
PROBLEMS

Tudor-Hapsburg Trade Wars and Northern Commercial Networks 1486-1506

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Beginning in the late 1480s, the northern European economy weathered a series of recurrent disputes that at least partially disrupted commercial traffic between England and the Hapsburg-Burgundian Low Countries for extended periods. The interruptions occurred intermittently over the course of two decades. Their effects were by no means all-pervasive in the Anglo-Burgundian sphere, nor were they even confined to it. With English woollen cloth in reasonably constant demand on European markets, these «trade wars» necessarily had an impact on the broader distributive networks. In particular they affected merchants belonging to the confederation of northern European trading towns known as the German Hanse. They also sparked English interest in an alternative market in the Baltic region. As a consequence, the disruptions prompted some of the principal diplomatic initiatives and economic strategies that influenced subsequent commercial trends. Those trends, in turn, helped shape international trade patterns for the early sixteenth century.

From mid-November 1487 until early April 1489 mercantile shipping in the Narrow Seas was interrupted by an English embargo on direct trade with the Low Countries. It was imposed in the first instance as a punitive response to the involvement of the Burgundian ducal house, and specifically that of Dowager Duchess Margaret, in the failed Yorkist rebellion of 1487¹. Already, though, negotiations during the previous year had failed to produce a commercial agreement with the Hapsburg regent of the Burgundian territories, Emperor-elect Maximilian I.

English cloth was one of the corner-stones of the trade at the Brabantine entrepôts of Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom, but as early as November 1486 English merchant adventurers who traded there contemplated evacuation. Moreover, for several months the English government also had been vigorously enforcing parliamentary statutes to limit the thriving Lowland trade of London's

¹ M. Bennett, *Lambert Simmel and the Battle of Stoke*, (New York, 1987), pp. 60-63.

Hanseatic merchants. Amid allegations of the complicity of some English merchants in the intrigue surrounding the Yorkist pretender, Lambert Simnel, some members of London's merchant guilds nevertheless continued to transact business in the Low Countries. Henry VII ordered them to cease trading to and from the lands of the King of Romans by 15 November². Hanseatic merchants in England also were obliged to comply with the ban, although thinly-veiled coercion and restrictions on the export of unshorn English woollens already had hampered their trade since the previous autumn³. In any event, the actual embargo was imposed at the height of political turmoil in Flanders, with English trade there already compromised. The drapery towns of Bruges and Ghent were in open revolt against Maximilian, and, as if marauding bands of mercenaries and the constant threat of French military incursion were not enough to disrupt normal commercial traffic, maritime skirmishes involving English vessels provoked additional violence directed specifically at the English merchant community⁴. Though amenable to a new commercial treaty with England, Maximilian was barely holding his own against the rebellious towns, and so really lacked the requisite political security for a meaningful trade pact⁵.

Until it was rescinded in the spring of 1489⁶, the restriction imposed by King Henry virtually closed down England's direct export trade to the Low Countries. It affected not only the English and Lowland economies, but also the northern sector of the much larger continental network. The hub of England's woollen trade was London, with average annual exports during the early 1480s of 30,000 to 40,000 broadcloths. About one third of these usually were customed to merchants of the German Hanse, who, by virtue of charters granted in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, were free to move throughout the kingdom and to transact business with both foreign and denizen merchants. They also paid a lower customs rate on cloth exports than their denizen counterparts. Hanseatic merchants sent substantial quantities of English cloth to the Baltic region and also to Brabant, whence it was distributed eastward via Cologne and Frankfurt⁷. Although Hansards from Cologne still

² *Acts of Court of the Mercers' Company 1453-1527*, ed. L. Lyell and F.D. Watney, (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 297-303.

³ *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, ed. K. Höhlbaum, K. Kunze, W. Stein, (Leipzig, 1876-1939), XI, nr. 183; *Hanserecesse*, series (3), ed. D. Schäfer, (Leipzig, 1881-94), II, nr. 106-10.

⁴ *The Cely Letters*, ed. A. Hanham, (Oxford, 1975), pp. 235-36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 227, 242; *The Reign of Henry VII from contemporary sources*, ed. A.F. Pollard, (London, 1913-14), I, pp. 282-85; *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Reigns of Richard III and Henry VII*, ed. J. Gairdner, (London, 1861-63), II, pp. 52-54; *Materials for a History of the Reign of Henry VII*, ed. W. Campbell, (London, 1873-77), II, pp. 247-48, 284.

⁶ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. P.L. Hughes and J.F. Larkin, (New Haven, 1964), II, nr. 18. *Materials*, II, pp. 377-78, 440-41.

