

THE GOLDEN CARRIAGE



THE GOLDEN CARRIAGE

of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein

by Georg Kugler

photographs by Ronald V. Wiedenhoef

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

THE COLLECTIONS OF THE PRINCE OF LIECHTENSTEIN



AT THE BEGINNING of the eighteenth century, there were many hundreds of carriages in most European cities; in Paris, London, Vienna, and Rome there were thousands. But the number of gala carriages in the courts alone was far greater than the population figures of these cities would have led one to expect. Only a few of the numerous and varied vehicles of that period have been preserved in the large collections of Madrid and Lisbon, Moscow and Stockholm, Munich and Vienna, where they are counted among the most popular attractions. Their splendor, pomp, and artistry fill viewers with astonishment, but few are in a position to assess the important function that carriages once played in affairs of state and court. Similarly, when we look at certain paintings in palaces or galleries, colorful depictions of joyous festivities or solemn ceremonies, we find it difficult to establish the relationship between these images and historical reality. These pictorial reports, however, seem to be essentially accurate and the vehicles on exhibition must be the ones actually used in the ceremonies, assumptions that can be proved by a fortunate historical occurrence, the survival of a unique example: the Golden Carriage of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein.

In the history of carriages the Golden Carriage occupies a special place inasmuch as numerous documents in the archive of the Prince of Liechtenstein contain information concerning its construction and use. These documents are further supported by contemporary reports and pictorial representations of official events at which this exquisitely beautiful carriage was driven.

The term “Golden Carriage” is not historical; it probably dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when this gilded French Rococo example was the most striking vehicle among the numerous black and dark-colored coaches kept by the Princes of Liechtenstein. At that time, English taste was in vogue on the Continent, and this influenced the style of coach construction as well. The Golden Carriage was therefore no longer in use—it seems like a miracle that it was preserved at all—and its artistic quality was probably recognized even then. But the carriage was long ignored by scholars, who were very slow to examine the historical and artistic aspects of state coaches. Not until 1966 was its art-historical importance acknowledged in an extensive doctoral dissertation. During the following decade the Golden Carriage became the object of sustained and careful attention, for it was restored in the Museum of Historical Carriages at Schönbrunn Castle in Vienna. From 1977 to 1979 it was exhibited there in its renewed splendor.

The historical and artistic significance of the Golden Carriage can only be appreciated in the context of the general development, function, and rank of gala carriages. The history of the European state carriage used as a means to represent royal or noble personages began at the court of Burgundy in the early fifteenth century, when a special, “higher” class of carriage was developed. These carriages were used mainly by princesses, who often had to undertake long journeys in that age of political marriages. For the occasion of a noble bride’s ceremonial entry into a city, a customary travel carriage was ennobled, as it were, by being promoted to the rank of entry carriage. In the subsequent course of the century, the Italians carried this development further, proudly and with great stylistic assurance drawing on their classical tradition. In Germany, this new type of vehicle, in which one was carried in some comfort, was ill adapted to the ideals of medieval chivalry and the self-image of the knight-in-arms famed for his prowess at tournaments. Only gradually were carriages accepted as an official means of transportation. In the sixteenth century they were used primarily at courtly festivals as triumphal carriages upon which allegorical, mythological, or historical *tableaux vivants*—to which the organizers of the festival or the guests personally contributed—were driven past the admiring crowds. The

festival offered an opportunity for princely representation in which the carriage assumed a role analogous to that of a badge of rank; this custom was then adopted in the political-diplomatic domain as well. Riding in a coach became the prerogative of envoys and high dignitaries of state and church, and they made use of it especially when the execution of their office required that they publicly enter a foreign capital or present themselves at court.

