

## Performing Status: Cardinals and Diplomacy in Seventeenth-Century Rome

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“The court of Rome ... is made up of nothing besides its ceremonies”, wrote the seasoned diplomat Abraham de Wicquefort in 1677.<sup>1</sup> Public performances in the “theatre state” that was seventeenth-century Rome became increasingly important as the political power of the Papas States declined, as Peter Burke has noted.<sup>2</sup> The roots (and routes) of the Roman processions could be traced back to Antiquity: the prestige of ancient lineage, assisted by the force of repetition, formed as ever the cornerstone of the symbolic authority upon which the Pope’s temporal power was built.<sup>3</sup>

Elaborately decorated carriages for personal use attained a remarkable position as signifiers of luxury and high social rank in the middle of the seventeenth century and were to keep this status for about a century.<sup>4</sup> An ambassador could wait several months for his carriages to be ready before making the official entry to the court where he had been conducting unofficial negotiations since long. There are countless recorded instances of traffic-jams in the seventeenth century caused by disputes over rank: whose carriage should yield its place in the street to whom? Such squabbles may seem futile and almost amusing today, but I would argue that they should be taken seriously as indications of a performative culture in which the outward signs of rank and the acceptance by others of a claim to precedence in, for example, a procession or a chance meeting of two carriages in a narrow alley, was, at least to some extent, *what constituted rank*. In early modern society, there was a more immediate relation between the meanings of the words ”precedent” (as in a precedent for future cases) and

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham de Wicquefort, *L’ambassadeur et ses fonctions*, The Hague, 1682 (1677), I, p. 418. ”La Cour de

<sup>2</sup> In *Performativity and Performance in Baroque Rome*, ed. P. Gillgren and Mårten Snickare, 2012, chapter 1. See also, Stefano Andretta, “Ceremoniale e diplomazia pontificia”, *Cérémoniel et rituel à Rome (XVI–XIXe siècle)*, ed. Maria Antonietta Visceglia and Catherine Brice, École française de Rome, Palais Farnèse 1997, p. 210.

<sup>3</sup> Irene Fosi, “Court and City in the Ceremony of the *Possesso* in the Sixteenth Century”, *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492–1700*, ed. Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia, Cambridge 2002, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> For the historical background, see Tydén-Jordan 1985, p. 9-37.

”precedence” (as in order of precedence) than their present use would perhaps lead one to expect. If you ceded your rank on one occasion, you might have lost it forever; but on the other hand, by repeating acts of a certain kind you might attain a rank you strictly were not entitled to. The task of the masters of ceremonies was to counteract such subversive, precedence-creating travesties. The *Magistri ceremoniarum*, or officials who monopolized ceremonial tasks, had appeared at the Roman court by mid-fifteenth century, leading the European development in this field.<sup>5</sup>

Where diplomats were concerned, the precarious power equilibrium of Europe could be affected if honours were conceded to a country or an individual not entitled to it on the basis of historical precedence or, exceptionally and after protestations, present consequence. Because of this, peace conferences and other gatherings of international representatives were often severely impeded by disagreements over etiquette. The two substantial volumes of Abraham de Wicquefort’s *L’Ambassadeur et ses fonctions*, printed several times from 1677, is quintessentially a collection of precedents – mostly dealing with the order of precedence. The printed descriptions of the ceremonies served to point out that the proper honours had been conferred. Subsequently, the texts could be used as reference works to look up precedents. Foreign monarchs could also charge their ambassadors to gather archival material pertaining to questions of precedence, as did the King of Spain in 1718.<sup>6</sup>

In the official ceremonies, as well as in his everyday actions, an ambassador to the Papal court asserted the status of his sovereign and his country, *performing* it as a series of movements and utterances, using ephemeral structures, coaches, furniture, art objects and clothes as indispensable backdrops and props.

