

Chapter 5

IN HIGH PLACES

Behind Matthias's Throne

In the following sections, we examine Vitez's political actions after King Matthias's accession. Their scope is limited to Vitez's political life, his diplomatic activities and his involvement with foreign powers. Unfortunately, using this approach means that some important events, such as his appointment as archbishop of Esztergom or his founding of the University of Bratislava, are glossed over. They will be discussed separately, in their own sections. The key points here will be his participation in Matthias's election and accession, the role he played in the making of the peace treaty with Emperor Frederick III, his involvement in the preparation and execution of the Hungarian participation in the Bohemian Crusade and, lastly, his complicity in the conspiracy against Matthias.

As we will see, Vitez's influence waxed and waned considerably during this period. As Matthias got older, he increasingly pushed Vitez into the background, which makes it more difficult to discern which of Vitez's actions were of his own device, and which of Matthias's. It is important to note there were many factors at play at the Hungarian court, and the king's policy was not necessarily the dominant one. It is necessary to present the events in a clear and uninterrupted manner, as many of those regarding Vitez's ecclesiastical career or his cultural activities happened simultaneously with political developments. As it would not do either of those aspects justice either to intersperse them or to drastically condense them so as to interrupt the narrative, they feature in separate sections.

The watershed moment in Vitez's life was, without any doubt, Matthias Corvinus's accession. After it, he was no longer just one of the pieces on the board, but a policy-maker and statesman. However, despite everything he accomplished up to that point, the part he played was, as so many things in his life, decided by chance. Nevertheless, this time he was far better equipped to control the tide of events instead of being carried by it.

The series of events preceding Ladislaus V's death was essentially accidental. The king initially entrusted the captive Matthias Hunyadi to the treasurer of the Duchy of Austria Konrad Hölzler, who became the king's most trusted adviser after the assassination of Count Ulrich of Celje. However, not long before his death, Ladislaus had Hölzler imprisoned for embezzlement and ordered Matthias's transfer to Prague.¹ Therefore, purely by coincidence, Vitez and the young Hunyadi were at the same place at the time of Ladislaus's death—the former a powerful courtier, the latter a prisoner.

¹ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 143–44.

The king's death caused another power vacuum in Hungary. The neighbouring rulers pressed their more or less legitimate claims, attempting to fill it. Duke William of Saxony, married to Ladislaus's eldest sister Anne, had arguably the strongest claim, but it was not taken very seriously, except by Balthasar Montschiedel.² William himself devoted his energies to his bid for the throne of Bohemia, not Hungary.³ King Casimir IV of Poland was a much more serious contender, as he was not only married to Ladislaus's other sister, Elizabeth, but was also a brother of the heroic King Wladislas, who perished at Varna.⁴ The rest of the candidates were Ladislaus's distant cousins, Emperor Frederick and his brother Albert (recently elevated to archduke of Austria).⁵ Both of them concentrated their efforts on the Duchy of Austria, and the latter attempted to become margrave of Moravia as well.⁶

Vitez was probably weighing his options. As he served John Hunyadi and Ladislaus V through almost two decades of conflict with the emperor, Frederick or Albert's taking the throne would have been risky for him. Casimir was an alluring option, especially as he would not have had the time to focus exclusively on Hungary and would have therefore had to rely on his advisers. However, his election would have prolonged the internecine war, considering that the Hunyadi party held almost half of the kingdom and refused to recognize anyone but their own candidate.

This candidate was Matthias Hunyadi, a boy of fourteen and the last remaining heir of John Hunyadi, who just happened to be in Vitez's vicinity. From Vitez's perspective, he was the ideal choice. Matthias was an inexperienced youth, and if Vitez would arrange the situation to his advantage, he could hope to effectively rule though him. After all, the boy's claim was virtually nonexistent. He could not claim the throne by the right of inheritance, and his family was of foreign, not aristocratic stock.⁷ If elected, Matthias would need the help of powerful and experienced politicians such as Vitez, and that presented many opportunities. Besides, by offering his support to Matthias, Vitez could both regain his reputation among the Hunyadi party and stop worrying about the animosity of the Habsburgs. Of course, as we cannot be certain of Vitez's motives, this is merely speculation, but it might help us understand why he, who had

² See Fraknói, "Anna szász hercegné," 3–6.

³ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 154.

⁴ Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 29–30. Długosz, probably trying to justify later events, claimed that the emperor supported Casimir's bid. See Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:220–21.

⁵ The title was awarded to him by the emperor in 1453, during one of their more amiable episodes. See Wilhelm Baum, "Albrecht VI. († 1463), Erzherzog von Österreich. Skizze einer Biographie (1. Teil)," *Der Sülchgau* 31 (1987): 23–45 at 36.

⁶ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 161–62 and 176.

⁷ Bonfini noted that Matthias was prone to fits of rage if someone would belittle his origins, which his opponents would often do. He was mocked for being a Wallachian and some called him a mongrel (because his mother was Hungarian), particularly among the nobility of Hungary proper. See Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 542. Regarding Matthias's ancestry, see Radu Lupescu, "Matthias Hunyadi: From the Family Origins to the Threshold of Power," in *Matthias Corvinus, the King*, ed. Farbaký et al., 35–50.

until then served Jagiellonian and Habsburg kings, decided to support a candidate so different from them.

Immediately after Ladislaus V's death, Vitez contacted the leaders of the Hunyadi party—Matthias's mother, Elizabeth Szilágyi, and her brother Michael. He had much to offer them. Not only was he at the court in Prague, in direct contact with Matthias, but he also had access to the Bohemian governor, George of Poděbrady, and could obtain his support for Matthias's bid. Vitez thus had the opportunity to practically deliver the boy to the Szilágyis and to secure the support of the most powerful neighbouring ruler. The Szilágyis took his offer and relied on him to negotiate with Poděbrady.

Three weeks after Ladislaus's death, Poděbrady agreed to support Matthias's bid and made sure that the strongest enemies of the Hunyadis—Nicholas of Ilok and John Jiskra—would not attend the election diet in January 1458.⁸ This, however, came at a price. Matthias was required to get engaged to Poděbrady's daughter Catherine, which he did, perhaps on Vitez's advice. Poděbrady also requested a payment of sixty thousand florins, but immediately remitted it as part of his daughter's dowry.⁹ Vitez communicated Poděbrady's terms to the Szilágyis, who apparently found them acceptable. He continued to work with them on gathering support for Matthias.¹⁰ It is possible that the Szilágyis deliberately deceived Ladislaus Garai when they made a deal with him on January 12, according to which Matthias was to marry Ladislaus's daughter Anne.¹¹ However, it is likely that they were willing to promise anything to anyone at the time, thinking they would later be able to choose which commitments to fulfil.¹² It is possible that Vitez also influenced the papal legate Carvajal, who was in Hungary at the time and who might have secured the pope's support for Matthias.¹³

With these preparations in place, Michael Szilágyi marched his army to Pest, where the Estates had gathered. Under duress, they elected Matthias as king on January 24, 1458. Szilágyi was immediately appointed as his governor.¹⁴ Soon afterwards, Poděbrady brought Matthias to the Hungarian border, to Strážnice on the River Morava. There, on February 9, Matthias swore to bring Catherine to his kingdom within a year and to marry her when she turned twelve, and to crown her as queen upon his own coronation, or pay an indemnity of one hundred thousand florins, to repay Poděbrady

⁸ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 152–53.

⁹ Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 299.

¹⁰ Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 529–30. Bonfini claimed that Poděbrady insisted on a ransom in return for Matthias's release. Some historians accepted this as credible (see, for example, Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 136; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 53).

¹¹ Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 140–41.

¹² It seems they were still considering their options when Matthias acceded to the throne, as there were rumours about him breaking off the betrothal to Catherine and planning to marry Anne: Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 207.

¹³ Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 140. Carvajal might have believed that Matthias's (and, by extension, Szilágyi's) election would be beneficial for the pope's crusade project. See Canedo, *Un español*, 189–90.

¹⁴ Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 298–99.

for his help during the election. He also made an alliance with Poděbrady and his sons. This contract was witnessed by, among others, Vitez, Bishop Vincent Szilasi of Vác, and Elizabeth and Michael Szilágyi, all of whom applied their seals to it.¹⁵ In Bonfini's version of these events, Vitez was the most important factor in them; in Strážnice he gave a welcoming speech to Matthias on behalf of Hungary and brought him across the Morava.¹⁶ Although the speech itself, which Bonfini records in full, is almost certainly Bonfini's contrivance, Vitez apparently played a very important part in Matthias's accession, at least because his influence in the kingdom increased immensely after it.

As an experienced statesman, Vitez knew that there would be consequences to the alliance with Poděbrady. The Utraquist governor soon followed in Matthias's steps, and on March 2, 1458, was elected as king of Bohemia thanks in no small part to the support of Zdeňek of Šternberk, one of the most powerful Catholic Bohemian nobles.¹⁷ However, he did not have a bishop to crown him. The Bohemian bishops were Utraquists and as such unconfirmed by the pope, and the only Moravian bishop, Protase of Boskovice, was just appointed as bishop of Olomouc and still unconsecrated.¹⁸ Vitez was likely seen as a staunch ally of Poděbrady, as the latter's rivals, such as Margrave Albert of Brandenburg and the dukes of Saxony, thought it necessary to prevent him from performing the coronation.¹⁹ Indeed, not long after his election, Poděbrady asked Matthias to send him a bishop, pointing out that he was keeping up his end of the alliance—specifically, that he admonished Nicholas of Ilok to submit to Matthias. The request possibly came with an oral message expressly asking for Vitez. Matthias agreed on March 15 to send *some* bishop, noting somewhat sourly that Nicholas of Ilok still did not show any signs of submission.²⁰ However, before dispatching said bishop, Matthias consulted Carvajal, who did not oppose the notion, but did recommend that the officiating bishop should request of Poděbrady to swear an oath of fealty to the pope and to renounce all heresies before the coronation.²¹ This is significant, as just before the dukes of Saxony had, through the papal tithe collector Marinus di Fregeno, asked the pope and Carvajal to prevent Vitez from officiating the coronation.²² The legate himself may have believed that Vitez would not insist on the

15 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:573–75, doc. 279 (see also Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 54). It was specified that the wedding was to be a Catholic one. The Hungarian side likely insisted on this proviso to avoid participating in Utraquist rituals.

16 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 535–36.

17 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 160.

18 Protase was appointed by the pope on November 21, 1457: see UB, 115–16, doc. 119. Although his family was originally Utraquist, they converted to Catholicism, apparently under Capestrano's influence. See Kalous, "Boskovice urai," 375–76.

19 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 162. The only other bishop they thought was likely to crown Poděbrady was Jošt of Rožmberk, who would later be a close adherent of Poděbrady's.

20 MKL, 1:1–2, doc. 1.

21 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 167.

22 Max Jordan, *Das Königthum Georg's von Poděbrad* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1861), 431–32, docs. B and C.

oath and therefore suggested that Matthias should not send him to Prague. The ones ultimately sent there were the bishops of Győr and of Vác, Augustine of Shalanky and Vincent Szilasi respectively.²³

As these two came from opposing sides of the political spectrum, their mission may have meant to demonstrate the newly established Hungarian unity. In any case, what they did in Prague determined the events of the next several decades. Nominally, Poděbrady refused to renounce all heresies, as he did not think himself a heretic. He did, however, agree to swear fealty to the pope, under the condition that it would be done in secret, to avoid an outrage among the Utraquists.²⁴ Shalanky and Szilasi consented and, before the coronation, both Poděbrady and his wife, Joan of Rožmítal, swore on the Gospel to the written text of the oath, held by Shalanky.²⁵ After the oath was taken, on May 7, 1458, Shalanky crowned Poděbrady.²⁶ It is impossible to know how Vitez would have acted had he been in Prague instead, but judging by his efforts to preserve the alliance with Poděbrady, he likely considered it essential. By then, his own policy had begun to take shape, and he finally had the power to implement it.

During the first years of Matthias's reign, the royal court tried to secure the support of the lesser nobles and to curb the power of the magnates. Vitez probably had a hand in laying this course.²⁷ He was seen as one of the most influential persons in the kingdom, and his contemporaries thought the path to the king led through him. For example, in May 1458, the Venetian Senate instructed its ambassador in Hungary, Pietro Tomasi, to approach Vitez as soon as possible and try to win his support for a request from the king.²⁸ Also, in 1462 the papal nuncio Girolamo Lando reported to the pope that Vitez's advice was worth more than the combined power of all other Hungarian bishops.²⁹ Vitez could exert such an influence on the young king not only due to his carefully crafted international prestige and his role in the accession, but also because he managed to rather quickly eliminate the competition. Matthias managed to make himself an enemy of Michael Szilágyi, and the latter was forced to step down as governor in mid-1458, in which Vitez played a part.³⁰ The king also antagonized other powerful allies of his late father, such as Ladislaus of Kanizsa.³¹

23 MKL, 1:8, doc. 5.

24 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 168–71.

25 MDE, 1:22–25, doc. 16.

26 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 172; see also Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 174.

27 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 68; Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 81–82.

28 MDE, 1:26–27, doc. 18. For the context of his action, see Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 88.

29 Johann Christian von Engel, *Geschichte des Ungarischen Reiches und seiner Nebenländer*, 5 vols. (Halle: Gebauer, 1797–1804), 2:15–16, doc. 3; regarding this report, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 142.

30 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 14; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 60–61. Pálosfalvi thought that his mandate as governor was supposed to end with Matthias's arrival in Hungary. See Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 81.

31 Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 83.

If he was truly working to strengthen royal power and limit that of the magnates, Vitez had an example to look up to—George of Poděbrady, who was doing the same since Ladislaus V's coronation, and trying to rule with the support of the Estates after his own accession.³² Vitez also had a vested interest in reducing the magnates' and increasing the king's power, as he could influence the young king directly. After all, no one really saw Matthias as anything more than a convenient puppet at the time.³³ It is difficult to determine which of the latter's decisions during the first year of his reign were really his own, and which were dictated by his advisers, particularly Vitez.

If we decide to view Vitez as one of the most influential among Matthias's advisers, it is perhaps baffling that he was not immediately reinstated as privy chancellor. At that time, the privy chancellor was effectively the only chancellor, as Matthias was not yet crowned and therefore could not legally use the royal double seal, carried by the high chancellor. Although Cardinal Szécsi still held the title, he could not issue any of the king's charters.³⁴ The privy chancellor, on the other hand, could, as the legal restrictions did not apply to the secret seal. During the first few years of Matthias's reign, that office was held by Albert Vetési, bishop of Nitra from 1457 and of Veszprém from 1458, and after him by Nicholas Bodó Györgyi, provost of Székesfehérvár.³⁵ However, it was not crucial to Vitez to hold that office himself,³⁶ as he could wield his power directly through Matthias.³⁷ In fact, he was given a chancery office only after his influence on the king started to wane.

Vitez had other ways of securing his power. After his acquaintance Enea Silvio Piccolomini became Pope Pius II in 1458, Vitez obtained from him a lifelong exemption from the authority of his metropolitan (the archbishop of Kalocsa), his primate (the archbishop of Esztergom), and all papal legates, as well as the privilege to be personally subject directly to the Holy See, no matter which diocese he ruled.³⁸ That was presumably a precaution meant to prevent another incident such as when Vitez was interned by Szécsi, or when Várdai tried to supplant him as bishop of Oradea. Vitez had also gathered enough influence to start promoting his protégés to positions of power.

32 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 389.

33 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 299; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 31.

34 This does not mean he was powerless; in fact, his judicial authority as judge of the court of the king's special presence had most likely increased. See András Kubinyi, "Szécsi Dénes esztergomi érsek—különös tekintettel Mátyás-kori politikai szerepére," in *Lux Pannoniae—Esztergom, Az ezeréves kulturális metropolis*, ed. István Horváth (Esztergom: Balassa Bálint Múzeum, 2001), 97–108 at 99.

35 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 34. Regarding Vetési, see Pál Rainer, "Vetési Albert Veszprémi püspök," *A Veszprém Megyei Múzeumok Közleménye* 18 (1986): 227–33. Györgyi was provost of Székesfehérvár from 1444 until his death around 1475: see Engel, *Magyarország világi archontológiája*, 1:83.

36 Cf. Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 20–21.

37 This is another similarity between him and Provost Benedict (son of Michael) of Székesfehérvár, who did not hold any office in King Sigismund's chancery (being formally his "special adviser"), but had a great influence on the charters issued by it. See Málýusz, *Kaiser Sigismund*, 291.

38 Theiner, 2:319–20, doc. 489.

One of the first bishops appointed after Matthias's accession was his nephew, Janus Pannonius. In March 1459, when Pannonius was provost of Titel (he advanced from being custos of Oradea by then), he was made Vitez's coadjutor in Oradea.³⁹ Immediately afterwards, after the death of Nicholas Barius, he was appointed as bishop of Pécs, despite being well below the required canonical age of thirty.⁴⁰ It appears that Vitez was in charge of that diocese for a while, perhaps due to Pannonius's youth. In a letter sent in June 1459, King Matthias addressed Vitez as the custodian and episcopal administrator of the diocese of Pécs.⁴¹ It is also possible, although difficult to prove, that Pannonius was deputy chairman of the court of the king's special presence in 1458.⁴²

A Man of Peace

The first few years of Matthias's reign were the period in which Vitez's actions as a statesman became more prominent. As his position became reasonably secure, he could start implementing his policy. However, he never explicitly expressed his policy, and what little of it we can discern from his writings is limited to the broader problem of Christian unity and coordinated action against the Ottomans. Nevertheless, we will examine his actions and try to determine whether there was an underlying pattern to them which could be considered a policy. As we shall see, if there was such a policy, it was one of peace.

One of the first goals Vitez devoted himself to was obtaining the Holy Crown for Matthias. The beginning was promising. In the summer of 1458, Vitez started negotiating the transaction with Emperor Frederick,⁴³ who previously hinted that he was ready to turn over the crown in exchange for money.⁴⁴ On September 1, Frederick offered to hand over both crowns he had in his keeping—the Holy Crown and the one previously worn by Queen Elizabeth—and expressed a willingness to cede the parts of western Hungary he still held, in exchange for a payment in cash.⁴⁵ The negotiations essentially came down to haggling. However, we do not know how they would have ended, as they were interrupted by a rebellion of Hungarian magnates in February 1459.

The dissatisfaction with the new king did not take long to erupt. Nicholas of Ilok, after vacillating for almost a year, gathered other dissidents and offered the throne either to Poděbrady, or to the latter's third son, Henry. However, the Bohemian king

³⁹ Theiner, 2:320, doc. 490.

⁴⁰ Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 111; Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 57; Kristóf, "I modi di acquistare benefici," 308.

⁴¹ DL 15 373.

⁴² Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 34. Cf. Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 71.

⁴³ Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 137–38; Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 14.

⁴⁴ According to Bonfini, the emperor claimed he was entitled to indemnities for the damages he had suffered while safekeeping the crown, and for fostering Ladislaus V. See Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 547.

