

HANSEATIC LEAGUE -

trading association established by north German towns and German diaspora merchant communities, dominating commercial activity in northern Europe, particularly around the Baltic area, from 13th-16thcs. The *hl* began in the late 12thc; by the 14thc it covered c100 towns. It was weakened somewhat by the linking of Lithuania and Poland in 1386 and of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway in 1397. In 1494, the Russian Tsar, Ivan IIIrd, closed the *hl*'s settlement at Novgorod. This, coupled with the rise of mercantile power in the Netherlands, further undermined the *hl* in the Netherlands and North Sea regions. It waned more as England rivaled the Netherlands for northern European dominance and Sweden became the main commercial presence in the Baltic. The final "diet" or meeting of the *hl* took place in 1669.

Its basic objective was to quell piracy and brigandry, as well as to foster safe navigational practice by e.g. constructing lighthouses. As a generator of considerable wealth, it had important early associations with organ culture. One of the league's main centers was on the island of [Gotland](#). Its capital Visby (which still has a Westphalian street network) was an important stop on the Gotland to Novgorod trading route and was also the point of embarkation for German crusades against Latvia. Reported to "hold the keys to the *hl*'s treasure chest," Visby brought wealth to Gotland, contributing to the construction of medieval organs in many of the island's churches, such as [Norrlanda](#). Other *hl* centers with strong organ connections were Lübeck, Hamburg and Gdansk.