

## Courage, Power and Myth – on the Trail of the Hanse in the European Hansemuseum

When Low German merchants from Soest, Münster, Groningen and Lübeck moored on the banks of the river Neva in 1193, they did not know that they were among the founders of a powerful association, which became known from the 14th century onwards as the „Dudesche Hense“. Over the following centuries, what started as a loose alliance of merchants preparing for commercial talks in the city of Novgorod evolved into the most influential network of economies and cities in northern Europe.

### The Hanse

The European Hansemuseum Lübeck has been dedicated to the multifaceted history of the Hanse. It illustrates its development from a group of merchants to a major northern European power with a network of more than 200 affiliated towns and cities. The exhibition examines the daring of the Hanse merchants, life abroad, riches, pomp and splendour, as well as the all-pervasive influence of religion. It concludes with the decline and dissolution of the mercantile network. Visitors are given the opportunity of discovering key events in the history of the Hanse by means of specially reconstructed scenes. For example, they can see how that meeting on the river Neva may have taken place when they walk past two cogs, authentic reproductions of the square-rigged sailing ships. „All the reconstructed scenes are based on the latest state of research and no expense has been spared to make them as historically accurate as possible“, says Dr Felicia Sternfeld, managing director of the Hansemuseum. As they walk through the exhibition, the visitors can also see how things may have looked in the kontore, the Hanse’s overseas trading posts. They can wander around a busy market hall in Bruges, gaze at the splendour of the Steelyard in London and examine an important trading centre for stockfish in Bergen. Lübeck, known as the „head of the Hanse“, is often the location for important moments in the development of the Hanse. It is here that the effects of the plague in the 14th century are portrayed, for instance. Its spread throughout Europe is an indication of how mobile the Hanse merchants were. Another scene focuses on the meeting of representatives of Hanse towns known as the Hansetag.

Many valuable original objects in the exhibition, including rare documents, paintings and collector’s items, also illustrate how the Hanse merchants lived and worked. Among the highlights are gold and silver coins from the Lübeck Hoard, which had lain buried in the city since the mid-16th century. Interactive media stations and infographics also enable visitors to learn in detail about economic relationships, trade routes and everyday life at the time of the Hanse.

One particularly interesting section of the exhibition is the archaeological dig. It tells of the earliest settlement in Lübeck around 800, the foundation of the city in 1143, and reveals the latest findings about the 1,200-year old history of the culturally important site on which the European Hansemuseum now stands.

### **Lübeck Castle Friary**

Another key element of the Hansemuseum is the Lübeck Castle Friary, one of the most important medieval convents in northern Germany. The former Dominican friary dating from the 13th century was extensively refurbished and restored with the help of federal funding and will be subject to special supervision to conserve its architectural and artistic legacies for future generations. An audio guide provides visitors with more information about the history of the friary as part of a separate tour. It also explains the unusual ornamental floors in the sacristy and the infirmary, frescoes from various periods and the keystones in the vaults, which are a defining element of the building's architecture.

The history of the Castle Friary's use has many dimensions and extends to the present day. After the Reformation it was an almshouse, later a hospital, then a prison, and with the addition of an annexe, a court of law, too. The social history of the 18th and 19th centuries, National Socialism and the post-war period have all left their mark on the site, and these traces have been preserved and elucidated.

### **Architecture**

The architecture of the new museum building makes a confident statement in its urban context, blending a finely crafted brick texture with elegant modernist lines. Subtle lines in the façade are a discrete allusion to the contours of buildings that used to stand here.

The open staircase in the centre links the historic docks with the old town in a bold gesture. It connects terraces, courtyards, a playground and restaurant, which offer spectacular views over the city and the port and create a place for people to explore, to sit and to enjoy. Thus the site that houses the Hansemuseum unfolds to reveal a location saturated with history, which in this highly condensed form is of inestimable value for the European history of the Hanse.

### **Information**

European Hansemuseum Lübeck  
An der Untertrave 1  
23552 Lübeck  
[www.hansemuseum.eu](http://www.hansemuseum.eu)

### **Opening hours**

Open every day (except December 24)  
10am – 6pm  
Last entry: One hour before closing

Photographic and other information material is available at  
[www.hansemuseum.eu /press/](http://www.hansemuseum.eu/press/)