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From Vilified Queen to Political Strategist: Re-evaluating the Role and Image of Bona Sforza The Queen's 1537 Response to Her Critics*

Streszczenie

Od zohydzonej królowej do stratega politycznego: ponowna ocena roli i wizerunku Bony Sforzy. Odpowiedź królowej na krytykę z 1537 roku

Artykuł analizuje kontrastujące narracje historyczne dotyczące królowej Bony Sforzy, koncentrując się na jej odpowiedzi z 1537 r. na zarzuty wobec niej podczas rokoshu szlachty pod Lwowem. Panowanie Bony, znacząco naznaczone konsolidacją gospodarczą i asertywnym zaangażowaniem politycznym, stanowi bogaty przypadek do analizy dynamiki kobiecego przywództwa w zdominowanej przez mężczyzn sferze. Znaczenie tego tematu leży w jego potencjale do wzbogacenia zrozumienia ról płciowych, dynamiki władzy i konstrukcji narracji historycznych w ramach wczesnonowożytnej historii Europy. Pomimo znacznego dorobku naukowego dotyczącego Bony, w badaniach brakuje szczegółowego odniesienia do jej własnych wypowiedzi, zwłaszcza listu z 1537 r. adresowanego do sekretarza królewskiego Samuela Maciejowskiego, a także do tego, co ujawniają one na temat postrzeżeń władzy i autorytetu. Celem tekstu jest zbadanie tych aspektów, stawiając pytanie: Jak samo-prezentacja Bony w odpowiedzi na oskarżenia podczas buntu w 1537 r. ukazuje złożoność kobiecego władztwa i kwestionuje istniejące narracje historyczne? Wykorzystując analizę treści listu, autor przyjmuje perspektywę kobiety u władzy, aby ocenić zestawienie

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między portretem Bony kreowanym przez współczesnych jej ludzi a jej własną artykulacją swojej roli i działań. Wyniki pokazują, że list Bony nie tylko potwierdza jej kompetencje i zaangażowanie w sprawy państwa, ale także kwestionuje pejoratywne charakterystyki jej panowania, sugerując świadome starania w nawigowaniu i przeciwstawianiu się nałożonym na nią ograniczeniom jako kobiecie. Jej strategiczne zarządzanie zasobami gospodarczymi, zaangażowanie w sprawy dyplomatyczne i prawne oraz kreowanie narracji o dobroczynnym, ale stanowczym rządzeniu wylaniają się jako kluczowe tematy. Te wnioski są istotne, ponieważ przyczyniają się do bardziej zniuansowanego zrozumienia przywództwa Bony, oferując wgląd w strategie stosowane przez kobiety u władzy do zdobycia autorytetu i wpływu na narracje historyczne. Ponadto autor podkreśla znaczenie analizy piśmiennictwa postaci historycznych w celu kwestionowania i rozszerzania ustalonych interpretacji historycznych, wzbogacając dyskurs dotyczący płci, władzy i historiografii w okresie wczesnonowożytnym.

Słowa kluczowe: Bona Sforza, historia kobiet, królowanie kobiet, władztwo

Summary

This study examines the contrasting historical narratives surrounding Queen Bona Sforza, focusing on her 1537 response to her accusers amidst the noble rebellion. Bona's tenure as queen consort, notably marked by economic consolidation and assertive political engagement, presents a rich case for examining the dynamics of female leadership in a male-dominated sphere. The significance of this topic lies in its potential to enrich understanding of gender roles, power dynamics, and historical narrative construction within the field of early modern European history. Despite considerable scholarship on Bona, there remains a gap in research specifically addressing how her own communications – particularly the 1537 letter to royal secretary Samuel Maciejowski – counter contemporary and later historical portrayals, and what this reveals about gendered perceptions of power and authority. This study aims to interrogate these aspects, posing the question: How does this re-reading of Bona's self-representation in her response to accusations during the 1537 rebellion illuminate the complexities of female rulership and challenge existing historical narratives? In the epistolary analysis this research adopts a gendered lens to assess the juxtaposition between Bona's portrayal by contemporaries and her own articulation of her role and actions. The findings reveal that Bona's communications asserted her competence and dedication to statecraft. This analysis challenges the pejorative characterisations of the queen's actions, suggesting a conscious effort to navigate and contest the gendered constraints imposed upon her rulership. Her management of economic resources, engagement in diplomatic and legal affairs, and the cultivation of a narrative of benevolent yet firm governance emerge as key themes. These findings are significant as they contribute to a nuanced understanding of Bona's leadership, offering insights into the strategies employed by female rulers to assert authority and influence historical narratives. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of examining communion strategies of historical figures to

challenge and expand upon established historical interpretations, enriching the discourse on gender, power, and historiography in the early modern period.

Keywords: Bona Sforza, women's history, queenship, rulership

“**T**hey call you good, Bona, by name, but you are evil incarnate... cunning, vengeful, greedy, a bad mother, a bad wife” proclaims a nineteenth-century couplet¹. The verse, attributed to the Polish antiquarian Ambroży Grabowski, offers a striking portrayal of Bona Sforza, a sixteenth-century dynast, juxtaposed through an ironic contrast between her name, which connotes goodness, and the attributes ascribed to her. The direct address to Bona, with “They call you good”, immediately establishes a tone of societal approval, a public façade of virtue attributed to her name, implying ‘goodness’ or ‘virtue’ in its direct translation. The irony emerges starkly with the subsequent phrase, “but you are evil incarnate”, suggesting a profound dissonance between public perception and Bona’s seemingly intrinsic nature. The term “evil incarnate” elevates the description from a mere moral failing to the embodiment of evil itself, indicating that her actions or character are fundamentally antithetical to the goodness suggested by her name. The list of attributes that follow – “cunning, vengeful, greedy, a bad mother, a bad wife” – further sets the individual’s moral character, presenting a multi-layered critique of her personality and actions. Each adjective selected not only condemns her in a personal capacity but also criticises her failure to fulfil societal and familial roles expected of her. In particular, the denouncement of her as “a bad mother, a bad wife” touches on the gendered expectations placed upon women, highlighting a shared judgement of women primarily in relation to their roles within the family unit. In terms of literary devices, the juxtaposition and irony are the most prominent, used effectively to create a vivid character sketch and stimulate reflection on deeper moral and societal questions. The direct address to Bona creates an intimate yet confrontational tone, pulling the reader directly into the dialogue and compelling them to engage with the moral implications of the individual’s actions and the societal labels affixed to her.