### *Visits*

Following the arrival and the unofficial audience with the Pope, making and receiving formal visits took up a substantial part of the ambassador’s time during the weeks to come. On the

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Antonietta Visceglia, *La città rituale. Roma e le sue cerimonie in età moderna*, Rome 2002, p. 122–123, quoting R. Trexler, *The Libro Cerimoniale of Fiorentine [sic] Republic by Francesco Filarete and Angelo Manfredi*, Geneva 1978, p. 18. Wicquefort also clearly has formed an opinion on the masters of ceremonies, as he says that “La Cour de Rome n’est pas fort prodigue de ses honneurs, & des civilités, dont le Maistre des Ceremonies tient un registre fort exact.” (Wicquefort 1682, p. 448).

<sup>6</sup> Visceglia 2002, p. 124–125.

day after his arrival, the French ambassador in 1608, the Duc de Nevers, visited the four Cardinals who had met him the day before at Ponte Milvio, and received calls from other Cardinals and the brothers of the Pope.<sup>7</sup> Patricia Waddy has shown how the disposition of an apartment in a Roman palace was fundamentally linked to the etiquette of a formal visit and how a certain number of rooms, in a certain sequence, were required to allow distinctions to be made between visitors of different ranks.<sup>8</sup> In case the host or one of his visitors were puzzled about how to behave during these visits, the masters of ceremonies were content to supply ample and precise advice. They had collected rules and sets of precedents for the rigid etiquette of formal visits and, we must suppose, saw to it that they were carried through

In a neat manuscript *memoriale* written about 1685, one master of ceremonies gives the following rules for a cardinal receiving “Ambasciatori Reggi”, i.e. diplomats of the highest ranks, focusing in particular on the subtle choreography for receiving a visitor at precisely the correct point of the room and escorting him to the appropriate point of departure, according to the ranks of host and guest.

The ambassadors from the Emperor, from France, Spain, Portugal and Venice send a messenger beforehand, as do the Cardinals. Gentlemen are sent to receive the visitors in the carriage; the Cardinal receives them at the door of the *sala* and accompanies them afterwards to the top of the stairs, feigning to want to descend. You should ring the bell when they come as well as when they leave. Before they arrive, arrange the chairs diagonally, but in such a way that the chair of the Cardinal has the better position, more facing the door, and so that the chair of the Ambassador turns its back to it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wicquefort 1682, p. 450.

<sup>8</sup> Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan*, New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1990, p. 3–6 ; see also the same author’s “Inside the Palace: People and Furnishings”, in *Life and the Arts in the Baroque Palaces of Rome: Ambiente Barocco*, ed. Stefanie Walker and Frederick Hammond, New Haven and London, 1999, p. 23–25.

<sup>9</sup> ASR, Camerale II, Ceremoniale, busta 1, Ceremoniale di corte, fasc. 1. libro manoscritto del maestro di Camera, “1685” (Memoriale delle Cerimonie di Corte), p. 1. “L’Amb:ri dell’Imperatore, di Francia, Spagna, Portogallo, Venetia mandano l’imbasciata, come li Cardinali, si manda li Gentil’huomini à riceverli nella carrozza, il cardinale li riceve alla porta della sala, e gli’accompagna à capo le scale con fingere di voler scendere, e si nel venire, come nel partire Li si’ suona la Campanella, e p:ma che venghino gli si prepara da sedere con mettere la sedia p. traverso, mà che la sedia del Card:le sia più superiore, e più in faccia alla porta, e che quella dell’Ambasciatore gli volti le spalle.”

A visit from the ambassadors from Florence or Savoy called for a slight reduction of the displayed courtesies:

The Cardinal receives them almost at the door [of the *sala*] and accompanies them afterwards to the top of the stairs, without, however, even feigning to want to descend. Ring the bell for them, both at the arrival and the departure. When it comes to sitting down, make sure that the Cardinal faces the door and that the Ambassador turns his back to it.<sup>10</sup>

Further downgrading awaits the ambassadors from Bologna and Ferrara, who are met by the Cardinal's *gentiluomini* at the top of the stairs.

