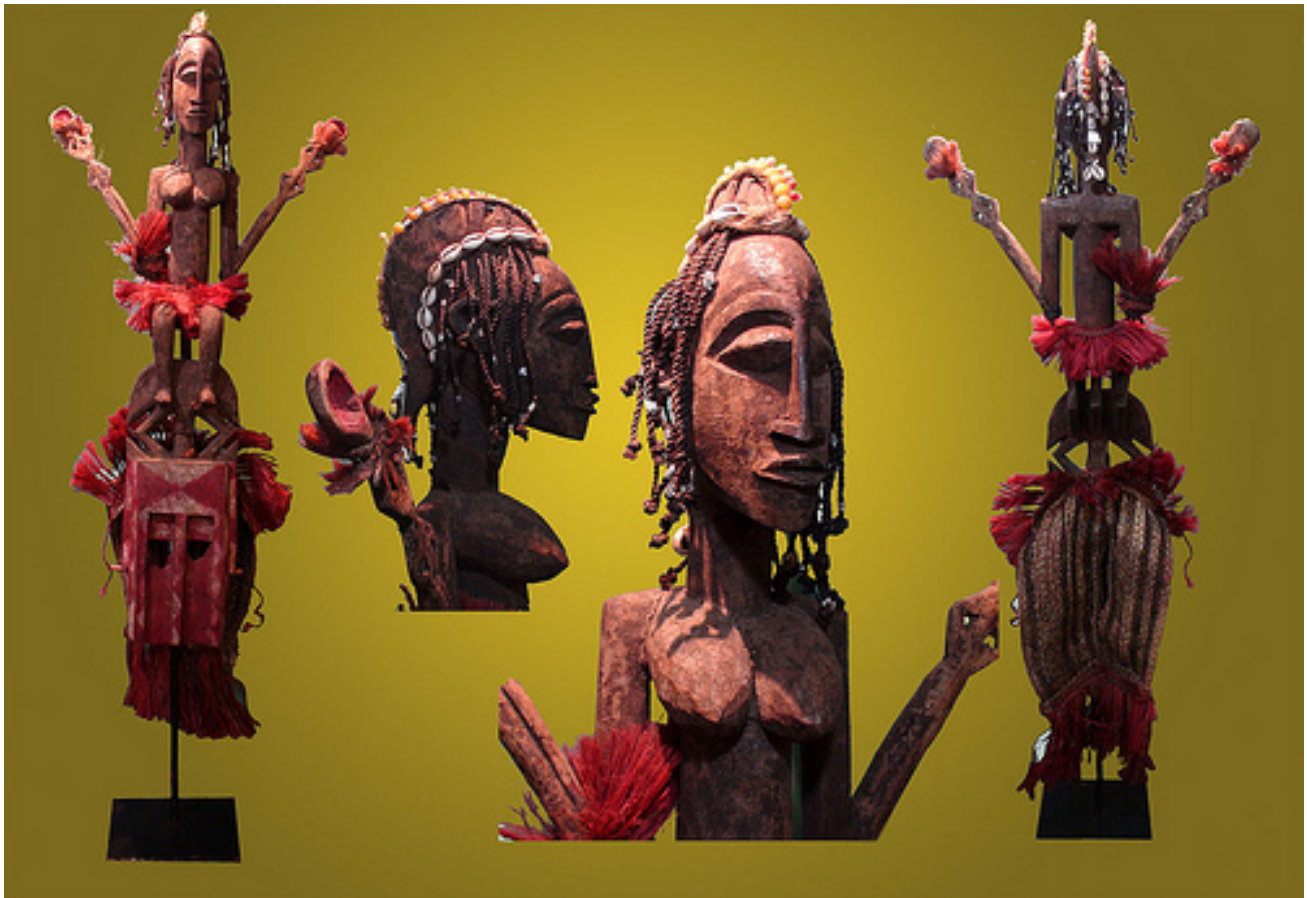
blue indigo dress and hats of the Dogon people

It is on the occasion of a Dama that new masks are carved. The fibres for the costumes are prepared and painted in the bush. Whereas the wooden headpieces may be carved, hidden from the sight of others, in the village. To attain their full magical powers, they are to be submitted to various rituals. In Sangha, the Wala Banga is to make a sacrifice for all masks on the mask altar (Wala). The owners of the masks do not assist. Each individual, however, will make sacrifices on his private altar in order to seek protection against sorcery. In some other villages, mask owners may want to seek protection through the intervention of mask dignitaries at Yougo Dogorou.

Today mask carving outside a ritual context has become frequent. The sale of such objects to tourists is no problem at all. But the sale of a mask that is still "active" in a ritual sense must be done with utmost care and requires ritual precautions.

Dogon myths as related by Marcel Griaule give a good idea as to the significance of certain masks :

Mask Satimbe : This mask represents the woman who, in mythical times, captured the old Albarga and stole the masks from the Andumbulu (supernatural beings). One day in the bush she surprised them dancing. They fled and left behind their masks and costumes made of red fibres. She disguised herself with it and returned to where she came from. The men from her village took it all away from her (Albarga included) and hid everything in a cave, for example, the sacred cave of Albarga at Yougo Dogorou.



