Queen Bona Sforza
as Part of the Blended Family
Not Obvious Relationships at the Royal Court in Cracow

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Queen Bona Sforza (1494–1557), the second wife (from 1518) of Sigismund the Old (1467–1548), the King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, is a figure of an exceptionally one-dimensional and lasting black legend’ among a gallery of numerous royal consorts not only of the Jagiellonian, but also of other Polish kings in the entire Polish monarchy. Many elements contributed to this legend. Some of them created a pejorative image of the Queen already throughout her life, while others were added, in historiography, literature, poetry, theatre, artworks, films, in the following centuries. In a broader understanding and culture, Bona’s “black legend” was deprived of any nuances, and became limited to a primitive image of the Queen as a ruthless poisoner and demonical demoraliser of her own son.1 In a rather porous collective memory, as well as in a serious historiography, Queen Bona is seen stereotypically and, in fact, one-dimensionally. Until the mid-20th century, this one-dimensional view, which included academic studies too, of Queen Bona’s life, her role and significance, engendered, almost without exceptions, a negative approach, often tinged either with antifeminism intolerant of an active and important role of a woman in public or political life, or with the spirit of Romanticism which, in opposition to the Polish heroine of the “Mother of the Fatherland”, was in need of creating her antithesis, an orderly villain of foreign background.2 Some modern research, e.g. by Katarzyna Kosior, tries to explain the vitality of the “black legend” of the Italian woman on the Polish throne either by the 19th century nationalism, a systemic communist anti-Germanism, or even by a literary construct, quite popular in recent times, of the “Polish post-colonialism,”3 which the historiography of the Jagiellonian era is also starting to request.4 This “campaign of antipathy, lasting almost half


a millennium,” as one of the historians in the 1980s referred to the image of Queen Bona in culture, literature and historiography, has been successfully overcome in historiography for at least the past seventy years, and the Queen’s negative image is replaced by an objective and well-balanced assessment. Even though the monumental biography of the Queen by Władysław Pociecha (1893–1958), presenting the events only until 1539, published in the 1950s and based on detailed Polish and European archive material, was the key publication in negating the previous image of Bona and the Queen’s vindication adopted a “hagiographic mood”, it became a crucial step in breaking through the prejudice against her and an impulse for new research. Today’s historiography took on a significantly more balanced and nuanced position. Without referring in detail or resolving the conflict over the sources and development of Queen Bona’s image in the Polish and, most recently also, European historiography, it should be stated that the issue of motherhood and, more broadly, the Queen’s family relations, was a significant component of this legend.

The royal family living in the spotlight and facing the universal expectation of being a role model, was also an object of not always kind, or perhaps hardly ever kind, people’s interest; it was an object of nearly constant observations and a subject of countless rumours. Moreover, the life of the royal family accumulated many myths and stories, including some thrilling ones, which were far from the facts, but they stemmed primarily from the last decade of Queen Bona’s stay in Poland (1548–1556), marked by an open and public conflict with her son, attitude toward her daughters-in-law, worthy of the worst stereotypes about mothers-in-laws, and neglect of her younger daughters who, as is often literary expressed, “withered in spinsterhood”. Fulfilling the obligations of the Queen as a mother was not the only key element in her position within the family (and the royal house) and the country. A skillfully constructed image and propaganda of the Queen’s motherhood could engender an invaluable tool for creating the Queen’s image and her queenship. As correctly noted by Katarzyna Kosior: “The queen’s eventual downfall demonstrates that accusations concerning her motherhood could break a queen’s political career just as an unblemished image of maternal perfection could help make it.” Thus, it is necessary to keep in mind that the frequent striking of a sensitive chord of the Queen’s motherhood was not, if not exclusively, political in nature. It is particularly well notices during the so-called Chicken War (wojna kokosza), i.e. the anti-royal revolt of the nobility in 1537. In its plans, the revolt was primarily

Polska w perspektywie postkolonialnej, Warszawa 2016 (= Debaty Artes Liberales 10), pp. 105–118.
7 K. Kosior, Outlander, p. 200.
directed against the policy of distributing the royal lands, the beneficiaries of which were mainly the magnates, but it was Bona who fell its main victim. In the process of fighting the Queen’s economic influences, who kept successfully implementing a grand plan of forming an extensive and profitable properties of the royal family, which was to become the foundation for strengthening the monarch’s authority and agency,8 Bona was also attacked as the mother and tutor of her only Jagiellonian son.9 The opinion of Piotr Zborowski (died in 1553), Castellan of Małogoszcz, who voiced his statement that queens are brought to kings not so that they would rule but to fulfil wives’ duties, was, in fact, a *vox populi.*10

Apart from too soft and feminine upbringing and education of little Sigismund Augustus, accusations against Bona—the mother referred mainly to the Queen’s relations with her already adult children.11 Any attempts to vindicate Bona as a mother or, more broadly, her influence and participation in the family constellations, are nowadays associated mainly with the reinterpretation of the already known interpretations present in the sources, which are often no less one-sided than the ones under criticism.12 In order