In the sixteenth century the official appearances of a sovereign, whether he was emperor, king, or duke, were always made on horseback. The ceremonial carriage did not attain the pinnacle of its development until about 1670, when it took on new significance as a royal vehicle, and even as the coronation carriage. It was the young King Louis XIV who, after attaining his seniority, had the royal carriage inventory renewed, since he found the heavy state coaches inadequate. He ordered the architect Jean le Paûtre to design a new type of carriage, which was to be perfectly shaped and equal to the most challenging conditions. The result was called the *carrosse moderne* or *grand carrosse*. The doors and the spaces between the supporting elements of the carriage body were no longer left open or disguised with textiles but were filled in with painted panels (*panneaux*) and glass windows. Such a carriage was like a precious showcase in which the King and Queen were displayed to the people. The French example was followed all over Europe, from Portugal to Russia, from England to the small German principalities. Carriages were frequently ordered from Paris, for the French capital was the world's center of carriage construction and had no equal in taste or quality until France was forced to cede her leading role to England after the Revolution.

The French court also set the standard in establishing a strict ranking order of carriage types, the so-called *Droit de Carrosse*. The royal court carriages, *Carrosses du Roi*, could only be used by the King and his closest relatives or, occasionally, recipients of some exceptional honor. The personal carriages of the King, *Carrosses du Corps du Roi*, could even serve as proxies for the monarch simply by appearing in his stead, empty, in a ceremonial procession. The coronation carriage, finally, the *Carrosse du Sacre*, assumed the highest rank and was used only in the ruler's solemn entry (*entrée solennelle*) into the coronation city of Reims. It was built exclusively for this purpose and was not driven again, neither in the parades celebrating the coronation nor at other festivals. Its pictorial program, insignia, heraldry, and general appearance would have been out of place on any other occasion.

The ceremonial coordination of the various state carriages produced the need for a new, practical type of vehicle for everyday use. The response to this need was the *berline*, allegedly invented by a Piedmontese architect, Philippe de Chièze. As General Quartermaster of the Elector of Brandenburg, he was said to have used this vehicle for a trip from Berlin to Paris, where it was imitated and named after the city of its origin. Since the Golden Carriage is a *berline*, it might be useful to describe briefly the distinguishing characteristics of this type of carriage. The special advantage of the *berline* is a chassis with two lateral beams (called *brancards* in French), a considerably more stable construction than the chassis of a *carrosse*. The *berline's* light, gently curved body is not suspended from the chassis as with the *carrosse* but rests on long, taut straps at a height that allows the doors to be opened above the *brancards*. The supporting straps can be tightened with cog-wheel winches to which they are attached at the rear of the chassis. In the middle of the eighteenth century, it became customary to suspend the body from S-shaped steel springs, and its size had to be diminished to allow the carriage to fit through city gates and palace entrances.

It was during the Regency (1715–22) that the *berline* began to develop artistically, and it reached its first efflorescence in the Rococo period. During the process, it underwent a functional

development similar to that of the state *carrosse*, though in a much shorter time. In the beginning, the *berline* was an unadorned, practical travel carriage; shortly after 1700 it had become an elegant city carriage, then a stylish gala carriage, and finally an ambassadorial carriage with a representational function. The earliest record of such a use is a report on the entry of the Venetian ambassador into the city of Paris in 1728, which mentioned a *berline* in the fourth and last place in the order of carriages. A decade later, on the occasion of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein's entry into Paris, we again find a *berline* in the fourth place; this is the one that is called the Golden Carriage today.

French protocol also regulated the solemn entry of ambassadors. In sixteenth-century custom, an ambassador was given one of the King's personal horses upon which to make his entry. But in 1610 a Spanish emissary introduced the use of carriages by entering Paris in his own *carrosse*, and other embassies followed suit. The French court reacted to this development in 1629 with the introduction of the *Carrosse de l'Ambassadeur*. A new kind of court official was appointed, the *introduceur*, whose function consisted of calling for a newly arrived ambassador at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs and escorting him in a long, precisely regulated procession either to his private residence or to the royal court. The ambassador, therefore, did not use his own vehicle but drove with the *introduceur* in the king's state *carrosse*, while his own parade carriage drove empty in the procession. It was in turn followed by the ambassador's household in the remaining *carrosses*. It is in this context of diplomatic tradition that the Golden Carriage of Liechtenstein has to be seen.

