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Contextualising the marriage of Bona Sforza to Sigismund I of Poland: Maximilian I's diplomacy in Italy and Central Europe*

Bona Sforza d'Aragona, was an early modern dynast and the sole surviving heir of Gian Galeazzo Sforza (1469–1494), duke of Milan and Isabella d'Aragona of Naples (1470–1524). In consequence of a 1517 marriage contract, she became consort of Sigismund I the Elder and was crowned queen of Poland on 18 April 1518 in Cracow.¹ Bona was born on 2 February 1494 in Vigevano near Milan as the third child of the parents whose marriage was the keystone of an alliance between Naples and Milan.² Bona's early

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1. On Bona Sforza in English see for example K. von Loewe, *Commerce and Agriculture in Lithuania, 1400–1600*, "The Economic History Review" 26 (1973), pp. 23–37; P. Kavaliauskas, *Land Management in Lithuania: Past and Future*, "GeoJournal" 33 (1994) no. 1, pp. 97–106; M. Morka, *The Beginnings of Medalllic Art in Poland during the Times of Zygmunt I and Bona Sforza*, „Artibus et Historiae" 29 (2008) nr 58, pp. 65–87; 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.
 2. D. Robin, L. L. Westwater, *Saving Naples: The king's malaria, the barons' revolt, and the letters of Ippolita Maria Sforza*, in: *The Renaissance of letters. Knowledge and*

life and youth were entangled in the dramatic events following the onset of the Valois-Habsburg conflict in sixteenth-century Italy. Her father died before Bona was 10 months old, and together with her mother and siblings Bona was dispossessed when the throne of Milan was usurped by her father's powerful uncle, Ludovico Sforza. This article aims to examine the events of the Habsburg-Valois Wars leading to the demise of the houses of Sforza and Aragon, that informed the acts of Habsburg dynastic diplomacy which placed Gian Galeazzo and Isabella's heir as a strong candidate to marry the newly widowed king of Poland.³

The contracting of the 1517 marriage of Bona to Sigismund I, initiated and encouraged by Emperor Maximilian I, was highly influenced by the course of the Habsburg-Valois conflict on the Apennine Peninsula. Habsburg policy objectives included, firstly removal of the prime claimant to the ducal throne of Milan and Bari from the dynastic checkboard of alliances in Italy, and secondly (and perhaps more importantly for Maximilian) the implanting of a Habsburg agent (Bona) at the side of the king of Poland to limit, if not stifle, Jagiellon expansion in East Central Europe that threatened Habsburg dynastic plans for the region.

The Italian Wars reshaped the inter-dynastic political and military standing of Bona's paternal and maternal dynastic networks. From the start of the Italian Wars in 1494, Milan was a battleground. Accession of Louis XI in 1461 and with it renewed French interest in Italian affairs set the scene for a prolonged dynastic conflict between the Valois and Habsburgs.⁴ Valois claims to Milan and Naples coincided with the Habsburg emperor elect's need for his papally sanctioned coronation as Holy Roman Emperor. For over sixty years the diplomatic and military rivalry between the two dynasties reshaped Italy and directly affected the family of Bona Sforza. The Valois-Habsburg dispute over possession of the duchy of Milan and the kingdom of Naples removed Bona's paternal and maternal Houses from direct rule over those realms.

community in Italy, 1300–1650, New York 2019, pp. 71–92; J. Wood, *Ippolita Maria Sforza. The Renaissance princess who linked Milan and Naples*, Jefferson 2020, pp. 226–228.

3. S. Ryle, *The Celebrations for the Marriage of Sigismund I of Poland and Bona Sforza, Duchess of Bari*, in: *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bariensis*, ed. R. Schnur et al., Tempe 1998, p. 525 (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 184).
4. M.E. Mallett, C. Shaw, *The Italian Wars 1494–1559*, New York 2014, p. 9.

Habsburgs and Valois Wars

The Valois and Habsburg conflict originated with competing dynastic claims on Naples and Milan and intensified after Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482) married Maximilian Habsburg in 1477. The conflict involving Naples has its roots in fifteenth century Aragonese expansion in the Western Mediterranean which started with the 1442 conquest of Naples by Alfonso V of Aragon (1435–1458).⁵

Both dynasties advanced hereditary claims to the throne of Naples: the Valois through Angevin inheritance,⁶ and the Habsburgs as successors of Alfonso V of Aragon and later of Ferdinand the Catholic. The French also claimed the rights to Milan as Louis XII was the grandson of Valentina, the daughter of Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351–1402) the first Duke of Milan. Seemingly the Habsburgs held the upper hand as the duchy of Milan was part of the Holy Roman Empire.⁷

The Treaty of Lodi (1454) when Naples under the House of Aragon joined the league of major Italian states enabled Alfonso V of Aragon to consolidate his position in southern Italy. Alfonso and his son Ferrante I (1458–1494) supported efforts of the Borgia family resulting in elevation of Alonso Borgia to the papacy as Calixtus III (1455–1458) and the subsequent election of Rodrigo Borgia as Alexander VI (1492–1503). The Aragon of Naples employed intermarriage as the “binding glue” of diplomatic agreements and statecraft. Although illegitimate Ferrante was ultimately excluded from succession in Spain, he succeeded Alfonso V in Naples, successfully subduing two baronial revolts (1458–1462 and 1485–1486).

The election in 1492 of Rodrigo Borgia, as Pope Alexander VI, however, made the French intervention in Italy almost inevitable as Giuliano della Rovere, the future Pope Julius II (1503–1513) took up residence at the French court in 1494 actively advocating the invasion of Italy to Charles VIII.⁸ When

5. *Spain in Italy politics, society, and religion, 1500–1700*, eds. T.J. Dandeleit, J.A. Marino, Leiden 2007, p. 99.

6. A cadet line of the Capetian dynasty who had ruled Naples from 1265 to 1435.

7. The Emperor held the prerogative of nominating a ruler to a vacant throne of an Imperial fief.

8. *Spain in Italy politics, society, and religion, 1500–1700*, pp. 1–2. See the text of the League pope Alexander VI, Maximilian I, Ferdinand and Isabella and Venice in *Calendar of letters, despatches, and state papers relating to the negotiations between England and Spain preserved in the archives at Simancas and elsewhere*, vol. 1, London 1862, doc. 96, p. 55.

Piero de Medici decided to back Ferrante of Naples, Florence and Naples were now in alliance against Milan and the French.

The houses of Sforza of Milan and Aragon of Naples.