⁴⁵ UB, 159–61, doc. 167.

turned down both offers.⁴⁶ Therefore, Nicholas and his allies, such as the counts Szentgyörgyi, John Vitovec, Ladislaus of Kanizsa, Martin Frankapan, and the bishop of Transylvania Matthias of Łabyszyn, elected Frederick III as king of Hungary on February 17, 1459.⁴⁷ This rendered Vitez's negotiations meaningless, as war with the emperor broke out again. It also created a lasting problem, as the emperor now claimed the title of king of Hungary for himself. However, although the rebels, supported by Imperial troops, had considerable success in the battlefield, Nicholas of Ilok withdrew after a few months and swore fealty to Matthias on July 1. That threw the rebellion into disarray.⁴⁸ True to Balthasar Montschiedel's earlier assessment of his character, Nicholas proved he was loyal only to himself.⁴⁹

During the rebellion, Vitez was firmly on Matthias's side and was among the magnates who affirmed their allegiance to him on February 10 in Buda.⁵⁰ However, the rebellion interrupted another item on his agenda. When it broke out, Vitez was negotiating in Szeged with the Bosnian king, Stephen Thomas, who agreed to send his son Stephen to what was left of Serbia to marry the recently deceased George Branković's daughter and become its ruler. That was a bitter honour, as an Ottoman invasion was looming. King Stephen wrote to Vitez from Bosnia on February 10, thirteen days after their meeting (he emphasized that he rode very quickly and without rest), promising to execute the plan despite the Ottoman pressure. He also let Vitez know he had learned that the Ottomans would make a decisive assault on Bosnia as soon as the snow melted, begging Vitez to influence Matthias to send him aid, because otherwise he would certainly perish.⁵¹ This plan was supposed to consolidate the defence of Hungary in the south by establishing an alliance between Bosnia and Serbia. Although the plan succeeded, the alliance failed militarily and Sultan Mehmed II conquered Smederevo, the capital of Serbia, on June 20.⁵² As Hungary was paralyzed with infighting, it was unable to prevent that, or even to respond to it. If not before, Vitez probably realized then that the Ottoman Empire was impossible to ignore, and that it would take the full strength of Hungary to resist it.

⁴⁶ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 206.

⁴⁷ See their declaration in *Vestigia comitiorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, 348–52. See also Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 544. Pálosfalvi warned that Ladislaus Garai had died shortly before the election, but his name and seal were included in the declaration nevertheless. See Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 83. Grgin thought that Martin Frankapan had joined the rebels due to his rivalry with his brother Stephen, who was Matthias's supporter. See Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 85. The only prelate among the rebels, Bishop Matthias of Transylvania, was an ally of Nicholas of Ilok. See Solymosi, "König Matthias Corvinus," 290.

⁴⁸ Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 63–64. Kubinyi thought that Nicholas used the rebellion as a means of exacting concessions from the king.

⁴⁹ For Montschiedel's assessment of the loyalties of Hungarian magnates, see Fraknói, "Anna szász herczegné," 4–6.

⁵⁰ For their declaration, see *Vestigia comitiorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, 352–55.

⁵¹ UB, 171–72, doc. 176. Regarding the power struggle that ensued in Serbia after Branković's death, see Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 94–97.

⁵² Olesnicki, "Mihajlo Szilágyi," 34–35; see also Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 197–98.

Pope Pius II was already aware of that, and he quickly took steps to end the war between Frederick and Matthias. Cardinal Carvajal, who was still residing in Hungary and trying to organize the increasingly elusive crusade,⁵³ suggested that George of Poděbrady could mediate between them. The latter found this offer appealing, as he needed the emperor to recognize him as king of Bohemia and prince-elector, and did not mind putting some pressure on Matthias due to the rumours about him refusing to marry Princess Catherine.⁵⁴ In July 1459, Vitez went to negotiate with the emperor again, accompanied by Oswald Rozgonyi, this time to broker a truce. They reported to Matthias that Poděbrady offered to mediate. Matthias accepted the offer and granted his envoys full powers.⁵⁵ The first result of the negotiations was a one-year truce, concluded in Brno under the Bohemian king's auspices. To maintain his neutrality, Poděbrady titled both Frederick and Matthias as nominated kings of Hungary in the text of the truce,⁵⁶ which Matthias agreed to ratify.⁵⁷

Vitez's actions show that strengthening the bond with Bohemia was one of his priorities. Bohemia evidently could tip the scales in a conflict between its neighbours, so such a policy was sound. Vitez set about realizing the wedding between Matthias and Catherine of Poděbrady. The Bohemian king, through his envoy Zdeňek Kostka of Postupice, specifically requested from Matthias that Vitez and Michael Szilágyi be included among the representatives who were to, in December 1460, discuss Matthias's and Catherine's marriage and reaffirm the alliance between Bohemia and Hungary.⁵⁸ While insisting on Szilágyi's presence—in fact, Poděbrady titled him as his "brother"—probably meant that George knew Matthias was not the only factor in Hungary, insisting on Vitez's says a lot about how much the Bohemian king trusted the bishop. It is also significant that Vitez was the one who, in early 1461, escorted Catherine to Hungary to marry Matthias.⁵⁹

It seems that the fall of Serbia strengthened Vitez's resolve to maintain the alliance with Bohemia and convinced him that making peace with the emperor was of paramount importance. The morale within Hungary was low,⁶⁰ and the recent rebellion was a sobering experience. It signalled the failure of the court's anti-magnate policy.⁶¹

53 When the pope sent a blessed crusade banner to Carvajal in April 1459, he specified that it was to be used only against the Ottomans, so that Matthias could not use it in his war against Frederick. See Canedo, *Un español*, 209.

54 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 207–9.

55 MKL, 1:9–10, doc. 7; see also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 139.

56 Kaprinai, *Hungaria diplomatica*, 2:341, doc. 49. For context, see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 210–11.

57 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:636, doc. 313.

58 UB, 234–36, doc. 230. Zdeňek Kostka of Postupice was, like his brother Albert, a distinguished Utraquist lord. See Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 283.

59 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 140; Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 21.

60 Carvajal reported to the pope that the Hungarians were again threatening to come to terms with the Ottomans, as they were facing war on two fronts. See Canedo, *Un español*, 214.

61 Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 84.

It also demonstrated the insecurity of Matthias's position, and that it was unwise to bind one's fate to him alone. Even more importantly, it shattered both the negotiations with the emperor and the anti-Ottoman strategy, proving that stability within Hungary and peace between it and its Christian neighbours was crucial for its survival. After the rebellion, and possibly prompted by it, Vitez inaugurated his policy of maintaining peace with Christian rulers and concentrating on containing the Ottomans.

Unlike Matthias, Vitez was old enough to remember the havoc wreaked by Ottoman incursions in the late 1430s and early 1440s when Serbia was under their control.⁶² Now Serbia had fallen again and Hungary lay exposed.⁶³ Vitez was not the only Hungarian prelate aware of the danger. Albert Hangácsi started fortifying his palace and the city of Cenad in 1459, not long after becoming its bishop.⁶⁴ Perhaps it was one of these two to whom the ban of Mačva and commander of Belgrade Simon Nagy of Szentmárton sent an alarming letter in May 1460, saying he sent several messages to King Matthias to warn him of an impending Ottoman attack on Belgrade, but that the king would not believe him. He begged the unknown addressee to persuade Matthias to reinforce Belgrade, because there was not enough food, troops or money for it to withstand a siege.⁶⁵

Besides the clear and present danger from the Ottomans, another reason for Vitez to pursue a peace policy was Pius II's effort to organize a general crusade, for which the Congress of Mantua was organized in 1459. The Kingdom of Hungary was represented at the congress by Count Stephen Frankapan, Albert Hangácsi, Bishop Francis of Krbava and the lector of Esztergom, Simon of Treviso; Nicholas of Modruš, then bishop of Senj, was also there, although unofficially.⁶⁶ Though the congress was a failure, the pope continued calling for a crusade. As he knew the emperor, King George of Bohemia, and King Matthias of Hungary were crucial for that project, he devoted his energies to reaching a peace agreement between Frederick and Matthias.

By then, Carvajal, who was still the papal legate, had become so loathsome to the emperor that the latter requested his removal, due to his partiality for Hungary. Pius refused, but he also warned Carvajal not to irritate the emperor any further.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, he decided to accelerate the peace efforts by dispatching Cardinal Basil Bessarion to mediate between the emperor and Matthias. Bessarion immediately approached the emperor, and in April 1460 asked Poděbrady, who was still chairing the negotiations, to delay them until his own, or at least his emissary's, arrival. He also

62 For that phase of Ottoman-Hungarian wars, see Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 85–87.

63 Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 94.

64 Juhász, "Bischof Albert," 72.

65 MDE, 1:78–79, doc. 50. For Simon Nagy, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 63.

66 Luka Špoljarić, "Nikola Modruški avant la lettre: Društveno podrijetlo, akademski put i počeci crkvene karijere (uz prilog o slučaju živog mrtvaca u Senju)," *Povijesni prilozi* 33, no. 46 (2014): 69–94 at 80. Regarding Simon of Treviso, see Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:89 and Marini, *Degli archiatri pontificii*, 1:152. For Pius's crusade project, see Housley, *Crusading*, 119–20.

67 Canedo, *Un español*, 216.

invited the Bohemian king to Vienna, to coordinate the plans for the crusade with the emperor.⁶⁸ The emperor joined Bessarion by extending his own invitation to George.⁶⁹ The relations between these two rulers, and between them and the pope, were becoming warmer, and Matthias was in danger of isolation.

Due to these developments, it would have been logical for Vitez to seek a rapprochement with the magnates, primarily with Michael Szilágyi. The latter was, as we have seen, on friendly terms with Poděbrady, and esteemed by the pope for continuing to wage war against the Ottomans on the southern borders of Hungary. He would have made a useful ally. There is an indication that Vitez approached him. In October 1460, Szilágyi issued a charter in which he pledged to protect Alexandrina of Těšín, widow of Ladislaus Garai, and their children, due to his alliance with the now late Ladislaus back in 1458. What is important here is that Vitez and his nephew Janus were there to witness the charter and affix their seals to it.⁷⁰ This might have signalled that Vitez had begun to improve his relations with Szilágyi and the other magnates, to make sure he would not fall together with Matthias if another, more powerful rebellion broke out. It could also be understood as an extension of what we might call his peace policy, meant to channel the kingdom's energy away from infighting and towards fighting the Ottomans.⁷¹ If so, it must have been a shock for Vitez when Szilágyi was captured by an Ottoman raiding party led by Ali-bey Mihaloğlu merely a month later, and executed in Constantinople soon afterwards.⁷²

Meanwhile, Matthias had other priorities. By 1461, the emperor's position had become precarious, as he was pressed between his brother, Archduke Albert VI of Austria (who had once again turned against Frederick), and Duke Louis IX of Bavaria-Landshut.⁷³ Around that time, Albert attended the wedding of Matthias and Catherine of Poděbrady, and he managed to impress the adolescent king with plans for a military campaign against the emperor. On April 10, the two made an alliance in Buda against Frederick III.⁷⁴ According to their plans, Albert was to become the new ruler of Austria, and Matthias was to receive the Hungarian holdings still occupied by the emperor, as well as the Holy Crown, in return for his aid.⁷⁵ It appears that Matthias greatly valued Albert and the alliance with him. In May 1461, when Cardinal Carvajal called for a new round of negotiations between the emperor and Hungary, Matthias

⁶⁸ UB, 221–22, doc. 216.

⁶⁹ UB, 227–28, doc. 222.

⁷⁰ Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 10:640–41, doc. 316. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 62–63.

⁷¹ Cf. Kubinyi, “Szécsi Dénes esztergomi érsek,” 101.

⁷² Olesnicki, “Mihajlo Szilágyi,” 101–2 and 105ff. The author convincingly explains that Szilágyi was captured while suppressing an Ottoman raid in southern Hungary, not during a reckless expedition across the Danube, as King Matthias later claimed. See also Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 202; Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 97–98.

⁷³ For the context of Frederick III's conflict with Louis, see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 253–55.

⁷⁴ Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 17.

⁷⁵ Langmaier, *Erzherzog Albrecht*, 525.

agreed, but insisted that Albert be represented at the negotiations, saying he would not negotiate anything without Albert's knowing.⁷⁶ However, it was soon revealed that Carvajal's attempts were irrelevant, as in June 1461 Albert and Matthias executed their plan. Albert declared war on the emperor, and Matthias coordinated his operations with him and sent him reinforcements.⁷⁷

Unsurprisingly, the emperor called Poděbrady to his aid. The latter answered, as he needed the emperor's support; negotiations with the pope regarding the legitimacy of the Utraquist Church had reached a critical phase.⁷⁸ An experienced politician such as Vitez might have known this would happen, but Matthias was surprised by it, perhaps because he thought his father-in-law and ally would not thwart his plans. To Matthias's great dissatisfaction, Poděbrady forced the invaders to agree to a nine-month truce, made on September 6, 1461 in Laxenburg.⁷⁹

This was when Vitez started acting assertively and independently of Matthias. We cannot be certain why, but perhaps he saw this truce as an opportunity to reconcile Hungary with its neighbours, even if not in accordance with Matthias's wishes. What we called Vitez's peace policy began to take shape. First, he took steps to reconcile the king with the remaining rebel magnates. When the counts of Szentgyörgyi made peace with Matthias in Esztergom on February 10, 1462, Vitez was among those who guaranteed, as the only bishop besides the host, Cardinal Szécsi, that the king would hold his promise of pardoning the counts for all the crimes they committed against himself.⁸⁰ That was sensible, as internal dissent would have hampered any foreign policy. What happened next, however, is unclear. The sources offer vague and confusing reports, but we will attempt to tentatively reconstruct the events.

Even before the Truce of Laxenburg expired, Albert VI renewed the conflict.⁸¹ Frederick retreated to Graz in Styria, as uprisings against him erupted in Austria. The papal nuncio Girolamo Lando, archbishop of Crete, went there with him, as he was at the time following the imperial court. Then, Vitez appeared in Graz. Unexpectedly, even bafflingly, he, acting on behalf of the Kingdom of Hungary, made a preliminary peace agreement with the emperor on April 3, 1462, in the presence of the nuncio.⁸² The earliest sources that mention Matthias's reactions to this event give us reason to think he did not intend for it to happen. He sent a letter to Vitez in which he made it clear that the latter did not tell him anything about the negotiations (which were apparently still going on when the letter was sent), and ordered him to immediately set out to present himself before the throne, even if it meant abstaining from the rites

⁷⁶ MKL, 1:13–14, doc. 9.

⁷⁷ Langmaier, *Erzherzog Albrecht*, 535 and 540.

⁷⁸ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 257.

⁷⁹ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 253–54; Langmaier, *Erzherzog Albrecht*, 540–41.

⁸⁰ DL 24 767. The same terms were granted to the allies of the Szentgyörgyis: see DL 15 698.

⁸¹ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 322.

⁸² Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 18–19. Lando was not a papal legate, but a nuncio with special powers: see Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 31–33.

of the Holy Week. The letter came with an express, reiterated instruction not to do anything but present himself before the king as soon as possible.⁸³

Such a reaction on the part of the king is indeed confusing, but a letter sent by Matthias to Albert VI not long after Vitez returned from Graz offers some clarification. According to it, Vitez himself declared he did not meet with the emperor in Graz on the king's orders, but on the advice of some of the prelates and barons of the realm. What he had arranged with Frederick III was not done in the king's name, but in the name of the royal council. Upon presenting himself to Matthias, he said it was not for the king to decide whether to ratify or annul the agreement thus made, because it concerned the whole of the kingdom and not just the king's person. In fact, he refused to show Matthias the text of the treaty, declaring he would present it to the Estates, at a diet summoned for that express purpose.⁸⁴

These two letters indicate that it was not Matthias's will to make peace with the emperor. However, why would Vitez act so brazenly? It is possible he and his allies on the royal council—the "prelates and barons of the realm" mentioned in Matthias's second letter—were aware of impending Ottoman attacks, and even if Matthias did not consider those an insurmountable obstacle to continuing the war with the emperor, Vitez was circumspect enough to know that doing so would antagonize both Poděbrady and the pope. That was a dangerous risk to take, especially as reinforcements from the West, which would be needed in the case of an Ottoman invasion, would have become unlikely. From that perspective, Vitez and his cohorts might have decided it was necessary to put an end to Matthias's alliance with Albert VI. It is possible that the Hungarian magnates, primarily those opposing Matthias's policies, such as Cardinal Szécsi and Nicholas of Ilok,⁸⁵ saw Matthias's actions as wasteful adventures, from which only Albert VI and Louis of Bavaria would benefit.

We have reason to believe that Vitez, with several decades' worth of experience, simply knew the political situation better than Matthias. The latter overestimated his alliance with Poděbrady. The Bohemian king turned out to be willing to intervene on the emperor's behalf, even militarily. He did so next winter, by waging war on Albert VI and forcing a peace agreement between the brothers on December 2.⁸⁶ He needed the emperor more than ever, as Pope Pius II had rescinded the very foundation of the Utraquist Church's legitimacy, the Basel Compacts, in March 1462, thus reducing Utraquism to a heresy.⁸⁷

⁸³ MKL, 1:17–18, doc. 12. Cf. Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 24.

⁸⁴ MKL, 1:20–21, doc. 14. See also Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 22 and Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 140–42. Note that Fraknói offers a different explanation of those events. In his opinion, Matthias was only pretending that he did not want a peace treaty.

⁸⁵ Girolamo Lando listed these two among the king's opponents in 1462. For the original text, see von Engel, *Geschichte des Ungarischen Reiches*, 2:15. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 142. Cf. Kubinyi, "Szécsi Dénes esztergomi érsek," 101–5.

⁸⁶ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 326–29.

⁸⁷ Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 267–70 and 275–77. See also Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 18–19.

Lando's, and therefore the pope's, role in this matter should not be disregarded. Although Pius II had in his *Commentaries* greatly exaggerated the part his emissaries played in the reconciliation of the emperor with Hungary, he also emphasized that he considered peace between them to be of paramount importance, due to the growing Ottoman threat.⁸⁸ There was even hope of a crusade being launched soon, as Venice agreed to take part in it and started sending monetary aid to Hungary.⁸⁹ Peace with the emperor was a prerequisite for any such aid, as otherwise there was a great risk of Matthias using it to wage war on the emperor. At the time of his negotiations with the emperor, Vitez was in close contact with Venice, including the doge, Cristoforo Moro, through his protégé George Polycarp Kosztoláni, on a diplomatic mission there in March and April 1462.⁹⁰ The peace agreement was potentially the result of a grand scheme, with threads stretching as far as Prague, Venice and Rome.

Soon after Vitez's return to Hungary, Archbishop Lando was supposed to arrive as well, probably to persuade Matthias to agree to the peace treaty. According to Matthias's letter to the nuncio, Vitez had been preparing the ground for the latter by assuring the king that Lando was well-disposed both to the king personally and to his kingdom. However, it seems Matthias was not eager to meet with the nuncio. He wrote that he and the royal council were currently busy in Vác, negotiating a reconciliation with John Jiskra (who joined the rebellion in 1459), and that Lando should therefore postpone his arrival.⁹¹ Perhaps Matthias was hoping to persuade the prelates and barons to refuse the terms negotiated by Vitez, and then to cancel the peace treaty altogether. However, in Vác, the expanded royal council agreed to the terms of the treaty, and a general diet was summoned to ratify it.⁹²

Another letter could explain what happened in Vác. Soon after the described events, Matthias sent a letter to the emperor, borne by his envoys, the provost of Bratislava George Schönberg and the parish priest of Buda Stephen Aloch (the former Austrian chancellor of Ladislaus V).⁹³ In it, he wrote that Vitez laid out before him and the royal council the terms of the treaty. He thanked Frederick for the treaty, emphasizing it had come at an opportune moment, as the Ottomans were on the offensive. He also wrote that he accepted the terms, and he would persuade the Estates at the upcoming

88 Enea Silvio Piccolomini, *Commentarii rerum memorabilium quae temporibus suis contigerunt*, ed. Giovanni Gobellini and Francesco Bandini Piccolomini (Frankfurt: Aubriana, 1614), 324 and 328. See also Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 172–73.

