

The Hanseatic League and the Russian state: the significance of historical experience

Olga Pavlova

*International Relations Department, Institute of Humanities
Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University
Saint-Petersburg, Russia
pavlovaok55@mail.ru*

Abstract—The article deals with the conditions for the origin and development of the Hanseatic trade community; the importance of economic, legal, confessional and international situation. Particular attention is paid to the relationship of the Hanseatic League and the Russian state, the Novgorod lands. The mutual interest of the Hanseatic League and Rus' in developing international trade and comprehensive communication is indicated.

Keywords—*the Hanseatic League; the Russian state; the Novgorod lands; international relations; sanctions; letters of treaty.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the formation and development of the Hanseatic League is the history of the development of economic relations which were based on the development of trade connections, primarily between European states. The Hanseatic League was in fact one of the first international trade associations. The study of historical experience is valuable in the context of globalization and new forms of economic cooperation.

II. METHODS

The study of the subject is based on the universal scientific and specific research methods. The descriptive and comparative-historical methods allow studying and highlighting those cities and states that were part of the league, and had the greatest impact on the economy and international relations. The historical method provides the possibility to single out the stages in the historical development of the Hanseatic League. The use of the historical-typological method enabled to determine and streamline the significance of trade cooperation. The events and phenomena that contributed to the development of trade and economic connections in the Middle Ages were studied by means of the historical-systematic method. The problem-chronological method allowed to consider the events and to identify the problems associated with the development of the economic activities of the Hanseatic League during its existence in chronological order.

The history of the organization and activities of the Hanseatic League is studied by researchers in many areas of science: history, economics, law, cultural studies, and ethnography in different countries of the world. Interest in the league remains high although a significant number of scientific papers have been written. A massive treatise of F. F. Fortinsky (1877), addressing the role of the seaside

Wendish towns in setting up the Hanseatic League, is of scientific interest still today. In the first pages of Fortinsky's book, the author noted a significant number of research papers related to the trading posts of the Hanseatic League, however, in his opinion, a full-scale in-depth study was not available at that time [1]. The study of Dr. Raushnik, published in 1842, is no less interesting nowadays. The author analyzed in detail the geography of the Hanseatic League and the stages of its development. [2]. Among the most significant studies is the work on the history of the Hanse by Philippe Dollinger [3], translated into many languages, unfortunately Russian is not included yet.

The studies of foreign scientists, primarily German and Dutch, currently consider discrete aspects of the life and activities of the Hanseatic League. For example, religious issues are discussed in the study of H. Kalem [4]. The current challenges faced by the new Hansa are explored in the article of N. Escach [5].

Contemporary Russian researchers are drawn to various aspects of the history of the Hanseatic League and Russia. A deep analysis of the relationship between Novgorod and the Hansa was carried out in the study by Ye. A. Rybina [6]; new correspondence documents of the German courtyard in Novgorod are presented in the work of M. B. Bessudnova [7]. The significance of Yamgorod in the relationship with the Hansa is discussed in the historical and bibliographic essay of V. V. Nazarov [8]. The study of the phenomenon of the Hanseatic League continues in the scientific articles by A. V. Napalkov, O. K. Pavlova, N. A. Vasilyeva and Yu. V. Kosov, and many others [9].

III. RESULTS

The purpose of this article is a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of the Hanseatic League and its relationship with the Russian state, as well as the importance of these relations for modern international cooperation.

The researchers explain the emergence of the first trade associations, primarily the need to protect merchants from the devastating raids of pirates (robbers). In addition, as a result of storms and shipwrecks, carts breakage, merchants lost their goods and income and they were not protected from the coastal and land rights. State authorities, as a rule, did not provide much help to commercial people. Therefore, in order to preserve their trading activities even before the Hanseatic League, merchants united to carry out trade activities. This was typical not only for European merchants.

In Russia there was a similar practice, for example, “Ivanovo Sto” (“Ivanov hundred”) united wax traders.

German merchants for greater safety united in societies for one or more trade enterprises. For such societies it was easier to pay taxes, and to get from local authorities coastal certificates permitting them trading. This is no less relevant today. The first alliances were made between Lübeck and Hamburg in 1210; between Hamburg, the Western Friezes and the Hadlers in 1239, and others. It was the first experience that showed the advantages of such associations.

There are different viewpoints concerning the year of foundation of the Hanseatic League. Lübeck and Hamburg are considered to be the founders of the league, with their union in the year 1241. The purpose was to protect the trade routes connecting the Baltic and North Seas. These cities concluded agreements of joint trade as early as in 1210. The next stage was the expansion of the union of coastal cities, which included Lübeck, Hamburg, Rostock, Lunenburg, and Wismar. In 1254, the largest alliance of that time was formed - the union of the Rhine cities. In 1267, led by Lübeck, as the most mature and experienced center in trade, a union of Hanseatic cities was formed, which included Hamburg, Cologne, Bremen and others. Among the first members of the Hanseatic League were the Baltic cities, since Baltic maritime trade in the 13th century was the most popular.

