

# The Renaissance Art of Murder



## Game manual



## The Renaissance Art of Murder

The LARP of intrigue, gossip and eloquence set during the reign of the last Jagiellons.

### Basic information about the game

#### Number of players:

6-10

#### Game time:

2.5-3 hours

#### Plot:

Bartolomeo Berecci, the architect of the Renaissance renovation of Wawel Castle, is dead. His body has been found on the main square in Kraków. The king is furious and wants to find the murderer at all costs. After a short investigation, he gathers a group of people who he believes may be responsible for Berecci's death. Locked in a castle chamber, they are forced to unravel the mysterious circumstances of the murder.

#### Topics:

history, rhetoric, argumentation, social inequalities.

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## Educational purposes

*The Renaissance Art of Murder* is a game that gives you the opportunity to understand certain aspects of the life of people from Kraków from centuries ago, get to know their mentality and values, all dressed up in conventions straight from crime novels. However, the task of the players is not to take on the role of detectives, but rather of orators who, using efficiently formulated arguments, will try to acquit themselves and shift the blame to others.

By using the LARP methodology (more below), the game allows you to take on the role of Renaissance characters and experience a unique adventure while taking care of the well-being of the players. Creating the world together and becoming part of it allows us not only to remember information better, but also to create an emotional bond with the subject being discussed.

By creating a safe space for them, gamers can develop soft skills such as communication, discussion, drawing conclusions, critical thinking and problem solving.

## Important information

To play this game you need to have materials like character sheets and gossips (see: *Game materials*). A room into which no one except the players and the facilitator will enter. Also, props or costumes may be useful.

The instructions describe how to facilitate the game step by step according to the scenario we have prepared. The way the game is played can, and at some points even should, be modified. Some segments are described in different versions, their selection depends on the profile of the group taking part in the game and the experience of the facilitator.



Game in Nausika Hub

## **Game plot**

One May morning in 1537, Bartolomeo Berecci, the court architect in charge of renovating the royal castle at Wawel Castle, was found stabbed to death in a corner of Kraków's Market Square. As soon as King Zygmunt I found out, he exploded with anger and ordered the murderer to be found.

People living in Kraków are stunned. Gossips spread around the city almost momentarily, even before the king's order. Everyone wonders who killed Berrecci and why?

It was impossible not to know and respect the distinguished architect. His buildings and sculptures caught the admiration of almost everyone.

But only a few people knew the architect well enough to have a motive that would allow the king to issue a verdict that satisfied him. Sigismund the Old ordered these people to be brought to his castle, heading to his castle all the suspects could once again admire the monumentality and richness of Berrecci's works!

## **A short description of the game**

*The Renaissance Art of Murder* is a LARP (live action role-playing) game based on intrigues between characters gathered in one room and the question: who killed the royal architect? As the characters are not detectives, but residents of Kraków with various activities, but not related to conducting investigations they can rely only on the testimony of others and the gossips spread by the castle staff.

The players' task is to talk to each other and build a convincing narrative that will make those gathered to focus their suspicions on someone else.

## Production - how to prepare the game?

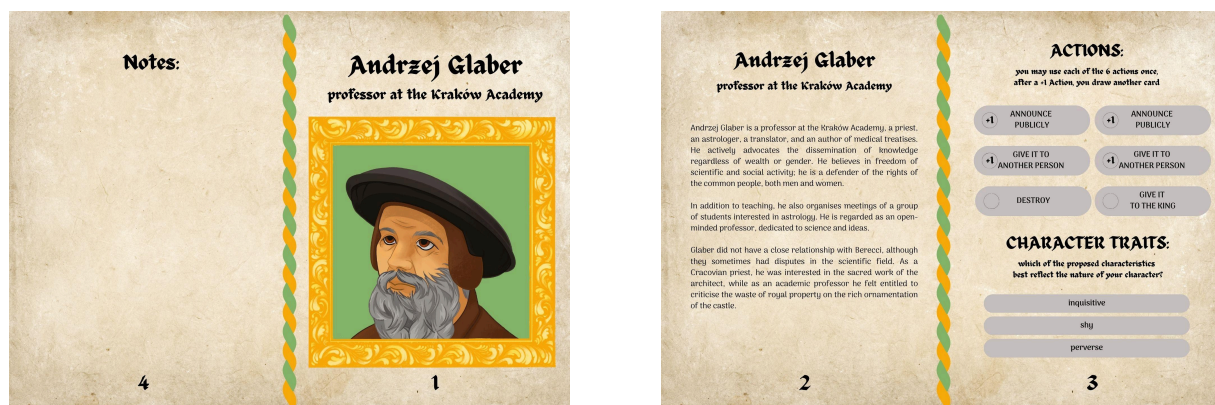
When designing Renaissance Crime Art, we wanted this game to be able to be played in the classroom with almost no preparation, just printed materials and an empty room. However, in order to provide the opportunity for greater involvement and deeper immersion for those playing, below are some elements with which to enhance the experience. We have written them in the form of specific instructions, but feel free to take them as loose inspiration. However, let's start with the essentials:

