

Chapter 6

A PETULANT PRELATE

The Threat of Transfer

The topic of the following chapter is Vitez's ecclesiastical career during the reign of Matthias Corvinus. During this time Vitez became the most powerful prelate in Hungary—the archbishop of Esztergom and primate of the kingdom. Although the ecclesiastical aspect of Vitez's career overlaps significantly with the political one, the former is treated separately here due to the intricacies which would make the larger events difficult to follow if both of them were treated as a whole. The first subject featured here is the attempt to transfer Vitez to the diocese of Zagreb. We will examine whether this attempt was intended to limit his influence, as it is possible King Matthias tried to do so due to Vitez's behaviour during the negotiations with Frederick III. As we will see, there are indications the king supported Vitez's rivals, perhaps within a broader effort of asserting his control over the Hungarian prelates.

Vitez's ecclesiastical career after Matthias's accession reflects his difficult relations with the king, especially after he negotiated a peace treaty with the emperor independently of the king. Matthias did not wait long to take revenge for such insubordination. The king made his move against Vitez at the Diet of Buda in May 1462. This time, he acted very subtly. He proposed for Vitez to be transferred from the diocese of Oradea to that of Zagreb. It seems the prelate was extremely displeased with this.¹ Even Matthias admitted, in the letter to the pope in which he suggested Vitez's transfer, that that would have been a fall from riches to rags, and a dangerous one at that, as there would be much resistance to Vitez's control within the diocese itself. As a solution, he promised to provide Vitez with an additional source of income during the initial stage of his new episcopate.² Immediately after proposing the transfer, Matthias behaved as if it was an accomplished fact—in May 1462, he conferred unto Vitez the full right of patronage over the diocese, including the right to present candidates for all its benefices.³

Vitez was already deeply involved in the diocese of Zagreb, but he had his own candidate for its cathedra—Demetrius Čupor. Unlike Vitez himself, Demetrius remained a staunch supporter of the Hunyadi party even after its members rebelled against King

1 See Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 179ff; Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 23. Although these authors do note that Vitez did not take kindly to this proposal, they thought that Matthias's motivation was to establish order in Slavonia, and that he considered Vitez the right person for the task.

2 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 202, doc. 25. Thomas Himfi claimed before the pope that numerous episcopal estates had been usurped by laymen. See MHEZ, 7:495–96, doc. 442. See also Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus," 10.

3 MHEZ, 7:430, doc. 409.

Ladislaus V in 1457. He was in control of the diocese of Zagreb as early as January 1458.⁴ He was supported by Michael Szilágyi,⁵ and later by John Vitovec, a former mercenary captain in the service of Ulric of Celje, who was received into Matthias's service and appointed as ban of Slavonia.⁶ Demetrius waged war against the Ottomans in Matthias's service in mid-1458,⁷ remaining loyal during the rebellion of 1459. By June of that year he was appointed as the king's chaplain.⁸ He remained firmly in control of the diocese during the early 1460s.⁹

Parallel to Demetrius's accomplishments, after Matthias's accession Vitez renewed his influence on the chapter of Zagreb. Its members previously tried to take advantage of his fall from grace, which led to an episode in 1457, when they asked for King Ladislaus's help in reclaiming the rights they previously ceded to the recently extinct counts of Celje.¹⁰ The Chapter's envoys happened to arrive in Buda when Vitez was in captivity, in May 1457,¹¹ and they took the opportunity to "slander" him, as he later accused them. He took his revenge in 1458, after Matthias's accession put him in a position of power. As the case of the mentioned rights was still being reviewed at the royal court, Vitez simply took the charter on which the chapter based its claim away from its envoys. In April 1458 the chapter was forced to suspend those of its members who had crossed Vitez, with the condition that they would be reinstated only if they presented Vitez's written confirmation that he had forgiven them.¹² Immediately after the chapter had performed this act of contrition, Vitez returned the precious charter, and King

4 DF 231 401.

5 In May 1458 Szilágyi asked the pope to receive some of Demetrius's subordinates as papal acolytes and chaplains: see MHEZ, 7:338, doc. 318. He also acted in favour of the chapter of Zagreb after Demetrius took over the diocese. See MHEZ, 7:303, doc. 286.

6 On April 18, 1458, Demetrius endowed Vitovec with a number of episcopal estates and incomes, including one castle, in exchange for the aid he had given Demetrius in taking control of the diocese. See DL 34 211. Regarding Vitovec's entrance into Matthias's service, see Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 80–81.

7 MHEZ, 7:362, doc. 339. This was during the Ottoman conquest of Serbia and their concurrent incursion in Syrmia: see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 196–97; Olesnicki, "Mihajlo Szilágyi," 29; Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 82–83.

8 DF 288 157.

9 He mostly resided in the episcopal manors of Čazma and Dubrava. See MHEZ, 7:361–362, doc. 337; 7:364, doc. 342; 7:395, doc. 369, and DF 282 433, 262 152, and 252 418.

10 Soon after Count Ulric's death, the chapter requested a copy of a charter issued by Frederick of Celje in 1441, in which he confirmed that the right to collect tithes in the district between the rivers Mur and Drava, ceded to his family by the chapter, would revert to the latter if his lineage were to become extinct. See MHEZ, 7:303–4, doc. 286.

