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Taming the enemy: The 1556 return of Queen Bona Sforza to Italy

Queen Bona Sforza's return to Italy in 1556 has often been viewed as a retreat from Polish politics, the final step in her waning influence at the court of her son, King Sigismund II Augustus (1520–1572). Yet evidence suggests a more nuanced explanation: Bona did not simply abandon her position but instead undertook a deliberate journey to negotiate her Italian inheritance with the House of Habsburg. By establishing herself personally in her southern domains, she sought to defend her claims to the principalities, which she had inherited from her mother, Isabella of Aragon (1470–1524), dowager Duchess of Milan, and *suo jure* Duchess of Bari. Far from stepping away from power, Bona's return embodied a calculated effort to counter a looming threat posed by Emperor Charles V (1500–1558) and King Philip II (1527–1598), both eager to strengthen Habsburg authority in the Kingdom of Naples. This study argues that Bona's intention was to engage face-to-face with those who contested her rights, thereby aiming to avert (or at least mitigate) the risk of permanent loss of her family's estates to the Jagiellon dynasty.

This article contributes to a broader scholarship on women's political strategies in early modern Europe. Historical analysis typically focuses

on male-dominated networks of negotiation, yet queens and consorts also wielded substantial influence, especially in dynastic matters. Bona's Italian inheritance was no peripheral concern; it formed a key element in the rivalry between the Jagiellons and the Habsburgs for influence in Central Europe. Recognising the growing tensions, Bona envisaged that a direct negotiation in Italy would be more advantageous than relying solely on remote diplomacy from Kraków or Vilnius. Her decision reflects a pattern among royal women, who employed personal diplomacy, financial leverage, and crossborder court networks to advance or safeguard their dynastic agendas.

Several interconnected themes guide this enquiry. First is the question of Bona's agency as a queen mother whose authority waned in Poland but who remained determined to protect her maternal family's holdings for her descendants, the next generation of the Jagiellons. Second is the interplay between the Polish court's ambitions in the wider European arena and the formidable Habsburg strategies aimed at uniting southern Italy under Spanish rule. Third is the consideration of how personal involvement, through direct oversight of Bari and Rossano, altered Bona's diplomatic position, allowing her to influence negotiations with the Spanish viceroys and local Neapolitan officials more forcefully than she could have from afar. Each of these threads illuminates the political, diplomatic, and financial repercussions arising from a strategic relocation meant to 'tame the enemy' on their home ground.

Historiographical Overview: Bona's Position in Polish and European Politics

A study of Bona's position in Poland and broader Europe calls for an examination of the extensive historiography that has shaped perceptions of her. Over the centuries, Polish historians have offered diverse, and at times contradictory interpretations of Bona's political objectives, managerial style, and overall influence on the monarchy.[1] From portraits of a scheming, power-hungry figure to later accounts that highlight her administrative reforms and economic foresight, the scholarship on Bona continues to evolve, demonstrating how changing research methods, newly

1 Among the early writings, see for example: S. Orzechowski, *Fidelis subditus w redakcyi I-ej z r. 1543*, ed. T. Wierzbowski, Warszawa 1900 (Biblioteka Zapomnianych Poetów i Prozaików Polskich XVI–XVIII w.).

discovered archival materials, and shifts in historiographical trends can alter our understanding of early modern rulers.

For a significant part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the dominant view of Bona in Polish historiography was largely negative.[2] Influenced by romanticised visions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a nascent noble democracy, historians portrayed her as an 'alien' figure who threatened national traditions and destabilised the delicate balance of power between the king and the nobility. This portrayal often relied on anecdotal evidence, local legends, or moralising chronicles that emphasised her alleged greed, disregard for Polish customs, and obsession with amassing wealth. Terms such as 'power hungry' and 'manipulative' were common; she was described as subverting the monarchy for personal gain, ignoring the counsel of magnates, and alienating potential allies. Two factors helped reinforce this 'black legend.'[3] First, Polish annalists and chroniclers of Bona's era often recorded the hostility she evoked among the nobility, who objected to her efforts to repair the state of the Crown Estate (*królewszczyzny*). Second, in the postpartition period (late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries), Polish historians searching for reasons behind the country's eventual weakening tended to highlight internal power struggles and mismanagement, with Bona serving as a convenient example of corruption at the highest levels. Although these early works contributed to documenting key events of her reign, they tended to select evidence that confirmed preconceived judgments, leaving little room to appreciate Bona's policies or the broader European context influencing her decisions.

A turning point came with the emergence of rigorous archival research in the midtwentieth century. Historians like Władysław Pociecha, who published a multivolume study of Bona, began consulting a much

2 M. Bobrzyński, *Dzieje Polski w zarysie*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1880; J. Szujski, *Dzieje Polski*, vol. 2, Kraków 1894.

3 Jerzy Besala revives the long-dismissed "black legend" of Bona Sforza. Using lay psychiatry, he brands her neurotically narcissistic, paranoid, and compulsively acquisitive and then blames her for her son's early sexuality, venereal disease, and dynastic failure. His vivid, gendered prose punishes Bona for adopting "male" prerogatives, reducing sophisticated fiscal and diplomatic policies to supposed flaws of character. The lively tale tells us more about modern Polish anxieties over power and gender than about the historical queen herself. See J. Besala, *Zygmunt Stary i Bona Sforza*, Poznań 2012; J. Besala, *Zygmunt August i jego żony*, Poznań 2015.

wider body of diplomatic correspondence and legal documents, particularly on questions of property management, foreign alliances, and economic reforms.[4] This scholarship emphasised Bona's genuine attempts at reforming the dynasty's finances and consolidating the Crown Estate to strengthen Jagiellon authority in the face of an increasingly powerful magnate oligarchy and nobility. From the 1970s onward, scholars like Stanisław Cynarski and Maria Bogucka offered more layered portraits of Bona. Cynarski, in particular, emphasised her dynamic role in statecraft, showing how she operated effectively as an intermediary between Poland-Lithuania and various Italian states, as well as with the wider Habsburg sphere of influence.[5] Meanwhile, Bogucka challenged some prevailing clichés by illustrating Bona's engagement in patronage networks, her dialogues with humanists, and her attempts to place the monarchy on a firmer financial footing.[6] The recovery of alienated Crown Estate properties was no longer viewed solely as a source of conflict with Bona but also as part of a broader negotiation among the monarch (in his dual persona of the head of state and the head of dynasty), queen consort, and nobility.[7] Recently, Ryszard Skowron argued that Bona's departure in 1555 was calculated, not capricious.[8] Her journey, Skowron argues, was a last-ditch legal gambit to control of her domains and secure an income independent of her son's realm.