The Emperor Charles VI and Louis XV of France agreed to exchange ambassadors, and in 1737 Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein was appointed Imperial Ambassador to the French court, while at the same time the Marquis de Mirepoix was sent to Vienna as French Ambassador. The Marquis de Mirepoix did not have new state *carrosses* built for the occasion, either in Paris or in Vienna; probably he rented carriages that had been built a decade earlier in Vienna and had been used as entry carriages by other ambassadors. The sequence of carriages at the entry into Vienna followed the rules of French protocol.

Prince Joseph Wenzel was not only a magnanimous aristocrat but also a connoisseur in matters of art, as were so many members of his house. He therefore brought qualities to his mission in Paris that today overshadow his gifts as a diplomat and politician. The most important political results of his negotiations with foreign minister Cardinal Fleury were annulled just a few years later when France took the side of Prussia in the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–48), but the works of art he commissioned and acquired in Paris remain as a testimony to the high level of his taste and patronage. On November 27, 1737, he received the Emperor's instructions and immediately assumed his post. After arriving in Paris on December 23, he employed several artists who today are counted among the greatest of their time. He acquired four beautiful genre paintings by Jean-Siméon Chardin, had his portrait painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud, and commissioned the brilliant interior architect Nicolas Pineau to design five *Carrosses de l'Ambassadeur*.

Pineau, born in 1684, had previously made designs for *berlines* but was principally active as an architect. From 1716–27 he had served as interior architect (*sculpteur-ornementiste*) at the court of Peter the Great. Back in Paris, early in the 1730s, he turned to the kind of spirited, asymmetrically undulant forms that announced the inception of the Rococo. It appears that Pineau served Prince Joseph Wenzel as a designer (*dessinateur*) only and that he assigned the construction of the carriages to those great masters who had decorated the Palais Rohan-Soubise under his direc-

tion. Among them were the *sculpteur du Roi* Jacques-Louis Herpin, the cabinetmaker (*menuisier-carrossier*) Millard the Younger, and the brothers Guillaume and Étienne-Simon Martin, famous for their lacquerwork. The Paris newspaper *Mercure de France* also expressly mentions the gilder (*peintre-doreur*) Pierre de Neufmaison, who earlier had contributed to Louis XV's coronation carriage, the *Voiture du Sacre*, in 1722. It is a pity, however, that we do not know the name of the bronze-caster who so impeccably carried out Pineau's designs for the finials on the roof.

Not only did the five parade carriages have to be designed and built right away, but the appropriate luxurious clothing and outfitting of the liveried servants and pages had to be produced, as well as saddles and bridles for the riding horses and caparisons and harnesses for the carriage horses. The work of preparation took a full year. The memorable *entrée publique* was staged on December 21, 1738, in Paris, and two days later, on December 23, a second procession took place at Versailles, where the King and Queen and the entire royal household were said to have been present.

The *Mercure de France* published a very detailed description of the Parisian *entrée*. This was followed by an equally detailed report in the Viennese *Diarium*. In this way, curious readers from both cities were filled in on what the Parisian sightseers had witnessed. The impressive procession consisted of more than fifty carriages. The Ambassador drove in his royal personal carriage together with the *introduceur*, while his own two empty *Carrosses de l'Ambassadeur* followed at an appropriate distance. Each of these was drawn by eight large, much-admired horses that had been brought in especially for the occasion from the princely Liechtenstein stable in Eisgrub, Moravia. The *Mercure de France* precisely described the first, red-and-gold parade carriage and the second, blue-and-silver one, praising the latter as the most beautiful of all. The third carriage was a green-and-gold *carrosse-coupé*, and in the fourth place, drawn by eight Danish horses, came the *berline à la mode*, the Golden Carriage.

