

The Role of Translation in the Diplomacy of the Habsburg Netherlands in the 17th century

The case of Suarez de Arguello, German Secretary of
State (1612/1614-1632)

Aurélien Destain
Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

14th-15th december 2023 - Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris/Institut historique allemand (DHIP/IHA)

Threefold objective

- ▶ Highlight the pivotal role of translation in early modern diplomacy
- ▶ Provide a fresh perspective on "secondary" diplomatic actors, such as secretaries, and their daily work
- ▶ Encourage exploration of neglected sources, like diplomatic correspondences and working documents, to deepen our understanding of internal diplomatic mechanisms and power dynamics in the early modern era

The Secretaries for German Affairs in the Habsburg Netherlands

The State Secretariat for German Affairs served the government of the Habsburg Netherlands from the 16th to the 18th century.

Its primary function was to maintain political and diplomatic correspondence between the Circle of Burgundy and the Holy Roman Empire, with its significance rooted in the 1548 Augsburg Treaty, redefining the legal status of the Burgundy Circle within the Holy Roman Empire.

The Secretaries for German Affairs in the Habsburg Netherlands

► External Diplomatic Function:

- Emperor
- Imperial institutions (*Reichstag*, *Reichskammergericht*, Diets, and other imperial assemblies)
- German States (electoral princes, secular and ecclesiastical principalities, and imperial cities)

► Internal Diplomatic Function:

- Drafting instructions for Habsburg Netherlands and Burgundy Circle representatives in various imperial assemblies.

► This position requires a high level of fluency in German, French and Spanish

Antonio Suarez de Arguello: A Diplomatic Career with the Habsburgs

- ▶ Difficulty recruiting secretaries for the Brussels government due to inexperienced candidates or confessional requirements
 - Candidates were sourced from various parts of the empire to meet the diverse needs of diplomatic roles, like Arguello
- ▶ Born into a Hispano-Portuguese family in service to the Habsburgs for generations.
- ▶ In 1586, Arguello became the private secretary to Archduke Albert, then Viceroy of Portugal.
- ▶ Loyalty and language skills led to his appointment as German Secretary in Brussels in 1612, a position held until his resignation in 1632.

Antonio Suarez de Arguello: A Diplomatic Career with the Habsburgs

► Responsibilities as German Secretary:

- Drafting, sealing, and countersigning correspondences, maintaining records and inventories, as well as producing copies, summaries, and translations.
- Managing troops during the resumption of hostilities between Habsburg Spain and the Dutch Republic and the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War.