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12 These include e.g. a thesis that the Queen’s lack of effective attempts to marry off her three daughters when they were still young, Sophia, Anna and Catherine, did not stem from neglect or the lack of care for the future of the Jagiellonian Princesses, but could have been associated with an idea to send them to cloistered life or to leave them as unmarried companions of their aging mother (K. Kosior, *Outlander*, p. 204). There are not only absolutely no information in the sources to make such interpretations, but they clearly oppose both the psychological portrait of Queen Bona and the entire Jagiellonian tradition regarding the management of the royal daughters’ futures. It is worth emphasising that the future in either convents or as companions to one’s mother were never taken into consideration by Casimir IV Jagiellon (1447–1492) and his wife, Elizabeth of Austria, for their numerous daughters, even in the face of constant problems with providing their offspring with appropriate dowries (which were, in fact, paid only be their brother, Sigismund I the Old when he was already the King of Poland). Even in the case of the youngest daughter, Elizabeth (born in 1482), who, due to the lack of marriage proposals, was financially secured by her mother and brother, King Alexander Jagiellon (1501–1506), no attempts were made to stop finding a husband for her, which was eventually achieved in 1515, when Elizabeth was 32 years old. – Urszula Borkowska, *Dynastia Jagiellonów w Polsce*, p. 533.
to complete the image of the family relations at the Wawel court in the time of Queen Bona, and its fresh interpretation, it seems necessary and valuable to extend this image and add to it the Queen’s relations with people from outside of her nuclear family. So far, only her closest family has been subject to historical examination in the context of Bona’s family life, as well as her interpersonal skills. Bona was an essential part of the family that is nowadays commonly referred to as “blended” or, more academically, as “reconstructed” or “multi-family”. In Queen Bona’s own times, this situation was not only unheard of, but the research confirms that the participation of such families in the social landscape of the Early Modern Europe was similar to the ones we observe in the society of the 21st century. The experience of remarrying and living in an adoptive family was a universal situation among all social strata in pre-modern Europe. European rulers had a few wives and children from a few marriages and often also from their extramarital relationships, they married women who had already been married before, and who contributed not only money, family connections and life experience, but also their offspring, often from different fathers. In terms of an internal structure, the family of Sigismund I and Bona Sforza was not a rare or unusual phenomenon in the 16th century Europe. Nevertheless, since the royal family was concerned, it was particularly interesting that the complex family constellations had to include a difficult and conflict-prone factor of each member trying to take part in the power.

After marrying Sigismund the Old, a 51 year old widower, in 1518, 24 year old Bona Sforza, who had neither marital nor maternal experience, became not only a wife but also a mother to the King’s daughters from his previous marriage, Hedwig (born 1513) and Anna (born 1515). Their mother, Barbara Zápolya, the first wife of the Polish monarch, died in 1515, leaving behind a reputation of an extremely kind and humble woman who led a pious life. Therefore, the King’s new wife not only faced the necessity to find her way through a difficult role of a stepmother, but she also had to live up to the ideal image of her predecessor. However, this situation could also be treated as an exceptional opportunity. On the one hand, she could prove her maternal concern for the little princesses who, in the Polish political and systemic tradition, would not pose any threat to her own children’s future. One the other hand, giving birth to a son, or preferably sons, would allow the new Queen to fulfill her own motherhood in line with the social expectations which had clearly been laid out to Bona during her inaugural entry to Cracow,

and in more advantageous way for the royal spouse than the previous, well-remembered Queen. In a speech addressed to Bona during her welcome, before the ceremonial entry to Cracow, the Primate of Poland and Crown Chancellor, Jan Łaski (1456–1531), had expressed the hope “of the entire nation” that she would give the King what he and his kingdom had been missing, i.e. sons.\(^{16}\) Already at the beginning of the 16\(^{th}\) century, the dynasty started to feel concerned about its future and until the anticipated birth of the royal son, the Polish line of the Jagiellons could not have been certain of their continuity.\(^{17}\) The future of the dynasty and of the Queen herself depended on the efficiency of her womb. However, the future was also influenced by how the Queen would find her way through a new family puzzle, and how she would impact its numerous elements. Already at the wedding ceremony, Bona drew the attention of all those present by the endearing way in which she treated her husband’s little daughters. Hedwig and Anna received beautiful dressed and the Italian woman “kept them by her side as if they were her own daughters,” which won her the sympathy of her husband and his closest circle.\(^{18}\) It is possible to interpret this honourable and maternal affection of the young woman as a deliberate and calculated staging which fit the framework of what is nowadays referred to as a “political motherhood”.\(^{19}\) However, the concern she showed for her adoptive daughters was not perceived as a behaviour conducted just for effect, because in 1520, after the death of five-year old Anna, Sigismund the Old gave his wife “great thanks for the fact that You did not fend off the tender motherly attempts, stemming from the duty appropriate for Your virtue and our mutual love.”\(^{20}\) Although the sources are sparse, they are also unanimous and thus, they leave no doubt that Bona treated her husband’s daughters well, and the motherless princesses had an attentive protectress in her.\(^{21}\) In 1523, Bona, already a mother of her own three children, made a pious pilgrimage along teenage Hedwig and her husband, to the monastery in Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, which was famous for its miraculous image of Virgin Mary. The pilgrimage was most likely due to Hedwig’s recovery after a long and dangerous illness. In 1530, together with the entire family, she visited both Jasna Góra and the Benedictine monastery in


\(^{20}\) Acta Tomiciana II, p. 244; Jagiellonki polskie I, p. 64; Władysław Pociecha, Królowa Bona II, p. 108.

\(^{21}\) M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, p. 133.
Łysa Góra, where the relicts of the Holy Cross were held and worshipped.\textsuperscript{22} It was mainly due to Queen Bona’s intervention that only 10-year-old Hedwig was not married off to John (1513–1571), the younger of the two sons of Joachim I Nestor (1484–1535), Elector of Brandenburg. In fact, the matrimonial plans regarding the eldest royal daughter had been made as early as 1519, when Hedwig had still been a small child but, in contrast with the Brandenburg project, they had no chance for success. Ultimately, in 1535, Hedwig’s Brandenburg marriage did take place because she married the elder son of the Elector, Joachim II Hector (1505–1571), but the marriage negotiations took place mainly with the participation of Emperor Charles V and in secret from Bona who was hostile to the Habsburgs and was against the Hohenzollerns too.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, Queen Bona tried to include her adoptive daughter in her dynastic and political plans, in which the rivalry with the Habsburgs had its own prominent place, treating the matrimonial policies as an effective and useful tool for its creation. As correctly stated by Katarzyna Kosior, Queen Bona, contrary to the universal and well-established opinion of her almost unlimited influence on her husband, usually managed to implement those of the political projects which, even if they were not completely in line with her royal husband’s plans, were at least not in an open opposition to them. Bona could implement her own programme to the extent and for as long as it served the needs of her husband—the King.\textsuperscript{24} Hedwig’s marriage to a Hohenzollern was the Queen’s first, but not the last failure in her efforts to shape the state politics via the ties of the royal children’s marriages. It could seem that Sigismund the Old’s attitude, who agreed to guide Herwig’s future in secret from his wife, was associated with the fact that Bona was not the princess’ biological mother. However, the history of marriages of the royal couple’s children indicate that the biological kinship was not a decisive factor.

