REVIEWS

BARNES, Sandra T., (ed.), *Africa's Ogun. Old World and New* (second expanded edition), Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1997, xxi, 389 pp., $45.00 (cloth) 0 253 33251 6, $17.95 (paper) 0 253 21083 6.

Eight years after its first publication in 1989, this ground-breaking collection of essays on Ogun appears here in a second, expanded edition. 'Ogun Lalaaye'—'Ogun's fame is worldwide'—claims one of the god's Yoruba praise names, and the new edition reflects the continuing vitality of Ogun's various international manifestations by drawing on the recent upsurge of research into Afro-American religions. With a new introduction by Sandra Barnes, five more chapters added to the original ten, and weighing in at almost 400 pages, this is a very substantial volume indeed. With the exception of an historical analysis of the Ogun cult in precolonial Yorubaland, the new contributions focus largely on the New World, effectively shifting the emphasis away from Ogun's West African heartland and towards Latin America, the Caribbean and—importantly—the United States. It is here in the latter, in the face of stiff competition from the established global faiths, we find the old iron-wielding pioneer of the forests determinedly cutting a path into the idiosyncratic world of the new religious movements.

The ten original essays have been replicated without revision. Sandra Barnes's elegant introduction to the first edition outlines the historic importance of Ogun in the religious repertoire of the Yoruba-, Edo- and Fon-speaking peoples of West Africa, emphasising too his striking adaptability to modernity in both Old and New World contexts. Four chapters together trace the origin and spread of Ogun in Africa and the Americas. Identifying cognates of the word 'Ogun' in contiguous cultures stretching from the Igbo in the east to the Fon in the west, Robert Armstrong suggests that the association of the cult with hunting may have predated the metallurgical revolution and the concept of Ogun as (god of) iron. Barnes and Paula Ben-Amos analyse Ogun as an 'ideology of progress,' personifying the historical shift from hunting to agriculture, metallurgy and finally the militarised state-formation of
the Benin, Oyo and Dahomey empires. Karen McCarthy Brown then picks up the story in the slave societies of the Americas, locating the Ogun cult in the context of Haiti’s violent political culture. It was the aggressive, warlike attributes of Ogun’s multi-faceted personality, she argues, which came to the fore on the Caribbean island, where hunting and smithing were less important than in West Africa. Renato Ortiz closes Part One with a look at the Brazilian possession cult of Umbanda, which emerged in the 1930s as a mixture of spiritism, Christianity and the older Candomblé of Bahia.

The broad and sometimes rather speculative strokes of Part One give way to dense ethnographic description in a second group of essays which explore the meanings of Ogun in ritual, myth and art. With the partial exception of Margaret Thompson Drewal’s comparison of the dances of female devotees in western Yorubaland and Bahia, the focus is firmly on Ogun as Yoruba orisa. In a detailed reading of two civic festivals in the town of Ila, John Pemberton examines the dual, ambiguous nature of the orisa by stressing the role of Ogun as a symbol of human violence. Quick-tempered, impatient and belligerent, Ogun presides over the iron tools which carved culture from nature. If not carefully mediated, however, this violent nature can act against the social and political order, erupting as a destructive rather than a creative force. Ogun’s essentially ‘hot’ personality further unfolds in two styles of poetic chant, ọjọla and iremoja, examined with great subtlety by Adeboye Babalola and Bade Ajuwon respectively; and in his patronage as toolmaker of body-scarifying artists, as analysed by Henry Drewal.

Part Three, ‘Transformations of Ogun,’ comprises all new material, in some ways rectifying but in others compounding the shortcomings of the first edition. In celebrating Ogun as complex, universal metaphor and as resilient survivor, the original collection gave a misleading impression of the deity as unique amongst the many Yoruba orisa. The result was a triumphant but somewhat essentialised Ogun, cut loose from the moorings of localised, shifting cult complexes which characterise West African religious systems. This tendency to view Ogun as a pan-Yoruba deity of uniform character is convincingly challenged by J.D.Y. Peel in the volume’s only specifically historical essay. Drawing on references to orisa worship in journals and reports of agents—mostly indigenous Yoruba—of the Church Missionary Society between 1845 and 1912, Peel shows that the Ogun cult not only attracted specific occupational groups, but competed with those of rival orisa to fulfil different needs in different parts of Yorubaland. Thus, it was in the thickly-forested, ‘iron-hungry’ east that Ogun tended to attract the devotion of the