The result of these reevaluations is a profile of Bona that is certainly less romantic or starkly villainous than the nineteenth-century texts implied. While no scholar denies her authoritarian streak or propensity for forceful action, there is a growing consensus that she was a determined

4 W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona (1494–1557)*, vol. 1–4, Poznań 1949–1958.

5 See S. Cynarski, *Sprawa ostatniego testamentu królowej Bony*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne" (1977) no. 56, pp. 137–146; S. Cynarski, *Zygmunt August*, Wrocław 1988.

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

7 A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Monarchia dwu ostatnich Jagiellonów a ruch egzekucyjny. Cz. 1: Geneza egzekucji dóbr*, Wrocław 1974; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Odbudowa domeny królewskiej w Polsce 1504–1548*, Warszawa 2007; R. Leonavičiūtė-Gecevičienė, *Bona Sforca ir Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė: Jogailaičių dinastijos stiprinimas*, Vilnius 2021, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Vilniaus Universitetas, Lietuvos istorijos institute, Humanitariniai mokslai, istorija ir archeologija.

8 See R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie. Polsko-hiszpański spór o spadek po królowej Bonie*, "Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum" 28 (2022) no. 2, pp. 171–213.

political actor trying to advance both the Jagiellons' dynastic standing and her personal stake in Italian domains. By extension, recent research highlights the European dimension of her policies: her rivalry with the Habsburgs and her attempts to preserve Jagiellons' regional influence were not isolated intrigues but part of the larger power contests of the sixteenth century.[9] This revised understanding lays the essential groundwork for reexamining her 1556 return to Italy, allowing us to see it less as a humiliating retreat and more as a logical culmination of the strategic and often confrontational stance she maintained throughout her years in Poland.

While much of the Polish historiography on Bona Sforza has focused on her quarrels with magnates and her contested relationship with King Sigismund II Augustus, a wider lens positions her among the influential royal women of sixteenthcentury Europe.[10] Across the continent, female

9 Cf. 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*, ed. C. Fleiner and E. Woodacre, Basingstoke 2016, pp. 199–223 (Queenship and Power); P. Pastrnak, *Adducimus gemmam et florem. Bona Sforza's bridal journey (1518) in the light of rituals and ceremonies*, "Studia z Dziejów Średniowiecza" 22 (2018), pp. 174–193; K. Kosior, *Bona Sforza and the realpolitik of queenly counsel in sixteenth-century Poland-Lithuania*, in: *Queenship and counsel in early modern Europe*, ed. by H. Matheson-Pollock, J. Paul, C. Fletcher, New York 2018, pp. 15–34; R. Leonavičiūtė-Gecevičienė, *Bona Sforca ir Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė*; 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" 27 (2021) issue 2, pp. 63–90; A. Januszek-Sieradzka, *Queen Bona Sforza as part of the blended family. Not obvious relationships at the royal court in Cracow*, "Opera Historica" 23 (2022), no. 1, pp. 7–28; D. Czarnowski, *Królowa Bona a kształtowanie się kompleksu dóbr hospodarskich w rejonie Grodzieńszczyzny w I połowie XVI wieku*, in: *Kobieta na przestrzeni dziejów*, vol. 5, ed. B. Cecota, P. Jasiński, Piotrków Trybunalski 2023, pp. 107–121; D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *From vilified queen to political strategist: Re-evaluating the role and image of Bona Sforza. The queen's 1537 response to her critics*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica" 2024, no. 116, pp. 35–58; D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Reign of Sigismund and Bona: The rulership in Poland and Lithuania*, in *Jagiellonowie i ich świat. Bogactwo i ubóstwo Jagiellonów*, ed. by B. Czwojdrak, J. Sperka, P. Węcowski, Kraków 2025, pp. 191–210 (Studia Jagiellonica, 6).

10 See for example A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August. Król polski i wielki książę litewski, 1520–1562*, Kraków 2010; A. Januszek-Sieradzka, *Queen Bona Sforza as part*

rulers and consorts often carved out political agency for themselves through a combination of marriage alliances, inheritance strategies, and direct personal interventions in foreign courts. Examples abound: Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) oversaw the Low Countries on behalf of the Habsburgs, playing an active diplomatic role; Mary of Hungary (1505–1558) served as regent in the Netherlands.[11] Similarly, Isabella d'Este (1474–1539) in Mantua and Renée of France (1510–1574) in Ferrara leveraged strategic transnational political negotiation, shaped court cultures, international networks, and dynastic marriages to assert political authority and safeguard their children's succession.[12] Queens needed to perform the proper emotional registers (piety, maternal virtue,

of the blended family; M. Ferenc, *The solitude of Sigismund II Augustus: Between loneliness and seclusion*, in: *The Jagiellon dynasty, 1386–1596. Politics, culture, diplomacy*, ed. D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, Turnhout 2024, pp. 161–183 (East Central Europe, 476–1795, vol. 1).

11 Cf. S. J. Moran and A. Pipkin, *Introduction*, in: *Women and gender in the early modern Low Countries, 1500–1750*, ed. S. J. Moran and A. C. Pipkin, Leiden 2019, pp. 1–20; C. Lutter, *Gendering late medieval Habsburg dynastic politics: Maximilian I and his social networks*, "Austrian History Yearbook" 55 (2024), pp. 1–16; E. A. Lehfeldt, *Ruling sexuality: The political legitimacy of Isabel of Castile*, "Renaissance Quarterly" 53 (2000) no. 1, pp. 31–56; O. Réthelyi, *Mary of Hungary. The queen and her court, 1521–1531*, Budapest 2005; J. Kerkhoff, *Maria van Hongarije en haar hof 1505–1558*, Hilversum 2008; *Mary of Hungary, Renaissance patron and collector. Gender, art and culture*, ed. N. Garciá Pérez, Turnhout 2020 (Études Renaissantes); Y. De Meulder, *From multiple residences to one capital? Court itinerance during the regencies of Margaret of Austria and Mary of Hungary in the Low Countries (c. 1507–1555)*, in: *Constructing and representing territory in late medieval and early modern Europe*, ed. M. J. M. Damen, K. Overlaet, Amsterdam 2022, pp. 217–240; S. Broomhall, *Sovereign hybridities. Anne of Brittany, Claude of France, and more-than-human resource management at the château of Blois*, in: *Queens, queenship, and natural resource management in premodern Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. S. Broomhall and C. Davidson, London 2025, pp. 113–147.

