

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

THE SUBJECT OF this study is the life, career, and public activities of John Vitez of Sredna (early 1400s–1472)—a politician, prelate, diplomat and one of the most influential personages in the history of Renaissance humanism in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary. Vitez was a nobleman from medieval Slavonia, who had spent a large portion of his lifetime as the bishop of Oradea (1445–1465), and finished his career and his life as the archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary (1465–1472). He is also the author of the only extant complete collection of letters from the late medieval Kingdom of Hungary. His life is relevant to the history of Hungary, Croatia, Bohemia, Poland, and the wider Central European area. This work studies the existing literature on John Vitez, presents new sources on his life and career, and attempts to create a complete image of him within the context of the tumultuous history of early Renaissance Central Europe.

By studying the lives, careers and actions of individuals or groups in a given historical period, we can draw conclusions on the causes, courses and consequences of historical events, which will in turn help us to attain a clearer image of a past society, its customs and its perception of reality. Such an approach makes history more “human,” as well as more understandable and interesting.¹ However, the fabric of reality is woven of human expectations, attempts, successes and failures, and their identification as such depends more on a historian’s perception than on the data preserved in sources. That often makes one’s conclusions uncertain.

Such uncertainty was often a problem during my study of John Vitez’s life. The sources are often vague or, especially in the case of narrative sources, unreliable. Vitez’s contemporaries, such as John of Thurocz (Thuróczy), Jan Długosz or Enea Silvio Piccolomini, often reported on events in a way that would serve the purpose they were trying to accomplish—to flatter a ruler, praise their religion, or self-aggrandize. As for the charters, they mostly present brief reports on the consequences of Vitez’s actions, offering nothing in the way of his motives and the actions themselves. Therefore, it was necessary to avoid making (too many) poorly founded assumptions, basing conclusions on conditional statements, and outright guessing (although if we want to reach any conclusions whatsoever, the latter is sometimes unavoidable). It soon became obvious that the task would be impossible if I treated Vitez’s life as an isolated phenomenon.

To alleviate this problem, I decided to focus on the context of Vitez’s historical period, meaning the political, ecclesiastical and cultural events and developments contemporary to him, instead of studying his actions and making assumptions about his motives.² Sometimes this approach yielded very little, as I have often reached the same

¹ Bernard Guenée, *Between Church and State: The Lives of Four French Prelates in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 6.

² Such a method was used by Marianna D. Birnbaum in her biography of Janus Pannonius:

conclusions as other researchers had before. However, sometimes it led to findings different from the established narrative. Still, as the sources remain silent on many important issues, it proved to be impossible to altogether avoid assumptions based on the general tendencies of Vitez's historical period. In other words, we still do not know why Vitez acted as he did, what he was trying to accomplish, or whether those actions were his to begin with or he was simply executing someone else's will. Despite that, the assumptions based on the results of such a comprehensive approach are somewhat more reliable than they would otherwise be. In cases when the data on Vitez's actions were insufficient, such as regarding his study in Vienna or his bearing during the Transylvanian revolt of 1467, comparing them to the actions of other Hungarian prelates made it possible to determine things that would otherwise be unattainable. Also, this procedure provides the benefit of offering a panoramic view on the elite social strata of the fifteenth-century Kingdom of Hungary and wider Central Europe.

Before laying out the results of my own research, I briefly summarize the state of the previous historiographic research of the topic treated in this book, as well as how literature and the relevant sources are treated in it. It should be noted that, due to his importance for Hungarian national sentiment, John Vitez is a very common topic in Hungarian historiography. In Croatia he was also studied, but nowhere near as much as north of the Drava. That said, it is surprising that so few works dealing exclusively with his life and career have been published. Right at the outset of my research, it became apparent that the study of John Vitez was sharply divided into two separate compartments. The first, which produced very few publications, deals with Vitez's political, ecclesiastical and diplomatic activities. The second, much more copious, deals with his role as a Renaissance humanist and patron of the arts and sciences.

The representative work of the first compartment is the first and, until now, only complete biography of Vitez: *Vitéz János esztergomi érsek élete* by Vilmos Fraknói, published in 1879.³ Although its historiographical value is enormous, it has many shortcomings, primarily due to its nineteenth-century understanding of history. Of other works by Fraknói, his article "Zrednai Vitéz János primás származása" deserves mentioning, as it revises his previous theory on the Sredna family.⁴

Of other authors, Vince Bunyitay studied Vitez's activities as a prelate in his monumental history of the diocese of Oradea, but he focused only on the time when Vitez was its bishop.⁵ The next study dealing with Vitez as a politician did not come out until 1990—the article "Vitéz János, a politikus és államférfi (Pályavázlat—kérdőjelekkel)" by Ferenc Szakály.⁶ It, however, follows Vitez's career only until the time of Matthias

Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*. Works listed in the Select Bibliography below are simply cited in a shortened form in these notes.

3 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*.

4 Fraknói, "Zrednai Vitéz."

5 Bunyitay, *A váradi püspökség*, 3:269–93.

6 Ferenc Szakály, "Vitéz János, a politikus és államférfi (Pályavázlat—kérdőjelekkel)," in *Vitéz János Emlékkönyv*, ed. Bárdos et al., 9–38.

Corvinus's accession. András Kubinyi devoted several articles to Vitez,⁷ but he mostly studied his career from the viewpoint of his work in the royal chancery, assessing other aspects of his life according to that.

Studying Vitez as a Renaissance humanist and patron of the arts has been much more appealing to historians. Fraknói himself published several works on that topic.⁸ In the second half of the twentieth century, Iván Boronkai devoted much effort to studying Vitez's writings from the viewpoint of history of literature.⁹ He published the first modern edition of Vitez's letters, which also included his speeches and letters which were not part of the original *Epistolarium* compiled in 1452.¹⁰ Klára Csapodiné Gárdonyi published an overview of Vitez's book collection in 1984.¹¹ Over the last few decades, Maria Prokopp published a number of works on Vitez's cultural activities,¹² while the largest number of works on that topic was published by Klára Pajorin, whose contribution to the study of John Vitez could be compared only to Fraknói's.¹³

In Croatian historiography too, Vitez was studied mostly as a Renaissance humanist and a patron of the arts. Olga Perić devoted several articles to his collection of letters,¹⁴ and Miroslav Kurelac studied his contributions to science, culture and political theory.¹⁵ A semi-biographical novel about Vitez was also published in Croatian.¹⁶ More recently, a brief account of Vitez's life was published by Borislav Grgin in his book *Počeci rasapa*.¹⁷

I started my own research of Vitez's life and activities by studying his own writings—the collection of letters mentioned above, his speeches and other works. After this, I turned to contemporary narrative sources, such as the works of Antonio Bonfini (*Rerum Hungaricarum decades*) and Jan Długosz (*Historia Polonica*). The works of Enea Silvio Piccolomini proved to be most useful. Diplomatic sources, published and unpublished, filled in the gaps and cleared up some of the uncertainties. Of course, the narrative sources alone were not enough, especially when less publicly exposed details of

7 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János"; Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus Pannonius"; Kubinyi, "Adatok."

