Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces
USE AND THE ART OF THE PLAN

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CHAPTER ONE

The Apartment

The basic unit of planning in a Roman palace was the apartment, a set of rooms for the use of a single important resident, and the model resident was a cardinal. In the ecclesiastical society of seventeenth-century Rome, the leaders of society, who set the patterns of behavior and standards to be approximated by others, were cardinals — that is, single celibate men of high rank. (The pope, although exalted from the cardinalate, was unique in his spiritual and temporal dignity and therefore did not offer an appropriate model for others’ behavior.) Cardinals, however heterogeneous in their wealth and individual distinction, nevertheless formed a distinct class, headed by the cardinal nephew of the reigning pope and the dean, or oldest member, of the College of Cardinals. Lesser churchmen lived in more modest circumstances, and secular leaders had to include accommodations for their wives and other family members in their palaces; yet their manners and dwellings were but modifications of the patterns set by cardinals.

The cardinal ate and slept in his apartment, but its use went far beyond those private functions. In the papal capital, thronged with ambassadors and courtiers intent on diplomatic commerce, the paying of calls, whether of courtesy or of substance, was a major activity; and this activity took place not at some separate place of business but in apartments within palaces, according to an elaborate etiquette which was itself an important vehicle of diplomacy. The design of the apartment was therefore intimately bound to that etiquette: living quarters that would not accommodate the ceremony of receiving callers were useless. Roman etiquette was important enough to require handbooks setting forth its principles and details. The most prominent of these was Il maestro di camera, by Francesco Sestini da Bibiena, first published in 1621 and then republished in 1639, with several later editions. The etiquette was further distinctive enough to require explication for foreigners. Tantoux’s Traité de tout ce qui s’adapte en la cour de Rome . . . (Paris, 1623) was written on the occasion of the departure of the Cardinal de la Valette for Rome, not to discuss French usages, with which the cardinal and his entourage would already be familiar, but to set forth those of Rome, to which “his dignity would require him to conform as closely as possible.” The etiquette is the same as that described by Sestini, but with occasional notes to clarify points for the new French cardinal. Conversely, Roman travelers abroad noted the differences between foreign usages and those to which they were accustomed at home. The etiquette was enough of a curiosity that the Protestant convert Gregorio Leti detailed it in his description of Roman institutions.
in 1675. It was fundamental enough that other contemporary handbooks on household management referred to details of etiquette while describing duties of the several members of the household staff. It was subtle enough that individual cases were set down in special memoranda—for example, a note on the etiquette that Don Taddeo Barberini (not yet prince or prefect) observed in calling on and then receiving the Duke of Mantua. The practices of Costanza Magalotti Barberini, a woman and sister-in-law of Urban VIII, in receiving guests, and a detailed account of the etiquette to be used by the ambassador of the grand duke of Tuscany with respect to every person with whom he would be likely to deal in Rome.

A fundamental issue in Roman etiquette was the decision of the respective ranks of the participants. Rank itself was established by several considerations: the distinction between ecclesiastical (higher) and secular (lower) status, particular offices held; the distinction of one’s family or, in the case of ambassadors, the prince or nation served; one’s position within that family; and one’s age. Signs of rank included the number and quality of carriages in the guest’s train, the clothing worn for a visit; the announcement of the guest’s arrival by the ringing of a bell in the stair; the points in the guest’s progress toward the audience room at which he would be met, first by gentlemen attendants and then by the host; forms of address used; compliments paid; the offering of the left or right hand by the host; the arrangement of chairs in the audience room; the lowering of the portiere, or door hanging, during the interview (for guests of higher rank); and, on departure, the points in the suite at which the guest was bade farewell, first by the host and then by his gentlemen attendants. Fractions of etiquette were noted and sometimes had serious consequences, as in the Contesable Colonna’s affront to his visitor the Cardinal of Lyon in accompanying the cardinal to a point near his carriage and then quickly returning to his ground-floor apartment without waiting for the cardinal to mount his carriage and depart—an incident that affected relations between the French community in Rome and the Romans in 1676.

