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THE TOWNS OF THE GERMAN HANSE, 1358—1669: THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF URBAN DECISION-MAKING CULTURE: THOUGHTS AND PERSPECTIVES

The article explores the 'Hansa phenomenon' between the 14th and the 17th century, outlining briefly the stages of Hanse history and trends in Hanse historiography. A focus lies on the Hanse diets as a central institution to the 'Hansa phenomenon'. The authors first consider briefly the development of the Hanse diets from the first assemblies in the mid-fourteenth century until the last general Hanse diet took place in 1669, also giving some preliminary reassessments of the chronology based on the ongoing research. Finally, authors address possible solutions to current limitations to the study of these forums of common decision-making of Hanse towns at the Research Centre for Hanse and Baltic History to provide a better foundation for future research on the topic.

Keywords: German Hanse; historiography; medieval history; early modern history; associative culture; decision-making culture; digital edition

Hanse is without a doubt an important factor in northern European economic development. The beginnings of Hanse trade date to the 12th and 13th centuries, when groups of German merchants acquired privileges from rulers in England, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, and Russia over specific routes and destinations. At that time, the *hansas* were guilds of travelling merchants, different groups of Germans as well as Flemish or English towns. *Hansas* were an institution of long-distance traders to organise their trade more securely. The remarkable development in these first centuries of Hanse history is the increasing presence of German merchants at the hubs of northern European trade and that at different markets, notably Bruges, Bergen, London and Novgorod, different groups of German merchants came to hold privileges together as the German Merchant and shared trading posts to which these privileges were attached¹.

In the 14th century, the German Hanse developed as an association of towns. An involvement of the hometowns of German merchants associated in *hansas* in the protection of privileges developed from around 1300², formalised since the second half of the 14th century and lasted until the 17th century. A pivotal moment in the history of Hanse is the mid-fourteenth century: when the privileges of 'the German merchant'³ were (not for the first time) challenged at the market of Bruges, the hometowns of the merchants active at the market together implemented a trade boycott against the market of Bruges that eventually led to the renewal of their privileges in 1360. The 1358 assembly of Lübeck, Goslar, Hamburg, Rostock, Stralsund, Wismar Brunswick, Thorn and Elbing in Lübeck is now seen as the first Hanse diet (*Hansetag*) as at this time the records document a common identity of Hanse towns and common obligations and actions are carried out. The *recess* of the 1358 meeting, concerning the implementation of the trade boycott against the market of Bruges, underlines that each town of the German Hanse (*stad van der Dudeschen hense*) had to obey the resolutions made (see figure 1):

*Wer ok jenich stad van der Dudeschen hense, de sik mit vrevele ute desseme ghesette wolde werpen unde des nicht wolde holden, de stad schal ewichliken ute der Dudeschen hense blyven unde des Dudeschen recht es ewichliken entberen*⁴.

At the end of the conflict, an association of towns had consolidated, defending trade privileges together on behalf of their merchants, with commonly organised and financed activities⁵.

¹ Ogilvie S. *Institutions and European Trade: Merchant Guilds, 1000—1800*. Cambridge [et al.], 2011. Pp. 26-27; Epstein S. *An Economic and Social History of Later Medieval Europe, 1000-1500*. Cambridge [et al.], 2009. Pp. 80-81; Selzer S. *Die Mittelalterliche Hanse*. Darmstadt, 2010. Pp. 13-40; Hammel-Kiesow R. *Die Hanse*. München, 2014. S. 38-51; Hammel-Kiesow R. *The Early Hansas // A Companion to the Hanseatic League* / ed. by D. Harrold. Brill & Boston, 2015. Pp. 15-63.

² On the events of that time: Sarnowsky J. *The "Golden Age" of the Hanseatic League // A Companion to the Hanseatic League*. Pp. 65-69; Dollinger Ph. *Die Hanse*. Stuttgart, 2012. S. 77-83; Hammel-Kiesow R. *Die Hanse*. S. 63-66; Researchers identify different assemblies as the first Hanse diet, e.g. Henn favours 1356, see: Henn V. *Hansische Tagfahrten in der zweiten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts // Die hansischen Tagfahrten zwischen Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* / hg. v. V. Henn. Trier, 2011. Pp. 2—3. On 1358: Hammel-Kiesow R. *Art. "Hanse" // Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte II*. 2nd completely revised edition. 2010. Col. 776; *recess*: *Die Rezesse und andere Akten der Hansetage von 1256—1430*. Abt. 1 (HR 1). Bd. 1. Leipzig 1870. № 212, §§ 9,10.

³ The communities of the Low German merchants holding privileges together at 'foreign' markets, aka *Kontore* in London, Novgorod, Bruges, Bergen, were referred to as 'the German Merchant'.

⁴ HR 1. Bd. 1. № 212, § 10.

⁵ S. *Die Mittelalterliche Hanse*. S. 45-52.

