

Chapter 2

INSTRUMENTS OF POWER

EVERY PERSON, NO matter how great their achievements, must begin somewhere. Vitez's beginning was not glamorous. He did not make a triumphant entry into the world of Central European late medieval politics, and he did not rise instantly through its ranks. On the contrary, he, as a member of a relatively low-ranking Slavonian noble family, did not have either the funds, fame, or influence to instantly become a factor in the higher echelons of the Kingdom of Hungary. His beginnings were humble, and he had to advance slowly and painstakingly through its ranks. In this chapter we examine his advancement through the ranks of the Hungarian ecclesiastical hierarchy and the royal chancery.

Vitez began his career as a notary in the Hungarian chancery of Emperor Sigismund. We first find him as such in November 1437.¹ That position did not require any education other than basic Latin literacy,² as his tasks consisted mainly of penning charters pertaining to the Kingdom of Hungary.³ The position did not by itself carry much prestige. While describing the workings of the Austrian ducal chancery, Piccolomini said that notaries were easily replaced, and their incomes meager.⁴ Although Hungarian chanceries did have some peculiarities regarding the documents they produced,⁵ Vitez's income was probably as modest and his workplace as insecure as those of his Austrian colleagues. However, chancery service did hold promise of social advancement, and was often rewarded with ecclesiastical offices.⁶ It did not take long for Vitez to receive one.

After Sigismund's death and the election of Albert of Habsburg as king of Hungary, Vitez continued to serve the new ruler. Shortly after his coronation in early 1438,⁷ Albert endowed Vitez with the office of *custos* (roughly equivalent to a Western sac-

1 DL 35 058.

2 Although Vitez was styled a *magister*, this title was by then applied to any official: see Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 296. Cf. Prokopp, "The Scholarship of Johannes Vitéz," 351. For comparison's sake, out of thirty-three protonotaries of Emperor Frederick III, only eight held any academic degree: see Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 576.

3 Szakály, "Vitéz János," 11.

4 *Briefwechsel* part III, *Briefe als Bischof von Siena*, vol. 1, *Briefe von seiner Erhebung zum Bischof von Siena bis zum Ausgang des Regensburger Reichstages (23. September 1450–1. Juni 1454)* (hereafter III/1):403–4, doc. 215.

5 See Daniela Dvořáková, "Aspekte der *Narrationes* der Schenkungsurkunden Sigismunds für Ungarische Adelige," in *Kaiser Sigismund (1368–1437): Zur Herrschaftspraxis eines europäischen Monarchen*, ed. Karel Hruza and Alexandra Kaar (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012), 235–44 at 235–38.

6 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 297; Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 601; Szakály, "Vitéz János," 12.

7 For Albert's election and coronation, see Günther Hödl, *Albrecht II. Königtum, Reichsregierung und Reichsreform 1438–1439* (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1978), 10 and 15.

ristan) in the cathedral chapter of Zagreb. This endowment marked the beginning of Vitez's rise in the ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. It, however, as most things in Vitez's life, did not come easily. A vacant office was guaranteed to attract clerics willing to vie for it. Indeed, in January 1438 a certain Marinus of Sevnica petitioned the pope for the office and received it.⁸ He was a member of the Apostolic Chancery,⁹ and it was customary for papal officials to request recently vacated offices for themselves.¹⁰ However, a papal grant did not guarantee they would receive them.¹¹ At least one other contender petitioned the pope,¹² and the chapter of Zagreb, acting of its own accord, elected one of its own members to the office.¹³ Thanks to King Albert's support, Vitez prevailed over the other contenders and the chapter was forced to accept him as one of its members. He requested and received a papal confirmation on August 14, 1438 in the form of a *nova provisio*,¹⁴ which was usually issued when one's right to an office was disputed.¹⁵ Only Marinus of Sevnica refused to relent. He pledged to pay the annate (ecclesiastical tax due to the Apostolic Camera) for the office,¹⁶ started a lengthy lawsuit,¹⁷ and continued to press his claim as late as 1446.¹⁸ By then this issue had become irrelevant to Vitez.

Difficulties such as these were typical for Vitez's time, when the popes, chapters, and lay authorities were still contending the right to award ecclesiastical offices.¹⁹ Although the lay lords had the most direct power and their candidates were therefore able to *de facto* take possession of their offices, as Vitez had, some contenders were able to bypass the lay patron and petition the pope directly, as Vitez's rivals did.²⁰ Sometimes they were successful. For example, Vincent Kot was elected and confirmed

8 MHEZ, 6:513–14, doc. 483. Marinus was an acolyte in 1439: see *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:175–76, doc. 614.

9 He was an abbreviator in 1446, so it is probable that he held some post in the Chancery at this time as well: see *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:232, doc. 891 and MHEZ, 7:73, doc. 71.

10 Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 21.

11 See Jadranka Neralić, "...tibi, qui ut asseris, de nobili genere ex utroque parente procreatus existis, auctoritate presentium indulgemus...: Plemstvo i crkvena karijera u papinskim dokumentima 15. Stoljeća," in *Izabrane teme iz hrvatske povijesti—Zbornik radova sa znanstvenih kolokvija Dies historiae 2004.–2006.*, ed. Suzana Miljan and Marko Jerković (Zagreb: Društvo studenata povijesti "Ivan Lučić-Lucius," 2007), 155–82 at 168–69.

12 MHEZ, 6:515–16, doc. 486 and *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:161, doc. 542.

13 MHEZ, 6:519–20, doc. 491 and *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:162, doc. 548.

14 MHEZ, 6:539, doc. 512.

15 Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 160.

16 MVC, 2:99, doc. 126.

17 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:175–76, doc. 614.

18 MHEZ, 7:73, doc. 71; *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:232, doc. 891; MVC, 2:121, doc. 163.

19 Regarding this, see Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance*, 78–80, 84 and 98–99.

20 Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 145.

as archbishop of Gniezno in 1436 despite the protests of the Polish king Wladislas III.²¹ However, the situation in Hungary favoured the king more than the pope, as in 1404 King Sigismund abrogated the right of clerical patrons to award ecclesiastical offices.²² He later reached a compromise with the College of Cardinals during the Council of Constance, allowing the Holy See merely to confirm candidates presented by the king.²³ Unsurprisingly, the papacy never fully assented to this arrangement, claiming that Sigismund had imposed “servitude” upon the Church in Hungary.²⁴ It, however, benefited Vitez greatly, as it enabled him to prevail over the pope’s candidates.

His case was a common example of Sigismund’s practice of endowing his clerks with ecclesiastical offices,²⁵ continued by his successor Albert of Habsburg. Many of them prospered during the latter’s short reign. For example, Stephen Basso of Bük, a protonotary in Albert’s Hungarian chancery (who also held high offices during Sigismund’s reign), was royally awarded in 1439 by becoming provost of Székesfehérvár. That office had previously become vacant by the king’s promotion of Benedict son of Michael to the bishopric of Győr.²⁶

Benedict’s career was quite similar to Vitez’s. A man of lowly origins (unlike Vitez, he was probably first-generation nobility), he rose by serving the ruler as an adviser and diplomat.²⁷ He accompanied King Sigismund to the Council of Constance, the imperial coronation in Rome and the Council of Basel, and would often represent the king at the Holy See, where he was given the office of protonotary apostolic.²⁸ He went on to serve King Albert, who appointed him his special adviser (*consiliarius specialis*). Benedict helped Albert to be elected as king of Hungary, and he accompanied him on

21 CE, 2:351, doc. 241. Pope Eugene IV apologized to the king, but nonetheless refused to change his decision. The king’s candidate was Wladislas of Oporów, who was then bishop of Włocławek. See CE, 2:356–57, doc. 244.

22 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 263–64.

23 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 277.

24 CE, 2:363–64, doc. 246.

25 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 278.

26 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:182–83, doc. 647 and 183, doc. 650. For his career, see Tamás Fedeles, “Crkvene veze između Pečuha i Zagreba: Pečuški kanonici u zagrebačkom stolnom kaptolu (1354.–1526.),” *Etnografija hrvata u Mađarskoj* 11 (2004): 141–61 at 145–46 and Szakály, “Vitez János,” 11–12. Provosts of Székesfehérvár were subject directly to the pope: see *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:60, doc. 90 and 65, doc. 113.

27 Mályusz thought that Benedict was related to the Vincze of Szentgyörgy family (Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 291). However, there was no blood relation between them: see Erik Fügedi, “A Szentgyörgyi Vincze család,” *A Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleményei* 11 (1972): 261–70 at 261–62 (my thanks to Norbert Tóth for directing me to this article). The first estate his family can be linked to is Labdásvarsány (see DL 12 377; partially transcribed in *Budapest történetének okleveles emlékei*, vol. 3, 1382–1439, ed. Bernát Lajos Kumorovitz (Budapest: Budapest Történeti Múzeum, 1987), 168, doc. 996); it was given to Benedict and his relatives by King Sigismund in 1416 (János Károlyi, *Fejér vármegye története*, 3 vols. (Székesfehérvár: Csitári Kő- és Könyvnyomdája, 1899), 3:467–68, doc. 36). See also Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 2:71 and 2:83.

28 DL 72 902. There were twelve protonotaries in the Apostolic Chancery, some of whom were honorary, as Benedict probably was: see Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 44.

his campaigns against the Poles and their allies in Bohemia.²⁹ Albert unsuccessfully tried to make him bishop of Zagreb in 1438,³⁰ finally succeeding to secure for him the see of Győr in 1439.³¹ Benedict continued to serve the king, representing him when a truce with Poland was concluded in Namysłów in February 1439 and during the peace negotiations that followed.³²

This example shows that there were successful, ambitious men in the royal chancery when Vitez began work there, who might have served as role-models for him. Another was Matthias of Gotalovac, a powerful chancery official and practically the central figure of the royal bureaucracy during the 1430s.³³ He was appointed as bishop of Vác in late 1437.³⁴ Yet another was Gregory Némethi, a protonotary, who managed to become custos, and later provost of the Pécs cathedral.³⁵

All these men were much more experienced than Vitez, and incomparably more powerful. Accordingly, the rewards they were given by the ruler for their service were greater. Although the office of a custos was an enormous boon for a young notary like Vitez, it was not disproportionately great. Unlike in other chapters in Hungary, in the cathedral chapter of Zagreb the custos was not the fourth most prestigious official—he was preceded by all of the archdeacons.³⁶ Still, the office did bring a considerable income.

Vitez's duties were to take care of the cathedral's valuables and to keep it tidy and furnished with liturgical equipment. He was also supposed to keep the chapter's records and safeguard its seal.³⁷ However, given his service at the chancery, we have reason to doubt he had ever performed these duties personally. It is more likely he did so through a substitute.³⁸ Although the chapter charter prescribed that absent

29 DL 72 903.

30 MHEZ, 6:554, doc. 520. The summary wrongly identifies Benedict of Zvolen as the candidate, but the latter was never a provost of Székesfehérvár.

31 The pope deigned to confirm him half a year later; *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:183, doc. 649.

32 CE, 2:388, doc. 254 and 2:391, doc. 256. On both occasions Kaspar Schlick also served as the king's envoy.

33 High chancellor from 1434 to 1437, and again in 1439 (Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:89). See also Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 293–94; Szakály, "Vitéz János," 11–12 and Fedeles, "Crkvene veze," 147–48.

34 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:156–57, docs. 520 and 522.

35 Fedeles, "Crkvene veze," 148.

36 Ante Gulin, *Hrvatski srednjovjekovni kaptoli—Loca credibilia sjeverne i središnje Hrvatske* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2001), 52–53.

37 Gulin, *Hrvatski srednjovjekovni kaptoli*, 15.

38 In the fifteenth century it was not unusual for holders of ecclesiastical offices to be permanently absent (Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 348–49; see also Stump, *The Reforms of the Council of Constance*, 166). For example, Matthias of Gotalovac received a permission from the pope to receive the income as provost of Zagreb without performing the required duties (Gulin, *Hrvatski srednjovjekovni kaptoli*, 45–46).

members were to be deprived of their income, that rule was often ignored.³⁹ By the mid-fifteenth century, absentee canons of Zagreb, by right of ancient custom, were not obligated to be present at their posts if they were in the king's service.⁴⁰ In their stead, liturgical and other duties were performed by substitutes—prebendaries or *clerici chori*.⁴¹ In the custos's case, he had a subcustos to rely on.⁴² Also, his office did not include pastoral care, thus being literally a sinecure,⁴³ which was the most sought after source of income among clerics.⁴⁴

There are only two pieces of information that might indicate Vitez had resided in Zagreb: his own statement, made in 1450, that he knew Benedict of Zvolen while the latter was still in minor orders,⁴⁵ and Paul of Ivanič's claim that Vitez had long resided within the diocese of Zagreb.⁴⁶ However, Benedict was already a priest when he became a member of the chapter of Zagreb in 1437,⁴⁷ and it is much more likely Vitez had met him at the University of Vienna. As for Paul's claim, he was possibly exaggerating.

As there is no information on his actions in the chapter of Zagreb, we may assume that Vitez spent most of his time at the royal chancery. In August 1439 he was already King Albert's protonotary,⁴⁸ and it is probable that he was accompanying the king at the time.⁴⁹ Several royal charters, issued in Bodrog on October 12, 1439 and ordering that some estates, previously pawned to the Rozgonyi family (named after Rozhanovce in today's Slovakia) by the king or his predecessor, were to be permanently transferred to them, name Vitez as one of the king's agents charged with their execution.⁵⁰ However, the king's orders were not carried out by Vitez, but by his colleague, notary Dennis of Székesfehérvár. This is the last time such menial tasks were assigned to Vitez, while Dennis continued to perform them, even after he was promoted to protonotary around 1441.⁵¹

39 Marko Jerković, "Kandidati za prebendu zagrebačkog kaptola u provizijama pape Bonifacija IX. (1389.–1404.)," *Croatica christiana periodica* 37, no. 72 (2013): 21–49 at 41.

40 MHEZ, 7:415, doc. 391.

41 Fedeles, "Crkvene veze," 142; Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 298.

42 The chapter charter does mention the office of subcustos, although its income was not defined. See MHEZ, 296–98.

43 MHEZ, 6:513–14, doc. 483; MHEZ, 7:73, doc. 71.

44 Neralić, "...tibi, qui ut asseris," 162.

45 MHEZ, 7:186, doc. 180; Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 150, doc. 72. See also Ljudevit Ivančan, *Podatci o zagrebačkim kanonicima, 1912–1924*, unpublished manuscript in Nadbiskupijski arhiv Zagreb, 174.

46 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 152, doc. 72, note k.

47 MHEZ, 6:493–94, doc. 467.

48 DF 231 184 and 231 192. See also Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 107.

49 For Albert's itinerary, see Hödl, *Albrecht II*, 28–36.

50 DL 13 447, 13 448, 13 450, and 13 452. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 15–16.

51 See DL 13 641, also concerning a livery of seisin involving the Rozgonyis.

Unlike mere notaries, protonotaries were important officials who would control the chancery while the chancellor was absent.⁵² In fifteenth-century Hungary, they were highly valued for their skills.⁵³ Vitez had become proficient in internal Hungarian and international politics, possibly by learning from experienced diplomats such as Kaspar Schlick, John de Dominis, Matthias of Gotalovac, Benedict son of Michael, or others, which would have made him capable of performing complex and sensitive duties. Some authors believe Matthias of Gotalovac might have mentored Vitez during his early years.⁵⁴ However, even though they were both Slavonians, it seems that they were never in close contact.⁵⁵

The two people who most likely did help advance Vitez's career were the Dalmatian John de Dominis and the Italian Taddeo degli Adelmari. Klára Pajorin was the first to assume that De Dominis had a hand in appointing Vitez to an office in Zagreb.⁵⁶ De Dominis, then bishop of Senj, would often travel between the Hungarian court and the Curia at the time when Vitez presented his supplication,⁵⁷ and it was common for bishops visiting the Curia to act as procurators for supplicants from their regions.⁵⁸ De Dominis was indeed known to do so either himself, as in the case of Matthias of Gotalovac in January 1438,⁵⁹ or through his agents, as in the case of Stephen Basso in February 1439.⁶⁰ Considering the future relations between De Dominis and Vitez, it is likely the old diplomat noticed him then. As for Taddeo degli Adelmari, he performed similar favours for Hungarian supplicants. For example, he acted on behalf of Abel of Korčula when the latter was given the diocese of Zagreb in 1438,⁶¹ and was delegated by Dennis Szécsi to receive the pallium in his stead when he was elected as archbishop of Esztergom in 1440.⁶² Taddeo, too, may have come to know Vitez around this time.

52 Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 601.

53 Mályusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 296–97.

54 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 11; Szakály, "Vitéz János," 12; Fedeles, "Crkvene veze," 148.

55 See also Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 10.

56 Pajorin, "L'Influsso del concilio di Basilea," 102. Note that "de Dominis" (similarly to "degli Adelmari") is in the ablative case and denotes familial origins, not geographical ones. Even though it is not grammatically correct, we will refer to him as "Dominis" for the sake of clarity and brevity.

57 Dominis had started serving as a liaison between Hungary and the Holy See in King Sigismund's time: see Baum, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 287 and 290. In early 1438 he was appointed nuncio in Hungary and Bohemia (*Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:158–60, doc. 527 and 535). In March 1438 he was elevated to a *legatus missus* (*Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:163, doc. 553; full transcription in Theiner, 2:217, doc. 372). He was very successful in his office, managing to negotiate the Truce of Namysłów that ended Albert's war with Poland (CE, 2:386, doc. 254). In May 1439 the pope prolonged his mandate and sent him to serve King Albert as an adviser (Theiner, 2:219–20, doc. 375).

58 Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 51.

59 MCV, 2:730, doc. 1316.

60 MCV, 2:99–100, doc. 127.

61 MHEZ, 6:526–27, doc. 499.

62 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:187–88, docs. 674 and 675. The pope's emissary

The King's Reward

Although he was not at all a significant member of the Hungarian hierarchy, Vitez was becoming noticed by his superiors, and was well positioned to take the next chance for advancement, if it happened to present itself. It soon did. The first opportunity for Vitez to show his worth, and probably the kernel of his future career, was the embassy to Kraków in 1440. King Albert of Habsburg died in late 1439, leaving two kingdoms and a duchy—Hungary, Bohemia and Austria—without a ruler. The Polish king Wladislas III Jagiellon was a serious candidate for the Hungarian throne after King Sigismund's death,⁶³ and he renewed his bid after Albert's. The Hungarian Estates promised to deliver their response through an embassy, which was formed in January 1440. Its members were the ban of Dalmatia, Croatia and Slavonia Matko Talovac, judge royal Stephen Báthori, master of the treasury John Perenyi, master of the doorkeepers Ladislaus Pálóci and master of the stewards and count of Somogy and Virovitica Emeric Marcali. It was headed by John de Dominis, bishop of Senj.⁶⁴

These ambassadors were those who held the Estates' mandate, but the embassy itself was much larger, with an entourage of about one thousand cavalry.⁶⁵ The ambassadors were vested with full powers,⁶⁶ which were rarely conferred, especially when the matter to be negotiated was of high importance, as they gave them the liberty to negotiate virtually freely.⁶⁷ De Dominis's experience in negotiating with the Poles would have been valuable there, so it is not surprising that he headed the embassy, especially as he had previously gained King Wladislas's sympathies.⁶⁸

Later events make it apparent that Vitez was also going to Kraków. Surprisingly, the high chancellor Matthias of Gotalovac, then bishop of Vác, was not. This was perhaps because his inclusion would have caused uncertainties regarding precedence, as the Estates wanted De Dominis to preside over the negotiations.⁶⁹ Considering his experience, he was likely given free choice of which chancery officials to bring along.⁷⁰ He probably chose Vitez because he already knew of him. Even if they were not in personal contact before, they most likely were by then, as it was customary for older

for this matter was Valentine of Kapos, and the bishops charged with performing the ritual were Benedict son of Michael and Matthias of Gotalovac.

