

'Koes' Kabeiric kantharos

Many **kantharoi** (tall drinking cups with big handles) were found at the **Kabeirion** (Sanctuary of the Kabeiroi) near Thebes, Boeotia, Greece. A black kantharos [[Greece 9](#)] is decorated with white figures in a cartoonish style found only at that Sanctuary. While we don't know exactly where this vase was found its style of decoration as well as the words painted on it strongly suggest that it came from the Kabeirion.



'Koes' kantharos, 450–425 bc, in the Ure Museum [[Greece 9](#)]

The white figure with a big head and beard on one side is probably the god Kabeiros. Images on vases found at the Kabeirion show similar reclining figures with big heads. Inscriptions identify this figure as Kabeiros. Our vase is inscribed, too – under one of the handles –

but not with the name of 'Kabeiros'. The word 'koes' is written here twice: the first version is misspelled and the second is a correction. At least one ancient author (Hesychius) defines 'Koes' as a priest of the Kabeiroi', but this name appears to be only used on the island of Samothrace (near Turkey). Annie Ure thought that this inscription

proved communication between the Sanctuaries at Thebes and Samothrace. The white figure on the other side looks like a traveller because he wears a **petasos** (wide-brimmed hat) and walks with a staff. The **caduceus** (herald's staff) behind him further identifies him as Hermes, the god of travellers.

You might wonder who this Kabeiros is? He was worshipped at the Sanctuary at Thebes with **Pais** (this name means 'Child' in Greek). Kabeiros was perhaps his father. While Kabeiros is linked with Dionysus, Pais is linked with Hermes (which may explain his presence on this vase). The two gods seem to have been attendants to *Meter* (Mother), an earth goddess. The only thing that distinguishes our figure from other images of Kabeiros is that he holds a bird rather than a *kantharos*. Such birds are, however, found on other Kabeiric vases.

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