In the period of high mortality of mothers’ in childbirth, the “inherited” children were an obvious element of the family landscape at royal courts; however, Bona’s extraordinary family also consisted of Sigismund the Old’s children out of wedlock. Before Jagiellon ascended the throne and entered into politically motivated marriage with Barbara Zápolya, he had been in an informal relationship since 1499 with a Moravian townswoman, Katarzyna Telniczanka who give birth to three of his children: John

\textsuperscript{22} Urszula Borkowska, Królewna Jadwiga i jej książeiczka do spowiedzi, Roczniki Humanistyczne 35, 1987, No. 2, pp. 83–99, here p. 86. In 1532, Hedwig, alongside her stepsisters, took place in the Holy Mass celebrated in the Wawel Cathedral as a thanksgiving for the recovery of Sigismund the Old who had been struggling with his illness for a long time: he Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw (hereafter AGAD), Archives of Crown Treasury (hereafter ASK), Royal Accounts (hereafter RK) 75, card 42.

\textsuperscript{23} M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, pp. 170–172.

\textsuperscript{24} K. Kosior, Bona Sforza and the Realpolitik of Queenly Counsel in Sixteenth–Century Poland–Lithuania, in: Helen Matheson-Pollock – Joanne Paul – Catherine Fletcher (edd.), Queenship and Counsel in Early Modern Europe, Basingstoke 2018, pp. 15–34.
(born in 1499), Regina (born around 1500–1501) and Katarzyna (born around 1503). Telniczanka accompanied Sigismund firstly in Buda, where he was staying at the royal court of his brother, Vladislaus Jagiellon, King of Bohemia (from 1471) and Hungary (from 1490), and then in Głogów (Sigismund was the Duke of Głogów in 1499–1508, Duke of Opava in 1501–1511, and governor of Silesia and Lusitia 1504–1507), and, finally, in Cracow. Having decided to end his relationship to Katarzyna, Sigismund took care of her financial future, providing her with a steady income and a tenement house in Cracow and soon after, he encouraged one of his closest associates, a treasurer, Andrzej Kościelecki (1455–1515) to marry his long-standing concubine. The marriage triggered a deep aversion of both the senators and Kościelecki’s offended family, but paying no heed to the negative reactions, the monarch kept supporting the widow financially after the death of the treasurer.

Queen Bona took well her husband’s constant, emotional and financial, care for Katarzyna and her children, those from her relationship with the King, as well as the daughter of Telniczanka by Andrzej Kościelecki, Beata (born 1515). Furthermore, there was a widespread rumour at the court that Kościelecki’s posthumous daughter was, in fact, another child by the King. In 1519, i.e. soon after Bona’s arrival in Cracow, Telniczanka moved to Vilnius where her and the King’s son, John (1499–1538), was appointed a bishop. When Kościelecka died in Vilnius toward the end of 1528, her body was transported to Cracow and the lavish funeral of the former royal concubine took place under the watchful eyes of the legal wife who, unlike her husband, was present. Queen Bona’s biographer, Władysław Pociecha who interpreted numerous events with a clear fondness of the Queen, sees this symptomatic behaviour as her “great generousness”. Undoubtedly, a measure of generousness was necessary but this endearing attitude toward the former love of her husband and the mother of his children was perhaps also associated with the relations the Queen had established with Telniczanka and Sigismund’s son, John, with whom Katarzyna stayed in Vilnius, having a relatively relaxed lifestyle and interfering with the diocese’s management.

Even before his first marriage, Sigismund had taken care of his son’s future, who, despite being born out of wedlock, was destined by this father to priesthood and career.


26 M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, p. 132.

27 W. Pociecha, Królowa Bona II, p. 132.

28 Z. Anusik, Królewska krew, p. 31; more broadly, see Stephen Christopher Rowell, Meilužė ir ragana: Kotryna Telničietė ir “juodasis” jos mitas, Lietuvos istorijos metraštis 2019, No. 2, pp. 41–64.
at church. As a result of Sigismund the Old’s efforts to remove any canonical obstacles *super defectu natalium*, Pope Julius II granted John, with a bulla dated on 29 July 1510 in Rome, a dispensation from the obstacles stemming from his birth, and he legitimised and ennobled him. This provided John with access to all church dignities, as if he was *de legitimo matrimonio et de nobili genere ex utroque parente procreatus*. In 1512, Sigismund bestowed his son with a surname of one of “the Lithuanian Dukes” (*ex ducibus Lithuanie*), which John used ever since. The account records prove that the King spared neither efforts nor financial means for his son’s upbringing and education, providing significant amounts for all his needs. Young John was present in Cracow at the wedding and coronation of Bona Sforza in 1518. At this time, he was appointed by his father to the royal chancellery, where John received a position of a secretary with a much higher remuneration than other secretaries, despite his young age and the lack of experience. When John took over the bishopric of Vilnius, he quickly became the co-organiser of Queen Bona’s politics, particularly the one regarding Lithuania. They both had the dynasty’s best interests at heart and Lithuania was its foundation and safeguard. Before John’s departure for Lithuania, Bona had proven herself to be a friendly and kind person toward her “natural” stepson, so to speak. In June 1523, when John, already the Bishop of Vilnius, was staying in Poland, the Queen accompanied by her husband and other bishops, made a pilgrimage to the Church of Saint Stanislaus in Szczepanów.