The disparaging depiction is found in the nineteenth-century widely-circulating doggerel published by influential Ambroży Grabowski (1782–1868) who popularised knowledge of the past in his collections of commentaries, stories and sources. Accompanying Bona’s woodcut portrait, it stands in stark contrast to the

¹ “Bona ci dano na imię, a tyś złość wcielona... chytra, mściwa, łakoma, zła matka, zła żona”. A. Grabowski, *Groby, trumny i pomniki królów polskich w podziemiach i wnętrzu Katedry krakowskiej na Wawelu*, Kraków 1868, p. 123.

contemporary portrayal of the queen as an exemplary figure of Italian womanhood. Bishop Filip Padniewski (1510–1572), the Deputy Chancellor of Poland, gives a sharply different image of the queen who defied traditional gender roles to lead the realm with unparalleled wisdom and authority. Padniewski’s narrative illuminates the queen’s deliberate departure from the pursuits typically associated with women of her time, as she “immersed herself in the administration and governance of the state”. This decision not only highlights her defiance of societal expectations but also underscores her commitment to her nation’s prosperity. Padniewski notes her “remarkable success” and the profound “influence over her husband, the king”, illustrating her exceptional leadership skills and the respect she commanded within the highest echelons of power. The author emphasises the queen’s intelligence, which was “far from what was customarily attributed to the female mind”, challenging prevailing stereotypes about women’s capabilities. Padniewski captures the essence of her dedication by stating that “from the outset, she devoted herself assiduously to her passion for statecraft”, as evidence of her unwavering commitment to her role as a ruler².

While Padniewski highlights the queen’s departure from traditional gender roles, her success, and her influential partnership with the king, the couplet from the nineteenth century shows a vastly different representation. This juxtaposition raises intriguing questions about the historical narrative and perception of queens consort in Poland and Lithuania. Padniewski’s narrative acknowledges the queen’s intelligence and dedication to statecraft. In contrast, the nineteenth-century verse relies on personal attacks that undermine her character and leadership abilities without acknowledging her contributions to the realm’s government. The contrast between these two depictions underscores the complexity of historical interpretation and the influence of gender bias. Padniewski, focusing on the queen’s achievements and the respect she commanded, offers a contemporary yet corrective account compared to the derogatory image presented by Grabowski in his popular account of Polish history addressed to a wide audience of general readers. The disparity between opinions about the queen, argued Polish historian Maria Bogucka, exemplifies the romantic reemergence of the negative popular image of Bona set against popular tales of corrupting influence of foreigners on Polish history.

² “Regina Bona Italica femina, muliebribus studiis relictis rebus civilibus administrationeque Reipublicae se inseruerit, tantosque habuerit successus, tantum apud coniugem regem valuerit, ut eius arbitratu omnes fere honores distribuerit et alia pleraque negotia conficeret. De qua vulgatum iam erat, quod minime muliebri ingenio esset, occasionem sibi usurpandi sensum imperii studiose initio operam dedit”. *Garnrati archiepiscopi Gnesnensis et episcopi Cracoviensis vita*. K. Hartleb, *Jan z Ociszyna Ocieski, jego działalność polityczna i diarjusz podróży do Rzymu (1501–1548)*, Lwów 1917, p. 241.

Bogucka highlighted the importance of reassessing popular historical narratives to recognise the true impact of figures like Bona Sforza³.

Bona Sforza, a formidable figure in sixteenth-century European politics, emerged as a decisive protagonist in Poland and Lithuania. During her 30-year marriage to Sigismund I, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania, the queen exerted an unmatched level of influence in both domestic and foreign politics. Together with Sigismund, Bona pursued assertive control over the economic resources within her husband's realms and making a significant impact on the economic foundations of the House of Jagiellon. This article aims to provide an in-depth examination of Queen Bona's 1537 letter to one of her trusted courtiers, where the queen gave a response to a range of accusations levelled at her during a rebellion of the nobles. She also provided a clear assessment of her own abilities. This letter offers a unique insight into the queen's perspective on her expertise, her motivations for consolidating the Crown Estate, and her intentions towards the realm and her subjects. This self-assessment was both a defence and a proclamation of Bona's capacity to discern what was beneficial for Poland and Lithuania, suggesting a level of confidence in her abilities to participate actively and wisely in governance.

The successful rule of Bona and Sigismund

Bona Sforza (1494–1557), the only surviving heir of Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Duke of Milan, and Isabella of Aragon, experienced a youth profoundly shaped by the Valois–Habsburg conflict that engulfed sixteenth-century Italy⁴. Her upbringing under the care of the House of Aragon in Naples and Bari, along with the independence and political acumen of her mother, Isabella, over the Duchy of Bari and Principality of Rossano, markedly influenced her perspective on female sovereignty amidst dynastic conflict⁵. Isabella's rule in her own right, marked by the economic

³ M. Bogucka, *Bona Sforza*, Warszawa 1998.

⁴ S. Broomhall, C. James, *Elite Women and the Italian Wars, 1494–1559*, Cambridge 2024.

⁵ D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Daughter, Mother, Widow: The Making of the Identities of Isabella d'Aragona*, "Gender & History" 2023, pp. 1–16; A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona alla corte aragonese*, "Archivio storico lombardo" 1919, vol. XLVI, pp. 593–610; idem, *Isabella d'Aragona Duchessa di Milano e di Bari*, "Archivio storico lombardo" 1921, vol. XLVIII, pp. 269–457; D. Defilippis, *Mecenatismo e letteratura: la corte di Isabella e Bona Sforza a Bari*, [in:] *Principi e corti nel Rinascimento meridionale: i Caetani e le altre signorie nel Regno di Napoli*, eds. F. Delle Donne, G. Pesiri, Roma 2020, pp. 189–202; S. Valerio, *Il ducato di Bari tra Isabella e Bona: percorsi della cultura aragonese a cavallo tra XV e XVI secolo*, [in:] *Intellettuali e potere nelle periferie del Regno. A Accademie, corti e città in Italia meridionale (sec. XIII–XVIII)*, eds. C. Acucella, C. Conte, T. De Angelis, Potenza 2023, pp. 55–70.

and cultural growth of Bari, offered Bona a unique insight into female leadership within the Neapolitan dynastic networks of power.

Upon her marriage to Sigismund of the Jagiellon dynasty, Bona arrived in a realm where female rulership was rare, the exception being Jadwiga of Anjou (1374–1399), the queen regnant and wife of the first Jagiellon king. The stability and prosperity of Poland and Lithuania during Bona's period of influence alongside Sigismund, underscores the significance of their collaborative authority, which thrived on mutual respect and a shared entrepreneurial spirit. This partnership extended into strategic initiatives that bolstered the dynasty's financial base and territorial security, against a backdrop of external threats from the Habsburgs, the Teutonic Order, and Muscovy⁶. Notably, Bona's legal capacity to own property independently of the Crown allowed her to play a critical role in the financial strategies aimed at securing the dynasty's independence and augmenting its wealth, thereby underlining the instrumental role she played in the consolidation of the Jagiellon dynasty's power and resources.

