

# HEKATE CULT

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Roman Name
Ἑκάτη	Hekatê	Hecate	Hecate, Trivia

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HEKATE was the goddess of witchcraft, the night, the new moon, ghosts, necromancy and crossroads. She had few public temples in the ancient world, however, small household shrines, which were erected to ward off evil and the malevolent powers of witchcraft, were quite common. Her most important cults were those of Eleusis and the island of Samothrake, where she was worshipped as an associate-goddess of the Mysteries.

In classical sculpture Hekate was depicted in one of two ways: either as a woman holding twin torches; or as three woman standing back to back and facing in three directions. According to Pausanias, Alkamenes was the first sculptor to portray her in this so-called Triformis style. There is a good example of an Hekate Trimorphis in the Vatican Museum and also one in Antiquities Museum of Leiden.

## GENERAL CULT

*Pindar, Paean 2 (trans. Sandys) (Greek lyric C5th B.C.) :*

"It was the first of the month when this befell, and the gracious Hekata, the maid of the ruddy feet, was thereby sending us a message that was longing for fulfilment."

[N.B. Offerings were made to Hekate on the morning of the new moon]

*Cicero, De Natura Deorum 3. 18 (trans. Rackham) (Roman rhetorician C1st B.C.) :*

"If you think Latona [Leto] a goddess, how can you not think that Hecate is one, who is the daughter of Latona's sister Asteria? Is Hecate a goddess too? We have seen altars and shrines belonging to her in Greece."

## HOUSEHOLD SHRINES

Small household shrines were erected to Hekate to ward of the harmful influences of witchcraft and the power of the evil eye.

*Aeschylus, Fragment 216 (from Scholiast on Theocritus, Idyll 2. 36) (trans. Weir Smyth) (Greek tragedy C5th B.C.) :*

"Lady (*despoina*) Hekate, before the portal of the royal halls." [I.e. her shrine by the gates.]

*Euripides, Medea 396 ff (trans. Vellacott) (Greek tragedy C5th B.C.) :*

"My chosen helper Hekate, who dwells in the inner chamber of my house [i.e. at the household shrine]."

*Aristophanes, Plutus 410 ff (trans. O'Neill) (Greek comedy C5th to 4th B.C.) :*

"Ask Hekate whether it is better to be rich or starving; she will tell you that the rich send her a meal every month [i.e. food placed inside her door-front shrines] and that the poor make it disappear before it is even served."

*Aristophanes, Wasps 804 ff :*

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*Aristophanes, Wasps 604 ff.*

"I have heard it foretold, that one day the Athenians would dispense justice in their own houses, that each citizen would have himself a little tribunal constructed in his porch similar to the altars of Hekate (Hekataion), and that there would be such before every door."  
[N.B. *Hekataion* were statues or chapels of Hekate, placed at the entrance of houses.]

## CROSSROAD SHRINES

*Aristophanes, Frogs 440 ff (trans. O'Neill) (Greek comedy C5th to 4th B.C.) :*  
"The Lady Hekate's wayside shrine."

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 30. 2 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :*  
"It was Alkamenes [of Athens], in my opinion, who first made three images of Hekate attached to one another."

*Ovid, Fasti 1. 141 ff (trans. Boyle) (Roman poetry C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :*  
"You see Hecate's faces turned in three directions so she can protect the triple crossroads."

*Virgil, Aeneid 4. 609 ff (trans. Day-Lewis) (Roman epic C1st B.C.) :*  
"Hecate whose name is howled by night at the city cross-roads."

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## CULT IN ATTIKA (SOUTHERN GREECE)

### I) ATHENS Chief City of Attika

*Aristophanes, Wasps 799 ff (trans. O'Neill) (Greek comedy C5th to 4th B.C.) :*  
"Athenians . . . in their own houses . . . constructed in the porch . . . altars of Hecate . . . before every door."

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 30. 2 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :*  
"It was Alkamenes, in my opinion, who first made three images of Hekate attached to one another, a figure called by the Athenians Epipurgidia (on the Tower); it stands beside the temple of Nike Apteron (Wingless Victory) [on the Akropolis]."

