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Originators: Transformation and Collaboration in the Production of Original Written Artefacts

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Article

Creating, Confirming, Reconstructing Authority – The Originators of the *Hanserezesse*

Ulla Kypta | Hamburg

1. Introduction

The handwritten originals discussed in this contribution created and organised a community of various German-speaking towns in late medieval and early modern Northern Europe. This community is commonly called ‘Hanse’. Every few years, towns from Deventer to Tallinn and from Kiel to Cologne sent delegates to the Hanse Diets (*Hansetage*) to discuss cooperation especially in matters of economic policy. When the representatives of the towns met, they wrote down their discussions, deliberations, and decisions in the so called ‘Hanserezesse’. In this article, I examine the different originators who gave the *Hanserezesse* the status of originals, a status which sustained this community of towns for several hundred years.

The *Hanserezesse* – the written records of the proceedings of the Hanse Diets – played a very important role in the history of the Hanse towns; indeed, they were the only visible thread holding the Hanse towns together. The authority attributed to the *Hanserezesse* was crucial, if the towns were to be induced to enact and follow the decisions made by the Hanse Diet, and cooperation was to continue. In other words, these documents had to be regarded as originals – although this does not imply that contemporaries ever used the term ‘original’.

In this article, ‘original(s)’ serves as a technical term to denote written artefacts that were invested with a certain authority. However, the authority contained in these documents was not created by a central power. The assembly of the Hanse towns had no legal basis with which it could force the towns to implement the common rules and regulations; rather, if cooperation was to work, the group of towns had to recognize the *Hanserezesse* as original – i.e., authoritative – written artefacts. Thus, in this case study of the *Hanserezesse* it is argued that the status of an original was not something inherent in the document; it had to be created by a community that regarded the document as an original. In

turn, this original consolidated the community by operating as a common ground for discussion and cooperation.

In this article, I first present the originals and the context in which they were created. In the main part, I discuss the two groups of people who gave the written artefacts the status of originals, viz., the originators who created the authority of the *Hanserezesse* and the originators who recognized, consolidated, and perpetuated this authority. The authoritative status that these originals acquired is preserved in modern scholarly editions, thus transforming the *Rezesse* from the most important building block of Hanse cooperation into the most important building block of Hanse research. In sum, it becomes clear how a community was established and sustained by constantly recognizing the special status of the *Hanserezesse*. The community was formed by originators who maintained this status – a shared status – by repeatedly and regularly acting as originators.

2. Originals: the *Hanserezesse*

The written artefacts analysed in this article were first composed in the Late Middle Ages and in the early modern age in the North of the Holy Roman Empire. The starting point of the evolution of the *Hanserezesse* lies even earlier:¹ During the High Middle Ages, merchants from various towns of the Holy Roman Empire began to cooperate with one another when they travelled abroad, for example to the Russian trading outpost in Novgorod where they could buy furs as well as goods from the Far East – goods that had travelled via the Silk Road to this place of exchange between Europe and Asia.² Fur, wax or ash were traded from Russia and other places in the east as far as Bruges in the west, where merchants from various northern towns

¹ For a good introduction into the basic facts of Hanse history, see Hammel-Kiesow 2021, Selzer 2010.

² Angermann, Friedland 2002.

also cooperated.³ Together, they persuaded the Bruges city authorities to grant them special privileges, for example the right to unload their ships on holidays or a guarantee of fixed conditions if they entered into a contract with a broker or carrier.⁴ Similar practises were found in Bergen (Norway) and in London (England). Merchants formed communities, trading outposts called ‘Kontore’, and were more and more often referred to as ‘Hanse merchants’.⁵

The *Kontore* that managed the privileges and relations between traders and the authorities thus consisted of merchants from different towns. Over time, it became both necessary and convenient for the representatives of those towns to meet and discuss questions of how the trade of their burghers was organized.⁶ In 1358, delegates of the merchants’ hometowns came together to impose a trade boycott on Flanders to persuade the Bruges city authorities to grant them better privileges. On this occasion, the Hanse towns wanted to create the impression of unity and called themselves ‘the German Hanse’ (*Hansa Theutonicorum*); this meeting is usually regarded as the first Hanse Diet.⁷ The last of these diets took place more than 300 years later in 1669.⁸

During these three centuries, representatives of the towns met on an irregular, but quite frequent basis.⁹ Rates of attendance changed according to the number of towns that were interested in the topics discussed. For example, a large number of cities sent representatives to the diet of 1418, when some general problems of organization were tackled; the *Rezess* names delegates from 31 towns.¹⁰ At other diets

far fewer delegates gathered, for instance, the last diet of 1669 was attended by representatives from only six towns.¹¹ Most meetings took place in Lübeck, and, around the turn of the fifteenth century, the town developed into a kind of centre of administration for the Hanse.¹² Contemporaries did not use the name ‘Hanse Diet’, but rather just called it *tag* (‘day’), a very generic term used for all kinds of assemblies in premodern Europe.¹³ The label ‘Hanse Diet’ was introduced by modern researchers to distinguish the meetings of the Hanse towns of various regions from other, mainly smaller local assemblies. Towns from the different regions mostly met to discuss matters of common economic policy: How could they get and ensure special trading privileges from the king of England; how should ships be loaded; what was the volume of a standard ton of herring; how could princes be induced to leave the towns alone and let them carry out their own policies etc.¹⁴ The management of the *Kontore* and how they should operate was a recurring theme on the agenda.¹⁵ How could the *Kontore* bring the merchants to pay their duties, and how should they react against threats from the authorities? Occasionally conflicts with rulers even led to wars, most prominently the wars against the king of Denmark (1368–1370) and the king of England (1469–1474).

The assemblies lasted from two to four weeks and ended when the official record of the meeting, the ‘Rezess’ was distributed. The German term ‘Rezess’ means the passing of laws, and, in the beginning, the *Hanserezesse* simply contained the resolutions of the diets. From the late fifteenth century onwards, however, the written artefacts also paraphrased the discussions between the representatives which preceded the resolution. Sometimes the *Rezess* even mentioned the time of day when something was discussed.¹⁶ The *Rezesse* of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were extensive volumes containing several hundred pages. From the mid-seventeenth century, resolutions and discussions were split into two separate volumes, *Rezesse*

³ The trading outpost in Bruges is one of the topics of Hanse history that has been most avidly researched; see Henn 2014.

⁴ Jenks 2005, 37–40.

⁵ Schubert 2000. In the High Middle Ages, the term ‘Hanse’ referred to various groups of travelling merchants. It was only during the Late Middle Ages that ‘Hanse’ came to denote a specific group of towns and merchants from Northern German towns.

⁶ Hammel-Kiesow 2021, 66–68.

⁷ Behrmann 2001, 122.

