

Goddess of Transformation

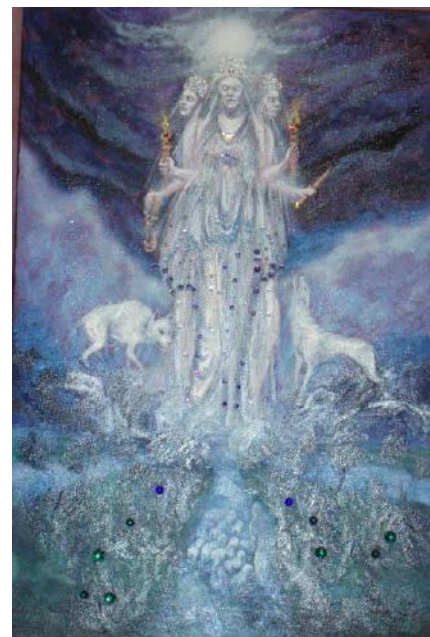
HEKATE HAS POSSIBLY BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT AND INVOKED THROUGH RITUAL AND affirmation more than any other mythical deity. She is most commonly known today as the patron goddess of witches and magick, but this does not do justice to her powerful lineage. Mythical individuals speak to us from the collective unconscious and their stories resonate through all cultures, races and belief system. Myths morph and change as they travel through time and none can say which version is the “truth”. Hekate carries the archetype of feminine power and wisdom, deeply seated in connection to the past, transitions between the realms and oracular intuition.

If we are lost or uncertain on our spiritual journey through life, she is there to help us

The earliest accounts of Greek cosmology and the creation myth come from around 750 BCE, the time of Greek poets Hesiod and Homer. In Hesiod's *Theogony* we learn how Gaia, (Mother

Earth) created Ouranos, (the Heavens) and Pontus, (the Deep Oceans) in order to produce children. With Ouranos, she created 12 Titan deities, including Hekate's maternal grandparents (Koios and Phoebe) and her paternal grandfather (Krios). With Pontos, Gaia created 5 maritime offspring including Hekate's paternal grandmother (Eurybia), “bright with a heart of flint and mastery over the sea”. Eurybia's union with Krios produced Hekate's father (Perses), “a destroyer, pre-eminent among all men in wisdom”.

Koios, god of the inquisitive or questioning mind was associated with heavenly oracles, his wife Phoebe goddess of the prophetic mind or earth oracles was associated with the site at Delphi, so together they were thought to have acted as the font of all knowledge coming from Heaven and Earth. Their union produced Leto (later to be the mother of Apollo and Artemis) and Hekate's mother, Asteria, “the starry one of happy name”. It was thought that the two daughters inherited associations with the two main branches of prophecy. Leto and her son Apollo being associated with the prophetic oracular powers of light and heaven, whereas Asteria and her daughter Hekate presided over the powers of the night, astrology through the stars, chthonian darkness and the ghosts of the dead. So Hekate was from a different lineage from the Olympian gods (born from the Titan pair of Chronos and Rhea), but nonetheless fought by their side in the wars which resulted in the other Titans being banished to Tartarus. Hesiod makes plain that although Hekate was an only child and had no husband or brothers to support her claims, she had the full support of Zeus behind her: he honored her above all. Whereas other Gods had dominion over areas that she was “honored” in, it is clear that she had such “power” there, that people would make offerings to her and ask for her assistance in these matters. This suggests that her authority was more indirect and mystical in nature. Her triple nature extended over the earth, heavens and sea, even extending down to the underworld. She had power to assist with achieving wealth, success, fame and glory in sporting contests, battles, fishing, animal husbandry and childbirth. Whilst Hekate's link to prophecy, the powers of the underworld and the night has been clearly established, it is not clear how she initially became linked to witchcraft. Greek Historian Diodorus Siculus claimed Hekate to be fathered by Perses, as a brother to King Aetes of Colchis, and later to marry her uncle Aetes, having Circe and Medea as her daughters. This flies in the face of both Hesiod and Homer's older accounts and seems unlikely but, for some, has possibly validated her connection to witchcraft. There are many references to Medea as daughter to Aetes, niece to Circe and devotee or High Priestess to Hekate both by Homer and other accounts. There are no references other than Diodorus, to Hekate being their mother. Certainly Hekate was looked up to as a higher source of magickal knowledge by Circe and Medea, as there are references to them considering themselves her hand maidens or



Hekate by Kay Steventon from the *Ancient Feminine Wisdom of Goddesses and Heroines*, US Games, 2007

