

Epistolary Networks: Information, News and Practical Knowledge  
in the Correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz Sisters  
from Early Seventeenth-Century Central Europe

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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## Abstract

The dissertation focuses on written communication and information exchange among close-kin elite noblewomen in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy, using the extensive and previously unexplored bilingual (German and Czech) letter collection of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters: Katharina Kurzbach (c.1570–1637), Maria Magdalena Tržzka (c.1570–1633), Sabina Solms (1584–1623) and Eva Poppel Lobkowitz Countess of Batthyány (c.1590–1640). This thesis painstakingly reconstructs what we can know of the lives of these sisters and conducts a paleographic close reading of their letters. It explores the practical aspects of letter delivery, the formal features of letter writing, and the written transmission of political news, secret messages, and practical medical knowledge in the early modern period. This study demonstrates that the complexities of the social, personal, and communicative dynamics among high-ranking female relatives can only be comprehended when one considers the interplay between the epistolary content, its material presentation on the page and the societal realities of the letter writers. The letters demonstrate how social and emotional disparities between the sisters both influenced the content and material formats of their ongoing written conversations and the degree of agency they could exercise. This thesis argues that the personalities, choices, and subsequent failures and successes of the sisters' husbands largely determined the opportunities, limitations, and range of actions the Poppel Lobkowitz women could undertake on behalf of their families. While literacy granted these women the ability to communicate their experiences and daily pursuits through writing, their personal autonomy and agency was limited by the constraints imposed by the hierarchical structures and prevailing values of early modern society.

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## **Abbreviations**

MNL Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár (National Archive of Hungary)

DWB Deutsches Wörterbuch of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

NDB Neue Deutsche Biographie

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate my work to my late professors, Dr. László Katus, who instilled in me a passion for history and guided me toward the study of women's history, and Dr. Vera Zimányi, who taught me the skills of paleography and the importance of languages for historians.

## Preface

### *The Batthyány family archive*

The seventeenth-century letters of the Bohemian relatives of Eva Poppel Lobkowitz Countess of Batthyány were found in the private correspondence of the Batthyány family, housed today in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest. These letters, written in German and Czech, have proved to be a treasure trove, as they have until now not yet received any scholarly attention. From the sixteenth to twentieth centuries, the Batthyány family was one of the most prominent Hungarian noble families, with members holding high political positions and owning estates in Western Hungary and the region that is known as Burgenland, Austria. Until the mid-twentieth century, the family's private archive was located in the town of Körmend in western Hungary. Due to its secluded location at the Austrian border and restricted access to the public until the twentieth century, the archive preserved the most substantial collection of historical documents before the 1800s. In the early 1900s, the archivist Sándor Takáts, the first biographer of Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, who was married to Ferenc (II) Batthyány, was among the few granted permission to conduct research in the Batthyány's archive. Takáts had access to the intact sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries missive collection, including those from Eva Poppel's Bohemian relatives. During the military plundering in Körmend in the spring of 1945, the family library and archive were destroyed, causing irreparable damage to its holdings. After the war, the remaining archive was transferred to Budapest, where it suffered further losses in the fire at the National Archive building in 1956. Even before 1945, the pre-1800 correspondence collection had been organized in alphabetical order according to letter writers by the archivist Béla Iványi. Taking into account the losses, Iványi's register

was amended in the 1950s under the direction of Vera Zimányi. This provides the basis of the finding aide to the Batthyány's early modern family correspondence, which consists of around 55 000 letters, and is available online at the Hungarian National Archives website. The letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters are part of the P1314 holding of the National Archive of Hungary (MNL P1314) and will be referred to by their respective number.

### *Personal and geographical names*

Personal names and names of geographical locations appear in various languages and spellings in German, Czech, Hungarian and Latin primary sources and secondary literature. To maintain consistency in the present thesis, I will refer to the Poppel Lobkowitz family members as they most often appear in the letters; for the Bohemian nobility, I will use the Czech form of their names, while I will refer to the Austrian and German nobility in German and the Hungarian nobility in Hungarian. For the entire family, I will use their full last name, i.e., Poppel Lobkowitz, while I will refer to individual family members only as Poppel, the name of the family's branch. While the Poppel Lobkowitz family and the sisters' families were all entitled to the use 'von' ('z') for their family names, indicating their noble lineage, I will also refer to them without the nobiliary particle. Geographical locations, including towns and estates in Bohemia, Austria and Hungary, will be referred to by their Czech, German and Hungarian names, respectively. Names of major cities and territories will be given in English.

## INTRODUCTION

The present dissertation focuses on written communication and information exchange among close-kin elite noblewomen from the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. The research is based on the extensive, and previously unexplored, bilingual letter collection of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, written in German and Czech between 1606 and 1636. Based on a complex analysis of manuscript letters, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of letter-writing practices among elite female relatives and how they communicated and exchanged political news, secret messages and medical knowledge over great distances between Bohemia, Lower Austria and western Hungary. This investigation also allows us to better comprehend the experiences, as well as the possibilities and scope of activities, in which these early modern elite Central European women engaged.

This study is especially significant because of the breadth and uniqueness of its source base as well as the larger insights into the culture of early modern news networks, letter-writing and the lives of the lesser aristocracy in the early-seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy it provides. While the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters were born and married into the leading political elite of the Habsburg lands, these women were not from those royal or princely families about whom we know most. These letters are also exceptional in that they were, with few exceptions, addressed to female family members rather than male relatives or authorities. The letters between the sisters, all (with only one exception) written in German and Czech, also offer a window into the cross-cultural and

multi-lingual world of elite women in the decades before and during the Thirty Years' War, a time of great political and confessional turmoil. Through a close reading, analysis and contextualization of the sisters' fragmentary letter exchange, the study aims to expand our knowledge about female literacy and letter-writing practices and explore how women used language and their own hand as a medium to transfer political, business and private information. Finally, by studying this particular corpus of noblewomen's personal documents, I hope to expand on how marriage and the success or failure of husbands ultimately defined the extent of early modern noblewomen's autonomy and how social and marital status shaped siblings' relations, their epistolary networks and modes of communication in early modern Central Europe.

***Political and cultural context: Noblewomen in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Central Europe***

The early modern Habsburg Monarchy, comprised of the Habsburg hereditary lands (largely equivalent to present-day Austria) and the Kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary, was a multiethnic state governed by the Habsburgs and an upper nobility interconnected through family ties. Since the mid-sixteenth century, cross-national marriages became one of the most important means of integrating the culturally and linguistically diverse Austrian, Czech and Hungarian nobility into a unified supranational political elite.<sup>1</sup> In this process, elite women played a central role in building alliances,

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<sup>1</sup> Géza Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 86–88; András Koltai, "Dienste, Damen, Karriere. Die Familie Batthyány und der Kaiserhof im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert," in *Die weltliche und kirchliche Elite aus dem Königreich Böhmen und Königreich Ungarn am Wiener Kaiserhof im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Anna Fundarková, et al. (Vienna: Institut für Ungarische Geschichtsforschung in Wien, 2013), 303–336.

maintaining connections and furthering the social elevation of their families.<sup>2</sup> The histories of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters illustrate how daughters of the high nobility left their birth families to become members of a new family by marriage, thereby weaving the noble houses into an increasingly intricate web of families and networks. Female siblings from the same noble household established new or strengthened existing connections between the upper elite of the Habsburg lands. Through their dowry or inheritance, they contributed to acquiring and expanding the land holdings of their families, which were inseparably linked to noble identity and its accompanying privileges and responsibilities. The land that women brought into the marriage promoted social advancement and provided income for the husband's family.<sup>3</sup> However, not every marriage was a success and, as the history of the Poppel Lobkowitz family shows, even a wealthy bride could not always save a family from failure.

The four sisters Katharina (before 1570–c.1637), Maria Magdalena (c.1570–1633), Sabina (1583–1623) and Eva (c.1590–1640) were daughters of the Bohemian nobleman Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz (1537–1609) and Maria Magdalena von Salm-Neuburg (1548–1607). Their marriages into prominent noble houses of the Batthyánys, Trčkas, Solms and Kurzbachs demonstrate elite women's importance in the cross-cultural integration of the Protestant nobility in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. Their husbands belonged to the highest ranks of the Hungarian,

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<sup>2</sup> The most illustrious example of women's instrumental roles in a family's network building and success is the Habsburg family, which ascended to become the foremost Central European power through a clever marriage policy; see, for instance, Joseph F. Patrouch, "“Bella gerant alii”: Laodamia's, Sisters, Habsburg Brides: Leaving Home for the Sake of the House," in *Early Modern Habsburg Women: Transnational Contexts, Cultural Conflicts, Dynastic Continuities*, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Maria Galli Stampino (London: Routledge, 2013), 25–38.

<sup>3</sup> Ronald G. Asch, *Europäischer Adel in der frühen Neuzeit. Eine Einführung* (Köln: Böhlau, 2008) and Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre. Die Adelige Frau in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), 159–164.

Czech, Austrian/German and Silesian elite but remained outside the Habsburg court's inner political circle. Traces of these women can be found in extant documents linked to their male relatives. In this regard, noble families' rank, wealth and political success in accumulating and preserving many legal and personal papers allowed their female members to remain more visible than those from more modest backgrounds, even if what we know about the Poppel Lobkowitz women is drawn mainly from the documents created to capture the life experiences of their husbands.

Thus, we know more about Eva and Maria Magdalena, whose husbands, the Hungarian Ferenc Batthyány and the Bohemian Jan Rudolf Trčka, were well-known for their rank, wealth and military leadership and left behind a significant corpus of private documents, providing substantial source material for historians today.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Sabina and Katharina, the wives of the ambitious but less successful German Count Philipp Solms and the impoverished Silesian nobleman Heinrich Kurzbach, respectively, have almost wholly escaped historical attention since their family archive did not survive the centuries, and thus their stories have sunk into oblivion.<sup>5</sup> The historical amnesia is, however, not complete. Family genealogies compiled by later generations preserved their

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<sup>4</sup> For Eva Poppel Lobkowitz and the Batthyány family, see Sándor Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja* [The Foster Mother of Miklós Zrínyi] (Budapest: Franklin, 1917) and "Batthyányné Lobkovitz Éva," in *Régi Magyar Nagyasszonyok* [Great Hungarian Ladies of the Past], ed. Pál Réz (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1983 [1914]), 247-286; Katalin Kincses, ed., *Ím küntem én orvosságot.* 'Lobkowitz Poppel Éva levelezése. 1622-1640' ['Here I have sent you medicine,' The Correspondence of Éva Poppel Lobkowitz] (Budapest: ELTE, 1993) and András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám. Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén* [Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Magnate and His Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century] (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012). On Maria Magdalena and the Trčka family, see František Hrubý, "Marie Mandalena Trčková roz. z Lobkovic," in *Královný, kněžny a velké ženy české* (Prague, 1940), 258-63 and Jaroslav Šůla, "Dva kšafy Jana Rudolfa Trčky z Lípy" [Two Testaments of Jan Rudolf Trčka of Lipa], *Stopami dějin Náchodska sborník Státního archivu Náchod*, 5 (1999): 159-169.

<sup>5</sup> About the Solms family see Friedrich Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie des Hauses Solms-Lich," *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 9 (1959): 66-119 and Rudolf zu Solms Lich, *Geschichte des Grafen-und Fürstenhauses Solms*. (Adelmann, 1865). For Katharina Kurzbach and the Kurzbach family, see Konrad, Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens* 38 (1904): 234-275.

names as wives and mothers together with older scholarly works exploring the once-intact early modern family archives in Central Europe. The letters enable the biographies of these women to be reconstructed.

The sister's biographies also provide valuable insight into the realms of action available to elite women. Katalin Péter has argued that within the prevailing norms that governed early modern society, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were particularly favourable for women to achieve a certain degree of independence.<sup>6</sup> In this context, two significant factors influenced the life of women and the extent of their agency: the Reformation and the persistent state of warfare in the region. Luther's teaching of the companionship of husband and wife loosened medieval conceptions of patriarchal hierarchical authority in the family by stressing marital companionship and the equal status of husband and wife.<sup>7</sup> With its focus on the Bible, Protestantism also emphasized equality between the sexes in religious education and supported young women to learn how to read and write.<sup>8</sup> While in the sixteenth century, noblewomen usually learned the alphabet as adults, by the turn of the seventeenth century, daughters of elite families were educated in small groups under the supervision of the Hausmutter (mistress of the noble household). The curriculum was tailored to encompass the duties and expectations placed

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<sup>6</sup> Katalin Péter, *Magánélet a régi Magyarországon* [Private Life in Old Hungary] (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2012), 17.

<sup>7</sup> The patriarchy that organized early modern society was not based on the oppression of women by men, as some feminist views on history claim—but rather on the traditional fatherly authority of the head of the family over his household, which included both men and women. Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled. Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and Bob Pierik, "Patriarchal Power as Conceptual Tool for Gender History," *Rethinking History* 26, no. 1 (2022): 71–92.

<sup>8</sup> Sigrid Westphal, "Reformatörisehe Bildungskonzepte für Mädchen und Frauen—Theorie und Praxis," in *Geschichte der Mädchen und Frauenbildung*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Claudia Opetz (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1996), 1:135–151.

upon women. They learned how to manage a household, read religious literature, prayers and psalms and acquire basic writing skills.<sup>9</sup>

The ability to read and write had practical consequences for women during the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when ongoing wars inside and at the eastern borders of the Habsburg Monarchy increased noble women's economic responsibilities. While their husbands were occupied by state affairs at the royal and imperial court in Prague or Vienna or engaged in battles on the battlefield, their wives put their literacy skills to use to oversee the administration and day-to-day running of family estates, supervised building constructions and managed family and business correspondence.<sup>10</sup> Examples from sixteenth-century Hungary show that noblemen belonging to the leading political elite not only allowed but encouraged their wives to acquire literacy skills. In the 1540s, Orsolya Kanizsai learned the alphabet after she had become wife of the Hungarian Palatine Tamás Nádasdy. Similarly, Erzsébet Czobor was illiterate at the time of her marriage and was thought how to read and write by her Lutheran husband, Count György Thurzó, one of the richest magnates in late sixteenth-century Hungary.<sup>11</sup>

For prominent noblemen, like Nádasdy, who sympathised with Reformation ideas, or Thurzó, a devout Lutheran, it was important that their wives could read the

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<sup>9</sup> About the education of young girls at the Batthyány court, see the introductory essay by Katalin Kincses, "Liktárium–patika–füveskönyv–fürdőház [Electuary, Apothecary, Herbarium, Bathhouse]" in *Lobkowitz Poppel Éva levelezése*, 22-23.

<sup>10</sup> Tünde Lengyel, "Esettanulmány a kora újkori női műveltség kérdéséhez. Elvárások, lehetőségek, határok" [A Case Study to the Questions of Early Modern Female Literacy. Expectations, Possibilities and Limitations], *Századok* 153, no. 2 (2019): 235–250.

<sup>11</sup> The level of elite women's literacy in the Central European region varied greatly. In Hungary, it was still not uncommon in the mid-seventeenth century that elite noblewomen had limited literacy skills. Women from the lower nobility did not become literate until the eighteenth century. See István György Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 123–130.

scriptures, psalms and prayers and thus participate in the literate culture of Protestant piety. While Palatine Thurzó may have justified his actions on Protestant notions of promoting the reading of scripture, teaching his wife the alphabet had practical considerations, too. Literacy allowed elite women to exercise considerable agency on behalf of their husbands, who relied on their wives' assistance in estate management and business when they were away. Letters of elite women, like Erzsébet Czobor or Eva Poppel, survived most abundantly from the period when they became widows and had the most freedom to act independently in matters such as managing estates, settling legal transactions, making decisions about their children's education and marriage partners as well as acting as patrons of church and culture.<sup>12</sup> However, noblewomen who were consigned to the legal guidance of their husbands or other male relatives also had opportunities, albeit to varying degrees, to mediate, influence and manoeuvre within the constraints of a social system that privileged men.<sup>13</sup>

The research into the correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters not only fine-tunes the narratives of patriarchy but also provides a more precise picture of our understanding of women's agency in the early seventeenth century. This much-discussed term has often been used broadly to juxtapose contemporary gender roles and emphasise

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<sup>12</sup> Lengyel, "Esettanulmány," 242–243 and Kincses, "Liktárium, patika, füveskönyv, fürdőház," 13–87.

<sup>13</sup> Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *The Historical Journal* 32, no. 4 (1989): 817–841. See a selective list of literature on early modern widowhood from the past thirty years: Robert J. Kalas, "The Noble Widow's Place in the Patriarchal Household: The Life and Career of Jeanne de Gontault," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, no. 3 (1993): 519–539; Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1999), Britta Juliane Kruse, "Adelige Witwen im Netz frühneuzeitlicher Verhaltensdiskurse. Standesgrenzen und Aktionsradien," in *Zwischen Thronsaal und Frawenzimmer. Handlungsfelder pommerischer Fürstinnen um 1600*, ed. Dirk Schleinert and Monika Schneikart (Köln: Böhlau, 2017), 37–64; Martina Schattkowsky, ed., *Witwenschaft in der frühen Neuzeit: fürstliche und adelige Witwen zwischen Fremd- und Selbstbestimmung* (Leipzig: 2003). For the Hungarian context, see Gabriella Erdélyi, ed., *Özvegyek és árvák a régi Magyarországon, 1550–1940* [Widows and Orphans in Old Hungary, 1550–1940] (Budapest, MTA BTK TTI, 2020).

women's spheres of independence in early modern society.<sup>14</sup> However, the biographies and correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz women reveal that their agency aligned more with the original meaning of the word, i.e., in their role of carrying out actions on behalf of others. In this sense, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' actions were less about their own independent choices and more about acting in support of their families with their husbands' approval and encouragement.

The sphere of actions and identity for both men and women was primarily defined by family relationships. As Heide Wunder has pointed out, cooperation rather than competition characterized relationships between men and women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, overriding notions of hierarchical gender roles.<sup>15</sup> The letters and histories of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters validate this perspective. Rather than working against the patriarchal system, these women navigated the system within their traditional roles as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters. They often acted as agents on behalf of their husbands, buying and selling land, arranging secret diplomatic meetings and cooperating with them when medical emergencies arose.

Noblewomen's agency was, moreover, limited. Even though early modern couples were perceived as equals before God, the final decision on what their wives could or could not do still rested with their husbands. Ferenc Batthyány, who cherished tender feelings towards his wife throughout his life, was strict about with whom she

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of women's agency in these discussions is often associated with notions of freedom and choice, which are much cherished values of our modern society, but which can be only applied with caution in different temporal, social and geographical contexts. For a recent discussion on the topic, see Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, ed., *Challenging Women's Agency and Activism in the Early Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Heide Wunder, *Er ist die Sonne, sie ist der Mond. Frauen in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 262–268. See also Ulinka Rublack, ed. *Gender in Early Modern German History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5

could socialize. As the widow Eva Poppel explained in a letter to her son Ádám, Ferenc Batthyány was convinced that Prague society, with its festivities and affluent lifestyle, would be harmful to his wife and, therefore, did not allow her to travel to Bohemia.<sup>16</sup> Ferenc also overrode Eva's preferences when selecting a midwife for her, presumably because he thought he knew better how to take care of her than she did herself. More dramatically, the example of the oldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister Katharina Kurzbach illustrates the detrimental consequences of the absence of a husband's authority and how divorce in the early modern period led to increased vulnerability for women and a limitation of their options and freedom of action. Despite differences in characters, abilities and their demonstrations of skills in politics, business, communication and medicine, the extent of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' actions and their historical presence depended almost always on the social prominence and the achievements or failures of their husbands.

### ***Description of the source: The Poppel-Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence***

The Poppel-Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence is a subset of a large collection of letters received and written by Eva Poppel Lobkowitz between 1604 and 1640 that have been preserved in the Hungarian Batthyány family's early modern correspondence collection housed today in the Hungarian National Archive in Budapest.<sup>17</sup> This is one of

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<sup>16</sup> Eva Poppel's letter to Ádám Batthyány, Dobra (Neuhaus), 28 November 1632 (37991) published in Kincses, *'Im küttem én orvosságot'*, Letter no. 25, 136–141.

<sup>17</sup> *Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár* (Hungarian National Archive, abbreviated as MNL) P1314, private correspondence of the Batthyány family, microfilm nos. 4770–4927 (Letters are listed in alphabetical order of senders). Letters of Katharina Kurzbach, MNL P1314, B 100 nos. 26521-26539, B 112 nos. 29776-29782, B 144 nos. 38123-38126; Letters of Maria Magdalena Trčka, MNL P1314 B 187, nos. 50051-50014; Sabina Solms MNL P1314 B 164, 43565-43642, 44473, B 198, 52873-52875.

the largest extant collections of letters for any early modern woman and consists of over 2000 letters. Out of a total of 1853 letters for which Eva was the recipient, 177 letters—received between 1606 and 1637—were from her three sisters. In the smaller group of letters that Eva drafted (235 total), the majority were addressed to her son, Ádám Batthány, and were written in the period after the death of her husband Ferenc in 1625. However, three draft letters survived that Eva wrote to her sister Sabina from the years 1608 and 1616. As discussed briefly below, more letters that Eva sent to noble acquaintances outside the family are also part of the Batthyány family’s archive. Although Eva’s letters to non-family members are not the focus of this study, this correspondence supplements our knowledge concerning her activities and social network.

As is the case with most letter exchanges, the written communication of the sisters is incomplete. We hear only the voices of Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina, since, except for three letters, the responses of Eva Poppel are missing. Nevertheless, the scope of these letters authored by related noblewomen is exceptional because they have survived the general neglect towards documents related to or created by women by early modern archival practices, which followed highly gendered norms.<sup>18</sup> As Katrin Keller has pointed out, letters and other types of documents written to and by men were considered important legal or business documents and carefully preserved. Conversely, women’s correspondences was often counted as private and, consequently, deemed less worthy of keeping.<sup>19</sup> Family archives held, albeit selectively, onto letters written by or to the closest

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<sup>18</sup> James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36–39 and Rosemary O’Day, “Tudor and Stuart Women: Their Lives through Their Letters,” in *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 130.

<sup>19</sup> Katrin Keller, *Hofdamen. Amsträgerinnen im Wiener Hofstaat des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 13.

female family members, such as wives, married daughters and sisters of the head of the family. Letters of noble widows, who acted as heads of the family, were usually kept in greater numbers as well. However, documents related to unmarried daughters and other female relatives were often discarded unless they pertained to family estates, inheritable property, or were otherwise regarded valuable to the family.<sup>20</sup>

The gender imbalance in the preservation customs of early modern family archives is also evident in Eva Poppel Lobkowitz's extant correspondence. Out of the total letters she authored—most of them survived in draft—, only thirteen, fewer than six percent, are addressed to women, and of those, only three were written to one of her sisters and none to her daughters.<sup>21</sup> Upon examining the total number of letters written to Éva Poppel, the gender imbalance appears to be somewhat less pronounced. She received 1852 letters from which approximately one-third (550 letters) were written by over a hundred women (132), including her relatives, household members, business associates and women from the Hungarian and Lower-Austrian nobility.<sup>22</sup> The relatively high number of women's letters in Eva Poppel's correspondence indicates that she frequently maintained written contact with women in the region and beyond even though, in many cases, only a single letter from a given letter writer has survived. Thus, the large number of letters from Eva Poppel's female relatives preserved in the Batthyány family archives indicates the importance that the family attached to their correspondence. Eva Poppel and her three sisters had shared rights to their parents' Hungarian properties and engaged in

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<sup>20</sup> James Daybell, "Gender, Politics and Archives in Early Modern England," in *Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800* (London: Routledge, 2017), 25–45.

<sup>21</sup> MNL P1314, nos. 4605–4638 and 37905–38107.

<sup>22</sup> For a list of correspondents see the online finding aid to the Batthyány family's sixteenth and seventeenth-century correspondence, <https://adatbazisokonline.mnl.gov.hu/adatbazis/batthyany-missilisek> (accessed 13 July 2023).

negotiations for decades with the Batthyánys, who eventually acquired and incorporated them into their estates. The letters of Eva Poppel's Bohemian relatives were likely kept, then, as evidence for the Batthyánys' legal right to the Poppel estates in western Hungary.

This extensive corpus of women's letters also speaks to female literacy in Central Europe, indicating that letter-writing as means of distant communication had become a regular activity for higher-ranking noblewomen by the early decades of the 1600s. The rate of female literacy in the Habsburg Monarchy was visibly growing since the mid-sixteenth century but still lagged behind that of western countries.<sup>23</sup> The level of women's literacy skills also showed significant regional variations. While in the eastern parts of the Monarchy, including Hungary, high-ranking noblewomen did not become confident readers and writers until after the mid-1600s, the female elite in Bohemia were becoming literate as early as the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The sisters' numerous letters written in their own hands attest, therefore, to their confidence in holding the pen and, thus, to the value that the Poppel Lobkowitz family assigned to female education.

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letter corpus is also noteworthy because of its bilingual character, which reflects the cross-cultural world of early modern Central Europe. Born into the Protestant branch of one of the leading noble families in Bohemia in the latter half of the sixteenth century, the sisters married members of the Bohemian,

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<sup>23</sup> István György, Tóth, "A magyar művelődés a kora újkorban. Magyar nyelvű írásbeliség, tovább élő szóbeliség, írott latinság [Hungarian Culture in the Early Modern Period. Hungarian Written Culture, Surviving Orality, Written Latin]," in *Magyar művelődéstörténet*, ed. Kósa László (Budapest: Osiris, 2006), 186.

<sup>24</sup> István György Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000) and John M. Klassen, *Warring Maidens, Captive Wives and Hussite Queens. Women and Men at War and at Peace in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 527) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

Silesian, German and Hungarian nobility. They communicated across the cultural and linguistic borders of the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy by exchanging letters between Prague, Vienna and western Hungary written in German, the region's lingua as well as in Czech, their mother tongue.

Ruled by the Habsburg family since the first half of the sixteenth century, this multi-cultural region, called the Habsburg Monarchy, encompassed the Habsburg hereditary lands in Austria as well as the kingdoms of Bohemia and Hungary. Each of these lands had its own distinct history, legal traditions and a confessionally mixed population that spoke close to a dozen different languages in addition to German, Czech and Hungarian. By the early 1600s, the leading Protestant Czech and Austrian-German nobility became increasingly intertwined due to centuries-long cultural proximity and intermarriages. They owned properties in both lands and maintained a bilingual Czech and German culture.<sup>25</sup> Although integrating the Hungarian nobility into the supranational elite of the Habsburg land was less successful, some of the Hungarian nobility also found marriage partners from the Austrian nobility. As a result of cultural and family connections, many of them also spoke and corresponded in German.<sup>26</sup>

This cross-cultural and multi-lingual aspect of close-kin women's written communication in the early modern Habsburg Monarchy has been neglected by

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<sup>25</sup> Václav Bužek, "Zum tschechisch-deutschen Bilingualismus in den böhmischen und österreichischen Ländern in der frühen Neuzeit," *Österreichische Osthefte* 35 (1993): 577–592.

<sup>26</sup> The Poppel Lobkowitz women and their families were among the last generation to participate in the supranational integration of the Habsburg lands' nobility before it came to a halt with the failed Bohemian Revolt. The subsequent suppression and forced re-catholicization of the Protestant nobility of Bohemia marked the end of this process; see Géza Pálffy, "A magyar nemesség bécsi integrációjának színterei a 16–17. században [The Sites of the Hungarian Nobility's Integration in Vienna in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries]," in *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*, ed. Pál Fodor, Géza Pálffy and István György Tóth (Budapest: MTA TKI Gazdaság- és Társadalomtörténeti Kutatócsoportja, 2002), 307–331 and his *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth-Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

Hungarian and Czech scholars, who have largely remained within the confines of their respective national historiographies. The research community of these countries has traditionally focused on political, social, religious and cultural history related to men and has only slowly and unevenly developed an interest in early modern women's history and letter writing. Historical and literary studies in the Czech Republic have underestimated the potential of researching early modern women's history. Only a few women's correspondences can be accessed in print, while studies on medieval and early modern women are also scarce and often portrayed in a traditional manner as mere companions of men.<sup>27</sup> This limited focus is reflected in studies on the Czech Trčka, German Solms and Silesian Kurzbach families, which mainly on the male heads of these families, with only peripheral references to their wives.<sup>28</sup> This neglect of women's letters and stories not only stems from a traditional approach to history but also from the dearth of contemporary sources. The lack of research on the families of Eva Poppel's Bohemian female relatives is partly due to the scarcity of surviving documents following the dissolution of their family archives after their lineage became extinct in the late 1600s.

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<sup>27</sup> Alfred Thomas, "Women Readers and Writers in Medieval and Early Modern Bohemia," in *History of Central European's Women's Writing*, ed. C. Hawkesworth (London: Palgrave, 2001), 7–13. For published letter collections from early modern Bohemian women, see Zdenek Kalista, ed. *Korespondence Zuzany Černínové z Harasova s jejím synem Humprechtem Janem Černínem z Chudenic* [Correspondence between Zuzana Černínová of Harasov and Her Son Humprecht Jan Černín of Chudenic] (Prague, 1941) and Anna Skybova, ed., *Listy bílé paní Rožmberské* [The Letters of Lady Rožmbersk] (Brno, 1985) cited in Thomas, "Women Readers," endnote 14 and 13. The fifteenth-century letters of the sisters Perchta and Anezka Rožmberk were published in English; see John Klassen, *The Letters of the Rožmberk Sisters: Noble Women in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Konrad Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens* 38 (1904): 234–275; Friedrich Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie des Hauses Solms-Lich," *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 9 (1959): 66–119; František Hrubý, "Marie Mandalena Trčková roz. z Lobkovic," in *Královný, kněžny a velké ženy české* (Prague, 1940), 258–263; Jaroslav Šůla, "Dva kšafy Jana Rudolfa Trčky z Lípy [The Two Testaments of Jan Rudolf Trčzka of Lipa]," *Stopami dějin Náchodská' sborník Státního archivu Náchod* 5 (1999): 159–169.

In Hungary, several important editions of early modern women's letters have been published in the past thirty years. Among them, the most well-known is a selection of Eva Poppel Lobkowitz's medicine-related letters edited and introduced by Katalin Kincses.<sup>29</sup> The volume, almost exclusively consisting of the correspondence of the widow of Count Ferenc Batthyány written in Hungarian in her last fifteen years, has become a central reference work for subsequent studies on the Batthyány family, as well as a significant source for recent research on early modern family, childhood and medicine.<sup>30</sup> However, women's letters written in languages other than Hungarian in the Batthyány countess' correspondence, including the significant bilingual German-Czech corpus of Eva Poppel's three sisters, have completely escaped the attention of scholars. The present research on the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters, thus, aims to fill this gap and show the richness of the bilingual written communication of seventeenth-century women, exploring topics of delivery modes and materiality of the page, and communication of news, sensitive messages and medical knowledge.

### ***Literature review***

Letters, as a highly rhetorical literary genre, have been around since antiquity. They became more numerous and pragmatic from the late fifteenth century, as

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<sup>29</sup> Erika Terbe, ed., *Batthyány Ferencné Svetkovics Katalin levelei (1538–1575)* [The Letters of Katalin Svetkovics, Wife of Ferenc Batthyány (1538–1575)] (Budapest: Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság, 2010); Borbála Benda and Gábor Várkonyi, eds., *Erzsébet Rákóczi levelei férjéhez (1672–1707)* [The Letters of Erzsébet Rákóczi to Her Husband] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Katalin Kincses, ed., *‘Ím küntem én orvosságot’ Lobkowitz Poppel Éva levelezése. 1622–1640* (Budapest: ELTE, 1993). A few publications on women of the Batthyány family have been released recently, including a monograph on Eva Poppel's daughter Erzsébet Batthyány and a study of smaller scale on her mother-in-law, Zrínyi Dorica, wife of the erudite nobleman Boldizsár (Balthasar) Batthyány. Mónika Zsámbéky, *Batthyány Erzsébet* (Szombathely: Szülőföld Könyvkiadó, 2012); Csilla Gramantik, "Zrínyi Dorica élete levelei tükrében [The Life of Dorica Zrínyi Based on Her Letters]," *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis, Sectio Philosophica, Tomus XVIII.*, Fasc. 1 (2014): 57–63.

commercial connections grew and literacy spread among the social and mercantile elite. Early modern family letters are complex and greatly diverse. Typically presented in a highly formal language, they contain a mix of topics ranging from politics, business, natural science, medicine and intellectual or theological discussions to family and personal matters, not distinguishing strictly between public and private. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century letters, as a medium of personal interaction, also reflect the complexity of social hierarchy by marking the precise relationships between corresponding partners through rhetorical language and even in the materiality of their pages (for instance, through the deliberate choice of the size of margins or spaces or use of one's own hand or that of scribes).

Differences in gender and education of the letter writers also contribute to the complexity of premodern family letters as source material. Men from elite families increasingly received formal education from the sixteenth century onwards and held various public roles at the royal or local governmental offices. Letters written by men thus tend to be often formal and provide insight into political and business practices or display their author's intellectual and scientific interests. Women, on the other hand, remained outside of early modern formal education and public life.<sup>31</sup> Consequently, their letters could differ with respect to men. Women's letters from the period are regarded as more spontaneous than those of men, with their style following the rhythm of oral

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<sup>31</sup> For women's literacy and education, see James Daybell, "Interpreting Letters and Reading Script Evidence for Female Education and Literacy in Tudor England," *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (2005): 695–715; Leonie Hannan, *Women of Letters: Gender, Writing and the Life of the Mind in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016). Intellectual life: Lynette Hunter, ed., *The Letters of Dorothy Moore, 1612-64: the Friendships, Marriage and Intellectual Life of a Seventeenth-Century Woman* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Sabine Beckmann, "Literarische Kommunikation zwischen pommerschen Fürstinnen und Gelehrten des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts," *Zwischen Thronsaal und Frauenzimmer: Handlungsfelder Pommerscher Fürstinnen um 1600*, ed. Dirk Schleinert und Monika Schneikart (Köln: Böhlau, 2017), 65–88.

conversations, shedding light on the female perspective on events, relationships, concerns of life and spaces where women could act relatively independently.<sup>32</sup>

It is precisely these complementary perspectives offered in early modern personal letters of men and women that have piqued the interest of scholars across various research fields.<sup>33</sup> Traditionally, scholars of political history, economy and science have used the private correspondences of men to examine pre-modern political, commercial and scientific practices. However, more recently, scholars of the history of communication have been examining letters as mediums of news and information, while social historians use letter collections to map out personal networks and aspects of early modern family life. A particular interest in women's letters and letter-writing practices was spurred on by feminist and gender studies as well as the information revolution of the 1990s. Historians, literary scholars, linguists and researchers of cultural studies, in conjunction with historians of science and medicine, have turned to women's letters to explore the life, interests, contacts and responsibilities of individual women through their writings.<sup>34</sup> Studies have investigated formal and communicative aspects of women's letter writing, elite women's literacy and education, intellectual life, religious

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<sup>32</sup> For women's letter-writing, see Daybell, ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing*; Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, eds., "Form and Persuasion in Women's Letter 1400- 1700," in *Women's Letters across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion* (Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Graham T. Williams, *Women's Epistolary Utterance. A Study of Joan and Maria Thynne, 1575-1611* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2009); Ute Schwarz, *Expressives Sprachhandeln als Ausdrucksform der Persöhnlichkeit. Eine Kommunikationsgeschichtliche Studie an den Briefen der Pirckheimer-Frauen aus den Jahren 1505-1547* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Marie Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig, et al., eds., *Handbuch Brief*, vols.1-2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

<sup>34</sup> Klassen, *The Letters of the Rožemberk Sisters*, Peter Matheson, "A Life in Letters: Argula von Grumbach (1492-1556/7)," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4 (2009): 27-60.

experiences, cultural and political patronage, family relationships and personal networks, medical talk and practical knowledge of household medicine.<sup>35</sup>

This study of the Poppel Lobkowitz sister's seventeenth-century written communication thus draws on this wide spectrum of cross-disciplinary interest in all aspects of early modern women's letters that has developed over the past more than three decades. This research has received inspiration from the works of Ann Crabb and Steven Ozment, who have used personal correspondences of merchant families to explore womanhood and marriage, family values and relationships, practices and concerns of men and women in Renaissance Italy and Early Modern Germany.<sup>36</sup> My investigation is also informed by Sophie Ruppel's study on siblings' relationships within the seventeenth-

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<sup>35</sup> For women's epistolary culture and religion, see Meredith K. Ray, "Letters and Lace: Arcangela Tarabotti and Convent Culture in Seicento Venice," in *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, ed. Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen (London: Routledge, 2009), 45–73; Camilla Russel, "Women, Letters and Heresy in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Giulia Gonzaga's Heterodox Epistolary Network," *ibid.*, 75–93. For cultural and political patronage, see Katrin Keller, "Kurfürstin Anna von Sachsen (1532–1585): Von Möglichkeiten und Grenzen einer 'Landesmutter,'" in *Das Frauenzimmer. Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2000): 263–285; James Daybell, ed., *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450–1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). Christina Antenhofer, "Letters across the Borders: Strategies of Communication in an Italian-German Renaissance Correspondence," in *Women's Letters across Europe*, 103–122; Nadine Akkerman, ed., *The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart Queen of Bohemia*, vol. 1. 1603–1631 and vol. 2. 1632–1642 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For family relationships and personal networks, see Doris Aichholzer, "Briefe adeliger Frauen: Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme, ein Projectbericht," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 105, no. 1 (1997): 477–483; Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen: Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006); Nolte, Cordula. "'Pey eytler finster in einem weichen pet geschrieben.' Eigenhändige Briefe in der Familienkorrespondenz der Markgrafen von Brandenburg (1470–1530)," in *Adelige Welt und familiäre Beziehung*, ed. Heinz Dieter Heimann (Potsdam: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2000), 177–202; Megan Moran, "Brother-Sister Correspondence in the Spinelli Family and the Forming of Family Networks in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 44, no. 1 (2013): 47–71. Medicine: Elaine E. Whitaker, "Reading the Paston Letters Medically," *English Language Notes* 31, no.1 (1993): 19–27; Susan Broomhall, "Women's Little Secrets': Defining the Boundaries of Reproductive Knowledge in Sixteenth-Century France," *Social History of Medicine* 15, no. 1 (2002): 1–15; Anna Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth-century England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); Alexandra Bovt, *Körper im höfischen Gespräch. Die Briefe Liselottes von Pfalz* (Göttingen: Univeristätsverlag, 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Steven Ozment, *Magdalena and Balthasar: An Intimate Portrait of Life in 16th-Century Europe Revealed in the Letters of a Nuremberg Husband and Wife* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) and Ann Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence: Widowhood and Family Solidarity in the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

century German high nobility as well as Alisha Rankin's research into the medical and pharmaceutical activities of noble women in sixteenth-century Saxony and Thuringia informed my own investigation into these topics in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence.<sup>37</sup>

The works of James Daybell on women's letters in early modern England and his research into the materiality and social meanings of pre-modern letter writing shaped many aspects of my study. Daybell's research delves into the social fabric and materiality of women's letters in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and what they reveal about social conventions, family relationships, female literacy and the function of letter writing in these private documents. He maintains that the pragmatic aspects of early modern letters can shed light on women's public engagement in business and politics and inform us about patronage relationships, where women acted as intermediaries and advocates for others. The public nature of women's letters is also evident in the collaborative composition and production process between women and their scribes, while the materiality of the page mirrors the intertwined social relations through the epistolary formalities and the visual presentation of the text on the letter's folio. However, as I will suggest, women's literacy and confidence in writing also enabled them to maintain privacy on the letter's pages by discussing topics perceived as confidential without the involvement of others.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, and Alisha Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>38</sup> Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing* and also his *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England*, "Gender, Politics and Diplomacy: Women, News and Intelligence Networks in Elizabethan England," in *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robin Adams and Rosanna Cox (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101–119 and "The Materiality of Early Modern Women Letters," in *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1690*, ed. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (London: Routledge, 2016), 55–77.

In the general framework of Central European women and gender history, I draw on Heide Wunder's considerations into the changes in gender relationships in the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Although the Lutheran concept of marriage reinforced women's subordinate role to their husbands as natural, it promoted love as a key factor in stabilizing marriages. The "notion of equality of husband and wife" as Wunder explains, "can be detected even in the traditional division of labour between them, which was merely functional and could be changed when necessary: the husband could delegate his authority to his wife in case of illness or absence, and the widow was both mother and father of underage children." This marital equality also extended to the freedom of conscience, with husbands required to respect their wives' confessions.<sup>40</sup>

To provide a social, cultural and geographical framework for the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence, I have also consulted the comprehensive studies of Beatrix Bastl and Katrin Keller on the world of female court society in Vienna and Lower Austria and on Katalin Péter's research on marriages, private life and childhood in early modern Hungary.<sup>41</sup> Finally, András Koltai's monograph on the seventeenth-century Hungarian magnate Count Ádám Batthyány and his court was a great asset for the history of the Batthyány and Poppel families and for identifying places, people as well as events

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<sup>39</sup> See Heide Wunder, "Überlegungen zum Wandel der Geschlechterbeziehungen zu im fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhundert aus sozialgeschichtlicher Sicht," in *Wandel der Geschlechterbeziehungen zu Beginn der Neuzeit*, ed. Heide Wunder and Christina Vanja (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 12–26 and her seminal work *'Er ist die Sonne, sie ist der Mond': Frauen in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Beatrix, Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe*; Keller, *Hofdamen*; Katalin Péter, *Beloved Children. History of Aristocratic Childhood in Hungary in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001) and also her *Házasság a régi Magyarországon. 16–17. század* [Marriage in Hungary in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries] (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2008), and *Magánélet a régi Magyarországon* [Private Life in Early Modern Hungary] (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont - Történettudományi Intézet, 2012).

referred to in the correspondence.<sup>42</sup> For providing a larger political and social context to the sisters' biographies and letters, I have drawn upon the works of scholars of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy and its lands, including but not limited to R. J. W. Evans, Géza Pálffy and Petr Mat' a.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Methodology***

The set of source materials authored by the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters lends itself to a microhistorical approach. It relies on a paleographical close reading of the letters to investigate the experiences, relationships and communication of a closely defined group of women and place them in their precise historical context.<sup>44</sup> The process of reading, understanding and translating the letters, written in German and/or Czech, was

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<sup>42</sup> András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára* [Ádám Batthyány and His Library] (Budapest and Szeged: OSZK-Scriptum Rt., 2002) and his *Batthány Ádám. Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén* [Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Magnate and His Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century] (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> In addition to R.J.W Evans' classic, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), my research draws upon works from Hungarian, Czech and Austrian historians, including, among others, Géza Pálffy's monograph on *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth Century*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009), studies by Petr Mat' a on the Bohemian nobility, *Svět české aristokracie (1500-1700)* [The World of the Aristocracy in Bohemia] (Praha: Nakl. Lidové noviny, 2004) and his "Der Adel Böhmens und Schlesiens in der Frühen Neuzeit in vergleichender und Beziehungsgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Adel in Schlesien*, vol. 1. *Herrschaft–Kultur–Selbstdarstellung*, ed. Jan Harasimowicz and Matthias Weber (Munich: Oldenburg, 2010), 223–262, as well as essay collections on the history of early modern Vienna published by Peter Csendes and Ferdinand Opll, eds., *Wien. Geschichte einer Stadt. Band 1: Wien. Von den Anfängen bis zur ersten Wiener Türkenbelagerung (1529)*, Bd. 2 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), and Andreas Weigl, ed., *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg. Bevölkerung, Gesellschaft, Kultur, Konfession* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001). To gain a better understanding of the specific events leading up and during the Thirty Years' War, I have also consulted the works of Anton Gindely, *History of the Thirty Years War*, vol. 1., transl. Andrew Ten Brook (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1885), Brennan C. Pursell, *The Winter King. Frederick V of the Palatine and the Coming of the Thirty Years' War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) and Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Giovanni Levy, "On Microhistory," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writings*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Penn State University Press, 1992), 93–113, John Brewer, "Microhistory Refuge History and the Histories of Everyday Life," *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 1 (2010): 87–109, and Filippo de Vivo, "Prospect or Refuge? Microhistory, History on the Large Scale. A Response," *Cultural and Social History* 7, no. 3 (2010): 387–397.

challenging and required an enormous amount of time and patience.<sup>45</sup> In addition to the one hundred seventy letters written by the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, I read and studied over three hundred letters from family members, friends and business relations.

During this research, I had to expend considerable effort to identify and decipher the close to fifty different handwritings belonging to the Poppel women and their scribes. The letters display both simple and elaborate forms of the German cursive (*Kurrentschrift*) and its Czech variant, which was the script predominantly used in German-speaking Central-Europe. Compared to humanist handwriting, German cursive, with its slanted script and often elaborate loops on the ascenders, is difficult to read. Prior to the standardization of grammar and spelling, letter writers had unique ways of spelling, often influenced by local dialects.

Handwriting, in particular women's hand, is challenging to decipher. Unlike their male counterparts, women lacked formal schooling, which is reflected in the content and execution of their writing. They tended to write in incomplete sentences and utilized phonetic spelling, often leading to words or parts of words that are difficult to comprehend for contemporary readers. In this context, it is interesting to note that even in the seventeenth century, deciphering women's handwriting caused problems. Ferenc Batthyány, the husband of Eva Poppel, for example, received a letter from a Viennese merchant woman that he could not read, prompting him to seek the help of his secretary. Fortunately, the secretary was able to transcribe the letter onto the empty space of the letter's folio, creating a legible copy that has survived to this day.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The Czech letters were transcribed and translated with the assistance of Eva Bullard.

<sup>46</sup> Eva Claus' letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 5 October 1624 (7945).

In addition to the challenges posed by reading handwritings, the fragmented nature of their letter collection presented additional difficulties regarding their interpretation. With many of the sisters' letters missing and the responses of the recipients almost entirely absent, the context of these written conversations is frequently obscure. To fill the gaps, I researched the contemporary political, social, cultural and family context to elucidate the actions and agency of these aristocratic women whose historical memory was largely erased. This was necessary to make sense of their writing, thereby putting their letters in context. My micro-historical approach and my dialogue with the sources explain the constant shifting between observation and contextualisation but also the reliance on findings of cross-disciplinary research into the cultural world of these early-seventeenth-century women and their written documents.<sup>47</sup>

The process of reading and transcribing the letters has guided my investigation and raised questions that have shaped the arguments and conclusions of this thesis. The personal nature and diversity of early modern family correspondences make them highly subjective, revealing mostly exchange of information and social relationships. The letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz women are particularly well-suited for studying the modes of communication and the transfer of practical knowledge between close-kin elite women. Through this close-up investigation, I explore the types of information these women shared with each other over their thirty years of bilingual correspondence. Initially, I intended to investigate the seventeenth-century correspondence of the Hungarian Batthyány archive to explore women's healing practices and practical medical knowledge in Eva Poppel's German-written letters. However, the large number of German and

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<sup>47</sup> Vivo, 390.

Czech written letters from her female relatives among the more than five hundred letters written by women to the Batthyány countess raised additional questions beyond the scope of the project as originally conceived.

The very survival of these letters was a riddle: What made the correspondence of these distant female family members so important that the Batthyány family preserved them among their family papers instead of discarding them? Besides the question of their survival, the bilingual nature of letters was also puzzling. Why did these women letter writers switch between languages? Why were most of the letters written in German, but included a considerable number in Czech? What can the choice of language and handwriting in their letters, whether that of scribes or the women themselves, tell us about the level of literacy of these women? What are the communicative and social meanings of language and handwriting and how have they shaped women's written communication about public and private concerns over the years? How did women communicate differently in writing than men? Through these questions, informed by literary and linguistic studies of early modern letter writing, I shed new light on the historical persons behind these women letter writers and elucidate how second-rank elite women in early seventeenth-century Central Europe conducted business, assisted or quarrelled with each other, shared news, secrets and recipes, and worried about the fate of their letters.

### *Chapter summaries*

The first chapter of the thesis situates the Poppel-Lobkowitz correspondence within the political, social and cultural context of the early seventeenth-century Habsburg

Monarchy. It provides an overview of the Poppel Lobkowitz siblings' negotiations concerning their maternal inheritance in Hungary—the likely reason for the survival of their correspondence—and the biographies of the four sisters and their families. Through the sisters' life stories, we gain insight into the diverse life paths of highborn noblewomen in early modern Central Europe. However, our knowledge about Katharina, Maria Magdalena, Sabina and Eva is incomplete due to the societal norms of their time, which privileged male experience.<sup>48</sup> While we have more information about Eva Poppel, Countess of Batthyány and her older sister Maria Magdalena Countess of Trčzka, who both married prominent and wealthy Hungarian and Bohemian noblemen, the historical identities of the other two sisters, married to less significant members of the Silesian Kurzbachs and the German Solms families, have been largely lost to history.<sup>49</sup>

As a result, the biographies of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters are far from uniform. Each sister's life is approached differently based on what has been preserved in collective memory, uncovered through past historical research, or recounted in their letters.<sup>50</sup> Their portraits are painted in connection to and interaction with men: as wives and mothers and as single women who were widowed or abandoned by their husbands. These portraits demonstrate that, despite patriarchal structures, there were certain areas in which elite noblewomen could exercise relative independence and autonomy. They exercised authority in managing family estates and organizing their noble households and enjoyed considerable freedom in conducting business and influencing the political and business

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<sup>48</sup> Doris Aichholzer, "Kloster, Fehlgeburten und Türkengefahr. Das Themenspektrum in Briefen adeliger Frauen vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert," *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 54, no. 2 (1999): 116–132, here 118.

<sup>49</sup> Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*; Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*; Koltai, *Adám Batthyány*; Hrubý, "Marie Mandalena Trčkova roz. z Lobkovic"; Šůla, "Dva kšafy Jana Rudolfa Trčky z Lípy"; Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe" and Ulhorn, "Die böhmische Linie des Hauses Solms-Lich."

<sup>50</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, "The Social Self and Ego-Documents," in *German History* 28, no. 3 (2010): 263–272.

actions of their male relatives.<sup>51</sup> However, these portraits also reveal that elite women's freedom to act was highly dependent on the success or failure of their marriages.

Chapter Two explores the letter delivery and messengers in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence. The communication revolution of the late twentieth century has generated increased interest in the modes of communication of earlier times. As a result, there has been a focus on the study of early modern communication systems, including the birth and history of the Imperial Post operated by the Thurn-and-Taxis family and its affiliations across various parts of Europe.<sup>52</sup> Older studies on postal history have primarily focused on the development of the national postal organizations in individual countries, particularly organized delivery from the eighteenth century onwards.<sup>53</sup> While studies on letter writing in early modern England and western Europe have discussed methods of letter delivery in connection with the anxieties of letter writers within their national context, less attention has been paid to private carrier systems, the socio-cultural background of personal letter carriers and how the nobility in Central Europe organized and protected the route of their letters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990): 259–281.

<sup>52</sup> Rüdiger Wurth, "Das Königreich Ungarn im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Postgeschichtliche Aspekte unter Habsburgischer und osmanischer Herrschaft," *Burgenländische Heimatblätter* 1 (2007): 6–22. Wolfgang Behringer's monographs on the history of the Imperial Post provide a comprehensive understanding of the birth and organization of the institutionalized carrier services: *Thurn und Taxis. Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen* (Munich: Piper, 1990) and his *Im Zeichen des Merkur: Reichspost und Kommunikationsrevolution in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2004).

<sup>53</sup> Eduard Effenberger, *Geschichte der österreichischen Post* (Vienna, 1913) and Lajos Hencz, *A magyar posta története* [History of the Hungarian Post] (Budapest, 1937).

<sup>54</sup> Walker, Sue. "The Manners of the Page: Prescription and Practice in the Visual Organization of Correspondence," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, no. 31 (2003): 307–329. James Daybell, "Delivery, Reception and Reading," in *Women Letter-Writers in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 151-174, Gary Schneider's chapter on "Epistolary Anxiety. Politics, Deception and the Working of the Post," in *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letterwriting in Early-Modern England 150–1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 75-108; Horst Wenzel, "Boten und Briefe. Zum Verhältnis körperlicher und nichtkörperlicher Nachrichtenträger," in *Gespräche - Boten - Briefe. Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter*, ed. Horst Wenzel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1997), 86–105.

The second chapter of the thesis attempts to fill this gap by examining how the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters communicated about mail delivery, including their employment of both postal courier services and private messengers. Through a close reading of their letters, the chapter investigates the possible use of the royal post by the Poppel Lobkowitz women, the social makeup of the people who served as their messengers and the organization of private letter delivery. The chapter also examines whether the sisters' choice of delivery method was influenced by their social and economic standing.

In the third chapter, I explore the form and materiality of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence, focusing on the letters' physical features rather than their content. I examine the script, language and visual organization of text and space on the letter's folio to reveal their respective communicative and social meanings. My approach draws inspiration from Peter Beals's manuscript study on early modern scribes as "agents in the process of written communication," James Daybell's extensive research on the materiality of early modern letters in England and Vera Fasshauer's linguistic studies on the gender-specific aspects of women's correspondences in German-speaking Central Europe.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, I will incorporate observations on the communicative use and meanings of languages in premodern written communication.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Beal, *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); James Daybell, "Material Meanings and Social Signs of Manuscripts Letters in Early Modern England," *Literature Compass* 6, no. 3 (2009): 647–667 and his *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012) and "The Materiality of Early Modern Women Letters," 55–77; Fasshauer, Vera, et.al. *Genderspezifiek in mitteldeutschen Fürstinnenkorrespondenzen der Frühen Neuzeit. Korpusphilologische Studien* (Kovac, 2018) and her "Frühneuhochdeutsche Korrespondenzen sächsischer-ernestinischer Fürstinnen," in *Handbuch Brief. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, et al. (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 727–739.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Burke, "The Social History of Language," in *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 1–33. Randolph C. Head, "A Plurilingual Family in the Sixteenth Century: Language Use and Linguistic Consciousness in the Salis Family Correspondence, 1580–1610," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 3 (1995): 577–593; Herbert Schendl, "Code-Change and Code Switching in Some Early Fifteenth-Century Letters," in *Middle English from Tongue to Text. Selected Papers from the Third*

Using paleographic tools, I investigate the handwriting styles, signatures and other formal characteristics of the Poppel sister's correspondence. Through the examination of scripts from scribes, I have attempted to reconstruct the social profile of those who assisted the Poppel Lobkowitz women with their correspondence. Additionally, analysis of holograph letters, written by the sisters in their own hand, highlights features of structuring space and using language typical for early modern women's letters, along with epistolary conventions such as address, salutation and valediction. This analysis sheds light on the authors' level of literacy, familial hierarchy and personal relations.

In addition, I contend that the language used by the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters in their correspondence was influenced by their language skills, the availability of scribes and the nature of the information being conveyed. Being able to write in their own hand also provided the sisters with the opportunity to maintain epistolary privacy, allowing them to exchange confidential messages without the involvement of a third party. Finally, my investigation will suggest a correlation between economic well-being with the presence and absence of scribal help within the higher female elite of early modern Central Europe.

Chapter Four is presented as a case study investigating the communication of political news and confidential information related to diplomacy and business. The chapter focuses on the letters of Sabina Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Solms, with the

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*International Conference on Middle English: Language and Text, held at Dublin, Ireland, 1–4 July 1999*, ed. Peter J. Lucas and Angela M. Luca (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), 247–262; Christopher F. Laferl, “Die Familienkorrespondenz Ferdinands I,” in *Quellenkunde der Habsburger Monarchie (16–18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Josef Pauser, Martin Scheutz and Thomas Winkelbauer (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2004), 828–836 and Päivi Pahta, Janne Skaffari and Laura Wright, eds., *Multilingual Practices in Language History* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017).

aim of highlighting women's role in the public news exchange and exploring various channels through which the nobility in the Habsburg Monarchy was informed about important events during the Thirty Year's War. The chapter analyzes a series of scribal letters dated from 1619, demonstrating how a lesser noblewoman in Vienna served as a source of information for her extended family by sending newsletters with reports on the imperial election and military events connected to the Bohemian Revolt.

The chapter also explores how women's letters in the early seventeenth century served as a vehicle for confidential communication, reinforcing Benedek Láng's argument that people from all walks of life, including women, were prone to secrecy and used ciphers and other techniques to communicate not only diplomatic messages but a range of diverse information they deemed confidential.<sup>57</sup> Noblewomen like Sabina employed various techniques to conceal messages intended for private eyes. She arranged the letter's parts in unusual ways by switching hands, from scribal to autograph and back, used ciphers to hide sensitive content from unauthorized readers and employed code-switching, by changing the language of the written conversation from German to Czech—a little-known language in the borderlands of Lower Austria and Hungary—to communicate delicate information to the Batthyány family. Through reading Sabina's letters, it becomes evident that letters exchanged between female relatives served their husbands' ends, as they communicated political intelligence and confidential messages through their wives to escape scrutiny. Thus, this chapter illuminates the important role

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<sup>57</sup> Benedek Láng, "People's Secrets: Towards a Social History of Early Modern Cryptography," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 45, no. 2 (2014): 291–308 and from the same author *Titkosírás a koraiújkor Magyarországon* [Cryptography in Early Modern Hungary] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2015).

that women played in communicating political news and the various techniques they used to ensure the confidentiality of their messages.

The fifth and final chapter delves deeper into the topic of early modern elite women's medical knowledge. Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, the widow of Ferenc Batthyány, was a renowned medical expert and healer in seventeenth-century Hungary, first introduced to the historical literature by the archivist Sándor Takáts in the early 1900s.<sup>58</sup> Takáts established Éva Poppel's image as a famous healer by drawing attention to the custom of dispensing medication and medical advice, which was widely practiced by many seventeenth-century noblewomen.<sup>59</sup> He and his fellow historian-physician, Gyula Magyar-Kossa, cited extensively from Eva Poppel's correspondence and emphasized her expertise in women's health problems.<sup>60</sup> More than seventy years after the publication of Takáts's monograph, Katalin Kincses edited and published more than a hundred letters from Éva Poppel's Hungarian correspondence, which dealt with the countess' medical activity.<sup>61</sup> By providing access to some of the letters addressed to or written by Éva Poppel in a transcribed and annotated form, Kincses offered a detailed picture of healing practices in a Hungarian aristocratic court of the 1630s. In her introductory essay,

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<sup>58</sup> Takáts was one of the first Hungarian historians to receive permission to conduct research using the private archive of the Batthyány family, located at the time in the western-Hungarian town of Körmend. His research in the Batthyány family's correspondence resulted in publications dedicated to early modern Hungarian noble women, including a monograph on Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány. See András Koltai, "A Batthyány család körmendi központi levéltárának kutatástörténete" [History of the Research Pursued in the Central Körmend Archives of the Batthyány Family], *Levéltári Közlemények* 71 (2000): 217–218. Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja* and his *Régi magyar nagyasszonyok* [Great Hungarian Ladies of the Past] (Budapest, 1914).

<sup>59</sup> Although Takáts writes in a somewhat elevated style and usually omits the exact source of his quotations, he nevertheless provides a large amount of valuable information about Eva Poppel and her family as well as about the practice of medicine in seventeenth-century Hungary. See Dóra Bobory. *The Sword and the Crucible, Count Boldizsár Batthyány and Natural Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 5.

<sup>60</sup> Magyar-Kossa Gyula, *Magyar orvosi emlékek* [Hungarian Medical Reminiscences] vol. 3 (Budapest: Magyar Orvosi Könyvkiadó Társulat, 1931), 450–452.

<sup>61</sup> Kincses, *Im küttem én orvosságot*.

Kincses questions Takáts' claim that Éva Poppel possessed exceptional medical knowledge and that the Batthyány widow was "a frequently requested, learned medical doctor."<sup>62</sup> Instead, she argues that caring for the wellbeing of the members of a noble household was an intrinsic duty of many elite women in the seventeenth century. Kincses suggests that it was Eva Poppel's strong character, organizational skills and broad therapeutic experience that made the widow of Ferenc Batthyány exceptional among her contemporaries.<sup>63</sup> The medical practice of the Hungarian countess thus resembles the pharmaceutical activities of the sixteenth-century German noblewomen extensively studied by Alisha Rankin.<sup>64</sup>

Beginning with this premise, the chapter explores the tradition of passing down practical therapeutic knowledge among elite families. Specifically, the chapter examines how close female relatives circulated therapeutical advice, recipes and remedies, contributing to the young Batthyány countess' therapeutical and pharmaceutical knowledge, which later established her reputation as a medical expert. The chapter analyses how Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina discussed health concerns and sickness in their letters, taking into account social and personal differences between the sisters that may have influenced the inclusion or omission of health-related information. Furthermore, the chapter investigates Sabina Solms' role in mediating therapeutic knowledge and connecting professional medical healers to the Batthyány court, relying on her personal network in and around Vienna while acting as an agent for the Viennese ladies as they eagerly sought Eva Poppel's medicine.

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<sup>62</sup> Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Kincses, '*Ím küttem én orvosságot*,' 59.

<sup>64</sup> Alisha Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters*.

While several topics addressed in my thesis merit sustained individual study, my aim is to emphasize the richness and complexity of women's letters in terms of their content and social relations. Framed by the context provided by the first chapter, the following four chapters (chapters two to five) are loosely connected by the overarching theme of communication, as they explore not only the physical delivery of letters but also the transmission of information, news and secret messages and practical medical knowledge within them. In the course of my investigations, the social component became increasingly relevant. The status of the siblings, the result of birth order and personal fortunes or misfortunes particular to each, seemed to define both the content of and the visual presentation of their letters. Through these women's writings, this thesis provides a window into the lives and experiences of a group of related noblewomen who have hitherto remained relatively obscure. By exploring the avenues and spheres of life in which these noblewomen exercised agency, this research illustrates how the lives of even elite women were circumscribed and contingent upon their relationships with men, especially husbands.

## CHAPTER ONE: The History of the Poppel Lobkowitz Sisters

In early March of 1619, a particularly sorrowful and humble letter from the Polish city of Poznan was delivered to Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány. The letter written in the hand of her oldest sister Katharina Kurzbach sought support concerning a previously discussed matter. Katharina's distress was tangible, as she implored her wealthy sister for help. "My dearest lady Evicko, have mercy on me, if not on my behalf, then for the drop of blood of yours that is also in both you and me!"<sup>1</sup> Katharina's appeal expressed the essence of early modern noble identity. This identity was anchored in the shared lineage that connected men and women of the same rank all the way from birth through marriage until death.<sup>2</sup> The reference to the "drop of blood" that linked together the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters by birth implied that with hereditary rights also came responsibilities towards those less fortunate in the extended noble family. The status of birth, indeed, was no guarantee for a privileged life. The fortunes of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, which differed from each other considerably, were highly dependent on whom they married as well as on the manifold religious, political, economic and dynastic forces at play in the course of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> *Katharina's letter to Eva*, Poznan, 3 March 1619, MNL P 1314, no. 26527.

<sup>2</sup> Beatrix Bastl, "Zur sozialen Identität der adeligen Frau. Ihre Ausdrucksformen an kleinen Höfen," In *Adelige Hofhaltung im österreichisch-ungarischen Grenzraum (vom Ende des 16. bis zum Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts)*. *Symphosium im Rahmen der "Schaliner Gespräche" vom 20.–23. September 1995 auf Burg Scлавning*, ed. by Rudolf Kropf und Gerald Schlag (Eisenstadt: Burgenländischen Landesmuseum Eisenstadt, 1998), 23–25, Gaunt, David, "Kinship: Thin Red Lines or Thick Blue Blood," in *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500–1789, The History of the European Family*, eds. Kretzer, David I. and Barbagli, Marzio, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 257–287.

This chapter provides a political, social, cultural and biographical background to the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence. It highlights the important role these women played in their parents' family politics which expanded the Poppel Lobkowitz's personal and political network across the Habsburg lands. First, the chapter will introduce the Poppel Lobkowitz family presenting a brief history of the family negotiations over the family inheritance in western Hungary and the social and political realities in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. This will provide context for the biographies of the four sisters and their families, which will take up the second half of the chapter.

***The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' "common concern": the Hungarian family inheritance***

The presence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters in the Hungarian Batthyány family's archive today underscores the importance to the Central European nobility of land that women brought with them into their marriage. As early modern correspondence often evinces, fighting over dowries and inheritances occupied many noble families; the settling of such legal matters between relations could last for generations. The inheritance negotiations between the Batthyány, Trčka, Solms and Kurzbach families kept the written conversation among close female relatives going for almost thirty years. Such disputes facilitated the survival of the correspondence among Eva Poppel's sisters, as the letters of her Bohemian relatives were kept as legal evidence underlying generation-long legal settlements.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For legal disputes of families in various early modern contexts, see Eileen Spring, *Law, Land and Family: Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300 to 1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Barbara Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550. Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Nancy E. Wright and Margaret W. Ferguson, eds.,

The fight between relatives over the Western Hungarian Poppel inheritance originated in the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In 1567, the Hungarian noblewoman Margit Széchy died without a male heir, leaving her considerable wealth to her daughter, Magdalena Salm. This decision initiated a long battle between various families related by marriage, as they all claimed a right to the inheritance, among them the Széchy and the Poppel families.<sup>5</sup> The estates of Dobra (Neuhaus, today in Austria), Rakicsány (Rakičan, today in Slovenia), Felsőlendva (Grad, today in Slovenia), Muraszombat (Murska Sobota, today in Slovenia) with their surrounding villages and seigniorial rights over the abbey of Szentgotthárd (today in Hungary) endowed to Magdalena Salm's husband, Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz, as a royal donation in 1582. Controversies with the Poppels' rival Tamás Széchy temporarily eased with an agreement signed in 1591. Magdalena Salm received Dobra, while Felsőlendva and Muraszombat were divided equally among the disputing parties.<sup>6</sup> While the family dispute over the moderate-sized lands quieted down between the rival Poppel and Széchy families, a new family conflict flared up between

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*Women, Property and the Letters of the Law in Early Modern England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> For more on its history, see Vera Zimányi, *A herceg Batthyány család levéltára*. Repertórium [The Archives of the Princely Batthyány Family Repertory] (Budapest: Művelődésügyi Minisztérium Levéltári Osztálya – Levéltárak Országos Központja, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Under Hungarian customary inheritance law, which favoured the male hereditary line, noblewomen were entitled to their share in movable assets. They could only inherit the family land in the absence of a male heir. Male members of side branches of the family often attempted to size up the inheritance to retain the land within the extended family. See Gabriella Gáspár, "A női jogok a magyar rendi társadalomban" [Female Rights in the Hungarian Feudal Society], *Jura 2* (2007): 39–50.

<sup>6</sup> The western Hungarian estates of the Poppel Lobkowitz family continued to be a source of ongoing disputes leading to two more official affirmations of their rights. In 1611, the Hungarian Palatine György Thurzó reaffirmed the rights of the heirs of Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz and Magdalena Salm to their parental inheritance, including the places that Tamás Széchy had lost to the Poppel Lobkowitz family. Since Tamás Széchy failed to comply with earlier arrangements, a renewed settlement was reached in 1626, which divided the estates of Felsőlendva and Muraszombat village by village between the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters and the Széchy family. See János Károly, *Fejér vármegye története* [The History of Fejér County] (Székesfehérvár, 1899), 3: 211–13; Zimányi, *A herceg Batthyány család levéltára*, 12; Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 133.

the Hungarian Batthyány family and the heirs of Ladislav Poppel some twenty years later.

The Poppel inheritance was adjacent to the estates of Ferenc Batthyány, a prominent early-seventeenth-century Hungarian aristocrat. When Ferenc married the youngest Poppel Lobkowitz daughter, he also hoped to acquire the future inheritance of his bride's family. When Magdalena Salm died in 1607, followed by Ladislav Poppel two years later, their children entered into various agreements with the Batthyány family regarding the administration of their Hungarian properties. The Poppel's only living son, Jan Mikulaš Poppel, first entrusted the management of his estates to Ferenc Batthyány. When Jan Mikulaš died in 1614, his Hungarian shares were divided between his four sisters.<sup>7</sup> These negotiations conducted over several decades between the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, Katharina Kurzbach, Maria Magdalena Trčka, Sabina Solms and the Batthyánys highlighted the aspirations of the Hungarian family to increase their wealth.

Details of the Batthyánys' settlements with the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters can be only reconstructed in broad terms. First, Eva Poppel reached an agreement with her oldest sister Katharina Kurzbach. According to the deal, Eva's maternal inheritance in Bohemia was deferred to Katharina against payment. This mortgage transaction was most likely a trade-off for Katharina's Hungarian properties in Dobra and Muraszombat. The official document ratified by the Hungarian Palatine György Thurzó explained the transaction with the wartime conditions in Bohemia and Moravia, as well as with "other

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<sup>7</sup> Magdalena Salm owned properties in both Bohemia and Hungary in her own right. She bequeathed her Bohemian estates to her two sons, Jan Mikulaš and Adam Poppel, while her smaller estates in Hungary were divided among her daughters and Jan Mikulaš Poppel. After Jan Mikulaš died in 1614, his shares were acquired by the Batthyánys, while the majority of the Bohemian estates, including Ledec, ended up in the hands of the Trčka family; see Károly, *Fejér vármegye története*, 213 and Frančisek Pleva, *Ledeč, nad sázavou dějiny města* [Ledec nad Sázavou, the History of the Town] (Město Ledec nad Sázavou, 1997), 32–33.

rightful reasons”, likely implying Batthyány’s personal interest in obtaining legal ownership over Katharina Kurzbach’s shares.<sup>8</sup>

A similar agreement was probably arranged with Sabina Solms, who pawned most of her villages to Eva Poppel.<sup>9</sup> Maria Magdalena Trčka, on the other hand, likely continued to manage her shares with the help of Poppel estates’ steward Pál Pethő.<sup>10</sup> The Batthyánys did not acquire the entire Poppel Lobkowitz inheritance until the 1630s. Katharina Kurzbach sold her lands to Eva Poppel in 1632, while the shares of Maria Magdalena and Sabina were bought by Eva Poppel’s son from their heirs.<sup>11</sup> With these final purchases, Ádám Batthyány became one of the wealthiest landowners in Royal Hungary. Simultaneously, the incorporation of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ inheritance into the Batthyány estates also marked the end of an era characterized by cross-cultural integration of the Bohemian political elite into the nobility of the Habsburg lands through marriage. The family history of Ladisav Poppel Lobkowitz illustrates the beginnings of this integration.

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<sup>8</sup> András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám, Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén* [Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Magnate and His Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century] (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012), 133.

<sup>9</sup> See Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 24 February 1618 (43600). The practice of pawning estates, referred to as a temporary property transaction in feudal legal terminology, was widespread among the landed nobility in Central Europe. It allowed quick access to cash by granting the right to use the land in exchange. While restrictions were imposed on the transfer of noble land to other family members for a specific period, it frequently resulted in the creditor eventually acquiring the property, thus ensuring the ownership of the estate remained within the family; see Balázs Bodzási, “Zálogjog a feudális magyar jogban” [Hypothec in the Hungarian Feudal Law], *Jog Állam Politika: Jog- és politikatudományi folyóirat* 5 (1): 143–157.

<sup>10</sup> Károly, *Fejér Vármegye története*, 212–214 and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 133. About the shares of the two sisters, see Maria Magdalena’s letters to Pál Pethő, nos. 50061–61, 50064–65, 50068–70, 50073–77, 50114 (1608–1610, 1630).

<sup>11</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 536. Ádám Batthyány acquired the shares of the two deceased sisters from Sabina’s son Philip Adam Solms in 1636 and a year later from Adam Trčka’s widow. *Ibid.*, 138.

# Poppel Lobkowitz Family

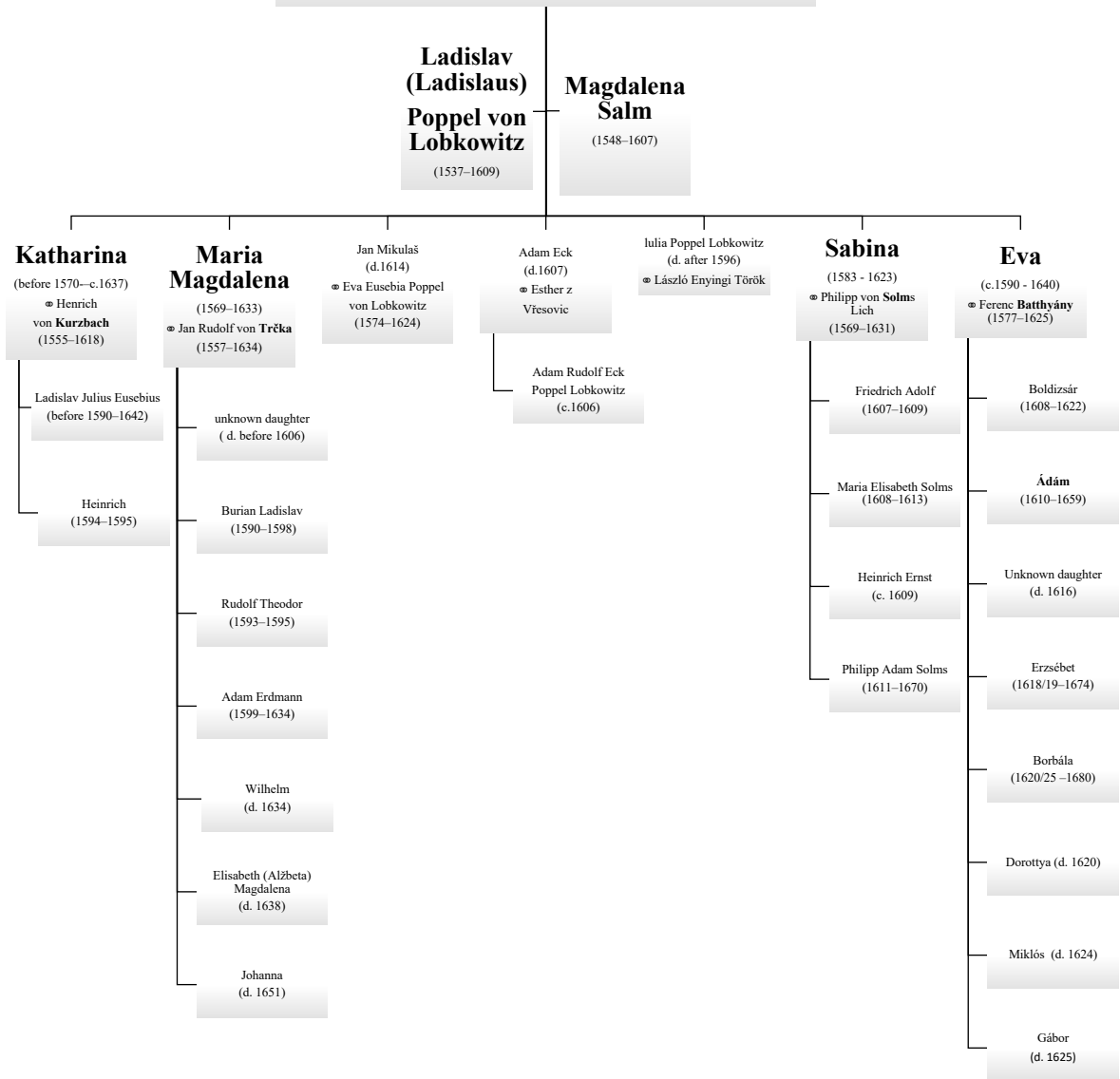


Figure 1: Family tree of the Poppel Lobkowitz family

***The Parents: The marriage of Ladislav Poppel of Lobkowitz (1537–1609) and Magdalena of Salm-Neuburg (1548–1607) and the Habsburg Monarchy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries***

The family history of Ladislav Poppel unfolded within a long tradition of noble intermarriage and efforts to consolidate family estates under the aegis of Habsburg rule. With a history reaching back to the early fifteenth century, the Poppel branch of the Lobkowitz family belonged to one of the oldest noble houses in the Bohemian Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The family received its second name from the fortress of Lobkovice, which came into their possession in 1409.<sup>13</sup> During the next century, the family acquired large parcels of land in central and northern Bohemia. The family's material wealth increased parallel to the growing participation of its members in the kingdom's political life. In the late 1500s and the early 1600s, members of the Poppel Lobkowitz family rose to the highest ranks of Bohemian nobility and held privileged offices at the royal and imperial court of Rudolf II.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The name of the family is spelled variously: Lobkowitz, Lobkowicz, Lobkowic. To remain consistent, the form *Lobkowitz* will be used.

<sup>13</sup> Johann Siebmacher, *Siebmacher's grosses Wappenbuch*. vol. 30: *Die Wappen des böhmischen Adels*. (1886; repr., Neustadt and der Aisch: Bauer & Raspe, 1979), 195-196. Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 65.

<sup>14</sup> One of the most prominent members of the Catholic branch of the family, Adalbert Zdenko Poppel von Lobkowitz, was elevated to the rank of prince in 1624 by Emperor Ferdinand II. He also served as the highest court chancellor of the Bohemian crown; see Siebmacher, *Die Wappen des böhmischen Adels*, 195 and R. J. W. Evans, *Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550-1770* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 205.



Figure 2: The Habsburg Monarchy 1521–1772. Copyright: Princeton University

By this time, the Bohemian kingdom, together with Royal Hungary and the Habsburg hereditary lands had been part of a large multicultural and multilingual state in Central Europe ruled by the Habsburg family since 1526.<sup>15</sup> With Rudolf II moving his residency permanently to Prague in 1583, the capital of Bohemia became one of the most important political and cultural centres of sixteenth-century Europe. The joint court of the Habsburg lands and the Holy Roman Empire offered opportunities for political careers, social connections and cultural refinement. Rudolfian Prague thus attracted the German and Bohemian nobility, leading them to establish permanent residences in the Prager Lesser Town close to the Hradzin.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Géza Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy in the Sixteenth-Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 30–31.

<sup>16</sup> Since the establishment of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1526, the nobility of Austrian and German origin had a leading role in running the offices of the central court, while the Bohemian and Hungarian political elite participated in the government of this new state to varying degrees. After the Habsburg royal seat moved to Prague in 1583, the Bohemian nobility increasingly assumed central dignities at the imperial and royal court. On the other hand, the Hungarian political elite, with a few exceptions, did not take leading positions in the central administration. The geographical distance between Hungary and the royal seat in Prague, coupled with political resistance against the Habsburg rule, problems of communication in German, and the constant Ottoman threat at the Hungarian borders were some of the reasons why the Hungarian elite was underrepresented at the joint court in Prague; see Pálffy, *Kingdom of Hungary*, 72–81; Jaroslava Hausenblasová, ed., *Der Hof Kaiser Rudolfs: Eine Edition der Hofstaatsverzeichnisse* (Prague: Artefactum, 2002), 398–409.

High-ranking noble families in Bohemia frequently sought marriage partners for their children from prominent foreign families to pursue their social and political ambitions. By establishing cross-cultural family connections, members of the Bohemian, Austrian and, to a lesser extent, the Hungarian nobility acquired estates and nobility in each other's lands and held political offices in local governments and in the royal and imperial court in Vienna allowing them to advocate for their common interests.<sup>17</sup> The pattern of intercultural marriages that aimed to integrate the culturally diverse aristocracy of the monarchy into a supranational leading elite was most distinctive in the second half of the sixteenth century. As a direct consequence of the increasingly tense relationship between the Protestant nobility and the central Catholic court over the centralization efforts of the Habsburgs, this intercultural mobility of the political elite came to a complete halt in the years after the Bohemian Revolt (1618–1620).<sup>18</sup>

In the backdrop of the political struggles of the late Rudolfian era and the decades preceding and following the defeat of the estate rebellion in the Battle of White Mountain, the family histories of Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz and his daughters represent a culturally diverse elite in the Habsburg Monarchy that strived to increase their lands and further their political careers through intercultural marriages. Ladislav III the Elder (Ladislav III starši na Zbiroze a Mostě, 1537–1609), the father of Katharina, Maria Magdalena, Sabina and Eva, felt equally at home in Bohemia and Hungary. While his estates of Zbiroh, Biskupice and Vejvanov in Central Bohemia and his position at the

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<sup>17</sup> In the mid-sixteenth century, Hungarian, Bohemian, Austrian, German and Croatian nobility (for example, the Salm-Arco-Ungnad, the Pernštejn-Lobkovic-Rožmberk-Kolovrat and the Székely-Széchy-Thurzó-Zrínyi families) established family connections, initiating a process of integration of the political elite across the Habsburg territories. Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary*, 87–88.