⁸ Postel 2001, 156; Huang, Steinführer 2020.

⁹ Exactly how often the Hanse Diets met is not easy to say because researchers are still discussing which diets should be counted as ‘Hanse Diets’ and which should be regarded as only regional meetings of some of the towns; see Huang (forthcoming). For the early period from 1356 to 1407, Henn counts 68 Hanse Diets; see Henn 2001. During the fifteenth century, the Hanse towns met on average approximately every third year, Münger 2001, 39. From 1550 to 1669, 36 diets took place; see Huang, Steinführer 2020, 13.

¹⁰ Lübeck, Köln, Bremen, Rostock, Stralsund, Wismar, Braunschweig, Danzig, Gotland, Riga, Dorpat, Reval, Stettin, Anklam, Osnabrück, Stargard, Stade, Buxtehude, Salzwedel, Stendal, Hamburg, Dortmund, Lüneburg,

Greifswald, Münster, Kolberg, Nimwegen, Deventer, Zutphen, Harderwijk, Elburg. HR, I, 4, No. 556, 534f.

¹¹ Lübeck, Danzig, Hamburg, Bremen, Braunschweig and Köln. Rostock, Osnabrück and Hildesheim were represented by others. See Huang, Steinführer, 2020, 14.

¹² Jenks 1992.

¹³ Hardy 2018.

¹⁴ Henn 2001, 7.

¹⁵ Jörn 2000 gives London as an example.

¹⁶ For instance, ‘Monday morning at eight, the delegates came together at the municipal hall’; HR III, 5, No. 105, §106, 183.

on the one hand and protocols on the other.¹⁷ However, for most of their existence, the *Rezesse* comprised both the discussions and the resolutions.

Every town that had sent a representative to the diet received a *Rezess*. If twenty towns had participated in a diet in Lübeck, the chancellery in Lübeck wrote the *Rezess* twenty times.¹⁸ Thus, there were several versions of each *Rezess*. In this contribution, I focus mainly on the *Rezesse* – the versions – found in the State Archive in Gdansk,¹⁹ since I have had the opportunity to study them in Gdansk.

Unfortunately, we do not know exactly how these versions were produced. Indeed, a study of the documents seems to suggest that we should regard them not as many copies of a single original, but rather as a number of versions each of which had the status of an original. In contrast, the records of the proceedings of the imperial diets, starting in 1495, were issued as one authoritative charter, whose special status was certified by the seal attached to the document.²⁰ The Hanse Diet, however, did not attach a seal or a mark of any kind. No single version of the *Rezess* was the most authoritative; each version was produced with the same amount of care. It will be shown below that the Gdansk version can be treated as an original, i.e., as an authoritative document. There is no reason to believe that any Hanse town or city regarded their versions of the *Rezess* as more or less valuable than any other.

The *Rezesse* served as a reference for any questions about what had been agreed and how the community worked; thus they played a very important role in the cooperation between Hanse towns.²¹ In a way, the *Rezesse* mirror the non-written constitution of the Hanse.²² Over the course of the three centuries that the Hanse towns worked together, they tried time and again to validate the rules regarding cooperation in yet other documents. At certain times, some of the towns – but never all – succeeded in forming closer and more formal alliances,²³ but these leagues never lasted very long. Hence,

the *Rezesse* can be regarded as the cornerstone of collective action; the community of Hanse towns articulated itself in the *Rezesse* which were written and issued following their meetings.

Nevertheless, the resolutions laid down in the *Rezesse* were not immediately legally binding. Each city council had to decide to adopt them into their own urban law;²⁴ if they had failed to do this, any effort to harmonize policies would have come to nothing. Hence, the *Rezesse* had to be given a certain authoritative force to induce the individual city councils to accept the thinking which lay behind them and to adhere to the rules contained in them. Since the Hanse Diet had no executive powers, this authoritative force could not be achieved by imposing penalties or sending troops. It was the special status of the *Rezesse* as originals which consolidated their authority. This does not mean that every town council always adopted every resolution into its urban law. However, the authoritative force of the *Rezesse* was strong enough to keep cooperation going for a few hundred years. To find out how the *Rezesse* attained this power, we have to see how they came to be seen as originals – an enquiry which implies the following question: Who were the originators of the *Hanserezesse*?

3. Originators of the *Hanserezesse*

The *Hanserezesse* were written after a Hanse Diet. However, they continued to have authoritative force over several centuries. Thus, it makes sense to discern different types of originators through the lifetime of these written artefacts. Two groups of originators can be discerned, namely the persons who created the written artefacts as originals and the persons who recognized the special status of the written artefacts as authoritative with regard to their own actions and decisions. Thus, one group of originators – the scribes – gave the documents the status of an original; the other group helped to maintain this status over the centuries.

3.1 Creating authority

The *Rezesse* were drawn up at the Hanse Diets where representatives from various town councils from the northern Holy Roman Empire had gathered to discuss matters of common interest, especially a common economic policy. The progress and the results of their discussions were written down in the *Hanserezesse*. Two elements of the process of

¹⁷ Huang, Steinführer 2020.

¹⁸ For example, on the *Rezess* of 1577 found in the Gdansk archive the scribe had written the note ‘dantzick’ to indicate that this was the version that was to go to Gdansk; see Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 48.

¹⁹ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28.

²⁰ Deeter 2011, 147.

²¹ Deeters 2011, 146.

²² For a similar interpretation, see Ressel 2020, 100.

²³ They were called ‘tohoposaten’ or, in the later sixteenth century, ‘confederations’; see Seier 2012, and Iwanov 2016, chapter 2.3.

²⁴ Hammel-Kiesow 2016, 185. One is reminded of EU procedures here. For a comparison between Hanse and EU structures, see Hammel-Kiesow 2007.

creating an original can be discerned at this stage. Firstly, the content of the *Rezesse* had to be created during the diet, and secondly, it had to be put it down on parchment, or later, on paper. The representatives of the towns were responsible for the first part, and the urban scribes of the town hosting the diet for the second.

Thus, the representatives of the towns must be regarded as the first group of originators of the *Hanserezesse*. When the delegates of various cities came together, they constituted the entity of cooperation known as the Hanse. And this fact – that the discussions and decisions took place at a Hanse Diet – invested them with a special authority. Some rules had to be observed, however, to make sure that the Hanse Diet was recognized as a regular Hanse meeting: The representatives of the towns had to be members of their respective city council, not notaries or clerks.²⁵ Resolutions had to be passed unanimously, i.e., the delegates had to reach a consensus on every single topic.²⁶ Every town had to agree with the consensual position; a majority vote was not an option. This consensus, however, could – and often did – consist in agreeing to disagree for a time and to postpone the topic to the next meeting.

