Family Structure in Early Modern Scotland: How does written correspondence reveal the interpersonal relationships of aristocratic families in the 17th and 18th centuries?

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“Archibald came here / this day he looks very well on it so all your son / except Basile are here now & I wish some of them / were wt you for any good they do here & I have repented / often the bringing John here”

-Duke of Hamilton to Duchess of Hamilton 23 Jan 1693
GD 406/1/7422

Duchess Anne Hamilton

Duchess Anne Hamilton (1631-1716) held a position of power within her family unknown to most women at the time, having legally inheriting her family’s titles. Her status as the head of the family is revealed through private correspondence where she exhibits influence in economic, social, and political affairs.

Intimate Lives

- This excerpt reveals a very intimate look into Anne Hamilton’s marriage.
- In the above letter, Anne’s husband William writes to her on economic concerns, political matters, and private family happenings.
- The hierarchy within their marriage is apparent: Anne’s rank gives her final say.

Authority and Correspondence

The above letter is just one example of the cipher that was used between Anne and William to convey sensitive information. Her authority was communicated to her husband (as in the above letter), as well as her children and in-laws. Often, in correspondence with her children she would exert power through sociopolitical affairs.