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*The German Hansa and King Richard II of England:  
A Nuanced and Evolving Relationship during the latter  
14<sup>th</sup> Century.*

*By*  
*Charles-nicholas M. Beard*



Picture from: <https://www.pinterest.com/karsten1202/die-hanse/>. Last accessed April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

*Dedicated to Nancy Maulsby and Dini Pickering,  
Thankyou for your faith and patience.*

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Charles-nicholas M. Beard  
University of New Hampshire, 2017.

## **Introduction**

For generations of scholars, the goal of defining the nature of the relationship between the English and the North German and Baltic Hansa has proven to be elusive. Modern interpretations have often met with nearly as little success as the Hanseatics' own contemporaries had in defining the sentiments underlying the Anglo-Hanseatic interactions and the precise course of its development, and this is due, in part, to the fact that the English side represented a complex alignment of interests. This study intends to investigate this important international relationship between medieval England and the merchants of the German Hansa, and to provide a survey of the administrative and diplomatic realities. Specifically, these chapters will focus on, and attempt to contribute to, the historiographical debate surrounding these two medieval economic superpowers during the reign of King Richard II in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century by enhancing the existing with an in-depth study of the changing factors motivating English diplomacy. As a result of this effort, this thesis will be able to more specifically triangulate England's early efforts to gain a position in the commercial revolution, and we will be able to further understand the context of the evolving importance of international relations to medieval trade during this pivotal moment of the commercial revolution. The process of comparing the prevailing interpretations of Anglo-Hanseatic relations with an analysis of the Calendars of the Patent and Close Chancery Rolls for Richard II's reign will center in on the particulars of the evolving and nuanced rapport between royal authorities and the German Hansa. While the reign of King Richard II does represent a tumultuous moment in the history of the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship, a deeper read of the situation reveals that the English government proceeded

through several diplomatic phases with their mercantile counterparts, not just a single see change in nature of Anglo-Hanseatic relations from pleasant to hostile, as some other historians have suggested.

The German Hansa, or “Hanseatic League”, as it is known by many modern commenters, has provoked scholarly discussions concerning international trade and medieval economics. The Hanseatic organization is a highly interesting subject for many reasons, most notably their longevity, unparalleled achievements in medieval commerce, and enduring fame. They were an association of mercantile city-states and trading companies who worked in concert with one another, to varying level of success, from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century to the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The German Hansa managed to attain a dominant position in virtually all international trade in northern Europe, especially, they were known for their near monopolistic control of the trade routes originating in the Baltic Sea. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century their trade routes also extended to the shores of Great Britain, where they had established a longstanding and highly profitable international relationship with the kingdoms of that island, particularly the English. While the Germans were known to have traded with the Scots and other Kingdoms of the North Sea region, this trade paled in comparison with the flourishing import and export trade enjoyed by the Hansa in England.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons and others, the German Hansa is often lauded by historians as being one of the, if not the, most powerful commercial interests of the medieval period.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. Translated by D.S. Ault and S. H. Steinberg. New York, N. Y.: Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1970. 218, 220, & 246.

<sup>2</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 18, 45-6, 116-19, & 139-43.

The most notable accomplishment of the Hanseatic merchants was the fact of their overall size and the scope of their trade. Historians during the 19<sup>th</sup> century often presumed that international trade, particularly in northern Europe, never rose much above the level of subsistence.<sup>3</sup> Later discussion of the German Hansa verified that this was not accurate and the fact that the Hansa was comprised of hundreds of cities and towns, from different regions of northern Germany, the Baltic coast, and Scandinavia, makes their vast economic triumph and longevity all the more impressive. The overseas merchants and mercantile houses from the various cities agreed to work together without having been compelled to do so by princes or kings. In the end, these merchants and overseas traders realized the need for the mutual profit and protection for all within their organization, and thereby took steps to foster a culture of cooperation and unity.<sup>4</sup> In modern terms, such a feat would be unimpressive, however one must consider the fact that international commerce during the medieval period was a highly dangerous and risky enterprise, threatened at all times by piracy, deadly weather conditions, and temperamental aristocratic magnates. Competition in business could be cut throat during the 14<sup>th</sup> century and traveling to distant lands could be hazardous to more than just one's bottom line.

The Hanseatic merchants were able to overcome the myriad challenges of the medieval period by working together and they managed their entire system of trade networks and commercial infrastructure through largely peaceful means. The members of the Hansa were not usually compelled with the threat of violence from other Hanseatic cities, nor did they maintain a centralized military capability with which to engage or coerce other polities. Each city and its

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<sup>3</sup> von Brandt, Advaster. *Recent Trends in Research on Hanseatic History*. From: "History, New Series, Vol. 41, No. 141/143 (February – October, 1956), pp. 25-37." 29.

<sup>4</sup> Hunt, Edwin S. ; Murray, James M. *A History of Business in Medieval Europe, 1200-1550*. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1999. 21-3, 24, 29, 79-81, 87, 160, 162-7, & 206.

merchant community was able to decide and act according to their own best interests. For five hundred years, the Hanseatic cities and towns succeeded in allying their individual interests for the common goal of trade. Many modern commenters have likened the German Hansa to a prototype United Nations or European Union because of these characteristics.<sup>5</sup>

The German Hansa in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was also of immense importance to the English economy, as they facilitated much of England's overseas trade with Europe and in the Mediterranean. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century England was in the process of becoming a major world leader, a true super power in terms of military and diplomatic capability.<sup>6</sup> Trade and commerce were a significant element of England's ambitions, especially in the fields of wool, leather, and finished cloth. Because the German Hanseatic merchants possessed ready trade networks and shipping infrastructure, many English merchants and whole sale wool traders depended on their German contacts to carry out this England's textile trade. German merchants from the Hansa also had access to money and other finished and luxury good with which they could trade with the English for textiles, and further enhance the commercial markets in England.<sup>7</sup>

The commercial revolution is an additional element to consider here, as the phenomena is clearly visible through the evolving interactions between the English and the German Hansa. The commercial revolution was an international paradigm shift and expansion of international trade and commerce during the early and high medieval period. While the English were relative late

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<sup>5</sup> Pedersen, Frederik. *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic: English Merchants and England's Relations to the Hanseatic League 1370-1437*. Pisa University Press Lungarno Pacinotti © 2006.

[http://www.academia.edu/161532/Trade\\_and\\_Politics\\_in\\_the\\_Medieval\\_Baltic\\_English\\_Merchants\\_and\\_England\\_s\\_Relations\\_to\\_the\\_Hanseatic\\_League\\_1370-1437](http://www.academia.edu/161532/Trade_and_Politics_in_the_Medieval_Baltic_English_Merchants_and_England_s_Relations_to_the_Hanseatic_League_1370-1437) ; 2-3.

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd, T. H. *England and the German Hanse 1157-1611: A study of their trade and commercial diplomacy*. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 51-4.

<sup>7</sup> Lloyd, T. H. *England and the German Hanse 1157-1611*. 11-14, 28, & 30-32.

comers to the commercial revolution, their explosion onto the scene in the late 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> centuries was seismic in its repercussions. The English wool trade, carried out largely through intermediaries, provided textiles for much of northern Europe, forcing out the Low Countries as the principle source of wool in northern Europe.<sup>8</sup> England's wool and other cloth wares were in high demand throughout Europe, even in southern France and throughout the Mediterranean region. But the late 14<sup>th</sup> century was the first moment that the German ascendancy in northern and eastern European trade, and particularly the control over the actual trade routes and access to ports, became a point of contention between the two storied partners.<sup>9</sup>

That England and the German Hansa formed a symbiotic circle is the inescapable conclusion, based on the above interpretation. However, the 14<sup>th</sup> century also marks a moment of expansion for the English, whose kings had set themselves the task of wresting the French crown from the Valois, and who, as some historians have suggested, sought to increase their country's international trade capabilities too. The reign of King Richard II is seen by many scholars as significant turning point in Anglo-Hanseatic relations. More precisely, some historians have posited that the policy of King Richard II was to antagonize the German Hansa and prosecute its merchants in an effort to gain readier access to the German's lucrative Baltic trade routes for English merchants.<sup>10</sup>

Even though Richard II's reign was a troubled period for Anglo-Hanseatic relations, the situation was more complex than some historians have noted in previous discussions. The last

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<sup>8</sup> Lloyd, T. H., *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982. 46-8, 51, 53, 72-3, 79-81, 98-122, & 130-3.

<sup>9</sup> Goldthwaite, Richard. *The Building of Renaissance Florence*. Baltimore, M. L.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. 12-3, 19, & 28-9.

<sup>10</sup> Pedersen, Frederik. *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic*. 1-3, 6, & 9-10. See also: Lloyd, T. H. *England and the German Hanse 1157-1611*. 12, 25, & 34-35.

quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century did see a surge in the English drive to acquire a level of privileges in Germany that were reciprocal to those which they extended to the Hanseatic merchants in England. It would not be true to say, however, that the English were willing to risk everything in terms of their good relations with the Hansa in order to achieve that end. In order to demonstrate this, the following study will focus on two main goals, firstly discovering indications of an English governmental policy concerning relations with the Hansa, or at least a trend in policy. After establishing the political trends and tactics in Anglo-Hanseatic diplomacy, this study will examine evidence that illuminates the actual day to day expression of these policies and the expression of the Hanseatic response. In short, the purpose of this thesis is to illustrate that the picture of Anglo-Hanseatic relations is more complicated than simply that the English decided to begin to antagonize and vilify the German Hansa in the latter half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Chancery Rolls for King Richard II's reign tell a more nuanced story. It is irrefutable that this period saw several tense exchanges between the royal government in England and the German Hansa, but Richard II's government was forced to change tactics on several occasions in order to preserve good relations with the German Hansa.

This study has focused on the Chancery Rolls, both Patent and Close, from 1377 to 1399; although the last decade is relatively silent on Hanseatic issues. The Rolls were official documents used to record events, communications, memoranda, and decisions taken by the various officials of the royal court. The Rolls include letters and commands from the King and his Royal Council, as well as from the Royal Exchequer and the other authorities within the administration. Copies of letters from ambassadors and even treaty documents can be found in the Rolls. These Rolls were most often copies of messages that had been dispatched by the court to its officers in the counties and towns. The two types of Rolls describe messages that were sent

out in two states, in the case of the *Patent Rolls* they were open and unsealed, and in the case of the *Close Rolls* they were sealed. The *Patent Rolls* and the *Close Rolls* have no significant or uniform designation defining when one type was used over the other. Rather, determination over which method to use appears to have been at the discretion and convenience of the body or official authoring or officiating each document.

The Rolls are an excellent resource for discovering the activities and prerogatives of the Royal government itself because these documents refer to issues being officiated and ruled on by the King, the Parliament, and the Council. Sometimes these documents even provide explanations or rationales for the particular actions being taken. By examining the types of issues and incidents were officiated by particular authorities it is possible to examine the sources of decision-making within the English government, and which officials were concerned with the different aspects of trade and interaction with the Hansa. Trends in the Patent and Close Rolls provide hints at the underlying motivations. However, to put great stock in such analyses would be methodologically difficult, given that there is little to no means by which we can secondarily verify or cross reference such conclusion. As a result, these chapters will attempt to offer possible interpretations, based on a logical extrapolation of the sources, but will attempt to avoid any definite conclusion concerning the psychology of a given situation or the internal machinations of the royal court.

