INTRODUCTION: QUEEN ANNE

On 19 May 1536, Anne the queen consort of Henry VIII, was beheaded on Tower Green in London in front of a small number of spectators. Four days earlier she had been tried and convicted of having committed adultery with five men, among them her brother, George, Lord Rochford. Commentators differed about the nature of her guilt, some offering reasons for her execution, such as her influence on foreign policy, that had nothing to do with the public charges. There was, as John Foxe, the martyrologist later contended, some impenetrable mystery behind the events that led to her death. Hailing her as a new Deborah, he maintained that God had proved her innocence by permitting Elizabeth, her only surviving child, to reign as queen of England.[1]

His "Book of Martyrs" was unquestionably one of the most frequently purchased volumes in Elizabethan England. After its first appearance in the English language, in the homes in which two books could be found, often one was the scriptures and the other his "Martyrs." Despite the enormous popularity of his work, his detailed accounts of Anne's activities as a religious and charitable queen did not long survive the reign of her daughter. Instead, the compelling and condemnatory statements of Eustace Chapuys, the Imperial ambassador assigned to Henry VIII's court, and of Nicholas Sander, a priest active in Catholic Reformation politics, prevailed over Foxe's laudatory statements.[2]

For almost seven years, from 1529 when he first arrived in England at the age of thirty until 1536 when Anne was beheaded, Chapuys, a native of Savoy and a graduate of the University of Turin, was her greatest critic. During these years he wrote countless letters to Charles V and other correspondents about

Henry's attempts to obtain a divorce from Catherine of Aragon so that he could take a second wife. Because the envoy never altered his view of Anne as a concubine who desecrated the marriage sacrament, he characterized her not simply as a representation of evil but as its very embodiment, a she-devil, an Agrippina.[3]

As evidence for her role at court in the 1530s, scholars have, since Paul Friedmann in 1884, cited Chapuys' dispatches eclectically, failing to analyze them within a critical framework or to apply the same rigorous test to them as has been applied to Foxe's anecdotes. This haphazard approach to the envoy's letters has perpetuated both minor and fundamental inaccuracies about Anne, for it ignores the extraordinary inconsistency of his remarks, even in reports forwarded to the emperor only weeks and sometimes days apart. Because Charles held the same prejudices and expectations as Chapuys, he may have overlooked these contradictions, but historians need to notice them and to be more cautious in their use of these documents.[4]

A close reading of the ambassador's correspondence between 1529 and 1536 readily indicates that his information should be divided into at least the following four categories: (1) repetition of ubiquitous rumors at court; (2) information deliberately leaked to him by royal servants; (3) original, and sometimes unsubstantiated, speculations of his own; (4) actual, first-hand information, such as interviews with the king and his ministers, announcements of arrivals and departures of envoys, and seasonal movements of the court. Often it is extremely difficult to decide into which of the first three categories the gossipy, second-hand news should fall, a difficulty that must alert scholars to the need for handling all of his letters with caution. This plea for caution is not based upon merely one or two episodes in which Chapuys' self-contradictions can be isolated. It is the mass of information, the innumerable facts that cannot be reconciled with each other, that lend credence to this warning about crediting his comments in the absence of corroborative evidence.

Efforts will be made in this study to deal with this envoy's information within the context of domestic and foreign events, determining whenever possible the accuracy of his accounts and their probable source. This approach is the first that recognizes both the enormity of his partisanship and the extent of his

deception by the royal ministers. Not only did they have accurate insights into his weaknesses and strengths but so also did Catherine and her daughter Mary, who realized he was their most loyal and dutiful ally. When the news imparted by Chapuys has been given its proper interpretation, his single-minded view of Anne as a flirtatious, evil desecrator of the sacred sacrament of marriage must, as a matter of course, be rejected.