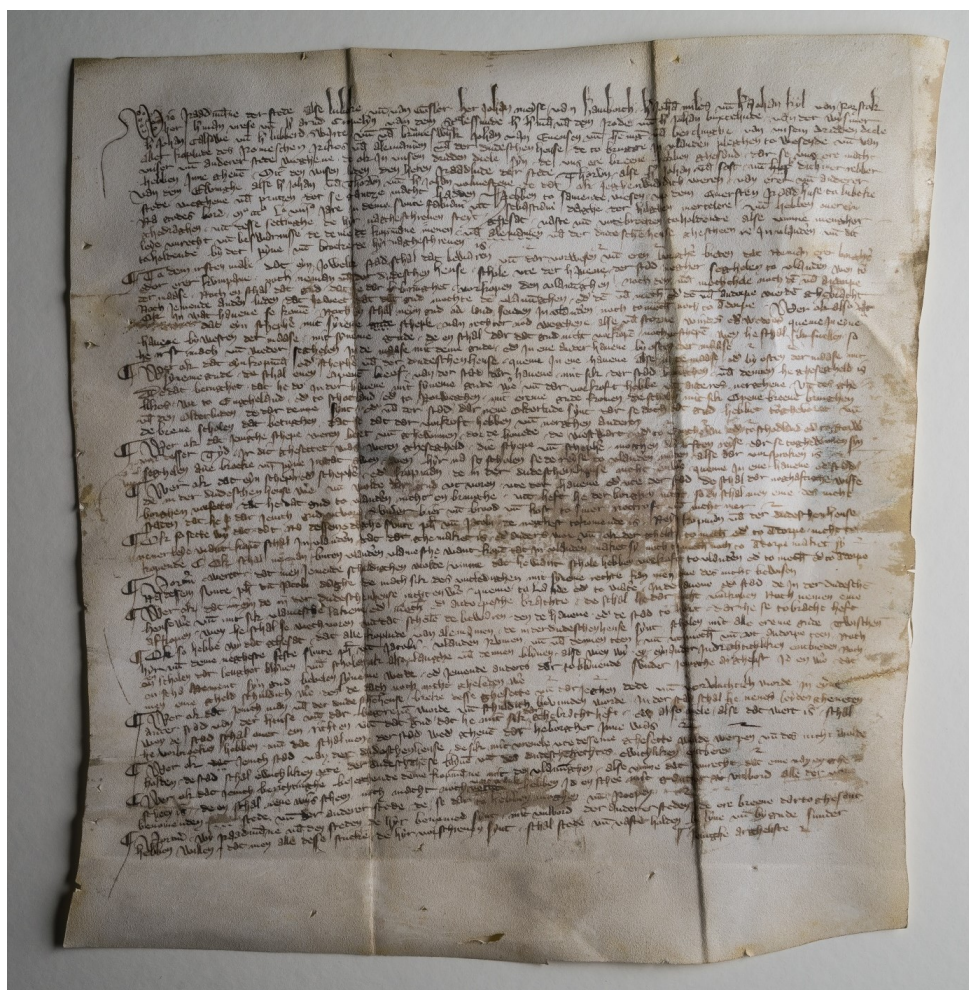


Figure 1: Facsimile of the recess of 1358, deciding and proclaiming the boycott against Bruges. © Hansemuseum. Photo: Olaf Malzahn.

From the later 14th century on, a core group of about seventy Hanse towns and another up to one hundred smaller towns, whose merchants enjoyed Hanse trade privileges shaped northern European economic development. The formation of the German Hanse as a supra-regional league of towns in the mid-fourteenth century combined the economic and military power of the towns and allowed them to achieve significant victories and secure their privileges. Focal point of the activities of the united towns were the four main settlements (commonly known as *Kontore*, a 16th c. term) of the German merchant in Bruges, London, Bergen and Novgorod, though the Hanse also held other trading settlements. The main common institution are the meetings of Hanse towns, the Hanse diets (*Hansetage*), formulating common ordinances, the *Hanserecesse*. Until in 1669 the last Hanse diet took place, the meetings of Hanse towns should be the central institution of the association of towns, with the main objective to maintain and secure the trade privileges of the German Merchant.

Early Hanse research appreciated the German Hanse as a strong organisation prompted by fragmented states and weak rulers. Recent Hanse historiography has challenged this older notion of a state-like German Hanse of the 13th-17th c. as a prequel to a strong German Empire, introduced in early Hanse historiography around 1900 and driven by contemporary nationalistic political agendas⁶. Such nationalistic narratives neither appreciate the complexity of Hanse nor its development over time — both important to understand its contribution to the (northern) European economy and society.

Recent Hanse research has highlighted a more fragmentary nature and heterogeneity of the German Hanse. New avenues of research employ institutional research, aiming at better understanding the contributions Hanse institutions made to economic exchange in northern Europe⁷. The German Hanse as a conflict management institution in mercantile

⁶ E.g.: Huang A., Kypta U. Ein altes Haus auf neuem Fundament. Neue Trends in der Hanseforschung und die Nutzbarkeit der Rezessionen // *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. Bd. 129. 2011. S. 213-230; Jahnke C. Hansisch oder nicht-hansisch? Die kleinen und die großen Hansestädte // „Hansisch“ oder „nicht-hansisch“ — das Beispiel der kleinen Städte und Livlands in der Hanse / hg. v. J.Kreem and J.Sarnowsky. Wismar, 2019. S. 1-22.

⁷ Jenks S. Transaktionskostentheorie und die mittelalterliche Hanse // *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. Bd. 123. 2005. S. 31-42; Link Ch., Kapfenberger D. Transaktionskostentheorie und hansische Geschichte: Danzigs Seehandel im 15. Jahrhundert im Licht einer volkswirtschaftlichen Theorie // *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. Bd. 123. 2005. S. 153-170; Ewert U. Ch., Selzer S. Die Neue Institutionenökonomik als Herausforderung an die Hanseforschung // *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. Bd. 123. 2005. S. 7-29; Kypta U.

conflicts has shed light on hitherto unseen functions of the German Hanse⁸. Researchers furthermore have shifted their attention from the coastal regions to inland towns, adding export production of the Hanse towns to the portfolio of Hanse trade⁹. Decision-making processes, regional perspectives and the relationship of smaller towns within those regions with the German Hanse aim at understanding the different levels of urban cooperation within Hanse better¹⁰. A promising recent development is a comparative approach of Hanse diets and other meeting cultures, namely Imperial diets¹¹. Last but not least, individual merchants and their enterprises rather than 'the Hanse' have received attention as agents in Hanse history¹². Such merchant-based studies at times challenge well-known nationalistic narratives, e.g. by re-evaluating Lübeck-Danish relationships¹³. These new perspectives have introduced much needed complexity to a geographically and chronologically broad historical phenomenon.

The Hanse diets play a central role in many of the works mentioned as they are indeed the only authority coordinating Hanse as a whole¹⁴. Although the Hanse diets are certainly not a new topic in Hanse research, the development of the inner organisation of the association of the towns of the German Hanse, their decision-making processes, information flow and communication networks deserve further systematic analysis. Gaps in our knowledge are due to the availability of the source material that poses a challenge for any systematic and comprehensive long-term study on the three hundred years of Hanse diets. A particular restraint to advances in research is the limited accessibility of the source material from 1537 on, when the *Hanserecesse*-edition ends¹⁵. Three volumes of archival inventories from Cologne and Gdansk published by the Hanseatic History Society give further insights into the sources on Hanse history

Von Brügge nach Antwerpen. Institutionen statt Organisationen // *Hansischer Handel im Strukturwandel vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert* (Hansische Studien; 25) / hg. v. R. Hammel-Kiesow. Trier, 2016. S. 161-182.