Dogon Saimbe masks

According to certain traditions the name of the lady is Yayeme and she came originally from the village of Yendouma. Following these events, the woman who discovered the masks was nominated "Ya Sigine" (the sister of the masks). Today the "Ya Sigine" priestess is the only woman who plays an active role during masked rituals. She is also the sole woman for whom masked dances will be performed at her funeral. Women are completely excluded from all mask-related rituals. During masked dances, they watch on from a fair distance.



This photo is no longer available

Dogon Satimbe masks

The Great Mask : This mask is made once every 60 years on the occasion of the "Sigui". This ritual lasts seven years. It starts at Yougo Dogorou and moves alongside the escarpment to the southwest. A long time ago the Sigui came to an end on the plateau at the village of Songo. This was no longer the case in 1972 when Jean Rouch, for the purpose of his documentary, filmed Amadingue Dolo (late chief of the masks) and Diangouno Dolo (late chief of Sangha) ending the ritual at Songo.

The Great Mask is carved from a single piece of wood and measures several metres in length. It looks like a plank with a mask sculpted at its lower end. It is not meant to be worn.

Before, according to Dogon myths, death did not exist. Instead, men metamorphosed into serpents. Yet, after the breaking of a taboo, the Dogon were exposed to death. The Great Mask represents the first ancestor who died in the form of a serpent. Its elongated form looks like a serpent. It is the receptacle of the ancestor's soul.

Every 60 years a new Great Mask is sculpted in replacement of the previous one. On this occasion, the dignitaries of the Society of the Masks teach a few previously chosen young men the secrets of the cult. They are present during the carving of the Great Mask and they have to learn Sigi So, the secret language of the Sigui. After having completed their initiation, they will replace the previous Olubaru initiates.

The Dogon who follow the rituals of the Society of the Masks possess a shelter near to their village where the Great Masks (old & the last to date) are stored. In 1930 Marcel Griaule counted nine Great Masks in the village of Ibi. It means that the beginnings of the Sigui cult in this particular village go back to the 14th century (9 masks x 60 years = 540 years).



The Great Mask leaves its shelter on the occasion of a funeral to be held for an important dignitary only (i.e. Olubaru). A hole is made in the roof of the house of the deceased and the mask is placed through it. The upper part of the mask can be seen from far away (see photo above). The mask so displayed is the one which was carved in the presence of the deceased when he was still an "Olubaru to be" at the last Signi.

Most ethnographic literature translates "Great Mask" as Mask Imina-Na. However, Imina-Na is the name given to the "voice" of the Great Mask and not to the wooden structure itself. The voice of the mask is a rope with two wooden or metal pieces attached at one end. By making it whirl above one's head, the Imina-Na makes a sound resembling the mask's voice. Depending on the region, the exact name is either Wara or Dannu. Originally the Dannu (a wooden pole) and the Buguduru (a cone of clay) form the stand against which the Wara leans ("Masques Dogons - M.Griaule" - page 745). With time passing, a number of villages abandoned the carving of the Wara and replaced it with the Dannu.



Pupil and thief mask

The Sirige mask :



Dogon Sirige mask

This mask measures several metres in length. It represents a Ginna, the house of the extended family. It takes a strong young adult to manoeuvre this type of mask. They jump and make rotating movements with the head forwards, backwards and sideways. Such movements require a physical strength that not all dancers possess. A husband with a wife who is pregnant will never wear a costume with the usual red fibres. It would bring her in danger. To the Dogon the colour red represents menstrual blood.

It happens that a mask breaks whilst dancing. Dancers and the dignitaries of the Society of the Masks will try to hide the repairing from the spectators' view. Masks are magical objects and any intervention needs secrecy.

The Kanaga mask :





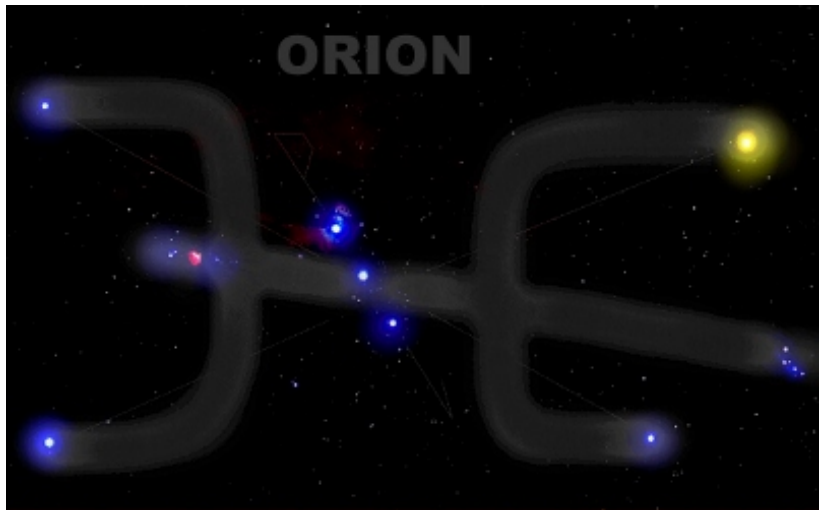
The significance of the Kanaga mask remains obscure. There are a variety of interpretations. It has been described, among others, as a bird or a female spirit. Kanaga dance performances are very spectacular. The dancers always appear in numbers. They make a circular movement with the mask and brush the ground with its upper part. Striking it would be wrong. But it happens more often than not. Sometimes, in the heat of the moment, a mask even breaks.



