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Barbary Newton's Archive:  
Women and Enslavement in Seventeenth-Century Barbados and England

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Barbary Newton was an enslaver in late seventeenth-century Barbados, then the most important colony in the English Empire and the crucible for the development of racial slavery. Barbary spent several decades in Barbados with her husband Samuel Newton, and together they were one of the most propertied enslaving families, claiming ownership of more than 260 enslaved people. Following her husband's death in 1684, Barbary returned to England, her birthplace, with her children and grandchildren, where she established herself as landed gentry in Staffordshire. She was part of the first wave of Caribbean absentees to return to England, and through her detailed correspondence we can understand how enslavers responded to this new transatlantic context. In a telling letter to her kinswoman in Barbados, we learn that Barbary attempted to traffic an enslaved woman named Ansee to perform caring and intimate labor for Barbary's family in England. Barbary's extensive and previously unpublished personal archive, as well as legal records, wills, and deeds in Barbados and England, attests to women's significant role as absentee plantation owners during the late seventeenth century, the ways their gender shaped their practices of enslavement, and the intimacy of the ties between Barbados and England. It also brings to the surface the individual biographies of enslaved women such as Ansee, including her maternity, her kinship ties, and how she may have attempted to resist the demands of her enslaver.