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ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

NEW INSIGHTS INTO EASTERN LYDIAN SCULPTURE: AN ANALYSIS OF A RECENTLY DISCOVERED MARBLE HECATE STATUETTE FROM THE BLAUNDOS EXCAVATIONS

Abstract: This article focuses on a newly discovered triple Hecate statuette unearthed during archaeological excavations at the ancient city of Blaundos in Eastern Lydia. Although the cult and representations of Hecate were already known in the region, the Blaundos statuette introduces new typological and iconographic features that offer fresh perspectives on the local sculptural repertoire. While the piece has the form of a free-standing statuette, it is carved with locally distinctive craftsmanship exhibiting relief-like characteristics. Its three-headed, single-bodied design represents a relatively rare type within the area.

The attributes depicted on the statuette provide new insights into the iconography and origins of Hecate in Lydia and Phrygia. The dog, a primary attribute of the goddess, along with a ram's head and a grape cluster, appear for the first time on this statuette within the regional Hecate sculptural corpus. In this context, the statuette, considered to be a local production from Eastern Lydia, is analyzed and dated in the article with a focus on its typological, iconographic and stylistic characteristics.

Keywords: *Blaundos, Eastern Lydia, Sardes, Maionia, Hecate.*

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Blaundos is situated on the western bank of the Ulubey Canyon, at the easternmost periphery of Lydia. Between 2018 and 2023, archaeological excavations conducted under the direction of Prof. Birol Can have yielded a wealth of sculptural artefacts. Among the significant findings, in 2022, a remarkable three-headed Hecate statuette was discovered within a pear-shaped cistern, positioned between the Demeter (Ceres) Temple and its associated altar in the city center¹ (**Fig. 1**). The statuette, made of white marble and consisting of three broken pieces, was found within a mixed finds context at the bottom of a cistern, reaching a depth of approximately six meters.

This type of Hecate statuette, known as 'Triple' (Trivia)², is commonly found in Lydia, as well as in Caria and Phrygia in Western Anatolia³, regions

¹ CAN et alii 2023, 429.

² For the meanings of triple representations in different cultures, see ÇELEBİ 2017, 49-54.

³ DAŞBACAK 2008, 144; DEBORD 2013, 85-91; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2019, 129-130.



Fig. 1. Findspot of the statuette (photo: Blaundos Excavations 2022).

where cult-related finds are frequent. Sculptural artefacts depicting Hecate have been discovered in cities of Lydia, such as Maionia, Philadelphia, Satala, Thyateira, Sardis, Kollyda, and Sidas⁴. The Hecate statuette from Blaundos, a reflection of the Hecate cult in Eastern Lydia, holds significance both locally and regionally, as it represents the first depiction of the goddess found in the city⁵.

In this article, the statuette, reflecting both the general characteristics of Hecate depictions and certain local sculptural practices, is analyzed in terms of its typological, iconographic, and stylistic characteristics, offering a fresh perspective on the local sculpture of Eastern Lydia. The features of the statuette have also been analyzed within the context of sculptural practices of the region and its vicinity, resulting in proposals concerning its possible origin.

DESCRIPTION

The artefact, discovered in three broken pieces during the excavations, was reassembled by the restoration team,

⁴ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016.

⁵ Apart from this statuette, no other finds have been discovered that could support the existence of the Hecate cult in Blaundos: For the findings from the excavations and research at Blaundos, see FİLGES 2006; CAN 2017, 73-82.

and registered under the inventory number BL'22-BN25 before being delivered to the Uşak Museum. The statuette, which has a relatively high base (7 cm) compared to its size, stands at 35.5 cm in height with the base and 12 cm in width (**Fig. 2**).

The three-headed statuette, sharing a common body, features a crescent-shaped crown adorned with a rosette atop the central head, while each of the lateral heads is topped with a tall polos. At the top of the head, there is a quadrangular recess (dowel hole) that is not visible from the front (**Fig. 3**). On all three heads, the hair is parted in the middle and combed backward in evenly spaced sections. The braided hair falls onto the shoulders of the main figure. All three faces are partially eroded. The garment, with half sleeves extending to the elbows and a broad V-neckline, reaches down to the ankles. A twisted belt encircles the waist. The arms extend straight downwards, lying close to the body, with thick bracelets on the wrists. The right hand holds a ram's head, while the left holds a grape cluster. Just below these objects, a dog is depicted on each side with its head turned upwards. The statuette's feet are bare. The back of the statuette is left plain in block form without any sculptural intervention (**Fig. 4**). The rough back of the block, together with the rectangular recess on top of the head, suggests that the statuette was most likely fitted into a small niche



Fig. 2. Frontal view of the statuette.