### II) ELEUSIS Town in Attika

Hekate was one of the chief goddesses of the Eleusinian Mysteries, alongside Demeter and Persephone. The story of the Abduction of Persephone describes her role in the sagas of the Mysteries.

*Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae 280 ff (trans. O'Neill) (Greek comedy C5th to 4th B.C.) :*  
"[Description of the Thesmophoria festival held in honour of the Great Goddesses, Demeter and Persephone :]

Woman Herald : Silence! Silence! Pray to the Thesmophorai, Demeter and Koura [Persephone]; pray to Ploutos, Kalligeneia, Kouroutrophos [Hekate], Ge (the Earth), Hermes and the Kharites (Graces), that all may happen for the best at this gathering, both for the greatest advantage of Athens and for our own personal happiness! May the award be given her who, by both deeds and words, has most deserved it from the Athenian people and from the women! Address these prayers to heaven and demand happiness for yourselves. Io Paeon! Io Paeon! Let us rejoice!"

For the Eleusinian MYTH of Hekate see <a href="#">Hekate &amp; the Rape of Persephone</a>
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## CULT IN AIGINA (SOUTHERN GREECE)

### I) AIGINA Chief Town of Aigina

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 30. 2 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :*  
"Of the gods, the Aiginetans worship most Hekate, in whose honour every year they celebrate mystic rites which, they say, Orpheus the Thracian established among them. Within the enclosure is a temple; its wooden image is the work of Myron, and it has one face and one body. It was Alkamenes, in my opinion, who first made three images of Hekate attached to one another [in Athens]."

## **CULT IN SIKYONIA (SOUTHERN GREECE)**

### **I) TITANE** Town in Sikyonia

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 11. 8 :*

"In the portico [of the temple of Askepios at Titane, Sikyonia] are dedicated images of Dionysos and Hekate, with Aphrodite, the Mater Theon (Mother of the Gods), and Tykhe (Fortune). These are wooden."

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 12. 1 :*

"In Titane there is also a sanctuary of Athena, into which they bring up the image of Koronis [mother of Asklepios] . . . The sanctuary is built upon a hill, at the bottom of which is an Altar of the Winds, and on it the priest sacrifices to the winds one night in every year. He also performs other secret rites [of Hekate] at four pits, taming the fierceness of the blasts [of the winds], and he is said to chant as well the charms of Medea."

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## **CULT IN ARGOLIS (SOUTHERN GREECE)**

### **I) ARGOS** Chief City of Argolis

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 2. 22. 7 :*

"[In Argos] near the Lords [shrine of the Dioskouroi] is a sanctuary of Eilethya, dedicated by Helene when, Theseus having gone away with Peirithoos to Thesprotia, Aphidna had been captured by the Dioskouroi and Helene was being brought to Lakedaimon. For it is said that she was with child, was delivered in Argos, and founded there the sanctuary of Eilethya, giving the daughter she bore [Iphigeneia] to Klytaimnestra, who was already wedded to Agamemnon, while she herself subsequently married Menelaos . . . Over against the sanctuary of Eilethya is a temple of Hekate [the goddess probably here identified with the apotheosed Iphigeneia], and the image is a work of Skopas. This one is of stone, while the bronze images opposite, also of Hekate, were made respectively by Polykleitos and his brother Naukydes."

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## **CULT IN THESSALIA (NORTHERN GREECE)**

### **I) PHERAI** Town in Thessalia

*Lycophron, Alexandra 1174 ff (trans. Mair) (Greek poet C3rd B.C.) :*

"Brimo Trimorphos [Hekate] . . . appeasing the goddess of Pherai with sacrifice."

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## **CULT IN THRACE (NORTH OF GREECE)**

### **I) HAIMOS & STRYMON** Mountain and River in Thrace

Hekate was closely identified with the Thracian goddess Bendis.