Bona and John’s political paths were quickly converged, and the mutual understanding was most certainly deepened by the fact that they both had an undeniable economic and administrative sense. Already toward the end of the second decade of the 16th century, John was looking after Bona’s financial interests in Lithuania, e.g. overseeing legal and administrative matters associated with taking over by the Queen the properties of Pinsk, granted to the Queen in 1523 by Sigismund the Old. John also acted as a witness to the bestowal of the Lithuanian estates to Bona over a long period of time, as the

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33 W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona II*, p. 117.

documents referring to both 1524\(^{35}\) and 1533 were preserved.\(^{36}\) The Bishop of Vilnius also supported the Queen’s efforts to ensure the continuity of the Jagiellonian succession. The throne of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was of key significance; the maintenance of the Polish–Lithuanian union required that the hereditary rulers of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were elected kings of Poland. Although the Polish–Lithuanian agreement acts stipulated the necessity to arrange matters between both parties while appointing the Grand Duke, the Jagiellons, in cooperation with the local political elites, were practically departing from this principle. Already in 1522, with the active participation of Bona and the support of her Lithuanian associates led by John of the Lithuanian Dukes, the two-year-old Sigismund Augustus was appointed the “heir and Grand Duke” after his father’s death.\(^{37}\)

Sigismund Augustus’ ascend to the grand ducal throne in the Vilnius Cathedral on 18 October 1529 was a symbolic event for the harmony of the complex family arrangement.\(^{38}\) One brother placed a Lithuanian calpac on the head of another brother at the request of their father and with the full approval of the former’s stepmother and the latter’s mother. When seeking the solution to the problem in Masovia in 1526, i.e. the childless death of the last Prince of Masovia, Janusz III (1500–1526), the situation of this Polish fief had to be regulated and John proposed the elevation of the Grand Duchy of Lithuanian to the position of a kingdom under Sigismund Augustus’ reign, and giving Masovia to him as a fief.\(^{39}\) It is believed that the notion of giving Masovia to the little Jagiellon was suggested by Queen Bona and John was only loyalty and consistently playing in the same political team as his stepmother. The act of the last will of the then Bishop of Poznań (1536–1538) is revealing in the context of the functioning of this inclusive family. John, whose relations with his own sisters had become more distant over time, and who finally wanted to enter the phase of conflict over his mother’s inheritance, decided in his last will to bequeath some of his fortune to his stepsister from his mother’s side, Beata Kościelecka, and some more to his stepbrother from his father’s side, Sigismund Augustus.\(^{40}\)


\(^{36}\) Printed in ibidem, II, p. 207.


Apart from the daughters from the King’s first marriage and his children by Bona, the elder daughter of Sigismund the Old by Katarzyna Telniczanka, Regina, was also brought up at the royal court in Cracow. Until her wedding in 1518, she was a constant companion to Princess Hedwig and her younger stepsister, Beata. Regina got married and left Cracow when Bona was only entering the role of the lady of the Wawel Castle so their relations were unavoidably limited. The younger daughter of Sigismund the Old and Telniczanka, Katarzyna, was not staying with her parents but at the royal court in Buda and, as can be assumed, she was brought up alongside Anna Jagiellonica (1503–1547), the only daughter of Vladislaus II of Hungary and his wife, Anne of Foix-Candale. Katarzyna’s marriage to George II (III), Count von Montfort, in 1526, was most likely planned by the Hungarian or Austrian court. Sigismund the Old’s letter to Anna Jagiellonica proves that the Hungarian Princess had some part in arranging the marriage of her cousin. There are no confirmations in the sources of any contact between Bona and Katarzyna, even though the involvement of the politicians close to the Queen in the issues of the Polish King’s daughter living in Hungary is noticeable. In 1522, Primate Jan Łaski tried, to the King’s indignation, to marry Katarzyna off to the Moldavian Voivode, Stephen IV (died 1527), the illegitimate son and successor of Bogdan III the Blind (1478–1517). However, Katarzyna’s marriage to Count von Montfort was not without a political significance to Bona. Władysław Pociecha assumes that later on it became a window of opportunity for the Queen to establish political relations with Cardinal Otto Truchsess von Waldburg (1514–1573), who related to the royal son-in-law. This valuable acquaintance turned out to be particularly useful after the Queen had left Poland in 1566, for it was Cardinal Otto Truchsess who welcomed Bona on 27 March 1556 in Padova, on route to her native Bari.

Queen Bona’s family was neither nuclear nor even inclusive, i.e. including children out of wedlock; in fact, the entire structure was even more complex. The royal court in

43 Polish Academy of Sciences. Kórnik Library, fasc. BK00228: Kopiariusz Piotra Tomickiego zawierający odpisy akt i korespondencji z lat 1518–1528, fol. 86.
45 W. Pociecha, Królowa Bona II, p. 47.
Cracow was a home not only to the daughter of Katarzyna Telniczanka and Sigismund the Old, but also the daughter of Telniczanka and her husband, Andrzej Kościlecki, Beata, who was born in 1515. Without paying attention to widespread rumours at the court that the girl was Sigismund the Old’s daughter, Bona did get involved with a remarkable consistency and care in the life of, firstly, Beata-the baby, and then, Beata-the adult woman, but also, finally, Beata-the mother, as well as Beata’s daughter, Elizaveta (1539–1582). Universally known statement by the chronicler, Łukasz Górnicki (1527–1603) that Telniczanka’s daughter “was brought up in so much honesty as if she was also to be the King’s family,”\(^{47}\) offers an insight into the approach toward and education of little Beata, which proved that no fault could be found in Bona’s court. Even if such accusations could have been made, those rumours would have appeared over time among the court circles and, more broadly, noble coteries, who were the increasingly unfriendly toward the Queen. Beata Kościelecka, who was brought up at Queen Bona’s royal court, met her husband there, Illia Ostrogski (1510–1539), who came from a powerful princely family of Volhynia. She married him in February 1539 but she was a pregnant widow already in Augusts. After Beata became a widow so quickly, it was Bona who took the actual care of Beata and her daughter Elizaveta, born posthumously, and her great fortune inherited after her father, even though it was Sigismund Augustus who acted as the official guardian. Taking care of Beata and then her daughter, Elizaveta, is probably Bona’s longest, constant and loyal relation, confirmed by deeds, affections and emotions. When Elizaveta, the heir to the fortune of the Ostrogski family, became an object of increasingly more brutal matrimonial intrigues, the Queen, toward the end of her stay in Poland, in the mid-1550s, offered shelter to the two harassed women at her Warsaw court.\(^{48}\) How effective was the Queen’s help and protection is well proven by the fact that after Bona had left in 1557, Beata and Elizaveta ultimately fell victims to greedy suitors, lost their fortune and spent the rest of their lives in imprisonment. Maria Bogucka is correct when she states that “had Bona stayed in Poland, their lives would have been completely different.”\(^{49}\)