The *Mercure de France* does not show the same interest in this vehicle as it did in the two state carriages: "Le quatrième Carrosse étoit en Berline, doré par le Sr. Martin l'ainé, doublé de velours cramoisi, enrichi d'une broderie d'or; L'Imperiale étoit surmontée de bronzes dorés, & l'Attelage étoit de huit chevaux Danois, dont les ornemens des crinières & des aigretes étoient en cramoisi or: les Harnois de maroquin rouge, garni de bronzes dorés." (The fourth *carrosse* was a *berline*, gilded by Saint Martin the Elder, lined with crimson velvet, enriched with gold embroidery; the roof [*imperiale*] was decorated with gilded bronze and the team was made up of eight Danish horses, whose mane ornaments and plumes were of crimson and gold; the harness was of red Morocco leather, decorated with gilded bronze.)

This description begins with the peculiar sentence: "The fourth *carrosse* was a *berline* . . ." As stated earlier, the *berline* is a completely different type of carriage from the state *carrosse*—different in the manner of its construction, silhouette, and maneuverability. It seems that the idea of the state *carrosse* as the only suitable official carriage for an ambassador was still so firmly established that the word *carrosse* was regarded as the generic term. When Pineau designed the *berlines* for the Prince of Liechtenstein, he must have carefully considered the role this vehicle played among the fashion-conscious ladies and gentlemen of Paris; evidently he created the ideal of the elegant gala carriage of the Rococo without striking a false note in the choice of the carriage's "rank."

The published *Ordre de la Marche . . . de l'Ambassadeur de l'Empereur* lists eighteen pages and forty footmen as well as forty "hand" horses from the Royal Stables (*Petite Écurie du Roi*). So-called hand horses led by their bridles were a common sight at large processions—a fact that casts a telling light on the horse's role in courtly ceremonies and in the aristocratic world of the Baroque

in general. The horse was esteemed then for reasons that have nothing to do with the values set by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on successful race horses. Since classical antiquity, the riding horse had been the faithful companion of the knight, the hero, while the carriage horse was an indispensable living contributor to any festival—as indicated by its eighteenth-century name, “parade horse.” Very large horses called *carrossiers* were bred for the sole purpose of drawing state *carrosses*. The princely Liechtenstein stud in Eisgrub, as well as the imperial stud at Kladrub (by the river Elbe), were famous for their noble carriage horses of Italo-Hispanic origin. These high-stepping animals were of imposing appearance, with beautiful long manes and tails and handsome Roman noses. Horses in a team had to be similar in size, color, and of matching character in order to make up a harmonious group of eight. Portraits of noble horses were frequently commissioned; the owners liked to show the animals off to visitors, as well as include them in solemn processions. While being shown, the horses were covered with caparisons and led by grooms. When the Prince of Liechtenstein made his ambassadorial entry into Paris, the stable of the French king supplied the hand horses, but it would not have been unusual if the forty or more hand horses as well as the carriage horses had been brought in from Austria.

Following the two solemn entries into Paris and Versailles in December 1738, the two *berlines* were employed at least once again, but probably many times more. All we know for certain, however, is that the Princess of Liechtenstein was received by the French Queen on March 1 of the following year and that she used “the fourth and fifth *carrosses*” for her ceremonial drive to the palace. The Princess probably drove in the “fourth” one, the elegant *berline à la mode* that is called the Golden Carriage today. As late as 1760, in Vienna, it was still called the “fourth red gala carriage” in accordance with its rank in the ambassadorial entry into Paris.

It is not surprising that after the end of his term the Prince of Liechtenstein was willing to pay the high cost of transportation to take the precious carriages back to Vienna with him. The artistic rank of the Parisian carriages is further underscored by the fact that they were found perfectly fitting to be used in another official function twenty-two years later, when no carriage of remotely comparable splendor could be found in Vienna.