89 Magda Jászay, "Venezia e Mattia Corvino," in *Italia e Ungheria*, ed. Graciotti and Vasoli, 3–18 at 6.

90 Fraknói, "Mátyás király magyar diplomatái," 8–11. Doge Moro entrusted Kosztoláni with a letter for Vitez, in which he praised both Vitez and Janus Pannonius. See Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 85, doc. 10. Perhaps Janus's poem about Kosztoláni's return from Italy refers to this mission. See Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 150.

91 MKL, 1:22–23, doc. 16.

92 Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 68.

93 George Peltel von Schönberg was formerly a protonotary of Ladislaus V, and after the latter's death he entered the emperor's service and actively participated in his war against Albert VI. He remained close to the emperor even after joining Matthias's court. See Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 609–10.

diet to ratify them. The tone he used when mentioning Vitez's negotiations with the emperor in Graz is significant—he wrote that Vitez went there on the advice of “some of us,” probably meaning the prelates and barons, whom the king termed his brothers.⁹⁴ The tenor of the letter is such that it might be assumed it was dictated either by Vitez himself, or by someone from his circle, as it emphasizes the role of the magnates and diminishes that of the king. It should also be noted that it was not a coincidence that the reconciliation with Jiskra coincided with the royal council's decision to accept the terms Vitez negotiated. Jiskra submitted to Matthias because the emperor withdrew his support from him.⁹⁵ The royal council could thus be convinced of the usefulness of the peace agreement with the emperor.

It is worth noting that Vitez had still not shown the king the text of the treaty. The letter mentioned above merely stated that he had “laid it out” before the king and the council, presumably orally. As previously discussed, Vitez said that he would show it only to the Estates. It is not clear why he chose to do so, but it might be because he did not have the mandate to negotiate anything; even if he did, the treaty would require ratification to become binding.⁹⁶ Perhaps there was reason for him to think that Matthias would not be willing to ratify it, but that the Estates would. Those were, during the first years of Matthias's reign (at least until 1463), relatively independent, and Matthias usually did not challenge their decisions.⁹⁷

With all this considered, we can assume Vitez was acting independently of Matthias when he concluded the peace agreement with the emperor. There was certainly a reconciliatory pattern in the diplomatic actions Vitez undertook during the first years of Matthias's reign, which we termed his peace policy, and this might be considered its pinnacle. A war that had lasted for more than two decades was finally over. Vitez would never again be able to accomplish anything of such political magnitude. Also, judging by Matthias's actions, he was never forgiven for it.

The treaty was ratified very soon after the events in Vác. The Estates gathered in Buda on May 20, 1462, and deliberated for a week; late in the evening, on May 26, they decided to accept the peace terms, and to send their decision to Archbishop Lando, who would then communicate it to the emperor. The Venetian ambassador Tomasi immediately reported this to his superiors, adding the Estates decided that the money to be delivered to the emperor in exchange for the Holy Crown would not be provided before the end of the year, as it could not be gathered before then; the ambassador remarked that the king did not have any money at all at the time.⁹⁸ In fact, a few days later he wrote to Venice that many were doubting whether the king would be able to

⁹⁴ MKL, 1:21–22, doc. 15.

⁹⁵ Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 300. Matthias wrote of Jiskra's submission in his letter to Albert VI: see MKL, 1:21, doc. 14. Regarding this, see also Oslanský, “Portrét Jána Jiskru,” 85.

⁹⁶ Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 40.

⁹⁷ Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 68.

⁹⁸ MDE, 1:141–43, doc. 88.

redeem the crown at all, as he was, in the ambassador's words, destitute.⁹⁹ Indeed, the Estates decided to collect a special tax for this purpose.¹⁰⁰ Vitez used his influence to secure the nobles' support for this tax. As he wrote in a letter to an unnamed Transylvanian lord, he sent numerous letters to his acquaintances in Transylvania, enticing them to contribute to the Holy Crown's return to Hungary. He claimed its return would enable the Hungarian nobility to unite and fight more effectively against the Ottomans, adding that his own estates were also suffering from Ottoman raids.¹⁰¹ He also sent a letter to Carvajal, who was in the meantime recalled to Rome, informing him of Jiskra's submission and the Hungarian Estates' ratification of the peace treaty with Frederick III, and asking him to influence the pope to send Hungary (Vitez referred to it as Carvajal's adoptive homeland) some aid for fighting the Ottomans, saying the rumours about their impending attack were frequent and trustworthy, that the Danube was teeming with their ships, and its shore was covered in their tents.¹⁰²

Those two letters offer an outline of Vitez's outlook on the political situation. From his perspective, peace with the emperor was supposed to end the infighting and empower Hungary to effectively counter the Ottoman Empire. The pope would have certainly supported that. In early June 1462, not long after the treaty was ratified, Archbishop Lando finally arrived in Buda. During his audience with the king, the welcome address was given by Janus Pannonius, who said Vitez had already prepared the king for the nuncio's arrival and explained to him the reasons behind it, and declared on behalf of the king, the prelates and the barons that Lando should return to the emperor as soon as possible and tell him the kingdom was ready to make peace.¹⁰³ It is noticeable that Pannonius emphasized Vitez's role, but also the role the prelates and barons. It is also important to note that Vitez remained in direct contact with the emperor. The Venetian ambassador reported to his government that the nuncio left Buda on June 7, bearing the Estates' resolution, but that he (the ambassador) is already certain the emperor would accept it, because he confirmed he would in a letter he sent to Vitez.¹⁰⁴

This letter is important because it demonstrates that Vitez was in direct contact with the Venetian ambassador as well, and that he had been sharing confidential information with him. Venetian aid was almost certainly dependent on whether Hungary would make peace with the emperor, and Vitez's actions were undoubtedly aimed

99 MDE, 1:144, doc. 90.

100 Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 68.

101 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 208, doc. 31.

102 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 210, doc. 34. Carvajal left Hungary in September 1461. See Canedo, *Un español*, 217–18. Carvajal would allegedly often remark that Hungary wanted money, not legates. See Iacopo Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere (1444–1479)*, ed. Paolo Cherubini, 3 vols. (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1997), 3:1476–77, doc. 509.

103 Pannonius, *Opusculorum pars altera*, ed. Teleki, 54–58, there misdated. See also Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 145.

104 MDE, 1:146, doc. 91.

towards securing that aid. During the night of May 27, immediately after dispatching to Venice the report in which the Diet of Buda agreed to the terms of the peace treaty, Ambassador Tomasi wrote another. In the meantime Vitez himself came to him with a message from the king, saying he learned from his contacts in Serbia that the sultan marched his army to Sofia, and that no reports were coming from the voivode of Wallachia, which the king found disturbing.¹⁰⁵ A few weeks later, Tomasi wrote that Vitez had received news from his estates adjacent to Wallachia that the sultan had entered that country at the head of a large army, and that rumours indicated that he was heading for Belgrade.¹⁰⁶ This alarming news, as well as the ratification of the peace treaty, likely prompted the Republic to send aid to Matthias as early as June 1462, and also to intervene with the pope to encourage other Italian states to do so.¹⁰⁷

Despite Vitez's efforts, it was too late to prevent the fall of Wallachia. That country had recently ceased paying tribute to the sultan, so Mehmed II personally led the campaign that resulted in its conquest, forcing out Voivode Vlad III Dracula, who sought refuge in Hungary. An Ottoman puppet, Vlad's brother Radu III was to be installed as the new voivode, and Ali-bey Mihaloğlu was appointed as governor of Wallachia, with the task of securing Radu's rule.¹⁰⁸ Although preparations to aid Dracula in the struggle against the sultan were made in Hungary throughout 1462, ultimately nothing came of them.¹⁰⁹ Matthias did eventually march his army to the Wallachian border, but he did nothing to counter the Ottoman conquest. He recognized Radu as the new voivode and imprisoned Dracula, probably due to the latter's intriguing with the sultan and as a punishment for the damages his troops inflicted on Hungarian lands. Wallachia remained an Ottoman vassal.¹¹⁰

There is an indication that Vitez took part in this campaign—namely, a note in the book he was reading at the time, saying he finished it on September 27, 1462 in Sibiu, near the Wallachian border.¹¹¹ The campaign's failure was certainly a setback for his anti-Ottoman efforts. Janus Pannonius took it upon himself to compose a celebratory poem in which he praised Matthias for imprisoning the "tyrant" Dracula and implored him to return home as soon as possible, as his wife and mother were longing for him.¹¹²

105 MDE, 1:143, doc. 89.

106 MDE, 1:147, doc. 92.

107 MDE, 1:148–51.

108 Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 219–22. Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 140–43. See also Castilia Manea-Grgin, "Biskup Nikola Modruški o vlaškom knezu Vladu III. Drakuli-Tepešu te o podrijetlu i jeziku Rumunja," *Povijesni prilozi* 24, no. 28 (2005): 107–133 at 117–21.

109 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 204–5.

110 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 301; Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 95–96; Richárd Horváth, "Hunyadi Mátyás és Havasalföld," *Világtörténet* 3–4 (2010): 3–12 at 5–6; Manea-Grgin, "Biskup Nikola," 123–24.

111 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 145–46.

112 Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 88–89. The image of Dracula as a tyrant was widespread among the contemporary humanists: see Manea-Grgin, "Biskup Nikola," 126.

Its purpose was to present the campaign as a success, although it is difficult not to notice the sting of irony.

With Serbia conquered and Wallachia in the sultan's fold, Bosnia stood as the only remaining Hungarian vassal. The relations between its king Stephen II Tomašević (son of the late Stephen I Thomas) and Matthias were not good.¹¹³ Vitez worked on their reconciliation in the spring of 1462. Pius II contributed to the quarrel between the rulers by sending a legate to crown Stephen against Matthias's will,¹¹⁴ so he tasked Vitez with intervening in the Bosnian king's favour and persuading Matthias to take him under his protection. Vitez responded that the pope's letter to Matthias arrived simultaneously with envoys from Bosnia, and that Stephen II had already regained Matthias's favour.¹¹⁵ But the rift did not fully heal. In May 1462, Matthias wrote to Carvajal that he had conceded to extend his protection to the Bosnian king, due to the pope's and Carvajal's own insistence, but he made it clear he had done so reluctantly.¹¹⁶

Half a Chancellor

The year 1462 was, as we have seen, one of Vitez's busiest. It was marked primarily by his reconciliatory efforts, which resulted in the submission of what was left of the pro-imperial rebels, an improvement in relations with Bosnia and, most importantly, a preliminary peace treaty with the emperor. A direct consequence of the latter was a warming of relations with the Republic of Venice, which would soon turn into an alliance. In the light of later events, it appears that Vitez was indeed preparing Hungary for open conflict with the Ottoman Empire. However, his own position at King Matthias's court did not improve because of it. Here we will examine the effect of Vitez's peace policy on his career, as well as the development of the external policy of the kingdom.

At the Diet of Tolna in March 1463, an embassy was appointed to finalize the peace treaty with Frederick III and bring the Holy Crown to the Kingdom of Hungary. Its members were Stephen Várdai, John Vitez, Nicholas of Ilok, Ladislaus Pálóci, and Emeric of Zapolje (Szapolyai in Hungarian). After more than twenty years of intermittent war, these players made peace with the emperor in Wiener Neustadt on July 19, 1463.¹¹⁷ Vitez's presence among them indicates he was still one of the foremost men in the kingdom, but also that his diplomatic skill was too valuable to be dispensed with in matters of such importance.

113 See Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 232–33; Szakály, "Phases of Turco-Hungarian Warfare," 94–95.

114 Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 203–4.

115 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 209, doc. 33. Vitez reported the same to Carvajal: see *ibid.*, 210, doc. 34.

116 MKL, 1:35, doc. 27.

117 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 20. The Zapolje family, named after an estate in today's Croatia, rose rapidly during Matthias's rule. Kubinyi theorized that Emeric was an illegitimate son of John Hunyadi. See Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 20–22.

The treaty itself was very lenient toward the emperor, supporting the assumption that Matthias may have been unwilling to accept it. According to its text, Frederick was to surrender what he was still occupying in Hungary, except for the castles of Forchtenstein and Kobergsdorf. Matthias was granted the option to buy those after the emperor's death for forty thousand ducats. Both rulers were to thereafter be titled as kings of Hungary, and Matthias was to address Frederick as his father. Also, if Matthias would die heirless, the inheritance right to Hungary would pass to Frederick. The treaty was concluded in the presence of the papal emissaries Domenico de' Domenichi, bishop of Torcello, and Rudolf von Rüdesheim, at the time provost of Freising.¹¹⁸ As mentioned earlier, the Holy Crown was to be ransomed for a considerable sum of money.

The final negotiations, led right before the conclusion of the treaty, were marked by mutual mistrust. In his *Commentaries*, Pope Pius II mentioned a thirty-day delay caused by the emperor's insistence on the pope guaranteeing the treaty. He also noted there was so little trust between the opposing sides that the ambassadors would neither hand over the ransom money to the emperor first, nor would the emperor give them the Holy Crown. In the end they handed over both to the papal emissaries, who executed the exchange.¹¹⁹

Bonfini's version of these events gives Vitez a larger role. According to him, the embassy arrived at Sopron, which was held by Frederick, with an entourage of three thousand cavalry, being given the permission to reside there during the negotiations by the emperor's commander. However, the emperor allowed only Vitez to travel to Wiener Neustadt with two hundred horsemen, where the two negotiated alone for a month. Bonfini also mentions the lack of trust during the final transaction, but in his version it was suggested by Vitez and the bishop of Passau, Vitez's old colleague Ulrich von Nussdorf, that the emperor's men should bring the Holy Crown, and the ambassadors the money, to the town gate, for the exchange to take place simultaneously.¹²⁰ Although there is no reason to trust Bonfini unconditionally, Vitez possibly played a special part in the final negotiations with the emperor, as he negotiated the preliminary agreement with him a year previously. Perhaps the month during which Bonfini claims Vitez was negotiating with the emperor represents the delay mentioned by Pius II.

118 See the transcript of the treaty in Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 202–9. See also Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 299–300. Some later chroniclers claimed there was also a secret clause stipulating that Matthias would not remarry after the death of his wife Catherine of Poděbrady, who was at the time dying of consumption, and thus eliminating the possibility of him having legal heirs. Although this was most likely a later contrivance (as it appears only in sources written well after Matthias's death), some historians believed the secret clause did exist. See Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 143 and Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 3:331, and the sources listed therein.

119 Piccolomini, *Commentarii rerum memorabilium*, 328. By the time the pope confirmed the treaty in September 1463, Rüdesheim was already bishop of Lavant. See Theiner, 2:382–91, doc. 567.

120 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 558–59. Bonfini claimed the sum in question amounted to sixty thousand gold coins. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 143–44.



Figure 2: Remains of Székesfehérvár Basilica, the coronation site of the kings of Hungary. Wladislas, Ladislaus V, and Matthias Corvinus were all crowned here. Photograph by author.

In the meantime, Ottoman conquests continued. Bosnia was the next to fall. In May and June 1463, Mehmed II personally led the conquering army, capturing and executing King Stephen II.¹²¹ This left Hungary without the last of its vassal and buffer states, and such a blow could not be ignored. Matthias gathered a large army, but did not attempt to engage the sultan. He waited until autumn instead, allowing the main body of the Ottoman army to depart.¹²² Meanwhile, he was joined by Vitez and Archbishop

¹²¹ Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 236–39.

¹²² Pálosfalvi, “The Political Background,” 86–87.



Stephen Várdai.¹²³ Together they witnessed a watershed event, along with the palatine Michael Ország, Nicholas of Ilok, Stephen Frankapan, John Vitovec (by then recognized as the ban of Slavonia), and Emeric of Zapolje: on September 12, 1463, in Petrovaradin, an alliance was made between the Kingdom of Hungary and the Republic of Venice, represented there by the ambassador Giovanni Emo.¹²⁴ At least partly a result of Vitez's diplomatic manoeuvrings, it also signalled that Venice was alarmed by the shifting balance of power in the Balkans. Also, it should be kept in mind that the alliance bound Matthias as much as it bolstered him. Unlike in the previous year, this time

123 Matthias's deed of grant issued to Várdai and his family in April 1464 mentions that the archbishop had contributed troops for the Bosnian campaign. See Zichy, 10:299. doc. 220.

124 Theiner, 2:380–82, doc. 566. See also Jászay, "Venezia e Mattia Corvino," 6–7.

he was compelled to counter the Ottoman expansion. He limited himself to conquering the Bosnian capital Jajce and a large part of the country, without attempting to take all of it.¹²⁵

There are some indications that Vitez personally took part in this campaign. The ambassador Emo, who did participate in it,¹²⁶ sent a report to the Venetian authorities on November 3, saying there was much discontent with the Republic in the Hungarian military camp after the return of Bishop Nicholas of Modruš from his mission in Venice. The bishop brought news that Venice had not sent any additional monetary aid, and that it intereved in the dynastic struggles in Hercegovina, which the king considered a matter of his own concern. Emo also reported what Várdai and Vitez told him regarding these matters, which could mean they were with the king's army at the time.¹²⁷ It should be noted, however, that Várdai was in Zagreb on November 12, and with Vitez and Matthias in Dubrava (in Slavonia) on January 23, so perhaps he did not venture to Bosnia.¹²⁸ Janus Pannonius also took part either in this campaign, or the one that took place next year,¹²⁹ considering that he later bragged to Bisticci that he had accompanied the king on his campaigns against the Ottomans, and that he once even helped shovel the snow covering the king's camp.¹³⁰

Matthias's Bosnian campaign was mostly successful, but it ended quickly, as winter set in. Venice tried, through Emo, to persuade the king to press on, promising him sixty thousand ducats if he would continue the campaign in 1464. Emo was also tasked with finding out from bishops and other magnates he was on good terms with—probably meaning Vitez and Várdai—how many troops, including mercenaries, the king could muster with that sum.¹³¹ However, such plans were interrupted by an event of crucial importance: the royal coronation.

Although the Holy Crown had been in Hungary for almost a year, Matthias's coronation had to be postponed due to the Ottoman onslaught. However, Matthias's partial conquest of Bosnia, made possible at least in part by Vitez's peace policy, brought him the aura of a victor over the infidels, and thus made the ceremony even grander. In the atmosphere of triumph, Cardinal Szécsi crowned Matthias on March 29, 1464, in Székesfehérvár.¹³² On that occasion, a celebratory diet was held, during which the

125 Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 245–46; Pálosfalvi saw this as a return to King Sigismund's defensive strategy: see Pálosfalvi, "The Political Background," 87–88. See also Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 207–8.

126 Jászay, "Venezia e Mattia Corvino," 7–8.

127 MDE, 1:258–61, doc. 159. Emo's letter is not preserved. This information comes from Venice's response, sent on December 31. On Bishop Nicholas's mission to Venice and Dubrovnik and his participation in the Bosnian campaign, see Špoljarić, "Politika, patronat," 7.

128 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 54.

129 Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 145–46.

130 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:331.

