MYTHOLOGIS

THE DOGON MYTHOLOGY BOOK

Amma, the Nommo, and Sirius

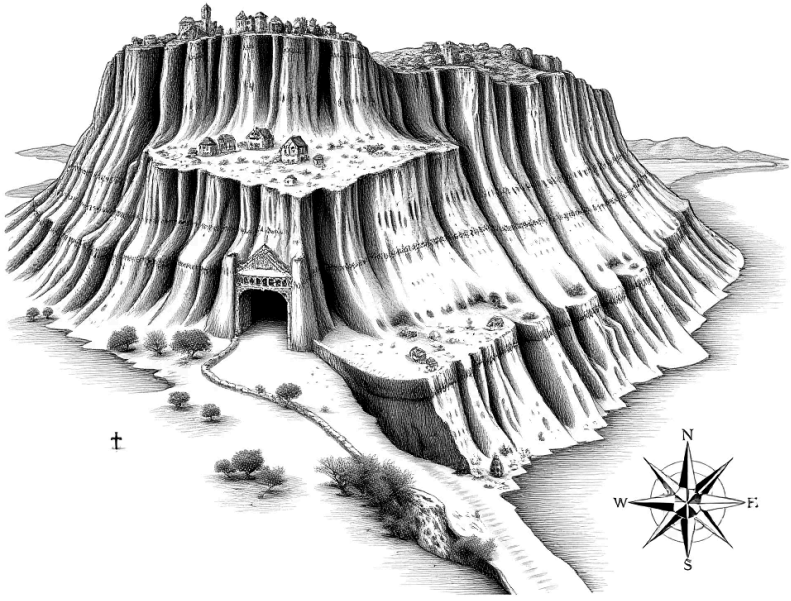
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For those who listen to what the stories say, not what we wish they said.