11 They presented their plea to the king on May 24: see MHEZ, 2:249–50., doc. 187. and MHEZ, 7:315, doc. 296.

12 MHEZ, 7:333, doc. 312.

Matthias ruled in the chapter's favour.¹³ Soon after this, Demetrius Čupor cleansed the chapter's ranks of his adversaries and filled them with his supporters.¹⁴

This demonstrates that Vitez carefully maintained his reputation, and thought it important to demonstrate that crossing him was perilous indeed. He demonstrably already had much influence in the diocese of Zagreb and his ally was effectively acting as its bishop, although without the pope's confirmation. It was therefore a wise move on Matthias's part when he attempted to both remove Vitez from a rich diocese in which he had become entrenched and remove one of his allies from a position of power. Although Vitez vehemently opposed the transfer, Matthias managed to persuade the royal council to assent to it.¹⁵ In its letter to Carvajal, the council admitted that Vitez had until then consistently refused to be transferred to Zagreb, and that he was only with difficulty convinced by the king and the council to consent to it.¹⁶

It is possible that Matthias made use of the animosity some of the prelates (such as Várdai) felt for Vitez to put pressure on him in the royal council and present his transfer as a virtuous and pious project, undertaken to deliver the diocese of Zagreb from ruin. At least that was how the king presented it in his letters to the pope, Carvajal and the other cardinals.¹⁷ In this light, Vitez's refusal would have seemed a base and selfish act. Carvajal wrote to Vitez regarding the transfer, and the latter replied that he had accepted it grudgingly, and that the cardinal knew how fiercely Vitez previously resisted it. He agreed to it, wrote Vitez, because the king and the council had practically forced him to do so, and only after he managed to obtain the promise of an additional source of income while he would work on reclaiming the episcopal holdings. What this source of income would be, he did not know, but he asked Carvajal to support him in that matter. As for the other candidates for the bishopric of Zagreb, meaning Thomas Himfi and Demetrius Čupor, Vitez wrote that one of them responded to the summons to the royal court, while the other stubbornly refused to do so, even though he had been summoned four times.¹⁸ The latter was probably Demetrius, because we know that Thomas did obey the king's summons.

Thomas Himfi had a history of conflict with Vitez. At the outbreak of the rebellion of 1459, he was among those who swore allegiance to King Matthias on February 10. In the text of the oath he was titled as a bishop without a diocese and rector of the Benedictine abbey of Pannonhalma, while Demetrius was titled as the bishop of Zagreb.¹⁹ However, soon afterwards Thomas joined the rebels and surrendered his abbey to their ringleaders, the counts Szentgyörgyi. The Milanese ambassador to Hungary claimed that he had done so because he had been denied the diocese of Zagreb

13 MHEZ, 7:339, doc. 321.

14 MHEZ, 7:356, doc. 338 and 7:359, doc. 337.

15 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 203–4, doc. 26.

16 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 204, doc. 27. Both this and the previous letter are undated.

17 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 202–3, doc. 25; 205–6, docs. 28–29.

18 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 206–8, doc. 30.

19 *Vestigia comitorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, 353. See also DL 15 316 and 15 318.

by none other than Vitez, of whom the ambassador wrote that he had swapped dioceses with the previous bishop of Zagreb.²⁰ The ambassador likely confused Vitez with Demetrius (who did exchange dioceses with Benedict of Zvolen), but it seems that Vitez as well held a grudge against Thomas.²¹ However, in January 1460, Thomas stepped before Matthias and again swore fealty to him, confirming the act in writing. In exchange, he was forgiven his prior transgressions and recognized as the bishop of Zagreb, and allowed to remain in control of Pannonhalma.²² Not long after that, the case of the diocese of Zagreb was reopened at the Roman Curia.²³ As we will see in the following paragraphs, this may have been an early sign of Matthias's attempts to curb Vitez's power. It was certainly a stab in the back for Demetrius, who was essentially punished for being loyal. But Vitez was a dangerous enemy to have, and Thomas would soon feel the brunt of his enmity.

As Thomas himself confessed to the pope in January 1461, during the previous rebellion he had hired mercenaries to, as he said, fight for his episcopal rights.²⁴ With the help of the lay magnate Ladislaus Töttös of Bátmonostor, he occupied the Cistercian abbey of Cikádor and the nearby town of Bátaszék.²⁵ Töttös reconciled with the king as early as the summer of 1459,²⁶ but Thomas continued to hold those places. In November 1460 he sent an urgent message to Töttös from Bátaszék, begging him for military aid and saying he would himself soon go to the king.²⁷ This was when Thomas was in the king's favour; in the following year he resided at the royal court and participated in the sessions of the royal council.²⁸ However, he was not in Vitez's favour. Sometime during 1462,²⁹ Thomas fled Hungary for Rome. There he staked his claim to the diocese of Zagreb, but he also, in August 1462, accused Vitez before Pope Pius II of violently occupying Cikádor Abbey. The pope entrusted the investigation to Cardinal Szécsi and charged him with returning the abbey to Thomas.³⁰ It should

20 MDE, 1:64–65, doc. 42. See also Kubinyi, "A kaposújvári uradalom," *Somogy megye múltjából* 4 (1973): 3–44 at 22. Regarding the actions of the counts Szentgyörgyi, see UB, 222–24, doc. 160.

21 For Fraknói's opinion of this, see Fraknói, *Vitez János*, 169.

22 DL 102 543.

23 MHEZ, 7:401, doc. 378.

24 MHEZ, 7:405, doc. 382.

25 A few years later, Thomas confessed to Pius II that he had conquered the monastery from some laymen and held it illegally for two years. See MHEZ, 7:472, doc. 435. These "laymen" were in fact the troops of Emeric of Zapolje, who was on the king's side at the time. Emeric was reimbursed by the Töttöses in August 1459 for the damages he had suffered. See Zichy, 10:89, doc. 70.

26 Zichy, 10:86, doc. 67.

27 Zichy, 10:130, doc. 106.

28 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 145.

29 In 1464 Thomas said he had been living for almost two years in the household of Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini. See MHEZ, 7:515, doc. 455. Perhaps he was the person alluded to by Ammannati in his letter to Vitez, of whom he said that their opinions regarding him differed. See Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere*, ed. Cherubini, 2:605.

30 MHEZ, 7:434–36, docs. 414–15.

be kept in mind that Vitez was exempt from any ecclesiastical jurisdiction except the pope himself, as we have previously mentioned. Still, it is doubtful whether this warrant would have had much effect in normal circumstances. However, Vitez's position was not as secure at the time, as the king's initiative to transfer him to Zagreb began to progress.