8 Fraknói, "Váradon írt Vitéz-codex"; Fraknói, "Vitéz János Livius-codexei."

9 Boronkai, "Vitéz János diplomáciai"; Boronkai, "Vitéz János és az ókori klasszikusok"; Boronkai, "Vitéz János retorikai."

10 Iohannes Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai.

11 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*.

12 For example, Prokopp, "Az egyetemszervező"; Prokopp, "Johannes Vitéz, arcivescovo di Esztergom"; Prokopp, "The Scholarship of Johannes."

13 For a list of her works regarding Vitez, see the Select Bibliography below.

14 Perić, "Zbirka pisama"; Olga Perić, "Tragom Ivana Česmičkog u pismima Ivana Viteza od Sredne," in *Dani Hvarske kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 156–64; Perić, "Res privatae dans la correspondance de Iohannes Vitéz."

15 Kurelac, "Kulturna i znanstvena"; Kurelac, "Ivan Vitez od Sredne i Jan Panonije (Ivan Česmički) između anarhije i tiranije," in *Dani Hvarske kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 222–46; Kurelac, "Ivan Vitez od Sredne, kanonik kustos zagrebački."

16 Josip Paro and Olga Perić, *Uspon mirnog čovjeka—Ivan Vitez* (Zagreb: Globus 1979).

17 Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 45–52.

Vitez's life and career (such as, for example, his relations with his neighbours) needed to be dealt with. I therefore made extensive use of various legal documents and private letters, either preserved in manuscript form or published in collections.

When studying various aspects of Vitez's life, I would always start from the primary sources. They were given the most importance, but caution was paramount here as well. Generally, I always relied on legal documents and private letters, if they were available, more than on narrative sources. When treating narrative sources, I have always approached them as potentially biased or uninformed, and I point out wherever necessary in the text that a certain piece of information comes from a narrative source. Also, in cases when I found out that my study of the primary sources had nothing new to add to the existing state of research, I simply cited the most relevant literature on the subject. In cases when there was a conflict between my own findings and the previous researchers' theories, I pointed that out in the footnotes. In this manner I managed to offer a fresh perspective on the previously known sources, to add some previously unknown ones, or ones unused in this context, and to provide an overview of the relevant literature and the other authors' opinions.

Regarding the structure and contents of this book, it should be said that, as I strove toward presenting a complete image of Vitez's life, I observed every stage of it in the context of other persons of his status. To begin with, it was necessary to explain Vitez's origins. To achieve this, I had to study the history of his family, the nobles of Sredna. After this, I concentrated on the beginnings of Vitez's career, his first years as a prelate and his diplomatic and political activities. Regarding this, it should be noted that Hungarian prelates were magnates of the highest rank, who possessed considerable swathes of the kingdom. Therefore, Vitez's ecclesiastical career should not be understood purely as a religious issue, as his interactions with other prelates, with other lords, and the ways in which he managed his estates, were of equal importance. The next stage, Vitez's education, proved to be even less straightforward. While we do have some data regarding the Sredna family, on Vitez's student years we have almost nothing. However, as we know that Vitez enrolled in the University of Vienna, it proved to be worthwhile to study the activities of other contemporary prelates at that university, as well as its curricula. The results go a long way towards explaining Vitez's future interests.

To present a clear and coherent image of Vitez's life and career, the book's chronology is divided into two parts, the central point being King Matthias's accession in 1458. Vitez's political, ecclesiastical, and cultural activities before and after that point are studied in separate chapters. In this way, both the causality between events and different aspects of Vitez's life can be followed without losing track. It is important to note that although the book studies Vitez's life in the context of its time, it deals with events that were relevant from Vitez's point of view. Its scope expands and narrows with it, so at some stages it encompasses the entirety of Central Europe, and at others only the Kingdom of Hungary, or even less. His contemporaries are dealt with to the extent to which they or their actions interacted with Vitez, and they therefore disappear and reappear as they did in Vitez's life. The events that were relevant to his life and career are described in greater detail, while others are merely glossed over. Essentially, the intention here was to depict the world in which Vitez lived, but primarily *his* world.

Vitez's Identity and Family Background

The name "John Vitez" has become so embedded in international historiography it is difficult to imagine that the person denoted by it never used it. It is one of many pieces of information about John Vitez of Sredna that are the result of several centuries' worth of historiographical theories, which have with time become indistinguishable from facts. For example, authors usually state that he was born in 1408.¹⁸ This was an assumption made by Fraknói, and he himself admitted there is no evidence to support it.¹⁹ The earliest mention of Vitez that we know of comes from a charter issued in 1417, which Fraknói did not take into consideration while writing Vitez's biography. In it, Vitez's uncle Philip renounced the rights to an estate in favour of the Pauline monastery on Garić in the name of himself, his sons John (*Iwan*) and Jacob, his brother Dennis and Dennis's son John, who was our Vitez.²⁰ The charter does not say how old the latter was at the time.