In this blended family, Queen Bona managed to arrange her relations with her husband’s children, both those from his first marriage as well as her own, in a way that not only did not result in the family conflicts, but instead offered the Queen and her political, economic and dynastic projects some evident benefits. But Bona’s position in this family puzzle was also definitely favourable. The daughters of her royal spouse, both the legitimate and illegitimate ones, posed no threat to her or her offspring in the political reality of the 16th century Poland, and this space interested Bona, a woman


\(^{49}\) M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, pp. 132, 252–253.
thinking in terms of states and dynasties, the most. It was no different with Sigismund I’s illegitimate son, John of the Lithuanian Dukes. Despite making him legitimate and ennobled, he was born out of wedlock and was destined for a career at church, and if he did not become the Queen’s allies, he would have ended one of her numerous opponents at most. However, he would never be any threat or competition to the son or sons from her marriage to the Polish King. Polish law and political tradition, which frequently limited queens in her ambitions and activities, clearly worked here to the Queen’s advantage, providing comfort and security regarding the rights of her own children. In Poland, the situation of illegitimate royal children was never modelled on the 15th century western European pattern of “the golden age of noble bastards,” as Jacob Burkhardt defined it, and in the 16th century, illegitimacy was already clearly stigmatised by the society, but in the case of the royal children, their future and opportunities in life were decided mainly by their royal father’s attitude. The attitude of the legal wife was also of importance in the royal marriage. In the relations with her husband’s children, but not her own, Bona was able to demonstrate her interpersonal skills, allowing to use these relations to achieve her own goals. Even if the Queen did have affection for them, as was the case with e.g. Beata Kościelecka and her daughter, where no family obligations were involved, the Queen always made them subject to the dynastic matters. The situation was no different with her own children. She uncompromisingly took care of the throne’s dignity and the monarch’s authority. As correctly observed by Maria Bogucka, “she knew that the ruler’s craft required some sacrifices in private life and she agreed to them

50 In contemporary historiography Burkhardt’s opinion from 1860 is even more nuanced, particularly in relation to England or German states, even though its universal validity is still emphasise in terms of the status of children whose fathers were of high rank; there were almost no differences between legitimate children and those born out of wedlock; cf. e.g. Judith J. Hurwich, Bastards in the German Nobility in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries: Evidence of the Zimmerische Chronik, The Sixteenth Century Journal 34, 2003, pp. 701–727; Helen Matthews, The Legitimacy of Bastards. The Place of Illegitimate Children in Later Medieval England, Barnsley 2019.


52 Tadeusz Szulc, Kochanki i nieprawe dzieci królów polskich w okresie elekcyjnym (w świetle ówczesnych relacji), Studia z Dziejów Państwa i Prawa Polskiego 10, 2007, pp. 127–145. It is worth mentioning that the knowledge of Sigismund the Old’s children by Katarzyna Telniczanka was no secret also in Hungary, where the younger of the daughters, Katarzyna, was brought up. One of the representatives of Venice, who observed the ceremonies during the meeting in Vienna in 1515 between the three monarchs: Sigismund I the Old, Vladislaus II of Hungary and Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor, wrote down in his memoirs that the Hungarian Princess, Anna, was travelling in one of the carriages accompanied by the natural daughter of the King of Poland (Z. Wdowiszewski, Genealogia, p. 141).
accordingly.” It seems that in her relations with her own children, it was the heritage of the family of Sforza that had the greatest impact; if necessary, a ruler should sacrifice the lives of his own children for political reasons.

Apart from the “inherited” daughters by the King’s first wife and her husband’s illegitimate children, Bona had five of her own children who were born between 1519 and 1526. Contrary to appearances, the relations with the children whom her husband brought into the family were by no means the reason of the widespread opinion on Bona’s failure as a mother, but rather the relations with her own offspring. It seems that the event which took its toll on Bona’s attitude to Sigismund Augustus in particular, was a dramatic loss of a child in 1527. In September 1527, the pregnant Queen took part in a hunt in Niepołomice, near Cracow. A bear brought from Lithuania just for the event, was set free; it attacked and badly injured peasants and royal courtiers who were taking part in the hunt and, eventually, moved towards the Queen who fell from her horse during her flight and “untimely, gave birth to a son there, who was buried in Niepołomice.” It was the loss of a boy, a son, whose birth could have changed for the better the situation and opportunities of the dynasty and family. As Maria Bogucka correctly stated, after the accident that deprived Bona of any possibility to have more children, more sons, “the future of the Polish and Lithuanian throne hanged on a delicate thread of one man’s life.” It seems that this was the reason for accumulating all the hopes, plans, but also worries and concerns regarding Sigismund Augustus, the only son, who as a seven year old boy started to carry the burden of the sole Jagiellonian continuator and successor. The exaggerated care showed to the only son stemmed from this fact, perhaps taking place at the expense of the younger daughters. The mother’s love began to pain Sigismund Augustus only when he was already an adult man who wished for autonomy and independence. At the time,

53 M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, p. 216.

54 These issues are address by K. Kosior, Outlander, pp. 199–224, ascribing the already established in the Polish historiography “black legend” of Queen Bona as a mother, primarily to the work by Antoni Danysz, O wychowaniu Zygmunta Augusta, Kraków 1915, whom she consistently refers to in her work, in footnotes and bibliography, as “Dantysz”.


56 At Queen Bona’s request, the remains of the royal son were moved in 1548 from Niepołomice and laid to rest in the Sigismund Chapel, the Jagiellonian mausoleum in the Wawel, next to Sigismund I the Old. – Greta Czypryniak, Ryt pogrzebowy w Polsce w XVI wieku. Część 1. Pogrzeby królewskie, Krzysztofory. Zeszyty Naukowe Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa 29, 2011, pp. 119–168, here p. 144.

