

**“Once More Unto the Breach, Dear Friends:”
Cardinal Wolsey and the Politics of the “Great Enterprise” 1518 - 1525**

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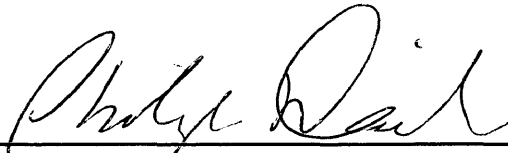
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ABSTRACT

This is a study of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey and his diplomatic policy between 1518 and 1525. This period was one of great diplomatic activity between England and the Holy Roman Empire because Henry VIII and Charles V were allied in a “Great Enterprise” against France. Cardinal Wolsey was charged with implementing Henry VIII’s wishes for war, but did not have the financial resources to do so adequately. Therefore, he pursued a policy of delay until Henry VIII could go to war again. However, Wolsey delayed too long and eventually his diplomatic and financial policy collapsed. In essence, this thesis leads historians to a further understanding of two aspects of early-modern English history. First, it serves as a case study in which one can see England progressing from “medieval” to “modern.” Second, and perhaps more important, it gives historians new questions to ask about the nature of the English Reformation.

Introduction

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more And teach them how to war! And you, good yeomen, Whose limbs were made in England, show us here the mettle of your Pasture. . . . Cry - God for Harry! England! And Saint George!”¹ Thus, Shakespeare prepared his audience for Henry V’s victory at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. When discussing the French wars of Henry V’s descendant, Henry VIII, Shakespeare’s words bear great significance and lend a certain insight into both the role of monarchs in early modern Europe and England’s role in the Habsburg - Valois conflict between 1518 and 1525.

In essence, kings of the sixteenth century saw themselves as war leaders. Their purpose was to expand their domains, expand their power, and expand their influence by conquering and enlarging their domains. The only way of doing this was to go to war.² Early modern monarchs made these wars on the pretext of dynastic claims dating back hundreds of years. Thomas More and many of the humanists argued against this by saying that monarchs should govern their own kingdoms and not try to conquer others.³ Yet, the political reality in the sixteenth century was that France and the Holy Roman Empire were trying to expand into Milan, Aragon was trying to expand into both Naples and Navarre, Venice was trying to expand into the Holy Roman Empire, and Rome was trying to expand into Venice. All of these states sought to exploit the others to their best advantage economically, militarily, and diplomatically. This European system bred

¹ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*. Act III, Scene I.

² Eugene Rice and Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, Second Edition*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 118.

³ Thomas More, *Utopia*. Robert M. Adams, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1992), 26.

warfare⁴ and as Michael Howard points out, for most European monarchies at this time “It is more in the true interest of those Kingdoms in general. . . [to] continue in a state of war. . . than in a state of peace. . . commerce will flourish more. . . than under any peace which should allow an open intercourse. . . .”⁵

It is in this context that one should view the wars between Henry VIII of England, Francis I of France, and Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire. These monarchs all wanted martial glory for themselves and hoped to bring economic and diplomatic advantages to their respective dynasties. However, there is more to this war-mongering amongst the crowned heads of Europe. Between 1518 and 1525 there were significant changes in the very way warfare was carried out throughout Europe. Monarchies were beginning to eclipse feudal aristocracies, centralized bureaucracies were beginning to exert more influence over localized powers, gunpowder was beginning to revolutionize military organization and strategy, and, most importantly, governments were beginning to exert more control over taxation and finance.⁶ Howard describes these trends by saying that “The growing capacity of European governments to control, or at least to tap, the wealth of the community, and form it to create mechanisms - bureaucracies, fiscal systems, armed forces - which enabled them yet further to extend their control of the community, is one of the central developments”⁷ of the early modern era.

England was no exception to this. Steven Gunn has argued that England’s invasion of France in 1523 “might justly be seen as the watershed between medieval and

⁴ Steven Gunn, “The French Wars of Henry VIII,” 28-29.

⁵ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 48.

⁶ Eugene Rice and Anthony Grafton, *The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, 1460-1559*, 110-124.

⁷ Michael Howard, *War in European History*, 49.

modern English strategy.”⁸ Gunn defined “medieval” as England’s direct military intervention in European affairs and “modern” as “English manipulation of the struggles of other European powers.”⁹ In essence, when one looks at the “Great Enterprise” (Henry VIII’s and Charles V’s term for the invasion of France between 1521 and 1523), this thesis is true not only militarily, but also diplomatically and economically. Therefore, it might be useful to expand that thesis, taking into consideration not only military strategy but also the other trends of the sixteenth century. Thus, one can understand “modern” as both English manipulation of European conflicts and as greater “centralization” of control over England’s financial resources, and “medieval” as both direct military intervention in European affairs and “decentralization” of control over financial resources.

Therefore, in a fundamental way, England’s diplomatic and economic policies between 1518 and 1525 were a “watershed” between “medieval” and “modern.” Diplomatically, Wolsey was manipulating European affairs to England’s best advantage. Economically, he was reforming government and attempting to make finances more efficient. Why was he doing this? He wanted to bring military glory to his master, Henry VIII. So, one can see how Wolsey, under these definitions of “medieval” and “modern,” would be considered “modern” and Henry VIII “medieval.” However, these “modern” ideals were just beginning to develop. Wolsey certainly would not have considered himself “modern.” In fact, his own words contradict such usage. When in 1525 Henry VIII’s council urged Wolsey to manipulate affairs and not to intervene

⁸ Steven Gunn, “The Duke of Suffolk’s March on Paris in 1523,” *The English Historical Review*. 101 (1986), 631.

⁹ *Ibid.*

directly, he retorted with a fable about men who sheltered in caves from the rain. These men then hoped to rule over those who did not go into the cave with them (“wetted fools”). However, once it stopped raining, their plan failed.¹⁰ Therefore, one can clearly see that Wolsey did not want England to isolate itself from Europe.

So, how is one supposed to read the contradictory evidence in this “watershed”? The answer is not simple. Sixteenth-century politics were very complex and very fluid. Diplomacy was even more fluid. Monarchs made and broke treaties with ease and often do not seem to have any uniform alliances with anyone.¹¹ As a result, it is difficult to determine what is happening in foreign policy during this period. David Potter perhaps puts it best when he argued that “foreign policy became a matter of day-to-day tactics rather than of long-term planning.”¹² That is certainly the case with England’s foreign policy between 1518 and 1525.

Henry VIII wanted war. He wanted to become king of France and he wanted to put himself into the center of European politics.¹³ Charles V wanted an ally against France in his upcoming war.¹⁴ In 1521, Henry VIII and Charles V enjoyed a solid alliance which showed no indications of breaking down. The war was proceeding well for Charles V, and Francis I was becoming weaker. In 1523, it seemed that Henry VIII’s dream of military conquest in France and Charles V’s desire to bring Francis to his knees was about to come true. By 1525, relations between England and the Holy Roman

¹⁰ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII. (London: Public Record Office, 1920), vii, 1114.

¹¹ Garrett Mattingly, Renaissance Diplomacy. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1970), 162.

¹² David Potter, “Foreign Policy” in Diarmaid MacCulloch, ed. The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics, Policy, and Piety. (London: MacMillan Press, Ltd., 1995), 133.

¹³ Steven Gunn, “The French Wars of Henry VIII,” in Jeremy Black, ed. The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe. (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1987), 28.

Empire had collapsed completely. Henry VIII's policy had not changed. In 1525, Henry still planned to invade France and follow through on the alliance. Charles V's policy had changed and he snubbed Henry VIII.¹⁵ Why?

The effect of the actions of the two monarchs was to pull Henry VIII's chief minister, Thomas Cardinal Wolsey in opposite directions. Wolsey's duty was to bring glory to his master, and, thus he supported Henry VIII's alliance with Charles V against Francis I. There are no indications (that the evidence will support) that Wolsey wanted peace or acted in contradiction to Henry VIII's orders.¹⁶ However, he did not have the resources to carry out a full-scale war, so he tried to follow Henry VIII's orders in the best way he could. In a certain sense, one can view both Henry VIII and Charles V as "medieval." They supported direct military intervention and had very inefficient "decentralized" methods of obtaining revenues for this military intervention. Wolsey combined both approaches. He, too, was "medieval," and supported military intervention in Europe. He too had a "decentralized" government apparatus. However, he was also "modern." Because he did not have the means to carry out military intervention in France, he manipulated European affairs to England's best advantage and attempted to "centralize" and make English war-making more efficient.

Wolsey did not make these changes because of great principles or a desire to "modernize" the English system of government. He made these changes on a day-to-day basis (as Potter pointed out). Because of constraints, Wolsey employed "modern"

¹⁴ Geoffrey Parker, "The Political World of Charles V," in Geoffrey Parker, ed. Charles V. (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999), 17.

¹⁵ J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 138.

¹⁶ George Bernard, War, Taxation, and Rebellion in Early Tudor England. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 44.

methods of diplomacy and finance. In addition, one might be able argue that this anticipated what would later happen under Thomas Cromwell. In essence, one can see how the period between 1518 and 1525 was a transitional one in English foreign and economic policy. By looking briefly at the events between 1518 and 1525, the policies and ambitions of Henry VIII and Charles V, and especially the politics of Cardinal Wolsey, it becomes clear that Wolsey employed “modern” techniques in order to sustain a “medieval” policy of his master. In the end, however, this was a policy that Wolsey was unable to maintain.

