

## CHAPTER 6

# Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* and Boasian Culturalism

### An Historical Analysis

In 1925, Franz Boas, 'the father of American anthropology', faced by what he called 'the difficulty of telling what part of our behavior is socially determined and what is generally human', arranged for his 23-year-old student Margaret Mead to go to Samoa in Western Polynesia. 'The compelling idea' of Franz Boas's 'life work' was (according to his student Leslie Spier) 'the complete molding of every human expression — inner thought and external behavior — by social conditioning'. Mead's task was to obtain, under the direction of Franz Boas, an answer to 'the problem of which phenomena of adolescence are culturally and which physiologically determined'. In 1928, in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Mead concluded unreservedly that the phenomena of adolescence could only be explained in terms of 'the social environment'.

Mead's extreme conclusion was very much to Boas's liking, and early in the 1930s he asserted, in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* that 'the genetic elements which may determine personality' are 'altogether irrelevant as compared with the powerful influence of the cultural environment'. This is a succinct statement of the Boasian culturalism that 'from the late 1920s' became, in the words of George Stocking, the leading historian of American anthropology, 'fundamental to all of American social science'. In this way, Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, with its approving foreword by Franz Boas, became one of the most influential anthropological texts of the 20th century. It is this situation that makes

the historical study of what happened to the young Margaret Mead in Samoa so fundamentally important. We are dealing, I would emphasise, with a strictly historical problem. What I want to do is to give a brief and final account of the historical research that I have over many years been conducting into Margaret Mead's Samoan fieldwork of 1925–1926.

My book of 1983, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, contained a detailed refutation of Mead's general conclusion of 1928 and, in particular, of the account of the sexual mores of the Samoans on which her general conclusion was based. So highly inaccurate was Mead's account (as Eleanor Gerber reported in 1975) that many Samoans believed that her 'informants must have been telling her lies in order to tease her'. In 1983, however, there was a complete lack of corroborative evidence for this Samoan belief. Then, in 1987, while visiting American Samoa, I was introduced, by the late Galea'i Poumele, a high chief of Fitiuta and the then secretary of Samoan affairs of the government of American Samoa, to Fa'apua'a Fa'amu, who, in 1926, had been Mead's closest Samoan friend. She had just returned to her natal island of Ta'u after having lived since the early 1960s in Hawaii. According to Fa'apua'a Fa'amu's sworn testimony to Galea'i Poumele, which was recorded on video on 13 November 1987, she and her friend Fofoa (who died in 1936) had, during the course of travelling with her in March of 1926 on the island of Ofu, comprehensively hoaxed Margaret Mead about the sexual mores of the Samoans.

There was thus, from 1987, a conspicuous need to test the sworn evidence of Fa'apua'a Fa'amu against the circumstances of Mead's Samoan fieldwork. A meticulous examination of all of the available primary sources was required. For the conscientious historian, the point had been reached where there could be no avoiding this question: '*What, in fact, actually happened during Margaret Mead's brief sojourn in the remote islands of Manu'a in the mid-1920s?*'

The first step was to arrange for Fa'apua'a Fa'amu to be questioned in much greater detail than had been possible in November of 1987. Accordingly a series of questions based on all of the then available information on Mead's Samoan fieldwork was drawn up and arrangements were made for the Samoan *alii*, Unasa, Dr L.F. Va'a, who was studying for a doctorate in anthropology from The Australian National University, and who, in 1988, was a lecturer in Samoan language and culture at the National University of Samoa, to travel to Fitiuta to interview Fa'apua'a. On 2 May 1988,

Unasa interviewed Fa'apua'a Fa'amu for a total of six hours and put to her over 250 questions dealing with her life history and with numerous aspects of her relationship with Margaret Mead during the first three months of 1926. Most of these questions had been prepared in advance on the basis of what was already known from published sources. Fa'apua'a's statements were recorded verbatim in Samoan. They provided a mass of detailed information of relevance to Mead's activities in Manu'a during 1926. A preliminary account of this research — entitled 'Fa'apua'a Fa'amu and Margaret Mead' — was published in the *American Anthropologist* in December 1989.

In 1990, when I was a Woodsworth visiting scholar at the Institute of the Humanities at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, the late Professor Douglas Cole presented me with photocopies of the correspondence of 1925–1926 between Franz Boas and Margaret Mead which he had obtained from the American Philosophical Society during his own research on the biography of Franz Boas. It was after studying this correspondence that I decided to embark on the historical study both of Margaret Mead's years as a student of Franz Boas and of the fieldwork she undertook in Samoa under his supervision. My first approach was to the archivist of the National Academy of Sciences, who sent me, in July 1991, a copy of Mead's 'roster file' for the years 1925–1926 from the archives of the National Research Council of the USA. Then, in 1992 I travelled to Washington DC to study, in the Manuscript Room of the Library of Congress, all of Margaret Mead's Samoan papers.

