This book examines the effects of the Peloponnesian War on the art of Athens and the historical and artistic contexts in which this art was produced. During this period, battle scenes dominated much of the monumental art and large numbers of memorials to the war dead were erected. The temple of Athena Nike, built to celebrate Athenian victories in the first part of the war, carries a rich sculptural program illustrating military victories. For the first time, the arts in Athens expressed an interest in the afterlife, with many sculptured dedications to Demeter and Kore, who promised initiates special privileges in the underworld. Not surprisingly, there were also dedications to healer gods. After the Sicilian disaster, a retrospective tendency can be noted in both art and politics that provided reassurance in a time of crisis. Bringing together essays by an international team of art historians and historians, this is the first book to focus on the new themes and new kinds of art introduced in Athens as a result of the thirty-year war.

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ART IN ATHENS DURING THE
PELOPONNESIAN WAR

EDITED BY

OLGA PALAGIA

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This volume investigates the effects of the Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) on the art of Athens. Most of the papers assembled here were first presented in the colloquium “The Timeless and the Temporal: The Political Implications of Art during the Peloponnesian War, 431–404 B.C.,” organized by the present editor at the 104th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America in New Orleans in 2003. The authors here discuss aspects not only of the art history but also of the history and religious attitudes of the Athenians during this critical period.

An exodus of artists and intellectuals is documented throughout the war, spearheaded by Iktinos, who found employment in the Peloponnesse (Phigalia), while the tragic poets Euripides and Agathon, as well as the painter Zeuxis, moved to the court of the Macedonian king Archelaos. Cult statues and architectural sculptures continued to be made, mainly during the Archidamian War (431–421) and the Peace of Nikias (421–415), while the brief period of Alcibiades’ victories in the Aegean in 411–408 may have inspired a spate of sculptured dedications demonstrating renewed confidence in the city’s destiny after the Sicilian disaster. New elements introduced in Athenian art as a result of the war are particularly highlighted in this book. Statuary in this period is not particularly innovative, except for the marble statue of Nemesis, created by Agorakritos for her temple at Rhamnous at the beginning of the war. Its base was decorated with an Athenian version of the myth of Helen’s birth, allowing the Athenians to adopt the main goddess of Sparta, thus neutralizing her potentially adverse influence. The architectural sculptures of the Ionic temple of Athena Nike and the temple on the Ilissos belong to the period of the Archidamian War. The triumphalist spirit of the Nike temple sculptures forms a sharp contrast with the introspection and melancholy of the Ilissos frieze, which deals with war atrocities.

The war triggered a revival of sculptured reliefs, both funerary and votive, and the invention of record reliefs. Funerary iconography in both sculpture and vase painting, exploring themes ranging from battle scenes to the passage to Hades, is particularly rich in this period. The vase-paintings of the Meidias Painter introduce new subjects that are intimately related to developments in the imagery of sculpture. War, death, and resurrection, as well as life in paradise, are some of the themes that recur in Athenian art of the war years. A new archaistic trend in sculpture may be associated with conservative elements in the political life of Athens.
Preface

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NOTE

1. The base and its political implications were discussed by O. Palagia (“Meaning and narrative techniques in statue-bases of the Phedian circle,” in N. K. Rutter and B. A. Sparkes [eds.], Word and Image in Ancient Greece [Edinburgh 2000] 53–78) and are not included in the present volume.