

THE GERMAN HANSA

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Chronology of the Hansa

General History

Hanseatic History

First half of 12th century	Beginning of German colonisation in the east		
1125-1137	King (from 1113 Emperor) Lothair III		
1142-1180	Henry the Lion Duke of Saxony	1143-59	Founding of Lübeck
1152-1190	Emperor Frederick I	c.1157	Henry II grants privileges to the Cologne merchants in London
1154-1189	Henry II King of England	c.1160	Formation of the Community of German merchants visiting Gotland
1189-1192	Third Crusade	End of 12th century	Founding of the German <i>Kontor</i> in Novgorod
1202-1242	Valdemar II King of Denmark	1201	Founding of Riga
1213-1250	Emperor Frederick II	1226	Lübeck granted imperial charter, becomes an imperial city
1216-1272	Henry III King of England	1227	Victory at Bornhöved over the Danes
1230-1283	Conquest of Prussia by the Teutonic Order	c.1230	First alliance between Lübeck and Hamburg
1237	Livonia becomes subject to the Teutonic Order and Estonia to Denmark (until 1346)	c.1250	Founding of Stockholm
1253	Founding of the archbishopric of Riga	Second half of the 13th century	Building of the <i>Marienkirche</i> in Lübeck
1254	Rhenish town league	1252-1253	Privileges granted to Hanseatic merchants in Flanders
1273-1291	King Rudolf of Habsburg	1256-1264	Formation of the League of Wendish towns
		1280-1282	First transfer of the Bruges <i>Kontor</i> to Aardenburg

		1281	Organisation of the London Steelyard
1285-1314	Philip the Fair King of France	1284-1285	Hanseatic blockade of Norway
		1293	Control of the Novgorod <i>Kontor</i> passes from Visby to Lübeck
1286-1319	Eric Menved King of Denmark	1307-1319	Danish protectorate in Lübeck
1309	Teutonic Order moves its headquarters to Marienburg	1307-1309	Transfer of the Bruges <i>Kontor</i> to Aardenburg
1327-1377	Edward III King of England	1347	Statutes of the Bruges <i>Kontor</i>
1337-1453	Hundred Years War		
1340-1375	Valdemar IV Atterdag King of Denmark	1356	First general Hanseatic diet. The Hansa of the towns begins to develop
1346-1378	Emperor Charles IV	1358-1360	Embargo against Flanders
		1361	Visby captured by Valdemar IV
1346-1384	Louis de Male Count of Flanders		
1348-1350	The Black Death		
1356	Golden Bull, constitution of the Empire	1367-1385	Cologne Confederation formed against Denmark
		1370	Peace of Stralsund
1375-1412	Margaret Queen Regent of Denmark, Norway (1380) and Sweden (1389)	1388	Trade broken off with Flanders, England and Novgorod
1384-1404	Philip the Bold Duke of Burgundy and Count of Flanders	1388-1392	Embargo against Flanders
1386-1434	Vladislav II Jagiello King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania	1392	Peace of Niebur with Novgorod
1397	Union of Kalmar unites the three Scandinavian kingdoms	1390-1401	The <i>Vitalienbrüder</i>
1400-1410	Emperor Rupert	1408-1416	Overthrow of patrician regime in Lübeck
1411-1437	Emperor Sigismund	1410	Defeat of the Teutonic Order at Tannenberg

1412-1439	Eric of Pomerania King of the Scandinavian Union	1418	Hanseatic statutes against trouble-makers
1419-1467	Philip the Good Duke of Burgundy	1419	Founding of the University of Rostock
1422-1471	Henry IV King of England		
c.1428	Introduction of the Sound dues	1426-1435	War between the Hansa and Denmark. Peace of Vordingborg
1428-1430	The Low Countries united under Philip the Good	1419-1441	Conflict between the Hansa and Castile
1439-1448	Christopher II (of Bavaria) King of the Scandinavian Union	1438-1441	War between the Hansa and the Dutch. Peace of Copenhagen
1455-1485	Wars of the Roses	1436-1438	Transfer of the Bruges <i>Kontor</i> to Antwerp
1461-1483	Louis XI King of France	1451-1457	Last embargo against Flanders
1461-1483	Edward IV King of England		
1467-1477	Charles the Bold Duke of Burgundy	1454-1466	War between Poland and the Teutonic Order
		1466	Second Peace of Thorn: the towns on the Vistula come under Polish sovereignty
		1470-1474	The Hansa at war with England
1477-1493	Maximilian Regent of the Low Countries (Emperor 1486-1519)	1471	Cologne excluded from the Hansa
1478	Conquest of Novgorod by Ivan III	1474	Peace of Utrecht
1470-1503	Regency of Sten Sture in Sweden	1483	Perpetual peace between the Hansa and France
		1489	The St George statue by Bernt Notke
1509-1547	Henry VIII King of England	1494	Ivan III closes the Novgorod <i>Kontor</i>
1513-1523	Christian II last king of the Scandinavian Union	1522-1531	Lutheranism spreads throughout north Germany
1523-1533	Frederick I King of Denmark	1525	Albert of Hohenzollern secularises Teutonic Prussia

1519-1556	Emperor Charles V		
1523-1560	Gustavus Vasa King of Sweden	1533-1535	Wullenwever burgo-master of Lübeck
1547-1584	Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible)	1534-1536	The Counts' War
1556-1598	Philip II King of Spain	1556-1591	Sudermann syndic of the Hansa
1558-1603	Elizabeth I Queen of England	1557	Diet at Lübeck, reorganisation of the Hansa
1561-1581	Estonia under Swedish protectorate, Livonia under Polish protectorate	1558	Capture of Narva and Dorpat by Ivan IV
1562	Secularisation of the Teutonic state in Livonia by Ketteler, who becomes Duke of Kurland and Semigallia, and a vassal of Poland		
1563-1570	Nordic Seven Years War between Sweden and Denmark, the latter in alliance with Lübeck	1564-1568	Building of the Hansa's house in Antwerp
1566	Beginning of troubles in the Low Countries which lead to the ruin of Antwerp	1566	Lübeck suffers a naval defeat off Gotland
		1567	Hamburg grants privileges to English merchants
1581	United Provinces proclaim their independence	1579	Elbing grants privileges to English merchants
1588	Destruction of the Invincible Armada	1598	Elizabeth I closes the London Steelyard
1588-1648	Christian IV King of Denmark and Norway	1601	Stade excluded from the Hansa
		1607	Hanseatic embassy to Spain
1609-1621	Truce between Spain and the United Provinces	1616	Alliance between the Hansa and the United Provinces against Denmark
1611-1632	Gustavus Adolphus King of Sweden	1621	The Swedes land in Livonia and capture Riga

1618-1648	Thirty Years War		
1625-1629	Danish War against the Habsburgs; Peace of Lübeck	1626	Conquest of Prussia by Gustavus Adolphus
		1628	Wallenstein besieges Stralsund
1630	Gustavus Adolphus lands in north Germany	1630	Alliance between Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg
		1631	Sack of Magdeburg by Tilly
1648	Peace of Westphalia	1669	Last Hanseatic diet at Lübeck

CHAPTER FIVE

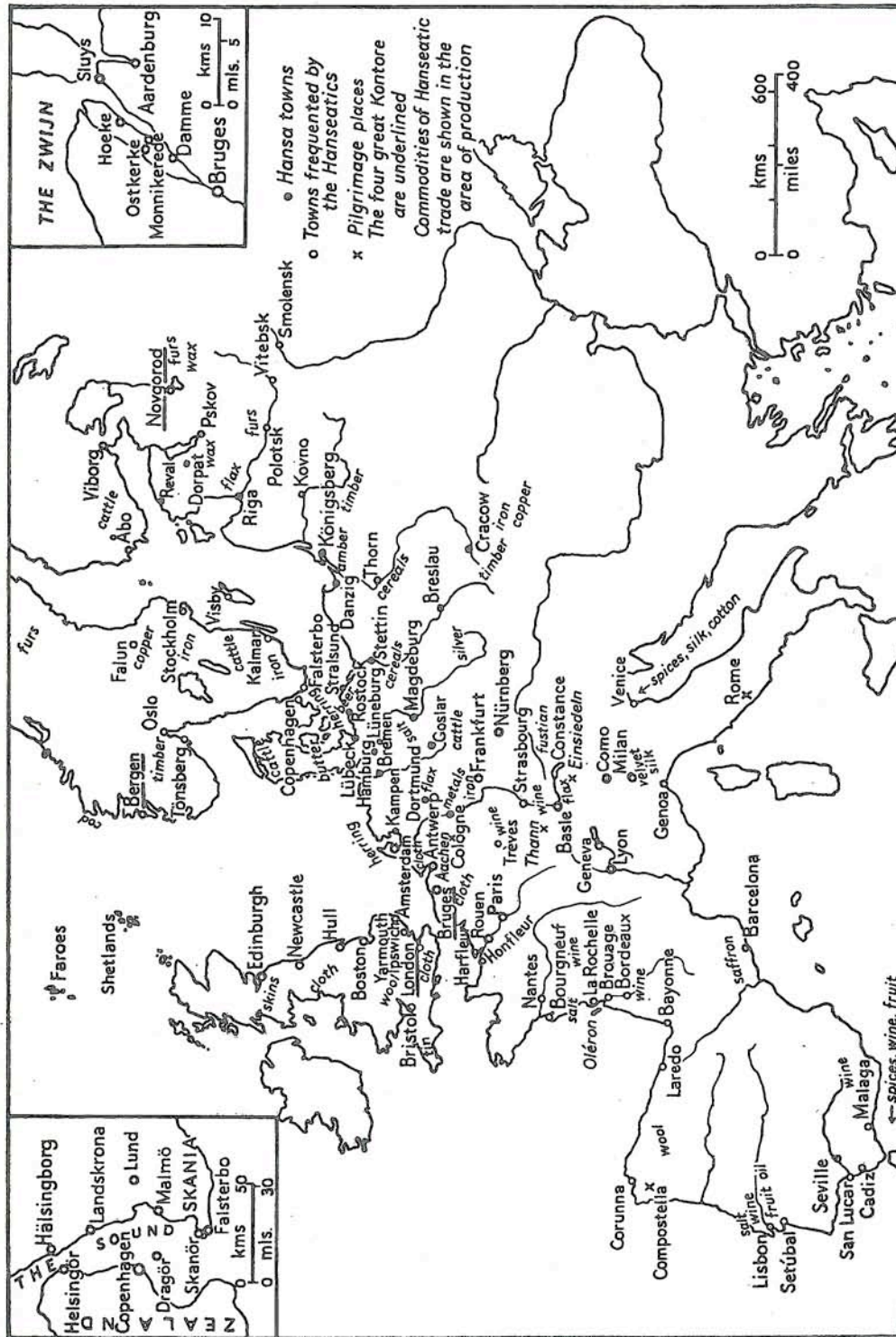
The Organisation of the Hansa

I. MEMBERSHIP

UP to the middle of the fourteenth century, that is to say in the period before the formation of the Hansa of the towns, there is no real difficulty in deciding who was a member of the community. All German merchants who enjoyed the Hanseatic privileges when abroad were assumed to be members. What procedure had to be followed by candidates for membership we do not know. In a *Kontor* the alderman probably held an inquiry and gave a decision; or perhaps the candidate was accepted by his companions when the company set out from a Hanseatic port. But the problem appears to have caused no difficulties. Neither the first three *schra* of Novgorod nor the 1347 regulations of the Bruges *Kontor* make any reference to it. It seems likely that there was a ready acceptance of applicants, provided they were natives of north Germany, or of any Baltic maritime town where there was a group of Hanseatic merchants. The statute of the Bruges *Kontor*, for instance, lists members from Swedish towns.

When the Hansa of the towns had been formed, after the middle of the fourteenth century, enjoyment of the Hanseatic privileges was conditional on citizenship of a member town. It seems that there was at first some doubt about the position of merchants who were citizens of small towns not recognised as Hanseatic, and hitherto not admitted into the community, but in 1366 the diet of Lübeck made a ruling that only citizens of Hansa towns could enjoy the privileges of the 'common merchant'. Thereafter outsiders were probably obliged to acquire citizenship of a Hansa town.

The inadequacy of this ruling became apparent in the fifteenth century, when it was noted that many foreigners were becoming citizens of Hansa towns merely in order to enjoy commercial privileges. To put a stop to this, the diet of 1434 restricted membership of the Hansa to merchants born in Hansa towns. But this ruling must have been difficult to enforce, for it was reaffirmed more than once. Towards the end of the century



2 Hansatic trade in Europe (15th century)

the more important towns, at least in the Westphalian third, were instructed to issue certificates attesting citizenship of a Hansa town.

But which towns were members of the Hansa after the middle of the fourteenth century? This is one of the most difficult problems in the history of the community. The answer varies according to the definition given to the phrase 'Hansa town', which can mean either a town whose merchants when abroad were admitted to the *Kontore* and enjoyed the Hanseatic privileges, or a town actively participating in the organisation and operations of the community and taking its share in the resultant expenses – in other words, a town which, directly or indirectly, received a summons to the Hanseatic diets.

One might have expected the Hansa to take the trouble to draw up an official list of member towns and keep it carefully up to date. But nothing of the sort can be traced, and it seems that the need for such a list never made itself felt. At the time of the first Hanseatic diets it was apparently taken for granted that towns interested in protecting their merchants abroad were automatically members of the Hansa, and no one thought of enumerating them. Only in very rare instances was the matter discussed. This was done in the case of Bremen, for example, which had remained outside the Hansa for a long time, applied for membership in 1358, and was accepted only after due deliberation. Later on, other towns whose earlier membership of the community was doubtful or disputed did the same. But for most of the original Hansa towns nothing of this kind was necessary and often it is only in a late document that we find them mentioned as members of the Hansa.