Sforza dynastic struggle before the Habsburg-Valois Wars in Italy

When Bona's grandfather, the 32 years old Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan died at the hands of assassins in 1476, the Sforza family had occupied its throne for only two generations. Galeazzo Maria's father, the *condottiere* Francesco I had established the Sforza family as the dukes of Milan as recently as 1450. Yet, the Sforza very quickly became part of the wide network of alliances supported by intermarriage with other ruling families of Italy. Following Galeazzo Sforza's assassination, his widow Bona of Savoy (1449 – 1503) claimed regency in the name of Gian Galeazzo, their 7-year-old son.⁹ Her regency was undermined and ultimately overthrown by her brother-in-law, Ludovico Sforza (Il Moro), Duke of Bari who from 1479 took control of the government of Milan. Ludovico did not relinquish rule when his nephew Gian Galeazzo reached adulthood and Ludovico increased his grip on all aspects of government.¹⁰

In 1489 Gian Galeazzo married his first cousin, Isabella d'Aragona, the daughter of Alfonso II Duke of Calabria and Ippolita Sforza (1445 – 1488).¹¹ This dynastic marriage was agreed by Isabella's grandfather, Ferrante I (1423, r. 1458 – 1494) King of Naples in exchange for Galeazzo Maria Sforza's agreement to annul the unconsummated marriage between Ferrante's daughter Eleonora d'Aragona and Sforza Maria Sforza, Duke of Bari.¹² The nuptials

9. M. Keen, *The Angevin Legacy, Dynastic Rivalry and the Aftermath of the Hundred Years War, 1453–1491*, in: *Contact and Exchange in Later Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale*, eds. H. Skoda, P. Lantschner, R.L.J. Shaw, Suffolk 2012, pp. 145 – 158; G. Lubkin, *A Renaissance court. Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza*, Berkeley 1994, pp. 55 – 62; A. Dina, *Lodovico il Moro prima della sua venuta al governo*, "Archivio Storico Lombardo" 13 (1886), pp. 737 – 776.
10. C. Shaw, *The Politics of Exile in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge 2000, p. 8.
11. The date of Isabella's birth was handwritten by Queen Bona Sforza herself in the Jagiellon family's prayer book: "Isabella Aragonia dux Mediolani nata est Neapoli die IIII octobris... MCCCCLXX-o" (British Library, Prayer book of Sigismund I of Poland, Add MS 15281). Cf. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona Duchessa di Milano e di Bari*, "Archivio Storico Lombardo" 48 (1921), p. 270. The marriage of Gian Galeazzo with Isabella was agreed in 1471 and the contract of marriage was concluded in 1472 in Naples. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona*, p. 273.
12. *Corrispondenze diplomatiche veneziane da Napoli dispacci di Zaccaria Barbaro 1 novembre 1471–7 settembre 1473*, a cura di G. Corazzol, Roma 1994, 265. Cf. C. Shaw, *Isabella d'Este. A Renaissance princess*, Milton Park 2019, p. 7.

of Gian Galeazzo and Isabella were celebrated *per procura* in Naples on 21 December 1488 and on 30 December Isabella departed Naples for Milan with an entourage reported to number 400 courtiers in order to fulfill her role as a dynastic bride.¹³ Royal daughters were educated to conform to the demands of multiple roles as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers. The network of alliances further shaped the demands of these roles forcing dynastic women not only to manage contradictory identities but also navigate their multiple loyalties. The exercise of these roles formed the basis of a dynast's power, and their performance enabled the exercise of that power.¹⁴

The young couple's life together started with controversy due to apparent failure on Gian Galeazzo's part as the marriage was not consummated on 28 January 1489, when the ceremonial bedding of the couple took place in Vigevano.¹⁵ The ducal court of Gian Galeazzo was based in Pavia which effectively meant that the young Duke and his new spouse were sidelined by Ludovico, and despite interventions from Isabella's grandfather, Ferrante I, Gian Galeazzo never ruled Milan in his own right.

In February 1489 at the request of Ludovico, Isabella's Neapolitan entourage left Pavia depriving her of the company of her Aragonese attendants.¹⁶ Isabella was stripped of her most familiar attendants forcing her to conform to Ludovico's expectations even if she was "very bitterly grieving for being abandoned by them all."¹⁷ These expectations might have included submission to Ludovico's wishes rather than delivering the Sforza heir to Gian

13. W. Pocięcha, *Królowa Bona (1494–1557)*, t. 1, Poznań 1949, p. 75, n. 15; K. T. Steinitz, *The voyage of Isabella d'Aragon: from Naples to Milan, January 1489*, "Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance" 23 (1961) num. 1, pp. 17–33. Courtiers were often called upon to write histories of family alliances through marriage. The importance of marriage for forming alliances was the main focus of Antonio Trivulzio's oration at the wedding of Gian Galeazzo and Isabella d'Aragona. More on the celebrations in R. Schofield, *A Humanist Description of the Architecture for the Wedding of Gian Galeazzo Sforza and Isabella D'Aragona (1489)*, "Papers of the British School at Rome" 56 (1988), pp. 213–240.
14. F. Downie, *She is but a woman. Queenship in Scotland, 1424–1463*, Edinburgh 2006, pp. 198–199.
15. Giacomo Trotti, Ambassador of d'Este family in Milan. His reports dated 29 January and 3 February 1489. Archivio di Stato di Modena, Archivio segreto estense, Carteggio degli ambasciatori, Milano, Dispatches of Giacomo Trotti [hereafter: Dispatches of Giacomo Trotti]. See C. James, *Friendship and Dynastic Marriage in Renaissance Italy*, "Literature and History" 17 (2008) no. 1, p. 11.
16. "lasciandola quasi sola fra tanta gente ostile" (Trotti, 11.02.1489. Dispatches of Giacomo Trotti).
17. "molto amaramente dolendosi da tutti li suoi essere abbandonata" (Trotti, 11.02.1489. Dispatches of Giacomo Trotti). Cf. E. S. Welch, *Women as Patrons and Clients in the*

Galeazzo. The birth of Isabella's son Francesco Sforza in January 1491, moreover, coincided with the strengthening of Ludovico's position as the ruler of Milan through his dynastic match with Beatrice d'Este (1475–1497), the daughter of Ercole d'Este and Eleonora d'Aragona.¹⁸

Isabella d'Aragona knew Beatrice d'Este intimately and they'd been raised together in Naples 1477–1485 at the court of their grandfather. Their rivalry started if not upon Beatrice and Ludovico's wedding, then certainly after Beatrice gave birth to Massimiliano Sforza in 1493.¹⁹ Correspondence between Beatrice and her mother reveals that Isabella's aunt Eleonora d'Aragona, for the sake of the strategic relationship between Ferrara and Milan, approved, if not encouraged, Ludovico and Beatrice efforts to supplant the Sforza line of Gian Galeazzo with their own descendants.²⁰

As Ludovico's wife, Beatrice took on an active role as a partner rather than the tool of Ludovico's policy and worked to undermine her maternal family's reign of Naples. Her official visit to Venice in May 1493 brought Venice in the orbit of the French plans to renew the Valois claim to the kingdom of Naples.²¹ The rapprochement between Milan and Venice and Milan and France had its roots in the complex patchwork of regional alliances cultivated since the accession of Isabella's grandfather Ferrante to the throne of Naples in 1458, and his incessant warring against Neapolitan barons encouraged to rebellion by Angevin claims to Naples.²² Ferrante was often described as cunning and merciless, and these traits of character did not win the enduring loyalty of his subjects nor lasting alliances across Italy.²³ With the growing aspirations of Ferrante, other Italian powers became concerned about his

Courts of Quattrocento Italy, in: *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. L. Panizza, Cambridge 2000, p. 22.