### Before the game

- Provide a spacious room
- Print out the necessary materials
- Read the instructions carefully, plan your work

### Game materials – printing

Character cards and gossip are required for the game. Print the cards double-sided in A4 format, we suggest printing the gossip in A5 format, single-sided, on harder paper.



The number of people playing determines the number of gossips present in the game. We have prepared 6 gossips for each character. If 7 people play your game, put only 7 sets of gossip into circulation, assigned to the characters chosen by the players.

At the start of the game, each character is given 2 gossips (it is important that they are not about themselves). Specific actions taken in the game make it possible for the player to draw more cards (also about their character). Gossips are selected from the position of the person in charge (more under Place).

Jan did not allow ordinary Cracovians to confession. Only a nobleman or a rich man had the chance to confess his sins to the bishop.

Rumour has it that Jan strongly criticised Berrecci's decision on how to finish the roof of the chapel commissioned by King Sigismund. According to him, gold alone does not emphasise the prestige of the monarch enough.

## **The person running the game**

The most important tasks of the facilitator are to run the workshop and take care of the game - controlling the time, issuing gossip, leading discussions, keeping an eye on the safety of the people playing.

Gossiping takes place during the first part of the game, when the players can talk freely. Discussion takes place during the second part of the game.

During the activities described above, the facilitator should also be in a role in order to maintain the atmosphere of the game (more on possible variations below).

The game can be played by one person, but we suggest that 2-3 people play the game.

1. leading the workshop and debriefing;
2. playing the role of an independent character;
3. a security person, whose job is to wait in another room, not far from the playing area, and, if necessary, to talk to a player who has encountered difficulties during the game. The mere presence of such a person gives a sense of security. It is often the case that no one reports to the safety person, which does not mean that they were not needed.

## **NPC**

Your role is also to impersonate characters, but you will not take part in the intrigue. You will play the role of a person working at the royal court, whose task is to oversee the deliberations of those gathered at Wawel Castle.

The primary role: a person who serves the king (this can be a clerk/female, a trusted lady of the court, a diplomat, a priest...). This is the person who represents the king, speaking on his behalf.

Additional role: impersonating the king - during the discussion. Works well with younger participants, not necessary with a coordinated group. Playing the king presents a greater acting challenge for the facilitator.

## **Place**

The game requires one spacious room that no one can enter during the game. It can be delicately decorated - we leave this matter without specific instructions, as the game will work well in a classroom as well as a room with tapestries on the walls. It is also a good idea to prepare a board or wall on which to hang gossip.

It is necessary to prepare a desk with gossip cards (divided into specific characters, with the text covered; so that the players can indicate who they want to find out more about, without being able to see the content of the cards) During the first part of the game, the facilitator should be close to this place to give out gossip cards.



Music is an additional element that allows those playing to get more into the character. During the test, we played period pieces without specific control or attribution to scenes. There can also be silence during the game.

## Costumes

Costumes are the element most associated with larps. Warriors in armour and foam swords sometimes even feature on the news. However, Renaissance Crime Art does not require specially designed costumes, symbolic elements suffice - an appropriate hat, a more elaborate dress, a black scarf on the head of a widow, etc. We wholeheartedly encourage you to either prepare or ask those playing to bring small items to make them feel like the character being played.



*Game in Collegium Maius.*

## **Game structure**

This segment summarises the steps of the whole experience in points. The idea is that the facilitator, having already read the whole manual, can use the structure of the game as a reminder of the next steps.