The union between Sigismund and Bona Sforza marked a significant era in the joint rulership of Poland and Lithuania, where governance was exercised collaboratively⁷. Theresa Earenfight has proposed that the term 'rulership' – signifying dominion and sovereignty over people and territory – provides a more inclusive framework to understand monarchical authority, beyond the traditional association of monarchy with male dominion⁸. This concept, embodying a network of power relations, suggests that authority extends beyond the singular figures of the king and queen, involving a broader spectrum of actors. In the context of Bona and Sigismund's partnership, rulership is understood here as a collaborative venture that views the monarchy as an adaptable institution capable of incorporating both the king and queen without losing its coherence. This approach facilitates an understanding of the monarchy as capable of evolving in response to diverse political ideologies, cultural backgrounds, and attitudes towards the gov-

⁶ See for example: D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Contextualising the Marriage of Bona Sforza to Sigismund I of Poland: Maximilian I's Diplomacy in Italy and Central Europe*, "Folia Historica Cracoviensia" 2021, vol. XXVII pp. 63–90; K. Kosior, *Outlander, Baby Killer, Poisoner? Rethinking Bona Sforza's Black Legend*, [in:] *Virtuous or Villainess? The Image of the Royal Mother from the Early Medieval to the Early Modern Era*, eds. C. Fleiner, E. Woodacre, Basingstoke 2016, pp. 199–223; K. Kosior, *Bona Sforza and the Realpolitik of Queenly Counsel in Sixteenth-Century Poland–Lithuania*, [in:] *Queenship and Counsel in Early Modern Europe*, eds. H. Matheson-Pollock, J. Paul, C. Fletcher, New York 2018, pp. 15–34.

⁷ P.P. Szpaczyński, *Spór o królową Bonę*, "In Gremium" 2018, vol. XII, p. 287.

⁸ T. Earenfight, *Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe*, "Gender & History" 2007, vol. XIX, pp. 1–21; E. Woodacre, *Queens and queenship*, London 2021, pp. 7–8.

ernance of queens consort, offering insights into the complex dynamics of political power and authority.

Throughout their 30-year marriage, Bona and Sigismund significantly expanded control over the Crown Estate's resources in Poland. By 1555, Bona managed an extensive portfolio, which led to a reduction in the Crown Estate's debts by nearly 50 per cent, paradoxically sparking debate among the Polish nobility⁹. The queen's legal strategies for debt redemption and enhanced management practices not only increased estate productivity but also shifted traditional perspectives on the Crown Estate ownership and dynastic sources of revenue. Bona's approach to repaying and assuming debts – which was fully compliant with Polish laws and customs – underscored her understanding of power as relational and networked, rather than static or centralised. The queen's financial independence, evidenced by her control over a substantial dowry and dower estates, allowed her to exert considerable agency within the monarchy. Her proactive management of these assets, inspired by her mother Isabella of Aragon, marked a departure from the traditional roles expected of queens consort. The expansion of her dower in 1545, following her son's marriage to Elizabeth of Austria, exemplified her foresight in leveraging economic and political resources for the dynasty's benefit. This arrangement not only secured her dowry against the new dower but also established a systematic approach to wealth preservation and intergenerational transfer, reinforcing the dynasty's long-term prosperity¹⁰.

Bona's active role in dynastic wealth management challenged conventional gender and political norms in sixteenth-century Poland and Lithuania, reflecting a departure from established traditions. Her significant influence within the Jagiellon dynasty, particularly in Lithuania where the dynasty's authority was undisputed, led to perceptions of her wielding excessive power. This period also witnessed the emergence of restrictions on royal prerogative by the Sejm, the evolution of Polish parliamentary practices, and the rise of a noble citizenship concept, situating Bona's queenship within broader socio-political transformations. Her reign thus exemplifies the nuanced interplay between agency of queen consort and institutional structures in shaping the contours of royal authority¹¹.

⁹ A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Odbudowa domeny królewskiej w Polsce 1504–1548*, 2nd ed., Warszawa 2007, pp. 13–15, 149–150, 154.

¹⁰ W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona (1494–1557)*, vol. I, Poznań 1949, pp. 212, 240–241; A. Dembińska, *Zygmunt I. Zarys dziejów wewnętrzno-politycznych w latach 1540–1548*, Poznań 1948, pp. 265–271.

¹¹ Cf. *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. C. Levin, R. Bucholz, Lincoln 2009, pp. xiii–xiv.

The context of the nobility's rebellion

The letter to king's secretary Samuel Maciejowski (1499–1550) dated 8 September 1537, which is examined in this article, should be contextualised within the historical backdrop of the 1537 rebellion (*rokosz*). The rebellion of the nobility against the royal authority is meticulously documented in *Conciones in maximo totius regni Poloniae conventu apud Leopolim de republica habitae A.D. MDXXXVII*¹². The author of the *Conciones*, Stanisław Górski (c. 1497–1572), was a clergyman who, over the course of his career as a secretary of Queen Bona Sforza and her son Sigismund Augustus, amassed one of the most extensive collections of Polish documents. The collection of documents related to the rebellion offers invaluable insights into the political, social, and cultural context of the time, rendering it a vital resource for understanding the events.

The 1537 rebellion was primarily driven by a section of the nobility's dissatisfaction with Sigismund's policies on the backdrop of the Habsburg diplomatic efforts to engage the Jagiellon dynasty in a broader anti-Ottoman coalition. The immediate catalyst for the rebellion was the king's demand for a military campaign against Moldavia, intending to support Moldavian Voivode Petru Rareș against the Ottoman Empire. The nobility, hesitant to embark on another costly and remote military expedition amidst the ongoing conflict with Muscovy, found this demand particularly contentious. Sigismund's call to arms placed significant financial burdens on the nobility, owing to the costs associated with mobilisation for the king's military endeavours¹³. A prominent theme in the grievances aired during the rebellion was the perceived reduction of noble privileges by the king's centralising policies. The nobility feared losing their traditional rights and autonomy, especially in judicial matters and local governance, as the monarchy endeavoured to consolidate royal authority across Poland and Lithuania¹⁴.

The influence exerted by Queen Bona Sforza and her Italian courtiers was another point of contention, with accusations of the latter's interference in Polish affairs for personal gain. The speeches collected in the *Conciones* reveal the nobility's

¹² S. Górski, *Conciones in maximo totius regni Poloniae conventu apud Leopolim de republica habitae A.D. MDXXXVII*, ed. W. Kętrzyński, Kraków 1878.