Historians divide the development of the Hansa mainly into two stages. The first - as the existence of the organization in the form of the Hansa merchants, until about the middle of the 14th century, and the second - the Hansa cities, since the second half of the 14th century. Until the middle of the 14th century, i.e., before the formation of Hanseatic cities, almost all German merchants who enjoyed Hanseatic privileges could be considered full members of the organization. The basic prerequisite for admission was the origin of a candidate from one of the cities of Northern Germany or any sea city in the Baltic involved in Hanseatic trade.

It is obvious that the league was formed in several stages, and it experienced a number of periods of its development. The development of the league was conditioned both by the expansion of trade, and by internal and external situations.

The foundation of the Hanseatic League pursued several goals: expanding of foreign trade and strengthening its monopoly; protecting its members from pirate attacks and devastation; delivering the league members from various regulations of the states in which they were engaged in trade; ensuring political security.

Enhancing craft industry, and improving purchasing power made trade profitable, but not safe. In addition to natural disasters and destructive pirate raids, there arose a risk of competition among merchants.

Thus, consolidating facilitated protection of economic interests of tradespeople since individual trading in those days was not only dangerous, but also ruinous.

In the 13th century, Europe had a relatively developed urban structure. The geographical location of the Hanseatic cities should be noted: all of them, as a rule, were located on

riverbanks or seashores, i.e. waterways were the most common. One of the reasons for the rise of Lübeck (founded in 1143) as a Hanseatic trade center was its geographical location.

“The Hanseatic merchants, who were at the head of the league, had trade and political talents, and they, one way or another, indirectly or openly, forced the neighboring cities to make concessions to them, or provided an opportunity to join the league” [10, p. 72]. More and more new cities joined the Hansa: Kiel, Amsterdam, Hannover, Berlin, Stockholm, Narva, and others. In addition, the league opened its kontors in Novgorod, London, Venice, Poland and other cities and countries, which testifies to the expanding structure of the league, and its increasing economic significance. It is noteworthy that the safety of the kontors was guaranteed by local authorities.

The activities of the Hanseatic community are of interest from the perspective of modern international relations. With numerous current international sanctions, it is appropriate to recall that the basis of the league activities was East-West trade, in particular with Novgorod; trade relations with Scandinavia was an important concern as well.

Foreign economic relations of Novgorod with Northern Europe included not only the development of trade relations, but were political in nature, which translated into political alliances, dynastic marriages and, finally, into calling the Varangians to develop and manage the state.

As noted above, the Baltic and North Seas became the leading places of international trade. As early as in the 10th century, economic relations of Novgorod with Gotland, the center of the Baltic trade, and with Sweden were known. According to Ye. A. Rybina, in the 10th – 11th centuries between the South Baltic coast and Novgorod there were not only trade and economic contacts, but also cultural ties [6, pp. 37-38]. By the end of the 12th century in Novgorod, Peterhof, the German trading station, with St. Peter's Church was under construction; contracts were signed; the new round of development of Novgorod's trade relations with the Western partners began. We can say that the relationship was resumed, as the trade relations of Novgorod with German merchants in Gotland was known before [6, p. 55].

By the 13th century, German merchants firmly settled on the South-West coast of the Baltic sea. Contracts were concluded between the trading cities not only for defense and the fight against pirates, but also for assistance during the wars of the cities against their suzerain. Together, the German merchants not only reinforced their positions in the Baltic and North Seas, but also formed their settlements on the coast. Hence the German trading stations in Bruges, London, Novgorod, and other cities developed.

The relationships between trading associations, cities and authorities not always were peaceful. So, in the 60's of the 13th century, Novgorod established trade relations with the Livonian Order. However, the successful promotion and expansion of the territory of the Order created a threat to the western borders of the Novgorod Principality. Unsuccessful armed attacks against Novgorod lands led to the fact that the Livonian Order demanded from Lübeck economic sanctions for Novgorod: to stop the supply of goods and declare an economic blockade to Novgorod. Moreover, with a similar

proposal, the Livonian Order acted repeatedly, intermittently. Truly, everything new is well-forgotten old: the modern economic sanctions have their own history. Sanctions caused damage to trading associations. In the year 1268, the ambassadors were sent from Lübeck to Novgorod, but a trade agreement was not concluded then. The researchers suggest that trade resumed in 1270, as evidenced by the letters sent to German merchants from Lübeck, reporting the opening of trade with Novgorod.

