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## Gdańsk as a Hanseatic City in the Late Middle Ages. Selected Aspects: Symbolism, Ruling Elites, Maritime Contacts

**Keywords:**

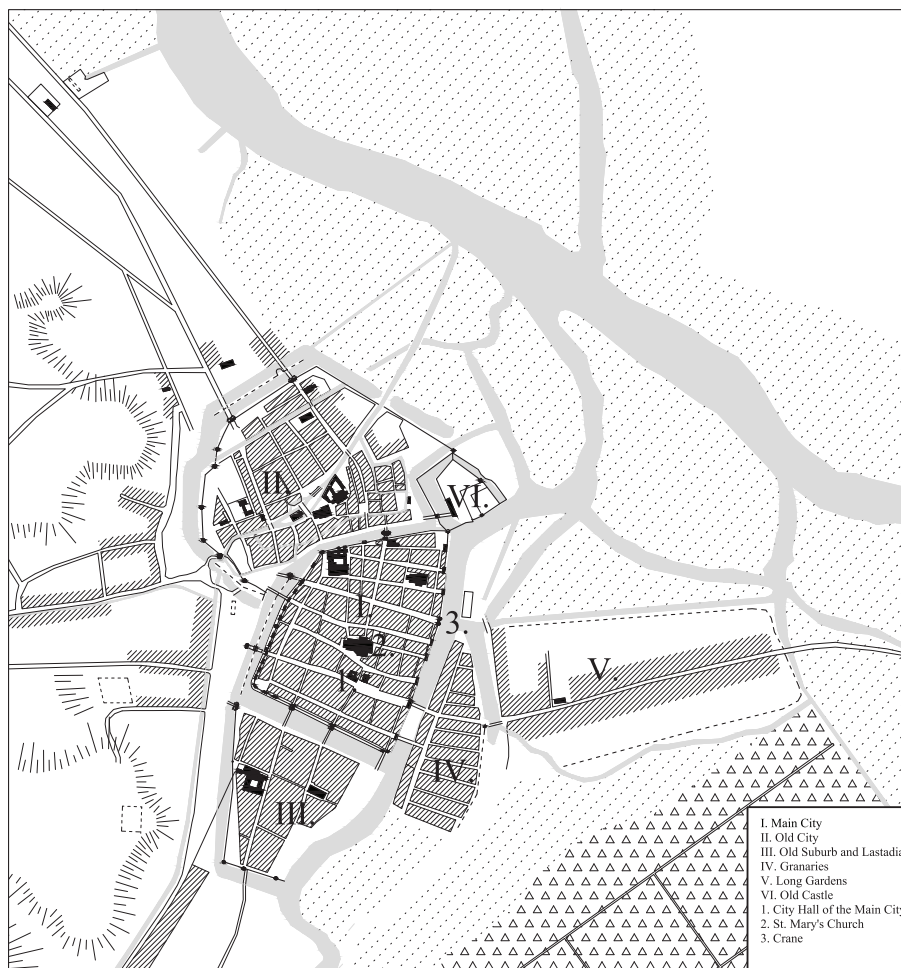
Cog, ships, Lastadie, merchants, Gdańsk

**Abstract**

For 13<sup>th</sup>-century Gdańsk, as for other cities of medieval Europe, it was important to create a community identity, which was expressed in the symbolism of seals and later also heraldic colours and coats of arms. In Gdańsk a seal of 78 mm in diameter, which survives on a document dating from 1299 (hence from pre-Teutonic times), depicts an unmanned cog borne along by the waves. In late medieval Gdańsk, as in other Hanseatic towns, power belonged to elite families, who formed a ruling group. During 1454–1525 families such as the Falckes, Bischofs, Bocks, Ferbers, Scheweckes, Suchtens, and Zimmermanns each had two members who served as mayors. Maritime contacts played one of the most vital roles in the social and economic life of late medieval Gdańsk, and these included trade links with the English – competitors of the Hanse who could not be taken lightly.

## Introduction

The German Hanse of the medieval period is one of the most interesting examples of a community whose creation was dictated by economic considerations. Founded thanks to the concerted efforts of merchants from Lübeck, the Hanse controlled trade from Novgorod to Flanders and England. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century more towns and cities of the Baltic and North Sea basins gradually joined the Hanseatic League. Member cities sent representatives to attend assemblies of the Hanse at which they



Gdańsk before 1500, © Piotr Samól

took consensual decisions.<sup>1</sup> Important objectives of the community's joint action plan included: ensuring safe passage for ships from member cities; protection against pirates; using economic management structures, namely the *Kontors* in Veliky Novgorod, Bergen, Bruges and London, to control imports and exports; and competing with their rivals, in particular the English and the Dutch.<sup>2</sup> When writing

<sup>1</sup> Carsten Jahnke, "The Baltic Trade," in: *A Companion to the Hanseatic League*, ed. Donald J. Harreld (Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Dollinger, *Dzieje Hanzy XII–XVII w.* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen. Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1997), *passim*; see also the English edition: *The German Hansa* (London: Routledge, 1999); Henryk Samsonowicz, "Polityka morska miast hanzeatyckich," in: *W epoce żaglowców. Od antyku do XVIII wieku*, eds. Beata Możejko, Ewa Bojaruniec-Król (Gdańsk:

about Hanseatic towns, we have to remember that over the centuries they developed certain common models of operation and conflict resolution, as well as a symbolism and Hanseatic culture.<sup>3</sup>