⁷ *England's Export Trade 1275-1547*, ed. E.M. Carus-Wilson and O. Coleman, (Oxford, 1963), pp. 107-09; *Public Record Office*, E122 194/24, 25, 26, 73/41, 78/3. For the trade

were sending their English cloth to markets as far off as Venice in 1487, they alone declared lost profits of £1,000 sterling at the Antwerp, Bergen op Zoom and Frankfurt marts when their shipments from England that year were hindered⁸. The imposition of the embargo, though, forced a hasty and by no means insignificant modification of this central distribution system. Hanseatic merchants in England were now prohibited from shipping to Maximilian's Lowland ports. Instead, they re-routed their consignments northward over Hamburg, Kampen and Groningen, whence they could be carted south again to interior markets and distribution points.

An option for English Merchant Adventurers was to re-direct their cloth trade to the wool staple at Calais. This, however, presented certain difficulties. The protectionist ordinances of Bruges and the Flemish drapery towns severely restricted the onward shipment of English broadcloths. Only Hanseatic merchants were permitted to transport foreign woollens across Flanders to inland markets⁹. This meant that the majority of English cloth consignments still had to be trans-shipped coastwise — that is to say from Calais to Brabant or elsewhere. Here, too, the limitations of Calais as potential entrepôt and transit centre were accentuated by the prevailing political instability in Flanders. The insurrections there periodically made coastal traffic, as well as the road to Bruges, insecure for those attempting to move merchandise to or from the town. English Staplers were detained and had their goods confiscated at Ostend, Gravelines and Dunkirk. Hanseatic merchants were arrested by soldiers from Ghent in 1487, and at least one English cloth shipment belonging to Cologne merchants was robbed by soldiers from Bruges, despite valid certification for transport through Flanders. Yet another consignment was seized by the captain of a garrison at Gravelines¹⁰. As much as it was threatened and periodically obstructed, however, commercial traffic did not come to a complete halt. And Calais did serve as a conduit for woollen shipments and for England's import trade. Despite the risks, diverse Hanseatic-owned cargoes of wainscots, hops and tar were being directed from Antwerp to Calais in 1488. Also, in incidents not directly related to the Anglo-Hapsburg feud, Cologne merchants from the Hanseatic comptoir in London had pepper, fustian, dyestuffs and thread distrained at Calais the following year¹¹.

of the Cologne merchants to Frankfurt and points beyond: *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels und Verkehrs im Mittelalter*, ed. B. Kuske, (Bonn, 1917-34), II, nr. 1055; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, X, nr. 589.

⁸ *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 183, 233, 243; *Hanserecesse*, (3) II, nr. 228-33; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1055, 1206-32.

⁹ J. H. Munro, «Industrial Protectionism in Medieval Flanders: Urban or National?», *The Medieval City*, ed. H.A. Miskimin, et al., (New Haven, 1977), pp. 229-68.

¹⁰ *The Cely Letters*, pp. 236-42; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 331; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1206-22, *Acts of Court*, pp. 297-98.

Cloth export totals, recorded in English customs accounts, indicate that the embargo initially had a profound impact on all the principal merchant sectors in the English capital-denizen, non-denizen and Hanseatic. The dominance of London in the woollen export trade is reflected in a corresponding drop in national totals. Equally instructive is the apparent rapid recovery by Hanseatic and non-denizen merchants. By the second year of the embargo, the Hansards had their alternate distribution network in place, and Hanseatic cloth exports from London quickly rebounded to previous levels. The less voluminous trade of other non-denizens also recovered, as they simply purchased English cloth in England rather than at Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom. For English exporters, circumstances were different. Without a contingency network or alternative market, they lagged behind for another year. Denizen cloth exports from London showed no real improvement until 1488-89. Even with the re-routing of shipments to Calais and the northern Hanseatic ports, there was a reduction of about 20% in aggregate cloth exports from London during the two Exchequer years affected by the ban. Especially hard hit were the English merchants¹². Consequently, while the embargo forced the diversion of Hanseatic traffic and heightened the commercial importance of Calais, it also had the subsidiary effect of rekindling English interest in an alternative overseas market, specifically the Prussian staple at Danzig. And so it was scarcely by chance that the Baltic trade and, hence, England's relations with Denmark and the Hanse became a focus of concern for the Crown precisely when traffic to the Brabant fairs was restricted.

Throughout the early 1480s Anglo-Hanseatic relations had deteriorated steadily. Yet by the autumn of 1487 the English government was extending proposals for a formal conference with Hanseatic representatives¹³. Of special interest to the English was the possibility of expanding their commercial activity in the Baltic. By this time, in relation to the overall volume of denizen woollen exports from England, the Prussian staple at Danzig had become a distant secondary market, and was likely to remain such, so long as the Brabantine connection could be maintained. But the Anglo-Lowland dispute now threatened to disrupt routine overseas traffic for an extended period. Against this background of uncertainty, then, English woollen exporters now professed renewed interest in the Baltic — a market that had been of relatively little importance to them throughout the preceding decade.

