

## 8 PŘÍLOHY

312 *Governing Monarchy*

### *Henry VIII*

'Magnificent, liberal, and a great enemy of the French', was the Venetian ambassador's report on the new king on the first day of his reign in April 1509. The auspices could hardly have been better. Henry VIII was seventeen years of age, well built, athletic, and reputed something of a scholar. His was the first peaceful succession to the throne since that of Henry VI in 1422 and there was no sign of disaffection. His father bequeathed him a stable and well-ordered realm and a substantial treasure. The financial position was so strong that for the past five years it had not been necessary to summon Parliament for supplies. Abroad, the great rift between Valois and Habsburg, which had developed after Charles VIII's incursion into Italy in 1494, offered a safe choice in diplomacy between cautious non-alignment or a skilful tilting of the scales.

Henry set off with an admirable determination to take his responsibilities seriously and to keep abreast of the paperwork. It did not last—in which respect he was no different from most monarchs. His passion for hunting and jousting, his interest in music and theology, to say nothing of his demanding love life, meant that documents rarely received the detailed attention Henry VII had given them. Hence, there was an opportunity for a capable minister to make himself indispensable by taking over the burden. We must be careful how to interpret this however. Henry never surrendered the reins totally, and none of his ministers ever forgot that, at any moment, the prince could give them their dismissal. But in the nature of things, Henry's lack of application weakened his position: a good deal of influence slipped out of his hands, even if he retained the final say.

Almost his first action as monarch turned out to have momentous consequences. Within seven weeks of his accession, Henry had married Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow. Her previous marriage to Arthur in 1501 had lasted a mere five months and had almost certainly never been consummated when he died at Ludlow in 1502 at the age of fifteen. The remaining seven years Catherine had spent in England, formally betrothed to Henry, but in a twilight existence, a diplomatic pawn in constant danger of being sacrificed. Henry's reign falls into three parts. The first, up to 1529, saw the emergence and supremacy of Thomas Wolsey. A royal chaplain at the accession, he was appointed almoner: by 1514 he was archbishop of York, and the following year saw him a Cardinal of the Church and Lord Chancellor. The second period, from 1530 to 1540, carries the imprint of the clear mind of Thomas Cromwell, who moved into the vacuum created by the disgrace and death of the Cardinal. Surviving a few awkward months, when it looked as though he would be sucked down by his former association with Wolsey, Cromwell was a member of the Council by 1531, Chancellor of the Exchequer by 1533, and secretary to the king