Before examining Gdańsk (Danzig) as a member of the Hanse, I need to train some attention on the political history of the city, which went through various twists of fate during the medieval period, particularly concerning changes in its governance.<sup>4</sup> Gdańsk, which was first mentioned in written records at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, was initially ruled by governors appointed by Poland's ruling Piast dynasty. As a result of the regional division of lands known as the fragmentation of Poland, Świętopełk – a member of the local Samborides (Polish: Sobiesławice) dynasty of Pomerelia – began to use the title *dux*, and it was he who chartered Gdańsk's Old Town (Stare Miasto) based on Lübeck law. In 1294, the death of Mestwin (Mściwój) II, the last male of the dynasty, led to a struggle over Pomerelia and Gdańsk. This became a game of thrones between the Piasts, the Czech Přemyslids, the margraves of Brandenburg and the Teutonic Order. The Teutonic Knights seized the stronghold and town with an attack on the night of 12–13 November 1308, massacring those inhabitants who did not manage to flee. Shortly thereafter, the Order captured the whole of Pomerania, and it was not until the 1320s that life returned to Gdańsk.<sup>5</sup> The Order stamped

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Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Gdańska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2016), 64–68; *Lübeckische Geschichte*, ed. Antjekathrin Graßmann (Lübeck: Schmidt Römhild, 2008), 135–146. The most recent literature concerning the nature of the Hanse is collated in Angela Huang, Ole Meiners, “The Towns of the German Hanse, 1358–1669: Three Hundred Years of Urban Decision-Making Culture: Thoughts and Perspectives,” *Ученые записки Новгородского государственного университета имени Ярослава Мудрого* 5/23 (2019), [https://www.academia.edu/41793616/The\\_towns\\_of\\_the\\_German\\_Hanse\\_1358\\_1669\\_Three\\_hundred\\_years\\_of\\_urban\\_decision\\_making\\_culture\\_Thoughts\\_and\\_perspectives](https://www.academia.edu/41793616/The_towns_of_the_German_Hanse_1358_1669_Three_hundred_years_of_urban_decision_making_culture_Thoughts_and_perspectives)). A fresh perspective on the subject of piracy is presented in the monograph *Merchants, Pirates, and Smugglers. Criminalization, Economics, and the Transformation of the Maritime World (1200–1600)*, eds. Thomas Heebøll-Holm, Philipp Höhn, Gregor Rohmann (Frankfurt, New York: Campus Verlag, 2020). When it comes to Holland, it must be remembered that until the middle of the 15 century, the towns belonging to the County of Holland and the bishopric of Utrecht were themselves members of the Hanse. Only gradually did the Dutch shift from partners to competitors: see Dieter Seifert, *Kompagnons und Konkurrenten, Holland und die Hanse im späten Mittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Dollinger, *Dzieje Hanzy, passim*; Johannes Schildhauer, *Dzieje i kultura Hanzy* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1995); Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz, “The late medieval and early modern Hanse as an institution of conflict management,” *Continuity and Change* 32/1 (2017): 59–84.

<sup>4</sup> Błażej Śliwiński, “The political history of Gdańsk: from the early tenth to the fourteenth century,” and Beata Możejko “The political history of Gdańsk: from the early fifteenth to the sixteenth century,” in: *New Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Poland and Prussia. The Impact of Gdańsk*, ed. Możejko (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2017), 17–46.

<sup>5</sup> Śliwiński, “The political history of Gdańsk,” 21–26; see also *idem*, [https://gdansk.gedano-pedia.pl/gdansk/?title=GDA%C5%83SK\\_%E2%80%93POCZ%C4%84TKI\\_MIASTA](https://gdansk.gedano-pedia.pl/gdansk/?title=GDA%C5%83SK_%E2%80%93POCZ%C4%84TKI_MIASTA), accessed on 29 I 2021. On the flight of Gdańsk's residents in 1308 see: Śliwiński, Możejko, “Exile and Return?”

its authority over the town by building a castle next to it, which served as the seat of Gdańsk's Teutonic commanders and local officials who exercised administrative, legal and military power. The commanders answered to the Order's grand masters, whose main residence from 1309 onwards was the castle at Malbork (Marienburg).<sup>6</sup> By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century there were three urban centres that had been granted privileges by the Teutonic Order: the Old Town, Main Town (Główne Miasto) also known as the Chartered Town (Prawne Miasto), which was the one that became a member of the Hanse, and the Young Town (Młode Miasto). Each of these entities had its own self-government, mayors, councillors and magistrates.<sup>7</sup> These towns, especially the wealthiest of the three, enjoyed relatively good relations with the Order until it faced off against Poland in the Great War of 1409–1411 (which included the famous Battle of Grunwald). After the Order was defeated and forced to pay Poland hefty war reparations, public sentiment changed in the Main Town. Rising taxes and the flouting of existing privileges led firstly to the creation of the Prussian Confederation, which united noble elites and towns in Prussia opposed to the politics of the Order, and then in February 1454 to an armed uprising. The nobility and burghers decided to submit to the rule of King Casimir IV Jagiellon (Kazimierz Jagiellończyk) of Poland. The decision taken by this monarch in March 1454 to incorporate Prussia into Poland sparked another Polish-Teutonic conflict, namely the Thirteen Years' War (1454–1466). Gdańsk Main Town, which provided Poland with both military and financial backing, was granted privileges by Casimir IV that guaranteed the city wide-ranging political and economic autonomy. The residents of both the Old and Young Towns were made subordinate to its authority.<sup>8</sup> The latter, which was perceived as post-Teutonic, was dismantled in 1455 and its residents were relocated to the Old and Main Towns.<sup>9</sup>

By 1466, after the Second Peace of Toruń (Thorn), Gdańsk was part of Royal Prussia (made up of Pomerelia, the Chelmno Land [Kulmerland] and the Bishopric of Warmia [Erlmland]), which was under the suzerainty of the kings of Poland – initially those of the Jagiellon dynasty and subsequently the elected kings, right up until

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Gdańsk in the Aftermath of the Teutonic Order's Actions in Pomerelia During the First Half of the Fourteenth Century," *East Central Europe* 47/1 (2020): 29–38.