⁸ Höhn Ph. Verflechtungen der Streitschlichtung? Zum Austrag kaufmännischer Interessenkonflikte im Hanseraum (1365—1435) // *Mit Freundschaft oder mit Recht? Inner- und außergerichtliche Alternativen zur kontroversen Streitentscheidung im 15.-19. Jahrhundert* (Quellen und Forschungen zur höchsten Gerichtsbarkeit im Alten Reich 65) / hg. v. A. Cordes. Cologne [et al.], 2015. S. 19-39; Wubs-Mrozewicz J. Mercantile conflict resolution and the role of the language of trust: a Danzig case in the middle of the sixteenth century // *Historical Research*. Vol. 88. 2015. pp. 417-440; Wubs-Mrozewicz J. The late medieval and early modern Hanse as an institution of conflict management // *Continuity and Change*. 2017. Vol. 32. Issue 1. Pp. 59-84; a research project under her leadership will bring further insights on the topic: Wubs-Mrozewicz: NWO VIDI project 2018-2023 Managing-multi-level conflicts in commercial cities in northern Europe (c.1350-1570).

⁹ Huang A. Die Textilien des Hanseraums. Produktion und Distribution einer spätmittelalterlichen Fernhandelsware (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte; 71). Cologne [et al.], 2015.

¹⁰ Advocating such an approach is Oliver Auge, most recently: Auge O. Die Hanse in der Region und Regionalgeschichte // *Jahrbuch für Regionalgeschichte*. 2019. Bd. 37. 37-56. Case studies on local and regional perspectives on Hanse towns and their role in the German Hanse: Fahlbusch F.B. Zur hansischen Organisation im Hochstift Münster im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert // *Westfälische Forschungen*. 1985. Bd. 35. S. 60—72; Schipmann J.L. Politische Kommunikation in der Hanse (1550—1621). *Hansetage und westfälische Städte* (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, N.F. 55). Cologne [et al.], 2004; Schipmann J.L. Politische Kommunikation in Soest im 16. Jahrhundert. Politisch-gesellschaftliche Stadtstruktur — Ämterhierarchie und Ämterlaufbahn — innerstädtische Konsens- und Entscheidungsfindung in der Hansepolitik // *Westfälische Zeitschrift*. 2006. Bd 156. S. 227—263; Henn V. Die kleinen westfälischen „Hansestädte unter Soest“. Eine Bestandsaufnahme // *Hanse und Stadt. Akteure, Strukturen und Entwicklungen im regionalen und europäischen Raum, Festschrift für Rolf Hammel-Kiesow zum 65. Geburtstag* / hg. v. M. Hundt und J. Lokers. Lübeck, 2014. S. 29-51; Henn V. Die kleinen westfälischen „Hansestädte unter Soest“. Eine Bestandsaufnahme // *Hanse und Stadt. Akteure, Strukturen und Entwicklungen im regionalen und europäischen Raum, Festschrift für Rolf Hammel-Kiesow zum 65. Geburtstag* / hg. v. M. Hundt und J. Lokers. Lübeck, 2014. S. 29-51; Jahnke C. Hansisch oder nicht-hansisch? S. 1-22; Selart A. Die kleinen Städte Livlands und ihre Rolle in der oder für die Hanse // „Hansisch“ oder „nicht-hansisch“. S. 23-42; Kubon S. Die kleinen preußischen Städte und die Hanse // „Hansisch“ oder „nicht-hansisch“. S. 43—56. More specifically on decision-making: Hammel-Kiesow R. The Early Hansas. Pp. 15-63; Rettig D. Ad referendum. Zur Funktionsweise hansischer Versammlungen 1370—1453 // *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*. 2018. Bd. 136. S. 133-172; Höhn Ph. Entscheidungsfindung und Entscheidungsvermeidung in der Hanse. Das Beispiel der Sunddurchfahrt um 1440 // *Entscheidungsfindung in spätmittelalterlichen Gemeinschaften (Kulturen des Entscheidens)* / hg. v. W.E. Wagner. Göttingen [2019, in print].

¹¹ Hardy D. Tage (Courts, Councils and Diets): Political and Judicial Nodal Points in the Holy Roman Empire, c.1300—1550 // *German History*. 2018. Vol. 36:3. Pp. 381-400; Summer School at the Center for Hanse and Baltic History in August 2019, see for the (German) report: <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8487>, last accessed on 12 November 2019. A comparative study by Gabriele Annas is in preparation.

¹² *Institutions of Hanseatic Trade. Studies on the Political Economy of a Medieval Network Organisation* / ed. by U.Ch.Ewert und S.Selzer. Bern [et al.], 2016; Jahnke C. Netzwerke in Handel und Kommunikation an der Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert am Beispiel zweier Revaler Kaufleute, Habilitationsschrift der Philosophischen Fakultät der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel. Kiel, 2003; Burkhardt M. Der hansische Bergenhandel im Spätmittelalter. Handel — Kaufleute — Netzwerke (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Neue Folge; 60). Cologne [et al.], 2009; Brusbärde R. Handelsbriefe aus Riga (1458). Die Verflechtung der livländischen Kaufleute im Ostseeraum // „Hansisch“ oder „nicht-hansisch“. S. 75-96; also editing new materials: Stockhusen S. Hinrik Dunkelgud und sein Rechnungsbuch (1479 bis 1517). Lebensformen eines Lübecker Krämers an der Wende vom 15. zum 16. Jahrhundert (VSWG — Beihefte; 245). Stuttgart, 2019.

¹³ Baur K. Freunde und Feinde. Niederdeutsche, Dänen und die Hanse im Spätmittelalter (1376—1513) (Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Neue Folge; 76). Cologne [et al.], 2018.

¹⁴ Dollinger Ph. Die Hanse. S. 124; Henn V. Hansische Tagfahrten. S. 1; Behrmann Th. Der lange Weg zum Rezeß. Das erste Jahrhundert hansischer Versammlungsschriftlichkeit // *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*. 2002. Bd. 36. S. 433-434; Selzer S. Die Mittelalterliche Hanse. S. 56.

