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ABSTRACT

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Autore parte:	HARM VON SEGGERN
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ABSTRACT:	<p>Lübeck was by far the biggest and most important city in northern Germany and even in northern Europe in the late middle ages. It is well known, that the longdistance trade within the Hanse was established by tradingcompanies of a special type between two or more merchants (in medieval Lower German: wedderlegginge, in modern German: Widerlegung, no English word). Because of a lack of sources it is very difficult to describe the economic evolution of Lübeck in the 14th and 15th centuries. So we have to make a detour in order to find out the leading merchants and their family- and trading-connections. In this paper I want to show that there is a possibility to detect the personal links between the merchants of Lübeck in late 15th century. This possibility consists in the analysis of the so called "Niederstadtbuch", a special towns register, which was written in the ground floor of the townhall (explaining the strange name, literally the 'lower towns book'), and which contains the decisions of the towns council concerning only the problematic cases of the voluntary jurisdiction (7570 entries for the years 1478-1495). It must be added, that there is also a "Oberstadtbuch" (written in the first floor of the towns house) which forms a register of the properties within the city. The analysis of the Niederstadtbuch shows a lot of companies, which were founded and liquidated in front of the city's council. A second source, a customs book (in German: Pfundzoll, directly in English: poundtoll) from the Lübeck harbour in the years 1492-1496 allows us to recognize the merchants who were most active in these four years, but just these merchants did not inscribe their companies in the city's registers. With a closer look to the only some liquidation of companies of the most active merchants, we can see, that these few cases stand in combination with the death of one of the company's members. In addition to this we see the members of the companies acting as executors of a will and as guardian for the widows and orphans of their colleagues. All this is described at the examples of Volmar Mues, most active in the trade with Stockholm, and of Hans van Dalen, whose colleague Diderik van Buren was active in Bruges in Flanders. What we can see is a close network between the merchants, consisting of formal and legal ties. It remains the question, if these were more important than direct family ties.</p>
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