Regarding John's family background, Fraknói was at first led astray by the surname "Vitez," which means "knight."²¹ In 1888 he revised his account, as by that time the charters of the Garić monastery were transferred from Zagreb to Budapest and in them Fraknói found numerous mentions of the Sredna family. It became obvious that the Sredna family indeed existed and that Vitez was a member of it.²²

Why, then, do we not refer to him as John of Sredna? Fraknói thought that he must have adopted the surname "Vitez" from another Slavonian noble family, such as the

18 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, "Ime Ivana Viteza," 441; Pajorin, "Antiturcica," 17; Pajorin, "I primordi della letteratura antiturca," 822. Boronkái simply stated that Vitez was born "around 1400": see Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 11. Miroslav Kurelac claimed that Vitez was born in 1405 and his opinion filtered into Croatian historiography: see Kurelac, "Kulturna i znanstvena," 21; Kurelac, "Ivan Vitez od Sredne i Jan Panonije (Ivan Česmički) između anarhije i tiranije," in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 222–46 at 222; Žarko Dadić, "Znanstveni i kulturni krug Ivana Viteza u Mađarskoj u 15. stoljeću," in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 183–207 at 183; Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 45; Hrvoje Petrić, "Was Janus Pannonius (1434–1472) Actually Born in Komarnica, Podravina?," *Podravina* 1, no. 1 (2002): 75–82 at 76; Snežana Božanić and Milica Kisić, "О Ивану Витезу од Средне у делу *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*," *Istraživanja* 23 (2012): 217–31 at 218. However, Kurelac himself came to doubt that, so in his last article on John Vitez he put his year of birth as 1405, but with 1408? in parentheses: see Kurelac, "Ivan Vitez," 179. See also Perić, "Zbirka pisama," 99.

19 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 9.

20 DL 35 447; digest in Elemér Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 8. Közlemény," *Levéltári közlemények* 10 (1932): 256–86 at 258–59, doc. 150. See also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 100 and Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27.

21 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 2ff. This theory was accepted and repeated by Marijanović: see Stanislav Marijanović, "Jan Panonije u svom vremenu—Janovo pravo lice," in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 126–46 at 139.

22 Fraknói, "Zrednai Vitéz," 571. Cf. Csapodiné Gárdonyi, "Ime," 441. Today these charters are kept in the Croatian State Archives, but the National Archives of Hungary has photographs of them. See Silvija Pisk, "Prilog povijesti srednjovjekovnih pavlinskih samostana: prava i povlastice samostana Blažene Djevice Marije na Gariću (Moslavačka gora)," *Radovi: Zavod za hrvatsku povijest* 43, no. 1 (2011): 149–85 at 156–57.

Vitez of Csév or the ones of Komarnica.²³ However, John himself never used the surname “Vitez,” and the surname “of Sredna” was applied to him by his contemporaries.²⁴ The inscription on his tombstone, discovered in scattered pieces in the ruins of the medieval Esztergom Cathedral during the eighteenth century, reads:

IMMORTALE DECVS S_ _ S, ET OMNIS GLORIA DOCTRINAE, RELIGIONIS HONOR,
IOANNES JACET HIC PATRIAE PATER OPTIMVS ILLE, CUI CAPUT ORNABAT STRIGONI-
ENSIS APEX. OBIIT SEXTO IDVS AVGVSTI ANNO.

This can be translated as: “Immortal ornament (of sciences?) and glory of all learning, honour of religion; here lies John, that excellent father of fatherland, whose brow was adorned with the mitre of Esztergom. He died on the sixth of the Ides of August.”

An inscription on another monument found in the ruins reads:

REVERENDISSIMVS DOMINVS JOANNES DE ZREDNA, DIOECESIS ZAGRABIENSIS ARCHI-
EPISCOPVS STRIGONIENSIS, PRIMAS, ET ASPOSTOLICAE SEDIS LEGATVS NATVS, EXCEL-
LENS DOCTRINA, INGENIO PRAECLARVS, RELIGIONE PIVS OBIIT SEXTO IDVS AVGVSTI
ANNO 1472 CVIVS ANIMAE MISEREATVR DEVS.²⁵

This can be translated as: “Most reverend lord John of Zredna from the diocese of Zagreb, archbishop of Esztergom, primate, and permanent legate of the Apostolic See, who excelled in learning, was distinguished by his character, and was devoted to religion, died on the sixth of the Ides of August of the year 1472; may God have mercy on his soul.”

The coat of arms shown on these monuments is halved horizontally. In the upper field is a lion *passant* and in the lower a *fleur-de-lys* flanked by two six-pointed stars. On the tombstone the escutcheon is supported by two dragons. This is the coat of arms that Vitez also used as bishop of Oradea.²⁶ Some thought it possible that this was actually the coat of arms of Janus Pannonius’s family,²⁷ and there were also attempts to link Pannonius with the Vitez of Komarnica family.²⁸ However, the evidence that he was a member of the Česmica family is irrefutable.²⁹ As we will later see, Pannonius’s family was connected to the Sredna family by marriage.

23 Fraknói, “Zrednai Vitéz,” 574.

24 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, “Ime,” 442–45; see also Bunyitay, *A váradi püspökség*, 1:283–84.

25 On the discovery of these monuments, see Máthes, *Veteris Arcis Strigoniensis*, 64–65. Both are today kept in the crypt of the Esztergom Basilica.

26 See a facsimile of Vitez’s episcopal coat of arms in Bunyitay, *A váradi püspökség*, 1:292.

27 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, “Ime,” 446–47. Birnbaum argued that Vitez used the Garazda family coat of arms together with his own (Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 12), thinking that he was related to it. That opinion was, however, based on Fraknói’s older version of Vitez’s origins: see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 7. Two codices from Vitez’s library do bear coats of arms of both Vitez and the Garazdas, prompting some researchers to try to establish the link between them. See Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 7; Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 18–19. Cf. János M. Bak, “Janus Pannonius (1434–1472): The Historical Background,” in Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 29–45 at 30 and Marijanović, “Jan Panonije u svom vremenu—Janovo pravo lice,” in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 126–46 at 140.

28 Petrić, “Was Janus Pannonius (1434–1472) Actually Born,” 80. For the Vitez of Komarnica family, see Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 164–73.

29 Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 26.