In 1760, while Austria was embroiled in the fifth year of another war with Prussia, Crown Prince Archduke Joseph became engaged to the Bourbon Princess Isabella of Parma, the daughter of Duke Philip. Emperor Francis I and Empress Maria Theresa were determined to celebrate their son’s marriage with great pomp, despite the heavy cost of the war. In accordance with tradition, the wedding was to be held by proxy in the bride’s native town. Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein was chosen to be the bridal ambassador. As first cavalier at the imperial court and head of the house of Liechtenstein since 1748, he could not be matched in either wealth or lineage!

Prince Joseph Wenzel departed for Parma with his entourage in the middle of August 1760. The convoy was divided into five sections, which included numerous postal and travel carriages, some of which had already been built and some of which were newly constructed. In addition, four of the ambassadorial carriages brought back from Paris were carefully disassembled, packed, and transported to Parma after having been thoroughly restored in Vienna. The work report presented by the court harnessmaker, Maximilian Wahler, provides a detailed description of the restoration of a gala carriage—the earliest such work known to us. Only the blue-and-silver carriage, the “second *carrosse de Paris*,” remained in Vienna; the Prince had entrusted it to the imperial equerry, to be kept in readiness for use as the bride’s entry carriage. At the court’s expense, this carriage was also restored and equipped with new blue velvet harnesses. The carriages, securely wrapped in mattresses and placed in special low-loading wagons, were then





taken to Parma as part of the princely convoy. In several towns the roadways had to be deepened beneath the city gates and the tops of arches pulled down to enable the vehicles to pass through.

The *entrée* into Parma on September 3, 1760, was carried out with great pomp following the customary protocol. The enthusiastic onlookers were especially impressed with the splendid liveries of the servants and with the horses' caparisons and harnesses. All of these fittings had been newly fashioned in Vienna at an enormous expense; a total of 219,725 florins was spent, including the cost of restoration. On September 13, the bride of the future Emperor set out on her trip to Vienna under the Prince's escort. They traveled for eighteen days, five of which were days of rest. On October 2, after passing through the South Tyrol and Carinthia, they reached the castle of Laxenburg, where the bride and bridegroom met for the first time. On October 6 the couple entered Vienna in a nearly interminable procession; finally, in the court church of Saint Augustine, the wedding of the houses of Bourbon and Hapsburg was performed.

In a large painting Martin van Meytens (1695–1770) depicted the entry procession with the Imperial Palace in the background. Ninety-four six-horse gala carriages, almost all of them *coupés* belonging to the nobility and a few *berlines* of the imperial court, drove into the city, followed by the splendid carriages of the Prince of Liechtenstein. His *livrée*, his pages and house officers as well as the Moor Angelo Soliman, surrounded the Golden Carriage. This *berline*, which had originally been employed as a stylish processional carriage—fourth in rank at the time of its first appearance in Paris in 1738—was now serving as the personal carriage of the Emperor's chief paladin. Following the carriage of Prince Joseph Wenzel, the bride rode in the mighty blue-and-silver state *carrosse* that had been built for the Prince's entry into Paris. As we can see in the painting, it still is, as it was in Paris, "*le plus beau de tous!*" Unfortunately, neither this carriage nor the other ambassadorial carriages built for the Paris *entrée* (excepting, of course, the Golden Carriage itself) have been preserved.