In 1989, after the testimony of Fa'apua'a Fa'amu had become known, the historian George Stocking expressed skepticism about 'octogenarian recollections' of 'events of sixty years before'. It was therefore decided to check Fa'apua'a's recollections of the time she spent with Margaret Mead in further detail against independently established historical facts that I had obtained from Mead's Samoan papers in the Library of Congress. Arrangements were made for Unasa L.F. Va'a (who was in Samoa conducting his own research for his dissertation in anthropology at The Australian National University) to revisit Fitiuta with a further series of questions based on Mead's Samoan papers of 1925–1926. This further research produced quite definite evidence that Fa'apua'a in 1993, as in 1988, had substantially accurate memories of Manu'a in 1926, including the time that she and Fofoa had spent with Mead on the islands of Ofu and Olosega on March of that year. On 3 May 1993, for a second time,

Fa'apua'a swore on the Bible before witnesses that all of the testimony she had given to Unasa L.F. Va'a was to the best of her knowledge 'true and correct in every way'.

During the 1990s additional evidence was sought from various other sources, right up to the time of the crucially significant discovery in 1999 of Mead's account (published in New York in 1931) of what had transpired between Fa'apua'a and Fofoa and herself on the island of Ofu in March of 1926. The historical analysis that follows is thus based on all of the available primary sources.

The vitally significant information for the understanding of what happened to Margaret Mead in March of 1926 is the fact that she brought with her to Samoa in 1925 a fundamentally mistaken preconception about the sexual mores of the Samoans she was about to study. This key historical fact is documented in Mead's own papers. It was a preconception she had formed from 1924 onwards about Polynesian sexual behaviour from her reading of the literature on Tahiti and the Marquesas. It had been further fed in the instruction she received at the Bishop Museum in Honolulu in August 1925 from Edward Craighill Handy. Although neither Edward Craighill Handy nor Margaret Mead realised this, the sexual mores of Samoa were markedly different from those of either Tahiti or the Marquesas.

Mead was given first-hand information about this marked difference on 10 October 1925, when she travelled to Leone on the island of Tutuila to interview Helen Ripley Wilson, a part-Samoan who spoke English and, according to Mead, was 'a Samoan by sympathy' and 'thoroughly conversant with Samoan custom'. Mead had gone to Leone especially to question Helen Wilson about the Samoan *taupou* system and the position of girls and women in Samoan society.

In Samoa, an *ali'i*, or titular chief of high rank, has the right to confer on one of the sexually mature virginal girls of his family the rank of *taupou*, the girl chosen being usually one of his own daughters. In a Samoan family, daughters possess a special status of respect vis-à-vis their brothers, and so a *taupou* is the apotheosis of the honorific standing of a chiefly family, with her hand in marriage being much sought after by other titular chiefs of rank. A *taupou*, like an *ali'i*, has an accompanying title unique to the family of which she is a member, and she is given a ceremonial

installation in which all members of the community participate. *Taupou* were to be found in every village in which there were titular chiefs of rank, and their traditional titles were known and respected throughout Samoa.

Mead had taken with her to Leone a list of 25 typewritten 'Questions to ask Mrs. Wilson'. She was correctly informed by Helen Wilson that only *ali'i* had the 'right to have a *taupou*'. A *taupou*, however, belonged to the whole village. As a virgin, the *taupou* was chaperoned even within her own village, by the wife of a talking chief, or *tulafale*, and if she went to another village, her 'chaperone' had to go with her. Indeed, as Mead recorded in her fieldnotes, 'girls even of common families' are 'never sent from village to village singly, without an older woman'. Further, 'It was not considered right to send a girl when there were plenty of men around the place.' Here, Mead was being accurately informed about the way in which every attempt is made in Samoa to safeguard the virginity not only of the *taupou* but also of the girls of 'common families'. This safeguarding of virginity in the traditional society of Samoa was to ensure that a male, and particularly a male of rank, could be certain that the female he was marrying was a *virgo intacta* who had not been possessed by any other male, this being regarded as imperative for the maintenance of masculine honour and prestige. Furthermore, this safeguarding of nubile females was associated with the distinctively Samoan custom of the formal testing of virginity at marriage by the manual defloration of the 'bride' before witnesses, by a male representative of the 'bridegroom'.

On 9 November 1925, about a month after she had interviewed Helen Wilson in Leone, Margaret Mead took up residence in the US Naval Dispensary on the island of Ta'u in Manu'a. Rather than live with a Samoan family she had decided to live with expatriate Americans, and the US Naval Dispensary remained her research headquarters for the five months that she spent in Manu'a. In this way Mead chose to cut herself off from the realities of Samoan existence.

In her letter of 29 November 1925, she told Boas that 'any discussion of sex and religious matters' would have to wait until she had obtained 'greater linguistic practice'. On 16 December 1925, however, Mead interviewed To'aga, the English-speaking wife of Sotoa, the high chief of Luma, about both female virginity and marriage in Manu'a. She was told, as is recorded in her fieldnotes, that 'virgins formerly left their hair long on top and shaved at the sides' and that 'if a girl eloped or became pregnant her head was shaved that all might know of her disgrace'. To'aga then went on

to inform Mead that at the marriage of a *taupou* or ceremonial virgin, 'the tokens of virginity were taken by the boy's *tulafale* (or talking chief), while in the marriage of an ordinary girl the ceremony takes place in the house, where only the family and the boy's friends are present and some elderly man, chosen by the boy, performs the ceremony'. This account, it will be noted, is very much in accord with what Helen Wilson had told Mead in Leone on 10 October 1925 about the sexual mores of the Samoans.