If there was any uncertainty as to how to receive a guest, the best advice was to put the guest off for a few hours, making some excuse, until inquiries could be made as to the details of his rank. Some persons were praised for their ingenuity in dealing with problematic situations, as the cardinal who took to his bed, pretending to be sick, receiving his guest there, so that the usual requirements for advancing to meet the guest at some particular point in the suite would not have to be observed; and the cardinal who nodded toward two guests arriving at the same time in such a way that it was left to the guests to decide which of them should have precedence. Scenarios intolerable to one party or the other simply were avoided: Taddeo Barberini withdrew from public ceremonies to avoid confronting with the secular ambassadors who would not yield precedence to him as Prefect of Rome, and the ambassadors exercised similar restraint; the ambassadors of Tuscany declined to visit the Cardinal Colonna, because of uncertainties of forms of address to be used.

The etiquette as described in handbooks of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries assumes a particular architectural setting (Fig. 7). The apartments in which guests were received were normally (but not always) on the piano nobile, and the stair was thus an essential feature of the path to the audience. Beyond the landing of the stair was the large sala, or sala dei palafrenieri, succeeded by perhaps two anterooms and, finally, the audience room. Beyond the audience room and not normally accessible to guests were the cardinal’s bedroom and a service room. The number of anterooms could vary, according to the prestige of the resident; and the private rooms could be augmented by a study, gallery, or other room. The chapel opened from one of the anterooms. Additional nearby rooms might also be useful.

The ceremony of receiving guests was perfectly in accord with the linear sequence of rooms of the apartment. The guest arrived at the foot of the stair, delivered there by his carriage. If of high rank—a cardinal, a grand duke, an ambassador of a king, or possibly an ambassador of Tuscany or Savoy—his arrival was announced at this point by the ringing of a bell. The guest ascended the stair and advanced through the sala and anterooms to the audience room. He was met, first by attendant gentlemen and then by the host, at a point commensurate with his rank, with respect to that of his host. For example, a visiting cardinal would be greeted by gentlemen at the foot of the stair and then by the cardinal host in the sala, or (as a sign of greater respect) possibly beyond the door of the sala, but surely no farther than the top of the stair. For the ambassador of the grand duke of Tuscany, the cardinal host would come forward one and one-half rooms (to the middle of the outer anteroom, if there were the standard two anterooms), the gentlemen having greeted the visitor one room earlier. Ambassadors of Malta, Bologna, and Ferrara would be met by the gentlemen in the outer anteroom and by the cardinal in the middle of the inner anteroom, although the ambassador of Malta was to be treated a little better than the other two. The points at which guests of other ranks were to be met were similarly specified. Compliments were exchanged, the guest was offered the left or right hand of the host, and host and guest continued to the audience room.

The audience room further signs of rank were revealed. For guests of high rank, the portiere was lowered over the doorway, ensuring privacy during the interview (but for a woman guest the portiere was normally left raised). The chairs in the room were positioned according to the respective ranks of host and guest, whether facing the door (the favored position), with the back to the door, with the side toward the door, or some subtle variation of the basic positions. The sensitivity of this matter is shown by Casiano dal Pozzo’s description of the visit of the grand duke of Tuscany to Cardinal Francesco Barberini: the chairs had been positioned so that their sides were equally toward the door, but the grand duke, “through an excess of goodness and modesty,” twice adjusted his chair to show greater deference to the cardinal, who then twice adjusted his own chair to restore the balance between the two. Lunadoro notes the great difficulty of determining the proper arrangement of seats, in his opinion a skill learned more from practice than from theory. The cardinal nephew of the reigning pope would never offer a seat to a lesser prelate, while the ambassadors of Bologna or Ferrara, or to secular persons of
lower rank, although other cardinals would do so. At last the interview began, and once again rank came into play, as the person of higher status initiated the conversation.

