

# Bruges and the German Hanse: Brokering European Commerce

Peter Stabel  
Universiteit Gent



Van de 13<sup>de</sup> tot de 16<sup>de</sup> eeuw was de Duitse Hanze ongetwijfeld een van de belangrijkste commerciële fenomenen in Europa. De Hanze begon als een losse vereniging van individuele kooplieden, maar geleidelijk ontwikkelde ze zich in de 13<sup>de</sup> en 14<sup>de</sup> eeuw tot een verbond van handelssteden van de Noordelijke Nederlanden tot Scandinavië en de Baltische Staten. Als handelsorganisatie was ze aanwezig op de belangrijkste Noord- en West-Europese markten, ze stichtte heel wat steden in het Oostzeegebied en ze richtte handelsnederzettingen of kontore in te Brugge, Londen, Nowgorod en Bergen. Ondanks het feit dat de internationale handel in deze periode werd gedomineerd door de technologisch meer geavanceerde Italiaanse handelsnaties en dat vooral het Noordzeegebied zich ontwikkelde als ontmoetingsplaats van de handel tussen Zuid- en Noord-Europa, slaagden de Noordduitse kooplieden er toch in om een vooraanstaande rol te spelen in het handelsverkeer en tegelijk ook Noordoost-Europa (het Oostzeegebied, Rusland en Scandinavië) in de mainstream van de Europese economie binnen te loodsen.

De sleutel tot hun succes was de complementariteit tussen Oostelijk en Westelijk Europa. De handelsstromen, die in de 14<sup>de</sup> eeuw werden geconcentreerd in Brugge en in mindere mate ook in Londen, waren gebaseerd op de uitwisseling tussen een geavanceerde en een minder geavanceerde economie, tussen een industrieel en een agrarisch gebied. Verschillende economische organisatie leidde ook tot gedifferentieerde patronen van vraag en aanbod, tot de uitwisseling van bulkgoederen en grondstoffen uit het oosten met industriële producten en luxegoederen uit het westen en het zuiden. De controle van deze onevenwichtige, maar ook zeer complementaire handel liet de Hanze toe om op enkele decennia uit te groeien tot een cruciale speler in de internationale handelsstromen. De Hanzekooplieden reageerden daarbij op structurele veranderingen in het Europese handelsverkeer. Zij ontwikkelden al dan niet onder invloed van kooplieden uit Italië of de Nederlanden, eigen handelsgebruiken en technieken. Maar de Hanze was ook een belangrijke politieke factor in Noordoost-Europa en door de uitgebreide handelscontacten creëerde ze ook een belangrijke culturele uitwisseling in deze regio.

Een groot deel van hun internationale contacten legden de Hanzeaten in de Nederlanden, en voornamelijk in de belangrijkste handelsstad in de late Middeleeuwen, Brugge. De dichtheid en de intensiteit van de internationale handel in deze laatste stad zorgde voor een schaalvergroting van internationale handelscontacten in Noordwest-Europa. De Hanze heeft hiervan goed gebruik gemaakt om haar machtspositie te consolideren, maar de kooplieden uit Noordoost-Europa werden er ook sterk beïnvloed door nieuwe economische en culturele waarden. De ontmoeting van twee verschillende culturen, die gedurende twee eeuwen in Brugge plaatsvond, leidde tot een traag proces waarbij in de loop van de 15<sup>de</sup> eeuw de verschillen geleidelijk kleiner werden. De Hanze heeft zeker een onuitwisbare rol gespeeld in de creatie van een meer homogene, stedelijke cultuur in een gebied dat zich uitstrekte van Keulen tot Stockholm en van Brugge tot Danzig.

Peter Stabel (b. 1962) wrote his PhD thesis – at the University of Ghent (1994) – on urban patterns in late medieval and early modern Flanders. He is postdoctoral fellow at the University of Ghent and has published on urban economies, textile industries, international commerce and political organisation of cities in Northwestern Europe during the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern Period. His current research projects deal with Italian international trade and the contacts between southern and northern Europe, and with the importance of markets and retail in late medieval and early modern cities.



## INTRODUCTION

In 1463 cloth entrepreneurs from the small industrial towns of Aalst and Dendermonde in the county of Flanders decided to ignore commercial monopolies in the cloth halls of the commercial gateway-city of the Low Countries, Bruges, and to go with their woollens, which were woven with the expensive Spanish merino wool, to the growing Brabantine fairs of Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom. Because of the town's involvement in this commercial transfer, the town magistrates of Dendermonde asked the local drapers to participate in the costs of bringing Dendermonde woollens to the fairs. In one year drapers sold more than 2,400 woollens, or more than 40% of the cloth output of the town in the middle of the 15th century. The decision to transfer commercial interests from Bruges to Antwerp proved to be a successful move. The next year, twenty-nine Dendermonde drapers, including the most important entrepreneurs in the town, already sold more than 2,800 woollens in the four Brabantine fairs and the declining output of Dendermonde cloth was stopped temporarily. The success of these cloth entrepreneurs, however, did not go unnoticed in Bruges, the most important cloth market of the Low Countries in that period.

Especially the Hanseatic merchants – who were used to buying up the bulk of Dendermonde cloth and although they were regular visitors of the Brabantine fairs – realised that this development threatened their monopoly on Flemish cloth made of Spanish wool. After the initial success of the Dendermonde woollens in Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom, they took joint action with the Bruges magistrate: forbidding the entrepreneurs to bring their woollens to Brabant and restating that Bruges was the staple market for these kinds of woollen cloth. The entrepreneurs had to comply with this commercial monopoly. The town account of 1466 states that the taxes on cloth export to the Brabantine fairs were no longer levied because of the ordinance forcing the entrepreneurs to bring their woollens to the Bruges staple market. There the woollens should be properly checked and marked, so that the customers in the Hanseatic territories could control their quality in the manner they were used to. The account further states in a very laconic way the position of the entrepreneurs, who no longer dared to send their woollens to Antwerp and Bergen-op-Zoom, because they feared that this way they would lose the Hanseatic merchants, their main customers.

This event clearly illustrates the crucial importance of the Hanse for the Flemish textile industries. The massive presence of Hanseatic merchants in the gateway-markets of the Low

Countries and in the core regions of the Southern Netherlands in particular – Bruges in the County of Flanders and Antwerp in the Duchy of Brabant – proved to be one of the most important variables which determined the social and economic development of the parties involved. It was in these gateway-markets that Hanseatic traders were able to meet traders from all over Christian Europe, and it was here that they traded Central and especially Eastern European goods and commodities with products from the Mediterranean and from Western Europe. But at the same time, the presence of these trading communities offered considerable possibilities and comparative advantages for local traders and manufacturers. The decay in the 14th century of the overland trade-routes via Central Germany and especially via the Champagne fairs had caused serious difficulties in the highly developed textile industries of the Southern Low Countries. The rising transaction costs were the main catalysts for the growing tendencies towards specialisation in luxury cloth and luxury commodities. The position of the city of Bruges as a gateway-market and an international meeting-place was crucial. As textile entrepreneurs lost most of their Mediterranean, South-German, French and English clientele – because of local import substitution, increasingly higher prices for raw materials, and in particular of English wool, competition from within the Low Countries (Leiden) and more from without (England) – the Hanse became a uniquely important trading partner for the output of woollens from Flanders, Walloon-Flanders, Artois, Brabant and Holland. The fact that the cloth industries were able to resist decay throughout the 14th and 15th centuries can only be explained by this Hanseatic link.