In addition to the legal status of the delegates and the need to find a consensus, the general setting and the procedures of the diet were important in investing the *Rezess* with authority. A Hanse Diet followed a certain protocol. For example, at the beginning the delegates gathered for a common religious service in church.²⁷ Proceedings always started with checking which towns had sent representatives, which towns were represented by other towns,²⁸ and which towns had sent letters excusing themselves.²⁹ In this way, the members of the Hanse – the towns which constituted the Hanse at any point in time – were officially confirmed. The next item on the agenda was almost always a discussion about the order of seating, a discussion that roughly mirrored

the economic and political importance of the towns and was thus often contested.³⁰

The discussions were structured by the seating order. The delegates voted on the order of seating, hence, whoever sat at the top of the table could influence the rest of discussions more easily than someone who had to vote last. The chair of the meeting – usually the mayor of Lübeck – called out the item on the agenda and proposed a possible common position. Then all the delegates had to express their position on this point. They could agree to the proposed position, disagree, or say that they had no interest in this subject. However, each town had to make a statement, each town had to be heard. The resolutions agreed upon were invested with the authority of all the towns present at the meeting. Thus, all the delegates together constituted the Hanse and thereby enabled the document recording their discussions to be regarded as an original by the fellow town councillors at home.

The second group of originators was the scribes, the material originators. Since the Hanse towns did not develop into a fixed entity, the Hanse itself did not dispose of its own bureaucracy. The scribes who wrote the *Rezesse* were part of the urban administration of the town that hosted the meeting, in most cases Lübeck.

The scribes from the host city created the original by giving the written artefact a special shape and form: it was always written by hand, never printed. The text was neatly arranged in sections which were separated by a few blank lines; the beginning of each section was often written in larger letters (Figs 1 and 2).

When the delegates discussed the treaties they might sign, the discussions on the subsections were marked with numbers corresponding to the subsections of the proposed treaty (Fig. 3).

If a larger part of a page or a whole page was left blank, the scribes wrote in large letters *Nihil deest* ('nothing missing here') to indicate that nothing had been erased and to prevent anyone from entering paragraphs after the record was finished (Fig. 4).

The scribes also made use of standard phrases that any reader familiar with the *Rezesse* would instantly recognize; these were sometimes written in a larger font. For example, the *Rezess* typically started with the phrase, 'in the name of

²⁵ Henn 2001, 7–8.

²⁶ Hammel-Kiesow 2016, 184–186.

²⁷ Seier 2017, 66.

²⁸ To name just one example: in 1525 Braunsberg was represented by the delegates from Gdansk; see Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 7a.

²⁹ For instance, a large number of towns sent notes asking to be excused for their absence, namely, Cologne, Nijmegen, Duisburg, Emmerich, Groningen, Roermond, Münster, Osnabrück, Dortmund, Soest, Herford, Lemgo, Bielefeld, Wesel, Minden, Deventer, Zwolle, Kampen, Bremen, Königsberg, Braunsberg and Brunswick. See Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 57.

³⁰ For example, in 1576 the delegates from Soest claimed that they should sit in front of and not behind the representatives from Lüneburg; see Schipmann 2004, 50.

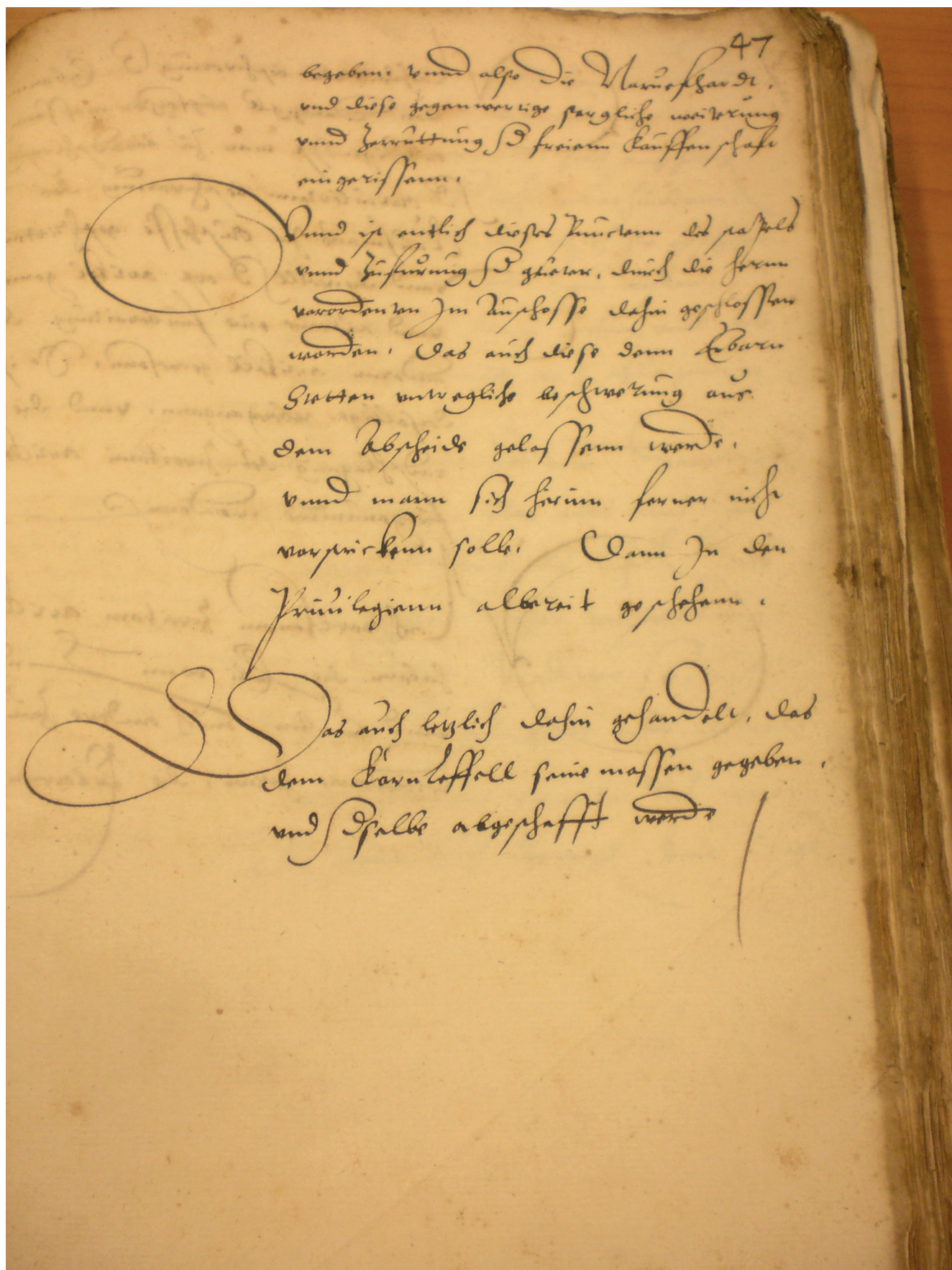


Fig. 1: Hanserecess from 1566, Gdansk, Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300,28 no. 37.