The Hansa was reluctant to draw up a list of its members for another reason. Periodically such a list was demanded by foreign governments, especially by England, who wished to put an end to the abuses resulting from uncertainty on this point. These demands were always met with evasive replies, on the pretext that it was impossible to present an exact list. The real reason was that the Hansa was not anxious to furnish its adversaries with a document which might be used as a basis for collective claims for compensation and demands for indemnities.

However lists of Hansa towns do exist, inserted in official documents of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and drawn up for various purposes: assignments of quotas in military contingents or fiscal levies, convocations of diets or rolls of absentees. Naturally these lists differ considerably, presenting what are often intentional omissions or additions. Although they are of no great value in themselves, they do at least

afford us a rough estimate of the number of Hansa towns. According to the most reliable, these varied between 55 and 80. This is confirmed by certain other estimates, emanating from various sources. For instance in a petition addressed to Pope Urban VI (1378–89) mention is made of 'Lübeck, the head and leader of 77 great cities, long united in a league or association called the Hansa'. This figure, which might seem suspect because of its symbolic character, is however corroborated by other estimates made by the Hanseatics themselves. For example the Bruges *Kontor* in 1469 spoke of 'the Hansa, which comprises 72 good towns, not counting all those which look to them'. At this period the figure 72 was almost official, accepted even by foreign chancelleries: Louis XII, in 1507, wrote to 'the 72 cities of your community and confederation'.

Modern historians, however, following Walther Stein, have rejected this figure as meaningless and much too low. Taking 'Hansa town' to mean a town whose citizens enjoyed commercial privileges abroad, they have drawn up a list and arrived at a figure of more than 180. It is probable that detailed research based on the above criterion would permit the addition of several dozen more, if all member towns, whatever their importance, are regarded as of equal standing.

But we must ask whether this is a valid criterion, and whether in the fifteenth century every town whose merchants enjoyed the Hanseatic privileges was actually accepted as a member of the Hansa. According to Luise von Winterfeld's researches on Westphalia it seems that it was not so. It is evident from the documents that the only towns to be accepted as 'towns of the Hansa' were those which were summoned to the Hanseatic diets and which were represented there either directly, or indirectly by the delegate of another town. Only these towns were called upon to furnish financial or military contributions when the need arose. The 'associate towns' (*Beistädte*), although they shared in the commercial privileges, were not regarded as full members. There are therefore grounds for making a distinction within the Hansa itself between two classes of town of unequal status, the active members, of which there were about 70, called 'towns of the Hansa', and the passive members, of which there were about 100, usually very small, called 'Hanseatic towns'. The total of about 180 Hansa towns represents in some sort the survival of the Hansa of the merchants, with the organic grouping of the Hansa of the towns superimposed upon it.

It is difficult enough to list the towns which were members of the Hansa at any time between 1350 and 1450. It would be futile to try to

draw up a list giving exact dates. For that one would need to know for each town the date of entry and the date of withdrawal. In most cases this is impossible. For a convincing demonstration of this fact one has only to take a close look at how a town was admitted to the Hansa – in its wider sense – and how it ceased to be a member.

There were three ways in which one could be or become a member of the Hansa: by being accepted from the beginning, that is, from about 1358, as a town of the German Hansa; by being officially admitted on request; by slipping in unofficially, which was only possible in the case of small towns.

It has been said that when the Hansa of the towns was formed, no list of members was drawn up. Obviously the most important towns figure among the original members but there are a number of doubtful cases which cannot be cleared up even by later documents.

For towns not recognised as Hanseatic from the beginning a formal request for admission was necessary. In general the application laid great stress upon the fact that the town's merchants had in former times enjoyed the privileges of the 'common merchant' and that it was therefore a Hansa town. The application was examined and accepted or rejected in a Hanseatic diet. We know of only one exception to this procedure. The town of Neuss was admitted in 1475 by imperial decree, after successfully withstanding the siege by Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Sometimes an application was refused because the applicant town was too remotely situated. Constance, for instance, was refused admission in 1417. But more often it was through fear of unfair competition, or a suspicion that the candidate was trying to extend the benefit of the commercial privileges to foreigners, especially to the Hansa's dreaded rivals, the Dutch. The applications of Utrecht, presented in 1422 and 1451, were both rejected for this reason. Arnhem, which first applied in 1380, was admitted as late as 1441, in the same year as Kampen, which had been a candidate for a similar length of time. It was, however, simply jealousy of the Livonian towns which caused the rejection of Narva's application in the sixteenth century.

As there was no authoritative list of the original members, a number of small towns, whose membership of the Hansa was, to say the least, doubtful, were able to assert their Hanseatic status and usurp the benefits of the community's rights without applying for membership. In Westphalia in particular there were constant complaints about this abuse in the second half of the fifteenth century. Eventually in 1494 it was decided that

only the leading towns were competent to issue certificates of Hanseatic membership to individual merchants, which in effect made them the final judge as to which towns were members.

Similarly membership of the Hansa could be terminated in three ways: by exclusion; by withdrawal; by tacit renunciation of the rights and duties of a Hansa town.

Exclusion, although it always created a great stir, was only a minor factor in the numerical decline of the Hansa. There were relatively few exclusions, and except in the final years they were always temporary. They were most often justified by civil disorders resulting from revolution. The dispossessed council, in whole or in part, lodged a complaint with the Hanseatic diet, which then took the decision. This happened in the case of Brunswick in 1375, Bremen in 1427, Münster in 1454. Violations of the fundamental principles of the community were less common, though it was on these grounds that Cologne was excluded, since it had obtained special privileges in England in 1471.

Rather more numerous, and often permanent, were the official withdrawals. One of the reasons for these was pressure from the territorial overlord, anxious to strengthen his authority over the town. This was the case with Northeim in Saxony as early as 1430, Berlin in 1452, Halle in 1479. More common, though not openly admitted, was the desire to escape the expense of membership. Breslau announced in 1474 that her commercial interests were taking her away from the Hansa.

Much more common were *de facto* but undeclared withdrawals. A growing number of small towns could no longer fulfil the financial burdens of membership, notably the costs of delegations to the diet. Their merchants no longer frequented the *Kontore* and therefore no longer needed to take advantage of the privileges. In these circumstances their adherence to the Hansa was meaningless and purely theoretical. After many vacillations the diet decided in 1514 to face the implications of these cases of absenteeism and about thirty towns were declared excluded from the community. Several of them, however, later applied for re-admission and were again counted as Hansa towns.

In view of all these uncertainties it would be meaningless to draw up lists of member towns for various periods. One can only say in a general way that the number of Hansa towns increased notably during the first half of the fifteenth century. Cologne in particular, hoping to strengthen her influence in the Hanseatic diet, favoured the admission of several neighbouring towns. During this period exclusions and tacit with-

drawals were still rare, though later they become more numerous. Thus the Hansa appears to have attained its largest membership shortly before the mid-fifteenth century. This, then, marks the peak of the Hansa as an institution, fifty years after its zenith as an economic force.

Though fundamentally an association of towns, the Hansa counted among its members one sovereign prince, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order. The considerable part played by the Teutonic Knights in the colonisation and development of German towns in Prussia and Livonia explains this anomaly, as it also explains the authority he exercised over the Prussian towns, which was greater than that of any other territorial ruler. One would expect the Grand Master's membership of the Hansa to have led to all his subjects being considered Hanseatics, but in fact only the citizens of six Prussian towns were considered full members, though the Order's own merchants appear to have enjoyed the Hanseatic privileges everywhere except in Novgorod. Their status was, however, somewhat ambiguous, as can be seen from a letter dispatched by the Grand Master in about 1390 to the *Kontor* at Bruges. The *Kontor* had excluded from the benefits of the Hanseatic privileges the Head of the Trade Department (*Grosschäffer*) of Königsberg and his agents, because of some flagrant violation of these privileges. The Grand Master argued that the *Grosschäffer*, being a member of the Order, could not be a member of the Hanseatic community and therefore could not be excluded from it; but, of course, he ought to respect its regulations.

There can be no doubt that the Teutonic Order, famous for its christianising influence, in which knights from far-off countries played their part – Marshal Boucicault, for example, from France, and the Earl of Derby, the future Henry IV, from England – conferred upon the Hansa in the eyes of feudal Europe a prestige to which a community of merchants could never have laid claim. The Grand Master is even described as 'chief of the Hansa' (*caput Hansae*) in certain English sources. It is also evident that the naval and military strength of the Teutonic Order was often very valuable to the Hansa. But this very strength was not without its disadvantages. The Order had its own objectives, and often involved the Hansa in enterprises that damaged its commercial interests and embroiled it in quarrels with foreign powers. Although the Order at first contributed to the prosperity of the Hansa, it was later one of the factors in its decline.

Finally there should be mentioned the strange case of the peasant community of Dithmarschen (on the west coast of Holstein), which may

have joined the Hansa at a late date. In 1468 the community concluded an alliance with Lübeck, which, frequently renewed, lasted until 1558. The resounding victory which these peasants in 1500 won over the Danes strengthened the alliance, and from then on delegates from Dithmarschen appeared regularly at the Hanseatic diets. The peasants of Dithmarschen had been trading by sea since the fifteenth century, particularly with Livonia, but the Livonian towns were suspicious of these peasant traders who, with the support of Lübeck, laid claim to the Hanseatic privileges. In 1554 the Hanseatic diet decided that the inhabitants of Dithmarschen were not members of the Hansa but that their participation in the Hanseatic privileges was to be tolerated. This decision reflects the ambiguity of their status. Five years later this peasant community was overrun by the Danes and the alliance with Lübeck lapsed. The case of Dithmarschen, like that of the Teutonic Order, reveals the diversity and flexibility possible within the Hanseatic organisation.

2. HANSEATIC DIETS AND REGIONAL DIETS

From 1356 onwards the *Hansetag*, the general assembly of the Hansa towns, was the controlling organ of the Hansa. It might even be said that it was the only institution which could strictly be called Hanseatic, since the Hansa had no administrative apparatus of its own, and the regional diets took counsel also on matters which did not concern the Hansa.

The *Hansetag* was the supreme authority within the community. It decided, in principle without appeal, all important matters of concern to the whole community: the ratification of treaties or commercial charters, negotiations with foreign towns or rulers, the dispatch of embassies, questions of peace, war or blockade, financial and military measures, economic regulations of all kinds, the exclusion or admission of members, mediation in disputes between Hansa towns, and so on.

All this constituted a heavy task which, one might have thought, would have made frequent and regular meetings essential. But in fact meetings were never held at regular intervals, in spite of attempts to set up such a system in the fifteenth century. If one enumerates the assemblies which can properly be termed general, that is, those at which the towns of all three thirds were represented, one arrives at the following figures: 27 between 1356 and 1400, 12 between 1400 and 1440, and 7 between 1440 and 1480. If those diets at which only two of the thirds were represented,

but which could, at a pinch, be called general, are added, the figures become respectively 41, 14, and 17, that is, less than one per year in the fourteenth century and scarcely one every three years in the fifteenth.

These figures are astonishingly low, and are in marked contrast to the frequency of the regional diets, which often met several times a year. The explanation is quite simple. The towns shrank from the high cost of sending delegations to distant cities. Also, as some of the questions to be debated were of interest only to certain towns, it was preferable to summon all the towns only when questions of a truly general character were to be discussed. This helped to cut down the number of absentees. Finally the community relied on Lübeck to take all the necessary decisions, except in matters of major importance, since Lübeck was in fact in charge during the intervals between diets. The leadership of Lübeck had become firmly established as early as the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth it had become even more marked, and it was officially recognised in 1418, when the town was asked, in association with the Wendish towns, to take charge of the interests of the community.* This decision accounts in part for the dwindling number of general assemblies held in the fifteenth century, though it does not follow that the controlling function of Lübeck was always accepted without demur.

Because of its pre-eminence and its geographical situation Lübeck was the normal meeting place of the general diet. Of 72 diets held between 1356 and 1480, 54 met in Lübeck. Ten were held in Stralsund, out of consideration for the Prussian towns which put forward a plea for a less distant meeting-point, three in Hamburg, two in Bremen, and one each in Cologne, Lüneburg and Greifswald.

It was also Lübeck, except in very special circumstances, which took the initiative in summoning a Hanseatic diet. Its council sent the summons to the other Wendish towns and to the principal towns of the thirds, which in turn passed on the invitation to the other towns in their area. That at least was the procedure in theory, as set out in a regulation sent to the Saxon towns in 1426. In actual fact the list of towns to which Lübeck directly addressed the summons was continually changing.

The date fixed for the meeting was sufficiently far ahead – several months – to allow groups of towns to agree beforehand on the agenda, to define their point of view on certain matters and to allow their delegates, furnished with a strict mandate, to arrive at the assembly at the time fixed. Travelling expenses were largely the responsibility of the town

* Document No. 15 (b).

sending a delegate but also partly of the towns indirectly represented by it, calculated according to a scale which gave rise to fierce bargaining. In order to cut down costs, certain towns at the beginning of the fifteenth century asked if they could be represented by their syndics, who were doubtless familiar with the diplomatic and legal affairs under discussion. But the *Hansetag* of 1418 ruled that only councillors were competent to represent their towns at the diet.

The Hanseatic diet was attended by far fewer members than the total membership of the community would suggest. Ordinarily ten to twenty towns alone were represented, though often, it is true, by two or three delegates each. The highest figure, reached in 1447, was 39 delegations, scarcely half the effective total. This means that no assembly was truly representative. In addition to the delegates of towns, who alone had a vote and a choice in the drafting of the ordinances (*Rezesse*), distinguished guests were sometimes present, among them the emperor, the archbishop of Bremen, princes, either in person or by proxy, and delegates from the *Kontore*, invited for matters which concerned them.