## **HANSE AND EUROPE: SOME RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In recent years the German Hanse has experienced a renewed interest, among historians, but also among a more general audience. This revival of the interest in a medieval commercial organisation in the late 20th and early 21st century is by no means a coincidence. In a period when the European Union tends to dominate more and more aspects of daily life, when most Europeans will share, and in fact are already sharing one and the same currency, this is hardly surprising. More so because, after the German reunification, an expansion of the Union towards the countries in Central and Eastern Europe is becoming unavoidable, and hence the geographical scope of the Union will shift away very radically from a concentration in North-western and Mediterranean Europe towards a more balanced system including parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

In fact, this development is quite similar to the developments which took place in late medieval Europe, when German colonisation in the Baltic Region and a commercial expansion linked North-eastern Europe with the mainstream of the European economic system in Western and Southern Europe. And indeed scholars have not failed to notice these remarkable and striking similarities. The Hanse proved to be a carrier not only of economic commodities and wealth, but also of language, culture and social customs in the same way that globalisation and political and economic unification in Europe are doing today. In the symbolic year 2000, on the threshold of a new millennium, when the European Union is making up its mind to strengthen its ties with Eastern Europe and to integrate various countries on its eastern frontiers within itself, the German Hanse can serve as a historical example of how integration was achieved many centuries earlier and

what its consequences were for European history as a whole.

Flanders, and more in particular the commercial metropolis in the Low Countries, Bruges, was the place where for almost two centuries two cultures met, on the one hand the *advanced* Mediterranean economy and on the other hand the more *backward* North-Sea and Baltic economy. It was also the place which gradually allowed both cultures to interact, so that in the course of the 15th century economic and cultural differences became smaller, without, however, reaching a point of integration. The Hanseatic urban culture, which reached from Cologne to Soest, from Lübeck, Rostock and Danzig to Sweden, Finland and Novgorod, gradually was also influenced by Flemish, Italian, Spanish, English and French elements. Hence Bruges was not only an economic, but also a cultural transmitter.

Bruges was the most important gateway-city for industrial commodities manufactured in the Low Countries. In this densely urbanized region, textiles, mostly woven from local and – in particular – imported wool (especially from England and Spain) were produced for a European export market. The value added in the industrial centres and the high levels of output in the commercial centres allowed relatively high standards of living. Bruges was, however, also the pivotal market in North-western Europe because of the presence of important Italian merchant companies from Florence (Medici, Frescobaldi), Milan, Genoa (Raponi), Venice (Corner) and Lucca (Arnolfini), of great numbers of Iberian merchants (Portuguese, Catalan, Castilian and Basque), and of French, English, German and Hanseatic traders. Luxury commodities and manufactured goods from the Mediterranean, the Levant and North-western Europe (spices, luxury textiles, linens and woollens, fashion, arts and crafts, raw materials) were exchanged both for bulk commodities from the East (grain, wood, dairy), and also for expensive raw materials such as fur and amber, although almost no finished goods came from those areas.

These international contacts were not always contacts between equals. There was a world of difference between the Mediterranean world, and even North-western Europe on the one hand and the Central European and Baltic World on the other hand. To put it bluntly and with some exaggeration, despite the fact that the Hanse was a community of commercial cities, where urban standards of living and urban commercial-ideology was dominant, the confrontation of Italians, Spaniards and Flemings on the one hand and Hanseats on the other hand was a confrontation of an urban world with a rural world, of an industrial and commercial ideology with an agrarian way of life, of a cosmopolitan and open world with a closed and inward-oriented society.

It must be stressed, however, that the German Hanse was no monolith: there were huge differences between the various regions and cities, differences in political status, economic organisation, and cultural interests. Lübeck, the semi-official capital of the Hanseatic League, because of its central location on the shores of the Baltic Sea, was the concentration point of Baltic trade before it reached Western Europe. It had a function very similar to that of Bruges, but on a less cosmopolitan level. It was, as Bruges, an active trading city, but with very few foreign merchant colonies. Other cities were less influential, and their trade did not carry so much weight. But it is clear that there were strong incentives towards competition within the Hanse and describing Hanseatic trade between western Europe and

eastern Europe as a monopoly trade is not completely accurate.

## HANSEATIC TRADE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

From the 13th to the 16th century the German Hanse was undoubtedly one of the most important commercial phenomena in Europe. It started as a loose association of north German merchants in the 12th and 13th centuries, when there were many such organisations in Western Europe. But gradually it developed in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries into a community of some 200 towns from the northern Low Countries (towns like Deventer and Zwolle) in the west, via the North Sea and Baltic shores to today's Finland in the east. It created trade settlements, the so-called *kontore*, in Bruges, London, Novgorod and Bergen (Norway), and it was present on the major markets of medieval Europe, both in North-western and, though more timidly, in parts of Mediterranean Europe as well. But most of all, it was a unique creation in the Middle Ages, because of its dimension, its political aspiration and its economic, mainly commercial, impact. Despite the fact that international commerce in this period was dominated by the technically advanced Italian merchants, and that it was the North Sea-region (the Low Countries, South-eastern England) which provided the setting for exchange between Southern and Northern Europe, the North-German merchants were able to develop international trade in North-eastern Europe (the Baltic region, Russia, Scandinavia) and to integrate this space economically into the mainstream of the European economy.

When, in 1161, four years after the founding of Lübeck in 1159, German merchants founded a commercial settlement in Visby, on the island of Gotland, they undoubtedly failed to realize that this experiment of collaboration and mutual support would dominate – and even monopolise only some decades later – international trade in northern and eastern Europe for a period of four centuries. In the beginning it was a simple association of individuals, the merchants of the Holy Roman Empire who stayed in Gotland (*universi mercatores imperii Romani Gotlandiam frequentantes*). The changing circumstances of international trade and greater international insecurity, however, required a more formal community of trading towns. Hence the German Hanse, as it is known in perception of most people, was born in the late 13th and early 14th century.

The key to its success was a clear complementarity between Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Trade flows were based on the balance between an advanced and a less advanced economy, between an industrial and a agrarian region, and exchange centred quickly on the commercial networks around Bruges and London. Different economic organisation led to different patterns of demand, hence the Hanse supplied the West and the Mediterranean with furs, wax, timber, mining produce and, last but not least, with grain. In return textiles, salt and luxury commodities manufactured in the Flemish and Italian cities were brought to the urban consumers in the Hanseatic towns and especially to the wealthy aristocracies of Eastern Europe. This imbalance and complementarity allowed rapid growth of the Hanse as a commercial organisation, as a community of merchant cities. In the course of 14th and 15th centuries this trade was completed with furs and leather from Eastern Europe, cutlery from Cologne, wine from the Rhineland, linen from Westphalia, beer from Bremen and Hamburg, salt from Lüneburg, herring from

Scandinavia, wood from Thuringia and grain from Prussia and Poland. For their return journeys, Hanseatic merchants shipped French sea salt, woollens from the Low Countries, Italy and England, silks from Italy and the Levant, wine from France, tombstones from Hainaut, almonds and spices, rice, figs, oranges, raisins from the Mediterranean. Furthermore, this commercial network was linked to the system of fairs in central Germany (e.g. Frankfurt am Main from the 1320s).