63 Before the election, the pope's emissary received instructions not to support either Albert or Wladislas publicly, but to support both of them in private. CE, 2:362–63, doc. 246.

64 CE, 2:410, doc. 268.

65 CE, 2:411, doc. 269.

66 CE, 2:415, doc. 273.

67 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 40.

68 Theiner, 2:219–20, doc. 375.

69 Cf. Szakály, "Vitéz János," 12. For issues of precedence in embassies, see Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 34–35.

70 Vitez was certainly not the only available candidate. Stephen Basso was probably still a protonotary at that time (see *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:183, doc. 650; MHEZ, 2:170, doc. 123), and there was also the abovementioned Dennis of Székesfehérvár.

ambassadors to tutor their younger colleagues; contemporary manuals on diplomacy even recommended it.⁷¹

Upon reaching their destination, the ambassadors opened negotiations with their Polish counterparts, the driving force among whom was the bishop of Kraków Zbigniew Oleśnicki, who would later personally accompany the king to Hungary.⁷² The negotiations were arduous, but on March 8, 1440, after a mass at the Kraków cathedral celebrated by De Dominis, it was announced that the ambassadors had elected Wladislas Jagiellon as king of Hungary.⁷³ The Hungarian embassy managed to obtain one important concession. Wladislas agreed to issue a decree immediately upon his coronation, in which he would obligate himself to defend Hungary not only with its own, but also with the Polish army (and vice versa). This was important because the Ottoman Empire had recently started pursuing an extremely aggressive policy towards Hungary.⁷⁴ The ambassadors' proclamation, in which they made public Wladislas's election—and made note of this stipulation—was composed on March 9, in Kraków, by John Vitez.⁷⁵ This was not unusual, as it was his job within the embassy to compose documents.⁷⁶ Even so, the new king would reward him for it in due time.

At first glance, it would seem that Vitez's superiors unjustly neglected to promote him during the first year of Wladislas' reign.⁷⁷ However, the reason was that the entire Hungarian bureaucratic structure—and the country in general—was in turmoil, even during the negotiations in Kraków.⁷⁸ The late King Albert's wife Elizabeth, daughter of Emperor Sigismund, gave birth to a son on February 22, 1440, having him crowned soon after as Ladislaus V.⁷⁹ She started a revolt immediately upon hearing of Wladislas's election.⁸⁰ Faced with a lack of funds and an abundance of enemies, the queen was soon forced to make peace and conclude an alliance with her late husband's second cousin, king of the Romans Frederick (usually known as Frederick III), who contested her rule in Austria. His price was extortionate: custody of Austria,⁸¹ Elizabeth's own children, including Ladislaus, as hostages,⁸² and custody of the Holy Crown of

⁷¹ Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 34.

⁷² Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 168 and 176.

⁷³ CE, 2:411, doc. 269.

⁷⁴ Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 157ff; see also Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 83–85.

⁷⁵ Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 169–70, doc. 1.

⁷⁶ Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 11; see also Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 97.

⁷⁷ See Szakály, "Vitéz János," 13.

⁷⁸ Stephen Báthori never arrived in Kraków, but was addressed as the judge royal until King Wladislas's election (CE, 2:411, doc. 269). Immediately afterwards, Ladislaus Pálóci took his place, and signed the mentioned proclamation as judge royal (CE, 2:415, doc. 273).

⁷⁹ Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 281.

⁸⁰ Tamás Pálosfalvi, "Cilleiek és Tallóciak: küzdelem Szlavóniáért (1440–1448)," *Századok* 134 (2000): 45–98 at 49–50.

⁸¹ *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, 12:59–61, no. 20.

⁸² *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, 12:65–66, no. 30.

Hungary.⁸³ Thanks to such heavy sacrifices, Elizabeth was able to continue the war against King Wladislas, and after her death in December 1442, Frederick took up her son's cause.⁸⁴

As a result of the queen's revolt, the kingdom was sundered by a lengthy struggle. The bishop of Győr Benedict son of Michael was among the first to be vanquished. Although he initially supported Wladislas's election,⁸⁵ the old diplomat made a fatal mistake by crossing over to the queen's side,⁸⁶ and he was captured soon afterwards during the siege of Győr.⁸⁷ Matthias of Gotalovac also supported the queen and promptly lost his place as high chancellor, replaced by the bishop of Eger Simon Rozgonyi,⁸⁸ a fierce supporter of the Jagiellonian king.⁸⁹ On the opposite end, many Polish diplomats followed Wladislas to Hungary, such as Nicholas Lasocki and Gregory of Sanok.⁹⁰ It took a while for the complicated system of royal bureaucracy to reorganize itself.

Vitez's future career was decided by De Dominis's transfer to the bishopric of Oradea. Wladislas originally wanted De Dominis to take over the diocese of Zagreb, but Pope Eugene IV overruled that.⁹¹ After some contention, he offered the king a compromise solution: De Dominis would be transferred to the vacant diocese of Oradea. Apparently not satisfied with the offer, Wladislas sent the pope an angry letter,⁹² but he ultimately agreed to the transfer.⁹³ De Dominis therefore went to Oradea, a bishopric much wealthier than Senj, in late 1440.⁹⁴

In mid-1441, it was decided it was finally time to reward Vitez. King Wladislas's chaplain, Thomas son of Peter, delivered to Pope Eugene IV a list of the king's officials (including himself) for whom he requested permissions to hold two incompatible offices, i.e. those that included pastoral care.⁹⁵ As personal presence was obligatory

83 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 282; Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 251.

84 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 283; Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 277–78.

85 CE, 2:412, doc. 271.

86 He and Matthias of Gotalovac were both present at Ladislaus V's coronation, at which Cardinal Dennis Szécsi officiated. CE, 2:417, doc. 275; Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 236; Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 443.

87 CE, 2:421, doc. 276.

88 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:89; Szakály, "Vitéz János," 13. Simon was transferred from Veszprém to Eger in early 1440 (CE, 2:412, doc. 271), and Matthias of Gotalovac took over Veszprém after that (*Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:190–91, doc. 688).

89 Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 128–29. It seems there was a personal hatred between him and the queen: see Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 448.

90 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 442.

91 "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Konzils von Basel," ed. Johannes Haller, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, ser. 2, 16 (1901): 207–45 at 230–31, doc. 24.

92 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:198, doc. 726.

93 *Concilium Basiliense*, vol. 7, *Die Protokolle des Concils 1440–1443: Aus dem Manuale des Notars Jakob Hüglin*, ed. Johannes Haller and Hermann Herre (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1910), 265.

94 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:193, doc. 708.

95 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:198–99, doc. 729. Thomas became a canon of

for holding such an office, a special permission was required for holding more than one.⁹⁶ Vitez, then still a royal protonotary and custos of Zagreb, was among those officials, and the pope granted him this permission.⁹⁷ Although this did not mean that Vitez would automatically receive a better office, it demonstrated the king's intention to provide him with one.

The opportunity presented itself in 1442. Provost of Oradea Corrado dei Cardini (also a canon of Zagreb),⁹⁸ an experienced diplomat and an acquaintance of Poggio Bracciolini, died. At first, Pope Eugene IV awarded his office to Cardinal Branda Castiglione, then a nonagenarian, in March 1442.⁹⁹ However, King Wladislas had in October 1441 requested and received from the pope the right to nominate six persons for offices in cathedral or collegiate chapters.¹⁰⁰ It seems that he decided to exercise that right, because by December 1442, although Castiglione was still alive at the time, Vitez had become provost of Oradea.¹⁰¹ The king's will seems to have prevailed this time and there were no judicial inconveniences. Vitez was probably selected for this office by De Dominis, the new bishop of Oradea. It is possible that he took part in the latter's symposia and had his first taste of Renaissance humanism.¹⁰²

Thanks to the custom of Hungarian chapters to record the names of their most distinguished members in the legal documents they issued, there is an abundance of sources mentioning Vitez as provost of Oradea.¹⁰³ Some even bear his full name: *Johannes de Zredna*.¹⁰⁴ Although we know he held that office at least since late 1442, the sources are silent regarding what he actually did during his tenure.¹⁰⁵ Older historians, such as Kaprinai, concluded that he must have spent the time educating John Hunyadi's sons,¹⁰⁶ based on Bonfini's dubious claim that Vitez was their teacher.¹⁰⁷

Plock soon after that: see *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:199, doc. 732.

96 Neralić, *Put do crkvene nadarbine*, 105–6.

97 A full transcription of Wladislas's request regarding Vitez is in MHEZ, 7:12, doc. 19.

98 MHEZ, 6:41, doc. 40.

99 *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 22, doc. 15. For information regarding Cardini, see Pajorin, "L'Influsso del concilio di Basilea," 103 and Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 18. He was last mentioned as provost of Oradea in November 1440 (DF 281 299).

100 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:200–201, doc. 736.

101 DL 13 688.

102 Klára Pajorin, "Alcuni rapporti personali di Pier Paolo Vergerio in Ungheria," in *Convegno internazionale di studi "L'Umanesimo Latino in Ungheria"*, ed. Papo and Papo, 45–52 at 46; Pajorin, "L'Influsso del concilio di Basilea," 107–8.

103 The only document Fraknói had discovered which mentions Vitez as holding that office is DL 13 714: see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 18. Other examples can be found in DF 291 388 and DL 99 649, 47 696, and 70 892.

104 DF 263 366.

105 For some opinions, see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 19–20 and Szakály, "Vitéz János," 13ff.

106 Kaprinai, *Hungaria diplomatica*, 1:58–63.

107 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 521.

The truth was probably not as romantic or grandiose. Vitez was simply not important enough to attract much attention, and the provostry of Oradea was more than satisfactory for a person of his status. It was the most distinguished office after the bishop's own, and it included pastoral care, which meant Vitez would have had to appoint (and support) a vicar if he was absent. Its official yearly income was an enviable sum of two hundred and fifty florins.¹⁰⁸ It also provided its holder with considerable military might and corresponding obligations to the king, whom the provost of Oradea had to follow to war at the head of a troop of fifty horsemen.¹⁰⁹

Other than being entrusted with the mundane task of executing a last will by Pope Eugene IV in April 1445,¹¹⁰ one of the few things we know Vitez did while he was provost is that he attempted to travel to Italy. This piece of information comes from a letter Vitez sent to Nicholas Lasocki, in which he vaguely wrote about various obstacles and enemies working against him, and of a great tragedy he suffered, due to which he can no longer tell true friends from false.¹¹¹ Paul of Ivanić interpreted this as Vitez doubting whether to go through with the promotion he was promised (presumably, to bishop of Oradea), which would mean the letter was written after De Dominis's demise. In the same letter, Vitez wrote about his inability to travel to the place of his heart's desire, which Paul interprets as him undertaking a journey to Italy to study, but having to abort it upon reaching Zagreb, because Ban Matko Talovac had forbidden him to leave the country for peculiar reasons—allegedly because the roads were infested with brigands.¹¹²

The ban probably knew very well who Vitez was (after all, they were in Kraków together) and how damaging it could be for the kingdom if he fell into enemy hands. However, we should not disregard that John de Dominis, Vitez's superior, maintained contacts with Kaspar Schlick, who was Frederick III's chancellor at the time. Schlick was trying to persuade him to cross over to the Habsburg side, and it seems De Dominis was considering it. In a letter to De Dominis, Schlick mentioned a visit by the latter's envoy, a modest and courteous man, who brought him much useful information.¹¹³ It is conceivable that Vitez's supposed journey to Italy was a secret mission to Frederick's court.

Be that as it may, King Wladislas's reign in Hungary certainly was a time of opportunity for a new generation of aspiring bureaucrats. On the Polish side, there were Gregory of Sanok and Nicholas Lasocki, to whom Wladislas entrusted many important missions. According to a biography by Callimachus Experiens (Filippo Buonaccorsi), Gregory was one of the king's most trusted advisers not only on political, but also on

108 *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 25–26, doc. 19.

109 Vitez's predecessor Cardini requested the permission to hold two incompatible offices because the provostry alone was not enough for him to support his troop. *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:184, doc. 657. See also Kristóf, *Egyházi középréteg*, 196.

110 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:223, doc. 842.

111 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 60–61, doc. 20.

112 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 61, doc. 20, notes b and g.

113 *Briefwechsel*, I/2:24–26, doc. 15.

religious issues.¹¹⁴ As for Lasocki, he represented Wladislas during peace negotiations with Frederick III in Vienna, convened in 1443 by the papal legate, Cardinal Giuliano Cesarini. Piccolomini, who was also present there, remembered him as being excessively haughty.¹¹⁵ Kaspar Schlick had a better opinion of him, recommending him to Cesarini in mid-1443 as “my venerable lord dean” and saying that he had full confidence in him.¹¹⁶ Lasocki was also one of Wladislas’s representatives also when a truce was concluded with Frederick in May 1444.¹¹⁷ According to Piccolomini, he did not contribute much to the affair, having only succeeded in insulting Frederick’s representatives.¹¹⁸

On the Hungarian side, bishop of Vác and doctor of canon law Peter Agmánd of Aluniş (Hungarian: Kecsed) rose prominently.¹¹⁹ Although he was Queen Elizabeth’s chancellor before the war, and received several estates from her in January 1440 as a reward for faithful service,¹²⁰ it seems that he switched sides soon after that.¹²¹ He represented King Wladislas in negotiations with Frederick III together with Lasocki,¹²² but unlike the latter was remembered by Piccolomini as a very humble man.¹²³ Paul of Ivanić described him as a distinguished individual, of exemplary lifestyle, beloved by all.¹²⁴ In King Wladislas’s Hungarian chancery, which was headed by Simon Rozgonyi, Andrew Kálnói rose to the place of vice-chancellor. He was provost of the collegiate chapter of St. John the Baptist in Pécs, and also acquired the provostry of Székesfehérvár in 1443, after the death of Stephen Basso, with the pope’s permission to hold them both.¹²⁵ That made him one of the most powerful prelates in Hungary.¹²⁶

As we have seen, Vitez was not at all the only official at King Wladislas’s disposal, nor the most important one. His ascent was by no means guaranteed. It would take a completely unexpected combination of events for him to reach the top of the Hungarian church and state—such as an unsuccessful crusade against the Ottomans, ending in the Battle of Varna. In the following section we will examine perhaps the most

114 Callimachus, *Vita et mores Gregorii Sanocei*, ed. Miodoński, XIIIr–XIIIv. See also Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 460 and 482.

115 *Briefwechsel* part I, *Briefe aus der Laienzeit (1431–1445)*, vol. 1, *Privatbriefe* (hereafter I/1):565, doc. 192. See also *Briefwechsel*, I/2:52, doc. 27.

116 *Briefwechsel*, I/2:40, doc. 21. Lasocki was dean of the chapter of Kraków at the time.

117 Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 392.

118 *Briefwechsel*, I/1:320–22, doc. 141.

119 He became bishop of Vác in May 1440, when Matthias of Gotalovac was transferred to Veszprém: *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:190, doc. 686.

120 *Oklevéltár a Tomaj nemzetségbeli Losonczy Bánffy család történetéhez*, 1:632–34, docs. 442–43.

121 Szakály thought that he continued to secretly support the queen: see Szakály, “Vitéz János,” 19.

122 *Briefwechsel*, I/2:52, doc. 27.

123 *Briefwechsel*, I/1:565, doc. 192.

124 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 117, note m.

125 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:211, doc. 729 and 217, doc. 818.

126 Cf. Szakály, “Vitéz János,” 13.

significant of Vitez's career advancements: his appointment as bishop of Oradea. We will see how it was intrinsically connected to his involvement with John Hunyadi, in whose government Vitez was an active and important participant. Therefore, we will first explain the context of his appointment, and then examine his actions as one of the factors in Hunyadi's system. We will focus primarily on the diplomatic services he rendered unto the governor, but also on Vitez's role in Hunyadi's military campaigns and in his relations with the Hungarian higher clergy.

Hunyadi's Attendant

The year 1445 was a turning point for the Kingdom of Hungary. The Battle of Varna, fought on November 10, 1444, in which King Wladislas and a number of distinguished men lost their lives, left a great power vacuum in the Hungarian church and state.¹²⁷ John de Dominis was among the slain. His military contingent was the largest of all Christian forces present there and he was entrusted with the holy banner of St. Ladislaus. However, he did not distinguish himself in battle, as he was among the first to flee. He ultimately drowned in a nearby lake.¹²⁸ We do not know whether Vitez took part in the battle, but considering the size of De Dominis's contingent, it is likely that his troop was there. If he was with it, he probably escaped when the whole unit broke and fled during the Ottoman opening assault.¹²⁹

The high chancellor Simon Rozgonyi was also killed,¹³⁰ as were many of the magnates. The situation was chaotic, with bands of survivors slinking back home for months, and for a long time it was unclear who was killed and who was not. For example, various rumours circulated regarding the fate of Cardinal Cesarini, the papal legate; it was not known until July 1445 that he was among the dead.¹³¹ The pope even sent his nuncio Valentine of Kapos to the Wallachian voivode Vlad II Dracul in March 1445 to find Cesarini, because he heard he had sought refuge there.¹³² Piccolomini wrote in December 1444 that Franko Talovac—Ban Matko's brother—was also killed, which soon proved to be false.¹³³ It was long rumoured that King Wladislas had managed to escape.¹³⁴ His adherents, led by the palatine of Hungary Lawrence Hédervári,

127 For a partial reconstruction of the list of participants, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 124–28.

128 Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 127–28.

129 Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 462–63.

130 Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 253 and Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 488.

131 Pajorin, "Primordi," 816–18.

132 CE, 2:453–54, doc. 305.

133 *Briefwechsel*, I/1:490, doc. 167.

