Queenship and Eternal Life: Tije Offering Palm Ribs at the Sed-Festival Thrones of Amenhotep III

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Depictions of the offering of palm ribs in ancient Egypt refer to the presentation of a long reign and eternal life. The most common scene is of deity offering palm ribs to the pharaoh; however, O. E. Kaper studied rare depictions of the pharaoh offering palm ribs to deity in a ritual found in the Dakleh Oasis. In his study Kaper compares the scenes in the Dakleh Oasis to what he believes are the four known depictions of the queen as officiant of the palm rib.1 His list includes four objects: a carnelian gemstone on which Queen Tiye is shown offering palm ribs to Amenhotep III (fig. 1),2 an ivory chest cover with a relief where Queen Tiye is a griffin or sphinx offering palm ribs to the cartouche of Amenhotep III, and a travertine lamp and small golden shrine from Tutankhamen’s tomb on which Queen Ankhesenamun is depicted offering palm ribs to Tutankhamen. These depictions are all from the Eighteenth Dynasty and perhaps reflect the increased power of women in the court during that dynasty, or it is possible that this motif of the queen offering palm fronds was more pervasive and we

1. O. E. Kaper, *Temples and Gods in Roman Dakhleh* (Studies in the Indigenous Cults of an Egyptian Oasis: Proefschrift Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 1997), 179–80. Kaper is interested in these depictions of the queen offering palm ribs because it is similar in the human, and not divine, nature of the officiant. However, it is interesting that Kaper only gives examples of the queen offering palm ribs and does not mention the carnelian gemstone paired with the Queen Tiye depiction that shows the princesses offering palm ribs.

2. The stones from this bracelet are found at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: MMA no. 26.7.1340.
just do not have a good sampling extant. In either case, offering of palm ribs by the queen offers new information on the role of queen. The depiction on the carnelian gemstone is of particular interest because it shows Amenhotep III on the sed-festival throne and is part of a bracelet likely gifted to Queen Tiye at Amenhotep III’s first sed-festival. While the role of the queen in this festival remains obscure, an overview of how palm ribs were used in ancient Egypt, an overview of the sed-festival, and a close analysis of the carnelian gemstone offers insight into both the divine role and private role of the queen in ancient Egypt.

Palm Ribs

The palm rib, a palm frond stripped bare of its leaves, seems to be one of the earliest methods the ancient Egyptians used to record time. The goddess Se-shat, often shown wearing a leopard skin signifying that she is one of the most ancient of goddesses, has as her chief mission the notching of a palm frond to mark the pharaoh’s life-period. Seshat records the royal names of the pharaoh at birth and coronation, grants the pharaoh sed-festivals, and her symbol is seen in depictions of sed-festivals such as the images of Osorkon’s sed-festival. Seshat is the goddess who both grants sed-festivals and the length of the king’s life; in many ways she is similar to the Greek idea of fate. While other gods present the pharaohs with palm ribs of sed-festivals, Seshat alone or Seshat with Thoth marks the sed-festivals for the pharaoh.

It is from the ancient notching of palm ribs and the association of the growth of the palm frond with the lunar month that the palm rib came to be the hieroglyph renpet meaning year. This word is related to the noun renpwt, “fresh plants,” and the verb renpy, “to become young” or “to renew life.” The palm rib is often seen as more than just representative of a year, but as a symbol for recurring years. It is important to note, as does Nadine Guilhou, that the palm rib


4. Wainwright, “Seshat and Pharaoh,” 30–32. Seshat is also known for helping the king lay out the measurements and plans of the temples. Her flowerlike symbol in many ways resembles a palm tree and is often shown with the horn symbol referring to the month.


