

# A Hungarian Orphan's Rare Courtly Career in the Spanish Monarchy

Martin Somogyi's Service at the Spanish Habsburg Court  
in Brussels, 1594–1631\*

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**Abstract.** Martin Somogyi, a Hungarian orphan and nobleman spent nearly forty years in the service of the Habsburg dynasty, most of that time in Brussels, the capital of the Spanish Netherlands. Via the Dietrichstein and Cardona families, from his childhood he received extraordinary patronage and was a close confidant of several family members, while providing constant courtly services to them and to Albert and Isabella, archdukes and governors of the Spanish Netherlands. He became baron and estate owner in both Flanders and Moravia, and from Brussels he repeatedly went on diplomatic missions to Central Europe. Having spent thirty years as vice-captain of the governors' personal guards, his patrons including Archduke Albert requested a Spanish Order of Cavalry for him, but with no effect. By the 1620s, Somogyi's career reached its peak and his dissatisfaction was growing. Therefore, he requested from Dietrichstein his return to Central Europe, but again with no success. He died without male offspring, and his descendants still live in Belgium. Somogyi is also known for having sent to Central Europe one of the first issues of the second part of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*.

**Keywords:** Habsburg, Netherlands, court studies, Spanish Monarchy, early modern, Hungary

## Introduction

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Hungarian Martin Somogyi was a close confidant of the Austrian and Spanish archdukes and vice-captain of their bodyguards in Brussels.<sup>1</sup> He performed demanding diplomatic duties

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and received gifts and favours for his services. With the support of a powerful woman and a cardinal, the talents of this ordinary and, at the same time, unique person propelled him up the ranks.<sup>2</sup>

Internationally, his was a commonplace career, because during the reign of Albert and Isabella (1598–1633), the wealthy courts of Spain and the Low Countries were flooded by princes, counts, and noblemen from Burgundy and Germany, as well as from the far corners of Europe—including Poland and Bohemia, Italy and Spain, countries that were much more prosperous than the eastern territories of Europe.<sup>3</sup>

However, in Hungarian history Somogyi's career is unique, as there are no other Hungarian-born figures with a similar career in the Spanish Low Countries. Although in the Spanish Monarchy at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when it was reaching its Golden Age, there were thousands of people who had fled the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (mainly Hussars, around 500–2000 light cavalry soldiers, including Hussar colonels,<sup>4</sup> and a much smaller but significant number of galley slaves, approximately fifty persons,<sup>5</sup> prosecuted by the Spanish Inquisition), apart from Martin Somogyi, we only know of one Hungarian-born nobleman who travelled to the Iberian Peninsula, namely Miklós Pálffy.<sup>6</sup> In the 1560s, the latter spent several years in Madrid in the company of the Central European Habsburg archdukes who had been brought up in Spain, namely the future Emperor Rudolf II and Ernest, the future governor of the Spanish Netherlands.<sup>7</sup> We also know of ad hoc cases and shorter or less significant stays (study trips, peregrinations, and others).

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- 2 Albert VII, Archduke of Austria (1559–1621) was co-governor of the Spanish Low Countries with Princess Isabella Clara Eugenia (1566–1633) from 1598 until his death.
- 3 For this and the archdukes' regency in general, see: Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety*; Raeymaekers, *One Foot*.
- 4 Monostori, "Egy magyar arisztokrata."
- 5 Monostori and Smid, "Magyarok a spanyol."
- 6 Count Miklós Pálffy (II) (1552–1600), chief justice, general, the 'hero of Győr (Raab),' referring to the 1598 recapture of Győr from the Ottoman Empire. A fairly rich documentary record of Miklós Pálffy's Spanish Monarchy-related contacts in Slovakia has been preserved (more on this in another section), but very few pieces of information about what services he was providing during his stay in Spain. See also Fundárková and Pálffy, eds, *Pálffyovci v novoveku*; Almási, "Educating the Christian Prince."
- 7 Ernest of Austria (1553–1595), Governor of the Spanish Netherlands (1594–1595).

