



## Entre Rome, Bruxelles et l'Espagne : le confesseur du gouverneur- général, quelles loyautés ?

Pierre-François Pirlet

Université de Liège

U.R. *Transitions* - Moyen Âge et première Modernité

## ● Princely confessors' names – 1598-1659

### ○ **Archduke Albert (1596-1621) :**

Iñigo de Brizuela, o.p. (1595-1621)

### ○ **Isabel Clara Eugenia (1598-1621-1633) :**

Andrés de Soto, o.f.m. (1598(?)-1625)

Poménius de Barbançon, o.f.m. (1625)

Pierre Paunet, o.f.m. (1625-1627/1631)

Pedro de Castro, o.f.m. (1627/1631-1633)

### ○ **Marquess of Aytona (1633-1634) :**

Pedro de Vivero, s.j. (1633-1634)(?)

### ○ **Cardinal-infant don Fernando (1634-1641) :**

Juan de San Agustín, o.s.a. (1634-1640)

Gonzalo Pacheco, o.s.a. (1640)

Juan de la Madre de Dios, o.c.d. (1640-1641)

### **Francisco de Melo (1641-1644): ?**

### **Marquess de Castel-Rodrigo (1644-1647):**

Pedro de Vivero, s.j. (1644-1647)

### **Piccolomini, duke of Amalfi (1644-1647) (Gobernador de las armas):**

Johannes Baptista van Hollandt, s.j. (1644-1647)

### **Archduke Leopold Wilhelm(1647-1656) :**

Johann Schega, s.j. (1647(?)-1656(?))

Johannes Baptista van Hollandt, s.j. (1647-1656)

### **Don Juan Jose of Austria (1656-1659) :**

Francisco de Gamboa, o.s.a. (1655-1659(?))

Gabriel Mettermans, o.s.a. (1656(?)-1657(?))

## ● A valuable reputation

- Princely confessors enjoyed a reputation of influence over their penitent which made them very valuable to Rome and Madrid.
- Which role did these centers of power give them ?
- Which resources were granted to them, and for which result ?

## ● Rome's view of the position

- Princely confessors were seen as advocates of roman interests in the Catholic Netherlands.
- Nuncios used to think of them as means to bypass the governmental institutions and to have a direct access to the Prince.
- In addition, they were seen as a valuable source of information.

## ● A strategy set up in Rome

○ At the Archduke's court, “one [= the nuncio] *should be on good terms with Father Iñigo de Brizuela, confessor of the Archduke, as he is more powerful than anyone in matters of State and Church.*”<sup>\*</sup>

○ “*The nuncio has to be on good terms with Father Andres de Soto, confessor of the Infanta; he doesn't influence State affairs, but he has a great influence on religious matters.*”<sup>\*</sup>

○ This strategy had to be tailored by the nuncios who enjoyed a *de facto* autonomy.

○ Their correspondence depicted these confessors: personality, cooperation with the nuncio, health reports and, in case of decease, names of possible successors.

\* (Personal translation. As quoted by DE MEESTER B. (éd.), *Correspondance du nonce Giovanni-Francesco Guidi Di Bagno (1621-1627)*, p. 7)

## ● Madrid

○ The roman strategy has not been found as efficient as expected : confessors acted as agent of the Crown, for the benefit of the king and the general governor.

○ This attitude was no coincidence : Brussels' confessors were chosen in Madrid, on the basis of their ability to run religious institutions which was seen as a proof of capability within Brussels' government.

○ The goal was to make a royal authority control agent out of him, and to put him in front of Calvinist rebels, of general governors' willingness of autonomy and of Rome's influence in the country.

## ● Means of action

○ The confessors worked closely with the Prince.

○ They were often members of decision-making organs :

- State Council (Brizuela, San Agustín)
- *Juntas* (for the renewal of the Twelve Years' Truce, finances, justice, foreign affairs)
- General governor's *Secret councils*

○ Effective control of the princely *casa*, which offered him the possibility to oversee the princely entourage.

## ● For the benefit of the general governor ?

○ Princely confessors were seen as royal agents, but the king was not the only recipient of their action :

○ E.G. Brizuela supported the conclusion of the Twelve Years' Truce from the beginning, while initially the king was reluctant to conclude it (1608-1609).

○ E.G. Juan de San Agustín raised objections to the appointment of Falconieri as nuncio, following Cardinal-infante's opinion, while Madrid was not against it. (1634)



## ● Final thoughts

- The action of the confessors never was exclusive.
- It was variable, changing, and linked to political circumstances.
- Their ability to influence policies was due to their proximity with the Prince : they were amongst the Prince's immediate collaborators.
- The office of confessor was loosely defined : this allowed for the confessor to be appointed in several governing organs.
- This access to power was closely monitored by Madrid and Rome which, in turn, developed political strategies aiming to take advantage of the situation.
- **Studies of diplomatical and political mechanisms of power within European courts should include a chapter dedicated to princely confessors, as their role in this matter remains unrecognized.**

Thanks!

ANY QUESTIONS?

You can find me at  
[pfpirlet@ulg.ac.be](mailto:pfpirlet@ulg.ac.be)