

## Noblewomen

**S**EVENTEENTH-CENTURY Rome was populated by a significantly larger number of men than of women: at the beginning of the century, in 1600, there were 109,729 persons, 63,133 men and only 46,596 women; and the predominance of men prevailed through the fluctuations of population over the years.<sup>1</sup> Concomitantly, the presence of the papal court in Rome meant both a large number of temporary residents in Rome, intent on diplomacy, and a large number of ecclesiastics (in 1600, almost 6,000 bishops, priests, monks, and nuns). The leaders of this society were the pope's chief courtiers, the cardinals. In such a society, the lives of noblewomen and the architectural provisions for those lives hold special interest.

### Noblewomen's Lives

Giovanni Battista de Luca's *Il cavaliere e la dama* gives a picture of the proper life of a Roman noblewoman.<sup>2</sup> In relation to her husband, the woman should be subject, dependent, submissive, humble, obsequious, and patient. Appropriate activities for women are handwork with linen, wool, and silk; taking care of the house; attending to the good education of the children (although wet nurses may often be employed, and girls destined for marriage may be educated in a convent rather than at home); being obse-

quious to the husband; and cultivating the fear of God. As for literature, sciences, liberal arts, spirited and gracious conversation, games, dancing, playing instruments, singing, and similar activities—women are advised not to involve themselves in these; for, while in men it is praiseworthy to cultivate both gifts of the body and gifts of the mind, in women such development rarely works out well, leading instead to greater exposure and license and a loss of modesty. Women most certainly should not attempt to study theology; this would only lead to errors. In social contacts between men and women, great prudence and circumspection should be exercised: meetings should always be in public, in full light, and not too frequent; and no letters or notes should be exchanged. This picture is in marked contrast to that of noblewomen at the court of Urbino in the early sixteenth century, as presented by Castiglione in *Il cortegiano*,<sup>3</sup> or the active lives of such sixteenth-century women as Isabella d'Este. Women in seventeenth-century France were much more involved in affairs of the world than were their Roman contemporaries, according to Christopher Wren's estimation of them when he visited Paris in 1665: “. . . the Women, as they make here the Language and Fashions, and meddle with Politicks and Philosophy, so they sway also in Architecture . . .”<sup>4</sup> Italian men traveling in the train of Francesco Barberini, papal legate to France in 1625, were

surprised by the openness, lively conversation, and freely obtained kisses of French women — favors which led to no “conclusion.” In his journal of the cardinal’s voyage, Cesare Magalotti relates the tale of a young Italian man’s encounter with a spirited woman of Avignon and his eventual acute embarrassment at his misinterpretation of her behavior, then ponders the profound differences between the social conduct of French women and that of Roman women.<sup>5</sup> The dedication of *Il cavaliere e la dama* to the extraordinary Christina of Sweden, who, as the author declares, brings together the characteristics of *cavaliere* and *dama*, seems not to have been influenced by de Luca’s picture of an admirable noblewoman.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary accounts of public occasions in Rome confirm de Luca’s ideal of a modest and circumscribed life for women, in the Roman atmosphere of religious celibacy and male dominance. At the formal, ceremonial entry of the French ambassador to Rome on 25 November 1608, according to an observer’s account, the streets were full of carriages and people, while princesses and other women watched from the shelter of windows and doorways.<sup>7</sup> On 11 February 1651, Gigli noted that the princess of Rossano had had a special wood loggia built in the façade of her palace in via del Corso, with windows and proper furnishings, from which ladies could watch the Carnival festivities in the street below.<sup>8</sup> (In contrast, a century earlier, in 1545, women enjoying Carnival festivities from the balcony of Palazzo Farnese had been joined by men, including many cardinals and even the pope.)<sup>9</sup> When theatrical performances were given at the Palazzo Barberini, the women attended on a single night, escorted by their husbands; and cardinals, prelates, and other men saw the production on another night.<sup>10</sup> The pious Donna Costanza Barberini chose not to attend performances of the comedies at all and did not allow her women attendants to do so either.<sup>11</sup> At banquets women sat at tables apart from men, or at least the seating arrangements

and service were carefully contrived so as to protect men and women from one another. Cardinals in particular were cautioned not to sit between two women.<sup>12</sup> At the banquet following the marriage of Taddeo Barberini and Anna Colonna, fourteen secular members of the two families were arranged on the right side of the table, the three women guests grouped together after the bridal couple; and fourteen cardinals were arranged according to rank on the left side.<sup>13</sup>