131 MDE, 1:263–65, doc. 161.

132 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 144.

king confirmed the Estates' liberties.¹³³ As the king's decrees from then on had the full force of law, the peace treaty with Frederick III was confirmed, as the Hungarian ambassadors promised it would be. Only then, on April 3, did the ambassadors, including Vitez, finally declare their mission discharged.¹³⁴

Shortly after the coronation, Matthias rewarded those who made it possible. Vitez seemingly received much. The king awarded permanent ownership of Bihar county to the bishopric of Oradea, but not to Vitez personally, an important nuance, especially as Vitez's term as bishop of Oradea would soon end. Listing the reasons for the donation, the king wrote that Vitez was imprisoned together with him in 1457, that Vitez was to be thanked for bringing him to Hungary from Prague, that Vitez had always helped him both actively and with his advice, that he had helped to pacify the kingdom, and, lastly, that he had always either personally participated in, or contributed troops to the king's military campaigns, against the Bohemians (meaning the brigands in the north of the kingdom) and the Ottomans, in Wallachia and in Bosnia.¹³⁵

There were further rewards. A few weeks after the coronation, on June 11, Matthias granted Vitez the privilege to swear judicial oaths by proxy, either through the count of Oradea or his deputy judge, both Vitez's subordinates. The reason for this was interesting: Matthias's charter stated that Vitez had often been called to court by many accusers, among whom his abutters were especially numerous, and that he was often required to establish his innocence by compurgation. However, as tradition required of him to do so in his cathedral, dressed in liturgical vestments, he was often forced to leave Matthias's side. This privilege was supposed to free him of such obligations, allowing him to remain close to the king.¹³⁶ Finally, on June 30, 1464, Matthias confirmed Ladislaus V's donation of the Piatra Șoimului Castle to Vitez, because the Losonci family was still refusing to turn it over. Nevertheless, the judicial proceedings regarding the castle dragged on until 1466, when the judge royal Ladislaus Pálóci ruled that King Sigismund had mortgaged it to the Losoncis and the Jakcs Kusalyi family for 6750 florins, and that Vitez was obligated to honour their usufruct until he would buy them out.¹³⁷

Vitez's opinion was apparently still sought; his influence at Matthias's court had not evaporated. However, Stephen Várdai's star suddenly started to rise. The archbishop of Kalocsa stayed away from the court until the spring of 1462, when he started to frequently appear in Matthias's vicinity.¹³⁸ It may be that Matthias started using him as a counterbalance to Vitez, as the relations between these two had not been warm at least since Vitez's imprisonment. This is indicated by a series of small disputes

133 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 301–2.

134 DF 292 952. Note that Vitez was not titled as count of Bihar in this charter.

135 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 562. The original charter is not preserved, so we are forced to rely on Bonfini's rendition of it. Regarding this, see also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 145. Regarding Matthias fighting the "Czech" brigands, see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 300.

136 Pray, *Specimen hierarchiae Hungaricae*, 2:154–59. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 145–46.

137 DL 88 433.

138 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 43.

between Vitez and Várdai's family. Judging by a letter from April 1460, his relations with Nicholas Várdai had soured. In it, Vitez warned Nicolas to stop subjecting Vitez's serfs in Szabolcs county, of which Nicolas was count, to his authority, as Vitez's diocese was exempt from the authority of comital courts.¹³⁹ Also, in early 1462 Nicholas confiscated the belongings of one of Vitez's servants in Ajak, prompting the bishop to send an agent to adjudicate on the matter; his verdict was that Nicholas acted illegally.¹⁴⁰ The list of court cases involving Stephen Várdai and his relatives Nicholas and Simon from 1461 mentions one against Vitez.¹⁴¹ Vitez's ally John Kállói also quarrelled with Nicholas Várdai's family in 1463.¹⁴² Those events do not necessarily signify open hostility, but they are far from the more cordial relations Vitez and Nicholas enjoyed before 1457.

It is noticeable that, from about the time of the coronation onward, no matter what honours Vitez received from Matthias, Stephen Várdai received equal or greater ones.¹⁴³ For example, at the coronation diet, both Vitez and Várdai were granted the privilege to hold fairs on their estates on Sundays and on Marian feast days.¹⁴⁴ That was, of course, trivial, but the king also took serious steps to advance Várdai's career. In July 1464, Matthias asked Pope Pius II to make Várdai a cardinal. As Hungary already had a cardinal—Archbishop Dennis Szécsi—Matthias argued the latter was more suited to ecclesiastical than to political affairs.¹⁴⁵ This possibly reflected the lack of trust Matthias had in Szécsi. Nevertheless, the reason for Várdai's elevation was at least partly to set him as a counterbalance to Vitez.

The king's reform of the royal chanceries brought those two prelates in close contact, and it might have been symptomatic of Matthias's treatment of Vitez. After the coronation, all high and privy chancellors were deposed, and their chanceries merged into a single office. The unified title of high and privy chancellor was then bestowed on both Várdai and Vitez. However, a vast majority of the charters would thenceforth be issued by Várdai, while there are very few known occasions on which Vitez would have a part in the unified chancery's workings.¹⁴⁶ Bonfini claimed the two prelates would carry the royal seal in turns, for six months each, and that they carried out their duties without disagreements.¹⁴⁷ However, there are very few known instances in which Vitez affixed the seal. The seal's handler's initials were usually inscribed beneath the

139 Zichy, 12:263–64, doc. 209.

140 Zichy, 10:206–7, doc. 159.

141 Zichy, 10:202, doc. 155.

142 Zichy, 10:286–87, doc. 212.

143 This prompted Solymosi to think that Várdai was Matthias's favourite prelate. See Solymosi, "König Matthias Corvinus," 290–91.

144 *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, ed. Bak, 3:22.

145 MKL, 1:55–56, doc. 41. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 139–40.

146 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 35–37.

147 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 572. Kubinyi considered this unlikely, as most known charters from that period were composed by Várdai. See Kubinyi, "Adatok," 37–38.

wax, and Vitez's are found there extremely rarely.¹⁴⁸ On one of the occasions when Matthias's royal double seal was applied by Vitez, this was pointed out in the text of the charter, and the palatine's seal was affixed to it as well, likely ensuring there would be no doubt regarding its authenticity, as Várdai was not present when it was issued.¹⁴⁹

Vitez may have been actively trying to get himself appointed as chancellor at the time of Matthias's coronation, perhaps because he realized his informal influence on the king was not as strong as it was six years ago, and decided to compensate for it by obtaining a formal bureaucratic office. If that was his intention, it is possible that Matthias decided to check him by giving the office of chancellor to both him and Várdai, as by doing so he would simultaneously reward Vitez for bringing him the Holy Crown, and prevent him from using the office to increase his own influence. Vitez was indisputably still useful to the king, and the latter did not want to remove him from the court. However, by relying on Várdai he could be sure the issuing of royal charters would be in the hands of a less independently-minded prelate.

Despite Matthias's efforts, Várdai had to wait before becoming a cardinal. Cardinal Ammannati Piccolomini, who was employed as his promoter, wrote to Várdai on January 5, 1465, that he had done all he could with Pope Pius II, but that the latter had died soon after the king requested a cardinal's hat for Várdai, and that Ammannati did not have as much influence with the new pope, Paul II. This letter also contains one of the few indications that Vitez and Várdai were not at odds, as Ammannati wrote he had received letters from the king, Várdai, "our" Vitez, and Janus Pannonius, and that he had devoted himself to the business they entrusted to him. He also asked Várdai to give his regards to Vitez and Pannonius.¹⁵⁰ The letter does not specify whether the mentioned business was the same for all those listed, but it might mean that Vitez and Pannonius supported Várdai's bid for a cardinal's hat, so perhaps Vitez and Várdai had by then reconciled. On the same day, Ammannati sent a letter to Pannonius, listing the same excuses for not being able to perform the (unidentified) tasks, and one to Vitez, the substance of which was the same. In that last one he included several compliments to Vitez, claiming the late Pope Pius II often spoke well of him, praising his part in the peace negotiations with the emperor, and that Cardinal Carvajal was known to remark that Vitez's influence had made his assignment as legate significantly easier.¹⁵¹

148 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 36. However, Kubinyi warned of a large number of charters dated between March 1464 and March 1465 marked with the initials "Jo. Q." or "Jo." Older historians thought the person behind these initials was either Janus Pannonius (as bishop of Pécs—*Johannes Quinqueecclesiensis*), or John Beckensloer (as provost of Pécs). Kubinyi noted it is possible that Pannonius was acting as Vitez's substitute in the chancery, as it is known that in the late 1460s he did manage some of the assignments related to it. See Kubinyi, "Adatok," 30–31.

149 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 47.

150 Jacopo Ammannati-Piccolomini, "Commentarii, eiusdemque epistolae," in Piccolomini, *Commentarii rerum memorabilium*, 512–13, doc. 66. The letter was dispatched in early 1465, as Bishop Mark of Knin, who was to carry it, could not allow himself to depart for Hungary from Rome any earlier, due to the old pope dying and a new one being elected.

151 Ammannati-Piccolomini, "Commentarii," 513–14, docs. 67 and 68. See also Pajorin, "The First Humanists at Matthias Corvinus' Court," 140 and Pajorin, "L'Influsso del concilio di Basilea," 116.

Meanwhile, as could have been expected, the Hungarian intervention in Bosnia did not go unnoticed at the Sublime Porte. In the summer of 1464, the sultan besieged Jajce, which was defended by Emeric of Zapolje, but was unable to conquer it. Just as he had done a year previously, Matthias waited for the Ottoman army to depart, and then, in autumn, made a quick assault on the part of Bosnia under Ottoman control. That was wise, as Hungary had so far regularly lost direct engagements with the Ottoman main force; consequently, however, the success of the campaign was again limited. Although he did conquer Srebrenik, the main objective, Zvornik, did not succumb to Matthias's siege.¹⁵² Both Várdai and Vitez took part in this campaign. A charter issued by Matthias on October 19, 1464, during the siege of Zvornik, to Andrew Nagymihályi, count of Bihar (or, rather, Vitez's commissary in that office), testifies to that, as it states Vitez personally brought Andrew's plea before the king.¹⁵³ Várdai's presence is evidenced by the initials—*S. ar. Co. Can rius*—beneath the royal seal, abbreviations for "*Stephanus archiepiscopus Colocensis cancellarius*" ("Archbishop Stephen of Kalocsa, Chancellor").¹⁵⁴

Matthias had just turned twenty-one in 1464, but already knew how to keep his subjects in check. We do not know what Vitez thought of that, but as long as the king was actively pursuing an anti-Ottoman policy, he did not have any reason to object. Although Matthias did not necessarily agree with Vitez's actions, it was indisputable that they brought results. The peace policy was successful: it reconciled the nobility with the king, redeemed the Holy Crown, secured the realm's western border and helped it to successfully wage war against the Ottomans. Besides, Archduke Albert VI died in December 1463,¹⁵⁵ along with his plans of an anti-imperial alliance with Matthias. By early 1465, Matthias had no reason to be displeased with Vitez, especially as he could consider him successfully subdued.

Creeping towards War

The years that followed Matthias's coronation are comparably the most confusing period of Vitez's life. The reason for this is, paradoxically, not a lack of sources, but rather the extremely tumultuous state of the Central European political landscape. Several significant changes took place at the beginning of this period. Primarily, after the conquest of Srebrenik in 1464 Matthias apparently lost interest in offensive actions against the Ottomans. The Republic of Venice was aware of that; its government informed Matthias in mid-1465 that it did not consider itself obligated to send him any further aid. The relations between the two allies cooled, partly due to false rumours about Matthias preparing to ally with the emperor against Venice.¹⁵⁶ In late 1465, when much more accurate rumours spread about Matthias considering making

¹⁵² Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 220.

¹⁵³ DL 16 073.

¹⁵⁴ See Kubinyi, "Adatok," 55.

¹⁵⁵ Of course, rumours of poisoning abounded again. See Langmaier, *Erzherzog Albrecht*, 637ff.

¹⁵⁶ Zsuzsanna Teke, "Rapporti diplomatici tra Mattia Corvino e gli stati italiani," in *Italia e Ungheria*, ed. Graciotti and Vasoli, 19–36 at 20–21.

peace with the sultan, the Holy See reacted with indignation, but in vain; Matthias continued to wage an illusionary war against the Ottomans in his correspondence with the pope and Venice, while in reality he found a *modus vivendi* with them.¹⁵⁷

Vitez had by then reached the apex of his career. In 1465 he was made archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary.¹⁵⁸ We do not know whether he personally agreed with the shift in Matthias's foreign policy, he apparently submitted to the king's will. In July 1466, the Venetian authorities urgently requested of their ambassador, Francesco Venerio, a report on the allegations of Matthias intending to make peace with the sultan, as in his previous report, sent a month previously, Venerio claimed that he could not send any definite answers regarding that before conversing with Vitez.¹⁵⁹ The latter was in Trnava at the time,¹⁶⁰ so it seems the ambassador was awaiting his return. This indicates Vitez's opinion still mattered in international politics, at least to Venice. In fact, upon being appointed as ambassador to Hungary in July 1465, Venerio was instructed to formally introduce himself to both Vitez and Várdai immediately after his arrival.¹⁶¹ Although we do not know what information he received from Vitez, immediately after the latter's return from Trnava, in August 1466, Venerio reported that Matthias decided to pursue making peace with the sultan. This report was received with elation, as Venice was not eager to continue the extremely costly war, and the Republic instructed Venerio to make sure Matthias would include the return of the Peloponnesian holdings and Lesbos to Venice in the peace treaty with the sultan.¹⁶² It therefore seems Vitez was unable or unwilling to prevent this initiative.

The purpose of Matthias's strategic shift soon became apparent. It was supposed to free his forces to turn westwards, where his erstwhile father-in-law, George of Poděbrady (Catherine died in early 1464), was at his most vulnerable. Although his trial for heresy was previously suspended due to the emperor's intervention in his favour, Pope Pius II reopened it in June 1464.¹⁶³ Pius's death stalled the process, but Paul II renewed it in August 1465, authorizing his emissary, Bishop Rudolf von Rüdesheim of Lavant, to release Bohemian subjects from their oath of fealty to their king.¹⁶⁴

157 Housley, *Crusading*, 89–91.

158 His appointment is discussed in chapter 6 below.

159 MDE, 2:24–25, doc. 13.

160 DL 16 363.

161 MDE, 1:348, doc. 213.

162 MDE, 2:25–26, doc. 14. For further context, see Joan-Aurel Pop and Alexandru Simon, "The Venetian and Wallachian Roots of the Hungarian–Ottoman Truce of Spring 1468: Notes on Documents from the States Archives of Milan," in *Italy and Europe's Eastern Border (1204–1669)*, ed. Alexandru Simon, Julian Mihai Damian, and Mihailo Popovic (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2012), 283–301.

163 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 381–82.

164 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 396. Rüdesheim was not a legate, although he styled himself as such, but a nuncio with special powers. See Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 33.

Zdeněk of Šternberk started gathering malcontents, and in November 1465 they founded a league of Catholic lords in Zelená Hora.¹⁶⁵

Faced with increasing instability, Poděbrady turned to Matthias, who was still formally his ally, for help. It was planned for them to meet personally in the autumn of 1465, but Matthias cancelled the meeting in favour of leading a short and abortive campaign against the Ottomans.¹⁶⁶ He sent Vitez in his stead, to which Poděbrady replied by sending Bishop Protase of Olomouc. Vitez apparently accompanied Matthias on that campaign at least as far as the Ottoman border, as he notified Protase of his forthcoming arrival from Belgrade.¹⁶⁷ The two prelates met in Trnava and agreed that Matthias would intervene with the pope on Poděbrady's behalf and suggest a reinstatement of the Basel Compacts.¹⁶⁸ Matthias's anti-Ottoman campaign turned out to be nothing more than a show of force, perhaps for the sake of his foreign allies; he notified Vitez immediately after its beginning that he would withdraw to Hungary as quickly as possible, due to a shortage of provisions.¹⁶⁹ The king's attention would from then on increasingly turn from the Ottoman frontier to Bohemia.

For the next few years, Vitez and Protase would act as the premier representatives of their respective rulers in their mutual contacts. It was an uneasy task. The pope threatened Protase with suspension if he continued supporting Poděbrady.¹⁷⁰ As for Vitez, the letter he sent to Protase on October 17, 1465, is indicative of his standing. He notified the Moravian bishop that King Matthias had received the pope's bull in which Poděbrady was accused of heresy, and ordered it to be forwarded to Vitez. He decided to immediately send a copy of it to Protase, stressing that Matthias had given him the permission to do so. It was unfortunate, said Vitez, that Poděbrady, who at the beginning of his reign seemed to be a wise and worthy ruler, was now so reviled. However, he added that he had himself, both in Prague and later, during Poděbrady's mediation of the negotiations with the emperor, personally advised George to convert to Catholicism to preserve his reign, but that the latter would not listen to him. Vitez promised to do his best to clear Poděbrady's name, but he also warned that the pope's condemnation would overpower the Bohemian king if he persisted in Utraquism. To that Vitez appended a remark telling Protase this was all confidential, and that he should proceed as he saw fit.¹⁷¹

This remark might be interpreted as a hint that Protase should distance himself from Poděbrady. That would have been sound advice. A few months later, in December 1465, the nuncio Rüdesheim wrote to Protase that the pope heard rumours of him being Poděbrady's most successful advocate, in dealings with both Hungary and the

165 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 403–4.

166 Regarding this campaign, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 224.

167 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 420.

168 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 181–83.

169 MKL, 1:126, doc. 89.

170 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 450–51.

171 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 217–18, doc. 41.

Bohemian magnates.¹⁷² Protase replied he had always been loyal to the Holy See,¹⁷³ but the pope did not find that satisfactory; in May 1466 he ordered him to sever all ties with the Bohemian king.¹⁷⁴

Protase's support for Poděbrady was no secret—he had himself defended his king in a letter to Rudesheim.¹⁷⁵ The question of whether Vitez's support, public or otherwise, was sincere is much more complicated. When the Bohemian king inquired whether Matthias had done anything of what Vitez and Protase agreed upon at Trnava, Vitez replied, from Buda, in February 1466, that Matthias instructed him to send a letter on the matter to Cardinal Carvajal, and that he had done so, but could not send a copy of it to Poděbrady because Janus Pannonius (who was apparently assisting Vitez in matters of state) left it in Pécs.¹⁷⁶ This evasiveness might indicate that Vitez's intervention with the pope was not in the Bohemian king's favour at all.

It is difficult to discern how much of this was of Vitez's own making, and how much originated with Matthias. In this letter, Vitez stressed that it was written “de mente domini nostri Regis” (roughly translated, “according to my king's wishes”), adding that he would not dare correspond with Poděbrady in Matthias's absence or without his orders. This is significant, as it gives us reason to think Matthias had by then taken control of his kingdom's foreign policy, and that Vitez was relegated to executing his orders. The following examples corroborate this. In a letter he sent to Vitez while he was on the short anti-Ottoman campaign of 1465, Matthias included a copy of his response to Poděbrady regarding the latter's request for Matthias to intervene with the pope on his behalf, and told Vitez he would soon discuss the other matters with him in person.¹⁷⁷ As Poděbrady immediately asked Vitez for his opinion of this response, the latter pointed out to Poděbrady that he was not present when Matthias composed it, and could therefore not comment on it before Matthias's return. It appears Vitez did not have much autonomy when it came to his correspondence with the Bohemian king.

As for the response in question, Matthias said he would gladly intervene with the pope on Poděbrady's behalf, and that a special envoy would be sent to Rome for that purpose.¹⁷⁸ An envoy, George Handó, was indeed sent in late 1465.¹⁷⁹ However, even before he was dispatched, in October 1465, Matthias notified the pope that he was in favour of the Bohemian king being tried for heresy, and that he was open to other

172 UB, 372–74, doc. 342. Rudesheim was then in Wrocław, which had rebelled against Poděbrady.

173 UB, 382–83, doc. 346.

174 UB, 404–5, doc. 357.

175 UB, 344–45, doc. 325.

176 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 218, doc. 42. See also Perić, “Tragom Ivana Česmičkog u pismima Ivana Viteza od Sredne,” in *Dani Hvarskog kazališta XVI*, ed. Batušić et al., 156–64 at 162–63. Considering this, Kubinyi's assumption that Pannonius was substituting for Vitez in the chancery seems plausible. See Kubinyi, “Adatok,” 31.