Chapter 1

Henry VIII

Shakespeare's words "Once more unto the breach, dear friends. . ." calls to mind Henry VIII's martial desires and qualities. Henry VIII's model was Henry V, and Henry VIII imitated Henry V in an almost ritualistic fashion.¹ He sought to revive the Hundred Years War and bring a golden age back to England. His father, Henry VII, had brought England out of civil war and had left his son with a sizeable treasury. Henry VIII wanted to revive Henry V's martial glory and "imperial" kingship. Hence the rhetoric used for Henry VIII's three invasions of France in 1513, 1523, and 1543.² Since France was the traditional enemy, and England was not strong enough to support an invasion of France alone, Henry needed an ally. Therefore, an alliance between England and some other European power was needed. In the 1520s the choice was obvious, and Henry VIII chose to ally himself with Charles V.

Henry VIII followed a pro-Habsburg and pro-Burgundian policy not unlike that of his father and ancestors before him. In fact, one can trace Burgundian influences to Edward IV, who started looking to that court as a model.³ Henry VII, conscious of that tradition, continued it and imported architectural, artistic and poetic styles, and even ceremonies from the court of the Burgundian dukes. One of the most striking examples of this is Henry VII's emulation of the Burgundian Order of the Golden Fleece within his

¹ Steven Gunn, "The French Wars of Henry VIII," in Jeremy Black, ed. The Origins of War in Early Modern Europe. (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1987), 36-37.

² Dale Hoak, "The Iconography of the Crown Imperial, in Dale Hoak, ed. Tudor Political Culture. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 59-60.

³ Sydney Anglo, ed. Chivalry in the Renaissance (New York: The Boydell Press, 1990) 121.

own chivalric Order of the Garter.⁴ Charles Habsburg was the Duke of Burgundy from 1515, and Henry VIII, continuing the traditions of his father, looked to that court for inspiration in his own.

However, this pro-Habsburg approach of Henry VIII stemmed not only from the fact that Charles Habsburg was Duke of Burgundy, but also from the alliance system that his father had devised before Charles inherited Burgundy. Henry VII had hoped to marry Archduchess Margaret of Austria, Charles's aunt, and later Charles's regent in the Netherlands.⁵ Also there was talk in Henry VII's council of the future Henry VIII's marriage to Eleanor, Charles's sister. The Habsburgs also sought to ally themselves with the Tudors. Emperor Maximilian I favored the marriage of the future Henry VIII and Eleanor as well, and sent an ambassador to Henry VII in order to negotiate it.⁶ Even the marriage to Catherine of Aragon had some connections to the Habsburgs, and one cannot underestimate her influence over Henry VIII with regard to the imperial alliance. Catherine was the sister of Joanna of Castile, who was Maximilian's daughter-in-law and Charles's mother. One can see how even in Henry VII's time the Tudor line was very closely tied to that of the Habsburgs; Henry VIII carried forward that policy, and tried to secure the marriage of his own daughter, Mary, to Charles V in 1522.⁷

Henry VIII also wanted such an alliance because of his own competition with Francis I, King of France. The two were similar in stature, learning, and physical prowess, and competed for the title of the true "Renaissance Prince." Henry VIII was

⁴ Gordon Kipling, The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance. (The Hague: Leiden University Press, 1977), 18.

⁵ Karl Brandi, The Emperor Charles V. (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1939) 45.

⁶ J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII. (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1968), 10.

⁷ R. B. Wernham, Before the Armada. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1966), 100.

always contending with Francis and had designs himself on becoming the King of France. By 1522 Henry spoke of his campaign to reclaim his rights as king of France and to invade France with the Holy Roman Emperor, as he had done in 1513 and would do again in 1543.⁸ Henry VIII saw himself as another Henry V, and sought to carve up France and make himself an “emperor” in his own right. One can see this quite clearly in the imperial imagery prevalent in the joint entry of Charles V and Henry VIII into London in 1522,⁹ and in Henry’s own intentions, as he stated to Charles in 1525 regarding a joint invasion of France and a division of French lands between the two monarchs in the wake of Pavia.¹⁰ This conception of “imperial kinship was also clearly prevalent in the iconography of England’s “imperial” crown between 1509 and 1522.¹¹ Henry VIII claimed that “his line [Francis I’s] ought to be abolished, removed and utterly extinct” and that Henry should become King of France “by just title of inheritance.”¹²

This policy did not change between 1518 and 1525. Charles V was Henry VIII’s opportunity to become the great imperial monarch, like his idol Henry V. In 1522, the two monarchs signed the Treaty of Windsor and solidified their alliance. To Henry VIII, this alliance was vital. There was no other way to achieve his ambitions. Also, there was another motive to this alliance. Henry VIII had no male heir, and, if he died unexpectedly, England would be left with a six-year-old queen. The last time that England had been left with a female ruler, Queen Matilda in 1135, nearly twenty years of

⁸ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 87.

⁹ Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1969), 196.

¹⁰ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 136-138.

¹¹ Dale Hoak, “The Iconography of the Crown Imperial,” 54-103.

¹² J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, IV, 1212.

civil war had ensued. England had just recovered from the “Wars of the Roses” in 1485 and Henry feared for the future of his dynasty.

Catherine of Aragon was now 36 and had had eight children, seven of whom had died. It was increasingly unlikely that she would have another boy. Therefore, the only option open to Henry was to marry his daughter Mary off to some prince who could defend her claim. Charles was the natural choice. He could not only defend his claim, but, when Henry VIII died, Charles V would become King of England, Ireland and France (Henry VIII’s titles) as well as Holy Roman Emperor, King of Spain, and Duke of Burgundy. Thus, Charles would be, as Henry termed it, “lord and owner. . . of all Christendom.”¹³ This Anglo-Imperial alliance would be the answer to all of Henry VIII’s problems, and would fulfill the dreams of the humanists, like Erasmus, who called for a universal peace among all Christians which could be achieved by such a union. Such a union could not be refused by Charles V, given Charles’s circumstances in 1522.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2

Charles V

Charles thought that England would provide an excellent ally in these wars. England was a hitherto untapped source of wealth, and Henry VIII's father had reportedly left his son with a vast fortune. Charles would have known about this, and sought to exploit it to his advantage. In addition, Henry VIII had had some success in his last campaign against France, and seemed eager to renew it again.¹ Charles also sought to maintain the alliance that his grandfather had wrought, and sought Mary's hand to cement it.² England was the most powerful European power (next to France and the Empire) economically and militarily and could seriously threaten Imperial interests if allied with France. If England allied with France, it could cut off Spain and the Netherlands, thus cutting the Empire off from lucrative overseas trade, and thereby effectively cutting Charles's empire in half. Hence the alliance made great sense from the Imperial point of view.

The marriage to Mary was also very attractive to Charles in 1522. Margaret of Austria, Charles's regent in the Netherlands, believed that an English alliance was absolutely vital, and stressed that belief to Charles quite vehemently.³ Charles also liked the prospect of becoming King of England. Even if he did not conquer France this time, he would be able to surround it completely via this English alliance. Charles also seemed to show a strong love for his English relatives, perhaps because of the influence of Margaret. In addition to calling Henry VIII, "my good uncle,

¹ Karl Brandi, Charles V, 160.

brother and father” he showed this love through his actions at the English court. One English courtier said, “the emperor made such a semblant love to the English court that he won the love of the Englishmen.”⁴ Mary could definitely help to achieve Charles’s ambitions as well as Henry’s.

In addition, Charles V was eager for this alliance because of problems within his own dominions. His ministers were far from united in support of their master and more often than not they promoted different policies. Margaret of Austria, regent of the Netherlands, the most outstanding example, was criticized for being too pro-English in her own policies, sometimes more pro-English than Charles himself.⁵

Furthermore, factions within the Empire were of divided opinion on the advisability of the war. The Burgundian faction was pro-French and predictably did not support Charles’s war efforts. The Burgundians supported Francis I’s aims in Italy, and felt that Charles’s claims to Italy were not well grounded. These councilors were particularly strong in the Netherlands, and Margaret had great difficulty there trying to restrain her pro-French courtiers. In some cases Margaret could not provide the money and supplies that Charles and Wolsey demanded because her ministers would not cooperate.⁶ On the other side of the coin were the anti-French Spanish factions who supported Charles’s aims in Italy; they were pro-English if only to secure help against the French.⁷ The struggles between these very divergent groups

² J. G. Russell, “The Search for Universal Peace. . .”, 176.

³ M. J. Rodriguez-Salgado, “Charles V and the Dynasty,” in Geoffrey Parker, ed. Charles V, 15.

⁴ *Ibid*, 16.

⁵ Geoffrey Parker, “The Political World of Charles V,” 6.

⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid*, 18.

caused significant problems in the execution of Imperial war policy. These struggles made the need for an alliance more necessary.