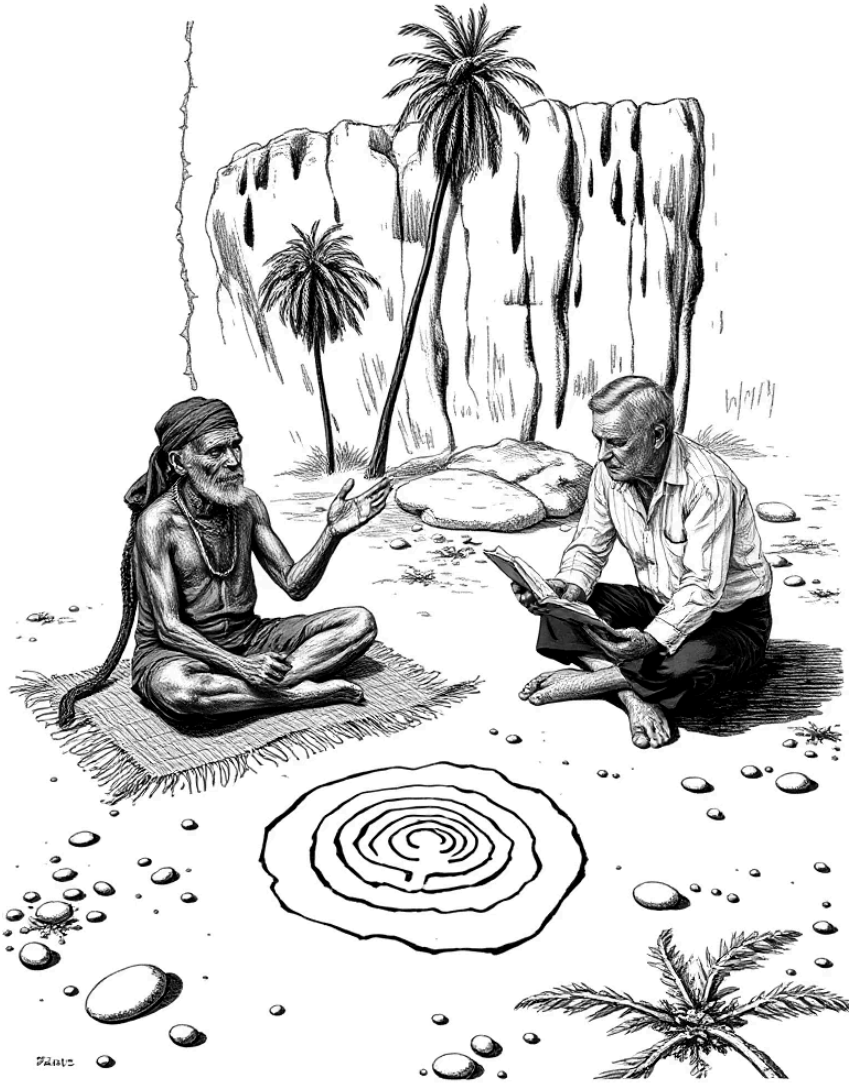
INTRODUCTION

I am standing at the base of the Bandiagara escarpment in eastern Mali, looking up at granaries carved into red sandstone, their wooden doors decorated with rows of ancestors and cosmological diagrams. The air smells of millet dust and the iron-rich earth that bleeds color into everything it touches. A hogon elder gestures toward the cliff face and begins to speak about Amma, the creator who threw pellets of clay into the void to make the stars. His voice is quiet, careful, the kind of voice you use when you are handing someone something old and breakable. I am listening, and I am also watching the way the late afternoon light carves shadows into the stone, the way centuries of habitation have left marks you can read if you know how to look. This is Dogon country, and the mythology that grew here is older than the cliffs, though the cliffs themselves feel older than memory. I came to this material the way I come to most things: sideways, curious, looking for patterns. My background is cryptography and naval service, not anthropology. I spent years reading encrypted signals, learning to see structure where others saw noise. Mythology operates on similar principles. It encodes what a culture knows about itself, about the world, about the forces that shape both. The Dogon cosmology is one of the most precise encoding systems I have encountered outside a cipher. It is also one of the most controversial, which is partly why I wanted to write this book. The Dogon people live in the Mopti region of Mali, primarily along the Bandiagara escarpment, a sandstone cliff that runs roughly 150 kilometers and rises up to 500 meters in places. The villages are built into the rock, stacked and terraced, some of them dating to the fourteenth century when the Dogon migrated to the escarpment to escape Islamization and slave raids. Sanga, perched near the center of the plateau, is one of the most vis-

ited, though visited is a relative term. This is not easy country to reach, and it was even less so in 1931 when a young French ethnographer named Marcel Griaule arrived with notebooks, cameras, and an agenda that would shape how the West understood Dogon thought for the next half-century. Griaule worked among the Dogon for 25 years, returning season after season, building relationships, recording conversations. In 1948, he published Dieu d'eau, translated into English as Conversations with Ogotemmêli. The book is based on 33 days of interviews with a blind elder named Ogotemmêli, who explained the architecture of Dogon cosmology in language so detailed, so internally consistent, that it reads like a theological treatise. Amma, the supreme god, creates the universe from a cosmic egg. The first act of creation fails: Ogo, the pale fox, is born incomplete and rebellious, an agent of disorder. Amma tries again and succeeds, producing the Nommo, twin spirits of water and order who descend to earth in an ark and bring the gifts of language, agriculture, and social structure. Eight ancestors follow, each associated with a different grain, a different craft, a different principle. The mythology maps onto every aspect of Dogon life: architecture, weaving, ritual, speech. It is elegant. It is also, quite possibly, too elegant. Griaule's later work, Le Renard pâle, co-written with Germaine Dieterlen and published in 1965, goes even further. It presents a cosmology so elaborate, so astronomically sophisticated, that scholars began to ask uncomfortable questions. How much of this came from Ogotemmêli? How much did Griaule shape, edit, or extrapolate? The answers are not clear, and they matter. Anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s was not the reflexive discipline it is now. Fieldworkers did not always interrogate their own influence. Griaule was brilliant, dedicated, and convinced he had been given access to secret knowledge. He may have been right. He may also have been hearing what he wanted to hear. Then came the Sirius controversy, and things got stranger. In 1976, Robert Temple published The Sirius Mystery, a book arguing that the Dogon possessed detailed astronomical knowledge of Sirius B, a white dwarf star invisible to the naked eye and not confirmed by Western astronomers until 1862. Temple claimed this knowledge had been passed down from ancient contact with extraterrestrial beings from the Sirius system. The book became a bestseller. It also became a problem. Critics pointed out that Griaule had access to telescopes, that French colonial teachers worked in the region, that knowledge moves in more than one direction. The debate has never fully resolved. Some scholars