¹⁵ See for the series *Hanserecesse*. Abteilungen 1-4. (1870—1970).

from Cologne and Gdansk for the period until about 1600¹⁶. No editions or inventories were published for the period up to 1669 (and beyond). This still favours research on the ‘medieval Hanse’ constructed in the 19th century, although online inventories of city archives and digitization have improved the situation¹⁷.

This paper gives an introduction into the work of the Research Centre for Hanse and Baltic History (FGHO)¹⁸ working towards a long-term analysis of the Hanse towns’ meeting culture by focussing on the *recesse*, the proceedings of Hanse and other urban meetings of the 14th-17th c., both in analysis and as a strategy to make the masses of unedited sources accessible to the research community. We will start with an introduction in the chronology of Hanse diets between 1358 and 1669 by conducting a brief analysis of the data collected on Hanse diets from the *recesse* so far. Though a focus solely on the regulations (*recesse*) certainly does not allow for a comprehensive view on the German Hanse at a given time, it enables us to:

Take into account regional meetings as well, to embed Hanse diets in a system of urban associative culture.

Take a long-term perspective over three hundred years of Hanse diets to develop new perspectives on the development of the ‘Hanse phenomenon’ over time.

Such a vertical study of the meetings and decision-making of Hanse towns by using the *recesse*, however, lacks a solid foundation. Addressing this issue, we will, finally, present an ongoing project at FGHO carried out by the authors that develops a strategy and infrastructure to provide a better basis for such a research agenda.

Hanse meetings, 14th to 17th c.: Frequency and Motivations

Let us begin by outlining the chronology of the German Hanse as an association of towns. The German Hanse as a supra-regional consortium of towns developed from around 1300, formalised since the second half of the fourteenth century and lasted until the 17th century. *Dagfarten*, meetings, of the Low German towns became a common feature of their cooperation with the mid-fifteenth century — as sketched out above, researchers now date the first Hanse diet to 1358. At the end of the conflict about the privileges in Flanders in 1360, the many *hansas* of (Low) German merchants were now incorporated into a cooperation of towns, defending trade privileges together on behalf of their merchants, with commonly organised and financed activities¹⁹.

Between the 14th century and the last Hanse diet in 1669, in sum about 200 towns met for over three hundred years in a changing composition to further common interests. To this date, 172 general Hanse diets have been identified²⁰ that tell a story of balancing self-interest and common good, competition and cooperation. Hanse historiography has for a long time highlighted the 14th century as not only the formation period of a ‘Hanse of Towns’ (aka ‘Hanseatic League’) but also the ‘heyday’ of Hanse, the period of the highest frequency of Hanse diets and allegedly the strongest cohesion within the German Hanse. This period is allegedly followed by a long decline, a verdict seemingly supported by the declining number of Hanse diets over time (see figure 2)²¹.

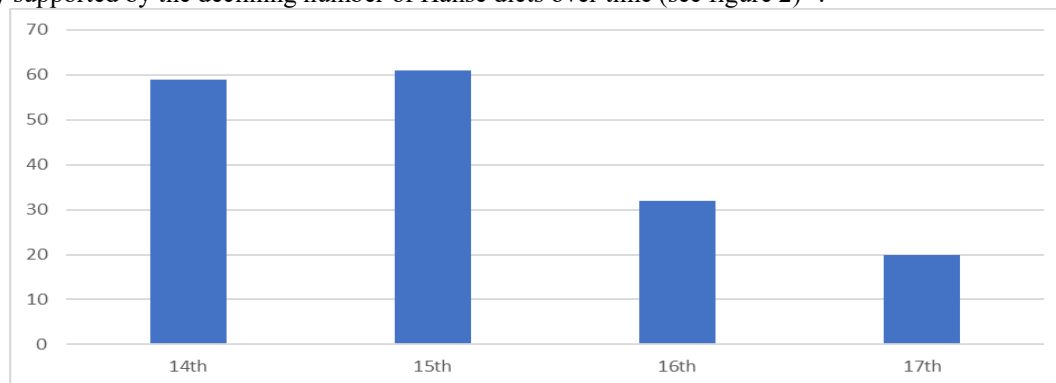


Figure 2: Hanse diets — a story of decline? A visualisation of recorded diets in centuries. Sources: HR; Kölner Inventar; Danziger Inventar; Iwanow I. *Die Hanse im Zeichen der Krise. Handlungsspielräume der politischen Kommunikation im Wandel*

¹⁶ Höhlbaum K. *Inventare Hansischer Archive des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts. Erster Band: Köln (1531—1571)*. Leipzig, 1896. [Kölner Inventar I]; Höhlbaum K. *Inventare Hansischer Archive des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts. Zweiter Band: Köln (1572—1591)*. Leipzig, 1903. [Kölner Inventar II]; Simson P. *Inventare Hansischer Archive des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts. Dritter Band: Danzig (1531—1591)*. Munich & Leipzig, 1913. [Danziger Inventar].

¹⁷ Especially archives in the Netherlands allow remote access to digitized source collections, e.g. Regionaal Archief Nijmegen, 1 Stadsbestuur Nijmegen 1196—1810, https://studiezaal.nijmegen.nl/detail.php?nav_id=0-1&imgid=2281230422&id=2126618110, last accessed on 15 November 2019; Lübeck ‘Hanseatica’ are in the process of being digitized, soon accessible via the online catalogue, https://www.stadtarchiv-luebeck.findbuch.net/php/main.php?ar_id=3730,01.1-03.09-ASA-Externa,Hanseatica.

¹⁸ <https://www.fgho.eu/>, last accessed on 15 November 2019.

¹⁹ Selzer S. *Die Mittelalterliche Hanse*. S. 45-52.

²⁰ Hammel-Kiesow R. *Liste der Hansetage von 1358 bis 1669*, Europäisches Hansemuseum Lübeck, 15.10.2015 [internal document]; Rath J. „alß gliedere eines politischen leibes trewlich meinen“; Iwanow I. *Die Hanse im Zeichen der Krise*; AHL, ASA Externa — Hanseatica; StA Braunschweig, *recesse* in inventory groups B III & BIV.