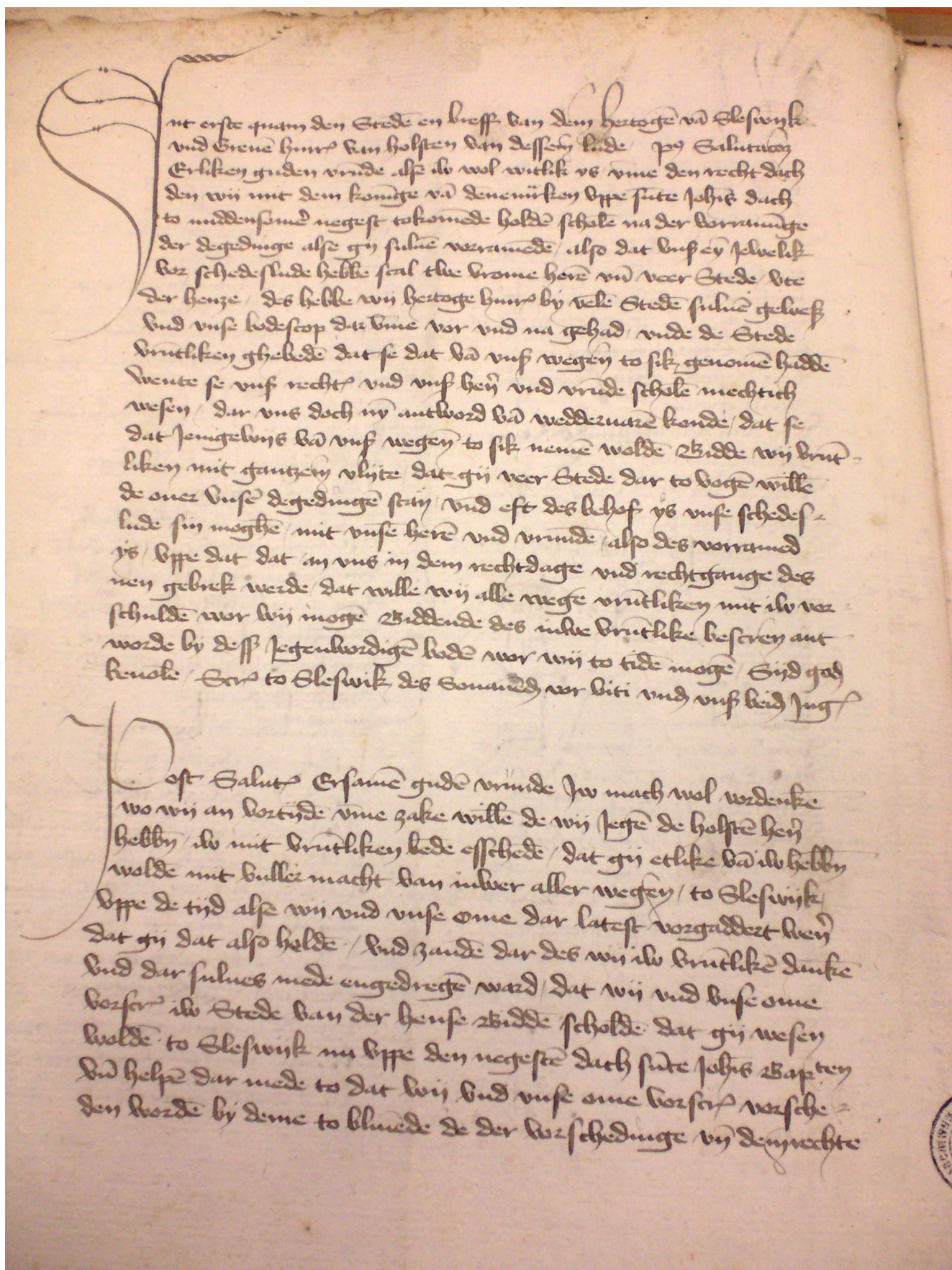


Fig. 2: Hanserezess from 1418, Gdansk, Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300,28 no. 153a.

