
Project A08 – The German Hanse as a Distant Mirror
Kick-off meeting, Groningen, Nov. 4th 2006

Research proposals and abstracts

A need for safety

Risk-reduction-strategies in the mirror of the past

Dick E.H. de Boer (Groningen)

In our times we are accustomed to, our at least expecting, protection offered by the national state and by supra-national organizations in order to safeguard at a general level the exchange of goods, people, and even thoughts (including intellectual property-rights). Next to this we have developed elaborate systems and organizations that we can rely on for the more private or entrepreneurial aspects of exchange. Insurance, share-holding, company-structures, partnerships of all kinds help us in our efforts to reduce the risks of commerce and trade, of travel and exchange. Hardly we are aware of the fact that we owe the intriguing diversity of risk-reducing strategies to our ancestors, and especially to those cooperating within, or competing with Hansa. Hansa itself, as sprouting from alliances of merchants, already was an organization that effectuated the facilitation of commerce and trade through the development of joined strategies and the sharing of privileges as the prerequisites of safe-trade.

Within this framework additional strategies were developed to reduce the threats that were posed to commerce – by man and nature, through shipwreck, pirates, misconduct, mistrust, deceit, through monetary instability, misharvest, uncertainty. On the one hand solutions that were invented through keen minds, and were refined through practice and experience, became the foundations of institutionalized forms of cooperation, partnership insurance etc. of today. On the other, solutions that were of (almost) equal value in the past – like entrusting safe-conduct and passage to the power of relics and saints – have lost their attraction to most traders.

Awareness of the similarities and differences can help us to understand better the modern practices of risk-reduction, as seen from their roots. One of the very important aspects that can be of help to future generations is a better knowledge of the way in which merchants, sailors and traders before, in spite of or opposed to the national state *in statu nascendi* profited from supra-regional and supra-national networks. To a Europe which is outgrowing the political, mental and commercial restrictions of nationalism, this peculiar mirror of the past is very instructive.

The Hanse, a non-organisation?

Dr. Paul Brood

One of the most interesting aspects in the history of the German Hanse is the question whether it was an organisation or not. Anyway, the Hanse was a union that secured its members economical profits and guaranteed trading privileges. The origins of this League lie in the loose associations of long-distance merchants, notably from northern Germany and Westphalia. About 1300 the League was transformed in a union of cities. Until 1356 a structure with any hierarchy or competence can not be recognized. A few members of the Hanse did have enough influence. Especially the city of Lubeck, which is the mightiest player on this field. Besides, four cities develop so called *Kontors*, trade centres with a certain jurisdiction. These towns were Nowgorod (Russia), London, Bruges (Belgium) and Bergen (Norway). The *Kontors* were directed by an olderman, assisted by some merchants. The Hanse *Kontors* and the merchant settlements around these centres acted as entrepots for the commodities over which the Hanse had established a quasi monopoly. They even were allowed to lay a tax on the products to pay the costs of the *Kontors*.

The year 1356 is a turning point. The so called Hanse Day was pronounced to be an institution to look after the common interests of the League. The participating cities formed the Hanse Day. In spite of successes the Hanse Day suffered from the low attendance of the meetings. Besides the representatives were hampered by a too small mandate. One could compare the Hanse with the Dutch General States during the time of the Republic. The need of mandate and consultation for the provincial representatives was a delaying factor in the decision process. The most severe problem, however, was that the interests of the Hanse as a whole were not always in line with the interests of the individual member. In the mid of the sixteenth century the Hanse appeared to be a mature organisation when a cash was installed and a syndicus was assigned. Nevertheless only one syndicus has hold this high position and after the Westphalian Treaty in 1648 the Hanse declined quickly.

This brief description mentions several organisational aspects which indicate the existence of a trade organisation, but also emphasize that the sovereigns did not appreciate such an organisation as a political power. Therefore it is interesting to investigate the strong and weak qualities at managerial and legal level. The problems which will be studied are the effectivity of decision making in the Hanse and the autonomy of the cities. In the decision process the cities had the right to ratify all resolutions taken on a higher level. Important is also the effectivity as a court or as an organisation inferior to the high sovereign courts.

