CHAPTER FOUR

PRINCE ECKEMBERGH COMES TO DINNER,
OR: POWER THROUGH CULINARY CEREMONY

Introduction

It is not often a historian finds the kind of sources that enable him to reconstruct past behaviour and, thus, to enter past man’s mind. In papal Rome, with its emphasis on stylised acts and (e-)motions, the situation is slightly better. ‘Baroque behaviour’ as codified in prescriptions and descriptions of ceremony and ritual, can in fact be ‘read’ and interpreted. As ceremony was the lifeblood of the papal capital,¹ I have searched for a suitable case to analyse it in action, and have been lucky to discover one. The 1637–1638 mission of the Imperial ambassador Johann Prince Eckembergh—or Von Eggenberg—to Pope Urban has produced a relatively large amount of texts which allow for what historians of literature call ‘close reading’,² because they are what anthropologists have termed ‘thick descriptions’. Multi-layered as they are, these texts yield fascinating information both on desired and on actual behaviour, thus illuminating an important aspect of culture in papal Rome.

Preparations

On the night of November 30, 1638, thousands of Romans flocked to the palace of the Spanish ambassador on the Piazza di Spagna. The austere but elegant front was ablaze with candles and torches; guards in ceremonial livery were standing at the huge vaulted entrance. The


This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC License.
occasion of all this festivity was the banquet which Don Manuel de Moura y Corte Real, Marques of Castel Rodrigo, ambassador extraordinary of His Catholic Majesty King Philip IV of Spain, was about to offer to his guest of honour, the plenipotentiary extraordinary of the Emperor, Johann Antonn Fürst von Eckembergh and Duke of Krumau, as well as to the resident Spanish and Imperial ambassadors, Don Juan Chumacer and the Duke of Bozzolo. The banquet was one of the last festivities in a long series that had started more than a year before when news had reached Rome that Ferdinand of Habsburg had been elected King of the Romans and, consequently, would assume the imperial dignity, an event that had taken place in December 1636.

Yet, the times were sombre. Europe was involved in one of its most destructive armed conflicts to date. In the so-called Thirty Years’ War, the Emperor and the King of Spain faced the French, the Danes and the Swedes, as well as the Dutch. For the popes, the religious balance of Europe was on the point of being definitely turned in favour of Protestantism—in their parlance: heresy. This meant their ideological and moral authority was at stake, as well as their actual power over the ‘national’ Churches in the various states of Europe, more specifically those in the Empire. The new Emperor’s coronation, and even more the news of the agreement recently reached on the selection of Cologne as the seat of an international peace congress, had been greeted with great joy, not least by Pope Urban, who had been feverishly urging his diplomats all over the continent to work for European peace. This was especially important because the two needed each other now more than ever, having to combat yet another common enemy: besides the Protestants who undermined their power from within, they also faced the Islamic Turks who threatened it from without. It was precisely to prevent the Protestants and the Turks from taking advantage of the perilous situation of a Europe divided within itself that Pope and Emperor needed a show of both their respective power and their mutual cooperation.

Perhaps to counter the prevailing pessimism, all those who had a stake in the felicitous outcome of a much-needed papal-imperial...
rapprochement tried to present as optimistic a vision of the present and the future as was possible. Indeed, for a month Rome indulged in a positive orgy of festivities. For when the news had arrived, on January 4, 1637, many of the imperial party’s well-wishers decided to show their joy, and a series of celebrations followed, as Giacinto Gigli noted in his diary.

The papal public orator—effectively the propaganda master—Agostino Mascardi published the speech he had given to an audience assembled in the palace of Maurizio, Prince-Cardinal of Savoy, the protector of the German Nation. An anonymous writer informed the public of the solemnities organised by the Duke of Bozzolo, the resident imperial ambassador. Such imperial allies as Cardinals Aldobrandini and Pio, as well as the administrators of the German and Spanish national churches also organised various public entertainments, whose descriptions were duly printed. Another nameless writer cleverly pretended to tell what happened as seen through the eyes of Cornelius Heinrich Mottmann, an influential person in Curial circles and, moreover, imperial agent in Rome, thus, probably, attracting at least a number of readers-buyers for his booklet. Antonio Gerardi, after going into details about the election of the new emperor, his coronation, and reactions to it in the German lands, described the wondrous fireworks and other forms of festive display that were staged on Piazza di Spagna, Piazza Navona and elsewhere in town. He did so in a text addressed to the said Cardinal of Savoy—a man, obviously, who had no need of such a description, but who served as the official recipient of a story which really was meant, again, to inform the Roman public, and, possibly, a wider readership as well, for a German edition was provided, too.

Whereas this last text was a mere twelve pages long, with an illustrated frontispiece, only, Luigi Manzini wrote to the Duke of Modena, describing the festivities organized by Maurizio of Savoy himself in a sumptuous book of some 160 pages, with eleven engravings showing the most spectacular moments. Giacinto Gigli, too, was struck by the magnificence of the occasion: a huge ‘theatre’ had been erected outside the Cardinal’s dwelling, the Orsini-palace at Monte Giordano, surrounded by an arcade of 40 arches, each crowned with a short inscrip-

5 The following list is taken from: M. Fagiolo dell’Arco, *Bibliografia della Festa barocca a Roma* (Rome 1994), nrs. 129–142. The interpretation is mine.
tion extolling Ferdinand’s many virtues; odoriferous water spouted from fountains on the piazza within this arcade. The first of February, a banquet was offered to the members of the Sacred College, and to the resident ambassadors, while the people were given free wine. The imperial ambassador acted likewise, with fireworks and other festivities.

But the Spanish ambassador tried to outshine even his imperial colleague, offering the public both a comedy, staged on the piazza in front of his palace, and a showering of money and pastries. The fireworks he organised in honour of the new emperor were such that they attracted a number of chroniclers, both verbal and visual. Ferrante Corsacci published a fourteen-page pamphlet, with four illustrations, in Italian. Albeit in Spanish, Miguel Bermudez de Castro did better, with eighteen pages and ten illustrations, engraved on the basis of drawings by no less a painter than Claude Lorrain (1600–1682).7 The inveterate, though critical chronicler of life in papal Rome, Theodoro Ameyden (1586–1656), addressed a twenty-page text to Cardinal de’Medici, adorned with 22 engravings, including five by, again, Lorrain. And, last but not least, for the avid collector some thirteen Lorrain-engravings of the fireworks were published separately.

To be sure, the Venetian ambassador who was present at the fireworks organised in front of the *Palazzo di Spagna*, somewhat spitefully but very significantly remarked that, surely, the symbolism of it all was lost on the spectators.8 He probably was right for, mostly, the intricacies of the ideological messages buried in this kind of audio-visual propaganda must have escaped any but the most learned among the lookers-on. Yet in this specific case, with the finale of the fireworks showing the cardboard King of the Romans who, sailing down, on horseback, from a tower erected in front of the palace, emerged unscathed from the flames and was reverentially greeted by the ambassador and his suite, hardly can have demanded great powers of comprehension. Giacinto Gigli, for one, very well understood what was meant,9 though it seems that a note of irony crept into his description—who was this would-be King of the Romans but a cardboard figure indeed?

Nevertheless, a massive propaganda campaign had been staged, which cannot have failed to impress the Roman public who enjoyed...
the bustle even though, as Gigli stoically remarked, many people were hurt and even died, ‘as is usual during these occasions’. Whether they all consciously noted the great absentees, we do not know. Yet, the members of the Barberini-family were conspicuously lacking among the chorus of the new emperor’s well-wishers. Those who were among the better-informed might have guessed the reason: Pope Urban was deemed to be rather more pro-French than pro-Habsburg and, at least on this occasion, made no bones about showing it.

Again, Gigli noted what happened. As one of the representatives of the ‘People of Rome’, he was told that the city council, too, would want to show its joy, perhaps prompted by the imperial ambassador who, for obviously propagandistic reasons, let it be understood that he was willing to share part of the financial burden a big public display would entail. But when the conservators sent one of their officials to the Pope to inform him of their intention, Urban haughtily replied that in Rome he was King of the Romans, and that they should on no account stage any festivities. It is precisely this attitude that explains what happened in the following year.

For the time being, however, after Ferdinand’s coronation, a lull set in. For collective action to be taken, the relationship between the new Emperor and the Pope had to be formalised, first. Therefore, Prince Eckembergh was sent to Rome. The official occasion was the ceremonial need to announce Ferdinand’s election and coronation to Urban and to offer his obedience as well as formally ask for papal recognition—a recognition that took the place of the coronation which no longer was performed by a pope himself. Hence, the mission, while really a remnant of an essentially medieval situation that did not reflect actual power relationships in Europe anymore, still was essential in an ideological context, wherein imperial policy should be sanctioned by the papacy. But despite these ceremonial needs, from the imperial perspective Eckembergh’s mission was meant specifically to cement the Habsburg alliance with Barberini Rome.