²¹ Still dominant in: Dollinger Ph. *Die Hanse*. E.g. Sarnowsky challenges this narrative and dates a ‘golden age’ from the mid-fourteenth century to about 1474, diagnosing a decline from the 16th c.: Sarnowsky J. The “Golden Age” of the Hanseatic League; Sarnowsky J. *Das Ende der mittelalterlichen Hanse // Ene vruntlike tohopesate: Beiträge zur Geschichte Pommerns, des Ostseeraums und der Hanse. Festschrift für Horst Wernicke zum 65. Geburtstag / hg. v. S.Birli [u.a.]*. Hamburg, 2016. S. 499—513.

(1550—1620) (*Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte*, N.F. 61). Cologne [et al.], 2016, appendix 3, S. 340-342; Rath J. „alß gliedere eines politischen leibes trewlich meinen“. *Die Hansestädte und die Konflikte Braunschweigs mit den Welfen im 17. Jahrhundert*, überarbeitete Fassung der Univ.-Diss. 1997. Münster, 2001; City Archives of Lübeck [AHL], ASA Externa — Hanseatica; City Archives of Brunswick [StA Braunschweig], B III & B IV.

As we have mentioned before, truly re-thinking the history of the German Hanse requires a long-term analysis that is limited by the existence of source editions, making the *recesse* broadly accessible. In the process of constructing the European Hansemuseum in Lübeck a list of all 172 general Hanse assemblies, that is a meeting for all Hanse towns, has been compiled for the first time²². This list is being developed further at the Research Centre for Hanse and Baltic History.

Our ongoing analysis of the *recesse* regarding the frequency of meetings, the attendance and inner organisation largely agrees with Jahnke's recent verdict that by the early 15th century 'the German Hanse' was still a rather loose cooperation and only consolidated in the first half of the 15th century²³. An analysis of the *recesse* shows that a common identity of Hanse towns and an established meeting culture took roots in the first third of the 15th century: Only from 1407 do the *recesse* almost consistently speak of the *nuncii consules civitatum de hansa infrascriptarum*²⁴, from 1417 increasingly in Low German as the *heren radessende boden van den steden der Dudeschen henze*²⁵. By around 1400, assemblies of Hanse towns had become an established format to further a common economic policy of the participating towns, but a common identity truly only took roots in the first third of the 15th century.

Along with this common identity came a formalisation of Hanse meeting culture in the early 15th century. A preliminary analysis of the early *recesse* until the mid-fifteenth century reveals that from 1410 the Hanse towns regulate their meetings and decision-making process. First the *recesse* from 1417 and 1418, then again 1430 and 1434 regulate how Hanse towns met²⁶. The *recesse* thus suggest that we might only now speak of Hanse diets in a narrower sense, with identity and specific institutions, setting the meetings apart from other urban meetings.

Although the number of diets of Hanse towns should in the 15th century not be as high as in the second half of the 14th century, neither this nor the ongoing efforts to enforce attendance and further regulate the meetings is conclusive evidence for a decline of the association of Hanse towns in the 15th century. Negotiating common rules for longer-term cooperation is a lengthy process and could, in fact, just as much be seen as a stabilization of a cooperation that was previously *ad hoc* and driven by crises and now became a continuous common institution to improve the conditions for supra-regional trade.

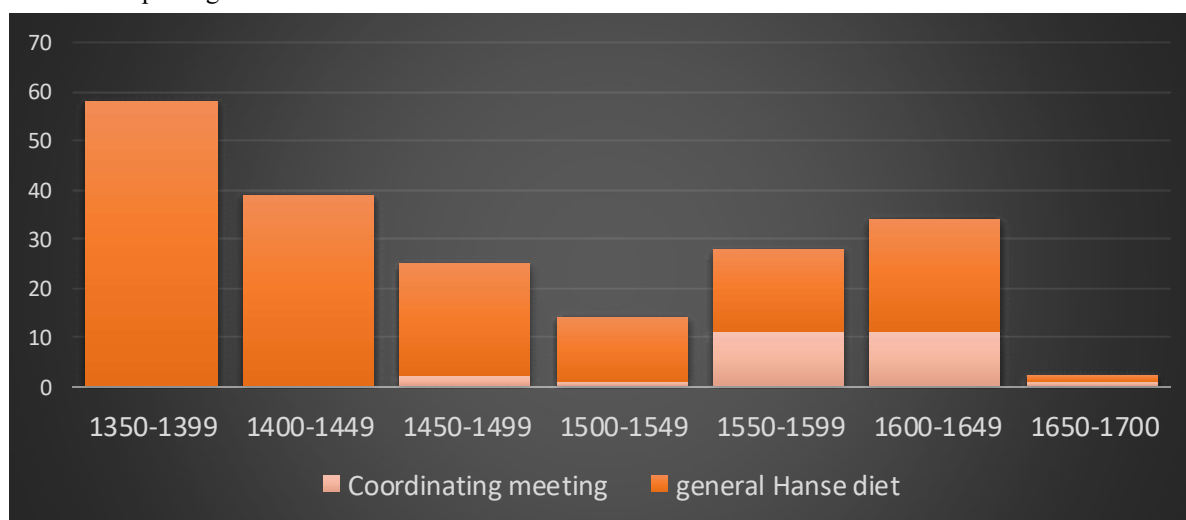


Figure 3: Hanse diets, 1358—1669. Sources: HR; Kölner Inventar; Danziger Inventar; Iwanow I. *Die Hanse im Zeichen der Krise*. Appendix 3, 340—342; Rath J. „alß gliedere eines politischen leibes trewlich meinen“; AHL, ASA Externa — Hanseatica; StA Braunschweig, B III & B IV.

²² Hammel-Kiesow R. Liste der Hansetage von 1358 bis 1669 [internal document].

²³ Jahnke C. Die Hanse am Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts. S. 26-27.

²⁴ 1407: HR 1. Bd. 5. Leipzig, 1880. № 392; 1412: HR 1. Bd. 6. Leipzig, 1888. № 68.

²⁵ 1417: HR 1. Bd. 6. № 397; 1418: HR 1. Bd. 6. № 556. In the 1420s, only few *recesse* have survived, all of them now referring to the convened *stede van der Dudeschen henze*: 1423: HR 1. Bd. 7. Leipzig, 1893. № 609; 1426: HR 1. Bd. 8. Leipzig, 1897. № 59; 1427: HR 1. Bd. 8. № 156. From the 1420s on, the common identity of the convened towns is then firmly established.

