CHAPTER SEVEN

Coaches

By the seventeenth century, coaches were an important fact of Roman life. Although Isabella d'Este had brought a carriage to Rome in 1525, it was only around the middle of the sixteenth century that the popularity of carriages began to spread. They very quickly became essential for every person of quality. In 1564, Pius IV was enough concerned about the new fashion that he felt called upon to direct the cardinals to ride horses instead of going about in coaches, which he considered more suitable for women; but his admonition was to no avail. In 1581, Montaigne could report that distinguished persons went about only in carriages, and that only lesser persons and youths rode horses. At St. Peter's in 1644, John Evelyn noticed that a carriage "belonging to Card. Medicis had all the metall worke of Massie Silver, vis, the bow behind and other places; and indeed the Coaches at Rome, as well as Covered Wagons, which are also much in use, are generally the richest and largest that I ever saw." Splendid carriages became a major sign of the wealth and status of their owners and a major occasion for expenditures. They quickly found their place in the elaborate etiquette of the day, and they correspondingly required physical space in the palaces and in the city.

As rules of precedence determined one's place within an audience room or at a dinner table, so too the interior of a coach became ordered by similar rules. The six places were ranked so that the two rear seats (facing forward) were the most desirable, the seats by the two doors next in order, and the two seats in the front, facing backward, the least prestigious; and of each pair, the seat to the right was preferred. Once settled, the passengers also consulted rank to determine their behavior: for example, if more than one cardinal was in the coach, the older cardinal would give commands to start and stop, even if the coach was not his. Rules of precedence likewise applied in the encounters of coaches in the city streets—often as much a matter of necessity as of courtesy, because of the narrowness of streets. In ecclesiastical Rome, others would stop and yield to a cardinal's coach, but there were nevertheless exceptions: after stopping, a cardinal would let a woman's coach be the first to start again, and he might also let the coach of a letterato proceed first, as a sign of his respect for letters.

The etiquette of receiving guests took carriages into account. For very distinguished guests, the finer distinctions of rank were acknowledged in the host's accompanying the guest to the foot of the stair, to his waiting carriage, and then turning to leave either before or after the coach began to move. Another sign of rank was simply the number of carriages that accompanied a person on his visit. A single car-
riage would suffice for a routine visit, but for more important ceremonial calls a train of carriages would be required. Persons might lend their carriages to one another for such occasions. Taddeo Barberini was out with seventy or eighty carriages and many servants, palafrenieri, and pages when he encountered the Venetian ambassador in an incident of precedence that would have serious diplomatic repercussions. The anonymous author of Barb. lat. 4360 was pleased to note that his proposal for the new Barberini palace provided a piazza that would accommodate a hundred carriages while still leaving unimpeded a path down the center to the south entrance to the palace (see Fig. 133). Some cortèges would include even more than a hundred coaches. On 13 September 1647 the French ambassador, going to a papal audience at the Quirinal Palace with five carriages and many liveryed attendants, was accompanied by a cortège of more than one thousand persons in 202 coaches; and the same train escorted him on his visits to cardinals in the following days. An especially splendid cortège occurred in 1650, when the ambassador of Spain went to his first audience with three hundred carriages, of which one hundred were sent by Prince Ludovisi, eighty by the Conestabile Colonna, sixty by Prince Gallicano, and twenty-five by the Princess of Botera.

It is only to be expected that such large and splendid objects, the use of which had become so integral a part of Roman life, would come to affect the design of palaces. A person of rank had to accommodate not only his own carriages but also those of his distinguished visitors. We have already noted that the carriage entered into the etiquette of paying visits, and to do this it literally entered the palace, passing through the main portal, taking the visitor to the foot of the main staircase, moving through the loggias of the courtyard, waiting there for the duration of the visit, and receiving its passenger once again at the foot of the stair. The author of Barb. lat. 4360 proposes dimensions for the Barberini palace that specifically take visitors' coaches into account: an arched portal would be 14 palmi wide and 28 palmi high, and the arches of a courtyard loggia would have the same dimensions. The loggia on the side of the courtyard adjacent to the entrance would be 33 or 34 palmi wide, to allow for the turning of carriages that would take passengers to the foot of the stair and then wait in the loggia; the loggias on the other three sides of the square courtyard could be narrower, only 22 or 23 palmi, but still wide enough for two coaches. Palaces that did not provide passages free of steps and wide enough for carriages, even if relatively new and otherwise well designed, would nevertheless be inadequate. The elegant Palazzo Baldassini, built in the early sixteenth century, before the Roman craze for carriages, has four steps up from the street to the entrance passage and another three steps up to the level of the courtyard, precluding the admission of carriages to the foot of the stair. The Palazzo Farnese, the construction of which stretched through the years of the sixteenth century, fortunately was begun on a grand enough scale, and with a courtyard at a low enough level, that it was not rendered obsolete by the new carriages; even so, its dimensions are smaller than those proposed in Barb. lat. 4360, with a portal of 2.9 meters/13 palmi, a first loggia of 6.230 meters/28 palmi, and side loggias of 4.334 meters/19 palmi (see Fig. 5).