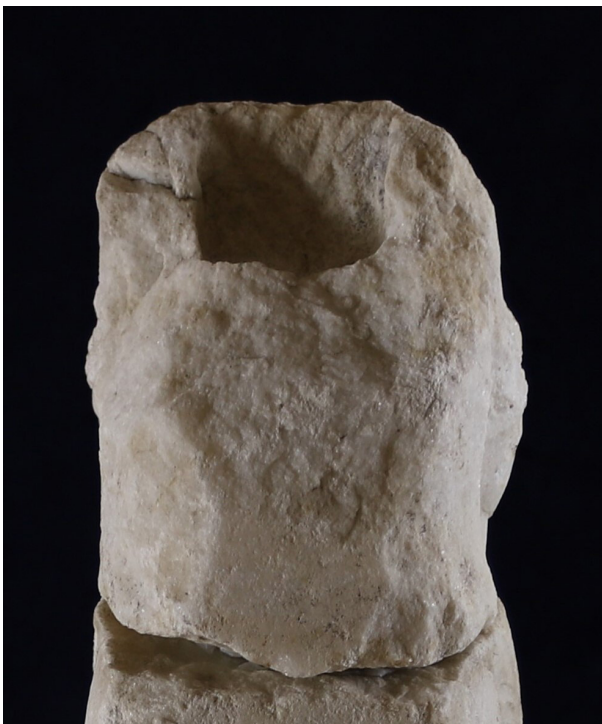


Fig. 3. Quadrangular recess at the back of the head.



Fig. 4. The back side of the statuette.

designed to match its form. A brief inscription in two lines, reading “CNNA (C)YXHN” in Greek, is carved on the front face of the high base (**Fig. 5**). The inscription likely indicates that the statuette was a personal votive dedicated to Hecate by a woman named *Enna*⁶.



Fig. 5. Inscription on the base.

TYOLOGY, ICONOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLISM

In the typologies developed for Western Anatolia, depictions of Hecate are classified into two main types: the single-bodied (monoprosopos) and the triple-formed (trimorphos)⁷. It is known that the earliest example of the single-bodied type was a wooden statue made by Myron, while the first example of the triple-formed type was sculpted by Alcamenes⁸. Triple depictions have often been symbolically interpreted through various triadic conceptual models such as birth-life-death, morning-noon-evening, youth-maturity-old age, mind-body-soul and earth-sea-sky⁹. Among the representations of Hecate, the triple-formed type is the most prevalent, and examples of this type were also adopted in Lydia and its surroundings during the Roman Imperial Period¹⁰. Depictions of Hecate in a single-bodied, anthropomorphic form are typically associated with earlier periods, whereas representations with a triple-headed or triple-bodied configuration that strongly emphasize fantastical and symbolic features became increasingly prevalent in later periods, especially from the 2nd century AD¹¹. The relatively few and larger-sized depictions of Hecate are identified as cult statues, while the more frequently encountered smaller figurines and reliefs are regarded as votive offerings presented with the purpose of protection from evil, within the context of *apotropaicism*. Even smaller ivory and bronze figurines depicting the goddess are also thought to have been worn around the neck for protective

purposes¹². In this context, Willers argued that all depictions of Hecate are small in size and therefore belong to the realm of personal private belief¹³; however, Akyürek-Şahin considered this view plausible while reminding that not all the available findings are of small size¹⁴.