dismiss the whole thing as pseudoscience built on contaminated fieldwork. Others argue there is something real beneath the controversy, even if it is not what Temple claimed. I do not think the Dogon learned astronomy from aliens. I also do not think the tradition Griaule recorded is worthless because he recorded it imperfectly. The truth, as usual, is harder and more interesting than either extreme. This book is an attempt to tell the full story. Not the sanitized version, not the sensational one. I want to lay out the cosmology as Griaule and Dieterlen presented it, cite the primary sources where they exist, acknowledge the gaps and the questions, and then trace how Dogon mythology has moved through the world since 1948. That includes the Sirius controversy, because you cannot write honestly about this material and pretend it did not happen. It also includes the living tradition, the ways Dogon communities today engage with, adapt, and sometimes reject the narratives that outsiders have built around them. The structure follows the mythological arc. We begin with Amma and the cosmic egg, the creation of the universe and the failure of Ogo. We move through the descent of the Nommo, the establishment of order, the arrival of the eight ancestors. Then we examine the material culture: how the mythology is expressed in masks, in granaries, in the layout of villages. We address the Sirius question directly, with the astronomical data and the historiography laid out plainly. And we close by looking at what Dogon mythology means now, in the twenty-first century, as both a living tradition and a case study in how the West consumes, misunderstands, and occasionally learns from the cosmologies of others. I have written this book the way I would want to read it. That means no jargon where plain language will do, no hiding behind academic distance when the material demands a judgment, and no pretending I have answers I do not have. Where the sources disagree, I say so. Where the tradition is contested, I follow the contest. I have tried to write with respect for the people whose stories these are, and with honesty about the limits of what any outsider can know. Mythology is not fiction. It is the way a culture thinks out loud about the questions that matter: where we come from, why things break, how to live in a world that is beautiful and difficult and never entirely knowable. The Dogon cosmology is one answer to those questions. It is not the only answer, but it is a rigorous one, and it deserves to be taken seriously. I learned to read encrypted signals by assuming the person who wrote them was at least as smart as I was. I have tried to bring the same assumption to this work. The Dogon elders who

spoke to Griaule were not primitive mystics waiting to be decoded by a Frenchman with a notebook. They were intellectuals, theologians, people who had spent their lives thinking about the structure of reality. Griaule got some of it right. He also got some of it wrong. Both things can be true. What follows is my best effort to separate the two, to honor the tradition, to cite the sources, and to tell you what happened when one very old way of understanding the cosmos collided with modernity, with colonialism, with the Western hunger for the exotic and the scientific need for proof. It is a complicated story. It is also, I think, worth your time. The escarpment is still there, red and patient, carved by wind and memory. The granaries still stand. And somewhere, if you ask the right questions and listen carefully, someone will tell you about the stars.



CHAPTER 1

THE CLIFF AND THE COSMOLOGISTS

In October 1946, in the village of Ogol on the Bandiagara escarpment, the elder Ogotemmêli sits cross-legged on a woven mat outside his compound. He is blind. Has been for fifteen years, since a rifle accident during a hunt. The blindness matters. It means he sits still now, measuring time not by the sun's arc across the sky but by the rhythm of voices, the scrape of a hoe against hardpan, the arrival of visitors whose footsteps he knows from twenty paces. Across from him, Marcel Griaule arranges his notebook, his pencils, the small leather case that holds his eyeglasses. Griaule is forty-eight years old, a former pilot who flew reconnaissance missions in the Great War and now maps the interior of other people's minds with the same disciplined precision he once brought to aerial photography. He has been coming to this cliff for fifteen years. He speaks Dogon well enough to argue. Ogotemmêli knows this and has decided, for reasons he will not fully explain, that it is time. The elder picks up a millet stalk, thin and brittle, and begins to draw in the patch of sand smoothed flat between them. The first mark is an oval. An egg. He taps the center of the egg with the stalk and makes a small depression. Then he drags the stalk outward in a slow spiral, the kind of line that has no beginning you can point to, only a center that pulls everything else into orbit. He does not look down. His fingers move by memory, the way a musician's hand finds the fret. Griaule watches the spiral emerge and writes: *Première figure: l'œuf du monde*. First

