

# Towards a typology of triangular bronze Hekate bases: contextualizing a new find from Sardis

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Excavations in Field 49 at Sardis in the summer of 2015 recovered a bronze triangle inscribed with three images of the goddess Hekate, Greek epithets, and magical symbols (Gr. χαρακτῆρες). The Sardis triangle is the third example of this design known from Roman Anatolia, the other two having been recovered from Pergamon and Apamea.<sup>1</sup> This article aims to situate the new find within its archaeological and historical contexts and, through comparisons with the Pergamon and Apamea finds, to refine our interpretations of the forms and functions of these objects.

Field 49 at Sardis is a flat plateau just north of the acropolis. Supported by a series of monumental limestone terrace walls, this part of the city was inhabited almost continuously from the Lydian period through late antiquity. The triangle was found along the face of a wall of a large house, which was constructed in the 1st c. A.D. (subsequent to the earthquake of A.D. 17: Tac., *Ann.* 2.47) and remained in use until at least the 3rd c. It was recovered from a fill containing pottery ranging from the 6th c. B.C. to the 5th c. A.D. This was interpreted as a leveling fill because of the broad chronological range of the pottery and the 1264 plain white tesserae from a disused section of flooring. Deposition of the fill is dated by the latest datable pottery, the neck of a Late Roman fusiform unguentarium (5th-6th c. A.D.)<sup>2</sup> and the rim of an African Red Slip Hayes' form 61a (325-400/420). In the S half of the plateau several 4th-c. structures were excavated, and, just north of the triangle's findspot, part of a villa with *opus sectile* floors probably of the 4th-5th c. Many of the Late Roman strata have eroded or were leveled after the area went out of use, but ceramic and numismatic evidence point to a dense occupation during the 4th and 5th c. All evidence from the Late Roman period suggests domestic occupation hereabouts. Architectural spolia, including a pediment block, *bucranium*, lion-head spout, and other cornice blocks built into a Late Roman wall, suggest that a sanctuary had stood on the plateau during the Early Roman period; the spolia wall, which dates to the 4th c., provides a *terminus ante quem* for the sanctuary's destruction. This part of the city seems to have been abandoned by the end of the 6th c., after which the hill was used as a cemetery.

The Pergamon triangle was published with no further findspot information.<sup>3</sup> It was found together with 9 or 10 other magical implements, including 3 'thunder stones,' a bronze disc, a 4-sided bronze nail marked with *charaktes*, 2 rings, and 2 (perhaps 3) bronze *lamellae*, all inscribed with magical figures.<sup>4</sup> R. Gordon suggested (rightly, we believe)

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1 The Pergamon triangle was first noticed by A. Conze and C. Schuchhardt, "Die Arbeiten zu Pergamon 1886-1898," *AthMitt* 24 (1899) 199-200, no. 6, but properly published by R. Wünsch, "Antiken Zaubergegät aus Pergamon," *Jdl Erg.* 6 (1905) 11-14, no. 1. The Apamea triangle was excavated in 1977 and first published by G. Donnay, "Instrument divinatoire d'époque romaine," in J. Balty (ed.), *Apamée de Syrie: bilan des recherches archéologiques 1973-1979* (Brussels 1984) 203-7.

2 H. S. Robinson, *The Athenian Agora V. Pottery of the Roman period, chronology* (Princeton, NJ 1959) M369.

3 Conze's reference to this find is very peculiar. It is perhaps more likely that it was found by tomb-robbers, possibly not even at Pergamon itself, and sold to the German archaeologists, who smuggled it out of the country.

4 These objects are distributed among the Altes, Neues and Pergamon Museums (Misc. 8612,