Triple Hecate statues were initially categorized typologically into two groups: “three-headed, single-bodied, six arms” and “three-headed, three-bodied, six arms”¹⁵. However, as the number of findings increased, it became evident that the existing typologies could be revised and refined to accommodate new forms. Indeed, even when the Hecate types found in Lydia are analyzed regionally based on the number of heads, bodies, and arms, it becomes apparent that the diversity is significantly increased. These can be grouped into forms such as “three-headed, three-bodied, three-armed”¹⁶, “three-headed, three-bodied, six-armed”¹⁷, “three-headed- single-bodied”,¹⁸ and “three individual relief figures around a single column”¹⁹. Some of these examples are free-standing sculptures, while others are in relief form. Although some figures reflect a triple form, they do not carry the torch, one of the goddess’s most prominent symbols, and other preferred attributes may vary. The Blaundos Hecate belongs to the “three-headed, single-bodied” group among the given types. Such stylistic practices, also observed in other Lydian examples from Maionia and possibly the Hermos Valley, have been interpreted as a failure on the part of the artist²⁰. Although the Blaundos Hecate is carved from high-quality marble, its workmanship does not meet a high standard. Therefore, it is believed that works of this caliber found in the Eastern Lydia region were likely produced in small, local workshops²¹.

Nevertheless, the statuette is striking among the Hecate representations found in Eastern Lydia due to certain distinctive typological and iconographic features it exhibits. Although the statuette is free-standing, it was approached almost as a relief (**Fig. 6**); its front and lateral faces were emphasized, while the back side were left unworked. The torch, one of the frequently observed attributes in triple Hecate depictions, is absent in the work.

When the statuette is examined from top to bottom, a crescent crown with upward-pointing tips above the central head draws attention (**Fig. 7**). This attribute evokes the goddess’s dominion over the night and the starry sky, as well as her associations with young virgins and fertility²². At the center of the crown, there is a partially damaged rosette

⁶ Dr. Şenkal KİLECI is currently undertaking comprehensive studies on the inscriptions from Blaundos, encompassing this statuette.

⁷ KARAGÖZ 2002: 303 ff.; BAŞARAN 2004: 89 ff.

⁸ PAUSANIÁS Description of Greece II, 30.2.

⁹ For detailed information on the tripartite structure, epithets and meanings of Hecate, see KARAGÖZ 2002: 303 ff., BAŞARAN 2004: 89, AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 24 ff.; ÇELEBİ 2017: 44.

¹⁰ AYBEK et alii 2009, 137 no. 120; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016: 21-23, fig. 7.

¹¹ BAŞARAN 2004: 91; BÜYÜKÖZER 2020: 71.

¹² BRAHMS 1994, 179; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 4, fn. 19.

¹³ WİLLERS 1990, 302.

¹⁴ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016: 107, fn. 19.

¹⁵ KARAGÖZ 2002: 303 ff.

¹⁶ DURUGÖNÜL et alii 2015, 142 no. 80.

¹⁷ DURUGÖNÜL et alii 2015, 140-141, no. 79; MERİÇ 1987, 27, 262, fig. 9.

¹⁸ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016: 18-19, fig. 5 a-c.

¹⁹ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2019, 14-16, fig. 3.

²⁰ DURUGÖNÜL et alii 2015, 142-143 no. 81; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 122-123, 128, fig. 3, 5.

²¹ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2019, 143.

²² The crescent motif is also seen in depictions of goddesses Diana (Artemis) and Selene, during the Roman period. For detailed information on the crescent depiction and its meanings, which can be seen in a vast geography extending from Central Asia to the Mediterranean basin, see: ÇELEBİ 2017, 31, 34, 44-49, 54.



Fig. 6. The lateral sides of the statuette.

resembling a wreath or bouquet, tied with a ribbon at the bottom. This polos bearing a crescent crown adorned with a rosette has previously been attested only in a Hecate depiction from Sardis, dating to the 2nd or 3rd century AD, within the sculptural corpus of Lydia²³. It has been argued that the iconography of the Sardis Hecate is unlikely to be of Lydian

origin, due to its stylistic similarity to contemporaneous Hecate depictions from Altıntaş (Kütahya) in the Upper Porsuk Valley of Phrygia, and the absence of rosettes within crowns in other Lydian Hecate representations²⁴. At first glance, it appears reasonable to attribute this work to Phrygia, where depictions of crescent crowns adorned with

²³ HANFMANN/RAMAGE 1978, fig. 429-430.

²⁴ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 31-33, fig. 14 a-c.