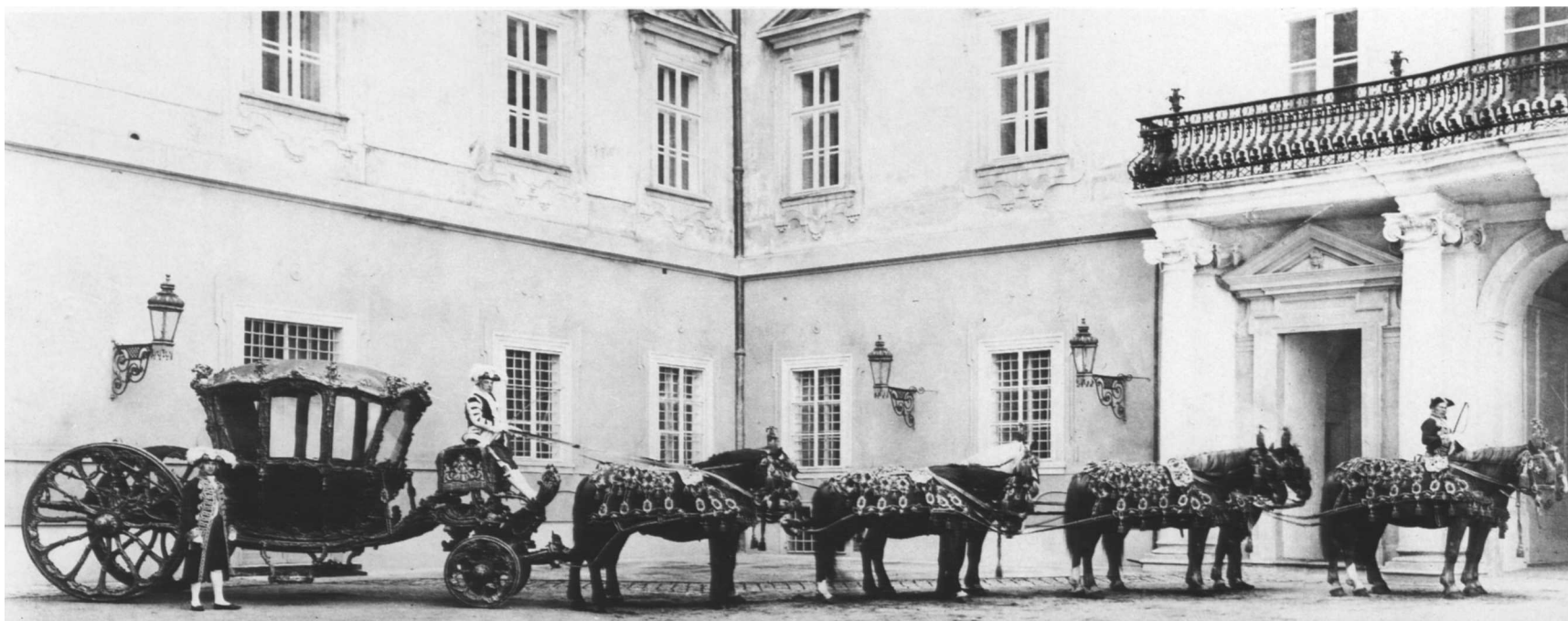
The Prince rendered his last great public service to the imperial house when he was dispatched to Frankfurt as principal emissary for the preparation of Crown Prince Joseph II's election and coronation as Roman King. Once again the Golden Carriage was employed as an official entry carriage. Thus, the Prince of Liechtenstein, one of the great aristocrats of the eighteenth century—a soldier and far-seeing military reformer, a diplomat and representative of his country, and a connoisseur of the arts—served his Empress through the years of her rule. His high position, his time, and his life are vividly evoked by the existence of the Golden Carriage.

Having dealt with the history of the Golden Carriage's creation, its initial function and evolving ceremonial rank, we should now consider its artistic qualities. The carriage has been so remarkably well preserved that its singular beauty may be admired without reservation. Its condition today is approximately that of 1760, when, as described above, a general renovation of the Parisian carriages was considered necessary for the mission to Parma and the solemn entry into Vienna. Restorers of the time plied their trade with care and sensitivity, and it is extraordinary that nothing was changed in the external appearance of the French *berline*; only the paintings on the panels of the carriages were freshened up and the fastenings of the body were renovated or replaced. Guillaume Martin's alternately polished and matte gilding was restored to its original effect; this in turn brought back to life the virtuosity of the carving, which swirls around the structural elements of the chassis and the body, contrasting with them and, interrupted by *rocailles*, playfully winding around the paintings on the lower half of the body and the crystal-glass windows in the upper half. These surging lines are continued in the flamelike appearance of the ormolu bronzes on the roof. The carriage as a whole is structured so that all of

the forms move upward along the walls with an effect of progressive attenuation and weightlessness. The upholstery and the gold embroidery in the interior required some repairs in 1760, and new gala harnesses and caparisons had to be manufactured. In addition, the Viennese pearl embroiderer Peter Anton Dierckes created for the hand horses gorgeous caparisons, which were used for the first time in Parma. Nine of the original set of twelve are still in existence.

