



Goddess and Polis: The Panathenaic Festival in Ancient Athens

Jenifer Neils

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While the Olympics, because of their modern revival, enjoy the greatest fame today, in ancient Greece other religious festivals were equally elaborate and impressive spectacles. The lavishly illustrated *Goddess and Polis* is the first work devoted to the Panathenaia, the most significant of these festivals to be held in ancient Athens. Founded in 566 B.C., this complex ritual performed for the goddess Athena vied with other Greek festivals in grandeur and importance and was particularly distinguished by the works of art commissioned in its service. Among these were the painted vases known as Panathenaic amphoras, each of which contained forty liters of olive oil, awarded to athletic and equestrian victors. The contests depicted on these vases are the best extant illustrations of Greek sport. Although women were excluded from the competitions, they had an important role to play in the weaving of the peplos, an elaborate textile that took nine months to produce. The culmination of the festival was a long procession bearing this new robe to the cult statue of the goddess; the procession in turn was the subject of another great work of art, the Parthenon frieze. Combining art, spectacle, and civic consciousness, the Panathenaia contributed to the development of the high classical style of Periklean Athens. This book deals with every aspect of the festival and produces a vivid portrait of the worship of the patron goddess of the city. Essays by eminent classical scholars examine in depth the musical and poetic competitions, the athletic and equestrian contests, the peplos, and the evolving image of Athena as documented in sculpture from the Acropolis. Jenifer Neils, the curator of the exhibition *Goddess and Polis*, held at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, has contributed an introduction to the Panathenaia, an essay on the prize amphoras, and detailed entries for the seventy objects exhibited.

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