Multilingual Dynamics in 17th-Century Brussels Governance

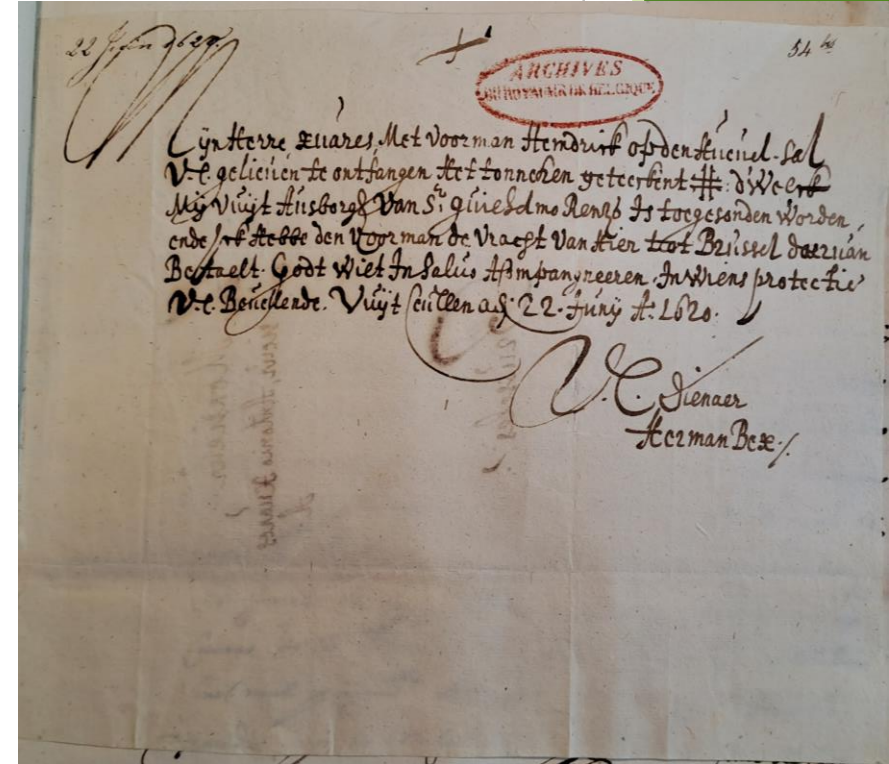
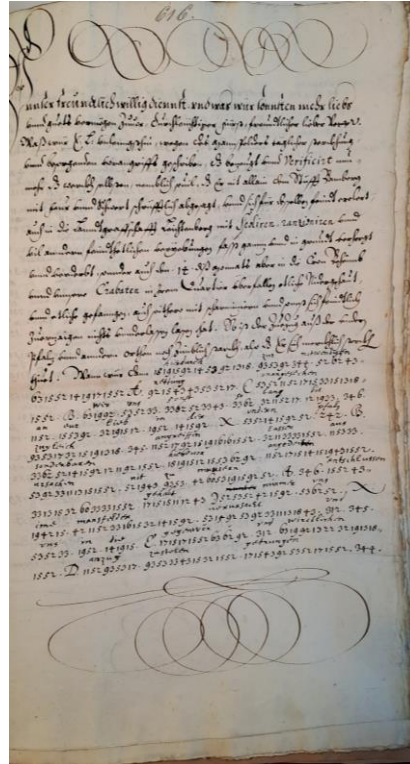
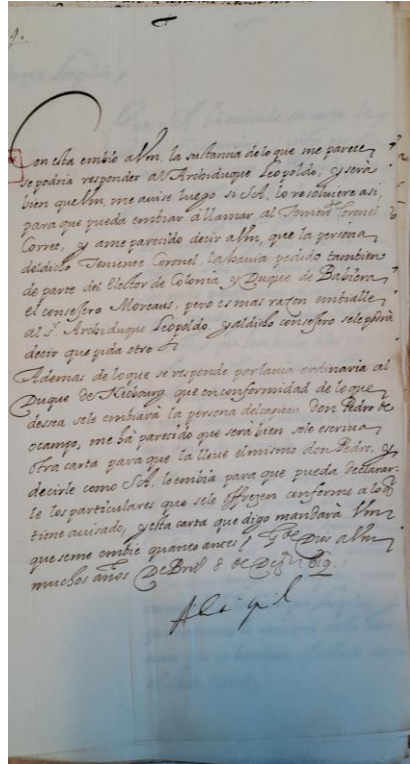
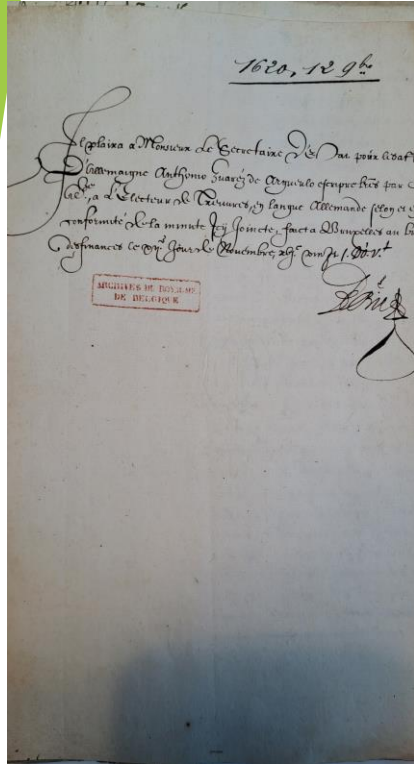
► Government Diversity:

- 17th-century Brussels government reflects the Habsburg Empire: multilingual and cosmopolitan
- Secretaries of State in the Netherlands often possessed proficiency in multiple languages

► Multilingualism in German Secretariat:

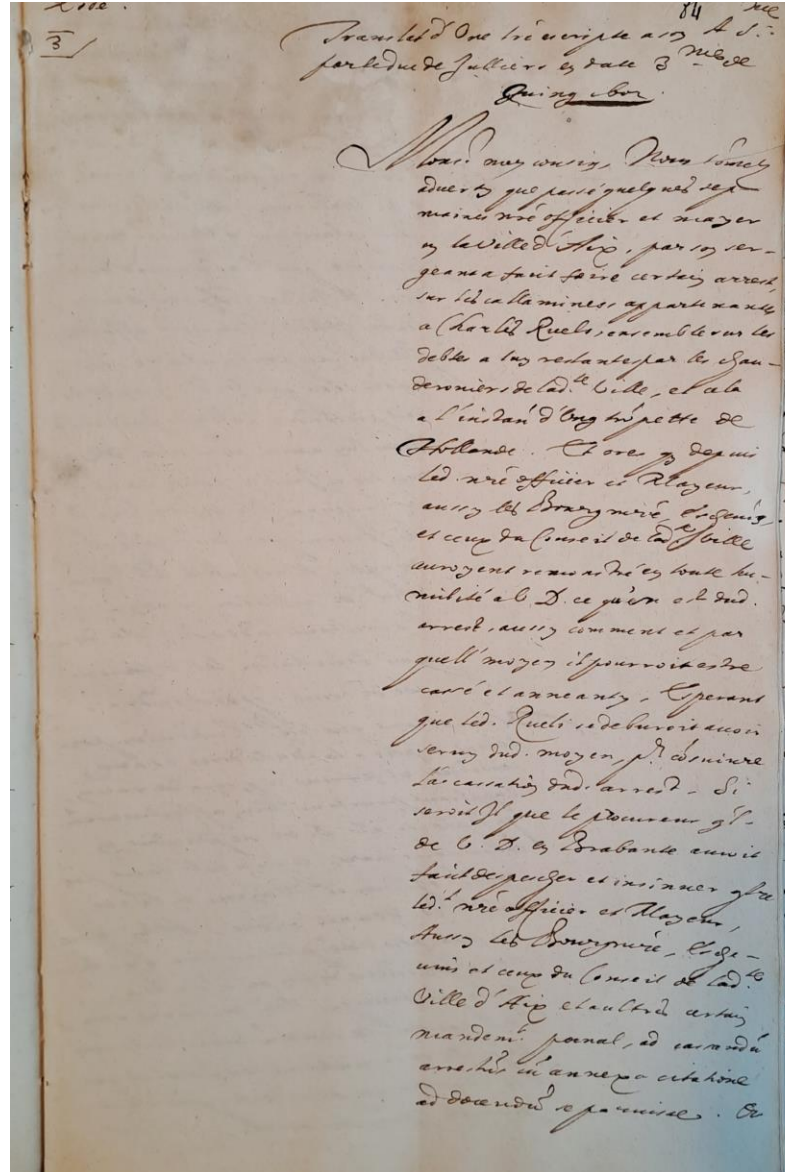
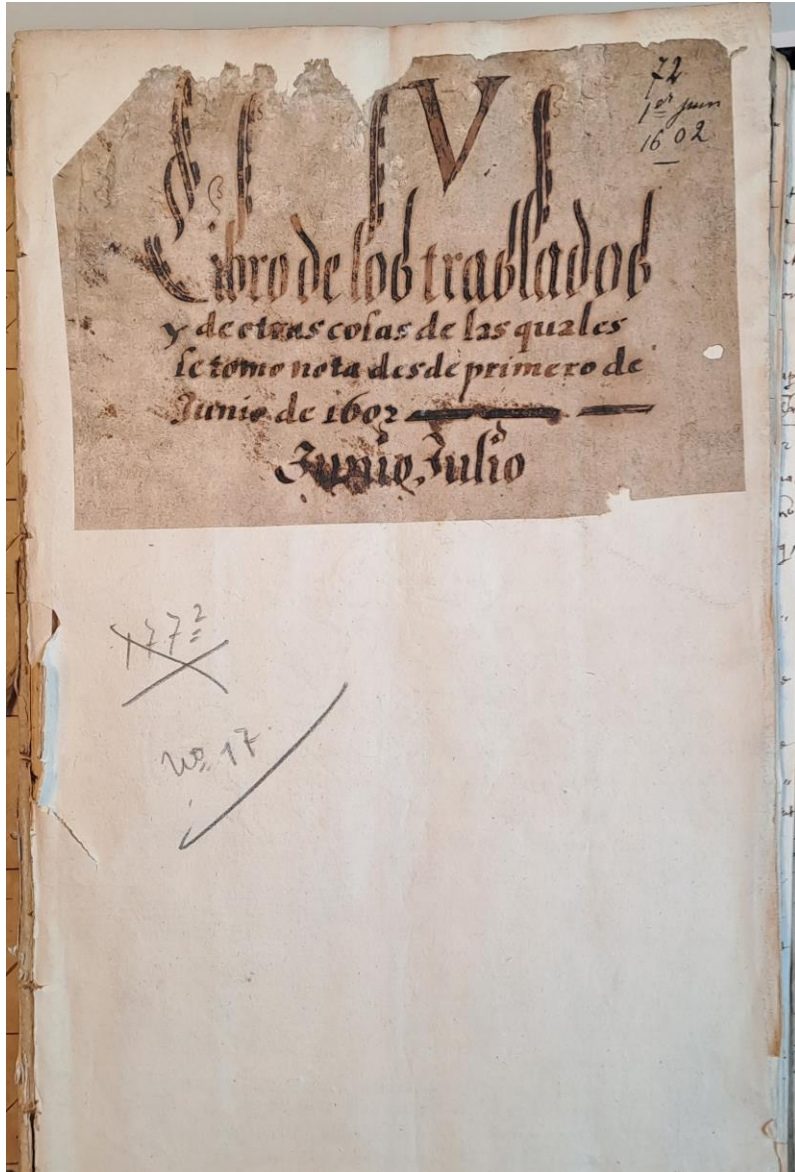
- Archives of the German Secretariat reveal documents primarily in German, Spanish, and French, with additional records in Italian, Latin, and Flemish
- German secretaries required linguistic flexibility for effective communication