12 Cf. C. James, *The travels of Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua*, "Studies in Travel Writing" 13 (2009) no. 2, pp. 99–109; *Queens and power in medieval and early modern England*, ed. by C. Levin and R. Bucholz, Lincoln 2009; *Queens consort, cultural transfer and European politics, c. 1500–1800*, ed. by H. Watanabe-O'Kelly and A. Morton, London 2017; K. *Representing the life and legacy of Renée de France*, ed. by K. D. Peebles and G. Scarlatta, Cham 2021.

intercession, counsel, and patronage) to bolster their influential position and legitimate their capacity to govern or influence the government.[13]

From dominance to marginalisation

When Bona arrived in Poland in 1518 as the queen consort of King Sigismund I the Elder, she quickly assumed an active role in state affairs.[14] At a time when the Jagiellon monarchy faced challenges from powerful magnate families, Bona offered a dynamic presence that could complement her husband's stately but cautious manner.[15] She became heavily involved in shaping policy, often offering Sigismund counsel. Through this role, she championed changes in land management, taxation, and Crown Estate oversight.[16] One of Bona's most impactful initiatives was her management of the Crown Estate, the extensive landholdings that served as a foundation for the monarch's revenue and patronage. Drawing on her Italian background, she pursued more intensive farming methods and introduced new agrarian practices aimed at boosting yields and hence the dynasty's income.[17] In return, she wielded considerable sway over appointments to local offices and could reward loyal courtiers with grants or leases on newly enriched royal estates. This fusion of economic reform and political patronage reinforced her reputation as an influential queen consort: unafraid to wield power in what was essentially a male-dominated environment.[18]

13 See for example Kosior's examination of how Anna, Bona's daughter, exercised authority after her brother Sigismund II Augustus's death, using her dynastic legitimacy and personal negotiations to secure power. K. Kosior, *Anna Jagiellon: A female political figure in the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*, in: *A companion to global queenship*, ed. E. Woodacre, Amsterdam 2018, pp. 67–78.

14 A. Januszek-Sieradzka, *Queen Bona Sforza as part of the blended family*, pp. 7–28.

15 D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Contextualising the marriage of Bona Sforza to Sigismund I of Poland*, pp. 63–90.

16 For example, A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Odbudowa domeny królewskiej*.

17 D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Redefining resource stewardship in the interest of the dynasty. Bona Sforza's innovations in Poland and Lithuania*, in: *Queens, queenship, and natural resource management in premodern Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. by S. Broomhall and C. Davidson, London 2025, pp. 171–195.

18 D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Reign of Sigismund and Bona*.

Upon Sigismund I's death in 1548, Bona found her political status suddenly in flux.[19] Her son, now King Sigismund II Augustus, did not share his father's inclination to rely on her counsel. Instead, the new monarch sought to assert his own authority, forging alliances with different court factions and appointing favourites to key positions.[20] Across Europe in the midsixteenth century, dowager queens exercised robust influence at court, but Bona's forceful leadership style, acquired under Sigismund I, now collided with her son's desire to demonstrate his independent rule.[21]

Court observers noted that Sigismund Augustus increasingly distanced himself from his mother's circle, preferring advisers with whom Bona had minimal contact.[22] In addition, his accession to the throne heralded substantial changes in how the Crown Estate was administered. While Bona still held rights to a substantial number of these estates as the creditor of the Crown, she was no longer at the heart of the decision-making process. Over time, the dowager queen felt her carefully cultivated networks within the royal council began to slip away; her son and his advisers were neither dismissed outright nor wholeheartedly adopted. Her voice no longer dominated policy discussions.[23]

The broader political environment further eroded Bona's standing. Following the Lwów Rebellion in 1537 and throughout the 1540s and 1550s, a faction of the Polish nobility began demanding the recovery of alienated lands (Polish: *ruch egzekucyjny*) of the Crown Estate.[24] These nobles argued that too much public land had been granted, mortgaged, or otherwise appropriated by powerful magnates or royal favourites:

19 R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*.

20 Cf. M. Wrede, *Królowa Bona: między Włochami a Polską*, Warszawa 1992, p. 72.

21 Cf. S. Broomhall, *Making power. Gender, materiality and Catherine de Medici*, in: *Revisiting gender in European history, 1400–1800*, ed. E. M. Dermineur, A. K. Sjögren, V. Langum, New York 2018, pp. 145–168; S. Broomhall, *Counsel as performative practice of power in Catherine de' Medici's early regencies*, Cham 2018, pp. 135–159 (Queenship and Power); S. Broomhall, *In the orbit of the king. Women, power, and authority at the French court, 1483–1563*, in: *Women and power at the French court, 1483–1563*, ed. S. Broomhall, Amsterdam 2018, pp. 9–40; S. Broomhall, *The identities of Catherine de' Medici*, Leiden 2021.

22 Cf. M. Ferenc, *The solitude of Sigismund II Augustus*, pp. 161–183; A. Januszek-Sieradzka, *Queen Bona Sforza as part of the blended family*, pp. 7–28.

23 Cf. A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August*, p. 427.

24 Cf. D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *From vilified queen to political strategist*.

a development they saw as weakening the monarchy and burdening the broader realm.[25] Although Bona herself had always advocated for a strong monarchy and careful oversight of the Crown Estate, her personal, yet dynastic, acquisitions came under scrutiny.[26] She had, in effect, expanded her own holdings in ways that in public perception blurred the boundary between what belonged to her personally, what belonged to the dynasty, and what belonged to the monarch in the right of the Crown. Local disputes over boundaries and taxes on these properties emerged, turning her from a wouldbe ally of noble reformers into a target of their frustration.