Though there were obstacles in the way of a shift to the Baltic trade, they

¹¹ *Stadsarchief Antwerpen*, Cert. I 2r.; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 292-93, 299; *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Handel met England, Schotland en Ierland*, ed. H.J. Smit, Gravenhage, 1928-50), (2) I, nr. 39; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1143, 1206 - 12-26.

¹² *England's Export Trade*, pp. 109-10. The two Exchequer years in question would run from Michaelmas 1486 to Michaelmas 1488. London's enrolled customs account for the first of these years (1486-87) runs only from 10 December 1486.

¹³ *Hanserecense*, (3) II, nr. 188-90, 212.

were not insuperable. The most obvious hindrance was the escalating cycle of violence in northern waters, largely instigated by mercenaries in the service of King John of Denmark. Passage into the Baltic via the Sound, as well as access to the much coveted Icelandic fisheries, hinged on relations with the Danes. A new Anglo-Danish accord, negotiated during 1489 and confirmed in 1490, opened Iceland to licensed English trade and guaranteed mutual freedom of navigation and commerce¹⁴. With this, the first of two essential prerequisites for a commercial initiative in the Baltic was accomplished. The second necessary precondition was an explicit confirmation of the long-standing English claim to reciprocal trading rights at the Prussian staple. Tough bargaining with representatives from Hanseatic towns resulted in qualified recognition of the principle of reciprocity a year later¹⁵. In the interim there had been a brief lull in the unrest in Flanders, and King Henry's restriction on the Lowland trade was lifted. Nevertheless, the embargo of 1487-89 had, in addition to its effects on the Calais trade and the Hanseatic routes, set in motion the diplomatic initiatives that attempted to establish the basis of a contingency network for the English woollen export trade.

It was an alternative whose viability did not go untested for long, because that trade still depended heavily on the Brabant markets for overseas distribution. Consequently, it remained particularly vulnerable to new breaches in Anglo-Hapsburg diplomacy. Another rift of major proportions occurred in 1493. It had been another summer of political transition in the Low Countries, during which Maximilian officially succeeded to the imperial title and his son Philip was proclaimed of age to assume his ducal responsibilities in the Burgundian lands. Again the English had been having problems transporting merchandise across Flanders, and again the Dowager Duchess had offered overt support to yet another pretender to the English crown, Perkin Warbeck. In September 1493 Henry Tudor proclaimed his second suspension of direct trade to the Lowlands¹⁶. In deference to the concerns of English merchants, the ban

¹⁴ *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1485-1494*, p. 321; *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, nr. 21; *45th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, (London, 1885), pp. 5-6; *Materials*, II, pp. 438, 470, 472.

¹⁵ *Caspar Weinreichs Danziger Chronik*, ed. T. Hirsch and F.A. Vossberg, (Berlin, 1855), pp. 123-24; *Hanserecesse*, (3) II, nr. 496-511. Protectionist trade statutes had been zealously enforced against Hanseatic merchants in England during the previous three years. *Ibid.*, nr. 109-10, 161, 298-303, 306-08, 387, 508, 509; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 126-27, 333, 594; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1054, 1206. In 1491 Hanseatic negotiators reluctantly reaffirmed the articles of an Anglo-Hanseatic treaty signed at Utrecht in 1474. In exchange for the reconfirmation of existing Hanseatic rights and freedoms in England, Englishmen at Danzig were offered as much freedom as they were supposed to have had for the past sixty years. *Hanserecesse*, (3) II, nr. 502, 504.

¹⁶ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, nr. 31; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1485-1444*, p. 475. *Acts of Court*, pp. 572-75. For the Hapsburg/Burgundian collusion in the Perkin

applied specifically to aliens as well as denizens, and so included merchants of the Hanse. The Hansards were obliged to cease shipping directly to the lands of the new duke and his father, and were pressured again to allow English access to Hanseatic ports. The influence of London's merchant fraternities need not be overestimated, however, for the embargo was decided upon well before their representatives consulted with the king in mid-September¹⁷. Moreover, Henry had not exempted the German merchants from his similar sanction in the late 1480s, and it stands to reason that he would not have considered doing so in 1493. Likewise, the principle that Englishmen be allowed to trade freely to Hanseatic ports was not new. It had been confirmed as recently as two years before by a joint Anglo-Hanseatic assembly at Antwerp. But that agreement had not, in itself, provided sufficient incentive for northern expansion of English overseas trade once traffic to the Lowlands had resumed. The new embargo of 1493, though, could not help but test the reciprocal arrangement with the Hanse. It would perforce encourage the development and utilization of that alternative market. Or so it appeared.