The research is carried out in the available literature, especially German literature. It is remarkable that the Hanse had very few attention in the Dutch legal history research. For a proper understanding it is interesting to compare the Hanse with other trade organisations: old ones, like the the Dutch East India Company, and new ones, like free trade organisations as EG en EFTA. Which are the similarities, which are the differences?

Introduction and conclusions

Hanno Brand
Hanse Research Center Groningen

- **Introduction to the project**

According to the outline of the application.

- **The German Hanse: weaknesses and strength of a mercantile network.**

Since the participants in this project will treat aspects of the German Hanse's rich history, the book will open with a chapter that dresses along several lines the actual state of research and views on the main characteristics of this network. Especially the last couple of years, historians and sociologists have published several works and articles in which the new trends in research are analyzed, new views on the nature of the German Hanse explored and new perspectives and explanations offered. Such publications were provoked by the fact that current public opinions on the nature of the German Hanse were determined by the prevalence of traditional views on the predominance of an urban league who successfully took over the protective duties of a weak German Empire. Disintegration occurred as a result of an increasing incompatibility of the economic interest of the various members, reinforced by the shifting of trading routes and the opening of the American markets. Opposition against this rather static view rose only since the 1960's. New questions were formulated and new topics explored as historical research started to reflect fundamental changes in world perception which were provoked by the dissolution of the political dominance of the national state as policy making forum. Also economic globalization, fundamental changes in economic organization and new perceptions on citizenship forced historians to redefine old questions and existing views on the workings and role of the German Hanse in the long period between ca. 1100 and 1700. It resulted into an intensification of historical research on the nature and a enormous variety of aspects which explain the nature and organization of the Hanse as a loose but long-standing network. The dynamic forces at work regard the abilities of merchant networks to new trading conditions as does the introduction of new concepts like the protection of property, the reduction of transaction costs or diplomacy as a tool to redefine trading conditions. Research on regional differences and the formation of new solidarities seems to emphasize the view that the Hanse was an organization under stress and reacted as such resulting into a widening ideological gap between the Hanse of merchants on the one hand and the Urban league on the other.

This contribution will adhere to such observations, but also concentrate on the four different fields defined in the application, being: 1. economic policies, 2. cohesion and diversity, 3. markets and innovation and 4. common culture and identity. Such a division will allow us to go into those items which seem to be of relevance for the overall goal of the book, being the definition of indicators that might help to improve new forms of government. Three models seem to be particularly relevant here. The first concerns the model formulated by the sociologist Pichierra applied in relation to the political and economic organization of modern urban networks. Second, the works of Spruyt and Epstein which concentrate on the competition between urban leagues and the rising modern state analyses will offer useful concepts. Differences in organization, but most and foremost all his use of concepts like free-riding and defection seem valuable instruments in order to define the nature of the urban Hanse. Especially its failure to avoid such mechanisms offers useful indicators.

The stakeholders model may function as a third overall concept, because it allows us to define the solidarities and interests of three acting layers in the Hanse, being the general Diets, the regional Diets and finally the urban councils. Differences in interests will inform us on the discrepancies between Hanseatic policy making on the one hand and the economic and political interests of its members on the other. The chapter will also analyze both the weakness and the strength of the Urban League.

- **Conclusions and indicators for new forms of government**

This section is at this stage of the project obviously highly indicative. Indicators will probably evolve around the internationalization of regional economic policies the one hand and the barriers that may obstruct such developments. A second related item might concern the effectiveness of economic policy making in relation to fundamental differences in regional development and interests. National borders are still hampering economic co-operation. The example of the Hanse shows, that an extended region without clear political borders allows the creation of common decision and legal procedures through which the risks related to interregional economic exchange are reduced and co-operation can be improved. Within such a context the creation of central institutions dealing with the foreign affairs of the regions might add to the competitive position of the regions. One might consider that exactly the loose organization of the Hanse explains its longevity. Concepts like temporarily withdrawal or monitoring and learning bring about the desired flexibility of regional co-operation without the risk that forced compromises result into the dissolution of such networks. It also reduces the risks linked to the effects of free riding and defection and thus help to prevent disintegration.