### **1. Introduction to the game [30 min]**

- What is a larp?
- What will the larp look like? Outline the structure of the game.
- Important information before the game starts
- Safety rules
- Historical background

### **2. Workshop [30 min]**

- Selection of character cards, getting into character
- Explanation of the game mechanics
- Time to go to the toilet and change into costumes if necessary

### **3. Gameplay [90-120 min]**

- The plot of the game

#### **PART I - Conversations between characters [30-50 min]**

- Speech by the King's messenger
- Time for conversation and exchange of gossip

#### **PART II - Royal court[30 min]**

- Discussion in the circle, accusations and defences
- Announcement of the murderer and epilogue

### **4. Summary [20-30 min]**

- Character exit - and exchange of experiences
- Reflection, feedback

## **Description of specific points**

We will now look at all the points listed above. The information below can be modified and adapted to suit your group, for example, experienced gamers do not need to be explained what a larp is.

### **Introduction to the game**

- **What is LARP?**

LARP (live action role-playing) is a type of role-playing game in which the bodies of the players are involved. They take on the role of a given character, about whom they learn the most important information from the character card. Everything that is not presented by the facilitator or is not included in the game materials (here: character cards or gossip) is subject to improvisation by the players. Their task is to take on the role of a character and act in accordance with the rules and logic of the world in which the game takes place.

- **What will this larp look like?**

The Renaissance Art of Crime is divided into an introduction to the game, a pre-game workshop, gameplay and a conclusion. The actual part, in which players take on the role of their chosen character, is divided into two parts: the first is based on conversations between characters and the exchange of gossip, the second on the royal court.

- **Important information before the game starts**

The game is set in 16th century Poland and therefore social inequalities and differences in gender positions are preserved. Some players may find possible exclusions, signs of anti-Semitism, xenophobia or misogyny difficult, so it is worth explaining where such inequalities come from and why it is important to bear them in mind. And to outline safety principles, as described below.

Women are assigned different social roles than men - playing a character with a particular gender indicates the character's status and abilities, linked to the information contained in the character sheet and gossip. Of course, there is nothing to prevent each person playing from personally choosing a character of any gender - not necessarily the one they identify with themselves.

- **Safety rules**

Renaissance Art of Crime is a role-play involving emotions. It deals with the death of a well-known scientist. It requires talking about the deceased with witnesses who are not always cooperative. Players may encounter slander and gossip, and will raise political and religious issues. During the course of the game, conflicts, arguments and misunderstandings may arise - which can lead to difficult emotions. It is therefore extremely important to follow some basic safety rules.

It is important to emphasise the larp convention, i.e. to draw the attention of the Play Person to the fact that they have created the characters: all conflicts happen between the fictional people in the game, not between the individual individuals playing the role.

If, for any reason, a Play Person feels unable to participate in the game, they should be able to leave the room and rest. He or she should be able to talk to the Safety Person - a person who is not participating in the game but is in close proximity. Her role is to listen and to look after her physical wellbeing, not to give advice. This role should not be confused with therapy. The person who has interrupted the game can return to it at any time.

During gameplay, the Person in Charge and all Players should respect each other's boundaries so that everyone can feel comfortable. Therefore, the other persons should not be touched without their express permission. It is permissible to enter into conflicts, but remember to be respectful of the other person.

In a borderline situation, when someone is deeply hurt (mentally or physically) there is a slogan 'stop the game', which when uttered loudly interrupts the game, and the attention of the Leader should be directed to the person who uttered these words. If the problem is solvable, once mitigated, the game can continue; however, if the event makes it impossible to continue the game, it should be ended and the game should proceed to the Summary.

- **Historical background**

Presenting the historical background is up to the facilitator. One option is to send out information to those playing in advance. Historical knowledge can also be presented during the introduction to the game - to the extent that it suits the needs and abilities of the group.

The game is not a historical reenactment, so detailed knowledge is not necessary. Familiarisation with the historical background serves the purpose of understanding the social, political and cultural situation of the time in which the game will be played. The historical background determines the relationship between the characters and the specific body of knowledge.

