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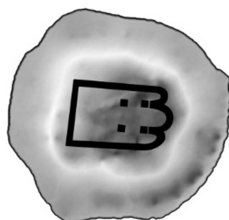
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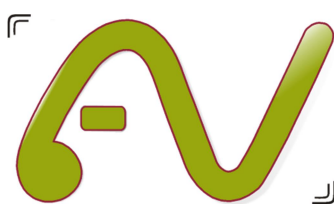


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CONSIDERATIONS ON GODDESS HECATE - GODDESS OF CROSSROADS

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Rezumat. Hekate era zeița enigmatică din mitologia greacă ce patrona magia, vrăjitoria, simbolizând lucrările tainice ale beznei nopții și ale lumii subpământene. Originea cultului este incertă, după unii cercetători fiind de origine tracă, după alții își are originea în vechea Helladă. Pe Hekate, Hesiod o prezintă ca fiind fiica lui Perseu cu Asteria. Descinzând direct din titani, era independentă de zeii Olimpului. În epoca ei culturală culminantă, era venerată ca zeița cu trei capete sau trei trupuri, adesea însă ca o zeiță în trei ipostaze diferite sau cu trei înfățișări simultane – tripla Hekate numită Triceps, Triformis, Trigemina, Trivia. În epoca romană a fost adorată mai ales în provinciile germanice. Imaginile plastice de obicei o reprezintă ca având înfățișarea unei femei cu trei corpuri sau sau trei capete, așezate spate la spate ținând în cele 6 mâini torțe, șerpi, cheie, bici, pumnal. Drept sacrificii i se aduceau: câini, miere, oi negre și pești - simbol al divinităților chtoniene. Oamenii ridicau la răscruci statui zeitei, iar oamenii din zona rurală îi aduceau ofrande pe care le așezau în apropierea lor.

Imaginea trinitară a Sorții la români ca și imaginea trinitara a Hekatei simbolizează substratul mitic al răscrucii destinului uman, de cumpănă, de alegere, destin pe care oamenii încercau să-l îmbuneze. În sec XX, în anii în care asupra satelor se abăteau nenorociri și mureau mulți oameni, pentru a opri fenomenul, se făceau pomeni în intersecții, probabil pentru a îmbuna o străveche divinitate cum a fost Hekate, pe care în secolul trecut o numeau pur și simplu *Moartea*.

Cuvinte-cheie: Hekate, moarte, răscruce, lume subpământeană, soartă.

Crossroads have significant religious importance in all traditional cultures. They are places where humans meet their destiny and life changing events take place. Crossroads, places of epiphany by excellence, are considered to be haunted by frightening spirits and thus humans must go to extreme lengths to tame them. In ancient times, people would place columns, pillars, rocks, crosses, votive inscriptions at crossroads, as they were considered passages between different worlds, between life and death, the roads of afterlife being important and frightening.

Ancient Greeks worshiped Hekate at crossroads. The origin of her cult is still uncertain, some researchers consider it to have Thracian origins, others consider it to come from ancient Hellas, Hekate being the guardian of children, hunters and fishermen. Hesiod describes Hekate as an "*only child*", the daughter of Perses and Asteria, sister of Leto, descending straight from titans, and independent to the Gods of Olympus. Hekate is described in several later stories as the daughter of Deo (Demeter) and thus, stepsister

of Persephone, or as daughter of Goddess Nyx, or even of Zeus and Asteria, or the daughter of Aristaeus.

Hesiod, in his work *Teogony*, considers Hecate a very important goddess saying that she rules over the world of the dead, over the world and over the world of the Gods. She is the source of all glory and the best at the magical art of sorcery¹. Zeus preserved all her privileges, probably due to her great power and even gave her some more. She spreads blessings and goodwill upon all mortals, fulfilling their wishes². But, as we mentioned, Hecate is also a chthonic goddess, a goddess of death, and as such, she is part of a trinity: Hades- Persephone – Hecate. In this trinity, Hades thus represents the idea that there is nothing after death, his wife Persephone symbolizes the hope in an existence in the afterworld, and even hope of returning, resurrection; the third member, Hecate symbolizes faith in the cyclicity of life.