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priestesses in Homer's *Illiad*, so it is not hard to see how this aspect was picked up by the authors of the Greek tragedies, many years on. In *The Mythic Tarot*, Liz Greene and Juliet Sharman-Burke claimed Zeus and Hera as Hekate's parents, (through a vague reference in *The Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, attributed to a later tradition but not referenced). Representing Hekate as "The Moon" with an interpretation around the transpersonal and our unconscious, bringing confusion, fluctuation and uncertainty through dreams, trivializes her powers and abilities. The story associating her through hiding in the house of a woman in childbirth, after stealing her mother's rouge and later being purified in an Underworld river, is at totally odds with the powerful woman described by Hesiod. Due to her ability to guide us through times of transformation and transition and her many associations with the underworld and the "restless dead", I would associate her more with the "Death" card.

The emergence of the triple nature of Hekate stems from her having dominion over the sky, the earth and sea, and – through Asteria – also the underworld. She was said to be able to see down an individual's roads at the same time, their present, where they have come from and the different options for them in the future. Thus she became known as the goddess of the crossroads and transformation, there to help anyone lost, confused or uncertain on their spiritual journey through life.

She became shown with three heads, Hekate Trivia, goddess of the crossroads. The Romans set her time at the 29th of the month, the time of the Dark Moon, when offerings or "Hekate's suppers" were left out for her and her followers. The sound of barking dogs symbolised her approach in Greek and Roman literature, her constant companions on her wanderings at night, along with the ghosts and souls of the "restless dead". She was often pictured with Cerebus the three-headed dog who guards the Underworld and possibly associated with the star Sirius in the constellation Canis Major with connections to Anubis (The Egyptian undertaker god). It has even been suggested that she was an earlier incarnation of his mother Nephthys, also connected to underworld transitions. Hekate's name has several meanings, including "the remote one" and "the unseen", it can also mean "the hundred", coming from her role in the Corn Goddess trilogy as the harvested corn, with a 100 lunar month reign for the sacred king before his sacrifice. The asteroid Hekate was named from this aspect of her, as it was the 100th to be discovered, in July 1868.

Hekate's other symbols, shown in statues, include a scourge or rope (representing her ability to punish, or to herd cattle and sheep, or tie the umbilical cord in birth or rebirth); a dagger (relating to ritual power and the power to cut through to the truth, which later became the witch's athame) and a key (seen to portray her ability to unlock the mysteries of the occult or the secrets of the afterlife and to enter the underworld). The twin torches she is often depicted holding, symbolize her role in shining the light to enable others to find their way.

Hekate's Triple Goddess status is strongly focused around the third triad, as the matured Crone. Her archetype resonates strongly with this Moon phase, when the Sun's rays are no longer reflected by her surface, and we can see the Moon's true face. Hekate is there assisting us to search for the truth when making our decisions at the many crossroads we face in life. She was worshipped by both the Greeks and the Romans who had their own festivals dedicated to her.

[With her guidance], we feel safe,
to stop at the crossroads, before
deciding which path to take

The Bible told that women are meant to endure pain in childbirth.

Thus the narrow-minded and dogmatic patriarchal viewpoint put midwives amongst the first group of women to be condemned as witches during the Inquisition. Hekate's association with childbirth included her here, the hag-like images of the witch associated with her, came from an unconscious fear of feminine power, independence and the feminine mysteries. She represents the wisdom of the crone, sometimes accompanied by owls, the bird of wisdom, on her journeys. This respected strength of the "grand-mother" and the feminine, demonstrated by the American Native Indian culture, was feared by the patriarchy.

Hekate is a goddess of intuition, associated with synchronicities and dreams, her three way connection facilitates the integration of the past, present and future, identifying patterns that have occurred in relationships and behavior, wisdom that is gained from experience and living a full life. She enables us to feel safe, to stop at the crossroads, before deciding which path to take.

While it may seem that the forks in the road are driven by external events, it is really our inner direction that has drawn the event to us, to enable us to fulfill a need for growth at a deep unconscious level. Our direction often shifts quite dramatically when we reach our second Saturn return and make decisions about how we will spend the important last third of our lives. We become less concerned about being who we really are and less fearful of being thought to be different or weird. It's a time when our emerging psychic abilities are felt to be more acceptable and normal. Hekate operates liminally, able to translate in the twilight zone between the

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visible and spirit worlds. As we have seen, the mythology around her is unclear and uncertain. She is there to help us descend into our own underworld, gaining depth and learning wisdom through suffering and facing up to our demons. As we grow older we recognize her as the inner witness, the wise counselor who helps us pay attention to our dreams and listen to our intuitive perceptions.

Sara Gilbert