Multilingualism in German Secretariat:



Archives générales du Royaume (AGR), Secrétairerie d'État aux affaires allemandes (SEA).

Libros de los traslados



Translation Workflow: A Daily Task for the Secretary

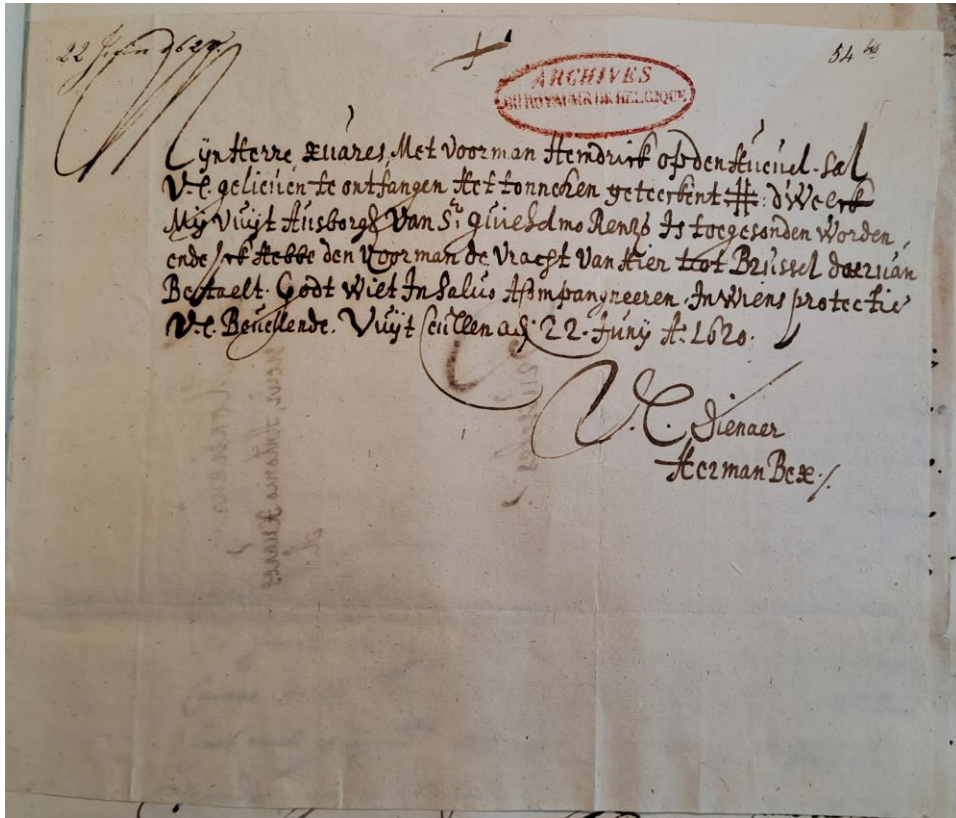
► Translation Process Overview:

- As a crucial intermediary between the Archducal government and the Holy Roman Empire, Arguello's translation duties involve receiving official correspondence in Spanish or French from the government.
- These letters are then translated into High German, returned to the government, and finally dispatched to the Holy Roman Empire.
- Arguello preserves a copy of the translated letter in a registry.
- In the reverse process, letters from Germany reach the German secretary, either through the Brussels government or directly to the Secretariat.