18. C. James, *What's Love Got to Do with It? Dynastic Politics and Motherhood in the Letters of Eleonora of Aragon and her Daughters*, "Women's History Review" 24 (2015) no. 4, p. 535.
19. C. James, *What's Love Got to Do with It?*, pp. 535–536.
20. Cf. C. Shaw, *Isabella d'Este*, p. 77.
21. C. James, *What's Love Got to Do with It?*, p. 540; F.M. Vaglianti, "Governare, io donna". *Isabella d'Aragona principessa delle due Italie*, in: *Con animo virile. Donne e potere nel Mezzogiorno medievale, secoli XI–XV*, a cura di P. Mainoni, Roma 2010, p. 472; I. Lazzarini, *Communication and conflict. Italian diplomacy in the early Renaissance, 1350–1520*, Oxford 2015, p. 141.
22. See for example D. Abulafia, *The western Mediterranean kingdoms, 1200–1500. The struggle for dominion*, New York 1997, pp. 223–245.
23. M.E. Mallett and C. Shaw, *The Italian Wars 1494–1559*, p. 10.

influence and an alliance was formed by his enemies including: the papacy, the Venetians, the Florentines and the Milanese. Perhaps the tipping point was Innocent VIII's deposition of Ferrante in 1489 when the pope presented Charles VIII with the crown of Naples.²⁴

The deterioration of the relationship between the courts of Milan and Naples increased the marginalisation of Gian Galeazzo, especially after the birth of Ludovico's heir Massimiliano Sforza in 1493.²⁵ In that year Isabella d'Aragona wrote to her father Alfonso, Duke of Calabria seeking his help in improving the position she found herself in as wife of the rightful duke but marginalised by his uncle.²⁶ Isabella wrote because she claimed she could no longer suffer the indignity of living in servitude.²⁷ Isabella's use of discursive authority as an Aragon dynast reveals her conception of this medium of communication mindful of men's expectations and own gender roles. Isabella's act reveals how she was able to exercise power according to contemporary ideas about authority.²⁸

Described by contemporary commentators as a woman with the "courage of a man," Isabella's letter is also marked by them as a "truly tragic act" which they claimed changed the history of Italy as it ignited "the first sparks of the fire of wars that would envelope Italy." Alfonso's inclination to act in response to his daughter's appeal to his duty as father, protector and dynast was nonetheless limited by Ferrante I's preference for a diplomatic solution. Contemporaries such as Bernardino Corio, Paolo Giovio and Trajano Boccalini condemned Isabella's letter to her father as the chief cause of the French

24. D. Chambers, *Popes, cardinals, and war. The military church in Renaissance and early modern Europe*, London 2006, pp. xx – xxi.
25. For example, the papal nuncio Giacomo Gherardi witnessed the public humiliation of the Aragonese ambassador at the hands of Ludovico Sforza. E. Carusi, *Dispacci e lettere di Giacomo Gherardi, nunzio pontificio a Firenze e Milano, 11 settembre 1487–10 ottobre 1490*, Roma 1909, p. 571; F. Malaguzzi-Valeri, *La corte di Lodovico il Moro, la vita privata e l'arte a Milano nella seconda metà del quattrocento*, vol. 1, Milano 1913, p. 368.
26. P.M. Dover, *Royal Diplomacy in Renaissance Italy. Ferrante d'Aragona (1458–1494) and his Ambassadors*, "Mediterranean Studies" 14 (2005), pp. 83, 85.
27. Cf. B. Corio, *Bernardini Corii viri clarissimi Mediolanensis Patria Historia*, Mediolani 1503, f. R ii r – v. Modern edition: B. Corio, *Storia di Milano*, a cura di A. Morisi, vol. 2, Torino 1978, pp. 1481 – 1482.
28. Cf. R. Allinson, *A monarchy of letters. Royal correspondence and English diplomacy in the reign of Elizabeth I*, New York 2012, p. xiii.

descent into Italy and the conquest of Naples because it further inflamed Ludovico Sforza's hatred of Alfonso.²⁹

Recognising the Emperor held the right to formally invest the Duchy of Milan with a candidate of his choice, in 1493 Ludovico orchestrated the marriage of Gian Galeazzo's sister, Bianca Maria Sforza, to the now widowed Maximilian I, making him imperial kin.³⁰ Given Valois-Habsburg rivalry this marked the duchy of Milan as a greater French target.³¹

The threat was realised in 1500 when the Duchy of Milan was invaded as part of the Valois-Habsburg conflict engulfing Italy.³² French troops occupied Milan and they identified Gian Galeazzo and Isabella's legitimate Sforza heir as a political threat, and the boy Francesco Sforza (1491 – 1512) was taken as a French hostage. In 1500 Isabella escaped Milan with her daughters, Ippolita and Bona, returning to Isabella's native Naples. This was also a strategic move by Bona's mother as she sought the investiture of the Duchy of Bari, a fief of the Neapolitan Kingdom, which had been ceded to her by Ludovico Sforza.³³

29. P. Giovio, *Illustrium virorum vitae*, s.l. 1551. Quotes from the Italian edition. "Il coraggio di un uomo" (P. Giovio, *Elogi degli uomini illustri*, trad. A. Guasparri, a cura di F. Minonzio, Torino 2006, p. 812). "Un atto famigerato e davvero tragico che ci ha portato alla rovina" (P. Giovio, *Elogi degli uomini illustri*, p. 812). Cf. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona*, p. 335. (Italian text of the letter is given on pp. 337 – 338). Alessandro Colombo claims that the letter is a forgery. A. Colombo, *Il "grido di dolore" di Isabella d'Aragona duchessa di Milano*, in: *Studi di storia napoletana in onore di Michelangelo Schipa*, Napoli 1926, pp. 331 – 346. Others disagree: C. Panzera, *Dai libri di storia ai libri di lettere: su alcune fonti epistolari di Francesco Sansovino (Del Secretario, libri IV–VII)*, in: *Francesco Sansovino, scrittore del mondo*, a cura di L. D'Onghia, D. Musto, Sarnico 2019, pp. 346 – 347. "Fu lei a scatenare le prime scintille dell'incendio di guerre che avrebbe avvolto l'Italia" (P. Giovio, *Elogi degli uomini illustri*, p. 812). Cf. F.M. Vaglianti, *Isabella d'Aragona, duchessa di Milano*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 62, Roma 2004, pp. 609 – 615; F.M. Vaglianti, "Governare, io donna", p. 473 – 475.
30. The dowry was 400,000 ducats. J. Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, Oxford 2009, p. 84; G.M. Metzsig, *Kommunikation und Konfrontation. Diplomatie und Gesandtschaftswesen Kaiser Maximilians I. (1486–1519)*, Berlin 2016, p. 43; J. Gagné, *Milan undone. Contested sovereignties in the Italian Wars*, Cambridge 2021, pp. 78, 89 – 90.
31. The French were to rule Milan between 1499 – 1512 and 1515 – 22. J. Gagné, *Milan undone*, pp. 77 – 102.
32. J. Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, p. 182.
33. G. Cioffari, *Bona Sforza. Donna del Rinascimento fra Italia e Polonia*, Bari 2000, pp. 17 – 19.