The choice of Eckembergh for ambassador probably had been motivated by two arguments: not only was he the son of the late Emperor

---

10 Gigli, Diario, o.c., 292.
11 Gigli, Diario, o.c., 292.
12 I have used L. von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, Vol XIII–I (Freiburg 1928), 484–488, to reconstruct the general outlines that help elucidate the political background of the banquet.
Ferdinand’s favourite friend and, indeed, unofficial prime minister who, incidentally, himself had been an ambassador to Barberini Rome in the early 1630s, he also was by far the wealthiest nobleman of the Austrian Habsburg countries. As was usual all over Europe, missions like these could only be entrusted to men very rich in their own right and, moreover, willing to gain or preserve royal favour by dispensing huge sums from their own coffers on their master’s behalf. In this respect, at least, the Duke of Krumau did not disappoint his Emperor. Though, perhaps, lacking his father’s political astuteness, the second Prince Eckembergh definitely could be relied upon to represent his master in suitable splendour.

However, despite his in the end gigantic expenses the ambassador did not, at first, succeed in securing a smooth procedure. Actually, when Eckembergh arrived in Rome on May 9, 1638, being met, at dusk, by the Cardinal of Savoy, as protector of the ‘German Nation’, and by the two resident Habsburg ambassadors, the Austrian and the Spanish one, he found that things had not at all been arranged as he had ordered. He knew that much depended on the impression he would make, the need for a splendid entry having been demonstrated some years before when the newly-arrived Spanish ambassador, failing to stage the customary cavalcade, had completely fallen from public grace, thus dishonouring his master.\(^{13}\) Now noting that preparations for such a ceremonial entry had not been made, due, or so it seemed, to problems about his reception at the papal court, Eckembergh officially declared he would ‘go on to Naples for two months’. Unofficially, however, he did enter Rome, leaving it to the other Habsburg representatives to convince the Curia that his demands would have to be met, first, before he would honour the Pope with his official entry.

In Rome, which considered itself the normative centre of Christian culture, the main problem was, basically, the age-old question whether or not the temporal would yield and even bow to the spiritual, viz. whether the Emperor would accept papal precedence as formalised in the rules codified in the *Cerimoniale Romanum*, which the papal court held up to all Europe as the model of courtly behaviour—it really should have the force of the Gospels, someone even wrote.\(^{14}\) After several months of diplomatic bickering, Rome agreed to accept one telling exception to its own rules: whereas other Catholic princes still were

---

\(^{13}\) Gigli, Diario, *o.c.*, July 1625.

\(^{14}\) *BAV*, Vat. Lat., Vol. 7852, f. 448\(^v\), sqq.
expected to pay their obedience to the Pope, the Emperor only was asked to present his ‘observance’, probably best translated as ‘reverential attachment’. That problem solved, Eckembergh agreed to meet Urban. However, by now, Summer had started, and to evade the damp heat of the Vatican, Urban had moved, as was his annual wont, to his summer residence, the palace of Monte Cavallo, on the Quirinal Hill. Thither the ambassador would have to ride.

*The first entry and the first audience*

Thus, on June 18, 1638, Eckembergh officially entered Rome through the Porta del Popolo, amidst a great crowd of cardinals, bishops and noblemen who first conducted him to the Orsini Palace on Monte Giordano, the residence of the Cardinal of Savoy. From there he went on horseback to Monte Cavallo.

Kneeling before the Pope who was seated on his throne, the ambassadorial orator delivered his speech and the ambassador himself handed Urban his master’s letter, after having kissed it.

This was the first of a sequence of actions and motions that in their origin we now can date back to the ritual originally developed at the imperial court in Byzantium, a conscious emulation and fusion both of the sacral motions used in church liturgy and of ancient Roman-imperial ceremonies; it was a ritual that, in this modified form, was taken over by the popes and, I would like to stress, from Rome spread over Western Europe precisely because Europe’s princely courts adopted the culture exemplary set by the early 17th-century papacy. Thus, it became the behavioural norm of Baroque society, the society of the absolutist princes.

The process is clearly shown in what happened next. After the Pope had motioned to the ambassador that he might rise, Eckembergh assisted Urban in disrobing himself, receiving his ceremonial vestments before handing them to a servant. Obviously, we here see the ritual of the Mass introduced into profane culture, the culture of the court; it thus became a ceremony foreshadowing and perhaps even directly

15 *Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Archivio Santacroce (AS)*, Vol. 69, 68v.
17 For the text, see: *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 8876, f. 202r, sqq.
18 *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 12431, fols. 29r–32r.
influencing the procedure adopted by Louis XIV of France at Versailles when he introduced the formal *lever* and *coucher du roi*. Allowing France’s chief noblemen to dress and undress him, Louis clearly aimed at a sacralization of the king’s person along the lines laid down at the papal court. The ritual was then adopted at other European courts as well.

Leaving the Quirinal, Eckembergh returned to the Orsini Palace, to attend an official banquet given in his honour. Yet, the ‘many bystanders who, out of curiosity, came to watch this festive occasion’, noted the ambassador’s manifest melancholy. And they were right. The Duke was enraged. Enraged because, in retrospect, he was not at all satisfied by the ceremonies. He felt neither he nor his imperial master had received the honours due to them.

To start with, he should have been received outside the Porta del Popolo by the Prefect of Rome, Urban’s nephew Don Taddeo Barberini, second Prince of Palestrina. Then, the Pope’s other nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the Secretary of State, should have led him into the official papal residence, the Vatican, where the Pope would have sat enthroned in the *Sala Regia*. Then, instead of only nodding to indicate that he might rise from his kneeling position, the Pope should have signalled him to do so in a voice loud enough to be heard by the entire audience. Urban should then have invited him to sit down beside him, in full view of the members of the Sacred College, seated as well, and of the other courtiers, who, of course, would have remained standing. These and other related grievances convinced Eckembergh that he should punish the Curia. Therefore, he ordered that the costly decoration of the palace of the Duke of Ceri, which he had taken as his official residence, be dismantled and decided not to stage the traditional cavalcade that would mark his public, official entry in Rome—eagerly awaited by the entire population and of great symbolic value—until more adequate ceremonies had been agreed to by the papal court, incorporating all the details he demanded.

What lay behind this seemingly grotesque pique? Apparently, it was all caused by Eckembergh’s wish to present the Emperor—both to the papal court and to the population of Rome—as a prince who rightly claimed absolute precedence over all other European princes, most specifically over the King of France, one of the reasons being

---

19 ASR, AS, Vol. 69, 35r–v.
20 ASR, AS, Vol. 69, 61r.
that the recently-arrived French ambassador, the Duke of Crequi, had greatly impressed Rome with his master’s splendour and, thus, power.\textsuperscript{22} However, rumour had it there were other reasons as well.\textsuperscript{23} Whereas the new Emperor did need the papal bull that would sanction his election and coronation, he was not willing to give in on an issue that had greatly bothered Rome, viz. the imprisonment of the archbishop-elector of Trier who, it was said, had conspired with the French and had planned to boycott Ferdinand’s election in the first place.

\textit{A ceremonial society}

Obviously, the ceremonial problems were real in the sense that they reflected equally real diplomatic battles over really serious political issues. Eckembergh’s ceremonial displeasure had to be answered by the papal court. But it was precisely this court that, claiming the highest power on earth, considered itself the norm of civilised behaviour, of ceremony, and had created itself in such a way that a single foot wrongly set could spell ruin. The Curia, Rome, not only was a ceremonial society, it was a society that considered its ceremonies sacrosanct. From the pope downwards and, indeed, guided by him, the entire town, and everybody in it somehow was embedded in a series of ceremonies, that was dictated by the annual cycle of the Church’s festivities—again, the festivities of a power that felt these were the ultimate festivities: ceremonies of joy, ceremonies of mourning, ceremonies celebrating life, ceremonies celebrating death—and, as a sign of hope and, consequently, an instrument of ultimate power, ceremonies celebrating resurrection.

As in imperial China and Japan, monarchies where the temporal was inextricably mixed with the ecclesiastical, the profane with the sacred, in Rome, too, there was a standing commission of cardinals and senior civil servants, in this case a specific department, or board, that dealt with all questions concerning rites and ceremony. Among this group, the real arbiters, those who had the heavy task of interpreting the time-honoured \textit{Ceremoniale Romanum}, were the powerful masters of ceremony.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} All this can be inferred from: \textit{BAV, Ottoboniani Latini (OL)}, Vol. 2701, f. 62\textsuperscript{v}, as well as from: \textit{ASR, AS}, Vol. 69, f. 90\textsuperscript{v}.

\textsuperscript{23} Gigli, Diario, \textit{o.c.}, 312.