The Cardinal receives them in the middle of the anteroom and accompanies them afterwards to the door of the *sala*, not descending at all. The ambassador from Malta is treated two steps better...<sup>11</sup>

The ever more differentiated distinctions, another anonymous master of ceremonies some fifteen years later compiled his prescriptions into a clever chart, now in the Archivio di Stato di Roma, with the help of whose rows and columns it is easy to establish the correct procedure.<sup>12</sup> (See fig.)

A check in this document shows that the rules cited above more or less still applied, with minor adjustments, such as the recommendation to meet the ambassadors from Bologna and Ferrara two or three steps into the *sala*, rather than in the anteroom, and accompanying them

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 3. "Il Cardinale li riceve quasi alla porta, e gl'accompagna à capo le scale, senza però nè anche fingere di scendere, e si nel venire, come nel' partire Li si suona la campanella. Circa al sedere si guardi, che il Cardinale stia in faccia alla Porta e che l'Imbasciatore si volti le Spalle." See also Markus Völkel, *Römische Kardinalshaushalte des 17. Jahrhunderts*, Tübingen 1993, p. 331 *et passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 4. "Li Gentil'huomini li riceve à capo le scale dall'istessa si accompagnano à mezza scala. Il Cardinale li riceve à mezza' Anticamera, e gli accompagna alla Porta della sala senza scendere niente, L'Imbasciatore di Malta si tratta due passi meglio, che i sudetti".

<sup>12</sup> The chart is folded and glued to the inside of the cover of a small volume in ASR, Camerale II, Ceremoniale, busta 1, ceremoniale religioso ecclesiastico. It is written at the earliest in December 1696, a date given on the verso as the time for a diplomatic mission related to the death of the Polish king Jan III Sobieski.

only “two-sixths and a little more” into the sala, rather than following them the whole way to the door. (It has to be admitted that the degree of details and distinctions in the quoted *memoriali* sometimes appears to be attributable to the professional ambition of the zealous master of ceremonies who wrote them, rather than to any absolute codes.) The documents do not mention any forms of address or other phrases. The image conveyed is thus one of controlled, wordless movement in architectural space, a dance-like performance during which those involved were extremely apprehensive of lapses, transgression and improvisation, for irregularities could perform, as well as confirm, a change in social relations.