<sup>6</sup> On the Teutonic castle in Gdańsk see: Możejko, "Zamek krzyżacki w Gdańsku w świetle inwentarzy z lat 1384–1446," *Studia z dziejów średniowiecza. Krzyżacy. Szpitalnicy. Kondotierzy* 12 (2006): 115–200; *eadem*, [https://gdansk.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?title=ZAMEK\\_KRZY%C5%BBACKI](https://gdansk.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?title=ZAMEK_KRZY%C5%BBACKI), accessed on 31 I 2021. On Malbork/Marienburg castle see Sławomir Józwiak, Janusz Trupinda, *Organizacja życia na zamku krzyżackim w Malborku w czasach wielkich mistrzów 1309–1457* (Malbork: Muzeum Zamkowe w Malborku, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Śliwiński, "The political history of Gdańsk," 28–29.

<sup>8</sup> Możejko, "The political history of Gdańsk: from the early fifteenth," 30–34.

<sup>9</sup> On the Młode Miasto, its inhabitants and the reasons for its abolishment see Piotr Samól, *Młode Miasto Gdańsk (1380–1455) i jego patrymonium* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2018).

the Partitions of Poland. I have written elsewhere about Gdańsk having served as Poland's link with western Europe during the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Here, I would like to explore another important chapter in the biography of this city, namely its Hanseatic days.

Gdańsk Old Town became a member of the Hanse in the mid-1500s. During the following century, particularly in its latter half, it played by far the most important role of all the Prussian towns. In this article, I will highlight several aspects that marked out late medieval Gdańsk as a Hanseatic city. These distinguishing features include the municipal authorities' sigillography and heraldry, which drew on Hanseatic symbolism. Other distinctive characteristics were the ruling elite of Gdańsk and their involvement in the politics of the Hanse, and the city's maritime contacts, which reflected its policy towards non-Hanseatic counterparts, in particular the English. Of course, there are other aspects of Hanseatic Gdańsk which I could point to, such as architectural trends, but the limited scope of this article forces me to focus on the aforementioned, most critical ones. In terms of chronology, I will concentrate on the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, though this does not mean that I will not make reference to earlier centuries.

## Symbolism and self-government: the sigillography and heraldry of Gdańsk and the Hanse

For 13<sup>th</sup>-century Gdańsk, as for other cities of medieval Europe, it was important to create a community identity, which was expressed in the symbolism of seals and later also heraldic colours and coats of arms. This was an important element of visual communication,<sup>11</sup> particularly between city authorities and local society. In Hanseatic towns, where many if not most residents relied on the sea for their livelihoods, the ship was an obvious and readily understood symbol, the cog being the most popular merchant vessel up until the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century both in the Baltic and the North Sea.<sup>12</sup> It was the cog, with two mariners on board, that Lübeck used as the motif for its city seal. The depiction of the sailors is seen

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<sup>10</sup> Możejko, "Late Medieval Gdańsk as a Bridge between Regions: Western European, Hanseatic, and East Central European Contacts," in: *The Medieval Networks in East Central Europe. Commerce, Contacts, Communication*, eds. Balázs Nagy, Felicitas Schmieder and András Vadas (London and New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2019), 227–235. The subject of the Hanse was touched upon in the cited article, but I would like to focus on slightly different aspects herein.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Średniowieczna gra symboli* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> For a summary of the discussion on what type of ship the cog was see Reinhold Paulsen, *Schiffahrt. Hanse und Europa im Mittelalter. Schiffe am Beispiel Hamburgs, europäische Entwicklungslinien und die Forschung in Deutschland* (Wien: Böhlau, 2016), 122–127, 143, index. This by no means devalues the argument developed here, or at least the association of Hanse and the "cog" as a focal point of German national history.

as a symbolic reference to the wider community of seafarers who plied the North Sea. The figures aboard the cog are also interpreted as symbolic representations of a merchant and a skipper,<sup>13</sup> in other words the two linchpins in Hanseatic trade.

The municipal authorities of Elbląg (Elbing) and Gdańsk followed in Lübeck's footsteps. The earliest known seal of Elbląg appears on a document from 1242 and depicts a cog sailing to the left, with a mast secured by seven cables, and a hooded sailor with his hand on the tiller; a flag (with no emblems) flies from the mast, below which is the cross of the Teutonic Order (who founded the town). In Gdańsk a seal of 78 mm in diameter, which survives on a document dating from 1299 (hence from pre-Teutonic times), depicts an unmanned cog borne along by the waves.<sup>14</sup> Main Town Gdańsk was already using this 13<sup>th</sup>-century seal under Teutonic rule, whilst in 1352 a new matrix of a secret seal came into use, which also depicted a cog. In the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, novel trends in signifying the identity of self-governing authorities through coats of arms reached Pomerelia, where towns that were devising their heraldic programmes at the time incorporated elements into them associated with the symbolism of their overlords, namely the Teutonic Order. Such was the situation with Gdańsk Main Town, which chose two silver (white) crosses on a red field as the emblem in its coat of arms.<sup>15</sup> The new seal matrices that appeared in the chancery of Gdańsk Main Town in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century reflect an attempt to combine Teutonic (two crosses) and Hanseatic (a cog) symbolism. The device on this seal consisted of a cog featuring a cross on the flag flying atop its mast; in another variant a shield with two crosses was depicted on the side of the ship.<sup>16</sup> The colours of Gdańsk Main Town's coat of arms were the same as those of the Hanse, hence red and white (in heraldry white represents the metal silver).<sup>17</sup> In 1457 Casimir IV, king of Poland, honoured the coat of arms of Gdańsk (after its three urban centres were united in 1454 under the authority of the Main Town, this became the symbol of the whole city) with the addition of a gold crown above the crosses.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Erich Hoffmann, "Das Zusammenwirken von Kaufmann und Seefahrer Interpretation des Lübecker Schiffissiegels," in: *Lübeckische Geschichte*, ed. Antjekathrin Graßmann (Lübeck: Schmidt Römhild, 2008), 101–103.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Ewe, *Schiffe auf Siegeln* (Rostock: VEB Hinstorff Verlag, 1972), 147–148; Śliwiński, "Herb Gdańska w XIV–XVIII wieku," in: *Aurea Porta Rzeczypospolitej. Sztuka Gdańska od połowy XV do końca XVII wieku. Eseje* (Gdańsk: Muzeum Narodowe w Gdańsku, 1997), 133; Możejko, "Najdawniejsze pieczęcie i herb miasta Elbląga," in: *Z przeszłości Elbląga*, ed. Andrzej Groth (Koszalin: Wydawnictwo BWSH, 1999), 56.