\textsuperscript{24} A list is in: \textit{BAV, Vat. Lat.}, Vol. 7930, fols. 188\textsuperscript{v}–189\textsuperscript{v}.
In this period, there were four of them, two senior ones, Paolo Alaleone and Carlo Antonio Vacari, and two junior ones, Gasparo Alaleone and Domenico Bella. With their own archive and with a voluminous library of ‘diaries’ documenting ceremonial practice and stretching back for more than a century, they were constantly being consulted for precedents, they were among the most important keepers of the papacy’s collective memory. Indeed, they were the choreographers of the ballet of papal power, being the ones who instructed everyone in their proper movements and behaviour, including, it must be realized, the pope himself. For not being, as in a hereditary monarchy, “porphyrogeneitou”, born into the purple, he too, on his accession, had to be instructed so as to behave in accordance with the honour of Holy Church, whose guardians the masters of ceremony were.

If only to smooth procedures within the bewilderingly complex structure of the papal court proper, guidelines were necessary. This court, with its Mastro di Casa, its Scalco Maggiore, Forriere Maggiore, Trinciante Maggiore, each with their assistants; with its Secret Chamberlains, Secret Chaplains and Secret Adjutants, and its Chamberlains of Honour; with its Scalco de’ Poveri and his staff, who daily fed the dozens of poor people who ate from the papal table. This court, with its Secretaries of State, Secretaries of the Secret Letters, Secretaries of the Memorials. This court, with the General of the Papal Guard, the General of Holy Church, the General of the Papal Galleys, the Keeper of the Castel Sant’Angelo—all functions held by Urban’s nephew Taddeo who, for each of them, had a specific staff. This court, with its Cardinal Grand Penitentiary, its Cardinal Vice-Chamberlain of Holy Church—the Pope’s nephew Francesco Barberini—, its Cardinal camerlengo, its Prefect of the Court of Grace and Justice. This court, with its dozen or so Congregations of Cardinals—this court simply needed regulations, and people explaining and enforcing them.

Consequently, to give but a small example, over time the masters of ceremony had compiled long lists which detailed the dress code for each and all of these courtiers—a code that, in the case of the ecclesiastical members, from the pope himself down to the lowest deacon, varied by the day. Equally long lists spelled out the manner in which courtiers and visitors were to behave in the papal presence: how many

25 BAV, Vat. Lat., Vol. 12353, fols. 213r–275r.
26 BAV, B.L., Vol. 5009, passim.
27 BAV, Vat. Lat., Vol. 12345, f. 45r sqq.
steps after entering the Papal Chapel, when to cover one’s head, and when to uncover it, when to kneel, when to stand, when to sit—for the major ambassadors and the cardinals on their stools, and for important female visitors on their cushions, for only the pope sat in a proper chair.

Perhaps the popes themselves were the ones whose life was constrained most by the annual cycle of ceremonies, by the complex rules it posed on their court. Each day, and sometimes several times a day, they were dressed for the specific function they had to perform; they also had to be briefed as to the proper gestures they should make: for the normal papal Mass, for the special, festive occasions, for the public blessings, for the audiences, for the consistories, for the processions. If they presided over a Pontifical Chapel, the dressing ceremony was a public one, and a bevy of cardinals assisted them in their vesting. When they carried the Holy Sacrament, two cardinals supported their arms and the most important ambassadors of the European states present held up their robe.

Periodically, the popes tried to even more enhance their position as the rulers of the “caput mundi”, of their capital as the City Eternal that set an example to the world but also asked the world to accept and honour its pretensions: were they not emperors as their Roman predecessors had been, rulers temporal and spiritual? Was not their capital the living embodiment of an imperial tradition that set it above all the nations?

During the pontificate of Urban VIII, this wish resulted in two highly-debated decisions. The one was to raise the pope’s “Fratres in Christo”—the members of the College of Cardinals, the successor body of Rome’s ancient senate—to the position of ‘Princes of the Blood’. After years of discussion in the Congregation of Rites, they were given the title of ‘Eminency’, much to the chagrin of the ambassadors of the major Christian princes who now had to give them precedence. Still more problematic was the decision to raise the Prefect of Rome—Don Taddeo Barberini, Prince of Palestrina—to a position in which he, too, preceded all ambassadors, following immediately after the cardinals. He even was given a headdress resembling an ancient mitre. The decision, as obviously political as the previous one, was

28 E.g.: BAV, Vat. Lat., Vols. 8429, 8439, 12343, 12345, et cetera.
29 BAV, Vat. Lat., Vol. 13398, f. 44v, sqq.
argued on the basis of extensive historical arguments, which, again, harked back to Antiquity, in once more stressing the continuity between imperial and papal Rome.\footnote{BAV, B.L., Vol. 5009, f. 111v, sqq.; drawings of the mitre: f. 108v, 149v.} The European ambassadors, on behalf of their masters, were enraged: now they, representing sovereign heads of state, would have to give way to a man whom many considered an upstart—as, indeed, secretly, these often haughtily-aristocratic gentlemen may well have thought each successive bunch of papal nephews were “homines novi”: they only owed their position to the chance election of their uncle to the papacy.

In the fiercely competitive milieu that was papal Rome, where every gesture had a meaning, denoted rank, the imperial ambassador, newly arrived from Vienna, had to find his way. Even though Eckembergh was not a boorish man—court etiquette in Vienna was complex, too, modelled on the Spanish example that, itself, had taken quite a few of its rules from Rome—he could not be expected to know all the niceties peculiar to ‘The Town’. An obviously knowledgeable anonymous writer surmised what, according to the “on dits” at the papal court, really had gone wrong.\footnote{BAV, BL., Vol. 5009, fols. 251v, sqq.}

As was customary, the papal masters of ceremony had carefully briefed the ambassador in the Roman rites. Eckembergh, after having knelt to kiss the instep of the Pope’s slipper on the embroidered mark of the Cross, would receive a short papal nod, indicating that he might rise to take his seat. However, the ambassador, for reasons unclear, had not seen the nod and had remained kneeling throughout the ceremony. Urban, bewildered—inevitably, he, too, was a ‘slave’ of the Roman ritual—, had been indecisive for a moment. Then, making the Sign of the Cross over the ambassador’s head, and following the disrobing ceremony, he had retreated into his rooms.

Not noticeably perturbed—or so people thought at the moment—Eckembergh had gone on to visit the papal nephews, which he certainly would not have done if he had been angry. Only later, malevolent persons suggested to him he had been grossly slighted by the Pope, and, moreover, in front of no less than twelve cardinals, a ‘corona’, the anonymous interpreter writes, a ‘definitely majestic theatre’—the legitimizing witnesses of Urban’s pre-conceived plan to humiliate him and his imperial master?
In short, Eckembergh did not enjoy his food at the Cardinal of Savoy’s marvellous banquet. Indeed, he sat there, contemplating whether to leave Rome during the night to return to Germany. Luckily, people succeeded in convincing him that such an action would be quite inappropriate and, indeed, counter-productive. But doing nothing would be equally unacceptable.

What followed was sheer theatre, too, the theatre of diplomacy. For over six months, high-ranking officials on both sides tried to find a solution that would satisfy both parties without either one having to give in. In Rome, a special congregation, a committee of cardinals was created to deal with the problem. In Vienna the Imperial Chancellery took over, acting on the basis of the ambassador’s feverish letters.33

The committee first gathered on the Saturday following the fateful Friday. Urban, who had been warned of the ambassador’s wrath, offered to sign a declaration stating that he had indeed given the official nod that would have signalled Eckembergh to rise and take his coveted seat. The ambassador rejected the offer. In Vienna, this would be seen as an implicit admission that he had been unacceptably inattentive. Then the Pope offered a new audience, where four cardinals would be present. This, too, was unacceptable to Eckembergh: there were to be twelve cardinals, and he wanted to be loudly invited to sit.

By Sunday, the congregation dealing with this incident had grown to no less than twelve cardinals but even such a highly eminent number did not produce a result. Rumour had it that ‘those cardinals who were papabile had felt terribly uncomfortable, for casting their votes they would have to keep the friendship both of the papal nephews and of the Austrians’, an act of dexterity that was impossible, the more so as it now transpired Urban really did think the ambassador should not be allowed to sit, precisely because so many cardinals had been present. To have the ambassador sit during the Papal Chapel would be unacceptable as well: he should remain standing, albeit at the first step of the papal throne. So he actually was unhappy with the instructions his masters of ceremony had given.

Inevitably, the latter felt called upon to defend themselves: they could not have known that so many cardinals would have been present. By now, everyone agreed that ‘these are definitely considerable problems.’

Monday morning saw the entire papal court breathlessly but not wordlessly waiting for a decision. None came. Repeating the audience, according to some, would cause damage to Rome’s reputation, with its implicit admission that the Curia had not acted according to custom. The Pope’s own honour was at stake: why should he stage a new consistory to amend for someone else’s mistake? Others argued that a new audience would, on the contrary, increase Rome’s honour, increase ‘the majesty of the Church’: the imperial ambassador would repeat his master’s offer of observance, and reverence. Moreover, would it not be a fittingly benign act of supreme humanity to allow the poor man to redress the consequences of his own inattentiveness?

The case dragged on. People complained. Ceremony, which was of crucial importance, simply was not handled in the right way, anymore, because those who had the knowledge to make it function properly were lacking, nowadays. Were scapegoats sought? I do not know. But I do know Paolo Alaleone did retire from the position of first Master of Ceremonies, though, typically, it was his nephew who succeeded him.