Seen from the outside the Hanseatic diet was an impressive institution, but it suffered from internal weaknesses, some of which were rather foolish. The principal one was absenteeism,* caused by a desire to avoid the cost of sending a representative or of being involved in unpopular decisions. When there were too many absentees, it became necessary to summon a second assembly, to the great annoyance of the delegates present, who had been put to needless trouble. Unsuccessful attempts were made to enforce attendance. In 1430 it was laid down that anyone absent without good cause was to be fined one gold mark. Confiscation of goods was envisaged, and even exclusion from the Hansa. In 1457 the diet ordered thirty towns to pay the fine, unless speedy and valid excuses were proffered. But all such measures remained ineffective, mainly because no one was eager to apply them strictly.

Often the diet could not begin its work until long after the date which had been fixed, because of having to wait for the late-comers. Here again a system of fines did little to improve matters. No less irritating was the common practice of leaving the diet before the end of the session, when discussions appeared to be turning to the disadvantage of their own town. Delegates preferred to slip away before a decision was taken: this made it easier for their council to refuse to accept it. It was therefore decreed that all delegates were to present their excuses publicly before

* Document No. 21.

leaving and to subscribe in advance to the decisions arrived at after their departure.

In the council chamber the position of each delegate was fixed according to an order of precedence which naturally gave rise to frequent disputes. The chief seat, at the centre of a horseshoe-shaped table, was the prerogative of Lübeck, although it was repeatedly claimed by Cologne. Cologne took the second seat, on the right of the representative of Lübeck. The third seat, on his left, was occupied by the representative of Bremen – the seat of an archbishop – but Hamburg also laid claim to it.

Debates went on for a long time and agreement was often difficult to come by. Delegates often argued that they had no authorisation to pronounce on the matter under discussion, and that they must refer it back to their town, whose views would not be known until long afterwards. Sometimes they lodged a protest on behalf of their mandators, and their disapproval had to be inserted in the *Rezess*. After the discussions, resolutions were voted on under a simple majority rule. Those sponsored by Lübeck were usually carried. They were then inscribed on parchment in the form of a *Rezess*, to which was affixed the seal of the town in which the session had been held. Each delegate received a copy, and on his return home had further copies made and dispatched to the other towns for which he had been acting. These ordinances in their entirety represented the collective legislative and diplomatic records of the Hansa and were presumed in principle to be accepted and applied by all its members. But there was a great gap between theory and practice.

The difficulty of bringing together delegates representing all sections of the Hansa in part explains the existence of assemblies of the 'thirds'. The 'thirds' are mentioned for the first time in the 1347 statutes of the Bruges *Kontor*. Within the *Kontor* merchants were grouped according to their country of origin in one of three 'thirds', Lübeck–Saxony, Westphalia–Prussia and Gotland–Livonia. Each 'third', as the names indicate, consisted of at least two groups. The first, with Lübeck as its principal town, comprised the Wendish, Saxon, Pomeranian and Brandenburg towns. The second, led first by Dortmund and later by Cologne, included the Westphalian, Rhenish and Prussian towns. Geographically this was a strange grouping, since no community of interests can be discerned. It was no doubt established in the hope of counterbalancing the powerful Wendish–Saxon 'third'. The principal town of the remaining third, which was the least powerful, was sometimes Visby and sometimes

Riga. It is surprising that the Livonian towns did not form part of the same 'third' as the Prussian towns, particularly as they had the same overlord. No doubt the existence of this 'third' was due to the reluctance of Visby, which was still very influential in the mid-fourteenth century, to join either of the other two. These groups which developed within the Bruges *Kontor* were not found in the other *Kontore*, where the German merchants grouped themselves differently. As a result the assemblies of the 'thirds' concerned themselves almost entirely with Flemish affairs, their usefulness being to complement the badly attended *Hansetage*.

The division into 'thirds' meant that the principal town of each 'third' acted as intermediary and was therefore more influential within the Hanseatic organisation. Consequently competition for the rank of chief town of a 'third' was keen. Cologne, disregarded at first because there were not many Cologne merchants in Bruges, soon laid claim to first place in the Westphalian 'third' and by taking advantage of the decline of Dortmund, which had been weakened by warfare, succeeded in obtaining it in the middle of the fifteenth century. Brunswick was very unwilling to submit to Lübeck and eventually succeeded in obtaining a re-organisation of the 'thirds', officially adopted by the Lübeck diet in 1494. From then on there was a Lübeck 'third' (principal town Lübeck), a Westphalian 'third' (principal town Cologne) and a Saxon third (principal town Brunswick) which also included the Prussian and Livonian towns. The town of Danzig was naturally not content to take a subordinate place, and after fifty years of competition between Danzig and Brunswick for direction of the 'third' there came into existence a Saxon 'quarter' headed by Brunswick, and a Prussian-Livonian 'quarter' headed by Danzig. The three 'thirds' were thus replaced by four 'quarters'.

In the functioning of the Hanseatic organisation the diets of the 'thirds' were less important than the regional diets. The community of interests was obviously greater between towns in the same area, especially when they were under the same territorial prince. This was the case in the east with the towns of Brandenburg, Prussia and Livonia, and in the west with the towns of the countships of Cleves and Guelders. Being near each other they could meet and consult together at frequent intervals without incurring any great expense. These regional diets played a great part in the preparatory work for the Hanseatic diets* as well as in the execution of decisions taken there. They were, however, not specifically

* Document No. 22.

Hanseatic. More important to them were the decisions of a political nature relating to the maintenance of their legal status and their relations with their overlord. The groups also comprised towns which were not members of the Hansa, and their delegates apparently left the assembly when Hanseatic matters were discussed.

Among the regional diets those of the Wendish towns had the greatest influence on the policy of the Hansa. They met often, several times a year. Situated at the very centre of the Hanseatic network, owing allegiance to different territorial rulers, comprising both Baltic and North Sea ports, counting one Saxon town (Lüneburg) and at least one Pomeranian town (Stralsund) among their members, and being under the direction of the 'head of the Hansa' (Lübeck), the Wendish towns were an epitome of the whole community. They had, of course, their own interests, which were in many respects distinct from those of either the eastern or the western towns. Often they had to face charges of self-interest. But the question of repealing the mandate to direct the affairs of the Hansa which had been granted them in 1418 was never seriously considered – proof that in all essential matters they embodied the will of the Hansa as a whole.

The Hanseatic community was based ultimately on the councils of the individual member towns, which, especially in the case of the larger towns, played a decisive role. They called meetings of regional diets, discussed questions to be brought before the general diet, sent off their representatives, assumed responsibility for the cost of delegations, carried on correspondence with neighbouring towns and with Lübeck, and saw that the Hansa *Rezesse* were carried out. One need hardly stress the exceptional role played by the council of Lübeck, which often had to take serious decisions on behalf of the Hansa and to commit itself to expenditure in the common interest with no certainty that its actions would later be approved by the general diet.

Thus the administrative and political functioning of the Hansa was assured by three types of assembly, superimposed one above the other. At its base were the councils of the separate towns. Above them came the regional diets, sometimes with extended membership. And at the top there was the *Hansetag*, the only institution which was specifically Hanseatic, with the council of Lübeck acting as its permanent representative.

3. THE FOUR *Kontore* AND THE OTHER SETTLEMENTS ABROAD

The *Kontore*, or associations of German merchants abroad, were the backbone of Hanseatic trade. Founded spontaneously at different times and accorded special privileges by the ruling powers wherever they settled, they were governed by regulations which became progressively more rigorous, and came under the jurisdiction of the Hanseatic diet after the mid-fourteenth century. They were known officially as 'the community of merchants of the German Hansa in . . .' (for example *communis mercator hanse Theutonice Bergis existens*) and, more briefly, as 'the common merchant at . . .' (*der gemene kopmann to . . .*). The word *Kontor* was not used until the sixteenth century.

If one were to count up all the German merchant settlements, not only those in northern and eastern Europe but also those on the Atlantic coast as far south as Portugal, the total would be several score. Legally they were all of equal status, but obviously some were more important than others. Four of them were the mainstay of the Hansa, and fundamental to its prosperity. These were the *Kontore* at Novgorod, Bergen, London and Bruges. It is perhaps surprising that there was none in countries like Denmark, Sweden or Poland, with which the Hansa carried on an active trade. But the rise of a great *Kontor* was possible only under certain conditions which did not obtain everywhere. It was essential that there should be an important commercial centre, at a considerable distance, relatively speaking, from north Germany, where Hanseatics could make large purchases of products for which there was a big demand. It was also essential that the local authorities should be willing to grant privileges. In Denmark the Germans found only a limited quantity of saleable goods. Skania would have been more suitable, because of its dried herring, but there were no big towns there and foreigners made only short visits, when the fairs were being held. In Sweden, Stockholm seemed well adapted for the development of an important *Kontor*, but although German merchants were very numerous, they were awarded no special privileges there. Finally in Poland trade was carried on by the Hansa towns of Thorn, Cracow and Breslau, so that the need for another settlement was never felt.

The organisation of the *Kontore* was much more rigorously regulated than that of the home towns. Each had its own leaders, tribunal and treasury. Unlike the community of Hansa towns, each *Kontor* had

the legal status of a corporation. It had its own seal, which in the case of London and Bruges bore a two-headed eagle, in Bergen a cod-fish, and in Novgorod the key of St Peter. All merchants visiting the town were obliged to present themselves to the authorities of the *Kontor*, to submit to the strict discipline prescribed by the statutes, and to lodge within the walled precinct (except in Bruges). Each year the assembly of all the merchants elected a variable number of aldermen, who were obliged to accept the appointment, which was not rendered any more attractive by the fact that it was unpaid. Even with the help of assessors, the administration of a *Kontor* was a heavy task. It entailed jurisdiction over the members, administration of the funds drawn from fines and from a turnover tax (*schoss*), commercial, legal or diplomatic negotiations with the local authorities, correspondence with the towns, and perhaps attendance at the Hanseatic diet to furnish information (the *Kontore* were not members of the Hansa, and were not normally called in to attend). Although they were in general administered along the same lines, there were quite noticeable differences between the various *Kontore*, which deserve to be studied.

Novgorod. The Hanseatic *Kontor* at Novgorod (*curia sancti Petri, Peterhof*) is one about which we know most, owing to its statute (*schra*) which appeared in seven successive revisions between the middle of the thirteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. Situated on the right bank of the river Volkhov, at the corner of the market square, it covered a fairly spacious site, surrounded by a palisade with only one entrance gate. The principal building, the stone-built Church of St Peter, was not used only for religious purposes. It housed the treasury, the archives and the weighing machines, and also served as a depot for goods of the most varied kinds. At times so much was crammed into it that it became necessary to forbid the stacking of goods on the altar. Finally in case of attack the church was the ultimate refuge for the merchants. Around the church there were hutments which served as living quarters for the merchants (*Meistermänner*), their assistants and apprentices, and also the great meeting-hall, business premises and administrative offices, stalls, malt-house, presbytery and prison. Since the fourteenth century the Germans had also been in possession of the Court of St Olaf, or Court of the Goths, originally the settlement of the Gotlanders, situated near the river, where some of the merchants lodged when accommodation was short.

The importance of the Novgorod *Kontor* explains the bitter rivalries which it provoked among the Hansa towns, as each was anxious to gain

control of its administration. Visby, heir to the Gotland Community, retained its influence over the *Peterhof* until about 1293. Then for over a hundred years Lübeck and Visby contended for control, until the Livonian towns, especially Dorpat and Reval, entered the field and from 1442 onwards prevailed.

The principal peculiarity of the Novgorod *Kontor* lay in the alternation, more clearly marked than elsewhere, between the winter merchants (*Winterfahrer*) and the summer merchants (*Sommerfahrer*), travelling by both land and water. They seldom met, and each group had its own separate organisation. Over a period of two hundred years this underwent a series of transformations. Up to the middle of the fourteenth century the general assembly of the merchants (*Steven*) had complete liberty to elect the alderman (*Oldermann*) of the *Hof*, who appointed four assessors. His powers seem to have been more absolute than elsewhere, as was only natural in a *Kontor* so isolated and remote. However appeal might be made against his decisions to the council of Visby, and later to that of Lübeck: the two councils quarrelled over this prerogative from the end of the thirteenth century and throughout the fourteenth. The alderman also administered the *Kontor* funds which the merchants took with them when they departed and deposited at Visby. The revenue was derived partly from fines and the letting of buildings and stalls, but mainly from the dues on exported goods, originally paid to the prince of Novgorod. The priest of the Church of St Peter came with the merchants and returned with them. For hundreds of years his salary was a bone of contention. In addition to his ecclesiastical functions, he dealt with the correspondence of the *Kontor*, a duty which carried with it in the mid-fourteenth century the privilege of summoning the assembly of merchants.

When the *Kontor* became subordinate to the towns, the latter intervened to restrict its independence. From 1346, if not earlier, the priest was appointed by Visby and Lübeck in turn and later on by Dorpat and the Livonian towns. The *Steven* lost its right to elect the alderman, a function which also fell to Lübeck and Visby, who exercised it in turn. Then the office of 'alderman of the *Hof*' was abolished in favour of two aldermen of the church (*Olderlude von St Peter*), who in their turn resigned the direction of the *Kontor* to lower officials (*Vorstender*). In the fifteenth century a completely new official, the *Hofknecht*, appointed by the Livonian towns, became the actual head of the *Kontor*. His authority rested on the fact that he alone resided permanently in Nov-

gorod, sometimes for several consecutive years. This, together with the fact that he spoke Russian and was in constant communication with the local authorities, led him, in spite of his title – the literal meaning of which was 'servant of the *Hof*' – to be widely respected and to play an important role in politics. Nevertheless the Novgorod *Kontor*, which in the early part of the fifteenth century had often been visited by more than 200 merchants and their assistants at a time, declined rapidly as the century progressed, until it was finally closed in 1494.