¹³ K. Łopatecki, *Organizacja, prawo i dyscyplina w polskim i litewskim pospolitym ruszeniu (do połowy XVII wieku)*, Białystok 2013, pp. 138–140; T. Szulc, *Z badań nad egzekucją praw. Podstawy ustawodawcze egzekucji dóbr, ich interpretacja i nowelizacja na sejmach za panowania Zygmunta II Augusta*, Łódź 2000, pp. 30–31.

¹⁴ A. Prochaska, *Rokosz lwowski w r. 1537*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 1902, vol. XVI, no. 1, pp. 1–22; no. 2, pp. 208–242; and no. 3, pp. 381–400.

critique of Sigismund's foreign policy decisions, including alliances and engagements deemed not in Poland's best interests. While not the central focus, the documents hint at underlying religious tensions within Poland and Lithuania amidst the spread of the Reformation across Europe. The nobility, comprising both staunch Catholics and those sympathetic to Protestant ideas, was further disenchanted by the king's perceived favouritism, contributing to the atmosphere of mistrust and dissatisfaction¹⁵. Although the rebellion did not realise its most ambitious objectives, it succeeded in compelling the king to concede to demands regarding noble privileges and foreign policy conduct. This rebellion underscored the significant influence wielded by the nobility and their capacity to challenge royal authority¹⁶.

Queen's targets her opposition in her letter to Samuel Maciejowski¹⁷

Samuel Maciejowski, the king's secretary, was the key informant of the queen during the 1537 rebellion. His correspondence addressed to the queen provided Bona with the insight into the actions and general attitude of the nobility gathered near Lwów in July 1537 and enabled her to grasp the tenor of accusations levelled at both her and the king. Bona's letter is an example of using deflected communication to communicate response directed at Maciejowski but addressed to others. Bona is deliberate in choosing to address Maciejowski himself as the queen does not elevate the nobility's grievances to a legitimate complaint that deserves her response. In the opening of her letter to Maciejowski, she expresses gratitude for his thorough

¹⁵ G. Schramm, *Szlachta polska wobec reformacji 1548–1607*, trans. J. Górny, ed. M. Ptasiński, Warszawa 2015, pp. 273–275.

¹⁶ The nobility's grievances and admonition directed at the monarch were raised during parliamentary debates in subsequent years. "Lecz iż Korona polska nie przyrodzonym prawem na WKM przyszła, nie podbiła nas mocą, ani mieczem swobodnymi ludźmi będąc, nie będąc tego powinni, jeno z nadziei tej, któreśmy o WKMci jeszcze w dzieciństwie WKMci wybraliśmy cię sobie za Pana nie inszym sposobem, jedno, iżbyś wolnym ludziom panował a nie inaczej, jeno wedle prawa, a swobód naszych, a chociaż królowie polscy tak swobodnym ludziom rozkazywali, sławnie przedsię panowali" [However, the Polish crown did not come to Your Majesty by natural right, you did not conquer us by force or sword, we, being free people, were not obliged to do so, but out of the hope we had for Your Majesty since your childhood, we chose you as our Lord not in any other way but so that you would rule over free people according to our laws and freedoms, and although Polish kings commanded such free people, they ruled gloriously nonetheless – translation mine]. J. Szujski, *Dyaryusz sejmku piotrkowskiego 1548*, [in:] *Dyaryusze sejmów koronnych 1548, 1553 i 1570 r.*, Kraków 1872, pp. 221–222.

¹⁷ The letter's Latin text used for the purpose of this analysis is printed in: *ibidem*, pp. 78–84.

reporting, stating, “although they were not pleasing”, she nevertheless finds his “duty in documenting what has transpired there quite commendable”¹⁸. Her tone reveals a respect for duty and the management of information in governance. Furthermore, her praise for courtier Grand Hetman Jan Tarnowski’s management of the nobility’s responses illustrates her recognition of the importance of delegating responsibilities to trusted royal advisors. The queen recognises Tarnowski’s “eloquence, prudence, and loyalty”, which she deems characteristics of “a wise, steadfast, and faithful counsellor”¹⁹. This not only underscores her capability to identify and harness the strengths of the courtiers but also her strategic approach in maintaining order and authority.

Bona’s analytical assessment of the nobility’s feedback to Tarnowski’s communications reflects her prudent nature. She perceptively identifies self-serving interests disguised as public concerns, demonstrating her astute understanding of political manipulation and her dedication to prioritising the kingdom’s welfare over individual ambitions. The letter underscores Bona’s assertive leadership style, as she commits to acknowledging the contributions of her devoted advisors and ensuring they are appropriately rewarded. This assurance, communicated deliberately to Maciejowski, coupled with her pledge to reciprocate loyalty and service, highlights her recognition of the critical role loyalty and fidelity play in government of the realm, and her commitment as a queen to nurture and honour these virtues.

The subsequent passage delves into Queen Bona’s personal engagement with the Jagiellon court’s affairs, domestic politics of Poland and her experience of betrayal. By shedding light on her direct support for the family of an individual who has subsequently opposed her and the king, she accentuates a violation of the unspoken agreement of loyalty and reciprocity expected to govern relations within the realm. This feeling of personal betrayal not only lends a human element to her role as queen but also demonstrates the emotional investment required in her leadership. Bona’s disappointment in the actions of the Cracow land judge (*iudex terrestris*) Mikołaj Taszycki (d. 1545) reflects her firm expectations of fidelity from those she has aided²⁰. Taszycki, one of the leaders of the rebellion, accused the queen of unlawful dispossession of the nobility who, as creditors of the Crown, possessed lands of the Crown Estate. In her letter Bona reminds Maciejowski of the care extended to Taszycki’s sons at her court underlines the significance she places on personal

¹⁸ “Quae etsi non fuerint nobis iucundae, tamen officium vestrum in perscribendis his, quae istic acta sunt, est nobis non mediocriter gratum”. *Ibidem*, p. 78.

¹⁹ “Qui in dando illo ea eloquentia, ea prudentia, ea fide usus est, qua sapientem, constantem et fidelem consiliarium uti aequum erat”. *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*. Cf. R.I. Frost, *The Oxford History of Poland–Lithuania*, vol. I (*The Making of the Polish-Lithuanian Union*), Oxford 2015, p. 371.

loyalty as a foundation of political alliances, suggesting a leadership approach that views generosity and personal support not just as acts of benevolence but as strategic investments in the court's and, by extension, her reign's stability.