Yet, despite all these difficulties, a compromise was reached in the end. On November 7, 1638, Eckembergh entered Rome again.

The second entry

Many Roman nobles had come to the Villa Giulia, a mile out of town, where such cavalcades always assembled, arriving either on horseback or, if they belonged to the higher echelons, in their coaches or sedan-chairs. Indeed, such coaches and litters sometimes were kept by the dozen by the wealthiest members of Roman society, including, of course, the cardinals, precisely for the purpose of adding lustre to these processions. Participating in it, as the envoys of Rome and of the Pope, they would honour the Ambassador and his master. As one of the Roman diarists noted: ‘thus act the less powerful towards those in power; they give up their freedom for the chains of hierarchy’. Could he have better summarized the transition from a feudal to a court society?

The same diarist noted that, on entering Rome, the cavalcade took care to pass through as many streets as possible, its specific purpose

---

34 BAV, BL., Vol. 5009, fols. 263r–264r.
35 ASR, AS, Vol. 69, fols. 63r–v.
being to impress as great a multitude as possible, for only in this way would the population be convinced of a prince’s—in this case the Emperor’s—power. In thus writing, this critic once more gave proof of the fact that contemporary observers analysed their situation using the same concepts historians and sociologists recently have come up with. The formerly independent nobility had lost its power; the time of the absolute princes had arrived; they had tamed the nobles, subordinating them to the rigours of court hierarchy; yet they also needed acts of not merely grand but also eminently visible propaganda to impress their power on the population.

Another perceptive diarist highly significantly praised Eckembergh’s procession as a cunningly constructed ‘secular poor man’s bible’; indeed, though contemporary descriptions mention people’s complaints about the quick succession of images that passed by them, it is quite obvious that Eckembergh’s entry had been staged as a picture book with a definite political message.

The cavalcade started with a series of 60 mules, divided into five groups, each mule, caparisoned in solid silver, carrying cartoons depicting scenes from contemporary European politics. These were evidently meant to influence the public in Ferdinand’s favour, which, effectively, meant to influence Urban to support the Habsburg cause against France. The wealth of gold brocade, silver, velvet and gems was loudly applauded as well.

Here, as always, we may conclude that such manifestations were appreciated on various levels, by various categories of spectators. The overdose of riches impressed the world, the public at large, those who were illiterate, helping to bring home the power message to them as well. Yet, there also were those on whom the possible deeper reading of the twelve cartoons with scenes set in the Heavenly Rose Garden was not lost. Paradise might be regained, if a treaty would restore peace to Europe—a treaty that would only be possible if the Pope mediated between the belligerents, thus exercising and showing his supreme position also in matters temporal which, from the imperial perspective, meant that Urban would support Ferdinand’s just demands. But a rose, just born, rapidly dies again in its moment of greatest bloom, one of the chroniclers noted, wistfully or maliciously. This act of visual propaganda was followed by some military display: twelve German halberdiers, six trumpeters on horseback and 24 arquebusiers afoot. In this way, Eckembergh still managed to openly affront his host: his men marched into Rome with naked arms, a pre-
rogative belonging to a sovereign prince in his own capital, only.\footnote{BAV, Manoscritti Chigiani, Vol. N II 49, fols. 544v.} Then came two companies of the papal Horse Guard, and eighteen palfreniers leading the cardinals’ mules, sent to honour the ambassador; the animals did not actually carry their eminent load, the Princes of the Church, but their hats only. Two by two followed 24 pages, to introduce a great multitude of the Roman nobility. Behind the Roman nobles, suitably dressed for the occasion, came the members of the papal household, as well as some silver-clad mace-bearers; the masters of ceremony, with four palfreniers on horses of which even the hoofs were shod in silver; and the Swiss Guard, accompanied by some 30 of the ambassador’s lackeys.

And then Eckembergh himself appeared, on horseback, glittering with gold and gems, assisted by two high-ranking prelates. The ordinary imperial ambassador followed with a huge multitude of minor prelates. Making up the end of the cavalcade, the ambassadorial baggage was shown, a costly display laden on a great many carts, which received ‘universal applause’.\footnote{ASR, AS, Vol. 69, fols. 64r–69v.} Along the way, two choruses sang hymns.\footnote{BAV, OL, Vol. 12, f. 146v.} What sort of state music they performed I regrettably do not know. Even if the poet had been revealed, and thus, perhaps, the text and its propagandistic message, one might have searched in vain for the music: in 17th-century opinion, composers mostly did not deserve to be mentioned.

The procession moved on to the palace of the Duke of Ceri, situated by the Trevi Fountain, rented by Eckembergh for the duration of his stay. It had been sumptuously, not to say stupendously adorned both within and without. Indeed, such was the splendour of the decorations that numerous contemporary descriptions have recorded it, providing a clear picture of the purposes of this piece of propaganda. Rome had never seen its like, one of the chroniclers wrote, which, though perhaps exaggerated, meant something in a city where forms of highly expensive and yet supremely ephemeral architecture were erected for almost every festive occasion.\footnote{For a survey: M. Fagiolo, S. Carandini, eds., L’Effimero Barocco. Strutture della Festa nella Roma del’600, Vols. I–II (Rome 1977–1978).}

Just as in imperial times the trumpeters used to invite the people to attend the circus games, they now called the public to come and view
The ‘glories of Caesar’, or so they said—a fine and clever touch, I think, recalling that Ferdinand was after all the successor of those emperors who had held power over Rome long before there had been popes; yet it may not have endeared him to the present Pope, who considered himself Caesar… Inevitably, for many days the streets around the palace were overcrowded with carriages bringing persons of quality to see all the splendour, while the common public gaped as well. What did they see?

The palace’s façade had been artificially widened till it seemed twice its size. This cinemascopic screen then had been hung with paintings executed by the famous Bolognese artist Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi (1606–1680). The intricate iconographic program proclaimed one simple message, only. The House of Habsburg was hailed as Europe’s corner stone from times immemorial, a power immortal going from victory to victory because all its actions were surely founded in Faith.

The central piece was a more than life-sized representation of the Emperor Ferdinand in a triumphal chariot drawn by four horses, trampling his enemies; Fame preceded him and Victory crowned him. The two flanking pictures acquainted the public with the conquest of Regensburg and the battle of Nördlingen. The four main windows of the palace were topped with portraits of former emperors. The entire composition was symmetrical, being vertically divided by enormous putti and tall columns. Allegorical figures symbolizing such virtues as Fortitude, Justice, Piety and Religion crowded the margins, lording it over such monsters as Heresy and Rebellion. In huge escutcheons the Donau and the Tiber rivers were depicted. Latin inscriptions in big, gold lettering also served to drive the message home.

The public was suitably stupefied. According to their mood, people were agreeably surprised by such intricate propaganda or, instigated by those who openly ridiculed it, made fun of it themselves, jokingly offering alternative interpretations that, in view of the Roman tradition in this field, may well have been of a bawdy nature. Some more favoured spectators were allowed entrance to the palace. Gaping at

---

40 BAV, Vat. Lat., Vol. 7852, f. 478r sqq.
43 BAV, Ottoboniani Latinì, Vol. 12, f. 142r.
the huge treasure of gold, silver, gems and rock crystal that filled the rooms, at least one observer remarked that it resembled Nero’s Golden House.45

Nine days later, Urban moved from the Quirinal to the Vatican, where he was to preside over a consistory especially convened to honour the Imperial Ambassador.

Therefore, on the 16th of November, all Rome crowded along the streets leading to St. Peter’s, to see Eckembergh approach the Vatican under constant gunfire. People were not disappointed. In fact, stupefied once again was the word used to describe their feelings. The entire Roman nobility participated in what several observers did not hesitate to term ‘a new triumph of Rome’s greatness’. It is a sign of Rome’s continuing self-consciousness that most commentators saw both the first and the second of Eckembergh’s entries as a triumph in the classical sense, an act meant to honour the Urbs as the “caput mundi”.

Although Gigli noted on both occasion that ‘one had never seen anything more superb’,46 actually, many considered the ambassador’s second cavalcade even more impressive than the first one. Judging from the descriptions, Eckembergh’s suite wore some ancient German garb, reminiscent of medieval costume; should this be interpreted as a manifestation of growing national consciousness on their part? The public was much surprised though to see Eckembergh’s followers dressed entirely in black and gold. One commentator ventured the interpretation that these ‘funeral colours probably were intended to bring to mind the ancient Roman triumphs with their warning of memento te hominem esse’; also, the black was taken to symbolize the strength and stability of the empire, the gold its riches;47 others thought the colours signified humility and wealth, the proximity of happiness and misery, a warning that victory could easily be followed by defeat.48

This is precious information indeed. We do not often have several sources giving information about the reactions of the public to this kind of spectacle with the complex messages involved. Yet, such partly complementary, partly opposing views should warn us against easy interpretations. Relying on our iconological ‘knowledge’, we may think we can disclose the intention of propaganda. Still it will not help us reveal

45 ASR, AS, Vol. 69, f. 90r.
46 Gigli, Diario, a.c., 312.
47 ASR, AS, Vol. 69, fols. 70v–72r.
what actually went on in the observers’ mind, whether the message was understood according to its intentions. For these conflicting texts are descriptions left by intellectuals, members of the cultured elite who were trained to ‘read’ allegories and symbols. In this case, a warning is all the more appropriate because, for all the learned speculation of these contemporary observers, nobody seems to have realized that black and gold were, simply, the Imperial colours.

