

CONCLUSION

AFTER STUDYING VITEZ'S life and works in the context of his era, if we consider the various aspects of his activities (political, diplomatic, ecclesiastical, and cultural), we can conclude they were not radically different from those of other prelates of his time, but there was a certain uniqueness about him. He managed to take advantage of circumstances on a number of occasions, to seize the moment, sometimes even to turn disaster into triumph. He displayed amazing acuity and adaptability in sudden reversals of fortune which might have rendered others stunned. This became apparent on occasions he had no way of predicting. For example, no one could have predicted that King Albert would die precisely when Vitez was in the position to become a member of the embassy which was to offer the Hungarian throne to King Wladislas, or that John de Dominis would become bishop of Oradea, and then be killed in the Battle of Varna precisely when Vitez was the most likely candidate for his successor. Additionally, neither he nor his contemporaries could have known Ladislaus V would be removed from Frederick III's custody in 1452, and Vitez would be employed as his privy chancellor, or that Vitez would be in Prague with Matthias Hunyadi precisely at the time of Ladislaus's death.

Many of Vitez's contemporaries were crushed by these events. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny that Vitez possessed the talent and skills allowing him to take advantage of the opportunities presented to him. He became one of the greatest magnates in Hungary, a veritable kingmaker, precisely because he could to act quickly and deliberately, choose the right allies and associates, outplay his opponents, and endure adversities, such as his arrest in 1457. With these skills and aided by chance, Vitez became the most powerful prelate in Hungary during the first few years of King Matthias's reign, when his power exceeded that of all other fifteenth-century Hungarian prelates, including Cardinal Szécsi.

From beginning to end, Vitez's career, despite his exceptional qualities, is representative of his peers. He came from a middle-ranking Slavonian noble family, not at all a distinguished one, and embarked on his career because he was fortunate to have a father who fought for King Sigismund. This allowed him to study in Vienna and most likely opened the door to the royal chancery for him. Vitez's assignments in the chancery were not different from those performed by other officials, and his only opportunity to distinguish himself was the embassy to Kraków in 1440. He was probably included in the embassy, with the task of performing bureaucratic duties, thanks to John de Dominis, who met him previously. Thanks to his participation in that mission, he was eventually made provost of Oradea. This put him in exactly the right position at the time of De Dominis's and King Wladislas's demise, which threw the kingdom into disarray, and he was the candidate for the bishop's see who was pliable enough to guarantee stability in the uncertain environment of John Hunyadi's regency.

As the bishop of Oradea, Vitez's actions were not significantly different from those of other prelates of his time, such as Andrew Kálnói and Peter Agmánd. His duties consisted of ruling his diocese, mostly through officials, vicars and other subordinates, and of performing diplomatic missions for his patron, John Hunyadi. His appointment

as a privy chancellor of Ladislaus V was unexpected, but not illogical, as it was a result of a compromise between Hunyadi's and the Habsburg party. As a privy chancellor, Vitez turned out to be shrewd enough not to follow his former patron's orders to the letter. He was a good attendant to his new master, King Ladislaus, and had the opportunity to learn from George of Poděbrady, who took on the role of the king's guardian.

The greatest leap forward in Vitez's career took place during the turbulent years of 1456 to 1458, from the death of John Hunyadi to the election of his son Matthias as king of Hungary. Then it became clear that Vitez was no longer either on the Hunyadi or the Habsburg side, but primarily on his own side, and that he was capable enough to create policy for the Kingdom of Hungary. Cardinal Szécsi had similar tendencies, but the difference between these two prelates was that Szécsi tied his fate to the Habsburgs, while Vitez proved to be much more flexible. The period when Vitez decided Hungarian policy culminated with what we termed his "peace policy," manifesting in the initiative for a peace treaty with Emperor Frederick III in 1462. From then on, Vitez would have to adjust his actions to accommodate King Matthias's will, as the young king began to rule in earnest.

The war against George of Poděbrady turned out to be Vitez's undoing. Although he supported his king in its opening phases, a series of failures and defeats caused him to once more try to act independently. This resulted in a clash with Matthias, and the so-called conspiracy of 1471. Even though there is no evidence that Vitez intended to depose Matthias, plotting with his enemies forced the king to take decisive steps against him, leading to Vitez's arrest in 1472. In this respect, Vitez's fate was no different from that which befell other disobedient prelates; in fact, Matthias did to him the same as he had done to Demetrius Čupor and Thomas Himfi. The supposed conspiracy of 1471 and/or 1472 was not a tightly knit group with clear goals, but a loose gathering of lords with differing opinions on what to do and how. Vitez remained on the margins of the revolt, making it uncertain whether he openly opposed Matthias.

What made Vitez different from other prelates of his time and helped him to successfully adapt to emerging situations, as well as to extricate himself from dire circumstances, was his understanding of the importance of prestige and self-promotion, both at local and international levels. That understanding allowed him to refine and increase his power to levels unavailable to most men of his status. Temporary alliances with other magnates, such as those Vitez made with Albert Losonci, Nicholas Várdai or John Vitez Kállói, were typical for his time and regularly practised by his contemporaries. Also, it was not exceptional that Vitez was prone to surrounding himself with men he could trust, such as the group of clerics he brought from Zagreb during his first years as the bishop of Oradea, or Janus Pannonius and George Polycarp Kosztoláni later in his life. The *familia*, or retinue, was the power base of any Hungarian magnate, whether ecclesiastical or lay. However, befriending scholars and artists, and building up one's reputation as a patron of the arts, were Vitez's distinctive features, propelling him to levels of fame unheard of among his peers, which in turn advanced his career. His fame helped him during his first arrest in 1457, and when he was appointed as the archbishop of Esztergom in 1465. Vitez was not the only fifteenth-century Hungarian prelate who used such means to increase his power, but he certainly was the most

successful. The ultimate proof of his success is that he is still remembered more as a humanist or a patron of the arts than as a politician, diplomat or landholder.

As we examine Vitez's life and works, one factor constantly emerges: the stars. Vitez's interest in astrology was partly sparked by his interest in contemporary cultural trends, and it caused him to establish contacts with distinguished astronomers and/or astrologers. But it cannot be explained purely as conforming to trends. We can safely assume Vitez was genuinely interested in prognostication, and that makes his actions all the more difficult to interpret. Perhaps the reasons for them were as banal as the position of planets on a specific day. Although it is tempting to view all the actions of Vitez and his contemporaries as logical, meaningful, and rational, we cannot forget that they were humans, with their whims, irrationalities, and fancies.

Ultimately, it should be kept in mind that Vitez was, throughout his life, a cleric of the Catholic Church. His contributions to contemporary ecclesiology or theology are either non-existent or long forgotten, but his actions as a Hungarian prelate were significant. Starting as a loyal agent of John Hunyadi, he slowly advanced in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, avoiding dangerous situations such as the dreaded transfer to Zagreb. He managed to get his supporters elected as bishops, fought the clerics who opposed him, such as Thomas Himfi, and brought many ecclesiastical institutions (such as the diocese of Nitra) under his direct control. The Hungarian Church would certainly not have been the same without Vitez, and it was impossible for other Hungarian prelates to ignore him, whether they opposed or supported him.

Finally, it should be said that researching John Vitez's life and career demonstrates that a fresh reading of sources, including those known since the nineteenth century, interpretations of which had become entrenched over the decades, can lead to new conclusions. A series of sources so far unexamined in this context was also considered, which filled some of the previously existing lacunae. Despite this, as we live in a time when communication among scholars and access to information is easier and faster than ever before, we can be certain this biography will soon need to be revised. That would be welcome, as it would confirm Vitez significance for historiographical research.