In her report to the National Research Council of the USA of 6 January 1926, Mead correctly reports (as she had been told by To'aga) that, in the case of a *taupou*, and also at the marriage of a girl of lesser rank, 'a representative of the bridegroom is permitted to test the virginity of the bride'. This is an accurate account (as far as it goes) of the traditional sexual mores of the Samoans. But then, in this same report, and despite the fact that she had engaged in no direct investigation of the sexual behaviour of adolescent girls, Mead adds the completely contradictory and entirely false information that in Manu'a there was 'an extensive tolerance of premarital sexual relations'. This then is the preconception that Mead had brought with her to Samoa.

Margaret Mead's passionate desire as a 23-year-old student at Columbia University was to undertake ethnological research in the remote Tuamotu Islands of Polynesia. To this Boas would not agree, considering it to be too hazardous. Instead, he imposed on his 23-year-old student a study of his own devising: 'to see how much adolescent behavior is physiologically determined and how much it is culturally determined'. It was agreed that this study would take place in American Samoa which was in regular communication with the USA. As Mead herself has stated, she was 'explicitly instructed by Professor Boas to resist the temptation to do standard ethnography'.

However, during her visit to the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, en route to Samoa, the Museum's Director, Herbert P. Gregory, offered to publish, as one of the prestigious Bulletins of the Bishop Museum, any account of the ethnology of Samoa that she might be able to complete. The temptation was too strong, and on 1 November 1925, some days before she had even arrived there, Mead wrote to Edward Craighill Handy, agreeing to work on an 'Ethnology of Manu'a' for the Bishop Museum. Mead's fieldwork in Manu'a was planned to last for six months, a quite limited period for the completion of the task that Boas had imposed upon her. Yet from the

time of her first arrival in Manu'a, in direct defiance of the instruction she had been given by Boas, Mead gave as much as one third of her time to ethnological research for the Bishop Museum.

During December 1925, in addition to this ethnological research, Mead completed a 'detailed census of the 856 inhabitants and the one hundred households of the villages of Luma, Si'ufaga and Faleasao', in which all of the girls she was proposing to study lived. However, at the time of her report of 6 January 1926 to the National Research Council of the USA, she had made no systematic study of the sexual behaviour of the adolescent girls of Manu'a.

On 1 January 1926, the island of Ta'u was struck by a devastating hurricane. It 'destroyed every house' in a nearby village and seriously disrupted for some three weeks the research on adolescent girls that Mead was waiting to begin. When she wrote to Boas on 16 January 1926 she was in a distraught state. She had, she said, 'no idea' whether she was 'doing the right thing or not' or 'how valuable' her 'results' would be. It all weighed 'rather heavily' on her mind. 'Will you,' she asked her supervisor, 'be dreadfully disappointed in me?' And her letter ended with the agitated words: 'Oh I hope I won't disappoint you in this year's work.'

On 19 January 1925, Mead made her first dated entry in the loose-leaf folder in which she recorded her notes on the sexual behaviour of adolescent girls. The dated notes in this loose-leaf folder continue until 15 February 1926. They comprise some 50 pages, each measuring 7½ by 5 inches. The notes themselves are highly unsystematic, fragmentary and anecdotal. Furthermore they provide abundant evidence that, because Samoan girls were, as Mead says of one of them, 'very secretive', she was having extreme difficulty in collecting any kind of reliable information.

Ordinarily, most of the girls Mead had selected for study were at school and 'inaccessible except for about two hours a day'. This situation had changed when the school closed after the hurricane of 1 January 1926. It was to reopen on 1 March 1926. The final fortnight of February 1926 was thus the last chance that Mead had for concentrated research on her adolescent girls. Yet when the opportunity arose, with the arrival of an expedition from the Bishop Museum, she completely abandoned further research on these girls and travelled on 20 February 1926 to Fitiuta at the eastern end of the island of Ta'u, there to engage until 3 March 1926 in ethnological research.

It so happened that Andrew Napoleone, the Samoan school teacher in Fitiuta, spoke excellent English, and in 36 pages of her field notebook number 4, Mead recorded the statements of Napoleone about the sexual mores of the Samoans. Chapter 10 of *Samoa: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, by Napoleone A. Tuitelepaga, which Mead, in her introduction, describes as 'a treasury of astute comments on Samoan custom and culture', is entitled 'The Role of the Woman'. In it Napoleone states (on p.431) of all Samoan girls:

After she has reached puberty, her girlhood and womanhood periods are guarded very closely; everywhere she goes she is escorted by her mother, older married sisters, or the family of old ladies. Her brothers, because of the brother-sister taboo, would not dare to go near her, but kept an alert ear-eye watch to assure her safety, so that she can keep her virginity until she gets married.

Again, on page 63 of his chapter on marriage, Napoleone writes: 'Brothers and other male relatives did everything to protect their virgin female relatives. As a result of this custom, women up to the age of twenty-five years kept their virginity to the time of their marriage, hence the custom of *fā'amasei'au* (defloration of the virgin bride).'

