
Preface

The dominance in late medieval trade of the northern Europe of the federation of merchants known as the Hanse is well known. The Hanse became established not only as an economic force, but also played a political role in order to maintain or even advance their commercial interests. The growth in the economic power of the Hanse was marked also by their increasing geographical reach. In the North Atlantic, the rise of the Hanse was marked by a growth in the number of voyages to Bergen in Norway, culminating in the establishment there of a permanently occupied centre and of a Kontor. The advance of the German traders in this region coincided with the gradual decline of the Norwegian merchants, which it in turn hastened. Whereas in the twelfth century Norwegian vessels had played an important role in trade in the Baltic, their position there in the second half of the thirteenth century was increasingly challenged by German traders who also began sailing to Norwegian ports. By the end of the fourteenth century the dominance of Germans merchants in Norway was established, with even the English clearly superseded as the dominant traders.

The papers in this volume focus mainly on the following two centuries when German merchants played a major role, not only in Bergen, the staple town through which all imports and exports to the North Atlantic were channelled, but also in voyaging out to the islands – Iceland, the Faroes and the Scottish Northern Isles. These trading journeys established a direct link between the area of Germany and the North Atlantic, and provided means by which goods, wealth and knowledge might be exchanged. The effects of this were felt not only in material terms, that is in the goods which

were exchanged for fish, the main product of the North Atlantic. It also impacted on the economy and on culture. To investigate the many aspects of this international exchange, it has been necessary to assemble a range of scholars from across northern Europe, and to deploy a range of methods which extend from linguistics to entomology, that is, from the study of language to the study of insects. The range of disciplines represented here reflects the items which were transported intentionally or were unintentionally introduced. The studies here go beyond a simple examination of the events, and so consider a whole range of consequences of the intercourse between two regions of Europe.

Most of the papers here were presented at a conference at the Nordvegen Historiesenter at Avaldsnes on the island of Karmøy in Norway in May 2013. The location was chosen because a series of archaeological investigations on land and underwater had made clear that Avaldsnes must once have been a port of some significance for Hanseatic ships. We thought it was necessary to bring archaeologists and historians (and others) together to discuss the written evidence in the light of the recent archaeological findings. In the considerable period which has passed since the conference, the authors have revised their papers, often as a result of the vigorous discussion which took place. The editorial process has also taken longer than anticipated at the time, because of the considerable problems in finding common approaches for so many disciplines and nationalities. It is much regretted that the interval between has seen the deaths of two of the scholars who attended and subsequently contributed papers – Knut Helle and

Klaus-Joachim Lorenzen-Schmidt. It is fitting that the volume should be dedicated to their memory.

The conference was made possible through the generosity of the Karmøy Kommune who over the years has given continuing support to the study of this area of Norway. We are grateful to Endre Elvestad and Arnfrid Opedal who together with Frode Fyllingsnes and Marit Synnøve Veia helped to make the local arrangements. We would also like to thank the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) who partially funded the conference (grant nr. CA 146/18-1). We have also benefitted in many ways from

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Participants of the conference at Avaldsnes Historiesenter, May 2013 (photo: Marit Synnøve Veia).