By suggesting to Maciejowski that Taszycki should to "judge for himself" the merit of his actions, Bona demonstrates a leadership ethos that values personal integrity and self-reflection²¹. This method not only signals her reliance on moral and ethical considerations, but also hints at a form of power, where she leverages the implicit disappointment and moral superiority to influence behaviour and expectations within her court. The mention of Taszycki's judicial role, to which he was elected in 1532, serves as a rhetorical device which underlines the motifs of justice and accountability²². The queen contrasts his legal responsibilities with his personal conduct, subtly challenging the integrity and fairness of someone who, despite holding public office, fails to embody the principles of loyalty and gratitude towards his sovereign. This dual reference to his professional and personal capacities introduces a layer of complexity to her critique, emphasising the interplay between personal character and public responsibility, and the obedience to the crown.

Bona's assertion that "the time will come when we shall not overlook this in silence" reveals a monarch who is strategically persevering, choosing her confrontations wisely but also resolute in her determination to address disloyalty towards her when appropriate²³. This patience, which implies underlying anger if disappointment, signifies a queen who is deliberate rather than reactionary in her approach and in her conflict resolution strategies. Bona's allusion to the adage about the "many roads to Rome" illustrates her adaptability and perseverance²⁴. Acknowledging that while certain routes may be obstructed, alternatives remain viable, she demonstrates her preparedness to explore different solutions to obstacles. This adaptability is the key feature of her rulership, enabling her to navigate the intricacies of her role with inventiveness and resolve.

Her demand for comprehensive reports on the allegations and her response to the grievances regarding the redemption of Crown Estate properties underscore her determination in defending her sovereignty and the rights of the Crown. By challenging the idea that her ducal origins should preclude her entitlement to "possess

²¹ "Qui vir bonus, quod hanc nobis gratiam refert, ipse, qui idem iudex est, iudicet, quam laudem ex eo promereatur". J. Szujski, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

²² M. Lubczyński, *Wykazy posłów sejmowych z lat 1507–1512*, "Kwartalnik Historyczny" 2015, vol. CXXII, no. 3, p. 531.

²³ "Sed tamen veniet aliquando tempus nostrum, quo id silentio non praetermittemus". J. Szujski, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

²⁴ "Sunt enim multae, ut est in proverbio, ad urbem Romam viae; quarum una, si non processerit, alteram ingredi poterimus". *Ibidem*.

royal lands” in the Kingdom of Poland, she directly addresses and counters the nobility’s efforts to diminish her authority, affirming her status and the legitimacy of her actions²⁵. Bona’s critique of the nobility’s hypocrisy, which involves claiming titles and privileges for themselves while denying her access to royal possessions, underscores her determination to confront entrenched noble and oligarchic privilege. Her perceptive observations regarding the nobility’s eagerness to retain titles and the respect they command illustrate her awareness of social hierarchies and her preparedness to question and critique those imposing ‘new laws upon us according to their whims’²⁶. Bona emphatically highlights her royal lineage, setting herself apart from the nobility and non-royal dukes. She dispels any misconceptions about her heritage, asserting her descent from kings, not dukes. This clarification transcends mere lineage; it serves to bolster her inherent authority and rightful sovereignty, firmly placing her within a royal, rather than noble, context.

Addressing the misinterpretation of statutes, particularly that of King Władysław Jagiello (1352 x 1362–1434), she clarifies that it does not apply to her as queen. By arguing that the laws regarding the ownership of the Crown Estate were intended for dukes rather than queens, Bona accentuates her sovereignty and legal status as queen consort²⁷. Her insightful interpretation of the laws demonstrates an engagement with the legal framework that governs her realm, asserting her rights against any challenges. Bona questions the logic behind denying her rights to the Crown Estate when such rights are extended to her subjects. This rhetorical strategy not only contests the reasoning of her adversaries but also reaffirms her status as queen and her dynastic position. By framing her argument around fairness and logical consistency, she fortifies her case for the legitimacy of her actions and decisions. Moreover, the queen highlights her initiatives in recovering debt-ridden possessions of the Crown Estate and efficiently managing these previously mismanaged and dispersed assets. This demonstrates her dedication to stewardship of the kingdom’s resources, portraying her as a responsible and proactive ruler. Her efforts to consolidate these estates for the benefit of the king and her son further underscore her role in safeguarding the kingdom’s welfare and the future of the Jagiellon dynasty.

²⁵ “Aiunt enim statutum regis Iagielonis nobis obstare, quominus bona regia teneamus, propterea, quod simus ex genere ducali”. *Ibidem*.

²⁶ “[...] novas nobis leges pro libidine sua volunt imponere [...]”. *Ibidem*.

²⁷ “Praeterea statutum hoc Iagellonis Wladislai intelligitur de ducibus et his, qui ex ducibus descendunt, subiectis regno vel etiam non subiectis et non de reginis, quia nos non sumus ducissa neque subdita regni, sed sumus regina regni Poloniae et omnium illius subditorum princeps ac domina et ob hanc causam statutum hoc recte de nobis interpretari non potest”. *Ibidem*, p. 79.

Bona asserts her autonomy and intellectual capacity in governance, refuting the notion that her actions are merely influenced by her advisors. Citing her chamberlain, Mikołaj Wolski (d. 1548), as an example, she demonstrates her ability to discern what is beneficial and worthwhile for the kingdom. She emphasises her active involvement in decision-making and her qualifications for governance, reflecting a strong sense of agency and independence characteristic of her reign. The queen underlines her commitment to her subjects' welfare and the kingdom's security as the driving forces behind her decisions, such as redeeming the Crown Estate's holdings and "building fortresses on them for the preservation of those very subjects"²⁸. This duty highlights her understanding of the responsibilities of monarchy, not merely as a position of power, but as a role necessitating active engagement and investment in the kingdom's prosperity and defence. Her protective approach to economic management, prioritising the long-term well-being and safety of her people over personal gain, reveals her to be a benevolent monarch.

Despite her assertiveness and independence, Bona recognises the supreme authority of the king, her husband, showcasing a balance between her agency and the hierarchical structures of the monarchy. This deference does not undermine her leadership but instead illuminates a nuanced comprehension of her role within the dynastic and political framework of the kingdom. The queen's acknowledgement of ingratitude and misunderstanding from those criticising her decisions highlights the challenges of navigating a patriarchal society as a female ruler. Her resolve to act according to her judgement, while respecting the king's authority, elucidates the complexities of rulership and its public perception, where personal initiative must coexist with adherence to established norms and expectations.

Bona's assertion of her financial independence and the substantial wealth she introduced to Poland from Italy not only distinguishes her from previous queens but also underscores her contribution to the wealth of the realm and her personal enhancement of the Crown Estate. By challenging traditional expectations and contributions of queens to their marital countries, she shows herself to be an economically powerful and self-sufficient monarch. In addressing misconceptions about her wealth, Bona emphasises her financial acumen and the legitimacy of her possessions. This strategic move seeks to maintain her dignity and the respect of her subjects and critics alike.