The Hanseatic merchants in London had ships laden with cloth and ready to sail by mid-October 1493. In the event that London merchants could furnish a cargo, at least one English skipper offered to accompany the Hansards. Apparently unprepared to adjust their export trade in response to the embargo, the Merchant Adventurers hesitated¹⁸. The Hanseatic merchants seemed poised to gain an advantage. They were bound for the extortionate sum of £ 20,000 sterling not to ship directly to the Low Countries, but unlike their English rivals, they did not intend to sit idle while Henry waged his economic war on the Hapsburgs.

On the morning of 15 October, an unruly mob converged on the Hanse's Steelyard enclave in London and damaged the warehouses. The following day wardens of the merchant guilds were summoned before the Chancellor. They were warned to keep the peace, but also urged to take advantage of their opportunity to ship with Hanseatic carriers and trade to Hanseatic ports. Had the King not presented them with as good an opportunity as they were likely to get to penetrate the Hanseatic markets they consistently claimed to be excluded from? Evidently not, since, by their own admission, the Londoners still found themselves «not advised or in purpos at this tyme to shipp any goodes with the said Esterlinges¹⁹».

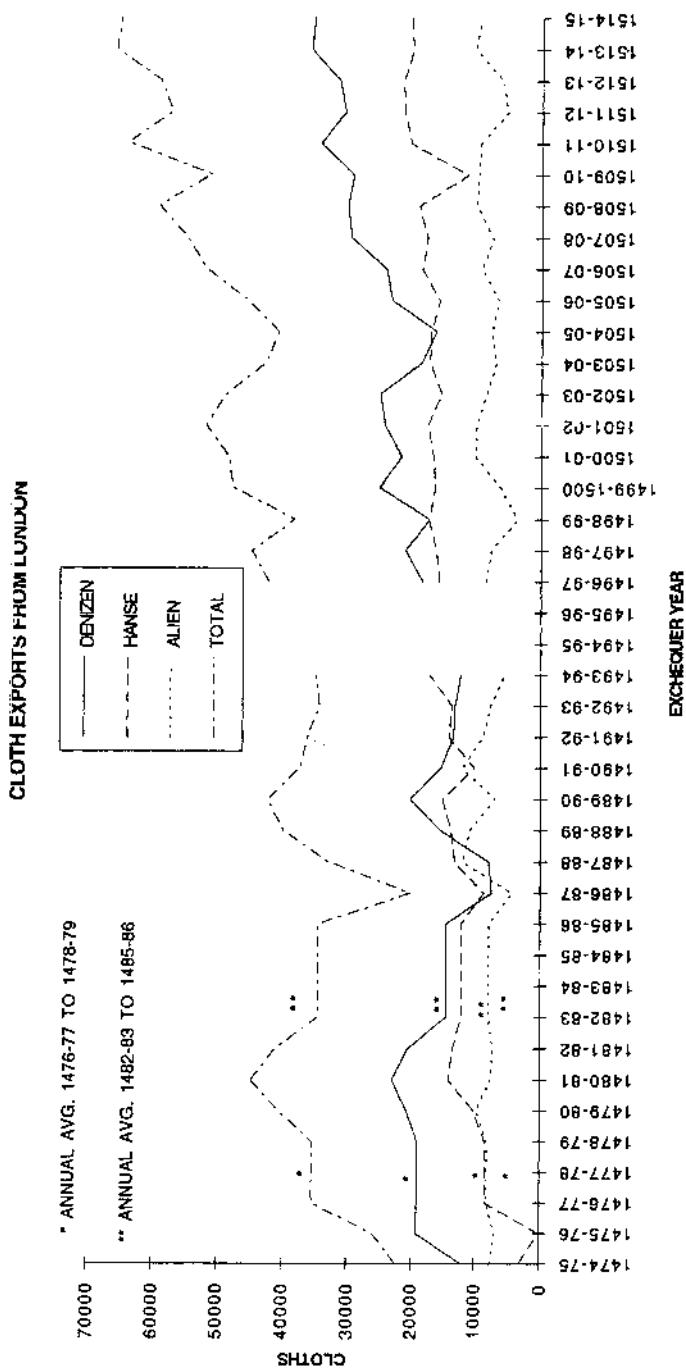
The situation by no means pleased the Hanseatic merchants in the English capital either. They had goods worth several thousand pounds sterling ready for shipment to the annual autumn fair at Antwerp. Those consignments now had

Warbeck episode: C. Weightman, *Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy 1446-1503*, (New York, 1489), pp. 170-77 and *Calendar of State Papers: Venice*, ed. R. Brown, (London, 1864), I, nr. 644, 648-52, 664, 677.

