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# THE HISTORY OF THE “HANSE COG” A SHIP TYPE BETWEEN SCIENCE AND POLITICS\*

von Reinhard Paulsen

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The famous “Hanse cog” is not only familiar to the general public but also constitutes a part of German national identity. The term combines phenomena from two completely disparate historical fields: the Hanse and the cog, that is, a political and diplomatic entity and a wooden ship. How did this come to pass? When and why did the “Hanse cog” enter German national consciousness?

### *1. Municipal cogs: “Germany at Sea”*

The origin of the term “Hanse cog” can be traced back to an emerging German research into ship types in the period leading up to World War I. Colonial and imperial ambitions made Germany focus on England as main global opponent, which entailed challenging England at sea and building

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\* This paper results from my presentation given at a workshop on cog affairs in March 2015 at the German Maritime Museum, Bremerhaven.

up the Imperial German navy.<sup>1</sup> Politics and the overall spirit of the time were powerfully influenced by this German pursuit of Maritime power.<sup>2</sup> However, the desired degree of naval prestige proved difficult to attain for a continental land-power like Germany, handing German historical scholarship the difficult task of conjuring up a historical substantiation and an ideological basis for an allegedly resurgent Germany powerful at sea.<sup>3</sup>

This forced a transformation of the early romantic-liberal view of the Hanse. The leading German Hanse historian of the time, Dietrich Schäfer, declared the Hanse to have been a "commercial state" and the late medieval representative par excellence of Germany at sea.<sup>4</sup> The maritime power

<sup>1</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler characterises the Imperial German naval policy as a strategic challenge especially against Great Britain. It was „der Kampfauftrag gegen rivalisierende Staaten, wobei Großbritannien als stärkste Seemacht von Anfang an als der Hauptgegner zur See ins Auge gefaßt wurde. « Für Deutschland ist der zur Zeit gefährlichste Gegner zur See England », formulierte Tirpitz sein Credo bereits in einer vertraulichen Denkschrift vom Juli 1897" (Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 3, München 1995, part 6, chap. IV B.5.e, p. 1130). Tirpitz goes on in this memorandum: „Es [England] ist auch der Gegner, gegen den wir am dringlichsten ein gewisses Maß an Flottenmacht als politischer Machtfaktor haben müssen" (Volker R. Berghahn, *Der Tirpitz-Plan. Genesis und Verfall einer innenpolitischen Krisenstrategie unter Wilhelm II.*, Düsseldorf 1971, p. 188, fn. 76, also p. 109–110, source reference p. 109, fn. 7). In his memoirs, too, Tirpitz puts it straight: „Die Flotte erschien mir niemals als Selbstzweck, sondern stets als eine Funktion der Seeinteressen. Ohne Seemacht blieb die deutsche Weltgeltung wie ein Weichtier ohne Schale" (Alfred von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen*, Leipzig / Berlin <sup>3</sup>1927; p. 50).

<sup>2</sup> In a keynote speech on „Die Aufgaben der deutschen Seegeschichte" (1908) Dietrich Schäfer generalises: „Daß ein großes Volk sich in der Welt nicht behaupten kann ohne Geltung zur See, ist in den letzten Jahrzehnten Gemeingut deutscher Überzeugung geworden" (in: Dietrich Schäfer, *Aufsätze, Vorträge und Reden*, Vol. 2, Jena 1913, pp. 281–292, here p. 292). Addressing the Emperor in 1899 Grand Admiral Tirpitz underlines the benefits of a battle fleet: „Abgesehen von den für uns durchaus nicht aussichtslosen Kampfverhältnissen wird England aus allgemein politischen Gründen und von rein nüchternem Standpunkt des Geschäftsmanns aus jede Neigung uns anzugreifen, verloren haben und infolgedessen Euer Majestät ein solches Maß an Seegeltung zugestehen und Euer Majestät ermöglichen, eine große überseeische Politik zu führen." (Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler 1871–1945*, Darmstadt <sup>3</sup>1996, p. 204 with source reference).

<sup>3</sup> In 1897, by now State Secretary of the Imperial Navy Office, Tirpitz starts campaigning for the makeup of a mighty Imperial fleet of battle ships (Tirpitz-Plan). The same year Schäfer insists on his fellow scholars' public support: „Ich glaube auch, daß diejenigen nicht ganz unrecht haben, die behaupten, der deutsche Gelehrte sei zu penibel, zu zaghaft, vielleicht zu wissenseitel in der popularisierenden Verwertung seiner Studien" (Dietrich Schäfer, *Deutschland zur See. Eine historisch-politische Betrachtung*, in: Schäfer, *Aufsätze* (see fn. 2), pp. 24–101, here p. 25). Schäfer accentuates the relevance of Hanse research because „das Studium der hansischen Geschichte Einsicht und Urteil über den Wert und die Wichtigkeit von Seemacht und Seegeltung zu fördern und zu klären imstande ist" (Dietrich Schäfer, *Der Hansische Geschichtsverein und die Geschichte der deutschen Seeschifffahrt*, in: *Marine-Rundschau. Zeitschrift für Seewesen* 16, 1905, pp. 357–359, here p. 357). It cannot surprise that Tirpitz mentions Schäfer to be a particular supporter of his: „Von den Historikern hat mich besonders Dietrich Schäfer unterstützt" (Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* (see fn. 1), p. 96, fn. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Schäfer, *Deutschland zur See* (see fn. 3), pp. 24–101, here p. 36, 37.

of contemporary imperial-Prussia was construed as natural German continuation of the German medieval maritime Hanse.

Being seen a direct precursor of Wilhelminian battle fleet policy promoted an increasing interest in medieval Hanse ships and ship types. German scholars like Wilhelm Stieda, Bernhard Hagedorn und Walther Vogel<sup>5</sup> dedicated themselves to researching historical shipping. In the context of the general political framework, the research agenda was to survey and compare maritime capabilities on a European scale. The Hanse towns’ ships and shipping were more or less perceived as one part of European seafaring venture.

However, this artificial construction of the Hanse as a maritime state and as Germany at Sea was completely foreign to the material scholars discovered in the sources. There was no mention of „Hanse cogs“ but only a diverse number of Dantzke, Revall or Lubeke *schiphers*, *schepe* and general shipbuilding of individual, self-responsible sea towns in a considerable diversity.