Implicit in her defence is the suggestion that her wealth and possessions have benefited Poland. By introducing significant wealth into Poland, Bona demonstrates that her financial contributions have positively impacted the realm's resources.

²⁸ "[...] ad aedificandas in illis arces pro conservatione eorumdem subditorum nostrorum".
Ibidem.

This legitimises her wealth and positions her as a benefactor to the kingdom, potentially enhancing her standing among her subjects and within the royal court. Emphatically stating that “God will not comfort those in their malice who wish her to be poor”, Bona communicates her defiance against detractors and her steadfast belief in her royal dignity²⁹. Her comparison between the malicious desires of her opponents and her illustrious background serves to accentuate the stark contrast in status and perspective, asserting that her royal dignity should not be equated with modesty.

Queen Bona confronts the envy and greed she identifies as the driving forces behind attempts to undermine her status and wealth. Her acknowledgement of these motivations indicates a deep understanding of the personal and political jealousy that poses a threat to her position and assets. This recognition highlights the complexities of her queenship in an environment characterised by competition and hostility. Bona’s discussion of her rightfully acquired estates in Poland, alongside the potential threat to her holdings in Italy, underscores her insistence on the legitimacy and justice of her acquisitions. By stressing the rightful basis of her wealth, she defends her economic decisions and stewardship, countering accusations of unjust enrichment or inappropriate gains.

The mention of divine support (“the Lord God will not forsake us”) and the assurance of sustenance indicates Bona’s reliance on faith as a source of strength and solace³⁰. This declaration extends beyond a rhetorical expression of trust in divine providence to serve as both a personal affirmation and a political statement, framing her as a monarch shielded by God’s protection from her adversaries’ schemes. Bona highlights her advocacy for all her subjects, underscoring her readiness to intervene on behalf of not only the powerful but also of the most vulnerable in society. This approach reveals a compassionate dimension to her reign, using her position for the benefit of those in need. Her actions affirm the principle that a monarch’s responsibilities extend beyond governance to encompass the welfare and protection of all subjects, irrespective of their social standing. The queen’s comments on the nobility’s attempts to limit her activities to intercessions “for those afflicted with calamities” reveal a tension between her sense of royal prerogative and the constraints the nobility sought to impose³¹. This tension underscores the complex dynamics between the monarchy and the nobility, with Bona asserting her autonomy and

²⁹ “Sed non consolabitur illos deus in eorum malevolentia, qui nobis paupertatem optant [...]”. *Ibidem*, pp. 79–80.

³⁰ “Sed nihil agunt, non deseret nos dominus deus nec deficiet panis nobis in aeternum”. *Ibidem*, p. 80.

³¹ “[...] intercessiones pro calamitosis [...]”. *Ibidem*.

resisting efforts to diminish her influence. By referring to the gratitude and support of those she aided, Bona highlights the reciprocal nature of loyalty and assistance within the realm. This reciprocity not only consolidates her position but also demonstrates the tangible benefits of her compassionate acts, cultivating a network of support and allegiance that surpasses nobility.

The queen's strategy of stationing captains "everywhere in our estates" represents a calculated measure to safeguard her possessions and interests through the appointment of loyal individuals³². This move reflects a nuanced understanding of power dynamics and the critical role of loyalty in securing control over dynastic assets. It exemplifies how Bona proactively managed her resources and endeavoured to protect her interests through strategic placements. Acknowledging the potential for errors in her governance "due to our lack of foresight" indicates a commitment to accountability and the readiness to rectify mistakes³³. This acknowledgment of possible oversights underscores a crucial aspect of her leadership, emphasising a dedication to justice and equity.

Bona robustly defends her captains' conduct, and by extension, her administration, against allegations of injustice. By asserting that her officials act more justly and humanely than their critics, she challenges the validity of complaints against her, portraying her governance as ethically superior. She confronts misconceptions about her and her officials' dealings with the nobility and neighbouring estate owners. By asserting the absence of legitimate grievances against them, she aims to quash rumours and clarify her stance on justice and fair treatment.

The queen denounces those disseminating false accusations as the true oppressors. By exposing their tyranny and the suffering it causes, she reverses the narrative of victimisation, positioning herself and her administration as defenders of the oppressed. Bona's pledge to "not remain silent" about the injustices perpetrated by these "tyrants" against their neighbours affirms her role as an advocate for justice³⁴. This commitment to proactive governance and her vow to uphold justice and address grievances exemplify her resolve to govern with fairness and integrity.

The queen embodies a pivotal aspect of queenship – the strategic use of personal wealth and influence to fortify her rule. Her "abundant kindness" signifies not merely benevolence but a calculated deployment of resources to cultivate loyalty and support³⁵. This passage probes Bona's disillusionment with the ingratitude and

³² "Capitaneos possessionatos ubique in bonis nostris collocavimus". *Ibidem*.

³³ "[...] per inconsiderantiam nostrum". *Ibidem*.

³⁴ "[...] in quas iidem tyranni invaserunt, id quod nos suo loco et tempore non tacebimus". *Ibidem*.

³⁵ "[...] nostra liberalitate". *Ibidem*.

treachery of beneficiaries, underscoring the political intricacies rulers – especially women – confront in securing the allegiance of their subjects amidst perpetual threats of betrayal. Her growing discernment of the duplicitous nature of court politics, as evidenced by her reference to “recognising these foxes”, marks a rhetorical device to signify an evolution in her political understanding³⁶.

The queen’s adept use of metaphorical language, exemplified in the phrase “Lethaeo fonte longa poterint obliviam”, highlights her rhetorical prowess³⁷. Translated as “they will long be able to drink oblivion from the Lethean spring”, this eloquent allusion to Greek mythology poignantly captures her adversaries’ forgetfulness of her past kindness, as if they had imbibed from Lethe’s waters. This passage not only illuminates Bona’s personal strategies and experiences as a ruler but also offers insights into the dynamics of early modern queenship, including the exertion of power, navigation of political landscapes, and the influence of gender on leadership. Bona emerges as a figure embodying resilience, acumen, and an intuitive awareness of the human condition and of loyalty’s ephemeral nature.