Overall, the information enclosed within these documents does suggest the conclusion that the foreign policy under King Richard II's reign progressed through three noticeable stages. The first phase pertained to the renegotiation the Hansa's "ancient privileges", that is the treaties which had governed the relationship between the Hansa and Richard II's forbearers following the accession by Richard as king in 1377. Such renegotiations were common, particularly at the

outset of a new king's rule, but the Royal Council advocated the revocation and full renegotiation of all the previous agreements with the Hansa. The Royal Council's authority was essentially paramount, during this period, because Richard was a minor and the government was largely carried out through the auspices of the regency and council of regency.<sup>11</sup> Richard II was not in a position to rule independently of the Royal Council, or make independent judgements concerning the value of maintaining earlier arrangements with the Hansa.

By 1381 the king renewed the Hansa's "ancient privileges", but the strong-armed style of negotiations between the German Hansa and the English was far from over. Royal policy concerning the German Hansa continued to embody an English desire to push the traditional boundaries of the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship by targeting a small group within the Hansa, namely the Prussians and the Teutonic Order. Finally, the English found it necessary to curtail efforts to force the Hansa to give up some of the previous privileges and to further extend trading rights to the English merchants due to a severe famine in England that began in 1391. This final stage in the evolving Anglo-Hanseatic interaction during Richard II's reign indicates the changeable nature of English diplomacy in their dealings with the German Hansa that was more reactive to events than to a particularly commercial interest on the English side, vis-à-vis trade relationships. These chapters will explore how and why the royal government found it necessary to employ a fluid approach to the negotiations with the German Hansa, and will demonstrate that the king of England, effectively, did avoid a truly damaging trade war with the German Hansa.

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<sup>11</sup> Saul, Nigel. *Richard II*. New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1997. 60-1.

## Chapter 1

Any historiographical discussion of events must begin with a series of basic questions. *Inter alia*, one must establish who are the human subjects of the historical conversation and what evidence exists from which to access their story. The introduction has, previously, attempted to set the stage for this research project by describing the Calendars of the Chancery Rolls for the reign of King Richard II, and also describing the manner in which they were analyzed. But a conversation of historical topics cannot stand alone, in its method and conclusions, and ignore the larger historiographical context. Inevitably the deductions of one study must draw on the contributions of other historians' previous efforts in the area of focus. Furthermore, a study must attempt to preface its own argument by indicating how the new synthesis can enhance understanding in a given field. This chapter is intended to offer some background information for the previous interpretations of Anglo-Hanseatic interactions during King Richard II's reign.

This thesis focuses on the evolution of the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship for the reign of Richard II, but a background discussion of the state of the historiographical discussion regarding both the evolution and development of the Hansa as an organization, and the nature of early medieval English trade from the Norman period onward, will set the following chapters into an understandable narrative. Later chapters will also touch on the previous Anglo-Hanseatic relationship before the rule of King Richard II, as a means to review important details relating to those chapters. This chapter will bear the lion's share of the work for introducing the historiographical and historical context of the greater Anglo-Hanseatic interaction up to the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The Hansa, itself, was a coalition of city-states located in modern day northern Germany, and also along the Baltic littoral region of what is today Poland, Livonia, Estonia, Pomerania, and Russia. The Hansa, often called Almain, the Easterlings, Prussia, or the *Hansa Teutonicorum* by many English period sources, dominated Baltic and North Sea trade from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The Hansa has been traditionally dated from 1159, with the founding of the city of Lübeck, to 1669 and the last recorded meeting of the Hanseatic diet, or council of town's representatives, at Lübeck. Although the history of the Hansa can be said to encompass at least five hundred years, its formative and waning years are often excluded from the history of the Hansa as a coalition because during both these spans of time the unity of the coalition had either not been accrued or had dissipated. Most scholarly treatments of the Hansa focus on the period from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when all of the towns and regions of the Hansa collaborated more or less harmoniously. Philippe Dollinger, one of the foremost experts on the Hansa during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, has argued that the success of the Hansa was based on a characteristic of intercity unity, and that the organization ceased to function when such unity was absent.<sup>12</sup>

In order to understand what the German Hansa was and how it operated it is important to understand the importance of cohesiveness among its members, and therefore to understand the history of the Hansa as an organization it is important to recognize the stresses and hindrances which undermined Hanseatic cohesiveness. Philippe Dollinger seeks to define this voluntary configuration and also chronicles the founding of the communities and the slow apotheosis of the organization and he argues that the cooperative nature of the German Hansa is quintessential to the institution. He starts by tracing the Hanseatic history from its humble and fractured

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<sup>12</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 10-12, 18, 45-6, 85-9, 116-20, 139-40, & 280.

beginnings as an association of north German and Gotland overseas merchants towards its eventual rise toward continent wide importance. The geography of the Baltic region and northern Germany were integral to the development of the trade route spanning from Novgorod to Lübeck, thence to Hamburg and Bruges, and finally to London. This trade route enabled the Hansa to monopolize the trade of commodities from Russian and the north-eastern region as those commodities moved towards European markets. The towns of this region worked together for mutual benefit and in order to mitigate the many risks inherent to long distance during the Middle Ages and they utilized the north-south trade route out of the Baltic to form the backbone of their mercantile alliance.<sup>13</sup>

The institutional dynamic and precise extent of membership for the Hanseatic organization is a matter of continuing debate and investigations. The first significant commentary of the organizational structure of the German Hansa was provided by Georg Sartorius, an early nineteenth century German language historian, who reintroduced the topic of the Hansa to modern historical study, he argued that "...the weakness of the cities inevitably led them to mutual association..."<sup>14</sup> This concept, that the towns of the Hanseatic organization banded together for mutual defense and for combined bargaining power in the face of powerful feudal lords and kingdoms, became a driving force behind many of the early German and English language interpretations of Hanseatic identity.

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<sup>13</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 10, 18-19, and 372.

<sup>14</sup> Satorius, Georg. *Geschichte des Hanseatischen Bundes*. (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1802.) <http://book.google.ca/book?id=JmIPAAAAQAAJ&dq=Geschichte+des+hanseatischen+Bundes>, p. xi.

Helen Zimmern furnished one of the first English language discussion of the Hansa coming near the end of the nineteenth century. Her book “The Hansa Towns published in 1889, represents one of the earliest English centric efforts to address the subject of the Hansa. She argues that the pivotal moment in the rise of the Hansa was the twelfth century after the fall of the Imperial family Hohensaufen and the collapse of the centralize royal authority in Germany. It was during this unstable time, a time in which Zimmern states that “...the ducal power was broken, as the German-speaking lands became the camp of anarchy, confusion, and lordlessness, where rightful and unlawful sovereigns quarrelled [sic] with each other...[that] the towns that had silently and gradually been acquiring much independent strength... take up a firm position against the prevailing social conditions...” Zimmern further contends the Hansa began to cultivate an autonomous or semiautonomous identity in order to maintain security over their trade routes and gain the ability to bargain collectively in foreign lands.<sup>15</sup> This early story of the Hansa’s intrepid spirit of freedom and self-sufficiency, that was the focus in nineteenth century literature of both the English and German language traditions, was soon to be challenged by a new interpretation of the nature of the Hansa, one which sought to expose the Hansa’s nefarious dealings as part and parcel of their *modus operandi*.

The German historian Fritz Rörig also touched on the issue of the framework of the Hanseatic association, which he suggests was reaching a point of major transition during the last decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> These observations by Rörig have little bearing on a discussion of the Anglo-Hanseatic situation during this period, but his observations concerning the nature of

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<sup>15</sup> Zimmern, Helen. *The Hansa Towns*. Elibron Classics; © 2005. 31.

<sup>16</sup> Rörig, Fritz. *Aussenpolitische und Innerpolitische Wandlungen in der Hanse nach dem Stralsunder Frieden (1370)*. From: “Historische Zeitschrift, Bd. 131, H. 1 (1925), pp. 1-18.” 1-3, 8, 9-10.

the Hanseatic system in Germany do underline the cohesive quality of the Hanseatic organization. Rörig states that the Hansa was based, geographically speaking, largely on the north-eastern trade route from the Baltic sea to the North Sea and that its structure can be viewed as a linking up of the widely-separated centers of agriculture in northern Germany and the industrial regions in the Low Countries and the north-west of German territory. He suggests that the early monopolies of overseas transportation and trade in Scandinavia, the Baltic, and even in England had formed the basis for Hanseatic agency and ascendancy. They became the principle middle-men for much of the northern European commerce.

Advaster von Brandt also points out the necessity of cooperation for harmony between the Hanseatic cities and town.<sup>17</sup> In presenting an overview of the various elements native to the Hanseatic organizational structure von Brandt points out that the Hansa was also an organization of people and families. While the specifics elements comprising this observation are not imminently important to the topics of these chapters, it is edifying to realize that the German Hansa was a cooperative group composed both of towns and city-states as well as of merchant communities and the commercial families who operated the vast trade routes described by Dollinger and Rörig.

Dollinger dedicated a generous amount of space to this subject in his 1964<sup>18</sup> survey of the Hansa, and although he does not take a definitive stance on the subject, but he does lay out the various possibilities and demonstrates the primary sources surrounding the Hansa's organizational structure.<sup>19</sup> The Hansa can be said to have consisted of about 70 major cities and

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<sup>17</sup> von Brandt, Advaster. *Recent Trends in Research on Hanseatic History*. 27-8, 31, & 36-7.

<sup>18</sup> *The German Hansa*, by Philippe Dollinger was originally written in French, and then in 1966 it was translated into German and finally English in 1970.

<sup>19</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 45-7, 85-9, 116-29, 136-40, & 286-90.

another 80 to 120 less substantial associated towns. Further complicating matters is the fact that Hanseatic membership seems to have fluctuated wildly at various moments and both the bestowing of and lifting of membership could occur with little to no official record. The Hansa's political outlines could be encompassed by the northern territories of the Holy Roman Empire and the coastal regions of Prussia and Livonia, which were controlled by the Teutonic Order.<sup>20</sup>

The German Hansa, as a unified organization, began to take shape as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The general consensus among historians, however, both English language as well as in the German language tradition, points to the late 13<sup>th</sup> or early 14<sup>th</sup> century as being the true formative moment for the Hansa.<sup>21</sup> Fredrick Pedersen, who comments extensively on the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship and its changing dynamic during the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, also argues that the 14<sup>th</sup> century can be seen as a true moment of crystallization for the Hanseatic identity. An ever-increasing volume of production and international trade also characterized this period, and was a driving force behind the fortunes of the Hansa as well as other powerful economic players, during this stage of the European commercial revolution.

Dollinger further contends that the Hansa was an association of city-states, or *Bund* in German, with the principle goal being "...to protect its merchants in foreign parts and to extend their trade."<sup>22</sup> He also observes that, owing to the fact of the German Emperors' relative weakness in the north, as compared with the Imperial political strength in other regions or the political strength of other medieval rulers over their entire kingdoms, the Hansa became a *defacto* political power in the areas of the Baltic and North Seas. Dollinger further argues that the

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<sup>20</sup> Dollinger, *The German Hansa*. 16, 37, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Pedersen, Frederik. *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic*. 3-6.

<sup>22</sup> Dollinger. *The German Hansa*. xvii.

voluntary nature of the Hanseatic community remained a major factor in the organization's successes during this early era of its primacy.