57 M. Bogucka, Bona Sforza, p. 138.

the mother who had always been close to him, started to become increasingly distant.\textsuperscript{59} However, the accusations of demoralising the son, treating him objectively, bringing him up as a passive and easily manipulated person, and showing a generally understood bad influence on the Jagiellonian heir are certainly unfounded. As rightly noted by Maria Bogucka, these accusations are a component of the Queen’s “black legend”, an element of political campaign against Bona, which was very effective because it accurately and strongly aimed at the Queen’s most fundamental duty as a mother.\textsuperscript{60} It is also worth pointing out that after getting married, women from the Jagiellonian dynasty, unlike many examples from Europe, maintained close ties with their fatherland, with mothers and siblings, also with Sigismund Augustus and their sister-in-law, the third wife of the King, Catherine of Austria (1522–1572, Queen of Poland from 1553), and the distant family members. The letters written by the last generation of the Jagiellons are a striking and convincing proof of cultivating family ties.\textsuperscript{61}

Academic works on the subject, often biased and not too extensive, paid attention to the role of Bona’s character and personal qualities, which left a permanent and negative trace on the family ties in the last generation of the Jagiellons. Naturally, mainly those personal characteristics of the Queen were emphasised which did not belong to the catalogue of virtues appropriate for the role model of a monarch’s wife and a mother to the royal children, i.e. impulsiveness, independence, vivacious temperament, imperiousness, unwillingness to submit to the existing customs, absolutist aspirations, astuteness, mischief. But what was absolutely unacceptable to the society’s nobility were the open political ambitions of the Queen and determination to implement them.\textsuperscript{62} As pointed out by Katarzyna Kosior, according to the 16\textsuperscript{th} century gender politics, the royal spouse was able to achieve her political or diplomatic goals but only via discreet and unofficial activities, delicate manipulation with the use of non-political instruments.\textsuperscript{63} Queen Bona questioned these rules publicly.


\textsuperscript{60} M.A. Janicki, \textit{Una regina e due re}, pp. 53–69; K. Kosior, \textit{Outlander}, pp. 203–204.


\textsuperscript{62} M. Bogucka, \textit{Bona Sforza d’Aragona}, pp. 79–100.

\textsuperscript{63} K. Kosior, \textit{Outlander}, p. 200.
Maria Bogucka emphasises that regardless of accusations made by the then ill-disposed political enemies of the Queen, and some of the historians who followed them, Bona was “a good wife and mother.” I believe this opinion can be more specific. Bona was a good, carrying and loving mother as long as the children were still children, but she did not know how to properly establish her relations with the children once they were adults. In fact, it is worth noticing that Bona treated all the royal children, whether adoptive or her own, in the similar way once they were adults; since they were the members of the royal, dynastic family, the predominant element in her attitude as a mother-stepmother-caregiver, was to think in terms of categories regarding the dynastic interests, and the adult children had to acknowledge this life priority, also in their family ties. Despite very many personality and characterological factors, it seems that the source of conflict with her beloved son, that was damaging both sides, stemmed from that fundamental difference in acknowledging the vocation and majesty of power, because the son did not share his mother’s stance on the necessity of scarifying his own life, needs, feelings and wishes on the altar of the dynastic interests. Bona was unable to make peace with the fact that Sigismund Augustus was able to give up on the raison d’être, monarchical authority and the dynasty’s wellbeing for his personal happiness and his relationship with a Lithuanian magnate, Barbara Radziwiłł (1523–1551). Sigismund Augustus never came to terms with the fact that his mother, even in the name of the national interest, acted against him. The letters written by Sigismund Augustus to Mikołaj “the Red” Radziwiłł (1512–1584), the brother of his beloved wife and his trusted friend, suggest that after Barbara Radziwiłł’s death, Sigismund Augustus not only shut himself off to the possibility of making peace with this mother, but he also questioned their entire relation, including the time when she had been undoubtedly good and close to her son. In May 1522, Jagiellon wrote that “in the young years we would go away from Cracow for a few miles without trumpets, and we missed nothing of Her Majesty, our mother, and then, even now we do not miss Her Majesty either.” It seems that this bitter attitude of Sigismund Augustus was sealed only by Barbara Radziwiłł’s death, and it seems, he had hoped for his mother’s changed behaviour. In the period when Barbara passed away, i.e. the time marked with the King’s great bitterness and aversion to his mother, the monarch, who could neither forget nor forgive his mother, expressed the distinctive words that “despite her motherly duty, she had gotten herself involved in other factions against him,” and he added with some satisfaction that “Her Majesty had unnecessarily lost a lot because of the factions which Her Majesty supported.” Was


65 M.A. Janicki, Una regina e due re, pp. 53–69.


Sigismund Augustus, fighting for having his non-dynastic marriage acknowledged, still relied on the hope that Bona would give priority to her motherly love over the political and dynastic ambitions? Did he count on his mother’s approval of his life choice, unworthy of the King and, in her opinion, unfavorable to the state?

Nevertheless, Sigismund Augustus was an exception among all Bona’s children in terms of his insurmountable aversion to his own mother, even though his mother tried to subject his sisters’ lives to the dynastic affairs too. However, Bona’s love of her eldest daughter, Isabella (1519–1559), was not a sufficient argument for not ordering her to remain in Transylvania definitely, despite the threat from Turks and the fear of the Habsburgs.68 The daughters not only accepted their mother’s approach and the means of fulfilling her motherhood, both toward their brother and themselves,69 but, according to the later sources, they kept her in their memories, and as mature women, wives and mothers, they missed her, their home in the Wawel Castle and the atmosphere that prevailed there.70

As an appendix to the issue of the family relation at the Cracow royal court of Sigismund I and Queen Bona, it is worth to examine the question on how the Polish Queen’s daughters functioned in their own new families. For it is evident that throughout the years when they observed their mother and participated in her family mosaic, they possessed this difficult, but somewhat indispensable awareness and skill in the lives of the majority of royal children and daughters in particular of establishing relations in complicated and conflict-prone connections within blended families. They owned it and used it in practice.