As if those problems were not enough for Charles, the Turks were pressing ever forward into his Austrian possessions and Martin Luther's preaching divided the Church within the Empire. Charles's New World possessions were developing, and, as a major source of revenue, they required a certain amount of attention. The Diet of Worms was scheduled to meet in 1523 and Charles also had to deal with revolts in his German domains. He had so many problems besetting him on many fronts that he did not have the military and financial resources necessary to deal with the French war. Troops and money were needed from an outside source, and England seemed to be the best choice in the 1520s.⁸ Therefore, Charles courted Wolsey by promising him his support in the upcoming papal election. During the conference of 1521 he wrote very warm letters, "Monsier, le Cardinal. . . . I cannot persuade myself that your intentions are otherwise than upright, knowing the care and solicitude that you have always shown in our mutual affairs. . . In doing which I shall have occasion to know and appreciate your good intentions. . . Your good friend, Charles."⁹

When Wolsey did not give the support that he had promised and did not support the military effort with as much vigor as he said he would, the emperor was furious. The entire effort was very poorly planned, and England did not give him what he needed and wanted. To Charles, this seemed like a breach of contract. No matter how much he begged and pleaded, the money and troops agreed upon were not

⁸ *Ibid*, 46.

forthcoming because Wolsey delayed sending important shipments of money and supplies to the war front.¹⁰ After Wolsey's negotiations with France in 1524, that breach led to cold relations between the two, and, after Charles's victory at Pavia in 1525, that change in policy cost Wolsey his victory. Henry VIII had expected this to be the achievement of his dreams: "Now is the time for the emperor and myself to devise the means of getting full satisfaction from France. Not an hour is to be lost."¹¹ That "satisfaction" was not forthcoming and neither Henry nor Charles had gained any of the aims that they desired, primarily because of Wolsey, on whom all of the hopes of the "Great Enterprise" hinged.

⁹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII. (London: Great Britain Public Record Office, 1920), II ii.

¹⁰ R. B. Wernham, Before the Armada, 106.

¹¹ J. Bergenroth, ed. Calendar of Letters, Dispatches, and State Papers Relating to the Negotiations Between England and Spain. (London: Great Britain Public Record Office, 1866), iii, 82.

Chapter 3

Cardinal Wolsey: Pro-Peace 1518-1520

The Treaty of London of 1518 was the cornerstone of English policy during the years before to the Great Enterprise. Leo X had called for a crusade against the Turks, and Wolsey cleverly used the opportunity to put England in the position of “Arbiter of Europe.” The purpose of this treaty seems to have been based on a false premise. Neither England nor any other power of Europe actually intended to start a crusade, and England could not because of the financial cost of the invasion of France in 1513. However, by capitalizing on this opportunity, Wolsey was able to put his master where he desired to be, at the center of European politics, without actually having to commit England to further financial obligations. In addition, Wolsey was able to become a *legatus a latere* because “it was not the manner of this realm to admit *legatos a latere*” (meaning an Italian *legatos a latere*).¹ In essence, Wolsey was able to use this situation to further his own ambitions (to obtain more power within and outside England), as well as Henry VIII’s.²

Wolsey was able to conclude a treaty with all of the powers of Europe, one that followed the Pope’s plan, which itself was based on the precedents of Italian treaties, such as the Treaty of Lodi of 1454. It stipulated that if any power suffered aggression, the other powers would come to its aid until peace was restored. In addition, all powers would allow troops to move across their territories, and no power

¹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, II, 4034.

could hire foreign mercenaries. Finally, all former treaties were null and void.³ This treaty exemplified the humanists' call toward universal Christian peace, as laid out by Erasmus in the *Querella Pacis*, and made Henry the great humanist prince who would bring about a new age of learning and amity unparalleled in European history. Bishop Foxe praised Wolsey by saying that, "undoubtedly, my Lord, God continuing it, it shall be the best that ever was done for the realm of England; and after the king's highness, the laud and praise shall be to you a perpetual memory."⁴ The Venetian ambassador said that "I lauded this excellent project, and told him (Wolsey) he could do nothing more glorious in the world, or that could add greater splendour to his eminent qualities than in the midst of great strife amongst princes to prove himself that *lapis angularis* which joined the two detached walls of the temple."⁵

The treaty was followed with much celebration. In October 1518 Wolsey marshaled the clergy of England to make a statement about the need for peace and crusade,⁶ and employed Richard Pace to deliver the oration. Hall described it by saying, "the kyng and Ambassadors. . . roade to the church of saynct Paul. . . with the highest step. . . that the kyng and the Ambassadors might be sene."⁷ The same day, it was announced that the Princess Mary would marry the Dauphin, that Henry and Francis would meet as a gesture of dedication to the treaty, and that Henry would

² *Ibid*, II, 1440

³ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 72.

⁴ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, II, 4540.

⁵ R. Brown, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, II, 177.

⁶ *Ibid*, 221-222.

⁷ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 594.

return the English occupied city of Tournai.⁸ In fact, the celebrations at court were so magnificent during this year that the Venetian ambassador remarked that the pomp was greater and more sumptuous than he had yet seen.⁹ It was hoped that this outward display of friendship toward the Francis would ease negotiations with him, and lessen the threat of invasion.

However important this treaty may have looked on the surface, it lacked substance. In attempting to put this treaty into action Wolsey made several questionable assumptions. The first was the existence of *three* powers on the Continent. In 1518, these were Emperor Maximilian, King Charles of Spain, and King Francis of France. Francis was economically and militarily the most powerful of the three; should he cause any trouble, the ensuing diplomatic confusion would give Henry enough time to live up to his obligations under the treaty. In other words, if Francis invaded anyone, Henry VIII would be able to demand a peace conference that would give England time to prepare for war, if needed. Secondly, Wolsey knew that Maximilian would not ally with Charles against Francis for any extended period of time. Maximilian had always been known to go with the highest bidder in military and diplomatic relations (as Henry's war with France in 1513 had shown), and there was little reason to assume that he would not do the same again, given the opportunity. As a result, Charles would not be able to take on Francis alone. Spain did not have the money or resources to combat France without the Emperor's help. Thirdly, the treaty assumed that Italy would be the scene of future altercations in

⁸ R. Brown, Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, II, 1085.

Europe. Both Charles and Francis had claims in Italy that they vehemently fought over, and though these claims were often rhetorical, Maximilian had none. Therefore, if Francis and Charles declared war against each other over Italy, it was unlikely the Maximilian would come to the aid of one or the other.¹⁰

Wolsey's peace policy rested on Maximilian's longevity, but the Emperor died in 1519. This was something obviously unforeseeable in 1518, and, after the election of Charles, the policy of peace collapsed. Now there were only two powers on the continent, and those powers were of roughly equal might militarily and economically. Both had an interest in Italy, and conflict was inevitable. Wolsey tried to maintain his policy of peace and keep England from entering the conflicts arising between Francis and Charles. The plans for Henry and Francis to meet had already been put into motion by that time, and it was too late to withdraw them, even though it was probably only a matter of time before Henry declared war on Francis and supported Charles. Such was the background to what was to be the most sumptuous display of Wolsey's treaty of Universal Peace, the Field of the Cloth of Gold. The Venetian ambassador perhaps put it most succinctly, "These sovereigns are not at peace. . . they hate each other cordially."¹¹ So great was English hatred of the French that the Marquis of Dorset claimed that if he had a drop of French blood in his body "he would cut himself open to get rid of it."¹²

⁹ *Ibid*, 282.

¹⁰ Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, 58-103.

¹¹ R. Brown, *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, III, 108.

¹² *Ibid*, 109.

Wolsey's policy of peace was unsustainable. The rivalry between Henry and Francis, even at a time when they were ostensibly promoting peace, shows just how fragile that peace was. All of the monarchs who signed the treaty actually moved to negate it. Charles, seeking to destroy the alliance between England and France, met with Henry just before he left for Calais and tried to secure an anti-French alliance.¹³ Charles hoped that this would nullify the encounter between Francis and Henry.¹⁴ Pope Clement VII later claimed that the treaty was a usurpation of Rome's position and stated "from it we can see what the Holy See and the pope have to expect from the English Chancellor."¹⁵ When war broke out between Charles and Francis the next year, England had to take a position. Henry wished to ally himself with the Emperor, and Wolsey knew that more time was needed for preparation for war. Therefore, Wolsey attempted to enforce his treaty. Thus began the Conferences at Calais and Bruges in 1521.

¹³ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 936.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, III, 551.

¹⁵ J. J. Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, 73.

Chapter 4

Cardinal Wolsey: Pro-Imperialism 1521-1523

After the collapse of Wolsey's peace policy and the beginning of the Habsburg/Valois war, it became necessary, despite the economic difficulties, to initiate a policy favoring the Holy Roman Emperor. This is what Henry VIII strongly desired and what Wolsey was hoping to delay as long as possible, because England was still not ready for a large-scale invasion of Europe. In 1521, this inherent contradiction in English policy came to the fore. Wolsey was given contradictory orders both to conclude an Imperial alliance favorable to Henry VIII and to negotiate a peace settlement between Francis and Charles according to the terms of the 1518 Treaty of London. Hence, the very confusing diplomatic maneuvering at Calais and Bruges began. Wolsey somehow had to ensure both Charles and Francis that his master had their best interests at heart. For as long as possible Wolsey tried to assure both of them that England would come to their aid. By 1522, this became impossible, and Wolsey and Henry concluded a treaty with Charles V at Windsor. However, even after Henry signed the 1522 treaty, the imperial ambassador's reports make it clear that Wolsey intended to delay the implementation of the treaty as long as possible.