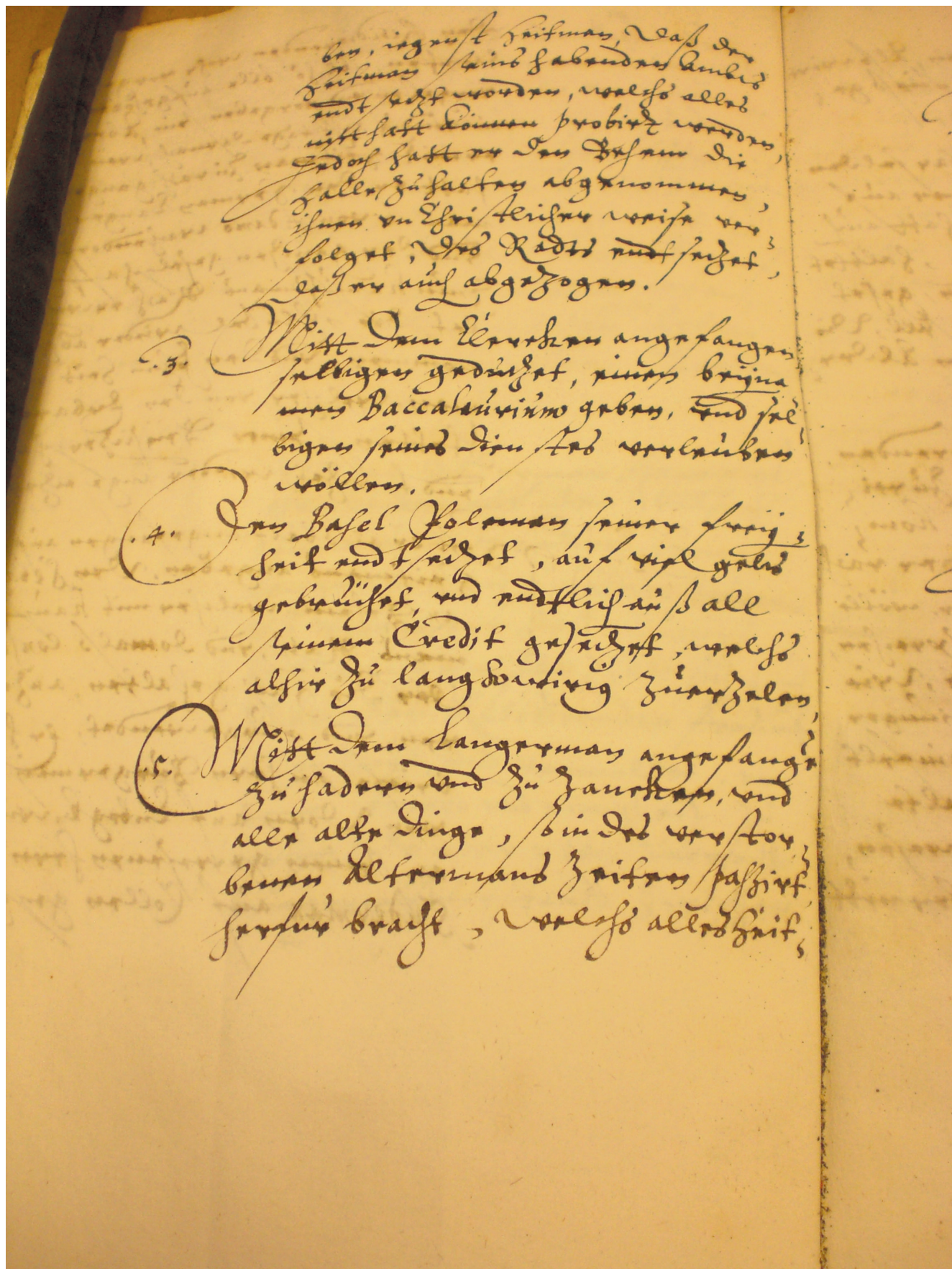


Fig. 3: *Hanserezess* from 1594, Gdansk, Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300,28 no. 62.

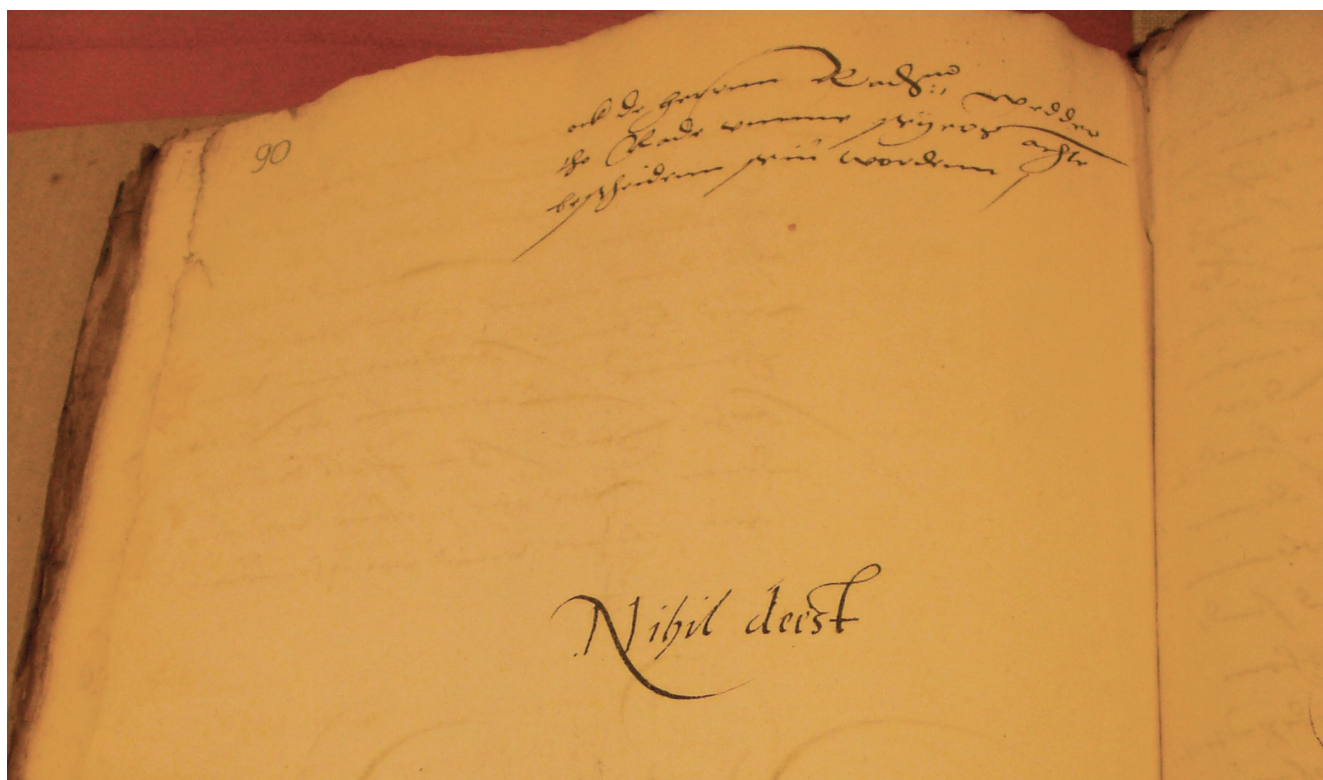


Fig. 4: *Hanserezess* from 1549, Gdansk, Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300,28 no. 14.

God Amen’ or ‘in the name of the Holy Trinity Amen’, and these words were often written in larger letters. A *Rezess* ended with the statement that the delegates had heard and approved the *Rezess*, then thanked each other and said their goodbyes (Fig. 5).

Unfortunately, the sources do not mention how approval was organized, but perhaps the statement at the end of the document refers to the fact that the delegates could close the discussions on each topic of the agenda only when they were able to agree on a common position, and this common position was written into the *Rezess*. It is possible that the whole document was read aloud at the end of the diet.

As mentioned above, every town represented at the meeting received its own version of the *Rezess*. However, the delegates did not wait for their *Rezess* to be drawn up; they travelled home and the *Rezess* was sent later. For example, the *Rezess* of the meeting that ended in Lübeck in November 1584 was brought to Gdansk by a messenger from Lübeck on January 17th, 1585.³¹ Interestingly, the exact wording of the various versions differed slightly, and it is still not known exactly how much one *Rezess* differed from another. At first glance, it is surprising that each version of such an important document was not worded in the same way. The idea that

those involved did not consider the exact wording to be so important is supported by the fact that, when delegates referred to older *Rezesse* in later diets, they did not quote specific phrases or words, but rather mentioned the general agreements that had been reached.³² Thus, the *Rezesse* were not used as laws, but rather as the source for general norms of cooperation.

In sum, the first two groups of originators created the authority of the document: The delegates to the diet who discussed the agreed agenda, and the scribes who recorded the proceedings of the diet as an original *Rezess*. The status of the delegates as city councillors and their observance of certain procedural rules invested the discussions and resolutions recorded in the *Rezess* with authoritative force.

