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Religion in Society/// Image, Text, Reality

*The snake at Athens: Erichthonios, Athena or something else? On the οἰκουρὸς ὄφις and its possible origins.*

I propose here the analysis of one of the most conspicuous animals of the Greek culture in relation with the Athenian religion. A serpent was thought to live at the top of the sacred rock of Athens, and it was regularly fed with honey cakes. It seems to be a very usual inhabitant and it is only its disappearance what deserves mention in Hdt. 41, 3.4 and Plut. *Them.* X, 12. The identity and origin of such illustrious inhabitant was not very clear in the ancient world itself. For some authors it was Erichthonios, the “divine child” who was born on the Acropolis and who died also on it as Erechtheus. For others, it was closely related with Athena, the poliad goddess who watched over the city. I will go through all these figures and will deal also with other similar heroes also fed with honey cakes. I will also look back to Mycenaean and Minoan times so as to try to grasp the meaning and possible origin of the Athenian sacred snake, always bearing in mind both artistic and literary references.

(The Greek font I have used for the title is *Graeca Italic*)