Sophia Jagiellon (1522–1575), similarly to her mother, married a man who had also had an unofficial family, a long-time concubine and her children. Henry II the Younger, Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg, whom Sophia married in 1556, legitimised his children and bestowed estates upon them in 1514, and one of his illegitimate sons held an important office at the ducal court. The Duke not only had his second family, but he also visited and supported it throughout his marriage to Sophia. As pointed out by Sophia’s biographer, “she somehow managed to deal with it all,” established a good relationship with her three decades older husband, even though her situation, in the face of the lack of offspring, was not equal to the Bona’s position, who was the mother of the heir to the throne.71 On the other hand, as Almut Bues noticed, the lack of Sophia’s own


69 K. Kosior, Outlander, p. 204–205.


71 J. Pirożyński, Zofia Jagiellonka, p. 52.
offspring facilitated her role as a mediator and intermediary in this complicated family arrangement, and triggered no competitive behaviours. The Duchess was a skilled and effective mediator in the conflict between her husband and his son, Julius (1528–1589). In the conflict, which was primarily based on religious issues, Henry was consequently supporting Catholicism while Julius decided to embrace Lutheranism; Julius could rely on his stepmother’s kindness and her efforts to mitigate her husband’s attitude toward his son. Sophia’s concern for Henry is also endearing in this case. In August 1558, she assured her stepson that she would try to end this family conflict peacefully, but only so as not to upset her gravely ill husband. Sophia Jagiellon’s role in solving the complex family dispute was also appreciated by Henry who believed that Sophia treated Julius as her natural son and loved him more than he had deserved it. The Duchess managed to bring about reconciliation between the conflicted men. Julius married her niece, Herwig, the daughter of Hedwig Jagiellon (the daughter of Sigismund the Old and Barbara Zápolya), and due to the perseverance and mediation talents of Sophia, Henry eventually agreed that his Lutheran, disabled son would become his heir.

Catherine Jagiellonica (1526–1583), the wife of John III Vasa (1537–1592), first the Grand Prince of Finland from 1562, and then, from 1569, the King of Sweden, was primarily known as a wife loyal in misfortune, who willingly stayed with her husband who had been thrown into prison. Although she was the least similar among her sisters to their mother, she also knew how to take care of a child that was not hers. In the exceptionally complicated family relations at the Swedish royal court, which were

72 Almut Bues, Dynasty as a Patchwork House, or the (Evil) Stepmother: the Example of Zofia Jagiellonka, Hungarian Historical Review 8, 2019, pp. 669–694.
74 A. Bues, Dynasty, p. 680.
75 J. Pirożyński, Zofia Jagiellonka, p. 53.
77 In 1563, the King of Sweden, Eric XIV Vasa accused John of treason and an attempts to make Finland independent, and he imprisoned the spouses in the Gripsholm Castle. Eric, willing to avoid any further conflict with Sigismund Augustus due to the imprisonment of his sister, was ready to send Catherine back to Poland. He also suggested that Catherine Jagiellon would live in Sweden in a place indicated by him. Catherine, showing her wedding ring to the King’s envoys, stated that she would remain by her husband. The spouses spent four years imprisoned in the Gripsholm Castle. – Władysław Czapliński, Katarzyna Jagiellonka (1526–1583), in: Emanuel Rostworowski (ed.), Polski Słownik Biograficzny XII, Wrocław 1966–1967, pp. 218–220.
78 M. Duczmal, Jagiellonowie, p. 349.
not free from crime, in the second half of the 16th century, Catherine remained beyond any reproach. After the death of the dethroned Eric XIV of Sweden (1533–1577) and the decision of her husband to exile from Sweden Eric’s underage son, Gustav Eriksson Vasa (1568–1607), the boy was sent to Poland at her request. For some time, which is difficult to define now, he was taken care of by the Queen’s sister, Anna Jagiellon, and stayed at her court in Masovia. The young Vasa lived in modest conditions, perhaps even in poverty. However, his education was taken care of, even if it was certainly not what his Lutheran father had had in mind as he was educated in a institutions run by the Jesuits.79

Anna (1523–1596), long unmarried (she married Stephen Báthory, the King of Poland between 1576 and 1586, only in 1576 when she was 53 years old), childless and harshly, although erroneously, assessed by the existing historiography as a person of mediocre personality, average character traits and shallow life, turned out to be her mother’s daughter not only in terms of the administrative and economic talents, but also, contrary to appearances, in putting together the difficult family puzzles.80 She did not have a chance to find her way in the role of a wife and mother, but she was excellent as an aunt, and thus implementing her motherhood both emotionally and politically.81 Anna Jagiellon truly loved Sigismund Vasa (1566–1632, the future King of Poland in 1587–1632) and Anna Vasa (1568–1625), the children of her sister Catherine, the death of whom made Anna responsible for their fate.82 In Sigismund’s case, referred to by Anna as Zyzio, who was the King, Catholic, the embodiment of the Jagiellonian ambitions, her feelings were natural. Anna Jagiellon did her best for the young Vasa to become the King of Poland after the death of her own husband, Stephen Báthory.83 However, she had a special affection for Anna Vasa, her namesake. The fate of Janusia, as Anna Jagiellon affectionately called her, was on Anna Jagiellon’s mind; this Dowager Queen, universally regarded as an intolerant and narrow-minded person, did lament her niece’s Lutheranism, but she kept this lamentation to herself and did not try to convert her ward.84

84 M. Bogucka, Anna Jagiellonka, pp. 165–167.
Particularly interesting is the fact that Bona’s skill to successfully enter the blended family was not altogether foreign to her adoptive daughter, Hedwig Jagiellon. The woman, brought up at the Wawel court in the care of her stepmother, also managed to become an adoptive mother to the children of her husband from his first marriage. As stated by the Brandenburg sources, Hedwig became an exemplary mother to her three stepchildren, John George, Barbara and Friedrich, who were only 10, 8 and 5 years old respectively when she arrived at her husband’s court. Between 1537 and 1541, she gave birth to four of her own children, and thus, there are many similarities in her motherhood to the situation of her own stepmother.\textsuperscript{85}