## 2. From a state-like to a völkisch-Nordic Hanse

World War I scuttled Germany’s ambitions towards prestige at sea and political Germany revised its ideological strategy and defining itself henceforth as a continental land power with a pan-European claim to supremacy. The main objective of Germany under National Socialist rule was the so-called “Continental European Großraumwirtschaft” controlled by a “Germanic Reich” subjecting Southeast European, Italian, French and eventually English “Unterräume” – sub regions to German rule.<sup>6</sup> In its

<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Stieda, *Revaler Zollbücher und –quittungen des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Halle 1887; Bernhard Hagedorn, *Die Entwicklung der wichtigsten Schiffstypen bis ins 19. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1914; Walther Vogel, *Geschichte der deutschen Seeschifffahrt*, Bd. 1: Von der Urzeit bis zum Ende des XV. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 1915.

<sup>6</sup> One of the main protagonists of this strategy was Werner Daitz, since 1932 board member of the Hansischer Geschichtsverein. He explained European Großraumwirtschaft as block formation with regard to global economic grouping, the medieval Hanse serving as a model: “Wenn Europa nicht zwischen den transozeanischen Großgebilden, dem British Empire, dem Amerikanischen und dem chinesisch-japanischen Block zerdrückt werden will, wenn dieses alte Europa eine Wiedergeburt erleben will und eine neue Zukunft – dann muß der alte hansische Gedanke in neuem Geist und in neuer Form wieder erstehen” (Werner Daitz, *Die alte Städtehanse und der kontinentaleuropäische Wirtschaftskreislauf*, in: Werner Daitz, *Der Weg zur völkischen Wirtschaft. Ausgewählte Reden und Aufsätze*, Teil 2: Deutschland und die europäische Großraumwirtschaft, Dresden 1941, pp. 7–29, here p. 24). Still in 1944, Fritz Rörig defined Hanse as „Großraumwirtschaft“: „Im ganzen wird man sagen dürfen, daß es der hansischen Gesamtleitung gelungen ist, gestützt auf den hansischen Kernraum, die Ostsee und Nordsee umfassende Großraumwirtschaft aufzubauen, deren charakteristische Pfeiler die vier großen hansischen Auslandskontore, in Nowgorod, in Brügge,

economic greed, Nazi Germany increasingly turned towards the Eastern countries, using terms like "Lebensraum" and "Ostlandritt" to attempt to justify an allegedly naturally inherited "Drang nach Osten".<sup>7</sup>

The Hanse as a representative of a Germany at sea had become obsolete. Instead, the Baltic Sea's importance was overemphasised in the context of a new eastbound land strategy. Nazi ideology declared these marginal waters to be the central European sea because, as a "Nordic" brochure put it, "the greatest and most profound decisions in the development of European history are made in the Baltic Sea area."<sup>8</sup>

In order to match this new conception of European history, the history of the Hanse, too, was rewritten to portray it as an ethnic advance guard heading eastwards.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1920s the historian Fritz Rörig began to popularise a new, mystically glorified Hanse by telling the tale of a racially pure and in every respect superior German merchant carrying out a great pre-existing Hanse plan by extending the German 'Drang nach Osten' along the shores of the Baltic Sea.<sup>10</sup>

Hitler himself did not invent any new ideological basics. He adopted pre-existing pan-German ('alldutsche') ideology<sup>11</sup> and remained in line

London und Bergen waren" (Fritz Rörig, *Die Hanse im europäischen Raum*, in: Reichsführer SS, SS-Hauptamt (Hrsg.), *Germanische Gemeinsamkeit. Vorträge an der SS-Junkerschule Tölz*, Posen 1944, pp. 94–117, here p. 112).

<sup>7</sup> The historian Heinrich Reincke declared the 'Drang nach Osten' to be „eine elementare Grundtatsache unserer gesamtdeutschen Volksgeschichte“ (Heinrich Reincke, *Der Zug der Deutschen nach Osten*, in: *Mitteilungen der Nordischen Gesellschaft*, Hamburg-Kontor 21. Nov. 1943, pp. 173–204, here p. 174). For 'Drang nach Osten' see the profound study of Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der Deutsche Drang nach Osten. Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes*, Darmstadt 1981, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Brochure of the Nordische Gesellschaft, Lübeck: Fred J. Domes, Vorwort zu: Fred J. Domes (Hrsg.), *Die Schicksalsgemeinschaft der Ostsee*, Oldenburg i. O. / Berlin 1935, p. 3 („daß die größten und tiefsten Entscheidungen europäischer Geschichtsentwicklung im Ostseeraum geschehen“).

<sup>9</sup> According to Reincke early Low German merchants 'broke into' ('einbrechen') the baltic East: „Die Fernkaufleute der großen rheinischen und westphälischen Städte sind es gewesen, die noch vor dem Erscheinen des deutschen Fürsten, des deutschen Ritters und des deutschen Bauern als erste in den Nordostraum eingebrochen sind.“ (Heinrich Reincke, *Hanse*, in: Heinrich Hunke (ed.), *Hanse. Downing Street und Deutschlands Lebensraum*, Berlin 1942, pp. 13–33, here p. 22).

<sup>10</sup> Early western long distant tradesmen were still arduously feeling their way to the East. In 1928 Rörig imputed them with an all-embracing strategic Hanse idea they systematically transformed into action. Rörig's mystical dicta read: "The whole was before the parts" and "It is the spirit that accomplishes the body" (Fritz Rörig, *Die geistigen Grundlagen der hansischen Vormachtstellung*, in: *HZ* 139, 1929, pp. 242–251, here p. 243 („Das Ganze war früher da als die Teile“) and p. 251 („Es ist der Geist, der sich den Körper schafft“): Rörig's contribution to the 6<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Science in Oslo 1928.).

<sup>11</sup> Rainer Hering labels Pan-Germanism: "Antisemitismus, Antislavismus, Antiromanismus, Antiurbanismus und vor allem Anti-Internationalismus sind die zentralen Negativter-

with the *völkisch* movement of the early twenties. At the time Hitler only saw the movement eastward as involving ‘the sword and the plough’.<sup>12</sup> Rörig’s new Hanse doctrine, also grounded in *völkisch*<sup>13</sup> and racist tradition,<sup>14</sup> was well-suited for the right wing camp of the *völkisch* movement and National Socialism. Hanse research rounded out the idea of Germanic bands of blood-and-soil knights, peasants, and settlers, all eastward bound, by adding to them the conquering Hanse merchants.<sup>15</sup> So Rörig delivered additional historical corroboration and explanation.