<sup>15</sup> Śliwiński, "Herb Gdańska," 133–135.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 135–136.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Możejko, "Przywileje Kazimierza Jagiellończyka z 1457 r. dla Gdańska a zmiany heraldycznego wizerunku miasta," in: *Okręt Kościoła z gdańskiego Dworu Artusa. Materiały z sesji zorganizowanej przez Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Gdańska dnia 25 maja 2007 roku w 550. rocznicę nadania Miastu honorowego przywileju przez króla Kazimierza Jagiellończyka* (Res Gedanenses.

Thus, Gdańsk affirmed its Hanseatic identity in visual terms using symbolic colours. Notably, over the centuries the city (Gdańsk Main Town) continued to use a seal with the ship motif characteristic of Hanseatic towns, though in time the cog was replaced by a hulk, and instead of just two crosses the flag featured two crosses and a crown.<sup>19</sup>

## Ruling elites in late medieval Gdańsk

Self-government symbolism was associated with demonstrating the decision-making or activity of city authorities. In Gdańsk, under the terms of Chełmno (Kulm) Law by which the city was governed, power was held by the mayors, councillors and magistrates.<sup>20</sup> As stated earlier, in the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Gdańsk came under the rule of the kings of Poland, in no small measure due to the efforts of the city's elite, in particular the members of the Main Town council, who decided in early 1454 to break away from the Teutonic Order and submit to Poland. After 1454, the structure of authority in Gdańsk was such that power was held by a General Council comprising four mayors, fourteen councillors and five councilmen from the Old Town. Up until 1507 annual elections took place on 22 February, thereafter being moved to 17 March.<sup>21</sup> Of the four mayors, the first, known as the presiding mayor, held greatest sway, overseeing administrative, judicial and maritime affairs (including certificates for ships), and settling disputes between shipowners, merchants, skippers and crews. He also had patronage over the Churches of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Trinity. This office was held on a rotational basis: the first mayor stepping down to the role of second mayor, and so on (though naturally there were exceptions to this rule arising, for example, from death or illness).<sup>22</sup> From 1457 onwards the king

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Studia i Materiały Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Gdańska, vol. I, 2008), 15–19; Śliwiński, “Symbolika i dzieje pieczęci oraz herbów miasta Gdańska,” in: *Rządzący i Rządzeni. Władza i społeczeństwo*, eds. Sylwia Bykowska, Edmund Kizik, Piotr Paluchowski (Gdańsk: Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Gdańska, 2015), 147–164; *Res Gedanenses. Studia i Materiały Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Gdańska* 9 (2015): 153–154.

<sup>19</sup> Śliwiński, “Herb Gdańska”; *idem*, “Symbolika i dzieje,” 155.

<sup>20</sup> Key works on the ruling elite of Gdańsk's Main Town include: Joachim Zdrenka, *Główne, Stare i Młode Miasto Gdańsk i ich patrycjat w latach 1342–1525* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 1992); *idem*, *Urzednicy miejscy Gdańska w latach 1342–1792 i 1807–1814*, vol. 1: *Spis*, vol. 2: *Biogramy* (Gdańsk: Muzeum Archeologiczne w Gdańsku, 2008), which was first published in German in 1992. The aspirations of Gdańsk's patricians and their efforts to obtain noble titles were highlighted by Ewa Bojaruniec, “Social Advancement among Patrician Families in Gdańsk in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period as Exemplified by the Ferber Family,” *Acta Historica Universitatis Klaipedensis* 29: *Mobility in the Eastern Baltics, 15<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (2014): 160–172.

<sup>21</sup> *Poczet sołtysów, burmistrzów, nadburmistrzów, przewodniczących Miejskiej Rady Narodowej i prezydentów Gdańska od XIII do XXI wieku*, ed. Możejko (Gdańsk: Oficyna Gdańska, 2015), 93–94.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, 19–21. The details of their biographies reveal that each mayor successively held the office of first, second, third, and fourth mayor, before once again serving as first mayor.

was represented in the city by a burgrave, whose remit concerned the judiciary, passing judgement on issues including death sentences and crimes on the road. Every year the city council nominated eight candidates to the king as potential burgraves. The monarch often selected the same person time after time.<sup>23</sup> It was the mayors and councillors who were sent to attend Hanseatic assemblies as envoys of Gdańsk city council.<sup>24</sup>