After the death of Sigismund I, tensions escalated. Bona discovered that many influential nobility distrusted her motives. They accused her of exploiting the monarchy for her private benefit and expressed resentment that she, an Italian-born queen, seemed to operate outside established norms. Bona felt increasingly isolated. Voices in the circle of Sigismund II Augustus suggested that her exit from political life could clear the way for a more harmonious relationship between the king and the nobility. For her part, she believed that her attempts to uphold strong monarchical authority were being misrepresented, yet her capacity to defend her position was dwindling. Personal matters also contributed to her waning influence. Sigismund Augustus's marriage to Barbara Radziwiłł had stirred controversy from the outset; the Radziwiłł family was among the increasingly powerful magnates, with substantial landholdings in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.[27] The dowager queen took a dim view of this alliance (or rather mésalliance), fearing that it would further diminish the dynasty's standing and align the king too closely with magnate interests she distrusted. In the swirl of court intrigue, Bona's hostility toward Barbara widened the rift between mother and son, fuelling rumours as she actively campaigned against the marriage and its subsequent legitimisation through Barbara's coronation.[28]

Beyond her son's marital choices, Bona felt exasperated by other thwarted dynastic ambitions. She had long hoped to secure stronger ties

25 Cf. A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Monarchia dwu ostatnich Jagiellonów*; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Odbudowa domeny królewskiej*.

26 Cf. D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Redefining resource stewardship*.

27 Cf. A. Januszek-Sieradzka, *The Lithuanian wife of Sigismund II Augustus: Barbara Radziwiłł's path to becoming queen of Poland*, in: *The Jagiellon dynasty, 1386–1596*, pp. 185–210.

28 Cf. M. Bogucka, *Bona Sforza*; M. Ferenc, *The solitude of Sigismund II Augustus*.

in Central Europe, particularly in Hungary, where her daughter Izabela struggled to maintain power in the face of Ottoman encroachment and Habsburg interference. Bona's attempts to broker marriages or dynastic alliances for her children that might safeguard Jagiellon influence in the region did not see the success she hoped for, leaving her anxious about her lineage's future.[29] Collectively, these setbacks deepened her sense of disillusionment. She faced both personal disappointments (losing sway over her son and watching him build new alliances) and political frustrations as the monarchy she had tried to strengthen drifted towards compromise with powerful magnates and foreign influences. As hostility from the nobility grew and her role in shaping domestic policy dwindled, Bona began looking towards the lands she still managed in her own right. That land was in southern Italy, where her maternal inheritance in Bari and Rossano remained a tangible resource.

Italian inheritance: legal foundations and Habsburg ambitions

Bona Sforza's inheritance of the principalities of Bari and Rossano was no minor footnote in her personal story, but it was the cornerstone of her enduring involvement in southern Italian politics. When she departed Poland for Italy in 1556, she did so knowing that these domains represented both opportunity and danger.[30] On the one hand, they offered a vital source of income, legal standing, and dynastic prestige. On the other hand, they exposed her to the growing ambitions of the Habsburg dynasty, which saw in Bari and Rossano an integral piece in the larger geopolitical puzzle of sixteenthcentury Europe. Appreciating why Bona felt compelled to defend her claims in person requires exploring how she came to own these estates, the myriad legal complications surrounding them, and the extent of Habsburg covetousness for the region.

Bona's Italian inheritance originated with her mother, Isabella of Aragon, a member of the royal house of Naples and the Sforza family of Milan that had accumulated territorial rights in the Kingdom of Naples.[31] Historically, southern Italy was marked by complex feudal

29 Cf. M. Duczmal, *Izabela Jagiellonka. Królowa Węgier*, Warszawa 2000; T. Oborni, *'Georgius Monachus contra Reginam': Queen Isabella and her reign in the Kingdom of Hungary*, in: *Isabella Jagiellon, Queen of Hungary (1539–1559): Studies*, ed. Á. Máté, T. Oborni, Budapest 2020, pp. 189–209.

30 Cf. R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*, pp. 171–213.

31 Cf. R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*, pp. 171–213.

relationships, with the Kingdom of Naples itself governed successively by the Angevins and Neapolitan Aragons and then absorbed into the Spanish Aragon sphere before passing into the Habsburg hands.[32] In this shifting environment, titles and principalities often changed hands through marriage contracts, royal grants, and papal endorsements. Isabella of Aragon gained control of the principalities of Bari and Rossano following a series of dynastic twists: partly enabled by ceded claims, backdated grants, and confirmations issued by her husband's uncle Ludovico Maria Sforza (1452–1508), also known as Ludovico il Moro, her uncle King Frederick IV of Naples (1452–1504), King Ferdinand II of Spain (1452–1516), and Emperor Charles V.[33] When Isabella died in 1524, her rights passed to Bona, who at that time was already Queen of Poland and married Sigismund I. Bona still draws income from her Italian estates, appoints local administrators, and count on her maternal inheritance to bolster her position in European politics.[34]

Yet, the path to secure possession of Bari and Rossano was riddled with potential legal traps. In feudal law, investitures required acknowledgment from an overlord, in this case, the Spanish King, as he also happened to be sovereign of the Kingdom of Naples. Though Charles V had at various points confirmed Bona's entitlement, he also added clauses such as *salvo iure cuiuslibet tertii* ("without prejudice to the right of any

32 Cf. A. Russo, *Federico d'Aragona (1451–1504): Politica e ideologia nella dinastia aragonese di Napoli*, Napoli 2018.

33 Cf. F. M. Vaglienti, *"Governare, io donna." Isabella d'Aragona principissa delle due Italie*, in *Con animovirile. Donne e potere nel Mezzogiorno medievale, secoli XI–XV*, ed. P. Mainoni, Roma 2010, pp. 455–484; P. Zutshi, *An unpublished letter of Isabella of Aragon, Duchess of Milan*, "Renaissance Studies" 20 (2006) no. 4, pp. 494–501; D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *Daughter, mother, widow: The making of the identities of Isabella d'Aragona*, "Gender & History" 36 (2024) issue 2, pp. 353–368.