These are the circumstances in which Matthias made his move to uproot Vitez. The plan he presented to the pope was to transfer Vitez to Zagreb, grant him the Provostry of Glogovnica as an additional source of income (which amounted to a paltry sixty florins), and allow him to unofficially continue holding the diocese of Oradea. Thomas Himfi, although the king praised him, was supposed to become what he was before his reconciliation with Matthias—a bishop without a diocese and rector of Pannonhalma Abbey. Lastly, Demetrius Čupor was slated to receive the abbeys of Cikádor and Bijela in compensation for the bishopric of Zagreb. This would have helped Matthias keep Vitez in check, as his unofficial control of the diocese of Oradea could easily be revoked. However, Carvajal opposed this plan. He instead suggested that Stephen Várdai should be transferred from the archdiocese of Kalocsa to the diocese of Oradea, while keeping the pallium, archbishop's title and metropolitan jurisdiction, and that rule over the archdiocese of Kalocsa (but not its cathedra) should be given to Vitez. However, Várdai refused to assent to this.³¹ That is understandable, as he did not have any reason to trust Vitez and would not risk trading places with him. It is also not a given that Carvajal was acting in Vitez's favour; perhaps the opposite is true, as Thomas Himfi called the cardinal his ally in 1464.³²

Considering that Vitez mostly vanished from political events during the second half of 1462, the king may have successfully suppressed him. It seems his circle, including Janus Pannonius, lost much of its influence around that time. When writing to Cardinal Alessandro Oliva in September 1462, Janus promised to do what he could for Bishop Mark of Knin, whom the cardinal recommended, but sadly remarked that he had not seen the king recently, and even if he had, Janus's words would not mean much to him.³³ That year also marked the beginning of the ascent of Vitez's future rival, John Beckensloer of Wrocław. In May 1462, when the latter was provost of Pécs, Matthias granted him the income of Pécsvárad Abbey, as a reward for his aid in returning some of the former rebels back into the king's fold.³⁴

Perhaps because it was not necessary to subdue Vitez any further, his transfer to Zagreb never took place. In the spring of 1463, Matthias wrote to the pope that he would agree with whatever the latter decided regarding the diocese of Zagreb. As for Thomas Himfi, Matthias reported to the pope that he had Cikádor Abbey returned to him. Regarding the pope's suggestion that Thomas could receive the bishop's see of

31 The plan, and the reactions it caused at the Curia, can be discerned from the papal response to the emissary: see MKL, 1:28n1. The emissary was Ladislaus Veszenyi: see Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 202, doc. 25. Regarding him, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 14.

32 MHEZ, 7:515, doc. 455.

33 Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 83–84, doc. 9.

34 MKL, 1:31, doc. 25. Cf. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 178–79.

Nitra instead of that of Zagreb, Matthias was more cautious: he wrote that he would give it to Thomas only if he would (again) swear fealty to him in person.³⁵ At about the same time, Vitez sent a letter of his own to the pope, saying he had recently resided in the diocese of Zagreb and managed to—with the king's and the local metropolitan's (Várdai's) aid—redeem its holdings from the laymen who had usurped them, noting those holdings were in poor condition. As the ordering of the diocese was the official purpose of the intended transfer, he considered it fulfilled, and asked the pope not to burden him with it any longer.³⁶

Both letters were carried to Rome by the same person, Bishop Mark of Knin, perhaps meaning Vitez was by then back in the king's favour. This notion is backed by Matthias's request, expressed in his recently mentioned letter, that the pope reconfirm the founding of the chapter of St. Ladislaus's Tomb in Oradea Cathedral, which Vitez intended to found back in 1459. It seems that Vitez truly was trying to bring order to Slavonian property rights, which were in disarray ever since the extinction of the counts of Celje. On April 7, 1464, immediately after his coronation, Matthias pledged the castles of Čakovec and Štrigova to Frederick Lamberger,³⁷ a former retainer of the counts of Celje who had by then entered King Matthias's service. The official reason for the pledge was some debt Matthias allegedly owed Lamberger. However, on the same occasion both castles were partially pledged to Vitez and, indirectly, Janus Pannonius, who was acting on Vitez's behalf, to the value of six thousand florins, the sum they spent redeeming those castles. Lamberger was to either respect their usufruct or buy them out.³⁸ Vitez possibly spent that money during his mission in the diocese of Zagreb; perhaps he was not redeeming only episcopal holdings, but royal ones as well, as the holdings of the counts of Celje had formally reverted to the crown after their extinction.³⁹ It is also conceivable that doing so won back the king's favour.

The pope, however, was either not adequately informed of those developments, or had an agenda of his own. He let Matthias know that Thomas Himfi presented himself before him, and had entrusted his case to Cardinal Nicholas Cusanus. When the cardinal examined it and brought his findings before the Consistory, Thomas's claim on the diocese of Zagreb was found to be valid. However, the pope agreed to transfer Vitez to the diocese of Zagreb if an additional yearly stipend of eight thousand ducats would be secured for him. For that purpose, he persuaded Thomas to accept the diocese of Nitra instead, with permission to hold it together with the abbeys of Pannonhalma and Cikádor. As for the diocese of Oradea, it was to be given to Demetrius Čupor. The pope

35 MKL, 1:36–37, doc. 29.

36 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 211, doc. 36. Vitez mentioned the king had recently ordered Cikádor Abbey to be returned to Himfi, indicating the letters were written at about the same time.

37 Regarding Lamberger, see Engel's comment in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 196n509, Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 81, and Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 81.