134 For example, a pamphlet was circulating in Rome, claiming that the crusaders had won at Varna and that Wladislas was in Constantinople: CE, 2:454–58, doc. 306.

were among those spreading such rumours, trying to buy themselves the time to bring the situation under control.¹³⁵

One of the areas needing this control was the diocese of Oradea. Wladislas's supporters, especially John Hunyadi, voivode of Transylvania (where much of the diocese was located), could not afford to allow it to fall into the hands of the Habsburg party. In early 1445 they appointed Franko Talovac, a survivor of Varna, who was then ban of Slavonia, as its governor.¹³⁶ The situation in the diocese was tense, with many of its soldiers' fates still unknown. For example, one of the diocesan officers lost two of his brothers at Varna, but was still hoping for their return.¹³⁷ The news of the bishop's death spread quickly, and many took the opportunity to usurp episcopal estates.¹³⁸

In April 1445 the magnates took on the arduous task of finding a solution to the power vacuum. To keep the country from falling apart, seven captains of the kingdom—one of whom was Hunyadi—were appointed at the Diet of Pest, held in April and May.¹³⁹ Vitez took part in this diet. In a letter to a certain Archdeacon Paul, written on April 29 in Oradea, he wrote that he was invited and was making ready to attend, hoping a compromise would be reached between the Jagiellonian and Habsburg supporters, which would lead to a permanent peace within the kingdom.¹⁴⁰ If he managed to reach Pest soon after writing that letter, he might have witnessed the proclamation of the great compromise on May 7. To end the internecine war, Ladislaus V was elected as king of Hungary. To save the reputations of those who were until then claiming that Wladislas was still alive, it was decided that an envoy would be sent to Poland to check whether he was there. If he was not, the election would be confirmed and King Frederick III would be requested to turn over both Ladislaus and the Holy Crown. If he would refuse, all obligations to the newly elected king would be annulled.¹⁴¹ The Estates of Bohemia, who had previously elected Ladislaus as king of Bohemia, agreed to this election.¹⁴²

It was probably at this diet that it was decided Vitez would be nominated as bishop of Oradea. The letters requesting Vitez's confirmation, sent by Hunyadi and the nobility of Bihar county (in the diocese of Oradea) to Rome, were dated April 28, 1445, so they were either composed during the diet or immediately before it.¹⁴³ In them, Hunyadi appealed to probably every papal official he believed could help secure Vitez's

135 Held, *Hunyadi*, 114–15.

136 Pálosfalvi, "Cilleiek és Tallóciak," 78; Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:77.

137 DL 36 627 and 86 679.

138 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 49, doc. 6.

139 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 288. See also *Briefwechsel*, I/1:568, doc. 192.

140 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 49, doc. 6; see also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 27.

141 For the text of the resolution, see, *Vestigia comitiorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, *Supplementum* 2:9–36.

142 *Briefwechsel*, I/1:507, doc. 174.

143 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 55–56, doc. 13. Only the letter to Giorgio Cesarini bears a date, but Paul of Ivanić clarified (in note f) that the other letters were sent at the same time as that one.

confirmation. Among them were the patriarch of Aquileia Lodovico Trevisan, the *éminence grise* of Eugene IV's Curia,¹⁴⁴ the previously mentioned Taddeo degli Adelmari, then a papal physician, who already knew both Hunyadi and Vitez,¹⁴⁵ and Giorgio Cesarini, brother of the deceased cardinal.¹⁴⁶

We do not know whose idea it was that Vitez should be the new bishop. His position as provost of Oradea undoubtedly made him a "safe" choice, as it likely helped for the election to pass without much resistance from the chapter. It is possible that the diocese's governor Franko Talovac, whose power base was in Slavonia, endorsed his nomination, thus supporting a fellow Slavonian. However, the one who made sure that Vitez's confirmation in Rome would go through was John Hunyadi. Examining the relationship between Vitez and the legendary warrior, we can only conclude that it is possible that they knew each other. Although Paul of Ivanić noted that Vitez had composed letters describing Hunyadi's victories over Ottoman armies preceding the Battle of Varna,¹⁴⁷ that does not mean they were necessarily connected at all.¹⁴⁸

As with most things regarding Vitez's early years, there are only inklings regarding this problem. Andrew Pannonius, a Carthusian scholar, provided one of them. In his youth he was a soldier in John Hunyadi's retinue, before leaving Hungary in 1445 and entering the charterhouse in Venice.¹⁴⁹ In a work he dedicated to Matthias Hunyadi, then king of Hungary, in the 1460s, he stated that he knew Vitez when the latter was still in minor orders.¹⁵⁰ That could mean any time before 1445, when Vitez was titled as a priest for the first time,¹⁵¹ and it could indicate that Vitez and Andrew frequented the same milieu—perhaps the court of John Hunyadi. Szákaly was of a similar opinion, thinking that Vitez's letters regarding Hunyadi's victories before 1445 were in fact the latter's private correspondence commissioned from Vitez.¹⁵² Also, in 1454 Piccolomini recounted that Hunyadi threatened to demote Vitez to chaplain if he inconvenienced him, because as he made him a bishop, he could unmake him too.¹⁵³ Could this have meant that Vitez used to be Hunyadi's chaplain? It is not unlikely, as in the

144 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 51, doc. 7. Hunyadi had never been in contact with him before, which he himself remarked on. Piccolomini wrote that Trevisan had become so powerful during Eugene's final years that the latter was the pope in name only (Enea Silvio Piccolomini, "Historia rerum Friderici III. imperatoris," in *Analecta monumentorum omnis aevi Vindobonensia*, ed. Kollár, 2:1–474 at 134.

145 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 53, doc. 10.

146 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 54–55, doc. 13.

147 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 42, doc. 2, note B.

148 Cf. Held, *Hunyadi*, 11 and 115.

149 Sándor Bene, "Where Paradigms Meet: The Theology of Political Virtues in Andreas Pannonius' *Mirrors for Princes*," in *Italy and Hungary*, ed. Farbaký and Waldman, 173–217 at 177.

150 Andreas Pannonius, "Libellus de virtutibus," ed. Fraknói and Ábel, 87. See also Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 47.

151 *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 24, doc. 18.

152 Szákaly, "Vitéz János," 15.

153 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:491, doc. 290.

fifteenth century the powerful would award such titles to clerics they wanted to keep in their service, similarly to how they could make laymen their retainers.¹⁵⁴ Those were trusted individuals, often handpicked for higher honours by their masters; for example, Hunyadi made one of his chaplains provost of Cenad in 1450.¹⁵⁵ It is possible that Hunyadi made Vitez his chaplain sometime before 1445.

Besides these hints, we also have the already mentioned claim by Antonio Bonfini, according to which Vitez taught Hunyadi's sons, Ladislaus and Matthias, and Kaprinai's theory that evolved from it. The latter conjectured that the see of Oradea was a reward for Vitez's pedagogic services. However, he found it necessary to modify Bonfini's claim, as Matthias was only two when Vitez was made bishop, so he concluded that Vitez must have taught only the elder son, Ladislaus.¹⁵⁶ Although later events might point to a closer relationship between Ladislaus Hunyadi and Vitez, this theory remains unprovable.

The simplest solution would be that Vitez was made bishop of Oradea because he was a newcomer there, with a modest family background and without support from the local nobility, and as such completely dependent on Hunyadi. The latter could believe that Vitez would be an obedient prelate, ready to follow his orders.

Vitez's services were soon required. Ladislaus V was too valuable to simply be given away and Frederick III refused to hand him over. In 1446 Hunyadi was elected as governor to rule in his absence, thus becoming the most powerful man in the kingdom.¹⁵⁷ Researchers have long noticed that letters regarding peace negotiations with Frederick III make up a significant portion of Vitez's collection.¹⁵⁸ In fact, Hunyadi's military campaigns against the king of the Romans were accompanied by diplomatic offensives conducted by Vitez.

The first of these campaigns targeted the episcopal city of Győr, then occupied by Frederick's forces. Vacant since the death of Benedict son of Michael, its see was given to Augustine of Shalanky (Hungarian: Salánk) in 1445,¹⁵⁹ as a part of the great compromise between the Habsburg and Jagiellon supporters. Shalanky was firmly on the Habsburg side and formerly served as Queen Elizabeth's vice-chancellor, perhaps even chancellor.¹⁶⁰ As most of his diocese found itself under his former faction leader's occupation, the new bishop was unable to collect tithes due to him.¹⁶¹ This was used by Hunyadi and Vitez to justify an offensive against Frederick in late 1446. As the lat-

154 Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 801–4.

155 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:283, doc. 1132.

156 Kaprinai, *Hungaria diplomatica*, 1:58–63.

157 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 288.

158 See, for example, Perić, “Zbirka pisama,” 103ff.

159 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:71.

160 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:112–13, doc. 51 and 121–22, doc. 55. See also Nemes, “Salánki Ágoston,” 8–10.

161 *Briefwechsel part II, Briefe als Priester und als Bischof von Triest (1447–1450)* (hereafter II):49–50, doc. 14 and p. 242.

ter had the (Roman) pope's support,¹⁶² Vitez composed a letter in Hunyadi's name to Eugene IV on October 18, 1446, in which he accused Frederick of mistreating the diocese of Győr to such an extent that he had allowed stables, warehouses and shops to be constructed by the walls of its churches, including the cathedral.¹⁶³ He also took steps to justify the offensive before the Venetian Senate and Doge Francesco Foscari, as word had spread that its real targets were in fact Venetian holdings. Vitez assured them that Hunyadi had no intentions of attacking them, claiming in his letter that Frederick's usurpation of church revenues was the cause of the campaign.¹⁶⁴ These letters were delivered by Vincent Szilasi,¹⁶⁵ a notary of Hunyadi's, who was also a canon of Oradea (since 1445) and Vitez's associate.¹⁶⁶

Both of these attempts failed, however, as Frederick's embassy (with Piccolomini as its member) shadowed Hunyadi's and managed to counter its actions. The doge condemned the Hungarian campaign.¹⁶⁷ The pope went even further by handing over Hunyadi's (or, rather, Vitez's) letter to Piccolomini, so that he could refute it more efficiently.¹⁶⁸ Piccolomini also convinced the cardinals of his master's righteousness, remarking that two of them—Tommaso Parentucelli (the future pope Nicholas V) and Juan Carvajal—had defended Frederick's honour as if they were Austrians themselves.¹⁶⁹ This is not surprising, as these two were the ones negotiating Frederick's cooperation with the Roman papacy against the Council of Basel.¹⁷⁰

Despite the diplomatic setbacks, Hunyadi's 1446–1447 winter campaign in Austria was successful.¹⁷¹ Frederick agreed to negotiate, and a truce was concluded on June 1. According to its terms, he was supposed to hand over the city of Győr, but keep some other Hungarian territories close to the border.¹⁷² Shalanky was to receive his seat, at the cost of obligating himself in written form not to wage war on Frederick or Ladis-

162 Frederick III was a key supporter of the Roman papacy in its struggle against the Council of Basel: see Joachim W. Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel and the Secular and Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire: The Conflict over Supreme Authority and Power in the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 282–83 and Johannes Helmuth, "The Empire and the Council," in *A Companion to the Council of Basel*, ed. Michiel Decaluwé, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 410–42 at 434ff.

163 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 70, doc. 25.

164 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 72–73, doc. 26.

165 Piccolomini called him "Vincentius Hungarus": see *Briefwechsel*, II:238.

166 Kristóf, *Egyházi közélet*, 249–50.

167 *Briefwechsel*, II:238.

168 *Briefwechsel*, II:241–42.

169 *Briefwechsel*, II:251.

170 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:193–94, doc. 87.

171 Piccolomini wrote disparagingly of this campaign, ridiculing Hunyadi for pillaging the countryside without taking any fortifications. See Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 130. If viewed as a *chevauchée*—a strategy favoured by the Ottomans Hunyadi had spent the past decade fighting—this was precisely the purpose of the campaign.

172 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 289.

laus V.¹⁷³ However, the true success of the campaign was that it convinced Frederick that the newly appointed governor was a force to be reckoned with.

These events introduced Vitez to the European diplomatic forum. Hunyadi continued using his services when similar issues arose, such as in August 1447: the new pope, Nicholas V, dispatched Cardinal Juan Carvajal to Vienna as his legate, primarily to conclude a concordat with the king of the Romans, but also to preside over peace negotiations between him and Hungary.¹⁷⁴ King Frederick was crucial for the Roman papacy's effort to eliminate its rival in Basel, and his interests were therefore far more important to the pope than Hungary's. Judging by their actions, Hunyadi and Vitez probably knew this. Still, the Hungarian Estates elected seven ambassadors in September 1447 to go to Vienna and try to get Ladislaus V and the Holy Crown handed over to Hungary. These were the cardinal and archbishop of Esztergom Dennis Szécsi, the bishop of Vác Peter Agmánd, who was in the meantime appointed as high chancellor,¹⁷⁵ bishop of Győr Augustine of Shalanky, the palatine of Hungary Ladislaus Garai, the judge royal Ladislaus Pálóci, the royal treasurer Michael Ország, and Bishop John Vitez himself.¹⁷⁶ The latter's role was to protect Hunyadi's interests and speak on his behalf, as he himself admitted in a letter to Carvajal written on January 15, 1448.¹⁷⁷ His task was most likely to prevent any agreements not favourable to his master from being made.

Custody of Ladislaus V remained a burning issue, especially as now the Bohemians also demanded that he be handed over to them.¹⁷⁸ As previous researchers noted, Ladislaus's repatriation was not in Hunyadi's interest.¹⁷⁹ The king's absence guaranteed him the leading position in the kingdom, in the face of rising animosity among the magnates. On the other hand, Carvajal knew that the Roman pope's status in the Holy Roman Empire depended on Frederick III; he also thought the latter's custody of Ladislaus was the best means of keeping the peace in the region.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the negotiations were essentially destined to fail. Vitez's greatest concern was to keep the

173 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:205–7, docs. 95 and 97. See also Nemes, “Salánki Ágoston,” 15–16.

174 Canedo, *Un español*, 111.

175 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:89.

176 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 76, doc. 27, note I. See also Held, *Hunyadi*, 127 and Canedo, *Un español*, 111–12. The same assembly elected Ladislaus Garai as palatine. See Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 289. His family was named after their castle and township—both of which no longer exist—in today's Croatia, close to the village of Gorjani. See Krešimir Regan, “Gorjani—srednjovjekovno sjelo plemićke obitelji Gorjanski,” *Scrinia Slavonica* 6 (2006): 127–59.

177 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 74–75, doc. 27. Although this and the other letters pertaining to this issue are dated 1447, the year was 1448 according to our reckoning. Carvajal's mission was announced in May 1447 (Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:201–2, doc. 93), and he arrived in Vienna in the following November (Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV*, 313). Paul of Ivanić explains that Vitez's letter dated January 18, 1448 pertains to the same embassy to Vienna as the one mentioned previously (Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 84, doc. 34, note a).

178 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 30, 32 and 38.

179 Held, *Hunyadi*, 127; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 292.

180 Canedo, *Un español*, 111 and 130.

rest of the Hungarian embassy, particularly Cardinal Szécsi, a firm supporter of Ladislaus V,¹⁸¹ from doing something that could upset the *status quo*.

It seems that Szécsi was aware of this, as he was in no hurry to depart for Vienna. Carvajal concluded the Concordat of Vienna with Frederick III on February 17, 1448,¹⁸² but the Hungarian ambassadors did not even arrive by then. The cardinal issued an invitation to them on Christmas 1447, and Hunyadi agreed that the negotiations would start a week after New Year's, but the embassy tarried. That was embarrassing. Vitez wrote to Carvajal on January 15, conjuring up excuses such as that the cardinal did not send a reply to confirm the date, and that Hunyadi himself was not currently in Hungary, but in Wallachia, pacifying the country after his war against Voivode Vlad II Dracul and the succession war in Moldavia, because of which he left Vitez in charge of arranging the embassy's departure.¹⁸³ Hunyadi was indeed pressuring Vitez to get the embassy underway, and the latter sent a short letter to Szécsi on January 18, chastising the cardinal for not sending directions regarding departure to the other ambassadors, his responsibility as the head of the embassy. He even threatened to depart on his own if Szécsi remained obstinate.¹⁸⁴ Both of these letters were sent from Oradea, so it seems Vitez was wintering at his seat.

As nothing had happened by mid-February, new excuses had to be made. As Frederick III had sent the embassy an official letter of invitation granting it safe conduct, Vitez wrote to Frederick and Carvajal demanding a new letter, claiming the old one was not adequate, as it did not guarantee safety from a specific brigand named Oberberger. As a group of Hungarian pilgrims on their way to Rome was recently robbed in Austria, the ambassadors were allegedly worried that a scandal would break out if they were attacked.¹⁸⁵

Delays such as these were not unusual for medieval embassies, and they would often cause political difficulties.¹⁸⁶ Worries about personal safety or possible scandals were justified, as every ambassador, while granted protection, still had to answer for his actions and could be tried for them.¹⁸⁷ For example, one of Hunyadi's envoys was impris-

181 Regarding his political allegiance, see András Kubinyi, "Szécsi Dénes bíboros prímás," in *Entz Géza Nyolcvanadik születésnapjára—Tanulmányok*, ed. Ilona Valter (Budapest: Országos Műemlékvédelmi Hivatal, 1993), 99–107.

182 See Helmrath, "The Empire and the Council," 436ff.

183 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 74–75, doc. 27. For Hunyadi's intervention in Wallachia and Moldavia, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 148. See also Held, *Hunyadi*, 125 and Engel's comment in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 149n367. The Polish king Casimir IV, who considered Moldavia his vassal state, decided to ignore Hunyadi's activities (CE, 3:33–34, doc. 26). Incidentally, Augustine of Shalanky's consecration was scheduled for November 1447, and he was forced to invite the burghers of Bratislava to it, as Hunyadi and the rest of the magnates were busy fighting in Wallachia. Nemes, "Salánki Ágoston," 22.

184 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 84, doc. 34.

185 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 76–79, docs. 28–29.

186 See Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 33.

187 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 42–44.

oned in Rome in 1450 because of personal debts, despite his master's protests that he should have been guaranteed immunity.¹⁸⁸ There are also many examples of ambassadors being attacked *en route*.¹⁸⁹ However, this particular embassy was a very reluctant one. When it finally arrived in Vienna, its visit was perfunctory. Piccolomini briefly noted the Hungarians' arrival, and that Carvajal failed to reconcile them with Frederick.¹⁹⁰

This meant that Vitez had succeeded in his mission, as the formalities were observed, but the *status quo* remained undisturbed. Despite some embarrassment, Hunyadi could be satisfied with his services. In the following years Carvajal continued to press for negotiations, to be held first in Buda, and later in Bratislava,¹⁹¹ but the situation remained unchanged. This suited both Frederick III and Hunyadi. It, however, did not please the Hungarian Estates. After a diet was held in June 1450, Vitez composed a long letter to Pope Nicholas V on Hunyadi's and the Estates' behalf, asking the pope to reconsider the issue of Ladislaus's custody. It was a listless effort. Vitez wrote that much effort was already wasted on that issue and encouraged the pope not to exert himself—sending an apostolic letter or a papal envoy to Frederick would suffice.¹⁹² The Bohemian Estates made similar attempts, but Piccolomini cynically noted they did so more out of habit than conviction.¹⁹³

Indeed, such attempts were not in the interest of the great and the powerful. Three of the most powerful Hungarian magnates—Hunyadi, Nicholas of Ilok (Hungarian: Újlak), and Ladislaus Garai—reached private agreements with Frederick III in Bratislava, on October 22, 1450.¹⁹⁴ Hunyadi agreed not to dispute Frederick's custody of Ladislaus V, nor his occupation of the border areas in western Hungary, and Frederick was to keep the Holy Crown and Ladislaus until he turned eighteen. In return, Frederick recognized Hunyadi as governor of the Kingdom of Hungary and promised to consult him before emancipating Ladislaus. The agreement even contained a clause stipulating that Hunyadi and Frederick would keep to it even when dealing with the Hungarian Estates.¹⁹⁵ Hunyadi was thus safe from unpleasant surprises. His agreement with Frederick served as a model for the latter's similar pact with George of Poděbrady, Hunyadi's Bohemian counterpart, who also worked against Ladislaus's emancipation.¹⁹⁶

188 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 146–48, doc. 71.