In the family palaces as well as in public, the scrupulous separation of the sexes was maintained, and separate apartments were arranged for the women. The women’s daily lives were not generally involved with those of their husbands; rather, they were surrounded by women companions, some of noble families and some of lesser rank, perhaps ten in number, who resided in secluded apartments in the palace.<sup>14</sup> They also had their own staff of male servants, apart from those of their husbands: *palafrenieri*, chamber attendants (*camerieri*), coachmen, stewards, chaplains, and others.<sup>15</sup> Expenditures in support of their companions and servants were recorded distinct from those of the men of the family.<sup>16</sup> Separate kitchens for the women were maintained, and separate accounts were kept for the provisioning of their tables.<sup>17</sup> Women had their own horses and carriages.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the partitioning of the women from the rest of the household, there was also a certain kind of participation of women in the diplomatic business of Rome. In spite of the extreme dominance of men in Rome, and celibate churchmen at that, it was nevertheless seen as necessary that prominent men should have female counterparts, at least for the playing out of the serious business of visiting. Wives fulfilled this role for the secular nobility, and churchmen enlisted close female relatives. There were several occasions on which noblewomen would receive formal visits. Newly created cardinals paid visits of courtesy not to Roman barons but to their wives, on some occasion for celebration or congratulation.<sup>19</sup> The ambassador of Tuscany was

advised that prominent women newly arrived in Rome were to be sent messages of welcome and then be called on.<sup>20</sup> Cardinal legates called on the wives of the important men in whatever province they were visiting; and a cardinal who traveled to a city governed by a grand duke—for example, Florence—called on the grand duchess (and the dowager grand duchess, if there was one) immediately after his first visit to the grand duke.<sup>21</sup> Women called on other women, both guest and hostess acting on behalf of men of their family, as in the case described by Maffeo Barberini (the future Urban VIII) in a letter written from Paris to his sister-in-law Costanza Barberini: newly elevated to the cardinalate in 1606, he reminded Costanza to pay respects to the two sisters-in-law of his benefactor Pope Paul V (Virginia and Ortensia Borghese).<sup>22</sup> Groups of women, along with their companions and serving women, might visit a noblewoman especially on a holiday or other special occasion.<sup>23</sup> Women might also go to the papal palace for an audience with the pope,<sup>24</sup> and they might have occasion to call on a cardinal.<sup>25</sup>

Costanza Magalotti Barberini provides a most impressive example of the obligation of a Roman noblewoman to participate in diplomatic society.<sup>26</sup> She was a modest and pious woman of a Florentine mercantile family who in her youth had hoped to become a nun; but her parents thought it better that she marry Carlo Barberini. This she did, in 1595. A dutiful wife and devoted mother, according to contemporary accounts, she continued in her modest ways. When her brother-in-law Maffeo Barberini was elevated to the papacy as Urban VIII in 1623, she found herself thrust into a prominence that she did not want. Urban obliged her to use the title "Eccellenza," customary for relatives of a pope, and to hold court. Even after her husband's death in 1630 the pope denied her petition to be allowed to enter a convent as *conversa*, and she could only retire to the family palace, whether the "Casa Grande" ai Giubbonari or (from 1632 until 1634) the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, to

live as in a cloister. This secluded secular life was possible to her only because her son Taddeo had married Anna Colonna in 1627 and the younger woman was then available to assume the public duties of a female relative of the pope.<sup>27</sup> At last, in 1640, she was able to enter the newly founded convent of the SS. Incarnazione, where her two daughters were nuns. Although she retained secular garb and remained free to come and go, she rarely went out. Feeling herself unworthy of a nun's habit, she lived as a novice; only twenty-four hours before her death on 15 August 1644, she finally received the habit and made her profession as a nun.<sup>28</sup>