<sup>18</sup> Pálffy, *Kingdom of Hungary*, 59–88 and Joachim Bahlcke, *Regionalismus und Staatsintegration im Wiederstreit. Die Länder der böhmischen Krone im ersten Jahrhundert der Habsburgerherrschaft (1526–1619)* (Munich: Oldenburg Verlag, 1995).

imperial court as chancellor and president of the royal chamber (from 1582–86) tied him to Bohemia as marshal and military governor of the Hungarian Kingdom, he participated in the ongoing Turkish wars at the eastern borders of the monarchy.<sup>19</sup> Beyond politics and war, family relations also linked the Bohemian aristocrat to Hungary. During a military campaign against invading Ottoman troops, Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz met Magdalena of Salm-Neuburg (1548–1607), the daughter of Margit Széchy of Felső Lendva (1524–1567), countess of a prominent noble family in western Hungary and married her in Pozsony (Preßburg, today Bratislava, Slovakia), the seat of the Hungarian diet, in 1565.<sup>20</sup> Based on his family connections and properties in western Hungary, which came into his possession through this marriage, Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz received a Hungarian *diploma indigenatus* (an official recognition of nobility) and was elevated to the Hungarian nobility seven years later.<sup>21</sup> Under the influence of his wife, he converted to Protestantism, even though most of the extended Poppel Lobkowitz family was Catholic throughout the period and remained loyal supporters of the Habsburgs.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Stanislav Kasík, Petr Mašek and Marie Mžyková, *Lobkowitz: dějiny a genealogie rodu* (České Budějovice: Veduta, 2002), 112 and Joachim Bahleke, Winfried Eberhard and Miloslav Polívka, eds., *Handbuch der historischen Städten: Böhmen und Mähren* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1998), 679. For a concise biography of Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz see Koltai, *Batthyány Adám*, 65–66.

<sup>20</sup> Intermarriage between the Hungarian and the Austrian or German nobility was not uncommon before the seventeenth century, as shown by the marriage of Margit Széchy to the German Count Nikolaus I Salm Neuburg. It was also common for marriage partners to learn each other's mother tongue; see Géza Pálffy, "A magyar nemesség bécsi integrációjának színterei a 16-17. században" [Scenes of the Hungarian Nobility's Integration in Vienna in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries], in *Tanulmányok Szakály Ferenc emlékére*, ed. Pál Fodor, Géza Pálffy and István György Tóth (Budapest: MTA TKI Gazdaság- és Társadalomtörténeti Kutatócsoportja, 2002), 307–331 and Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja* [The Stepmother of Miklós Zrínyi] (Budapest: Franklin, 1917), 6.

<sup>21</sup> Pálffy, *The Kingdom of Hungary*, 87–88.

<sup>22</sup> Stanislav Kasík, Petr Mašek and Marie Mžyková, eds., *Lobkowitzové: dějiny a genealogie rodu*. [Lobkowitz: History and Genealogy of the Family] (České Budějovice: Veduta, 2002), 35; Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 6-7. Ladislav was not the only Protestant in the Lobkowitz family; his relative Wilhelm Poppel Lobkowitz also became a follower of Lutheranism. See Petr Mat' a, "Vorkonfessionelles, überkonfessionelles, transkonfessionelles Christentum. Prolegomena zu einer Untersuchung der Konfessionalität des böhmischen und mährischen Hochadels zwischen Hussitismus und Zwangskatholisierung," in *Konfessionelle Pluralität als Herausforderung. Koexistenz und Konflikt in*

Becoming Protestant, however, did not prevent Ladislav from getting involved in the plot which was led by his Catholic brother, Jiří starší (George the Elder, d. 1607) in response to Rudolf II's tolerant politics towards the Bohemian Protestants.<sup>23</sup> The coup failed, and Ladislav fled the country to avoid retaliation before his brother's trial began in 1593.<sup>24</sup> Accused of high treason, Ladislav's Bohemian estates were confiscated in his absence. Thanks to her resourcefulness, perseverance and connections, his wife Magdalena was able to secure part of the confiscated family property by 1595.<sup>25</sup> With Ladislav in exile, Magdalena lived with her underage children mostly on her estates in western Hungary.<sup>26</sup> Only after his brother had died in prison in 1607 was Ladislav rehabilitated and allowed to return to Bohemia, where he died two years later.<sup>27</sup>

Ladislav Poppel and Magdalena Salm had eight children, of whom two sons and four daughters survived to adulthood.<sup>28</sup> In their Protestant household, the children spoke

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*Spätmittelalter und Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Joachim Bahlcke, Karen Lambrecht and Hans-Christian Maner (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006), 310.

<sup>23</sup> Petr Mat' a, *Svět české Aristokracie*, (1500–1700) [The World of the Aristocracy in Bohemia] (Prague: Nakl. Lidové noviny, 2004), 128–129. Josep Janaček, *Ženy české renesance* [Women's Czech Renaissance] (Praha, 1977), 57–75.

<sup>24</sup> While Czech historiography only briefly mentions that Ladislav went left Bohemia before his trial, without providing any precise information about where he lived during his exile. Hungarian historians maintain that after 1594, the family primarily lived in western Hungary; Janaček, *Ženy české renesance*, 155. See also Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 7–9 and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 65–66.

<sup>25</sup> Janaček, *Ženy české renesance*, 80.

<sup>26</sup> The confiscation only applied to Ladislav's properties and, as a result, Magdalena Salm retained her Bohemian properties, where she spent the winter months after 1593 (Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 16).

<sup>27</sup> František Hrubý, "Marie Magdalena Trčková, roz. z Lobkovic," in *Královny, kněžny a velké ženy české* (Praha, 1940), 259.

<sup>28</sup> Nr.120–126 in Kasík, et al., *Lobkowiczové dějiny*, 116–117. No other source has been found to confirm the existence of two additional children mentioned in the Lobkowitz genealogy: Eliška or Alžbeta (118) and Adam (119), although the latter might be identical to Adam Eck (126). The Poppel sons, Jan Mikulaš and Adam Eck, died before turning forty. In 1607, the younger brother Adam, a military captain of Ferenc Batthyány, was murdered in Hungary by Kristóf Bánffy. The older brother Jan Mikulaš married his first cousin, Eva Eusebia, daughter of his uncle Jiří Poppel, in 1608 and died without issue seven years later. Surviving letters in the Batthyány missive collection show that the brothers corresponded regularly with Ferenc Batthyány, addressing him as brother and neighbour and exchanging concerns regarding their adjacent estates in western Hungary. See the letters of Jan Mikulaš Poppel to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 38113–38115, 38117, 38119–38121 (1604–1613) and to Eva Poppel, no. 38118 (1608). See Adam Poppel, cavalry captain, to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 37892–37893 (1607). Nothing is known about the fifth daughter,

Czech and German and learned how to read and write in both languages, as the language preferences of the sisters' surviving holograph letters indicate.<sup>29</sup> The older siblings Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina primarily wrote in Czech when writing without scribal assistance, but they also occasionally composed letters in German. The youngest sibling Eva, on the other hand, wrote mostly in German. In addition, evidence in the correspondence also indicates that all sisters spoke or at least understood some Hungarian.<sup>30</sup>

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters put their language skills to good use after they were married off to prestigious members of the Silesian, Bohemian, German and Hungarian Protestant elite. These marriages followed familiar patterns that reflected the intercultural family politics of the political elite in the Habsburg Monarchy. Because of the considerable age gap between the girls, two sets of weddings were celebrated close to twenty years apart. The first two weddings were held in the 1580s, establishing closer ties between the Poppel Lobkowitz and the Bohemian Trčka and the Silesian Kurzbach families. The marriages of the two younger daughters to members from the respectable Solms and Batthyány families were celebrated in 1603 and 1607, extending and reinforcing links to the German Hessen and Hungarian Kingdoms. The Poppel Lobkowitz

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Julie (125), who died shortly after her wedding to the Hungarian nobleman István Török in 1595. Koltai also mentions another daughter named Julie, who died in the 1580s as a child (Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 11; Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 520). Some sources also mention a further Poppel daughter named Griselda, who married the Bohemian nobleman Jaroslav Kolovrat (Janaček, *Ženy české renesance*, 59). A painting from 1580 in the Lobkovice Collection in Nelahozeves Castle depicts Griselda (8) and her older sister Maria Magdalena (11). However, in the family's printed genealogy, Griselda (83) is listed as the daughter of one of Ladislav's youngest sisters and not under his children. See Jitka Mikysková, *Marie Magdaléna Trčková z Lípy*, BA Thesis (Univerzita Karlova Praha, 2012), 9n, and *Lobkoviczové dějiny a genealogie rodu*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Václav Bužek, "Zum tschechisch-deutschen Bilingualismus in den böhmischen und österreichischen Ländern in der frühen Neuzeit," *Österreichische Osthefte* 35 (1993): 577–592.

<sup>30</sup> When Katharina visited Maria Magdalena, she cautioned her sister in Hungarian to keep the children away from the sick members of her households; see Katharina's letter to Eva, 6 July 1616 (29780). On the use of language in the correspondence, see Chapter 3.

marriages thus highlight the linguistic and cultural diversity of the early-seventeenth-century Central European nobility, connected by an intricate web of kinship that extended across the borders of the Habsburg lands before 1620. At the same time, the sisters' biographies also display four very different life courses resulting from their families' fortunes or misfortunes.

***The eldest sister: Katharina Poppel of Lobkowitz, Countess of Kurzbach (c.1570–c.1637)***

What we know about the eldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister, Katharina (Czech: Katařina) comes from her letters that have survived in the Batthyány archive and an unfinished story of her marriage published more than a hundred years ago.<sup>31</sup> At a fairly young age, Katharina married the Silesian Freiherr (baron) Heinrich (III) Kurzbach von Trachtenburg (Jindřich mladší Kurzpach z Trachenburka) (1555–1618).<sup>32</sup> The wedding, which took place at the Poppel Lobkowitz residence in the Lesser Town of Prague (Malá Strana) on October 21, 1584, might have sealed a series of earlier estate transactions between the two families after Heinrich's uncle, Heinrich II, sold his Bohemian estates to Katharina's mother, Magdalena Salm.<sup>33</sup> At first sight, Katharina's marriage to Heinrich

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<sup>31</sup> Katharina Kurzbach's letters to Eva Poppel, Ferenc and Ádám Batthyány, nos. 26521–26537, 29776–29781 and 38123–38126 (1608–1636). In 1904, the Silesian archivist Konrad Wutke published the story of Heinrich Kurzbach's marriages based on the surviving letters of Katharina and Heinrich written before 1600. Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe des 16. Jahrhunderts," *Verein für Geschichte Schlesiens* 38 (1904): 234–275.

<sup>32</sup> Also spelled Kurzpach or Kurtzpach. On the family see Siebmacher, *Die Wappen des böhmischen Adels*, 234. Heinrich's uncle Heinrich of Kurzbach II (d.1590) was an imperial chancellor and chief mint master, who supported the movement of the Czech Brethren. He became a member of the Bohemian "Herrenstand" in 1569; Anton Gindely, *Böhmen und Mähren im Zeitalter der Reformation. Geschichte der Böhmisches Brüder*, vol. 2 (Prague, 1858), 131.

<sup>33</sup> For the wedding's date see Kasík, et al., *Lobkowiczové dějiny*, 116 and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 520. The Lesser Town was one of the oldest parts of Prague where the Bohemian nobility acquired houses as Prague increased its importance as a royal and imperial seat during the reign of Rudolf II. The uncle of Katharina's father, also named Ladislav Popel of Lobkowitz, owned a house in the St. Joseph Gasse 9, inherited by Zdenek Vojtech Popel of Lobkowitz, the later high chancellor of the Kingdom of Bohemia

promised the Poppel Lobkowitz family a son-in-law who could provide for their eldest daughter as befitted her social standing. In addition, the establishment of a family connection through marriage to the ancient and respected Kurzbach family seemed to allow the Poppel Lobkowitz's family network to expand, exemplifying the integration efforts of the Bohemian high nobility with the Silesian elite.<sup>34</sup>

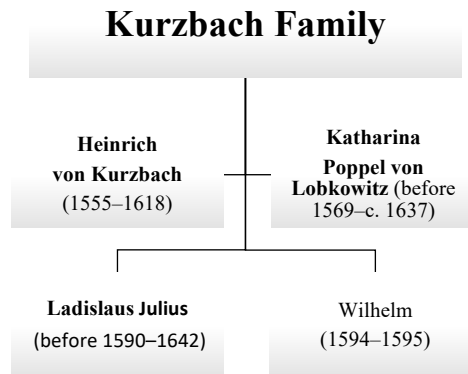


Figure 3: Family tree of the Kurzbach family

Heinrich Kurzbach's expectations of his marriage with the Poppel Lobkowitz's daughter were similarly high, although for different reasons. The haste with which he sought to wed the wealthy Katharina was motivated by the dire state of his finances. The

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(1599) in 1583. This same palace was probably where Ladislav Poppel and his family lived until his disgrace in 1593. See Joseph František Jaroslav Schaller, *Beschreibung der königl. Haupt und Residenzstadt Prag sammt allen darin befindlichen sehenswürdigen Merkwürdigkeiten*, (Prague, 1796), 2:39 and 102 and Janaček, *Ženy české renesance*, 57. A petition of Maria Magdalena Lobkowitz to Rudolf II from 1593 mentions the estates Mertensdorf and Nizieboh, which she purchased from the old Heinrich von Kurzbach. See "Majdalena z Lobkovic prosí císaře Rudolfa II., aby manželi jejímu odpustil a statky jí náležející nezabíral [Magdalena of Lobkovitz begs Emperor Rudolph II to forgive her husband and not to seize her property]," Czech (Bohemian) Assemblies Digital Library. Digital Repository of the Chamber of Deputies Parliament of the Czech Republic, no. 152, <http://www.psp.cz/eknih/snemy/v080/1593-94/t015200.htm> (accessed 6 May 2023).

<sup>34</sup> Around 1550, the Kurzbachs acquired the estates of Lämberg (Lemberk), Ronburg (Ronov), Helfenburg und Drum (Stvolínky) through marriage but they had to give up most of their North Bohemian properties by the end of the sixteenth century; see Petr Mat'á, "Der Adel Böhmens und Schlesiens in der Frühen Neuzeit in vergleichender und Beziehungsgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Adel in Schlesien*, vol. 1. *Herrschaft–Kultur–Selbstdarstellung*, ed. Jan Harasimowicz and Matthias Weber (Munich: Oldenburg, 2010), 242.

defence of the northern-Silesian Kurzbach estates against the Polish incursions consumed much of the former wealth of Heinrich's father, Wilhelm.<sup>35</sup> To the disappointment of Heinrich, however, the bride did not come with a large dowry, and the promise of Katharina's future inheritance was not enough to rescue him from the imminent financial disaster.<sup>36</sup> In 1590, when the family estates of the Kurzbach's Standesherrschaften (state counties) Zmigród (Trachtenberg) and Milicz (Militsch) came into Heinrich's possession, the family was already so heavily burdened with debt that he had no choice but to sell them.<sup>37</sup>

Financial problems went hand in hand with marital troubles related to the unreliable, fortune-hunting character of Heinrich Kurzbach. Two years before his wedding to Katharina, Heinrich's first marriage had ended suddenly. Accusing his young wife of adultery, Heinrich sought the annulment of his marriage from the bishop of Breslau, leaving the poor woman immured in her room. However, the evidence against the wife was not easy to produce, suggesting mercenary motives as the underlying cause of the indictment against his first wife, who brought a considerable dowry of 40,000 guildens and the town of Prausnitz (Prusice) into the marriage.<sup>38</sup> Since the legal

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<sup>35</sup> Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe des 16. Jahrhunderts," 251–255 and August Sadláček, *Hrady, Zámky a tvrze Království českého* [Castles, Palaces and Fortresses of the Kingdom of Bohemia]. vols. 1–15. (Praha, 1882–1927), 14:102–104

<sup>36</sup> The bride's dowry was intended to cover costs of moving into her husband's household and was meant as a financial provision in case she survived her husband; John M. Klassen, *Letters of the Rožmberk Sisters: Noblewomen in Fifteenth-Century Bohemia* (Cambridge: D.D. Brewer, 2000), 20. Katharina's dowry was allocated in the form of a mortgage worth 10,000 gulden, attached to the estate of Trachtenberg, which could only be changed or transferred with her or her father's permission. The condition was included in their marriage agreement to protect the bride's interest; see Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 251, 255. For details about the legal controversies regarding Katharina's dowry and the selling of the Kurzbach estates, see *ibid.*, 255–259.

<sup>37</sup> Freie Standesherrschaften were specific administrative units in Silesia between 1500 and 1800. Granted as royal privilege they were exempt from feudal tenure; *Zedler Universal-Lexicon*, (1735), vol. 9, 1865. In 1593 Heinrich III sold the estate of Trachtenberg to Adam Caspari Filius [Adam von Schaffgotsch] for the sum of 195 000 thalers. Johann Sinapius, *Schlesische Curiositäten erste Vorstellung* (Leipzig, 1720), 145.

<sup>38</sup> Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 240.

procedures kept dragging on, the impatient Heinrich, who had just converted to Catholicism, travelled to Italy with the probable intention of obtaining papal permission for annulment.<sup>39</sup> The sudden death of his wife in 1584 halted the legal process and allowed Heinrich to remarry in the same year.<sup>40</sup>

Heinrich's second wife did not fare much better than her predecessor. Within a short time, Katharina and their young children became a burden for the heavily indebted count. By the late 1580s, the couple had already begun to live separately. While Katharina and her two sons were taken in by her wealthy sister Maria Magdalena Trčka, Heinrich either stayed in Breslau or lived lavishly, undertaking expensive travels to Poland, Brandenburg and Bohemia.<sup>41</sup> Although he occasionally visited his family in Prague, he showed little inclination to support his wife and children financially or take them back to Breslau. Heinrich's demands that his wife should free up her life estates/dower (dotalium) worth 4000 Thaler to consolidate his debts met with resistance from Katharina's parents.<sup>42</sup> The husband thereupon declined all responsibilities towards his wife, declaring that he preferred her to stay in Bohemia for good.<sup>43</sup> In the 1590s, the

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<sup>39</sup> This is suggested by Claudia Zonta who discovered Heinrich Kurzbach's name listed among the students at the University of Sienna of the year 1583; see her *Schlesier an italienischen Universitäten der Frühen Neuzeit 1526–1740*. PhD Diss. (Universität Stuttgart, 1999), 133. Heinrich Kurzbach received a Protestant education and probably studied in Wittenberg. He converted to Catholicism sometime before his wedding with Katharina Poppel Lobkowitz (Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 253).

<sup>40</sup> For details regarding Kurzbach's first marriage, see *ibid.*, 238-249.

<sup>41</sup> The couple had at least two children, Lacek (Ladislaus Julius Eusebius, d. 1642) and Wilhelm (1594-1595); see Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 260 and 272.

<sup>42</sup> In Bohemian law, the dowry lands were part of the husband's property and meant to secure the livelihood of his wife after his death. He could use these lands, but he needed the consent of his wife to dispose of them; see Anděla Kozáková, *Právní postavení ženy v českém právu zemském* [The Legal Status of Women in Czech Land Law] (Prague: Bursík a Kohout, 1926), 30-32; Michaela Antonín Maláníková, Witold Breziński and Marija Mogorović Crljenko, "Gender and Family in Medieval Central Europe," in *Oxford Handbook of Medieval Central Europe*, ed. Nada Zečević and Daniel Ziemann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 218.

<sup>43</sup> In October 1594, Heinrich notified the Poppels about his intention not to bring his family back to Breslau. The following year, he persuaded Katharina to relinquish her rights to her dowry, a precondition to sell the Kurzbach estates (Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 256–266).

war between Katharina's relatives and her irresponsible husband was waged via letters for some time but to no avail. The marriage ended with a *de facto* separation.<sup>44</sup>

Katharina's failed marriage explains the profound silence about Heinrich Kurzbach in her letters. Whereas close-kin relatives usually included greetings from spouses and children in the salutation and conclusion of their letters, the absence of Heinrich's name from the formal parts of the body text in Katharina's letters is striking. The only exception is a hastily jotted letter sent to Eva from Vienna on March 25, 1618 when Heinrich Kurzbach's death was apparently imminent. In this letter, Katharina referred to herself as a "poor widow" and to her almost thirty-year-old son Ladislaus (d. 1642), as a "poor orphan" and announced her immediate departure to Poland.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Heinrich Kurzbach died in Breslau three days before the letter was dispatched to Hungary.<sup>46</sup>

While Heinrich remained in Breslau until his death, Katharina lived primarily in Prague and northern Bohemia.<sup>47</sup> Katharina Kurzbach's frequent travels were most likely

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<sup>44</sup> Eventually, Katharina was granted the right to live separately from her husband, but details how her failed marriage ended are unknown. On the legal praxis of divorce from bread-and-board, see Andrea Griesebner, "Auf ewig Dein? Das Institut der Scheidung von Tisch und Bett Beitrag zum Themenschwerpunkt 'Europäische Geschichte – Geschlechtergeschichte'," Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2015, <https://www.europa.clio-online.de/searching/id/fdae-1653> (accessed 15 May 2023). Although Wutke announced, at the end of his study, that he would continue the story, the second part of the article was never published (Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 271).

<sup>45</sup> Ladislaus Julius Eusebius von Kurzbach (d.1642 in Saldschitz or Zaječice in Czech) See his letters written to Eva Poppel and Ádám Batthyány, nos. 27972-27975 (1614–1637).

<sup>46</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 25 March 1618 (26525).

<sup>47</sup> Karl August Müller, *Vaterländische Bilder in einer Geschichte und Beschreibung der alten Burgfesten und Ritterschlösser Preußens*, vol. 1: *Die Burgfesten und Ritterschlösser Schlesiens* (Slogau, 1837), 273. A reference to a writing desk in Prague where Katharina stored vital documents, such as the register of her Hungarian estates, suggests that she kept her primary residence in the Bohemian capital; see *Katharina's letter to Eva*, Vienna, 25 March 1618 (26525). Heinrich Kurzbach inherited the North-Bohemian village of Kozly, located four kilometres from Ronov, from his father. In a letter dated 1628, Maria Magdalena refers to Katharina as "lady sister from Kozilas", suggesting that the village remained in possession of the family after Heinrich died in 1618; see Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 April 1628 (50109) and Siebmacher, *Die Wappen des böhmischen Adels*, 234. The young Ladislav Kurzbach bought the estates in Worczmany in 1621, but he further increased his debt that his sons sold Worczmany to the Lords of Neundorf-Eisenberg.

related to the lack of support from a husband and the absence of property sufficient to sustain herself and her family. These trips were possibly tied to and motivated by the various financial transactions she conducted to repay her creditors and make ends meet. In 1618, she undertook several trips to Poland to secure the little property that her husband left behind.<sup>48</sup> She also frequently travelled to Vienna to make money by selling horses and wine.<sup>49</sup> While in Vienna, Katharina occasionally visited her sister in Hungary, mainly to retrieve the annual payment that Eva Poppel paid for renting Katharina's inheritance shares.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout her life, Katharina struggled with debt. The deferential tone of her letters and her frequent complaints about her destitute state may have reflected the reality of her precarious situation, rather than being just a rhetorical tool of persuasion. She lamented being forced to pawn her valuables at various Jewish brokers.<sup>51</sup> More than once, she approached Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány for help to redeem "the things" that she left "with the Jewess" in Vienna.<sup>52</sup> The general impoverishment of the oldest Poppel sister and her family is illustrated by the items she and her son had pawned to the Jewish brokers over the years. In 1614, a golden hat string inlaid with rubies and a silver

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<sup>48</sup> See Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 May 1618 (26526). Katharina travelled twice to Poznan in Greater Poland in December 1618 and May 1619; See her letter to Eva Poznan, 3 March 1619 (6527).

<sup>49</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1611 (38125), Vienna, 2 May 1618 (26526), [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529), Vienna, 20 November 1636 (26537).

<sup>50</sup> Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608 (26521). Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, October 1623 (26529). On the legal custom of mortgaging noble estates, see, footnote 15.

<sup>51</sup> Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608 (26521) and Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 21 November 1611 (38126).

<sup>52</sup> Ladislaus Julius Kurzbach's letters to Eva Poppel, Opočno, 21 August 1614 (27963) and to *Ferenc Batthyány*, Prague, 2 April 1614 (27964). The history of the Viennese Jewish community dates back to the Middle Ages. During the Ottoman wars of the late sixteenth century and the Thirty Years' War, Jews lent large sums to the Habsburgs in exchange for protection from the Lower Austrian nobility's renewed efforts to expel them from Vienna. The Jews in Vienna were excluded from professions and were only allowed to make a living as money brokers. They also had the right to lend money against clothing and could sell unredeemed items after a year and a day; see Gerson Wolf, *Geschichte der Juden in Wien (1156-1876)* (Vienna, 1876), 20–51.

dish had to be redeemed by the Batthyánys. Fifteen years later, cloth and textiles, including fine, snow-white linen, a gift from Eva, landed on the shelves of the pawnbroker's shop.<sup>53</sup> Her last extant letter before her death a few months later, dated from Vienna in November 1636, ends with a desperate call to her sister. "For the love of God, I beg for the money. You would not want to hold it back any longer."<sup>54</sup> Disagreement over delayed payments concerning Katharina's mortgaged inheritance shares was one of the recurring sources of conflicts between the two siblings, as Katharina's letters suggest. Since none of Eva's responses to Katharina survived, the question of why Eva Poppel deferred paying the fees due to her sister remains unanswered, whether the sister's conflicts were resolved by turning to mediating help, apology, or simply by paying the money.<sup>55</sup>

Katharina stood apart from the rest of her siblings not only because of her diminished economic position but also because of her confessional identity. Following her husband, she converted to Catholicism as a gesture to demonstrate and strengthen the marital alliance.<sup>56</sup> Such confessional disloyalty was not unusual within early modern families.<sup>57</sup> Although adhering to the faith of the marital partner often led to conflicts

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<sup>53</sup> Ladislaus Julius Kurzbach's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 2 April 1614 (27964) and Katharina's letter to Eva, 29 April 1628 (26532).

<sup>54</sup> "...vmb gottes wilen zú bitten, wegen des gelths sie velle es lenger nidt aúff holten..." Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 4 November 1636 (26536).

<sup>55</sup> For conflict behaviour and strategies of conflict solutions between noble siblings, see Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 230–293.

<sup>56</sup> For Heinrich Kurzbach's conversion, see Wutke, "Eine schlesische Magnatenehe," 252–253. Such conversions were not uncommon in the family. Katharina's father, Ladislav, left his Catholic family for his Protestant wife, Magdalena Salm and Magdolna Batthyány, the daughter of Eva Poppel, took up the Catholic faith of her husband, István Csáky (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 109).

<sup>57</sup> In eighteenth-century Holland, women converted to their husband's faith in approximately seventeen percent of cases; Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Intimate Negotiations: Husbands and Wives of Opposing Faiths in Eighteenth-Century Holland," in *Living with Religious Diversity in Early-Modern Europe*, ed. Scott Dixon, Dagmar Freist, Mark Greengrass (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 234; See also Gabriella Erdélyi, "Confessional Identity and Models of Aristocratic Conversion in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Hungary," *Social History* 40, no. 4 (2015): 473–496.

among family members, resentments towards the party who converted could diminish over time or be overridden by more serious concerns.<sup>58</sup> This might have been the case with Katharina as well. Fearing her approaching death, she begged Eva Poppel to arrange a proper funeral for her held by a Catholic priest when the time came.<sup>59</sup> Receiving an appropriate burial was a particular concern for the eldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister, especially since she lacked social and financial support from her family. Despite the possible dissatisfaction of her immediate relatives, some thirty years later, Katharina trusted her strongly Lutheran sister, relaying to Eva her last will: “for the body is commanded to God as he wills, but let the soul be provided for.”<sup>60</sup> As Katharina’s case suggests, close kin relationships could override resentments and confessional divides.

Katharina Kurzbach’s entire correspondence with Eva Poppel is characterized by a highly submissive tone towards her socially superior sibling. Because the two sisters grew up separately—they were born at least twenty years apart—the emotional distance between them was considerable.<sup>61</sup> The sisters’ detachment was exacerbated by the significant differences in their social and economic circumstances and confessional status. Katharina frequently complained about her hardships. Her pleas for cart, wine, or arrears of payment allow a glimpse into the experiences of marital separation for a noblewoman in the early seventeenth century. Left without a male guardian, she was forced to rely on the mercy of her relatives and was deprived of the security and social recognition that a marriage to a landed aristocrat would otherwise have provided.

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<sup>58</sup> Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen, Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), 252–258.

<sup>59</sup> Katharina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529).

<sup>60</sup> “... for the body is commanded to God as he wills, but let the soul be provided for ...” Katharina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>61</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 90.

Katharina likely supported herself through the sparse income from her parental inheritance, which did not generate enough wealth to provide for her livelihood.

However, Katherina's correspondence also attests to her self-reliance. She travelled alone, negotiated with merchants and pawnshop keepers and tried to fend for her rights in inheritance disputes. Surprisingly, amidst all her hardship, her penmanship improved, as she practiced writing daily by producing many of her letters with her own hand.<sup>62</sup> From references in the letters of the Viennese merchant woman Eva Claus, we also gain the impression that Katharina may have had a challenging personality.<sup>63</sup> She was demanding, exhibited traits of anxiety and was also described as being talkative and presumably indiscreet, which could have strained her personal relationships. The hardships in Katharina's life stemming from her unfortunate marriage to Heinrich Kurzbach can be attributed to a combination of factors that likely include the challenging personalities of both husband and wife.

***The second sister: Maria Magdalena of Trčka (c.1569–Světlá, 8 July 1633)***<sup>64</sup>

Maria Magdalena, the second daughter of Ladislav Poppel and Magdalena Salm, was, in almost every respect, the opposite of her older sister. She was intelligent, wealthy and successful.<sup>65</sup> Like her mother, she also was practical, energetic and equipped with

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<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the image of her organized letters, displaying steady and confident handwriting, attests to the education Katharina received under her mother's wing. For more on the Poppel Lobkowitz sister's education and handwriting, see Chapter 3.

<sup>63</sup> See the references to Katharina Kurzbach in Eva Claus' letters to Eva Poppel, 7934 (1618), 7986 (1628), 7988 (1629), 7992 (1629), 8000 (1633) and 17588 (1637).

<sup>64</sup> Kasík, et al., *Lobkowiczové dějiny*, 116. For information of Maria Magdalena's death place, see Marie Koldinská and Petr Mat'á, eds., *Deník Rudolfského Dvořana: Adam mladší z Valdštejna, 1602–1633* [Diary of a Rudolfian Courtier: Adam Valdstein the Younger, 1602-1633] (Prague: Argo, 1997), 327.

<sup>65</sup> Jaroslav Šůla, "Dva kšafy Jana Rudolfa Trčky z Lípy" [The Two Testaments of Jan Rudolf Trčka of Lipa], *Stopami dějin Náchodska sborník Státního archivu Náchod* 5 (1999): 160.

good business instincts. Her marriage to Count Jan Rudolf (1557–1634), from the extremely wealthy family of Trčka, secured the second Poppel Lobkowitz sister an affluent life and prominent status in the highest circles of the Bohemian elite.<sup>66</sup>

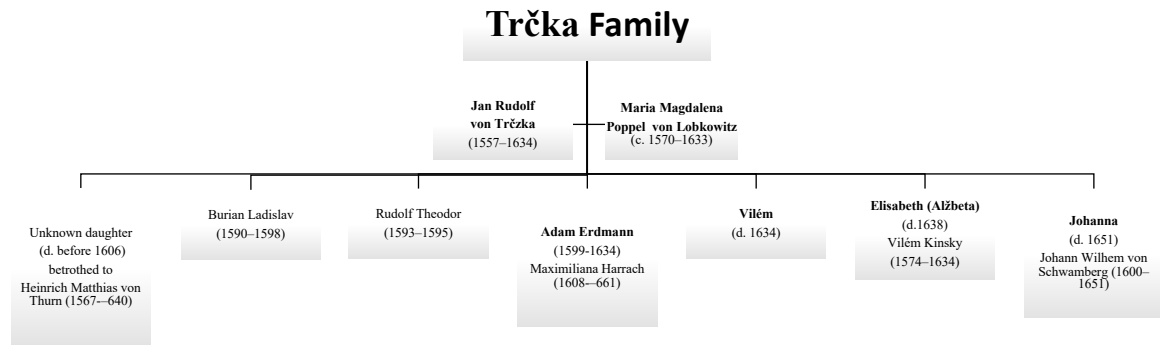


Figure 4: Family tree of the Trčka family

The grandiose Renaissance castle in Opočno, the primary residence of the family in Central Bohemia, represented the wealth and social advancement of the Trčkas.<sup>67</sup> At the turn of the seventeenth century, the Protestant Jan Rudolf Trčka was still regarded as a *homo novus* (a new man) among the Bohemian aristocracy, as he was only elevated from knighthood to the Bohemian Herrenstand in 1593.<sup>68</sup> His quick ascent up the ladder of the Bohemian nobility granted him important positions at the imperial court: he became chancellor in 1593 and valet (Kammerdiener) to Rudolf II in 1608.<sup>69</sup> While Jan

<sup>66</sup> Jan Rudolf Trčka married Maria Magdalena Poppel Lobkowitz 8 February 1588 (Šůla, 160).

<sup>67</sup> Jan Rudolf purchased the estate of Opočno from the heirs of his deceased cousin, Christoph Jaroslav in 1606 and owned several estates in Central Bohemia, including Světla, Ledec, Kounice, Lipnice, Veliš, Jenikau, Richenburg, Lichtenburg, Smřic, Seelau, Chotěboř, Vlašim, Kamenic, Tetschen, Frimburk and Dobruska (Siebmacher, *Die Wappen des böhmischen Adels*, 177–178; Mat'a, *Svět české Aristokracie*, 160 and Bahleke, *Böhmen und Mähren*, 432).

<sup>68</sup> In the German-speaking lands of the Holy Roman Empire, the nobility with the title Freiherr belonged to the lower levels of the 'Herrenstandand'. In the social hierarchy, a Freiherr was positioned between a Ritter (knight) and a Graf (Count). The status was approximately equivalent to English baron in rank (Mat'a, *Svět české Aristokracie*, 58).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*; Hausenblasová, *Der Hof Kaiser Rudolfs*, 397.

Rudolf was close to the Utraquists, the moderate wing of the Czech national church, he sent only a small troop of soldiers to the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. Previous historical research has attributed Jan Rudolf's passivity during the uprising of the Protestant estates to his lukewarm character.<sup>70</sup> Jaroslav Šůla, however, argues that the apparent timidity of Count Trčka may have been a result of a severe illness, as suggested by his testimony prepared in 1617.<sup>71</sup> Although he did not become Catholic until his official conversion in 1628, he joined the growing circle of Ferdinand II's supporters shortly after the defeat of the Bohemian rebels. This move ensured Jan Rudolf's escape from the political and financial retributions of the Habsburgs against the leading Protestant elite of Bohemia.<sup>72</sup>

The large estates of the Trčka family were concentrated primarily in eastern and northern Bohemia, but they also owned property in Moravia. The center of the Trčka estates lay in eastern Bohemia and included, among others, the estates of Smiřice, Náchod, Opočno, Lipnice, Ledec and Světlá. This vast family fortune, estimated by the 1620s at four million guildens in assets, has been attributed to the assiduity [i.e. diligence] of Jan Rudolf.<sup>73</sup> Rather, his clever wife, Maria Magdalena, stood behind most of the

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<sup>70</sup> Hrubý, "Marie Mandalena Trčková roz. z Lobkovic," 259.

<sup>71</sup> Jan Rudolf's commitment to Protestantism was stronger in the decade preceding the revolt of 1618. He financed the constructions of churches and schools in the towns of Opočno and Dobruška. However, he fell severely ill around 1617, which might have drained him from the energy to be more actively involved in the uprising of the Bohemian estates (Šůla, "Dva kšafy," 163).

<sup>72</sup> Only Frantisek Pubička's early nineteenth-century history mentions Rudolf Trčka as Utraquist. By the seventeenth century, this moderate wing of the Czech national reform church had already incorporated many of the ideas of Lutheranism; Frantisek Pubička, *Chronologische Geschichte Böhmens*, vol. 6, part 3 (Prague, 1801), 377.

<sup>73</sup> About the estimated wealth of the Trčka family confiscated after the death of Jan Rudolf, see Tomáš Bílek, *Dějiny konfiskací v Čechách po roce 1618* [History of Confiscations in Bohemia after 1618] (Prague, 1882), 684-714. For more on Jan Rudolf Trčka, see the diary of Adam Valdstein, Koldinská, *Deník Rudolfinského Dvořana* and Pleva, *Ledeč*, 33-34.

Trčka's real estate transactions.<sup>74</sup> According to Josef Janaček, noblewomen like Maria Magdalena Trčka and her mother Magdalena Salm, with a shrewd acumen for business, were often more diligent in managing estates and conducting business, large and small, than their husbands. "For noblemen," he wrote, "it was an unspeakable humiliation to work like townsmen, but they did not mind that their hardworking wives were successful in business". Noblemen overlooked the fact that they often bestowed greater authority upon their wives than was proper for a woman in a subordinate position. This, as Janaček underlines, "was one of the changes that the Renaissance brought into the lives of women of noble birth".<sup>75</sup>

The changes in noblewomen's life, which Janaček attributed to the "Renaissance" in sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Bohemia, were similar to the greater scope of actions allowed for elite Hungarian women in the same period. The Reformation in Central Europe presented new opportunities for Protestant noblewomen by emphasising conjugal partnership and advancing their literacy skills. Noblewomen used their literacy not only for religious piety but also for practical purposes that allowed them to assist their husbands in the management of family estates and the conduct of business affairs. The success of Magdalena Salm and her daughter in the real estate business can be attributed

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<sup>74</sup> Frantisek Hrubý's characterized Maria Magdalena Trčka as a powerful and clever woman with excellent skills both in business and political intrigue. Hrubý, "Marie Magdalena Trčková roz. z Lobkovic," Maria Magdalena Trčka was also remembered for her alleged cruelty towards her subjects and was mockingly called 'Manda Trčzkova', Pleva, *Ledeč*, 33.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 72. Janaček's observation about how elite women's life has changed in sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Bohemia coincided with the publication of Joan Kelly's famous study "Did Women Have a Renaissance" in 1977. Kelly's argument, which stated that the "Renaissance" had little impact on the rights and opportunities of women compared to earlier times, initiated a decades-long scholarly debate about the experiences of women compared to men in areas of sexuality, religion, culture and intellectual life, while it also sparked discussion about terminology and periodization. See Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 137–164. For revisiting the discussion, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Foreword" *Early Modern Women* 8, (Fall 2013): 241–247 and Theresa Coletti, "Did Women Have a Renaissance? A Medievalist Reads Joan Kelly and Aemilia Lanzer," *ibid.*, 249–259.

to these women's natural talent, but, more significantly, it arose out of a situation of necessity. Magdolna had to take charge and preserve the family's wealth while her husband was in political exile. Likewise, her daughter, Maria Magdalena, conducted business with the consent and support of her husband, whose interests may have lain elsewhere but whose actions were likely also limited by ill health.<sup>76</sup> Despite Luther's assertion of the inferior position of women to men, wives still found space to hold authority over areas of life that their husbands either could not handle or despised.<sup>77</sup>

Maria Magdalena had an exceptional instinct for business and management. She traded with estates on a large scale, and property frequently changed hands among close friends and even within her family. In 1598, she sold the Trčka estate of Ledeč, with the town and surrounding villages, to her mother Magdalena Salm. After the death of the Poppel Lobkowitz parents in 1607 and 1609, respectively, Ledeč became heir to her eldest brother Jan Mikulaš Poppel. When he died heavily in debt and without living issue in 1614, Maria Magdalena convinced his widow to sell the family estate to her husband, Jan Rudolf.<sup>78</sup> Through these intricate estate transactions, she was able to return Ledeč to its former owner, thereby making a handsome profit.<sup>79</sup>

The 1620s provided further opportunities for Maria Magdalena to prove her business acumen. In the years following the disastrous Battle of White Mountain, the Trčkas gained easy access to the Bohemian estates of the exiled Protestant nobles in exchange

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<sup>76</sup> Šůla, "Dva kšafy," 163.

<sup>77</sup> Albrecht Classen and Tanya Amber Settle, "Women in Martin Luther's Life and Theology," *German Studies Review* 4, no. 2 (May 1991): 231–260.

<sup>78</sup> Eva Eusebia Poppel Lobkowitz (1575–1624) was the wife of Jan Mikulaš Poppel Lobkowitz (d. 1624) and daughter of his disgraced uncle Georg (Jiří) Poppel. She was well known for her humanist education and full command of Latin and Greek. For a short reference to Eva Eusebia, see Moritz Csáky, "Lobkowitz, Georg Poppel," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (NDB) (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1985), 14: 731.

<sup>79</sup> For more about trading between the Ledeč, Trčka and Poppel Lobkowitz families, see Pleva, *Ledeč*, 32–34.

for a considerable loan to Ferdinand II to fill up the treasury emptied by war. Maria Magdalena took advantage of this opportunity and bought confiscated land cheaply in the name of her husband.<sup>80</sup> One of Maria Magdalena's biggest purchases was the northern Bohemian estate of Nachod, confiscated from Jan Albrecht of Smiřice. She bought the estate from the Imperial Chamber for 175,000 Rhenish gulden in 1623 and earned an extra fifteen percent by selling it five years later to her son Adam for 200,000 gulden.<sup>81</sup> Maria Magdalena also acquired Nové Město (Neustadt), a town in the Nachod district, which formerly belonged to the Protestant nobleman Rudolf von Stubenberg.<sup>82</sup> Nové Město was first bequeathed to Albrecht von Wallenstein, the great imperial general of the Thirty Years' War, but he quickly passed it on to the Trčkas.<sup>83</sup> Acquiring Nové Město was expensive and especially difficult, as we learn from Maria Magdalena's letter written to Eva in 1626:

I have never had such trouble and difficulties with any purchase, and I have even cried on the day of my birthday. I had to give [...] my house in Prague, included in all that, and, trust me, I had to give hundred thousand in cash many times when the Count [Wallenstein] confiscated it for himself. [I was trying] to get the money from all the places where it was kept, I sold everything I could and pawned all I could: by the good Lord, I cannot describe all the suffering I had to endure with that

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<sup>80</sup> Hrubý, "Marie Mandalena Trčkova", 260. Since the reign of Rudolf II, it became common practice to establish financial links between the royal fiscal chamber and the Bohemian aristocracy in form of noble loans in exchange for privileges. See Mat' a, *Svět české Aristokracie*, 178. It is estimated that the Trčka's purchases were worth about half a million gold pieces by the end of the confiscation process: Eduard Doubek, "Trčkové a Albrecht z Valdštejna," *Havlíčkovobrodsko 10* (Havlíčkův Brod: Okresní vlastivědné muzeum a Státní okresní archiv v Havlíčkově Brodě, 1994), 25–30.

<sup>81</sup> Bílek, *Dějiny konfiskací*, 546 and Bahlcke, *Böhmen und Mähren*, 387.

<sup>82</sup> Although Stubenberg died in early 1620, he was accused of conspiracy posthumously. His estates were confiscated and subsequently sold to the supporters of Ferdinand II; Bahlcke, *Böhmen und Mähren*, 405.

<sup>83</sup> Wallenstein (Albrecht Václav Eusebius z Valdštejna, 1583–1634) sold Nové Město to the Trčka's in exchange for various properties, including the Trčka's house in the Lesser Town in Prague, which later became what is known today as Wallenstein Palast. The former Stubenberg estate was eventually sold by Rudolf Trčka to his son Adam in 1628. See Petr Uličný, "Belvederes and Loggias in Prague: Two Faces of the Leisure: Architecture of the Imperial City," *Studia Rudolfiana* 14 (2014): 30–50, and also his "Valdštejnský palác v praze. Revidované dějiny, nové souvislosti" [Wallenstein Palace in Prague. Revised History, a New Connection], *Průzkumy Památek* 21, no. 2 (2014): 22; see also Lydia Baštecká and Ivana Ebelová, *Náchod* (Náchod, 2004), 87–94 and Bílek, *Dějiny konfiskací*, 782–783.

purchase. That fifty thousand we had to pay him [Wallenstein] coin by coin, and the good Lord be my witness that I write the truth.<sup>84</sup>

As the letter implies, Maria Magdalena had already been involved in the confiscation and acquisition of Nové Město by Wallenstein even before purchasing the estate for her family. Settling these transactions took years. For, even the wealthiest families, like the Trčkas, faced difficulties producing the requested sums due to the rapid currency devaluation in Bohemia in the early 1620s.<sup>85</sup>

The Trčka Countess' talent in economic entrepreneurship matched her excellent political and networking skills, which she facilitated and expanded through family connections. Despite her financial ties to the loyal Habsburg political elite, Maria Magdalena kept connections to those Bohemian Protestants in exile even after the defeat of the Protestant Revolt. She provided financial support to the leader of the rebels, Count Matthias Thurn (1567-1640) and helped the Moravian Captain Ladislav Velen ze Žerotína (1579-1638) to exchange letters with his relatives.<sup>86</sup>

The Trčkas' hesitation to take sides was reflected in the family's marital strategies. Due to Jan Rudolf's poor health, especially after 1617, Maria Magdalena rather than her husband, might have chosen marriage partners for her children from both the Bohemian Protestant opposition and families supporting the Catholic Habsburgs.<sup>87</sup> In 1606, an unknown daughter was betrothed to her friend, Count Jindřich Matyáš of Thurn-Valsassina (Heinrich Matthias von Thurn) (1567-1640). Although the prospective bride

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<sup>84</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, *Světlá (Swetla)*, 26 January 1626 (50106), trans. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>85</sup> Arnošt Klíma, "Inflation in Bohemia in the Early Stages of the Seventeenth Century," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Economic History Congress*, ed. by Michael W. Flynn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), 375-386 and Volker Press, "Adel in der österreichischen böhmischen Erbländern und im Reich zwischen dem 15. und 17. Jahrhundert," in *Adel im Wandel: Politik, Kultur, Konfession 1500-1700* (Vienna: Niederösterreichisches Landesmuseum, 1990), 27.

<sup>86</sup> Hrubý, "Marie Magdalena Trčková," 260.

<sup>87</sup> Šůla, "Dva kšafy," 163.

died shortly before the wedding, Maria Magdalena continued to keep a friendly relationship with the Count for the next twenty years.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, the Trčka's second daughter Alžběta/Eliška (Elisabeth) became the wife of the exiled rebel, royal chief master of the hunt Count Vilém Kinsky (1574-1634). Although the groom was closer in age to the mother than his bride, he was a good choice because of his ownership of large estates and commitment to the Lutheran faith. Kinsky took an active role in the Bohemian rebellion; nevertheless, his estates were not confiscated, thanks to his connections to the Trčkas.<sup>89</sup> Whereas Maria Magdalena sought husbands for her daughters from among the Bohemian Protestant elite, for her oldest son Adam Erdmann, she found a wife in circles loyal to the Habsburgs. Through Adam's marriage with Maria Maximiliana, the daughter of the Catholic imperial privy councillor, Count Karl von Harrach, the Trčkas not only established a kinship with one of the most powerful Habsburg-loyal Catholic families but also became in-laws of Albrecht Wallenstein.<sup>90</sup> Establishing family relationships with members of these families showed the crucial importance of family ties to current and future potential political powers in ensuring the survival of the Trčzka's lineage.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Count Thurn bought the estate of Velish in northern Bohemia from Jan Trčka, his future father-in-law (*Ibid*).

<sup>89</sup> Jaroslav Šůla, "Kladsko v plánech účastníků Valdštejnského spiknutí [Kladsko in the Plans of the Participants in the Wallenstein Conspiracy]," *Kladský Sborník 2* (1998): 149–156.

<sup>90</sup> Albrecht Wallenstein married Isabella Katharina, another daughter of Karl Harrach; see Katrin Keller and Alessandro Catalano, eds., *Die Diarien und Tagzettel des Kardinals Ernst Adalbert von Harrach* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010), 230.

<sup>91</sup> Maria Magdalena Trčzka's name is also closely linked to the conspiracy associated with Wallenstein, whose immense wealth, powerful military army and growing political ambitions in the late 1620s posed a serious threat for Ferdinand II and simultaneously nurtured hope among the exiled Protestant nobility for the possibility of an independent Bohemia. The Wallenstein biography of the popular historian Golo Mann throws an especially unfavourable light on Maria Magdalena, depicting "old Lady Trčzka" as a stubborn Protestant and great plotter, exchanging letters with clandestine information concealed by invisible ink with her daughter, the Countess of Kinsky. While there is little research on what role Maria Magdalena might have played in shaping the future of post-White-Mountain-Bohemia, her connections to Wallenstein were

Maria Magdalena's estate transactions and her efforts to create an influential personal network connecting the family to both the Catholic Habsburgs and the Protestant opposition exposed the underlying pressures for survival facing the Protestant nobility of Central Europe.<sup>92</sup> Although the Trčkas might have sympathized with the Protestant cause, they were terrified by the uprising of 1618. Therefore, they tried to avoid taking a clear position on either of the opposing sides in order to save the family's enormous wealth. The Trčkas' material interest and the burden of unpaid debt, which accumulated during the years of excess property transactions, forced them, like many other families, to get closer to the ruling political power, the primary source of political favour and wealth.

In this context, Catholic conversion was the ultimate solution for economic, political and social survival. Under the growing pressure of the Counter-Reformation in the 1620s, the Trčkas' loyalty to the Protestant faith weakened. By publishing the royal patent in 1627, Ferdinand II forced the Protestant nobility in Austria and Bohemia to choose between conversion or exile and confiscation of their estates.<sup>93</sup> A year later, Rudolf Trčka and his son Adam converted to Catholicism. While holding the reins of family policy firmly in her hands, Maria Magdalena, however, remained committed to her Lutheran faith.<sup>94</sup>

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as much about financial gain as they were probably about long-term political motivation; see Golo Mann, Wallenstein, *His Life*, transl. Charles Kesler (London: Andre Deutsch, 1976), 560–561, 565.

<sup>92</sup> Šůla, "Dva kšafy," 165.

<sup>93</sup> The royal patent issued by Ferdinand II in 1627 gave the Protestant nobles of Austria and Bohemia a year to choose between Catholic conversion or exile and confiscation of their estates. Because of his ultimatum, over 750 were forced to leave their land: Robert Bireley S.J., *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 45.

<sup>94</sup> For confessionally mixed marriages in seventeenth-century France, see "Divided families," in Keith P. Luria, *Sacred Boundaries: Religious coexistence and Conflict in Early Modern France* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 143–192.

Maria Magdalena's correspondence with her sister Eva is largely silent about the political struggles in Bohemia. Maria Magdalena's letters before 1609 reflect the orderly life of the Bohemian aristocracy in the last decade under the reign of Rudolf II. The letters shed light on the lavish lifestyle led in the Trčka residences of Opočno and Světla and the heavy traffic of luxury objects, skilled servants and Ottoman slaves between the two sisters and their families. Maria Magdalena supplied Eva with colourful fine textiles and clothing made of silk, atlas, taffeta, damask and linen, as well as jewelry such as bracelets, rings, pearls, a necklace, a golden crown, a clock from the goldsmith Hertzog, gold and silver from Venice and glass bottles from Bohemia.<sup>95</sup> In return, Maria Magdalena received dogs, hounds, falcons, a wild boar, a horse, wine, honey, wax and fruits, including peaches, pumpkins and chestnuts from the Batthyánys.<sup>96</sup> Upon request, Eva also sent her a young boy to play instruments and a Turkish slave girl who was especially dear to the Maria Magdalena.<sup>97</sup> The exchange of goods and persons between the Trčka and Batthyány families reflects the visible division in the Central European economic market, where agricultural products from Hungary were traded for artisanal and luxury goods produced in the wealthier western parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. At the same time, it points to how far the Czech and Hungarian nobility was embedded in the emerging global economy of the early seventeenth century.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Silk, atlas, taffeta, no. 50056; damask, no. 50089; linen no. 50080; bracelets, no. 50053; rings, nos. 50056 and 50078, ruby ring, no. 50080; necklace, nos. 50057 and 50086; silver and gold, nos. 50085 and 50090; glass bottles, no. 50060.

<sup>96</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Small dog, no. 50071; hounds, no. 50056; falcons, no. 50059; wild boar, no. 50072; horse, no. 50059; wine, nos. 50072 and 50085; honey, no. 50080; wax, no. 50085; fruit, no. 50059.

<sup>97</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Opočno, 5 October 1607 (50059) and Smiržice (Schmiritz), 19 March 1607 (50054).

<sup>98</sup> Vera Zimányi, *Economy and Society in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Hungary (1526–1650)* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1987). See also Matthew P. Romaniello, "Trade and the Global Economy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750, Volume II*, ed. Hanish Scott

In the 1610s and 1620s, the subject and tone of Maria Magdalena's letters changed. They express palpable distress over the family business and describe the tense political atmosphere in Bohemia. Immediately after the death of her parents and younger brother, her letters were mostly concerned about taking on the financial debt of the deceased and about the settlement with the Hungarian nobleman Tamás Széchy over disputed villages in western Hungary.<sup>99</sup> In the months following the revolt of the Protestant nobility in Bohemia in May 1618, the tone of her letters became dark and resigned. The unrest on the streets of Prague in May 1618 utterly frightened Maria Magdalena. She became sick and only visited the capital when her older sister Katharina was present.<sup>100</sup> Reports about military confrontations in Bohemia in the 1620s are mentioned only in passing in her letters.<sup>101</sup> Maria Magdalena continued to send Eva what she desired from Prague, but the time when an abundance of exchanged goods travelled between Bohemia and Hungary two decades earlier was a thing of the past. Towards the end of her life, concerns about the Hungarian inheritance resurfaced in her correspondence, as she declared her willingness to sell her shares to Eva Poppel.<sup>102</sup> While the historical narrative has painted a rather unfavourable image of the calculating and greedy Trčka Countess who joined hands with the Catholic Habsburgs to secure her

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(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014): 307–333 and Janine Maegraith and Craig Muldrew, “Consumption and Material Life,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750, Volume I: Peoples and Place*, ed. Hamish Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 369–397. There are also few welcome studies on the effects of global trade and consumption in Central Europe in the period before 1750; see, for example, Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Veronika Hyden-Hanscho, “Invisible Globalization: French Hats in Habsburg Vienna, 1650–1750,” *The Journal of European History* 45, no. 3 (2016): 11–54.

<sup>99</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, nos. 50060 (1608), 50072 (1609), 50091 (1613), 50083 (1610), 50085 (1611), 50088 (1612).

<sup>100</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva [n.p.], 27 May 1618 (50099) and Prague, 21 June, 1618 (50100).

<sup>101</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Prague, 18 May 1620 (50103) and [n.p.], 10 August 1625 (50104).

<sup>102</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 April 1628 (50109).

family's future, Maria Magdalena's letters to her sister imply her unease regarding the uncertainty about the future, as the Trčkas were rendered financially vulnerable by their association with Protestantism.

It is an irony of history that the increasingly close association with Wallenstein, which Maria Magdalena maintained to ensure the Trčka family's survival, eventually caused Trčka family's downfall. Wallenstein's immense wealth, powerful army and growing political ambitions beginning in the late 1620s posed a severe threat to Ferdinand II, who decided to get rid of him. As close associates of the Field Marshall, young Adam Trčka and his brother-in-law Vilém Kinsky were assassinated alongside Wallenstein in 1634. Maria Magdalena did not live to see the destruction of her family. She died in 1633, outlived by her husband and sons by only a year.<sup>103</sup> The sudden extinction of the family's male lineage allowed the royal chamber to lay hands on the Trčka's immense wealth. The family estates were confiscated and subsequently sold. The rise and fall of the Trčka family exemplify a distinct phenomenon that characterised the leading nobility in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. Parallel to the breaking down of the nobility's Protestant identity, extinction increasingly threatened the lineages of established noble families in the Bohemian lands after 1600. In addition, the combined effect of high infant mortality and low fertility rates, as well as the fact that a high proportion of the male nobility died on the battlefield, resulted in the disappearance of the old elite.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Maria Magdalena's younger son Vilem died in March 1634, shortly after the murder of his brother Adam in Cheb (Šůla, "Dva kšafy," 165–166).

<sup>104</sup> Pável Král, "Das Aussterben Böhmischer Adelsgeschlechter an der Wende vom 16. zum 17. Jahrhundert," in *Zwischen Schande und Ehre. Erinnerungsbrüche und Kontinuität des Hauses*, ed. Martin Wrede and Horst Carl (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2007), 387–398.

*The third sister: Sabina Poppel of Lobkowitz, Countess of Solms (Prague, 2 November 1583 – 3 June 1623, buried in Ledec)*

The German archivist Friedrich Uhlhorn's history of the Bohemian branch of the German Solms-Lich family provides the most information about Sabina, the second-youngest daughter of Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz and Magdalena Salm.<sup>105</sup> Sabina, or Zbinka, as she was called in the family, was born on November 2, 1583.<sup>106</sup> At twenty, she married Philipp, Count of Solms-Lich (1569–1631) from the prominent German Protestant Solms family in Hesse.<sup>107</sup> Sabina met her future husband in Hungary during the late 1590s when the adventurous young Count Solms served as a cavalry officer and oversaw the recruitment for the ongoing Ottoman wars. As a reward for his services, Solms was promoted and became military chancellor of King Rudolf II.<sup>108</sup>

Sabina married Philipp Solms in the castle of Světla in 1603, which belonged to the bride's wealthy brother-in-law, Jan Rudolf Trčka.<sup>109</sup> The wedding was elevated by the presence of prominent guests and by the lavish gift from Rudolf II presented to the newlywed couple by Count Adam, the last member of the prestigious Bohemian aristocratic family of Valdstejn and a close friend of Jan Rudolf Trčka.<sup>110</sup> The experience with the disastrous marriage of Katharina made the Poppel family particularly cautious. The marriage agreement of Sabina and Philipp meticulously listed what each party brought into the matrimony to lessen the parents' unease about the little-known groom and his distant family in Germany.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," des Hauses Solms-Lich." *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 9 (1959): 66-119.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 119, and no. 124 in Kasík, etc., *Lobkowiczové dějiny*, 117.

<sup>107</sup> For more on the life of Count Philip Solms-Lich, see Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie".

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>109</sup> Světla nad Sázavou. Bahlcke, *Böhmen und Mähren*, 97.

<sup>110</sup> Koldinská, *Deník Rudolfinského Dvořana*, 64. See also Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 93–94.

<sup>111</sup> Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 94.

The marriage of Count Philipp Solms and Sabina Poppel von Lobkowitz shows how family ties among the nobility advanced individual careers and linked together the culturally distinct elite of the Habsburg lands. Philipp became acquainted with the Bohemian political elite by marrying into Bohemia’s leading aristocratic family. His widening connections to the serving court nobility furthered his political ambitions and allowed him to become the founder of the Bohemian Solms-Lich lineage.<sup>112</sup> In addition to his estates in Hessen, Philipp Solms also acquired Okraulitz (Okrouhlice) in Central Bohemia, which Sabina brought to their marriage, thereby initiating the first step in becoming a member of the landed nobility in Bohemia.<sup>113</sup>

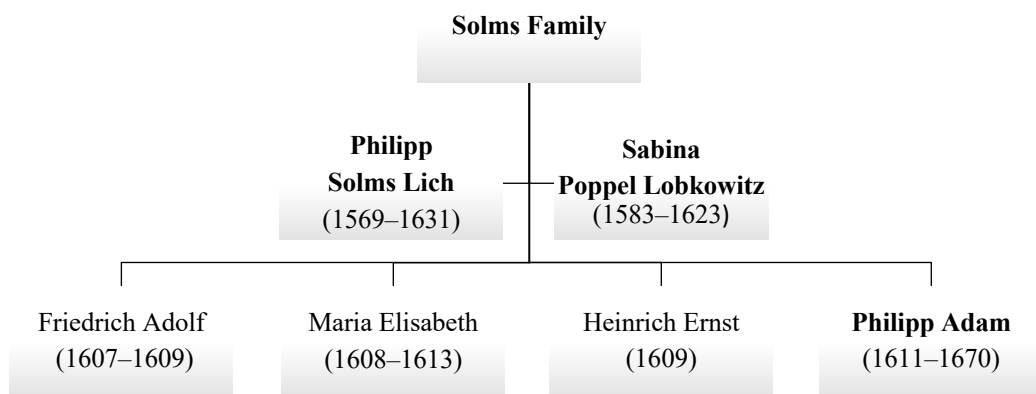


Figure 5: Family tree of the Solms family

In the first few years, the couple did not have a stable residence, moving back and forth between Bohemia, the German Solms estates, Vienna and the Hungarian Dobra (Neuhaus, today in Austria), where Sabina owned land inherited from her mother. The

<sup>112</sup> Rudolf zu Solms Lich, *Geschichte des Grafen-und fürstenhauses Solms*, (Adelmann, 1865), 203–206, Friedrich Uhlhorn, “Die Solmsers Archive in der Wetterau,” in *Archivische Zeitschrift* 39 (1930), 69; see also his “Die Böhmisches Linie”, 66–119 and *Geschichte der Grafen von Solms zwischen Reformation und Westfälischem Frieden*, ed. Gerhard Menk (Darmstadt: 2011). See also Jürgen Rainer Wolf, “Grafschaft Solms,” in Winfried Speitkamp eds., *Handbuch der hessischen Geschichte*, vol. 3: *Ritter, Grafen und Fürsten – weltliche Herrschaften im hessischen Raum ca. 900–1806* (Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission für Hessen, vol. 63) (Marburg 2014), 376–402.

<sup>113</sup> Count of Solms received Virneburg, Saffenburg and Gelsdorf. Uhlhorn, “Die böhmische Linie,” 94.

changing birth and burial places of children in genealogical records, combined with the range of places noted in the letters, reveal not only how frequently the Solms family changed its residence. It also shows that in the first half of the seventeenth century, large segments of the nobility, particularly the younger sons of noble families, were still mobile in Central Europe.<sup>114</sup> Sabina's and Philipp's first son was born in Hohensolms in 1607.<sup>115</sup> The couple spent nearly all of the next two years mainly in Bohemia. Their second child, a girl, was born on the Trčka estates in Vrbce (Wirbitz) in October 1608.<sup>116</sup> In the fall of 1609, Sabina quickly returned to her estates in Hungary but left again for Hohensolms in Hesse, where a second son was born in December.<sup>117</sup> A few months later, the infant was buried next to his brother in the family tomb of the Poppel Lobkowitz family in the Bohemian Ledec.<sup>118</sup> In the early 1610s, the Solms family continued to travel back and forth between Hungary and Vienna, where the couple's only child to survive into adulthood, Adam Philipp, was born in 1611. Their daughter, "dear Maria Betushka," succumbed to illness in Lich, Hesse two years later.<sup>119</sup>

There are many reasons for the Solms' unsettled life. The management of the scattered Solms estates in Germany, Bohemia and Hungary was difficult, and none was large enough to maintain a proper residence. The prolonged dispute between Philipp

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<sup>114</sup> See Philipp and Sabina Solms' letters to Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 43505–43523 (1608–1612) and 43566–43584 (1608–1614). For the children born to Philipp Solms and Sabina Poppel Lobkowitz, see Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 94–95.

<sup>115</sup> Friedrich Adolf (Hohensolms, 22 July 1607–Prague, 3 July 1609, buried in Ledec).

<sup>116</sup> Maria Elisabeth (Vrbice (Wirbitz), 8 October 1608–Lich, 9 May 1613).

<sup>117</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Neuhaus (Dobra), 1 September 1609 (43567).

<sup>118</sup> Heinrich Ernst (Hohensolms, 8 December 1609–[unknown date], buried in Ledec).

<sup>119</sup> See the letters of Philipp Solms dated in Lich in 1610 in the Hessisches Landesarchiv, Akte D 5 No. 110/7. Adam Philipp (Vienna, 23 May 1611–1670) pursued a military career in the imperial army, eventually reaching the average rank of a cavalry captain in the Thirty Years' War. After he retired, he spent the rest of his life on his Bohemian estates (Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 110–111). Maria Elisabeth Solms died at age five and was buried in Lich. See Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.pl], [n.d.] (52875)

Solms and his German relatives over the governance of his inheritance in Hessen and his increased involvement in the political and social scene, first in Prague and then in Vienna, brought the Count away from his old German home.<sup>120</sup> Philipp's restlessness might have been a cause why the couple was never able to acquire a stable residence comparable to Némétújvár (Güssing) and Rohonc (Rechnitz), the two residences of the Batthyány's in western Hungary or the Trčka's large Renaissance castle in the central Bohemian Opočno.<sup>121</sup> However, after close to a decade of constant moving, the Solms finally settled in Vienna around 1614. The date overlaps with a sudden renewal in the written communication between the sisters. Following close to four years of almost complete silence, probably caused by temporarily severed contact or loss of letters, Sabina resumed her regular correspondence with Eva, which could be seen as a sign that life had eased for the Solms family.<sup>122</sup>

In the 1610s, Vienna became the city of opportunity. With the royal court relocating from Prague after the election of Matthias II in 1611, the traditional residence of the Habsburgs became once again the administrative center of both the Imperium and the jointly governed Habsburg lands, a perfect destination for the politically ambitious Philipp Solms.<sup>123</sup> To further his political career and demonstrate his commitment to

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–104.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 92 and 94.

<sup>122</sup> Sabina's 13 letters from 1614 were sent without exception from Dobra and Szentgotthárd, where she had her maternal shares indicating that she primarily stayed there during this year. The Solms went back to Hessen one more time in 1617 and remained there for almost a year. See the letters of Sabina's lady-in-waiting, Magdalena Harrach to her father. Niederösterreichs Landesarchiv, Briefe der Maria Magdalena von Harrach geb. Hardegg an ihren Vater Georg Friedrich Prüschenk Graf von Hardegg 1616–1618 in Briefe Adelige Frauen (16.–18. Jahrhundert) Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme, nos. 8-11. <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/Frauenbriefe/briefliste1.htm> (accessed 7 May 2023).

<sup>123</sup> Although the grand palaces along the Herrenstraße, a street where families of the highest ranks acquired a residence, were not built until the mid-1630s, the increasing presence of the Austrian-Bohemian and, to a much lesser extent, the Hungarian aristocracy was already significant in the early decades of the seventeenth century; see Rupert Feuchtmüller, *Die Herrengasse* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1982).

Archduke Ferdinand, who later became Emperor Ferdinand II, Philipp Solms converted to Catholicism around 1615. His decision met with disapproval of his wife Sabina, who remained a committed Lutheran until her death.<sup>124</sup> The marital disagreement was particularly evident over the religious education of the couple's only son, Adam Philipp. Despite Sabina's protest, Philipp sent their son to be educated by the Jesuits, who had established their school in Vienna in the 1550s.<sup>125</sup>

For Philipp, Catholic conversion was a pragmatic decision that opened the door for him to attain the office of Imperial Chancellor, entitling him to use the attribute of 'Wohlgeboren' or 'wellborn' before his name.<sup>126</sup> During the revolt in 1519, Philipp fought with his troops on the side of the Habsburg king.<sup>127</sup> Honouring his loyalty, Ferdinand II helped Philipp acquire two confiscated estates in 1623: Herálec and Humpolec in Bohemia.<sup>128</sup>

Count Solms' new Bohemian acquisitions were a sign of the royal appreciation of his service and his social and political advancement. However, even with the later improvements to his financial situation, his wealth was never anything nearly resembling the fortune of his wife's brother-in-law, Jan Rudolf Trčka. When the fifteen-year-old Adam Philipp Solms announced his wish to leave the Viennese court and become a soldier, the old Count lectured him about proper behaviour, declaring that he "was not a Jan Trčka with estates fifty times bigger than his own" and, therefore he could not afford

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<sup>124</sup> Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 104.

<sup>125</sup> The young Adam Philip did not remain a student of the Viennese Jesuit gymnasium for very long. After only three days, Philipp took him out of the school and sent him to Graz to study together with the "young lordship". Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 21 June 1621 (43611). For the beginnings of the Jesuit school and its activities see Joseph F. Patrouch, *Queen's Apprentice: Archduchess Elizabeth, Empress María, the Habsburgs, and the Holy Roman Empire, 1554-1569* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 365–372.

<sup>126</sup> Wolf, "Grafschaft Solms," 393.

<sup>127</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 28 August 1619 (43604).

<sup>128</sup> Uhlhorn, "Böhmische Linie," 105.

to allow the young Solms to act irresponsibly.<sup>129</sup> Philipp's intent to educate his only son at the imperial court was in line with the practice of many aristocratic families in Austria and western Hungary who wanted to ensure that their sons received a good court education. By providing service to the princely children, the young Philipp Adam would be able to master not only polite manners but would also learn how to navigate court society, smoothing his way to a possible career in the government.<sup>130</sup>

Philip Solms was not exaggerating when he tried to hold back his son from committing a fatal mistake concerning his future. His comparison with his wealthy in-laws highlights the social and financial distance between the Solms and the Trčka families, which Philipp's relatively moderate career advancement at the Habsburg court was unable to overcome. That Philipp could not afford comfortable accommodation for his family can be inferred from Sabina's letter: She complained to Eva that she could not organize a wedding for her Fräulein [Miss] Annamarie, as her house was not large enough for such an occasion.<sup>131</sup> Only in 1622 was the couple able to move into a decent home in the inner city of Vienna.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> "... dmnakhe núr nit das ich vn herr Trčzka bin, welche 50 mahl mehr gúetter hat alls ich das ich dier deinen múttwillen ahm allen ohrten kam herbeÿ schaffen ..." [... [do not think], that I am Lord Trčka, who has fifty times more estates as I do, and who is able to go at all places after your will ....] Philipp Solms' letter to his son Philipp Adam, Vienna, 12 March 1626 (43540).

<sup>130</sup> As was the case with Philip Adam Solms, members of the Batthyány family spent varying times at the Viennese court for educational purposes. Boldizsár (Ferenc Batthyány's father) served as *Edelknabe* (noble youth) in the court of Habsburg Maximilian II before embarking on a Bildungsreise (educational tour) of Europe. His son Ferenc had little interest in education, yet he also spent time in Vienna in his youth; see András Koltai, "Egy magyar főrend pályafutása a császári udvarban. Batthyány Ádám (Bécs:1630–1659)" [A Hungarian Magnat's Career at the Imperial Court], *Korall* 9 (2002): 58. For the education of noble sons in seventeenth-century Central Europe, see the in-depth study of Antje Stannek, *Telemach's Brüder: Die höfische Bildungsreise des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2001).

<sup>131</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 9 April [1616/17] (43627).

<sup>132</sup> According to Philip Adam Solms' letter, dated in the early 1630s, the king bequeathed his father a building formerly owned by the family of Lichtenstein at the 'alten Bauernmarkt' (quoted in Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie," 105); see also Thomas Winkenbauer, *Fürst und Fürstendiener: Gundacker von Lichtenstein, ein österreichischer Adel* (Vienna: R. Oldenburg, 1999), 411.

Sabina's relationship with Eva Poppel was shaped by the economic differences between their families and their closeness in age. Born only a few years apart, shared childhood memories likely helped the two sisters maintain a friendly relationship throughout their adult years.<sup>133</sup> Living mainly in Vienna and occasionally on her Hungarian estates in Dobra and Szentgotthárd, Sabina visited the Batthyánys frequently. She was involved in selling agricultural products like oats, honey and wine produced on the Poppel Lobkowitz estates, making purchases in Vienna on behalf of Eva. The two sisters exchanged letters frequently, as they needed to work together to sell for the best price and buy the highest quality goods.

Cooperation among elite siblings was regarded as natural in the early modern period and can be viewed in the context of patron-client relationships.<sup>134</sup> Researching the cooperative strategies of seventeenth-century princely families, Sofie Ruppel has maintained that younger siblings acted as envoys on behalf of their older brothers and sisters and supplied them with information and recent news.<sup>135</sup> Looking at siblings' relationships in the Poppel Lobkowitz family, we can see a modified version of such role distribution.<sup>136</sup> The older sibling Sabina Solms, with her lower economic status, acted as an interlocutor in news distribution and in handling purchases on behalf of her higher-ranked younger sister. Sabina's letters are indeed full of political news, particularly from the early years of the Thirty Years War. She dispatched reports circulated in Vienna about political events and military battles occurring in Bohemia and the German lands.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 89.

<sup>134</sup> Linda A. Pollock, "Younger Sons in Tudor and Stuart England," *History Today* 39, no. 6 (1989): 26–29.

<sup>135</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 180–212.

<sup>136</sup> Although there are no surviving letters from the correspondence between the older two sisters, it is likely that a similar division of roles characterized the relationship of Katharina to her younger and wealthier sibling Maria Magdalena.

<sup>137</sup> See more about Sabina's 'newsletters' from 1619 and the early 1620s in Chapter 4.

Sabina not only conveyed news and messages to Eva but was one of her closest intermediaries in Vienna, doing business on her younger sister's behalf. She managed contacts with the merchant and trade community in the city, delivering and picking up orders for goods that Eva requested and arranging for their payments.<sup>138</sup> She bargained with Viennese tradesmen the price of Flemish herring and traded honey produced on the Batthyány estates.<sup>139</sup> She shopped for fine fabric, damask, silk and brocade, but also clothing and accessories, belts, fur coats, bonnets and lace, fine artisan work such as silver, a chest and an inlaid box.<sup>140</sup> Upon Eva's request, Sabina also bought Johann Arnd's prayerbook along with five similar books bound together in three volumes for five guildens.<sup>141</sup>

In addition to the large range of goods that Sabina acquired on behalf of her sister she also sent gifts to family. Sabina sent the Batthyány children candy, marzipan and 'Kirchtag' (fairing), bought at the church fair, while her husband Philipp sent a colourful little chest and a treasure box inlaid with gold and silver for Eva's little daughter, Manza.<sup>142</sup> Eva's presents were fewer and but just as generous: she gifted Sabina with a nightgown and supplied her with capons, lard, wheat, oats and plums, which were produced on the Batthyány estate but difficult to procure in Vienna.<sup>143</sup> This exchange of

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<sup>138</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 20 May 1615 (43588) and 28 April 1615 (43587).

<sup>139</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 25 February 1616 (43592).

<sup>140</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, damask, no. 43591; silk, nos. 43594, 43596 and 43597; brocade, no. 43592; belts, nos. 43587, 43596 and 43598; fur coat, no. 43620; bonnet, no. 43595; lace, no. 43573; silver, no. 43622; chest, no. 43591; inserted box, no. 43595.

<sup>141</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, no. 43634 (n.d.). Joannes Arndt's, *Paradiß Gärtlein* (1612) was a contemporary bestseller. Its 1615 edition published in Magdeburg is listed in an inventory of Ádám Batthyány's library from 1651. András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára* [Ádám Batthyány and His Library] (Budapest and Szeged: OSZK-Scriptum Rt., 2002), 213. For the library of Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel, see *ibid.*, 86-91.

<sup>142</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, nos. 43575, 43594 and 43573.

<sup>143</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, nos. 43619 (lard), 43615 (linen). Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 213-214. It is hard to determine the extent to which the disparity in gift exchange implied by Sabina's letters can be attributed to the incomplete letter exchange between the sisters. It is possible that Eva also regularly sent

goods and presents was typical of the gift-giving culture of the seventeenth century. It communicated informal support and enhanced family bonds.<sup>144</sup> The gift-giving aspect of the sisters' written communication is most evident in the exchange of medical recipes and remedies as well as medical personnel. Sabina sent Eva therapeutic advice and recipes and traded her sister's medicines, among them her famous *Frauen aqua vita*, to noblewomen in Vienna.<sup>145</sup>

Part of this gift-giving culture was also the steady flow of favours, services and recommendations. Sabina helped the Batthyánys to find professional healers, doctors, barber-surgeons, apothecaries and midwives when the children were sick or when Eva needed assistance with her pregnancies.<sup>146</sup> She recommended a well-trained scribe for Ferenc Batthyány and two girls as company for Eva's daughter Manza.<sup>147</sup> In return, Eva sent her sister carts and horses and attended to Sabina's sick steward.<sup>148</sup>

After 1619, the themes in Sabina's letters shift. She was still running errands for Eva, but often reported shortages and rising prices in Vienna and complained increasingly about her declining health. The dominance of Eva Poppel over her older but less wealthy sibling is particularly palpable as Sabina's letters become increasingly

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gifts to Sabina and provided her with financial assistance. However, the three extant letters from Eva to her sister make no mention to gift exchange. Instead, they confirm Sabina's intermediary role in Eva Poppel's communication with Maria Magdalena and a Viennese doctor regarding a request for a Turkish slave and a translation of a Latin medicinal recipe into German. Furthermore, the occasional subordinate tone of Sabina's letters also suggests a close but unequal relationship between the two siblings.

<sup>144</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

<sup>145</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, [n.d.], November 1621 (43619), St. Gotthard, (Szentgotthárd), 29 November 1614 (43582) and Vienna, 28 April 1615 (43587).

<sup>146</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Neuhaus (Dobra) 29 January (43574), 1614 and Vienna, 17/27 April 1616 (43586).

<sup>147</sup> Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 22 October 1619 (43607) and Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 28 July 1621 (43614).

<sup>148</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 19 April 1614 (43579) and Sebenstein, [n.p.] [n.d.] October [n.y.] (43637).

conflict-ridden over delayed payments of fees for her estates mortgaged to the Batthyánys.<sup>149</sup> Despite ongoing tensions between the sisters, aggravated by the ongoing legal disputes, their cooperation prevailed. Sabina continued to favour the Batthyánys, buying shoes for Eva's children, looking for a desired bag for her husband and sending medicine for her sick peasants.<sup>150</sup> For sisterly relationships in the seventeenth century, loyalty towards the extended noble family was more important than personal grievance and discontent.<sup>151</sup>

Towards the end of her life, Sabina Solms faced increasing material and personal hardship. In the early 1620s, rising food prices made daily life difficult in war-torn Vienna, and Sabina relied more and more on her sisters' gifts of "kitchen food".<sup>152</sup> In addition, debilitating weakness forced her to stay in bed for weeks, while the medicine she took daily "tormented [her] so much, that [she] thought it would kill [her]."<sup>153</sup> Physical discomforts went hand in hand with emotional distress due to her lack of money and worry about the future of her son.<sup>154</sup> Sabina also had little time to enjoy the family's newly acquired house in the inner city. First among the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, she died at the age of forty in 1623.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> See Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 122-123.

<sup>150</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 21 March 1622 (43622) and 7 July 1622 (43624).

<sup>151</sup> For the seemingly contradictory strategies of early modern nobility regarding legal disputes and family alliance, see Antonio Terrasa-Losano, "Legal Enemies, Beloved Brothers: High Nobility, Family Conflict and the Aristocrats' Two Bodies in Early-Modern Castile," *European Review of History - Revue européenne d'histoire* 17, no. 5 (2010): 719-734. For the intertwined siblings relationships among the seventeenth-century gentry in England, see Linda Pollock, "Rethinking Patriarchy and the Family in Seventeenth-Century England," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 1 (1998): 3-27.

<sup>152</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 13 August 1621 (43615).