²⁶ Some examples of regulations from the ongoing analysis: 1417/1418: Wendish towns as the secretary of the German Hanse / in charge of organising the Hanse diets: HR 1. Bd. 6. № 556, § 87; on admission and quorum §17. S. 536, repeated in 1447: Hanserecesse. Die Rezesse und andere Akten der Hansetage. Abt. 2 [HR 2]. Bd. 3. Leipzig, 1883. № 288, § 49. S. 187; in 1434 on the duty to attend and an oath to excuse non-attendance: HR 2. Bd. 2. Leipzig, 1881. № 439, §§38—39. S. 362-363; HR 2. Bd. 2. № 440. S. 367-368; 1447 on penalties: HR 2. Bd. 3. № 288, §68. S. 190.

Recent research has investigated not only the general Hanse diets, meetings with intended attendance of all (major) Hanse towns, in the mid-sixteenth century still about 66 towns,²⁷ but has also explored other types of meetings of Hanse towns to understand the workings of the German Hanse in the 16th and 17th century²⁸. Two more types / levels of meetings developed next to general Hanse assemblies: 1) The Quarters and Thirds held their own internal, ‘regional’ meetings to develop a common position on Hanse issues (*Drittelstage*; *Quartiertage*). The ‘heads’ (*hovetstede*), the leading towns Lübeck, Cologne, Gdansk and Brunswick, were in charge of the decision-making process in their Thirds or Quarters. 2) Meetings of only the leading towns became a regular feature of Hanse decision-making (*Kommunikationstage*; *Tage der korrespondierenden Städte*). Although only general Hanse diets were competent to make decisions on behalf of the community as still emphasised in 1668 and 1669²⁹, these types of meetings together with meetings within the Quarters or Thirds kept costs low and communication going. Considering all types of meetings, the period between the second half of the 16th century and 1629 is one of a lively interaction between Hanse towns (see figure 3), though increasingly moderated through a smaller circle of leading towns.

When looking at Hanse town meetings over time, between 1358 and 1669, including both general Hanse meetings and other types of meetings in the decision-making toolbox of the Hanse towns, we might observe that indeed the frequency of meetings of Hanse towns was comparatively high in the 14th (58) and also, though at a lower level, in the first half of the 15th century (39). This is in accordance with recent and ongoing research, pointing out that the Hanse towns were active, but had not consolidated their meeting culture before the early 15th century; the 15th century is one of great conflicts, namely with England, but has — as pointed out before — altogether been evaluated as part of a ‘golden age’ of the German Hanse. However, not disputing that the 16th century was one of disruption and conflict that challenged the Hanse consortium, the development into different types of meetings can again be read differently: not as a reaction of crises (alone), but also as a further formalisation and specialisation of meeting practice aimed at a more efficient decision-making process. The number of meetings in total increased, showing an interest of the Hanse towns in ongoing cooperation at a time of insecurity and transformation for larger parts of Europe. Although the developments of the 16th and 17th century effected and eventually ended the meeting culture of Hanse towns, the documented meetings between the 14th and the 17th centuries speak more of transformation than of decline.

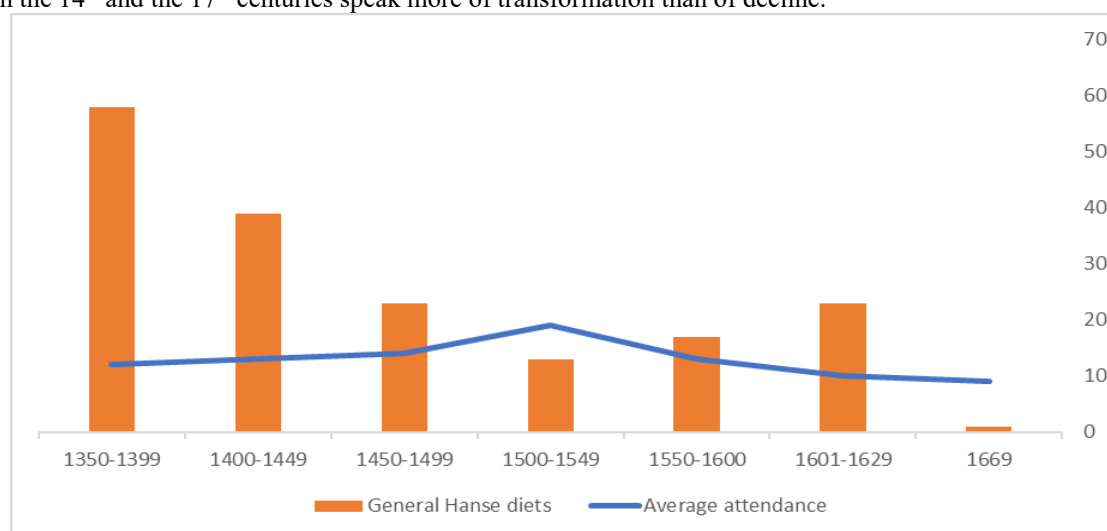


Figure 4: Number of attending towns at general Hanse diets in average, 1358—1669. Sources: HR; Kölner Inventar; Danziger Inventar; Iwanow I. *Die Hanse im Zeichen der Krise*. Appendix 3, 340-342; Rath J. „alß gliedere eines politischen leibes trewlich meinen; AHL, ASA Externa — Hanseatica; StA Braunschweig, B III & B IV.

A brief look at attendance furthermore does not confirm a regressing attendance (figure 4): Data on the number of attending towns could be collected for most of the general Hanse diets between 1358 and 1669. The data shows that attendance is on average highest in the first half of the 16th century, when the number of Hanse diets is the lowest; in the following period, commonly interpreted as a German Hanse in decline, the data shows a higher frequency in meetings and only a slight drop in attendance, until 1629 when the Thirty Years War disrupted the interactions of Hanse towns. Afterwards, meetings of delegates from a larger number of Hanse towns became increasingly difficult. Lübeck, Bremen and Hamburg were since 1629 commissioned to act on behalf of the Hanse as the entirety of Hanse towns was not able to continue their traditional decision making. After the Westphalian Peace in 1648, efforts to convene a general Hanse assembly in 1651, in 1662 and 1668 failed. The 1669 diet that was supposed to revive Hanse should then be the last meeting of Hanse towns.