Once the Hansa had established its hegemony over the Baltic and north German region the constituent members, both the Hanseatic merchants and the larger communities which they represented, continued to push their trading routes farther afield. London became one of the most important trading centers for the overall trade network of the German Hansa. Hanseatic commerce with England was one of the mainstays of their overseas trade network.

“It was now that German sailors and merchants, especially those from Cologne and Bremen, began to take a steadily increasing share in the North Sea trade. At the beginning of the eleventh century King Ethelred II accorded his protection to the merchants of the Empire, putting them on an equal footing with the Londoners as ‘worthy of good laws’. These *homines imperii* were for the most part merchants from Tiel, but some were from Cologne, which had long traded with England, and some from Bremen, whose commercial relations with England are attested before 1100. The Cologne merchants, having increased their trade, were granted, in 1130 at the latest, the right to reside in London, an advantage refused to the merchants of Tiel and Bremen. At some time – the date is unknown – they acquired a house on the Thames, upstream from London Bridge, the Guildhall, which they made their business headquarters and which was the cradle of the future Hanseatic factory (*Kontor*)...”<sup>23</sup>

Dollinger shows that in 1157 Henry II granted his special protection to the Cologne merchants, their goods and their settlements. It is a somewhat contested, although largely legitimate, view that England of the twelfth and especially the 13<sup>th</sup> century lacked a significant community of foreign traders and therefore the corresponding market share in the carrying trade. Another historian, G. A. Williams, suggested that the English were a net importer of finished goods during the 13<sup>th</sup> century and that alien merchants were chiefly responsible for this commerce, and

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<sup>23</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 5-6.

the profits, as well. Dollinger, T. H. Lloyd and Pedersen, among others, have speculated that during the course of the 14<sup>th</sup> century this situation began to change, as the English began to prosecute a more aggressive expansion of their trade routes into the Baltic and eastern regions.<sup>24</sup>

The German Hansa's rise to prominence in English circles, both among the commercial class and with the royal court, precipitated the development of Hanseatic privileges in England during the late 13<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The final iteration of Hanseatic privileges were conferred through the *Carta Mercatoria* (1303) by king Edward I (1272-1307) which was later confirmed in 1317 and 1327 by Edward's like named son and grandson. Pedersen argues that the English kings Edward II (1307-1327) and Edward III (1327-1377) dealt favorably with the Hansa and with most groups of foreign merchants active in their kingdom.<sup>25</sup> T. H. Lloyd's argument concurs with this overall assessment that the Hansa had been furnished with and acquired the most comprehensive list of privileges of any mercantile group operating in London during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> Many who have focused on the topic of Anglo-Hanseatic relations, such as T.H. Lloyd, F. Pedersen, and P. Dollinger, contend that the German Hansa became preoccupied with the maintaining of their existing privileges after this point.

One of the most prized privileges which the Hanseatic merchants in England had gained was the right to maintain guild halls and other storage and living facilities in English territory. The Hanseatics jealously guarded this privilege against any measure of reciprocity towards the English by means of numerous strategies. They developed their largest and most important

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<sup>24</sup> Lloyd, T. H., *Alien Merchants in England in the High Middle Ages* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) 4. See: G.A. Williams. *Medieval London, From Commune to Capital*. (1963), 65.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick, Pedersen, *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic*. 163-64.

<sup>26</sup> Lloyd, T.H. *England and the German Hansa*; 57.

property in London at the Kontor christened the Steelyard.<sup>27</sup> A “Kontor” was the center of a Hanseatic trading colony outside of Germany, specifically the main outposts in any given country. Kontors were the central hub for Hanseatic trade in a given area and the word is of largely Hanseatic origin. These Kontors were not just used as staging areas for Hanseatic merchants to store and sell their goods, but also as symbol of the Hansa’s age old and continuing presence as well as their political power and legal rights in a foreign country. The privilege to maintain permanent, or even vernal, guild houses was among the most advantageous privileges available to foreign merchants of the medieval period because of the stability and security it offered. According to Lloyd’s interpretation of medieval politics, the privilege to set up a guild hall was also a privilege which most governments of the middle ages were highly hesitant to grant.<sup>28</sup> The German Hansa had been granted this distinguished and virtually invaluable right early on, however, the fact that they maintained this right in England and saw its expansion in London and other cities shows the extent of Hanseatic influence with the royal authorities. Many of the historians discussed above have pointed out that these extensive privileges were a particularly vehement sticking point in the developing conversation, diplomatically speaking, between the English and the German Hansa.

In 1340 King Edward III sent missives to instruct his “prelates, counts, barons and commons” for the precincts of London and at least twelve other cities to grant the receipts for all customs duties on wool, leather, and finished woolen cloths to the representatives of the German Hansa.<sup>29</sup> Although England was often in great conflict with other medieval powers, the kings of

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<sup>27</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*, 64-5, and 98-106.

<sup>28</sup> Lloyd, T.H. *Alien Merchants in England*, 124, and 127-40.

<sup>29</sup> Document : *Undertaking Given by the English Customs to a Group of Merchants From Dortmund*. (Circa 1340) From : Dollinger, *The German Hansa*, 384-385.

England still saw fit to pay their debts to the Hansa whenever they borrowed money from the Germans. T. H. Lloyd convincingly argues that although the kings and the high-ranking peers often showed favor towards foreign merchants, and to the German Hansa in particular, the people of the realm often fostered feelings of xenophobia.<sup>30</sup> It stands to reason that tensions caused by xenophobia and competitive resistance would have been especially high among the English merchant community, even though many did trade with the German Hansa to both parties' mutual benefit.

The Scottish journalist and historian Ian D. Colin brought forward this dichotomy in 1915 and introduced to the subject a new sense of international rivalry, which he claimed was central to the relationship between England and Germany during the High Middle Ages. Colins cited the term *Stammverwandt*, the sense of two foreigners, or groups of foreigners, who possess a "like voice" or kindred spirit, and by this term, which he quotes from the German newspapers of his own day, Colvin intended to describe the prevailing apparent sense of familiarity that could have characterized the relationship between the kings of England and Germans merchants of the Hansa. However, from the outset of his book Colin argued against the prevalence of this sentiment and contended, instead, that the German Hansa's relationship with England had often garnered an ambivalent or even hostile tone during medieval times.

Colvin the German Hansa had possessed a long history of negative interactions with the English government and this narrative of antagonism was prompted by two primary goals on the part of the Hanseatic merchants. The first motivation of German policy towards England was political and engendered the attempt by the Holy Roman Emperor to coopt England's might as a

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<sup>30</sup> For further discussion see: Lloyd, T.H. *Alien Merchants in England*. 10-12, 15-17, 20, & 25-34.

bulwark against France.<sup>31</sup> The second component of Colvin's one sided interpretation of the Hansa's motivations relates to that organization's commercial goals. He makes the accusation that most of the Hansa's efforts in overseas trade with England was a concerted project to cheat the English. Colvin's point can be summed up in his own words, "Indeed our whole story (that of the English people) teaches us that when the German has something that the Englishman lacks, the Englishman has to pay a very heavy price for it."<sup>32</sup> Ian Colvin's nationalistic perspective results in his postulating a paternalistic relationship between the towns and cities of the German Hansa and the Holy Roman Emperor. From this nationalistic interpretation of Anglo-Hanseatic interactions we can see that a narrative of Hanseatic complicity in Holy Roman diplomatic and trade policy can also be argued, and this would have been one possible interpretation by the English of Hanseatic intentions in England during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

It is with the somewhat polemical interpretation of Ian Colvin that the historiographical dialogue begins to rally around a political description of the Hanseatic organization, which show the Hansa as being representative of greater political machinations. The continuing preoccupation with a political interpretation of the Hansa, among English language historians at least, can then be followed to Hyman Palais, who wrote at the end of the Second World War. Palais recounts the various advantages which the Hansa possessed, owing to the prominence of its merchants in the city of London, and the political influence that their permanent guild hall gained them. He also mentions the various court institutions to which the Steelyard had ready access, including their own internal court for handling internal disputes, and the right of the Hansards to mediate disputes with private English citizens. The German Hansa also had made

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<sup>31</sup> Colvin, Ian D. *The Germans in England, 1066-1598*. Kennikat Press; © 1971. xi – xxxi.

<sup>32</sup> Colvin, Ian. *The Germans in England, 1066-1598*. xv.

powerful inroads in London, where there were many mayors of the city of London who were Steelyarde alderman, presumably of German-English decent.<sup>33</sup>

Palais also illustrates how the anti-German resentment among the burgesses of England continued to increase and gain momentum at least as late as the fifteenth century due to Hanseatic attempts to drive the English foreign merchants from traditionally Hanseatic territory.<sup>34</sup> Palais' argument fits well with the narrative of English and Hanseatic competition and Palais further demonstrates how English merchants and town citizens worked to convince the King of England that the Hansa's privileges should be curtailed. He points to "the Good Parliament" of 1376 and the situation surrounding the ascendance of King Richard II, a mere child and therefore susceptible to manipulation by his courtiers and advisors, as evidence of the tenuous and precarious position for both the Hansa in London and the kings of England who wished to protect the principles of foreign trade in England.<sup>35</sup>

The interpretations of the Hansa as a strictly political phenomenon continued to be the main motivation behind Palais's observations of Anglo-Hanseatic relations. As other historians before him, Palais focused on the interactions between the German Hansa and the English authorities as being fundamentally unjust, with interactions favoring the cunning merchants of the German Hansa who were underhanded and conspiratorial. Palais did, however, give a balanced interpretation of the English efforts to push into the formerly Hanseatic dominated trade of the Baltic regions. He describes the growing power, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and early fifteenth

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<sup>33</sup> Palais, Hyman. "England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380." In *The American Historical Review* 64 (1959): 852-865. 854-856.

<sup>34</sup> Palais. *England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380*. 858.

<sup>35</sup> Palais. *England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380*. 860.

centuries, of the English Merchant Adventurers, who worked to overcome the Hansards' monopoly on Eastern trade in Poland and Russia. He pointed out that the demand for reciprocity of trade privileges became the bench mark for Anglo-Hanseatic relations and negotiations.<sup>36</sup>

Eileen Power, writing a decade and a half prior in 1941, also presents a case for examining the German Hansa as an economic organization with a distinct social dimension. Power frames her introductory lecture of the *Ford Lectures* by saying "...I begin by insisting upon the weakness of the conventional view of the middle ages in Western Europe as mainly a period of natural economy and self-sufficiency."<sup>37</sup> As such, Power set the stage, both in her lecture and within the historiographical discussion, for the shift in definition of Anglo-Hanseatic interactions from political to economic. Alternatively, the economic turn in Anglo-Hanseatic literature took a commanding role in the discussion of motivation, internationally speaking and pursuant to both sides, by 1966, with Michael M. Postan's treatment of the Hanseatic subject.<sup>38</sup> Postan's effort to broach the topic of the intersection of political and economic history is roughly an even mix of the older political tradition of historiography and the more contemporary social and institutional economic point of view. The product of this process was an increased importance of the socio-political nature of the Hansa and that the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship was motivated by both diplomatic and economic factors.

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<sup>36</sup> Palais. *England's First Attempt to Break the Commercial Monopoly of the Hanseatic League, 1377-1380*. 854, 861-3.