34 Cf. L. Pepe, *Storia della successione degli Sforzeschi negli stati di Puglia e Calabria, e documenti*, Bari 1900; 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. Accademie, corti e città in Italia meridionale (sec. XIII–XVIII)*, ed. by C. Acucella, C. Conte, T. De Angelis, Potenza 2023, pp. 55–70; R. Quaranta, *La signoria dimidiata di Isabella d'Aragona e di Bona Sforza sulla Terra di Grottaglie (1507–1557) con cinque lettere della Regina di Polonia al Capitolo della Collegiata*, in: *La Compagnia della storia: omaggio a Mario Spedicato*, ed. by F. C. Dandolo, A. Marcos Martín, G. Sabatini, Lecce 2019, pp. 521–556.

third party"), which left open the possibility of future claims.[35] Documents stressed the need for Bona (and her husband, Sigismund I) to homage to Charles V for these estates or risk them reverting to the Crown of Naples.[36] Lawsuits were a real risk, especially if the Habsburgs or other Sforza relatives challenged her claim. Such cases often turned on technicalities: the legality of Isabella's original grant, the conditions of Bona's investiture, or whether her rights lapsed if she failed to administer the fiefs directly. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Emperor had first seized Bari after Isabella's death, only to later "grant" it back to Bona under strict terms. These ambiguities deepened Bona's concern that without her physical presence to assert and defend her rights, her authority could be quietly undermined.

Bona, Charles V and Philip II's focus on southern Italy

The Habsburgs saw the Italian peninsula, especially the Kingdom of Naples, as vital to their Mediterranean strategy.[37] Charles V aimed to entrench Habsburg control in Naples and Sicily, with Bari's port and Rossano's location making them valuable targets. His son, Philip II, who inherited Naples in 1554, continued this policy, determined to suppress any remnants of feudal autonomy. By the 1540s, Habsburg officials in Naples began compiling records to question the legitimacy of Bona Sforza's claim to Bari and Rossano, arguing that their investiture was conditional.[38] By the early 1550s, this effort intensified. Aware of these manoeuvres, Bona feared for her and her son's inheritance should she remain in Poland.

Habsburg authorities avoided overt confrontation, instead applying steady legal and administrative pressure. Though silent on their long-term aims, the Spanish viceroys blocked Bona from appointing officials

35 Cf. G. Cioffari, *Bona Sforza. Donna del Rinascimento fra Italia e Polonia*, Bari 2000, pp. 202, 287; L. Pepe, *Storia della successione*, p. 176.

36 Cf. F. Ruiz Martín, *Relacje między Hiszpanią a Polską w XVI wieku: Karol V i Filip II – Zygmunt I i Zygmunt II August*, transl. by I. Stoińska-Kairska, J. S. Ciechanowski, C. González Caizán, ed. by J. Kieniewicz, M. Urjasz-Raczko, C. González Caizán, Warszawa 2022, pp. 129–147.

37 On its origins, see D. Abulafia, *The western Mediterranean kingdoms, 1200–1500. The struggle for dominion*, New York 1997. For a broad contextual background, see J. O'Leary, *Elite women as diplomatic agents in Italy and Hungary, 1470–1510: Kinship and the Aragonese dynastic network*, Amsterdam 2022.

38 Cf. S. Valerio, *Il ducato di Bari tra Isabella e Bona*; R. Quaranta, *La signoria dimidiata*.

or managing fortresses. Requests to reaffirm her rights were met with fresh demands for homage, signalling that control rested increasingly on the Crown. Bona realised that unless she negotiated directly with Philip II in Italy, she risked having her domains quietly absorbed into the Kingdom of Naples. The situation was further complicated by the substantial loan Bona had extended to the Spanish Crown. In 1556, Philip II (desperate for funds amidst wars with France and the Papacy) borrowed 430,000 ducats from her, secured by a 10% interest drawn from customs at Foggia. For Bona, the loan offered not only financial returns but also leverage: a sign of loyalty and a deterrent against challenges to her feudal titles. Yet, the same agreement gave Spain ready cash and kept Bona nominally tied to Habsburg dynastic politics. She hoped it would strengthen her position in negotiations; Philip, meanwhile, could later downplay obligations once his grip on the region was firm. Given the Habsburgs' record in Naples, Bona understood that ceremonial assurances meant little without direct presence. Her return to Italy allowed her to oversee revenues, manage the annuity, and assert her rights in person.

Remaining in Poland would have ceded the initiative to Spanish officials. Travelling to Bari was a bold assertion of her rights: a calculated gamble that personal diplomacy might succeed where distant petitioning could not. The stakes were high: securing vital income, defending her dynastic inheritance, and preserving Jagiellon prestige. But so were the risks.

Journey to Italy (1556): Diplomacy, preparations, and motives

When Bona finally set out for Italy in 1556, she did so under circumstances marked by cunning negotiation and growing tension. Contrary to later impressions of an abrupt flight spurred by court hostility, her departure had been in the works for years, though often couched in ambiguous language about personal health and family estates.[39] The route, timing, and logistics were carefully planned to maximise her bargaining position

39 See correspondence between Bona and Pompeo Lanza: K. Żaboklicki, *Lettere inedite (1554–1556) di Bona Sforza, regina di Polonia, al suo agente italiano, Pompeo Lanza*, Roma 1998. These letters are a vital source for assessing Bona's international agency and negotiations with Charles V and Philip II. They also clarify the extent of her financial, logistical, and personal preparation. Lanza acted as her intermediary in Brussels and London, relaying her requests and presenting her as a loyal Habsburg subject while discreetly informing her of court dynamics, legal threats, and political shifts.

vis-à-vis the Habsburg authorities, who were eager to assert their control over Bari and Rossano.[40] By assessing the immediate context, the negotiation tactics that paved her way, and the reactions in Poland, we see a queen mother who firmly believed in "taming the enemy" on their home ground rather than letting them dictate outcomes from a distance.