3.2 Confirming authority

The authority of the *Hanserezesse* was created during and immediately following each Hanse Diet. To maintain its status as an original, however, the authority of the document had to be recognized by a community. Hence, the second group of originators consists of those who acknowledged, confirmed, and thus perpetuated the authority of the *Rezesse*. Accordingly, the *Rezesse* – the actual written artefacts –

³¹ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 57.

³² See for example HR II, 6, No. 356 §55, 334.

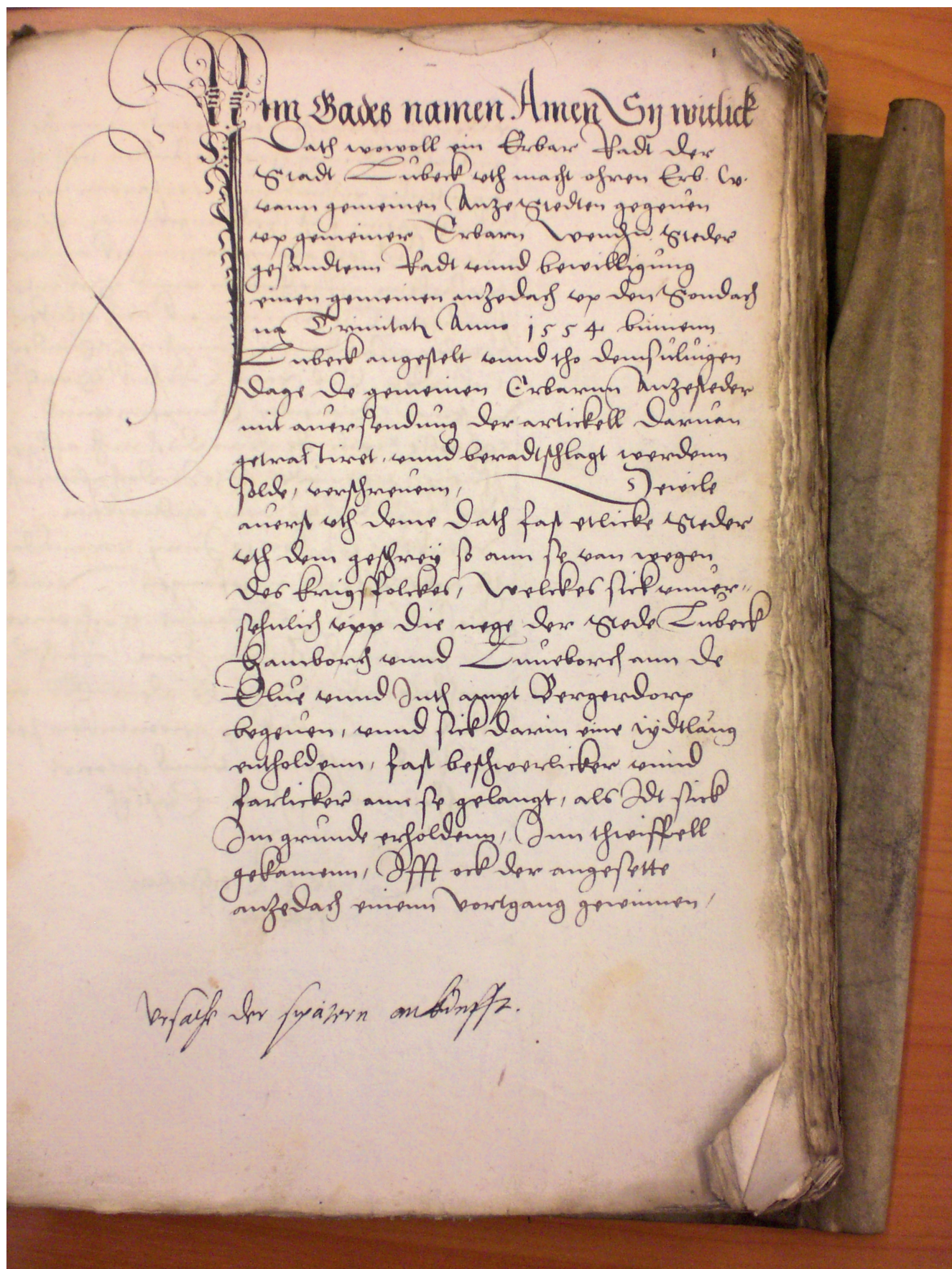


Fig. 5: from 1554, Gdansk, Archivum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300,28 no. 24.