It was to this custom that prime attention was given in the information that Andrew Napoleone gave to Mead, at her request, when they conversed in Fitiuta in February 1926. Thus Mead's notebook number 4 begins with Napoleone's account of ritual defloration at marriage. In this ritual, as Mead's own notes of February 1926 record, the talking chief of the bridegroom, having wrapped his first and second fingers in a piece of white bark cloth or, if that was unavailable, white trade cloth, would rupture the bride's hymen. The cloth stained with hymenal blood was then, with a great shout, held up 'for all to see'. When it was known that the bride was a virgin, drums were beaten, objects broken, guns fired, and there was feasting. If a girl was not a virgin, so Napoleone stated, it was for her to confess this in advance to the officiating talking chief, for if the ritual were performed and the bride proved 'not to be a virgin', then all of the old women of her family would 'beat and berate her'.

Napoleone's account of February 1926 made it plain, furthermore, that this custom applied not only to the *taupou*, but to 'ordinary marriages' as well. His account also made it clear that with their ritual of public defloration at marriage — a ritual that traditionally applied to 'ordinary marriages' as well as to that of the *taupou* — the Samoans were much

preoccupied with female virginity. This information fully confirmed all that Mead had been told by Helen Wilson in Leone on 10 October 1925 and by To'aga, the wife of Sotoa the high chief of Luma, on 16 December 1925. By March 1926, then, Mead had been repeatedly informed about the sexual mores of the Samoans.

By 7 March 1926 Mead had still made no systematic investigation of the sexual behaviour of the adolescent girls she was supposed to be studying. Instead, she had been giving her time to ethnological research for the Bishop Museum, and on 8 March 1926, when a whale-boat arrived from the off-lying island of Ofu, Mead, 'lured by thoughts of ethnological gain', at once hired it to take her there for a ten-day visit. Her aim was to complete her ethnology of Manu'a for the Bishop Museum. Once again, Mead was abandoning research on her adolescent girls, none of whom could be contacted from Ofu or Olosega.

In her letter to Boas of 15 February 1926, Mead listed the information on a range of aspects of the behaviour of adolescent girls that she was proposing to collect by the end of March 1926, after which there would still remain for 'special investigation' the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl, as well as 'any philosophical conflicts' that might be evinced. These topics, Mead told Boas, were 'the most difficult to get at' and required 'the greatest facility in the language and the longest intimacy'. She was, therefore, deferring systematic research on the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl and on 'any philosophical conflicts' until April 1926, the last month of her stay on Manu'a. Furthermore, in this letter to Boas of 15 February 1926 she once again recorded the preconception she had brought with her to Samoa, giving it as her opinion that in Manu'a there was 'great promiscuity between puberty and marriage'.

This then was the mistaken belief that Mead took with her on her journey to Ofu and Olosega, on which she was accompanied, as travelling companions, by two young women from Fitiuta, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa, who were a few months older than Mead herself. Mead, identified as she was with the US Navy, was, in effect, a member of the governing elite from America, and so was able to behave as she did, living, as she put it, 'like a visiting young village princess'. In particular, at the US Navy Commissary, Mead had access to resources quite beyond the reach of either Fa'apua'a or Fofoa. Subordinate though they were to their American benefactor, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa were, nonetheless, thoroughly enjoying themselves. They were having a holiday together with all expenses paid.

When they went to wash Mead's clothes, they would always take along the ukuleles they had brought with them. In the mornings, before getting up, they would sing songs together.

In Samoa in the 1920s, it was unusual for unescorted females to travel about together. The arrival in Ofu village of three young women, one of them an American with a Samoan *taupou* title, aroused intense interest. On the second night of their stay, Mead, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa were ceremonially courted by the *aumaga* of Ofu, made up entirely of untitled men, most of them unmarried. On such occasions, which are called *aiava*, there is much speech making, singing and dancing, with first one side performing and then the other. There is also, during *aiava* of this kind, a great deal of light-hearted banter, frequently involving sexual innuendoes and allusions. Fa'apua'a recollected that during their meeting with the *aumaga* of Ofu, she and Fofoa joked with Mead, asking if there was a voting man she especially fancied and that when Mead jokingly replied that indeed there was, they bantered with her about the choice she had made. According to Fa'apua'a, it was on the island of Olosega, on 11 March 1926, the day following this formal but agreeably titillating encounter with the high-spirited young men of Ofu, that Mead, with whom they had already begun to joke about erotic matters, first began to question them concerning the sexual behaviour of the girls of Manu'a.

On 13 March 1926, after having completed her ethnological enquiries on the island of Olosega, Mead, accompanied by Fa'apua'a and Fofoa, walked all the way back to Ofu village. It was an experience that Mead described as 'sheer delight'. From the western tip of the island of Olosega they were ferried one at a time by outrigger canoe to the eastern end of the island of Ofu. From there, the three of them made their way along the southern coast of Ofu back to the village in which they had been staying earlier. It was, as Mead describes it, 'a long walk skirting the sea, at places racing the tide or leaping between high waves from one wet rock to another, but mostly following an easy trail, under a weak, complacent sun'. According to Fa'apua'a it was during this 'long walk' when Fa'apua'a and Fofoa were alone with her that Mead questioned them closely about sexual behaviour.