At the conclusion of the interview, on signal from the host, the portiere was raised and the guest accompanied to points once again consigned with his rank, to be bade farewell first by the host and then by the gentlemen attendants; and these points were different from those at which he had been greeted. The cardinal would accompany his cardinal guest to his coach; and, as soon as it would have begun to move, he would turn away. The ambassador of the grand duke of Tuscany would be escorted to the coach, but the cardinal would turn to leave before the coach would have begun to move. The ambassador of Malta, Bologna, and Ferrara would be accompanied the length of the two anterooms by the cardinal and one room farther by his gentleman attendants. Persons of other ranks would be treated similarly, the gentlemen always going about one room farther than the cardinal host with the departing guest. Virtually every possibility was foreseen, and procedures were set forth—for example, for the arrival of a second guest while the first guest was taking his leave, or for the departure of several guests at once.

If ritual was prescribed and the apartment was specifically defined, there still was room for some variation in both etiquette and architecture. The host could show subtle favor by advancing a step or two beyond the prescribed point in greeting a guest, or by deeming well-calculated combinations of position, words of greeting, and the extension of the left or right hand. It was Duke Cesaretti’s “choice” to exercise an “excess of courtesy” toward the Tuscan ambassador by waiting at the top of the stair until the departing ambassador had reached the first landing. The apartment could have more or fewer anterooms, according to the rank or pretensions of the host, and the pattern of points of greeting and farewell would be stretched or compressed accordingly.

The private chamber of the cardinal could be complemented by a study, gallery, or other room for private use. Additional rooms near the sala or outer anteroom, but outside the basic suite, would be useful if a distinguished guest was required to wait while the cardinal was busy with someone else (but lacking such a withdrawing room, the maestro di camera would simply empty an anteroom of other persons so that the distinguished guest could wait there with appropriate comfort and dignity).

The ceremony of dining complemented that of the reception of guests and enjoyed a similar relationship between a fixed architectural frame work and flexibility of action. Meals were served in the apartment, but the location and particular arrangements of the service might vary according to circumstances. Although no room was set aside exclusively for dining, meals often were served in the outer anteroom (which is even called “the room where the Prince will eat” in Evitascandalo’s handbook). The season or particular day’s weather might suggest that a meal should be served “in a cool place, a garden, a loggia, or a cool room, or, on the other hand, a warm room, with or without a fire.” Banquets might be arranged in the sala. In any case, tables of the appropriate size were brought and set up for the meal and were taken away when the meal was over. Tables for the service of both food and wine were similarly brought and set up, usually in an adjacent room. A permanent credenza, or serving table, was arranged in the sala for use when meals would be served in the first antecardinal. or some other convenient room might be pressed into service. It was also possible to arrange the serving table in the same room, but in that case it had to be out of sight of the dining cardinal. As for an audience with the cardinal, so too with a meal, one’s position at table was determined by rank, with respect to the entrance to the room, the position of the carver, and one’s right hand.

Food was brought in courses (alterating between hot courses from the distant kitchen and cold plates from the credenza), artfully sliced by the carver (Fig. 2), and placed before the cardinal and his guests. The gentleman and other staff members stood in attendance, removing their hats whenever the cardinal lifted his cup to drink. The meal over, all was removed and the room was once again available for the reception of guests or any other appropriate use. It was also possible to eat privately, in one’s own chamber, but that was not the custom among persons of rank and was worthy of comment: the Venetian ambassador Angelo Contarini included in his characterization of the Capuchin Antonio Barberini, brother of Urban VIII and Cardinal of S. Onofrio, the remark that he was very simply, alone, without ceremony, and with his table turned toward the wall.

A private room beyond the audience room was set aside for the cardinal’s sleeping and toilette. It did not figure in the etiquette of receiving guests. Chamber attendants entered the room only in the absence of the cardinal to perform such services as cleaning, making the bed, bringing water for washing, removing wastes, and bringing the clothes to be worn that day. The room was locked at night, with an attendant sleeping outside the door to hear his master’s call during the night. Cardinal Francesco Barbe-
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chamber assistants (assistanti di camera), and pages stayed in the anterooms, especially during the hours of audience, and were not to spend time in the sala. The gentlemen’s duties were to show honor to the cardinal by their presence, to assist in the reception of guests, and to make conversation with guests who were obliged to wait a while in the anteroom. While not otherwise occupied, they might play a board game like chess or read a spiritual or historical book; chamber assistants were especially encouraged to read, that they might learn something while at the same time dispelling the boredom of standing on duty.39 Assistants were to enter the bedroom only in the cardinal’s absence, unless they were to help him dress or otherwise perform some specific service.40 Even the task of cleaning was divided according to the nature of the rooms: the public spaces were swept by the segatore (literally, “sweeper”); the sala was kept clean by the palafrenieri; and the private rooms were cleaned by the segatore signore or by the chamber assistants.41