Naturally, the similarities in the biographies of Bona and her daughters might generally be linked with some characteristic traits of the lives of women from the royal households. However, it seem that the clearly visible trait of the Jagiellonian women’s queenship in skilfully arranging the relations in the new families regardless of the levels of complexity in their internal ties, can be considered a special legacy which the royal daughters took from their family households. This unique and valuable disposition to function in a blended family was most certainly the element of Bona’s original queenship and legacy which was primarily associated with an open pursuit to keep power and not hiding those activities behind the husband’s authority. Political motherhood, which to her was associated with arranging the relations in her extended, blended family, which was ultimately not always beneficial or offering the expected results, was, however, practiced also by her daughters. On the other hand, it must appear surprising that Bona never took care of any narrative corresponding to her needs regarding her own queenship and motherhood, either by historiography or literature, or, finally, art.\textsuperscript{86} It was as if the Queen thought that the implementation of political plans was sufficient, which, she deeply believed served the dynasty and the countries she ruled, and that there was no need to provide any pro-royal propaganda to these actions. Therefore, the majority of sources of Queen Bona, as the wife, mother, tutor, caregiver, comes from one-sided, unfriendly accounts of her political opponents in particular. Bona, a shrewd woman, excellently finding herself in the political game, took no care of having works written, which would positively present her motherhood, as was done by e.g. Isabella of Castile and Catherine de Medici.\textsuperscript{87} No artistic portrait of the family was painted or any presentation of Bona as the mother surrounded by the group of her children was made. One of the few initiatives of the Cracow’s court on such a propagandist nature was a series of cast royal medals with the portraits of Sigismund I, Queen Bona, Isabella and Sigismund Augustus from 1532, signed by a sculptor, Giovanni Maria Mosca, known as Giovanni Padovano. The medal with Bona’s portrait on the reverse presents

\textsuperscript{85} Two children born in 1543 and 1545 died soon after.

\textsuperscript{86} Charles Beem, Queenship in Early Modern Europe, London 2020, p. 163.

\textsuperscript{87} Ch. Beem, Queenship, p. 163; K. Crawford, Catherine, pp. 643–673.
an artichoke bush with a band with the following words “She is the one who brings,” which was undoubtedly referring to the Queen as the mother bearing fruit, i.e. the royal children. The reverse of Isabella’s portrait medal presents a woman with an outstretched hand, next to whom a trunk is situated, from which a leafy branch grows, an allegory of the royal daughter, treated as a fresh branch implanted thanks to Bona on the trunk of the Jagiellonian dynasty. The lion on the reverse of the medal with Sigismund Augustus’ portrait and a maxim from the “Aeneid” that accompanied it, presents a young King in a reflection of monarchical virtues of justice and clemency, and refers to the biblical figure of King Salomon.88 Even the deliberate change of Bona’s and her children’s dates of birth was to serve the family-dynastic propaganda. According to the inscription on the medal, Bona, who was made six years younger, was born in the jubilee year of 1500, and Sigismund and Isabella, one year older than in reality as per the medal’s inscription, were born right after the royal couple’s wedding. This deliberate manipulation was to enhance the conviction among the recipients that the portraits expressed a happy royal marriage blessed with wonderful offspring and remaining under the Lord’s protection.89 This valuable, and yet isolated, example of the Queen’s concern for the propaganda of the notion of the Queen’s motherhood as crucial for the prosperity of the family and dynasty does, however, raise question on why the medals were minted only for half of the royal family members. Why were the medal’s portraits not made for the eldest royal daughter, Hedwig, and Sigismund and Bona’s three younger daughters, Sophia, Anna and Catherine? Was, the propaganda of the royal motherhood, in Bona’s opinion, wasted on highlighting the representation, or even over-representation, of numerous daughters in the family? This clear lack of concern for the narrative on Bona’s entire queenship, as well as her motherhood, as its important component, also offers the result suggesting that even with the accounts or excerpts seemingly placing Bona in the positive light, they are nearly always interpreted as a negative stereotype and put into question, particularly with so many other narratives presenting her in a bad, or even very bad, light.90


89 M. Grzęda, Kilka uwag, p. 11; idem, Portret w polityce, pp. 42–43.

90 Cf. e.g. comments on Bona’s image in the letters written by her secretary, Stanisław Górski, and his historiographic interpretations, see M.A. Janicki, Una regina e due re, p. 56; Anna Skolimowska,
Bona’s means of functioning in the blended family, so typical of her, along other elements of the extensive model of queenship established by her in Poland for the first time, were later transferred by her daughters to Germany, Sweden and Hungary, and Anna continued it in the city situated by the Vistula River. Books, artworks or jewellery collections were visible carriers of these cultural transfers to the countries of the Princesses’ husbands, including the female representative of the Jagiellonian dynasty. The example of Bona’s queenship and motherhood seems to indicate that the skill to function within the blended royal family could be a cultural and dynastic investment, as well as an asset that provided benefits.


Agnieszka Januszek-Sieradzka

Queen Bona Sforza as Part of a Blended Family
Non-Obvious Relationships at the Royal Court in Cracow

Abstract

Historiography has tried to break, not without difficulties and, so far, with rather limited success, the centuries-old "black legend" concerning Bona Sforza (1494–1557), Queen of Poland from 1518. One of the most long-lasting and distinct components of the Queen's image is the assessment that she was a bad mother, overprotective and toxic toward her elder children, and distant and indifferent toward her younger daughters, as well as a bad mother-in-law. Bona was a significant part of what we would nowadays refer to as a blended family. After her marriage to Sigismund the Old, Bona Sforza became a mother to his daughters from his first marriage. She gave birth to five children of her own between 1519 and 1526. The King's daughter by his lifelong, pre-marriage concubine, Katarzyna Telniczanka, was brought up at the royal court in Cracow; so was the daughter of Katarzyna and her husband. The son of the King and Katarzyna, Jan, Bishop of Vilnius, had a close relationship with the royal family, and Queen Bona even established friendly relations with her husband's illegitimate son. Bona's means of functioning within the blended family, so typical of her, along with other elements of the extensive model of queenship established by her in Poland for the first time, were later continued by her daughters. The example of Bona's queenship and motherhood seems to indicate that the skill of functioning within a blended royal family could be a cultural and dynastic investment, as well as an asset that provided benefits.

KEYWORDS:
Queen Bona Sforza (1494–1557); royal family; blended family; family relationships; royal motherhood; political motherhood; queenship