38 DL 15 945.

39 Cf. Pálosfalvi, "Vitovec János," 458–59.

allowed the king three months's time to accede to this solution; and if he chose not to, the pope would re-establish Thomas's right to the diocese of Zagreb.⁴⁰

These decisions were, however, based on antiqued data. At the Diet of Tolna in 1463,⁴¹ the king and the gathered lords decided the diocese of Zagreb would be formally held by a royal governor only until its holdings were redeemed. Bertold Ellerbach, a former rebel who reconciled with the king simultaneously with the counts Szentgyörgyi, was selected for the task. John Vitovec, the dominant strongman in Slavonia, was cautioned against aiding any of the pretenders to the episcopate.⁴² This probably referred to Demetrius Čupor, considering his previously mentioned ties with Vitovec. As for Demetrius, he was admonished not to defy the king's will, but to peacefully surrender the episcopal holdings, with the promise that the king would compensate him and his status and honour would not be harmed.⁴³ The only part of the pope's plan that materialized was Thomas Himfi's transfer to the diocese of Nitra, which took place in early 1464. The pope himself warned Vitez and Demetrius that if Thomas was unable to take control of this diocese and Cikádor Abbey within a year due to their actions, his claim to the diocese of Zagreb would be reinstated.⁴⁴ Thomas was subsequently recognized as bishop of Nitra by King Matthias, and titled as such in royal charters, but in those same charters the diocese of Zagreb was listed as vacant and Demetrius was titled a bishop without a diocese.⁴⁵

Judging by this, Matthias decided to put the diocese under his direct control, abandoning the plan to get Vitez transferred there. It is difficult to say whether that meant he had reconciled with Vitez, but it is worth noting that around that time, Vitez sent a letter of appreciation to Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini, thanking him for coming to his aid and unexpectedly granting his protection, of which Vitez learned from Bishop Mark of Knin.⁴⁶ Janus Pannonius also thanked Ammannati for this unidentified favour rendered unto Vitez, and sent him a gift.⁴⁷ We do not know whether Ammannati's protection had anything to do with Vitez's planned transfer to Zagreb or the accusations against Vitez that Himfi brought before the pope, but it certainly did not harm Vitez's standing at the Curia. Also, this indicates that Bishop Mark was working in Vitez's favour when he was in Rome. He was on good terms with Vitez

⁴⁰ MKL, 1:37–39.

⁴¹ For more on that diet, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 206.

⁴² Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 212, doc. 37. For Ellerbach's reconciliation with the king, see DL 15 698. Pálosfalvi thought that this task was given to Ellerbach because he used to be Vitovec's ally, and that it was thought that he would be able to negotiate with the latter. See Pálosfalvi, "Vitovec János," 462.

⁴³ Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 212, doc. 38.

⁴⁴ MHEZ, 7:472–76, docs. 435–36.

⁴⁵ DL 15 520.

⁴⁶ Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 216–17, doc. 40. In his reply, Ammannati said this thing Vitez thanked him for was a trifling matter he scarcely remembers. See Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere*, ed. Cherubini, 2:605.

⁴⁷ Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 81–82, doc. 8.

and Janus Pannonius since becoming bishop in mid-1462. Around that time, Vitez and Janus recommended him to the Slavonian and Croatian lord Gregory of Blagaj, asking him to help Mark with the collection of his tithes.⁴⁸ Mark was also supposed to run some errands for Janus in Rome, so the latter and Vitez wrote several letters of recommendation for him, addressed to curial dignitaries.⁴⁹

To conclude, Vitez successfully avoided a transfer, but his power diminished considerably in the process. It took Matthias just a few months to reduce his ability to act independently. Perhaps this was because the young king was no longer inexperienced, and had now devised ways to assert his authority. It is possible that a note on the margins of a codex containing a miscellany of speeches and letters, which Csapodi Gárdonyi thought was inscribed by Vitez, was made at about that time. It says “*Mathia nota*,” and it is located next to a passage from Cicero’s *De amicitia* in which the author says that youths, upon growing up, often forget those who used to be close to them. It may be that Vitez was trying to let the king know he was aware of his faltering influence, and to appeal to the trust Matthias used to have in him.⁵⁰

Primate of Hungary

Considering Matthias’s attempts to transfer Vitez to a less advantageous position, it might seem surprising that his career took a sudden turn for the better not long afterwards. However, we should keep in mind that Vitez was, despite everything, a very capable courtier, and his relations with the king did not consist only of disagreements. The previous chapter features just one facet of his relations with Matthias, with the narrow evasion of his planned transfer was just one detail in the complex web of fifteenth-century Church politics. Here we consider its exact opposite: Vitez’s appointment as primate of Hungary. In this discussion we also examine the level of control Vitez had over the Hungarian Church and his manner of exerting it. Namely, we study the dioceses Vitez had under his direct or indirect control, such as Zagreb and Nitra, and the conflicts and cooperation with King Matthias that stemmed from or brought about that control.

After the events described in the previous chapter, Matthias probably did not regard Vitez as a threat, evidenced by the latter’s appointment as high and privy chancellor in 1464. This explains why in February 1465, after the death of Cardinal Szécsi, Matthias and the royal council asked the pope to appoint Vitez as the archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary.⁵¹ As Vitez was still titled only as a nominated archbishop on May 25, 1465,⁵² we can assume it took a while for the papal confirma-

⁴⁸ Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 209, doc. 32.

⁴⁹ Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 210, doc. 35; Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 80–81, docs. 6–7.

⁵⁰ Regarding this note, see Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 119–20. This codex may have been brought from Italy by Janus Pannonius.

⁵¹ MKL, 1:76–77, doc. 58.

⁵² DL 16 206.

tion to arrive. It is quite disappointing that there are so few sources regarding Vitez's investiture. Bonfini made only a brief note of it, saying Matthias made Vitez Archbishop Szécsi's successor after the latter's death, that Vitez had renounced the diocese of Oradea to make that possible, and that the pope confirmed his transfer to Esztergom. He also noted that Matthias confiscated the eight thousand florins Szécsi bequeathed to the fabric of the Esztergom Cathedral, perhaps meaning the cardinal's relations with the king remained wintry until the former's death.⁵³ Although Matthias's motives for promoting Vitez are not clear, we can assume that Vitez, as a manifestly capable, the most powerful, and one of the eldest Hungarian prelates, was a suitable candidate for that position.