<sup>37</sup> Power, Eileen. *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History. (The Ford Lectures)* <http://socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/power/WoolTrade.pdf> . 5/8/16. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Postan, M.M. "The Economic and Political Relations of England and the Hanse (1400 to 1475)." In *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Eileen Power and M.M. Postan, 91-155. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966. An excellent chapter compended within Postan's combined cooperative work with Eileen Power entitled *Studies in English Trade in the Fifteenth Century*

While a clear changeover in emphasis was underway, evidenced by Power's comments, Postan originally ascribes many of the same federalized characteristics to the German Hansa as his predecessors, and he describes the organization as having coalesced into a more unified political unit by the same period upon which Palais focuses, specifically the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Postan elaborates further by commenting that "...[t]he changes were manifold. Some of them affected the international situation in Northern Europe, others occurred in the inner structure and mutual relations of the Hanseatic towns. But whether external or internal, they undermined the very foundation of the Hanseatic prosperity, and forced upon the league a policy of rigorous and jealous protection."<sup>39</sup> Interpretations of Anglo-Hanseatic relations continued to straddle many of the older methodologies and modes of thinking, as a more sophisticated understanding of the Hansa was beginning to reflect the complex nature of the Hansa.

T. H. Lloyd, contributing to the historiography of the Hansa by the early 1980s, demonstrates the revised position, one which takes political matters into account but which does not lose sight of the fact that the Hanseatic organization can also be treated as a socio-economic entity. Lloyd places the Hanseatic merchants at the leading edge of the changes that the commercial revolution was slowly bring to northern Europe.<sup>40</sup> The picture of the Hansa had, by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century evolved to accept that the Hansards were both a class of people and the agents for a larger organization, but that furthermore the towns of the German Hansa were driven both by economic and socio-political concerns.

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<sup>39</sup> Postan. *The Economic and Political Relations of England and the Hanse (1400 to 1475)*. 94.

<sup>40</sup> Lloyd. *England and the German Hansa, 1157-1611*. 3-5.

Overall the historiography of Anglo-Hanseatic interactions is based on many different perspectives and has seen a general trend towards an equal sided discussion of the socio-political and economic motivations of both parties. The German Hansa has been viewed as a highly efficient operator, capitalizing on every advantage available to them. The motivations of the English have also been suspect, according to different interpretations. The most important thing to draw from this historiographical discussion, however, is the fact that the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship was a dynamic and evolving phenomenon centered on the conversation of interests applicable to these two great mediaeval powers.

*The Reign of King Richard II of England as a Lens for Examining the Intricacies of Diplomacy and International Trade*

The other major feature of this thesis is its focus on the reign of King Richard II of England. Richard II was known by contemporaries as autocratic but weak, ambitious but lazy, and both highly religious and authoritarian.<sup>41</sup> These contrasting and, in some cases, conflicting interpretations of the reign of King Richard II give rise to the general impression that the period from 1377 to 1399 was highly fractious and ruinous for the dynasty.<sup>42</sup> But in truth the situation was more complex than simply King Richard II lacked the skill or temperament to sufficiently

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<sup>41</sup> Lyon, Bryce. *A Constitutional and Legal History of Medieval England*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1960. 491-2.

<sup>42</sup> The House of Anjou, also called the Angevin Dynasty, was the primary vessel for the transmission of the Plantagenet Dynasty. The later ruled England from the reign of Henry II, ascended to the throne of England in 1154, until the reign of Richard III, whose death in 1485 concluded his short rule and represented the beginning of the Wars of the Roses period. After the deposition of Richard II the Plantagenet House broke into two cadet branches, the House of York and the House of Lancaster.

rule England. More over Richard II's reign creates an excellent middle ground perspective by which to view the developing English diplomacy with its international trade partners, and furthermore, an excellent lens by which to study the internal politics behind such emergent policy.

Richard of Bordeaux was born in France during epiphany of 1367, specifically the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. His parents were Edward Prince of Wales, known as "the Black Prince", who was son and heir apparent of King Edward III.<sup>43</sup> Because Richard II father died in 1376 of a wasting disease, and because Richard's grandfather died later that year, Richard II became a child King. Nigel Saul, the preeminent historian of King Richard II's reign has stated that the young King's minority status and the popular conception of his youth was a constraint to the King throughout much of his career.<sup>44</sup> Due to this tendency for Richard II's authority to be, at various times and to various extents, both checked and challenged by his peers the English foreign policy during this period is likely a very fertile ground for viewing the juxtaposition of different interests, from the royal interests to those of the peers. It is possible that a glimpse of the opinions and preferences, regarding foreign policy, of different factions of the London burghers can be estimated from some exchanges.

King Richard II was anointed as king of England on July 16<sup>th</sup> of 1377, but even though he had gained his rightful title, Richard II was still technically a child according to the traditions of kingship in England. English custom, as well as European custom more generally, held that a king could only rule with the constraint of a regency or consular body until he reached the age of

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<sup>43</sup> Bennett, Michael. *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*. Sutton Publishing, Gloucestershire; 1999. 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> Saul, Nigel. *Richard II. (Part of the Yale English Monarchs Series)*. Yale University Press. New Haven, C.T.; 1997. 6-10.

majority, traditionally fourteen years old.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the young king under the authority of his regents and his council, a state which hampered his ability to implement his own foreign policy. This state of affairs would continue until January 20<sup>th</sup> 1381 when King Richard II was married to Queen Anne of Bohemia, the young daughter of Emperor Charles IV.<sup>46</sup> But in the meantime the Chancery Rolls often make reference to the king's need to gain assent from his advisors and to seek consent from the Parliament.

Thusly an examination of these documents requires careful notice of any statements concerning the specific stance of any given party, whether it be the stance of Richard II or the Royal Council. This chapter will try to be sufficiently attentive to these details, but the overall policies of the English government regarding their relationship with the German Hansa will have to be taken on the assumption that the ultimate actions taken were generally a consensus of the royal authorities, unless the individual opinions of various bodies can be demonstrated.

The above described state of royal government, spanning King Richard's early years, seems to have led to an uncertain situation regarding policy, and this would have been dire for the merchants and the leadership of the German Hansa, specifically those Hansards physically living and working in England or about to travel there, because they were unable to gain a strong reassertion of their ancient charters and privileges. In the first place the Hanseatic merchants operating in England do appear to have secured the concession of their ancient charters from King Richard II, however royal approval seemed insufficient as new levels of taxation appear to have been imposed on these merchants in London and in other ports. This may seem counter intuitive, and certainly would have seemed inconvenient to the Hanseatic merchants. The Rolls,

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<sup>45</sup> Saul, Nigel. *Richard II*. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Saul, Nigel. *Richard II*. 60-1.

however, state that while the king had granted his assent for the Hansa's retained privileges, the council and the parliament still needed to confirm these patents for the liberties to be valid.<sup>47</sup> As such the Hansa was constantly complaining about being forced to pay surety and provide security for the higher levels of taxation which could, in theory, be retroactively asked of them by the council and parliament. This all appears to have been a stop-gap measure by the royal authorities during the period of transition from King Edward III's rule through the early years of King Richard II's administration.

On the other-hand the royal council did issue orders to distraint the collected tax revenues, or in some other way insure that such revenues would be available for refund if the charters were confirmed by the council. The council also reaffirmed their commitment to examining the issue of Hanseatic charters on several occasions, this most likely because the verification of the Hansa's legal status did appear to be a high priority for the young king. Even still the Hansa was understandably anxious to have their legal status verified by all parties of the royal government was clear given their repeated petitions to have the standing orders in the various ports of England, specifically the order to safe-deposit the sureties and additional taxes so that they might be refunded at a later time, confirmed for the benefit of the local customs officials. The Hansa may have been confident that they would be able to persuade the council to grant them their ancient liberties because they had already earned the king's commitment to reaffirming the Hanseatic charters.

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<sup>47</sup> The legal terminology for the late 14<sup>th</sup> c. describing rights compended in contracts focused on the principles of liberties and privileges, terms which were often interpreted in similar if not transposable fashion. For the purpose of this paper the terms *liberties* and *privileges* are being used interchangeably. The legal rights described and imbued by these terms were recorded in documents known as *charters*. For a more substantive discussion of *privileges* see: Lloyd, T. H. *England and the German Hansa 117-1611*. 20-22, 27-28, 29, 37.

The Hanseatic organization during this time period, that is the reign of Richard II from 1377 to 1399, was also at a crucial moment in their development. The Treaty of Stralsund had been affected in 1370 and this document had brought the conflict between the Hanseatic cities and Denmark to a close.<sup>48</sup> The war between the Hansa and Denmark had also represented the culmination of the Confederation of Cologne, a prototype joint military venture by the Hansa. However, while the Hansa had gained great concessions from the Danes and increased their prestige throughout the Holy Roman Empire and Europe as a whole, they had also arrived at a turning point for the Hanseatic organization. The question of Hanseatic unity and centralization moving forward would be the defining issues for the Hansa in their interactions with foreign powers and especially England. In order to best address this issue it is important to understand that the Hansa was often a reactive organization. They tended to respond to external events in a manner designed to safeguard and preserve their privileges abroad. I detailed study of interactions between England and the Hansa for the perspectives of both entities, that is the Hanseatic merchants both domestic to Germany and those stationed at the Steelyarde, as well as the Royal administrative perspective and, where possible, the perspective of the peers of the realm, the council, and the parliament.

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<sup>48</sup> Dollinger.

## Chapter 2

The relationship between the royal authorities of England and the German Hansa during the reign of King Richard II is best understood, arguably, through the context of their intersecting and evolving policies. These policies can be accessed through a number of lenses accessible through the primary sources, although our overall compendium of sources on this topic is, regrettably, limited.<sup>49</sup> The Chancery Close Rolls, as previously described, are an excellent source for learning about the English intentions and actions with regards to the merchants of the German Hansa. While some historians have argued that the presence and ascendancy of the German Hansa in England had a hampering effect on English trade interests, others have put forward the idea that the Hansa, and other international trading and shipping entities, helped to facilitate English shipping that would have been impossible otherwise. Although a proper determination on this score cannot be accomplished within the confines of this paper, it is possible, and necessary, to evaluate the development of Anglo-Hanseatic trade over the course of the latter's existence up to the period with which this paper is concerned.

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<sup>49</sup> The term "policy", utilized here and throughout these chapters, is admittedly an anachronistic and potentially misleading term, however, it is meant to describe the developing trends and the decisions by English law makers regarding the path they would wish to see government action take. The Chancery Rolls do not make mention of any official policies, in the modern sense. That said, they do describe the king's feelings and attitudes towards various actions and his justifications and, to some extent, his motivations as well. Over all the term "policies", for want of a better phrase, is meant to refer to president and *ad hoc* trends or strategies, implemented by the royal authorities, that example the will of King Richard II in consultation with his Parliaments and his Royal Council.

The Anglo-Hanseatic relationship taken in profile for the entire 14<sup>th</sup> century is a topic which has been deliberated on at length by numerous historians from both sides of the North Sea, as discussed in the historiographical contextualizing discussion of the previous chapter. The most condensed version of this dynamic, that is the evolving relationship between the Germans and the English, is submitted by Philippe Dollinger in his survey of Hanseatic history. This interpretation simply contends that the Hansa had been attempting to preserve and expand their privileges first gained through their friendship with King Henry II in the mid to late 12<sup>th</sup> century and defend against any attempts by English merchants to gain a foot hold in Baltic trade through the reigns of Edward I and his successors Edward II and III.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore King Richard II's reign possess several questions concerning the apparent shift in Hanseatic strategy towards England and vis-a-versa, given the conceptualization of this period as representing a see change in Anglo-Hanseatic relations. Where the previous chapter was aimed at exploring the secondary discussion surrounding the characterization of this evolving relationship, this chapter will focus on an analysis of English policy towards the Hansa during the early years of Richard's reign.