Sigismund I the Elder and the geopolitical situation of his kingdoms

In Central Europe, Bona's future husband's life was also being shaped by inter dynastic rivalries – in this case competing interests between the Jagiellons and Habsburgs. Born in 1467 and named in honour of his maternal great grandfather, Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund (r. 1433 – 1437), Sigismund I was the fifth son of Casimir IV (1427 – 1492) and Elizabeth of Austria (c. 1436 – 1505) and as such considered unlikely to succeed to either the throne of Lithuania or Poland. However, in contrast to his elder brothers Sigismund was reported to be of robust health. He was described by the courtier Iodocus Ludovicus Decius as:

of great posture, strong in spirit and body, with a light dark hair, big eyebrows, eyes of a foreboding glance, cheeks with natural blushes and all expression on his face that evokes respect, and the generous nature did not neglect to endow him with everything, that is part of human beauty.³⁴

Sigismund was experienced in government and spent some years (1498 – 1501) at the court of his eldest brother, Vladislav II, King of Bohemia (1471 – 1516) and Hungary (1490 – 1516). During this time, Vladislav bestowed upon him the principality of Głogów and later the duchy of Opawa before appointing Sigismund as the viceroy of Silesia and Lusatia in 1504.³⁵

On the death of his brother Alexander, Sigismund I ascended the throne of Lithuania in 1506 and shortly afterwards secured his election as King of Poland. He was 40 years old. As a Jagiellon dynast, Sigismund's hereditary rule of Lithuania was uncontested, and his house had held the elected throne

34. "Sigismundus vero, corpore procerus, ingentis staturae ut animo, ita membris fortissimus, subfusci crines, snpercilia magna, oculi aspectu minaces, genae rubedine naturali nitentes totaque facies veneranda et nihil, quod ad humanae formositatis felicitatem pertineret, sollers natura neglexit" (I.L. Decius, *De Sigismundi Regis Temporibus Liber*, Impressum Craccouiae 1521).

35. Two monographs cover the life of Sigismund I in great detail: Z. Wojciechowski, *Zygmunt Stary (1506–1548)*, Warszawa 1946 (Biblioteka Wiedzy o Polsce); W. Pocięcha, *Czasy Zygmunta Starego*, s.l. 1947. See also D. Stone, *Zygmunt I the Old*, in: *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386–1795*, Seattle 2001, pp. 36 – 50. For the accounts of Sigismund's court, see *Zsigmond lengyel herceg budai számadásai, 1500–1502, 1505*, közzéteszi A. Divéky, Budapest 1914.

of Poland since the 1386 marriage of Jogaila, Grand Duke of Lithuania to Poland's Angevin Queen regnant, Jadwiga.³⁶

From the outset of his reign, Sigismund faced foreign policy choices which were the consequence of the internal and external strategies pursued by his father, Casimir IV, and his brothers. The most significant of these was Casimir's dynastic expansionary program in Central Europe. Indeed, Sigismund's reign, including his marriage choices, were in part directed to solve the issues faced by the Jagiellon dynasty firstly in Bohemia, Hungary, and Moldavia, secondly in Prussia and the Baltic, and thirdly in the East with the growing power of Muscovy. The successful election of Sigismund's brother Vladislav to the throne of Bohemia in 1471 and Hungary in 1490 brought the Jagiellon dynasty in direct conflict with the Habsburgs and Ottoman Turks.³⁷

The key challenge for Sigismund came in the 1510s when the Habsburgs under the leadership of Maximilian I were able to establish a broad anti-Jagiellon coalition.³⁸ This coincided with the Teutonic Order's attempts to rescind its vassalage to Poland which intensified after the election of Albrecht Hohenzollern of Brandenburg as the Order's Grand Master in 1511.³⁹ Lithuania's eastern neighbour, Muscovy began laying claim to the lands that made up most of the hereditary domain of the Jagiellon dynasty, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Maximilian's diplomacy brought together Brandenburg, Denmark, the Teutonic Order, Saxony, and Muscovy.⁴⁰

The danger of this coalition was apparent to Sigismund. He attempted to create an anti-Habsburg alliance with Hungary (which ultimately failed), sealed by his marriage in 1512 to Barbara Zápolya (Szapolyai). He then took

36. Cf. R.I. Frost, *The Oxford history of Poland–Lithuania*, vol. 1: *The making of the Polish-Lithuanian union*, Oxford 2015, p. 4.

37. *A history of the Czech lands*, eds. J. Pánek, O. i. Tůma, 2 ed., Prague 2018, pp. 187–205.

38. H. Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, Bd. 4: *Gründung des habsburgischen Weltreiches, Lebensabend und Tod 1508–1519*, München 1981, pp. 163–177.

39. Cf. D. von Güttner-Sporzyński, *The end of the Crusader state in Prussia: The treaty of Kraków in 1525*, in: *Fighting for the Faith: the Many Crusades*, eds. K.V. Jensen, C.S. Jensen, J.M. Jensen, Stockholm 2018, pp. 331–359.

40. K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515. Geneza, przebieg i znaczenie*, Warszawa 1975, p. 166. On the conflict with Muscovy, see M. Nagielski, *Rywalizacja Rzeczypospolitej z Państwem Moskiewskim o dominację w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XVI–XVII wieku*, "Sensus Historiae" 11 (2013) nr 2, pp. 87–115.

a pragmatic approach by embarking on closer and direct cooperation with Maximilian.⁴¹

The rapprochement between Sigismund and Maximilian is often considered a failure of Jagiellon diplomacy because of the eventual domination of Bohemia and Hungary by the Habsburgs although a different perspective is far more convincing: Jagiellon dynasts, like their Habsburg counterparts, did not pursue a uniform dynastic policy.⁴² The Jagiellon policy formulated in Cracow reflected the needs of Poland and Lithuania as much as the Jagiellon Court of Vladislav II formulated the priorities for Hungary and Bohemia. Likewise, Maximilian's strategy which encompassed the whole of Europe was not fully shared by his son Philip, his daughter Margaret and later his grandson Charles, each of whom focused almost entirely on Western Europe.