Rapidly trade expanded eastwards to Novgorod (fur, wax) and along the shores of the Baltic Sea. New cities were being developed, and the local Slavic populations were brought under German law. Rostock was founded in 1200, Riga in 1201. Stralsund and Danzig became important transit cities. From 1230 the conquests by the Teutonic Order entered the Hanseatic sphere of influence, and the towns of Torn (Torun) and Königsberg (Kaliningrad) were founded. Scandinavia as well came within their reach (this development was stimulated by the founding of Stockholm ca. 1251). In Western Europe, there was of course no colonising policy, but here trade was organised with Flemish, English, French, Iberian and Italian merchants from the 13th century onwards. Land routes were used from Lübeck to Hamburg (Jutland shipping dates only from second half of the 13th century). Next, *cogs* – the most popular ship in the northern seas of medieval Europe – were used to sail the North Sea and the system of rivers and canals in the Low Countries.

There were often important differences as to the impact of the Hanse in each region. Hence, there are clear differences in the structures of Hanseatic settlement, depending on the relations with regional powers (from strictly commercial contacts in North-western Europe to independent but isolated settlements in Russia, and to real colonisation and the creation of new “German” cities in Poland, Scandinavia and the Baltic, sometimes at the expense of local development). In other parts of Europe, Hanseatic colonies were founded in London (Steelyard), Bergen (Die Brücke), Novgorod (Peterhof) and the *kontor* in Bruges, so Baltic and North Sea trade could be controlled. There were important differences between these settlements. In Bruges, for example, there was no possibility of creating a separate urban space under German law, as was the case in Novgorod and Bergen.

The rise and consequent decline of the German Hanse in the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern Period cannot only be explained by the actions of the Hanseatic merchants alone. They were largely indebted to general developments of European commerce in the same period. Because the traditional trading mechanisms in medieval Europe collapsed in the latter parts of the 13th and the first half of the 14th century, the land routes, and the Champagne fairs, by which two very different systems of trade in Southern and Western Europe were connected, were abandoned. Rising transaction costs and greater insecurity prevented a recovery of these routes until the middle of the 15th century. Instead maritime trade took over. But the conditions necessary to participate in this trade had changed also quite dramatically. Italian and later Iberian merchants entered the Northern seas and Flemish *active trade* disappeared gradually from the British Isles (wool and cloth), from France, from the Mediterranean and also from the Baltic region. There are many indications that Flemish traders had been active in Kiel (“Flämische Strasse”), in Hamburg and in Lübeck. In fact many inhabitants of the latter

city are called “Flaming”. Instead of sending out merchants, Bruges became the pivot of trade in North-western Europe.

Although the growth of maritime trade in the late middle ages was first of all a sign of economic contraction, it also created new possibilities for Hanseatic trade. In gateway cities such as Bruges and London, Hanseats could meet with other trading nations and they could develop close ties with the manufacturing regions of North-western Europe (textiles, in particular, cloth). The concentration of international trade in a few nodal cities (even within the Hanseatic territories) reduced transaction costs and facilitated the development of banking and credit facilities. It also allowed a dramatic change in the structure of commercial firms, as merchants became more sedentary and started to rely more and more on factors and long term associations.

The developments triggered by the Hanseatic expansion towards the East did not always come about unchallenged, nor was it to last very far into the Early Modern Period. In the course of the 16th and 17th centuries the growing Dutch and English maritime powers and the rising trade cities of southern Germany took over. These new rivals could no longer be scared away by an aggressive foreign policy or by war, and Hanseatic merchants relied too much on their traditional monopoly trades; they did not seem to realise that general commercial axes and, with the rise of nation-states, the general political constellation in Europe had changed drastically. In reality, Hanseatic trade was in decline from the 15th century on. Gradually new systems of fairs become more important in Southern Germany and Brabant (Antwerp, Bergen-op-Zoom). There were gradual but structural shifts of commercial routes, which became once again more landlocked. But the Hanse resisted for a long time and it was still leading German trade in this period. Its geographical scope was even broadening as Hanse ships sailed more often along the French coast to Bourgneuf for salt, and even to Spain for other commodities (in 1449 the salt fleet counted no less than 110 ships; among them half were Hanseatic and the rest Dutch). But in general, competition from Holland, Normandy and England became stiffer, and from the late 15th century, the western trade was in full decline. In 16th-century Antwerp the Hanse was only of marginal importance, despite its tradition of trading in the Low Countries and its ostentatious new building in this commercial metropolis. Even in the east there were increasing difficulties: the Peterhof in Novgorod was confiscated by Tsar Ivan III in 1494, and there was growing competition from South-German merchant companies and in particular from the Dutch grain trade (the so-called “mother trade” of Amsterdam).

Because of this, difficulties within the Hanse arose. The Prussian cities, and in particular Danzig, and the eternal outsider, Cologne, wanted to follow their own course of action. It is significant for its sense of conservatism that the Hanse built splendid and very expensive palaces in the commercial metropolises of the Low Countries – in Bruges in the late 15th and in Antwerp in the late 16th century – at exactly the time when their commercial supremacy had ceased to be effective. When the “common interest” of the community failed to produce results, the individual cities chose to go their own way. Some, such as Hamburg, were successful; others, such as the former capital of the League, Lübeck, were soon in full decline and the Hanse was gradually dissolved in the period from the 1630s to the 1660s.

The Hanse was primarily an economic association of cities; it was, however, also a political force, though it lacked a single common political structure and it remained under the wings of German imperial power. But the lordship of the emperor was often merely theoretical and, as an important commercial power, the Hanse developed usually without much interference its own foreign and economic policies. It did, for instance, not hesitate to use its commercial supremacy to bully its trading partners, and sometimes it even resorted to armed conflict in order to defend its commercial interests and its trading privileges. But despite the often acclaimed “common interest”, and a common institution, the Hanseatic Diet (*Hansetage*), a kind of parliament with representatives of the cities and quarters which convened on a rather irregular basis, the German Hanse was never a political and economic monolith, nor did it aspire to become one.

There was often rivalry, even bitter conflicts of interest among its members. Moreover, there was a strong tendency towards political supremacy of the leading cities (in particular the largest trading city, Lübeck). Claims of well-known historians even in the recent past that the Hanse was united by a sense of solidarity, created by common commercial interest, by policies of colonisation in Eastern Europe, and by the sharing of a common political and urban ideology, have been put into perspective by more recent research. Self-interest, the search for commercial gain, and jealous advancement of each city’s privileges, were as important as factors in determining policy (as they are in the European Union today, of course). Only at the end, in the 16th century, when the apogee of the Hanse had long gone by, attempts were made to create a more solid organisation, with an internal tax system – much too late to change the course of history.

## THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF TRADE IN LATE MEDIEVAL BRUGES

Bruges had been an active trading city almost from its origin. Because of rapid industrial expansion (textiles, in particular woolens) and urban growth, the county of Flanders very rapidly became the centre of dynamic economic development in North-western Europe. Active Flemish trade, often led by Bruges merchants, reached during the 12th and 13th centuries into France, Germany, the other principalities of the Low Countries and particularly into England, Flanders’ privileged trading partner because of the wool and cloth trade. Flemish merchants organised so-called *Hanse* to organise trade and by creating systems of support to reduce risk and enhance profits. The most important outlet, however, for Flemish manufactured goods were the Champagne fairs in the course of the late 12th and 13th centuries. Here Flemish traders caught up with Mediterranean and Italian commerce. It was also the place where new commercial and financial techniques were introduced (systems of credit, letters of exchange, commercial organisation, such as the *Hanse of the 17 cities*, again led by Bruges merchants, etc.). Flemish woolens, of various types and qualities most of them manufactured in the leading cities of the region (Ghent, Ypres, Bruges, Saint-Omer, Mechelen, Leuven, Brussels, Leiden, Lille and Douai), were sent to England, France, and to Central, Eastern and Mediterranean Europe. The Flemish economy, centred on industrial manufacture on a scale unequalled in Europe, thrived.

In the 14th century all this changed dramatically. General economic and demographic decline caused structural shifts in commercial orientation. Moreover, greater insecurity

from the late 13th century onwards, worsened by the Anglo-French war, caused a serious decline of transcontinental routes, and hence of the Champagne fairs as meeting points of European trade. Rising transaction costs also changed the structure of the cloth trade, as cheaper textiles were outpriced by regional import substitution. The Flemish cloth industry during the later Middle Ages, therefore, is characterised by the growing importance of ever more expensive woolens. The loss of the cheaper markets caused structural changes in the industrial towns themselves, and growing specialization of luxury textiles in the larger cities and of medium priced woolens in the smaller towns.

But the necessity of commercial exchange remained, and gradually commercial routes changed. Maritime trade took over where overland trade declined. Bruges, and to a lesser degree London, became the focal points of international commerce in North-western Europe. The first Italian commercial galleys (Genoa, Venice, Pisa and Florence) reached the harbours of the Low Countries in the 1270s and 1280s, and very quickly international commercial exchange between Southern and Northern Europe was concentrated in Bruges. North-German traders only arrived relatively late in the Zwin-Estuary (Bruges and its port towns Sluis, Damme, Hoeke, Sint-Anna-ter-Muide, and Monnikerede). Their first privileges date from the middle of the 13th century, but they experienced their finest period only from 1350 to 1450. From the second half of the 15th century the number of Hanseatic merchants declined and in the early 16th century there were only a dozen or so left, not enough to continue the *kontor*, which was moved to Antwerp. From the beginning, the counts of Flanders had not allowed the Hanse to follow their normal procedure and create a separate commercial settlement. This undoubtedly stimulated closer contacts and cultural exchange with the local Flemish population and with the other foreign merchants.

The density and size of commerce also required new methods of commercial credit and new banking techniques. The Italians undoubtedly monopolised modern techniques of banking



Fig. 1  
Map of Bruges.

and credit. But for the actual trade of the other merchants a new infrastructure could also be provided in Bruges itself by an integrated system of hostellers, brokers and money-changers. Bruges became the financial clearing house in Northern Europe, and also larger transfers of cash were concentrated in the city (e.g. payments to the Vatican by the Teutonic Knights in Prussia). The presence of large firms of Italian merchants and bankers made Bruges and London into the financial centres of Northern-Europe. New commercial techniques were only slowly introduced in the Hanseatic cities themselves. There is no doubt that young merchants were trained in the West. Nonetheless there is still little trace of advanced Italian techniques in Hanseatic cities. This does not mean that Hanseatic trade was necessarily “simple” trade: advanced methods of barter trade, transfers of paper money in account ledgers, systems of credit, letters of exchange, etc., were frequently used, although they were also often mistrusted by the Hanseatic authorities. But little evidence of double entry bookkeeping and similar practices have been found among the North-Germans. The Hanseatic merchants made use efficiently of the tight network of local hostellers, brokers and moneychangers in the city. They had numerous local contacts or they employed Hanseatic factors which were present on a permanent basis in Bruges. Hence, on a more limited scale than the Italians, the Hanseats succeeded in establishing their own financial and credit networks, their own banking systems and methods of avoiding money transfer and spreading risk. The few business ledgers and the more numerous business letters which have been preserved do not allow us to qualify these networks as “primitive”. The main problem, however, was that the clearing systems, which could be used in Bruges, because of the city’s importance as a money market, could not be transferred to the Hanseatic cities themselves.

## **THE GERMAN HANSE IN BRUGES**

Therefore, the massive presence of Hanseatic merchants in Bruges was no coincidence. From the second half of the 13th century the German traders received privileges. At its apogee, in the latter part of the 14th century, there were hundreds of Hanseatic merchants during the trading season at the market of Bruges. The names of more than 950 different Hanseats between 1373 and 1380 have been preserved: usually at any given time there were 40 to 50 merchants, but at the height of the trading season their number could rise to more than 200. Most merchants came from the major trading cities in the Hanseatic territories (Lübeck, Hamburg, Bremen, Cologne, Dortmund and Münster) but there were also merchants from smaller ports and towns (Greifswald, Riga, Stralsund, Visby, Wismar, Danzig, Thorn). A pageant in 1440, which celebrated the end of the revolt of Bruges against the Burgundian duke Philip the Good, included 144 Hanseatic merchants, dressed in red-and-black liveries, while there were a further three messengers, four servants, four writers and a fool (in the same pageant there were about 160 Italian merchants). But this high number was probably only a representative group, not the whole number of Hanseats staying in the city. When in 1457 the Hanseats return to Bruges after a boycott, a festive pageant was organized and more than 200 people participated. Even when Hanseatic trade was already declining, from the 1470s onwards, the Hanseats remained the most numerous trading community in Bruges. At a pageant in 1468 held on the occasion of the marriage of the duke Charles the Bold with Margaret

**Table 1.** Entry of Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, in Bruges, 1440

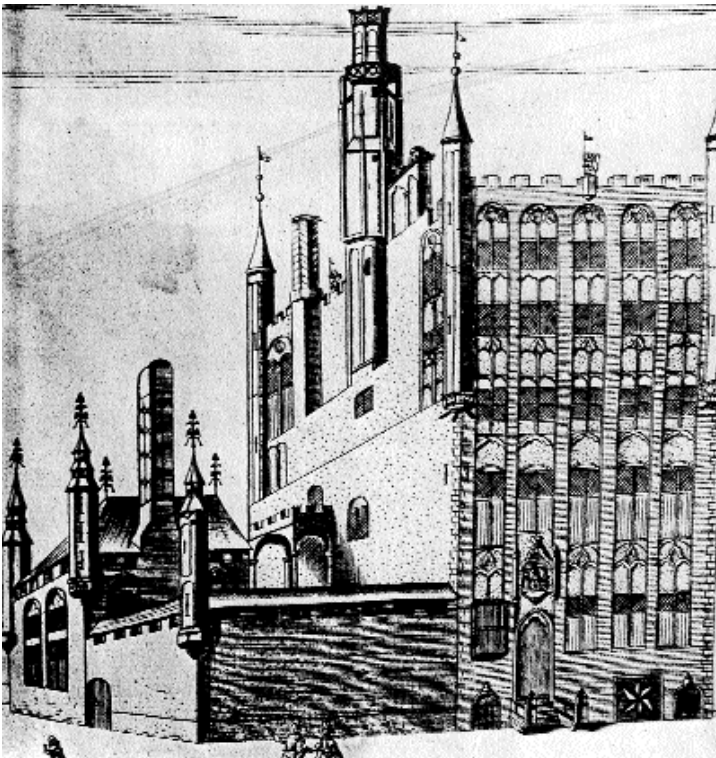
**Presence of foreign merchants**

Hanseats	136
Italians	150
Venice	40
Genoa	36
Milan	40
Florence	22
Lucca	12
Castilians	48
Catalan	?
Portuguese	?
Scots	?

of York, there were still 108 Hanseatic merchants. Only in 1506 were there too few merchants to guarantee the continuity of the Hanse *kontor* in Bruges and by the 1520s everyone had moved to Antwerp.