¹⁷ *Acts of Court*, pp. 572-83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 587.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 588-91 and *The Reign of Henry VII*, I, pp. 96-97.



to be diverted to Hamburg. When bad weather forced some carriers into ports in Zealand anyway, exasperated Cologne merchants begged the Crown's forbearance, since, in any case, the cargoes were intended for the distant mart at Frankfurt. They added that they were prepared to forsake their English trade if any punitive action were taken against them. In this instance the King chose not to force the issue²⁰, but otherwise the restrictions were enforced. The resultant disruptions of sailings to Zealand and Brabant again forced the Steelyard to reintegrate its London trade with the east-west axis of the continental network by diverting seaborne cargoes northward and then funnelling commercial traffic through Hamburg. Appeals to allow merchandise to be trans-shipped via Kampen and Groningen initially proved unsuccessful. Instead, the Cologners had to rely almost exclusively on the inland network linking Hamburg with the Rhineland via Stade, Osnabrück, and Münster. Although extensive use of these routes was not unprecedented, it still depended on the co-operation of numerous bishops, princes, and territorial magnates²¹.

By April 1494 it was clear that the Merchant Adventurers were incapable of sustaining their cloth export trade without a cross-Channel gateway. Virtually out of necessity, Henry VII then declared a cloth staple and free market at Calais, with commercial freedoms comparable to those offered at the Brabant marts²². Buoyed by a measure of political stability that had eluded his father a half decade earlier, Duke Philip retaliated with a counter-ban on English cloth throughout the Lowlands. Barring overt action in the shipping lanes he could not prevent English woollens from being carried to and offered for sale at Calais. However, he would now make it exceedingly difficult for anyone to move such merchandise to inland markets once it had crossed the Channel²³.

For most of the next two years direct trade between England and the Low Countries was interrupted, though how stringently the Hapsburg edict was enforced is open to question. Early on, licences exempting individuals from the restrictions could be purchased, and a threat of increased vigilance in January 1495 suggests that enforcement may have been rather haphazard. Certificates for commercial traffic to and from Antwerp also reflect inconsistencies. A Florentine merchant attempting to bring English cloth coastwise from Calais to Antwerp had his cargo seized at Vlissingen. There were other confiscations as well, and traders from Augsburg, Breslau, and Memmingen, sending textiles to Cologne and Leipzig, made declarations that none of their cloth was English. And yet other agents of Strasbourg merchants did not attempt to conceal their

²⁰ *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 710, 723.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 713, 715, 743, 769, 781, 783, 784, 835, 893, 910; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1335, 1405. Eventually the Hanseatic shippers were able to use Kampen as well. *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 904, 959.

²² *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1485-1494*, p. 477; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 729.

²³ *Brommen*, (2) I, nr. 83; *Tudor Economic Documents*, ed. E. Power and R.H. Tawney, (London, 1924), II, pp. 6-9.

intention to trans-ship English cloth. There is little doubt that by September 1495 the restrictions in the Low Countries were relaxed, but then Duke Philip proclaimed Bergen op Zoom to be the staple for woollen imports. He also imposed a substantial tax of one gold florin — the florin of St. Andrew — on each English broadcloth offered at the Brabant marts²⁴.

The embargoes were lifted after protracted negotiations culminated in February 1496 with a new treaty, the much heralded *Intercursus Magnus*. The accord re-opened the Anglo-Lowland trade and exempted English merchants from any new tolls or taxes in the Low Countries²⁵. A return to the old distribution system was not as immediate as it might have been, though, because the levying of the St. Andrew florin was resisted well into the late 1490s. Moreover, by Philip's reform edict of 1495, collection of the ducal water toll at Antwerp had resumed. Its imposition on English shippers ran contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of the new treaty. Ultimately, the Merchant Adventurers lobbied successfully for relief from it later in 1496, but the florin of St. Andrew was quite another matter. In the spring of that year, English merchants who refused to pay it were arrested and brought before the lords of the Council of Brabant, and forced to do so. Informed of this, King Henry ordered the immediate evacuation of English traders from the Duke's lands. By September, only a half year after the *Intercursus* had been proclaimed, textile shipments from England to the Lowland ports once again were forbidden and Calais was the staple for English cloth²⁶.