*The 16th century is called the "Golden Age" in Poland - indeed, it was a fortunate time for the country on the Vistula River. In 1466, after the victorious Thirteen Years' War, the power of the Teutonic Order was broken and Poland regained access to the Baltic Sea. This allowed trade to increase, and cities grew richer and larger. Also Kraków, the capital of the kingdom and the residence of the kings, being at the crossroads of trade routes, attracted merchants, who were also followed by artists and architects from many countries. At the end of the 15th century, the Nuremberg sculptor Wit Stwosz settled here and made the magnificent altarpiece in St. Mary's Church, the largest Gothic altarpiece in Europe, between 1477 and 1489. It was, in a way, the culmination of the already ending Middle Ages.*

*King Zygmunt I of the Jagiellonian dynasty, raised by the Italian poet and diplomat Philip Callimachus, was enamored of the ideas of the Renaissance - the revival of the culture of ancient Rome. He took as his wife the Italian Bona Sforza, Duchess of Bari, who turned out to be a skilled but ruthless politician. Also in the sphere of architecture, Zygmunt was fond of Italian designs and wanted to change the face of the still medieval castle - he hired Florentine Bartolomeo Berecci to rebuild the royal castle at Wawel. It was he who designed, among other things, the Zygmunt Chapel.*

*In the roman republic, the Polish nobility found its ideal political model. It sought to reduce the powers of the king and magnates and increase its own. The Sejm - the Polish parliament - developed. Successive rulers, in order to obtain the means to carry out their policies, had to negotiate with the nobility and grant them increasingly broader privileges, also at the expense of the rights of the townsfolk and peasants. The townsfolk, for example, were not allowed to acquire landed property. Serfdom was gradually increased for peasants.*

*Good conditions for life and development were found in Poland by the Jewish community, which was under the protection of the king, but also subject to various restrictions. Jews were mainly engaged in trade and money lending. Sometimes they faced hostility from the Christian population. In 1494, after a fire in Kraków, the Jews were accused of causing it and were forced to resettle in the neighboring city of Kazimierz.*

*The University of Kraków played a major role in cultural and intellectual development. Founded in 1364, it blossomed into one of the best universities in the 15th century. In 1491-95 Nicolaus Copernicus, later the founder of the heliocentric theory, was educated here. In those days, more than half of the students were foreigners. The university was affiliated with the Church, the professors were mostly priests, and only Christians were allowed to study, and only male students.*

*During this golden era, however, black clouds were already beginning to appear on the horizon around Poland. In 1526, Zygmunt's nephew Ludwig Jagiellon, king of Bohemia and Hungary, was killed in the battle of Mohacz against the Turks. Turkey occupied most of Hungary, and the Habsburgs - a rival dynasty to the Jagiellonians, holding the title of Roman emperors of the German nation - took power in the rest and in Bohemia. In 1517 Martin Luther began the Reformation movement - seeking to renew the Church. Religious disputes broke out, in some places taking bloody forms, but in Poland in this early period managed to maintain peace and relative religious tolerance. The last Teutonic master in Prussia, Albrecht Hohenzollern, embraced Lutheranism and paid the fief homage to King Zygmunt in 1525. Still, he schemed to increase his position and throw off Polish supremacy.*



## Workshop

- **Selection of character cards, getting into character**

Once the character cards have been selected, people playing should have a few minutes to review the information about their character. It is then useful to carry out the game.

As the Leader, ask everyone to line up in a circle and briefly introduce their characters: in the first person, including their name, occupation and selected additional information from the card. When you have finished, ask everyone to repeat their name again. Then grab an object of your choice (ball, ball, etc.) and throw it to one of the people, repeating their name. Each character should receive the object at least once and pass it to another person.

Don't worry about the relationships between the players. In the royal court, hardly any of the characters mentioned would have a closer relationship with each other as they come from different social groups. If you wish, you can encourage the players to talk about possible relationships between their characters at their leisure.

- **Explanation of the game mechanics**

Renaissance crime plays rely on conversations between characters, but it is gossip that is responsible for changing the dynamic and introducing new information.

A gossip is both a physical card and information. People who play the game remember the content of a card after reading it, even if they pass the card on. Gossips are not knowledge but hearsay; their appearance in the game is an event to which players are expected to react, a contribution to improvising scenes and arguments for discussion.

Actions marked on the character cards are associated with gossips. Below we describe the action of each of them. There are four different actions on the cards, two of which appear twice.

- Pass on to another person - involves passing on the gossip in question to another person. Both the person receiving the card and the person passing it on can benefit from its content during the game. Passing on is a metaphorical sharing of information with one person. It can be used to work together to protect each other and to shift the accusation jointly to a chosen character
- Announce publicly - the gossip is read out loud and hung on the wall. The aim of this action is to make the information known to all players
- Destroy - the gossip is no longer in play. The person playing may tear up the gossip or give it to the person in charge. The given information is not shared with other characters.
- Pass to the king - a gossip passed to the king is information passed directly to the ruler - he, coming to court, will know of the content contained therein. It acts as a voice pointing out the guilty party - however, the people playing should not know about it (more on this in the description of the king's court).