In July 1515 Sigismund and his brother Vladislav II of Bohemia and Hungary met with Emperor Maximilian in Vienna.⁴³ During this "festival of the Central and Eastern European 'giants'" Maximilian adopted Louis, the Jagiellon heir to the Bohemian and Hungarian throne, as his son, making him "Vicar-General of the Holy Roman Emperor" and heir apparent to the imperial throne.⁴⁴ A double marriage was agreed between the Jagiellons

41. U. Borkowska, *Dynastia Jagiellonów w Polsce*, Warszawa 2011, p. 78; W. Ogris, *Die habsburgisch-jagiellonische Doppelheirat von 1515*, "Österreichisches Archiv für Recht & Religion" 50 (2003) H. 2/3, pp. 322 – 335; B. Przybyszewski, *Barbara Zapolya królowa Polski 1512–1515*, Łańcut 2000, pp. 26 – 27; M. Rekettyés, *Stosunki polityczne i kulturalne polsko-węgierskie za Władysława Jagiellończyka*, Wrocław 1999, pp. 101–102. Cf. Selection of essays in *Das Wiener Fürstentreffen von 1515. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Habsburgisch-Jagiellonischen Doppelvermählung*, Hgg. B. Dybaś, I. Tringli, Budapest 2019.
42. Cf. W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 1, p. 145. A differing point expressed in K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515*, pp. 234 – 242; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Zygmunt August. Król polski i wielki książę litewski 1520–1562*, Kraków 2010, p. 58; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Jagiellonowie i Habsburgowie w pierwszej połowie XVI w. Konflikty i ugody*, "Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka" 38 (1983) nr 4, pp. 449 – 467.
43. E. Spekner, *Die Geschichte der habsburgisch-jagiellonischen Heiratsverträge im Spiegel der Quellen*, in: *Maria von Ungarn (1505–1558). Eine Renaissancefürstin*, Hgg. M. Fuchs, O. Réthelyi, Münster 2007, pp. 25 – 46 (Geschichte in der Epoche Karls V, 8); W. Ogris, *Die habsburgisch-jagiellonische Doppelheirat von 1515*, pp. 322 – 335; K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515*; G.M. Metzsig, *Kommunikation und Konfrontation. Diplomatie und Gesandtschaftswesen Kaiser Maximilians I. (1486–1519)*, p. 268. Cf. J. Cuspinianus, *Diarium Ioannis Cuspiniani praefecti urbis Viennensis de congressu Caesaris Maximiliani Augusti et trium regum Hungariae, Bohemiae et Poloniae, Vladislai, Ludouici ac Sigismundi in urbe Viennensi facti xvij Iulij anno Christi MDXV*, s. l. 1561.
44. M. Biskup, *Die Rivalität zwischen Jagiellonen und Habsburgern um die böhmische und die ungarische Krone im 15. und Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts*, "Österreichische

and Habsburgs: Louis to Maximilian's granddaughter, Maria, and his sister Anna's to one of Maximilian's grandsons, either Ferdinand or Charles.⁴⁵ This double betrothal was one of favourite diplomatic instruments of Maximilian.⁴⁶ Maximilian's gamble, similar to the double marriages arranged into the house of Spain exposed the Jagiellon dynasty to the possibility of future Habsburg succession in Bohemia and Hungary. Yet, the opposite was also true; the double marriage presented the opportunity of Jagiellon succession to the hereditary Habsburgs lands.⁴⁷ Whilst the matter of succession in Bohemia and Hungary seemed to be the prime consideration for Sigismund, it was, the security and the maintenance of peace on the Polish and Lithuanian frontiers of Sigismund's realm that was key to Sigismund's endorsement of the marriage agreement.⁴⁸

Most important for Sigismund I was Maximilian's agreement to support Jagiellon policy in Prussia and against Muscovy. The agreement was heralded as "the renewal and strengthening of friendship and brotherhood" and provided strategic and substantial immediate gains for Sigismund: detaching Maximilian from his alliance with Muscovy and Prussia enabling Sigismund to reassert Polish suzerainty over Prussia and the Teutonic Order and preventing war with Muscovy for several decades.⁴⁹ The accusations that Sigismund's diplomacy were an attempt to appease Maximilian do not reflect the facts on the ground.⁵⁰ Sigismund achieved what was strategically required for the benefit of Poland and Lithuania, fully recognising that the thrones

Osthefte" 32 (1990), pp. 269 – 285; H. Noflatscher, *Von Maximilian zu Karl V. Der Fall "Burgund-Österreich"*, in: *La cour de Bourgogne et l'Europe. Le rayonnement et les limites d'un modèle culturel*, éd. W. Paravicini, Ostfildern 2013, pp. 721 – 743.

45. H. Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, Bd. 4, p. 202.

46. A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Jagiellonowie i Habsburgowie*, p. 452.

47. M.C. Rady, *The Habsburgs. To Rule the World*, New York 2020, p. 83; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, *Jagiellonowie i Habsburgowie*, p. 453; K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515*, pp. 3, 61 – 62, 214 – 219.

48. K. Baczkowski, *Stosunki habsbursko-jagiellońskie w ostatnich latach życia cesarza Maksymiliana I na tle spraw wschodnich*, Kraków 2014, pp. 7 – 9.

49. M. Dogiel, *Codex diplomaticvs Regni Poloniae et Magni Dvcatvs Litvaniae*, t. 1, Vilnae 1758, pp. 173 – 175. Select documents related to the Congress of Vienna published pp. 167 – 172, 175 – 181. Cf. D. Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian state, 1386–1795*, Seattle 2001. See also D. Stone, *Zygmunt I the Old*, pp. 36 – 50. See details in H. Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, Bd. 4, pp. 204 – 212.

50. The assessment of the 1515 agreements between the Habsburg and Jagiellon dynasts is subject to an ongoing debate. For the summary of various arguments see K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515*, pp. 67 – 113; K. Baczkowski, *Stosunki*, pp. 6 – 10. More recent arguments of Dariusz Kołodziejczyk are not convincing. D. Kołodziejczyk, *The*

of Bohemia and Hungary were elective and that the safety of Jagiellon patrimony in Lithuania required immediate action.⁵¹

Death of Gian Galeazzo and Isabella becomes Duchess of Bari

Back in Italy, Isabella's husband Gian Galeazzo died on 21 October 1494 aged 25 years. Shortly before his death in Pavia he was visited by his first cousin Charles VIII of France to whom Isabella unsuccessfully appealed for protection.⁵² On 22 October Ludovico Sforza summoned the Council to a meeting in Milan and publicly requested that Gian Galeazzo's son Francesco be acknowledged as the new duke. The members of the Council rejected this proposal, offering the throne to the established strongman, Ludovico himself. Ludovico was already in possession of the imperial investiture charter to the dukedom (dated 5 September 1494) issued by Maximilian I, which was not made public until April 1495, when Ludovico paid homage to the Emperor.⁵³ On 26 May 1495 the ceremony of his accession was celebrated in Milan.

Shortly after the death of Gian Galeazzo, Ludovico requested that Isabella and her children move from Pavia to Milan. She was pregnant and preferred to stay in Pavia until early 1495 when the baby was expected but agreed to Ludovico's request to travel to Milan. In December Isabella arrived in Milan where she was met firstly by Ludovico's wife, Beatrice d'Este and then by Ludovico himself.⁵⁴ On 20 January 1495 Isabella d'Este who was visiting Milan for the childbirth of her sister's child reported that she met with Isabella who was a picture of grief.⁵⁵ On 1 March 1495 Isabella gave birth to her fourth child, a daughter, Bianca Maria. Isabella's position at the Sforza court deteriorated further with the French advance on Naples. Her father Alfonso II abdicated 15 January 1495 just as Naples fell to the French.

Crimean Khanate and Poland–Lithuania. International diplomacy on the European periphery (15th–18th century), Leiden 2011, p. 61.

