

HECATE

ROMAN, 2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE, REMAINS OF POLYCHROMY

HEIGHT: 44 CM.

WIDTH: 18 CM.

DEPTH: 18 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*FORMERLY IN AN ENGLISH PRIVATE
COLLECTION.*

*SOLD BY SOTHEBY'S LONDON, "[...]
ANTIQUITIES", 10 JULY 1972, LOT 189.
IN THE COLLECTION OF THE CHARLES
EDE GALLERY, LONDON.*

IN SID PORT'S COLLECTION.

*THEN BACK TO THE COLLECTION OF
THE CHARLES EDE GALLERY.*

*THEN IN THE SWISS PRIVATE
COLLECTION OF DR SYLVIA LEGRAIN-
GERSCHWYLER, ACQUIRED IN 2006
FROM THE ABOVE.*



This surprising marble sculpture represents Hecate, the Greek goddess of the moon. Here, she is represented not with three heads, as she is often depicted, but in her

triple-bodied form, the three bodies standing back-to-back around a central pillar, the top of which is slightly flared. This small monument is called a *hekateion*. The three feminine bodies are standing in a hieratic attitude, their arms held down at their sides and attributes in their hands. The three goddesses have the same face. Each has large, deeply carved eyes, eyelids delimited by fine incisions, discreet brow ridges, a straight, strong nose, a small, full lipped mouth and a small, slightly protruding chin. Their ears are covered by their hair, which is in the same style for all three figures. It is divided in two sections by a central parting and gathered at the back in wavy locks, the whole hairstyle being secured by a headband. Each figure's face is framed by a long lock on either side, which cascades down their shoulders to their chests. All three are crowned with *poloi*, cylindrical crowns mainly worn by chthonic deities.

They are all garbed in the two garments usually worn by feminine figures: a long, draped robe, the chiton, covered by a thick mantle, the himation, which is cinched at the waist with a thin belt, positioned quite high, just under the chest. Their mantles cover their shoulders and fall in a smooth swathe of fabric to their elbows, leaving the deities' forearms bare. The garments are also marked by an overfold at their thighs, creating an extra layer. Many vertical folds are visible on the upper parts, while U-



shaped folds mark the fabric over their legs and a large, vertical swathe of fabric covered in deep folds goes between their legs. On either side of their legs, there are more deep, vertical folds, which show the transition between the goddesses, without, however, differentiating both garments. The more or less deep carving and folds thus create a superb play of light and shadow, enabling the artist to show the whole range of their mastery. The goddesses' feet, which emerge from the garments, are not as detailed as we are used to seeing, but shod. Each foot is arranged parallel to its partner, both set slightly apart.



The hands, held down at their sides, are represented with great finesse and rendered in a way that is particularly naturalistic anatomically. Some are holding attributes while others hold merely a piece of their clothing, which is probably the reason for the fold at their thighs. One deity is holding two large torches, held vertically along her body,

with big flames issuing forth at the level of her face and reaching the top of her polos. While one of the torches is fragmentary, the second is perfectly preserved, and the marble is hollowed out between the upper, flamed part of it and the top of the dorsal pillar. Again, this is a testament to the sculptor's considerable skill. The identical goddess to her left has a ewer in her right hand, which she is holding by the handle, while her left hand is clutching part of her clothing. Finally, the last figure in the triad is holding a round, flat object in her right hand, between her thumb and her extended fingers. It is a patera, a libation vessel. Her left hand, too, is holding some of the fabric of her chiton. At her feet is a dog, sitting on its hind legs, its muzzle turned up towards the goddess.



Hecate, daughter of the Titan Perses and Asteria, goddess of shooting stars and nocturnal divinations, is a complex goddess in Greek mythology. Her cult, which

originated in Asia Minor, spread in Greece and then in the Roman world. She is considered to be a helpful goddess endowed with a universal power, the mistress of magic and ghosts, who guides spirits at night with dogs as companions. Hecate is also the protector of crossroads. She is worshipped under the names of Trioditis and Trivia ("triple road goddess") and is thus depicted as a triple bodied being. In the oldest representations, she appears simply as a woman, commonly bearing two torches. The triple Hecate, patron of crossroads, is represented not only at crossroads, but also at the entrances of towns and houses. She is the guardian of thresholds as well as the guide of travellers who lost their way. As a moon goddess, she is also a protective deity associated with fertility cults, granting material and spiritual wealth, honour and wisdom.



In addition, she is the goddess of the night and death, linked to Hades' retinue.

From an iconographic perspective, as the goddess of crossroads, a companion to travellers and a moon goddess, the triple Hecate combines the figures of Artemis/Diana, who reign on Earth, with Hecate, who reign over the Underworld, and Selene, goddess of the moon. In each representation of the triple Hecate, the goddess' hands hold one or two lit torches to guide and light the way at night – also an attribute of the goddess Persephone – as well as a patera, a vessel intended to hold liquid offerings, meant as a reference to her connection with the Underworld and Hecate's cleansing rites, which were held at crossroads on the sixteenth day of each month. Sometimes, one of the goddesses is accompanied by a dog, an animal that was believed to guide travellers.