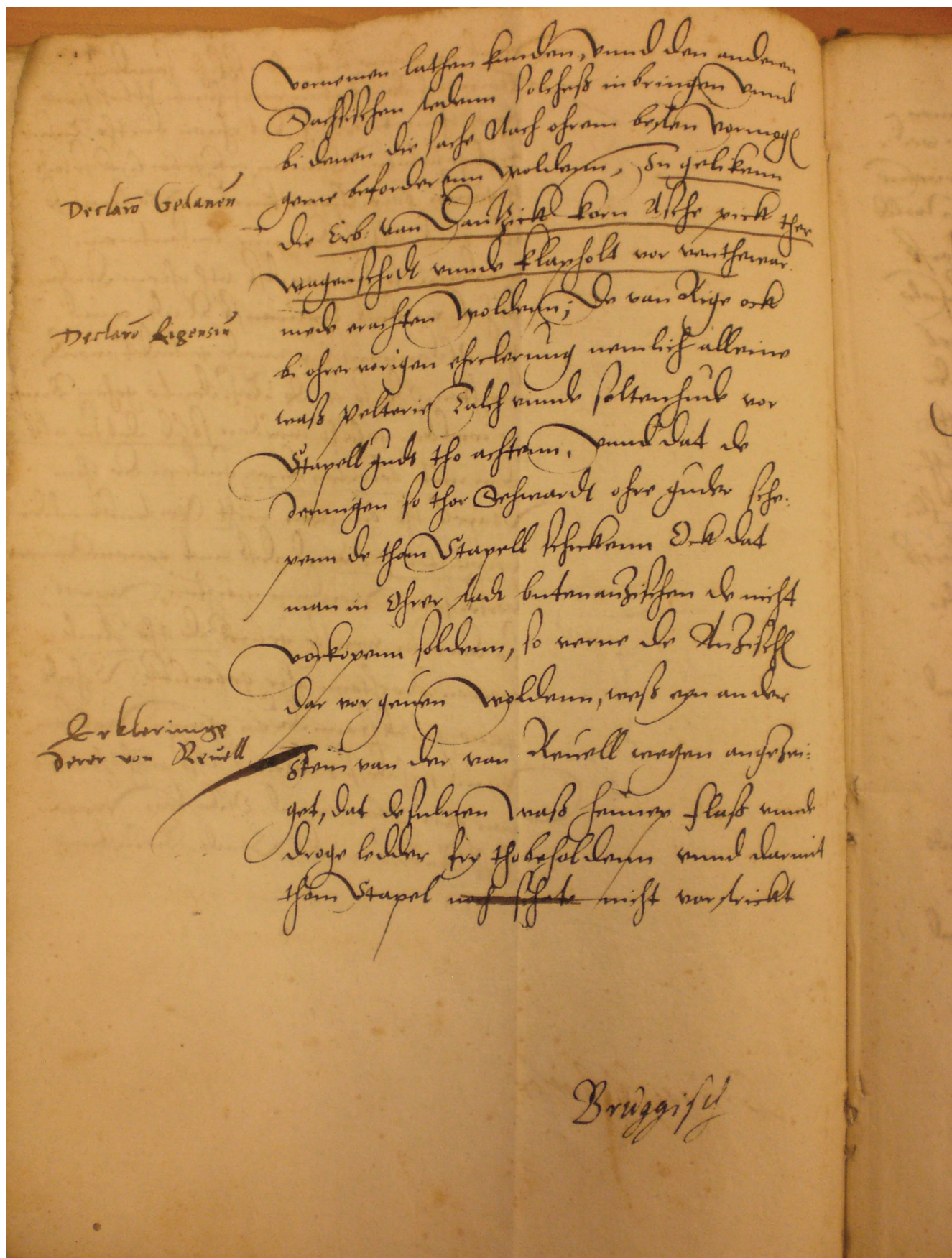


Fig. 7: *Hanserezess* from 1554, Gdansk, Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 24.

place.³⁷ However, some of the marginal notes, comments, and indexes were added much later – even centuries later. This suggests not only that the *Rezesse* were regarded as special documents by the towns which participated, but also that the cooperation between the towns was highly valued. There are also indications that the *Rezesse* were immediately seen as a source of the current rules and regulations regarding cooperation, thus enforcing their status as authoritative originals. One such document contains an inserted sheet with a note stating that the Gdansk delegate to one of the Hanse Diets took a copy of the *Rezess* to the diet in Lübeck.³⁸ Indeed, the administration in Gdansk sometimes prepared collections of selected paragraphs of the *Rezesse*.³⁹ Presumably, these collections served as a memory and argumentation aid for the delegates at the diets. It is also well known that delegates referred to older *Rezesse* as sources of authoritative information. For example, at the diet of 1447 the towns agreed that it was henceforth forbidden for Hanse merchants to load their commercial goods onto ships belonging to owners from non-Hanse towns. In 1470, the diet re-issued the same decree; and here, the delegates stressed that they were affirming the rules the towns had already agreed upon in the *Rezess* of 1447.⁴⁰ When Soest claimed the seat in front of Lüneburg (and not behind), their delegates referred to the old *Rezesse* as the authoritative source stating that Soest belonged there.⁴¹ Thus, delegates who cited the old *Rezesse* as a source of past consensus can also be regarded as originators, since they confirmed the special – original – status of the *Rezesse*.

These examples show that, at some point in time, the power of the original was conferred on its parts. Firstly, the *Rezess* had to be created and recognized as an original in order to gain normative force. This seems to have worked so well that, over time, even extracts of a *Rezess* could be regarded as originals with authority. It had to be clear, however, that these extracts originated in a *Rezess*. These collections of excerpts do not state, for instance, ‘this is what we agreed upon’, but rather, ‘these are older *Rezesse*’. It was necessary to refer to the original to invoke its power.⁴²

Referring to the *Rezesse* as sources of reliable information was not the only way in which their authority as originals was recognized; their special status was also confirmed by the fact that town administrations stored them in special collections. In the Gdansk archives, for instance, the *Rezesse* were very often put into one volume together with related documents, e.g., with the invitation to the respective diet and the instructions given to the Gdansk delegates.⁴³ Sometimes, concepts for letters to be written in connection with the meeting were stored in the same volume along with yet other documents. The whole collection was then bound together with a thick cover and given the title ‘*Rezess*’.⁴⁴ In so doing, the urban personnel credited the *Rezesse* with a special status that was then attributed to the other documents stored with the *Rezesse* (see above). The whole collection was called a ‘*Rezess*’, thus confirming that the *Rezesse* were the most important building blocks of Hanse cooperation.

In sum, the creation of an original involved expanding and changing the arrangement of the first version, thereby confirming its status as an authoritative document, an authority which was valid for selected parts of the whole written artefact. In this way, the persons recognizing, confirming and perpetuating the status of the *Rezesse* as originals may themselves be seen as originators; these include firstly, the persons – presumably working in the urban administration – who annotated the *Rezesse*, procured selections of excerpts and prepared folders containing the *Rezesse* together with related documents; and secondly,

³⁷ An analysis of the ink used might help to better determine the age of the additions. This work is planned in RFC07 over the course of the next years.

³⁸ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 83.

³⁹ One such early collection holds extensive excerpts from the *Rezesse* 1395, 1396, 1397, 1398, 1399, 1400, 1401, 1402, 1403, 1405; see Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 217. Excerpts of *Rezesse* from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century were printed around the middle of the seventeenth century; see Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 85.

⁴⁰ HR II, 6, No. 356 §44, 334: ‘ene bevestinghe aller recesse. Unde wante denne de stede van der Dutschen hense radessendeboden nu tor tyd bynnen Lubeke rypliker unde merkliker vorgaddert synt, dan se van langhen yaren her vorgaddert unde vorsammelt synt gheweset, also hebben se alle artikelen in deme recesse anno 47 ascensionis domini bevestighet unde besloten hyr uppert nye bewillet, bevestighet unde confirmiret, so se de hyr yegenwardighen vornyen, willen, bevestigen unde conirmeren in kraft desser recesses, (nichtsedemyn alle andere recesse) myd eren innehebbenden artikelen vor dat ghemene beste besloten unde belevet by werde, macht unde krafft to holdende unvorbroden, so se sik des hyr beholden unde darvan protesteren.’

⁴¹ Schipmann 2004, 50.

⁴² The following phrase is written on a printed collection of essays from the middle of the seventeenth century: ‘Abdruck etzlicher hansischer Recessen’ (print of several Hanse *Rezesse*). Each excerpt is marked as ‘stems from the *Rezess* of the year...’. Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 85. The collection from the early fifteenth century is called ‘liber recessi’ (book of *Rezesse*) in the same archive, but it is not clear when this title was added. (300,28 no. 217).

⁴³ See for example Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 46, 51, 68 or 83.

⁴⁴ See for example Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, 300, 28, no. 74.

the delegates to Hanse Diets who referred to the *Rezesse* as authoritative sources and enhanced their status as originals by assigning the power attributed to the originals to copies and selections of paragraphs of the older *Rezesse*.