The second audience, and the papal banquet

Arriving at the Vatican, there first was an official reception in the Sala Regia, the papal throne room where Eckembergh had wanted to be received in the first place, perhaps because he well knew the political significance both of the space itself and of the pictorial propaganda with which it was adorned. The fact had been born out only two years earlier in a famous case. Following an official protest by the Most Serene Republic of Saint Mark against the rephrasing of an inscription added to one of the room’s frescoes depicting the peace signed in 1177 between Pope Alexander III and the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, the Pope had refused to budge. Indeed, Urban had ordered the revision precisely because, historically incorrect, the old text emphasised Venice’s participation in the treaty, even allowing the Republic a crucial role in the restoration of Pope Alexander to the papacy. However, the text always had been a much-cherished Venetian tradition, defended by its historians against all those who already had shown it to be a myth. Though the new wording was not at all anti-Venetian, the leaders of the Republic were enraged and withdrew their ambassador; only when in need of papal support against the Turks, in 1638, did they send a new one, while Urban allowed the new inscription to be removed, without, however, having the old one restored. Meanwhile, the rumour caused by the incident had reverberated all through Europe. And of course, this specific fresco was not unimportant for contemporary opinions about the imperial dignity in relationship to the papacy, either.

The procedure followed for Eckembergh’s reception was that which had been used six months earlier when he had visited the Pope at Monte Cavallo. He kissed the papal foot, or rather the instep of the

[49 Pastor, o.c., XIII/2, 718–719.]
papal sandal. Now, of course, Urban made certain that his nod was visible enough, both for the ambassador and for the assembled court—but speak up he did not. Yet, Eckembergh rose, and sat down on his stool, while his orator delivered the speech, and only rose again when the papal answer was read. Finally, the Pope gave Eckembergh the bull confirming Ferdinand’s election. Once more the ambassador assisted the Pope to disrobe.

However, the consistory was now followed by a grand banquet. For those who think that such was normal procedure, it should be noted that it was not, neither then nor, one might add, has it been ever since. A history of papal public meals, though important from many points of view, has yet to be written. Some elements can be offered here.

As indicated above, papal court procedure can be said to have originated in its lasting form in Avignon. There, the increasing interaction between the popes, their closest collaborators and a throng of hangers-on who tended to become professional courtiers, dictated the regulation of vicinity and distance, the creation of an order, a hierarchy that came to affect both the way men behaved and the space in which they did so. Soon, court life was regulated entirely according to the rules laid down by the papal masters of ceremony; their manuals give precious information about all aspects of what came to be considered civilised demeanour, including the ‘culture of the table’, with such fascinating elements as table manners.

Following such scholars as J.J Burckhardt and N. Elias, historians have told us that, if not originating at the smaller Italian courts of the Renaissance, etiquette, including table manners as manifestations of a process of individualization, can be first seen in France. However, I would definitely maintain one should go to 14th-century papal Avignon to find the roots of this process, if only because precisely at the papal court, the court of a religious prince, such ‘affect-management’ would have to be demanded of both courtiers and other noble visitors.

While the Avignon sources and, indeed, our information well up into the 16th century indicate the popes themselves did regularly preside

---


over luxurious banquets, it seems that both the frequency and the nature of these occasions changed during the later part of the century. The Vatican banquet for Prince Eckembergh is a precious testimony not only of what normally happened during these festive meals, but also of some new procedures introduced at this time.

One of the chroniclers writes that the rooms of the papal palace were filled with a gigantic multitude, if only because such occasions were nowadays rare—the Swiss Guard even had to make room for the Pope and his guests to pass. Such was the pressure of the people that the credenzas that carried the papal state plate were in danger of collapsing. One should not forget that in these times princely palaces still were by and large public domain, precisely because they thus fulfilled their propagandistic function as theatres of power.

In the dining hall, the Pope sat down, alone, under a canopy placed behind a table at the head of the room—in imperial Byzantium, too, the basileus used to sit apart from the other guests. At his right hand side, and at a right angle, another table had been laid, at which Eckembergh and the regular imperial and Spanish ambassadors were seated. Otherwise, the room was empty in the sense that, just like the churches of the time, that had no seats, either, it only was filled with a huge amount of standing spectators, both the papal courtiers and the men from the ambassadorial suites.

As far as I have been able to make out, the dishes served during this banquet were simple. The Pope was always served first, and partook of the food first, too. Only after he had taken of a dish, the ambassadors ate themselves. At regular intervals, the Pope ordered one of his pages to carry plates from his own table to the ambassadors just like he used to honour banquets where he was not present, but which were of a suitably religious nature, with a gift of food, as if in a ‘take and eat’—thus, in September 1639, the Pope sent some precious food-gifts to the Roman Jesuits, to be included in the festive banquet staged on the occasion of the first centenary of the Society. In the same vein, in imperial China, the Son of Heaven not only officiated at the various altars, but also participated in banquets where he ‘fed the

52 See for a specific case: M. Antonelli, Alcuni Banchetti Politici a Montefiascone nel Secolo Decimoquarto (Rome 1901).
54 Gigli, Diario, o.c., September 1639.
earth’, represented by the court nobles and the foreign representatives; he gave them the food from his own table, food that was deliberately sober, archaic.

Every now and then, the Pope proposed a toast to the ambassadors. At such moments, they rose, and uncovered their head; the other people knelt. During the entire meal, a choir sang, sometimes performing with a few voices, only, accompanied by the organ, sometimes with the full chorus; among the compositions were two motets on texts by the Pope himself, set to music by Filippo Vitali (c. 1590–1653) and Stefano Fabri (1605–1657), as well as an Italian dialogue written by Urban, also with music by Vitali.

Obviously, this was no normal state banquet, staged according to all the demands of refined elegance and display of riches in food and utensils. Obviously, this papal banquet copied the liturgy of Holy Eucharist within an otherwise secular context—but was not the pope the prince of two powers, spiritual and temporal? Probably, the Tridentine need to sacralize daily life and behaviour had found a perfect vehicle in the papal banquets, the more so as, during the Renaissance, precisely these occasions had, according even to many contemporary critics, deteriorated into such manifest profanations of the papacy. Consciously or not, the ‘new’ practice harked back to the Ancient and biblical origins of festive banquets which lay in the sacrifice itself: both in the Old Testament books and in such texts as Hesiod’s ‘Works and Days’ and Cato’s Liber de Agricultura complex rules for sacral banquets were given. Indeed, in imperial Rome the “eucharisticon” created the festive meal on the interface between temple and palace, specifically in the imperial precincts of the Palatine, as Horace’s ‘Odes’ and Martialis’s poems show. Sacralizing the act of eating was, in a way, the moral justification of the violence represented in the consumption of the living organisms one had killed; gestures and prayers, indeed the entire ritualization now brought about this sacred character of eating. In this perspective, Holy Eucharist was eating and drinking made divine, an act of love that both neutralized the contradictions inherent in the food act and united man made god and god made man in a mystical union.

55 Capella Sistina, Diario, Vol. 58, f. 38.
57 Horace, Odes, II, 3, 11; Martialis, VIII, Praef. and I. Cfr. also passages from Statius, Silvae.
Transferring eucharistical practice to the papal banquet-scene, its sacralization also realized a profoundly Baroque ideal, giving a metaphysical dimension to the otherwise fundamentally physical act of eating.

Yet, from the point of view of the anthropology of food, the entire construction is a fascinating anomaly, running parallel with the even nowadays fundamentally religious dimension and implication of eating in many non-Western cultures—a parallel that, probably unbeknownst to the reformers of the papal banquet, brought them back to the real basis of the Last Supper in an originally anthropophagical culture.

However, without doubt the new papal banquet consciously incorporated yet another element of the great ceremonies of the Church, more specifically of the Eucharist on Maundy Thursday, itself a copy of the Last Supper: before entering the dining room, Pope Urban had washed the ambassadorial feet.