The several rooms of the apartment were characterized not only by their occupants but also by their furnishings. The sparsely furnished sala of a person of high rank was dominated by a baldacchino beneath which stood the credenza with its plate rack, ready for service during meals. Benches stood along the walls, and chests containing bedding were for the use of the palafrenieri on duty during the night. Large candleholders for evening light were permanent fixtures of the room. A fire would be built in the fireplace during the winter months, but palafrenieri and others were not to be allowed to sit around the fire; rather, they were to be made to stand and move about to keep warm.42 If the resident was a cardinal of high birth he displayed a second baldacchino in the outer anteroom, a chair beneath it turned toward the wall.43 Both anterooms contained chairs and stools, a table on which lights would be set in the evening, and board games for the gentleman’s amusement.44 Tables for dining were brought in only at meal-time. The audience room was furnished according to the pleasure of the cardinal, with chairs to be arranged for visits, a table, and a small table for the bell, to be placed near the person of highest rank during an interview.44 Seventeenth-century inventories reveal the sparse sumptuoseness of the rooms, with richly upholstered sets of chairs, inlaid tables and little chests, and wall hangings of fabric or leather.45

The architecture of the apartment thus provides not only places for eating and sleeping but also a stable framework within which the flexible drama of the reception of guests can be played out. The setting is linear and sequential, with clearly marked points of reference in the stair, the rooms, and their doorways. The sequence is long enough to accommodate the many gradations of rank that must be distinguished. The several rooms (sala, anteroom, audience room, bedroom) have their separate characters and are frequently and served by specific members of the household. The audience room itself is a neutral space within which furniture and persons can be arranged with respect to its one fixed point, the door.

The two interdependent systems—an etiquette based on hierarchial distinctions with respect to an architectural framework, and the particular form of that architectural framework—seem fully developed by the early decades of the seventeenth century. Sestini (1601), Tonticou (1625), and Lanaro (1625), but first composed ca. 1617 all describe essentially the same etiquette, and they assume an architectural sequence of floor, sala, two anterooms, and audience room, with a private bedroom beyond. Outside the realm of theory, the descriptions of the practices of the ambassador of Tuscany and of Costanza Barberini, along with other documentary evidence, show the firm establishment of both etiquette and apartment. The buildings studied in the second part of this book show several concrete realizations of the abstractions described in the text.

When Cardinal Francesco Barberini traveled abroad in the 1620s, he was unavoidably aware of the contrast between Roman apartments and those of France and Spain, and between Roman usages and those of other nations. In Paris in 1625, he was lodged in splendidly furnished rooms in the archbishop’s palace, near the Cathedral of Notre-Dame (Fig. 3, no. 2), but his apartment had only three main rooms, “camera, anticamera e sala,” according to his cupbearer, Cisanno dal Pozzo. Richly outfitted beds were in both “anticamera” and “camera,” in the second of which Francesco apparently was to sleep. A rezzonico, chapel, and small “gabinetto” were private rooms, beyond the “camera.” In other words, Francesco had a typical (if splendid) French appartement of antichambre, chambre, cabinets, and garderobe (only the first two for the reception of guests), preceded by a suite. A loggia had to be called into service to extend the suite for the observance of Roman etiquette, and the cardinal ate according to his usual style, but in the sala.49 On his visit to Louis XIII at the Louvre, he passed through the Tuileries palace, the length of the Grande Galerie, and the Petit Galerie to find the king in his “camera,” in a red damask bed surrounded by a balustrade—no not at all like a Roman audience room. Further peculiarities of planning, decor, and ceremony awaited him on his trip to Spain in 1626—all to be recorded by Cisanno dal Pozzo.50

The well-defined apartment of early seventeenth-century Rome was distinct not only from contemporary apartments in France and elsewhere but also from Roman apartments of only a century earlier.