The Hanseatic merchants very rarely became citizens of Bruges. Thideman Zuelinc from Lübeck, who became burgher of Bruges in 1445 after having lived for 38 years in the city, and the wine-seller Peter de Winter from Cologne in 1476 were exceptions. The status of burgher would have allowed Hanseats to participate in retail trade, but it would also have meant that they would have lost their other commercial privileges for wholesale trade. These were overwhelmingly important compared with the privileges for citizens and they created a *comparative advantage* for

those who had guest status in the city. The status of temporary or semipermanent guest did not prevent members of the German merchant colony from developing strong ties with the



**Fig. 2**  
The house of the Hanseatic League in Bruges.

local Bruges and the Burgundian elite: the Prussian merchants Tarrax were member of the fraternity of Our Lady of Roosebeke in Bruges and they were buried, as many other Germans, in the monastery of the Carmelites (Ypol Tarrax was from 1468 to 1474 master of the ducal mint in Bruges; in 1474 he moved to Antwerp where he held until 1478 a similar position. He died in 1480 and was buried in the Our Lady's church of Antwerp).

The Hanse was the most privileged trading community in Flanders, which gave it a comparative advantage *vis-à-vis* other trading communities in Bruges. The privileges were considered as crucial for the interests of the merchants, and privileges were closely scrutinized and harshly protected. They concerned mostly the legal status of the Hanseats and the juridical authority of the Hanse officials abroad, but they also dealt with the course of international commerce (matters of debt, taxation) and with social life. The Hanse did not even hesitate to transfer the seat of the *kontor*, and hence of the lion's share of their commercial activity, to nearby towns (Aardenburg) and even to other principalities (Dordrecht in Holland, Antwerp in Brabant, Deventer and Utrecht). Very often the Hanse only returned after its privileges were either reconfirmed or strengthened (1282, 1307-1309, 1338, 1349, 1351, 1358-1360, 1388-1392, 1436-1438, 1451-1457). At other occasions, the Hanse fled from Bruges, because of internal political turmoil in the county. The killing of 80 Hanseats at the harbour of Sluis in 1436 (after an ordinary tavern brawl) was caused not so much by xenophobia, as by the political tension in Bruges and its surroundings. Although the count of Flanders and the city magistrates feared such periods of embargo, in general such threats failed to achieve a lot. The unity of the various Hanse cities was very often more theory than reality. There were internal tensions and, for example, the interests of very differently oriented cities such as Cologne and Lübeck could diverge enormously. Growing dependence of Flemish textile entrepreneurs also often lead to difficulty.

The internal organisation of the Hanseatic *community* was dominated by the aldermen (*Alterleute*) and the council. They defended the general interests of the *common merchant* of the Hanse in Flanders. The institution developed out of similar organisations in various smaller 13th century Flemish towns (Oostkerke, Hoeke and Sluis). From 1347 the Hanse aldermen in Bruges were responsible for the whole of Flanders. The Hanse was divided into three *members* (Lübeck and the Wendian-Saxonian cities, the Westphalian-Prussian cities and the merchants from Gotland, Livland and Sweden; in the 16th century a fourth member was added). Each member had its own aldermen and until 1447 its own financial organisation; each was also represented in the council of 24 officials (two aldermen from each member who each appointed six additional councillors). But from the beginning it was clear that Lübeck was the most influential city in the organisation. Reunions of the council were held until the 1470s at the monastery of the Carmelites. Decisions were made by simple majority. A secretary (usually a lawyer coming from the Hanse cities in the eastern Low Countries, Deventer etc.) played a pivotal role in the organisation, as he had to guarantee continuity.

In general Hanseatic merchant companies were family based. Hence an important merchant dynasty like the Veckinhusen – amongst them the ill-famous Hildebrand Veckinhusen, who went bankrupt – had representatives scattered all over the Hanseatic space (Bruges, Reval, Dorpat, Lübeck, Dortmund and Cologne). Besides Hildebrand, his brother Sivert also possessed a house in Bruges before 1395 and they became both alder-

men of the *kontor*.

As most merchants remained only a limited period of time in Bruges, they usually rented houses, rooms and storage room. There were no separate living quarters of Hanseats in the city, they lived among the local population, they lived in the houses and inns of wealthy and politically influential Bruges burghers. This had very obvious advantages for both parties. For the merchant these included the existence of a very flexible system of storage and accommodation. Moreover their hosts were also able to act as representatives of the merchants in case of absence. There is no doubt that this also led to a more formal system of local factors among the so-called hostellers in the city, who also acted as brokers, bankers, informants and go-betweens for the foreign merchant (and hence helped to reduce transaction costs). It also stimulated close personal and long-standing ties between merchants and their hosts. These hosts became really trading experts, and they led for instance the official delegations of Bruges at the Hanse diet. Sometimes the Hanseatic merchants also owned houses in the city.

The houses that they owned, the storage facilities, and the inns, where most Hanseats stayed, were concentrated in the commercial heart of the city (the quarters of St. John's in the 14th century and that of the Carmelites in the 15th). Here they lived at close quarters with the other foreign merchants in Bruges: Venetians, Florentines, Lucchese, Castilians, Catalan, Portuguese, etc. There is only scarce information about contacts between these various nationalities, but they must have been very frequent. The merchants often shared



**Fig. 3**  
The houses of the Florentines, Venetians and the Genoese in Bruges.

## FLEMISH ENTREPRENEURS AND HANSEATIC MERCHANTS

The concentration of international trade in the commercial metropolis of Bruges undoubtedly

edly helped entrepreneurs in the Low Countries to remain present on the international market. Inside the industrial landscape, there was also a trend towards specialisation. Cloth entrepreneurs and merchants adapted their trade regularly to the demands of international commerce. But this dependence of industry on foreign trade – a dependence which sharpened in the course of the 15th century as the exports of high-quality woollens were almost exclusively oriented towards a Hanseatic and Eastern-European clientele – made the industry also very vulnerable to changes in fashion and taste, to trade disruption, and, last but not least, to political turmoil. Developments of international transaction costs were crucial in this respect. Entrepreneurs reacted often very swiftly by adapting production and by changing commercial orientation.

There is no doubt that the 14th century trade disruptions, caused by wars and insecurity, had a disastrous effect on the cloth output of Flanders. Higher transaction costs outpriced the cheap and medium quality woollens on the European market, especially in Southern Europe, traditionally one of the most important consumers of Low Countries cloth. Therefore, to maintain their presence on the export market, cloth entrepreneurs focussed on very expensive woollens, commodities which were less vulnerable to higher transaction costs, but also for which demand was less elastic and for which import substitution in the consuming regions was much more difficult.