► Oral Instruction Pathway:

- Another, more oral-centric path involves the secretary receiving instructions verbally, drafting a minute, presenting it to superiors, and, after additions and corrections, composing the final letter for signature.

Expanded Role Beyond Intermediary:



Arguello's role extends beyond mere intermediary functions, numerous letters from princes of the Holy Roman Empire or Dutch representatives are directly addressed to him.

Two ways of translating

► Verbatim Translation:

- verbatim translation of the minute received from the government, originally drafted in French or Spanish.
- This demonstrates the secretary's linguistic proficiency and ability to convey the precise wording.

► Interpretation of a Political Will:

- goes beyond literal translation.
- It involves interpreting the political will of the government, showcasing the secretary's political and diplomatic acumen.

Verbatim Translation:

1622, 10^{to} junio

ARCHIVOS DE INDIA
DE BELGIQUE

Las cartas para el S^r Arcebispo Leopoldo
y Dⁿⁱ Tilly ha parecido convenir que se buel-
van abaxer en la conformidad de la
minuta que va con esta, Sup^{ta} al^{ta} m^{de}
que se hagan luego procurando que en la
traduccion en Aleman se ajuste lo mas
que se pudiere, con la minuta, y que en la
carta del S^r Arcebispo se ponga con con-
sentimiento de don Gonzalo de Cordova,
y Mons^{de} Tilly, y en la del dicho Si-
lli con consentimiento del S^r Arcebispo,
y don Gonzalo, y en estando acanadas
las enviara Vm. a firmar de S^{ta} A^l
De Dios al^{ta} m^{de} muchos años
Palacio deo de junio 1622
Al^{ta} m^{de}

J. Suarez

Verbatim Translation:

1622, 10 juin

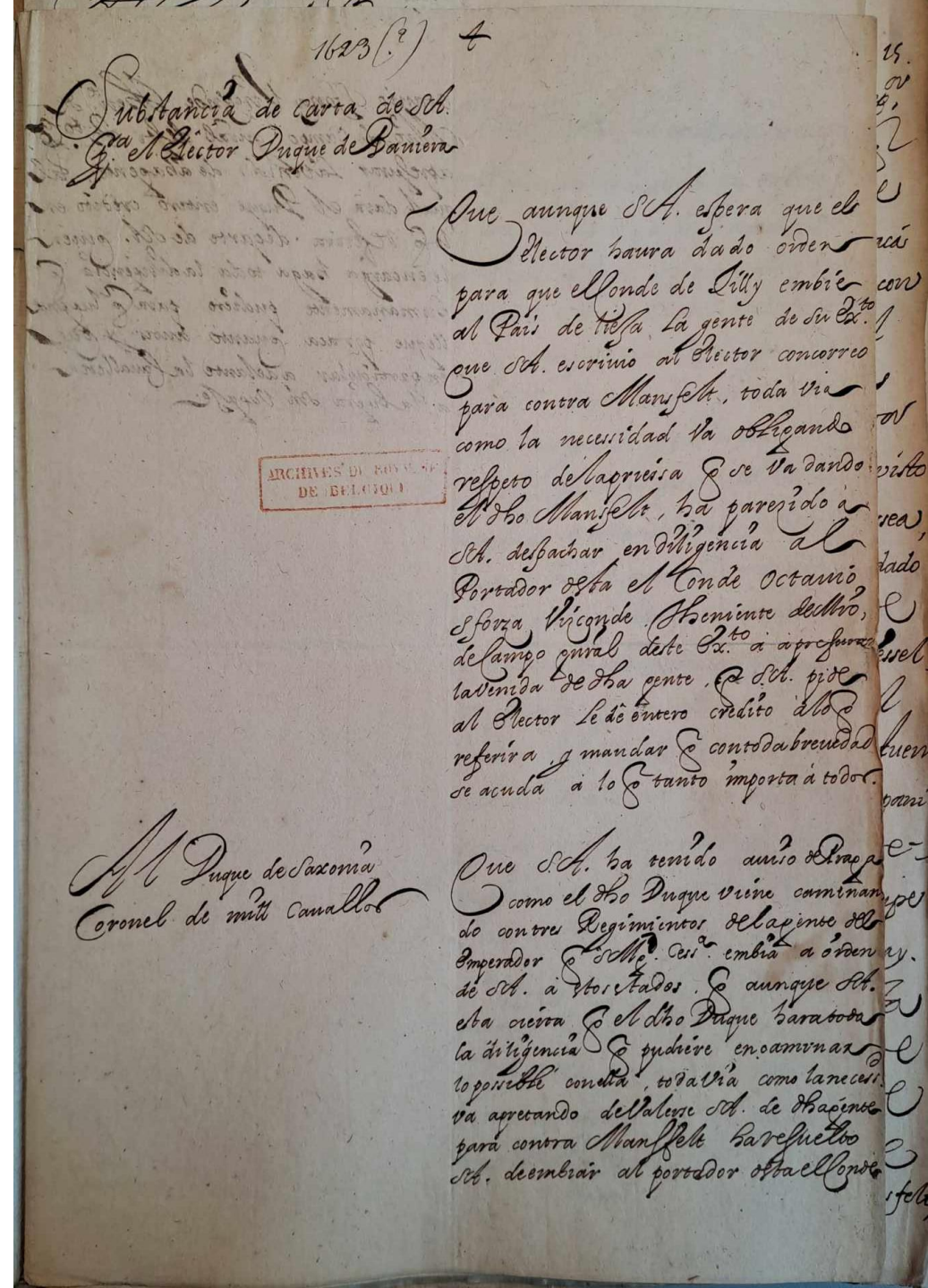
“Las cartas para el Señor Archiduq Leopoldo y Tilli ha parecido convenir que se vueluan ahazer en la conformidad de la minuta que va con esta. Suplico a Vm. [Vuestra Merced] mande que se hagan luego, procurando que en **la traduccion en Aleman se ajuste lo mas que se pudiere con la minuta**; y que en la carte sel S. Archiduque se porga con consentimiento de don Gonzalo de Cordoua y Mons. De Tilli; y en la del dicho Tilli con consentimiento del S. Archiduq y don Gonzalo; y en estando a cavadas las embiara Vm. afirmar de S.A.. Garde Dios a Vm. muchos años. de Palacio a 10 de Junio 1622. [Signature]”

