Magiczny Kraków

Queen Bona Sforza and her culinary legacy

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Queen Bona Sforza and her impact on Polish culinary culture have become the stuff of legend.

In 1533, writer Stanisław Orzechowski wrote that Bona "brought us out from the time of wild old-fashioned gentry to the current culture of life and put us on par with the Italians in terms of sophistication and with the Greeks when it comes to science." However, the question remains what her real impact on Polish culinary arts was. Contrary to popular belief, Poles were familiar with a variety of vegetables even before Bona arrived to the country. Despite the fact that she is given credit for bringing *włoszczyzna* (literally: Italian stuff), a mix of vegetables used for soups to Poland, we probably owe it to the monks settling down in the country at that time.

However, Queen Bona definitely contributed to the popularity of citrus fruit. Purchases of citrus fruit are recorded for the first time in the royal accounts of Sigismund I the Old at the beginning of the 16th century where oranges were bought several times – either for supper or *ad coquinam*. In 1539 Sigismund wrote to King Ferdinand with a complaint in relation to a delivery of oranges that was held in Vienna: "to cure my illness, I use a type of apple called arancia (*poma quae vocant: arancia*, hence the Polish name *pomarańcza*), out of great consideration for my health she [Queen Bona – author's comment] recommended they bring this type of apple."

A famous culinary-themed anecdote from the time of Bona is a squabble about cheese. Elizabeth of Austria, the wife of Sigismund II Augustus, asked the steward of Queen Bona for Parmesan cheese. He gave it to her without asking for permission from his principal. It was easy to predict Bona's reaction –she was not fond of her daughter-in-law. The dispute about the cheese is just one proof that Bona did not approve of her sickly daughter-in-law. From the account of Giovanni Marsupino, a Habsburg envoy, we know that the king did not visit his wife at night and dined together with his mother. This difficult relationship came to an end with Elizabeth's premature death.

Sources:

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