In order to gain a deeper and more nuanced perspective and begin to understand the interactions between the royal English authorities and the German Hansa during the reign of King Richard II one must first look at the evidence that is available. This chapter will begin that process by examining the Patent and Close Chancery Rolls for the time period. In particular, any this chapter focuses on letters and commandments which have to do with Anglo-Hanseatic interaction for the early years of Richards reign. Other historians have noted the friendly attitudes of royal officials towards the Hansa during the long years of Edward III's reign, but the first years of any new king's reign are always a good opportunity for new policies and stances on

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<sup>50</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 55-58.

administration to be considered.<sup>51</sup> As such this chapter will look at the available documents for Richard II's early rule and attempt to characterize the nature of the evolving Anglo-Hanseatic relationship, while bearing in mind that the many different variables that feed into policy decisions do ultimately obfuscate our perspective.

This chapter will attempt to consider both evidence which plays directly to the question of the royal government's international policy, as would have been decided centrally and then imposed on the regional areas, as well as instances of English to German interaction that denotes the expression of these policies on the local level. Where possible, it will be important to differentiate between the local interests and their assertion of regional agency as opposed to the royal government's agency, the later representative of the court, both the Royal Council and the king as well as the Parliament in some instance.

The full motivation behind any given instance of precedence observable in the Chancery's Patent and Close Rolls is difficult to pin down with any certainty, and the various organizations and interests within the royal government which officiate the various letters from the Chancery become somewhat important in triangulating the impetus behind any given royal policy. Although it may be necessary for this chapter to assume that the king's opinion on any given matter ultimately superseded the other organizations and interests in the royal government, that is not to say that the king possessed total authority and proceed at all times as he wished. Ultimately this chapter will only be able to speculate as to the decisions and opinions of the German Hanseatic merchants, given that the Royal Chancery Rolls are our main source of evidence, and therefore the Hanseatic side of the relationship will be treated in a more theoretical

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<sup>51</sup> Pedersen, Fredrick. *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic*. 163-64. Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 56-8.

way than the English side. The opinions of other historians will be relied upon to paint the picture of the Hansa's perspective, where necessary, but with the intention of avoiding any arguments which maybe derivative.

*Evidence of the early policies of the royal government and the Anglo-Hanseatic struggle at the bargaining table*

A letter from the Close Rolls describes the status of negotiations in 1378. A situation had arisen in London and Great Yarmouth, a city in Norfolk county, that offers a finger on the pulse for the state of the relationship between the English royal government and the German Hansa during the early years of Richard II's reign. The letter contains an order by the Council dated May 20<sup>th</sup> of that year, and clearly depicts the unresolved state of affairs for concerning the matter of the Hanseatic privileges. This document shows that the overseas trading merchants of the Hansa, both in London and Great Yarmouth, were paying over and above the traditional *customs*, import and export taxes taken in a variety of forms.<sup>52</sup>

These taxes were gathered by royal authorities attached each English port and they seem to have answered to the city bailiffs, although in some cases they answered to royal sheriffs or direct royal authorities serving at the behest of the king, such as in the case of five Cinque Ports of Kent county which answered to the Castellan of Dover Castle, who was the king's stepbrother, incidentally. These tax rates were determined by the royal authorities from the royal court and ultimately were at the discretion of the king himself. The Hanseatic privileges helped

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<sup>52</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 66.) 1378 May 20. Westminster.

to ensure that the German merchants in England were able to pay significantly lower rates on exports and imports as compared with most other foreign merchants doing business in England.

Based on the volume of petitions and complaints submitted by the Hansa to the Royal Council the most important of these taxes were poundage and tonnage, straight import tax rendered upon all dried and liquid wares, respectively. During the reign of Edward III that Hansa had gained privileges regarding these taxes which put the Germans nearly on par with the English.<sup>53</sup> The occurrence of Richard II's rise to rule was a logical moment to revisit these levels of privilege. As a result, however, the visiting Hanseatic merchants were notably concerned, understandably so, that they may not receive refunds for the higher than normal level of taxation being collected at the major ports.

An additional noteworthy aspect of this letter, which sheds light on the continuing negotiations between the royal authorities and the German Hansa regarding the Hansa's privileges, presumably the Royal Council given that the king had already given signs of his favor to the hanasards, was that the letter makes no mention of a solution to the situation to these grievances, placing the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship at a crossroads. The fact that the Hansa had arrived at an impasse with the royal authorities is further highlighted through the wording of the letter regarding future actions, specifically where it states that "...in case the council shall not restore to them a charter of liberties..."<sup>54</sup> the tax collectors should retain the excess taxes above the ancient privileges of the Hansa. The overall negotiating position of the royal government, specifically the Royal Council, seems to have been that the charters of the Hansa should not have

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<sup>53</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 55-7, & 244-5. For a discussion of English law and practice surrounding customs and import taxes see: Lloyd; *Alien Merchants in England*. 11-13, 27-30

<sup>54</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 66.) 1378 May 20. Westminster.

been renewed and that the council advised the king that England would be better suited if the Germans were not retendered their liberties as they had stood under King Edward III.

The passing of one king and the rise to rule of a new one was a perfect moment for royal authorities to renegotiate the privileges which had been agreed to in antiquity. Such moments, where renegotiation would appear opportune to both sides and also relatively inoffensive or unobtrusive to normal trade, would also have been an excellent moment for previously agreed principles to be challenged and old debates reopened. It is possible that the royal council was holding out as a means to flex their own administrative or political muscle, or even to attempt to interpose their own interests and the interests of their constituents. Regardless, it was important for both the Hansa and the royal authorities to bring such negotiations to a swift and decisive close, in order not to disadvantage English merchants operating on the continent or German merchants visiting or planning to visit English ports, or to risk an escalating conflict which would impinge on trade for both sides.

A swift resolution of these negotiations was not forthcoming, as by the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 1378 a letter from the Royal Council sitting at Gloucester indicates that they were going to defer to the authority of the parliament, possibly a stalling tactic given that the parliament only sat for short intervals. The ruling from Gloucester was a similar order responding to a Hanseatic petition regarding taxation over and above their privileges and yet again, as with the order dating from May of that same year, the royal authorities in London and the other major trading ports of England were instructed to gather security against the additional taxes above the old Hanseatic privileges. The Royal Council did, however, stipulate that, once the parliament had been consulted concerning the levels of import tax to which the Hansa should be levied in the future, a new order by the king would then perhaps settle the outstanding issues surrounding the Hanseatic

privileges. That the Royal Council anticipated a new set of privileges to be issued, with higher dues from the Germans is evidenced by their order to secure collateral equal to what ever would be granted in increased taxes "... by advice of this parliament shall be adjudged due to him (the king, or more precisely the Exchequer) over and above the same (previously due)..."<sup>55</sup> According to the order it seems that the Royal Council was banking on the parliament for that year finding in favor of a policy of increased taxes for the German Hansa.

An account in the close rolls from early in 1379 shows how the royal government was maneuvering to ensure the interests of their trading partners from the continent while preserving the dignity of the English actors. The matter at hand was a petition, from Alardus de Useden, John Boukes, and other unnamed merchants claiming to hail from Hamburg, in which the merchants from this Hanseatic town sought the return of ship and goods which had been "taken at sea". This incident which was addressed by royal authorities from Westminster on May 26<sup>th</sup>, and was pertaining to a capture at sea of the ship, crew, and merchandise of a Hanseatic trading mission working out of the port of Calais in northern France. Calais was an English controlled port due to the early victories of the English over the French during the first engagements of the Hundred Years War.

The order to the town of Herewich, regarding the above described incident, makes two things clear. First, the tenor of the letter indicates that this serious situation was the result of English transgression, and secondly it specifies that regardless of the legal status of the English ships the law should rightly see all the lost property belonging to the Germans from the pirated ship returned to the Germans. The ship captains William de Foxton and John Newerk, both

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<sup>55</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 214.) 1378. Oct. 24. Gloucester.

operating out of the city of Calais and most likely acting independently of royal authority, captured the Hanseatic ship and presumably conducted the ship and crew to Herewich. The order also indicates that the situation represented a serious enough international incident to concern the king and his relations with his continental relatives. The letter specifically makes mention of the king's relations and it states that the "...merchants of Hamburg in Ostland of the lordship and power of Duke Albert the king's cousin and friend..."<sup>56</sup>

As the negotiations concerning the formal status of Anglo-Hanseatic relations dragged on through their second full year and further on through King Richard II's early reign there was a need insure that other aspects of the king's foreign policy were not adversely affected. Alternatively, it is possible that the royal authorities were interested in not allowing conflict with the Hansa to escalate further, assuming that they sensed or recognized that the protracted negotiations over the Hanseatic privileges were straining the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship, and therefore took steps to mitigate situations like the one described in the Herewich order. If this is the case than it seems conceivable that the royal authorities may have honed in on the fact of Duke Albert's connection to the Hansa's ship as a pretense for intervention in order to avoid undercutting or angering those of the council and parliament who wished to rein in Hanseatic privileges. By stepping in on specific situations, especially those which may be seen to have been whole the fault of the English such as with a privateer attack, the royal authorities over all could have been trying to deescalate conflicts which threatened the already flagging relationship between England and the German Hansa.

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<sup>56</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 193.) 1379. May 26. Westminster.

Later that year the Parliament of 1379, held at Gloucester in early August, held no respite from these negotiations for either the English or the Germans as by the 30<sup>th</sup> of October orders were still being disseminated to English port authorities at London, Kingston upon Hull, Great Jernemuth, and St. Botolph indicating that the policy of collecting increased customs and providing security to the merchants, in case the policy should be reversed, was still in effect.<sup>57</sup>

*The Hanseatic privileges were finally confirmed and the king takes steps to stabilize the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship but more conflict ensues*

The question of Hanseatic liberties and the confirmation of their charters remained an open question throughout much of 1380, as no further orders regarding the Hansa were sent out from the royal court and encompassed in the Chancery Rolls. The king and the Royal Council did reach an accommodation with the Hansa by September 28<sup>th</sup> of 1380 when a “Writ of *supersedeas*”<sup>58</sup> was issued to the various English ports canceling the previous measures of holding collateral towards the potential retroactive taxation of the Hansa at a higher rate than the old charters had contended.<sup>59</sup> The Royal Council’s portend that additional customs would be levied on the Hansa appeared to have been inaccurate, at least so far as this initial round of privilege negotiations was concerned. The German Hansa must have been ecstatic to have finally received their renewal of their ancient privileges and liberties, especially seeing as they had

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<sup>57</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 266.) 1379. Aug. 16. Westminster. & Patent Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 270.) 1379. Oct. 30. Westminster.

<sup>58</sup> Writ of *supersedeas* : Latin, meaning “to issue”, the Calendars of Patent and Close Rolls treat this term as indicating a commandment from the court, or other officiating organization, as overriding all previous orders and rulings, except those specifically enumerated.