Bona's first overtures about leaving Poland date to 1549, shortly after her husband Sigismund I's death. She began hinting that she wished to revisit her homeland, ostensibly to oversee property matters and benefit from the milder climate. These early signals met with strong resistance from Sigismund II Augustus, who feared that such a move would jeopardise his own future claims to Bari and Rossano by effectively removing the dowager queen from his sphere of influence. Undeterred, Bona made repeated appeals, often through trusted courtiers, seeking partial approvals or conditional travel permits. Over the years, Charles V's envoys have joined this interplay, subtly reinforcing the point that Bona's presence in Naples would facilitate direct negotiations over her feudal investiture, thus forestalling any conflict with the Spanish Crown.[41] The Emperor and his son, Philip II, found it expedient to support Bona's relocation, believing that once in Italy, she could be more closely managed or, alternatively, that her absence might weaken the Jagiellon monarchy's ability to launch unified claims.[42]

One key to Bona's eventual success was her deliberate framing of the journey as largely a therapeutic retreat. She cited health ailments and the need for medicinal baths, particularly mentioning the "Bagni di Abano," thus reducing suspicion that her trip was motivated by purely political ends.[43] This line of reasoning softened opposition within the Polish senate, as few magnates wanted to be seen publicly denying an ailing dowager queen the right to seek treatment.[44] Moreover, Bona sometimes played up the idea that she would soon return, limiting her official statements

40 R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*, pp. 177–179.

41 Cf. K. Żaboklicki, *Lettere inedite (1554–1556)*, pp. 7–24.

42 See correspondence in F. Ruiz Martín, *Relacje między Hiszpanią a Polską w XVI wieku*, pp. 129–147. Also on the relations between the courts of Span and Poland: R. Skowron, *Dyplomaci polscy w Hiszpanii w XVI i XVII wieku*, Kraków 1997.

43 Cf. R. Mazzei, *Il viaggio alle terme nel Cinquecento. Un 'pellegrinaggio' d'élite fra sanità, politica e diplomazia*, "Archivio Storico Italiano" 172 (2014), no. 4, pp. 645–690.

44 Cf. L. Pepe, *Storia della successione*, p. 247; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August*, p. 431. Cf. Bona Sforza to Charles V, Warsaw, 18.11.1555, in: *Documenta Polonica*

about a permanent settlement in Bari. While some of Sigismund Augustus's advisers suspected that her real intention was to settle her Italian inheritance for good, the official storyline of "temporary travel" gained enough plausibility to secure a royal safeconduct in 1555.[45] When she finally left the following year, few observers believed she would actually come back, but the veneer of a mere sojourn had blunted the most vociferous domestic opposition.

Bona's departure plan succeeded partly because she cultivated an extensive network of allies and informants in Naples, Rome, and at the imperial court. Figures like Giovanni Lorenzo Pappacoda (a courtier who had served in her entourage for years) and Pompeo Lanza (her representative at the courts of Charles V and Phillip II) proved instrumental. Pappacoda travelled back and forth, exchanging letters with Spanish viceroys, collecting legal memoranda on Bari's feudal status, and relaying Bona's assurances that she would coordinate her rule with Habsburg interests. These personal relationships served her dual strategy. On the one hand, they convinced Charles V and Philip II that Bona was, at least nominally, prepared to cooperate. On the other hand, they gave her insider information about the Spanish monarchy's intentions, including updates on the composition of the viceroy's council and any fresh legal moves to challenge her inheritance. In this sense, Bona was "taming the enemy" not by capitulating to them but by operating from within their own administrative circles.

Bona's decision to relocate to Italy stemmed from her conviction that physical presence was essential to asserting authority. In sixteenth-century Europe, legal claims hinged on in-person inspection of charters, courtroom testimony, and acts of homage. Remaining in Kraków or Vilnius left her dependent on envoys who could be delayed or ignored. By moving to Bari, she aimed to oversee tax revenues, monitor garrisons, and pressure Neapolitan officials through regular contact with the viceroy. Her rule in Lithuania illustrates this logic. There, Bona wielded power through estate audits, legal arbitration, and direct appointments: performing sovereignty in person. She recognised that in a fragmented legal landscape, authority was enacted not through distance but by occupying the space

ex Archivo Generali Hispaniae in Simancas, part 1, ed. W. Meysztowicz, Romae 1963, no. 44, pp. 77–78 (Elementa Ad Fontium Editiones, 8).

45 Cf. L. Pepe, *Storia della successione*, p. 247.

where power was contested.[46] In positioning herself in Bari, Bona aimed to make it politically costly for the Habsburgs to ignore her. Her presence forced the Habsburgs to act overtly (through lawsuits or revocations), risking diplomatic scrutiny and inviting resistance from local allies.

Bona's carefully orchestrated journey to Italy in 1556 was the product of multiplelayered planning, secrecy, and a diplomatic web that spanned courts and kingdoms.[47] She saw her personal presence in her southern domains as a strategic imperative, enabling her to negotiate directly with Habsburg officials and assert her claims to Bari and Rossano in a tangible, hands-on fashion. In her mind, this was the best path to preserve her dynastic legacy, protect her and her descendants' financial interests, and demonstrate that she was not relinquishing political authority but reasserting it in a new theatre of operations.

Bona's Italian strategy in action: "Taming the enemy"

Once Queen Bona finally set foot on Italian soil in 1556, her resolve to "tame the enemy" became apparent in the daytoday measures she undertook to protect her lands and solidify her claims. In part, this was a matter of personal presence: the symbolic and practical impact of the legitimate holder of Bari and Rossano physically occupying those territories was considerable. At the same time, Bona relied on a suite of diplomatic engagements with Charles V and Philip II, calibrated both to reassure them of her ostensible loyalty and secure her son's inheritance under favourable terms.[48]

After an arduous journey from Poland, Bona took up residence in Bari's principal fortress. By planting herself in the heart of the principality, she reinforced her authority far more effectively than if she had relied on proxies. In an era when government was highly personal, the physical presence of a ruler conferred legal and symbolic weight; it meant

46 Cf. R. Leonavičiūtė-Gecevičienė, *Bona Sforca ir Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė*.

47 Cf. L. Palmarini, *La simbologia della Polonia e dei suoi regnanti nella "Dichiaratione dell'arco fatto in Padova nella venuta della Serenissima Reina Bona di Polonia"*, "Romanica Cracoviensia" 23 (2023) no. 3, pp. 339–348; L. Cini, *Passaggio della Regina Bona Sforza per Padova nell'anno 1556*, in: *Relazioni tra Padova e la Polonia. Studi in onore dell'Università di Cracovia nel VI centenario della sua fondazione*, Padova 1964, pp. 27–66.