J. J. Scarisbrick has argued that during these years "Wolsey's policy was a peace policy. . . ."¹ Peter Gwyn claims that Wolsey's aim was "to bring an alliance about with the Emperor."² In truth, his objective was to do both. Henry VIII firmly desired an alliance with the Emperor in 1521, and Wolsey was obligated to conform to the diplomatic policy of the king. However, Wolsey also keenly understood the financial

¹ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 49.

² Peter Gwyn, "Wolsey's Foreign Policy," 755.

situation of England and knew that Henry did not have the money to carry out a war for any length of time, so peace was a necessary goal. Therefore, although an imperial alliance was inevitable, his plan in these seemingly contradictory conferences was to please both sides and keep England in the middle until it became impossible to do so. If he delayed long enough, the war, he thought, might end and England would have more time to prepare for another conflict between the two most powerful dynasties of sixteenth-century Europe. Even after England was firmly committed to the Imperial cause in 1522, Wolsey continued this policy of delay until 1523, when the military opportunity brought on by the Duc de Bourbon's defection forced England to intercede on Charles's behalf.

The period from July to November 1521 seemed to be full of contradictions. The meeting of the three chancellors, Thomas Wolsey of England, Mercurio de Gattinara of the Holy Roman Empire, and Antoine Duprat of France, accompanied by the Papal nuncio, Geronimo Ghinucci, appeared to constitute nothing more than display. War had already begun between Francis and Charles, and both wished to make Henry their ally. At the outbreak of war, Wolsey, ostensibly carrying out the terms of the 1518 Treaty of London, called for arbitration to prevent "the effusion of Christian blood. . . the consuming of treasure, subversion of realms, depopulation and desolation of countries and other infinite inconveniences. . . ."³

The consuming of treasure was probably one of Wolsey's chief concerns, as England had none by this time. What might seem to a modern reader to be some kind of Machiavellian subterfuge on Wolsey's part (either to obtain an Imperial alliance and deceive the French, or to obtain a peace settlement and to deceive the Imperialists), was

probably not Wolsey's intention. Wolsey did not wish to undo all of the work he had done prior to these conferences. He claimed in 1521 that he did not want to abandon the Treaty of London.⁴ In that sense, he was working for peace. On the other hand, France was the natural enemy of England, and Wolsey had to conform to his master's wishes for an alliance with the Emperor. Henry openly declared his intention to recover land in France and stated that French aggression against his natural ally in 1521 gave him cause to intervene.⁵ Charles had insisted that Wolsey visit him at Bruges as a condition of sending his chancellor to Calais.⁶ The initiative for this conference between Charles and Wolsey at Bruges came either from Charles himself, or, perhaps, from Margaret of Austria.⁷ What was Wolsey's primary aim at these conferences? The answer was delay. Wolsey knew that any number of things could happen and England was in quite a good bargaining position. Both Charles and Francis were short of money and needed English aid. Wolsey could use that knowledge in order to bargain and to obtain favorable concessions from both sides without committing Henry to military intervention.⁸

At Calais, Wolsey bargained with both the French and the Imperialists in order to get as many concessions as possible. In fact, he insisted on obtaining these points from the French king, or, Wolsey threatened, Henry would ally with the Emperor.⁹ In fact, Wolsey considered himself so successful in obtaining these concessions that he boasted that "he (Francis) is now bound, your Grace (Henry) at large."¹⁰ The first of these concessions Wolsey won from Francis had to do with fishing rights and communications.

³ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 1270.

⁴ *Ibid*, III, 1556.

⁵ *Ibid*, III, 1440.

⁶ *Ibid*, III, 1213.

⁷ *Ibid*, III, 1283.

⁸ J. Bergenroth, Calendar of State Papers Spanish, II, 337.

⁹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 1383.

He desired, and won, freedom of fishing rights, freedom of communication of the ambassadors and their messengers, freedom of access to Calais for the victuallers, and the assurance from the French that the havens, ports, rivers and lands of the king of England would be free from attack and safe for all.¹¹ He also obtained from Francis and Louise of Savoy an agreement to abandon Francis's campaigns around Tournai and to concentrate his efforts in Artois.¹² So happy was Louise of Savoy over this peace that Wolsey had secured that she called him "my son and my good friend."¹³

What did these concessions from the French gain for Henry? Because of Wolsey's negotiations, Henry no longer had to worry about French incursion into England's fishing waters or disruption of trade and provisioning of Calais. He did not have to worry about ambassadors either English or foreign being hindered during England's time of neutrality, or any kind of attack on English soil by the French. Thus, even if England went to war against France, the threat of invasion by the French was less likely. Wolsey bought England time without having to worry about French disruption of its trade because of war. Thus, Francis could not try to draw Henry to his side by moving toward Calais or ruining the English economy.

Wolsey did not focus his energies entirely on the French, however. He also compromised with the Imperialists during his time at Bruges. Wolsey was not expected to publicize the alliance and England did not have to declare war until March 1523, nearly two years away.¹⁴ In addition, Wolsey secured an agreement for the betrothal of the Princess Mary to Charles, the continued payment of the French pension to Henry VIII

¹⁰ *Ibid*, III, 1443.

¹¹ *Ibid*, III, 1524.

¹² *Ibid*, III, 1710.

¹³ *Ibid*, III, 1202.

(since France would inevitably stop paying it after a declaration of war), and a promise from Charles that he would not negotiate with France (without giving a similar promise for England). At the same time, Wolsey advanced Henry's wishes for a new European order. England and the Empire would divide France between themselves.¹⁵ So important was this, that Edward Hall claimed Wolsey, "immediately after his arivyng (back at Calais) he treated them (the French ambassadors) of peace, yet not so earnestly as he did before and that perceived the sayd ambassadors and wrote therof to the Frenche kynge."¹⁶ This statement of Hall's was probably written after the fact, but it is beyond doubt that Wolsey got what he wanted from the Imperialists.

The commissions Wolsey received from Henry stated that he was to mediate between the combatants, to conclude a treaty with the Emperor against Francis, to treat for a closer amity with France against the Emperor, and to treat for a confederation of the pope, emperor, and the king of France.¹⁷ He did exactly that. He had concluded a treaty with Charles, though it did not have to be publicized for another two years. This gave Wolsey ample time either to make preparations or switch sides (whichever became most practicable). He assured the French that Henry was interested in their welfare, and Francis reciprocated by claiming that he trusted Wolsey implicitly with the "amity" and hoped only for good between France and England.¹⁸ Wolsey concluded a shaky truce between France and the Empire, which again gave Wolsey time to maneuver, and that truce was meant to facilitate the further preparations for a crusade against the Turks (as

¹⁴ Peter Gwyn, "Wolsey's Foreign Policy," 765.

¹⁵ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, III, 1508-1509.

¹⁶ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 231.

¹⁷ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, III, 1443. Also J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, 86.

¹⁸ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, III, 1904.

dictated by the Treaty of London).¹⁹ Unfortunately however, these conferences accomplished little else than display. The peace process was not helped greatly, the war effort was helped little, and England stayed firmly in the middle, not committing either to war or peace. Wolsey was able to gain time without promising much. At this point, the imperial alliance was cemented, yet could easily be broken. Wolsey had, according to Henry VIII himself, “furnished in all degrees and purposes most likest a great prince, which was much to the high honour of the King’s majesty and of his realm. . . . by whose counsel, devotion, and industry, he had been able to achieve greater things than all his predecessors in so many wars and battles.”²⁰ This praise would not only have suited Wolsey’s own ego, but gave him the time he needed to delay, at least until 1522.

However, even when the alliance between England and the Empire was confirmed and England had declared war in 1523, there were significant delays. The Imperial ambassador, Louis de Praet, fumed over what he saw as Wolsey’s obstinate refusal to cooperate. Soon after the confirmation of the Treaty of Windsor and just before the Duke of Suffolk’s invasion in 1523, de Praet said that Henry and Wolsey, “could no wise be satisfied. . .” and that they insisted on a delay of “one or two years. . . .”²¹ De Praet described in detail how Wolsey was delaying, “perceiving that the Cardinal wished only to put some appearance of justice on his side, without any desire to advance the business at hand.” De Praet claimed that when he tried to put forth the business of the war Wolsey “became more difficult and . . . complained.” De Praet also accused Wolsey of making “reproachful words against your Majesty in his accustomed manner, and saying that it

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 1786.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 1519.

²¹ William Bradford, The Correspondence of Charles V, 54-55.

was proper to wait. . . .”²² De Praet declared that Wolsey, even in the presence of Henry VIII, remained obstinate, and “took up the argument, and announcing the thing (the invasion of France) was not feasible. . . the co-operation proposed was not on equal terms. . . and were ready to abandon their part of their demand. . . .”²³ In other words, according to de Praet, Wolsey wanted to stop supplying money and troops for the invasion of France because he felt England was contributing more than Charles V was.