figure: the egg of the world. The air is hot and dry. October in the Sahel is the tail end of the farming season, the millet harvested and stored in the granaries whose wooden doors, carved with rows of ancestors and lock mechanisms older than anyone can date, line the cliff face like a written record no European has learned to read. The smell is dust and livestock and the faint iron tang of red sandstone, the same stone that stains every piece of cloth, every calabash, every human hand that touches it long enough. Ogotemmêli begins to speak. His voice is low, careful, as if he is handing Griaule something old and breakable. He describes Amma, the creator, alone in the void before there were stars. He describes the first seed, the first vibration, the collision that cracked the cosmic egg and spilled the Nommo into being. Griaule writes without looking up. His pencil scratches across the page in a private code of abbreviations and arrows. For thirty-three days, this will be the pattern: one old man drawing in sand, one European writing in a notebook, and between them a conversation that will become, depending on whom you ask, either the most complete account of an African cosmology ever recorded or the most ambitious act of interpretive projection in the history of ethnography. The Dogon are not a single people in the way the name implies. They are a linguistic and cultural cluster, speakers of more than a dozen languages within the Dogon family, itself a branch of the Niger-Congo phylum. Population estimates are notoriously imprecise. Contemporary sources suggest somewhere between four hundred thousand and eight hundred thousand people identify as Dogon, most of them concentrated in the Mopti region of eastern Mali, where the Bandiagara escarpment rises like a geological argument out of the surrounding plain. The escarpment runs roughly northeast to southwest for about one hundred fifty kilometres, a fault line in red and ochre sandstone that in some places stands two hundred metres tall. Villages cling to its slopes and nestle into its overhangs. Some are built directly into cliff faces, their granaries accessible only by rope ladders or toe-holds cut into vertical stone. The effect, seen from below, is of a city stacked in layers of time, each generation building slightly above or behind the last, so that what you are looking at is not just a settlement but a vertical archive. Griaule first arrived here in 1931 as part of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti, a trans-African ethnographic expedition funded by the French government and led by Griaule himself. The mission was ambitious in scope and morally complicated in method. It collected thousands of objects, many of them removed

from shrines and sacred contexts without what we would now consider meaningful consent. Griaule was not sentimental about this. He believed that knowledge justified the means of its acquisition, a position easier to hold in 1931 than it is now. He returned repeatedly over the next two decades, each time deepening his relationship with particular informants and his command of the symbolic systems they described. In 1938, he published *Masques dogons*, a study of the Dogon mask traditions and the *awa* society, the association of initiated men who perform masked dances at funerals and commemorative ceremonies. The book is dense, technical, filled with diagrams of mask types and transcriptions of ritual speech. It is also the first sustained European attempt to take Dogon religion seriously as a coherent intellectual system rather than a collection of curious practices. But it was the 1946 interviews with Ogotemmêli that changed everything. Griaule published the transcripts in 1948 under the title *Dieu d'eau: entretiens avec Ogotemmêli*, translated into English as *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*. The book reads less like an ethnographic monograph and more like a Socratic dialogue, with Ogotemmêli in the role of patient teacher and Griaule as the student whose questions, though frequent, rarely interrupt the flow of instruction. What Ogotemmêli describes is a cosmology of astonishing coherence and detail: the creation of the universe from a cosmic egg, the emergence of the Nommo as amphibious twin spirits, the theft of fire by the Pale Fox, the descent of the first granary containing the eight ancestors of humanity, the establishment of agriculture and metallurgy, the ordering of society into clans and cults. Every element is linked to every other by a system of correspondences. Numbers have meanings. Colours have positions. The granary is a model of the cosmos, its eight compartments aligned with the cardinal and intercardinal directions, its contents distributed according to a logic that maps celestial order onto terrestrial space. The book was a sensation. It was translated into multiple languages, taught in university seminars, cited as proof that African thought could match European philosophy in complexity and abstraction. Claude Lévi-Strauss praised it. Mircea Eliade referenced it. For a brief moment in the mid-twentieth century, the Dogon became the most discussed non-literate tradition in the academic study of religion. Griaule himself was explicit about his ambitions. He believed he had uncovered not just a mythology but a philosophical system, one that had been preserved in oral form with a precision comparable to the written traditions of Greece or India. In the in-