Her triple personality can thus be interpreted in different ways. First, her three faces could correspond to the phases of the moon: waxing, full and waning. However, her triple identity could also symbolise the triple empire over which she reigned: the sky, the land and the sea, or the three aspects she embodied: terrestrial, underground and celestial. Finally, the triad could refer to the three directions a traveller could take at a crossroads.

The Greek author Pausanias attributed the creation of the type of the triple-bodied Hecate to Alcamenes, an Athenian sculptor from the 5th century BC. He created a representation of Hecate called "*triformis*", with three bodies and three heads, consecrated on the Acropolis in Athens, near the Temple of Athena Nike, in around 430 BC. This iconography, the meaning of which is still misunderstood, became

canonical during Antiquity, and many effigies were created, mostly to be placed in front of doors or by crossroads. There, offerings of food were laid out in front of the statue of the goddess and, more exceptionally, a dog was sacrificed in the hope of winning her favour. Both unique and multiple, the triple Hecate was a complex deity who was both worshipped and feared by the ancient Greeks. With her tripartite nature and the arrangement of the three figures around a central column, the *hekateion* is a powerful symbol against the forces of evil. There are several similar examples conserved in different international museums (ill. 1-6), which sometimes present variants, as is the case of that of the Chiamonti Museum (ill. 7).



Sculpted from a gorgeous, fine grained white marble, our Hecate is enhanced by an elegant brown patina, a testament to the passing of time. The idea that such a work – the iconography of which is not even the most

widespread – survived through the centuries to make its way to us in this very good state of conservation only underlines the preciousness of the statue.



Once in an English private collection, our *hekateion* was sold by Sotheby's London, in July 1972 (ill. 8), before being added to the collections of the Charles Ede Gallery. It was next part of Sid Port's private collection, and then re-joined the Charles Ede Gallery, which sold it to Dr Sylvia Legrain-Gerschwyler (1936-2022) in 2006. The Swiss neurosurgeon and her husband, who were passionate about art, collected many miniatures, books of hours and paintings and drawings by Old Masters, as well as gorgeously crafted ancient objects. Our statue was, furthermore, included in the Charles Ede Gallery's catalogue *Collecting Antiquities* in 1976, to illustrate the chapter on Roman marble statues (ill. 9).

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. *Hekateion*, Greek Hellenistic, 1st century BC, marble, H.: 51 cm. Antikensammlung, Berlin, inv. no. Sk 173.

Ill. 2. Triple-bodied Hecate, Roman, late 2nd century - early 3rd century AD, marble, H.: 42.5 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 2594.

Ill. 3. Statue known as the Triple-Bodied *Hekateion*, Roman, 1st - 2nd century, marble, H.: 38 cm. BnF, Département des monnaies, médailles et antiques, Paris, inv. no. 57-239.



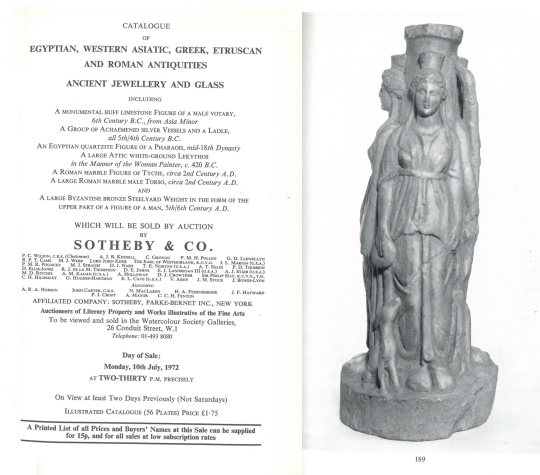
Ill. 4. Triple statue of Diana, Roman, AD 161-200, marble, H.: 91 cm. The British Museum, London, inv. no. 1805.0703.14.

Ill. 5. Triple-bodied Hecate, Roman, AD 50-350, marble, H.: 75.5 cm. Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, inv. no. Pb 136.

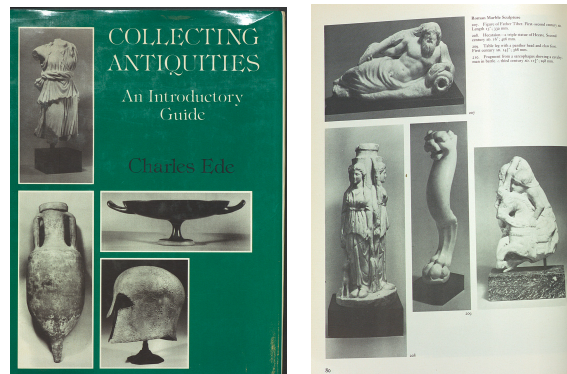


Ill. 6. Hecate, Roman, 2nd - 3rd century AD, marble, H.: 71.5 cm. History and Archaeology Museum, Constanța, Romania. Ill. 7. Hekateion, Roman, 3rd century AD, marble, H.: 110 cm. Museo Chiaramonti, Vatican, inv. no. 1922.

Provenance:



Ill. 8. Sotheby's London, 10 July 1972, lot. 189.



Ill. 9. Charles Ede Gallery, *Collecting Antiquities, An introductory Guide*, London, 1976, p. 80, fig. 208.