In late medieval Gdańsk, as in other Hanseatic towns, power belonged to elite families, who formed a ruling group.<sup>25</sup> The mayors of that period were: Wilhelm Jordan (1454–1461), Jacob Falcke (1457–1461), Johann von Schouwen (1461–1475), Johann Fere (1461–1478), Johann von dem Walde (1461–1468), Philip Bischof (1470–1483) Johan Angermünde (1476–1482), Johann Ferber (1479–1501), Martin Bock (1483–1484), Johann Schewecke (1484–1490), Georg Bock (1484–1503), Heinrich Falcke (1489–1505), Heinrich Suchten (1492–1501), Georg Mandt (1502–1513), Johann Schewecke (1503–1512), Mattias Zimmermann (1504–1513), Anton Bokelmann (1506–1507)<sup>26</sup>, Eberhard Ferber (1501–1522), Gregor Brandt (1514–1524), Heinrich Wise (1514–1524), Philip Bischof (1517–1535), Matthias Lange (1522–1524, 1526–1529), Kurt Suchten (1525), Johann Wentland (1525), and Georg Zimmermann (1525).<sup>27</sup> From this list alone it is evident that during 1454–1525 families such as the Falckes, Bischofs,

<sup>23</sup> Joachim Zdrenka, *Die Danziger Burggrafen 1457–1792/93* (Hamburg: Im Selbstverlag des Vereins, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> Marian Biskup, "Rola Elbląga w Związku miast hanzeatyckich," *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie* 3–4 (1988): 17–232. The author noted that Toruń and Elbląg were foremost among the Prussian cities attending Hanseatic assemblies in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century. However, by 1377 Gdańsk had become visibly more active, regularly sending delegates to meetings of the Hanse. Gradually, Gdańsk took on the leading role among Prussian towns, representing centres such as Elbląg and Toruń by the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. On the subject of Gdańsk becoming an important intermediary in the Hanse's contacts with Lithuania, Livonia, Kraków and Wrocław, see Roman Czaja, "Przenoszenie listów między miastami hanzeatyckimi w strefie bałtyckiej w XIV–XV wieku," *KLIO. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym* (2012): 12. A recent analysis and comparison of late medieval and early modern assemblies (including Hanseatic ones) is provided by Ulla Kypta, "Versammeln, besprechen, beschließen. Der Vergleich verschiedener Tagfahrten des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 138 (2020): 1–23.

<sup>25</sup> On the role of elites in Hanseatic cities, including Gdańsk, and on the use of the terms patriate, upper echelons, and ruling groups, see Roman Czaja, *Grupy rządzące w miastach nadbałtyckich w średniowieczu* (Toruń: Roczniki Towarzystwa Naukowego w Toruniu, 2008), 6–39; *idem*, "Städtische Gemeinden im mittelalterlichen Preußen und Livland – zwischen Ratsherrschaft und bürgerlicher Partizipation," *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska* 77 (2017): 121–135, wherein there are also remarks concerning ruling groups. We know that from 1342 to 1526 representatives of 245 families sat on the Main Town council, compared with only 128 families during the period from 1526 to 1792 (*Poczet*, 94).

<sup>26</sup> This mayor had particular ties with Bruges: see Renée Rößner, *Hansische Memoria in Flandern* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), 292–293.

<sup>27</sup> Dates in parentheses indicating when the given individual held the office of mayor are cited after *Poczet*, 89.



Bocks, Ferbers, Scheweckes, Suchtens, and Zimmermanns each had two members who served as mayors. All of these mayors had earlier held office as magistrates and councillors, and either personally or through their ancestors had commercial contacts, which included long-distance maritime trade. Most of them eventually became involved in politics – attending meetings of the Hanse or assemblies of the estates (initially under Teutonic and later under Polish rule). One person worthy of special mention is Filip Bischof who, together with his younger brothers Peter and Arnat, moved to Gdańsk from Lübeck, where his older brothers Albert, Walter and Johann were in business, and he himself maintained commercial links with Bruges and Brussels. Filip amassed a considerable fortune in Gdańsk, trading in cloth, wax, furs, Atlantic salt and herrings, and sending goods to Hamburg, Lübeck, Bruges and Livonia. He made numerous property investments in Gdańsk, acquiring plots on Św. Ducha, Świętojańska, Lastadia, Długie Ogrody, Św. Piotra, and Chlebnicka Streets as well as on the hill known as Cygańska Góra. As a result of various transactions and financial operations, he also became the owner of the Langfuhr (Wrzeszcz) district. He made numerous religious donations, bought the Chapel of 11,000 Virgins in the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary from David von der Bele, and commissioned a predella depicting the Resurrection and the Holy Trinity. By the time of the Thirteen Years' War, he was already involved in politics, and in 1459 he served as Gdańsk's representative at peace talks with Amsterdam. In 1469, together with councilman Berndt Pawest, as envoy of Gdańsk's municipal authorities he attended a Hanseatic assembly in Lübeck, where discussions were held concerning relations with England and the renewal of privileges for Hanseatic merchants. In 1472 he led negotiations with merchants from Bruges, and during 1471–1476 he represented Gdańsk at assemblies of the Prussian estates. In his last will and testament of 1483 he left instructions that he be buried in the Cistercian abbey at Oliwa (the last resting place of Pomere-lia's pre-Teutonic rulers); he also made numerous devotional bequests, and left the Artus Court his best suit of armour. Philip Bischof's chattels and real estate were valued at 40,000 marks, whilst his trade turnover amounted to nearly 2% of Gdańsk's total turnover, all of which made him one of the city's wealthiest residents.<sup>28</sup> The Bischof family also played an important role in the early decades