Through the mediation of the Habsburg branch in Central Europe, the Kingdom of Hungary established increasingly close political, economic, and cultural ties with the Spanish Habsburg Empire, but due to the geopolitical position of the country—in contrast to Poland and the Kingdom of Bohemia, from which far more nobles arrived in the Low Countries—the life of Martin Somogyi seems exceptional in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since the numbers and importance of noble migrations and journeys were lesser than the intensity of economic, military, and cultural relations.<sup>8</sup>

Somogyi's name appears in several papers in the international literature: in addition to the *Documenta Bohemica*, one of the most important source publications on the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648),<sup>9</sup> he appears in the works of prominent Czech, Spanish, and German-speaking scholars, such as Josef Polišenský,<sup>10</sup> José Eloy Hortal Muñoz,<sup>11</sup> and Dries Raeymaekers<sup>12</sup> on the Habsburg court in the Spanish Low Countries. Hortal Muñoz and Raeymaekers provide several detailed studies about the international landscape of career-building strategies in the contemporary Habsburg courts. Over the past decade, Czech scholarship has also scrutinized his life, but almost exclusively in relation to his correspondence with Cardinal Franz von Dietrichstein,<sup>13</sup> the Moravian overlord.<sup>14</sup> In the course of our research, we have managed to identify a number of details in the archives of Madrid, Brussels, and Vienna that are not included in the source publications and the literature introduced above.

## An orphan boy's trip to Brussels

Usually signing his name as Martin Somogý, Martin Somogyi's date and place of birth<sup>15</sup> are not known. In his correspondence, he repeatedly referred to his orphanhood and his extreme gratitude to the Dietrichstein family, at whose court he grew

8 Monostori, "Hungaria Hispanica." See also the various essays in "Eagles looking."

9 The *Documenta Bohemica* published excerpts from his letters in Spanish to Cardinal Franz von Dietrichstein, preserved in Brno, written between 1617 and 1631: MZA RAD, 1909.

10 Polišenský, "Hispania de 1614."

11 Hortal Muñoz, "La casa del archiduque Ernesto"; Hortal Muñoz, "The Household of Archduke Albert."

12 Raeymaekers, *One Foot*.

13 Franz von Dietrichstein (1570–1636) Archbishop of Olomouc, Governor of Moravia, and Cardinal.

14 Luska, "Las redes de información"; Nováková, "Comunicar novedades." Copies of some letters written by Dietrichstein to Somogyi have also survived: ÖStA HHStA StAbt Spanien, Diplomatische Korrespondenz 19–17 (Mappe 359) and 20–17 (Mappe 383).

15 In the English literature: Martin de Somoghy.

up.<sup>16</sup> His appointment as baron in Vienna in 1620 refers to him as a nobleman of the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>17</sup> At that time, there were half a dozen Somogyi families living in the Kingdom of Hungary. Márton (Martin) could not have been a descendant of the more numerous Dergh or Karcza branch, but was probably from another Somogyi family. The members of this family were probably granted a noble charter in 1587.<sup>18</sup> We know of a Transylvanian Ambrosius Somogyi (Simigianus), a clerk of the Inner-Szolnok County of Transylvania between 1590 and 1606, who was also a historian.<sup>19</sup> However, as he was born in 1564, it is unlikely that his grandson should have been serving in a courtly position in 1594. Based on his name, the family may have fled from Somogy County—perhaps because of the Turkish conquest—to the shrinking Kingdom of Hungary, and perhaps even further, to Moravia. Further studies will have to clarify some of the unknown chapters of his life.

Martin Somogyi may have arrived in Brussels with a member of the Dietrichstein family, as a member of Ernest of Habsburg's entourage as governor of the Spanish Low Countries, probably in 1594, when the Archduke travelled from Vienna to Brussels. Ernest died unexpectedly in early 1595; the earliest source currently known about Martin Somogyi relates to this event. Two weeks after Ernest's death, Somogyi applied for admission to the court of the newly appointed Governor Albert (Ernest's brother) along with other courtiers.<sup>20</sup> According to the document, he first served Ernest as a page, and later as a *gentilhombre de la casa* (gentleman of the household), and requested promotion to Albert's immediate entourage (*gentilhombre de la boca*, gentleman of the king's table), the latter being a group of lower nobles under the direction of the Master of the Court. The aristocrats typically held chamberlain or other higher offices.

Somogyi, who was subsequently added to the list of those requesting transfer from the court of Ernest, was recommended to the court of Archduke Albert by a certain 'Mrs Dietrichstein en España' (*señora de Dietrichstein en España*): Margarita Folch de Cardona i Requesens (1535–1609).<sup>21</sup> The recommender was a guarantee for a positive evaluation: she had also promoted her own son, Maximilian von Dietrichstein, to one of the highest dignities (*sumiller de corps*).