Alli SS.ri Cardinali	Incontri delli. SS Cardinali	Incontri delli SS.ri Gentilhomini	Accompagnamento delli SS.ri Cardinali	Accompag[niamen]to delli SS.ri Gentilhomini	Ambasciate	Campanella e scaletta secreta	La Campanella si sona quando è con li fiocchi la scaletta quando è incognito
	Quattro o cinque scalini	Alla carrozza	Alla carrozza	Alla carrozza	La sera per la mattina	Campanella e scaletta	
Ambasciatori Reggi e nipoti di Papa viventi	Uno o dui passi fuori della seconda porta della sala	Alla carrozza	Si scende un scalino con fingere il secondo	Alla carrozza	La sera per la mattina	Campanella e scaletta	Come sopra
Ambasciatori di Savoia e Toscana	Su la seconda porta di sala	Vicino alla carrozza	Vicino a capo le scale	Alla carrozza	La sera per la mattina	Scaletta e campanella	Come sopra
Duca di Bracciano e Contestabile Colonna	Vicino la seconda porta di sala	Vicino alla carrozza	Tre o quattro passi fuori di sala	Alla carrozza	Alla carrozza	La sera per la mattina	Scaletta solamente
Ludovisi Savelli Chigi Altieri Pamfilio Odescalchi Borghese e Zagarola Palestrina Carbognano Poli Sermoneta	Tre terzi di sala	Non molto vicino alla carrozza	Due passi fuori della seconda porta di sala	Alla carrozza	Da casa	Scaletta	
Viconaro Sonnino Cesarini	Un poco più di mezza sala	A piedi le scale	Un passo fuori della seconda porta di sala	Vicino la carrozza con aspettare che partino	Che sia già partito di casa		
Ambasciatore di Parma	Mezza sala	Più di mezze scale	Un passo fuori della seconda porta di sala	Non molto vicino alla [carrozza] senza aspettare che parta	Che sia già partito di casa		
[...] Governatore di Roma Senatore Acqua [...] Altempis [...] Residenti Reggi	Mezza sala	Più di mezza scala	uscire et entrare la seconda porta di sala	Vicino li ultimi scalini con aspettare che parta			Si avverta che adesso tanto il Governatore quanto il Senatore si incontreranno da corteggiani et acompagniato alla carrozza
Ambasciatore di Malta, Santinelli, Caffarelli, [...] Strozzi, [...]mesio, [...] Residente di Savoia, Auditore alla Camera, Thesoriere et Inviati Reggi	Un terzo di sala	Primo branco di scala e qualche scalino del secondo	Alla seconda porta di sala, senza uscire, alcuni però escono et entrano	All'ultimo branco di scale a vista della carrozza senza aspettare che parta	Per strada		[note:]Al Sig.re Imbasciatore di Malta, adesso gli annettoano li imbasciata da casa anticipata perché vole invitare il corteggio de Cavalieri cardinali poi che hanno la croce e Cavalieri parenti gli sonano anche la campanella
Ambasciatore Bologna e Ferrara	Uno o dui passi in sala	Tre o quattro scalini	Dui terzi di sala, e più	Più di mezza scala	Per strada		Non viene però mai mutano il titolo di V.S. Ill.ma nel trattenimento

One of the sources also gives detailed rules for the dress of the Cardinal during a visit: a combination of the traditional garments *sottana*, *rocchetto*, *mantelletta*, *mozzetta* and *ferraiolo* according to the occasion and the status of both visitor and the Cardinal himself.<sup>13</sup>

I have given some examples of how architecture and the applied arts were described and used in the context of diplomacy and court etiquette in the seventeenth century. As with other expressions of courtesy (speech acts for instance), the kind of objects considered in this essay, their design, size, position, appearance or non-appearance during a ceremony, were performative statements that asserted or denied social rank, and thus had the potential to insult, flatter or negotiate.

I do not wish to claim that my reading of the relationship between etiquette and the arts is in any way a new insight; but it is perhaps one that has interested historians rather than art historians. About the person who more than anyone else in the seventeenth century used rigorous etiquette as a tool in the formation of the absolutist state, Orest Ranum writes:

All his life, no gesture, glance, or movement of a cheek muscle would be too small for Richelieu to scrutinize and to assess whether or not it was respectful. The same could be said for every movement of the limbs, the height of chairs, the number of steps, the quantity of lace, length of ribbons, and the order of arriving and leave-taking before the king.<sup>14</sup>

Ranum also emphasizes the transference of rituals from the church to the state, citing how servants and courtiers in the king's bedroom at Versailles would bow before the royal *nef*, a vessel in gold shaped like a ship and containing the king's napkin, knife and fork, and relating this behaviour to the genuflections in front of altars and holy images.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Cardinals as Papal diplomats: Flavio Chigi in France*

How courtesy helped to build the modern state is the topic of Ranum's essay. A related theme is how the role of the applied arts in that process preconditioned the design and interpretation

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<sup>13</sup> See note 26, libro manoscritto del maestro di Camera, "1685", passim. The dress of the clergy is of course still ruled by precedence (as well as occasion), as a brief consultation of Catholic websites will show.

<sup>14</sup> Ranum 1980, p. 431–432.