De Praet was far from an impartial observer, and did not always show the amount of restraint he perhaps should have, but through his correspondence one can see how Wolsey was trying to delay, even shortly after the alliance had been made. The same is evident in Wolsey’s own letters to the Emperor. He wrote that he wanted “to seek the ways of peace and to make honourable and reasonable offers for the same.”²⁴ During the invasion, he told the Emperor that he and Henry had changed plans and wished to invade Paris in the hopes that it would end the war more quickly.²⁵ All of these delays and desires to get the war finished more quickly had to do with finance.

²² *Ibid*, 57-58.

²³ *Ibid*, 59.

²⁴ J.S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 2537.

²⁵ *Ibid*, IV, 61.

Chapter 5

War: 1521-1523

Despite the incredibly good financial situation that Henry VII left to his son, Henry VIII very quickly depleted his father's fortune and left England in so precarious a situation that he had to find a way of rescuing England from virtual bankruptcy. Thus, Wolsey had to pay for Henry VIII's war with very limited financial resources. Generally, historians have agreed that royal financial reserves in 1525 were significantly depleted from what they had been in 1509.¹ However, it is very difficult to reconstruct income and expenditures during Henry VIII's reign, one can only do so accurately from 1536 to 1547, the only years for which relevant records exist. Therefore, one has to make some very broad assumptions. Yet, when one looks at the actions of Wolsey in the Parliament of 1523, the Parliament convened to finance the "Great Enterprise," it is important to try to understand his financial outlook. The following analysis is far from definitive. If one looks at these numbers not as a penny-by-penny account of royal finances but as representative of some very general trends, one can gauge the impact of finance on Henry and Wolsey's foreign policy between 1518 and 1525.

Since many records are missing, such as the receipts of the treasurer of the chamber and the Chancellor of the Exchequer between 1509 and 1525, the critical years of Henry VIII's first and second French wars, one has to make deductions from other sources in order to arrive at even a partial picture of England's financial situation. The only two studies one can use are F. C. Dietz's overview of Tudor finance, published in

¹ Richard Hoyle, "War and Public Finance," in Diarmaid MacCulloch, ed. *The Reign of Henry VIII*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

1921, and Richard Hoyle's more recent attempt to understand the financial basis of English war-making during Henry VIII's reign. The four charts following, including the income, expenditure, and deficit/surplus of finances between 1509 and 1525 use those sources as a starting point.²

The first figure tries to arrive at an idea of Henry VIII's income. The first column details the expenses of the exchequer. Since the records are missing, one has to go back to Henry VII's reign to look at the detailed accounts of that time. Ideally, one should be able to use the later years of Henry VIII's reign and get an average using figures between 1536 and 1546. But, in the 1540s, the dissolution of the monasteries significantly inflates the income of the crown, and thus significantly inflates the overall average (so much so that Henry VIII appears to be doing well financially in 1525, which is very unlikely).³ When one calculates the average amount of money coming into the exchequer between 1485 and 1509, one arrives at £44,000. Using the same method for the Chamber, one arrives at the figure of £66,176. Admittedly, it is unlikely that income would have remained static for sixteen years. However, these figures offer a useful frame of reference.

The Savings column in the charts demonstrates the amount of money left to Henry VIII by his father. The Venetian ambassador reported in 1531 that it was £1,300,000,⁴ and that is the amount used in this chart. Henry VIII's French pension, according to Hoyle and Potter, was about £21,316 and that amount appears to have been static throughout the reign, except when England and France were at war (1513-1514 and

² Unless otherwise noted, all the numbers for these charts comes from F.C. Dietz English Public Finance. (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1920), 51-116. And Richard Hoyle, "War and Public Finance."

³ Richard Hoyle, "War and Public Finance," 91.

1522-1524), when it appears at 0. The Extraordinary income is all income collected by Henry VIII and Wolsey through parliamentary grants, forced loans, and other grants and subsidies given to the Crown from any other source (such as the grants of convocation).

The second figure details Expenditures during the reign. Again the records are missing, so once again has to go back to the reign of Henry VII and extrapolate by averaging the expenditures of the last five years of Henry VII's reign and carrying them forward into Henry VIII's reign. Thus one arrives at £76,503. This is most likely a very conservative estimate and does not allow for inflation. The column entitled War takes into account additional expenses for Henry VIII's wars with France, expenses not included elsewhere.

The Totals figure lists governmental surpluses and deficits and this is displayed graphically in the chart entitled War Finance 1509-1525. By putting the expenditures for every year in one and the government's cash in hand in the other column, one can see how England fared financially during the early years of Henry VIII's reign. At the beginning of the reign, the government had at its disposal approximately £1,569,736, and remained in fairly good financial shape until the first war with France. By the time Henry made peace, in 1514, the crown had about £335,349 in reserves. By the end of Henry's second war with France, Crown debts amounted to at least £177,590.

Again, these figures far from definitive, but if one takes it as representative of a general trend in finance, there are several things one can deduce from it. At the beginning of Henry VIII's reign, the income of the crown far surpassed its expenditures,

⁴ R. Brown, ed., Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice and other Libraries in Northern Italy, IV, 694.

and Henry VIII was in an excellent position financially. He took advantage of this between 1511-1514 and went to war with France. Between 1515 and 1517, England began to go into debt. By 1517, Wolsey was able to get England out of that situation, though very narrowly. Obviously, the royal treasury could not finance another war at that time. During the years of peace between 1518 and 1521, that gap narrowed, and the government maintained a small surplus, though nothing close to what it had before. Finally, in 1521 war came again and diminished that surplus exponentially while costs increased just as much. This plunged England into debt in 1522-1523, a debt from which it did not recover. Even though Wolsey and Henry raised additional revenues in the parliament of 1523, there was no possibility of surmounting the debt any time soon.

This financial picture explains a great deal about Wolsey's financial policies during the "Great Enterprise." On the eve of the second war with France in 1521, Wolsey only enjoyed a surplus of about £390,698. The first invasion had cost twice that sum, and, in addition to the war, there were regular expenses of court. Charles V planned to come to England, and Wolsey needed to have a clear idea of how much money he could contribute to the war effort in order to settle negotiations with the Empire. Since there was no surplus as there had been in 1513, he might have known that he would have to raise that money through taxation. However, Parliament was reluctant to agree to such sums. Therefore Wolsey had to have something to prove England's wealth, thereby persuading both parliament and the Emperor that England would be ready for war. He had boasted in 1521 that England was a "mighty power and puissaunt realme."⁵ The time had come to prove it. Therefore, in 1522 he undertook an unprecedented assessment of English wealth, comparable to the Domesday Book. In order both to gain time for these

preparations and to delay the war, he wrote to Charles asking him to postpone his visit to England until 1522 (it was originally supposed to be at Easter 1521).⁶ This bought Wolsey more time before having to commit to anything, and it gave him an excellent weapon to use against parliament when he finally summoned it in 1523. The proscription of 1522 counted every household in every county valued at £20 a year or more in lands. It assessed how many able-bodied men each family might be willing to provide and how much money in taxes they would be able to afford. The results came to about £455,000,⁷ which was used in order to gain two loans from the realm in 1522-1523.

All amounts for all of the following charts are in £ sterling

	Income					
	Exchequer	Chamber	Savings	French Pensions	Extraordinary	Total
1509	44560	66176	1300000	21316	0	1432052
1510	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1511	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1512	44560	66176	0	21316	74000	206052
1513	44560	66176	0	0	0	110736
1514	44560	66176	0	0	0	110736
1515	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1516	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1517	44560	66176	0	21316	260000	392052
1518	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1519	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1520	44560	66176	0	21316	0	132052
1521	44560	66176	0	21316	215820	347872
1522	44560	66176	0	0	269841	380577
1523	44560	66176	0	0	269841	380577
1524	44560	66176	0	0	425359	536095
1525	44560	66176	0	21316	237143	369195

⁵ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 626.

⁶ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, III, 2164

⁷ J.J. Goring, "The General Proscription of 1522," *The English Historical Review* 86 (1971), 681-705.