Another parallel might concern the direct linkage between internal and external organization forms. The history of the Hanse shows that despite internal differences a cohesive outward policy can be formulated and even effectuated. Hanse historians like to emphasize the cultural unity of the League since it facilitates interregional co-operation and exchange. Solving integration problems related to multi-ethnicity is a challenge for modern governments. The history of the Hanse suggests however, that cultural unity is not a pre-condition for interregional economic exchange. Rationalism and opportunism are at the root of economic endeavor, meaning that modern governments should recognize those new challenges and create the frameworks and institutions that enable individuals and enterprises to anticipate such developments. Finally, the history of the Hanse seems to indicate that regional economies do flourish best under the absence of strong central powers. It suggests that regional institutions should avoid that discrepancies between regulations and practical needs become unbridgeable. It demands that efficient communication lines are implemented, that overregulation should be avoided, but also that a set of mechanisms should be established in order to facilitate exchange, innovation, modernization and most and for all adaptation to changing market conditions by governing institutions. It is exactly such lack of flexibility that contributed to the demise of the German Hanse.

- **Summary in the Hanse Passage Bulletin**

In a special issue of the Hanse Passage Bulletin a summary of the book will be offered. This synthesis will serve as a preliminary statement of the research group in order to provide the Hanse Passage officials and sponsors with a short overview of the obtained results.

Tuchproduktion, hansischer Tuchhandel und Handelspolitik vom 14. bis 16. Jh.

Rudolf Holbach
Universität Oldenburg

Das Projekt richtet sein Augenmerk auf die Zusammenhänge zwischen den Veränderungen und Verschiebungen in den nordwest- und mitteleuropäischen Tuchlandschaften sowie bei der Nachfrage nach ihren Erzeugnissen einerseits, den hansischen Handelspraktiken und einer zugehörigen Handelspolitik andererseits.

Die Diversifizierung und Verdichtung der Textilherstellung sowie die Ausbildung neuer Produktionszentren und Gewerbelandschaften, die bislang nicht in das hansische „Handelssystem“ einbezogen waren, erforderten eine Reaktion hansischer Kaufleute. Vor diesem Hintergrund ist zunächst zu betrachten, zu welchen Zeiten in welchem Umfang und in welcher Vielfalt über die traditionellen Erzeugnisse hinaus neue Produkte in den hansischen Handel Eingang und dort Akzeptanz fanden. Ebenso geht es darum, inwieweit, mit welchen Mitteln, mit welcher Begründung und mit welcher Wirkung Konkurrenzprodukte abgelehnt bzw. bekämpft wurden.

Speziell sind – mit Blick auf die hansischen Träger wie Verweigerer von Entscheidungen und auf Erfolg oder Misserfolg - die wirtschaftlichen, rechtlichen und politischen Maßnahmen zu vergleichen, mit denen man hansischerseits die eigenen Handelsinteressen im Textilsektor zu wahren suchte. Dazu gehören auch solche Phänomene wie die kollektiven Lieferungsverträge, mit denen man sich günstiger Produkte kleinerer Tuchorte beschaffen konnte, oder einzelne Aktivitäten zur Erhaltung des Kontororts Brügge, z.B. über eine versuchte Bindung neuer Tuchsorten an diesen. Im Hanseraum selbst sind Ansätze zur Konkurrenzregulierung und Handelskontrolle sowie auf der Produktionsebene angesichts von Krisenerscheinungen in einzelnen hansischen Standorten der Tuchherstellung auch Gewerbeförderung oder produktinnovative Umorientierung mit einzubeziehen. Dabei muss jeweils einer möglichen Diskrepanz von Norm und Wirklichkeit und inner- wie zwischenstädtischen Interessendivergenzen Rechnung getragen werden.

