

The Sirius Mystery

The Sirius Mystery is a pseudoarchaeology book by Robert K. G. Temple first published by St. Martin's Press in 1976. Its second, 1998, edition is called *The Sirius Mystery: New Scientific Evidence of Alien Contact 5,000 Years Ago*.

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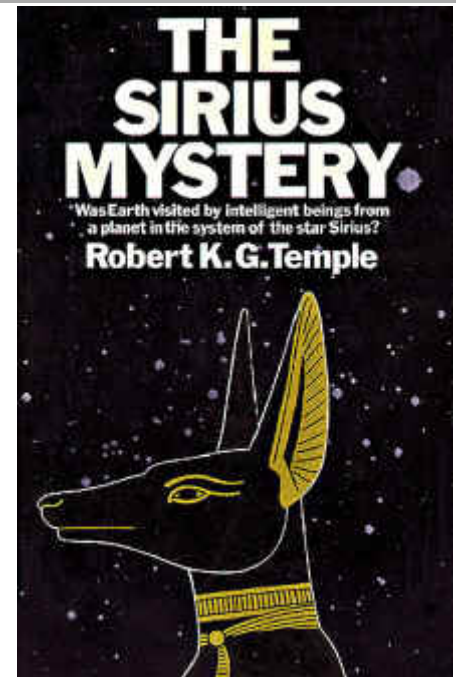
Overview

The book presents the hypothesis that the Dogon people of Mali, in west Africa, preserve a tradition of contact with intelligent extraterrestrial beings from the Sirius star system.^[1]

These beings, who are hypothesized to have taught the arts of civilization to humans, are claimed in the book to have originated the systems of the Pharaohs of Egypt, the mythology of Greek civilization, and the Epic of Gilgamesh, among other things. Temple's theory was heavily based on his interpretation of the work of ethnographers Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen. A substantial bulk of *The Sirius Mystery* consists of comparative linguistic and mythological scholarship, pointing out resemblances among Dogon, Egyptian and Sumerian beliefs and symbols. Greek and Arab myths and words are considered to a lesser extent.

The "mystery" that is central to the book is how the Dogon allegedly acquired knowledge of Sirius B, the white dwarf companion star of Sirius A, invisible to the naked eye. Temple did not argue that the only way that the Dogon could have obtained what he understood to be accurate information on Sirius B was by contact with an advanced civilization; he considered alternative possibilities, such as a very ancient, advanced, and lost civilization that was behind the sudden appearance of advanced civilization in both Egypt and Sumeria. He personally found the theory of alien contact more convincing, but he did not claim certainty about it. Noah Brosch explained in his book *Sirius Matters* that cultural transfer could have taken place between 19th century French astronomers and Dogon tribe members during the observations of

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Cover of the first edition

Author	Robert K. G. Temple
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the solar eclipse on 16 April 1893. The expedition, led by Henri Deslandres, stayed in the field for five weeks and it is reasonable that during this time many contacts with the locals took place, and that relatively modern astronomical knowledge was then transferred.^[2]

However, some doubts have been raised about the reliability of Griaule and Dieterlein's work on which *The Sirius Mystery* is based,^{[3][4]} and alternative explanations have been proposed. The claims about the Dogons' astronomical knowledge have been challenged. For instance, the anthropologist Walter Van Beek, who studied the Dogon after Griaule and Dieterlein, found no evidence that the Dogon considered Sirius to be a double star and/or that astronomy was particularly important in their belief system.^[5] Others, such as Marcel Griaule's daughter Geneviève Calame-Griaule and an anthropologist, Luc de Heusch, came to criticize Van Beek's dismissal as "political" and riddled with "unchecked speculation", demonstrating a general ignorance of Dogon esoteric tradition.^{[6][7]}

Reviews of claims

Ian Ridpath

In 1978, Astronomer Ian Ridpath observed, in an article in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, "The whole Dogon legend of Sirius and its companions is riddled with ambiguities, contradictions, and downright errors, at least if we try to interpret it literally."^[8] Ridpath stated that while the information that the Dogon probably gained from Europeans to some extent resembles the facts about Sirius, the presumed original Dogon knowledge on the star is very far from the facts. Ridpath concluded that the information that resembles the facts about Sirius was probably ascertained by way of cultural contamination. More recent research suggests that the contaminator was Griaule himself.^[4]

Carl Sagan

Astronomer Carl Sagan touched upon the issue in his book *Broca's Brain* (1979), seeing problems in Temple's hypothesis. As an example, Sagan believes that because the Dogon seem to have no knowledge of another planet beyond Saturn which has rings, that their knowledge is therefore more likely to have come from European, and not extraterrestrial, sources.^[9]

James Oberg

Journalist and skeptic James Oberg collected claims that have appeared concerning Dogon mythology in his 1982 book.^[10] According to Oberg, the Dogons' astronomical information resembles the knowledge and speculations of European astronomical knowledge of the late 1920s. The Dogon may have acquired their astronomical knowledge, including the information on Sirius, from European visitors before their mythology was recorded in the 1930s. Oberg also points out that the Dogon were not an isolated tribe, and thus it was not even necessary for outsiders to inform the Dogon about Sirius B. They could very well have acquired such knowledge abroad, passing it on to their tribe later. Sirius B was first observed in 1862, and had been predicted in 1844 on dynamic grounds. However, Oberg does concede that such assumptions of recent acquisition are "entirely circumstantial" and have no foundation in documented evidence.

Jason Colavito

The skeptic Jason Colavito counts *The Sirius Mystery* among the body of works in a tradition of ancient astronaut ideas that was ultimately inspired by H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos in his 2005 book *The Cult of Alien Gods: H. P. Lovecraft and Extraterrestrial Pop Culture*.

Unproven claims

One unproven aspect of the reported Dogon knowledge of the Sirius system is the assertion that the Dogon knew of another star in the Sirius system, Emme Ya, or "larger than Sirius B but lighter and dim in magnitude." A dynamical study published in 1995, based on anomalous perturbations of Sirius B (suggestive of the star being gravitationally influenced by another body) concluded that the presence of a third star orbiting Sirius could not be ruled out.^[11] An apparent "third star" observed in the 1920s is now confirmed as a background object,^[12] something previously suggested by Holberg in 2007:

Benest and Duvent found that stable orbits with a period of up to six years exist around Sirius A. There are no stable orbits around the less massive Sirius B which exceed three years. Therefore, if Sirius C exists, it must orbit Sirius A. It is also possible to conclude that such a star could in no way be responsible for the flurry of sightings from the 1920s, it would be too faint and too close to Sirius A to have ever been seen by visual observers.^[13]

— J.B. Holberg

The former study also concluded that while a triple system for Sirius could not be fully eliminated, the probability was low.

Temple's book and the debates that followed its release publicized the existence of the Dogon tribe among many New Age followers and proponents of ancient astronaut theories. Speculation about the Dogon on numerous websites is now mingled with fact, leading to wide misunderstanding among the public about Dogon mythology. Temple, however, has stated in the reprint of *The Sirius Mystery* (1999) that he in no way supports what he refers to as "sinister cults" that have been inspired by his book.^[14]

He also used the second edition of his book to complain about what he said was "the extreme and virulent hostility towards me by certain security agencies, most notably the American ones."^[15]

See also

- List of alleged extraterrestrial beings
- Murry Hope
- Nommo
- Pseudoarchaeology

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External links

- *The Sirius Mystery: how do the Dogon people of Mali know about Sirius B?* (<http://www.badarchaeology.net/extra-terrestrial/sirius.php>)
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