troduction to *Dieu d'eau*, he writes that the knowledge Ogotemmêli shared was not personal speculation but the fruit of a structured educational process, transmitted from elder to initiate across generations, tested and refined the way a scientific hypothesis is tested, by its explanatory power and internal consistency. Germaine Dieterlen, Griaule's longtime collaborator, took the project further. She had been part of the Mission Dakar–Djibouti and had conducted her own fieldwork among the Dogon independently of Griaule's. After his death in 1956, she continued the work, publishing in 1965 a monumental study titled *Le Renard pâle* (*The Pale Fox*), co-authored with Griaule but based on decades of additional research. Where *Dieu d'eau* is a readable introduction, *Le Renard pâle* is an encyclopedia. It runs to more than five hundred pages and includes hundreds of diagrams, genealogies, and ritual sequences. It expands the cosmology in directions barely sketched in the earlier book, introducing new actors, new stages of creation, new layers of symbolic correspondence. The Pale Fox, mentioned only briefly in *Dieu d'eau*, becomes a central figure, the trickster whose rebellion against cosmic order introduces chaos, sex, and death into the world. The granary of the eight ancestors is described in exhaustive detail, its architecture mapped to the human body, to the calendar, to the structure of language itself. Dieterlen argued that Dogon cosmology was not only coherent but esoteric, a body of knowledge revealed progressively to initiates according to their level of understanding, with the deepest truths reserved for the *hogon*, the spiritual leader of each territorial section, and the senior members of the *awa* society. The *hogon* is not a priest in the Christian or Islamic sense. He is elected from among the eldest men of a lineage and undergoes a long period of ritual seclusion before assuming office. Once installed, he is forbidden from touching metal, from washing with water drawn by anyone but himself, from leaving his village except for certain prescribed ceremonies. He lives in a state of ritual purity so extreme that it borders on paralysis. His authority is not political but symbolic. He is the living link between the community and the ancestor spirits, the *lebe*, who dwell in the earth and sustain the fertility of the fields. The *awa* society, by contrast, is active, public, performative. Its members carve and wear masks representing animals, spirits, ancestors, and abstract forces. They dance at funerals to guide the dead into the afterlife and at the *sigui*, a ceremony held once every sixty years to mark the generational renewal of the cosmos. Membership in the *awa* is contingent on initiation, a process that involves instruction in the

mythology, the making and consecration of masks, and the learning of a secret language, the *sigi so*, spoken only during ritual contexts. Behind all of this lies a question that has shadowed Dogon studies since the beginning: how much of what Griaule and Dieterlen recorded was indigenous knowledge, and how much was collaborative invention, the product of a cross-cultural conversation in which both sides brought their own expectations and shaped the narrative to fit? The question is not new. It was raised obliquely even in Griaule's lifetime by colleagues who wondered how a blind elder in a remote village could articulate a cosmology that seemed to echo structuralist anthropology, Jungian archetypes, and Pythagorean number mysticism all at once. But the critique became explicit and sharp in 1991, when the anthropologist Walter van Beek published 'Dogon Restudied: A Field Evaluation of the Work of Marcel Griaule', based on his own extended fieldwork in the same villages Griaule had worked in. Van Beek's findings were blunt. When he asked Dogon elders about the cosmology described in *Dieu d'eau* and *Le Renard pâle*, most of them had never heard of it. Some recognised fragments, names of spirits or ritual objects, but not the grand narrative structure. The cosmology, van Beek argued, was not widely known among the Dogon because it had never been widely taught. It was the possession of a small group of initiated elders, possibly even the invention of a single lineage or a single informant, amplified and systematised by Griaule's relentless questioning and his desire to find in Africa an intellectual tradition that could rival the classical Mediterranean. The debate has not been resolved. Subsequent scholars, including Eric Jolly, have pointed out that van Beek's critique, while important, rests on its own set of assumptions: that mythological knowledge should be uniform across a population, that what is not widely known is not authentic, that collaboration between ethnographer and informant is always contamination rather than co-creation. Jolly's work in the early 2000s has shown that Dogon religious knowledge is indeed stratified, that different levels of initiation grant access to different levels of narrative complexity, and that what Griaule recorded may represent the upper tier of an esoteric tradition rather than the common mythology known to every farmer and blacksmith. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle, which is to say it is irreducible to a single answer. Griaule was not inventing out of whole cloth, but neither was he passively transcribing. He was asking questions, and the questions shaped the answers. Ogotemmêli was teaching, but he was also performing,