Fig. 7. The crescent crown on the central head.

rosettes have previously been documented²⁵. This view can also be supported by the influence of Phrygia on the spread of the Hecate cult and its depictions in Eastern Lydia²⁶. However, with the discovery of the Blaundos Hecate, a new suggestion can be made: there are important attributes in

the depictions of Lydia and Blaundos Hecate that are not observed in Phrygian examples. For instance, iconographic elements such as a dog, a ram's head, and a grape cluster observed on the Blaundos statue are entirely absent from the known representations of Hekate in the Upper Porsuk Valley. Moreover, there are now two rosette depictions, one from central Lydia (Sardis) and the other from eastern Lydia

²⁵ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2019, 148, 171, fig. 4, 11, 12, 14, 26, 27, 30.

²⁶ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 112.

(Blaundos). The vegetal rosettes and wreaths at the center of the Lydian crescent crowns are a frequently observed motif across various branches of Lydian sculpture, particularly in reliefs²⁷. Moreover, there are views suggesting that such rosettes or wreaths are definitively the work of artists from the Hermos Valley²⁸. These findings strengthen the possibility that the Blaundos and Sardis Hecate depictions are of Lydian origin.

In the Blaundos Hecate statuette, where the faces are partially eroded, the hair is parted in the middle and combed backward at regular intervals on all three heads. The widely spaced structure in the upper part of the hair resembles a schematic mural crown (*corona muralis*). The positioning of the arms at either side of the body and the absence of torches in the hands is a convention previously attested in Lydia, notably in the examples from Maionia and Philadelphia. However, the depiction of Hecate holding a ram's head and a grape cluster (**Fig. 8**) is unparalleled in known representations from either Lydia or Phrygia. The coexistence of these two iconographic features is attested solely on sarcophagi from Lydia²⁹. The depiction of the ram's head evokes the goddess's chthonic aspect and suggests a connection with Hermes³⁰. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (445–447), Hecate is described as having the power to increase or diminish flocks, a role that parallels that of Hermes. Within mythological traditions, Hecate and Hermes are frequently linked due to their convergence in multiple functions. Both deities act as *psychopompoi*, facilitating the passage of souls between the realms of the living and the dead. Notably, their roles are underscored in myths such as Persephone's return to the earth, which emphasizes themes of transition and

renewal. Additionally, they share associations with liminal zones such as boundaries, crossroads, and transitional spaces. Their protective roles over travelers, combined with their connection to magical and esoteric practices, further reinforce their intertwined domains in ancient religious thought. As a reflection of these functions, triple statues (*hermoi*) of both Hecate and Hermes were erected at crossroads and along roadsides³¹.

Grapes, still among the most widely cultivated agricultural products in the Middle Hermos Valley, are frequently represented in Lydian sculpture, reflecting both social and religious aspects of life. The grape cluster is a commonly encountered motif in Lydia, particularly in the city of Philadelphia and the Katakekaumene region of eastern Lydia, appearing in Dionysian iconography such as freestanding sculptures, table legs, and votive reliefs³². Therefore, the Blaundos Hecate may also suggest a relationship between the goddess and the cult of Dionysus, whose presence at Blaundos has previously been attested through inscriptions³³, coins³⁴, and sculptural artefacts³⁵. Indeed, the triple-faced herms (*hermoi*) were employed not only in sculptural representations of Hecate but also in other works reflecting the cult of Dionysus in eastern Lydia³⁶.

On either side of the goddess are female dog figures squatting on their hind legs, rendered in relief on the statuette (Fig. 5). The dogs have furry bodies, collars around their necks, and heads turned upwards. The dog, which appears with Hecate as one of her earliest symbols from the 4th century BC onward, is depicted in pairs or greater numbers beside the goddess starting from the 1st century



Fig. 8. The ram's head and the grape cluster in the hands of the statuette.

²⁷ SONKAYA 2019, 10-15, 23-25, fig. 16-17, 24-27.

²⁸ MALAY 2006, 98.

²⁹ DURUGÖNÜL 2015, 177, nr. 106, 107.

³⁰ RADULOVIC et alii 2015, 48; ZOGRAFOU 2021, 3-4.

³¹ LARSON 2007, 146; ZOGRAFOU 2021, 45-54, 60-65, 112-120.

³² DURUGÖNÜL 2015, 93, 138, 162, nr. 77, 98.