Bergen. The Bergen *Kontor*, called by the Norwegians *Tyskebrygge*, the 'German quay', consisted, like the *Peterhof*, of an enclosed and privileged site on the fiord. It contained about twenty adjacent plots (*gaarden*), at first rented, later gradually purchased outright. Each of these sites was rectangular in shape, 18 to 20 metres wide and about 100 metres deep. The front faced the sea where the ships docked. At the back there were wooden buildings – up to fifteen in each *gaard* – assembly-halls (*Schüttinge*), living quarters and business premises, some that could be heated, some occupied only in summer. The whole, periodically destroyed by fire and rebuilt, still exists and gives a fairly accurate idea of the appearance of the 'German quay' in the Middle Ages. The church of the Germans, St Mary's, stone-built and partly Romanesque, which remained the property of the *Kontor* from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, is also still standing.

The organisation of the *Kontor* is not known in any great detail. The main lines appear to have been laid down in 1343, when the king of Norway confirmed the Hanseatics in their former privileges. A little later it was made subordinate to the towns, which in fact meant Lübeck. Indeed, of the four great *Kontore*, the 'German quay' was certainly the least open to all Hanseatics. Although merchants from Westphalia and the Wendish towns were to be found in Bergen, the overwhelming majority were always from Lübeck, and the preponderance of Lübeck was never called in question, at least up to the sixteenth century. Only a merchant from a town administered under Lübeck law could be elected alderman, and Lübeck had the right to nominate the priest of St Mary's Church. The number of aldermen appears to have varied. Six are mentioned in 1388, but only two in the fifteenth century, assisted by eighteen jurors.

The German colony in Bergen included not only the non-resident merchants but also a group of craftsmen who far outnumbered them. The latter had settled there as early as the thirteenth century and lived

outside the *Tyskebrygge*. Among them were to be found furriers, tailors, goldsmiths, barbers and bakers, but all were known by the generic name of *Schomaker*, since the great majority of them were in fact shoemakers. These German craftsmen were originally subject to a Norwegian bailiff, but at the end of the fourteenth century they were placed under the jurisdiction of the *Kontor*, whose principal concern was to prevent them from engaging in trade, which occasioned frequent disputes. The German merchants and craftsmen together accounted for perhaps quarter of the total population of the town.

London. The London *Kontor*, situated on the bank of the Thames a short distance upstream from London Bridge, was called the *Stalhof*, in English the 'Steelyard'. The name is not derived, as was once believed, from the steel imported by the Cologne merchants, but comes from the word *stal* and simply means a place where goods are offered for sale. The *Stalhof* was located between the river and Thames Street, being approximately square in shape and surrounded by a wall. It comprised the original settlement of the Cologne merchants, the Guildhall, fronting on Thames Street, where the merchants held their general assemblies, and some adjacent plots which were acquired later. At first the Germans rented the land and the main buildings, but they were gradually able to buy up the freeholds, and their ownership was confirmed by the Treaty of Utrecht (1474). As elsewhere the yard contained a number of buildings, both business premises and living quarters, but there was no church, only a chapel. The Church of Allhallows the Great, which was frequented by the Germans, lay outside the enclosure.

Only the broad outlines of the organisation of the Steelyard are known up to the beginning of the fifteenth century. The Cologne merchants, who had been granted privileges as early as the mid-twelfth century, were joined during the thirteenth century first by Westphalians and then by 'Easterlings'. After a temporary secession of the merchants from Lübeck and Hamburg, caused by the chicaneries of the Cologne merchants, the various groups banded together in 1282 to form a 'Hansa of the Germans'. They did not, however, amalgamate completely. The statute of 1437 shows that the merchants of the Steelyard were divided according to their origin into three thirds, though these were different from those of the Bruges *Kontor*. The first, led by Cologne, included the Rhinelanders. The second comprised the Westphalians, the Saxons and the merchants from the Wendish towns. The third, led by Danzig, covered the merchants from Prussia, Livonia and Gotland. This separa-

tion appears to have counted for very little, however, being invoked only for the election of assessors. The control of policy, of the assemblies, the treasury and the tribunal, was common to all three thirds. Each third appears, however, to have had its own salaried secretary or *clerc*, whose importance increased in the fifteenth century as the volume of correspondence grew. These clerks were sent sometimes on diplomatic missions, not only to Hansa towns but also to foreign courts.

As in the other *Kontore*, the general assembly of the merchants of the Steelyard elected its leader, the 'German alderman' (*aldermannus Theutonicorum*), annually at the beginning of January. From among the Council of Twelve the alderman chose two, not from his own third, as his assessors; and the three formed the executive committee of the *Kontor*. The peculiarity of the Steelyard, however, lay in the existence of another alderman, the 'English alderman'. Proposed by the merchants and installed by the king, the English alderman had to be a citizen, sometimes the mayor, of London and a member of the city council, to which he swore an oath of loyalty on taking up his duties. He was usually a native of Germany who had acquired English nationality. His authority was not limited to the Steelyard but extended to all Hanseatic *Kontore* in England, for which reason he was sometimes referred to as the 'supreme alderman of all England' (*overste alderman van al Engellant*). His function was both judicial – to act as mediator in disputes between Hanseatics and Englishmen – and diplomatic – to represent and defend the interests of the Germans before the native authorities. This curious integration of the Hanseatic organism into existing English institutions, which certainly had its advantages, led also to an obligation which has no equivalent in any other *Kontor*. From the end of the thirteenth century onwards the merchants of the Steelyard were responsible for manning and maintaining Bishopsgate, one of the entrances to the city.

Bruges. The *Kontor* at Bruges was exceptional in that it did not have a self-contained site at its disposal. The German merchants therefore lodged with landlords or in rented houses. They were also to be found in Damme, a wine staple, in other ports on the Zwiijn, and especially in Sluys, particularly favoured by the seamen. Since 1442 the *Osterlinge*, as the Hanseatics were called, had possessed a house of their own, and another, larger one was completed in 1478. It was situated on the square, which was their favourite meeting place. Previously they had held their assemblies in the refectory of the Carmelite convent, whose church was their official religious centre.

The *Kontor* was granted its first privileges in 1252 and soon became prosperous. But it was not properly organised for another hundred years, and then probably only after serious disagreements among its members. According to the statute of 1347,* the merchants were divided into three thirds, Lübeck–Saxony, Westphalia–Prussia and Gotland–Livonia, a grouping which seems to reflect that of the Hansa towns. The thirds had a considerable degree of autonomy. Each elected annually two aldermen (who named six assessors chosen from among their third), held separate assemblies, and appointed delegates who negotiated with the town in matters concerning their third, and controlled its own treasury. Funds were derived principally from the *schoss*, a sales tax of a third of a groschen per pound, that is, 1/720 of the value. The Gotland third, however, being poorer, was obliged to charge a higher rate, which led it in the mid-fifteenth century to demand and obtain the amalgamation of the three treasuries. In 1486 the decline in the *Kontor*'s fortunes caused the number of aldermen to be reduced from six to three, one for each third, and the number of assessors from eighteen to nine. Even when most of the Hanseatics had emigrated to Antwerp, the aldermen continued for a long time to stay at Bruges, maintaining the fiction that the *Kontor* was still active.

The Bruges *Kontor* was incontestably the most important of the four, both because of the volume of business transacted there and because of the number of merchants from all Hanseatic regions who frequented it. The general assembly of 1457 brought together about 600 people, probably including assistants, servants and seamen. For a ceremonial procession in 1440 in honour of Philip the Good, the Hanseatics provided 136 horsemen (compared with 150 Italians and 48 Spaniards), which would give about the same total figure. The diplomatic role played by the aldermen was exceptionally important, as they maintained diplomatic relations not only with the rulers of the Low Countries, the counts of Flanders and the duke of Burgundy, but also with the French and Spanish sovereigns, since they were the natural spokesmen of the Hanseatic establishments scattered along the Atlantic coast. Lastly the cultural influence of the *Kontor* was considerable. It was there that the Hanseatics perfected their commercial and financial techniques, and from there that the literary and artistic movements of the west penetrated into north Germany.

Other settlements abroad. However important the four great *Kontore*

* Document No. 17.

may have been in the organisation and business life of the Hansa, the part played by more modest establishments, scattered throughout the countries bordering on Germany, must not be overlooked. Legally, these factories were no different from the *Kontore*. Their organisation was the same and their merchants enjoyed the Hanseatic privileges. According to an instruction sent by Cologne to her citizens in England, as soon as four merchants found themselves together in a foreign town, they were to elect an alderman and obey him. A similar stipulation was made by Lübeck. This means that Hanseatic communities abroad must have been more numerous than is generally known.

The most prosperous of these settlements probably contained as many merchants as did the *Kontore*. This may be presumed to have been true of Pskov, especially when trade with Novgorod was interrupted. It was certainly true of the 'company of the common merchant from German towns in Copenhagen', founded in 1378 by citizens of the Wendish and Pomeranian towns. This company owned several houses in the town, and obtained the lion's share of Danish trade until its privileges were suppressed in 1475. Some of these establishments possessed an enclosed site, as at Polotsk, where the Germans had their own church, at Tönsberg and doubtless at Oslo, and at Boston, where it was called the *Stalhof*, as in London.

Like the *Kontore*, these settlements, autonomous at first, were brought under the control of the towns after the mid-fourteenth century. This usually meant that they were controlled by the town whose merchants were present in the greatest number, a process which was accentuated in the fifteenth century with the development of the staple. In this way Pskov came to depend closely on Dorpat, Polotsk on Riga, Kovno on Danzig, Tönsberg and Oslo on Rostock. In the west geographical factors led to these settlements being made subordinate to the great *Kontore*. Thus the Bruges *Kontor* – with the support of the Hansa, which was anxious to establish there the staple for all the commerce of the Low Countries – asserted its authority over the factories in Antwerp, Dordrecht, Utrecht and many other towns. Towards the south it exercised control over the settlements along the Atlantic coast, notably those at Nantes, Bourgneuf, La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Lisbon.

In the same way the London Steelyard never relaxed its efforts to bring all the Hanseatic settlements in England under its control, and even destroy their independent organisation. The most active establishments were those at Ipswich, Yarmouth, Lynn, Boston, Hull, York and

Newcastle. From the fourteenth century onwards they sent delegates to the Steelyard in London to co-operate in working out a common policy. They were also obliged to send to London the dues levied on their merchants. When in the mid-fifteenth century certificates of Hanseatic membership were required, the Steelyard reserved to itself the exclusive right to issue them for England. But it did not succeed in suppressing the independent organisations of the factories, which retained their own aldermen. Boston in particular resisted its interference strenuously, being frequented mainly by citizens of Lübeck coming from Norway, and dependent on the Bergen *Kontor*, which on occasion spoke of 'our alderman of Boston in England'. In 1474, however, the Steelyard succeeded in obtaining recognition of its authority over Boston, conjointly with that of the Bergen *Kontor*.

4. CHARACTERISTICS AND RESOURCES OF THE HANSA

One of the most striking features of the history of the Hansa is the contrast between the breadth of its activities and the amorphousness of its structure. The community, made up of towns none of which was fully sovereign, did not even rank as a corporation. After it had forbidden the use of the seal of the Gotland Community, it did not even have a seal of its own. It had no common institution other than the *Hansetag*, no permanent officials (at least not before the mid-sixteenth century), no regular financial resources, no fleet and no army.

It would be reasonable to expect that such an organism, which had none of the traits characteristic of a state, but which nevertheless wielded the power of a state, should have perplexed jurists steeped in the principles of Roman law. However in the Middle Ages there is little trace of any desire to define the legal character of the Hansa. The question only arose in certain special cases. For example in 1418, a dispute at law having arisen between Hamburg and Bremen, the latter town asked Cologne for a copy of the foundation charter of the German Hansa. Cologne replied, with good reason, that no such charter was to be found in her archives. Fifty years later, after the arrest of the German merchants in England, the Privy Council tried to justify the measure by enunciating the principle of the collective responsibility of the Hanseatic merchants. In reply it received a veritable treatise on the nature of the Hansa.* It was neither a society (*societas*), nor a college (*collegium*), nor

* Document No. 26

a corporate body (*universitas*), but a permanent federation (*firma confederatio*) of towns, owing allegiance to various princes, having no common institution – even the Hanseatic diet was not admitted as such – and consequently not responsible for the acts or undertakings of any of its members.

Such a loose organisation had its advantages but also entailed certain drawbacks, especially in the event of serious difficulties. In certain quarters, notably in Lübeck, this had not gone unnoticed. It was for this reason that attempts were made in the last third of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century to strengthen the Hansa by means of leagues, with precisely defined financial and military obligations, concluded for a fixed number of years and often renewed. The earliest was the Cologne Confederation, formed in 1367 to intensify the war effort against Denmark. This included Holland and Zeeland towns which were not members of the Hansa. Though it was extended several times beyond the original date, it was not maintained after 1385, by which time all the clauses of the Peace of Stralsund had been fulfilled.

In the fifteenth century the increasingly alarming pressure exerted on the towns by the princes gave rise to new leagues, called *tohopesaten* ('standing together'). In 1418 Lübeck, which had just been officially recognised as the head of the Hansa, put forward a plan for a league based on the organisation of the Wendish league. It was to comprise about forty Hansa towns from the various regions and in case of aggression provided for measures of mediation followed, if necessary, by military action. The size of the military contingent and of the financial subsidy to be contributed by each town were laid down. This plan appears to have been approved in principle, but subsequently no trace of its activities can be found. However the *tohopesate* was renewed in 1430 and again in 1443, restricted this time to the towns of the Lübeck third, and on several later occasions.

In the attempts to bring all the Hansa towns into a closer union with precise obligations, the *tohopesaten* were only moderately successful, since they aroused the mistrust that the towns always showed towards commitments of a political or military nature. They were much less effective than the regional leagues, in which the feeling of solidarity was strengthened by the threat of oppression from an overlord common to all the members. It was also always recognised that these leagues were clearly distinct from the Hansa proper. The hope, cherished for a time by Lübeck, of turning the Hansa into a true league was disappointed,

and it was never anything more than a community devoted to exclusively commercial ends.