representing time is probably not interchangeable with the symbolism associated with palm trees.\(^8\) Specific use of the palm rib can be seen in depictions of, and the hieroglyph for, the god Heh, who holds palm ribs in his uplifted hands and wears a palm-rib headdress. Heh is the god, and hieroglyph, of eternity, and it is appropriate that he is associated with the palm rib, or *renpet*, signifying time. Offering of the palm rib is especially common in contexts concerning the coronation and *sed*-festival of the pharaoh. In depictions of the *sed*-festival the pharaoh is usually shown twice, once on the throne of Lower Egypt and once on the throne of Upper Egypt wearing the respective crowns. These two thrones are often shown back-to-back, and the pharaoh is presented with the notched palm rib, as Richard H. Wilkinson describes, by the “partially personified emblems of the Two Lands—the Horus falcon and the Seth animal” (fig. 2).\(^9\) Wilkinson argues that although the offering of palm ribs is symbolic, it is possible that real palm fronds were given to the pharaoh during the *sed*-festival.\(^10\)

Palm ribs are also carried by Thoth, the scribal god, and are presented to the pharaoh by various gods as emblems of divine support of the pharaoh’s long reign, or giving him eternal life. Somewhat of an anomaly, as Kaper has studied, palm ribs in the Dakleh Oasis appear to be offered to the gods by the pharaoh, an offering not known from temple reliefs in the Nile Valley.\(^11\) However, the gods, like the pharaoh, needed long reign and power and there are even texts referring to the *sed*-festivals of the gods, albeit these festivals are likely metaphorical.

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and not actually celebrated. In many of the depictions of the offering of palm ribs there are tadpoles—a hieroglyph representing multiplication or 100,000—and shens—representing 10,000,000—found at the base of the palm ribs. With the tadpole and the shen below the *renpet*, the offering symbolized eternity or endless years.

The *Sed*-festival

As is clear from the preceding discussion, the *sed*-festival is one of the prime venues for depictions of the offering of palm ribs. The *sed*-festival is one of the most mysterious of the ancient Egyptian festivals and it is not known exactly what rituals happened during this festival, how it evolved, or what its purpose was. We have no texts describing the *sed*-festival, but from the earliest dynasties we have texts mentioning that *sed*-festivals were celebrated. The fragmentary visual data we have comes from different dynasties, and it is not clear if we even have depicted all the main events of the festival, nor are we certain that archaeologists and scholars have correctly reconstructed the reliefs and put together the sequence of events and rituals. The hieroglyph for the *sed*-festival is two chapels on a dais with sloping sides or stairs with two empty thrones back-to-back. Frequently, to clarify this hieroglyph, the double-throne image is placed on the *heb* hieroglyph—the alabaster bowl that is the determinative for festival. The origin of the *sed* hieroglyph possibly comes from a *sed*-festival ritual where the pharaoh is re-crowned king of Upper and Lower Egypt. To indicate an offering of endless *sed*-festivals, these double-throne hieroglyphs are strung together and hung from a palm rib with a tadpole below. The offering of endless *sed*-festivals intensifies the long reign and rejuvenation aspect of the palm rib offering. This is how Ankhesenamun is shown on the small golden shrine from the tomb of Tutankhamen.

The *sed*-festival is interpreted as a test of the pharaoh’s ability and worthiness to rule and perhaps consisted of a repetition of rituals associated with the accession of the throne. One theory held by many early scholars, such as A. Moret

13. These symbols are often found at the bottom of Seshat’s palm rib (Wainwright, “Seshat and the Pharaoh,” 35).
14. It is interesting to note that the offering of palm ribs resonated into the twentieth century in Nubia. Blackman in 1916 describes how palm ribs stripped of their leaves were carried by women at wedding processions and the practice of putting palm ribs at the head and foot of graves in Nubia (Aylward M. Blackman, “Libations to the Dead in Modern Nubia and Ancient Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 3.1 [January 1916]: 31–34).
15. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals*, 97. See Erik Hornung and Elisabeth Staehelin, *Studien zum Sedfest* (Aegyptiaca Helvetica; Geneva: Centre d’études orientales de l’Université de Genève, 1974) for charts with the data we have on *sed*-festivals throughout the dynastic period.
17. Bleeker is not convinced that there is a direct connection between the *sed*-festival and the accession to the throne ceremony (*Egyptian Festivals*, 111–12).
and G. A. Wainright, suggests that in predynastic times if the king was unfit he would be ritually murdered as part of the sed-festival and a new king brought forth. C. J. Bleeker adamantly disagrees with this theory and writes that “no indications are to be found in either the prehistory or the history of Egypt of any custom by which a king who had grown weak and senile was eliminated.” It is clear in the dynastic period that the sed-festival was considered as rejuvenating, and not replacing, the pharaoh. Moret suggests that one of the results of the sed-festival was that the pharaoh was given a longer period of renewed life than in the daily temple rituals. Whether or not the sed-festival originated as ritual murder of an unfit king, it seems that it became a festival of rejuvenation for the pharaoh that perhaps was to occur 30 years after the pharaoh was either made crown prince or crowned. The idea of 30 years comes from a translation from the Rosetta stone that may not mean 30 years, but simply a very long reign, as the number 30 for Egyptians was associated with the length of a generation. It certainly was not necessary to begin celebrating sed-festivals on the thirtieth year of the king: Thutmosis II celebrated two sed-festivals and did not even live past thirty.