189 For examples, see *Epistolario*, 3:412, Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 129, and *Briefwechsel*, III/1:179, doc. 102.

190 Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 139.

191 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 79–80, doc. 30, especially note e, and 96, doc. 40, note a.

192 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 144, doc. 69.

193 Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 181.

194 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 292. See also Canedo, *Un español*, 129–30.

195 *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, ed. Heinrich Koller et al., vol. 13, *Die Urkunden und Briefe des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs in Wien, Abt. Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv: Allgemeine Urkundenreihe, Familienurkunden und Abschriftensammlungen (1440–1446)*, ed. Paul Herold and Kornelia Holzner-Tobisch (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), 145, no. 181.

196 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 49–50.

The Sword and the Crosier

In the previous section we see that Hunyadi used Vitez's services extensively when it came to matters of diplomacy. However, if we turn to Vitez's role in the governor's military campaigns, it seems that Vitez served Hunyadi primarily as a literary warrior, not an actual one. As we have seen, he did not participate in the Wallachian campaign of 1447. There is also no evidence suggesting that he followed Hunyadi to a raid against the Ottomans in late 1445, conducted in cooperation with the Crusader navy under Cardinal Francesco Condulmer. Vitez did compose a letter to Pope Eugene IV in Hunyadi's name on November 29, 1445, in which the Hungarian commander's meeting with Cardinal Condulmer in Nicopolis was mentioned,¹⁹⁷ but he was probably not personally present at the meeting.¹⁹⁸ As the raid ended in early October,¹⁹⁹ it is likely he wrote the letter after Hunyadi's return.

A more complicated issue is Vitez's participation in Hunyadi's Crusade of 1448, which ended in the governor's defeat on Kosovo Polje. Fraknói thought Vitez did participate in it, based on the fact that he composed several letters in Hunyadi's name in the crusader encampment, to be carried to the pope by Nicholas Lasocki.²⁰⁰ Those were, for example, the letter written on September 6, 1448 near Kovin,²⁰¹ that of September 8, written *in progressu exercituali* (on the march) by a ford of the Danube near Kovin,²⁰² and the one of September 17, written by the ford, but on the other side of the Danube, in Serbia.²⁰³ Lasocki was supposed to make a stop in Venice on his way to Rome, so Vitez composed a letter in Hunyadi's name for Doge Francesco Foscari, also written in Serbia, by the same ford, on September 12. That letter states that Lasocki witnessed the beginning of the campaign, because Hunyadi requested him to stay until then.²⁰⁴ Also, as Carvajal was still toiling away to reconcile the Hungarians with Frederick III, his letter regarding the current state of the negotiations was brought to the crusader encampment.²⁰⁵ Lasocki was supposed to deliver the response to the cardinal at the first convenience. Vitez composed it on September 14, also by the ford.²⁰⁶ On the same spot, Hunyadi and Vitez witnessed the last will of Emeric Marcali,²⁰⁷ who was killed on the Kosovo Polje soon afterwards.

197 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 47, doc. 4.

198 Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 29–30.

199 This was most likely a perfunctory *chevauchée*, performed because the Crusader flotilla was in the area. See Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 143–44 and Held, *Hunyadi*, 119. Regarding the flotilla, see Jefferson, *The Holy Wars*, 223–24.

200 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 47–49.

201 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 94, doc. 38.

202 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 87–89, doc. 36.

203 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 90–93, doc. 37.

204 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 95–96, doc. 39.

205 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 174, doc. 3.

206 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 96, doc. 40.

207 DL 14 915.

It appears that all these letters were composed before the campaign began in earnest, while the army was still crossing the Danube. It did not start its march towards central Serbia before September 28. Lasocki witnessed its departure, but did not follow it.²⁰⁸ As there is no mention of Vitez having participated in the crusade, it is likely that he returned to Hungary when the army departed. If he did, that was very fortunate for him. Hunyadi's army suffered a crushing defeat on Kosovo Polje on October 20. Hunyadi himself managed to escape, but he was captured while returning through Serbia by its despot, George Branković. The hostility between the two went back to 1444,²⁰⁹ and besides, Branković's daughter Catherine was married to Hunyadi's bitter rival, Count Ulric II of Celje. The governor also made things worse by threatening to overthrow Branković for his refusal to take any part in Hunyadi's crusade.²¹⁰

In a letter to Lasocki, written by Vitez in Hunyadi's name on December 30, after the governor's release, the latter's captivity was elegantly omitted, and it was simply stated that he had spent some time with the despot, arriving on Christmas Eve to Szeged, where the Hungarian diet was in session. In his comments, Paul of Ivanić explained that the purpose of the omission was to preserve the governor's dignity, but that it was well-known that he was captured, and released with great difficulty.²¹¹ Vitez was among the magnates who gathered in Petrovaradin in late November 1448 to negotiate his release, together with Andrew Kálnói, who was then bishop of Pécs, and bishop of Bosnia Raphael Herceg.²¹²

The Diet of Szeged also had to deliver a response to Cardinal Carvajal, regarding an agreement with Frederick III previously reached in Bratislava. It was composed, probably by Vitez, on December 14, informing the cardinal that the diet unanimously decided not to deliberate on the said agreement due to the present crisis. The truce was to be upheld and negotiations continued.²¹³ It is possible that this was Vitez's doing, to make sure the *status quo* remained undisturbed during Hunyadi's absence. There was indeed a crisis in the kingdom, similar to that after the Battle of Varna. It was long unknown who survived Kosovo Polje and who did not.²¹⁴ Many of Hunyadi's allies were killed in

208 This information comes from a letter to Lasocki, composed by Vitez on Hunyadi's behalf at the end of 1448. See Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 97, doc. 41.

209 See Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 155–56 and 167.

210 Held, *Hunyadi*, 129.

211 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 98–99, doc. 41, Paul's comment in note o. Vitez's report on the Battle of Kosovo Polje was written in a manner that would make Hunyadi the hero. On the other hand, Piccolomini recounted a different version, delivered by Count Ulric of Celje, according to which the battle was lost due to Hunyadi's rashness and arrogance. See *Briefwechsel*, 2:75, doc. 23.

212 Zichy, 9:205, doc. 158. See also Vjekoslav Klaić, *Krčki knezovi Frankapani* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1901), 233. Kálnói was made bishop of Pécs in 1445: see Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:73.

213 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 173–75, doc. 3.

214 The last of the Talovac brothers, Perko, wrote to the pope on January 31, 1449 that he still did not know whether his brother Franko survived the battle or not. *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknoi, 34–35, doc. 27.

the battle, such as Franko Talovac.²¹⁵ Hunyadi's fate was also unknown for a while;²¹⁶ as before, there were even rumours that the Christians had won.²¹⁷

The governor eventually took his revenge on Branković. It took some patience, as the magnates increasingly resisted his rule.²¹⁸ Nevertheless, the despot was ultimately forced to negotiate, and Vitez was one of the delegates—together with the Ladislaus Garai, Nicholas of Ilok and Ladislaus Pálóci—appointed by the Estates to mediate between the two. His role was to act in Hunyadi's best interest,²¹⁹ probably the reason he was included among the delegates. After great difficulties, they hammered out an agreement, signed in Smederevo on August 7, 1451. It stipulated that Branković was to give his granddaughter and ward Elizabeth—daughter of Ulric of Celje and Catherine—to Hunyadi's son Matthias in marriage. The wedding was to take place two years later, after the girl turned 13, and she was to be allowed to remain Orthodox Christian.²²⁰ This was a great success for Hunyadi, as it would have made him, a man of obscure origin, a member of a true royal family.

To conclude, there is no evidence that Vitez personally fought in Hunyadi's armies, despite some bishops, such as Ladislaus Hédervári of Eger, having done so.²²¹ However, he most likely did have to put his troops at the governor's disposal. This is implied in a charter issued in 1453 to Stephen Keczer, one of the soldiers in Vitez's retinue, which states that Stephen had fought both abroad, against the Ottomans, and within Hungary, against the Bohemians.²²² The former statement probably refers to the Crusade of 1448. The latter concerns Hunyadi's campaigns against the troops of John Jiskra, nominally loyal to Ladislaus V, who held most of northern Hungary (today's Slovakia).²²³ We cannot be sure whether Vitez participated in them. His troops did fight in the north, but without him, in 1456.²²⁴ A written order from Hunyadi to Vitez and count of Bihar Francis Csáki, instructing them to intervene in some local proprietary matters, issued on July 18, 1452, could point both ways.²²⁵ Although the document was issued

215 Pálosfalvi, "Cilleiek és Tallóciak," 96. The list of fallen magnates is impressive: see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 149–51.

216 Similar to the situation after Wladislas's death, Hunyadi's supporters were spreading rumours that he had been Despot Branković's honoured guest and not a captive, and that he was already on his way back to Hungary. This was weeks before the governor's release. See DL 44 531.

217 Guarino Veronese wrote of them to Lasocki: see *Epistolario*, 2:513, doc. 816.

218 Held, *Hunyadi*, 135–36.

219 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 54; Held, *Hunyadi*, 144.

220 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:305–12, doc. 147. The girl died before the wedding took place: see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 131.

221 Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 260–61; Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 501.

222 DL 14 719.

223 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 290–91.

224 Zichy, 9:519, doc. 376.

225 DL 55 517.

in Drienčany, recently conquered from Jiskra's forces,²²⁶ it does not necessarily imply that the addressees were present during the conquest.

The Governor and his Bishops

Let us now briefly examine Vitez's role in ecclesiastical affairs concerning Hunyadi. As we have seen, the governor would always make sure that Vitez was included in issues important to him. For example, Franko Talovac was once excommunicated by Cardinal Szécsi in a trivial court case, in which the latter acted as judge. Hunyadi managed to get the pope to suspend the censure and transfer the case to Vitez.²²⁷ Also, if some of the clerics in Hunyadi's service were to be introduced to ecclesiastical offices, the pope regularly gave the task to Vitez. This was the case with Vincent Szilasi, whom Hunyadi presented to the parish of Baia Mare in 1446,²²⁸ Peter of Crkvica, whom the same presented to the lectorate of Zagreb in 1447,²²⁹ and Hunyadi's chaplain, Thomas, son of Paul, made provost of Cenad in 1450.²³⁰

For arranging such matters, Hunyadi had his man in Rome—Nicholas Lasocki, at the time acting as a representative of the Kingdom of Hungary at the Holy See.²³¹ To reward him and, in all likelihood, control him more efficiently, in 1449 Hunyadi wanted to award him the archbishopric of Kalocsa. That would have been Lasocki's first cathedra, as he was still merely the dean of Kraków.²³² However, he refused it, allegedly due to its poor state, asking instead for the diocese of Transylvania instead. Hunyadi agreed and, as its bishop, Matthias of Łabiszyn, was still alive and well, asked the pope to transfer the latter to Kalocsa.²³³ Lasocki ultimately did not accept that diocese either, as he had succeeded in persuading the pope to give him the diocese of Włocławek in his native Poland. As the business of transferring Matthias of Łabiszyn to Kalocsa was already underway, Hunyadi suggested that Peter Agmánd be transferred to Transylvania, and his see in Vác filled by Vincent Szilasi.²³⁴

This was confusing for everyone involved. In the autumn of 1449, Hunyadi embarked on one of his campaigns and left the whole business of the transfers to Vitez,

226 See Engel's comment in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 162n414.

227 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:263, doc. 1041.

228 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:231, doc. 881. Szilasi was already a canon of both Oradea and Alba Iulia.

229 MHEZ, 7:111, doc. 108.

230 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:283, doc. 1132; *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 36–37, doc. 29.

231 He was addressed as such, for example, in *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 33–34, doc. 26 and Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 106, docs. 46 and 114, doc. 52.

232 He was almost made bishop of Poznań in 1438: see CE, 1/1:115–18, docs. 106–109 and Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:219.

233 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 107–8, doc. 47.

234 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 109, doc. 48.

who was to report everything to him. Vitez obediently followed the governor's directions, forwarding his requests to the pope in a letter composed on October 20, 1449. An additional problem arose in the meantime. The bishop of Transylvania refused to be transferred to Kalocsa, so Vitez asked the pope to force him to comply.²³⁵ However, Matthias of Łabiszyn, a Pole who had arrived in Hungary with King Wladislas, could afford to disobey the governor, as he had a powerful protector—Nicholas of Ilok.²³⁶ In a letter to the pope, written by Vitez in Hunyadi's name on January 18, 1450, the governor admitted that Matthias could not be forced to yield. Peter Agmánd was not as fortunate, as although he initially resisted the transfer, Hunyadi managed to break his resistance and asked the pope to confirm him as archbishop of Kalocsa.²³⁷

This ecclesiastical conundrum demonstrates how tenuous Vitez's position was. Hunyadi could make or break Hungarian bishops, and only those protected by powerful magnates were safe from his grasp. Vitez had to stay in the governor's good graces if he wanted to remain in Oradea. It is understandable why such an arrangement did not appeal to Lasocki. Even so, Vitez was disappointed that his old friend refused to stay in Hungary. After Nicholas informed him of his newly acquired cathedra in Poland, Vitez responded on January 29, 1450, writing that although he otherwise had a very high opinion of Lasocki, in this matter he did not, as he had refused a gift and caused problems that a wise man never would.²³⁸

Despite refusing to become a Hungarian prelate, Lasocki continued to represent Hungary in Rome.²³⁹ However, he died in September 1450, before entering into his diocese.²⁴⁰ Peter Agmánd also died around that time, before the papal bull confirming him as archbishop of Kalocsa arrived.²⁴¹ This provided new opportunities for Hunyadi's dependents. Vincent Szilasi was made bishop of Vác on July 17, 1450,²⁴² and Raphael Herceg archbishop of Kalocsa on August 31.²⁴³

Other diplomatic tasks Vitez performed were of lesser importance. He had contact with the Pauline monk Valentine of Kapos, a papal chaplain and a minor penitentiary (since 1439).²⁴⁴ Valentine was often sent by popes on diplomatic missions to his native Hungary, such as to deliver the messages of Nicholas V to the Hungarian Estates in

235 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 111–13, doc. 51.

236 László Solymosi, "König Matthias Corvinus und der Ungarische hohe Klerus," in *Matthias and His Legacy*, ed. Bárány and Györkös, 283–300 at 290.

237 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 115–16, doc. 53.

238 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 121, doc. 58.

239 He received praise for completing previous tasks and received new instructions from Hunyadi in June 1450: see Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 137–40, docs. 66–67.

240 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 148, doc. 71, note b.

241 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 117, doc. 53, note q.

242 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:283, doc. 1129.

243 Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:132.

244 *Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:186, doc. 665.

mid-1449.²⁴⁵ In October 1449, Vitez mentioned in a letter to the pope that he personally conversed with Valentine about Lasocki's promotion to one of the Hungarian dioceses.²⁴⁶ He also composed several letters regarding the conflict between Valentine and the Hungarian Estates over the provostry of Dömös.²⁴⁷ That was a mostly defunct institution, and Nicholas V tried to give it to the Paulines and make Valentine its first prior, which sparked an argument between the pope and the Hungarian Estates over the right of patronage.²⁴⁸ Valentine withdrew and it seems that he later, in the 1460s, made friends with Thomas Himfi, one of Vitez's enemies.²⁴⁹ He also joined Cardinal Szécsi's circle and received several offices from him in 1465.²⁵⁰

Vitez also had contact with diplomats serving Alfonso the Magnanimous, king of Aragon and Naples, namely with Bernard Lopez, the king's secretary, regarding the organization of the Crusade of 1448.²⁵¹ Lopez would go on to serve Alfonso's son, King Ferdinand I of Naples.²⁵² However, the chief person for contacts with Lopez and, consequently, Naples, was not Vitez, but Count Stephen Frankapan, whose wife—Isotta d'Este—was a distant relative of King Alfonso. Although the Frankapans had sided with the Habsburg party during the succession war, Stephen made peace with Hunyadi in 1446. Lopez was often a guest at his court.²⁵³

These were the conditions in which Vitez worked during Hunyadi's rule. As we have seen, he served his governor as a diplomat and as a liaison between him and the ecclesiastical circles, and he contributed troops to military campaigns. We could say that he was, overall, a stabilizing factor in the often-shifting environment of the Hungarian interregnum, and that his services were primarily meant to bolster Hunyadi's government, to justify his actions before foreign powers, and to maintain an uneasy peace between domestic potentates. However, although Vitez was an important figure, he nonetheless had little power of his own. When he got the opportunity to step out of the governor's shadow, he took it. In the following sections we will see how Vitez entered the service of King Ladislaus V and became a power in his own right. First, we shall examine the context of his appointment as the king's privy chancellor, then his actions in this capacity, with an emphasis on the peace negotiations with Emperor

245 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 104–5, doc. 45.

246 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 113, doc. 51.

247 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 122–30, docs. 59–61; 137–39, doc. 66; 141, doc. 68.

248 Fraknoi, *Vitéz János*, 62–67; see also Held, *Hunyadi*, 141–43.

249 The “Brother Valentine” Himfi mentioned as one of his allies in his speech before the pope was most likely him: MHEZ, 7:512, doc. 455.

250 MREV, 3:178–80, docs. 291–92.

251 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 81–84, docs. 31–33. Regarding attempts at making an alliance with Alfonso, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 145. Regarding Bernard Lopez, see Alan Ryder, *The Kingdom of Naples under Alfonso the Magnanimous - The Making of a Modern State* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 88, 232, 236, 248 and 276.

252 Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 277–78.

253 Klaić, *Krčki knezovi Frankapani*, 230–32.

Frederick III and the organisation of an anti-Ottoman crusade, and finally his role in the turbulent events that followed Count Ulric of Celje's assassination.

The Privy Chancellor

A storm was gathering in 1451. While Frederick III was preparing to go to Rome for his imperial coronation and wedding to Princess Eleanor of Portugal,²⁵⁴ the Austrian nobles dissatisfied with Frederick's rule, gathered around Ulric Eizinger,²⁵⁵ started plotting to pry Ladislaus V out of his custody. Frederick was aware of the danger, so he took Ladislaus with him to Italy.²⁵⁶ After they left Austria, the conspiracy grew, and many of the Hungarians joined it.²⁵⁷ In 1452, several Hungarian prelates, members of Cardinal Szécsi's clique, planned an escape attempt in which Kaspar Wendel, Ladislaus's teacher, was supposed to play the key role. Paul, the titular bishop of Argeș, who used to serve Queen Elizabeth during the succession war,²⁵⁸ was the liaison between Wendel, Eizinger and the Hungarians. Their plan was to be put in motion in Florence, when Frederick and Ladislaus would be passing through on their return from Rome. Another one of Szécsi's adherents, the bishop of Győr Augustine of Shalanky, secretly approached Wendel there, in the church of Santa Croce, to deliver the instructions to him.²⁵⁹ However, the plot was discovered, and Wendel was tortured and imprisoned.²⁶⁰ After this attempt failed, the Austrians rebelled openly in July 1452, demanding Ladislaus's release from Frederick's guardianship and asking Hungary and Bohemia for help.²⁶¹

This course of events suited neither Hunyadi, nor George of Poděbrady, who had only recently been elected as governor of Bohemia.²⁶² Both of them would have had to step down if Ladislaus were emancipated. Therefore, George did not send any help to the rebels, but his arch-rival Ulric II of Rožmberk was happy to do so. Hunyadi also did not assist the rebels,²⁶³ but his nemesis, Ulric II of Celje, did. The outcome hung in the balance until the rebels managed to besiege Frederick in Wiener Neustadt. Forced to yield, the emperor handed over Ladislaus V to Ulric of Celje (the boy's maternal rela-

254 For Piccolomini's report on the preparations, see Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 169ff.

255 As a supporter of Frederick III, Piccolomini had only the worst to say about Eizinger. See Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 184.