aware that his words would be written down, translated, carried across the ocean to audiences who would never see the cliff or smell the millet dust or understand the weight of speaking into a silence that expects revelation. The granary stands at the centre of the first village, its wooden door carved with figures so old the grain has worn smooth in places, leaving only shadows where ancestors used to be. Inside, in the cool dark that smells of grain and earth and time, Griaule kneels and sketches the interior layout in his notebook. The granary is square, divided into eight compartments arranged around a central post. Each compartment holds a different crop: millet, sorghum, beans, groundnuts, rice, fonio, okra, cotton. Ogotemmêli has explained that the granary is a model, that the eight compartments correspond to the eight ancestors, that the central post is the axis of the world, that the door faces east because that is where the sun rises and where, in the beginning, the first light broke the cosmic egg. Griaule draws this. He draws the proportions, the placement of the door, the way the roof beams converge on the post like spokes on a wheel. He is thinking about Vitruvius, about the classical orders, about the way architecture in every tradition encodes cosmology. He is also thinking about his own fieldwork, about the hundreds of hours spent in conversations like this one, where every object is a text and every text requires a key. Outside, the sun is setting. The cliff face catches the light and turns the colour of dried blood. A group of children play near the granary, throwing a ball made of rags and string. They know Griaule by sight. He has been here long enough to become part of the landscape, the white man with the notebooks who sits with the elders and asks questions nobody else asks. They do not know what he writes. They do not know that he believes he is rescuing their culture from oblivion, that he sees himself as the last chance to record something precious before it disappears under the weight of Islam, Christianity, French colonial education, modernity. He is not entirely wrong about the threat, but he is wrong about the rescue. The culture does not need rescuing by an outsider. It needs space to continue, to change, to teach itself to the next generation on its own terms. Griaule does not see this. He is a man of his time, and his time believes that knowledge recorded in European languages is safer than knowledge held in memory, that what is written down is saved and what is not is lost. Back at the compound, Ogotemmêli is still drawing in the sand. The spiral has become a series of concentric circles, each one divided into segments, each segment labelled with a word Griaule has to ask him to re-

peat three times before he can transcribe it. The process is slow. Ogotemmêli's voice is patient, but there is an edge to it now, the edge of a teacher who knows that the student, no matter how diligent, is missing something fundamental. Griaule feels it too. He feels the gap between the diagrams in the sand and the lived reality of the village around them, between the cosmology as system and the cosmology as practice, between what can be said and what can only be shown. He writes it all down anyway. He believes that writing is a form of preservation, that the notebook is a granary for words, that what he is doing here will matter long after both of them are gone. He is right about that, though not in the way he imagines. The notebooks will matter. The books will matter. But they will matter as much for the questions they raise as for the answers they claim to provide. *Dieu d'eau* is not a neutral record. It is a collaboration, a negotiation, a meeting of two minds from radically different traditions trying to translate the untranslatable. What emerges is something new, something neither purely Dogon nor purely French, a hybrid text that belongs to the history of anthropology as much as it belongs to the history of the Dogon themselves. This does not make it false. It makes it what all ethnography is: partial, positioned, shaped by the encounter it claims to document. The primary sources for this book, then, are not innocent. They are Griaule's *Masques dogons* and *Dieu d'eau*, Dieterlen's *Le Renard pâle*, and the critical responses they have generated over the last seventy years. They are van Beek's fieldwork and Jolly's reassessments. They are also the oral traditions that continue to be performed in Dogon villages today, the mask dances and funeral rites and harvest ceremonies that go on whether or not anyone is writing them down. The mythology exists in multiple registers: in the esoteric teachings of the *hogon* and the initiated elders, in the public performances of the *awa*, in the everyday practices of farmers who plant their fields according to a calendar that maps the movement of stars, in the stories told to children about the Nommo and the Fox and the first ancestors who descended from the sky in a granary woven from threads of light. It exists, most importantly, in the refusal of the Dogon to be reduced to a single narrative, to be turned into symbols of timeless Africa or victims of colonial misrepresentation or anything else that flattens the complexity of a living tradition into a case study for someone else's theory. The thirty-three days of instruction end in late November 1946. Ogotemmêli has taught Griaule the structure of creation, the names of the spirits, the symbolism of the gra-