M. Murray lists 17 pharaohs who, she determines from fragmentary depictions, celebrated this festival. Although her data is plausible, it is inaccurate to say, as she does, that the pharaoh seated on the back-to-back thrones of Upper and Lower Egypt refers to the sed-festival as this image is also associated with the accession of a pharaoh. Our best sources which we know from their inscriptions are sed-festivals are the detailed, albeit fragmented, representations of this festival for Neuserre, of the Fifth Dynasty, in the chapel of the sun temple at Abu Gurob; Amenhotep III, of the Eighteenth Dynasty, in the tomb of Kheruef and at the temple at Soleb; and Osorkon II, of the Twenty-second Dynasty, at the temple at Bubastis.

In comparing the representations of the sed-festivals of Neuserre, Amenhotep III, and Osorkon II we can deduce several common aspects of this festival. The sed-festival included bringing together the deities, in the form of their statues and emblems, of both Upper and Lower Egypt and housing them in rows of shrines resembling the different architectural shape of shrines of

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22. F. Ll. Griffith (“Jubilee of Akhenaton,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 5.1 [January 1918]: 61–63.) discusses some of the arguments for when sed-festivals were held, referencing works by Kurt Sethe, Spiegelberg, and Meyer.
23. Eric Uphill, “The Egyptian Sed-Festival Rites,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies 24.4 (October 1965): 365. Uphill is not as sure that the Soleb reliefs are clearly depicting a sed-festival, but Bleeker and later scholars believe that some of the Soleb reliefs are indeed of a sed-festival.
Upper and Lower Egypt. An imitation of this row of shrines can be seen at the sed-festival court connected to Djoser’s Pyramid at Saqqara. There was either the building of a temple/palace for the sed-festival or renewal of such a building, and many gifts and offerings were given both to the royal family and to the gods. A procession ensued from a pavilion to the sed-festival palace, where the king was presented to the assembled gods in their respective shrines of Upper and Lower Egypt. The queen and princesses are present in many of the sed-festival scenes and are shown watching or, in the case of the princesses, shaking sistroms to ward off evil. In all depictions it is clear that there is the specific use of a short ritual mantle, or sed-robe, which is donned before ascending the throne, perhaps while the pharaoh was in the sed-festival palace. Bleeker notes that the typical short sed-robe was kept for more than fifteen centuries and must have been a sacred cultic garment. Finally, another key element to all the representations is the appearance of the pharaoh several times wearing alternately the crown of Lower and Upper Egypt and the ascent of the sed-festival throne.

Beyond these key common aspects it is unclear how the typical sed-festival proceeded. There are major differences between the representations of the sed-festivals of Neuserre, Amenhotep III, and Osorkon II. The Neuserre depictions show the pharaoh doing a cultic dance consisting of a fourfold walk around a field while those of Amenhotep III show oxen driven around the walls of one of the festival buildings four times. Only in Amenhotep III’s third sed-festival is there the depiction of the erection and worship of the dd-piller, and only in Osorkon’s is there the cultic decree granting Thebes and her priestesses privileged positions. Eric Uphill, focusing on the Osorkon reliefs, tries to reconstruct the order and details of the rituals of the sed-festival and includes a ceremony in a tomb where a ritual mummification—or preservation—and renewal of the pharaoh takes place. Although this particular ritual is not in all sed-festival depictions, in most cases Ptah, the god of the underworld, plays a significant role.

