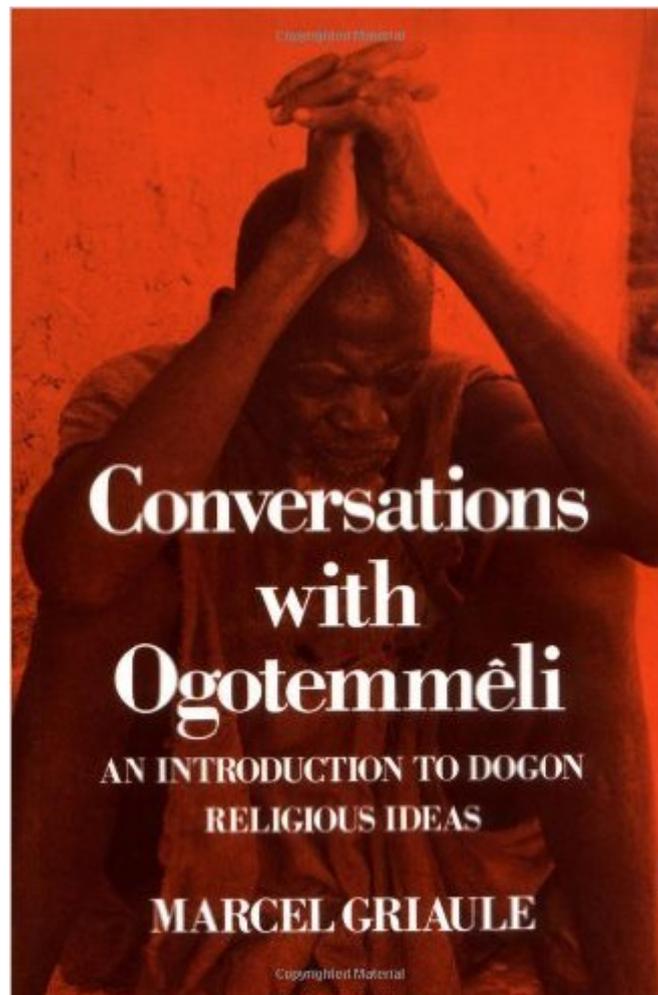


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Conversations With Ogotemmeli: An Introduction To Dogon Religious Ideas



Synopsis

Originally published in 1948 as *Dieu d'Eau*, this near-classic offers a unique and first-hand account of the myth, religion and philosophy of the Dogon...

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

French ethnologist Marcel Griaule led numerous research expeditions throughout Africa from the 1930s until his death in 1956. He carried out his best-known research on the Dogon people of Mali. "CONVERSATIONS WITH OGOTEMMELI" is presented as a series of 33 encounters with Ogotemmeli, an elderly Dogon sage, who explains his people's creation myth and understanding of the universe. Griaule's text offers us Ogotemmeli's words with comparatively little comment and even less explanation. We read of gods and water spirits, immortal ancestor figures and blacksmiths descending to earth on rainbows. Griaule asks questions and relates his own interpretation of the story but only rarely. Near the end he wonders whether there is more than a superficial resemblance between Dogon cosmology and the signs of the Zodiac. Otherwise, the book consists of elaborately rendered folklore, "straight from the horse's mouth" so to speak. The problem with this text is that Griaule gives us nothing with which to evaluate what his elderly informant is telling him. As renowned anthropologist Jack Goody wrote of this English translation in 1967, "What are we to make of this rich and indigestible fare?" There is no way to judge the significance of this myth based on this book alone, and subsequent research has thrown much of what Ogotemmeli tells us into doubt: the question is not whether the old man really said all this to Griaule (he probably did), but whether what he told him was really at the heart of Dogon culture. The fact that other

anthropologists working among the Dogon have failed to find evidence of a coherent creation myth, despite spending years in the field and mastering the language (neither of which Griaule had done), should make us ask what this book really represents.

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