The paintings on the eight panels of the carriage body are tender and radiant, and their subject matter is utterly unpretentious. Instead of the usual glorifications of noble virtues, celebrations of sovereign prerogatives, or apotheoses of war, these pictures represent the four elements and the seasons, “played” by putti on the large panels (the doors and both the front and back walls of the body) and the small lateral panels respectively. The name of the artist is mentioned neither in the newspaper reports nor in the official accounts, but for stylistic reasons these paintings may be attributed to the workshop of François Boucher (1703–70). The lightness of the carriage body, distinguished by its splendid colors and elegant wood carving, is complemented by the somewhat heavier appearance of the chassis with its scrolling golden *rocailles* set off against a bright red ground. The golden shafts and swirls broaden in the direction of the carriage body, ending in the uniformly gilded footboard; similarly, the gold of the bridge riding over the rear of the chassis contrasts effectively with the black panel inserted into the back wall of the body. The delicately proportioned yet sturdy wheels remind the viewer that a carriage must be in motion to attain its full effect. Indeed, it should be kept in mind that horses and carriage are to be regarded as a unit. The horses were chosen for their size and color, and the colors of their splendid harnesses were carefully selected to harmonize with those of the horses and the carriage. Eighteenth-century parade harnesses are even more rare than the carriages of that time. Of the precious harness for a team of six that was produced for the Golden Carriage in Vienna in 1760, only an incomplete harness for four has survived. Overlaid with red velvet, embroidered, and decorated with gilded bronze appliqué, the harness would cover the horse’s body like a net. The painting of Isabella’s entry into Vienna conveys an impression of the total effect of the carriage, horses, and harnesses, and beyond that of the splendor and vitality of the time. Indeed, the marriage of the future Emperor Joseph II to Princess Isabella of Parma was something of a farewell celebration for the Baroque. The Golden Carriage of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein, which still today testifies to the brilliant event, reflects and evokes this era long gone.

The Golden Carriage at Feldsberg Castle about 1930







The Entry of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein into Parma on September 3, 1760 by anonymous Italian artist, 1761–62. Oil on canvas, 81¹/₈ in. x 8 ft. 4⁷/₈ in. (206 x 256 cm.). Vaduz, Collections of the Prince of Liechtenstein



The Entry of Princess Isabella of Parma into Vienna on October 6, 1760 by Martin van Meytens (Swedish, 1695–1770). Oil on canvas, 12 ft. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. x 18 ft. 7 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (390 x 566 cm.). Vienna, Schönbrunn Castle





The Golden Carriage at Schönbrunn Castle, Vienna.
Length 20 ft. (610 cm.); greatest width 83⁷/₈ in. (213 cm.);
greatest height 10 ft. 5⁵/₈ in. (319 cm.)











Panels on the left side of the Golden Carriage, showing the allegory of air framed by allegories of summer and spring by the atelier of François Boucher (French, 1703–70)