1622, 10th June

"The letters to Mr. Archduke Leopold and Tilli seemed to agree that they should be made in accordance with the minutes that go with this one. I beg you [Your Mercy] to order that they be returned in accordance with the minutes that go with this one. I beg you to order that they be done immediately, **taking care that the German translation conforms as much as possible to the minute**; and that in the letter of the Archduke it be done with the consent of Don Gonzalo de Cordoua and Mons. de Tilli; and in that of the said Tilli with the consent of the Archduke and Don Gonzalo; and when they are done, Your Majesty will send them to be affirmed by Your Majesty. Garde Dios a Vm. muchos años. de Palacio a 10 de Junio 1622. [Signature]"

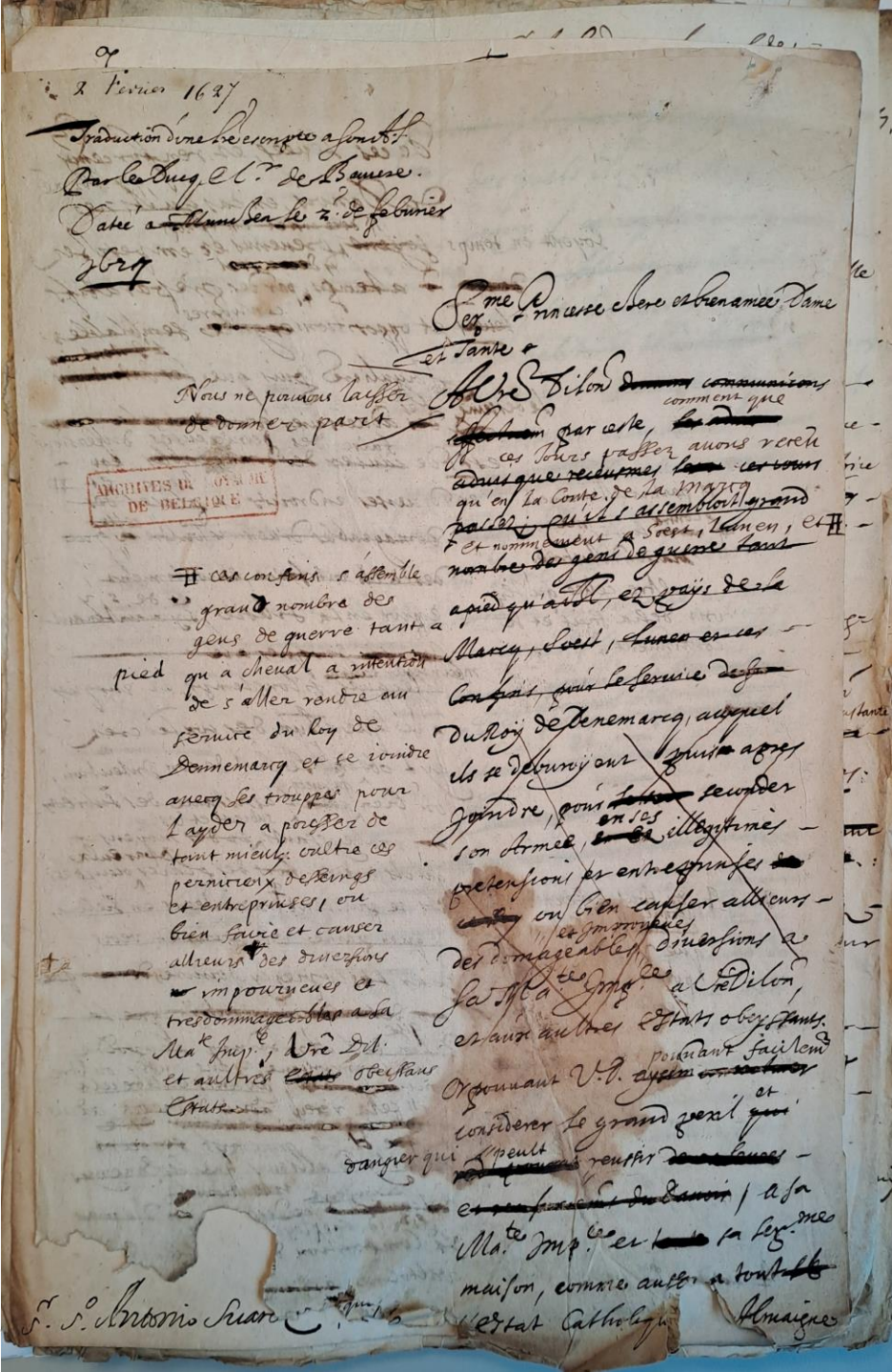
Interpretation of a Political Will:

- ▶ **Substance over Words:**
- ▶ **Brief and Successive Instructions:**
- ▶ **Complexity of Translation:**
 - Demands more than linguistic competency from the German secretary.
 - Highlights not only diplomatic maneuverability but also political finesse.
- ▶ **Political Interpretation:**
 - The German secretary, from concise instructions, demonstrates the ability to translate not just the content but also the political will, both in substance and form.



Translation Process:

First Hand	Second Hand