Not surprisingly, an official description of the papal ceremony had been ordered. In as many words the papal court indicated it intended to codify this new standard of courtly culture, now set by Rome once more. Yet, at least in Rome its style was to remain unique, as the person who presided over it was unique. As another banquet, described below, will show, the papal occasion was kept deliberately sober, precisely to set it apart from the manifestations staged by the Pope’s subjects. Indeed, if one studies the entire phenomenon in its historical perspective, it would seem that while the state dinners of the Roman cardinals and the banquets of the foreign ambassadors of the 16th and 17th centuries had evolved out of the late medieval practice of papal Avignon, contrariwise, the papal banquet of Urban’s times was a reversal, perhaps one more intentional manifestation of the desire that permeated his entire pontificate to re-memorize ancient practices in their root forms both Christian and pagan, in this case recreating the banquet as a liturgy, the secular pendant of the Eucharist. In later pontificates, this idea was abandoned again; we know that Pope Alexander VII dined with his most important guest ever, Queen Christina of Sweden, even allowing her to sit at his side, and that his successor, Clement X, did so as well, even going to her own palace to attend such functions.

Continuing festivities

Next day, November 25, Eckembergh paid an official visit to Donna Anna Barberini, Rome’s first lady as the wife of the Prefect of the Urbs, Urban’s nephew Taddeo. Against prevailing custom, he brought his entire suite. Thus had acted the French ambassador, the Duke of Crequi, and the representative of German culture obviously decided to show that German Höflichkeit was not to be outdone by French courtoisie. Soon, Rome decided that ladies should indeed be thus honoured in future—another fashion had been set.

Incidentally, the public role of women was largely restricted to this kind of occasion, where they were given a function in the theatre of power. Otherwise, their presence in society now was far less visible than had been accepted in the preceding century.

The evening brought a new climax. Eckembergh was invited to attend a banquet given by the cardinal-secretary of state, Francesco Barberini, in his palace of the Cancellaria—to stage such festivities, the Apostolic Chamber allowed Francesco some sc. 3000 annually.60 Reputedly, it was, again, a sumptuous banquet, now followed by a comedia, a performance combining theatre, music and ballet within a splendid setting aiming to create a bel composto. However, also performed was San Bonifatio, a musical tragedy first given during Carnival of that year, based on a text by one of Urban’s poetic courtiers, Giulio Rospigliosi (1600–1669), the future Pope Clement IX.61 It had been set to music by Virgilio Mazzocchi (1597–1646), and been paid for by Cardinal Barberini himself.62 Precisely these occasions, that could give the illusion that the room and the audience as well as the stage and the piece enacted were essentially one, realized one of the favourite concepts of Baroque culture, the one that viewed life and the world as theatre and thus, in a way, as illusion, as vanity.

Rome was proud of its musical culture. One of the chroniclers, who stressed the musical elements in each of the festivities, rather smugly remarked that ‘because of the continuous warfare in their countries, these German gentlemen were not often able to enjoy these kinds

61 Murata, Operas, o.c., 289–291.
of Roman pleasures’. As if to prove the point, Eckembergh also was invited to attend a performance of the musical tragedy *Il Sant’ Alessio*. As a nice point of etiquette, it was this archetypal ‘Barberini opera’, written by Rospigliosi and composed by Stefano Landi that had been originally performed in 1632, on the occasion of the visit to Rome of the present ambassador’s father, the first Prince Eckembergh, and since proudly repeated for other high-placed visitors. Indeed, it was deemed important enough to have its “argomento”, the outline of its tale, published by the Press of the Apostolic Chamber, and that not only once, but twice.

Giacinto Gigli describes the effect it had, ‘with its many marvelous scenes that changed continually, showing palaces, gardens, woods, hell, and angels who, while talking, sailed through the air, and, in the end, a great cloud which, when it opened, revealed paradise’. Rospigliosi, however, had slightly altered his original libretto, adapting its prologue—the usual moment to explain an opera’s ideological meaning—to the new occasion.

Whatever the impact of the prologue’s political message, the effect of the stage rising out of the floor was well-calculated to inspire surprise and, if perhaps silently-voiced, praise on the German company’s part. Afterwards, the composer Landi took the occasion to honour Eckembergh and, of course, himself, with the dedication of the sixth book of his *arie*.

After three more days of official meetings, such as the one with the German Nation in Rome, gathered in the *Collegio Germanico*, whose representatives also offered musical entertainment, Eckembergh’s momentous visit neared its conclusion.

I was fascinated to discover that, perhaps to drive home the willingness of the Curia to collaborate with the Emperor despite Urban’s French leanings, the Barberini brothers presented their guest with one of their prized possessions, a painting by Nicholas Poussin—a Frenchman working in Rome—showing the *Capture of the Temple* by the future emperor, Titus. This may have referred to Rome’s primary duty to

---

63 The libretto is in: *BAV, Vat. Lat.*, Vol. 13538, fols. 270–326. The music was printed in Rome, in 1634.

64 *Argomento del S. Alessio* (Rome, 1634; 1635)

65 Gigli, Diario, *o.c.*, 244.

66 Murata, Operas, *o.c.*, 37, 291; Hammond, *o.c.*, 235.
defend the Faith, to combat heresy, as well as to the Emperor Ferdi-
nand’s duty to function as the papacy’s ‘military arm’. It is highly likely
that Francesco Barberini thought he could not very well omit this ges-
ture. He would be risking to affront Eckemberg and the Emperor who
must have known that some years earlier, in 1633, another of Poussin’s
pictures, quite probably representing the same scene, had been given
by him to the French ambassador Crequi—indicative of the politi-
cal balancing act Rome was constantly forced to perform. Eckemberg
also was given a second painting, by Giovanni Francesco Romanelli,
depicting Lucrezia, probably while being confronted or protected by an
armed man—the Barberini inventory which mentions this gift is not
clear about this aspect. If so, this may have alluded to the city of Rome
and, hence, to the papacy’s need of Ferdinand’s support in these dire
times.68

Whether or not on account of all these courtesies, Eckemberg
seems to have returned to Vienna with a rather glowing vision of the
success of his mission. Yet, one has to ask whether Urban was equally
pleased. It is tempting to speculate that though Ferdinand only o
ffered
his ‘observance’ it yet was a minor diplomatic and, therefore, ideolog-
ical triumph. However, future generations were given a different ver-
sion. Albeit without further details as to occasion or date, one among
the precious series of Barberini tapestries is catalogued as representing
‘Pope Urban receiving the obeisance’, suggesting the Emperor had not
changed the old tradition. If it does refer to this occasion, it would have
made a politically spectacular hanging for any of the papal reception
rooms—not least for the Sala Regia.

A propagandistic display: food for thought

Let us return to Piazza di Spagna. On November 30, 1638, the Span-
ish ambassador extraordinary to the Holy See, the Marquis of Cast-
tel Rodrigo, offered his banquet to the imperial ambassadors: at the
end of Eckembergh’s visit, the Habsburg allies closed their ranks and
showed their unity to Rome. An all too short, and not very illuminat-
ing, itemized description—more like an inventory—of the food served

67 M.A. Lavin, Seventeenth-century Barberini Documents and Inventories of Art (New York
1975), 29, docs. 240 and 241. The Crequi Poussin is called “Presa del Tempio di
Salomone”; it must be the same subject. Cfr. F. Vivian, ‘Poussin and Claude seen from
68 Lavin, o.c., 36, doc. 282.
in the course of the banquet has been preserved in, of all unlikely places, the archives of the Papal Ministry of Finance. This has made it possible to reconstruct—partly through an identification of the various foodstuffs—the presentation and especially the meaning of this night’s feast. For there, all the above-mentioned political events were symbolically or allegorically recreated in the dishes served to the guests and displayed to the public at large.

Since, from the late Middle Ages onwards, it had become custom to use state banquets as propaganda and, hence, to invite as many spectators as possible, the doors of the frescoed state rooms of the Spanish embassy, including the banqueting hall, were thrown open to the public, too. After all spectators had flocked in, they must have stood agape at the magnificence of the spectacle offered to them. Even the dull enumeration of items in the document cannot hide the splendour. Arrayed on the tables and credenzas of the dining-room, where the twenty-four guests were to dine in public, were an astonishing number of allegorical figures—mostly made of clarified butter, marzipan or sugar paste—whose meaning one can only guess by taking into account the evening’s political background. Though the list gives one no clue to the sequence of the imagery, I have tried to reconstruct the scene as follows. For a scene it was, deliberately set by its architect—for that was what, according to Scappi in his treatise on the kitchen, was a cook’s true profession: to build ‘marvellous edifices’.

To start with, there was a life-size marzipan imperial eagle, displaying the imperial coat-of-arms on its chest, supported by two slaves made of butter, all this obviously honouring the new emperor, Ferdinand III. A Moorish slave-girl made of folded cloth—besides butter, marzipan and sugar, this was another material of which table decorations often were made—held a broken lance, while on her head a seraph sat, on whose head, again, an angel stood, rather awkwardly perched, I would say, clutching a shield with Prince Eckembergh’s coat-
of-arms; the group was assisted by two figures dressed in green, representing Fames, with trumpets and the armorial bearings of the resident imperial and Spanish Ambassadors. Four cherubs, seated on an anchor—one of the elements of Eckenbergh heraldry—raised another escutcheon with the prince’s coat-of-arms. The country of the host was represented by a figure holding the Spanish royal arms.