<sup>59</sup> Close Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 401.) 1380. Sept. 28. Westminster.

worked out their agreement with the king personally at least three years previously. Now the Hansa had a full agreement and could return to business as usual, although not all the parties within the German Hansa were happy with the outcome of the situation as we will see in the next chapter.

The English government's policies toward the Hansa, and particularly as pertained to raising levies on Hanseatic merchants, may have been affected to a modest extent, by a desire to cultivate a reconciliatory tone towards the Hansa period new sentence as is evidenced by an order originating from the Royal Council to Robert de Selby of Kingston, a knight and most likely a bailiff for that city. On October 12<sup>th</sup>, mere weeks after ratification of Hanseatic charters, this new issue came to the fore. It appears that a ship from Lübeck, called "La Marienknyght", was captured at sea by authorities from Lynn and Kingston, and there upon the ship and crew were conducted to Lynn and detained for the crime of possessing Scottish goods.

During this time period the English had decreed that commerce with Scotland could only be carried out through English ports need citation. This policy, imposed by English authorities, was all the more important to the English when it concerned major trade powers such as the Hanseatic towns, of whom several were known for and traded heavily in military equipment and strategic resources such as iron for forging.<sup>60</sup> As such the violation by the Lübeck ship described in the order would have been a matter of importance touching on the defense of the realm, and therefore all the more serious. Royal authorities, however, sought to return the ship and crew to Lübeck, less the illegal cargo, most likely in an effort to smooth things over with the Hansa. The intent of this action to thaw Anglo-Hanseatic relations and encourage renewed commerce with

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<sup>60</sup> Lloyd, T.H.. *England and the German Hanse*. 47, 89-91, & 175. Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 86, & 218-9.

the Germans is hinted at by the manner by which the order describes the need to expedite the dearest of the German ship and closes by stating“... that city (Lübeck) is of the king’s friendship.”<sup>61</sup> This friendship of the German Hansa and King Richard II seems to be a reference to the continuing effort on the part of the king to maintain a status quo with the Hansa, as we noted earlier with his move to reissue the Hanseatic privileges in the first years of his reign.

The successful resolution of the charter negotiations in late 1380 would not be the end of the legal troubles faced by the Hanseatic merchants operating in England. As early as February 20<sup>th</sup> of 1381 the German merchants in London had already found it necessary to apply to royal authorities for assistance in the matter of verifying the proper customs rate for dyed and undyed wool cloth being exported from England. The council further confirmed to the customs collectors of the port of London that the Hanseatic merchants who were operating out of the *Gildehalla Teuthonicorum*<sup>62</sup>, the general name for the London kontor, should only pay the customs agreed upon in the privileges. Additionally, the council provided supplementary explanation for the government policy by stating that:

“...it is the king’s will that they shall enjoy all the liberties aforesaid, and shall not be compelled to pay other customs, in consideration of their services in war and elsewhere, of no small aids by them given to the king in his need, and of their exceeding readiness in the king’s business above other alien merchants...”<sup>63</sup>

This elaboration pertaining to at least three of the king’s rationales for favoring the Hansa would seem to indicate that major royal policy shifts sometimes required further justification in order to

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<sup>61</sup> Patent Rolls: Vol. 1 (p. 414.) 1380. Oct. 12. Westminster.

<sup>62</sup> ***Gildehalla Teuthonicorum***: The Guild Hall of the Germans or *Gildehalla Teuthonicorum* in Latin and this facility was the Steelyard, the name of the German Kontor at London. See: Lloyd. *England and the German Hanse*. 15-7, 19, 27-8, 51, 150, 191-3, 198, 200-3, 222, 228, & 141-151.

<sup>63</sup> Close Rolls: Vol 3 (p. 427-28.) 1381. Feb. 20. Westminster.

illustrate to the corpus of royal authorities how a rules change would benefit the king and kingdom. Whether or not this is a correct interpretation, it is clear that emphasizing the importance of this issue for the king was considered a typical aspect of policy issuance. We can also suppose that orders like the one described above were efficient at greasing the wheels of trade because no other serious issues cropped up until late in 1382.

A renewed challenge to the continuation of the Hansa's privileges came on September 26<sup>th</sup> of 1382 when the customs collectors of London began to levy a new tax of 15d. per last of herring instead of the legal 12d. called for by the charters.<sup>64</sup> This new dispute between the Germans and the royal authorities at the port of London, that is the authorities associated with the bailiffs at the local level, may represent a new attempt by the English to skirt their agreements with the Hansa. The fact that the Royal Council required that security be extracted from the German merchants until the parliament could have a chance to rule on the matter could be seen to point to this conclusion. That the Hanseatic privileges should take precedence seems self-evident, but it is possible that this episode is another example of the Royal Council attempting to assert that the Germans merchants should face a higher tax liability.

To say, with certainty, that this was the case is nearly impossible, especially given two other letters of the Chancery pertaining to orders which counter the above argument came out later that year. The first was a directive sent to the treasurer and barons of the Exchequer on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1382 which instructed these authorities to cancel a 6d. in the pound general levy on all merchandise of the Hansa.<sup>65</sup> The other order, dated December 3<sup>rd</sup>, was sent out to various other major ports of England with similar orders. These three orders by the council in the fall of

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<sup>64</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 2 (p. 152.) 1382. Sept. 26. Westminster..

<sup>65</sup> Close Rolls Vol 2 (p. 174.) 1382. Nov. 18. Westminster.

1382 do little to explain the royal policy towards the Hansa during this period except to emphasize the fact that the tumult, which had characterized the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship so far during King Richard II's reign, was far from pacified.

It appears that by December of 1383 many of these issues, especially those surrounding levels of taxation versus the rights of the Hansa given the Hanseatic privileges, had not been resolved and the royal government had reinstated its former policy of collected and depositing for safe keeping a sum to the amount of the enhanced taxes, that is the higher rates than agreed in the Hanseatic privileges. Another item from the Chancery Rolls pertains to an order dated December 9<sup>th</sup> 1383, and suggests that a possible concern on the part of the royal authorities existed touching on the matter of German merchants consorting with or otherwise dealing with trading interests of enemy realms. It is unlikely that the Hansa was actively trading with both English merchants and the enemies of England simultaneously, or at least while on the same trade missions. If the Germans had attempted this it would stand to reason that the English would simply arrest the merchants. Rather, it makes more sense to interpret these incidents as an effort by the English to simply instituting this extra "fee" as a way of getting around the privileges of the Hansa. One cannot rule out the possibility that the English had reason to collect the additional amounts, but the more direct explanation is likelier.

In late spring of 1385 a new royal action took place pertaining to German merchants of the Hansa in the port of St. Botolph. Around the time of the previous Michealmas a number of German ships had lingered around that port and along the neighboring coastline in an attempt to wait out a provisional levy which had been set to expire on Michealmas. The earl of Northumberland, acting in his capacity as "admiral to the northward", arrested all the German vessels thought to have employed this tactic and he charged them with having attempted to

defraud the king. Apparently this ruling by the earl was sound in the eyes of the king and council and many merchants were found for their participation in the scheme. Several of the German parties, however, claimed innocence and, for reasons that are unclear in the document but which may relate to the fact that they could have been German fishermen and not professional merchants, prevailed upon the king for clemency.<sup>66</sup> In either event, we have a picture here of the king's continued application of a policy of enhanced taxation married to a policy of individual examination of outlier cases that possess sufficient grounds for favorable rulings to the Hansa.

If King Richard II had truly sought to extend a more expensive customs policy across the board to all foreign merchants, which one would think would be well within his power, than why did the king continuously seek to mitigate the effects of a policy that was well exercised and appreciated at the local level it is not clear what you are asking here. Furthermore, most of the incidents examined so far make reference to the fact the charters of privileges, already granted by the king, are to be respected in letter and spirit until consultations of either or both the parliament and the council can be made. This last step is usually repeated with each passing year, indicating that a solid commitment to all Hanseatic privileges had not yet been established. Although the overall royal posture toward the German overseas merchants remained somewhat murky up to 1385, a provocation on the part of the Germans was soon to upset the unsteady balance.

As with the previous incident involving the ship of Lübeck called "La Marienknyght", on October 12<sup>th</sup> 1380, it appears likely that trade on the part of the Hansa with either Scotland or France was a point of contention with the English. The nature of this trade and the legitimacy of this type of business from the standpoint of international trade in the Middle Ages is beyond the

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<sup>66</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 3 (p. 619-20.) 1385. April 29. Westminster.

scope of this chapter. It is understandable from a modern perspective, where *free trade* is the supremacies and trade embargoes and blockades are nearly unheard of, that a commerce driven organization such as the Hansa would find it necessary to keep their trade routes open with all nations, even when two or more of those trade partners were at odds with one another. To King Richard II, as with all the European kings, to do business with an enemy was to make one's self an enemy as many historians have pointed out.<sup>67</sup> This must have been a particularly sticky point of contention in the privileges negotiations from 1380. The fact that this issue recurs so often in Anglo-Hanseatic interaction shows just how difficult a position both sides were in; the English unable to forgive an offense such as cavorting with enemy merchants and the Hansa unable to surrender the chance for profit for the sake of England's warmongering. Such consternation typified the ongoing interactions between German overseas traders and the royal authorities.

The line running through all of these strained interactions was a continuous effort by the king to maintain a cordial tone with the Hansa. From the initial labor by the Royal Council to regulate the German Hansa through the negotiations around Hanseatic privileges to the measures taken by the royal authorities to deal with the Hansa by a softer touch, presumably at the behest of the king, the early years of King Richard II's reign witnessed the royal government trying to balance the interests of the realm while not alienating the German Hansa. Indeed, it seems that at many times the king and Royal Councils language towards their own agents was far more severe than towards the Hansards themselves. This was about to change.

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<sup>67</sup> Lloyd, T. H. *Alien Merchants in England*. 11, 15-6, 27-30, 37, & 61-2. Lloyd often provides a detailed assessment of English law regarding aliens and their rights. These selections touch on both the laws and the Anglo-French interactions during wartime.

### Chapter 3

When the English authorities finally had granted the Hanseatic merchants their privileges, at least by September of 1380, and had from then on attempted to foster an atmosphere of reconciliation from 1380 until at least 1383. Given this, one would assume that the prevailing opinion of historians, that England and the German Hansa were at one another's throats during the reign of King Richard II, must be preposterous. If peace had been reestablished between the German Hansa and the royal government under Richard II just three years into his reign than what is the basis for arguing for a continued hostility between these economic powers? Where historians agree, and where their analysis of the situation does line up well with the accounts of the Close and Patent Rolls of Richard's Chancery, was the fact that the Prussians, and perhaps the Teutonic Order more specifically, had rejected the privileges settlement which had been negotiated in London and agreed to by most of the other towns and regions of the Hansa.<sup>68</sup> As such regular trade between the Prussians and the English was still strained and often carried out by intermediaries, namely other hansards. This chapter will examine the continued efforts by the royal authorities and by the Hansa within the Prussian quarter to establish a normalized relationship.

While the Chancery Rolls show that the first half of the decade was relatively uneventful, in terms of anti-Prussian rhetoric and actions on the part of the royal English authorities. Even though the subsequent conflict between the German hansards of the Prussian quarter and the

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<sup>68</sup> Lloyd, T.H. *England and the German Hanse*. 61, 66-68. Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 72-78. Pedersen, Fredrick. *Trade and Politics in the Medieval Baltic*. 160-170.