Das Vorhaben lässt sich gleich drei Untersuchungsschwerpunkten des Gesamtprojekts zuordnen. Die Entwicklungen, die im Laufe des späten Mittelalters in Nordwest- und Mitteleuropa eintreten, hängen eng mit Veränderungen bei „Markets and innovation“ zusammen, mit denen sich die Mitglieder der Hanse auseinander zu setzen hatten. Mit der Betrachtung protektionistischer und sonstiger Maßnahmen gegenüber Nichthansen zugunsten des eigenen Handels oder den Ansätzen innerhansischer Konkurrenzregulierung im Textilsektor werden die „Economic policies“ berührt. Der Vergleich unterschiedlicher Verhaltensweisen von Kaufleuten, Städten und auch Städtegruppen bei Konflikten schließlich zielt auf das Erkennen von „Cohesion and diversity“ auf Grund differierender Interessenlagen ab.

The Hanse and after

Lex Heerma van Voss

International Institute of Social History

After the Hanse a weak state (the Dutch Republic) and then a stronger state (England/the UK) became the leading economic nation. There is a sound argument to be made that links these developments: stronger states were able to protect their merchants effectively. They thus made a league of merchant cities redundant, offering protection and contract enforcement to their merchants, to foreign merchants and to other citizens.

However, this leaves several questions unanswered:

- how did the change from one efficient equilibrium to the next take place? Did merchants themselves play a leading role in these institutional shifts or did the changes take place for different reasons, creating new configurations in which merchants saw opportunities? How did the shift of merchant support (if indeed, such a shift there was) take place?
- was the more consolidated state always beneficial to merchants? Did merchants also stand to lose from the loss of spatial flexibility with the rise of the territorial state? Was rent seeking by stronger states a greater risk? Was it easier for merchants to influence local town politics than national politics?

The contribution will follow state formation, merchant political influence, the rise of mercantilist policies and the blossoming of international trade in their interrelationship in northwestern Europe between ca. 1500 and 1750. It will - given the subject - be based on secondary literature. Its theoretical framework will borrow from Tilly's work on state formation, and North's and Greif's work on institutional change.

The contribution will conclude with a brief observation on the question whether the argument developed also points to elements of earlier commercial and political organisation which we still, even today, have lost and which it might be worthwhile to redeem.

Beteen the Hanse and Poland. Danzig's independent policies within Hansa".

Tomasz Maćkowski
Uniwersytet Gdański

In my article I would like to:

- 1) explain, based on the current state of research, the principal causes which determined the policy of Danzig towards the Hansa, which from the XVth century onwards was more and more influenced by especially Lübeck and the Wend towns.
- 2) put forward explanations of Danzig's changing attitude towards the Hanse, caused by the rise of new territorial powers and the emergence of new political and economic loyalties.
- 3) retrace Hanseatic influences of both economic and cultural nature in the shaping of the identity of Gdansk, based on almost neglected but illustrative sources.

Focus will be put on the consequences of the thirteen-years war (1454-1466) which proved to be a breaking point in Danzig's Hanseatic policies and caused a redefinition of its relations with the core of the league, being Lübeck and the Wend towns. Before the war, Danzig belonged to one of the Hanse's most loyal members in the region, consciously following the political guidelines defined by the General Diet. After the war, Danzig was participating in various political and commercial networks and was confronted with a reshuffling of the balance of power in the region, resulting from the demise of the Teutonic order as a territorial power on the one hand and the rise of the Polish Kingdom on the other. New privileges and huge financial inputs linked the city of Danzig to the Polish crown; a tendency which in many ways seemed to be contradictory to its membership of the Hanseatic League which sought to emphasize the independence of its members from territorial powers. 4 – Old Town, Young Town, Osiek and Main Town united in one the dynamically developing organism. Why is this relevant??