None of the contemporary writers refer to Vitez by that name. For example, Vespasiano da Bisticci simply called him *meser Giovanni, Arcivescovo di Strigonia*.³⁰ The first to introduce the name “Vitez” was Antonio Bonfini, who refers to John of Sredna in five places in his *Rerum Hungaricarum decades* as “Ioannes Vitesius” or “Vetesius.”³¹ Csapodiné Gárdonyi thought that this novelty might have stemmed from a text by Galeotto Marzi, in which Galeotto mentions three Johns—bishop of Syrmia John Vitez of Komarnica, commonly known as “the Younger,” our Vitez, and Janus Pannonius. It is possible that Antonio Bonfini read this text and thought all these people were members of the same family.³² Marzio indeed claims that “Archbishop John” (of Sredna) and “Bishop John” (Pannonius) were blood relatives (*consanguinei*) of John Vitez (of Komarnica). However, he made it clear that Vitez was the surname only of the latter John’s family,³³ and he never referred to the former two Johns by it.³⁴

John of Sredna was not a close relative of John Vitez of Komarnica.³⁵ The latter was, however, a distinguished member of the Jagiellonian court during Bonfini’s time (the 1490s), and it is possible he himself exaggerated his consanguinity with John of Sredna, as stressing a bond between himself and a distinguished rebel against Matthias Corvinus might have brought him the favour of the Jagiellonians.

It took several centuries for Bonfini’s mistake to take root. It seems that even those familiar with Bonfini’s work did not know that “John of Sredna” was one and the same as “Iohannes Vitesius.” The first who did was Elek Horányi in the late eighteenth century, who coined a new, composite name “Ioannes Vitézius de Zredna.” After that it became commonly used, and remains such even today.³⁶

This is unfortunate, as the Sredna family had a long history, going back to the time of the Arpadians. Its earliest known member was a certain Večerin or Večelin (this was probably a local variant of the name Wezelin), mentioned in 1257 as a castle-warrior of Gračenica county.³⁷ He had three sons: Desiderius, Gymzina, and Dennis, all men-

30 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:319. See also Alfredo Reumont, “Commentario dei tre prelati ungheresi menzionati da Vespasiano da Bisticci,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, ser. 3, vol. 20 (1874): 295–314 at 297.

31 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 535, 562, 564, 593. The “Vetesius” version is used only once, on p. 519.

32 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, “Ime,” 447–48.

33 Galeottus Martius, *De egregie* (2005), 178–81.

34 Galeottus Martius, *De egregie* (2005), 196–97, 204–7, 208–9.

35 Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 168–69. Cf. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 12, Marijanović, “Jan Panonije u svom vremenu—Janovo pravo lice,” in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 126–46 at 136; and Petrić, “Was Janus Pannonius (1434–1472) Actually Born,” 78.

36 Pajorin, “Vitéz János vezetéknevéről.”

37 CD, 5:71ff, doc. 591. Castle-warriors (*jobagiones castrī*) were, basically, the king’s soldiers who owned land in exchange for military service. See Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*, 20, 48–49 and 79ff and Erik Fügedi, *The Elefánthy: The Hungarian Nobleman and His Kindred*, ed. Damir Karbić, trans. Csaba Farkas (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1998), 37–38. Gračenica was an old Slavonian county that was absorbed by the Križevci county in the mid-fourteenth century: see Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 63–64.

tioned in 1273.³⁸ Dennis in turn had two sons, Desiderius and Germanus; they were the only ones to continue the family line, as Gymzina's son George was killed around 1331 in a blood feud. Sometime before that, the surviving members of the family were elevated to the status of county nobles of Gračnica.³⁹ Both brothers started their own family branches. They were last mentioned in 1340.⁴⁰

Desiderius's son Gerard was John Vitez's grandfather. His generation was the first to possess Sredna, or at least the first to possess it under that name. They were mentioned as its owners in 1365 and it seems they were newcomers there, as another family unsuccessfully contested their ownership of it, claiming it rightfully belonged to them.⁴¹ This was not the original estate owned by the family when they were still castle-warriors, as that one still existed, as royal property, in the fifteenth century and was called *Večerynfelde* or *Gemyzynafelde*—Večelin's land or Gymzina's land. It was still remembered that it used to be held by Večelin, a castle-warrior of Gračnica, and his sons Gymzina and Dennis.⁴² The last time some members of the family were mentioned to have a stake in that estate, located between the rivulets Sredna and *Radslavcz*, was in 1390, when it was simply called *Gresench*,⁴³ probably because it belonged to Gračnica Castle.

Gerard was a rather adroit litigant. He represented parties in the Slavonian banal court,⁴⁴ acted as a royal agent in serving a summons,⁴⁵ and investigated crimes in the service of the count of Križevci in 1386.⁴⁶ After this last case he was no longer mentioned as alive. His sons Dennis, Philip and Peter were represented by their second cousin George, son of Stephen in a court case concerning some of their posses-

38 CD, 6:39, doc. 35. Gymzina was also mentioned in 1278 (CD, 6:245, doc. 210.) and Dennis in 1279 (CD, 6:287–88, doc. 242) and 1296 (CD, 6:253, doc. 221).

39 CD, 9:546, doc. 443 and CD, 10:4, doc. 3. Germanus was in the service of the count of Gračnica in 1327: see CD, 9:347, doc. 288.

40 CD, 10:561, doc. 394. They were previously mentioned in 1338 (CD, 10:386–87, doc. 285). See also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 114.

41 CD, 13:447–48, doc. 324. Gerard's brothers Dennis and John and his cousins (Germanus's sons) Gregory and Stephen are also mentioned here.

42 AHAZU, 70: D I–CXL (Zbirka latinskih isprava), D–IX–33 and D–IX–35; digests in Jakov Stipišić and Miljen Šamšalović, eds., "Isprave u Arhivu Jugoslavenske akademije (Inventar)," part 1/3, *Zbornik Historijskog instituta Jugoslavenske akademije* 2 (1959): 289–379 at 362, nos. 1682 and 1684, and 363, no. 1688, and in *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár*, ed. Norbert C. Tóth and Bálint Lakatos, vol. 12 (Budapest: Magyar nemzeti levéltár, 2013), 101, no. 215; 109, no. 240 and 193, no. 502.

43 AHAZU, 97: Codices, I d 12, vol. IV, pp. 12–13; digests in Stipišić and Šamšalović, "Isprave 1," 322, no. 1026 and 324, no. 1068.

44 CD, 16:148–49, doc. 133 and 182–88, doc. 159; see also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 104, and Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27.