Yet in spite of its structural weaknesses the Hansa was not without the means to make its own members, as well as foreign states, adhere to its decisions. In dealing with a single town, persuasion, mediation and finally sanctions were used. If a town was recalcitrant, submission was often achieved by means of letters, verbal messages, exhortations and threats. Disputes arising between two Hansa towns were more serious, and it was important to achieve a settlement without allowing any outside intervention. The *Hansetag* of 1381 gave precise instructions on this subject. Neighbouring towns were encouraged to meet to attempt a reconciliation between the opposing parties, but any participation by a territorial ruler in this mediation was to be avoided. If they were unsuccessful, the matter was to be brought before the Hanseatic diet, which gave a final decision, appeal to any prince or to the emperor being forbidden. Naturally the efficacy of this procedure varied a good deal. Usually, after much close bargaining and a hard-won compromise, the differences were settled. Occasionally, however, a prince, jealous of his authority, would forbid towns owing him allegiance to take their disputes before the Hanseatic diet, as did the Grand Master in 1426 in the case of a dispute among the Prussian towns. And occasionally the *Hansetag*, faced with a refusal to acquiesce in its judgement, would have to have recourse to sanctions. In minor cases, such as negligence in carrying out Hanseatic obligations, the offenders were fined. In serious cases, especially when a duly constituted council was overthrown by violence, the diet decreed the exclusion of the rebel town, thus depriving its merchants of the benefits of the privileges abroad and of all commercial relations with other towns. We have seen that Brunswick (1375), Bremen (1427) and Cologne (1471) submitted to such an exclusion, which was, however, temporary. Enforcing the obedience of a recalcitrant town by military action was never contemplated.

Exclusion could, of course, also be used against individuals guilty of having transgressed the 'law of the common merchant'. Sentence was pronounced either by the town of which the merchant was a burgess, or by the *Kontor* where the offence had been committed. It involved his banishment from all Hansa towns and the confiscation of his goods, a certain proportion however being left for the heirs. In times of war this penalty was inflicted on all those smuggling goods into the blockaded country. An exclusion which attracted much attention was that of

Christian Kelmer, a great merchant from Dortmund and former alderman of the London Steelyard, which took place in 1385. Having imported furs into England and paid the customs duty demanded, he had re-exported the unsold furs and paid customs duty again, not bothering about the customs exemption enjoyed by the Hanseatics in England and so running the risk of calling this exemption in question.* Since he was highly regarded at court, Kelmer had no difficulty in obtaining English nationality and he took frequent advantage of it to make trouble for his former compatriots: proof that exclusion, even of one individual, could be a two-edged weapon.

In dealing with a foreign power, the Hansa had in essence three weapons at her command with which to press her claims: negotiation, suspension of trade and war.

When a dispute arose, usually as a result of attacks upon merchants or some violation of the Hanseatic privileges, an attempt was first of all made to reach a friendly settlement. Negotiations with the foreign town or prince were conducted by the heads of the *Kontore*. If these led to nothing, the diet sent an embassy, formed, at least on important occasions, of delegates from various towns, which shared the cost among themselves. In actual fact it was often Lübeck which took on the burden and expense of providing these embassies.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the delegates were always members of a town council, and usually merchants. In the fifteenth century it became more and more common to employ jurists, university graduates well-versed in Roman law. Officials, notably the syndics of the towns, were also entrusted with diplomatic missions. However the councillors retained their prestige, and their participation was essential to any important embassy. For example in 1476 the Bruges *Kontor* wrote to Lübeck about a proposed embassy to Louis XI of France, saying that the king would consider himself insulted if the leader of the delegation were a mere secretary without a doctor's degree.

Hanseatic diplomats had a reputation for skill and tenacity in negotiation. One of the English negotiators of the Peace of Utrecht said that he would prefer to treat with any prince in the world rather than a Hanseatic councillor. As was only natural, certain members of the council made a speciality of diplomatic work and were constantly on the move. One of these was the Lübeck councillor Johann Doway, who undertook several missions in Flanders, Denmark, Gotland and Livonia.

* Document No. 23.

These missions were not without their dangers. Apart from the perils of travel by sea, the ambassadors risked imprisonment and even assassination. In treaties signed with the rulers of Novgorod and Smolensk in the thirteenth century, the murder of an ambassador was listed as entailing liability for a double indemnity.

When negotiations were unsuccessful, and if the stake was worth it, the Hansa decreed a suspension of trade with the offending country. For a long time this economic weapon was the most effective in its armoury, and was employed in the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries against various countries, and at times simultaneously against several. These included Poland, Novgorod, Norway, England, Scotland, Flanders, France, Castile and even Venice (in this case, it is true, on the orders of the Emperor Sigismund). An embargo was obviously damaging to the Hanseatics themselves, but its effects were usually felt even more severely by the country concerned, which suffered not only a decline in its trade but the loss of essential foodstuffs, grain in the west and in Norway, salt and herring in the east. An embargo, therefore, though its effects were not immediately apparent, soon led to negotiations which ended, after two or more years, by restoring peace.

In Flanders the Hansa used a more flexible form of embargo, transferring the *Kontor* from Bruges to another town in the Low Countries. This avoided the disadvantage of a complete cessation of the Hanseatics' trade in an area vitally important to them, and Bruges, alarmed at the prospect of being supplanted by a rival, soon showed itself more accommodating. As a result the earliest transfers of the *Kontor*, the first in 1280, the second in 1307, from Bruges to Aardenburg, carried out with the approval of the count of Flanders, were a complete success. Two subsequent moves, in 1358 and 1388, to Dordrecht, aimed at Bruges and at the count of Flanders simultaneously, were still effective. But the extension of Burgundian rule over the greater part of the Low Countries rendered the system ineffective, as it involved the transfer of the *Kontor* to a port too remote from Flanders. The last transfer, to Deventer and Utrecht in 1451, was a partial failure.

It was difficult to enforce the strict application of an embargo. The Hansa tried to achieve it by rigorous and minutely detailed regulations. Merchants were required to swear an oath promising not to frequent the forbidden zone and certificates had to be produced attesting the origin of all goods transported. Offenders were punished by banishment and by confiscation of their goods. Smuggling could never be entirely eliminated

but up to at least the fifteenth century it did not prevent an embargo being successful.

For the Hanseatics themselves, however, embargoes entailed serious and cumulative disadvantages. Not only did they hinder Hanseatic trade in one area, but their repercussions weakened it elsewhere. Also they put a heavy strain on Hanseatic solidarity. The various groups of towns never had identical interests, and in applying a blockade they showed varying degrees of enthusiasm. Because of this there was almost constant bad feeling between the Wendish and Prussian towns during the fourteenth century. For the Hansa's competitors, the Hollanders and south Germans, an embargo provided an excellent opportunity to take their rivals' place. In these circumstances the economic weapon, highly effective in the period of Hanseatic expansion, quickly became blunted when the period of decline set in.

The ultimate sanction was war. Again and again the Hansa had to resort to war, either to safeguard her independence or to protect her merchants. Although the community had no financial resources of its own, no fleets, no soldiers other than those of the towns and of the Teutonic Order, it nevertheless managed to cope with the situation. The financial difficulties were surmounted by levying duties on goods (*Pfundzoll*) and using the funds so obtained to equip warships and maintain the contingents put in the field by the towns. The military resources of the Hansa always remained modest, and she was obliged to seek allies not only among the German princes but also among foreign states. In fact Hanseatic military action was essentially a war of piracy – large-scale naval operations were rare. Except in Denmark and Norway the Hanseatics did not risk incursions into enemy territory.

The principal adversary of the Hansa was Denmark, whose designs upon north Germany, periodically revived, constituted a threat to the very existence of the community, while its control of the Sound made it capable of striking heavy blows at Hanseatic trade. War with Denmark is a constantly recurring feature of the history of the Hansa. Mostly it was waged for political reasons, usually involving the other Scandinavian states; but there were also many conflicts – with England, Holland, France, Castile, not to mention the pirates – which arose from commercial matters. On the other hand there were no land wars which can properly be called Hanseatic, not even those waged by the Teutonic Order against the Russians, to which the Hansa sometimes contributed a financial subsidy. Disputes with ruling princes never gave rise to concerted action

by the community. The most serious effort in that direction was the dispatch of contingents to the siege of Neuss by various towns in 1475, to reinforce the imperial army in its struggle against Charles the Bold of Burgundy.

It is not surprising that in spite of the number of wars in which it became involved the Hansa, being a society of merchants and having as its objective the prosperity of their trade, should always have been very reluctant to have recourse to arms. War implied great financial sacrifices, interruption of trade, loss of ships and goods; it entailed dangerous concessions to allies always greedy for their own advantage; it brought back the scourge of piracy. Finally, even more than an embargo, it accentuated the lack of unity within the community, as a great number of towns tried to evade the burden of heavy military commitments. In fact most of the Danish wars were waged by the Wendish towns alone. The only wars that one might truly call Hanseatic were those fought against Valdemar IV from 1361 to 1370 and against England from 1470 to 1474. The most clear-sighted of the Hansa's leaders, especially in Lübeck, were fully aware that war endangered the very existence of the community, and they had recourse to it only in the last extremity.

5. THE HANSA, THE EMPEROR AND THE PRINCES

The Hansa towns, with the exception of Visby, Cracow and the Swedish towns, were all situated within the territory of either the Holy Roman Empire or the Teutonic Order. Even as late as the fourteenth century the Hanseatics called themselves 'the common merchants of the Roman Empire of Germany'. But in reality the Hansa and the Empire were two quite distinct political entities which made only a few tentative and short-lived attempts to act in concert.

In the early days, it is true, Lothair III, and especially Henry the Lion, who was as much the emperor's deputy in north Germany as a territorial prince, gave decisive encouragement to German commercial expansion in the Baltic. The privileges conferred on Lübeck by Frederick I and Frederick II can also be regarded as evidence of a positive policy in this direction. But after the decline of imperial power in north Germany in the mid-thirteenth century, the emperors concentrated all their efforts on restoring their power in south Germany. The Hansa developed independently of them, and indeed by assuming responsibility for the protection of German commerce in northern Europe, took their place.

When the emperor did intervene in the north, it was as lord of the imperial cities rather than as emperor. But there were very few imperial cities in the area. Apart from Lübeck there were only Dortmund and Goslar and, in an already marginal zone, Nordhausen and Mühlhausen in Thuringia.

In the Middle Ages only one emperor, Charles IV of Luxembourg, showed any real interest in the Hansa. At the beginning of his reign he had seemed hostile rather than friendly. He refused to support the Hansa against the Danes, and the clause in the Golden Bull which forbade the formation of urban leagues gave cause for anxiety. But his attitude changed after the Hanseatic victory over Denmark. In 1375 he went in person to Lübeck and stayed there for ten days, presiding over a session of the town council and addressing the councillors as 'my lords'. He appears to have envisaged a strengthening of the bonds between the Hansa and the Empire. His acquisition of Lusatia and the march of Brandenburg seemed to presage a more active policy in north Germany, manifesting itself on the economic front in a closer relationship between Bohemia, the North Sea and the Baltic by way of the Elbe. Lübeck seems not to have welcomed these projects, which were in any case abandoned on the death of Charles IV three years later. None of his successors implemented his plans, and Lübeck had to wait five hundred years for the honour of a second imperial visit, in the person of William I.

In the fifteenth century the Emperor Sigismund also intervened in Hanseatic affairs, but only as mediator in the conflict between Lübeck and the Hansa which broke out after the setting up of a town council hostile to the patriciate. Peace was restored but no further collaboration took place. Sigismund later appealed to the Hansa for help against the Hussites, but he himself never thought of supporting the Hansa in any way. Finally in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Habsburgs tried to make the Hansa a partner in their European policy, in collaboration with Spain. But the Hanseatics were reluctant to participate, especially as by this time the political situation had been embittered by religious differences. It is therefore probably true to say that throughout the centuries the Empire and the Hansa never managed to co-operate.

But as nearly all the Hansa towns were situated within the territory of some lay or ecclesiastical prince and were subject in some degree to his authority, one of the major problems which the Hansa had to solve was that of the relationship between town and prince. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the principalities were still too weak to prevent

the emancipation of the towns or to oppose effectively the formation of urban leagues. The great strength of the towns lay in their wealth, which enabled them to make loans to the princes, who were always short of money, and to obtain in exchange the attributes of sovereignty, among them the right to levy tolls and market dues, to fortify the town and to exercise criminal jurisdiction. The homage rendered to the prince was usually balanced by the confirmation of privileges, and there was a strict protocol governing his right of entry into a town. Only in the lands of the Teutonic Order was the situation different. Up to the battle of Tannenberg (1410) the Prussian towns were kept in fairly close subjection by the Grand Master and could only carry out the decisions of the Hansa with his approval.

But after the mid-fourteenth century the progressive strengthening of the German principalities modified this equilibrium. The princes did all they could to reassert their authority over the by now almost independent towns and to impose on them an economic policy which favoured the interests of their own territory and thus called in question the towns' relationship with the Hansa. This gave rise to many confused conflicts, connected sometimes with similar disputes in the Low Countries and south Germany. In 1388 the archbishop of Cologne, encouraged by the overwhelming defeat of the Swabian Town League, attacked Dortmund, but without gaining any decisive success. Similarly in 1396 the duke of Brunswick, supported by the duke of Mecklenburg, made an abortive attempt to take by force the town of Lüneburg, which was aided by Lübeck, Hamburg and several Saxon towns. Aware of their peril, the Hansa towns tried to organise their defences against the ambitions of the princes. But as we have already seen, the attempt to strengthen the Hansa with a *tohopesate*, a military and political league, had very little practical result. More effective were the regional leagues, especially those of the Wendish and Saxon towns. Within this framework the principle that military or financial aid must be given to any town attacked by a prince, and that princes should be excluded from the settlement of any dispute between towns, was often applied.