An account of the etiquette observed by Costanza as first female relative of the pope, presumably in her apartment in the "Casa Grande" ai Giubbonari, has survived.<sup>29</sup> It followed in principle the etiquette prescribed for men of the period, but it was more condensed. For example, she greeted guests who were cardinals at the door of the anteroom immediately preceding the audience room, inside or outside the door, depending on the rank of the particular cardinal, and bade them farewell in the outer anteroom before the outermost room of her apartment, the *sala dei palafrenieri*. (A cardinal would greet another cardinal in the *sala dei palafrenieri* or at the top of the stairs and then accompany him to his coach after the visit.)<sup>30</sup> Other male visitors were shown respect in proportion to their rank. Since Costanza apparently had only two anterooms and eschewed the use of the *sala* and stairs, she had to depend heavily on compliments and gradations of deference in her manner to show distinctions among the ranks of her many callers. Donna Costanza's women callers—wives of ambassadors, princesses, duchesses, marchionesses, relatives of cardinals, and so forth—were shown greater deference, according to the conventions of the system, than were men of comparable rank. To bid farewell to women who bore the title "Eccellentissima," Costanza would go to the limit of her apartment (never done for a man), to the outer door of the *sala dei palafre-*

*nieri*, or even beyond, to the top of the stair.

As women's etiquette was an adaptation of that used by men, men also made certain adjustments in their normal etiquette with respect to women. Men gave precedence to women on visits, in encounters with their carriages in the streets, and at banquets; but if there were more than two or three women, a cardinal need yield only to the woman of highest rank.<sup>31</sup> Following the good example of Cardinal Aldobrandini, later Clement VIII, cardinals gave audience to women of whatever rank with the *portiera* raised (although it might be lowered if the woman guest was the cardinal's mother or sister).<sup>32</sup> At papal audiences women were allowed to sit on a stack of three or four cushions (instead of standing or sitting on stools or other specified chairs, as men would do); and, again following the example of Clement VIII, they were offered refreshments in another room at the conclusion of the audience.<sup>33</sup>

### Noblewomen's Apartments

Women who fulfilled responsibilities of receiving and paying calls in the diplomatic society of Rome required apartments similar to those of men.

In Palazzo Borghese, after the remodeling of 1671–76, Prince Giovanni Battista (grandson of Marcantonio) and Princess Eleonora had two pairs of apartments in the west wing of the palace: parallel suites on both the ground floor and the *piano nobile*, with the prince's rooms toward the street and his wife's toward the garden (see Figs. 42, 47).<sup>34</sup> On the ground floor they shared the first three large rooms to the left of the entrance from piazza Borghese (A4, A5, A6), and then each had an anteroom (A10, A8a), an audience room (A11–12, A8b), and a room containing a *zampnaro*, a large and elaborate bed (A13, A9); smaller rooms and a chapel followed in the extension toward the Ripetta. Upstairs, after the grand *sala* and its adjacent chapel C7, there followed two anterooms (C8, C9), an audience room (C10), two more rooms (C11, C27), and a

chapel (C30) for the prince; and three anterooms (C12, C13, C14), an audience room (C15), a smaller room (C28), and a gallery (C35) on the princess's side. The walls of the ground-floor rooms were covered with paintings from the famous Borghese collection (instead of the usual fabric or leather hangings), and the furnishings and hangings at the doors and windows were similar in kind and in richness in the two apartments, the only differentiation being that the first three rooms and the prince's suite were done in red and the princess's rooms had green hangings and upholstery. Each of the two audience rooms had a baldacchino in the appropriate color.<sup>35</sup> The equivalent and parallel suites corresponded to the similar and parallel forms of etiquette by which both prince and princess would have received guests. They also provided for easy connections between the more private rooms of the husband's and wife's suites, and the princess's two suites were placed toward the garden, conveniently below the apartment of her women attendants.