45 CD, 16:234–35, doc. 194.

46 DL 35 279; digest in Elemér Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 6. Közlemény," *Levéltári közlemények* 9 (1931): 284–315 at 298–99, doc. 25.

sion rights in 1400.⁴⁷ This is when the family started using the surname “of Sredna.”⁴⁸ Although some of its members owned estates individually, it is apparent that Sredna had by then become the family seat, and that all of them had a stake in it.⁴⁹

Of the three sons of Gerard, Dennis was the most successful. He joined King Sigismund’s army during his invasion of Bohemia in 1403,⁵⁰ and distinguished himself enough for the king to endow him and his brothers with the estate of Rogoža.⁵¹ He was in the king’s presence on several other occasions during the next few years,⁵² so it is possible he continued to participate in royal military campaigns.⁵³ He and his brother Philip were listed among people in the king’s confidence in 1413.⁵⁴ Until 1425 Dennis was rarely involved in matters of his estates or their environs, so it is possible that he

47 DL 35 302 and 35 303, digests in Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 6. Közlemény,” 311, docs. 40–41. Fraknói thought George was their paternal uncle (see Fraknói, “Zrednai Vitéz,” 571).

48 It was first appended to George’s name in 1395. The same charter contains the only appearance of his brother Michael: CD, 18:66–67, doc. 51.

49 DL 34 856 (digest in Elemér Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 3. Közlemény,” *Levéltári közlemények* 6 (1928): 87–203 at 118, doc. 80) identifies George as a *frater condivisionalis* of Gerard’s sons. The term denotes a participant in joint ownership of an ancestral estate: see Fügedi, *The Elefánthy*, 5 and 20–21; see also István Werbőczy, *Tripartitum opus iuris consuetudinarii inclyti regni Hungariae / The Customary Law of the Renowned Kingdom of Hungary: A Work in Three Parts, the “Tripartitum,”* ed. and trans. János M. Bak et al. (Idylwild: Schlacks, 2006), 112ff.

50 See Baum, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 47–49.

51 DL 34 667; digest in Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 3. Közlemény,” 101, doc. 39. See also Kamilo Dočkal, “Srednjovjekovna naselja oko Streze: prilog našoj srednjovjekovnoj topografiji,” *Starine* 46 (1956): 145–202 at 191–92 and Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27. The king’s donation was issued near the castle of Skalica; regarding Sigismund’s sojourn there, see Pál Engel and and Norbert C. Tóth, *Itineraria regum et reginarum / Királyok és királynék itinerariumai (1393–1438)* (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézetében, 2005), 80. For this type of donation to several brothers through one of them, see Werbőczy, *Tripartitum opus*, ed. Bak et al., 108–9 and Rady, *Nobility, Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*, 101.

52 DL 35 321, digest in Elemér Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 7. Közlemény,” *Levéltári közlemények* 10 (1932): 92–123 at 92, doc. 57; DL 34 669, digest in Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 3. Közlemény,” 102, doc. 41. See also Dočkal, “Srednjovjekovna naselja,” 192.

53 According to DL 34 669, Dennis addressed the king personally in Đurđevac in November 1405, when Sigismund was returning from his campaign in Bosnia (see Engel and Tóth, *Itineraria regum et reginarum*, 84; regarding the war in Bosnia, see Pál Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, trans. Tamás Pálosfalvi (London/New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), 233–34). Dennis also conversed with the bans of Slavonia in Veliki Zdenci in June 1404, while they were on a military campaign (DL 34 668; digest in Mályusz, “A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 3. Közlemény,” 101–12, doc. 40; see also Dočkal, “Srednjovjekovna naselja,” 192), so it is possible that he was in their army.

54 DL 38 115. See also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 77.

followed Sigismund to some of his wars, maybe to Bohemia,⁵⁵ Bosnia,⁵⁶ or other places.⁵⁷ The only exceptions occurred in 1407, when he was involved in some transactions,⁵⁸ and in late 1414, when soldiers from a nearby fortress assaulted his sister Helen, pillaged his estates and abducted several of his serfs, so Dennis returned to personally accuse them in the county court.⁵⁹ This was the time when the kingdom was preparing for a great attack on Bosnia, which ended tragically in August 1415.⁶⁰ Many Slavonian nobles were captured or had trouble returning home after the defeat, and their estates were often pillaged by their more fortunate neighbours.⁶¹ The fact that Dennis was present in Slavonia before the campaign might mean that he also took part in it.

Dorothy, Dennis's first wife, was most likely Vitez's mother. She was first mentioned in late 1416, during an inquiry of the pillaging of her estates, which took place in September 1415,⁶² perhaps while Dennis was away in Bosnia. As Dennis's first (and only) son—John Vitez—was first mentioned on January 10, 1417,⁶³ we may presume Dennis was married some time before that.

Between 1400 and 1425, local affairs were mostly dealt with by Dennis's brothers, Philip and Peter.⁶⁴ It seems the latter also fought for King Sigismund, as by 1408 the king had awarded him several estates previously belonging to a local noble who had joined a rebellion against him.⁶⁵ Peter was also involved in a rather troublesome matter of being sentenced to death for committing calumny against his cousin, George of Sredna, in 1408. The ever-reliable Philip managed to extricate him, at the price

55 Baum, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 58.

56 For Sigismund's expeditions in Bosnia, see his itinerary in Engel and Tóth, *Itineraria regum et reginarum*, 84 and 86–88.

57 For various wars involving Sigismund during the 1410s and 1420s, see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 234–36.

58 Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 97, doc. 72; MHEZ, 5:308, doc. 231. See also Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27.

59 DL 35 415; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 115–16, doc. 122.

60 Dubravko Lovrenović, "Bitka u Lašvi 1415. godine," in *Raukarov zbornik. Zbornik u čast Tomislava Raukara*, ed. Neven Budak (Zagreb: Odsjek za povijest Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu—FF-press, 2005), 275–95 at 275–76.

61 Nikolić Jakus, "Obitelj Čupor Moslavački," 285–87; Lovrenović, "Bitka u Lašvi," 279 and 288.

62 DL 34 843; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 109, doc. 62. See also Dočkal, "Srednjovjekovna naselja," 177–78. For an opinion regarding her parentage, see Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27. Regarding Peter Castellan, the powerful neighbour responsible for the pillaging, see Pavao Maček and Ivan Jurković, *Rodoslov plemića i baruna Kaštelanovića od Svetog Duha (od 14. do 17. stoljeća)* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest / Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2009), 96–102.

63 DL 35 447.

64 Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 99, doc. 79; 106, doc. 96; 120, doc. 134; Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 8. Közlemény," 262, doc. 154; 262, doc. 159; 263, doc. 162; 266–67, doc. 172; 271, doc. 183; 275, doc. 196. See also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 146–47.