The ideal palace for a Renaissance cardinal in Rome is described by Paolo Cortesi in his De Cardinalatu, published in 1510, shortly after his death.51 The basic palace type was the same as that still current in the seventeenth century—a three-story block with an interior courtyard. The cardinal’s apartment lay on the piano nobile and was gained by a stair from the loggia of the courtyard. Its first room was a large sala (aula), at first glance similar to the sala of a seventeenth-century apartment but different in its uses and relation to other rooms. The chapel was to be open to the sala (not to an anteroom) for the hearing of mass by everyone gathered there. The audience room was in or immediately adjacent to the sala, without intervening anterooms. Paintings that might adorn the walls of the audience chamber would show that audience might be given in a number of ways: the prince seated, or
walking about, or standing with his back to the light, in the sala or in a garden loggia, but not according to the formal scheme described by Sestini and other later authors. The dining room, adjacent to the sala and overlooking a garden, was to be coupled with the silver closet (cella argenteria), where visitors could see the display of silver vessels—an arrangement unlike the secure orrieria, or butler’s pantry, of the seventeenth-century palace. The bedroom was to be paired with the night study, “in the inner parts of the house.” In other words, the apartment is described not as a linear suite of rooms but, rather, as three clusters of rooms; there is no sense of an articulated framework within which hierarchical distinctions among persons can be measured; and there are not the distinctive, precisely named and characterized rooms of the seventeenth-century apartment.

Frommel organized his careful investigation of the uses of rooms in sixteenth-century Roman palaces according to the names given the rooms in contemporary documents and plans, in this way he revealed both the imprecision of naming rooms with respect to function and the lack of a coherent linear sequence in the earlier buildings. The “sala grande” was the most important interior space, where ceremonies and audiences might be held in addition to such special events as banquets, theatrical productions, and dancing; the chapel was adjacent (as in Cortesi’s ideal scheme but not in the seventeenth century); the sala might be furnished with musical instruments, rugs, and works of art, but not with tables and chairs, except during banquets; and palafronieri were not associated with it. The smaller “salotto,” or “sala seconda,” was directly adjacent to the sala grande; it functioned as a waiting room for audience and as serving room for banquets in the sala. The “saleta” was another, smaller, representational room of imprecise function. The “anticamera,” so important a room for the seventeenth-century apartment, was used in the sixteenth century for various functions, in various relations to other rooms.

4 Palazzo Farnese, piano nobile, reconstruction of façade wing of project of 1506 (C. L. Frommel, Der römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance, III, Pl. 15a)
The “camera” was a smaller room to be used both for sleeping and for receiving guests, without the distinction between public and private functions that developed later. Even as late as 1596, when Evitascandalo published the revised version of his Maestro di Casa, and when he described the uses of the rooms as Sestini and others were to do later, the association of specific names with specific functions had not become fixed: he describes the “sala,” the “stanza dove il Principe mangiava” (that is, the outer anteroom), the “anticamera” (the inner anteroom), and the “Camera del Principe, o dell’audienza,” and elsewhere he writes of “le camere,” without distinguishing between audience room and bedroom.