While it is ambiguous exactly what role women played in the sed-festival it is clear that musician priestesses and the high priestess, who was known by the title “God’s Wife,” played vital roles in temple rituals and festivals in general. The earliest known example of a pharaoh’s wife, and not just the high priestess, being called by the title “God’s Wife” was Iahhotpe, the mother of Amosis I, the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty; also, the first time the title “Hand of God” was applied to a queen was in the Eighteenth Dynasty, from the time of Hatshepsut and Amenophis II. These titles continue to be applied to the queens of the Eighteenth dynasty, and this may explain why the Amenhotep and Osokorn depictions of the sed-festival give particular attention to the presence of the queen.

during many of the rituals and show many royal women, including the princesses, performing the ceremonial function of musician priestesses shaking sistroms to dispel evil. Queen Tiye, the main wife of Amenhotep III, in the tomb of royal scribe Kheruef is even depicted with the pharaoh in a boat drawn by 20 people as part of the sed-festival. It is the depiction of Queen Tiye on a bracelet likely made for Amenhotep III’s first sed-festival that helps us understand better the role of the queen.

From this bracelet there are five plaques extant depicting sed-festival scenes and the royal family of Amenhotep III. This bracelet shows three different types of offering of palm ribs: the god to the pharaoh, princesses to the pharaoh and queen, and the queen to the pharaoh. It is of particular interest because the queen offering palm fronds to the pharaoh is not only a very rare scene but this particular image shows Amenhotep III on the double sed-throne. The understanding of the offering of palm ribs and the sed-festival helps us to interpret this stone and gives us insight into the divine and private roles of the queen. To fully analyze the carnelian gemstone depicting Queen Tiye presenting palm ribs at the sed-festival throne of Amenhotop III, we will look more closely at who Tiye was and at the depictions of the sed-festivals of Amenhotep III.

Queen Tiye and the Sed-festivals of Amenhotep III

Scholars have argued that Queen Tiye was a foreigner, some saying she is from Nubia and others saying she is from Asia; however, when the tomb of her parents, Yuya and Tjuju, was discovered in 1905 there were no indications of her being anything but Egyptian. They even seem to be from the Egyptian town Akmim. However, it should be noted that Yuya’s name is somewhat odd, and his foreign origin could be argued. Whether or not Queen Tiye was a foreigner, she was a nonroyal marriage for Amenhotep III. Tiye nonetheless enjoyed all the privileges of the principal wife and queen, and no previous queen played so prominently during her husband’s lifetime. Amenhotep III and Tiye had four known daughters, Stamen, Henuttaneb, Isis, and Nebetah, all who appear frequently on statuary and reliefs. Tiye is shown on equal scale with Amenhotep III with three of their daughters in a colossal statue from Amenhotep III’s mortuary temple. Sitamen and Isis were raised to the position of “great royal wife” sometime in the last decade of their father’s reign. Amenhotep III and Tiye were also presumably the parents of prince Tuthmosis, who predeceased his father, and Amenhotep IV, better known as Akhenaton.

30. For a sketch on the scholarship of Tiye and her origins see Arielle P. Kozloff and Betsy M. Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and His World (Bloomington, Ind.: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), 23–24.
32. Kozloff and Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun, 43.
It is during Amenhotep III’s reign that the queen first adopts as part of her insignia the horns and disk of Hathor, the goddess of fertility and rejuvenation, and carries the sistrum that was closely associated with the cult of Hathor. From the walls of the royal scribe Kheruef, it seems that the marriage of Amenhotep III to Hathor, perhaps in the person of the queen, was part of the sed-festival liturgy. Gay Robins hypothesizes that “the prominence of Tiye and other royal women in Amenhotep’s reign may have been related to the stress on the divinity of kingship, leading to a corresponding emphasis on the divine side of queenship.” Tiye sets the precedent for the role of other queens in the Eighteenth Dynasty who continue to be worshipped as Hathor and fulfill the role of divine female counterpart to the pharaoh.