65 DL 35 346; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 99, doc. 78. The rebellion mentioned here is probably the one of 1403: see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 209.

of Peter's own and some of his brothers' estates.⁶⁶ As Peter does not appear in later sources, he may have died not long after that.⁶⁷

In Hungarian customary law, calumny was defined as committing fraud in litigation over possession rights.⁶⁸ We may assume that the estate of Sredna was at the centre of this affair, as Dennis and his brothers had no part in it, at least since their father's death. In 1425, Dennis became personally involved in the dispute over Sredna, asking King Sigismund to arrange for him and his brother Philip to take ownership of one half of the estate, saying it was rightfully theirs. The king agreed, but Dennis's cousins George, son of Stephen, and Lawrence, son of Gregory, opposed this, causing a lengthy lawsuit.⁶⁹ It seems that Germanus's branch of the family had usurped the rights of Desiderius's when Dennis and his brothers were minors (as we have seen, George acted as their guardian), and it took several decades for them to settle the matter.⁷⁰ After much litigation,⁷¹ Sredna was finally divided in 1430, with one half going to Dennis and Philip, and the other to George and Lawrence.⁷²

This was the time John Vitez emerged as a historical figure in his own right, so let it suffice to say that his mother died sometime before 1433, when his father married Ilko, widow of Ambrose of Újudvar, who already had several children.⁷³ Dennis also passed away not long after that. The last time he was mentioned was in 1435, when he, his son John and daughter Helen were said to have been jointly renting several peasant plots.⁷⁴ By 1437, the only surviving male members of Vitez's family were, beside himself: his first cousin, Philip's son Benedict,⁷⁵ and his third cousin, George's

66 DL 35 347; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 99–100, doc. 80 and DL 35 356; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 102, doc. 86.

67 Peter was last mentioned in 1410. See DL 35 370; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 106, doc. 96.

68 Werbőczy, *Tripartitum opus*, ed. Bak et al., 336–39.

69 DL 35 505; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 8. Közlemény," 279, doc. 205. Lawrence had at least one brother, named John: see DF 288 094. I thank Bálint Lakatos for bringing this to my attention. John was also probably mentioned in DL 35 406 (digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 7. Közlemény," 113, doc. 115).

70 Fraknói came to a similar conclusion: see Fraknói, "Zrednai Vitéz," 573–74.

71 In chronological order: DL 34 856, 35 509, 35 510, 35 516, 35 522, 35 518, 35 519, 34 861, 35 521, and 35 308. Digests respectively in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 3. Közlemény," 118, doc. 80; Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 8. Közlemény," 280, docs. 208–9; 282–83, docs. 215–16 and 218–19; Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 3. Közlemény," 120, doc. 85; Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 8. Közlemény," 284, doc. 220; and Elemér Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 9. Közlemény," *Levéltári közlemények* 11 (1933): 58–92 at 58, doc. 224.

72 DL 35 046; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 9. Közlemény," 63, doc. 235.

73 DL 103 562 and 103 563.

74 AHAZU, D–X–33.

75 Philip was last mentioned as being alive in 1433 (DL 35 543; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 9. Közlemény," 69, doc. 247), and Benedict was first mentioned in 1434 (DL 35 549; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 9. Közlemény," 72, doc. 256).

son Stephen. They were the ones mentioned in the new donation of Sredna, granted to Vitez and his relatives by King Sigismund on his deathbed.⁷⁶ Benedict married Dennis's stepdaughter Helen, also called Ilko, around 1450.⁷⁷ It seems that they did not have any children together.⁷⁸ He was last mentioned in 1461.⁷⁹ Stephen was last mentioned in 1464.⁸⁰ He, as far as we know, did not have any sons, only a daughter named Dorothy.⁸¹ By the 1470s, the Sredna family name had died out.

However, another branch needs to be added to the Sredna family tree. Vitez's father Dennis also had daughters. Contemporary sources agree on the fact that the poet John of Česmica—better known as Janus Pannonius—was a son of Vitez's sister.⁸² This information is well known to historians and does not warrant further corroboration.⁸³ Interestingly, those two never referred to each other as uncle and nephew; in two of his letters, Vitez called Pannonius his "brother," and their editor, Paul of Ivanić, added that Janus was indeed the bishop's *frater*.⁸⁴ Pannonius gave us the name of his mother—Barbara—in his poems,⁸⁵ and several papal charters confirm it.⁸⁶ Two of his elegies let us know she died on December 10, 1463, aged about sixty.⁸⁷ She was probably older than her brother John and was born a short while after their father had

76 DL 35 058; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 9. Közlemény," 73, doc. 259.

77 Helen was mentioned as his wife in 1454 (DL 100 741), and Benedict acted as the guardian of her daughter, also named Helen, in 1449 (DL 35 594; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 9. Közlemény," 89–90, doc. 301). The latter Helen later married Stephen Kerser of Presečno and had a son named John (DL 35 108, digest in Elemér Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 10. Közlemény," *Levéltári közlemények* 12 (1934): 111–54 at 118, doc. 361; DL 103 688; 100 740; 100 794; 35 667, digest in Elemér Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi középkori pálos kolostorok oklevelei az Országos Levéltárban: 11. Közlemény," *Levéltári közlemények* 13 (1935): 233–65 at 233, doc. 404). See also Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 98.

78 Ilko was already deceased in 1457 (DL 100 741). In 1456 Benedict is mentioned to have been renting a portion of the Újudvar estate, but there is no mention of his children: see AHAZU, D–XII–76.

79 DL 35 074; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 10. Közlemény," 118, doc. 328. Ritoókné Szalay, in *Nympha*, 28, thought that Vitez might have taken him into his service.

80 DL 35 104; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 10. Közlemény," 135–36, doc. 357.

81 DL 35 076; digest in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 10. Közlemény," 117–18, doc. 327.

82 See, for example, Theiner, 2:320, doc. 490; Piccolomini, *Opera*, 392; Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:327; Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 588 and 593.

83 See, for example, Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 7–8; Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 9ff; Bak, "Janus Pannonius (1434–1472): The Historical Background," in Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 29–30; Csapodiné Gárdonyi, "Ime," 445; Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 26; Pajorin, "Primordi," 824; Dražen Nemet, "Prikaz Janusa Pannoniusa u djelu Antonija Bonfinija *Rerum Ungaricarum Decades*," *Podravina* 9, no. 18 (2010): 45–58 at 54.