Two Swiss soldiers—again executed in marzipan—could be seen brandishing their halberds, engaged in a fierce battle over the possession of a huge ham, glazed with sugar. This might refer to the struggle between the imperial army and the Protestant forces over the possession of the town of Breisach, one of the keys to the Empire and strategically situated on the roads connecting Spanish Milan with the Spanish Netherlands—a struggle which had started in September 1638, and ended, less than three weeks after the banquet, with the town’s surrender to the Emperor’s enemies, after four months of heroic defence.

A cloth-made bull held on a rope by a cowherd, was, in his struggle to get free, dragging the herdsman through the dust. But Hercules, miraculously at hand, held the bull by its horns with one mighty hand, threateningly raising a golden club with the other. This scene, too, obviously referred to episodes from the war; perhaps it symbolized the importance of Spanish aid—disguised as Hercules—to imperial policy in Germany. Or, as Hercules was one of the mythological figures allegorically used to represent Taddeo Barberini, the Church’s general, it might have symbolised the importance of papal aid—though, militarily speaking, the papal army would not have been much help in any battle.

A butter Neptune was seated in an equally buttery shell, over the edge of which sea-lions were crawling. The shell was drawn by two sirens, probably to symbolize Spain’s pretended mastery over the seas.

However, there were also three huge ceremonial ‘salads’, made of artfully carved and arranged radishes and turnips that adorned the table in their great silver boats. One represented the King of the Romans triumphantly driving a chariot drawn by four horses, with an attendant cherub holding the banner and the imperial crown. Another salad-chariot drawn by lions lustily trampled over the dead bodies of the vanquished, carrying Mars and the Spanish banner. On the third, under a gilded tree, a rustic lyre-player was accompanying a group of dancing country-folk. While the meaning of the first two ‘salads’ is obvious enough, that of the third one is not immediately clear; it might be interpreted as representing the general wish to bring peace to the war-weary peoples of Germany and Italy.
Another ‘ensemble’, of three shepherds dancing to the tune of a flute-player under a big laurel tree—the Tree of Peace—adorned with real leaves, must have enlightened the guests and the many lookers-on about the hopes held in Rome, Madrid and Vienna for the success of the negotiations with France and its allies in Cologne. Rather in contradiction to this, though perhaps more indicative of the real intentions of the allies, yet another group showed two mounted warriors, one of whom had just been felled and was about to be stabbed by the other’s lance, demonstrating the hope that the fortunes of war might still favour the allies against France.

A representation of Religion holding a Cross and a Bible, worked in butter, was assisted by two cherubs, one with a map of the Papal States, the other with the Tables of the Law, the whole group an obvious reference to the rôle of the Church as a peace-making, law-giving mediator, with an aside to Pope Urban’s efforts to preserve the territorial integrity of the Lands of St Peter notwithstanding the tumultuous times.

Smaller decorations, also illustrating the general theme of war and peace, included a marzipan Charity, in flowing robes worked in butter, pouring water from an urn into a shell held by two putti, and tritons riding a dragon, with cupids on their shoulders, each carrying a bow and arrows.

All these figures, whether made of butter, marzipan, sugar, turnips or skilfully folded cloth, were highlighted with silver and gold decorations, and raised on bronze-coloured pedestals that were adorned with scenes depicting episodes from the ambassadors’ diplomatic careers.

The menu

The main table was laid with two cloths. The cutlery was covered with artistically arranged leaves, which, for the ambassadors, were entwined with gold thread. Next to every plate a gilded cup was placed, filled with fresh grapes and decorated with garlands of laurel and myrtle leaves. Side-plates for each guest were covered with figures carved out of butter, and with sliced winter melon on gilded leaves. The napkins were, of course, intricately folded and pleated according to the rules of the art of piegatura, which made them, besides the trionfi, into the highlights of table decoration.

Between the above-mentioned allegorical figures, however, which...
most certainly were not prepared for actual consumption, and the food that may have given real palatable pleasure, there were a number of decorative cold dishes put on the table as well, such as grand pies baked in the form of roses and raised on eagles made of marzipan paste; poached and jellied capons, surrounded by figures of baked sugar; and larded turkey with camelloni, all decorated with fresh flowers and taffeta pennants embroidered with the ambassadors’ arms.

When the guests had entered, taken their seats and partaken of these cold dishes, probably to the accompaniment of music, the first course of the “cucina calda”, the ‘hot kitchen’ was served, consisting, like the following ones, of three different dishes each. According to the Baroque predilection for the ritual effect of movement, the food was brought in as in a procession.

The four ambassadors were served individual portions, while the remaining twenty guests had to share a number of undoubtedly abundantly-piled plates from which they could fill their own ones.

To start with, the rank and file of the guests had minestrone, thick soup covered with artichokes, truffles (an expensive ingredient, even in 16th and 17th-century Italy, mainly used for royal tables), pistachios and sausages, while the ambassadors’ precious china cups were filled with broth of capon.

Huge chargers called piatti imperiali were laden with hams stewed in wine with herbs and flowers. Roasted sweetbread was garnished with throstles—two for each guest—and sausages, and covered with a rosette of buttered puff pastry. Plates with three capons each, boiled in a sauce of herbs and sausages, and garnished with boned golden-fried goats’ heads—whenever such animals were served in their entirety, one may assume the architect-cook had used iron to wire them and keep them whole—completed the first course, which was accompanied by all sorts of confectionery.

The second course from the ‘hot kitchen’ served the guests roasted veal with whole kidneys, surrounded by grilled lemons and pomegranates. Star-shaped pigeon-pies were stuffed with minced veal, artichokes, truffles, sweetbreads and pistachio nuts, and covered with an ‘imperial

73 Tannahill, o.c., 283–284.
74 B. Scappi, Opera o.c., Book I, chapter 140.
hood’ made of buttered sugar paste. Leg of mutton had been roasted with juniper berries, and was served with little pies with pears in syrup and mashed prunes.

As a third course there were larded and roasted partridges under imperial crowns of paste, the plates’ edges covered with pastry ornaments filled with blancmange; small plates with morello sauce came separately. *Capirotati*, a variable dish composed, on this occasion, of young turkey that had been larded and stuffed with pigeons and brains,75 were dished up with a kidney sauce. A pie of boned and roasted goats’ heads came with bread.

The fourth course consisted of huge plates, each with three *salami grossi*, sausages filled with tender chicken meat, which had been fried first and then covered with spiced and glazed pastry. A dish named *oglia pudria* was, of course, the famous Spanish soup *olla podrida*, noted for its many ingredients: it contained sweetbread, chopped cabbage, tripe, slices of beef, ham, sausages, onions and lentils, to name but a few—one will find a recipe in Scappi’s treatise.76 Young roasted turkeys were again served, this time filled with little pastry shells, stuffed with capers, pomegranates and quinces. On side-plates, Spanish olives came on a bed of cedar leaves.

The fifth course started with pheasants on a buttered pastry bed, and with *salsa reale*, a heavy sauce, to go with it. Minced sweetbread, mixed with truffles, ham and pine-nuts, was served in the form of a huge cake, surrounded by little pies. Iced tartlets of whipped cream completed this course.

Though still within the series of the *servizio della cucina calda*, the last course did not, in fact, include any hot dishes at all, but consisted of cold ones, served on express order of the Marchioness of Castel Rodrigo and prepared by her ladies: *ove misiche*, a very popular dessert of egg yolks beaten with rosewater, cooked in clarified sugar and then moulded into various fanciful shapes; some sort of rich cake, which went under the name of *Zuppa di Spagna*; and endless plates laden with spiced and candied sweetmeats. The fact that it was explicitly


76 Scappi, *Opera*, o.c., Book I, chapter 142.
stated that these desserts were sent by the ladies seems to show that all the guests were male; it would confirm the notion that women were mostly absent from state banquets; if, occasionally, they did attend such functions, they often sat at separate tables.

Dancers who, apparently, had been entertaining the guests during their heavy prandial duties, now advanced to the table and served the gentlemen some of the cold and jellied capon which had formed part of the table decoration.

After the ambassadors’ napkins had been changed—according to the procedure as outlined in Scappi’s book—fruit was served, or, to use the proper term, the *servizio della credenza* started. The ‘credenza’, the ornamental side-board, not only had its practical use as a serving table, but also functioned as a showpiece, in this case for the Spanish ambassador’s collection of plate: forty huge chased gilded-and-silver vessels with little silver-gilt cups hanging from the rim, and filled with an enormous quantity of all sorts of candied fruit and other assorted sweetmeats, partly white, partly coloured, were arranged in pyramids, producing a colourful and artistic effect. The sheer quantity of the candies denoted the importance of the banquet: other inventories which have been preserved make a point of mentioning the number of vessels filled with candy to indicate the size of a banquet.

The wine table—the *bottiglieria*—likewise served as a status symbol, being loaded with a collection of precious glass, gilded wine vessels, crystal flasks, mother-of-pearl drinking shells and silver-gilt tankards, jars and pitchers, to hold and serve precious wines which were liberally dispensed.

