Hecate

In Greek mythology, Hecate is most often referred to as the goddess of the crossroads. Her statues or images were placed at city gates, at entrances to sacred sites, and at the doorways of private homes. It was believed she acted as a protectress and guide. Her sculpture guarded the entrance to the Acropolis of Athens.

Her sculptures show her with three bodies or three heads, each facing in a different direction, so that she has a complete view of whatever is going on anywhere. So, it is no accident that she is the one, other that Helios, the sun, who observed Hades abduction of Persephone. Some of the Greeks said that Hecate was a daughter of Demeter, sister of Persephone. Certainly, she is shown to be a companion to Persephone and included in rites dedicated to Persephone.

As a guide, she is even especially helpful in times of darkness or uncertainty, such as Persephone was experiencing. And she was helpful in the darkness of night. Her images often show her with a halo of moonbeams, similar to the sun’s beams surrounding the head of Helios, the sun. Or, she is shown carrying two torches lighting up the night.

She was said to be stationed too at the gate of Hades, that most unknown place of all, and she even occasionally acted as a guide right into Hades’ underworld. According to Pausanias, the 2nd-century CE Greek traveler, some mystery cults dedicated to the goddess believed those suffering the darkness of mental illness could be cured by association with Hecate.

Because of these associations, Hecate is naturally associated with the darkness of witchcraft and magic, but that was not her primary associations in ancient Greece. She appears in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and in Hesiod's *Theogony,* where she is described strongly as a great goddess.

Hesiod wrote in the Theogony: “Zeus, Cronus’ son, honored [Hecate] above all others: he gave her splendid gifts, to have a share of the earth and of the barren sea, and from the starry sky as well she has a share in honor, and is honored most of all by the immortal gods. For even now, whenever any human on the earth seeks propitiation by performing fine sacrifices according to custom, he invokes Hecate; and much honor very easily stays with that man whose prayers the goddess accepts with gladness, and she bestows happiness upon him.”