<sup>153</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 24 February 1621 (43610), Vienna, 24 June 1621 (43612) and Vienna, 23 August 1621 (43615).

<sup>154</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva Vienna, 21 June 1621 (43611).

<sup>155</sup> Uhlhorn, "Böhmische Linie," 119.

***The fourth sister: Eva Poppel Lobkowitz Countess of Batthyány (c. 1590–1640)***

The recipient of most of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' surviving letters, Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány, was the youngest of the Poppel Lobkowitz siblings. Born in Bohemia around 1590, she spent most of her childhood on her mother's estates in western Hungary, where her family moved after 1593.<sup>156</sup> Since only her father Ladislav Poppel was banished from Bohemia, Magdalena Salm returned with her underage children to Prague every winter to visit her older married daughters and other relatives. These occasions allowed the young Eva to become familiar with Prague society and improve her language skills in Czech.<sup>157</sup>

Around the age of seventeen, Eva married the Poppel's Hungarian neighbour Ferenc Batthyány, royal equerry and lord-lieutenant of the county Sopron (Ödenburg) and Captain of Transdanubia in 1607.<sup>158</sup> The union of the two families was based on the mutual feelings of the couple and the shared interests of their families. Eva had known Ferenc since she was a child, while his courting letters evince his affectionate feelings for his future bride.<sup>159</sup> For the parents, it was a convenient choice to marry their daughter into the prestigious family in Hungary, the land where Eva spent most of her life. For the Batthyánys, the marriage of the Poppel Lobkowitz's daughter offered the prospect of

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<sup>156</sup> For the life of Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, see Sándor Takáts, *Régi magyar nagyasszonyok* [Great Hungarian Ladies of the Past], ed. Pál Réz (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Kiadó, 1982 [1914]), *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja* [The Stepmother of Miklós Zrínyi] (Budapest, 1917), Kincses, 'Im küttem én orvosságot' and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 65 ff.

<sup>157</sup> Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 16-17. As Anje Stannek has noted, the distinction between mother tongue and foreign tongue was less clear for early modern people than for us (Stannek, *Höfische Bildungsreise*, 34). Similarly, the concept of belonging to a particular nation based on geographical boundaries rather than language did not develop until the nineteenth century. Eva Poppel, for example, regarded herself as being from the German nation ("én is német nemzet voltam"). Her remark in the letter to her son implies that she likely grew up speaking primarily German. *Eva Poppel's letter to Ádám Batthyány*, Dobra (Neuhaus), 28 November 1632. See Kincses, 'Im küttem én orvosságot', 141, no.25.

<sup>158</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 63.

<sup>159</sup> Ferenc Batthyány's letter to Eva Poppel, undated (1604-1606) (4589-4591).

extending their lands by incorporating the Poppel Lobkowitz's adjacent properties into their estates.<sup>160</sup>

Rising to prominence in the sixteenth century, the Batthyány family, indeed, emerged as one of the biggest landowners in western Hungary. Ferenc was the son of the humanist magnate Boldizsár (Balthazar) Batthyány, lover of natural philosophy and friend of the botanist Carolus Clusius, whose court in Némétújvár (Güssing), with its impressive library and erudite guests, became the center of Protestantism and learning in the late sixteenth-century.<sup>161</sup> Unlike his father, Ferenc preferred the sword to books, not only because he was more interested in earthly pleasures—fighting, hunting and dance—than sharpening his mind with letters, but these interests were born of necessity. After Ottoman ruler Suleyman I took the royal seat of Buda in 1541, the Hungarian landlords in the region west of the Danube River had to face the encroachments of the Ottoman Empire. Especially in the early 1620s, eastern Hungary became a transit zone between several conflicting powers. Ferenc Batthyány had to defend his estates not only from the recurring Ottoman threat but also from the looting troops of the Protestant Transylvanian Prince Gábor Bethlen and the intruding armies of the Habsburg Field Marshall Collalto.

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<sup>160</sup> The details of the marriage settlement are unclear. It is also uncertain whether the father was present or only distantly involved since no direct evidence survived regarding where exactly Ladislav Poppel lived between 1594 and 1607. Older historical research, such as that conducted by Hungarian archivist Sándor Takáts, questioned whether Rudolf II punished the younger Poppel brother for his involvement in the treason against the king. However, Czech historians such as Janaček maintain that Ladislav was in exile without mentioning exactly where. These studies, however, are agreed on that during Ladislav's exile his wife and children lived in Hungary; see, *Zrinyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 14 ff. Janaček, *Ženy české renesance*, 57–75. In the absence of further research, Hungarian studies only mention the fact of exile; see, for example, Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 66.

<sup>161</sup> Dóra Bobory, *The Sword and the Crucible: Count Boldizsár Batthyány and Natural Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

Therefore, the count pursued a politics of extreme caution to neither offend the Habsburg court and his Catholic neighbours nor betray the Protestant Hungarian nobility.<sup>162</sup>

As a noblewoman from a prominent Protestant family, Eva Poppel was presented as an excellent match for Ferenc Batthyány. The couple’s marriage was harmonious and based on affection and friendship. Ferenc sent tender letters to Eva, addressing her as “my sweetheart” and closing as “your good friend,” to which Eva replied with polite but reserved courtesy.<sup>163</sup> They had nine children, of whom only four reached adulthood.<sup>164</sup>

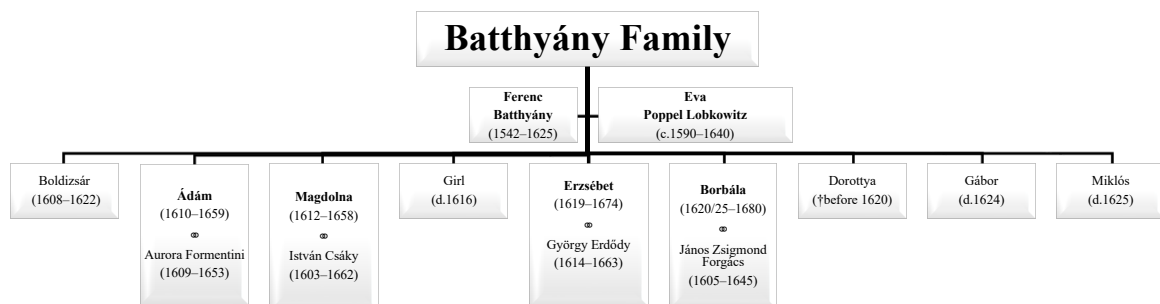


Figure 6: Family tree of the Batthyány family

Eva was an educated woman of strong character who liked reading and enjoyed listening to the songs of the Renaissance poet Bálint Balassi.<sup>165</sup> Although Takáts’ book, published in 1914, presented a highly idealized image of Eva Poppel, relying on eulogies

<sup>162</sup> The nobility in western Hungary was confessionally diverse. Due to the threat of the Ottomans, both Protestants and Catholics, needed the military and financial support of the Habsburgs. Ferenc Batthyány had to maintain a delicate balance between the various confessions, but the most important thing for him was to protect his estates (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 71–77).

<sup>163</sup> See Ferenc Batthyány’s letter to Eva Poppel, nos. 4355, 4372, 4381–87, 4396–98, 4406–09, 4411–12, 4415–16, 4418–19, 4421, 4432–34, 4457–58, 4522, 4528, 4547–48, 4551, 4578, 4597–92, 4594, 4596 (1604–1625) and Eva Poppel letters to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 4617, 37906, 37912, 37914–17, 37921–22, 37924–26 (1604–1620).

<sup>164</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 521–524. For marital friendship in the early modern period, see Lawrence Stone, “The Companionate Marriage,” in *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 325–404.

<sup>165</sup> Takáts, *Régi magyar nagyasszonyok*, 252–253.

in her funeral sermon, Eva indeed read the Balassi poems that Ferenc included in his courtship letters.<sup>166</sup> She likely owned some books as well. The inventories of the Batthyány family library prepared in the 1640s and 1650s suggest that a distinct portion of its volumes once very likely owned by the Batthyány countess. Her library reflected the societal expectations of an educated woman, consisting mainly of devotional literature and a considerable number of printed and manuscript medical and recipe books, mainly in German but also in Czech and Hungarian.<sup>167</sup>

Eva Poppel was also a strong supporter of Protestantism and likely had considerable influence on Ferenc Batthyány's backing of Gábor Bethlen and the Protestant cause in 1621.<sup>168</sup> After the death of Ferenc in 1625, she wielded considerable influence over the religious affiliation of the family. Unlike her husband, who leaned towards Calvin's teachings, the Batthyány widow invited Lutheran preachers to the Batthyány court, entrusted them with the education of her son Ádám and financed their literary activities.<sup>169</sup> Some of the books in the Batthyány library were dedicated to the Batthyány countess, attesting to her literary patronage.<sup>170</sup>

Eva's commitment to the Lutheran faith was viewed by members of her extended family as well as by the neighbouring and distant nobility as assurance of an excellent

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<sup>166</sup> See *Batthyány Ferenc's letter to Eva*, [n.p., n.d.], (4591). István Vadai, "Batthyány Ferenc és Balassi Bálint" [Ferenc Batthyány and Bálint Balassi], in *A Batthyányak évszázadai. Tudományos Konferencia Körmenden 2005. október 26–29*, ed. Zoltán Nagy (Körmend: Körmend Város Önkormányzata, 2006), 217–222.

<sup>167</sup> Ádám Batthyány's library, which included the books which belonged to his mother, was reconstructed by András Koltai based on extant inventories and catalogues from 1642, 1644, 1651, 1653 and 1654 (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára*, 148–276).

<sup>168</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 71–72.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 77–83.

<sup>170</sup> Protestant preachers, such as the Calvinist János Kanizsai Pálffy and the Lutheran György Zvonarics, dedicated their books to Eva while György Zvonarics' brother Mihály published his two Gospel commentaries with the Batthyány widow's financial support (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára*, 89; 274–275).

education for noble children. Under Eva's wing, many noble boys and girls received elementary instructions in reading, writing and reciting the psalms, first at the Batthyány residences in Rohonc (Rechnitz) and Némétújvár (Güssing) and later at her court in Dobra.<sup>171</sup> According to an inventory from 1608, for example, close to sixty children were housed at the Batthyány court, a fifth of them girls.<sup>172</sup> As was customary for the time, noble children were often brought up in the household of a relative or a close friend of equal or higher social standing.<sup>173</sup> In 1608, Barbara Stubenberg from nearby Styria interceded on behalf of Sofia Langewitz, asking Eva Poppel to take the girl and educate her in the Protestant faith to prevent her from being sent to the nuns.<sup>174</sup> Nine years later, the eleven-year-old Adam Rudolf Eck Poppel, son of Eva's deceased brother Adam Eck, was also accepted in his aunt's court, thereby escaping Jesuit schooling forced upon him by his Catholic relatives.<sup>175</sup> Both cases underline the importance of education at the Batthyány court and the significant role the Batthyány countess played in the preservation

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<sup>171</sup> Takáts, *Régi Magyar Nagyasszonyok*, 269-270. Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*, 22–23.

<sup>172</sup> The inventory lists forty-five boys and twelve girls. Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*, 73, fn.47. Evidence from 1610 and 1612 account for ten older boys and seventeen girls. *Ibid.* According to inventories that survived from the 1630s, the widow Eva Poppel still had over twenty older and younger girls in her household in Dobra. They received instructions along with Eva Poppel's two younger daughters, Erzsébet and Borbála. Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*, 23 and 73, fn. 48.

<sup>173</sup> Antje Stannek, *Die höfische Bildungsreise*, 25-28; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 145; Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 94-96; see also Diane Watt, "'No writing for Writing's Sake': The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Preston Women," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 125.

<sup>174</sup> As Barbara lamented, living with nuns would be unfavourable for the girl, as she would forget the catechism and the lovely psalm she already learned to recite by heart; see *Barbara Stubenberg's letter to Eva*, Mureck, 22 March 1608 (44422).

<sup>175</sup> See the letter of the boy's mother, Estera z Vřesovic, to Eva, Prague, 2 February 1617 (29764) and the supporting letter of Sabina Solms to Eva, Prague, 5 February 1617 (43599). See also Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 71. Jesuit schools established from the mid-sixteenth century onwards aimed to educate the next generation of the Catholic elite. For example, the Clementinum in Prague was founded to train the clergy and educate the young noblemen of Bohemia. Václav Bužek, "Nobles between Reformation and Compromise," in *A Companion to the Reformation in Central-Europe*, ed. Howard Louthan and Graeme Murdock (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 326.

of the nobility's Protestant identity against the growing pressure of Counter Reformation.<sup>176</sup>

Even though Eva Poppel had never renounced her Lutheran faith, she could not keep her son from converting to Catholicism. The decision of the nineteen-year-old Ádám Batthyány to convert was strongly influenced by his Catholic relatives and prominent politicians, including his brother-in-law, László Csáky, the Batthyánys' neighbour Palatine Miklós Esterházy and, most importantly, the Jesuit Cardinal Péter Pázmány, a leading figure of the Hungarian Catholic renewal.<sup>177</sup> Ádám Batthyány's conversion shattered Eva Poppel's plans for marrying him to the daughter of the Protestant Illésházy family.<sup>178</sup> In addition, financial controversies aggravated the tensions between mother and son. After Ádám became head of the family in 1629, the Batthyány widow left the Batthyánys' main residence and established her own court at her maternal inheritance in Dobra.

By the 1630s, Eva Poppel had widely established her fame as a medical healer and was sought by family members, neighbours and the Hungarian elite for therapeutic advice and medicine.<sup>179</sup> At her court in Dobra, she surrounded herself with healing professionals, including her court physician, a barber-surgeon, a midwife and several

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<sup>176</sup> Dóra Bobory, "Batthyány Boldizsár és a reformáció" [Boldizsár Batthyány and the Reformation], in *Szentírás, hagyomány, reformáció*, ed. Beatrix, F. Romhányi and Gábor Kendeffy (Budapest: Gondolat, 2009), 245–255 and Imre Katona, "A Batthyányiak és a reformáció" [The Batthyány Family and the Reformation], *Savaria* 5/6 (1971–1972): 435–466.

<sup>177</sup> While career considerations and retributions were driving forces in the conversion of the Bohemian and Lower Austrian nobility, the high nobility of western Hungary, among them the Esterházy and Csáky families, converted to Catholicism due to the constant pressure from the Ottoman presence and the need to defend the eastern borders for which they required continuous financial and military support from the Habsburgs (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 9–99).

<sup>178</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 99–109. Despite his mother's recentment, Ádám Batthyány married the Catholic Aurora Formentini, a lady-in-waiting at the Habsbourg court, with whom he fell in love during his stay in Vienna between 1630–1632 (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 117–130; Keller, *Hofdamen*, 276).

<sup>179</sup> Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*. For more on medicine, see Chapter 5.

women collecting herbs.<sup>180</sup> An inventory from Dobra lists a small cabinet containing herbs, glass bottles, electuaries and a chest with remedies for women, indicating that a significant part of Eva's medical activity focused specifically on women's ailments.<sup>181</sup> The correspondence from the last fifteen years of her life with family members, wives and daughters of nearby noble families as well as the service nobility of her court document her expertise in pregnancy, childbirth and childhood illnesses, skills traditionally associated with female healers.<sup>182</sup>

Widowhood allowed Eva Poppel to retain considerable freedom and autonomy. Her maternal inheritance of the Dobra estate and her shares in the estates of Körmend and Németújvár (Güssing) continued to provide the Batthyány widow with the material necessities for a lifestyle befitting her rank.<sup>183</sup> Eva Poppel's social standing, legal status as a widow and material wealth let her act with considerable authority — exerting control over court estate management, education, religious stewardship, cultural patronage, family politics and legal matters concerning her inheritance.

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 35–40. Like Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, her daughter Magdolna and daughter-in-law Aurora Formentini also practiced medicine at their court (*Ibid.*, 47; Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 390–391). For medicine practiced by sixteenth-century German noblewomen, see Alisha Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

<sup>181</sup> Kincses, *Ím küttem én orvosságot*, 46.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. Letters from Eva Poppel's last fifteen years have survived in greater numbers than those from her married years, making her medical knowledge and pharmaceutical activity visible only after she became a widow.

<sup>183</sup> Usually, the wills of noblemen discussed the right of usufruct that their widows could claim to the whole or parts of their deceased husband's estate. However, as Ferenc Batthyány did not leave a will, Eva Poppel reached an agreement with her son Ádám that they would share the rights over the estates of Körmend and Németújvár (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 92–93). For the rights of widows under early modern Hungarian law, see Zsuzsanna Peres, "Az özvegyek jogai a korai újkor Magyar Királyságban" [Widows' Rights in Early Modern Kingdom of Hungary], in *Társadalom és jog a középkor és a korai újkor Magyarországon. Jogtörténeti Tanulmányok. Miskolci Tanulmányok 2.*, ed. Gábor Nagy et al. (Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetemi Kiadó, 2021), 101–110.

## *Conclusion*

Based largely on letters that survived because of common concerns about inheritance, this chapter has reconstructed what we know about the principal actors in the Poppel Lobkowitz correspondence. The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters and their families embodied a generation of early-seventeenth-century noblewomen from the highest elite who lived through the final moments of a cross-cultural and multilingual Habsburg aristocracy increasingly threatened by religious fissures. Represented by the Poppel Lobkowitz, Kurzbach, Trčka, Solms and Batthyány families, the integration process within the German Czech and Hungarian-speaking political elite of the monarchy was slowed in the 1610s by growing political and religious tensions between the Catholic Habsburg government and the Protestant nobility of its lands. The retaliations after the Battle of White Mountain not only eliminated the Protestant noble community in Bohemia as a political force but also put an end to any further unification of the political elite with cross-cultural marriages.

Born as equals in status, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' social place among the hierarchy of siblings and their economic possibilities were markedly determined by their marriages. Katharina Kurzbach's biography sheds a rare light on the struggles of a noblewoman abandoned by her husband. Conversely, the life trajectories of Maria Magdalena Trčzka and Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány, reveal a more familiar picture of elite women married in the landed high nobility with comfortable wealth: they had excellent organization skills and demonstrated an affinity for estate administration and politics. Maria Magdalena was skilled in estate transactions, while Eva was known for her cultural and religious patronage and her expertise in the practice

of medicine. The correspondence of the fourth sister, Sabina Solms, provides insight into the social milieu of the Viennese career nobility. She was practical, with good communication skills and connections that allowed her to become an agent and go-between for her powerful sibling Eva.

Despite the differences in economic status, the shared upbringing at the Poppel Lobkowitz household equipped these noblewomen with the manners, attitudes and practical skills expected of contemporary elite women. The personal documents the sisters left behind suggest that each of them possessed a strong character shaped by a combination of their upbringing and their adherence to their religious principles. In the court of the Protestant Poppel Lobkowitz family, these women were raised under the wing of an energetic and strong-minded mother, receiving an education befitting their social status. They spoke several languages, could read and write and were skilled in household management. While the social and intellectual climate of sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century Central Europe did not encourage elite noblewomen to pursue humanist education, it provided them with enough reading and writing skills to demonstrate a certain freedom in entrepreneurship, estate administration, patronage of religion and book production while also taking considerable responsibility for the instruction of their children. Thus, literacy allowed these seventeenth-century noblewomen to become visible, as they recorded their experiences through the medium of letters.

The following chapters will explore some aspects of these women's actions as performed on the letters' pages. They will examine how the Poppel Lobkowitz women organized the delivery of their correspondences, crafted their letters and conveyed

political news, private messages and practical medical knowledge in writing. Through a meticulous analysis of these letters, we will also gain a glimpse into these women's traditional roles as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, as well as the possibilities and limitations faced by a noblewoman who was divorced from her husband. Through their letters, we will have a better understanding of how these noblewomen negotiated their own sphere within the household or navigated the grey zone of politics during the tumultuous decades of the early-seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy.

## CHAPTER TWO: Post, Messengers, “Occasions”: The Poppel Sisters’ Private Letter Delivery

My dear sister, I could write more if I were certain you received my letter.<sup>1</sup>

- Undated letter from Sabina to Eva –

The safety and integrity of written communication were concerns shared by many letter writers throughout early seventeenth-century Habsburg Central Europe. The period preceding and during the Thirty Years’ War was particularly marked by local hostilities. Heightened political and religious tensions as well as persistent warfare posed a constant challenge to the secure transmission of letters. Correspondents frequently fretted over the potential delays, interceptions, misplacements or losses and devised strategies to ensure the safe arrival of their mail.

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters harboured deep concerns regarding their letters’ safety. Given the lack of reliable postal service, these noblewomen primarily relied, with few exceptions, on private messengers for letter delivery between Vienna, Bohemia and Hungary. They maintained a system of conferring with each other regarding the sending and receiving of letters, as well as the individuals involved, allowing them to track the progress of their letters, packages and messengers. Based on the example of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ correspondence, the purpose of this chapter is to throw light on the postal conditions in the Habsburg lands and delivery management practices employed by the female nobility, a topic discussed only infrequently and in general terms by

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<sup>1</sup> “... Mein liebste frau schfester ih het jehr fiehl zú schreiben wen ich fer siehert wehr das dú die prief bekomst...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, [n.d.] (34626).

researchers of early modern communication. Through examining these women's letters, the chapter aims to show how these noblewomen effectively oversaw and managed their letter delivery within and beyond the realm of the organized post in the early-seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy. Drawing from a close reading of the letters, I argue that the chosen delivery method depended on a combination of factors, including geographical distance, the letter writer's financial resources, the letter's content as well as considerations of trust and convenience. Additionally, I contend that the supervision of personal letter delivery was a complex task that required organization and networking skills and cooperation between the sisters, their messengers and go-betweens in Vienna. Finally, the analysis aims to highlight the connection between trust and the social standing of the messenger, serving as a guarantee for the safekeeping and delivery of both oral and written messages.

Providing the context for the conditions of postal and private letter delivery in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy, the chapter begins by exploring the early operations of the Thurn and Taxes Post and its royal branches in Bohemia, Austria, Hungary and the German lands. This historical backdrop sheds light on how the Poppel Lobkowitz women may have used official postal carriers and organized letter delivery to send legal documents to the Batthyány family in western Hungary. The chapter then delves into the volatile political and military conditions that rendered roads dangerous for messengers who travelled between Prague, Vienna and the Batthyány's residence in Némétújvár (Güssing) and generated anxiety on the part of letter writers. It examines how these noblewomen addressed their letters, navigating letter couriers as they traversed the perilous landscape of war-ridden Bohemia and western Hungary. As the primary method

of mail delivery involved employing private messengers, the chapter explores how the Poppel Lobkowitz women engaged the services of various letter carriers and organized the delivery routes. The letters themselves describe some of the packages and oral messages messengers carried along with letters and the challenges they encountered during the delivery process. By combining the early history of postal services in the Habsburg lands with a close reading of the letters, we will be able to draw a more nuanced picture of the operation of private delivery systems managed by noble families from the perspective of elite women. This approach will enable us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how noblewomen closely related by kinship in early modern Central Europe took initiative, mediated and cooperated to convey their letters to their intended recipient.

### ***Postal services in the early seventeenth-century in Habsburg Central Europe***

By the early 1600s, when the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' first extant letters to Eva Poppel were dated, the imperial post, headed by members of the Thurn and Taxis family, operated a dense network of postal routes all over Europe. Postal courier routes linked the Thurn and Taxis company's headquarter in Brussels with German cities and with the southern and eastern part of the continent through Innsbruck and Vienna. (Figure 7)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis. Die Geschichte ihrer Post und ihrer Unternehmen*. Munich: Piper, 1990, 47.

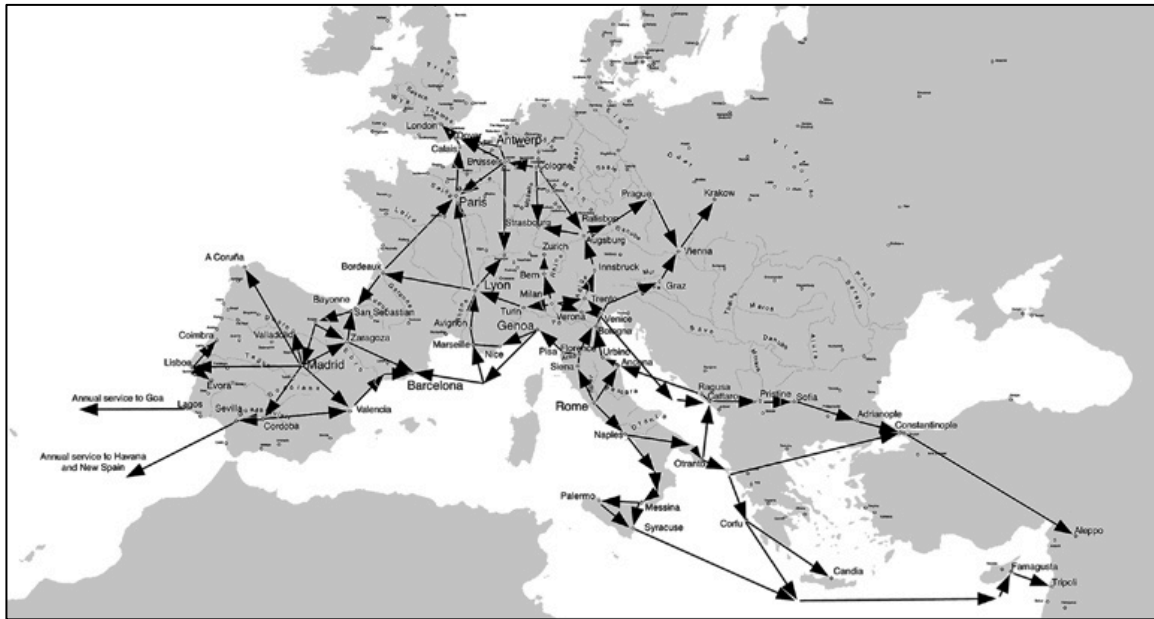


Figure 7: Ottavio Codogno's scheme of postal routes (1608) (Researchgate.net)

This expanding postal communication network also included Bohemia, with the first postal route established between Prague and Vienna via Augsburg in the 1520s.<sup>3</sup> With the increasing importance of Prague as a royal and imperial seat in the latter part of the sixteenth century, additional postal routes were established between Bohemia and the rest of the Empire, first through Linz and, later, through Neuhaus, Pilsen and Regensburg, thus increasing the speed of governmental and private communication.<sup>4</sup> In the Habsburg

<sup>3</sup> The postal route between Prague and Vienna over Tabor and Linz covered 400 km and had 19 postal stations (*Ibid.*, 37).

<sup>4</sup> Posts from Bohemia reached Austria through various routes. In the sixteenth century, the city of Linz became an important trade center and a vital junction connecting Prague with Austria and western Europe. The first postal station between Prague and Linz was established via Tabor in the 1560s. By the early seventeenth century, additional postal stations with horses were set up in southern Bohemia between Freistadt and Koschitz, which linked the Viennese post to Linz. However, Linz fell behind other postal routes towards the end of the sixteenth century as regular postal service was established between Prague and Vienna via Tabor and Neuhaus or Pilsen and Regensburg; see Zděněk Šimeček, "Linz und die Nachrichtenvermittlung nach Böhmen vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert," *Historisches Jahrbuch Linz* (1969): 276. Initially, the Thurn and Taxis company was designated primarily to assist the written communication between the royal and imperial court offices. Because of financial considerations, however, the imperial post soon extended its service to private users. Since the early sixteenth century, cities and individuals could send letters, packages and money for payment (Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 31-33).

Monarchy, postal routes were placed under the supervision of the Lower Austrian postmaster, a title owned by the Paar family since the early 1600s, who oversaw both the official court communication and news distribution within these lands.<sup>5</sup> Couriers of the Habsburger Hofpost and the royal post of Hungary connected Vienna via Pozsony (Preßburg), the seat of the Hungarian king and the Hungarian diet, with the northern part of the country and further east with Transylvania. A route via the western-Hungarian towns Sopron (Ödenburg) and Körmend (Kirmant) also ran toward the south.<sup>6</sup> Since the Batthyány estates were just a few miles from Körmend, letters sent with the official postal couriers from Prague via Vienna could reach the Batthyány court via this second, shorter route.<sup>7</sup> (Figure 8)

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<sup>5</sup> From the late sixteenth century onwards, territorial branches of the Taxis Post were established due to the division of the Habsburg Empire in 1555 and the increasing complexity of postal needs in different regions. The postal service in the German lands was called the Reichspost (imperial post), while the Austrian postal service was called the Kaiserliche Reichspost (imperial postal service) or the Habsburger Post (Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 54–55).

<sup>6</sup> The Hungarian Royal Post was established by Hofpostmeister Matthias Taxis and financed by the Hungarian Chancellery (*Magyar Kamara*). Nikolaus Schobesberger, et al., “European Postal Networks,” in *News Networks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 22; Rüdiger Wurth, “Das Königreich Ungarn im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Postgeschichtliche Aspekte unter habsburgischer und osmanischer Herrschaft,” *Burgenländische Heimatsblätter* 1 (2007): 6–22; István Kenyeres, “A királyi posta a 16. században Paár Péter pozsonyi postamester számadásai alapján” [The Royal Post in the Sixteenth Century Based on the Accounts of Peter Paar, Postmaster of Pozsony], *Studia Agriensia* 20 (1999): 107–115. Lajos Hencz, *A magyar posta története és érdemes munkásai* [History of the Hungarian Post and its Virtuous Workers] (Budapest, 1937), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Franc Sebjanic, “Batthyánische Herrschaft in Übermurgebiet und Südburgenland im Zeichen der Türkeneinfälle vom Ende des 16 bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhundert,” in *Kleinlandschaft und Türkenkriege*, ed. by Rudolf Kropf and Wolfgang Meyer (Schleiniger Gespräche, 1983) (Eisenstadt: Burgenländisches Landesmuseum, 1983), 157.

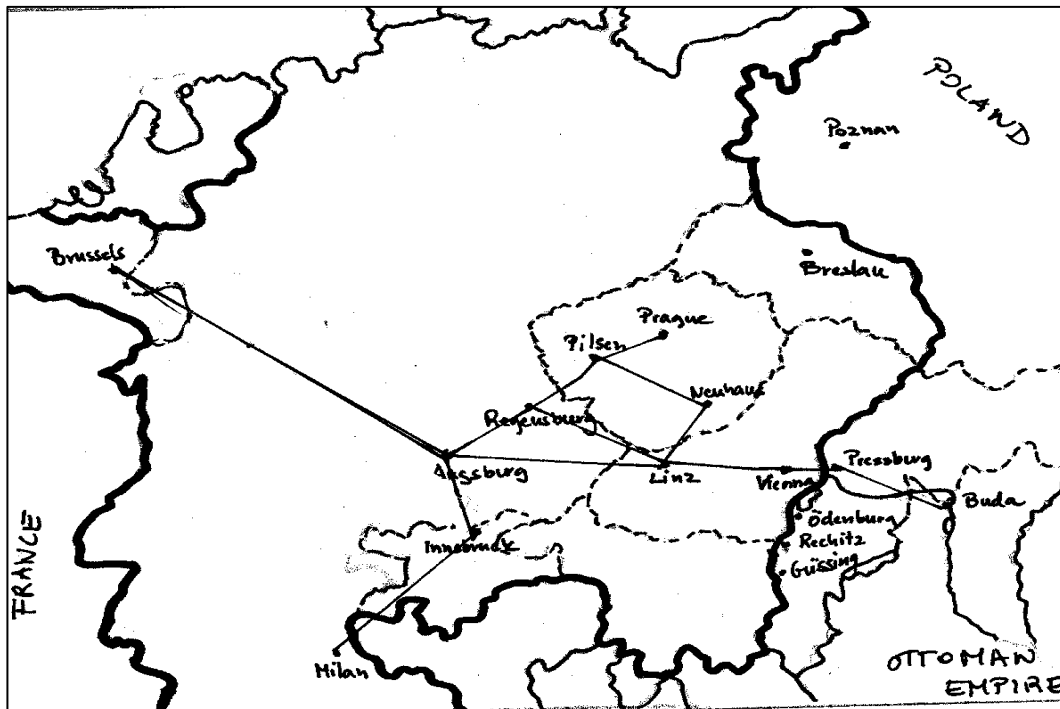


Figure 8: Postal routes within the Habsburg Monarchy in the first half of the seventeenth century<sup>8</sup>

Sending mail by “ordinary post,” as the regular service of the imperial post was called, had several advantages over trusting letters to private messengers.<sup>9</sup> It was fast and offered regular service as well as security. By the early seventeenth century, Thurn und Taxis couriers departed from major European cities twice weekly. Changing horses and personnel at postal stations at regular intervals (every 15 km), couriers travelled with their sealed leather bags at about 7.5 km per hour, covering 100–150 km per day.<sup>10</sup> Along

<sup>8</sup> The map is drawn from the description in Behringer, *Thurn and Taxis*, 30 and 36.

<sup>9</sup> Compared to the ‘ordinari’ post, the ‘extra-post’ was used if express service was needed. In this latter case, special couriers travelled day and night for a higher fee (Behringer, *Thurn and Taxis*, 52).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Münch, *Lebensformen in der frühen Neuzeit, 1500 bis 1800* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1998), 499 and Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 18. A German mile in the sixteenth century was not a fixed measurement but varied considerably, showing the distance a rider could cover in an hour. It was usually estimated to be between 7.4 and 9 kilometers (or between 4.6 and 5.6 miles) depending on the terrain and other factors. Robert Walser, *Lasst uns ohne nachricht nit. Botenwesen und Informationsbeschaffung unter der Regierung des Markgrafen Albrecht Achilles von Brandenburg*, PhD Diss. (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, 2004), 132.

postal routes, inns served as stations for changing horses, providing stalls for the animals and board for the postal servants.<sup>11</sup> Courier relays usually kept at least a pair of horses and at places with increased postal circulation the number of horses would correspondingly increase.<sup>12</sup> Messenger couriers were paid monthly to cover the maintenance of their animals, which included providing oats, hay, straw, two postal servants and extra funds for travelling.<sup>13</sup> Although their payments were often in considerable arrears, couriers also took along private letters, making their job profitable enough to make a decent living.<sup>14</sup> Initially, the *Thurn and Taxes* Post was established to serve the needs of the imperial court. It was only responsible for the communication of news and the relaying of official correspondence between princely courts and offices. However, to obtain regular income to complement the company's insufficient financing, the postal company soon opened to business customers and private users who could send letters and also remittances and packets by postal couriers.<sup>15</sup>

Sending letters with postal couriers, especially legal correspondence, was not only relatively fast but also a safe option. To ensure its smooth and safe operation, the Thurn and Taxes Company received imperial protection in 1505.<sup>16</sup> Even though the imperial or royal postal couriers provided great advantages in terms of predictable speed and safety,

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<sup>11</sup> Erhard Rieder, "Zur Geschichte des Postwesens in Ober-Österreich," *Oberösterreichische Heimatsblätter* 6, no. 3 (1952): 276.

<sup>12</sup> In 1568 the postal station of Pozsony, the center of the Hungarian diet, had nine horses to maintain communication with Transylvania and the Habsburg court in Vienna (Wurth, "Postgeschichtliche Aspekte," 10).

<sup>13</sup> In the late sixteenth century, postal couriers in Upper Austria received a monthly amount of 16 Gulden to keep four or five horses (Rieder, "Zur Geschichte des Postwesens," 279–282).

<sup>14</sup> Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 30–31, Rieder, "Zur Geschichte des Postwesens," 281.

<sup>15</sup> By the early seventeenth century, private customers could rent horses at courier stations. However, a scheduled carriage service was not introduced until after 1650 (Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 30–33).

<sup>16</sup> In 1501, Maximilian I granted imperial postmaster Franz von Taxis several privileges for his service, including exemption from local tax and jurisdiction and granting imperial protection. See Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 38–39 and from the same author, "The Empire as a Communication(s) Universe," in *The Holy Roman Empire, (1495–1806)*, ed. R.J.W. Evans et al. (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), 351.

the nobility would only occasionally rely on the service of the official post. They distrusted the postal couriers overseen by the royal chamber, not least because they feared that their letters would be intercepted and opened.<sup>17</sup> Instead, noble courts established their own private delivery systems, relaying letters with the help of personal letter bearers, messengers, family members, friends or anyone who could responsibly serve in this capacity.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Private letter delivery: messengers as middlemen of distance communication***

In the early 1600s, the female nobility of the Habsburg Monarchy relied on private messengers or, often, randomly arranged letter delivery. Although the imperial postal network and its branches covered large parts of continental Europe, distributing news and carrying official government correspondences, noblewomen continued to trust older forms of long-distance communication, hiring servants specifically for messenger services or trusting them to relatives, acquaintances, merchants and travellers.<sup>19</sup>

Messengers were integral for continuous written communication among the early-seventeenth-century nobility. They acted as middlemen between corresponding partners, not only delivering letters but also conveying oral messages to the letters' receiver upon arrival. As James Daybell posited, these "bearers were a physical extension of what was written on the page" reaffirming or expanding upon the matters discussed in the letters, or

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<sup>17</sup> Veit Didczuneit, "Postgeschichte," in *Handbuch Brief von der frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 1., ed. Marie Isabel Matthews-Schlinzig, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 165–167 and Angela Standhartinger, "Briefzensur and Briefgeheimnis in der frühen Neuzeit," *ibid.*, 270–271.

<sup>18</sup> James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128.

<sup>19</sup> Pál Mikó, *Női magyar levélstílus a 17. században* [Hungarian Women's Epistolary Style in the Seventeenth Century] (Székelyudvarhely, 1896), 4–5. Wolfgang Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis. Die Geschichte ihrer Post und Ihrer Unternehmen* (Munich: Piper, 1990); Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 128–133.

even presenting unrelated messages.<sup>20</sup> Before the sixteenth century, when society was predominantly illiterate, conveying oral messages through letter bearers was a prevalent mode of distant communication, and the physical letter functioned only to validate the spoken word.<sup>21</sup> This connection between lower literacy skills and the reliance on oral messages in distant communication persisted into later centuries. Women's letter writers may have used this form of communication more often due to their weaker literacy skills in compared to men as indicated by frequent references to oral messages delivered by trusted messengers in the letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters.<sup>22</sup>

Trust was, indeed, central to the messenger's profession. These individuals carried great responsibility for the letters' delivery, ensuring the confidentiality of the letter's contents and the safe delivery of any accompanying material objects or money.<sup>23</sup> Gary Schneider argues that messengers could also be a source of anxiety for early modern letter writers, "raising concern about the privacy of information, the stability of communicative exchange and the efficacy of epistolary commerce."<sup>24</sup> Trusting letters to messengers often caused worry regarding the potential disclosure of information to an unwanted third party. The fear of losing a letter *en route* was ever-present for the early modern letter writer.

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<sup>20</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Horst Wenzel, "Boten und Briefe. Zum Verhältnis körperliche und nicht körperliche Nachrichtenträger," in *Gespräche–Boten–Briefe: Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter*, ed. Horst Wenzel (Berlin: Eric Schmidt Verlag, 1987), 86–105.

<sup>22</sup> The review of a substantial number of letters from the Batthyány family archive suggests that references to oral messages conveyed by messengers were more common in women's letters than in those of men.

<sup>23</sup> E. John B. Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 33–36.

<sup>24</sup> Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 76.

In the Habsburg Monarchy, concerns about the safety of messengers and letters increased, especially before and during the political and military conflicts of the Thirty Years' War. During the 1610s, the growing political tensions between the Catholic Habsburg government and the Protestant nobility and their armed hostilities after 1618 often disrupted the continuous correspondence between Prague and Vienna. Travel on the roads from Vienna to western Hungary was similarly dangerous. Although the Treaty of Zsitvatorok, signed with the Ottomans in 1606, secured peace for the eastern parts of the Habsburg lands, including the Hungarian Kingdom, those living east of Vienna were nonetheless in constant fear of a renewed invasion as the Empire's borders cut through the heart of Transdanubia, the region just west of the Danube.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the early 1620s also witnessed the complete collapse of public safety on western-Hungarian roads, as the imperial military troops and the hussars of the Transylvanian Prince Gábor Bethlen took turns raiding and plundering villages while robbing and threatening the lives of travellers.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, in Bohemia, a central region of the Habsburg Monarchy, the military pacification and forced re-Catholicization of its lands in the 1620s created ongoing political instability.<sup>27</sup>

The volatile political and military landscape of the Habsburg lands in the 1610s and 1620s also threatened the flow of written information among the families of the

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<sup>25</sup> Gustav Bayerle, "The Compromise at Zsitvatorok," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 6 (1980): 8–53.

<sup>26</sup> The troops of imperial general Collalto took and plundered Rohonc (Rechnitz), one of the castles in the possession of the Batthyánys. See Ádám Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám. Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén* [Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Magnate and his Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century] (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012), 197.

<sup>27</sup> In the early 1620s, Czech Protestant exiles attempted to return to Bohemia with the help of the Danish army, but their plans were thwarted by the troops of the supreme imperial commander Albrecht Wallenstein. Meanwhile, the overall situation was worsened by peasant revolts in Moravia and Central Bohemia that lasted until the end of the decade. See Antonin Gindely, *History of the Thirty Years' War* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), 407 and Jörg Hoensch, *Geschichte Böhmens: Von der Slavischen Landnahme bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1997), 230–231.

Poppel Lobkowitz sisters living in Bohemia, Vienna and Hungary. Ensuring the secure arrival of letters was especially important for these women, as the ongoing negotiations over their Hungarian inheritance increased the traffic of letters between the Batthyány, Kurzbach, Trčka and Solms families, frequently exchanging legal documents and negotiating or fighting over their shares. The Poppel Lobkowitz women thus needed to pay close attention to the safe delivery of both official court records and private letters.

### *Addressing letters*

Consistent with early modern addressing practices more broadly, addresses on extant letters in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence contain mostly sparse information regarding the precise route of letters. Before the use of envelopes in the early eighteenth century, letter writers folded the letters' bifolio into an oblong-shaped packet. They closed the folded folio with one or more seals along the folding lines and, occasionally, fastened it with strings to safeguard the letter's content from unwanted readers and prevent the writing from getting damaged. The address, or superscription, was then placed in the blank space outside the folded and closed letter.<sup>28</sup> It indicated the name and rank of the letter's receiver and sometimes, but not always, included the geographical destination (Figure 9).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 7 and 49.

<sup>29</sup> The observation is based on examining hundreds of letters that survived in the early modern missive collection of the Batthyány family. For postal signs, including porto marks, see Joachim Helbig, *Postvermerke auf Briefen 15–18. Jahrhundert. Neue Ansichten zur Postgeschichte der frühen Neuzeit und der Stadt Nürnberg* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2010), 10 and 20–22. See also the images of late-seventeenth-century locked letters recently discovered in a box owned by a postmaster of Den Haag: Rebekah Ahrendt, et al., *Signed, sealed and undelivered* (The Hague, 2015), <http://brienne.org/unlockedbriennearchive> (accessed 7 May 2023).

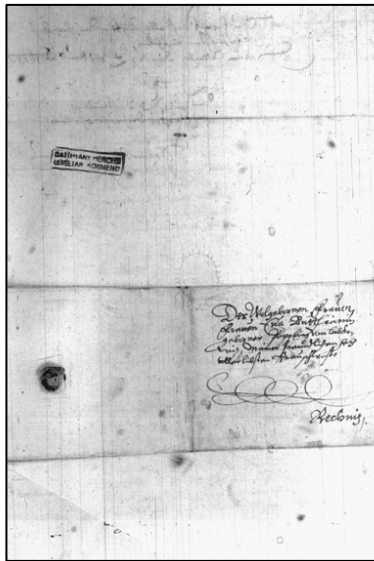


Figure 9: Address leaf of Sabina Solms' letter to Eva Poppel (1608)<sup>30</sup>

The carefully designed address leaf on a letter from Maria Magdalena Trčka from 1618 provides an example of the early modern practice of addressing letters (Figure 10).

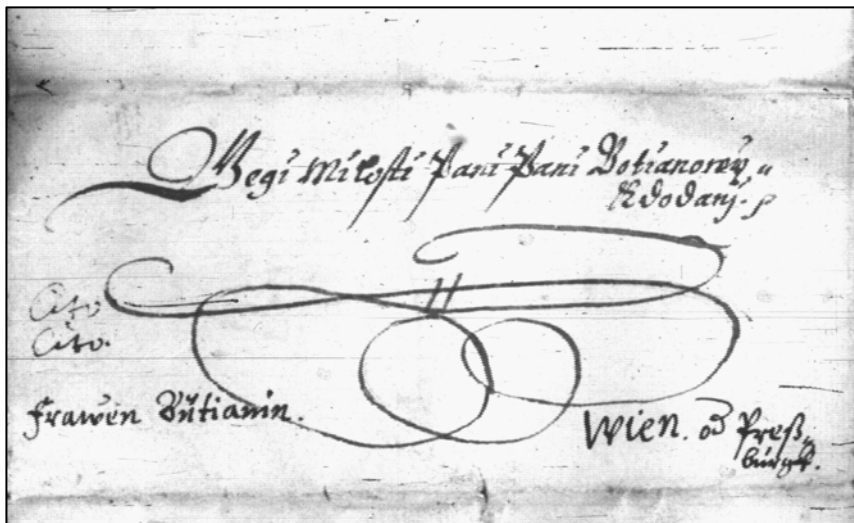


Figure 10: Maria Magdalena Trčka's letter to Eva Poppel (1618)<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> "Der Wolgeborenen Fraüen, Fraüen Eúa Butthianin geborner Popplin von lobkowitz, meiner freündlichen herz allerlibsten Fraú schweste Rechnitz" [*To the wellborn Lady, Lady Batthyány, born Poppel von Lobkowitz, my most beloved Lady Sister, Rechnitz*]. Sabina's letter to Eva, Vrbice (Wirbitz), 27 September 1608 (43569).

<sup>31</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 5 April 1618 (50098).

This bilingual letter sent from the Trčka resident of the Bohemian Švetla (Swietla) displays the typical features of a carefully executed superscription, bearing the handwriting of a scribe. At the top, the scribe wrote the name of the letter's receiver, Eva Poppel and her title in Czech: "To her Grace, to Lady, Lady Batthyány, to be delivered to her hand." On the left side of the bottom half of the paper, he also penned Eva Poppel's name, "Fraúwen Batthyány," in German, while on the right side of the address, he indicated the letter's alternate destination, "Wien o[der] Pressbúrg" (Vienna or Preßburg). A decorative flourish separated the three address parts attesting to the scribe's trained hand. While in the middle of the left margin, the Latin words "cito, cito," meaning quickly or fast, were added in a simple script.<sup>32</sup>

The term "cito" was regularly used by the imperial postal service as well as by private carriers to indicate expedited mail delivery.<sup>33</sup> The careful addressing of the letter in both Czech and German, the use of the word "cito" next to the address, and the inclusion of two potential places for delivery suggest that the letter was expedited and expected to pass through several hands along the way from Bohemia to Hungary. The letter was likely first dropped off by the courier messenger at one of the postal stations in Vienna or Preßburg before it was picked up by messengers of the Batthyány family and delivered to the Batthyány countess.<sup>34</sup> Although the address is unusually detailed, as it disclosed the letter's route from the letter writer to its receiver, it doesn't provide

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<sup>32</sup> See 'cito' in *Zedler Universal-Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1731–1754), 6:173. The words 'cito', meaning quickly or fast, and its abbreviated superlative form 'citissimo,' appears below or next to the addresses in Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (26524) and [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529).

<sup>33</sup> According to the 1588 order of Rudolf II postal carriers had to ride with letters marked with "cito" at a speed of six miles per hour. Eduard Effenberger, *Geschichte der österreichischen Post* (Vienna, 1913), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Hencz, *A magyar posta története*, 28–29.

information about whether it was sent through royal postal couriers or conveyed by personal messengers.

Letter addresses in the sisters' correspondence rarely, if at all, bear official postal signs. The absence of signs used for imperial postal tracking—such as strokes, circles or numbers—on Maria Magdalena's letter likely suggests that she sent the letter with a private carrier. However, it is also equally possible that Maria Magdalena used the expedited imperial carrier services as a private customer. References to the "post" in many of Maria Magdalena's and her sister's correspondence imply that these noblewomen resorted to the services of the imperial post if they needed to dispatch letters of importance in a fast and secure way.

### *Sending letters by post*

In their correspondence, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters only occasionally referred to the "post". The term usually appears in the context of the delivery of legal documents prepared by a professional secretary or a procurator. References to the term "post" are most numerous in letters dated between 1609 and 1614 when negotiations over the Poppel Lobkowitz siblings' parental inheritance in Hungary and Bohemia were underway and when the sister's legal disputes with rival Hungarian families and other interested parties reached their peak.<sup>35</sup>

In 1610, Eva Poppel informed her relative, the supreme burgrave Adam II von Sternberg, that because her brother and two sisters were residing in Bohemia, they would not be able to appear in person at the Hungarian court in Pozsony and therefore would

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<sup>35</sup> For the history of the Poppel Lobkowitzes' western-Hungarian inheritance and the sister's negotiations with the Batthyány family see Chapter 1.

send their testimonies prepared by a sworn secretary with the post.<sup>36</sup> The following year, Maria Magdalena wrote Eva that “as soon as the dispatched letters are ready and signed by His Royal Majesty, they will be sent via post to Vienna and from there to [my sister’s] hands without delay.”<sup>37</sup> In 1612, two endorsed procurator letters were dispatched by Maria Magdalena and the sister’s brother Jan Poppel Lobkowitz from Prague to the Batthyány residence in western Hungary.<sup>38</sup>

The nature of the delivery arrangement Eva and Maria Magdalena meant by the word “post” is implicit in the term’s meaning. By the late sixteenth century, the term “post” was commonplace in Europe and referred to direct and fast communication of messages and letters by relay. It was a shortened form of the Latin term *positiae stationes*, indicating a place where stables could be stationed and where the riders could change to another horse.<sup>39</sup> “Post” thus meant both the Reichspost (Imperial Post) and the various postal systems run by cities and princely territories.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the term “post” in the letters implies either the couriers of the Reichspost or its territorial branch, the postal service of the Habsburg court in Vienna.

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<sup>36</sup> *Eva Poppel’s letter to Adam von Steinberg*, Rechnitz, 9 November 1610 (37911). From the sixteenth century, the Royal Chancellery of Hungary was responsible for dealing with litigations related to the rights to noble estates. Under Emperor Rudolf II (1576–1612), the Royal Chancellery of Hungary was temporarily moved to Prague, but it returned to Pozsony (Preßburg) after his death.

<sup>37</sup> “... So bald, alß vberschikte beföhlich, verfertigt vndt von ihr kinigl: maytt: vnttershrieben werden, sollen sie ohne einigeß seümmiß dúrch die post aúf Wien, von dannen in Vngern zú dehro handen kommen ...” [... as soon as the dispatched [letters] are ready and signed by His Royal Majesty they will be sent through the post to Vienna and from there to [her sister’s] hands without delay ...]. Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611 (50085).

<sup>38</sup> In June, Maria Magdalena inquired about the arrival of the legal letter containing the signed agreement related to her Hungarian shares. In September, she dispatched an endorsed procurator letter signed by her brother Jan Poppel Lobkowitz. Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Kunice (Kunitz), 20 June 1612 (50088) and Švetla (Swietla), 18 September 1612 (50089).

<sup>39</sup> Wolfgang Behringer, “Das Netzwerk der Netzwerke,” in *Das Mediensystem im Alten Reich der frühen Neuzeit (1600–1750)*, ed. Johannes Arndt and Esther-Beate Körber (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 39–58.

<sup>40</sup> Helbig, *Postvermerke auf Briefen*, 9–10.

References to the post in the correspondence shed light on the route and the speed of the post between Bohemia and Hungary. The address leaf from 1611 suggests that letters sent from Bohemia by the postal couriers to the eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy were first delivered to Vienna before being forwarded to the Batthyáns' residence in Némétújvár (Güssing).<sup>41</sup> In another letter sent from the Bohemian capital on April 1, 1628, Maria Magdalena acknowledged receiving Eva's letter from Hungary ten days earlier, on March 21.<sup>42</sup> These references provide information about the average speed of postal delivery. Postal couriers typically covered the distance between Prague and western Hungary in approximately seven to ten days. It would take three days on horseback to travel to Linz and another two or three days to reach Vienna. From there, the Batthyány court could be reached within 48 hours, a distance which, if necessary, could be shortened to one day.<sup>43</sup>

Next to speed, security was likely another consideration for trusting legal documents to imperial postal couriers. In October 1619, Maria Magdalena informed Eva that she was sending documents entrusted to her by her husband Jan Rudolf Trčka via the "German Post."<sup>44</sup> The fall of 1619 was a particularly turbulent period, as Vienna, for the second time that year, had been attacked by Bohemian and Hungarian troops. Since the Reichspost and its Upper and Lower Austrian branches enjoyed imperial protection, dispatching legal documents to Hungary with imperial couriers was likely a much safer way to send letters than entrusting them to private emissaries.

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<sup>41</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611 (50085). See also Hencz, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 April 1628 (50109).

<sup>43</sup> Regarding the postal speed between Prague and Linz, see Šimeček, 276–78. About the distance between Vienna and the Batthyány residences in Hungary, see András Koltai, "Egy magyar főrend pályafutása a császári udvarban. Batthyány Ádám (1610–1653)" [The Career of a Hungarian Magnate at the Imperial Court. Ádám Batthyány (1610–1653)], *Korall* 9 (2002): 58.

<sup>44</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 1 September 1619 (50102).

While Maria Magdalena trusted legal letters to the official courier service, her older sister Katharina Kurzbach lacked confidence in postal couriers. Instead, she sent two procurator letters (“Zwen Procúrador Priëff”) to Hungary with private letter bearers. She explained her reservations with unusual clarity:

I wanted to send them by Post, but letters are often left behind and therefore not answered because of negligence. Since I did not want to take any risk, I have sent these letters with my messenger so that he will be sure to deliver them to you.<sup>45</sup>

Katharina’s reservations about the official post were not unfounded. By the late sixteenth century, customers had begun to complain about the careless handling of mail and the frequent disruption of courier services.<sup>46</sup> These concerns were reflected in the postal decrees (*Postordnungen*) of 1587 and 1596, which regulated the imperial courier service by imposing fines on courier messengers for straying off course and dismissing those couriers who opened letters or lost packages. Why Maria Magdalena and Eva did not share Katharina’s reservations, especially considering their usual reliance on the official postal services for dispatching legal documents, is not clear. It is possible that Katharina was more anxious by nature. However, it is also plausible that blaming the Habsburg Post for negligence was a way to conceal the fact that she herself was delayed in responding because she lacked the financial means to pay the required fees.<sup>47</sup> Regardless, aside from

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<sup>45</sup> “... ich habs wöll[e]n aúf der posst shiekhen die weill aber aúß nachlessigkheit die schreiben offft aúf der post ligúndt verpleiben vnd solche nicht aberantwort werdn hab ihs nicht derfen wagen sonder bej dissem agten potten damit sie gewiß vberantwort werden vberschickhen welche sie also bej zaig[er] dißem aigen[en] potten zú recht woll empfang[en] wirdt ...” Katharina’s letter to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (26524).

<sup>46</sup> Behringer, 72.

<sup>47</sup> For dispatching letters to Eva, Katharina likely used the couriers of the Batthyány or the Trčka families who regularly travelled between Bohemia and western Hungary. She might have asked reliable acquaintances journeying to Vienna, and out of courtesy or for a small fee they would carry along her letters.

legal documents, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters employed various forms of private delivery for personal correspondence among family members.

### *Sending letters by messengers*

Personal messengers were indispensable for early modern distant communication. They carried responsibility for the safe and timely delivery of their patrons' letters and conveyed verbal messages to letter recipients, thereby ensuring the continuity of both oral and written communication. In the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence, frequent references to messengers, servants and a diverse array of individuals who assumed the role of messengers point to the particular importance noblewomen assigned to their letter bearers.

Little is known about the men and women who conveyed the letters of early modern letter writers. Letter-bearers were usually referred to in very general terms such as "this messenger of mine" or "my approved" messenger."<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, in some letters, the Poppel Lobkowitz women identified their messengers by name. Sabina, for example, entrusted Leonard Straukl, caretaker of Herr Paar, with handing a letter over to her sister.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in replying to Eva Poppel, Maria Magdalena informed her that [Eva's] "letter ... had been delivered to [her] at Smiriče by Armand at this very hour."<sup>50</sup> Inserting the messenger's name in a letter's text indicated the trustworthiness of that

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<sup>48</sup> Katharina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 2 May 1618 (26526) and Prague, 21 November 1611 (38126).

<sup>49</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 17 July 1621 (43613).

<sup>50</sup> "...meiner hertzieliebsten frauē Schwester vnd Tochter schreiben, ist mir gleich diese stūnde, zū Smirstiz dūrch den Armandy behendiget ...". Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611 (50085).

person and helped both the letter's writer and its receiver to oversee letters which had been sent and received.

Looking at the names of letter carriers also allows for a glimpse into the social profiles who have served these women in their capacity as a messenger. These individuals belonged to diverse strata of early modern society. Messenger duties were assigned to servants, scribes, low-ranking nobles, family members, neighbours, travelling merchants and women. Family servants are often mentioned by their first name only, thereby indicating their lower social status.<sup>51</sup> These servants were employed specifically to carry out long-distance courier duties travelling on horseback within the triangle of the Trčka, Batthyány and Solms residences in Bohemia, Hungary and Vienna. In the early 1610s, for example, Maria Magdalena's servant, Janusch, also called Johannes, would deliver letters to and from the central Bohemian cities Smiriče and Světla, as well as between the Trčka residences in Prague.<sup>52</sup> This same servant would also be dispatched to the Batthyány court in Hungary, carrying not only Maria Magdalena's but also Katharina's letters.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, the women often seized the opportunity to convey letters to each other's departing messengers. One of the Batthyány family's servants named Armand, for instance, carried letters for Eva, Sabina, and Maria Magdalena to and from the Batthyánys' courts.<sup>54</sup> Sabina's letter-bearer, Arnold, departed to Rohonc (Rechnitz), with

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<sup>51</sup> Extant records from the seventeenth-century Batthyány household lists artisans by their profession as their last name and attached their first name, often written in diminutive form. See Mária Horváth, "Namen und Sprache in der Familie des Ádám Batthyány (1609–1659)," in *Mundart und Name in Sprachkontakt: Festschrift für Maria Hornung zum 70. Geburtstag* (Vienna, VWGÖ, 1990), 189–203.

<sup>52</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611 (50085) and Světla (Swietla), 18 September 1612 (50089).

<sup>53</sup> See Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 8 December 1615 (26523).

<sup>54</sup> *Armand* (Armandi, Armandy, Vrmand): either a first name or a misspelled form of the Hungarian last name Ormány. Armand was in the service of the Batthyány family and carried letters between Maria

a letter asking for Eva's signature and immediately returned to Vienna to fulfill a similarly urgent letter delivery for the Count of Solms.<sup>55</sup> In the same way, *kleiner Matthiashen* ("little Matthias"), in the service of Eva Poppel, was employed as a long-distance messenger delivering letters between the Trčka and Batthyány residences.<sup>56</sup>

Messenger duties were also delegated to scribes. The trusted Viennese agent of the Batthyánys, Melchior Lehner, worked as a secretary for the Batthyány couple and was often given the task of delivering Eva's correspondence to Vienna.<sup>57</sup> Herr Stefanavszky, likely identical with the Hungarian scribe Márton Stefanich, was known to have carried Katharina's letter with an accompanying oral message to Eva Poppel in 1631.<sup>58</sup> In some cases, one can infer the scribal profession of letter bearers from the specific attribute attached to their first names. Katharina, for example, confirmed that she received Eva's letter from Batzmadeag, while Sabina sent letters with István deák.<sup>59</sup> The Hungarian term *deák* commonly referred to educated men versed in Latin.<sup>60</sup> Such men

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Magdalena, Sabina and Eva. See Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 July 1611 (43670) and Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 23 August 1610 (50078) and Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611 (50085).

<sup>55</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 28 November 1614 (43582).

<sup>56</sup> For confirmation of receiving Eva's letter delivered by the little Matthias ("kleinen Matthiashen"), see Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, nos. Kunitz (Kunice), 11 November 1609 (50071), Swietla (Světla), 23 August 1610 (50078) and Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő, Swietla (Světla), 23 August 1610 (50077).

<sup>57</sup> See Eva Poppel's letters to Melchior Lehner, nos. 4599–4635 (1615–1618) and Melchior Lehner's letters to Eva, nos. 109235 and 10241 (1617).

<sup>58</sup> Katharina's letter to Ádám Batthyány, Prague, 7 August 1631 (26533). The sender of one now lost letter in the Batthyány missive database is indicated as Márton Stefanics (Stephanych) deák (scribe). See <https://adatbazisokonline.hu/adatbazis/batthyany-missilisek> (accessed 10 June 2023).

<sup>59</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125). Batzmadeag is a likely misspelled form of Balázs deák. His name also appears in Eva Poppel's letter dated a year later. Eva's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Rechnitz (Rohonc), 11 November 1610 (37912). For István deák see Sabina Solms' undated letter to Eva Poppel (43635).

<sup>60</sup> Tibor Klaniczay, *Pallas Magyar ivadéakai* [The Hungarian Descendants of Pallas] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 84.

were frequently sought out by noble families, as they were able to assist with daily correspondence as well as with the various administrative needs of noble estates.<sup>61</sup>

The examples in the Poppel sisters' letters indicate that literate men of relatively high social status were often employed as scribes and entrusted with messenger duties due to their perceived trustworthiness.<sup>62</sup> Higher up the social ladder of letter bearers were members of the lower nobility and the civic elite who performed administrative duties in the service of the Batthyány or the Poppel families. They usually held the title Mr. (Herr in German or Pan in Czech) and were designated in the correspondence by their last name. The sisters consigned letters to István Blaskovics, the military Captain of Körmend, András Tarródy, a local nobleman in the service of Ferenc Batthyány, Pál Pethő, the caretaker of the Poppel estates in Szentgotthárd and Dobra as well as Jakob Kuhlmaier, the Poppel's Viennese agent and the previously mentioned but not identifiable Herr Zott.<sup>63</sup>

Relatives were also important mediators in the distant communication of the sisters as well, taking on the role of letter bearers. Maria Magdalena entrusted letters to close family members travelling to Vienna or Hungary. In 1607 she sent letters to Eva

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<sup>61</sup> István György Tóth, *Jobbágyok, hajdúk, deákok. A körmendi uradalom társadalma a 17. században* [Serfs, Heyducks, Scribes. Society of the Estates of Körmend in the Seventeenth Century] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 126–127.

<sup>62</sup> István György Tóth, "Magyar nyelvű írásbeliség, tovább élő szóbeliség, írott latinság," [Hungarian Written Culture, Persisting Orality, Latin Literacy] in *Magyar művelődéstörténet*, ed. Kósa László (Budapest: Osiris, 2006): 236–245.

<sup>63</sup> István Blaskovics: Sabina's letter to Eva, Prague, 10 February 1617 (43599). See also István Blaskovics' letters to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 1475, 1477–1480 and 6822–6848 (1608–1618). András Tarródy: Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 28 July 1625 (26530). See also András Tarródy's letters to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 48586–48587. Pál Pethő: Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Kunitz (Kunice), 26 November 1609 (50071). For Pál Pethő's letters to Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel Lobkowitz see, nos. 37070–37142. A letter written by the noble judges Gáspár Darabos and Ambrus Hertelendi addresses him as the "Prefect of Lord Trčka's estates in Szentgotthárd and Dobra"; see no. 9750/a (1612). Jakob Kuhlmaier: Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 7 September 1607 (50058). See also Kuhlmaier's letters to Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel, nos. 26510–16511 (1607). Herr Zott: Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (26524).

from Prague with their brother, Adam Eck Poppel.<sup>64</sup> Twenty years later, her son, Adam Trčka, returned to Bohemia with letters after a visit with Eva Poppel in Rohonc (Rechnitz). Relatives maintaining residence in Vienna also fulfilled messenger duties. The Croatian ban György Zrínyi (viceroy Juraj Zrinski), a relative and neighbour of Ferenc Batthyány, who owned a house close to the Burg, carried Sabina's hastily scribbled letter to Eva when he travelled to Hungary.<sup>65</sup> Sending letters with family members assured the safe delivery of letters, but also meant saving costs, an important factor for some of the sisters.

Cost played a significant role in determining the method of sending letters. The sister's choice of letter carriers largely depended on whom they were able to afford to carry out the task. The recurring names of Janusch, Armand, and Little Matthias in the letters of the wealthier sisters, Eva and Maria Magdalena, and the moderately well-off Sabina, indicates that these servants fulfilled messenger duties for a longer period.<sup>66</sup> The absence of such references in Katharina Kurzbach's letters, on the other hand, implies that the impoverished oldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister had intermittent access to letter bearers or servants. Therefore, Katharina frequently sent letters to Hungary with the messenger couriers of her sisters. She dropped off letters at the Trčka's residence in

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<sup>64</sup> Maria Magdalena entrusted two letters to her brother [Adam Eck?], who himself confirmed that he had sent them to Eva Poppel via Frau Schramkschreiberin and via Jakob Khulmair: Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 7 September 1607 (50058.)

<sup>65</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 23 August 1621 (43615). The Zrínyi family was one of the few Hungarian noble families who had a house at the Freyung adjacent to the Burg in Vienna. See Ferdinand Oppl and Martin, Scheutz, eds., *Der Schlierbach-Plan des Job Hartmann von Enenkel. Ein Plan der Stadt Wien aus dem frühen 17. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 120 and Koltai, "Egy magyar főrend," 59.

<sup>66</sup> For Johannes, see Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Schmirschitz (Smiriče), 30 June 1611 (50085), Světla (Swietla), 18 September 1612 (50089) and Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 8 December 1615 (26523); Armand and little Matthias are mentioned in the correspondence of Maria Magdalena and Sabina from the early 1610s. See Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Kunice (Kunitz), 26 November 1609, (50071), Světla (Swietla), 23 August 1610 (50078), and Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 30 June 1611, (50085), and to Pál Pethő, Swietla (Světla), 23 August 1610 (50077), and also Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 July 1611 (43670).

Prague to be taken along by Maria Magdalena's messengers departing for Hungary.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, she counted on the Batthyány couriers arriving regularly to the home of Eva Claus in Vienna to receive letters or send a note along with them. Eva Claus, the wife of the imperial court trader Georg Claus, was Eva Poppel's confidant and business agent in Vienna for more than two decades.<sup>68</sup> Eva Claus also acted as the primary contact for Katharina, facilitating communication with Eva by forwarding letters and conveying verbal messages between the two Poppel Lobkowitz sisters.<sup>69</sup>

When Katharina was unable to send letters with the messengers of the Batthyány or the Trčka family, she resorted to occasional letter bearers from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. Besides the already mentioned noblemen András Tarody and Herr Zott, she entrusted letters to a judge from Breslau and a Jewish merchant named Adam, both travelling from Prague to Vienna.<sup>70</sup> During her stay in Poznan in 1619, Katharina dispatched a banner with a Jewish woman from the Polish town of Luboń.<sup>71</sup> While the elderly Katharina was staying in Vienna, she rushed so as not to miss the opportunity to send her greetings and a letter to Eva with Frau Berger who was about to visit Ádám Batthyány's young wife Aurora Formentini in Rohonc (Rechnitz).<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Katharina trusted her letters to Eva Poppel's messengers, Mednyányszky and Batzmadiég, and Maria Magdalena's servant Janusch. Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125) and Prague, 8 December 1615 (26523).

<sup>68</sup> The close to one hundred letters written by Eva Claus and held today in the Batthyány Archive shed light on the important role of Viennese merchants in managing everyday purchases for the Hungarian nobility. Frau Claus assisted Eva Poppel by finding buyers for the wine produced on the Batthyány estates, purchasing fine fabric and various goods, and helping with financial transactions and payments. After the death of her first husband, she remarried and signed her letters as Eva Haag.

<sup>69</sup> Katharina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 25 March 1618 (26525) and Poznan, 3 March 1619 (26527). See also the letters of Eva Claus (Haag) to Eva Poppel, nos. 7934 (1618), 7943 (1624), 7988 (1629), 8000 (1633), 17587–88 (1637).

<sup>70</sup> Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125) and Prague, 5 January 1623 (26528).

<sup>71</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Poznań, 3 March 1619 (26527).

<sup>72</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 4 November 1636 (26536).

The sisters often entrusted valuable gifts and goods to these messengers, making reliability a significant concern. In their letters, they often listed the items—garments, medicine, food, small presents and money—that the messenger was expected to hand over to the letter’s receiver. Some of these objects, such as ruffles, small pieces of jewellery, a few packages of electuary from Passau or sweets for the children bought at the annual fair, were small enough to fit in the messenger’s bag, while goods in bulk, like bier, flax, capons or fruit and trunks packed with fine silk, linen, garments, glasses and knives were loaded on carts.<sup>73</sup>

The individuals whom the Poppel Lobkowitz women were most likely to trust with their goods were messengers of higher social rank, including caretakers, secretaries, military leaders, or reliable servants. Evidence for this survives primarily from Sabina’s letters. For example, she sent Eva a belt with Farkas, the Batthyánys’ messenger, a collar design conveyed by Pál Pethő bailiff of the Hungarian Poppel estates and money with the caretaker of Fürstenfeld.<sup>74</sup> On occasion, the delivery of valuables had to be delayed until a reliable person could be found. Sabina had to wait, for instance, for the return of trustworthy Captain Blaskovics to send with him “the things that the Lady Sister ordered [her] to buy.”<sup>75</sup> In another instance, she hesitated to send the pearls specifically made for

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<sup>73</sup> Garment: Ruffle (Kröß), no. 43596 (1616); jewelry: ring (Ring), no. 50056 (1607) and necklace (Kettlein): no. 50086 (1611); sweets: (Kirchtag), no. 43573 (1614); candy (Zucker), no. 43575 (1614); marzipan, no. 43594 (1616); electarium (Passauer lattweg), no. 43618 (1621); beer, no. 50078 (1610); flax, no. 43572 (1614); capons (Capännern), no. 43571 (1611); peaches (dürantzen), squashes (plützern) and chestnuts (kösten), no. 50059 (1607); silk (blaue Seyden), no. 43594 (1616); linen, no. 50089 (1612); garments (vberschickten genäheten), no. 43576 (1614); nightgown (nacht mändlein), no. 43568 (1608); hat, bottles, two pair of knives, no. 50060 (1608).

<sup>74</sup> Farkas: Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 June 1616 (43598); Pál Pethő: Sabina’s letter to Eva, Wirbitz, (Vrbce), 22 September 1608 (43568); caretaker of Fürstenfeld (Steiermark). Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 24 June (43612).

<sup>75</sup> “... In sachen, die mir mein Fraw Schwester anbefohlen... muß warten biß daß der Plakowitsh etwan heimfaren wirdt ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 February 1616 (43593).

Eva, fearing that her messenger might lose the jewellery. Instead, she continued to look for a trustworthy person fitting to the task.<sup>76</sup>

Trusted messengers delivered not only valuable goods or money but also conveyed sensitive information. In the Poppel correspondence, there are frequent references to information conveyed in person, highlighting early modern letter writers' insecurities regarding the written word, and their reliance on oral communication. Before the sixteenth century, important information was rarely conveyed in writing, and letters were only used to confirm the validity of the messages entrusted to the memory of the letter bearer who presented them orally upon arrival.<sup>77</sup> The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters preserved the medieval practice of relying on oral communications delivered by messengers, reflecting a persistent preference for memory over paper and ink.<sup>78</sup> This was especially true for information not meant to be shared with others. Therefore, intimate parts of messages were often excluded from letters and instead conveyed verbally by the messenger.<sup>79</sup>

Several letters mentioned orally delivered messages concerning the Poppel sisters' legal settlement over the Hungarian inheritance.<sup>80</sup> For example, in a five-page letter written in 1609, Katharina discussed the partition of the personal belongings of the sisters' deceased mother. As not much room was left on the folio for elaborating on the family affair, Katharina closed the letter with the conventional epistolary phrase of "not

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<sup>76</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 19 April 1614 (43579).

<sup>77</sup> Wenzel, "Boten und Briefe," 94–95.

<sup>78</sup> Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, 29.

<sup>79</sup> Daybell, *Woman Letter-Writers*, 132.

<sup>80</sup> Katharina's letters to Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel, Prague, 8 September 1610 (26521) and Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125), Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Kunitz (Kunice), 26 November 1609 (50071), Schmirschitz (Smířice), 30 June 1611 (50085) and Kunitz (Kunice), 20 June 1612 (50088) and Sabina's letter to Eva, Prague, 17 February 1617 (43599).

intending to hold up [my] Lady Sister any longer”, announcing that she instructed “Batzmadieg” to convey further details about the matter at hand. The accompanying spoken explanation delivered by the messenger likely contained additional information about the financial controversies between the Poppel siblings which Katharina did not wish to share with other potential readers.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, information regarding legal business issues was conveyed by Eva Poppel to the Captain of Körmend, Herr Blaskovics, to hand over to Sabina Solms. This can be inferred from a brief reference to an agreement concerning the redemption of the Poppel shares in Szentgotthárd in the letter which was sent along with the captain. In this way, one can assume that the spoken message was more detailed and of real importance.<sup>82</sup>

However, not all orally conveyed messages were meant to be confidential. Sometimes, the Poppel women delegated messages to their bearers because it was simply more convenient to do so than explain the matter in writing. Maria Magdalena, for example, wanted to write about all kinds of things, but a “major reason” barred her from picking up the pen. It is possible that she was preoccupied with daily business or simply lacked the time to elaborate on the matter which could explain why she choose to instruct Herr Pethő to personally discuss it with Eva Poppel.<sup>83</sup> In another letter, she “sent a word with Johannes” that accompanied the inkwell that Maria Magdalena sent as a present for

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<sup>81</sup> Katharina’s letter to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125).

<sup>82</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Prague, 17 February 1617 (43599).

<sup>83</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Kunice, 26 November 1609 (50071). It is indeed difficult to know for sure why Maria Magdalena chose not to commit the information to paper. It could be due to various reasons such as sickness, lack of space on the paper or other unidentified factors. As customary for the time, she wrote on folio sized papers folded in half. Since she already used up two folios for her letter including the address page and seven pages of writing, it is possible that she did not want to take an extra folio and waste paper. However, it is equally possible that the information was of private nature, such as gossip, which she did not want to commit to paper.

her sister.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, Katharina received Eva's response to her request for wine, presented by the entrusted messenger Eva Claus.<sup>85</sup>

References to oral messages were usually announced in the letter's closing part or the postscript, often specifically naming the messenger. These announcements served to remind the letter's receiver to expect the letter's carrier to present additional information. They also confirmed the trustworthiness of the information and its conveyer.<sup>86</sup> In the postscript of a letter directed to *Ádám Batthyány*, for example, Katharina pronounced that "the presenter [of her letter], Herr Stefanavsky, should tell Your Grace what I have ordered and commanded to him."<sup>87</sup> The letter itself did not go beyond deferential courtesies towards the young count, suggesting that the real message, which likely related to her usual plea for money, was commended to the oral message presented by Herr Stefanavsky.

The Poppel women's qualms concerning trusting delicate information to paper mirrored similar fears about the safety of messengers and the letters and goods with which they were entrusted. Writing from Poznan in 1619, Katharina gave voice most directly to her anxiety: "For the Lord sees my great want and misery about which I cannot write because of the great distance of travel and the insecurity of messengers."<sup>88</sup> Due to the dangers that awaited the messenger along his journey, finding a bearer with the courage to take the warlike roads of Bohemia and western Hungary was often

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<sup>84</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Schmirschitz (Smiriče), 30 June 1611 (50085).

<sup>85</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 May 1618 (26526).

<sup>86</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125). For similar references to orally delivered messages, see Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 19 September 1608 (26521) and Vienna, 2 May 1618 (26526), and to *Ádám Batthyány*, Prague, 7 August 1631 (26533).

<sup>87</sup> Katharina's letter to *Ádám Batthyány*, Prague, 7 August 1631 (26533).

<sup>88</sup> "... For the Lord sees my great need and difficulty which for the great distance of the travel, and the insecurity of messengers, I must not write ..." Katharina's letter to Eva, Poznan, 3 March 1619 (26527), transl. by Eva Bullard.

challenging. In 1623, Katharina, for example, complained to Eva that even though she had wanted to notify her that she had safely arrived in Vienna, she couldn't find anyone who would dare take her letter to Hungary without a handsome reward.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, messengers who took up such a task had to be paid well. Kraliček received two guldens from the Countess of Trčka for the two letters he delivered from the northern Bohemian Smiriče to her then unmarried sister Eva, staying in Prague, and was promised a third one for returning with her letter. For taking two letters from Vienna to Némétújvár (Güssing), 150 km away, the Countess of Solms paid her two messengers four and six guldens, respectively.<sup>90</sup> Due to the high delivery costs, the sisters often worked together sharing messengers and expenses.

### ***Difficulties delivering letters***

In exchanging letters, the Poppel sisters often collaborated and sent multiple letters in a single delivery. Because of high travel expenses and the *ad hoc* nature of letter delivery, they used every opportunity to dispatch letters relying on each other's messengers. The Trčka servants carried, for instance, Katharina's letters from Prague to Hungary.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, returning from Rohonc (Rechnitz) to Vienna, Katharina received two letters from Eva Poppel, one addressed to her, the other to her sister, Lady Trčka, which she was supposed to forward to Bohemia.<sup>92</sup> Messengers were also expected to return with an answer. In 1608, Maria Magdalena asked Eva Poppel not to keep her

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<sup>89</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529).

<sup>90</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Smiriče (Schmirschitz), 19 March 1607 (50055), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>91</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 8 December 1615 (26523).

<sup>92</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 25 March 1618 (26525).

messenger long, but to respond to her letter as soon as possible.<sup>93</sup> Since violence and insecurity on the roads around Vienna made it challenging to find a letter carrier, Sabina requested from Eva a messenger who would deliver her letters.<sup>94</sup>

From the Batthyánys' western-Hungarian residences, letters took a long time to reach Bohemia because delivery was slow or because the response was delayed. Securing the flow of written communication and concerns about the whereabouts of letters was thus a recurring theme in the Poppel sisters' correspondence. Writing to Eva in 1607, Maria Magdalena hurried to acknowledge the arrival of her sister's "long-awaited letter."<sup>95</sup> Another time, she complained about not having received any answers to several letters she sent to Eva in the previous months, except the one Mr. Scribe from the chancery ("pan Schreiber") handed her four weeks ago.<sup>96</sup>

Sickness, the absence of a scribe with adequate language skills, or the lack of suitable horses or reliable messengers could also hinder the delivery of letters. Sabina apologized for not letting the Batthyánys' messenger return for two days, "because on the first day, when the messenger arrived, I felt not well and therefore stayed in bed the whole day. [While] the next day, the gates remained closed until one in the afternoon, when the homage [paid to the king] was over."<sup>97</sup> Katharina was delayed in responding to

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<sup>93</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 31 December 1608 (50063).

<sup>94</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), [n.d.] December (43629).

<sup>95</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 5 October 1607 (50059).

<sup>96</sup> "... I have sent some people there and used that opportunity to write but have never received any answers, besides the one that Mr. Schreiber [chancery scribe] handed me four weeks ago ..." Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 5 April 1618 (50098), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>97</sup> "... dan der erstún tag alß der bott ankommen ~~hab~~ kan ich vbel aúf gewessen vndt deßweg[en] den gantzen tag zú beth geleg[en]. den andern tag aber ist die húldigúng vergangen sindt deßwegen die thor vor einer vhr nit vfgemacht worden..." Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43634).

Eva as she couldn't find a scribe who would draft her a letter in Hungarian.<sup>98</sup> Sometimes, letters could not be sent off immediately, as messengers faced unexpected delays.