## Highlights of the gossips:

- are not facts
- each gossip can be referred to more than once
- a gossip passed on to the king is an additional voice pointing to the murderer (of which only the person in charge knows)

## Gameplay

### • The plot of the game

One May morning in 1537, Bartolomeo Berecci, the court architect in charge of renovating the royal castle at Wawel Castle, was found stabbed to death in a corner of Kraków's Market Square. As soon as King Zygmunt I found out, he exploded with anger and ordered the murderer to be found.

People living in Kraków are stunned. Gossips spread around the city almost momentarily, even before the king's order. Everyone wonders who killed Berrecci and why?

It was impossible not to know and respect the distinguished architect. His buildings and sculptures caught the admiration of almost everyone.

But only a few people knew the architect well enough to have a motive that would allow the king to issue a verdict that satisfied him. Zygmunt I ordered these people to be brought to his castle, heading to his castle all the suspects could once again admire the monumentality and richness of Berrecci's works!

### • PART I - Conversations between characters

The messenger's speech - a reminder of the purpose of the visit to the royal castle

His Majesty the King orders those assembled in this hall to hold discussions in order to decide who is guilty of the murder of the King's architect. The King considers it a fact that one of you is guilty.

The discussions will be followed by a court and the passing of sentence, by the King, of course. Shortly after your arguments and possible defence are known. Consider who to accuse and how to defend yourselves. Good luck!

During this part of the game, characters can loosely talk to each other. They can also perform actions and select further gossip cards.

The end of the conversations between the characters will occur when the leader announces the end and invites you to meet the king. It is a good idea to let the players know how long the part will last approximately: both at the beginning and during the game.

- **PART II - Royal court**

In this part, the players should gather in one place, e.g. sit on chairs in a circle. The person in charge, playing the role of an NPC of his choice (the king or the king's messenger, as the king could not come in person, however), leads the conversation. First, everyone is allowed to make an introductory speech (about a minute per person) in which they accuse someone or defend their name. Depending on the time, a round of replies to the accusations can also be introduced. The facilitator then reads out the gossip given to the king and the people concerned can defend themselves (one minute per person).

If you have more time available, you can allow one more round of defensive/accusatory speeches. The time given in brackets is indicative. The length of the response depends on the group and your ability.

Then it is time for the vote: each character writes the name of the person they indicate as the murderer on a small card. Each card represents one vote. Alternatively, a show of hands may be held or the characters may be asked in turn to say the name of the person they are voting for. The person in charge counts the votes and adds the gossip that has been given to the king. If the result is not clear (for example, there was a tie), the person in charge makes the final decision and names the guilty party.

The royal court ends with the announcement of the murderer and the reading of the epilogue - the further fate of the person who has been convicted. Epilogues can be found on the last pages of the instructions.

## **Summary**

- **Character exit - and exchange of experience**

Take off the costumes, put away the props. Each person playing can take it in turns to say their real name, thus symbolically cutting themselves off from their character.

Share the experience! Circle of sharing - everyone should briefly describe their experience, talk about their emotions in 2-3 sentences. The idea is not to recite the behaviour in question, but to name the emotions that arose during the game.

- **Reflection, feedback**

This is the time to construct longer reflection statements. What did you enjoy? Favourite moment? What did you remember? What caught your attention? What was most difficult?

Within this section, you can use the following prompts, transforming the game into a learning experience.

## How to turn play into knowledge?

Here are sample questions to ask during the debriefing:

1. Would your characters have an equal chance during such a trial? (consider gender, social stratum, profession)
2. As part of the gameplay, you voted on who was at fault, but plot-wise it was the king who decided who was at fault. Do you think such a system is fair? How does it compare to modern courts?
3. What arguments were most convincing to you? Give examples. Why were these the most convincing?
4. Which characters would most likely have been held accountable in XVIth century reality? And which would be left without any suspicion?
5. How could the trial in which your characters took part have been made fairer? What trait gave you the best chance of not being found guilty?
6. What seemed to you to be modernized in your play? What could not happen, what dialogues could not take place in Renaissance realities?