177 MKL, 1:126, doc. 89.

178 MKL, 1:127, doc. 90.

179 MKL, 1:129–30, docs. 93–94.

actions against him as well, including war.¹⁸⁰ In the spring of 1466, alarming rumours spread through Bohemia, of Matthias being ready to make war on it if the pope so ordered him.¹⁸¹ By the end of that year Matthias was complaining to Poděbrady about the crimes allegedly committed by Moravian nobles in Hungarian borderlands, especially by Matthew of (Moravian) Šternberk. Matthias insisted Matthew's case be settled not judicially, but by force. A series of letters was exchanged by the two kings, gradually degrading into angry bickering.¹⁸²

It is apparent that there was at least some duplicity involved in this correspondence: on whose part, it is difficult to say. It would be safe to assume Poděbrady did not want to antagonize Hungary. The sources indicate that Matthias was not averse to war. But as to Vitez, we do not know.¹⁸³ His offers to help Poděbrady may have been sincere, but certainly not to the extent that involved going against the Holy See or Matthias. In any case, war with Bohemia would shatter the peace policy for which Vitez had laboured so much. Poděbrady and his court appear to have thought Vitez was on their side: they praised him for his honesty in his dealings with them, and insisted upon Matthias sending him to negotiations. For example, Prince Victor, King George's son and heir, thought it wise to send a report on the legal steps taken against Matthew of Šternberk in October 1466 not directly to Matthias, but to Vitez, so that Matthias would get the information from him. Victor was sent to Moravia to address the offences Matthias complained about, and was persuaded by Bishop Protase and the Moravian nobles to agree to a peaceful solution. Nevertheless, Matthias insisted Matthew of Šternberk be dealt with militarily, and was insulted by an agreement made without his approval.¹⁸⁴ Victor possibly anticipated such a reaction, and hoped Vitez, who was with Matthias at the time,¹⁸⁵ would mollify him, especially as his friend Protase was one of the authors of the abovementioned peaceful solution. It involved Matthew being subjected to a trial presided over by two Hungarian and two Bohemian prelates and barons—Vitez, Protase, the palatine of Hungary and the marshal of Bohemia. In a letter to King Matthias, Poděbrady expressed his disappointment with Matthias's refusal of this solution, as well as with Vitez's failure to arrive in Brno for the meeting with Poděbrady. The latter expected him, and Vitez did set out for Brno, but unexpectedly aborted the journey, promising to arrive at an unspecified later date. Poděbrady also refused to discuss these matters by letter, saying he would wait to personally discuss them with Vitez, whom he called his sincere friend. Matthias answered that he was not responsible for Vitez's failure to arrive, but that the latter

180 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 420–21.

181 UB, 402, doc. 354.

182 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 477. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 184–89. The whole correspondence can be found in MKL, 1:144–200.

183 For various opinions regarding this, see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 193, Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 24, Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 85 and Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 193.

184 MKL, 1:146–52, docs. 110–11.

185 Matthias was in Esztergom on October 29 (MKL, 1:144–46, doc. 109), and in December both he and Vitez were in Trnava (MKL, 1:159–60, doc. 115; Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 220, doc. 43).

could not travel because the roads were infested with brigands, and that he would gladly dispatch Vitez again when they become safer. Both of these letters were written in a polemical tone and were peppered with insults.¹⁸⁶

We do not know whether Matthias ordered Vitez to abort the journey to Brno. One cannot fail to notice that unsafe roads were once again presented as a reason for cancelling negotiations. However, the significant detail is that Poděbrady invited Vitez personally and called him his friend.¹⁸⁷ In a subsequent letter to the Bohemian king, sent in December 1466, Vitez defended Matthias's actions and tried to convince Poděbrady that Matthias would remain his steadfast ally, if only Poděbrady would reimburse and avenge the damages inflicted by his subjects. He stressed several times that the Bohemian king could trust him, reminding him of their personal contacts and promising he would do everything to preserve the peace. He also, in greatest confidence, advised Poděbrady to stay in good relations with Matthias no matter at what cost, because otherwise the consequences would be dire.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps this was a subtle warning of Matthias's intentions. Poděbrady responded he did not doubt that Vitez's advice was sincere and meant no offence, and that he still expected to meet him in Brno, or whatever place Vitez chose, believing that together they could settle all disputes between their respective kingdoms.¹⁸⁹

Knowing Vitez's previous involvement in secretive and questionable dealings, such as delivering confidential information to Piccolomini, planning Count Ulric's assassination, negotiating Matthias's release from Poděbrady's custody and his subsequent election, and his peace negotiations with Emperor Frederick, it is not impossible that he meant to convince King George of his honesty while preparing a war against him. However, Poděbrady was an experienced politician and could not be deceived easily. Conceivably, Vitez was sincerely trying to prevent a war, but did not have either the influence or the resources to directly oppose Matthias. In late December 1466, after harsh words were exchanged between the two rulers, Vitez wrote to Poděbrady that he would have preferred if both sides had done differently. As for his failed journey to Bohemia, he said Matthias allowed him another attempt, and asked Poděbrady to arrange a meeting somewhere close to the border.¹⁹⁰ It seems Matthias had different things in mind, however, as he suggested to Poděbrady that John Beckensloer, who was in the meantime, after Vitez's promotion to the archbishopric of Esztergom, made bishop of Oradea,¹⁹¹ should go instead of Vitez. Protase informed Vitez that this suggestion was refused, and that Vitez absolutely should come to meet with King George, on any date of his own choosing.¹⁹²

186 MKL, 1:166–78, doc. 120.

187 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:215–16, doc. 410.

188 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 218–20, doc. 43.

189 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:220–22, doc. 413.

190 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 220–21, doc. 44.

191 This is discussed in chapter 6 below.

192 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:224–25, doc. 415. According to Protase, Poděbrady considered Beckensloer his subject. That is not surprising, as the latter was a native of Wrocław.

Protase was, despite the pope's threats, still working to preserve Poděbrady's reign. It seems that Vitez was, at least from the Bohemian side, seen as inclined to do the same. On January 10, 1467, Poděbrady again asked Matthias to send Vitez to him, calling the latter "amicus noster charissimus" (our dearest friend), adding Matthias should not think ill of Vitez because of Poděbrady's wish to negotiate with him personally, promising he would negotiate with Vitez as if he was negotiating with Matthias himself.¹⁹³ The invitation was also sent to Vitez directly, this time inviting him to Prague, as urgent business was preventing Poděbrady from travelling to Brno. The king's son Victor was ordered to escort Vitez from the Hungarian border to Prague and back, so that safety could not be an issue this time.¹⁹⁴ The international situation was indeed dire for the Utraquist king. The urgent business referred to above was a diet summoned for the purpose of finding a way to reconcile Poděbrady with the Holy See.¹⁹⁵ If Vitez was seen as a person who would contribute to those efforts, it is all the more puzzling why he did not do so.

It is possible Matthias worried that Vitez might attempt something unsanctioned, as he had done five years ago, if he was allowed to meet Poděbrady in person. If that was so, it is not surprising he did not allow the meeting to take place. Still, he did not prevent Vitez from participating in the negotiations with the Bohemian king's emissary, Albert Kostka of Postupice, who arrived in Hungary in early 1467,¹⁹⁶ probably because they were conducted under Matthias's supervision. Kostka reported to his king that Vitez had sincerely and benevolently contributed to his negotiations with Matthias, resulting in the latter's agreement to personally meet with Poděbrady. The Bohemian king accepted that wholeheartedly, and asked Vitez to be present at that meeting, explicitly stating his trust in him.¹⁹⁷ Even after his return to Bohemia in February 1467, Kostka confirmed to Poděbrady that Vitez was well-disposed towards him and his kingdom.¹⁹⁸ However, we can assume that Matthias was not, as his projected meeting with Poděbrady never took place. From then on, Matthias would promise to send Vitez to negotiate, but never did.¹⁹⁹

Poděbrady continued to trust Vitez, to the extent that he asked him to act as his representative at the Imperial diet in Nuremberg in the summer of 1467, at which Vitez arrived as Matthias's emissary.²⁰⁰ He was forced to seek his aid because his own emissaries were driven away immediately upon their arrival.²⁰¹ Vitez departed for

193 MKL, 1:179.

194 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:232–33, doc. 419.

195 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 443.

196 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 480–81.

197 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:239–40, doc. 424.

198 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:250–51, doc. 429.

199 MKL, 1:193–94, doc. 132 and 1:200, doc. 136.

200 UB, 468–69, doc. 403.

201 UB, 472, doc. 405.

Nuremberg after May 13, as he was still in Buda on that date, perhaps preparing for his mission.²⁰²

By then, the political situation had changed considerably. On December 23, 1466, the pope concluded Poděbrady's trial, declaring the latter a relapsed heretic and perjurer, and therefore unfit to rule.²⁰³ The nuncio Rüdesheim forwarded the verdict to Protase,²⁰⁴ admonishing him to distance himself from his formally deposed king. This time, Protase obeyed, and he soon joined the League of Zelená Hora.²⁰⁵ In addition to losing his ardent advocate, Poděbrady lost his most powerful ally, the emperor. The Bohemian king had become accustomed to being supercilious toward Frederick III after saving him from his brother in late 1462, and when Poděbrady's envoys acted in an excessively insulting manner in February 1467, the emperor shouted furiously that he would no longer suffer such insolence.²⁰⁶ Shortly after that, the members of the League of Zelená Hora, led by Zdeněk of Šternberk, rebelled openly.²⁰⁷

The pope proclaimed a crusade against the Bohemian Utraquists and the recruitment of crusaders began.²⁰⁸ Bishop Lorenzo Roverella of Ferrara was sent to Germany to gather recruits, arriving at the Diet of Nuremberg. This diet was originally intended to organize a crusade against the Ottomans, but Roverella and the emperor's envoy—Vitez's old acquaintance, Bishop Ulrich von Nussdorf of Passau—appropriated it to promote the Bohemian Crusade, although without much success.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it was noted that the papal emissaries declared the Utraquists a more urgent and important threat than the Ottomans.²¹⁰ At that moment, King Matthias's and the pope's wishes were finally aligned. Matthias wrote to Vitez in Nuremberg to urgently, before the beginning of August 1467, report to him whether aid for the war against the Ottomans could be expected from the Empire, specifying he did not mean future, but immediate aid, so he could decide whether to make peace with the sultan.²¹¹ The only answer he could have gotten from Vitez was that there was no interest in anti-Ottoman campaigns, only in anti-Bohemian ones.

Vitez returned to Hungary even before August, as he was in Esztergom on July 18.²¹² Poděbrady wrote to him around that time, saying that he wanted to ask Vitez to come and visit him on his way to or from Nuremberg, but that there was no opportunity

202 DF 249 865.

203 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 438.

204 UB, 425–26, doc. 374.

205 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 450–51.

206 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 433–34.

207 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 451–54.

208 UB, 487–88, doc. 417.

209 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 460–62. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 189–90.

210 UB, 472–74, doc. 405.

211 MKL, 1:200–201, doc. 137.

212 Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 221, doc. 45.

for that because Vitez was preoccupied with King Matthias's and his own business.²¹³ There was indeed a good reason for Vitez to hurry home. Another revolt against Matthias had broken out, again casting doubts on the sustainability of his reign.

The Transylvanian Revolt, another in a series of uprisings of Hungarian noblemen against Matthias's policies, postponed whatever plans the king may have had. It was precipitated by a reform of royal finances, introduced in 1467, which included a tax increase.²¹⁴ Although it began in Transylvania, the revolt soon spread throughout the kingdom, led by the ever-fickle Szentgyörgyi brothers, recently appointed as voivodes of Transylvania, Bertold Ellerbach, and the Zapolje brothers, Emeric and Stephen.²¹⁵

According to Bonfini, Vitez played a decisive role in the crushing of this rebellion. Most significantly, he reconciled Emeric of Zapolje with the king.²¹⁶ Also, a letter sent by Matthias to Albert Kostka on August 17, 1467 from Buda suggests that Vitez was in the king's company at that time, and that Matthias intended for him to take part in the royal campaign in the south of the kingdom.²¹⁷ However, Vitez went north instead, as on September 14 he was in Győr.²¹⁸ Demetrius Čupor may have been considering joining the rebels, and Vitez thought it necessary to make sure he would not. As we will later see, he was given control of the fortress of Nitra around that time, so the king may have tasked him with pacifying the northern part of the kingdom.

By the end of the year, the royal forces stamped out the rebellion in the east, and Vitez was in Oradea together with Janus Pannonius, waiting for the king's return from a punitive expedition to Moldavia.²¹⁹ The mere fact that Vitez did not withhold his support from the king indicates he still considered Matthias's reign viable and beneficial. Considering how the other Hungarian bishops acted, Vitez and Janus were apparently among the minority giving Matthias their unambiguous support. Stephen Várdai, for example, acted ambivalently. Some inconclusive indications place him among the rebels, but by the end of 1467 he certainly joined Vitez and Janus in Oradea.²²⁰ Bishop Nicholas of Zapolje of Transylvania, a cousin of the renegade magnates, also did not unequivocally support the king, even though there is no evidence of him having joined the rebels.²²¹ This vacillation would have its reprise in 1471, when many of the magnates would calculate to whom and at what price to sell their allegiance.

213 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:283, doc. 443.

214 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 302. Regarding the financial reform, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 47ff.

215 Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 82–83.

216 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 570 and 572.

217 MKL, 1:201–2, doc. 138.

218 DF 240 527.

219 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 41.

220 Kubinyi, "Adatok," 41; see also MDE, 2:68, docs. 39–40.

221 Kalous, "Boskovice urai," 382–83; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 83.

The one who supported Matthias the most in 1467 was Bishop John Beckensloer of Oradea, who was rewarded with estates confiscated from the rebels.²²² Soon afterwards, he was transferred to the even richer diocese of Eger. He personally participated in Matthias's failed expedition to Moldavia in late 1467, undertaken with the excuse that Voivode Stephen III supported the rebels.²²³ Although Vitez did not accompany Matthias there, he probably did contribute troops for the campaign. Janus's poem about a "Prelate John's" banner, returned to its owner by his men after the campaign in Moldavia, indicates that.²²⁴ It is also notable that Pannonius once again took the role of the king's publicist, presenting a failed campaign as a great success.²²⁵

The Transylvanian Revolt tied up Matthias's forces and any plans for joining the Bohemian Crusade had to be postponed. Quite the opposite, Matthias affirmed his alliance with Poděbrady and asked him not to grant asylum to the escaped rebels.²²⁶ The attack on Voivode Stephen III brought further complications. It enraged the Polish Estates, because they considered Stephen a vassal of Poland. They brought their protest before Matthias, simultaneously (and ominously) complaining about unrelated border incidents.²²⁷

Matthias's negotiations with the sultan stalled, and did not resume before 1468. In March 1468, the Milanese ambassador to Hungary reported to his authorities that Matthias was negotiating with Ottoman emissaries in Oradea, and that they were offering him Smederevo in exchange for Jajce.²²⁸ From then on, reports regarding Matthias's relations with the Ottomans became unclear. Bonfini claimed Matthias refused their peace offer, as accepting it would have ruined his reputation, but that he agreed to maintain a tacit truce with the sultan for as long as the latter would do the same.²²⁹ Długosz recorded that Protase of Boskovice had, upon arriving in Kraków as an emissary of King Matthias in 1468, reported to the Polish king that Matthias had already dispatched John Jiskra to conclude a three-year truce with the sultan on his behalf.²³⁰ A Milanese ambassador repeated similar rumours circulating through Venice in 1468 and early 1469.²³¹ However, as early as January 1469 the same ambassador reported

222 *Oklevéltár a Tomaj nemzetségbeli Losonczy Bánffy család történetéhez*, 2:95–97, doc. 79.

223 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus," 18. Długosz claimed that the bishop of Pécs took part in that expedition, but he probably confused Beckensloer with Pannonius. See Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:418. Regarding Matthias's war with Stephen III, see Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 302.

224 Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 90–91.

225 Regarding this, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 84.

226 MKL, 1:201–2, doc. 138. Matthias wrote about that to Albert Kostka; regarding that letter, see also Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 481.

227 CE, 1/1:241–42, doc. 214.

228 MDE, 2:79, doc. 47. See also Babinger, *Mehmed der Eroberer*, 284–85 and Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 29.

229 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 577. Engel thought this likely: Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 307.

230 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:421.

231 MDE, 2:86–88, docs. 52–53 and 55.

there were now rumours about Matthias being at odds with some of his magnates, Stephen Várdai most of all, because of his dealings with Mehmed II.²³² It is possible Várdai was against such dealings, especially as his archdiocese was exposed to Ottoman raids. As difficult as it is to discern truth from fabrication, Matthias either really did make a truce with the sultan, or other Christian rulers thought he did.²³³

We do not know what Vitez thought of this. There are no reports of him resisting Matthias's actions. However, the king was staunchly supported by Beckensloer, the new bishop of Eger. After his transfer in 1468, Matthias wrote to the pope that he wanted the diocese of Oradea to remain vacant, because he frequently received information about prelates working against him; consequently, he would not promote anyone but those who proved themselves loyal to him.²³⁴ Vitez was most likely still among the latter. However, Bisticci claimed Vitez had lost his influence on the king due to the actions of a certain German bishop.²³⁵ Although we cannot be certain who that person was, Beckensloer seems to fit the description.

By the spring of 1468, the debris of the Transylvanian Revolt was cleared, and Matthias could concentrate on foreign politics—specifically, his conflict with Poděbrady. All he still needed was a *casus belli*, and it was soon provided. Poděbrady's army, led by his son Victor, invaded Austria in support of the local rebels against the emperor. Frederick sent out calls for aid, among others to Matthias. At the same time, Bishop Protase and Zdeněk of Šternberk personally went to Hungary and asked Matthias to support the League of Zelená Hora. The Hungarian king agreed, and responded to the emperor's call for aid. After years of creeping diplomacy, on March 31, 1468, Matthias declared war.²³⁶

The Bohemian Crusade

We have so far seen Vitez lose much of his formerly pivotal role in Hungarian diplomacy. His participation in maintaining the relations with Bohemia were mostly reduced to constant invitations to negotiations which he never attended. King Matthias had by then become the dominant factor in his kingdom. It is therefore difficult to determine Vitez's role in the Hungarian entry into the Bohemian Crusade. We shall now examine his actions during the first years of the war.

First, it should be said that in Bohemia, Vitez was still seen as a beacon of hope. In the flurry of frantic diplomatic actions prompted by Matthias's attack, the Bohemian court asked him for help. Poděbrady sent him a copy of Victor's declaration of war (or, rather, feud) on the emperor, insisting the cause was just and begging him to convince

232 MDE, 2:92, doc. 58. See also Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 574.

233 Regarding this, see also Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 225 and 235–36. The Sublime Porte was well aware that both Venice and Matthias wanted to make peace and was fanning hostilities between them. See Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs*, 216.

234 MKL, 1:208–9, doc. 145.

235 Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:322–23.

236 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 486–90.