Happily for the towns, solidarity between the princes was no stronger than that between the towns. In 1443 consultations took place between the king of Denmark, the dukes of Mecklenburg and Brunswick, and the margrave of Brandenburg, with a view to finding some means of subduing the towns, but no common action resulted. The struggle became particularly fierce towards the middle of the fifteenth century, when the

princes achieved some measure of success. The most marked was that of the margrave of Brandenburg, who forced the cities within his electorate, notably Berlin and Frankfurt-on-the-Oder, to withdraw from the Hansa. In the west the duke of Guelders seized Arnhem in 1466. However the towns usually emerged victorious from these attacks, in spite of their marked military inferiority. From 1440 onwards the Prussian towns allied themselves with the nobility against the abuse of power by the Teutonic Order and forced the Grand Master Paul von Rüssdorf to abdicate. This humiliation inflicted on a powerful prince had widespread repercussions. Stettin, with the aid of the Wendish towns, repulsed the attack of the margrave of Brandenburg. In the west the archbishop of Cologne, despite great efforts, failed to seize Soest (1444-7). Above all the defeat under the walls of Neuss of Charles the Bold, the ally of the great German lords, was taken as symbolising a defeat for the princes and a victory for the towns.

Nevertheless there can be no doubt that these fifteenth-century struggles against the princes were in the long run very damaging to the Hansa towns. Certain of them, for example Dortmund and Brunswick, took a long time to recover from their ruinous effects. Nearly all were weakened by the considerable expenses involved in strengthening their walls and paying their mercenaries. Their influence declined sharply while that of the princes increased. The latter developed not only their military power but also their economic ascendancy, taking the grain trade into their own hands and controlling the agricultural markets. It is obvious that one of the essential factors in the decline of the Hansa in the fifteenth century was the exhausting struggle carried on by the towns against the princes.

CHAPTER TEN

Hanseatic Trade

I. THE SOURCES

THE study of Hanseatic trade in the Middle Ages must be preceded by an evaluation of its documentation. It goes without saying that such documentation is most unsatisfactory. The extant texts make it easy to ascertain the chief commodities, their place of origin and destination, and what types of business were carried on in various fields. But for a reasonably accurate picture quantitative data are essential, even if the figures are unreliable – as they always are. During the last fifty years Hanseatic and other historians have made a detailed study of the quantitative aspects of Hanseatic trade, both relative and absolute. Substantial though still limited results have been achieved.

From the documentary point of view, the history of Hanseatic trade can be divided into three periods.

1. Up to about 1275 there are hardly any figures at all, even for individual items. Chronicles, charters, regulations, even customs rolls such as that of Bruges for 1252, give no precise details.

2. From the end of the thirteenth century to the middle of the fourteenth century a certain amount of data begins to be available in the debtors' registers set up in various towns, notably Hamburg, Lübeck and Riga. But they only provide information about the details of certain transactions by a particular merchant, as do the earliest account-books of Lübeck merchants, dating back from the end of the thirteenth century, like those of an unknown trader around 1280, and of Hermann Warendorp and Hermann Wittenborg in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, or the first inventories of lost ships. A few figures of more general significance do, however, exist, for one country – England. From the Customs Accounts and the export licences for wool sacks instituted by Henry III we know the number of merchants, whether English, German or of any other nationality, who were engaged in the wool trade in 1273 and 1277, and also the number of sacks exported in those years. These figures concern a branch of trade which was of only secondary

importance to the Hansa, wool being exported almost exclusively to the Low Countries. But a later Customs Account gives a list of merchants and merchandise leaving the port of Boston during the summer of 1303, while another gives similar information for arrivals at the port of London during 1308–9. There is also a fair amount of other data enabling an estimate to be made of the volume of Westphalian trade in England in the second quarter of the fourteenth century.

But all this amounts to very little. It is important to note that the enormous increase in Hanseatic trade at this time, and its ascendancy in the northern seas, is not reflected in any of the figures available.

3. From about 1350 onwards the documentation becomes fuller. There is a good deal of detailed information, either of the same kind as for the previous period but more plentiful and more precise, or of a new kind, such as merchants' correspondence. But one essential source, of outstanding importance, is represented by the customs accounts (*Pfundzollbücher*). Poundage (*Pfundzoll*) was levied in times of war when ships and cargoes left or entered Hanseatic ports. It was levied on about ten occasions between 1361 and 1400, and frequently during the following century. The most complete list, and the one which has been most closely studied, is that for Lübeck in the year 1368. Of great value also are the lists for Hamburg in 1369, 1399 and 1400, for Danzig in 1474–6 and 1490–2, and for Lübeck in 1492–6. The last, unfortunately, are not easy to use in the form in which they have been published by Bruns.

These fiscal documents are of great interest because they give, in principle, the sum total of ships and merchandise leaving or entering a particular port in a particular year. No doubt they contain many errors and omissions. They are certainly no more accurate than the customs accounts of the Sound from the end of the sixteenth century onwards, whose unreliability has recently been established. It is nonetheless true that in comparison with the vagueness of the information available for the preceding period, they provide a considerably clearer picture.

Valuable as they are, the *Pfundzollbücher* have the disadvantage of being concerned only with exceptional years, years of war, because of course it was war that led to the levying of the tax recorded in them. Thus the figures for trade with the belligerent countries are deceptive. This explains the insignificance of Lübeck's trade with Norway in 1368, and also the small number of furs imported from Russia in that year. In addition it must be remembered that in the Middle Ages, as a result of different contingencies, it was not unusual for trade to be doubled or

halved from one year to another. To obtain a clear picture identical sets of figures for consecutive years would be needed, which the *Pfundzollbücher* do not provide.

Only two series of continuous figures have been preserved. The first is provided by the English Customs Account and deals with the export of English cloth by Hanseatic merchants* (and others) during the years from 1399 to 1482 with hardly any gaps. This provides us with exceptionally precise information. The second set of figures has been taken from the accounts of the Teutonic Order and covers the transactions of the great treasury of Königsberg with Flanders from 1390 to 1404.† Unfortunately the corresponding figures for the other commercial office of the Order, the great treasury of Marienburg, are missing. A third though fragmentary series is provided by the *Pfahlgeld* or anchorage dues levied in Danzig. These give some information about trade in the port of Danzig for ten of the years between 1460 and 1496. Lastly from the customs accounts of the Sound there survives for the fifteenth century only the list of ships which passed through the straits in 1497.

It is evident therefore that the documentation of Hanseatic trade for the period 1350 to 1500 is extremely fragmentary and disparate. Consequently it is difficult to trace the development of trade, except in the case of English cloth, or to determine the relative importance of the principal commodities. It is particularly regrettable that in the present state of research on the *Pfundzollbücher* there are virtually no trade statistics available for the whole of the first half of the fifteenth century in any Hanseatic port. More serious still is the lack of any quantitative data for either the whole or a part of the trade by land, which was perhaps just as important as trade by sea. The most useful information surviving on this subject is provided by the memorandum book in which the merchant Paul Mulich listed the goods he bought at the Frankfurt Lent Fair in 1496 for dispatch to Lübeck.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Hanseatic trade can be defined as essentially the trade carried on by German merchants from the towns of north Germany, transporting the products of the east towards the west and vice versa. It was this trade between eastern and north-western Europe which gave rise to the Hansa

* Document No. 47.

† Document No. 45.

and kept it in being. Hanseatic trade was thus from very early days organised on the axis Novgorod–Reval–Lübeck–Hamburg–Bruges–London, though a detour round Denmark through the Sound became increasingly common.

This main stream of trade, based principally on the exchange of furs and wax for cloth, and later salt, was fed by tributary streams from neighbouring countries: in the north from Sweden (copper and iron), Skania, Norway and later Iceland (fish) and Scotland (cloth); in the south from Prussia and Poland (grain and timber), Hungary (minerals) and southern Germany (wine) and from the shores of France and Portugal (salt). It was also augmented, though less than used to be thought, by products made or harvested in the Hanseatic zone itself (beer, linen, salt, grain). The prosperity of the Novgorod–London axis can be said to reflect the prosperity of the Hansa itself. When it was weakened by Dutch rivalry and by the development of a new east–west trade route via Breslau–Leipzig–Frankfurt, it presaged the community's decline.

In addition to this specifically Hanseatic trade axis, there was an older one of great importance: the Rhineland route linking Italy and Frankfurt with the Low Countries and England. The Hansa had a share in this trade route, principally through Cologne. But this was always a minor route for the Hanseatics, along which they had no monopoly, except in the export of wine to the north-west.

Although it formed a comparatively small proportion of their trade, the Hanseatics sometimes participated in the direct exchange of goods between two foreign countries without sending them through Hanseatic ports. Their share in the shipment of English wool to the Low Countries was considerable, and they also maintained regular contact between Norway and England, which resulted in the Boston factory becoming dependent on the Bergen *Kontor*. In the west Hanseatic ships annually brought wine to England from Poitou and Gascony during the fifteenth and early sixteenth century, while Cologne merchants traded between Frankfurt, Lyon, Milan, Genoa and Catalonia, though the last-named hardly counts as a centre of Hanseatic trade.

The establishment of regular trade routes appears to have been determined more by the desire to buy than to sell. The merchants set off mainly to fetch something their customers wanted rather than to sell the goods they had taken with them. It was the quest for furs that took the Germans to Novgorod, for fish to Skania and Bergen, for cloth to Flanders, for salt to Bourgneuf and Lisbon. The reverse is only known to

apply to the Cologne merchants in their trade with England: their chief concern was to sell their wine. But this was before the formation of the Hansa.

Hanseatic trade, more than that of any other nation, is characterised by the existence of relatively well-defined trade routes. As a rule the same ships, singly or in convoy, travelled regularly to and from the same foreign ports. Most merchants – with a few exceptions among the most prosperous – preferred to confine their business activities to one and the same region. This tendency towards specialisation is reflected in the multiplicity of the typically Hanseatic *Fahrer* associations, which grouped together all the merchants of a town trading with a particular foreign country.

In the cycle of exchange it appears that, broadly speaking, the east provided raw materials, bulky and relatively low in value, while the west sent back finished articles and luxury goods in return. This accounts for an important characteristic of Hanseatic trade, the lack of balance in exchange, the merchandise moving from east to west being much bulkier and, apparently, more valuable than that going in the opposite direction. Ships which had sailed westward with full holds often returned only partly laden or wholly empty, thus setting problems in the use of freight space which the Hanseatics never managed to solve satisfactorily. The increased need for French salt brought only a partial solution to a situation which resulted from the geography and economy of the northern countries. The imbalance can be detected as early as the thirteenth century. It becomes obvious in the traffic passing through Lübeck in 1368, when a third of the ships returned to Danzig in ballast, and through the port of Hamburg, where exports were much larger than imports. Finally in the sixteenth century it can be seen most clearly in the customs accounts of the Sound.

To obtain an accurate picture of Hanseatic trade as a whole, one would need to have an approximate idea of the relative importance of the traffic through the main ports. But there are insufficient reliable figures to provide the basis of such a comparison. According to the *Pfundzollbücher* trade in the port of Lübeck from March 1368 to March 1369 amounted to 546,000 Lübeck marks, of which 339,000 marks were imports and 207,000 exports. Similar figures for Hamburg in 1369 are 235,000 marks (47,000 and 188,000); for Reval about 300,000 marks in 1379 and 1382 (years of prosperity) but not more than half this figure in other less prosperous years such as 1378, 1383 and 1384. More significant is the comparison of the yield of the *Pfundzoll* in different ports in the same

year. Walther Vogel has attempted such a comparison for the period from 22 February 1368 to 29 September 1369. If Lübeck's share is reckoned as 100, that of the other Wendish ports on the Baltic amounts to 93 (51 for Stralsund, 26 for Wismar, 16 for Rostock). That of the Prussian towns, taken together, amounts to 152, which suggests that Danzig's trade was equal in importance to that of Lübeck. That of the Livonian towns was a mere 41 (19 for Riga and 16 for Reval). In the North Sea, Hamburg's share was 72 and Bremen's 10. There is no need to point out that similar figures for other periods would have to be established before the Hanseatic ports could be classified in order of importance.

It would be useful if the development of trade in any one port could be traced over a fairly long period, but there again the lack of statistics makes such a task impossible. According to F. Bruns the seaborne trade of Lübeck in the Baltic alone amounted in 1492 to 660,000 Lübeck marks, of which 218,000 represented imports and 442,000 exports, while in 1368 – when imports and exports through Hamburg were particularly high – the amount was only 153,000 (57,000 and 96,000). This comparison does no more than allow us to note that, even allowing for monetary devaluation, there was a marked increase in trade during the fifteenth century – not a very original conclusion.

These two figures for Lübeck for the years 1368 and 1492 raise the general question of how Hanseatic trade developed during this period. Was the increase more or less regular except during wars and blockades, or were there periods of depression? The fifteenth century is generally considered a period of economic recession all over Europe, marked principally by a steep fall in agricultural prices. This, of course, also affected Hanseatic commerce. According to the accounts of the Teutonic Order the price of rye (in silver currency) declined steadily throughout the century by more than 50 per cent. This does not necessarily mean that the grain trade was cut by the same amount, especially as in the Low Countries the price of corn rose slightly in the same period.