Sabina's servant, István deák, for example, had to wait several days because he couldn't find a horse, while Katharina could not find a messenger willing to cross the Hungarian border because "they [were] all afraid to travel."<sup>99</sup> Indeed, messengers often risked their lives while delivering letters. On the way to the Batthyány court, one of Sabina's messengers was captured at the town of Bernstein in Lower Austria. The situation became severe as the captors wanted to hang him. Details of the messenger's escape are not revealed; we only know that he eventually got back to Vienna unharmed.<sup>100</sup>

Occasionally, letter couriers were also held back, especially when an answer about a serious matter needed extra time for consideration. Maria Magdalena, for instance, dedicated an entire letter urging Eva for a response about their negotiations over their shares in the Hungarian Poppel inheritance discussed in letters she had sent earlier.<sup>101</sup> Dispatched mail could also simply get off course without reaching its destination. The letters and the two barrels of wine which Maria Magdalena left at the family's Bohemian residence of Švetla to be sent to Vienna never reached their destination and were later returned to her.<sup>102</sup> Given the risk of letters going easily astray, organizing delivery routes and finding reliable intermediators in Vienna was a way for the Poppel Lobkowitz women to maintain control over the movement and delivery of their letters.

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<sup>98</sup> "... ich wolt ihrs gar won herzen gehrn eher geschikht haben. so hab ichs in warheit. von dem hn[?] ungarisch[en] secretarÿ niht eher bekhúm[m]en khúmnen ..." Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (26524). Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43635).

<sup>99</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43635).

<sup>100</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, [n.d.] (43626).

<sup>101</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 31 December 1608 (50063).

<sup>102</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Kunitz (Kunice), 20 April 1612 (50087).

Perilous travel conditions between Prague and Vienna in the 1610s and 1620s were the cause of much of the sisters' worries over safe letter delivery. "Soldiers and people are all running wild and written things are not safe" wrote Katharina to Eva, apologizing for her infrequent writing.<sup>103</sup> To minimise the risk of losing letters, Maria Magdalena took the initiative to organize the delivery of her correspondence with Eva relying on their mutual contacts in Vienna. Just a few days after the defenestration of the Habsburg-loyal officers in Prague in May 1618, Maria Magdalena asked Eva to find a reliable individual in Vienna who could bring letters between Bohemia and Hungary.

My sweetheart, write to me about how things are with You and, if possible, I would always write to You about all the matters here if only I knew to whom to send the letters in Vienna. [I cannot send letters] until You choose someone for yourself who is not disagreeable to the locals here so that they would not confiscate them. Order him [the person of your choice] to open any packet and, depending on whom the letters belong to, [and order him] to deliver them only to Your own hands. And write to me again if I can write safely what I wish [to do so].<sup>104</sup>

Despite the letter's unclear wording, Maria Magdalena was looking for a reliable private agent who would be able to meet the arriving messengers in Vienna. This person would be able to open the messenger's leather sack with the letters and packages, sort its content according to the destination and find a suitable messenger who could travel to Hungary and ensure the safe delivery of the sent items.<sup>105</sup>

Maria Magdalena's search for a responsible contact person in Vienna corresponded to similar practices in merchant communities in the region. To lower delivery fees, letters headed in the same direction were wrapped in envelopes and dispatched in bundles to major towns where local agents forwarded them to their

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<sup>103</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 28 July 1625 (26530).

<sup>104</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 27 May 1618 (50099), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>105</sup> Messengers and postal couriers carried letters in sealed leather bags called 'Felleisen' attached to the horse (Behringer, *Thurn und Taxis*, 24).

destination.<sup>106</sup> For example, Jewish communities in Prague and Vienna maintained such agent-organized private postal services, as a group of intercepted letters discovered in the state archive in Vienna in the early 1900s has revealed. In their respective communities in Prague and Vienna, specific individuals were responsible for the smooth communication between business partners, friends, and families who managed the incoming and outgoing mail and hired messengers to carry letters back and forth between the two cities.<sup>107</sup>

Similarly, Maria Magdalena Trčka also attempted to establish a delivery network to oversee mail delivery between the distant Trčka Bohemian residences and the Batthyány court in western Hungary, which required close coordination and cooperation among a diverse pool of intermediaries and messengers.<sup>108</sup>

Maria Magdalena's letters are most revealing about the logistics of the Trčka family's private courier network. From the Trčka's residences in Opočno, Smiriče, or one of the other Trčka estates, letter bearers first departed for Maria Magdalena's house in the Lesser Town (Malá Strana).<sup>109</sup> Once in Prague, letters were sent either by the official post or by a designated personal messenger to Vienna.<sup>110</sup> Upon arrival in Vienna, messengers went to the houses of specific agents responsible for forwarding letters to the designated address. Usually, the envoys would not return immediately to Prague, but rather remain at

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<sup>106</sup> About the practice of early modern enveloping (Kuvertierung), see Joachim Helbig, *Postvermerke auf Briefen*, 82–83.

<sup>107</sup> Alfred Landau and Bernard Wachstein, eds., *Jüdische Privatbriefe aus dem Jahre 1619* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1911), XXIX.

<sup>108</sup> There is little research on privately run postal couriers in the early modern period. For the workings of princely and city courier services in the German lands, see Chapter 3, "Fürstliche Postanstalten" and Chapter 8, "Städtische Botenanstalten–Nürnberg", in Helbig, *Postvermerke auf Briefen*, 52–61 and 103–109.

<sup>109</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 26 January 1626 (50106). Petr Uličný, "Belvederes and Loggias in Prague; Two Faces of the Leisure: Architecture of the Imperial City," *Studia Rudolfiana* 14 (2014), 30–50.

<sup>110</sup> Effenberger, *Geschichte der österreichischen Post*, 3.

the given agent's house for several days until they received letters from the Batthyánys' messengers. This practice is attested to in a letter from the early 1630s, in which Maria Magdalena announced that she would instruct her servant to stay in Vienna until his messenger returned from Hungary with Eva Poppel's letter to be taken to Prague.<sup>111</sup>

Mutual acquaintances in Vienna served as mediators ensuring the delivery of letters between Eva Poppel and her Bohemian relatives. One of Maria Magdalena's earliest extant letters discloses how the Countess of Trčka sought to establish a reliable delivery network through Vienna to the Batthyány court. In 1607, shortly after Eva married Ferenc Batthyány, Lady Trčka asked her sister for information about the whereabouts of two previously sent letters. Maria Magdalena listed her Viennese contacts who had been involved in the letters' delivery so that her sister could identify the specific letters referenced.

I beg You to let me know whether you have received my letters and which letter is from whom. Because I have sent two letters to You, [I have sent one] with our dearest Lord Brother, whom himself said that he dispatched it [to you] and one [was sent] via Frau Schrannenschreiberin and one [was sent] through Jakob Khulmaier, I would like to know if they arrived [in your hands], and also which place is safer for letters to be sent to.<sup>112</sup>

The letters in question were brought to Vienna by the sister's brother Adam Eck Poppel and were handed over to two separate intermediaries responsible for safe delivery.<sup>113</sup> The letter's language suggests that Maria Magdalena was testing the reliability of these two

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<sup>111</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 11 January 1630 (50113).

<sup>112</sup> "... pitt dú wollest mir zú wissen then, ab dú meine schreiben bekommen, vnd welche oder von wehm dú solchn empfangen, dann ich die zwey schreiben dúrch vnser, herzlibsten herrn brúdern, der selbst gesagt, das er die solche vbersendet, so wol dúrch frau schramkschreiberyn, vnd dúrch Jacob Khúlmaÿarn ..."; Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Swietla (Světla), 7 September 1607 (50058).

<sup>113</sup> The messenger who delivered the letters to Vienna, was the sister's brother, military captain Adam Eck Poppel Lobkowitz in the service of Ferenc Batthyány. He was murdered by Kristóf Bánffy in late 1607 or early 1608. Sándor Takáts, *Zrinyi Miklós nevelőanyja* [The Stepmother of Miklós Zrinyi] (Budapest: Franklin, 1917), 69. Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 519.

agents, the wife of the court scribe, and Jacob Kuhlmaier, the Viennese agent of the Poppel family.<sup>114</sup> She was looking for a safe connection in Vienna through which her future letters could be forwarded to Hungary. The name of “*Frau Schranckschreiberin*”, the wife of the chief scribe (Schranenschreiber) at the Lower Austrian judicial court, also emerged in an earlier letter from the same year, suggesting that her house was already used as a safe place for mail that was in transition.<sup>115</sup>

Over the years, houses owned by the Hungarian nobility or the civic elite in Vienna also served as distribution centres for letters arriving from Bohemia and Hungary. The Poppel sisters’ correspondence specifically mentioned the “Hungarian House,” one of the trusted Viennese houses frequented by Hungarian envoys.<sup>116</sup> Since the mid-1500s, the house, located next to the Augustine cloister near the Hofburg, had been in the ownership of the Nádasdy family. It was here, in the *Freihaus* of the Nádasdys, where Ferenc Batthyány rented the upper level from Ferenc Nádasdy’s widow Erzsébet Báthory, and where Eva Poppel also stayed during her occasional visits to Vienna.<sup>117</sup> References in the correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz women bear testament to the fact that messengers from Bohemia often delivered letters to the “Hungarian House.” In

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<sup>114</sup> See Jakob Kuhlmaier’s letters to Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel from 1607 (26510 and 26511).

<sup>115</sup> “Schranckschreiber” in Gerlinde Sanford, *Wörterbuch von Berufsbezeichnungen aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert. Gesammelt aus den Wiener Totenprotokollen der Jahre 1648-1668 und einigen weiteren Quellen* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang 1975), f.119. The chancellery of the provincial and city court, called the *Schranne*, was near the Burg; see “Schranne,” in Felix Czeike, *Historisches Lexikon Wien in sechs Bänden* (Vienna: Verlag Kremayr & Scheriau, 1992-2004), vol. 5, 141–142. Richard Perger, “Die Baugeschichte der Wiener Schrannegebäudes nach schriftlichen Quellen,” *Jahrbuch des Vereins der für Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 57/58 (2002): 269-299, quoted in Oppl, *Der Schlierbach-Plan*, 98. Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Opočno, 17 February 1607 (50053).

<sup>116</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 12 May 1617 (43611) and Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Kunitz (Kunice), 20 April 1612 (50087).

<sup>117</sup> Until the 1630s, the court nobility did not maintain permanent residence in Vienna. Instead, nobles who came to Vienna for service were accommodated by the court in the homes of the city burghers or lived in so-called ‘free houses’ exempted from paying city taxes. See Oppl, *Schlierbach-Plan*, 166. For Batthyány’s rental in the Nádasdy’s house, see *ibid.* 126, Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 117 and András Koltai, “Egy magyar főrend pályafutása,” 59.

1609, the Breslauer priest reported to Katharina that he had handed over the letters to the Nádasdy House in Vienna.<sup>118</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter from 1612 expressly indicated the Nádasdy House as the delivery address.<sup>119</sup>

Besides receiving and distributing incoming letters, the Nádasdy House also assisted messengers, directing them to the correct addresses for letter delivery. Before the age of postal codes and house numbers, messengers would be guided by the information provided on the address page of a given letter while also receiving oral instructions from the letter writers, intermediaries, or fellow messengers. Occasionally, the address leaf contained specific instructions regarding where one could inquire about the residence of the letter’s receiver. The address page of Eva Poppel’s letter, for example, written in 1617 to the Batthyány’s Viennese contact, Melchior Lehner, instructs the bearer to inquire at the Hungarian house about Lehner’s proper address.

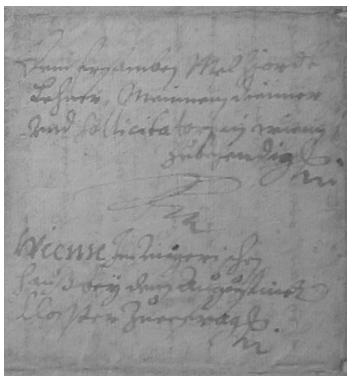


Figure 11: “To my servant and solicitor, Melchior Lehner in Vienna, to his own hands | Vienna: Inquire in the Hungarian House at the Augustine cloister” Address leaf of Eva Poppel’s letter to Melchior Lehner (1617)<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Katharina’s letter to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125).

<sup>119</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Kunice (Kunitz), 20 April 1612 (50087).

<sup>120</sup> Address: “Dem ersamben Melchiordh Lehner meiner dienner und sollicitatorn in wienn zubegendig[en] Wienn im vngerischen hauß beÿ dem Aúgústiner klosster zúerfrag[en]”, Eva Poppel’s letter to Melchior Lehner, Toplica, 12 May 1617 (4611).

The Hungarian House served as an orienting point for the Poppel sisters' messengers probably, until the Batthyány family permanently gave up its residence in Vienna in the early 1630s.<sup>121</sup>

Like the Nádasdy house in the 1610s and, probably, the 1620s as well, Eva Claus' home also functioned as a private courier station—receiving and distributing mail, finding appropriate carriers, or arranging other means for the secure delivery of letters to the Batthyány court. As mentioned earlier, this merchant woman was an important contact person for the oldest Poppel sister Katharina Kurzbach. In 1634, during one of her extended stays in Vienna, Katharina wrote to Eva Poppel complaining about not having received a response to her numerous letters. While it was a frequent trope in early modern letters to use the post as an excuse for infrequent letters, Katharina's complaints shed light on the couriers' rate of letter deliveries to Eva Claus's house. Awaiting a note from Eva, she observed the Batthyány couriers' weekly arrival with correspondences which would only be forwarded to further destinations or delivered to local individuals. When her maidservant reported that she “recognized one of Eva Poppel's envoys entering the house of Mrs. Claus, she [Katharina] sent a small letter to the man asking if he had any letters indeed for [her], but he had nothing.”<sup>122</sup>

It is likely that this was not the first time that Katharina tried to use the Batthyány couriers staying at Frau Claus' house to send letters to her sister. In the absence of the Hungarian envoys, the merchant woman also assisted Katharina in finding letter bearers who would deliver her letters to the Batthyány court. During Gábor Bethlen's third

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<sup>121</sup> On occasional visits to Vienna in the 1630s, the Batthyány widow stayed either in the house owned by the Croatian Zrínyi family or at the residence of the Hungarian Rákóczy family (Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 117 and Koltai, “Egy magyar főrend pályafutása,” 59).

<sup>122</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 25 January 1634 (26534), transl. by Eva Bullard.

campaign in 1623, the roads in western Hungary became so dangerous that Katharina could not afford the high courier fees that messengers charged. Only through the well-connected Eva Claus was she able to find a carrier willing to undertake the journey over the war-ridden Hungarian border.<sup>123</sup> Because of the large gaps in Katharina's correspondence, it is hard to tell whether she used any other intermediaries to keep in contact with Eva Poppel. However, frequent references in her letters to Eva Claus point toward the significance of this merchant woman as her most trusted connection in Vienna and an important link to her sister throughout the years.<sup>124</sup>

Finally, the Poppel sister's letters also reveal how messengers and letter writers collaborated in delivering correspondence safely. Experienced messengers trained newly employed carriers and showed the best ways to ensure that letters would reach their destination. In the spring of 1607, Maria Magdalena wrote to Eva to forward a request to her mother, Magdalena Salm, regarding the delivery of valuable jewellery to Hungary. The older Poppel sister wanted her mother to send a messenger to Vienna to meet the letter carrier who had been dispatched from Prague with the bracelets. The messengers were supposed to meet at the house of the court scribe's wife so that the Bohemian envoy could be shown the route to Rohonc (Rechnitz) "so that when he delivers letters in the

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<sup>123</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529).

<sup>124</sup> Further references to the intermediary role of Eva Claus see Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26525 (1618), 26526 (1623), 26529 (1634), and 26535 (1636). Eva Claus also frequently mentions Katharina in her business reports addressed to the Batthyány countess. Claus assisted her on more than one occasion, not only accepting and forward Katharina's letters in Vienna but also accompanying her occasionally across the Hungarian border to Preßburg (Bratislava, Slovakia) as suggested by Katharina's request for such a service. Eva Claus, however, was rather cautious sharing information with the Kurzbach countess. As she noted in a letter to Eva Poppel that the Kurzbach countess tended to be gossipy: "if she knows something, everyone will know it". Nevertheless, the merchant woman displayed great compassion when Katharina became seriously ill and continued to keep a close eye on her until the countess' death sometime after 1637. See Eva Claus' letters to Eva Poppel, 7934 (1618), 7986 (1628), 7988 (1629), 7992 (1629), 8000 (1633), 17588 (1637).

future, he would not make a mistake and wander into Ottoman territory or otherwise get lost or robbed.”<sup>125</sup> As the request indicates, trusted houses in Vienna served as ‘check-ins’ to both orient messengers sent from Bohemia and to receive ‘training’ from their Hungarian colleagues familiar with the specific roads leading to the Batthyány residence.

### *Conclusion*

Amidst deep social and religious changes that marked the transition towards a new order in the Habsburg lands in the 1610s and 1620s, Protestant women, like the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, kept long-distance relations via their extended family and personal correspondences. These female kinship networks functioned not only to uphold personal and patronage bonds but also to seek reassurance and comfort in the face of escalating religious hostilities and the pressure of the Counter-Reformation. Through letter exchanges, women kept informed each other and their families about the political and religious developments in their lands that deeply concerned them while they also went about their common affairs as they negotiated legal matters or conducted family business. For women, therefore, securing the delivery of their letters was of utmost concern.

This chapter thus used what we can glean from the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’

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<sup>125</sup> “... liebste frauw mütter pitten, daß sie alß bald einen potten von aúch [euch] nach Wien abfertige, der s[ich] bei der frauw schranckschreiberyn dosel[bst] anmelde, vnd zeigern meine potten den wegkh biß zú zúch weiße, das wann er ein andermahl dahin geschickt werde, deß wegenß nicht fehle, vnd etwa ghar zú den türckhen oder andern verirrúngkh laúff, daß er deß jenigen so ihm vertraúet ganz vnd gar beraúbet würde ...” [... I ask the most beloved Lady Mother, to dispatch a messenger from your place to Vienna as soon as possible, who would then report to the wife of the chief scribe, and would show the way to my messenger to you. So that when he delivers letters in the future, he would not make a mistake and wander into Ottoman territory or otherwise get lost or robbed ...], Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Opočno, 17 February 1607 (50053)

correspondence to illuminate how close kin noblewomen in the early-seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy used various modes of letter delivery. These noblewomen used the ordinary postal service of the Habsburg court to dispatch officially prepared and signed legal letters, while they relied on personal messengers to send their private letters. protestant networks. The correspondence also suggests that the letter writers' social and financial status impacted the choice of messengers and method of delivery. While the wealthier sisters, Maria Magdalena and Eva, employed servants specifically hired to carry out messenger duties, the financially disadvantaged Katharina mainly relied on her sisters' couriers or the service of occasional letter carriers. The organization of travel routes required close collaboration between the sisters, their messengers and women from the Viennese merchant community to ensure the safe delivery of written messages and valuable goods.

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters regularly voiced their fears regarding postal reliability, dangerous travel conditions and the trustworthiness of their letter carriers, demonstrating that maintaining epistolary privacy was a central concern for early modern noblewomen. While the traffic of private correspondence steadily increased during this period, the importance of orally communicated news and messages did not diminish. As indicated by numerous references, the sisters entrusted not only sealed letters to reliable messengers, occasionally including valuable objects for them to bring along, but also gave oral communications for them to deliver. In this way, messengers became important mediators between letter writers and recipients and between the written and spoken word. Indeed, the Poppel sisters' epistolary anxieties subsided only when the bearer handed over the letter and personally presented the letter writer's oral message. As their hands

would break the letter's seal and carefully unfold its leaf, the letter's visual presentation—its physical layout, script, and language, informed them about the letter's public or private nature and the social standing, personal relationship, literacy and communicative intentions of its writer, topics which will be explored in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER THREE: Inside the Letter: The Significance of Hand and Language

“The medium is a message if not the message”<sup>1</sup>

In the early seventeenth century, letters were increasingly favoured as a medium of written communication among the literate female elite. In neatly folded and sealed bundles, letters conveyed messages between women who were separated by distance. The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ confidence in writing is revealed in their close to thirty-year-long letter exchange. They frequently dispatched letters with felicitations, condolences, political news, medical recipes and reports about business and family. However, the text of the letter was not the only medium that carried information. The materiality of the sisters’ letters, with their physical appearance, various handwritings and alternating languages, communicated larger intentions and meanings for their receiver. For the modern reader, this material evidence of early modern women’s letters enables a better comprehension of social hierarchies within early modern families and the dynamics of women’s letter writing and offers insight into the nuances of written information exchange in early seventeenth century Central Europe. Based on the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ correspondence, the following chapter will examine the formal aspects of early modern women’s letters, exploring the intertwined relationship between handwriting, vernacular language, scribal usage and their communicative meanings.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Burke, “Languages and Anti-Languages in Early Modern Italy,” *History Workshop* 11 (Spring 1981): 24–25.

In the Middle Ages, the Latin word ‘littera(e)’ or letter referred to a piece of official document such as a deed or a charter produced for the court.<sup>2</sup> Legal letters were written in a highly formal style and strictly followed contemporary epistolary conventions that governed the letter’s rhetoric and physical presentation on the page. These conventions originated in the medieval *art dictaminis* and were promulgated in letter writing and chancellery manuals circulated across early modern Europe.<sup>3</sup> As official documents became increasingly differentiated during the sixteenth century, the meaning of the term ‘letter’ had gradually changed and became associated with written correspondences exchanged outside of the courtly context, which we now recognised as family or personal letters.<sup>4</sup>

In Central Europe, with centuries-long German (and Latin) cultural influence, forms of the opening and closing modes of letters, including address, salutation, *captatio benevolentiae* (i.e., the capturing the goodwill of the reader), valediction and subscription, shaped vernacular letter-writing practices and became established in family letters over the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Although family letters usually adhered to the letter-writing etiquette of the time, letter writers would often relax the rules to adapt to the social, personal or physical circumstances. In addition, personal letters were often written with the assistance of a scribe. Scribal letters thus retained some of the

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<sup>2</sup> Körmendi Lajos, *Levéltári kézikönyv* [The Handbook for Archival Practice] (Budapest: Osiris, 2009), 26.

<sup>3</sup> Vera Fasshauer, “Frühneuhochdeutsche Korrespondenzen,” in *Handbuch Brief*, vol. 2., 733.

<sup>4</sup> Beatrix Bastl, “Formen und Gattungen frühneuzeitliche Briefe,” in *Quellenkunde der Habsburgermonarchie (16.–18. Jahrhundert). Ein exemplarisches Handbuch*, ed. Josef Pauser, et al. (Vienna: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2004), 802. It should be noted, that at our time period, it was still common to refer to official documents signed by the king or governmental officials as “letters”; see Chapter 2.

<sup>5</sup> Georg Steinhausen, *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1889), 39–62 and 123–125. See also Michael Betsch, “The System of Czech Bond Address Forms until 1700,” in *Diadoric Perspectives on Address Term Systems*, ed. Ima Taavitsainen and Andreas H. Jucker (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002), 135.

characteristics of an official letter, as other individuals besides the correspondents were involved in the letter's production and, often, in its reception. Throughout this chapter, the public aspect of early modern family letters will be considered when discussing the public and private spheres, as exemplified in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters.

Many of these letters display multiple handwritings, pointing to the collaborative nature of early modern letter-writing. Women dictated their letters to scribes and often made corrections, edits and marginal notes and postscripts in their own hands.<sup>6</sup> This cooperative aspect of the letter-writing process highlights the inclusiveness of early modern epistolary culture, which was rarely reduced to the intimate relationship of two corresponding partners but included a range of other actors, secretaries, scribes and letter carriers.

In this chapter, I will employ the terminology used in manuscript studies. Letters, where the main text was written by someone other than the author, will be called "scribal letters." Letters written entirely in the author's own hand, i.e., in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' handwriting, will be referred to as "holograph letters." The term "autograph hand" will refer to women's signatures in letters, where the signature's handwriting differs from the handwriting of the main text.

The over 170 letters addressed to Eva Poppel, Countess of Batthyány and her family were written in either German or Czech in the sister's own hands or by their secretaries. In these women's letters, elaborate chancellery or humanist scripts that scribes learned in church schools and collegiums alternate with the simple untrained

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<sup>6</sup> Zsuzsanna Kocsis, *Kora újkori levélírnokok. Kézazonosítási lehetőségek elmélete és módszerei* [Scribes in the Early Modern Period: Theories and Possibilities of the Identification of Handwritings] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Figyelő Alapítvány, 2020), 42–46.

cursive taught to women by home tutors.<sup>7</sup> Depending on the availability, the letter writers' physical condition as well as the socio-political context and the nature of the written message, the sisters chose to produce letters employing the handwriting of their secretaries or, on certain occasions, they decided to exclude them from the conversation choosing to write letters in their own hands. In doing so, women letter writers conferred a larger meaning upon the writing hand.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to handwriting, the space organization on the letter's folio was also loaded with meaning.<sup>9</sup> The "manners of the page" with appropriate placement and arrangement of the obligatory letter parts, salutation, subscription and signature, reflected the given social relationship between the corresponding partners and visually expressed social distance and closeness through the arrangement of text and space on the letter's folio. Like the letter's paper, which had to be chosen, folded and sealed in a socially appropriate way, its visual presentation had important semiotic functions, displaying the relative status between the letter writer and its receiver.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, the languages used in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters were used to convey formal and informal messages.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, the language of the early modern court, expressed in epistolary conventions in the letter's opening and closing

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<sup>7</sup> James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 54. See also his "Interpreting Letters and Reading Script Evidence for Female Education and Literacy in Tudor England," *History of Education* 34, no. 6 (2005): 695–715; "Material Meanings and Social Signs of Manuscripts Letters in Early Modern England," *Literature Compass* 6, no. 3 (2009): 647–667.

<sup>8</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50; Daybell, "'Ples acsep thes my skrybled lynes': The Construction and Conventions of Women's Letters in England, 1540-1603," *Quidditas*, 20 (1999): 207–223.

<sup>9</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 47–50.

<sup>10</sup> Sue Walker, "The Manners of the Page: Prescription and Practice in the Visual Organization of Correspondence," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66, nos. 3–4 (2003): 307–329.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Burke, introduction to *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 8.

formulas and the presentation of the text on the folio, displayed the intricate social relationships between corresponding partners.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the sisters' decision to write in German or Czech with assistance or without often indicated the receiver, additional meanings regarding the public or private content of the letter. In this way, the form of a given letter, including the choice of language and handwriting, influenced whether it would be read privately, aloud or shared in any other way.

In studying these women's correspondence over several years, questions arise regarding the intricate nuances between hand, language, social status and the author's communicative intentions. Due to the hybrid nature of the letter as a historical and literary source, these questions cannot be strictly separated.<sup>13</sup> The letters' physical presentation, the various handwritings and languages in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence thus simultaneously elucidate the intertwined relations among social equals within Central European aristocratic families and the shifting boundaries between the notion of public and private in the written communication of female close-kin elite. Through a palaeographic close reading of these letters with particular attention to their material characteristics, this chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of the practice of letter writing among women in early seventeenth-century Central Europe.

### ***Letter writing in early modern Central Europe***

The nobility of Central Europe began using letters for distant private communication during the sixteenth century. Encouraged by the Reformation, the upper

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<sup>12</sup> James Daybell, "The Materiality of Early Modern Letters," in *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1450–1690* (London: Routledge, 2016), 55–77.

<sup>13</sup> Doris Aichholzer, "Briefe adeliger Frauen: Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme: Ein Projektbericht," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 105 (1997): 478.

elite in the Habsburg Monarchy attached growing importance to education and became increasingly familiar with the alphabet. The literacy level of the nobility varied along geographical and gender lines. It was higher in the western, more developed parts of the Monarchy, such as in Bohemia or Lower Austria, than in the eastern regions. Men in noble families also learned to read and write earlier and more extensively than women. By the mid-1600s, however, the number of letters in family archives of the Habsburg lands multiplied, and among them were also letters authored by women.<sup>14</sup>

The number of surviving letters noticeably expanded during the later sixteenth century as a direct result of the growing bureaucratization of the state and heightened military conflict with the Ottomans. Male members of prominent noble families were increasingly occupied with warfare, political engagements and administrative duties in the royal court, frequently requiring them to leave their noble residences for a longer period of time. Growing literacy and geographical mobility thus prompted the nobility of the Habsburg lands to keep in contact with their family members through letter writing, allowing them to remain involved in the management of their noble households.

Early modern family letters were pragmatic, as they focused on the practicalities of everyday life. In a formal style, these letters included greetings, thanksgivings,

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<sup>14</sup> Scholarly literature over the past thirty years has addressed various aspects of literacy development in the Habsburg Monarchy primarily from a nation-based perspective. György István Tóth's *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000) focuses mainly on developments of literacy in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Hungary, although his conclusions likely have relevance for other regions within Central Europe. For the early literacy developments in the Hungarian context, see also Erik Fügedi, "Verba volant... Oral Culture and Literacy among the Medieval Hungarian Nobility," in *Kings, Bishops, Nobles and Burghers in Medieval Hungary*, ed. János Bak (London: Variorum Reprints, 1986), 1–25. For the beginnings of literacy in Bohemia, see Frantisek Smahel, "Literacy and Heresy in Hussite Bohemia," in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000–1500*, ed. Peter Biller and Anne Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 237–254 and especially, 240–241. Alfred Thomas, "Women Readers and Writers in Medieval and Early Modern Bohemia," in *A History of Central European Women's Writing*, ed. C. Hawkesworth (London: Palgrave, 2001), 7–13 and his "Margaret of Teschen's Czech Prayer: Transnationalism and Female Literacy in the Later Middle Ages," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (June 2011): 309–323.

apologies, congratulations and condolences while discussing family business and everyday practicalities, leaving little room for subjective utterances. The structure and style of these letters followed the guidelines of German written letter manuals (*Briefsteller*), which, unlike the humanist epistolary tradition, emphasized rules of class etiquette above textual clarity.<sup>15</sup> Works such as Johan Zainer's *Formulari* (1479) or Johann Rudolf Sattler's *Thesaurus notariorum* (1607), which were widely used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century.<sup>16</sup> Personal letters, written by both men and women, adhered to intricate phrases appropriate to the social rank of the addressee and structured their texts to include the five components (salutation, exordium, narration, petition and conclusion) as proscribed by medieval epistolary theory.<sup>17</sup> Letters written by secretaries indicated the specifically public character of their content, discussing business concerns and forwarding diplomatic, military and family news.

Letter writers in Central Europe corresponded mostly with scribal assistance before 1800. The nobility employed a diverse group of anonymous scribes who were either professionally trained or possessed efficient writing and language skills.<sup>18</sup> Letters directed to the royal court, judicial institutions and various public offices, or letters asking favours from or offering services to social superiors, as well as letters written to men, even to close relatives, required a professional hand to present them in a properly

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<sup>15</sup> Regina Dauser, "Brieftheorie der frühen Neuzeit," in *Handbuch Brief*, vol. 2, 667.

<sup>16</sup> These early letter manuals were, in the strict sense, formularies that provided writing guides for the chancery style used by notaries. After the mid-seventeenth century, they were replaced by guides for a more relaxed letter-writing style known as *Briefsteller*. Reinhard M.G. Nickisch, *Brief* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), 78 and Markus Schiegg, "Briefsteller," in *Handbuch Brief*, ed. Matthews-Schlinzig, et al., vol. 1., 276–278

<sup>17</sup> Vera Fasshauer, "Frühneuhochdeutsche Korrespondenzen," in *Handbuch Brief*, vol. 2., 733.

<sup>18</sup> Kocsis, *Kora újkori levélírnokok*, 46–50.

formulated and visually pleasing form and also to show courtesy towards the addressee.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, letter writers also turned to scribes to ease the physical burden of writing. Numerous scribal letters before 1650 display the childish signatures of their authors, indicating their poor writing skills.<sup>20</sup> Finally, employing scribes to manage personal correspondence was a matter of prestige, as it showed the elevated social status of the letter writer.<sup>21</sup>

Holograph letters (entirely penned by the women themselves) conveyed a message distinct from their scribal-written correspondence: they signalled intimacy, as their authors intended to keep third parties out of the communication. That letter writers were aware of the significance and meaning attached to holograph letters can be illustrated by Sabina Solms's intention to write to her sister Eva "in [her] own hand" about the "unbelievable news" she received from her husband.<sup>22</sup> Philipp Solms' intelligence to his wife after the imperial election in Frankfurt in the late summer of 1619 must have been important as Sabina did not want to employ her German scribe. Sabina's holograph letter was not preserved, but it was probably composed in Czech, just like most of the other letters written in her own hand. For Sabina, writing in her "own hand" usually also meant switching from German—the language of her overwhelmingly scribal correspondence—to the secure medium of her mother tongue to keep the written conversation private. The practice of switching languages can also be observed, although to a lesser extent, in the correspondence of the older Poppel Lobkowitz sisters.

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<sup>19</sup> The ornate script of invitation letters for weddings, baptisms, or other family events signalled the importance and grandeur of the celebratory occasion. See Manfred Beetz, *Frühmoderne Höflichkeit. Komplimentierkunst und Gesellschaftsrituale im altdeutschen Sprachraum* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture*, 123–125.

<sup>21</sup> Kocsis, *Kora újkori levélírnokok*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> Sabinas' letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 [10] September 1619 (43606).

Consequently, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters highlight the specific role of a vernacular language in the written communication of seventeenth-century Central Europe. In the multilingual Habsburg Monarchy, letter writers could deliberately choose between languages, depending on the intricate interplay between the letter's subject matter, the epistolary intent of the letter's author and the corresponding partners' linguistic abilities. In general, the Bohemian, German and Hungarian nobility corresponded with royal government officials in Latin and, as time went on, in German.<sup>23</sup> Family members living in distant corners of the monarchy also tended to write to each other in German, the region's *lingua franca*, to discuss politics, business and legal matters. When it came to personal topics or confidential information, they sometimes turned to their shared native tongue, foreign to the cultural context in which they lived, to protect the letter's content from unwanted readers.<sup>24</sup> As Thomás Knož has pointed out in regard to the cultural and linguistic context of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Moravia, "a linguistic language was often used semiotically as a code in addition to being a nation's attribute. In this way, language as a code could function not merely for communication amongst a defined group of persons but also to exclude persons existing outside of the group."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> For the continuing importance of the Latin language in Central Europe, see Peter Burke, "Heu domine adsunt Turcae: A Sketch for a Social History of Post-Medieval Latin," in *The Art of Conversation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 54–56 and his "Latin: A Language in Search of a Community," in *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 46–47.

<sup>24</sup> Emperor Habsburg Ferdinand exchanged letters with his relatives in French or Spanish, which often contained more personal information than the letters he composed in German; see Christopher F. Laferl, "Die Familienkorrespondenz Ferdinand I," in *Quellenkunde der Habsburgermonarchie (16–18. Jahrhundert). Ein Exemplarisches Handbuch*, ed. Joseph Pauser, Martin Scheutz and Thomas Winckelbauer (Vienna: Oldenburg, 2004), 832; see also Peter Burke, *The Social History of Language*, 1–21.

<sup>25</sup> Thomás Knož, "Natus Moravus linguae Bohemus: Nation, Language and Culture in Early Modern Moravia," *Historica: Historical Sciences in the Czech Republic* 9 (2002): 50.

### *The Poppel sisters' letters in numbers*

The correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters is significant for its exceptional size, the relatively large number of extant holograph letters and its multilingual character. Their letter corpus consists of 177 letters, mostly written to Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány, between 1605 and 1636.<sup>26</sup> Despite the quantity of surviving letters, the correspondence of the three women is highly incomplete, displaying gaps, particularly from the early 1610s and from the 1620s.<sup>27</sup> Most of their letters were written in scribal hand, mainly in German, but a considerable portion, approximately one-third, were penned entirely by the sisters themselves. An additional ten percent of the letters include holograph postscripts, marginalia and corrections written primarily in Czech. (Figures 1-5).

	Scribal	Holograph	Total
Katharina	12 (40%)	18 (60%)	30 (100%)
Maria Magdalena	44 (67%)	21 (33%)	65 (100%)
Sabina	72 (88%)	10 (12%)	82 (100%)

Figure 12: Distribution of scribal and holograph letters in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters (Total)

	German	Czech	Hungarian	Total
Katharina	14 (47%)	16 (53%)	0	30 (100%)
Maria Magdalena	34 (52%)	31 (48%)	0	65 (100%)
Sabina	75 (92%)	6 (7%)	1 (1%)	82 (100%)

Figure 13: Distribution of languages in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters (Total)

<sup>26</sup> A small number of letters are addressed to Eva Poppel's husband, Ferenc Batthyány, her son Ádám Batthyány and to Pál Pethő, the caretaker of the Hungarian Poppel estates. In addition, three letters written by Eva Poppel to Sabina Solms have survived which are not included in these numbers.

<sup>27</sup> In Katharina's correspondence (1608–1636) spanning three decades, no letter survived from fourteen years (1610, 1612–1614, 1627–30, 1632–33, 1635). Maria Magdalena's letter corpus (1605–1630) lacks letters from 1621–1624 and 1627–28, as well as her last three years of life (1631–33). Similarly, there are no letters to be found in Sabina's correspondence (1606–1621) from the years 1607, 1610, 1612–13, 1620.

	German		Czech		Hungarian		Total
	Scribal	Holograph	Scribal	Holograph	Scribal	Holograph	
Katharina	11 (37%)	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	15 (50%)	0	0	30 (100%)
Maria Magdalena	32 (49%)	2 (3%)	12 (19%)	19 (29%)	0	0	65 (100%)
Sabina	71(87%)	4 (5%)	0 (0%)	6 (7%)	1(1%)	0	82 (100%)

Figure 14: Correlation of writing hand and languages in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters

	Body text (Scribal)							
	German				Czech			
	Marginalia and Postscripts				Marginalia and Postscripts			
	Scribal		Holograph		Scribal		Holograph	
	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz
Katharina	5	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Maria Magdalena	5	0	0	6	0	0	0	1
Sabina	35	0	1	6	0	0	0	0

Figure 15: Bilingual letters displaying two handwritings

	Letter's addressees																
	Eva Poppel				Ferenc Batthyány				Ádám Batthyány				Pál Pethő				
	Scribal		Holograph		Scribal		Holograph		Scribal		Holograph		Scribal		Holograph		
	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	G	Cz	
Katharina	11	0	0	15	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	
Maria Magdalena	20	10	1	16	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	13	1	0	1
Sabina	68	0	3	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Figure 16: Distribution of letters according to recipients in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters

Looking at these numbers closely, it becomes clear where an individual preference existed to write letters with or without assistance in either in German or Czech. Sabina Solms, who lived in Vienna, corresponded primarily in German with scribal help. The bulk of her eighty-two letters were addressed to Eva Poppel, while four were sent to Eva's husband, Ferenc Batthyány, and one Czech holograph letter to the caretaker of the Poppel estates, Pál Pethő.<sup>28</sup> Ninety percent of the letters to her sister were dictated to secretaries. Except for one surviving letter written in Hungarian, all of Sabina's scribal letters were composed in German.<sup>29</sup> Of the ten letters bearing the sign of Sabina's hand, six were penned in Czech and four in German.<sup>30</sup> In addition, six scribal letters contain holograph additions in both languages.

Scribal letters in German and Czech dominate the letter corpus by Maria Magdalena Trčka as well. The correspondence, however, contains significantly more holograph letters than the letter exchange with Sabina Solms. Of the 65 letters, Maria Magdalena addressed 48 to Eva, of which 17 bear the sign of her hand, and all but one are written in Czech.<sup>31</sup> The remaining sixteen letters are directed to two men, Pál Pethő (15) and Ferenc Batthyány (2). Four of these letters were written in Czech (two by scribes and two in the author's own hand, all addressed to Pál Pethő), while the remaining letters were in German.<sup>32</sup> Thirty-one of Maria Magdalena's scribal letters are written in German,

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<sup>28</sup> Sabina's letters to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 43607 (1619), 43609 (1619), 43623 (1622), 43639 [n.d.].

<sup>29</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 13 May 1619 (43601).

<sup>30</sup> Sabina's holograph letters to Eva in Czech, nos. 43616 (1621), 43641 [n.d.], 52873–85 [n.d.] and letters in German, nos. 43600 (1618), 43636 [n.d.], 43633 [n.d.]. One German holograph letter is addressed to Ferenc Batthyány and one Czech holograph letter to Pál Pethő, nos. 42623 (1622), 4473 [n.d.].

<sup>31</sup> Maria Magdalena's holograph letters to Eva in Czech, nos. 50055 (1607), 50057 (1607), 50081 (1610), 50084 (1610), 50094 (1614), 50095 (1615), 50097 (1617), 50099 (1618), 50100 (1618), 50104–105 (1625), 50106–108 (1626), 50109 (1629), 50111–12 (1629); in German, no. 50110 (1629).

<sup>32</sup> Maria Magdalena's scribal letters to Pál Pethő in German, nos. 50064–65 (1609), 50068–70 (1609), 50074 (1609), 50075–77 (1610), 50079 (1610); in Czech, nos. 50062 (1608), 50073 (1609). Maria Magdalena's holograph letters to Pál Pethő in Czech, nos. 50061 (1608), 50014 (1630); in German: 50110

while only twelve are written in Czech. Correspondingly, one-third of her letters are holographs, written primarily in Czech, and another handful of letters have Czech autograph additions.

Meanwhile, the oldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister, Katharina Kurzbach, relied much less on scribal assistance than her other two sisters. Of her thirty letters that survived in the Batthyány's family archive, sixty percent (18) are written in her hand, mainly in Czech. The Czech holograph letters were, without exception, directed to her sister Eva, while the two German holograph letters were addressed to Ferenc Batthyány and his son *Ádám*. Only eleven letters, almost exclusively in German, were dictated to scribes.<sup>33</sup> In conclusion, these numbers show that all sisters engaged in correspondence in both languages, both with and without the aid of scribes. Katharina and Maria Magdalena, the two older sisters residing in Bohemia, wrote more frequently in Czech. On the other hand, Sabina, who spent most of her adult life in or around Vienna, primarily corresponded in German. The extent to which the sisters relied on scribes for their correspondence varied. The majority of Maria Magdalena's and Sabina's correspondence was dictated to scribes, while over fifty percent of Katharina's letters were written in her own hand (holograph).

### *Literacy, frequency of letter exchange and language use*

The extent of the letter corpus and the abundance of holograph letters show that the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters were confident letter writers, pointing to the importance of

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(1629). Maria Magdalena's German letters to Ferenc Batthyány: scribal, no. 50091 (1613), holograph, no. 50082 (1610).

<sup>33</sup> The only scribal letter written in Czech in Katharina's correspondence is addressed to Pál Pethő (26522).

literacy in the Poppel Lobkowitz family. The sisters' education was comparable to elite women's learning in other parts of Europe.<sup>34</sup> Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina were taught, above all, practical skills needed for running the household: cooking, sewing and preparing medicine, but also reading, writing and arithmetic.<sup>35</sup> The steady handwriting of their letters demonstrates that they wrote with relative ease and speed since they managed a considerable portion of their correspondence independently. They became confident in holding the pen from daily practice, as increased responsibilities of noblewomen in the household and estate management during the latter half of the sixteenth and especially in the seventeenth centuries required them to correspond with members of the noble household and conduct business in writing.

By the early seventeenth century, letter writing had become a regular part of noblewomen's daily routine.<sup>36</sup> Objects associated with the material culture of literacy provide evidence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' everyday engagement in the practice of writing. Sabina, for instance, asked Eva for quality paper, more suitable for writing letters to the Viennese ladies than the "dreadful" paper she had.<sup>37</sup> Maria Magdalena sent

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<sup>34</sup> Martine Sonnet, "A Daughter to Educate," in *History of Women in the West*, Volume 3: *Renaissance and the Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. Arlette Farge and Natalie Davies, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994-1996), 101-131.

<sup>35</sup> Tünde Lengyel, "Esettanulmány a kora újkori női műveltség kérdéséhez. Elvárások, lehetőségek, határok" [Case Study to the Question of Early Modern Female Literacy: Expectations, Possibilities and Limitations], *Századok* 153, no. 2 (2009): 235-250. See also Sigfrid Westphal, "Reformatatorische Bildungskonzepte für Mädchen und Frauen—Theorie und Praxis," in *Geschichte der Mädchen- und Frauenbildung*, ed. Elke Kleinau and Claudia Opitz (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1996), 135-151, and Ilse Brehmer, "'Sie war in Höflichkeit gewant. In Kunst geübt mit Mund und Hand. Die schöne Maid sprach rein - Französisch und Latein': Erziehung und Bildung der adeligen Frauen," in *Geschichte der Frauenbildung und Mädchenerziehung in Österreich*, ed. Ilse Brehmer and Gertrud Simon (Graz: Leykam, 1997), 29.

<sup>36</sup> Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture*, 123-130.

<sup>37</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [no.d.] (43641).

the Batthyány couple a “kalamarz” or inkwell as a gift, while Katharina owned a writing desk in her residence in Prague and supplied Eva with “geschriebwerg” (paper).<sup>38</sup>

Based on the dates and references to the dispatch and arrival of letters, we can also discern the frequency of letter exchange among the sisters. In 1614, Sabina, the most diligent letter-writer among the three, dispatched letters to Eva at least once a week.<sup>39</sup> Maria Magdalena’s couriers delivered letters from Bohemia to the Batthyány court in Western Hungary at least once a month, and often in two weeks intervals. Letters from Hungary probably arrived about every two weeks at the Trčka’s residences as well.<sup>40</sup> The highly fragmented correspondence of the oldest sister, Katharina, and her frequent complaints about the lack of responses from Eva, on the other hand, suggests that the written exchange between the oldest and youngest Poppel Lobkowitz siblings was less frequent.<sup>41</sup> While Katharina sent letters from Prague about once a month and from Vienna even more frequently, she could only do so if she found an occasional letter bearer since, unlike her wealthier sisters, she could not afford her own messenger.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Inkwell: Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Schmirschitz (Smřice), 30 June 1611, (50085); writing desk and paper: Katharina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 15 March 1618 (26525), 4 November 1636, (26536).

<sup>39</sup> Numerous letters survived between January and March 1614, attesting to frequent (weekly and occasionally even daily) correspondence between Sabina and Eva. See Sabina’s letters written to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 24 January 1614 (43572), Neuhaus (Dobra), 29 January 1614 (43573–74), St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 13 March 1614 (43576), St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 14 March 1614 (43575) and St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 27 March 1614 (43577–78).

<sup>40</sup> From the forty-nine letters addressed to Eva by Maria Magdalena, about half mention dispatched or received letters. Despite the incompleteness of the correspondence, the dating of Maria Magdalena’s letters and the occasional references to the dates in Eva’s letters suggest that the sister’s exchanged letters every ten to fourteen days. This pattern is particularly clear from the years 1607–1612. See Maria Magdalena’s letters to Eva, nos. 50054–40090.

<sup>41</sup> For example, in November 1611, Katharina lamented about not having received a reply from Eva to her letter sent more than six weeks before. In January 1634, she complained about the absence of response to the four letters she had sent from Vienna earlier. See Katharina’s letters to Eva, Prague, 21 November 1611 (38126) and [Vienna], 25 January 1634 (26534).

<sup>42</sup> About the occasional letter bearers of Katharina, see Chapter 2.

The numbers presented in the charts above also highlight the correlation between language preference and the linguistic environment where the letter writers and the recipients were born, raised, or lived. Growing up and living in Bohemia, the two older siblings, Katharina and Maria Magdalena, wrote more often in Czech than in German, while their younger sister, Sabina, who probably spent part of her childhood in Hungary and later resided mainly in Vienna, corresponded primarily in German. There are also significant differences in how often the Poppel Lobkowitz women wrote with scribal assistance. More holograph letters survived from Maria Magdalena and Katherina, indicating that they were both confident letter writers in their own right. Katharina wrote many of these letters in her own hand because she could not afford a scribe. Although only a relatively small number of extant letters bear the sign of Sabina's hand, this does not necessarily indicate she was a weaker writer than her older sisters. Instead, it shows her individual preference to dictate letters to scribes. It is also worth noting that while the dominance of Czech letters in the holograph correspondence of the sisters suggests that the three sisters usually corresponded in their mother tongue in the absence of a scribe, one-quarter of the close to forty letters bearing their hand was composed in German, proving their competency in German as well.<sup>43</sup>

Moreover, the language competency of the addressee was a decisive factor in the Poppel Lobkowitz women's linguistic choice. For example, Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina corresponded with Eva Poppel's husband and son in German, as both Ferenc and Ádám could read German, but neither of them knew Czech. Pál Pethő, the caretaker

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<sup>43</sup> Laferl, "Die Familienkorrespondenz Ferdinand I," 833. See also Allison Rayne and Geoffrey Parker, "A King and Two Queens: The Holograph Correspondence of Philip with Mary and I and Elizabeth I," in *Early Modern Exchanges: Dialogues Between Nations and Cultures*, ed. Helen Hackett (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 96.

of the Poppel estates in Hungary, on the other hand, must have had a good command of Czech as he received letters in both languages from the Trčka countess.<sup>44</sup>

	German	Czech
Ferenc Batthyány	8	0
Ádám Batthyány	1	0
Pál Pethő	11	7

Figure 17: Language distribution in letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters (scribal and holograph) addressed to men

In addition, letters written to Eva in German displayed courtesy to the youngest Poppel sibling, who would have had a weaker grasp of Czech. Having grown up outside Bohemia during her father's exile and thus spending much of her childhood on her mother's Western Hungarian estates, she spoke mostly German and likely learned Hungarian too.<sup>45</sup> It is certain that Eva had learned to speak and read in Czech as well: her Bohemian relatives sent Czech-written letters, while inventories compiled in the 1640s and 1650 list several Czech books in the Batthyány's family library.<sup>46</sup> However, there is

<sup>44</sup> As Maria Magdalena's Czech written letters to Pál Pethő suggest, the caretaker could read Czech. However, his writing ability in this language may have been limited. This explains why Maria Magdalena promised to send Pethő a scribe with proficiencies in Czech and German, which was likely needed to assist him corresponding with the royal authorities in Prague concerning the outstanding debts and the Hungarian shares of her deceased brother, Adam Eck Poppel. Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő, 3 July Kunitz 1609 (50068). See Maria Magdalena's letters to Pál Pethő, nos. 50061–62 (1608), 50068 (1609), 50073 (1609), 50114 (1630). See also the letters of Katharina and Sabina written to Pethő, nos. 26522 (1609), 44473 [n.d.].

<sup>45</sup> The youngest Poppel sister was not more than five years old when Ladislav Poppel was accused of high treason and fled Bohemia in 1593. Only after he was rehabilitated in 1607 was he able to return to Bohemia.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, the letters of Ladislav Poppel Lobkowitz (29766–29768), Magdolna Salm (38140–41), Jan Nikolaus Poppel (38116), Ester Ester Vřesovic (Lobkowitz) (37904, 29764), Johann (Jan) Erdmann Poppel von Lobkowitz (29762–63) and the Bohemian Protestant preacher Dénes Petrassek (Dionysius) (37190–37202). For the Czech books in the Batthyány's library, see András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára* [Ádám Batthyány and His Library] (Budapest and Szeged: OSZK-Scriptum Rt., 2002), 91 and 109.

no indication that she knew how to write in Czech.<sup>47</sup> Of Eva's three surviving letters to Sabina, two were written in German and one in Hungarian. Meanwhile, her correspondence with members of the Batthyány family was conducted interchangeably in German and Hungarian.<sup>48</sup> That Eva Poppel was most comfortable in the German language is evident from the correspondence with her immediate family members. Ferenc Batthyány wrote exclusively in German to his wife, mostly in his own hand, while Eva answered him in Hungarian with the help of a secretary. The letters of Eva's oldest daughter Magdalena to her mother are written mainly in German, while the correspondence with her son was conducted exclusively in Hungarian. This pattern clearly shows that when writing letters, in most instances, letter writers took the preferred language of their corresponding partner into account.

### *The extended hands of the letter writer: The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' scribes*

Scribes were essential members of elite households. In the Habsburg Monarchy, high-ranking families, like the Batthyány family, employed several scribes who assisted with paperwork and managed the multilingual correspondence of the family. Many of these scribes came from the lower ranks of the nobility and were educated in church

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<sup>47</sup> Since we have almost no record of Eva Poppel's responses to her sisters, it is difficult to determine whether she could write in Czech. However, it is possible that she had basic writing skills in this language. A short note on the outer side of Sabina's letter addressed to Ferenc Batthyány states is written in simple German script, likely in Eva's hand: "wal posledni hoktobeis oz do 16 decembr sam dost 8 list" [from the last [day] of October to the 16. of December I receive[d] 8 letter[s]]. Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 22 December 1619 (43609).

<sup>48</sup> See Eva's letters to Sabina in German, Schleining (Szalónak), 22 July 1608 (4597), Schleining (Szalónak), 27 August 1616, (4608) and in Hungarian, Schleining (Szalónak), 20 August 1616 (37918).

schools or sometimes at universities.<sup>49</sup> They were employed for a limited time, usually not exceeding a year.<sup>50</sup>

Noblewomen in wealthier families were accustomed to delegating the task of writing to scribes employed by their families. However, women in less affluent families often had to put up with whoever happened to be at hand: husbands, court clerics or female relatives.<sup>51</sup> These literate helpers became the extended hand of women, assisting with proper epistolary language working from notes or after dictation, and mediating words and intentions between the letter's author and the paper itself.<sup>52</sup> The letter's nicely rounded script testified to the scribe's dexterity, but the identity of the hand's owner almost always remained concealed behind ornate flourishes and loops.<sup>53</sup> Although all but one of the Poppel Lobkowitz sister's scribes, who reveals herself in a signed postscript, remain anonymous, several inferences can be made about these scribes' social backgrounds and their mistresses' changing fortunes.

### *The scribes of Maria Magdalena*

Close examination of the Maria Magdalena's scribal letters shows the hands of fourteen individuals (A-N) in her correspondence.<sup>54</sup> A comparison of their handwriting also reveals that she delegated the management of her correspondence to two scribes

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<sup>49</sup> Tibor Klaniczay, "Értelmiség egyetem nélküli országban," [Intellectuals in a Country Without University] in *Pallas magyar ivadékai* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 77–85.

<sup>50</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 264–265.

<sup>51</sup> Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture*, 123–125.

<sup>52</sup> Marijke van der Wall, "The Black Box of Delegated Writing Early Modern Scribes and Female Literacy in the Netherlands," *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 7, no. 2 (2021): 303–330.

<sup>53</sup> For the scribal art in manuscripts, see Peter Beal's chapter about a seventeenth-century anonymous scribe called 'Feathery' in his *In Praise of Scribes: Manuscripts and their Makers in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 58–108.

<sup>54</sup> Capital letters from A-N indicate the 14 individual scribal hand detected in Maria Magdalena's correspondence.

between 1607 and 1613: ‘Scribe C’ was responsible for her German correspondence while ‘Scribe E’ was responsible for her Czech letters. All Czech-written scribal letters preserved from these eight years can be attributed to the work of scribe E, whose services Maria Magdalena relied on during her stay in Světla (Figure 18).<sup>55</sup>

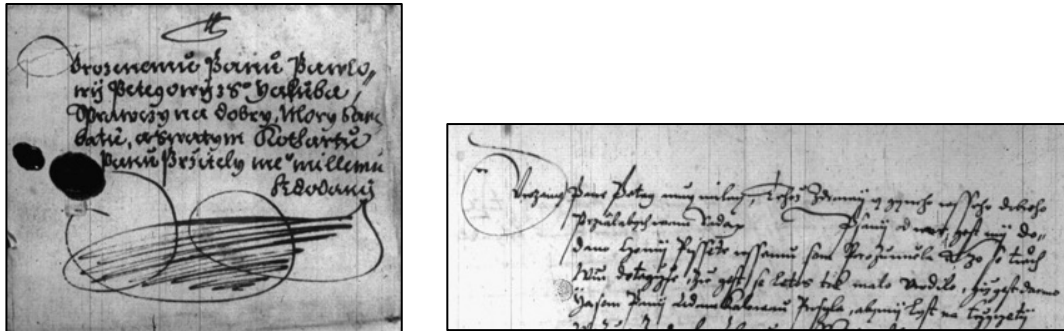


Figure 18: Handwriting of Maria Magdalena’s Czech scribe (E)

Scribe E demonstrated the skills of his profession on the address page, placing a simple flourish under the address written in bold printed letters. However, inside the letter, he recurred to a simple angled script embellishing only the initial letters N or Z of the salutation with a loop. Maria Magdalena also employed another secretary responsible for her German correspondence (Scribe C). The bulk of the twenty-nine German scribal letters dated from this period bears distinctive signs of his hand: overly wide left margins, a large capital B on the top of the folio indicating the beginning of the letter, and initials with dramatic curves at the opening of the paragraphs (Figure 19).

<sup>55</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letters, 50060 (Opočno, 1608), 50062 (Světla, 1608), 50072 (Světla, 1609), 50089 (Světla, 1612), 50092–93 (Světla, 1613).

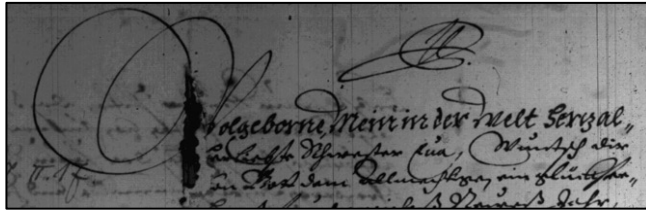


Figure 19: Handwriting of Maria Magdalena's German scribe (C)

This German secretary must have been a trusted man of the Trčka Countess, signing letters on her behalf as he accompanied his mistress as she moved between the family estates of Opočno, Kunice, Světlá and the Trčka's residence in Prague.<sup>56</sup>

### *The scribes of Sabina Solms*

Unlike the wealthy Maria Magdalena Trčka, Sabina Solms did not seem to have long-term secretarial assistance. This conclusion is based on the comparison of nearly twenty scribal handwritings identified in the Solms' household. During the seventeen years of correspondence with the Batthyánys, most scribes worked for Sabina for less than six months, and only a few of her scribes lasted more than a year.<sup>57</sup> The Solms travelled frequently and struggled with money, which might explain the absence of a permanent secretary in Sabina's employment. During the couple's visit to Bohemia and Hessen, Sabina probably sought assistance from local scribes, as she did during her stay

<sup>56</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters written by her German scribe (Scribe C): 50053 (Opočno, 1607), 50056 (Kunice, 1607), 50058 (Světlá, 1607), 50059 (Opočno, 1607), 50064–67 (Prague, 1609), 50068 (Kunice, 1609) 50069 (Světlá, 1609) 50070 (Prague, 1609), 50071–72 (Kunice, 1609), 50074 (Světlá, 1609), 50075 (Opočno, 1609) 50076–78 (Světlá, 1610), 50083 (Prague, 1610), 50085 (Smiřice, 1611), 50086 (Opočno, 1611), 50087–88 (Kunice, 1612), 50090 (Kunice, 1612).

<sup>57</sup> Around nineteen scribal hands can be identified in Sabina Solms letters (A-U). During Sabina's stay in Hungary, Scribe E and Scribe G assisted her from January to April (43572–74, 43576–79) and November and December 1614 (43580–84). In Vienna, Scribe H worked for her from April to July 1615 (43585–90) and Scribe P from June to December 1619 (43602–09, 43628, 43634, 43637). Scribe Q stayed for over a year in the service of the ailing Sabina between February 1621 and July 1622 (43610–15, 43617–18, 43622, 43624, 43626). The largely undated letters of her female scribe (Scribe S) indicate that she worked for her in a scribal capacity in 1616 and 1617 (43625, 43627, 43630–32, 43635–36, 43638, 43640, 43642).

on her Hungarian estates in Szentgotthárd and Dobra. Here, two educated men, probably the stewards of the Poppel Lobkowitz estates, acted as her secretaries.<sup>58</sup> Husband and wife shared the same scribe during the Solms' stay in the Bohemian town of Werbitz (Vrbice) in 1608 and in Vienna from 1615 to 1616. During this time in Vienna, at least three different individuals acted as secretaries for the Solms couple.<sup>59</sup> Only in her last few years did Sabina employ secretaries for an extended period, as distinct handwritings of two scribal hands can be recognized in ten and eleven letters dated 1619 and 1620–21, respectively.<sup>60</sup>

Literate female members of the Solms' household may have also performed scribal tasks.<sup>61</sup> Between 1616 and 1617, Sabina employed a young lady from her small entourage for scribal duties.<sup>62</sup> The girl's simple script and the strong phonetic spelling points to her unschooled hand. The identical handwriting found in two signed postscripts, as well as in ten undated letters, indicates that these letters were dictated to Magdalena Hardegg, daughter of the Lower Austrian Count Georg Friedrich Püschenk Hardegg (Figure 20).<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Seven and five letters respectively can be attributed to two hands dated in Dobra and Szentgotthárd from 1614 (43572–43574, 43576–43579) and (43580–43584).

<sup>59</sup> See Philipp Solms' letter to Ferenc Batthyány, 27 September 1608 (43513) and Sabina's letter to Eva, 22 September 1608 (43568). See also, Scribe 8 in 1615 (6 letters, 43585–90), Scribe 16 in 1619 (10 letters, 43602–09, 43634, 43637) and scribe 18 in 1621/22 (11 letters, 43610–15, 43617–18, 43620, 43622, 43624).

<sup>60</sup> The same hand can be seen in 10 letters from 1619 (43602–43609, 43634, 43637) and the hand of another scribe can be recognised in 11 letters dated between 1621 and 1622 (43610–43615, 43617–43618, 43620, 43622, 43624).

<sup>61</sup> Marcy North, "Household Scribes and the Production of Literary Manuscripts in Early Modern England," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 4 (2015): 133–157.

<sup>62</sup> Evidence from seventeenth-century Dutch households shows that it was not unusual for women to assume the role of a scribe despite their lower education; see Marijke van der Wall, "The Black Box of Delegated Writing Early Modern Scribes and Female Literacy in the Netherlands," *Journal of Historical Sociolinguistics* 7, no. 2 (2021): 311–325.

<sup>63</sup> Magdalena Hardegg (1595–1628). Sabina's letters written in Magdalena Hardegg's hand: 43625, 43627–28, 43630–32, 43635–36, 43638, 43640, 43642. Anton Harrer, *Die Herren und Frauen von Zelking. Eine Spurensuche*. (Melk, 2016), 510–520.

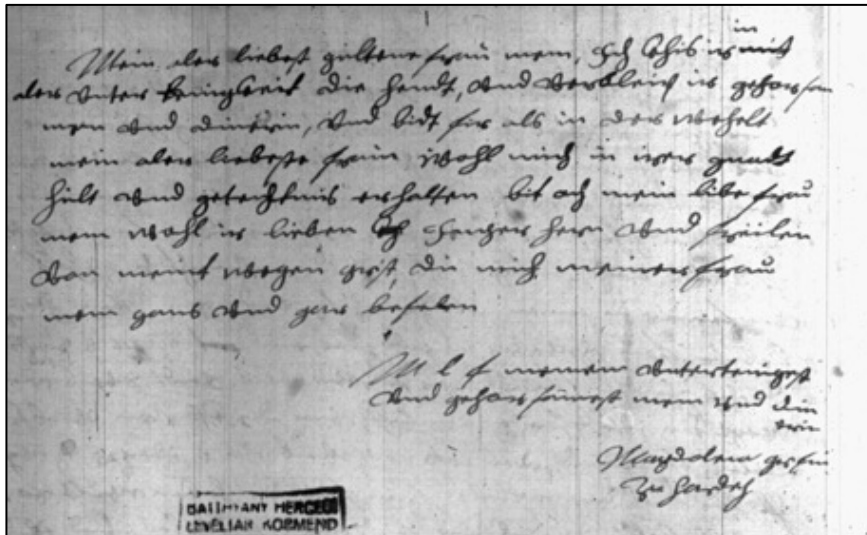


Figure 20: Postscript written by Magdalena Hardegg (n.d.)<sup>64</sup>

Magdalena Hardegg served as Sabina’s lady-in-waiting for over a year, having received food, clothing and education appropriate to her gender and social standing.<sup>65</sup>

The Fräulein’s ability to write nicely and legibly was likely the reason why Sabina choose her to assist with her daily correspondence in Vienna or Prague, where the Solms spent the winter of 1617.<sup>66</sup> The female scribal hand was appropriate to write about

<sup>64</sup> “Mein aler liebste gultene frau mam, ich khis ins in der vnter tenigkeit die handt, vnd verbleiv ins gehorsam men vnd dienerin, vnd bidt fir als in der wehelt mein der liebste frau wohl mich in irer gnadt hilt vnd getechtnis erhalten bit auh mein libe frau mam wohl ins lieben immer herrn vnd freilen von meinert wegen grist, dú mich meiner frau mam gans vnd gans beselen m l f meinem vntertenigest vnd gehorsamest mem vnd dinerin Magdolena grfin zú hardeh.” [*My most beloved golden Lady Maim [woman kin], I kiss your hand in subservience and remain your obedient servant, and I ask you, my most beloved Lady in the world, to receive and hold me in your Grace and remember me. I also beg you, my beloved Maim, to forward my greetings to your beloved Lord and daughter. I diligently command myself to my Lady Maim, M.l.f [sic], your most subservient and obedient woman kin and servant, Magdalena Countess of Hardegg*] Postscript in Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.d.] (43630).

<sup>65</sup> Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Lieber, Ehre: Die adelige Frau in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), 256.

<sup>66</sup> See Sabina’s letter to Eva written during her visit to the Trčka’s, Kunitz (Kunice), 28 January 1617. (43625). The young Magdalena von Hardegg accompanied the Solms couple to Bohemia, in early 1617. The Solms spent the first two months of the year before leaving for the German Lich sometime in March. She wrote several letters to her father Georg Friedrich Hardegg about the trip and especially about the Carnival festivities in Prague. Magdolna’s letters addressed to her father survived at the Niederösterreichische Landes Archiv Briefkonvolut Hardegg NÖLA, Archiv Stetteldorf, Karton 84 and are available in excerpts on *Briefe von adelige Frauen (16–18. Jh). Beziehungen und Bezugssysteme*, <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/Frauenbriefe/hardegg2.htm> (accessed 7 May 2023).

mundane topics: desired fabrics, honey, foul-smelling butter, or requests for a cart or medicine.<sup>67</sup> However, when Sabina asked Eva to intercede on behalf of Ester Vřesovic, the widow of the sisters' brother, Adam Eck Poppel (d. 1607), she employed a skilled German scribe with elegant handwriting to further her case. The letter aimed to convince her sister to accept Ester's son, Adam, into her court and ensure he receives a Protestant education. This led Sabina to write with professional assistance, as the handwriting of her lady-in-waiting was not suitable for presenting such a request.<sup>68</sup>

### *The occasional scribes of Katharina Kurzbach*

Contrary to the Trčka and Solms Countesses, the oldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister, Katharina Kurzbach, did not seem to have regular secretarial assistance. Of her surviving thirty letters, scribes wrote eleven letters in Czech and German, and, except for two, all display different hands.<sup>69</sup> Katharina, who had only a small household with a few servants, most likely relied on her sisters' secretaries or asked people with sufficient scribal skills when the letter's subject required a skilled hand. In two instances, however, we do know the identity of her occasional scribes.<sup>70</sup> The first one was a priest ("Ordinari") from the Silesian Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland), whom Katharina employed "two or three times" to write letters about an undisclosed matter.<sup>71</sup> Katharina's other intermittent scribe was a man in the service of the Batthyány family, a certain Mednyánszky to whom she

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<sup>67</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva: 43631 (fabrics), 43527 (butter), 43633 and 43640 (honey), 43530 (medicinal wine), 43636 (horses).

<sup>68</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Prague, 17 February 1617, (43599).

<sup>69</sup> The two letters display identical handwriting and were dated on the same day. The shorter one, written in Czech, was addressed to Pál Pethő, the caretaker of the Hungarian Poppel estates, while the longer letter, written in German, was sent to Eva. Katharina's letters, [n.p.] 6 April 1609, (26522, 38124).

<sup>70</sup> Letter writers sometimes mentioned the name of the person who assisted them with writing (Kocsis, *Kora újkori levélírnokok*, 56).

<sup>71</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, 1609 (38125).

dictated a pleading letter on behalf of the widow of Miklós Petánczy, asking to supply the servant with house and provisions.<sup>72</sup> As the subsequent letter reveals, Katharina got confused about the scribe's name. When Eva claimed that she was not familiar with Mednyánszky's name, Katharina apologized, explaining that she meant 'Bazmadiég' but accidentally dictated the wrong name to the scribe.<sup>73</sup> References to 'Bazmadiég' and the priest from Breslau came up from 1608-1609 during negotiations between Katharina and the Batthyánys over the division of the Poppel inheritance in Bohemia and Hungary. The importance of the letter's subject might explain why Katharina employed skilled scribes to discuss her legal concerns in writing.<sup>74</sup>

### *The politics of handwriting: the scribal hand*

There are various reasons why the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters corresponded with scribal help. During the tumultuous years of the early 1600s, there was a greater need for information and an increased obligation for individuals to keep in contact with family as well as with royal and military officials. In addition, scribal handwriting was often associated with business and legal matters. When recipients observed an elaborate secretarial script, they realized, at a glance, if a letter's content required serious attention. Apart from intercession on behalf of a relative or retainers, the sisters sought scribal assistance when discussing everyday matters in their letters. These topics ranged from

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<sup>72</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 6 April 1609 (38124). The widow is likely identical to Orsik Petanczy, wife of the tipstaff from Szalónak. See her letter to Eva, no. 36452 (1608).

<sup>73</sup> The distorted name 'Batzmadiég' probably refers to Balázs deák (scribe) from Némétújvár (Güssing). See his letters to Ferenc Batthyány from 1605-1609 (1515-1518). See also a reference to Balázs deák's son, who apparently also served in the role of a scribe. Sabina's letter to Eva, St Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 24 January 1614 (43572).

<sup>74</sup> See Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, 26521 (1608) and her two letters to Eva, 38124-25 (1609).

desired purchases such as delicate fabrics, clothing, jewellery, wood, honey, wheat, wine or medicine to political events, court gossip and family news. The sisters also dictated their letters when discussing the important “common concern” of negotiations regarding their parental inheritance and related financial transactions.

Scribal letters survive in particularly significant numbers from the years when negotiations and legal battles over inheritance occupied the siblings and their families. Close to forty percent of Katharina’s scribal letters (4 out of 11) deal with the division of parental inheritance from the years 1608–1609 immediately after the death of her parents.<sup>75</sup> An additional four scribal letters (40 %) from 1615, 1618 and 1636 reveal tensions between Katharina and the Batthyánys over her Hungarian shares.<sup>76</sup> Between 1609 and 1612, Maria Magdalena sent twenty-four scribal letters from Prague to Eva and the Hungarian caretaker Pál Pethő, out of which eleven (46%) deal with the negotiations with the Batthyánys.<sup>77</sup> Although the few scribal letters in Sabina’s correspondence written between 1609-1612 are silent about these legal battles, letters written between 1616-1621 deal extensively with Sabina’s property rights in the Hungarian Szentgotthárd and the injustice she suffered because Eva laid hands “on the best of her lands”.<sup>78</sup> The scribal hand in these “business” letters ensured a proper presentation of the discussed topics that either concerned or could be shared with other members of the Batthyány family.

The form and materiality of the scribal handwriting signalled formality and was intended to highlight the letter’s semi-public character regarding not only its content but

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<sup>75</sup> Katharina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, 26521 (1608); Katharina’s letter to Pál Pethő, 26522 (1609); Katharina’s letters to Eva, 38124–25 (1609).

<sup>76</sup> Katharina’s letters to Eva, 265243–24 (1615), 26537 (1636).

<sup>77</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letters to Eva, 50066-50067 (1609), 50071 (1609), 50078 (1610), 50080 (1610), 50085 (1611), 50088 (1612) and 50090 (1612); Maria Magdalena’s letters to Pál Pethő, 50065 (1609), 50068 (1609), 50079 (1610).

<sup>78</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva, 43594 (1616), 43599 (1617) 43601 (1619), 43613-43614 (1621), 43617 (1621).

also its production and delivery.<sup>79</sup> As Esther-Beate Körber has noted in the context of the sixteenth century, a letter was “an official piece of writing” (*offizielles Schriftstück*), as it was rarely intended for a single person but could be shown to others.<sup>80</sup> The public notion of family letters written in the secretary’s hand retained its relevance in the next century. A third person would be able to hear the letter’s content, such as the secretary to whom the letter was dictated or the individual who read letters out aloud to the intended recipient and to those around her. In addition, letters discussing legal matters could be shared with the head of the family involved in legal transactions concerning their wives’ inheritance. A letter from 1608, for example, attests that Ferenc Batthyány negotiated with Katharina about handing over her Hungarian shares to Eva, suggesting that he was fully aware of the ongoing written discussion between the two sisters.<sup>81</sup> Letters like this could serve as legal evidence for the Batthyány family in case their right to the Poppel properties in Western Hungary was contested. This is probably why the letters of Eva Poppel’s sisters were not discarded, following the fate of most of the women’s letters, but carefully preserved in the Batthyány’s family archive.

Letter writers of both sexes also delegated writing duties to secretaries if they needed to correspond in languages other than their own.<sup>82</sup> As the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ letters attest, trained scribes with proper language skills were highly valued but not necessarily always available. The scribe Sabina recommended to Ferenc Batthyány, for example, was a young fellow with fine parents and nice handwriting but who did not

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<sup>79</sup> Daybell, *Woman Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 51. About the socio-semiotic importance of handwriting see Andi Gredig, *Schreiben mit der Hand. Begriffe–Discourse–Praktiken* (Berlin: Frank & Timme Verlag für wissenschaftliche Literatur, 2021), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Esther-Beate Körber, “Der soziale Ort des Briefes,” in *Gespräche–Boten–Briefe. Körpergedächtnis und Schriftgedächtnis im Mittelalter*, ed. Horst Wenzel (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1997), 251.

<sup>81</sup> Katharina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 19 September 1608 (26521).

<sup>82</sup> Kocsis, *Kora újkori levélírnokok*, 47.

know much Latin, a skill which the Hungarian count was particularly looking for.<sup>83</sup> From time to time, the sisters and their families needed the service of scribes with sufficient command in German, Czech or Hungarian, to ease the flow of official communication with the Hungarian chancellery and the royal offices in Prague—offices that held the right to make decisions in legal matters concerning family inheritance.<sup>84</sup> Bilingual scribes were especially in demand at the Trčka and Batthyány courts after the death of Ladislaus Poppel in 1609, when the division of the parental inheritance became the sisters' most important common concern. Maria Magdalena's letter to her Hungarian caretaker Pál Pethő, dated the same year, reveals the need for multilingual scribal assistance to manage official correspondence at both the Trčka court and in Hungary: "Regarding the Hungarian boy, István deák, I talked to my dear Lord, and he will gladly receive him. Therefore, you should send him at your earliest convenience. I will also try to send you a boy who knows both Bohemian and German as soon as possible."<sup>85</sup>

For many women (and men), dictating letters to scribes was also a great assistance in trying times. Even for the most competent letter writer, writing became a challenge, especially when they became sick. Sabina, otherwise perfectly capable of writing on her own, describes the disabling effect of illness on her reading and writing abilities as follows:

I lament and remember that I have been lying in bed paralyzed, and I am so sick that I can move neither my hands nor my feet, and I have to let myself be lifted and

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<sup>83</sup> Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 22 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>84</sup> István Fazekas, *A Magyar (Udvári) Kancellária és hivatalnokai 1527-1690 között* [The Hungarian (Court) Chancellery and its Officials between 1527 and 1690]. Akadémiai doktori értekezés (Budapest, 2018), 92.

<sup>85</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő, Kunitz (Kunice), 3 July 1609 (50068). The caretaker of the Poppel and later the Trčka's possession in Dobra and Szentgotthárd, Pál Pethő must have spent some time in Prague. This can be inferred from the Maria Magdalena's remark about Pethő's wife traveling to Bohemia. Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 23 September 1608 (50060).

carried wherever I have to go and that I cannot even read my sister's letter not to mention to reply to it, although otherwise, I can write a lot, but, because of this great weakness, I cannot even hold the pen not to mention to get out of bed and write.<sup>86</sup>

Writing was demanding in normal circumstances as well. Holding the quill at a proper angle and handling the ink without making the paper messy was a skill which needed considerable time and practice to execute.<sup>87</sup> While the neat script of letters penned in Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina's own hand proves their capability to write long letters with relative ease, Eva found letter writing somewhat burdensome.<sup>88</sup> This is evident from Katharina's advice that Eva should delegate the task of letter writing to someone else because she knows that her sister "does not like to write and that she is always much occupied."<sup>89</sup> The surviving letters confirm Katharina's observation. From the handwriting in her over two hundred letters, very few can be recognized with certainty to be the product of her own hand. While the steady but relatively simple script of her two undated holograph letters written to her son in Hungarian attest that the elderly Eva Poppel was a competent letter writer, her rather childish signature indicates that writing was probably not something the Batthyány countess enjoyed (Figure 21).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "...clag aber vnd erinnere dieselbe daß ich nún ir tag lamig zú beth geelgen, vnnd so sehr kranck bin, aúch wedder händ oder füß wegen kann sondern múß mich heben vnd tragen lasen, wohin ich will also, daß ich der frauw schwester schreiben, nit leßen kón[en], het aúch der frh. schwester nicht allein vf ihn schreiben zú antworten, sondern aúch sönsten sehr viel zú schreib[] kan aber wegen groser schwachheit[] kin feder in der halten, vielweniger daß ich aúf stehn vnd schreiben sollte ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, 4 Vienna, Februar 1621 (43610).

<sup>87</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 105.

<sup>88</sup> To acquire appropriate writing skills, one would need at least ten years practice to learn how to write well: Colette Sirat, *Writing as Handwork. A History of Handwriting in Mediterranean and Western Culture* (Brepols: Turnhout, 2006), 131.

<sup>89</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 25 January 1634 (26534).

<sup>90</sup> See Eva Poppel's two autograph signatures authenticated by MP abbreviation. Eva Poppel's letters to Ádám Batthyány, Dobra (Neuhaus), 16 March 1640 (38099) and [n.p.], [n.d.], (38109). About the childish signatures of seventeenth-century Hungarian aristocratic women, see Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture*, 127.

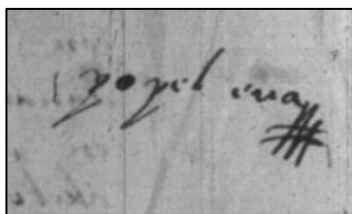


Figure 21: Eva Poppel's autograph signature

Most of Eva Poppel's extant letters, even those written to her husband, display a scribal cursive, suggesting that she managed her daily correspondence primarily with assistance.<sup>91</sup>

Finally, the ability to delegate the task of writing letters to a secretary was something of a luxury. As demonstrated above, the wealthy Maria Magdalena Trčka employed the same German scribe for years. Sabina Solms, with much more limited financial recourses, was also able to pay for short-term secretarial services. A negative correlation between social prominence and prosperity and the use of scribal help might explain the relatively small number of scribal letters in the correspondence of Katharina Kurzbach, who was socially disadvantaged and financially ruined by a dysfunctional marriage.<sup>92</sup>

Scribal handwriting in early modern letters demonstrated respect and courtesy for the letter's receiver.<sup>93</sup> The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, like other letter writers of the time, dictated letters to their secretaries, not necessarily because they couldn't write, but because they believed that their own childish and often illegible hand would offend the

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<sup>91</sup> The observations on Eva Poppel's handwriting are limited and would benefit from further research. Eva Poppel's letters to Ferenc Batthyány, 37912, 37914–15, 37917–19, 37921, 37922, 37924, 37926.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>93</sup> Daybell, *Woman Letter Writers in Tudor-England*, 51.

letter's reader.<sup>94</sup> Letters displaying a trained hand thus gave appropriate form to written communication in a hierarchical and status-conscious society.