Emphasizing this role of divine queenship, or divine female counterpart to the pharaoh are the depictions of Queen Tiye at the sed-festivals of Amenhotep III. There are at least three times that Amenhotep III celebrated the sed-festival, and it seems that his elaborate preparations for these festivals were unprecedented. Not since perhaps the Twelfth Dynasty had a sed-festival been celebrated in anything other than a perfunctory way. The duration of the sed-festival under Amenhotep III was sixty-seven days, and the festivities were lavish according to the labels from food pots for the event found at the Malqata palace. Even the king of Babylon, Kadashman-Enlil I, wrote to Amenhotep III complaining that he had not been invited. In the tomb of the royal scribe Kheruef, an inscription records that Amenhotep III celebrated the sed-festival according to ancient documents, which leads us to believe that many if not all of the rituals depicted were at one time a part of earlier pharaohs’ sed-festivals. Another piece of evidence that Amenhotep III used ancient sed-festival documents is a fragment of a Predynastic or First Dynasty palette carved with a sed-festival scene with an Eighteenth Dynasty depiction of Queen Tiye on the reverse. This association of Tiye with an ancient sed-festival scene perhaps indicates the importance of


34. Kozloff and Bryan, *Egypt’s Dazzling Sun*, 43.


42. Kozloff and Bryan, *Egypt’s Dazzling Sun*, 40. The Egyptian Museum, no. JE 46148. See also a fragment in the Brooklyn Museum, no. 66.175.
Tiye’s role in the *sed*-festival and as queen.

The first *sed*-festival of Amenhotep III happened in year 30 as recorded by the dockets from the Malqata palace, an inscription in the tomb of Khemhet, scenes at the temple of Soleb, and a scene in the tomb of the Royal scribe Kheruef. Amenhotep III boasted of a great harvest in year 30/31 and one granodiorite statue of Amenhotep III in the *sed*-robe with the inscription “lord of the *sed*-festivals” shows him obese signifying plenty. The second *sed*-festival in the year 34 is known from several hundred jar labels from the Malqata palace, and the third in year 37 to 38 is known from text and scenes in the tomb of Kheruef, and jar labels from Malqata palace. The depictions and text in the tomb of Kheruef at Thebes are peculiar in their depiction of the repeated presence of Queen Tiye and the princesses. In this tomb it is written of Tiye that “she is in the suit of the king just as the goddess Ma-a-t follows the god Re” and of the women that “the women were escorted to the king in order to perform the *hb sd* rituals right in front of the throne.” These inscriptions shed light on the carnelian bracelet, which is perhaps a depiction of women performing *sed*-rituals at Amenhotep III’s throne.

Before Amenhotep III’s third *sed*-festival, his son Akhenaton had already moved much of the royal court to el-Amarna. Uphill notes that although Akhenaton was a religious reformer he still celebrated the *sed*-festival. Tutankhamen, the grandson of Amenhotep III, did not have a *sed*-festival, most likely because of his premature death. However, it is the wife of Tutankhamen, Queen Ankhesenamun, who is shown offering Tutankhamen endless *sed*-festivals in conjunction with her palm rib offering on the small golden shrine. Perhaps she is following in the tradition of her grandfather’s wife, Tiye, who is shown offering palm ribs on the carnelian plaque.

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44. Kozloff and Bryan, *Egypt’s Dazzling Sun*, 195. The statue is from the mortuary temple of Amenhotep III at Thebes and is now in Cairo: The Egyptian Museum, no. JE 33901.
49. Eric Uphill, “The *Sed*-Festivals of Akhenaton,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22.2 (April 1963): 123–27. The *sed*-festival of Akhenaton is discussed in F. Ll. Griffith, “The Jubilee of Akhenaton,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 5.1 (January 1918): 61–63. Here Griffith finds no reason to associate what Petrie and Murray identify as a depiction of Akhenaton’s *sed*-festival in Huya’s tomb at el-Amarna because once the depiction had been cleaned it was clear that the queen was in the palanquin with the pharaoh. However, since it is clear that Queen Tiye was in the boat with Amenhotep during his *sed*-festival perhaps it is still possible that the Huya tomb depiction is of a *sed*-festival of Akhenaton.
The Carnelian Plaques of Queen Tiye

