

**ERICHTHONIUS AND
THE THREE DAUGHTERS
OF CECROPS**

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Erichthonius and the Three Daughters of Cecrops by Benjamin Powell

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BENJAMIN POWELL

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THE THREE DAUGHTERS OF CECROPS

BY

BENJAMIN POWELL, A.B., A.M.

A Thesis presented to the University Faculty of Cornell University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, June, 1904.

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EDITORS' PREFACE.

The premature death of Benjamin Powell in June, 1905, several days before the Commencement at which he would have received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Cornell University, made it impossible for him to superintend the publication of his Doctor's Thesis. The task, therefore, of reading and correcting the proof has devolved entirely on the Editors of the Cornell Studies.

They have been greatly aided in this task by Dr. L. L. Forman, of Cornell University. It is hoped that the result is such as would meet with the approval of Dr. Powell.

166952

PREFACE.

In this treatment of Erichthonius and the Three Daughters of Cecrops but little is required by way of introduction. I think the body of the work may speak for itself. Even a short sketch of the work done by me in the study of religion, myth, and ritual would be of little practical value to my readers. My plan has been to study the sources for this particular myth as fully as possible, and to adapt to my use the information thus gained from the classical writers. It seemed to me wise to treat the subject broadly, rather than to hew to one hard and fast line and try to make everything conform to a preconceived view. So many changes and influences come into the history of a myth that a great deal of allowance has to be made for peculiar features which do not belong to it originally.

I have tried to arrive at the truth and to present it, although at one time I may adopt a suggestion from one author and at another time discover the truth in an author whose ideas are opposed to those of the first. However for a complete survey, one must take many points into consideration, the etymology of names, whether the divine personage in question was a personification of some natural phenomenon, or a beast, bird, reptile or insect, a totem, a spirit of the crops, or an historical personage. This I have endeavored to do and my results are hereinafter set down. The writers whose works are used in my text are carefully credited with each reference. The work of Miss J. E. Harrison, who has discussed this myth more than any other writer, has been especially helpful. The literary sources are put in a body at the end.

The myth, which must be one of the most ancient at Athens, was not written down until somewhat late in her history, so that the classical evidence, although appearing somewhat bulky, is not always satisfactory and is often but a repetition of some previous account. I have begun the discussion with the different classical accounts of the myth and have then passed on to an attempted explanation of its meaning and that of the ritual connected with it. As will be seen, anthropology has entered largely into the discussion throughout.

ERICHTHONIUS AND THE THREE DAUGHTERS OF CECROPS.

Antigonus Carystius (*Historiae Mirabiles*, xii)¹ quotes Amelesagoras, the Athenian, who is telling the reason why no crow flies over the Acropolis, and why no one could say that he had ever seen one. He gives a mythological cause. "The goddess Athena was given as a wife to Hephaestus, but when she had lain down with him, she disappeared and Hephaestus, falling to the ground, spent his seed. The earth afterwards gave birth to Erichthonius, whom Athena nourished and shut up in a chest. This chest she gave into the keeping of the daughters of Cecrops, Agraulus, Pandrosus and Herse and enjoined upon them not to open the chest until she returned. She then went away to Pellene* to bring a mass of rock, that she might fortify the Acropolis. Two of the daughters of Cecrops, Agraulus and Pandrosus, opened the chest and saw two serpents coiled about Erichthonius. It is said that a crow met Athena as she was returning with her load and told her that Erichthonius was exposed. When the goddess heard this, she threw down the mass of rock, which is now Mount Lycabettus, and hurried to the Acropolis. On account of this evil message, she told the crow that it would be unlawful for it to approach the Acropolis."

Euripides in the *Ion* (l. 23)² refers to the story and writes that Athena placed two serpents as guards over Erichthonius. She then gave him to the Aglauridian maidens (*παρθένους Ἀγλαυρίδας*) to keep. Again in the *Ion* (l. 272 ff.)², he refers to the fate of the maidens. They broke the command of the goddess and at their death stained the rocks with blood (*i. e.*, threw themselves over the edge of the Acropolis).

* Mommsen (*Feste der Stadt Athen*, p. 498. N.) thinks this was the Thracian Pellene.