English rose quickly to a noticeable level, it is important to remember that the other members of the German Hansa and the English authorities would have been simultaneously working to repair the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship. Even still, the occurrence of rising tensions between the Hanseatic Prussian and the English is important because it illustrates a new tactic by those English interests concerned with achieving an altered dynamic between the Germans and the English. Those who wanted to turn the direction of Anglo-Hanseatic trade into the Baltic and back against the Hansa needed a method to do so without risking an all-out trade war. This chapter will also illustrate this new strategy on the part of the English.

*The Ancient Privileges of the Hansa are challenged once again, this time the Prussian Quarter of the Hansa is specifically targeted for English retaliation*

The first indication of a significant crisis moment arising in the Anglo-Hanseatic relations came in early 1386 when John de Burnham, the former mayor of Lenne, was ordered to gather the proceeds of punitive property seizures from the Prussian merchants of the Hansa in that city and deliver all Prussian property to Nicholas de Exton, the then mayor of London. This order, dated February 8<sup>th</sup>, was referring to a previous command by the king's will and both actions were a move by the royal authorities to capture equivalent equity of the Prucian's in order to compensate "certain lieges" who were native to England for arrests of goods in Germany by Prucian authorities. This repartee represents the opening salvo an escalating trade war between King Richard II and the Hansa. What is interesting to note is that fact that the English had begun to recognize the fault-lines inherent to the structure of the Hansa in Germany and, furthermore, had shaped their policy take advantage of the lack of Hanseatic unity. During this period of King

Richard II's reign comes the first evidence that the English would attempt to deal with the Prussians on different terms than with Lübeck or with various other cities and quarters of the organization.

The command of February 8<sup>th</sup> 1386 was clearly originated by means of the intervention of the king and the order is defined as a "Strict order, under peril of the king's wrath". The king had decided to charge Prussian merchants for perceived grievances against Englishmen in Germany. The document states:

"...as the king's command was from time to time to arrest all goods and merchandise of the lordship of Prucia until further order, and by advise of the council the king took order to send to Prucia certain ambassadors for delivery of the goods there arrested and amends of other grievances and wrongs..."<sup>69</sup>

This clearly illustrates that this particular issue was being handle by the king and council in a reactive fashion, and most likely the Prussians were agitating and retaliating against English traders in order to protest the ongoing debacle concerning the Hanseatic privileges. That the English were not willing to provide assurances that the liberties of all Hansards would be observed and that the English would not cease moves to gain a more optimal agreement through hard dealing had now precipitated a strong response on the part of the Prucians.

A month later on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March the escalating conflict intensified still further and grew to encompass merchants for Denmark and other areas of the Hansa. The royal authorities took steps to avoid aggravating the entirety of the Hanseatic organization, but the English did begin targeting ships of diverse lands, including other German regions, and searching for any Prussian

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<sup>69</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 3 (p. 204-5.) 1386. Feb. 8. Westminster.

goods, or even Prussian made goods, which the English could arrest and hold against the Prussian arrests of English goods in Germany. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, however, the king responded to the protests of several of these continental merchants, not of Prussia, who had been caught up in the English sweep and he ruled that if the merchants would swear that their goods were not Prussian made or bound for Prussia than these merchants were in fact innocent of the indictment levied against them.<sup>70</sup>

In June of 1386 the English authorities continued their efforts to mount an embassy to Prussia by continuing to research the extent of lost English properties. Westminster sent out a strongly worded notice to England's overseas merchants in residence at London to compile a list of Prussian offenses and deliver it the royal authorities promptly. Furthermore the king wished to have deputation or single representative for the merchants who would speak for the community of English merchants regarding their grievance against the Prussian Hanseatic quarter.<sup>71</sup> In August and November additional notices went out to seventeen other major ports of the realm requiring similar representative deputations with lists of English losses for the purposes of the informing the king's ambassadors.<sup>72</sup> Other Hanseatic members seemed to have been largely immune from these escalating acts of retaliation against the Prussians, except for instances where the other hansards were attempting to trade on the behalf of their Prussian Hanseatic comrades.

Frustratingly the rolls do not reveal whether or on the English embassy to Prussia was successfully dispatched, but it is clear that the any mission undertaken, or any other kind of de-escalation techniques that may have been endeavored, achieved negligible results. By late in the

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<sup>70</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 48.) 1386. March 8. Westminster.

<sup>71</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 67.) 1386. June 2. Westminster.

<sup>72</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 163.) 1386. Aug. 18. Westminster. Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 194-5). 1386. Nov. 30. Westminster.

year 1387 the English were still prohibiting free trade and egress by Prussian merchants. An order dispatched to the authorities of Lynn stipulated that a Prussian cloth merchant named Goscal Wynbergh was to be allowed to carry on trade in that port, but he was to be monitored and not permitted to leave England without further petition.<sup>73</sup> The order even mentions that the action by royal authorities, to permit Wynbergh to carry on trade as long as he remained a resident of England, was only because his wares were being destroyed by worms. So even this order was to the benefit of the king's treasury, as worm infested wool could not be sold or arrested in either event it would be better for all parties if Wynbergh at least sold his wares before all profits and taxes were lost.

Another letter from the Rolls regarding an order dated December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1387 indicates that the royal authorities had not suspended or interfered in the free commerce of other Hanseatic traders in England. A writ *supersedeas* was issued to the customs collectors of Southampton on that day, the matter at hand being yet another overly ambitious port authority that sought to double charge the Hanseatic merchants for imports of fish. The order states that "...the said Arnald and the others have shown the king that, although they have paid the collectors 3d. in the pound, the mayor and bailiffs and the collectors are distraining them for payment of 2d. upon every barrel to the use of the mayor..."<sup>74</sup> There is also reference made to the fact that the ancient privileges of the full Hansa, excepting the Prussians as mentioned above, were still being honored by the king. To some extent one could argue that this particular situation may have been derived from criminal acts of graft on the part of the Southampton officials, but a simple misunderstanding of royal policy seems equally plausible.

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<sup>73</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 353.) 1387. Oct. 14. Westminster.

<sup>74</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 459-60.) 1387. Dec. 24. Westminster.

It is largely evident that the English had effectively begun dealing with the Prussians as a separate organization from the Hansa. Regardless of the reasons for the continuing or outstanding problems of the larger Hanseatic organization concerning specific customs rates and legal challenges to the activities of specific English ports, a picture is emerging of a new strategy by the English in their dealings with individual groups of the German Hansa. This new strategy served to undermine the Hansa coherence as a unified trade alliance and it weakened the negotiating position of the Prussians, given that they would have to stand alone in the face of English hostility. To the Hansa generally, however, this trend was a potentially lethal tactic because the Hansa derived most of its negotiating power from its near monopoly on east-west trade from Russia and its power of collective bargaining, as it represented at least one hundred and fifty cities and towns across northern Europe during this period.<sup>75</sup> If the English were able to break the Prussians and gain preferential trade access to Baltic waters than the entire Hansa would soon feel the repercussions.

*Renewed efforts to mount an embassy to Prussia and the treaty between England and Prussia signed at Marienburg castle on August 21<sup>rst</sup>, 1388*

While the English had successfully ferreted out the Hansa's principle weakness, namely the fragile and fractured state of the Hanseatic organization, their efforts force Prussia's submission and gain advantage for the English merchants operating in Germany proved to be not only fruitless but also costly. The 1387 episode involving the Prussian merchant named Goscal Wynbergh demonstrated how the necessities of trade, most notably the perishability of most

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<sup>75</sup> Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 45-7, 85-9, 116-29, 136-40, & 286-90.

medieval goods, would not wait for the royal authorities to leverage a preferential deal with the Germans. Time was not on the side of the English and every day the king continued his embargo of Prussia he lost tax revenue and England suffered through a continuing dearth of previous goods from the east.

Despite these realities, the conflict between the Prussians and the royal government entered a second stage of renewed tension. In March of 1388 the king and council initiated another search for English plaintiffs complaining of Prussian improprieties. The Close Rolls of the Chancery record an effort on the part of the royal authorities to once again seek out injured English merchants who should come forward and, furthermore, they state that failure to obey would result in severe consequences for any noncompliant English merchants. It seems that this type of language was necessary to ensure that all English overseas merchants would come forward. It is not clear why this would be the case, but hesitation on the part of certain English merchants could be explained by either expenses incurred by the English merchants in order to comply or by the fact that the prolonged conflict had already cost the English merchants in terms of lost commerce. The order was encompassed in a letter dated March 23<sup>rd</sup> that was clearly meant to cast a wide net as it was relayed to a dozen English ports.<sup>76</sup> This effort to gather grievances against the Prussians was intended to furnish the upcoming embassy to Prussia with the evidence to support argument intending a settlement for the English. The embassy was also meant to mitigate hostilities between the hansards of Prussia and the English, as we can assume that the royal authorities were interested in procuring a resolution to the ongoing and destructive conflict.

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<sup>76</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 481.) 1388. March 23. Westminster.

From late May to early June of 1388 preparations on the part of the royal authorities continued so as to gather the requisite people and equipment for the impending negotiations in Prussia. Thomas Graa and Walter Sibille, citizens of York and London respectively, were selected to lead the embassy and ships in Lynn and Kingston upon Hull were retained for the missions transport across the North Sea to the continent.<sup>77</sup> Between June 9<sup>th</sup> and June 11<sup>th</sup> the final preparations were made, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> of that month a proclamation was issued reiterating the complete embargo of all Prussian goods and trade across at least twelve of the kingdom's largest ports and most likely including all of them.<sup>78</sup> This crescendo of activity pertaining to the Prussia problem was indicative of the king and councils elected approach to pressuring the Hanseatics by continuously intensifying the punitive actions employed against the Germans. Most likely this was a way of demonstrating their resolve to both Germans and native English merchants, as we may suspect that the English merchants might have grown tired of this now decade long contest between England and various of the Hanseatic quarters. It is possible that royal policy towards the Hansa was as greatly affected by the optics of the situation as by the royal authorities' ultimate intentions and goals. While the Chancery Rolls do not reveal this specifically, it is important to remember that, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, the Germans carried out an important role in the execution of English overseas trade.

The exact details concerning the ambassadorial mission of Graa and Sibille are not mentioned in the Chancery Rolls either, but news of their successful negotiations with the Teutonic Order of St. Mary had reach England at least as early as October 1388.<sup>79</sup> Orders to

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<sup>77</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 488.) 1388. May 28. Westminster. Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 416.) 1388. June 11. Westminster.

<sup>78</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 498.) 1388. June 10. Westminster.

<sup>79</sup> The Order of St. Mary and its legal relationship with Prussia is complicated. The Order of St. Mary was an ecclesiastical institution, but it was also a major land controlling organization with

London bailiffs dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of October were aimed at rolling back any punitive measures that had been imposed on the Prussian merchants in England.<sup>80</sup> The king and his council now sought to extend a reconciliatory hand of friendship to the Prussians, in much the same pattern as they had done seven years before with the members of the full Hansa. Orders were subsequently dispatched to at least half a dozen major English ports with the king's commandment that all Prussian merchandise should be, in the terminology of Rolls, "dearrested". The wording of these documents seems to establish a clear level of comprehension on the part of the royal authorities that this agreement with Conrad Zolver of Rothenstein, the then *master general* or grand master of the Teutonic Order, was in essence a de-escalation of the conflict that had been derived by the actions of both sides.