256 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 55.

257 Held, *Hunyadi*, 146.

258 See Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:109–10, doc. 49 and *Analecta monumentorum omnis aevi Vindobonensia*, ed. Kollár, 2:988–89, doc. 47.

259 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:352–53, doc. 181; Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 324–25.

260 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:97–98, doc. 46.

261 Piccolomini reported in July 1452 that only some of the Bohemians supported the rebellion, that the Hungarians did not send any troops, and that Ulric of Celje did join the rebels, but reluctantly. *Briefwechsel*, III/1:102, doc. 48.

262 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 57.

263 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 59; cf. Held, *Hunyadi*, 146.

tive) on September 4, on the condition that Ulric would keep him out of public view until Martinmas, when a great diet was to be held in Vienna to decide what to do next.²⁶⁴ However, Ulric ignored that provision and brought Ladislaus to Vienna immediately.²⁶⁵

Vitez presumably realized that everything was about to change, and what an abundance of opportunities that offered. With impressive speed, he gathered his retainers and was by September 15 already preparing to depart for Vienna, to bow to the newly emancipated king.²⁶⁶ However, he did not leave immediately, perhaps because he waited for the Estates to act. Considering their usual speed, they were surprisingly quick. Of course, the old Habsburg party was jubilant, and the first emissary sent before Ladislaus was none other than Augustine of Shalanky.²⁶⁷ Vitez was eventually made a member of an enormous embassy, headed by Cardinal Szécsi and Palatine Garai, which arrived in Vienna in October.²⁶⁸ According to an eyewitness, Provost Jacob of Vasvár (one of Shalanky's canons) Vitez travelled with a splendid entourage of two hundred horsemen, along with Hunyadi's son Ladislaus, Cardinal Szécsi and other magnates. Unfortunately, the ambassadors' arrival was marred by a minor scandal—the king was supposed to ride out of Vienna to greet them on October 7, but was busy feasting and left them to wait on the road for hours.²⁶⁹

This might have been an early sign of Ladislaus's character, and it is possible that some were able to read it. A day after this inconvenience, on October 8, in the ducal palace overflowing with spectators, Vitez made his first speech before the king on behalf of the Hungarian embassy. A large part of it consisted of apologizing on behalf of Hunyadi and other Hungarian lords for not taking part in the rebellion that led to Ladislaus's emancipation. Vitez claimed that Hunyadi did not help the rebels because he had been afraid that Frederick III might harm Ladislaus, and besides he did not have the time—although he wanted to—to join the rebellion, because it had succeeded so quickly. In fact, he compared Ulric of Celje to Caesar himself, saying that his success is similar to the one described with the words “veni, vidi, vici”. Other than these contradictory excuses, he conveyed to Ladislaus the Hungarian Estates' invitation to come to Hungary as quickly as possible.²⁷⁰ During the next several days, Vitez and Cardinal Szécsi competed with Garai and Nicholas of Ilok over who would throw a more splendid feast for the king. The aforementioned Provost Jacob claimed that Vitez and Szécsi

264 *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, 12:180–81, no. 254.

265 Piccolomini, “*Historia Friderici*,” 396.

266 DL 38 843. This document concerns George Gecsei, who was at the time a retainer of Vitez's; he remained in his service until at least 1458. See *Codex diplomaticus comitum Károlyi*, ed. Géresi, 2:319–22, doc. 190.

267 Piccolomini, “*Historia Friderici*,” 399.

268 Szakály, “*Vitéz János*,” 22; Held, *Hunyadi*, 238. For eyewitness accounts, see Piccolomini, “*Historia Friderici*,” 399ff and Antal Áldási, “*A magyar országgyűlés követsége V. Lászlóhoz 1452 október havában*,” *Századok* 44 (1910): 554–62.

269 Áldási, “*A magyar országgyűlés*,” 556 and 559–60.

270 *Vitéz, Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 228–31, doc. 1.

had won by a large margin, and that they had spent at least a hundred florins on the feast.²⁷¹ It seems that at least they realized where the little king's priorities lay.

The honour to speak for the embassy was certainly a tribute to Vitez's rhetorical skill, as it was customary for an embassy to begin its mission with a grand speech. However, its role was primarily artistic and the real business would begin after it.²⁷² Indeed, as agreed with the newly crowned Emperor Frederick III, a diet was to convene on Martinmas, and various embassies were arriving to participate in it. The most difficult negotiations were led with the Bohemian embassy. The Bohemian Estates insisted on their kingdom being elective, not hereditary. They composed a list of conditions for Ladislaus's election, including establishing his court in Prague and preserving the rights of the Utraquists. A compromise was reached in December 1452, but the Bohemian Estates did not accept it. The problem remained open.²⁷³

Enea Silvio Piccolomini was also in Vienna, as a papal emissary, together with Cardinal Nicholas Cusanus, and they were both charged by the pope with protecting the emperor's interests.²⁷⁴ Piccolomini even composed a treatise against the Austrian rebellion for the occasion.²⁷⁵ This was probably when he and Vitez became acquainted,²⁷⁶ as there is no indication of them having known each other before. Piccolomini later wrote that while the diet was in progress, he visited the Viennese mansion of Cardinal Szécsi as a representative of the emperor, together with Ulrich Sonnenberger and Hartung von Kappel,²⁷⁷ to convene with the Hungarian ambassadors. There he personally debated with Vitez, who spoke on the embassy's behalf, on the conditions of the future peace agreement with the emperor. Vitez demanded that the emperor hand over the Holy Crown and everything that his forces were still occupying in Hungary. In Piccolomini's opinion, he spoke rather rashly and belligerently. Piccolomini suffered that for a while, but felt compelled to react when Vitez asserted that Ladislaus V had been Frederick's prisoner, saying that being in the custody of a blood relative could not be called imprisonment. This caught Vitez by surprise, and he retreated, saying he had merely meant that the king was now more available to Hungarians.²⁷⁸

271 Áldási, "A magyar országgyűlés," 561.

272 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 36–38.

273 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 85–86.

274 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:108, doc. 52. Cusanus was already sent as a legate to the Empire a year earlier (see Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV*, 340–41), so he was the closest cardinal available.

275 See Piccolomini, [*Pii II*] *Orationes*, ed. Mansi, 1:184–248, doc. 11. See also *Briefwechsel*, III/1:131, note b.

276 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 33; Pajorin, "Primordi," 822.

277 Ulrich Sonnenberger of Öhringen was a loyal supporter of Frederick III. After the rebellion of 1452, he tried to obtain the bishopric of Passau. Although he had the emperor's support, the mitre went to Ulrich von Nussdorf, a member of the rebel alliance. Sonnenberger became bishop of Gurk in 1453. See Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 586–90. For his biography, see Jakob Obersteiner, *Die Bischöfe von Gurk 1072–1822* (Klagenfurt: Geschichtsverein für Kärnten, 1969), 233–48.

278 Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 400–402. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 83–85.

In December, an even larger Hungarian embassy arrived in Vienna. On December 13, Vitez addressed the king again on behalf of the ambassadors, saying that this time, as the king had summoned them, both the ambassadors and those who appointed them (meaning the Estates) were present, with only a few remaining absent. As for the rest of the speech, Vitez merely repeated the invitation to Ladislaus to come to Hungary as soon as possible.²⁷⁹ His remark about the few who were absent probably referred to Hunyadi, who was still lingering in Hungary. However, as the inevitable could not be postponed any further, he too arrived at the end of December.²⁸⁰ He renounced his position as governor, receiving in return the title of captain-general, hereditary ownership of the county of Bistrița, and the authority to dispose with the royal incomes in Hungary.²⁸¹ It is possible that Vitez's future career was also a concession to Hunyadi.

Ladislaus V briefly visited Hungary in early 1453, attending a diet in Bratislava to confirm the agreements reached during the past few months.²⁸² This was when it became apparent how important the Diet of Vienna was for Vitez. He appeared in Bratislava as the king's privy chancellor, issuing the king's charters; for example, he personally composed and affixed the secret seal of the Kingdom of Hungary to the charter awarding a new coat of arms to Hunyadi.²⁸³ That was probably an unpleasant sight for many. Cardinal Szécsi was hoping that his circle of Habsburg supporters would take full control of the royal bureaucracy. He managed to get himself appointed as high chancellor,²⁸⁴ and the office of privy chancellor was supposed to go to Shalanky.²⁸⁵ It is likely that Hunyadi did not allow that, instead wanting Vitez to act as his agent at the court.

At the Court of the Ill-Fated King

Thus Vitez became a member of the royal court, in charge of the king's secret seal and serving as the judge of a special court attached to the secret chancery, called the court of the king's personal presence (*personalis praesentiae*).²⁸⁶ He followed the king back to Vienna and started handling his correspondence concerning Hungarian affairs; for example, on March 4, 1453 he composed a letter in Ladislaus's name to the Polish king Casimir IV, responding to the latter's accusation that brigands (likely Jiskra's dis-

279 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 234–38, doc. 2.

280 See Engel's comment in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 167n431.

281 Held, *Hunyadi*, 146–47. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 87.

282 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 293.

283 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 183–85, doc. 9; Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:365–68, doc. 177. For Hungarian royal charters marked with the words *commissio propria*, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 32.

284 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:89.

285 Szakály, "Vitéz János," 23. Cf. Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 15. Shalanky was hated at the imperial court: see Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 322.

286 See Szakály, "Vitéz János," 12 and Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 34.

banded troops) were pillaging his lands around Spiš. Vitez dismissed the issue by stating that those were not Ladislaus's subjects.²⁸⁷

Vitez's duties were not merely bureaucratic. His diplomatic abilities were also put to use. It did not take long for him to embark on his first grand mission in the king's service. The peace negotiations with Frederick III were still dragging on, and the next round was held in the emperor's seat of Wiener Neustadt. Vitez gave a speech there on March 23, in which he praised Frederick's younger brother, Duke Albert VI of Austria, for assuming the role of mediator. He also presented Ladislaus's conditions: the return of the Holy Crown and everything Frederick still held in the Duchy of Austria and the Kingdom of Hungary.²⁸⁸ The relationship between Frederick and Albert was turbulent,²⁸⁹ but on that occasion Frederick had indeed given his proxy to his brother, who suggested that Frederick should be bought out of the contested holdings.²⁹⁰ Ladislaus's ambassadors initially refused that; Piccolomini, still acting as a papal emissary, tried to persuade the emperor to agree to further concessions, but only managed to provoke his wrath. However, Albert negotiated with the ambassadors (including Vitez) for a whole night, managing to wring out their assent.²⁹¹ Due to the resistance of the Hungarian Estates and Ulric of Celje, this agreement was never ratified,²⁹² but the negotiations were a valuable experience for Vitez nonetheless. They proved that peace with the emperor could be bought.

Vitez also made a valuable friend during these events—Enea Silvio Piccolomini.²⁹³ It was a friendship of convenience, as both of them would try to draw confidential information out of each other.²⁹⁴ For example, not long after their meeting in Vienna, on April 10, 1453, Piccolomini reported to Pope Nicholas V that Vitez had divulged to him that King Charles VII of France had covertly sent an envoy to Ladislaus V to persuade him to agree to the convocation of a new general council, and that this was supposed to be kept secret from the Hungarian Estates.²⁹⁵ A week later, Piccolomini sent a

287 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 179–82, doc. 8.

288 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 238–42, doc. 3.

289 The conflict between them, often erupting into open warfare, started in the 1430s, when Frederick denied Albert his share of the family inheritance. See Konstantin Moritz A. Langmaier, *Erzherzog Albrecht VI. von Österreich (1418–1463). Ein Fürst im Spannungsfeld von Dynastie, Regionen und Reich* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2015), 28ff.

290 *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, 12:190–94, no. 266.

291 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:127–30, doc. 61.

292 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:145–46, doc. 74.

293 Klára Pajorin, "The Crusades and Early Humanism in Hungary," in *Infima Aetas Pannonica*, ed. Kovács and Szovák, 237–49 at 245.

294 Cf. Pajorin, "Primordi," 823.

295 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:132, doc. 62. France remained a bastion of conciliarism even after the Council of Basel was dissolved in 1449. See Götz-Rüdiger Tewes, "Kirchliche Ideale und nationale Realitäten. Zur Rezeption der Basler Konzilsdekrete in vergleichender europäischer Perspektive," *Vorträge und Forschungen* 67 (2007): 337–70 at 346.

letter for Vitez to King Ladislaus's Austrian chancellor Stephen Aloch of Stein,²⁹⁶ asking him to forward it to the addressee, because Piccolomini did not know where the latter was at the time. He also remarked that Aloch could open it if he wished to.²⁹⁷ He could afford to do so because, as we have seen, he and Vitez would pass on confidential information to each other in person, as was usual in their time. Letters would contain only harmless information, while confidential messages would be delivered either in person or by the letter's carrier.²⁹⁸ Piccolomini certainly seemed very eager to stay in contact with Vitez, even if that meant going through a number of intermediaries. A few weeks after the letter to Aloch, on April 27, 1453, he wrote to King Ladislaus's secretary Nicholas Barius, asking him to deliver his thanks to Vitez for the gifts he had received from him, and to check whether his previous letter was delivered. He also mentioned that he asked Vitez to send him a book on Hungarian history.²⁹⁹

Considering Piccolomini's trouble with reaching Vitez, it seems that the latter was not at the royal court in Vienna at the time. He did still receive orders from the king—for example, on May 17 Ladislaus personally issued a charter ordering Cardinal Szécsi (the high chancellor), Palatine Ladislaus Garai, judge royal Ladislaus Pálóci and Vitez to intervene in some court process involving the nuns of Óbuda.³⁰⁰ However, Vitez did not participate in Ladislaus's next great embassy, the one that in August 1453, in Wrocław, negotiated the wedding of the king's sister Elizabeth to the Polish king Casimir IV. Stephen Aloch was a member of it, while Hungary was represented by Stephen Várdai.³⁰¹ The latter was archdeacon of Pata (in the diocese of Eger) and the king's adviser at the time.³⁰² It is possible that during this, Vitez was attending to the business of his diocese. He indeed was in Oradea when the king visited it in July 1453,³⁰³ so he had probably arrived there somewhat earlier, to prepare for the king's visit. After it, he may have participated in embassies charged with maintaining communication with Emperor Frederick,³⁰⁴ but we do not know that for certain. Although Vitez did

296 Stephen Aloch used to be a chaplain of Frederick III; he crossed over to Ladislaus after the latter's emancipation and became his chancellor for the Duchy of Austria. His new master gave him the parish of Gars, previously held by the already forgotten Kaspar Wendel. See Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 581, 593 and 622–23.

297 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:142–143, doc. 72.

298 Camargo, *Ars Dictaminis, Ars Dictandi*, 18–19; Camargo, "Where's the Brief?," 4–9.

299 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:143–44, doc. 73. See also Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 33.

300 DL 14 684.

301 Both sides sent illustrious embassies. See Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, vol. 13, part 2, 121 (hereafter 13/2:121) and UB, 63, doc. 52.

302 See Zichy, 9:346–47, doc. 270. Várdai had studied in Kraków and Vienna, returning to Hungary after attaining a doctorate in canon law in Padua in 1451. See Béla Kovács, "Studensek, magisterek, doktorok," *Archivum—A Heves megyei levéltár közleményei* 11 (1983): 5–41 at 30.

303 See Keresztúry, *Compendiaria descriptio*, 220–21, doc. 2N. Ladislaus stayed in Oradea for several weeks: see DF 284 161 and 222 498 and DL 44 690 and 38 309. He decided to found a new chapter in the city's cathedral, by the tomb of St. Ladislaus. See Bunyitay, *A váradi püspökség*, 1:282.

304 See *Briefwechsel*, III/1:145, doc. 74.

participate in the Diet of Bratislava in late August and early September 1453,³⁰⁵ he was not among the ambassadors sent to inform Frederick III that the Hungarian Estates refused to ratify the previously mentioned peace agreement; this embassy was headed by the bishop of Vác Vincent Szilasi.³⁰⁶

All things considered, it seems that Vitez's position at the king's court was not firmly established, perhaps due to the decisive influence which Count Ulric of Celje had on the young king. As we have seen, a much more prominent role was played by Stephen Aloch, an agent of Ulric's.³⁰⁷ He was rewarded for his service with the lectorate of Zagreb by mid-1453,³⁰⁸ probably due to the fact that the counts of Celje were patrons of that diocese at the time.³⁰⁹ Aloch's decline coincided with Count Ulric's loss of influence in late 1453. In early 1454 the office of Ladislaus's Austrian chancellor was taken by Ulrich von Nussdorf,³¹⁰ and Aloch was no longer lector of Zagreb as that office was held by some John,³¹¹ probably identical to John Aloch of Stein who held it in 1458.³¹² The latter was likely Stephen's brother or relative.

Changes that occurred in late 1453 accelerated Vitez's rise. This was intrinsically related to the transfer of Ladislaus's court to Prague. In April 1453, after much bickering, most of the Bohemian demands were accepted, George of Poděbrady was confirmed as governor for the next six years, and Ladislaus was to transfer his court to the Czech capital, where he was to be crowned as king of Bohemia.³¹³ This was indirectly Ulric of Celje's undoing, as he tried to levy the cost of Ladislaus's procession to Prague on the Austrian estates. In a palace coup in September 1453, the place of the king's chief adviser was taken by Ulric Eizinger.³¹⁴ Immediately afterwards, the great migration to Prague began. Two thousand Austrian cavalry, led by Eizinger (Count Ulric tried to join the procession, but was forbidden by the king), escorted Ladislaus to Bohemia,³¹⁵ together with three thousand Bohemian horsemen led by George of

305 DL 14 719. For the diet, see *Briefwechsel*, III/1:230, doc. 126 and 242, doc. 135.

306 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:309, doc. 172.

307 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 38.

308 *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Wien*, ed. Karl Uhlirz et al., part 2, *Regesten aus dem Archive der Stadt Wien*, vol 2, *Verzeichnis der Originalurkunden der Städtischen Archives 1412–1457* (Vienna: Alterthum-Verein zu Wien, 1900), 347–50, nos. 3509, 3517, and 3520.