By that time, Vitez knew well how to rule a diocese. In Esztergom he quickly established a circle of subordinates he could rely on. Some were inherited from the previous archbishop; others were brought in from Oradea. Of the latter, Andrew Nagymihályi, who briefly served as Vitez's deputy count of Bihar, remained in his service. This is demonstrated by the fact that on April 9, 1470, Vitez gave him one of the estates of the Pietra Șoimului Castle as a reward for many years of faithful service.⁵⁴ The castle was then still held by the Losoncis, which means Vitez had not yet bought them out. In November of the same year, he appeared before the palatine's court with Nagymihályi, because the latter requested a copy of Ladislaus Pálóci's verdict from 1466, confirming Vitez's possession of the castle, so he could defend his right to the estate he was given. Vitez needed the original document himself, so he had the court make a copy.⁵⁵

Another important person Vitez brought to Esztergom was George Polycarp Kosztoláni. He had by then become an experienced diplomat and served as Vitez's secretary at least in 1466 and 1467. King Matthias explicitly mentioned him as such in the letter of donation issued to him and his family on April 4, 1467.⁵⁶ Kosztoláni was Vitez's secretary in the previous year as well, and he personally participated in the issuing of Vitez's charters. His signature—*Geor. polycarpus Secretarius*—can be found on one of them, containing the instructions issued to Vitez's tithe collectors in Bratislava county on June 10, 1466.⁵⁷ His tenure of this office ended in 1467, when he was sent to Rome as a royal emissary. He made a home for himself there, found employment at the Apostolic Chancery, and married one of George of Trebizond's daughters.⁵⁸

Among the attendants Vitez inherited from Szécsi, there was the old diplomat and erstwhile lector of Esztergom Simon of Treviso, appointed as archbishop of Bar (in today's Montenegro) in 1461.⁵⁹ He stepped in as the archiepiscopal vicar of Esz-

53 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 564. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 177.

54 DL 88 496.

55 DL 88 513.

56 DL 75 653. Kubinyi thought this meant that Kosztoláni passed from the king's service to Vitez's: Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 87.

57 DL 16 363.

58 Pajorin, "L'Influsso del concilio di Basilea," 112.

59 Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:89.

tergom during the period of vacancy between Szécsi's death and Vitez's investiture.⁶⁰ He retained that position for a while during Vitez's archiepiscopate,⁶¹ although not for long, as he was titled as Vitez's former vicar by pope Paul II in June 1467.⁶² In March 1469 Vitez already had a new archiepiscopal vicar—Michael, titular bishop of Milcovul in Moldavia.⁶³

Among other established members of the archdiocese of Esztergom, Vitez relied heavily on George of Schönberg, provost of Bratislava. Vitez appointed him as his vicar *in spiritualibus* on April 26, 1469, but with a jurisdiction limited to the area between the rivers Váh, Morava and Danube, where he was allowed to adjudicate in Vitez's name. He was expressly provided with this authority so the professors and students of the university Vitez founded in Bratislava would not have to leave the city to appear before the ecclesiastical court.⁶⁴ Schönberg was also appointed as Vitez's vice-chancellor of the University of Bratislava, remaining in that office until his death in 1486.⁶⁵ The Viennese theology professor Leonard Huntzpichler praised him as an excellent choice for that position.⁶⁶ Parallel to that, Schönberg continued serving as the king's envoy, particularly to German princes.⁶⁷ George's plethora of offices was complemented in August 1469 by the pope's permission to wear episcopal insignia, issued on King Matthias's request.⁶⁸

Another member of Vitez's circle was Nicholas of Lunga (Nyújtod in Hungarian), canon of Székesfehérvár and, from 1467, bishop of Knin.⁶⁹ He served as Vitez's assessor in the archiepiscopal court, and Vitez would delegate him to hear cases in his absence.⁷⁰ As a highly educated man, who studied in Vienna and Padua,⁷¹ he fit the model of attendants usually employed by Vitez.

These were not all Vitez's assistants. We know there were more; for example, when Vitez left the Diet of Nuremberg in the early summer of 1467, he left behind one

60 György Bónis, *Szentszéki regeszták—Iratok az egyházi bírászkodás történetéhez a középkori Magyarországon* (Budapest: Püski, 1997), 367, no. 3016.

61 He was mentioned as such in early 1466: see DL 16 305 and DF 286 820.

62 MREV, 3:187, doc. 304.

63 DL 88 476; DL 16 826. Michael was mentioned as also holding the archdeaconry of Nógrád, a canonry of Esztergom, and other benefices. See also Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:191.

64 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 222–23, doc. 46. For a list of cases that fell under the authority of ecclesiastical courts according to the Hungarian law (revised in 1462), see *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, ed. Bak, 3:17.

65 György Székely, "Universitätskanzler im Ungarn des 14–15. Jahrhunderts," in *Universitas Budensis 1395–1995*, ed. Szögi and Varga, 35–50 at 50.

66 Frank, *Der antikonkiliaristische Dominikaner Leonhard Huntzpichler*, 377–78.

67 See Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 509–10 and MKL, 1:236, doc. 172.

68 Császár, *Az Academia Istropolitana*, 113–14, doc. 12.

69 Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:251. He was mentioned by Andrew Pannonius in 1467: see Andreas Pannonius, "Libellus de virtutibus," ed. Fraknói and Ábel, 131.