### 3. *The invention of a “Hanse cog” in NS-times*

It is at this point that we start to touch upon the core of this paper. The term “Hanse cog” appeared for the first time embedded in Rörig’s Hanse explanation as a useful ornament of Nazi-propaganda. A European type of a transport ship was elevated to a special Hanse-German one: an allegedly superior cog ship that served as a weapon and tool in the irresistible advance of the Low German, predominantly Westphalian, merchant into the Baltic Sea.

The Director of the State Archives of the City of Hamburg – a dyed-in-the-wool National Socialist – Prof. Heinrich Reincke<sup>16</sup> propagandised

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mini, mit denen sich auch die alldeutsche Ideologie beschreiben lässt” (Rainer Hering, *Konstruierte Nation. Der Alldeutsche Verband 1890 bis 1939*, Hamburg 2003, p. 497). One of the first Pan-German League activists was Dietrich Schäfer. In 1935 Werner Daitz emphasizes the continuity and tradition of right-wing-*völkisch* Hanse research: „Nur zwei Historiker der Hanse, die diesen Namen wirklich verdienen, sind bekannt: Dietrich Schäfer und dann vor allem aber auch der heute unter uns weilende, neuerdings der Berliner Universität angehörende Prof. Dr. Fritz Rörig. Ihm vor allem verdanken wir die Erkenntnis und Begründung der Hanse als eines auf *völkischer* Grundlage beruhenden Fernhandelsverbandes“ (Werner Daitz, *Nordischer Seefahrergeist und imperialistisches Händlertum*, in: Daitz, *Weg zur völkischen Wirtschaft* (see fn. 6), pp. 163–176, here p. 167).

<sup>12</sup> Germany, Hitler advised, had to follow the road of the former Teutonic Knights, “um mit dem Schwert dem deutschen Pflug die Scholle, der Nation aber das täglich Brot zu geben” (Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (two volumes in one), München 1933, p. 154).

<sup>13</sup> I retain the German term “*völkisch*” because the English “ethnic” does not really correspond to the particular Nordic-Germanic use of the expression, which denotes the innate superiority of Germans to all other ethnic groups.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Reich’ and ‘Volk’ had always been central categories of Pan-German mystifications. Rörig used both for his Hanse idealization: „Die höchsten Einheiten unserer Geschichte, Reich und Volk, projizieren sich in dieser verehrungswürdigen Ursubstanz hansischen Seins auf den Ostseeraum” (Fritz Rörig, *Hanse, Ostseeraum und Skandinavien*, in: Egmont Zechlin, *Völker und Meere. Aufsätze und Vorträge*, Leipzig 1944, pp. 134–152, here p. 142).

<sup>15</sup> The cog was added to the plough as means of running down the old Baltic Sea world as Heinrich Reincke illustrated in 1940: “Wie der deutsche Pflug das Ostland, so hat das deutsche Schiff (die “Kogge”) die Ostsee erobert” (Reincke, *Hanse* (see fn. 9), p. 22).

<sup>16</sup> About the historian Reincke: Reinhard Paulsen, *Die Koggendiskussion in der Forschung. Methodische Probleme und ideologische Verzerrungen*, in: *HGbl 128*, 2010), pp. 19–112,

this “Hanse cog”, as the “Hanseatic Letters to Soldiers” of 1943 (Fig. 1) demonstrate. The front page and title<sup>17</sup> highlight the “Hanse cog” as the symbol of the Hanse. The text emphasises the cog as a “victory sign of German bravery and German pioneering feats.”<sup>18</sup>

Alfred Rosenberg<sup>19</sup>, a chief ideologue of the Nazi movement, rhapsodised: “Once the Baltic Sea was sailed by Hanse cogs, symbols of a newly rising power.”<sup>20</sup> “Once when Lübeck decided the fate of our home waters of the Baltic Sea, the German ships, being belligerent cogs, ploughed the Baltic Sea.”<sup>21</sup>

According to Karl Pagel (1942) the cog was employed as a revolutionary weapon to conquer the Baltic Sea:

“For the expansion of Baltic Sea shipping the cog was of the same importance as literacy in commercial transactions was for trade – a sort of revolution. The German knew how to use this weapon. The cog provided him with total predominance over all competitors he met on the Baltic Sea.”<sup>22</sup>

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here p. 70–71; in particular: Joist Grolle, *Hamburg und seine Historiker*, Hamburg 1997, S. 123–140 („Von der Verfügbarkeit des Historikers Heinrich Reincke in der NS-Zeit“). Reinckes ideological repertoire comprised völkisch, racist and anti-Semitic views, blood and soil theories, Führer cult and hostility towards democracy. For detailed evidence be referred to Grolle, *ibid.*, pp. 124–127. Grolles critical study on Reincke is convincing in evidence. He backtraces Reinckes adoption of national socialist thinking in the course of 1925 to 1933 and demonstrates his personal attitudes.

<sup>17</sup> Heinrich Reincke, *Reichsadler und Hansekogge als Zeichen der deutschen Hanse*, in: Hans Ochsenius (Hrsg.), *Hansische Soldatenbriefe der Kameradschaften und Altherrenschaften des NSDStB zu Hamburg*, Hamburg 1943, p. 2–3. See Fig. 1 [NSDStD = Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (National Socialist German Students’ League)].

<sup>18</sup> Reincke, *Reichsadler und Hansekogge* (see fn. 17), p. 3 („Siegeszeichen deutschen Wagemuts und deutscher Pionierleistung“).

<sup>19</sup> In Jan. 1934 he adopted the official, presumably self-created title of a “Representative of the Führer for the surveillance of the total intellectual and ideological instruction and education of the NSDAP”. Rosenberg was sentenced to death in the Nuremberg Trials and was hanged in 1946: Reinhard Bollmus, „Rosenberg, Alfred Ernst“ in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 22 (2005), pp. 59–61. [Online version: <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/ppn118602691.html> (31.07.2015)].

<sup>20</sup> Alfred Rosenberg, *Europa, der Norden und Deutschland*, in: *Domes, Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (see fn. 8), pp. 7–12, here p. 10 („Einst fuhren auf ihr [der Ostsee; RP] die Hansekoggen, Sinnbild einer neu aufsteigenden Macht“).