Howard Carter in 1912 bought three convex plaques in Luxor, which he sold to Lord Carnarvon, with the low relief figures of Amenhotep III and Queen Tiye. The collection of Lord Carnarvon including these plaques and an additional partial one that matched the set, obtained by Carnarvon from the MacGregor collection, was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art through the generosity of its trustee Edward S. Harkness in 1926. This museum acquired one more matching plaque in 1944 from the collection of Henry Walters of Baltimore that appears to go with this same set. Four of these plaques are carnelian and one is of sard, and because they are convex and similar to bracelets on the mummy of Tutankhamen, they are believed to all be part of one bracelet with the original settings missing. Alan H. Gardiner, writing when there were only three known plaques, hypothesized that these plaques were a bracelet that “once rested upon the arms of no less a person than Queen Tiye.” William C. Hayes, writing after two more plaques were acquired, agrees with Gardiner that the bracelet must have been made for Queen Tiye. As evidence for this is the absence of Sitamun, who was likely already the wife of Amenhotep III, not simply his and Tiye’s daughter, and therefore would have been less appropriate on a bracelet that was made for Tiye. Hayes also suggests that this piece of jewelry was made on the occasion of Amenhotep’s first jubilee (1375 b.c.e.) since each of the scenes is related to the sed-festival and the presentation of small monuments and gifts to the king and other members of the royal family was part of the sed-festival. Even scenes in the tomb of the Kheruef at Thebes show the presentation of jewelry, including bracelets such as this one would have been, to Amenhotep III and Tiye on the occasion of two sed-festivals.

50. MMA no. 26.7.1340—queen presenting palm fronds.
51. Gardiner quotes verbatim how Lord Carnarvon obtained the three plaques: “In November 1912, I received a telegram from Mr. Carter asking me to send out a certain sum as he has bought for me some very interesting objects. The three plaques arrived in England about a month later in charge of a friend. Mr. Carter had bought them in Luxor, by a happy chance just forestalling the Berlin Museum. Where they were found it is hard to say, but there are not many places whence they could have come. Personally, I think their provenance must by the Bibân el Mulûk: the so-called tomb of Amenhotep and Tij up the W. valley had been disturbed by the natives before Mr. Theodore Davis began to dig there. These engraved stones must certainly have belonged to the king himself and were probably set in bracelets or armlets. When the tomb was robbed no doubt the gold settings were taken and the stones cast asides as too compromising” (Alan H. Gardiner, “Three Engraved Plaques in the Collection of the Earl of Carnarvon,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 3.2/3 [April–July 1916]: 73).
Lawrence M. Berman and Betsy M. Bryan suggest that the jewelry was made for the pharaoh, but whether or not for the king or queen, it is certain by the quality of the workmanship and by the intimate depictions of the royal family that it was indeed made for royalty.56 Hayes points out that the wear on the surfaces of these five plaques means that these were probably not funerary jewelry, although most likely used in the Royal Burial, but were worn by the owner in his or her lifetime. The scenes on the bracelet would have served as a reminder to the wearer of both the sed-festival for which they were made and of Tiye’s role as queen.

The five plaques are tiny, and each measure about 4 x 2.5 x 0.2 cm. They are very carefully carved, and the cartouches and inscriptions seem microscopic. The modern settings are copied from the bracelet of Queen Tawosret.57 The sard plaque shows what is thought to be Queen Tiye as a griffin or sphinx with the cartouche of Amenhotep III.58 Queen Tiye depicted as a sphinx is not unprecedented, but she is the first queen honored with this image which had previously been reserved for the king. The only other time besides the carnelian plaque that Queen Tiye is shown offering palm ribs, in this case to a cartouche with Amenhotep III’s name, she is depicted as a sphinx or griffin in relief on an ivory cover to a chest, as noted by Kaper.59 Berman writes that Tiye’s representation as a sphinx is meant to “emphasize her role as the king’s divine, as well as earthly, partner.”60 Even in this, the simplest of the set of plaques the role of Tiye’s divine queenship is set forth.

