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**Erechtheus and the Arrephoria**

Pausanias' account (1.27.3-4) of the Athenian Arrephoria is our basic source for the festival. O. Broneer (*Hesperia* 1932, 50-55) showed that the Arrephoroi can have descended from the Acropolis with their covered offerings only by way of the great cleft at the north edge of the Acropolis plateau. Broneer also identified a shrine of Aphrodite and Eros on the Acropolis north slope as that of Pausanias' "Aphrodite called 'in the Gardens'" and concluded that this was the *destination* of the maidens' descent. This has elicited much speculation (i.e., Elderkin, *Hesperia* 1941, 119 ff., Burkert, *Hermes* 94, 1-25) on Aphrodite's role. I hope to show, however, that both the identification and its associated conjectures are mistaken, and that the Arrephoria were instead rites of Erechtheus.

First, Pausanias' words do not support Broneer's thesis: ε)στι δε\ περι/βολοι ε)ν τῷ= πο/λει th=j kaloume/nhj ε)ν Kh/poij )Afrodi/thj ou) πο/ρρω, kai\ di' au) tou= ka/qodoj u(po/gaioj au)toma/th; tau/tῷ kati/asin ai( parqe/noi, "There is a precinct in the city of the Aphrodite called 'In the Gardens' not far off, and through this a natural underground descent; by this descent the maidens go down." The precinct, that is, marks the *beginning* of the descent, not its goal: thus, ε)ν τῷ= πο/λει "in the city" actually signifies ε)ν τῷ= α)κροπο/λει "on the Acropolis".

So Pausanias does not place Aphrodite in the festival; nor is there other evidence for her presence, either mythical or cultic. Nor are the attendant speculations convincing. Burkert's makes the festival a rite of passage into puberty with its attendant sex (thus Aphrodite). A true rite of passage, however, suits neither the age of the Arrephoroi (7-11; *Etym. Magn.* 149.19-23), their number (two), nor that the identity of their offerings was concealed from them (Pausanias).

If Aphrodite is dismissed from the Arrephoria, our emphasis can shift to Erechtheus/Erichthonios, for whom there is good evidence in the festival myth (Pausanias 1.18.2), in which Kekrops' daughters were given the infant Erechtheus in a chest by Athena, with instructions not to open it. Aglauros and Herse disobeyed, and, maddened by the sight of Erechtheus inside, threw themselves to their deaths from the Acropolis. Erechtheus himself has long been recognized as a vegetation deity who dies and is reborn each year (Nilsson, *MMR*<sup>2</sup> 531-583). In time, he evolved into a mythical king of Athens (Eur. *Erech.* passim), and the details of his birth and nursing were appropriated by a doublet, Erichthonios (Escher, *RE* 6, col. 440; Nilsson *MMR*<sup>2</sup> 562): his death, however, remained prominent (Eur. *Erech.*, frg. 65 Austin, lines 21, 59-60, etc). This birth and death should have received some annual commemoration at Athens, which is likely to have been the Arrephoria. The offerings carried by the Arrephoroi included snake-figures (schol. Luc. 80.2), while in myth the chest of the Kekropidai contained Erechtheus/

Erichthonios as a snake or together with snakes (schol. Plat. *Ti* 23e.11-12, Paus. 1.24.7; [Apollod.] 3.189). The snake-figures were carried underground through a cleft which may have been both the source of Erechtheus' epithet Earthborn (Hdt. 8.55; also, a

subordinate meaning of *kh=poj*, "garden," is *pudenda muliebria*) and the chasm of his violent death (Eur. *Ion* 218; K. Jeppesen, *AJA* 83, 384). The destination of the Arrephoroi was probably the cave-shrine of Aglauros, who is named in the Erchia calendar, and is in the mythos of the nurses of Erechtheus/Erichthonios. Through her priestess, Athena was also prominent in the festival, and in its myth is Erechtheus/Erichthonios' foster mother ([Apollod.] 3.189).

Supporting Erechtheus' vegetation status, the term of office of the Arrephoroi corresponded approximately to the season of plant growth in Greece (end of Pyanopsion – Skirophorion; Harpokration, *Suda* s.v. *Xalkei=a*). The Arrephoria, then, may have primarily commemorated Erechtheus' death. His rebirth, however, may have been observed also, in the maidens' ascent from below with new offerings (Pausanias): ceremonies of divine death and rebirth were often performed at very short intervals.