³³ KİLECI/CAN 2020, 297-306, fig. 2.

³⁴ FILGES 2006, 286, abb. 255.

³⁵ SONKAYA and CAN 2025.

³⁶ DURUGÖNÜL 2015, 162-163, nr. 98.

BC³⁷. According to Pausanias (III.14.9), in Ionia, a black female puppy was sacrificed at night to the Wayside Goddess. In Sardis, dog bones possibly related to Hecate or Hermes were found in pottery as food remains³⁸. In this context, the depictions of dogs on the Blaundos statuette suggest an association between the goddess and grave cults. The portrayal of the animals with their heads raised in a howling posture towards the moon may symbolise her lunar aspect, particularly in connection with the crescent depicted on her head³⁹.

At this stage, it can be concluded that the Blaundos Hecate exemplifies one of the prevalent practices of the triple type and detailed iconography in East Lydian sculpture. This region is the part of Lydia where all known depictions of the triple Hecate have been found. Although the ram's head, the grape cluster, and the floral rosette are rarely seen in Hecate images, they are among the characteristic iconographic elements in other branches of Lydian sculpture. The dog appears only in the Blaundos statuette among Hecate representations from both Lydia and Phrygia. The statuette's iconographic richness exemplifies the expression of Hecate's multifaceted character and her complex relationships with other deities in sculptural works. All of these observations may be indicative of the existence of a local workshop in East Lydia that specialised in cultic practices. They also support earlier proposals regarding the existence of sculptural workshops active in Lydia. Among these, the Sardis workshops, known in the Middle Hermos Valley since the Archaic Period⁴⁰, and the city of Philadelphia, an active centre in Eastern Lydia during the Roman Period⁴¹, stand out as prominent production centres.

STYLE AND DATING

The Blaundos Hecate statuette conveys a simple and local workmanship, as evidenced by the carving limited to the front face of a white marble block, while most of the lateral faces and the entire back remain unworked. In general, the bodily limbs are disproportionate, and the carving on the garment in particular reflects an unnatural and schematic form. The frontal presentation of the entire body; the upright depiction of the head, arms, and legs; the back surface left entirely unworked, and the linear rendering of the garment's folds collectively evoke archaistic artistic practices⁴². The statuette, originally carved as a single free-standing marble sculpture together with its pedestal, reflects characteristics typical of relief works in that only the front face and partially the sides are carved.

The statuette, recovered in three broken fragments, exhibits notably different carving techniques. The shoulders were deliberately widened to support the placement of all three heads. While the head, face and hair exhibit relatively elaborate workmanship, the folds on the second fragment,

extending from the shoulders to the legs, are notably superficial and convey a linear character. The belt, which appears to be twisted, is carved with simple workmanship, as a continuation of the folds rendered in narrower and diagonal forms. A deep carving channel, apparently associated with the initial production phase, runs horizontally across the legs and cuts through the drapery folds. The folds flowing downwards with a slight inclination to the right are abruptly interrupted at this deep line and resume below with narrower intervals, gently inclining to the left. This visual arrangement allows for various interpretations from technical and iconographic perspectives: It appears that a modification was made at this point during the carving process, presumably to correct an initial error, yet the attempt to conceal the flaw was ultimately unsuccessful. In terms of drapery interpretation, although the garment bears a closer resemblance to a tunic than to a *peplos* or *chiton*, this line also appears to reflect an unsuccessful attempt at forming a *kolpos*. It may be acknowledged that such rudimentary practices, rarely encountered in mainstream sculpture, indeed constitute significant indicators of local workshops. Moreover, such rudimentary workmanship is also clearly observed in certain depictions of Hecate from Eastern Lydia that have been unearthed⁴³.