309 The right of patronage was granted to them by Elizabeth of Luxembourg, Queen of Hungary, in 1440, and they took control of the diocese by force in 1445. See Pálosfalvi, "Cilleiek és Tallóciak," 54 and 72ff.

310 Nussdorf was then bishop-elect of Passau, as the emperor was blocking his confirmation because of his participation in the rebellion of 1452. See *Briefwechsel*, III/1:580–83, doc. VIII. See also Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 588 and 654–56.

311 MHEZ, 7:265, doc. 251.

312 MHEZ, 7:359, doc. 358.

313 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 88–89.

314 Piccolomini related the event with much malice: see *Briefwechsel*, III/1:302ff, doc. 172.

315 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:314, doc. 176.

Poděbrady and fifteen hundred Hungarian ones led by John Hunyadi. Duke Albert VI of Austria and Margrave Albert of Brandenburg also took part.³¹⁶

Vitez probably arrived with the Hungarian contingent. He was present when Ladislaus was crowned by the bishop of Olomouc John Haz in St. Vitus's Cathedral in Prague, on October 28.³¹⁷ A few days later he composed several letters in Ladislaus's name, informing the addressees—including the Polish king—of the coronation.³¹⁸ But for Vitez, the most important event took place the day before. On October 27, Hunyadi, Eizinger, Poděbrady and several other magnates entered a treaty of cooperation.³¹⁹ Of course, it was only worth as much as its participants were willing to uphold it, but it gathered the most powerful men in Austria, Bohemia and Hungary. It is therefore significant that Vitez was one of them. Although it was probably Hunyadi who had him included, to bolster his own position, Vitez was nevertheless recognized as powerful in his own right. He was the only bishop and the only bureaucrat among the signatories, and in the treaty's text he was listed in the third place, right after Poděbrady and before Eizinger and his brothers.³²⁰

This was a crucial moment in Vitez's career. He took residence in Prague and remained there as one of the few non-Bohemians at the king's court.³²¹ Piccolomini reported in April 1454 that besides Vitez and Ladislaus's Austrian chancellor Ulrich von Nussdorf, all the other members of the royal court were Bohemians. Among the latter, he praised his old friend Prokop of Rabštejn, who was appointed as the king's chancellor for Bohemia.³²² Prokop's family, although noble, was not distinguished, and he had himself long served Frederick III; after Ladislaus's coronation, Poděbrady convinced him to come to Bohemia.³²³ These three powerful men, Nussdorf, Vitez and Rabštejn, effectively controlled the royal bureaucracy. Piccolomini treated them as equals; for example, in late 1453, after Prokop had asked Piccolomini to send him Niccoló Lisci of Volterra to work for him in the Bohemian chancery,³²⁴ Piccolomini made sure to recommend Lisci to Vitez.³²⁵ After Lisci's arrival in Prague, Piccolomini

316 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:310, doc. 172.

317 The rite was traditionally performed by the archbishop of Prague, but the Utraquist archbishop-elect John of Rokycany lacked the pope's confirmation. See Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 92.

318 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 188–89, docs. 13–14.

319 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 92–93.

320 Franz Kurz, *Oesterreich unter Kaiser Friedrich dem Vierten*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Doll, 1812), 1:277–79, doc. 15. Zdeněk of Šternberk was also one of the signatories. See also Szakály, "Vitéz János," 23.

321 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:401, doc. 212.

322 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:462–63, doc. 274.

323 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 105.

324 Piccolomini pointed out that Lisci was learned in law, history, poetry, and rhetoric, which means that Prokop probably wanted a humanist for his chancery. *Briefwechsel*, III/1:357–59, doc. 183.

325 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:356, doc. 182. Transcript also in Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 36, doc. 1. See also Pajorin, "Primordi," 823.

instructed him to give his regards both to Prokop and Vitez.³²⁶ He also wrote directly to Prokop in January 1454, asking to be recommended to Vitez and Nussdorf.³²⁷

Vitez was not really the only member of Ladislaus's Hungarian secret chancery in Prague. He had at least his vice-chancellor, Nicholas Barius, with him. The latter was then provost of Eger.³²⁸ It is possible that Vitez had personally picked him for chancery service.³²⁹ It was necessary for at least one Hungarian administrative unit to reside at the court, to handle the correspondence concerning Hungary, but it is likely that the king also wanted to keep Vitez by his side, considering that he tried to increase his income. In 1454 he requested of the Hungarian Estates that Vitez should receive not only his personal salary, but the total income of the chancery, due to the cost of staying at the court.³³⁰ Vitez had apparently managed to develop a good rapport with the young king.

While in Bohemia, Vitez maintained his friendship with Piccolomini, probably aware of its potential usefulness. It was Vitez's influence, among other factors, that prompted Ladislaus V to suggest to Pope Nicholas V that Piccolomini should be made cardinal.³³¹ Piccolomini received a copy of the letter containing that suggestion, produced by Vitez's secret chancery, from Prokop of Rabštejn, and thanked Vitez, Prokop and Nussdorf for recommending him to the king.³³² This attempt failed, however, as Nicholas soon died and the next pope, the Spaniard Callixtus III, had other favourites.³³³

Vitez also had the opportunity to meet the papal nuncio Giovanni Castiglione, bishop of Pavia, during the flurry of activities caused by the fall of Constantinople in 1453, when Pope Nicholas V sent out a legion of emissaries tasked with calling for a crusade.³³⁴ Castiglione was sent to Emperor Frederick and King Ladislaus.³³⁵ In December 1453 he presented the idea of a crusade against the Ottomans to the emperor.³³⁶ The latter was aware that Sultan Mehmed II was on the offensive, especially as he kept receiving alarming letters from George Branković, who expected an Ottoman

326 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:378, doc. 195.

327 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:404, doc. 215.

328 See Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:422–23, doc. 206.

329 Szakály, "Vitéz János," 24.

330 *Decreta Regni Hungariae / Gesetze und Verordnungen Ungarns 1301–1457*, ed. Ferenc Döry, Györgyi Bónis, and Vera Bácskai (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976), 433.

331 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 186–87, doc. 11. This letter was certainly not sent from Prague on September 12, 1453 (because the king did not arrive there until October), but probably from Bratislava, as the previous one was (in *ibid.*, 186, doc. 10).

332 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 37, doc. 2; *Briefwechsel*, III/1:291, doc. 206. See also Pajorin, "Primordi," 823.

333 Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini*, 120–21.

334 See Canedo, *Un español*, 136.

335 Castiglione was sent as a nuncio with the powers of a legate: see Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 160.

336 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:394ff, doc. 207.

assault on Serbia.³³⁷ Castiglione's visit prompted him to summon an Imperial diet in Regensburg for next spring, to discuss a potential crusade. Ladislaus V had different priorities. Around Christmas 1453, his emissaries proposed a meeting between the king and the emperor, and an alliance against Count Ulric of Celje. Frederick III postponed his response to this suggestion.³³⁸ That was a sign that the potential crusade had other, more subtle uses.

Vitez was probably not one of those emissaries, as he was in Prague immediately before they appeared before the emperor in Wiener Neustadt.³³⁹ He was also there to greet Castiglione in January 1454. The latter gave a speech before Ladislaus V, presumably very similar to the one he had previously given before the emperor.³⁴⁰ Vitez replied in the king's name, praising the pope for taking it upon himself to organize a crusade and proclaiming Ladislaus's readiness to contribute to it.³⁴¹ But he also knew how to use the idea of a crusade to his ruler's advantage. After eight days of negotiating, Castiglione was summoned before the king, and Vitez addressed him with a much longer speech. Referring to certain agreements reached between the nuncio and the king's advisers (among which he doubtlessly counted himself), he pointed out that the fall of Constantinople should not be the only reason for a crusade, as Hungary was directly threatened by the Ottomans. He said that the king had decided to summon diets in his realms for next February, in Prague for Bohemia and in Buda for Hungary, and to report their decisions to the pope.³⁴² That was similar to what the emperor had promised. Vitez sent a summary of this speech to the pope on January 26.³⁴³ That was less than nothing as far as the crusade was concerned, but the negotiations between Frederick III and Ladislaus V had just reached a new level, as relations between them had become a religious issue. By the time the diet in Buda convened in February 1454, it was already suspected that the crusade could become a bargaining chip. Piccolomini thought the diet's real purpose might have been aimed against the emperor.³⁴⁴

However, the diet dealt more with internal than with foreign matters. Among the king's decisions published there, the most relevant were, firstly, that two new commissions were to be formed, one tasked with gathering and distributing the king's incomes in Hungary, and the other with advising the king about the affairs of the realm. Secondly, that royal incomes were not to be distributed to anyone who did not receive

337 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:281–82, doc. 153.

338 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:399, doc. 211.

339 UB, 69–70, doc. 59.

340 His speech mostly consisted of the usual crusading clichés. See the transcript in Boronkai, "Vitéz János diplomáciai," 118–22.

341 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 31–33; Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 242–45, doc. 4. Fraknói mistook Castiglione for Carvajal and placed the speech in 1456.

342 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 245–51, doc. 5.

343 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 190–91, doc. 15.

344 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:398, doc. 211. Regarding the diet, see Held, *Hunyadi*, 148–49.

a special permit from the king himself.³⁴⁵ Many scholars thought Vitez was behind those decisions, either because he wanted to decrease Hunyadi's power and increase the king's, or because they fit into his political idea of limited monarchy.³⁴⁶ However, the system those decisions attempted to establish was an exact copy of the one already existing in Bohemia. An advisory commission was established there in 1452,³⁴⁷ and commissions in charge of reorganizing the royal incomes right after Ladislaus's coronation.³⁴⁸ Those were all Poděbrady's ideas. As the latter was the king's closest adviser during his stay in Prague, it is likely that he influenced Ladislaus to introduce a similar system in Hungary, to salvage what little royal authority was left there, and probably to limit Hunyadi's rule and give it a semblance of legitimacy, which it sorely lacked.

There is no evidence that Vitez was the instigator of that reform.³⁴⁹ Hunyadi's reaction to it points at Poděbrady as the one responsible. The former governor complained to Eizinger and other Austrian signatories of the treaty of cooperation from October 1453—but, significantly, not to Poděbrady. The Austrians conveyed Hunyadi's complaints to the king, and that probably swayed Ladislaus to cancel the whole project and proclaim it a misunderstanding.³⁵⁰ Hunyadi's power over the royal holdings in Hungary remained intact. Although he had formally resigned the office of governor, he was behaving as a king in all but name. Everyone just continued to call him governor, including Piccolomini,³⁵¹ and even Vitez.³⁵² The magnates had come to loathe him; in September 1453 Ulric of Celje, Nicholas of Ilok, Ladislaus Garai and Ladislaus Pálóci formed an anti-Hunyadi league.³⁵³

Vitez had to carefully balance between his old master in Hungary and his new friends in Prague. He still had much to fear from Hunyadi, not least because his diocese was well within the latter's sphere of influence, and an open attempt on his rule was not something Vitez could contemplate. Piccolomini related that he heard about Hunyadi threatening to take away Vitez's diocese if he composed charters with which the king intended to transfer the command of some royal fortresses to Hunyadi's old enemy John Jiskra, who was still in the king's service.³⁵⁴ Jiskra was a useful and necessary means of containing the so-called "Brethren," groups of nominally Czech brigands

345 *Decreta Regni Hungariae*, 432–33.

346 Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 131; Held, *Hunyadi*, 150; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 294. These authors mostly quote Elemér Mályusz's opinion: see *Decreta Regni Hungariae*, 431. Cf. Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 16–17. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 90–93.

347 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 57–58.

348 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 100–103 and 109–10.

349 Szakály thought so too: see Szakály, "Vitéz János," 27.

350 Katona, *Historia critica*, 6:981–82. Fraknói omitted this whole affair: see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 93.

351 See, for example, *Briefwechsel*, III/1:398, doc. 211 and 459, doc. 272.

352 DL 81 224.

353 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 294. See also Canedo, *Un español*, 332.

354 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:491, doc. 290.

that had become endemic in the north of Hungary.³⁵⁵ However, Hunyadi treated the Hungarian royal demesne as his own and would not allow the king to meddle in it. But if he really did threaten Vitez, he would have done so because he, as the privy chancellor, would produce the charters, not because producing them was his idea.³⁵⁶

Besides internal conflicts, Vitez had to balance international ones as well. In the spring of 1454, an Imperial diet was held in Regensburg, and despite Vitez's previous proclamation of Ladislaus's readiness to participate in the organization of the crusade, the king did not send an emissary there. Piccolomini wrote a treatise on the diet a few months later and dedicated it to Vitez.³⁵⁷ In the dedication he pointedly wrote that the carelessness of the Christian people worried him. He noted it was a great shame that Ladislaus's emissaries were not present at the diet, as Bohemia was part of the Holy Roman Empire (and its king a prince-elect), and because a crusade would benefit Hungary most of all. He especially blamed the Hungarian magnates, adding on a conciliatory note that he would not make any direct accusations because he feared Vitez's retort, as Vitez knew how to trade blows.³⁵⁸ To soften his harangue, Piccolomini mentioned that a Burgundian embassy, headed by the bishop of Toul Guillaume Fillâtre, praised Ladislaus greatly upon returning from Bohemia.³⁵⁹ However, in letters to other addressees he did not mince words, writing that it may well be that God himself was threatening to exterminate the Hungarians, to punish them for neglecting the common good of Christendom.³⁶⁰

Also on the international level, Vitez met Fillâtre and the other Burgundian ambassadors on the first Sunday of Lent in 1454, at a preliminary meeting in Mainz regarding the conflict over the Duchy of Luxembourg.³⁶¹ This duchy had been a vassal of the Kingdom of Bohemia since the fourteenth century, but Duke Philip III of Burgundy had recently claimed it for himself.³⁶² Vitez was one of Ladislaus's emissaries in this matter (as was Gregory of Heimburg, a famous jurist), and he travelled to Prague together with the Burgundians after the meeting, arriving on Maundy Thursday.³⁶³ As this business concerned the Kingdom of Bohemia, whose subject Vitez was not, it is likely that he was only formally the head of Ladislaus's embassy, as he was the only consecrated

355 Július Bartl, "Vzt'ah Jána Jiskru a Jána Huňadyho," in *Husiti na Slovensku*, ed. Kaczarová, 69–78 at 74.

356 Cf. Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 171.

357 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:492–93, doc. 291. In Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 40, doc. 5 the dedication is mistakenly placed in 1455.

358 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:495.

359 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:510 and 549. Duke Philip III of Burgundy was eager to participate in the crusade and had personally attended the diet in Regensburg.

360 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:491, doc. 290.

361 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:443, doc. 256; 510, doc. 291.

362 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 141.

363 "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Königin Elisabeth von Ungarn und ihres Sohnes König Ladislaus," ed. Ernst Birk, in *Quellen und Forschungen zur Vaterländischen Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1849), 209–58 at 249, doc. 10.

bishop at his court and as such its only member not outranked by Fillâtre.³⁶⁴ In his speeches and letters he normally dealt only with matters concerning Hungary.

The Manifest Menace

One of Vitez's main concerns was the business of organizing the anti-Ottoman crusade. Hunyadi had openly threatened to give Ottoman armies free passage through Hungary unless other Christian countries came to its aid.³⁶⁵ Branković was threatening to do the same,³⁶⁶ simultaneously sending panicked pleas for aid to Ladislaus and reminding him that he was still a vassal of Hungary.³⁶⁷ Vitez was responding as well as he could to various accusations, but it was undeniable that the king could no longer afford to ignore the Ottoman threat or the Imperial diets promising to counter it. Castiglione warned him that the emperor's emissaries spoke harshly against him in Regensburg.³⁶⁸ Due to this, Ladislaus was represented at the next diet, held in Frankfurt in the autumn of 1454. Vitez was not among his emissaries,³⁶⁹ although the speech given there by one of the ambassadors, probably Nicholas Barius, was almost identical to parts of Vitez's aforementioned second response to Castiglione, delivered almost a year earlier.³⁷⁰ Although this and the other speeches held in Frankfurt were rhetorical masterpieces,³⁷¹ almost nothing was achieved. The most concrete contribution was the pledge made by the papal emissary that the pope would provide a fleet for the crusade.³⁷² Decisions were postponed for the next diet, to be held in Wiener Neustadt, where the emperor himself would participate.

364 John Haz was then either dead or dying, as a new bishop of Olomouc was elected by June 1. See *Briefwechsel*, III/1:491, doc. 220. Nussdorf was still unconfirmed and no other bishops resided at the court. Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 98.

365 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:467, doc. 274.

366 *Briefwechsel*, III/1:488, doc. 288.

367 Vitez responded to his pleas in Ladislaus's name: see Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 196–97, doc. 20.

368 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 191, doc. 16.

369 The embassy's membership can be determined from a charter in which Ladislaus's representatives prolonged a truce with Philip III of Burgundy in Frankfurt on October 16. Those were chancellors for Austria and Bohemia Ulrich von Nussdorf and Prokop of Rabštejn, vice-chancellor for Hungary Nicholas Barius, Stephen Várdai (then provost of Alba Iulia), and Gregory of Heimbürg. See *Urkunden, Briefe und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte der habsburgischen Fürsten Kg. Ladislaus Postumus, Erzherzog Albrecht VI. und Herzog Siegmund von Österreich aus den Jahren 1443–1473*, ed. Joseph Chmel (Vienna: Hof- und Staats-Druckerei, 1850), 68, doc. 73. See also Pajorin, "Crusades and Early Humanism," 245. Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 99 and Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 34.

370 The speech was published in Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 252–54, doc. 6. Compare with Vitez's earlier speech, especially the part about the struggle between Hebrews and Philistines (*ibid.*, 252) and the whole section after "Cum autem sepenumero..." (*ibid.*, 253).

371 Housley, *Crusading*, 159ff.

372 Piccolomini, [*Pii II*] *Orationes*, ed. Mansi, 1:288, doc. 14; Canedo, *Un español*, 145.

In mid-November 1454, Ladislaus V and George of Poděbrady embarked on a tour of Bohemian vassal countries, Lusatia and Silesia.³⁷³ Vitez took his leave of the king then and returned to his diocese.³⁷⁴ He was there, in Kölesér, on November 25, settling disputes among his parish priests.³⁷⁵ But that was certainly not the primary reason of his return. The Imperial diets, with their promises of enormous crusader armies, forced the Kingdom of Hungary to act. Hunyadi had summoned a diet for November 1454, but the king proroged it until January, to implement the agreements reached in Frankfurt.³⁷⁶ Vitez came as Ladislaus's envoy, and he declared his mission to Hunyadi and an assembly of magnates in Petrovaradin on December 19, delivering the king's orders that a diet was to be held in Buda next January, to discuss the future crusade.³⁷⁷

However, great changes took place over the next few months. In February 1455, Poděbrady escorted Ladislaus back to Vienna. In the meantime, Ulric of Celje took his old place at the court, outplaying Eizinger and reconciling with the king.³⁷⁸ Count Ulric's influence took Ladislaus's policy in a completely different direction, towards renewing the war with the emperor.³⁷⁹ As the already ridiculously lengthy peace negotiations were prolonged once more in August 1455,³⁸⁰ it was clear that the crusade was becoming less and less likely.