In the 14th – 15th centuries, trade relations developed, but the political situation was complicated. On the one hand, Novgorod authorities guaranteed the German merchants three land and one water way along the rivers. However, hostile relations with Sweden could not ensure safe trade in Novgorod lands. Conflicts among merchants, and between merchants and local authorities occurred quite often. The instability had led to the need for settling the relationships. In 1361, the embassy of the cities was sent to the German kontor in Novgorod with the directive that henceforth the decisions made by the merchants in Novgorod would be coordinated with Lübeck, Visby, Riga, Reval and Dorpat. Between Novgorod and the Hansa there were recurrent conflicts because of non-observance of agreements, poor-quality goods, etc.

In 1478, Ivan III suppressed the resistance of Novgorod, the Republic lost its independence, which affected Novgorod-Hanseatic trade. Despite the loss of its independence, Novgorod continued developing trade relations with the Hansa and beyond, with Sweden, and with Western partners. In 1486, in response to the request of the Livonian cities to renew their old privileges of freedom of trade, Ivan III instructed the ambassadors to restore peace with the Hanseatic merchants. The Hanseatic League was interested in maintaining and developing relations with the Russian state. Their goal was to hold in their hands the monopoly of trade relations between Western Europe and Northern Russia. In this regard, for merchants who dealt with Rus' knowledge of the Russian language was of great importance. It was believed that knowledge of the Russian language for a merchant trading in Rus' was a great advantage, and it facilitated improvements of dealings [11, p.68].

Special attention should be paid to the ethical and legal base of the Hanseatic League. The internal regulation of the relations of the Hansa was written in Scra, which had several editions. Scra means "the book of laws", in the modern sense these are the rules of doing business. The analysis of several editions of Scra was carried out in Ye. A. Rybina's research. She links the emergence of the first Scra in the second quarter of the 13th century with the purpose of regulating the relations of Novgorod and German merchants. The first Scra consisted of nine articles which related to the procedure of electing the head and his assistant, defined privileges, established fees, etc. [6, p.56]. Scra banned trade relations with competitors - the Dutch and the Flemish, i.e. non-Hanseatic merchants. A German merchant, who arrived in Novgorod to deal with Russian merchants, had to have a witness. "Scra did not allow the Germans to take goods out of the yard's territory so that their Russian counterparties could carefully examine them in their own premises. The Germans considered one of their most important privileges

in Novgorod the right to take Russian furs into their yards for a preliminary examination." [12, p.136].

The history of the Novgorod-Hanseatic trade and political relationships was based on treaties. There were letters of treaty between Novgorod and Riga, Novgorod and Lübeck. Birch-bark treaty letters of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries have been preserved. In this regard, original documents, such as the birch-bark letters of Veliky Novgorod (Novgorod the Great) and Pskov, are of particular value [13]. As a rule, the letters of treaty promised to provide unimpeded passage of caravans of German merchants on the territory, in this case, of Novgorod and Pskov lands.

Disagreements often arose between merchants, reciprocal claims and reproaches appeared. For instance, the Russian ambassadors in the early 15th century (1402) attended the congress of the Livonian cities. They expressed serious complaints about the violation of weight and size of goods by German merchants, "cloth sold by the Germans is short, bags of salt are too small, barrels of honey and sweet wine are also smaller than the assigned size, and honey and wine are of poor quality" [14, p. 111]. At the same time, the study of M. B. Bessudnova provides interesting documents. So, the Hanseatic merchants complained to tysyatsky (captain of the thousand) and posadnik (governor of the city) about Novgorodians who attacked the Gothic courtyard, robbed the Church of St. Peter, organized an armed invasion of the German courtyard [7, p. 80].

Hence treaty relations were common practice in international trade. The system was far from perfect, as were frequent reciprocal violations of treaties. In addition, there were differences in cultural and legal perceptions and attitudes. Ye. R. Squyres and S. N. Ferdinand, analyzing the language contacts of Russian and Hanseatic merchants, noted, "The legal perceptions of Russian and Hanseatic merchants, historically associated with different traditions, diverged at a number of points [...]." An interesting conclusion was made by the researchers, "Not only the conflicts of everyday life, but also frequent in the history of the courtyard wars and blockades interrupted the normal activities of the merchants, and became the theme for the exchange of letters and complaints both with Novgorod and between the Hanseatic cities, and in the end were brought to Hanseatic courts and congresses. It must be said that the language and tone of these documents, even of those containing demands or threats, never went beyond neutrality and civility." [11, pp. 70,71]. Thus, despite all disagreements, there were certain ethical rules that were followed when drafting documents.

The union shaped lifestyle and traditions, provided an opportunity to exchange experience, the necessary information, fostered a culture of communication.