Since writing to Boas on 15 February about the research she intended to do on her sample of adolescent girls, virtually all of Mead's time, except for bulletin and letter writing, had been given to ethnological research, first in Fitiuta and then on Ofu and Olosega, locations far removed from the villages of Luma, Si'ufaga and Faleasao where all of the adolescent girls she

was supposed to be studying lived. Indeed, by 13 March 1926, well over half of the time that Mead had allowed for the collection of the mass of information listed in her letter to Boas of 15 February had passed without her making any progress at all. And there still remained to be tackled, in April 1926, her 'special investigation' of the sexual behaviour of Samoan girls, when she would be systematically investigating this topic for the first time. Because of the great amount of time she had given to ethnological research, there was an immense amount to be done — and very little time in which to do it. Thus, by 13 March 1926, the 'investigation of the adolescent girl' as 'a study in heredity and environment', which she was in Samoa to undertake at the express wish and under the direct supervision of Professor Franz Boas, was in a state of considerable crisis. It was a crisis that had been created because, in Mead's own words, she had 'abandoned' her interest in 'socially unimportant adolescents' for almost a month in order to do quite unrelated research for her projected monograph on the ethnology of Manu'a. It was in this impasse that Mead turned to the questioning of her travelling companions about sexual behaviour, hoping that in this way she could make up for lost time, and, if at all possible, reach a solution to the research problem Boas had assigned to her.

It was on Saturday, 13 March 1926 then, when alone with Fa'apua'a and Fofoa for some hours, that Mead grasped the opportunity to question them. According to Fa'apua'a, Mead put to Fofoa and herself the preposterous proposition (so it seemed to them) that despite the great emphasis on virginity in the *fa'aSamoa* and within the Christian church of which all Manu'ans were adherents at that time, unmarried Samoan girls were, **in secret**, sexually promiscuous. In this way Mead was seeking to substantiate her preconception that in Samoa there was 'great promiscuity between puberty and marriage'.

If only she could obtain from Fa'apua'a and Fofoa a clear confirmation concerning the premarital promiscuity that she believed secretly existed in Manu'a, she would then have established a cultural pattern that would allow her to reach what she so desperately needed, an acceptable solution to the problem Boas required her to investigate under the terms of her research fellowship. She had been led to believe by Boas that informants like Fa'apua'a and Fofoa could speak for the culture by which they had been shaped.

In Samoa, it is not acceptable, in ordinary conversation, 'to discuss sexual matters publically'. And so, in their embarrassment at Mead's brashness, Fa'apua'a and Fofoa, having conspiratorially pinched one another, blandly agreed to all she had suggested to them, telling her with due embellishment that they, like other young women and girls, regularly spent their nights with members of the opposite sex. In so doing they were, as a prank, engaging in what Tim O'Meara has termed 'recreational lying' which is 'one of the main forms of entertainment' among Samoans. It is also a custom that is very much a part of Samoan culture.

Called *ula*, *tausua*, *taufā'alili* or *taufā'ase'e* (depending on the intentions of the perpetrators), 'recreational lying', as O'Meara has noted, 'happens continually' in Samoa, with all ages engaging in it, people tell you stories 'especially about sex', try to get you to believe them, and then 'sort of chuckle inside'. As this account of O'Meara's indicates, the 'recreational lying' that is so common among Samoans is a form of behaviour in which, in the words of Curtis MacDougall, 'a deliberately concocted untruth' is made to 'masquerade' as the truth, this being MacDougall's definition of a hoax. In the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, a hoax is defined as 'a humorous or mischievous deception with which the credulity of the victim is imposed upon', with the term hoax being derived from the Latin *iocus*, meaning to joke or jest. The terms that Samoans commonly use to describe or refer to this behaviour clearly demonstrate that we are dealing with a form of joking behaviour. Thus, whereas *ula* (the term that the late Galea'i Poumele used in his conversation with Fa'apua'a on 13 November 1987) means to make fun of someone, *tausua* (the term that Fa'apua'a used in her interviews with Unasa L.F. Va'a) means 'to joke'; *taufā'alili* (another term used by Fa'apua'a on 13 November 1987) means 'to cause someone to shake with laughter' and the meaning of *taufā'ase'e* is 'to deceive in a joking way' (lit. to cause someone to lose her footing). *Taufā'ase'e* behaviour is thus a culturally ordained form of joking behaviour quite different in its intention from outright lying.

This then was the quintessentially Samoan response that Fa'apua'a and Fofoa fell back on when Mead advanced what to them was the ludicrous notion that the adolescent girls of Manu'a were, in secret, sexually promiscuous. As Fa'apua'a remarked to the late Galea'i Poumele, when he interviewed her in Fitiuta on 13 November 1987, 'As you know, Samoan girls are terrific liars when it come to joking, but Margaret accepted our trumped up stories as though they were true.'

According to Fa'apua'a, she and Fofoa colluded in telling Mead what they did because of their embarrassment at her insistent questioning on the topic of sexuality. They were enjoying themselves like true Samoans at the expense of a visiting American. They had no idea that Mead was an anthropologist, who, having taken their untruths and hyperbole to be facts, would put them in a book. If only Mead had challenged them, Fa'apua'a commented, they would at once have admitted that they were only joking. But Mead never did challenge them.

Mead's hoaxing on 13 March 1926 is fully attested to by the sworn testimony of Fa'apua'a Fa'amua, which is of a kind that could be presented in any court of law. Furthermore, with quite decisive historical significance, Fa'apua'a's sworn testimony is fully confirmed by Mead's entirely independent account dating from 1931 of what went on between herself and Fa'apua'a and Fofoa on the island of Ofu in March of 1926. For the historian, this independent confirmation of a specific happening is like a fix in coastal navigation. It is evidence of quite conclusive relevance. We know that we are dealing with an historical reality.