The only continuous series of figures which might be helpful is that for Hanseatic exports of English cloth. Unfortunately it cannot be regarded as typical of the general line of development, as there was an exceptional boom in English, as well as Dutch, cloth in the fifteenth century to the detriment of Flemish cloth, and it is not known how much of the latter was exported in the Hanseatic zone. The number of lengths of English cloth exported by the Hanseatics increased from about 6,000 at the beginning of the fifteenth century to 9,000 during the 1460s and

reached more than 15,000 by about 1480. The only periods when there was a marked falling off coincided with the wars against Denmark (around 1430) and England (1469–74). However there was one somewhat smaller decrease – of a thousand lengths – in the 1410s, which was unrelated to war. This is confirmed by the correspondence of the Veckinchusens, which gives the impression of a marked stagnation of business during the period, of a saturation of the market which made it difficult to find buyers for the most diverse commodities, such as fish, furs, amber and spices, not only in the Hanseatic zone but as far away as Venice also. The inference is that business was extremely slack from 1408 to 1418. But the crisis does not seem to have continued after 1420. Consequently, with no indications to the contrary, it is probable that with this single exception Hanseatic trade increased more or less regularly throughout the fifteenth century, though with the fluctuations inherent in all medieval trade.

These fluctuations in Hanseatic trade bring up the question of price development. A fairly precise answer can be given only for Prussia, about which the accounts of the Teutonic Order give a good deal of information, especially for the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century.

It is evident from these accounts that prices dropped considerably during the last third of the fourteenth century and that the drop was particularly sharp during the 1390s and persisted until about 1405. The fall is most marked in the case of Brabantine cloth of medium or inferior quality. Between 1379 and 1400 the Prussian retail prices of various kinds of cloth show a drop of a third. For example Oudenarde cloth dropped from 9 marks to 6, Geraardsbergen (Grammont) cloth from 8½ or more to 5½, Dendermonde cloth from 9¾ to 6½. For many other varieties the fall was 25 per cent. A similar fall is evident in the prices of other articles of many different kinds, both imported and home-produced: cod, salt, spices, southern fruits, rye and timber. The sharpest drop was in the price of amber (80 per cent for the commonest type). This fall in prices can be explained in various ways. In the case of cloth, for instance, because of the English and Dutch competition; freight charges went down because of the increase in the number of Dutch ships in the Baltic; finally the general rise in the volume of trade, with supply outstripping demand, produced an excess of certain luxury goods such as amber.

During the early years of the fifteenth century the fall in prices was checked and even halted in the case of metals, salt, wax and timber. Soon, however, prices rose again, particularly after 1410. This rise was particularly marked in the case of rye, which in 1417 cost five times as

much as in 1410, but it was also considerable in the case of timber and even cloth. In Prussia it was due largely to insecurity resulting from the defeat at Tannenberg, but it extended throughout the Hanseatic orbit and probably explains the slump which is vividly depicted in the Veckinchusen letters and which affected the most diverse wares: furs, wax, fish and spices. Customers refused to buy at the higher prices and business stagnated for several years.

From 1418 onwards it seems that prices fell again, but this cannot be traced so clearly as in the previous period. The price of wax, it is true, rose from 32 Prussian marks per *schiffpfund* to 45 between 1420 and 1460, but this increase in nominal value did not compensate for the monetary devaluation. The price of rye (in silver currency) shows in Prussia a decline of more than 50 per cent between 1405 and 1508, and a similar fall is found in Lübeck and Göttingen. This was certainly one of the causes of the increase in grain exports to the west, particularly to Flanders, where no corresponding fall in prices can be observed. On the whole it seems that the increase in the volume of Hanseatic trade between the middle of the fourteenth and the end of the fifteenth century should be related to the fall in prices.

Lastly it would be helpful if the profits made by the merchants could be assessed. There is a good deal of information on this subject in the balance sheets of trading companies and in the accounts of the Teutonic Order, but the gains vary so much and for such very different reasons that no valid conclusion can be drawn. For example in 1400 the sale of three separate consignments of herring brought the Order profits of 20, 33 and 60 per cent respectively! From a series of transactions carried out in the same year it can only be inferred that profits generally ranged somewhere between 15 and 25 per cent and that the most profitable sales were usually of salt, herring and Ypres cloth. But for other commodities an entirely different state of affairs might be revealed.

In any survey of Hanseatic trade the principal commodities transported must be enumerated. The available statistics are not sufficient to enable us to range them in order of importance, and in any case the order would vary in different periods. But among the innumerable articles which we know of, there are eight that may be called fundamental and typically Hanseatic: cloth, furs, wax, salt, dried or salted fish, grain, timber and beer.

During the last three hundred years of the Middle Ages the cloth trade occupied first place, in terms of value, in the transactions of Hanseatic

merchants. It was by far the most important commodity imported into the German towns and into the eastern countries too. In Lübeck in 1368 cloth represents more than a third of all imports and more than a quarter of the total trade. The enormous demand, the wide range in quality and price, the more or less certain profit, varying from 15 to over 30 per cent, explain its importance. In the thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century the Hanseatics dealt almost entirely in Flemish cloth, and they remained faithful to Flemish fabrics longer than any other foreigners. However in the fifteenth century the English and Dutch cloths, despite the regulations designed to exclude them, increasingly gained ground, though it is not possible to estimate their proportion of the total. Cloth from other sources – France, the Rhineland, the Hansa towns themselves – never played anything more than a modest role. The rising importance of Polish textiles from Silesia must not be overlooked. Their competition became so alarming that by the end of the fourteenth century the Novgorod *Kontor* forbade their sale. At the same time luxury Italian cloths, transported mainly through Frankfurt, were increasingly in demand in the north.

Trade in furs and wax, both eastern products, formed a kind of counterbalance to trade in cloth, a product of the west. The demand for furs in western and Mediterranean countries was considerable, and the multiplicity of varieties and prices made it possible for the merchants to adapt their trade to the most diverse needs. Furs were imported mainly from Russia, especially from Novgorod, but also from Livonia, Lithuania, Poland, Prussia and Sweden. Lambskins, on the other hand, travelled in the opposite direction, from England and Scotland to the Baltic. The fur trade was thought to be the foundation of Hanseatic wealth, though its importance is not always borne out in the figures as clearly as might be expected. At Lübeck in 1368 it takes only fifth place, after Swedish butter, though this may be a result of exceptional circumstances. On the other hand fur occupies an unrivalled place in the affairs of certain great merchants, such as the Veckinchusens, and there is mention of ships transporting more than 200,000 pelts valued at tens of thousands of marks.

The fur trade was always considered extremely profitable, as it still is, but careful research has recently shown that it was not always so. The Veckinchusens in particular met many disappointments in their business, in both Venice and Bruges. They often had to keep consignments in stock for a considerable time, or were obliged to sell at a loss or for a

very small profit. In 1411 in Frankfurt a consignment valued at a thousand marks was disposed of at a profit of only 1.5 per cent. This transaction took place in the period of economic recession and therefore does not provide a basis for generalisation; the fact that the two brothers continued to deal in furs on a large scale perhaps indicates that normally they could expect more substantial profits.

Wax was produced in very much the same countries, Russia, Livonia and Prussia. Trade in wax was less speculative than that in furs, since its use as a source of lighting throughout the west assured a steady sale at a moderate profit, averaging from 10 to 15 per cent. There are no figures which would allow the volume of trade to be reckoned precisely except at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when imports into England rose to several thousand hundredweights,* but as early as the thirteenth century the Hanseatics had established a monopoly in the import of wax from the east, which they retained longer than their monopoly of furs.

If wax, furs and cloth played an essential part in the early development of the Hansa in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of salt in the commercial expansion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The demand for salt was substantial. According to extant accounts from Upper Saxony the average consumption per person in the mid-fifteenth century was about 15 kilogrammes a year. When food was salted down, a barrel of salt was required for four or five barrels of herring or for ten barrels of butter. This precious commodity was almost completely lacking in the east. The low salt content of the Baltic prevented the exploitation of sea-water. As for rock-salt, in the whole of eastern Germany, apart from the mines at Lüneburg, only the modest salt-pits at Kolberg were of any value. Being both bulky and cheap, salt had to be transported by water if it was to travel any distance. It was therefore an ideal commodity for maritime trade, and as the movement of the salt trade was always eastward, salt formed the principal return freight for ships bringing to the west such bulky products as grain, timber and ash.

Up to the mid-fourteenth century the east was supplied almost exclusively by Lübeck with Lüneburg salt – one of the foundations of its wealth. In 1368 it was by far the most important article exported from the town. Soon, however, French salt, less pure but also less expensive, was arriving in the Baltic in larger quantities and by the end of the

* Document No. 48.

fourteenth century 'Bay salt' was commoner than salt from the Trave. French salt was at first bought in Flanders, but the Hanseatics soon began to fetch it themselves from Bourgneuf and Brouage. In the fifteenth century they also began to make regular journeys to Lisbon to bring back Portuguese salt from Setúbal. Salt from other sources – Scotland, Frisia, Kolberg, Halle and Galicia – played only an insignificant role in Hanseatic trade. There are no overall figures for the Hanseatic salt trade, but in some years during the fifteenth century more than 100 ships – some of them Dutch – carried cargoes of salt through the Sound. In Reval 1,350 lasts of Bay salt were imported in 1383, and nearly double that amount each year in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Demand was continually increasing, probably because the Russians and Lithuanians were selling salt further and further afield. Taking advantage of the urgency of their requirements, the Teutonic Order occasionally placed an embargo on shipments in order to put pressure on the Russian government. The vital importance of salt in the east had moreover a further effect: it made it much easier for the Hollanders to increase their trade with the Baltic countries and Prussia.

The fish trade – dried cod from Norway and salt herring from Skania – was rather different from other branches of Hanseatic commerce because of the multiplicity of its outlets. Fish was brought from the north to the Wendish ports on the Baltic and thence redispached to both the east and the west, and also, indeed mainly, into the interior, even as far as south Germany and beyond. Herring was imported in far larger quantities than cod, although the latter apparently had the advantage of keeping better. The import of salt herring into the Wendish ports at the end of the century has been estimated at 150,000 barrels, of which half went to Lübeck. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, long before Amsterdam, Lübeck was built on herring-barrels. However this trade received a severe blow in the fifteenth century, when the North Sea fisheries were developed. Dutch herrings were not so good as the Skanian ones but they were cheaper and almost completely supplanted their rivals in north-west Europe, even penetrating into the Baltic to offer competition there too.

Together with salt, grain – especially rye – was the commodity which the Hanseatics distributed the most widely at the end of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately the lack of reliable figures for the period before 1550 makes it impossible to estimate the increase in the grain trade. Rye, barley and wheat were grown everywhere. By the thirteenth century the

countries of the middle Elbe, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg, were exporting grain to Norway and the Low Countries, but in the fourteenth and especially the fifteenth century it was Prussia and Poland who became and remained the great grain-producing regions, exporting principally via Danzig to the whole of the west, in response to an ever-increasing demand. Though figures are not available, the importance of the export of grain can be clearly seen from the political influence which the Hansa acquired through it. The pressing need for grain and flour had by the end of the thirteenth century reduced Norway to close economic dependence on the Wendish towns. Later on, the decreasing yield of corn in Flanders, and its growing cost, made it possible for the Hansa to obtain substantial advantages on many occasions. Finally in post-medieval days France, Spain and even Italy began to buy Hanseatic grain. The export of cereals was therefore one of the firmest foundations of the community's power, and even caused its temporary revival in the sixteenth century. But even more than was the case with salt, the increased demand for cereals offered the Hollanders the surest means of establishing themselves in the Baltic.

The Hanseatic east was also the west's great source of timber. Various regions specialised in its export, notably the hinterland of the Weser, Pomerania and Norway. But it was the vast forest areas in the basin of the Vistula and in Lithuania which made Danzig the leading exporter of timber, as well as of such highly valued by-products as ash, pitch and resin. The principal customers were England and Flanders, who needed timber for their ships. In the fifteenth century Prussia was exporting oak beams and planks (*Wagenschoss*) in thousands, and boards of varying thickness (*Klappholz*, *Dielen*) in hundreds of thousands. Yew from the Carpathians was widely required in England for the manufacture of bows, and it has been said that the Hundred Years War was won with the aid of Prussian wood. Unlike the export of grain, the trade in timber seems to have slackened off at the end of the fifteenth century, perhaps as a result of competition from Norway. By-products were less affected, as can be seen from the customs accounts of the Sound.

One of the most important exports was beer, the only one produced within the Hanseatic zone and not in a foreign country. In the thirteenth century Bremen was the chief exporter of beer to the Low Countries, but it was later supplanted by Hamburg. According to the *Pfundzoll* of 1369 beer represented a third of Hamburg's total seaborne exports, to the amount of 62,000 marks. It was thus as valuable to Hamburg as the salt

trade was to Lübeck in the same period. In the fourteenth century the Baltic ports, especially Wismar, Rostock and Danzig, became great brewing towns which exported large quantities of beer to Norway, Skania and eastern Europe.

Besides these basic commodities there are a further ten which did not equal the first group in value or bulk, but which were nevertheless important in Hanseatic trade. Wine ranked highest among them, and if figures were available for the total trade in wine, it might even be found to be one of the chief commodities. But although mention is made in some instances of consignments or purchases exceeding 1,000 hectolitres, and wine is found in every Hansa town, in Scandinavia and even as far afield as Moscow, the quantities imported were nearly always fairly modest (800 hectolitres annually in Reval between 1426 and 1436) and wine does not play a great role in the affairs of any one merchant. But it must be remembered that no account-books survive for the great Cologne merchants. In the Hanseatic zone people drank mostly Rhenish wine, which was cheaper than French wine; it was handled by Cologne and Frankfurt. The sales of French wine from Poitou, La Rochelle, Bordeaux and Orléans increased rapidly in the fifteenth century, as did those of Spanish and Portuguese wines (Osey, Rumanie, Algarve) and the sweet Greek or Greek-type wines (Malmsey). Unfortunately there is no way of judging the relative importance of these various vintages. The wines of the north German plain, from Guben (south of Frankfurt-on-the-Oder) and the lower Vistula, were of only minor importance.

Trade in English wool, even more than the trade in wine, was of a marginal character, as most of it went exclusively to Flanders. In Lübeck in 1368 wool came only thirty-second in the list of imports. After being very important in the first half of the fourteenth century (3,000 sacks were exported by the Hanseatics in 1340) it later became insignificant, nor did the Hanseatics participate much in the export of Spanish wool to the Low Countries.