Although Chapuys characterized her as the other woman, who, he thought, used witchcraft to manipulate and control the king, it was left to a later scholar, Nicholas Sander, to describe her fully as a witch. Because he believed that she had been grossly libidinous, the seducer of numerous men, including Sir Thomas Wyatt, the great Tudor poet, Sander chose to give her the features of a witch, as he perceived such people. Anne had, he asserted in his posthumously published study of the divorce in 1585, a monstrous appearance, including a tumor on her neck and a sixth finger on her right hand.[5]

These assertions are absolutely false, but although Edward Lord Herbert, Gilbert Burnet, bishop of Salisbury, and other historians disputed them publicly, modern scholars have generally discarded Foxe's statements and adopted some modified form of Sander's and Chapuys' characterizations. For many historians Anne remains the lady with an extra fingernail who was too flirtatious, even if in a harmless courtly way, for her own safety and well being. The result of this interpretation is that the responsibility for her tragic death resides with her, the victim, rather than with the king and his ministers, the ones who orchestrated her execution.[6]

This study of her life takes seriously the claims of Sander, who probably never saw her, and of Chapuys, who refused even to have a personal conversation with her, that many of her contemporaries actually viewed her as a witch. Her life will be analyzed within the framework of sixteenth-century values and impulses, including the honors system, attitudes toward deathbed statements, fears about the birth of monstrous babies, and the association of incest and sodomy with witchcraft. In an attempt to understand her by the terms of her society, information from a wide range of sources will be used to support the argument that she miscarried a defective fetus in 1536. It was because Henry

viewed this mishap as an evil omen, both for his lineage and his kingdom, that he had her accused of engaging in illicit sexual acts with five men and fostered rumors that she had afflicted him with impotence and had conspired to poison both his daughter Mary and his illegitimate son, Henry, duke of Richmond. All of these are activities his contemporaries associated with witchcraft.[7]

Since theologians and clergymen charged that god visited deformed babies upon parents who were guilty of gross sexual conduct, her husband's ministers began to search for Anne's lovers among his courtiers. The candidates chosen were those reputed to be libertines or more specifically those suspected of having committed illicit sexual acts, in at least two of the cases buggery, for sodomites, like witches, were characterized as devil worshippers. Not until the nineteenth century was the concept of a separate species of homosexuals developed, for, until then, individuals with enormous sexual appetites were expected to move in a progression from adultery and fornication to buggery and bestiality. No attempt will be made here to set forth the actual nature of sodomy and witchcraft in the sixteenth century; it was her contemporaries' fearful perception not their real knowledge of these phenomena that caused her death.[8]

To set the stage for her fall, this book begins with Anne's childhood, which was spent in royal nurseries in the Netherlands and France. Then it examines her love affair with Henry in 1527 and follows the unsuccessful efforts of Thomas, Cardinal Wolsey, to persuade Clement VII to invalidate the king's first marriage. Attention will then turn to the activities of Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell, and to the legislation that made it possible for Anne to marry Henry and for her daughter's place in the succession to be established. Special consideration will be given to the demands and goals of both Anne's immediate Boleyn and Howard relatives and her more distant kin. She was not an autonomous figure, but the daughter of an ambitious father and the niece of an arrogant uncle, Thomas, third duke of Norfolk, who had much to gain by her rise to the queenship.

Analyzing events from these perspectives makes it unnecessary to justify or to condemn by moral standards the actions of Catherine and Anne, who are usually viewed as competitors for the queenship, for they were both struggling to preserve and to

advance their lineage. They became the involuntary victims of the king's drive and ambition for his own lineage, and of the rules of their Church and society that drastically limited divorces. The issue at stake was not which one of these noblewomen Henry loved more but which one of them, given the constraints of the human anatomy, would be more likely to present him with the desired male heir. It is a testimony to the success of the sixteenth-century socialization of women that several women believed that they were destined to resolve his succession crisis. Anne's story is one of five failures although ultimately her daughter contributed to the history of England one of its finest chapters.

When the details of Anne's life are viewed within the framework of these social and cultural values, the modern conception of her as a *femme fatale* must be discarded. Establishing a valid explanation of her role at court that takes into consideration the beliefs and fears of sixteenth-century Christendom and treats them with sensitivity is an useful undertaking, not only because historians owe it to the dead to depict them in a rational manner but also because the events of the Reformation will not be clearly understood until her crucial place in that revolution is sorted out.

1 BOLEYN ORIGINS

In 1509 just before his eighteenth birthday, Henry VIII became king of England. Young and optimistic about his dynasty's future, he confirmed the Spanish alliance by marrying Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow, and supporting the efforts of her father, Ferdinand, and Pope Julius II to limit French territorial expansion. Hoping to obtain Habsburg support for this alliance, called the Holy League, Henry sent three diplomats to the Netherlands in May 1512, to meet with its regent, Margaret, archduchess of Austria and daughter of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor. One of those envoys was Sir Thomas Boleyn, whose daughter, Anne, would some twenty years later become Henry's second wife.