The account, by Margaret Mead of the time she spent with Fa'apua'a and Fofoa on the islands of Ofu and Olosega in March of 1926, is contained in a little-known book entitled *All True! The Record of Actual Adventures That Have Happened to Ten Women of Today*, which was published in New York in 1931. The 'adventure' by 'Dr. Margaret Mead' is entitled 'Life as a Samoan Girl'. It begins with a reference to 'the group of reverend scientists' who sent her to study the adolescent girls of Samoa with 'no very clear idea' of how she was 'to do this'. It ends with an account of her journey with Fa'apua'a and Fofoa to the islands of Ofu and Olosega in March 1926. Mead, using pseudonyms, refers to Fa'apua'a and Fofoa as the 'two Samoan girls. Braided Roses and Born-in-Three-Houses', and she describes how these 'two Samoan girls' (in fact they were both 24 years of age and slightly older than Mead herself) accepted the 'great squares' of bark cloth that were presented to her after she had, on Ofu, danced as a ceremonial virgin. Mead then records the crucially significant information that: 'In all things I had behaved as a Samoan, for only so, only by losing my identity as far as possible, had I been able to become acquainted with the Samoan girls, receive their whispered confidences and learn at the same time the answer to the scientists' questions'. Here Mead is specifically linking the 'whispered confidences' of Fa'apua'a and Fofoa (which we know, from the sworn testimony of Fa'apua'a, were about the

sexual mores of the Samoans) to her being able to obtain an 'answer to the scientists' questions'. There could be no more explicit account of what in fact had happened!

It should be noted that Meads use of the information provided by Fa'apua'a and Fofoa was perfectly sincere, for a hoaxed individual is quite oblivious of what it is that has happened. Indeed, all of Mead's attitudes in respect of Samoa from mid-March 1926 onward must be assessed in the light of this fundamental psychological fact. Her letter to Boas dated Ofu, 14 March 1926, her book *Coming of Age in Samoa* of 1928, and everything she subsequently wrote on Samoa were written in a complete lack of awareness that she had on Saturday, 13 March 1926, been comprehensively hoaxed about the sexual mores of the Samoans.

The independent accounts of Fa'apua'a and of Mead herself are also fully corroborated by the highly revealing letter that Mead wrote to Franz Boas in Ofu village on Sunday, 14 March 1926. This letter is a document of crucial historical significance. In her letter to Boas of 15 February 1926, Mead, in addition to listing the wide range of information she was planning to collect on her sample of adolescent girls, informed him that she was deferring systematic research on the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl until April 1926, the last month of her stay in Manu'a. On 20 February 1926 she travelled to Fitiuta to work on her 'ethnology of Manu'a' for the Bishop Museum, and this was followed, on 8 March 1926, by her ethnological expedition to the island of Ofu and Olosega. In giving her time to the 'ethnology of Manu'a' in this way, Mead was completely abandoning the study of her sample of adolescent girls, all of whom resided in three villages at the western end of the island of Ta'u, Luma, Si'ufaga and Faleasao. Yet, in her letter to Boas of 14 March 1926, Mead informed him that 'her problem' was 'practically completed', and at once proceeded to summarise her 'results'. 'Sexual life' (i.e. the 'sexual life' of the adolescent Samoan girl), she informed Boas, 'begins with puberty in most cases', adding that 'fairly promiscuous intercourse obtains until marriage'.

This information cannot possibly have come from Mead's study of her sample of adolescent girls for she had, on 14 March, not undertaken the 'special investigation' of the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl that was planned for April 1926. It is thus information that can only have come from the 'whispered confidences' of Fa'apua'a and Fofoa on the previous day. The 'whispered confidences' of Fa'apua'a and Fofoa had convinced

Mead of the 'truth' of her belief that, in secret, the unmarried females of Manu'a were sexually promiscuous and it was on this entirely mistaken opinion that she based her conclusion that, because the community did not attempt to 'curb' this promiscuity, there was an absence of stress.

It was in this way then that Mead, on 14 March 1926, solved the problem she had been set by Boas. During a brief return visit to Samoa in November 1971, Mead confessed that it was a problem she 'didn't even want to study'. What the 'whispered confidences' of Fa'apua'a and Fofoa had done was to provide her with a solution she could present to Boas. She was however completely ignoring what she had been told about the sexual mores of Samoa by Helen Wilson, To'aga and Napoleone. She had thus really done no more than reach a result that would, she felt, please Boas, whose approval she so greatly desired.

When Mead's letter of 14 March 1926 reached New York, Boas was indeed pleased and at once wrote to her. Addressing her as 'My dear Flower of Heaven', he told her how glad he was that she had been able to 'do so well' with her 'difficult problem' as to 'feel able' to state her results 'so succinctly'. Boas, given his own beliefs, had found Mead's mistaken 'results' to be entirely acceptable.

