

Sources from the Past

Privileges Granted in London to the Hanse of Cologne 1157–1194

The Baltic Sea and the North Sea were centers of a thriving trade network known as the Hansa, an association of trading cities that included all the major commercial centers of Poland, northern Germany, and Scandinavia. The hanse of the German city of Cologne requested Emperor Frederick Barbarossa to make favorable commercial treaties with foreign countries, including with Henry II of England in 1157. The hanse of Cologne then obtained special favors in London, including royal protection of their house and equal privileges with the French in selling wine. By the reign of English King Richard I, the hanse had also obtained freedom from certain tolls throughout England.

Grant of Henry II, 1157. Henry, by the grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou, to his justices, sheriffs, and all officers in England, greetings. I command you to guard, maintain, and protect the men and citizens of Cologne as if they were my own men and my friends; and you are to protect all their wares and merchandise and possessions so that you injure neither them, nor their house in London, nor their merchandise, nor impede their business, nor permit any of these things to be done. For all their things are in my custody and protection. For which reason let them have security and peace on paying their lawful customs; nor shall you exact from them any new customs or duties which they have not been accustomed to pay and which they ought not to pay. And if any one should maliciously transgress this order, see that full justice be done to him without delay.

Grant of Henry II, 1157. Henry, by the grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou, to his sheriffs and bailiffs of London, greetings. I grant that the men of Cologne may sell their wine at the market where French

wine is sold, namely, for three denarii the setier. And so I forbid them to be disturbed there or that any one should do them injury or harm.

Grant of Richard I, 1194. Richard, by the grace of God, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and Count of Anjou, to the archbishops, bishops, earls, barons, justices, sheriffs, and to all officers and bailiffs, and to all his faithful people in England, greeting. Be it known that we have freed our beloved citizens of Cologne and their merchandise from those two solidi which they were accustomed to give for their gild-hall at London, and from all other customs and demands which pertain to us in London and throughout our land of England. We have granted also that they may come and go freely throughout our entire land, and that they may go freely and buy and sell in the fairs of our land, in the city of London, and elsewhere. Therefore we wish and command that the citizens of Cologne shall have the said liberties and free customs throughout all this our realm of England.

For Further Reflection

- From the agreements above between two English monarchs and the hanse of Cologne, how would you characterize the commercial relationship between European rulers and private trading associations during the medieval period?

*Source: J. M. Lappenberg, ed., *Urkundliche Geschichte des Hansischen Stahlhofes zu London* (Hamburg, 1851), Part II, pp. 3–5, reprinted in Roy C. Cave and Herbert H. Coulson, *A Source Book for Medieval Economic History* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1936; reprint ed., New York: Biblio & Tannen, 1965), pp. 220–22. Scanned by Jerome S. Arkenberg, Cal. State Fullerton. (Translation slightly modernized.)*

The formula dividing society neatly into three classes captures some important truths about medieval Europe. It clearly reflects a society marked by political, social, and economic inequality: although they did not necessarily lead lives of luxury, those who prayed and those who fought enjoyed rights and honors denied to those who worked. Though bound by secular law, for example, clerics were members of an international spiritual society before they were subjects of a lord, and if they became involved in legal difficulties, they normally faced courts of law administered by the church rather than secular rulers. For their part the nobles mostly lived off the surplus production of dependent peasants and serfs.

Chivalry Yet, though expressing some truths, the formula overlooks processes that brought considerable change to medieval European society. Within the ranks of the nobles, for example, an emphasis on chivalry and courtly behavior gradually introduced expectations of high ethical standards and refined manners that encouraged warriors to become cultivated leaders of society. **Chivalry** was an informal but widely recognized code of ethics and behavior considered appropriate for nobles. Church officials originally promoted the chivalric code in an effort to curb fighting within Christendom. By the twelfth century the ritual by which a young man became initiated into the nobility as a knight commonly called for the candidate to place his sword upon a church altar and