<sup>28</sup> Henryk Samsonowicz, *Badania nad kapitałem mieszczańskim Gdańska w II połowie XV wieku* (Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Dział Wydawniczy 1960), 68, 93, 107–108; Andrzej Labuda, "Predella Filipa Bischofa z kościoła NMPanny w Gdańsku – problem późnośredniowiecznej ikonografii śmierci," in: *Sztuka Pobrzeża Bałtyku* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1978), 203–239; Zdrenka, "Bischof Filip," in: *Słownik biograficzny Pomorza Nadwiślańskiego*, vol. I, ed. Stanisław Gierszewski (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Gdańskie, 1992), 113–115; Piotr Oliński, "Zmiany własnościowe fundacji w kościołach parafialnych na przykładach z kościoła parafialnego Najświętszej Marii Panny w Głównym Mieście w Gdańsku," in: *Colloquia mediaevalia Pragensia* 5 (2006): 254–258; Możejko, *Rozrachunek z życiem doczesnym. Gdańskie testamenty mieszczańskie z XV i początku XVI wieku* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2010), 68–71.

of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Philip's son became mayor. Also called Philip (born around 1468, died in 1535), he conducted business on a wide range of fronts, including investing in copper, iron and silver mines in the Carpathians. He was also involved in maritime trade, and in 1510, together with his business partners Heinrich Bockelmann and Hildebrandt Holthusen, he lost a cargo of "Lisbon oil" and pepper, plus a crate of clothes and a parrot, worth 339 marks in total, when a ship owned by Gdańsk citizen Andreas Blancke sailing from Zeeland (a province of the Low Countries) was seized and looted by Lübeckers in the Sound. As late as 1517, Philip and his associates were still making claims for compensation (probably to no avail) against the Lübeckers. The younger Philip died in 1535, and, like his father, was buried in the Cistercian church at Oliwa.<sup>29</sup> Philip's descendants did not play any significant role in the city.

Another notable family were the Suchtens, whose ancestor came to Gdańsk from Süchteln in the Rhineland. Heinrich von Suchten, son of Gdańsk councilman Berthold, was initially a provider of financial services, offering loans at interest, but in 1469 he began a career as a magistrate, then as a councillor and finally rose to the office of mayor. He led a very active life in politics, representing Gdańsk at numerous assemblies of the Royal Prussian states. Of his many children, his son Heinrich became a councillor, Kurt was made mayor in 1525,<sup>30</sup> whilst Christoph was a Renaissance poet.<sup>31</sup> Towards the end of his life, mayor Heinrich Suchten supported his fellow Gdańsk patricians – the Feldstete, Melamann, Angermünde and Pileman families – by becoming involved in a dispute with the rising Ferber family. He prevented Mauritius, son of mayor Johann Ferber, from marrying the wealthy Anna Pileman, granddaughter of Otto Angermünde. The Suchten family ceased to serve on the city council in the latter half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The fortunes of the aforementioned Ferber family, who had settled in Gdańsk after arriving from the Rhineland in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, took an entirely different path. The first Ferber to pursue a career on the city council was Johann. Initially, he was involved in overseas trade, importing wine, raisins, figs, cheese, olive oil and cloth from western Europe and exporting timber, hops, rye and copper (re-export). He traded in land and provided loans. This was an example of a Hanseatic burgher who

<sup>29</sup> *Hanserecesse* [hereafter: HR], hrsg. Dietrich Schäfer, Bd. III/6, (Leipzig 1899), no. 185; HR, III/7, hrsg. Dietrich Schäfer (Leipzig 1900), no. 431; Sławomir Kościelak, "Philip Bischof," in: *Poczet*, 127–129. Philip's brother, Albert, pursued an ecclesiastical career, studying at Leipzig, Orleans and Bologna, before serving as canon of Ermland and during 1495–1511 as parish priest of St Catherine's Church, Gdańsk: Możejko, "Young burghers from Gdańsk at European universities in the late Middle Ages – research exploration," *Colloquia mediaevalia Pragensia* 18 (2017): 163–165.

<sup>30</sup> Sławomir Kościelak, "Kurt von Suchten," in: *Poczet*, 130–132.

<sup>31</sup> Zbigniew Nowak, "Suchten Christoph, humanista, poeta łaciński, kanonik warmiński, proboszcz w Gdańsku," in: *Polski słownik biograficzny* [hereafter: *PSB*], 65/3 (Warszawa–Kraków: IH PAN, 2008), 338–339. Heinrich's grandson was also a poet: *idem*, "Suchten Aleksander (ok. 1520 – między 1576 a 1590), kanonik warmiński, lekarz, alchemik, poeta," in: *PSB*, 337–338.

was keen to uphold the splendour and prestige of his family both in life as in death, investing in a family chapel at the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The chapel became the family crypt of the Ferbers for several centuries, regardless of the church changing in denomination from Catholic to Protestant. Over the years the Ferbers founded a number of altars in their chapel. As mayor, Johann attended numerous assemblies of the states, and in 1492 in Kraków he participated in the election of Jan Olbracht Jagiellon as king of Poland.<sup>32</sup> Of Johann's many children, the one who forged the greatest career was his oldest son, Eberhard, who became mayor, and in 1515 secured ennoblement for himself and his descendants by getting King Sigismund I the Old (Zygmunt Stary) to approve the Ferber coat of arms (a shield with three boars' heads). Eberhard's wife, Gertrude, was also ennobled through heraldic adoption by the Szydłowiecki family, which granted her the use of their Odrowąż coat of arms. Eberhardt did not stop there; in 1515 he obtained confirmation of his noble status from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I,<sup>33</sup> a move probably designed with more than just prestige in mind. These ennoblements guaranteed the Ferbers a place among Polish and German noble families. The position of the Ferber family was further bolstered by Eberhard's youngest brother, Mauritius who became the bishop of Warmia. Despite periods of political turbulence, the Ferbers governed the city up until the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century (the last mayor to come from this family was Nathanael Gottfried Ferber).