*Lycophron, Alexandra 1174 ff (trans. Mair) (Greek poet C3rd B.C.) :*

"Brimo Trimorphos [Hekate] . . . queen of Strymon."

*Ovid, Fasti 1. 389 ff (trans. Boyle) (Roman poetry C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :*

"I have seen Sapaean [a Thracian tribe] and your snow dwellers, Haemus [mountain in Thrace], offer the guts of dogs to Trivia [Hekate]."

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## **CULT IN SAMOTHRACE (GREEK AEGEAN)**

### **I) ZERYNTHIA** Mountain & Cave of Samothrake

*Lycophron, Alexandra 74 ff (trans. Mair) (Greek poet C3rd B.C.) :*

"Zerynthos [on the island of Samothrake], cave of the goddess to whom dogs are slain [Hekate]."

*Lycophron, Alexandra 1174 ff :*

"The maiden daughter of Perseus, Brimo Trimorphos (Three-formed), shall make thee [Hekabe queen of Troy] her attendant [Hekabe was transformed into a dog], terrifying with thy baying in the night all mortals who worship not with torches the images of Zerynthia [Hekate] queen of Strymon, appeasing the goddess of Pherai with sacrifice."

*Strabo, Geography 10. 3. 20 (trans. Jones) (Greek geographer C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :*  
"Some, however, believe that the Kouretes were the same as the Korybantes and were ministers of Hekate [in the Mysteries of Samothrake]."

*Strabo, Geography 10. 3. 10 :*

"Now most of the Greeks assigned to Dionysos, Apollon, Hekate, the Mousai, and above all to Demeter, everything of an orgiastic or Bakchic or choral nature, as well as the mystic element in initiations . . . And branch-bearing, choral dancing, and initiations are common elements in the worship of these gods."

*Nonnus, Dionysiaca 3. 61 ff (trans. Rouse) (Greek epic C5th A.D.) :*

"Already the bird of morning was cutting the air with loud cries [on the island of Samothrake]; already the helmeted bands of desert-haunting Korybantes were beating on their shields in the Knossian dance, and leaping with rhythmic steps, and the oxhides thudded under the blows of the iron as they whirled them about in rivalry, while the double pipe made music, and quickened the dancers with its rollicking tune in time to the bounding steps. Aye, and the trees whispered, the rocks boomed, the forests held jubilee with their intelligent movings and shakings, and the Dryades did sing. Packs of bears joined the dance, skipping and wheeling face to face; lions with a roar from emulous throats mimicked the triumphant cry of the priests of the Kabeiroi, sane in their madness; the revelling pipes rang out a tune to honour of Hekate, divine friend of dogs, those single pipes, which the horn-polisher's art invented in Kronos's days."

*Nonnus, Dionysiaca 4. 184 ff :*

"Grottoes of the Kabeiroi and Korybantian cliffs [on the island of Samothrake] . . . the revelling companies of my mother's [Elektra, queen of the island of Samothrake,] Hekate with their torches in the night."

*Nonnus, Dionysiaca 13. 400 ff :*

"Zerynthos [on the island of Samothrake] of the unresting Korybantes, the foundation of renowned Perseis [Hekate], where the rocks are thronged with torchbearing mystics of the Maid."

*Nonnus, Dionysiaca 29. 213 ff :*

"[The Kabeiros] Alkon grasped a fiery bolt in one hand, and swung about a festal torch of Hekate from his own country [i.e. Samothrake]."

*Suidas s.v. Zerynthia (trans. Suda On Line) (Byzantine Greek lexicon C10th A.D.) :*

"Zerynthia : . . . Also Zerinthian cave, where they used to sacrifice dogs. There the mysteries of the Korybantes [Kabeiroi] and of Hekate took place."

*Suidas s.v. All' ei tis humôn en Samothraikei memuemenos esti :*

"In Samothrake there were certain initiation-rites, which they supposed efficacious as a charm against certain dangers. In that place were also the mysteries of the Korybantes [Kabeiroi] and those of Hekate and the Zerinthian cave, where they sacrificed dogs. The initiates supposed that these things save [them] from terrors and from storms."