70 DF 237 610.

71 Kalous, "King Matthias," 8.

Hungarian bishop to act as Matthias's envoy—a "bischoff von Bauden," mentioned on August 1.⁷² This probably referred to the see of Vidin, a titular office which, according to Eubel, was at that time occupied by Andrew of Sárospatak, who also had episcopal authorities in the diocese of Nitra.⁷³ Perhaps he was an agent of Vitez's, especially as the diocese of Nitra was then under the latter's control, as discussed below. However, Vitus Hündler was still alive then, and still a bishop of Vidin. In 1467 he served, at least for a while, as an episcopal vicar to Demetrius Čupor in Győr,⁷⁴ while keeping his tenure as an episcopal vicar of Pécs. However, by then he was in terrible relations with his employer, Janus Pannonius. Hündler himself admitted that Pannonius could not stand him—allegedly because he did not like Germans—and was trying to find employment elsewhere. Pannonius apparently even tried to deprive him of his income and seized his personal belongings; Hündler thought it necessary to threaten him with excommunication to get them back.⁷⁵ Considering such farcically bad relations, it would have been strange for Hündler to accompany Vitez to Nuremberg. It seems more likely that the abovementioned Andrew of Sárospatak was the person Vitez would have relied on.

Vitez's position in Esztergom was, as we have seen, strengthened by a group of reliable attendants. However, his promotion also created opportunities for his rivals. In March 1465, before Vitez's transfer to Esztergom was finalized, King Matthias asked the pope to assign the diocese of Oradea to John Beckensloer as soon as it became vacant.⁷⁶ This probably did not appeal to Vitez's adherents.⁷⁷ Not long afterwards, Matthias repeated the request, this time before the new pope, Paul II, for Stephen Várdai to be made a cardinal.⁷⁸ A few months later he did so again, adding he had full confidence in Várdai, and that he intended to appoint him as the military commander of the Belgrade region, then exposed to Ottoman raids, during the short anti-Ottoman campaign of 1465.⁷⁹ The king's request was finally fulfilled in early 1468.⁸⁰ This meant Matthias gave significant power to two people who could not have been considered Vitez's allies. Precisely at this time, around 1465, a new clash between the king and the newly created primate erupted, again involving the diocese of Zagreb.

72 UB, 472, doc. 405.

73 Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:108.

74 DF 207 913.

75 Koller, *Historia Episcopatus Quinqueecclesiarum* (Bratislava: Landerer, 1782–1812), 4:338–39, 4:344–46, and 4:353–55.

76 MKL, 1:81–82, doc. 61.

77 Birnbaum thought that Janus Pannonius had been hoping to receive his uncle's former diocese, because it was allegedly wealthier than his: Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 178–79. Kubinyi disagreed, indicating that the income of Pannonius's diocese of Pécs was more or less equal to that of Oradea. See Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus," 9–10. It should not be disregarded, however, that Vitez had amassed other assets for the bishopric of Oradea, such as Bihar county.

78 MKL, 1:91–92, doc. 67. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 137.

79 MKL, 1:99–101, doc. 73.

80 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 46.

As previously mentioned, in 1464 Matthias ceased to recognize Demetrius Čupor as bishop of Zagreb. In a letter written in May 1465 (and carried to the pope by Bishop Mark of Knin), the king said he and the royal council agreed that Demetrius should not be allowed to control the episcopal fortresses and estates. He mentioned that Demetrius was offered Pécsvárad Abbey, to be vacated by Beckensloer's appointment as bishop of Oradea, in exchange for his diocese. As Demetrius refused the offer, it was decided that the diocese of Zagreb would be divided into a spiritual and a temporal component. Demetrius was to retain the spiritual authority, together with a yearly stipend and some of the episcopal estates. The temporal authority was to be handed over to Oswald Thuz, together with Pécsvárad Abbey. The pope was merely asked to confirm this as a *fait accompli*. Also, in this letter Matthias finally declared that he considered the question of Vitez's transfer to Zagreb closed, due to the latter's transfer to Esztergom.⁸¹ The fact that he had waited for so long to formally dismiss the issue might mean he held on to it, perhaps as a threat to Vitez.

However, Matthias made a mistake. When he dispatched Bishop Mark to Rome, he sent Demetrius with him, with the task of persuading the pope to accept Matthias's decisions. In a letter Demetrius was supposed to deliver to the pope, Matthias claimed that he had been acting in the demoted bishop's best interest, to enable him to rest after a lifetime of hardships.⁸² But Demetrius had no intention of buckling under Matthias's requests. On the contrary, he persuaded Pope Paul II to, on June 14, 1465, declare his claim to the diocese of Zagreb valid and, what is much more, to appoint him as bishop of Zagreb anew, emphasizing that he was to have full spiritual and temporal authority.⁸³ Thereby all doubts regarding Demetrius's position were removed, and he returned to Slavonia a full-fledged bishop, confirmed by the pope. Immediately after his return, he retreated to the episcopal fortress of Garić and on August 26 appointed a procurator who went to Rome and settled the matter of his *servitia*.⁸⁴

As could have been expected, Matthias was incensed. He wrote to Paul II that he considered Demetrius incompetent and untrustworthy, and that he would not recognize him as bishop of Zagreb. However, he acceded to the pope's refusal to divide the diocese. Therefore, he forced Demetrius to renounce it before himself and the papal nuncio, Girolamo Lando. In compensation, Demetrius was given the diocese of Bosnia—the smallest and poorest one in the kingdom—and Bijela Abbey (with the argument that it was close to his family's estates), along with a yearly stipend. As the bishopric of Zagreb was therefore vacant, the king invoked his right of patronage and appointed Oswald Thuz as its bishop.⁸⁵ As the king also warned the pope not to trust his critics, it seems someone was acting in Demetrius's favour in Rome. Per-

⁸¹ MHEZ, 7:522, doc. 463.

⁸² MHEZ, 7:524, doc. 465, and MKL, 1:95–96, doc. 69.

⁸³ MHEZ, 7:530–31, docs. 472–73.

⁸⁴ MHEZ, 7:539, doc. 480.