<p>« Donnons, communicons, par ceste, les advis advis que receumes ces iours passez qu'il s'assembloit grand nombre des gens de guerre tant à pied qu'à cheval en pays de la Marcq, Soest, Lunen et ces confins pour le service du Roy de Denemarcq auquel ils se déburoyent [sic], puis après joindre pour seconder son armée en ses illégitimes prétension et entreprises ou bien causer ailleurs des dommageables diversions à sa Majesté Impériale et aux autres estats obeyssants. »</p>	<p>« Nous ne pouvions laisser donner part comment que ces jours passer avons reçu qu'en la Conté de la Marcq et nommement a Soest, Lunen et *ces confins s'assemble grand nombre des gens de guerre tant à pied qu'à cheval a intention de s'aller rendre au service du Roy de Dennemarcq et ce ioindre avec ses troupes pour l'ayder a poresser de tant mieul. Aultre ce pernecieux desseings et entreprises, ou bien faire et causer ailleurs de diversions impourveues et très dommageable à Sa Majesté Impérial et autres obeissans estats. »</p>



Translation Process:

► Secretary's Attention to Detail:

- The reformulation in the first translation indicates the secretary's meticulous attention to detail in his daily translation work.
- The phrasing adjustments suggest a certain adaptation to the original text.

► Translator vs. Transcriber:

- Arguello emerges as more than a transcriber; he is a translator who adapts and reformulates the text into the target language.
- His role goes beyond exact copying, emphasizing a thoughtful translation process.