The carnelian plaque obtained in 1944 shows Amenhotep III enthroned wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and the sed-festival shirt with the crook and flail (fig. 3). Queen Tiye, wearing the double plumed head-dress of a queen, is seated behind him, and two princesses with sistrums perform their ceremonial function as musician priestesses. The sistrum is an instrument especially associated with Hathor and emphasizes the rejuvenating side of Hathor’s nature because the rattling noise it makes was considered to revitalize the ka.61 The princesses are shaking sistrums not only for the pharaoh but for queen Tiye also. She is meant to be protected and rejuvenated just as her husband Amenhotep III. Behind Tiye a fan bearer is shown on a smaller scale, and Hayes suggests this was the donor of the bracelet.62 This scene perhaps not only shows an actual ritual of the sed-festival but also shows the importance of the queen in her relationship with the pharaoh. The pharaoh is in front of her as protector but she is also on the

56. Kozloff and Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun, 442.
57. The silver bracelets of Queen Tawosret are now in the Cairo Museum. Th. Davis, The Tomb of Siptah, pls. 9, 10 as observed by Gardiner, “Three Engraved Plaques,” 73.
60. Kozloff and Bryan, Egypt’s Dazzling Sun, 43.
level of the ruler as she is an aspect of the rulership of the pharaoh. The broken plaque shows Re Horakhty enthroned with palm rib in hand, probably crowning Amenhotep III, but its broken state makes it difficult to ascertain.63 This is, how-

Fig. 3: Amenhotep III, Tiye, and princesses with sistra. 
(Illustration by Daniel O. McClellan)

The fourth plaque, and part of the original Carnarvon purchase, shows Amenhotep III wearing the khepresh-helmet holding the crook in one hand and the ankh in the other, and enthroned with the vulture behind. Tiye stands behind wearing the vulture headdress and the two feathers holding the flail and the ankh as part of the inscription “stability and life behind her.” It seems that she is an integral part of the divine role of ruler in this image. She is holding the flail as her husband holds the crook, and both have the symbol that represents the vulture and the cobra combined representing Upper and Lower Egypt. The pharaoh’s throne in this depiction is over the basket sign and sled sign—like the sled used to carry divine statues. This sled for the gods extends under the feet of Queen Tiye. Together they are the divine rulers and as such two princesses are shaking sistra before them and holding palm ribs with ankhs on top and microscopic tadpoles, symbol for multiplication or 100,000, and shen signs, symbol for 10,000,000, at the bases—all together symbolizing eternal life. The queen is being offered the signs of endless years, or eternal life just as the pharaoh in this scene. Focusing on the carnelian plaque that shows the sed-festival double throne pavilion with Queen Tiye presenting palm ribs to Amenhotep III on both sides, we see an image that is rare if not unique (fig.

63. Hayes compares this piece with the reliefs of Amenhotep III in the first and second ante-chambers of Amenhotep III’s Temple at Luxor where he is seen kneeling between Amen Re and another divinity receiving the crown (“Minor Art and Family History in the Reign of Amun-Hotpe III,” 278).
1). Amenhotep III is wearing the sed-festival cloak and is sitting on the two thrones of Upper and Lower Egypt. Below the sed-festival thrones is the hieroglyph $hb$, sign for festival, and above the scene is the winged solar disk, depicting the tutelary deity Horus Behedty. This is a rare depiction as other sed-festival images like this one with the double throne show the god-personifications of the Horus falcon and Seth animal presenting palm ribs to the pharaoh, not the queen. On the left, in addition to the palm rib, Tiye holds the ankh in her other hand, symbolizing life, and to the side is a cartouche with the name worn, but that was presumably Tiye’s, and the phrase “who lives.” On the right her figure supports the cartouches with “Nebmare, granted life” (Nebmare is another name for Amenhotep III), along with the palm rib in her hand. Two vertical lines of inscriptions frame the image, behind Tiye’s figures. The inscription on the left reads, “The good god, lord of the Two Lands, Nebmare, granted life eternally,” and on the right, “Son of Re, of his [body], Amenophis-Ruler-of Thebes, granted life eternally.” Tiye is the vehicle by which eternal life is granted to Amenhotep III in this image. This plaque differs from the other two in that it has notches, probably as part of the original setting.