Such transformations contributed to the growth of Danzig, which was to become one of the biggest harbors in the Baltic and therefore a major rival of Lübeck. Relations with the Hanse were now to be characterised in terms of rivalry and competition instead of co-operation and dependency. Its flowering grain trade most certainly contributed to such developments and outings of free riding and defection occurred as became clear that the Hanse's protectionist policies were incompatible with Danzig's economic interests. Tensions grew as Danzig's trade with the Hanse's main rivals in the Baltic, being England and Holland expanded. It are exactly such tensions that were exploited by the Hanse's main rivals and which contributed to the downfall of the Hanse in the 16th century. Still membership of the Hanse remained important, since Danzig's foreign trade was based on the use of Hanseatic privileges abroad which explains Danzig's rather ambiguous attitude towards the League. Ambiguity also determined the relations with the Polish King and nobility. Although Danzig was by far the largest economic center in the region, which wealth was gratefully tapped by the Polish rulers, the town had no economic hinterland. Danzig was a transit harbor, selling and transporting the agricultural produce of the Polish nobility. Danzig owed its wealth to the grain export towards the western markets and jealously protected its new acquired position. In that position the city could count on the support of the Polish king but also had to deal with the jealousy of the Polish nobility who opposed Danzig's economic monopolies. Danzig was also caught in a web of various loyalties and dependencies. They they contributed to the formation of a very specific civic identity as it was reflected in various forms of contemporary art. It is this complex of attitudes, dependencies and loyalties which allow us to draw parallels with modern integration problems and show how defection and free might undermine the cohesion of interregional networks.

Free Frisia and the Hansa

Job Weststrate and J.A. (Hans) Mol

During the later Middle Ages the Frisian lands were in a number of ways exceptional in the North Sea Region. In contrast to its neighboring territories, the Frisian lands were a feuding society that was completely decentralized in terms of political structure. The lands lacked a central lord. The inhabitants, the 'free Frisians', theoretically governed themselves in a communal way, participating in so-called *universitates terrae*. Most of these autonomous lands however, were rather ruled by a large number of chieftains, or *hoofdelingen*, who each had their own small territorial basis. The relations between the *hoofdelingen* were notoriously unstable: large parts of late medieval Frisia were characterized by a constant competition for power and endemic small-scale warfare.

In economic terms Frisia seems to have been somewhat of an island unto itself as well. Although Frisian traders had been very active in long-distance trade in North-Western-Europe from the Early Middle Ages onwards, by the thirteenth century most of their activities had been taken over by merchants from both the county of Holland and the hanseatic IJssel towns. By the late Middle Ages a largely pastoral economy dominated the Frisian lands. The level of urbanization was low in the region, Frisian towns were to a large extent controlled by the *hoofdelingen*, and subsequently most Frisian urban markets were less developed than their counterparts in the other territories of the Netherlands and Northern Germany. As a result, the towns did not play a very large role in the interregional and international commercial networks of North-Western-Europe.

From the perspective of the Hanseatic and Dutch merchants that sent goods from the North Sea area to the Baltic and vice versa, the Frisian lands appeared to be a hindrance rather than a potential market area that should be explored for commercial purposes. Time and again the power struggle in and for Frisia had its effect on Dutch and Hanseatic shipping. The Frisian chieftains tried to extend their reach to the sailing routes on the Waddenzee. Ships sailing to and from the Zuyder Sea area regularly fell prey to privateers that worked in the service of a *hoofdeling*. Another, more famous example are the *Vitaliebroeders*, the groups of privateers that were hired by several warring parties in Northern and Western Europe around the year 1400. Among the parties that gave shelter to these privateers were chieftains in both Westerland Frisia as well as Eastern-Frisia, as has been documented in several studies by Benninghoven, Ehbrecht, Janse, Puhle and very recently in a number of articles in the bundle *Störtebeker 600 Jahre nach seinem Tod*.

In our contribution to the Hansepassage-project we would like to explore the position of Frisia within the commercial and economic structures that shaped the North Sea and Baltic regions during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. On the one hand, we will give due attention to the ways in which Frisians after ca 1350 tapped the international flow of goods by capturing ships and allowing robbed goods to be sold on the Frisian markets. One must note that this was not an entirely Frisian phenomenon. A similar tendency to create an 'alternative' market for stolen goods can for instance be seen in Bremen and in the Scandinavian kingdoms.