### *Women's hand: signature, handwriting and epistolary space in holograph letters*

Holograph letters, characterized by their distinct features, present a notable contrast to letters penned by a scribe. They stand apart through their individual signature, the flow of handwriting and often, by the distribution of text and space on the letter's folio. The sisters signed most of their letters in their own hands. Customary for the period, their autograph signatures are accompanied by the Latin acronyms MP or MPPria, standing for 'manu propria' or 'signing with my own hands,' serving as the verification for the letter's authenticity (Figure 22).<sup>95</sup>

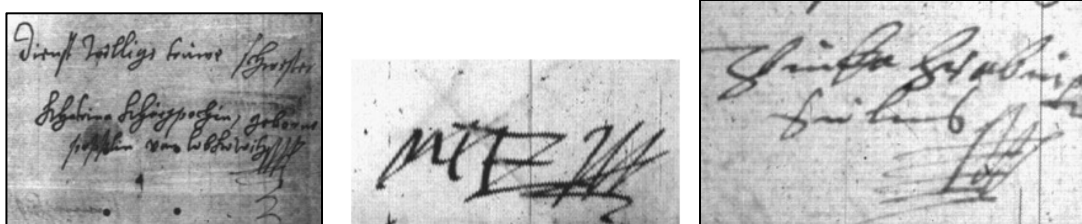


Figure 22: Autograph signatures of Katharina Kurzbach, Maria Magdalena Trčka and Sabina Solms<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> István Monok, "A női könyvtulajdonos, a női olvasó a 16–17. században" [Female Book Owners and Female Book Readers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries], in *A zsoldártól a rózsaszín regényig. Fejezetek a magyar női művelődés történetéből*, ed. Papp Júlia (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 2014), 79.

<sup>95</sup> Signatures were not the only forms of letter authorization in seventeenth-century Central Europe. Seals bearing the family's coat of arms, that closed the folded letters on the outside, could also serve the purpose of authentication, especially when letter writers had weak literacy skills. István György Tóth, *Jobbágyok, hajdúk, deákok. A körmendi uradalom társadalma a 17. században* [Serfs, Heyducks, Scribes) The Society of the Körmend Estate in the Seventeenth Century] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992), 128–129.

<sup>96</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, no. 26535, Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, nos. 50081 and Sabina's letter to Eva, no. 43641.

How often the sisters validated scribal letters with their autograph signature varied greatly. Katharina was most keen to emphasize her authorship over the epistolary process. She signed all the scribal letters, except for two, in her own hand.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, in Maria Magdalena's correspondence, twenty-one out of the forty-four scribal letters display her autograph signature. Except for two, the signatures in the remaining twenty-three letters bear the hand of Maria Magdalena's German scribe, who was in her service between 1607–1612. The scribe must have been Maria Magdalena's trusted man, as he was granted the authority to sign on her behalf and even affix the authenticating sign of MP to the signature.<sup>98</sup> While the two older sisters often signed their scribal-written letters themselves, Sabina seemed to care less about validating letters with her own signature. She personally signed only forty percent (29 letters) of her scribal letters (72 letters), often entrusting secretaries to sign the letters on her behalf (43).<sup>99</sup> However, Sabina also had her trusted man, the court judge of Szentgotthárd. This scribe authenticated five out of seven letters dated from 1614 by attaching MP to his scribal signature.<sup>100</sup>

Letters penned by the sisters can be identified by their distinctive handwriting in the signatures and the plain script running in thick lines up to the right edge of the letter's folio. Similarities in the calligraphy, the way the hand executes the writing, retain the letter writer's cultural identity. The calligraphy shows how handwriting was. Growing up

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<sup>97</sup> Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, no. 26521; Katharina's letter to Pál Pethő, no. 26522; Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26523–26526, 26535, 29780, 38124.

<sup>98</sup> Maria Magdalena's scribal letters with autograph signatures: 50051–53, 50056, 50059, 50060, 50062–63, 50065, 50068, 50073, 50079, 50080, 50089–93, 50102–103 and 50013. Scribal letters signed by the German scribe: 50058, 50064, 50066–67, 50069–72, 50074–78, 50083, 50085–88,

<sup>99</sup> Sabina's scribal letters with autograph signatures: 43566–67, 43570, 43573–74, 43586–90, 43601, 43605, 43607–09, 43611–15, 43617–22, 43629, 43637, 43639. Scribal letters with scribal signatures: 43565, 43568–69, 43571–72, 43574–85, 43591–99, 43602–04, 43606, 43610, 43625, 43627, 43629, 43635–36, 43638, 43640, 43642.

<sup>100</sup> Letters signed by the court judge of Szentgotthárd using the abbreviation MP: 43572, 43574, 43577–79.

in Bohemia, Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina were taught a simplified Czech cursive derived from the German *kurrent*.<sup>101</sup> This plain script is displayed in the sisters' Czech and German holograph letters (Figures 23-25).

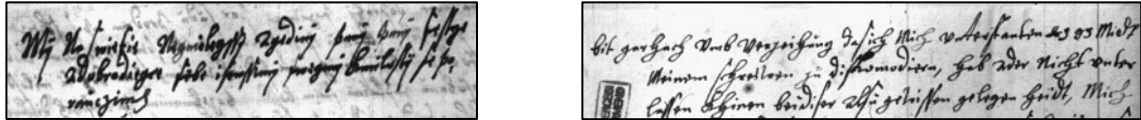


Figure 23: Katharina's handwriting in Czech and German<sup>102</sup>

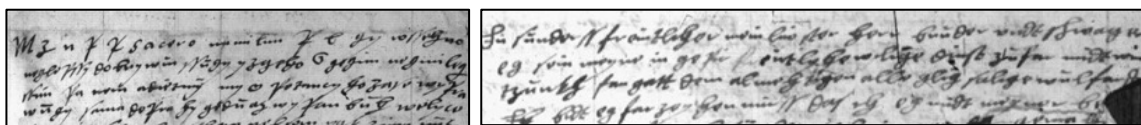


Figure 24: Maria Magdalena's handwriting in Czech and German<sup>103</sup>

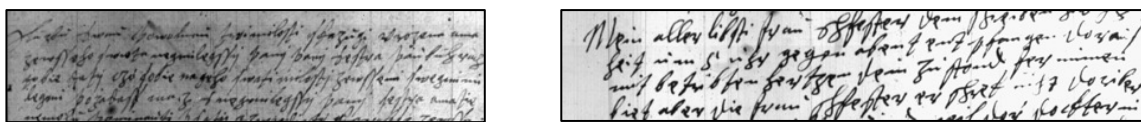


Figure 25: Sabina's hand handwriting in Czech and German<sup>104</sup>

In general, the handwriting of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters is similar and distinctly recognizable by the narrow, elongated vertical strokes of the consonants, which also characterizes the handwriting of other members of the Poppel Lobkowitz family.<sup>105</sup> Their

<sup>101</sup> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German *Kurrent* was a handwriting developed from the late medieval cursive writing; Karin Schneider, *Paläographie und Handschriftenkunden für Germanisten* (Tübingen, 1999), 65–78 and 82.

<sup>102</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, no. 26534 (1636) and to Ádám Batthyány, no. 26533 (1631).

<sup>103</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, no. 50081 (1610) and to Ferenc Batthyány, no. 50082 (1610).

<sup>104</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, nos. 43641 [n.d.], 43633 [n.d.].

<sup>105</sup> The style of penmanship, which is how one was initially taught how to write, is closely tied to cultural identity. This can be observed in the handwriting of other Bohemian relatives of Eva Poppel. The handwriting of the sisters' mother, Magdalena Salm, was similar to that of her daughters. At the same time, Ester Vřesovic, wife of their deceased brother Adam Poppel Lobkowitz also wrote in a similar way to her sisters-in-law. See Ester Poppel Lobkowitz's letter to Eva Poppel, no. 37904 (1607) and the holograph postscript in Magdalena Salm's letter to Ferenc Batthyány 38142 (1606). The marginal note in a scribal letter written in Jan Rudolf Trčka's hand also displays features that suggest that men and women in early modern Bohemia were taught the same simple cursive for private use; see Jan Rudolf Trčka's letter to Eva Poppel, no. 50045 (1610). About writing style as a mark of cultural identity, see Anup Kumar Kapoor and Monika Saini, "Handwriting as Means of Cultural Identity," in *Journal of Forensic Sciences and Criminal*

hand is easily distinguishable from the simple German cursive, which can be seen in letters written in the hand of Magdalena Hardegg, who uses broader bowls and displays an attraction to loops in the descendant and ascendants of the consonants b, l, d, and h (Figure 26).<sup>106</sup>

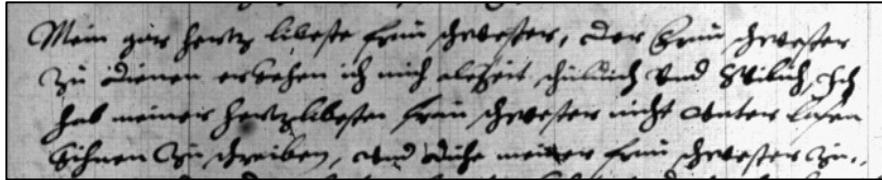


Figure 26: Magdalena Hardegg's handwriting in Sabina's letter to Eva

Even though a different pen, a new ink, sickness or old age altered and matured the Poppel women's handwriting, the scripts—and the calligraphy of letters distinct to their hand—remained the same.

The distinction between scribal and holograph letters can be seen in the handwriting and signatures employed as well as in the management of space on the manuscript folio. The sisters' holograph letters often display a profusion of lines and a lack of textual division, contrasting with the well-structured and visually appealing scribal letters, where the letter's opening and closing sections, such as the address, salutation, valediction and signature, are typically separated by blank space. This difference in the visual appearance of holograph and scribal letters was not a coincidence but aligned with the conventions of epistolary etiquette that governed social interactions on paper.

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*Investigation*, 3, no. 1 (2017), <https://juniperpublishers.com/jfsci/pdf/JFSCI.MS.ID.555605.pdf> (accessed 20 May 2023). Further examination of holograph letters could refine the observation above, suggesting that men and women in Central Europe likely learned the same simplified form of handwriting, unlike in early modern England, where the italic script was deemed more appropriate for women's hands (Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 88).

<sup>106</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, no. 43627 [n.d.].

Early modern letter writers adhered to the rules concerning the spatial organization of the letter's text and were aware of the significant social meanings of the structuring space. They were guided by contemporary letter manuals, which prescribed how letter writers should adjust the letter's space to reflect the corresponding partners' social and personal relations and economic status.<sup>107</sup> The size of space between the epistolary parts, such as salutation, subscription and signature, contracted or extended depending on the existing social distance between the letter writer and its receiver. A large gap placed between the opening and closing formulas and the body of the text with the signature further down on the right, for example, indicated the letter writer's deference or inferior position to the addressee. Little or no space between the text and the subscription with the signature, on the other hand, indicated the equal status or social dominance of the letter writer over the addressee.<sup>108</sup>

Adherence to the etiquette of space can be observed in both scribal and holograph letters, although to a different degree. Having learned the rules in schools, the sisters' secretaries usually complied with contemporary epistolary etiquette, leaving generous space on the margins and between distinct parts of the letter's text. They did so to express respect toward the letter's receiver, underline the significance of the subject matter, or simply display their scribal skills.

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<sup>107</sup> Jonathan Gibson, "Significant Space in Manuscript Letters," *The Seventeenth Century* 12, no.1 (1997): 110, Walker, "The Manners of the Page," and Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 9091.

<sup>108</sup> James Daybell, "Material Meanings and Social Signs of Manuscripts Letters in Early Modern England," *Literature Compass* 6, no. 3 (2009), 656.

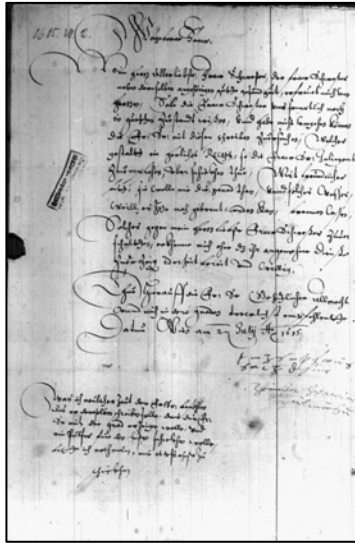


Figure 27: Sabina's scribal letter to Eva (1615)

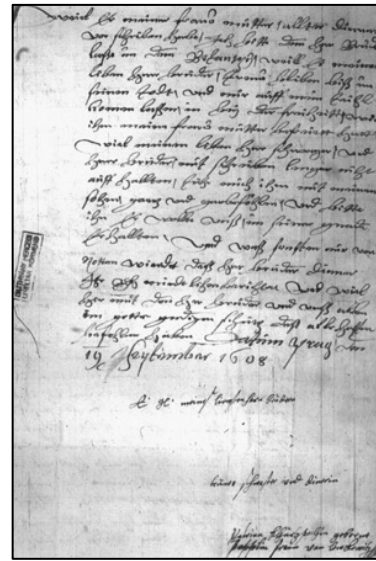


Figure 28: Katharina's scribal letter to Ferenc Batthyány (1608)

Sabina's and Katharina's scribal letters also reveal the agreement of the women and their secretaries concerning the rules of epistolary space. The scribe in Sabina's letter left a distinct gap between the address and the body text of the letter and divided the letter parts into paragraphs, done in the same way as Katharina's scribe (Figures 27-28).

(Appendices A, B).<sup>109</sup> In both letters, the placement of the autograph signatures reflects the relationship to the letter's receiver: Sabina signed her letter directly under the body text displaying personal closeness with her sister, while Katharina placed her signature to the very bottom right corner of the folio showing deference towards her socially superior male relative, Ferenc Batthyány.<sup>110</sup>

The holograph letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters mostly ignore the epistolary rules of space. Sabina's undated letter begins immediately on the top of the first page

<sup>109</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 15 July 1615 (43590) and Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608. (26521).

<sup>110</sup> Walker, "The Manners of the Page," 315.

with a brief address form, “My dear Lady,” and continues without leaving any space between the opening mode of the address and the body text of the letter.

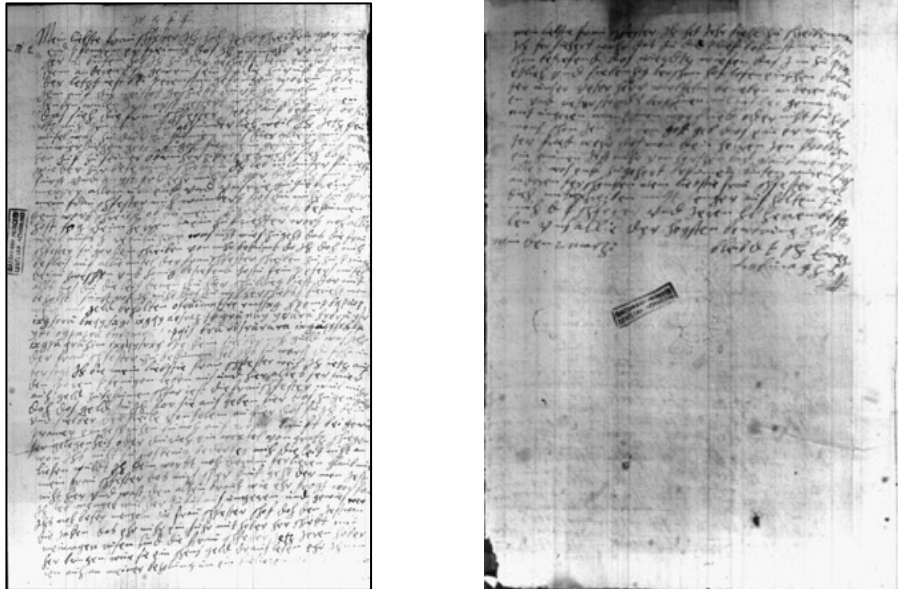


Figure 29: Sabina’s letter to Eva (n.d.)

Meanwhile, the abbreviated signature follows the date close to the body text on the right side. Undisturbed by textual structuring elements, such as indentation or punctuation, the lines in the body of the text run uninterruptedly from edge to edge, leaving no space empty on the folio except for a narrow strip on the left margin. On the top of the first page directly above the body of text, the initials of the shortened salutation formula, “W g f f,” standing for “Wohlgeborne Frau Frau,” are squeezed in, no doubt in haste, after the letter had been finished (Figure 29) (Appendix C).<sup>111</sup>

A similar spatial structuring of the manuscript folio can be seen in Maria Magdalena’s letters. She rarely separated the salutation from the rest of the text in her

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<sup>111</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 March [n.y.] (43626).

holograph letters, although she tended to leave considerable space between the text, the subscription and the signature. This parsimonious handling of space and the resulting unstructured presentation of the text on the letter's folio signals intimacy between the corresponding partners.

The relaxed attitude towards epistolary politeness expressed in handling space in letters seemed not distinctly characteristic of women's letter writing. Holograph letters of noblemen could display a similar disregard of conventions for epistolary space, mainly when they corresponded with close-kin relatives. For example, Ferenc Batthyány, a man of the sword rather than the pen, wrote numerous letters to his wife in the same indistinct way as his sisters-in-law (Figure 30) (Appendix D).<sup>112</sup> Similarly, Philipp Solms' only extant letter, written in his own hand and addressed to his wife, exhibits similar features, indicating the social proximity of the corresponding partners (Figure 31) (Appendix E).<sup>113</sup> These examples show that letter writers paid less attention to rules, at least to an extent, if they corresponded with close relatives without scribal assistance.

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<sup>112</sup> Ferenc Batthyány's letter to Eva Poppel [n.d.] (4547).

<sup>113</sup> Philipp Solms' letter to Sabina Solms, 1619 (43534).

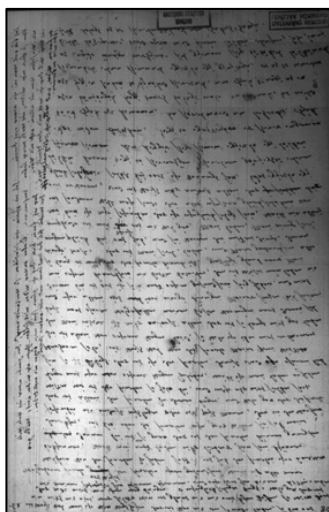


Figure 30: Batthyány Ferenc’s letter to Eva Poppel [n.d.]

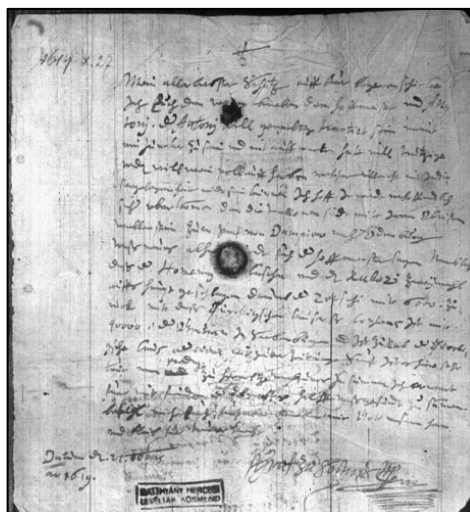


Figure 31: Philipp Solms’ letter to Sabina Solms (1619)

Although the holograph letters were more ‘relaxed’ overall, they did not completely disregard epistolary rules regarding social status and gender. Maria Magdalena and Katharina employed relatively large gaps of space in their letters addressed to male relatives in the Batthyány family. The superior social position of Ferenc Batthyány and his son Ádám, heads of the Batthyány family, over the female relatives of Eva Poppel manifested in the placement of Katharina’s signature in the bottom right corner of the letter’s folio (Figure 32) (Appendix F).<sup>114</sup>

On the other hand, in letters addressed to Pál Pethő, a lower-rank noble in the service of the Poppel family, Maria Magdalena’s signature remained close to the text,

<sup>114</sup> In her holograph letter written in Czech addressed to Ádám Batthyány, Katharina leaves a wide margin on the left side of the folio and distinctly ample space between the salutation and the body of the text, emphasizing the social superiority of the head of the Batthyány family: Katharina’s letter to Ádám Batthyány, Prague, 7 August 1631 (26533). See a similarly wide gap above the signature in Katharina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608 (26521) and Maria Magdalena’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 18 November 1610 (50082). However, signatures in Sabina’s four surviving letters to Ferenc Batthyány remain close to the body text. Sabina’s letters to Ferenc Batthyány, nos. 43607, 43609, 43623, 43639.

indicating that the addressee's social rank and not their gender was guarding the economy of the manuscript space (Figure 33) (Appendix G).<sup>115</sup>

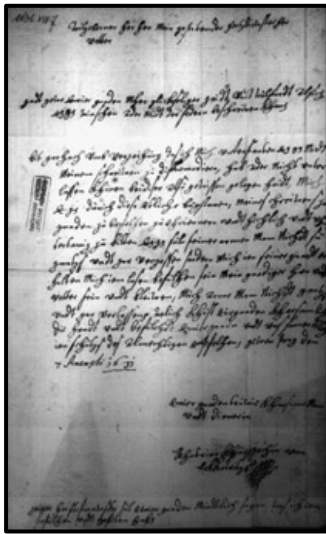


Figure 32: Katharina's letter to Ádám Batthyány (1631)

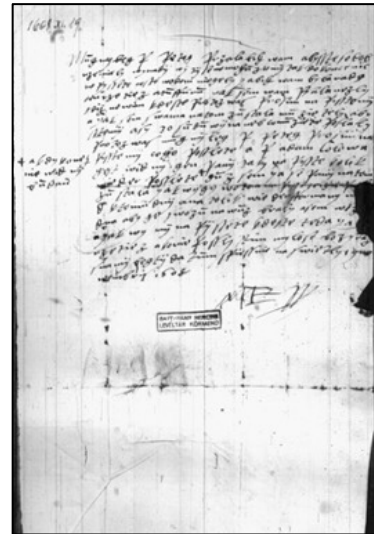


Figure 33: Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő (1608)

In letters between social equals who shared an emotional closeness, the blank space contracted considerably between and around the text, pointing to their intimate relationship. In the holograph letters of Sabina and Maria Magdalena written to Eva, space was often neglected, with a contraction or elimination of the space between the salutation and the letter's main text and between the main text and the signature, indicating their similar social status and emotional closeness.<sup>116</sup> Social equality is also mirrored in the signatures' position. The sisters often signed their letters close to the body

<sup>115</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő, Světlá (Swietla), 11 November 1608 (50061). See also nos. 50062, 50064-65, 50068-70, 50073-77, 50079, 50114, 38143.

<sup>116</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.], (43626) and Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 10 August 1625 (50104).

text, leaving a large part of the letter's folio below their signature empty (Figures 34–35)  
(Appendices H, I).<sup>117</sup>



Figure 34: Sabina's letter to Eva (n.d.)

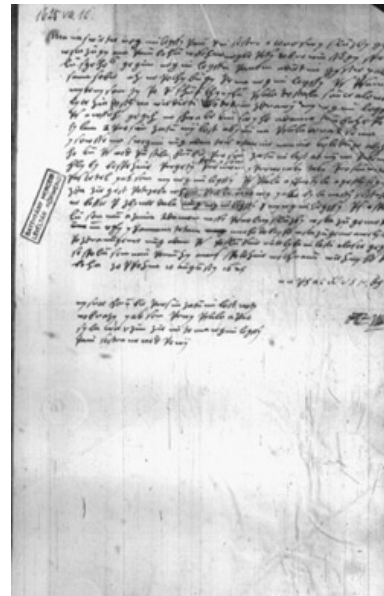


Figure 35: Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva (1625)

Katharina's holograph letters are different, pointing to how her lower social position might have influenced her letter-writing practice. Most of the letters written in her hand to Eva are surprisingly well organized, displaying a consciousness of politics in the manuscript space that exposes the eldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister's inferiority to her youngest sibling. While her letters' texts cover the entire folio, she almost always separates the salutation from the main text, indicating her sister's elevated social position.<sup>118</sup> In a Czech-written holograph letter dated from 1618, for instance, Katharina

<sup>117</sup> Gibson, "Significant Space in Manuscript Letters," 4. Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.], (43626) and Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 10 August 1625 (50104).

<sup>118</sup> Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26527–31, 26534, 26536, 26538–39, 29776–77, 29779.

leaves a blank space between the salutation and the body of the text, thereby stressing the higher social rank of Eva Poppel (Figure 36) (Appendix J).<sup>119</sup>



Figure 36: Katharina's letter to Eva (1618)

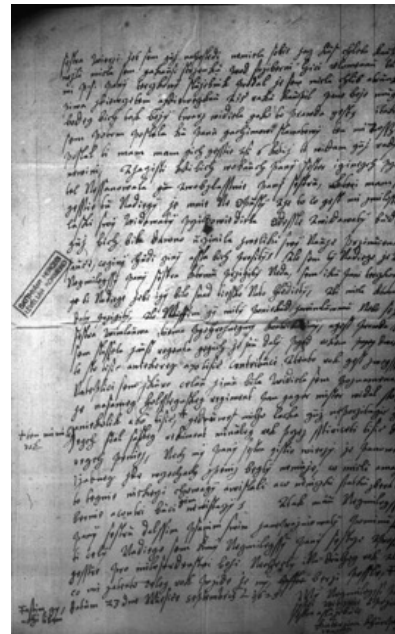


Figure 37: Katharina's letter to Eva (1625)

Katharina places her signature neatly on the right side of the page, leaving clear space above the subscription. However, the need for communication tends to override epistolary rules of space concerning social distinction. Given the expense of paper, she tried to fit as much information as possible on the page, often leaving minimal or no gap between the main text and the subscription (Figure 37) (Appendix K).<sup>120</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 4 April 1618 (29777) and Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], 2 September 1625 (26531). Katharina tended to structure the text in the letters' main parts. A distinct sign of her handwriting is that she always indents the first line to the left. Occasionally, she divides the letters' text into paragraphs and uses commas within sentences, although she does so randomly.

<sup>120</sup> Heiko Droste, *Dienst der Krone. Schwedische Diplomaten im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster: LIT Verlag 2006), 120.

The confidence with which Katharina Kurzbach structured epistolary space reflects a writing proficiency acquired through daily practice. She imitated the epistolary language of space observed in letters written by male authors and their secretaries. Katharina likely handled most of her correspondence herself, as she could only occasionally afford a scribe and was compelled to be her own secretary. The ratio between the extant holograph and scribal letters in her correspondence (19:11) also implies a correlation between improved writing skills and diminished social and financial status. Two-thirds of Katharina's letters were written in her own hand, mainly in Czech. She used scribal assistance only for her German correspondence when the given subject matter required the letter to appear in a proper fashion, presented by a professional hand. Katharina's penmanship and her awareness of epistolary space demonstrate an inverse correlation between status and, if not agency, at least "visibility". Due to the economic necessities induced by divorce, Katharina, in order to voice her plight, was compelled to represent herself via the written word. The very material form of her letters elucidates Katharina's misfortune and her downward social mobility.

### ***Epistolary etiquette and self-positioning in the hierarchy of siblings***

Social relationships between early modern letter writers were not only reflected visually by the handling of space on the letter's folio but also through its rhetoric. The sisters' scribal and holograph letters retained the five-part structure scheme with conventional opening and closing formulas. Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina followed the social etiquette of early modern letters, as they adhered to the prescribed epistolary structure and form characterized by highly formal style, recurring linguistic

patterns and formal phraseology. They addressed Eva with “Wohlgeborne Frau, Frau” or “Urozena pany, panÿ” (Wellborn Lady, Lady), a form that pertained only to female members of the high nobility.<sup>121</sup> The first line of their letters then repeated the address with an elaborate cluster of attributes and continued with the obligatory offering of service and expressing good wishes:

My wellborn, amiable and most beloved Lady Sister, next to the offering of my free-willing services, I wish that the eternal God grant your Grace and your most beloved Lord and Children present and future well-being of body and soul.<sup>122</sup>

In letters penned by a secretary, the salutation formula usually appears on the top of the folio, visibly separated from the rest of the letter. In contrast, in the holograph letters of Maria Magdalena and Sabina, the address is usually merged with the salutation of the first line.

Following the salutation, the sisters acknowledged receiving Eva Poppel’s letter and expressed their joy or sorrow about the countess and her family’s good health or worrisome ailments. Reporting about the status of the expected letter and the polite ritual of acknowledging the received information concerning the health of the Batthyány family also eased the transition to the actual subject discussed in the letter’s central part.<sup>123</sup> The closing sentence of the letter, called valediction, then reiterated the initial courtesies: greetings of family members and friends were passed on to Eva and members of her

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<sup>121</sup> Renate Kohn, “Zwischen standesgemäßem Representationsbedürfnis und Sorge um das Seelenheil. Die Entwicklung des frühneuzeitlichen Grabenmals,” in *Macht und Memoria: Begräbniskultur europäischer Oberschichten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Marc Hengeren (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), 35 and Zuzana Prokešová, *Historische Entwicklung der deutschen Frauenanrede und Frauenbezeichnungen*, Diplomová magisterská práce (Brno: Mazarykova Univerzita, 2006), 24.

<sup>122</sup> “Wohlgeborne freündliche mein herzlibste frau schwester neben erbietung meiner ganzwilligen diensten wünsche ich I[hr] G[naden] sampt dero herzlibsten herrn vnd kindern von Gott dem Allmächtigen alle zeitliche vnd ewige wolfahrten zúr seel vnd leib inderzeitig zúúor”: Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571).

<sup>123</sup> About epistolary continuity see Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 55–65.

family together with the recommendation of service and blessings of God. The exchange of courteous greetings was so indispensable that if the sisters accidentally forgot to greet the extended family of the Batthyánys in the valediction, they subsequently included the greetings in a postscript or added them on the margin.<sup>124</sup>

The address to the recipient, particularly in the salutation and the letter's conclusion, mirrored the complexity of sibling relationships in the seventeenth century. In letters exchanged between close-kin women of equal rank, variations in the mode of the address indicated the letter writer and receiver's respective place in the hierarchy of siblings and shifts in the sisterly relations in terms of personal closeness and distance. The Countess of Solms, for example, addressed her youngest sister as "my Lady sister" which she often expanded with a variety of attributes, such as wohlgeborne (wellborn), freundlich (amiable), allerliebste or herzallerliebste (most beloved). These attributes clustered before the address and the customary deferential tone in the letters' conclusion expressed social esteem appropriate to the rank of Eva Poppel. Sabina's assurance of remaining Eva's "most faithful servant and sister until death" conveyed humility required even from those of equal social status.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters addressed Eva Poppel with family terms that reflected their birth order, or, at times, their respective position within

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<sup>124</sup> See the postscripts in Sabina's letters to Eva, nos. 43587 and 43600; Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26527–28, 26534 and 38126.

<sup>125</sup> "...meiner h[ochge]ll[iebten] f[rau] schwester treue dienerin und schwester weil ich leb..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Lich, February [n.d.], 1618, (43600). "The letter writer intends to grant the addressee social appreciation by giving the addressee a certain salutation and to classify him/her as equal by demeaning oneself in the conclusion": Beatrix Bastl, "Zur sozialen Identität der Adelligen Frau. Ihre Ausdrucksformen den kleinen Höfen," in *Adelige Hofhaltung im Österreichisch-Ungarischen Grenzraum (vom Ende des 16. bis zum Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts)*. *Symposium im Rahmen der 'Schlaininger Gespräche' vom 20.–23. September 1995 auf Burg Schlaining*, ed. Rudolf Kropf and Gerald Schlag (Wissenschaftliche Arbeiten aus dem Burgenland) (1998): 21–38.

the social hierarchy of siblings. Maria Magdalena often addressed Eva as “most beloved sister and daughter.”<sup>126</sup> Calling her younger sister her daughter emphasized the Trčka countess’ higher place in the birth order of the siblings but also emotional intimacy. As Beatrix Bastl has pointed out, seventeenth-century nobility did not use family terminology in a strict sense. Mothers-in-law and stepmothers were addressed as mothers, in-laws as brothers and sisters, while female relatives were called by the general term *Mume* or *Mämb*.<sup>127</sup> This addressing practice, which transferred family terminology to close-kin relatives, presented relatives of high nobility as one extended family. At the same time, it also communicated equal rank, emotional closeness and friendship.<sup>128</sup>

Katharina also used parent-child terminology. She sometimes addressed her youngest sister as “my good child” (*dobro ditko*).<sup>129</sup> In two further instances, she called the Batthyány countess “my in the world most beloved Lady, Lady Eviczko,” an unusual gesture at a time when only unmarried women were called by their first name.<sup>130</sup> Intimate forms of address, such as “my dearest Lady Evicko” or “my sweetheart”, appear in the

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<sup>126</sup> “Wolgeborne frau frau, meine in der welt herzallerliebste frau schwester...” See Maria Magdalena letters to Eva, nos. 500085–88. The Czech address follows closely the German one: “Ma zewsseh negmilegssy pani pani sestro a coro” [High born lady, lady sister and my dearest daughter]. See Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, no. 50100.

<sup>127</sup> Eva Poppel, for example, was addressed by her nephew, Julius Kurzbach as “mamb”, while her sister-in-law Ester Vřesovic, widow of Adam Eck Poppel, called her “meine schwester”. See Julius Kurzbach’s letter to Eva Poppel, Opočno, 2 April 1614 (27963) and Ester Vřesovic (Lobkowitz) letter to Eva Poppel, Prague, 12 February 1617 (29764). Similarly, Katharina called her brother-in-law Ferenc Batthyány as her brother (Bruder), while she addressed her nephew Ádám Batthyány as her cousin (Vetter) Katharina’s letters to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608 (26521) and to Ádám Batthyány, Prague, 7 August 1631 (26533). See also Bastl, *Tugend und Liebe*, 38–39.

<sup>128</sup> Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen. Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), 66–70.

<sup>129</sup> “Ma zwsosheo swesta negmilogsy paný sestro a dobro ditko ...” Katharina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.] 23 September 1625 (26531).

<sup>130</sup> “Ma negmilagssy paný paný Ewiczko ...”: Katharina’s letters to Eva, [n.p.] 29 April 1626 (26532) and Prague, [n.d.] (29781). See also Maria Magdalena’s letters to the unmarried Eva Poppel from 1605-1607 (50051–53 and 50055).

body text or marginal notes in several of Katharina's letters.<sup>131</sup> Epistolary intimacy of this kind can be found only in her Czech holograph letters, accompanied by strong deferential rhetoric and almost always connected to requests, for instance, when she asked for money or pleaded for the release of a prisoner.<sup>132</sup> In a handful of letters, Katharina even addresses her younger sister as her mother.<sup>133</sup> Letters of this kind were usually sent in desperate situations.<sup>134</sup> In 1615, Katharina used utmost deference when negotiating with the Batthyánys over the compensation for her parental shares in Hungary.

Your Honoured Lady [wellborn Lady Lady], my beloved Lady Sister and Lady Mother, Today I received your letter from Frau Claus, and the answer, which she [Frau Claus] has written through my messenger, including a bit of note from Frau Trčka. Regarding what my dear Lady sister wrote to me, [that] You cannot send me the money You promised, only when I hand over to You and Your dear Lord the original Register about the same properties. Such a great disgrace from my dear Lady sister, whom I recognize as my only mother and her dear Lord as my father in this world! I cannot understand why You did not write me anything about this matter for such a long time, which You were wondering about, but You notified me [only] now in the last hour [...]<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> "Ma negmilegssý paný Ewiczko", Katharina's letter to Eva, Poznan, 3 March 1618 (26527) and Prague, 5 January 1623, (26528); "mein schatz": Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 1 June 1609 (38125) and Prague, 21 November 1611 (38126).

<sup>132</sup> Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 21 November 1611 (38126) and Prague, 5 January 1623 (26528).

<sup>133</sup> "My gemsseho switka negmilegssý pany sestro amatý se pormücze[?] gesse, rüce gý libne p." [To my dearest in the whole world, lady sister and mother, I command myself from my heart and kiss her] Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26524-25, 26528, 26538 and 29780, transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>134</sup> In 1615, Katharina sent a letter to Eva regarding the delayed dispatch of a procurator letter concerning the Hungarian inheritance, listing various reasons why she couldn't send the document earlier. Three years later, the cause of stress was another official document, precisely a 'register' of her shares from the Hungarian Poppel inheritance. Katharina wrote, apologizing that she couldn't fulfill the Batthyány's demand to send the official record as she was preparing to depart from Vienna for her husband's funeral in Breslau. Meanwhile, the requested document was locked up in her writing desk in Prague. The third letter's subject again is related to the estate of Ledec (Ledetsch), the inheritance of the sister's deceased brother Jan Mikulaš. The estate was eventually sold to the Trčzka family by Jan Mikulaš's widow. See Katharina's letters to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (23524), Vienna, 15 March 1618 (26525) and Prague, 7 July 1616 (29780).

<sup>135</sup> "... mein gar hertzliebe frauw schwester vnd frauw mütter. ich schreiben heúnt von der frauw Khloßin, wie auch die antwort, so sie mier bey meinem botten geschrieben, daß [...] auch eingeschossenes brieflein die frauw Tertschkhin, hab ich empfangen, belangent, ds mir meine geliebte frauw schwester schreibt, sie khünne mier mein geldt, so ich von ihr empfangen soll, nicht rhünder volgen laßen, eß sey dann ds ich ihr, vnnnd ihrem geliebten herrn die original, egister vber die selben, güetter anhendige, solcher größn vngenadt, hette Ich mich zú meiner hertzliebsten frauw schwester, die Ich mier dann auff dießer welt, für mein ein[zige] müetter, vnd ir: gl: ihm gelieben herrn, für einen vatter er[kenne] nit verstehen ... " Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (23524).

Here Katharina delegated parental authority to her younger sister and her husband to win the compassion of her more powerful relatives. This rhetorical strategy revealed her peculiar condition as a single woman in the extended family and her diminished position in the order of the Poppel siblings.

The wording in the letter's closing part, valediction and subscription, were especially prone to bring actual hierarchical relationships to light. Subscription protocols required the letter writers to express appropriate deference and a renewed commitment to the letter's receiver. However, subtleties in wording repeatedly point to the unequal social standing of equals by birth, indicating existing patron-client relationships between noble siblings.<sup>136</sup> This is particularly obvious in Katharina's letters. Not only did she sign her letter in conventionally humble terms, referring to herself as "the most faithful sister and servant of my sister," but sometimes concluded with very subservient language.<sup>137</sup> In the closing sentence of a letter to Eva from 1623, she begs for a horse to be able to travel from Vienna to visit her sister: "I await her gracious answer and her will, and with that, I command myself to her and his Grace and placing myself below the soles of their shoes."<sup>138</sup> The submissive position of the eldest sister is further emphasized by a broad spectrum of attributes that she used, presenting herself as "free willing," "most" or "always faithful," "sincere," "assisting," "subservient" or "obedient" sister.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Sharon Kettering has noted that deferential terminology in correspondences of the French nobility indicated a patron-client relationship between the correspondents; see her "Patronage, Language, and Political Culture: Patronage in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 17, no. 4 (1992): 844.

<sup>137</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 5 January 1623 (26528), transl. by Eva Bullard

<sup>138</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] October 1623 (26529), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>139</sup> See, for example, Katharina's letters to Eva, nos. 26536 (treuste) 26525 (gehorsam), 26527 (free-willing), 26528 (most faithful), 26524 (helping), 26529 (sincere and constantly faithful), 26532 (obedient) and 26539 (humble and obedient).

A similarly submissive tone is present in the valedictions and subscriptions of Sabina Solms' letters to Eva: by "offering" her "subservient service" and subscribing herself "my beloved Lady sister's most faithful servant and sister as long as I live", she acknowledges her subordinate position to Eva Poppel.<sup>140</sup> Although the wording expressed the appropriate social distance between the Solms and Batthyány countesses, as the epistolary etiquette required, the fact that the subscription of her letters varied little and mostly appeared in abbreviated form suggests that these formulas in Sabina's letters became a matter of habit and convention.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, the absence of deferential references and the short wording *dienstwillige* (at your service) in the subscription of Eva's three surviving letters to Sabina shows her superior position in the hierarchy of the Poppel sisters.<sup>142</sup>

In contrast to the correspondence of Katharina and Sabina, Maria Magdalena, while never forgetting to offer her service to the Batthyány countess ("To serve my most beloved Lady sister and daughter"), rarely referred to herself as a servant.<sup>143</sup> With a renewed reference to Eva as her daughter, not only did her dominant position in the hierarchy of the Poppel siblings become evident but also her tender feelings for her

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<sup>140</sup> "... meiner h[ochge]l[iebten] f[rau] schwester treue dienerin und schwester weil ich leb ..." autograph (43600) variants (43602, 43610, 43613). In letters dictated to Magdalena Hardegg: "...meiner frau schwester drohe schwester bis in doht ..." (43625), see also (43630–31, 43635–36, 43638); "... d[er] l[ieben] frauwen und dienstwillige schwester die weill ich lebe od bis in todt ...", (?) see also (43568–69, 43670–71, 43580, 43583); or "...meiner hertzliebsten frauen schwester befliesse dienerin ..." (43595) variants (43575–79).

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, "d[er] t[reue] d[ienerin] u[nd] sch[wester] w[eil] j[ch] l[eb]." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 20 May 1615 (43588).

<sup>142</sup> Eva's letters to Sabina, Neuhaus (Dobra), 22 July 1608 (4597), Schleining (Szalónak), 27 August 1616 (4608), and 20 August 1616 (37918).

<sup>143</sup> The term "servant" in a submissive context appears only once, in Maria Magdalena's German correspondence. The distinctive wording in the conclusion can be attributed to the scribe, who was accustomed to consistently using this phrase to close letters. "... e[uer] g[naden] meiner herzlichsten frau schwester gehorsame dienerin..." (Your Grace, my most beloved Lady Sister, obedient servant), Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Prague, 18 May 1620 (50103).

youngest sister.<sup>144</sup> The fact that Magdalena and Sabina were accustomed to abridging the subscription's wording or leaving the subscription out altogether shows the flexible stance towards epistolary etiquette, which could be relaxed in the context of a warm relationship between close-kin relatives.

### *Orality in the letters*

The opening and closing conventional formulas of the sisters' letters provide the framework for the letter's main text, which conveys information and messages in a more unstructured, conversational style. Research into early modern women's letter-writing practices has repeatedly emphasized the oral quality of women's correspondences.<sup>145</sup> A lack of training in rhetoric and the infrequent encounter with the written language of printed works were commonly mirrored in women's letter writing.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, the Poppel women's letters often resemble spoken dialogue. Like in a face-to-face conversation, the sisters presented various topics as they came to their minds. They referred to or repeated previously received information, asked questions and submitted requests.

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<sup>144</sup> "... meiner hertz geliebten frau schwester und tochter dienen ..." Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, Kunitz (Kunice), 26 November 1609 (50071), or "... m[a] n[eg] p[ani] s[estri] a c[era] W Vs a M bds ..." [My dearest Lady Sister and daughter], [n.p.], 27 May 1618, (50099).

<sup>145</sup> Karen Scott, "Io Catarina: Ecclesiastical Politics and Oral Culture in the Letters of Catherina of Siena," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 87–121 and Diane Watt, "No Writing for Writing's Sake: The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," *ibid.*, 122–138; Elizabeth S. Cohen, "Between Oral and Written Culture: The Social Meaning of an Illustrated Love Letter," in *Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800): Essays in Honor of Natalie Zemon Davis*, ed. Barbara B. Diefendorf and Carla Hesse (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993) and Kristen B. Neuschel, *Word of Honor. Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 103–131.

<sup>146</sup> Fasshauer, "Frühneuhochdeutsche Korrespondenzen," 735.

Sabina's letter from 1608 provides a good example of the absence of a clear rhetorical structure. In this letter, she randomly clustered various conversation themes on two sides of a bifolio. The letter presents eleven pieces of information. Sabina first acknowledged receiving the almonds that Eva sent her as a gift, reiterated the news about the Batthyánys' good health, and indicated that the Batthyány countess must nurse her sick son in the absence of a wet nurse. Then, she again thanked Eva for the almonds and reported that she received the hair locks for making a wig and dispatched them to the Imperium and updated her about the ordering of tableware. Next, she informs her sister about her weak disposition and her husband catching measles. In the last part of the letter, she apologizes for not writing sooner, requests more wine, declares that they are expecting the arrival of a dog which would be presented as a gift to Ferenc Batthyány, and informs that she has sent a ribbon sample with Pál Pethő.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, Maria Magdalena's letter from 1607 incorporates nineteen different topics, among them, her mother's and brother's death and funeral, the appropriate colour of a mourning dress, the request for a Turkish slave girl for herself and a horse for her husband, about the death of the goldsmith and the currency exchange within Bohemia and Hungary.<sup>148</sup>

This patchwork of topics in the sister's holograph letters are characterized by incomplete sentences, phonetic and capricious spelling, random setting of word borders and arbitrary use of majuscules that reflect the way elite women learned to write by reading and through listening, as they heard letters read aloud in the family and thereby learned forms and phrases by heart.<sup>149</sup> The same obscure manner of writing is typical for

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<sup>147</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Werlitz, 22 September, 1608 (43568) and [n.d.] (43640).

<sup>148</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 5 October 1607 (50059).

<sup>149</sup> Fasshauer, "Frühneuhochdeutsche Korrespondenzen," 735.

letters written with assistance, as the scribe would put the speedily presented information and wandering thoughts to paper. Personal names were particularly prone to erratic spelling displaying the dominance of orality in women's letters. As these sisters wrote or dictated letters to their scribes, German, Czech and Hungarian names became distorted, often beyond recognition.<sup>150</sup> Spelling errors such as these, coupled with the letter's erratic structuring, demonstrate the writing style, oral character and speech-like spontaneity typical of early modern women's letters.

### *Postscripts and marginal notes*

An additional feature of women's informal epistolary style is the presence of postscripts and marginal notes on the letter's folio.<sup>151</sup> In these additional remarks, information left out from the body text could be included, corrected, reiterated or further explained. Postscripts, which could easily be omitted while reading aloud, served to convey confidential or more personal information. Postscripts and marginal notes appear in abundance in the sister's letters: seventy percent of Katharina's, fifty-nine percent of Sabina's, and forty-four percent of Maria Magdalena's letters contain shorter or longer textual additions. These insertions, often added in the women's hand, were the results of

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<sup>150</sup> The Czech name Trčka was especially susceptible to misspelling: the sisters referred to Maria Magdalena as "fraú trczkj," "trzken," "toretchizŷn," "terckhim," "torckhitn," "tertzschkin," and "türzschkŷn".

<sup>151</sup> The letters from Eva Poppel's closest male relatives display fewer and shorter postscripts and marginal additions than those from her sisters. For example, out of the fifty letters Ferenc Batthyány wrote to his wife, only seven contain postscripts and more extended marginal notes. Philipp Solms' letters have a relatively higher proportion of postscripts (9 out of 29 letters). However, these additions are always composed with utmost formality in scribal hand and introduced with the abbreviation P.S. In the two surviving letters written by Jan Rudolf Trčka to Ferenc Batthyány, one includes a brief addition written in a scribal hand. Nevertheless, these observations alone are insufficient to determine the level of spontaneity in letters of men. A more comprehensive comparison of the presence and absence of postscripts and marginal notes in letters of men and women would increase our understanding of gender-specific similarities and differences in early modern letters.

proofreading and included information left out from the main letter under, above and around the signature or on the folio's left margin.

A letter sent by Sabina to Eva in 1615 illustrates the spontaneity of these remarks. The visual image of the letters' second page shows various scribal additions jutting down in a random order covering the entire folio (Figure 38) (Appendix L).<sup>152</sup> The obscure wording of these postscripts suggests that Sabina dictated to her secretary what she had left out from the main text after reading through the letter. It is possible to see that, as Sabina dictated the additional message, the scribe could only write the extra words below the main text and around the signature.

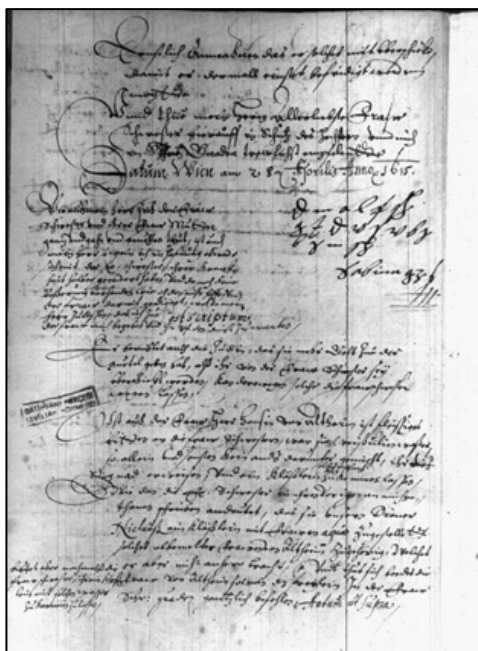


Figure 38: Sabina's letter to Eva (1615)

<sup>152</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 18 April 1615 (43587).

The first postscript in the letter was very professionally executed. Added below the signature, it was introduced by the proper Latin title “Post Scriptum” and ended with “*actum ut supra*” referring to the date indicated above. The postscript informed Eva about a Jewish woman who added more gold to the belt than was given to her and about Frau Althan’s request for lily water. It also reiterated her previous demand, mediated through Sabina in an earlier letter, for a bottle of *aqua vita* that was sent with servant “Niclauß” but not received. This last information was then amended on the left margin, written in a smaller script asking Eva for the medicine again. Finally, Sabina remembered to forward greetings to the Batthyány family and send her sister get-well wishes that the scribe squeezed into the gap between the date, signature and the first Post Scriptum.

The content of the postscripts and more extended side notes in letters varied greatly. Greetings from and to relatives and friends, requests, last-minute messages, as well as identification of the letter’s carrier were usually delegated to short postscripts and notes on the margin.<sup>153</sup> Longer ones often elaborated on the information presented in the main letter, discussed additional business further or turned to new subjects altogether.<sup>154</sup> These additions, inserted by the scribe but more often written in the sisters’ own hand in Czech or German, were sometimes quite extensive and could encompass two or three pages, fully covering the letter’s bifolio.<sup>155</sup> An example of this is Maria Magdalena’s

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<sup>153</sup> Greetings: Katharina’s letters: 26522, 26527–28, 26534, 38126; Maria Magdalena’s letters: 50102, 50110. Sabina’s letters: 43573, 43576, 43579, 43584, 43587, 43595, 43600, 43625, 43640. Requests: Katharina’s letters: 26532, 26534–35; Maria Magdalena’s letters: 50059, 50065, 50074, 50082, 50104, 50063; Sabina’s letters: 43567, 43575–76, 43590, 43615, 43622, 43637. Last minute messages: Katharina’s letter 26529; Maria Magdalena’s letter: 50106; Sabina’s letters: 43570, 43578, 43597, 43601, 43608, 43612, 43620. Identification of letter carrier: Katharina’s letter: 26533; Sabina’s letters: 43614, 43623.

<sup>154</sup> Katharina’s letters: 26534, 26537, 26539; Maria Magdalena’s letters, nos. 50063, 50074, 50085, 50089, 50095; Sabina’s letters: 43570, 43573, 43575–76, 43581–83, 43587, 43588, 43597, 43602, 43604, 43606, 43612 (1621), 43642.

<sup>155</sup> Katharina’s letter, 29779; Sabina’s letter, 43571, Maria Magdalena’s letters, 50060 and 50085.

German-written scribal letter sent from Smiřice in 1611, which notifies Eva about the speedy dispatch of the requested and signed public documents via post. To this short, one-page German letter, another three pages, written in Czech, were added in Maria Magdalena's own hand, giving instructions on the division of the sister's Hungarian inheritance while talking about purchases and sickness in the family. Such extended additions, written in autograph hand and in a language other than the language of the main letter, did not only functioned as postscripts but also letters within letters, displaying the coexistence of public information and private message on a letter's page.

Adding holograph postscripts to scribal letters while switching from German to Czech had distinct functions and meanings. One was probably convenience: transferring a last-minute thought or piece of information to the paper in their own hand was easier and quicker for the sisters than asking for the scribe's renewed assistance. In one short note, Sabina notifies Eva about the collars she made for her and asks for a large carton so she can send them to her.<sup>156</sup> The Post Scriptum attached to the German letter, which discussed upcoming negotiations with a Viennese businessman and the Batthyánys about pending debts to be paid, was written in Czech, probably because it was easier for Sabina to jot down a piece of information that she had just received in her mother tongue.

Czech-written autograph insertions and postscripts in German scribal correspondence were often intended to hide private or sensitive information from prying eyes. For instance, a letter in German by Katharina to Eva sometime before 1634, detailing a long list of grievances about a partially fulfilled delivery of wine from Hungary to Bohemia, is followed by a five-page holograph postscript written in Czech,

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<sup>156</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Neuhaus, 1 October 1609 (43567).

which includes a somewhat enigmatic reference to a piece of news: “I have heard something about it, but I am not allowed to write about it. I fear lest my lady sister may let someone else read this.”<sup>157</sup> While the context of the postscript, probably related to some cash transaction, is unclear, Katharina seems to have switched to Czech because she did not trust the letter as a carrier of private information. In the above-discussed rather long postscript of a German letter from 1611, Eva received a clear order from Maria Magdalena in Czech: “do not tell anyone that I have granted you the contract.”<sup>158</sup> The mentioned legal document contained the settlement between the four sisters and their brother Jan Mikulaš Poppel (d.1614) regarding their parental inheritance in Hungary and had to be shielded from the other parties concerned, particularly Jan Mikulaš, who wanted to have the contract himself. Maria Magdalena likely turned to Czech to exclude other parties, including the scribe, from learning about the content of her confidential message.<sup>159</sup>

Finally, the beneficial aspects of bilingual letter writing are most apparent in Sabina’s holograph postscript attached to a short scribal German letter written in 1614 to Eva, where she changed languages in the middle of the sentence. First, Sabina started to write the postscript in German, complaining that her husband did not take her seriously: “Though my Lord laughs at me that I am so afraid, I don’t feel like joking.” Then, she

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<sup>157</sup> “I have heard something about it, but I am not allowed to write about it. I fear lest my lady sister may let someone else read this.” Katharina’s letter to Eva [n.d.] (26539), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>158</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Smiřice, 30 June 1611 (50085), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>159</sup> “Concerning our contract, all is settled already, and the word is given in *freyen guten wylen* [good free will], but if we agreed on the word; if we take on /challenge the Hungarian chancellor [Bálint Lépés, bishop of Nyitra, royal chancellor of Hungary (1608-1623).] what should I do with it then? Lord Jan [Jan Mikulaš Poppel Lobkowitz (†1614)] says I am to give it to him since he does not get on well with the chancellor. But since I had promised you [Eva] that I will not give it to anyone else, then my dear heart, write to me whether I should give it to Lord Jan since I will not give it to anyone until I receive your answer, my dearest Lady Evicko.” Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Schmirschitz (Smiřice), 30 June 1611, (50085), transl. by Eva Bullard.

abruptly turned to Czech, “ma pani ewitzko ... [My dear lady Evicko] I beg you to speak to your lord regarding the paper of the tailor...”<sup>160</sup> While illegible handwriting obscures the meaning of the postscript, the strategy of pushing confidential information out of reach of curious readers by switching to another language is evident. The owner of prying eyes, from whom the message in the postscript had to be protected, was in this instance probably the secretary or, more likely, Sabina’s husband Philipp Solms himself, whom Sabina had to bar from the rest of the written communication to be able to convey her concerns and seek advice from Ferenc Batthyány without her husband’s knowledge.

The examples above display the practicalities of bilingual correspondence in early seventeenth-century Central Europe, where political and confessional tensions, dangerous roads and, probably even more importantly, family disputes, threatened the free flow of written information. Changing the language of conversation from German to Czech within a single letter was deliberately employed by the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters to communicate private messages securely.<sup>161</sup> In this way, languages could be employed as codes, providing protection from curious messengers, scribes and other third parties unfamiliar with these tongues. Indeed, such “code-switching” was probably not unique to the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters but was more widely practiced in multilingual communities throughout the early modern period.<sup>162</sup> The sisters’ handwriting in the tongue of their childhood also conveyed their shared cultural and linguistic identity and expressed

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<sup>160</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szetgotthárd), 8 November 1614 (43581), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>161</sup> Benedek Láng’s example of a Hungarian Jesuit in South America who inserted loose and confidential remarks in his Latin written letters to his superior underlines the usefulness of using rare languages to practice secrecy. *Titkosírás a koraijkori Magyarországon* [Cryptography in Early Modern Hungary] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2015), 170–171.

<sup>162</sup> For the practice of code switching in letters, see Herbert Schendl, “Code-Choice and Code-Switching in some Early Fifteenth-Century Letters,” in *Middle English from Tongue to Text. Selected Papers from the Third International Conference on Middle English: Language and Text, held at Dublin, Ireland, 1–4 July 1999*, ed. Peter Lucas and Angela M. Lucas (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 247–262.

personal closeness and intimacy.<sup>163</sup> Only when they wrote in Czech would Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina address Eva Poppel by her first name, “ma ewizko” (little Eva) and refer to each other as “pan zbinka” (lady Zbinka), “pan kaca” (Lady Kaca) or “pan manda” (Lady Manda), names their parents called them.<sup>164</sup> In this way, conventions of language and writing in the Poppel sisters’ letters reveal specific cultural codes and meanings regarding epistolary privacy and intimacy, features that we associate with letter writing that only reached its fully developed form in the personal and intimate written conversations of the eighteenth century.<sup>165</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has attempted to show the complexity of female letter writing in the early seventeenth century. The materiality of the letter, including the image of the letter’s folio, handwriting and language of those who held the pen, was loaded with meaning regarding the level of literacy, social status of female nobility as well as family relationships. The bilingual correspondence attests to the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ awareness of the communicative significance of language and script, as they switched between tongues and hands, as required by a given letter’s social and situational context. The choice on the part of Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina to dictate letters in German to their scribes or to write on their own in Czech depended on the subject matter,

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<sup>163</sup> Letter writers switched between languages for various reasons, but scholars agree that written code switching in letters was an act of shared identity signalling closeness and intimacy. Richard Ingham, “Medieval Bilingualism in England: On the Rarity of Vernacular Code-Switching,” in *Multilingual Practices in Language History*, 320.

<sup>164</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Schmirschitz (Smřice), 30 June 1611, (50085), Sabina’s letter to Eva [n.p.], [n.d.] (52874).

<sup>165</sup> Dauser, “Brieftheorie der frühen Neuzeit.”

language skills, language competency of the letter's receiver, but also the availability of scribal assistance.<sup>166</sup>

Both scribal and holograph letters adhered to the formal conventions of the German epistolary tradition. The forms of address and expressions of deference, or their absence give insight into shifting social statuses and the dynamics of personal relations between elite siblings. The physical letters exist as an expression of status; to a greater degree than one might expect, the letters reveal hierarchies that emerged within families, as social rank took precedence over blood relations. In their production, transmission and reception, the Poppel sisters' correspondence kept the semi-public character of the medieval letter, as many of them were written and read out loud by scribes and secretaries. These women's letters also remained pragmatic as they primarily dealt with the outside world, events and objects rather than with intimacies and the inner life of the corresponding partners. Yet the presence of a significant number of holograph letters that contained confidential content also points to the growing need of seventeenth-century women letter writers for epistolary privacy and their desire to communicate without the involvement of third parties.<sup>167</sup> As demonstrated, the coexistence of scribal and autograph hands on the same letter's folio visually separated the public from the private within the letter. At the same time, switching the letter's language from German to Czech created a medium for safely communicating confidential messages.

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<sup>166</sup> In the correspondence, German scribal letters often discuss matters important both for these women and their families, while holograph Czech letters would present a rather personal subject.

<sup>167</sup> See Rolf Köhn, "Dimensionen und Funktionen des Öffentlichen und Privaten in der Mittelalterlichen Korrespondenz," in *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne*, ed. Gert Melville and Peter von Moos (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998), 325 and Nickisch, *Brief*, 81–82.

As women's letters remained on the margins in the world of early modern manuscripts, excluded from the public realm and ignored by family archives, the women themselves, with some few exceptions, were relegated to the fringe of historical and collective memory. Indeed, the selective preservation of women's written records obscured many aspects of their lives and work. Paradoxically, the same male-oriented elite society that discarded most of the paperwork associated with women nonetheless encouraged women, at least among the social elite, to become literate and join the growing community of letter writers. By acquiring penmanship, early modern women could perform on the stage of the material letter. In their written communication, they adhered to epistolary conventions, imitating a mainstream model defined and used by men, but they also became actors in their own right. They deliberately employed scribal assistance for information that could be shared with the broader community while reserving the task of writing personal messages in their own hand, often on behalf of their husbands. These women's writings, thereby, display the exchange and cooperation between women and men. Simultaneously, the letters also show a diverging notion of what is perceived as 'public' and 'private' in early modern written communication. The following chapter will continue to explore the topic of these notions, demonstrating how public news and confidential messages were transmitted in Sabina Solms' letters.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Political News and Confidential Messages in the Letters of Sabina Poppel Lobkowitz

Regarding the most recent news, I heard, with a heavy heart, that the troops of my Lord were beaten by the troops of Prince of Ansbach and Prince of Heidelberg.<sup>1</sup>

My dear, burn this letter for I could not entrust you anything else while alive because my Lord entrusted me with this, and it was trusted to him by one of our faith.<sup>2</sup>

By the seventeenth century, literate noblewomen played an important role in informal diplomacy, news dissemination, as intelligence distribution in Central Europe had become more prominent.<sup>3</sup> Prevailing early modern attitudes and social conventions prevented noblewomen, except for a few female members of royal and princely houses, from directly entering the early modern political stage.<sup>4</sup> However, contemporary views of women's limited intellectual capacity allowed their everyday letter exchanges to become a practical and convenient vehicle for the unchecked transfer of public information and

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<sup>1</sup> "... Was neue zeitung anlangt muß Ich mit schmerzen hören daß meines herrn sein volck bey Ahnsbach von deß fürsten von Anspach vndt deß von heidelberg seinem volck sey geschlagen ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, 24 August 1619 (43604).

<sup>2</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, 20 December 1611 (43571), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>3</sup> István György Tóth, *Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 123–130; Katrin Keller, "Kommunikationsraum Altes Reich. Zur Funktionalität der Korrespondenznetze von Fürstinnen im 16. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 31, no. 2 (2004): 205–230; For the larger European context, see James Daybell, "Gender, Politics and Diplomacy: Women, News and Intelligence Networks in Elizabethan England," in *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Robin Adams and Rosanna Cox (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101–119 and Nadine Akkerman, "The Postmistress, the Diplomat, and a Black Chamber?: Alexandrine of Taxis, Sir Balthazar Gerbier and the Power of Postal Control," *ibid.*, 172–188.

<sup>4</sup> Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For the Aristotelian concept of female inferiority, see William W. Fortenbaugh, "Aristotle on Women: Politics i 13.1260a13," *Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2015): 395–404. About early modern women and politics, see Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women in Politics," in *Renaissance and the Enlightenment Paradoxes*, ed. Arlette Farge and Natalie Zemon Davis, vol. 3 of *History of Women*, ed. Georges Duby, et. al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 167–186; Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 2 (1990): 259–281; Katrin Keller, "Frauen und Politik in der höfischen Gesellschaft des alten Reiches zwischen 1550 und 1750," *zeitenblicke* 8, no. 2 (2009), [https://www.zeitenblicke.de/2009/2/keller/index\\_html](https://www.zeitenblicke.de/2009/2/keller/index_html) (accessed 2 August, 2022).

secret messages. Elite women picked up and forwarded pieces of news and gossip, as they moved in royal courtyards or the hallways and chambers of noble residences.<sup>5</sup> Even noblewomen not directly connected to the centres of power could use the informal channels of their private correspondence in order to communicate political news and confidential information to their family and personal network. The neglected letters of early modern elite women—dedicated to courteous greetings, exchange of gifts, and the practicalities of life—were, I argue, an ideal space for the free circulation of both public and covert information.

As the present chapter aims to show through the case study of Sabina Solms's correspondence, women's letters encompassed both publicly circulated political news and confidential messages intended for private reading. The inclusion of openly discussed public events, conveyed through official newsletters, and dictated to or copied by scribes, allowed these letters to be read aloud and shared within the family.<sup>6</sup> Simultaneously, women's letters also served as an informal channel for their husbands to exchange confidential information, thereby avoiding scrutiny. Untrained handwriting, allusive language, and a mother tongue foreign to the environment where the letters circulated facilitated the secure transmission of confidential information. The following case study will thus illustrate the agency of noblewomen as they collaborated with and acted on behalf of men. They adeptly gathered and disseminated public news with the assistance

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<sup>5</sup> Sarah Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 413; Claire Walker, "Prayer, Patronage, and Political Conspiracy: English Nuns and the Restoration," *Historical Journal* 43, 1 (2001): 9–10 and 21 and Keller, "Kommunikationsraum Altes Reich," 208.

<sup>6</sup> James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 149.

of male kin, acquaintances and secretaries, while playing a pivotal role in facilitating secret diplomatic conversations for their husbands.

### *The letter-corpus*

In their correspondence, the Poppel Lobkowitz women rarely commented on current political events preceding and during the Thirty Years War. Of the 177 surviving letters in the Batthyány missive collection written by Eva Poppel's sisters, Katharina Kurzbach, Maria Magdalena Trčka and Sabina Solms, only about 18 percent of these report on events happening around them. In particular, the two older Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, Katharina Kurzbach and Maria Magdalena Trčka, rarely mentioned the violent political and confessional struggles that caused great distress in the Bohemian nobility in the 1610s and 1620s. But their written silence did not indicate disinterest. Instead, it is probable that they didn't trust their opinion to paper, choosing instead to convey sensitive information orally through their messengers.

Some letters with sensitive contents were probably destroyed. Thus in 1611, Sabina warned Eva to burn a letter with information from 'one of our faith'.<sup>7</sup> Protestant women, like Sabina and Eva, had to be especially careful when they shared information about growing confessional tensions in the Habsburg lands. Sabina's instructions to throw the incriminating letter into the flames is a hint of the fate that awaited many letters in an era full of religious and dynastic intrigue.

During the dynastic wars in fifteenth-century England, the noblewoman Margaret Paston specifically instructed her correspondent to burn her letter, while in Elizabethan

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<sup>7</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 20 December 1611 (43571).

England Catholics regularly turned to this method to avoid censure. Catharina Medici's correspondence from the time of the Huguenot war in the 1560s and 1570s is highly incomplete, likely because she called on her corresponding partners to destroy written evidence by fire.<sup>8</sup> The letters of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia, granddaughter of Queen Mary Stuart, met a similar fate. Finding refuge in Holland after the defeat of the Bohemian Revolt, she burned most of her letters containing sensitive political information.<sup>9</sup> Exchanging clandestine messages was, however, not restricted to members of royal and princely families only. Fortunately, some letters survive to illustrate how lower-ranking noblewomen also concealed the circulation of news.

Despite the common practice of burning letters that contained covert messages, and the dearth of public news and confidential information shared in the letters of the two older Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, considerably more is known from Sabina's Solms' letters about the significant position she took in the news acquisition of the Hungarian Batthyány family. In Vienna during the 1610s and early 1620s, Sabina had immediate access to political intelligence from her contacts in the city or from members connected to Habsburg court. Out of the eighty-two letters that Sabina sent primarily to Eva Poppel, twenty-one contain information about political or military events or convey confidential

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<sup>8</sup> Diane Watt, "No Writing for Writing's Sake: The Language of Service and Household Rhetoric in the Letters of the Paston Women," in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherevatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 123 and Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth's letter to Thomas Roe of 27 September 1636 (Letter 284) in Nadine Akkerman, ed., *The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart Queen of Bohemia*, vol. 2: 1632–1642 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 523–525. The practice of burning letters was also common in Central Europe. For example, the Hungarian noblewoman Anna Mária Széchy assured Ferenc Lessenyei Nagy that she had burned his letter after reading it, while Erzsébet Révay instructed her lover János Radvánszky to do the same. In these cases, the destruction of letters was not related to politics or religion but to the private life of the corresponding partners. Business matters, marital problems or love affairs could equally be reasons for letter writers to be secretive and for letters to go up in flames: Deák Farkas, *Magyar hölgyek levelei, 1515–1709* [Letters of Hungarian Ladies, 1515–1709] (Budapest: A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvkiadó-Hivatala, 1879), 282 and 424.

messages about diplomatic meetings, family quarrels and rumours.<sup>10</sup> These letters attest to the significant role that a lesser aristocratic woman in Vienna played in the informal circulation of both public news (reports about war and political events) and secret messages in the turbulent years before and during the Thirty Years' War. Her letters containing news reports concern mainly the imperial election in the late summer of 1619 and the battles in Bohemia and around Vienna in the two years following. Reports from the battlefield would have been of value to Eva Poppel and her family, as the nobility in Hungary eagerly awaited news to arrive from the German Reich. These reports thus confirm that noblewomen close to the Habsburg court participated in the diffusion of actual political news between the lands held by the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy.

Sabina's correspondence between 1611 and 1621 also contains a significant amount of private information intended only for her sister. These secret messages are embedded in the main letter, or attached as postscripts dictated to the scribe or were written by Sabina herself in Czech. Some of these confidential messages were concerned with the confessional struggle between the Habsburg kings and the Protestant nobility of its lands and shows the significant role women played as interlocutors in diplomacy, mediating between men belonging to opposite confessional and political platforms.<sup>11</sup> Secrecy in women's letters, however, was not limited to political matters. Like other

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<sup>10</sup> Letters with political news and military events: 43583 (1614), 43602–43606 (1619), 43608 (1619), 43637 (1619) 43611–43612 (1621), 43614–43615 (1621), 43628–43629 (no year). Letters with confidential information: 43571 (1611), 43581 (1614), 43583 (1614), 43606 (1619), 43616 (1621), 43626 (n.d.), 52873 (1619), 52874 (n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571) and 9 September 1621 (43616).

contemporary letter writers, Sabina regarded family disputes over inheritance and other grievances as a sensitive topic that was to be kept private.

After an overview of public news communication in the early seventeenth century, three case studies will illustrate how Sabina Solms' letters served as the source of public news for her extended family as well as the various techniques that were employed in order to protect private information from prying eyes. The first example shows how women's letters written with scribal assistance functioned as newsletters. The second example will demonstrate the use of cipher in a holograph letter, while the third case study will examine the role of bilingual language usage in Sabina's letters, as she used Czech, her mother tongue, as a code to write about confidential matters to her sister.

In her letters, Sabina distinguished between public news and private information through various means. Throughout the chapter, it will be shown how the choice of hand, secretary, or autograph, as well as the choice of language, German or Czech, were deliberate decisions of the letter writer to distinguish public news from private information.<sup>12</sup> Sabina turned to secretarial help on those occasions when she forwarded political and war reports that circulated in newsletters and other public sources of information. Not trusting the eyes and ears of those who surrounded her, she tended to write in her own hand when the discussion involved sensitive information about relatives and their political or confessional affairs or other private matters. These letters will be examined to uncover the subtle interplay between epistolary themes, the writing hand and

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<sup>12</sup> About early modern letter writers' awareness of contextual language use, see Randolph C Head, "A Plurilingual Family in the Sixteenth Century: Language Use and Linguistic Consciousness in the Salis Family Correspondence, 1580–1610," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 26, no. 3 (1995): 592.

language preference in Sabina's letters and thereby delineate the emerging borders between public and private.

### ***Handwritten newsletters and private correspondences in the early seventeenth century***

In the early seventeenth century, people in the Habsburg-ruled lands were eager consumers of news. Burgeoning print businesses and expanding postal networks increasingly provided access to information about the Long Turkish War (1593-1606) and the confessional contentions leading to the Thirty Years' War, which captivated contemporaries' attention. Since the second half of the sixteenth century, handwritten newsletters of merchant and princely families, printed broadsheets and private correspondences had quenched the growing thirst for information about diplomatic encounters, court politics and battlefield events.<sup>13</sup> In the German-speaking lands, handwritten and, from the early seventeenth century, printed newsletters were compiled by diplomatic envoys, professional news writers and local postmasters and circulated through mounted Ordinary-Post riders of the imperial post.<sup>14</sup> Based on the model of the

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<sup>13</sup> Zsuzsa Barbarics and Renate Pieper, "Handwritten Newsletters as a Means of Communication in Early Modern Europe," in *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe 1400-1700*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 53–79 and Barbarics, "Handwritten Newsletters as Interregional Information Sources in Central and Southeastern Europe" in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*. ed. Brendan Dooley (London: Routledge, 2010), 155–178; Christian Oggolder and Karl Vocelka, "Flugblätter, Flugschriften und periodische Zeitungen," in *Quellenkunde der Habsburg Monarchie*, ed. J. Pauser, M. Scheutz and Th. Winkelbauer (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 2004), 860–874.

<sup>14</sup> The most well-known early modern German newsletters are the Fugger-Zeitungen, commissioned by the merchant family of the same name in Augsburg between 1568 and 1605. The collection is held today in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna and is available online: <https://fuggerzeitungen.univie.ac.at>. For a detailed study of the collection and its context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century manuscripts and newsletters, see Katrin Keller, "Die Fuggerzeitungen: Ein Literaturbericht," *Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte* 14 (2012): 186–204 and a comprehensive study on the collection, Katrin Keller and Paola Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext. Zeitungsammlungen im Alten Reich und in Italien* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2015). See also Johannes Kleinpaul, *Die Fuggerzeitungen, 1568–1605* (Leipzig: Reinicke, 1921). For literature in English, see Johannes Weber, "Straßburg 1605. The Origins of the Newspaper in Europe," *German History* 24, no. 3 (2006): 388–412 and from the same author "The Early

Italian ‘avisi’, German manuscript newsletters were copied in princely chancelleries, in offices of merchants, government diplomats and agents of nobles, and disseminated through commercial cities like Augsburg or Köln, Hamburg, Vienna, and Prague, connecting the Empire with the rest of Europe and the New World.<sup>15</sup> Commercially distributed manuscript newsletters were called variously ‘Zeitung’ (News) or ‘Neue Zeitungen’ (Current News) and usually travelled together with other types of printed and manuscript documents or were attached to private correspondences.<sup>16</sup> By the seventeenth century, these compiled news media became a common form of acquiring political news throughout German-speaking Central Europe.<sup>17</sup>

From the increasing variety of news, only a handful of handwritten newsletters were available upon subscription in the eastern part of the Habsburg monarchy as its infrastructure lagged behind that of Western Europe.<sup>18</sup> In the major cities, like Vienna or Pozsony (Preßburg), people had likely access to handwritten and later printed newsletters arriving from Frankfurt or Bohemia. Public news also reached them through news circles

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German Newspaper—A Medium of Contemporaneity,” in *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Brendan Dooley (London: Routledge, 2010), 69–79.

<sup>15</sup> For the close connection of German newsletters to the Italian ‘avisi’, see Cornel Zwielerlein, *Fuggerzeitungen als Ergebnis von italienisch-deutschem Kulturtransfer, 1552–1570*, *Quellen und Forschungen aus italiensichen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 90 (2010): 169–224. For more about the production and distribution of manuscript newsletters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in general see Johannes Arndt, *Herrschaftskontrolle durch Öffentlichkeit. Die publizistische Darstellung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 66–67.

<sup>16</sup> In the seventeenth century, the German word ‘Zeitung’ had a double meaning. It was used interchangeably to refer to reports of recent events and to the periodic handwritten or printed medium that contained these reports. Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* Online, vol. 31, col. 591–595. [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/zeitung](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/zeitung) (accessed 24 May, 2023). On the German name of manuscript newsletters see Georg, Steinhausen, *Geschichte des deutschen Briefes* (Dublin: Weidmann, 1968 [Berlin, 1889]), vol. 1, 66 and his study “Die Entstehung der Zeitung aus dem brieflichen Verkehr,” *Archiv für Buchgewerbe und Gebrauchsgrafik* 65 (1928): 51–64. For a discussion of the complexity of the early modern news media and the challenges distinguishing manuscript newsletters and other types of documents with news content, see Keller and Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext*, 25–31.

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of the extant collections of early modern manuscript newsletters in German archives and libraries, see Keller and Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext*, 184–196.

<sup>18</sup> Barbarics, “Handwritten Newsletters,” 156.

established by aristocratic families.<sup>19</sup> Wealthy families, like the Southern Bohemian Rosenbergs or the Thurzós in Upper Hungary and the Western-Hungarian Nádasdys, issued their own manuscript newsletters based on the news collected by their agents.<sup>20</sup> The Styrian nobleman Georg von Stubenberg, for example, “read the Böhmisches Neuzeitungen” about the military movements of the Bohemian Protestants.<sup>21</sup> The nobility in the region, including the Batthyány family, also received updates about what happened in the Imperium and beyond through their personal correspondence network. Thus, letters written by members of their extended family remained an essential source of information about recent political and military events for the Hungarian elite.

### ***Family letters as ‘newsletters’: actors in the private news market***

Surviving letters of Sabina Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Solms, from the late 1610s and early 1620s show that she was an important resource for the Batthyány family in their news network. As Sabina lived close to the Habsburg’s residence in the Burg in Vienna, she may have had regular access to the imperial court where fresh news was brought by postal couriers but also through acquaintances or by word of mouth.<sup>22</sup> This is

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<sup>19</sup> Zdeněk Šimeček, “Geschriebene Zeitungen in den böhmischen Ländern um 1600 und ihr Entstehungs- und Rezeptionszusammenhang mit den gedruckten Zeitungen,” in *Presse und Geschichte II. Neue Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung*, ed. H. Gebhardt and H. W. Lang (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1987), 71–82.

<sup>20</sup> For example, the southern Bohemian Rosenberg family controlled news communication between the Upper-Austrian commercial town of Linz and Bohemia: Zdeněk Šimeček, “Linz und die Nachrichtenvermittlung nach Böhmen vom 15. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert,” *Historisches Jahrbuch der Stadt Linz* (1969): 269–290; Zsuzsa Barbarics, “Die Bedeutung der handgeschriebenen Neuen Zeitungen in der Epoche Ferdinands I. am Beispiel der sogenannten ‘Nádasdy-Zeitungen’,” in *Kaiser Ferdinand I, Ein mitteleuropäischer Herrscher*, ed. Martina Fuchs (Münster: 2005), 179–205, and Arndt, *Herrschaftskontrolle*, 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Barbara Stubenberg’s letter to Eva Poppel*, Muregg, June 11, 1611 (44428).

<sup>22</sup> For the early modern information market, see the studies of Mario Infelise, Zsuzsa Barbarics, Francesca Trivellato, and Florike Egmond, in *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400–1700*, vol. 3 of *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond

attested to by the extensive political and war reports that survived in a series of letters from the politically tumultuous year of 1619.

The German letters, all written in the same scribal hand, were dated between June and December and all but one were addressed to Sabina's sister Eva Poppel.<sup>23</sup> They deal partially or entirely with the imperial elections in Frankfurt and the escalating military confrontations between Catholic and Protestant forces in Bohemia. In their accounts of events, some of these letters resemble the style of manuscript newsletters.<sup>24</sup> They give precise dates for political events, such as the elections in Frankfurt, describing the Bohemian and the Habsburg military strength by specifying the numbers of troops, their current positions, and the course of military maneuvers.<sup>25</sup>

The first in the series of these letters, dated in June 1619, for example, provides a detailed account of the movements of the Imperial Field Marshals and the Bohemian and Hungarian troops in and around the Southern Bohemian town of Budweis (České Budějovice):<sup>26</sup>

The troops of Dampierre, Bucquoi and the Hungarians count thirty-two thousand men, while the Bohemians have only five thousand recruited soldiers, the rest are only subjects, altogether fifteen thousand men. It is said that eleven thousand Spanish soldiers arrived around Passau and were moving on the Golden Road to

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For women's participation in news distribution, see Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 152–157.