16 About orphanhood in the Central European Habsburg lands: Horn, *Nemesi árvák*.

17 ÖStA AVA Adel RAA 398.32.

18 Csergheő, *Der Adel von Ungarn*, vol. 4, 589.

19 Csergheő, *Der Adel von Ungarn*, vol. 4, 589; Nagy, *Magyarország családjai*, 294.

20 *Memoria de los criados del serenísimo archiduque Ernesto que por haber quedado desacomodados piden a Su Alteza se sirva de ellos*. Brussels, 5 March 1595 AGRB SEG, Varia 687, sf.

21 Maximilian von Dietrichstein (1569–1611) was Archduke Albert's Chamberlain (1595–1598).

Margarita Cardona was born into a noble Catalan family, her father was vice-roy of Sardinia.<sup>22</sup> Later, in the service of Albert's mother, Maria of Habsburg, she became one of the most influential courtiers of the Holy Roman Empress and Queen of Hungary (wife of Emperor Maximilian II). In 1553, she married Adam von Dietrichstein, a high-ranking Habsburg court official, Grand Master of the Court (1576–1590), and diplomat from an Austro–Moravian noble family. Their son was the aforementioned Franz von Dietrichstein, born in Madrid in 1570, during his father's embassy in Spain. Margarita Cardona followed her mistress, Maria, who returned to Madrid after the death of her husband, Maximilian II (1576). The eldest daughter of the Emperor Charles V, she retained her influence, and the Empress Dowager was highly respected. Her son, the future Emperor Rudolf II, was brought up at the court of King Philip II of Spain, together with the aforementioned Ernest, partly under the tutelage of the Dietrichstein-Cardona family. In later years, the increasingly powerful clan gained key positions in the Spanish Habsburg court.<sup>23</sup> In the first decades of the seventeenth century, Franz von Dietrichstein was one of the most influential politicians of the Habsburg Monarchy in Central Europe: he was both president of the Habsburg Privy Council and cardinal protector of the Austrian hereditary provinces. He maintained active relations with the Spanish Monarchy until the end of his life, and necessarily, with all the political-diplomatic hubs of the Spanish Monarchy in Europe (Rome, Brussels, Vienna, Milan, etc.).<sup>24</sup>

The Pálffy family records held at the Slovak National Archives provide important information on the origins of Martin Somogyi.<sup>25</sup> Another son of Margarita de Cardona, Maximilian von Dietrichstein—through the Krusics family—wrote a letter to his relative, Baron Miklós Pálffy of Erdőd in 1598, in which he talks about Martin Somogyi. The Austro-Moravian aristocrat, who was Archduke Albert's chief chamberlain between 1595 and 1598, asked Pálffy for a detailed family lineage (*linaje*) in Latin. Maximilian von Dietrichstein, as the letter shows, thought that Somogyi was the nephew of 'Forcas Draquin' (Drághy Farkas?) and that Somogyi's father had served with Miklós Pálffy's wife (Maria Fugger). Given the integration of the Pálffy family into the Viennese court, Somogyi's relations with them might have helped him launch his career.<sup>26</sup> We also learn that Somogyi's sister (name unknown) was married to a Spanish nobleman (whose name is unfortunately not given either),

22 Maria of Habsburg (1528–1603), Archduchess of Austria and Infanta of Spain, Queen of Hungary (1563–1576), Empress of the Holy Roman Empire (1564–1576).

23 For the life of the Cardona family and Margarita, see: Cruz Medina, "Margarita de Cardona."

24 González Cuerva, "La forma de lo informal."

25 Pálffy, "A Pálffy család."

26 See also Fundarkova, "Význam vzdelania."

a member of the Order of Santiago.<sup>27</sup> In a letter from Mrs Cardona, we also read a somewhat contradictory account of the husband: in February 1601, she writes of Somogyi's (now) brother-in-law, who was staying with her in Spain, that he is the procurator general of the Order of Calatrava.<sup>28</sup>

### Comet-like career, 1595–1607

During the first five or six years of his stay in Brussels, Martin Somogyi's career took a comet-like turn. The reason for this spectacular progress cannot be explained on the basis of our current knowledge. The rapid change was felt by the courtier himself, because when from the 1620s onwards, it was much more difficult for him to progress further, in his correspondence there is increasing emphasis on the fact that he was receiving less favour from Dietrichstein and the archdukes. At least that was how he perceived his stalled career, which he attributed to his being a foreigner (*extranjero*) and the difficulties that this caused.