The few notices of noblewomen's suites in Palazzo Borghese before 1671 suggest that they too were comparable to those of the men (though always separate from them)—richly furnished and suitable for the playing out of Roman etiquette.<sup>36</sup> In particular, an apartment that included a chapel, in the northeastern wing of the palace, was at one time used by Donna Virginia, wife of Giovanni Battista Borghese and sister-in-law of the pope. This apartment was later taken over by Cardinal Pier Maria Borghese, who lived there until his death in 1642,<sup>37</sup> and the cardinal's residence there demonstrates the suitability of the apartment for a prominent unmarried man as well as for a widowed noblewoman.

Like Palazzo Borghese, Palazzo Barberini was also to house women relatives of a pope. Donna Anna Colonna Barberini had a large and richly furnished suite in a most prominent location, on the *piano nobile*, in the north wing (see Fig. 102).<sup>38</sup> Its chapel C30 was the site of the baptism of her daughter Lucrezia on 8 September 1632.<sup>39</sup> Her rooms were entered from the grand central

*salone*, and four anterooms (the vault of the third, C29, bearing Andrea Sacchi's splendid fresco of the "Divina Sapienza")<sup>40</sup> preceded the audience room C27. The large number of anterooms was appropriate to Anna's high rank and also surely useful in allowing her to express many gradations of respect to her varied visitors without going beyond the door of her apartment to the *sala* or stairs (inappropriate for a woman) and without having to depend on compliments and other nonarchitectural signs, as had her mother-in-law in an apartment with only two anterooms. A small spiral service stair S8 descended from the inner rooms of the apartment to the basement and ascended to the attic and the quarters of her women attendants; and a separate private stair S7 communicated with the apartment of her husband Taddeo below. Like Virginia Borghese's apartment, Anna's rooms could readily be converted to the use of a cardinal: Antonio Barberini, recognizing the natural coolness of the northward-oriented rooms, arranged his summer apartment here when he took over the entire palace in 1635.<sup>41</sup>

Later, widowed and alienated from the Barberini family, Anna continued to live in a style befitting a woman of her rank. In 1651 and 1652 she bought houses near SS. Apostoli and the palace of her Colonna relatives, forming from them a single complex called Palazzo dell'Olmo, or dei Colonnese, where she lived until her death on 31 October 1658. The inventory of her possessions in the palace reveals a suitably prestigious apartment, including a *sala dei palafrenieri*, anteroom, chapel, audience room, and so forth.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, the widowed Costanza Barberini eschewed splendor and ceremony and lived modestly in two rooms in a remote part of the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane, on the "secondo piano nobile" (see Fig. 103, D25 and D26).<sup>43</sup> According to a contemporary account, her rooms, though warmed by a fireplace, were very modestly furnished: without the rich wall hangings customary for a person of her rank, the walls held only simple devotional pictures; there were no jewels, gold, or silver; and there were

only a few old chairs, some of black leather with black fabric covers and some with seats of straw.<sup>44</sup> She slept on a straw pad, without the usual more comfortable mattress atop it; and when she moved to the convent in 1640 she gave up the straw as well, to sleep directly on the boards of the bed.<sup>45</sup> Costanza's private chapel D49 was on the same floor of the palace as her rooms but somewhat removed from them. Adjacent to Costanza's rooms, to the north, were the kitchen D28 (with a turnbox, or *rota*) and dining room D27 of her women attendants, and their bedrooms were in the attic of the north wing.

Pietro Cataneo remarked that noblewomen rarely went out but customarily spent much more time at home than their husbands did, and that accordingly they had a special need for airy and attractive quarters.<sup>46</sup> The limitations of noblewomen's lives made it especially desirable that they have places for enjoying the informal companionship of their women attendants within the palace and in enclosed gardens. The anonymous Barberini advisor, the author of Barb. lat. 4360, proposed a garden accessible from the women's apartment, enclosed, planted with an ellipse of trees, and centered on a fountain: ". . . the women could come here from their apartment, and remain here at their ease, alone, without being able to be seen by anyone."<sup>47</sup> In the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane the designer contrived a six-room "casino" in the north wing, opening to an enclosed garden, which Anna and her companions could enjoy in warm weather (see Fig. 110).<sup>48</sup> At the Palazzo Colonna-Barberini in Palestrina, the apartment occupied by the princess in 1629 was adjoined by a little garden, with a house for the "signorini," probably in the area now occupied by the church of S. Rosalia. The three-bay loggia and its fountain, a part of the princess's apartment, may also have been an attempt to provide the women with a pleasurable place within the confines of the palace (see Fig. 181, A9).<sup>49</sup> At Palazzo Borghese after 1671, the princess's ground-floor apartment opened to the enclosed garden.