These measures were still in force in the spring of 1497. Steelyard merchants again were bound to the royal treasury — this time for the sum of £ 18,000 — not to ship to the restricted ports. Captains from Hamburg and Danzig, freighting their vessels at London, were required to procure certificates from towns where they would discharge the cargoes, in order to satisfy the Crown that they were not contravening the sanctions²⁷. Renewed negotiations between Burgundian envoys and English officials resulted in the resumption of sailings to the autumn mart at Antwerp, whereupon the merchants of Cologne, at least, were of the impression that collection of the florin of St. Andrew was to be suspended. Instead, the tax merely was reduced, and the Cologners and their

²⁴ J.H. Munro, «Bruges and the abortive Staple in English Cloth», *Revue Belge de philologie et d'histoire*, XLIV (1966), pp. 1150-52; G. Schanz, *Englische Handelspolitik gegen Ende des Mittelalters*, (Leipzig, 1881), II, nr. 6; *Bronnen*, (2) I nr. 92 footnote 2; *Etudes Amersois: Documents sur le commerce international à Amers 1488-1514*, ed. R. Doehaerd, (Paris, 1962), II, nr. 925, 1006, 1020, 1042-43, 1053, 1116; *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, CC. 23250.

²⁵ *Tudor Economic Documents*, II, pp. 11-15; *Bronnen*, (2) I, nr. 96.

²⁶ *Acts of Court*, pp. 599-618; *Letters and Papers*, II, pp. 69-72, 377; S.T. Bindoff, *The Scheldt Question to 1839*, (London, 1945), pp. 52-57.

²⁷ *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 994; *Ancient Kalendars and Inventories of His Majesty's Exchequer*, ed. F. Palgrave, (London, 1836), III, p. 58; *Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln*, Hanse III, K 12 B1.72, 74.

civic council were irate when it was collected at Antwerp. Some Hanseatic merchants continued to avoid the Zealand/Brabant corridor by shipping English cloth over Kampen until a new Anglo-Burgundian treaty was concluded in 1499 and the tax thereby discontinued²⁸.

Hence, these serious disagreements, so important to the English, Brabantine and Hanseatic trade, were not resolved until some three years after the *Intercursus*. In the interim, since 1493, London's Merchant Adventurers had made no real inroads in the Hanseatic sector, relying instead on the commercial lifeline to Calais. Henry VII's embargo and the resultant trade war had done nothing to lessen the dependence of the nation's cloth exporters on traditional Lowland markets. The merchants of the Hanse had fared somewhat better. True, Brabant was still the most convenient conduit for their trade from London. And, to stay competitive within the expanding international merchant community in the Low Countries, they necessarily had to maintain a high profile at the Brabantine entrepôts once normal traffic resumed. But the trade of the Hansards also depended on getting English cloth to Frankfurt for subsequent distribution, and they proved themselves fairly adept at adjusting their network to circumvent the English and Burgundian restrictions. In the process they inevitably enhanced the economic importance of the North Sea and Zuider Zee ports, which already interconnected with the Baltic trade. The coastal trade to these ports was strengthened, and so too were the inland routes that linked them to the Rhineland. Cologners and Lübeckers were shipping cloth from Calais to Kampen and Hamburg in 1495, and as late as 1499 Cologners continued to redirect consignments of English goods southward from Kampen²⁹. Notwithstanding the importance of the fairs and finishing industries at Bergen op Zoom and Antwerp, Brabant was not the exclusive transit corridor for an extended continental woollen trade in which the non-Hanseatic market at Frankfurt remained a principal connection.

Since no customs records for London's cloth export trade survive for the two consecutive years beginning Michaelmas 1494, it is especially difficult to assess the impact of the Anglo-Lowland quarrel on overseas commerce from the English capital. However, during 1493-94, the first year of the embargo, woollen exports were not drastically out of line with previous annual totals. A significant, though not extraordinary, decline in cloth exports by non-Hanseatic aliens was offset by a corresponding increase in the Hanseatic sector. The creation of the cloth staple and free market at Calais apparently did ease the problems of English exporters as well, but again, without quantitative

²⁸ *Acts of Court*, pp. 633-34; *Bronnen*, (2) I, nr. 94-134; *Quellen zur Geschichte des Kölner Handels*, II, nr. 1425, 1459, 1505/33; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 991, 1019, 1033, 1046, 1072, 1129; G. Schanz, *op. cit.*, nr. 7-14; J.H. Munro, «Bruges and the abortive Staple», *op. cit.*, p. 1154. The new treaty was proclaimed in England in May 1491. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, nr. 45.

²⁹ *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, XI, nr. 904, 910, 1129.

customs evidence, an assessment of trade over the next two years is impossible. Beginning with the Exchequer year 1496-97, when denizen woollen exports totalled 18,310 units, enrolled customs for London run consecutively, and reflect a steady upward trend in all sectors of the cloth export trade with few setbacks. The greatest surge, however, came only after the collection of the St. Andrew florin was discontinued, and the most dramatic improvement was in the denizen sector³⁰.