Translation in the Career of the Diplomatic Secretary

► Secretary Arguello's Role:

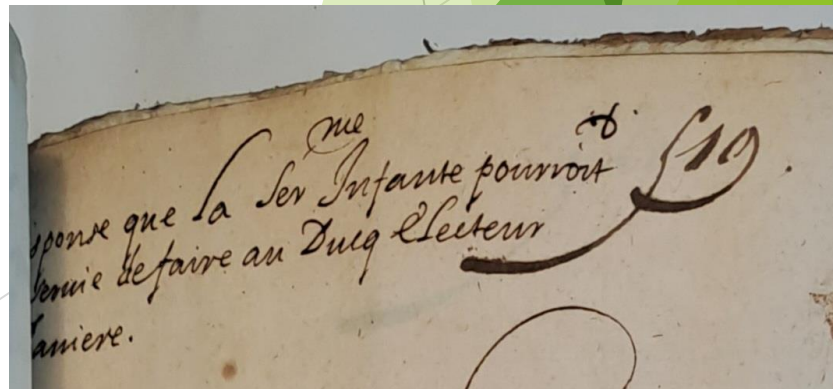
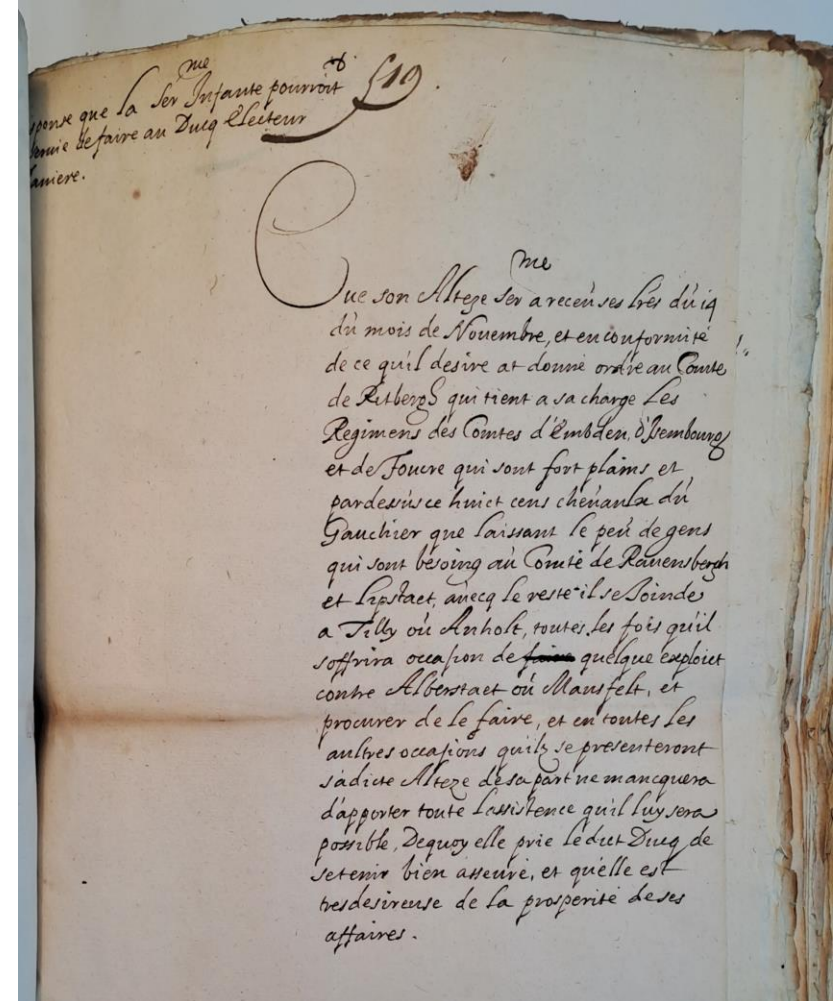
- Arguello goes beyond a mere diplomatic intermediary; he is an indispensable actor within the government of the Netherlands, serving as one of the most informed individuals due to his linguistic skills.
- His linguistic and diplomatic knowledge grants him not only influence as a secretary but also as an advisor, likely providing counsel on diplomatic matters.

► Diplomatic Function of Translation:

- The secretary's ability to maintain and translate diplomatic correspondences endows him with a significant diplomatic role.

“Response that the Most Serene Infanta could serve to make to the Duke Elector of Bavaria”

AGR, SEA, 361, n°19, 1619-1621.



The Role of Secretaries-Diplomats in 17th-Century Peace Negotiations

► Significance of Secretaries-Diplomats:

- The insights presented shed new light on the crucial role played by secretaries-diplomats during peace congresses and diplomatic negotiations in the first half of the 17th century.
- Negotiators and diplomats encounter the same working conditions as those of a Secretary of State: a multilingual environment and the need for an acute knowledge of the issues.

► Multilingual Dynamics in Peace Negotiations:

- Suggesting in-depth analysis and reflection on language use within delegations for a comprehensive understanding.