84 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 158–59, docs. 76–77. See also Perić, "Zbirka pisama," 108. Cf. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 38.

85 Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 216–17; see also Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 47.

86 In 1458, Pope Callixtus III issued two charters in which Pannonius's mother, father, sister, and brother are named. See Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 29.

87 Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 100.

received the possession Rogoža from the king. Another of Dennis's daughters, named Helen, was mentioned as an unmarried girl (*puella*) in 1435, so it is possible that she was the youngest.⁸⁸ It is likely that she was actually his stepdaughter, who was also named Helen.

Although the Sredna family was old, it was not very distinguished. Its members never bore any titles or possessed any fortifications, and their estates were not large or numerous.⁸⁹ None of them—except Vitez, of course—ever performed any important functions; Stephen, son of George, was the only one to perform a state function, by being a noble magistrate of Križevci county in the 1460s.⁹⁰ Thuróczy was probably right when he called Vitez a member of lowly Slavonian nobility.⁹¹ However, Vitez's father was often in contact with King Sigismund and, thanks to his martial abilities, gained considerable favour with him. It is likely that he used it to propel his son into royal service. Nevertheless, the prestige thus gained did not spill over onto the rest of the family.⁹²

This does not mean that Vitez's relatives did not try to curry favour with him. While selling his share in the Sredna estate to the Pauline monastery on Garić in 1461, his cousin Benedict stipulated that the monks were to sing masses for his whole family, but especially for his deceased uncle Dennis: Vitez's father. It is also probably not a coincidence that his third cousin Stephen named his daughter Dorothy,⁹³ after Vitez's mother.

Opinions vary regarding the ethnicity of the Sredna family. Historians thought that its members were ethnically Hungarian, magyarized Slavs or Croats.⁹⁴ As for Vitez's contemporaries, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who personally knew him and Janus Pannonius,⁹⁵ listed them both among Hungarians in the chapter on Transylvania of his *Europa*, but emphasized that they were of Slavonian origin.⁹⁶ Vespasiano da Bisticci,

88 AHAZU, D-X-33.

89 Pálosfalvi used these criteria to identify about ninety families that made up the noble elite of Križevci county in the fifteenth century. See Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 27–29.

90 DL 35 094; summary in Mályusz, "A szlavóniai és horvátországi: 10. Közlemény," 131–32, doc. 348. On noble magistrates, see Fügedi, *The Elefánthy*, 37.

91 Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 289.

92 Pálosfalvi reached the same conclusion while studying other such cases. See Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 317–18.

93 DL 35 076. Regarding the identity of Vitez's mother, see also Dočkal, "Srednjovjekovna naselja," 177, and Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 27ff.

94 For example, see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 9 and "Zrednai Vitéz," 574–75; Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 25–26 and 28; Dadić, "Znanstveni i kulturni krug," in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 183–207 at 184; Tibor Klaniczay, "Pojmovi Hungaria i Pannonia u doba renesanse," trans. Stanko Andrić, *Književna revija* 38, no. 1–2 (1998): 241–49 at 248.

95 Regarding their acquaintance, see Pajorin, "Primordi," 822–23. Vitez probably introduced Pannonius to Piccolomini during the diet of Wiener Neustadt in 1455: see Mariotti, "La corrispondenza poetica," 52–53.

96 Piccolomini, *Opera*, 392. See also Nemet, *Prikaz Janusa*, 46.

who probably got his information directly from Pannonius,⁹⁷ also claimed that Vitez was *di natione ischiavo* (of Slavic ethnicity),⁹⁸ but presents an interesting ambiguity in his biography of Pannonius—after stating that he was an *ischiavo* (Slav),⁹⁹ he calls him *Ungaro* (Hungarian).¹⁰⁰ John Thuróczy simply states that Vitez was born in Slavonia,¹⁰¹ and Bonfini repeats that, probably taking it from him.¹⁰² Pietro Ranzano, another contemporary chronicler, called them Dalmatians,¹⁰³ but that is certainly due to his *all'antica* vocabulary, meaning that he tended to use approximate terms from Classical antiquity for contemporary phenomena. It is also probably not accidental that in a letter to Vitez, Leonard Huntpeichler praised the “Slavonian or Dalmatian” nation as being ancient and very dear to him.¹⁰⁴

Vitez never called himself a Slav, but his family indeed became slavized, even if it was not of Slavic origins. By looking at the names of his ancestors and relatives, it appears that some of them used Hungarian versions of common Christian names, such as Gellért (Gerard) and Dezső (Desiderius). However, in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, Vitez's uncle Philip named one of his sons *Iwan*, which is the Slavic version of John,¹⁰⁵ and during the following decades, members of Vitez's family started using last names with Slavic suffixes. Vitez's third cousin Stephen was called *filius Georgii Bangotha* in 1439,¹⁰⁶ but nine years later he started using the last name

97 Tanja Trška, “Ivan Vitez od Sredne i Jan Panonije iz perspektive talijanskog humanizma: Vespasiano da Bisticci i Ischiavi,” in *800 godina slobodnog kraljevskog grada Varaždina 1209.–2009: Zbornik radova s međunarodnog znanstvenog skupa održanog 3. i 4. prosinca 2009. godine u Varaždinu*, ed. Miroslav Šicel and Slobodan Kaštela (Zagreb / Varaždin: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zavod za znanstveni rad u Varaždinu / Grad Varaždin, Varaždinska županija, 2009), 609–18 at 609.

98 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:319. Trška points out that this could denote ethnic and/or geographical origins. See Trška, “Ivan Vitez,” 609–10.

99 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:327.

100 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:328–29. Older printed editions of Bisticci's work (for example, Lajos Pongrácz, “Vespasiano da Bisticci e i suoi clienti ungheresi,” *Biblioteca dell'Accademia d'Ungheria di Roma* 17 (1939): 5–23 at 8–9) treated this as if Bisticci was stating that Pannonius had “become” Hungarian, which does not make any sense in context. Nevertheless, older works usually quoted this version (for example, Reumont, “Commentario,” 305; Pongrácz, “Vespasiano,” 17). For explanations of this misreading, see Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:xv–xvi, Trška, “Ivan Vitez,” 613, and Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 11.

101 Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 289.