⁸⁵ MHEZ, 7:528, doc. 470. Lukinović also thought that Demetrius was acting under duress: see Lukinović, "Biskup Demetrije Čupor," 205. Cf. Razum, "Osvaldo Thuz," 78–79.

haps this was Vitez trying to protect his ally. In the end, the king did not execute this plan, perhaps purely by chance. Namely, Augustine of Shalanky died and the diocese of Győr became vacant, so Matthias decided to give it to Demetrius. In April 1466, the king asked the pope to confirm this decision, and to confirm Thuz as bishop of Zagreb, which the pope apparently had still not done, perhaps out of consideration for Demetrius.⁸⁶ On the same occasion, Matthias's emissary to the pope, Provost George Handó of Pécs, promised in Demetrius's name that the *servitium* for the diocese of Győr would be paid.⁸⁷

Perhaps Vitez stood in the background of these events, as it is unlikely Demetrius would have managed to sway the pope's opinion by himself. Exactly at the time when he and Bishop Mark were sent to Rome, in early May 1465, Janus Pannonius and John Rozgonyi were there as King Matthias's emissaries, sent there to swear fealty to the new pope on the king's behalf.⁸⁸ Bonfini confirms that Mark arrived in Rome while the mentioned emissaries were still there,⁸⁹ and Pannonius was certainly in Rome at least until May 19.⁹⁰ During that time he gave two speeches before the pope—one public and one private—in which he praised Matthias's efforts in fighting the Ottomans and encouraged the pope to continue financing him.⁹¹ Pannonius, therefore, had more than one opportunity to act in Demetrius's favour, and if he did, it is hard to imagine he would have done so without Vitez's approval. The fact that Pannonius, upon his return to Hungary in July 1465, fell out of favour with King Matthias,⁹² indicates he did something in Rome that displeased the king. In fact, it is possible that the person responsible for his loss of favour was the papal nuncio Girolamo Lando, as Pannonius became very angry with him after these events. In a letter to Galeotto Marzio, he called Lando a liar, an evil beast and a lazy glutton.⁹³

Considering Matthias's displeasure with Janus, it is conceivable the latter helped Demetrius gain the pope's favour. Perhaps Vitez was trying to protect his ally, and consequently his own influence in the diocese of Zagreb, by instructing Pannonius to back Demetrius's claim in Rome. We can assume Lando learned about Janus's actions and passed the information on to Matthias, causing Pannonius's fall from grace. Also, if Vitez was protecting Demetrius, he did not fail completely. Demetrius's transfer to Győr was a relatively good compromise: Vitez's ally remained a full-fledged bishop

86 MKL, 1:137–39, doc. 103. The pope promptly complied with Matthias's requests. See MHEZ, 2:306, doc. 248.

87 MCV, 2:539–40, doc. 1038. Handó was sent to Rome in early 1466. See MKL, 1:135–36, doc. 101.

88 According to the Venetian authorities, these two left Buda on February 20. See MDE, 1:313, doc. 192.

89 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 565.

90 MHEZ, 7:526, doc. 467. See also Razum, "Osvaldo Thuz," 311.

91 Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 58–69. See also Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 159.

92 See Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 60–61 and 177–79.

93 Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 95–97, doc. 17. Lando was then at Matthias's court because he was again dispatched as a nuncio to Hungary in 1464, to support the king's crusading efforts. See Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 161.

with a real diocese, not just an empty title. Despite that, Demetrius was not satisfied with his new diocese and was unsuccessfully trying to return to Zagreb, claiming in 1470 he was better suited to be its bishop than Oswald Thuz, who allegedly did not know the local language.⁹⁴

Whether or not Vitez supported Demetrius or not, this game of cathedras proved that he, although elevated to the rank of primate, did not possess enough power to openly challenge Matthias's will even in ecclesiastical matters. The time of weak rulers, around whom prelates and barons could weave their plots, was over. Matthias intended to rule, both over the church and the state, whether the prelates liked it or not. However, this did not mean that he did not trust Vitez or consider him useful, at least compared to other prelates.

One of the less trustworthy prelates was Thomas Himfi, recently made bishop of Nitra and provided with the pope's protection, specifically from Vitez. He once more displayed his fickleness, providing Vitez the opportunity to take his revenge and simultaneously increase his power. Here we examine how Vitez gained control of the diocese of Nitra.

Thomas was probably one of those prelates of whom Matthias later wrote to the pope that they were working against him. As we know from one of the king's charters, Thomas and his family, the Himfis, had in 1464, while Matthias was occupied with the siege of Zvornik, harboured the king's enemies, "Czechs and foreigners," in their fortresses of Pannonhalma and Döbrönte. They were also found guilty of attaching the royal seal, ripped from an original charter, to a forged one. Matthias punished the bishop and his relatives by confiscating their estates.⁹⁵ The "Czechs and foreigners" were the last remaining groups of the Brethren, led by John Švehla, which Matthias would wipe out in a battle near Kostol'ani, not far from Nitra, in early 1467.⁹⁶

Due to Thomas's treason, the king took the control of the diocese of Nitra away from him.⁹⁷ Matthias's men governed it for a while, but it was eventually put under Vitez's control. According to a complaint brought before the king by the Benedictines of St. Hippolytus's Abbey on the Zobor Hill by Nitra, Vitez held the fortress of Nitra as early as mid-1467, and his retainer Peter Kot was stationed there as its castellan. After their abbot died sometime before August 1467, Vitez ordered Kot to take control of their abbey, which he did, also seizing the charters containing the abbey's privileges.⁹⁸

Vitez was probably given control over Nitra's fortress during the Transylvanian revolt, perhaps to strengthen the king's control over the North, and perhaps in payment for his loyalty. Why Vitez occupied Zobor Abbey remains unclear, but it is per-

⁹⁴ Lukinović, "Biskup Demetrije Čupor," 205; Razum, "Osvaldo Thuz," 87–88.

⁹⁵ Renáta Kupovics, "A döbrönteí vár kutatása," *Castrum* 9, no. 1 (2009): 31–68 at 39; Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:96–98, doc. 364.