nary, the meaning of the masks, the logic of sacrifice, the grammar of a cosmology that binds earth and sky, human and animal, speech and silence into a single pattern of relations. Griaule has filled notebook after notebook. He will spend the next two years turning those notes into *Dieu d'eau*, a book that will make the Dogon famous and will also, in ways neither man could foresee, turn them into a problem, a test case, a flashpoint in debates about authenticity and authority and who has the right to speak for whom. Ogotemmêli will not live to see the controversy. He will die in 1962, still blind, still respected, still drawing diagrams in sand for anyone who asks the right questions. Griaule will die in 1956, in Paris, far from the cliff, his reputation secure but also, already, beginning to fracture. On the last day, Griaule asks Ogotemmêli why he decided to teach him, why after fifteen years of polite but limited conversation he suddenly opened the door to the deeper knowledge. Ogotemmêli's answer is recorded in the final pages of *Dieu d'eau*. He says that he was instructed to teach, that the elders had discussed it and decided that the knowledge should be shared, that the world was changing and that if the Dogon did not tell their own story, someone else would tell it for them, and badly. It is a pragmatic answer, and also a sad one. It acknowledges the reality of colonial power, the fact that Griaule and people like him will write about the Dogon whether the Dogon cooperate or not, and that cooperation at least gives them some measure of control over the narrative. It also suggests that Ogotemmêli understood the risks, that he knew the knowledge, once written down, would leave his hands and travel in directions he could not predict or control. And it did. The cosmology that Ogotemmêli drew in sand and Griaule wrote in ink has travelled far. It has appeared in textbooks and museum exhibitions and New Age manuals. It has been invoked as evidence for ancient astronauts, for hidden wisdom, for the superiority of oral over written culture, for the opposite. It has been deconstructed, defended, dismissed, and resurrected more times than anyone can count. Through it all, the cliff remains. The granaries remain. The hogon still walks the narrow paths between compounds, and the *awa* still dance at funerals, and the elders still teach the young ones how to read the diagrams, how to interpret the masks, how to remember the stories that matter. The mythology is not frozen in Griaule's notebooks. It is still being told, still being lived, still changing in response to new conditions and new questions. That is what makes it a living tradition rather than an artifact. That is also what makes it impossible to capture in a

single book, whether written by a French ethnographer in 1948 or anyone else. The last light fades from the cliff face. The granary doors, dark against the red stone, close for the night. Inside, the millet waits for morning, for the hands that will measure it out, for the mouths that will eat it, for the next planting season when the cycle begins again.



CHAPTER 2

AMMA AND THE COSMIC EGG

In the beginning there is only Amma, alone in the void. The void has no colour because there is no light, and no darkness either, because darkness requires something to obscure. Amma is shaped like a potter's wheel spinning, though there is no potter and no clay yet, only the possibility of both. The wheel turns without friction, without sound, a motion so slow that it might be stillness, so fast that it might be everywhere at once. Amma thinks, and the thought has weight. It gathers at the centre of the spinning, dense and hot, compressing into a point smaller than a millet seed but heavier than all the sandstone cliffs that will one day rise from the earth's crust. The compression continues until the thought becomes substance, and the substance becomes an egg. Not the kind you crack for breakfast. This egg is perfect, symmetrical, humming with potential. The Dogon call it the *po*, the smallest seed, the one that contains everything. It floats in the void, rotating slowly, and inside it are the blueprints for stone, for water, for fire, for the first breath of wind. Inside it are the future outlines of every animal, every plant, every word that will ever be spoken. The egg does not rest. Amma's vibration passes through it, a frequency too low to hear but strong enough to crack the shell from within. The crack begins at the top, a hairline fracture that spirals outward, tracing a logarithmic curve. The spiral is not random. It follows a pattern that will repeat itself later in the shape of galaxies, in the coil of a snail's shell, in the arrangement