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## CULT IN DELOS (GREEK AEGEAN)

### I) PSAMITE Islet near Delos

Hekate was worshipped on Psamite an islet in the vicinity of Delos. In some accounts this island was the metamorphosed body of her mother Asteria.

*Suidas s.v. Hekates nesou :*

"Hekates nesou (of the island of Hekate) : On the approach to Delos lies a certain islet, which some call Psamite. They say that it is called this because the goddess is honoured with psamita. A psamiton is a particular kind of cake."

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## **CULT IN RHODES (GREEK AEGEAN)**

*Suidas s.v. Asphodelos :*

"Asphodelos (Asphodel) : A bulbous plant, having long leaves and an edible stem; and its seed when roasted and the root chopped up with figs fetches a high price. [It is] sacred to Persephone and the underworld [deities]. Also Rhodians wreath Kore [Persephone] and Artemis [Hekate] with asphodel."

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## **CULT IN LYDIA (ASIA MINOR)**

### **I) EPHEOSOS** City in Ionia / Lydia

*Strabo, Geography 14. 1. 23 (trans. Jones) (Greek geographer C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :*  
"They [the priests of the temple of Artemis at Ephesos] showed me also some of the works of Thrason, who made the Hekatesion (Shrine of Hekate)."

### **II) KOLOPHON** Town in Ionia / Lydia

*Pausanias, Description of Greece 3. 14. 9 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :*  
"I know of no other Greeks [than the Spartans sacrifices to Enyalios] who are accustomed to sacrifice puppies except the people of Kolophon; these too sacrifice a puppy, a black bitch, to Enodia (of the Wayside) [Hekate]. Both the sacrifice of the Kolophonians and that of the youths at Sparta are appointed to take place at night."

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## **CULT IN KARIA (ASIA MINOR)**

### **I) LAGINA** Town in Karia

*Strabo, Geography 14. 2. 15 (trans. Jones) (Greek geographer C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :*  
"Stratonikeia [in Karia, Asia Minor] is a settlement of Makedonians . . . There are two temples in the country of the Stratonikeians, of which the most famous, that of Hekate, is at Lagina; and it draws great festal assemblies every year."

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## **CULT IN PAPHLAGONIA (ASIA MINOR)**

### **I) R. HALYS** River in Paphlagonia

*Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica 4. 245 ff (trans. Rieu) (Greek epic C3rd B.C.) :*  
"They [the Argonauts] made fast their stern cables on the Paphlagonian coast at the mouth of the River Halys. Medea had told them to land there and propitiate Hekate with a sacrifice. But with what ritual she prepared the offering, no one must hear. Nor must I let myself be tempted to describe it; my lips are sealed by awe. But the altar they built for the goddess on the beach is still there for men of a later age to see."

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## **CULT IN SICILY (SOUTHERN ITALY)**

### **I) PAKHYNOS** Town in Sikelia

*Lycophron, Alexandra 1174 ff (trans. Mair) (Greek poet C3rd B.C.) :*  
"[The goddess Hekate] shall make thee [Hekabe queen of Troy] her attendant [after her transformation into a dog] . . . And the island spur of Pakhynos [in Sikelia] shall hold thine [Hekabe's] awful cenotaph, piled by the hands of thy master [Odysseus], prompted by dreams when thou hast gotten the rites of death in front of the streams of Heloros. He [Odysseus] shall pour on the shore offerings for thee, unhappy one, fearing the anger of the three-necked goddess [Hekate], for that he shall hurl the first stone at thy stoning and begin the dark sacrifice to Haides."