While this gemstone could be interpreted as completely symbolic, it could also be read as both symbolic and as a depiction of an actual part of the sed-festival ceremony. As discussed previously, the princesses are shown in the sed-festival reliefs on the tomb walls of Kheruef as taking part in the ceremony as musician priestesses shaking sistrums for the pharaoh; perhaps the queen was actually part of the ceremony where the king was crowned with the two crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt. This would add credence to the idea of the matriarchal origins of the pharaoh and resonates with the idea of the queen as a form of Hathor, something that begins with Tiye, because Hathor was the goddess of procreation and guarantor of rejuvenation. In royal mythology the queen and the pharaoh’s mother, also called queen, were to be as the sky goddess Nut, who continually gave birth to the sun, thus associating the queen as both a goddess and consort to the gods in the pharaoh’s royal birth. The role of the queen was that of renewal and regeneration for the king, at least the aspect of giving him posterity if not on a more cosmic level, and whether or not the queen actually presented the pharaoh with palm ribs during the sed-festival, this carnelian gemstone shows the divine and regenerative aspect of queenship. Tiye, in this depiction, is replacing the gods of both Upper and Lower Egypt—Horus and Seth. This placement seemingly gives the queen the role as divine representative of both Upper and Lower Egypt, and it is interesting that the queenly crown, the vulture headdress Tiye wears in one of the other plaques, represents the two goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt—the vulture

64. Description and interpretation of inscriptions taken from Gardiner, “Three Engraved Plaques,” 73–75.

65. For a lengthy analysis of the relation of Hathor to the palm motif in the Eighteenth Dynasty see Kantziös, “The Palm Tree–Palmette Motifs,” 75–166.
goddess Nekhbet and the cobra goddess Wadjyt.\footnote{Robins, \textit{Women in Ancient Egypt}, 23.}

It should be taken into consideration that this bracelet was worn by someone, probably Queen Tiye, and therefore is an example of private art. The depiction of the queen in the role of offering palm ribs to the pharaoh on the \textit{sed}-festival throne is not known anywhere else and therefore was likely not meant to be a public image. As part of Queen Tiye’s jewelry, it would have served as a personal reminder of her role and duty toward the pharaoh. This seems to be the role of the small golden shrine of Tutankhamen that M. Eaton-Krauss and E. Graefe suggest was commissioned by Queen Ankhesenamun and was “intended to document Ankhesenamun’s ideological role as Tutankhamun’s queen, this being in turn the transposition of the wife’s traditional role in ancient Egypt into the royal sphere. . . . Each panel may be understood as illustrating Ankhesenamun’s supportive and sustaining function as Tutankhamun’s spouse.”\footnote{M. Eaton-Krauss and E. Graefe, \textit{The Small Golden Shrine from the Tomb of Tutankhamen} (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1985), 29.} Like the carnelian bracelet, the shrine reminded the queen of not only her divine queenship but also of her more private role as spouse to the pharaoh.

Conclusion

The carnelian gemstone depicting queen Tiye offering palm ribs to Amenhotep III on the \textit{sed}-festival throne, along with its matching set of plaques, offers insight into the offering of palm ribs, the rituals of the \textit{sed}-festival, and the intimate role of the queen as the divine regenerative aspect of the pharaoh and the human supportive spouse of the pharaoh. While this type of jewelry might not be unattested, it is unique as far as we know today. The only scenes that come close to those found on the bracelet are those of Ankhesenamun on the small golden shrine and travertine lamp. As a lock of Tiye’s hair was found in Tutankhamun’s tomb, it is possible that the aged queen personally influenced Ankhesenamun. Queen Tiye set the example for some of the great queens of Egypt including Nefertiti, who was the wife of Tiye’s son Akhenaten, and Ramses II’s wife Nefertari, whose temple at Abu Simbel is very similar to Tiye’s at Sedeinga. By analyzing the carnelian plaques in light of the offering of palm ribs and the \textit{sed}-festival, our understanding of the role of queenship in this period is increased.