

Hekate at Ancient Corinth

The recent find of a Hekate statuette (S 3824) in a marble pile at ancient Corinth initiated a closer look at other images of the goddess and her presence at the site. There are at least fourteen small-scale marble figurines of triple-bodied Hekate in the sculpture storeroom at Corinth. They follow the standard archaistic rendering of this deity: three frontal figures arranged around a core, sometimes a clearly articulated shaft. The triad wears polos hats, their peploi are patterned with a regular series of folds, and the overfolds form deep central swallow-tails. One Hekate usually bears a torch, another stands with arms lowered by her side; a dog sometimes accompanies the third.

There are many of these little archaistic figures, most of them probably Roman in date. The Athenian Agora, for example, has produced over twenty marble Hekate statuettes. They are thought to draw on a statue of Hekate Epipyrgidia made by the fifth-century sculptor Alkamenes, whom Pausanias (II.30.1) said was the first to fashion her with three bodies. But most of the small scale Hekates are Roman and it is difficult to make a direct link back to Alkamenes and his statue. In addition to small Hekates in the round, Corinth also has produced a large seated sculpture of Cybele. The side of her rocky throne is adorned with a relief version of Hekate.

Hekate was connected with several other deities, including Artemis, Demeter, and Dionysos. She was a chthonic god, but also supported women and human reproduction. Aristophanes (*Wasps* 804) said that many people had images of Hekate outside their doors, and she was a god who protected roads and gates. Is it possible to determine the original setting and function of the Hekate sculptures at Corinth ?

Not all these works have findspots, but the ones that do all come from the Forum at Corinth, albeit in late secondary contexts. At least four were excavated in the area of the

Bema, a few others turned up on the east side of the excavated Forum, near Peirene spring. And several were found near the South Stoa. The construction of the Stoa in the fourth century B.C. absorbed the east wall of a little fifth-century precinct, the so-called Stele Shrine, at the west end of the Forum. This installation continued in use, with the west wall of the Stoa now its eastern boundary, for several centuries. The Stele Shrine produced terracotta banqueters, horse figurines, and votive pottery. Nearby, many fragments of late Classical votive reliefs were been found. Hekate also might have found a home in this precinct. Another candidate, the so-called Heroon of the Crossroad, at the intersection of two roads, is just south of the Bema. This shrine consisted of four Protogeometric graves that were later enclosed by a limestone wall. It is possible that Hekate was an appropriate guardian for this crossroads or that she was set up near the junction of the Forum and the Lechaion Road running south toward Akrocorinth. One more site can be mentioned: east of the Lechaion Road and north of the Peribolos of Apollo, the badly preserved Temple A must have also been the locus of various cults.

Corinth often produces sculpture rare in the rest of Greece. Along with the Hekate figurines, the site has also yielded a fragment (S 1211) from the top of an unusual life-sized, probably Roman version of the triple-bodied goddess. One side of a face is preserved, along with clear remains of the tops of two more heads. The surviving face measures ca 0.25 m. high, from top of head to chin, thus belonging to a figure that may have been as much as 1.75 m. tall. Apart from the large Roman Hekate statue from the Temple of Hekate and Persephone at Cyrene it has few parallels. The presence of this big sculpture at Corinth, along with the little ones, suggests that a significant cult of Hekate, or a shrine perhaps associated with the chthonic traditions of the Forum, probably existed in Roman times.