Outside, visitors' carriages also made demands on the palace and its site. When Maffeo Barberini, newly created cardinal, returned from a diplomatic mission in France in 1607, his anticipation of guests in carriages (corresponding to his new rank as well as to theirs) meant that he could not take up residence in his palace in via dei Giubbonari, which at that time opened onto only a very narrow street (see Figs. 52, 62); instead, he stayed at the Palazzo Salviati in piazza di Collegio Romano. Barb. lat. 4360 also makes clear the necessity of ample parking space for visitors' carriages outside the palace. It is surely no accident that the great Roman palaces of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries
rise on piazzas instead of in narrow streets. The space of the piazza not only enhances the monumentality of the great building; it also satisfies a most important function. At the Barberini palace in via dei Giubbonari, it was not until around 1640 that Maffeo’s nephew Taddeo had a chance to improve the situation: the nearby piazza del Monte di Pietà was enlarged, and Taddeo was able to bring the entrance to his palace forward to share in the amplitude of that piazza.  

At the same time Taddeo proposed to widen a narrow side street leading to his stables: the text and notes on a chiorgaph of August 1642 (see Fig. 81) show that the vicolo along the southwest side of his property was to be widened 3 palmi at its south end and 1½ palmi at its west end, so that “it will be wide enough that carriages can pass, which they cannot now do.” The proposed enlargement would make the street 14 palmi wide at its south end and 11½ palmi wide at the west end—still considerably narrower than Palazzo Farnese’s courtyard loggias.

Not only guests but also residents of palaces would arrive and depart by carriage. For public movements, the main portal served well, but other occasions required carriage access to a private entrance. Barb. lat. 4360 describes a carriage drive around the south and east sides of the proposed building, to give light and air to the lower rooms on those sides, to isolate the whole block of the building, and also, specifically, to deliver the residents by carriage to private entrances and stairs (see Fig. 133, Q). In the palace as built, stair S9 provided a private exit for Taddeo Barberini (see Figs. 99, 100, 101). At Palestrina, carriages could go up a ramp and around the west end of the palace into a private courtyard to receive the residents (see Fig. 181, B12). At Palazzo Borghese, a carriage could wait at a door at the foot of spiral stair S4 or stair S7 (see Fig. 20). At the “Casa Grande” ai Giubbonari passage A5 was newly made in 1610, specifically to connect Cardinal Maffeo’s apartment and private stair S2 with the street (see Fig. 57). At Palazzo Chigi a private exit opened from ground-floor room B1 to the narrow vicolo del Piombo along the southeast flank of the palace (see Fig. 201).

The growth in the prestige of the Barberini family in the seventeenth century is paralleled by an increase in their need for carriage rooms. In 1594 Maffeo Barberini had two carriages, but his “Casa Grande” had no carriage rooms; only in 1609–12 were rooms A10 and A16 built for that purpose (see Fig. 57). In 1621, when Maffeo was paying wages to three coachmen, carriage rooms were part of the new construction at the “Casa Grande.” Carriage rooms were included in the rental of the Palazzo Condulmer-Orsini-Pio for Taddeo Barberini’s famiglia, beginning in 1627. At the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, eleven carriage rooms of various sizes would accommodate twenty-five to thirty coaches in 1632–34. Twelve carriages were listed in the inventory of Taddeo’s goods in 1648, after his death in Paris. Even his modest uncle, the Capuchin Cardinal Antonio di S. Onofrio, had four carriages.

Coach rooms were of necessity on the ground floor and had wide doorways, but they did not have to be in the palace itself. The small house occupied by Enea Orlandini, absorbed into Palazzo Borghese in 1607–10, had two coach rooms. Orlandini may have rented them out to the various tenants of the neighboring Palazzo del Giglio-Deza; it is unlikely that the resident of so modest a house would himself need two coach rooms. The Borghese remodeled room A10 as the palafrenieri’s room, and A13 remained a coach room for a few years longer, until the Ripetta extension of 1611–14 (see Fig. 20). Borghese coaches were later kept in the large entry hall below A18, finally designated “rimessone” in the remodeling of 1671–76 (see Fig. 42). The Borghese also had coach rooms outside the palace, in nearby buildings—for example, four rimessi “toward the piazza,” new in 1619, and carriage rooms in neighboring houses for Cardinal Scipione Borghese’s coaches in 1621.
The old Palazzo Sforza had coach rooms on its lowest level, but those rooms were taken over by other functions when it was remodeled as Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane (see Fig. 100, A2 and A3), and Barberini coaches were kept outside the palace. The smallest of the eleven Barberini rimessi held only a single coach. Some were the ground-floor rooms of houses to the north of the palace, and others were built anew. The only requirement was a portal wide enough to admit a coach (that is, about 11 palmi), and for this the shop opening characteristic of Roman row houses often served well. In Specchi’s view of Palazzo Chigi in piazza Colonna (Fig. 12), a two-horse coach is emerging through such a portal with little room to spare.