Henry Tudor's stormy relations with the Hapsburgs continued on into the early years of the sixteenth century. In 1502 there was a new alliance and commercial treaty with Maximilian³¹, but within two years relations had soured, and the cycle of trade embargoes seemed set to begin all over again. The scenario was, by this time, a familiar one. Yet a third challenger for the English throne — Edmund de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk — was plotting rebellion from the Low Countries, and when Maximilian deferred repeated English requests for his banishment, Henry VII responded with another trade ban. The almost predictable prohibition on direct sailings to the Low Countries came into effect in late 1504 and was followed by the usual proclamation of the free market at Calais in January 1505. No one was permitted to bring goods to Calais that had originated in the Hapsburg-Burgundian Lowlands. Accordingly, Hanseatic cargoes to and from England were again diverted over Hamburg and Kampen³².

Prior to this, a noteworthy compromise had been reached in another sphere. Formal talks between the Crown and Hanseatic delegates in 1499 had failed to resolve outstanding differences. Hanseatic grievances included charges that entrenched privileges in the kingdom were being systematically curtailed. So, early in 1504 Henry VII's final parliament, in a move initiated by the Crown, passed an act which exempted Hanseatic merchants from all statutes that were in conflict with their existing charters³³. The Steelyard merchants thereby gained a long-sought guarantee of their rights and freedoms that appeared to confirm their legal status in England for many years to come.

Biographers of Henry VII have not hesitated in labelling this an «inexplicable action» and an «acknowledgement of total defeat against the Hansards... not dictated by economic considerations³⁴». On the contrary, in view of the almost continually unsettled state of Tudor-Hapsburg affairs, it actually was quite a logical conciliatory gesture. The King's reign of nearly

³⁰ *England's Export Trade*, 110-11.

³¹ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, nr. 52; *Public Record Office*, E30/686.

³² *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, I, nr. 56; *Letters and Papers*, I, pp. 186-222, II, p. 379; *Calendar of the Patent Rolls, 1494-1509*, pp. 404-06; *Hanserecense*, (3) V, nr. 29.

³³ *The Reign of Henry VII*, II, pp. 272-73; *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. A. Luders et al., II, p. 665; *Hanserecense*, (3) V, nr. 22.

³⁴ R. Lockyer, *Henry VII*, (London, 1968), p. 74; S.B. Chrimes, *Henry VII*, (London, 1972), p. 236.

twenty years had been punctuated throughout by trade sanctions that responded as often as not to dynastic intrigues rather than mercantile concerns, and England's foreign trade remained hardly less dependent on the Lowland markets or the contribution of the Hanseatic merchants than it had been in 1485. It was plain that the Hanseatic trade remained crucial to England, and Henry could not help but be aware that his 'on again — off again' embargoes played havoc with it. The interruptions especially aggravated the merchants of the Steelyard, who were already greatly annoyed about the inconclusive talks of 1499 and the enforcement of protectionist statutes³⁵. It is plausible, of course, that the King and his advisors feared possible Hanseatic support for the fugitive Suffolk. It is probable, however, given the various grievances and the repeated disruptions of shipping, that they did not want to put Anglo-Hanseatic trade at risk by further alienating the Steelyard fellowship. Moreover, the King undoubtedly realized that, for the time being at least, he had achieved all he could for Englishmen desiring to trade to the Hanse's Baltic ports. The new legislation therefore was simply an attempt to offset the difficulties that the impending resumption of politically motivated trade war would cause the Hanse. The practical implications proved quite negligible in any event. When the new crisis passed, the zealous enforcement of statutes affecting the Hanseatic trade resumed. In the absence of what might pass for coherent economic «policy», the legislative manoeuvre of 1504 was entirely consistent with a pattern of *ad hoc* stratagems. Those stratagems still had to accommodate either the Hanseatic trade or the Lowland commercial link at any given time, or else risk England's possible isolation from the northern sector of the European trade.

This last embargo came to an end early in 1506, during Duke Philip's unplanned visit to England. He and his wife Joanna were *en route* to Spain to claim her Castilian inheritance when heavy seas forced them into English ports. During their stay of several weeks as guests of the King, both the extradition of de la Pole and a new commercial treaty were agreed upon³⁶. But the resultant *Intercursus Malus* remained unconfirmed by Philip at the time of his death in late September, and therefore never came into effect in the Low Countries³⁷. Margaret of Savoy, Regent of the Low Countries during the minority of Philip's son Charles, insisted, furthermore, that any trade pact with the English should do no more than confirm the terms of the 1496 agreement, and indeed it was the *Intercursus Magnus* that formed the basis of a further accord in June 1507³⁸. It determined the *status quo* in Anglo-Lowland commercial relations for the remainder of Henry VII's reign and the early years of Henry VIII's.

Mirroring some of the economic repercussions of this third and final break

³⁵ *Hanserecense*, (3) IV, nr. 4; *Statutes of the Realm*, II, pp. 506, 520, 534.