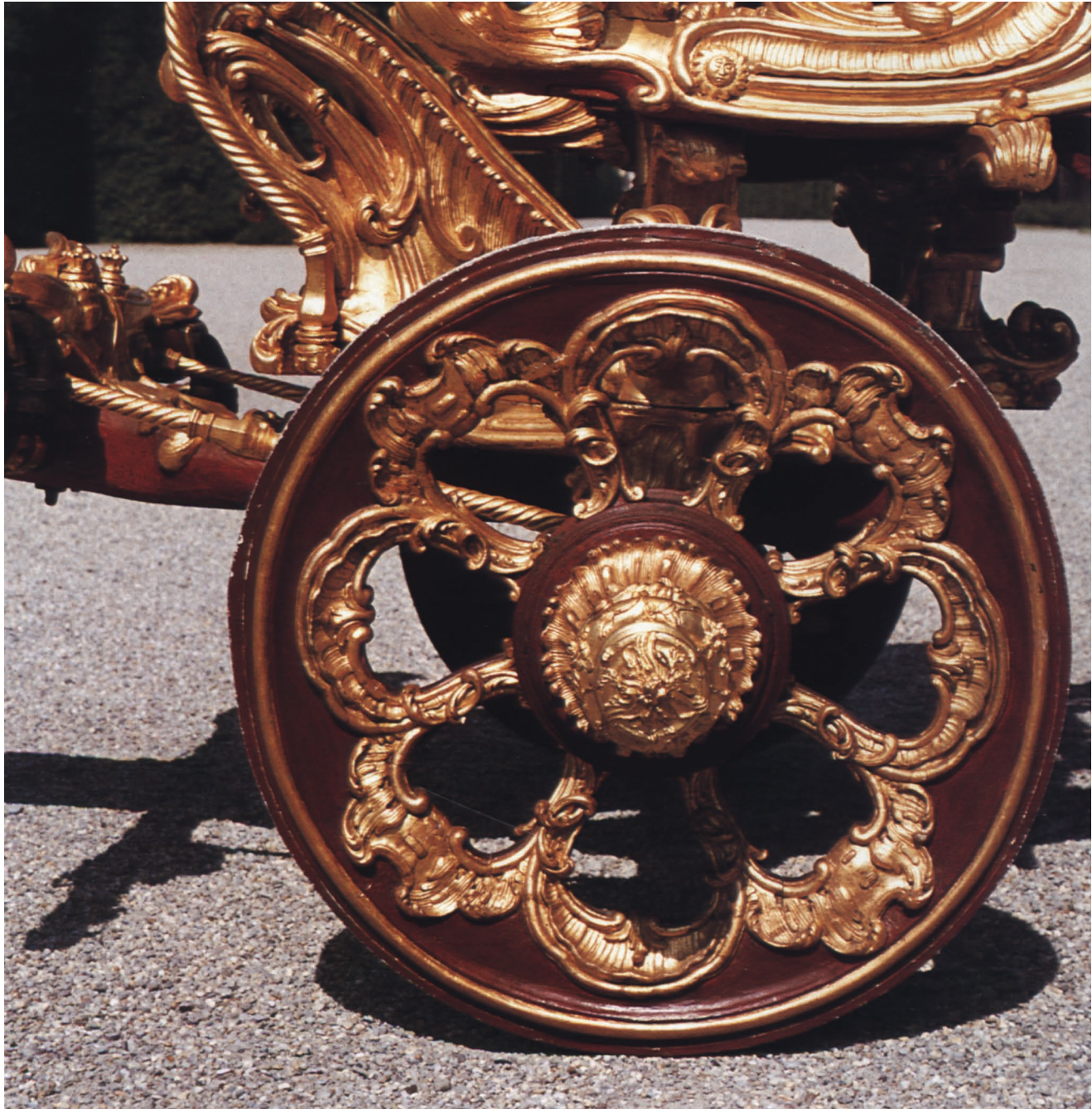




Panels on the right side of the Golden Carriage, showing the allegory of water framed by allegories of winter and autumn by the atelier of François Boucher (French, 1703–70)





















Portrait of Prince Joseph Wenzel von Liechtenstein by Hyacinthe Rigaud (French, 1659–1743). Oil on canvas, 57¹/₂ x 45¹/₄ in. (146 x 115 cm.). Vaduz, Collections of the Prince of Liechtenstein

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ON THE FRONT COVER: The Golden Carriage

ON THE BACK COVER: Carved ornament from the "stand"
at the rear of the Golden Carriage

FRONTISPIECE: Gilt-bronze finial on the roof
of the Golden Carriage

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