In the sixteenth century, as a consequence of the increasing political, economic and cultural activity of the nobility, a so-called "republic of the nobility" (rzeczpospolita) was established as a political system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth under the reign of the last two monarchs of the Jagiellonian dynasty, Sigismund I (1506-1548) and Sigismund Augustus (1548-1572). The political ambitions of the nobility, however, resulted in a long conflict with the dynasty whose power they purposed to reduce. In this article, I would like to suggest that accusations of love magic in the Renaissance court of Poland should be perceived as instruments in the political struggle in which the subjects did not hesitate to damage the image of the monarchy by means of the personal attacks on the monarchs' private life.

Accusations of love magic have attracted little scholarly attention so far, or have been examined solely from a theoretical point of view.¹ My purpose is to investigate closely several cases of love magic in the courtly culture of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during the reign of the Jagiellonian dynasty rather than to contribute to the discussion about general theories of witchcraft and magic. The reconstruction of the core of the accusations is a hazardous undertaking, especially if we take into consideration that there were no formal legal proceedings against the supposed witches; they were slandered behind their backs and described in the pamphlets rather than formally accused. I do not attempt to probe the relevance of slander, since the accusations, true or not, implied further consequences: they created in turn social facts which afflicted the lives of the slandered persons and determined a historical tradition to such an extent that during the Second World War Polish soldiers attempted to destroy Bona Sforza's gravestone because they were convinced that she had been a poisoner.

Love magic accusation is not the only charge that can be found in the sources. Numerous remarks concerning Bona Sforza's magic power on her

husband and son are included into the correspondence of the Habsburg legates at the Jagiellonian court. The atmosphere of fear and suspicion made Sigismund Augustus believe that his mother Bona Sforza might have poisoned his wife, Barbara Radziwill, and what is more striking, he was afraid that Bona could poison even him. Hence, the problem of magic accusation is very complex and this article does not go beyond the boundaries of a particular aspect, love magic.

Illicito Amore Captus... Sigismund Augustus and Women Accused Of Love Magic: Three Case Studies

The most famous case of love magic accusation in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is that of Barbara Radziwill (ca.1520-1551), the daughter of George Radziwill, castellan of Wilno and great Lithuanian hetman, and Barbara Kola of Dalejowo. Barbara was married to Sigismund Augustus, the only son of Sigismund I and Bona Sforza (1494-1557). Her case is well documented for the campaign against her was conducted in the time when the culture of print was already well developed. Therefore, pamphlets hostile to her were widely spread not only in Poland and Lithuania, but also abroad.4


3. Afraid of the poison passing through the skin, Sigismund did not have the courage to meet with his mother without wearing gloves; Przezdziecki, Jagiellonki polskie, vol. 6, pp. 14-15; see also Listy oryginalne Zygmunta Augusta do Nikołaja Radziwiłła Czarnego [Original Letters of Sigismund Augustus to Nikolaus Radziwill the Black], ed. S. A. Lachowicz (Wilno: Glücksberg, 1842), pp. 32, 294.

4. Orzechowski mentions the pamphlets and woodcuts, which were distributed in Germany (obscenissimas et ignominiosissimas picturas). Although he could not see them (as he came back from Germany before the relation between Sigismund Augustus and Barbara Radziwill started), his information seems to be too precise to be just imaginary; J. Nowak Dłużewski, Okolicznościowa poezja polityczna w Polsce [Occasional Political Poetry in Poland] (Warszawa: PAX, 1966), vol. 3, p. 178. Probably in Poland the situation was even worse, because when Barbara decided to visit Great Poland, the main center of the opposition against her, Nikolaus the Black Radziwill worried that it would be necessary to take some special servants who would remove the pamphlets that he thought were stuck to her carriage. The influence of these pamphlets must have been quite great, as the adherents of the king's marriage urged punishing the writers of these works (Dyariusz sejmów piotrskowskiego r. 1548, in Scriptores rerum Polonicarum, ed. J. Szujski (Kraków: Jagiellonian Univ. Press, 1872), vol. 1, p. 167, M. Ballinski, Pamiętniki o królowej Barbarze [Diaries About Queen Barbara] (Warszawa: Glücksberg, 1837), vol. 1, p. 159; vol. 2, p. 8. The discussion concerning