

DEMOGRAPHIC AND GENETIC EVOLUTION OF AN ISOLATED DOGON POPULATION

(MALI, ARRONDISSEMENT OF BONI)

The Dogons in this study form an isolated population living on a range of table mountains around the arrondissement of Boni in Mali.

(The coordinates of Boni, central geographic point of the study, are : 15°04'29" N and 2°13'15" W but Boni is not included in the study).

The genetics of this population was studied to describe and analyse group dynamics, the aim being to shed light on the factors and processes affecting changes in the population's genetic structure.

This population is very interesting, as it corresponds closely to the assumptions used in population genetics models: a clearly delimited group thanks to a strong ethnic barrier (96% of marriages between Dogons); small population size (5,100); partition into four endogamous sub-units corresponding to different settlement areas (84% of marriages within a single settlement area); endogamy resulting in high levels of consanguinity within each group.

Genealogies, providing a record of gene transmission from one generation to the next, were established between 1975 and 1987.

The population is spread across four mountain settlements located around 40 km apart, from west to east : Sarnyééré in the west; Ella; Loro; Tabi in the east.

Each isolated settlement area comprises 3-4 Dogon villages, with a total of 15 villages in all. Sahelian-type climate.

Islamized sedentary farmers in a patrilineal, patrilocal, polygamous society: a man aged 50 has had 2.7 wives on average. High natural fertility (7.2 births per woman on average), very high infant and early childhood mortality. Mean age at marriage 18.2 years for women, 23.9 years for men (age difference between spouses of 6 years on average).

Practically universal first marriage, associated with high matrimonial mobility (frequent divorces and remarriages). Preferential wife (in principle): matrilineal cross cousin.

The genetic study reveals that the population is indeed divided into 4 small isolates (= mountain settlements) and is not at all homogeneous.