Good relations with foreign trade communities were all important. Town and guild authorities immediately reacted when trade was interrupted or when complaints were made by foreign tradesmen. The ever-complaining Hanse merchants, in the end almost the only buyers of Flemish cloth, often caused panic-stricken behaviour among town magistrates, who feared for the future of their industry. Negotiations with foreign trade communities, in particular with the German Hanse, were always on the agenda of the representative bodies. The proximity of nearby gateway-markets, with their concentration of foreign merchants, their trading infrastructure, the relatively easy access to credit, cash, financial and banking techniques (thus avoiding costly cash transfers), and the existence of port and river transport infrastructure must have constituted a considerable comparative advantage for entrepreneurs in the region. These advantages are, however, very difficult to quantify. Did it mean that being near to an international gateway caused entrepreneurs to adapt more swiftly their industrial output both in quantity and in quality? Many indicators seem to point in that direction. Or was there more to it than the organisation and cost of manufacturing goods? Were transaction costs within the urban economic network of the Low Countries as decisive in allocating industrial activity to towns and to the countryside? By combining the various stages in the short trip from the draper's workshop to the merchant's inn and storage room, an assessment, however approximate, of transaction costs can be made.

Standardization of manufacture and the requirements of manufacturing for an international, and in majority a foreign, merchant community – although the scale of merchants from the Low Countries seems to increase in the 15th and certainly in the 16th century and active trade had never completely disappeared in the late middle ages itself – had clear consequences on entrepreneurial initiative, on the geographical mobility of the textile industries and on the scale of the enterprise. Both merchants and entrepreneurs had considerable benefits to gain from negotiated group delivery contracts (the so-called "Kaufsystem"). The town governments, most of the time dominated by the entrepreneur-

ial élites, put a lot of effort into such contracts; the best known example of which are those negotiated with Italian merchants for Iberian exports in the late 14th and early 15th century (the case of the small town of Wervik is well studied by Federico Melis), those with the Hanseatic merchants for the export of the new woollens made from Spanish wool in towns such as Poperinge, Oudenaarde and the towns on the river Dender, and the role of some Spanish wool merchants in the cloth industry of the town of Kortrijk.

But such monopolies on the export market were organised not only by the merchants; specialised brokers and local “marchands-drapiers” (merchant-entrepreneurs) or “marchands de draps” (cloth or linen dealers), often working as factors for the big merchants in the gateway-cities, could achieve similar goals. They too were able to create industrial networks, and to organize manufacture in a much larger scale than the size of their own enterprises would suggest, and to stimulate a dynamic process of division of labour between town and countryside, between skilled, guild-trained artisans and unskilled cheaper labour (the guild-regulated stages of manufacture in their own town or city; and the much free-er non guild-regulated stages of preparing the raw materials, which took place most of the time in the countryside).

Systems of economic dependence were created not only by industrial networks controlling supplies of raw materials, but also by trading techniques. Evidence suggests that, despite several restrictive *keuren* concerning payment and delivery on credit and a clear preference for cash transaction, woollens were usually sold by the cloth entrepreneurs to the merchants on credit, by means of *baratto*, barter trade which involved exchanging one commodity for another, or a combination of the two. The reasons for this preference of barter and credit are clear: the availability of large scale credit facilities, the importance of the Bruges and later of the Antwerp-market, where various types of commodities were exchanged, and perhaps most of all the fact that entrepreneurs and some merchants lacked enough hard coin to perform in a lucrative way on the money market.

## **A WORLD OF INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE: COMMERCE AND CULTURE**

Last but not least, one has to bear in mind that the Hanse was not only an economic and political power. Merchants did not only exchange luxury commodities, spices, textiles and arts and crafts from Southern and Western Europe for bulk commodities of the East. The Hanse also proved to be one of the highways of cultural transfers in Europe. Although commerce and trade formed the essence of the interaction, close contacts led to other types of exchange as well: exchange of ideas, exchange of ways-of-life, of literature, art and architecture. Hence Hanseatic merchants were attracted to Italian business techniques. Nonetheless, a big technical and cultural gap remained between the Italian and Iberian merchants on the one hand and the Hanseatic merchants on the other hand: in about 1200 a German merchant was often not able to read and write (in Lübeck there was only one episcopal school for training clergymen in 1262), and only from 1270 onwards do we find evidence of greater literacy (the oldest preserved commercial administration dates from 1330-6). The correspondence of both private merchants and the Hanse officials in the *kontore* with the authorities in the Hanseatic cities was very intense. Many of these letters concern the defence of the general interests of the Hanse in Bruges and deal with specialist

commercial information. But the letters also talk bluntly of commercial law and business practice, of the commercial cycle, of interest rates, of the state of the market, and they give assessments of the political situation and of cultural life. Hanse merchants were also attracted to French court culture.

As they spent longer periods in the cities of the Low Countries, they wanted to imitate the urban art and the urban way-of-life of Flanders. They became keen consumers of Flemish paintings, sculpture and fashion. Arts and crafts from Flanders exported to the Baltic included carved tomb stones (e.g. those of the bishops of Lübeck in the 14th century) and numerous paintings (the most famous of these was Hans Memlinc's *Passion of Christ* made for the cathedral of Lübeck in 1491, but in the 14th century also many French and Parisian paintings made their way to the Hanseatic cities through Brugge). Very surprisingly, no painted portraits of Hanseatic merchants by Flemish artists have been preserved. Flemish and Brabantine carved altarpieces were also very popular (e.g. Bruges altarpieces in Lübeck's St. James's church), as were various examples of applied arts from the luxury industries of the Low Countries cities (devotion prints, bells, chandeliers, rosaries made from Baltic amber). There are no indications that this was a two-way system. Almost no Hanseatic works of art could be found in the Low Countries (a statue of the Virgin by Hans Schröder in the Our-Lady's church in Brugge from the end of the 15th century is a rare exception). Instead of German works of art, it was the artists from the German Empire who came over to the cities in the Low Countries. Hans Memlinc came from Seligenstadt in Central Germany and his most important pupil Michael Sittow came from Reval (Tallinn).

The actual cityscapes of Hanseatic cities and of Northwest-European cities demonstrate this very clearly. Bruges, Lübeck and Danzig for example have many architectural elements in common: the extensive use of brick, typical decoration of facades, town gates combined with bridges, various examples of civic architecture, such as hospitals (Lübeck), commercial halls and town halls (Danzig). Lübeck had a civic organisation which set up and staged cultural events, such as jousts, which resembled greatly similar organisations in 14th century Bruges (the so-called "White Bear"), while other cultural groups helped to spread French court culture (literary circles promoting stories about the legend of King Arthur). Hanseatic merchants were members of Bruges religious fraternities and even the prestigious *Mariabroederschap Ten Droghen Bome* in the Franciscan's monastery counted, in 1495, not only courtiers from the Burgundian court, wealthy Bruges burghers, artists (such as the painter Gerard David) and Italian merchants (such as Tomasso Portinari) but also six Hanseats.

However, this exchange of information, of perceptions of the world, of political ideas was not only a one-way system. The famous story of *Eulenspiegel* was probably introduced in the Low Countries as an early print from Lübeck; the influence of a rich cultural centre such as Cologne, a city only marginally identifiable as Hanseatic, cannot be underestimated. The English printer, who had his business in Bruges for a long period, William Caxton, had learned the printing business in Cologne. So it is clear that the massive German presence in the important trading cities of Western Europe undoubtedly left its mark in these areas as well. German artists came to the Flemish cities to acquaint themselves with the new forms of expression. Few traces of the Hanseatic presence have been preserved in the actual cityscape of Bruges, but their presence could be felt very well in the 15th-century city.