In 1596, after the captain's death, Somogyi was appointed vice-captain (*teniente de guarda de archeros y alabarderos*) of both of his personal guards, the *alabarderos* (*alabarderos* or *halberdiers*) and the archers, the so-called *archeros* (*archeros* or *hartschiere*),<sup>29</sup> and for a short time he led both guards himself.<sup>30</sup> By this time, he had also been granted the title of *gentilhombre de la boca*, which he had claimed in 1595.<sup>31</sup> Eventually, he was appointed vice-captain of the *alabarderos*, a position he held until at least 1626, and in this position he earned the substantial sum of 1500 forints (544 ducats) a month.<sup>32</sup> Mrs Cardona also wanted him to become a chamberlain.

Martin Somogyi probably went to Spain at least on two occasions. The first time was in 1599, when he was in a selected group accompanying Albert from Brussels to the double wedding in Valencia. It was then that Albert married Isabella, and King

27 Maximilian von Dietrichstein to Miklós Pálffy, Nikolsburg [Mikulov], 25 June 1598. SNA AÜP Arm. I. Lad. 3. Fasc. 8, f. 29rv, here 29r.

28 Margarita de Cardona to Archduke Albert. Madrid, 2 February 1601. AGRB SEG, 533, f. 143r. This person is yet to be identified.

29 Raeymaekers, *One Foot*, 89. The captain was Pierre de Hennin-Liétard, Count of Boussu.

30 The *alabardiers* of the Spanish Netherlands' governors feature in multiple pieces of art. In a painting by the world-famous painter Jan Brueghel the Elder (*Banquete de bodas presidido por los Archiduques*), which depicts Albert and Isabella at a village wedding among their subjects, there are dozens of *alabardiers*. Martin Somogyi should almost certainly be depicted somewhere in this highly detailed work, but the supporting evidence is missing.

31 Hortal Muñoz, "The Household of Archduke Albert," 1038.

32 Raeymaekers, *One Foot*, 117, note 67.

Philip III of Spain married Margaret of Austria. From the latter marriage were born King Philip IV of Spain, and Anne, who gave birth to Louis XIV, the Sun King, and Mary Anne, the powerful and influential wife of Emperor Ferdinand III.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequently, Margarita de Cardona (from Spain) and Albert (from Brussels) launched a concerted campaign to persuade the Duke of Lerma, Philip III's first minister, to admit Somogyi to the Spanish Order of Cavalry, the Order of Calatrava.<sup>34</sup> This failed, however, and later failed again when Albert (after Lerma's death) tried in 1618.<sup>35</sup> In 1603, Somogyi travelled to the Duke of Jülich on a diplomatic mission. In 1607, he became a landowner in the Spanish Low Countries, acquiring the castle of Vichenet.

### Diplomatic missions and other tasks, 1607–1631

Somogyi's rise continued, but not as spectacularly as before. He was entrusted with a number of diplomatic tasks between 1612 and 1621, e.g., at Christmas 1612, he visited his patron Dietrichstein in Moravia.<sup>36</sup>

In his letters to Cardinal Dietrichstein, due to his role as vice-captain of the bodyguards and continuous presence at courtly and princely events, the well-informed Somogyi wrote in detail about the developments of the Thirty Years' War, and regularly consoled the cardinal about the Transylvanian Prince Gabriel Bethlen's invasions and conquests of Hungary, which directly affected Dietrichstein's estates.<sup>37</sup> It is noteworthy that other than that Somogyi was a Hungarian noble, his missions were never related to his Hungarian origins, to Hungary, or to Transylvania. In 1628, when Gabriel Bethlen's nephew Peter visited Brussels as part of his European

33 In 1596, Francisco de Mendoza, the high steward of Albert's forming court in Brussels, mentions Somogyi as the man who would accompany the archduke on his trip to Spain. RAH Colección Salazar y Castro 9–61. For the trip, with a mention of Somogyi, see: AGR Manuscripts divers, 1859. sf.