48 Cf. R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*, pp. 171–213.

that Bona could preside over local judicial sessions, sign decrees on site, and interact regularly with influential civic and ecclesiastical figures.

For several months after her arrival, she held court sessions that addressed longstanding land disputes or matters of local taxes. This visibility allowed her to remind the people of Bari and its surroundings that she was not a distant absentee owner but an active ruler defending their rights and overseeing their interests. By meeting with local notaries and judges, Bona bolstered her credibility in any prospective suits with Spanish authorities seeking to challenge her investiture. Yet her presence was not universally celebrated.[49] Officials loyal to Philip II observed her actions with caution, mindful that she was a formidable political actor whose interests could clash with their king's ambition to unify the region under more direct Spanish control. Correspondence from the viceroy's office in Naples reveals wariness about her ability to galvanise local support and possibly limit Spanish prerogatives.[50] She was, after all, a seasoned ruler with decades of experience at the Jagiellon court.

Despite her cautious arrival, Bona's ultimate goal was an unequivocal legal confirmation of her rights. She proposed a range of solutions: from paying a sizable redemption fee (to maintain full control of the fiefs) to awarding Philip II certain privileges within the principalities that might satisfy his strategic aims. In these negotiations, she drew on a host of documents, including the original charters that established her mother Isabella of Aragon's claim, updated charters granted by Charles V, and the safeconducts Charles V's envoys had given her in Poland, which promised that no lawsuit against her would proceed in her absence.

One of Bona's most frequently cited proofs was her right to receive the new investiture in person; in other words, she insisted that no final settlement could be decreed without her direct participation. Whenever Spanish lawyers questioned the scope of her fiefdom, she pointed to earlier confirmations that Charles V himself had issued, albeit conditionally. This caught Philip II in a bind. Acting too aggressively risked undermining the continuity of Habsburg promises, whereas softening his stance might enable Bona to retain more authority than the Spanish king considered acceptable.[51]

49 Cf. G. Cioffari, *Bona Sforza*, pp. 264–268.

50 Cf. L. Pepe, *Storia della successione*, pp. 228–230.

51 Lanza reported back to Bona on court politics, legal developments, and the health and movements of key figures. He provided early warnings about the shift

Provision of loans and financial leverage

From the outset, financial strategy played a central role in Bona's plan. The massive 430,000-ducat loan she had granted to Philip II served as a bulwark against unilateral Spanish takeover. If Philip II abruptly seized the principalities, he would expose himself to criticism for defaulting on a major creditor, a move that might tarnish his reputation at a time when he needed wealthy allies in the ongoing wars against France and the Ottomans.

Consequently, for a time, Spanish officials proceeded cautiously. Their willingness to entertain Bona's demands for a fresh investiture rose in proportion to how dire their financial needs became. Her capacity to finance armies and local governance in southern Italy was a real asset, and she insisted that ongoing payment of the interest be contingent on her uninterrupted possession of Bari and Rossano. Bona's manoeuvres highlight the extent to which sixteenth-century European statecraft relied on personal wealth, loans, and negotiated tributes. The Spanish monarchy, despite holding vast territories, faced perpetual budget deficits from costly military campaigns. Bona's money made her both a partner and a potential adversary. While Philip II never openly conceded the moral rightness of her feudal claims, he could not dismiss her out of hand when she held the purse strings to a crucial source of Spanish revenue.

Yet for all the leverage her loan provided, the Habsburg machinery in Naples and Madrid had its own tools. If it chose to, it could stall negotiations indefinitely, launch legal suits in local courts, or simply wait for Bona's eventual demise before tightening its grip on the land. Understanding the interplay between Bona's financial might and the Spanish appetite for direct rule is central to the story of her Italian sojourn. This phase, when Bona took bold steps to rule Bari in her own name, solidifies her legacy as a queen consort determined not to siply to relinquish power in Poland but to reassert it on another stage, in the heart of Habsburg territory.

The turning point: illness, death, and the aftermath

Bona's determined efforts to safeguard her Italian principalities took a dramatic turn in the autumn of 1557, when, after making the decision to return to Poland, she fell gravely ill and died under suspicious

in Spanish policy, including the appointment of the Duke of Alba and the withholding of her feudal confirmations. See K. Żaboklicki, *Lettere inedite (1554–1556)*.

circumstances. Within the space of a few days, the diplomatic and legal strategies she had employed unravelled, exposing both the fragility of her position and the opportunism of those seeking to benefit from her demise. The contest over her final wishes, encapsulated in two conflicting wills, became the catalyst for a swift Spanish takeover of Bari.[52] Meanwhile, Polish envoys struggled to mount a response that might preserve any semblance of Bona's ambitions, but their ultimate failure signalled the collapse of her "taming the enemy" plan. Bona's meticulously laid strategy, to inhabit Bari, negotiate face-to-face, and leverage her loan's financial clout, collapsed under the weight of Habsburg power. In a matter of weeks, the principalities were transferred to Philip II's realm, local control was granted to Spanish administrators, and the legal complexities Bona had sought to exploit were swept aside by a blitz of targeted actions.[53] Ultimately, her death turned out to be a watershed moment that deprived her claims of their strongest advocate. Had she lived longer, she might have prolonged negotiations or structured her assets in a way that was harder for the Spanish to seize. But her abrupt demise, entangled in allegations of foul play, allowed the Habsburgs to consolidate their grip swiftly, leaving Bona's heirs with only scraps of the inheritance. With her sudden passing, the dream of perpetually anchoring Jagiellon interests in southern Italy vanished, demonstrating that even the most skilled manoeuvring could falter in the face of larger imperial designs.

Conclusions

In the historiographical discourse, Bona's identity emerges as defined as a dialogic performance: never Bona's alone, always co-produced by supporters, detractors, and later historians. Her identity as queen is complex and highly dynamic. Her sovereignty is relational, as her authority emanated from *relations*: to mother (Isabela of Aragon), head of her house (Ferdinand II of Aragon and later Charles V and Phillip II), husband

52 Cf. L. Żaboklicki, *Gli ultimi giorni della regina Bona*, in: *Giornata della cultura polacca. Dzień kultury polskiej*: *Aula Magna – Salone degli Affreschi Palazzo Ateneo, Bari, 19 novembre 2004,* Servizio Editoriale Universitario 2005, pp. 29–33 (Quaderni di Ateneo, 9). The fate of Bona's will be covered by Falso, who also printed its text: A. Falco, *L'ultimo testament di Bona Sforza,* Bari 2000.

