

Observations on Paser Stela
(no. 43649), the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

Abdel Wahid Abdel Salam Ibrahim

The stela of Paser, which the Cairo Museum possesses (JdE 43649) is one of the most important religious documents ever found in Egypt. It was unearthed in Abydos, but exact provenance is unknown. The stela is limestone of very mediocre quality, and measures 54×35 cm. It was purchased in Balliana, the market town of the Abydos region. The inscriptions and representations are somewhat carelessly incised. It is the sole document which provides the greatest information on the cult of King Nebhepetre Ahmose I at Abydos. A good photograph is reproduced of G. Legrain "Un miracle d'Ahmès I^{er} à Abydos sous le règne de Ramsès II.", in: *ASAE* 16, 1916. It describes a land dispute put before the barque oracle of the deified Nebpehtyre Ahmose I, in the Year 14 of the King Ramses II of Nineteenth Dynasty, some two-hundred-and-thirty-five years following the death of Nebpehtyre Ahmose I.

The names and titles of the priests and priestesses serving the cult of King Nebpehtyre Ahmose I are found on a variety of objects from Abydos, spanning the period from the early Eighteenth Dynasty into the reign of King Ramses II of the Nineteenth Dynasty. The activity of an oracle cult of the deified King during the Ramesside Period implies that significant transformations to the nature and practice of Ahmose's worship had taken place over time at Abydos. Perhaps the oracles are the best illustrations of the interest which the deity was believed to take in human affairs. The oracles also show how the Egyptians almost forced their gods to abandon a passive attitude towards men and to reveal their will, advice or knowledge. This was through the intermediary of the statue of the god which was asked questions, though more than one case is related where the initiative was from the god himself. Strangely enough, the practice of approaching the god and consulting him appears relatively late in Egypt, the first known instances dating from the New

Kingdom. It is not necessary to conclude from this, as has sometimes been done, that the practice was originally unknown to Egypt, and was introduced from abroad on the contrary, consultation with the god is the natural outcome of man's reasoning, and the rather original technique which the Egyptians devised for this purpose suggests that oracles in Egypt were of native origin. The first reference to the divine being manifested is probably that made by King Tuthmosis III, who relates how, when he was still a boy, the god Amun, in the course of a procession of his statue round the temple, noticed him and halted.