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The Hanseatic League

Published by

Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



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[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-18 20:23 GMT)



1356 - circa 1450

The Hanseatic League

Trading towns in the Low Countries

In the long period from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, the towns of Zutphen, Deventer, Tiel, Kampen, Zwolle and others (particularly in the east of the country) were important and prosperous trading centres. They were members of the Hanseatic League. A Hansa was originally a collaborative arrangement between merchants in various cities who traded in the same goods. By working together they could reduce their costs, travel more safely (together), make purchases or sell in bulk, and arm themselves against the capricious whims of liege lords. In 1356, the Hansa towns formed a league of not just merchants but whole towns. The decision to form the league was made in Lubeck, a town in what is modern-day Germany. The German *Hanze*, which is called the Hanseatic League in English, became a powerful collaborative network of towns that stretched across Germany, the Netherlands,

Belgium, the Baltic States, Norway and Poland. Within its network, the league attempted to alleviate restrictions on trade as far as possible. The Hansa network also traded with partners outside this area, with London, for example, and even with Spanish cities.

Trade was brisk in such goods as salt, grains, fish, wood, wine, beer, animal skins and cloth. The goods were mainly transported by sea and on rivers using so-called 'cogs' (ships) of between fifteen to thirty metres in length. The towns grew and prospered, built city walls and became dotted with merchant's homes, warehouses and many other types of buildings. The legacy of the Hanseatic League can still be seen in the towns mentioned above, as well as in smaller Hansa towns like Hasselt and Doesburg.

For non-Hansa towns like Amsterdam, trade across the Baltic Sea was the so-called

“mother of all trade”. This trade formed the basis for an economic boom. It also meant that this trade centre had to compete with the towns along the IJssel. When the Hanseatic League collapsed in the course of the sixteenth century, the Baltic Sea trade through towns outside the league continued to flourish. By 1585, Antwerp had become

the true centre of trade and this position was later taken over by Amsterdam. Shortly afterwards, Dutch trade became increasingly focused on all the seven seas and became embedded in the conquest and exploitation of colonies. The shifting economic relationships in Europe resulted in the towns along the IJssel losing their prominent position.



Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Life in a Dutch Hansa town in the late Middle Ages
(e.g. markets)

The transport of goods in the Hansa period: the cog (ship)
Towns and villages along the IJssel

Secondary education sector

Amsterdam and the Hanseatic League
Economic history of the Hanseatic League
Urban heritage in Dutch (and German) Hansa towns
The role of merchants and traders in medieval towns
The collapse of the Hanseatic League

Past and Present

What are former Hansa towns doing with this tradition,
e.g. for promoting their town and in tourism?

In the Treasure Chest

Model of a cog

References

Places to Go

Deventer: Historisch Museum
Kampen: a visit to the Kamper Cog
Hansa town walk, available at the webshop of the
Kampen Tourist Office (VVV)
Hansa detective, inside the town of Deventer

Books for young people

Thea Beckman, *Gekaapt*

Background literature

Frits David Zeiler and Ger Dekkers, *Sporen van de Hanze: glorie van een gouden eeuw*, Zwolle 1997.
De "Gouden Eeuw" van de IJsselstreek (1250-1550) en de betekenis van de Hanze, Zwolle.

Websites

www.deventergerchiedenis.nl/edu/index-edu.htm
www.kamper-kogge.nl