A great deal of highly significant historical evidence is also revealed in the actions that Mead took after she had announced to Boas in her letter of 14 March, her answer to his problem. Mead had asked Boas in January 1926: 'If I simply write conclusions and use my cases as illustrative material will it be acceptable?' When she wrote to him on 14 March 1926, Mead was awaiting 'with great interest' Boas's reply to this pivotal question. She was still on the island of Ofu when Boas's letter of 15 February reached her on 11 March 1926. He had answered her momentous question in the affirmative, thus granting her the option to 'simply write conclusions' and to use 'cases' as 'illustrative material'. This answer marked a crucially significant turning point in Mead's fieldwork in Manu'a.

From her questioning of Fa'apua'a and Fofoa she had identified, she was convinced, the covert pattern of adolescent sexual behaviour in Samoa, and had formally announced her 'results' in her letter to Boas of 14 March 1926. This meant, as far as Mead was concerned, that she had successfully provided Boas with the 'sort of thing' that she understood he 'wanted', and with this conclusion concerning a topic that she 'didn't even want to study', she did no further research at all on the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl.

Indeed, as soon as she got back to the US Naval Dispensary on the island of Ta'u, Mead wrote to Boas again. After receiving his letter of 15 February 'on presentation of results', she had decided, she told him in a hurried note, written on 19 March 1926, to 'finish up' her work 'in the next month' and to terminate her fieldwork a month earlier than planned.

In her 'plan of research' submitted to the Board of National Research Fellowships in the Biological Sciences in February 1925 Mead had written of spending 'a year of actual fieldwork in Samoa'. In Samoa, in her report to the National Research Council of 6 January 1926, she proposed five months of 'intensive study of the adolescent girl', in addition to the four weeks of inquiry she had completed in 1925. This would have meant a total of six months of fieldwork in Manu'a. To achieve this, she would have had to continue her research in Manu'a until early in June 1926, when she would have been entitled to 'six weeks' vacation. But from 19 March onwards she was intent on leaving Manu'a and heading for the south of France just as soon as she possibly could. The 'blue honey of the Mediterranean', as F. Scott Fitzgerald called it, was beckoning. By terminating her fieldwork in Manu'a in April, she could sail from American Samoa for Australia on 10 May 1926, and reach Marseilles on 25 June 1926 for a protracted holiday in France, England and Italy.

This sudden cutting short of her fieldwork in Manu'a by over a month had drastic consequences for her projected 'special investigation' of the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl, which, as she had informed Boas in her letter to him of 15 February, she was due to undertake during the month of April 1926. The last entry of 24 March 1926 in her loose-leaf folder is headed 'Cases To Use as Illustrations' and clearly establishes that she had adopted Boas's acceptance of her proposal of January 1926 that she should 'simply write conclusions', and use 'cases as illustrative material'. And, how did she spend the time while awaiting the arrival of the US Navy vessel in which she would leave Manu'a? As recorded in her bulletin of 24 March 1926, she spent the time that was left to her on the island of Ta'u in patching such 'holes' in her ethnology of Manu'a as 'the width of a basket, the height of a post, the name of a feast, how they burn scars, what you really call your mother's brother, and how many fires there were at a death feast'.

In view of the fact that the information she had been given by Helen Wilson, To'aga and Napoleone about the sexual mores of the Samoans, involving, as it did, ritual defloration in public at marriage, there was, in scientific terms, an imperative need to carry out the 'special investigation' of the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl that she had planned for April 1926. What was needed was a detailed testing of her statement to Boas, in her letter of 14 March 1926, that in Manu'a 'sexual life begins with puberty in most cases' and that 'fairly promiscuous intercourse obtains until marriage'. Yet, as the relevant historical documents show, after she had dispatched her letter of 14 March 1926 to Boas in New York, Mead engaged in no further systematic investigation of the sexual behaviour of adolescent girls. As far as she was concerned, the problem that Boas had imposed upon her and that she 'didn't even want to study', had already been answered in a way that Boas would find 'acceptable'.

And so, the 'special investigation' of the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl that had to be carried out during April of 1926, if Margaret Mead's researches in Samoa were to have any genuinely scientific significance, was never undertaken. By the first week of April, when she should have been carrying out this crucially important investigation, her days were 'simply a procession of ceremonial farewells'. Indeed, with 'so little left to do', there was even time, as she mentioned on 7 April 1926, in a letter to her grandmother, for her to write a short story about the faraway valley in rural Pennsylvania where she herself had come of age. It was a story entitled 'The Conscientious Myth Maker'. By 16 April she was back in Pago Pago en route to the south of France.

Thus, at no stage during her five-month stay in Manu'a did Margaret Mead carry out a systematic investigation of the sexual lives of her sample of adolescent girls. Instead, the results contained in her letter to Boas of 14 March 1926 were obtained from the apparent confirmation by Fa'apua'a and Fofoa of her false belief that in Samoa there was 'great promiscuity between puberty and marriage'. That Mead failed to carry out, during April 1926, her planned 'special investigation' of the 'sexual life' of the adolescent girl is, in scientific terms, a scandal, of a kind unique in the history of 20th century anthropology. It means that the conclusions about sexual behaviour that Mead reached in *Coming of Age in Samoa* are, demonstrably, not based on any kind of systematic empirical investigation. This undeniable historical fact impugns, in the most basic way, the Samoan fieldwork of the 24-year-old Margaret Mead.