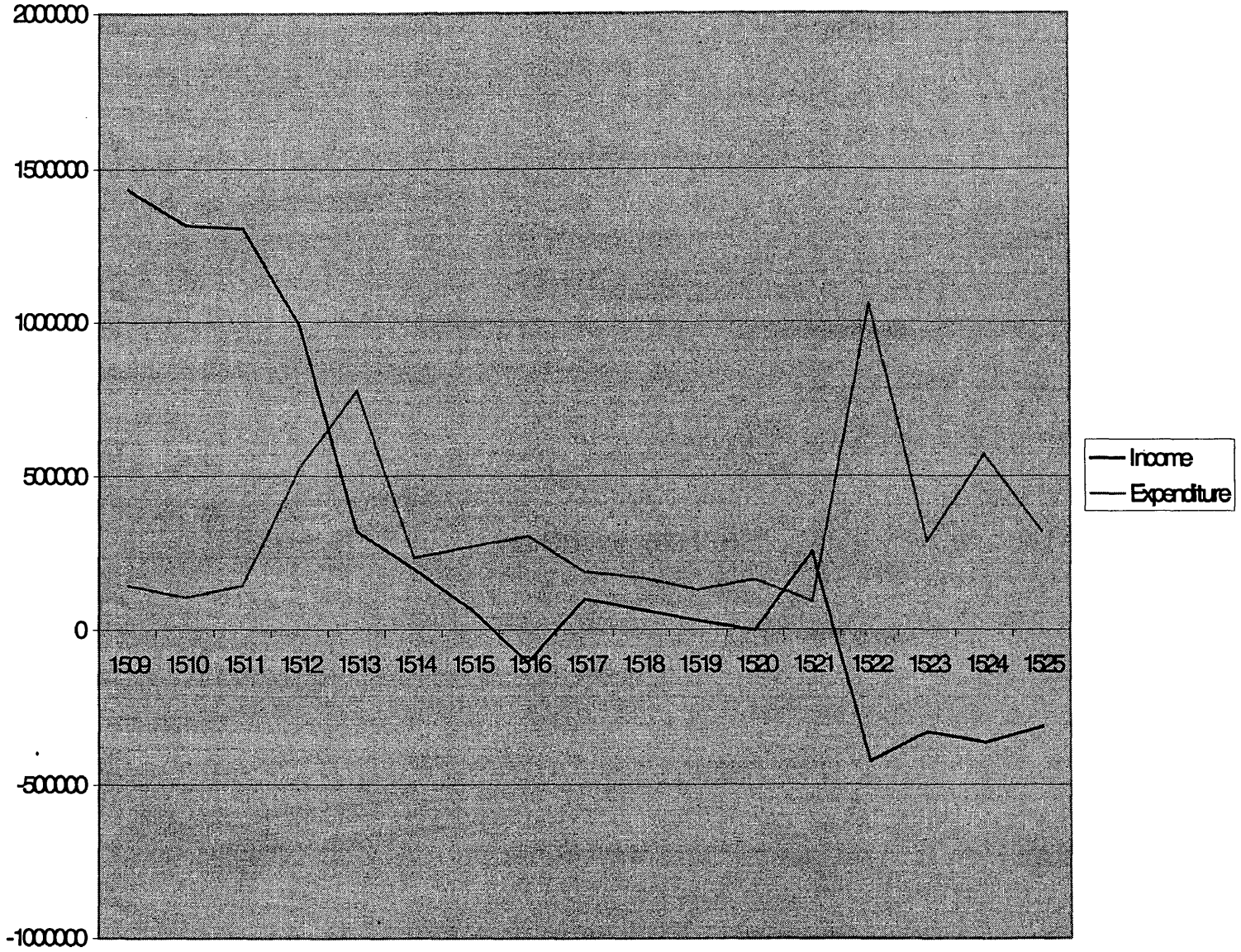
Expenditure

	Exchequer	Chamber	War	Total
1509	76503	65097	1231	142831
1510	76503	26725	1775	105003
1511	76503	64157	1509	142169
1512	76503	269564	181468	527535
1513	76503	699714	0	776217
1514	76503	155757	0	232260
1515	76503	74006	120000	270509
1516	76503	106429	120000	302932
1517	76503	72359	40000	188862
1518	76503	50614	40000	167117
1519	76503	52428	200	129131
1520	76503	86030	0	162533
1521	76503	15667	0	92170
1522	76503	15667	966570	1058740
1523	76503	15667	194570	286740
1524	76503	168157	325362	570022
1525	76503	168157	74570	319230

Totals

	Income	Expenditure
1509	1432052	142831
1510	1316270	105003
1511	1306153	142169
1512	984670	527535
1513	319189	776217
1514	197665	232260
1515	65613	270509
1516	-105267	302932
1517	97923	188862
1518	62858	167117
1519	27793	129131
1520	-2688	162533
1521	253014	92170
1522	-425149	1058740
1523	-331312	286740
1524	-365239	570022
1525	-315274	319230

War Finance 1509-1525



This proscription of 1522 was also used during Wolsey's parliament in 1523. He knew exactly how much each county would be able to contribute, and used that information when he addressed the parliament. His demand of £800,000, on top of the loans he was currently collecting, seems astronomical. However, if one considers the financial situation of 1523, his request becomes clearer. The crown was in debt £193,628. The last war had cost £776,217. Wolsey needed both enough money to bring Henry out of debt and to finance the war, meaning that he needed at least £969,845. So he was asking for significantly less than he needed, and, as John Guy has suggested, this was probably a bargaining ploy (implying that Wolsey did not have an exact idea of how much money he needed).⁸ However, even if the loans and taxes collected in full, Wolsey still needed £514,845 at a minimum. One can understand both why he kept parliament in session so long and why he was infuriated at the Commons when they would not grant him the sum he demanded. It explains his colorful statement that "he would rather have his tongue, plucked out of his hedde with a paire of pinsons, then to move the kyng to take any less some."⁹ This parliament was not summoned merely to raise money for war, though that was a very important part of it, but because "the yere following, the kyng and the Emperour should make suche warre in Fraunce, as hath not bene sene."¹⁰ It was summoned to do ". . . no thyng but the common weale," which meant keeping the king on a good financial footing.

This led to the debacle of Wolsey's financial policy, the Amicable Grant of 1525. This loan was yet another attempt to bring the Crown out of desperate financial difficulties. The war that parliament had refused to finance properly had pushed the king

⁸ John Guy, "Wolsey and the Parliament of 1523," Law and Government under the Tudors, 1-18.

⁹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 2484.

£177,590 into debt with expenses still running at £319,230 per annum. Wolsey somehow had to raise at least £496,820 just to balance the books. Without a king in good financial standing, the commons could not be defended against the French enemy and the government might go bankrupt. Wolsey probably could not comprehend why the House of Commons was being so uncooperative, as he wrote the Duke of Norfolk that it “be somewhat to the Kinges and my marvaile” that the commons “have not wel and ripely understonden such devices and communication . . . as hath passed upon the present charge to you comitted. . . . (meaning to collect the money for the Amicable Grant).”¹¹ This was an attempt to lessen English financial difficulties as much as possible, but as before, it was unsuccessful. Wolsey was unable to muster the support of the Commons and to gain money from an unpopular medium (taxation). Despite the fact that this was the King’s policy, it was associated with Wolsey and, as a natural consequence, unpopular with the people.¹²

All of these financial troubles, one could argue, explain Wolsey’s constant delays in executing military policy. J. J. Scarisbrick has argued that Wolsey did not always follow through on the King’s wishes, and sought peace in Christendom.¹³ Peter Gwyn and George Bernard have successfully argued against Scarisbrick and claimed that Wolsey did indeed follow the King’s policy.¹⁴ However, in light of the figures for revenues given above, one can see how Scarisbrick, Gwyn, and Bernard all had gotten

¹⁰ Hall, *Chronicle*, 284-285.

¹¹ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, IV, 571

¹² Peter Gwyn, *The King’s Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of Cardinal Wolsey*. (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1990), 370.

¹³ J.J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), 67-96.

¹⁴ Cf. George Bernard, *War Taxation and Rebellion in Early Tudor England*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986). And Peter Gwyn, *The King’s Cardinal*.

certain things correct. Wolsey was delaying, not only because he desired peace, but because he did not have the financial ability to pursue war to the fullest.

The Treaty of London was meant to buy time for England, allowing her to get her financial books in order and prepare for the inevitable English involvement in the Habsburg-Valois conflict. Keeping the appearance of peace was much less expensive than war. The entire Field of the Cloth of Gold cost only £15,000,¹⁵ Wolsey's entry into Bruges £2,400, Charles V's entry into London a mere £20,000.¹⁶ It was much cheaper for England to put on these shows of power and magnificence than it was to finance a war. In addition, Wolsey loved pomp and splendor;¹⁷ it would be no wonder that he reveled in this role of "peacemaker" of Europe.

The conferences at Calais and Bruges were again meant to buy time.¹⁸ England had a surplus of £390,698 in 1521, and if Wolsey could keep that surplus for as long as possible, the better prepared Henry VIII would be to make war on France. Wolsey's desire for peace might have stemmed from the £287,465 debt that England had incurred from some minor skirmishes in France and the possibility of an even larger invasion in 1522. The advantage of "peace" would be that Wolsey could call Parliament, raise taxes, and not have to pay anything until 1524, by which time he might have been able to collect as much as £539,682. This would have brought England temporarily out of debt and perhaps even finance another small-scale invasion of France. Thus, in this context the delays that Scarisbrick noticed could easily have been motivated by financial concerns. Indeed, Wolsey said in 1522 that he was delaying because "such a truce once

¹⁵ Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, 359.

¹⁶ Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry and Early Tudor Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 175.

¹⁷ Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, 20.

had, God may inspire in the minds of Christian princes to condescend into a further peace.”¹⁹

This plan went awry when the Duc de Bourbon rebelled against Francis I and decided to support the war effort of Charles V. The chance to use Bourbon’s powerful army and to take advantage of France’s division could not be lost. Because of Bourbon, the war might very well turn against France. Wolsey and Henry could not afford to miss this chance; consequently the need for money was even more desperate. Even so, Wolsey wrote that “there is no good war commenced or continued but only to the extent to conduce and bring once a good peace.”²⁰ So he was still trying to delay things; however, the king’s indebtedness by then was £193,628, and so it would have been best for England to obtain a peace on advantageous terms.

