



Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict: The Kinship of Women

By Hilary Lapsley

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This book tells the story of the extraordinary friendship between renowned anthropologists Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict. First as mentor and protégé, later as colleagues and lovers, these two remarkable yet temperamentally different women forged a bond that endured for twenty-five years, defying convention as well as easy categorization. Drawing on a broad range of sources, including recently released correspondence between Mead and Benedict, Hilary Lapsley reconstructs this complex relationship and situates it in the context of its time. She explores the ways in which Mead's and Benedict's professional work grew out of concerns in their own lives -- about sexuality and friendship, identity and difference. Lapsley also shows how Mead and Benedict used their anthropological studies to call attention to the cultural foundations of American life, Benedict seeking to make the world more tolerant of deviance and Mead to liberate the individual from the artificial constraints of gender and race. Overall, the book charts the course of a relationship that persisted in the face of numerous obstacles, including separations of long duration, the competing claims of other partners, secrecy about lesbianism, the tensions of professional rivalry, and the clash of different personalities.

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