

Peter Lawrence, *The Garia: An Ethnography of a Traditional Cosmic System in Papua New Guinea*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984. Pp. xxv, 276, figures, plates, genealogies, tables, bibliography, index. \$27.50.

*Reviewed by Terence E. Hays, Rhode Island College and Australian National University*

Pacific specialists have long been familiar with the work of Peter Lawrence, especially his classic *Road Belong Cargo* (Manchester and Melbourne, 1964). *The Garia* follows that book in a projected trilogy on the southern Madang Province of Papua New Guinea, to be completed with a general study of the Ngaing of the Rai Coast (p. 1). It is a logical sequel to *Road* since it contains a fuller account of Garia religion (chaps. 7-8) than did the earlier, more specialized analysis of cargo movements in the wider region. The book is not only a study of Garia religion, however, for the "cosmic system" referred to in the subtitle includes "their generalized economic and sociopolitical structure" as well (p. 1). Lawrence's main concern regarding the two realms of human and "superhuman" beings is with "how they impinge, or are believed to impinge, on each other in everyday social behaviour, land tenure, local organization and sociopolitical control" (p. 5). Thus, rather than a narrowly focused treatment of Garia cosmology in the usual sense of the word, the present work is offered as "an ethnography in the general field of network analysis" (p. 4).

*The Garia* could almost have been the first volume in the planned trilogy. Lawrence says that its "substantive first draft" was his 1951. doctoral thesis, published now "with some embellishment but relatively little basic modification" (p. xxi). Certainly, Melanesianists will recognize a sizeable portion of the book (chaps. 1-6) as his earlier monograph, *Land Tenure among the Garia* (Canberra, 1955), "with some embellishment."

It may be that Lawrence was ahead of his time in the 1950s in presenting Garia social organization as fitting poorly the "African models" then in vogue, a point discussed by Meyer Fortes in a useful summarizing foreword (pp. ix-xiii). But the intervening decades have witnessed major controversies concerning relationships among land pressure, descent ideology, and group formation in Papua New Guinea societies. Lawrence acknowledges the importance of these issues--indeed, they constitute the major ethnographic foci of this book--but he treats the larger debates only as brief asides (e.g., pp. 123-125) and, oddly, declares that the "detailed examination of these kinds of conjecture has

no place in a work such as this" (p. 125). One is frustrated by the particularistic nature of the book, especially when the author repeatedly implies (correctly) that the Garia material has wider relevance, as in his use of global-sounding chapter titles and subtitles: for example, "The Structural Form of Human Society" (chap. 2), and ". . . Disputes in Human Society" (chap. 6). If he has indeed primarily "addressed the work to professional anthropologists" (p. 245), he must anticipate some disappointment on their part that the theoretical issues involved here are not dealt with more fully.

Also likely to disappoint specialists-- and surely the audience of indigent public servants and "new expatriates" (diplomats and businessmen, etc.) he hopes will find this book useful (p. 246)--is the fact that Lawrence has "concentrated on the Garia as [he] knew them between 1949 and 1953" (p. 245), hence the "Traditional" in the book's subtitle. He has made numerous (if short) field trips to the Garia throughout the 1960s and 1970s and into the 1980s, but the vast bulk of the extended case material and statistical information included here derives from the earlier period. This choice of substantive emphasis proves especially troublesome when one tries to assess Lawrence's numerous claims regarding the "resilience" and "essential conservatism" of the Garia, and a brief "Epilogue: The Garia and the Modern World" (pp. 245-253) seems more of an afterthought than a culminating statement.

It is, of course, unfair to criticize an author for not writing the book one might have preferred, but I think that many would have welcomed with excitement a comprehensive study of the Garia such as Lawrence could write with the benefit of over thirty years of fieldwork among them and a long and distinguished career as an anthropologist. Given the announced plan to shift the focus to the Ngaing for his next major work, it appears that we are still to be kept on tenterhooks.