By the time Bourbon’s and the allies’ plan finally collapsed early in 1524, England’s debt was £227,555, the greatest ever. Wolsey made peace with Francis in that year. It is quite likely that this alliance was not a part of Wolsey’s grand scheme for universal peace; he entered into that accord for more practical reasons. Things were not going as well for the Empire at that time, and it was in the best interests of England to conclude the “Great Enterprise.”²¹

Wolsey’s diplomatic and financial policy had failed miserably, and he has been accused by some historians of not grasping the financial gravity of the situation. F. C. Dietz stated that, “he did nothing which indicates that he saw that, since the small margin between income and disbursements gave the king no opportunity to save much money,

¹⁸ Peter Gwyn, “Wolsey’s Foreign Policy: The Conferences at Calais and Bruges Reconsidered,” The Historical Journal 23 (1980), 755-772.

¹⁹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, III, 2764.

²⁰ *Ibid*, IV, 61.

and taxation could not be depended upon to provide rapidly and abundantly enough the money needed for wars. . . .”²² However, this is not altogether true. Wolsey, given his management of parliament in 1523 and his constant demands for money, appears to have at least some idea of that “margin” and thought that keeping England at peace and delaying war was the best tactic. That tactic would give England enough time to obtain additional tax receipts. What he did not see was that such a policy was impossible given the circumstances of the “Great Enterprise.” His delays with the Empire were not due to detestation of war. Wolsey probably wished to gain the best possible position for his master, but did not have the resources to carry out fully what was demanded of him.

²¹ George Bernard, War, Taxation, and Rebellion, 45.

²² F. C. Dietz. English Government Finance, 102.

Chapter 6

Cardinal Wolsey: Pro-France 1524-1525

In light of the financial problems that England was facing in 1524, it is not hard to see why Wolsey sought to ally England with France and again secure peace. England was now in such terrible shape financially that it was essential for Wolsey to take England out of war and to try to correct these financial problems with taxation: hence the so-called Amicable Grant of 1525. It was an honest attempt at remedying English financial deficits, and, indeed one can see how it increased royal income. However, even measures such as that could not eradicate the heavy debt and insurmountable expenses that England faced in 1524. Therefore, it also made sense to ally with France. The Empire was faltering militarily, the Duc de Bourbon, the Great Enterprise's hope, had collapsed, Clement VII and Louise of Savoy had both asked for peace, and Wolsey told Henry that a peace policy was expedient for "the king's highness and his council."¹ Of course, what happened at Pavia in 1525 was unforeseeable and proved to be Wolsey's final, fatal mistake during the Great Enterprise.

Wolsey probably thought, understandably, that in the circumstances in 1524, the war could not end in Imperial victory. He told the English ambassadors in Spain that "it is more necessary to lean unto the peace."² He also insisted that Bourbon would not be given more money until his invasion was successful, an outcome which

¹ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 61.

² *Ibid*, 186.

was beginning to look more and more unlikely.³ Indeed, a few months later, Bourbon was routed at Marseilles. All Wolsey needed was an official excuse to repudiate the Habsburgs and break his traditional policy of delay. This opportunity came when news of the papal election arrived in England in December 1523. In one of the dispatches from an Imperial ambassador to Charles, Wolsey's displeasure is clearly apparent: "The Sieur Legate has informed me, that he has received news from Rome, which in nowise to anticipate any great advantage from Pace's mission (to the Duc de Bourbon). . . . This he said with a change of colour and manifest anger. . . ."⁴

Thus in October 1524 Wolsey told the king that it "might right well do this feat (the invasion of France) without the emperor."⁵ Clearly it would be impossible for Henry to consider invading France alone, and Wolsey was saying, in essence, that Henry would receive no help from Charles. Therefore, it was best to get out of the war before England wasted even more money. Even after Pavia, this attitude colored Wolsey's feelings toward the Emperor. He did not think that Charles would really help Henry redraw the boundaries of Europe and he remarked to Henry that there could be nothing gained from an invasion of France at that time.⁶

Given the financial limitations and the weakness of the Empire in 1524, Henry and Wolsey had two options. They could either break the imperial alliance completely, abandon the Great Enterprise, and thus leave themselves politically isolated; or they could ally themselves with France and at least hope to regain some

³ *Ibid*, 384.

⁴ William Bradford, Correspondence of the Emperor Charles V, 33.

⁵ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 1249.

⁶ *Ibid*, 1371.

of the honor they had lost. The French pensions would start coming again, which might help to ease the financial burden and perhaps, if imperial fortunes continued, England could aid France against the Emperor in Italy and hope to gain some part in a military victory that had been denied Henry for the past year. Obviously, Henry and Wolsey chose the latter of those two options. Thus, after secret negotiations with the French for several months, Wolsey, somewhat against Henry's wishes, switched sides and allied England with France.⁷

Unfortunately, Wolsey switched sides too soon and tied his master diplomatically to a monarch now in captivity. It was a diplomatic catastrophe. Henry immediately switched sides again and tried to claim his title of King of France one last time. He wrote to the Emperor and sent ambassadors to draw up plans for the next invasion of France, and for the division of French lands between Bourbon, Henry, and Charles.⁸ He charged Wolsey with the task of financing this war - this provoked the Amicable Grant. However, Charles was not eager to start another war, especially in alliance with Henry VIII, who had not proven to be most reliable. He snubbed Henry, repudiated the alliance, and married Isabella of Portugal.⁹ In addition, Louise of Savoy, now regent of France, was unhappy with Henry's sudden *volte face* after Francis's capture, and saw it as a repudiation of the negotiations of 1524. Therefore, England was now more politically isolated than it had ever been before. None of the powers of Europe was allied with Henry, and Wolsey's diplomatic policy had failed miserably.

⁷ *Ibid*, 671.

Wolsey also blundered in his domestic policy. The enforcement of the Amicable Grant came close to bringing rebellion in some areas, and Henry had to intervene personally on Wolsey's behalf. Wolsey, having exhausted the possibilities for taxation, forced loans, and benevolences, had no way of getting England out of debt. No Parliament would grant him anything, and the prospects for the future looked extremely dim. Wolsey's popularity had reached an all time low, and, as Hall states "the people cursed the cardinal."¹⁰

Declining to disentangle England from European affairs, Wolsey insisted that England now had to make overtures to France against the Empire.¹¹ However, Francis was still in captivity and Henry resented having to abandon his traditional ally and to make overtures to a traditional enemy.¹² In addition, the outlook for financing even more diplomatic maneuvering was less likely than it had been five years ago. Wolsey had brought England to the brink of bankruptcy, and had no hope of reversing the situation soon. The prospect of maintaining Henry's accustomed place in European politics was now slimmer than it had been since he had ascended the throne.

What exactly was Wolsey's "policy" in 1518-1525? He supported Henry's wars, for political reasons if not for personal ones. If that is true, why have his tactics of delay persuaded some scholars that he was acting contrary to Henry? In fact, his delays served Henry's wishes as well. The invasion of 1513 severely depleted royal

⁸ *Ibid*, 1212.

⁹ *Ibid*, 1379.

¹⁰ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 700.

¹¹ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, VII, 1114.

financial reserves. The result forced Wolsey to pursue a peace policy that culminated in the treaty of 1518. The purpose of the treaty was not only to promote universal peace but also to give the royal treasury time to get back on sound financial footing. During the intervening years, Wolsey streamlined government finances and brought glory to his master. He streamlined the household in 1519 in order to make it more efficient,¹³ he started reforms in Star Chamber and the King's Bench,¹⁴ and he had the king declared Defender of the Faith in 1521.¹⁵ In other words, he saved money and instituted changes that would help England be more effective in the prosecution of war when it came again.

What kept him from success, however, was the state of royal finances. Between 1518 and 1521, he had not had enough time to make all of the reforms, financial gains, and political ties that he needed. Delay was essential. His policy was to postpone any military action in Europe in order to get those reforms finished, in the hopes of successfully prosecuting a war when it occurred. Unfortunately, he deferred things too long. Through his constant prevaricating, he angered the rest of Europe and brought both himself and his king to the brink of bankruptcy, ultimately losing face in the eyes of the monarchs he had hoped to impress.

Henry simply did not have the resources to make himself as powerful as Francis or Charles. Henry wanted to be a great figure on the European stage, but left the details to Wolsey. As it happened, Wolsey was able to bring glory to his master

¹² *Ibid*, IV 3105.

¹³ Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, 597.

¹⁴ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, III, 1283, 1293.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, III, 1656.

until 1525. By then, the crown's resources were so depleted that Henry could no longer afford to be the great arbiter that he had been. Wolsey still tried to please Henry, and, by doing so only made things worse. By 1525, his attempts to please Henry had angered the king, and he finally failed – the victim of the enormous pressures that all of Europe had placed upon him.