For the *servizio della credenza* fruit and vegetables were piled up on individual plates at the side-tables and handed out to the guests. At the same time, more allegorical decorations were unveiled at the main table: three eagles, made of willow-twigs and covered with gilded myrtle leaves, opening up their backs to reveal quantities of fresh red medlars; three gilded towers of the same make, bearing plates with huge sweet pears—the towers, I feel, obviously referring to the arms of Castille.

---

77 Scappi, *Opera, a.c.*, Book IV.
within three pavilions surmounted by imperial crowns ‘enormous red apples’ had been stacked. In the meantime the guests could take their pick from dishes with truffles, and of a concoction of milk and honey. Artichokes—the large as well as the very small ones—were served in gilt cups wrapped in napkins and laurel leaves for the ambassadors, and on big plates for the others. The fleshy, tender variety of sweet fennel was served in the same way, with dry fennel as alternative. Each guest could take two of the bergamot pears which had been piled on great salvers, adorned with flowers and gilded myrtle-leaves. Lumps of Parmesan cheese were presented in an equally decorative way. Plates of grapes and of big, syrupy quinces completed the course, as well as the dinner, for now the first cloth was lifted from the table, and on the second cloth silver basins were put filled with scented water, to enable the guests to rinse their hands. The ambassadors, of course, had their own individual finger-bowls.

All this, the compiler of the inventory adds in a short complacent note at the end of his list, was done with great pomp and circumstance, and amidst general applause ‘not only of the guests, but of all those who had trooped together to view the spectacle, which were many thousands of men and women’. Although the significance of some of the more intricate allegories must have been lost upon most of them, the spectators will not have lacked the company of a few men who were able, and indeed eager to explain even the minutest detail of the decorations and their meaning against the background of current politics. Clearly this ‘propaganda banquet’, as one may well term this gargantuan food-feast, had not been staged in vain. The power of the Emperor, and of his ally, Spain, and their role as protectors of the papacy, had been shown to a great many people. Nor did it take extraordinary powers of perception to understand that the two Habsburg powers had wanted to show the public the papacy could not very well afford not to join sides with them in the epochal battle for power over Europe.

Further food inferences

The significance of the inventory I have used as a peg for my reconstruction of this piece of culinary political propaganda does not stop here. It is also a valuable source for the history of food and manners in the first half of the 17th century.
Thus it is clear that in an age in which the consumption of meat by the population at large was declining steadily, the rich were still able to feast on huge quantities of game and other meat, with the still exotic turkey—introduced into Spain, and Europe generally, from the Americas in the 16th century: thence its Italian name pollanche d’India—as one of the favourites.

One may safely assume that the origin of some of the dishes served during the banquet was Spanish rather than Italian: the olla podrida, the capirotada and the prominence of the turkey indicate as much. Probably a chef had followed in the ambassador’s train when he left Spain to embark upon his mission to Rome. Certainly, any ambassador of the 17th century was as fully aware of the importance of an experienced cook as his fellow diplomats of later ages. In the 19th century, the Duke de Talleyrand, when preparing to depart for the congress at Vienna, stated that the first, nay indispensable member of any ambassador’s household was a good cook. Even today, the importance of a more or less ceremonious dinner-party amidst the complexities of diplomatic life should not be underestimated.

Nevertheless, even though the marquess’s chef may have been a Spaniard, the food certainly was not a fully Spanish affair. A comparison of the dishes served at Castel Rodrigo’s banquet with the ones eaten by the guests at Cardinal Barberini’s party earlier that week shows that the same ingredients turned up in the, probably, Italian orientated kitchen of the Cancellaria. It is hard to say whether this is an indication of the existence of an international, cosmopolitan cuisine geared to the fashions of diplomatic life, or of some now-vanished similarity between the Spanish and the Italian way of cooking; it is certain, however, that they resembled each other then more than now, if only because of the Spanish dominion over all of Southern Italy, Sicily, and Milan in the 17th century, and of the lingering Spanish preponderance in matters of ceremony and fashion in general, which, combined with the Italian influence, was only slowly superseded by the French cultural domination of Europe during the second half of the century.

The inventory, detailed though it may be as regards the decorations and the food, is not a cookery book, and accordingly does not

offer any information about the actual preparation of the dishes, nor, more specifically, about the amount of spices, sugar and salt that were used. Thus it is impossible to determine what the various courses must have tasted and, more specifically, how heavily spiced the sauces were. We know that, until about 1500, sauces tended to be over-elaborate, more to show the host’s ability to spend a small fortune on costly and rare ingredients than to produce purely palatal pleasure. The fact that information about spices is not given might indicate their diminishing importance. Indeed, the Italians were the first to stop cluttering up their food with seasoning and sauces, partly because of economic changes, such as the gradual closing down of the overland routes to the Orient and the Portuguese takeover of the spice trade. Thus, spices came to play a relatively minor part in the Italian cuisine, which began to rely more on indigenous materials—sausages, game, herbs, fruits and various cheeses—as the banquet of 1638 clearly shows. Though this may sound unlikely in view of the above description, the menu which resulted from these changes was simpler than its medieval predecessor would have been, if only because it relied on ingredients rather than on spices for variety and diversity.

*Table manners*

The inventory does inform us about table manners, although on this point, too, more details would have been desirable. Generally speaking, in the early decades of the 17th century, individual plates, individually served, were still reserved for guests of honour, while the ‘hoi polloi’ had to help themselves from a number of big plates strategically placed on the table. At this particular banquet, however, several courses were served individually to all guests, which marks a change from 16th-century procedure. The fact that it is specifically mentioned might indicate that this banquet took place during the process of transformation, which in later decades also led to changes of procedure in the countries north of the Alps.

The Italian word for cutlery—*posate*—being indeterminate as to the number of implements included, we do not know whether, at a banquet of this importance, a complete set of knives, forks and spoons was provided for each guest. More specifically, we do not know—since in Italy at least individual knives and spoons had come into use in the 16th century—whether each guest also had his own fork, instead of using
his fingers, as the Court of Vienna did up till 1651 or, for that matter, Louis XIV until the end of the 17th century; he even forbade his own brothers to use a fork when they supped with him, partly out of pride in his own mastery of eating soup with his fingers. It is, however, a well-known fact that individual forks first came into use in Italy during the last decades of the 16th century; this, as well as the circumstance that at our dinner a change of napkins is only mentioned after the guests had finished their desserts—which seems to imply that they had not soiled their fingers by groping around in whatever costly but greasy dishes they had enjoyed first—may lead to the conclusion that individual forks were indeed used.

The anonymous compiler of the inventory was undoubtedly quite right when he succinctly noted that everything at the Spanish banquet was conducted with much pomp and circumstance. If my reconstruction and the suppositions involved are valid, we may conclude that everything, from the table decorations to the food served and the manners displayed, was indeed of the greatest elegance and at the height of contemporary fashion.

**Conclusion**

With a meal that may well have caused him severe stomach problems, the visit of Prince Eckembergh to Rome came to an end. Nine months before his own arrival in the papal capital, he had sent a group of servants to make the necessary preparations. It was murmured that when he finally left, his embassy had cost as much as the annual income of a small state like Denmark or Scotland. Contemporaries estimated that on the Roman side, too, expenses had been staggering. In a way, this expenditure was reflected in the echoes of these really Baroque days, which resounded all over Europe. In many European libraries, manuscript collections hold descriptions of the Eckembergh ceremonies and the festivities surrounding it. Moreover, a text telling the story of Eckembergh’s entry was printed, both in Rome, and in Florence, in 1638, as *Descrizione della solennissima entrata fatta in Roma dall’eccellenza del*

---

82 BAV, Vat. Lat., Vol. 7852, f. 464r, sqq.
Sig. Duca di Cremau, Principe d’Eckembergh. All this ‘media coverage’ seems to have had an obvious reason.

Even during Eckembergh’s stay, the ceremonial public behaviour of one power, the Emperor, elicited a reaction of another, viz. France, and vice versa, all within the context of and in interaction with Rome, the epitome of civilization. Thus, standards of Baroque culture were being set. They were codified in texts that could serve as points of departure and reference for future behaviour, as was especially clear in the case of the document made up to commemorate the papal banquet. Moreover, while it has been suggested that the change of collective eating to individual eating was exported to Paris, in the late 16th and early 17th century, in the bridal suites of the two Medici princesses who were married to the heirs of France,84 I would suggest that the influence of such Roman experiences and texts as mentioned above played a significant role as well.

Obviously, these descriptions contributed to the genesis of a cosmopolitan culture that was accepted in wide circles precisely because it offered opportunities to express power and establish status. Parallel to the transfer of culture effected by, e.g., such a phenomenon as the Grand Tour, the rivalry that existed between states and was fuelled by Rome, that still saw itself as a culturally normative centre, continued to be a creative force. It was one of the important factors that helped generate a growing international culture, capable of incorporating new elements at any moment a new power presented the world with a manifestation of its own making.

84 Tannahill, o.c., 283.