53 See J. Benavent, *Carlos V y el regreso a Italia de la reina Bona de Polonia*, Universitat de València, 2021; R. Skowron, *Dyplomaci polscy w Hiszpanii w XVI i XVII wieku*; R. Skowron, *Księstwo Bari i sumy neapolitańskie*.

(Sigismund I), son (Sigismund II Augustus), and daughters; each requiring a different emotional script. Throughout her reign, Bona struggled with power, and often frustrated, objected to the perception that power she wielded was always seen as 'taken' – "taken away however briefly from rightful male hands."[54]

Bona's departure from Poland and subsequent residence in Bari stand out as a deliberate, proactive measure to safeguard her inheritance from Habsburg encroachment. Rather than succumbing to waning influence in Poland and Lithuania or resigning herself to diminished power, she adopted what might be called a "taming the enemy" strategy: confronting Charles V and Philip II on their own ground. By positioning herself in southern Italy, she aimed to reaffirm her feudal rights directly, gather local support, and leverage financial assets to stave off an outright Spanish takeover. This paper's central thesis underscores that Bona's return was no retreat but a purposeful act of self-defence, designed to preserve the Jagiellon legacy beyond Poland's borders. By situating Bona in this European context, we see that her efforts are not simply a footnote in Polish political history; they represent a local manifestation of how dynastic claims were pragmatically advanced by women in a highly competitive and fluid geopolitical landscape. She sought to assert control over Bari and Rossano through personal engagement with the Spanish Viceroy, feudal officials, and local civic leaders, just as other noble or royal women might have done in contested domains elsewhere. Similarly, her actions underscored a common practical reality: once female rulers or consorts stepped foot in a territory, they could make more compelling legal appeals, gather inperson testimony, and exert closer oversight over revenues. Her move thus dovetails with a distinctly sixteenthcentury understanding of power, in which personal presence and the display of sovereignty were integral to reinforcing rights. The story of Bona's Italian sojourn reveals much about the complexities of early modern power politics. On the one hand, she partially succeeded, at least in the short term. On the other hand, the ultimate Habsburg seizure of Bari and Rossano highlights the formidable reach of imperial bureaucracies. Bona's sudden death, and the legal ambiguities surrounding her final will, allowed Philip II's officials to bypass her claims with startling efficiency. Still, the memory of her intrepid campaign in Bari continued to shape Polish-Spanish relations for decades, as Sigismund II Augustus and subsequent monarchs repeatedly

54 S. Broomhall, *The identities of Catherine de' Medici*, p. 22.

pressed for unpaid interest and questioned the circumstances under which the Spanish Crown absorbed Bona's Italian lands.

Looking ahead, more detailed comparisons of Bona's gambits with the experiences of other sixteenthcentury consorts, can deepen our understanding of how women navigated dynastic inheritance conflicts. Such parallels may illuminate shared patterns in using personal presence, marriage alliances, and financial instruments as diplomatic tools. Future research might also broaden the scope, examining not only how individual queens endeavoured to preserve their properties but also how their actions influenced broader state policies and cross-dynastic alliances. In that sense, Bona's journey to Bari remains a fascinating testament to the agency early modern women could wield, as well as a potent reminder of the structural challenges that ultimately constrained even the most determined among them.

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Abstract

Darius von Güttner-Sporzyński

Taming the enemy:
The 1556 return of Queen Bona Sforza to Italy

This paper explores the return of Queen Bona Sforza to Italy as a deliberate and strategic move to counteract Habsburg opposition and secure the inheritance of her Italian domains for her son, Sigismund Augustus. In the mid-16th century, Queen Bona recognised significant political challenges in maintaining her heirs' control over the principalities of Bari and Rossano, which were part of her inheritance from her mother, Isabella of Aragon. Bona's return to Italy from Poland in 1556 was a calculated strategy to negotiate her Italian claims directly with the Habsburg dynasts. Bona's decision to "tame the enemy" on their political terrain reflects the multifaceted strategies of conflict resolution and power negotiation employed by royal women of the time. This paper argues that Bona's return was not simply a retreat from her political role in Poland but a proactive attempt to secure her family's legacy. This analysis will contribute to a broader understanding of women's political strategies in early modern Europe, highlighting Bona's role in shaping Polish and European politics.

Keywords:
Bona Sforza, Sigismund Augustus, Habsburgs, succession, dynastic politics

Abstrakt

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Oswoić wroga:
powrót królowej Bony Sforzy do Włoch w 1556 roku

Artykuł analizuje powrót królowej Bony Sforzy do Włoch jako przemyślany i strategiczny ruch, mający na celu przeciwdziałanie oporowi Habsburgów oraz zabezpieczenie dziedzictwa jej włoskich posiadłości dla syna, Zygmunta Augusta. W połowie XVI wieku królowa Bona dostrzegała poważne trudności polityczne, związane z utrzymaniem kontroli jej spadkobierców nad księstwami Bari i Rossano, które odziedziczyła po matce, Izabeli Aragońskiej. Powrót Bony z Polski do Włoch w 1556 roku był starannie zaplanowaną strategią, mającą umożliwić jej bezpośrednie negocjacje z Habsburgami w sprawie włoskich posiadłości. Decyzja Bony, by „oswoić wroga" na jego własnym terytorium politycznym, ukazuje złożone strategie rozwiązywania konfliktów i negocjowania władzy stosowane przez dynastyczne kobiety tej epoki. Artykuł dowodzi, że powrót Bony nie był jedynie wycofaniem się z polityki, lecz aktywną próbą zabezpieczenia dziedzictwa swojej rodziny. Analiza ta wnosi wkład w szersze rozumienie strategii politycznych kobiet we wczesnonowożytnej Europie, ukazując rolę Bony w kształtowaniu polityki zarówno polskiej, jak i europejskiej.

Słowa kluczowe:
Bona Sforza, Zygmunt II August, Habsburgowie, sukcesja, polityka dynastyczna