51. Cf. K. Baczkowski, *Stosunki*, p. 9; K. Baczkowski, *Polska i jej sąsiedzi za Jagiellonów*, Kraków 2012, pp. 563–564.
52. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona*, p. 350. Charles and Gian Galeazzo were first cousins. Their mothers, Charlotte and Bona were daughters of Louis I Duke of Savoy (b. 1413, r. 1440–1465).
53. J. Black, *The Problem of Succession for the Visconti and the Sforza*, in: *Renaissance politics and culture*, eds. J. Davies, J. Monfasani, Leiden 2021, p. 37; J. Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, p. 92.
54. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona*, pp. 361–363.
55. A. Dina, *Isabella d'Aragona*, p. 363. Cf. C. Shaw, *Isabella d'Este*, p. 191.

Despite giving Charles VIII's armies free passage through Milan, in March 1495 Ludovico joined an anti-French League together with Venice, Alexander VI, Ferdinand the Catholic and Maximilian I. At the Battle of Fornovo (6 July 1495) French forces faced armies of the League and whilst the French claimed victory Charles VII retreated to France. In a turn of fate that characterised the Italian Wars, on the same day as the battle was fought, Isabella d'Aragona's brother Ferdinand II recovered Naples.

Ferdinand II soon died however and on 7 September 1496 Naples' crown was inherited by Isabella's uncle Frederick IV. Notwithstanding this unexpected change in leadership of the House of Aragon in Naples, Isabella's position in Milan worsened further and towards the end of 1499 as Louis XII claimed the title of Duke of Milan. Isabella made a decision to seek refuge in Naples.⁵⁶ Together with her daughters Bona and Ippolita she arrived there on 7 March 1500 seeking the protection of King Frederick IV. In July 1500 the whole Aragon family of Naples took refuge on the Island of Ischia in the Gulf of Naples when French forces reached Naples.⁵⁷ Whilst on Ischia, Isabella negotiated with the head of the Aragon dynasty, King Ferdinand of Spain to secure his confirmation of the fiefs granted by King Frederick of Naples to her for her dowry according to and with the consent of Ludovico Sforza, the former duke of Bari.⁵⁸ Isabella's appeal to Ferdinand the Catholic was successful and the king confirmed her earlier investiture as the Duchess of Bari in her own right in 1502.⁵⁹

Isabella d'Aragona's efforts to secure a dynastic marriage for Bona

Louis XII held Milan between 1505 and 1512 after Maximilian I annulled Ludovico Sforza's investiture. The French rule ended in the aftermath of the battle of Ravenna, when Sforza's son Massimiliano was established as the new duke

56. A new overview of the period: L. Arcangeli, *Milano e Luigi XII. Ricerche sul primo dominio francese in Lombardia, 1499–1512*, Milano 2002. Cf. A. Álvarez-Ossorio Alvarriño, *The State of Milan and the Spanish Monarchy*, in: *Spain in Italy politics, society, and religion, 1500–1700*, p. 99.

57. G. Notar, *Cronaca di Napoli*, Napoli 1845, pp. 233, 242.

58. Cambridge University Library, Letter of Isabella d'Aragona to Ferdinand II of Aragon dated 2.09.1501, Add. MS. 4100(2). See P. Zutshi, *An unpublished letter of Isabella of Aragon, Duchess of Milan*, "Renaissance Studies" 20 (2006) no. 4, pp. 494–501.

59. L. Pepe, *Storia della successione degli Sforzeschi negli stati di Puglia e Calabria, e documenti*, Bari 1900, pp. 110–112.

with support of the Swiss and the Venetians. The successor of Louis XII, Francis I however did not relinquish the French claim on Milan and formed an alliance with the Venetians against the league of Leo X, Ferdinand of Aragon, and the Swiss who supported Massimiliano Sforza.⁶⁰

Francesco Sforza, the legitimate heir to Gian Galeazzo died in France in 1512 making his younger sister, Bona the only direct successor to Gian Galeazzo and Isabella d'Aragona. Isabella who had been settled in and ruling Bari since 1502, worked on securing Bona's return to Milan as the rightful heir to Sforza dukedom.⁶¹ Bona's mother used dynastic diplomatic channels to achieve this through marriage, firstly involving Ferdinand the Catholic and his sister (and Isabella's intimate friend) Queen Joanna of Naples. Isabella first choice for her daughter to marry was Ferdinand's grandson Ferdinand or her own nephew, Massimiliano Sforza. It emerged in September 1513 however that the King of Spain's preferred match for Bona was Giuliano de Medici, Pope Leon X's brother.⁶²

Isabella navigated between various suitors including members of the house of Savoy clearly preferring Bona's return to Milan as the wife of Massimiliano Sforza. The matter of the Sforza marriage also became the subject of correspondence between Maximilian and Isabella through Andrea da Borgo (Andreas de Burgo), one of Maximilian's trusted diplomats and a close collaborator of Cardinal Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg.⁶³

The negotiations with Massimiliano must have been quite advanced because in early 1514 the Venetian Marino Sanuto recorded that the matter of the marriage between the duke of Milan and his cousin from Bari was settled.⁶⁴ Massimiliano's aunt, Isabella d'Este's visit to Naples in December 1514 seemed to confirm that the union which would unify the Sforza family was close. About that time Isabella d'Aragona requested her subjects contribute

60. J. Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan*, p. 84.

61. On 21 April 1502 the Castle in Bari was transferred into Isabella's control by Spanish forces. W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 1, p. 127. Records of the Duchy of Bari were copied into the Polish Chancellery Records on Bona's orders in Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych, Kopiaiuzsz dokumentów dotyczących księstwa Bari, 1485 – 1547, 1/168/0/-/002, ff. 129r – 129v.

62. *Calendar of letters*, vol. 2, doc. 132, p. 156.

63. H. Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, Bd. 5: *Der Kaiser und seine Umwelt. Hof, Staat, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Kultur*, München 1986, p. 786; G. Rill, *Andrea Borgo (Burgo)*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 12, Roma 1971, pp. 749 – 753.

64. M. Sanuto, *I Diarii*, vol. 17, Venezia 1886, cols. 498 – 499.

to her daughter's dowry.⁶⁵ By April 1515 however, the marriage had not taken place. Pope Leo X commented that Massimiliano was acting unreasonably when presented with the chance to reconcile the two Sforza lines through the marriage.⁶⁶

The end to the marriage plans with Massimiliano came with the victory of Francis I at the battle of Marignano (Melegnano) on 13 – 14 September 1515. The capture of Massimiliano Sforza on 4 October 1515 and his imprisonment in France was followed by the death of Ferdinand the Catholic on 23 January 1516. Habsburg succession in Spain exposed the fault line in the Habsburg dynasty's marriage policy because Maximilian now had to take into account the wishes of his grandsons Charles and Ferdinand.