The Hanseats had their quarters in the surroundings of the Hanseatic square (*Oosterlingenplaats*). Until the end of the 15th century they did not possess a communal house, although in 1442 they rented a house for the secretary of the “nation”. Only when they returned to Bruges in 1457 after a commercial boycott of the city, the urban magistrates donated this small square and an old house on the square made room for a lavish gothic palace after a design by the architect Jan van der Poele (Fig. 2). But this *Oosterlingenhuis* was not the only place where the Hanseatic League was prominently visible in Bruges. The Hanseats buried their dead in the monasteries of the Carmelites and the Augustinians; they donated works of art (e.g. stained glass windows) to the mendicant orders or to parish churches; they gave alms to religious and charity institutions. Hanseatic merchants in Bruges were also members of local fraternities (together with Italians and other merchants) and they participated in most prestigious urban festivities.

At the crossroads of this exchange were the Low Countries and South-eastern England. Here, two cultures met, but two cultures with distinctly different characteristics. On the one hand the advanced Mediterranean and Low Countries economies (a highly urbanised system; an open, cosmopolitan world, industrial and commercial), while on the other hand Eastern Europe remained, despite the influence of the Hanseatic cities, prevalently closed and rural. It was in Bruges, London, and the industrial and commercial towns of Flanders, Brabant and Holland that for almost two centuries intensive exchange took place, and a process was initiated by which in the course of the 15th century, economic and cultural differences gradually became much smaller. The Hanse helped to create a single homogeneous urban culture from Cologne to Soest, from Lübeck, Rostock and Danzig to Bruges.



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**Excerpts from the privileges of the German Hanse in Bruges 1360 (confirmed in 1392), obtained after a trade embargo**

1. Also dat zij bin der stede daer de coopman in leicht, hare coopmanscepe ende hare goed, zij mindre, cleene of groot, tallen daghen ende tallen tiden vercopen moghen, wanner zij willen, ende copen ander goed, elc met anderen jof met wien dat zij willen ende begheren, ende dat zij hare goed, dat zij daer niet vercopen en willen, moghen weder ute der stede of uten lande voeren, bi watre of bi lande, zo waer dat zij willen ende begheeren, gheldende haren rechten tol.

7. Voort zo wat huuse of kelnare die de coopmanne vorseid huren willen binnen der stede, daer de coopman in light, in te wonene jof haer goed in te legghene, dat men se hem niet verdierse hare termine ghedurende. Ende es dat zake, dat zi se langher begheren, dan hare termine, dat zi ze moghen behouden omme die zelve hure zonder verdiersen

9. Voort dat men van den vorseide coopmannen ghenen in vanghenessen leden zal om gheenrande scult, daer gheen wettelijc chaertere of en es, alse langhe als hi wisen mach binnen den landen van Vlaendren alse vele zijns goeds, als de scult ghedraghet, voor hem te stane wetten te pleghene, of suffisante personen, diene verborghen, wetten te pleghene.

11. Voort dat de vorseide coopmannen in de stede vorseid met haren gheselscepe ghemeene vergaderinghe moghen hebben openbaerlike, alse dicken als zij willen omme te ordenerne ende te corrigierne alle vorworden ende alle ordenancen onder hemlieden ghemaect ende punieren alle mesdaden, die onder hemlieden ghevalen, naer haer ordenancen, behouden der mesdaet die strict te live of te lede verliesene.

13. Voort zo wat manne die makelare es in de stede vorseid vanden vorseide coopmanne coopmanscepe ende goed, dat hi zal doen zinen eed voor scepenen in de presencie vanden coopman vorseid, recht makelare te wesene ende negheen gheselschap te hebben in dien goede daer hi makelare of es, ende rechtichede daerin te zegghene den copere ende den vercopere.

19. Voort dat alle coopmanne ende hare cnapen wapene draghen moghen ende copen ghelijc eenen poorter, ende wijn ende allerhande vitaille bringhen moghen bin der stede vorseid bi alzo dat zij ghelden de costumen vander stede, ende dat zijt vercopen moghen te haren besten.

(published in P. Bonenfant, J. Bartier, A. Van Nieuwenhuysen, *Ordonnances de Philippe le Hardi, de Marguerite de Male et de Jean sans Peur 1381-1419. Tome 1 1381-1393*, Brussels, 1965, 490-498)

1. They (the Hanseatic merchants) are allowed to do their commerce in Bruges and they may sell their goods, small or large quantities, anytime they want, and they may buy all commodities from anyone they desire. They are also allowed to re-export the goods they did not want to sell, out of the city and the county, by water or by land, at any time they want, if they pay the usual tolls.

7. The rent of houses and cellars, which the merchant wants to have in the city, to live in or to store his goods, may not be made more expensive during the time of the rent. And if the merchants want to prolong the rents beyond the original period, they can keep the houses and cellars without them becoming more expensive

9. Merchants from the Hanse may not be put in prison for debts, when there is no written

proof, as long as they remain in Flanders and their goods remain here for the amount of the debt, and if there are guarantors who give sufficient guarantee for the debts.

11. The Hanseatic merchants can organise public meetings whenever they want, in order to create or adapt their regulation and ordinances, and to punish according to their law all crimes for which they are responsible, except when the punishment involves death or any bodily harm.

13. Brokers in this city for the goods of the Hanseatic merchant must swear an oath before the bench of city aldermen and in the presence of merchants of the Hanse, to be honest, to do justice to both buyer and seller, and to have no commercial interests in those deals for which they are brokers.

19. Every merchant or his assistant has the right to carry arms and to buy and sell as any other bourgeois of the city. They may import wine and other food in the city as long as they pay the customary taxes, and they may sell these as they see fit.

(own translation)

### **Regulation of the *kontor* of Bruges 1347**

*In nomine Domini, amen. Umme dat et gud es ende profitelic, die stucke ende sake, der men gedenken sal, dat men die in ghescrifte hebbe ende halde, so waren de ghemenen coplude uten Romeschen rike van Almanien int jaer ons heren als men screef dusent driehondert ende seven en viertich jaer, vergadert ten Carmers in den reventer toe Brucghe, uppe sente Symon ende Juden dach der apostele, ende droghen daer over een alle die up de tyd daer waren, umme nutscepe der ghemenen coplude vorseghet, dat se wolden hebben ende halden en ghemene bok, daer men in screve alle ordinancien ende wilkore, die men under hem luden ordinieiren ende maken solde, ende ok wat se in custumen ende usanzien holden solden.*

1. *Int erste es to wetene, dat die ghemenen cooplude vorseghet sint ghedelet in dre deel; dat es to verstane: de van Lubeke ende de Wendeschen stede ende die Sassen ande dat dar to behort in en derdendeel; ende die van Westfalen ende de van Pruken ende dat daer toe behort int ander; ende de van Gotlande ende van Lyflande ende van Sweden ende dat dar to behort int derde.*

2. *Vortmer salmen elkes jares alleweghe achte daghen na Pincsten kesen ut elken derdendele twe oldermanne; ende wen men dar to kuset, die salt sin eder gheven en pund grot in de bussen der ghemenen coplude vorseghet ende staen daer na sinen eventure, of men anderwarve keyse of nicht, up die selven boete vorseghet*

