

Shankman, Paul. 2021. *Margaret Mead*. London, New York: Berghahn Books. 196 pp. Hb.: \$145.00/£107.00. ISBN: 9781800731417.

Book review by

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The biography *Margaret Mead* traces the life and career of the eponymous anthropologist, one of the most famous representatives of the field. Shankman barely takes a page to summarize the childhood or early youth of the scientist to quickly proceed to the year 1919 with an overview of Mead's early encounters as an anthropologist at Barnard, her becoming acquainted with Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, as well as her first field research, which led to her publication *Coming of age in Samoa* (1928). He continues to follow her life's story through the decades, recounting research trips, different circumstances of fieldwork, as well as her life in the United States. The author also depicts her personal life, perhaps in unusually great detail. The last chapters of the book are dedicated to periods after Mead's death in 1978, essentially due to the Mead-Freeman controversy, as well as Mead's overall legacy.

It is not always clear from which Shankman derives much of his information, as he gives few indirect citations, especially throughout the first half of the book. Because he is focusing a great deal not just on the personal life but also on the love life of Margaret Mead, leaving out references does appear somewhat out-of-place, for example, "When she was introduced to Bateson, he sympathetically observed, 'You're tired'. ... For Mead, these were the first kind words that she had heard in months, her attraction to him was immediate" (p. 65). And this is also the case earlier in the book with regard to Shankman's portrayal of Mead's relationship with Benedict, since there has been

heated gossip, even in the scientific world, concerning the nature of the relationship between the two female scientists (see p. 12).

Shankman takes a stance towards Mead's life and work that is neither judgmental nor neutral; with an upbeat tone to his writing, the author takes the reader on an exciting and almost gleeful journey of a scientist's successful career and, in this case, with an equally exhilarating private life. The biography's narrative style makes it an "easy read" and, because of Mead's life itself, allows Shankman to touch on many figures of cultural anthropology and ethnography that are of great importance to the profession and beyond, including Benedict, Malinowsky, Boas, and Sapir, to name just a few, as well as some of the concepts that they have brought forward. The book thus offers the opportunity to get an overview of the profession's history and many main figures and concepts for a student starting out as well as the experienced anthropologist wishing to refresh and extend their knowledge of the history of anthropology and ethnography.