Turning to accusations concerning her financial autonomy, Bona contrasts her situation with that of her predecessors to underscore the uniqueness of her financial contributions to Poland. This differentiation not only elevates her status but also substantiates her control over significant wealth and resources within the kingdom. She addresses misconceptions regarding her wealth’s origins, clarifying its source from her Italian assets, countering narratives that might undermine her contributions or imply dependency on Poland. This clarification bolsters her autonomy and validates her ownership. By asserting her rights and authority as queen, Bona demonstrates her proactive involvement in the economic management and wealth accumulation of her realm, challenging the era’s customary gender roles. Her investments from her Italian dowry into productive resources in Poland and Lithuania reveal a strategy to bolster the Jagiellon dynasty’s status and influence, enhancing her and her descendants’ political foundation.

Bona’s rhetorical invocation of God’s protection stands as a potent affirmation of her resilience and faith amidst opposition. She remains undeterred by malice, embodying a ruler’s steadfastness in adversity. Further emphasising her illustrious lineage, Bona separates herself from the nobility, grounding her policies and actions in her royal heritage. This assertion not only distinguishes her from the nobility but also legitimises her rule based on her royal descent. The queen revisits the theme of her wealth, defending her entitlement to accumulate assets in both Poland and Italy against envious detractors. This stance highlights a queen’s duty to actively enhance and protect her wealth as part of her royal obligations.

³⁶ “Sed nos istas vulpeculas”. *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 80–81.

Addressing grievances of Grand Marshal Piotr Kmita (1477–1553), Bona underscores her focus on accessible and responsive rulership³⁸. Her decision to dispatch an investigator to verify the complaints exemplifies her dedication to justice and due process. This measured approach underscores a ruler’s conscientious and equitable governance style. Bona’s defence of her subjects, predicated on the investigation’s outcomes, demonstrates her protective role, ready to shield her people from baseless allegations, affirming her guardianship over their welfare.

The resolution of the complaint, highlighting that the grazing of sheep was a customary practice among neighbours, showcases Bona’s commitment to harmony and positive relations. Her emphasis on the right to use communal pastures demonstrates a wise comprehension of shared resources and the dynamics of community relationships. Bona’s diplomatic handling of the situation, including her detailed communication to the king, illustrates her adeptness in diplomacy. By delineating the investigative process and its outcomes, she ensures transparency and cultivates trust among her subjects “for the sake of maintaining mutual goodwill”³⁹. The resolution’s focus on communal practices and benefits, eschewing punitive measures, mirrors Bona’s pragmatic approach to governance.

Bona and the king are portrayed as benevolent figures, whose grace, kindness, and conferred benefits assert their moral superiority. This portrayal positions Piotr Kmita’s grievances in a less favourable light, underscoring the expectation of gratitude and reciprocity in relations among the elite. Bona confronts the challenge of navigating false accusations within the court and towards the king. Her account of Kmita’s actions – sending peasants to ravage her fields and pre-emptively alleging her misdemeanours – illustrates the workings of political manoeuvring and the significance of controlling the narrative to preserve one’s reputation and standing. The insinuation of an investigation into these matters highlights the importance of evidence and due process in dispute resolution. Bona’s intent to articulate her case “in words at the proper time” indicates a preference for procedural justice over rash or public adjudication⁴⁰. The strategic choice to address these issues orally, avoiding written commitments, aims also to control the narrative, manage sensitivities, and ensure her perspective is communicated effectively. Bona’s invocation of divine retribution against Piotr Kmita for his deceit underscores the moral dimensions she ascribes to rulership and justice, reflecting a belief in ultimate accountability to a higher power. This perspective, prevalent in the era, served to reinforce societal and ethical standards.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

³⁹ “[...] pro conservanda mutua benevolentia factitare consueverunt”. *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ “Et de ista quidem re possemus habemus multa dicere, sed chartae haec committere nolumus, quae coram verbis suo tempore dicemus”. *Ibidem*.

The queen then shifts focus to the actions of a senator who informed the nobility that King Sigismund summoned the noble *levy en masse* “solely to instil terror into the nobility” and to “frighten nobles” into contributing funds for mercenary soldiers⁴¹. Bona’s recounting of this episode emphasises the pivotal role of communication and information dissemination in governance. The councillor’s “populist” announcement demonstrates how messaging can be tailored and propagated to influence perceptions and behaviours within segments of the population. Sigismund’s possible use of this strategy to secure noble support for the monarchy’s military and political objectives by manipulating their fears and expectations is suggested. Bona’s awareness of these developments and her receipt of information from various sources indicate her active involvement in political affairs. Her engagement suggests either complicity or a keen understanding of the strategic decisions made by Sigismund and their implications. This scenario reflects the nuanced balance of power between the Crown and the nobility, illustrating the monarchy’s ongoing efforts to secure noble support through various means. The letter’s narrative highlights the challenges in managing noble sentiments and reactions, with the senate’s revelation altering the nobility’s readiness for conflict to a stance of resistance. This change underscores the difficulty of garnering noble backing and the influence of strategic communications on their willingness to support royal initiatives.

Bona’s frustration with advisers who divulge confidential matters, thereby influencing public opinion and political outcomes, reflects the critical need for trust and discretion in advisory roles. Her critique of an “unreliable and weak” councillor for compromising the king’s strategies by public disclosure underscores the significance of confiding only in trusted individuals⁴². Bona’s concerns over the detrimental impact of indiscreet advisers on political stability and effective governance highlight the damaging effects of leaks and misinformation on the monarchy’s standing and the realm’s well-being.

Bona articulates a firm stance on treason, asserting that such betrayal merits severe punishment to uphold royal authority and ensure the realm’s stability. By drawing parallels with the betrayal among Christ’s apostles, she invokes historical and biblical narratives to highlight treachery’s inevitability, even within tight-knit, ostensibly loyal circles. This analogy not only rationalises her perspective on punitive measures but also emphasises the universal challenge of preserving loyalty and trust within a political framework. Her apprehensions regarding the nobility’s conspiratorial meetings against the crown underscore the perennial conflict between

⁴¹ “[...] nisi ad terrorem ipsi nobilitati incutiendum; quo perterrefacti nobiles faciliores ac propensiores redderentur tam ad contribuendum pro alendo milite mercenario quam”. *Ibidem*.

⁴² “[...] eves ac futiles”. *Ibidem*, p. 82.

royal and noble powers. Bona's advocacy for prohibiting and penalising such assemblies manifests her recognition of the dangers posed by unbridled noble ambitions and the necessity of enforcing laws to protect royal dignity and the realm's stability. Bona's acknowledgment of the "great beast with many heads", symbolising the collective force of the populace, reflects her consciousness of the potential for mass movements to challenge royal supremacy⁴³. This insight underpins her strategic approach to government, addressing broader population concerns. The queen concludes with her reflections on safeguarding her son's safety against defiant subjects, unveiling her maternal concerns for the monarchy's future and her progeny. Her emphasis on maintaining the crown's "due dignity" indicates her belief in respect and legitimacy as cornerstones of effective rulership.