³⁶ *Letters and Papers*, II, pp. 155-64.

³⁷ *The Reign of Henry VII*, II, pp. 322-23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 324; *Letters and Papers*, I, pp. 327-37.

in the Anglo-Lowland cloth trade are the extant customs enrolments for London. Exports by denizens, which were averaging more than 24,000 cloths annually in the four years prior to the embargo, plummeted to well under 19,000 for each of the two Exchequer years affected by the restrictions. The trade of non-Hanseatic aliens also declined, although by contrast the Hanseatic trade, with its alternate network in place on the continent, remained steady and even indicated slight growth. All three sectors — denizen, alien and Hanseatic — showed improvement from 1506 onward, and there was a spectacular recovery by English exporters, who sent more than 30,000 cloths overseas in the final year of Henry VII's reign. The figures leave little doubt as to the key participants in the trade. From Michaelmas 1505 through Michaelmas 1509, denizens accounted for half of London's cloth exports, and merchants of the Hanse a full 36%³⁹.

Notwithstanding two decades of periodic interruptions, southern England's woollen export trade remained concentrated in London and highly dependent on markets in the Low Countries. Broadcloth exports from London declined appreciably during the first English embargo, but the ban on direct sailings did not prevent consignments from reaching the comparatively secure and unrestrictive entrepôts in Brabant. They were brought in either coastwise from Calais or via the Hanse's North Sea ports. The unfortunate gap in the surviving enrolments of cloth exports from London renders the impact of the second dispute on the English woollen trade unclear. Yet the decline in cloth exports during the previous and subsequent embargoes does suggest the probability that the volume of trade was reduced during the mid-1490s also⁴⁰. During the embargo of 1505-06 broadcloth exports did decline noticeably, particularly in the denizen sector. But the interruption was brief and constituted only a temporary setback. Merchants and finishers from the Low Countries had a share of this trade — contracting English agents to deliver cloth at the Brabant fairs or bringing it there themselves.⁴¹ But by far the most important agents in the cloth export sector continued to be English and Hanseatic merchants.

By the early sixteenth century virtually all the cloth exported from southern England by Hansards was shipped from London. The men of the Steelyard continued to rely on the Zealand/Brabant trade corridor and, of course, their direct traffic to and from the Baltic. They had recourse as well, though, to a proven alternate network over Hamburg. That network could and often did reintegrate their London trade with inland routes to non-Hanseatic regions south and east of Cologne. And what of London's Merchant Adventurers? The

³⁹ *England's Export Trade*, pp. 112-13.

⁴⁰ A contrary opinion, based on «estimated» cloth export figures, is offered in P. Ramsey, «Overseas Trade in the Reign of Henry VII», *Economic History Review*, 2nd series VI (1953), pp. 173-82.

⁴¹ *Public Record Office*, C1/272/54; *Etudes Anversoises*, II, nr. 1332, 1354, 1398, 1604, 1773, 1800-01, 1848, 1850, 1870, 2020, 2107.

first of Henry VII's embargoes, in the 1480s, had given rise to diplomatic initiatives involving Denmark and the German Hanse that appeared to facilitate English commercial expansion in the Baltic region. However, if London merchants had much competitive potential at Danzig, it still had not been realized when the old King died in 1509. This is not to say they had no role at all. In 1503 half a dozen English ships passed through the Sound *en route* to Danzig. At least four were listed by the Danish toll collectors as being «aff Lunden i England», and the departures of two of them, with modest cloth cargoes, are indeed recorded in the corresponding London accounts. Woollen cargoes shipped from the Thames with Prussian and English carriers also are listed in an extant Danzig port book for 1506, although most of the cloth, including some for Englishmen, was off-loaded from Baltic ships. Likewise, huge consignments of bulk freight reached the English capital in Danzig ships, with few if any Englishmen listed among the cargo owners. But most instructive, perhaps, are London's cloth export figures for the first few years of Henry VIII's reign. For a period of two years beginning in April 1510 a sea war between Denmark and the Hanseatic town of Lubeck rendered mercantile shipping in northern waters especially vulnerable. Initially, Danzig was inclined to reduce trade to and from England to avoid losses to privateers. Broadcloth exports from the Steelyard fell dramatically in 1510 and then rebounded the following year. If London merchants had been significant at all in the Baltic trade, then a corresponding decline in denizen exports from the capital would be likely. Such was not the case, as turmoil in the Baltic scarcely affected the trade of Londoners⁴². For them, Prussia was as yet merely a subsidiary market.

⁴² Rigsarkivet, Øresundstoldregnskaber, 1503; Public Record Office, E122, 79/12, 80/2; Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300.19/9 18v., 65r., 81v., 82r., 100v., 118r., 118v., 137v.; *England's Export Trade*, p. 113.