<sup>21</sup> Rosenberg, *Europa* (see fn. 20), p. 12 (als „Lübeck einst schicksalsbestimmend für diese uns so heimatliche Ostsee“ war, fuhren „die deutschen Schiffe“ „als kriegerische Koggen durch die Ostsee“).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Pagel, *Die Hanse*, Berlin 1942, S. 252 („Die Kogge sollte für den Aufschwung der Ostseeschifffahrt etwa das bedeuten, was die Schriftlichkeit des kaufmännischen Verkehrs für den Handel bedeutet hat – eine Art Revolution. Der Deutsche hat die Waffe, die er damit in die Hand bekam, zu nützen gewußt. Die Kogge gab ihm die völlige Überlegenheit über alle Konkurrenz, auf die er in der Ostsee stieß“).

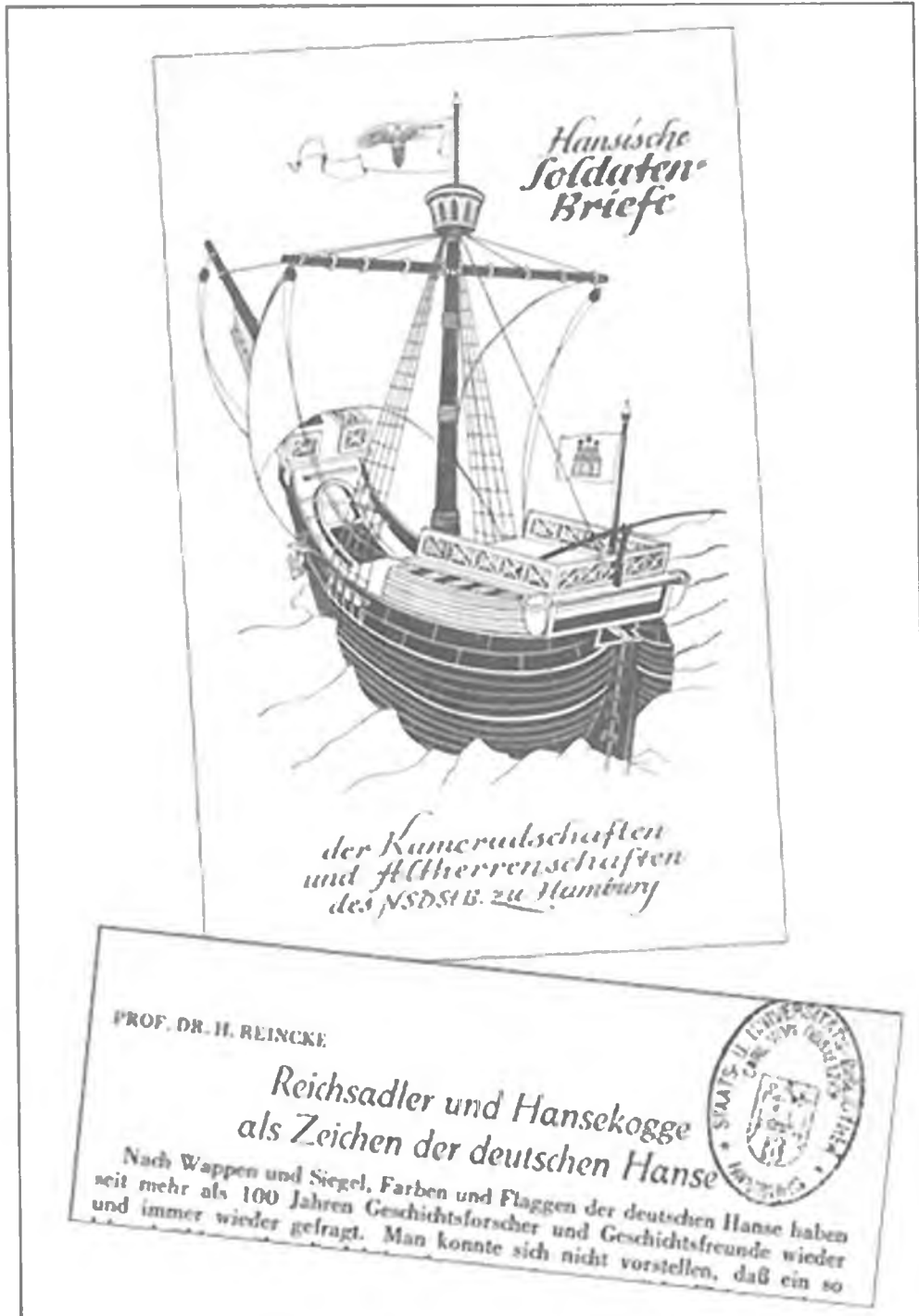


Fig. 1: Facsimile: Front page and headline of an article by Heinrich Reincke (see fn.17)

In this way, the general public always has considered the “Hanse cog” to be a symbol of the Hanse.<sup>23</sup>

Without any further proof, Fritz Rörig states in one single argument: “The cog was able to carry much more cargo than the longer and narrower ship of the Scandinavians. So she was better suited for regular trading voyages.”<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion: The so-called “Hanse cog” was a calculated invention of völkisch-national socialist propaganda, endorsed by distinguished scholars, but utterly without any actual research into the history of shipping. As a matter of fact, the cog was a common European freighter that sailed the Scandinavian seas as well as the Mediterranean where it was converted into the carvel-planked cocha and then ramped up to be the largest ship of the Late Middle Ages, the carrack.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4. The “Economic Miracle Hanse”

The Nazi period in Germany resulted in a total economic and ideological collapse. Nonetheless in the post-war decades Hanse research realigned its course only marginally and superficially. The most severe, völkisch-Germanic, chauvinistic excesses of the Nazi terminology were dropped, but the so-called “spirit of the Hanse” or “worshipful quintessence of the Hanse”<sup>26</sup> still constituted the core of a new “whitewashed” Hanse. In this new reading, hegemony over the Baltic Sea had no longer been established violently and militantly but through the efforts of the Hanse as the mediator between the East and the West (“Mittler zwischen Ost und West”).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Pagel asserts: “Für den Groß- und Fernhandel ist zu allen Zeiten die Kogge *das Schiff* der Hanse gewesen und geblieben – die Kogge ist auch am längsten im Bewußtsein der nachkommenden Geschlechter geblieben, und sie hat selbst dort eine Statt, wo die Nachwirkung der Hanse auf die Assoziation „Hansekogge“ beschränkt ist und vielleicht noch auf die Schulerminiszenz «Hansestädte Hamburg, Lübeck, Bremen»“ (Pagel, Hanse (see fn. 22), p. 254).