The closest stylistic analogues to the Blaundos Hecate are naturally attested in works originating from Lydia. Among these, two reliefs of Hecate from Maionia (Gökçeören) and the Hermos Valley stand out prominently⁴⁴. In all three works, the figures are depicted as three-headed and single-bodied. In the Hermos Valley artefact, the goddess figure reflects higher-quality workmanship in terms of proportion, the natural posture of the shoulders, and the treatment of the clothing and hair. Therefore, the Blaundos Hecate bears a closer stylistic similarity to the Maionia piece. The imperfections observed in the anatomical proportions, along with the sculptural treatment of the hair and drapery folds, draw the Blaundos and Maionia reliefs into stylistic proximity. Both reliefs depict three-headed figures, with hair bundles evenly spaced and rendered in soft, rounded contours. In both reliefs, the garment folds are arranged at regular intervals and fall in a vertical, linear form. These similarities indicate that the dates of the Blaundos and Maionia figurines are likely close. This date corresponds to the 2nd century AD, or more likely, the 3rd century AD, which coincide with the active periods of Blaundos⁴⁵. Indeed, all known examples of triple Hecate statues found in Western Anatolia are dated to the Roman Period, from the 2nd century BC onwards⁴⁶. Additionally, all sculptural works depicting Hecate found in Eastern Lydia are dated to the 2nd or 3rd centuries AD. Inscriptions related to the goddess discovered in the region are also predominantly assigned to the same centuries based on their characteristics⁴⁷.

³⁷ WERTH 2006, 173; For more information see also AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 11, fn. 34.

³⁸ GREENEWALT/PAYNE 1978, 43-45.

³⁹ For further information on this subject, see ÇELEBİ 2017, 28-31.

⁴⁰ HANFMANN/RAMAGE 1978, 18 vd. 29, dn. 5, fig. 20-50.

⁴¹ DİNÇ/DURUGÖNÜL 2017, 258, 262.

⁴² HAVELOCK 1964, 43 ff.; BÜYÜKÖZER-GİDER/BÜYÜKÖZER 2020, 70 vd.

⁴³ DURUGÖNÜL et alii 2015, 142-143 no. 81; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 122-123, 128, fig. 3, 5.

⁴⁴ DURUGÖNÜL et alii 2015, 146, nr. 85; AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 18-19, fig. 5 a-c, 25-26, fig. 9a-b.

⁴⁵ CAN 2017, 77.

⁴⁶ MİTROPOULOU 1978, 38 vd. fig. 45-46, 75-76, 79.

⁴⁷ AKYÜREK-ŞAHİN 2016, 38.

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

The ancient city of Blaundos is situated at the easternmost part of the Lydian territory, on the border with Phrygia. Therefore, it is not unexpected that a triple statuette associated with the previously attested cult of Hecate in Eastern Lydia and Phrygia was discovered at Blaundos. This statuette, encountered for the first time at Blaundos, is significant as it represents the second known depiction of a goddess found in the city after Demeter. It displays local characteristics, consistent with the majority of other Hecate depictions found in the region. However, detailed comparative analysis reveals that the artifact possesses certain distinctive features. With its three-headed, single-bodied form, it represents a type less commonly observed in Western Anatolia. The absence of this type in Phrygia and its presence in three examples in Eastern Lydia reinforce the likelihood of local production. Moreover, the grape cluster and ram's head motifs held in the hands, along with the dog -one of the goddess's primary symbols- have not been encountered in previous Hecate representations from these regions. With these features, the statuette expands the known iconographic repertoire of Hecate depictions in Eastern Lydia. Therefore, it deserves a distinctive place among similar finds from Lydia and its surroundings.

The statuette, a personal votive offering, is also notable as a reflection of the spread of the cult of Hecate in the region and its emergence at Blaundos. The variation in the symbolic meanings represented by the depicted attributes can be seen as reflections of different aspects of the cult. These attributes and the context of the find also evoke the goddess's associations with other deities such as Demeter, Hermes, and Dionysus. However, there is no evidence to suggest public worship of Hecate in the city. Moreover, no other finds related to Hecate have been recovered from Blaundos.

Triple Hecate statues were typically erected at crossroads and in front of houses during the Roman period. The small size of the statuette, the recess above its head, and the unworked back side indicate that the Blaundos Hecate statuette was likely placed within a niche. The statuette should date to the 2nd century AD, or more likely the 3rd century AD, based on its stylistic features and the prevalent usage period of the triple type. The presence of its typological, iconographic, and stylistic parallels in Eastern Lydia suggests the existence of a local workshop producing modest works in this region. This workshop, familiar with the cult and iconography of Hecate, likely lacked the technical capabilities of the more refined workshops at Sardis and Philadelphia, which produced higher-quality pieces.

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