Administration in the 18th Dynasty

The overall administrative structures in use during the 18th Dynasty are characterized both by clear trends and by some inconclusive situations. Too few of the officials of Ahmose and Amenhotep I have been securely identified to indicate the families and regions represented in the early 18th Dynasty royal retinue. By the middle of the dynasty, however, the kings' closest associates were buried either in Thebes or at Saqqara, with more of our documentation deriving from the southern city. From the reign of Hatshepsut onwards, the élite officials for whom we may expect to find a decorated tomb chapel and burial shaft at Thebes or Saqqara included the vizier, the treasurer (literally the overseer of the seal), overseers of gold and silver houses, royal stewards, overseers of the granary (of Egypt or Amun), the king's son and overseer of southern countries, royal heralds or butlers (often involved in diplomacy), royal nurses (male and female), regional mayors (sometimes buried in their home districts), the high priest of Amun (Thebes), the high priest of Ptah (Saqqara), the second, third, and fourth priests of Amun, and overseers of the army, as well as various levels of royal scribes.

The 18th Dynasty pharaohs' need to garner support from powerful élite families has been mentioned with respect to scenes of the enthroned ruler in private tombs of the reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, and powerful families held the positions of vizier and high priest of Amun during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. Important members of Thutmose III's retinue, including the vizier User (TT 61 and TT 131), his steward and counter of grain for Amun, Amenemhat (TT 82), and the overseer of the granary of Amun, Minnakht (TT 87), had burial chambers with similar versions of the Litany of Ra and the Amduat. Erik Hornung's recent study of User's texts has underscored the royal prerogatives assumed by élite individuals in the time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. One of the two tombs of Senenmut (TT 71 and TT 373) was designed to emulate a royal burial, including an astronomical ceiling such as those later used in the Valley of the Kings. Privileged access to the king arose in other ways as well (for example, through burials granted in the Valley of the Kings). This was true for the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II.

In contrast to the élite families well known in the time of his aunt and father, many of Amenhotep II's close associates had earlier served in the military both under Thutmose III and under Amenhotep himself. Such close relations as army service can foster were perhaps made all the stronger by their origins in youth, when the king and his court associates learned to hunt and drive chariots. Usersatet, the 'viceroy of southern countries', may well have been one of these childhood friends who then served as a royal herald abroad under Thutmose III. The inscription on a stele which he left at the fortress of Semna in the second-cataract region contains within it the text of a remarkable letter sent by Amenhotep II to his old friend posted abroad: 'You sit ... a chariot-soldier who fights for his Majesty ... the [possessor of a wo]man from Babylon, and a ser-
vant from Byblos, of a young maiden from Alalakh, and an old lady from Arapkha.' Another man who had served Thutmose III, Amenemheb (TT 85), must have died rather early in Amenhotep II’s reign. In an inscription from his tomb, Amenemheb described the appointment of Amenhotep as king and then related how the king spoke to him: ‘I knew your character when I was (still) in the nest, when you were in the retinue of my father. May you watch over the élite troops of the king.’

A courtier who perhaps best typifies the whole of Amenhotep II’s rule was a friend from the military campaigns and childhood play. The great steward Kenamun fought together with Amenhotep in Retenu. When recognized for his service, Kenamun was appointed as steward of Peru-nefer, the seat of a large naval dockyard and ship-building centre. A royal residence was also active there in the mid-18th Dynasty. Later in his life Kenamun’s sinecure included the profitable stewardship of the king’s own household. Kenamun appears to have been active for almost the whole of Amenhotep II’s reign. His tomb (TT 93) shows elegant stylistic elements known only from tombs painted late in this three-decade period, but there is no hint that Kenamun survived into Thutmose IV’s rule. The decidedly non-military character of Kenamun’s chosen tomb-painting themes, coupled with images of the prosperous élite lifestyle, are in harmony with the tone set by tomb paintings contemporary with both Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III.