<sup>24</sup> Fritz Rörig, Volk, Raum und politische Ordnung in der deutschen Hanse, (Festvortrag vor der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften am 27. Januar 1944), Berlin 1944, p. 8 („Für regelmäßige Handelsfahrt war der Kogge wegen seiner größeren Ladefähigkeit weit geeigneter als das längere, schmalere Schiff der Skandinavier.“).

<sup>25</sup> Ian Friel, The Carrack: The Advent of the Full Rigged Ship, in: Robert Gardiner (ed.), Cogs, Caravels and Galleons. The Sailing Ship 1000–1650, London 1994, pp.77–90; Reinhard Paulsen, Schiffahrt, Hanse und Europa im Mittelalter. Schiffe am Beispiel Hamburgs, europäische Entwicklungslinien und die Forschung in Deutschland, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2016, chap. 5.1 („Bayonner Koggen im Mittelmeer“) pp. 143–146 and 5.4 („Die Karacke“), pp.152–156.

<sup>26</sup> The “verehrungswürdige Ursubstanz hansischen Seins“, as Rörig haloed matters (Rörig, Volk, Raum und politische Ordnung (see. fn. 24), p. 11. See also above fn. 14).

<sup>27</sup> Ahasver von Brandt, Die Hanse als mittelalterliche Wirtschaftsorganisation – Entstehung, Daseinsformen, Aufgaben, in: Leo Brandt (Hrsg.), Die Deutsche Hanse als Mittler zwischen Ost und West, Köln / Opladen 1963, pp. 9–37.

In another euphemism for “superior Germanness”, the Hanse was destined to show the underdeveloped East how to organise trade and exchange, towns and administration, how to implement literacy, how to administer justice, and how to become a western Christian.

It should be noted that this new, peaceful and entrepreneurially cunning Hanse merchant, as Ahasver von Brandt saw him, fitted precisely into the post war experience of West Germany, the time of the “German economic miracle” (“Wirtschaftswunderzeit”).<sup>28</sup> Since the world had already had enough of Germany’s perilousness and startling Teutonic thoroughness, it was now highly advisable to emphasise the country’s potential for peace. In this intellectual environment the Hanse – now re-christened as a peaceful “Economic Miracle Hanse” – appeared once again as a historical ornament of the contemporary political system and its respective ideology.

### 5. *“Hanse cog” setting the post-war course*

After World War II the aggressive and populist presentation of a “Hanse cog” was no longer viable. However, instead of taking a critical view of the “Hanse cog” as an aberration from the Nazi period, Hanse- and shipping researchers clung to the old conception, attempting somehow to arrive at a scientific explanation for the superiority of the “Hanse cog”.

In his dissertation about “The ship of early Hanseatic times” of 1953 (printed in 1956) Paul Heinsius<sup>29</sup> provided a scholarly investigation of the cog but failed to present any proof whatsoever that it was Hanseatic. While Heinsius’ work on the historical sources cannot be faulted, his results were skewed by his ideological predisposition toward the Hanse. As he himself summarized his work:

“The ships of the early Hanse were the principal prerequisite of the rise of the Hanse and the later Hanseatic supremacy on the seas. They were one of the most important tools for the Hanse to gain its superior position over the course of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>30</sup>

He left no doubt that the Hanseatic ships in question were in fact Hanseatic cogs despite the fact that nothing in his studies justified such a

<sup>28</sup> For ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ see: Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 5, München 2008, chap. III.A.2, pp. 53–59; David R. Henderson, German Economic Miracle, in: *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Indianapolis 2008 [online: <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/GermanEconomicMiracle.html#> (31.07.2015)].

<sup>29</sup> Paul Heinsius, *Das Schiff der Hansischen Frühzeit*, Weimar 1956.

<sup>30</sup> Heinsius, *Schiff* (see fn. 29), p. 246 („Die Schiffe der hansischen Frühzeit waren eine der wesentlichsten Voraussetzungen des hansischen Aufstiegs und der späteren hansischen Überlegenheit zur See. Sie waren eines der wichtigsten Mittel, mit dem die Hansen im Laufe des 13. Jahrhunderts ihre überragende Stellung errangen“).

conclusion. Heinsius did not query Rörig's and von Brandt's official Hanse explanation but simply took it for granted that it was the Hanse cog which enabled the Hanse to establish its supremacy in the Baltic and overcome a "highly developed Nordic shipping".<sup>31</sup>

The huge flaw in Heinsius' cog theory leaps to the eye when he writes:

"We shall see that the German cogs suddenly showed up in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This type of a large seagoing medieval vessel was to play a crucial role in the Christian Occident. The term cog found its way into most of the European languages."<sup>32</sup>

Apparently "German cogs" suddenly appeared and afterwards "German ships" were adopted all over Europe. For Paul Heinsius the "Hanse cog" was not merely the pioneer type on the Baltic Sea, it was a trendsetter for the rest of Europe.

#### 6. *The discovery of the Bremen ship in 1962*

With the discovery in 1962 of a medieval ship, which had sunk not far from the Bremen harbour, scholarly und public attention focused on the cog. The excavation of the wreck from the Weser mud at Vegesack and its preservation played a pivotal role in the founding of a new German National Maritime Museum. In an obituary on Paul Heinsius of 2001 Detlev Ellmers talks about the relevance of Heinsius' dissertation. Heinsius

"could not anticipate that he would deliver one of the basic preconditions to establish this museum. Without his new findings about the shape of cogs the ship wreck of 1962 discovered in the Weser near Bremen would never have been identified as a Hanse cog and most probably never have been salvaged. And the cog was also the decisive scholarly impetus for the financial support of the Federal government for the establishment of the Bremerhaven museum."<sup>33</sup>

So it was a „Hanse cog"! Yet nobody could possibly draw conclusion regarding the commercial privileges and the political organisations of medieval long distance merchants or even the ownership of a ship, based

<sup>31</sup> Heinsius, *Schiff* (see fn. 29), p. 11 („der so hoch entwickelten nordischen Schifffahrt“).

<sup>32</sup> Heinsius, *Schiff* (see fn. 29), p. 76 („Wir werden noch sehen, daß die im 12. Jahrhundert plötzlich auftauchenden deutschen Koggen als Großschiffstypen des Mittelalters im Abendland bald eine entscheidende Rolle spielen sollten. Auch der Name der Koggen sollte in die meisten europäischen Sprachen Eingang finden“).