The common link between the families that ruled Gdańsk was that their wealth and prosperity were based on overseas trade, often involving other Hanseatic cities.

## Maritime contacts

As I have written about elsewhere, in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century ships from Gdańsk not only plied routes to ports on the Baltic and North Seas, but also to Spain, Portugal, and even Iceland.<sup>34</sup> The city's many maritime contacts are attested by sources published in the *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* as well as by the mooring toll registers of fees paid by ships entering and leaving the port of Gdańsk.<sup>35</sup> Like

<sup>32</sup> Bojaruniec, "Johann Ferber," in: *Poczet*, 107–108.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> Możejko, "Morskie podróże późnośredniowiecznych gdańszczan do Zachodniej Europy – wstępne rozeznanie materiału," in: *Samotrzeć, w kompanii czy z orszakiem. Społeczne aspekty podróży w średniowieczu i w czasach nowożytnych*, eds. Monika Saczyńska, Ewa Wólkiewicz (Warszawa: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Niemiecki Instytut Historyczny w Warszawie, 2012), 217–228; *idem*, "Late Medieval Gdańsk as a Bridge," 227–228.

<sup>35</sup> *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* [hereafter: HU], Bd. VI–XI, are the relevant volumes for the late medieval period. The most important of the mooring toll registers are Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku [hereafter: APG], 300, 19. Cf. Możejko, "Z dziejów floty gdańskiej w XV wieku," in: *Komturzy, rajcy, zupani. Studia z dziejów średniowiecza* 11 (2005): 166–167, wherein earlier literature on the subject. Gdańsk's mooring toll registers were used in a study of the grain trade by Christina Link, *Der*

other Hanseatic port towns, Gdańsk had an area known as *Lastadie* (Lastadia) where ships were built. It was located on the banks of the Motława, in the Old Suburbs (Stare Przedmieście), southeast of the Main Town. Ships were built, repaired and fitted out at this site, which also served as a storage yard for timber and iron components used in construction.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Gdańsk had excellent shipbuilding facilities capable of meeting not only local demand. However, in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century the Hanse prohibited ships from being sold to or built for its rivals. These bans were systematically upheld, eliciting futile objections from Gdańsk. Meanwhile, residents of England, the Low Countries and Zealand were keen to order ships from Gdańsk's Lastadia. The Gdańsk councillor Berndt Pawest argued at a meeting with the aldermen of the Hanseatic *Kontor* in Bruges that it was worth building ships in Gdańsk, where timber, iron, carpenters and blacksmiths were readily available.<sup>37</sup> The bans imposed by the Hanse were not fully complied with in Gdańsk: for example, in August 1451 master Hans Herrendorp of Gdańsk complained that he had built a ship commissioned by the Englishman Thomas Kathons, who already owed him 90 Prussian marks.<sup>38</sup> Building ships for non-Hanseatic clients, in particular the Dutch, became more commonplace in Gdańsk during the 1470s.<sup>39</sup>

Gdańsk's relations with England, which, alongside the Netherlands, was one of the Hanse's main competitors, were fairly complicated. There were English attacks on Gdańsk shipping, such as the one that took place in the autumn of 1419, when Gdańsk shipmaster Johann Tolk, sailing from Spain in command of *Le Saint Esprit de Dansk*, was arrested near the Channel by Sir Thomas de Carrew, English admiral of the royal fleet. In the service of King Henry V of England, the admiral carried out privateering raids on French and Spanish vessels. The capture of Tolk's ship resulted in damage to some of the goods she was carrying, and so the Gdańsk skipper later lodged a complaint with London's authorities and received compensation for the lost cargo.<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, in early November 1419, Henry V ordered

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*preußische Getreidehandel im 15. Jahrhundert. Eine Studie zur nordeuropäischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Bd. LXVIII, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Możejko, "Z dziejów floty," 167–170; *eadem*, "Maritime Gdańsk in the second half of the fourteenth and the fifteenth century," in: *New Studies*, 102–103; see also <https://gdansk.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?title=LASTADIA>, accessed on 26 I 2022.

<sup>37</sup> HR, II/6, ed. Goswin von der Ropp (Leipzig 1890), 6, no. 547; Możejko, "Z dziejów floty," 174. On Hanseatic contacts with England see Stuart Jenks, *England, die Hanse und Preußen*, Bd. 1–3 (Köln: Böhlau, 1992); Timothy Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse. A Study of their Trade and Commercial Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> HU, ed. Walter Stein (Leipzig 1899), vol. 8, no. 84, par. 27; Możejko, "Z dziejów floty," 173.

<sup>39</sup> Możejko, "Z dziejów floty," 175. Technical advances in shipbuilding in Gdańsk were influenced by the city's seizure of the French caravel *Pierre de la Rochelle*. For more on this vessel see *eadem*, *Peter von Danzig. The story of a Great Caravel, 1462–1475* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020).

<sup>40</sup> *Eadem*, "Morskie przypadki gdańskiego szypra Johanna Tolka w pierwszej połowie XV wieku. Pechowy szyper czy los wielu," in: *Stilo et animo. Prace historyczne ofiarowane Tomaszowi Jasińskiemu*

the return of all goods from the Gdańsk ship *Maryknyght*, which had run aground off the Norfolk coast.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes, however, disputes with England dragged on for several years, as was the case with Gdańsk skipper Erik Keding and the merchant Peter Struwe. In 1418, the hulk *Marienknicht*, captained by Keding, was attacked and seized by the English near Kingston upon Hull. Compensation claims made by Keding, and moreover by the Gdańsk merchants who had lost goods aboard the captured vessel, failed. In retaliation, on arrival in Gdańsk the English ship *Bartholomeus*, owned by a merchant and councillor from Hull, was detained in the port and most probably sequestered by Gdańsk.<sup>42</sup>