The change from the compact princely apartment of the early sixteenth century to the extended linear suite of the seventeenth century can be traced in Palazzo Farnese. Begun in 1542, the palace was built in sections, as finances permitted. The rooms behind the five easternmost bays of the façade were built first; with the stair and the light court behind the third and fourth bays, they formed a palace in miniature, in which the cardinal could live while construction proceeded. The next phase, begun in 1552, included the colonnaded vestibule, the “salotto dipinto” above, and the rooms to the north (Fig. 4)—a fragment of what Frommel has reconstructed as a double palace for the residence of the cardinal’s two sons, but nevertheless a complete dwelling for one distinguished resident, with its stair in the east angle of the block; the “salotto dipinto” as the “sala grande,” the next room to the north as “camera seconda” or “saletto,” and the north corner room as “camera,” both bedroom and audience room. A similar apartment of a few grand rooms would have been projected to the southwest for the second resident. Work stopped, to be taken up again only in 1540–41, according to a revised plan (Fig. 3). In the interval, the cardinal had become Pope Paul III, his son Ranuccio had died, and his son Pier Luigi had become Duke of Castro. The design for a double palace, if ever conceived, was no longer appropriate; but at the same time the status of the family had greatly changed. A single major apartment, enlarged in both scale and number of rooms, was developed from the nucleus of rooms begun in 1515; the stair was moved from the east angle of the building to a position along the southeast side of the courtyard; the former site of the stair and the cluster of small rooms in the east angle gave way to a new grand salone five bays long; the “salotto dipinto” and the following room became anterooms, a chapel was opened to the second of the anterooms (at least by 1547); the north corner room became the “camera a paragonimento in sul cantone overo terzo salotto,” and the suite continued around to the northwest side of the palace. Now an urban residence for the duke, son of the pope, the palace had taken on the plan of the papal residences—
the Vatican palace (Fig. 6) and Palazzo Venezia — in the extended linear suite and especially in the naming of the fourth room in the suite as the "sala dei paramenti." The formal similarity to noble apartments of the seventeenth century is clear.

Still, the duke’s palace was not a papal palace. It had assumed the dignity and the pretention of a papal palace in its plan, and the pope might indeed come and use the palace on occasion; but the fact remained that the duke and his sons did not have the same activities or ceremonies that the pope had. Although rules of precedence had long been intrinsic to the papal court, its ceremonies remained rather static with respect to its architectural setting. Persons positioned themselves in relation to one another according to their respective ranks, but all were clearly subordinate to the pope. They approached him with due respect as he sat on his throne; he did not advance to meet them. The relationship of papal ceremony to its architectural setting in seventeenth-century Rome remained distinct from that of the etiquette of cardinals and other Romans to their apartments. If the plan of the apartment may be sought in papal planning, the uses to which the apartment is put have their own development.

By the time of Montaigne’s visit to Rome in 1580–81, the apartment of a suite of many rooms leading to the audience room was not confined to palaces of papal families but was generally well established. By the end of the century, older palaces once inhabited by persons of quality were deemed inadequate if their apartments had too few rooms.

The form of the apartment was no more inert or fixed than any other aspect of Roman life, and it continued to change in the course of the seventeenth century. The suites of rooms became still longer. Anterooms in excess of Sestini’s standard of two were introduced. There might be two audience rooms, for guests of different rank. In 1685–88 Tessin observed two audience rooms in the south wing of Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane (see Fig. 102, C3 and C5), the first for "knights and prelates" and the second for unspecified persons, and in Palazzo Chigi in piazza SS. Apostoli he also noted two audience rooms (see Fig. 204, C11 and C14), the second for "women and particular knights." The baldacchino, previously restricted to the sala (where it hung over the credenza) and the outer anteroom, appeared in the audience room. The inventory of the "Casa Grande" at Giubbonari in 1646 lists a number of baldacchinos, one of them specifically in the "Stanza dell’Audienza" of Taddeo Barberini’s apartment. Palazzo Chigi’s two audience rooms had baldacchinos when Tessin visited, as did room C2 in the apartment for paintings in 1667; Palazzo Barberini had a baldacchino in the second of the cardinal’s audience rooms and also in the audience rooms of the prince and princess in the north wing, when their apartments were remodeled in the 1670s.

Borghese, each of the two audience rooms of the twin apartments of the ground floor, as remodeled in 1671–76, had a baldacchino (see Fig. 42, A1b and A11–12). A portrait of the reigning pope hung beneath the baldacchino. Another elaboration was the introduction of the representational bed, or zampanaro, in a room after the audience room but before the noble inhabitant’s actual private sleeping room. Romans may have been influenced by the splendid beds they saw in reception rooms in France, even as they insisted on the privacy of sleep. The zampanaro is present as early as 1648 in the Barberini “Casa Grande” at Giubbonari. In Palazzo Borghese in 1671–76, both prince and princess had a room with a zampanaro in their twin ground-floor apartments (see Fig. 42, A9 and A13). Tessin paused long in admiration of Cardinal Chigi’s splendid bed in a richly decorated alcove in Palazzo Chigi, completed in 1668 (see Fig. 204, C16).