RELIGION AND TOLERATION
COROLLARIES OF COMMERCE BETWEEN ENGLAND AND GDAŃSK IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

John D. Fudge

Mercantile accords, shipping patterns, and commodity structures offer a valuable though far from complete picture of relations between Gdansk (Danzig) and England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Long-distance trade also made possible a range of interpersonal contacts. Although they are not quantifiable for the most part, some of the consequences of social and commercial interaction nevertheless help nuance an understanding of interregional communications and continuity. Going beyond traditional boundaries of political economy these contacts help in describing broader conceptions of bilateral exchange.

Late medieval Anglo-Baltic trade was heavily concentrated at Gdansk and for many decades prior to the mid-sixteenth century English ships that cleared the Sound seldom called at any other Baltic port. From the island kingdom came rabbit skins, lead, and many types of woollen textiles. Gdansk was a transhipment point for iron, flax, and furs from Sweden and the eastern Teutonic lands, but above all exported grain and forest products that originated in the hinterlands of Prussia and Poland. Gdanskers were middlemen in this trade and in the distribution of English cloth as well. They strove to remain so, to the exclusion of all non-denizen competitors. The Teutonic Order was complicit in insulating Gdansk’s merchants. Within the town mercantile contact between foreign and non-denizen guests was restricted. When Royal Prussia became part of the Polish-Lithuanian domain in 1466 Gdansk achieved autonomy in trade matters and immediately invoked its own protectionist laws. The English were repeatedly denied special concessions and, like other outsiders, prohibited from bargaining directly with non-denizens. By contrast, Gdanskers came to England as privileged

1 Akten der Ständetage Preussens unter der Herrschaft des Deutschen Ordens, 1, pp. 384, 434, 484, 506–507, 513; 2, pp. 50, 140, 4, pp. 557–62. This is not to say that Englishmen were prevented from travelling outside Gdansk. They also did business at nearby Elblag (Elbing) and in 1519 English merchants resident in Gdansk were robbed as