<sup>23</sup> See Sabina's letters written in 1619, nos. 43602, 43604, 43605, 43606, 43608, 43609. The letters dated December 1619 (43608 and 43609) were addressed to Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány and contained the same information.

<sup>24</sup> Despite the diversity of the genre, early modern newsletters primarily provided information by listing events in order of importance and with considerable care for accuracy. They typically refrained from commentary on the events they reported: Katrin Keller, "Zeitungssammlungen im Alten Reich: Umriss einer Medienlandschaft," in *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext*, 24–26.

<sup>25</sup> For similar examples, see the manuscript newsletter sent from Köln dated 30 January 1586. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 8959, 290r. <https://fuggerzeitungen.univie.ac.at/zeitungen/cod-8959-290r> (accessed 9 May 2023).

<sup>26</sup> Sabina sent the letter shortly before the failed siege of Vienna by the Bohemian Protestant army led by Count Thurn which took place between June 4th and June 12th, 1619; see Helmuth Kretschmer, *Sturmpetition und Blockade Wiens im Jahre 1619* (Vienna: Österreichische Bundesverlag, 1978).

Bucquoi's troops in Budweis [České Budějovice]. Archduke Leopold gathered four thousand men; among them was my lord with his troops.<sup>27</sup>

With similar accuracy, the consecutive letters report the imperial election in Frankfurt, the Coronation of Elector Palatine Frederick V in Prague, and the movements of the Habsburg army led by Field Marshal Henri Dampierre in Moravia and Bohemia.<sup>28</sup> The factual manner in which these news reports were written contrasts with Sabina's letter-writing style, suggesting that she left the composition partially to her scribe, who may have summarized the acquired news accounts in his own words or copied them from written sources.

It is hard to pinpoint exactly the news sources Sabina and her scribe relied on for the compilation of these reports. They most likely had access to handwritten or printed newsletters arriving weekly to Vienna from the German lands and Bohemia.<sup>29</sup> In the 1610s, a variety of handwritten newsletters, diplomatic accounts and correspondence was available in the city.<sup>30</sup> By this time, printed newsletters, such as *Die Frankfurter Postzeitung*, published under the supervision of the Frankfurter Postmaster, or die *Zeitung*, issued weekly in Hildesheim with a subsection *Zeitung aus Böhmen, Osterreich und andren Landen*, were also commercially available.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> "...Tampier *Búckoi* vndt vngarisch völcck zwey vndt dreisig taúsent man die + Bohemen + aber núr vf 5000 geworbene soldaten, die andern sint núr vnderthanen sint zúsamén 15000 man. Es sint wie man sagt zú Passaún elf taúsent spanier ankommen, so vber den Goldtweg zú dem von *Bockoy* vf Búdtweis rúcken. Aúch hat der Ertzhertzog Leopoldt 4000 men beisamen vnder welchen aúch mein herr mit seinem volck ist ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 June 1619 (43602).

<sup>28</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 September 1619 (43606), and to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 22 December 1619 (43609).

<sup>29</sup> Heiko Droste, "Einige Wiener Briefe wollen noch publicieren," in *Die Entstehung des Zeitungswesens im 17. Jahrhundert: Ein neues Medium und seine Folgen für das Kommunikationssystem der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Volker Bauer and Holger Böning (Bremen, edition lumiére, 2011), 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> See the library and archive holdings of manuscript newsletters in Vienna, among them the newsletter collections of the Schallenberg and Harrach families from the early 1600s, listed in Katrin Keller and Molino, *Die Fuggerzeitungen im Kontext*, 194–195.

<sup>31</sup> *Die erste (Andre, Dritte ...) Zeitung so sie sich .... zugetragen hat*, vol. 1619 (Hildesheim, Joachim Gössel, 1619–1622).

Indirect evidence for the use of newsletters is provided by reference to the Habsburg Post. In her letter dated September 1619, Sabina questioned whether the coronation of the Emperor had taken place because she did not receive any news reports from Frankfurt, as the *Ordinari Post* was delayed.<sup>32</sup> In another letter, she presented the troop movements of the Protestants' leader, Matthias Thurn and the imperial commander, Charles Bucquoy (1571–1621) in May 1619, asking Eva Poppel to confirm the validity of the Bohemian “avisirer.”<sup>33</sup> Her request suggests that the Batthyány family relied on various news sources, including newsletters delivered by the Batthyány's couriers from Bohemia at regular intervals.<sup>34</sup>

Sabina also received battlefield news through a personal network which included her husband Philip, who commanded forces that fought Bohemian rebels in the summer and fall of 1619. In the summer of 1619, Philipp sent updates to his wife from Moravia, where his troops fought alongside the army of the Archduke.<sup>35</sup> Three months later, Sabina reported to Eva about the “incredible news” that she heard from Philipp regarding the defeat of his “fellow [Catholic] believers”.<sup>36</sup>

Sabina also received news updates from the Viennese court physician Mathias Judex. The doctor provided a detailed account of the defeat of Philipp Solms' troops at

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<sup>32</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 September 1619 (34606).

<sup>33</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 1 June 1619 (43602).

<sup>34</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 August 1619 (43605).

<sup>35</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 1 June 1619 (43602).

<sup>36</sup> “..... Ich von meinem herrn so wúnder seltzame zeitúngen múß anhören ...” *Sabina's letter to Eva*, Vienna, September 10, 1619 (43606). Sabina's correspondence suggests that Philipp wrote to his wife regularly from the battlefield. The only one of his letters written to his wife that survives in the Batthyány archive also contains military news that occurred in the fall of 1619. The letter written in the illegible hand of the Count discusses the military campaign of Gábor Bethlen against King Ferdinand, as armies of both sides gathered not far from Vienna at the Hungarian city of Sopron. A month later, Sabina attached the letter of her husband to his own to inform the Batthyánys about the Dampierre's efforts to recruit soldiers for the siege of Sopron. Philipp Solm's letter to Sabina, Vienna, 27 October 1619 (43534).

the German town of Ansbach and the confiscation of the Count's belongings and carriage, which was also confirmed by the countess' servants.<sup>37</sup> This might not have been the only time that the court physician supplied Sabina with current news (*neue Zeitung*). Other physicians supplied noble clientele with news reports as well. The letters of Valentine Purgolt, the Anabaptist physician of the Batthyánys, also contain extensive reports about military battles in the first phase of the Thirty Years' War and political affairs in the Habsburg court.<sup>38</sup>

Eyewitnesses' oral reports validated the authenticity of pieces of news conveyed in letters. Sabina reassured her sister that Philipp Solms' written report about the siege of the Hungarian town of Sopron by Dampierre in late November was confirmed by the Hofmeister's verbal recount of the events.<sup>39</sup> Philipp's trusted man was also his messenger carrying letters and news back and forth between the Solms couple. In his letter to Sabina about a month earlier, Solms announced the arrival of his trusted servant who would

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<sup>37</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 24 August 1619 (43604).

<sup>38</sup> See Valentine Purgolt's letters to the Batthyány family, nos. 38806–38828. For the introduction of his correspondence, see Mária Nagy-Tóth, "Valentianus Purgolt, a Batthyányak újkeresztény orvosának levelei, 1622–1636" [The Letters of Valentinus Purgolt, New Christian Court Physician of the Batthyány Family], *Somogy megye múltjából* 38 (2007): 19–38. Both doctors, Purgolt and Judex, cherished an interest in contemporary history and politics that stemmed from their humanist education; see Nancy Siraisi, *History, Medicine and the Traditions of Renaissance Learning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). Fleeing from persecution, followers of the Anabaptist movement found temporary refuge in Moravia and in Western parts of Hungary during the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century. These communities, known as New Christians or Habáns, were famous for their ceramics produced for noble and burgher households. Medical doctors and apothecaries, who adhered to their beliefs, were employed by noble families, including the Batthyány family. Eventually, the Anabaptists were settled in Transylvania by Prince Gábor Bethlen. See Emese Bálint, "Anabaptist Migration to Moravia and the Hutterite Brethren," in *Religious Diaspora in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Timothy G. Fehler, Greta Grace Krocker and Charles H. Parker (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014), 137–152 and Béla Krisztinkovich, "Anabaptista orvosok, gyógyszerészek a higiénia szolgálatában [Anabaptist Physicians and Apothecaries in the Service of Hygiene]," *Communicationes ex Bibliogheca Historiae Medicae Hungarica* 20 (1961): 88–117.

<sup>39</sup> "... hirmit ein schreiben welches mir mein herr dúrch seiner hoffmeister, zúgeschickt, daraúst sie dan vernehmen kan wie es itzd vndt stehe, aúch berichtet mich meineß hern hoffmeiyster daß Graff Tampier mit 9000 aúf Odenbúrg vndt daselb belegene..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 22 November 1619 (43637).

retell “all that otherwise is happening here.”<sup>40</sup> Other stewards serving the high nobility also acted as agents of political intelligence. For instance, the news about the arrival of Gábor Bethlen’s envoys to Dampierre’s camp in Brünn was delivered to Sabina by the Hofmeister of the younger Lord Heusenstein.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, Sabina also passed on to her sister unverified rumours circulating in Vienna. In early June, she reported about the gathering of eleven thousand Spanish soldiers at the Lower-Bavarian city of Passau, while at the end of the summer, she wrote from the quiet capital that “it is said that the citizens of Frankfurt had sworn in the King as the seventh elector.”<sup>42</sup> The news that the Catholic Habsburg Ferdinand was elected emperor over the Protestant elector Palatine, Frederik V, perplexed Sabina. She gave voice to her reservation about what she had heard by word of mouth in a marginal note written in her own hand: “The Bohemian envoys have to withdraw their protest but [ ... things] are not going so badly as it is rumoured.”<sup>43</sup>

In such letters, political news reports that could be freely shared with others often appeared side by side with private messages. Sabina’s letter, written in scribal hand on 10 September 1619, provides an example of such coexistence.<sup>44</sup> The last of three letters Sabina and Eva exchanged between late August and early September of that year shows the sisters followed, with unusual attention, the royal and imperial elections that took place simultaneously in Prague and Frankfurt and in the last days of August 1619. The

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<sup>40</sup> Philipp Solms’ letter to Sabina, [n.p.], 21 October 1619 (43534).

<sup>41</sup> “... deß Júngen herrn von Heúsentein sein Hofmeister hat referirt ...”. Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 September 1619 (43606).

<sup>42</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva, Vienna, 1 June and 28 August 1619 (43602 and 43605).

<sup>43</sup> “... Vnd, die pehmischen gsonten mit irer protestazion obzihen misen iestz wor oder nit wiert mon bold herin jest g súnsten nicht sú geschleht zú gangen |alls sie hir sogen ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 28 August 1619 (43605).

<sup>44</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 September 1619 (43606).

letter is divided into two distinct parts. The main letter, properly signed and dated, was written as a summary of political news received from Frankfurt with details that could also be read by a larger audience of the Batthyány court. The second part of the letter consists of two postscripts with messages intended solely for the eyes of Eva Poppel.

On the first two pages, Sabina discussed the diverse political and military events that had occurred in the previous days. In a similar fashion to manuscript newsletters circulated by merchant houses and noble courts, newsworthy items are listed one by one in a seemingly random order.<sup>45</sup> The subjects of the letter cover the imperial and royal elections, which had just taken place in Frankfurt and Prague, the negotiations between the envoys of the Transylvanian Prince Gábor Bethlen and the Protestant opposition, the Hungarian's support of the Bohemian cause, the acceptance of the new Bohemian King as Moravian Margrave and the theft of items from Imperial Field Marshal Count Henri Dampierre during his military campaign in Bohemia.<sup>46</sup>

While Sabina reported on the elections and events in Vienna, she conveyed doubt about the news she had received about the complex and explosive politics of the time. In summer 1619, tensions simmered in Bohemia between Protestant-leaning nobles and the Catholic Habsburg monarchy. The nobles' decision to offer the Bohemian crown to a young Calvinist prince, Frederick V of the Palatinate, was an act of defiance that had possible repercussions for the impending election of the Holy Roman Emperor.

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Schilling, "Die Fuggerzeitungen," in *Quellenkunde der Habsburg Monarchie*, 875-880.

<sup>46</sup> About Bethlen's politics in 1619 see Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War, Europe's Tragedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 289; Peter Broucek, *Kampf um die Landeshoheit und Herrschaft im Ostern Österreichs 1618 bis 1621* (Militärhistorische Schriftenreihe 65), (Vienna: Bundesverlag / Heeresgeschichtliches Museum 1992), 22f, and Sonja Reisner, "Aber auch wie vorgese tags außer Scharmüzieren anders nichts verricht ... Die Kämpfe vor Wien im Oktober 1619 im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Quellen," in *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg. Bevölkerung, Gesellschaft, Kultur, Konfession*, ed. Andreas Weigl (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), 448.

Sabina began her report by describing the volleys of gunfire and the singing of the *Te Deum* that marked the festivities in Vienna celebrating the official inauguration of the Catholic Habsburg Ferdinand II as Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>47</sup> She harboured mistrust toward the bits of news that slowly trickled down from the German Empire by word of mouth.<sup>48</sup> She raised doubts about the legitimacy of Ferdinand's election, especially since the regular postal service between Frankfurt and Vienna, which normally carried official news, had stopped.

But because the regular postal service between Frankfurt and Vienna was stopped, I am, and so are others, wondering whether the coronation in Frankfurt took place or whether they are only talking about it to force the estate to observe homage to the king.<sup>49</sup>

She reasoned that failing communications with Frankfurt and rumours of a completed imperial election would nudge Protestant princes to declare their allegiance. Sure enough, toward the end of the letter, she did not forget to mention the withdrawal of the Protestant nobility from negotiations with Archduke Leopold in Vienna, representing his brother Ferdinand II in his absence.<sup>50</sup> Sabina was also puzzled over the news she received from Bohemia, as she reported about Elector Palatine

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<sup>47</sup> Harald Tersch, "Freudenfest und Kurzweil. Wien in Reisetagebüchern der Kriegszeit (ca. 1620–1650)," in *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, 155–250.

<sup>48</sup> Even with the availability of handwritten newsletters, printed pamphlets, and other written forms of news exchange, including personal letters, orality remained the dominant method of news acquisition in Central Europe until well into the seventeenth century; see Robert Scribner, "Oral Culture and the Diffusion of the Reformation Ideas," in *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in the Reformation Germany*, ed. R. Scribner (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 50; Paul Münch, "Verkehr, Kommunikation, Öffentlichkeit," in *Lebensformen in der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1992), 486–516.

<sup>49</sup> "... weil aber die ordinari posten allenthalben aufgehalten worden, zweiffel ich vndt ander gar sehr dran, ob die crönung zú Franckfürth seÿe fortgangen oder obß erdacht seÿ damit man die ständt núr zúr huldigung bring[en] möge ...," Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 September 1619 (43606).

<sup>50</sup> About the military intervention of Archduke Leopold in early June 1619 see Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 June 1619 (43602). See also Reisner, "Die Kämpfe vor Wien," 447.

Frederick's election as King of Bohemia and about the marching of the Protestant and Catholic troops towards Prague for the anticipated crowning of Frederick.<sup>51</sup>

Relying on the news circulating in Vienna, Sabina considered the possibility that the new king of Bohemia could change the course of the elections. What perplexed her, along with many of her Protestant contemporaries, was the constitutional impasse that followed the Bohemian estate's decision to replace Habsburg Ferdinand—elected, but not crowned, King of Bohemia in 1617—with the Protestant Elector Palatine Frederick V, and what this decision meant for the outcome of 1619's imperial elections.<sup>52</sup> While there

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<sup>51</sup> "... Insonderheit komt mir diß in etwas seltzam für, daß der von Heidelberg, welcher den 20. ditto, zum behmischen könig soll gewiss gekrönet werden, draußen den könig soll haben zum siebenden chürfürsten, vndt, also. für ein behmischen könig erkandt vndt angenommen haben, weil er itzúndt selber zum behmischen könig soll gekrönet werden, vndt deßwegen schon vergangenen montag welcher der 2. tn. dito ist gewesen, mit 16000 man acht meil von Prag ankommen ist. sonsten vermeint man der Graff Búqoi sey nún weit genúg hinein aúf Prag, dan er schon vber das wasser, vndt dargegen der Graff von Thúrn herúber gesetzt, soll aber Graff Búqoi von den behmen also vmbgeben sein welche In die 6000 starck mit landt vndt geweckenem volck, daß er weder denen zú Búdweiß noch sie im zú hilf kommen können, vndt verhoffen die behmen, eß soll ihme keiner davon kommen vndt entgehen können, die crönung deß von heidelberg ist schon allenthalben In Behmen *publicirt*, soll gar gewiß den 20. tn. ditto Ihne vortgang haben ... " [*Especiallly, it appears to be somewhat peculiar, that he from Heidelberg who was certainly crowned Bohemian King on the 20th [of the month] and the king should be acknowledged and accepted as the seventh elector and Bohemian king, as he now should be crowned himself king of Bohemia, and therefore already on last Monday, which was the second of the month, he had arrived with 16,000 men eight miles from Prague. Otherwise, people think, Count Bucquoy was already quite close to Prague, since he crossed the water across from where Count Thurn [was staying], but it is said, that he is surrounded by the Bohemians, who are reinforced with 6,000 recruited peasants, so that neither he can come to the aid of the [troops] in Budweis nor they can help him, and the Bohemians hope that no one from them would be able to escape or flee. The crowning of the one from Heidelberg was already announced everywhere in Bohemia, so it should have happened for sure on the 20th [of the month]*], Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 September 1619 (43606).

<sup>52</sup> With the death of Emperor Matthias II in March 1619, his nephew, Ferdinand, was seen as the most likely candidate for the imperial seat of the Holy Roman Empire, which was held without exception by members of the Habsburg dynasty since the fifteenth century. Ferdinand II, who was elected Catholic King of Bohemia and one of the seven electors in the Empire, appeared to have enough support to secure the imperial seat with his vote and those of the spiritual electors of Köln, Mainz, and Trier. However, the leader of the German Protestant estates, Palatine Frederick V, was also an elector and wanted to protect the imperial constitution and the rights of the Protestants in the Empire by postponing the elections, thereby preventing the hereditary succession of the Habsburg house on the imperial throne. On August 23, 1619, the rebel Bohemian estates revoked Habsburg Ferdinand's right to rule, and three days later, they elected Elector Palatine Frederick V as King of Bohemia. With the royal crown of the Bohemian lands, Frederick was expected to receive the electoral vote of the Bohemian King and, in doing so, secure most of the Protestant electors. Frederick had no desire to become Emperor himself and supported the candidacy of Maximilian I from the Bavarian princely Wittelsbach family. Maximilian, however, withdrew from the imperial candidacy, and the Palatine's envoys voted for Habsburg Ferdinand in the imperial elections on

was nothing particular in this letter in regard to political speculations and the outcome of the Frankfurt elections received from Vienna that Eva could not have shared with those in her immediate surroundings, one of the letter's postscripts also contained private matters directed only to her.

The two postscripts attached to Sabina's "newsletter" both bear the sign of the same scribal hand but are written with distinctly different ink (Figure: 39). While dark ink was used for the second postscript on the bottom half of the page, as well as for the main letter, the first postscript above displays a visibly paler ink.

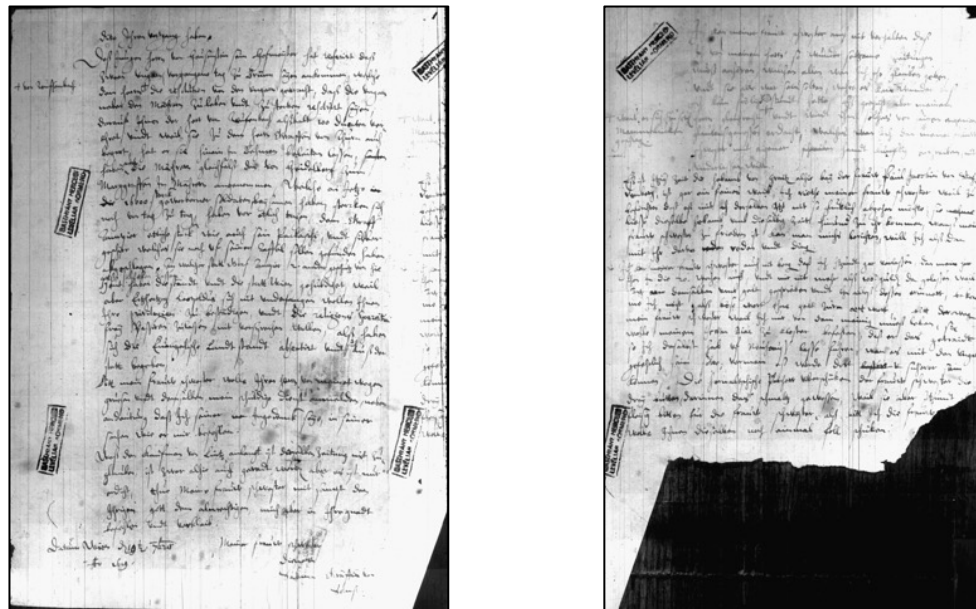


Figure 39: Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 [19] September 1619

Along with the changing colour of the ink, the content also changed. While the official portion of the letter displays features of a manuscript newsletter with information on

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the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1619 in order to avoid irritating Ferdinand and to prevent Frederick's political isolation (Pursell, *The Winter King*, 72-80 and Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 282).

current political and military events, the second postscript with the same dark ink contains candid family information concerning a midwife Sabina recommended to her expectant sister, and her financial troubles, exacerbated by Philipp Solms' refusal to support her. Between these two blocks of information, the pale-coloured postscript on the top of the letter's last page includes confidential information that implies existing tensions surrounding the Catholic Philipp Solms:

I cannot hide from my Lady Sister that I heard astonishing news from my Lord, all of which I believe, and if all is true, it would be no wonder I would cease to have happy days. But it happened to my Lord for sure because he enslaved himself to such Mamluks, and such things were invented by his fellow believers, which in the future I won't fail to write more about to my Lady Sister with my own hands.<sup>53</sup>

The obscure language makes the message hard to understand. The sensitive intelligence that Sabina received from her husband, imperial chancellor Philipp Solms, was only hinted at as "astonishing news" without going into details. However, the word "Mamluks" gives away the subject of the confidential information. By using the term, commonly known as a reference to slave-soldiers turning against their monarch, Sabina alluded to the Catholic supporters of the Habsburg King, implying some intrigue brewing at the royal court. The Catholic convert Philipp committed himself to King Ferdinand II's service, which indicated his involvement in the plot, something that she thought could have had importance for the Protestant Batthyány family.<sup>54</sup> It is, however, equally possible that Philipp intended to communicate a covert message to Ferenc Batthyány. Details of the "wondrous news" in the postscript were possibly omitted not because the

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<sup>53</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 10 September 1619 (43606).

<sup>54</sup> The term mamluk became known throughout Europe following the Ottoman conquests of Egypt and the Levant in 1516-1517. In the seventeenth century, the term was commonly used in a derogatory sense for someone who abandoned his fate. See *Grimm Wörterbuch* Online, vol.12, col. 1820, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/mameluck](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/mameluck) (accessed 11 May 2023).

corresponding partners were both familiar with the context, but because Philipp wanted to signal the topic to his brother-in-law without fully disclosing it to his wife. The obscurity of the postscript's wording further implies that Sabina did not fully understand what she was writing. The function of the pale postscript in Sabina's letter was not about passing on real information but rather to provide instructions about a future discussion of the matter. In this way, the actual conversation was likely not between Sabina and Eva but between its actual sender and receiver, their husbands.

The question of why Sabina allowed her scribe to pen what may have been this confidential message is not known. Did she trust her scribe, who wrote letters on her behalf in 1619, more than her other helpers? Or did she make the scribe her confidant because the postscript did not give away the real message? Furthermore, it remains a conundrum as to why the letter and its two postscripts were arranged in this particular way, with the postscript containing the private message being placed in the middle of the letter and why it was written with a different ink than the rest of the letter. It comes across as if the second postscript containing private but not sensitive information had been written in darker ink at the bottom part of the page first, and the blank space on the upper part of the folio was filled in later with the concealed information. The reason for this textual arrangement is not apparent. However, it seems that Sabina deliberately placed the confidential message within the letter's main text so as to not immediately expose the sensitive information for perusal.

This covert message, penned by a scribe in the letter from September 1619, was an exception. Most often, Sabina dismissed her scribe when she wanted to send her sister confidential messages. She used ciphers or her Czech mother tongue as a code to protect

the sensitive information in her letters from prying eyes. As the second part of the chapter demonstrates, Sabina's holograph letters offered privacy and proved to be a valuable tool in the exchange of secret messages.

### *Epistolary secrecy: woman's hand and cipher*

“My Lady Sister, I am wondering, since You haven't written [me] a word, whether you have received my ciphered letter?”<sup>55</sup> The inquiry about the whereabouts of her previously sent ciphered letter was written in German in Sabina's own hand. This undated holograph letter was probably written in the late 1610s or early 1620s when political instability and war in the Habsburg lands posed a risk to letters and the flow of written information. The use of the term ‘ziffer,’ the German word for ‘cipher,’ shows Sabina's familiarity with the term as well as the method of ciphering, evinced not only by the earlier dispatched “zifer brief” but also by the encrypted mono-alphabetic text inserted between the letter's German lines.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Sabina's letter highlights the role women played in the exchange of sensitive information in early modern East-Central Europe, linking women's practice of cryptographic techniques and other forms of textual disguise to the rising notion of epistolary privacy.

In the “Age of Secrecy”, as Daniel Jütte refers to the European sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, creating and sending encrypted messages in letters was common

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<sup>55</sup> “... mein frau schfester mich wündert dos dú mihr sú gor kein wort schreibst ob dú meini zifer brief bekúmen host ...” Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 March [n.y.] (43626). Further two German holograph letters written survived in the Batthyány archive addressed to Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel, nos. 43623 (1622) and 43633 (n.d.).

<sup>56</sup> For the term *ziffer* (Geheimschrift) see *DWB Online*, vol. 31, col. 1239–1246 [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/ziffer](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/ziffer) (accessed 11 May 2023) and *Zedler's Universal Lexikon* (1731–1734), vol. 62, 676–677.

practice.<sup>57</sup> Epistolary secrecy was not restricted to a particular social group or a specific gender and was practiced by men and women from all walks of life.<sup>58</sup> Acquiring and forwarding covert intelligence has been mainly linked to the field of early modern diplomacy. In the 1600s and early 1700s, there was no single royal or princely court in Europe that did not employ secret code systems in intelligence acquisition and diplomatic maneuvering. The use of cryptography, however, went beyond diplomacy. Coded messages were exchanged between husbands and wives, lovers, and female relatives concerning legal and financial businesses or love affairs.<sup>59</sup>

Encrypted messages were also not absent within early modern noblewomen's correspondence either. Alessandra Strozzi, in the fifteenth century and Elisabeth Stuart nearly two centuries later, wrote in ciphers to perplex spies and inquisitive onlookers.<sup>60</sup> As Benedek Láng has demonstrated, Hungarian noblewomen did not shy away from writing in codes to hide private messages from unwelcome readers.<sup>61</sup> The evidence of

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<sup>57</sup> Daniel Jütte, *The Age of Secrecy, Jews, Christians and the Economy of Secrets 1400-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 178.

<sup>58</sup> Cipher was used by the aristocracy of the princely courts, diplomats and secretaries, doctors and apothecaries, soldiers, travellers, and merchants, as well as various religious groups, including Jews. Benedek Láng, "People's Secrets: Towards a Social History of Early Modern Cryptography," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 45, no. 2 (2014): 299–300; see also Alan Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89–95; for the use of shorthand and invisible ink (lemon juice), see Andrea McKenzie, "Inside the Commons Committee of Secrecy: George Treby's Shorthand and the Popish Plot", *Parliamentary History* 40, no. 2 (2021): 277–310.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Ann Crabb, *The Strozzi of Florence, Widowhood and Family. Solidarity in the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University Press, 2000), 3 and 162–163. Elisabeth Stuart used seven different cipher keys in her correspondence, writing in codes to his son Elector Palatine Charles Lewis and Sir Thomas Roe: Nadine Akkerman, *Elisabeth Stuart, Queen of Hearts: The Battle of White Mountain and the Courage of the Queen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 373–385. Jacqueline Eales, "Patriarchy, Puritanism and Politics: The Letters of Lady Brilliana Harley (1598–1643)," in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), 147–148.

<sup>61</sup> Láng, *Titkosírás a kora újkori Magyarországon* [Cryptography in Early Modern Hungary] (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2015), 154–155.

cipher in Sabina's letter further demonstrates that coding was a broad social practice of secrecy in early modern correspondence that also included women.

The primary criterion for the practice of secret writing was literacy, as only those noblewomen who knew how to write could practice coding.<sup>62</sup> Women most likely learned the techniques of ciphering and deciphering within their families. Seventeenth-century aristocratic libraries often included printed works on cryptography, such as Colorni's *Scotographia*, which was intended specifically for aristocratic readership. Sophisticated ciphering systems were used in diplomacy and required extensive knowledge of languages to comprehend the scientific treatises written primarily in Latin. These were extremely complicated and, therefore, rarely implemented in everyday practice.<sup>63</sup>

Evidence from early modern Hungary suggests that people generally used simple encrypting methods described in deciphering manuals and circulated in prints or manuscript forms in all parts of Europe.<sup>64</sup> Most of the Hungarian nobility, like the Rákóczys, Zrínyis, or the Illésházys, used their own ciphering system, which they often shared with their immediate family and relatives.<sup>65</sup> The reference to the "ziffer brief" and the presence of the ciphered lines in Sabina's letter also implies that the sisters used the same coding method and key needed for deciphering encrypted lines.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 307.

<sup>63</sup> Láng, "People's secrets," 294.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 294–296 and Láng, *Titkosírás*, 103.

<sup>65</sup> For example, Péter Pázmány, archbishop of Hungary, who supported the Catholicization of Eva Poppel's son Ádám Batthyány, used his own cipher alphabet in his Italian correspondence: Péter Tusor, "Pázmány bíboros olasz rejtjelkulcsa: C. H. Motmann 'Residente d'Ungheria': A római magyar agenzia történetéhez" (Cardinal Pázmány's Italian Codebook: C. H. Motmann 'Residente d'Ungheria,' On the History of the Hungarian Agenzia in Rome), *Hadtörténelmi közlemények* 116 (2003): 535–581, quoted in Láng, "People's Secrets," 299.

<sup>66</sup> Daybell, *Material Letter*, 150.

Sabina’s undated letter, sent from Vienna, quite cleverly concealed ciphred information. This two-page long letter is one of the two letters that Sabina composed in German and wrote in her own hand, using a simplified form of Czech cursive. The physical presentation of the holograph letter as a single long line running uninterruptedly down the page helps to conceal the ciphred text placed in the middle of the page. (Figure 40)<sup>67</sup>

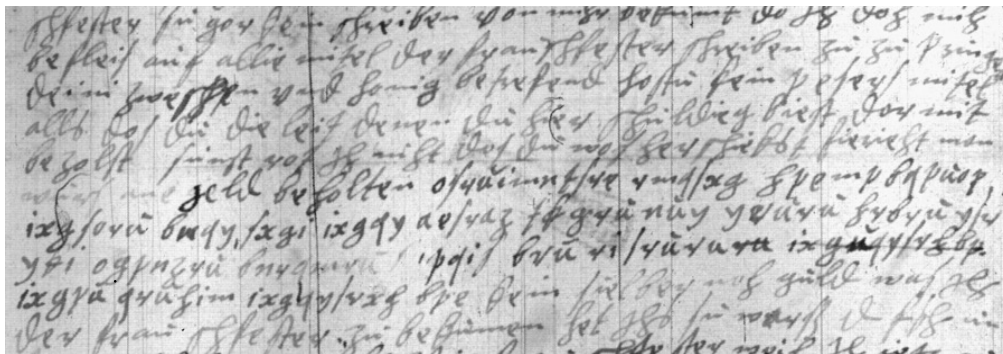


Figure 40: Ciphred lines in Sabina’s letter to Eva Poppel (n.d.)

The cryptogram consists of four lines. It is likely written with the technique of mono-alphabetic transposition, in which the letters of the plaintext (the message from which the code text was created) were rearranged according to fixed coding rules but without changing the identity of the individual letters (See Appendix C).<sup>68</sup> This simple ciphred method was commonly used in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but continued to be employed in letters of the Hungarian nobility a century later.<sup>69</sup> Letter

<sup>67</sup> “... ofr úimnt[ra rmg]xg h pepbqúop | ixg[orci birgy, jxgi ixggy aesraz tk g rú núy yrúú | hrbrú v[rl]yki ogpnzrú bhrqrurú[ ipqof brú ri] rú rartt ixgúgysrhbp | ixgya qrúhim ixggy[rxh bpe...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, (n.p.), (n.d.) (43626).

<sup>68</sup> David E. Newton, *Encyclopedia of Cryptology* (Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1997), 216; Dejanirah Couto, “Spying in the Ottoman Empire,” in *Correspondence and Cultural Exchange*, 284.

<sup>69</sup> David Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing* (New York, McMillan, 1967), 106–114 and Láng, “People’s Secrets,” 299 ff. In early modern Hungary, the personal network of famous politicians, like Miklós Zrinyi or the Transylvanian Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II, preferred to use more sophisticated systems of substitution techniques, such as homophonic alphabets, number combinations, and symbols. Many

writers also tended to employ the same keys for long periods, giving enough time for outsiders to break the code.<sup>70</sup> The use of easily breakable ciphers in early modern letters thus suggests that letter writers were less concerned about official interception and more about keeping messengers out of the communication.<sup>71</sup> The discrepancy between the complicated cipher systems discussed in learned theoretical treaties and the rather simple ciphering techniques employed in daily corresponding practice highlights that early modern secrecy was as much about the participants involved in exchanging confidential messages as about the exchanged message itself.

What information the Countess of Solms mediated through the ciphered lines to the Countess of Batthyány is not known. In the absence of a key, one would have to resort to a lengthy process of breaking text encrypted in even the relatively simple mono-alphabetic code. Inconsistent spelling and grammar, individual writing styles or errors further complicate the decoding process, and having only a few words or lines in cipher does not provide enough material to solve the puzzle. In this way, even the simplest system can be a strong guard for the messages entrusted to them.<sup>72</sup>

Unlocking the language in which the ciphered lines were written poses further problems. While the main text of the letter was written in German, the encrypted lines might have been written in Czech. This would explain the use of Czech characters in the encrypted message. On the other hand, the use of German in coding may have been more common because Eva's command of German was better than of Czech, making this

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letters of local interest, however, contain a simple form of mono-alphabetic transposition that was easy to use (Láng, *Titkosírás*, 108).

<sup>70</sup> Daybell, *Material Letter*, 26.

<sup>71</sup> Láng, "Peoples Secrets," 306 and Akkerman, *The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart*, vol. 2., 1055. Láng also argues that in the early modern period people often employed ciphers not to conceal secrets but "to protect themselves and others" (Láng, *Titkosírás*, 139).

<sup>72</sup> Láng, *Titkosírás*, 27–28.

technique more effortless. Since Sabina tended to mix these two languages in her correspondence, it is possible that the ciphered lines in this German-written letter were coded in Sabina's mother tongue, which provided an extra layer of protection. On the other hand, the ciphering could have just as easily been written in German, the language Eva Poppel preferred to use in her correspondence.

The ciphered text in Sabina's letter will likely remain unsolved. The key that many letter writers in this period simply sent along with the letter is not provided here; the text is also short, giving little material to decode this simple monoalphabetic code.<sup>73</sup> Based on the context of the letter, however, we might speculate about what was hidden in the ciphered lines.<sup>74</sup> As usual, Sabina writes about various topics in random order. She begins reporting about her captured messenger at the Hungarian border. Then she expresses her concern about Eva Poppel's health, asks about the whereabouts of a missing letter, complains about her disastrous finances, and provides some political intelligence. The ciphered text in the middle of the letter's body might be linked to the coded letter that she had sent earlier. But it could just as easily be connected to her concerns about the sister's "mutual friends,"<sup>75</sup> a reference that immediately precedes the inquiry about the fate of the previously sent ciphered letter. The letter's closing lines refer to the Protestant nobility convening in Prague—among them the sisters' relative Herr Wilhelm—which could link the ciphered text to the increasingly tense political

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<sup>73</sup> Láng, *Titkosírás*, 27–28.

<sup>74</sup> See *Eva Poppel's letter to Ádám Batthyány*, Dobra, November 28, 1632 (37993) published in Kincses, *Poppel Éva levelezése*, 136–141.

<sup>75</sup> "... Ih leb in laüter fürieht súrg vnd angst fer zehr mich sú gor doß ih mih an merken allein úm eúk vnd vnseri gútie freint ...” [*I live full of fear, concern, and anguish for You and our good friends which consumes me [entirely]*]. Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43626).

atmosphere in the Habsburg monarchy and thereby imply the political nature of the coded information.<sup>76</sup>

The encrypted message, however, does not necessarily have to do with political intelligence or confessional conflicts. Since secrecy in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century letters was not confined to the political sphere only, the ciphered lines in Sabina's letters could also relate to money, valued goods, or a legal debate. This is later suggested by the letter's context surrounding the encrypted text, where Sabina urges Eva to pay her back with honey and wine, informs her about the increased prices of gold and silver, and asks for money and financial support.<sup>77</sup>

In a similar vein, the coded message could also be linked to the legal declaration or resolution that Eva Poppel demanded from her sister that was referred to in the second paragraph above the ciphered lines:

My Lady Sister, I am wondering that You don't write me any word, whether you have received my ciphered letter? Tell your Lord that my court judge was here that the Lady sister did not receive any letter [resolution] from me, although I tried my best to deliver the letter [i.e., the resolution] to the Lady Sister.<sup>78</sup>

The letter that Eva Poppel demanded from Sabina, but had not received, was a legal document likely linked to the ongoing negotiations over their maternal inheritance in western Hungary. Since the Batthyánys' goal was to incorporate the Poppel inheritance

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<sup>76</sup> Vilém Poppel of Lobkovic (1575–1647), royal councillor and courtly justice. He was the only member of the Poppel Lobkowitz family besides Ladislaus Poppel Lobkowitz who became Protestant. Because of his involvement in the Bohemian Revolt, he was sentenced to death but later received amnesty. See Sanislav Kasík, Petr Mašek, and Marie Mžyková, eds., *Lobkowitzové: dějiny a genealogie rodu*. [Lobkowitz: History and Genealogy of the Family] (České Budějovice: Veduta, 2002), 30 and 93–94.

<sup>77</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43626).

<sup>78</sup> "... mein frau schfester mich wúndert dos die mihr sei gor kein wort schreibst ob dú meini zifer brief bekúmen host sog deim herren mein húfriehter wort noh allie weil aúfs h resúlúzion was niht wies zúgeht das die frau schfester sú gor kein shreiben von mihr bekúmt do ih doh mih befleis aúf allie mitel der frau shfester shreiben zú zú pringen ..." *Ibid.*

into their family estates, Eva wanted a “resolution” in which Sabina would withdraw her claim to her Hungarian shares.<sup>79</sup> The content of the “zifer brief” could therefore be linked to Eva Poppel’s demand and, thus, connected to the family dispute over the inheritance.

The above-discussed possibilities point to the diverse ways in which people in the seventeenth century conveyed confidential information in letters. In the seventeenth century, coded messages were used by various social groups for a variety of reasons and appeared in various contexts unrelated to diplomatic or political intelligence.<sup>80</sup> The reference to the ciphered letter and the coded lines in Sabina’s undated letter evinces not what was hidden behind the ciphers, which cannot be solved, but rather how seventeenth-century close-kin elite women on both sides of the Austrian and Hungarian border participated in mechanisms of keeping written information secure by using simple encrypting methods in their letters.

### *Language as code*

Because writing a ciphered message was time-consuming for the letter writer and ciphers were often hard for the receiver to understand, early modern letter writers also utilized lesser-known languages if they wanted to protect private information in their letters from being exposed to unwanted readers. In her book on secret writing in mid-seventeenth-century English Royalist literature, Lois Potter draws a link between linguistic knowledge and secrecy, noting that “every language looks like a secret code to

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<sup>79</sup> For more details about the legal negotiations between the Poppel Lobkowitz siblings over their Hungarian inheritance, see the introduction and Chapter 1.

<sup>80</sup> Láng, “People’s Secrets,” 291.

the person who does not know its rule.”<sup>81</sup> Potter refers to the general desire in the early seventeenth century to create a universal language. Her observation is also relevant for vernacular tongues, which could not be understood outside of their own geographical and cultural context and thus were well suited for transferring confidential information. Contemporaries in multilingual Central Europe were undoubtedly aware of the possibility of disguising information in a language spoken by a relatively small population. In his Latin correspondence with his superior, an eighteenth-century Jesuit, for example, interjected remarks in his Hungarian mother tongue to conceal his personal, and less flattering, comments on the missionary work in Peru.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, the bilingual German and Czech written correspondence of Sabina Solms attests to how an early seventeenth-century woman used her mother tongue to guard private information enclosed in her letters. Although Sabina could write well in both languages, she often composed her letters in Czech when she wanted to commit confidential information to paper, as I discuss below.<sup>83</sup> While these private messages could easily have been understood by anybody who could read Czech, disclosure of their content only posed a real danger within Czech-speaking territories. Outside of the Bohemian lands, however, Czech was spoken only among the nobility and the civic elite of towns in the border region between Austria, South Bohemia, and Moravia.<sup>84</sup> Further

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<sup>81</sup> Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42.

<sup>82</sup> See János Zakarjás' case in Láng, *Titkosírás*, 170–171.

<sup>83</sup> Sabina's biography and her letters suggest that she learned to speak and write in Czech and German, and that she likely also understood and spoke some Hungarian.

<sup>84</sup> Václav Bužek, “Zum tschechisch-deutschen Billinguismus in den böhmischen und österreichischen Ländern in der frühen Neuzeit,” *Österreichische Osthefte*, 35 (1993): 579 and Beatrix Bastl, “Der Adel in den Österreichischen Erblanden. Selbstverständnis–Selbstdarstellung–Selbstbehauptung,” *zeitenblicke* 4, no. 2 (2005), <https://www.zeitenblicke.de/2005/2/Bastl> (accessed 6 July 2023).

away from this geographical region, speaking or even understanding Czech was an exception.

Writing letters in a lesser-known language to guard confidential messages proved particularly advantageous during times of war. The western part of Royal Hungary in the 1610s and early 1620s was a chaotic and unstable region, where travellers were frequently attacked by marauding Hungarian and Ottoman soldiers who robbed them of belongings, including the letters they carried.<sup>85</sup> However, the risk that robbers or spies would read confiscated letters was probably less of a concern for letter writers. What probably mattered more for letter writers was to exclude undesired third parties—scribes, messengers and the like—in their immediate surroundings from private written communication.<sup>86</sup> In the final section of this chapter, a few letters will exemplify how Sabina used her mother tongue to shield confidential messages regarding both family and political affairs that might have been turned against the writer, its recipient, and their families or otherwise become an embarrassment if intercepted and read.

The bilingual letter written at the end of 1614 (see Appendix M) presents an example of the utility of corresponding in Czech when family feuds required caution in communication.<sup>87</sup> The first part of the letter dealt with a monetary transaction between Maria Magdalena and Eva, mediated by Sabina. The public nature of the business between the sisters required a courteous presentation of the matter, so Sabina wrote it in German with scribal help. Meanwhile, the postscript written in Czech from Sabina's own

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<sup>85</sup> Tobias P. Graf, "Knowing the 'Hereditary Enemy': Austrian-Habsburg Intelligence on the Ottoman Empire in the Late Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Intelligence History* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/16161262.2022.2031522> (accessed 6 July 2023).

<sup>86</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 87-90.

<sup>87</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 2 December 1614 (43583).

hand addressed a confidential matter concerning the dangers that the Solms couple faced while travelling through Western Hungary.

In the Czech postscript, Sabina presented a murder story. She described how the marauding Hungarian cavalry (hussars) harassed the village priest of Jennersdorf and threatened the life of the Solms couple.<sup>88</sup> As the report goes, the hussars attacked Sabina's peasants, taking away their horses and leaving one of them dead. Rumours spread that they were spending the day drinking in a tavern and asking people when and in which direction the Solms couple were expected to travel. According to Sabina, the hitmen were hired by a local landlord, Széchy, who planned to take revenge on the Solms and "give [them] a bullet."<sup>89</sup>

Decades-long animosity between the Széchy family and the Poppel Lobkowitzs may have triggered this violence. Tamás Széchy, a relative of the Poppel sisters, had disputed the sisters' rights over their Western-Hungarian inheritance in Szentgotthárd and Dobra.<sup>90</sup> Why Széchy wished for the death of the Solms couple is not apparent, but his malicious intentions probably had to do with his not having kept the earlier agreement between the Poppel and Széchy families.<sup>91</sup> Why Sabina chose to share her chilling experiences with her sister in Czech is also a matter of conjecture. She might have wanted to make her aware of Tamás Széchy's alleged murder plot. Here, the sister's knowledge of Czech proved to be a useful safeguard of the confidential message. Not

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<sup>88</sup> The village of Jennersdorf (Gyanafalva in Hungarian) belonged to the estate of Szentgotthárd. It is located today in Burgenland, Austria. See András Vályi, *Magyar országnak leírása* [The Description of Hungary], vols. 1–3 (Buda, 1799), vol. 2, 69.

<sup>89</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 2 December 1614 (43583).

<sup>90</sup> Tamás Széchy of Rimaszécs (d.1618) was a maternal relative of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' grandmother Margit Széchy and claimed rights to the Poppel Lobkowitz inheritances in Western Hungary. Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 133.

<sup>91</sup> For a summary of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' inheritance negotiations, see Chapter 1.

spoken or understood on the roads between their residences in Szentgotthárd and Rohonc (Rechnitz), the Czech language ensured that the letter's content was illegible or at least difficult to access in case it landed in the hand of Széchy's men.

A second letter from 1611 underlines the practicality of using a lesser-known language to conceal political intelligence, as tensions between the Catholic Habsburg Court and the Protestant Hungarian elite cautioned Sabina Solms to communicate confidential messages to Eva Poppel in Czech. Like the previous example, the three-page letter dispatched to Eva Poppel from Vienna at the end of 1611 was written by two hands in two languages.<sup>92</sup> The first page and the postscript on the last page were written in German by the scribe, while a text bearing Sabina's hand in Czech is inserted between the main body text and the postscript on the second page of the letter (Figure 41).

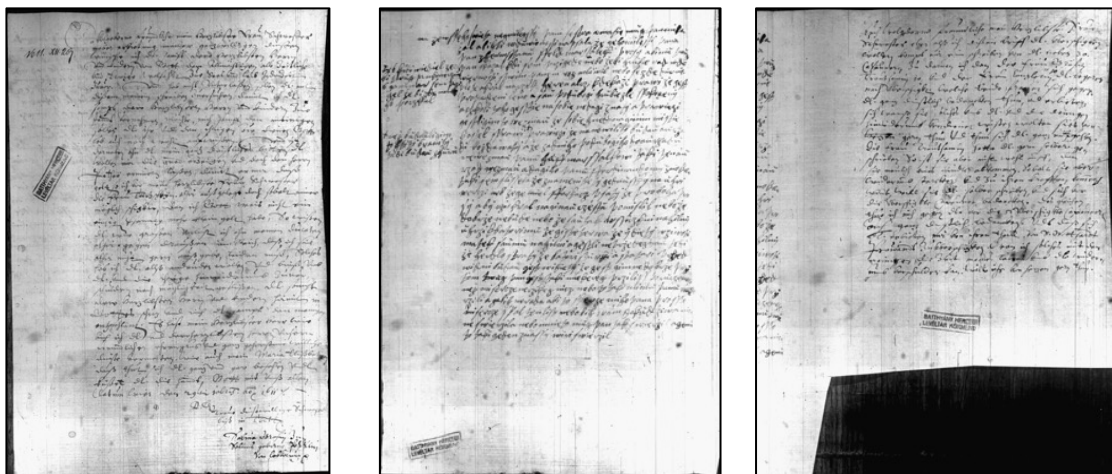


Figure 41: Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611

<sup>92</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571).

The arrangement of the altering scribal and holograph script on the letter's pages indicated the boundaries between public information and a private message to the letter's reader. Thereby, the letter's receiver Eva Poppel knew, even before she began reading, which part of the letter she could share with others and which part she had to keep for herself.

Here, the main text and the postscripts are arranged in a similar manner as in the letter from 1619, a holograph postscript with confidential information being inserted between the scribal texts addressing family business. Accordingly, the main part of the letter deals with the siblings' conflict over money, as Eva Poppel withheld funds that Sabina received from Maria Magdalena in exchange for her shares in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' inheritance in Bohemia. At the same time, the German postscript on the last page acknowledged the arrival of Eva Poppel's letter and thanked her for the generous gift of fifty chickens. In the main letter as well as in the postscript, the simple scribal hand with its nicely rounded letters highlighted the importance of the family matter. The scribal handwriting lent a particular public flavour to Sabina's letter as a scribe was involved in its production, while it was also free to be read aloud by the letter's receiver or her scribe.<sup>93</sup>

The holograph Czech postscript placed between the main letter and the German postscript, on the other hand, was meant only for the Batthyány countess. It was written "in confidence," upon the request of Philipp Solms:

My dearest in the whole world Lady Sister, and Mother, My Lord had asked me to write to you in confidence that his Grace, the Lord of Hernistan [sic], Field Marshall begs your Lord to give him a message about his arrival. For if he knew

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<sup>93</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was not uncommon for letters to be read aloud both with and without the sender's permission. Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 106–107.

when your master would arrive here, latest on the 6th of January, he would wait for him here. For he would greatly appreciate speaking to your master in confidence  
...<sup>94</sup>

The Field Marshal's invitation to a private meeting, which Sabina relayed through Eva Poppel to Count Batthyány, happened amid the growing political tensions in the Habsburg lands.<sup>95</sup> The discontent of the Protestant nobility in Bohemia over the religious intolerance of the Habsburgs is discussed in the postscript as follows:

... strange things are happening here, and the king cries *heren aloc* where the righteous ones preach that there is linen to be spun and where the Utraquists<sup>96</sup> are grievously unhappy though they are not letting anyone see it yet. They say that if the church is taken away from them, they will build another one in a different spot, and if they are prevented from doing this, they will revolt. They say that if [the king] will grant new offices but will not accept any of the Utraquists, they will take away the office from the Court Marshall<sup>97</sup> and will grant it to Lord Ferdinand from Nekune [sic]<sup>98</sup>

The Czech postscript gives voice to the political discord over the emperor's intent to withdraw The *Letter of Majesty* in 1609, which secured religious freedom for the Bohemian Protestants. To prevent expected unrest, Rudolf II called for the troops of his nephew Leopold, Archduke of Upper Austria, into Bohemia.<sup>99</sup> Although Leopold's military intervention failed, and Rudolf's abdication the next year passed the Bohemian crown to his nephew Matthias II, the Protestant estates remained "grievously unhappy".

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<sup>94</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571).

<sup>95</sup> The Field Marshal is probably identical with Hans Mollard, President of the Court War Council (Hofkriegsrat) (1610–1619).

<sup>96</sup> Sabina uses "Utraquists" to refer to the Bohemian Protestant nobility. Most of the Utraquists in the sixteenth century adopted Luther's teachings and followed the Augsburg Confession; see R.J.W. Evans, *Rudolf and his World, A Study in Intellectual History, 1576–1612* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 30.

<sup>97</sup> Jaroslav Bořilo von Martinic, Hofmarschall (chief steward) (1609–1618). He was one of the three officials who became victims of defenestration at the Hadschrin in 1618. Zdenek Hojda, "Martinitz, Jaroslav Bořita Graf von," in NDB, vol. 16, 302–303,

<sup>98</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571).

<sup>99</sup> Robert Bireley, *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578–1637* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 67–69.

As Sabina explicated, people feared that Protestant churches would be closed and that the Catholic nobility would be elected to the high royal offices of Bohemia.<sup>100</sup>

Sabina also indicated in her confidential message that the politically tense situation in Bohemia was not the only problem the Habsburgs faced. The position of the leading Hungarian elite, in particular the standing of Ferenc Batthyány and the volatile foreign politics of the capricious Gábor Báthory, Prince of Transylvania, made the central government uneasy.<sup>101</sup> Báthory, who stood behind crown prince Matthias in the conflict with his brother Rudolf in 1608, was seeking favour and support from the Ottomans.<sup>102</sup> The insertion within the letter written in Czech leaves no doubt that Báthory's political flirtation with Istanbul was well known in Vienna, bringing back lively memories of the terror caused by the sight of the Turks under the walls of Vienna some eighty-five years earlier.<sup>103</sup>

The invitation for a meeting concealed in a women's letter must be viewed in the context of these political events. From the beginning, the Protestant Batthyány's relationship with the Habsburg court was complicated. In the early 1600s, the Hungarian Count joined the camp of Rudolf II. In 1608, however, he switched to Rudolf's rival Matthias and supported his election as king of Hungary, who bestowed on him the high-

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<sup>100</sup> One of the Poppel Sisters' relative, Zdeněk Lobkovic, Chancellor of Bohemia was one of the most fervent Habsburg supporters and convinced advocates of the Counter-Reformation. He refused to sign the Letter of Majesty, which granted religious freedom to the Bohemian estates. J.V. Polišenský, *The Thirty Years' Wars*, transl. Robert Evans (London: B.T. Batsford, 1971), 75–77. [Originally published Czech in Prague, 1970.]. Evans, *Rudolf II and his World*, 286–288.

<sup>101</sup> The letters postscript addressed the difficult situation of the Bohemian Utraquists in general and the personal political standing of Sabina's brother-in-law, Ferenc Batthyány.

<sup>102</sup> László Nagy, *A rossz hírű Báthoriak [The Ill-Famed Báthorys]* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1984), 131. *More on Báthory and the conflict between Rudolf and Matthias see* Teréz, Oborni, *Erdély fejedelmei [The Princes of Transylvania]* (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2002); Václav Búzek, ed., *Ein Bruderzwist im Hause Habsburg (1608–1611)* (České Budějovice: Vyd. Jihočeská univerzita, 2010).

<sup>103</sup> About the Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1529 see Walter Hummelberger, *Wiens erste Belagerung durch die Türken 1529* (Militärhistorische Schriftenreihe, Heft 33) (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1976).

ranking Hungarian office of Oberstallmeister.<sup>104</sup> The Hungarian lord's loyalty to the Habsburg king was questioned, as Philipp Solms' message, mediated through his wife Sabina, suggests. According to the Count, members of the central government assumed that Batthyány was one of "those frantic ones," alluding to the Hungarian rebels who maintained connections to the capricious Báthory.<sup>105</sup>

The Field Marshall's request for a meeting with the Protestant Batthyány could also be related to the new political directions that Cardinal Melchior Klesl took in 1611. A close adviser of Matthias and the leader of the Privy Council, Klesl turned away from the guidelines of Rome to support the Catholic party. Instead, the Cardinal was inclined to accommodate the Bohemian and Austrian Protestant estates because losing their support would leave the eastern part of the monarchy defenceless against a renewed Ottoman attack.<sup>106</sup> To win the political and military support of Ferenc Batthyány, the leader of the military defence on the eastern borders of the Habsburg lands in western Hungary became, thereby, a small, but important component of Klesl's politics that inclined to give "concessions on religion for the greater good of the state, [...] and ultimately for religion itself."<sup>107</sup>

As Sabina's letter demonstrates, women's letters could serve as an excellent means of communication between men involved in high politics. The Field Marshall's request for a secret meeting with the Protestant Batthyány reached the Hungarian magnate through the mediation of women. Philip Solms was assigned the task of arranging a meeting with Batthyány in Vienna. But instead of writing directly to his

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<sup>104</sup> Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 63.

<sup>105</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 December 1611 (43571).

<sup>106</sup> Bireley, *Ferdinand II*, 70–71.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

brother-in-law, a move which might pose a potential risk to the writers and the letters themselves, Solms entrusted his wife with passing on the message to her sister, Eva Poppel. It was not the only time that Philipp communicated with Ferenc Batthyány through his wife. A couple of months later, Count Solms wrote to his brother-in-law that he would be away from Vienna adding that further details would be discussed in his wife's letter sent to the Countess of Batthyány.<sup>108</sup> Philip Solms's communication with Ferenc Batthyány through their wives' letters illustrates how women's letters functioned as practical vehicles for exchanging covert messages because their correspondence was considered politically irrelevant and thus neglected by authorities.

Finally, a holograph letter sent from Vienna in early September 1621 presents an example of the usefulness of uncommon vernacular in the eastern part of the Habsburg monarchy during the troubled years of the early 1620s.<sup>109</sup> In this period, an extended network of the Habsburg and Ottoman intelligence traversed the region, while troops of the local nobility, the light cavalry of Bethlen, Imperial soldiers and the occasional intrusion of Ottoman auxiliary troops caused violence and insecurity in Western Hungary.<sup>110</sup> Since one could never be sure who might get hold of the letter bags of

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<sup>108</sup> This was not the last time that Philip Solms arranged a private meeting with his brother-in-law: in one of Philip's two surviving letters written in his own hand in 1620, he invited Ferenc Batthyány to a personal meeting at Gleisdorf in Styria to relay to the Hungarian count what "His Majesty commanded" to him. The message from King Ferdinand II to the Hungarian Count was likely related to the Habsburg court's efforts to win over Batthyány against the Transylvanian Prince and elected king Gábor Bethlen. This sensitive political matter prompted the Count of Solms personally pick up the quill and write to Ferenc Batthyány without the involvement of a scribe. See Philipp Solms' letters to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 31 July 1615 (43528) and Hütenbach, 11 September 1620 (43535).

<sup>109</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 9 September 1621 (43616).

<sup>110</sup> Gábor Ágoston, "Információszerzés és kémkedés az Oszmán Birodalomban a XV-XVII. században" [Intelligence Acquisition and Spying in the Ottoman Empire between the Fifteen and Seventeenth Centuries], in *Európa és az Oszmán hódítás* (Budapest: HM Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, 2014), 103.

travellers, a letter written in Czech would deny easy access to its confidential information if it happened to be opened without authorization.

This letter is one of the few in Sabina's correspondence that was written entirely in Czech.<sup>111</sup> It discusses two subject matters: the military situation in Western Hungary in the late summer of 1621 and the dire financial state of the Solms Countess.<sup>112</sup> Sabina started her letter forwarding a rumour that the Habsburg court intercepted Eva Poppel's letter addressed to her.<sup>113</sup>

It is said here [Vienna] that at the court they have received a letter, which you wrote to me, in which you warned me that we should not leave this place since Schtraff [sic] saw 10,000 Turks. I beg you, if it is true what you have written to me, and what people also say that you have already hosted [some] Turks; I am greatly afraid, my Lady Evicko, that the heathen [ie. Turks] will degrade you and all of us.<sup>114</sup>

The letter of the Batthyány countess carried confidential information closely linked to the Batthyánys'—or, more precisely, Eva Poppel's—dealings with the neighbouring Ottomans occupying the region west of the Danube River.<sup>115</sup> To illuminate the context of Sabina's remarks, it is necessary to briefly divert to the Batthyánys' political position in the first years of the Thirty Year's War.

In 1620, Ferenc Batthyány turned his back on the Habsburg court and joined the political camp of Protestant Gábor Bethlen, Prince of Transylvania Bethlen (1613–1629).<sup>116</sup> Material gain rather than confessional solidarity or political conviction seems to

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<sup>111</sup> Czech holograph letters in Sabina Solms' correspondence, nos. 43641, 44443, 52873–75.

<sup>112</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 9 September 1621, (43616).

<sup>113</sup> Exact place is not given in the address, but other letters written before and after of September 1621 suggest that Eva Poppel was residing in Némétújvár (Güssing) at that time.

<sup>114</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 9 September 1621 (43616).

<sup>115</sup> Nagy László, "Adalékok Bethlen Gábor hadseregének dunántúli hadműveleteihez (1619-1621)," [Contribution to the Transdanubian Campaign of Gábor Bethlen's Army] *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények* 7, no. 2 (1960): 100–101.

<sup>116</sup> In 1619, Bethlen entered the Thirty Years' War on the Protestant side and led two campaigns in Upper Hungary and Moravia against the Habsburgs. He wanted to unite the Transylvanian Principality and Royal

have motivated Batthyány's decision to back Bethlen's election as King of Hungary. In exchange for his political and military support, the Transylvanian Prince donated large areas of land owned by the Catholic Church to Ferenc Batthyány, including the monastery of Szentgotthárd. In retaliation for Batthyány's defection, imperial troops led by General Collalto plundered his estates and held Rohonc (Rechnitz), the family's main residence, under siege. Against these strains, Ferenc Batthyány's loyalty to Bethlen quickly faded and, a year later, he returned to Habsburg service.<sup>117</sup>

The words Sabina received concerning her sister's intercepted letter indirectly evince the Viennese court's unease over Ferenc Batthyány's loyalty to the Habsburgs. That Eva Poppel maintained friendly connections with the Ottomans who provided military aid for Bethlen's political aspirations to become King of Hungary, showed her active involvement in politics and in the shifting political commitment of her husband. Sabina did not mention Ferenc Batthyány by name. Instead, she wrote in Czech, reminding Eva that a collaboration with the Ottomans would lead to Habsburg reprisals and harm the Batthyány family both politically and personally. This, in turn, implied that Eva Poppel influenced her husband's political decision to support the Transylvanian Prince.<sup>118</sup>

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Hungary under his rule. In 1620 the Hungarian diet in Besztercebánya (today Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) elected Bethlen king of Hungary but he renounced his royal title in the treaty of Nikolsburg signed at the end of 1621. Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 72–75.

<sup>118</sup> Of Ferenc Batthyány and Eva Poppel, the latter seemed to be the more adamant supporter of the Hungarian Protestant cause. During the summer of 1620, Bethlen's political ally, the Lutheran magnate Imre Thurzó, secretly contacted Eva Poppel to win over Batthyány, who at the time was negotiating with Wallenstein in Vienna. When Bethlen began his military campaign in Western Hungary in late September of 1620, Thurzó turned again to Eva Poppel, asking her to persuade her husband of Bethlen's support (Letter of Imre Thurzó to Eva Poppel, Sopron, 4 October 1620, in Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja*, 28–29 and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 72).

While the sensitive political intelligence received from the Habsburg court occupied the first half of Sabina's Czech letter, the second part is concerned with a private matter of smuggling valuables into Vienna that needed to be concealed and protected by using the lesser-known language. Eva Poppel was blamed for not being willing to ask her noble neighbours Lord Sternberg and Lady Königsberg to bring these unspecified "things" to Vienna. "It would have been so easy for you to send them since they also brought things hidden in wheat, which they would have been able to hide in the flour barrels like they did when they had sent me things earlier."<sup>119</sup> This complaint highlights the creativity of the seventeenth-century nobility in protecting and concealing valuables from raiding soldiers; simultaneously, Sabina committed confidential political intelligence and information about hiding places of valuables without hesitation to paper because she was confident that the language she used would protect the letter's content from curious readers.

### ***Conclusion***

The case studies above, based on the Viennese noblewoman Sabina Solms's correspondence, show how a woman belonging to the lesser Viennese elite contributed to the written transmission of public news and confidential information in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg monarchy. These case studies shed new light on the social dimensions of early modern public and private news distribution in women's written communication. They also demonstrate how public and secret information was

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<sup>119</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 9 September 1621 (43616), transl. by Eva Bullard.

committed to paper differently, as revealed by different kinds of script, textual arrangement, and language usage.

The news reports included in the letters reveal Sabina's increased interest in current affairs. These letters displayed how a Catholic field marshal's Protestant wife perceived the imperial elections and military conflicts between the Protestant and Habsburg forces in the year 1619 and beyond. Sabina Solms was informed about events in the political arena and on the battlefield from diverse sources, ranging from weekly newsletters to reports from eyewitnesses, while she also relied on the accounts of respectable individuals and hearsay. Therefore, her letters illustrated how at the dawn of the Thirty Years' War political information trickled through personal channels of family networks with the assistance of women.

While the interest in contemporary news is palpable in Sabina Solms' correspondence, so is her inclination towards secrecy. Her letters also demonstrate how a second-rank noblewoman was involved in the exchange of intelligence within the highest political elite. Sabina's confidential messages reflected the tense political atmosphere of the 1610s and 1620s. Like many contemporary noblewomen, Sabina Solms participated in political diplomacy by facilitating secret connections and forwarding confidential messages between members of the Viennese political elite and the Hungarian Count Ferenc Batthyány in her correspondence with Eva Poppel.<sup>120</sup> These examples demonstrate close collaboration between men and women while they also show the aptness of women's letters in disguising covert communication between men, thereby

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<sup>120</sup> For noblewomen's role in politics and patron-client relationships at the power centers of royal and princely courts. See Olwen Hufton, "Reflections on the Role of Women in Early Modern Court," *The Court Historian* 5, no. 1 (2000): 1–13, and Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers of Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002).

serving their political ends. Since women's letters generally remained outside of public interest, messages written in an illegible female hand obscured by phonetic writing and written in a lesser-known language were less exposed to the scrutiny of the authorities and, in that way, became a convenient tool for husbands to exchange private messages.<sup>121</sup>

The case studies also reinforce Láng's observation that in the seventeenth century, the notion of secrecy was different from ours and did not relate to only politics and diplomacy. Similarly, it was primarily the immediate surroundings of the corresponding partners, scribes, and messengers, and not necessarily confiscation and the scrutiny of government agents, that posed the real risk of compromising the epistolary privacy of women's letters in the seventeenth century.

This close reading of Sabina Solms' letters has revealed how the Solms Countess ensured that covert messages remained hidden within the letter's pages. She shielded political intelligence and mundane concerns from immediate access by a specific arrangement of various letter parts, using cipher and writing with her own hand in the lesser-known Czech language. Much of the confidential information Sabina trusted to paper also remained elusive because of the poor writing style distinctive to early modern women. Unlike in letters written by men with rhetorical training, the function of such messages in women's letters was not so much about providing detailed explanations but about maintaining the flow of communication and signalling that the actual message might arrive orally.

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<sup>121</sup> One example of the difficulty contemporaries faced in reading a woman's hand is evident in Eva Claus's letter addressed to Ferenc Batthyány. The Viennese merchant woman had a highly obscured and phonetic handwriting style that Ferenc struggled to decipher. This likely prompted him to seek assistance from his secretary to transcribe the letter, with the scribe's transcription being attached to the original letter. See Eva Claus' letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 5 October 1624 (7945).

Whether writing in an unfamiliar language, in cipher, or with the women's own illegible hand, the content eventually sealed the fate of many early modern letters. Letters with sensitive information were destroyed in order not to be regarded as evidence of betrayal and compromise the potential participants of the information exchange. Early modern letter writers' anxiety over exposing confidential information to unwanted eyes is made explicit in Sabina Solm's request to Eva Poppel to burn her letter at the end of its postscript from 1611. These requests were not always honoured, as the survival in the Batthyány family archive of some Sabina's letters with public news reports and secretive messages attests. The few such sources that survive contribute to our understanding of noble women's active participation in the information market of early seventeenth-century Central Europe. As this chapter has demonstrated, elite women of secondary ranks mostly operated behind the scenes on the early modern political stage; the next chapter, however, will examine how domestic medicine was an area where such women were clearly visible, confidently displaying their authority.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Women's 'Medical Talk': Healing Knowledge and Practice of Medicine

Here I am sending to the Lady sister two recipes attached; I ask You with the amiable request that You prepare such water for me in Your distillery.<sup>1</sup>

In late June 1615, Eva Poppel Countess of Batthyány received a German-written letter from her sister, Sabina Countess of Solms, with two recipes and a request to prepare medicine from them. Carefully copied in a neat secretary hand, the instructions on how to make “Ein wasser fürn stein und sandl” (water for stone and sand), referring to the disorder modern medicinal terminology would call renal gravel, and “Erdtber waßer für die Blattern und and[er]e hitzige kranckheiten” (Strawberry water for the pox and other feverish maladies) were attached to the letter on a separate folio (See Appendix N).<sup>2</sup> Both recipes relied on the efficacy of the strawberry plant, which was known by early modern herbalists and medicinal books for its internal cleansing and fever-reducing properties.<sup>3</sup> As the Countess of Solms explained, by preparing and sending the requested remedies, the Batthyány countess would demonstrate her benevolence, obliging her to

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<sup>1</sup> “... hirmit vbershiecke ich der fraw, schwester zweÿ recept, wie hernach folggt, mit freündlicher bitt die fraw schwester wolle mir solche wasser brennen lassen ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, 22 June 1615 (43589).

<sup>2</sup> In early modern medical texts, the German word ‘stein’ (stone) can refer to all kinds of ailments caused by solid forms of material obstructing the urinary tract or the gallbladder. *DWB Online*, vol. 18, col. 2015, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=S42787](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=S42787) (accessed 2 July 2023). Similarly, the word ‘Sand’ (sand) referred to sand-like sediment in the urine (calculus renum), *DWB Online*, vol. 14, col. 1760, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=S01598](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=S01598) (accessed 16 June 2023). The word ‘blattern’ or, ‘kindsblattern’ stood for the disease known as variolae: *DWB*, vol. 2, col. 78, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=B07910](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=B07910) (accessed 16 June, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Leonhard Fuchs, *New Kreüterbuch* (1543), Cap. CCCXXIX. The Hungarian medical doctor Ferenc Pápai Páriz listed strawberries among the ingredients of medicines, which were being prepared through cold distillation: *Pax Corporis*, Kolozsvár, 1690 (Budapest: Magvető, 1984 [1764]), 253 and 303.

return such favour diligently in kind.<sup>4</sup> The letter's closing courtesies followed the well-established epistolary etiquette of the time, promising future compensation for the requested medicine. These medicinal recipes and the medicines prepared from them were therefore considered gifts, reinforcing patronage relationships among early modern female relatives. This exchange of recipes for medicine also testifies to the Poppel Lobkowitz women's knowledge and expertise in the art of healing.<sup>5</sup>

Sabina's half-page-long letter is an example of how therapeutic knowledge was transmitted among early modern aristocratic families. It also shows the significant role female relatives played in handing down and circulating recipes, remedies and common healing practices. Since time immemorial, domestic medicine has been regarded as women's domain.<sup>6</sup> Throughout early modern Europe, women were responsible for tending to sick and ailing members of their household, assisting with childbirth, treating women's diseases and preparing medicine. Mothers taught their daughters how to treat common illnesses or protect the household during local outbreaks of disease.

However, this everyday knowledge of healing was not solely limited to women. Men had always expressed interest in women's therapeutic practices, actively

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<sup>4</sup> "... Vnd bey guter gelegenheit hernacher anhero schrieken, in den erzeiget mir die fraw schwester ein große genadt, vnd ich will es vmb die fr[au]: s[chweste]r: alles fleisses verschültten ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 22 June 1615 (43589).

<sup>5</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> F.P. Reties, "The Healing Hand: The Role of Women in Ancient Medicine," *Acta Theologica Supplementum* 7 (2005): 165–188; Holt Parker, "Women and Medicine," in *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World*, ed. Sharon L. James and Sheila Dillons (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2012): 107–124; Monica Green, "Women's Medical Practice and Healthcare in Medieval Europe," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 2 (1989): 434–473 and also her, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Sheila Barker and Sharon Strocchia, "Household Medicine for a Renaissance Court Caterina Sforza's Ricettario Reconsidered," in *Gender, Health and Healing*, ed. Sarah Ritchey and Sharon Strocchia (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 139–166; Cordula Nolte, "Domestic Care in the Sixteenth Century: Expectations, Experiences and Practices from a Gendered Perspective," *ibid.*, 215–244, and Naama Cohen-Hanegbi, "Afterword: Healing Women and Women Healers," *ibid.*, 315–323.

contributing to their collection, preservation and circulation.<sup>7</sup> From the sixteenth century onwards, this collective knowledge of household medicine, once passed down orally from generation to generation, was increasingly transferred to paper. Assisted by secretaries and educated male members of noble households, the experiences of women with sickness and traditional and newly acquired practices of healing and medicine-making were recorded in family correspondences and recorded in handwritten recipe books.<sup>8</sup>

Using the correspondence of the Poppel-Lobkowitz sisters, this chapter will examine how close female relatives of the upper nobility in Central Europe transmitted medical information and practical therapeutic knowledge in their letters. By comparing the medical information included in the letters of Katharina, Maria Magdalena and Sabina, I will argue that various conditions including age, geographical location, social status and personal interest all impacted the flow of written medical information and how information was shared. These parameters also determined how the sisters discussed questions of health and illness and to which extent they provided medical advice and assistance. The letters will also illustrate that the individual's given position in the social hierarchy greatly determined who could participate in the written medical conversation. The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence also reveals that the practice of home medicine at the Batthyány court was a collaborative endeavour within the family. Eva

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<sup>7</sup> Monica Green, *The 'Trotula': A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) and also her *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Elaine Leong, "Collecting Knowledge for the Family. Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household," *Centaurus* 55, no. 2 (2013): 81–103. See also the list of medicinal books handwritten recipe collections in the Batthyány library in András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám és könyvtára [Ádám Batthyány and His Library]* (Budapest and Szeged: OSZK, Scriptum RT., 2002), 178–181. For memory as the primary aid for storing information in the Middle Ages, see M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record, England, 1066-1307*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013).

Poppel's therapeutic expertise and medicine-making was aided by her relatives and a diverse range of individuals, her female close kin frequently serving as intermediaries between medical professionals and those in need of assistance. By shedding light on the therapeutic concerns, interests and practical knowledge conveyed by the letters of female relatives, one can also witness noblewomen's active participation in the cultural exchange of healing knowledge between Prague, Vienna and western Hungary. The chapter thus provides a more nuanced picture of the medical landscape of the early seventeenth-century Habsburg Monarchy.

### ***The medical cosmos of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters***

The medical cosmos of the Poppel Lobkowitz women was shaped by the Galenic tradition of humoral medicine. This tradition perceived the human body not as a complex system of discernable organs but rather as a vessel of constantly changing fluxes.<sup>9</sup> Humoral theory understood health and sickness as the balance and imbalance of four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile) and their qualities (hot, cold, wet and dry). Thus, medical cures aimed to restore the state of equilibrium by getting rid of the excess fluid through sweating, bloodletting, taking medicine with laxatives and emetic properties and by adjusting daily regimens.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Duden, *Geschichte unter der Haut. Ein Eisenacher Arzt und seine Patientinnen um 1730* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987), published in English as *The Woman Beneath the Skin. A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, transl. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Ulinka Rublack, "Fluxes: The Early Modern Body and the Emotions," *History Workshop Journal* 53 (2002): 1–16; Peregrine Horden and Elisabeth Hsu, eds., *The Body in Balance: Humoral Medicines in Practice* (Berghan Books, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Vivian Nutton, "Galenic Medicine," in *Ancient Medicine*, second ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 236–253; Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 97–106.

Academic humoral theory played a minor role in the everyday medical practice of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters as they addressed illnesses and the symptoms thereof in a fleeting, often obscure manner.<sup>11</sup> Instead, the women talked about being ‘sick’ or ‘weak’ or pointed to visible signs such as quartan fever, wasting or spots. Still, some diseases were explicitly named, like pox, dropsy and dysentery, and this indicated that seventeenth-century lay culture was increasingly aware of an “ontological conception of disease” in which some illnesses followed a discernible course with predictable disease development for certain maladies.<sup>12</sup> Most of the healing practices and medicinal recipes found in the correspondence were drawn from natural healing methods, using simple drugs containing herbal and household food items.<sup>13</sup> Although healing by magic or prayer was in decline, such practices still can be sporadically detected in the sister’s healing repertoire.<sup>14</sup> And while there is no direct evidence that the Poppel Lobkowitz women used chemical therapies, they were likely aware of them, as they maintained contact with doctors and apothecaries engaged in the Paracelsian art of healing.

The practical medicine described in the sisters’ letters dealt with the complaints of sick men, women and children alike. Sporadic evidence indicates that men occasionally became involved in the trade of medical recipes.<sup>15</sup> However, there were clear gender lines

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness and the Sick Body in Early Modern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), originally published in German as *Homo patiens: Krankheits- und Körpererfahrung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> See Margaret Pelling, “Contagion/Germ Theory/Specificity,” in *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, ed. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Taylor and Francis Group, 1993), 315 and Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness*, 70.

<sup>13</sup> Alisha Rankin, *Panacea’s Daughters: Noblewomen as Healers in Early Modern Germany* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 109–110; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the recipe for distilling lemon water (“Wie man das Zitronenwasser brennen soll”) attached to the letter of Ladislav Lobkowitz Poppel, addressed to Eva Poppel, Ledeč, 25 April 1608

regarding roles and responsibilities in early modern domestic medicine. Whereas making medicine and caring for the sick remained largely the province of women, male relatives assumed the responsibility for coordinating care with experts from outside the home, including hiring doctors and midwives.<sup>16</sup> While generally, the medicine practiced by Eva Poppel and her sisters was not any different than in other parts of early modern Europe, these noblewomen relied on their own curative resources, turning only occasionally to expert medical assistance.<sup>17</sup>

Before the 1700s, the medical landscape in the eastern parts of the Habsburg Monarchy was plagued by a shortage of healthcare professionals.<sup>18</sup> Physicians with degrees from medical faculties were few and far between. The two largest towns in western Hungary, Pozsony (Preßburg) and Sopron (Ödenburg), along with the mining towns Kassa (Košice, Slovakia), Bártfa (Bardejov, Slovakia) and Eperjes (Presov, Slovakia) in Upper-Hungary employed physicians, barber-surgeons, apothecaries and, occasionally, midwives. However, residents of smaller towns or the countryside, including the estates of the noble elite, had to depend primarily on untrained health practitioners or were left to fend for themselves when they became sick.<sup>19</sup>

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(29767) and the reference to the recipe received from a male relative of the Solms family. See Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 23 March 1614 (43576).

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Smith, "The Relative Duties of Men: Domestic Medicine in England and France," *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 3 (2006): 237–256 and Anne Stobart, *Household Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 169. For the active participation of men in the recording of domestic how-to-does including medicinal recipes, see Leong, "Collecting Knowledge".

<sup>17</sup> The Poppel sisters' healing methods bore similarities to medical practices of female noble healers in sixteenth-century Europe: see Rankin, *Panaceias's Daughters*, Susan Broomhall, *Women's Medical Work in Early Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Lynette Hunter, "Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570–1620," in *Women, Science, and Medicine, 1500–1700*, ed. Hunter Lynette and Hutton Sarah (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1997): 89–167.

<sup>18</sup> Katalin Simon, "Mesterségből hivatás. Sebészmesterek és orvosdoktorok Magyarországon az egységes orvosképzés bevezetéséig [From Craft to Profession: Master Surgeons and Medical Doctors in Hungary until the Introduction of Uniform Medical Education]," *Korall* 11 (2010), 79.

<sup>19</sup> Gyula Magyary-Kossa, *Magyar orvosi emlékek*, III [Hungarian Medicinal Reminiscences] (Budapest: Magyar Orvosi Könyvkiadó Társulat, 1931), 3: no. 1606, 286–287 and no. 1089, 302.