*The first seminar of Time Dive in Kraków on which Renaissance Art of Murder was firstly designed.*

## **Epilogues**

### **Jan Chojeński**

When King Zygmunt I learned about Chojeński's crime, he called a meeting of high-ranking people of the Catholic Church. It was decided to take away John's title of bishop and transfer him to another position in a small village in northern Poland. The new position did not suit the priest and, due to his possessive nature, he gained many enemies, thanks to whom he never returned to the honorable role of bishop. He probably died many years later as a humble priest.

### **Seweryn Boner II**

King Zygmunt I did not expect that his faithful servant could turn out to be a killer. But he had to punish him. So he sentenced him to exile from the city. Seweryn's family, associated with the Habsburg dynasty, did not believe Boner was guilty and tried to publicize the king's decision as a political action that harmed the good name of the family. In addition, she demanded the return of gold belonging to Seweryn and compensation for investments that did not have time to pay off - it was a difficult time for the royal treasury.

### **Jakub Perec**

When he was charged with murder, he fled with all his wealth to Italy. He lost his license and his good name in the world of book dealers. He found himself in a small Jewish community where he led a long, peaceful life focused on serving people and strictly observing religious commandments. All his possessions became royal property. Without his work, the Academy did not receive the latest publications for many years. Students were particularly sad about their lost source of access to popular literature.

### **Mikołaj Castiglione**

When he was charged with murder, he fled to Italy to spread the word about the unjust and barbaric trial that took place in Poland. He turned to high-ranking bishops with a complaint and a request for acquittal, and the information even reached the Pope. Italian clergy supported Mikołaj, which harmed Polish politics in international public opinion.

### **Andrzej Glaber**

The angry King Zygmunt I sentenced Andrzej Glaber to death by hanging. The university stood up for its professor, but the punishment was not withdrawn. The rector only managed to convince the king to be less cruel and not sentence one of the best academicians to death in torture, which is why Glaber was beheaded - which was considered a more humane punishment. Just before the execution, the academician gave a speech in which he swore by God that he was innocent and thus enraged the gathered crowd of onlookers to start a rebellion against the king.



### **Francesca San Savino**

The condemned Francesca counted on the help of Queen Bona Sforza, her friend. However, the queen did not respond to her requests, not wanting to go against her husband's will. However, the punishment was mild: Francesca was sent back to Italy. She lived with her husband in Milan, where she led a modest life, taking care of the house and raising a child born shortly thereafter. She was never heard of in Kraków..

### **Dorota Czarnowoyska**

King Zygmunt I showed no mercy towards Dorota, who was accused of murdering her husband. He sentenced her to death. Dorota, fearing the form of execution, the preceding torture and the shame awaiting her, decided to commit suicide. She set her tenement house on fire, dying with her daughters in the flames. Just before her death, she was heard shouting that she was innocent, so God would forgive her this sin. The fire covered a large part of the city, destroying many wooden buildings in the neighborhood.

### **Jadwiga Birschenke**

Jadwiga, accused of Berecci's murder, denied her guilt. She presented documents in which Berecci confirmed that she had repaid the debt, so she had no reason to murder the architect. The townspeople believed her, defending one of their favorite innkeepers. The king remained adamant, but decided to lessen the punishment: he sentenced the woman to have her arm cut off. Jadwiga thus preserved her life, but was marked for the rest of her days as a criminal. Her inn became infamous because visitors saw her as a condemned woman, disbelieving the local gossips of her innocence. Only regular guests and the woman's faithful friends crossed the threshold of the temple.

### **Regina Bogusław**

Sentencing to death the respected abbess of such an important order would cause too much scandal. Therefore, King Zygmunt I decided only to deprive Regina of the role of prioress and the ability to take care of the sick. He ordered her to remain in the monastery for life, thereby condemning her to proscription - the loss of subjectivity in the light of the law and the social system. Regina officially declared to the nuns that she was innocent, but humbly accepted the punishment and devoted herself to prayer in the privacy of the monastery.

### **Joanna Maciejewska**

When King Zygmunt I made it public that Sister Joanna was guilty of Berecci's murder, her unsympathetic courtiers joined in the accusation, accusing her of impious behavior and casting spells on men. The scale of public dissatisfaction and the desire to convict the guilty was so great that a public execution took place a week after the verdict was announced. Joanna was publicly burned at the stake, which was quite a rare but spectacular punishment. Supposedly, when the woman climbed the stake, she publicly proclaimed her innocence, but then remained silent. There was no pain visible on her face, so she was hailed as a saint by witnesses.