What to make of the observations presented here? As mentioned in the beginning, this is only an exploratory analysis with long-term data on occurrences and attendance of Hanse diets that needs to be further refined, but may

²⁷ AHL, ASA Externa — Anglicana, no. 728, 2r; ASA Externa — Hanseatica, no. 160; StA Hannover, Bestand 1.AA.2.01 Nr. 2264.

²⁸ Namely: Iwanow I. *Die Hanse im Zeichen der Krise*; Schipmann J.L. *Politische Kommunikation in der Hanse*.

²⁹ Mentioned in the 1669 *recessus* in the preamble: AHL, ASA Externa — Hanseatica, no. 247, *recessus* p. 1; protocol 1v-2r.

illustrate that such data might provide fresh perspectives on the development of the German Hanse as a dynamic association of towns. The lines of investigation sketched out here could be extended by including regional meetings as well, to gain a more comprehensive picture of the engagement of (groups of) towns in both political and economic policy. Another aspect would be a thematical classification of topics over time — an enormous undertaking that would, however, allow us to understand the motivations of Hanse towns in participating in the German Hanse much better — and consequently the functions of Hanse as an institution of supra-regional urban cooperation. However, any such study requires a deeper study of the *recesse* of the convened Hanse towns after 1537 — and thus a better access to the unedited source material. The next section of this paper will deal with improving the basis for future research.

Quo vadis? An inventory of urban meetings and editing *recesse* in the 21st c.

Being arguably the most important and prominent events of the associative political culture of the Low German cities from 13th to 17th century, urban diets left — as mentioned — an enormous wealth of source material. Every major town and most of the smaller ones in this area participated to some extent and on some level in the manifold gatherings, from local meetings of neighbouring towns to big diets of the main cities of a larger area, such as the Hanse diets. As main events of the urban external relations, the documents which were produced in preparation of, during and after the events were collected in the city archives and kept thoroughly as part of the institutional memory of the municipal administration. As such, much of the material has been known to historians and thus became subject of large-scale endeavours to publish it³⁰. Yet, most of these undertakings took place in the 19th and early 20th century and leave much to be desired from a modern day perspective. First of all, urban diets can and should be understood as a common and in many ways interconnected phenomenon of the political culture in the respective area. Yet, their sources are scattered among many publications which often focus on either a political entity — like ‘the Hanse’³¹ — or a region — such as Livonia³² — thereby artificially separating diets of different kinds and obscuring connections between diets on different levels or in different regions. Additionally, phenomena like ‘the Hanse’ are to a large extent created in hindsight by these monumental editing projects which collect and publish ‘their’ sources under ‘their’ given names³³. Last but not least, especially when it comes to Hanse diets the focus on meetings of the ‘entire’ Hanse in its heydays lead to disregarding allegedly less important diets which were for some reason not identified as Hanse events by the editors. Another by-product of this focus on the medieval Hanse is the fact that the endeavour to edit the Hanse diets ends with the diet of 1537 up until now.

The project “Records of Low German Urban Diets” takes these considerations as starting point³⁴. The projects’ main goal is to facilitate further research on the associative urban political culture in the area from the 13th to the 17th century by collecting sources on the topic, and to improve the accessibility of written records of the diets, especially of the *recesse*. The project, therefore, consists of two parts: 1.) Creating an inventory in which the records of Low German urban diets are collected and brought together in a publicly accessible online-database, 2.) developing a concept towards a digital edition of the *Hanserecesse* from 1537 until the last diet in 1669 in preparation for a larger project to complete the *Hanserecesse* using the potential digital web-based editions offer.

To provide the largest possible overview of sources dealing with Low German urban diets, the inventory will bring together published records as well as archival documents. It aims to cover all kinds of *recesse*, which means all kinds of proceedings, final protocols or records of common decisions or understandings, issued by diets of Low German cities from 13th to 17th century. As mentioned above, especially in the late 16th and 17th century, particular groups of Hanse cities met in times when it was either impossible to hold a regular Hanse diet of the entire community of towns (e. g. due to the Thirty years war) or when many cities were not willing to make the effort to participate in such a meeting. Therefore, the *recesse* of the ‘communication diets’ (*Kommunikationstage*) of the corresponding cities (*korrespondierende Städte*), the diets of the *Drittel* and *Quartiere* and also of all kinds of non-regular ad-hoc gatherings of Low German cities that were, for example, intended to form a short-termed defence alliance against regional princes (*tohopesaten*), are taken into account and will be included.

As the first step in this endeavour, the published editions are utilized. They prove to be an essential source, especially since some of the published archival documents are not available anymore due to the loss of archival tradition, e. g. in the wake of World War II. Drawing upon the large editions such as the *Hanserecesse*, the *Urkundenbücher* of the Hanse or of major Hanse cities like Lübeck, and collections such as the *Akten und Recesse der livländischen Ständetage* the major relevant events and diets can be identified³⁵. In many cases, large parts of the

³⁰ For diet proceedings first of all the *Hanserecesse* 1870—1970, also for Livonia: *Akten und Recesse der livländischen Ständetage* / hg. v. L.Arbusow [u.a.] [AR]. 3 vols. Riga, 1907—1938. Furthermore, the collections of deeds and charters of Hanse towns and regions contain relevant material: *Bremisches Urkundenbuch* / hg. v. D.R.Ehmck [u.a.]. 7 vols. Bremen, 1873—1993; *Urkundenbuch der Stadt Lübeck* / hg. v. J.F.Böhmer und F.Techen. 12 vols., Lübeck, 1843—1932; *Liv-, est- und kurländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten* / hg. v. F.G. von Bunge [u.a.]. 17 vols. Reval [u.a.], 1853—2018; *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, 11 vols., Halle [u.a.], 1876—1939; *Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch* / hg. v. Verein für mecklenburgische Geschichte und Altertumskunde. 25 vols., Schwerin 1863—1936; *Preußisches Urkundenbuch* / hg. v. Historischer Kommission für ost- und westpreußische Landesforschung. Politische Abteilung, 6 vols. Königsberg [u.a.], 1882—1986.

³¹ HR. 1870—1970.

³² AR. 1907—1938.

³³ Huang A., Kypka U. Ein altes Haus auf neuem Fundament; Jahnke C. Hansisch oder nicht-hansisch?