<sup>33</sup> Detlev Ellmers, Paul Heinsius 1919–2001, in: *Deutsche Schifffahrt* 2, 2001, p. 26 (Heinsius hatte „ohne es ahnen zu können – eine der grundlegenden Voraussetzungen für die Gründung dieses Museums geschaffen. Denn ohne die darin gewonnenen neuen Erkenntnisse über das Aussehen von Koggen hätte man das 1962 in der Weser vor Bremen entdeckte Schiffswrack nicht als Hansekogge identifizieren können und sehr wahrscheinlich nicht geborgen. Und ohne Kogge hätte für die Museumsgründung in Bremerhaven der für die Bundesbeteiligung ausschlaggebende Forschungsimpuls gefehlt“).

solely on the remnants of a wrecked ship. In fact, it was archaeologically impossible to identify the wreck as a “Hanse” ship.

Was the wreck a cog at all? After all, the Bremen ship could have just as well been a crayer. The oldest evidence of a crayer dates back to 1341 in England. From the last decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century we can also verify crayers in the Hanse world. The largest crayer I have found in the documents was a Livonian Baie-salt crayer carrying some 12 hundred of salt (90 last of Baie salt).<sup>34</sup> The Hanseatic Urkundenbuch knows of 77 crayers up to 1500, and they are scattered all over West and Northeast Europe. The crayer was a cargo vessel of normally 35 to 70 last loading capacity.<sup>35</sup> For Walther Vogel the crayer was “the smaller counterpart of the cog and they probably closely resembled each other.”<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the crayer only barely shows up in Heinsius’ work.<sup>37</sup>

Ellmers puts the case very clearly indeed: Had the wreck not been identified (however speciously) as a “Hanse cog”, there would have been no public funding by the Federal Government and no museum. Thus the Weser wreck had to be declared to be the “Bremen Hanse Cog”, creating concrete proof for the vanguard role of the German Hanse out of thin air. The ship served to support the formation of German national identity distinguished from other maritime nations.<sup>38</sup> Besides scholarly kudos for an immense archaeological achievement the so-called “Hanse cog” received official blessing as the central exhibit of the National Maritime Museum.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the national German maritime museum had been built

<sup>34</sup> Hansisches Urkundenbuch (HUB) vol. 7.1, no. 767, § 13, p. 418: Prussian-Livonian list of losses. Loss of the *kreyer* of *schipher* Tydeman Clyngenberge in der *Bayeschen vlote* run by a crew of 22 and carrying 12 hundred of salt (1438).

<sup>35</sup> Concerning crayers see: Paulsen, *Schiffahrt* (see fn. 25), chapt. 3.4. (“Kreier”), pp. 109–116 and app. E.8 and G.3.4.

<sup>36</sup> Vogel, *Deutsche Seeschifffahrt* (see fn. 5), p. 501 („das kleinere Gegenstück zum Koggen, dem er wahrscheinlich in allen wesentlichen Zügen ähnelte”).

<sup>37</sup> He mentions the crayer only once in a single sentence: „Other names such as “Kraier”, “Heckboot”, “Hoikbort” appear to have been merchantmen of a medium size in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.” (Heinsius, *Schiff* (see fn. 29), p. 209 („Andere Namen wie „Kraier“, „Heckboot“, „Hoikbort“ scheinen im 13. Jahrhundert mittlere Handelsschiffe gewesen zu sein”).

<sup>38</sup> In 1968 Ahasver von Brandt stated the German view in “An Appraisal concerning the Scientific Significance of the Discovery of the Bremer Kogge and Requirements for its Evaluation” (*The Mariner’s Mirror* 54, 1968, pp. 19–21), dealt with in Paulsen, *Koggendiskussion* (see fn. 16), pp. 68–69 and more detailed in Paulsen, *Schiffahrt* (see fn. 25), chapt. 13.4 („‘Hansekogge’ und Deutsches Schiffahrtsmuseum”), pp. 476–479. This document in addition with what Ellmers imparted in 2001 (citation fn. 33) shows clearly the substantial political and national relevance of the matter.

<sup>39</sup> Even still in 2014 an official report speaks of the „zentralen Bedeutung der Hansekogge als musealem Leitobjekt des DSM“ (Der Senat der Leibniz-Gesellschaft, *Stellungnahme zum Deutschen Schiffahrtsmuseum (DSM) Bremerhaven* (27.11.2014), p. B–10: [http://www.leibnizgemeinschaft.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/downloads/Evaluierung/Senatsstuellungennahmen/DSM\\_-\\_Senatsstuellungnahme\\_27-11-2014\\_mit\\_Anlagen.pdf](http://www.leibnizgemeinschaft.de/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/Evaluierung/Senatsstuellungennahmen/DSM_-_Senatsstuellungnahme_27-11-2014_mit_Anlagen.pdf) (03.08.2015)).

around the Hansecog of 1380 to the point where it was deemed to have lost the plot following the restauration of the 'Hanse cog' as the idea of the "Hanse cog" began to lose support.<sup>40</sup>

### 7. *A Frisian-cog- and a Hanse-cog-legend*

Nevertheless, there was still the matter of Heinsius' unsatisfactory claim of a sudden appearance of a large German cog ship in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Heinsius asserted: "The new ship type appeared abruptly. This obviously indicates a sudden invention."<sup>41</sup> There is no precedent in maritime history for an invention of this kind. It was Detlev Ellmers who substituted for this queer idea of Paul Heinsius with his own historical narrative, which I will sketch here:<sup>42</sup>

1. After the Romans withdrew from Western Europe, maritime transport shipping collapsed in the "Dark Ages", as they are called.
2. The historical gap was filled by the tribe of the Frisians who developed their own new type of transport vessel.
3. The rebirth of trade under the Frisians in the Merovingian era marks the beginning of a new ship building tradition of the cog.
4. In order to make this theory plausible, the Frisians had to be endowed with great historical significance. Therefore Ellmers draws on theories of Frisian eminence which have been elaborated (in particular in German Medieval studies) since Wilhelminian times.
5. In the context of this putative Frisian dominance Ellmers contrues a Frisian trade monopoly, founded on and sustained by the superior Frisian cog.
6. Expanding to the East, this Frisian trade made use of Haithabu as a