34 See Cardona's letters to Albert on this matter: AGRB SEG, 533, fols. 137r–156v, and Albert's letters from Brussels to the Duke of Lerma on the same date concerning the young Somogyi's "growth" (*acrecentamiento*), his journey to Spain and the Order of Cavalry: BNE Mss. 687, fol. 185 and 261. Interestingly, the letters of recommendation from Archduke Albert to the Duke of Lerma are published in volumes 42 and 43 of the *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, but those concerning Somogyi are missing, probably because they were deemed less important.

35 Albert to Philip III. Brussels, 24 December 1618. AGRB SEG, 518, fols. 129v–130r. (draft). It is not known whether he received or discussed the request.

36 *Schreiben des Erzherzogs Albert an Kaiser Matthias mit einer Empfehlung für den Truchsess und Leibtrabanten-Gardehauptmann Don Martin Somogy, der an das kaiserliche Hoflager reist (1612)*. ÖStA HHStA LA Belgische Korrespondenz 9-1-48.

37 Background on the trip: Hátori Nagy, "Francia követjelentések."

peregrination, he was received by Governor Isabella in the usual manner of the time, a fact which Martin reported to the cardinal.

As Cardinal Dietrichstein's delegate, Somogyi was given several key tasks. He had to forward letters from the cardinal's sister, Beatriz de Cardona y Dietrichstein, Marquise of Mondéjar, to Brussels, and then the replies to Moravia. He had to deliver letters to Isabella and others, such as Octavio Visconti, Albert's Master of the Horse and, in one case, to find a painter for Dietrichstein.

In 1620, Martin Somogyi received the title of baron in Vienna on the recommendation of Archduke Albert and became *el barón de Somogyi*.<sup>38</sup> There was a genuine basis for his constant dissatisfaction and regular complaints about his poor financial standing that we read of in his letters. Although Albert had requested the title of cupbearer from Ferdinand II, a letter of 1622 shows that he had not yet received a patent to that effect.<sup>39</sup> According to a 1626 document preserved in Madrid, he was owed 912 escudos from his salary.<sup>40</sup>

In a letter to Dietrichstein in the mid-1620s, Somogyi accused Isabella of forgetting him. The cardinal tried to help him, and in 1627 he wrote to Isabella, Octavio Visconti, and the famous General Ambrogio Spinola about Somogyi's case.<sup>41</sup> At the same time, Somogyi was also thinking of leaving Brussels. First, he asked Dietrichstein to help his transfer to the court of Archduke Charles, who had died unexpectedly in 1624, and then he asked Dietrichstein to support his transfer to the court of the future Emperor Ferdinand III. It is unlikely that the cardinal took any significant steps for Somogyi, as he would have lost one of his most important confidants in the Spanish Monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>42</sup>

We have not found any sources about Somogyi's education, but his education was probably not below the level of the nobles of the Low Countries. This is shown by a unique and culturally significant fact, namely that in 1620 Somogyi sent Franz von Dietrichstein a copy of the second part of Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, published in Brussels in 1615. According to Czech scholars, the cardinal was one of the first Bohemian readers of the Spanish giant of the Golden Age.<sup>43</sup> Somogyi was also closely associated with a figure in the Brussels theatre scene, the

38 Martin Somogyi to Archduke Albrecht. *Zusicherung der Berücksichtigung seiner Empfehlung* (1620). ÖStA HHStA Reichshofrat (RHR) Grat Feud Promotoriales 5–92.

39 Nováková, "Comunicar novedades," 147–48.

40 Philip IV to Isabella. 21 February 1626 AHN Estado, Libro 260. fol. 51v. (*Copiador de reales despachos concediendo mercedes en el Norte, Flandes.*)

41 Ambrogio Spinola (1569–1630) was a Genoese general in the service of the Spanish Monarchy from 1602 to his death.

42 Nováková, "Comunicar novedades," 147–48.

43 Polišenský, "Hispania de 1614."

playwriter and poet Diego Muxet de Solís, who had been involved in a literary dispute between Lope de Vega and Cervantes in Spain ten years earlier, and who later travelled to Moravia to visit Dietrichstein. In the preface to the Brussels edition of his works in 1626, Muxet de Solís states that he decided to dedicate his book to Cardinal Dietrichstein at the suggestion of Baron Somogyi.<sup>44</sup>

## The estate-owner and his descendants

In 1607, Martin Somogyi acquired the castle of Vichenet about forty kilometres southeast of Brussels, and in the 1620s he became the lord of the village of Bothey in Namur. King Philip IV of Spain, as Margrave of Namur, pledged the estate to him.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, no substantial information on his life has been found in the Namur Provincial Archives. In 1629, he received a grant of land from Dietrichstein in Štáblovice, Moravia.<sup>46</sup>