However, Wolsey also had his own ambitions. He himself reveled in the pomp and pageantry of the European stage.¹⁶ Kings, Emperors, and rulers of Europe were courting his favor. He was given titles such as *Cardinalis Pacificus* and “Arbiter of Europe” by Francis and Charles, and was affectionately called “my good friend” by Louise of Savoy, and the “Lover of Peace” by Margaret of Austria.¹⁷ He had an extraordinary ego, and this praise by important people would only have fed it further. One only has to look at the pageants Wolsey patronized at his own court, to see how much he cherished his role as diplomat. All of them centered around the theme of Wolsey's diplomatic triumphs and his dedication to the cause of peace.¹⁸ Peace also allowed Wolsey to further his ambitions in England. Because of overtures of peace by the pope, Wolsey became a *legatus a latere*. Royal financial strain allowed Wolsey to gain more control over the king's household and he was able to dismiss many of his enemies. When peace came, Wolsey gained the respect of Erasmus and Thomas More, men whom Henry VIII admired, and thus, Wolsey gained standing with him as well. Edward Hall described Wolsey as a man “more

¹⁶ Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal*, 20.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, III, 1694.

¹⁸ Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy*, 225-231.

profitable than honourable,”¹⁹ and peace would not only profit the king financially, but also Wolsey personally. Rarely would the son of an Ipswich butcher be able to overshadow the Holy Roman Emperor, and that fact was one that Wolsey certainly would have understood. If war came, it would jeopardize Wolsey’s situation among the monarchs of Europe. If it did not, Wolsey would continue to be a leading actor at the center of a European stage.

¹⁹ Edward Hall, Chronicle, 707.

Conclusion

After Charles's victory at Pavia, the "Great Enterprise" officially ended. Henry and Francis allied themselves against Charles V and threatened an invasion of Germany. After 1525, Henry VIII's desires for military conquest, for marriage between his daughter, Mary, and Charles, and his dream of being as great a king as his ancestor, Henry V, were at an end. Or so it seems. Just because Henry had not achieved his dreams in 1525 does not necessarily mean he gave them up altogether. In fact, he tried again to conquer France in 1544. The failures of 1525 called for a change in strategy. The first part of that strategy was to put the royal treasury back on sound financial footing. Henry VIII was no longer able to get money out of Parliament because Wolsey had angered its members with his treatment of them in 1523 and again in 1525 with the Amicable Grant.¹ The easiest way to fill the treasury again, in Henry's mind, was to find a way of obtaining more of the church's wealth. Cardinal Wolsey, whose influence with the king was already dwindling because of his diplomatic failure, was the first barrier that Henry VIII had to remove in order to get at that wealth.

Henry was greatly angered at Wolsey after Charles refused to stage a second invasion of France. So great was this snub that the ambassadors reported that Charles would do "little or nothing. . . to your [Henry VIII's] commodity, profit or benefit."² As if that were not enough, Wolsey was now negotiating with Louise of Savoy, who had been England's enemy only a few months previously, and expelled the imperial

ambassador, Louis de Praet, from England.³ Wolsey was now firmly allied with France and could not maneuver between France and the Empire as he had done previously. Also, he made two trips to France to visit the Queen Mother, Louise of Savoy, and the two publicly denounced Charles V as a liar.⁴ Wolsey even celebrated this pro-French policy in his palace of Hampton Court with sumptuous pageants representing the benefits of a French alliance.⁵ The first hint of Henry VIII's dissatisfaction with Wolsey came at the end of 1525, when Henry took Hampton Court from him.⁶

Wolsey had isolated himself politically. In theory, Wolsey was still following the same policy he had been using since 1518. He tried to make Henry VIII a player in European politics and to bring glory to him. It just so happened that Wolsey was no longer able to ally Henry VIII with Charles V because he had angered Charles so much with his constant delays during the "Great Enterprise." The alliance with France could afford England the opportunity to stay at peace and get her finances in order. It also kept Henry VIII from being cut off diplomatically, in case there was some sort of alliance between Charles and Francis. At any rate, it was unlikely that there would be another war for awhile (Francis I was a captive of Charles V and France was as not financially prepared to fight another war). Given the chance, Wolsey probably would have continued reforming the household, calling parliaments,

¹ Roger Schofield, "Taxation and the political limits of the Tudor state," in Clare Cross, David Loades, and J. J. Scarisbrick, Law and Government under the Tudors, 228-229.

² J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 1371.

³ J. Bergenroth, Calendar of State Papers, Spanish, III, 51.

⁴ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 1380.

⁵ Sydney Anglo, Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy, 208.

and forcing loans as he had done in the 1520s. However, that would have taken a great deal of time, and Henry VIII still wanted to make war on France. Henry argued with Wolsey on this point, claiming he would only agree to peace with France if Francis offered him land, preferably land in the North of France which could serve as a launching point for another invasion.⁷ Henry VIII could not invade France with Wolsey's alliance in effect. He wanted to invade again and he needed the money to do it. The only way to ensure that both those things would happen was to remove Wolsey.

As early as 1523 Henry VIII had tried to tax the church in order to pay for his wars.⁸ Wolsey stood in the way and softened the blow to the church. Though Wolsey's general proscription called for an assessment of "all spiritual dignities and benefices" several exemptions were granted to the clergy. Also, the commissioners who appraised the gentry did not appraise the clergy. Wolsey appointed different commissioners to assess the value of the clergy's benefices and, according to Peter Gwyn, this assessment was "economical."⁹ Wolsey also had a reputation for insulating the church from lay attacks. In 1515, at Baynard's castle, in an attempt to shelter the church from taxation and to protect some of its privileges, Wolsey knelt before Henry asking him to protect the liberties of the church, to which Henry

⁶ Peter Gwyn, The King's Cardinal, 28.

⁷ J. S. Brewer, Letters and Papers, IV, 3105.

⁸ Richard Hoyle, "War and Public Finance," 86.

⁹ Peter Gwyn, The King's Cardinal, 311-313.

refused.¹⁰ If Henry was to get money from the church, Wolsey would most likely try to block it.

Coincidentally, at the same time that Henry VIII was looking for ways to tax the church, he was also seeking divorce from Catherine of Aragon in order to secure a male heir to the throne. In 1527, when Wolsey was in France, Henry VIII commissioned research on the *Collectanea satis copiosa* which, among other things, produced arguments for his own temporal jurisdiction over the church, a perfect justification for more clerical taxation. Even the divorce may have its roots in the diplomatic failure of 1525. Henry VIII had secured a marriage for Mary to Charles V in 1522 and claimed that Charles would become “lord and owner. . . of all Christendom.”¹¹ With a marriage between Charles and Mary, Henry secured the succession of his daughter with the aid of a powerful husband from the Habsburg family. This would have been an acceptable proposition, considering the Tudors had been allied with the Habsburgs since the late fifteenth century. But in 1525 Charles promised to marry Isabella of Portugal, and therefore Henry VIII’s designs to ensure the succession of his daughter were dashed. It is true that after 1525 Mary was betrothed to the French dauphin. However, that would mean that eventually a French king would have sat on the English throne, a prospect unacceptable to many Englishmen, including Henry himself, and it was unlikely that Henry would have a son and heir with the now aging Catherine of Aragon.

¹⁰ John Guy, *Tudor England*, 110.

¹¹ J. S. Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, IV, 1212.

Therefore, one can see that the failure of the “Great Enterprise” had significant ramifications for England and for Henry VIII. It left the royal treasury in need of money, and, if Henry VIII wished to continue making war against France, he needed money fast. Wolsey might have been able to bring England out of debt eventually, but considering his failure in obtaining Henry’s martial desires between 1518 and 1524, and the diplomatic overtures he was making to France in 1525, that prospect looked even more unlikely. The easiest way for Henry to obtain money was through clerical taxation. Wolsey would serve as an additional obstacle to that because he had defended the church in the past (as one would expect him to do).

One can see that the “Great Enterprise” and Wolsey’s diplomatic and financial failures force historians to ask several new questions. Did Wolsey’s failure to obtain Henry VIII’s divorce in 1529 bring down the cardinal or was it his failure to obtain Henry VIII’s conquest of France? How precisely did Henry VIII’s bankruptcy and subsequent search for clerical taxation lead to the jurisdictional revolution of the 1530s? It would take a great deal more research to answer these questions completely. However, this study of Wolsey and his failure in 1525 has led me to believe that the impact of Henry VIII’s wars has been overlooked to a certain extent. Wolsey’s failure to obtain Henry VIII’s conquest of France certainly did contribute to his downfall. Henry VIII’s bankruptcy and search for clerical taxation arguably did eventually shape the political Reformation of the 1530s. In this sense it could be argued that there would have been a reformation without Anne Boleyn. Of course, there are many other circumstances that contributed to the break with Rome.

However, 1525 became a turning point in Wolsey's fortunes and ultimately those of all of England. In his play *Henry VIII* Shakespeare's Cardinal Wolsey claimed in reference to Anne Boleyn "There was the weight that pull'd me down. . . . The king has gone beyond me: all my glories in that one woman [Anne Boleyn] I have lost forever. . . ." ¹² This paper has suggested that the issue is more complex, and historians will need to re-examine both the reasons for Wolsey's fall and the origins of the English Reformation.

¹² William Shakespeare, *Henry VIII*, Act III, Scene II.

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