Additionally the Chancery of the Close Rolls for King Richard II included a copy of the letter from Conrad Zolver of Rothenstein to the king which detailed the agreement that both parties had consented to at Marienburg Castle on August 21<sup>st</sup> of that year. This agreement was principally comprised of four stipulations, each seemingly based upon an established principle of reciprocity and a desire to achieve mutual de-escalation through protocols of parity in regulation. The first article of the treaty simply states that, royal reparations to Prussia notwithstanding, all grievances and matters of reprisal will be cancelled to the effect that both sides were committed to forgiving any previous damages or losses. The other three articles of the treaty detail a framework for avoiding future conflict. First the Prussians conceded the right of English

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legal status similar to a duchy. The cities of Prussia each maintained their own individual relationship with the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, but the Order also considered the Hanseatic merchants of Prussia to be a subsidiary organization to the Order. See: Dollinger, Philippe. *The German Hansa*. 91-2, 111-5, 149-50, 168-9, 194-5, 212, 215-220, 287-8, & 300-3.  
<sup>80</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 538.) 1388. Oct. 6. Cambridge. Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 529.) 1388. Oct. 19 Westminster.

merchants to travel and conduct commerce throughout Prussia at their own liberty, however the Prussians do deny the English overseas merchants the right to construct a unified foreign community of temporary or permanent resident traders in Prussia. Both sides were also required to furnish all merchants from the opposite country with a means of legal arbitration by a higher body, specifically, in the Prussian case this is a four-person council that reports directly to the grand master of the Teutonic Order and in the case of the English it is the embassy returned to London who would thereby report to the king himself. These judicial bodies would have the ability to correspond and negotiate with one another moving forward.<sup>81</sup>

The protocol derived from the treaty of 1388 at Marienburg Castle stipulates that if any altercations should arise between the English authorities and the Prussians, that is to say generally speaking, on the international scale equal to the trade war which had precipitated the treaty itself, than the English and Prussian merchants, those operating in the opposite country, should each be detained for no more than a year and then released to return to their respective countries. Furthermore, in an effort to smooth over relations with Prussia and the Hansa as a whole the royal authorities immediately began to issue orders to the agents at, inter alia, Lynn, Great Yarmouth, and Colecester to rectify arrests of Prussian merchants and return goods and ships to those merchants.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, the king was clearly interested in opening a new chapter in Anglo-Hanseatic relations, as these documents from the Chancery Rolls all take pains to place great emphasis on the requisite that "...the peace be not broken which has been made between the king and them of Prussia, which the king is firmly resolved to keep on his side, and no new

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<sup>81</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 654.) 1389. Feb. 10. Westminster.

<sup>82</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 574.) 1389. Feb. 17. Westminster. Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 579.) 1389. Feb. 28. Westminster. Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 585.) 1389. May 22. Westminster.

dispute arise...”<sup>83</sup> This is yet an additional piece of evidence giving voice to the fact that the intermittent Anglo-German conflicts from 1377 to 1388 had taken an appreciable toll on both sides and from 1388 onward the royal government in England was interested in, once again, changing its strategy.

Even though the royal government had taken precautions against further antagonization of the German Hansa, flare ups of antipathy between elements of the English side and particular merchants from the Hansa. For example, around October 29<sup>th</sup> of 1389 the English authorities acting under the authority of John de Holand earl of Huntingdon, the king’s “admiral to the westward”, detained ships and cargoes of some Prussian merchants operating out of London the king intervened on the behalf of the Germans. That these arrests were made against the king’s wishes is made clear as the letter from the Chancery Rolls explicitly states “...that [the capture of the Prussian ships] was not done by will or authority of the king but to his grievous sorrow and dishonor...”<sup>84</sup> The rationale for such an explicit registering of the king’s dismay is hinted at when the order states that the royal authorities were concerned that incidents like this “...may perchance tend to renewal of strife between the king and them of Prussia...” King Richard II was anxious insure continued peace between England and the Hansa would not be threatened by independent actions by overzealous port officials. Some weeks later, on November 17<sup>th</sup>, the council declared that the officials of Lynn should release all Prussian goods back into the custody of the merchants.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 579.) 1389. Feb. 28. Westminster.

<sup>84</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 5 (p. 94.) 1389. Oct. 29. Westminster.

<sup>85</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 4 (p. 564.) 1389. Nov. 17. Westminster.

The Prussians were invested in the normalization process as well. The Chancery Close Rolls make note of two orders in October of 1389 that facilitated the safe and unrestricted travel of Prussian ambassadors to and from England. Detric Roder, a knight of the Teutonic Order, and John Stolte were registered by the royal government as ambassadors for Prussia, although these accounts don't make mention of either of these diplomats' duties or activities.<sup>86</sup> It can be assumed that they were tasked with various responsibilities related to facilitating smooth trade and furthering negotiations between the German Hansa and the English. The orders themselves further stipulate that these dignitaries and their retinues should be afforded free movement throughout the territory of England. That these men needed clearance to move about the realm and also armed trains of servants suggests that they were traveling to various ports and even inland, most likely to treat with English nobility, although to what ends the Chancery Rolls cannot tell us. Besides which, the fact that these men were able to travel in the company of armed men with horses suggests that these particular dignitaries were of near or equal standing with the peers of the realm and may have required security for their persons and possessions, although why this would be can only be speculated at.

King Richard II himself is recorded as having officiated the first of these orders and this might represent another point that suggest the king's sincerity in turning over a new leaf with the Hansa, or at least in maneuvering for a novel negotiating strategy against them. As such the years 1388 to 1389 could be argued to represent see change in English foreign policy concerning the Germans. By the last decade of the fourteenth century the royal government had begun to lessen their challenges to the saliency of the German Hansa, especially the Hanseatic monopolies on

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<sup>86</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 5 (p. 21.) 1389. Oct. 16. Westminster. & Close Rolls Vol 5 (p. 26.) 1389. Oct. 22. Westminster.

goods and products from their north-eastern trade routes. The next stage of England's Anglo-Hanseatic policy would be determined by necessity.

*The realities of Medieval Europe food supplies and the beneficial role of the German Hansa in an English famine crisis*

The final turn in the relationship between England and the visiting German merchants of the Hansa developed after 1389, a particularly tumultuous moment in the reign of King Richard II. A noticeable decline in the number of orders and writs pertaining to violations of the Hansa's privileges and grievances against the Hansa becomes evident in the Chancery Rolls. By fall of 1391 the only Anglo-Hanseatic issue being litigated by the council and other royal authorities pertains to a famine affecting the realm and the vitally needed imports of corn and other food stuffs from Prussia.

Prussia itself is one of the regions of northern Germany which could produce a large quantity of food for export and their trade in various grains and other staple food products was well established. By October 13<sup>th</sup> of 1391 the royal government had begun waving all import customs on such grains so as to combat the "...great and growing dearness of corn and other victuals in the realm..."<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately for England, and especially for the suffering city dwellers hit hardest by famine, it seems that local commandments through the authority of the London mayor had caused bakeries not to be able to purchase grain from sources other than the "common weal of the city" until their reservoir of grain had been depleted. The exigencies of this

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<sup>87</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 5 (p. 388.) 1391. Oct. 13. Westminster.

situation are somewhat unclear, however, what is clear is the fact the England was in the midst of a chaotic state of emergency and the Prussians were one options for salvation.

In November of that year the grain situation had worsened and major port cities Great Yarmouth were threatened with shortage. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of October a group of three Hanseatic merchants, likely representing separate ships, sought permission to move their inventory of grain to the imperiled city and sell it there without having to pay a second import custom, as was the standard practice if merchants moved their goods by sea and could not provide proof that they had payed taxes elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> Apparently legal troubles had once again stood in the way of this move by Hanseatic merchants to do business in Great Yarmouth and the result had been damage to the German's store of grain. One hopes that the food was eventually discharged to the hungry population. In either event these episodes illustrate the continued utility of the Hanseatic community operating in England during the later years of King Richard II's reign.

With regards to the famine years of the early 1390s it is difficult to calculate the exact ramification that such a crisis might have had on the Anglo-Hanseatic foreign policy of the royal government. What can be deduced is that despite the several combative decades of maneuvering the Hanseatic merchants still traded in England and still severed in a number of indispensable roles for both the king and the kingdom. While it may be going too far to say that the Hansa was beginning to enjoying a warm relationship with the king and his subjects from 1391, it is clear to see that England could not afford to do without the German Hansa. Prussia in particular was an important partner to the royal authorities during times of dearth and famine. Furthermore, the

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<sup>88</sup> Close Rolls Vol. 5 (p. 403.) 1391. Nov. 17. Westminster.

English had taken great pains to secure and protect peaceful interactions with the German Hansa in Prussia and also the various other quarters of the Hanseatic community.

## *Conclusion*

The intersecting relationship between the North German and Baltic Hansa, on the one hand, and the royal authorities of England, on the other, is clearly a complex topic. This thesis has focused on the diplomatic interactions between these two medieval powers, particularly the actions and reactions of the English as they dealt with and attempted to out maneuver the hansards. As mentioned previously, the business of extrapolating the intent and motive behind the steps taken by the English authorities, with regards to their agenda or long term plans in dealing with the Hansa, is an extremely subjective task. In addition, our primary sources are quite limited, and as such, most historiographical conversations surrounding the evolution of the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship have found it beneficial to employ a variety perspectives in order to triangulate English and Hanseatic intentions. This thesis differs from many of the previous explorations of this issue in two respects.

To start, the specific emphasis on the Chancery Rolls, a noticeable feature of this study's methodology, would seem to burden the analysis of the Anglo-Hanseatic relationship with an English heavy bias. While this is true, these chapters have also benefited from the attention to dynamics internal to the royal government and its interactions with its subsidiaries, e.g. the port authorities of England, the sheriffs, and so forth, as well as with the various civilian and commercial interests native to England. This specificity concerning the internal motivations of the royal government toward the Hansa, a relative strength for this discussion, has been referred to previously as difficult to prove and unverifiable by means of cross reference. Even so, this thesis is able to provide many interpretations that can widen the field of understand and

underline the principle conclusion surrounding a multiple tiered and multiple phased foreign policy of the English towards the Hansa during Richard II's rule.

Secondly this study highlights the fact that, up until recently, the historical and medieval economic discussion of Anglo-Hanseatic relations from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and extending into the 15<sup>th</sup> century, has been overly interested in using King Richard II's reign for the purposes of explaining a periodization pursuant to the accepted theory of Anglo-expansionist efforts by the English to colonize the Baltic; colonize in the sense of gaining physical access to the trade route. This larger theory, one which suggests that England was affectively attempting a quantum leap in terms of the size and scope of their international trade infrastructure and capabilities, may be viable in broad strokes. However, at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century England still had its hands full with other matters, such as wars which posed an existential threat to the English monarchy. Furthermore, the theory that English intentions in dealing with the Hansa during this period were aimed at challenging Hanseatic ascendancy in the great northern European trade routes fails to take into account the many important roles and services which the German Hansa held and provided for the English kings of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Over all this thesis offers a contrary position, not to the idea that Anglo-Hanseatic relations were strained during Richard II's rule, but that the partnership between the German Hansa and the English kings was able to survive and thrive in spite of these increasing tensions. From the Hanseatic perspective, the English were one of their most important contacts. England was one of the Hansa's most important and profitable trading counterparts. The English, on the other hand, would have been significantly disadvantaged in their main export trading without the assistance of the Germans.

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