On the other hand, the commercial interaction between Frisia and the outer world obviously contained of more than war-induced robbery alone. The pastoral economy of the Frisian lands was rapidly expanding in the first half of the fifteenth century, bringing forth products such as cheese and butter, which were exported through the IJssel towns to Cleves, Jülich and the Rhineland. Consequently, the small market towns could grow again, notwithstanding the instability of the regional power relations.

Moreover, Frisians traded with citizens of the towns of Bremen and Hamburg and they seemed to have played a role in the international oxen trade as well. Our project will examine the ways in which these commercial contacts were maintained and thus how the Frisian lands were directly or indirectly integrated in the late medieval regional and international trading networks.

In answering these questions it is important to realize that Frisia was neither a monolithic nor a static entity from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. Though we have characterized the Frisian lands in general as a politically fragmented and feuding society, changes over time did take place and these changes reflect different developments within the different Frisian regions. The chronology and forms of pacification however differed throughout the Frisian lands. Eastern-Frisia was to a certain extent coerced into pacification by the town of Hamburg in the beginning of the fifteenth century. Earlier on Middle Frisia had been brought under the influence of the town of Groningen that in the process created its own small city-state. In Westerlauwers Frisia, at the same time, some towns tried to establish a Swiss-like confederation to guarantee peace and promote economic development, but they did not succeed in the end. It was not until the very end of the fifteenth century that Albrecht of Saxony subjugated this region, to transform it into a princely state, which was transferred by his son Georg to the House of Habsburg in 1515.

So during the period under investigation all Frisia eventually was pacified and brought under more or less central rule. Ultimately, the pacification of the Frisian lands would lead to urban development and economic growth. Each region followed its own path of integration in different networks. The slow but steady proliferation of markets in Westerlauwers Frisia during the fifteenth and sixteenth century for instance, even if it occurred on a small scale, paved the way for the integration of that part of Frisia in the network of Amsterdam from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards.

"The Hanseatic League and Baltic: towns, trade and politics in medieval Livonia (13th-16th centuries)".

*Dr. Andris Sne
University of Latvia*

This research project focuses on two main issues which are closely related to the four proposed research topics defined in the application (economic policies, cohesion and diversity, markets and innovation and common culture and identity). The geographic scope is the Baltic States or the urban landscape of medieval Livonia. The first issue concerns the trading interests of the Hanseatic and Livonian merchants against the background of Northern Crusades and the rise of Livonia of the late 12th and 13th centuries. The crusades represent also an age of political, economic and cultural transformations. The second issue concerns the relations between Livonia and different parts of Europe within the framework of the Hanseatic League, including Livonia's eastern and western neighbours, which took the form of cooperation, competition and conflict. The over all question is geared to the emergence of a Livonian identity and the meaning of its connections with the Hanseatic League in the process of Europeanisation of the eastern Baltic region.

The late 12th and 13th century saw a wide specter of social, political and cultural transformations on the eastern coasts of the Baltic. New features like literacy, fief relations alongside with the Conversion and Crusaders' statehood as well as towns developed in the track of the Northern Crusades. The trading associations from northern Germany and especially from Lübeck played a leading role in the transmission of new cultural, political, social and economic values. Since the middle of the 12th century merchants but later also aristocrats went eastward, building a new elite in the region. The crusading movement generated also impulses for the German 'Ostsiedlung' or 'Drang nach Osten' and the development of trading contacts. After the submission of the Daugava Livs and the conversion of the Letgallians and the Estonians, the Teutonic Order emerged as a new sovereign power in the region. The eastern Baltic also had joined Western Christendom by the late 13th century and was transformed into a loose federation of feudal states, governed by an elite of mainly German origin. It were the German hanseatic merchant using the Daugava and Gauja river ways that linked the Baltic with the Russian inlands, where centres like Polock and Smolensk were situated. Three kinds of activities – conquest, conversion and trade - went alongside in the Baltic during the 13th century. It were these three elements which were to shape the identity of Livonia. The towns of Livonia were from the very beginning involved in the Hanseatic League, which determined the course of cultural, economic and political developments. Several clusters of inhabitants overlapped, leading to the emergence of a mixed identity with both a native and hanseatic elements. Close encounters and mutual cooperation between the Livonian towns and the Hanseatic League in the 14th century only reinforced such tendencies.