4. The aftermath: reconstructing authority

The originators created, recognized, and preserved the status of the *Rezesse* as originals over the course of three centuries. From c. 1350 to 1669, Hanse Diets were held, and the *Rezesse* were distributed among the various towns, then annotated, indexed, stored, and referred to in later meetings. The authoritative power of these *Rezesse* can also be seen in the cooperation between the towns, a cooperation that was shaped by the joint projects recorded in the *Rezesse*. Not only did the *Rezesse* influence the Hanse community, they were, to a certain extent, responsible for creating the Hanse as a community of towns and people.

But the power of these originals did not end when the Hanse towns ceased to cooperate. Research into the Hanse started immediately after the demise of the Hanse Diets. Scholarly treatises on the nature and special character of the Hanse were published as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁵ The first volume of what can be regarded as modern historical research on the Hanse appeared in 1808.⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century, the emerging European nation states began to publish editions of sources they considered to be important for their national histories.⁴⁷ Germany was not yet a unified state, but – perhaps for this very reason – German scholars searched for sources reaching back to the Middle Ages that would help to create a German identity. To begin with, they studied the charters establishing the prerogatives of the emperors and kings, and the chronicles recording their deeds.⁴⁸ Soon after this project started, however, discussions began as to how the *Hanserezesse* could be published.⁴⁹ Since the *Rezesse* were issued in several versions and stored

in various archives, this was not an easy project and has still not been completed.⁵⁰

The fact that nineteenth century scholars held the opinion that the *Rezesse* should be among the first sources to be edited in a historical-critical fashion surely derives from the special status of the *Rezesse* as originals. In fact, these scholarly editions both mirror and consolidate the status of originals. In this way, the modern editors can be counted as the last group of originators of the *Rezesse*.

The status of the modern editors as originators derives from the special status they granted the *Rezesse*. This has even been criticized by recent researchers:⁵¹ These modern editors saw the *Rezess* as the undisputed centre of each meeting, as its heart. Nevertheless, they considered yet other documents which they regarded as related to the *Rezess* to be important, and included them in the *Rezesse*. Some of these documents were indisputably written in connection with the *Rezesse*, for example, reports of delegates giving their impressions of how the negotiations went.⁵² Other documents, however, were more loosely related to the *Rezess*, for instance letters written from one town to another.⁵³ By putting the *Rezess* at the centre and structuring all the other documents as either leading up to or stemming from the meeting recorded in the *Rezess*, the editors created the impression of highly ordered proceedings which are perhaps more typical of a modern bureaucracy than of a premodern assembly. Hence, these editors can be viewed as retrospective originators, investing the *Rezesse* with even more authority than they probably had.

Indeed, their use of the term ‘Hanserezesse’ for these editions is somewhat inappropriate since these volumes contain various types of documents over and above the actual *Rezesse*.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ Ressel 2014; Cordes 2001; Iwanov 2016, 293–300.

⁴⁶ Sartorius 1802–1808.

⁴⁷ In France, the edition of the ‘Recueils des historiens des Gaules et de la France’ started in the eighteenth century. In England, two large projects began in the middle of the nineteenth century: firstly, the ‘*Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores*’ (the so-called Rolls series), secondly, the public record office started publishing editions of various administrative documents.

⁴⁸ Edited by the Monumenta Germaniae Historica; see <<https://www.mgh.de/en>>.

⁴⁹ Waitz 1870.

⁵⁰ The latest volume – which brings us up to 1537 – was published in 1970, see HR IV, 2. Thus, there are approximately 130 years of *Rezesse* which remain to be edited. The Research Centre for Hanse and Baltic History in Lübeck is hoping to provide transcriptions of the Lübeck *Rezesse* as well as some other versions; see <<https://fgho.eu/en/projects/hanse-quellen-lesen>>.

⁵¹ Huang, Kypta 2011; Jahnke 2019.

⁵² For example, the edition covering the diet from 1487 contains not only the *Rezess* but also a report by the representative from Riga, see HR III, 2, no. 164, 192–206.

⁵³ The edition covering the diet from 1487 includes not only the letters officially written by the assembled delegates of the Hanse Diets, but also several letters sent from the delegates of one town to their home council and vice versa; see HR III, 2, no. 168–173, 209–213.

⁵⁴ The eight volumes of the first series are called *Hanserezesse und andere Akten der Hansetage* (‘Hanserezesse and other documents of the Hanse Diets’); but in the second series, the second part is dropped, and the editions are simply called *Hanserezesse*.

In this way, these editors enhanced the meaning of *Rezess*. The editions of the ‘Rezesse’ must be consulted even if the researcher is studying e.g., the instructions for delegates or the letters sent between the towns – and not the records of the actual Hanse Diets. The ‘Rezesse’ are seen as the most authoritative source of Hanse history. To a certain extent, these editions are new originals, and their authoritative force is strengthened when researchers interested in any topic of Hanse history turn first to these editions of the *Rezesse*. The editions create a community, but not a community of towns, rather a community of researchers who invest the editions of the *Rezesse* with the authoritative power of originals, and in turn the *Rezesse* – the larger versions containing a variety of related documents – shape and maintain the community of Hanse researchers. This might explain why research on the Hanse has continued to be a topic of historical research for 150 years without any major interruption.

5. Conclusion

This contribution has shown how an original – a *Hanserezess* – was created at different points in time. Firstly, at the Hanse Diets, documents were written and invested with authoritative force by the city councillors who convened in a certain configuration, and by the city clerks who recorded these proceedings in a certain shape and form. Thus, a first version of the originals was created at each of the Hanse Diets. Secondly, these records were regarded as legitimate sources of the law in each single town as well as of the rules and agreements that shaped the cooperation between the towns. A second version of the original was created when city clerks and councillors examined and indexed the *Rezess* for use in future discussions, and when they copied the written artefact or excerpts from it to take with them to further meetings; these second versions were later enhanced when clerks and councillors appended related documents. Furthermore, the authority of the originals was reconstructed and transformed by the research which preceded the modern editions.

Thus, at different points in time, various groups of people invested these documents with some authority, recognizing them as authoritative – as originals. These groups also acted as originators. By being originators of the same original, they strengthened their ties. Since the community of Hanse towns was not based on any formal foundation such as a charter or a treaty, the joint creation of an original played an important – if not the most important – role in holding the community together.

Furthermore, the content of the *Rezesse* – the rules and agreements – structured and organized cooperation between towns. This was possible because the *Rezess* was regarded as an original by the various parties involved. To a lesser degree, the community of Hanse researchers is also constituted and shaped by their common appreciation of the *Rezesse* as originals – as authoritative sources of Hanse history. The *Rezesse* as originals thus created, shaped, and maintained first the community of Hanse towns and then the community of its researchers.

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