An ideal stable is described by the anonymous author of Barb. lat. 4360 (see Fig. 133, S). For him, the modern paragon was the stable at the Villa Aldobrandini in Frascati, 280 palmi in length, its long central aisle flanked by stalls for seventy-two horses. The available space at the site of the Palazzo Barberini to be built suggested to the author a more compact arrangement of two vaulted halls, each with a central aisle flanked by stalls, also for seventy-two horses. It was to be built at the northwest corner of the sloping site, under a broad terrace, its two aisles opening to the drive ascending to the terrace and west portal of the palace. Its open siting, away from the main part of the palace, meant that its noises and odors would not reach the apart-
ments on the piano nobile. Two additional vaulted halls, also under the terrace, would complement the stable. That nearer the stable would contain the daily supply of straw and hay for the horses on its lower level; and above would be a dormitory with beds for fourteen or sixteen stable hands. (Evitascandalo had advised just this separation of sleeping boys from hay, for the sake of the freshness of the hay.) The second vaulted chamber, with its entrance higher along the drive bordering the raised terrace, would have been for coaches. On a spare corner of the site, there would have been room for a little apartment for the stable master (maestro di stalla). While the quarters of both the stable master and his hands would have windows to the stable, there might also be one or two lofts over the doors in the stable, where someone might sleep, to be able to respond quickly to any disturbance in the stable during the night. Another room, to have been constructed under the terrace north of the palace and east of the stable, would have held the day’s supply of grain and equipment for the stable. Barns for long-term storage of grain and hay would have been at some distance from the stable, and saddles and tack would have been kept with the coaches. A fountain on the north terrace and another at the northwest corner of the site would have provided water for the horses. Perhaps aware of Taddeo Barberini’s special interest in his horses, the author of the proposal provides a stair by which the patron can descend privately from the palace directly to the stable, as well as a door directly from the lowest level of the palace to the coach room.

The actual situation at the Palazzo Barberini was considerably less formal. As for quarters for many members of the famiglia and the coaches, so too the small houses in the neighborhood were remodeled to accommodate the horses. The typical Roman row house lent itself well to conversion as a stable. The ground floor, measuring perhaps 23 × 55 palmi, could be outfitted with a row of seven or eight stalls, each about 7 × 14 palmi, with a passage running the length of the stable. A pavement of bricks in the stalls and more sturdy cobblestones in the passage, a channel for drainage for the horses’ wastes, and a long manger would complete the remodeling. A fountain was in the courtyard behind the stables. With this arrangement, horses could be grouped according to type or customary employment—for example, country horses, mules, saddle horses, horses for the carriage of “His Excellency,” horses for the coach driven by the coachman Andrea. There were nine such stables, each accommodating three to ten horses or mules, and a large stable, its new roof measuring 170 × 46 palmi; in all, there was room for about a hundred horses. Hay and grain were kept in barns to the northeast—also apparently remodeled row houses.

The resident of a small house might stable his horses very near his own quarters. For example, Monsignor Francesco Barberini’s “Casa Grande” had a stable on the northwest side of the courtyard in 1581; but it is surely no accident that, as the house grew in size and prestige, the stables were removed. The Sforza palace had stables on the lowest level, opening to the north, but these too were removed by the Barberini. The noises and smells of stables were better kept away from the apartments of distinguished persons. Carriages, however, made good neighbors.

Cardinal Chigi made a clear distinction between stables and coach rooms in his palace in the 1660s. Five coach rooms lined the courtyard (see Fig. 203, B19, B20, B21, B22, and B27), but a new stable was built as far away as possible, beyond the garden, toward the present via SS. Apostoli (see Fig. 208, D). Previous residents had seen the desirability of the remote location and had built a stable in that area, labeled “stalle che si serve al Presente” on the site plan of 1664 (see Fig. 189). In 1666–68 the new stable was built, its dimensions and proportions suggesting the model of the stable at Villa Aldobrandini. It was just the right size for about sixty horses arranged in two files of stalls flanking a central passage. Bernini’s quick sketches show his
ideas for the stable—its vaulted hall sur-
mounted by an arcaded loggia or rooms, and a 
“corridor or gallery” connecting the palace with
the stable (see Figs. 214, 215, 216). The arrange-
ment provided an unencumbered courtyard, a
remote location for the stable, a convenient pas-
sage to the stable for the cardinal, and the con-
tainment and regularization of the garden,
shields from the view of the monastery of S.
Marcello across the street, by means of the long,
narrow structures. 66 Falda’s map of 1676 (see Fig.
209) shows the controlled composition. The in-
convenience of bringing horses around from the
stable to the courtyard to hitch them to the
coaches would be minor, in light of the formal
and functional advantages.