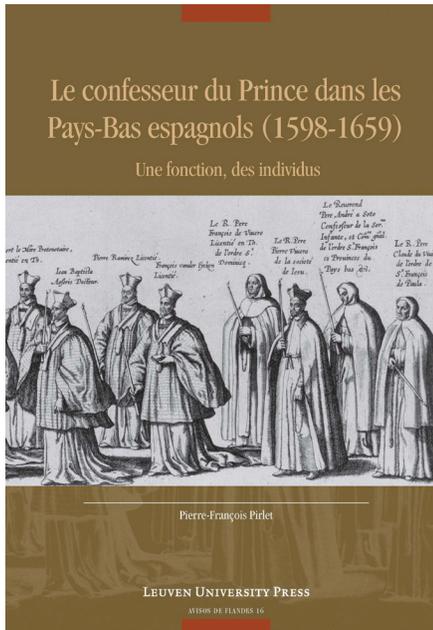


Note

Pierre-François Pirlet, *Le confesseur du Prince dans les Pays-Bas espagnols (1598-1659). Une fonction, des individus*, Avisos de Flandes 16, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2018. ISBN 978 94 6270 160 1.



The newest addition to Leuven University Press's series *Avisos de Flandes*, Pierre-François Pirlet's *Le confesseur du Prince*, maps the confessor's role and influence at the chapel of the Brussels Coudenberg Court in the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands. In doing so, the author aims to contribute to two major strands of recent historiography. First, he incorporates insights from the field of court studies, highlighting the importance of household functions, ceremonies, and etiquette in the making of early modern politics and diplomacy. Secondly, he reinforces the current attention paid to the 'royal' confessor in studies about early modern Catholicism. Besides administering the sacrament of penance, the confessor appears as a person of confidence and a crucial vector of communication between Brussels, Madrid, and Rome during their tense relationships in the first half of the seventeenth century.

The first and third part of the book analyse the function of the *confesseur du prince* in a systematic manner. Building on recent scholarship by Luc Duerloo, Dries Raeymaekers, Birgit Houben, José Eloy Hortal Muñoz, and Koldo Trapaga Monchet, Pirlet shows that proximity to the Archdukes and subsequent governors-general in Brussels opened spheres of influence that neither official nor officious functions anticipated, thereby replacing an older historiographical strand that focused rather too exclusively on the formal membership of governmental councils or diplomatic embassies. Although the confessor does not overtly appear in many of the sources consulted in archives across Belgium, France, Spain, and the Vatican, Pirlet's study convincingly demonstrates that the confessor was in fact omnipresent.

As the title suggests, the core of the work focuses on biographies of individuals. The second part of the book consists of five case studies on those confessors with the longest tenures. For example, the Dominican Iñigo de Brizuela, confessor to Archduke Albert, emerges as a crucial figure during the Twelve Years' Truce with the Dutch Republic (chapter four). The Recollect Franciscan Andrés de Soto served as confessor to Archduchess Isabella, in particular during the Habsburg Netherlands' difficult return to Spanish rule after the death of her husband in 1621 (chapter five). The Augustinian Friar Juan de San Agustín provided spiritual guidance to the Cardinal-Infante Don Fernando between 1631 and 1640, mediated between Rome and the Spanish kings on nomination privileges in the Low Countries, and also offered sharp opposition to Pieter Roose, the main councillor within Brussels bureaucracy (chapter six). Johann Schega assumed office during Archduke Leopold-Wilhelm of Austria's governorship, with Johannes Baptista van Hollandt taking over during his sickness; he was particularly active in combatting the spread of Jansenism in the Low Countries (chapter seven). Finally, Francisco de Gamboa attended Don Juan José, with the Discalced Carmelite Gabriel Mettermans serving as his substitute. Both men continued to combat the Jansenist controversy in Flanders. To complete the picture offered by these five biographical studies, chapter fourteen provides a complete prosopographical list of all twelve confessors who served the Brussels court between 1598 and 1659.

This work offers a pioneering insight into a clerical role which has received little attention in the field of court studies. Pirlet is able to document the omnipresence of confessors at court, whether participating in daily worship and masses, in questions of ceremony and etiquette, in matters of war and peace, or in church-state affairs. By focusing on five specific individuals, he also provides the necessary substance to the figure of the confessor, both as spiritual advisor and liaison between the centre and its peripheries in early modern Catholicism. For an Anglo-Saxon audience, the book's structure might be a little hard to digest, but those who carefully read the different chapters will be rewarded with ample information and interesting insights for research on the first half of the seventeenth century.

Violet Soen, KU Leuven