102 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 594.

103 Ranzano, *Epitome rerum Ungaricarum*, LIXv.

104 Isnard Wilhelm Frank, “Das Gutachten eines Wiener Dominikaners für die Universität Preßburg aus dem Jahre 1467,” *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 16 (1967): 418–39 at 424.

105 DL 35 447. We can be certain that this was intentional, as in the same document Vitez himself is referred to as *Johannes*.

106 DL 35 554.

Bangodých,¹⁰⁷ and continued doing so for the rest of his life.¹⁰⁸ In Slavic languages, the suffix *-ich*, when used in last names, denotes a descendant of the person to whose name it is attached, and “Bangotha” was Stephen’s father’s nickname. Similarly, Vitez’s nephew Benedict was known as *Gelethich* during the 1460s.¹⁰⁹ Vitez himself was called *Iohannes Dionisii alias Gele* in a letter to Pope Eugene IV in 1438.¹¹⁰ That was the time when last names came into use in Hungary,¹¹¹ and it seems that Vitez’s branch of the Sredna family used his grandfather’s name (Geleth, i.e. Gerard) as its surname.¹¹² If he had not become a prelate, he would have probably also been known as Gelethich.

It is most likely that Vitez was exactly who his acquaintance Enea Silvio Piccolomini thought he was: a Hungarian of Slavonian origin. Slavonia was in the fifteenth century usually thought of as part of Hungary and its inhabitants called themselves Hungarian.¹¹³ Vitez’s letters indicate that he thought of “Hungary” as his homeland;¹¹⁴ however, that does not mean that he identified himself as an ethnic Hungarian. He was a member of the “Hungarian people” in the sense that he was a peer of the Kingdom of Hungary.¹¹⁵ A nice parallel would be the case of Kaspar Schlick, born in Chéb in Bohemia.¹¹⁶ Despite his German descent, he called Hungary his homeland whenever it could benefit him to do so.¹¹⁷ The only fact supporting his claim was his ownership of estates there, and his status as a member of the Hungarian nobility.¹¹⁸ He did not hesitate to declare himself Italian as well, at least on his mother’s side.¹¹⁹

107 DL 35 588.

108 DL 35 074, 35 076, 35 077, 35 094, 35 104.

109 DL 35 623, 35 626, 35 074.

110 MHEZ, 6:539, doc. 512.

111 Marija Karbić, *Plemićki rod Borića bana* (Slavonski Brod: Hrvatski institut za povijest—Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, 2013), 81.

112 See also Kurelac, “Kulturna i znanstvena,” 24.

113 Klaniczay, “Pojmovi Hungaria i Pannonia,” 242–44. For example, in Piccolomini, *Opera*, 387–88, it is stated that the southern border of Hungary is the river Sava. Pálosfalvi touches on the problem of Slavonic nobility’s ethnicity very insightfully in *The Noble Elite*, 14–16n30.

114 For example, in Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 37–38, doc. 2. See also Klaniczay, “Pojmovi Hungaria i Pannonia,” 248.

115 For such a definition of the “Hungarian people,” see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 121–22 and 350. See also Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 11 and Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 53.

116 Franz Fuchs, “Schlick, Kaspar,” in *Neue deutsche Biographie*, vol. 23, Schinzel—Schwarz, ed. Hans Günter Hockerts (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2007), 77–78.

117 See, for example, *Briefwechsel* part 1, *Briefe aus der Laienzeit (1431–1445)*, vol. 2 (hereafter I/2):57, doc. 28 and 79, doc. 41.

118 *Briefwechsel*, I/2:161, doc. 97. For this sense of belonging to the Hungarian nobility, see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 338.

119 *Briefwechsel*, I/2:153, doc. 90. See also Piccolomini, *Opera*, 124 and Alfred Pennrich, *Die Urkundenfälschungen des Reichskanzlers Kaspar Schlick nebst Beiträgen zu seinem Leben* (Gotha: Perthes, 1901), 2ff.

It would perhaps be most appropriate to call Vitez simply Slavonian, as his family's estates were in medieval Slavonia, in what had by Vitez's time become the county of Križevci. They were in the neighbourhood of the Garić monastery, in the territory of Gračenica.¹²⁰ Their exact location is more difficult to pinpoint. Večelin's estates lay in the Lonja river basin, south of Gračenica.¹²¹ The Sredna creek, which gave its name to the adjacent estate,¹²² no longer exist, but was probably one of the rivulets which drained into the Lonja. Due to massive land improvements conducted in that area during the last two centuries, most of the old watercourses are now gone, but a stream called *Szredai* can be seen south of Gračenica on an eighteenth-century military map.¹²³ The stream called *Radslavcz* or *Radykouc*, mentioned as flowing parallel to Sredna,¹²⁴ might be today's Rakitnjak or some other rivulet in that area.¹²⁵

I have laid out the book's subject, and its research and scope, as well as its structure, research methods, and the current state of research. With this short overview of Vitez's family history, I establish a starting point for embarking on a study of his life and career. We are, therefore, prepared for moving on to his role in the Central European political, ecclesiastical, and cultural history of the Late Middle Ages. We begin with the start of his political career; later chapters present his ecclesiastical and cultural activities. Let our journey begin.

120 Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 124.

121 CD, 5:71–73, doc. 591. Some of the boundaries listed there still exist, such as the streams Trebež and Kutina.

122 The name *Zrednamelleky*, usually applied to the estate, simply means “by Sredna”: see Fraknoi, “Zrednai Vitéz,” 571.

123 Mapire—Historical Maps Online, Arcanum Adatbázis Kft, <https://mapire.eu/en/map/europe-18century-firstsurvey/?layers=163%2C165&bbox=1850682.5755242247%2C5694353.146590834%2C1863571.7694188126%2C5698174.998005093>.

124 AHAZU, Codices, I d 12, vol. IV, p. 12 and AHAZU, D–IX–33.

125 For other attempts at determining the location of Sredna, see Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 63, Dočkal, “Srednjovjekovna naselja,” 177 and 199, and Ritoókné Szalay, *Nympha*, 26. However, it should be noted that earlier studies often confused Gračenica with Garešnica. See Pisk, *Pustinjaci*, 63–64 and Silvija Pisk, “Toponim Gračenica u srednjem vijeku,” *Zbornik Moslavine* 13 (2012): 29–40.