Dogon Kanaga mask

Masks represent the bush and its mysteries. During funerary rituals they leave the bush and enter the village. They attract the soul of the deceased out of his house and towards sunset they return to the bush followed by it. Masks are not all equal in importance.

Certain types (Kanaga, Satimbe, Sirige) are important from a religious point of view. They are surrounded by an aura of mystery. Their dances have a wild quality. They do not speak but emit noises. The Olubaru shouts to them in Sigi So (the secret language of the Sigi). Other mask types tend to interact with the public and their dances may even be entertaining. The following pages show masks that are easily identifiable (human and animal).





Dogon artistic carving work

THE DOGON PANTHEON

The Dogon have an animist religion, which means that they believe that all natural objects and forces have a living soul.

In the world of the Dogon people, everything has meaning and significance. For example, the Baobab is a sacred tree which can never be cut or sold; the fox, the snake, and the crocodile are sacred animals that have a place in Dogon mythology and may never be killed.

Dogon old lady and grand-daughter

AMMA was the main god of the Dogon. He created the sun, the earth and the people. After Amma created Mother Earth out of clay, he raped her and she gave birth to several sets of twins, which form a pantheon of Dogon mythical beings.

Beautiful Dogon girl, Mali

AROU was the youngest of the four supernatural brothers who were the ancestors of the Dogon. Arou led his people on a mythical voyage to Bandiagara which became he homeland of the Dogon. When the four brothers reached the cliffs of Bandiagara, Arou gave a shout to claim the land. Enraged by his youngest brother's boldness and disregard of the proper order of descent and inheritance, Dyon, the eldest brother, abandoned Arou by the side of the road. This is where Arou encountered an old woman who offered him gifts of supernatural powers. These gifts served the Dogon as tools for defense, to domesticate animals, and to make rain.

Dogon stool

BLACKSMITH was the first of the eight human ancestors who came down from the sky to earth. He arrived in an ark containing everything that was necessary for people to survive. He taught people how to make tools and plant seeds for growing food. CROCODILE was a sacred animal that was believed to have led the Dogon people to water during their mythical journey across Africa. The Dogon were on their way to their current homeland, which is called "Falaise de Bandiagara."







Village of Amani in Dogon land famous for its sacred crocodiles

DOMNO was one of the four mythical brothers (see Arou).

DYON was the eldest of the four mythical brothers who rode a horse carrying Arou, the youngest, on his shoulders (see Arou).

LEBE SEROU was an agricultural god who was worshipped in the Lebe cult. According to myth, the four tribal founders (Arou, Domno, Dyon and Ono) each carried a piece of earth connected to their primordial ancestor, Lebe Serou, to their new land. The most important aspects of the Lebe cult are keeping the order of agricultural life, and the renewal of the Dogon lands and people.



Offering Millet Beer. A village elder offers the village chief millet beer from a calabash bowl. Male village elders often socialize over a bowl of millet beer, especially on days of special celebrations or after performance of the mask dance.

NOMMO were fish-like creatures with a human torso and the tail of a snake. The Nommo are the mythical twins born out of the second mating of Amma and Earth. They are water spirits.
ONO was one of the four tribal ancestors of the Dogon who founded Dogon Country (see Arou).



PALE FOX was an unnatural and socially disruptive creature born out of the first mating of Amma and Mother Earth. All divine children were born as twins with a male and female counterpart; however, the pale fox was born without placenta and did not have a female twin. That is why he is a symbol of loneliness. The myths of the pale fox tell about the chaos that resulted from an imbalance of male and female qualities.

Dogon
Market
SNAKE
was a
sacred
animal
who
miguided
the
enemies of
the Dogon
while they
were on
their
mythical
journey to



Bandiagara.

YORUGA was a male god born out of the union of Amma and Mother Earth. Since he broke out of the womb too early, he and his sister were imperfect. All of mankind is descended from these two beings; and just like these divine twins they can never be perfect either.

Dogon girl carrying her little sister on
her back

SOURCE:<http://www.dogon-lobi.ch/pdfeng1.pdf>





Dogon hogon carving

Dogon woman

Dogon kids playing

Dogon woman carrying a load of calabash

Dogon woman











Smiling Dogon Girl



Dogon boy riding a donkey

Dogon
kids
waving



This photo is no longer available



Dogon woman



Dogon Men, they are conducts between heaven and earth.



Dogon mother breast-feeding her baby



Dogon women standing in front of a Mosque