Matthias of it.²³⁷ Albert Kostka also wrote to Vitez, saying he had been working to preserve the alliance between Hungary and Bohemia for two years, and that he thought Matthias should mediate between the emperor and Poděbrady, as well as between the latter and the pope, instead of joining them in the war against him. He, too, begged Vitez to somehow stop Matthias.²³⁸ Even after the first shock passed, when Poděbrady met Matthias's invasion with the bulk of his force and pushed him into Austria, he still considered Vitez his friend. During a parley by the city of Laa an der Thaya, the Bohemian king suggested Vitez should arbitrate between himself and Matthias.²³⁹

On the other hand, it seems Vitez actively supported Matthias's actions. There are several indications of that. For example, on April 9, 1468, Bishop Protase wrote to Rüdesheim (who was in the meantime elected as bishop of Wrocław) that Matthias's prelates had helped him the most to convince the king to declare war on Poděbrady.²⁴⁰ Also, in late May, the municipal notary of Görlitz wrote to his city council that he had received second-hand news about Vitez sending his troops to aid Matthias.²⁴¹ Finally, there is evidence that Vitez's men really did fight in Matthias's army in Moravia, as the king rewarded two of them in November 1468 on Vitez's request.²⁴²

This is not surprising, as a pragmatic person like Vitez would, if war was inevitable, prefer to help make it a short and successful one. King Matthias had confidence in him, to the degree that he asked the pope to delegate to him (or some other Hungarian prelate, but primarily Vitez) the authority to adjudicate the legal proceedings against Nicholas Bánfi of Lendava and his family, as well as, if possible, all other legal issues concerning Matthias's subjects who had received summonses to the papal court, as he needed the accused for the war.²⁴³ This would have saved the accused the journey to Rome, but also ensured the verdicts would not be incompatible with the king's needs. It is also significant that Janus Pannonius, Vitez's confidant, personally participated in Matthias's campaign. On July 3, 1468 he rode into recently conquered Olomouc together with the king, Zdeněk of Šternberk and other magnates.²⁴⁴ Pannonius was also appointed as the royal treasurer in the autumn of the same year, with the task of collecting war taxes, and he remained in that office until 1469, when he was appointed as ban of Slavonia.²⁴⁵

We can safely assume that Vitez supported his king in the early stages of the Bohemian Crusade, when the odds were on his side. However, unlike Janus, he did

237 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:329–30, doc. 465.

238 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:341–42, doc. 471.

239 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:313.

240 UB, 523–24, doc. 440. Regarding Rüdesheim's election, see Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 489 and Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:415.

241 UB, 532, doc. 451.

242 DL 16 146.

243 MKL, 1:237–38, doc. 173.

244 UB, 543, doc. 459.

245 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 48; Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 24; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 88–89.

not personally take part in the operations in Moravia in 1468.²⁴⁶ He remained in Bratislava, where we find him on April 21,²⁴⁷ and from there he returned home, to Esztergom, where he was on May 1.²⁴⁸ Perhaps he was too old or too sick to take the field. Nevertheless, in early May, when the war was going badly for Matthias, the latter ordered Vitez to organize the defence of Bratislava from a potential Bohemian counteroffensive.²⁴⁹ This forced the prelate to urgently journey back to the borderlands. On his way there he visited Nitra, where he finished emending a copy of one of Tertullian's works on June 2.²⁵⁰ From there he hastened to Bratislava, where we find him on June 8.²⁵¹

Despite the initial setbacks, by the end of the campaigning season Matthias had conquered most of Moravia. Poděbrady had lost some of his most important supporters—the Catholic lord John II of Rožmberk crossed over to Matthias, and the Utraquist Zdeněk Kostka of Postupice was killed. But the war was far from over, as the German crusaders' invasion of Bohemia proper ended in complete failure.²⁵² In September 1468 the Hungarian king returned to Bratislava, where he summoned a diet to convince his Estates to continue financing the war effort. Vitez took part in that diet, as did Janus Pannonius, who probably arrived from Moravia with the king. That was where Pannonius was appointed as the royal treasurer, charged with collecting the war tax.²⁵³ Also, this was most likely the diet at which the astrologer Martin Bylica triumphed in a public debate regarding the exact calculation of the time of birth of one of Reynold Rozgonyi's sons.²⁵⁴ After the diet, the king retired to Buda. Vitez went there with him, as we find him there on November 8.²⁵⁵ They were probably encouraged by Bylica's prediction of Poděbrady's imminent death.²⁵⁶

However, as soon as Matthias retook the field in January 1469, misfortune struck him. As his forces were replenished with fresh troops (and perhaps due to Bylica's predictions), he decided to bring the war to a swift end by attacking Bohemia directly and conquering Kutná Hora with its silver mines, Poděbrady's main source of income. However, the campaign went horribly awry. Matthias's army was outmanoeuvred and surrounded at Vilémov. Forced to parley with Poděbrady, Matthias agreed to a truce

246 Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 193.

247 DF 240 535.

248 DF 234 695.

249 Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 11:343–44, doc. 472.

250 Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 140.

251 DF 266 510.

252 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 497–506. At the Roman Curia it was feared that the German failure would ruin the crusade's chances of success. See Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere*, ed. Cherubini, 2:1229–31, doc. 377.

253 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 24.

254 Hayton, "Expertise *ex stellis*," 33–37.

255 DL 16 146.

256 Hayton, "Expertise *ex stellis*," 40–41.

and the opening of peace negotiations.²⁵⁷ It was agreed that those would be held in Olomouc, which was under Hungarian control. Vitez was still in Esztergom on March 17,²⁵⁸ but he travelled swiftly to Moravia, entering Olomouc on April 4 as a member of Matthias's grand entourage, together with Beckensloer, the papal nuncio Roverella, the Imperial ambassador Bishop Johannes Roth von Wemding of Lavant, the Bohemian magnates Zdeněk of Šternberk and John of Rožmberk, and others.²⁵⁹ Poděbrady encamped with his army outside the city, and negotiations began.²⁶⁰

The conditions offered to King George were dictated by Roverella, and they were draconian. The Bohemian king was supposed to renounce Utraquism and ensure its extermination, as well as to completely submit to Matthias and recognize his conquests. The only concession he was offered was the right to bear the title of king for the rest of his life.²⁶¹ Most likely not even Matthias took those conditions seriously. He was stalling for time, perhaps with Vitez's help. Bishop Protase, who was present there, reported to the League of Zelená Hora that Matthias told him, after taking counsel from Vitez, that he expected reinforcements from the German princes. This shows that Vitez was still one of Matthias's chief counsellors, and he may have suggested the king keep Poděbrady in Olomouc until his allies' forces rallied.

Vitez apparently still had Poděbrady's trust as well, as on April 15 he was sent to negotiate with the Bohemian king after the latter requested a personal meeting with Matthias and Roverella. Five days later, the kings met in person, in a field outside Olomouc, and Matthias was on that occasion accompanied not only by Vitez, but also by Beckensloer, Zdeněk of Šternberk, and other Bohemian lords. Ultimately, in late April Poděbrady and Matthias agreed to prolong the truce until the end of the year.²⁶² However, the shocking event that followed rendered all this irrelevant.

Ever since the negotiations began in mid-April, Zdeněk of Šternberk had been preparing Matthias's election as king of Bohemia. The chance of Matthias making peace with Poděbrady, with whom they severed their ties, doubtlessly upset Bohemian Catholic lords. Therefore, on May 3, 1469, the rump Bohemian Estates, led by Zdeněk, formally elected Matthias as their king. The latter accepted, swearing the coronation oath before Vitez and the papal emissaries. The coronation itself could not take place, as the Bohemian royal insignia were in Poděbrady's possession.²⁶³

257 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 512–19.

258 DL 88 476.

259 UB, 570, doc. 480. As the sources place Vitez in Olomouc in April 1469, it seems the document in which he proclaimed Schönberg his vicar in Bratislava is misdated in Vitéz, *Opera*, ed. Boronkai, 223, doc. 46. Roth was appointed as bishop of Lavant after Rüdesheim was elected as bishop of Wrocław. Regarding him, see Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, 2:174 and Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III*, 698ff. Regarding Roverella's status, see Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 33.

260 UB, 571–75, doc. 481.

261 UB, 569–70, doc. 479.

262 All this information comes from Protase's report in UB, 577–80, doc. 482. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 87.

263 UB, 581–82, doc. 482. See also Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:441, and Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 37.

We do not know whether Vitez was working with Zdeněk, but it seems he approved of the election. It is conceivable that he had been deceiving Poděbrady ever since the negotiations began, and that this was the very reason Matthias kept sending him to negotiate with the Bohemian king. If so, perhaps other Hungarian diplomats were instructed to act similarly. George Schönberg, for example, did his best to convince the Imperial Estates gathered at the Diet of Regensburg in February 1469 that Matthias had no intentions of claiming the Bohemian crown for himself.²⁶⁴ Perhaps these men, Matthias included, were taken by surprise by how the events unfolded, but it seems more likely that such a development was at least partly planned.

In any case, Vitez did not shirk from officiating Matthias's enthronement, nor from helping him to assert his rule. He accompanied Matthias to Silesia after the election, where the king was to receive the homage of the local estates. He arrived in Wrocław on May 26 as a member of the royal entourage, together with Beckensloer and the bishop of Lavant.²⁶⁵

In the short term, Matthias's election had disastrous effects, not only because all hopes of making peace with Poděbrady were utterly dashed. Most importantly, Poland was extremely dissatisfied. After he had declared war on Poděbrady, Matthias sent Bishop Protase to Kraków to try to appease King Casimir IV, who had a solid claim on Bohemia as the late Ladislaus V's brother-in-law. Protase's mission was a failure: Casimir declared he would consider anyone who claims the Bohemian crown his enemy. Immediately afterwards, Albert Kostka arrived in the Polish capital as Poděbrady's emissary, promising his king would nominate one of Casimir's sons as his heir.²⁶⁶ It is therefore understandable that Matthias's election as king of Bohemia prompted Casimir to continue negotiating with Poděbrady.²⁶⁷ Matthias's relations with Poland deteriorated further later in 1469. A meeting of representatives of the two kingdoms was supposed to be held in Podolínec. However, the Hungarian embassy failed to arrive on the agreed date, as Matthias kept its members in Bratislava due to some urgent business, likely the session of the royal council summoned to approve further war taxes. The Polish emissaries were unwilling to wait for their counterparts' arrival and abruptly departed, causing a diplomatic incident.²⁶⁸

On the opposite side of the kingdom, the alleged truce with the sultan turned out to be just that. Mehmed did temporarily refrain from waging a war of conquest on Hungary, but he did not prevent his subjects from raiding it.²⁶⁹ In 1468 and 1469 Croatia was ravaged by Ottoman raiders, and the local magnates, such as the Frankapans and the

264 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 510. The possibility that the Kingdom of Bohemia could secede from the Empire greatly upset the Imperial Estates; see Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere*, ed. Cherubini, 2:1217–22, doc. 372.

265 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:441–42; UB, 590, doc. 589.

266 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 502–3; see also Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:421–23.

267 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 38–39.

268 CE, 1/1:242–43, doc. 215; Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:499. Regarding this session of Matthias's royal council, see Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 90.

269 Regarding the Ottoman raids after 1468, see Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács*, 231–32.

Kurjakovičs, sought protection from Venice and the emperor. Matthias was extremely displeased by this, and he reacted by occupying some of the said magnates' holdings.²⁷⁰ But displeasure with the Hungarian king's foreign policy stretched much farther than some aggrieved nobles. Venice, left to face the sultan's forces virtually alone, was exasperated with Matthias fighting Poděbrady instead of the Ottoman Empire. On March 27, 1469, the Signoria informed the Hungarian ambassador that they hoped Matthias would turn his attention to the Ottomans as soon as possible.²⁷¹ The Venetian ambassador negotiated with Matthias, Vitez and Albert Vetési in Bratislava in late August 1469, trying to persuade the king to actively fight the Ottomans, but Matthias said he would not do so if Venice would not supply him with money first. The Signoria replied their Republic was unable to send him any aid, as it was already spending enormous sums on its own actions against the Ottomans.²⁷² What went unspoken was the suspicion that any forthcoming aid would be sunk into the Bohemian Crusade. That concern was openly voiced by the Hungarian Estates in late 1470, when the king proposed a new round of war taxes. The Estates consented, with the condition that money thus raised would be used against the Ottomans, not Bohemians.²⁷³

As Vitez participated in the negotiations with the Venetian ambassador, he could see that the Republic, with which he had previously cultivated such warm relations, was losing faith in its alliance with Matthias. Vitez worked to improve the kingdom's relations with Florence around this time, with the possible intention to counter Venice. The Florentine government sent their regards to Vitez and Janus Pannonius on November 29, 1469, saying that the king's emissary, Stephen Bajoni (another Vitez protégé) told them Vitez and Pannonius had done much to make their king more favourably disposed towards Florence.²⁷⁴

Nevertheless, enemies were multiplying at a pace even Vitez was unable to keep up with. The alliance with the emperor was falling apart. The Ottomans were plundering not only Hungarian and Venetian lands, but the emperor's as well,²⁷⁵ and the latter suspected Matthias of granting safe conduct to their raiding parties.²⁷⁶ Also, many of the Bohemians were affronted by Matthias's election as king of Bohemia, which allowed Poděbrady to rally his forces and turn the tide against Hungary. In mid-1469, the bishop of Wrocław Rudolf von Rüdesheim admonished Matthias for not leaving troops stationed in Silesia and asked him to immediately dispatch some aid. The king replied he would do so as soon as he had troops to spare, and that he and the nuncio Roverella had written to Vitez, ordering him to secure reinforcements from the emperor.²⁷⁷

270 Grgin, *Počeci rasapa*, 100–104.

271 MDE, 2:99–101, doc. 64.

272 MDE, 2:140–41, doc. 93.

273 Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 90.

274 Gentile, "Marsilio Ficino," 93–94.

275 Regarding this, see Theiner, 2:408, doc. 583 and Teke, "Rapporti diplomatici," 23–24.

276 Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen*, 304.

277 MKL, 1:240–41, doc. 176.

Reinforcements from Frederick III became a dire necessity after Matthias suffered a severe defeat at Uherské Hradiště in 1469.²⁷⁸ Vitez spent almost the entire November negotiating with the emperor's representatives in Wiener Neustadt and Vienna, at the head of Matthias's embassy. Hans Hausner, an emissary of the city of Chéb, who was in Vienna at the time, wrote on November 23 that the Hungarian ambassadors—among whom he named Vitez and John of Rožmberk—requested the emperor to send the military and monetary aid he promised Matthias, but also that he renounce the title of king of Hungary, which was a new development, and a sign of deteriorating relations. The emperor's chief negotiator was probably Ulrich von Nussdorf, with whom Vitez had a long-standing acquaintanceship.²⁷⁹ It seems Matthias himself was supposed to come to Vienna, as his mansion was being readied. Hausner conversed with Vitez on that occasion and was awed by him, saying: "Es ist wunderlich mit den grossen herrn!" (It is wonderful [to be] with the great lord!) He noted that his companion Nicholas Schlick (one of the late imperial chancellor Kaspar Schlick's brothers) commented: "Wann der von Gran ist gancz konig, waz der tut" (loosely translated: The [archbishop] of Esztergom acts as behoves a king).²⁸⁰

This round of negotiations failed, and the Hungarian ambassadors left empty-handed. This seemed to only anger Matthias. The Milanese ambassador Cristoforo Bollato (also known as Cristoforo da Bollate) wrote on January 21, 1470 that Vitez returned to Vienna around last Christmas, and that this time further requests were added to existing ones—that the emperor hand over the Hungarian holdings he was allowed to keep by the peace treaty of 1463, and that he pardon Andrew Baumkircher, the Hungarian count of Bratislava who led the uprising against him in Styria.²⁸¹ Matthias wrote to the ambassadors that they were to leave immediately if the emperor would not comply with those requests. They did leave, twice, but both times the emperor persuaded them to return. In the end, the most they were able to achieve was to arrange a personal meeting between Matthias and Frederick in Vienna. Bollato thought Matthias had no intention of improving his relations with the emperor, and that he would turn on him as soon as he had reached a peace agreement with Poděbrady.²⁸²

We do not know whether that was really Matthias's intention, or, if so, whether Vitez knew about it. However, relations between Matthias and Frederick worsened even before Vitez conveyed these extreme requests. Ottoman raids and Baumkircher's revolt were just pieces in a greater mosaic of disagreements. In fact, it seems Matthias wanted a full annulment of the concessions granted to the emperor by the 1463 peace treaty in payment for coming to his aid. He perhaps even aimed to supplant the

278 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 43.

279 Adolph Bachmann, ed., *Urkunden und Actenstücke zur Österreichischen Geschichte im Zeitalter Kaiser Friedrichs III. und König Georgs von Böhmen (1440–1471)* (Vienna: Gerold, 1879), 480–82, doc. 363.

280 Bachmann, *Urkunden und Actenstücke*, 483–85, doc. 364.

281 Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 87.

282 MDE, 2:206–7, doc. 144. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 195–96.

emperor by becoming king of the Romans.²⁸³ Frederick III therefore simply replaced Poděbrady with another, perhaps even more dangerous creditor, and he had, by the time Matthias arrived in Vienna in February 1470, begun striving to extricate himself from the Bohemian Crusade and the uneasy alliance with the Hungarian king. However, if Bollato's opinion was correct, Matthias intended to collect his debt one way or another.

Frederick may have been the weaker party, but Matthias was worse at hiding his animosity. Immediately before his arrival in Vienna, on February 9, his counsellors dispatched a strange missive to the emperor: a guarantee that their king would act friendly towards him during their meeting. Among the guarantors were Vitez, Pannonius, Beckensloer and other magnates.²⁸⁴ The fact that such a guarantee was thought necessary demonstrates that Matthias was not merely an unpleasant ally, but a direct hindrance to the alliance itself.

The negotiations were nearly broken off several times. Bollato wrote that the king almost left the negotiations twice, and that both rulers would act more politely towards one another only when they met in Vitez's presence.²⁸⁵ Matthias apparently went as far as to request the emperor's daughter's hand in marriage, and his intentions to become king of the Romans were spoken of. Frederick, of course, strongly disagreed with such ideas, so Matthias flew into his notorious fits of rage. In the end, despite Vitez's best efforts, Matthias abruptly broke off the negotiations and left Vienna, gravely insulting the emperor in the process.²⁸⁶ Another layer of complexity was thus added to the political situation, and the future became an even greater enigma. Many of the actors began to reconsider their allegiances.

The End of the Tether

The last few years of Vitez's life were marked by significantly more autonomy than he displayed during the period between 1463 and 1470. In this chapter we will examine how this was brought about by his increasing displeasure with Matthias's policy, eventually leading to his involvement in the 1471–1472 plots against Matthias. The nature of that involvement will be considered, especially as the paucity of evidence makes it uncertain whether Vitez acted against Matthias at all.

After the 1470 Vienna conference failed so dismally, Vitez retreated to Esztergom. As we find him there for quite a while, he may have temporarily withdrawn from politics.²⁸⁷ He was not a young man any more. Statesmen of his generation were becom-

283 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 518–19 and 522–23.

284 Kurz, *Österreich unter Kaiser Friedrich dem Vierten*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Doll, 1812), 2:247, doc. 28.

285 MDE, 1:73–74, doc. 46. Note that document is misdated; it is impossible that the events described in it took place in 1460.

286 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 196; Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 556–57; Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 44–45.

287 DL 88 496; DF 237 834 and 225 576.

ing scarce; for example, Ulrich Sonnenberger died in December 1469.²⁸⁸ Vitez's health had deteriorated due to the stress of the previous couple of years. For example, in June 1469, when King Matthias was in Wrocław, the local chronicler Peter Eschenloer noted that his entire entourage took part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament on the feast of Corpus Christi, except for Vitez, who was too weak to walk.²⁸⁹ In his book *De homine*, written in 1469–1470 in Esztergom and dedicated to Vitez himself, Galeotto Marzio wrote that Vitez suffered immensely from kidney stones, and was in great pain while performing his political duties.²⁹⁰ This is reflected in one of Janus Pannonius's poems dedicated to Vitez. In it, the poet compares Vitez to Prometheus being mangled by an eagle, and admonishes him to stop exerting himself, because his body could not bear it.²⁹¹ Kidney stones could have caused Vitez to suffer periods of paralyzing pain, making it difficult from him to travel, so it was understandable that he wanted to remain in Esztergom for a while. However, another reason for his seclusion may have been the collapse of the relations between Matthias and the emperor. That might have seriously shaken Vitez's reputation.²⁹² Perhaps he started losing faith in his abilities, or, more likely, Matthias's.