In Greek mythology, Hecate is the mysterious goddess of magic, witchcraft, symbolizing the secretive deeds of the night and of the underworld. In ancient times she was adored especially as a goddess rendering youth³. In the peak of her cult, she is revered as the three-headed goddess or the triple-bodied goddess, a goddess in three different poses or with three simultaneous images⁴ – the triplicate goddess, called the "triple goddess", Triceps, Triformis, Trigemina, Trivia⁵. The most important worship places of Hecate were in Samothrace, Lemnos, Athens and Aegina in Thessaly, Boeotia and various places in Asia Minor.

At the end of each month, ancient Greeks from rural areas⁶, but Athenians as well, made offerings of food to the poor in the name of Hecate⁷. The goddess and the animals who accompany her are protectors to those that cannot protect themselves: babies, children, lunatics and the poor⁸. Her offerings included: dogs, honey, black sheep and fish – symbols of chthonian deities. People placed shrines for the goddess at crossroads where people from rural areas brought offerings⁹, and made sacrifices. These shrines depicted Hecate as a three –bodied or three-headed woman. Dogs were the favorite sacrificial animals, Hecate being represented accompanied by dogs, hence the belief that the howling of dogs announce the death brought by Hecate¹⁰. Her shrines were low, often half buried – symbol of her presence both on earth and in the underworld. In classical antiquity, people placed pillars – so called Hecataion – with the image of the goddess at doorways and crossroads.

Hecate was very feared, as the goddess of the mysteries of the night and sorcery, she was the "*unnamable*". In Athenian antiquity she was associated with ghosts

¹ Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995, vol. 3, p. 151.

² Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

³ Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

⁴ Kernbach, 1989, p. 216.

⁵ Ferrari, 2003, p. 402.

⁶ Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

⁷ Ferrari, 2003, p. 402.

⁸ Manea, historia.ro.

⁹ Grimal, 2001, p. 214.

¹⁰ Kernbach, 1989, p. 216.

and all the supernatural creatures of the night. She was considered to be the cause of nightmares and madness. A dark image of her is the Medusa, with her hair made of snakes and glance that petrified all living creatures. Her children are frightening creatures. One of the most frightening monsters of the Odyssey, Scylla, the destroyer of ships is the child of the goddess. The Empusa demons were also the daughters of the goddess. These creatures of the night were seductive creatures that she would often send to punish or to test people. They could take any form, but were originally beautiful women with donkey or satyr legs, made of bronze. A more known form of Empusa is the Lamia – a mermaid or a succubus –, close to Lilith. Hecate, just like Lilith, is a patron of infantile death.

The extraordinary duality of the goddess makes her the guardian of those in extreme situations. Thus, Hecate guards over the birth of Hercules, the hero of humans, hindering Hera, the mistress of the Olympus, from inhibiting the birth of the hero. She plays also a major part in helping Hercules during his twelve trials by offering him shelter.

Hecate helps the hero Jason and the Argonauts get the golden fleece directly or by means of the witch Medea. This is in fact a symbol for the quest for higher knowledge. She helps Jason and saves his life at the very end of his journey when people and gods want to kill him and deprive him of the fruit of his great journey.

Hecate is embodied in one of the most beautiful characters of Homeric antiquity – Iphigenia, sister of Orestes and daughter of Agamemnon. Hesiod and Euripides mention the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her own father in honor of goddess Artemis – one of the instances of Hecate. But the goddess Artemis transforms her into young Hecate. At the end of the journey her fate is united, in the paradisiac Leuce islands, with the hero of Iliad, Achilles.

The queen of sorcery makes great effort to save Persephone – the daughter of the goddess of the riches of the earth, Demeter, from the hands of the god of inferno, Hades. When Persephone is abducted, she intervenes by the gods and helps Demeter, suggesting that she should speak to the god of the sun, Helios, to find Persephone – the symbol of life after death. The circle is complete when Persephone – *the afterlife* – joins Hades – *death* – and Hecate – the *resurrection* – forming a cycle – *death – afterlife – resurrection*.

Ancient Greeks worshiped Hecate as the goddess of the underworld, the realm of the dead, reigning over the serene place where only those who had a good death would go. The esoteric meanings associated with Hecate are extremely profound. There were secret rituals dedicated to Hecate, mysteries, in which only the worthiest souls were initiated. Rituals of that period have not survived today, or have not been discovered yet.

