

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.