<sup>40</sup> Being an institution of the Leibniz Association the museum was evaluated in 2014 by the Leibniz Senate. The report is disillusioning: „Der frühere Direktor des Museums – er trat 2012 in den Ruhestand ein Prof. Dr. Lars Ulrich Scholl; RP] – leitete das Museum ohne klare Linie. Der damalige Beirat und das Aufsichtsgremium begleiteten die Entwicklung unzureichend“ (Senat, Stellungnahme (see fn. 39), p. 3). They notice that „die Konservierung der Kogge abgeschlossen ist und kein weiteres zu konservierendes Objekt zur Verfügung steht“ (ibid. p. B–10). Now, after more than 40 years of existence, they claim: „Das DSM muss ohne Verzug eine Strategie entwickeln, um die Hansekogge im Rahmen der Dauerausstellung ihrer musealen Leitfunktion entsprechend angemessen zu präsentieren und zu würdigen“ (ibid., p. B–8). But as there never existed a „Hanse cog“ in history all strategies around the central exhibit will again have to rely on outdated, biased Hanse explanations.

<sup>41</sup> Heinsius, *Schiff* (see fn. 29), p. 15 („Das schlagartige Auftreten des neuen Schiffstyps scheint für eine plötzliche Erfindung zu sprechen.“).

<sup>42</sup> It is not possible to present in this article the comprehensive historical analysis and the research background proving the listed issues. I have to refer to my dissertation of 2016: Paulsen, *Schifffahrt* (see fn. 25), sect. III („Mittelalterliches europäisches Schiffswesen“), pp. 263–500.

bridge head with a Frisian colony which founded a mint and built cogs. To quote Detlev Ellmers: „Their settlement in Haithabu demonstrates the ambition of the Frisians, to penetrate into the Baltic Sea from their home base in Haithabu, and to eliminate and take over all intermediate trade as they had done on the French and English shores and rivers.”<sup>43</sup>

After having intensely worked through the sources and on a critical review of the past 120 years of research I am able to state the following:

1. No breakdown of early medieval transport shipping ever took place. The tradition of West European Celtic shipping continued till the end of the Viking era around 1000 A.D. The case in point is Breton trade, which flourished on the Atlantic coast throughout these centuries.
2. The Frisians were an inconspicuous border people, dwelling on the inhospitable south coasts of the North Sea. They played no important social and political role in Frankish-Carolingian times. The real Carolingian gateway settlements were Quentovic and Dorestad, not Haithabu.
3. The Frisians did not have a monopoly of trade. There is no evidence of any elimination of competition „along the French and English coasts“.
4. There is no written or archaeological evidence of a Frisian colony, a mint or cog building in Haithabu in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century.

To sum up: Ellmers presents us with a comprehensive Frisian-cog-legend. No Frisian Wadden Sea cog invaded the Baltic Sea in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, nor had this “mud glider” been transformed in the East into “the superior large Hanse ship that was superior even to all Scandinavian ships”, as Ellmers stated as late as 1972.<sup>44</sup>

The Frisian-cog-legend transformed itself into the Hanse-cog-legend about the outstanding Hanse merchant with his superior Hanse cog, formerly the Frisian cog.

Modern German nationalism lived on in Hanse research as an “Economic Miracle-Hanse” and experienced its heyday in the 1960s and 70s with the National Maritime Museum and the “Bremen Hanse cog”.

<sup>43</sup> Detlev Ellmers, Die Bedeutung der Friesen für die Handelsverbindungen des Ostseeraumes bis zur Wikingerzeit, in: Sven-Olof Lindquist (Hrsg.), *Society and trade in the Baltic during the Viking Age*, Visby 1985, pp. 7–54, here p. 37 („Allein die Tatsache, daß sie sich in Haithabu ansiedelten, zeigt, daß sie mehr vorhatten, nämlich von Haithabu aus in die Ostsee vorzudringen, um dort ebenso den Zwischenhandel auszuschalten und selbst in die Hand zu nehmen, wie sie es entlang der französischen und englischen Küsten und Flüsse getan hatten.“).

<sup>44</sup> Detlev Ellmers, Frühmittelalterliche Handelsschifffahrt in Mittel-und Nordeuropa, Neumünster 1972, p. 73/74 (zum späteren, „sogar allen skandinavischen Schiffen überlegenen hansischen Großschiff weiterentwickelt“).

### 8. *Gradual retreat of the Hanse and shipping research*

Over the last decades, these nationalistically biased positions had to be revised step by step. First, Scandinavian shipping research corrected the image of the cog in terms of size and performance compared to Nordic vessels.

Staying abreast of these changes, Detlev Ellmers attested in 1985 that “the Scandinavian ships were in no way inferior to the cogs of the Hanse period in relation to size, seaworthiness and sailing performance, but rather the opposite was true for the time of the 1160s.”<sup>45</sup> The cog was no longer the superior ship of the Low German merchant advancing eastwards.

At the same time, in light of their own Nordic cog finds, Scandinavian researchers began to question the theory of a Frisian-Hanse cog tradition.<sup>46</sup> Critics have repeatedly pointed out that the Bremen find was called a cog and was declared the prototype of cogs yet to be identified. In 1999 Timm Weski proposed the term “Ijsselmeer Type”<sup>47</sup> and in 2011 Carsten Jahnke the term “Transportschiff Typ Bremen” (TTB).<sup>48</sup> In 2012 and 2014 Daniel Zwick offered similar criticism.<sup>49</sup>

2010 Detlev Ellmers conceded that „the archaeologists caused confusion” by talking straight off about a Bremen cog rather than beginning with a neutral description of the find as “type Bremen”.<sup>50</sup> And recently Ellmers has even followed Eike Sieglöff<sup>51</sup> in the definition of an archaeo-

<sup>45</sup> Detlev Ellmers, *Die Entstehung der Hanse*, in HGBll 123, 1985, pp. 3–40, here p.8/9 (dass „skandinavische Schiffe den Koggen zur Hansezeit an Größe, Seetüchtigkeit und Segeleigenschaft keineswegs nachstanden, eher war zur fraglichen Zeit um 1160 das Gegenteil der Fall”).