Two other men were greatly advanced in the time of Amenhotep II, probably because of early court acquaintance. The vizier Amenemopet and his brother the mayor of Thebes, Sennefer, became extremely affluent owing to the king’s attentions. These two men were so influential in the Theban region that they were both afforded burial in the Valley of the Kings, and Sennefer’s wife Sentnay, a royal nurse, was interred there as well. Both men also had large tomb chapels at Sheikh Abd-el-Qurna on the Theban west bank (TT 29 in the case of Amenemopet); indeed Sennefer had two tombs (TT 96 upper and lower) in order to accommodate several different female contemporaries, probably including both wives and sisters. The elder daughter of Sennefer, Muttuy, shown on statuary and in the lower part of tomb TT 96, appears to have married a man called Kenamun who succeeded Sennefer as mayor of Thebes. This couple, Muttuy and Kenamun, were contemporaries of Amenhotep III and were interred in tomb TT 162.

Thutmose IV’s approach to the administration was to allow the military offices to shrink, replacing them with bureaucrats, often selected from long-established élite families. However, every king had his favourites, and Thutmose IV’s was the steward Tjenuna (TT 76). Tjenuna’s fragmentary tomb biography suggests he had a personal relationship with Thutmose IV that resembled that of a son to a father: he called himself ‘true foster child of the king, beloved of him’. Although there is not sufficient documentation to support the notion that Tjenuna was as powerful as either Senenmut or Kenamun, Thutmose IV may well have trusted his chief steward (who was also steward for
Amun) as much as any other single individual. An official called Horemheb must also have been a powerful and close ally, to judge both from the size of his burial (TT 78) and from the fact that it contained a depiction linking him with one of Thutmose IV’s daughters, Amenemopet.

The civil officials often represented traditional families of influence. Hepu was vizier in the south during Thutmose IV’s reign, and a Ptahhotep administered the north. That the two viziers existed simultaneously is confirmed by the Munich papyrus dated to Thutmose’s reign in which both men called ‘vizier’ appear as judges. Hepu’s tomb (TT 66) is situated in the prestigious cemetery of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, a placement that conforms to that of viziers under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. Although it is the most deeply placed tomb of the reign, it is rather small and comparatively unimpressive when viewed beside others of the period (for example, TT 76 and TT 63).

Clearly the royal administration prospered during Thutmose IV’s rule, court and bureaucratic connections supplanting military ones almost entirely. The rank of ‘general’ or ‘military officer’ is practically unknown in the period, while that of ‘royal scribe’ abounds, such that even the viceroy of Nubia Amenhotep came from a ‘paper-pusher’s’ background. The office of ‘scribe of recruits’ was never so well attested, but the fact that the holders were often clearly court associates suggests the position required not the hardened military man but the loyal civil official. With the exception of the Konosso ‘police action’ (see above, in the section headed ‘Thutmose IV in Syria–Palestine and Nubia’), even the employment to which the levied ‘recruits’ were put in this period and later remains a mystery. It would not surprise us to find that they were as common in quarry expeditions and building enterprises as in military manoeuvres.

The court of Amenhotep III is unusual in being known to us nearly as much from monuments outside Thebes as from those within it. The king’s treasurers, Sobekmose and his son Sobekhotep (Panehsy), do not have Theban tombs, but the former was buried in Rizeikat. Tombs of the reign, including one of a vizier, Aper-el, have been discovered at North Saqqara by Alain Zivie, and numerous stelae found in the 19th century at that same site name people from the reign. The king’s best-known associates, however, did reside in or leave tombs in Thebes. His viziers Ramose (TT 55) and Amenhotep both built extravagant chapels of carved limestone in Thebes, but the latter’s is destroyed. This family, though associated heavily by titles with the Memphite region, may, as William Murnane notes, have in fact been Theban. The chief of the king’s granary, Khaemhet, likewise left a relief carved tomb at Thebes (TT 47), as did Queen Tiye’s steward, Kheruef (TT 192). The most beloved courtier of all was Amenhotep, son of Hapu, to whom the king granted the privilege of his own funerary temple, overlooking the funerary temple of Amenhotep III himself. Amenhotep, son of Hapu, a military scribe from a Delta family, oversaw the completion of many of Amenhotep III’s most challenging monuments; the king’s recognition of his service led to his eventual deification in the first millennium BC.