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## **CULT TITLES OF HEKATE**

Hekate had a number of cult titles, variously referring to her cult functions and the locations

of her shrines:--

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Translation
Περσεϊς	Perseis	Perseïs	Destroyer, Daughter of Perses
Βριμω	Brimô	Brimo	Angry One, Terrible One
Αιδωναια	Aidônaia	Aedonaea	Lady of the Underworld
Τριμορφις	Trimorphis	Trimorphis	Three-Formed, Three-Bodies
Τριοδιτις	Trioditis	Trioditis	Of the Crossroads, Of the Three-Ways
Ενοδια	Enodia	Enodia	Of the Wayside, Of the Crossroads
Εινοδια	Einodia	Einodia	Of the Wayside (Epic spelling)
Εννοδια	Ennodia	Ennodia	Of the Wayside (Thessalian sp.)
Ζηρυνθια	Zerynthia	Zerynthia	Of Mount Zerynthia (in Samothrace)

The Romans title Hecate Trivia, the Latin equivalent of the Greek Trioditis

A shrine of Hecate was called a Hekatesion:--

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Translation
Ἑκατησιον	Hekatêsion	Hecatesium	Temple of Hecate

## POETIC TITLES & EPITHETS OF HEKATE

Hecate had a number of poetic titles and epithets:--

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Translation
Νυκτιπολος	Nyktipolos	Nyctipolus	Night Wandering
Αταλος	Atalos	Atalus	Tender, Delicate
Χθονιη	Khthoniê	Chthonia	Of the Underworld
Κουροτροφος	Kourotrophos	Curotrophus	Nurse of the Young
Σκυλακαγετις	Skylakagetis	Scylacagetis	Leader of the Dogs
Κουρη μουνογενης	Kourê mounogenês	Core munagenes	Only Begotten Maiden
Λιπαροκρηδεμνος	Liparokrêdemnos	Liparocredemnus	Bright-Coiffed, With Bright Headband
Ανασσα ενεροι	Anassa eneroi	Anassa eneri	Queen of the those Below (i.e the Dead)

## ENCYCLOPEDIA HEKATE TITLES

A'NGELOS (Angelos). A surname of Artemis, under which she was worshipped at Syracuse, and according to some accounts the original name of Hecate. (Hesych. s. v.; Schol. ad Theocrit. ii. 12.)

BRIMO (Brimô), the angry or the terrifying, occurs as a surname of several divinities, such as Hecate or Persephone (Apollon. Rhod. iii. 861, 1211; Tzetz. ad Lycoph. 1171), Demeter (Arnob. v. p. 170), and Cybele. (Theodoret. Ther. i. 699.) The Scholiast on Apollonius (l. c.) gives a second derivation of Brimo from Bromos, so that it would refer to the crackling



city gives a second derivation of *Phos* from *Dionos*, so that it would refer to the cracking of the fire, as Hecate was conceived bearing a torch.

CHTHO'NIA (Chthonia), may mean the subterraucous, or the goddess of the earth, that is, the protectress of the fields, whence it is used as a surname of infernal divinities, such as Hecate (Apollon. Rhod. iv. 148; Orph. Hymn. 35. 9), Nyx (Orph. Hymn. 2. 8), and Melinoë (Orph. Hymn. 70. 1), but especially of Demeter. (herod. ii. 123; Orph. Hymn. 39. 12; Artemid. ii. 35; Apollon. Rhod. iv. 987.)

PHERAEA (Pheraia). 1. A surname of Artemis at Pherae in Thessaly, at Argos and Sicyon, where she had temples. (Callim. Hymn. in Dian. 259 ; Paus. ii. 10. § 6, 23. § 5.) 2. A surname of Hecate, because she was a daughter of Zeus and Pheraea, the daughter of Aeolus, or because she had been brought up by the shepherds of Pheres, or because she was worshipped at Pherae. (Tzetz. ad Lyc. 1180; Spanheim, ad Callim. l. c.)

PHO'SPHORUS (Phôsphoros), Phosphorus also occurs as a surname of several goddesses of light, as Artemis (Diana Lucifera, Paus. iv. 31. § 8; Serv. ad Aen. ii. 116), Eos (Eurip. Ion. 1157) and Hecate. (Eurip. Helen. 569.)

Source: Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology.

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- *Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae* - Greek Comedy C5th-4th B.C.
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