<sup>15</sup> Ranum 1980, p. 433.

of objects. It is significant that the probably best-known diplomatic incident in Rome during the seventeenth century involved the relations with France, and that the applied arts played a noteworthy role for the ensuing humiliation of the papacy. The incident in question took place in August of 1662 during the embassy of the Duc de Créqui to Rome. The Pope's Corsican guard did not respect the French authority around the ambassador's residence, the Palazzo Farnese, and during skirmishes a number of the duke's servants and guards were killed. France used this as an opportunity to gain several substantial reparations (land, money) from the weakened Papacy, but also as the occasion to humiliate the Pope and the Church of Rome in more symbolical ways. In 1664, Pope Alexander VII's nephew, Cardinal Flavio Chigi, was sent as a Papal Legate to France with the special mission to make the Pope's excuses to Louis XIV. The ceremonies and negotiations that took place during the embassy are well documented, both by the French and the Italians.<sup>16</sup> The official (or most official) excuses were made during an audience with the French King at Fontainebleau on July 29<sup>th</sup>. Many courtiers were present and observed every detail of the proceedings, but they could not hear everything. One observer noticed, however, that the King laughed courteously at some of the Cardinal's remarks. Here follows an extract from the notes of Paul Fréart de Chantelou, made on the occasion.<sup>17</sup>

”Sur les trois heures S.E. fut à l'audience chez le roy à travers deux files de gardes depuis son appartement jusque à celui du roy<sup>153</sup>. Les valets de pied et pages de S.E. et des autres prélats et seigneurs marchant devant; Les seigneurs en suite; Le porte croix<sup>154</sup> de S.E. puis les prélats et M. le légat. La croix demeura dans l'antichambre de Sa Majesté, qui vint recevoir S.E. à la moitié de sa chambre; M. le légat salua le roy avec une inclination fort profonde, et Sa Majesté lui fit un fort grand accueil, et la mena dans la ruelle de son lict où estoient Messieurs les premiers gentilshommes de la chambre et m.e de la Garde-robe. Ils s'assirent chacun dans un fauteuil; celui de Sa Majesté regardant la porte du balustre, et celui de M. le légat opposé à la mesme porte. S.E. leut l'escrit qui avoit esté concerté, après quoy le roy lui

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<sup>16</sup> Charles de Moüy, *Louis XIV et le Saint-Siège. L'ambassade du Duc de Créqui*, I-II, Paris 1893; Daniela del Pesco, ”La légation de Flavio Chigi à Paris en 1664 : mémoire et documents nouveaux (avec quelques observations sur le *Journal de voyage du cavalier Bernin en France* de Paul de Chantelou)”, *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 123, no 2, 2011, p. 475-512.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Daniela del Pesco, ”Mémoire du traitement fait par la maison du roy à Monsieur le cardinal Chigi légat à Latere en France”, *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome*, 123, no 2, 2011, p. 513-547.



parla avec la plus grande affabilité du monde et l'escouta de mesme à ce qui se vit au visage de Sa Majesté. Quand M. le légat arriva, M. de S.t Aignan s'estoit avancé pour suivre le roy qui alloit au devant de S.E. Ce que ayant veu, M. de Noailles qui estoit contre la cheminée avec M. de Lionne, il s'avança aussi, jugeant qu'il estoit de sa charge d'estre près de Sa Majesté; M. de S.t Aignan au contraire prétendant que le Capitaine des gardes n'a nulle fonction dans la chambre, il y eut un petit différend qui fut remarqué; lequel estant depuis venu aux oreilles du roy, il commanda à M. de Montemard et à M. de Charost de l'accommoder en sorte qu'il n'en entendist plus parler. L'audience de M. le légat dura environ demie heure, le roy après s'estant levé et tenant M. le légat à sa gauche, le ramena la longueur de toute sa chambre et deux ou trois pas au delà."

Chantelou comments on the placing of the armchairs (as does the anonymous Roman maestro di camera, above note 9), and also on the movements and positions of the courtiers in the room. A strong indication for the significance of the exact setting for the audience is a tapestry ordered by the King from les Gobelins, which shows not only the people and objects mentioned in the written accounts, but also the appearance of the room and its furnishings. In my paper, I will discuss the tapestry and other images representing the audience further.