<sup>46</sup> Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Danish Cog-Finds*, in: Seán McGrail (Hrsg.), *The Archaeology of Medieval Ships and Harbours in Northern Europe*, Oxford 1979, S. 17–35. A survey also in: Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Die Bremer Kogge – ein Schlüssel zur Geschichte des Schiffbaus im Mittelalter*, in: Gabriele Hoffman und Uwe Schnall (Hrsg.), *Die Kogge. Sternstunde der deutschen Schiffsarchäologie*, Bremerhaven/Hamburg 2003, pp. 256–270, here pp. 263–267.

<sup>47</sup> Timm Weski, *Wurde wirklich eine Kogge gefunden?* in: *Antike Welt* 37, 2006, S. 91–96; Paulsen, *Koggendiskussion*, (see fn. 16).

<sup>48</sup> Carsten Jahnke, *Koggen und kein Ende. Anmerkungen zu den Thesen von Reinhard Paulsen und Detlev Ellmers*, in: ZVLG 91, 2001, here p. 306.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Zwick, *Variationen in der mittelalterlichen Schiffbautechnik anhand von Wrackfunden in Bremen*, in: *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Archäologie des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* Nr. 24, Paderborn 2012, pp.283–298, here p. 290; Daniel Zwick, *Conceptual Evolution in Ancient Shipbuilding: An Attempt to Reinvigorate a Shunned Theoretical Framework*, in: Jonathan Adams /Johan Rönby (Hrsg.), *Interpreting Shipwrecks: Maritime Archaeology Approaches*, Southampton 2014, pp. 46–71.

<sup>50</sup> Detlev Ellmers, *Koggen Kontrovers*, in: HGBll. 128, 2010, S. 113–140, here p. 114/115.

<sup>51</sup> Eike Sieglöff, *Maritimes Kulturgut der Wikingerzeit und des Mittelalters aus Hollingstedt*, in: Klaus Brandt (Hrsg.), *Hollingstedt an der Treene : ein Flusshafen der Wikingerzeit*

logically neutral “Kollerup-Bremen-Shipbuilding tradition”, “which has been referred to as cogs in the Middle Ages”.<sup>52</sup>

Why do I use the term „retreat“ instead of “realignment”? I do so deliberately because up until now Hanse and shipping research seems to have done nothing but back-pedal after having been proven wrong.

The cog as a Hanse ship or rather the cog type Bremen was always an integral part of a particular Hanse theory. For 150 years the Hanse has been ideologically exploited by the ruling system, instrumentalizing the Late Middle Ages in order to make them compatible with contemporary German-nationalistic ambitions.<sup>53</sup>

It is our responsibility as scholars to tackle controversial issues such as the Nazi invention of the “Hanse cog”, the official nationalistic intentions which guaranteed the founding of the German Shipping Museum, or the designation of the new Hanse Museum in Lübeck as European. If we do not recognise the political backgrounds of certain traditions – and remain cognizant of the problems involved in so doing – we will not escape the danger of ending up, once again, as stooges of the latest fashionable European variants of nationalistic German politics.

### 9. *The state of medieval shipping research*

Today, the history of a “Hanse cog” has run its course – at least in scholarly circles<sup>54</sup> – and we have to move beyond it. We need a consistent and comprehensive theory of European shipping in the Middle Ages to replace the various different national or regional shipping histories.

Finally, I would like to sketch out my research on medieval navigation and promote my recently published dissertation<sup>55</sup>:

- The cog is neither „Hanseatic“ nor Low German-Scandinavian but European.
- „Hanseatic“ ships or „Hanseatic“ shipping never existed. In the Late

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und des Mittelalters für den Transitverkehr zwischen Nord- und Ostsee, Neumünster 2012, pp.115–248, here p. 121.

<sup>52</sup> Detlev Ellmers, Kogge und Holk als Schiffe der Hanse, in: Michael Hundt und Jan Lokers (Hrsg.), Hanse und Stadt. Akteure, Strukturen und Entwicklungen im regionalen und europäischen Raum: Festschrift für Rolf Hammel-Kiesow zum 65. Geburtstag, Lübeck 2014, pp. 53–67, here p. 60 („die im Mittelalter als Koggen bezeichnet wurden.“), also p. 58–61.

<sup>53</sup> Paulsen, Koggendiskussion (see fn. 16). sec. VII, IX; Paulsen, Schifffahrt (see fn. 25), sec. IV. („Schiffe, Hanse und deutsche Forschungsbilder“), pp. 503–566.

<sup>54</sup> See the examples in sect. 8 (above). The same is good for Thomas Förster who describes the popular myth of the »Hansekoggen« (Thomas Förster, Schiffe der Hanse, Rostock 2009, p. 7) and asks: „Wie sah sie wirklich aus, die legendäre »Hansekogge«?“ (ibid., p. 9).

<sup>55</sup> Paulsen, Schifffahrt (see fn. 25).

Middle Ages shipping was still generally a matter of individual sea towns.

- The cradle of medieval transport shipping lies on the Atlantic shores of Brittany and was Celtic.

The Early Middle Ages saw two shipbuilding traditions co-existing independently of each other: One was the old Celtic tradition of carvel-planked sailing freighters, the other, a much younger one, the tradition of the Nordic clinkered Long Ship.

- Medieval and late medieval transport vessels were all developed as a hybrid mix of the two main shipbuilding traditions of West and North-west Europe.
- We cannot demonstrate the existence of an individual cog building tradition and much less a distinctive Frisian tradition. The late medieval cog was a hybrid ship.

### *10. Outlook*

What to do with the insights of this paper? What to do with the constant populism surrounding the “Hanse cog”? It goes without saying that scholars are obliged to correct obsolete theories not only in teaching but also in all communication with the media. The problem is that rejecting the idea of a “Hanse cog” automatically raises further issues: Who invented this legend and why? What was it good for in modern Germany all throughout the past half-century?

Today, one of our biggest issues is that biased historiography still serves as historical confirmation for national politics. An apologetic historiography does not result from a simple lack of sources but is rather the consequence of individual scholars’ ideological predispositions within an academic mainstream. Furthermore, there are a number of relevant real-life concerns: pressure to find employment, to be acknowledged in the academic scene, to attract funding for projects, to render an account to financing institutions, or even to restructure a whole National Museum without the faintest definition of what “national” might stand for in the world of today.

Deconstructing the myth of the “Hanse cog” entails revealing the tradition of nationalistic Hanse concepts which are still alive and well in Germany. As I see it, we are still burdened with a nationalistic heritage in all historical fields including medieval studies. Any reasonable European and global perspective is dependent on fighting nationalism in all countries and historians are urgently needed on the front line of this struggle.