Although we cannot know what Vitez really thought, at least until 1470 he behaved as if he believed it was possible and likely that Matthias would win the war against Poděbrady. The change in his behaviour after the Vienna conference indicates he might have changed his opinion. If he did, he was not the only one to do so. By the end of 1470, Rudolf von Rüdeseheim became convinced the Bohemian Crusade was a mistake.²⁹³ By early 1471, the emperor was again on excellent terms with Poděbrady, and even Zdeněk of Šternberk was trying to reconcile with the latter.²⁹⁴ In fact, Frederick III started negotiating an anti-Hungarian alliance with Casimir IV,²⁹⁵ and Venice fanned the hostility between them and Matthias, due to rumours about him desiring Trieste and planning an invasion of Dalmatia.²⁹⁶ Additionally, the pope did not recognize Matthias as king of Bohemia; as a result, Matthias began to publicly doubt his support.²⁹⁷ To make an unfavourable situation worse, in mid-1470 Poděbrady launched

288 Obersteiner, *Die Bischöfe*, 247.

289 Peter Eschenloer, *Historia Wratislaviensis*, ed. Hermann Markgraf, *Scriptores rerum Silesiacarum* 7 (Wrocław: Max, 1872), 204.

290 Galeottus Martius Narniensis, *De homine libri duo* (Basel: Frobenius, 1517), fol. 87r–v (vailable online at <https://www.e-rara.ch/ch16/id/20948497>). See also Csapodiné Gárdonyi, *Die Bibliothek des Johannes Vitéz*, 48 and D'Alessandro, "Astrologia, religione e scienza," 139.

291 Pannonius, *Epigrammata*, ed. Barrett, 98–99.

292 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 24.

293 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 567; Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 155–56.

294 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 582–83. Roverella noted that the emperor remained strangely inactive in the war against the Bohemian king. See Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere*, ed. Cherubini, 2:1217–22, doc. 372.

295 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 47.

296 Teke, "Rapporti diplomatici," 25.

297 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 571–72. The nuncio Roverella did recognize Matthias's election,

a series of raids on the north of Hungary, intending to incite the local populace to rise against Matthias.²⁹⁸

The Kingdom of Hungary seemed beset by enemies on all sides, with Matthias driving it into ruin. Of course, later he proved he was able to fight all his neighbours and win, but there was no way of knowing that then. When Vitez returned to Hungary in 1470, everything he could see portended a disaster. Poland and Venice were indignant. Poděbrady's troops were on Hungarian soil. Ottoman raiders ran rampant. News about the Ottomans plundering Hungary and enslaving its inhabitants were spreading.²⁹⁹ Długosz claimed their raiding parties ravaged Transylvania, Croatia and Slavonia, reaching as far as Zagreb, and that Matthias did nothing to stop them.³⁰⁰ That was not merely anti-Corvinian propaganda: the Chapter of Zagreb and the citizens of the nearby city of Gradec indeed reported to Matthias that the Ottomans were raiding their estates.³⁰¹

This bleak outlook could have prompted Vitez to try to effect a change in the kingdom's policy. Although he remained politically inactive throughout most of 1470, he came out of his seclusion to participate in the Diet of Buda, summoned in late 1470 to approve yet more war taxes. We find him Buda in November and December 1470.³⁰² In a charter he issued there on December 8, he claimed he had not time to adjudicate cases concerning his archdiocese, due to being extremely busy with affairs of state.³⁰³

Vitez was still far from being a defeated, tired old man. In fact, the events that followed suggest he tried to turn the kingdom's forces back against the Ottoman Empire. The Hungarian Estates shared this initiative. They did approve a new round of war taxes, but the decree proclaiming them included the proviso that the tax money should be used mostly to fight the Ottomans, as they, and not the Bohemians, were the greatest threat to the kingdom.³⁰⁴ Faced with the suspicions of the Estates, a number of prelates and barons guaranteed Matthias would uphold the decrees of this diet, not introducing new taxes against the will of the Estates. However, it is significant that Vitez was not among them.³⁰⁵

As he was present in Buda when the guarantee was issued, something must have inspired Vitez not to take part in it. The only source offering any information is a much later third-hand report, written on September 14, 1471. The information it conveys

but under duress and without the pope's permission. See Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 156.

298 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 563–64.

299 See, for example, Bachmann, *Urkunden und Actenstücke*, 482, doc. 363.

300 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:461.

301 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:406ff.

302 DF 268 976; DL 88 513.

303 DF 237 610.

304 *Vestigia comitiorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, 384.

305 *Vestigia comitiorum apud Hungaros*, ed. Kovačić, 390. See also Fraknoi, *Vitéz János*, 202. Regarding this diet, Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 90.

came from Hans Monhaupt, an agent of the princes-electors of Saxony. According to him, the Hungarian king requested that the Estates grant him the means to continue the war in Bohemia. Vitez delivered the Estates' response, saying they would provide him the means, but only for defending Hungary from the Ottomans. Upon hearing this, the king asked Vitez to consider a different response. When Vitez declined to do so, Matthias struck him in the face.³⁰⁶

Considering that the conspiracy against Matthias was well underway when this document was written, it may have been just a piece of anti-Corvinian propaganda. There was certainly an abundance of disinformation circulating at the time. For example, a Milanese ambassador in Venice reported to his authorities rumours about Matthias being dead, having been killed by two of his chamberlains.³⁰⁷ On the other hand, the decree of the 1470 Diet of Buda stated exactly what Monhaupt later ascribed to Vitez: the Ottomans were the greatest threat to the kingdom, and the tax money was to be used to counter them. Why, then, did Vitez deny it his guarantee? Perhaps he really did bring the Estates' terms before Matthias, and the latter eventually agreed to them, but only after insulting Vitez to such a degree that he refused to participate in the diet any further.

There are other indications of Vitez having distanced himself from Matthias in late 1470. Matthias apparently thought it necessary to ask the pope to persuade Vitez to continue supporting him. On January 8, 1471, Pope Paul II admonished Vitez not to stop supporting the king regarding the Bohemian Crusade, which he had, in the pope's words, until then so eagerly done. The pope also said Matthias was constantly asking him to bestow new honours upon Vitez, and that he was so far unable to do so because he had other pressing business, but that he would be more forthcoming if Vitez would continue supporting Matthias.³⁰⁸ The timing and the content of the letter indicate its purpose was to make Vitez stop opposing the king's policy, something he had only recently begun to do.³⁰⁹ Additionally, in March 1471, shortly before his death, Poděbrady wrote gleefully to his friend, Margrave Albert of Brandenburg, that Matthias was having trouble with his magnates, including the prelates.³¹⁰

At the beginning of 1471, Vitez returned to Esztergom. It appears he left Buda immediately after the diet and retreated to his domain, devoting himself to affairs concerning his archdiocese.³¹¹ The only contact between him and Matthias during the first half of that year was a short letter sent by the king on March 8, warning Vitez to stop illegally imposing tithes on the estates belonging to the convent on

306 CE, 3:157–59, doc. 132. Kubinyi considered this source unreliable; however, he did not disregard it completely. See Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 25 and Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 91. Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 201, and Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 198.

307 MDE, 2:224–25, doc. 162.

308 Theiner, 2:417, doc. 593.

309 Cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 178.

310 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 583.

311 See DF 279 697, 225 577, and 227 247; DL 102 585 and 17 214.

Margitsziget.³¹² In that document Vitez was titled as the high and privy chancellor. He would bear that title until his death, despite everything. Perhaps he rejoined the royal court in the late summer, as on August 22 he issued one of Matthias's charters, in his capacity as a high and privy chancellor.³¹³ That was exceptional, as by that time he probably bore that office in name only; after Stephen Várdai died in the first half of 1471, the chancery was effectively run by the new archbishop of Kalocsa, Gabriel of Matuchina.³¹⁴ After all, Matthias himself addressed Vitez as high and privy chancellor even after he had him arrested, when it was quite impossible for him to perform his duties as such.³¹⁵

There are no indications that Vitez acted against Matthias in mid-1471, and it may be that he once again took his place at the court. Długosz claimed Matthias had by then known that Vitez and Janus were the ringleaders of a plot against him.³¹⁶ However, considering that author's bias, relations between Vitez and the king may have been fairly normal. Perhaps the pope's admonition had worked. Bonfini's report corroborates this, as it states Vitez was the last one to join the conspiracy against Matthias, and that he did so reluctantly, on Janus's urging.³¹⁷

As for the conspiracy itself, Bonfini claimed it was caused by the extortionate taxes imposed by Matthias, from which even the Church was not exempt, as well as by his reduction of the role of the prelates and barons in the affairs of state. Regarding Vitez personally, Bonfini claimed Matthias angered him by confiscating many of the incomes of the archdiocese of Esztergom, including its dues from the gold mines on its territory.³¹⁸ It is not unlikely that such a matter would have catalyzed Vitez's animosity, especially considering the accusations brought against the king by the conspiracy's participants were largely their personal grievances.³¹⁹ A whole litany of such accusations was published by the Polish prince Casimir when he invaded Hungary in late 1471. At least some guessed the list was composed by Vitez,³²⁰ though there is no evidence of it.

As the conspiracy was, by its very nature, secret, it is difficult to discern truth from fabrication. We cannot be certain whether Vitez was one of its ringleaders, a reluctant participant, or an opportunistic observer. Still, it is unlikely that Vitez, as Długosz

312 DL 17 178.

313 DL 73 614.

314 Kubinyi, *Matthias Corvinus*, 36–37. Previously the parish priest of Buda, Gabriel was delegated by the nuncio Roverella to gather support for the anti-Ottoman crusade. See Kalous, *Late Medieval Papal Legation*, 134.

315 DL 17 349.

316 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:462–63. Fraknói agreed with this: see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 212–13.

317 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 592; see also Matić, "Ivan Vitez," 169–70.

318 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 588–89. Fraknói and Nehring mostly repeat this: see Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 204–10 and Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 54.

319 Kubinyi, "Vitéz János," 25.

320 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 215–17.

asserted, hated Matthias.³²¹ It is possible he joined a group of dissenters in early 1471, when they did not have a clear agenda. However, later, when it turned out that proceeding with the conspiracy would hurl the country into a new internecine war, it would not have been inconsistent with Vitez's previous actions—such as after Count Ulric's murder, during the Hunyadi rebellion or after the rebellion of 1459—to balk at that and seek a peaceful solution. Perhaps that is what happened in August 1471, when, as we mentioned, we find Vitez issuing a royal charter. Finally, when it became obvious that the revolt would start with or without Vitez, he, as will be explained later, was not willing to risk everything and was careful not to commit himself.

What decided the course of the conspiracy were the alarming events abroad. George of Poděbrady died on March 23, 1471, and the Bohemian Estates gathered to elect a new king. Matthias decided to enter the election as a candidate, even though that implied his previous election was invalid.³²² According to Długosz, he sent Beckensloer and the Transylvanian voivode Nicholas Čupor to present his bid, supposedly offering to reinstate the Basel Compacts. However, his supporters, including Zdeněk of Šternberk and John of Rožmberk, were few.³²³ In the end, the Estates fulfilled the late King George's promise by electing the Polish king's eldest son, Wladislas Jagiellon.³²⁴

Thus, the king of Bohemia was Catholic again, and the Bohemian Crusade lost much of its religious dimension. This election ushered in a Jagiellonian alliance of Poland and Bohemia, hemming in Hungary between the Jagiellonian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire. Also, Matthias's attempts at making foreign alliances failed. For example, Margrave Albert of Brandenburg wrote to Duke William of Saxony that he was offered Lusatia in exchange for recognizing Matthias as king of Bohemia, but that he refused.³²⁵ All of this most likely convinced Vitez that a change of policy was urgent.

The events at the Imperial diet in Regensburg, held in July and August 1471, reflected this urgency. Matthias sent Bishop Albert Vetési and John Rozgonyi there, and they, supported by one of the few remaining advocates of the Bohemian Crusade, Lorenzo Roverella, requested aid from the Imperial Estates. The emperor and the German princes did not recognize Matthias as king of Bohemia and refused to send him any further aid for fighting the Bohemians; they were willing, however, to offer him aid for fighting the Ottomans. As that was not the kind of aid Matthias wanted, nothing was accomplished. However, a letter from Vitez and other Hungarian magnates arrived in Regensburg independently of the king's emissaries, and in it the senders

321 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:471.

322 Heymann, *George of Bohemia*, 588.

323 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:466.

324 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 203.

325 "Urkundliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Häuser Brandenburg und Österreich, der Länder Ungarn und Böhmen namentlich aus der Zeit Markgraf Albrechts Achilles von Brandenburg," ed. Karl Adolf Konstantin Höfler, *Archiv für österreichische Geschichte* 7 (1851): 25–146 at 57–58, doc. 32.

requested aid precisely for fighting the Ottomans. This shows Matthias was facing serious dissent at home and losing control over his kingdom's foreign policy.³²⁶

The Hungarian king was aware of the situation he was in. On July 19, 1471, Bishop Protase brought Matthias's peace offer to Kraków, proposing to let the pope decide the rightful king of Bohemia. Matthias also offered to adopt Wladislas and recognize him as king of Bohemia, on the condition that the latter accepted his tutelage. He also offered to marry Casimir IV's daughter. However, all of this was refused.³²⁷ Casimir knew Matthias was at a disadvantage and was unwilling to reduce the pressure he was under.

This refusal probably convinced the dissenters in Hungary that Matthias's cause was lost, as they intensified their efforts after it. According to Długosz, around the time of Wladislas's coronation in Prague (August 21), Hungarian magnates started sending emissaries to Casimir IV, begging him to send them his younger son, also named Casimir, so they could make him their king. The foremost among them were allegedly Vitez, Janus Pannonius and Reynold Rozgonyi. Although Długosz was certainly biased, the Polish invasion of Hungary was very likely precipitated by internal dissent. In any case, the chronicler continues, Casimir IV agreed to send his son to Hungary with an army. It gathered in Nowy Sącz on October 2, and entered Hungary later that month.³²⁸

However, Casimir was too late. Matthias had by then managed to bribe, coax or intimidate most of the Hungarian lords. In September 1471 he summoned a great diet in Buda, at which he redressed many of the grievances brought against himself.³²⁹ He also managed to sway some of the magnates who were calculating whom to support. For example, he bought Nicholas of Ilok by granting him the title of king of Bosnia.³³⁰ According to an anonymous report sent from Hungary to John of Rožmberk, Vitez was also present at this diet, and he personally negotiated with the king. However, he requested a letter of safe conduct before attending.³³¹ There is no reason to think this did not happen, especially as Vitez had before always tried to negotiate a peaceful solution to a conflict. Even Długosz claimed he and Janus Pannonius started having doubts about supporting Prince Casimir before he even entered Hungary.³³² However,

326 Nehring, *Matthias Corvinus*, 52–54. Rozgonyi died during this embassy: see Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 19.

327 CE, 1/1:252–53, doc. 221.

328 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:470–71. See also MKL, 1:270, doc. 189.

329 See the text of the decree issued at the diet in *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, ed. Bak, 3:24–28.

330 Richard Horváth, "The Castle of Jajce in the Organization of the Hungarian Border Defence System under Matthias Corvinus" in *Stjepan Tomašević (1461.–1463.)—sлом srednjovjekovnoga Bosanskog Kraljevstva*, ed. Ante Birin (Zagreb / Sarajevo: Hrvatski institut za povijest / Katolički bogoslovni fakultet u Sarajevu, 2013), 89–98 at 94–95.

331 See a transcript of the document in František Palacký, *Geschichte von Böhmen*, 5 vols. (Prague: Tempsky, 1865), 5:57–58n1. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 213–15.

332 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:471.

Vitez's request for safe conduct suggests he was at least somewhat involved with the conspirators.

The safest assumption might be that Vitez was acting similarly to Nicholas of Ilok—trying to extort concessions from Matthias by threatening to support the Poles. In fact, if we consider the actions of other alleged conspirators, it becomes obvious that very few of them persisted until the bitter end. When Prince Casimir arrived in Hungary, only Reynold Rozgonyi and a few other lords joined him.³³³ Bonfini claimed that before the September Diet of Buda Matthias could not count on anyone except Michael Ország and Gabriel of Matuchina, but that the number of his opponents fell precipitously after it.³³⁴ There are indications that many of the lords were involved with the conspiracy, but the fact that they eventually joined Matthias suggests some of them were only considering when, and at what price, to offer their support to him. That was, for example, the case with Emeric of Zapolje.³³⁵ We should also bear in mind that this was the third rebellion Matthias had to face. It is therefore likely that not many of the lords were eager to support him unconditionally, as his rule was proven to be fragile and often challenged.

It should also be remembered that the Polish king was playing a very intricate game, in which Hungary was only one of the prizes. He faced Matthias on two fronts, and the main one was in Bohemia. Noticeably, he did not commit fully to his younger son's expedition to Hungary: he treated it ambiguously. On the one hand, he disseminated propaganda about Hungary being rightfully his.³³⁶ On the other, on November 16, 1471, he promised to some Hungarian nobles who had sworn fealty to him that he would have their well-being in mind if he were to make a peace treaty with Matthias, referring to the latter as king of Hungary.³³⁷ It seems his plan was to reach a compromise with Matthias, and that Prince Casimir's expedition was essentially a distraction. If it managed to dislodge Matthias, all the better; but if it would induce him to recognize Wladislas's claim to Bohemia, it would have fulfilled its purpose. The fact that the Polish army retreated swiftly after Matthias consolidated his forces also indicates that King Casimir did not intend to commit his troops in Hungary.

Nevertheless, some of the participants in this tug of war were trampled underfoot. For example, Reynold Rozgonyi fled to Venice after the Poles retreated.³³⁸ Those who had been vacillating for too long paid for their indecisiveness. Oswald Thuz, bishop of Zagreb, for example, did not openly join the rebellion, but he also did not personally join Matthias's army or put his troops at his disposal when a general summons to war

333 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 217. See also Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 92.

334 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 588 and 590.

335 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 588; Horváth, "The Castle of Jajce," 94–95; Kubinyi, *Matthias Rex*, 21.

336 A Milanese agent reported in December 1471 that he had seen a pamphlet with such content with Cardinal Francesco Todeschini Piccolomini. See MDE, 2:237, doc. 168.

