

### Book Reviews

J. B. LOUDON (editor), *Social anthropology and medicine*, London and New York, Academic Press, 1976, 8vo, pp. xxv, 600, £7.00.

The thirteen essays in this book were presented at the annual conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists in 1972, and are now extensively revised. The authors are mainly professional anthropologists, some including the editor, with medical qualifications, and two with only the latter. These professional backgrounds have helped to make this an important book in primitive medicine as well as in social anthropology.

The main theme is concerned with concepts of health and illness, and the varied handling of it is mainly due to editorial skill. Each local belief needs individual interpretation in the light of religious and magical practices, and an understanding of it will elucidate the preferred remedy. A great deal of information is provided, often from field studies, although no new or striking insights are forthcoming. Nevertheless the book is a significant contribution to ethno- and, therefore, paleo-medicine. Of equal importance is the appearance of the medically qualified social anthropologist, who, although not unknown in the past, has certainly been rare. Dr. Loudon's "Introduction" discusses medicine in general and the association of the two disciplines and the likely results of it. His book is worthy of wide attention by medical historians as well as by social anthropologists and sociologists.

EUAN W. MACKIE, *Science and society in prehistoric Britain*, London, P. Elek, 1977, 8vo, pp. xii, 252, illus., £12.50.

The title of this book suggests at first glance a paradox: surely there was neither science nor society in Neolithic Britain. The author, who is Assistant Keeper in the Hunterian Museum, University of Glasgow, bases his work on that of Professor Alexander Thom and adds to his claims that the megalithic monuments of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Britain indicate that at this time an upper level of society composed of a religious élite existed, well versed in mathematical and astronomical knowledge.

Having surveyed the British achievement under such titles as 'Prehistoric metrology and geometry', 'The origins and affinities of the megalithic yard', 'Prehistoric astronomy', and 'Stonehenge', Dr. MacKie discusses the Neolithic society and its sites, based mainly at Durrington Walls in Wiltshire and Skarae Brae in Orkney. He suggests a reinterpretation of them, by means of his extensive experience of classic Maya culture in which astronomer-priests were also found.

This book will, no doubt, prove to be controversial, but there seems enough evidence now accumulated to indicate that the traditional view of the barbaric and tribal Ancient Britain must be modified.

PASCAL JAMES IMPERATO, *African folk medicine. Practices and beliefs of the Bambara and other peoples*, Baltimore, Md., York Press, 1977, pp. xvii, 251, illus., \$16.00.

Dr. Imperato has written several books on Africa (see, for example, *A wind in Africa*, 1975, reviewed in *Med. Hist.*, 1977, 21: 355), and this one examines the medical problems, beliefs, and practices of several native communities, mainly in West Africa.

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He uses the Bambara of Mali as his chief illustrative group, and owing to his close associations has been able to learn more about them than many other foreigners. Surgical practices, herbal remedies, the traditional medical practitioners, the powerful influence of Islam in this part of Africa, the relationship between primitive and modern medicine, and religious lore as it relates to disease, are all discussed authoritatively and sympathetically.

The medical historian studies contemporary primitive medicine in order to help him extrapolate into the unknown of prehistory. There are, of course, many books that will help him in this endeavour, but Dr. Imperato's is one of the best available. It also presents a wealth of information on disease in present-day Africa and the efforts being made to control it. Moreover, it is well produced and relatively modest in price.

HARLAN LANE, *The wild boy of Aveyron*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1977, 8vo, pp. [xiv], 351, illus., £6.95.

Yet another addition to the already extensive literature on this topic. The discovery of the ten- or eleven-year-old Victor in central France in 1799 instigated a debate that still continues: was he Rousseau's "noble savage", an imbecile, a deaf-mute, or an autistic child? In any case he was a creature to be studied carefully in order to elucidate human learning and social development. Dr. J. M. Itard spent five years trying to educate Victor with only partial success, but the methods he used were the forerunners of those employed today with deaf or mentally retarded children.

The author has discovered three missing papers by Itard and a report on Victor by Pinel, the famous French pioneer in psychiatry, and is thus able to provide the first full historical and psychological analysis of Itard's methods of education and speech therapy. From them have stemmed new answers to basic questions of speech acquisition.

Lane, a psychologist specializing in linguistics, has written a detailed account but with insufficient documentation, the system employed for the notes provided being curious and difficult to use; there is, however, a full bibliography of twenty-five pages. Nevertheless, this book is an important contribution to the wild-boy corpus, to the history of the teaching of the handicapped, to the continuing arguments on the effects of environment on mental and linguistic development, and to the ever-popular discussion concerning the nature of man.

E. M. THORNTON, *Hypnotism, hysteria and epilepsy. An historical synthesis*, London, Heinemann Medical Books, 1976, 8vo, pp. vii, 205, illus., £5.95.

It is quite likely that in the past certain curious attacks, bizarre behaviour, and other odd episodic activities which were given many interpretations were in fact epileptic in origin. Recent knowledge of temporal lobe and other types of seizures allow us to make this retrospective judgment. It is the author's opinion that mesmerism can be accounted for likewise. Thus the convulsive crisis, the deep coma, the convulsions, and other physical phenomena are all epileptic in origin when the early accounts of them are studied carefully. Hysteria is also closely involved with mesmerism and of like causation. Oddities such as Tremblers, Jumpers, Convulsionaires, the Jerkers,