Habsburg diplomacy and the Jagiellon Court

Emperor Maximilian I, the widower of Bona's aunt, Bianca Maria Sforza (1472 – 1510) began to champion the idea of marriage between Sigismund and one of his Habsburg candidates (including Bona Sforza) shortly after the death of Sigismund's first, Hungarian wife, Barbara Zápolya (1495 – 1515) who died on 2 October 1515 in Cracow. Habsburg diplomats, and no doubt Maximilian himself, were already aware during the Congress of Vienna in July 1515 that Queen Barbara was dangerously ill following the birth of the couple's second daughter on 1 July 1515.⁶⁷ Her death brought an end to the 1512 alliance between Sigismund and the House of Zápolya which was directed against the Habsburgs and their involvement in succession disputes in Hungary.⁶⁸ The renewed Muscovite – Lithuanian war forced Sigismund to reconsider rapprochement with the Habsburgs in order to neutralise Maximilian I's diplomatic efforts to destabilise the Jagiellon realm.⁶⁹

65. C. Shaw, *Isabella d'Este*, p. 214; W. Pocięcha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 1, pp. 182 – 183.

66. G. Palmieri, *Lettere alla duchessa di Bari sotto il pontificato di Leone X*, in: *Spicilegio vaticano di documenti inediti e rari*, a cura di G. Palmieri, I. Carini, Roma 1890, p. 19. Letter dated 14 April 1515.

67. U. Borkowska, *Marital contracts of the house of Jagiellon*, "Majestas" 13 (2005), p. 80. Z. Wdowiszewski, J. Tęgowski, *Genealogia Jagiellonów i Domu Wazów w Polsce*, Kraków 2005, p. 120; B. Przybyszewski, *Barbara Zapolya królowa Polski 1512–1515*, pp. 73 – 74.

68. M. Dogiel, *Codex diplomaticus*, t. 1, p. 121. On Sigismund's alliance with the Zápolyas, see K. Baczkowski, *Zjazd wiedeński 1515*, p. 70.

69. M. Duczmal, *Jagiellonowie – leksykon biograficzny*, Kraków 1996, p. 79; K.-H. Spiess, *European Royal Marriages in the Late Middle Ages. Marriage Treaties, Questions of Income, Cultural Transfer*, "Majestas" 13 (2005), pp. 7 – 21; W. Ogris, *Die habsburgisch-jagiellonische Doppelheirat von 1515*, p. 322 – 335; O. Réthelyi, *Jagiellonian–Habsburg*

Sigismund's court included a sizable and powerful pro-Habsburg faction under the leadership of Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki who exerted significant influence on the King's policy. Sigismund's widowhood gave Maximilian a chance to strengthen Habsburg influence at the Jagiellon court by providing Sigismund with a new bride subservient (or at least agreeable) to Habsburg wishes.⁷⁰ Władysław Pociecha suggests that at the conclusion of the Congress of Vienna in August 1515, the Emperor tested his ideas in regard to Sigismund's need to wed on select members of the Polish legation: Rafał Leszczyński, Maciej Drzewicki, and Jan Dantyszek.⁷¹

Shortly afterwards Cardinal Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg wrote to Chancellor Krzysztof Szydłowiecki with a direct suggestion of marriage proposing a number of candidates: Maximilian's own granddaughter Eleanor of Castile, Bona Sforza and Joanna of Naples (widow of Ferdinand II of Naples).⁷² The significance of this match was highlighted by the fact that on Maximilian's instigation, Sigismund's brother, Vladislav II instructed his ambassador to Poland to approach the king on the matter.⁷³ Sigismund's response communicated to Maximilian by Krzysztof Szydłowiecki was diplomatic but reflected the king's priorities in December 1515: the king was still grieving too deeply after the death of Queen Barbara to consider the possibility of marry again.⁷⁴

The Habsburg diplomatic offensive did not go unnoticed by Polish courtiers opposed to Habsburg influence and the king played a clever double game.⁷⁵ The Primate Jan Łaski, leader of the anti-Habsburg court faction,

marriage policy and cultural transfer. The question of household and court ordinances, in: Das Wiener Fürstentreffen von 1515, passim; A. Sucheni-Grabowska, Jagiellonowie i Habsburgowie, pp. 449 – 467. Among primary sources: B. Wapowski, Bernardi Vapovii de bello a Sigismundo I Rege Poloniae contra Moscos gesto A. MDVIII, ed. J. Korzeniowski, Cracoviae 1891.

70. W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 1, p. 188.

71. W. Pociecha, *Królowa Bona*, t. 1, pp. 188 – 189.

72. For Eleanor of Austria, see *Contemporaries of Erasmus. A biographical register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, eds. P.G. Bietenholz, T.B. Deutscher, vol. 1, Toronto 1985, pp. 426 – 427. Cf. *Acta Tomiciana*, per S. Górski, canonicum Cracoviensem et Plocensem collectarum, t. 4, Posnaniae 1855, p. 51.

73. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 11.

74. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 37.

75. The letter written to Sigmund von Herberstein by Isabella d'Aragona suggests the involvement of this trusted counsellor of the Emperor. S. von Herberstein, *Selbstbiographie, 1486–1553*, in: *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum*, Bd. 1, Hrsg. T.G. von Karajan, Wien 1855, pp. 111 – 112. Cf. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 223.

strongly advised the King not to marry any of the candidates proposed by the Emperor. Consequently Sigismund instructed the Deputy Chancellor Piotr Tomicki to respond to Cardinal Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg with a promise that the king would consider the matter of marriage and will hear Maximilian's counsel in that regard.⁷⁶ Piotr Tomicki, one of the leader of the Habsburg faction in Poland stressed that the quicker the marriage under the aegis of the Emperor could be arranged the better for "the bonds of friendship and affinity" between both monarchs.⁷⁷ In the meantime, presumably with the king's agreement, his confidant the banker Jan Boner, dispatched his own envoy to the Burgundian court, to obtain a portrait of Eleonor.⁷⁸

The death of Sigismund's elder brother Vladislav II on 13 March 1516 left Sigismund the head of the House of Jagiellon, now represented by only two male dynasts: Sigismund himself and his nephew, Vladislav's infant heir, Louis. The issue of succession in four countries ruled by the Jagiellon dynasts became the prime concern not just for their elites, who benefited from the stability of the throne, but also to Maximilian I pursuing Habsburg control over Bohemia and Hungary.

Sigismund policy choices leaned towards preservation of the alliance with the Habsburgs which kept the Teutonic Order and Muscovy at bay. On 11 October 1516, Sigismund wrote to members of the Polish Senate advising of the Emperor's marriage proposals.⁷⁹ Whilst the candidature of the recently widowed Mary Tudor, sister of Henry VIII, was made, Sigismund also made it known that Eleanor of Castille was his preferred candidate.⁸⁰ Here the lack of consistency in Habsburg policy revealed itself with Maximilian's grandson Charles disallowing the match of his sister to Sigismund in preference to the

76. The Habsburg faction at the Polish Court promoted the benefits of the marriage with a Habsburg candidate, see for example *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 48 (Piotr Tomicki to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki); *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 45 (Sigismund to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki); *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 47 (Piotr Tomicki to Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg).
77. "quam celerius conficiatur pro majori conjunctione et vinculo ejus amicitie et federis" (*Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 47 [Piotr Tomicki to Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg]).
78. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 53 (Piotr Tomicki to Jan Boner). Later *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 176 (Sigismund to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki). Even Pope Leo X seemed to endorse the need of Sigismund to marry in a letter addressed to Polish prelates. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 301 (Leo X to Isabella d'Aragona).
79. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 46.
80. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, pp. 50 (Piotr Tomicki to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki), 177–178, 178–180 (Sigismund to Maximilian).