Among metals, iron and copper took first place. Swedish and Hungarian copper, brought to Lübeck from Stockholm and Danzig, was almost entirely re-exported by sea to the Low Countries and England, while copper from the Harz was transported overland to Cologne. Iron, though handled in larger quantities, was dealt with in the same way. It came mainly from Sweden and Hungary, but also from the Rhenish Slate Mountains, the Siegerland, from where it was shipped to western Europe.

The only textile industry of any importance in the Hanseatic zone was the linen-weaving of Westphalia. This gave rise to a considerable volume of trade, especially with the west, as can be seen from the export figures for Hamburg in 1369: linen was in second place, with a value of 30,000 marks. The production of flax seems to have increased remarkably in the fifteenth century in north Germany, Prussia and especially Livonia, where it gradually became the principal article of export.

Spices, principally pepper and ginger, do not seem to have bulked as large in Hanseatic trade as might have been expected, though they probably played an important part in the business of certain great merchants such as the Veckinchusens. Of the imports into Lübeck in 1368 they accounted for only a few hundred marks, and in 1495 they represented only 4 per cent of Paul Mulich's purchases in Frankfurt, although by that time the demand had increased considerably. Trade appears to have been brisker in foodstuffs from the Mediterranean countries – figs, raisins, rice, saffron and especially oil, all of which were dispatched to the east from Bruges and Frankfurt.

All other commodities were of secondary importance, even if at times they occupied a considerable place in the business of certain merchants. They include the products and by-products of stock-farming, oxen, horses, salted meat, butter and fats from Scandinavia and Pomeranian honey; among mineral products, silver, zinc, lead, alum; textile fibres, such as silk and hemp, and fustian; metal goods, wood and leather wares from Nürnberg, Cologne and Brunswick; Prussian amber, and gold or silver luxury articles, pearls, coral, etc.

What emerges clearly from this list is the extreme variety of Hanseatic trade. It would obviously be wrong to say that it consisted only in the exchange of raw materials from the east for expensive goods from the west. The diversity of goods dispatched to the west is evident. They were mainly foodstuffs, but also included raw materials for industry and such luxury products as furs and amber. It is the diversity of its trade which explains the key role played by the Hansa in the European economy.

Such is the Hanseatic trade in outline; but to understand its complexity it is necessary to examine, as far as possible, the conditions, nature and volume of trade in each of the regions.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that the Hansa disappeared in the seventeenth century. The marvel is that it survived so long. It is indeed extraordinary that so many towns, so different and so remote from one another, should for nearly 500 years have been able to engage in so many corporate activities, and remain so loyal to a community of which they were, after all, only voluntary members.

The community's long existence resulted, in the first place, from the geographical situation of the Hansa towns. Lying as they did between north-east and north-west Europe, they were predestined by nature to form a line of communication and a trade route between the two regions. But the Hansa cannot be explained by geography alone, as is evident if one compares its members with the Italian towns which played a comparable role in southern Europe. They too were intermediaries between east and west, but there was never any question of their forming an association. On the contrary they were usually engaged in bitter rivalry, whereas the members of the *dudesche hense* were united by a strong sense of national, and even more of imperial, solidarity. Although the Empire had lost its authority in this area by the mid-thirteenth century, the title 'merchants of the Roman Empire' still conveyed respect, and the dignity of imperial city certainly contributed to the recognition of Lübeck's pre-eminence within the community. In addition this solidarity was reinforced by one circumstance which had no equivalent in the Mediterranean – the urban colonisation of the east, which was the collective achievement of the western towns. A physical link was maintained between new towns and old, their merchants and leading families often being related to one another by marriage as well as doing business together. Colonisation was thus one of the strongest elements binding the community together.

The Hansa came into being to satisfy the desire of the merchants of the north German towns for mutual aid and support in the defence and advancement of their interests abroad. It was always a very fluid organisa-

tion, and although it remained substantially the same from the twelfth to the thirteenth century, it underwent a number of important structural modifications. At first it was an association of German merchants in the Gotland Community as they used the island as the regular meeting place on their business trips. A hundred years later this organisation, which was hardly competent to direct activities which had spread to all shores of the northern seas, disappeared and was never replaced, as far as any formal institution was concerned. Instead groups of merchants trading abroad, linked together by common interests, based themselves on settlements which, as time went on, acquired important privileges, but were not contained within any fixed organisation. It was the towns, who were making contact with each other through regional leagues, which now took the place of the Gotland Community in directing and protecting their merchants abroad.

When in the mid-fourteenth century commercial life was subject to greater risks, those German towns which were interested in foreign trade felt the need for some more binding form of organisation. They therefore joined together and formed the 'Hansa of the towns', whose mouth-piece was the *Hansetag*, the general diet, attended by delegates from all the towns. It met only at irregular intervals, but was nevertheless, from every point of view, the ultimate authority within the community. At the same time the towns asserted their authority of the foreign *Kontore*, which had hitherto been independent, and ruled that only burgesses of the Hansa towns should benefit from their commercial privileges. The Hansa of the towns had taken the place of the Hansa of the merchants. This led directly to attempts to strengthen the community by making it not only an economic but also a military and political organisation. But the different leagues which came into being during the fifteenth century with this end in view remained quite separate from the Hansa, and were in any case not very effective. It was not until the mid-sixteenth century that a final attempt at reorganisation made of the Hansa a league whose members were obliged to pay regular contributions. But it was already so enfeebled that this last attempt at consolidation could not check its decline and final disappearance.

The Hansa was for a long time strong and prosperous, partly because of her own internal strength, but also because Europe had need of her. For centuries the west demanded the products of the east, first furs and wax, then the products of forest and mine, and finally increasing quantities of grain. In return the east needed from the west cloth and particularly

salt. The generous privileges which foreign sovereigns granted to the Hansa were the result of these basic and unremitting demands. In addition the Hansa owed its success, at least in the beginning, to the technical superiority of its chief means of transport, the cog, well-adapted to the carrying of bulky commodities; to the excellence of its business methods, modelled on those of the Italians and Flemings, and to the outstanding ability of its artisans, which helped to consolidate the economic domination of the Hanseatics, especially in the north. All these factors combined to give the Hansa the monopoly of commerce in northern Europe, and although its supremacy was threatened as early as the end of the fourteenth century, it stubbornly defended the position it had obtained, and was able to maintain it more or less intact for another 200 years.

However the community carried within itself the seeds of dissolution, which was finally to stifle the sense of solidarity. It was evident from the beginning that the interests of so many different towns could never be completely harmonised. The Hansa had to make allowances for the divergent interests of its members, and therefore set up a fluid organisation, limited to the protection of commercial interests. One serious cause of dissension resulted from the position of the towns in relation to the land and the sea. Whereas Lübeck and the Wendish towns wanted to trade along the land route Lübeck–Hamburg, the Prussian and Livonian towns preferred to use the sea route through the Sound. This led to constant disagreements between the two groups on the policy to be adopted towards Denmark and even towards England. A further source of discord came to light with the expansion of the Dutch merchant fleet. Lübeck wanted to exclude the Dutch from the Baltic, but the Prussian and Livonian towns found it profitable to have them there. The newcomers not only bought part of their grain production but also augmented their supply of salt.

The history of the Hansa is marked by a series of disagreements and disputes, some of them extremely serious. Historians have sometimes ascribed too much importance to the inter-urban quarrels of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, regarding them as proof of the community's decadence and contrasting them with the harmony which is supposed to have prevailed in earlier times. This is too simple a conclusion and almost entirely false. Even in the most prosperous period there were always grounds for dispute, as is shown by the exclusion of the Bremen merchants in 1285, the secret understanding between Rostock, Wismar and the *Vitalienbrüder*, and the frequent opposition of the

Teutonic Order to the policies of Lübeck. In 1412 Lübeck herself was seriously threatened with exclusion from the community. At first these internal conflicts ended in reconciliation, dictated by the generally recognised need for unity. But eventually they proved more powerful than the sentiment of Hanseatic solidarity.

Apart from the strain of internal conflicts, another main factor of Hanseatic weakness, as has often been stressed, was that the Hansa was never supported by a powerful state. Except in her early days, she received no effective help from the emperors, who were indifferent to events in an area over which they had lost their authority. They looked on the Hansa as nothing more than a possible source of revenue and were often downright hostile to her, notably in their support of the Fuggers. In times of war the Hansa was reduced to seeking alliances with north German princes. But these, anxious to re-establish their authority over the emancipated towns, were in spite of their occasional support not so much allies as dangerous enemies, who contributed to the weakening of the Hansa towns. Meanwhile in the rest of Europe the great monarchies were consolidating their power, and were more anxious to favour the economic activity of their own subjects than to ratify and renew commercial privileges originally granted to foreigners.

Equally fatal to the Hansa was its continual struggle against Denmark. She was exhausted by it, and only survived as long as she did because of the periodic crises which hindered the Danes in the pursuit of their expansionist policy in north Germany. It has been said that the Hansa towns might have benefited by Danish supremacy. This would have increased their trade with Scandinavia, the vexed question of the passage of the Sound would have been decided in their favour, and among the kings of Denmark they might sometimes have found the powerful protector they always lacked. But if the Hansa had come under Danish sovereignty, Lübeck could certainly not have played the great historic role she did.

Apart from the Danes the chief adversaries of the Hanseatics were the Dutch. They were even more formidable, since their economic development threatened the commercial basis of the community. It is no exaggeration to say that after the beginning of the fifteenth century the Dutch were the Hanseatics' nightmare – which found its symbol in the legend of the Flying Dutchman. Here again one may well ask if this confrontation was really necessary, and whether the Dutch – also nominally subjects of the Empire – could not have found a place within

the Hansa to the benefit of the community, which would have been spared an unprofitable conflict. The Cologne Confederation of 1367, to which the Dutch towns adhered, proved that there was no lack of grounds for an understanding. In this matter the Hansa was perhaps the victim of her own conservatism. From the fourteenth century onwards she was willing to accept any town whose merchants could not boast of having previously belonged to the community. This was impossible in the case of the young Dutch towns; and so the Dutch, who could have been the Hanseatics' partners, became their most determined rivals.

The spirit of conservatism, which seems to have been particularly strong in Lübeck, was one of the main causes of Hanseatic weakness in and after the fifteenth century. Attempts were constantly made to maintain or restore those economic conditions which had ensured the greatness of the community in the mid-fourteenth century or even the thirteenth, and to oppose innovations necessitated by changing circumstances. As foreign competition intensified, the only remedy proposed was an even stricter regulation of trade. In striving to limit the business operations of foreigners in her domain, the Hansa hindered the activities of her own merchants, forbidding them to go into partnership with foreigners or to trade on credit. This was bound to increase their inferiority relative to their competitors. It would, however, be unjust to consider these petty regulations as nothing more than the expression of a narrow-minded attitude, imprisoned in the past and incapable of understanding modern requirements. The Hansa could retain her identity as a community only if all her members enjoyed equal rights in their trade abroad. Therefore equality had to be maintained. To allow individuals, whether towns or persons, to decide for themselves what measures to take to meet the demands of the moment, would have been to betray the Hansa itself. In the international situation of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries an association of merchant cities was able to assume control of the commerce of northern Europe. But in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when increasing competition was supported by powerful governments, such an organisation could no longer compete successfully. It was not the measures taken by the Hansa to ensure her survival which brought about her downfall. On the contrary they delayed it. It was the political and economic transformation of Europe as it passed from medieval to modern times which inevitably destroyed the Hansa. The Hanseatic leaders are hardly to be reproached for not having realised this, and for having tried to save the community as best they could.

The important historic role of the Hansa was for a long time underestimated, largely because the development of northern Germany in modern times took place within an entirely different framework and over a period which saw the decline of many of the towns which had played a leading part in the community. Among them were Lübeck and the other Wendish towns of the Baltic coast, Rostock and Stralsund, and inland such towns as Dortmund, Goslar and Lüneburg, as well as Kampen and Deventer on the Zuiderzee. The towns then coming into prominence – Berlin, Königsberg, Hanover – had formerly been members of the Hansa, but it was as the capitals of monarchies that they were becoming increasingly important. Even the development of navigation and trade no longer took place under the aegis of the three 'free and Hanseatic towns', but under the patronage of monarchs, principally those of Prussia.

For all this, the Hansa occupies a very considerable place in the history of Europe during the last 300 years of the Middle Ages. Although she did not, as was once believed, create the towns of the east and north, she gave decisive encouragement to their development. She founded the lasting prosperity of Danzig, Riga, Reval, Stockholm and above all of Hamburg and Bremen. Further afield the great markets at Novgorod, Bergen and Bruges were developed by the enterprise of the Hanseatics. For centuries they supplied the peoples of east and west with products essential for their development and often for their very survival. Through her too the ideas and arts of the west, and in particular of the Low Countries, spread to all the countries on the shores of the Baltic.

Admittedly the work of the Hansa did not always have positive results. The heavy traffic in cloth from the Low Countries prevented the growth of a large-scale textile industry in northern Germany, and more often than not the interests of the craftsman were subordinated, even sacrificed, to those of the merchant. One cannot deny that in Norway Hanseatic domination ruined the local agriculture, and, to a large extent, local trade, thus creating an unfortunate economic imbalance. On the whole, however, there can be no doubt that the Hansa benefited the inhabitants of the countries in which its activities were carried on.

Finally the community was inspired by a spirit which, though based on material self-interest, is nonetheless worthy of admiration and respect. Indifferent to nationalistic prejudices and even, to a large extent, to religious differences, the Hanseatics were deeply pacific and had recourse

to war only when all else failed. They always did their utmost, both among themselves and in their dealings with foreign countries, to settle their quarrels and remove their grievances by arbitration and negotiation. In this way they offer us a lesson in wisdom which we could well profit by today.