3. *Vortmer weret also dat er en wech vore van den ses oldermannen, die vive sullen keysen enen man ute deme selven derdendele, dar die seste olderman in horde, ende des solen se sin vulmachtich uppe de vorbenomeden boete*

4. *Vort solen die ses oldermanne vorseghet machtich syn, de ghemenen Duschen to samene te bedene, uppe ene boete cvan dren groten binnen der tyd also en unboden wert ter stede to commene daer de olderlude sint ...*

5. *Vortmer weret also, dat et nod were van groter sake, so moghen die ouderlude onbeden wem se wellen, bi wo hogher bote dat se wellen.*

6. *Vort weret also, dat en olderman dar nicht en queme, die sal hebben verboret dubbel boete.*

7. *Vortmer weret also dat de olderlude nicht conden over en ghedreghen, so sal die minneste hop deme mesten hope volghen.*

8. *Vortmer gheliker wis weret also dat de dre derdendele nicht over en conden dreghen, so es te verstane: wes de twe derdendele over en dreghen, dat des dat derdendeel sal ghevolghen.*

9. Vort so wat sake dat anghaet den ghemenen Duschen also to seggende: et si in der porten of buten porten, van den saken sal holden dat word de wiseste ende de et best can van den ses oldermannen vorseghet, dem et die vive wisen, dat he dar best to ghevellich si. It ne were dat die sake roerde mer int eene derdendele dan int andere, inde wat derdendele die sake mest roren, de olderlude, die van deme derdele siin, de solen holden dat wort also vander sake vorseghet...

10. Vort solen die ses oldermans upten selven dach vorseghet keysen ses man ut elkem derdendele, up ene bote van vif scillingh grote eme elken, wemen dar to kuset, ende stan nochtan de eventure, off men ene noch anderwarve keyse up die selve boete vorseghet. Ende dit sin denne te ghadere achten man.

11. Vortmer de ses oldermannes ende de achten manne vorseghet, die solen verghaderen also dicke, also et en de ondermannes unbeden. Ende dese moghen alle saken untrichten sunder verghaderinghe der meynen Duschen

12. Vort wene de olderlude keysen vor scepen te ghane of anders war, war es te done is binnen der porten, dat solen se don up ene bote van twen scilling grote; buten der porten, es si to ridene of te ghane, up ene boete van vijf scillingh grote.

13. Vort also de ghemenen Duschen ton Carmers verghaderen of de achten man, also oldermans binnen den reventer gan, so solen se secghen enen cnapen, dat he umme ga in de kerken, ende secghe, dat die olderlude dar binnen sin, dat se dar binnen comen; ende ware dat sake, dat enich man daer queme, dat die olderlude hadden ere rede anghesat, de solden ghelden dre groten in de bussen

14. Vort also de oldermans over deme contoer staen ende ere rede recken, were dat sake dat enich dar binne uppe de banc gheinge sitten, jof keghen anderen snak beghonde to begripene, it were met ene of met twee of wo vele dat er weren, ende se daer nicht na horen, dat die olderlude segheden: also vele als er weren, en ellic van den solde gheven in de busse enen groten, also dicke ende also manich warven, also id deden. Ende der ghelike, also dicke als en ellic derdendeel bi sic to rade ghet, de solden ghelden die selve boete.

15. Vort wie die dore up diet sunder orlof der oldermannes, de sal gheven vif scillingh grot in de bussen; ende ok die en wech geit sonder orlof, die sal gheven drie groten in die bussen.

16. Vort dat die olderlude moghen enen elken man vermanen bi sinen eede, die warheit te secghene, des men ene vraghen sal van eliken dinghen, de behoren in dat Dudesche recht, up ene boete van enem pont grote.

17. Vort were dat sake, dat eneghen copmanne vorseghet eneghe sake an trede, si were clene oder grot, it were buten Brucghe eder binnen Brucghe, die sal hi vervolgen up sinen selves cost; ende es id also, dat he sin wort nicht holden wol en can, so bidde he enen anderen die sin wort vor hem halde. Ende to sinen saken solen eme helpen de Duschen, war dat se connen ende moghen.

(published in *Hanserecense. Die recense und andere Akten der Hansetage von 1256-1430*, 1, 1870, p. 75-77, and translation in J.P. Sosson, *Het Oosterlingenhuis te Brugge*, in A. d'Haenens, *De wereld van de Hanze*, Antwerp, 1984, p. 178)

In the name of God, Amen. Because it is prudent and useful to write down the regulation and ordinances, which should be obeyed, the merchants of the Holy Roman Empire in Germany have decided in the year of Our Lord 1347 during their reunion at the dining hall of the Carmelites in Bruges, on the day of the Holy Apostles Simon and Judas (28th October), to keep a common book for the member-merchants where all the decisions and decrees will be registered, and also the customs which should be respected.

1. Firstly, it should be stated that the community of merchants consists of three groups (*thirds*): the merchants from Lübeck, associated with those of the Wendian towns, the merchants from Saxony and their allies; the second group are merchants from Westphalia, Prussia and their allies; and the third group are the merchants from Gotland, Livland and their allies.
2. Each year, on the eighth day after Whitsun, each group has to elect two aldermen. The elected alderman is forced to accept his position or pay a sum of one pound to the treasure of the group of merchants, and risking a second election or paying the fee.
3. If one of the aldermen leaves the city of Bruges, the other five aldermen elect a replacement from the group of the leaving alderman. He should accept his position or pay the amend.
4. The six aldermen can convey the German community of merchants on a date or at a place of their own choice. Absent merchants shall pay an amend of three shilling.
5. If an important matter requires it, the aldermen are able to subpoena everyone and ask amends.
6. If an alderman does not appear at the required date, he shall pay double amends.
7. If there is no consensus in the reunion, the minority should yield to the majority.
8. Similarly the *third* which does not agree with the other two must accept the decision of the majority.
9. If a certain matter inside or outside Bruges is important for the community of merchants, the most just and responsible alderman, appointed by the other five aldermen, will represent the community. If the matter concerns in particular one third, more than the other thirds, an alderman from this third will be chosen.
10. The six aldermen will choose on the day of their election six judges within their third, who must, if they refuse their position, pay amends of five half shillings according to stipulation no. 2.
11. The six aldermen and the eighteen judges must convene whenever the aldermen ask them to. They can decide on all current matters without intervention of the General Assembly of the German Merchants
12. When the aldermen choose representatives among local magistrates, these have to accept their nomination. If they refuse they must pay amends of two silver half shillings in the city, or five half shillings *extra muros*.
13. When the community of German merchants convenes at the monastery of the Carmelites, and when the aldermen retire for their meeting in the dining hall, their servants must look in the church for people wishing to attend the meeting. If someone arrives after the aldermen started their discourse, they must pay three pennies to the treasure.
14. When the aldermen address the crowd from their bench (*kontor*) and people present sit on the bench or talk to other people without paying attention to the words of the aldermen, they must pay each time amends of one penny. The same measure applies to meetings of the thirds.
15. People who open the door without permission of the aldermen, must pay five silver pennies, anyone who leaves the meeting without permission pays three pennies.
16. The aldermen may ask anyone to answer under oath the questions, which belong to German law, amends are one pound.
17. If a merchants wants to have dealings inside or outside Bruges, he must do so at his own expense. If he is not prepared to do this, he must ask a colleague to act as his representative. All Germans must assist him to the best of their possibilities for each enterprise.