Nevertheless, the events Vitez put in motion in Hungary took their course. The Hungarian Estates agreed to send representatives to the Imperial diet in Wiener Neustadt requesting safe conduct for a great embassy led by Cardinal Szécsi, with Vitez, Andrew Kálnói, Count Ulric, Hunyadi and other magnates as members, escorted by two thousand cavalry. However, the emperor hesitated to grant it, and by the end of February Piccolomini suspected that the crusade would never materialize.³⁸¹ Hunyadi ultimately refused to leave Hungary, but Vitez and the rest of the embassy eventually, on their way to Wiener Neustadt, arrived before King Ladislaus in Vienna.³⁸² This was where it became apparent what a delicate balance Vitez had to maintain between several dangerous factors. On March 3 he warned the king that he received a letter from Castiglione, in which the nuncio informed him he had previously twice asked Ladislaus to send representatives to Wiener Neustadt, without receiving a response. Prompted by this, Ladislaus immediately sent a letter to Castiglione, saying he would

373 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 122–23; see also UB, 87, doc. 78. The king and the governor were to leave Prague a week after Martinmas.

374 His last known act in Prague was composing a royal charter on October 4. See DL 107 560.

375 DF 278 585.

376 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 172.

377 Zichy, 9:475–76, doc. 347.

378 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 127; Canedo, *Un español*, 332.

379 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 128ff.

380 *Regesten Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440–1493)*, 12:222, no. 331.

381 Canedo, *Un español*, 147 and 325.

382 Canedo, *Un español*, 332.

soon send representatives and justifying his tardiness by claiming he was waiting for Count Ulric to arrive in Vienna.³⁸³

It was obvious that the crusade did not matter to Ladislaus's court. Nevertheless, Vitez had to keep up appearances before the pope and the emperor. When the king's embassy arrived in Wiener Neustadt, Vitez gave brilliant and rhetorically exemplary speeches there on its behalf, which were later often transcribed and held up as models of rhetorical skill.³⁸⁴ In his first speech, given on March 23, he acknowledged the emperor's primacy among Christian rulers, reminding him of his duty to defend Christendom. However, when it came to pressing issues, he dismissed the fact that the emperor and Hungary were still formally at war by claiming Hungary would join the crusade anyway.³⁸⁵ Piccolomini responded on the emperor's behalf, praising Vitez's eloquence, but avoiding any commitment on his master's behalf, simply stating that it would be honourable to help Hungary because it had fought the Ottomans for so long.³⁸⁶

These pretentious speeches did not advance the issue in any way. The one who tried to do so was Poděbrady, who offered to mediate between Ladislaus V and Frederick III, in exchange for the latter's promise to support the Utraquist cause before the pope.³⁸⁷ The Hungarian embassy responded to Poděbrady's offer through Vitez. In his second speech, he pointed out that his embassy did not have the mandate to negotiate a peace treaty, but he did offer his cooperation within the limits of his authority. He reiterated that a crusade should be launched regardless.³⁸⁸ As his cooperation without a mandate was not worth much,³⁸⁹ it appears that he was trying to dismiss this issue as irrelevant, to satisfy both his king and the pope. The emperor's side was aware of that, and at the close of the diet, on April 25, Vitez could only feign indignation over the emperor's alleged listlessness and employ legal arguments, claiming the decree to launch a crusade was made by the Imperial diet and did not depend on the emperor being at peace with Hungary.³⁹⁰ Piccolomini again responded on the emperor's behalf, saying the latter decided to postpone the crusade for a year, because so much time had passed that an army could not be assembled before winter, and because the death of Pope Nicholas V had dashed the hope of a crusader fleet materializing. Most importantly, he stressed that any future crusade would depend on Ladislaus V making peace with the emperor.³⁹¹

383 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 197–98, doc. 21.

384 Boronkai, "Vitéz János retorikai," 137ff. Boronkai thought that his first speech was composed in accordance with the principles of Pseudo-Cicero's *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. See also Pajorin, "Primordi," 824.

385 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 15 and 20. Fraknói published the specimen of the speech preserved in Munich.

386 Piccolomini, [*Pii II*] *Orationes*, ed. Mansi, 1:316 and 321.

387 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 128–29.

388 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 23–24, doc. 2.

389 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 40.

390 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 271–73, doc. 9.

391 Piccolomini, [*Pii II*] *Orationes*, ed. Mansi, 1:330–31. Assembling the fleet was an enormous problem. The pope's own fleet was not built until 1457. Housley, *Crusading*, 67.

The whole situation was fraught with conflicting interests and Vitez handled it as well as anyone could have. In his final speech, he expressed disappointment with the emperor's decision, but also promised to make sure King Ladislaus and the Hungarian Estates would accept it without animosity.³⁹² After this he reported to Ladislaus in Vienna. Castiglione followed him there, and presented the king with his idea of solutions to the problems that impeded the crusade—specifically, the lack of a peace treaty between the emperor and Hungary, and the conflicts between the Kingdom of Bohemia and the duke of Burgundy over Luxembourg, and with Duke Frederick II of Saxony over other matters.³⁹³ Hunyadi was also a problem that, according to Castiglione, demanded a solution, as the emperor doubted that he would obey Ladislaus.³⁹⁴ Vitez replied on the king's behalf, limiting himself to the issues concerning Hungary. He assured the nuncio that Hunyadi's obedience was not to be of concern, but did not offer any solutions to the conflict with Frederick III, merely saying his master was right and the emperor wrong.³⁹⁵

Vitez was trying to separate the issues of the crusade and the peace treaty, which was the opposite of what the emperor wanted. The latter probably knew that treating those issues as interdependent would put enormous pressure on Hungary. In any case, Vitez was acting as Ladislaus's court expected of him. As for his personal feelings, it seems that he was hoping a treaty would ultimately be reached. In a private letter to Cardinal Carvajal, written in April 1455, Piccolomini remarked that the rivalry between Ulric of Celje and Hunyadi was the greatest obstacle to peace.³⁹⁶ As he was conversing with Vitez at the time, it is entirely possible that he was repeating the latter's opinion. A letter from Piccolomini to Vitez, written on May 15, corroborates this theory. It is a reply to Vitez's earlier letter, in which he wrote of Castiglione's activities in Vienna. Piccolomini cryptically stated he hoped that harmony would be reached and that the person on whom the state depends would agree to make peace.³⁹⁷ We do not know who this person might have been, but it is clear the correspondents did, and that they had talked about this before. Not long afterwards, Piccolomini held a speech before Pope Callixtus III, saying Hungary had long defended Christendom and lamenting: "Oh, how ungrateful we are towards Hungarians, our defenders!"³⁹⁸

392 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 273–76, doc. 10.

393 For the latter, see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 47f.

394 A year earlier, Frederick III attempted to make an alliance with Hunyadi against Count Ulric, but his attempt failed spectacularly. This was reported to Vitez, who was then in Prague, by Piccolomini. It seems that the imperial court thought that Hunyadi was uncontrollable. See *Briefwechsel*, III/1:500–501, doc. 291.

395 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 25–28. We know of Castiglione's suggestions only from Vitez's reply. The latter is preserved only in Fraknói's transcript, as the original was lost or destroyed. See Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 13.

396 Canedo, *Un español*, 147–48.

397 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 41, doc. 6.

398 Piccolomini, [*Pii II*] *Orationes*, ed. Mansi, 1:342, doc. 16 (translation mine).

It is possible that his change of heart regarding Hungary was a result of Vitez's influence.³⁹⁹

After a short stay in Vienna, Vitez returned to Hungary, to continue his increasingly futile efforts at organizing a crusade. In late May he was in Buda, where he, together with Hunyadi, Szécsi and Kálnói, issued summons to a diet that was to be held in the following summer in Győr.⁴⁰⁰ He also attended it, as did Hunyadi, George Branković and other magnates. The famous friar Giovanni Capestrano was there too, and he made unrealistic plans with Hunyadi about forcing the Ottomans out of Europe and conquering Jerusalem.⁴⁰¹ A letter from Callixtus III arrived, and the Estates sent a reply, saying that they would readily participate in any crusade he would launch, but also pointing out that the diet in Wiener Neustadt had achieved nothing. On the other hand, they were greatly impressed with Capestrano.⁴⁰² Conversely, the latter was, according to his own words, most impressed with Vitez and Kálnói, and he admonished the pope for not addressing them personally in his letter.⁴⁰³

After this diet—also fruitless—Vitez probably remained in Hungary. We know that he was in Oradea in December 1455. It is possible that he avoided the court after it fell under Count Ulric's influence, and the state of his relations with Hunyadi is unclear. The former governor summoned him at the end of the year; Vitez asked, through emissaries, whether the invitation was urgent, and upon finding that it was not, he excused himself. He did cooperate with local magnates, however. The royal treasurer and count of Szabolcs Nicholas Várdai, Andrew Báthori and Nicholas Drágfi invited him to a meeting, to be held on January 3 in Bagamér, and Vitez declined Hunyadi's invitation so he could meet with them.⁴⁰⁴ The purpose of this meeting was probably to coordinate military actions against the Brethren in the North, which were put into motion in early 1456. Vitez's retainers and the troops of the castellan of Tokaj were defeated by the Brethren at *Keresztur* (likely Bodrogkeresztúr) in early February, after which the castellan withdrew to Tokaj and Vitez's retainers were dispersed and fled to the area around Szerencs. The other allies—Nicholas Várdai, Drágfi, Báthori, John Vitez Kállói and his father—were called to Tokaj, as there were not enough troops left to defend it.⁴⁰⁵

Some of these were men with whom Vitez had worked before. It is possible that Nicholas Várdai, brother of the future archbishop Stephen, became the royal treasurer

399 Pajorin, "Primordi," 819.

400 Zichy, 9:498–99, doc. 364.

401 Housley, *Crusading*, 108–9.

402 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 198–200, doc. 22. For Capestrano's mission in Hungary, see Housley, *Crusading*, 30–31 and Péter Kulcsár, "L'unione contro i turchi e l'unità religiosa nell'Ungheria quattrocentesca," in *Spiritualità e lettere*, ed. Graciotti and Vasoli, 319–28 at 326–27.

403 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 117.

404 DL 81 224.

405 Zichy, 9:513, doc. 376.

in November 1453 thanks to Vitez's support.⁴⁰⁶ John Vitez Kállói (not related to the bishop in any way) had also previously cooperated with Vitez,⁴⁰⁷ and he was one of Hunyadi's castellans of Tokaj in 1452.⁴⁰⁸ The mentioned alliance against the Brethren was probably made out of necessity, as their presence so deep within Hungary proper threatened the involved nobles' estates. The Brethren had become significantly more dangerous after the emancipation of Ladislaus V, as John Jiskra was then stripped of many of his functions and estates, which destabilized the area previously under his control.⁴⁰⁹ He got some of them back in 1454 (despite Hunyadi's protests) and tried to contain the Brethren, with varying success.⁴¹⁰ Vitez's involvement with the anti-Brethren alliance indicates that he had focused on his domain, not on organizing the crusade.

Pope Callixtus III was much more persistent.⁴¹¹ In September 1455 he dispatched another wave of emissaries to Christian rulers; this time, the one sent to Ladislaus V was none other than Cardinal Juan Carvajal. He arrived in Vienna on November 22 and was very pleased with the reaction to his call for a crusade. However, Vitez was not the one to speak for the king on that occasion, as that honour was given to Gregory of Heimburg.⁴¹² Ladislaus pledged his support for the crusade and promised to summon another diet in Hungary.⁴¹³ This time he personally participated in it, coming to Buda in February 1456. However, his agenda was different than the pope's. He was trying to rouse the Hungarian Estates for a war against Emperor Frederick III, not the sultan,⁴¹⁴ and started mustering troops in Vienna for that purpose.⁴¹⁵

After a long absence from the king's court, Vitez was again with Ladislaus when he entered Buda.⁴¹⁶ It is possible that he really believed that he could help organize the crusade, but perhaps he was just there because it was expected of him. In March, Hunyadi arrived as well. His relations with the court were abysmal, almost escalating to open war.⁴¹⁷ With Carvajal's mediation, he reconciled with Ladislaus V and agreed to turn some of the royal castles over to him, in return gaining full control over Belgrade and some other border fortresses.⁴¹⁸ An agreement of cooperation was formally

406 Szakály, "Vitéz János," 24. See also Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 17.

407 DL 44 729.

408 DL 55 522.

409 František Oslanský, "Portrét Jána Jiskru z Brandýsa," in *Husiti na Slovensku*, ed. Kaczarová, 79–88 at 83–84.

410 Bartl, "Vzt'ah Jána Jiskru," 74–75.

411 See Housley, *Crusading*, 27–28.

412 Canedo, *Un español*, 156–57.

413 UB, 93–94, doc. 89.

414 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 131.

415 UB, 101–2, doc. 100.

416 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 44–45.

417 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 174–75.

418 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 131–32; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 295.

reached between Count Ulric, Hunyadi and other Hungarian magnates, including Vitez.⁴¹⁹ Nevertheless, despite Carvajal's exhortations, the Estates decided to postpone the crusade until after the harvest, nominally due to the lack of foodstuffs.⁴²⁰ On April 6, Vitez publicly declared in the king's name that the crusade would begin on August 1, and that Ladislaus V would personally provide the victuals for the army.⁴²¹ It is possible that this postponement was a prelude to cancellation.⁴²² Deep divisions between Hunyadi and the other magnates could not be so easily overcome, and it is undeniable that the previous two crusades left bitter memories of defeat. However, all of this soon became unimportant, as news that the sultan's army was on the march reached Buda.

The long-feared invasion had begun. Now the king needed Vitez. In May 1456 he charged him, together with Cardinal Szécsi and Hunyadi, to organize the defence of the Danube crossings and border fortresses, and to coordinate the recruitment of crusaders with Cardinal Carvajal.⁴²³ Thus all the previously mutually opposed parties suddenly found themselves forced to cooperate. Vitez's erstwhile underling, Nicholas Barius, was also there; the king had nominated him as bishop of Pécs in December 1455, after Andrew Kálnói's death.⁴²⁴ Both he and Vitez were present at the court in Buda on May 16, when they and other magnates witnessed the king's promise to compensate Count Ulric for the cost of the royal procession to Hungary.⁴²⁵

The 1456 Ottoman invasion of Hungary is irrelevant for this study, but its aftermath was very important for Vitez's career. Therefore, let it suffice to say that the hammer eventually fell on Belgrade. Unexpectedly to everyone—himself included—Hunyadi managed to defend it.⁴²⁶ A wave of triumphalism washed over Christian Europe.⁴²⁷ However, if viewed soberly, the situation had become no less dire for Hungary.⁴²⁸ Indeed, the Ottomans were not discouraged by the defeat and in the following years their pressure on Hungary and its vassal states was stronger than ever.⁴²⁹

419 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 41.

420 Canedo, *Un español*, 159; Held, *Hunyadi*, 155–56.

421 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:500, doc. 251. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 120 and Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 18.

422 Housley, *Crusading*, 109–10.

423 Canedo, *Un español*, 159–60.

424 *Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 40–41, doc. 32. The pope's confirmation followed soon afterwards: see MCV, 2:738–39, doc. 1338.

425 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:522–23, doc. 252. See also Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 18 and Klaić, *Zadnji knezi Celjski*, 92. It is worth noticing that the count chose to cover the cost himself this time, probably remembering what happened the last time he tried to levy it on someone else.

426 Housley, *Crusading*, 112. For a recent reconstruction of the siege, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 176–87.

427 Housley, *Crusading*, 27; Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 133.

428 Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 93.

429 Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 80.

We do not know whether Vitez's troops took part in the defence of Belgrade, nor where he himself was during the eventful summer of 1456. It is possible, if (considering his previous distance) unlikely, that he went to Vienna with the king and Count Ulric in May and was with them when they returned to Hungary at the head of a large Crusader army in late summer, when a diet was summoned in Futog to plan a continuation of the anti-Ottoman campaign.⁴³⁰ He was in Belgrade with Ladislaus Hunyadi, Palatine Garai and other Hungarian magnates to greet the king and the count when they arrived by boat from Futog.⁴³¹ It is possible that he was in the meantime dismissed from the post of privy chancellor, as he was last mentioned as such on April 7, 1456.⁴³² There certainly was something unusual happening with the royal chanceries, as Nicholas Barius, Stephen Várdai and Albert Hangácsi were all titled as vice-chancellors within a short time span.⁴³³ Perhaps this was a portent of the power struggle that would soon ensue, in which even Vitez would be forced to choose sides. His days of careful balancing between Hunyadi and the court were over.

To the Dungeon and Back

As we approach the end of this chapter and this stage, according to our division of Vitez's career, we come to the most turbulent and uncertain period of Vitez's life. Allegiances would shift, power struggles would ensue, and the system Vitez helped to build, predicated upon the consensus on Ladislaus V's rule, would crumble. As we will see, not even Vitez managed to emerge from the turmoil unscathed. His involvement in the Hunyadis' conspiracy had him incarcerated, but he soon recovered his standing at the court, proving his political adroitness and paving the way for his future ascent.

The events were put into motion by the death of the erstwhile governor. Soon after the Siege of Belgrade, John Hunyadi died of the plague. His elder son Ladislaus thus became the head of his party and expected to take over his father's prerogatives. However, as the post of captain-general was now vacant, Ladislaus V appointed Count Ulric to it at the Diet of Futog.⁴³⁴ Affronted by this, the Hunyadi party decided to strike while the iron was hot. In Belgrade, on November 9, Ladislaus Hunyadi, his maternal uncle

430 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 188–89.

431 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 64.

432 Szakály speculated that Vitez might have been replaced by Barius, and Stephen Várdai made vice-chancellor, as they were both more agreeable to Count Ulric. See Szakály, "Vitéz János," 25–26.

433 Hangácsi from the second half of 1455 (DL 75 855; Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:513–14). Barius was still vice-chancellor when he was nominated as bishop of Pécs (*Oklevéltár a Magyar király kegyuri jog történetéhez*, ed. Fraknói, 40–41, doc. 32), which would mean that he held the post simultaneously with Hangácsi. Várdai was mentioned as vice-chancellor around May 1456 (Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 17) and was still one as late as November (*Oklevéltár a Tomaj nemzetségbeli Losonczy Bánffy család történetéhez*, 1:694, doc. 487). It does not help that the sources do not specify at which of the chanceries these men worked.

434 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 189. See also Held, *Hunyadi*, 170–71. Note that before returning to Hungary, Ulric made a treaty of cooperation with George of Poděbrady: Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 133–34.

Michael Szilágyi and their supporters assassinated Count Ulric and detained the king, disbanding the Crusader army.⁴³⁵

Willingly or not, Vitez played a role in this plot. Antonio Bonfini was the first to name him as one of the conspirators. According to Bonfini, on the night before the assassination, Ladislaus Hunyadi sought advice from his late father's friends, primarily Vitez. Although he was not enthusiastic about the plan, Vitez ultimately gave it his approval.⁴³⁶ It is impossible to tell whether those are facts or Bonfini's construct.⁴³⁷ Other sources claim that the Hunyadis' conspiracy to remove Count Ulric was joined by several Hungarian magnates, one of whom was a bishop.⁴³⁸ On the other hand, eye-witnesses testified that Vitez pleaded with Hunyadi to free King Ladislaus's entourage, which was robbed and imprisoned after the assassination.⁴³⁹ This could mean that he did not unconditionally condone Hunyadi's actions, which would fit his profile. He usually did not approve of excesses, and after Ulric was dead, he probably thought the Hunyadis' goal was accomplished and that further escalation of the conflict was pointless.