The importance of the crossroads is universal. It is some sort of center of the universe, a meeting place with the destiny. Oedipus meets his father Laius and kills him at a crossroads, at the end of a lengthy journey which had the purpose of preventing the meeting between the two. But destiny crosses their path and they meet at a crossroads.

In the Roman period Hecate was worshiped mainly in the Germanic provinces¹¹ by the epithet Trivia, being recognized under that name even in Rome¹². As a goddess of witches, she haunts crossings of three roads, each of her three heads looking on one way. It is said that she appears only when an ivory moon is shining, she helps her subordinates in the nights with a full moon.

Dogs were her favorite animals. Images usually depict Hecate as having three bodies seated back to back and holding in her six arms torches, snakes, a key, a whip and a dagger¹³. *Hekatos* means in Greek one hundred as Hecate would keep the unburied bodies on the shores of the river Styx for a hundred year. Romans considered the three animal representations that she wears on her three heads – a horse, a dog and a lion - as symbols of the three realms she governs: the Sky, the Earth and the Inferno.

Romans preserved the cult of Lares at crossroads to prevent ill fate. In rural areas, Romans celebrated *Compitalia* between January 3 and 5. The name of the festivity comes from *compita* which means crossroads – the place where pats met, a celebration of the dead. For this occasion, people honored the Lares by bringing offerings and sacrifices at the shrines and altars placed for them at crossroads. People offered dolls, fleece balls, and would sacrifice pigs on the altars placed at crossroads which were considered gathering places of the spirits and especially of the dead. This celebration became so important that Augustus included it in his own cult by placing his own statue among that of the Lares at crossroads, to be recognized as patrons of destiny¹⁴.

There are not many representations of Hecate in Roman Dacia. She appears either in reliefs or as statue. The most numerous representations of the goddess, approx. 20, were discovered at *Sarmisegetusa Ulpia*, followed by *Sucidava*, *Drobeta*, *Dierna*, *Mehadia*, *Ocna Mureș* and depict the goddess as a Triform, the majority of the monuments dating from the 3rd century AD¹⁵.

The name of the goddess Hecate has various meanings: the one from afar or the distant one, the one who works from afar (from the distance), the one who either eliminates or brings the end, the one of great amplitude, or of extreme negativism (on the dark side). She dwells in the darkest area of the underworld, the inferno, the Tartar – in fact the realism (the hidden, alternative world) of the darkness. In some cases Hecate acts as a psychopomp connecting the world of the living with the world of the dead like Hermes¹⁶. The triple instance of the goddess Hecate – goddess of all creatures of the world and underworld, sometimes good, sometimes bad is equivalent to the Triade of Fates.

In the ancient Greek and Roman towns people placed pillars with the image of the goddess at doorways and crossroads, the so called *Hekataion*. The statues with

¹¹ Ferrari, 2003, p. 402.

¹² Grigore, 2016.

¹³ Kernbach, 1989, p. 216.

¹⁴ Chevalier, Gheerbrant, 1995, vol 3, p. 150.

¹⁵ Ștefănescu, 2002-2003, p. 131-133.

¹⁶ Petre, Lițu, Pavel, 2011, p. 188.

the three images of the goddess were later replaced at crossroads by crosses (the three directions in which you may go, plus the direction you came from)¹⁷. The triple image of the Fate in Romanian culture, just like the triple image of Hecate, symbolize the mythical aspect of the crossroads of the human destiny, that of balance or choice¹⁸. Hecate, goddess of crossroads – places considered by excellence places of sorcery, is the guardian of incomprehensible¹⁹. The triple bodied goddess, mistress of the sky, earth and the underworld, the patron of the life-death-life circle, Hecate is, undoubtedly, a great divinity of Indo-European origin who reigns over preexistence, life, death and afterlife and who was adopted by Christians²⁰ exactly for the popularity of her cult and perpetuated through *interpretation christiana* both by means of the crosses placed at crossroads who replaced the old pillars in her honor, as well as by means of the sacrifices made at crossroads²¹.

¹⁷ Grigore, 2016.

¹⁸ Vulcănescu, 1987, p. 164.

¹⁹ Balaci, 1969, p. 172.

²⁰ Ghinoiu, 2004, p. 27-29.

²¹ Hurduzeu, 2019, p. 909.

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