King of Portugal.⁸¹ (Similarly, in the matter of the Treaty of Noyon of 13 August 1516, Maximilian's grandson Charles accepted French control of Milan in exchange for Francis I's acknowledgement of Charles' claim to Naples, and Charles acted without seeking the approval of the Emperor.)

Maximilian's envoy Sigmund von Herberstein communicated the news to Sigismund and strongly recommended Bona as the imperial candidate.⁸² Sigismund was ready to receive envoy Crisostomo Colonna from Bona's mother and the audience was held in Vilnius on 4 March 1517 when the king was presented with a portrait of Bona. The Polish side was now ready to negotiate the marriage contract.⁸³

Discussion and conclusion

Dynastic women were expected as wives to facilitate and maintain alliances between ruling families, as mothers to assure the continuation of the dynastic bloodline, as widows to guard the patrimony for their children, and, when acting with the agency of a ruler in their own right, to combine all these roles with the exercise of sovereignty.

Maximilian I's diplomacy acted according to the tried and tested contemporary gender norms and as a dynastic patriarch expected his female dynastic relatives to be loyal to their dynastic patrons and facilitate and maintain alliances between ruling families.⁸⁴ His expectations would have been strengthened by the assurances offered by Bona's mother Isabella, that her daughter will be "grateful and obliged for everything."⁸⁵ The Habsburg diplomacy and Isabella promoted familial construction of Bona as the heir of Gian Galeazzo Sforza and thus Maximilian's niece, who whilst transitioning to a new role and status as queen consort of Poland would closely align with imperial policy and Maximilian's wishes and expectations.

Within the context of competing Habsburg and Valois interest in Italy, Bona's mother Isabella, emerged among the closely interrelated group of elite women as a key player. Her mastery of the diplomacy and utilisation of family

81. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 199 (Sigismund to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki).

82. *Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 227. Cf. S. von Herberstein, *Selbstbiographie*, p. 113.

83. „praeterea venit cum nuncio secretarius matris ipsius virginis et imaginem eius attulit, que nobis bene placet" (*Acta Tomiciana*, t. 4, p. 199 [Sigismund to Krzysztof Szydłowiecki]).

84. Cf. S. Broomhall, *The Identities of Catherine de' Medici*, Leiden 2021, pp. 19–20.

85. Archivio di Stato di Milano, Letter of Isabella d'Aragona to Andrea da Borgo, Carteggio Visconteo – Sforzesco: Potenze sovrane, Cartella 1475.

networks served as a counterbalance to political and military alliances. Isabella could not compete on the battlefield but worked her whole married life (and later in widowhood) to secure an economically and politically secure base for her children.

The marriage of Bona Sforza and Sigismund I fulfilled the objective that arose from the century long rivalry between the House of Habsburg and the House of Jagiellon for domination of Central Europe. The acceptance of Bona as his queen by Sigismund I represented, for Maximilian I, a strategic success cementing his forceful diplomacy in Italy and in Central Europe. It also further reinforced the Habsburg-Jagiellon agreement of 1515. For the Habsburgs the marriage succeeded in removing the Sforza heir from Italy and gained, or so they thought, a queen submissive to Habsburg imperatives in Central Europe.

The dynastic instrument of marriage, so frequently and successfully used by Maximilian I was deployed in order to curtail the Jagiellon dynasty's power and authority in Central Europe. These expectations assumed that there would be compliance and collaboration from the Sforza heir against her own and her spouse's dynastic interests. Bona's life after her marriage however would demonstrate her agency and success as a dynast who viewed Habsburg patronage not only as a hindrance to her House's aims but as a political imposition unilaterally associated by Bona with the loss of her ancestral Milan, and the destruction of her Neapolitan maternal kin.

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Abstract

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*Contextualising the marriage of Bona Sforza
to Sigismund I of Poland: Maximilian I's diplomacy
in Italy and Central Europe*

This article will focus on the circumstances which contributed to the 1517 dynastic marriage of Bona Sforza of Milan to Sigismund I the Elder of Poland. It will examine the decline of Sforza and Neapolitan Aragon influence on the Apennine Peninsula in the face of Valois and Habsburg claims to supremacy. This article aims to place Habsburg diplomatic manoeuvring to secure the installation of Maximilian I's niece as Queen of Poland in the context of Habsburg-Valois rivalry in Italy and Habsburg ambitions for dominance in Central Europe where they challenged the Jagiellon dynasts of Bohemia and Hungary, and of Poland and Lithuania. This article will demonstrate that the contracting of the Sforza-Jagiellon marriage was initiated by Maximilian I as an extension of a deliberate and assertive Habsburg policy. Habsburg policy objectives included removal of the prime claimant to the throne of Milan and the placing of a queen acquiescent to Habsburg strategy at the Jagiellon court in Poland. This article will conclude that the marriage was used by the Habsburgs as a dynastic and political tool to limit the Jagiellon dynasty's power and authority in Central Europe.

Keywords:

Bona Sforza,
Jagiellon dynasty,
queens, diplomacy,
conflict, marriage

Abstrakt

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Kontekst małżeństwa Bony Sforzy z Zygmuntem I Starym: dyplomacja Maksymiliana I we Włoszech i Europie Środkowej

Słowa kluczowe:

Bona Sforza, dynastia
Jagiellonów,
królowe,
dyplomacja,
konflikt,
małżeństwo

Artykuł skupia się na okolicznościach, które przyczyniły się do zawarcia w 1517 roku dynastycznego małżeństwa Bony Sforzy z Mediolanu z polskim królem Zygmuntem I Starym. Analizuje upadek wpływów Sforzów i neapolitańskich Aragonów w obliczu roszczeń Walezjuszy i Habsburgów do supremacji na Półwyspie Apenińskim.

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie habsburskich manewrów dyplomatycznych, zmierzających do ustanowienia siostrzenicy Maksymiliana I królową Polski, w kontekście rywalizacji Habsburgów i Walezjuszy we Włoszech oraz dążenia Habsburgów do dominacji w Europie Środkowej, gdzie rzucili wyzwanie przedstawicielom dynastii Jagiellonów w Czechach i na Węgrzech oraz w Polsce i na Litwie. Artykuł wykaże, że zawarcie małżeństwa pomiędzy dziedziczką Sforzów i królem Polski zostało zainicjowane przez Maksymiliana I jako rozszerzenie przemyślanej i asertywnej polityki Habsburgów. Cele polityki habsburskiej obejmowały usunięcie głównego pretendenta do tronu Mediolanu i umieszczenie królowej przychyłnej Habsburgom na dworze Jagiellonów. Artykuł kończy się konkluzją, że małżeństwo to zostało wykorzystane przez Habsburgów jako narzędzie dynastyczne i polityczne w celu ograniczenia władzy i autorytetu dynastii Jagiellonów w Europie Środkowej.