

## Stele of Paser the Elder

New Kingdom, mid 18th dynasty

Limestone

H.: 61 cm; W.: 45 cm

Department of Egyptian Antiquities, Musée du Louvre (C 65)

This rounded stele is highly original: on the top register, decorated with a double scene of offering, Paser the Elder, director of the chamberlains, and his wife receive the tribute of a priest; the absence of a praying figure on the right is noteworthy—Paser's son and daughter-in-law are seated alone at the offering table, an unusual version of this kind of scene. The text on the lower register begins, as usual, by an offertory formula in which the name of the main beneficiary, Paser, is preceding by a long lists of laudatory terms. When Paser then speaks up to vaunt his own merits, his texts slips into cryptographic writing in which each hieroglyph has a value that differs from its habitual one. This technique, which began in the Middle Kingdom, was not designed to hide anything but to attract the attention of readers, forcing them to stop and demonstrate their own intellectual powers. It was a highly effective way of making the reader remember the deceased, thus perpetuating his memory. The end of the text returns to conventional script, describing in detail the person who executed this stele: none other than the deceased's grandson and namesake, Paser the Younger, who was "privy to the secrets of the Library," which perhaps explains the highly intellectual use of cryptography.



© 2006 Musée du Louvre/ Georges Poncet