Mead's official report was entitled 'The Adolescent Girl in Samoa'. After Franz Boas had pronounced himself 'completely satisfied' with it, it was dispatched on 14 April 1927 to the National Research Council of the USA and, on 10 May 1927, approved for publication as *Coming of Age in Samoa*.

In this report, Mead says of the adolescent girl that 'all of her interest' is 'expended on clandestine sex adventures'. She also lists living as a girl 'with many lovers as long as possible' as one of 'the uniform and satisfying ambitions' of the Samoan girl. In *Coming of Age in Samoa* she writes of the deferring of marriage 'through as many years of casual love-making as possible'. To this mistaken view of Samoa Margaret Mead adhered for the rest of her life. Thus, in 1950 she described Samoa as one of the 'best studied examples' of 'premarital freedom'. It was certainly her belief on 10 November 1964, when she visited me in the Research School of Pacific Studies of The Australian National University in Canberra. During a major interview published some two years before her death in 1978, she was still attributing the easy nature of adolescence in Samoa to 'freedom of sex'. All of these generalisations about 'premarital promiscuity' in Samoa are entirely in accord with the letter Mead wrote to Boas on 14 March 1926, the day after she had been hoaxed by Fa'apua'a and Fofoa — a hoaxing which gave rise to what may be properly called 'the Mead myth' about Samoa.

According to Mead, Franz Boas thought that her study of adolescents in Samoa 'would indicate that culture is very important', and when, in Chapter 13 of *Coming of Age in Samoa*, she proclaimed 'cultural conditioning' to be all important, Franz Boas accepted this conclusion with alacrity. Thus, not only did Boas vouch for *Coming of Age in Samoa* as a 'painstaking investigation', but in discussing Mead's Samoan research in his book *Anthropology and Modern Life* of 1928, he repeated, as though it were a fully substantiated anthropological fact, Dr Margaret Mead's entirely false claim that in Samoa, where there was 'freedom of sexual life', the 'adolescent crisis disappears'.

It so happens that 1927 was the year when, during a visit to New York, Jacob Epstein sculpted a portrait of Franz Boas. Boas's face, according to Epstein, was 'scarred and criss-crossed with mementos of the many duels of his student days in Heidelberg, but what was still left whole in his face was as spirited as a fighting cock'. While engaged in the nature–nurture controversy, Boas had been fighting for well over a decade to establish

his belief in 'the complete molding' of human behaviour 'by social conditioning'. When Margaret Mead presented him with an apparent proof of this belief he was overjoyed. As Liam Hudson and Bernadine Jacot have put it, 'What Mead showed Boas was what he wanted to see and having seen what he wanted to see, considerations of science and scholarship went by the board.' Convinced, as he was, of the 'truth' of his ideas, all that mattered to him was that he had 'won'. That Boas behaved in this highly partisan way shows how eager he was to promote the idealist ideology of which for decades he had been a prominent advocate. Most certainly, Boas's active promotion of Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* as a 'painstaking investigation' was crucial in securing its widespread acceptance by anthropologists and others as 'careful scientific work', and, by George Spindler of Stanford University in 1978 (50 years after its first publication) as the 'epitome of anthropology'.

It is now known from detailed historical research that the extreme environmentalist conclusion to which the young Margaret Mead came in *Coming of Age in Samoa* is based on evidence that is quite unacceptable scientifically. Thus, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, far from being a 'scientific classic' (as Mead and Boas supposed), is in certain vital respects (as in its dream-like second chapter) a work of anthropological fiction. Indeed, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute of Wilmington, Delaware, in listing the 50 worst and best books of the century, has adjudged Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, with its approving Foreword by Franz Boas, to be the 'very worst' book of the 20th century.

Furthermore, in the light of present-day knowledge it is also evident that Boasian culturalism at the beginning of the 21st century has become a scientifically unacceptable belief system. During the last half of the 20th century there were, in the words of Ernst Mayr, 'unprecedented breakthroughs in genetics, cellular biology and neuroscience'. Never before have there been such fundamental advances in our understanding of the mechanisms of life. Then, on 26 June 2000, came the announcement of the virtual completion of the Human Genome Project. It can thus be said, in the light of present-day knowledge, that Boas's declaration of the early 1930s (derived from Mead's general conclusion in *Coming of Age in Samoa*) that 'the genetic elements which may determine personality' are 'altogether irrelevant as compared with the powerful influence of the cultural environment' is one of the most egregious anthropological errors of all time.

In 1984, George Milner, who, when compiling his scholarly *Samoan Dictionary*, worked in all parts of the Samoan archipelago, judged that 'Mead's Samoan fieldwork was a disaster, and its data unreliable in the extreme'. Since that time, protracted and detailed historical research has fully vindicated Milner's judgement. Indeed, the historical evidence on Mead's Samoan fieldwork is now of a kind sufficient to convince any rational man or woman. There will, however, I have no doubt, always be a lunatic fringe of true believers, who will, while clinging to the wreckage of Boasian culturalism, persist in their efforts to reinstate Mead's aberrant conclusion of 1928.

For my part, I am satisfied with the detailed historical research that I have been able to conduct. And, having been able to withstand the irrational opprobrium that has been heaped upon me by the Meadophiles of the USA, I find solace in the tag: '*finis coronat opus*'. The controversy over Margaret Mead's Samoan fieldwork is then, for me, finally at an end.

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