Since the sixteenth century, Hungarian nobility had relied on the medical resources of Vienna whenever they needed medicine or wanted to hire doctors. In the early 1550s, the Hungarian Palatine Tamás Nádasdy consulted learned doctors in Vienna about his wife's medical problems and hired a midwife from the city to assist with the birth of his son Ferenc.<sup>20</sup> Thirty years later, Lady Pálffy from Komárom asked her husband, Miklós, to request medicine against *Morbus Hungaricus* from Frau Khuen in Vienna.<sup>21</sup> The Batthyány family was also closely connected to learned medical circles in the nearby capital of the Habsburgs. Ferenc Batthyány's father, Boldizsár, was in a friendly relationship with the physician Nicolaus Pistorius and Carolus Clusius, the famous humanist doctor and botanist prefect of the medicine garden for the imperial court.<sup>22</sup>

The Batthyánys continued to rely on the medical resources of Vienna, which, by the early seventeenth century, was well on its way to becoming the center of medical learning in the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>23</sup> The medical faculty of the city, established in the fourteenth century, along with the relocation of the imperial court from Prague to Vienna after 1611, attracted students and erudite medical doctors alike. The number of physicians and apothecaries increased, serving both the court nobility and various hospitals in the

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<sup>20</sup> See the letter of the physician Martin Stopius from 1554 about the consilium held over Lady Nádasdy's medical problem: MNL, E 185 Mf. 6917. B 1546. 119. title 1-5. Tivadar Vida, ed. *'Szerelmes Orsikám...' A Nádasdyak és Szegedi Kőrös Gáspár levelezése* ['My beloved Orsi...'] The Correspondence of the Nádasdy Family with Gáspár Kőrös Szegedi] (Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1988). Bernadett Asztalos, *'Ha Isten velünk, ki ellenünk....' Nádasdy Tamás magánélete négy megközelítésben*, ['If God is with us, who is against us...': Four Approaches to Tamás Nádasdy's Personal Life Based on Archival Sources], PhD diss. (Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, 2010), 121–122.

<sup>21</sup> Magyary-Kossa, *Magyar orvosi emlékek*, III: no. 964, 250.

<sup>22</sup> Dóra Bobory, *The Sword and the Crucible: Count Boldizsár Batthyány and Natural Philosophy in Sixteenth-Century Hungary* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 68–71 and 87–99.

<sup>23</sup> Elisabeth Tuisl, *Die medizinische Fakultät der Universität Wien im Mittelalter: Von der Gründung der Universität 1365 bis zum Tod Kaiser Maximilians 1519* (Vienna: Vienna University Press, 2014).

city.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Vienna's medical marketplace became a primary destination for those living further away, looking for medicine, or searching for professional care, often with the assistance of their personal network.

In the early modern medical marketplace, relatives and servants frequently facilitated medical encounters between patients and medical practitioners.<sup>25</sup> Through their recommendations of healers, treatments and reliable medicine, sick people could take control of their treatment.<sup>26</sup> The mediating role of the female relative in the trade of medical service and practical medical knowledge is most visible in Sabina Solm's letters. Being among the sisters closest in age to Eva Poppel, Sabina acted as her agent in Vienna. She recommended healing experts to the Batthyány couple, interceded on behalf of noblewomen who desired Eva Poppel's medicines, and negotiated with doctors, midwives and apothecaries. She also supplied her sister with therapeutic advice, instructions as well as recipes from her own collection. Most of the time, however, she supplied, through correspondence, mediated knowledge received from doctors, apothecaries and friends as well as medical wisdom preserved in the memory of the

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<sup>24</sup> In the 1610s and 1620s, Vienna had six hospitals, including the civic hospital (Bürgerspital), and five care facilities (Siechenhäuser and Pestspitäler) treating patients with infectious diseases. Martin Scheutz and Alfred Stefan Weiss, *Das Spital in der Frühen Neuzeit: Eine Spitallandschaft in Zentraleuropa* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2020), 607–622 and Sarah Pichlkastner, "Insassen, Personal und innere Organisation des Wiener Bürgerspitals in der frühen Neuzeit. Eine Projektskizze," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 123, part 1 (2015): 117–132. For the apothecaries in Vienna, see Felix Czeike, "Aus dem Apothekenalltag in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Wiener Geschichtsblätter* 54 (1999): 61–97.

<sup>25</sup> For the concept of early modern medical marketplace, see Harold Cook, *The Decline of the Old Medical Regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). See also Mary Lindemann, *Health and Healing, in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 358 and Alfons Zarzoso, "Mediating Medicine through Private Letters: The Eighteenth-Century Catalan Medical World," in *Medicine Mediation and Meaning in Cultural Approaches to the History of Medicine: Mediating Medicine in Early Modern and Modern Europe*, ed. Willem de Blécourt and Cornelia Osborne (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 115–116.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas D. Jewson, "Medical Knowledge and the Patronage System," *Sociology* 8, no. 3 (1974): 369–385.

family that was transmitted in her letters. Through her engagement, Sabina became a significant resource of therapeutic knowledge to her sister. Her letters show that, by the 1610s, the Batthyány countess already had a substantial reputation as a pharmaceutical expert, laying the foundation for her later fame as a respected healer who would be known for her potent medicine and therapeutic advice.<sup>27</sup>

The written transmission of domestic medical knowledge in these personal documents also speaks to complex social relations among early modern female relatives. The salves, potions, medicinal waters and recipes accompanying the letters of Maria Magdalena and Sabina were regarded as valuable gifts, establishing and cementing personal relationships between the Trčka, Solms and Batthyány families and their extended relations.<sup>28</sup> By sending each other remedies and advice and recommending medical professionals, the sisters showed empathy to one another. Exchanging medicinal information was part of the supportive and ‘cooperative behaviour model’ between aristocratic siblings, as Sophie Ruppel has observed of the Palatine dynasty of Hessen-Kassel.<sup>29</sup> Offering mutual support was a mainstay of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters’ relationship. Despite their age differences and the physical distances separating Eva Poppel from her siblings Maria Magdalena Trčka and Sabina Solms, both of the older sisters were ready to assist their youngest sister when it came to concerns regarding women’s medical concerns, children’s illnesses and infectious diseases.

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<sup>27</sup> See the medicine-related correspondence of Eva Poppel published by Kincses, *‘Ím küttem én orvosságot.’ Lobkowitz Poppel Éva levelezése. 1622–1640* [‘I have sent you medicine.’ The Correspondence of Éva Poppel Lobkowitz. 1622–1640] (Budapest: ELTE, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> For the social meaning of early modern gift exchange practices, see Davis, *The Gift*, 34–42.

<sup>29</sup> Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen. Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), 216.

In this context, the uneven distribution of medical information in the correspondence suggests that the unwritten rule of sibling cooperation did not apply to all sisters equally. Whereas about half of the letters of Sabina Solms (40 out of 82 letters) contain topics related to medicine, such themes are present less frequently in the letters of Maria Magdalena Trčka (12 out of 65 letters) and almost completely absent from the correspondence of the eldest sister Katharina Kurzbach (1 out of 30 letters). Finding an explanation as to why close kin women approached the topic of medicine in such different ways is not easy. Alexandra Bovt's recent research on the correspondence of Liselotte Pfalz shows that written discussions about the body and illnesses in the late seventeenth-century French court changed according to the degree of acquaintance and the interests of their correspondents.<sup>30</sup> The present case study of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence similarly suggests that the inclusion of medicine-related topics in the epistolary conversations of close-kin female relatives was guided by personal interest just as much as by closeness in age, geographical location and emotional connection or distance. Furthermore, the letters imply that the relative social status of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters guided the etiquette of their written communication regarding illness and therapy. A combination of these factors might explain the absent voice of the oldest sister Katharina Kurzbach in the communication about medicine and the abundance of health-related topics in Sabina Solms' letters.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Aleksandra Bovt, *Körper im höfischen Gespräch: Die Briefe Liselottes von Pfalz im Kontext Der höfischen Kommunikationsideals* (Göttingen: Universitätsverlag Göttingen, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Future research can delve into the interplay between early modern courtly rules of epistolary rhetoric, the social status of letter writers, and how these factors influenced the discourse surrounding medicine in both men's and women's letters.

### *Medical information in the letters*

About a quarter (46) of the Poppel Lobkowitz sister's 177 letters contain medicine-related information, which can be divided roughly into four groups: general health information, sickness in the Batthyány household, external medical practitioners and Eva Poppel's medicine making. Thirty letters report various illnesses, infectious diseases, children's sicknesses and women's health concerns. Within this group, about a third of the letters are linked to the sisters' own ailments. The other letters deal with sickness in the sisters' immediate family, in the Batthyány family, ill members of their households and sick acquaintances.<sup>32</sup> In addition, two letters contain good wishes for the birth of the Batthyánys' two children.<sup>33</sup> One letter discusses the sorrow over the death of the sisters' mother and brother; two further letters announce the deaths of mutual acquaintances succumbing to infection.<sup>34</sup>

Another fourteen letters are specifically concerned with the health of Eva Poppel, her children and the Batthyány servants. These letters discuss remedies and medicinal ingredients sent to Eva Poppel to boost fertility or fight infectious diseases.<sup>35</sup> Most of the therapeutic advice was concerned with infant care, pregnancy and treating infection.<sup>36</sup> Some letters also contain full-length recipes for various ailments often presented in the

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<sup>32</sup> Letters of Maria Magdalena, ill disposition: nos. 50094 (1614), 50100 (1618), 50102 (1619); sickness in the Trčka family: nos. 50056 (1607), 50063 (1608), 50071 (1609), 50095 (1615); sick acquaintances: no. 50084 (1610); Letters of Sabina, ill disposition: nos. 43580 (1614), 43610 (1621), 43611 (1621), 43638 (n.d.); sickness in the Solms family: nos. 43622 (1622), 43638 (n.d.); illness in the Batthyány family: nos. 43576 (1614), 43585 (1615), 43591 (1615), 43611 (1621), 43624 (1622), 43629 (n.d.), 43634 (n.d.), 43638 (n.d.); sick household members: nos. 43591 (1615), 43608 (1619), 43620 (1621), 43624 (1624), 43639 (n.d.), and 52875 (n.d.); sick acquaintances: nos. 43594 (1616), 43628 (n.d.).

<sup>33</sup> Letter of Maria Magdalena, no. 50090 (1612); Letter of Sabina, no. 43642 (n.d.).

<sup>34</sup> Letter of Maria Magdalena, no. 50090 (1612); Letter of Sabina, no. 43628 (n.d.), Letter of Katharina, no. 29780 (1636).

<sup>35</sup> Letter of Maria Magdalena, no. 50055 (1607); Letters of Sabina, nos. 43595 (1616), 43619 (1621), 43620 (1621).

<sup>36</sup> Letters of Maria Magdalena, nos. 50055 (1607) and 50060 (1608); Letters of Sabina, nos. 43568 (1608), 43606 (1619), 43633 (n.d.), 43634 (no date), 43639 (n.d.).

forms of gifts.<sup>37</sup> Two letters also mention recipes but only with a promise for their future delivery.<sup>38</sup> The third group of medical information (8 letters) is linked to the sisters' involvement in hiring healthcare professionals—including doctors, apothecaries, midwives and wetnurses—for the sick in the Batthyány household.<sup>39</sup> Finally, several letters (10) testify to the demand of the female Viennese nobility for Eva Poppel's remedies.<sup>40</sup>

Health and sickness, however, were seldom the exclusive subjects of the sister's written conversation. Health-related news or therapeutic advice often combined with clearly unrelated topics and were randomly scattered throughout the text in the undisciplined fashion typical of women's letters of the period.<sup>41</sup> For example, at the end of a lengthy letter discussing bees, herring, marzipan, blue silk, musical instruments, hiring a gardener and sending lace samples, Sabina appended a short note about the ill condition of the Countess of Thurn.<sup>42</sup> In another letter, she inserted, between a report about servants forgetting to take along Eva's bonnets and a recommendation of a German gardener from Würzburg, a piece of advice regarding the treatment of Eva Poppel's sick son, Boldizsár and her own account of ill health.<sup>43</sup> Medicinal recipes and requests for cures were sometimes added in the Post Scriptum, on a separate folio attached to letters,

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<sup>37</sup> Letter of Maria Magdalena, no. 50055 (1607); Letters of Sabina, nos. 43576 (1614), 43589 (1615), 43590 (1615), 43620 (1621), 43640 (n.d.).

<sup>38</sup> Letter of Sabina, no. 43620 (n.d.).

<sup>39</sup> Letter of Maria Magdalena, no. 50060 (1608); Letters of Sabina, nos. 43568 (1608), 43574 (1614), 43586 (1615), 43591 (1615), 43560 (1619), 43607 (1619), 43624 (1622).

<sup>40</sup> Letters of Sabina, nos. 43581 (1614), 43582 (1614), 43587 (1615), 43590 (1615), 43591 (1615), 43595 (1616), 43604 (1609), 43622 (1622), 43630 (n.d.), 43638 (n.d.).

<sup>41</sup> James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>42</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 May 1616 (43594).

<sup>43</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43634).

or on smaller pieces of paper.<sup>44</sup> Only a few letters are exclusively focused on illnesses in the Batthyány family or sending medicinal recipes.<sup>45</sup>

Whereas medical-related information appeared randomly and scattered throughout the letter's body, epistolary conventions dictated a set place for inquiries into the health of corresponding partners and their families at the beginning of the letter.<sup>46</sup> After the initial salutation and the acknowledgement of receiving Eva Poppel's letter, Sabina and Maria Magdalena often continued, as the epistolary ritual required, with polite inquiries about their sister's health, sending their good wishes to her and her family:

Wellborn, my dearest Lady Sister, my willing service [to you] is the same as before. I have received my Lady Sister's letter from which I learned with happiness about the good health of Yours, your husband and your children. May God the Almighty allow you to remain in good health for a long time.<sup>47</sup>

The letter's exordium was, however, not just a place for courteous deference easing the transition to the main intention of the letter. It designated a space for the corresponding partners of equal social standing to inform each other about their own and their family's health.

I have received your letter that I have expected with sincere longing, and from it, I learned that you, with your dear lord and with all who belong to you, are, thank God, well, [and I let you know that] my most beloved husband, myself and all my children are, thank God, in fairly good health.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, the postscripts in Sabina's letters to Eva, request for *Frauen aqua vita*: St Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 28 November 1614 (43582); recipe for water kidney stone: Vienna, 22 June 1615 (43589); a recipe for strawberry water: Vienna, 2 July 1615 (43590).

<sup>45</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Neuhaus, 29 January 1614 (43574) and Vienna, 17/27 April 1615 (43586); Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 2 October 1619 (43607); Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 22 June 1615 (43589) and Vienna, 2 July 1615 (43590).

<sup>46</sup> Rankin, *Panaceias's Daughters*, 30–31.

<sup>47</sup> "... meiner frawen schwester schreiben hab ich empfangen vndt daraús ihren vndt ihres herzlichsten herren vnd kindern glücklichen zústandt mit freude vernommen, Gott derallmächtige wölle verläuchen daß sie in gúetter gesúndheit lang verbleiben ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 7 March 1616, (43594).

<sup>48</sup> "... ihr schreiben hab ich empfangen, dessen ich mit hertzlichenn verlangen erwart habe, vnd daraúß vernohmen, daß ihr, sambt ihren herzlichsten herren vnd all den ihrigen wolgehét hóre ich Gott weiß von hertzen? zwar in mein allerliebsten hern, ich vnd meine kinder, sind aúch noch Gott lob in zimlicher gesúndheit ..." Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 5 October (50059).

Maria Magdalena's letter dated 1607 is a typical example of this epistolary courtesy expressing the mutual well-being of the Trčka and the Batthyány families. Hearing about their relatives' "fairly good health" was not a mere pleasantry but rather helped to reassure news for family members who were geographically separated.<sup>49</sup>

These initial health-related courtesies also allowed the sisters to confirm that news about recent illnesses in the Batthyány family had been delivered and provided space in their letters in order to report health concerns about relatives or members of their respective households. From such civilities, the reader learned about the fever, swelling, bad cough and dysentery plaguing Maria Magdalena, Rudolf Trčka's horse-riding accident, Sabina's sore throat and Philips Solms' weakness.<sup>50</sup> The presence of health-related courtesies from one of the two surviving letters of Eva Poppel written to Sabina also suggests that such courteous inquiries about wellbeing were returned from the letter writers of equal standing in a similar manner.<sup>51</sup>

### *The absent voice of Katharina Kurzbach*

Polite, health-related inquiries and medical information were not equally present in the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence. The letters of the oldest Poppel Lobkowitz sister, Katharina Kurzbach, are markedly reticent about her ailments and those of others.<sup>52</sup> She neither sent nor asked for remedies nor gave or sought therapeutic advice,

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<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Sabina expressed her joy that Eva was "doing better than before" but also her sorrow about little Adamko's frail constitution. Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 24 June 1621 (43612) and Neuhaus (Dobra), 29 January 1614 (43574).

<sup>50</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, fever: nos. 50094 (1614) and 50109 (1628); cough: no. 50108 (1626); dysentery: no. 50094 (1614); riding accident: no. 50063 (1608); Sabina's letters to Eva, sore throat: no. 43580 (1614); weakness: no. 43577 (1614).

<sup>51</sup> Eva's letter to Sabina, Vienna, 20 August 1616 (37918).

<sup>52</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 8 December 1615 (26523).

breaking her silence over health and sickness only once, in 1616, when she reported about an infectious disease rampant in Prague that she believed to be the plague.<sup>53</sup> This discursive silence in Katharina's correspondence regarding medical topics went hand in hand with the absence of epistolary opening formulas concerning health. She refrained from including health-related courtesies in the exordium (the letter's introductory lines) without exception, promptly turning to her primary intent for reaching to pen.<sup>54</sup>

Frances Austin has noted that polite introductory health formulas in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century letters were governed and adjusted according to the relative social position of corresponding partners, a custom originating in epistolary conventions of earlier periods.<sup>55</sup> A survey of Eva Poppel's correspondence confirms Austin's observations. Polite health courtesies are generally missing from letters written by men. In women's correspondences, opening health formulas primarily appear only in letters of close female relatives of similar social status. These kinds of formulas are often included in the letters of Magdalena and Erzsébet Batthyány addressed to their mother.<sup>56</sup> Such inquiries, however, were excluded from the letters of Ester Lobkowitz, the widow of Eva's brother Adam Poppel Lobkowitz, indicating her lower position within the extended Lobkowitz family. Similarly, the Viennese merchant woman, Eva Claus, a social inferior

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<sup>53</sup> "... aber Gott weiß ob es nit gar die pest ist ..." Katharina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 6 July 1616 (29780).

<sup>54</sup> "mein in der welt herzallerliebste frau Schwester vnd múetter, ich thue mich derselbigen, ganz vnd gar befehlen, vnd schiekhe iehrhierneben, Zwen Procurator Prëff" [*My most beloved Lady Sister and Mother, I fully recommend myself to Your [service], here I am sending to you to procurator letters with my messenger ...*]. Katharina's letter to Eva, Prague, 22 October 1615 (26524).

<sup>55</sup> Frances Austin, "Heaving this Importunity: The Survival of Opening Formulas in Letters in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Historical Sociolinguistics and Sociohistorical Linguistics*, 4 (2004), [https://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl\\_shl/stylesheet.htm](https://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/hsl_shl/stylesheet.htm) (accessed 8 June 2023). According to Austin, these polite opening formulas disappeared from English correspondence by the early nineteenth century, surviving only in letters of women and lower-class letter writers.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, the letters of Magdolna and Erzsébet Batthyány to Eva Poppel, nos. 5122 (n.d.), 5132 (n.d.), 5135 (n.d.), 3311 (1640), 3424 (n.d.), 3431 (n.d.), 3440 (n.d.), 3441 (n.d.).

to the Batthyánys, also refrained from them in her correspondence.

Katharina's epistolary ritual also neglects both polite inquiries about Eva Poppel's health and statements about her own well-being, reflecting a distinct social distance between the oldest and the youngest Poppel Lobkowitz sisters.<sup>57</sup> Katharina and Eva were born almost twenty years apart and lived far from each other for most of their lives, having little or no shared experiences.<sup>58</sup> Tensions over the administration of Katharina's maternal inheritance in Hungary could have further added to the emotional distance between the two sisters.<sup>59</sup> However, as Sonja Ruppel noted, one's place in the social hierarchy, rather than family relationships based on close kinship or experience, influenced the relationships between elite siblings.<sup>60</sup> The silence in regard to health concerns and lack of medical-related information in Katharina's letters can be attributed to the highly formal rules of contemporary letter writing, which, similar to social interactions, more broadly emphasized relative status over closeness, the degree of consanguinity, emotional attachment and shared experiences. Even among siblings, conforming to the strict rules of early modern social conventions took precedence over expressing what we would now perceive as genuine or spontaneous emotions.

Prestigious marriages, stable financial circumstances and the social advancement of the family encouraged the flow of medical information between close kin relatives in Eva Poppel's correspondence. The sisters' marriages to the wealthy Rudolf Trčka and the politically ambitious Philipp Solms secured high social status for Maria Magdalena and

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<sup>57</sup> Marin Lyons, "New Directions in the History of Written Culture," in *Culture & History, Digital Journal* 1/2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.3989/chdj.2012.v1.i2> (accessed 27 May 2023).

<sup>58</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 90.

<sup>59</sup> For the history of the Poppel Lobkowitz inheritance in Hungary, see Chapter 1.

<sup>60</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 80. Similarly, Beatrix Bastl argued that within early modern noble families, status and rank was more important than personal relationships (Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre*, 72).

Sabina comparable to that of the Batthyány countess, which in turn elevated them in the social hierarchy, permitting them to discuss their own or others' wellbeing and express compassion towards one another.

### ***Medicine from Prague: The letters of Maria Magdalena Trčka***

Eva Poppel's early interest in medicine is indicated in one of the first letters of her second oldest sister Maria Magdalena Trčka, which dates from the spring of 1607. A few months before Eva's wedding to the Hungarian Count Ferenc Batthyány, Maria Magdalena sent a letter from Prague containing instructions on how to make "snake powder" as requested by her sister. Remedies containing animal venom were staple items in apothecary cabinets in seventeenth-century households and were used as an antidote for deadly ailments or for help in conceiving a child.<sup>61</sup>

The details about the recipe that Maria Magdalena was planning to send are not known. The letter, however, makes it clear that it was tailored specifically for the personal use of the Batthyány countess. Maria Magdalena reassured Eva that once she

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<sup>61</sup> Since antiquity, pulverized remedies containing parts of venomous animals, such as vipers, toads, or scorpions, had been used for medical purposes. Similar remedies to the snake powder requested by Eva Poppel were also recommended by the thirteenth-century monk Nicholas of Poland for breaking kidney stones and favoured remedies containing snake flesh; see William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 77; Klaus Bergdolt, "Zur antischolastischen Arztkritik des 13. Jahrhunderts," *Medizinisches Journal* 26, no. 3/4 (1991): 275; Martha Baldwin, "Snakestone experiments: An Early Modern Medical Debate," *Isis* 86, no. 3 (September 1995): 394–418. Snake flesh was also a key ingredient in theriac. The universal remedy of pre-modern medicine was believed to have a curative effect on many diseases, including snakebites, poisons and plague. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Neapolitan medical doctor Giuseppe Donzelli considered theriac a universal remedy effective against snake and other animal poisons and simple and compound poisons curing close to thirty ailments, including plague: *Nuovo et universale teatro pharmaceutics* (1667), 276, quoted in Sabine Kalff, *Politische Medizin der frühen Neuzeit: Die Figur des Arztes in Italien und England im frühen 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 346–347. For the medicinal use of viper, see Wolfgang Schneider, *Lexicon zur Arzneimittelgeschichte*, vol. 1: Tierische Drogen: Fachwörterbuch zur Geschichte der pharmazeutischen Zoologie (Frankfurt a. Main: Govi-Verlag, 1968), 67–69. The 'Giftpulver' used Anna von Saxony to treat poison and plague was probably a similar remedy to what Maria Magdalena sent to Eva (Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters*, 146).

received the desired medicine from the doctor, she would send it securely, ensuring “that no one unauthorized would be able to use it.”<sup>62</sup> While the instructions Magdalena provided are vague and difficult to understand, it is clear that the amount of the snake powder and the time of its administration depended on the gender of the individual.<sup>63</sup> For this unspecified ailment, it recommended that men consume an amount worth four ducats [drachma] on the first three Friday mornings of the month. Women, on the contrary, were advised to continue using the powder until they conceived, after which they should cease taking the remedy. To enhance the protective power of the medicine, Maria Magdalena also promised send a piece of wood to Eva that was to be worn on the body. The amulet promised lifelong protection from severe illness.<sup>64</sup> Considering that the request for the snake powder recipe from Hungary arrived in Prague in the spring of 1607, when the wedding plans of Count Batthyány with the youngest Poppel daughter were already underway, the medicine was likely intended to secure the health and fertility of the future couple.

The snake powder was likely deemed to be a potent medicine, as evidenced by the birth of Eva’s first child in April 1608, nine months after her wedding, thus prompting

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<sup>62</sup> “...Concerning the powder from the doctor, from my heart and gladly I will send it to you; I have already requested a recipe for the snake powder for the poison. Be assured that I am sending it so that no one unauthorized can use it. I send it to you; (for) the male gender four ducats each three Friday mornings; with God’s help it is safe from the poison for 30 years; for the female gender is it better to accept it each month for the women who are not accepted, and those who are accepted, then when she accepts one, it is enough for her ...” Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Smirzice (Schmiritz), 19 March 1607 (50055), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>63</sup> On fertility and impotence, see Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre*, 432.

<sup>64</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Smirzice (Schmiritz), 19 March 1607 (50055). Amulets and objects with similar special healing powers demonstrated that magical healing was still present in the medical culture of the Central European nobility during the early 1600s. See Karel Černý, “Magical and Natural Amulets in Early Modern Plague Treatises,” *Sudhoffs Archiv* 97 no.1 (2013): 98–99. See also Suzanna Ivanič, “Amulets and the Material Interface of Beliefs in Seventeenth-Century Prague Burgher Homes,” in *Domestic Devotions in the Early Modern World*, ed. Marco Faini and Alessia Meneghin (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 16.

the subsequent discussion about the care of her son Boldizsár in Maria Magdalena's letters.<sup>65</sup> When the infant suffered from inflamed skin, Eva relied on Maria Magdalena's experience and personal connections in Prague, as their mother, Magdalena Salm, had just died the previous year. Rashes were common ailments particularly affecting infants, as their bodies were prone to retaining moisture.<sup>66</sup> These skin irritations—also called ulcers, rashes, boils and the like—were interpreted not as a specific condition but rather as a manifestation of putrefied matter inside the body.<sup>67</sup> Doctors treating children with skin problems followed the recommendations of midwives and the German *Hausväterliterature* (a seventeenth-century genre providing instructions on household management).<sup>68</sup> They recommended simple herbal-based ointments without harsh ingredients, which eased the burning pain and calmed the child.

The curative instructions of Maria Magdalena were in line with this tradition.<sup>69</sup> She recommended washing the rashes with a broth prepared from simple herbs, such as trucha, mugworts and elm and treating the larger swellings with fresh goat milk.<sup>70</sup> Hearing about the sick little Bodiskó also prompted Maria Magdalena to send Eva glass

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<sup>65</sup> The wedding of Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány took place in Dobra 16 July 1607. The couple's first child, Boldizsár was born on 22 April of the following year; see András Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám. Egy magyar főúr és udvara a XVII. század közepén* [Ádám Batthyány, a Hungarian Magnate and his Court in the Middle of the Seventeenth Century] (Győr: Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár, 2012), 521.

<sup>66</sup> Walter Martin Manzke, "Pro Infantibus. Arzneiliche Kindertherapie in der frühen Neuzeit," *Pharmazie unserer Zeit* 38, no. 1 (2009):16.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Murphy, "Skin and Disease in Early Modern Medicine: Jan Jessen's De cute, et cutaneis affectibus (1601)," in *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 94, no. 2 (2020): 182; Olivia Weisser, "Boils, Bumps and Wheals: Reading Bumps on the Body in Early Modern England," *Social History of Medicine* 22 (2009): 321–39.

<sup>68</sup> On Hausväter literature, see Jürgen Donien, "Hausväterliteratur," in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern History Online*, ed. Graeme Dunphy, Andrew Gow. Original German Edition: Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit, ed. Friedrich Jaeger. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung und Carl Ernst Poeschel Verlag GmbH 2005–2012, [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2352-0272\\_emho\\_SIM\\_020741](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2352-0272_emho_SIM_020741) (accessed 16 March 2022).

<sup>69</sup> Boldizsár [Bódis, Bódiskó] Batthyány (Dobra, 22 April 1608–23 July 1622); Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 521.

<sup>70</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 23 September 1608 (50060). The Hungarian doctor Pápai Páriz also recommended washing the irritated skin of an infant child with sweet milk (Pápai Páriz, *Pax Corporis*, XXVIII).

bottles, possibly for medicine-making. At the same time, she also promised to look for female servants in Prague, including a young girl with cooking skills, a mature woman expected to have experience in cleaning and doing laundry and, most importantly, a young wetnurse who could help with the care of the Batthyány infant.<sup>71</sup>

Hiring a wetnurse for the five-month-old Bodiskó was of utmost concern for the Batthyány family in late August of 1608. Because of a “misfortune” befalling the woman who had been breastfeeding the sick infant until then, Eva had to nurse her son herself. This raised concerns in the family that she would become exhausted and weak.<sup>72</sup> To find a new wetnurse, Eva initially reached out to the Styrian noblewoman Barbara Stubenberg residing in the town of Murreck, close to the Batthyány’s residence in Némétújvár (Güssing).<sup>73</sup> Barbara claimed that she could not send anybody she trusted. The German wetnurse in town was accused of wrongdoing by her previous employer; as for Barbara’s own wetnurse, the woman’s child was already over a year old and thus the quality of her milk was unsuitable for newborns.<sup>74</sup>

Barbara Stubenberg’s opinion about the unsuitability of wetnurses highlights the vital roles these women played in caring for noble infants. In the early seventeenth

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<sup>71</sup> Maria Magdalena’s letter to Eva, Opočno, 23 September 1608 (50060).

<sup>72</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Wirbitz (Vrbiče), 22 September 1608 (43568).

<sup>73</sup> Barbara Stubenberg (born von Khevenhuller) (b.1571) was the wife of the Austrian Protestant nobleman Georg von Stubenberg (1560–1630). The Stubenbergs’ main residence in Muregg in south-east Styria, located about 40 km from the Batthyány’s residence in Némétújvár (Güssing). On the family, see Regina Pörtner, *The Counter-Reformation in Central-Europe: Styria 1580–1630* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 172–174.

<sup>74</sup> “... aus mejne ich libsten fraū gefäterin schreiben hab ih vernümben das ier mit den ämel [nutrix] nach vnglikhsällig get das ist mier won hohen leit vd walt meiner fraüen ieren begern nah gar gern ein güete ämel wan hiren aüs schikken so bin ih allein gar zū verzagt das ih mit so ein hahen khint mier nit reht draú, den wan iber lang naher was geschäh so gäb man mier deischen ämell die schült, süst hab ih schan ein ämel in haüs die hat aber mier ein diendel die ist schon ibers iar alt, sei [?] vns hat man in dein wol khein bedenken was nün mein fraū, mit mier schaft daß wil ih ier mit draüen hezen rihten sie las mich ier mänüng sei disen eigen boten wisen ...” Barbara Stubenberg’s letter to Eva Poppel, Muregg, 31 August 1608 (444223).

century, it was common for noblewomen not to breastfeed their infants due to the prevailing belief that breastfeeding could weaken and harm the mother's health.<sup>75</sup> Instead, they often hired a young and skilled 'Amme,' as the wetnurse in German-speaking areas was called.<sup>76</sup> They treated the wetnurse as a family member, as she would reside in their household for an extended period of time.<sup>77</sup> Mothers preferred women in their mid-twenties with several children which proved their experience in infant care.<sup>78</sup> At the time of hiring, the ideal wetnurse was supposed to have a male infant between six and twelve months old, when the mother's milk was thought to reach optimal quality.<sup>79</sup> It was also widely believed that the infant's health depended on the physical well-being of the breastfeeding woman. Since infants could be infected and become sick through the breastmilk corrupted by the wetnurse's questionable lifestyle or morality, mothers were looking for a mentally and physically fit woman with an exemplary character and moderate habits.<sup>80</sup>

As the local search for a suitable wetnurse failed, Eva Poppel turned to her relatives in Bohemia for help. However, it wasn't any easier to find a wetnurse in distant Prague than in nearby Muregg. Although Maria Magdalena had found a suitable woman,

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<sup>75</sup> Inflammation of the mother's breast was one of the main reasons why aristocratic families hired a wetnurse in the first place. However, as Katalin Péter noted, none of the contemporary doctors, midwives or mothers realized that the only remedy to provide a cure for inflamed breasts was to continue breastfeeding; see Katalin Péter, *Beloved Children: History of Aristocratic Childhood in Hungary in the Early Modern Age* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001), 74–75.

<sup>76</sup> The German word 'Amme' meant the wetnurse, which was a woman of lower social standing breastfeeding her employer's child, but it could also refer to a child's nurse ("Hebamme"): *DWB Online*, vol. 1, col. 278, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=A03181](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemid=A03181) (accessed 17 March 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Infants were typically breastfed for at least a year or until the child learned to walk (Péter, *Beloved Children*, 75–77). For wetnurses living in early modern households, see Linda Campbell, "Wetnurses in Early Modern England: Some Evidence from the Townshend Archive," *Medical History* 33 (1989): 363.

<sup>78</sup> Péter, *Beloved Children*, 75.

<sup>79</sup> Bartolomäus Metlinger, *Ein Regiment der gesundheit für die jungen Kinder* (Frankfurt, 1550), x–xi.

<sup>80</sup> See Walter Martin Manzke, "Pro infantibus," 16–17 and Patricia Crawford, "The Sucking Child: Adult Attitudes to Childcare in the First Year of Life in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 140–174.

she could not send her to Hungary without Eva's approval. However, since Eva either delayed in responding or her letter was caught up somewhere along the road and lost, Maria Magdalena gave the wetnurse to her other sister, Sabina, who also needed help, as she was about to give birth to her third child.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, Maria Magdalena promised to look for a nurse for Eva in the Bohemian capital, "since several of our servants work in Prague for good mistresses, [so] I could ask them and [probably] send a woman or another girl to you. Or, God willing, when you travel to us yourself, you could try her out here and take her with you."<sup>82</sup>

The young Batthyány countess' search for a wetnurse in 1608 highlights the demand for skilled infant care and illuminates the hiring process in early-seventeenth-century Central Europe. Wetnurses were recommended and passed around through personal and family networks. Noble families primarily sought a suitable woman locally. Only when their search failed would they hire help from further away, relying on the connections of relatives who lived at a distance.

As the face-to-face encounters between the sisters became infrequent, evidence of medical knowledge gradually vanished from Maria Magdalena's letters. Although reports about illnesses, mostly epidemics in the Trčka household and updates about the countess' state of health, did resurface periodically, there is no indication after 1608 that Eva approached Maria Magdalena and asked her for medicine and recipes, or that she received any assistance of this sort from Bohemia.<sup>83</sup> Why Maria Magdalena stopped

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<sup>81</sup> Maria Elisabeth Solms (Wirbitz (Vrbiče), 8 October 1608–Lich, 9 May 1613). Friedrich Uhlhorn, "Die böhmische Linie des Hauses Solms-Lich," *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte* 9 (1959): 95.

<sup>82</sup> Maria Magdalena's letter to Eva, Opočno, 23 September 1608 (50060), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>83</sup> Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva: reports on death of the goldsmith's wife from the plague (50059), children suffering from pox (50071), the severe swellings afflicting Maria Verunka (50084) and the spots of Beta (50095). She also writes about her own ailments: lying ill with scarlet fever (50094); suffering from swelling (50100), weakness (50102), bad cough (50108), and very high chills (50109).

discussing treatments in her letters remains a matter of conjecture, but personal reasons and changes in personal circumstances could have both played a role. She was close to twenty years older than Eva, and by the time the first children were born in the Batthyány family, she had already passed her prime childbearing years.<sup>84</sup> With her children becoming adolescents, her concerns shifted from their health to their future. After the 1610s, Maria Magdalena also became increasingly occupied with estate transactions, an area where she excelled, and probably had less inclination to discuss health problems and therapies.<sup>85</sup> Geographical distance and infrequent personal meetings further weakened the emotional ties between the two sisters. Prague was far from the Batthyány residence in Rechnitz, and the political and military turmoil of the 1610s and 1620s made roads between the Bohemian capital and western Hungary increasingly dangerous for travellers and letters.<sup>86</sup>

### ***Sabina Solms and Eva Poppel's Viennese network***

In the 1610s, as Eva Poppel's links to Prague weakened, she turned instead to Vienna to contact doctors and acquire recipes and remedies.<sup>87</sup> She often visited the Batthyány residences of Rohonc (Rechnitz) and Némétújvár (Güssing) from Vienna or from her nearby estates in Szentgotthárd and Dobra. Until her death in 1623, Sabina kept close contact with Eva, supplying her with medical recipes and advice and mediating

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<sup>84</sup> For Maria Magdalena's children see Chapter 1.

<sup>85</sup> About Maria Magdalena's life, see *ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 2.

<sup>87</sup> As Sándor Takáts has already pointed out in his biography on Eva Poppel that the Poppel relatives in Austria were an important source of the Hungarian countess' therapeutic knowledge. Takáts, *Zrínyi Miklós nevelőanyja* [The Stepmother of Miklós Zrínyi] (Budapest: Franklin, 1917), 92.

between the Batthyány countess and the doctors, midwives, apothecaries and noblewomen from Styria and Lower Austria.

Sabina's letters exhibit the collective nature of early modern noblewomen's practice of household medicine.<sup>88</sup> While remedies and therapies displayed in the letters drew on past domestic medical traditions preserved from the experience of previous generations, they also came from the Solms countess' own practice or were received from friends and acquaintances as well as from intellectual medical circles.<sup>89</sup> The communication regarding therapeutic knowledge and the practice of medicine-making also reveals a clear division of tasks between the two sisters. Whereas Eva Poppel's pharmaceutical skills and interest, as well as the abundance of space at the Batthyány court, allowed her to distill medicine in large amounts, Sabina's modest living circumstances in Vienna prohibited elaborate medicine-making while her broad social network facilitated the transfer and trade of recipes and remedies.

Sabina Solms' correspondence informs us most fully about how medicine was practiced in early seventeenth-century Central Europe. Out of the extant 82 letters that comprise her correspondence, more than half contain health-related topics. These letters were written between 1614 and 1622, when the Solms family lived close to the Batthyány court, first in Dobra (Neuhaus) and Szentgotthárd (St. Gotthard), and from 1615 in Vienna. Some of these letters report only on the state of health of members in the Solms and Batthyány households or mutual acquaintances, while thirty-eight letters also contain therapeutic advice, recipes, requests for medicine and reports about medical emergencies,

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<sup>88</sup> Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters*, 153.

<sup>89</sup> Elaine Leong, *Recipes and Everyday Knowledge. Medicine, Science and the Household in Early Modern England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 19–45 and Stobart, *Household Medicine*, 31–33.

seven of which are almost entirely dedicated to medical topics.<sup>90</sup> The letters dated between 1614–1616 discuss a variety of illnesses in the Batthyány and Solms families and attest to the frequent exchange of recipes and remedies between the sisters and their extended networks.<sup>91</sup> The correspondence from the last four years pertains especially to cures concerning childhood illnesses, Eva’s pregnancy, Sabina’s declining health and, most significantly, the epidemics of dysentery that struck Vienna and swept through western Hungary in the first years of the Thirty Years War.<sup>92</sup>

Infectious diseases, such as plague, pox and dysentery, were ubiquitous in the seventeenth century and posed a significant threat to rich and poor alike. Periodical outbreaks of plague had been part of the lives of townspeople in Austria and Hungary since the fourteenth century.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, soldiers living in unsanitary camp conditions during the Turkish wars of the late 1500s and during the Thirty Years’ War were responsible for spreading diseases to the populations in the countryside.

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<sup>90</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva: childhood sicknesses: no. 43577 (1614); pregnancy: nos. 43586 (1615) and 43607 (1619); curative recipes: nos. 43589 (1615) and 43590 (1615); treatment of epidemic diseases: nos. 43620 (1619), 43639 (n.d.).

<sup>91</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva: illnesses in the family: nos. 43574 (1614), 43577 (1615), 43580 (1614), 43585 (1615) and 43586 (1615); sending recipes: nos. 43576 (1614), 43589 (1615), 43590 (1615); request for medicine: nos. 43575 (1614), 43583 (1615), 43587 (1615), 43591 (1615), 43595 (1616).

<sup>92</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva: childhood illnesses: nos. 43629 (no date), 43634 (no date); Eva Poppel’s pregnancy: Sabina’s letters to Eva, nos. 43633 (no date), 43634 (no date) and Sabina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, 43607 (1619). Sabina’s declining health: nos. 43610 (1621), 43611 (1621); dysentery: Sabina’s letter to Eva, no. 43620 (1621) (recipe) and Sabina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, no. 43639 (no date) (advice).

<sup>93</sup> Emil Schultheisz, “Short History of Epidemics in Hungary until the Great Cholera Epidemic of 1831,” in *Traditio Renovata. Tanulmányok a középkor és a reneszánsz orvostudományáról*, ed. Mária Vida (Budapest: Semmelweis Orvostörténeti Múzeum és Levéltár, 1997), 203–218; Péter Óri, “A pestisjárványok demográfiai következményei a 17-18. századi Magyarországon [The Implications of Plague Epidemics in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Hungary],” *KSH NKI Történeti Demográfiai Évkönyve* (2005), 115–162; Andreas Weigl, “Fühnezeitliches Bevölkerungswachstum,” in Peter Csendes and Ferdinand Opll, eds., *Wien. Geschichte einer Stadt*, volume 2: *Die frühneuzeitliche Residenz (16. bis 18. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Karl Vocelka and Anita Traninger (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003), 10–131; Mitchell L. Hammond, *Epidemics and the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 34–35.

The omnipresent threat of “infection” is one of the most apparent concerns that occupied the letters of Sabina Solms. Children were particularly at risk of catching infectious diseases, as Sabina reveals in a hastily dispatched letter to Ferenc Batthyány. Visiting the Batthyány’s residence in Némétújvár (Güssing), she noticed that the air was foul. The danger, signalled by the bad odour, was confirmed by János, the barber, who informed Sabina that five people were already lying sick near the mills in the village. Not wishing to alarm her sister, Sabina warned Ferenc Batthyány to protect the children from the women who would deliver strawberries to the castle, ordering them to wait at the gate.<sup>94</sup>

Sabina’s observation about the presence of corrupt air around the Batthyány’s castle reflects the common belief in traditional medical theories that inhaling poisonous miasmas could cause disease.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, her advice to restrict the physical contact of children with peasant women coming from infected villages also reveals old preventive reflexes of keeping distance from the invisible source of disease and its transmissible character via human contact.

Like in many early modern disease descriptions, the notion of contagion mostly remains elusive. In an undated letter, the malady’s contagious nature can only be inferred from the preventive advice given to Eva Poppel:

My dearest in the whole world lady, my lady sister, this very hour, I received the news that your young lady-in-waiting is still in bed; I am so sorry for her. May the good Lord [...] relieve her of her troubles. I ask you, my dearest lady sister and, in God’s name, I beg you to commend me to your Lord. My dearest little angel, make

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<sup>94</sup> Sabina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43639).

<sup>95</sup> Annamarie Kinzelbach, “Infection, Contagion and Public Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern Imperial Towns,” *Journal of the History of Medicine* 61, no. 3 (July 2006): 369–389. For the sixteenth-century conception of bad smell as both sign and carrier of infectious diseases, see Hélène Cazes, “Apples and Moustaches: Montaigne’s Grinn in the Face of Infection,” in *Imagining Contagion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Claire L. Carlin (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 79–93.

sure that you do not catch anything...<sup>96</sup>

The warning to avoid close contact with the sick girl points to the virulent nature of her illness without assigning a name to it. Because the premodern medical culture viewed the inside of the human body as a fluid entity and its illnesses as the imbalance of fluxes, it was common to refer to illnesses in non-specific terms.<sup>97</sup> Sabina thus employed vague language using terms like “infection,” “catch” or “spots” to associate experiences or symptoms with the disease, thereby alluding to its contagious nature.<sup>98</sup>

However, in two instances, Sabina specifically named the diseases that became epidemic in Vienna and the western part of Hungary at the turn of 1620. In December 1619, she reported, “the many people in Vienna are dying from petechial [sic],” and that “the Count of Ilsenbürg died ten days ago, and his brother is also sick.”<sup>99</sup> An infection characterized by black spots on the body and accompanied by fever, identified today as a probable outbreak of typhoid, became known in Central Europe as the Hungarian spot and skin disease (*Ungarische Flecken und Pedeckensucht*). It affected the population of Vienna after the Bohemian army besieged the city in the fall of 1619.<sup>100</sup>

A highly fatal typhoid-like disease called the “ungrische Kranckheit”

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<sup>96</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (52875).

<sup>97</sup> Stolberg, *Experiencing Illness*, 26.

<sup>98</sup> Sabina letters to Eva, 43620 (1621), 43639 (n.d.), 43628 (n.d.), 43569 (1609).

<sup>99</sup> “...zú Wien sterben die leuth an den *pedechien* gut sehr, ist vor io. tag[en] ein graff von ijsenbürg [?] daran gestoben, vndt ligt sein brüder aüch kranck ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 13 December [1619] (43628).

<sup>100</sup> For a detailed description, see Raymund Minderer, *Consilium, oder Rätliches Gutachten: die jetzt schwebende und under den Soldaten mehrertheils grassirende Sucht betreffend ...* (Augsburg, 1620); “Pedechien” in Max Hoefler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamen-Buch* (Munich, 1899), 462. The plague outbreak in Wiener-Neustadt in 1619–1621 might have been the same disease: Gottfried Lammert, *Seuchen, Hungers- und Kriegsnoth zur Zeit des Dreissigjährigen Krieges* (Wiesbaden, 1890), 50. For the siege of Vienna in October 1619, see Sonja Reisner, “Aber auch wie voriges tags außer Schwarmüzieren anders nicht verricht ... Die Kämpfe vor Wien im Oktober 1619 im Spiegel zeitgenösscher Quellen,” in *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, ed. Andreas Weigl (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), 446–481.

(*Ungarische Seuche* or Hungarian disease) also appears in Sabina's correspondence. Known by its Latin name *Morbus Hungaricus* and identified today as dysentery, it spread in western Europe by German soldiers returning from the campaign against the Turks in Hungary in 1566, hence the Hungarian association.<sup>101</sup> With its distinct symptoms of diarrhea, high fever and fatigue, dysentery broke out in the army of the Transylvanian Prince Gábor Bethlen camping in western Hungary and spread quickly through the region in the early 1620s.<sup>102</sup> Sabina's long letter to Eva Poppel in December 1621 included advice, recipes and medicine sent to treat the epidemic that was rampant among the Batthyány subjects. Central to the letter were the preventive and therapeutic instructions of Magdalena Salm, highlighting the mother's therapeutic authority for her daughters: "I beg the Lady sister, you should prepare the smoke that our late Lady Mother, used to make and fumigate [around] regularly. I hope that the Lady sister will notice an improvement."<sup>103</sup> Magdalena Salm's fumigation advice echoed previous generations' encounters with plague and other contagious diseases. These prophylactic and therapeutic measures aimed to control the outbreaks by clearing the foul-smelling air and preventing the spread of sickness. The mother's instructions recommended "Carnobet" (a misspelled form of the Latin 'carbonate'),

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<sup>101</sup> The 'ungarische Seuche' is also known as Wechselfieber, Typhus, Ruhr. Symptoms of the disease are discussed in Tibor Győry, *Morbus Hungaricus. Orvostörténeti tanulmány* [Morbus Hungaricus. A Study in the History of Medicine] (Budapest: Pesti Lloyd-Társulat Könyvnyomdája, 1900). See also "Ungarische Seuche," in Hoefler, *Deutsches Krankheitsnamen-Buch*, 644. Emil Schultheisz, "A magyarországi járványok történetéből [From the History of Epidemics in Hungary]," in *Schultheisz Emil orvostörténeti tanulmányai*, ed. István Gazda (Budapest: Magyar Tudománytörténeti és Egészségtudományi Intézet, et al., 2018), vol. 2, 413–423.

<sup>102</sup> Erzsébet Arányi, *Fertőző betegségek Magyarországon 1600-1650* [Infectious Diseases in Hungary 1600-1650] (Budapest: Stephanium, 1911), 21.

<sup>103</sup> "... bit aber die frauw schwester wolle, einen solchen rauch wie die frauw schwester wie, es +ihn + die frauw mütter seell: hat, pflegen zu machen vnnd die immer fleißig darmit auß rauchern laßen, verhoff die frau schwester werde eine beßerung derauf spüren ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 11 December 1621 (43620).

referring to sweet-smelling wood burned in the castle's rooms several times a day.<sup>104</sup>

The maternal advice also provided instructions on how to take care of household dependents detailed in the letter's postscript hastily jotted down in scribal hand:

My dearest Lady Sister, I ask you not to forget that during dangerous times, [our] deceased Lady mother used to give her subject a fresh egg and as much sulphur as one can hold with three fingers, Item so much powder, as one is accustomed to add to, and as much as one can be held between three fingers it is very good for the Hungarian disease and other infections. The Lady Sister also should make smoke in the castle every morning, noon, and evening with carnobet [sic] so that it goes in all the rooms.<sup>105</sup>

The instructions passed on from mother to daughter exemplify the responsibility noblewomen carried towards the wellbeing of the entire noble household.<sup>106</sup> By fending

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<sup>104</sup> The seventeenth-century Hungarian physician Ferenc Pápai Páriz recommended burning ash, beech, pine, or spruce several times a day in places surrounded by walls (Pápai Páriz, *Pax corporis* 332–333). In Hungary, the smoke of lignum or baccae juniperi was commonly used during the pestilence; see Magyary-Kossa, 3: no. 1026, 271–73. Charcoal and sulphur, vinegar and other substances with disinfecting properties were widely used to desensitize infected areas (Győry, *Morbus Hungaricus*, 153). In 1577 the city of Vienna ordered houses to be disinfected by smoking wood of juniper and vinegar water during times of infections; see Susanne Claudine Pils, “Stadt, Pest und Obrigkeit,” in *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, 362. One late eighteenth-century plague treatise lists “sulphur, yellow and white arsenic, nitre, charcoal, gunpowder, tar, pitch, rosin, frankincense, vinegar, tobacco, juniper berries, pine tops and shavings” as fumigating substances: Patrick Russell, *A treatise of the Plague [...] Of the Police in Times of the Plague*, vol. 2 (London, 1791), 562.

<sup>105</sup> “... mein hertzliebste frau schwester ich bit sie wolle auch nit vergeßen vnd gedanken, wie die frau mütter seel: hat in gefehrlichen zeitten den leütten hat pflegen einzugeben einem frischen ay so viel schwefel alß man zwischen 3. finger halten kann, Item so vil púlver da man pflegt mit zú scheußen [?], auch so viel man zwischen 3 fingern halten kann, eingeben, doch ein jedes besonder, ist, sehr gút für die vngrisch krankheit vnd in fection, auch sollen die frau schwester allen morgen mittags vnd abenndts fleißig ein schloß mit carnobet [?] mach[en] laßen daß dan, alle zimmer geht ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 11 December 1621 (43620).

<sup>106</sup> The “Hausväter” literature (housefather books) of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries called attention to the obligation of housefathers and housemothers for the economic and physical wellbeing of all household members, including servants and peasants. These estate management guides included sections on farming, cooking, animal husbandry and medicine, among others. Fritz Hartmann, “Hausvater und Hausmutter als Hausarzt in der Frühen Neuzeit. Hausgewalt und Gesundheitsfürsorge,” in *Stadt und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Catharina Kolberg, et. al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 151–175 and Alisha Rankin, “The Housewife’s Apothecary in Early Modern Austria: Wolfgang Helmhard von Hohberg’s *Georgica curiosa* (1682),” *Medizina and Storia* 15 (2008): 55–76. About early modern households as economic entities see Otto Brunner, “Das alte Haus und die alteuropäische Ökonomie,” in *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 103–127.

off contagious diseases, they prevented the infection of their immediate family members and preserved the health of the estate's workforce. The therapeutic advice shows noblewomen's practice of treating their servants and peasants inflicted with infectious diseases with locally available remedies. Besides using smoke, the sister's mother recommended taking a small amount of pulverized sulphur to be consumed with egg to soothe the harshness of the substance.<sup>107</sup> Early modern medical sources mention sulphur mainly in the context of fumigation.<sup>108</sup> However, sulphur, known for its purging and fever-reducing properties, was also added to emulsions and juleps, particularly to treat typhoid-like diseases.<sup>109</sup>

Sabina complemented her mother's simple sulphur treatment with an equally affordable and straightforward medicine she acquired through her female network. According to the recommendation of Frau Schrott, those affected with the disease should hang a loaf of bread mashed together with pig lard, vinegar and distilled wine wrapped in a piece of cloth above their door.<sup>110</sup> A bit of red carrot placed under the tongue would also be an effective and cheap "remedium" for the Batthyánys' servants.<sup>111</sup> Hanging healing objects above doors was supposed to protect the entrance of people's houses and their bodies from poison. This practice was traditionally linked to magic rituals prevalent in previous centuries and still practiced in folk medicine at the time.<sup>112</sup> That such

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<sup>107</sup> In Pápai Páriz's *Pax Corporis*, many recipes for treating dysentery, particularly the dietary ones, call for eggs because of their nutritional value (Páriz, 184–200).

<sup>108</sup> Eighteenth-century German plague orders recommended burning sulphur for the poor because it was commonly accessible and cheap. See, for example, *Pestbeschreibung und Infektionsordnung* [...] (Vienna, 1763), part 1: 49.

<sup>109</sup> Kate Frost, "Prescription and Devotion: The Reverend Doctor Donne and the Learned Doctor Mayerne - Two Seventeenth-Century Records of Epidemic Typhus Fever," *Medical History* 22 (1978), 413.

<sup>110</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 11 December 1621 (43620).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> In seventeenth-century Hungarian medicine books and manuscript recipe compilations, the approach to sickness and healing was still influenced by traditional magical cures and healing practices. See Gizella

practices were known and circulated within noble women's written networks is further evidence that boundaries between magic and healing were permeable and folk practices were not utterly foreign to the medical arsenal of the early modern Central-European elite.<sup>113</sup>

While Sabina assisted her sister in treating the Batthyány's servants with locally available and inexpensive remedies, she also arranged for more costly forms of medicine from the apothecary in Vienna for the family. Around the time when the first signs of dysentery appeared at the Batthyány estates in November 1621, upon Eva's request, Sabina bought three boxes of "Passauer Lattweg" for 10 florins.<sup>114</sup> Electuaries or *Lattwege*, as they were called in German, were sweet medicinal confections known for their fever-reducing and purging assets used at times of infection.<sup>115</sup> Named after the Upper-Austrian town, the electuary from Passau was a popular remedy in Central Europe. Wolf Heimhardt von Hohberg's *Georgica Curiosa* (1682) advocated the electuary prepared from euphorbia, mastic, red myrrh, saffron and honey against poison and infection. Paul de Sorbait's eighteenth-century plague treatises listed the same remedy as an effective laxative.<sup>116</sup>

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Hoffmann, utószó [afterword] to *Medicusi és borbélymesterség. Régi magyar ember és állatorvosló könyvek Radvánszki Béla gyűjtéséből* [The Craft of Medici and Barber-Surgeons. Old Hungarian Books of Human- and Veterinarian Medicine Collected by Béla Radvánszky], ed. Gizella Hoffmann (Budapest: MTA Irodalomtudományi Intézet, 1989), 505–506.

<sup>113</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 177–211.

<sup>114</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.d.], November 1621 (43619).

<sup>115</sup> For electuary recipes for pestilence (latweg für die pestilenz) listed in German manuscript recipe compilations, see *Die medizinischen Handschriften unter den Codices Palatini germanici der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg*, ed. Matthias Miller and Karin Zimmermann (Heidelberg: Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, 2005), 58, 79 and 144. The German countess Dorothea Mansfeld also treated dysentery with electuary (Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters*, 42).

<sup>116</sup> Hohberg, *Georgica Curiosa Aucta, Das ist: Umständlicher Bericht und klarer Unterricht von dem adelichen Land und Feld Leben* (Nürnberg, 1682), 245 and Paul de Sorbait, *Pest-Beschreibung Und Infections-Ordnung. Welche Vormahls in besondern ....* (1727), 77.

Since Eva delayed sending the payment for the electuary to her sister a month later, Sabina wrote again that “the requested things from the apothecary,” together with the previously sent *Paßauer Lattweg*, cost 39 Florins, “which the Lady Sister herself can see in the attached bill from the apothecary.”<sup>117</sup> The apothecary’s invoice did not survive. However, the high sum paid for the medicine indicates that the electuary and the other drugs ordered from the apothecary were most likely intended for the personal use of Eva and her family.

During the dysentery epidemics in western Hungary in the early 1620s, Sabina also helped facilitate communication between the Batthyány countess and a Viennese physician to treat the infected subjects. In a letter dated in summer of 1622, she wrote:

My dear Lady Sister, after I had received the news that so many of the Lady Sister’s people have been lying sick, I talked to Doctor Judex, and he wishes that the Lady sister would inform him freely what troubles them or how the sickness looks like so that he could prescribe something from here.<sup>118</sup>

Doctor Judex’s request to describe symptoms via letters was not unusual in early modern medical praxis.<sup>119</sup> Physicians set up diagnoses relying on the written observation given by elite patients who lived at a distance.<sup>120</sup> While the outcome of the medical consultation

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<sup>117</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 11 December 1621 (43620).

<sup>118</sup> “... mein hertzlebe frauw schwester, nachdem ich vernommen, daß so viel vnder der frauw schwester ihren menschern sollen krann ker ligen, deßwegen mit dem herrn D. Júdexen darúon geredt, welcher begehrt daß die frauw schwester ihne vnbeschwerth wolle berichten laßen waß sie clagen oder wie sich die krankheit ansehet, kan er ihnen alß dan von hieraúß etwaß verordnete ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 7 July 1622 (43624).

<sup>119</sup> Matthäus Judex (1573-1626), a graduate of Padua, served as a court physician in Vienna during the first decades of the 1600s and was an adherent of Paracelsian medicine. The local medical faculty regarded Judex’s activity with suspicion and, in 1612, they banned him and his fellow physician, Valentine Rorer, from practicing medicine. Despite the disapproval of the medical authorities, both doctors persisted in their alchemical practices, as evidenced by the faculty’s complaint to the emperor, labelling them as ‘haeretici doctores aulici’. See Ingrid Matschinegg, *Österreicher als Universitätsbesucher in Italien (1500–1630). Regionale und soziale Herkunft – Karrieren – Prosopographie* PhD diss. (Univeristät Graz, 1999), 450. For Judex’s conflict with members of the Viennese faculty of medicine, see Jana Madlen Schütte, *Medizine im Konflikt, Fakultäten, Märkte und Experten in deutschen Universitätsstädten des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 166.

<sup>120</sup> The Hungarian doctor Gáspár Kőrös, for example, asked his patron Palatine Tamás Nádasdy to send him

with Doctor Judex is unknown, the letter attests to the role of close-kin female relatives as interlocutors in the exchange of therapeutic knowledge between the learned medical community of Vienna and noblewomen in charge of the wellbeing of their households.

### *Advice for treating sick children*

Sabina Solms' felicitations reached her sister Eva Poppel in the spring of 1616 as the latter emerged from the lying-in-chamber for the first time:<sup>121</sup> "Since I believe that your six weeks are soon over, I wish you and your child a happy presentation. Let the Almighty God give you and your child strength and bless you both with a long life."<sup>122</sup> Such greetings were common in early modern family correspondences as extended family members expressed both joy and relief when a child was born.<sup>123</sup> Sabina's wishes and the Batthyány family's hope for a strong and healthy child were, however, short-lived as the infant girl died within a few months.<sup>124</sup>

Child mortality was high in seventeenth-century Central Europe, as it was elsewhere on the continent. Before 1800, it is estimated that approximately twenty percent of children didn't survive the first year of life and among those who died before reaching adulthood, half did not live beyond the age of ten.<sup>125</sup> Many infants

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a detailed description of the menstrual blood of his wife as part of diagnosing her infertility problems (Vida, *'Szerelmes Orsikám...'*, 50).

<sup>121</sup> This marked the final point of the four to six weeks long childbirth ritual commonly practiced across early modern Europe. Adrian Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). For post-partum traditions among the early modern Austrian nobility, see Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre*, 473–507, especially 473–476.

<sup>122</sup> "...verman auch mein libeste frau schwester das deine sechses wochen schon miß seindt, windsch dies hir midt samdt deinen kindt ein gliglich auß gang der alle mechtiche godt sterck dich vnd dein kindt vnd es halt eng ale bein langen vnd gesündten leben ...". Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.d.] (43642).

<sup>123</sup> Péter, *Beloved Children*. 58.

<sup>124</sup> The child most probably is identical with the unnamed girl mentioned in the letter of the Hungarian bishop György Lépes to Ferenc Batthyány (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 523 fn. 155).

<sup>125</sup> Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 34. Gábor Bibza's research into funeral sermons of middle-class families found that child

died during or shortly after childbirth or succumbed to infectious diseases and other sicknesses due to poor hygiene and diet. Sabina often expressed her concerns over Eva's children and offered help and advice on numerous occasions, confirming contemporaries' fear for children's well-being. When Eva's daughter Erzsébet became sick, she was "sorry for the young Lady Petuschko that she is so ill".<sup>126</sup> Similarly, she worried about the Batthyány's first-born son Boldizsár, reminding her sister to remain patient because "the four-day fever in children is not something to play with."<sup>127</sup> Sabina rejoiced when she learned that "Herr Fredterchen" was recovering from a severe sickness because she "never doubted that God will help him and keep him alive," and lamented her own daughter's death: "Had it been possible, I would have saved my dear deceased Maria Bietushka from death, [and] my own blood I would have not spared. But in vain, in vain it is to [cry] against the will of God."<sup>128</sup>

Patently tending to their sick children and placing trust in the divine healer was often the only thing that seventeenth-century mothers could do when they faced potentially terminal illness. A mother herself, Sabina knew all too well how quickly illness could end in death as she had buried three of her four children before they turned five.<sup>129</sup> Children died frequently in the Batthyány family too. Dorica Zrinyi, Ferenc

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mortality rates were similar in Hungary to other parts of early modern Europe: Gábor Bibza, *Die deutschsprachige Leichenpredigt der frühen Neuzeit in Ungarn (1571-1711)* (Berlin: Lit. Verlag Dr. W. Hopf, 2010), 65–67.

<sup>126</sup> "... er ist mir wohl hertz lich leidt vmb die freüwle Petúschco daß sie so vbel aúf ist..." Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43629). Petuschko or Erzsébet Batthyány (1618/19-1674) was Eva Poppel's second daughter (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 523).

<sup>127</sup> "... eß ist mir von gründt meineß hertzen vm den Bodihko leidt daß er [nicht] so wol aúf ist, bitt aber mein frauw schwester wolle beÿ zaiten darzú thún dan mit dem vier tágig[en] fieber beÿ den kind[er]n nit zú schertzen..." Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43634). See also Pápai Páriz, *Pax Corporis*, 306-315.

<sup>128</sup> Boldizsár (1608-1622) or Ádám Batthyány (1610-1659). "... deß herrn fredterchen itzúnder beßer alß vor gehen soll erfreúw ich mich von herzen, hab aúch nieh dan zweifret daß ihm Gott nit helfen vnd erhalten solt..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Szentgotthárd, [n.p.] December [n.d.] (43629). Maria Elisabeth Solms, Sabina's daughter (1608-1613). Sabina's letter to Eva [n.p.], [n.d.] (52875), transl. by Eva Bullard.

<sup>129</sup> About Sabina's children see Chapter 1.

Batthyány's mother, lost three of her children within a year, while of the nine children born of the marriage of Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány, only four reached adulthood.<sup>130</sup> The ability to have children and preserve their health remained the most existential concern for the early modern nobility: a link between the family's past and future.<sup>131</sup> Sabina's letters thus reveal the important social role of close kin relatives in terms of providing aid in the healing of ill children. By offering therapeutic advice and recommending expert medical assistance, Sabina fulfilled the social obligation that was expected of an aristocratic female sibling, namely, to promote the well-being and prosperity of the extended noble family.<sup>132</sup>

Advising her younger sister about how to treat sick children, Sabina primarily drew on her own experience. When one of the Batthyánys' children suffered from stiff limbs, she provided two recipes for ointments to treat lameness upon Eva's request.

If you, my lady sister, desire to know how I used to make 'underwachs salbe', so I did it in no other way that by mixing honey and fresh butter and smeared the child [with it] on both sides and when it was hard [I greased it] also under his ribs.<sup>133</sup>

The recipe was a simple version of the well-known ointment circulated in the Central European region. The *Georgica Curiosa*, a popular household management book in seventeenth-century Lower Austria, recommended "Underwachs Salbe" prepared from

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<sup>130</sup> Csilla Gramantik, "Zrínyi Dorica élete levelei tükrében [The Life of Dorica Zrínyi Based on Her Letters]," in *Publicationes Universitatis Miskolcensis, Sectio Philosophica Tomus XVIII., Fasc. 1. (2014)*, 59–60. On the Batthyány children, see below and Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 524.

<sup>131</sup> Beatrix Bastl, "Adeliger Lebenslauf. Die Rieten um Leben und Sterben in der frühen Neuzeit," in *Adel im Wandel. Politik, Kultur und Konfession, Niederösterreichische Landesausstellung, Rosenburg 12 Mai-20. Oktober*, ed. Herbert Knittler (Vienna: Amt der NÖ Landesregierung, 1990), 382; Bastl, *Tugend und Ehre*, 425–430.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

<sup>133</sup> "... ist die vndters waex salben begertst dú zú visen mein libe frau schwester wie ichs gemacht hab, ist nigest andters als ein henich vnd frischen búdter, hab ich zú samen gemist., iges[?] gewennndt[?] vnd hab den kindt die seitden darúndt geschmirdt, vnd wahs hardt ist gewest ist vndter den b[r]iben ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43640).

animal fat, white lily bulb, soap, and red and white onion for children who were “small and hard around the ribs”.<sup>134</sup> A similar treatment was suggested by the Hungarian medical doctor Pápai Páriz to rub castoreum or plant oil on the stiff child’s neck along his spine until the tailbone.<sup>135</sup>

In the same letter, another slightly more elaborate variant of the ointment recipe called for butter, motherwort, common juniper, and ground ivy.<sup>136</sup> Sabina described the salve’s application on the child’s body in detail:

One should apply it warm on [the child], starting under his heart and his ribs; if both sides are hardening, one must apply it on one side in the evening and on the other side in the morning, but if only one of his sides is stiff, then one has to apply [the salve] only on that side...<sup>137</sup>

To supplement the treatment, Sabina also suggested giving the child some ginger in berry juice to prevent dehydration. She also underlined the medicine’s effectiveness and asserted that the salve was *probata est*, using the standard phrase of appropriation customary in early modern medical recipes.<sup>138</sup> Such validations were particularly common in children’s medicine, where the safety and success of the remedy was

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<sup>134</sup> See *Georgica Curiosa*, vol. 1 (1682), 338–339. A recipe with similar ingredients is listed under the name “Eine bewährte Unterwachs-Salbe vor die kleine Kinder” in Baptista Libertus *Freund in der Noth Darbietend bewährte und oft versuchte Artzneymittel* (Leipzig, 1710), 41.

<sup>135</sup> Pápai Páriz, *Pax Corporis*, 400.

<sup>136</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43640).

<sup>137</sup> “...wan mans kindt darúndt schmiren[en] wihl, so múß mans nach dem badt fein warmer schmiren, wan múß an heben von hertz gribel an, bis hinúnder an seigen vndt ern riben herz zún schieren so weidt als die seiten werdt súns ale bede seiden herdt [?], so múß mans zúm abwendt aúff dar ein seidt, vdt zú morgen aúff der andtern seiden schiren, wahr aber mir [?] ein seiden hardt ist, so múß mans stadtz aúff der selbichen seiden schmiren ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.d.] (43640). Similar instructions how to treat lameness or stiffness in children can be found in Pápai Páriz, *Pax corporis*, 396.

<sup>138</sup> Efficacy phrases implying a trial in practice, particularly the omnipresent “probatum est” (it had been tried), appeared both in Latin and vernacular texts. Claire Jones suggests that the Latin phrase was deliberately used in vernacular recipes, given that Latin was the language of authority: Claire Jones, “Formula and Formulation: ‘Efficacy Phrases’ in Medieval English Medical Manuscripts,” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 99, no. 2 (1998), 199–204. For approbation of the recipes in the context of the early modern medical marketplace, see Elaine Leong and Sara Pennel, “Recipe Collections and the Currency of Medical Knowledge in the Early Modern ‘Medical Marketplace’,” in *Medicine and the Marketplace Medicine in England and its Colonies c. 1450–1850*, ed. Mark S. Jenner and Patrick Wallis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 133 and 139.

vital.<sup>139</sup> In order to prove the efficacy of the treatment, Sabina emphasized that she “found nothing better for [her] children when they were so little as [Eva’s children].”<sup>140</sup> Thus, the personal experience and practice of a close family member heightened the value of the recipe and guaranteed that the salve was a potent medicine.<sup>141</sup> The fact that Sabina tried out the remedy on her own children was the best recommendation for its success.

### *Assisting and being assisted: mediating between midwife, physician and medicine*

In addition to infectious diseases and children’s maladies, several letters in Sabina Solms’ correspondence deal with pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum weakness. In her letters, most information about women’s health concerns emerges in two contexts: when the pregnant Batthyány countess needed medical assistance, and when noblewomen in neighbouring Austria approached Eva Poppel, seeking her medicine for similar concerns. These letters thus highlight the intermediary role of a noble sibling in medical encounters. Sabina facilitated connections between Eva Poppel and members of the medical trade who had the knowledge and experience with women’s concerns, as well as those women who desired the countess’ pharmaceutical expertise and remedies.

Most pregnancies proceeded without complications. Expectant mothers usually remained active and were able to travel, or do business until delivery.<sup>142</sup> But carrying children to term did not always go smoothly, and newborns often did not survive. Eva

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<sup>139</sup> Edith Snook, “‘The Women Know’: Children’s Diseases, Recipes and Women’s Knowledge in Early Modern Medical Publications,” *Social History of Medicine* 30, no. 1 (2016): 13.

<sup>140</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43640).

<sup>141</sup> Rankin, *Panacea’s Daughters*, 39–43.

<sup>142</sup> Péter, *Beloved Children*, 55–58.

Poppel, for instance, had at least nine pregnancies during eighteen years of marriage to Ferenc Batthyány, and five infants were either stillborn or died soon after birth.<sup>143</sup> Details about the birth chamber were not recorded, and we can only imagine the difficulties that Eva and her infants endured.

While Sabina's letters do mention situations related to problems with pregnancy or childbirth, they never delve into specific details about related medical concerns. As Susan Broomhall pointed out, women's medical problems were rarely disclosed in writing because contemporaries viewed such topics as ill-suited for women to discuss.<sup>144</sup> Guided by the attitudes of the Bible towards women and menstrual blood, male suspicion towards women and their reproductive knowledge never ceased. Modesty, therefore, was a required trait for women, restricting their abilities for public discussion about reproductive concerns and treatments, particularly in letters written with scribal assistance, thereby preventing them to reveal their experiences, being afraid of unwanted readers.<sup>145</sup>

However, it must be noted that such intimate topics were not completely absent from close-kin women's written conversation. The accidental survival of Magdolna Batthyány's holograph letter to Eva Poppel serves as evidence that she sought her mother's advice regarding her irregular menstruation and offered a relatively detailed

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<sup>143</sup> Eva's first son Boldizsár [Bodiskó], was born in 1608 and died at fourteen in 1622. Her second and only son to reach adulthood, Ádám [Adamko] (1610–1659), came into the world two years later. The boys were followed by five girls, Magdolna [Manca, Manda] (1610/12–1658); Erzsébet [Betuska] (1618/19–1674); Borbála [Báberli] (ca. 1620–680); Dorottya, stillborn before May 1620 and an unnamed girl (early 1616), who most likely died shortly after birth. Eva Poppel's last two children, Gábor (January 1624–December 27, 1624) and Miklós (1625) also died in infancy (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 521–524).

<sup>144</sup> Susan Broomhall, "'Women's Little Secrets': Defining Boundaries of Reproductive Knowledge in Sixteenth-Century France," *Social History of Medicine* 15, no.1 (2002): 2.

<sup>145</sup> Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Family*, 26–35.

account of her symptoms.<sup>146</sup> In early modern correspondence, the absence of discussions about women's concerns, therefore, can also be attributed to the fact that such matters were directly exchanged only with the closest family members in those letters written without the involvement of scribes. Additionally, since letters written in the women's own handwriting, in general, were often deemed unimportant to their families, those containing more detailed accounts of women's health problems were rarely preserved.

A further possible reason for the taciturnity over pregnancy, childbirth, or reproductive knowledge in women's correspondence is the reliance on oral communication of information for sharing such information.<sup>147</sup> Although the written exchange of information between family members expanded in the seventeenth century, information thought to be of importance was still exchanged by word of mouth, either during personal visits or in the form of reports presented by the letter's bearer.<sup>148</sup> What had been discussed in person or reported by the messenger did not need to be reiterated in writing. This might also explain the vague references to Eva Poppel's state of health in the letters. Sabina wrote about Eva's "blessed condition" ("glücklichen Zustand") but also about a health problem without being explicit: "I learned [from your letter] with a saddened heart about your condition, but I ask you my Lady sister not to worry about it because it happens rather often."<sup>149</sup> This latter reference suggests that Eva may have experienced a miscarriage. Since both sisters were familiar with the context, only the

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<sup>146</sup> See Magdolna Batthyány's letter to Eva Poppel, Pápa, 5 October [n.y.] (5122).

<sup>147</sup> Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 132-133.

<sup>148</sup> About the role of messengers in the communication of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, see Chapter 2.

<sup>149</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 22 June 1615 (43589) and "... doraús mit betribten hertzen dein zú stond fer númen biet aber die frau schfester er shrek niht doriber es geschiht gar úft ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43633).

most pertinent information was entrusted to paper.<sup>150</sup> Sabina thus discussed in her letters not symptoms and concerns regarding what happened during her sister's pregnancy or in the birth chamber, but rather how medical help should be sought and arranged.<sup>151</sup>

In the seventeenth century, facilitating connections with medical practitioners was the duty of family members. Female relatives living in the household or at a distance were involved in discussing various options of medical care and for hiring midwives and physicians would assist in the birth chamber.<sup>152</sup> Although doctors were sought out for their advice and medicine for worrisome pre- and postpartum conditions and while husbands were expected to support their wives and pay the fees of doctors and midwives, pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum care remained by and large women's province.<sup>153</sup>

If the birth was expected to be difficult, aristocratic families usually called a midwife. The midwife was usually a mature and experienced woman who, together with female relatives, ladies-in-waiting and women in the service of the noble lady, assisted the birth and took care of the newborn child.<sup>154</sup> Since it was not easy to find a qualified midwife in the Hungarian Kingdom before the late eighteenth century, noble families living west of the Danube River hired experienced women from nearby Vienna or Graz who served in noble households and were passed among the Austrian female elite.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Since Eva's responses to Sabina had not been preserved, we don't know whether she was more explicit in her letters about her health problems.

<sup>151</sup> Péter, *Beloved Children*, 55.

<sup>152</sup> Robert Jütte, "'Wo kein Weib ist, da seufzet der Kranke': Familie und Krankheit im 16. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Geschichte der Medizin der Robert-Bosch-Stiftung* 7 (1988): 17; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

<sup>153</sup> Jacque Gélis, *History of Childbirth: Fertility, Pregnancy and Birth in Early Modern Europe* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 99–101 and Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict*, 195–196.

<sup>154</sup> Ferenc Nádasdy, son of Palatine Tamás Nádasdy and Orsolya Kanizsai, was born with the assistance of a midwife hired from Vienna. See the *letter of Antal Sárkány to Tamás Nádasdy*, 7 October 1555, in Vida, *'Szerelmes Orskikám...'*, 127.

<sup>155</sup> On midwifery in Graz, see Heidemarie Krenn-Simon, "'Beystandt in kindtnöthen' - Grazer Hebammen in der frühen Neuzeit und die Anfänge des staatlichen Reglementierten Hebammenwesens," *Historisches*

Personal connections were essential for obtaining professional medical assistance. Families in need of a skilled midwife usually relied on the recommendation of their relatives and friends.<sup>156</sup> Two consecutive letters written to Eva Poppel and Ferenc Batthyány in 1619 point to Sabina's role as agent in hiring a midwife with a good reputation for her pregnant sister and also highlight an early modern husband's supportive role.<sup>157</sup> While the letters are silent about which of the Batthyány couple's children was about to be born, they attest to both the urgency of the case and to the family tensions between Eva Poppel and her close kin relatives, her sister and her husband, over choosing the right healthcare provider.<sup>158</sup>

In the first letter addressed to Eva in early September 1619, Sabina expressed her concerns over her sister's impending birth, recommending her to hire a qualified midwife.<sup>159</sup> Sabina was well-positioned to find an experienced woman as she maintained friendly relations with the female members of the Austrian nobility, including the Althan, Harrach, Hoffkirchen, Kollonits, Königsberg, Lobkowitz,

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*Jahrbuch der Stadt Graz* 23/24 (1993): 11–50. The professionalization of midwifery in Vienna originated in the mid-seventeenth century when midwives began to take exams at the medical faculty of Vienna: Sonia Horn, “Wiener Hebammen 1643–1753,” *Jahrbuch des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Wien*, 59 (2003): 35–102. In Hungary, midwifery as an organised profession was established only with the introduction of sanitary regulations in 1770 obliging midwives to take compulsory examinations throughout the Habsburg Monarchy. See Lilla Krász, “Zwischen Verbanntsein und Akzeptiertsein. Am Rande eines Hebammenprozesses aus dem 18. Jahrhundert,” in *An der Schwelle der europäischen Union*, ed. Ferenc Glatz (Budapest: Europa Institut, 2000), 220 and from the same author, “Ein ‘Janusköpfiger Beruf’: das dörfliche ‘Hebammenamt’ im Ungarn des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Deutsche Sprache und Kultur in der Zips*, ed. Wynfrid Kriegleder, Andrea Seidler and Jozef Tanger (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2007), 105–121.

<sup>156</sup> Emese, T. Ládonyi, “A bába és dajkaválasztás párhuzamai a 16–17. századi magyarországi főúri gyakorlatban” [Parallels in the Aristocratic Praxis of Choosing Midwives and Wetnurses in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Hungary], *Kaleidoszkóp* 9, no. 17 (2018): 67–81.

<sup>157</sup> Almost seventy years earlier, the physician Gáspár Körös advised Palatine Tamás Nádasdy to return home and comfort his pregnant and anxious wife. Nádasdy listened to his doctor, and when the couple's only son, Ferenc, was born, he donated a house in the town of Sopron to Körös (Vida, ‘*Szerelmes Orsikám...*’ Letter 59., 78).

<sup>158</sup> The Batthyány's family genealogy is not conclusive about whether Eva Poppel was pregnant with Erzsébet (born around 1618 or 1619), Borbála (born around 1620), or Dorottya (died before 1620) (Koltai, *Batthyány Ádám*, 523–524).

<sup>159</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 19 September 1619 (43606).