The situation started to change as rivals of the League, notably England and Holland, entered the Livonian markets and challenged the predominance of the Hanseatic merchants. Their presence triggered attempts undertaken by the Livonian towns to escape Hanseatic tutelage. The period between ca, 1450 and 1550 following can be characterized as an age of emancipation from Hanseatic control, which went along with the creation of a own identity. Economic policies were designed to regain control over the traditional inland and urban markets and only partly overlapped with the interests of the Hanseatic League. After the middle of the 16th century Riga and other towns of Livonia retreated from the Hanseatic League, only to be dominated by other rising powers in the Baltic, like Sweden and Russia. Still, it was due to the Hanseatic League that economies of the eastern Baltic were linked to Western European civilization, but it was also the emergence of Hanseatic rivals that provoked the economic emancipation of Livonia and thus the creation of a new identity.

Bremen als schwieriger Bündnispartner in der Hanse

Ulrich Weidinger, Bremen

Als Bremer Beitrag für das Hanseprojekt „The German Hanse as a distant mirror“ bietet sich als Teilaspekt des thematischen Forschungsschwerpunktes „cohesion“ and diversity“ die Untersuchung der besonderen Rolle Bremens als Bündnispartner innerhalb der Hanse an. Bremen wird in der Hanseliteratur im allgemeinen als „wankelmütige“, „eigenwillige“ und „launenhafte“ Hansestadt dargestellt, die nicht bereit war, sich der Gemeinschaft unter der Führung Lübecks dauerhaft unterzuordnen. Es wird also unterstellt, daß Bremen trotz seiner Mitgliedschaft in der Hanse immer wieder eigene Wege außerhalb des Städtebundes ging, weil die spezifischen bremischen Interessen sich im Rahmen der allgemeinen Hansepolitik nicht konsequent verfolgen ließen oder dieser gar konträr gegenüberstanden.

Der angebliche Sonderweg, den Bremen innerhalb der Hanse des öfteren in Anspruch nahm, scheint auf den ersten Blick die Charakterisierung der Hanse als reine „Interessengemeinschaft“ mit relativ schwachen Bindungen – ihren „Netzwerkcharakter“ also – zu bestätigen. Es wäre zu untersuchen, inwieweit diese Einschätzung einer kritischen Überprüfung standhält, oder ob es daneben nicht auch gegenläufige Tendenzen gab, die für eine straffere Anbindung Bremens an die Hanse sorgten. Immerhin wurde gegenüber Bremen auch zweimal das Zwangsmittel der Verhansung angewandt, die Hanse versuchte also in bestimmten Situationen auch Druck auf die Stadt auszuüben. Die scheinbar widersprüchliche Stellung Bremens in der Hanse eignet sich deshalb in hervorragender Weise für eine Untersuchung des tatsächlichen Charakters des hansischen Städtebundes und des den einzelnen Bündnismitgliedern zustehenden Handlungsspielraumes.

Dieser Ansatz bietet zugleich Anknüpfungspunkte zu aktuellen Tendenzen der EU-Politik, die durch den Beitritt neuer Mitgliedstaaten bzw. durch den Aufnahmeantrag künftiger Mitglieder gekennzeichnet ist. Auch hier spielt die Frage der festen Einbindung bzw. losen Assoziation eine nicht unerhebliche Rolle. Erinnerung sei hier nur an die Diskussion über die „Vollmitgliedschaft“ bzw. „privilegierte Partnerschaft“ bei der geplanten Aufnahme der Türkei. Es stellt sich daher die Frage, ob bzw. inwieweit sich aus der Rolle Bremens innerhalb der Hanse Lehren für den Umgang der EU mit ihren neu aufgenommenen bzw. neu aufzunehmenden Mitgliedern ziehen lassen.