⁹⁶ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 479; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 300; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 58.

⁹⁷ Solymosi, "König Matthias Corvinus," 294.

⁹⁸ DF 205 862; transcript in Anon., *Episcopatus Nitriensis eiusque praesulum memoria*, 119–21.

haps just opportunism,⁹⁹ or that it was also previously under Thomas Himfi's control. In any case, presumably not to displease the pope, the king still recognized Thomas as bishop of Nitra. He was titled as such in the charters confirmed by the king on April 18, 1468. Those charters were brought before Matthias by Vitez, who asked the king to reconfirm them because their seals were ripped off by the laymen who occupied Nitra. Significantly, among them was the one by which King Charles I donated Nitra county to the city's bishopric.¹⁰⁰ On this basis, we can assume Vitez was given control of the diocese's temporal holdings, most significantly its fortifications.¹⁰¹ That was essentially the same arrangement as the one previously offered to Demetrius Čupor, and the one forced on Vitez himself near the end of his life.

This shows that Vitez's relations with the king improved greatly during the second half of the 1460s. Nitra and Zobor Abbey were only a few among a multitude of ecclesiastical institutions Vitez brought under his control. The alliance with his nephew Janus Pannonius, Demetrius Čupor and (judging by his involvement in the intrigues with the Polish king in 1472) Oswald Thuz solidified his power in the Hungarian church. On the occasion of his reconciliation with the king in December 1471,¹⁰² it was mentioned that he held the rights of patronage over the abbeys of Bakonybél and Sâniob,¹⁰³ as well as over the Premonstratensian provostries of Šahy and Bozók,¹⁰⁴ which Matthias himself had granted him. Some of these suffered due to Vitez's ultimate downfall. For example, Matthias rescinded Sâniob's status as a "locus credibilis" (place of authentication) on May 1, 1472, not long after Vitez's arrest, formally because its seal was used to usurp privileges of the diocese of Oradea.¹⁰⁵

Vitez also held Pannonhalma Abbey for a while. As it was previously one of Thomas Himfi's benefices, we can assume it was entrusted to Vitez at the same time as Nitra. Pope Paul II wrote to Vitez on June 20, 1471, that Thomas Himfi constantly complained Vitez was denying him the incomes of both the diocese of Nitra and Pannonhalma Abbey, but that he (the pope) had so far considered Vitez's reasons for doing so valid. However, as this had by then been going on for a long time, he encouraged Vitez to let Thomas have those incomes.¹⁰⁶ The pope simultaneously wrote to Albert Vetési

99 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 24.

100 DF 273 069; transcript in Anon., *Episcopatus Nitriensis eiusque praesulum memoria*, 294–97. Another example in Vagner, *Adalékok a Nyitrai székes-káptalan történetéhez*, 421, doc. 23.

101 Anon., *Episcopatus Nitriensis eiusque praesulum memoria*, 293–94, claims that Vitez controlled only the temporal aspects of the diocese; cf. Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:472.

102 Török, *Magyarország primásai* (Pest: Laufer és Stolpnál, 1859), 2:79–81, doc. 71.

103 The former abbey is referred to simply as "Bél" in the document. There were two abbeys with that name in medieval Hungary (see Romhány, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok*, 9), but the one in question was almost certainly Bakonybél, as that abbey was previously under Szécsi's patronage. See MREV, 3:178–80, docs. 291–92. Regarding Sâniob, see Romhány, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok*, 90–91.

104 Regarding these, see Romhány, *Kolostorok és társaskáptalanok*, 14 and 77.

105 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:564.

106 Theiner, 2:425–26, doc. 607.

and Gabriel of Matuchina, asking them to intercede with Vitez in Thomas's favour.¹⁰⁷ This should probably be viewed in the context of the pope's collaboration with Matthias on putting pressure on Vitez during 1471, due to the latter's distancing from Matthias's policy.

In any case, by the time of the Polish entry into the Bohemian succession crisis, Vitez had become the most powerful prelate in Hungary, both in terms of office and direct control of its church. The only honour he lacked was a cardinal's hat, although there are indications he might have received it had he lived somewhat longer. Namely, Sixtus IV returned to the anti-Ottoman policy of his predecessors and was trying to end the Bohemian Crusade, but the Polish entry into the fray had diminished hopes that an anti-Ottoman crusade could materialize. Some of the cardinals even assumed King Matthias would make some arrangement with the sultan out of necessity.¹⁰⁸ The papal legate, Cardinal Marco Barbo, who was sent in January 1472 to mediate between Casimir IV and Matthias and to persuade them to fight the Ottomans instead of each other,¹⁰⁹ was issued written instructions on May 1. According to them, he was to try to reconcile Matthias with his prelates and barons, but most of all with Vitez, as he was the most influential among them. If Matthias would ask for a cardinal's hat for Vitez to regain his support, the legate was to give a vague response—that the pope would promote Vitez as soon as possible, but, in any case, only if he remained loyal to his king.¹¹⁰ This does not mean Matthias really intended to secure a cardinal's hat for Vitez, but that the pope thought that he might attempt it. Also, Bisticci's claim that Vitez, due to his virtues, would certainly have become a cardinal if he had lived a little longer, might mean the Curia was considering his appointment.¹¹¹ This might have fit into Sixtus's plans, as Vitez had the reputation of being an advocate of anti-Ottoman policies.

107 Theiner, 2:426, doc. 608.

108 MDE, 2:238–39, doc. 169.

109 Regarding his legation, see Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 71–73 and 157. See also CE, 1/1:259–64, docs. 224–225. Note that King Matthias strongly resisted this mission and instructed his emissary, Nicholas of Lunga, to persuade the pope not to replace Roverella with Barbo. See Kalous, “King Matthias,” 12–17.

110 Theiner, 2:436–38, doc. 622. Interestingly, the same response was to be given to the emperor if he would request the same for one of his prelates.

111 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:322.