Losenstein, Mindorff, Teufel and Tollet families. Indeed, the midwife, who was recommended to Sabina, came from the Styrian town of Graz with excellent references. She had just delivered a healthy girl to the second wife of Paul Jakob von Starhemberg, chancellor to Matthias II and general commissar of Hungary, who maintained friendly terms with the Batthyánys.<sup>160</sup> However, Eva showed little enthusiasm over the prospect of delivering her child with the assistance of an unfamiliar woman, as Sabina indicated in her second letter directed to her brother-in-law Ferenc Batthyány a few weeks later.<sup>161</sup> In this letter, Sabina reiterated her concern about Eva Poppel's condition, insisting that "this time, things seemed to be different" from her previous pregnancies. Thus, Sabina recommended that her brother-in-law hire the "midwife from Graz" in case of complications during the birth:

I would like to bring along a fine and good midwife so that it would appear as though she is serving me. In that way, my lady sister would not know about [the midwife] until she is needed. [Therefore,] my Lord Brother should declare to pay for her travel and for her absence [...] whether my sister wants it or not, [and] [...] Regarding such matters, one must not wait until the last minute because people cannot be brought here so quickly when they are needed.<sup>162</sup>

The plan to bring the midwife, disguised as her servant, to the Batthyány's residence in Szalónak (Schleinitz) aimed to make sure that expert assistance would be available at the right time. The letter makes it clear that the support and cooperation of the husband was

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<sup>160</sup> Starhemberg: Upper-Austrian noble family. Dorothea of Thannhausen (1575–1622), second wife of Paul Jakob Lord of Starhemberg (1560–1635), chancellor of Matthias II and General Commissar in Hungary, gave birth to Constanzia Barbara in 1619. See also *Paul Jakob Starhemberg's letters to Ferenc Batthyány*, 44248–44250.

<sup>161</sup> Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 2 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>162</sup> "... alß wolte ich aúch ein ~~fraúw~~ fein gúte geborne mit mir nehmen, dergestalt alß ob dieselb aúf mich wartete, daß es alß mein fraúw schwester nit erfúhre, bis man sie bederfet wan mein herr brúder [...] derselben ihr reið vndt versaúmnúß zúbezahlen sich erklären thete, mein schfester beigessen... oder nicht fihl fraúen von denen sie hir gebraúcht wirt verlesen [...] diesen sachen nit biß vf das letzt warten múß, dan man alß dan nit also geschwindt die leúth herbey kan bringen lassen alß es von nöthen thúet ...", *ibid.*

needed to address Eva's apparent misgivings about calling for help from outside her household.

There were several reasons for taking such precautions. Due to the difficulties in calculating the exact timing of a child's birth, it was necessary for noble families to make arrangements with midwives well in advance of the expected delivery date.<sup>163</sup> In addition, long distances and poor road conditions could hinder help from arriving on time. Moreover, experienced midwives were hard to find, especially if they had enough well-paid commitments elsewhere. The services of the midwife from Graz were in high demand among the noblewomen of Vienna, as is suggested by a marginal note in Sabina's hand: "she [the midwife] is going to leave the ladies here [in Vienna] who rely on her services so that she can follow me and serve my Lady Sister."<sup>164</sup> Therefore, Sabina suggested that Ferenc Batthyány should compensate the midwife for her travel expenses and lost income resulting from the commissions she missed while waiting for Eva Poppel's delivery.

Why Eva Poppel opposed the midwives' help is difficult to infer. Eva's strong personality and her reservations about the midwife's character could both be possible reasons. Women about to give birth interpreted the presence of doctors, barber-surgeons, or a stranger in the birth chamber as a bad omen because they feared something would go wrong with the birth. Indeed, before the eighteenth century, surgeons were only called in if they had to extract a dead fetus, thereby saving the mother's life.<sup>165</sup> Whether the sight

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<sup>163</sup> Zita Deáky and Lilla Krász, *Minden dolgok kezdete. A születés kultúrtörténete, XVI-XX. század* [The Beginnings of All Things. The Cultural History of Birth, from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries.] (Budapest: Századvég, 2005), 65–70.

<sup>164</sup> "... fihl frauén von denen sie hir gebraúcht wirt verlesen vnd mir zúgeföhlen meiner schfester zú dienen ..." Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 2 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>165</sup> Lianne McTavish, "Blame and Vindication in the Early Modern Birthing Chamber," *Medical History* 50, no. 4 (2006): 447–467. As in France, the profession of male-midwifery was not practiced in Hungary

of a midwife caused similar fears in Eva Poppel as the presence of a male medical practitioner would, reins a matter of conjecture. The fact that Sabina resorted to intrigue to keep the midwife on hand suggests that the Countess of Batthyány was hesitant to let unfamiliar help into her birth chamber.

Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány points to the active role of the family in the preparations for the birth, including ensuring that the necessary medical assistance was at hand. It is well documented that female relatives, along with women at the court, assisted the mother in giving birth, while the husbands were expected to be present before and after the delivery to provide emotional support to their wives.<sup>166</sup> More importantly, as our case demonstrates, family members were involved in the hiring process of professional assistance, particularly when the birth proved difficult.<sup>167</sup> While Sabina found an experienced midwife and made the necessary steps to ensure that professional help would be available at the birth, Ferenc Batthyány was expected to provide a cart and horses for travel and pay the midwife's fees. As the Countess of Solms emphasized in the closing lines of her letter: "I am waiting for my Lord Brother's response, which my Lord can send me together with the cart. I will abide by whatever my Lord Brother decides, [but]

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before the nineteenth century. Surgeons practicing midwifery are documented from the eighteenth century and barber-surgeons might have been called in cases of emergency but until the early nineteenth century male doctors or surgeons were rarely involved with childbirth and then mostly in cases of severe complications, involving cesarian section or extracting a dead fetus from the womb. In Hungary, regular training of male surgeon-midwives began at the medical faculty of Pest in the late 1810s; see Katalin Simon, *Sebészet és sebészek Magyarországon (1686–1848)* [Surgery and Surgeons in Hungary (1686–1848)], PhD diss. (ELTE, 2011), 94. For early modern France, see Gélis, 101–102, 305.

<sup>166</sup> Ulinka Rublack, "Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body," *Past and Present* 150, no. 1 (1996): 99.

<sup>167</sup> Ládonyi, "A bába és dajkaválasztás párhuzamai," 71.

she is an extremely good woman experienced in this matter.”<sup>168</sup> The final decision to hire the midwife was left not to the wife but to her husband.

### *Learned doctors from Vienna*

Male medical practitioners were rarely permitted to enter the birth chamber. Nonetheless, elite noble families would turn to doctors for treatment of symptoms during the course of pregnancy and after childbirth and when sick infants needed expert attention. For instance, Palatine Tamás Nádasdy’ hired Gáspár Körös, a graduate of the medical faculty of Padua, to treat the infertility of the palatines’ wife and monitor the health of his newborn son.<sup>169</sup> Sabina Solms’ correspondence also provides evidence for this practice in the Batthyány court. An undated autograph letter, presumably written in 1619, reveals how Sabina helped find a physician for her pregnant sister and organized the doctor’s visit from Vienna to the Batthyány residence:

My most beloved Lady sister, today around 5 o’clock, I received your letter, from which I understood your condition with a saddened heart. I beg you, Lady Sister, do not get frightened about it, as this happens quite often, [and] since the doctor is not here, I will see if I can ask Doctor Judex to travel with me to you. Tomorrow I will be, God willing, for sure there [...] I cannot leave you alone because you know [well] what is awaiting [for you] [and] you have [only] the wife of the court judge with you, and she also feels pregnant.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> “... erwarte hierüber meines herrn brüdern sein antwort, [...] welche mir der herr mit den wagen schicken kan wos mir mein herr brüter shofen wie er de dornoh wil ich mich ferholten es iest ein ieber aús, feins vnd in den sohen er fa reins weib ...” Sabina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 2 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>169</sup> See Vida, “*Szerelmes Orsikám...*”.

<sup>170</sup> “... mein aller libsti frau schfester dein shreiben hab ih heit um 5 úhr gegen abent empfangen doraus mit beribten hertzen dein zú stond fer númen biet aber die frau schfester er shrek niht doriber es geschihit gar úft rund weil der dockter niht hir iest wiel ich sehen ab ih d júderen khint er bieten das ehr mit mihr zú dier ruset wiel morgen wiels gatt gewies mit den tog hir aúf sein [...] dan ich dieh nicht sú allen losen kan was aúch das dú múrnzen der wos [?] for stet bei dier hast alls die múge húfrihterin vnd die iest selber aúh schfänger pefihlih ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43633).

References to the “lady sister’s condition”, and particularly the letter’s closing remark that the court judge’s wife “also feels herself pregnant,” leaves no doubt that the Batthyány countess was expecting a child. Instead of elaborating on what exactly the problem was, the relatively short letter elucidates Sabina’s efforts to obtain the service of the Viennese court physician Mätthias Judex.<sup>171</sup> As in the midwife’s case, Sabina acted as an intermediary between Eva Poppel and the medical doctor from Vienna, whom she knew well, as he had treated her a few times between 1619 and 1621.<sup>172</sup>

Doctor Judex was not the only doctor that Sabina recommended to Eva. A few years earlier, she also asked the chief physician of Lower Austria, Johann Bierdümpfel (1564–1620), to visit her sister in the spring of 1615.<sup>173</sup> Upon being informed that Eva was weak and sick, Sabina notified her older sister Katharina Kurzbach of the “sad news,” which the Kurzbach Countess received with “great sorrow.”<sup>174</sup> That the Batthyány countess might have suffered from the effects of a difficult birth can be inferred from the hasty preparation of the two Poppel Lobkowitz sisters for a visit to the Batthyány court and from Sabina’s efforts to bring Bierdümpfel along. The Viennese physician was reluctant to leave his patients behind and only agreed to travel to Hungary after Sabina promised that the visit wouldn’t require a long stay. The doctor took along his knowledgeable apothecary to prepare freshly made medicine for the patient.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> About Mathias Judex see above f.n. 119.

<sup>172</sup> Sabina’s letters to Eva, Vienna, 24 August 1619 (43604), Vienna, 21 and 24 June 1621 (43611–43612) and Sabina’s letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 2 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>173</sup> Johann Bierdümpfel, a graduate from the medical faculty of Basel, became the chief physician of Lower Austria in Vienna in 1608. The erudite physician wrote several treatises, including one on the perfection and imperfection of metals, which showed his interest in experimental chemistry. Johann Bierdümpfel, “Syrraxis metallikē trite” (Jena, 1591) and Georg Brückner, “Bierdümpfel, Johann,” in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipzig: Ducker & Humblot, 1875), vol. 2, 628.

<sup>174</sup> Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 17/27 April 1615 (43586).

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.* Bierdümpfel’s trusted assistant was Johann Reutter, owner of the apothecary to the *Zum Schwarzen Elefanten* since 1600. Felix Czeike, “Die Anfänge der Apotheke ‘‘Zum weißen Storch’’,” *Wiener*

Following this initial encounter, the Batthyány countess and the Viennese physician continued to exchange medical recipes.<sup>176</sup> In a letter dated November 1615, the physician responded to an earlier request from Eva for a purging medicine by sending her a recipe of cleansing juice made from quince (“Pürgirsafft von den Qúitten”). The formula indicates the precise measurements of the ingredients, including quince, plums and sugar, with instructions for preparing the brew.<sup>177</sup> Along with the recipe, Bierdümpfel also sent a powder for removing urinary sand (renal gravel).<sup>178</sup>

A second letter written the following summer further exhibits Bierdümpfel’s role as a supplier of pharmaceutical knowledge for the Batthyány countess. In July, Eva Poppel wrote to Melchior Lehner, the Batthyány’s middleman in Vienna, asking him to deliver a Latin recipe to the doctor, “with the request to do me a favour that he would translate this Latin description into German for me and to send the German translation to me.”<sup>179</sup> This request suggests that there was an apparent shortage in the Batthyány court of people who could understand Latin. Most importantly, the working relationship with the learned doctor and the exchange of recipes show Eva Poppel’s early interest in collecting medicine and the hands-on practice of medicine-making. Eva Poppel and Bierdümpfel remained in contact until he died in 1620. After the doctor’s death, she took the doctor’s two daughters to serve as ladies-in-waiting for her oldest daughter

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*Geschichtsblätter* 43 (1988), xi, xvii–xix and xxvi–xxviii. See also Sabina Reutter’s letters to Ferenc Batthyány, 39773 (1619) and 39774 (1625).

<sup>176</sup> For the exchange of medical knowledge between noble women and learned doctors, see Rankin, *Panacea’s daughters*, 54–58.

<sup>177</sup> Quince and prunes were well known for their cleansing properties.

<sup>178</sup> Johann Bierdümpfel’s letter to Eva Poppel, Vienna, 4 November 1615 (6726).

<sup>179</sup> “... ich schickhe auch den herrn doctor Wirteinpffel ein lateinisches zedels, ich bitt in d[a]s er mir so will zúgefallen thúe, d[a]s er mir dises lateinisches verzeichneter, aúf teutsch vertiern, vnd also verdeútschter herain schicktht ...”, Eva Poppel’s letter to Melchier Lehner, Szalónak [Schlaining], 24 July 1616 (4606).

Magdolna, thereby demonstrating appreciation for the long-standing service of her erudite client.<sup>180</sup>

### *Mediating Aqua Vita: Eva Poppel's remedies for the Austrian ladies*

By the end of the 1610s, Eva Poppel had become an established authority in medicine-making among the noblewomen of Lower Austria and Styria. Her pharmaceutical skills were well known in and around Vienna, as the steady traffic of requests for therapeutic waters in Sabina's correspondence suggests. Designed for treating diverse ailments, her remedies were herbal distillates with strong alcoholic content. During the multi-stage distillation process (*Wasser brennen*), to produce so-called 'burning waters' herbs and spices were cooked in wine, stored in jars and glasses, and left standing in cold places for weeks.<sup>181</sup>

Well into the eighteenth century, noble households used these potent curative liquids to treat various ailments.<sup>182</sup> They were known as a panacea, a kind of universal medicine thought to be effective for many illnesses, and their preparation was often linked to noble women's expertise.<sup>183</sup> For example, in 1543, Dorothea Mansfeld sent her white *aqua vita* to Martin Luther, claiming it was helpful "for fainting and exhaustion, be

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<sup>180</sup> See Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 29 July 1621 (43614).

<sup>181</sup> Iványi, Béla, "'Vízégetés' Nyugat-Magyarországon a XVI-XVII században" (Distilling Medicinal Waters in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Hungary), *Az Országos Orvostörténeti könyvtár közleményei* 4 (1956): 5–33.

<sup>182</sup> See, for example, the numerous references to *aqua destillata* in the late eighteenth-century German recipe book from Sachranger: Christoph Glaser, ed., *Die Sachranger Rezeptbuch. Edition und Kommentar der Arzneiverordnungen in einer volksmedizinischen Handschrift des ausgehenden 18. und beginnenden 19. Jahrhunderts aus dem Nachlass des Peter Huber (Müllner-Peter) von Sachrang im Chiemgau* in two volumes (Stuttgart: S. Hirzel Verlag, 2006).

<sup>183</sup> Alisha Rankin and Elain Leon, "Making Medicine in Early Modern Households," *Bulletin of Early Modern Medicine* 82, no.1 (Spring 2008): 145–169.

it a deadly affliction or something else.”<sup>184</sup> Mansfeld’s contemporary, Anna of Saxony, claimed that her famous *aqua vita* would be effective for “improving memory, reviving weak infants and women worn out by childbirth and as a remedy for dizziness, epidemic disease, stroke, epilepsy, dropsy, plague, chest congestion, heart palpitation, evil stomach, constipation and eye pain.”<sup>185</sup> Medicinal waters were also recommended for pregnant women to strengthen their womb, for those who carried a “weak child” and those who could not breastfeed.<sup>186</sup>

One of the medicinal brews that repeatedly appeared on the wish list of Austrian ladies was the so-called *Frauen aqua vita* prepared by Eva Poppel. As the attributive “Frauen” in front of the Latin term indicates, the medicine was specifically designed for women’s needs to regulate menstruation, help with quick recovery after giving birth and other female maladies. The water’s usefulness lay, as Sabina explained, in its cleansing and strengthening properties:

Concerning the Lady Sister’s [ailment], I recommend that You do not wish to stop the bad materia discharging from you but use only things which could strengthen it. For this purpose, the Frauen aqua vitae are recommended and [if] you regularly use it, it will clear all the bad materia.

Alcohol-infused herbal concoctions were commonly given to mothers after birth to expel corrupt fluxes from the womb, regulate the post-partum flow and restore the body to its former strength.<sup>187</sup> Eva must have known about the efficiency of *Frauen aqua vitae* as

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<sup>184</sup> Peter Assion, “Die Gräfin von Mansfeld, als ärztliche Ratgeberin Luthers,” *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 6, no. 2/3 (1971): 168.

<sup>185</sup> Anna of Saxony became famous for her white and yellow *aqua vita*, distributed in all parts of Germany. See Alisha Rankin, “Exotic Materials and Treasured Knowledge: the Valuable Legacy of Noble Women’s Remedies in Early Modern Germany,” *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 4 (2014): 533–555. See also Rankin, *Panacea’s Daughters*, 34 and 139.

<sup>186</sup> Miller and Zimmermann, *Die medizinischen Handschriften*, 898.

<sup>187</sup> Pápai Páriz recommended that mothers consume a wine-based broth infused with marjoram, rosemary, thyme or lovage to alleviate postpartum pain. Another variant with saffron was recommended for restoring strength (*Pax Corporis*, 292-293). For postpartum care, see Lea Astbury, “Being Well, Looking Ill:

she prepared a remedy specifically designed for women's ailments upon the request of Sabina's friend Lady Mindorff from Styria as early as 1614:

My cousin, Lady Mindorff, has asked me to send her Frauen Aqua Vita because she is still weak. Therefore, I ask my lady sister highly, do not deny such [request] but provide a small bottle of such aqua vita and send it to me.<sup>188</sup>

On another occasion, Sabina interceded on behalf of the wife of the Austrian field marshal Hans Althan:

As the Lady Sister indicated in her letter directed to me, she had sent a little bottle of Frauen Aqua with our servant Nicolaus, but it was not delivered to the above-mentioned Frau Althan, who begs the Lady Sister again to send her a little bottle of such water.<sup>189</sup>

Lady Althan was apparently pregnant, as she asked for pure white lily water, a distillate suitable for inducing labour.<sup>190</sup>

This was not the first time that Frau Althan had asked Eva Poppel for the precious water through Sabina. *Althein Fraún Aqua vita* appears on the top of a list of entries written in Eva's hand on the bottom of the address page of a letter dated a month

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Childbirth and the Return to Health in Seventeenth-century England," *Social History of Medicine* 30, no. 3 (2017): 500–519 and especially 505–507.

<sup>188</sup> "... die frau von Mindorff meine frau geuatterin, vnd liebe frau schwester hat mich gebeten, das ich ihr ein frauen aqua vita weil sie noch immer schwach, schicken wolte, bit meine f. schwester gar hoch, so wolte ihr solches nit ver sagen, sondern in einen gar kleinen glaßlein ihr solches aqua vita zu kommen laßen, hat mich solchen mir ten zu schicken ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, St Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 28 November 28, 1614 (43582). Lady Mindorff was the wife of the Styrien nobleman Johann Wilhelm von Mindorff. See Wilhelm Mindorff's letters to Ferenc Batthyány from 1621 (31409–31410).

<sup>189</sup> "... wie das die f. schwester in ihren vorigen an michgethanen schreiben andeutet, das sie vnsern diener Niclauß ein kläßlein mit frawen aqua zugestellet solches obbemelter frawen von Altherin zugehörig, welches es aber nicht anhero bracht, bittet aber nochmalß die fraw schwester, ihr ein kleßlein mit solchen wasser zu kommen zu lassen vndt thut sich bei des die fraw von Alheim sol woln ds freylein in der fraw schw: gnaden gentslich befehlen ..." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 28 April 1615 (43587). Hans Althan, unidentified member of the Lower-Austrian noble family of Althan. About the family see Jochan Siebmacher, *Siebmacher's, großes Wappenbuch: Die Wappen des Adels in Niederösterreich*. vol. 26, part 1: A-R. (1909; repr., Neustadt an der Aisch: Bauer & Raspe, 1983), 8–9.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.* Theodor Zwinger emphasizes the benefits of white lily water for pregnant mothers helping to induce childbirth in his *Theatrum Botanicum* (1696), 372. The compilation *Különféle destillált gyógyvizek használatáról szóló feljegyzések [Records on the Medical Use of Various Distilled Therapeutic Waters]*, survived in the Batthyány's family archive from 1650, listing white lily water as medicine treating ailments related to the womb. See Iványi, 27.

earlier.<sup>191</sup> *Frauen aqua vita* was undoubtedly the most popular medicine prepared in the Batthyány Countess' distillery, but not the only one. The ailing Frau Cantzlerin asked for "marter puder" (martyr powder), and Frau Heusenstein requested for "sauer brunne," a type of water with high mineral and carbon dioxide content.<sup>192</sup> While Sabina forwarded the ladies' wishes for healing preparations, she did not neglect her own needs, asking her sister to prepare "medicine for her steward suffering from dropsy" and to send "salt for protecting the cattle from getting sick."<sup>193</sup> These examples show that, by the 1610s, Eva Poppel's apothecary was already an important source for the noblewomen in Vienna. Sabina's correspondence also illustrates that the Batthyány countess supplied medicinal ingredients needed in Viennese households, thereby attesting to the widespread custom of medicine-making among the early-seventeenth-century Central-European female elite.

### ***Medicine-making in context: space, status and the transfer of therapeutic information***

The written exchange of recipes and remedies in Sabina Solms' correspondence highlights three closely related aspects of the medical culture of the early modern Central-European female nobility: the importance of having sufficient space to produce medicine was closely linked to status and personal interest in medicine-making, as well as to how female siblings acted as go-betweens in the exchange of practical medical knowledge. Before the great palaces were built in the 1630s and the 1640s, the court nobility of Vienna lived in small one-story houses or rented accommodations, which

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<sup>191</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 7 April 1615 (43585).

<sup>192</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43634). *DWB Online*, vol. 14, col. 1870, [www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/sauerbrunnen](http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/sauerbrunnen) (accessed 13 May 2023).

<sup>193</sup> Sabina's letters to Eva, Vienna, 27 December 1615 (43591) and St Gotthard, 8 November 1614 (43581).

often lacked sufficient space for preparing remedies on a larger scale and were out of reach for needed supplies.<sup>194</sup> Living in cramped quarters, however, did not prevent elite women from making their own medicine. The requests for ingredients sent through Sabina to Eva Poppel indicate the court ladies' occupation with medicine-making, albeit on a relatively small scale. For example, Frau Losenstein and her daughter Frau Hofkirchen asked Eva Poppel for quality wine to prepare "ein ertztin wein" (medicinal wine).<sup>195</sup> Sabina, who lived rather modestly, also sent bottles to her sister with the request to fill them with medicinal water from Neumüll as she wanted to make a salve to treat consumption.<sup>196</sup> On another occasion, she asked Eva for medicinal wine so that she could make medicine on her own to relieve headaches. Using distilled waters obtained from Hungary, noblewomen in Vienna could make simple remedies that needed no extensive preparations.

Distilling compound medical waters, however, required access to fresh herbs, space for equipment and the assistance of personnel, which went beyond the confines of the cramped living spaces in the city. Noblewomen who lived on large estates in the countryside had a greater chance of getting involved in large-scale pharmaceutical activities because they had the physical space to do so: rooms for distilling equipment, storage and unlimited access to fields with fresh herbs.<sup>197</sup> While women in noble households were, in general, responsible for supplying their families with remedies, Eva

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<sup>194</sup> Andreas Weigl, "Residence, Bastion und Konsumtionstadt," in *Wien im Dreißigjährigen Krieg*, ed. Andreas Weigl (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001), 45.

<sup>195</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, [n.p.], [n.d.] (43638). Helena von Herberstein (1546-1615), wife of Dietmar von Losenstein, governing head of Lower-Austria (österreichische Landeshauptmann). Marusch (Margarethe) von Hofkirchen (d. after 1624), daughter of Helena von Herberstein and Dietmar von Losenstein married to Georg Andreas Hoffkirchen, colonel of Lower Austria (d.1624).

<sup>196</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 May 1616 (43595).

<sup>197</sup> Rankin, *Panacea's Daughters*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. See also from the same author "The Housewife's Apothecary in Early Modern Austria".

Poppel probably engaged in making medicine on a larger scale precisely because the Batthyány estates provided the necessary space and resources for such activities.

The Batthyánys had a long tradition of distilling medicine and alcohol that reached back to the late sixteenth century.<sup>198</sup> In the 1610s, the family's primary residence in Rechnitz had a distilling house with two large ovens, elaborate equipment and ample staff. A letter from 1616 written by the court judge of Schlaining János Jobbágy to Ferenc Batthyány reveals that his wife regularly used the distilling equipment to "burn water."<sup>199</sup> The apothecary inventory from around 1650 confirms this large-scale production: it dispensed forty-six different types of waters, among them *Frauen aqua vita* and white lily water, two favourite remedies of the female nobility in Vienna.<sup>200</sup>

Requests for Eva Poppel's medicinal waters in Sabina Solms' letters indicate that she was already renowned for the quality of her medicine long before she gained widespread fame as a "medical doctor" during her widowhood in the late 1620s and 1630s. Eva Poppel's presence in the medical marketplace of early modern Hungary and Vienna was undoubtedly linked to her personal interest and talent in household medicine as well as to the proficiency she gained through decades of practice in the Batthyány's distillery. However, it was her elevated social status, as the wife and later widow of one of the prominent aristocrats in seventeenth-century Hungary, that ultimately brought

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<sup>198</sup> Iványi, "Vízégetés...", 6–8. Before the establishment of professional breweries in the late seventeenth century, beer was brewed in noble and civic households using distillatory equipment, which was also used to burn alcoholic beverages, such as fruit brandy. Along with wine, beer was consumed instead of contaminated water, particularly during epidemics. István Bogdán, "Egy korsó világos. A sörfőző mesterség" [A Pint of Ale. The Craft of Beer Brewery], in *Régi magyar mesterségek* (Budapest: Neumann Kht, 2006), 314 ff. Sabina's letter from the mid-1610s suggest that distillatory on the Batthyány estates was also used to brew beer. This is inferred from Sabina's letter, who asked Eva Poppel to send two barrels of beer to Maria Magdalena because she heard that "the Lady sister herself brews good beer." Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 27 December 1615 (43591).

<sup>199</sup> Iványi, "Vízégetés...", 8.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20.

recognition and praise to her pharmaceutical expertise. Although medicine-making had never been confined solely to great ladies, social status, as Alisha Rankin argues, accounted for the high degree of trust placed in those medicines produced by high-ranking women. “Trust and status were [...] bound closely together, and this in part explains the prominent involvement of elite women in vernacular medicine.”<sup>201</sup>

Noblewomen’s requests for medicine further underline the Countess of Batthyány’s activity of preparing remedies for herself and for others. The traffic in remedies was not a market activity, rather it was a pattern of gift exchanges that carried promises and expectations of repayment in kind. Gifts of medicine were an informal currency of favours that strengthened personal connections among early modern nobility.<sup>202</sup> Sabina Solms not only mediated requests from the female court elite for medicine but also forwarded medical instructions and recipes. For example, in midsummer of 1615, she sent to her sister a “wonderful recipe, that I highly recommend [...], with the friendly request, to do me a favour and burn me such water, while it is still possible.”<sup>203</sup> The recipe of *Strawberry water* that called for both leaves and roots of the strawberry plants mixed with milk and a handful of ant eggs was then attached on a separate sheet written, this time, in Hungarian.<sup>204</sup> In a few cases, Sabina expressly

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<sup>201</sup> Rankin *Panacea’s Daughters*, 44–45. Rankin builds on Shapin’s argument, which argues for the presence of a social component in the credibility of scientific experiments. Shapin maintains that, in the seventeenth century, public trust in the authority of gentleman experimenters was based on their honour, which was anchored in their “worth, wealth and virtue”. Steven Shapin, *The Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>202</sup> Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, “Gift and Favors: Informal Support in Early Modern England,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (June 2000): 295–338; Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*

<sup>203</sup> “... welcher gestaltt ein herliches recept, so der fraw sw: inliegent zúempfhahen, vber schieckhen thúe, mit freündlicher bitt, sie wolle mir die genad than, vnd solches wasser, weill es itzo noch gebrant werden kan, brennen lassen, solches gegen mein hertz liebste fraw schwester zúúor schultten, erkhenne mich ohne ds ihr angenehme dien ste zúer zeig[] iderzeit bereit vnd willig ...” Sabina’s letter to Eva, Vienna, 2 July 1615 (43590).

<sup>204</sup> “...eperj leuelet mind gjökerestól kel megh főzný egj két az leuet az teý kóziben ótnj az regetj es desj tej kóziben, az hangjanak az tik moniat köl az orstjoba tennj fél marokal mikor megh czjnallja ... [*The*

indicated the source of her curative knowledge. The medicinal root for toothache that she sent to Eva Poppel with instructions on its use to ease her sister's pain, for example, was handed down from Philipp Solms' family.<sup>205</sup> Sabina insisted that she received the recipe directly from her father-in-law. The high social status of Ernst Solms Lich, who himself collected medical recipes, was a guarantee of the remedy's efficiency.<sup>206</sup>

The practical medical knowledge of noblewomen in Vienna was a useful resource for Eva Poppel's expanding therapeutical arsenal. In 1616, Sabina apologized that she could not fulfill her sister's earlier request of distilling medicinal water. She would have sent the instructions on using the water from Neusmüll to burn thistle water (*Eberwasser*), but she was still waiting for Frau Althan to send her the recipe.<sup>207</sup> Thistle root boiled in spring water was known by seventeenth-century herbal and medicine books to be effective in stopping excessive monthly bleeding.<sup>208</sup> The reference to Lady Althan suggests that these recipes were also known and readily circulated among the Viennese female elite. These medicinal recipes and curative instructions preserved in the correspondence distinctly show Sabina Solms' diligence in acquiring medical information and communicating it to Eva Poppel. They also display how household pharmaceutical knowledge circulated within early noble families and how elite

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*strawberry leaves should be cooked together with its root, [then] a couple of leaves should be poured in milk, when its ready, add a handful of ant eggs to it ...] Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, St. Gotthard (Szentgotthárd), 23 March 1614 (43576).

<sup>206</sup> See Count Ernst zu Solms Lich's recipe collection in Miller and Zimmermann, *Die medizinischen Handschriften*, 947.

<sup>207</sup> "... das *recept* wegen des woßer von der Noßmüllh eper zú prenen, will ich meiner fr: shwester mit den nechsten shickhen, weillen es noch zeit hot, hets zwor ýezt mit geshigt, so múes ichs ober erst von der fr: von Althon bekhomen ..." [... *regarding the water from Neumüll to burn strawberry[water], I will send the recipe soon, because it has time. I could have sent it now, but first I must receive it from Lady Althan ...]* Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 5 May 1616 (43595).

<sup>208</sup> Garden thistle (*carlina acaulis*) in Adam Lonitzer, *Kräuterbuch* (1557) (Frankfurt, 1703), 191 and *Pax Corporis*, 283.

noblewomen who were inclined to medicine-making drew from their close-kin relations' pharmaceutical reservoir.

### ***Conclusion***

The chapter has examined a wide range of health-related topics, including experiences with illness, sharing of recipes, remedies and therapeutic advice in the correspondence of Eva Poppel Lobkowitz and her sisters. It discussed the family's shared practical medical knowledge, which likely contributed to Eva Poppel's special expertise in healing. By exploring how medical information was communicated and governed by family relations among the Poppel Lobkowitz women, the chapter presented the sphere of domestic medicine, where these women performed with confidence and considerable authority.

My research corroborates Sophie Ruppel's argument that early modern elite siblings demonstrated cooperative behaviour characterized by mutual reliance and solidarity within the extended family.<sup>209</sup> Before the rise of a more personal and intimate letter-writing style in the eighteenth century, sharing news about well-being or sickness and helping each other with advice, recipes, medicine or by arranging professional help was an important way for relatives to display their sisterly community and express intimacy. The correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters also provides examples of the restrictions on and limits of intimacy, reflecting both epistolary and social conventions. It showed how affinities and asymmetries in social status and wealth among the sisters influenced the presence and nature of medicine-related information in the

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<sup>209</sup> Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 180–229.

letters.<sup>210</sup> As explored in previous chapters, the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters diverged in their social status, and this manifested in their correspondence concerning health and medicine. This is evident in the case of Katharina Kurzbach, who was financially disadvantaged and of lower social standing in the rank of siblings. Consequently, her letters to Eva, who was married to the Hungarian magnate Ferenc Batthyány, contained little discussion of medicine and health-related topics, presumably because Katharina deemed it inappropriate for someone of her lower rank to broach such intimate topics. At the same time, the wealthy Maria Magdalena Trčka, who married into the upper echelon of the Bohemian aristocracy, ceased to talk about medicine after her interests turned to high politics and estate transactions.

It was the third sister, Sabina Solms, wife of a lower-rank court noble in Vienna, whose correspondence is most revealing about the exchange of medical information between female aristocratic siblings. As a skillful mediator, Sabina facilitated the communication and transactions of recipes and material between her social connections and her skilled medicine-making sister. Eva Poppel, while close in age to Sabina but higher than her in the social hierarchy, could reach out to her sister and rely on her personal relationships when she needed a recipe from the apothecary or a doctor. By offering her assistance to Eva, Sabina managed to overcome the social gap between them, allowing her to maintain a closer and more intimate relationship with her younger yet socially superior sister. At the same time, in her role as intermediary, Sabina made the court ladies in Vienna a devoted clientele for her sister's potent *Frauen aqua vita*.

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<sup>210</sup> As Bovt's study on the late seventeenth-century correspondence of the Princess of Orleans maintains, Liselotte von Pfalz adhered to the highly formal etiquette of early modern letter manuals navigating the written discussions about illnesses within the French court and her own wellbeing according to the degree of acquaintance and the interests of their correspondents (Bovt, *Körper im höfischen Gespräch*, 258–297).

Geographical and social factors and personal preference all played a role in why the youngest Poppel Lobkowitz sister became Eva Poppel's main contact. Living in the imperial residence in Vienna, Sabina had a broad social network of court nobility, established medical professionals, learned doctors, and skilled midwives. As a close-kin relative of a high-ranking noblewoman with outstanding medicine-making skills, Sabina became a highly sought-after intermediary in the early modern exchange of medicine and practical medical knowledge.<sup>211</sup>

For the female court nobility, communicating with the Batthyány countess through a close-kin relative was an effective strategy in obtaining much-desired potent remedies. Medicine was a valuable gift that smoothed and strengthened social ties among noblewomen within and beyond their extended families. In the context of the cultural transfer of medical knowledge in early seventeenth-century Central Europe, the mediating role of Sabina Solms thus arose out of a double social obligation of close-kin relatives towards both the extended noble family and their siblings of higher rank and economic status. Utilizing a broad personal network, she mediated between supply and demand, contributing to the exchange of medicinal knowledge between Vienna and the Batthyány court in western Hungary and reinforcing solidarity within the Central-European elite.

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<sup>211</sup> Rankin, *Medicine for the Uncommon Women: Experience, Experiment and Exchange in Early Modern Germany*. Ph.D. Dissertation (Harvard University, 2005), 13.

## CONCLUSION

“I didn't see my relatives for nineteen years, and even then, I was with them for barely for a week.”<sup>1</sup>

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters remained in contact throughout their lives. Their letters replaced personal encounters, which became sporadic as the women grew older, and as tensions between the Catholic Habsburgs and their Protestant lands eventually led to war. Eva was not allowed to visit her relatives in Bohemia more than once during her marriage to Ferenc Batthyány, and later, as a widow, she could not leave her underage children and the Batthyány estates unattended. Maria Magdalena was occupied with the management of the Trčka family's wealth, while Katharina, who continued to travel to Vienna, rarely had the means to venture further. Only Sabina, Eva's Viennese sister, continued her visits to the Batthyány court until she died at a relatively young age. It was the sisters' bilingual correspondence, where they discussed legal and everyday business and exchanged favours, news and medical information, that served to maintain their connectedness and sisterly bonds.

Through the lens of the four Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence, exploring the lives and written communication between female relatives over a thirty-year span, my doctoral thesis delves into the intricate nature of women's letters in early modern seventeenth-century Central Europe. This extensive work of primary research, focussing

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<sup>1</sup> “Tizenkilencz esztendeigh egyszernél többül en nem láttam az en atyamffiait, akkoris mindenestül foghua egy hetigh sem uoltam közöttük.” Eva Poppel's letter to Ádám Batthyány, Dobra, 28 November 1632, published in Katalin Kincses, ed., *Ím küntem én orvosságot.* *Lobkowitz Poppel Éva levelezése. 1622-1640* [‘Here I have sent you medicine,’ The Correspondence of Éva Poppel Lobkowitz] (Budapest: ELTE, 1993), Letter 25, 141.

on archival source material and coupled with an intensive investigation of its larger historical, social and linguistic context, underscores the highly multifaceted nature of seventeenth-century women's letters.

As a medium of written communication, these letters served as extended forms of oral conversation between elite female relatives, a conversation which exhibited a highly individualized and diverse set of themes and topics. At the same time, these women's letters also evince significant similarities, as they conform to the prevalent hierarchical norms established within early modern society. The thesis research has required an intersectional approach, as the information culled from these letters, outlining these elite women's lives and various enterprises, cannot easily be separated from questions of class, gender and religion, not to mention further, issues of identity, personality, social and personal relationships, geographic context and the blurred boundaries between the public and private spheres. Consequently, this research has revealed the complex sphere of activities in both the private and public lives of these women. The examination of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters written to Eva Poppel has provided insight into their relationships as siblings, having scoured the material for clues woven into the letters' rhetoric and their formal presentation.

This thesis on the information and knowledge exchange in the written communications of Katharina Kurzbach, Maria Magdalena Trčzka and Sabina Solms with their youngest sister Eva Poppel Lobkowitz, Countess of Batthyány – ranging from letter delivery, the formal aspects of letter writing, the written transmission of public news, confidential messages and practical information on healing—puts forward two comprehensive arguments. First, I have shown that the letters provide a wealth of insight

into the networked identities of these women, as they creatively advanced their families' fortunes while drawing on their own considerable personal resources. The extent of what they could or could not do, as well as their position within the greater family hierarchy, was highly dependent on the circumstances of their husband's family and shaped by his subsequent achievements and failures. Second, I also proposed that social disparities among the sisters influenced the written content of their discussions and were reflected in the materiality of their letter-writing. The language (German or Czech) and the method of writing, (scribal or holograph), used in their letters were often determined by a combination of various factors, including the correspondents' social status, the availability of assistants and the public or private nature of the messages they intended to convey. These connecting arguments are further complemented by a third consideration regarding the nature of personal relationships between Eva Poppel and her sisters. Alongside social status defined by marriage, factors such as personality, age difference and shared childhood experiences also played a role in shaping the quality of the siblings' relationships, which, in turn, influenced the content of their written conversations.

Chapter One presents the stories of the four noble sisters whose lives were shaped by very disparate fortunes. The narratives about Katharina, Maria Magdalena, Sabina and Eva illustrate how matrimonial alliances were the decisive factor in determining the post-marital fortunes of these noblewomen. Although the sisters were born into one of the leading aristocratic families of early modern Bohemia and were married into prominent families of Bohemian, Czech, German and Hungarian nobility, the scale of their autonomy and their presence in the historical record rested on their husbands' ability to preserve or increase their family's wealth and political power after marriage. The written

record of negotiations over family inheritance between the sisters and their families highlights that for early modern nobility, it was the ownership of land that determined wealth and their ability to advance socially. These negotiations also reveal how larger monetary family interests took precedence over solidarity and compassion for socially vulnerable family members.

The more affluent sisters, Maria Magdalena and Eva, married members of the Bohemian and Hungarian Protestant nobility whose wealth and social prestige closely matched their own. The two sisters lived in apparent harmony with their husbands, collaborated with their spouses in estate management, influenced family politics and engaged in cultural patronage and the making of medicine. In contrast, Sabina, who married a moderately successful career soldier, the nobleman Philipp Solms, lived the life of the wife of a town nobleman of limited means in Vienna. Tensions over lack of money and their son's education created palpable tension in their marriage. Since Philipp was not successful in acquiring estates that would ensure social and political advancement, his wife was limited to small-scale business ventures while trading news, medical advice and referrals in exchange for social influence and favours.

Finally, the story of the oldest sister, Katharina, highlights the legal, social and personal impact of divorce on a noblewoman's life. Her separation from Henrich, the last heavily indebted member of the once-prominent Kurzbach family of Silesia, left her at the mercy of her Bohemian relatives, forcing her to make a living pawning valuables and eking out a subsistence income on the proceeds of "some sewing or other handiwork".<sup>2</sup> Katharina's vulnerability is most evident in the way the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters dealt

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<sup>2</sup> Katharina's letter to Eva, [n.p.] 2 September 1625, (26531).

with their Hungarian inheritance. Lacking her husband's authority, which would have helped represent her interests in legal negotiations, Katharina was left to fight alone against the claims of the Batthyány and Trčzka families over her share. "Torn apart by debts," she was easily convinced to relinquish her landholdings to the Batthyánys in exchange for the promise of monetary compensations that she would, for the rest of her life, have to beg her sister Eva to pay out.<sup>3</sup>

The marriages and life trajectories of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters showed the possibilities and limits of early modern women's lives. As Beatrix Bastl has explained, "[t]he matching of noble spouses was primarily based on criteria that served the economic interests of the entire noble family. These criteria included factors such as maintaining equality of social status, ensuring the continuation and preservation of family lineage and securing manorial property. Even after marriage, the roles and responsibilities of men and women were shaped by common interests of the noble family."<sup>4</sup> Women were dealt a hand – and they had to take the hand they were offered.

The Poppel Lobkowitz sisters acted in alignment with their family's goals of enhancing social prestige, attaining material gain and furthering the family in the political realm. Personality traits, character, talents and special abilities were the driving force that allowed some of these women to excel in business, medicine or networking. However, these women exercised agency not such much in their own right as they did on behalf of their husbands, relatives and members of their noble households. Although literacy

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<sup>3</sup> Katharina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 19 September 1608 (26521)

<sup>4</sup> "Wie Adelige Ehepartner einenander ausgesucht wurden basierte auf Kriterien, die zum wirtschaftlichen Nutzen der ganzen Familie standen, so Gleichrangigkeit, bewahrung und fortsetzung der Familienkontinuität und Sicherung des Herrschaftlichen Besitzes. Die Aktionfelder von Männer und Frauen wurden auch nach der Heirat von diesen Zielen bestimmt." See Beatrix Bastl, *Tugend, Liebe, Ehre: Die adelige Frau in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2000), 152.

granted these women the ability to communicate their experiences and daily pursuits through writing, their visibility remained partial, as their agency was intricately tied to the opportunities and constraints imposed by the hierarchical structures and prevailing values of early modern society.

In the second chapter, I trace the physical path of letters in the early seventeenth-century Habsburg monarchy, exploring how the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters organized letter delivery and ensured they reached their intended recipients. While the royal and imperial post also served private customers, the Poppel sisters appear to have used the official courier service of the royal court primarily for sending official documents related to their legal dispute over their Hungarian inheritance. Like many noble families in the region, they arranged their own delivery service for private correspondence. A close analysis of the letters reinforces the link between noblewomen's economic opportunities and their choice of delivery methods. In the large households of the Trčka and the Batthyány families, Maria Magdalena and Eva trusted their letters to those servants specifically employed for messenger duties. On the other hand, Sabina and Katharina, who had fewer resources, often relied on their sisters' messengers travelling between Bohemia and Hungary or used the services of relatives and occasional non-related letter-bearers. As the chapter reveals, organizing letter delivery required cooperation on various levels, not only between the sisters and their letter-bearers, but also with commoners in Vienna who assisted them with the logistics of delivery. The chapter also presents evidence of how the sisters maintained personal connections through oral messages sent through mutual acquaintances. The example of Eva Poppel's agent and confidant, Eva Claus, shows how a Viennese merchant woman helped Katharina, the least fortunate

Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, and looked after her while also keeping her patroness, Eva Poppel, informed about Katharina's well-being.

While the second chapter primarily focuses on the practical aspects of close kin women's private letter delivery in the Habsburg lands, the third chapter examines the materiality of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' letters themselves. Informed by literary and linguistic studies on early modern letter writing, I explored the social meanings that can be gleaned from their physical layout, epistolary formalities, language choices and handwriting. The materiality of these women's letters provided further examples of how epistolary formalities and the distribution of text on the letters' pages signalled the relative social rank and emotional closeness or distance between the siblings. These observations remain incomplete as Eva's letters to her two oldest sisters have not been preserved. However, in the letters from Maria Magdalena to Eva, their equal social status and sisterly affection was expressed through the lack of spacing and the shortened wording in the subscription. Katharina, on the other hand, employed more generous spacing and a deferential tone, emphasizing both her subordinate position and strained relationship in letters to her youngest sister, Eva. The wording of the subscriptions in Eva's and Sabina's letters reflects a more subtle, but distinct, social difference between these two sisters as well. Their patron-client relationship is displayed, on the one hand, by Eva's use of the concise *dienstwillige* (at your service), while Sabina often signs her letters offering her "subservient service" and describes herself as "my beloved Lady sister's most faithful servant and sister as long as I live".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Eva's letters to Sabina, Neuhaus (Dobra), 22 July 1608 (4597), and Schleining (Szalónak), 27 August 1616 (4608) and Sabina's letter to Eva, Lich, [n.d.] February 1618.

Despite differences in the relative social order between the Poppel Lobkowitz women, their close kinship allowed them to frequently dismiss their scribes and write letters to each other themselves. The large number of holograph letters in their collection attests to their literacy but also to their inclination to write in their own hand. Here again, we observe a correlation between wealth and the use of scribal help, where the most economically disadvantaged sister, Katharina, tended to employ scribes less often than her more affluent siblings. Due to their bilingual upbringing, the sisters could write both in Czech and German. The choice of what language to employ in their letters and whether they collaborated with scribes depended, among other factors, on the availability of assistance, the language skills of the letter's writer and its recipient and, as I maintain, the type of information being conveyed. The comparative analysis of the sisters' letters also reveals that, by their choice of hand (the person writing the letter) and language, these women deliberately controlled access to certain information and maintained some level of secrecy.

Examples from Sabina Solms' bilingual correspondence in the fourth chapter reveal the use of language and handwriting to convey both public and private information. Sabina's "newsletters" from 1619, written with the assistance of a secretary in German, were evidence of her participation in the news market of seventeenth-century Vienna, with the countess collecting and forwarding news from political and military events at the start of the Thirty Year's War to her Hungarian relatives. By supplying Eva and her family with fresh news from the imperial election and on the movements of adversary armies in Bohemia, Sabina's communications proved to be instrumental in satisfying the desire of the Protestant nobility for updated news during a politically

intense moment. The German scribal script in these “newsletters” highlighted the public nature of the information conveyed, which could be shared with other members of the Batthyány household.

Letters featuring the nondistinctive hand of a woman could also convey notions of privacy and intimacy. Examples of Sabina’s holograph letters expose the deliberate deployment of the Czech language as a code as well as alpha-numeric ciphering to protect sensitive information from both government spies and prying eyes in the immediate surroundings of the corresponding partners. Surprisingly, it is likely that Sabina also acted as an intermediary in the exchange of confidential messages between husbands by communicating their messages in holograph letters to Eva in Czech. This case study illustrates how elite women disseminated both public and secret information on behalf of kin. Sabina acted not in her own interest but rather furthered the diplomatic negotiations of her male relatives and passed information on to aid her sister’s family.

Close-kin noblewomen’s supporting and mediating activities are most pronounced in the discussions of medicine in these letters. The final chapter of the thesis thus probes the practice of household medicine, traditionally considered the domain of women. Here, I demonstrate how close female relatives helped each other with medical knowledge by exchanging recipes, remedies and therapeutic advice. The sisters’ letters reveal how noblewomen in early modern Central Europe drew from a collective knowledge of healing practices that had been preserved, circulated and handed down over generations.<sup>6</sup> This shared practical knowledge of healing, as I argue, contributed to Eva Poppel

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<sup>6</sup> Elaine Leong, “Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender and Practical Knowledge in Early Modern English Household,” *Centaurus* 55 (2013): 81-103. Alicia Rankin, “Exotic Materials and Treasurer Knowledge: the Valuable Legacy of Noblewomen’s Remedies in Early Modern Germany,” *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 4 (2014): 533-555.

Lobkowitz' pharmaceutical expertise and thus her fame as an experienced healer in seventeenth-century Hungary. The exchange of recipes was also an important practice of gift exchange that deepened networks of reciprocity, benefitting families in other contexts as well. The letters also demonstrate a deep sense of solidarity and cooperation among the sisters during sickness. However, it appears that not all the sisters engaged in "medical talk" with Eva Poppel.

My analysis of epistolary formulas and the content of the letters suggests that the lower position of the oldest sister, Katharina, in the siblings' hierarchy and emotional distance may have hindered discussion with her of health issues or the giving of therapeutic advice in writing. Being socially and economically disadvantaged may have contributed to her silence in health-related topics. Her lower status seems to have prevented her from discussing matters considered intimate, not so much because of a reluctance to appear as if she were asking for money but, more likely, because of internalized notions about the appropriate distance that one should take with social superiors. Such social distance was also spelled out in Katharina's scribal practices of maintaining space in letters. In contrast, Sabina, the third sister and closest in age to Eva Poppel, was able to maintain an amicable relationship with her socially superior younger sibling. Her letters frequently discussed information related to remedies and demonstrated a strong commitment to assisting her sibling on this topic, as well as in the search for expert practitioners of cures for various illnesses and in the provision of recipes. Her ability to bridge the distance created by status and wealth may be attributed to their shared childhood experiences and Sabina's frequent visits from nearby Vienna.

This helped her maintain emotional closeness with Eva despite her lower position in the social hierarchy of the Poppel Lobkowitz siblings.

The analysis of the correspondence showed that wealth and prestige, or the lack of thereof, that came with marriage not only assigned Katharina, Maria Magdalena, Sabina and Eva a place within Bohemian, Hungarian and Silesian noble society but also determined their status in the family hierarchy. Her marriage to Ferenc Batthyány ensured the youngest sister, Eva, a prominent status akin to that of her older and wealthier sibling Maria Magdalena Trčka in Bohemia. Maria Magdalena's letters to Eva, characterized by relaxed epistolary formalities and accounts of exchanged gifts, objects and servants, reveal a relationship between the two sisters which started out affably but became more and more distanced over time. The impact of social inequalities on emotional bonds becomes particularly evident in the case of the eldest sister, Katharina Kurzbach. Her ill-fated marriage and subsequent separation relegated her to the lowest position in the sisters' hierarchy of rank and wealth. Katharina's reserved approach to conducting business with Eva regarding their Hungarian inheritance, combined with the former's difficult personality and the limited shared experiences due to their age difference, likely contributed to the further deepening divide between the two siblings. Katharina's references to Eva's unanswered letters and Eva's hesitance to fulfil financial obligations, along with her adherence to strict epistolary formalities, including deferential tone, careful management of manuscript space and the absence of health-related courtesies and topics, indicate the strained relationship and emotional distance between the oldest and the youngest Poppel Lobkowitz siblings.

The correspondence also offered evidence that social distance between elite siblings did not always simply equate to emotional distance. Sabina Solms, who was equal to Eva neither in wealth nor rank, managed to sustain a friendly relationship with her sister. This was not only because of her agreeable personality, shared experiences and geographical closeness, but also because Sabina was able to be of assistance to Eva and receive reciprocal benefits in return. And while the subscriptions in their letters never failed to conform to their respective social rank, the intimacy in their sisterly relationship was made evident by Sabina's medical advice and her willingness to act on Eva's behalf.

Letter exchanges of early modern relatives, such as the presented correspondence of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, are invaluable historical sources that offer numerous avenues for future researchers to explore.<sup>7</sup> Mapping out the personal connections of elite relatives would contribute to our understanding of the geographical range within which close kin female nobility exchanged letters or interacted through intermediaries and help to delineate the social makeup of their personal and business networks. Similarly, as revealed in letters, the material world of female nobility in the early seventeenth century would allow us to gain insight into the shared cultural world of early modern Central Europe and its connection to the expanding world economy. Further exploration of the material aspects of women's letters, including the style and quality of handwriting, spacing, and delivery modes in extant letters, would help answer questions about how cultural influences reflect social standing and personal relationships among family

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that limiting research to biological siblings may not align with conceptions of premodern family relations. In early modern family semantics, "brother" and "sister" encompassed a wider group of individuals, including collateral and more distant relatives in noble families or royal and princely rulers. See Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen. Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006), 317.

members and how they align with the visual presentation of letters in times of conflict or relative harmony.

I would like to conclude my study of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters' correspondence with a few remarks on the significance of elite women's literacy, actions, and their place in early modern society, thereby addressing a larger question on the extent of elite women's agency in early seventeenth-century Central Europe. The Reformation's promotion of universal literacy provided women, albeit mostly the elite, with the new and crucial means of communicating in writing. In noble families, husbands and fathers encouraged their wives and daughters to acquire basic literacy skills, partly to deepen women's religious piety but also because they needed their assistance with overseeing their manorial households. The ability to read and write thus allowed women to stay in contact with family and friends over long distances by exchanging messages, gifts, compliments, advice, conducting business, or fighting legal battles. The surviving letters of the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters thus not only attest to their literacy skills but also reveal the scope of activities in which they were engaged and the possibilities and limitations of acting on their own.

Embedded in the personal network of the extended noble family, these letters show the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters in their capacity to manage the practicalities of daily life. Eva and Maria Magdalena governed, with the approval of their husbands, over the family household that comprised family members, relatives and servants. We see the Countess of Trčka using her business acumen in trading with estates on behalf of her ailing husband, while the prominence of Ferenc Batthyány allowed Eva Poppel to practice medicine-making on a large scale. We see Sabina trading in the wine and honey

produced on her Hungarian estates, representing her sister in business dealings with merchants and artisans, and forwarding political news, secret messages, medicinal recipes and remedies.

Through their letters, we can see that early modern noble households offered women spaces where they could exercise, to a certain extent, their proper agency.<sup>8</sup> The fact that such correspondence has survived has made these women visible to historians, but visibility doesn't necessarily equate with what we would define as agency today. The agency of early modern women such as the Poppel Lobkowitz sisters, discussed in this thesis, was, moreover, not so much exercised to promote their own independent goals but rather employed in the interests of the larger family, reflecting shared hierarchical values. It is often difficult, if not impossible, to measure to what degree the activities of these women were rooted in their own interests or those of their husbands. Maria Magdalena conducted business on a large scale to increase the family wealth. Still, she may have been acting at her husband's behest because his ill-health made him incapable of carrying out such activities himself.<sup>9</sup> While it may not always have been explicit or overt, at times directing them from behind the scenes, husbands and other men were consistently involved in women's actions and played a part in their decisions.

To some extent, women's agency was contingent on the lottery of marriage and the degree to which relationships between spouses were harmonious or at least functional. Even in harmonious marriages, such as those of Eva and Magdalena, female

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<sup>8</sup> Heide Wunder, "Privacy and Gender in Early-Modern German-Speaking Countries," in *Early Modern Privacy. Sources and Approaches*, ed. by Michaël Green, Lars Cyril Nørgaard and Mette Birkedal Bruun (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022), 63-78.

<sup>9</sup> Jaroslav Šůla, "Dva kšafy Jana Rudolfa Trčky z Lípy" [The Two Testaments of Jan Rudolf Trčka of Lipa]. *Stopami dějin Náchodska sborník Státního archivu Náchod* 5 (1999): 162-163.

autonomy was limited: husbands had the final say over what their wives could or could not do. Ferenc Batthyány did not allow Eva to travel to visit her relatives and had the final say in hiring her midwives, on one occasion overriding her stated preference in the matter.<sup>10</sup> And while Sabina's husband was more supportive than Katharina's, Philipp Solms nonetheless decided to send his son to the Jesuits to be educated without consulting Sabina.<sup>11</sup> The case of Katharina highlights the severe consequences of marital separation, the constraints it imposed on noblewomen's choices and actions, and the vulnerability noblewomen endured living outside the protection and guardianships of their husbands. The destitute Katharina displayed considerable business skills that aided her survival: she stitched needlework for a living, and pawned and redeemed valuables, and also travelled alone and handled her own correspondence. Nonetheless, without a husband to support and advocate for her, Katharina was left to the mercy of her frequently greedy relatives.

Noblemen and noblewomen's shared authority over the noble household resulted from a new concept of consent marriage based on conjugal affection emphasized by Protestant preachers. Despite these positive changes, women remained under the guardianship of their husbands, who represented them in legal matters and managed their properties. Neither men nor women questioned this order. The letters and histories of the Poppel Lobkowitz do not provide evidence that women's ability to act, make choices and shape their lives and the world around them increased visibly during the early modern

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<sup>10</sup> Eva Poppel's letter to Ádám Batthyány, Dobra (Neuhaus), 28 November 1632 (37991) published in Kincses, *Im küttem én orvosságot*, Letter nr. 25, 136-141 and Sabina's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Vienna, 22 October 1619 (43607).

<sup>11</sup> Sabina's letter to Eva, Vienna, 21 June 1621 (43611).

period, nor did it change their inferior social status relative to men.<sup>12</sup> The examples demonstrate that the “Renaissance notion of women,” to use Mclean’s term, remained contingent upon and aligned with the norms of pre-modern patriarchal society.<sup>13</sup> Women’s opportunities and limitations, as well as the extent to which they could shape their own lives and the world around them, continued to be determined by the vagaries of marriage. This study is a testament to the freedoms and constraints of noblewomen’s life in early modern Central Europe.

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<sup>12</sup> M.E Wiesner-Hanks, “Introduction,” in *Challenging Women’s Agency and Activism in Early Modernity*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

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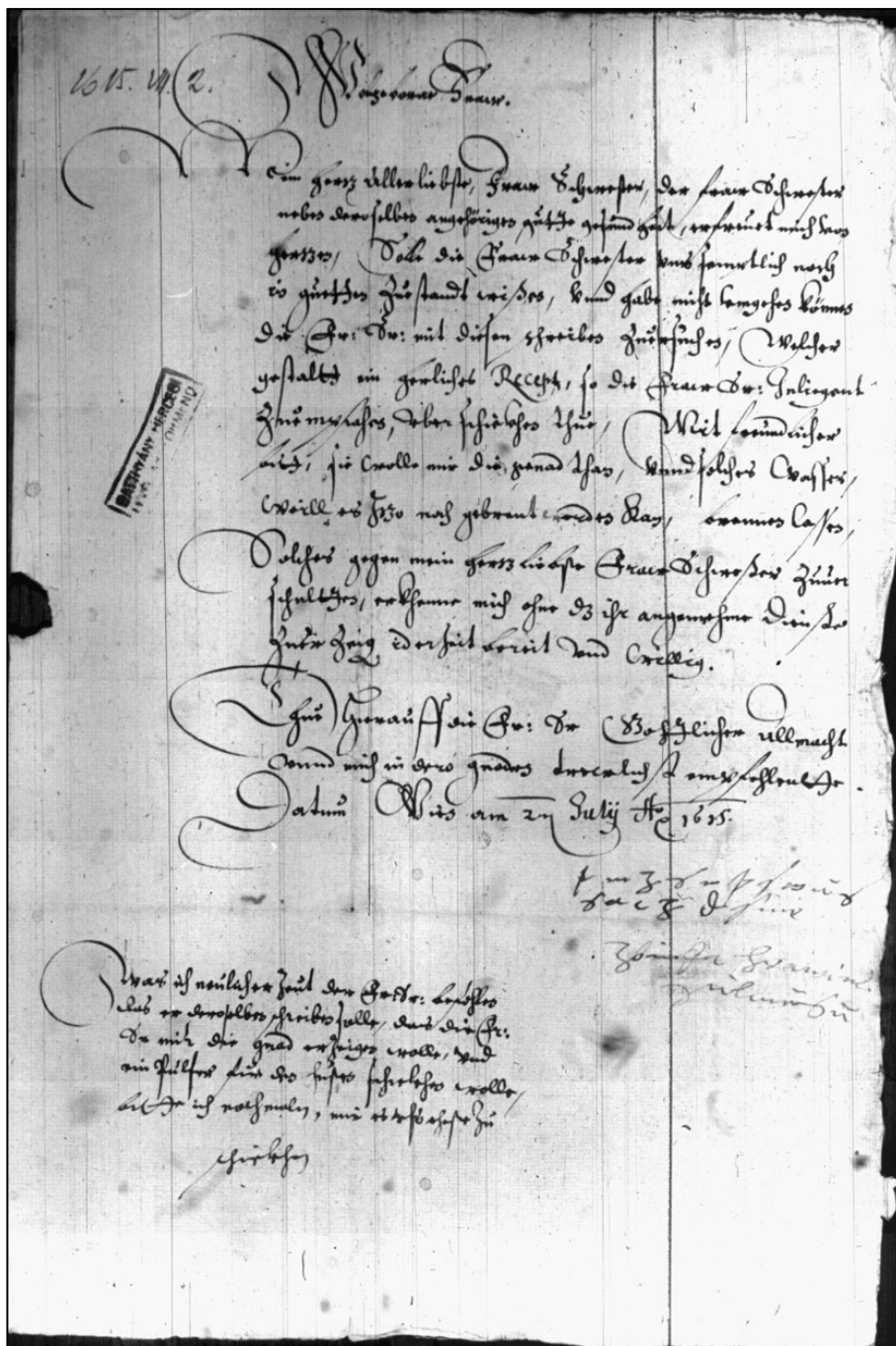
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sabina Solms's letter to Eva Poppel, Vienna, 15 July 1615, MNL P1314, no.43590



Appendix B

Katharina Kurzbach's letter to Ferenc Batthyány, Prague, 10 September 1608, MNL P1314, no. 26521

Wiel Ich meine frau mittler dinnem  
von schreiben dinstag das letzte dem den Bräutigam  
kuffe im dem Belangung weil Ich meinen  
leben den Bräutigam zu dem selben laß im  
fronen tadel und mir auf mein kuffe  
kannem lassen in dem der freitritter  
ich meine frau mittler dinnem dinstag  
Wiel meinen leben den Bräutigam und  
den Bräutigam mit schreiben langem kuffe  
auf dinstag kuffe mich ich mit meinem  
schon ganz und gurlafelken und bitte  
ich Ich wolle weiß im sinne grawe  
kuffe dinstag und weiß kuffe mir von  
nottem wienent das den Bräutigam dinnem  
Ich Ich wienent kuffe dinstag und weil  
den mit dem den Bräutigam und weiß kuffe  
im wette grawe schreibe das alle kuffe  
kuffe dinstag dinstag dinstag  
19 September 1608

L. G. meine kuffe dinstag

kuffe dinstag und dinstag

Katharina Kurzbach geborene  
Kuffe dinstag von dinstag









Appendix G

Maria Magdalena's letter to Pál Pethő, Svétlá, 11 November 1608, MNL P1314, no. 50061

1608. 11. 11.  
Műgyörgy f. Pető fizalabig wam abste/odot  
uzemle. bnyabj. w. z. semmofu z. w. z. tal. do. k. u. c. n. i. c.  
no. p. h. z. e. te. w. o. d. u. i. n. g. r. e. z. a. b. i. g. w. a. m. b. y. t. a. v. a. d. g.  
w. i. r. z. o. r. e. z. a. t. u. s. t. u. i. u. s. a. t. s. u. m. w. a. m. p. a. l. a. w. z. e. y.  
l. o. g. u. s. u. s. a. n. k. o. r. t. e. p. o. t. z. w. a. g. p. r. o. f. i. u. m. n. a. f. i. s. t. e. m.  
a. t. a. l. s. u. m. s. w. a. m. a. n. a. t. o. m. z. i. n. s. t. a. l. a. m. i. n. z. i. e. t. e. g. a. b.  
A. t. o. m. i. a. s. y. 30. s. u. d. u. w. i. n. a. u. t. o. c. o. m. z. i. d. e. p. e. t. e. l. e. y.  
p. o. t. z. w. a. g. m. u. g. n. y. l. e. g. f. p. e. t. o. g. p. r. o. f. i. u. m. i. u.  
+ a. l. d. y. v. o. u. s. z. p. e. t. e. m. i. y. c. o. s. t. o. p. o. t. z. e. t. e. a. f. a. d. a. m. l. o. t. o. w. a.  
m. e. w. i. d. m. y. s. u. d. u. i.  
s. u. d. u. i.  
g. y. z. w. i. d. m. y. g. u. n. p. a. n. i. y. z. a. l. y. z. a. f. i. s. t. e. w. o. l. i. t.  
w. i. d. e. r. p. o. t. z. e. t. e. g. u. z. s. u. m. y. a. s. e. p. a. n. i. y. n. a. t. o. m.  
z. i. n. s. t. a. l. a. z. a. t. w. i. g. y. w. o. t. a. m. i. y. p. a. p. a. z. z. e. t. e. f.  
D. e. l. o. m. i. t. o. m. i. y. a. n. a. w. o. l. i. t. w. i. d. d. i. s. t. a. n. c. i. a. m. i. y.  
D. u. a. a. b. y. g. o. p. i. w. o. z. u. n. a. w. i. z. b. r. a. t. y. a. s. t. e. m. w. t. z.  
a. g. a. t. w. y. m. y. n. a. p. i. h. z. e. t. e. b. d. e. z. e. z. o. d. a. y. a.  
u. z. e. t. e. z. a. b. o. r. i. t. p. o. t. z. e. y. z. i. m. m. y. c. o. s. t. b. o. z. y. r. a.  
p. a. n. i. y. g. e. g. t. y. d. a. z. i. m. p. i. s. t. u. i. t. n. a. p. w. i. t. z. l. y. y. g. u.  
w. i. d. e. r. 1608  
M. P. E. V.

BATTYÁNY HERCEG  
LEVÉLTÁR KÖRMEND











Appendix M

SABINA Solms' letter to EVA Poppel Vienna, 11 December 1614  
Secretary, secretary signature, added text in holograph Czech, MNL P1314, no. 43583, Address, secretary, fo. 1<sup>v</sup>: Der wolgeborne Fraüen, Fraüen | Eva Búthianin geborne Poplin | von Lobkowitz p Meiner freünd,,|lichen hertzliebsten fr. Schwester | zú ihren lieben handen.|

[fo.1<sup>r</sup>]

Wolgeborne frau frau



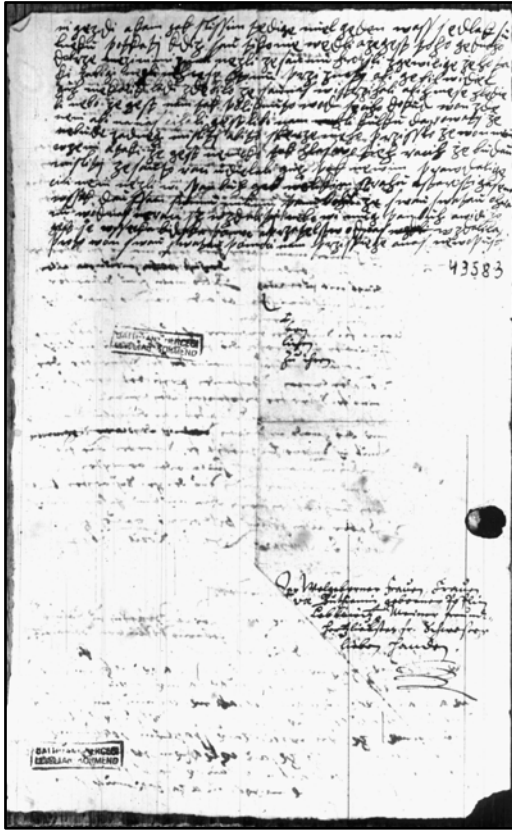
Freündliche meine hertzliebste frau Schwester, derselben | zúdienen bin ich shúldigk vnd demnach ich ihr schreiben ent,,|pfangen vnd doraus vernommen, das Sie noch alle, | got lob ~~xxx~~ frisch vnd gesund sein, bin ich von herten | erfreuet worden, denn als ich gestern verstanden, das | Sie von Rechnitz abgezogen waren, hab ich mich gedanken | machet, das Sie etwa sterbens halber weichen müßen, | Die zeitung[en] ausdem Reich, so mir mein fr. Schwester zúgeschrie,,|ben haben mich auch erfreuet sonderlich weil in denselben | gedacht wirdt, das Graff Moritz von Naßau, der | aúgústanish[en] confession zúgefallen sein sollen, thúet | sich hierúor mein lieber herr gegen meine fr. Schwester | zúm höchsten bedancken, # Vnd sich meiner hertzliebsten | fr. Schwester beúehlen, | vnd da[?] die zeitung[en] war | weren, weren sie | gar g[.]nat [?], [xxx | xxx] Bitte mein frau Schwester | wolle mich berichten, ob oder wan Sie wied[er] | nach | Rechnitz zihen werden. | Meine fr. Schwester erinnere ich auch hirmit das vnser | hertzliebste fr. Schwester die fr. Türtzkin mir neulich | ein zettlein, welches an meine ~~feh~~ fr. Schwester, der | 700 Taler wegen, Zúgestanden, geschrebet, welches auch | meine fr. Schwester entpfangen haben wirdt. | Bitte aber meiner fr. Schwester gar dienstlich, Sie wolle | mir die gnade erzeigen Vnd sich ~~desweg~~ ahetúern, + vnd mir gút den selbigen antworten + | damit ich vnser hertzliebste fr. Schwester die frau | Türtzkin in antwort hin wieder berichten kan, | ich vnd mein herr thuen vns der fr. Schwester vnd | ihren hertzliebsten herrn dienstlich vnd gehorsamblich, vnß aber allen götlich[en] *patrocimi* beúohlen. | Datúm S. Gotthard den ii. xbris 1614.

d[er]. fr[auw]. S[chwester].  
will. biß in thott

Sabina Gräfin vozú Solms |  
geborne Poplin von Lobkowitz.

[Autograph handwriting in Czech]

ma negmilagstij pani sestra nemohú |tie tagitij zejem poelikeg starostj | gok pak nepohibúgi ze snad gúz wotom wiss gak san nio ki húsarzi | hrúbie toho kniez zgener stor sfú hrúbie a gednoho miho sedla | ka hrúbie posedali age tak ze saúge za mertwie na hali gegih | koine acostaú úsebe mieli gim pobrali neiecko mússin slisseti ze |saú na nass cihali gak sme kpanú zmindorffú ten den geli | ze jáú minieli ze ten wecir zase spatikem pokedeme prawie | gize jáú jeciho húsarzi zesaú zlegden wsúlnekú úgeho | podamiho ge dnoho pili atam ze saú je tak pilnie nanas | wiptawali kúdi geg ime nadobraú a zastoli mûg pam nassan |



[fo.1<sup>v</sup>]

ni gezdí akam gok slissim tedige nūel geden wass jedlak sū | Inekū potkatj kdiz saū tikonie wedli ažegest toho gednoho | dobrze mezinimi znal nezli ze satmū hrozili zgewilige žehota | ki zabigi negli nehtese Kto mū při znajj abi gebil widiel | gūz nie kalik ladi zde bilo že saunas wistrziholi abih mese hledie | bi nebo že gest nam tak poliknūto wod secibo dokūd won zde | nemi abi nanas cihali gest libo nam ~~nehli~~ kūlkū darowatj ze | nebūde žadneg mislitj abito skerze nieho tieh racih že būdaū | wislitej ze saūto raū ūdielali gūh pak newim praw dalige | cili mein nezli wi pan būh gak welikim strahū asterosti gasem | wssok daū ssam sidimū nilimū pani bohil že swaū swataū ohra | tū wodanas raci sz wzd ali tū miba wi emig panbūh awich žo | gest se nessteka bilake pane asizotelstw odwas ~~negdi~~ wzdalila | proto won swaū swataū pamoci nam przispiege anas newopūstj

Der wolgeborner Fraūen, Fraūen |  
Eva Būthianin geborner Poplin |  
von Lobkowitz p Meiner freūd,,  
lichen hertzliebsten fr. Schwester |  
zū ihren lieben handen.

Translation:

Honoured Lady (Wellborn Lady, Lady),  
My amiable and most beloved Lady Sister, yours is my obedient service, and hence I have received your letter from which I understood that you all are, thank God, sound and healthy, [which] gladdened my heart. Since I learned yesterday that you left Rechnitz, I thought you had to leave because of death [i.e., plague]. As my Lady Sister wrote to me, the news from the Imperium has also delighted me, especially because they say that Count Moritz of Nassau had converted to the Augustinian confession. My dear Lord sends many thanks to my Lady Sister + and recommends himself to my dear Lady Sister, and if the news were true, they were [...] + I ask my Lady Sister to report to me if she would return to Rechnitz and if so, when. I also remind my Lady Sister that our dear Lady Sister, Lady Trčka, recently wrote me a note about the 700 thalers she has granted and which my Lady Sister should receive. I respectfully beg my Lady Sister to show me her grace + and send an answer to me + so I can report back to Lady Trčka. My Lord and I willingly and obediently recommend ourselves to the Lady Sister and her dear Lord and recommend ourselves to divine protection. Datum, St. Gotthard, 11 December 1614.

[Serving] willingly the Lady Sister until death,

Sabina Countess of Solms  
née Poplin von Lobkowitz.

(Translated from Czech by Eva Bullard)

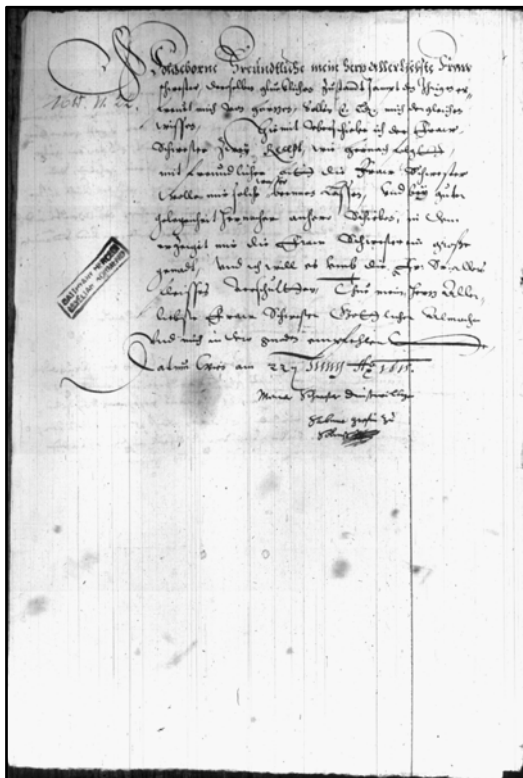
Appendix N

SABINA Solms letter to EVA Poppel

Vienna, 22 June 1615

Secretary, autograph signature, added text in secretary German, MNL P1314, no. 43589, Address, secretary, fo. 2<sup>v</sup>: Der Wohlgebornen Fraún, Fraún Ewa | Búdianin, geborne Poplin von Lúpnitz mei,,| ner hertz allerliebsten Fraw Schwester ./.

fo. 1<sup>r</sup>



**Wohlgeborne Freúndtliche meine hertzallerliebste Fraw**

chwester, derselben glücklichen zústandt sampt den Ihrigen er.,| freúet mich von hertzen, Sollen E.? Ld[]n. mich den gleichen wissen, Hirmit vbershieck ich der Fraw, | Schwester Zweý *Recept*, wie hernach folggt, | mit freúndlicher bitt die Fraw Schwester | wolle mir solche, + wasser + brennen lassen, Vnd beý gúter | gelegenheit hernacher anhero Schicken, in dem | erzeiget mir die Fraw Schwester ein große | genadt, Vnd ich will es vmb die fr[]: Sw[]: alles | fleisses Verschúltten, Thúe mein hertz Aller, | liebste Fraw Schwester Gottlichen? Almacht | Vnd mich in dero gnaden empfehlen, | Datúm Wien am 22n Juny A[nn]o 1615.

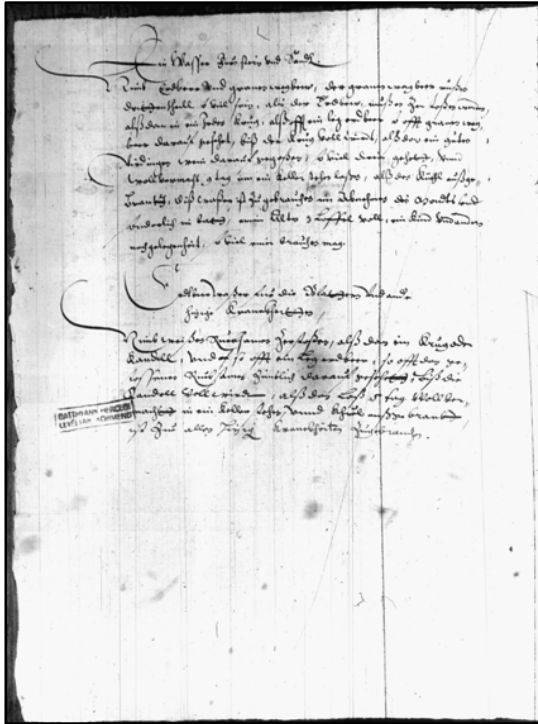
meiner Schwester dinstwillige | Sabina grafín zú | SolmsBMP

Translation:

Honoured, amiable, my most beloved Lady Sister, I rejoiced from my heart to hear from your well-being and those who belong to you and Your Dear; you should know that it is the same with us. Here I am sending two recipes to the Lady sister; I ask You with the amiable request that You prepare such water for me in Your distillery and send it to here when the opportunity arises, through which the Lady Sister would show your grace to me. And I will diligently oblige myself to the Lady Sister. I recommend my most beloved Lady Sister to God the Almighty and myself to her Grace.

At my sister's service  
Sabina Countess of Solms MP

Ein Wasser fürn stein vnd Sandl.



Nimb erdbeere vnd granen waxbeer, der granen waxbeer müßen| drittenthail so viel sein, ales der Erdbeer, müßen Zen stoßen werden, alß dan in ein Irdes Krúg, alß offft ein leg erd beer so offft granen wax,, | beer daraúf gesehet, biß den krúg voll wirdt, alß dan ein gúten | Virdigen[?] wein daraúf gegossen, so viel drin, gehett, vnd | woll vermacht 9 tag inn ein keller stehen laßen, alß den Kühel außge,, | brantt, diß waßer ist zú gebrauchén im Abnehmen des mondt vnd | sonderlich im batt, einem Alten 3 Loffel woll, ein kind vnd andern | nach gelegénhit, So viel einer braúchen mag. |

Erdtber waßer für die Blattern Vnd and[er]e | hitzige kranckheiten,

Nimb waißen Rúebsamen zerstoßen, alß dan im Krúg oder | Kandell, vnd of so offft ein leg erdbeer, so offft dan ge,, | stossenén Rúebsamen Zimblich daraúf gesehet i biß die | Kandell voll wirdt, alß dan laß 5 tag woll ver,, | macht in ein keller stehen, vnnnd khúel außzu brantt, | ist zú allen hissig[en] kranckheiten zúgebrauchen

Translation:

Water for stone and sand

Take strawberry and green waxberry; the green waxberry should be one-third of the amount of the strawberry. They must be crushed and then put in a clay jar with the green waxberry sprinkled over every layer of strawberry until the pot becomes full. Then one should pour a good amount of fine wine over it, as much as it takes up, and so bequeathed, one should let it stand in the cellar for nine days. When the water had been burned cold, use it by the waning moon in the bath for an older adult three spoons full, for children and others, occasionally, according to their needs.

Strawberry water for pox and other feverish maladies

Take crushed white wine seeds and [put] them in a jar or a pot/jug and sprinkle the crushed white wine seeds over every layer of strawberry until the pot becomes full. Then let it stand in the cellar for five days until it burns cold. It is to be used for all kinds of feverish maladies.