Religion was essential in the relations of the league with Rus' and other partners. Despite the serious problems associated with belonging to different confessions, both Russian and German merchants worshiped the saints patronizing them and had their own churches. As Ye. R. Squyres points out, "In the Hanseatic documents relating to Russian affairs, religious differences never become the focus of attention and, all the more, are not perceived as an obstacle to economic relations [...]" [11, p.72].

Thus:

- The Hanseatic League was the first of the known trade and economic associations established for the purpose of trading development and its security.
- The association, founded by German merchants, defended the interests of its members, organized the payment of taxes, negotiated with the authorities, but did not interfere in the personal trade relations of its members.
- The expansion of the league through the accession of new cities indicates a good organization, successful diplomatic activity to the benefit of strengthening the economic interests of the merchant class.
- The league was an international trade and economic organization that contributed to the establishment and development of international economic relations. It was based on the consideration of mutual interests through the system of treaties. This indicator of economic relations is especially important nowadays.
- The experience of the league's activity shows that using sanctions even against competitors is economically unprofitable for any party.
- Veliky Novgorod and Pskov, as representatives of the Russian state, developed trade and economic relations with the Hanseatic League on the basis of treaties, thereby developing economic ties with European states that participated in Hanseatic trade. Economic ties contributed to the exchange of experience, strengthening political and cultural ties between states.
- Successful development of economic relations is based on mutual interests, regardless of religious, national, or political affiliation.

IV. CONCLUSION

In 1980, the Hanseatic League of New Time began its activity in Holland. The event was timed to coincide the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Hansa. Modern Hansa exists as a non-governmental, inter-municipal organization established for the development of trade and cultural relations. However, the organization is positioning itself as the successor of the medieval Hanseatic League. There is no doubt that in all the respects – economic, international, legal, etc. – the medieval Hansa was not perfect. Nevertheless, experience has been gained with regard to cooperation and mutual interests, tolerance and loyalty, sanctions outcomes, and legal and cultural cooperation. Using this experience can undoubtedly serve to the successful development of economic, cultural and international relations not only between the countries – members of the Hanseatic League, but also contribute to the expansion of the League, and increase its importance on the world stage.

REFERENCES

- [1] F. F. Fortinsky, *Seaside Wendish Cities and Their Influence on the Foundation of the Hanseatic League until 1370*. St. Petersburg, 1877.
- [2] G. Raushnik, *The History of German Hansa*. Moscow: General Historical Library, 1842.

- [3] P. Dollinger, *The German Hansa*. London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1970.
- [4] H. Kalem, **On Some Aspects of Understanding Faith in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Paul Tillich** [O nekim vidovima poimanja vjere u Hansa Ursa von Balthasara i Paula Tillicha]. Diacovensia., in press.
- [5] N. Escach, *The Baltic German municipalities' inter-territorial strategies: a transition through city networks? Europa regional / Germany from a French perspective.*, in press.
- [6] Ye. A. Rybina, *Novgorod and the Hansa*. Moscow: Handwritten monuments of ancient Rus', 2009.
- [7] M. B. Bessudnova, *Correspondence of the Novgorod German courtyard from Tallinn city archive: 1346-1521*. Veliky Novgorod, 2017.
- [8] V. V. Nazarov and I.N. Nazarova, *Old Yamgorod and the Hansa merchants: a historical and bibliographic essay*. St. Petersburg: Renome, 2014.
- [9]
 - a) A. V. Napalkov, "To the question of economic relations of the Novgorod Republic and the Hanseatic League in the 13th -15th centuries" in *Current Problems of Science and Practice*, No.1, 2016, pp.27-29.
 - b) O. K. Pavlova, "The organization of medieval trade exemplified by the Hanseatic Trade Union" in *International Relations and the Dialogue of Cultures*, No.5, 2017, pp.92-106.
 - c) N. A. Vasilyeva and Yu.V. Kosov, "Modern trends of the Hanseatic traditions in the Baltic region" in *Baltic Region*, Vol. 9, No.2, 2017, pp.142-155.
- [10] A. Khoroshevich, *Trade of Veliky Novgorod with the Baltic States and Western Europe in the 14th – 15th centuries*. Moscow, 1963.
- [11] Ye. R. Squyres and S. N. Ferdinand, *The Hansa and Novgorod: language aspects of historical contacts*. Moscow: Indrik, 2002.
- [12] I.E. Kleinenberg, "Execution of the agreement of sale/purchase and exchange in the Hanseatic trade of Novgorod and Pskov" in *Auxiliary Historical Disciplines*, Vol. 3, Leningrad, 1970.
- [13] S.N. Valk, *Letters of Veliky Novgorod and Pskov*, No. 67, Moscow-Leningrad, 1949.
- [14] N.A. Kazakova, "From the history of relations between Novgorod and The Hansa in the 15th century" in *Historical Notes*, No. 28, Moscow, 1949.