She advises Maciejowski to counsel the king to adopt a cautious response to the nobility's demands, highlighting the significance of deliberation and the long-term ramifications of political decisions. Bona is acutely aware of the threats to royal dignity and the stability of the monarchy that could arise from acquiescing too easily to noble pressures, underlining the delicate balance between placating nobility and protecting monarchical interests. Her pragmatic recommendation to negotiate truces with the Wallachians to dissolve the assembly of rebellious nobility, should no better alternatives exist, signals a willingness to compromise to ensure the realm's overall stability. This approach underscores her prioritisation of peace over conflict or embarrassment. The queen's comments on the potential "domestic indignities" stemming from unresolved noble tensions reveal the governance complexities in her era, expressing concern for the royal family's stature and the broader impact of political discord⁴⁴.

By suggesting that the nobility might flout laws as readily as they accuse the monarchy of doing so, Bona points to the reciprocal nature of legal obligations, critiquing the nobility's selective application of legal standards to their benefit. She recognises the potential harm to noble relations from strict statutory enforcement, indicating a nuanced governance approach that weighs the implications of legal actions on noble support. Advising against initiating legal disputes with subjects during wartime, Bona emphasises pragmatism and unity's importance against external threats. This stance highlights an intentional leadership approach, prioritising immediate collective action over internal discord, with a vision for addressing legal and political issues in a stable, harmonious environment post-conflict.

Her critique of allowing "unrestrained multitudes" and "factious standard-bearers" excessive freedom reveals concerns about unruly factions undermining royal

⁴³ "[...] multorum capitum belua". *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ "[...] indignitates domesticas". *Ibidem*.

authority⁴⁵. Bona advocates for strong, decisive leadership that navigates through crises without yielding to populist demands or the loudest factions, ensuring the monarchy's centrality in state governance. Reflecting on the consequences of excessive leniency, Bona suggests that past patience and tolerance might have emboldened disobedience among subjects, highlighting the complex balance between mercy and order enforcement. Her frustration with subjects' ingratitude, and failure to recognise the monarchy's efforts and achievements, underscores the challenges in garnering loyalty and recognition, pointing to a disconnect between royal expectations and subject perceptions.

By labelling her subjects as "Herculean guardians and defenders of rights", the queen employs sarcasm to critique those who claim to champion justice and rights, suggesting their actions might ultimately harm the state's welfare, reputation, and their own interests⁴⁶. This critique illuminates the manipulation of Chancellery registers by subjects for personal gain, discrediting them when convenient and upholding their validity when advantageous, raising concerns about legality, integrity, and the exploitation of legal frameworks for personal benefit.

The queen's rhetorical questioning of the Chancellery registries' credibility signals deeper issues of trust and integrity within the realm's administration. By challenging the selective belief in these documents, Bona exposes a fundamental inconsistency and hypocrisy in law application, reflecting on the intense desire for usurpation and the audacious demands made by her subjects. She highlights the significance of various forms of documentary evidence, from historical records to judicial letters and merchant accounts, demonstrating a comprehensive governance approach that values written documentation as crucial for administration, decision-making, and societal order. The acknowledgment of judicial letters, often known to be fabricated yet still accepted because of statutory obligations, illustrates the tension between the ideal of absolute trust in official documents and the pragmatic reality of navigating flawed – and sometimes deceitful – information sources. By emphasising the high standards and diligence expected from sworn notaries in compiling Chancellery registers, Bona underlines these officials' pivotal role in upholding legal and administrative records' integrity. Her portrayal of the Chancellery registers as both a "common and particular treasure" and a "most faithful witness of actions and human affairs" conveys deep respect for these records as fundamental to the kingdom's evidentiary and legal framework⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ "Profecto non debebat eius maiestas huic effreni multitudini, praecipue vero factiosis istis antesignanis tam laxas habenas permittere". *Ibidem*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ "Verum tamen Herculei isti iurium custodes ac propugnatores videbunt posthac". *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ "[...] peculiaris omnium hominum thesaurus et actionum ac rerum humanarum testis fidelissima". *Ibidem*.

The final rhetorical question raises concerns about how the actions of a single “factious and insolent man” can erode the collective trust in vital records, highlighting the system’s vulnerability to individual misconduct and the broader implications for the government and the integrity of the legal process⁴⁸. Bona’s discernment between genuine public benefit and the self-serving behaviour of a few underscores her dedication to the welfare of her realm and subjects. She stresses the importance of authentic documentation for asset verification and legal proceedings, indicating her comprehensive understanding of the administrative framework supporting societal justice and order.

Instructing her correspondent to keep the information confidential and to use it judiciously in advising the king or countering public misinformation, the queen evinces her strategic information management. This selective sharing of insights reflects a careful approach to communication, aimed at strengthening the monarchy’s stance. Her inquiry into loyal supporters within the community demonstrates an understanding of the importance of allies who uphold the monarchy’s dignity and protect its interests, particularly those who have benefited from her favour. This search underscores the reciprocal nature of loyalty and support in maintaining stable governance. Bona’s insistence on confidentiality and the careful dissemination of sensitive information further illustrates her skill in political manoeuvring and addresses the complexities of navigating Polish politics, where information’s power hinged on its strategic use or misuse.

Conclusion

Bona’s masterful handling of criticism revealed through her correspondence with Samuel Maciejowski demonstrates her exceptional diplomatic skill, insightful political judgment, and steadfast commitment to the Jagiellon dynasty’s prosperity. Central to her reign is a respect for duty and an unwavering demand for accurate information, reflecting her dedication to transparency, accountability, and effective governance. Her strategic selection and empowerment of advisors, such as Jan Tarnowski, underscore her ability to harness human resources for the kingdom’s betterment. Bona’s discernment in differentiating between genuine public concerns and self-serving interests, coupled with her personal involvement in court affairs, reveals her keen insight into the complex nature of rulership and the importance of loyalty and personal relationships in political stability. Her responses to challenges and criticisms highlight her strategic patience, adaptability, and assertiveness, marking her as a ruler skilled in navigating political landscapes and

⁴⁸ “[...] idque propter unius factiosi atque insolentis hominis avaritiam”. *Ibidem*.

defending her sovereignty against opposition. Bona's confrontation of noble and oligarchic privileges, her engagement with legal interpretations, and her emphasis on financial independence illustrate a monarch deeply committed to justice, equity, and the prosperity of her realm. Her leadership style, characterised by a balance of tradition and a readiness to challenge the status quo, presents a ruler adept at managing the complexities of her time with intelligence and resilience.

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