It was essential that a woman's apartment be

accompanied by the apartment of her women attendants—normally located in an attic or mezzanine, convenient to the noblewoman's apartment and at the same time secluded and isolated from the rest of the palace. The women had individual rooms, a common kitchen and dining room, and a turnbox (*rota*) that permitted them to receive food and other supplies without coming into contact with the temptations of the rest of the palace. In Palazzo Borghese, the marriage of the young prince Marcantonio Borghese to Camilla Orsini on 20 October 1619 was the occasion for arranging rooms for the bride's attendants. Four attic rooms E1–E4, which had been constructed and finished with plastered walls and simple brick pavements in 1607, on the southwest side of the courtyard, were subdivided and joined to the corner rooms (see Fig. 34). Each small room had a window, a sloping wood ceiling, and a door opening to a corridor. A latrine was installed in the small spiral stair S4 serving this apartment. Rooms E8 and E9 were probably the women's pantry and kitchen; the corner room E9 was fitted with a wood ceiling and two lavatories, and a turnbox was made and installed.<sup>50</sup> The major remodeling of the palace in 1671 included another apartment for women in the attic of the west wing, which followed exactly the same pattern (Fig. 49, E7, E12–E22).<sup>51</sup> The simple furnishings of the individual women's rooms were listed in an inventory made in 1693: for each room, a plain bed, an armchair, a straw-seated chair, possibly a small table with a single drawer, a devotional picture on the wall, a chamber pot, and a close-stool.<sup>52</sup> This was quite in contrast to the opulence of the many-roomed apartments of the princess whom the women served.

At Palazzo Barberini the situation was similar. The women attendants of Donna Anna Colonna Barberini were accommodated in the west end of the upper floors of the north wing, just above Anna's apartment (see Fig. 103). Their small private rooms were complemented by three larger vaulted rooms, each with a window to the west: the kitchen D24; the dining room D23, with a

fireplace; and D22, a storeroom, which was also the location of the required turnbox.<sup>53</sup> The attendants of Anna's mother-in-law, Costanza, had a separate but similar set of rooms.<sup>54</sup>

The remodeling of Palazzo Chigi for the occupancy of Cardinal Flavio Chigi was the occasion for removing a women's apartment and its old turnbox, which would not be necessary in the all-male household of a cardinal.<sup>55</sup>

However separate the lives of men and women in seventeenth-century Roman society, it was nevertheless important that there be easy access between the private rooms of apartments of husband and wife. Since both suites were linear, extending outward from the *sala*, a few basic solutions naturally emerged. Suites of husband and wife might be parallel, as for Eleonora and Giovanni Battista Borghese after 1671; they might be located one above the other, as for Anna and Taddeo Barberini in their palace at the Quattro Fontane or at Palestrina; or they might stretch in opposite directions around a courtyard, thereby sharing both public entrance and private access, as in the Palazzo del Bufalo-Ferraioli.<sup>56</sup>

Beyond these functional relationships, the design of women's apartments might or might not affect the planning or appearance of the whole palace. Women's apartments can readily be used by men, as both Pier Maria Borghese and Antonio Barberini demonstrated, but men's apartments cannot be used by women without the additional provision of quarters for their women attendants and, optimally, some informal rooms and an enclosed garden. Probably the most common point of view is exemplified by the Palazzo Borghese, in which the whole building is seen as a three-dimensional plastic matrix within which women's apartments (as well as any other person's quarters) can be arranged according to the needs of any particular time. Palazzo Barberini seems exceptional in that the clear logic of its internal and external organization is apparent only if one understands the particular relationships among men and women and the role each resident played in the Barberini family and in Roman society.<sup>57</sup>