of seeds in a sunflower head, in the way the hogon walks the path around his compound during the consecration rites. As the crack widens, the first sound emerges. The Dogon word for it is *nommo*, which also names the twin water spirits who will be born later, who are both word and being, sound made flesh. The sound is not a voice, not yet. It is pure vibration, the hum of creation tuning itself, finding the frequency at which matter can condense out of thought and thought can shape matter. The egg splits. The fragments do not fall because there is no gravity, no up or down. They spiral outward in four directions, and as they spiral they cool and differentiate. One fragment becomes fire, bright and consuming. Another becomes water, formless and receptive. A third becomes earth, dense and stable. The fourth becomes air, invisible but present, the breath that will later animate the first ancestors. Amma watches this. Watches is the wrong word because Amma has no eyes. Amma *is* the watching, the awareness that holds the spinning fragments in relation to one another, that keeps the fire from consuming the water, the earth from collapsing back into itself. The four elements begin to interact. Fire heats air, air moves water, water erodes earth, earth feeds fire. The cycle establishes itself, automatic now, no longer requiring Amma's direct intervention. The spiral continues to expand. At its outer edge, where the vibration slows and cools, the first stars condense. They are not burning yet. They are seeds, *po* of their own, each one waiting for the signal to ignite. Amma will throw them later, scattering them across the void like a farmer broadcasting millet, and they will become the visible sky, the map by which every subsequent generation will navigate. The account of Amma and the cosmic egg appears most completely in Griaule's *Dieu d'eau*, particularly in the first chapter, where Ogotemmêli describes the creator as existing before time, before space, before the distinction between being and non-being. Amma is not a personal god in the manner of Zeus or Yahweh. Amma does not have moods, does not demand worship, does not intervene in human affairs with the petty jealousies that characterise so many Mediterranean deities. Amma is closer to the Greek concept of the *arche*, the originating principle, the uncaused cause that sets everything else in motion. The difference is that Amma retains agency. Amma *decides* to create, chooses to compress the void into the *po*, opts for vibration over stillness. This decision is not explained in the sources. It simply *is*, the foundational fact from which all subsequent facts derive. The *po* itself is described in exhaustive detail in *Le Renard pâle*, the 1965 study

Griaule and Dieterlen published after decades of additional fieldwork. The *po* is both singular and multiple. There is the first *po*, the cosmic egg that contains the blueprint for the universe, and there are subsequent *po*, smaller seeds embedded within every created thing, each one containing the pattern of its species. A millet seed is a *po*. A human embryo is a *po*. The difference is one of scale, not of kind. Every *po* recapitulates the structure of the original egg, spiraling outward from a dense centre, differentiating into parts while retaining the memory of the whole. The number 266 appears repeatedly in *Le Renard pâle* as the total count of categories into which Amma divided creation. These are not species in the biological sense but types, fundamental forms that cut across the boundaries we usually draw between animate and inanimate, organic and mineral. Stone is a category. Iron is a category. Speech is a category. Each one has its own *po*, its own seed-pattern, which can be planted, nurtured, harvested. The cosmological diagram associated with this phase of creation is called the granary of Amma, though it predates the descent of the actual granary that will arrive later in the narrative with the eight ancestors. The granary of Amma is a three-dimensional figure, difficult to render on a flat page but clear enough in Dogon ritual drawings. It consists of seven compartments arranged in a spiral, each compartment corresponding to one of the seven days of creation. The days are not twenty-four-hour periods. They are stages, phases of increasing complexity as Amma moves from the formless *po* to the structured cosmos. Griaule's *Masques dogons*, published in 1938, includes early versions of this diagram, though the fuller elaboration appears only in *Le Renard pâle*. The granary is both map and model. It maps the sequence of creation, the order in which different categories of being emerge. It models the structure of the universe, showing how the compartments relate to one another spatially, how the spiral connects the centre to the periphery, how the whole thing holds together under the pressure of its own internal logic. The diagram is not decorative. It is functional, used in divination, in the layout of fields, in the architecture of actual granaries, in the choreography of mask dances. To know the diagram is to know how creation works, to be able to replicate its structure in miniature, to align human activity with cosmic pattern. Number symbolism saturates every level of this cosmology. One is Amma, the unity before differentiation. Two is the principle of twinness, the idea that all created things come in pairs, that duality is the fundamental structure of being. The Nommo will be twins. The first hu-