337 CE, 3:584–85, doc. 76.

338 Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 201.

was issued. Matthias's revenge was swift—in January 1472 he forbade Križevci county to pay tithes and other taxes to the bishop.³³⁹

Unlike those, Vitez once again emerged triumphant. However, it is questionable whether he acted against Matthias at all. His only "rebellious" act was letting the Polish army occupy Nitra, but it is unclear whether he did that on purpose. Of the contemporary sources, Długosz was the only one to expressly claim Vitez gave the orders for the fortress's surrender.³⁴⁰ As for the others, Ranzano and Thuróczy vaguely claimed that some lords, Vitez and Pannonius among them, brought the Polish prince Casimir into Hungary and surrendered the fortress of Nitra to him.³⁴¹ Bonfini did not mention Vitez at all while writing about the Polish occupation of Nitra, but did claim Prince Casimir was unsuccessfully trying to persuade Vitez to come to his aid.³⁴² Eschenloer thought the castle was surrendered to the Poles by its castellan, who was Polish himself.³⁴³ This is somewhat corroborated by the treatment the castellan later received. Finally, a report sent by a Bohemian nobleman to the princes of Saxony on January 23, 1472, stated that Prince Casimir had occupied Nitra, which belonged to the archbishop of Esztergom, and left a garrison in it before retreating to Poland. Matthias succeeded to negotiate its surrender, after which he handed control to the archbishop, with whom he had reconciled.³⁴⁴ There is, therefore, no conclusive evidence of Vitez being responsible for the Polish occupation of Nitra, and even less that he had openly rebelled against Matthias. In fact, he was still in contact with the king on October 26, 1471, when Matthias, on Vitez's request, granted the chapter of Nitra an exemption from the obligation to contribute troops for the wars against the Poles and Ottomans.³⁴⁵

It is most likely that Vitez simply retreated to Esztergom and bided his time. He and Janus Pannonius reached some agreement with the king before December 17, 1471, when Bartolomeo Fonizio wrote to Peter Garazda (as we shall later see, they were both Vitez's contacts) that he heard of "his people" having reconciled with the king, by that meaning Vitez and Janus.³⁴⁶ Vitez certainly declared for Matthias in Esztergom on December 21, when Gabriel of Matuchina, Beckensloer, Michael Ország and

339 AHAZU, 110—D CXLVII (Privil.), no. 34. See also Razum, "Oswaldo Thuz," 92–94 and Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 374. There are indications that Oswald and his relative John Thuz acted against the royal city of Gradec, which remained loyal to Matthias. See MHEZ, 2:338, doc. 273 and 2:341, doc. 275.

340 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:472. This is the source cited in Teleki, *Hunyadiak kora Magyarországon*, 4:261, and in turn transmitted in Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 218. The version in Anon., *Episcopatus Nitriensis eiusque praesulum memoria*, 298 is very similar and probably also comes from Długosz.

341 Ranzano, *Epitome rerum Ungaricarum*, LIXv–LXr; Thuróczy, *Chronica Hungarorum*, 289–90.

342 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 591.

343 Eschenloer, *Historia Wratislaviensis*, ed. Markgraf, 247.

344 CE, 3:162–63, doc. 137.

345 József Vagner, *Adalékok a Nyitrai székes-káptalan történetéhez* (Nitra: Huszár, 1896), 426–27, doc. 24.

346 Fonizio, *Letters to Friends*, trans. Davies, 28, doc. 14.

Emeric of Zapolje reached an agreement with him on the king's behalf.³⁴⁷ In the text of the agreement there was no mention of Vitez having committed crimes against the king, merely that suspicions and disagreements between them had accumulated over the last few years. Vitez was to swear fealty to and recognize Matthias as the only true king of Hungary, and to garrison all of his fortifications with Hungarians (meaning, not foreign mercenaries). The latter request was in accordance with the decree of the September Diet of Buda.³⁴⁸ These garrison troops were to swear fealty to Vitez personally and, by extent, to the king, and to promise they would open their gates to royal troops if that was necessary for the defence of the kingdom. Conversely, royal troops were not allowed to evict Vitez's garrisons. Vitez also promised he would do whatever he could to reclaim Nitra and, if it was in enemy hands, Breznica (in today's northwestern Slovakia). If he failed, he would send aid to Matthias in the manner of all other Hungarian prelates and barons. This means that Vitez's contribution to the war against Poland was to consist of reclaiming Nitra and Breznica, probably because they were originally held by his troops. There was no mention of him having surrendered either of these fortresses to the Poles, nor that he was to turn them over to the king after reclaiming them. The agreement also stipulated that he was to demolish the fortress he built in Szekszárd and to stop building another one in the south of the kingdom.

In return, Vitez was to receive great rewards. First, the king would compensate him for all (presumably, previously confiscated) incomes of the archdiocese of Esztergom. Next, all verdicts brought against Vitez's brothers (probably meaning Pannonius) and retainers during the period of disagreement between the primate and the king were annulled, and their cases were to be reopened and settled by the royal council. Next, Vitez's rights of patronage were confirmed, together with all other rights belonging to his archdiocese. Also, Matthias promised to pay Vitez the seven thousand florins he borrowed from him. Lastly, the king granted absolute immunity to Vitez's person, liberty, property and retainers. If Vitez merely heard that someone had spoken ill of him before the king, he was to report it immediately and the matter would be brought before the royal council. Conversely, the king was obliged to immediately notify Vitez of such cases, and give him the opportunity to either swear his innocence, or defend himself before the royal council.

From this we can conclude there was almost no trust left between Vitez and Matthias, and that Vitez thought it necessary to shield himself from the king's retribution. However, judging by his previous cautiousness, open rebellion was not something he would have allowed himself to indulge in. It is far more likely that he merely avoided supporting the king, at least until he was granted a plethora of concessions. As usual, Bonfini wrote a whole dramatization of Matthias's reconciliation with Vitez, complete with imaginary speeches.³⁴⁹ The probably only true part of that report is that Matthias

347 A transcript of the agreement is in János Török, *Magyarország primásai—Közjogi és történeti vázlat*, 2 vols. (Pest: Laufer és Stolpnál, 1859), 2:79–81, doc. 71. Regarding it, see also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 218–20 and Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus," 24.

348 *The Laws of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary*, ed. Bak, 3:24.

349 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 590–91.

met with Vitez in person, as he was himself in Esztergom on December 21.³⁵⁰ From there he immediately took his army to Nitra, and on December 24 he was encamped by it.³⁵¹

Vitez had seemingly once again managed to outplay everyone. It should also be noted that he was true to his word. On January 18, 1472, Matthias wrote to Zdeněk of Šternberk that Janus Pannonius negotiated with the Polish garrison, after which it agreed to vacate Nitra and leave the country.³⁵² Regarding Pannonius's actions, they might indicate that Vitez was in contact with the Poles through him. Długosz claimed Pannonius joined Prince Casimir after the latter took Nitra, arriving from Esztergom with two hundred cavalry, but that after only a few days he returned the way he had come.³⁵³ This was perhaps one of Długosz's embellishments. However, Pannonius probably was in Esztergom at the time of Vitez's reconciliation with the king, and Vitez dispatched him to reclaim Nitra on his behalf after it.³⁵⁴ Długosz also claimed the negotiations with the Polish garrison were mediated by Pannonius, but he wrote that it was agreed Nitra would remain in the hands of Casimir's troops, almost certainly a fabrication. It is also significant that Długosz listed Breznica among Vitez's fortresses confiscated after his arrest in 1472,³⁵⁵ meaning that he recovered that fortress as well, if that was even necessary. The agreement between Vitez and Matthias made after the mentioned arrest confirms this, as it stipulated that Vitez was to turn over Breznica to the king.³⁵⁶ This means that Vitez had very quickly fulfilled the requirements of his reconciliation with Matthias. Although no sources mention that he personally left Esztergom, it is possible that he dispatched his troops together with Pannonius. On February 24 he rewarded his retainer Ladislaus Mark Terjéni of Csúz for faithful service, primarily during the recent unrest, by mortgaging to him the castle of Revište for one thousand florins. That castle belonged to Vitez personally, not to his archdiocese.³⁵⁷ Considering the size of the reward, this person may have been a military commander in Vitez's service.

Come, Sweet Death

As we have seen, Vitez could think he had successfully weathered the crisis. However, in a strange twist, his success was suddenly reversed. In March 1472, merely a few months after his agreement with the king, news circulated about Vitez and his allies having committed high treason. The reports on this are scattered and imprecise, so we can only examine the sources and attempt to reconstruct the events they refer to.

350 From there he sent a letter to the princes-electors of Saxony: see MKL, 1:261–62, doc. 186.

351 MKL, 1:263–64, doc. 187.

352 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 221. For a transcript of the letter, see Johannes Tanner, *Geschichte derer Helden von Sternen oder deß Geschlechtes von Sternberg* (Prague: Hraba, 1732), 388–89.

353 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:472.

354 Cf. Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 200.

355 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:477–78.

356 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:555.

357 DL 17 294.

On March 25, 1472, Matthias wrote to the princes-electors of Saxony that Vitez and his “brother” Janus Pannonius were traitors who caused harm not only to him, but to the whole of Christianity. He warned them that Pannonius might flee to their lands, requesting his immediate extradition if he did.³⁵⁸ The fleeing bishop actually took refuge in Oswald Thuz’s castle of Medvedgrad and died there before the end of March, most likely of pulmonary tuberculosis. When leaving Pécs, he took his belongings with him and left a garrison in the town fortress. Matthias’s forces soon besieged and conquered it.³⁵⁹ Pannonius’s castellan, a Slavonian nobleman named Ladislaus of Ravenica, was punished, and his holdings in Slavonia were pillaged in April 1472.³⁶⁰

Vitez was arrested at about the same time. Contemporary chroniclers seem not to know why. Eschenloer thought Vitez had again committed some treason, while Długosz claimed Matthias arrested him for no reason.³⁶¹ Bonfini asserted that the king was taking revenge for Vitez’s part in the recent rebellion, to make an example out of him and to make sure he would not flee. According to Bonfini, Matthias invited the prelate to participate in a session of the royal council in Buda, where he had him arrested and taken to Visegrád.³⁶² A report by an anonymous author, written before Vitez’s and after Pannonius’s death, offers an additional explanation of Matthias’s actions. According to it, the Polish king sent emissaries to Oswald Thuz, but Matthias learned of this and had them captured and tortured. After they revealed whatever messages they carried, Matthias decided to arrest Vitez. The anonymous author agrees with Bonfini that Vitez was lured out of Esztergom by an invitation to a session of the royal council. However, according to his report, Vitez suspected a trap and sent his secretary, some provost, to tell the king he was too sick to attend. Matthias had the provost detained and sent another invitation to Vitez. This time he did come, and was arrested. The report further claims the king arranged for Vitez to remain the archbishop of Esztergom, but that he was to be confined under surveillance in his see. Matthias entrusted the Esztergom fortress to Beckensloer, but he had to conquer Nitra once again. He also, according to the anonymous author, conquered the fortress of Pécs, from which Pannonius previously fled. The latter took refuge with Bishop Oswald and died soon afterwards. Oswald put himself at Matthias’s mercy, and was forced to surrender his (unnamed) fortress.³⁶³ This last part of the report is confirmed by other sources, so we can assume it is at least partly reliable.

358 MKL, 1:272–73, doc. 190; see also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 222.

359 Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 200–202. The symptoms of his sickness described in his poems correspond to pulmonary tuberculosis. See Vladimir Dugački, “Medicinski elementi u poeziji Ivana Česmičkog,” in *Zbornik radova četvrtog simpozija iz povijesti znanosti*, ed. Dadić, 183–92 at 186–88.

360 Pálosfalvi, *The Noble Elite*, 107–8.

361 Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 222.

362 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 592.

363 “Urkundliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der Häuser Brandenburg,” ed. Höfler, 76–77, doc. 60. Birnbaum thought that the author was one of Beckensloer’s men, probably because he titled this bishop as “mein Herr” but it is more likely that that was just a formal address. See Birnbaum, *Janus Pannonius*, 201.

This information gives us reason to believe Matthias planned the action against Vitez and his circle and executed it with lightning speed. The cause of it may have been that Vitez and his allies—Pannonius and, apparently, Oswald Thuz—remained in contact with Casimir IV, perhaps in case Matthias decided to break the agreement made on December 21. Casimir was likely to have maintained connections with Hungarian dissenters, as the issue of Bohemia was still unresolved. Matthias might have learned of this and decided to remove the involved prelates. The conditions of Vitez's release support the theory that his contacts with the Polish king were the main reason for his arrest. Namely, all confiscated possessions were to be returned to Vitez after peace was made with Poland. The only exception was the castle of Szanda, because the king took it from Vitez's men before the agreement was made.³⁶⁴ As for Matthias's reconquest of Nitra, mentioned in the anonymous report, during the truce negotiations with the Polish ambassador Stanislaus Strzelecki that took place not long after Vitez's arrest it was agreed that Vitez's castellan Peter Kot would be subjected to a test of loyalty. The ambassador was supposed to ask him on whose behalf he was holding the fortress, and if Kot answered he held it on the Polish king's or Prince Casimir's behalf, the ambassador was to relieve him of his duty. If he answered he was holding it on Vitez's behalf, which would be proper, the ambassador was to let the Hungarian Estates deal with him. Vitez was also obligated to settle any debts he might have owed Kot.³⁶⁵

Vitez did not stay imprisoned for very long. Matthias was persuaded by some of the prelates and barons to conclude a new agreement with him in Buda on April 1, 1472.³⁶⁶ The list of its guarantors is impressive—Lorenzo Roverella, Gabriel of Matuchina (titled as the high and privy chancellor),³⁶⁷ John Beckensloer, Albert Vetési, Michael Ország, the judge royal Stephen Báthori (junior), the Transylvanian voivode Nicholas Čupor, Zdeněk of Šternberk, and the royal treasurer John Ernuszt. Roverella's presence indicates that a papal agent once again protested against Vitez's incarceration, as Carvajal did in 1457. However, the conditions of his release were extremely harsh. He was allowed to reside in Esztergom, but under the surveillance of thirty-two guards loyal to Beckensloer. The latter was to receive command of the Esztergom fortress, and later he and Vitez were to share custody over it. This is completely in accordance with the previously mentioned anonymous report, down to the number of men guarding Vitez, so it seems its author knew the contents of this agreement. Vitez was also to turn over four more fortresses, including Breznica, to Beckensloer. He was left with full temporal and spiritual authority, and the king promised to eventually return all estates confiscated after Vitez's arrest, whether they belonged to him personally, his archdiocese, his chapter, or his retainers. Vitez also had the liberty to dispose of all his estates, except the ones belonging to the castellan of Esztergom, who was to be one of

364 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:556–57. Vitez bought Szanda in 1465 for three thousand florins, but it belonged to the archdiocese of Esztergom, not to him personally. See DL 16 206.

365 Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:580.

366 See the text of the agreement in Katona, *Historia critica*, 8:554–59. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 223.

367 Regarding his service as chancellor, see Kubinyi, "Vitéz János és Janus," 19–20.

Beckensloer's men. In case of Vitez's death, Beckensloer was to turn over the possessions in his custody to Matthias or his legitimate heir. Conversely, if the king would die heirless, they were to revert to Vitez. Additionally, Vitez was reminded that the king still regarded him as a threat by the stipulation that his men could only visit him alone and unarmed.

Długosz and Bisticci claimed there were some difficulties regarding the transfer of control of Esztergom to Beckensloer. Vitez's castellan allegedly refused to surrender it, even after Matthias threatened to have Vitez executed, but in the end the latter was allowed to enter the fortress and personally surrender it to the king.³⁶⁸ Bisticci probably received this information from George Polycarp Kosztoláni, at the time in Italy as Matthias's emissary; Pope Sixtus IV employed him as his notary and retainer, and gave him a number of ecclesiastic offices in Hungary.³⁶⁹ We know Kosztoláni told Bisticci, regarding his erstwhile benefactor, that of all Hungarian lords, only Vitez and Pannonius opposed the king, and the latter had them deposed, but spared their lives because some of the lords vouched for them.³⁷⁰

It might be interesting to note that the surrender of Esztergom was a legend among the local populace. Mathes noted in the early nineteenth century that there was a stone there with a carving of a hand on it, which the locals believed was made to commemorate an archbishop once surrendering the fortress to a king. The author remarked that the stone had nothing to do with Vitez, and that it probably came from a collapsed vault.³⁷¹

To conclude, Vitez was left with formal authority over his archdiocese, but his key fortresses were put under the control of a prelate loyal to the king. As we will see in the following chapter, that was Matthias's usual way of dealing with disobedient bishops. The defeated archbishop returned to his see, where we find him in late April and early May 1472. He continued to collect his incomes, as stipulated in the agreement with the king. Matthias notified him on July 27 that the nuns of Margitsziget once again complained of him exacting tithes on their estates, and warned him to stop doing so.³⁷² It seems the king had Vitez confined not to destroy him completely, but merely to prevent him from plotting until peace with the Polish king was concluded.³⁷³ We do not know what would have happened after that, as Vitez did not live to see it.

As early as April 1472, Vitez started liquidating his assets. On April 30, he donated the estate of Piliscsév to the chapter of Esztergom for the salvation of his soul, empha-

368 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:478; Bisticci, *Le Vite*, ed. Greco, 1:1:325.

369 MREV, 3:218, doc. 348.

370 Gentile, "Marsilio Ficino," 94–95.

371 Máthes, *Veteris Arcis Strigoniensis*, 10–11.

372 DL 17 349.

373 Vitez's erstwhile vicar Nicholas of Lunga participated in the peace negotiations on the king's behalf. See Antonín Kalous, "King Matthias Corvinus and the Papacy in Early 1472: Miklós Nyújtódi Székely in Rome," *Povijesni prilozi* 36, no. 52 (2017): 11.

sizing that it belonged to him personally and not to his archdiocese.³⁷⁴ On the same day, he gave his house in Bratislava to five of his retainers, also stressing he had bought it himself and that it was therefore his personal property.³⁷⁵ He seemingly sensed his life was at its end. Bonfini wrote Vitez was at that time old and tired of living, and that he was constantly praying for death to release him from the disgrace that befell him.³⁷⁶ Although unlikely that he was mistreated while in custody, the strains of the last several months must have taken their toll. We can assume he really was ill when he, according to the anonymous report, communicated so to Matthias. His kidney stones might have caused an inflammation of the urinary tract or other complications. If that were the case, Vitez was dying in horrendous pain.

Death finally came on August 8, 1472,³⁷⁷ about three months after Vitez started donating his possessions. The agony was probably lengthy. As always, accusations of foul play ensued. Długosz claimed Vitez was poisoned.³⁷⁸ Those accusations were unsubstantiated, and as he was seriously ill long before his arrest, there is no reason to suspect murder. We do not know whether Matthias mourned for him, but he was rather quick to start redistributing the deceased's assets. On August 22 he gave the castle of Piatra Șoimului to Bartholomew Drágfi, noting Vitez held it until his death.³⁷⁹ It therefore seems Matthias really did uphold his part of the agreement and did not confiscate Vitez's personal property, but only that belonging to his archdiocese. For example, in 1473 the chapter of Esztergom opposed Matthias's donation of Szanda Castle to Stephen II Báthori, arguing it belonged to the archdiocese.³⁸⁰ However, the agreement made upon Vitez's release stipulated the castle was not to be returned to the archbishop. Whether Matthias hated or loved Vitez, the latter gambled with his trust, and lost. In the end, he was punished severely, but not ruthlessly.

Vitez's last resting place was destroyed by the passage of centuries. If he had not become a prelate, he would have probably been buried in the Pauline monastery of Garić, as his family secured a plot for him in the monastery church in 1417.³⁸¹ As an archbishop of Esztergom, he was buried in his cathedral, and his remains are now lost forever.

374 DF 236 463 and 236 464. See also Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 5–6, but note that the interpretation there is wrong, as it was based on the author's later discarded theory that Vitez was a member of a family that originated from Pilis.

375 Császár, *Az Academia Istropolitana*, 118–19, doc. 20.

376 Bonfini, *Rerum Ungaricarum*, 593.

377 That is the date engraved in his tombstone: see Máthes, *Veteris Arcis Strigoniensis*, 64; cf. Fraknói, *Vitéz János*, 224.

378 Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 13/2:482–83.

379 DL 88 531.

380 DL 17 463.

381 DL 35 447.

