

## **All of a heap: Hermes and the stone cairn in Greek antiquity**

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The cross-cultural phenomenon of the accumulating stone cairn (Muhonen 2012) persists to this day in many cultures, as hillwalkers and travellers leave markers of their journey for posterity, through the addition of their own stone to heaps at crossroads' or on hills or mountains. These cairns signal the way forward for future wayfarers, and can also function as boundary markers and provide a platform for expression of intent or of prayer for protection and guidance through the medium of stone. In Greek antiquity, the practice was explained through an aetiological myth pertaining to the multifaceted and mercurial Olympian god Hermes, in whose very name the stone heap is implicit. In addition to presenting this mythical *aition* from which the practice is said to have derived in the ancient Greek world, this paper will further elucidate the inextricable relationship of the god and the stone heap from the earliest appearance of his name in Bronze Age Linear B texts. In this paper, I will also explore the physical aniconic manifestation of the god in the heap of stones and in the herm, examining the apotropaic and functional roles of these monuments. Of particular interest will be the archaeological remains of the Nekromanteion- the oracle of the dead- at Epiros in northwestern Greece. This site has yielded evidence of such stone heaps, which, it is likely, allude to the role of Hermes as *psychopomp*, or guide of souls, in Greek religion.