³⁴ <https://www.fgho.eu/en/urban-diets> last accessed 15 November 2019.

³⁵ See FN 30.

archival documentation of these events, as far as it was known and accessible at the time of their publication are mentioned there which can help to identify promising collections of relevant documents among the numerous city archives. Second, inventories of major city archives like the *Danziger Inventar* function as starting points for a thorough discovery of archival documentation of urban diets³⁶. While many editions end around 1500, the inventories provide an overview organized by topics over the exponentially growing amount of documents dating from the 16th century in the city archives. Yet, inventories like these are only available for the city archives of Danzig and Cologne so far. Finally, the archival documentation of the *recesse* of urban diets will be included. An exploratory investigation on the *Hanserecesse* of 1518 has shown that the way in which the relevant documents are registered and made available by the archives is quite diverse. While a few archives have digitized large amounts of their records and made them available online, some have their registers still exclusively in print format³⁷.

The database will first of all include the archival and bibliographical information of the sources and make them available to the larger public. Furthermore, the diets will be listed with their places, times, and participating cities/parties. Thus, the events can function as access points for the users and related documents can be identified for every diet. To provide an insight into the content dealt with at the diets, in the long term the topics of the articles of the *recesse* will be included as well, making the topics a third entry through which the information can be organised and used.

The inventory aims to give a central access point to the records of the manifold Low German urban diets of the 13th to 17th century. Thereby, it ought to help creating a field of research which so far is artificially divided and fragmented. By providing an overview of this field from a unifying perspective, the collaborations, cooperations and associations of the cities, the many connections and interdependencies of their diets and meetings, and the decision making and conflict management which took place at these major events of urban political culture can be studied in a new and more adequate way.

The second part of the project is about developing a concept to publish the so far missing *Hanserecesse* for the remaining ~130 years of the Hanse, starting with the last published *recess* of the Hanse diet of 1537 until the last Hanse diet in 1669. Contrary to the former *Hanserecesse*, the concept will employ a digital-first approach. By making use of the opportunities digital editions are offering, some of the main traits of the *recess*-type of document can be incorporated and made visible and analysable. The concept aims to bring together standards, tools and workflows which are most suitable for digitally transcribing, enriching, presenting and interlinking the *Hanserecesse*.

As one of the many opportunities of digital publications via the World Wide Web, it allows to employ a continuous editing and publishing process in which not only the final results intermediate steps can easily be made visible, accessible and usable. For example, an early, imperfect transcription of a *recess* can be published as a preliminary version which can already provide an overview of topics addressed at the diet although it is not yet available as final version which has undergone the entire process of a scholarly edition. This is particularly promising given the rapid development of handwritten text recognition (HTR), as it is provided e. g. by the Transkribus-tool³⁸. The combination of HTR and a continuous publication model seems to be a promising, yet delicate way of making historical documents available to the public. However, the way in which the scientific community deals with this new way of publishing is quite unclear so far and leaves room for debate, starting with the question whether this kind of preliminary version of an edition is facilitating research by helping to make (potentially) a vast amount of sources from the archives accessible to the public — or if it is rather a threat to the high standards of scholarly editions and blurs clear and distinct references and citations. As part of the project, a HTR for mid-16th century handwriting is trained using the *Hanserecesse* of that time to find out, if and to what extent HTR can be a useful part of the workflow for scholarly editions of historical documents.

Yet, In the long run the goal is to build a critical scholarly edition for which, concerning the representation of the text and the document, XML-encoded transcriptions following the P5 guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) are the well-established standard which provides solutions for a wide array of specifics of all kinds of texts³⁹. When it comes to *recess*-documents, especially the multiple versions of a *recess* seem to be a main challenge, yet an opportunity as well. While print editions — due to limited space — are often forced to publish a collated text which can only incorporate a limited amount of information about divergent text versions, a digital edition has capacities to incorporate different versions of one text, therefore copies and extracts can be made visible and available. This way, question such as who had which version of a text, which topics were particularly interesting to whom and how was a text — or parts of it — passed on to other cities or institutions can be addressed. Furthermore, communication networks become visible, the importance of the Hanse for certain issues and certain cities or regions can be made evident by practices of copying and extracting certain documents or parts of them, and the involvement with or interest for the Hanse by particular cities can be analysed via their possession of copies of *Hanserecesse* at a given time.

These are just a few examples, where a digital edition of the *Hanserecesse* can bring about new questions and new means to answer them. As we could hopefully show, a different perspective on the Hanse is closely connected to

³⁶ Höhlbaum K. Inventare Hansischer Archive des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts [Kölner Inventar I—II]; Simson P. Inventare Hansischer Archive des sechszehnten Jahrhunderts [Danziger Inventar].

³⁷ See FN 17.

³⁸ <https://transkribus.eu/Transkribus> last accessed 15 November 2019.

³⁹ <https://tei-c.org/Guidelines/P5> last accessed 15 November 2019.

new means of organizing and publishing relevant source material — and the other way around. Therefore, by creating an inventory for sources on urban diets and developing concepts for a digital-borne edition of the unpublished *Hanserecesse*, we hope to contribute to this discussion and facilitate further research on the Hanse and their associative and decision making culture.

Хуанг Ангела, Мейнерс Оле. Города Немецкой Ганзы, 1358—1669 годы: Триста лет культуры принятия городами решений: идеи и перспективы. В статье исследуется «феномен Ганзы» между XIV и XVII веками, кратко описываются этапы истории Ганзы и тенденции в ее историографии. Основное внимание уделяется ассамблеям Ганзы как центральному институту «феномена Ганзы». Сначала авторы кратко рассматривают развитие ассамблей Ганзы с первых собраний в середине четырнадцатого века до последней общей ассамблеи в 1669 г., а также некоторые предварительные оценки хронологии, основанные на текущих исследованиях. Наконец, представлены возможные решения, способных обеспечить лучшую основу для будущих исследований по этой теме в Исследовательском центре истории Ганзы и Балтии (Любек, Германия).

Ключевые слова: Немецкая Ганза; историография; средневековая история; ранняя современная история; ассоциативная культура; культура принятия решений; цифровое издание.

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Статья публикуется впервые. Поступила в редакцию 20.10.2019. Принята к публикации 10.11.2019.