Antoine de Brant, whose family had owned the *château* of Vichenet since 1550, sold it to Somogyi on 27 July 1607. After Somogyi's death, on 4 October 1633, his wife Barbara de Weyd, of unknown origin, was granted the usufruct. Somogyi had two daughters, one of whom, whose name has not survived, married Guillaume-Arnoul de Romrée, who in 1657 became lord of Vichenet. Interestingly, Guillaume was also vice-captain of the *alabardiers*' bodyguard, perhaps promoted under Somogyi's influence. Today, Vichenet is still owned by the Romrée family.

As mentioned before, on 31 October 1626, King Philip IV of Spain mortgaged the village of Bothey to Martin Somogyi, whose other daughter, Anna, bequeathed it to her nephew Emmanuel-François de Romrée (20 June 1662). The estate was administered by the Romrée family until 1727.<sup>47</sup>

Martin Somogyi wrote his last known letter to Cardinal Dietrichstein in August 1631. In April of the same year, Governor Isabella wrote at length to Ferdinand II about Somogyi's services.<sup>48</sup> Consequently, he died sometime between the second half of 1631 and mid-1633, probably without a male successor. A late descendant of Martin Somogyi, Charles de Romrée de Vichenet (1884–1957) was a Belgian

44 Muxet de Solís, *Comedias humanas*.

45 AGR AN Fonds de Corroy-Le-Chateau, 1647; Échevinages, 7987; Archives de la communauté de Vichenet, 2254.

46 Pilnáček, *Rody starého*, 1088.

47 For the data, see: *Annale*, 245 and Toussaint, *La nouvelle commune*. In one or two lines, the website of the town of Gembloux also mentions Somogyi in connection with the municipalities of Bothey and Bossière.

48 Isabella to Ferdinand II. Brussels, 18 April 1631. ÖStA HHStA LA Belgien Belgische Korrespondenz 40, f. 243v.

diplomat who took part in the Paris peace negotiations following World War I, later served in Madrid, and after World War II was Secretary General of the Belgian Foreign Ministry. Under the pen name Sophie Deroisin, his daughter Marie was a renowned Belgian writer, who died in 1994. Somogyi's descendants are known to be living in Belgium. We have tried to contact them to find out if they have preserved any of the family archives but have been unsuccessful so far.

## Closing words

The sources of Martin Somogyi's life are scattered in Austria, Spain, Belgium, and the Czech Republic, but research will certainly find new documents in France and in the territory of Hungary. No Hungarian-language documents from him have been identified, and it is not certain whether he spoke Hungarian (which fact may have been related to the time of when he was orphaned and when he left Hungary). What is certain is that for decades he attended hundreds of official events of the governors in the Coudenberg Palace at the Habsburg court in Brussels, and possessed first-hand knowledge of the difficulties of running a world empire. A nobleman born in a far-off land, he must have read or listened to the stories of Don Quijote de la Mancha and Sancho Panza with interest, if only because he had visited that windmill-filled land on at least two occasions.

Somogyi's career was not and could not have been built on a premeditated choice, like other career-building strategies of his peer courtiers. As an orphan and a young page, at the beginning of his services, he could not choose where to travel, where to request services and from whom, and how to move forward if his pretensions were not fulfilled. In this sense, his walk of life was atypical before the late 1590s, but typical after that decade.

We can only hypothesise about the reasons for the respect that surrounded Somogyi. Mrs Cardona and both her sons supported him with exceptional energy, and Archduke Albert wrote to Madrid at least three times on his behalf, recommending him for further favours. At Christmas 1612, Cardinal Dietrichstein reported to Albert from Moravia of his sincere love for Somogyi. In 1631, Isabella, the governor, then aged sixty-five, praised him at length to Emperor Ferdinand II. They all seem to have regarded Martin Somogyi as almost a family member. The exact reason and background for this strong affection is not known. Perhaps it was his orphanhood, perhaps it was simply his personality, perhaps it was his looks, and certainly it was his talent and his special services. What is certain is that in the Low Countries, even among the high nobility from different nations, he stood his ground. There could be no doubt about his loyalty: having come to Brussels from Hungary, he spent nearly forty years in the Habsburg dynasty's service.

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