Determined to advance his lineage, Sir Thomas took advantage of his immediate family connections and of his skills in French, the personal and governmental language of the Habsburgs in the Netherlands, to win favor with its regent.[1] By 12 August 1512, he had developed such a friendly relationship with the archduchess that she asked him if he would be willing to wager that their negotiations would be concluded in ten days. Upon his agreement, they shook hands: if she won, he would present her with a hobby, and if he won, she would give him a courser of Spain. When she settled on these horses as suitable stakes, it is possible that she remembered the hackney that the king of England had only recently sent to her nephew.[2] Whether or not she actually gave Thomas a courser when she lost the wager is unknown, but technically, if he did not receive payment, she remained in his debt.

The dispatches of the envoys reveal that during the following months, Boleyn took the leading role in explaining matters to the

regent or in translating official documents into French for her. By April 1513, when the Holy League was signed, he had won from her an invitation for his daughter Anne to join the schoolroom of her four wards, the children of Philip le Beau, her deceased brother, and the grandchildren of Maximilian. Among them was Charles, prince of Castile, the future Holy Roman Emperor, who was then betrothed to Mary, the younger sister of Henry VIII. Charles' mother, Juana, too ill to supervise the care of her children, was the sister of the English queen.[3]

Sir Thomas surely did not dream of using the opportunity for Anne to reside with the regent's wards as a stepping stone for finding her a royal husband. Rather more within the realm of expectation was that her education would facilitate her appointment as a maid of honor at the English court where French was considered the language of the cultured. There was also the possibility that she might be able to remain in the Netherlands, first attending Mary, if the princess did wed Charles, and later marrying a foreign nobleman, as a few of Catherine of Aragon's Spanish ladies had recently done in England.

To win this prestigious educational advantage for Anne required more than Boleyn's skills in French and his clever, if not charming, treatment of the thirty-two-year-old regent, the widow of the duke of Savoy. A woman of intelligence with an "easy and natural manner" in social discourse, she was a capable ruler and in 1513 held an important political position in the Netherlands. She was reputed to have a long-standing respect and fondness for the English and a desire to promote closer diplomatic relations with their kingdom. Endowed with a shrewd understanding of human nature, she realized that visitors to her court, even a young English resident, could, when they returned home, become ambassadors of good will for the Habsburgs.[4]

The regent's desire to maintain friendly ties with England was in part based on memories of her beloved namesake, her step-grandmother, Margaret of York, sister to Richard III, a well-known promoter of rebellions against the Tudor dynasty and widow of Charles the Bold, the last great duke of Burgundy. Sir Thomas had close connections with the Yorkist family that surely made him more welcome to the regent than the ordinary envoy. His wife, Elizabeth Howard, was daughter to Thomas, earl of

Surrey, whose father, the first duke of Norfolk, had died fighting for Richard III at Bosworth Field. In 1508, furthermore, Surrey had been one of the ambassadors appointed to negotiate the marriage treaty between the regent's nephew and Henry VIII's sister.[5]

Both the Howards and the Boleyns were descendants of Edward I, but the latter's rise to noble status was quite remarkable since their ancestors can be traced back only to the thirteenth century when they were at best small tenant farmers in Salle, Norfolk. By 1457 Sir Geoffrey, a descendant of these humble folk, was serving as Lord Mayor of London, had married Anne, the eldest daughter and co-heiress of Thomas, Lord Hoo and Hastings, and had acquired Blickling Hall in Norfolk and Hever Castle in Kent.[6] Sir Geoffrey's second son and heir, William, who inherited manors in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire from his maternal grandfather, became a knight of the bath at the coronation of Richard III and an Exchequer baron in the reign of Henry VII.[7]

Following his father's example, Sir William also married a noble co-heiress: Margaret, the younger daughter of Thomas Butler, seventh earl of Ormond. A direct descendant of Edward I, the earl was one of the richest men in the king's dominions when he died in 1515, leaving thirty-six manors in England to each of his two daughters, Margaret and Anne, and ultimately the disputed earldom and Irish estates to a male cousin. Ormond had sat in parliament as first baron of the kingdom and had occasionally acted as ambassador, serving in that capacity to the Netherlands in 1497. Testifying to his great family pride, he bequeathed to Thomas Boleyn, his eldest grandson, the following heirloom:

> a white horn of ivory, garnished at both the ends with gold and corse thereunto of white silk barred with barres of gold and a tyret of gold thereupon, which . . . was myn ancestors at first time they were called to honour, and hath sythen continually remained in the same blode; for which cause my father commanded me upon his blessing, that I should do my devoir to cause it to continue still in my blode . . . to the honor of the same blode.[8]

In 1501 that grandson had married Elizabeth Howard and had fathered at least three surviving children by 1512 when he was

assigned to the regent's court. The birthdate of his son, George, undoubtedly named after England's patron saint, is a matter of conjecture but came relatively early in the marriage, perhaps in 1503. Thereafter, despite Elizabeth's annual lyings-in, only two infants survived to adulthood: Anne and Mary, apparently born in 1507 and 1508 respectively, although no firm evidence of their birthdates has survived. The scholarly debate about their ages and sequence of birth, thought resolved by James Gairdner in 1893 and 1895, was reopened by Hugh Paget in 1981. Upon proving indisputably that it was Anne, not her sister Mary, who joined the regent as her maid of honor in 1513, Paget accepted the year 1501 rather than Gairdner's choice of 1507 as the date of her birth. At first glance this would seem to be an obvious selection since when girls received appointment as maids of honor they were usually older than the twelve years Paget claimed for Anne in 1513. Since the publication of Paget's findings, which were based on his careful analysis of a letter written by Anne from the Netherlands in 1514, a more convincing interpretation, which will be discussed later in this chapter, supports the 1507 birthdate. A reading of her letter in association with prevailing royal customs indicates that Anne actually lived in the schoolroom of the Habsburg children instead of at their aunt's court.[9]

Although there is no extant contemporary record of the sequence of the girls' births, as it was indisputably Anne who resided in the Netherlands, she had to have been the elder sister. By contemporary custom, the younger child would not have been favored with such a splendid opportunity to the detriment of her older sister unless the latter were, as Anne was not, already disqualified by marriage or some other impediment. The place of the children's birth similarly remained unrecorded. In the case of the sisters, tradition has claimed that Anne was born variously at Blickling, the residence of her widowed paternal grandmother from 1505 until 1539, Hever Castle, the headquarters of Sir Thomas during that same period of time, and a London home, and Mary at Hever; all of these were properties that had descended to their father at their grandfather William's death in 1505.[10]

Since several women in the family were named Anne, the elder Boleyn girl could have been the namesake of one of them, possibly

Ormond's elder co-heiress. But late in the reign of Henry VII, when Thomas' two daughters were born, his political position, particularly in Norfolk and at court, depended greatly upon his relationship to his wife's father. In 1495 Surrey had succeeded in winning Anne, sister to Queen Elizabeth of York, as the bride of his heir, Lord Howard. It would have been in keeping with Boleyn's ambitions for him to have selected his royal sister-in-law as godmother to his first-born daughter and to have encouraged her to name the child after herself. His other daughter could easily have been named after Mary Tudor, whose marriage to the prince of Castile her grandfather Surrey had been authorized to negotiate in 1508.[11]

As politically ambitious aristocrats often sought royal godparents for their children, it is relevant to the conjecture about the name of Anne that her father was the client of Surrey, who was successfully overcoming the disgrace caused by his father's support of Richard III. In the 1490s when the earl allied his son with a daughter of Edward IV, he was rebuilding the family's status and finances; by 1500 his lands in East Anglia alone were worth £600 a year and by 1501 he had become Lord Treasurer of England. A patron of scholars and an accomplished military leader who won his greatest victory against the Scots at Flodden Field in 1513 when he was seventy years old, Surrey was able to earn the respect and favor of the Tudors through faithful and useful service to them. Even before his success at Flodden Field, his increasing influence had made it possible for him to obtain appointments and grants for his dependants, thereby developing a network of support in the countryside and at court.[12]

One of the kinsmen Surrey favored was his daughter Elizabeth's husband. In 1503 when he escorted the young Margaret Tudor to Scotland for her marriage to its monarch, James IV, the earl obtained a place in her train for Thomas Boleyn. From 1506 Boleyn was occasionally associated in royal grants in Norfolk with Surrey and two of his sons, Lord Howard and Sir Edward Howard, and received in his own right estates and lands in several counties. In 1508 he obtained a minor customs position and in 1509 served as squire for the body at the funeral of Henry VII. Elevated to knight for the body at the succession of Henry VIII, Sir Thomas, along with his wife, Elizabeth, a member of the new