The strongest indication of Vitez's support for the Hunyadis' plot is the fact that he prospered thanks to its success. Ladislaus V, who was then *de facto* a prisoner of Ladislaus Hunyadi,⁴⁴⁰ bestowed Solyomkő Castle (today Piatra Șoimului in western Romania) and its estates upon Vitez. The castle until then was held in the king's name by Stephen Losonci, and the grant deed stated that it was given to Vitez in compensation for the great expenses and physical and mental exertions he had suffered while performing various diplomatic missions for King Ladislaus. It also stressed that the castle was given to Vitez personally and not to the bishopric of Oradea, and that the recipient had the liberty to bequeath it or dispose of it as he wished.⁴⁴¹ As Vitez had been in conflict with Stephen Losonci and his family before (his troops had occupied

435 Thuróczy had a great influence on historiography in this case, and his agenda was to justify Ladislaus Hunyadi's actions. However, Ulric's assassination was doubtlessly premeditated. See Engel's comment in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 190n490. See also Klaić, *Zadnji knezi Celjski*, 102–4. For a recent reconstruction of the assassination, see Robert Kurelić, "Posljednji svjedok ubojstva: Frankopani i Celjski u petnaestome stoljeću," *Povijesni prilozi* 35, no. 50 (2016): 205–29.

436 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 519; see also Tomislav Matić, "Ivan Vitez u djelima Antonija Bonfinija i Ivana Turočkog," in *Zbornik radova s prve medievističke znanstvene radionice u Rijeci*, ed. Kosana Jovanović and Suzana Miljan (Rijeka: Filozofski fakultet sveučilišta u Rijeci, 2014), 161–71 at 156.

437 Fraknói, for example, thought that his account was false. See Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 123.

438 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 83. The example offered here is the *Schöppenchronik* of Magdeburg.

439 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 71.

440 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 297.

441 DL 88 433. Stephen Losonci was among those put in charge of the royal castle of Piatra Șoimului by Hunyadi in 1452: see DL 14 568.

several of their estates),⁴⁴² it seems that he took advantage of the situation to deal with his adversaries.⁴⁴³

Count Ulric was evidently not much missed. Emperor Frederick's astrologer noted that there was not much grief over his death at the imperial court.⁴⁴⁴ He was the last of his line, and after his assassination his family's lands were torn apart by its enemies and former retainers.⁴⁴⁵ However, Ladislaus V did not forgive nor forget, and the Hunyadis' dominance was not agreeable to their rivals. When the Hunyadis started plotting to remove the king from power altogether, the ever-self-serving Nicholas of Ilok revealed the plot to the court,⁴⁴⁶ and the king's supporters, including Ladislaus Garai, John Jiskra and Ladislaus Pálóci, arrested John Hunyadi's sons and their allies in Buda in March 1457. The only cleric among the latter was none other than John Vitez.⁴⁴⁷ Ladislaus Hunyadi was executed soon afterwards, and the rest of the captives were imprisoned.

If not before, Vitez definitely lost the office of privy chancellor after his arrest. In February 1457 Stephen Várdai was promoted to it and held it simultaneously with Vitez, but in April the only two privy chancellors were Várdai and Barius.⁴⁴⁸ This could mean that the king and his adherents were planning ahead. Várdai was appointed as archbishop of Kalocsa in mid-1456,⁴⁴⁹ which made him Vitez's metropolitan and immediate superior. He was a supporter of Ladislaus V,⁴⁵⁰ and had personally warned Count Ulric of a plot to murder him upon his arrival in Belgrade.⁴⁵¹ He was also hoping to gain Vitez's bishopric after the latter's arrest, and the less prosperous archdiocese of Kalocsa was supposed to go to Albert Hangácsi.⁴⁵² Due to all this, he was perfect for subverting Vitez and preparing his removal and, ultimately, taking his place. It therefore seems the court was planning to permanently remove Vitez even before his arrest.⁴⁵³

442 *Oklevéltár a Tomaj nemzetségbeli Losonczi Bánffy család történetéhez*, 1:676–80, docs. 475–76.

443 For a similar opinion, see Szakály, "Vitéz János," 26.

444 "Aus dem Briefwechsel ... Georg von Peuerbach," ed. Czerny, 304, doc. 10.

445 The *Chronicle of the Counts of Celje* offers a dramatic account of these events: see Franz Krones, *Die Freien von Saneck und ihre Chronik* (Graz: Leuschner und Lubensky, 1883), 127ff.

446 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 190–91.

447 UB, 107, doc. 108. For a list of the arrested, see Engel's comments in Thuróczy, *Chronicle of the Hungarians*, trans. and ed. Mantello and Engel, 197–98nn512–17. Cf. Kaprinai, *Hungaria diplomatica*, 1:179–85.

448 Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:89. See also Szakály, "Vitéz János," 25–26.

449 Engel, *Közepkori magyar genealógia. Magyarország világi archontológiája*, CD-ROM, s.v. Főpapak/Kalocsai érsek/Várdai István.

450 According to a confidential report written for Duke William III of Saxony in December 1457, Várdai had always been a supporter of Ladislaus V. See Fraknói, "Anna szász hercegné," 5.

451 The poet Michael Beheim, who witnessed those events, claimed so. See Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 63.

452 Birk, "Beitrage zur Geschichte," 258, doc. 16. See also Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 102.

453 See Szakály, "Vitéz János," 25–26 and Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 19.

Vitez's imprisonment caused an international scandal. The papal legate, Cardinal Carvajal, protested immediately, telling the king that he would not suffer having a prelate imprisoned by a layman before his very eyes. Ladislaus retorted that Vitez had hostile intentions against him, but Carvajal insisted he be turned over to ecclesiastical authorities. After three days, the king relented.⁴⁵⁴ Vitez was turned over to Cardinal Szécsi, the highest ecclesiastical authority in Hungary.⁴⁵⁵ Conveniently, Szécsi was also a staunch supporter of Ladislaus V (as the high chancellor, he composed the charter which denounced the Hunyadi brothers).⁴⁵⁶ The king could be confident that he would not be sympathetic to Vitez, and indeed, Szécsi had him confined in Esztergom. It seems he was supposed to remain there. The king sent word to George of Poděbrady that Vitez was to remain Szécsi's captive indefinitely.⁴⁵⁷

Immediately before the arrest, Piccolomini sent Vitez his thanks for contributing to his recent promotion to cardinal, asking him to forward his regards to King Ladislaus.⁴⁵⁸ It seems that he was oblivious of what had been happening in Hungary during the past year. However, news of Vitez's arrest travelled quickly. Several months later Piccolomini wrote to Vitez that he and the latter's other friends had persuaded the pope to intercede with Ladislaus V in Vitez's favour, and that they themselves had sent two letters to the king—the first immediately after they heard of the arrest, and the other when the nuncio Lorenzo Roverella was departing for Ladislaus's court. They supposedly charged the nuncio with brokering Vitez's release, but Roverella notified them that King Ladislaus had already released Vitez before his arrival. Piccolomini wrote he was sure that the king was not enthusiastic about Vitez's arrest, but that Vitez's enemies, whom Ladislaus did not dare oppose, persuaded him to agree to it.⁴⁵⁹ His egocentrism aside, it seems that Piccolomini really did intervene in Vitez's favour; he wrote of it to Niccolò Lisci, of course claiming he was the one responsible for the pope's intercession.⁴⁶⁰

In any case, Vitez's confinement did not last long. In May 1457 King Ladislaus departed for Vienna, bringing along the late Ladislaus Hunyadi's younger brother

454 Canedo, *Un español*, 178. Canedo cited Fraknói, who in turn cited the report of a Venetian ambassador written on April 7, 1457. See Fraknói, *Carvajal János bíbornok magyarországi követségei*, 39–40.

455 Besides being primate of Hungary, he was granted the office of permanent legate (*legatus natus*) by Pope Nicholas V (*Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukács, 2:326, doc. 1337 and Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 140), and Callixtus III made him a legate *de latere* in 1455 (Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 24, 27, and 159).

456 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:546–53, doc. 268.

457 UB, 109, doc. 110; see also Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 99.

458 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 44, doc. 9. See also Paparelli, *Enea Silvio Piccolomini*, 123.

459 Vitéz, *Orationes*, ed. Fraknói, 44, doc. 10. Lorenzo Roverella, the future bishop of Ferrara, was merely a papal subdeacon at the time. See Marini, *Degli architri pontificii*, 1:157. His mission was to participate in the continuation of the peace negotiations between Ladislaus V and the emperor: Katona, *Historia critica*, 6:1199.

460 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 126.

Matthias as a prisoner.⁴⁶¹ On the way he visited Esztergom, where he ordered Vitez's release. Piccolomini later wrote that he did so because he did not want Vitez to be arrested at all, but that he could act freely only after leaving Buda and getting away from Hungarian magnates.⁴⁶² Bonfini took this report and expanded it into a touching melodrama, with Ladislaus visiting the incarcerated bishop and consoling him.⁴⁶³ However, Piccolomini was always trying to glorify the young king—unsurprisingly, as he himself took part in his upbringing.⁴⁶⁴ It is more probable that Vitez's release was a sober political decision, as he was more useful to the king outside prison, primarily due to the violent response of the Hunyadi party to the execution of Ladislaus Hunyadi.

It seems the king's circle anticipated some unrest after the coup and counted on the support of George of Poděbrady and Ulric Eizinger. The Bohemian and Austrian Estates were summoned to Trenčín beforehand,⁴⁶⁵ and Poděbrady and Eizinger were ordered to gather their troops at the Hungarian border at the end of March.⁴⁶⁶ However, there was little trust between Ladislaus's court and Poděbrady,⁴⁶⁷ and the execution of John Hunyadi's heir did not weaken his party. Quite the opposite, it galvanized it. A rebellion arose in Hungary, led by the Szilágyi siblings—John Hunyadi's widow Elizabeth and her brother Michael. The kingdom was once again divided by internal war.⁴⁶⁸

Surprisingly, but perhaps not shockingly, Vitez rejoined the king's ranks after his release. Even if he was not an intransigent supporter of Ladislaus V, his previous support for the Hunyadi party was limited. On July 2, 1457, Ladislaus wrote to the councilors of Bratislava to provide lodgings for several prelates who were to participate in the diet he had summoned—Várdai, Barius, Hangácsi (then provost of Eger), and John Vitez. As the diet was cancelled,⁴⁶⁹ we do not know whether Vitez actually arrived in Bratislava, but it seems he was trying to mediate between the king and the rebels. He was not the only prelate to do so—Hangácsi was sent to negotiate with Hunyadi partisans in Transylvania and was in turn captured by them.⁴⁷⁰ For Vitez's part, he travelled to Vienna together with his allies (at least one, John Vitez Kállói, went there with him)

461 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 140.

462 Piccolomini, "Historia Friderici," 466–67. See also Piccolomini, *Opera*, 140.

463 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 523. See also Matić, "Ivan Vitez," 165–66. Unlike Bonfini, Ranzano did not know much about these events; he claimed that the bishop of Oradea and the archbishop of Esztergom were both arrested. See Ranzano, *Epitome rerum Ungaricarum*, LIII.

464 He dedicated his *De liberorum educatione* to him in 1450, when Ladislaus was ten. See *Briefwechsel*, II:104–5, doc. 40.

465 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 88–89.

466 UB, 109–10, doc. 111.

467 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 139–40.

468 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 100–101; Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 297; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 28–29.

469 Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 107–9.

470 Juhász, "Bischof Albert Hangácsi von Csanád," 68–69. Although Juhász titles him as chancellor, the sources he cites refer to Hangácsi as vice-chancellor (for example, DL 15 147).

sometime before September 1457, to meet with the king and to work on making peace with the rebels ("causa paciencie et pacis inter regnicolis Hungarie").⁴⁷¹ This stance fits his profile, as it appears he was rarely firmly on either side in a conflict, but always ready to mediate between the belligerents. It also seems that, similar to the situation after Count Ulric's assassination, he worked towards a peaceful resolution.

It is likely that Vitez went to Vienna to take part in the negotiations led in and around it (Poděbrady refused to enter the city) in August 1457. The king was trying to gather allies and was courting Poděbrady, Albert VI of Austria, two of the dukes of Bavaria and others.⁴⁷² In any case, Vitez rejoined the king's court and in September 1457 travelled with it to Prague, where the royal wedding between Ladislaus and Princess Madeleine of France, daughter of King Charles VII, was to take place. To escort the bride, a great and illustrious embassy was to be sent to France, led by the Bohemian Catholic magnate Zdeněk of Šternberk. All of Ladislaus's realms—Bohemia, Hungary, Austria and Luxembourg—were to be represented in it; for example, Vitez's old colleague Ulrich von Nussdorf was to represent the Duchy of Austria.⁴⁷³ As the Kingdom of Hungary was divided by internal conflict, the rump Estates, consisting of Ladislaus V's partisans, gathered in Győr in late September to appoint their representatives.⁴⁷⁴ The only reason Vitez was not among them was that he was with the king at the time. The appointed representatives were Archbishop Várdai, the judge royal Ladislaus Pálóci and the lector of Esztergom Simon of Treviso.⁴⁷⁵ However, not long after the embassy's departure, the unfortunate bridegroom Ladislaus V died.

Europe was soon flooded with rumours that the king was poisoned. The blame was mostly laid on George of Poděbrady, although there were accusations against the Hunyadis, Emperor Frederick and Ulric Eizinger.⁴⁷⁶ According to recent analyses of the young king's remains, he died of acute lymphocytic leukaemia.⁴⁷⁷ Vitez was in Prague at the time of Ladislaus's death and, according to his own statement, he saw him die and wept before his body. A day later, on November 24, he sent a short letter to the

471 DL 15 188.

472 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 143.

473 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 143; for a full list of ambassadors, see Urbánek, *Konec Ladislava Pohrobka*, 115–16. See also UB, 116, doc. 120 and Piccolomini, *Opera*, 141. Cf. Katona, *Historia critica*, 6:1210.

474 UB, 113–14, doc. 116. Among them were Cardinal Szécsi, Bishop Salánki, the lord palatine Garai, Nicholas of Ilok and others.

475 The latter is the one and the same as lector Simon *de Montono*, King Ladislaus's envoy to the Holy See in September 1453 (*Diplomata pontificum saeculi XV*, ed. Lukcsics, 2:323, docs. 1322–23). In 1461 he was made archbishop of Bar (in today's Montenegro). See Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:89.

476 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 148–49. Bonfini did not believe such rumours (Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 525–26), but Vespasiano da Bisticci did (Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:320–21). An informant of Duke William of Saxony reported in December 1457 that he did not think the king had died of natural causes: see Fraknói, "Anna szász hercegné," 4.

477 Jiří Ferda et al., "111 Years of Radiology in the Heart of Europe: Czech Radiology 1896–2007," *American Journal of Roentgenology* 190 (2008): 1462–65 at 1464.

Hungarian representatives in France, in which he described the king's brief illness and death—according to him, Ladislaus died of the plague, but extremely suddenly. As their embassy had lost its purpose, Vitez advised them to return.⁴⁷⁸

This letter definitely proves that Vitez regained the king's favour and remained close to him until the latter's death.⁴⁷⁹ Also, in a confidential report given by Balthasar Montschiedel, a contender for the bishopric of Zagreb, to agents of Duke William III of Saxony immediately after Ladislaus's death, Vitez was listed among the king's most loyal supporters.⁴⁸⁰ In fact, it seems that Vitez, despite everything, had a personal affection for Ladislaus. In 1459 he decided to realize the deceased king's wish to found the chapter of St. Ladislaus's Sepulchre in the Oradea Cathedral. In the supplication in which he asked permission from the pope, Vitez stated that Ladislaus V planned to build a tomb for himself in the cathedral and to found said chapter, but was prevented by his early death.⁴⁸¹ As he could not provide a tomb for him—the king was already buried in the Prague Cathedral—Vitez would at least found the chapter.

King Ladislaus's death marked the end of an era for Vitez. Although it is possible he supported the Hunyadi conspiracy to murder Count Ulric, there are no indications that Vitez acted directly against the king, nor that he intended to follow the Hunyadis unconditionally. Even if there was a plan to remove him from the chancery, and although his arrest was not accidental, Ladislaus's court was eventually convinced of his innocence. The king's poet Michael Beheim, while composing verse on the events after Count Ulric's assassination, wrote the following:

von wardein der pischoff	(The bishop of Oradea,
Off dises küniges hoff	A member of this king's court,
auch wart gegriffen an.	Was also assailed.
dem wart vnreht geton	An injustice was done unto him,
als sich seit hot herfunden." ⁴⁸²	As was since then discovered.)

There is strong reason to believe that Vitez did not act rashly or without considering the consequences of his actions. He valued sobriety and deliberation. In the municipi-

478 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 201, doc. 23. Of course, the embassy lost its purpose only as far as the Kingdom of Hungary was concerned. The Kingdom of Bohemia still benefited from it, as the king of France agreed to support it in the conflict with Burgundy over Luxembourg. See UB, 122–23, docs. 125–26. This was probably the main purpose of the intended royal marriage: see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 141.

479 Cf. Szakály, "Vitéz János," 26–27. Boronkai and Csapodiné Gárdonyi have seen this letter on microfilm, but did not know where the original was kept (Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 12–13 and 201, doc. 23; Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 12). It was identified in the Archive of the Yugoslav (now Croatian) Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb by Miroslav Kurelac (Kurelac, "Kulturna i znanstvena," 29), but he mistranscribed the call number; it should be AHazu, Codices—97, II b 3, fol. 35r–v.

480 Fraknói, "Anna szász hercegné," 5. Cf. Szakály, "Vitéz János," 26.

481 Theiner, 2:320, doc. 491.

482 "Zehn Gedichte Michael Beheim's zur Geschichte Oesterreichs und Ungerns," ed. Theodor Georg von Karajan, in *Quellen und Forschungen zur Vaterländischen Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1849), 1–65 at 63, doc. 9.

pal charter he composed for his episcopal city of Beiuș, he ordered the judge and the jurors never to adjudicate after they had been drinking.⁴⁸³ Also, he was famous for consulting the horoscope before making any decisions.⁴⁸⁴ Vitez's most consistent effort, ever since he entered the service of Ladislaus V, was to maintain internal balance and peace within Hungary. However, both of his masters worked against that goal. Hunyadi might have been respected and feared, but he was brutal and power-hungry. Ladislaus V might have been pitied and loved, but he was a spineless puppet. When both were dead, the only man Vitez would serve would be himself. He had learned much. He knew how to weave agendas into speeches and to make politics out of personal contacts. But those were only some of the instruments of power at his disposal.

483 DL 50 326. See also Enikő Csukovits, "A középkori írástudók „munkaideje,” *Levéltári Közlemények* 63 (1992): 3–14 at 11.

484 Galeottus Martius, *De egregie* (2005), 206–7.