Incidents of this type did not, however, deter either side from engaging in maritime trade; Gdańsk ships sailed to English ports, and the English exported their goods to Gdańsk.<sup>43</sup> The London customs accounts of 1445/46 provide information about several dozen ships from Gdańsk. For example, on 8 June 1446 Jacob Moys arrived on the Thames aboard *Mariknyght de Dansk*, bringing mostly woodland products – timber and staves.<sup>44</sup> On the same day a number of other ships from Gdańsk also appeared on the Thames and paid tolls.<sup>45</sup> English merchants in turn did business in Gdańsk. The famous Englishwoman Margery Kempe, renowned as a mystic but above all as the author of the first autobiography written in English, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, visited Gdańsk. Her oldest son, John, who was active in trade with Prussia, relocated from Lynn to Gdańsk and married a local woman. In 1432, a year after his death, Margery arrived in Gdańsk with her daughter-in-law. In her autobiography she recalled her stay in the city: “The said creature waited in Gdańsk in Germany for about five or six weeks, and was warmly welcomed by many people for our Lord’s love. There was nobody as against her as her daughter-in-law, who, if she had been properly dutiful, was the most compelled and obligated to have comforted her.”<sup>46</sup>

w 65. *rocznicę urodzin*, eds. Maciej Dorna, Marzena Matla, Miłosz Sosnowski, Ewa Syska, cooperation Wojciech Baran-Kozłowski (Poznań: Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 2016), 271–280.

<sup>41</sup> *Eadem*, “Morskie przypadki,” 273, no. 17.

<sup>42</sup> *Eadem*, “Gdańszczanie: szyper Erik Keding i kupiec Peter Struwe w sporze z Anglikami,” in: *Pomerania et alia opuscula Joachimo Zdrenka dedicata*, eds. Joanna Karczewska, Marcelli Tureczek (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2017), 125–138.

<sup>43</sup> Samsonowicz, “Gdańsk a Anglia,” in: *Historia Gdańska*, vol. II: 1454–1655, ed. Edmund Cieślak (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1982), 139–150. Valuable evidence of contacts between Gdańsk and England is provided in Anna Paulina Orłowska, *Johan Pyre, Ein Kaufmann und sein Handelsbuch im spätmittelalterlichen Danzig. Darstellung und Edition* (Wien: Brill | V&R, 2022).

<sup>44</sup> “The London Customs Accounts: 24 Henry VI (1445/46),” ed. Stuart Jenks (*Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte* 74, Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2018), 97, doc. no. 78.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, 96, no. 77; 98, no. 79; 99, no. 80; 101, no. 81; see also Index for further entries of Gdańsk ships.

<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. by Anthony Bale (Oxford: University Press, 2013), Book II, Chapter 4, 210. Establishing the identity of Margery’s son was a longstanding challenge which has finally been resolved by Sebastian Sobiecki (“The writyng of this tretys’: Margery Kempe’s Son

Mutual Anglo-Hanseatic attacks at sea escalated in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Although King Edward IV confirmed the privileges of Hanseatic merchants in England, a number of hostile incidents took place on the Thames, one of which resulted in the burning of ships from Gdańsk. In response, under pressure from Gdańsk, a Hanseatic boycott of English cloth was agreed, and in the spring of 1471 it was decided to employ naval action against the English. In essence, prevailed upon by Gdańsk, Lübeck and Hamburg resolved to deploy an armed fleet, which was, however, destroyed by the English in July 1472. The conflict came to an end with the Peace of Utrecht, signed in 1474, which reaffirmed the privileges of the Hanse, but also gave the English freedom to operate in the Baltic.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite the earlier mentioned political changes, for almost two centuries Gdańsk was shaped by the Hanseatic community. The city used the distinctive symbol of the ship motif and the Hanse's red and white colour scheme. The Gdańsk elite, like that of other Hanseatic towns, were the key players in the city thanks to favourable business interests and auspicious matrimonial ties. Despite Hanseatic restrictions, shipwrights in Gdańsk built vessels for customers who were not members of the Hanse. Maritime contacts played one of the most vital roles in the social and economic life of late medieval Gdańsk, and these included trade links with the English – competitors of the Hanse who could not be taken lightly.

Naturally, Hanseatic aspects of Gdańsk also had their cultural manifestations, examples of which include the Artus Court with its fraternities, but this subject is addressed in a separate article in this volume.

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Most scholars agree that by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the splendour of the Hanse had begun to wane. The reasons for this were many: the problems caused by the silting up of the waterway that linked Bruges with the sea, the growing importance of nation states, geographic discoveries and the decline in significance of local commercial markets. This process continued throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> However, for Gdańsk the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century marked the start of its golden age, a period of progress and prosperity.<sup>49</sup>

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and the Authorship of Her Book,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015): 257–283, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sac.2015.0015>, accessed on 5 I 2022. See also: Roman Czaja, Anna Marynowska, “Foreign merchants and skippers in Gdansk (Danzig) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries”, in: *Las sociedades portuarias de la Europa Atlántica en la Edad Media*, eds. Jesús Ángel Solórzano Telechea, Beatriz Arizaga Bolumburu, Michel Bochaca (Logroño: Instituto Estudios Riojanos, 2016), 67–82.

<sup>47</sup> I have written more extensively about this in Możejko, *Peter von Danzig, passim*.

<sup>48</sup> Dollinger, *Hanza*. See also Samsonowicz, “Rozluźnienie związku z Hanżą,” in: *Historia Gdańska*, 314–329.

<sup>49</sup> For more on Gdańsk's heyday of the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> century see Maria Bogucka, “Gdańsk – największy port Bałtyku,” in: *Historia Gdańska*, vol. II, 465 ff.